

4 January 2023		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance 2022-2023		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The overall performance for the service is good. This report focusses on data up to the end of Quarter 2 in 2022-23.

At the end of Q2 2022-23, 282 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 257 young adults were receiving services from the Aftercare team. Children and young people are visited regularly and seen and spoken to alone where appropriate to do so. Children who go missing are managed consistently and this reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety.

Improvement is required in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment which is an area of focus with health partners and solutions have been identified to address performance in this area to ensure children's health needs are assessed.

An area of focus in the Aftercare team is care leavers being seen regularly, keeping in touch, and supporting young people into employment or education and have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Most children who are looked after are placed with foster carers or, where possible, with family members. Thurrock Council continues to develop it's 'Think Family' approach to reduce the need for children to enter care or help them to return to their families where it is safe to do so. Recruitment of foster carers continues to be a priority in Thurrock and finding appropriate local placements for children.

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19 which has had an impact on performance and timetabling for final court hearings. We continue to see upward pressure due to the duration of care proceedings being 40+ weeks (the target is 26 weeks)

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That members note improvements and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

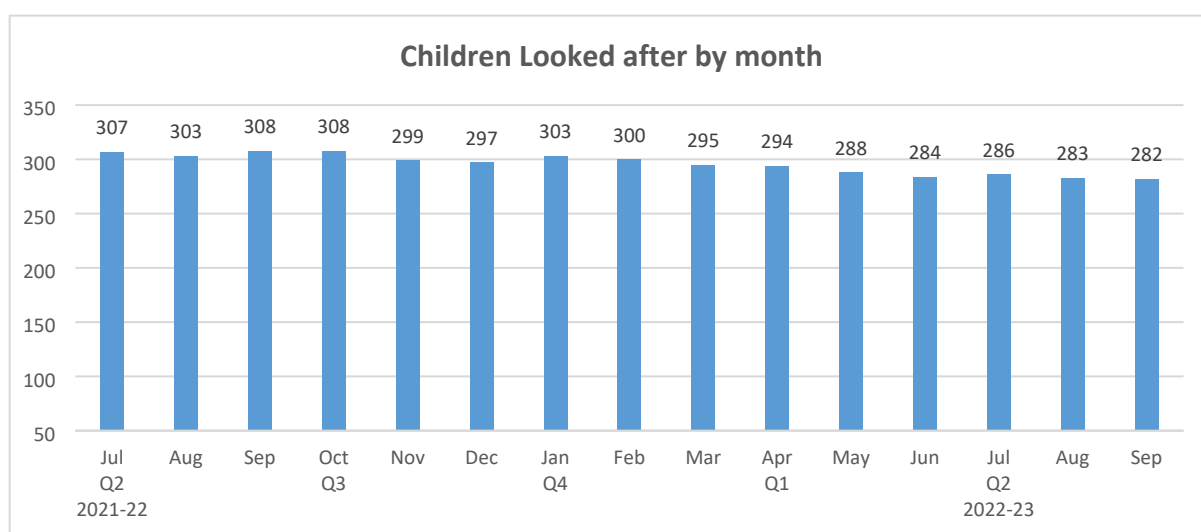
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At a Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing and their outcomes. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were looked after at the end of each month. There is monitoring of children who may need to become looked after and regular reviews of children entering care. The numbers of children becoming looked after have seen a lower trajectory in the first two quarters of 2022/23. We can expect this to change upward in the autumn as UASC are transferred into Thurrock (See s.3.2).



3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children.

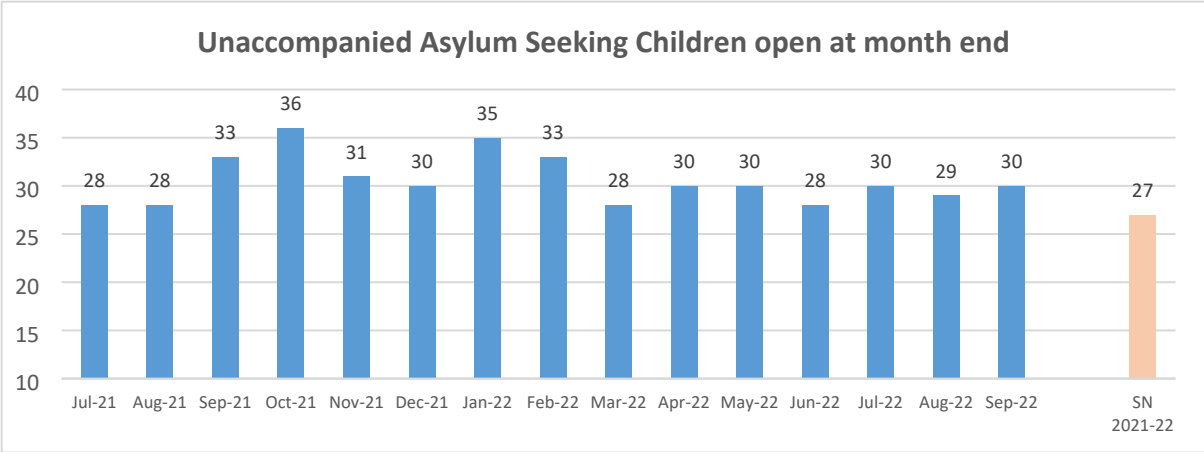
Thurrock's allocated number was 31 children; this has now been uplifted by the Home Office to 45 children. This means that Thurrock will now receive transfers in from other authorities and these will likely be from migrant processing centres in Kent. This will increase demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long term basis. Over the last year there have been fewer children arriving at Thurrock Ports/found in vehicles in Thurrock as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between July and September 2022, there were 5 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 10 in the same period in 2021.

When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme

(NTS). The NTS replaced, the Eastern Region¹ Transfer scheme in July 2021 and works efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

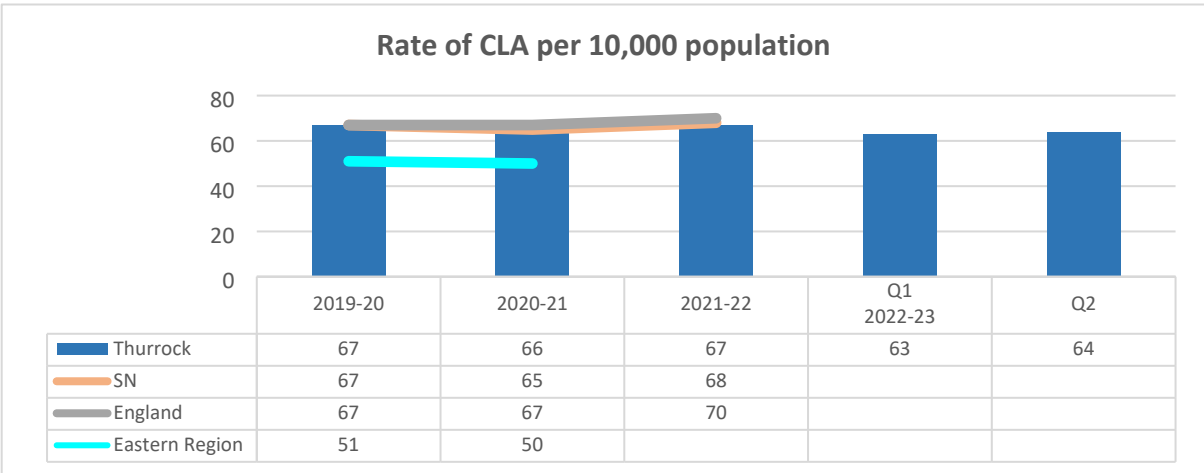
The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme. The Eastern Region Co Coordinator liaises with the Home Office co-ordinator.

The below graphs show the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month.



3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

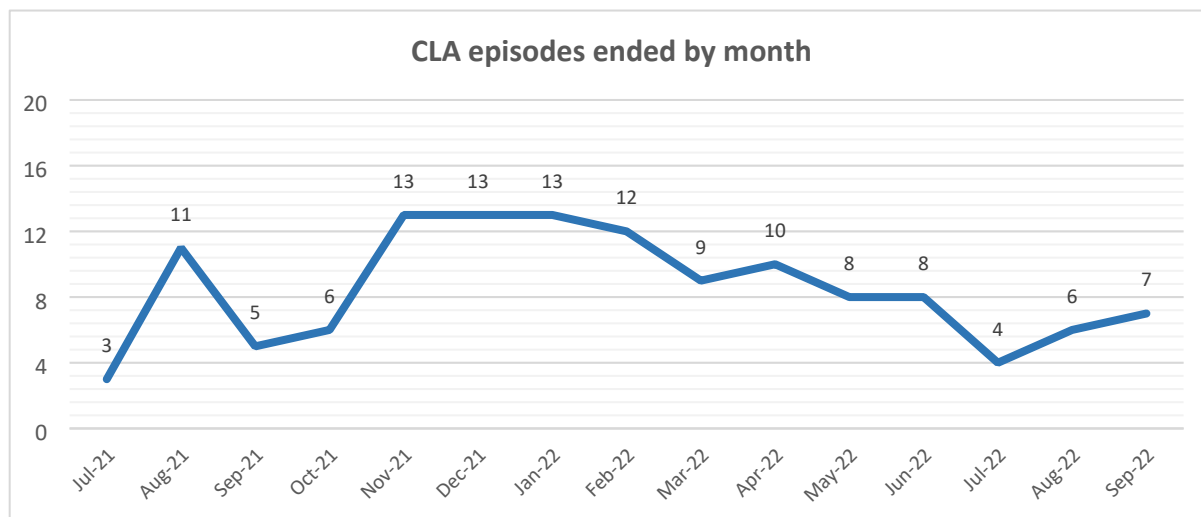
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18-year-olds in Thurrock. At the end of September 2022 there were 282 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68 and England average of 70.



¹ The Eastern Region comprises of Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock Local Authorities

3.4 Children Looked After episodes started and ended

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between July and September 2022, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 17.



The most common reason for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents.

There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock:

- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

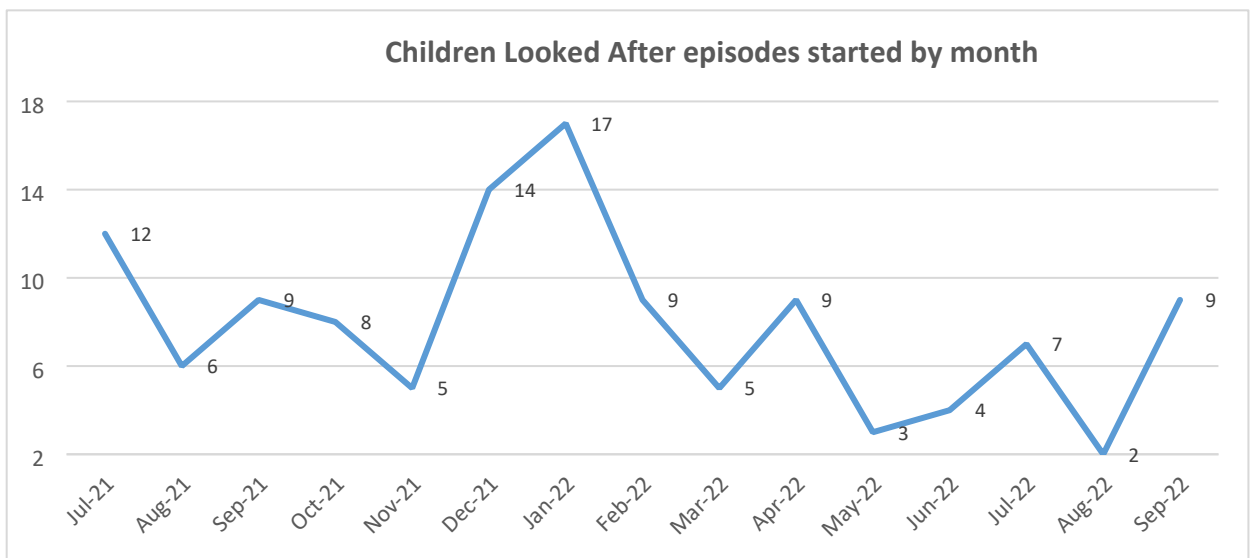
The below chart shows entries and exits in and out of care over the last few years and evidence fewer numbers of UASC entering care. As identified earlier in this report we expect to see this number increase in line with the change in the number UASC allocation

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Q2 2022-23 (Jul - Sep)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	18
UASC Care (% of total CLA population)	91 (44.8%)	75 (30.9%)	36 (24.0%)	38 (31%)	5 (1.8%)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	17

Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	282
Average UASC Population at end of reporting period	39	23	21	28	30

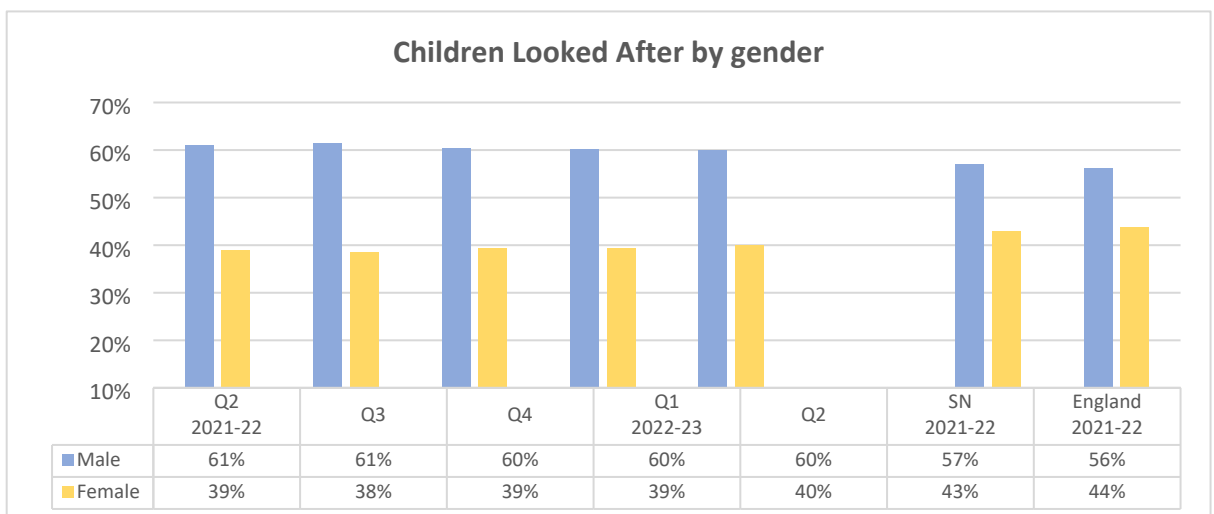
All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. Children and Families are supported to remain together to stabilise families who may be in crisis.

3.5 Children Looked After episodes started



3.6 Children Looked After by gender

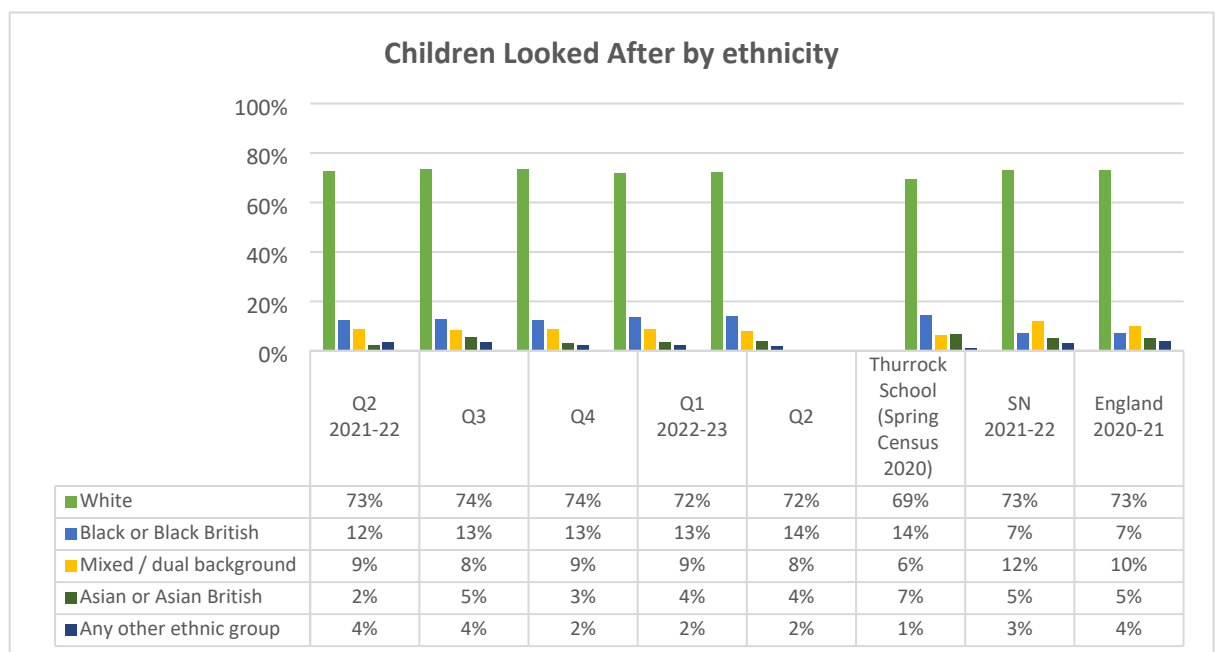
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages as of September 2022.



3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

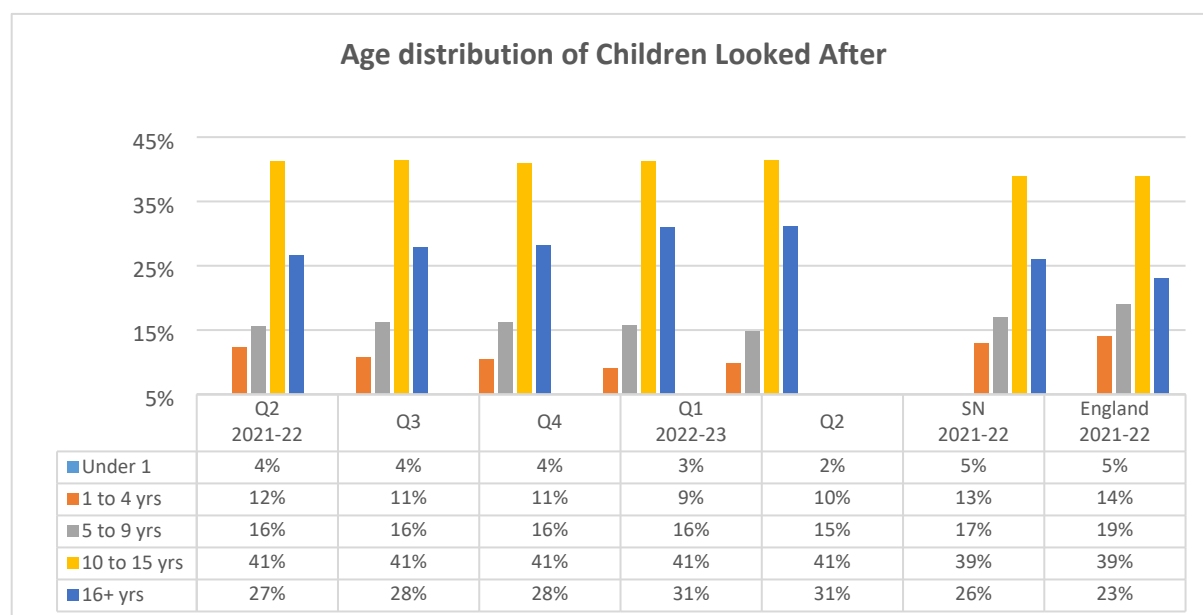
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

The percentages of Black or Black British children in care in Thurrock is 14%. This figure is significantly higher when compared to the Statistical Neighbour and National average of 7% but in line with the demographics of the population in Thurrock compared to statistical neighbours and national data. The schools census 2020 (which is the most recent information) indicated that 14% of the children living in Thurrock were Black or Black British, compared to 7% for the National and Statistical Neighbour averages. This data is also likely influenced by the number of UASC in Thurrock which accounts for 10% of the CLA population at the end of March 2022 and 57% (16) of the UASC population were described as Black



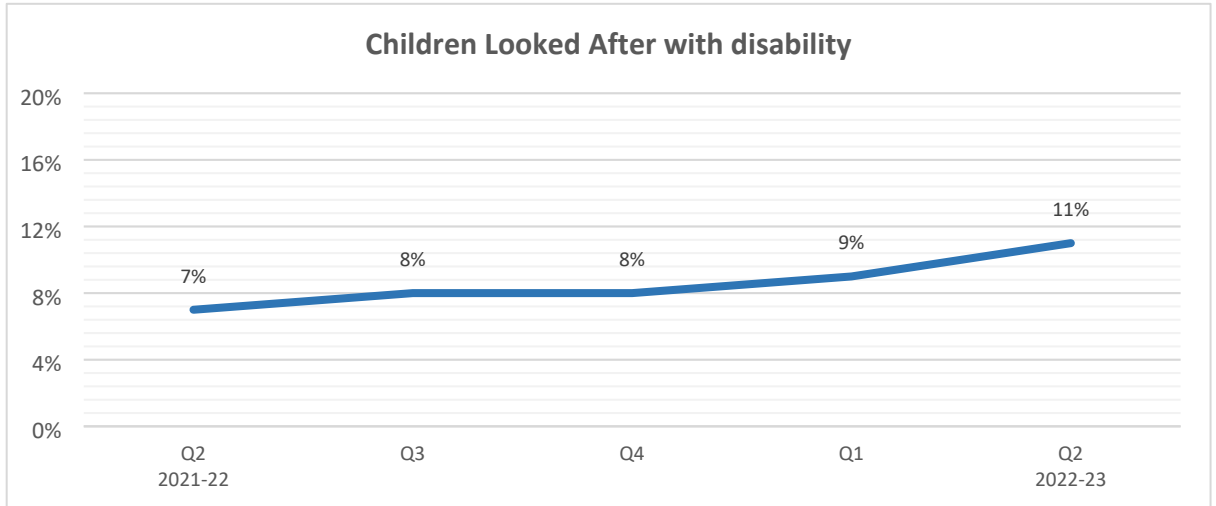
3.8 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2022, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. However, since July 2021, we have seen a 4% increase in the number of 16+ years. When comparing the 16+ with SN and England, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 26% and the England average of 23% as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



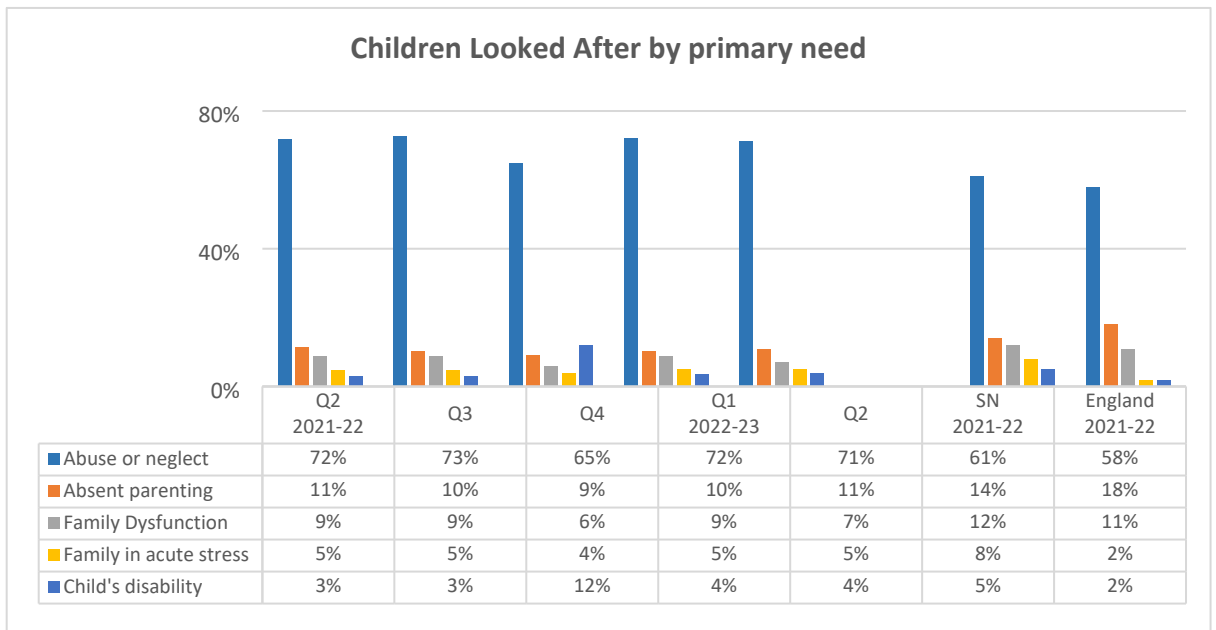
3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has risen by 4% since April 2021. At the end of September 2022, 31 (11%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 24 of these children were boys aged two and over and 7 girls aged 12 and over. 13 of 31 disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.



3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children become Looked After because of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care provide support and intervention to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary.

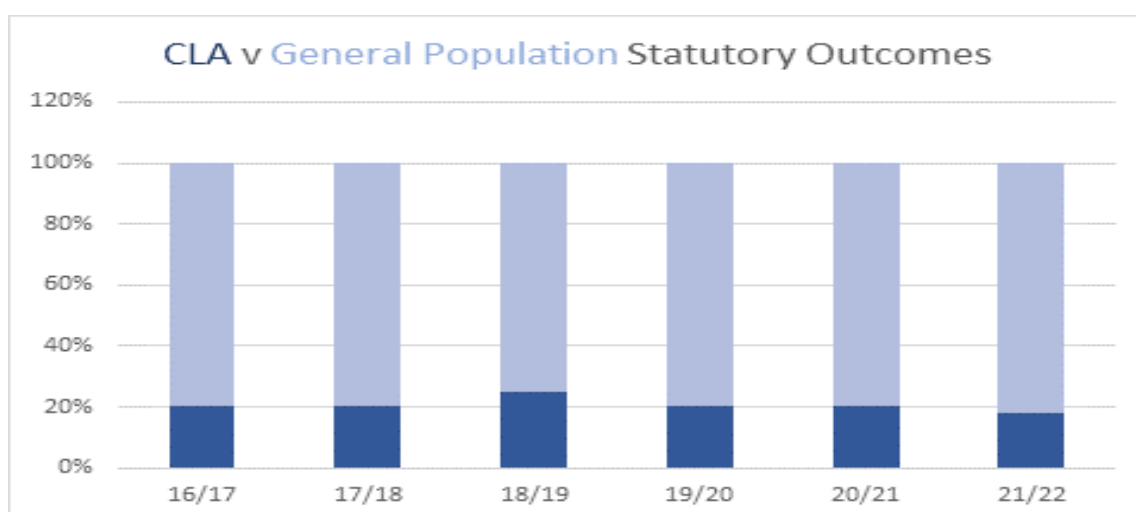


4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

4.1 Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is undertaken when a child has been convicted by the courts or made subject to a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution and consequently has YOS intervention.

During quarter 2 of 2022-23 there were 30 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 5 (16%) of these were looked after children (1,7% of CLA population). The 5 looked after children represented 17% of the young people open to YOS and were all white British.



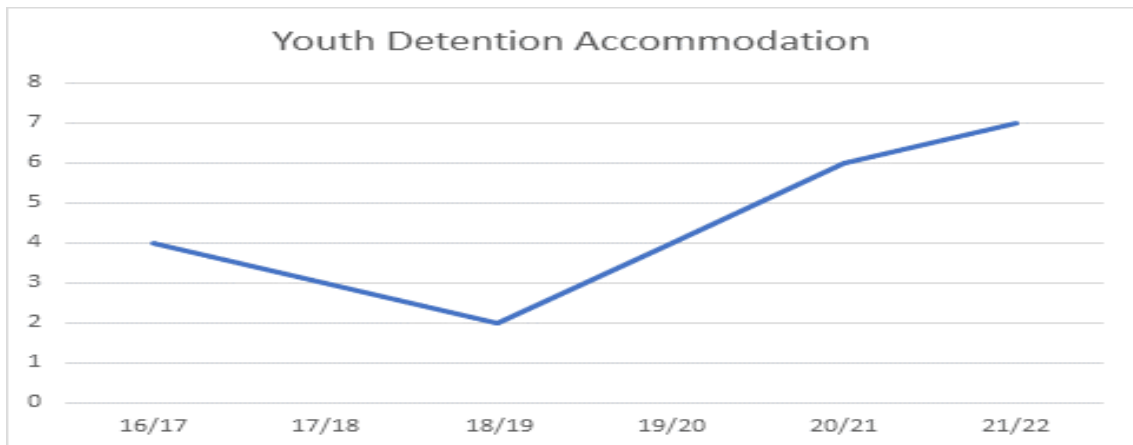
The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at or around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child that is made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.

2 children were subject to Youth Detention Accommodation Orders during quarter 1 of 2022-23, both were from the Black and Minority Ethnic community. Both young people are now serving custodial sentences. At the end of the second quarter there were no young people placed on remand.

The over representation of BAME young people in the Criminal Justice system is recognised as a national issue. Essex wide, we are working with our partners to identify the root causes for over representation via the Essex Criminal Justice Board. Locally we are monitoring the numbers of black children coming to the Out of Court Disposal Panel, where early intervention and diversion can be offered. The data in relation to our BAME young people in custody, on Court Orders, or receiving diversion intervention is scrutinised via the Youth Crime Governance Board on a quarterly basis and is a priority within our Youth Justice Board Plan 2021-24.



4.3 Out of court disposal panel

During Q2 for 2022/23 the out of court disposal panel dealt with 17 offences relating to 17 Thurrock children, of which 0 children had looked after status.

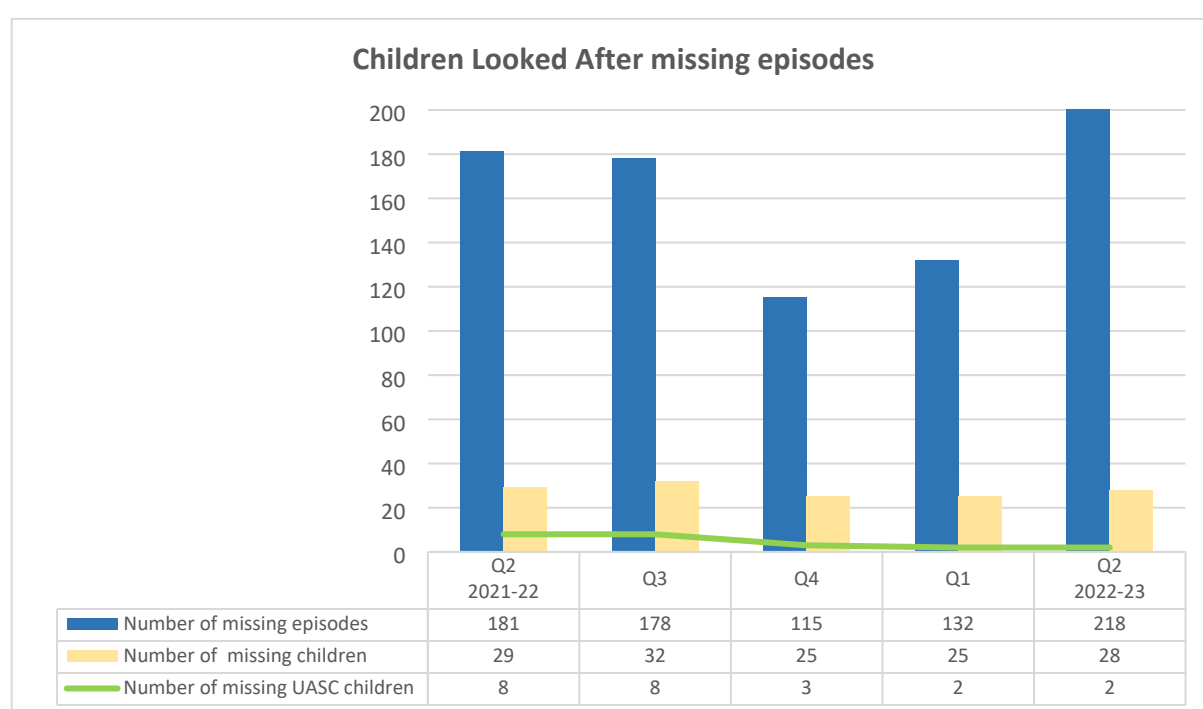
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol² aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

5. Children Looked After missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between July 2021 and September 2022. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

In Q2 2022-23 (Jul-Sep), there were total of 218 missing episodes represented by 28 individual children compared to 181 missing episodes in the same period in 2020-21; this represents a 20% increase in the number of missing episodes since Q2 2021-22. The majority of missing episodes relate to young people who are late home or who are missing for less than 24 hours and who are aged 16 and over.

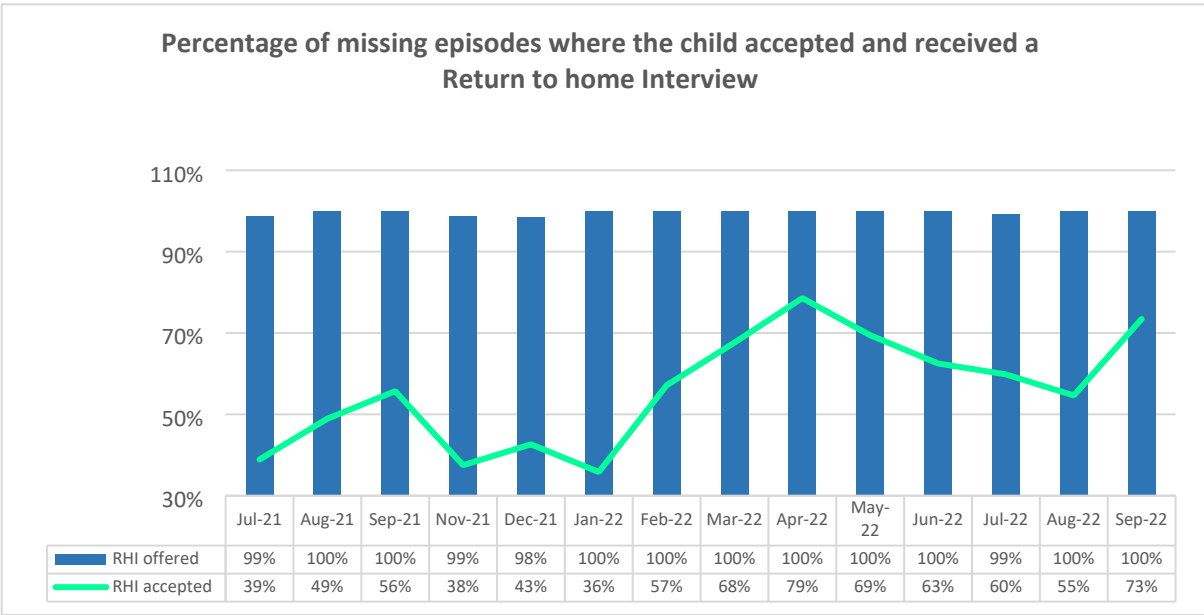


5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will also discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

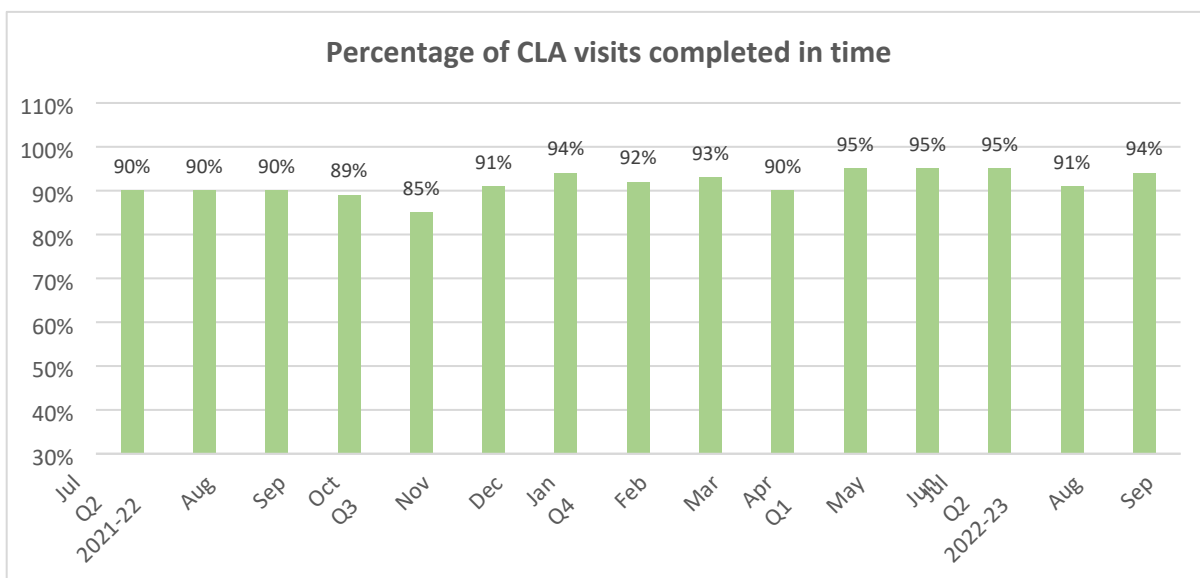
As at end of September 2022, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 100% of which 73% accepted and received an interview compared to 56% in September 2021. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but 'out'. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since July 2021. There continues to be a small number of CLA with a large number of episodes who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including their social worker and how this information is captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After visits

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. There has been a slight dip in performance in the last quarter and there is focused work within the service to ensure sustained improved performance and that children are seen and spoken to. The average quarterly visits completed in time between July and September 2022 was 93.5% compared to 89.4% in the same quarter in 2020-21 representing 4% increase.



5.3 Children Looked After in Education

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled. In line with Department for Education guidance, schools will not be publishing their data for 2021.

The annual report of the Virtual School Head teacher is a key document which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. The 2019-20 report was presented to Corporate Performance Board in January 2021.

In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Head teacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held accountable, and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda item 8 within Corporate Parenting Committee Pack January 21)

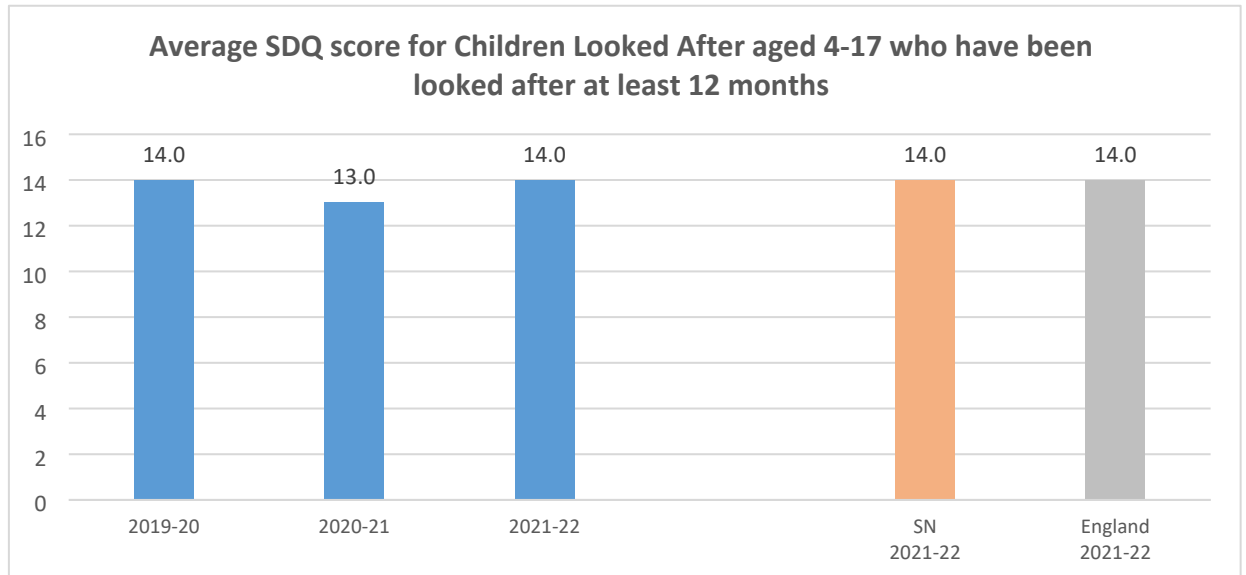
5.4 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-17 who have continuously been looked after for at least 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the Virtual School and Children's Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

For each child where their score indicates a level of need (scoring 13 or higher) their case is individually reviewed by a multi-agency panel to ensure appropriate services are in place. Children benefit from a suite of local services including EWMHS, Kooth (online Counselling) and commissioned therapeutic

services. For children placed out of area NHS provision or commissioned services are secured.

During COVID-19 the average scores have not increased and the mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



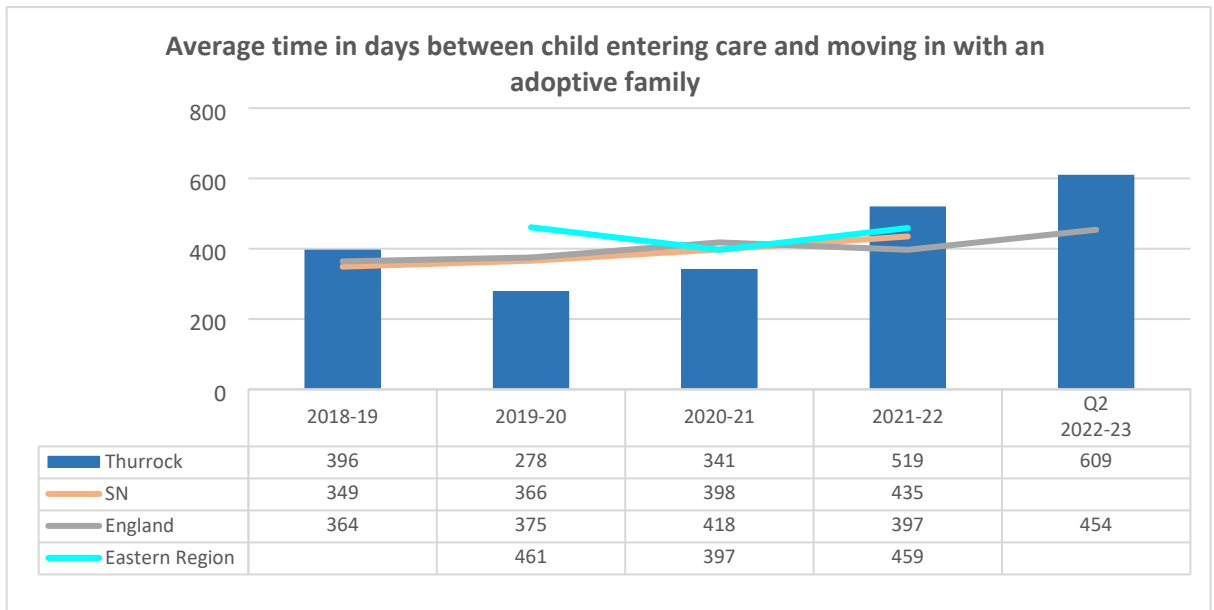
6. Adoption

As at the end of Q2 2022-23, there were 5 children adopted and 9 matched with prospective adopters.

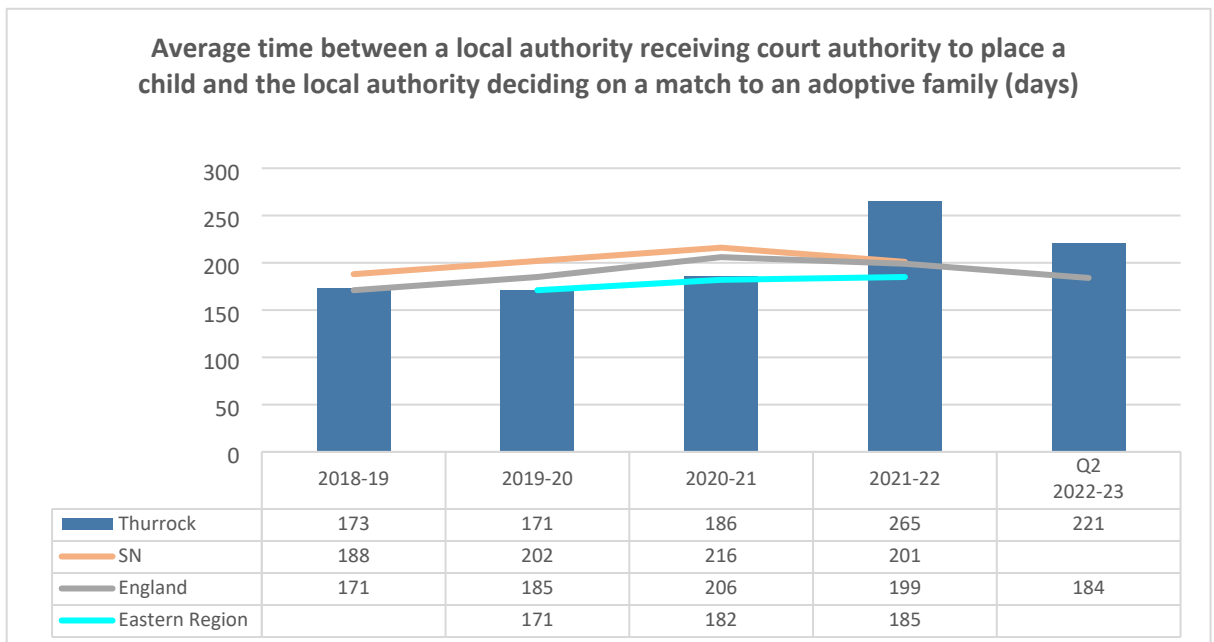
6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12-month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of Q2 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 609 days. Based on the Q2 2022-23 data, Thurrock is above the National average of 454 days. The 2022-year end benchmarking data shows that Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days and Eastern Region of 459 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.

Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability and family members being identified late. For a small group of children there are longer adoption journeys and these lift our average. We will continue to see upward pressure due to the duration of care proceedings being 40+ weeks (the target is 26)



As at end of Q2 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 221 days. Based on Q2 2022-23 data, Thurrock is above the National average of 184 days and based on 2021-22-year end data, Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days, the England average of 199 days and Eastern Region of 185 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. There has been delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay because of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as

soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order or appeal can prevent the placement of children with adoptive families. Due to the small numbers involved, the average can be impacted in exceptional circumstances by an individual case causing an increase in the average time between a court order being made and matching.

6.2 **CLA permanency**

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption only once all family and friend options have been exhausted.

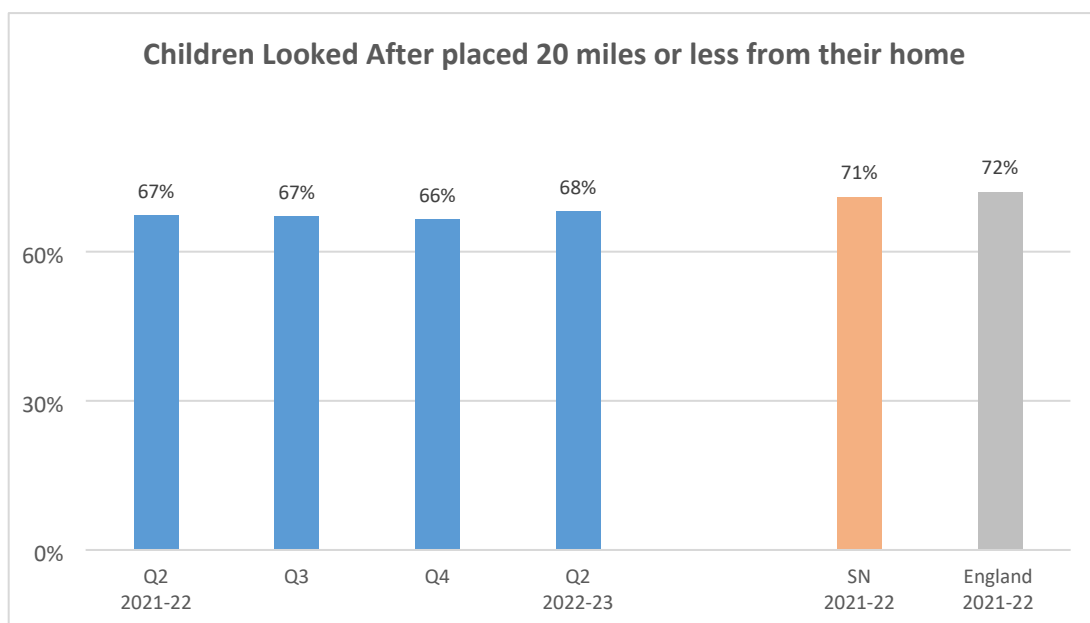
Of the total CLA cohort of 282, 16% (44) children were aged 0-5 as at end of September 2022. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There were significant delays in court proceedings and children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed.

6.3 **Children Looked After placement distance**

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of September 2022, 68% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 192 of 282 Children Looked After. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, Thurrock reflects performance close with the Statistical Neighbour average of 71% and the National average of 72%.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However, it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care³, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets Authority, October 2021, has noted the pressure on Local Authority placement services) and the local authority continues to seek Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.



7. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the **OC3 care leaver cohort** (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) of Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. There have been legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000⁴, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

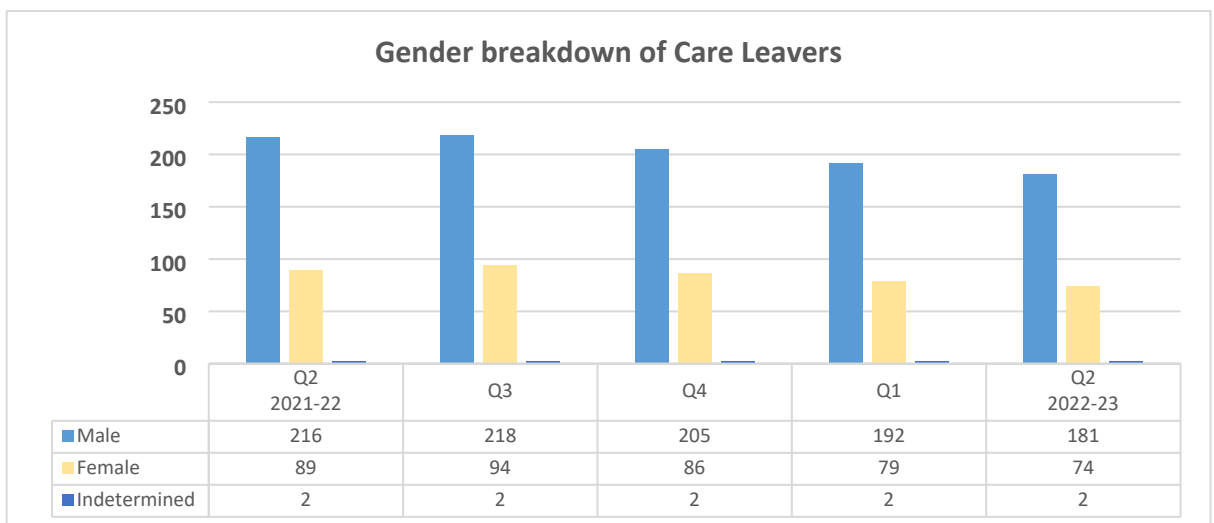
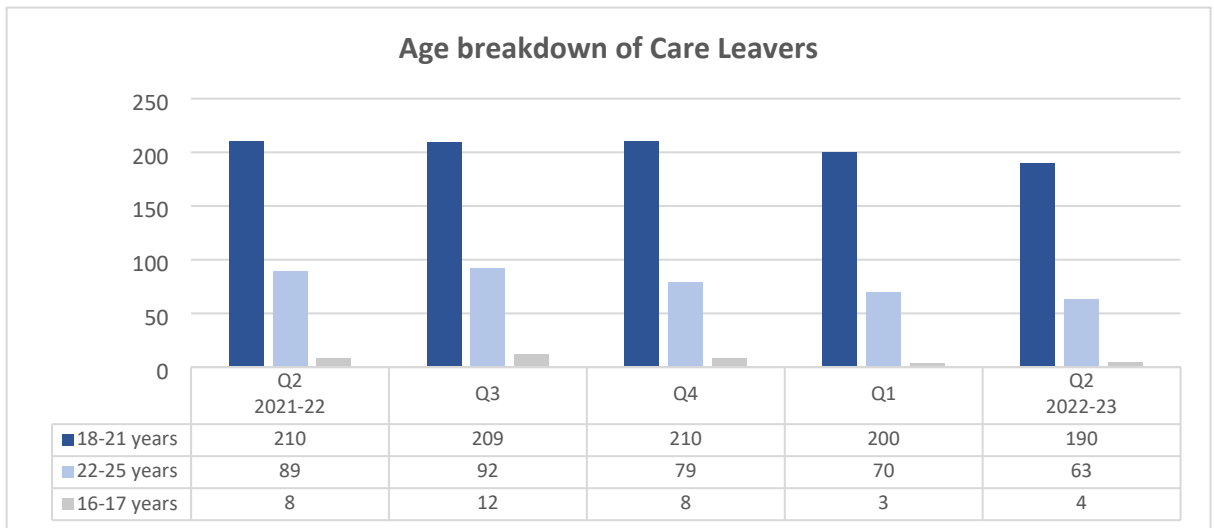
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

As at end of September 2022, 257 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is a drop from the previous year of 298 as a result of the Service undertaking a review of open cases to ensure the young people open actually needed the support. This cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

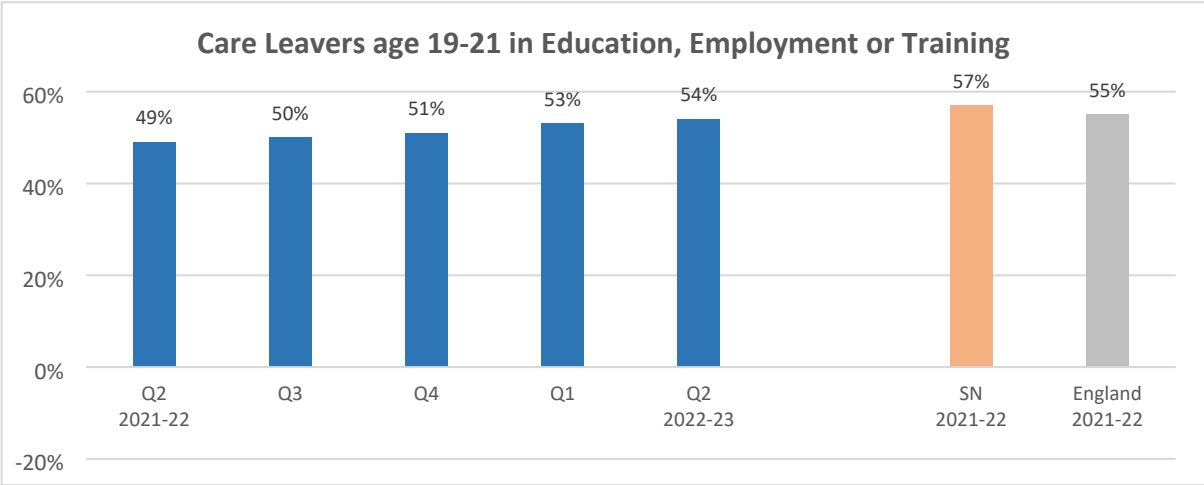
The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of Q2 2022-23, 54% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 49% in September 2021 which brings Thurrock in more line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18-year-olds who do not have an

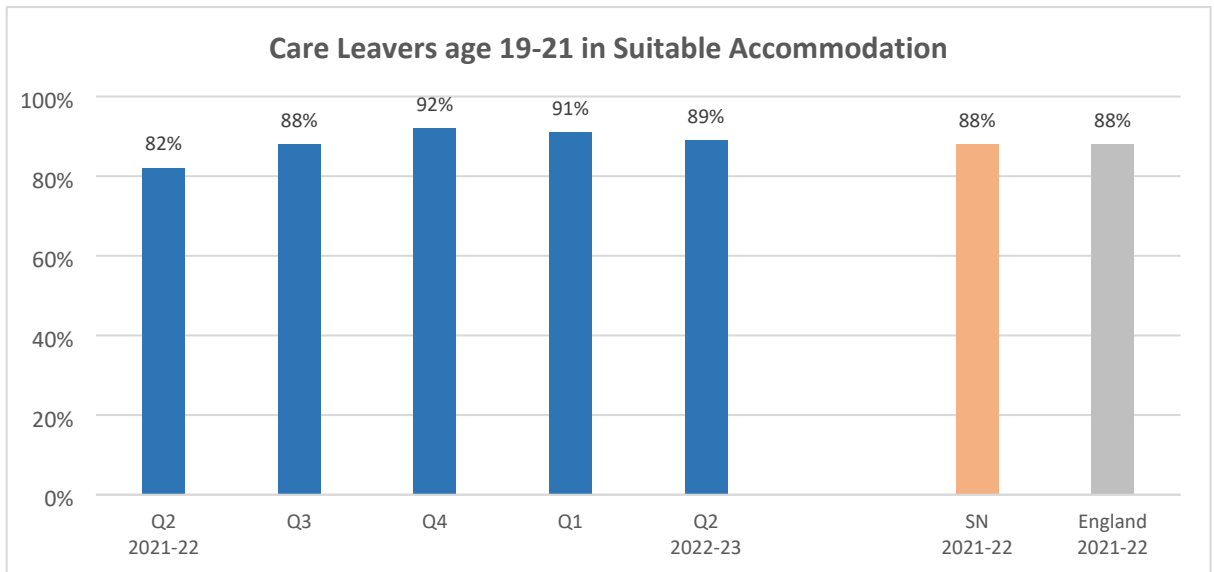
EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub, and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer.



7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q2 2022-23 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 89%. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 88% based on 2022 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

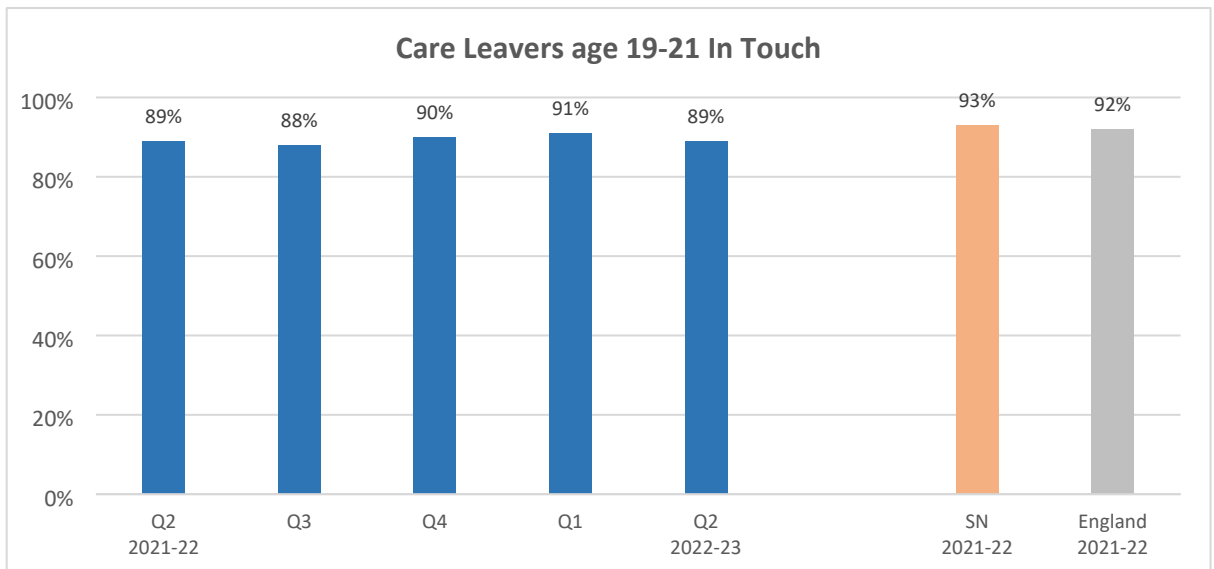
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



7.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently.

At the end of Q2 2022-23, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is marginally below the Statistical Neighbourhood average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2021-22 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



8. Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 Children's Overview & Scrutiny Board Members to note and comment on current performance position.

9. Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 Not applicable

10. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance, and community impact

10.1 None

11. Implications

11.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

The Children services budget continues to face increased financial pressures arising from placement costs, with limited supply of specialist provisions increasing the cost required to be paid. The Councils MTFS continues to provide support within a challenging financial climate

11.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social Care & Education

No implications identified.

11.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer - Adults, Housing & Health

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from this report. However, the service does collect diversity monitoring data for looked after children, this data is given within this report. The data is utilised to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics.

11.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Not applicable

12. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

Not applicable

13. **Appendices to the report**

None

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