

18 July 2023		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead – Business Intelligence		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good this report focusses on data of 2022-23.

At the end of Q4 2022-23, 292 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 270 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. Children and young people are visited regularly, and the management of missing children is consistent and 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

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Children are generally placed with foster carers or, where possible, with family members. Thurrock Council continues develop it's 'Think Family' approach to reduce the need for children to enter care. Foster Care recruitment continues to develop local placements for children.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That Members note improvements, challenges 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.

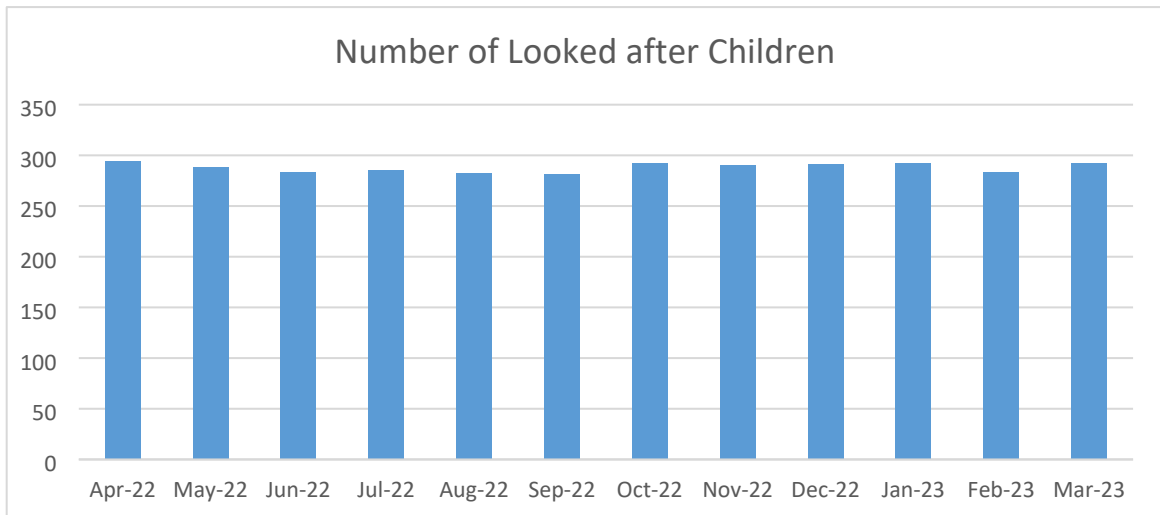
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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. 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 there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate. Thurrock's Children in Care numbers have remained relatively steady year to date from 294 in April 2022 to 292 in March 2023. The service saw a reduction in care numbers from this year down to 282 in September but has seen an increase in line with the additional numbers of UASC following the increased quota for each local authority from 0.07% per child population to 0.1%. This means the overall numbers of children in our care is stable, but a larger proportion are UASC.

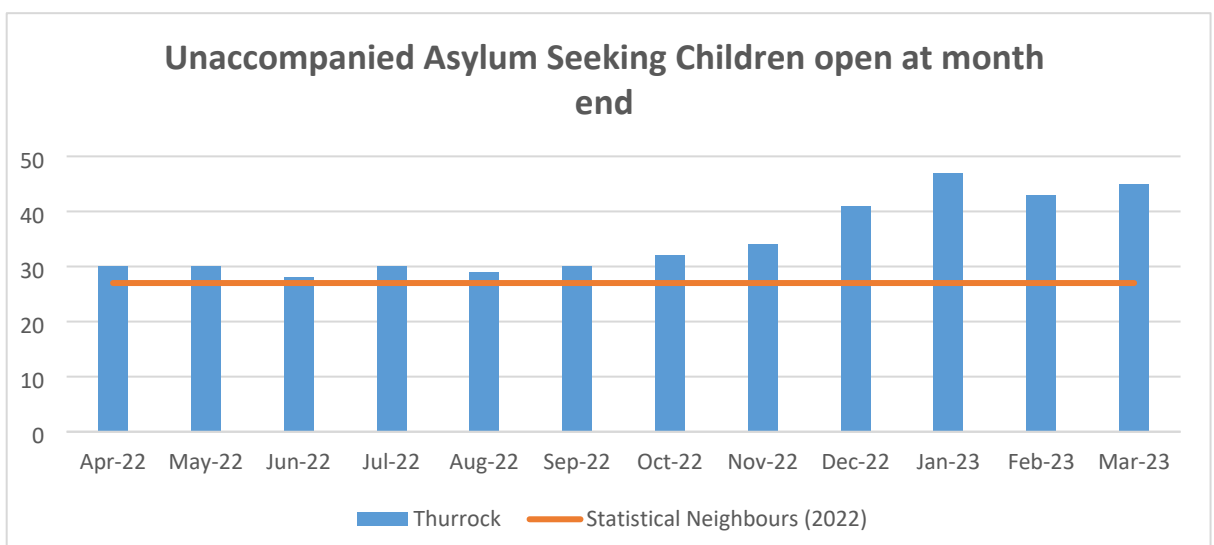


3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. Children either arrive in Thurrock directly and become looked after or are transferred into Thurrock via the National Transfer Scheme. Between 1st January and 31st March 2023, there were 12 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 12 in the same period in 2022. As of the 31st March 2023 Thurrock was at its limit of 45 UASC, we expect this to reduce in the next quarter due to a number of children turning 18. Further transfers are expected as a result.

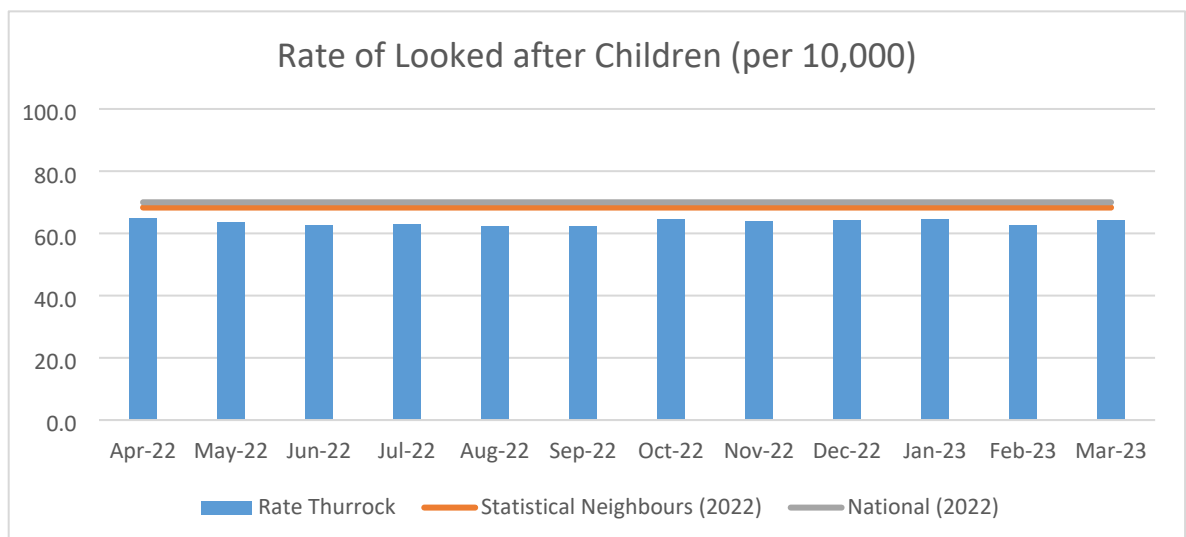
When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since April 2022.



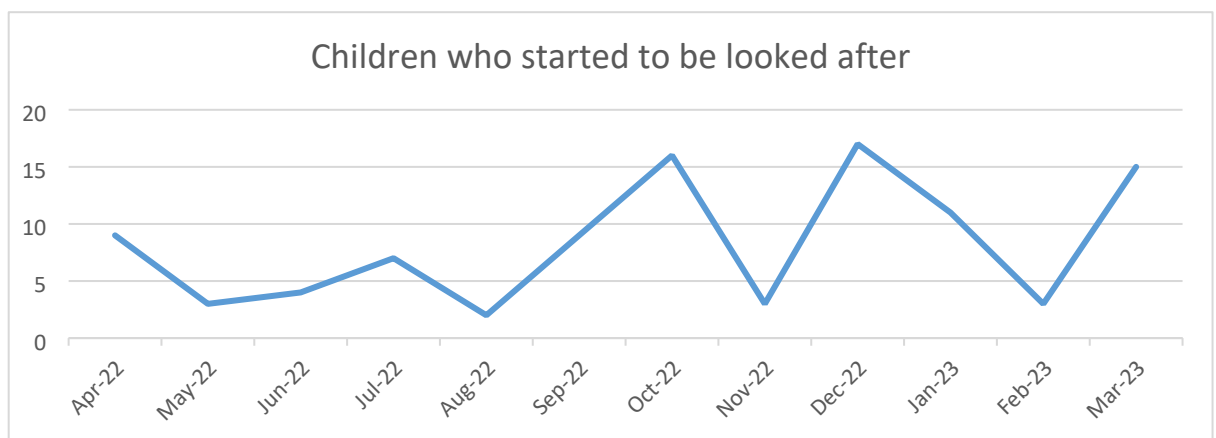
3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

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 March 2023 there were 292 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64.3 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68.3 and England average of 70 as at the end of March 2023. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children are coming into care and working with families to keep children within their family network/home where it is safe to do so. These lower looked after children's numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC because of the national threshold rising.

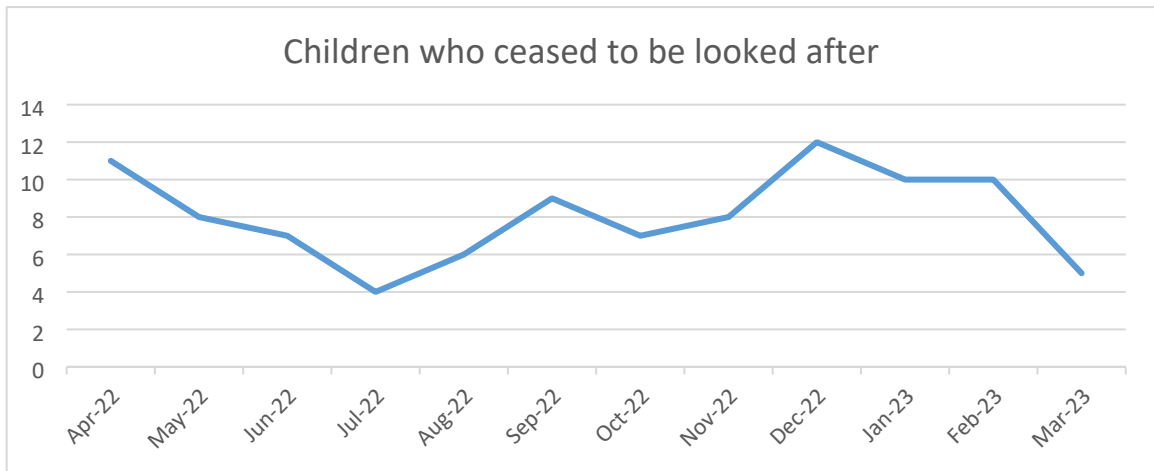


3.4 Children Looked After episodes ceased and started

It is normal for the number of children starting and leaving care to fluctuate.



Between April 2022 and March 2023, 97 children ceased to be looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22.:



The most common reasons for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents and those turning 18.

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

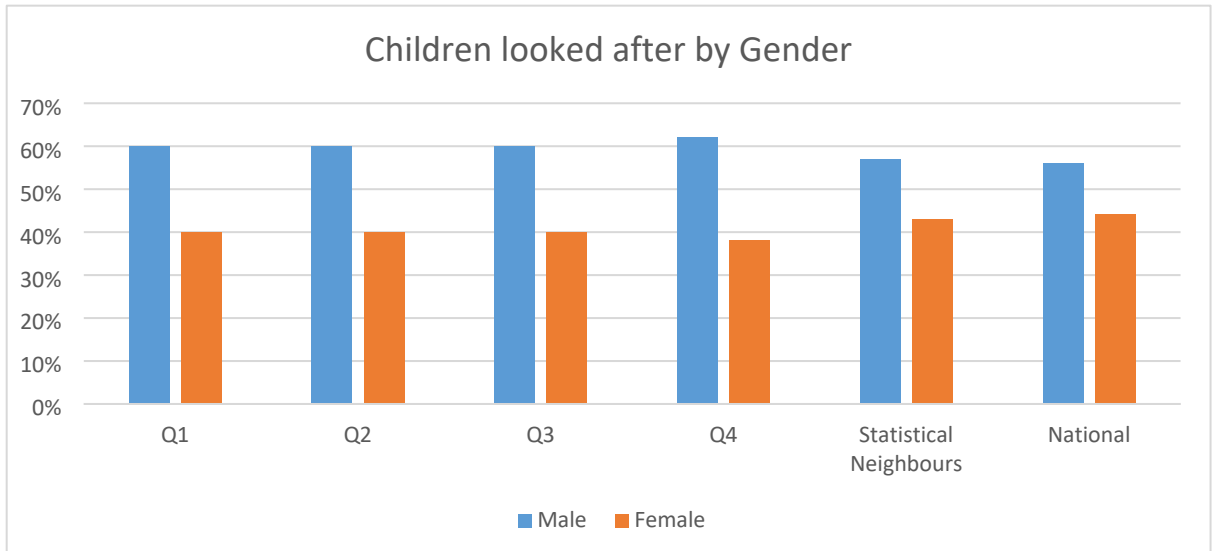
- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below charts show entries in and exits out of care over the last few years including the changing trajectory of the UASC population in line with the rise from 0.07% to 0.1%.

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Q4 2022-23 (Jan - Mar)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	29
UASC entering Care	91	75	36	38	12
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	25
Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	295	292
UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population)	31 (10.6%)	23 (7.7%)	24 (8%)	28 (9.4%)	39 (13%)

3.6 Children Looked After by Gender

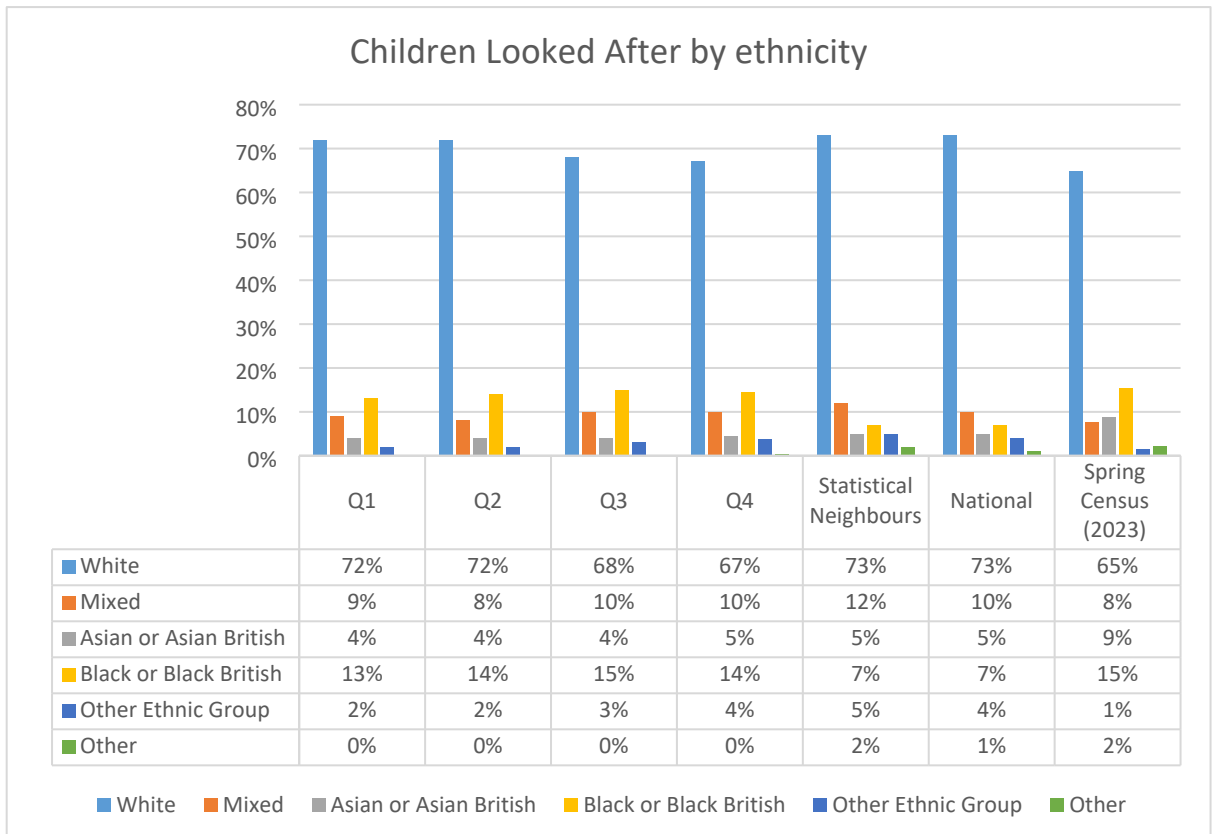
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as of March 2023 which is likely a reflection of our percentage of UASC who are predominately males.



3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

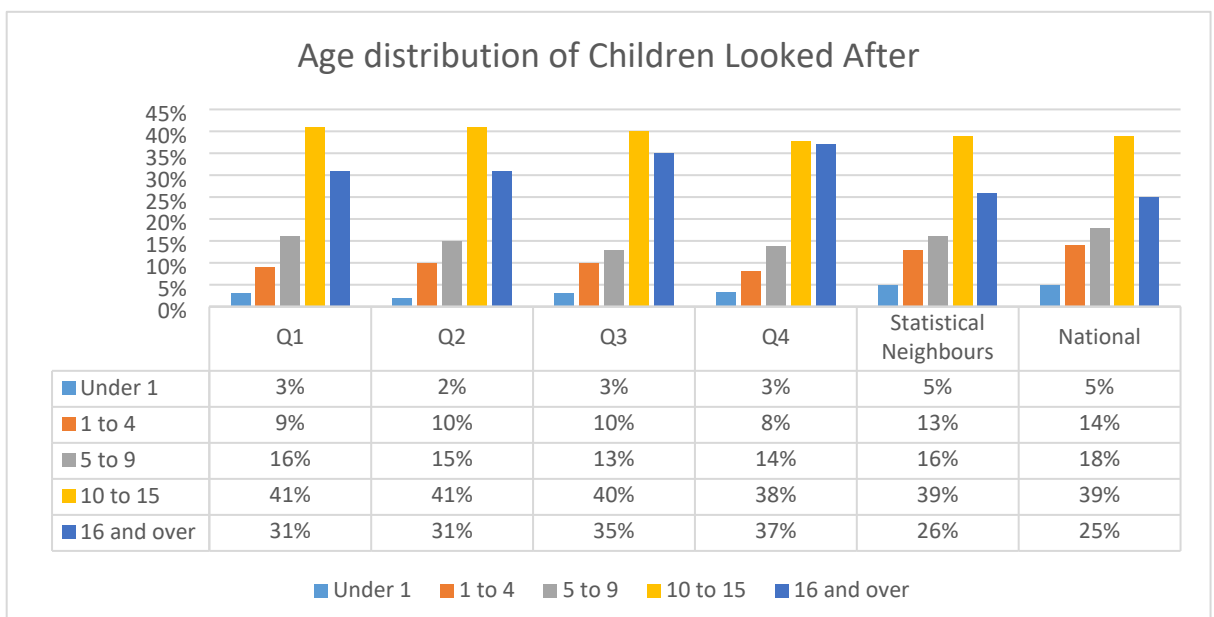
Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2023 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.



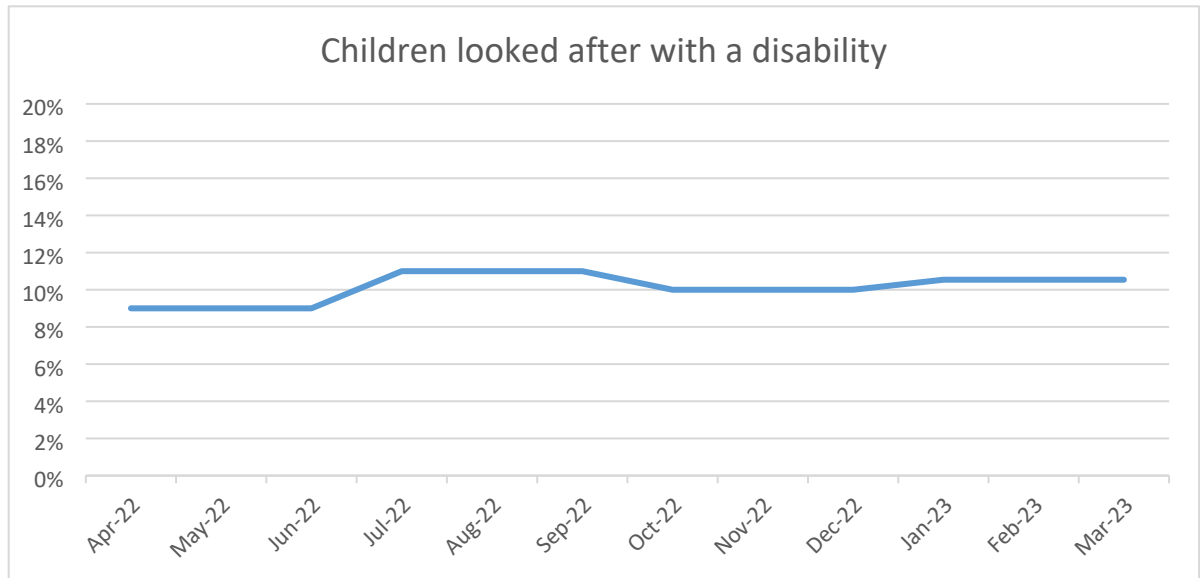
3.8 Children Looked After age profile

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 April 2022, we have seen a 6% 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 25% as at the end of Q4 2022-23.



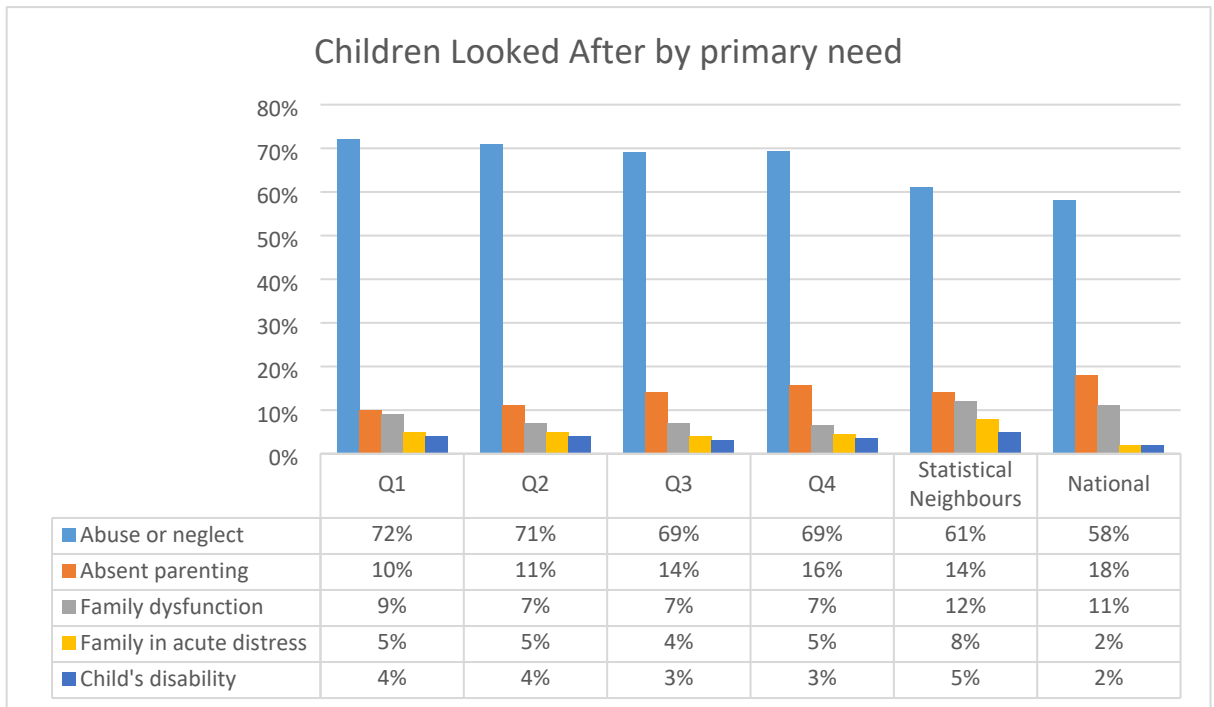
3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2022. At the end of March 2023, 31 (11%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 21 of these children were boys aged 5 and over and 7 girls aged 13 and over. 22 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 necessary.



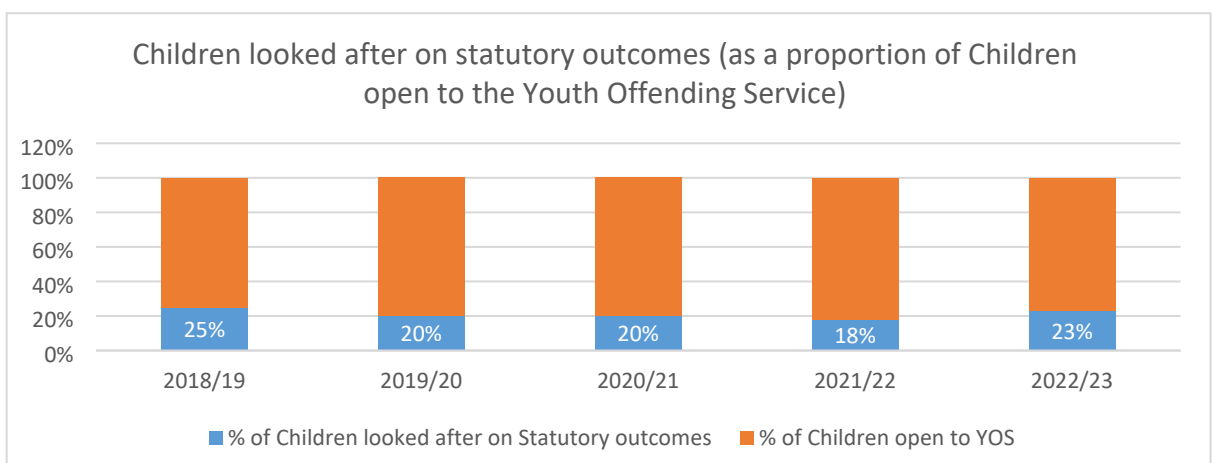
4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

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.

For the 2022-23 financial year there were 43 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 10 of these were looked after children. The 10 looked after children represented 23% of the young people open to YOS.

The number of Children Looked After over the last five years has been relatively static at around 20%.



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. There has been a slight increase since the last financial year but overall, the figure has remained relatively static.

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.

5 children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the 2022-23 financial year.

4.3 Out of court disposal panel

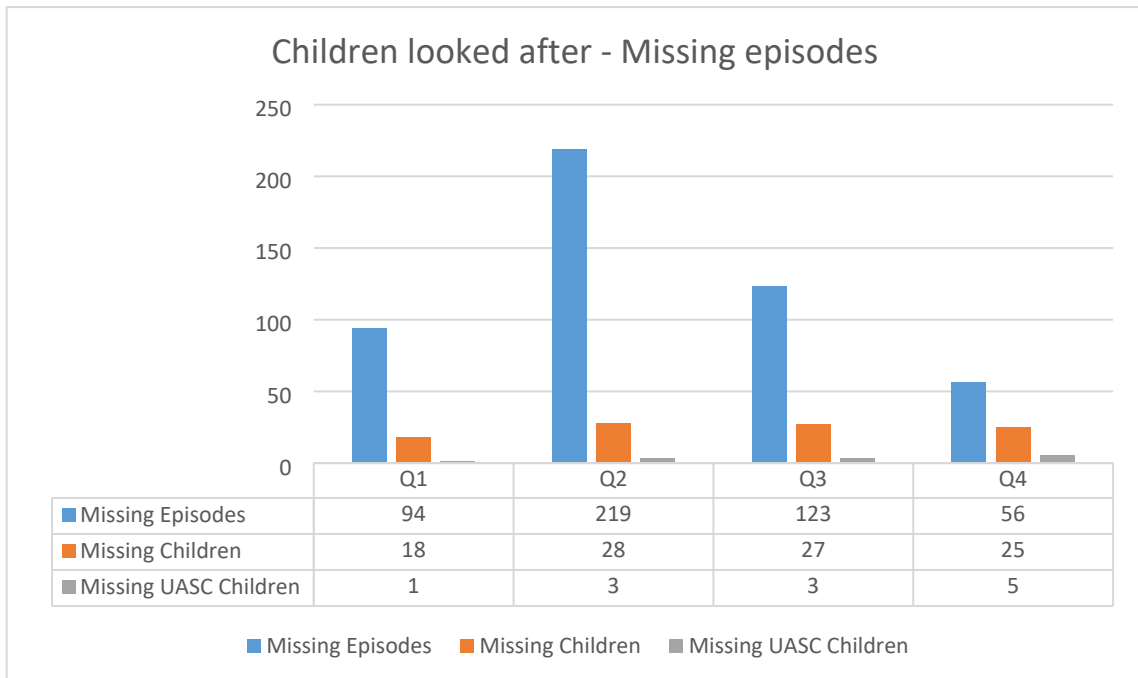
During the 2022/23 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 47 offences relating to 47 Thurrock children, of which 3 children had looked after status.

Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol¹ aimed at reducing 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.

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 April 2022 and March 2023. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were total of 492 missing episodes which represented 50 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there was a total of 566 episodes.



5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

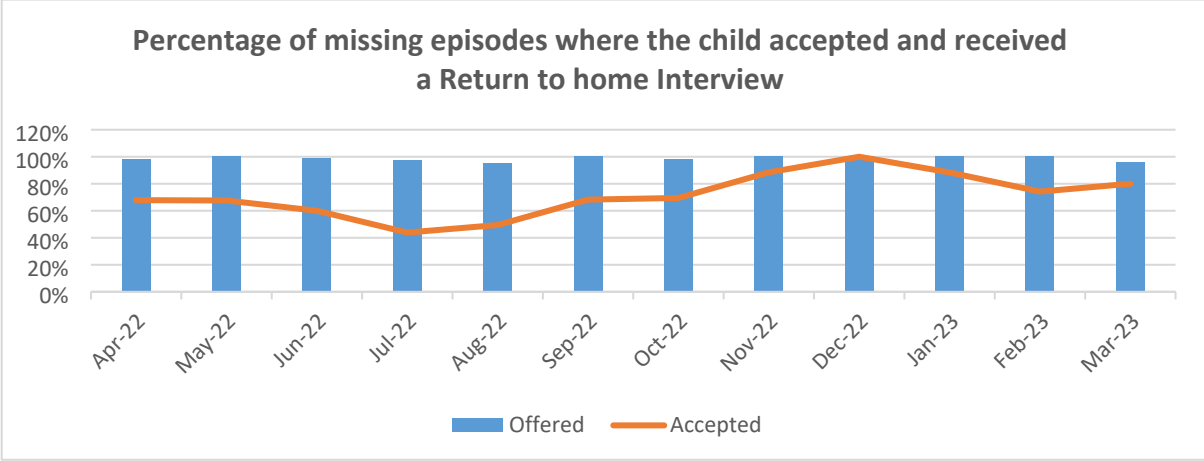
Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person’s circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers 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 the end of March 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 96% of which 80% accepted and received an interview compared to 53.1% in March 2022. 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 Missing Children Panel.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since April 2022 and shows an improved picture of children accepting and receiving a RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA 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

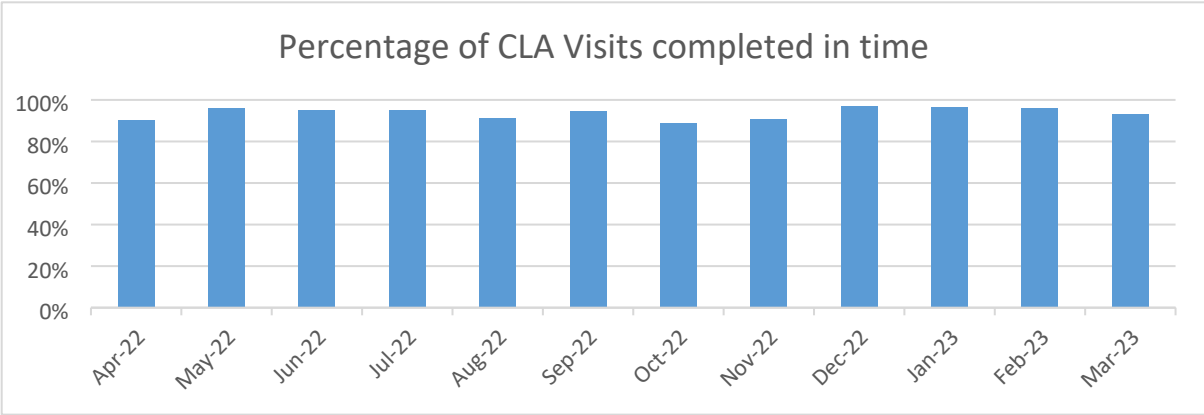
people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.

The Return Home Interview service is now being delivered and managed by the service from the 1st of April 2023. Bringing this ‘in house’ will enable the children to have consistency of support and build relationships with the workers to improve safety planning and reduce missing episodes.



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. The average visits completed in time between April 2022 and March 2023 was 94% compared to 91% in 2021/22 representing a 3% increase and visits in the last 12 months have consistently shown performance over 90% in time.



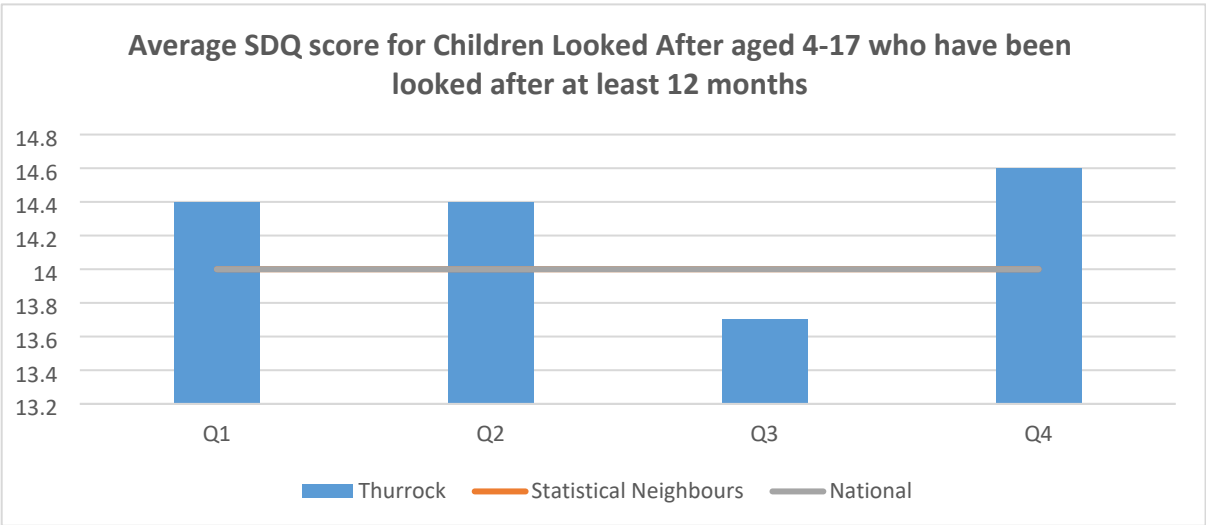
5.3 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

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.

The average scores are 14.6 which is in line with Statistical Neighbour and Nationally. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



6. Adoption

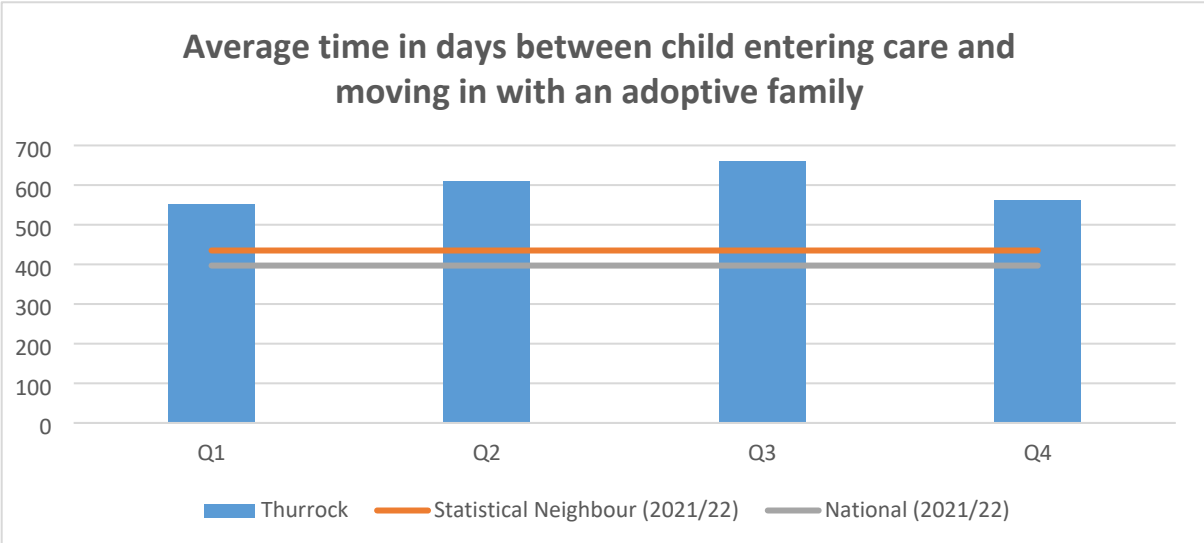
From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, there were 14 children adopted and 14 children were matched with prospective adopters. The service continues to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the regional need as is a net contributor to our Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt East. The number of children adopted is higher than last financial year which reflects the local need in 2022/23 and the conclusion of some long-standing proceedings.

6.1 Timeliness of Adoption

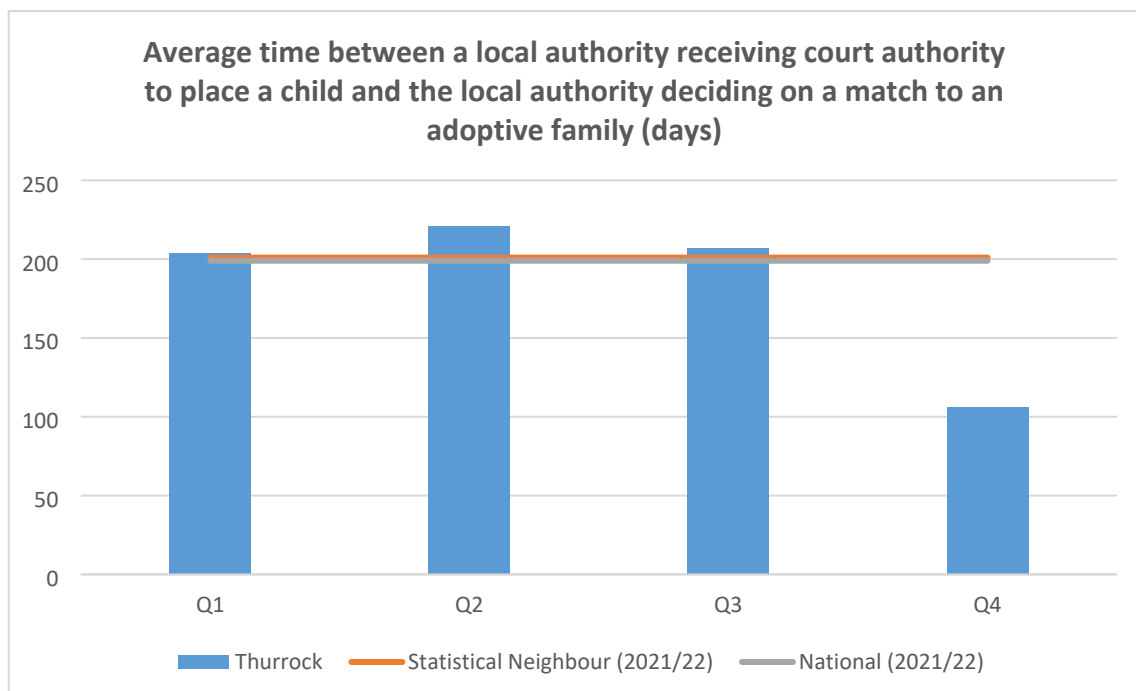
Proceedings in the local court remain over the 26-week target and judicial capacity is limited. The average duration of care proceedings nationally is 46 weeks. This means that care proceeding take longer than they should due to court capacity Other factors such as family members putting themselves forward later or the requirement for further assessments can impact the length of proceedings. The President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline process in January 2023 with a view to reducing the length of proceedings towards the 26 weeks statutory time limit. In terms of our local

court, direct work with the lead family judge has provided a prioritisation pathway and an additional Judge has been recruited.

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 Q4 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 560 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 397 days and above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, England average of 397 and Eastern Region of 459 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a very small number of children experiencing a delay can impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability, and family members being identified late. It is anticipated hearing capacity at the local court will be improved due to a new judicial appointment.



As at end of Q4 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 106 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 188 days and the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days.



This has been an area of focus and performance has improved with the timeliness target exceeded.

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 292 as at the end of Q4 2022-23, 14% (42) children were aged 0-5. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers.

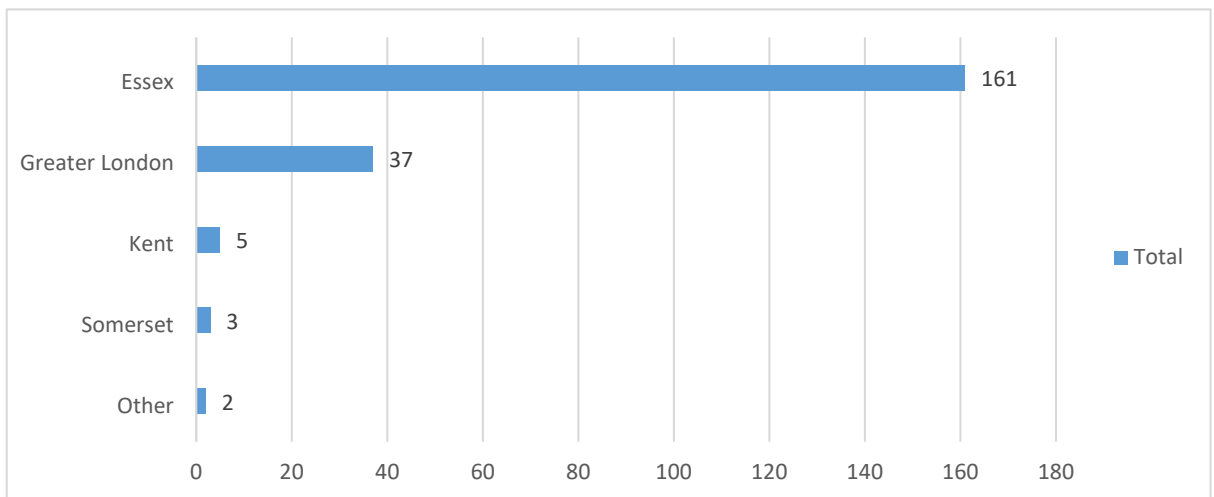
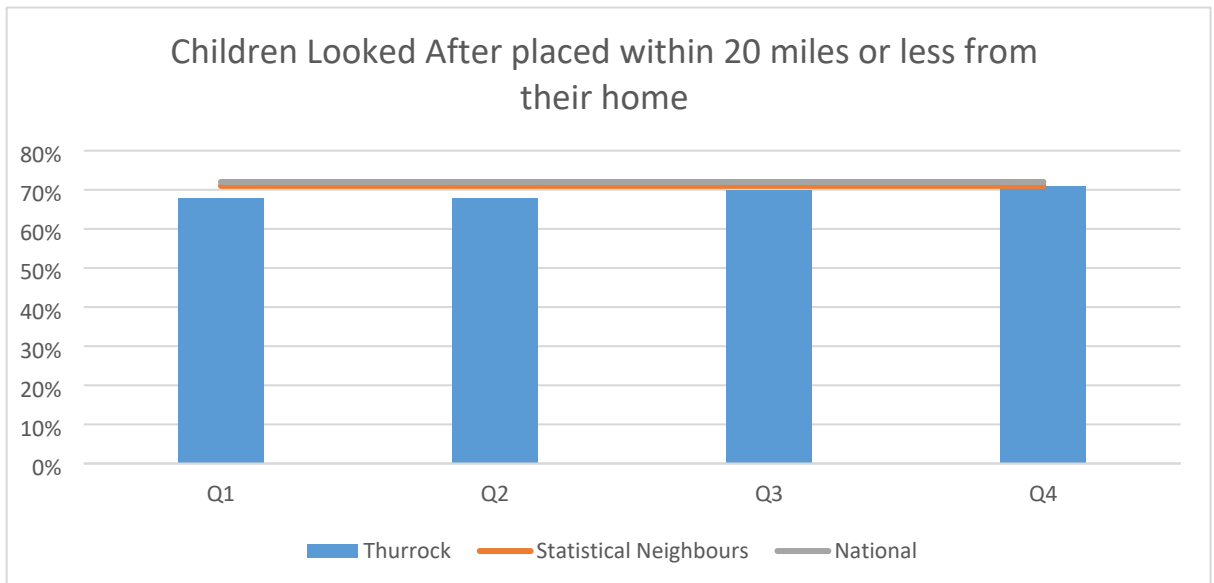
6.3 Children Looked After placement distance

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989. Placements out of area must be approved by the nominated person and placements 'at a distance' must be agreed by the Director of Children's Services.

At the end of March 2023 71% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 208 out of 292 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, Thurrock reflects performance close with the national average of 74%.

Thurrock is performing just slightly better than its statistical neighbours which is positive in maintaining children close to home. It is recognised that maintaining

children in their schools and communities is a priority for young people and for the Council. We continue to push for local placements for children,



7.0 Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year), and Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. Local authorities have a legislative duty to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers from the age of 16-21 and up until the age of 25 if required.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, 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.

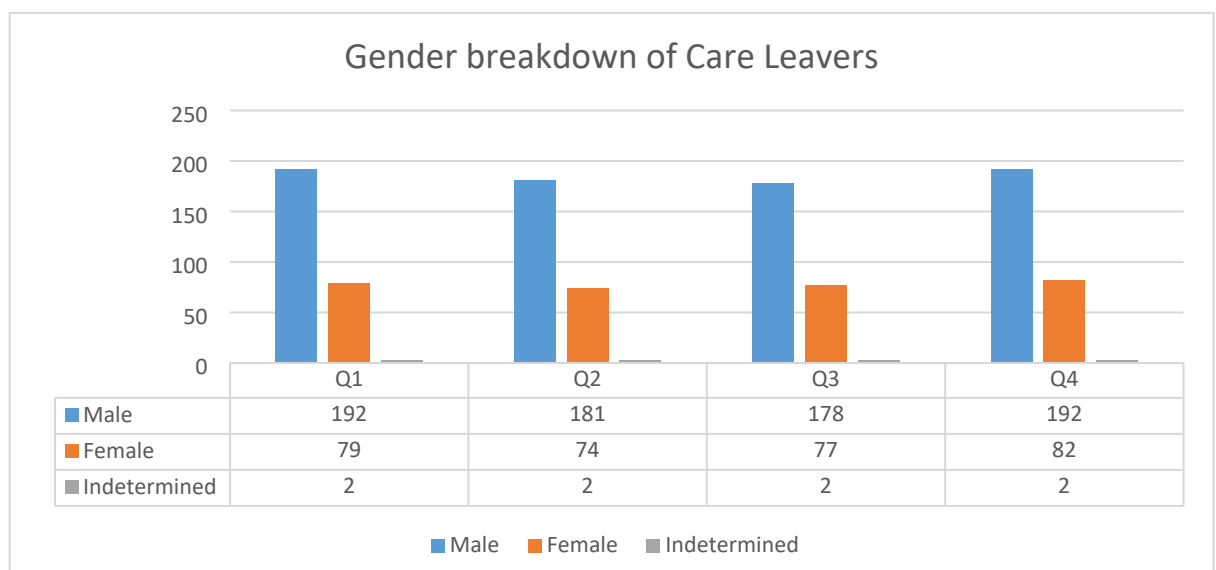
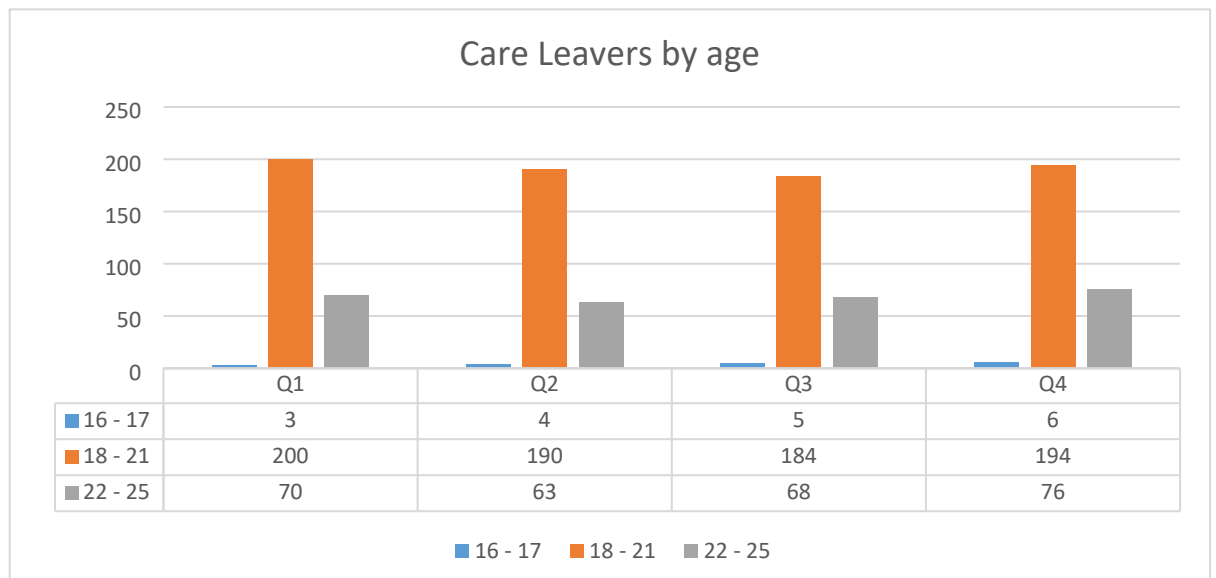
¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

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.

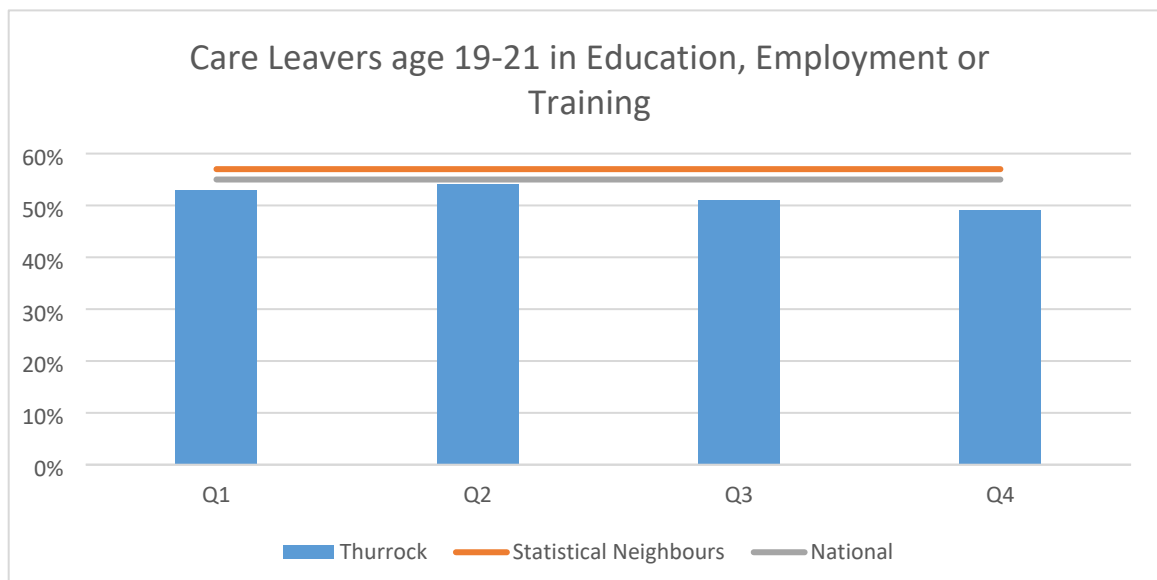
As at end of March 2023, 276 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service.

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 Q4 2022-23, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 52% in the same period in 2021/22 which is below 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.

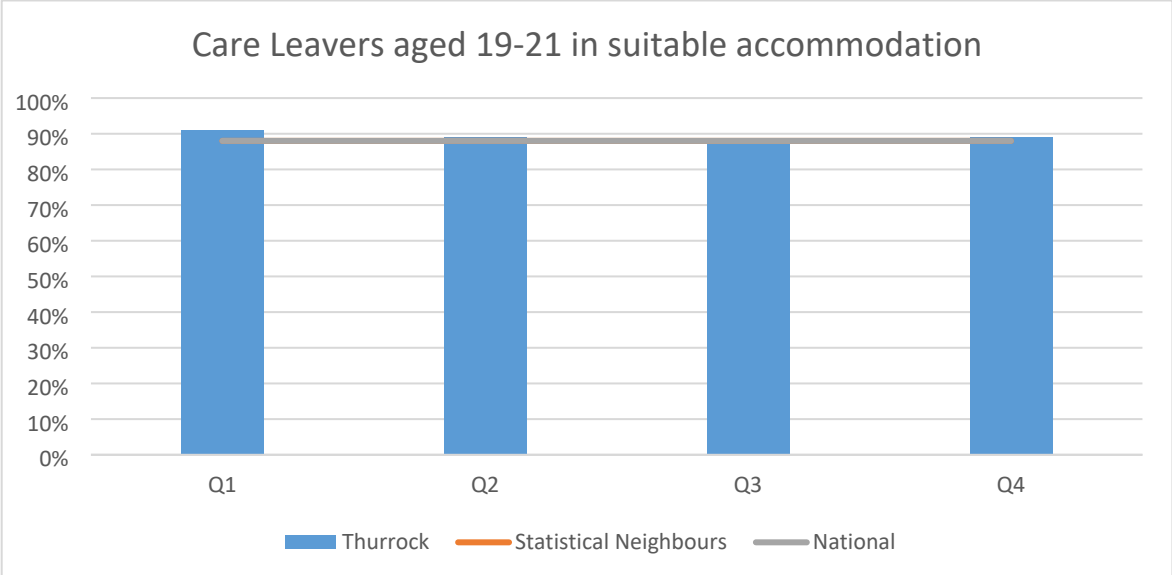


EET numbers are impacted by local economic factors and Thurrock has a higher proportion of care experienced young people who are unable to work as the result of their immigration status. Home Office decisions are delayed impacting our performance and the experience of our young people.

7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q4 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.

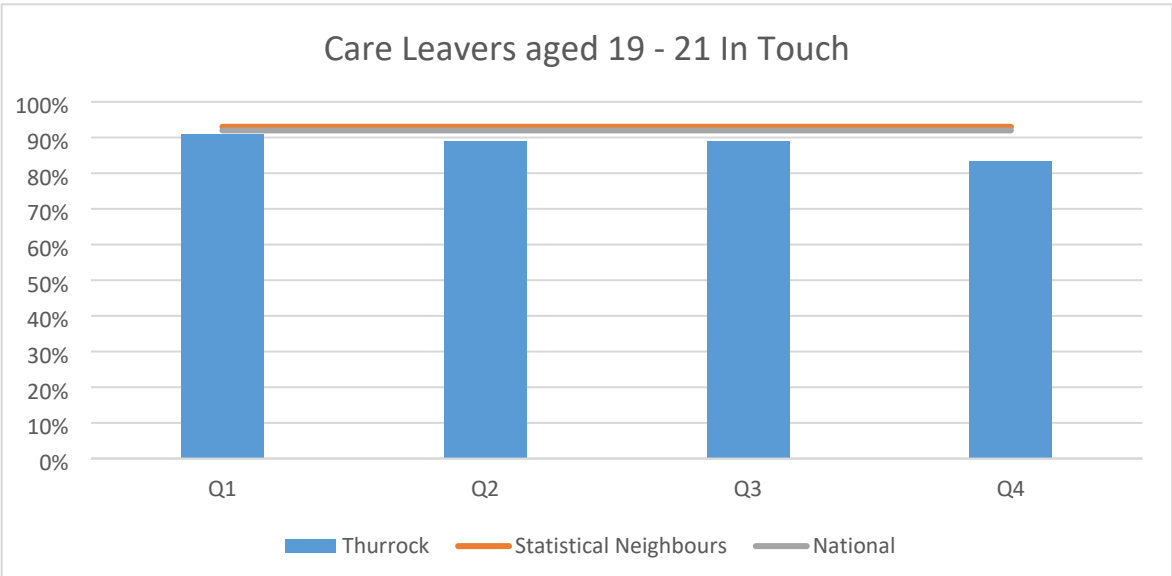
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2022, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to 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 Q4 2022-23, Thurrock was in touch with 83% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is below the Statistical Neighbour 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. Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

8.1 Not applicable

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

9.1 None

10. Implications

10.1 Financial

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

No implications

10.2 Legal

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

No implications identified.

10.3 Diversity & Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
**Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer**

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.

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

Not applicable

11. 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

12. Appendices to the report

None

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