

16 November 2023		ITEM: 6
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 1 2023-24		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager		
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 shows that:

- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.
- All data continues to be monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that decision-making within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remains robust and ensures families are supported by the most appropriate service.
- Between April and June 2023, the number of The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,561 compared to 1,515 in the same period in 2022, which demonstrates a consistent number of contacts received.
- Between April and June 2023, the number of referrals was 592 compared to 629 between the same period in 2022. This demonstrates a consistent number of referrals.
- Between April and June 2023 Early Help (Prevention and Support Service) received 346 referrals which included 55 children stepped down from Children's Social Care.
- 98% of children and families' assessments were completed in timescale. There has been consistent performance of 94% or above since August 2022, which demonstrates excellent performance in this area.
- As at end of June 2023, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 105 compared to 108 at the end of June 2022. Children subject to a Child Protection plan are carefully reviewed and numbers fluctuate each quarter, therefore this increase does not present any concern.

- The number of children looked after by Thurrock Council at the end of Quarter 1 2023 went up to 308 as the result of an increased number of children entering care in June including 9 UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children).
- For Care Leavers aged between 19-21 there has been improved performance across all three areas of suitable accommodation, being 'in touch' and being in education, employment, or training.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That members review the areas of good practice and performance in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to date to manage demand for statutory social care services.**
- 1.2 **Members provide appropriate challenges around areas for development or any areas of concern.**

2. Introduction and Background

This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for Quarter 1, 2023-2024 (April to June 2023). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data, and key performance indicators.

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.

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

The latest benchmarking data published is 2021-22 and is used within this report. The statutory returns that inform these have now been successfully submitted for the 2022-23 reporting period and reports will reference the updated benchmarking once published (expected Autumn 2023).

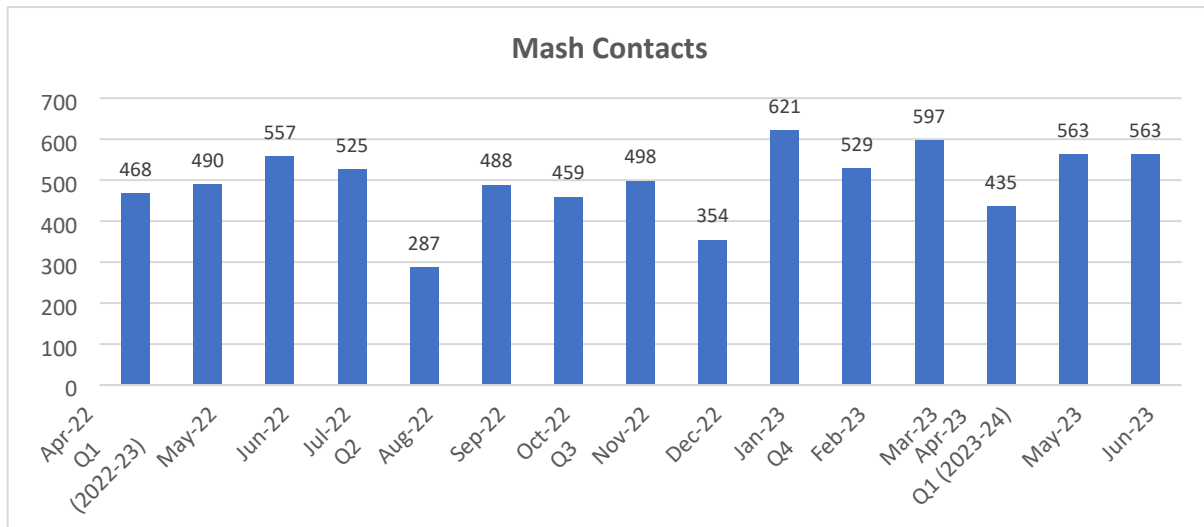
3. Thurrock Performance Data

3.1 MASH Contacts

The graph below shows the number of contacts received over the last year. The number of contacts fluctuate month to month, with Quarter 4 of 2022-2023 seeing the highest number of referrals over the year (1747). This number reduced in Quarter 1 2023-2024 (1561) which was similar to the number of contacts received in Quarter 1 2022-2023 (1515). This indicates that the rise in Q4 was a short-term variance. This data will continue to be monitored and reviewed to identify any patterns or themes, and any further action that may be required.

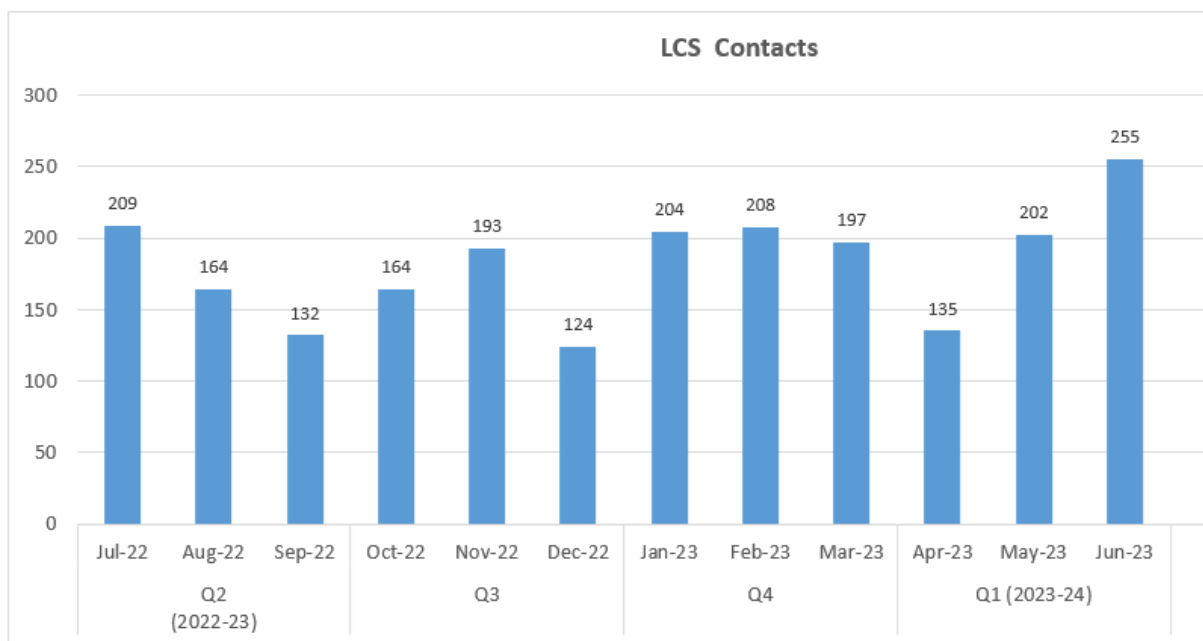
Of the total contacts of 1561 received in the period, 41% (645) resulted in no further action (NFA) and the remaining required some level of intervention. The number of contacts with an outcome of NFA remains consistent month to month. Where the outcome of a contact is NFA, advice is provided and agencies can contact the MASH to consult and discuss the best way

forward, including how to access to a range of universal services that can provide appropriate support and intervention to children and families.



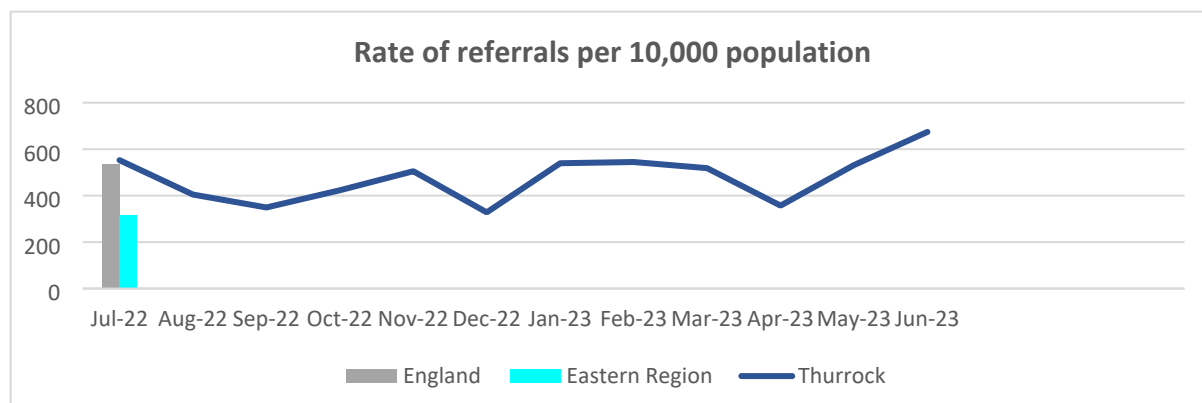
3.2 Referrals

Between April and June 2023, the number of referrals was 592 compared to 629 in the same period in 2022. This shows a 5.8% drop in the number of referrals when comparing the two quarters. This is a slight reduction; however, the number of referrals does fluctuate, and this does not raise a concern. Below shows the number of referrals since Quarter 2 2022-23.



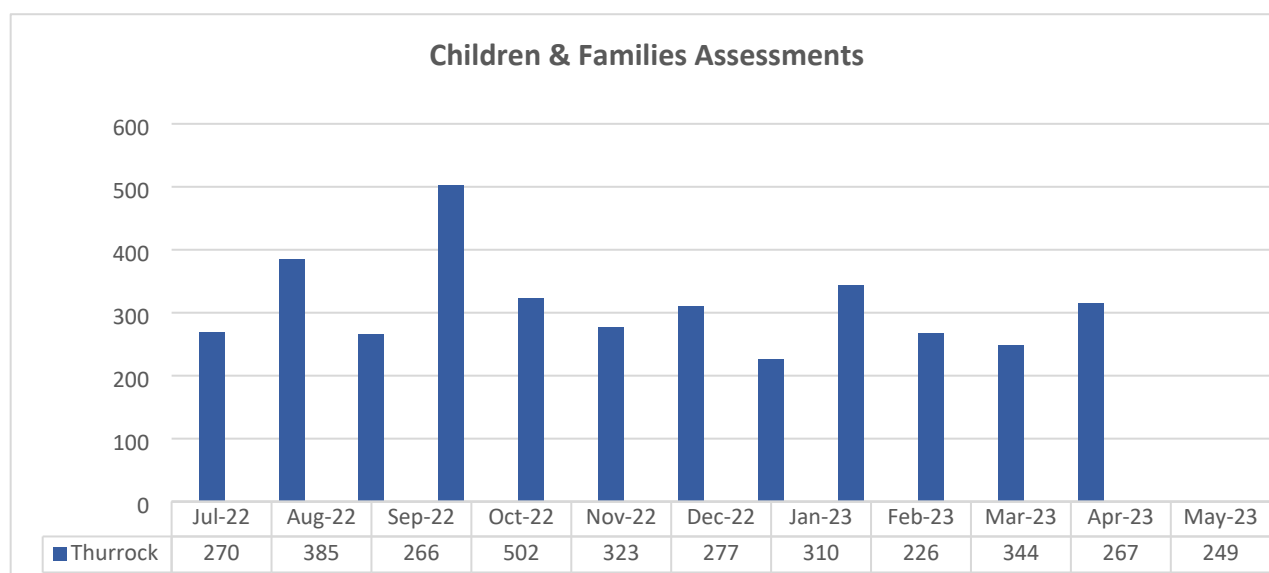
3.3 Rate of referrals

As at the end of June 2023, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 674. Based on the latest published benchmarking 2021-22 data, Thurrock is above the England rate of 538 and Eastern Region rate of 317. Once benchmarking for 2022 – 2023 is available, we will have a better understanding of how Thurrock compares nationally and within the Eastern Region.



3.4 Children & Families Assessments

Between April and June 2023, 831 assessments were completed compared to 921 in the same quarter in the previous year. This is a 9.7% drop in the number of assessments completed during Quarter 1 2023-24 to the same quarter the previous year. The graph below shows the number of assessments completed over the last 12 months. The number of assessments completed each month fluctuates, within a range of 226 (February 2023) – 385 (August 2022), aside from October 2022 where 502 assessments were completed. This was significantly higher than any other month over the year and appears to be a short-term variance as the number reduced to 323 in November 2023. The variance in the number of assessments completed is to be expected and does not raise a concern.



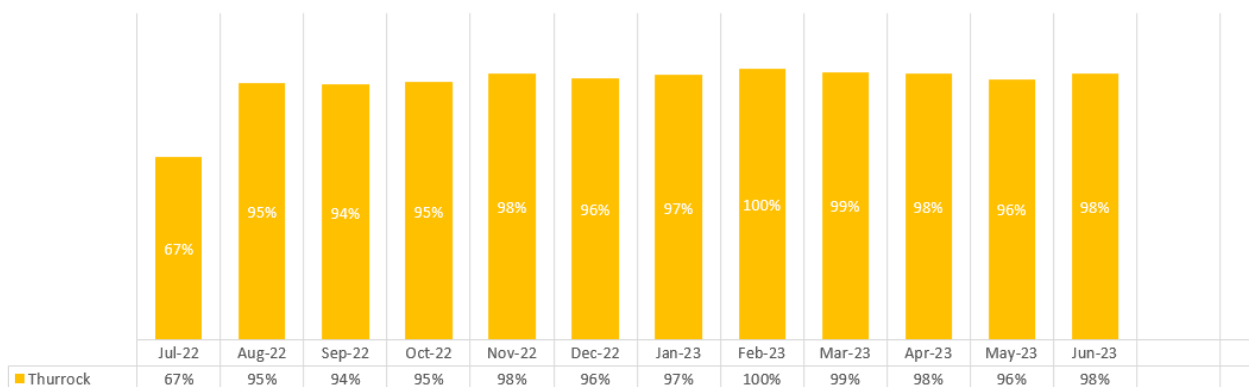
3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 98% as at end of June 2023.

The benchmarking data in March 2021-22 shows that at the end of Quarter 1 2023-24 Thurrock was above Statistical Neighbour average of 88.65%, the England average of 84.5% and Eastern Region average of 87.6%. This is reflective of the work being

completed within the teams to ensure assessments are completed within timescale and to a good standard.

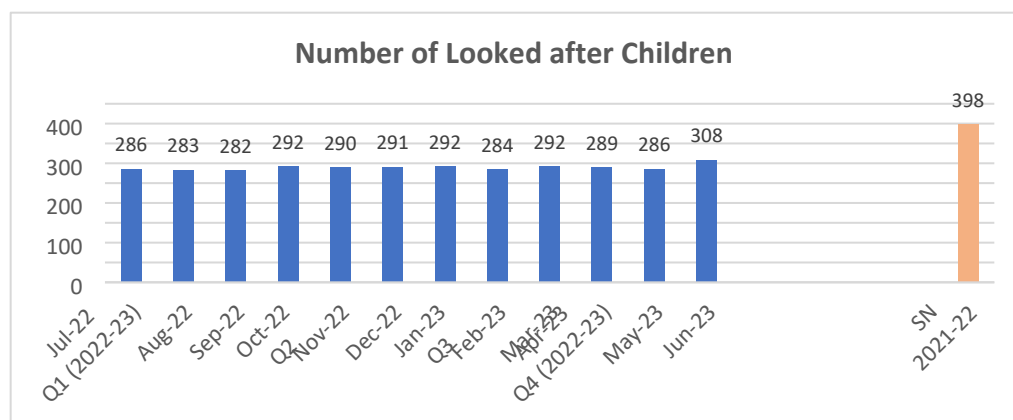
CHILDREN & FAMILIES ASSESSMENTS COMPLETED WITHIN 45 WORKING DAYS



4. Children Looked After (CLA)

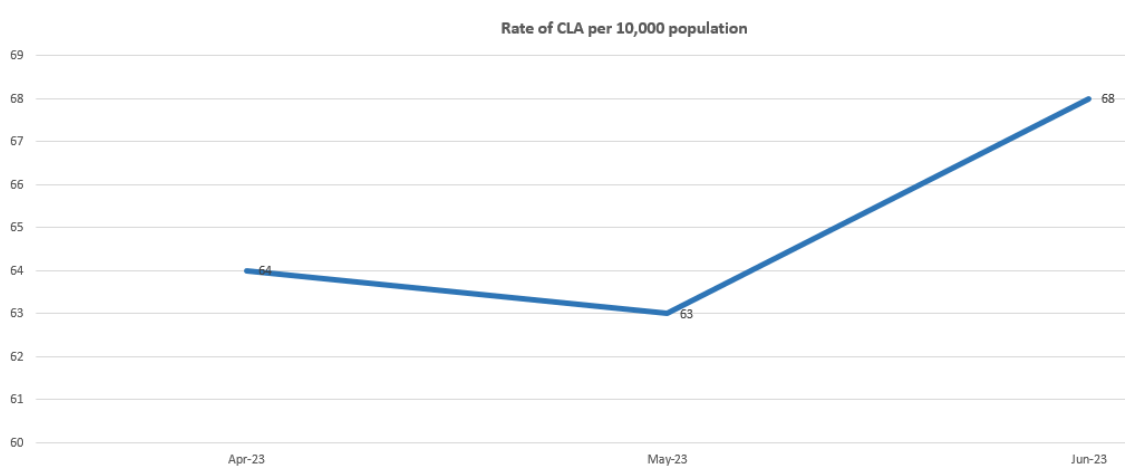
The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate. The end of Quarter 1, as at end June 2023, saw an increase up to 308 Children in Care. During June 30 children entered care, of these 9 were UASC and the remainder entered care as the result of safeguarding action by Thurrock Council and its partners.

Of the 308 children in Thurrock's care at the end of June 2023 47 children were UASC. This a greater proportion of the total number of looked after children than in previous years. This reflects an increased threshold for UASC and a reduction in the number of resident children in care.



4.1 The rate of CLA 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 June 2023 there were 308 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 68 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is in line with Statistical Neighbour average of 68 and below England average of 70.



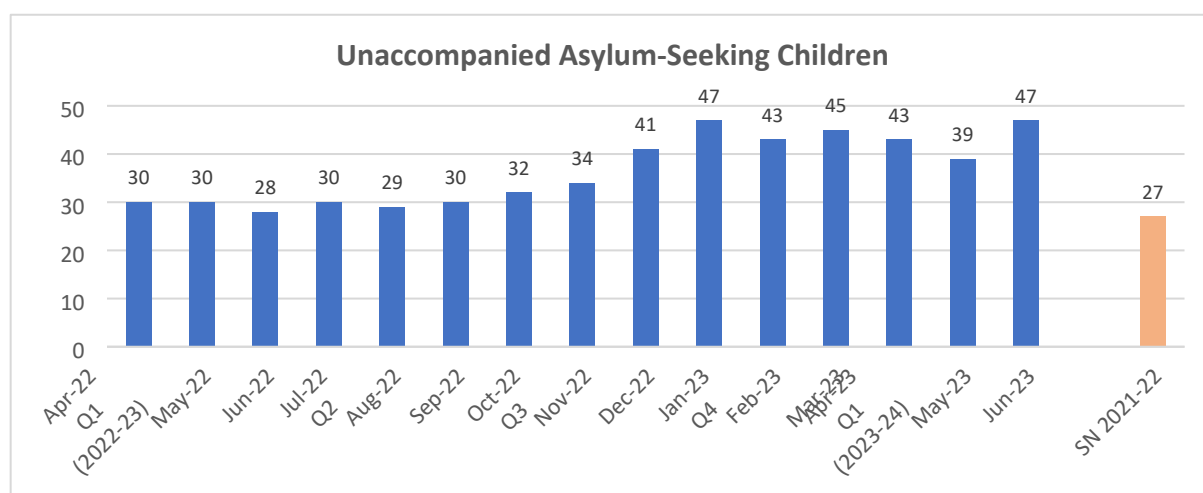
4.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

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 0.1% ceiling for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children as a proportion of its total number of children.

Thurrock's allocated number is 44 children Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. There is ongoing work with the Home Office to ensure timely and smooth transition for this cohort if Thurrock's allocation of UASC is exceeded.

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. As at the end of June 23 we surpassed our threshold of 44 with 47 UASC Children.

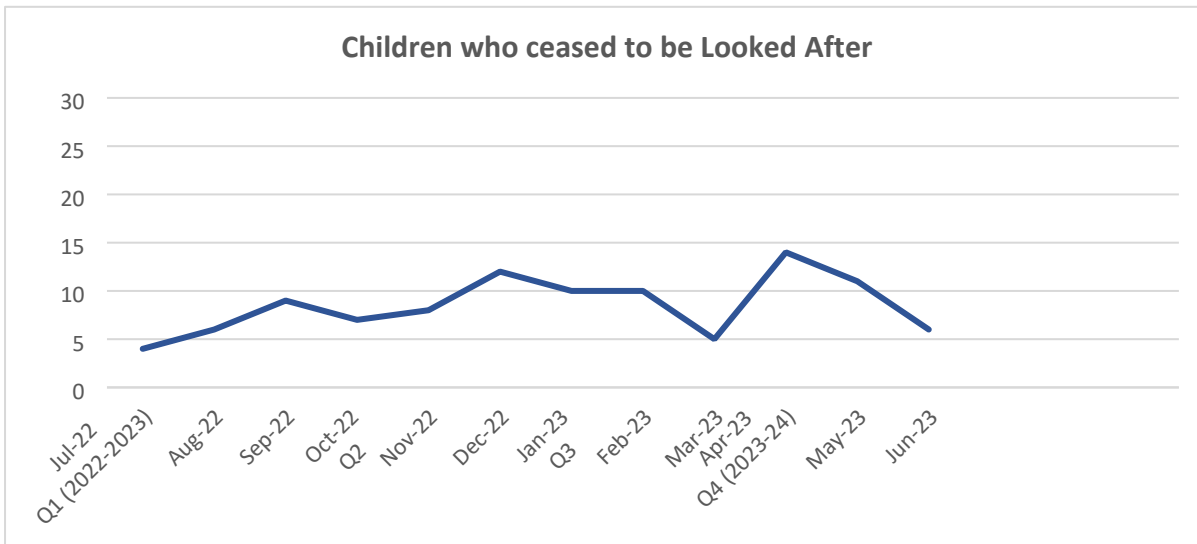


4.3 Children who ceased to be looked after

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between April and June 2023, 31 children ceased to be looked after. This fluctuates based on the following factors:

- The number of children turning 18 in the month
- The number of court cases concluding in leaving care to those with PR (parents/SGO/Adoption/Child Arrangement order)

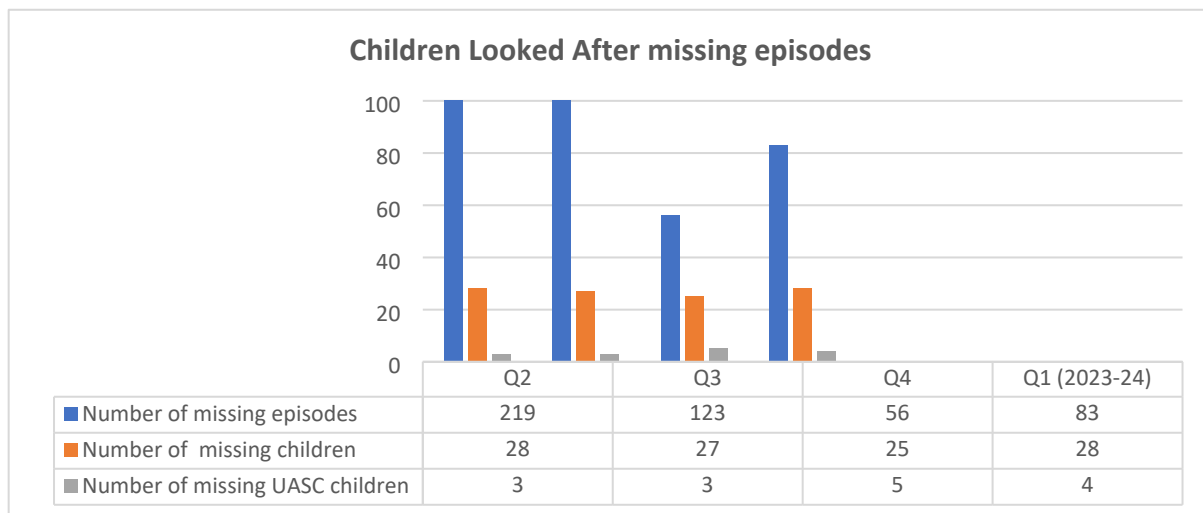
- S.20 arrangements ending.



4.4 CLA who go missing

During Quarter 1, April to June 2023 there were a total of 83 missing episodes which represented 28 individual children, 4 of which were UASC. The below chart shows the trend for missing episodes since Q2 2022-23.

Many of the children are missing for a few hours and have stayed out later than their agreed return time. Over 90% of the children and young people were staying with friends, or family. The others have refused to say where they have been, or who with. Over 80% of the children that went missing were aged 16 and 17 years old, with the majority being male young people. The youngest children were aged 13 years and there were 2 children that went missing of that age. With 1 aged 14 and 2 aged 15 years. 12 children went missing for more than 24 hours, with all but one recorded as missing over 72 hours.



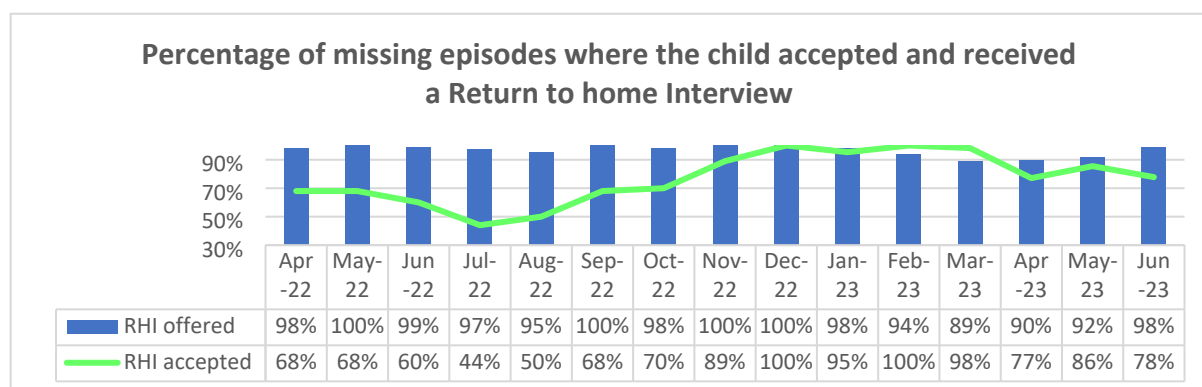
4.5 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub were 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 June 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 98% of which 78% accepted and received an interview compared to 99% and 60% respectively in June 2022. The offer of an RHI 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 panel monitors and makes multi agency plans to support the safety of young people during their absences and discusses whether the young people are at risk from Criminal or sexual exploitation.

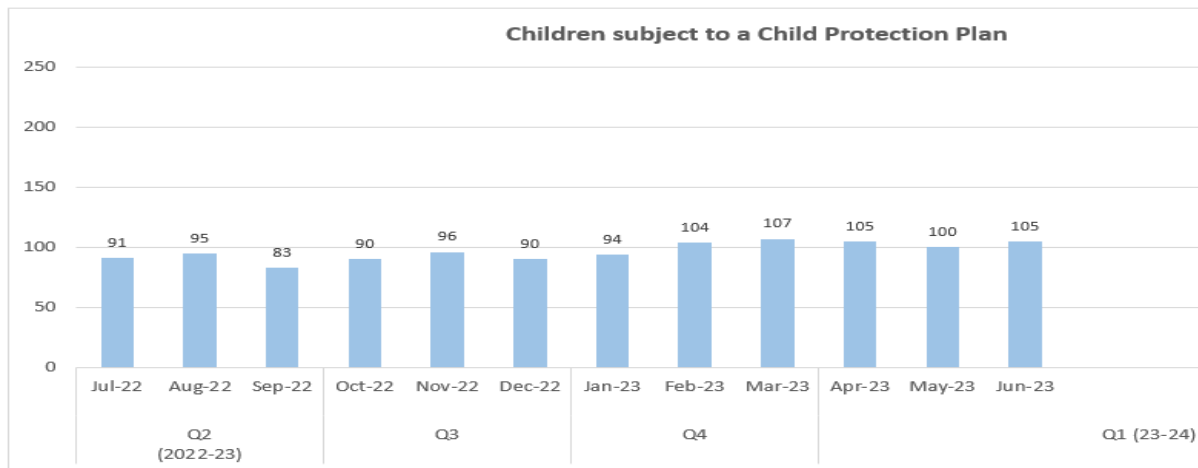
The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people since April 2022 and shows, in the main, an improved picture of children accepting and receiving an RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how they 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.



5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

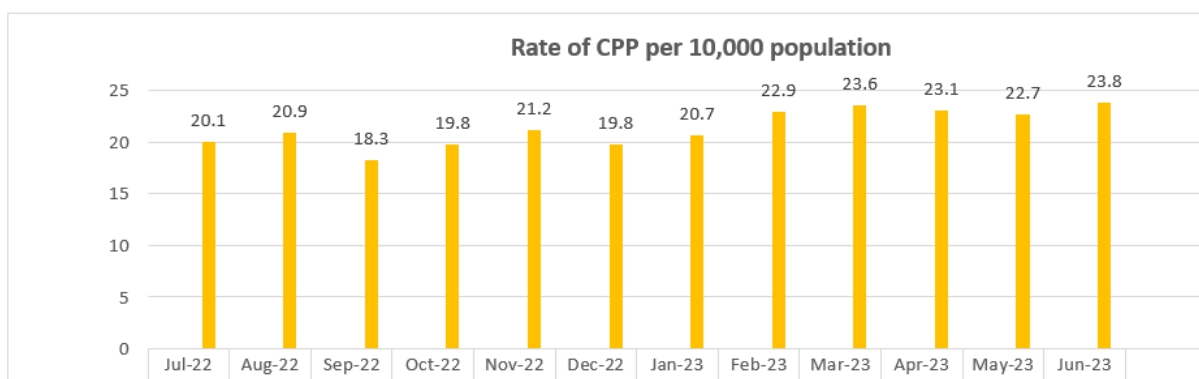
5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan

At the end of June 2023, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 105 compared to 108 at the end of June 2022. These numbers do fluctuate depending on family size and numbers of referrals.



5.2 The rate of CPP per 10,000 population

At the end of June 2023, the rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 23.8 per 10,000 population which is the same as end of June 2022. Based on the benchmarking data 2021-22, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour rate of 38.0 and England rate of 42.0. Despite being lower than the Statistical Neighbours, average figures for the Eastern region were 26.3 per 10,000 population. This is an indicator where a lower rate is usually reflective of better practice and there is also considerable variation across local authorities. For example, for Qu 4 in the eastern region Cambridge is 20.6 Essex 21.7 and Hertfordshire 16.3 whereas Norfolk is 40.6 The number of children subject to a repeat CP (Child Protection) plan is 14 % (June 2023) which compares favourably to the national and statistical neighbours of 20%. This indicates that interventions are effective in bringing about positive change in most cases

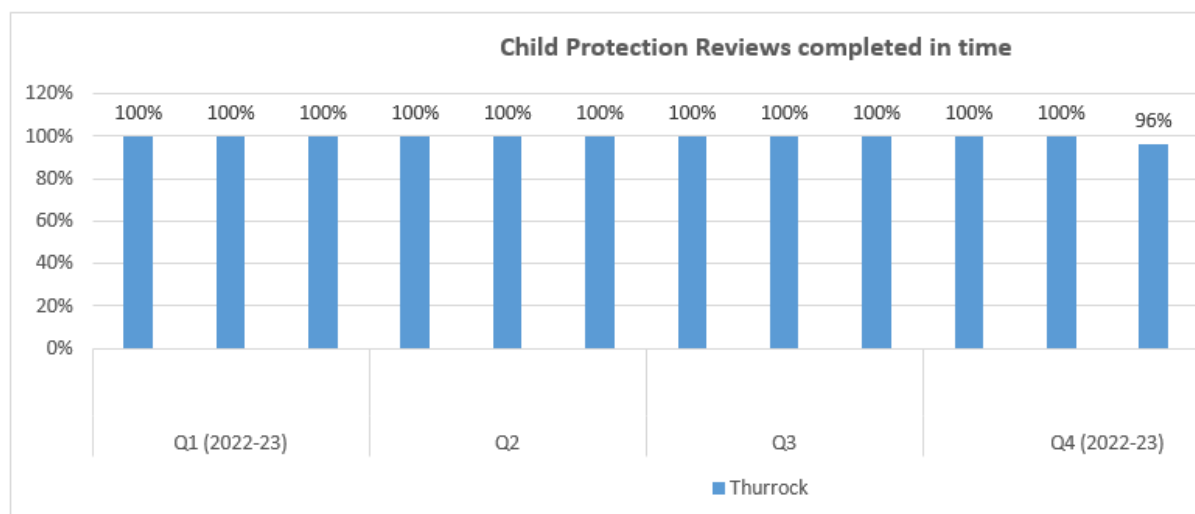


The regular monitoring of children subject to a CP plan through the CP surgery and through assessments using signs of safety continues to ensure that children who need to be subject to a child protection plan are offered those services, but if it is possible to work with families safely, a Child in Need Plan will be offered.

5.3 Child Protection reviews

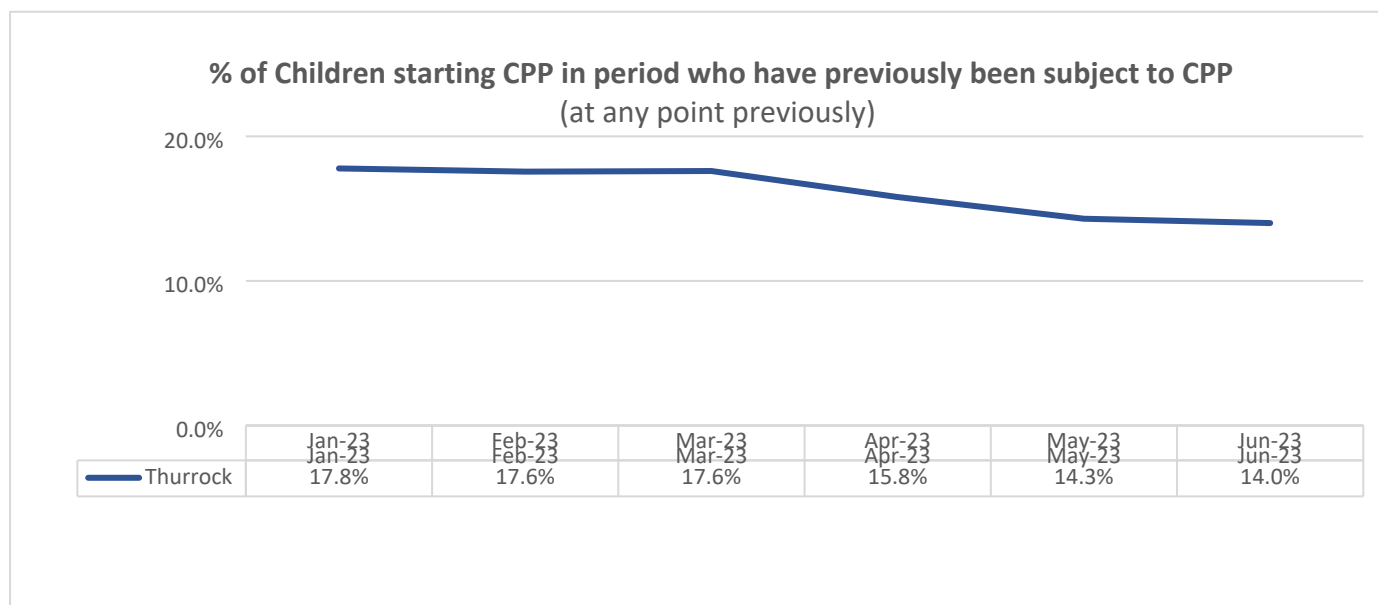
Child Protection plan reviews completed on time continue showing good performance which is usually 100% but 96% at the end June 2023. The below graph shows the overall trend since April 2022. The slight reduction in timeliness in June was to take account of the particular needs of one family.

Compared to 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock continues to perform above the Statistical Neighbour average of 88% and the England average of 89%.



5.4 Repeat Child Protection Plan

At the end of June 2023, the percentage of children subject to a repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 14%. When comparing to 2021-22 benchmarking data Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 20%, England average of 23% and Eastern Region average of 20%. This would indicate that the Child Protection plans have been effective in bringing about sustained change, as re-referrals are occurring less than comparators.



6. Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the **OC3 care leaver cohort** of Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving

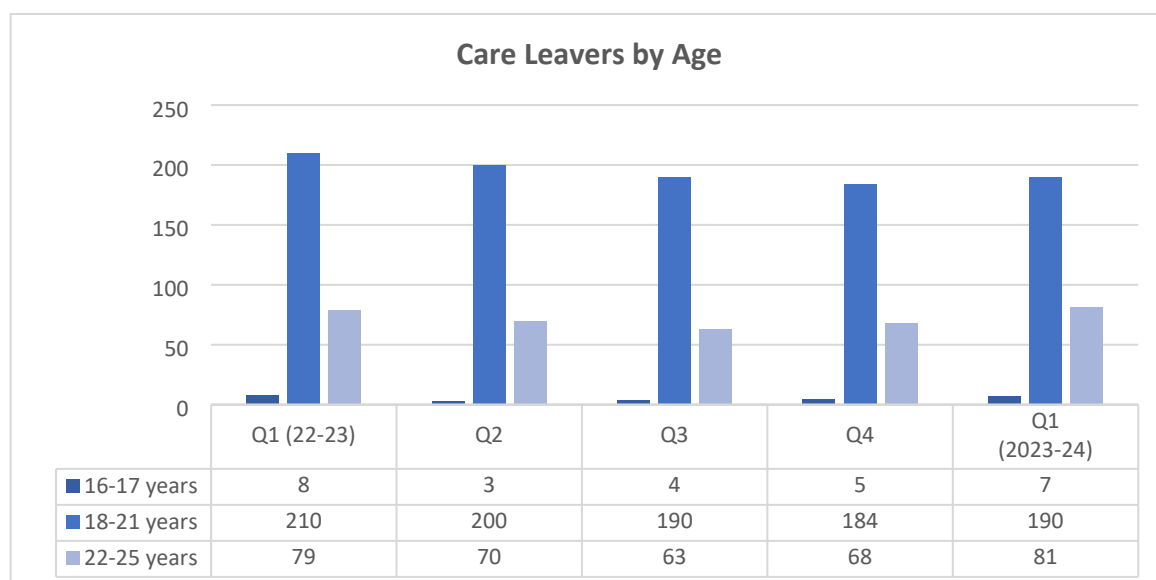
Care) Act 2000¹, is a person who has been ‘looked after’ or ‘in care’ for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

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

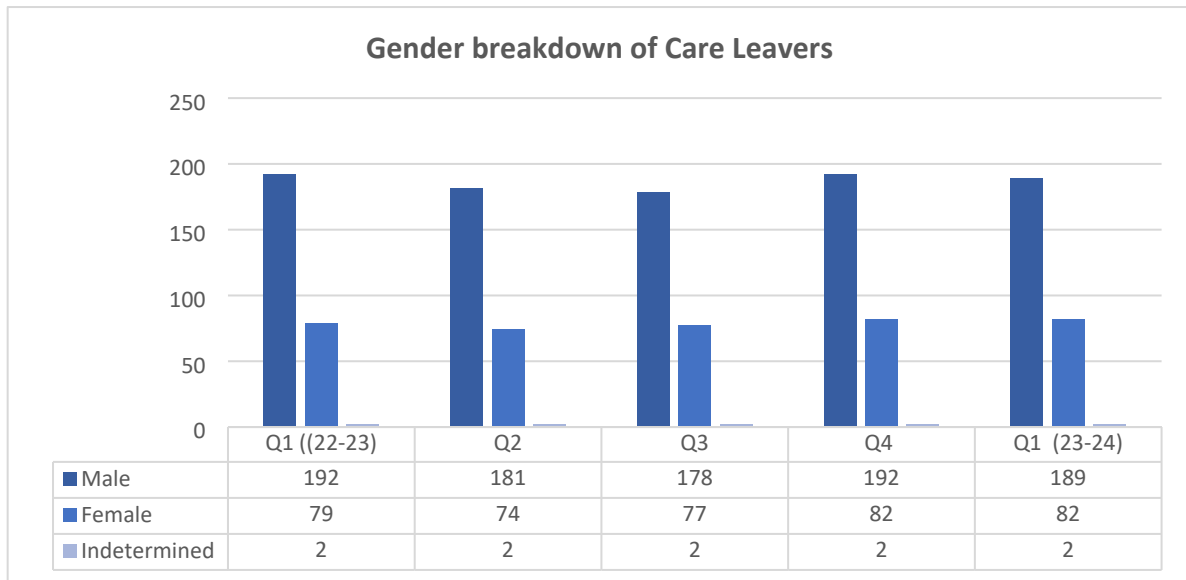
- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th 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 June 2023, 278 Care Leavers who were Relevant or Former Relevant and 109 who were Eligible Care Leavers were being supported and receiving an Aftercare service,

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

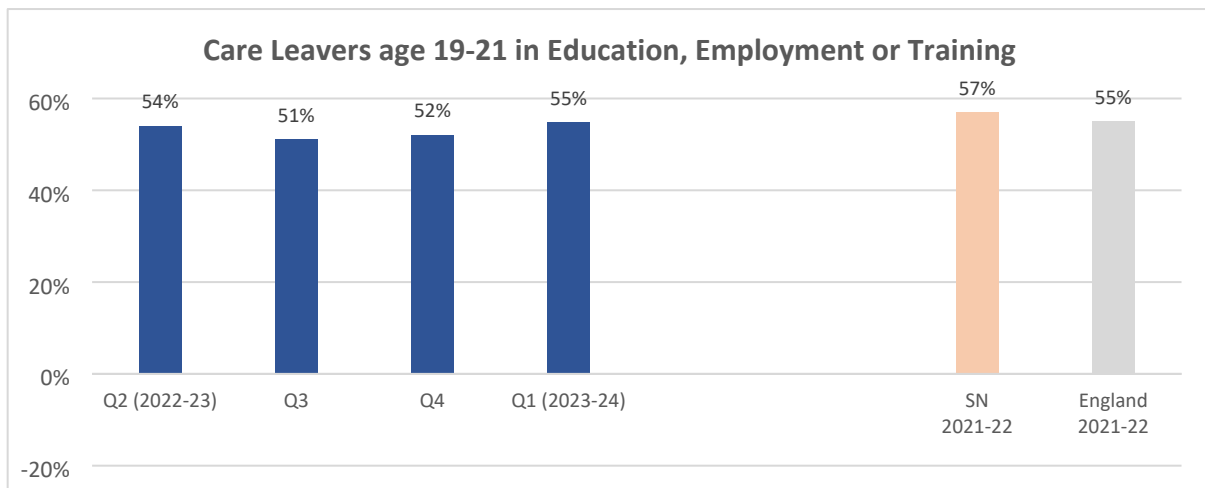


¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>



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

At the end of Q1 2023-24, 55% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment, or training, which brings Thurrock marginally below Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and in line with 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.

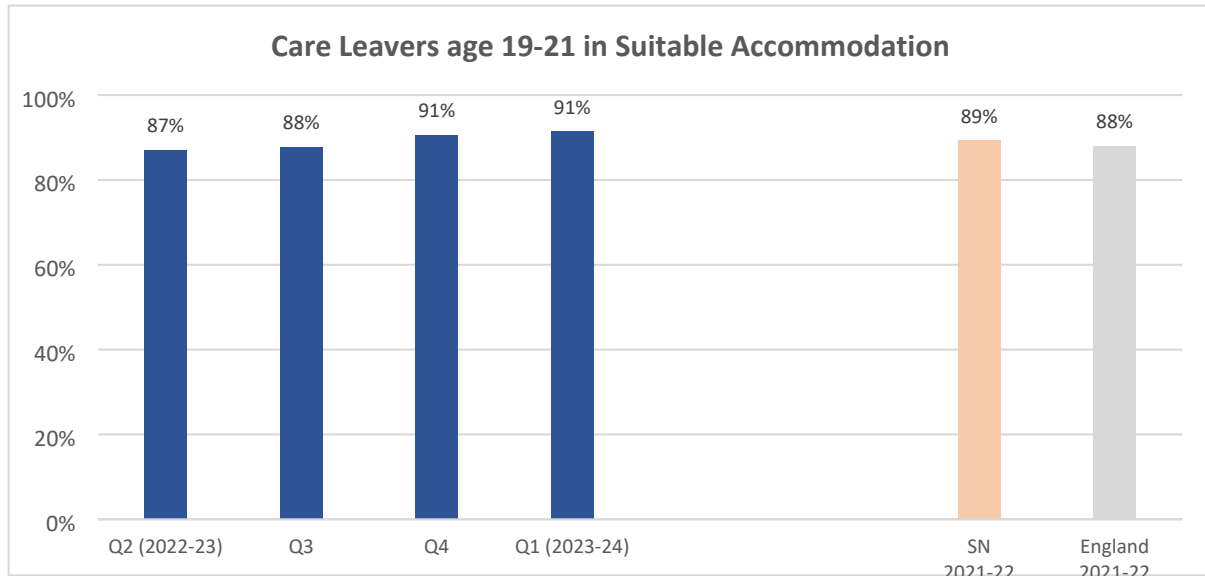


6.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q1 2023-24 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 91%. Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 89% and 88% respectively, based on 2021-22 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

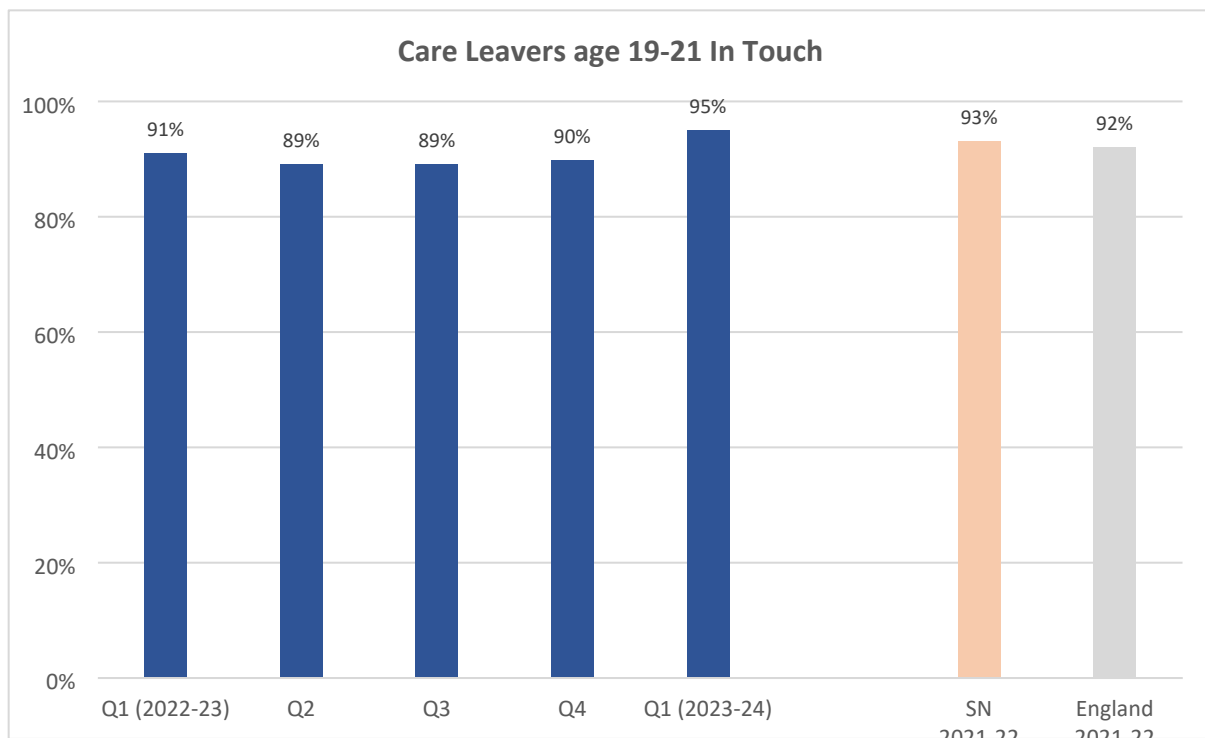
been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



6.3 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 Q1 2023-24, Thurrock was in touch with 95% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is above 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.



7. Adoption

As at the end of Q1 2023-24, there were 1 child adopted and 5 children were placed with prospective adopters.

7.1 Timeliness of Adoption

The average duration of care proceedings nationally has been over 40 weeks. 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.

The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 3-year rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days), as at end of Quarter 1 2023-24 was 498 days; this is an improvement on March 23 position of 560 days.

Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 397 days and the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, and Eastern Region of 459 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a small number of children experiencing a delay can impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays in part due to court availability, and family members being identified late. We are working towards reducing the duration of care proceedings through early planning and close monitoring.

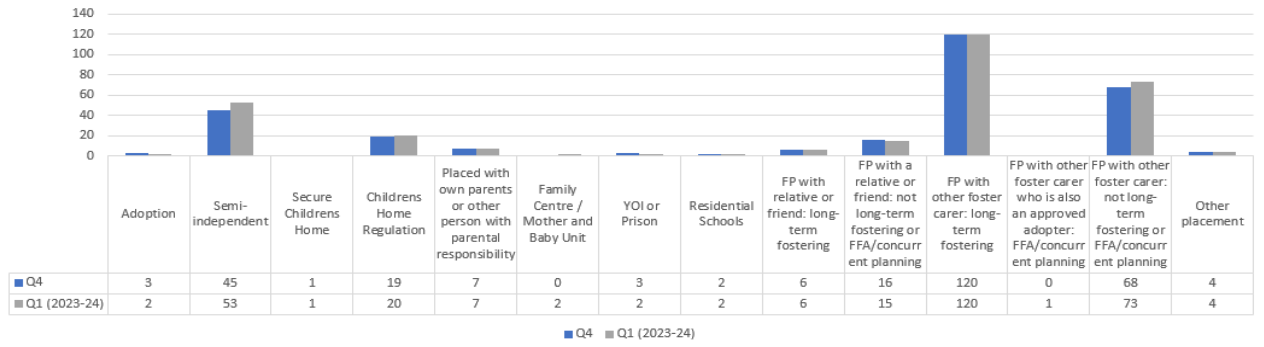
As at Q1 2023-24, the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (3-year average) is 177 days, this is slightly higher than March 2023 average of 106. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 196 days which is evidence of good performance.

7.2 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. At the end of June 2023, 72% of Children Looked After were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 223 out of 308 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, the national average for those placed 20 or more miles from their home was 16% and statistical neighbours was 21.8%, so at 28% Thurrock is currently above.

The chart below provides a breakdown by placement type as at end of Quarter 2 2022-23 and Quarter 1 2023-24.

Placement Type



■ Q4 ■ Q1 (2023-24)

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

No implications identified.

11.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal Services

No implications identified

11.3 **Diversity & Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
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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