

Thurrock - An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **3 July 2018**

Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL

Membership:

Councillors John Kent (Chair), David Potter (Vice-Chair), Alex Anderson, Garry Hague and Bukky Okunade

Nicola Cranch, Parent Governor
Kim James, Chief Operating Officer, HealthWatch Thurrock
Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

Substitutes:

Councillors Abbie Akinbohun, Steve Liddiard, Joycelyn Redsell and Luke Spillman

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 16
To approve as a correct record the minutes of Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 February 2018.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4 Declaration of Interests	

5 Items Raised by Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board

This item is reserved to discuss any issues raised by the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board.

6 Youth Work Presentation

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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **25 June 2018**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

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- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

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- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

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What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

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- **Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and**
- **leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon**

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Non-pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Our Vision and Priorities for Thurrock

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

1. **People** – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay
 - High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
 - Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
 - Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

2. **Place** – a heritage-rich borough which is ambitious for its future
 - Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
 - Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
 - Fewer public buildings with better services

3. **Prosperity** – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations
 - Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
 - Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
 - Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

Minutes of the Meeting of the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 February 2018 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Graham Snell (Vice-Chair), Gary Collins, David Potter, Joycelyn Redsell and Luke Spillman

Lynda Pritchard, Church of England Representative

In attendance: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes
Malcolm Taylor, Strategic Lead - Learner Support
Michele Lucas, Interim Assistant Director of Education, Learning and Skills
David Archibald, Independent Chair of local Children's Safeguarding Board
Adam Shea, Youth Cabinet Member
Grace Okutubo, Youth Cabinet Member
Mercy Okutubo, Youth Cabinet Member
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

78. Apologies

Apologies were given by:

- Corporate Director of Children's Services, Rory Patterson.
- Youth Cabinet Chair, George Wright.
- Parent Governor Representative, Myra Potter, who had ended her term as a School Governor in January 2018.

79. Minutes

Councillor Collins stated that the minuted text on paragraph two on page 15 was incorrect. This would be amended to:

Following on from Councillor Spillman's query and the Officers' response, Councillor Collins sought clarification on whether the academy systems were robust and able to sort problems as and when they occurred. The ISLSILS answered that there were good and outstanding schools within the Borough. The PRU had been the worst performing institution which was why the new provision in East Tilbury Primary School, was put in. The Jack Lumley site was also promising which was the right solution to encourage children to stay in mainstream education.

The minutes for the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2017 were approved subject to the changes suggested.

80. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business. However, the Chair wished to discuss Councillor Halden's email response to the Committee on the Head Start Housing policy for Care Leavers Plan.

During the Minutes agenda item, Councillor Spillman stated that he did not feel the minutes for the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 12 December 2017 were a true reflection of the meeting. This was particularly in regards to the report on 'Pilot Development of Head Start Housing for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People'. He went on to point out Councillor Halden's response email, provided to the Committee, had not provided a satisfactory response to what the Committee had asked for.

Councillor Spillman highlighted that he still wished to explore a broad range of options to be presented to the Committee with an explanation of how these were picked out to be the best options. With the discretionary exemption of council tax from 21 years old, he felt there needed to be an explanation on what the discretionary included. These options had not been provided in the last report which was why the Committee had asked for the paper to be brought back. The Chair asked if Officers could provide some information on the matter. The Interim Assistant Director for Learning, Inclusion and Skills (IADLIS), Michele Lucas, understood what the Committee was asking for and would look into the Committee's comments.

Councillor Collins questioned if there was a decision model that the Council used. The IADLIS answered that the service had carried out a fair amount of work on the paper. As she had not been at the last Committee meeting, she had not heard the debate so did not want to comment on the levels of detail. She did not want to mislead the Committee which she felt would not be helpful at that stage. It would be for the Committee to make a decision but said the Committee would already be aware that 18 – 21 year olds would have full exemption from council tax and acknowledged that a certain percentage would benefit from that.

In response, Councillor Collins sought clarification on there being no decision model to decide which care leavers got the council tax exemption. Adding to this, Councillor Spillman felt other factors had contributed to the council tax exemption for 21 – 25 year olds which explained why no set or basic criterias could be provided to be discussed. Councillor Collins agreed and also stated that having a decision model in place would have enabled the Committee to scrutinise it and why there was a need to have a discretionary exemption up to the age of 25. He felt it would be helpful if the Committee put together what discretionary exemptions could be included to provide a more structured discussion if the paper was brought back to the Committee.

The Chair stated that the decision made by Cabinet on the Head Start Housing Policy for Care Leavers Plan should be called in. The Vice-Chair supported this view. Councillor Redsell added that the Committee had to be sure that the paper was looked at properly and dissected.

81. Declaration of Interests

The Church of England Representative (CER), Lynda Pritchard, declared that she worked for a private fostering agency and that she was the designated safeguarding officer.

82. Youth Cabinet Update

An update was provided by the Youth Cabinet Members who said they had been welcomed to judge the Civic Awards 2018 on the Lifelong Achievement. There had been some great stories which had been heart-warming.

In January, a few of the Youth Cabinet members had attended guidance meetings which had been insightful on how crime rates could be improved in Thurrock to ensure young people felt safe as a group. Referring to the recent 'Make Your Mark' and 'Life Curriculum' results, the surveys were completed and the results were due to be presented to headteachers in March 2018. The Youth Cabinet had also met with Transport Officer, John Pope and discussed incidences of children not receiving a child bus ticket despite wearing school uniform. Concerns had also been raised on blind spots around bus stops and schools.

Recently, the Youth Cabinet had met with Thurrock's Chief Executive, Lyn Carpenter, who had given a talk on the future plans of Thurrock. The talk had been insightful as it outlined the Local Plan to build more houses and secondary schools in Purfleet and Stanford-Le-Hope which would make Thurrock more of a community.

Referring to children not being given bus tickets, the Chair asked what action had been taken. The Youth Cabinet member answered that they were waiting to hear back from John Pope but there had been no further incidents since. Councillor Redsell mentioned that she was part of the Bus User Group and would bring this up at the next meeting.

Councillor Spillman asked the Youth Cabinet members if any particular items had been brought up in their meeting with the Chief Executive and if they thought there was anything the Borough needed. The Youth Cabinet replied that there was the introduction of a possible Youth Mayor which would enable the young people to become more involved and better represented. Following up, Councillor Collins asked if there was anything the Youth Cabinet wanted to see physically in the Borough such as youth clubs. Youth Cabinet members would like more sporting clubs especially in regards to football teams. They gave an example of the Little Thurrock Dynamos football team who did not have a home ground. Councillor Redsell said Blackshots Field had training grounds which had recently been revamped along with a few others. The

Chair asked Councillor Redsell if this was publicised enough to which she replied it was on the website and through Sports Council meetings.

Councillor Spillman mentioned a conversation with the Chief Executive of Aveley Football Club who had said there were less football clubs due to the lack of money and people willing to coach. There was a need to encourage more civic engagement and activities that young people could rely on. Councillor Redsell added that they raised a lot of money for sports without the Council's help and that there were many ways to get funding as well. The CER also mentioned that Thurrock ran a volunteering scheme which was not publicised enough. The Chair asked Officers to check who ran the volunteer schemes and what could be done to help the Youth Cabinet.

83. Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2016 - 2017

The Local Safeguarding Children Board's Independent Chair (LSCBIC), David Archibald, gave an overview of the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Children Board's (LSCB) Annual Report 2016 – 17. The Annual Report was a statutory requirement to be provided to the Local Authority which outlined the effectiveness of safeguarding in the local area.

There had been a good level of engagement from key agencies across the Borough to ensure good safeguarding arrangements. With the new act due to be implemented, Thurrock LSCB would be working with a new strategic group to build the new safeguarding framework which would be built upon the current one. Government was drafting a guidance which would become formal by May 2018 following which proposals for the new arrangements for Thurrock would be drafted. Thurrock LSCB was continuing to build upon its previous strengths to ensure safeguarding continued to work well.

Referring to the last Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, the Chair sought clarification on the removal of some agencies that Thurrock LSCB had been working with but that Thurrock LSCB would still be working with some of these. The LSCBIC answered that LSCB discussions in Thurrock had emphasised the need to create new arrangements which met government guidance, but retained the involvement and contribution of the current range of partners.

Querying on children's mental health, Councillor Redsell noted that there was not much mentioned within the report. She asked what work and safeguarding would be undertaken for children with mental health issues. The LSCBIC stated this was an important subject and work was being done in that area. Little was mentioned within the report as the focus was on safeguarding.

Councillor Collins thanked the LSCBIC for the comprehensive report. Referring to page 29 of the report in regards to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), he asked how far down the road were the LSCB on combating this issue. The LSCBIC replied that there had been a national debate on this and that it was a priority within Thurrock. A meeting had taken place last month

with the police which had recognised the importance of FGM. There had been a strong openness with a view to prosecute where necessary.

Referring to page 40 of the report, Councillor Collins asked how many children had gone missing and whether this was from home or from care. The LSCBIC stated this was a combination of both from home and from care. He had been impressed by the mechanisms of Thurrock Council to monitor missing children and the call for police to take action where necessary. He referred to a recent case in London where a good working relationship had been established between the police and the Local Authority to find a missing child. The Assistant Director for Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes (ADCCTO), Sheila Murphy, stated that some of the children that went missing were the same ones who went missing frequently and comparatively, Thurrock was below the comparator group on missing children.

The CER queried what the greatest challenge the Thurrock LSCB faced and how this would be addressed effectively. The LSCBIC said it was the balance of resources and demand. Demands tended to rise when children were identified in cases of FGM, child sexual exploitation and missing children and further tightened resources. There had been a lot of publicity in the last few weeks about the struggles many councils had in regards to funding for children's services. From the Ofsted report from two years ago, there had been two action points identified which the LSCB was making good progress on. One included how to measure the effectiveness of children's safeguarding training which was being done through feedback from people who had undergone the training. The second action point was how the LSCB extracted and distilled information from case audits to feedback to practitioners to enable them to improve their performance.

Referring to page 56 of the report, the Vice-Chair voiced his concern on children searching methods of suicide at Palmer's College. He questioned if this statistic was only within Palmer's College and if there were statistics on this in other schools. The LSCBIC answered that part of the report had been provided by Palmer's College so was unable to answer regarding other schools. He stated that suicide was a serious issue and would be addressed. The Vice-Chair went on to say he would like to see more information on this issue and how it was monitored by schools.

In regards to looked after children, Councillor Spillman asked why a proportion of them were placed outside the Borough. The ADCCTO said some had been placed outside for welfare reasons such as keeping them away from dangerous people or other influences. Some were due to placement choice and on availability. Councillor Spillman went on to ask for reassurance that children were not being placed outside the Borough as it was cheaper. The ADCCTO answered that it was due to placement availability and that Thurrock would contact the Local Authority that the child was to be placed in beforehand. Out of Borough placed children were still visited by a Thurrock social worker in addition to the Local Authority. Thurrock would also speak with the Local Authority to ensure the child was looked after.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the report and progress made on children's safeguarding.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided comments on the report.**

84. Children's Social Care Development Plan 2018 - 19

Presented by the ADCCTO, the report set out the revised Children's Social Care Development Plan 2018-19 which built upon the Ofsted Improvement Plan. 8 priority action areas had been identified and listed in the Development Plan in appendix 1 for the service to improve upon. The plan took a systems approach where it would involve an annual conversation with Ofsted where the service would produce a self-evaluation which would also be shared with the Committee.

The service for children looked after had not been consistent so the Brighter Intervention Service had been established to strengthen the service's approach to early intervention and prevention. Workshops were being run to talk social workers through what pathway care plans were good. The aim was to drive out inconsistency so every child would get the same service. Overall, the plan continued to effectively progress on and additional input would be provided where needed to ensure progress remained on track.

Pointing out the summary sheet on appendix 1, the Chair queried the meaning of the numbers in the RAG summary of all areas column. The ADCCTO explained the numbers were populated to show the overall RAG rating of all 8 priorities. It meant the service had improved on their plan slightly.

Councillor Spillman mentioned that he had seen a number of social workers who had not received the support they had needed so he welcomed the workshops. He expressed concern on customer service levels from officers which should be of a qualitative standard. He asked how confident the service was in ensuring this. The ADCCTO responded that officers were expected to treat service users with respect which was monitored through feedback from families and direct observation from managers. The ADCCTO went on to say that standards were analysed from the tone of service users through meetings, letters and correspondences. A quality assurance framework was in place along with a recently recruited post to look into and ensure standards of quality. Collated feedback was also analysed to enable it to be used to further professional development. The workshops for social workers intended to provide a quick two hour learning session that was taught by experts and feedback would be taken from these as part of quality audits to check if it would bring about the improvements the service was looking for. Councillor Spillman went on to ask how the service dealt with negative feedback. The ADCCTO answered that complaints were investigated with some upheld where standards had not been delivered.

Referring to priority seven on appendix 1, Councillor Collins sought clarification in the Ofsted recommendation between the figures of 88% and 53%. The ADCCTO clarified that the 88% was in relation to the care plans for care leavers but the service was striving for 100% and the 53% related to the auditing of these plans which were of a good standard. This indicated the rest of the plans needed a good plan as current plans may not be specific enough and social workers would be improving these to ensure quality. Councillor Collins went on to ask if the plans were put together by social workers themselves. These care plans were put together by social workers working together with children.

Councillor Redsell said that training was good but social workers needed the experience. She continued on to ask how many children did the service aim to get back to their families. She hoped for some good outcomes on cases.

Regarding return interviews for missing children, the Vice-Chair asked why interviews were offered instead of being given. The ADCCTO explained that it was a legal requirement to offer a return interview. If taken up, the service would use an independent company such as Open Door, since children did not always want to speak to their social worker. An interview could not be forced upon children as most were not happy to talk. The Vice-Chair went on to say that if the target was to achieve 100%, then interviews should be given. The Chair added the question of what the service was doing to encourage children to have interviews. The ADCCTO said some children would not respond in interviews, particularly with 17 year olds who felt that they were almost adults and wanted independence. The Vice-Chair commented that it would not be possible to hit Ofsted's recommended target of 100% if the service was unable to compel children to respond.

The CER spoke of the recommendations to be agreed upon in the report and noted that some of the actions on the development plan were still amber and from 2015 / 16. She was concerned about recommendation 1.1 and asked what assurances could the service give to the Committee that the plan was moving forward. The ADCCTO explained that the plan was a live on and progressed as the service moved along. Some actions were still on the plan as they were still to be developed. The CER followed up by seeking clarification on whether the improvement and development plan were combined to which the ADCCTO confirmed it was.

Councillor Redsell asked what the placement home did when the children went missing. She also referred to recommendation 1.1 and agreeing with the CER, she expressed concern on whether the development plan actions would be completed or not. Councillor Spillman added that the document had not been readable on the agenda and it would be difficult to agree the recommendations.

The Committee were not satisfied on recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 and the ADCCTO accepted that the Committee did not have enough time to digest the plan due to the format. Therefore, she was happy to bring the plan back to the

Committee in the next meeting in the new municipal year. The Vice-Chair mentioned that recommendation 1.1 was for consideration and suggested that 1.2 could be amended to be agreed on.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the progress and direction of travel for children's social care in completing the required actions from the Development Plan.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted that the Development Plan but considered it needed to come back to the Committee in the future.**

85. Children's Social Care Performance

The ADCCTO introduced the report which highlighted the level of demand placed on Thurrock's statutory social care service for children. Demand had been managed by the service through early intervention which had reduced the number of children being placed on a child protection plan.

The data in the report also showed:

- Thurrock was closing more looked after children cases than its comparator group.
- Looked after children were placed well in stable placements with 64% of looked after children under 16 in the same placement for more than 2 years which provided long term stability.
- Significant improvements had been made in placing children within Thurrock at 42% which was 10% higher than the previous year.
- 11 children had been forecasted to be adopted by the end of the financial year.
- Housing remained a key challenge for young care leavers but the Head Start Housing Programme would address this to ensure support was offered to ensure a supported transition into independent living.

From the summary provided within the report, Thurrock was still forecasted to perform better than the east of England average and they were one of the best performing authorities to complete its assessments within a timescale.

Pointing to paragraph 3.29, the Chair queried when the report would be expected. The ADCCTO explained that the deep dive study was currently being carried out. The Lead was pulling the report together and analysing it which would be brought to the LSCB before going to Corporate Parenting Committee.

Referring to paragraph 3.31, the CER asked when the Committee would expect to see the service's self-evaluation report. This would be prepared in

April and shared with the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee afterwards.

Councillor Spillman brought up some cases he had in housing and mentioned about the lack of supervision with young care leavers who had been left in debt arrears. He questioned how this would be fixed. Regarding intentionally homeless families, the ADCCTO explained that children's social care supported them through paying rents but the issue was a home for children to live in. The service supported the family by finding a home the family could afford to live in but there was an expectation that the family also looked for suitable accommodation. The service did work with the housing department to find homes for these families as well. Councillor Spillman continued by saying that there needed to be bespoke solutions to individual circumstances and a framework in place to support families. A framework and policy should be in place for every social worker to follow.

The IADLIS added that the service had worked hard with young care leavers to ensure they managed finances well and there were programmes to help them. She said the service worked well with the housing department, particularly in regards to the houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) scheme which was doing well. Councillor Spillman felt the after care service had not worked well as young people had fallen into rent arrears.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the areas of improvement in children's social care, work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services and highlight areas of further investigation for deep dive studies.**
- 1.2 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted a new inspection framework had been introduced by Ofsted for children's social care.**

86. Children Missing Education

The Strategic Lead Inclusion and Principal Educational Psychologist (SLIPEP), Malcolm Taylor, gave an overview of the current situation with children missing education and what processes were in place to ensure children in Thurrock had access to suitable education despite their circumstances.

Children missing education was defined as children of a compulsory school age but was not at school. This did not include children who were electively home educated or children in pupil referral units. The service had a duty to ensure children were receiving appropriate education so tuition packages were offered. Cases of children missing education were reviewed on a risk based model through monthly meetings. In some cases following a review, these would be escalated for further formal action.

At 9.17pm, Members agreed to suspend standing orders for 15 minutes to enable all items on the agenda to be heard.

Councillor Redsell commented that she had recently heard Treetops Special School would be receiving 120 more pupils. She went on to ask why the Council only visited home taught children once a year. The SLIPEP's response was that Treetops Special School had freeschool applications and additional applications were accepted as needed. The service would look at road access to ensure disruption was kept to a minimum. In regards to elective home education, the SLIPEP said the guidance was to not overstep as parents had chosen home education. Initial monitoring was in place to identify any safeguarding actions. He went on to say that a new governmental guidance may be developed and that Thurrock currently had a more intense monitoring system than other Local Authorities. The service did advise schools not to suggest elective home education but some parents chose this as their child did not get their choice of school.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and provided comment on the current arrangements for monitoring children missing education and the processes in place to ensure all children had access to an appropriate education.

87. SEND Peer Review Action Plan and Progress Update

The report was presented by the SLIPEP which gave an update to the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) action plan that had been brought to the Committee in October 2017. Since then, progress had been good with 6 out of 11 key areas complete, 3 that were on track and 2 requiring additional support to ensure the appropriate impact.

Within the report, it included the progress of the transfer of Statements of SEN which Local Authorities were obligated to review and transfer these to an Education Health and Care Plan under new SEND arrangements set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. Thurrock Council had begun with 1011 statements and 909 had been completed so far. The deadline to complete the transfer was 31st March 2018 so the service was making good progress.

The Chair questioned how confident the service was in completing the statement transfers by the deadline. The SLIPEP said 76 statements now remained and the service was confident that the vast majority would be addressed. He was aware that some might not be finalised if parents wanted the plans to be changed. The Chair went on to ask how the introduction of the Education Health and Care Plans had occurred. The SLIPEP explained that this had been a national issue and within the SEND reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014, it had extended from statements that were primarily 5 – 16 years old but had increased to the age group of 0 – 25 years

due to a rise in demand and expectation from parents. This demand was occurring on a national level and not just in Thurrock.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the progress made on the SEND Peer Review Action Plan and the Transfer of Statements to Education Health and Care Plans.

88. Work Programme

The Committee acknowledged that the meeting was the last one of the current municipal year.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting by the Vice-Chair, a report on monitoring students searches in schools particularly in relation to searches on suicide methods, would be added to the work programme for the next municipal year.

The meeting finished at 9.35 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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3 July 2018	ITEM: 7
Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Children’s Social Care Development Plan 2018 - 19	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Sheila Murphy - Assistant Director Children’s Social Care	
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy - Assistant Director Children’s Social Care	
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson – Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This covering report provides a progress update to the revised Children’s Social Care Development Plan 2018 – 19. A copy of the Development Plan is available online.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Children’s Overview and Scrutiny consider the progress and direction of travel for children’s social care in completing the required actions from the Development Plan.**
- 1.2 That Children’s Overview and Scrutiny receive assurance that the Development Plan will deliver the required improvements.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The new Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework started in January 2018.
- 2.2 ILACS has a greater reliance on the use of ongoing intelligence to decide where and when to inspect. Ofsted will have access to data from various sources including annual data returns and the new annual self-evaluation. Under ILACS, local authorities are required to share their self-evaluation at the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. Thurrock had their annual engagement meeting on the 9 May 2018. Authorities will be subject to unannounced inspections.
- 2.3 The ILACS is seen as being within a ‘system’ of inspection and engagement

with Ofsted and not a one-off event such as a 4 week Single Inspection Framework (SIF) inspection. Each Local Authority will have an annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. A month before the engagement meeting the Local Authority will send Ofsted the annual self-evaluation of their services. Within a 3 year period a 'Requires Improvement' Local Authority will receive 2 focused inspections and a standard full inspection of 2 weeks duration. Ofsted is keen to have a continuing dialogue with Local Authorities, in order to 'catch them before they fall'.

- 2.4 In response to the ILACS the department has established a Children's Social Care Development Plan which incorporates the recommendations from the previous SIF, as well as including areas for improvement identified through our own self-evaluation.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Services to children, young people and families in Thurrock were judged to 'Require Improvement' by Ofsted in March 2016. The inspectors stated in their report that 'children and young people were found to be safe during this inspection, with none identified who were at immediate risk of significant harm without plans and services being in place to reduce these risks and to meet their needs'.

- 3.2 The Children's Development Plan builds on the work completed through the Ofsted Improvement Plan and is based on 8 priority action areas for the service. These are:

1. Recruiting, retaining and developing a skilled and confident social care workforce;
2. Providing coherent and coordinated early help services to children and their families;
3. Building consistent quality and timeliness of assessment; care planning and decision making for children in need and in need of protection;
4. Ensuring high quality support and services for looked after children and effective permanency planning. Ensuring timely purposeful post adoption support;
5. Putting the voice and day to day experience of the child at the center of social care practice;
6. All children missing from home or care must have access to a return interview. Analysis arising from risks faced by children missing from home or care and children missing from education, should inform action to reduce risk;
7. Supporting young people leaving care to have a positive and successful transition to adulthood and independence;
8. Embedding strong quality assurance and governance mechanisms to drive continual improvements in services.

- 3.3 Instability of the social care workforce has been a key priority for

improvement. The service was dependent on a high proportion of agency social workers, although it was acknowledged that a range of creative ideas had been implemented to improve recruitment; there has been a significant improvement made in this area, particularly in the recruitment of permanent Team Managers in the Children and Families Assessment Team (CFAT) and the Family Support Teams (FST). There has been an increase in the permanent recruitment of Social Workers in CFAT, FST and the Team for Disabled Children, who no longer has any agency staff members. At the time of the SIF inspection in March 2016 there were 60 agency social workers; at the end of May 2018 this number has been reduced to 39 agency workers.

- 3.4 The 2016 inspection found that the service for children looked after was not consistent and too many children became looked after on an emergency basis. A new service has been established to strengthen our approach to early intervention and prevention. Previous audits have suggested that the number of emergency admissions to our care has decreased. However this area of social work activity will continue to be monitored to ensure that progress continues to be made. Through more effective management of the service, the numbers of children in care and those on a child protection plan, have started to decrease during 2017/18 and are now more in line with our statistical neighbours. At the end of March 2017 there were 68 children per 10,000 of the child population subject to a child protection plan, whereas at March 2018 there were 54 per 10,000 subject to a child protection plan, in line with statistical neighbours average at 54.6. Looked after children were at 82 children per 10,000 at March 2017, that figure is 73.3 at March 2018 and statistical neighbours average are 68 per 10,000 of child population.
- 3.5 The 2016 Ofsted report said that more needed to be done to increase the number of in-house foster carers, as too many children and young people were placed out of the borough. Currently, more children are now placed with in-house foster carers than Independent Fostering Agencies, and there has been a clear shift in the balance of placements and increasing numbers of children are being placed in or near the borough. At March 2018, 87% of children in our care are placed within 20 miles of their home address, this compares favourably against the statistical neighbour average of 82% of children being placed within 20 miles of their home address.
- 3.6 The strategy is to increase the In-House foster placement capacity of 80 carers by 20% annually for the next 3 years. The intended outcome is that by 2020, Thurrock should be able to place up to 80% (230) of all children in care with In-House Foster Carers. To achieve this, a net increase of 45 new fostering household must be added to the current portfolio over the next 2.5 years. Our fostering recruitment target is a net increase of 60 approved carers by 2020. A net increase of 20 placements has already been achieved for 2017/18.
- 3.7 23 fostering assessments have been completed between 2017/18 which consists of 17 fostering households and 6 connected carers. 78.2% (18) were completed within the national timescale of 8 months from application to panel and approval. All new foster carers presented to panel within the last

three months were within national timescales which evidences an improvement in performance.

- 3.8 The Ofsted inspection of 2016 said that management oversight needed to be improved and regular supervision needed to be in place. The service has in place reporting mechanisms to monitor the regularity of supervision within required timescales (supervision to take place monthly), this information is scrutinised at the monthly performance meetings chaired by the Assistant Director, with all Service Managers in attendance. Current performance evidences compliance of supervision timescales at 85%. Remedial action is taken as required following these performance meetings. A programme of monthly audits is in place and the audit template has a section on management oversight and supervision for each case audited. Current performance indicates that more work needs to be undertaken to improve the quality of management oversight. Further work is being undertaken to clarify expected management standards and to drive performance to be consistently good. A Team Managers' monthly performance report has been in place since September 2017 and there is a section for the managers to report on monthly supervision requirements with opportunity to set out improvements in place within each team.
- 3.9 The Ofsted inspection 2016 stated that the organisation's use of management information and quality assurance was poor and this impedes improvement; Social Care managers have advised and supported the data team to provide a performance data digest which is regularly scrutinised by the Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director of Children's Services on a monthly basis to drive up performance. There is a Quality Assurance Framework for auditing cases and utilising the learning from these, with quality as its main focus. However, whilst there has been some investment to ensure that there is a full suite of data available to managers and that there is regular monthly audit activity taking place, there is still a need to embed this fully into practice.
- 3.10 Following series of workshops, social workers are responding positively to a culture of early permanency. Social workers involved with children subject to the Public Law Outline process are required to attend permanency planning meetings for advice and guidance. The tracking system introduced has made a real difference in early permanency, particularly for children suitable for adoption. Due to effective management oversight, robust adoption tracking and streamlined linking processes, the current adoption timeliness performance, over the 3 year average, is below England and Eastern Region average (which is good performance). 100% of looked after children adopted during 2017/18 were placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision for adoption and the average days between Placement Order and approval of match is 47.3. This is top quartile performance. This trend, if sustained, will make Thurrock one of the best performing authorities (for adoption timeliness) in England by 2020. However, more work needs to be done to increase the number of children

adopted from care.

- 3.11 Post Adoption and Special Guardianship support has been expanded to offer ongoing direct support to families to minimise crisis, disruptions, and breakdown. The offer is also extended to parents who require support to deal with the loss of children through adoption or special guardianship.
- 3.12 The Development Board continues to meet monthly to ensure that all of the recommendations and other areas for improvement have been implemented. The Board is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
- 3.13 Effective progress continues to be made across all areas of the plan and additional input is being provided to address those areas that require this to remain on track. There are examples of some very good work and improvements in the service, recruitment and retention is providing for a more stable workforce with staff who are committed to Thurrock, which is positive. The biggest challenge is inconsistency in social work practice. We are investing in Signs of Safety training as our social work model which is being rolled out to all staff, this will focus on a strengths based approach to working with families that will drive up assessment quality and provide a consistent framework of intervention. We have been delivering monthly training practice workshops for the staff since February 2018 to drive up practice standards. There is still a strong focus on analysing and understanding our data in relation to missing children and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and we continue to utilise additional resources for these tasks to ensure that Return Home interviews and CSE risk assessments are completed in a timely way. There is a focus on permanency planning for children. Quality Assurance process continue to be strengthened.

4. Consultation

N/A

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

The completed development plan will allow the council to meet and improve upon its core statutory functions in the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

There are no financial implications

6.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

There are no Legal implications

6.3 Diversity and Equality

Whilst there are no direct implications from this report, the work to implement the Development Plan will strengthen our ability to meet and improve the delivery of services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Manager

6.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/A

7. 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):

- Ofsted Single Framework Inspection Report dated 24.5.16

8. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Children's Social Care Development Plan (to be Tabled)

Report Author:

Sheila Murphy -
Assistant Director
Children's Social Care

3 July 2018	ITEM: 8
Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	
Children’s Social Care Performance	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Iqbal Vaza, Strategic Lead, Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence	
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director C&F	
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director, Children’s Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

Thurrock has experienced a high level of demand placed on its statutory social care service for children. Considerable work has been undertaken by the department in managing this demand through improving its early intervention service and managing the front door (MASH) more effectively. There has been a reduction in the number of contacts and referrals; easing the demand pressure of children becoming looked after and children being placed on a child protection plan. In particular the number of children on a child protection plan is now in line with comparator groups. This is a considerable improvement, given the high rate of child protection plans in previous years.

An area of focus is the number of children that have been adopted in 2017/18. Seven children were adopted, which is similar to previous years. This position is below Thurrock’s comparator group of 30 children being adopted.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note the areas of improvement in children’s social care, work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services and highlight areas of further investigation for deep dive studies.**
 - 1.2 Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note a new inspection framework has been introduced by Ofsted for children’s social care.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of children’s social care performance. It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, trend analyses, 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. It is essential that one version of performance information is used by the whole system; from case workers to the senior management team. The data in this report is from the latest performance digest (May 2018), regional benchmarking data (quarter 3 position) and national data sets based on 16/17 financial year. This data had been presented and discussed with the social care senior management team and the Corporate Director’s Performance Group.

3. Contacts and referrals

- 3.1 Thurrock is managing its demand placed on the front door (MASH) of children’s social care well. Although there has been an increase of 78 more contacts in 2017/18, than 2016/17, it is well below the increase from 2015/16 to 2016/17 (373).

Good progress has been made in reducing the rate of referrals and assessments. In 2015/16, Thurrock had one of the highest assessment rates at 713 per 10,000 of the child population. This has been reduced to 500 per 10,000 of the child population (see fig 2). Thurrock has also reduced its referral rate from 592 in 2015/16 to 507 in 2017/18.

Fig 1

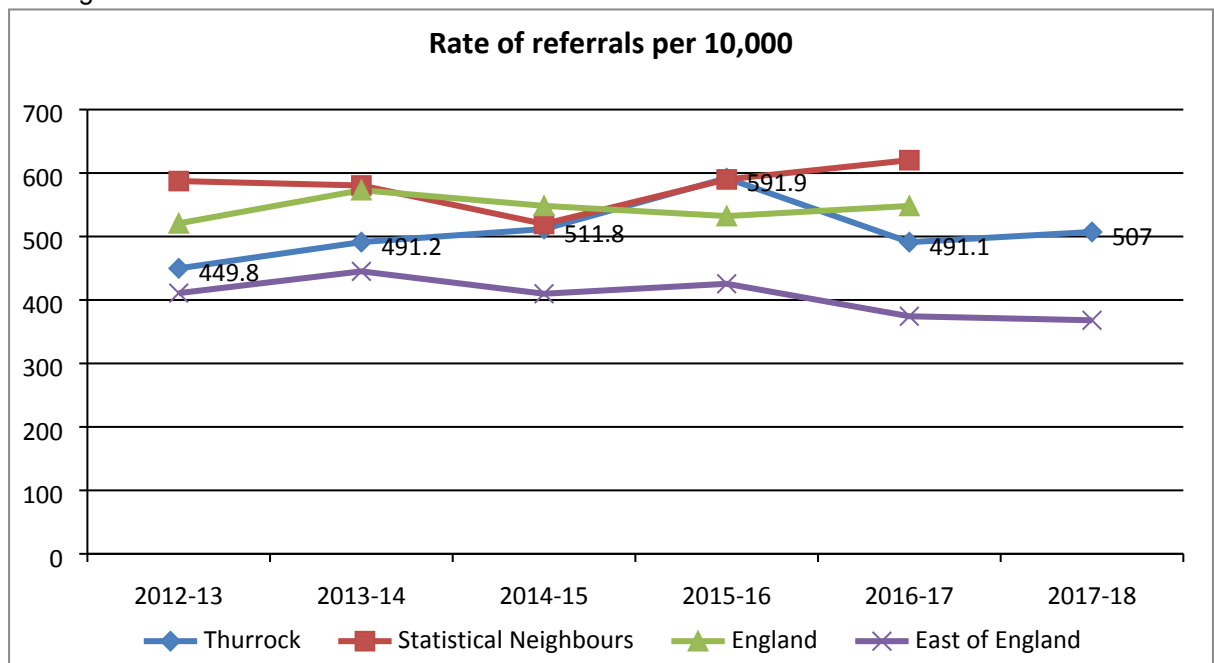
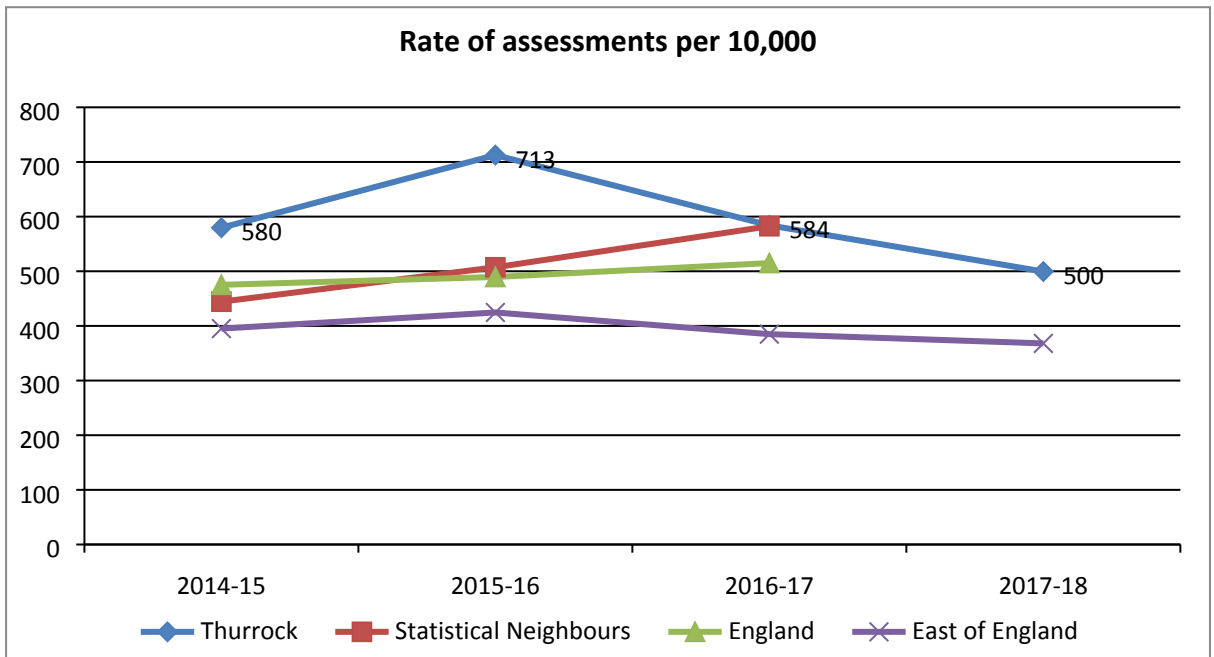
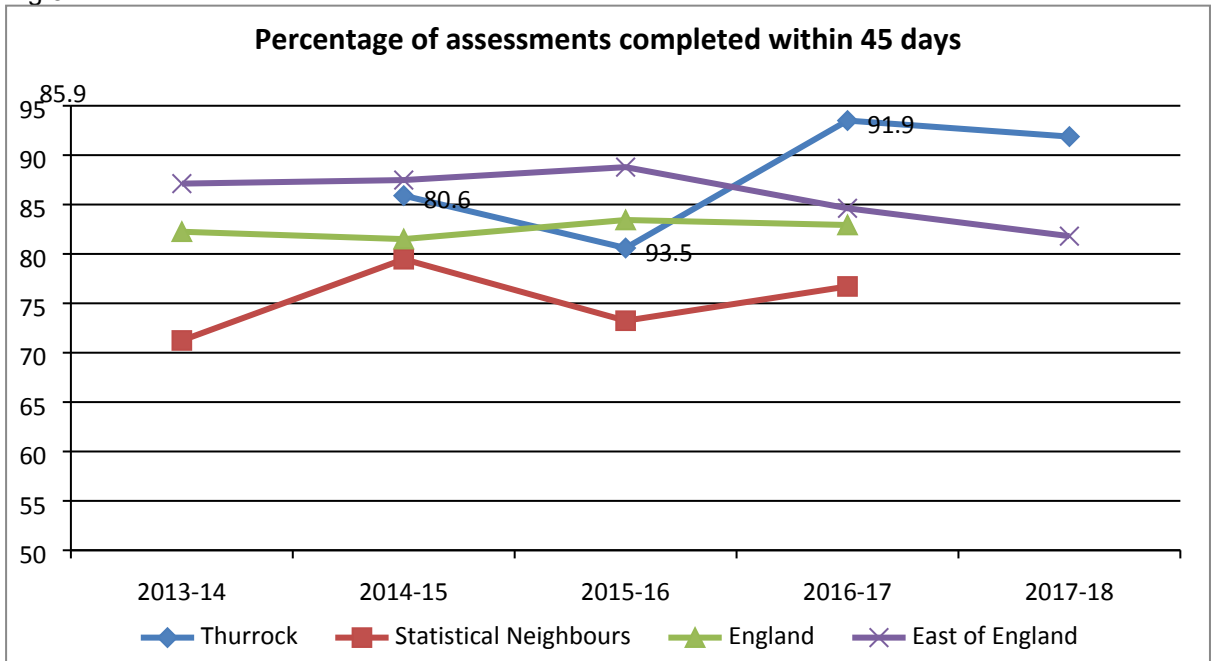


Fig 2



3.2 Thurrock is one of the best performing authorities in completing its assessments within timescale (see fig 3). It also has a low percentage of repeat referrals. In summary the front door of social care is being managed efficiently and work undertaken by the service to reduce demand has been reflected in the data.

Fig 3



3.3 Looked after children

3.4 The number of looked after children has reduced by 26 (see fig 4, 2016/17: 333, 2017/18 307) in comparison to the same position last year. This is partly attributed to a reduction in asylum seeking children reducing from 53 to 35 (see fig 5).

Fig 4

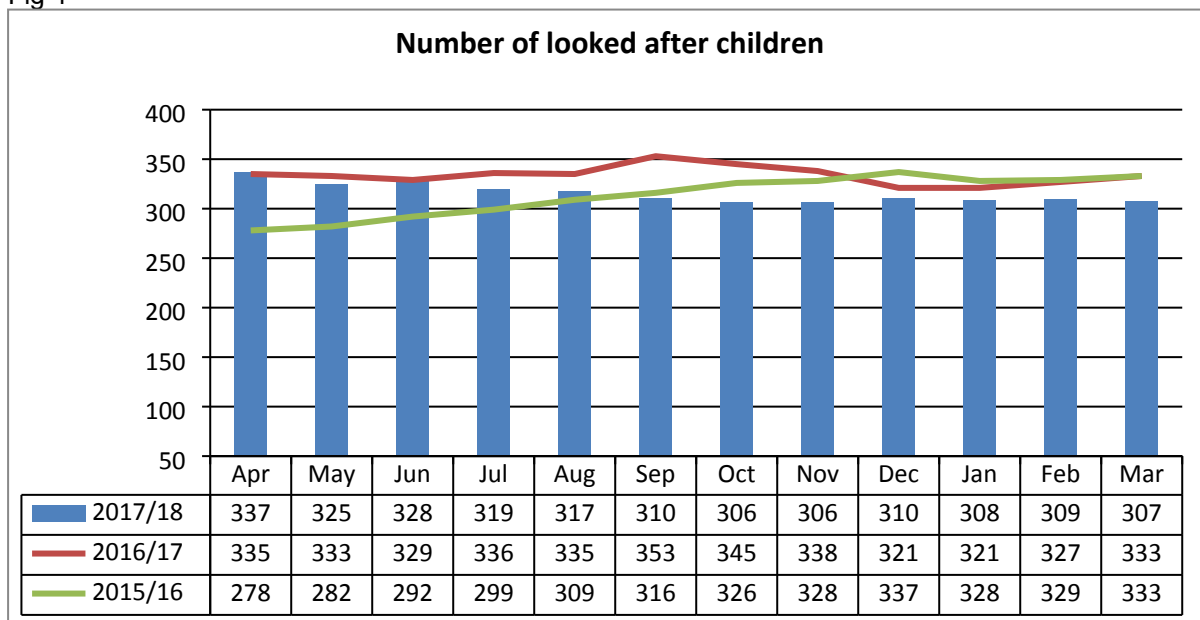
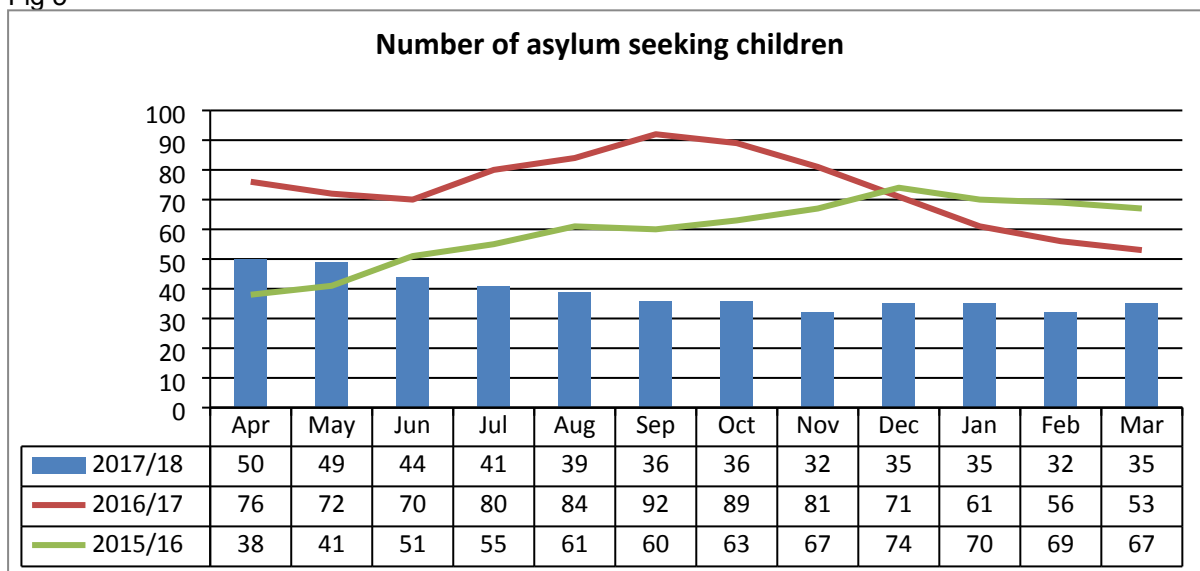


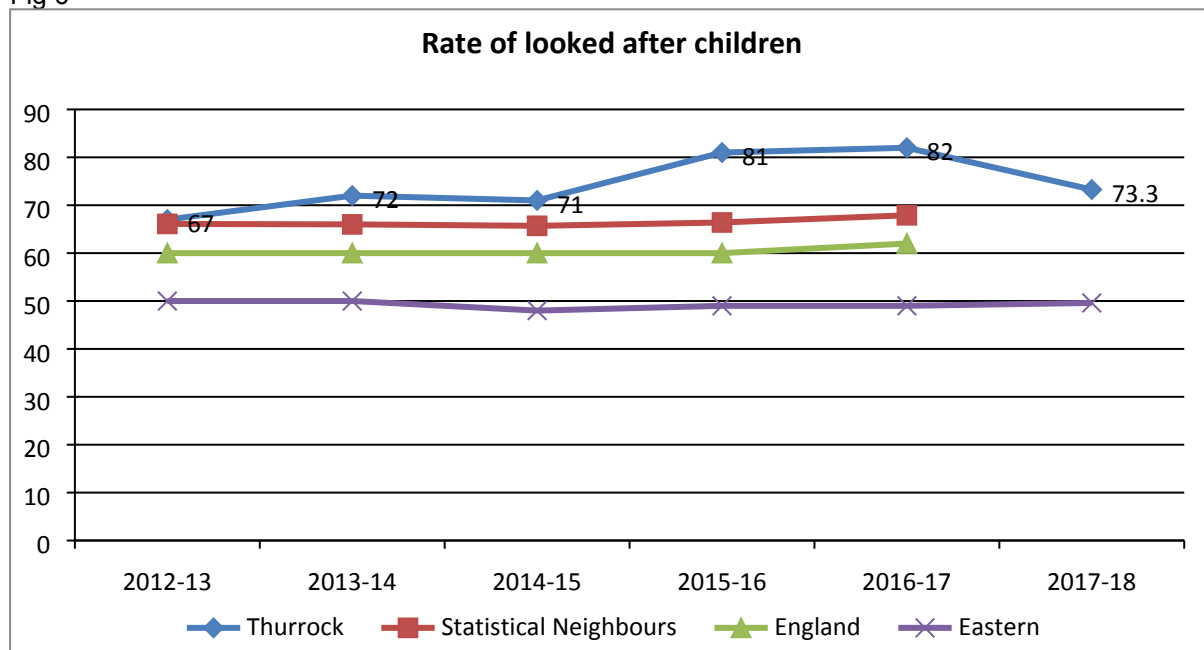
Fig 5



3.5 Thurrock is closing more looked after children cases than its comparator group and the east of England average. Given the high rate of looked after children this is a good position and helped reduced the rate from 82 per 10,000 of the child population in 2016/17 to 73 per 10k of the child population in 2017/18. However the rate of new looked after children is still higher than its comparator group. The service continues to monitor all new looked after

cases ensuring correct thresholds are being applied and children are only being looked after where necessary.

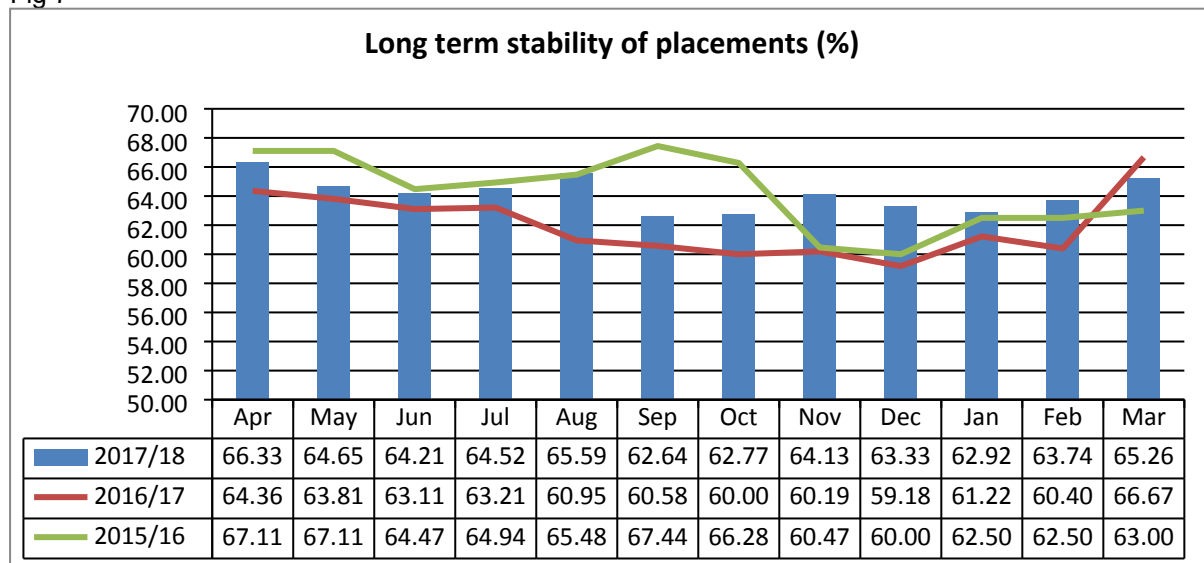
Fig 6



3.6 Placements

3.7 Thurrock performs well in placing looked after children in stable placements. In terms of long term stability, 65% (see fig 7) of looked after children under the age of 16 have been in the same placement for more than 2 years. This position is within the range of its comparator group.

Fig 7



3.8 Thurrock has made significant improvements in placing children within Thurrock. We now have 38% children placed within Thurrock, which is 6% higher than the position last year. This is both cost effective and ensures children are closer to their families and community where they also have access to good schools and other local services. Our target is to have at least 50% of placements within borough which will bring us in line with our comparator group.

3.9 Looked after children reviews

3.10 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service provides a statutory function providing scrutiny, challenge and oversight for all children in the care of the local authority, where ever they may be placed in the country. Part of the oversight is achieved by chairing looked after children (LAC) reviews. This is a statutory requirement placed upon the local authority.

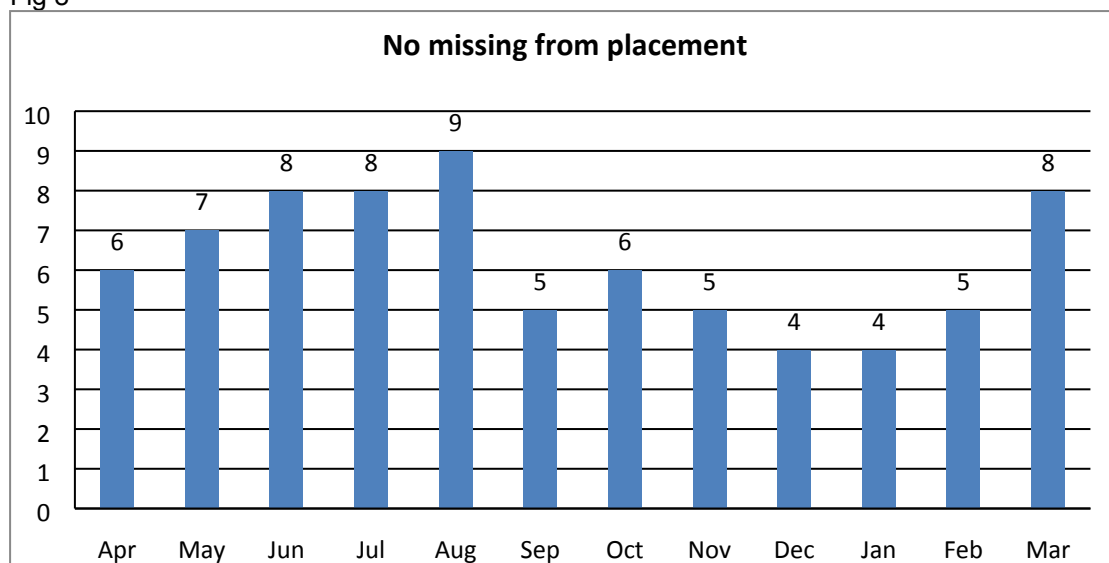
Statutory timescales are prescribed and all local authorities are required to adhere to these timescales, ensuring robust and timely oversight and intervention. The current performance for the service as recorded on the system at 14/5/2018 is 84% of reviews have been completed within the expected timescale. Although this is an improvement from last year, it is still below the standard that all local authorities are required to meet.

Close scrutiny is being focused on this performance indicator.

3.11 Looked after children missing

3.12 Thurrock had 8 looked after children with missing episodes from placement in March 2018 (see fig 8). There has been a reduction in the number of instances of missing children from 2017/18 – 291 compared to 2016/17 – 361.

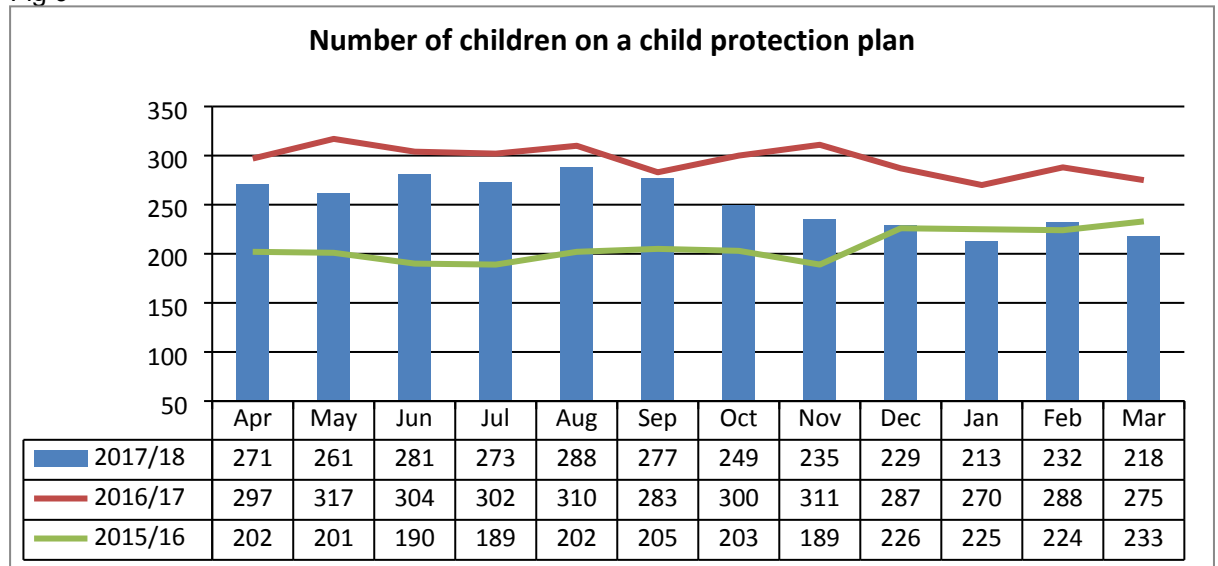
Fig 8



3.13 Children on a child protection plan

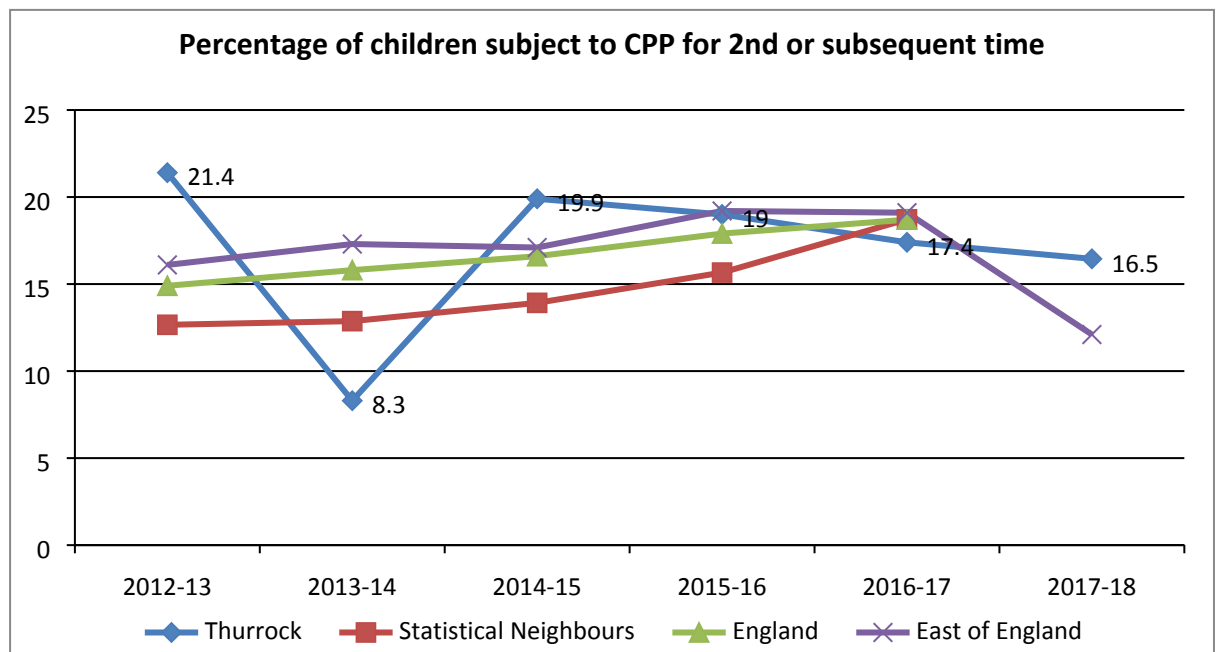
3.14 The number of children on a child protection plan has reduced by 57 (Mar 17: 275, Mar 18: 218) in comparison to the same position last year. This is attributed to a reduction in the number of child protection plans being started this financial year (2016/17: 329, 2017/18: 231). Given the previous high rate of child protection plans this is good performance.

Fig 9



3.15 Thurrock's percentage of children subject to a 2nd or subsequent time on a cpp has reduced to 16.5%. This is below our comparator group. The service will continue to monitor the re-plans to ensure only children that are suitable are taken off a child protection plan.

Fig 10



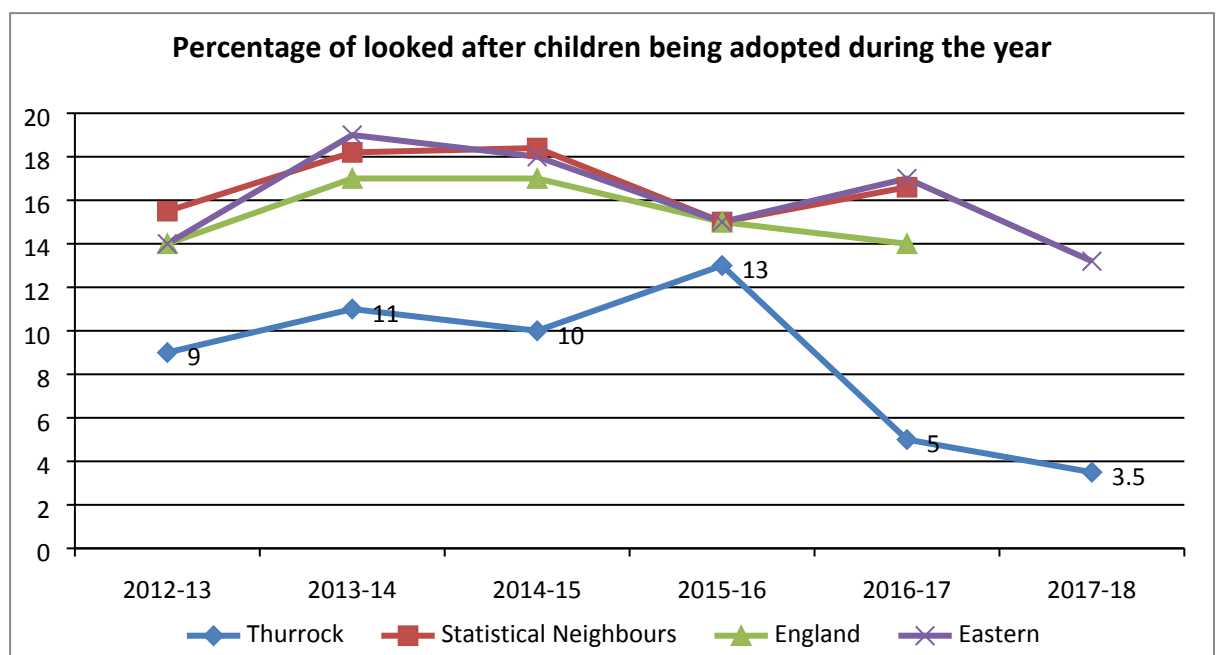
3.16 Child protection reviews

3.17 The number of statutory reviews completed within timescale at the end of 2017/18 was 96%. This is an improvement from last year and we are aiming for 98% within timescale for 2018/19.

3.18 Adoptions

3.19 Thurrock's percentage of adoptions (see fig 11) is low and below its comparator groups. Thurrock adopted 7 children in 2017/18, against a statistical neighbour average of 30 adopted children.

Fig 11



3.20 Care Leavers

3.21 We have continued to focus work on ensuring that the data sets have been refreshed and any inaccuracies have been removed from the system. As a result the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training has improved to 61.5%. This is below the target of 70% and 16/17 position (61.9%). Similarly, the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation has also reduced to 78.6%. This is below the position reported in 16/17 (85.3%).

3.22 The realignment of the aftercare service into the Inspire Youth Hub has seen a significant improvement in the number of young people in education employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock programme offers a bespoke programme to ensure that care leavers can access education employment and training. We have had considerable success with this and the figure is currently at 61.5% we recognise that this is below our very

ambitious target of 70% but we are significantly above the eastern region at 53.1%. For many of our care leavers we provide our recently judged outstanding Prince's Trust programme which is a way in which we enable young people to build confidence. One example of that is the recent recruitment of one of our carers leavers into an outdoor education apprenticeship at the residential centre that they attended during the 12 week programme. We actively seek apprenticeship opportunities for our care leavers and continue to provide a range of support programmes to enable them to engage fully in the local communities in which they live.

- 3.23 Housing remains one of the key challenges for young people who are Leaving Care, to address this we have further developed the Head Start Housing Programme – which will look to support care leavers into a HMO. The aim of Head Start is to provide a holistic approach to supporting young people in both sourcing and sustaining tenancies. We recognise that one of the key barriers relating to this is budget management and to address this we have developed a budgeting programme to ensure that young people can manage finances. The current position shows that we have 1.1% of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation – the rest of the data relates to young people who have gone missing from the LA – a significant percentage of these are made up of our unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and this is recognised nationally as an issue.

3.24 Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

- 3.25 The current inspection framework for children's social care is the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, which started in January 2018. Under ILACS, local authorities are required to share their self-evaluation at the annual engagement meeting with Ofsted. Thurrock has completed its self-evaluation and shared this with Ofsted as part of the annual conversation on the 9 May 2018. We are expecting an Ofsted focused visit before the end of 2018.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee to note and comment on current performance position

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 N/A

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

- 6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nilufa Begum**
Management Accountant

No Financial Implications

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Deputy Head of Legal Social Care and Education

No Legal Implications

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

Individual needs of children and young people which include their gender, religion, language and disability are considered. There is also the need to consider risks to children and young people such as sexual exploitation, gang related violence and trafficking.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/A

8. 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):

N/A

9. Appendices to the report – no appendices

Report Author:

Iqbal Vaza

Strategic Lead, Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence

Strategy, Communications and Customer Services

**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Work Programme 2018/19**

Dates of Meetings: 3 July 2018, 9 October 2018, 4 December 2018, 12 February 2019

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
3 July 2018		
Children's Social Care Development Plan 2018-19	Rory Patterson	Officers
Children's Social Care Performance	Rory Patterson	Officers
Youth Work Presentation	Pat Kielty	Members
9 October 2018		
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Members
Monitoring Children's Internet Searches in Schools (particularly suicide method searches)	Alan Cotgrove / LSCB	Members
Social Care Performance	Rory Patterson	Officers
4 December 2018		
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Members
Social Care Performance	Rory Patterson	Officers

Fees & Charges Report	Andrew Austin / appropriate finance officer	Officers
12 February 2019		
Youth Cabinet Update	Pat Kielty	Members
Social Care Performance	Rory Patterson	Officers