

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

## Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **4 June 2019**

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

### Membership:

Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard, Sue MacPherson and Jennifer Smith

Gregg Brown, Open Door

Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Kerry King, Children in Care Council

Billie-Jo King, Children in Care Council

### Substitutes:

Councillors Luke Spillman, Gary Collins, Bukky Okunade and Lynn Worrall

### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>	
<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 6 March 2019.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
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.	
<b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>	

<b>5</b>	<b>Children's Social Care Performance</b>	<b>13 - 24</b>
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<b>11</b>	<b>Care Leavers</b>	
	This item will be in the format of a presentation.	
<b>12</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020</b>	<b>133 - 134</b>

**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

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Agenda published on: **24 May 2019**

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# DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

## Helpful Reminders for Members

- *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

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- 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.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

**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

**Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:**

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

**If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps**

### 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 Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 March 2019 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Qaisar Abbas (*arrived 19.24*), Abbie Akinbohun, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Luke Spillman

Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

**In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families  
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead of Children Looked After  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead of Youth Offending Service and Prevention  
Tiffany Bright, Interim Strategic Lead of Skills  
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After  
Wendy Le, Democratic Services Officer

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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.

### **25. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 15 January 2019 were approved as a true record.

### **26. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **27. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Liddiard declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a foster carer.

### **28. Families Supported By Early Help**

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead of Youth Offending Service and Prevention, presented the report which outlined the Early Help Service that had been in Thurrock Council for over 10 years. iMPower were commissioned in 2017 to provide support to the service due to the overwhelming demand faced. The strategy recommended was for a more integrated working partnership between the Council and its partners to enable the Council had enough support in the event of a crisis. A key strength of the existing Early Help

service is that it already works with families and children in using 'assets' and a strength-based model of intervention.

Praising the good report, the Chair asked for a report to be brought back on the 586 children mentioned. She asked that the report provide clarity on the reasons why and what services were being provided to the 586 children. Clare Moore explained that the children's needs varied and could include domestic violence situations or parents with mental health issues. A breakdown would be provided within the report.

Agreeing that a report should be brought back, Councillor Spillman added that the report should include the actual services that were provided to the children in the Early Help service. He went on to say that early intervention was a good solution to prevent most situations from arising and questioned whether there were enough resources within the service to meet demands. In answer, Clare Moore said the service was resourced well in terms of staffing because there was a large team to deliver the service. Money was re-invested in staff and the service was looking to expand delivery to include the partners.

Councillor Spillman commented that early help intervention was more than just a social care issue as it encompassed other departments within the Council such as the housing service. He queried whether there were systems in place for departments to work together in regards to early intervention. Explaining that there were systems in place, Clare Moore said that relationships were considered more than processes. Relationships between colleagues in departments were strong and processes needed to be strengthened to ensure delivery of the Early Help service. Councillor Spillman went on to agree that there needed to be 'joined up thinking' within the Council.

Giving praise to the report, Councillor Johnson understood some referrals to the Early Help service came from the homeless team and he questioned where else referrals came from. He went on to ask if the Members could provide their help in any other areas. Clare Moore answered that referrals usually came from schools and the homeless team and had provided support to families in renting situations to prevent them from falling into arrears. In private rented accommodations, this was sometimes difficult as the service was not always aware families were falling into arrears. The service aimed to develop further within in the adult mental health service and work well with all partners and departments.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned the percentage of successful cases where the Early Help service had been able to help families. Clare Moore said success was measured through parental feedback in surveys and this was currently at 94% upon families leaving the Early Help service. Questionnaires were undertaken with families and those who also knew the family as relatives or friends.

Following on, the Chair sought clarification on the remaining 6%. Clare Moore explained that some families did not want the Early Help service; some



families resolved issues themselves and some families did not meet the threshold requirements. The Chair went on to ask if there had been cases where the service had intervened too quickly when it was not needed. In response, Clare Moore said that families would tell the service when they were not needed.

Councillor Liddiard commented on the interesting report and was pleased to hear that there was 94% success rate as it was rare to see those cases.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report.**

**29. Transition - Preparing Care Leavers for Adulthood**

*Councillor Abbas arrived 19.24.*

Presented by Tiffany Bright, Interim Strategic Lead of Skills, the report provided an overview of the offers and services available to Care Leavers which included the House Multiple Occupancy (HMO) scheme.

The Chair gave praise to the good report and thought that HMOs were a good start for Care Leavers. However, she was unsure how foster children felt about HMOs. The Committee discussed the option of HMOs and that some Care Leavers might find it harder to transition out of the service. Some young people would still need looking after during the transition phase and the service had to ensure young people had the needs to run their own home. The Committee felt the Council, as Corporate Parents, should be able to provide more for young people. It was a matter of managing expectations and the difficulty was in balancing housing needs and there needed to be more accommodation available.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned the success rate of Care Leavers transitioning from care to independence. Tiffany Bright answered that of the 250 18 – 21 year olds within the aftercare service, 20% required more help and there were some that required intervention. The other 200 were doing well and responded to their allocated support workers. Councillor Akinbohun went on to ask how many Care Leavers were able to acquire accommodation. In response, Tiffany Bright said more than 50% of Care Leavers were able to gain accommodation which was a combination of aftercare accommodation and rented properties on their behalf. Some Care Leavers were living with family or friends and some were in custody but regardless, all were still supported by the service and had an allocated support worker.

Pleased to see the report, Councillor Spillman mentioned that he had seen some rent arrears in social homes and asked if the service was confident that systems were in place to prevent a case slipping through. Answering that there were bi-monthly meetings with the housing team to prevent cases from slipping through, Tiffany Bright went on to confirm the service was confident. Care Leavers were also provided with the care they needed to transition.

Referring to the Spectre First mentioned in paragraph 2.1.12, Councillor Johnson asked the service to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the partnership and how well it was working.

**RESOLVED:**

**1. Recommendations**

**That the Corporate Parenting Committee provided comment on the service's work in the following areas:**

- 1.1 Work cross directorate and, in consultation with CL, to publish and promote the Local Offer**
- 1.2 Inform all CL of their rights under the Act and local policies to support them**
- 1.3 Build and maintain a diverse range of teams and partners to sign up to the CL Covenant including robust data collection and regular reporting**
- 1.4 Continue cross directorate work to extend/formalise the corporate approach to CL**

**30. Report on Merton Assessments**

The report was presented by Janet Simon, Strategic Lead of Children Looked After and outlined the Merton Age Assessment which was carried out on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). The assessment was undertaken when the age of an UASC was uncertain and was undertaken by two high level social workers. Paediatric and dental assessments were not to be relied on.

Councillor Spillman asked if there had been many cases of age concerns in which an assessment had to be carried out. Janet Simon answered that there had been 5 cases out of the 98 UASC that had arrived last year and found that some were adults which led to their detainment. Councillor Spillman was relieved to hear a low number of cases and hoped that the age assessments were carried out in an ethical manner.

Councillor Akinbohun queried whether the UASC inflow was high. In answer, Janet Simon said that there had been an influx during July 2018 to October 2018 but the inflow had slowed down in the last few months. Thurrock's maximum capacity for UASC was 28 and they currently had 30. The Council had an agreement with the Eastern region in which other Local Authorities (LAs) would take some of the UASC to keep each Council's capacity for UASC down.

On the nature of co-operation, Councillor Spillman questioned whether there were complications with other LAs. Explaining the Eastern region protocol, Janet Simon went on to say the agreement stated LAs would take some cases of UASC if they had not reached their maximum capacity themselves. Adding to this, Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families, said that there were some discussions and queries from LAs in regards to the age of UASC but of all the UASC that had arrived in Thurrock, nearly all had been received by other LAs following protocol. The protocol had been effective since its implementation in 2016. Councillor Spillman went on to question which LA in the Eastern region had the highest number of UASC to which Janet Simon replied that it was Thurrock Council.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if an age assessment had been challenged by other LAs taking in UASC from Thurrock. Confirming there had been challenges, Janet Simon went on to say that Thurrock Council would take the UASC back and reassess. There had also been a young person that had challenged the outcome of the assessment too. Councillor Akinbohun went on to ask who helped the young person to challenge their assessment and whether they received legal aid. Janet Simon explained that if a UASC was deemed to be an adult, they were detained and she believed there were specialist solicitors to help them.

Mentioning a conference, Councillor Akinbohun said she had heard that asylum seekers were given £30 a week to live on and she questioned whether that was enough for them. Janet Simon explained that UASC came into the system to be looked after. Over 18's were treated as adults and she was unsure of the processes regarding adults as she worked with children.

Following on, Councillor Spillman questioned if adults were entitled to legal aid. Janet Simon was unsure but understood that many solicitors operated on a 'no win, no fee' basis. However, she would check and feedback to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee noted and provided comment upon the work of officers in relation to Merton Age Assessments of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.**

**31. Pupil Premium Plus Report for the Virtual School**

Presented by Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After, the report detailed the use of the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) Grant for Children Looked After (CLA) and the proposed strategy on the use of the grant for 2019-2020.

The Chair gave praise to the report and commented on the detailed information given.

Councillor Spillman questioned if the funds were distributed to the LA and academy schools. Answering that the funds were distributed to whichever school CLA were in, Keeley Pullen said some children were doubled funded so did not always receive the extra funds. Instead, the extra money was used to commission an extra service to support them. Councillor Spillman went on to ask what monitoring and interventions were in place to ensure the schools delivered with the use of the funds. Keeley Pullen answered that monitoring was through Personal Education Plans (PEP) and meetings with the school. There was a robust dialogue between the Virtual School and schools regarding the interventions in place and clear escalation processes which ended with Keeley Pullen herself, the Corporate Director of Children's Services and Ofsted if needed. However, this scenario has never happened.

The Chair stated that it would be good to see which children did well within the Virtual School. Referring to paragraph 3.4.10, the Chair sought clarification on the first sentence. Keeley Pullen clarified that without additional funding from the PP+, some CLA would not have been able to attend educational visits which were too expensive.

Councillor Johnson mentioned that he was a school governor and saw how PP+ was spent and questioned how school reports would show whether they had CLA in their school. Keeley Pullen explained that it was a statutory requirement for schools to publish PP+ spending. However, school reports were broad and school governors were able to request further information within reports. To the Virtual School, schools had to clarify PP+ spending through PEP and discussions.

Of the £602,600 mentioned in paragraph 3.1.1, Councillor Akinbohun sought clarification on the spend of the rest of the fund. Keeley Pullen answered that the rest of the fund was allocated as the top slice which was detailed on page 42 of the agenda. The figures were received from the finance team but it had to be noted that some of the leftover money came from children who had left care or had not used the full amount.

Councillor Akinbohun queried how the service monitored whether CLA were receiving the services needed with the funds. Keeley Pullen explained feedback was provided from students which was used to improve services and staff would raise accountability where needed. Younger children were usually unaware of the funds but older children were asked.

Jackie Howell, Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association, questioned whether CLA over 16 still received the same PP+ grant or whether it was bursaries received. Confirming this was not the case, Keeley Pullen explained that PP+ was received up to year 11 but the Virtual School monitored up to 18 years of age and did not manage bursaries. Jackie Howell mentioned that bursaries were not managed well by schools and young people had to provide proof that they were still in care. Keeley Pullen said that the Virtual School tried to use funds to support their post-16s where necessary as post-16s had no funding. The Virtual School relied on foster carers and young people to

notify the service of where they encountered difficulties. Post-16s PEP would usually show where their bursaries were spent.

The Chair queried the percentage of CLA that took up the offer of 1 – 1 tuition. Keeley Pullen explained that year 10s would usually take up the offer and currently 70% of them were having weekly tuition. Some children had dropped a tuition subject because they were doing better and would take up another subject that they were struggling in. Upon reaching year 11, some children moved away from tuition as their school offered more revision classes. However, tuition was offered again if a dip in grades were seen. Currently, year 6s had been offered tuition which was well received.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
  - 1.1 That the Committee notes the budget and spending report for 2018-2019 for Pupil Premium Plus Grant for Children Looked After.**
  - 1.2 That the Committee notes the overall spending by schools of the grant.**
  - 1.3 That the Committee approves the proposed strategy plan for the Pupil Premium Plus Grant for 2019-2020.**

#### **32. Work Programme**

This was the last Corporate Parenting Committee meeting of the municipal year. The Committee thanked Officers for their reports and attendance.

There were no reports added to the work programme for the next municipal year.

**The meeting finished at 8.40 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**



<b>4 June 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## **Executive Summary**

The conversion of referrals into Children Services has fluctuated over the last six months. When comparing the data over the last six months with the same period from last year, there is a negligible increase of just eight contact. However, in recent months there have been changes to the way that some contacts are managed, which impacts on the data).

The data continues to be closely scrutinised to ensure that decision-making remains robust and to ensure families are supported by the most appropriate service. The rate of referrals is below similar authorities matched for need but more referrals result in full assessment of need and any risks. This is a more proportionate response for families. This has been achieved through the work of the “MASH” the multi-agency safeguarding hub and improving access to the Early Help Service. Early Help is currently supporting 730 children and their families.

The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan due to concern about abuse or neglect have reduced because we are starting fewer plans and reducing the length of time children are subject to plans.

The number of children looked after this year have reduced and is now in line with statistical neighbours. Children who can return to live with their family or relatives do so more quickly and the smaller numbers of younger children who cannot live safely with their family are placed with an adoptive family sooner. The number of young children placed with adoptive parents or in permanent care with relatives has increased. The number of children adopted has risen from 7 last year and at year end 13 children had been adopted in Thurrock.

Children looked after continue to make good educational progress with better than national average figures for looked after children. Performance this year being in the top 25% of authorities.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services**

**1.2 For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It describes current activity levels and performance of Children's social care services in responding to the needs of vulnerable children.

2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet internal and external reporting requirements. Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels and to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and information about how well children are doing. The information is discussed with front line workers so we know how well we are doing.

The data in this report is from the monthly performance reporting (At a Glance), regional benchmarking data and national data sets. This data has been presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director's Performance Group. Data has not yet been published in relation to statistical neighbours and national averages for 2018/19. 2017/18 outturns have been used within the charts for benchmarking purposes.

## **3. Performance**

### **3.1 Contacts and Referrals**

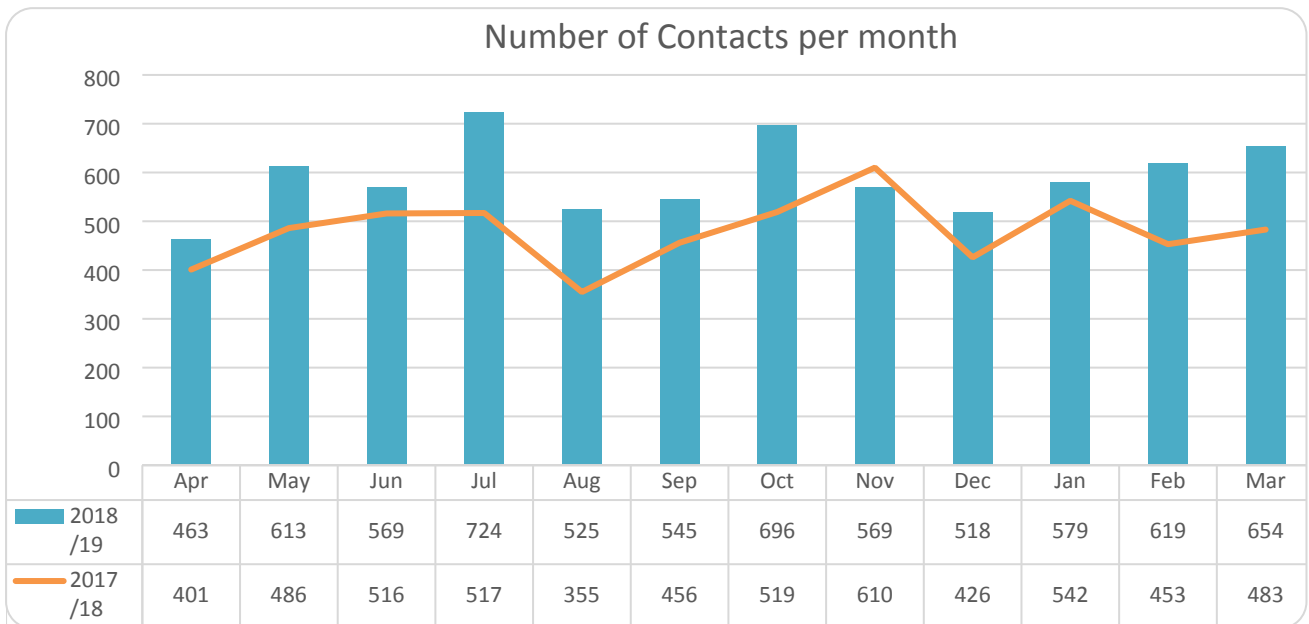
Thurrock is managing demand well at the front door (MASH) of Children's Social Care.

Number of Contacts:

Compared to previous years the rate of contacts and referrals has dropped. During 2018/19 we received an average of 480 contacts per month, as opposed to 589 per month during 2017/18. There is currently no emerging pattern for the spread of contacts received across the year.



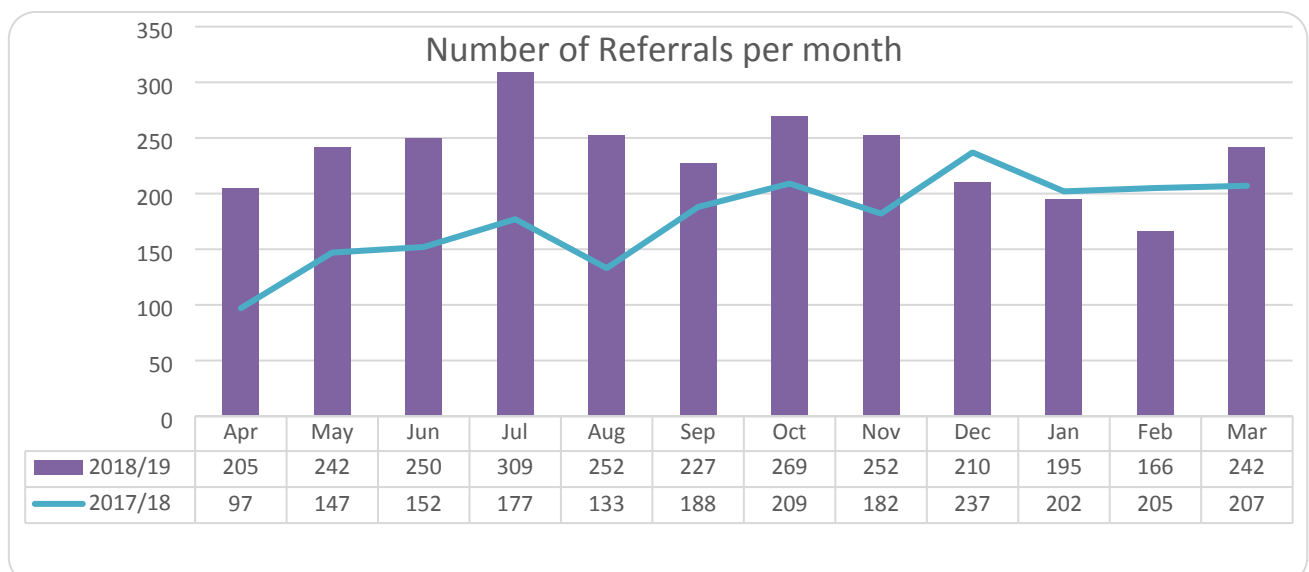
Contacts are calls about concerns for a child which are largely dealt with by giving advice or by referral to Early Help.



#### Number of referrals:

Referrals are those circumstances that need a social care intervention because of more serious concerns about a child’s wellbeing or development.

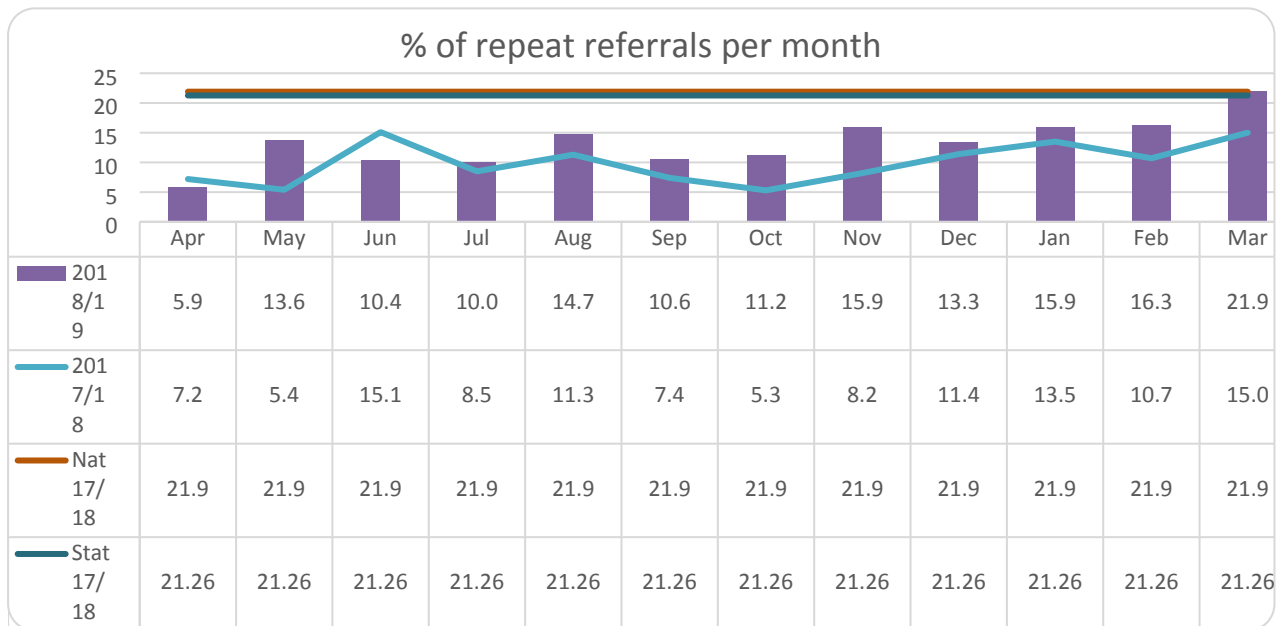
During 2018/19 we received an average of 178 referrals per month, this is lower than 17/18 monthly average of 235. Each month on average we receive about 220 referrals for October this was 268. For 2017/18 40% of contacts resulted in a referral, this has reduced slightly for 2018/19, whereby 37% of contacts became a referral.



### Repeat referrals:

The percentage of referrals received that pertain to a child previously referred (within a 12 month period) are monitored, this can differ greatly from month to month.

On average the % of repeat referrals has increased from 10.6% for 2017/18 to 13.3% for 2018/19. Should the national average and statistical neighbours' averages remain in line with the 2017/18 outturn then our 2018/19 for March (despite the increase to 21.9%) falls in line with those.



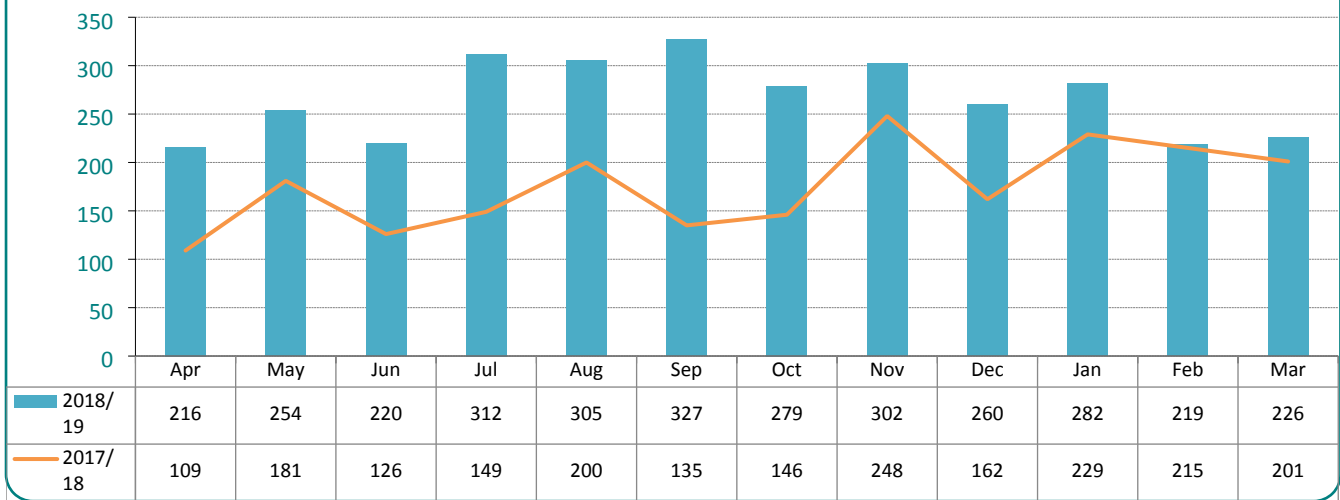
### 3.2 Assessments

Number of Children and Families Assessments completed per month:

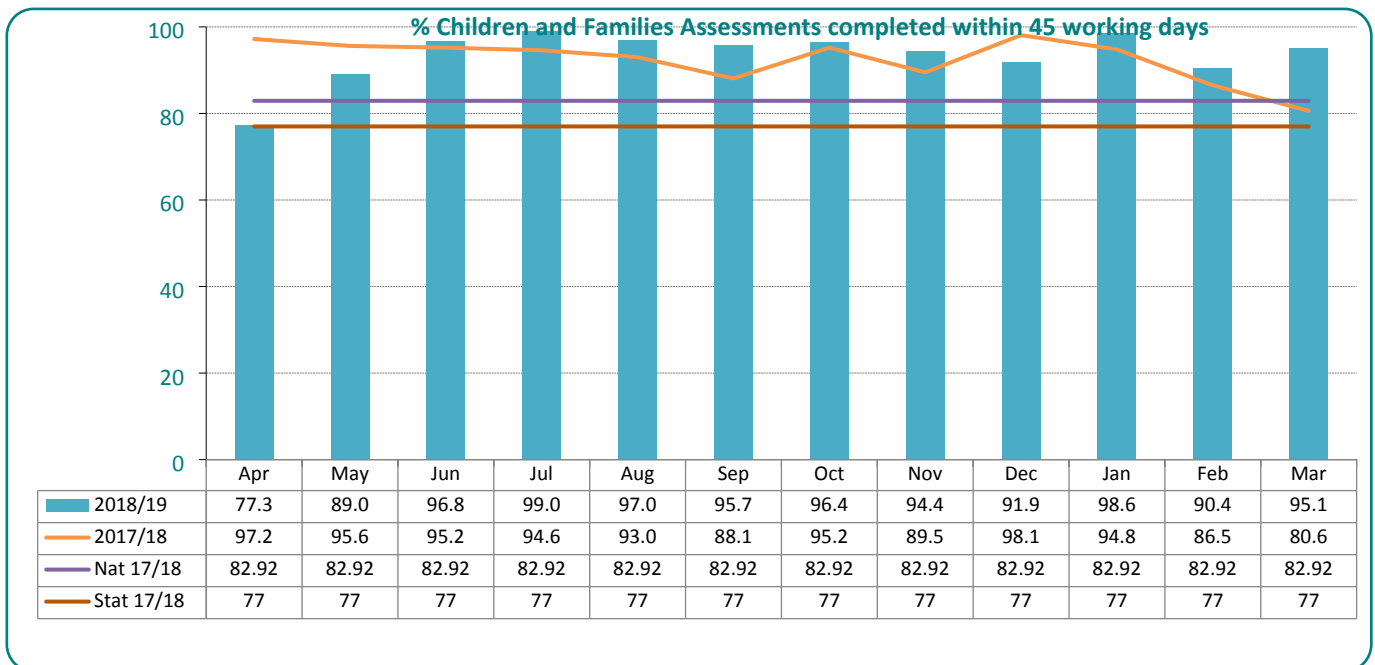
A total of 3202 Children and Families Assessments were completed during 2018/19, which is an average of 266 per month – this is an increase on the average of 175 per month during 2017/18. For every calendar month there has been an increase of assessments completed with the largest increases during the months of July and September 18.

We continue to have good performance in terms of assessments being completed within 45 days – 93.46 % of assessments (monthly average) were completed within 45 days during 2018/19 – the national average outturn for 2017/18 was 82.92 and our statistical neighbours' average outturn for 2017/18 was 77%.

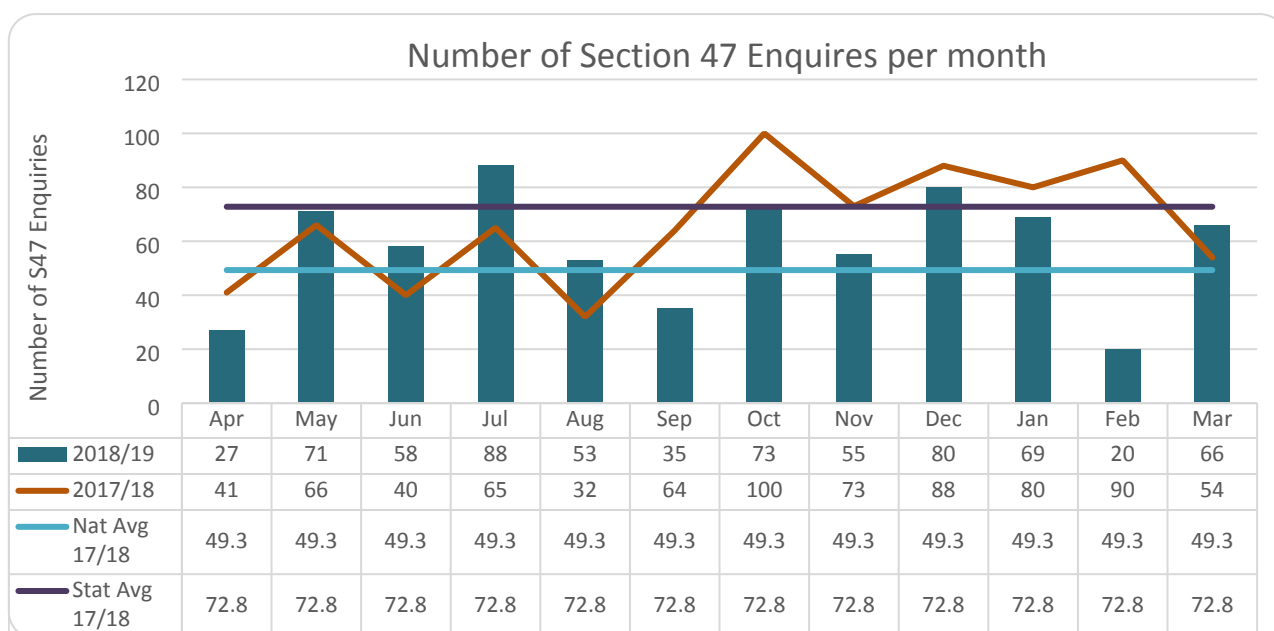
Number of Children and Families Assessments completed per month



Percentage of Children and Families Assessments completed within 45 working days:



### Number of Section 47 Enquires per month:



A section 47 enquiry relates to 47 enquiry refers to "Section 47 of the Children Act 1989". This is the law which allows social services to undertake an investigation where an allegation has been made that a child is at risk of harm.

During 2018/19 we had an average of 58 enquiries per month, which is slightly less than 2017/18, which was 66 on average per month. Both of these figures fall with the averages for 2017/18 (national being 49.3 and statistical neighbours being 72.8).

During March 2019 71.2% of Section 47 enquiries resulted in no further action being taken.

During the same period 100% of Initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 days of the Section 47 enquiry starting.

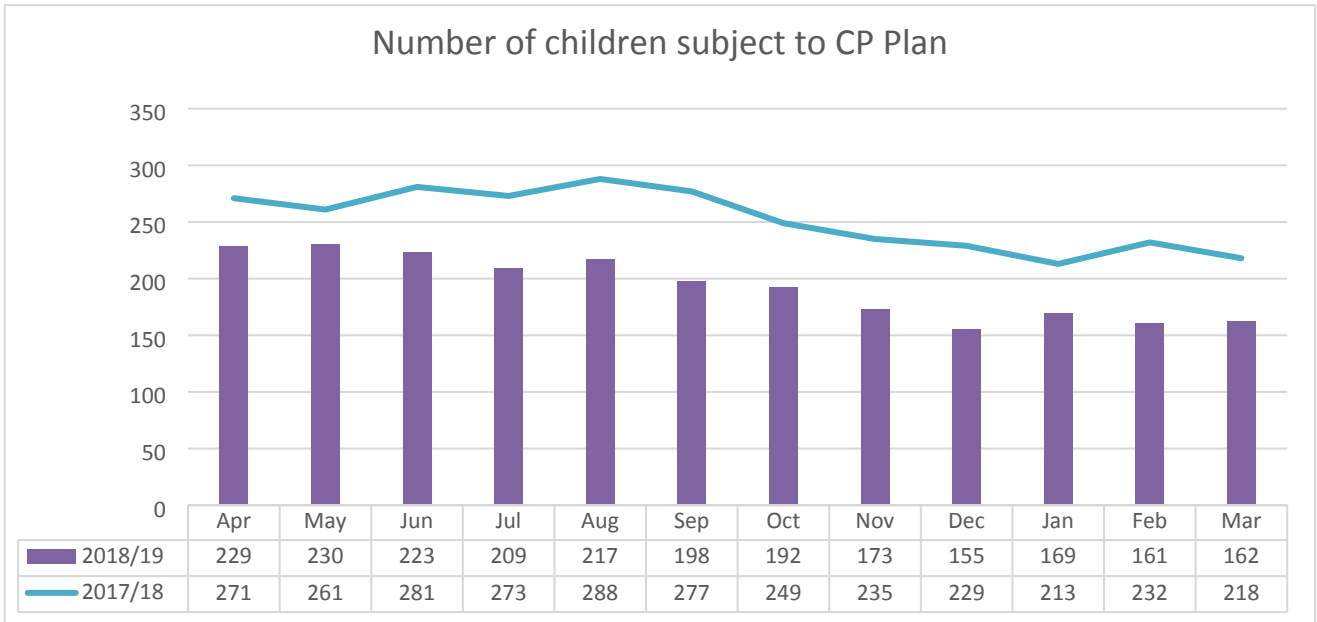
### 3.4 Children subject to Child Protection Plans

As at March 19 there was a total of 162 children subject to Child Protection Plans. This reflects a rate of 37.8 per 10,000 child population compared to similar authorities at a rate of 51.

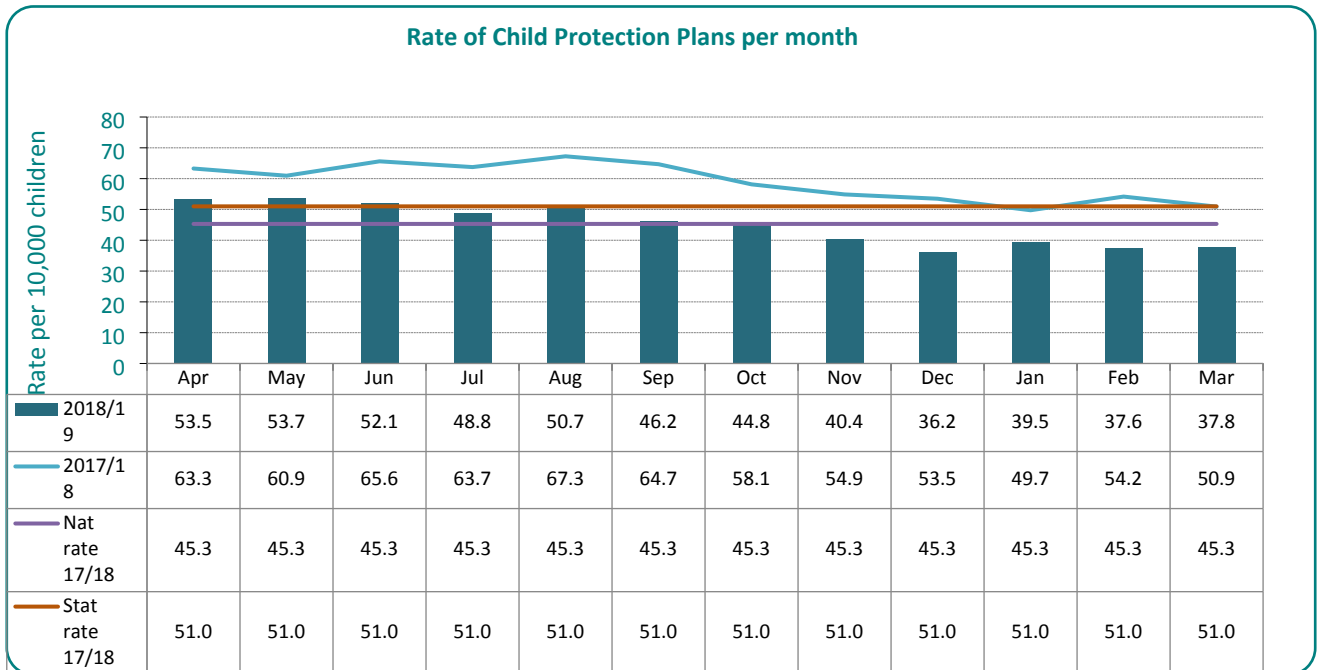
The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan due to concern about abuse or neglect have reduced because we are starting fewer plans and reducing the length of time children are subject to plans. Plans are reviewed in a timely way so that children and families understand what needs to change and progress.

As at March 2019 on 0.6% of those on a child protection plan had been on the plan for 2 years or more; the 2017/18 national average was 1.8% so is indicative of good performance in this area.

### Number subject to Child Protection Plan

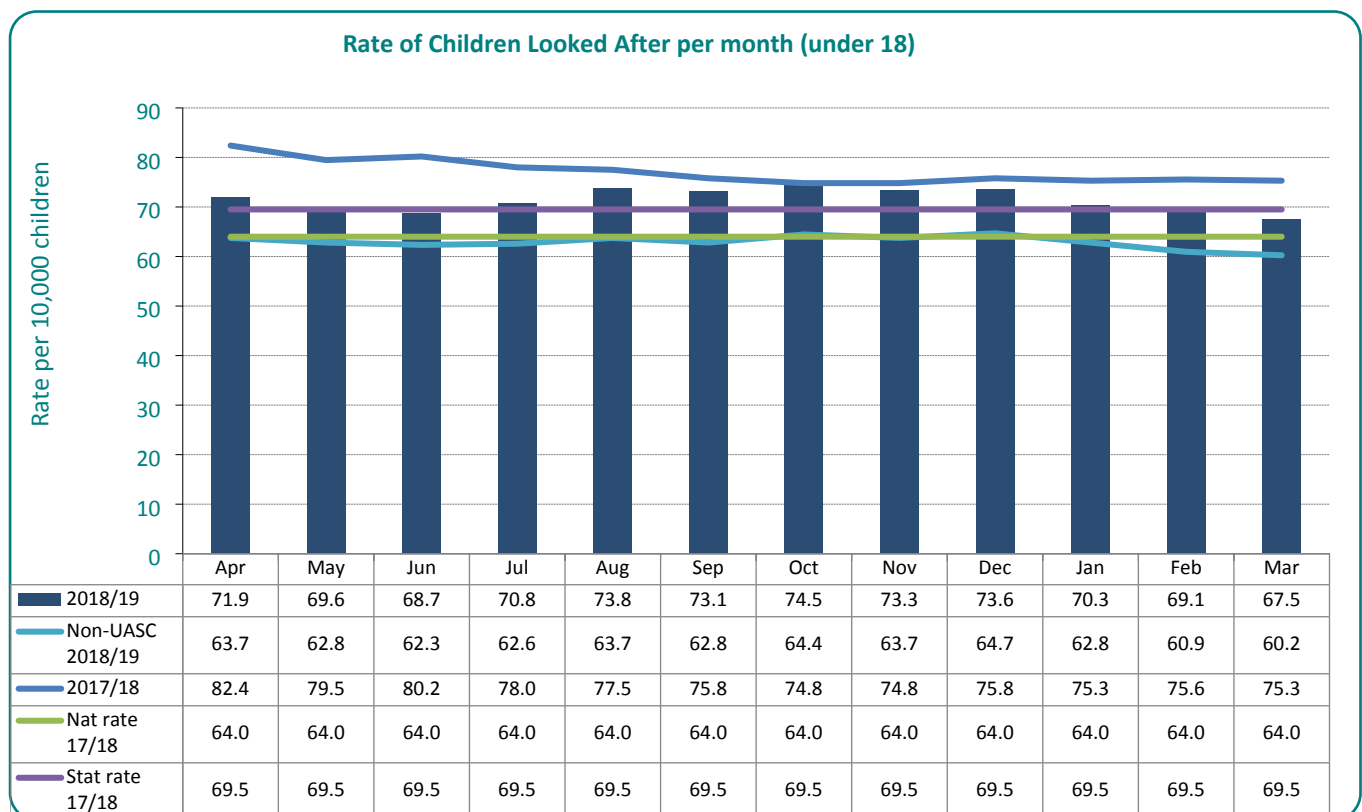
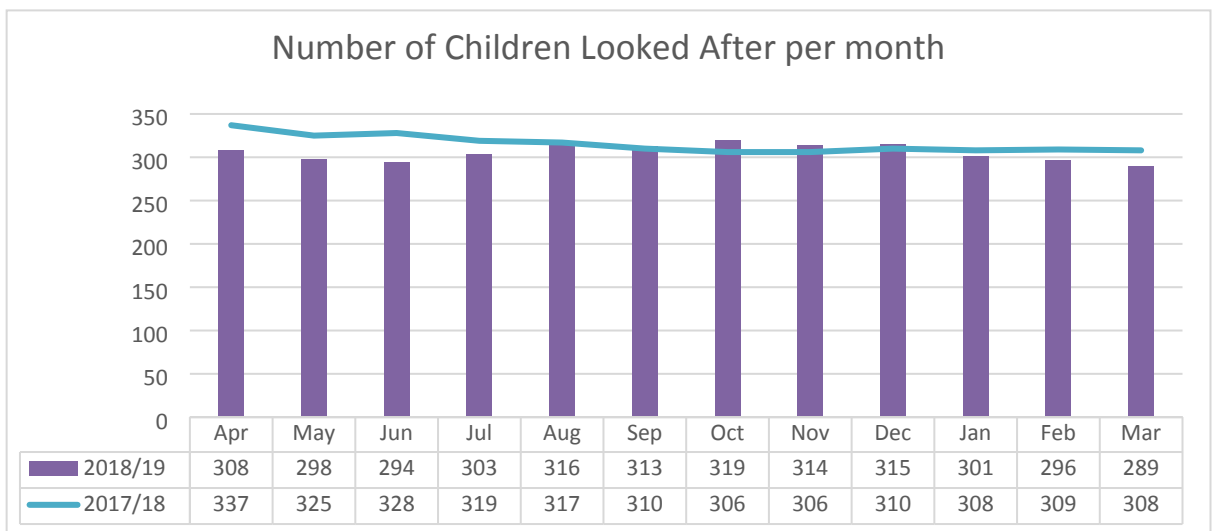


### Rate of Child protection plans

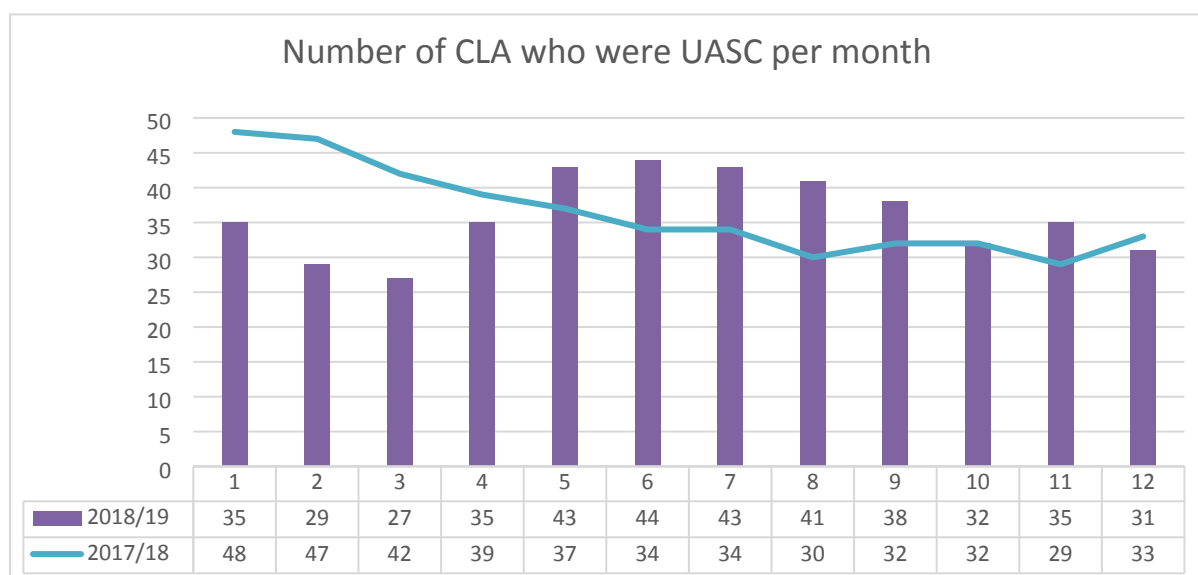


### 3.5 Children Looked After

As at March 2019 there was a total of 289 looked after children, this equates to a rate of 67.5 per 10,000 children. The number has reduced throughout the year; the rate in April 2018 was 71.9. The reduction has been achieved by reducing the length of time a child is looked after by progressing plans for long term care more quickly.



The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children remains high in Thurrock.



### 3.6 Adoption

In the last financial year we achieved thirteen Adoption Orders for children who required them and increase from 2017/18. At the end of April 2019 there are fourteen children with an agency decision for adoption but no placement order and nine children have a placement order. We can anticipate a continued need for adopters at or in excess of the amount required last year. Currently there are ten children placed with adopters. This reflects the dramatically increased activity of our new adoption service which is driving adoption for those children that require it.

The average time for a child from entering care to being placed with adopters has reduced from an average of 565 days in 2015 – 2017 to 423 days this year higher than the Eastern Region average of 378 but lower than the National average of 486. The time scale from Court authority to place to matching with adopters has reduced from an average of 193 days to 173 days this year slightly higher than the Eastern Region average of 165 days but lower than the national average of 201 days. This has been achieved by tracking processes to achieve placement weekly to reduce delay.

### 3.7 Children with missing episodes

Children with missing episodes have reduced from 26 (in month) at the start of the year to 19 as at March 2019. For these children the number of episodes has reduced from 65 to 32 in March 19. Children are offered an independent

return interview to try to address their reasons for going missing. The reasons range from not being settled in placement to the draw of friends.

### 3.8 Fostering

Most of our children looked after are placed with foster carers. We recruit and support our own foster carers but also have to use independent agency foster carers to get the right match for a child.

We are in the process of collating data for inclusion in the annual Ofsted Fostering Data set, this is yet to be validated, however as at March 2019:

Area	Number
Number of new carers approved between Apr 18 to March 2019	9
Number of mainstream fostering applications current in progress	8
Number of children placed in current fostering households	123

The number of children placed with in house fostering households has increased from 98 in August 2018 to 123.

### 3.9 Care Leavers

The percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training has improved from 61% last year to 65% for 18/19. This is better than the similar authority average of 50.89%.

The percentage of our care leavers not in education, employment or training is 19%, which is above the 2017/18 national average of 28%.

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 continues to offers a bespoke programme to ensure that care leavers can access education, employment and training. We have had considerable success with this.

For many of our care leavers we provide our Prince's Trust programme which is a way in which we enable young people to build confidence. 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.



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. This will 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.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to note and comment on current performance position.

#### **5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 5.1 Not applicable

#### **6. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 6.1 Not applicable

#### **7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

- 7.1 None

#### **8. Implications**

##### **8.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial implications to this report.

## 8.2 Legal

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

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 8.3 Diversity and Equality

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

There are no Diversity or Equality implications to this report.

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

- Not applicable

## 10. 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

## 11. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Mandy Moore

Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager

Strategy, Communications and Customer Services

<b>4 June 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Validated Attainment Outcomes for Children Looked After 2018</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning, Inclusion and Skills		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is public</b>		

## Executive Summary

Raising achievement in all areas of education for our Children Looked After [CLA] is a key priority for Thurrock Council. The Virtual School monitors and supports the educational progress and outcomes for CLA irrespective of where they are placed, in or out of borough. The Virtual School is responsible for pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this includes those who have left care during an academic year.

The Department for Education (DFE) published validated attainment data in March 2019 which details the results for Children Looked After and provides comparative data against National Children Looked After.

Non-validated data was provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee in the report dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019 which detailed the non-validated data outcomes for pupils for the academic year 2017-2018 irrespective of their length of time in care and a detailed analysis for this group of pupils was included in that report. This data was non-validated as it had been provided directly from the educational establishments the pupils attended and had not been ratified by the DFE at the time of the publication of the report.

The aim of this report is to provide a summary of the validated 2018 data for information and to provide a clear picture of trends for the achievements of our Children Looked After.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 The Committee notes the validated DFE outcomes of the summer 2018 teacher assessment, tests and examinations and commends the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 1.2 That the Committee recognises that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 1.3 That the Committee notes that prior attainment for pupils will impact on attainment in later years and that Thurrock CLA in care have made good progress.**
- 1.4 That the Committee has a clear picture of the attainment and progress outcomes for pupils who are looked after and also have a Special Educational Need or Disability.**

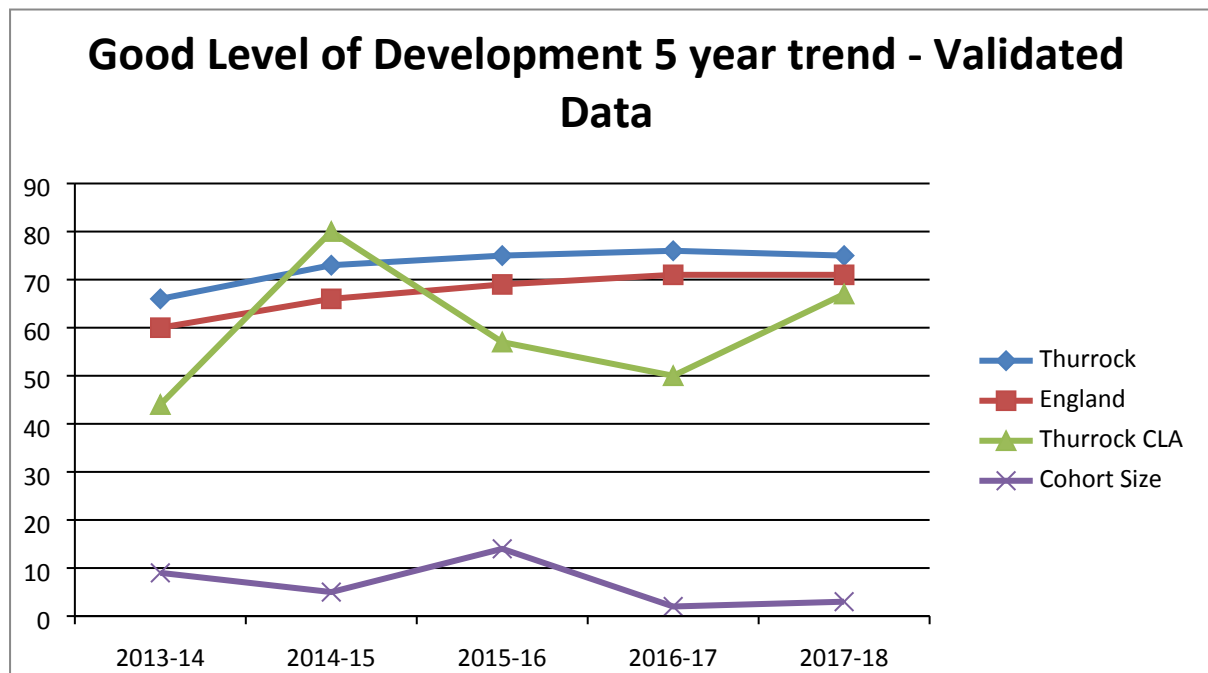
## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The target for Thurrock Children Looked After is for them to be improving year on year and to meet the expected standards. The target is to close the attainment gap between CLA and non-CLA and to be above national outcomes for all CLA.
  - 2.1.1 The year groups to be reported are outlined as follows:
    - Early Years – Foundation Stage [4-5 years old]
    - Year 1 (5-6 years old)
    - KS1 (6-7 years old)
    - KS2 (10-11 years old)
    - KS4 (15-16 years old)
  - 2.1.2 The data provided shows details for those children in care for 12+ months as this is the recognised benchmark for comparisons against national and regional data. The attainment of all children in the Thurrock Children Looked After cohort in 2017/2018 academic year has been provided in the Annual Report of the Virtual School Head which was previously presented to the Committee in January 2019.

## **3 Attainment for Children Looked After**

- 3.1 Early Years Foundation Stage Validated Data 12+ Months (EYFS age 5)**
  - 3.1.2 The Good Level of Development (GLD) measure is awarded at the end of EYFS when a pupil has achieved at least the expected level in the entire prime areas of learning and in literacy and mathematics.
  - 3.1.3 The GLD has fluctuated significantly over a 5 year period and this demonstrates the uniqueness and small size of each cohort. The size of each cohort shows that each child's result is worth a significant percentage amount.

3.1.4 The diagram below illustrates the performance of Thurrock CLA against national and Thurrock non-CLA pupils.



3.1.5 This year the Department for Education has provided national data comparisons for Children Looked After in the area of a Good Level of Development. Thurrock EYFS pupils in 2018 achieved higher than national CLA by 20% and achieved 11% above Eastern Region CLA pupils. The cohort is also closing the gap against Thurrock non-looked after children and this has reduced to just 7%. This is illustrated using the Nexus data provided below.

2018 | Matched pupils only | CLA 12 Months

EYFSP Benchmark (CLA) (Keypas)				ACHIEVED AT LEAST EXPECTED											
	Eligible	Ineligible	CLA Matches	Avg. Total GLD <sup>1,2</sup>	Avg. Total Pts.Score <sup>2</sup>	COM	PHY	PSE	Prime Goals	LIT	MAT	UTW	EXP	Specific Goals	All Goals
NCER National (CLA)	890	10	100.0%	47.0%	29.9	61.0%	70.0%	61.0%	55.0%	50.0%	58.0%	65.0%	71.0%	48.0%	46.0%
DfE Region - East (CLA)	60	-	100.0%	56.0%	30.8	64.0%	72.0%	66.0%	59.0%	58.0%	72.0%	73.0%	75.0%	55.0%	53.0%
Local Authority - Thurrock (all schools)	2,432	3	-	75.5%	34.0	83.1%	88.0%	86.6%	81.0%	77.0%	81.7%	84.7%	87.4%	74.3%	73.6%
Virtual School - Thurrock	3	0	100.0%	66.7%	32.7	66.7%	100.0%	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	66.7%	66.7%

3.1.6 This is a good set of results for Thurrock CLA and the Virtual School are continuing to support these children through Key Stage 1. The Early Years and Primary Phase education adviser ensures that these pupils are supported and that high aspirations for progress are in place in their schools.

3.1.7 The action plan of support has been provided in the previous Committee report and this is currently in progress for this academic year 2018/2019.

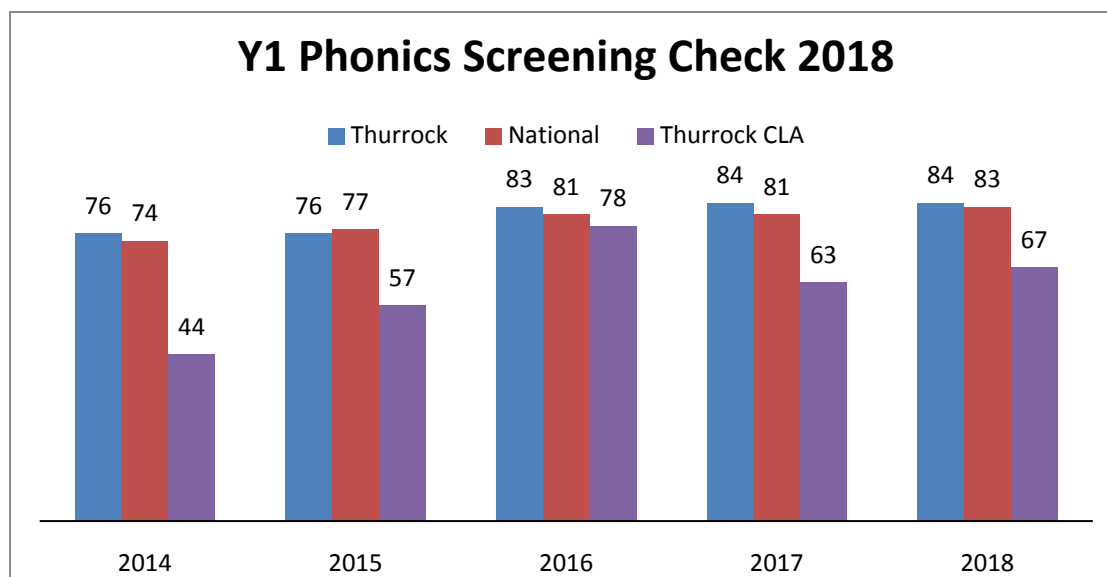
### 3.2 Year 1 Phonics Score [Age 6]

3.2.1 The year 1 phonics screening check is undertaken in June. There is no national data set provided by the Department for Education linked to Children Looked After. Therefore, the data and analysis below is the same as that detailed in the previous report.

3.2.2 The percentage of children who reached the expected standard has increased compared to the previous year. The data for 2015 was based upon a cohort of 7 pupils, 4 [57%] of whom passed. In 2016 there were 9 year 1 pupils in the cohort and 7 pupils [78%] passed the screen. In 2017 there were 8 pupils in the cohort and 5 pupils [63%] passed the screen. For 2018 there were 6 pupils in the cohort and 4 children passed [67%]

3.2.3 This is illustrated in the table and graph below

Year	Total Cohort Size	Number who passed
2015	7	4 pupils – 57%
2016	9	7 pupils – 78%
2017	8	5 pupils – 63%
2018	6	4 pupils – 67%



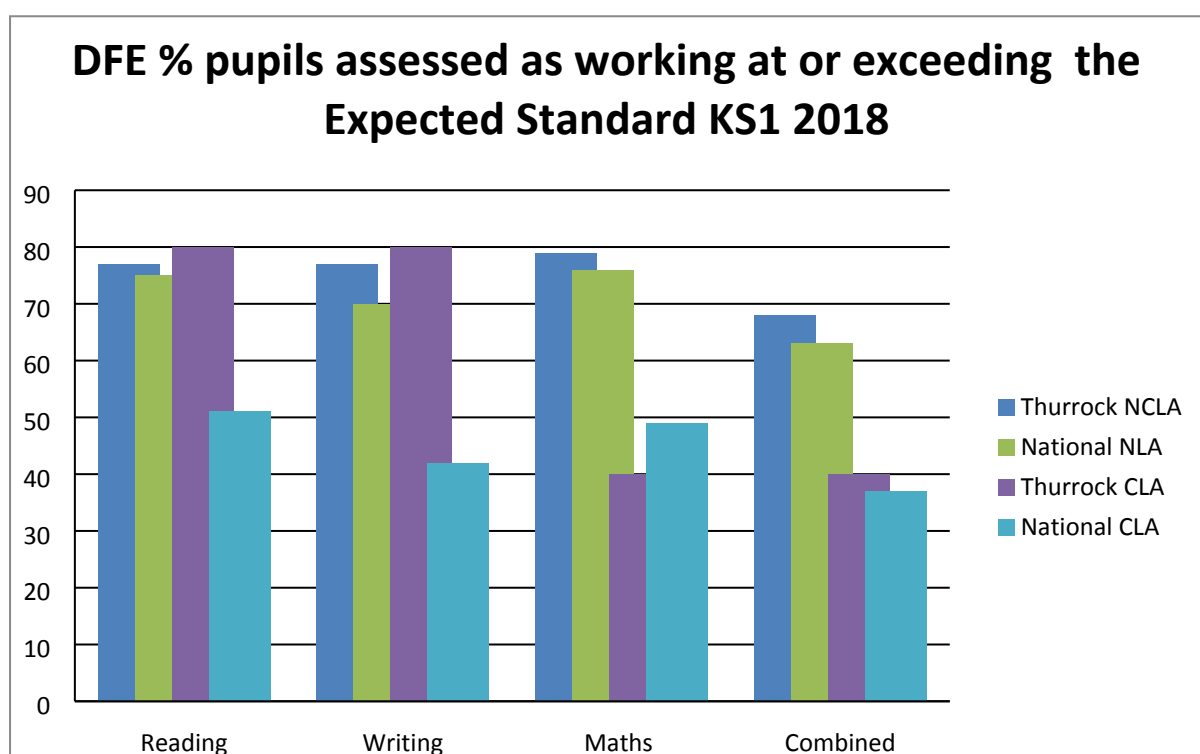
3.2.4 The data is fluctuating however, it is difficult to gauge trends when analysing such small cohort sizes. The different needs and circumstances, including length of time in care, needs to be considered. Only 2 children had been in care for a year or more. It is important to recognise the individual nature of every year 1 pupil and therefore, the Personal Education Plan process is crucial in this respect for identifying their educational needs.

3.2.5 The planned action for this academic year has continued to focus on the phonic interventions that schools provide for the year 1 and year 2 pupils in their schools.

### 3.3 Key Stage 1 Results Validated Data 2018 [Age 7]

3.3.1 From 2016, KS1 assessments are no longer reported as levels and cannot be compared to previous years.

3.3.2 In the graph below, it is possible to see how Children Looked After performed against National CLA and National and Thurrock non-CLA.



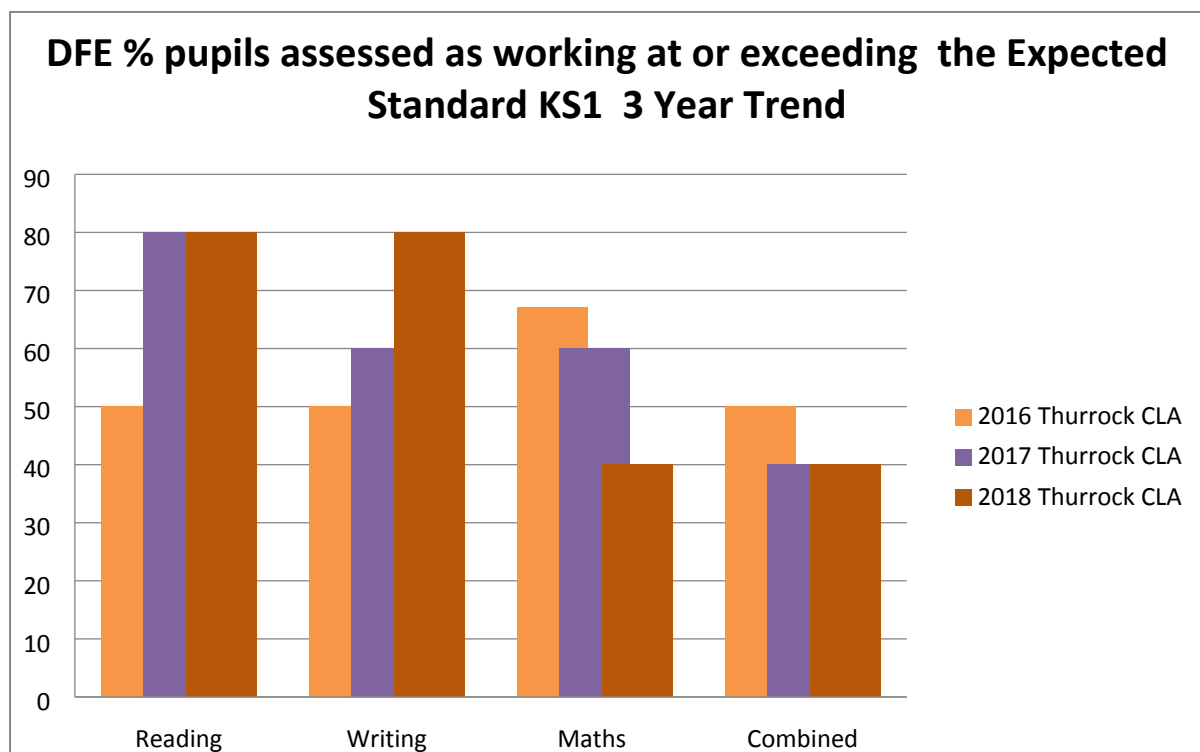
2018 Graph of Validated Results Comparison for National and Thurrock Non-CLA and National CLA

3.3.3 The above data is based upon a cohort size of 6 pupils. This is a very small data set for comparison particularly when comparing against very large numbers for Thurrock and all Year 2 Nationally.

Analysis of this data indicates that Thurrock CLA have performed better than their non-looked after and looked-after peers in the areas of reading and writing. The area for development is maths as this has declined to 40% which has affected the overall reading, writing and maths combined score. Specific CLA 3 year trend is provided in the graph below as a point of comparison. The increase in English scores is very good but a greater focus needs to be placed upon maths for improvement.

3.3.4 When comparing performance, the overall three year trend for Key Stage 1 pupils is very positive for reading and writing. However, there is an issue

relating to maths attainment. The 2018 cohort did not meet a good level of development in their prior attainment. This means that they have made expected progress in maths and above expected progress in English. The cohort sized for this group of pupils are very small with each child representing over 10%. This is shown in the next graph.



3.3.5 Contextual data for the cohort shows that all pupils who took SATs were in a Thurrock school. The 2 pupils who were disapplied due to SEND, attend provision out of borough.

3.3.6 All pupils across the year made expected progress based upon their individual targets and prior attainment. The 2 pupils who were disapplied have made expected progress based upon their starting points. They did not achieve a GLD at the end of their reception year due to developmental delay. These 2 pupils have been in care for 1 year or more. Their schools provide full time 1-1 intervention to support their specific needs. Both pupils have also had changes of care placement and changes of school during Key Stage 1.

3.3.7 In terms of prior attainment, only 3 pupils [50%] of the cohort obtained a good level of development at the end of their reception year two years prior to the Key Stage 1 assessments. This would suggest that the rate of attainment and progress for these pupils has remained consistent across key stage 1 for maths and accelerated for English. These pupils would have needed to make accelerated progress in that time to be able to reach the expected standard. 3 pupils [100%] out of the 3 who did not reach GLD at the end of the Foundation



Stage, reached the expected standard at KS1 for English and 1 pupil [33%] achieved this in maths.

Of the cohort that took SATs this year, 3 pupils [50%] had SEND and were accessing SEN support provision in their schools. All of these children achieved the expected standard in English and only 1 did not meet this standard for maths. These pupils made accelerated progress based upon prior achievement and learning needs.

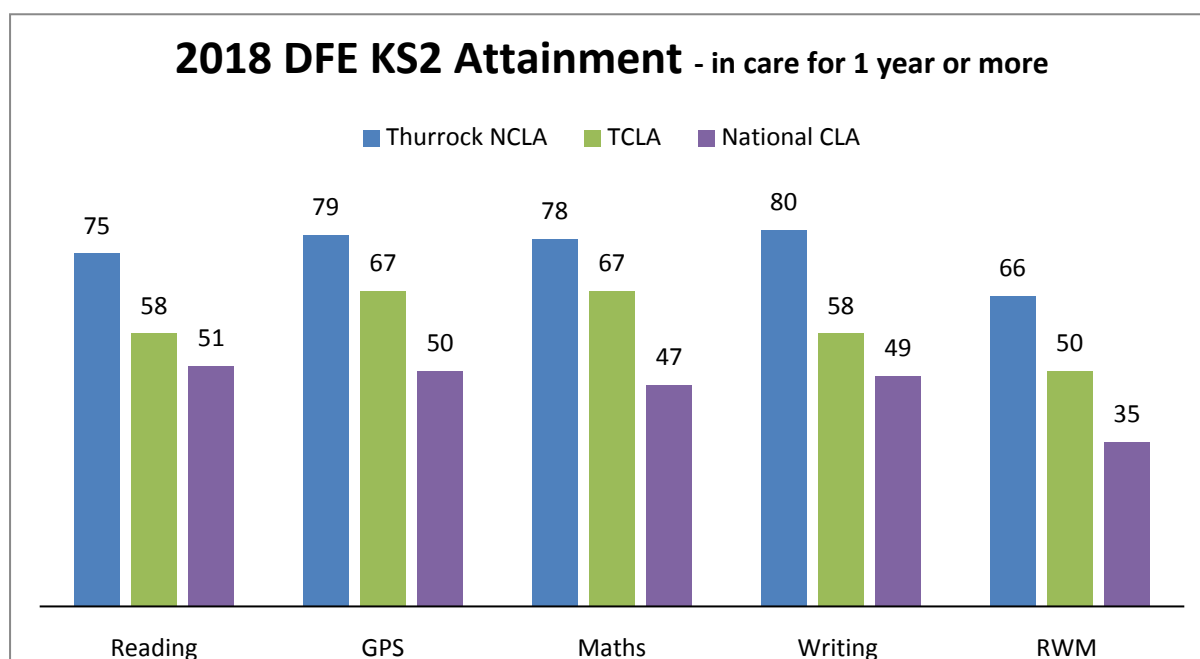
3.3.8 Additional contextual information has been provided and previous reports to the Committee in January 2019.

### 3.4 Key Stage 2 Results Validated Data 2018 [Age 11]

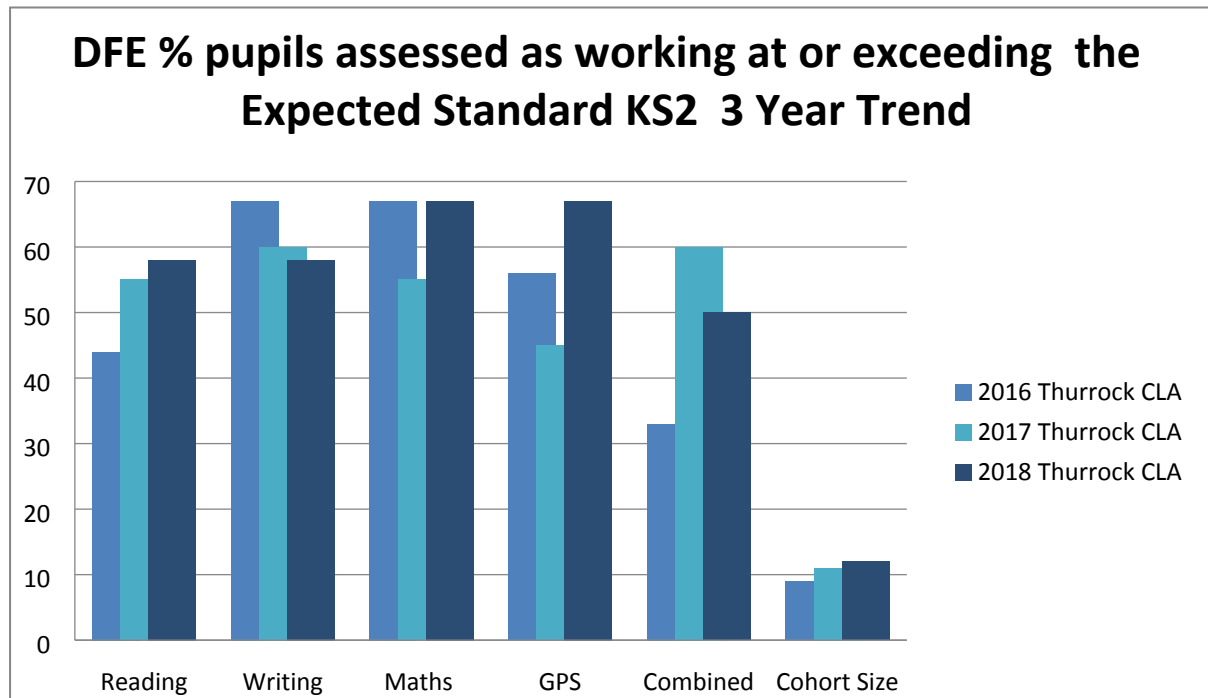
3.4.1 In KS2 results are no longer reported as levels: each pupil receives their test results as a scaled score and teacher assessments based on the standards in the interim framework. Comparative data prior to 2016 is not available for this reason.

3.4.2 The whole cohort size for the 2018 Key Stage 2 SATS was 17 pupils. All pupils took their SATS this year and there were no pupils disapplied. The results that are reported in the previous report were for all CLA pupils in the Virtual School for that academic year. For the whole Thurrock CLA cohort the statistics for those achieving the expected standard were as follows: reading 65%, GPS 59%, maths 71% and writing was 65%.

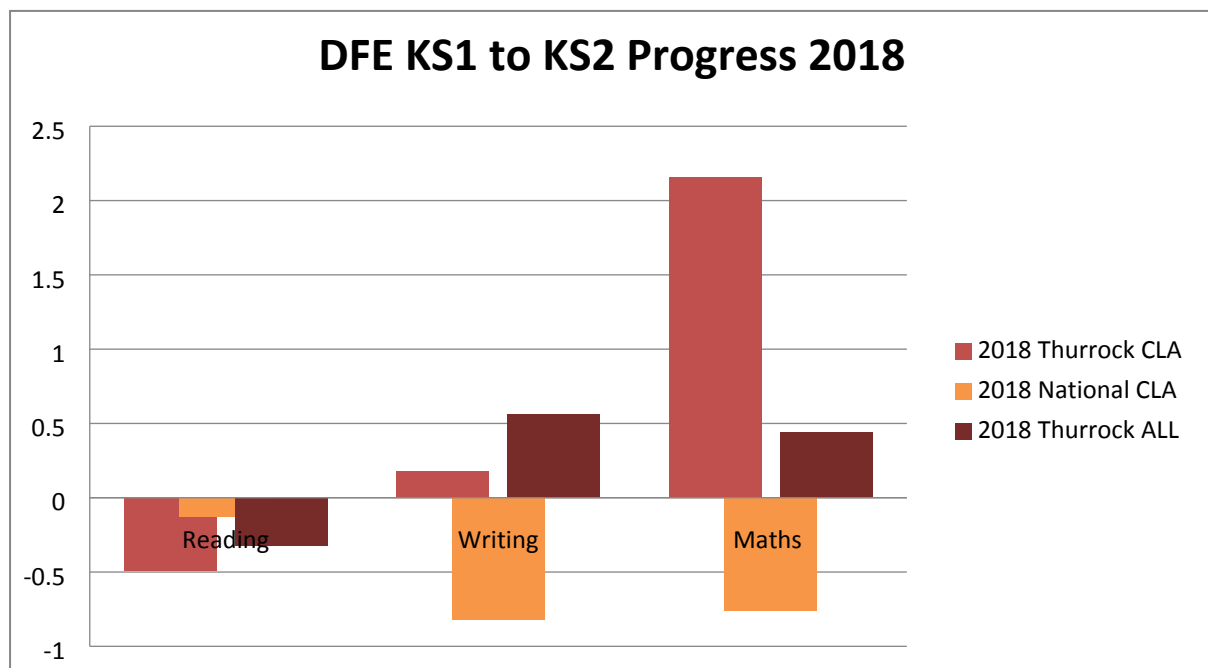
3.4.3 For those in care for 12+ months there is some variation which is illustrated in the information contained below.



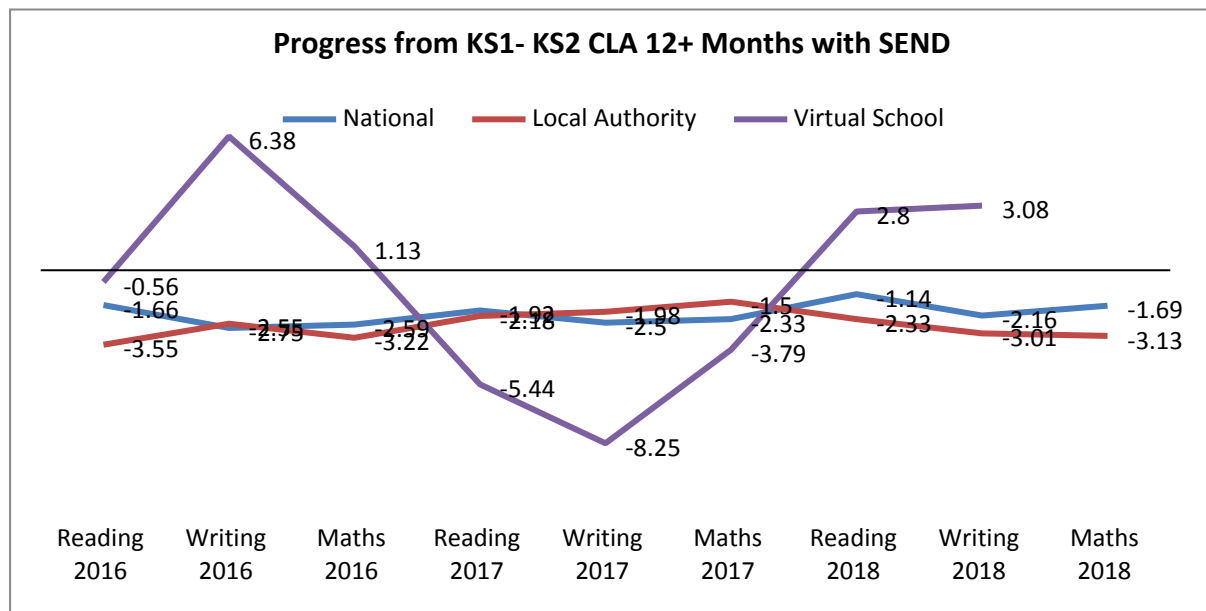
3.4.4 It can be seen that there is some fluctuation from the data that was previously reported as there are now variations in the cohort as there are fewer children being reported due to not all of the original pupils being in care for 12+ months. However, Thurrock Children Looked After are still performing better than their CLA National peers. The DFE three year trend shows that Thurrock CLA are improving in reading, GPS and Maths but has decreased in writing. This has affected the overall combined score.



3.4.5 Progress for our Children Looked After for 12+ months shows a promising picture for this cohort as reflected in the graph detailed below.



- 3.4.6 The above graph details the amount of progress made from Key Stage 1 SATs results to Key Stage 2 SATS results. Thurrock CLA have made good progress compared to national CLA in writing and maths. Progress in maths also exceeds all Thurrock non-looked after children. The area for development in terms of progress would still be reading although reading results have increased year on year since 2016.
- 3.4.7 Specific contextual data relating to all of the year 6 pupils was detailed in the previous Corporate Parenting Report on January 2019.
- 3.4.8 For pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) who had been in care for 12+ months, their attainment across a three year period has improved. In 2016 and 2017, no pupils with SEND achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths combined. In 2018, 50% of CLA pupils with SEND achieved the expected combined standard. In terms of progress, Thurrock Children Looked After with SEND are making better progress than national and Thurrock pupils with SEND. Although there was a dip in progress in 2017, overall our pupils with SEND compared to similar pupils is good.



Graph detailing progress comparisons against pupils with SEND 2016-2018.

- 3.4.9 In 2018 our pupils with SEND made excellent progress. When comparing Thurrock CLA to National non-CLA and National non-SEND, our CLA with SEND are making more progress from KS1 to KS2. In reading this progress is +2.4 points above national, in writing it is +2.58 points progress and in maths it is +4.23 points. This is excellent progress and clearly demonstrates what can be achieved with high aspirations and a supportive environment. This data demonstrates that the gap has been closed against non-looked after children and that our children with SEND are making accelerated progress.

### 3.5 Key Stage 4 GCSE Validated Results 2018 [Year 11 – Age 15-16]

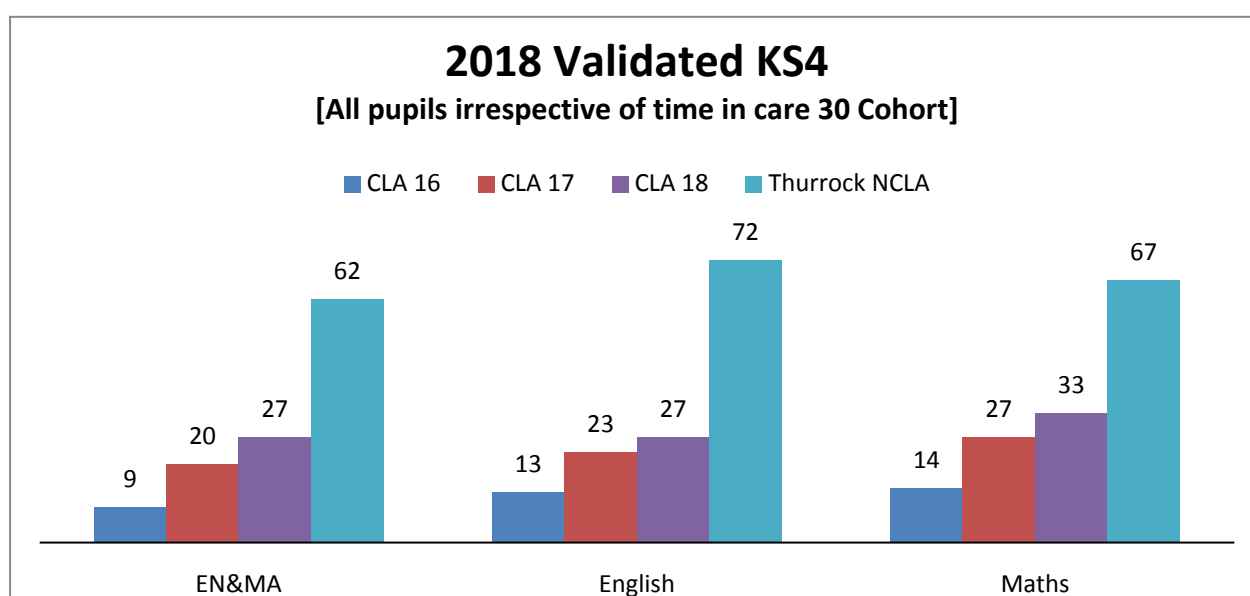
3.5.1 The following section of this report includes the 2018 data for GCSE. Progress 8 and Attainment 8 is included in this report as it was not available at the time of the previous report in January 2019. The data included, will detail the information for those who were in care for 12+ months. This data will also show comparisons against national looked after. Specific contextual data will not be included in this report as this has been provided in the previous Corporate Parenting report for January 2019 and the Head teacher's Annual Report.

3.5.2 The Key Headline Attainment Data for 2018 has not changed for the whole cohort which has been reported previously in January 2019. This is outlined below using point 4 or above as the benchmark.

3.5.3 Key Headline Data [Cohort of 30]:

- There were a total of 30 pupils in the year 11 cohort and 17 pupils [56.6%] were eligible to take GCSEs in English and maths
- 8 pupils [27%] achieved English and maths combined for the equivalent of grade C [point 4] or above
- 8 pupils [27%] achieved English at grade 4 or above
- In Maths, 10 pupils [33%] achieved the expected standard or above.
- In English literature, 9 pupils [23%] achieved the expected standard or above
- In Maths, 11 pupils [27%] achieved the expected standard or above.

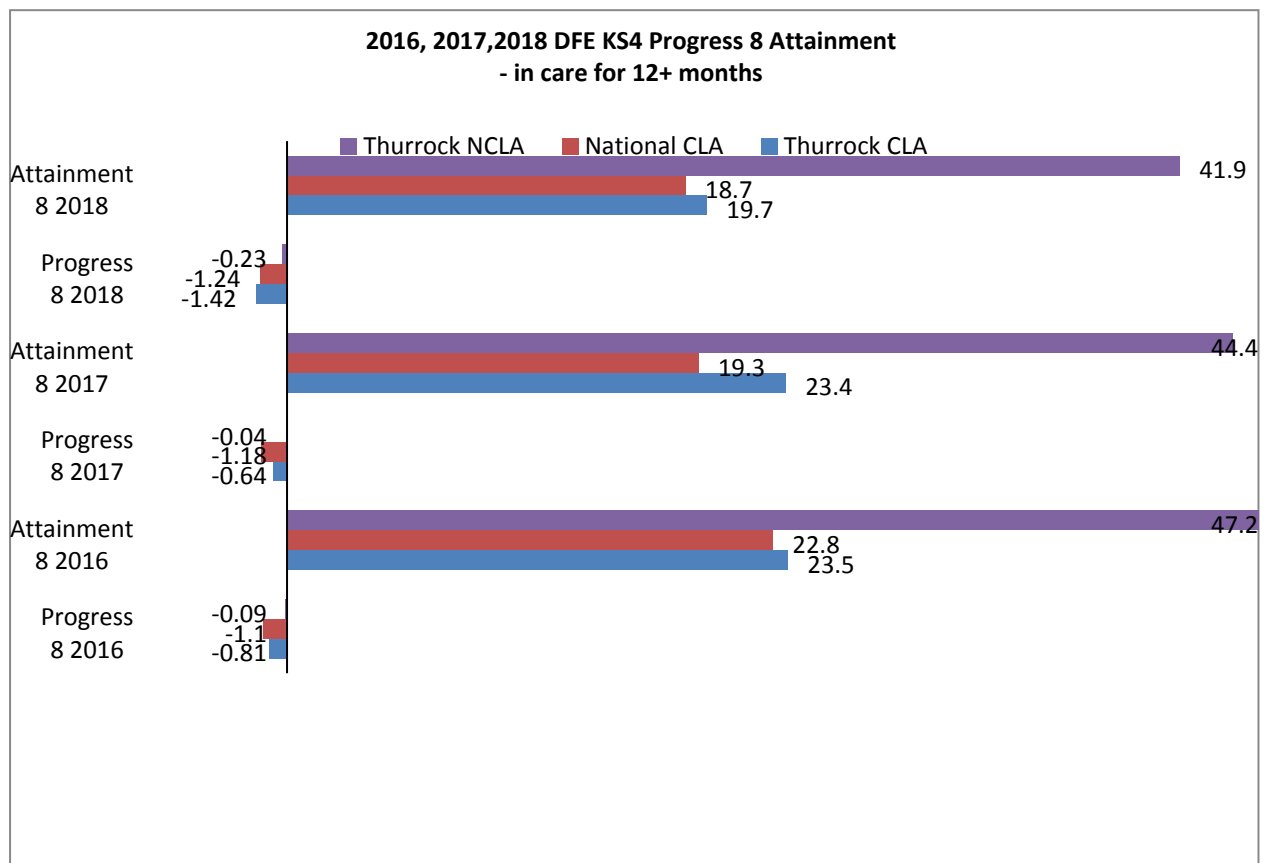
3.5.4 The data for the whole cohort which was presented in the January 2019 report details all pupils' achievements for points 4 and above, as this was in line with Thurrock schools and the data they were presenting. This is detailed in the graph below.



3.5.5 For those pupils in care for 12+ months the cohort size was 23 children (not all of them took GCSEs for reasons explained in the previous report dated January 2019). The Department for Education has provided data for those children who have achieved a point 5 or above. This is a point above that originally reported, as point 4 has previously been the accepted standard. This standard has now been raised to point 5. In 2018, Children Looked After for 12+ months figures show that:

- 13% achieved English and maths combined for the equivalent of point 5 or above. This is 5% above the national CLA figure.
- For English, 22% achieved point 5 or above. This is 6% above the national CLA figure.
- For maths, 17.4% achieved point 5 or above. This is 5% above the national CLA figure.

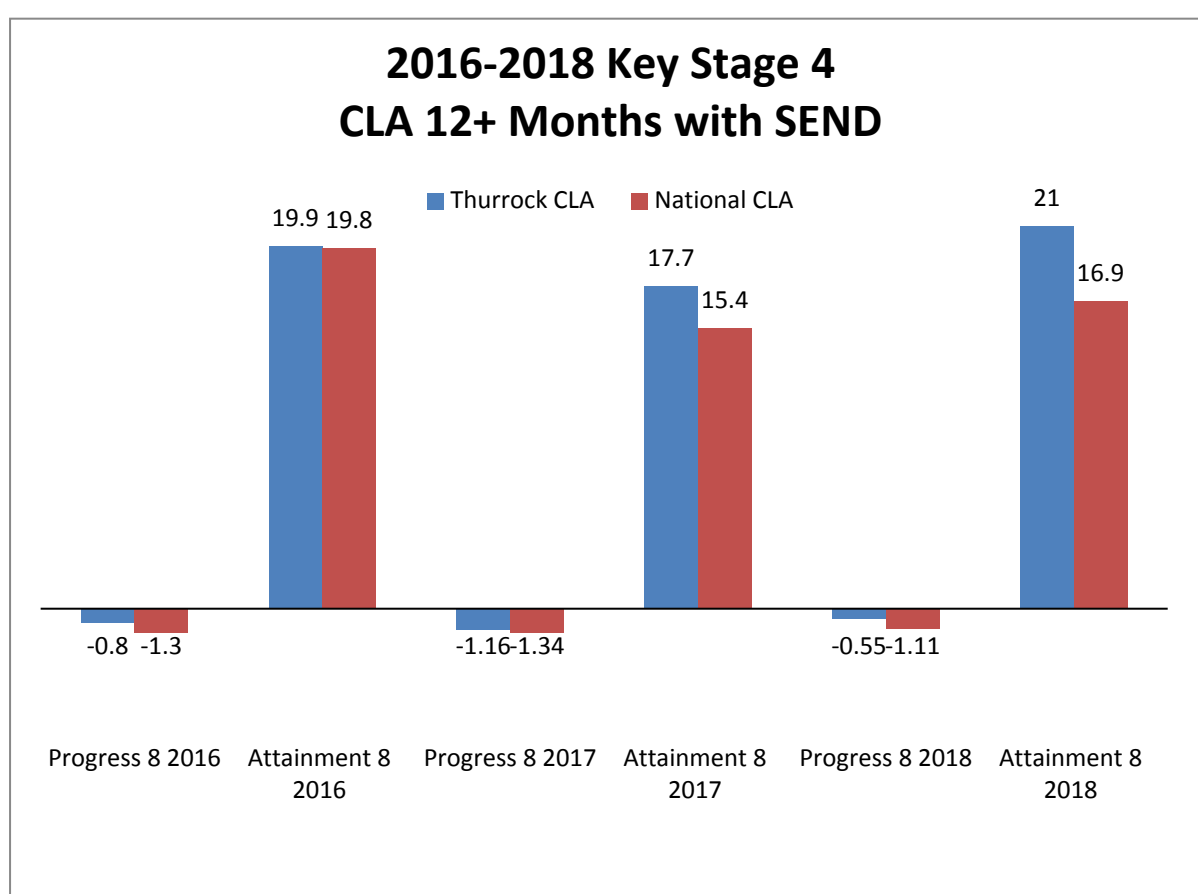
3.5.6 The graph below details the Progress 8 and Attainment 8 data trend for CLA for 12+ months. It shows the 3 year trend against Thurrock non-CLA and National CLA



3.5.7 This set of data needs careful analysis. Our pupils are performing better in their GCSEs than national children looked after and our data is improving. However, in 2018, the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 data score has declined compared to the previous two years. This trend is in line with Thurrock non-looked after. The CLA decline is despite the overall data trend showing an upward improvement in those achieving GCSEs. The academic data for 2018

showed better outcomes for CLA pupils achieving GCSEs in English and maths, however, a number of children could not have their progress scores calculated by the DFE because they did not have prior attainment in Key Stage 2 to compare to. This meant that although they achieved high GCSE grades of point 5 or above, their progress score was 0 due to no prior attainment. The data has also been affected by the increase in standards for achieving point 5 or above. The expected standard prior to this was point 4 or above.

3.5.8 Thurrock CLA pupils with SEND have achieved well in 2018. There was a decrease in attainment and progress in 2017 compared to 2016 but this was recovered in 2018. The pupils in the Virtual School for Thurrock who are CLA have performed consistently above national CLA with SEND. The three year trend is outlined in the graph below.



3.5.9 Thurrock CLA with SEND are also closing the gap against national non-looked after without SEND. Attainment 8 gap has reduced from -33.3 in 2016 to -24.8 in 2018. The Progress 8 gap has also been reduced from 0.86 in 2016 to 0.42 in 2018. This means that our most vulnerable groups are making good progress and reaching good attainment compared to others.

3.5.10 For our current Year 11 pupils, a programme of tuition was started during the summer term of 2018 when they were in year 10. It is hoped that those pupils

who have engaged with this, will benefit from the extra help we have provided as Corporate Parents. Our current year 10 pupils are also about to start their block of tuition to help them in 2020.

### **3.5.11 Summary of Analysis for all Key Stages - Key Headlines of Actions from All Data Collections**

What are we doing as a result of 2018 performance?

- Provision of Literacy Book Trust home learning resources to those aged between 3-13
- Provision of tuition for year 11 which started in the summer term of year 10 2018
- Provision of tuition for year 6 pupils which started in January 2019
- Conducting termly school visits for key year groups of children and those who are not making expected progress across other year groups
- Evidencing the work of the Virtual School through visit notes and case notes
- Development of an SEND strategy to further improve the outcomes for this group of children
- Continuing the interventions and key actions developed over the previous year to build upon good practice and successful outcomes.
- Introducing the use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires [SDQ] for every pupil from year R to 17 years old
- Rigorously analysing the use of Pupil Premium Plus Grant to evidence and track the impact of spending on pupil progress and outcomes
- From September 2019, our Year 11 pupils will be provided with a home revision pack and guidance on how to revise and avoid stress
- Our current Year 6 will be provided with a voucher for them to buy the necessary stationary they will need for their transition into Year 7.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 It is requested that the Committee agree the recommendations and use the reporting mechanisms to support and challenge the work of the Virtual School on behalf of Children Looked After.

## **6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance And Community Impact**

- 6.1 This report relates to the council priority to create a great place for learning and opportunity.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by:

**David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

There are no financial implications to this report.

This report asks that the Committee notes the increasing demand of services for Children Looked After and the range of services provided as detailed in the annual report. The responsibilities of the Virtual School have increased to support those in pre-school and in post 16 as a result of the changes to the Statutory Guidance in July 2014. The growing demand for services, particularly for those who are post 16 and/or needing alternative provision for their specific needs has had an implication on spending and budgets.

## 7.2 Legal

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

Section 22(3A) Children Act 1989, as amended, requires the Local Authority to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. The Children and Families Act 2014 amended section 22 to require the Council to appoint an officer to ensure that the duty is properly discharged. There is statutory guidance "Promoting the education of looked after children and previously looked after children" that must be followed in meeting this duty.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Supporting the improved educational attainment of Children Looked After targets Thurrock's most vulnerable young people. Data is collated to understand the profile of young people supported. Individual plans are informed by each young person's personal needs, including equality and diversity as well SEND and emotional health needs.

## 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – there are no implications as a result of this report

## 8. Conclusion

**8.1** In summary, the above report details the validated attainment outcomes for those in care during the academic year 2017-2018 and is to be read in conjunction with the previous report of January 2019. All of our Children Looked After achievements should be recognised and celebrated and we as a Council will continue to support them in the next stages of their academic journey.



**8.2 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):

- 'The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data' ADCS
- 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018

**9. Appendices**

- There are no appendices for this report

**Report Author:**

Keeley Pullen BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH  
Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After  
Children's Services

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<b>4 June 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Fostering Statement of Purpose</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## Executive Summary

This report is to updates members of the Committee on Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

#### 1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 National Minimum Standards (NMS) are applicable to the provision of fostering services. The NMS, together with Regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the 2011 Regulations), form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of fostering services. Standard 16 of the Minimum Standards relates to the Fostering Statement of purpose, which should ensure that Children, their parents, foster carers, staff our capacity to carry out this work.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 Thurrock's fostering statement of purpose 2019-2020 is attached at appendix 1.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how the Thurrock Council are meeting its statutory duties in relation to fostering.

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 None

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial Implications to this report.

#### **7.2 Legal**

Implications Verified by: **Lindsay Marks**  
**Principal Solicitor Children's safeguarding**

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013;

- provides the regulatory framework for fostering service providers including the need for a statement of purpose, management of the service and conduct

National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering Services – together with the regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care, provide the framework for the conduct of fostering services

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications Verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The Fostering Service is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

- None

### **7.5. 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):**

- None

### **8. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose 2019-2020

#### **Report Author:**

Dan Jones

Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements

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# THURROCK FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2019-2020

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Fostering Service is registered with Ofsted and complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Minimum Standards (2011) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The fostering service compiles an annual Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by the Fostering Placement Support Team and the Placement Assessment Team in the Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service. The Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and it is reviewed at least annually.

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the Fostering Service, to children who may be placed in foster care, their parents and legal guardians and to anyone wishing to foster.

The Statement of Purpose is also available on the Thurrock website at [www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering).

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

In Thurrock we take our role as Corporate Parent seriously. We want to make sure that all our looked after children and young people benefit from our efforts to maximize their full potential.

We believe that:

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- All children are entitled to grow as part of a stable and loving family.
- Where it is safe for them to do so, children should be brought up by their birth family.
- Children should be matched, wherever possible, with families who reflect their ethnicity, culture, language and religion. These factors have to be balanced against the need to be in a permanent placement, within a reasonable time frame.
- Team work in partnership with colleagues across services is important to ensure that delays in achieving permanence are minimised.

This means in Thurrock:

- Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will actively seek out their views, wishes and feelings.
- All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.
- Services will be built around children's needs, and will be inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. We recognise, positively value and promote each child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality.



- The particular needs of children who have a disability or who have complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account.

In addition:

- Decisions on use of resources will increasingly be taken jointly.
- Resources will be pooled wherever it makes sense to do so.
- Services will be jointly commissioned and provided where it is in children's interests to do so.
- We will integrate service delivery when this demonstrates added value.
- We will work with local communities, networks, groups and organisations that have a key role in promoting the well-being of children and providing services and support to them and their families.
- Services are evidence based and provided by a skilled workforce.

The Fostering Service seeks to provide a range of placements, including for parent and child, to meet the diverse needs of and to improve outcomes for children and young people looked after by Thurrock. We will do this by ensuring that children are suitably matched with fully trained, skilled and well-supported Foster Carers able to provide a high quality of care.

In Thurrock the Fostering Service is provided by the Fostering Assessment Team which undertakes the assessments of Foster Carers and Special Guardians, and the Fostering Placement Team, which

undertakes support and supervision functions for foster carers once they are approved.

That Foster Carers and supervising Social Workers are key members of the team around the child and placement.

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services for looked after children. In adhering to the NMS, we want them achieve the following outcomes:

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- We want our children and young people's wishes and feelings to be heard, recorded with evidence of being acted on.
- We want our children and young people to feel able to tell us what is working for them and what is not.
- We want our children and young people to be living in a place where they feel safe.
- We want our children to know that we will look for them if they run away and worry about them until they are found. Just as any parent would do.
- We want our children and young people to maintain contacts with their birth family where it is safe for them to do so.
- We want our children and young people to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships.
- We want our children and young people to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement and life opportunities.
- We want our children and young people to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in any areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the

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diverse needs of looked after children and young people including parents with child.

- Run an effective and efficient Fostering and Adoption Panel with sound decision making processes.
- Ensure that we match children with carers who can meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any of their concerns raised.
- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs.
- Ensure there is an updated statement of purpose and children's guide each year.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development.
- Provide learning development and continual professional development for Foster Carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Handle allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Ensure our Foster Carers are supported if they become subject to allegations and suspicions of harm.
- Pay foster carers appropriately and on time.

The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled manager's to promote these values and to work within the Council's equalities policies. The staff group is also provided with the Whistleblowing policy as part of their induction which

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makes clear the responsibility of all staff to report areas of poor practice.

### 2.1 Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are also is committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families.

## 3. THE SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Service is based in Thurrock Civic Offices alongside all other Children's Social Care Social Work Teams. The fostering service is part of the Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service which is part of the wider Children Looked after Service.

### 3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment Team** (the initial recruitment of foster carers and adopters)
- **Placement Assessment Team** (including private fostering arrangements, connected persons assessment and special guardianship assessment)
- **Fostering Support Team.**(the supervision and support of approved carers)

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- **The Placements Team** (searching for internal and external placements)

These four teams undertaking the following responsibilities;

- Recruitment and assessment of all task focused foster carers, Connected Person's Foster Carers (friends and family carers), and Special Guardianship assessments.
- Supporting task focused foster carers and Connected Person's Foster Carers.
- Providing external placement resource to children and young people who cannot be accommodated by in-house foster carers.
- Providing family contact and support services to children in care.
- Provide adoption services and post adoption and post Special Guardianship support.

### 3.2 Leadership and Management of the Fostering Service

All managers and Social Workers hold recognised social work qualifications, Health Care and Professions Council registration, post-qualifying training and other relevant experience working with children and families. The Service is committed to continuous professional development of all staff and therefore encouraged to attend internal and external training to develop and refresh their skills.

The staff group has a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience and is continually seeking to develop these to promote service improvement. The staff group is culturally and racially diverse and is reflective of the population that we serve

Thurrock Council's Fostering Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship.

### 3.2.2 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker

The Executive Director for Children's Services is Rory Patterson.

Sheila Murphy Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After is Janet Simon. Janet is also the **Agency Decision Maker** for the Fostering Service

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

Email: jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk

Janet's qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma Social Work and she is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Janet has worked in management roles since 2006.

The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Dan Jones

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a Bsc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has previously worked for the NSPCC, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council. He has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services

### **3.3.3 Team Manager, Recruitment Team**

Carole Parker is the manager of the Recruitment Team. Carole is a qualified HCPC registered Social Worker. Carole has been working as a Qualified and HCPC Social Worker since 2000. Carole's previous experience includes working in both Local Authority and Private Sector, Carole's experience encompassed working as a Residential Social Worker, undertaking family assessments, working with adolescent and post 16, and as a Registered Manager of children's homes (CH EBD), ensuring the homes were appropriately safe and sensitive to the needs of the young people being looked after.

Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team. Carole's team has responsibility in providing placements for young people between the ages of 0-18, in foster placements, residential, and 16+ supported accommodation, as well as being part of various panels relating to placements. Carole's Team works closely with placing Social Workers, also assisting in the monitoring of providers, ensuring that young people's needs are being met, working closely with the commissioning service around 16+ provisions and improving their life skills.

### **3.3.4 Team Manager, Placement Assessment Team**

Julia Sutton is a qualified and HCPC registered Social Worker. Julia has been working as a Qualified and HCPC Social Worker since 2000. Julia's previous experience includes working in the Children with Disabilities Team for Essex and the Looked after Children's Team in Thurrock since 2000, where she was the Social worker for children aged 0-18 undertaking statutory duties. In 2006 Julia became the Practice Manager for the Fostering & Adoption Team and in 2009 became the Team Manager of the Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team.

Julia's roles includes; The recruitment, training and assessment of Foster Carers, Private Fostering, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's), Temporary Approvals, Overseas and Step parent adoption, Fostering & Adoption Panel Advisor, management of Complaints & Allegations within the Fostering Service, Fostering



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Annual Reviews, Reviews of SGO's, Management of 6 Social Workers, a Family Support Worker, Fostering & Adoption administrators.

### 3.3.5 Team Manager Fostering Support Team

#### **Loice Kawonde is the interim Team Manager of the Fostering Support Team**

Loice has 9 years social work experience, most of which has been in frontline Assessment and Court work. Loice has been a Team manager for 5years across a range of childcare teams. Loice has previously managed a fostering team for another local authority and has an overview of Fostering services for approved carers here in Thurrock

### 3.3.6 Team Manager, Placements Team

Carole Parker is also the team manager of the Placements Team. Her details are as above.

## 3.4 Staffing of the Fostering Service

Currently there is currently 30 staff working in the Fostering Service. They include;

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 10 Senior Social Practitioners
- 1 Qualified Fostering Social Workers
- 1 Business Development Officer
- 6 Business Support / Administrators

### 3.4.1 Student Placements

We are committed to the development of trainee social workers are willing to offer

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placement opportunities to students from all backgrounds. However, due to the specialist nature of Fostering Service, we are able to offer student placement opportunity to only Final placement students.

### 3.5 Monitoring of the Fostering Service

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care for children. We monitor our performance through Fostering standards are monitored through

- Feedback forms for children
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Foster Carer supervision
- Foster Carer annual reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Case Audits
- Management Oversight and Case Supervision
- Performance Data
- Ofsted

## 4. FOSTERING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

The Fostering Service is providing a range of Foster Carers and variety of fostering arrangements for children and young people in Thurrock.

### 4.1 Baby (Birth to 24 months) Foster Carers

These are carers who provide fostering services to children from birth up to 2 years old. Baby carers must be available full time but are not required to have a

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spare bedroom provided that they have adequate space and can fit a cot in their own bedroom.

### **4.2 Permanent and task focused Foster Carers**

These are carers who make commitment to provide accommodation, care and support to children and young people, either S20 accommodation, Interim Care Order, Care Order until they reach adulthood.

### **4.3 Respite, Short Term & Bridging Foster Carers**

These are carers who take children on 'a single period' fostering usually up to three months or slightly longer. It includes placements where the plan is for a child to return home or move to an alternative permanent placement. These carers are usually task centred and are expected to work with a range of professionals to achieve the expected outcome. There are exceptional circumstances where a child may remain with such carers in medium to long terms. However, in such cases, it would be done in consultation and agreement with the Foster Carer.

### **4.4 Advanced and Therapeutic Foster Carers**

These are specialist foster carers providing bespoke therapeutic care to children and young people (CYP) displaying extreme emotionally challenging behaviours. These are children and young people have high levels of emotional and care needs. Carers in the categories are paid an enhanced fee and are required to be available full time and work with a range of clinicians and professionals who are providing therapy and treatment to the children.

They support the children's 'therapy/treatment 'after treatment' care which is very demanding therefore undertake specialist learning, guidance and support that enables the carers to understand the language and the behaviour of traumatised CYP.

Therapeutic Foster Carers are required to take this role full time and must be

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available to take children either in emergency or at short notices. They are prepared for and should be able to provide care and support to all categories and age groups of CYP including those that very limited information is available to the Family Placement Service. All therapeutic carers are required to undertake specific courses and training in addition to existing core training offered to all foster carers.

### **4.5 Parent and Child Placements:**

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children and their parents (mother and baby or father and baby) in the foster carer's household. There are rare occasions where the arrangement includes both parents. Parents and child carers are trained to support parents on how to appropriately parent their children.

The approach to supporting parents who are care leavers would be, wherever possible for Foster Carers to support them in transition towards moving into the community with their children. This would be based on a model that assists, guide and direct them to care for their own children with minimal intervention except where their child is or likely to be at risk. The general expectation would be for such parents to receive allowances including all the entitlements of the child and to provide for, and meet the child's needs as they would have done in their own accommodation. It should be noted that in certain cases only the baby or the mother are looked after. However, such arrangements would be clarified before the arrangement commences.

Parent and Child arrangements in court proceedings where the local authority is taking steps to safeguard the child shall be supported and monitored with carers taking an approach which assist the local authority to provide evidence to court in relation to carer's observation, records and judgement of mother / father's parenting capacity. Foster Carers will therefore be given training around observation skills, record keeping as well as court attendance and evidence giving.

### **4.6 Connected Persons Foster Carers (Family and Friends carers):**

These Carers are approved to look after a specific named child(ren). These carers are usually family members or friends who knew a child or children before they were accommodated by the local authority.

The Family Placement Service values the role of Connected Person's Foster Care wherever possible as it keeps the child or young person within the family network. This arrangements start on the basis of Temporary Approval of Carers under Regulations 24 of Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2010.

A full assessment and approval of Connected Person's Foster Carers shall be done in accordance with Standard 30 of the National Fostering Minimum Standards, 2011. All approved Connected Person's Foster Carers shall be supported and managed under the same regulations, statutory guidance and legislation as other registered Foster Carers.

## **5. RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS**

Thurrock Fostering Service undertakes recruitment activity throughout the year to ensure we recruit sufficient Foster Carers to meet the needs of our children looked after population and the Council's sufficiency duty. Thurrock Foster Carers are actively involved in recruiting new Foster Carers to ensure applications are considered and processed in a timely manner. Information days for potential Foster Carer's are held regularly at the Civic Offices, Lakeside shopping Centre and other venues across the Council to help interested but unsure applicants to learn more about the fostering task and the assessment and approval process.

The strategy for the recruitment of Foster Carers is based on the identified needs of our looked after CYP. This is based on the annual Sufficiency Strategy which assists the recruitment team in focusing on particular communities to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our looked after population.

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You may contact the Recruitment Team on **0800 652 1256** for further information on the next information session or look on Thurrock Council Fostering Service website.

### 5.1 Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application

When an enquiry is received from a potential Foster Carer, an information pack is sent out within forty eight hours of that enquiry with details about the different types of fostering and the assessment process. A follow up call is made by the duty Social Worker usually within three working days and arrangement is made for a home visit to discuss the application or to answer any additional questions a potential applicant may have.

Each applicant household over the age of 18 must give consent for Thurrock Fostering Service to undertake the following references and statutory checks:

- Disclosure and Baring Service checks – DBS (police references are obtained on all members of the household aged 18 years and over)
- Medical and health checks (the applicant's doctor will be asked to complete a health assessment report that will be forwarded to the Fostering Panel's medical advisor for review and comment)
- Local Authority checks (information held on children services database)
- Schools and employers checks
- Details of former partners where relevant
- References from all employers where the prospective carer(s) have work with children or other vulnerable groups
- A file review and references if carer(s) were previously approved by another fostering agency
- NSPCC checks
- Housing checks and reports

A decision to progress any application to stage two will be made upon receipt of all checks and references. However, there may be occasions where the stage one

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and two shall progress simultaneously. In such situation, the applicant would be clearly informed and process shall comply with the Independent Review Mechanism principle shall apply, if a decision is made to terminate the assessment at a later stage in the stage two processes.

### **5.2 The Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers:**

Successful applicants from the stage one process are required to attend Skills to Foster training as part of the assessment process. Thurrock Fostering Service has a procedure in place for the assessment of foster carers that details the process to be followed when assessing potential carers. It includes the requirement to complete and provide all the information as outlined in the Fostering Regulations 2011 & 2013

The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker from the Placement Assessment Team. Whenever an assessment is completed, there is a mandatory requirement for the report to be shared with the applicant(s) to confirm factual accuracy of the information sourced or gathered. Applicants are required to comment and sign the report to verify that they have read and agreed with the contents before they can be invited to attend the Independent Fostering Panel.

The assessment team aim to complete Stage one and two processes within 4-6 months upon receipt of a completed application. Every effort is made to ensure there no delays and applicants are given up to date progress of their application every month until the assessment is completed. Applicant Foster Carers will see an initial draft of their assessment to correct any factual errors. All reports are signed by the applicant and the report author.

### **5.3 Approval of Foster Carers**

All completed applicant foster carer's assessments are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation. Applicant Foster Carers attend the panel with their assessing Social Worker to answer questions by Panel members. The draft recommendations are communicated verbally to the

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applicants by the chair of the Independent Fostering & Adoption Panel on the day of the panel meeting. The Panel recommendations then go to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision of an applicant's suitability.

The Agency Decision Maker makes this determination within 7 working days of receipt of recommendation and minutes from the Panel.

### **5.4 Pre-Panel Information to Applicants and Post Panel Feedback**

An information pack which outlines the roles, functions and membership of the fostering panel shall be made available to prospective applicants as soon as they are notified that their application is being presented to the independent Fostering and Adoption Panel by the Panel Administrator. Applicants who attend the Panel are required to complete a survey about their experiences of attending the Panel. This is for quality and assurance purposes to ensure the panel process is fit for purpose.

### **5.5 Fostering Agreement & Induction**

Each approved Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Carer's Agreement and undertake mandatory induction training before commencement of their fostering career. The fostering agreement outlines the contractual relationship and agreement between carer and the Authority. The inductions set out expectations of the Foster Carers' role.

- The assessing Social Worker where possible will remain the allocated Social Worker until a supervising Social Worker is allocated.

## **6. MATCHING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FOSTER CARERS**

When a placement is required the Placement Team receives a placement request report which identifies the needs of the CYP and has additional information which assists in looking for the best possible match with a fostering household. This is crucial for successful match between a child and foster carer(s).



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There is an established procedure in place to be followed in the matching process. The Family Placement Service seeks to ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs.

Other information such as the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and their family are used to help make the right matches. Matches are achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement.

Matching criteria considers the child's assessed needs including but not limited to racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, disability and linguistic needs and matched as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family.

A planned introduction between the child and a new Foster Carer must take place within 7 days before the placement start date. However, this is not always possible when emergency placements are made therefore efforts shall be made to reduce emergency placements to its barest minimum.

### **7. TRAINING OF FOSTER CARERS**

The Fostering Service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities for foster carers. The service believes that quality training is an integral part of a fostering career and begins during the assessment process with a 'Skills to Foster' course. Once approved, all new foster carers are expected to complete a minimum of four mandatory Core Training Programmes each year, which aims to provide the basic skills and information that new carers need to perform their fostering task effectively. Specialist Foster Carers, (e.g. Therapeutic, Parent and Child, Advanced) are required to undertake further in their area of specialisation training in addition to the mandatory core

training.

Carers training needs shall be identified jointly with the carer's supervising Social Worker as part of the annual review process. Any training attended shall be added into the foster carer's training profile and considered as part of each carer's annual review process. The trainings may also count towards their professional qualification award and the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for newly approved foster carers.

Thurrock recognises carers skills set and value their experiences. We therefore encourage and involve foster carers in helping deliver training events. We aim to offer 'Training for Trainers' course for those who wish to undertake this task. We believe that this is an important way for carers to learn from each other, promoting partnership working between themselves, social care staff and other professionals.

### **8. SUPPORT PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARERS**

Foster carers receive at least monthly visits from an allocated supervising Social Worker. The allocated worker is expected to be aware of the demands of each placement and would be available to offer telephone support which includes a minimum of one unannounced visit annually. Each carer's supervising Social Worker has a duty to assess the needs of the carer and identify whether or not additional support and training may be required. Recordings are made about each supervisory visit using an agreed format and copies shared with carers for factual accuracy and information for sharing purposes.

Foster Carers can also contact the Fostering Duty Social Worker if their allocated worker is unavailable. The Foster Carer's have access to Supervising Social Worker support via the Out Of Hours rota, Monday to Friday until 10.30 pm and weekends between 9 am – 4.30pm. Thurrock Council also operates an Emergency Duty System (EDT) which is also available to all foster carers.

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All Foster Carers have access to a Therapist as part of the Therapeutic Support Sessions at Oaktree. This is available when they have new children or young people in placement. Foster Carers may also access Therapeutic Support Sessions at any point if there are any concerns and difficulties in placement either via a self-referral mechanism or being referred by a supervising Social Worker.

The Foster Carers attend regular formal and informal support group meetings. All Foster Carers have automatic membership subscription with Fostering Network and are encouraged to join the Thurrock Foster Carers Association – THE ONE TEAM

### **9. ANNUAL REVIEW AND SPECIAL REVIEWS**

All Foster Carers shall be reviewed in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The Family Placement Service is committed to a transparent Annual Foster Carer Review (AFCR) process which shall include self-assessment foster carers, consultations and feedback from all members of foster carers household, children Social Workers and the Reviewing Officer. The first annual review shall be presented to the fostering panel for approval. Thereafter, every third review shall be presented to the Panel unless there is an allegation, cause for concern or change of circumstance of the foster carer which will automatically triggers a special review process. All special reviews shall be presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel

All panel recommendations in relation to Annual Review process shall be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision on re-approval. All successful applicants shall receive a written confirmation within 10 working days from the Panel date. The Service Manager shall approve all Reviews which are not presented to Independent Fostering Panel.

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All approved Foster Carers shall be issued a Fostering Agreement which will set out the terms of their fostering arrangement with the council. The validity of each agreement shall not exceed 12 months from the date of issue. The statuses of all foster carers (General, Advanced and Therapeutic) shall be subject to annual reviews.

### 10. ALLOWANCE AND PAYMENTS SCHEME

The Allowance and Payment Scheme comprises is made up of two elements:

The **Boarding Out Allowance element** is designated for the care of the child. The allowance is payable to all foster carers who are subject to Fostering regulations and are caring for Thurrock Council' Looked after Children. It is structured to meet a child's needs over the medium to long term (see allowance s documentation). The same allowance is payable to Connected Person's Foster Carers who have been approved to care for a 'named child' still frequently- being a family member or family friend, sometimes referred to as a 'Family and Friend foster carer.'

The **Fee payment** is a reward payment to foster carers who meet the following additional requirements:

- Have been approved and registered as Foster Carer following a full competency based form F assessment.
- Have completed the compulsory *Skills to Foster Training* and upon approval, evidence ongoing work in Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) portfolio. (NOTE: the fee payment may be suspended if a Foster Carer has not completed a mandatory TSDS, one year after approval without acceptable mitigation and shall only be reinstated after the portfolio has been successfully completed.
- If a connected person carer (Family & Friend) – has completed the

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compulsory Skills to Foster training programme as part of with a full BAAF form C assessment. (NOTE: Temporary Approved carers Shall not receive competency payments)

- Have met the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and are committed to continuing personal and professional development to better meet the needs of children and young people placed with them. This is applicable to all foster carers including Therapeutic Foster Carers who have successfully completed the accredited courses for their fostering portfolios.
- Fully co-operate with the requirements of the fostering role, including attending reviews, record keeping, and working together with the Supervising and Child's Social Worker, schools and other professionals.
- Advanced and Therapeutic carers who are not available take children because of the decision to accept a **preferred age only** shall not paid competency during the period they are not fostering.

N.B. The fee payment scheme is currently under review.

### 10.1 The Boarding Out Allowance

The allowance is intended to contribute towards the general costs associated with the care of the child or young person and their day to day needs. The allowance is aimed at maintaining an expected standard of care for the looked after child or young person.

The allowance includes items that are purchased directly to meet the child's needs such as food, clothing and social activities. It also covers indirect costs such as family transport, family outings and any additional general household maintenance costs such as utilities and cleaning materials.

It is understood that the needs of children and young people of the same age group can vary widely and foster carers are responsible for using their discretion to ensure that the child or young person's overall needs are met. For example, some expenditure on items may not change from month to month e.g. food. However

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expenditure on items such as clothing and utilities may vary. The carer is expected to budget for these variations in expenditure.

If the carer's expenditure on the child or young person differs significantly from the proportions set out in the table above, the Supervising Social Worker should arrange to discuss the carer's expenditure at a supervisory visit. This will assist the foster carer to budget accordingly or assist the Social Worker to determine if any additional financial support is required.

- **Food** - Children and young people should receive dinner money or a packed lunch as is appropriate to their needs and preferences. They should be provided with breakfast before school and a meal in the evening. Healthy drinks and snacks should be made available within reason.
- **Health and hygiene** - Young people who have reached puberty will need an allowance to buy toiletries such as tampons, deodorant and shaving equipment etc.
- **Clothing** - It is important that children and young people are provided with sufficient shoes and clothes appropriate to their age. Carers should provide opportunities for children and young people to be involved in choosing and buying clothes as they get older. It is expected that foster carers would provide young person aged thirteen and over with money to buy some clothes for themselves from the basic allowance with guidance.
- **Pocket money and savings** - It is important that children have some understanding of the responsibilities of looking after their own money from the age of seven years. Prior to this, children's pocket money should be spent under the supervision of the foster carer or kept as savings. The child's social worker will be responsible in partnership with the foster carer for determining the exact amount of pocket money and savings as this will sometimes need to be considered in light of what is reasonable within the fostering family and the child's level of maturity. Carers are expected to

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help children to learn about savings as part of preparation for adulthood. It is therefore important for the carer to assist the child in opening up a savings account, such as a post office account, into which the child can save an element of their pocket money.

The Family Placement Service has an expectation that carers will open a savings account in the child's name for the sole purpose of saving the minimum amount of funds as set out in the allowance breakdown. This savings account is maintained and held by the carer until such time when the child leaves the placement. If the child moves placement, the savings book is then given to the supervising social worker who will ensure that it follows the child to their next place of abode. Where a foster carer is concerned about providing a child or young person with pocket money they should be referred to the supervising social worker, who will discuss ways to address the concerns.

### **10.2 Fostering Allowance and Fee Payment**

As noted above, the fostering allowance and payment rates are made up of the fostering boarding allowance and the fee payment for carers who have met the competency requirements. Competency payments for Advanced or Therapeutic Carers reflect the additional skills required to manage children presenting extremely challenging behaviours.

## **11. PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

The Fostering Support Team prepares and encourages Foster Carers to promote and support each child's education achievement whilst in placement. Foster Carers are supported through training and ongoing support to provide home environments that stimulate, encourage and value the experience of learning and educational achievements. It is our expectation that the CYP Social Workers shall consult and include Foster Carers in the educational plans for the children in their placement. This includes attending PEP's, Education Review Meetings, Parents

Evenings and School Activity /Open Days.

The Family Placement Service, where require will liaise with the Virtual School to provide access and support to learning mentors/additional tuition to support looked after children with education.

### **12. CONTACT**

The Family Contact Team (Oaktree) is the hub for all family placement contact activities. Oaktree staff and the CYP Social Worker are responsible for coordinating and supporting family contact arrangements. Foster Carers are also expected and may be requested to supervise contact in their homes or community subject to a risk assessment. It is also important that Foster Carers are aware of the names and details of the child's network of friends and, if appropriate, supported and its consistency encouraged and maintained.

Foster Carers will actively support, promote and facilitate safe contact between children, young people and their family and friends so that children can experience, as close as possible, normal family life. Foster Carers are also encouraged and supported to promote contact and friendships as set out in the children placement plans.

### **13. CHILDREN'S HEALTH**

The service promotes the health and development needs of children and young people living in foster care. We ensure that health care information for each child is provided to Foster Carers prior to the child being placed and no later than 7 working days, if the information is not readily available at the point of placement. We ensure that foster carers are aware of health, illness or medication issues



relating to child/children placed.

The service also ensures that the carer is given a copy of the child's Initial Health Assessment Action Plan. It is an expectation that all children and young people placed are registered with a GP and dentist close to the foster's home, if they are not already registered. Foster Carers are aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health care appointments.

### **14. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

The service recognises the rights of children and young people and discusses with foster carers the rights of a child. All young people in foster care have access to a named person responsible for seeking and promoting their rights. Children shall be consulted and their views incorporated in the delivery of service to ensure effectiveness in the day to day running of the Family Placement Service. The person shall provide ongoing support and advocacy for looked after young people as well as ensuring that they are provided with a copy of the children's guide and complaint procedure.

### **15. SAFEGUARDING**

The service complies with the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child protection procedures and its own associated procedures in all areas of child protection. The SET Procedures reflect all relevant law, regulation, statutory and non-statutory Government guidance and best practice; including the key government document 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'.

Thurrock Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2015) sets to deliver training to all carers and professionals, raising profiles and gathering intelligence in conjunction

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with the police and other partner agencies with the aim to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and offering support to children and young people who are being exploited.

The service monitors children and young people missing from care; all children reported missing will have a return debriefing interview and will be monitored by the Risk Assessment Group meeting (RAG).

All relevant training, child protections procedures, safe caring, children missing from care are reviewed for each individual household during the monthly supervision and as part of the annual review process.

### **16. FOSTER CARERS RECORDINGS**

Foster carers are expected to keep a separate daily log for each child in placement. Foster Carers are offered training on keeping records, their importance and implications. These issues are also explored in managing allegations training.

### **17. REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulation, 2011, this Statement of Purpose shall be reviewed annually.

### **18. STAKE HOLDER CONSULTATION**

The Thurrock Family Placement Service is a listening service and opened to further learning and development. We shall therefore peer review our practices with best performing fostering agencies. We shall also make concerted effort to solicit suggestions, feedbacks, comments and views from all relevant persons, professionals and key partners.

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Although not limited to them, the following are considered as stakeholders and extension of the service and as such the views shall be solicited formally through consultation meetings, surveys, surgeries, and commentary from:

- i. Foster Carers
- ii. Care Leavers
- iii. Fostered children and young people
- iv. Children' Social Workers
- v. Parents and carers Supervision Social Workers
- vi. Independent Reviewing Officers
- vii. Health Professional
- viii. Education Professionals
- ix. Open Door
- x. Councillors
- xi. Panel Members
- xii. Family and Friends carers
- xiii. Birth Children of Foster Carers
- xiv. Children in Care Council
- xv. Thurrock Foster Care Association
- xvi. Thurrock Safeguarding Board

### **19. PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE**

The Family Placement Service provides training to foster carers to help develop their skills on how best to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences, information, skills and advice that will support them in this objective. Young people preparing to leave care are referred by their social workers to the Leaving Care Team where practical advice and support is offered.

The Placement Support Team's principle is to improve choices for young people

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through Staying Put, Supported Lodging and other bespoke provisions that will meet the individual's needs. Each young person is therefore consulted by the supervising social worker about their considered options when the preparation for Pathway Planning is started. It is the service's expectation that Foster carers are always consulted and involved in the process of moving children and young people on to begin their adult life.

### **20. ALLEGATIONS, COMPLAINTS CONCERNS AND COMPLIMENTS**

The Fostering Team has a policy that deals with allegations, complaints and concerns against Foster Carers Procedure. All complaints are recorded and reviewed in line with procedural guidelines. Foster carers also have access to the council's complaints procedure. Staff and carers are provided with safeguarding training as part of the ongoing professional training and development programme. The Family Placement Service aims to respond to any allegation or complaint within 14 days but not exceeding 28 days.

We however recognise that there are some allegations and complaints that may require complex investigation which could take longer than 28 days. In such cases, the registered fostering manager shall write to the person(s) involved in the process, explaining the nature and complexity with anticipated timelines. This shall be followed up with periodical updates, keeping all parties informed with progress until the matter is concluded. Depending on the nature of allegation or complaint, for example, child protection enquiry, the regulator (Ofsted) and the Local Safeguarding Board of the Area Authority shall be notified accordingly.

The Family Placement Service welcome compliments and well as constructive feedback on what we do well as well as areas we should improve. All compliments and feedback should be sent to the registered Manager of the Fostering Service.

### **21. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE**

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- 21.1** In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the fostering services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.
- 21.2** Thurrock Council recognise that children, their birth parents, foster carers, applicants and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.
- 21.3** The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".
- 21.4** There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure
- 21.5** In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the social worker, as appropriate.
- 21.6** Any of the parties in the fostering process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:
- Any child who has been placed with our approved foster carers.
  - A birth parent of a child who has been placed with our approved carers including connected persons
  - Foster Carers

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- Applicants during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
- One person on behalf of another e.g. a parent/advocate on behalf a child.
- Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.

**21.7** Applicants to become Foster Carers who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the Fostering panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel's decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The Fostering agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager  
Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,  
Royds Hall Road  
Leeds, LS12 6AJ  
Tel: 0845 450 3956  
Email: [irm@irm.org.uk](mailto:irm@irm.org.uk)  
[www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

**21.8** Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

### **Complaints,**

Thurrock Council,  
Civic Offices,  
New Road,  
Grays,  
RM17 6SL  
Tel: 0800 021 3016  
Email: [complaints@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@thurrock.gov.uk)

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Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

### **22. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY**

**22.1** OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

**22.2** Thurrock Council's Adoption Service is regulated and inspected by:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Web: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

This statement of purpose is subject to annual review

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<b>4 June 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Adoption Statement of Purpose</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report is to updates members of the Committee on Thurrock’s Adoption Statement of Purpose.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock’s Adoption Statement of Purpose.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 17 and 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2005.

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Thurrock Council’s Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2019 – 2020 is attached at Appendix 1.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how the Thurrock Council are meetings its statutory duties in relation to Adoption.

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 None

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial implications to this report.

##### **7.2. Legal**

Verified by: **Lindsay Marks**  
**Principal Solicitor Children's safeguarding**

National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Adoption are issued under this Act – together with the adoption regulations, they provide the framework for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies

##### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The Adoption Service is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

- None

**7.5 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):

- None

**8. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Council Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2019 - 2020

**Report Author:**

Dan Jones

Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements

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## **THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE**

### **Statement of Purpose 2019 - 2020**

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 17 and 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2005.

#### **1. POSITION STATEMENT**

- 1.1** Thurrock Council believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their emotional physical and developmental needs throughout their life. When children cannot live with their own birth families, Thurrock Council is committed to finding them such a family.
- 1.2** Thurrock Council is part of Adopt East, an alliance of Adoption Services (partners) and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Southend, Luton, Norfolk, Bedfordshire, Adoption plus and Barnados). The priorities of the Alliance are as follows:
- Decisions about placements are always made in the child's best interests
  - Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence
  - Social Workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care
  - Matches are made without unnecessary delay
  - Fostering for Adoption where needed, to offer children early permanence placements
  - Every adoptive family has access to an ongoing package of appropriate support with a high-quality specialist assessment of need
  - The voice of adopters and their children is at the heart of national and local policy making and delivery of services
- 1.3** Thurrock Council will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Children, birth parents and relatives, adoptive parents and adopted people are entitled to a comprehensive service which promotes the welfare of children, supports families and treats all parties fairly, openly and with respect. This service will be planned and provided in collaboration with other relevant agencies and service user organisations.
- 1.4** The Statement of Purpose is provided upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the service, to children who may be adopted and their parents, to

anyone wishing to adopt, to adopted persons and their families and to those granted or who are seeking a Special Guardianship Order.

**1.5** The Statement of Purpose is subject to formal approval and is reviewed on an annual basis.

**1.6** Legislative Framework

- The Adoption Service complies with all relevant legislation:
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- National Minimum Standards (Adoption Services)
- The Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- The Statutory Adoption Guidance amended 2011, 2013 and 2014
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 amended by Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- The Children Act 1989

The framework is designed to ensure the service is accountable and defines practice and actions undertaken within the service.

## **2. AIMS OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

**2.1** To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child is at the centre of the permanency process.

**2.2** To ensure that where it is not possible for looked after children to be reunited with their birth families they are provided with a permanent, stable alternative family.

**2.3** To ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about the assessment, approval process and support services.

**2.4** To ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the permanency process and have access to support services.

## **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

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- 3.1** To ensure that children adopted from the care system are within the agreed timescales set by the government.
- 3.2** To recruit a sufficient pool of prospective adopters to meet the assessed needs of the children needing adoptive families.
- 3.3** To provide a range of adoption support services, including practical, financial and therapeutic services, in partnership with other relevant agencies.
- 3.4** To ensure that Thurrock Council employs staff with appropriate and sufficient skills, knowledge and experience to deliver the permanency service.
- 3.5** To ensure that all applicants for adoption are provided with an appropriate service from skilled and experienced workers.
- 3.6** To provide counselling, advice and support to adopted adults and their families that recognise the lifelong impact of adoption.
- 3.7** To provide a service for inter-country adoptions.
- 3.8** To recruit adopters in order to meet the needs of the children from differing cultural backgrounds.
- 3.10** To provide, post Special Guardian Order, support services, including, practical and financial (where applicable).
- 3.11** To apply, when needed, to the Adoption Support Fund for therapeutic services for children.

## **4. PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE**

Thurrock Council believes that:

- 4.1** Every child is entitled to a permanent family throughout their childhood, which should meet all the needs of the child in terms of religion, ethnicity, language, physical, social and emotional development and that promotes a supportive, life long relationship.
- 4.2** It is best where possible for children to be brought up by their own birth family.
- 4.3** Children and young people should not be in public care throughout their childhood, therefore, where it is not possible for looked after children to be reunited with their birth families they will be provided with a permanent, stable, alternative family and consideration whether adoption is the best way to provide a permanent placement.
- 4.4** The child's welfare is paramount in all decisions about his/her future.

- 4.5** The child's wishes and feelings should be taken into account according to their age and understanding.
- 4.6** A child's birth heritage, religious, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are all important factors to consider in finding a new family. The adoptive family should reflect this, if this can be found without unnecessary delay. No child should be denied loving adoptive parents solely on the grounds that the child and parents do not share the same racial or cultural background.
- 4.7** Birth parents and birth families are entitled to services that recognise the life-long implications of adoption. Thurrock Council will work in partnership with birth families to ensure that effective plans are made and implemented for their child. Birth parents will be provided with the opportunity to access support and information about the adoption process including the legal implications of adoption and their rights.
- 4.8** The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family should be valued and respected. The service will maintain an open and inclusive adoption recruitment strategy which will welcome all applicants regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, class or marital status and will encourage prospective adopters from all backgrounds.
- 4.9** Children with disabilities and special needs are entitled to the same opportunities to achieve a permanent family through adoption. Careful consideration will be given to recruiting people who can meet the full range of needs of children requiring adoptive families.
- 4.10** Every effort should be made to find adoptive homes where brothers and sisters can live together, unless this will not meet their individually assessed needs.
- 4.11** We work to ensure that plans are expedited in a timely way to avoid delays where ever possible recognising the detrimental impact that delay can have.
- 4.12** Every child is entitled to information about her/his birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- 4.13** We recognise the importance of continuing contact for children with their birth families and will make arrangements for ongoing contact - direct or indirect - between the child and his/ her birth family unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this.
- 4.14** A range of adoption support services should be provided to all parties in the adoption process including children, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families.
- 4.15** Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. Thurrock Council will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the needs of all parties in the adoption process are met.



**4.16** We continually review and improve our services within the limits of available resources.

**4.17** All parties to the adoption process should have access to Thurrock Council Complaints Procedure.

### **5. THE ADOPTION SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE**

Thurrock Council's Adoption Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship support.

The Executive Director for Children's Services is Rory Patterson

**5.1** Sheila Murphy Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service and is Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375659840

Email [smurphy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:smurphy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Sheila Murphy is a qualified social worker with over 30 years' experience. Sheila has extensive experience of child protection and looked after children. She has been a senior manager across different social care settings.

**5.2** The Strategic Lead responsible for adoption services is Janet Simon

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

Email: [jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk)

Janet's qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma Social Work and she is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Janet has worked in management roles since 2006.

**5.3** The Service Manager responsible for the Adoption Service is Dan Jones

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

Email: [drjones@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:drjones@thurrock.gov.uk)

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a Bsc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has previously worked for the NSPCC, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council. He has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services

**5.4** The Adoption Team comprises:

- 1 Team Manager
- 6 FTE Social Workers

- 1 FTE Life Story & Letterbox Worker

Supported by:

- 1 FTE Business Support

### **5.5 Team Manager – Sally Medbury**

Sally Medbury is the Manager for the Adoption Team in Thurrock. She qualified as a social worker in 2001 and holds the DIPSW, BSc in Social Work and the Post Qualifying Child Care Award. She has extensive experience as a social worker and has worked across Children's Services within Local Authority's across London and Essex. Sally was the adoption family finding senior practitioner in Thurrock from 2014 and has recently been appointed as the Adoption Team manager.

**5.6** Staff members are social work qualified with access to appropriate training, supervision and support. The social workers specialise in either family finding, adopter recruitment and assessment or adoption support work. They are able to work across the 3 teams where necessary. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

**5.7** Staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW/DipSW or equivalent and nearly all staff possess a university degree.

**5.8** All SW qualified staff are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

**5.9** The Adoption Team is an established and experienced team with the majority at senior practitioner level who are committed to providing a high quality service.

**5.10** The culture of the team is of continual learning and all staff are encouraged to extend their qualifications by attending relevant training.

## **6 ADOPTION SERVICES**

**6.1** The Adoption Team has responsibility to provide adoption services for the council including:

- Information related to adoption for the general public.
- Assessment and preparation of adopters.
- Permanence planning and family finding for adoption.
- Adoption support to all parties involved in adoption including adopters, children and adopted adults, birth parents and relatives.
- Counselling and access to records for adopted adults.
- Support to maintain contact where appropriate and planned between adopted children and their birth relatives and foster carers.

- Inter-Country Adoption services.
- 6.2** The Adoption Team provides a central point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an adopter, including those who make enquiries about inter-country adoption, step-parent and relative adoption. The team along with the recruitment team actively recruits adoptive families who can meet the needs of our children needing permanence through adoption. We engage in preparation of prospective adopters, which includes pre-approval training consisting of a four day of preparation group in either stage one or early stages of stage 2. Input on Dual Approval and Foster for Adoption is included in the preparation. In addition to the four days there is a family and friends training day.
- 6.3** Thurrock Council provides a range of information for prospective adopters and service users including families requiring adoption support. The information provided includes: recruitment brochures for adopters, booklets for our adoption support services for birth parents, adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families. The service also produces a guide to adoption for children looked after and information about attending the adoption panel.
- 6.4** The service has a website where prospective adopters or those requiring adoption support information can browse <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/adoption> The service benefits from a bespoke email address to encourage enquires: [PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk)
- 6.5** Various campaign activities include use of social media, advertising in local newspapers, billboards, leaflet drops, information days and adoption match exchange days. The teams are encouraged to attend events to promote adoption services for Thurrock Council.
- 6.6** The Adoption Team undertake family finding for all children in Thurrock who require an adoptive family. Family finding social workers present the adoption match to panel in partnership with the child's social worker. The family finding social worker, in partnership with the child's social worker ensures that an adoption support plan is in place for every adoptive family. They also coordinate and support introductions and placements of the child/ren once the match has been made.
- 6.7** The children's teams undertake the tasks of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption, in conjunction with the Adoption Service. Each child has a named social worker and an agreed care plan.
- 6.8** The children's teams work with the child's family during the decision making process for adoption. During this period the birth parents are offered the opportunity to speak to a member of the adoption team who is independent of their case for independent counselling.
- 6.9** The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is responsible for making decisions in relation to whether a child should be placed for adoption. The Child's Permanence Report is submitted to the ADM, who then has 7 working days to

make a decision. Medical and Expert reports are provided to assist in the decision making process.

- 6.10** The children's team and adoption social workers collaborate in family finding, matching, supporting adoptive placements and in contact arrangements, until the adoption order is made. When the adoption order is made the adoption team offer support as specified in the support plan.
- 6.11** The adoption service aims to work closely and in partnership with the teams within the department where adoption is a plan. They offer advice and consultation where this is appropriate. It aims to provide a holistic approach to planning for adoption to incorporate support to families throughout the placement of the child and beyond. All staff have access to training courses and are updated on developments in practice and legislative changes.
- 6.12** The aim of the permanency planning process is to reduce delay in achieving permanence for children from the point they become looked after. The Family Finders role is to assist social workers in the decision making process regarding permanence issues particularly in more complex cases and where adoption or SGO may be the outcome.
- 6.13** The permanency planning process, through a proactive dialogue between the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Children's teams and the Adoption Team Manager monitors the timescales in those cases where adoption has been identified as the most appropriate plan for a child in order to ensure that any delays are minimised and that drift does not occur.
- 6.14** IROs have a responsibility for monitoring the implementation of adoption plans and ensuring timescales are adhered to.
- 6.15** Children and prospective adopters are actively referred to Linkmaker. Approved adopters are referred following approval. Adopters are also informed that they can self-refer to Linkmaker once they are approved at panel should they wish.
- 6.16** Thurrock Council's adoption service is engaged in the development of the proposed Regional Alliance including the promotion of good practice.
- 6.17** The adopters social workers offer adoption support prior to the adoption order and the adoption team social workers provide adoption support following the adoption order. These social workers have responsibility for reviewing all the adoption support plans annually and this includes managing and reviewing the financial support offered to families.
- 6.18** Adoption support services to families are provided by the children's and adopters social workers until the adoption order is granted. This includes weekly visits in the first month of placement and support with accessing services like education and health. There is also access to consultation with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

- 6.19** Financial support can be provided to adoptive families through the adoption allowance scheme, which includes an annual review of their continuing need for an allowance. Financial support may also be available for therapeutic services via the Adoption Support Fund.
- 6.20** Adopters are refunded their expenses for accommodation, travel and reasonable subsistence during introductions.
- 6.21** The adoption support social workers process new requests for adoption support assessments from adoptive families who live in the county. Families living outside the county with whom Thurrock Council has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the adoption order. Financial support is subject to a means test and an annual financial review.
- 6.23** Support is commissioned for families living out of county where this is appropriate with receiving authorities for other types of support that are likely to last longer than the three year period stipulated in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Additional services are provided to adopted adults and adopters in Bucks; these include a counselling and access to records service, support groups, training, social events and a quarterly newsletter.
- 6.24** An adoption letterbox service is managed within the team to enable adopted children to maintain indirect contact with their birth families.
- 6.25** The adoption support social workers provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out about their birth parents and adoption details.
- 6.26** Birth families have access to independent support services before adoption. The adoption support team provides support advice and guidance post order. The team also offers a monthly birth parent drop in which is led by the adoption team.
- 6.27** The adoption service works within the requirements of all relevant Council policies e.g. complaints policy, recording policy, and access to records policy.
- 6.28** Applicants to become adoptive parents, who are dissatisfied with the Adoption Panel outcome, are advised of their right to make representation to the Independent Review Mechanism in order for their case to be considered by an independent review panel.
- 6.29** Thurrock Council's Adoption Panel provides a thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. Its overall function and purpose is to:
- Consider and make recommendations regarding whether children should be placed for adoption only in cases where the birth parents are consenting to adoption or relinquishing babies.
  - Consider and make recommendations about placements requiring permanency through adoption.

- Consider and make recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters, Consider and make recommendations about the proposed matches between children and prospective adopters.
- Consider any adoption support plans submitted as part of the proposed placement.

**6.30** The membership of the Adoption Panel aims to reflect the diversity of the local community and complies with regulations (adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

- Regulation 4 requires that the agency appoints from the central list: a person to chair the panel who is independent of the agency.
- One or two people as vice chairs, who may act as Chair if necessary.
- A medical advisor who makes a full contribution to the wider aspects of the panel as well as providing advice and comment on medical issues.
- Thurrock Council includes on its central list, independent members who have personal experience of adoption.
  - In addition, the Panel has:
    - A Legal Adviser - non attending
    - A Professional Advisor
    - A Panel Administrator

**6.31** The panel's business can only be conducted if there are at least five members present. This includes the chair or vice chair, and the adoption social worker. Where the vice chair has to chair the meeting, and is not an independent member, at least one independent member will need to be present for the panel to be quorate

## **7. THE RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR ADOPTERS**

**7.1** It is the task of the Recruitment and Adoption Service to find innovative ways of encouraging people to consider adoption. All applications from prospective adopters are welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

**7.2** All enquirers can access on Thurrock Council website information about adopting with Thurrock Council along with details of information events which can be booked online. Enquiries by phone are dealt with within 5 working days.

**7.3** The Adoption Service offers an initial telephone discussion or appointment to discuss further the enquirer's personal circumstances and their motivation to become an adoptive parent. A Registration of Interest form is provided to the applicants following this meeting at their request.

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- 7.4** The enquirer's discussion with the social worker is discussed with the Team Manager.
- 7.5** All applicants are expected to attend preparation training groups. The aim of these sessions is to inform and prepare people to deal with issues that are common to adoption placements. Observations through the group process and the learning of the applicants from it provide evidence for the assessment.
- 7.6** Once applicants have submitted their Registration of Interest forms and been invited to a preparation group, an assessing social worker is allocated to them to undertake a home study in order to prepare an in-depth report to support their application. The assessment is completed using the CoramBAAF prospective adopters report (PAR).
- 7.7** During Stage One of the Assessment Process, Thurrock Council also starts the process to undertake references, health and statutory checks including a Disclosure and Barring Records check.
- 7.8** A second opinion visit may be undertaken by another SW or Team Manager to prospective adopters. A written report of this visit is also presented to the Adoption Panel.
- 7.9** The Adoption Service endeavours to complete the PAR and present it to panel within 4 months of the start of Stage Two.
- 7.10** The information gathered in the home study, along with statutory checks and references form the PAR, which is presented to the Adoption Panel.
- 7.11** All applicants receive a copy of their assessment report and have opportunity to comment on it at least 10 days prior to it being presented to the Panel.
- 7.12** All applicants are invited and supported to attend the Adoption Panel when their approval is being discussed.
- 7.13** The Adoption Panel comments on the strengths and potential areas of difficulty or concern in the application. The panel recommends to the Agency Decision Maker whether to approve or not to approve the application. The panel can also defer making a recommendation and request additional information. The required time scales are adhered to concerning informing the applicants of the decision.
- 7.14** The decision of the Agency Decision Maker is conveyed to applicants verbally within 2 days that it is made and followed up in writing within 5 working days.
- 7.15** Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.
- 7.16** Before a match is agreed, adopters are given full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and an opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family. They will be involved



in discussions on how they can best maintain any links, including contact, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.

- 7.17** All adopters are referred to 'Linkmaker' at the start of stage two to link up with the Adopt East agencies.
- 7.18** An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration. A full matching report is completed which details the positive factors about the match, any risk areas together with an adoption support plan that details the adoption support services that will be made available to the adoptive family, the child and the birth family.
- 7.19** The assessing social worker continues to support the prospective adopter throughout the process of matching and placing a child, until an adoption order is made. This includes preparing them in advance of the child coming to live with them.
- 7.20** Adoption support services are provided by the Adoption Team who are available to provide support and advice to families and individuals who need or request assistance before, during and after adoption.
- 7.21** Where there are difficulties with the placement or the adoption breaks down, all the agencies involved co-operate to provide support and information to adoptive parents and the child.
- 7.22** Adoptive parents are informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

## **8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES**

- 8.1** The Adoption team offers advice to the permanency planning process where Special Guardianship is being considered and to the compilation of the support plan.
- 8.2** The adoption support social workers also process new requests for assessments of need from Special Guardians who live in Thurrock. Families living outside of Thurrock with whom Thurrock Council has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the SGO. The team ensures that any recommendations in the support plan are fulfilled which includes monitoring and reviewing support plans, finance, counselling and advice. There are also support groups, training and social events available. Financial support is subject to a means test and an annual financial review.

## **9. SYSTEMS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING SERVICE PROVISION**



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- 9.1 The Adoption Service is reviewed on a yearly basis through the Adoption Service Action Plan.
- 9.2 The Chairperson of the Adoption Panel produces an annual report that includes an evaluation of feedback received from those attending panel.
- 9.3 The Team Manager of the Adoption Team produces a twice yearly report on the service.
- 9.4 The Adoption Panel receives half-yearly reports on the progress of children and prospective adopters awaiting placement and adoption.
- 9.5 Forms have been devised to monitor the achievement of government set timescales with regard to adopted children and prospective adopters.
- 9.6 The Adoption Service staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance.
- 9.7 A file audit system is in place for managers to regularly check on the quality of record keeping and ensure that procedures are being followed.
- 9.8 Training on adoption issues is part of the learning and development plan for staff in Children's services and those involved in adoption work. Staff complete post-training evaluation forms, which feed into reports produced by the Children's Services Learning and Development Team.
- 9.9 We are developing 2 annual training days for the Adoption social workers from these teams which helps to ensure that panel members and social workers are kept up-to-date with current issues in adoption.
- 9.10 The Chairperson of the Adoption Panel reports back to the Agency Decision Maker on any practice issues so that these can be taken up through the line management system.
- 9.11 The Agency Decision Maker meets with the Chairperson of the Adoption Panel twice yearly to discuss any issues of concern.
- 9.12 The Assistant Director for Children's Services signs off the Statement of Purpose annually or when there are any changes made to the document.

## 10. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

- 10.1 Thurrock Council is continuing to ensure as many children are adopted (LAC A01). For the year 1st April 2018 to 31 March 2019, there were 13 adoptions.

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- 10.2** Thurrock Council is continuing to work towards increasing the numbers of looked after children placed for adoption within 4 months of the court authority to place.
- 10.3** Thurrock Council is planning and delivering services in accordance with the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its associated regulations and guidance.
- 10.4** Policies and procedures are being updated for the adoption and special guardianship services. These documents will ensure that the service is provided in line with new legislation, guidance and regulations.
- 10.5** Our aim is to ensure that life story work is undertaken for all children needing permanence in Thurrock Council. The Adoption Team has 1 fte worker who provides life story work post order where this is the outcome of an Assessment of Need.
- 10.6** All social workers in the team have received training on legislative changes and new practice developments.
- 10.7** The resource library for adopters and staff is continually updated to reflect current changes in legislation and practice.
- 10.8** The use of CoramBAAF forms, which reflect the changes to the regulations, are used by
- social workers, these include:
  - Child Permanence Report
  - Prospective Adopters Report
  - Adoption Placement Report Adoption Placement Plan
  - Adoption Support Plan
- 10.9** The Adoption Panel has the following responsibilities:
- To consider whether adoption should be the permanence plan for a child where the child is relinquished.
  - To ensure that the adoption plan has met the welfare checklist.
  - To advise adopters about the appropriate sharing of parental responsibility.
  - To monitor and ensure that adoption support plans are in place for all the adoptive families matched at the panel.
  - To recommend domestic adopters approval.
  - To recommend the match for a child within an adoptive placement
- 10.10** Monitoring takes place of children who are in the care system and where the care plan may be adoption. This ensures plans for children are being expedited in a timely and appropriate way.

### 11. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 11.1** In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.
- 11.2** Thurrock Council recognises that children, their birth parents, adoptive parents, prospective adopters and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.
- 11.3** The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".
- 11.4** There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure
- 11.5** In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the adoption social worker, as appropriate.
- 11.6** Any of the parties in the adoption process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:
- Any child who has been placed for adoption or placed under a special guardianship by the council - including adults who were formally adopted.
  - A birth parent of a child who has been or is being adopted or is or will be subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
  - Adoptive parents.
  - Prospective adoptive parents during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
  - One person on behalf of another e.g. an adoptive parent on behalf an adopted child.
  - Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.
- 11.7** Applicants to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the adoption panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent

Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel's decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The adoption agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager

Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,

Royds Hall Road

Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956

Email: [irm@irm.org.uk](mailto:irm@irm.org.uk)

[www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

**11.8** Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

### **Complaints,**

Thurrock Council,

Civic Offices,

New Road,

Grays,

RM17 6SL

Tel: 0800 021 3016

Email: [complaints@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@thurrock.gov.uk)

Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

## **12. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY**

**12.1** OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

**12.2** Thurrock Council's Adoption Service is regulated and inspected by:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street  
Manchester M1 2WD  
Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
Web: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)  
Telephone: 0300 123 1231

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<b>4 June 2019</b>		<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## Executive Summary

This report is to provide members of the Committee with an update on Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the members of the Committee are informed about the function and activities of Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This Reports sets out the function and work undertaken by Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel in the last year.

### 3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19 is attached at appendix 1.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how the Thurrock Council are meetings its statutory duties in relation to Adoption.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 None

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial Implications to this report.

##### **7.2 Legal**

Implications Verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal Social Care & Education**

Children Act 1989 (as amended);

- sets out the duties for local authorities in terms of services to be provided to children in need
- makes provisions with respect to fostering
- establishes the principle that children are best looked after within their families.

Care Standards Act 2000 (as amended) and National Minimum Standards (NMS)

- NMS for Adoption are issued under this Act – together with the adoption regulations, they provide the framework for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies
- NMS for Fostering Services – together with the regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care, these NMS provide the framework for the conduct of fostering services
- NMS are used by Ofsted during inspections.



### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications Verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The Adoption and Fostering Panel is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy.

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

- None

### 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):

- None

### 9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19

#### **Report Author:**

Dan Jones  
Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements

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# Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Panel Annual Report 2018/19

## 1. Introduction and overview

This extended report contains details of the work undertaken by the Thurrock Council Adoption and Fostering Panel during the years 1st January 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. This has been done to bring our annual report in to line with the financial year and so our reporting is consistent. The Panel is constituted to consider both fostering and adoption cases which allows us to respond to the changing needs of local children.

Thurrock Council is responsible for the Panel financing, administrative support and overall good functioning. However, the Panel is entirely independent as regards its recommendations. The Panel can only make **recommendations** to Thurrock; it is the authority that has the legal duty to take the actual decision, having taken full account of the Panel's recommendations and the reasons for them.

The Panel is available to meet on a fortnightly basis and to hold an extra meeting if there is a need to consider any matter on an urgent basis. In 2019/20 the Panel will continue meeting twice per month to accommodate the increasing panel business covering both fostering and adoption. Panel members need to undertake hours of careful reading prior to the meeting making the timely dispatch of agenda papers well in advance of each meeting vital.

The Panel holds business and training sessions to update knowledge on relevant professional and legal developments in fostering and adoption. During the year the Agency Advisor/Fostering Manager provided a briefing to all panel members on the development of the service. We will continue to keep under review and strengthen as necessary the central list of those available for Panel membership. The panel member appraisals will help the fostering service identify the additional perspectives that could help develop Panel effectiveness.

### 1.2 Fostering Service:

Thurrock Council is a Fostering Agency that provides a foster care service for children and young people who are 'looked after' by the Council. There are also looked after children and young people placed with relatives or friends of their family. These carers are known as Family and Friends Carers.

Thurrock also provides a service for children and young people who are not 'looked after' but, usually because they have disabilities, can benefit from short period of care by what are known as Shared or Short Break Carers.

In all these situations, the carers legally must be assessed and approved by the Council for whatever role they wish to undertake. Each role involves the care of children who are away from their parents and carries considerable day to day responsibility for vulnerable children who are sometimes going through very difficult times in their lives. Thurrock Council has invested in recruiting and supporting Foster Carers and the Recruitment Strategy is seeing the work of panel increase over time.

Whilst Thurrock needs to recruit foster carers to give such vulnerable children the

security and skilled care they need, fostering is a challenging task that has a major impact on the family life of those involved and is not for everyone. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the right people are approved, properly supported and provided with ongoing training and that there are regular reviews of their continued suitability. Thurrock is fortunate to have some very experienced and skilled carers who undertake excellent work with children.

During the above period, the Panel acted in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. In summary, the primary duties require the Panel to:

- *Consider applications for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer and if so the terms on which they should be approved (e.g., number and age of children to be placed).*
- *Consider all first annual reviews of newly foster carers and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering service and recommend whether or not the foster carers remain suitable to act as such, and if the terms of approval remain appropriate.* The Thurrock Panel invites carers to attend the first review consideration. Whilst the authority carries out an internal review each subsequent year, the Panel invites carers to attend a Panel review consideration every three years.
- *Consider Family and Friends Carer cases.* The above duties apply in these situations because when a child who is looked after by Thurrock and placed by the authority with such people, the approval must be under Fostering Regulations.
- *Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service. Advise on and monitor the effectiveness of the procedures for undertaking reviews of foster carers.* The Panel takes these duties very seriously. Whilst there is no legal requirement (unlike Adoption Panels) for there to be an Agency Adviser, the Panel strongly supports Thurrock's decision to have one.
- *Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred by the fostering service.* This general quality assurance role is an important aspect of the Panel's functioning. Panel has no role in the operational management of the service, but it does have access to information about the complex issues the service is dealing with and at times it is useful to comment on specific cases or on themes that have emerged during Panel discussions.
- As part of this latter function, the Panel also considers and makes recommendations on the following.
  - *Consider reports following allegations made against carers.*
  - *Consider all proposals by the authority that a carer's approval be terminated.*
  - *Consider exemptions to the terms of approval, normally when it is proposed that the usual maximum of three children be exceeded.* This can take place when, for example, to keep a group of siblings together in addition to other children already in placement. This duty relates to any carer living in Thurrock irrespective of who holds their registration as a carer. This could be another local authority or an Independent

Fostering Agency.

## 1.3 Adoption Services:

Thurrock Council is also a registered Adoption Agency providing the full suite of adoption services. There has been a change in how Thurrock Council delivers these services during the reporting period. From January 2018 – August 2018 Adoption Services were delivered through a partnership with Coram and since then Thurrock Council has begun to deliver all adoption services directly through the establishment of a new Adoption Team.

This presents an experienced panel with some new or returning challenges: whilst the panel has been considering matching for adoption, the approval of adopters is a function which has, again, become part of practice. The panel is supported in this by the panel advisor who is distinct from the fostering advisor.

The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and 2014. Thurrock Council has a “central list” of people with a wide range of experience and diverse backgrounds and a good mix to ensure equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory practices. The number and background of Panel members is under continual review to reflect the makeup of the local community and bring additional experience to the Panel. During this last year individuals with a professional background in education, health and adoption have been appointed to the central list. An individual previously in care will shortly be joining the central list. There are monthly meetings with additional meetings arranged as and when it is necessary to do so to ensure continuity of panel core business and functions.

Although not Panel members, the Agency Advisor and Panel Administrator provide vital specialist support to the work of the Panel and attend all meetings. Panel members greatly value the very professional service provided by these colleagues.

The Panel made recommendations on the following issues:

- Recommend the approval of a match between a child/ren and approved adopters
- Change of approval from adoption to long term fostering
- Since 1st November 2018 the Panel also considers applications from individuals and couples to become approved adopters.
- The Panel also considers applications for individuals and couples to adopt children from overseas.

## 2. PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Adoption and Fostering Panel consists of people with a wide range of relevant personal and professional experience. Current and former foster carers (not for Thurrock), people who were placed in foster care themselves when children and others with experience of working in and managing children's and fostering services, including children with disabilities, voluntary and community organisations. We have panel members who were adopted as children and who have adopted children

## Appendix 1

bringing the appropriate lived experience to our deliberations. The number of panel members is under continual review to reflect the make-up of the diverse and changing local community in Thurrock and bring additional experience to the Panel. A number of new panel members have been recruited.

An overview of the panel membership is as follows:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Panel Chair	Previous Service Manager of children services in Essex.
Panel Vice Chair	Fostered and then adopted as a child, within her family. Also an ex-teacher.
Panel Member	Adoption Social Worker, has previously fostered and then adopted two children.
Panel Vice Chair	Adoption Social Worker, previously Team Manager for the adoption Team at Barking and Dagenham.
Panel Member	Ex Teacher and Ex Foster Carer
Panel Member	Previous Team Manager for CAFCAS Social Worker.
Panel Member	Ex Midwife
Panel Member	Ex Midwife
Panel Member	Elected Member

Panel members are appraised annually by the Chair and the relevant panel advisor (see section 3). These are designed to help each member reflect on their work and identify areas for further training. The reviews were helpful in discussing issues that often cannot be pursued in similar depth during Panel consideration of specific agenda items, as we need to focus on the issue at hand. The reviews also provided an opportunity for reflection on how the Panel approaches the task. There was a clear view that team working continued to be good and that each member felt able to express his or her views freely before an agreed recommendation was reached. The Panel Chair and Agency Adviser feel that the Thurrock Fostering Panel has a strong and experienced membership with a good range of personal and professional perspectives.

The Chair also receives an appraisal with the relevant advisor and the Service Manager for Fostering, Adoption, Placements and Contact

Although not Panel members, the Agency Advisers and the Panel Administrator provide vital specialist support to the work of the Panel and attend all meetings. Panel members greatly value the very professional service provided by these colleagues.

The agency advisors are as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Julia Sutton	Panel Advisor for Fostering	Fostering Assessment Team Manager
Sally Medbury	Panel Advisor for Adoption	Adoption Team Manager

### 3. Panel Practice

Thurrock Council tries to ensure that the confidential agenda papers are sent out in good time (ideally more than 5 working days in advance of the meeting) for members to carefully read the material. At the meeting, the Panel firstly considers the documentation relating to each proposal, ensuring that the legally necessary statutory checks, references and documentation are in place to allow the matter to proceed. There is then a preliminary but focused discussion about the key aspects of the application or review, drawing on the range of perspectives available within the Panel membership. After identifying areas for further discussion, we then meet with the relevant social worker and the individuals involved. As indicated, we always invite those applying to become carers, with approved carers at their annual review and then every three years.

The Panel then recommends a course of action. As indicated, the Panel makes recommendations, it does not take decisions. The minutes of panel are passed on to the relevant Agency Decision Maker for them to consider. The Agency Decision Makers are separate for Fostering and Adoption cases:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Background</b>
Janet Simon	ADM - Fostering	Strategic Lead – Looked After Children
Sheila Murphy	ADM - Adoption	Assistant Director – Children’s Services

### 4. Foster Carer Approvals

During the dates considered in this report, the Thurrock Panel received twenty recommendations relating to applications for approval; thirteen households for general fostering able to provide placements for twenty seven children in total. There were seven Connected Persons Carer households for twelve children during the year. All wished to be considered as foster carers. Thurrock welcomes and encourages applications from all sections of the community and the Panel met with applicants of differing ethnicities, ages and sexual orientation. Some nine foster carer applications are currently being assessed so it is anticipated that we shall see a rise in applications to panel in 2019.

Prospective carers are usually asked questions about their experience of the preparation and assessment process and their views about the age and number of children they see joining their family. An important area is that of considering the impact of fostering on any existing children in the home. This can sometimes turn out to be a challenging issue for carers to manage, as the placement of a child with complex needs into a family group will inevitably have an impact on everyone in the family. The impact can be very positive in nature, but the reality is that it can at times be less positive for some birth children and lead to placement breakdown or a withdrawal from fostering. Panel members have a responsibility to ensure that the best decisions possible regarding timing of approval, the appropriate age range and the type of support that the carers will need are reached.

Fostering is a demanding and challenging task and whilst we need more carers, the assessment has to identify potential strengths and weakness so that the right decisions are taken and that carers have identified areas for further training and development. As indicated, fostering is not for everyone and Panel has a duty to explore any areas of concern directly with applicants and occasionally will ask for further reflection or information before a final recommendation is made.

Occasionally the Panel may need to recommend that an application should not be successful. This was not necessary during the last 12 months. If the Decision Maker agrees with such a recommendation, the applicant has a right to appeal internally or access a national Independent Review Mechanism Panel. The final decision rests with Thurrock. To date the Thurrock Panel has not had any decisions about approval matters referred to the IRM.

All applicants will have been through preparation group sessions where they will have heard at first hand (including from experienced Thurrock carers) about the task and then completed an individual assessment process. There is clear evidence from reports presented to Panel that the Thurrock introductory preparation groups are carefully planned and delivered, providing a good basis for the detailed assessment.

There is good dialogue between the Panel and the agency concerning issues that need to be covered in the assessment reports. This has contributed to the high standard of analysis by the assessing social workers. We continue to encourage the fostering service in its efforts to improve the standards of assessment and the consistent maintenance of good standards, particularly in relation to analysis. Over the year the panel has found all assessment reports to be of a high standard.

All applicants are asked to complete an evaluation form reflecting their experience of the preparation/assessment process and attendance at panel. During the last year there was a 100% return rate and all the feedback was extremely positive. In relation to Panel all applicants considered they were treated respectfully, their application considered objectively and they were given an opportunity to discuss their experience to date in some depth.

### **5. Foster Carer Reviews**

The Panel considered thirty two foster carer annual reviews during the period. With one exception the carers concerned attended all the reviews. In all cases the Panel was legally required to consider if the foster carer continued to be suitable for approval.

First annual reviews continue to be presented on time and it is clear from the reports that carers have an allocated supervising social worker, receive regular supervision



and have access to ongoing training provided by Thurrock. This first review provides a focused opportunity for Panel to see how potential has developed into reality. The review material and discussion with the carers can provide a picture of what life is like for a looked after child in the foster household and help Panel identify areas for development in practice standards and areas for further training. Panel members encourage the fostering service to obtain and consider the views of foster children and birth children of the foster children. We feel that this is vital, as we need to hear the voices of looked after children and of birth children who share their home and lives with foster children who are often going through a confusing and unsettled period in their young lives. The Panel were particularly keen to ensure that newly approved carers are well supported.

The three yearly reviews will provide an opportunity for a longer term reflection on how carers are developing and gaining experience in different areas of fostering. This process can lead to a reflection on changes of approval terms as the review can provide the necessary evidence for an increase in numbers or change to age range. The overall standard of review material was excellent. All reviews presented to panel were completed within statutory timescales and there is a significant improvement in gaining feedback from fostering household members, children's social workers and the children and young people themselves.

### **6. Approval of Prospective Adopters**

The Panel has considered three agency applications to be approved as prospective adopters since January. These have been largely applications from Foster Carers wishing to adopt a looked after child in their care. As a Panel we have been satisfied with the quality of the assessment work done and the rationale for recommendation is clear.

The panel has also considered the suitability of three applicants for intercountry adoption. This presents with a range of matters that panel needs to consider and has generated much discussion. One case was deferred by the Agency Decision Maker for further work, favouring a minority position on that panel. Although, by majority, panel had recommended approval a helpful discussion took place with the ADM and the Chair which clarified matters. The deferment was agreed.

### **7. Adoption Matches**

Since January 2018, thirteen children were presented to panel, four of which were made up of two sibling pairs. It is notable that despite the diverse make up of Thurrock; all of the children considered were white British. Two children were placed soon after birth with their existing foster cares and adoption would provide them with consistency of care. These were concurrent placements.

With Thurrock Council regaining its adoption services we anticipate changes in our work as an adoption panel

### **8. Other Panel Duties**

The Panel has often considered the formal resignation of carers via a full hearing; as the Fostering Regulations 2011 do not require a formal Panel consideration and recommendation, Panel is now notified of resignations and the reasons. Foster carers are free to resign and after 28 days, it takes full legal effect. In cases where

there are matters of care concern, the Foster Carer's registration is brought to panel for a formal recommendation. All the de-registrations during the last 12 months were at the request or agreement of the carers except in two cases where there were concerns about standards of care. Panel was able to give a recommendation in both these matters and in one case our view was accepted, the other is following a right of appeal via the IRM.

It is inevitable that each year a number of carers will retire after lengthy service, move to another area, or decide after a period of service that changed family circumstances such as the birth of a child or health difficulties mean that fostering is no longer viable. Some de-registrations are due to very positive child centred reasons such as the carers adopting the child in their care or being granted a Court Order such as Special Guardianship that removes the child from public care and gives the carers direct legal responsibility for the care of the child within their family.

As indicated above, the Panel is occasionally asked to recommend an exemption to the usual maximum of three children in placement. Although it is not a legal requirement for the Panel to be directly involved, Thurrock rightly regards this as good practice.

The Panel will occasionally be asked to consider whether a foster child's placement with carers should become permanent, the intention being that the carers commit to looking after the child until independence.

The Panel also has an important quality assurance role. From reports and discussions and feedback from foster carers the Panel have identified some practice issues and recommended policy and practice reviews. In previous years, the panel highlighted the importance of ensuring that the children looked after savings scheme was fully monitored. This year it recommended that the foster carer's Welcome Pack was reviewed and updated; this is being done.

### **9. Panel Development**

Thurrock's Fostering and Adoption Panel is experienced in all relevant matters of its work and has an appropriate level of stability. We are continually working to improve the operation of the panel and the following represents the next steps in our development

**9.1 Development Plan**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Means</b>	<b>Responsible Individual(s)</b>	<b>Target date</b>
1) Panel is able to learn from the experience of those attending	Feedback forms to be reviewed and to include all attendees and there is some systemic collection and review of feedback	Chair and Service Manager	August 2019
2) Good Practice is identified and shared	A good practice bank, accessible to the social work teams, will be created. Where the panel has identified work of a very high standard the chair shall direct the Panel Administrator to add it to the good practice bank.	Chair and Service Manager	August 2019
3) Panel has an active input in to the development and improvement of the service	Panel & Business meetings will be re-convened to be quarterly and include the relevant managers. The purpose of the meeting shall be to ensure thematic issues can be addressed and relevant policies agreed	Chair, Service Manager, Panel Advisors and ADMs	November 2019
	QA – written feedback on each case will be shared with the TM and SM responsible	Chair	September 2019
4) Panel membership reflects the community and current practice	Our panel is in a good position in terms of the experience of its membership but we recognise that development of membership is key. The central list will be opened up to encourage further applications	Chair	September 2019
5) The panel standing agenda and minutes reflect the full function of panel and the work done	Our panel agenda and minutes accurately reflect the cases considered but we do not always capture the wider work of panel. The agenda and minutes will be	Chair and Service manager	July 2019

	updated to reflect this		
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<b>4 June 2019</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Private Fostering Report</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Julia Sutton, Team Manager Fostering	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## **Executive Summary**

This report is to provide members of the Committee with an update on Thurrock’s Private Fostering Arrangements.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That the members of the Committee are informed about the in respect of children Privately Fostered in Thurrock**

### **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 This Reports sets out the function and work undertaken by Thurrock’s Fostering Service in respect of Privately Fostered children in the last year.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

3.1 Thurrock Councils Private Fostering Report is attached at Appendix 1.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how the Thurrock Council are meetings its statutory duties in relation to Private Fostering.

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 None

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications Verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Management Accountant**

There are no financial implications in this report.

### **7.2 Legal**

Implications Verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
**Deputy Head of Legal Social Care & Education**

The measures in section 44 Children Act 2004 and the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 are intended to strengthen and enhance the Children Act 1989 private fostering notification scheme. Along with the National Minimum Standards, they are intended to focus local authorities' attention on private fostering by requiring

- Regulation 4(1) provides that where a local authority has received notification of a proposal to privately foster a child they must, for the purposes of discharging their duty under section 67(1) Children Act 1989, arrange for an officer of the authority within seven working days to visit the property where it is proposed that the child will be cared for and speak to the proposed private foster carer and all members of his/her household. The local authority officer should also speak to the child whom is it proposed will be privately fostered and where practicable visit the child's parents or any person with parental responsibility for the child.

- The intention of Regulation 4(1) is to provide additional safeguards for children whom it is proposed should be privately fostered by requiring local authorities to check out a proposed arrangement and satisfy themselves that it will be suitable – or otherwise to exercise their powers to prohibit or to impose requirements – before it begins.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications Verified by: **Rebecca Price**  
**Community Development Officer**

The Adoption and Fostering Panel is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy.

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

- None

### **7.5. 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):**

- None

### **8. Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Council Private Fostering Report

#### **Report Author:**

Julia Sutton

Team Manager Fostering

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## THURROCK COUNCIL PRIVATE FOSTERING REPORT

This extended report contains details of the work undertaken by the Thurrock Council in respect of Private Fostering for a period covering 2018 to January 2019. This yearly report will be completed April to March going forward to bring our annual report in to line with the financial year and so our reporting is consistent with other service reports.

### 1. Private Fostering Definition

**1.1** Private Fostering is a private arrangement between a parent and someone other than a close relative. It occurs when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if disabled) is cared for and provided with accommodation, by an adult who is not a relative\* for 28 days or more. Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt, however a person who is a relative under the Children Act 1989 or a step-parent will not be a private foster carer.

*\*The Children Act 1989 defines 'relative' in relation to a child as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt. They could be a full or half relation, and could be related by marriage. The term also includes a stepparent (a stepparent must be married to the child's parent) A previous or current partner of the mother or father would not qualify as a relative; neither would extended family such as great aunt/uncle or cousins" - Source DCSF 2005*

**1.2** A child placed in Foster Care by the Local Authority under Sec 20 CA89 Voluntary Accommodation or via a Care Order Sec 31 CA 89, **is not** privately fostered.

**1.3** The period for which the child is cared for and accommodated by the Private Foster Carer should be continuous, but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break. (Replacement CA 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering 1.6.)

### **1.4 Examples of Private Fostering**

## Appendix 1

In most cases a birth parent selects and arranges private foster placements, which could take many forms. These can include;

- Children living with a friend's family after separation, divorce or arguments at home.
- Teenagers living with the family of a boyfriend or girlfriend
- Infants and young children whose parents are full-time students, or working unsocial hours, placed with agency-recruited host families.
- Children sent from abroad to improve their life chances, and placed with friends or distant relatives.
- Children who are estranged from their families who go to live, or are placed, with friends or distant relatives.

**1.5** However, it is not uncommon for a teenager to leave the care of their parents and move in with a friend without the permission of their parents. If this continues for over 28 days it is considered as Private Fostering.

**1.6A** A child is not privately fostered if cared for by a parent, or a person with parental responsibility or a close relative such as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood or half blood or by affinity) or stepparent.

**1.7 A stepparent** must be married to the child's parent. A stepparent who is separated from the child's parent but not divorced is still legally the child's stepparent. However, if the step-parent divorce's the child's parent this arrangement would become a Private Fostering Arrangement, unless the stepparent has legally obtained Parental Responsibility (PR) for the child or been granted a Residence Order. If a stepparent is widowed then they will remain the legal stepparent for the child, but should seek PR for the child.

**1.8** Regular private placements of under 28 days, made for reward, of children under the age of 8 years should be regarded as 'child minding'. Child Minding Regulations must be applied.

**1.9** The regulations are clear that a child has to be cared for and accommodated by someone other than a close relative, to be Privately Fostered. If a child remains

## Appendix 1

living at their home address and their parent/s arranges for a friend to care for their child/ren at the child's home whilst they are away for 28 days or more, it is not Private Fostering, due to basis that the child has to be accommodated. (The Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering 1.6)  
However, if there are any concerns about the child's welfare or you feel the child is a Child in Need then a referral must be made to the MASH Team.

Private Fostering arrangements within Thurrock are currently assessed and monitored by a dedicated Private Fostering Senior Social Worker, who is located within the Fostering Assessment Team.

All Private Fostering notifications are referred to the Fostering Assessment team, via a personalised email: [privatefostering@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:privatefostering@thurrock.gov.uk) where an initial visit is completed within seven working days of the notification.

If after the initial visit it is felt that the arrangement is a Private Fostering arrangement and there are no child in need or child protection concerns' the Private Fostering Social Worker will complete a full Private Fostering Assessment.

If a child in need or child protection concern arises then a referral will be made to the relevant Team and the Private Fostering Social Worker will work jointly with the Child's allocated Social Worker.

The Private Fostering Regulations 2005 requires that children placed in private fostering arrangements are visited by a Private Fostering Officer no later than every 6 weeks (more if required) within the first year and no later than every 12 weeks (more if required) after the first year. Within Thurrock the Private Fostering Social Worker visits all children who have been in Private Fostering Arrangements for under a year every four weeks and every eight weeks after the first year. Only when the placement is extremely stable, will all visits after one year be moved to every ten - twelve weeks.

## Appendix 1

Throughout the year of 2018/19 children in Private Fostering Arrangements were visited within the required timescales by the Private Fostering Social Worker and spoken to alone.

The Private Fostering Social Worker receives monthly supervision, from their Team Manager. The Private Fostering Social Worker is situated within the fostering service and is able to access direct support and guidance in between supervisions.

The Private Fostering Social Worker can also access further support via the Thurrock Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and the Family Support Teams.

### **National Minimum Standard 1**

**The local authority has a written statement of purpose, which sets out its duties and functions in relation to private fostering and the ways in which they will be carried out.**

All families are provided with a copy of this at the initial visit stage, setting out the LA duties.

The Statement clearly addresses the supporting criteria as set out in the standard one.

**National Minimum Standard 2.1 Local Authorities have to promote awareness of Private Fostering and the notification requirements to ensure that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification.**

**The local authority:**

**2.1 Promotes awareness of the notification requirements and ensures that those professionals who may come into contact with privately fostered children understand their role in notification;**

### **2.2 Responds effectively to notifications; And deals with situations where an arrangement comes to their attention, which has not been notified.**

We received 47 Private Fostering notifications between April 17 and March 18 this is 22 more notifications than the year of April 2016 – 2017

April 2018 to January 2019 we received 21 Private Fostering Notifications

The Local Authority has a Duty to respond to all Private Fostering notifications in their area, by visiting the child and carer within 7 working days.

There were no child in need or child protection concerns identified at the initial visit.

From the 47 Private Fostering notifications, 17 were Private Fostering arrangements, 30 notifications were either living with close family member, aged 16 or returned to the care of a parent within 28 days of the Private Fostering notification.

Since 2017 Thurrock Social Care started to receive Private Fostering notifications via the Home Language School, where people care for a child from overseas for a period of 11 weeks, to provide them with an educational experience of living within a family in the UK. The Carer has to provide a number of hour's education per day and take the child on educational trips.

We presently have one Private Foster Carer in Thurrock providing this service. This carer has cared for two children at separated times for a period of 11 weeks. Both children were from the same orphanage in Russia. The Director of the Home Language School has been contacted by the Private Fostering SW to gain further information and the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) has been informed. The Director of Home Language contacted Thurrock in advanced to inform us of the second Home Language School placement. This is positive in the fact that the Director of Home Language School is now contacting Thurrock direct to report of any placements due to take place in Thurrock.

## Appendix 1

From the 21 Private Fostering notifications received since April 2018, 7 were for girls, 9 were for boys and 5 were for a sibling group of (3 brothers) and (2 brothers)

From of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 20 initial visits were completed within the 7 working days timescale. The one out of timescales was an open case with the Family Support Team, where Child in Need visits were being regularly completed and This case is now been joint worked by Private Fostering and the Family Support Team.

Out of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 7 were Private Fostering cases (3 were living in Essex and a referral was made to Essex Social Care to complete a Private Fostering initial visit)

Under the national minimum standards 2.1 the LA has a Duty to raise awareness of Private Fostering within Thurrock. Please see below our Private Fostering Action Plan of work undertaken 2018/19.

Month	Date	Plan Advertising/promotion/social Media	Training delivered
April 18	18 <sup>th</sup>	Film of PF interview for social media update.	
	23 <sup>rd</sup>	Twitter post	
	26 <sup>th</sup>	PF Large Banner and stand at Blackshots leisure centre	
May 18	4 <sup>th</sup>	Council Twitter and Facebook post.	
	18 <sup>th</sup>	Leaflets, Banner and stand at Grays Market	
June 18	8 <sup>th</sup>	Gazette ½ page advert	
	8 <sup>th</sup>	Information on Council Insight	
	8 <sup>th</sup>	Meeting to discuss PF awareness with Eileen	

## Appendix 1

	30 <sup>th</sup>	Augustin PF SW and recruitment officers. Large Banner and stand at the Gateway school Fete.	
July	2-6 <sup>th</sup>  3 <sup>rd</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> 3 <sup>rd</sup> 6 <sup>th</sup>  14/7/18 21/7/18	PF week, information on Council insight chief exec Blog via Eileen Augustin PF SW. Twitter and Facebook post Council Twitter Gazette article and case study Leaflet and stand at Lakeside Twitter and Facebook Large Banner and stand at Port Tilbury Open Day	10/7/18 PF Workshop information session to Family Support teams 1 and 2.
August	3 <sup>rd</sup>  6 <sup>th</sup> 7 <sup>th</sup>  17 <sup>th</sup> 28 <sup>th</sup>	Email to churches inviting them to attend PF training. Twitter, facebook, council post Large Banner & stand at Grays Shopping Centre . Drop in at Grays Library Twitter, facebook, council post	
Sept 18	20/9/18  27/9/18  27/9/18	Advert in Gazette promoting PF training event. Large PF Banner and stand at Grays Town Centre Info on insight to promote PF training.	PF Workshop information session to MASH & CFAT.
Oct 18	2 <sup>nd</sup>  19 <sup>th</sup>	Large PF Banner and stand at Grays Town Centre PF training focused at medical	

## Appendix 1

	20 <sup>th</sup> 27 <sup>th</sup>	centres. Council facebook and Twitter Filming for PF advert for facebook and twitter.	
Nov 18	12 <sup>th</sup>  Nov- Dec	Health Visitor training at NELET Large advert on the Give a gift Screen at Lake side	
Dec 18	Ongoing	Gazette ½ page advert Council facebook and twitter Leaflet at Lakeside shopping to raise awareness	
Jan 19	7 <sup>th</sup> 20 <sup>th</sup>	Council facebook and twitter Gazette ½ page, advertising training. Leaflet at Lakeside shopping to raise awareness	
Feb 19	4/2/19  4/2/19	Council Facebook and twitter POST.  Private Fostering training to SWs, Health, education and nurseries. Com Rm 1 (10AM – 12)	
March 19		Council facebook and twitter Gazette ½ page advert.	

We fully understand the importance of Private Fostering awareness across Thurrock and dedicate a lot of time to this.

National Minimum Standard 3

**The Local Authority determines effectively the suitability of all aspects of the private fostering arrangements in accordance with regulations.**



## Appendix 1

Private Fostering initial visits are completed within seven working days from the date of notification. If the arrangement is Private Fostering then a full Private Fostering Assessment is completed within 42 working days in line with the Assessment Framework. In addition to the assessment, a Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) is obtained for everyone within the household aged 16 years and over, along with local authority checks.

The Private Fostering Social Worker makes a recommendation as to whether or not the Private Fostering Arrangement is satisfactory. This is then viewed and signed by the Team Manager.

Private Foster Carers are notified in writing of the outcome of the assessment. In cases where it is felt that the Private Fostering Arrangement is not satisfactory, the Private Fostering Carer may be requested to make some changes to meet requirements. Where this is not felt possible the parents of the child will be contacted and will be advised of the need to remove their child from the Private Foster Carer. All child protection concerns are referred to MASH.

### **National Minimum Standard 4**

**The Local Authority provides advice and support to private fostercarers and prospective private foster carers.**

All Private Foster carers are initially given an information pack which includes; The Private Fostering Statement of Purpose and leaflets on; Private Fostering, Special Guardianship Orders, Thurrock family information service, and the complaint/improvement form. Within this pack is also a feedback form on the service they received from the Private Fostering Social Worker and contact details of the Private Fostering Team.

All Private Foster Carers are encouraged to attend the Skills to Foster Training. All private foster carers are provided with the annual training calendar, this is discussed

## Appendix 1

within supervision with the Private Fostering Social Worker and carers are encouraged to attend training.

Supervision with Private Foster Carers is every four weeks within the first year, every eight – ten weeks in the second year and every ten – twelve weeks thereafter (more if requested) The Private Fostering Social Worker will provide the Private Fostering Carer with support and advice on;

- Private Fostering in general and the agreement between the carer/s and parent.
- The needs of the child and child development.
- Education
- Health.
- Housing.
- Benefits.
- Contact between the child and family.
- How to access community-based resources.
- Immigration advice

### **National Minimum Standard 5**

**The local authority provides advice and support to the parents of children who are privately fostered within their area as appears to the authority to be needed.**

The Private Fostering Social Worker strives to establish a good working relationship with all parents of children Privately Fostered, during the course of establishing the arrangements and throughout the Private Fostering arrangement. For parents living abroad this is often completed via phone and through emails. All parents are sent leaflets on Private Fostering and a letter from the Department explaining the role of the Private Fostering Social Worker and their contact details.

### **National Minimum Standard 6**

**Children who are privately fostered are able to access information and support when required so that their welfare is safeguarded and promoted. Privately fostered children are enabled to participate in decisions about their lives.**

During the monitoring visits, the Social Worker will see the child alone. This time is used to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings about the arrangement and the care they are receiving. The child/young person's wishes and feelings also form part of the private fostering assessment.

All children in private fostering arrangements are given a leaflet about private fostering which includes the contact details of their Social Worker. They are also given a Children's Guide for Private Fostering, this fully explains Private Fostering and provides a range of telephone numbers that the child can contact for support or advice.

The Private Fostering Social Worker fully explores with the child their understanding of the Private Fostering Arrangement and their view on this which is included within the assessment and monitored throughout the placement. The Private Fostering Social Worker will make a referral to other agencies where it is felt that extra support is required and support the child/young person through this.

### **National Minimum Standard 7**

**The local authority has in place and implements effectively a system for monitoring the way in which it discharges its duties and functions in relation to private fostering. It improves practice where this is indicated as necessary by the monitoring system.**

The Private Fostering Social Worker receives supervision on a monthly basis; the session is used to examine all the private fostering arrangements, to ensure that Duties are carried out in accordance with the Standards and that any support needed is explored and offered as practically possible.

Monthly returns are compiled to establish whether duties are carried out in accordance with the Standards, and to ascertain whether the advertising and promotional activities have been effective.

All duties that are discharged in relation to private fostering are routinely recorded. Apart from promoting best practice, this enables a range of accurate management reports to be obtained.

**We presently have 5 children privately fostered. This includes;**

- 1 young female aged 15 of black African origin, living with her cousin.
- 1 young female aged 14 of black African origin living with her great aunt.
- 1 young male (Transgender) aged 15 of white British origin living with step-father (never married to his mother) both biological parents deceased. This case is joint worked between PF and Family Support Team.
- 1 young female aged 12, of black African origin, living with Step-grandmother who has recently separated from biological grandfather. Case worked jointly with Family Support Team.
- 1 young female aged 15 of black African/Irish origin living with her second cousin.

**6 Private Fostering Placements have ended since April 18;**

- 1 male aged 12 of black Caribbean Origin, carer was granted a Special Guardianship Order.
- 1 female aged 14 of white British Origin, father moved in with PF carer.
- 1 Young female of black African origin became 16 on the 13/5/18 and therefore no longer PF.
- 1 young male aged 14 of white British ethnicity moved to Newham. A referral was sent to Newham notifying them of the Private Fostering Arrangement.
- 1 young male aged 15 of Russian origin, returned home after 11 weeks home language visit to UK.
- 1 female aged 12 of black African origin returned to care of parents

## Appendix 1

Notifications increased within April 17 – March 18 from 25 to 47 notifications reflecting the continuous work around Private Fostering Awareness, especially with Education, Health and Social Care.

Our notifications continue to predominately come from Education and Social Care, which is generally the first port of call re; children being registered at a school or Child Protection concerns raised to social care.

Private Fostering still need to link more into faith groups, which continues to be a struggle. This year within the service we will be working directly with faith groups.

Our Private Fostering Arrangements within Thurrock come from a diverse group including the indigenous population predominantly white British Teenagers living away from parents, due to difficulties within the family home.

We have found that Private Foster Carers for oversea arrangements tend to struggle with Social Care involvement. This is generally due to them caring for a close friend or family member's child to gain a better education and struggling to understand why Social Care needs to be involved, when there are no concerns about the child and their educational reports are good. Whilst this is often the case, Private Foster Carers are continually informed of the need for regular social care involvement. Private Foster Carers are informed that all children separated from their parents and close family members are vulnerable and will continued to be visited regularly.

Private Fostering cases that include white British teenagers living with a friend or distant family member, tend to be open cases to Family Support Teams and are worked jointly with Private Fostering. Private Foster Carers caring for white British teenagers generally want social care support. This is mainly due to the circumstances around why the young person feels unable to live with their parent/s and the negative effects this has upon the young person and their education.

The Private Fostering Social Worker continues to work closely with the UK boarder Agency regarding the immigration status for children placed in Private Fostering Arrangements from overseas.

## Appendix 1

At the time of writing this report we have 5 children in Private Fostering Arrangements. All children and carers are visited within the statutory timescales. The Placement Assessment Team continues to ensure that all Private Fostering Arrangements with Thurrock are carefully monitored and supervised.

Julia Sutton  
Team Manager  
Fostering Assessment Team

# Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting

**Year:** 2019/2020

**Dates of Meetings:** 4 June 2019, 10 September 2019, 7 January 2020 & 3 March 2020

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>4 June 2019</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance	Janet Simon/Mandy Moore	Officers
Overview of Academic Year 2018/19	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Fostering and Adoption Statements of Purpose	Dan Jones	Officers
Fostering/Adoption Panel Reports	Dan Jones	Officers
Private fostering Annual report	Julia Sutton	Officers
Care Leavers Presentation	Michele Lucas	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>10 September 2019</b>		
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children - Sufficiency Placement	Sheila Murphy/Sue Green	Officers
Annual Report for the VSHT	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>7 January 2020</b>		
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers

Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>3 March 2020</b>		
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey  
Last Updated: 15 May 2019