

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 **10 September 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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1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 12
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 4 June 2019.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	
4 Declaration of Interests	

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Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Kenna Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **2 September 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 4 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Jennifer Smith
	Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Apologies:	Councillors Sue MacPherson
In attendance:	Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children Mark French, Personal Advisor, Children's Services Dan Jones, Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School Julia Sutton, Fostering Team Manager Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 March 2019 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Councillor Redsell declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she was involved in a looked after child case.

4. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Looked after Children presented the report to Members and in doing so explained referrals into Children Services had fluctuated over the last six months. The Committee were informed that when comparing data over the last six months with the same period from last year, there was an increase of eight contacts.

Members were notified the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan due to concern about abuse or neglect had reduced. This was due to fewer plans being complied and the length of time children were subject to plans was being reduced. The number of children looked after for 2019 had also reduced and were now in line with the Councils statistical neighbours.

The Strategic Lead for Looked after Children advised the Committee the percentage of referrals received that related to a child previously referred within a 12 month period were monitored and on average the percentage of repeat referrals had increased from 10.6% for 2017/2018 to 13.3% for 2018/2019.

She continued to advise Members the average time for a child from entering care to being placed with adopters had reduced from an average of 565 days in 2015/2017 to 423 days this year. This was higher than the Eastern Regions average of 378, however was lower than the National average of 486.

It was explained that children with missing episodes had also reduced from 26 at the start of the year to 19 as of March 2019. The number of new foster carers being approved between April 2018 and March 2019. The Committee were informed the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training had risen from 61% last year to 65% for 2018/2019. This was better than similar authorities where the average was 50.89%.

The Chair of the Committee queried as to the reason children were placed with in-house foster carers. Officers explained there was a matching process which also took into account if a child had any siblings. By placing children with in-house foster carers, meant that additional support could be provided if it was required.

Councillor Johnson commented that as Thurrock was not geographically the same as the Eastern Region, why were comparisons being made. He further stated he felt it would be best if Thurrock was compared with its static neighbours.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services**
- 2. That any specific areas of interest were flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

5. Validated Attainment Outcomes for Children Looked After 2018

Presented by the Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After, the report detailed raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After was a key priority for Thurrock Council.

It was mentioned that the Department for Education (DFE) published validated attainment data in March 2019, which detailed the results for Children Looked After and provides comparative data against National Children Looked After.

The Committee were first informed of the year 1 phonics screening check, which was undertaken in June. Members were advised that as yet there was no national data provided by the DFE linked to Children Looked After. The percentage of children who reached the expected standard has increased compared to the previous year, the Committee were further advised for 2018 there were 6 pupils in the cohort and the pass rate was 67%.

Members were notified since 2016 KS1 assessments were no longer reported as levels and as such could not be compared to previous years. Therefore when comparing performance, the overall three year trend for Key Stage 1 pupils was very positive for reading and writing. However, it was highlighted that there was an issue relating to maths attainment.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After went on to explain KS2 results were also no longer reported as levels, with each pupil receiving their test results as a scaled score and teacher assessments based on the standards in the interim framework. For the whole Thurrock CLA cohort the statistics for those achieving the expected standard were reading 65%, GPS 59%, maths 71% and writing 65%.

She continued to inform Members for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) who had been in care for 12+ months; their attainment across a three year period had improved.

The Chair stated she was pleased to receive the report and its results for the boroughs Looked After Children. She sought clarity as to why writing results for KS2 had dropped for 2018. It was explained the exams for KS2 were teacher assessed and it was assumed that teachers were aiming on the side of caution, instead of over unfluctuating results.

It was commented that year 6 pupils were given a voucher once they had completed their exams. The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After explained that this was a new initiative for 2019 and children would be gifted with a £30 WH Smith voucher to allow them to purchase their stationery in preparation for secondary school. In addition to this revision packs were being created for Year 10 pupils with top tips for revision, preparing them for their GCSEs.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Noted 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.**
- 2. Recognised that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 3. Noted that prior attainment for pupils will impact on attainment in later years and that Thurrock CLA in care have made good progress.**
- 4. Had a clear picture of the attainment and progress outcomes for pupils who are looked after and also have a Special Educational Need or Disability.**

6. Fostering Statements of Purpose

The Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager introduced the report to the committee explaining the fostering statement of purpose set out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. The Statement of Purpose related to the Fostering Service provided by the Fostering Placement Support Team and the Placement Assessment Team.

Members were notified that the statement outlined the recruitment, approval, assessment, support and monitoring of the fostering service. The Committee was further notified of the establishment of the recruitment team which had grown significantly within the last year. The team had been very successful generating knowledge about fostering with more advertising and interest from the general public and this was providing to be beneficial to the service. It was mentioned that within the fostering support team an interim manager had been placed. Officers advised the Statement also include a Framework of decisions and placements offered for children with a variety of needs.

The Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager was hopeful that the recruitment drive would continue to be successful and would enable the team to not only gain new carers but to retain carers and to have a base of foster carers for Thurrock children.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and asked that for the new Members of the Committee that the term of bridging foster carers was clarified. It was explained that bridging foster carers would take children on a short term basis or children that were in between placements or children that were going home.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

7. Adoption Statement of Purpose

Members were addressed by the Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager who explained the report set out the roles and purpose of the Adoption Service, including the recruitment and approval of families hoping to adopt. It was further explained that the statement also highlighted the matching service for children, to ensure their needs were met.

Members were advised since the Adoption Service had been brought back in-house, there were 4 families who were currently going through the process to ensure it was fit for purpose, with the aim of setting the process live in July 2019.

Clarity was sought on the report where it mentioned adoption from other countries. Officers explained this covered the assessments of application and approval for people to adopt children from other countries. At present the service was being provided by the in-house adoption team, so any families looking to adopt children from overseas would in the first instant contact the Local Authority.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose.

8. Fostering and Adoption Panel Reports

Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager introduced the report confirming that the fostering and adoption panel was a join panel which heard both fostering and adoption cases. The Committee were made aware that the panel had a duty to produce a report every year. Members were advised that officers had met with the chair of the panel and discussed a development plan.

During questions from the Committee it was confirmed that sibling assessments were undertaken to ensure where possible siblings were kept together. It was also explained how to become a member of the panel and that the elected member currently sitting was Councillor Little.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about the function and activities of Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel.

9. Private Fostering Report

The Fostering Team Manager explained that Private Fostering was a private arrangement between a parent and someone other than a close relative. Private Fostering occurred when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if

disabled) was cared for and provided with accommodation, by an adult who was not a relative for 28 days or more. The Committee heard Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. In most cases a birth parent selects and arranges private foster placements, which could take many forms.

Members were informed that should it be necessary, then evidence of the relationship between the adult and the child was sought. With this the School Admissions team also assisted the private fostering team, in that if the relationship on an application form was not one of parent, then this was followed up to seek who was looking after the child. It was made clear that the main responsibility of the team was to ensure that any child not living with a parent was safe.

It was then explained to Members that should a child not leave their property or home and were being looked after by someone other than their parent then this was not classed as private fostering.

The Committee were notified the team received 47 Private Fostering notifications between April 2017 and March 2018 this was 22 more notifications than 2016/2017. From of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 20 initial visits were completed within the 7 working days timescale.

Officers further explained that different forms of advertizing had been produced for children and adults, this included newspapers, GP Surgeries and social media. On top of which the team also held information sessions and training days for schools.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After enquired as to if referrals were coming through schools, how were the team receiving referrals for younger children who were not of school age. Officers explained that training as also been given to Health Visitors and those in contact with young children and babies.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed in respect of children Privately Fostered in Thurrock.

10. Care Leavers

The Personal Advisor within Children's Services presented Members of the Committee with a presentation on Care leavers into Employment, Education and Training.

A copy of the presentation can be found as a supplementary to the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the Presentation given by Officers.

11. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee discussed the work programme for the up and coming year.

RESOLVED:

That the following reports be included on the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020:

- **10 September 2019 – Focus group work with foster carers**
- **10 September 2019 – Looked After Children Pledge**
- **10 September 2019 – Forster Care Case Studies**
- **10 September 2019 – Local Offer for Care Leavers**
- **07 January 2020 – Head start Housing**

The meeting finished at 8.40 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

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10 September 2019		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Local Offer to Care Leavers		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Not Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead for Children Looked After		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director, Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report is to update Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on Thurrock's Local Offer to Care Leavers.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Local Offer to Care Leavers

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers.

2.2 This report sets out Thurrock's offer to its Care Leavers and what support the local authority will provide to its care leavers.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

These are included in Appendix 1 attached to this report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of Thurrock Council's Offer to Care Leavers and how we are meeting these.

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

- 5.1 Care Leavers have been consulted in preparing this report.

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

- 6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

Extending the Personal Advisor duty to age 25.

The major implication is in respect of the requirement to extend the provision of advice and support, a personal advisor (PA) and a pathway plan to young people up to 25 who are not in education or training. The legislation also affects young people who are present in the UK, but have no recourse to public funds such as former UASC.

7.2 Legal

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

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 also requires local authorities to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to looked-after children and care experienced young people. The local offer should set out what support all local authorities will provide (not just Children's Services), having regard to the corporate parenting principles.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The 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. . Placements and Staff members represent 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 - Local Offer for Young Adults Leaving Our Care

Report Author:

Janet Simon

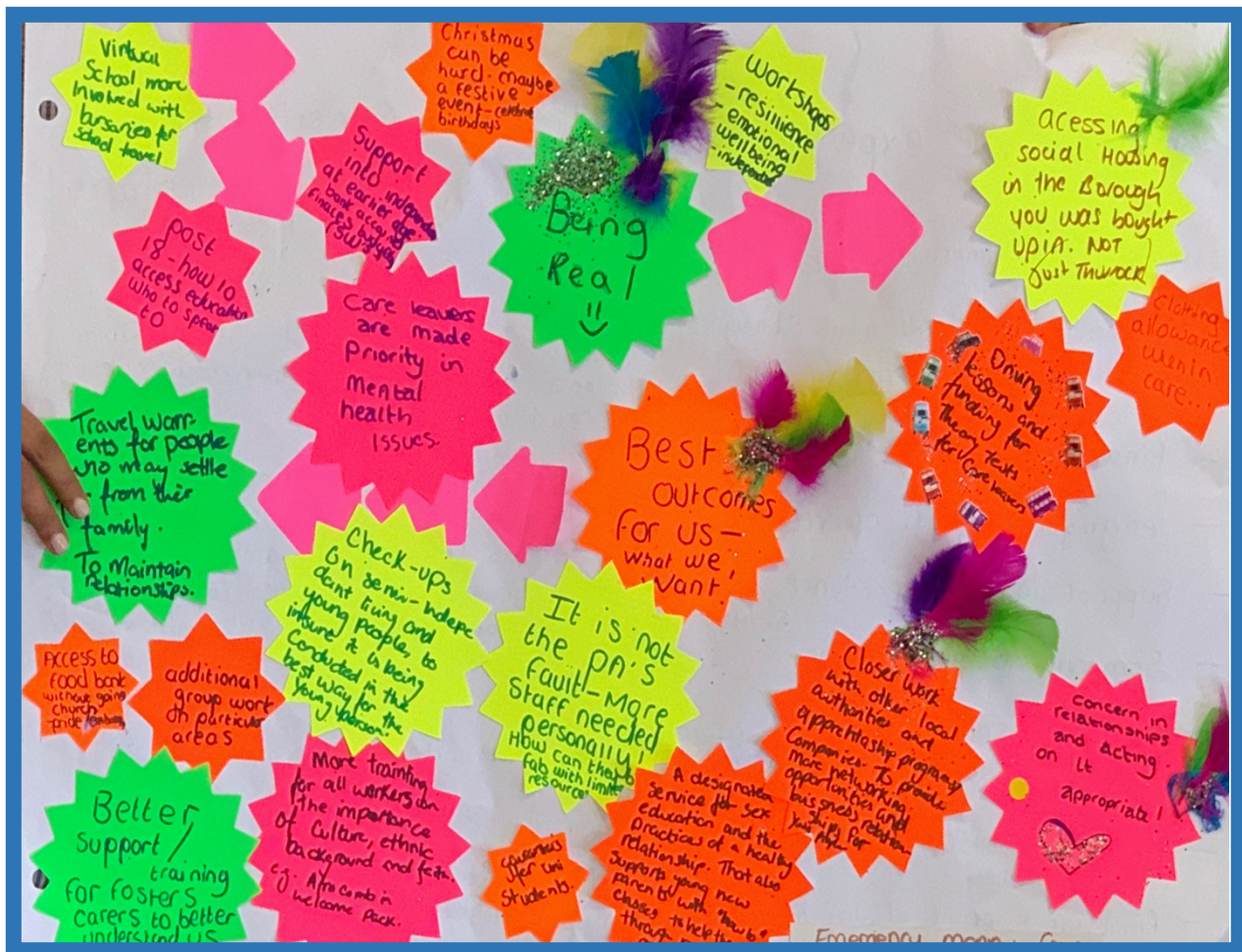
Strategic Lead, Children Looked After

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Local Offer for Young Adults

Leaving our Care

Improving the experiences young people receive when preparing to make their transition into early adulthood and beyond.



Local Offer for Young Adults Leaving Our Care

Welcome to the Local Offer for young adults leaving care in Thurrock

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a legal responsibility on all local authorities to write and publish a list of services that all care leavers will be able to access after they reach the age of 18 years. This is called the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

This is Thurrock's local offer to support our young people leaving the care of Thurrock Council. The offer is focused on achieving best outcomes for our care leavers and, providing all young adults leaving care in Thurrock with the best possible chance of success. This offer carries on the themes within Thurrock's Children Looked After Children and Care Leavers sufficiency strategy.

As Corporate parents, we aspire only for the best for our children and young people and we are focused on our commitments and responsibilities in that 'parental' role. We held an engagement event with Care Leavers in July 2019 to consider carefully what corporate parents should know and the skills required to meet their needs.



Charter for care leavers in Thurrock

We have a responsibility to children and young people in our care, and to our care leavers.

Our charter for care leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living
- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger

What the Children and Social Work Act 2017 says about the Care Leaver Offer

- (1) A local authority in England must publish information about-
 - (a) services which the local authority offers for care leavers as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989;
 - (b) other services which the local authority offers that may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living.
- (2) For the purposes of subsection (1), services which may assist care leavers in, or in preparing for, adulthood and independent living include services relating to-
 - (a) health and well-being;
 - (b) relationships;
 - (c) education and training;
 - (d) employment;
 - (e) accommodation;
 - (f) participation in society.
- (3) Where it considers appropriate, a local authority in England must publish information about services for care leavers offered by others which the local authority has power to offer as a result of its functions under the Children Act 1989.
- (4) Information required to be published by a local authority under this section is to be known as its “local offer for care leavers”.

The Care Leavers Local Offer in Summary

- 1.** Care leavers covenant
- 2.** Your home
- 3.** Education, employment and training
- 4.** Health and wellbeing

5. Money (helping you manage your money)
6. Preparing to leave our care
7. Participation in society:
8. Entitlements: Accessing my files/Advocacy and complaints

1. **Care leavers covenant**

Thurrock expects all young adults leaving care to have the same opportunities for education, employment and training as children growing up in their birth families homes.

Have you heard about the care leaver covenant? www.mycovenant.org.uk

The covenant is a pledge made by public, private and voluntary organisations to support all young adults leaving care to be successful. What does this mean I hear you say - well, in a nutshell, it details many exciting opportunities for young adults leaving care to apply for from employment work with placements and internships with big businesses, government departments, museums, theatres, or Premier League football clubs, as well as training workshops or life-skills coaching.

In addition to the private and voluntary sector offers of support, the package of support for young adults leaving care includes:

- 12-month internships from every government department in Whitehall, including 100 12-month internships from January 2019;
- Support from universities, such as bursaries and accommodation, with Cambridge, Leeds, and Manchester universities committing to supporting care leavers - data shows that only 6 per cent of care leavers aged 19 to 21 go on to higher education; and
- Resources and tools from Barclays Life Skills to help care leavers to manage their money better, as they often lack the safety net of financial support from their families.

Watch this space for developments on this and how Thurrock expects to be able to 'offer' young adults leaving care local opportunities.

It could not be easier to access, through the free to download app, Care Leaver Covenant App.

2. Your home

Where will I live?



One of the most important decisions we must agree with you as a Young Adult leaving our care is where you are going to live. It is very important that wherever you live, it is safe and feels like a home.

Your PA is here to help you with this, working through the options available to you and helping you to decide on what will be best for you at that time. All plans for where you live will need to be included in your Pathway Plan and agreed at your reviews.

If you are living with foster carers and want to stay there after you become 18, if both you and the foster carer agree, we will support you to remain there. This is called 'Staying Put'. A Staying Put arrangement refers to a situation where a young person who has been looked after for a total of at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and is living within a foster placement when they turn 18 continues to live there after their 18th birthday. It requires Local Authorities to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21. The principle guiding the new legislation is to offer young adults, the option to remain living with their foster carers until they feel ready to move on to live independently.

If you have been living in a residential care environment like a children's home, we will help you to stay in touch with special adults there. We will usually try to help you to live locally in Thurrock, so you may see less of them but this is something you could write into your pathway plan if it is important to you. If you have important links and have an established support network away from Thurrock and wish to remain there we will try and support this where possible.

Having somewhere, warm and safe to live is very important. If you were living with your family or with your parents, it is unlikely you would move away to live alone at the young age of 18 years old. That is why in Thurrock, we will encourage you to stay living with the carers you know, or very close by, so that you have good support.

We will worry about whether you are ready to live alone and we will discuss it together a lot. Your pathway plan will make very clear what is good for you, what you want and how we are going to manage this together.

We want it to be 'good for you' so this is one of the most important things about your future planning!

Our commitment is to make sure you have a home that is safe and "homely" and able to match your specific needs. Our options for where you can live once you are 18 Include:

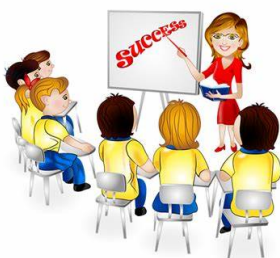
- ❖ Staying put - We will help you remain with a foster family (if you are already living with that family after turning 18) for as long as possible. Moves to semi-independence or full independence will only happen when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready to make this happen.
- ❖ You will be placed on the housing register as soon as you turn 18 years old. This will mean that when you are ready for a permanent home, you can begin to consider a social housing home.
- ❖ Supported accommodation - perhaps a shared house or flat, where you have your own room but share some facilities with other young people and receive support from a housing support officer.
- ❖ A Shared Lives/ Supported lodgings type arrangement might also be an option. This is sharing with an adult who will be there to help if you need it, but who will also be able to support you to live independently in their home.

- ❖ Independent accommodation from a housing association or a privately rented landlord.
- ❖ Returning to live with your family.
- ❖ When you are ready, a permanent home with either a social housing or private housing tenancy will be considered. Your legal status as a 'Care Leaver' gives you the right to be accepted on to the housing list, however, it is important that this does not happen until you feel able to live completely on your own and manage the responsibilities like paying all your bills on time. We can plan for this when we are writing your pathway plan. We will make sure your name is on Thurrock's housing register from the age of 18 years old.

Moving to live on your own is a massive step; it's not just about paying bills and cooking your own food. It's also about staying healthy and getting on with your neighbours. Your social worker/Personal Adviser will talk to you as part of the pathway planning process about the best ways for this to be a success that lasts.

- ❖ Moving in Day' – We will make sure that the right person is there to support you and make sure everything goes smoothly on your moving in day. We realise this can be an exciting but also scary time. Your PA will be there with you every step of the way for emotional and practical support. We will help you settle in and make sure all practical things are in place such as water, gas and electricity'.

3. Education, employment and training



Your PA will support you to access Thurrock's Inspire training and career services and you will receive the support from a specialist education and employment advisor. Helping you into education, employment or training.

As your corporate parent we have high ambitions for you and one of our priorities is to encourage and support you into a job that is good for you, make sure you know what options are available to you such as a university course, an apprenticeship or a training course.

We will help you get the funding you need in order to do well. Your PA will support you with any practical things that you may need.

Young adults leaving care can also access financial support for their education outside of Leaving care services. Some of this support is specifically for Young adults leaving care; your PA will support you with this.

At Thurrock, we believe that every single young adult can and should be able to work or study. Therefore your PA will stick by you when you are deciding what you wish to do – and will be there to give you a helping push and encouragement when you are unsure!

It does not matter if you have a gap in your education, you can always start again but should try to do this as soon as is reasonably possible

Leaving care services will help you to make applications that may financially support your education and training placements.

Financial support for young adults who have left our care and attend higher Education (university or at a college)

If you are a Young Adult leaving our care and attending Higher Education, you may be entitled to education equipment and living costs, ask your Personal Adviser for the current amounts. You are entitled to apply for student loans and grants. Usually you will not be able to claim benefits. Student loans and maintenance loans are administered by Student Finance. Both will need to be repaid when your earnings reach a certain amount when you have completed your course of further study. See student finance website for further information www.gov.uk/student-finance .

You may also be entitled to a Higher Education Bursary to meet the costs of your 'out of term' accommodation. Please visit the government funded website on supporting university finances for further information. www.gov.uk/extra-money-pay-university

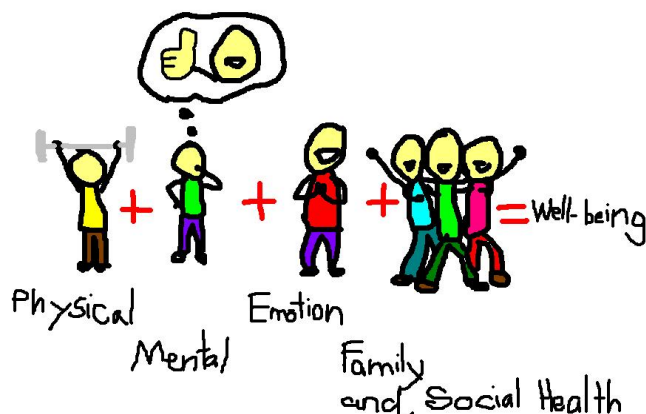
Two organisations which are useful to know about are Buttle UK, which is a charity who award universities a 'quality mark' for offering additional support to Young adults leaving care, and Propel, which is run by the Become charity. Both organisations are easy to access and offer good advice. Their details – and details of other charities which offer bursaries and grants are at the end of this document.

There are opportunities available which would look great on your CV too including:

1. Recruiting and interviewing new children's services professionals.
2. Meeting the elected members known as Councillors, to share your experience and help them to consider whether the services for children, young people and young adults are reaching the right people in the right way.
3. You could be involved in one of our focus groups. At different times throughout the year we may need to have a specific group to help us look at certain areas we would like to change or need advice on. It is important to us that young people are part of shaping the service that they receive.

Ask your PA for the details for our participation officer information about how to get involved.

4. Health and Wellbeing



We will help you prepare to be ready to leave care by supporting you to develop practical self-care and life skills, health, budgeting, domestic skills and personal and professional relationships.

You will receive a 'Health passport' which details your health history. Keep this safe for when you may need it. At the back of this book there are useful contacts of organisations which registering with the GP or a dentist. It is important that you take

care of yourself and speak to your PA about any health concerns you may have. Your pathway plan will also detail any health needs that you may have, remember to keep your PA updated.

5. Money



Your PA will help you to manage your money and understand any benefits you may be entitled to if you need to claim them. We do not assume that all our care leavers will need to claim benefits. We understand that the cost of things increase as time goes on and we will review our offer of financial support to care leavers yearly to make sure they are in line with any significant changes.

In addition, your PA will make sure that there is someone to support you in the event of a crisis or when things do not go according to plan.

Although you may still receive some financial support once you are 18, you will be expected to find your income from work, education grants and, if eligible, benefits. In most instances, we will not be responsible for your daily living costs.

Of course, we will not forget your birthdays and you will receive a birthday card from us up until you are 21 years old and your 21st birthday will be marked with a gift of £50 and where possible a meal. . There are of course also Christmas and other religious festivals that you may celebrate. We will mark these special times with a gift and, where possible, a visit.

Claiming benefits, if that is what you need, is not simple and you need to ensure you apply for everything you are entitled to. Your Personal Adviser will be able to help you

with this. You will need identification documents and a bank account for the benefits to be paid. Your PA will help you to get these in place before your 18th birthday, and support you to apply for your benefits before your birthday so that everything is set up to reduce any delays in payments. If you are receiving benefits and find yourself in a 'sanction' from the DWP, which usually means that you will receive no money, you should contact your Personal Adviser urgently.

Debt and money worries can have a serious impact on your well-being. In Thurrock, we would want to know as soon as you start to worry about having enough money. At that moment, WE WILL HELP YOU. We won't be able to give you more money than you are entitled to. BUT we will find ways for your life and living arrangements to be manageable.

DO NOT LEAVE THESE WORRIES UNRESOLVED. GET IN TOUCH.

Emergency Payments

There may be unexpected situations that arise that may leave you in a financial crisis or at risk of not being able to eat or heat your home.

In these times, a one-off emergency payment can be provided. We will talk to you about this option should the need arise.

Help with your rent

If you are over 18, living away from your family and are studying full-time in non-advanced education (up to and including A Level or equivalent), you can claim Housing Benefit. You can enrol in your course of study at any time up to your 21st birthday and can continue to receive these benefits up to the end of your studies or the end of the academic year in which you become 21 years old, whichever is earlier.

This help is also available to you if you have stayed on with your former foster carers.

Housing Benefit can pay for all or part of your rent. If you are likely to have difficulty paying your full rent, you can approach the council and ask for Discretionary Housing Payments. These are not guaranteed, but the council may be able to help you for a period until you find other accommodation or earn enough to pay your rent yourself.

Help with your council tax

Council Tax is a payment made to your local authority for local services such as collecting your rubbish clearing streets, running services (including providing social workers) and the local parks.

In 2018 Thurrock Council made a decision to exempt all care leavers living in the Thurrock area from payment of Council Tax up to the age of 25 years.

This means that as a young adult leaving the Council's care, you will not have to pay Council Tax if you live in Thurrock. This decision was made so that you have the best chance of success living independently. We hope that you will consider this as a signal that we want to support you and we want your future to be good!!

TV Licence

Everyone who watches TV, even if it is only via a catch-up service or online on your laptop has to have and pay for a licence. Payments can be divided up into weekly or monthly payments, and again, your PA will support you to apply. You are at risk of a fine or worse if you do not have a licence.

Setting up home allowance

It is an exciting time being able to choose your own furniture and how your home will look. We will provide you with a grant of £2000. This will not be given to you in one lump sum and will be spent with your Personal Adviser. The grant is not intended to meet the costs of personal support or accommodation costs. This payment is an important mark of your independence, so we will want you to spend it wisely and on things that will help you to make this important step towards independence.

Additional one off payments

In addition to any benefit or subsistence payments received, care leavers can also receive additional funding in the following circumstances:

Housing costs – dependent on financial assessment and agreement by the Corporate Director or Assistant Director of Children's Services.

Travel costs for attending a training course.

Fares to job and education interviews will be provided to young people not in education or training.

Travel warrant to support contact with your family if you or they live outside of Thurrock.

6. Preparing to leave care

We will be developing a new programme to help you with your 'future plans'. You will be hearing more about this soon and will likely be approached to participate in the development of this program.

7. Participation in Society



As your corporate parents we will be there to offer you advice and support. A big part of staying mentally and physically healthy is enjoying hobbies and interests.

We can make an agreement through your pathway plan about how we can support you to get involved in sporting activities or other leisure activities near where you live.

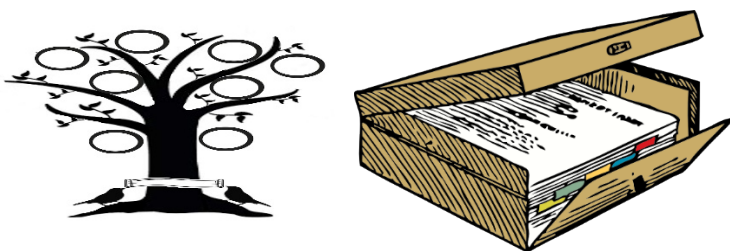
Your PA will have lots of details of clubs, community groups, and activities which may interest you, when you next speak with your PA ask for details.

If needed we can assist you to enrol on the electoral register, this is important so you can vote in Local and National elections, to have your voice heard.

We want to hear your views so we can improve the experience for other young adults leaving care.

You will be given the opportunity to get involved in a Care Leavers Group, training professionals, going on trips, participate in workshops and much more. Not only will this help boost your confidence but will also add to your CV.

8. Help to understand your history.



Entitlements and accessing my files

We will help you understand your rights and advocate on your behalf, helping you access information about you and providing support if you need to make a complaint.

Children's Services have to keep written case records of your care history. These records must be kept for 75 years. You can request your records any time after you become 18 years old. You do not have to read through the information on your own. It can be upsetting or confusing to do this alone. Your PA can support you or you can bring a friend.

We would strongly suggest that you do not do this on your own. You need to request to see your records in writing. Children's Services must then respond to you in writing giving the timescale for the viewing the files. It must happen within 40 days. You may find that some of the information is not available for you to read. This is because some of the information in your records may identify other people known as third parties. Additionally, if there is information that may seriously harm your physical or mental health it may not be given to you.

Our Commitments in Thurrock :

Getting ready for adulthood:

- ❖ We will help you with the changes that happen when you stop being a child who is 'looked after' and become a young adult leaving care. We will do this in a

supportive and positive way, making sure that you have the time it takes to be ready.

- ❖ We will help you remain with your foster family for as long as possible. We will only start thinking about independent living with you when you are practically, mentally and emotionally ready.
- ❖ We will help you maintain relationships with your carers, family, friends and social networks so that you have help and support during and after you leave our care.
- ❖ We will help you to understand what you need to be able to successfully live on your own and to be happy. We will also show you that we understand that leaving our care is a big step and that you need our patience and understanding, even when you make mistakes.

Practical help

- ❖ We will make it our priority to help you to find and keep a safe and welcoming home. We will make sure that you understand and take part in making your personal housing plan.
- ❖ We will help you learn how to take care of yourself, stay healthy and safe, manage your money, take care of your home, go to school, college or university, find a job, and have good relationships, able to raise families of your own if that is what you would like to do.
- ❖ We will understand that just because you become 18, this does not mean you will suddenly know all there is to know about being a responsible adult. We will help you to work out what being a responsible adult means, support you when you make mistakes and when we feel worried about you. We will make sure especially during the tough times, that we stand ready to help you.
- ❖ We will make sure that we see you every month (more regularly if we can) and more often when you first leave our care. We respect your choice to see us less if that is what you would like.
- ❖ We will help you to understand how to deal with conflicts and challenges without getting angry and frustrated at others or making things worse. We will help you

through our own example, being patient and understanding. When things don't go according to plan, we will help you make a plan B to fall back upon.

- ❖ We understand that as an adult you may make choices that are not good for you and may even mean that you are unsafe. We know that you are free to make such a choice, but we will always act to help you to protect yourselves and others around you. There may be times that we need to make contact with other services or people who can help you. If we need to do this, we will make sure that you know and are clear about what will happen next.
- ❖ We will help you to find special support, like therapy or counselling, when the time is right for you and if you tell us that this would help you.
- ❖ We will make sure that you feel part of our Thurrock "Corporate family" and like other families, we understand that you need to have a sense that you belong and are valued. We will help other people in the Council understand this when you may need their support, for example with housing or other services

Our relationship together

- ❖ We will always help you dream and aspire to be better than you are today.
- ❖ We will help you to believe that you will continue to grow and to succeed.
- ❖ Your pathway plan will be something that inspires you to achieve great things in your life, whatever that means for you.
- ❖ We will always listen to you, even when we don't agree with one another.
- ❖ We will hear you out and help you to speak your mind in a way that helps you be heard by others who need to listen.
- ❖ We will include you in all of the important decisions that need to be made about your life and your future.
- ❖ We will respect the times when you need some personal space or may not be ready to see or speak with us. We will always leave the door open so that you know you can seek us out when you are ready to receive our help or advice. You will receive help and support from us up until the age of 25.
- ❖ We will make sure that your current social worker or Personal Adviser does not leave you without saying goodbye and introducing you to the new adult who will be supporting you. All our new Personal Advisers will understand that getting to know you and to earn your trust will take time.

- ❖ We will help you identify the triggers that may lead you to become angry, lash out, hurt yourself or turn to drugs or alcohol to cope. We will help you plan for these situations and identify who you can turn to for help when you need it. If it is helpful, we will help you to make a safety plan so that you have some control at times when you feel vulnerable and worried.
- ❖ We will not make commitments to you unless we know we can honour them. We know that our honesty will be important if you are to trust and work with us. That may mean that sometimes we have to say things to you even when it may not be what you want or like to hear.
- ❖ We will help you to understand your history and how it is you came to be in our care. We recognise that having your life story book, pictures and mementoes are all important to your recalling important people and events in your life. We will support you if you find this upsetting and if you want to see your case files, we will make sure that your Personal Adviser is available to help you read through papers and to ask questions.
- ❖ We will make sure that you understand your rights and your responsibilities. This will include knowing who else can help you to express your views if you want to make a complaint because you feel you have been treated unfairly. If we are not able to keep these commitments to you, we understand that this will mean you may need to complain.
- ❖ We will always offer you a hug or a shoulder to cry on if that will help. It's ok for you to say no though!

We ask that you make the following commitments to us which we believe will support you

- Listen to and think about our advice and guidance, even if you don't always follow it.
- Let us know if you feel we are treating you unfairly or if we have made a mistake. We would like a chance to make things right.
- Accept our support, and let us know when you don't want or need our help.
- Understand that we have to make decisions about your safety when the law says we must or when you are in danger.
- Apologise and take responsibility for your actions when you make mistakes.

- Keep working hard on your goals, dreams and ambitions to the best of your ability.
- Be open and honest with us as much as possible.
- Tell us what your views, wishes and feelings are on anything we do to help.
- Let us know if you are in trouble or making decisions that are not good for you.
- So that we can have the best relationship together through these commitments, we ask that you try your very best to:
- Treat us with respect, even when you don't agree with suggestions we are making.
- Keep in touch with us as much as you can or feel comfortable with.

Summary - What should I expect?

You can expect the following support:

1. Your Personal Adviser will listen to you and help you with decisions that will affect your future - you will be provided with the information and support required to help you make decisions about where you are going to live, what you are going to do and how we are going to support you to look after yourself.

This means:

2. You will always have a Personal Advisor by your 18th birthday. Where possible, we will allocate a Personal Adviser to you by the time you are 16 1/2 years old. Where you have an allocated Personal Advisor, you will decide with them and your social worker how they will support you on your journey to young adulthood and beyond.
3. We will, together with you, develop an individual Pathway Plan which clearly sets out what you need, your aspirations, goals, including where you will live, study and work.
4. Provide you with somewhere safe to live and help you make it your home.
5. Offer you a clear financial plan setting out the money you will have to spend on everything, including rent, bills, travel, food and your well-being.
6. Support you with education, training and employment opportunities.
7. Help you to be healthy.

8. Provide you with a health passport which will include your health history and health needs.
9. Ensure you have a passport, national insurance number and birth certificate.
10. Ensure we listen to you and share with you clearly what you can do if you are not happy about something.
11. We will help you with contact with your family if you want this and it is safe for this to happen. Obviously as an adult, you are free to make your own choices, but we will help you to think about what will work or not.

Who will support you?

Thurrock's Aftercare Service is here to help support you as you learn to live more independently. Your Personal Adviser will help to make positive and ambitious plans for your future.

As a young adult leaving care you will have an allocated Personal Adviser (PA) where possible from the age of 16 ½ years but at a minimum by your 18th birthday. Your Social Worker, your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and your Personal Adviser where allocated will start to talk with you about a new plan for your future, called 'a pathway plan'. This plan will set out the things you need as you prepare to live your life independently when you are 18 years old. Your pathway plan must be an important part of your journey to leaving our care and we will help you write it so that you understand the support you have as you make decisions about where you will live, the job you do or the education and training you want to continue.

Your social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who know you well, will remain responsible, with you, for your pathway plan until you are 18. In the year and a half whilst we support you to prepare for your 18th birthday, we really hope that a new and important relationship will develop with your Personal Adviser. They will become an important adult in your life until you are 25 years old. Please do think of your pathway plan as being as important as a guide for you, that you have a shorter copy on your fridge or somewhere you can see it regularly so that you stay hopeful about your future!

How will I be involved?

For your Pathway Plan to be effective it will be based on your current needs, setting out the support that will be offered to you to achieve your aspirations.

As already mentioned, you will be fully involved in the development of the Plan and you will be offered support from your PA, your Social Worker and your IRO to express your wishes and views for your pathway plan review meetings as well.

What will be included in my pathway plan?

- Relationships and Support
- Accommodation arrangements
- Education, Training and Employment
- Health and Development
- Independent Living Skills
- Family and Social Networks

Your Personal Adviser will help you to develop and work with a support network which may include family, friends, cultural or religious organisations, and other support services or professionals.

Your Personal Adviser will visit you as frequently as you need to give you the maximum amount of support. At a minimum, your Personal Adviser will always visit when you move in to a new house, or when your PA is new to you, within 3 weeks. They will also stay in contact with you every eight weeks. However, you can request to see your PA more frequently.

Your pathway plan is important for you and for us so that we can agree goals that support your future needs and aspirations. We have high ambitions for you; therefore it is important that you are involved in the writing of your plan.

When writing your plan, we will focus on what is working well, what you may be worried about, and what practical things need to happen to make your plan work for you. We must check what is working with your plan at least every 6 months, but life changes happen so often that it would usually be more regular. Remember, your plan belongs to you. If you want us to look at it at any time and make changes, please ask. This is your life, you are in control of much of it, and we are here to make it a happy and safe one.

Birthdays, festivals and other significant moments in life

All young adults leaving care will receive a birthday card from their PA, a good luck phone call ahead of exams, and communication on the first day of a new job.

What if I need immigration support?

You may be a young adult leaving our care who was or is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child and have an application with the Home Office which is under consideration for asylum and refugee status.

Sometimes, these applications can take a long time, sometimes years, to process during which time you will not have permanent status in the UK nor be able to work or receive regular benefits. However, you will be entitled to support from the care leavers service including funding for housing, subsistence, healthcare and prescriptions.

It will be important that these considerations are planned with you as much in advance as possible before you reach 18 years of age. You can ask your Personal Adviser for further information on what support you are entitled to and how to appeal decisions.

If your leave to remain status is approved, this will normally last for five years and be subject to review. It will also grant you the right to work and possibly claim benefits during this period. Further discretionary periods of leave to remain can also be granted and you will be assisted to make an application for further leave to remain.

As part of your pathway plan, it will be important to talk about what happens if application for leave to remain in the UK is denied.

Your Personal Adviser will explore the appeals routes as well as what happens if you are facing removal from the UK and how this may need to be planned.

If your appeal rights are exhausted, we can continue to financially support you until it is time for you to leave the UK and we will support you emotionally and practically to consider your options. The important thing to remember is that we will not abandon you!

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10 September 2019		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead Children Looked After Sue Green, Strategic Lead Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director, Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report is to updates Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee on Thurrock's Placement Sufficiency Strategy

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Sufficiency Strategy and actions

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Local Authority has a statutory duty to produce a Placement Sufficiency Strategy which outlines how it will fulfil its responsibilities in terms of Children Looked After and Care Leavers. These are outlined in the report.
- 2.2 This strategy is focused on plans to meet the placement needs of children who are in care and young people who have recently left the care of the local authority and those who may be in care in the future.

- 2.3 Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that:
- is near the child's home;
 - does not disrupt his/her education or training;
 - enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
 - where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
 - is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 These are included in the attached strategy.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of how Thurrock Council are meeting its Placement Sufficiency Duties.

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: **David May**
Management Accountant

This report is an information report and as such is not requesting any funding. The Placement Sufficiency Strategy is a central part in the departments savings plans with value for money

7.2 Legal

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

Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development Officer

The 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. Placements and Staff members represent 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, or Impact on Children Looked After)

- 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 - Children Looked After and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Children Looked After Pledge
- Appendix 3 - Charter for Care Leavers

Report Author:

Janet Simon – Strategic Lead Children Looked After

Sue Green – Strategic Lead Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy

This version date	22/08/2019
Version number	Final
Review Frequency	Annually
Next review date	September 2020

Introduction

Children in Care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is our priority to ensure that all children in our care and their families receive the best possible support. This strategy outlines a review of the needs of our children and young people who are looked after and Care Leavers by Thurrock Council and our approach to addressing these.

Meeting the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents and a priority across the council and its partners. It is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents, to support each of our care leavers as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their maximum potential.

Our vision is to provide sufficient high quality placements for children and young people which understand their aspirations and ambitions and can support them to fulfil their potential. We aspire for our Care Leavers to have all the necessary skills and support to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence at a time that is right for them individually.

We want to make sure that we have appropriate placement and accommodation options, both now and in the future, that support our looked after children to achieve the best possible outcomes, whilst ensuring best use of available resources.

By working together across the service and with our partners responsible for children looked after we are focused on delivering the services children and young people need and deserve to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

A handwritten signature in grey ink, reading 'S. Murphy'.

Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children's Social Care

Our Vision for Thurrock

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

When a child becomes Looked After, the local authority becomes their “Corporate Parent” responsible for them during their period as a child who is looked after and when they leave Care. Every parent wants the best for their child. In Thurrock, we believe that where possible and in children’s best interest, children should live with their families or their communities. It is not always possible for children to remain with their families due to risk of harm or because they have been harmed.

We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they leave our care at the right time. We want our children looked after to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.

Members and senior leaders in the Council are committed to running the best possible services and ensuring that children within Thurrock remain safe. Members from all parties support children’s social care and provide support and challenge through the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The current Portfolio Holder is a passionate supporter of children’s social care, attends the Social Care Development Board and is a member of the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Sufficiency Duty

Legal context

Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on local authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority’s area, which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority’s area.

Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a child looked after that:

- is near the child’s home;
- does not disrupt his/her education or training;
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- is within the local authority’s area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children 2010) which states that:

“Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of looked after children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for looked after children.”

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the Local Authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the “market management”
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of “looked after” children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families

Thurrock the Place

There are 27,784 children on the school roll (School Census 2017 - the School Census is a statutory data collection report developed for all maintained nursery, primary, secondary, middle-deemed primary, middle-deemed secondary, local authority maintained, special and non-maintained special schools, academies including free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges and city technology colleges in England). There are 45,265 children and young people under the age of 18 years in Thurrock accounting for 26.3% of the population (2018). The population of children and young people is expected to increase by 11.2% in the next ten years.

Alongside existing increases in the child population in Thurrock there is expected to be a rapid economic and housing growth over the next decade. It is expected that the population of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years will rapidly increase as a result. It is highly likely, therefore, that the numbers of children looked after in Thurrock will also grow. In order to account for this expected population growth, the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) population projections take into account the high levels of job and housing growth expected to take place in Thurrock in the coming years to provide a more realistic forecast of population growth than the standard Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts.

The child (0-17 years) population has been increasing in Thurrock at a much faster rate compared to the national average. This higher rate of growth is expected to continue in the future in part due to the high level of economic and housing development currently taking place. It is likely that there will therefore, be a proportionate increase in the numbers of children looked after in Thurrock, even if the rate per 10,000 remains constant. The implementation of Early Help

through the Brighter Futures Strategy aims to provide support earlier and reduce the number of children entering the care system, alongside the introduction of the Families Together Team in April 2019.

It is estimated that from the baseline year of 2014 the child population (0 – 17 years) will grow by 19 % by 2024 and 35.4% by 2037. By comparison, the child population of England is projected to grow by just 13.3% by 2024 and 19.2% by 2037. This is around half of the rate of growth expected in Thurrock over the next 20 years.

Our Priorities

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
- Building 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

Place – a heritage rich borough which is ambitious for its future

This means:

- 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

Prosperity – a borough, which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

This means:

- 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

What are our children telling us?

During June 2019 we held a feedback week that included feedback from children/young people and parents to gain some insight into how young people felt we were meeting their needs. Some of their comments are listed below.

- 70% of children and young people scored their overall experience as 6 or above on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being totally satisfied) with 37% of these young people scoring 10.
- 87% understood the need for children's services involvement.
- 87% of children and young people agreed that their social worker does what they say.

- 56% of children and young people said that they were involved in making their plan and 30% said they were “sort of” involved.

Comments on what we are doing well

- Consistent
- Knowledgeable
- Listening, explaining and communicating
- Problem Solving and taking action
- Making things better
- Supporting, encouraging advising and information
- Connecting with children and hearing their voices
- Putting services in to help
- Making sure children are happy and safe
- Fighting family’s corner
- Keeping our word
- Efficient and caring
- Finding workable solutions

Comments on what we could do better

- Include children in planning
- Help children explain their feelings/listen to the child’s voice
- Help to acknowledge issues and make changes
- Make things move faster
- More resources for parents
- Help with anger, mental health to ensure child’s safety
- Changes of SW’s/placements
- Making sure the history is accurate
- Sensitivity of the power imbalance between social worker and family
- Less time on paperwork, more time with children.
- Visits don’t always suit the child i.e. after school/in school
- Too many people involved, cannot always remember who they are.

We want all children in our care and care leavers to be healthy, safe and happy, do well at school, training or employment and enjoy good relationships with their peers. We want our young people to be able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults into higher education, good careers and jobs, and achieve financial security.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people ‘doing well’ in care. It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that across all areas of our services supporting children who are looked after and our care leavers, we aspire to achieve the best possible placements and housing provision for our young people.

Children can be in care for varying lengths of time. Some children are unable to return to live with their parents because to do so would mean that they would likely

suffer further harm, abuse and/or neglect. When children become looked after in Thurrock, we will work hard to make sure that they are not further disadvantaged and that the care we provide is better than the care they have previously received. We will provide high quality care in a foster placements with a family or where necessary a high quality residential setting.

We want to enable our children and young people to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, along with their parents and carers. We will work with our children looked after and our young people who have left care to shape how we manage and organise the resources and services that support them.

Current Demand and Performance

Our Children Looked After (CLA)

On 31st March 2019 there were 293 children looked after in Thurrock which has seen a reduction over the last 2 years to 68.4 per 10,000, lower than our statistical neighbours average in 2017/18 of 69 per 10,000 and higher than the England average of 64 per 10,000 in 2017/18.

With the support of the Eastern Region protocol, the overall number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) has reduced representing 10.2% of our Children Looked After population.

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2018/19 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019/20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan.

Our Children Looked After are making good educational progresses with lower absences and exclusions as a result of good Personal Education Planning (PEP) and this has supported good engagement of older children in education, employment or training [EET] figures.

For the whole Thurrock CLA cohort in 2018, those achieving the expected standard were as follows:

- Reading 65%,
- GPS 59%,
- Maths 71%
- Writing 65%.

Age of Children in Care:

The highest percentage of children in care are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable with this age group representing 44% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2019. At the end of March 2019 UASC accounted for 10.2% of the Children Looked After population. As the numbers of UASC have decreased the percentage of 16+ Looked After population has stabilised over the last two years at 29%.

Children in Care with Disabilities:

3 % of our children looked after as at the end of March 2019 had a disability as defined by the Children Act 1989 (Section 17 Part 11).

Although this group make up a comparatively small proportion of the wider cohort of looked after children, they usually have complex needs and so it is essential that we can provide placements, which are able to meet their needs and provide them with the support they need to thrive. The specialist nature of the care needs of this group, the national shortage of provision and the need for an effective transition to Adult Services where appropriate make this a key group to consider with regards to planning of provision.

Location of placement:

83.9% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home. The size of Thurrock means that those children not placed in the Borough are generally in neighbouring or nearby authorities such as Essex, Southend, London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge. Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs.

Data: End of March 2019

Gender	Number	%
Male	174	59.4%
Female	119	40.6%

Ages:	Number	%
Under 1	14	4.8%
Aged 1 - 4	25	8.5%
Aged 5 - 9	40	13.7%
Aged 10 - 15	128	43.7%
Aged 16+	86	29.4%

Legal Status of Children in Care	Number	%
Interim Care Order	30	10.2%
Care Order	170	58%
Single Period of Accommodation	70	23.9.%

(S20)		
Placement Order	20	6.8%
Other	3	1%

Ethnicity:	Number	%
White British	180	61.4%
White Irish	0	0.0%
Any other White background	21	7.1%
White and Black Caribbean	7	2.3%
White and Black African	4	1.4%
White and Asian	1	0.34%
Any other mixed background	13	4.4%
Any other Asian background	6	2.0%
Black Caribbean	3	1.5%
Black African	39	13.3%
Any other Black background	4	1.4%
Indian	1	0.3%
Chinese	0	0.0%
Any other ethnic group	12	4.0%
Not obtained	1	0.4%

Children with a disability

Yes	9	3.1%
No	277	96.9%

Status:	Number	%
Unaccompanied and seeking asylum	30	10.4%

Where do our young people live?	Number	%
Foster Families	218	74.4%
Residential settings	25	8.5%
Live at home - placed with own parents	8	2.7%
Other Placement in the community	31	10.6%
Secure units	0	0.0%
Placed for adoption	11	3.8 %

Distance	%	Number
Under 20 miles and inside LA boundary	40.6%	119
Under 20 miles and outside LA boundary	42.3%	124
Over 20 miles and inside LA boundary	0.3%	1
Over 20 miles and outside LA boundary	16.4%	48
Distance not known or not recorded	0.3%	1

CLA SEND

Years 1-6	Total in Year	SEN Support	SEN Support%	EHCP	EHCP%
Years 7-11	139	19	14%	24	14%
Year 12-13	76	5	6%	14	18%
Totals	66	15	23%	13	20%

2018 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis:	
Number of Children Looked After of School Age:	254

2018 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis: 12+ months in care	CLA	ALL	National ALL	National Non Disadvantaged
Key Stage 2 Attainment Cohort				
Reading, Writing & Maths combined EXS+	50%	66%	64%	70%
Key Stage 2 Progress Cohort				
Average KS1-2 Progress Reading	-0.49	-0.32	0.0	0.3
Average KS1-2 Progress Writing	+0.18	+0.56	0.0	0.2
Average KS1-2 Progress Maths	+2.16	+0.44	0.0	0.3

From 2018, primary progress is reported as a number, and continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 1 to the end of Key Stage 2. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected

Secondary /Progression continues to measure the attainment from the end of Key Stage 4. A positive progress number means progress made is better than expected and a negative progress number means progress is less than expected.

2018 Key Stage 4 Exam Analysis: 12+ months – 23 pupils	Thurrock CLA	National	National Disadvantaged	National Non- Disadvantaged
Attainment 8 Score	19.7	46.6	38.2	50.6
5+ in English and Maths GCSEs	17.4%	43%	Not available	Not available
Progress 8	-1.42	0.0	-0.44	0.13

Attendance & Absence 2018-19

Average attendance:	94.1%
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Attending University	Number: 17
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Adoptions:	Number	% of exiting care
Adopted in 2018/19	13	6.3%
Special Guardianship Order	11	5.3%

Health:	Number	%
Annual Health Assessments 2017/18	195	90.6%
Annual Health Assessments 2018/19	194	95.1%
Annual Dental Checks 2017/18	94	43.7%
Annual Dental Checks 2018/19	175	85.4%
Up to Date immunisations 2017/18	141	65.5%
Up to Date immunisations 2018/19	171	84.9%

Under 5 years and had a development assessment 2017-18	6	42.8%
Under 5 years and had a development assessment 2018-19	12	75.0%

NB: Only includes Children Looked After in Care for more than 12 Months

Care Leavers

Care Leavers Receiving an Aftercare Service	226
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The definition of care leavers includes young people who have left care post 18 but also children who have not left care but have become eligible for support post the age of 18.

Eligible children within the meaning given by paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. Eligible children are young people aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still being looked after.

Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of the children Act are children who are not being looked after by a local authority, but was, before last ceasing to be looked after, an eligible child, and is aged 16 or 17

Former relevant persons within the meaning given by Section 23C (1) of the Children Act 1989 are young people aged between 18 – 25 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both

The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the leaving and aftercare team on turning 18. At the end of June 2019, 226 Care Leavers were receiving an aftercare service. Where needed, accommodation for this group is provided through a mix of council stock, private landlords and agents and housing association providers. To support young people as they move into our leaving and aftercare team we have the following services in place:

Inspire – Education Employment and Training: We have dedicated personal advisors who support young people into education employment and training. This is operated out of Inspire youth hub which brings together a range of support services to young people. A personal advisor will meet with the young

person linking closely with our virtual school to ensure that we have a range of opportunities available this includes progress into higher education, apprenticeship opportunities or college courses. Inspire also offers a range of programmes that meet the needs of young people who are not ready for formal routes, this includes our outstanding Prince's Trust team programme which supports young people who lack confidence to progress into other learning pathways.

Inspire – Headstart Housing: Recognising the need to ensure that young people entering into the aftercare service require suitable accommodation we have developed our own housing support team to provide a range of housing opportunities. Young people coming into the leaving care service have priority around social housing however, for some young people they are not ready to take on a tenancy and as such we provide a range of alternative accommodation until they are able to access their own social housing. This looks in a holistic way at the need of the young person and tries to ensure that we match them with accommodation that will meet their needs. Headstart has developed a range of support packages to meet the needs of young people, an example of this is the close working relationship with Job Centre Plus who have dedicated advisors to support with universal credit claims. We have also introduced a money management programme to support young people develop skills around money management. As accommodation is provided through a range of different types of providers we are working to extend the processes we have implemented for semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds to standardise what we offer for care leavers.

Progress Since Last Sufficiency Statement

As a part of the previous sufficiency analysis, the following priorities were identified:

- To ensure there is sufficient post 16 residential provision including to meet identified specialist needs.
- To provide and commission high quality placements that meet identified needs and improve stability

In response to these priorities, a full procurement exercise has been carried out to increase the quantity and quality of provision available. This provided the opportunity to set very clear quality expectations to all types of providers and also to apply a consistent approach to specifications and documentation. We now have a select list of providers who meet the local authority quality and cost expectations. We recognise that there may still be a need to make individual / spot purchases in order to meet the needs of the child or young person but this should reduce over the annual programme of tendering when we will continually add providers to the select list.

The procurement exercise did not address the shortage of placements for children and young people with high needs and we acknowledge there is further work to be completed to fully address this sufficiency issue. Placements of this type are therefore more likely to be secured through spot purchasing however the same quality criteria is applied to all placements.

The procurement exercise undertaken during the last 12 months had a focus on quality, distance and cost. As a result of this, from 1 April 2019 the Authority has operated a select list of preferred providers that will open annually. It is recognised that due to the needs of children and young people, spot purchasing will still be required although it is anticipated that this will reduce as the select list increases.

The procurement exercise has moved the local authority away from a model of a regional contract instead working towards a model that seeks to increase the number of placements within a 20 mile radius over the coming years, it also aims to reduce spot purchasing that did not support good value. This new exercise has also set a clear definition and rates for standard and complex care and has provided a wider range of 16+ accommodation with clear quality standards and monitoring processes.

Placements Sufficiency Comparison Following 2019 Award of Contracts for the Placements Tender (2017) – Key Changes:

Contract type: The contract types have been rationalised to one (from four) Thurrock specific contract bringing consistency in terms and conditions and decreasing the risk of contractual issues with the use of contracts that were not designed by Thurrock. We have moved from three Individual Purchase agreements and one Select List to one standard Thurrock Select List. Individual purchases will only be utilised if a placement cannot be found from the Select List, and in these cases will still be subject to a standardised set of contract terms and conditions.

Supported Accommodation: There are now twelve providers, five more providers than were in place pre-tender. All twelve providers are on standardised contracts and within the Select List whereas previously they had been on Individual Purchase. Distances to placement are broadly similar at an average of sixteen miles from Civic Offices, Grays. There are a greater number of locations available than pre-tender. Costs have remained broadly similar but now with discounts that were not previously routinely offered.

Independent Foster Care Agencies (IFA's): The number of providers on the Thurrock Select List has remained broadly similar to that achieved by the Eastern Regional Select List which ended in 2018. Whether those providers who passed the Thurrock tender can meet demand will need to be monitored going forward. The Council now has the added benefit of a Thurrock specific contract. Costs and discounts have remained broadly similar.

Residential care: The nature of the residential care market has resulted in a lower number of providers who tendered than Thurrock would have liked. However, 7 of the 9 placements are within 40 miles from Civic Offices, Grays. Thurrock also has the added benefit of a Thurrock specific contract. Costs remained broadly similar, however it should be noted that the previous placement costs could have varied considerably placement by placement as no contract terms were previously in place governing price. Discounts are now part

of the contract whereas these were not routinely offered under previous contractual arrangements.

Feedback from Young People on Placement Commissioning

During the Council's commissioning exercise engagement and consultation with young people who have experienced being "looked after" they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers. As a part of ongoing consultation, the views of young people will be gathered through the newly appointed Participation and Engagement Officer. A Joint Strategic Needs Analysis product on the needs of children who are looked after is also being developed and this will inform any future service provision.

Joint Commissioning and Partnership Working

We work closely with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) particularly for cases where there are significant care needs. Residential places are currently purchased according to need and where appropriate, agreed through a joint decision making panel. It is acknowledged that where there are complex needs the market drives the cost and availability of provision, this is an issue facing local authorities across England and continues to be a priority for us to address. Placements for children with significant health needs are jointly funded with the Continuing Care team in the CCG.

A partnership pilot to accelerate the introduction of the Transforming Care Programme is being developed with implementation due in 2019. This identifies young people at risk of entering care where the provision of a whole family support programme is likely to prevent this.

Transition to Adult Services

Only the most complex children and young people are assessed as eligible to receive Adult Social Care services, these tend to be young people who have been supported through the Children with Disabilities Team. The majority of those who do transition to Adult Services require learning disability support (65% in last 7 years), this is followed by mental health support (7% in the last 7 years).

What we are doing and the impact of this



Placement type and the age of our children in care population have recently been relatively constant. The numbers of children in care have decreased in line with our statistical neighbours. If we are to achieve the best outcomes for all these children we need to ensure that all our placement services are fit for purpose and continue to grow and develop.

There are six main strands to our plans for the next 12 months:

1. Focus on the child.
2. Achieving permanence
3. Developing Fostering
4. Commissioning provision
5. Developing our offer for care leavers
6. Developing the support offer for our most vulnerable children

Measuring the Impact

The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements through

feedback from children and young people as a part of their individual reviews and through different methods of participation and engagement. The following indicators will also provide some information on how well our duty to provide sufficient places to meet needs is being met:

- Placement stability
- Distance to placement
- Number of placements through framework against number of placements spot purchased
- Average cost per placement per type

Overall improvements

Across all of the services we deliver, we seek to make sure that all decisions are centred on the views and needs of the child. We also aim to making sure that our time is focussed on achieving the right outcomes for our children who are looked after to achieve these aims.

Priority 1: Focus on the child

Ensure that all internal processes are focused on the child and maximise the impact of money spent to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved.

Actions:

1. Make sure that the voice of the child is at the centre of everything that we do.
2. Ensure that all processes are efficient and minimise any potential wasting of resources.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased value for money achieved across all placements.
- Clear decision making processes and clarity around roles and responsibilities throughout the placement process.
- Better communication between teams and improved information sharing.
- All systems are fit for purpose and support effective management of information throughout process.

Priority 2 – Achieving permanence

2.1 Ensure there is sufficient support available for children to achieve their long term care plans to prevent looked after children remaining in placements which may not best meet their needs.

Where possible we want all our children to be in placements which provide them with long term placement stability, and where appropriate to leave care. We describe this as achieving permanence for that child. Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive. To achieve permanence it is

essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, special guardianship order, child arrangement order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential.

Actions:

1. Complete an in-depth review of all placements to understand where there is opportunity to support permanence or where a child might be better served by moving to a different placement.
2. Improve the placement review process to ensure all placements are regularly brought before the placement panel for review and all options for that child are considered at this time so each child is able to move towards permanence where appropriate.
3. Ensure all children who are at the edge of care and those becoming looked after are part of a Family Group Conference/Meeting.
4. Put in place necessary support for our carers and children in care to enable long term placements. This covers placement support such as therapeutic intervention to ensure the carer's home can meet the needs of the children placed with them.
5. Raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders wherever suitable to ensure that this option is available to achieve permanence for children who are looked after.
6. Improve our offer of life story work for children.
7. Review all approved connected carers to see whether an SGO would be more appropriate to meet the child's long term needs.

Expected outcomes:

- Increase placement stability and so minimise the damaging effects of additional placement moves for already vulnerable children.
- Granting more SGO arrangements will:
 - Enable young people to escape the intrusion and stigma that is sometimes attached to being looked after.
 - Young people have the security of knowing that they are legally part of their carer's family.

2.2 Further develop our adoption support services to achieve and secure improvements in service delivery.

Actions:

1. Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families).

Expected outcomes:

- Reduced adoption placement breakdowns through ensuring placements are adequately supported, helping us avoid further disruption for vulnerable children.

2.3 To recruit sufficient adopters and maintain existing placements as the number of available adopters continues to fall across the UK.

Actions:

1. Implementation of the Adoption Recruitment Strategy.
2. Raise awareness of support for those who have adopted through more effective use of social media.
3. Increase targeted support groups for families to allow early intervention where a placement might be at risk of breaking down.
4. Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust and achieve what is right for the child

Expected outcomes:

- Prevent placement escalation and support permanence.
- Reduce risks for a child resulting from being looked after: already separated from the birth family and foster carer, breakdown of a placement with their permanent carers can be extremely disruptive for a child.

Priority 3 – Developing Fostering

Fostering recruitment and retention

There are three main types of foster care available to our children who are Looked After. Where possible we keep children with people they already have some form of relationship with, this type of placement is Family and Friends Foster Care. When a child is first referred to us we will speak to any proposed carers to assess whether they will be able to provide the support that child needs. If we cannot find a suitable related carer, we will try to place them with one of our Thurrock 'in-house' carers. Only where we cannot identify an in-house placement to meet their needs will we then look to place them with an independent fostering agency (IFA). These placements are more likely to be further away and are usually more costly

We are looking over the next three years to significantly increase the number of children placed with Thurrock Council foster carers and so reduce our dependence on external fostering agencies. We have set a target to increase in house placements by 20 households year on year and reduce the proportion of children placed with costly independent fostering agencies rather than with in-house carers.

Actions:

1. Improve our offer to potential carers to encourage them to foster with Thurrock Council rather than an independent agency.
2. Increase support and training for our carers to help give them resilience.
3. Increasing local engagement and raising awareness of fostering with Thurrock.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased proportion of in-house carers, to meet our ambition to place more children with Thurrock Council carers by 2021.
- Improved value for money to allow us to invest more of our budget in supporting our children who are Looked After.

Priority 4: Commissioning Sufficient Provision

The levels of demand for placements as a result of the numbers of children in care and our limited control over the market is resulting in pressures within our external placements budgets and difficulty in identifying suitable placements for all children within the required timescales.

The recent placement commissioning exercise has enabled us to develop a select list of providers with clear quality frameworks to bring a consistent approach to all types of provision. Whilst this has been successful, there are only a limited number of residential providers who are a part of this and the majority of this type of provision is still spot purchased. Where children have needs which cannot be met through other types of placement we will seek to identify a residential home in which they can live. This more intense environment can ensure that children are given the help they need 24 hours a day. Where this type of placement is made we will review it regularly to ensure that it is still the best way to meet their needs and to support them to move to a fostering or a more permanent placement when appropriate.

Actions:

1. Responding to the increasing complexity of need presented by those needing residential placements.
2. Use business intelligence to direct commissioning practice and ensure a joined up approach to managing placements, including the continued development of the Thurrock Select list on an annual basis to reduce spot purchasing.
3. To further develop 16+ provision generally and where there are care needs rather than just support.
4. To further develop the existing area risk assessment work focussed on CSE, gang and knife crime.
5. To increase the number of residential providers, particularly where there are high needs.
6. To develop provision to support the step down from secure and high needs provision addressing the gap between care and support.
7. To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of

- further procurement work.
8. To continue to reduce spot purchasing through the annual procurement exercise recognising that this may always be needed to meet specific needs.
 9. To consider block purchasing where need has been identified to improve the offer and reduce costs
 10. Review and improve our short breaks offer to provide a variety of options for care.
 11. Improve placement planning and deliver a joined up approach to identification of specialist residential provision to reduce reliance on emergency placements.
 12. Review availability of therapeutic support to allow us to provide more support to those children placed in-house. Work closely together in partnership between services supporting looked after children with special educational needs.

Expected outcomes:

- Value for money within services which are commissioned.
- A joined up approach to commissioning all services which we cannot provide in house.
- Closer working with partners to ensure effective coordination of our needs and their offer.
- Better value for money.
- Higher proportion of children within residential placements located nearer to their home.
- Earlier recognition of any issues within placements to improve outcomes for our children who are Looked After.

Commissioning others to deliver services on our behalf

There are some services that we are unable to provide ourselves. This may be because we do not have the required specialist skills or may reflect the fact that we do not have sufficient capacity to deliver these services. Where this is the case, we will commission services from others; however, it is essential that we manage this effectively to make sure that these placements support our vulnerable children to achieve their full potential.

Priority 5: Developing the offer for care leavers

Provision of a range of offers for those aged 18 and over to ensure they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be Looked After.

Actions:

1. Develop the work through Headstart Housing to improve our accommodation offer to care leavers with different levels of support needs.
2. Put in place a supported lodgings offer through recruitment of foster

carers who can provide a bed to those who are aged 18 and over within a family environment

3. Support to and early identification of young people leaving care who are planning to move to live with birth relatives.

Expected outcomes:

- Increased availability of accommodation for Thurrock young people.
- Increased placement stability and outcomes through better quality testing of local provisions to ensure they can meet young people's needs.
- Better local offer available to young people in terms of choice of locations and styles of accommodation and support.

Priority 6: To develop the support offer available to our most vulnerable children

To develop early support to address the demand driven nature of preventative work which results in us not being able to provide support early enough to some of our most vulnerable children.

Actions:

1. Implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy to identify opportunities for integration with partners so that we can target services more effectively to the most vulnerable.
2. Providing the right support at the right time to children and their families.

Expected outcomes:

- Earlier support for families, to prevent escalation of issues and where possible keep children at home.
- Avoid confusion and duplication for families who need information advice and help
- Give families the tools to help them solve their own problems and also be more resilient in the future while making sure they know where they can go for help when they need it.

Outcomes of this strategy

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Children Looked After. Different cohorts of children require different approaches. This strategy has identified some of the key challenges we face in meeting our sufficiency duty and actions proposed to make sure we are best placed to meet these challenges and deliver financially sustainable services.

Our Pledge to Children Looked After

Our pledge

Our pledge makes 5 promises to children and young people in our care. These cover:

- health
- education
- reaching potential
- positive relationships
- leaving care

The pledge was written by young people and has been adopted throughout the council.

It applies to all children and young people, from birth to their 18th birthday, who are in our care. Some apply to those leaving care from the age of 18 up to 21 years, or 25 years in certain cases.

The pledge applies regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, ability or background. It applies wherever young people are placed, whether this is inside or outside Thurrock.

Our 5 promises

We promise to work to help you to develop healthily by:

- helping you to keep fit and healthy and giving you the resources and information on how best to equip yourself to continue to develop
- making sure you are given support to have regular health and dental checks
- having social workers support you in all aspects of your development and giving you every opportunity to flourish

We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and feel important to us while in care by:

- making staff available to speak to you when you need to contact them to discuss your problems, anxieties and achievements
- involving you in decisions and plans that are made that will affect your current and future life
- not changing your social worker unless absolutely necessary
- giving you advice and support to stay safe both within your home and community
- calling you back within 24 hours

We promise to help you reach your dreams while in care by:

- celebrating your achievements and recognising your goals and helping to push you further while in care
- supporting you to attend and achieve in education
- providing you with good educational opportunities that best meet your abilities
- providing you with a translating dictionary in your language when you first come into care if your first language is not English
- giving you the same opportunities available to young people who are not looked after

We promise to support your positive relationships and social activities by:

- giving priority when you ask to stay with friends and relatives away from your normal placement
- aiding you in having easy access to libraries, youth clubs and positive activities
- giving you access to an independent visitor/ mentors
- supporting you in being heard throughout the local authority across all departments

We promise to prepare you for adult life and leaving care by:

- supporting you financially up until the time you start work or are entitled to claim benefits
- providing you with a grant to help you settle into your own accommodation when you leave care
- supporting you in higher education at university
- helping you with support to seek employment and training
- helping you with transport for attending education and looked after children appointments
- supporting you to apply for all documentation and providing you with necessary

Appendix 3

Charter for care leavers

We have a responsibility to children and young people in our care, and to our care leavers.

Our charter for care leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living

- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger

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10 September 2019		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Summary of performance and trends

Demand:

The number of contacts to Children's Services seeking advice and support has remained fairly stable. The number of these contacts that become referrals has reduced in the last quarter.

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 (known as statistical neighbours) 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. Having a multi-agency MASH has supported a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions so that children and families receive the right help at the right time and that the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.

Assessments of need and risk are completed in a timely way and more children and families are offered early help following assessment in addition to those receiving further support under a child in need plan or a child protection plan.

The numbers of children subject to a child protection plan due to concern about abuse or neglect have further reduced this quarter reflecting a trend

over the last year. We are starting fewer plans and reducing the length of time children are subject to plans as change is achieved more quickly. This reflects work to improve the focus and purpose of child protection plans to ensure children and families are engaged in the goals of the work and clear about what needs to change.

The number of children looked after dropped over the last two years and have remained lower this quarter at a rate of 68.4 per 10,000 compared to similar authorities at 69.5 per 10,000. The number of children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers has dropped from a peak in 2016 of 64 to 21 in June 2019. We have increased our focus on permanence planning to ensure children do not wait to have a long term home. More children are moving to live with relatives where they cannot remain in their parent's care. The number of young children who are placed for adoption has also increased from 7 last year to 13 children this year.

Children looked after continue to make good educational progress with better than national average figures for attainment 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. It is important to note that data reported is a reflection of what is formally recorded in the Social Care record management system as at the date a report is produced and can be subject to change.

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 also discussed with front line workers.

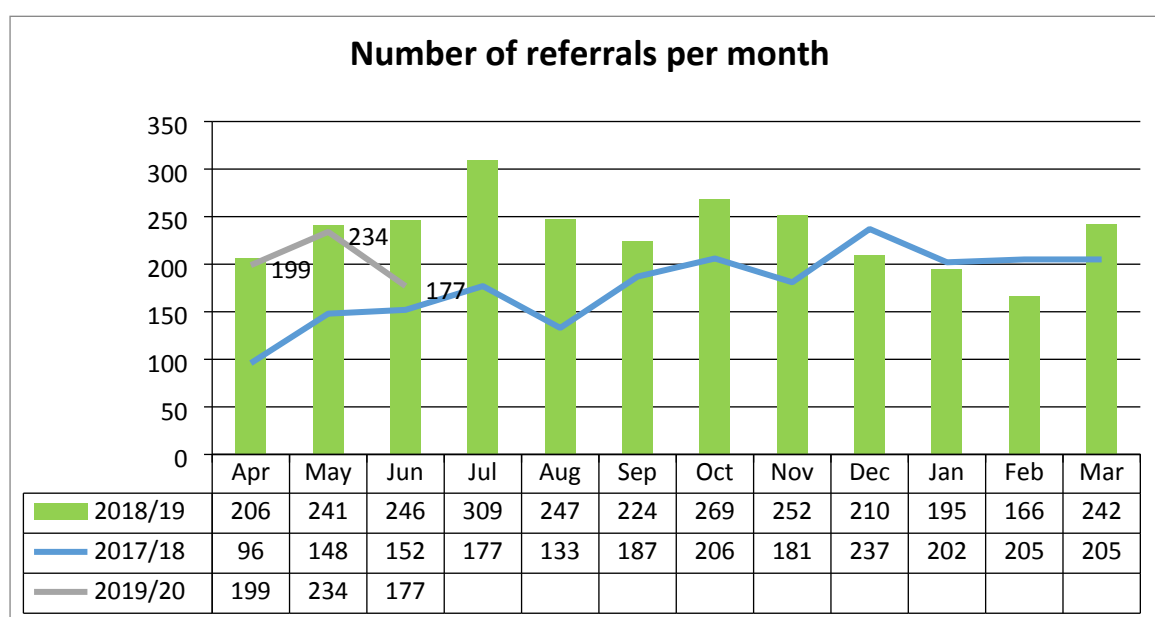
The data in this report is from the monthly performance reporting (At a Glance), regional benchmarking data and national data sets. This data has been presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director's Performance Group. Data has not yet been published in 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 Number of referrals

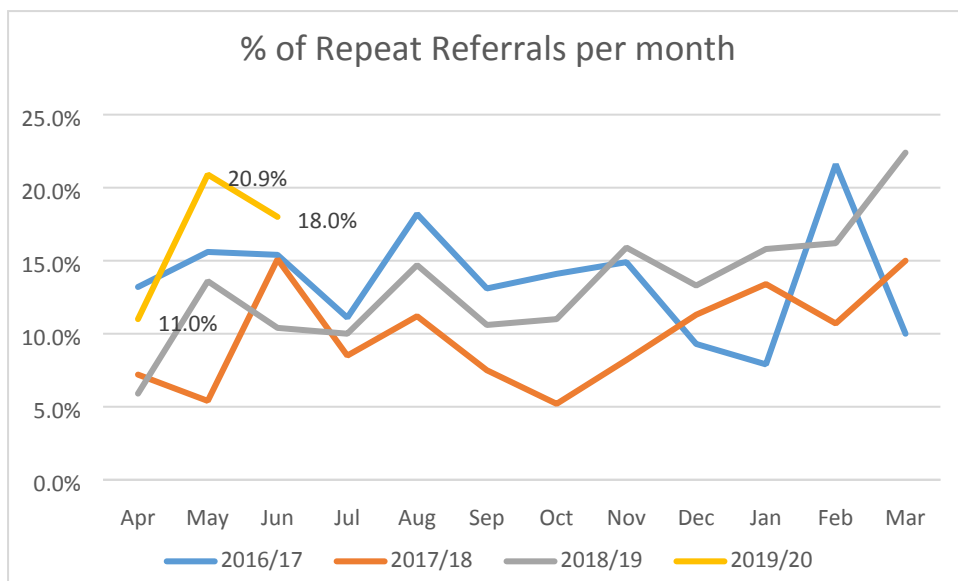
Contacts progress to a referral if it is felt there are circumstances that need a social care intervention because of more serious concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing.



For Quarter 1 2019-20 we have received an average of 203 referrals per month. The number of contacts to Children's Services seeking advice and support has remained fairly stable. The number of these contacts that become referrals has reduced a little in the last quarter. The rate of referral is in line with similar authorities matched for need.

Number of repeat referrals

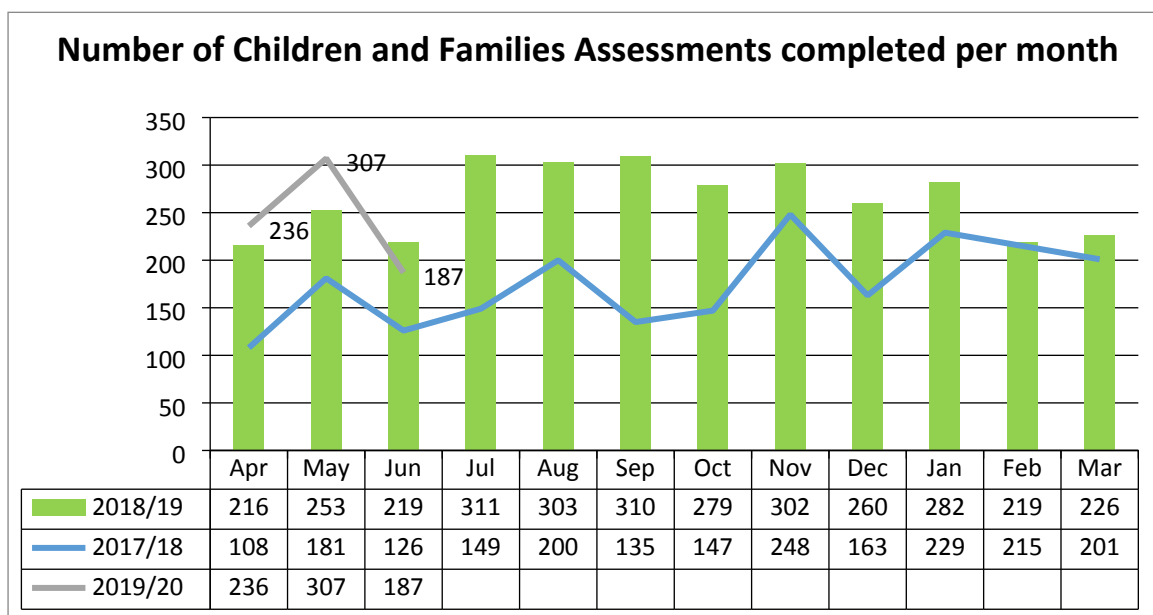
A repeat referral is counted if a child has been referred during the reporting period who has been referred previously within a 12 month period.



During Quarter 1 of 2019/20 there has been an average of 16.6% of repeat referrals for children that have been referred within the previous 12 months. This is slightly higher than previous monthly averages (13.3% for 2018/19). Overall the rate remains below similar authorities matched for need.

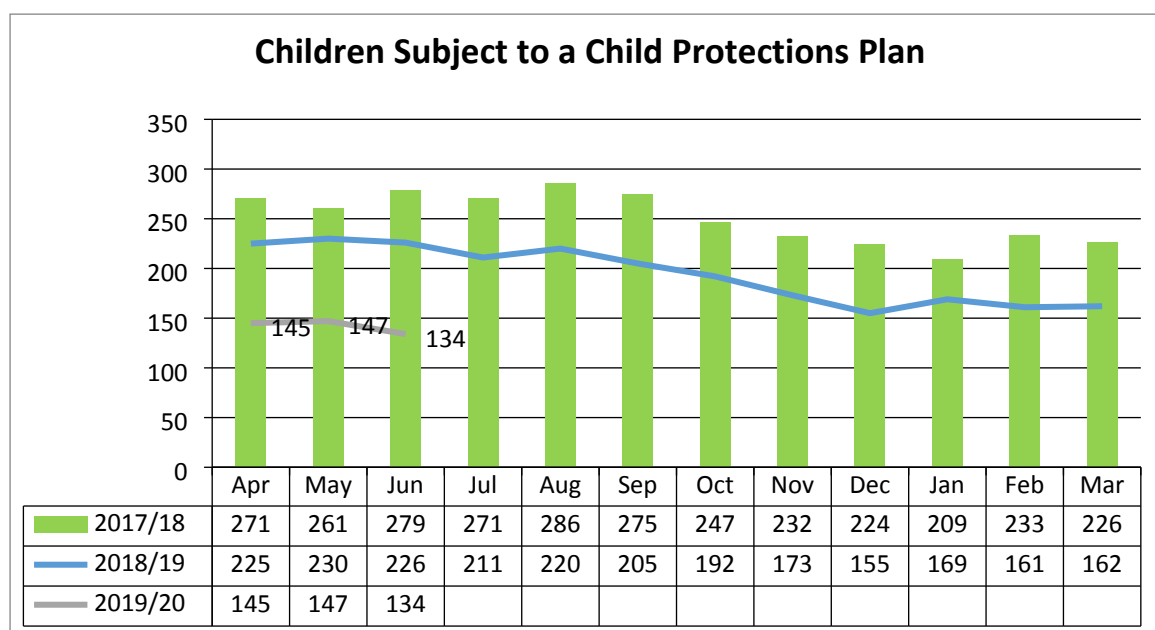
3.2 Assessments

Number of children and families assessments complete per month



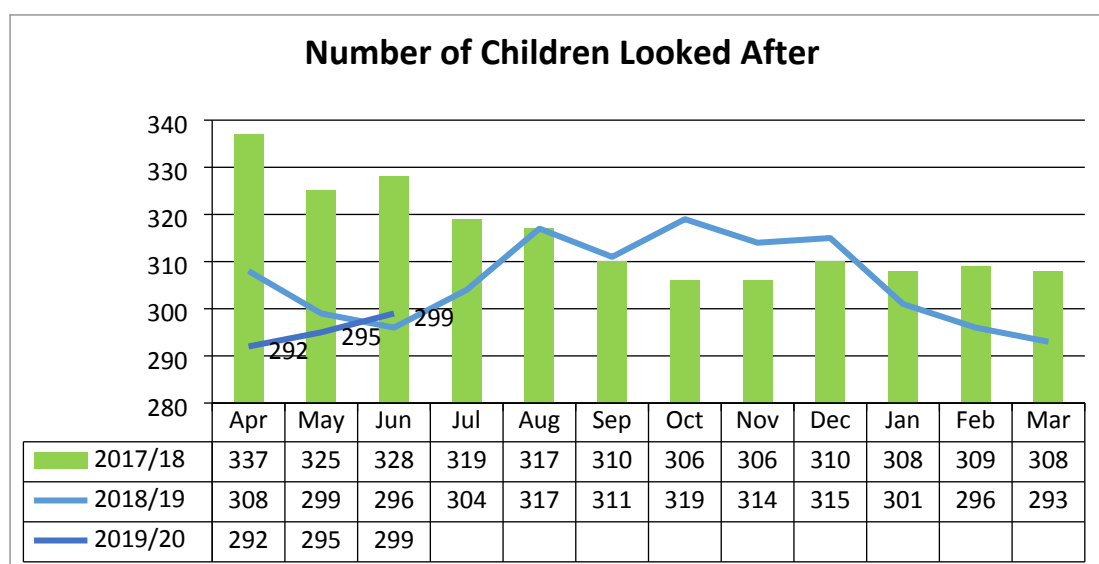
During Quarter 1 2019-20 there was a total of 730 children and families assessments completed, which equates to a monthly average of 243. The percentage of children and families assessments completed within 45 working days remains good at 96.4% (quarter average).

3.3 Children subject to Child Protection Plans

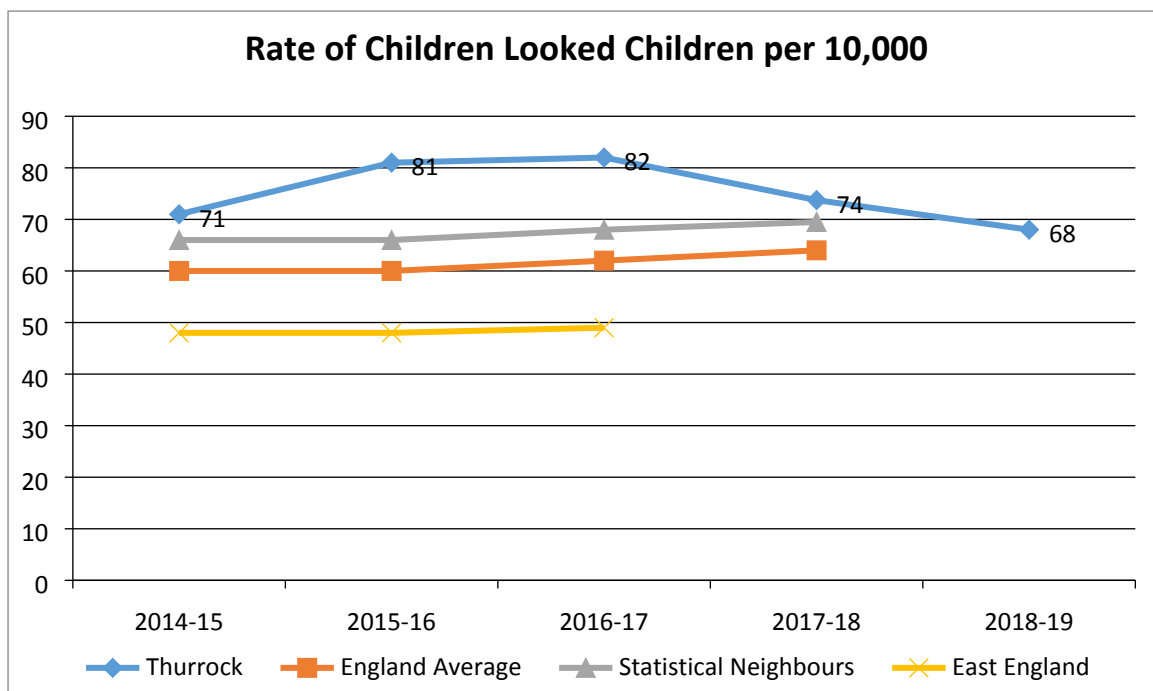


The number of children subject to a child protection plan has continued to reduce during Quarter 1 of 2019-20 to 134 in June 2019. This is a rate of 31.3 per 10,000 compared to a rate of 37.8 last year. This is below the similar authority rate of 51. Authorities identified as managing child protection plans with purpose and pace tend to have lower rates of children subject to child protection plans as duration of plans reduce.

3.4 Children Looked After



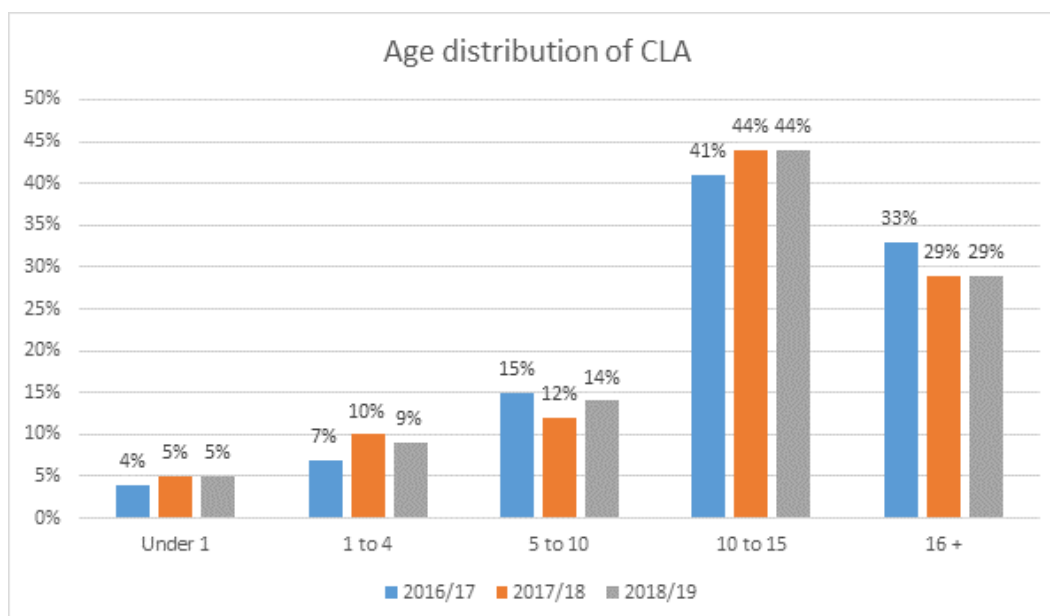
The number of children looked after has reduced since 2017/18, which had a monthly average of 315, to 306 in 2018-19 and 295 for Quarter 1 2019/20. Numbers have shown a steady decrease.



The reduction from 2017/18 to our end of year 2018/19 position (68.4) has brought us just below our statistical neighbour's outturn for 2017/18, statistical neighbour averages for 2018/19 will not be published until Autumn. As at end of Quarter 1 we have a rate of 68 children looked after per 10,000 of the population.

The reduction has been achieved by reducing the length of time a child is looked after. We have increased the number of children looked after moving to live with relatives and increased the number of younger children placed with adoptive carers.

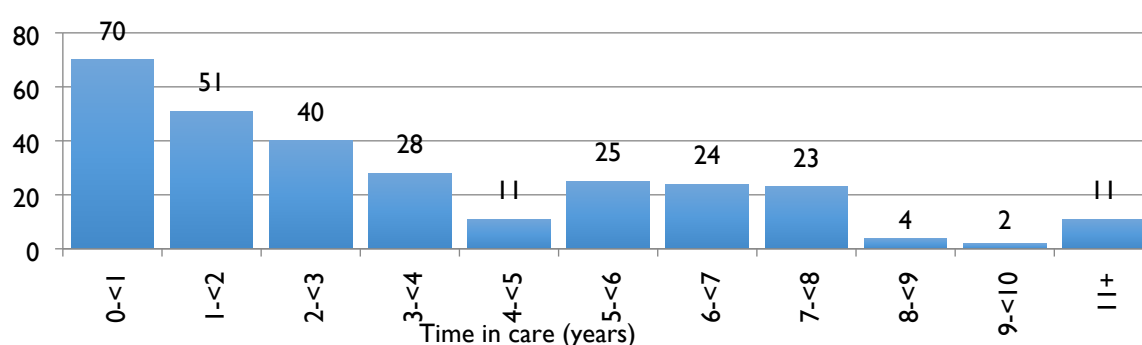
Age of Children and Young People in Care



Age of children looked after as at 31st March 19

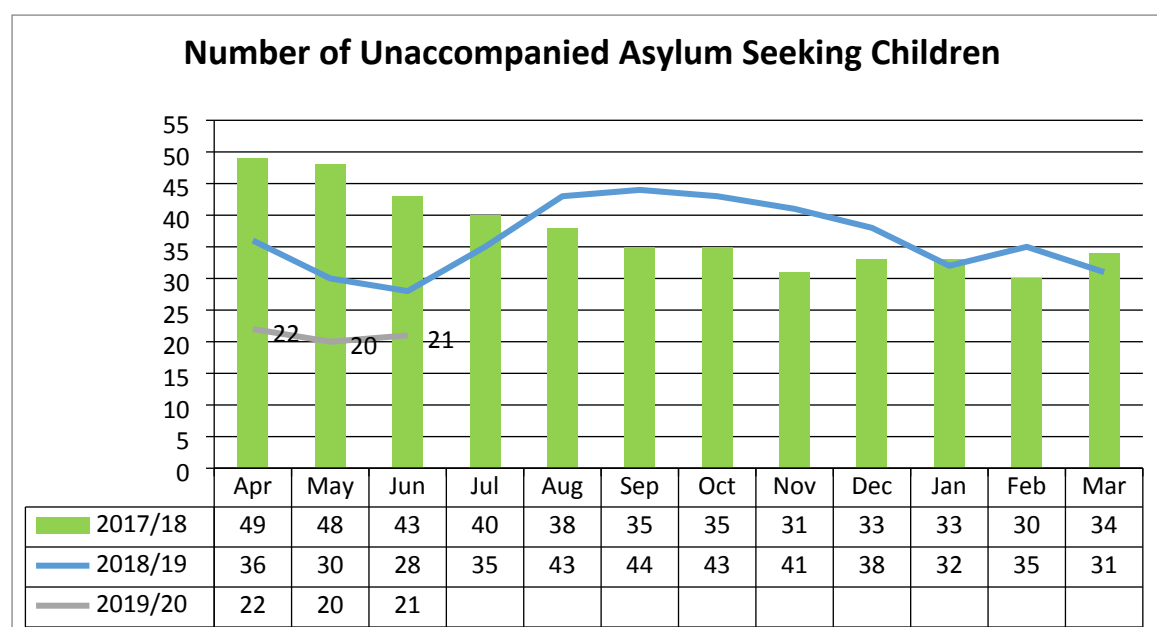
The age distribution represents improving practice in Thurrock, where the majority of children under five are moved on to permanency through adoption or placement with connected carers. Those currently being looked after under 5 are progressing through the court and permanency plans are underway. The impact of this can be seen in the number of children 5-10, where fewer children are remaining in care beyond five years old.

Time in Care for Children and Young People



This graph shows that last year's trend has continued with fewer children remaining in care long term and the majority of children coming into care for between 1 and 3 years.

Number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children



Our numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has reduced due to the effective operation of the Eastern Region UASC transfer protocol.

3.5 Adoption

In the last financial year we achieved thirteen Adoption Orders for children who required them an increase from 7 in 2017/18.

In Quarter 1 2019/20, 4 children have already received an adoption order. A further 17 children have a placement order made by the Courts in proceedings but have not yet been matched to adoptive carers. 8 children are placed with adopters but an adoption order has not yet been made. We can anticipate a continued need for adopters in excess of the amount required last year. 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 492 days for Quarter 1 this year, this is marginally above the 2017/18 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, lower than the national average of 201 days. This has been achieved by tracking processes to achieve the good performance.

3.6 Children looked after with missing episodes

	Quarter 4 2018/19			Quarter 1 2019/20		
	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19
Child Looked After	17	16	16	17	10	12
Instances	34	34	29	56	26	23
Child Looked After (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child)	3	0	3	2	2	2
Instances	3	0	3	3	3	2

In Quarter 1 the number of the general population of children looked after with a missing episode has reduced to 12 in June 2019. These children recorded 23 incidents in June 2019. Numbers of incidents for April were higher at 56, two children were responsible for the high number of incidents. Overall we expect the number of children showing missing incidents will reduce reflecting the current trend of a reduction in the number of children starting to be looked after. It is not uncommon for children to experience a period of distress when they become looked after that for most, but not all children, settles over time.

For children looked after because they are unaccompanied asylum seekers the number of children with a missing episode in June 2019 was two reflecting 2 episodes of being missing.

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. The rate of take up of return interviews with our independent provider remains low despite focus. Key workers from placements; foster carers and social workers discuss these incidents with children. We continue to review arrangements to try to reduce incidents of missing and engagement of children in return interviews.

3.7 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.

Area	Number
Number of new carers approved between Apr 19 to date	5
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	9
Number of children currently placed in Thurrock fostering households	123

The number of new carers approved in year to date is 5 compared to 9 for all of 2018/19. This reflects more effective recruitment. Because carers also leave the service due to retirement or other changes in circumstance this does not mean the overall number of carers has yet increased.

However the number of children placed with in house fostering households has increased slightly since last year to 123.

3.8 Care Leavers

The percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training improved from 61% in 2017-18 to 65% for 2018-19. For Quarter 1 this has decreased slightly 61%, however this remains better than the similar authority average of 50.89%.

The percentage of our care leaves not in education, employment or training as at end of Quarter 1 is 20%, which is better than 2017/18 similar authority average of 41.6%.

The nature of the children looked after that are not in employment, education or training reflects their high need, i.e. teenage parents, long term illness.

There is close alignment of the aftercare service with the Inspire Youth Hub, a partnership which has seen a significant improvement in the number of young people in education employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock Programme continues to offer 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. 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.

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: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

No implications identified

8.2 Legal

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

No implications identified

8.3 Diversity and Equality

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

No implications identified

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 & Customer Service

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10 September 2019		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children Coming Into Our Care During June And July 2019		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director, Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of some of the reasons children come into our care. This is to assist Members in their role as Corporate Parents, to understand the issues that are likely to mean children come into care.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to note the information in the report
- 1.2 For the information in the report to assist Members in their role as Corporate Parents

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Members wish to have a greater understanding of the issues that might affect a child coming into our care. By having a snapshot during June and July 2019 Members will be able to see the types of need that lead to children coming into our care. Members will be better informed in carrying out their Corporate Parenting duties.

3. Issues Options and Analysis of Options

In order for Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee to have an understanding of the kinds of issues that result in children coming into our care, we have set out the issues presenting, for children who came into our care during June and July 2019.

There were 29 young people in total who came into our care during those 2 months. Of those 29 children and young people:

- 15 were under 10 years of age
- 5 were aged between 10 – 15 years of age
- 9 were 16+ years of age; 7 of whom were unaccompanied asylum seekers
- There were 6 family groups
- 6 were female and 23 were male

The unaccompanied asylum seeking young people will be initially accommodated by Thurrock whilst waiting transfer to another Eastern Region local authority through the transfer protocol. The main presenting issues for the 16+ young people who came into our care was family breakdown, including parents who did not feel they could manage the presenting behaviours by the young people.

Children who came into our care under the age of 15 (20 children) did so because the care offered to those children meant they were not considered to be safe in the family home. Of those 20 children, 1 has subsequently returned home. We went into court proceedings in respect of 14 of these children to secure their position in our care and to plan for their permanence. 6 children were placed with extended family members, the remaining 14 were placed with foster carers.

Some of the key issues that led to children coming into our care, includes:

- Domestic Violence
- Mental health issues
- Substance misuse (including alcohol)
- Homelessness
- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 So that Members can effectively carry out their Corporate Parenting duties.

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

5.1 Not applicable

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

6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7.2 Legal

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

There are no Legal implications associated with this report.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The 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. Placements and Staff members represent diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

- 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):

- Not Applicable

9. Appendices to the report – there are two appendices for this report

- Appendix 1 – Report on Children coming into our care during June and July 2019

Report Author:

Janet Simon
Strategic Lead
Children Looked After

10 September 2019		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
The Council Pledge to Looked After Children		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead for Looked After Children		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director, Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report provides information to the Thurrock Corporate Parenting Committee on the Council Pledge for Looked After Children. All councillors are corporate parents to our looked after children. Ensuring that our looked after children are able to influence and shape the services provided for them is both a statutory duty and a key priority. This Pledge was therefore informed and developed with the Children in Care Council.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Corporate Parenting Committee endorse and adopt the Thurrock Pledge for Looked After Children**
- 1.2 That the Corporate Parenting Committee ensure the Pledge for Looked After Children is understood and effective across services working with looked after children**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1** As the corporate parent of children in care, the whole of Thurrock Council is responsible for their well-being. As a good corporate parent this means being an advocate and helping looked after children become successful, well-rounded adults.
- 2.2** The Children and Social Work Act (2017) sets out seven corporate parenting principles to which local authorities must have regard when carrying out their functions in relation to looked after children and young people:

- To act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
 - To encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - To take into account their views, wishes and feelings.
 - To help them gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 - To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
 - To ensure they are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
 - To prepare them for adulthood and independent living.
- 2.3 In addition to meeting our statutory duties, the Pledge demonstrates the commitment of the Council to meet the identified needs of Thurrock looked after children and respect the views of the children and young people who took part in the development of the Pledge.
- 2.4 The Pledge sets out a number of promises that children and young people have identified which, if delivered, makes Thurrock Council a good parent and carer. Members, chief officers and partners are signed up to the Pledge which signifies their shared commitment to it.
- 2.5 The Thurrock Pledge informs children and young people of their rights and highlight Thurrock Council's commitment to actively involving children and young people in decision making and the shaping of services.

3. Issues Options and Analysis of Options

These are included in Appendix 1 attached to this report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To keep the Thurrock Pledge to children who are looked after under review. For Members to promote and support the active implementation of the Pledge in Council business.

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

- 5.1 Not applicable

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

- 6.1 Not applicable

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7.2 Legal

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

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 provides that a local authority in England must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people have regard to the need—

- (a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- (b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- (c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- (d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- (e) to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- (f) for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work;
- (g) to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

The children and young people mentioned in this subsection are children who are looked after by the Local Authority, within the meaning given by section 22(1) Children Act 1989; relevant children within the meaning of section 23A (2) Children Act 1989; and young people aged under 25 who are former relevant children within the meaning of section 23C (1) Children Act 1989 .

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The 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. Placements and Staff members represent diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

- Not applicable

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):

- Not applicable

9. **Appendices to the report – there are two appendices for this report**

- Appendix 1 – The Thurrock Pledge for Children who are looked after

Report Author:

Janet Simon
Strategic Lead for Looked After Children

Thurrock's Pledge for Children who are Looked After

Our pledge makes 5 promises to children and young people in our care. These cover:

- health
- education
- reaching your potential
- positive relationships
- leaving care

The pledge was written by young people and has been adopted throughout the council.

It applies to all children and young people, from birth to 18 years-old, who are in our care. Some apply to those leaving care from the age of 18 up to 21 years, or 25 years in certain cases.

The pledge applies regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, ability or background. It applies wherever you are placed, whether this is inside or outside Thurrock.

Our 5 promises

We promise to work to help you to develop healthily by:

- helping you to keep fit and healthy and giving you the resources and information on how best to equip yourself to continue to develop
- making sure you are given support to have regular health and dental checks
- having social workers support you in all aspects of your development and giving you every opportunity to flourish

We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and feel important to us while in care by:

- making staff available to speak to you when you need to contact them to discuss your problems, anxieties and achievements
- involving you in decisions and plans that are made that will affect your current and future life
- not changing your social worker unless absolutely necessary
- giving you advice and support to stay safe both within your home and community
- calling you back within 24 hours

We promise to help you reach your dreams while in care by:

- celebrating your achievements and recognising your goals and helping to push you further while in care

- supporting you to attend and achieve in education
- providing you with good educational opportunities that best meet your abilities
- providing you with a translating dictionary in your language when you first come into care if your first language is not English
- giving you the same opportunities available to young people who are not looked after

We promise to support your positive relationships and social activities by:

- giving priority when you ask to stay with friends and relatives away from your normal placement
- aiding you in having easy access to libraries, youth clubs and positive activities
- giving you access to an independent visitor/ mentors
- supporting you in being heard throughout the local authority across all departments

We promise to prepare you for adult life and leaving care by:

- supporting you financially up until the time you start work or are entitled to claim benefits
- providing you with a grant to help you settle into your own accommodation when you leave care
- supporting you in higher education at university
- helping you with support to seek employment and training
- helping you with transport for attending education and looked after children appointments
- supporting you to apply for all documentation and providing you with necessary information on your rights

10 September 2019		ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision:
Report of: Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead, Quality Assurance and Reviewing		
Accountable Assistant Director: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director, Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee, established by the IRO Handbook (2010).

This report covers the period from 1 of April 2018 until the 31 of March 2019

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to note the IRO Annual report 2018 - 2019 and the recommendations in the report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

The IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

- promoting the voice of the child
- ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;
- making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;
- offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for children looked after and the delivery of services to them; and

- monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands.

2.2 During the reporting period, the IRO service has remained very stable with only one change in personnel. The Service continues to comprise of five, permanent Independent Reviewing Officers.

IRO Case Loads

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Average Case Load	56	67	67	61	62
Case Load Range	58-62	62-67	60-68	62-65	44-68

During the performance year April 2018 – March 2019, the IRO service conducted a total of 755 reviews, which is an increase on the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance improved in respect of reviews being held in timescale and was 93% which is up from 87% last year.

Children participated in person or through an advocate or by another means in 84% of their reviews which is an improvement on the 72% of their reviews last year (excludes Children under 4 years of age).

2.3 Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

Section 7 of the main report provides a detailed analysis of the characteristics of children moving through the care system in Thurrock.

Key points from this are:

- There has been a sustained reduction of the number of children in care over the past two years.
- There has been a continued reduction in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children.
- There are more boys looked after in Thurrock than girls
- The ethnic distribution of children looked after has not changed significantly in the past three years, although the proportion of Black British children has remained higher than Black British children in the total population.
- There has been a significant reduction in the use of Voluntary Accommodation (Section 20 CA1989), which is positive
- We have significantly improved the stability of placements
- Most children looked after live within 20 miles of their home address
- We have increased the number of children achieving permanency through adoption

One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority.

The IRO Service recorded 15 completed dispute resolutions which is where the IRO challenged children services about an aspect of practice. These challenges were about the following issues.

Number	Area of Practice Raised
2	Local Authority Pathway Plan/Transition plan for child leaving care was challenged and had to be amended
8	Permanency Plan for the child was not robust enough and had to be changed
1	Challenge to Local Authority plan for Contact
2	An issue regarding the plan for the child's education had to be addressed
1	Specific Advocacy was requested for parents to participate in the review process

The IRO service complete a compliance checklist for every review conducted, averaging between 60 and 75 checklist per month; key issues identified by the checklist for 2018-2019 were:

- Social work reports were not always provided in a timely way to the review
- Children fully participate in 84% of their reviews
- The consultation booklets are poorly used
- In a number of Reviews looked after children have experienced a change of social worker since the last review
- There has been a problem with completing initial health assessments

This has lead the service to review the use and design of consultation booklets, challenge teams about the production of reports, and work with the CLA service and Designated Nurse to review the process for the commissioning of initial health assessments.

The service will also in 2019 carryout a survey of the reasons behind the changes of social worker between reviews.

The Participation Worker was asked to engage young people and provide feedback on the IRO service and made the following points.

What Children and young people value about their IROs:-

- Honesty
- Trust
- Communication
- Confidence
- Hearing the YP's views
- Empathy

- Understanding
- Good listener
- Experience
- Patience
- Independent
- Equal power with looked after children
- Self-awareness
- Appropriate language (no jargon)
- Compassion

2.4 Young people's suggestions as to what we can do to improve the service:

- Hold a short pre-meeting to ensure that the plan is shared, everyone has information, actions and can come to the Children's Looked After review prepared to ensure progression of the plan.
- Give children the choice of who is invited, what is discussed, where it is held.
- Recognise where Children and Young People may need time out or where they might be uncomfortable discussing certain things in the meeting.
- Sometimes views are not taken seriously enough.
- IRO'S should be able to challenge local authorities that are not always making best decision for the child.
- More encouragement to attend reviews.
- Maybe in a different environment than a foster carer's house, child gets choice as to where they are.
- Maybe more conversation with the young person on how the meeting is to run and who it will involve, if they would feel comfortable with certain people their etc. Some young people may prefer smaller meetings with fewer people. It may encourage them to engage more.

2.5 In preparation of the IRO Annual Report, an Audit was undertaken of LAC reviews (30 cases) by the Interim Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

Key issues from the Audit.

IRO practice over the last year is less variable there were more examples of good recording of children's views and wishes; however, this was not always consistently found in the cases audited.

Practice issues, which need to be addressed:-

- The majority review minutes are now written up in timescale, however in a quarter of cases audited (30) these are on case notes as the social worker had not completed the pre-meeting report.
- Child participation – although in most cases the child's views were presented to the review, older children were choosing not to attend the meetings and this is an area for development.

- Quality of recommendations - in some reviews there were clear child focussed recommendations. In a small number however there were too much reliance on stock phrases, or simply statements such as - continue to monitor contact
- Challenge to care planning - some cases showed robust and well thought out challenge. However in a minority of cases where planning was weak and care plans lacked focus and direction there was insufficient challenge from the IRO.
- Care Plans since the introduction of the new format have significantly improved, plans are more focussed. More could still be done to individualise the plans and bring out the individual child needs.

3. Issues Options and Analysis of Options

These are included in the attached Annual Report.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To inform members of the work of the independent reviewing officer service during 2018-2019. The report also updates members with the recommended work plan for the IRO service during 2019 – 2020

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

- 5.1 Not applicable

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

- 6.1 Not applicable

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7.2 Legal

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

Section 118 Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the concept Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Since 2004 all Local Authorities have

been required to appoint IROs. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extends the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to child's review to monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to a child's case as set out in sections 25A - 25C of the Children Act 1989. The intention is that IRO's should have an effective independent oversight of the child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process. The IRO Handbook provides clear guidance on the IROs' role in and processes around the case review

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The 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. Placements and Staff members represent diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

- Not applicable

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):

- Not applicable

9. Appendices to the report – there are one appendix for this report

- Appendix 1 - IRO Annual Report 2018-2019

Report Author:

Ruth Murdock
Strategic Lead, Quality Assurance and Reviewing
Children's Services

**Thurrock Children's Services
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

ANNUAL REPORT

1st April 2018 – 31st March 2019

Author: Ruth Murdock

Date: 20th August 2019

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1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee, established by the IRO Handbook (2010).
- 1.2 Following presentation to the Thurrock Corporate Parenting Committee, Overview and Scrutiny and the Thurrock Safeguarding Children's Partnership, this report will be placed on the Council website as a publically accessible document.
- 1.3 Where possible, this Report refers to Children Looked After (CLA). Such use reflects the views and wishes of children and young people about their own identity and the way in which they prefer to be referred to by professionals.

2. Reporting Period

This report covers the period from 1st of April 2018 until the 31st of March 2019. Some of the data sets vary slightly from those published by children's social care due to minor variations in the timeframe for data capture.

3. The Legal, Statutory and National Context of the IRO Role

- 3.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 3.2 In March 2010 the IRO Handbook was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IROs should discharge their duties. Significantly, the Handbook stated:

The IRO has a new role conferred upon them to monitor the child's case as opposed to monitoring the review, effectively monitoring the implementation of the Care Plan between reviews (at para. 3.74)

The Handbook goes on to state that the primary role of an IRO is:

To ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child (at para. 2.10)

- 3.3 In discharging this role, the Handbook notes (at para. 2.14) that the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

- *promoting the voice of the child*

- *ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment; are up to date; effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;*
- *making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;*
- *offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for children looked after and the delivery of services to them; and*
- *monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands*

4. Local Context – Thurrock Council as a Corporate Parent

As a Corporate Parent, the Council is ambitious to ensure that children achieve their best possible outcomes while in the care of the authority, and that all children are helped to find a long term permanent home.

The IRO service plays a key role in monitoring and supporting plans to achieve this ambition.

5. Thurrock Council IRO Service

- 5.1 During the reporting period, the IRO service has remained stable with one member of staff who has been on long term sickness absence. This post has been covered by an internal secondment since February 2019. The Service continues to comprise of five, permanent Independent Reviewing Officers, all of whom are experienced and authoritative social work practitioners with social work management experience.
- 5.2 All five IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring enhanced checks. All have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience. All have substantial experience of effective direct work with children and young people.
- 5.3 There are 4 female and one male IRO and the IRO come from diverse backgrounds, ensuring young people in our care can be allocated to IRO's across a range of ethnic groups.
- 5.4 All five of the IROs are independent of Thurrock Social Care and are not involved in preparation of children in care plans or the management of children in care cases or have any control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 During the reporting period the IROs were line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

6. IRO Caseloads and Services Performance.

IRO Case Loads

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Average Case Load	56	67	67	61	62
Case Load Range	58-62	62-67	60-68	62-65	44-68

- 6.1 The average IRO case load remained stable throughout the year with IRO's having on average 62 cases.
- 6.2 In 2018 – 2019 One member of staff was on long term sick which impacted on IRO case loads, with 50 children having to be distributed across the other 4 IRO's taking the average to 78 cases for a short while until a secondment arrangement was recruited to and came into post in February 2019.
- 6.3 To contextualise the caseloads, the IRO handbook suggests that an average IRO caseload should be between 50 - 70 children and young people for a full time post (FTE). However, the average IRO caseload is a crude indicator of the work undertaken by the IROs, as children and young people's circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and in the distance which needs to be travelled to placements. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or have placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long term settled foster placements. There additionally needs to be enough flexibility in the service to respond to peaks in demand and associated workload, whilst maintaining a focus on quality and oversight.

Number of Child and Young Person in Care Reviews

<u>Due in Month</u>	<u>Apr-18</u>	<u>May-18</u>	<u>Jun-18</u>	<u>Jul-18</u>	<u>Aug-18</u>	<u>Sep-18</u>	<u>Oct-18</u>	<u>Nov-18</u>	<u>Dec-18</u>	<u>Jan-19</u>	<u>Feb-19</u>	<u>Mar-19</u>	<u>Year To Date</u>
Total Due	61	79	50	40	74	81	60	74	60	85	26	73	763
Total Held	61	79	50	40	74	81	60	73	59	81	25	72	755
Total Held In Timescale	48	74	44	40	72	78	56	66	56	76	25	71	706
Percentage of 'Total Due' Held In Timescale	79%	94%	88%	100%	97%	96%	93%	89%	93%	89%	96%	97%	93%
Held In Quarter	190			195			192			178			
Percentage Held In Timescale	87%			97%			93%			97%			

- 6.4 During the performance year April 2018 – March 2019, the IRO service conducted a total of 755 reviews, which is an increase on the number of reviews conducted the previous year. The performance, in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 93% of reviews held within timescales.

In the small number of cases not held on time these were the factors which affected performance:

- The IRO service not being notified early enough that children had become looked after and so there was a delay in booking the 1st review meeting
- Change of social worker and communication problems, which meant that a date for the next review had been set by the previous social worker but actions had not been carried forward by the new social worker and so the review had to be rescheduled
- Problems on the day of the review, IRO, social worker, carer, or report not available and so the review had to be cancelled

We will continue to improve the timeliness of reviews in 2019/2020 to achieve performance between 95%– 98%. We have improved communication when children are admitted to care which has led to 100% of initial reviews being completed within timescales currently.

Children and Young People's Participation in Reviews:

Participation	Total 2017 /2018	Total 2018/19
Not Recorded	105	0
PN0 Child aged under 4 at time of meeting	85	100
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	332	372
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	5	3
PN3 Child attends and conveys his/her view symbolically (non-verbally)		2
PN4 Child attended without contributing	4	5
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	12	3
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	122	159
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	83	103
Grand Total	750	747

This year children participated in person or through an advocate or by another means in 84% of their reviews (excludes Children under 4 years of age). This was an improvement on last year's performance of 72%.

The IRO services key function is to promote the child's voice within their review and for those children and young people who have not directly been involved in their review the reasons are always closely scrutinised. During 2018-2019, reasons given for non-attendance related to – older children making an informed choice that they did not wish to attend their reviews, and in some cases the child not being able to attend the meeting due to their behaviour. In these circumstances the IROs work closely with the connected network of the young person to gain as full a picture of the child's life as possible.

A key priority for the IRO service in 2019-2020 is improving the level of participation in reviews. To assist this we have:

- Adopted the mind of my own app, this is a nationally recognised and used communication system specifically designed to get the views of looked after children. It uses innovative software which can be used on tablets or mobile phones and allows the child/young person to communicate directly with their IRO in a friendly format which prompts them to talk about their needs. The app was launched in June 2019 and is already beginning to make an impact. This is a key project and we have created a cross departmental governance board to deliver this important and exciting new approach to engagement.
- Extended our contract with the advocacy provider Open Door. As part of this contract we have asked Open Door to contact every child over 7 who has become looked after and introduce themselves and explain the role of an advocate. The aim is to ensure our young people know about advocacy and that it is their right.
- We have created and appointed a Children's Participation Worker – specifically to promote and develop approaches to child participation. The officer came into post in May of 2019 and her first task was in delivering the Mind of My Own app alongside the lead IRO.

Completion of Review Reports

On completion of the child's review the IRO is expected to complete a report on the children's social care computer system. The report provides a note of the review and its discussions and the recommendation made by the review.

The target for having these review outcome reports completed and distributed to young people, parents and professionals is within 20 working days of the review. At the beginning of 2018/19 performance was under 50%, by mid-year it had improved to 75% and by 2019 it was 100% and in the first quarter of 2019/20 performance has been maintained at 100%.

The target is to maintain this good performance during 2019/20.

The use of Feedback and Consultation Forms

The IROs have generally received positive feedback from young people. Key comments from young people have been

- The IRO has been a consistent person in their life and has followed them through care
- They have advocated for them

Although consultation forms are sent out prior to all reviews and IRO's are using feedback forms with young people, the return rate was very low. The introduction of the Mind of My Own app is designed to supplement these forms and increase the amount of feedback received.

7. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

Numbers of Children in the care of Thurrock

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Number	284	333	334	308	293
Rate per 10,000	71	81	79	72	68.4
UASC	39	64	55	32	30
Adopted	13	7	9	7	13

At 31 March 2018, the number of children looked after by local authorities in England increased, up 4% to 75,420 from 72,590 in 2017, continuing increases seen in recent years. This is equivalent to a rate of 64 per 10,000 in 2018, which is up from 62 per 10,000 in 2017 and 60 per 10,000 in 2016.

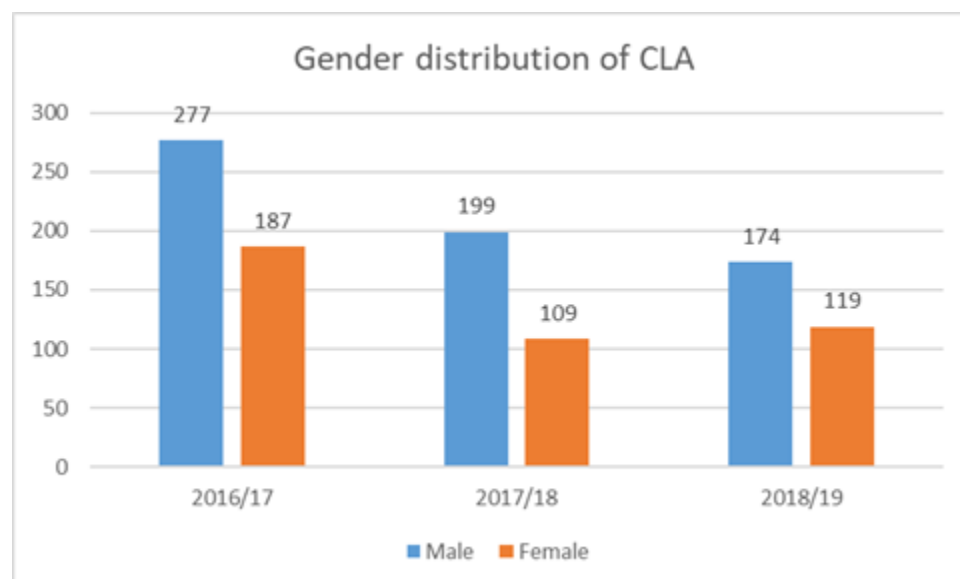
In Thurrock there has been a reduction in the number of children Looked after from March 2017 to April 2019. This has included a reduction in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children down to 30 from 64 in March 2016.

Thurrock's rate of children looked after in 2019 was 68.4 children per 10,000. Although this is slightly higher than the England average of 64 per 10,000 it is lower than the average of similar authorities (statistical neighbours) which for 2018 was 69.5 per 10,000. This also represents a sustained reduction in the number of children looked after over the past three years, which is better than the National and statistical neighbour performance which has seen a year on year increase over the past three years.

Nationally in 2017, 4,370 children looked after were adopted and this has decreased further by 13% to 3,820 in 2018. This is in line with the decrease in the number of looked after children with a placement order seen over recent years, which has fallen from 9,590 in 2014 to 5,360 in 2018.

In Thurrock there were 13 adoptions completed in 2018/2019, which is nearly double the previous years performance. There has been a renewed emphasis on permanency planning during 2018/19 and we have introduced weekly permanency tracking panels at which the IRO service is represented. These panels combat drift and ensure that a focus is maintained on achieving permanency for children in care.

Gender of Children and Young People in Care:



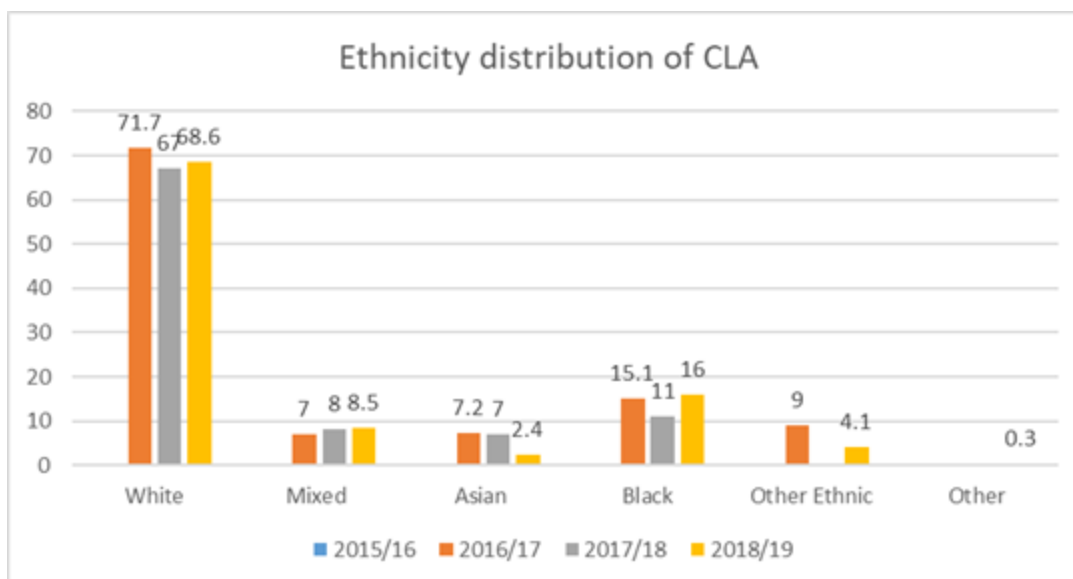
Over a three-year period the gender distribution of children looked after in Thurrock is interesting. The number of girls has remained fairly constant especially from 2017/18 to 2018/19; the number of boys has reduced this year, partly reflected in the reduction of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

There is still a higher proportion of boys looked after, factors which can be affecting this relate to issues such as youth offending, aggression and non-school attendance, all of which put boys at higher risk of coming into care.

Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care:

The ethnic profile of Thurrock

	Thurrock Council	England
White British	80.91%	79.75%
All non-White British	19.09%	20.25%
All black, African , Caribbean and black British	7.82%	3.47%
All Asian and Asian British	3.77%	7.82%



The number of children looked after in Thurrock from a white background has remained relatively stable over the past three years, once you allow for the changing numbers of children looked after, there has been a slight increase in the number of Black or Black British children and children from other ethnic groups. There has been a reduction in the number of Asian or Asian British Children.

Children from Asian/Asian British backgrounds represent 2.4% of the children looked after by Thurrock which is a reduction from last year's 8%. This is now closer to the local Asian British population which represents 3.7% of the total population in Thurrock.

Children from Black/Black British backgrounds represent 16% of the looked after population as opposed to being 7.82% of the total population. This is an increase from last year where 11% of children came from Black/Black British Backgrounds, but the percentage of children from Black/Black British backgrounds remain higher than the total population for the past years.

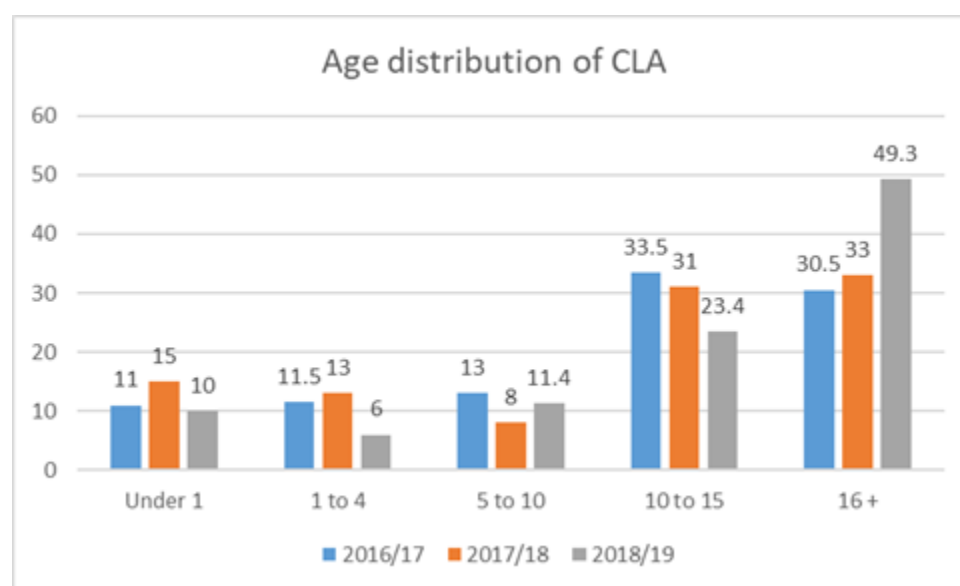
Identity is a core factor considered within the dimensions on developmental need (Care Planning Guidance 2015). This domain concerns the child's growing sense of self as a separate and valued person. It is important for a child who is in care to know who s/he is and where s/he has come from, and also to understand, as far as s/he is able, why s/he is being cared for away from home. Race, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability all contribute to a child's sense of identity, as well as feelings of belonging and acceptance by family, peer group and wider society, including other cultural groups. The importance of understanding who we are and where we come from is recognised in good social work practice, for example through undertaking life story work or other direct work.

Racial and cultural identity is an important aspect of identity for many Children Looked After. The assessment of each individual child's needs alongside the child's own views will determine the actions which should be put into the care plan to ensure that s/he is able to develop a strong sense of identity and self-esteem. This will act not only as a strong protective factor against unhealthy risk taking behaviours, but enable the child

to maximise his/her talents. Disabled children may also need particular help in developing a positive sense of identity in the face of negative public stereotypes about disability.

During 2019 the IRO service will conduct a review to explore the reasons for an increased number for Black/Black British children in care alongside the quality of matching children with placement which meet their ethnic, identity, religious and cultural needs and make recommendations to the Children looked after service.

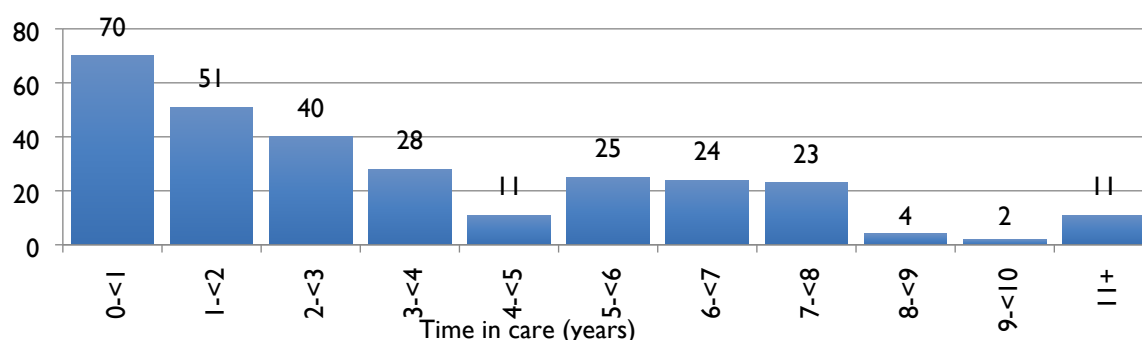
Age of Children and Young People in Care



The age distribution represents improving practice in Thurrock, where the majority of children under five are moved on to permanency through adoption or placement with connected carers. Those currently being looked after under 5 are progressing through the court and permanency plans are underway. The impact of this can be seen in the number of children 5-10, where fewer children are remaining in care beyond five years old.

The older age groups 10-15 and 16+ represent children who have remained in our care for a number of years, the 31 asylum seeking young people and a number of older adolescents who have been accommodated due to the risk of exploitation. This group of young people tend to have more complex needs and challenges around education. The challenge for the IRO service is to ensure there is effective transition planning for these children and that they leave care with the skills and support necessary to achieve their goals.

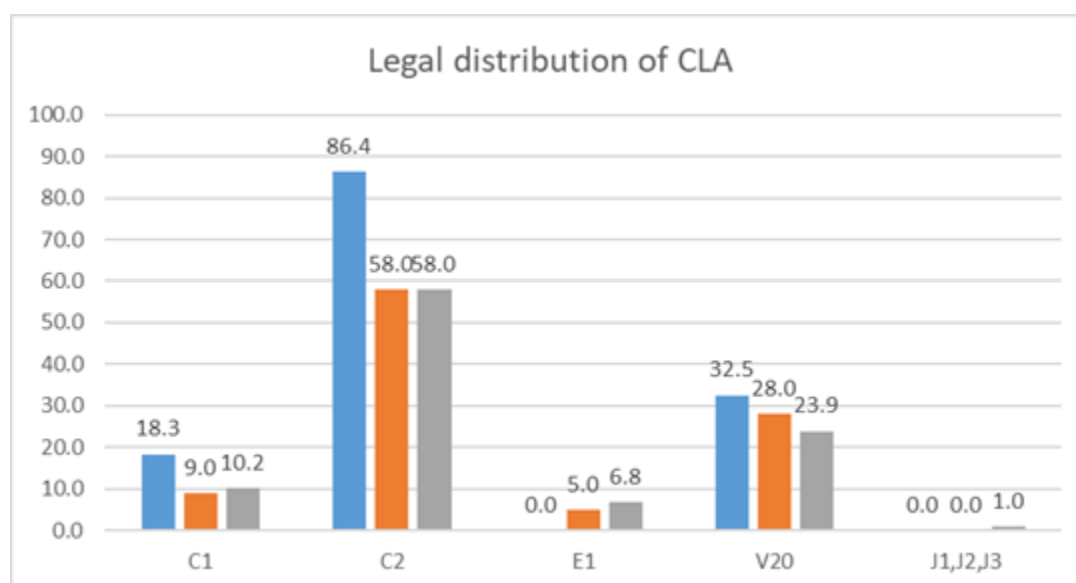
Time in Care for Children and Young People



This graph shows that last year's trend has continued with fewer children remaining in care long term and the majority of children coming into care for between 1 and 3 years.

The challenges for the IRO service are in ensuring that there are effective permanency plans for all children and ensuring cases do not drift. There is also a need to work with long term foster carers to explore whether an SGO would be more appropriate for a child who may have been in placement for over five years.

Legal Framework for Children in Care.



C1 = Interim Care Order

C2 = Care Order

V2 = Single Period of Accommodation under Section 20 CA 1989 (voluntary)

E1 = Placement Order (permission for adoption)

J1/J2/J3 = on remand, committed for trial or detained

Nationally at 31 March 2018, 55,240 (73%) children looked after were looked after under a care order, up from 40,090 (58%) in 2014. At 31 March 2018, 14,500 (19%) children were looked after under a voluntary agreement (s.20), down from a peak of 19,320 (28%) in 2015.

In Thurrock 75% of children are looked after through care orders and 23% are looked after on a voluntary basis (Section 20 of the Children Act 1989). The main reason for accommodation is due to concerns about the children's welfare. The other reason is the provision of specialist accommodation for children with a disability. This represents improved practice with a focus on ensuring children in care do not drift and there are permanency plans in place for them to move them on quickly from the care system into more permanent arrangements.

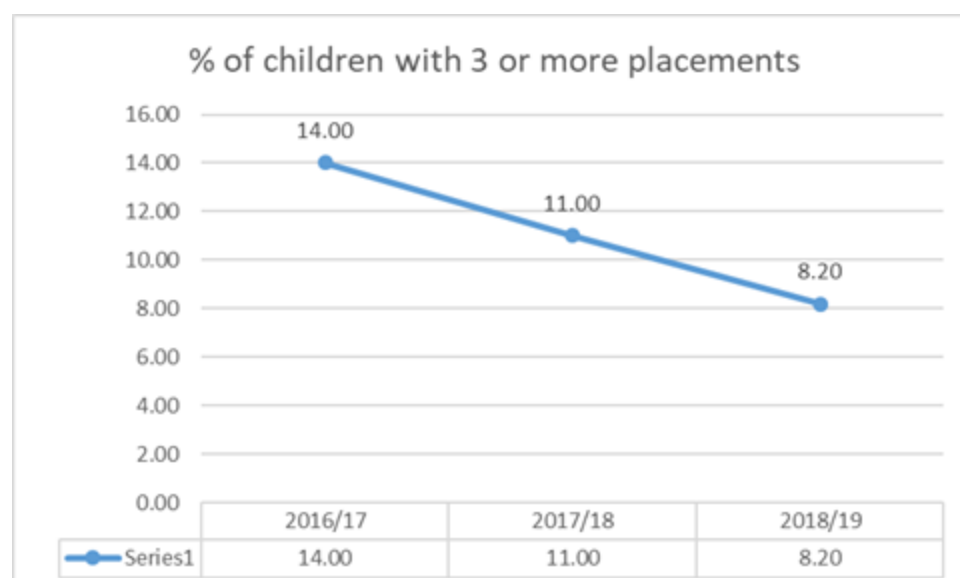
The majority of children looked after by Thurrock are subject to legal proceedings where they have suffered some form of abuse or neglect and the accommodation is being used to protect them from further harm and to secure permanency for these children.

This is in line with national and local trends where children's services use of accommodation is increasingly being targeted on children at the highest risk. In Thurrock we have increased services, including a new family's together team to divert children with lower level needs from the care system.

The number of placement orders which allow the authority to place a child for adoption have been increasing over the past three years and in 2018/19 there were 16 placement orders granted. This allows children to be placed with their permanent families in a timely manner.

The challenge for the IRO service is to ensure that plans are being carried out in timescales which meet the child's need.

Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care.

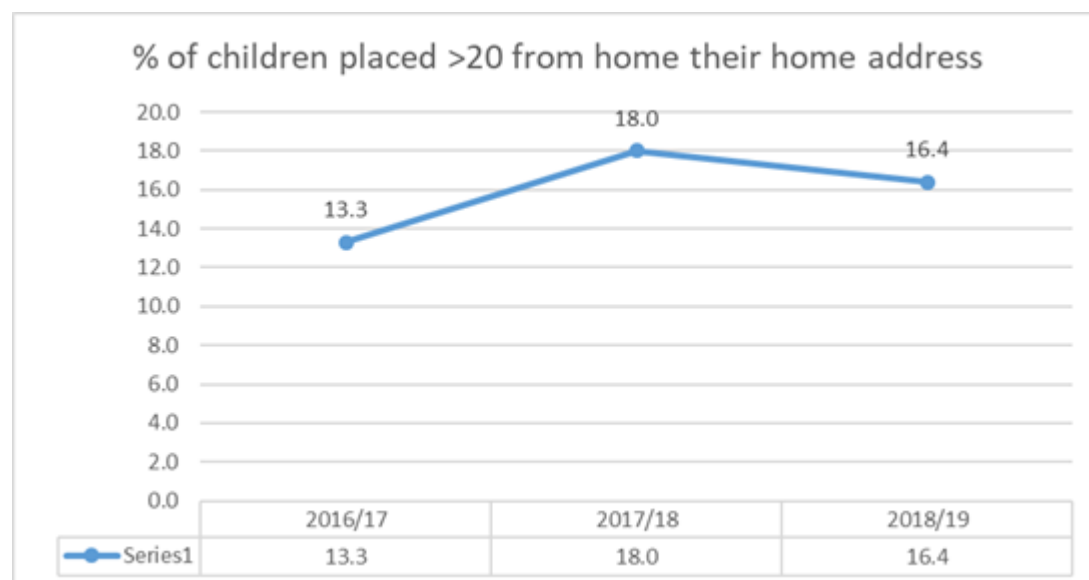


There is an improving picture of placement stability in Thurrock with a continuous fall in the number of children having three or more placement moves. This is partly related to the emphasis on permanency moving children out of the care system at the earliest possibility. It is also seen in the number of older adolescents who have been in longer term stable placements.

Placement stability is strongly correlated to the progress that children and young people make in care, as moves caused by placement breakdown can negatively impact on a young person's sense of worth, emotional resilience and is disruptive to developing friendship and support networks and educational achievement. Therefore a key role of the IRO is to support placement stability through scrutiny of placement plans. Placement stability in Thurrock is at 8.2% in comparison to the England and statistical neighbour averages of 10% which represents very good performance.

Placement Location of Children and Young People in Care

Percentage of children placed more than 20 miles from their home address

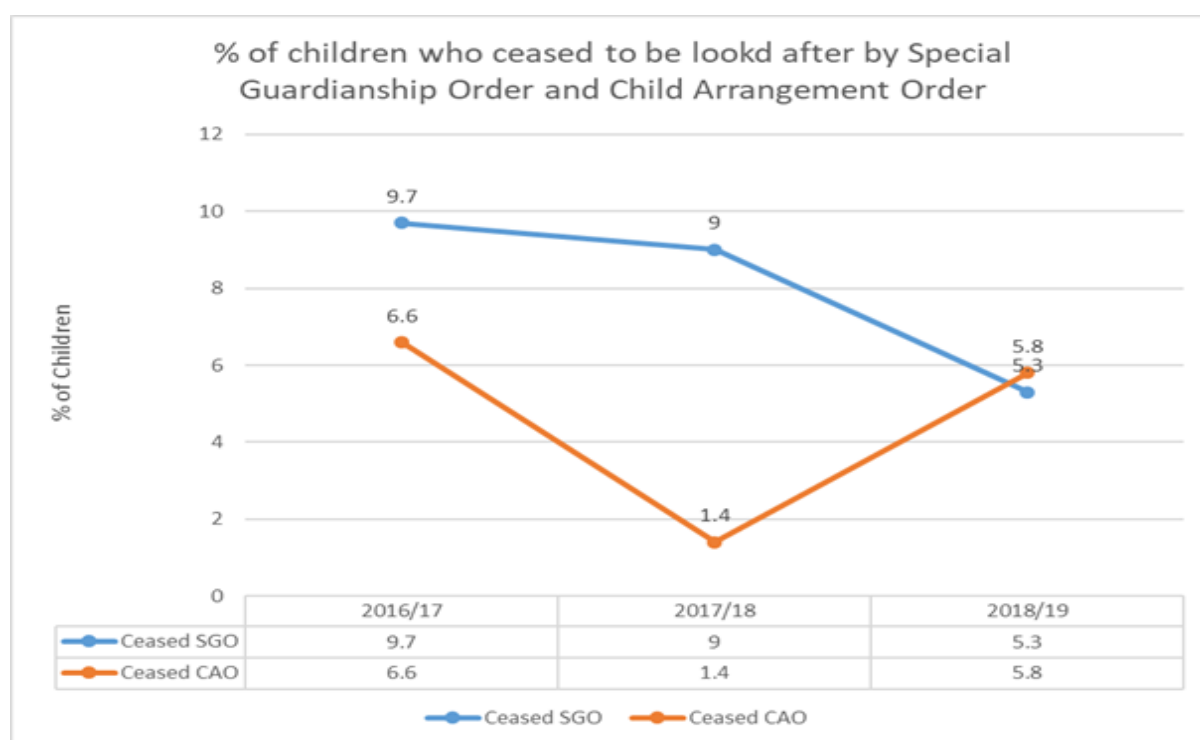


In England at 31 March 2018 there were 26% of children looked after placed more than 20 miles from their home. In Thurrock we have reduced this to only 16% of our looked after children which represents good practice. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place children as close to their home and community as possible so far as is consistent with their need to be safeguarded, or to have access to specialist therapeutic services.

The IRO service have highlighted that, for a small minority of children in care who have complex needs and extreme behavioural support needs, there are very limited local options for appropriate placements due to the nature of the needs, and these children are often those which end up placed at distance. The IRO service will monitor these placements closely to ensure that any opportunity to appropriately bring the children closer to home is taken.

Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement. It is a more secure order than a Child Arrangements Order (CAO) because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so, however it is less secure than an Adoption Order because it does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders. Both an SGO and CAO are routes to permanence for looked after children.



Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders can be used in care proceedings when looking at placing the child away from parents with friends or family members and offer a child a more “normal” childhood experience. They are also used to convert long term fostering arrangements, providing for a higher degree of commitment from the carer and a better chance of long term permanency for the child.

In Thurrock 5.3% of children left care through special guardianship, nationally 11% and 5.8% through child arrangement orders, nationally 4%. This performance is partly a reflection of the increasing numbers of children who have been long term fostered who are now over sixteen for whom a SGO or CAO may not be appropriate. There has been an increase in the use of CAO's by the Courts for children during proceedings.

The IRO service will continue to review the use of special guardianship and child arrangement orders. The reviewing service will need to carefully scrutinise plans to identify the possibility of using special guardianship and child arrangement orders.

8. IRO Service impact on the outcomes for children and young people.

Dispute resolutions and escalation

One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority. This responsibility is outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2015 and IRO Handbook 2010. Every child in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care.

An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person, for example in relation to planning for the care of the child, or the implementation of the plan or decisions relating to it, resource issues or poor practice by the Social Worker. When this happens the IRO is required to seek a resolution.

It is acknowledged that the resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. Nevertheless, the child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance with the IRO Handbook 2010 there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process whilst acknowledging and giving primacy to informal resolution where possible.

Thurrock's IRO's manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively and on an informal basis. More often than not, discussion with social workers and their managers is effective in achieving the progress required.

In July 2018 the IRO service developed a compliance checklist which was completed at each review. This allowed the IRO service to address process problems such as reports not completed for the review through the checklist. Individual checklist were sent to service managers and team managers to raise practice issues. The checklist themselves were analysed and the learning presented to the monthly performance meetings.

This had the result of reducing the use of the dispute resolution process for simple process issues.

Formal Disputes Raised 2018-2019

The IRO Service recorded 15 completed dispute resolutions which were about the following issues.

There were no disputes which had to be referred to the Corporate Director of Children Services or CAFCAS .

Number	Area of Practice Raised
2	Local Authority Pathway Plan/Transition plan for child leaving care was challenged and had to be amended
8	Permanency Plan for the child was not robust enough and had to be changed
1	Challenge to Local authority plan for Contact
2	An issue regarding the plan for the child's education had to be addressed
1	Specific Advocacy was requested for parents to participate in the review process

IRO Compliance Checklist

The IRO Checklist, introduced in July 2018 has been used as a way of providing a monthly dip sample into the quality of services provided to Children Looked After.

Some of the key practice areas captured through the IRO Checklist are: timeliness of CLA Reviews, the quality of care/pathway plans, participation of children/young people and their carer's and completion of CLA visits, PEPs, Health assessments and case summaries.

Key findings from the checklist this year:

- Social work reports were not always provided in a timely way to the review
- Children fully participate in 84% of their reviews
- The consultation booklets are poorly used
- In a number of Reviews looked after children have experienced a change of social worker since the last review
- There has been a problem with completing initial health assessments

This has led the service to review the use and design of consultation booklets, challenge teams about the production of reports, and work with the CLA service and Designated Nurse to review the process for the commissioning of initial health assessments.

Feedback from the Children in Care about the IRO Service

The children participation officer completed an initial survey with the children in care council and the other young people in care

What the young people said:

What works well:-

- Consistency of IROs which allows for a "bond" to be made and understanding between child and IRO. Particularly important where there are regular changes of social workers.

- IRO got to know the young person and recognised when breaks were needed for the Young Person during the reviews.
- IRO made sure Young Person was listened to and not talked over.
- IRO made sure that Young Person was informed of grants etc. they could apply for that they otherwise were not told about.
- Making sure the child feels welcome, it is their meeting after all.
- Being a person or people that were not social workers or involved directly in your case helped to talk about particular concerns, worries and wishes.
- It helped with relationship difficulties and overcoming certain problems,
- It helped me plan for my future, what I needed to do to get to where I wanted to be and who will be there to support me if needed.
- Involved collaborating with other services that would best help me at that particular time when looked after. Especially as a young person it is hard to know what is available and where to turn. Sometimes you just need that guidance.

What Children and young people value about their IROs:-

- Honesty
- Trust
- Communication
- Confidence
- Hearing the YP's views
- Empathy
- Understanding
- Good listener
- Experience
- Patience
- Independent
- Equal power with looked after children
- Self-awareness
- Appropriate language (no jargon)
- Compassion

What does not work as well?

- Young People felt at times put on the spot to discuss feelings during meetings with everyone sitting around which was uncomfortable.
- One young person said they were not always given a choice of who was present, one professional made them feel uncomfortable, but they didn't feel able to speak up about this.
- One young person said that changes in social worker meant that their Aftercare plan was not done until they had turned 18.
- Young people said they *Didn't always feel like she could say what she wanted to say during meetings.*
- One young person said, *I often chose not to engage, not be involved and not be at the meetings.*

Young people's suggestions as to what we can do to improve the service:-

- Hold a short pre-meeting to ensure that the plan is shared, everyone has information, actions and can come to the Children's Looked After review prepared to ensure progression of the plan.
- Give children the choice of who is invited, what is discussed, where it is held.
- Recognise where Children and Young People may need time out or where they might be uncomfortable discussing certain things in the meeting.
- Sometimes views are not taken seriously enough.
- IRO'S should be able to challenge local authorities that are not always making best decision for the child.
- More encouragement to attend reviews.
- Maybe in a different environment than a foster carer's house, child gets choice as to where they are.
- Maybe more conversation with the young person on how the meeting is to run and who it will involve, if they would feel comfortable with certain people their etc. Some young people may prefer smaller meetings with fewer people. It may encourage them to engage more.

This very helpful feedback has been considered by the IRO service and will form part of 2019/20 work plan.

Audit Activity

In preparation of this report an Audit was undertaken of CLA reviews (30) by the Service Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

Key issues from the Audit.

IRO practice over the last year is less variable there were more examples of good recording of children's views and wishes; however, this was not always consistently found in the cases audited.

Practice issues, which need to be addressed

- The majority review minutes are now written up in timescale, however in a quarter of cases audited (30) these are on case notes due to system issues which are being addressed.
- Child participation – although in most cases the child's views were presented to the review, older children were choosing not to attend the meetings and this is an area for development.
- Quality of recommendations - in some reviews there were clear child focussed recommendations. In a small number however there were too much reliance on stock phrases, or simply statements such as - continue to monitor contact
- Challenge to care planning - some cases showed robust and well thought out challenge. However in a minority of cases where planning was weak and care plans lacked focus and direction there was insufficient challenge from the IRO.

- Care Plans since the introduction of the new format, have significantly improved, plans are more focussed. More could still be done to individualise the plans and bring out the individual child needs.

9. Progress in respect of the IRO Service objectives in: 2018 - 2019

1. Implement IRO review minutes tracker and ensure all reviews are on the system within 20 working days of the meeting

Progress – this has been implemented and performance has reached 100%

2. Complete workshop with IROs and team managers on improving the quality CLA reviews

Progress - Practice workshops have been delivered throughout the year and a project has been completed to improve the templates for reports and plans on the LCS Children Recording system which have been redesigned and implemented. This has made a clear impact and the plans are now easy to follow, more work will be needed to improve the quality and ensuring that plans reflect the unique nature of the child's need, however the new plans represent a step change from previous practice. Further development work is planned for July 2019.

3. IROs to complete development project with children in care council on child participation. IROs to review training needs on child participation. Aim to raise the level of participation in reviews to 90%

Progress – The Child Participation Officer was commissioned and has been appointed in May 2019. The Participation officer is now working with the IRO's to improve participation.

4. Introduce compliance audit of all CLA reviews to monitor and ensure minimum practice standards

Progress - This was implemented on the 1st of July 2018 and has now been revised and version 2 will be implemented in July 2019. These have been presented to the monthly performance meetings and have been used to inform quarterly performance meetings. The challenge has been given to the CLA service and IRO to work together to improve: Children's Participation, Social Worker reports to reviews and the commissioning of initial health assessments.

5. Review the dispute resolution procedure and tracking mechanism

Progress - This was completed and implemented on 1st of August 2018 and will be revised in August 2019. The impact so far has been to reduce the number of formal disputes being raised, and to narrow their focus onto the quality of the care planning. This has been positive as it has shifted the focus of the IRO's onto issues affecting outcomes for children, rather than just focussing on gaps in process. These are important but covered by the compliance checklist.

6. Redesign of consultation and feedback forms and also to look at the possibility of using different communication methods such as texting or the Mind of My Own app.

Progress - The Mind of My Own App has been commissioned and implemented across the whole of children's services and will go live in June 2019.

7. Develop and implement – midpoint reviews for all children looked after by December 2018

Progress – Midpoint Reviews have now been implemented though there has been a delay in getting these underway and the IRO's have only begun consistently completing midpoint reviews since February of 2019.

10. IRO Service objectives in: 2019 -2020

1. **Work with the Children's Participation Officer and Children in Care Council to improve the participation of child and young people in reviews**
2. **Review the Dispute Resolution Process to ensure that IRO's are maximising their impact on improving outcomes for children and young people**
3. **Continue to embed and learn from the implementation of Mind of My Own as a communication tool**
4. **Continue to improve the quality of children in care plans and pathway plans through joint training and working, with some focus on planning towards transitions and re-unification.**
5. **Develop the use of the Signs Of Safety/Signs Of Success model within the IRO service**
6. **Review the impact of compliance checklists and use them to improve culture around preparation for reviews**
7. **Develop the role of IRO with regard to the Public Law Outline work (PLO) and Permanency Planning Processes**
8. **Develop the child focus of reviews**
9. **Review the reasons for Black/Black British children coming into care alongside the quality of services to meet their needs.**
10. **Develop a form for Midpoint Reviews on LCS to improve tracking and consistency**

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10 September 2019		ITEM: 11
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: All
Report of: Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

One of the roles of the Virtual School is to provide training to a range of colleagues including social workers, designated teachers and foster carers. This training includes providing information which enables those professionals to support the educational outcomes for Children Looked After [CLA].

The Virtual School Head Teacher [VSHT] is currently participating in an exciting new professional qualification for Virtual Schools which explores support for a range of colleagues who support children in care. .

This two year course is being provided by Bath/Spa University and the National Association of Virtual School Heads [NAVSH]. The VSHT's attendance on this course is being funded through Thurrock's Continuous Professional Development programme. This course will ultimately lead to the VSHT for Thurrock obtaining a Masters Degree in Professional Practice for Care Experienced Children.

A key element of the course is to complete a piece of action research which relates to the role of the Virtual School Head. The focus of this particular subject was chosen based upon prior research into the impact that foster carers can have on promoting the educational outcomes for children in their care. The title chosen by the VSHT for this action research is 'What is the impact of a structured training programme, with a focus on key educational information, on improving the confidence and knowledge of foster carers to support children in their care?'

Details of the specific expectation and statutory guidance for training can be found in the document 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 The Committee support the structured training programme to be delivered to foster carers which is provided annually by the Virtual School.

1.2 That the Committee sets an expectation that all Thurrock foster carers attend the training to improve their knowledge and confidence to support the education of the children and young people in their care.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The main aims of the action research were to:

- Create a structured programme of training which included power points, video clips and paper based and online resources which could be delivered by the Virtual School team
- Provide carers with a folder of useful resources, information and documents which could be kept for future reference
- To – provide carers with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to promote the education of the children in their care.

2.1.1 The programme was delivered across 20 working hours. This was achieved by providing 4 weeks of sessions which totalled 16 hours, plus the option of a further 4 hour session to cover any subjects that a carer may have missed due to missing any of the preceding 4 weeks.

The participants of this action research were all volunteers obtained from the Thurrock Fostering team. The VSHT attended key meetings of carers to explain the course content and why it was being offered. The dates and times were negotiated prior to the training commencing. It was important that it did not interfere with the crucial times of the start or end of the school day to enable carers to complete 'drop off' and 'pick up' duties.

It was also essential that there was a clearly agreed set of rules linked to confidentiality within the training group in order to ensure that children and carers were safeguarded.

2.1.2 In order to gauge the level of knowledge and confidence that each participant had before the training commenced, a questionnaire was provided for the carers to complete. These were anonymised and carers did not add their names or mention the names of the children in their care. This was to ensure that the strict ethical guidelines of Bath/Spa University and the General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR] guidelines were adhered to.

At the end of every training session, the carers completed an evaluation of their learning and of the content of the session. This was to ensure that the course content was meaningful, relevant and that the delivery of the training

and quality of the resources were meeting the course objectives and the learning needs of the carers.

At the end of the completed programme of sessions, the carers completed the original questionnaire to gauge their knowledge and confidence after the training.

3. Course Content

- 3.1 The course was specifically written to cover the key components that carers should have knowledge of in order for them to maximise their ability to support their children educationally and to be the daily educational advocate for the children and young people on their care.
- 3.1.2 The first session incorporated the subjects of: the roles and functions of a virtual school, the role of the designated teacher in schools, the purpose and content of a personal education plan and how pupil premium plus is used by schools and the virtual school to raise pupil attainment.
- 3.1.3 In the second session the carers learnt about the impact of carers in the education of care experienced children, how the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is used to gauge the mental health of children, how mental health can be supported in schools, behaviour policies and how schools promote behaviour, exclusion guidance and anti-bullying.
- 3.1.4 The third session comprised of a trauma and attachment overview and how this affects children and young people in school including the ability to learn and develop. The session also covered Special Educational Needs including categories of need, barriers to learning and the Educational Health and Care Plan process.
- 3.1.5 The final session focussed on the assessment of children and young people from pre-school to A'Levels. The areas covered included: the types of assessment methods that schools use, how to judge good progress and the national testing arrangements. The carers were provided with an insight to the types of tests and assessments that schools and other educational settings have. A particular emphasis was made on how children learn to read and how these experiences can be supported in the home.

4. Impact and Feedback from the Carers

- 4.1 There were originally 8 carers who started the course. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, 2 did not complete all of the course, but they did attend some of the sessions. For the purpose of the action research piece, the data provided by the questionnaires will be focussed on the 6 carers who attended all of the sessions and who completed the on-entry and exit questionnaires.

- 4.1.2 The questionnaire [Please see Appendix 1] was designed to establish the degree of knowledge and confidence that the carer had before and after the course. For each questionnaire completed, there was an increase in the carers' self-score in terms of their own knowledge, understanding and confidence. This would suggest that the course content covered the areas that carers need to have knowledge of in order for them to support their CLA. There was a consensus among the group that the training needed to be provided by an educational professional who knew the content of the subjects covered as well as being able to answer supplementary questions that arose during discussions. One carer commented that 'depth of knowledge is really important to offer training properly'.

All participants welcomed the training and felt that there was a need for a structured training programme. One carer wrote it 'gives confidence to carers to challenge the school and support the child'. Another carer felt strongly that a programme should be available and during feedback noted, 'much of the training for foster carers is based on care and well-being, very little (if any) is re – education'.

- 4.1.3 Each training session had an evaluation form to be completed at the end of the session [Please see Appendix 2]. When asked 'What is the most significant piece of learning you have taken away from today's session?', comments included:

'Understand my role as a carer and responsibilities of professionals'

'Bullying policies and how schools should be addressing this'

'Knowledge of exclusion'

'Reminder of impact of trauma'

'Phonics and watching the progress of my young person'

'Importance of reading to babies'

- 4.1.4 Overall the provision of this training course enabled carers to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence and make them more aware of how important they are in supporting our CLA in educational matters. It was a pleasure working with this group of carers as they were extremely keen and reflective about practice and how it can be developed to improve the educational outcomes for our children and young people.

Moving forward, the Virtual School would like to see this training approach become embedded as standard Thurrock practice for all carers. There would need to be some flexibility for sessions so that topics covered could be delivered in smaller subject areas. The sessions could also be offered more frequently across the year in order to enable all carers to attend different training over a time period and gradually build up their portfolio.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 Our carers play a very important role in supporting our CLA and young people. The more knowledge, skills and understanding that carers can have in how to support their CLA's education, the greater impact they can have.

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

This report asks that the Committee notes the level of resourcing used to support foster carers access to training. The Virtual School fulfils a range of functions, and training is one aspect of this. The Virtual School would be providing a significant time commitment to ensure that this training could be offered flexibly across the year and, therefore, it is cost effective if carers were able and encouraged to attend.

7.2 Legal

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

This report asks that the Committee notes the outcomes, and offer its commendations, taking into account in so doing the various contextual influences described by the report author. No decision is required. The Council is required by s22(3A) of the Children Act 1989, as amended, to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. The Children and Families Act 2014 amended s22 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: **Natalie Warren**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

Supporting the equality of access for carers to attend training is essential when providing training. Resources and teaching styles, will be adapted to support needs. Access arrangements should be in place for carers.

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 action research project which was conducted by the Virtual School Head. As a result of the positive feedback from the participants, the Virtual School are now requesting that there can be a structured approach for foster carers to access training to develop their knowledge and confidence to support their children and young people in education.

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):

- 'Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children' DFE February 2018

9. Appendices to the report – there are two appendices for this report

- Appendix 1 - Foster Carer Questionnaire
- Appendix 2 - Foster Carer Session Evaluation

Report Author:

Keeley Pullen BA (Hons), PGCE, NPQH

Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After
Children's Services

Foster Carer Knowledge and Confidence Questionnaire

Date:

What would you like to find out about as part of this course? (please write in the box below)

The first set of questions focuses on knowledge

Using a scaled score, please circle your level of knowledge linked to the following educational aspects for children looked after.

0 means no knowledge, 1-4 some basic knowledge, 5-8 good level of knowledge, 9-10 excellent level of knowledge.

The role of the Virtual School

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The role of the Designated Teacher

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The purpose of the PEP

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Pupil Premium Plus Grant

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How children learn to read

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How children and young people are assessed in education

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What the appropriate stages of progress are for my child

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The use of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Behaviour and Exclusions Legislation and practice

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Expectations for schools linked to mental health and well-being

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Supporting with homework

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Is there anything else you want to find out about? (please write in the box below)

The next set of questions focuses on your confidence

0 means no confidence at all, 1-4 some confidence, 5-8 good level of confidence, 9-10 very good level of confidence.

Supporting with homework

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Voicing your views in a PEP meeting

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Knowing what questions to ask at meetings in school

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Supporting with homework

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Being the daily first point of contact for schools

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Dealing with the difficult and unexpected conversations in school

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

How to support your child with educational matters

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Thank you for completing this part of the questionnaire. All answers are confidential and will be used to support your development of knowledge and confidence.

Is there anything else you would like to share or tell the instructor?

Do you feel there is a need for a structured training programme for foster carers that focusses on educational matters?

Please explain your answer below

Do you think it makes a difference if it is delivered by an educational professional or can it be delivered by other members of the local authority?

Please explain your answer below

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. All answers are confidential and will be used to support your development of knowledge and confidence. This will be repeated at the end of the course

Foster Carer Evaluation Form - Session 1

Date:

Using the scaled rating please evaluate the session for today.

Please circle

Content of the session

Poor 1-3

Fair 4-6

Good 7-9

Excellent 10

Quality of Resources

Poor 1-3

Fair 4-6

Good 7-9

Excellent 10

Development of own knowledge

Poor 1-3

Fair 4-6

Good 7-9

Excellent 10

Presentation Style of the facilitator

Poor 1-3

Fair 4-6

Good 7-9

Excellent 10

What is the most significant piece of learning you have taken away from today's session?

What will you do with this knowledge?

Are there any other comments from today?

Thank you for completing this evaluation and well done and thank you for your contributions.

10 September 2019		ITEM: 12
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2018/2019		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer		
Accountable Assistant Director: Shelia Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services		
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing & Health / Interim Director Children's Services		
This report is public		

Executive Summary

This report introduces the Corporate Parenting Annual Report, which was requested by the Leader following a Member Training session.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2018/19 be noted.
- 1.2 That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2018/19 municipal year.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 Each year Members are invited to a variety of training sessions, to assist them with their roles sitting on Committees. Following the Corporate Parenting Training held Wednesday 17 July 2019, it was requested that an Annual Report be produced detailing the work of Committee and their main achievements for that municipal year. The report is designed to inform residents of this work in an accessible and engaging format.
- 2.2 The last municipal year has seen the Corporate Parenting Committee tackle a wide range of topics, with Members leading on issues that have come to the fore both through their own research but also by understanding the issues that have arisen in the community.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 It is hoped that the format of the Annual Report will highlight to residents how the Corporate Parenting Committee have picked relevant community issues and how Members undertook work to form recommendations that positively affected these issues.
- 3.2 The report will be published on the Council's website and key community groups and participants from last year's work will be made aware of its publication directly.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The report outlines the positive work that has been undertaken during 2018/2019 and will be referred to Council for review in order for Members to comment on the overall work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

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

- 5.1 The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee has been consulted on the contents of the report.

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

- 6.1 The positive impact of the work of the Corporate Parenting committee for 2018/2019, in driving forward issues in relation to looked after children and care leavers to ensure Members are fully involved and engaged in their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no direct financial implications arising out of this report.

7.2 Legal

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

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report but it is good practice to produce an annual report reviewing the work of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Corporate Parenting Committee recognises the importance and role of diversity and equality issues. All work in 2018/19 sought to include looked after children and care leavers as appropriate.

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

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):

- Agenda, Reports and Minutes of meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee are available from:

<http://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/thurrock/>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2018/19

Report Author:

Kenna-Victoria Martin
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Legal and Democratic Services

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Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2018-2019

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Overview of Corporate Parenting

What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate Parenting describes the collective responsibility of the local authority to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are Looked After. Effective corporate parenting requires a commitment from all council employees and elected members. This responsibility was first set out in the Children Act 1989. Councillors have a lead role in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care by actively seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. Councillors need to aspire for looked after children in the same way that you would for your own children.

The role of the corporate parent is demanding. It requires energy, attention to detail and a willingness to engage with looked after children and care leavers in order to improve the services they use and their future outcomes. It is challenging to form a listening and learning relationship with vulnerable children but this is what we instinctively do for our own children and what we must consciously do for children entrusted to our care. As Officers of Thurrock Council we welcome scrutiny and challenge from Elected Members. By holding us to account we will continue to improve services and outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

Every Member should:

Every elected Member and manager within the Council, in conjunction with members of governing bodies of partner agencies, needs to:

- Be aware of their 'Corporate Parenting' role
- Have some knowledge of the profile and needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers
- Understand the impact on looked after children and young people of all Council decisions
- Receive information about quality of care and services children and young people are experiencing and consider if this would be 'good enough' for their own child
- Ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in services and support for looked after children and young people and strive to continually improve outcomes

Key to improving the Outcomes for looked after children

- It is with the corporate parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of looked after children ultimately rest
- A good corporate parent must offer everything that a good parent would including stability
- It must address both the difficulties, which looked after children experience, and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services
- Equally, it is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive

What makes Corporate Parenting effective?

An effective Corporate Parent makes sure that looked after children and young people and care leavers have as good care, nurture, health and well-being and life chances as they would expect and want for their own child. The Corporate Parent must act as a responsible parent. We believe that good, responsible parenting involves, but is not limited to:

- Making sure that children and young people have a strong sense of belonging
- Ensuring that they are cared about as well as cared for
- Supporting children and young people through school, college or work, being ambitious for them and helping them develop a sense of aspiration and belief
- Making sure children and young people are healthy and health-aware
- Making sure children and young people are actively listened to, respected and valued
- Encouraging them to develop and participate as citizens
- Encouraging them to form and sustain a range of healthy relationships
- Supporting them to manage their feelings and behaviours

In Local Authorities where services were effective Ofsted found articulation of the leadership, ambition and objectives for looked after children.

In these authorities, they found that the corporate parenting board/panel:

- Demonstrated a strong cross-party commitment to looked after children, championing their rights.
- Had high aspirations for their Children Looked After and monitored their progress

- Planned for and prioritised the needs of Children Looked After, resulting in a greater focus on improving outcomes
- Actively engaged with their young people

Membership

The membership of Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee is made up of eight Councillors drawn from all the political parties of the Council. It also includes the Co-Opted members appointed by Council:

- A nominated representative from Open Door
- Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council
- Chair of the Foster Carers Association
- Vice-Chair of the Foster Carers Association

Corporate Parenting Committee

It has been a pleasure to Chair the Corporate Parenting Committee in what has been a busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with a focus on external placements for young people during which the Committee were informed that there had been a reduction in the number of looked after children this year and that this was largely attributed to the reduction in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) remaining in the borough.

It was explained that this period had continued the consistent decrease in UASC placed in Thurrock and that this was due to the Eastern Region Protocol. The Eastern Region Protocol saw local authorities allocated a 0.07% of population number (for Thurrock this is 28) which determined the number of UASC that could reasonably be accommodated within borough, and as Thurrock was above this number, further UASC were distributed amongst the Eastern Region local authorities who were not at their 0.07% number.

The Committee were further briefed that:

- The majority of Children Looked After were in foster care placements and a focus had been placed on the recruitment of additional foster carers.
- There had been stabilisation in the use of residential placements and an emphasis had been placed on the review of the suitability of these placements and whether the needs of the young people could be better met in foster care.

Members requested continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance throughout the year. In June, it was explained that Thurrock had experienced a high level of demand placed on its statutory social care service for children within the last year and considerable work had been undertaken by the department in managing this demand. This had seen a reduction in the number of contacts and referrals; easing the demand pressure of children becoming looked after and children being placed on a child protection plan.

The Committee were also informed most indicators had shown improvement and the service was coming in line with its statistical neighbours. During the September update of the report, Councillor Liddiard congratulated the service on the good results on care leavers in education and training.

The Committee also acknowledged a report on unregistered and private homes of multiple occupancy for young people in Thurrock, during which Members were informed of the measures that had been implemented to ensure owners are required to register with the Council. The report also highlighted that there is no requirement for providers of Supported Accommodation for 16-18 year olds to be registered with Ofsted but that steps had been taken to implement local quality standards for this type of placement for young people.

Throughout the year, Members requested a number of reports on a range of topics, such as:

- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report
- Looked After Children Health Report – this was a detailed report on the health needs of looked after children.
- Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) – The report explained the process and protocol for UASC that also covered missing UASC.
- Children in Care Council Updates – Highlighted the change in Chair of the Children in Care Council which now has a joint arrangements of 2 Chairs but would continue to work as before.
- Transition - Preparing Care Leavers for Adulthood – The Committee praised the success of the Headstart scheme which was helping care leavers in their transition from care to independence.
- Report on Merton Assessments – The report clarified how a Merton Assessment was undertaken with UASC which gave reassurance to the Committee on the ethical nature of the assessment.
- Families Supported By Early Help – the Committee had been pleased to see that the Early Help Intervention service worked well due to its strength-based model of intervention.

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After which was a key priority for Thurrock Council. It is a statutory duty for the Council to have a Virtual School Head. The Council has a Virtual School team who champion the educational progress and attainment of our most vulnerable children who are in care and fulfil this duty for all children aged 3 – 18 years irrespective of where they are placed in the country. This was achieved through working closely with educational establishments, foster carers, social workers and local authority departments to ensure that our children attend school, make progress and achieve.

Thurrock children looked after are achieving well educationally. The educational attainment data for our children was better than the national looked after data in all reported areas from the Early Years through to Key Stage 4. Our children are performing better than other boroughs in the Eastern Region and compare favourably against our top five statistical neighbours. The Council's attainment data was improving year on year with more pupils meeting age related expectations and the national standards for all children.

There have been no permanent exclusion of Thurrock children looked after in over 5 years. The rate of fixed term exclusions is the lowest it has been for 5 years. This compares favourably against other local authorities who have high rates of excluded children.

Last academic year saw 94% of our children with high attendance rates and there was a reduction in unauthorised absence. This compares broadly in line with the national data of 95%.

Thank you to Officers, Democratic Services and the outside organisations who sit on the committee for all their hard work and to fellow Councillors on the Committee.

Councillor Joy Redsell

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee



Looking Forward...2019/2020

Corporate Parenting Committee Members are dedicated to being Corporate Parents and are looking forward to working with Officers and the outside organisations who sit on the committee on new and updated reports in 2019/2020. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research
- Looked After Children Pledge
- Annual Report of the Virtual School
- More direct engagement with children who are looked after and care leavers

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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
4 June 2019		
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
10 September 2019		
Sufficiency Placement	Sheila Murphy/Sue Green	Officers
Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Looked After Children Pledge	Sheila Murphy	Officers
Local Offer for Care Leavers	Michele Lucas	Officers
Case Study's regarding how/why children come into our care	Janet Simon	Officers

Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
7 January 2020		
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Head Start Housing	Michele Lucas	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
3 March 2020		
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey
Last Updated: 09 July 2019