

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 **1 September 2020**

Due to current government guidance on social-distancing and the COVID-19 virus, the Corporate Parenting Committee on 1 September 2020 will not be open for members of the public to physically attend. Arrangements have been made for the press and public to watch the meeting live via the Council's online webcast channel: www.youtube.com/user/thurrockcouncil

Membership:

Councillors Elizabeth Rigby (Chair), Steve Liddiard (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Sue Hooper, Sue Shinnick and Jennifer Smith

Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Substitutes:

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

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 2 June 2020	
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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.

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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: **24 August 2020**

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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 2 June 2020 at 7.00 pm

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

Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

In attendance: Councillor James Halden, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adult Social Care
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Carrie Bacon, After Care Team - Team Manager
Miss C Greenaway, Care Leaver Representative
Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead - Business Intelligence
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Miss S Stone, Care Leaver Representative
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 3 March 2020 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

4. Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adult Social Care Update

Councillor Halden Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adult Social Care, thanked the Chair for allowing him to attend the meeting to update Members on the work of his Portfolio.

During his presentation Councillor Halden stated it was his first Corporate Parenting meeting since he had taken over as Cabinet Holder for Social Care at the start of March. He commented that coming out of Covid-19 officers were still as ambitious as they were before and certainly not letting it get in the way of wanting to achieve the commitments made.

He continued to advise the two main areas in which he wished to focus on over the coming months were mobility and vulnerability. Mobility to keep looked after children well and support them achieve their ambitions, and at the same time looking at the change in profile of vulnerability.

Councillor Halden observed in terms of vulnerability from recent inspections Thurrock was a safe borough and as such, didn't want to become complacent so he had requested an independent review of the local safe guarding children partnership arrangements. This was to ensure that if the council was to have a serious event that the council investigated in a timely manner and secondly he wanted to make sure that the partnership had enough capacity, that it was not just the serious events that trigger a statutory threshold, that were investigated but the wider events; so to see what else we can learn with our partners.

In addition officers were working together with the Police and Crime Commissioner, to find ways to better integrate the youth offending service and other services across the system.

The Portfolio Holder moved on to mention the Council had been rated through Ofsted as good, Officers were now pushing forward to be outstanding. It was explained this meant the Council improved on getting transitions right and making sure that it's young people were put in the position where they could achieve their ambitions when they left care and not simply just going through the motions of them going through the system.

Finally he mentioned one of the areas he wanted to consider more closely was working with the council's partners in Fostering and Adoption, and wider to consider the standards to hold themselves to. He continued to state the council had some brilliant figures coming out from the Covid -19 crisis, 94.5% of all looked after children had had their visits completed within time scales. However there had been other figures which were not as good for example, only 58% of pathway plans were completed in April, so he had asked to have wide partnership discussions about the standards to apply to ourselves because ultimately everything the council did for this young people, should be about how positively the council was impacting the life chances of young people and not simply processing them through the system.

The Chair of the Committee, thanked Councillor Halden for this update and sought if the Committee had any questions.

Councillor Akinbohun firstly thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update. She then queried as to how badly Covid-19 had affected the councils Looked After Children.

Councillor Halden stated that Covid-19 had affected every part of society, however one of the things he was proud of was what the team had achieved, with both Social Workers in the council and Foster Carers in trying to maintain normality. He continued by mentioning the work of the virtual school has done a marvel of things over the last few weeks.

The Portfolio Holder commented officers had made sure all of the internal systems were still working, and all working together. It was important to make sure the financial resilience was in place, so as lockdown was starting to be lifted, should there be another wave Covid-19 the Councils Looked After Children would have the support and advice they needed.

5. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence introduced the report to Members providing a summary of the Children's Social Care performance. During which the Committee heard how in some instances when contact progressed to a referral, there may be the need for Social Care intervention, this would be when there were more serious concerns about a child's safety or wellbeing. In Quarter 4, Thurrock received 760 referrals compared to 603 in the same quarter of 2018-2019.

She continued to advise Members in 2019-20 a total of 4,116 assessments were completed compared to 3,180 in 2018-19. This was an increase of 29.4%. The number of assessments completed within 45 working days has remained consistent since 2018-19.

The Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence explained at the end of Quarter 4, the total number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 173 and the rate per 10,000 was 39.5. Although, this was the highest figure reported in the last 12 months, it reflected a trend towards higher levels of risk factors within cases referred to Children's Social Care. Members heard how Child Protection Plans were regularly reviewed by the Strategic Lead to ensure that risk was being well managed and that children do not remain subject to Plans for longer than necessary.

Members were notified that in Quarter 4, the number of Children Looked After was 298 which was slightly up from 287 in Quarter 3, representing an increase of 3.8% and compared to 2018-19, there has been a slight increase of 1.7%.

It was mentioned that as per the table in the report, in March 2020, 9 children in total went missing with 27 episodes. It was highlighted that it was important to bear in mind that the same child often goes missing more than once.

The Chair of the Committee enquired as to whether Care Leavers were given money advice. Officers confirmed that all Care Leavers had a Personal Adviser to give any support and assistance needed.

Miss Stone, a Care Leaver Representative commented that since she had left the care system, she hadn't received any support or assistance despite seeking for help. She further commented that she was passed through the care system and moved around a lot. Members requested that Miss Stone's case was reviewed and someone contact her to offer the support she was seeking.

Councillor Akinbohun sought clarity on the number of missing child and whether they were found and back with their families. Officers confirmed that all children were now back home with their families and were only missing for a number hours.

The Vice Chair of the Children in Care Council asked why is was young people had to have a health assessment. Officers explained it was a general assessment, so to have a better understanding of a young person's health such as asthma, diabetes or any allergies. The Vice Chair of the Children in Care Council commented that when going in to care a child's whole life changes and he felt that the assessment was intrusive.

Councillor MacPherson commented that she felt it would be worth looking into how the health assessment was explained, so to ensure that the young people fully understood what was going to happened and the reason why.

RESOLVED

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

6. Update on Ofsted Recommendation - Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After presented the report to the Committee and in doing explained that when a child or young person came into care, they would have an Initial Health Assessment. This was a statutory health assessment, and the assessment is to be completed within 28 days of the child coming into care.

Members were informed that a paediatrician or an appropriately trained medical practitioner completes the health assessment. The Initial Health Assessment identifies any existing health problems and deficits in previous healthcare and provides a baseline for managing the child's future health needs.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report, she stated that she was going to raise the subject at the next meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Akinbohun queried as to why for March 2020 only 74% of initial health assessments had taken place within the 28day deadline, given they could have arrived from another country. Officers explained any unaccompanied asylum seeking children were to have an initial health assessment in the same way any child who has entered the care system. They would also be registered with a local GP and or local hospital if required.

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After continued to explain the reasoning behind the 74% was down to the capacity of the Health service and also some children were placed outside of the Local Authority.

RESOLVED

That Corporate Parenting Members were informed about Health and Children's Services efforts to improve the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children Looked After.

7. Support Provided to Foster Carers during Covid-19

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After addressed Members advising them that Thurrock Council was a Fostering Agency registered with Ofsted, therefore they approved, monitored and supported Foster Carers who in turn supported the Children in their care.

Members heard how Foster carers usually received a package of practical and financial support to meet the needs of these children. The non-financial support included:

- Regular Face to Face Supervision with a qualified Social Worker
- Training relevant to their role
- An out of hours phone line to provide advice and support at evenings and weekend

The Committee were further informed the Councils approach had been to provide services as usual to Foster Carers who continued to care for children during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was explained that on the 24th April 2020 the government amended the regulated duties to Looked After Children via The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.

The Vice-Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association commented there had been a lot to consider throughout lockdown, such as, contact between the children they looked after and their parents as well as keeping their own families safe.

The Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association agreed stating the last few months had had a big impact on their families, along with the young

people they looked after. She continued by notifying the committee she had been home educating her young person, as difficult as it was to make that decision, it was best for her as it helped to ease her worries regarding covid-19.

Councillor Redsell, thanked the Foster Carers for their hard work in looking after the Councils young people.

It was sought by Members as to the support given to Foster Carers throughout the covid-19 pandemic. Officers explained they were continuing to give their Foster Carers all of the support they would usually receive, albeit sometimes remotely. This included shopping should anyone be shielding or providing the funds for young people to purchase bikes, not to mention emotional support was also given.

The Vice-Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association confirm she continued to receive support from the team at the Council and also the virtual school, to make home lessons fun for the children they were teaching, such as activities which could be held outside rather than all indoors.

RESOLVED:

That Corporate Parenting Members were informed about the support given to Foster Carers approved by Thurrock Council during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

8. Support provided to Care Leavers and Children Looked After during COVID-19

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After introduced the report to the committee explaining that on the 24th April 2020 the Government amended the regulated duties to Looked After Children via The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. This legislation reduced the Councils obligations in a number of areas, and the changes were temporary until 25th September 2020. Key changes were:

- The duty for Social Workers to undertake visits to Children in Care at least six-weekly had been temporarily removed, and could now be completed virtually via video or phone call, rather than face-to-face.
- Children Looked After reviews did not have to be completed six-monthly. Previously the law required an Independent Review of each Child in Care every six months.

Members heard how the current pandemic had introduced new elements of risk for everyone. During which the Local Authority had considered new ways of working to ensure that statutory duties were continued to be fulfilled and the Children and Young People in its care were safe and appropriately supported.

Officers continued to advise the report outlined actions taken by Children's Social Care to address the needs for Children who are Looked After and

Young People Leaving Care and ensure the best possible support during this difficult and unprecedented time.

The Chair of the Committee thanked the Strategic Lead for Children Looked After for her report. She enquired as to whether there was to be a back log of cases. It was explained it was possible to have a back log of cases, should they require court proceedings as experts were sometimes required. However this had not stopped the progression of adoption, whereby the council was seeking that new parents and the family who were looking after the child were to isolate for 13 days before.

Councillor MacPherson welcomed and thanked officers for the report. She expressed concern over the councils care leavers, who were working 0 hour contracts. Should they not be working at this time, what support was officers offering to make sure they could pay their rent. It was confirmed that officers were offering finance support to those care leavers who required help.

RESOLVED:

That Corporate Parenting Members were informed about support provided to Children Looked After and Care Leavers within the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic.

9. Pupil Premium Plus Report for the Virtual School

The Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After, presented the report to the Committee and in doing so, she remarked that raising achievement in all areas of education for the Councils Children Looked After remained a key priority for Thurrock Council.

She continued to inform Members the Virtual School monitored and supported the educational progress and outcome for Children Looked After irrespective of where they were placed, in or out of the borough. The Virtual School was responsible for pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this included those who had left care during an academic year.

The Headteacher of the Virtual School went on to explain the report detailed the use of Department for Education Pupil Premium Plus Grant for Children Looked After. This grant was allocated for pupils attending schools from Reception through to Year 11.

Members heard how it was the responsibility of the Virtual School Head to allocate and the implementation of the fund for each local authority. The fund was allocated every year at the beginning of the financial year and the Virtual School Head must allocate this funding across a school academic year for every pupil from Reception to year 11.

It was explain that the amount allocated per pupil was £2,300. Thurrock had a clear Pupil Premium Plus policy which was shared with Head Teachers of looked after pupils placed in and out of the borough at the beginning of the

financial and academic year. It was further explained Thurrocks Virtual School allocated £600 per academic term for every looked after child. The remaining £500 was top sliced to pay for services and interventions which supported pupils in the Virtual School.

Councillor Redsell, Chair of the Committee thanked the Headteacher of the Virtual School for her report.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- 1. Noted the budget and spending report for 2019-2020 for Pupil Premium Plus Grant for Children Looked After.**
- 2. Noted the overall spending by schools of the grant.**
- 3. Approved the proposed strategy plan for the Pupil Premium Plus Grant for 2020-2021.**

10. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee discussed the work programme ahead of the new municipal year. Members agreed to a number of reports being included on the Work Programme.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed for the Work Programme to be updated and include the reports discussed throughout the meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.50pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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

1 September 2020	ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children’s Social Care Performance	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children’s Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children’s Services	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

All below data refers to Q1 2020-21 with comparison to the same quarter in the previous year. Statistical neighbour and England averages have been made wherever possible.

The data in this report is obtained from the “At a Glance” monthly performance reporting, regional benchmarking data and national data sets and is presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team; areas that are agreed as corporate performance areas of interest are presented at the Corporate Performance Board. Data has not yet been published in relation to statistical neighbours and national averages for 2019-20 therefore, for the purpose of benchmarking, the 2018-19 outturn figures have been used.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members note any 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.

3. Practise summary of performance and trends

3.1 **MASH & LCS contacts:** In Q1 2020, the number of contacts received was 1,034 compared to 1,602 in the same quarter last year. This represents 35.5% drop in the number of quarterly contacts received. This is directly related to Covid-19 lockdown, which meant agencies who usually make the most referrals (schools) were not open to all children in the community.

3.2 **Referrals:** In Q1 2020, the number of referrals was 443 compared to 610 in the same quarter last year. This represents 27.4% drop in the number of referrals received. This is in line with the reduction in contacts but indicates a slightly higher percentage of contacts being treated as a referral. This is directly related to Covid-19 lockdown, which meant agencies who usually make the most referrals (schools) were not open to all children in the community.

3.3 **C&F Assessments:** In 2020, 92.7% of the children and families assessment were completed in timescale compared to 96.7% in Q1 2019.

3.4 **Child subject to Child Protection Plan (CPP):** The number of children subject to Child Protection Plan have increased throughout the year by 18.6% Q1 2020. The number of children in Q1 2019 was 134 compared to 159 in Q1 2020.

3.5 **Cases stepped down to Early Help:** Since Q1 2019, we have seen an increase in the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help. As at end of June 2020, 39 cases were stepped down compared to 23 in 2019. This is an increase of 70.0% in 2020.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.

All data continues to be monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that decision-making within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remains robust and ensures families are supported by the most appropriate service.

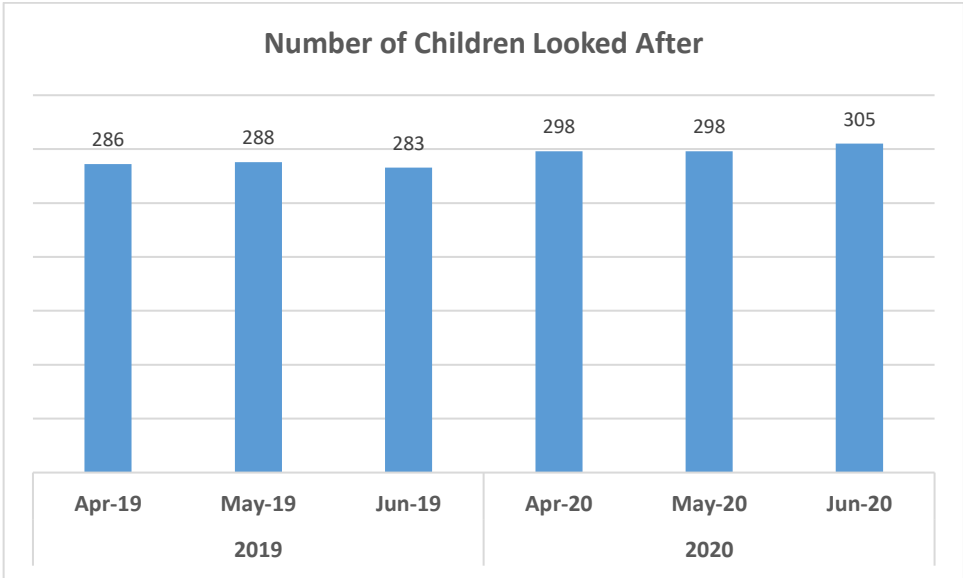
4. Data about Children Looked After

4.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The below graph shows CLA open at the end of each month. Comparing Q1 in 2019 and 2020, there has been 7.1% increase in number of CLA in 2020. 7.2% of 305 children looked after in 2020 were Asylum Seeker Children compared to 6.0% in previous year.

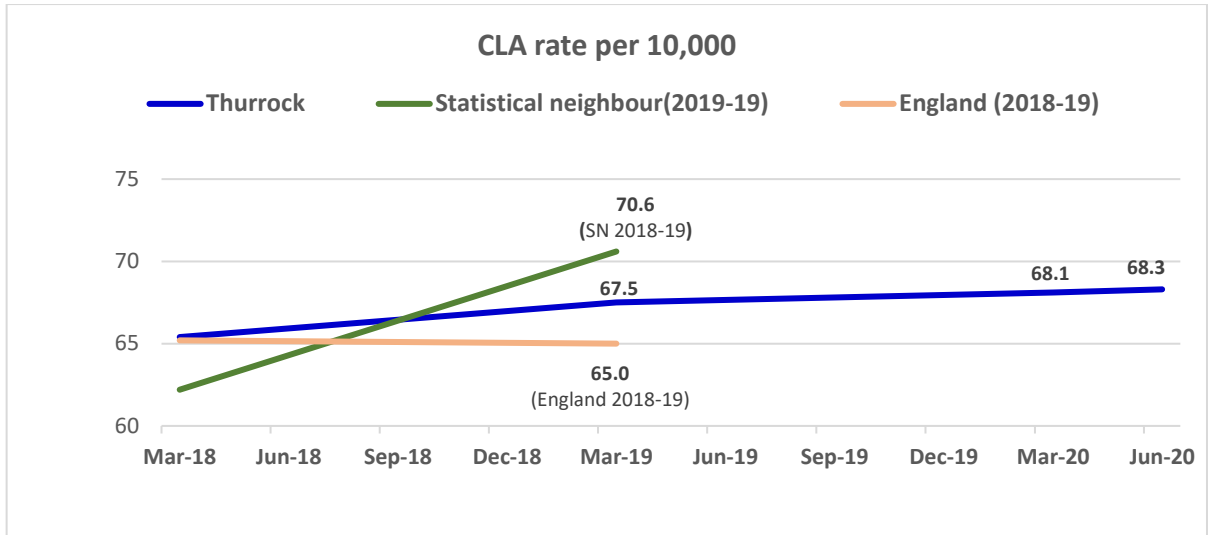
According to year end SSSA903 data published by DfE, between 2018 and 2019, the average increase in local authorities across England was 4.0%. Data for this reporting year 2019/20 has not been published as yet.

Graph below breaks down CLA open at the end of each month in Q1 2019 and 2020.



4.2 The Rate of CLA per 10,000

This graph shows the rate per 10,000 for Thurrock CLA for year end 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20 and end of quarter Q1 2020-21. The comparison against our statistical neighbour and England averages is based on the latest available data in 2018-19.



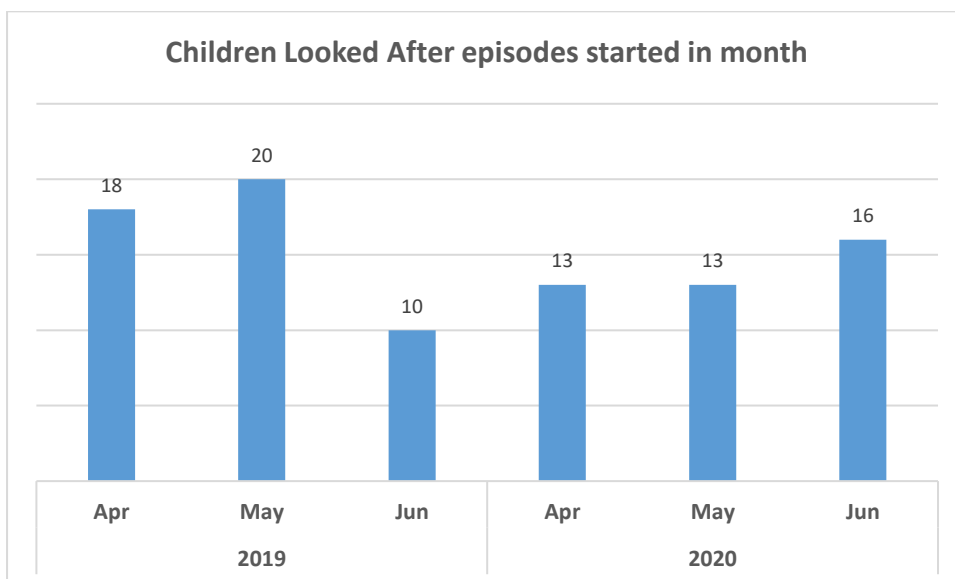
4.3 CLA started to be looked after in month

In Q1 2020, the total number of children who started to be looked after was 42 compared 48 in Q1 2019. Comparing the data in the two quarters, this represents 12.5% drop in the number of children who started to be looked after in Q1 2020.

Out of the 42 children who started to be looked after in 2020, 23.8% were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children compared to 14.6% in Q1 2019.

The yearly SSSDA903 DfE data shows that across local authorities the number of children started to be looked after fell by 2.0% in 2018-19.

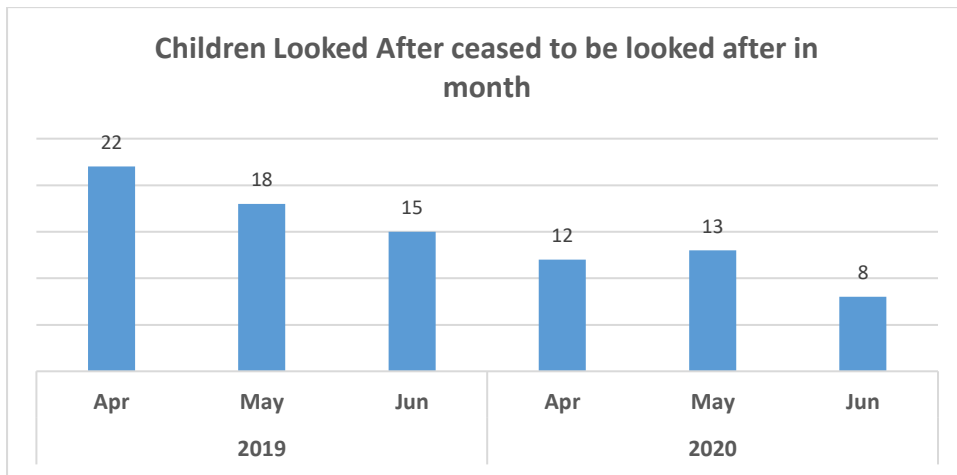
The below graph shows the number of episodes started each month in Q1 2019 and 2020.



4.4 CLA ceased to be looked after in month

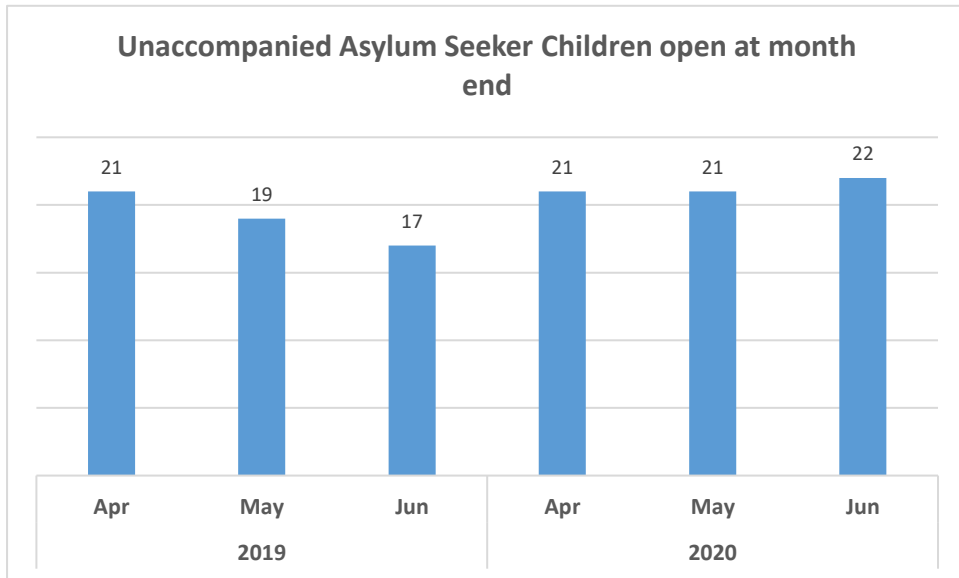
In Q1 2020, the number of CLA who ceased to be looked after was 33 compared to 55 in Q1 2019, showing that there has been 40.0% drop in Q1 2020. This will continue to be monitored through the performance management meetings.

Out of the 33 children who ceased to be looked after in Q1 2020, 27.3% were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children compared to 38.2% in Q1 2019. Graph below breaks down the number of episodes ended each month in Q1.



4.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

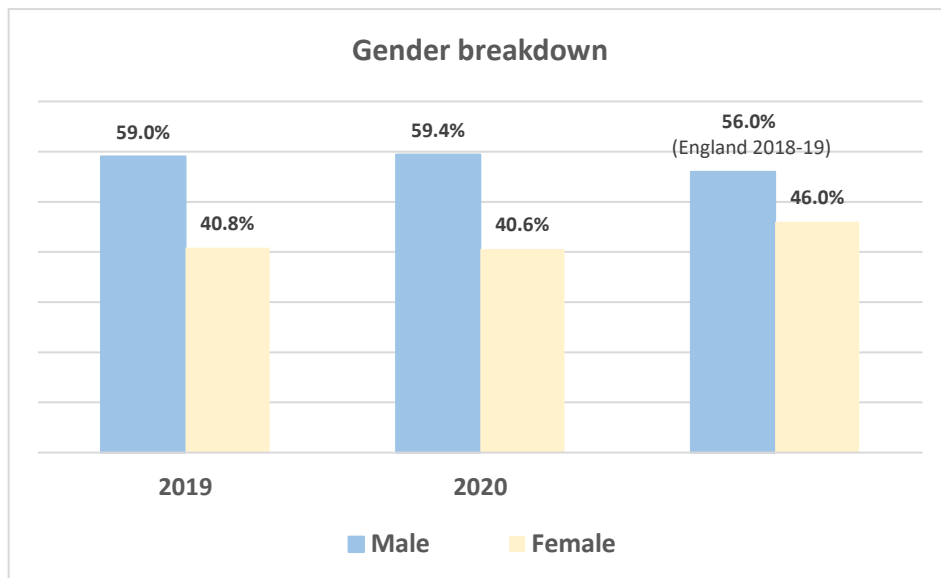
At the end of Q1 this year, the number of UASC open was 22 compared to 17 in the same quarter last year and largely being driven by males the age of 16 plus years in both Q1 2019 and 2020. Below graph breaks down the number of UASC by each month in Q1 2019 and 2020.



5. Characteristics of Children Looked After

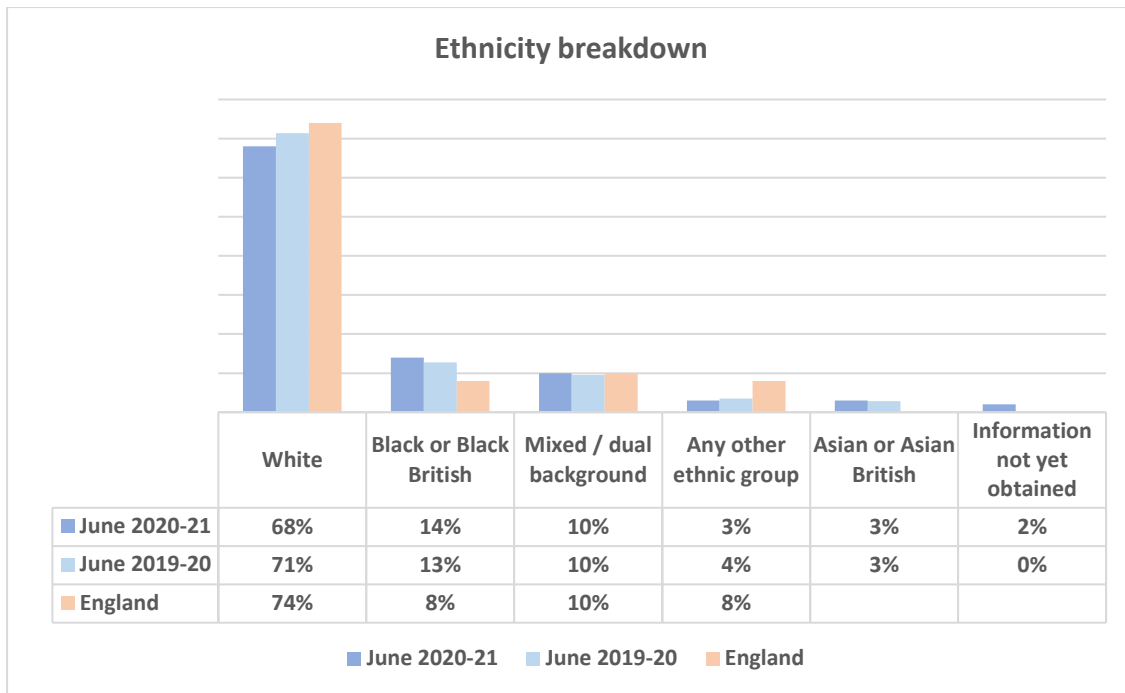
5.1 CLA by gender

The below graph shows that there are more males than females looked after in Q1 in 2019 and 2020. The breakdown is in line with the England average.



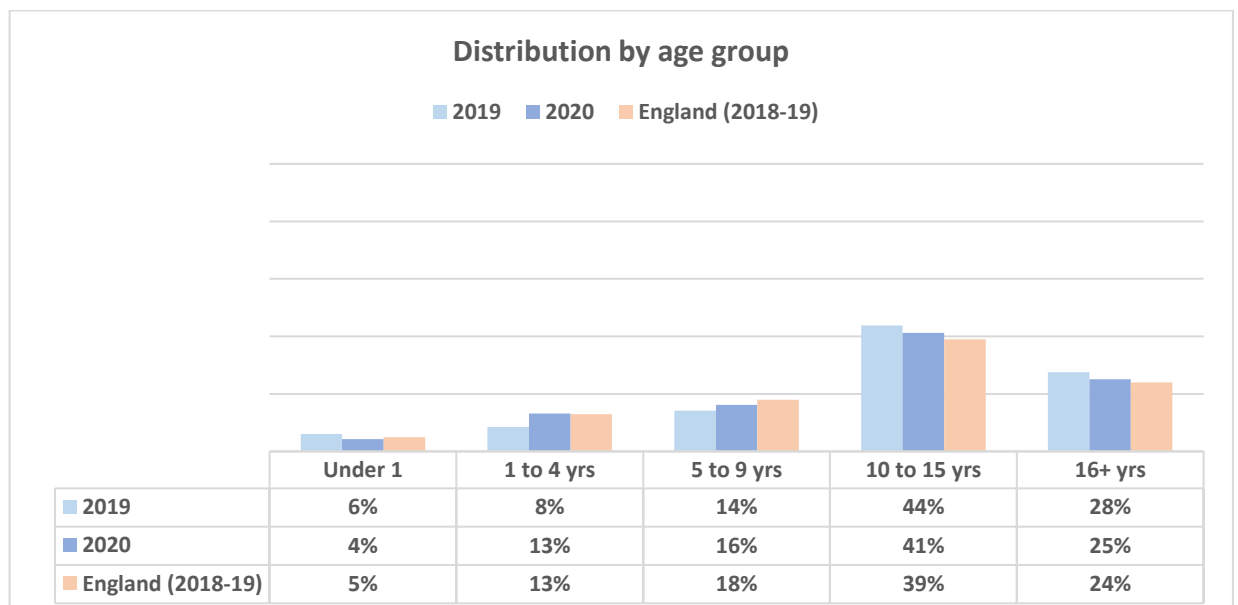
5.2 CLA by ethnicity

In Q1 in 2019 and 2020, we can see that Children Looked After are predominantly White. The below graph shows the breakdown of ethnicity as at end of June 2019 and June 2020. For the purpose of benchmarking, the latest available data for England is 2018-19 is included.



5.3 CLA Age Profile

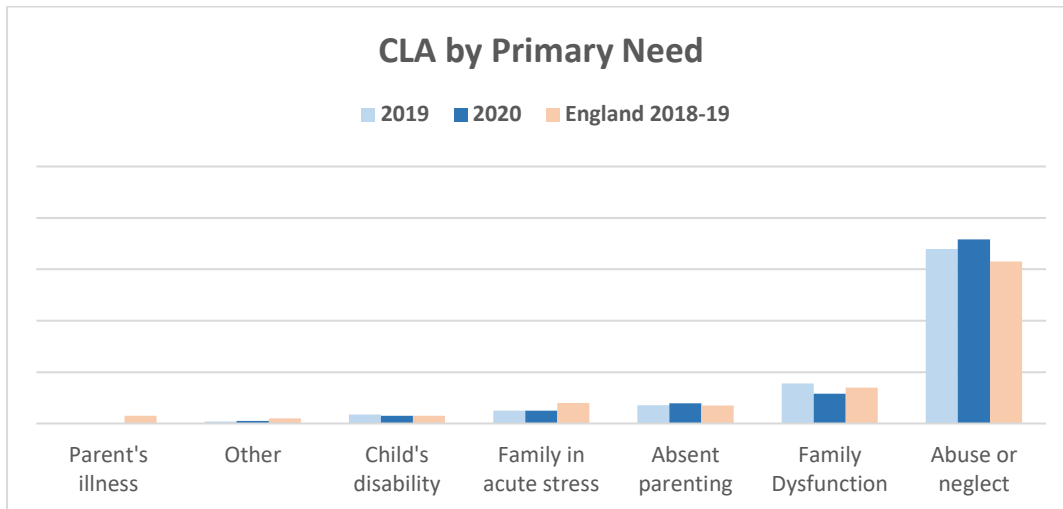
The age profile of children looked after in Q1 2020 is very similar to Q1 last year with little change in the proportion of children in each age group. Over time the number of children looked after who are under 1 year of age, have been decreasing and in Q1 2020, the percentage of children in this age group was below the England average. The vast majority of children are in the 10 to 15 year bracket which is also in line with England average.



5.4 CLA by category of need

There are range of reasons why a child is being looked after and here are the primary reasons why children became looked after in 2019 and 2020.

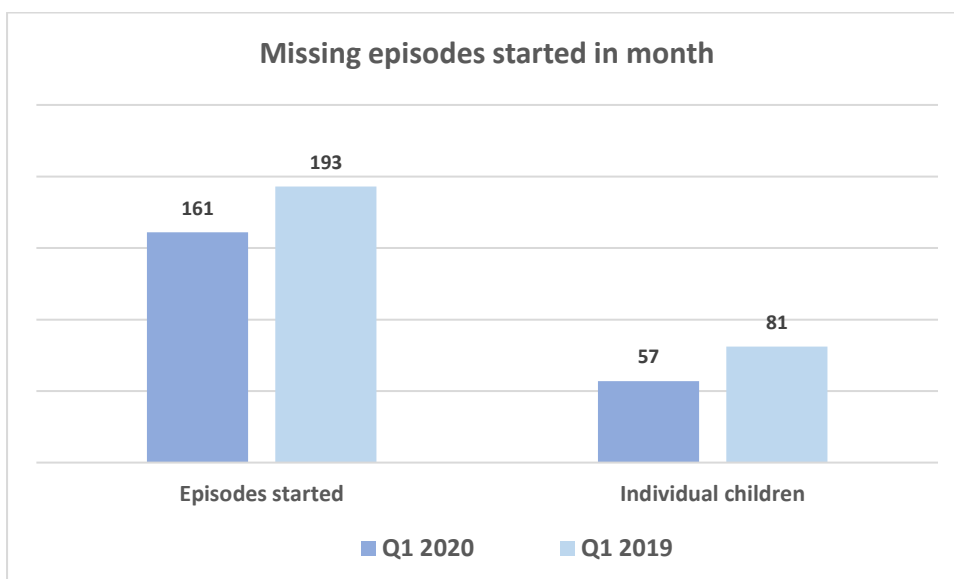
The proportion of children with each category of need is very similar in both years with vast majority being under the abuse or neglect category, and is in line with England data.



6. Missing episodes of Children Looked After

6.1 Missing episodes started each month

The graph below shows Q1 2019 and 2020 comparison with missing episodes started in each quarter and the individual children that the episodes were made up by.



6.2 Return home interview

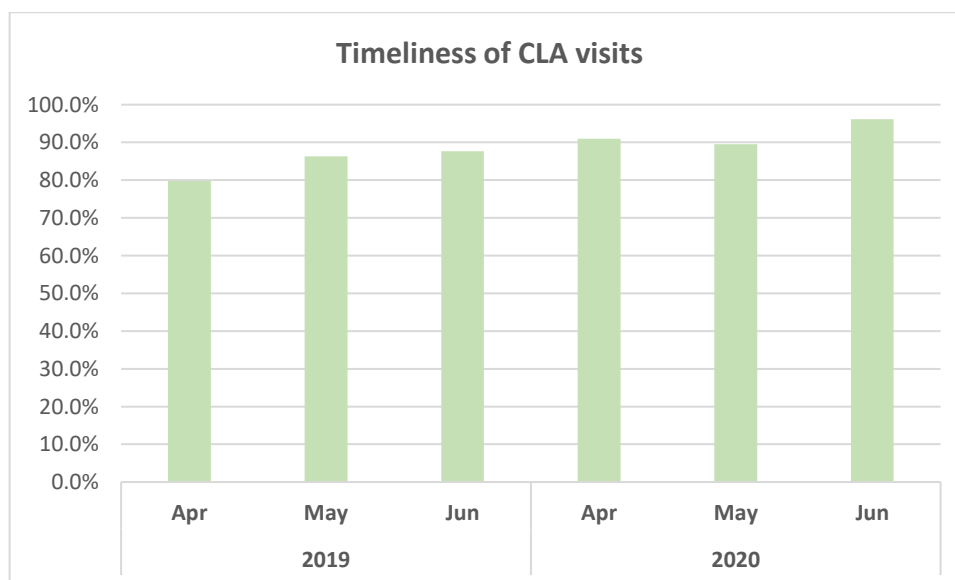
All children are offered an independent return home interview within 72 hours after they have been missing with the aim to identify the reason and to address these reasons. From April 1st 2020 Inspire Youth have been commissioned to undertake these interviews with the aim of improving performance and reducing missing episodes. The missing reasons vary from “not being settled in placement” to the “draw of friends”. Key workers from placements; foster carers and social workers discuss missing incidents with children and there is an ongoing work to try to reduce incidents and increase engagement of children at the return interviews.

7. Timeliness

7.1 CLA visits completed in timescale

Social workers are required to visit the child within one week of the start of any placement.

Since Q1 2019, the total number of visits completed have increased by 23.2% in Q1 2020. Quarterly visits that were completed in timescale have also seen an increase of 7.8% in 2020. The table below shows the monthly % of visits completed in time.



8. CLA Health

8.1 Initial Health Assessments

The numbers of initial health assessments completed within 20 working days have doubled since Q1 2019. The % of IHAs completed in timescale have seen 12.1% increase in Q1 2020. The average number completed in

timescale in Q1 2020 was 6 compared to 2 in Q1 2019. % that were referred to the Health Team for an Initial Health Assessment within 5 working days was 100% in June 2020 compared to only 12.5% in June 2019.

9. CLA Education

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.

9.1 Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

For children aged 5-16 years looked after for at least 12 months as at the end of Q1 2019 and 2020, 100% had their SDQ recorded with an average score of 14.3 in 2020 compared to 14.5 in 2019.

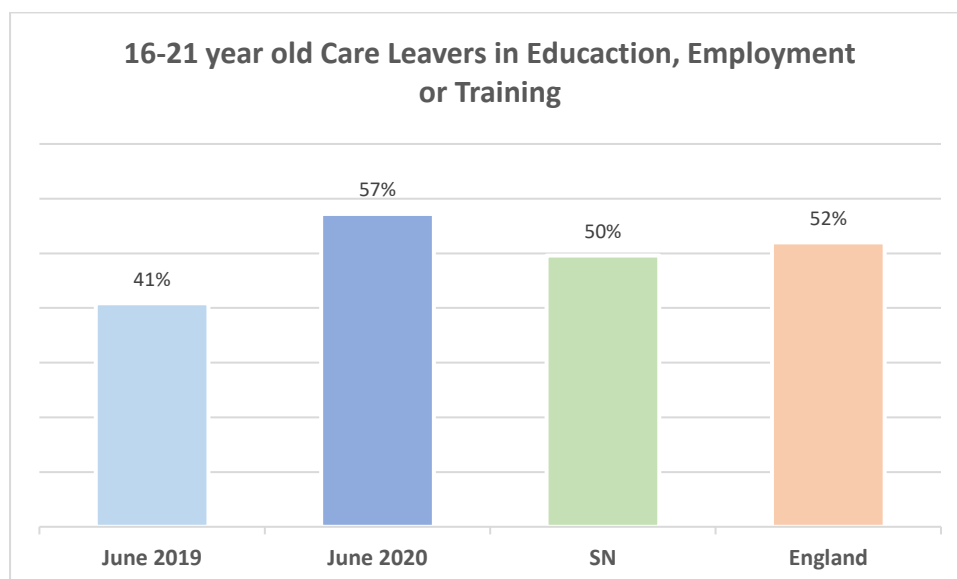
10. Care Leavers

10.1 Education, Employment or Training

Since Q1 2018-19, the 16-21 year old care leaver cohort has remained consistent. At the end of Q1 2019, the cohort was 230 compared to 229 in Q1 2020.

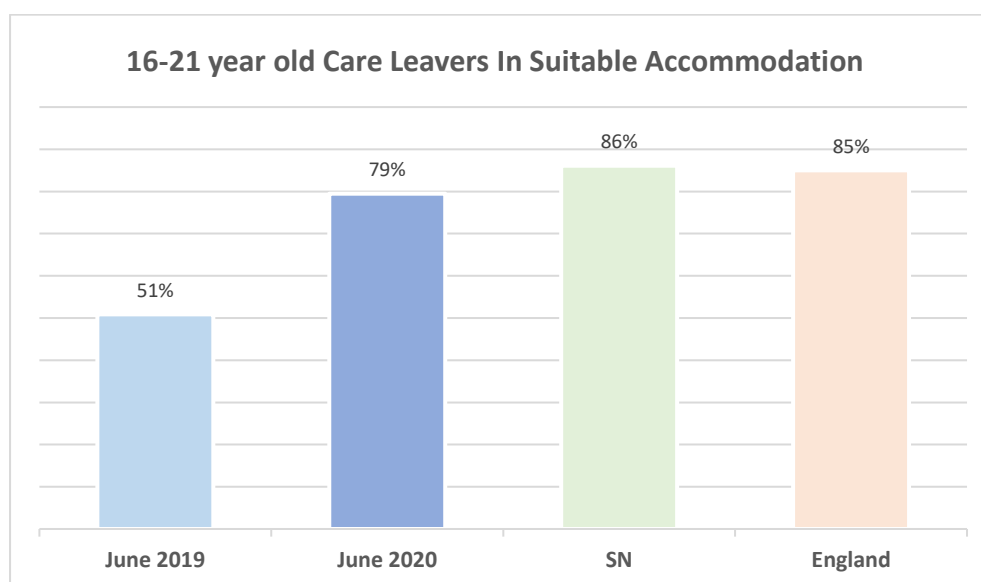
At the end of Q1, 2020, the total number of care leavers that fully or partially engaged in Education, Employment or Training was 131 compared to 94 in June 2019.

This shows that compared to June 19, there has been 16.3% increase in Q1 2020. Thurrock is above statistical neighbour and England averages published in 2018-19.



10.2 In Suitable Accommodation

In Q1 2018-19, the number of Care Leavers who were in a suitable accommodation was 117 compared to 182 in June 2020. The graph here shows that Thurrock had 29.0% more care leavers in suitable accommodation in June 2020 than in June 2019 and is closer to our statistical neighbour and England average of 2018-19.



10.3 Care Leavers In Touch

Local authorities are expected to stay in touch with care leavers and provide statutory support to help the care leaver transition to living independently. In Q1 2020-21, out of the total cohort for 16-21 year old care leavers, Thurrock stayed in touch with vast majority 90.0%, compared to 54.8% in Q1 2018-19. This is 35.2% improvement in Q1 in 2020.

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

For many of our care leavers we provide our Prince's Trust programme, which is a way in which we enable young people to build confidence. We actively seek apprenticeship opportunities for our care leavers and continue to provide a range of support programmes to enable them to engage fully in the local communities in which they live.

Housing remains one of the key challenges for young people who are Leaving Care, to address this we have further developed the Head Start Housing Programme – which will look to support care leavers. 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.

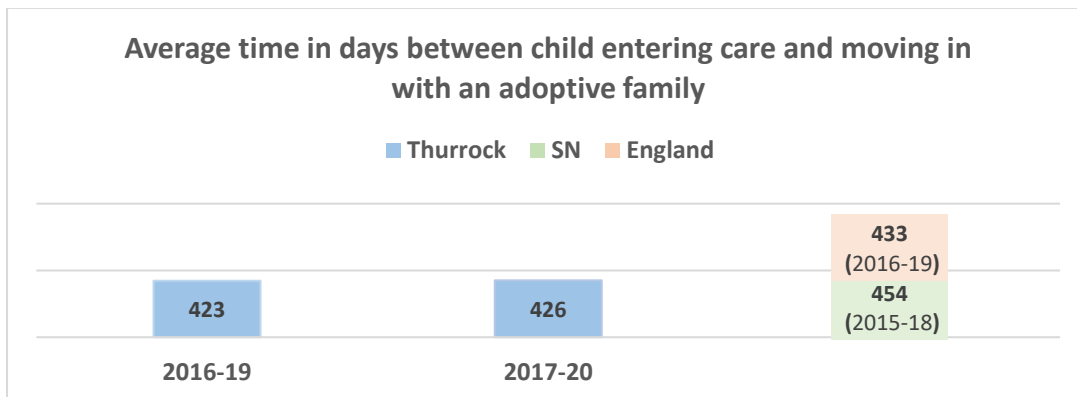
11. CLA Adoption

11.1 Number of children adopted

In Q1 2020, one child was adopted compared to 4 in Q1 2019. This reflects the timing of children placed, the number of Placement Orders and the impact of Covid-19 on the court process. The adoption service has worked effectively to place children for adoption safely and we anticipate 12 children being placed for adoption by the end of Q2 2020/21. We therefore anticipate a greater number of adoption orders in the second half of the financial year.

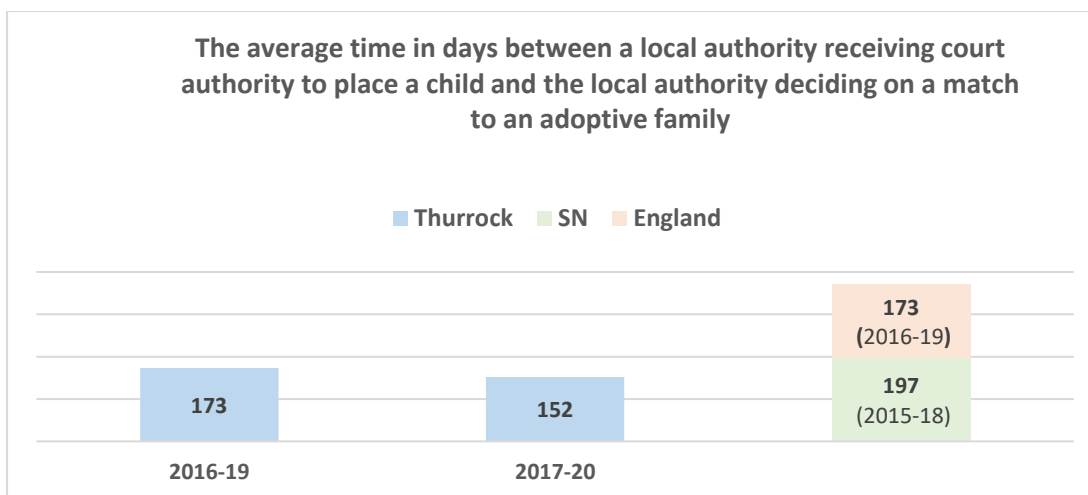
11.2 Child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family

The below table shows the number of average days (*3 year average*) for the period of 2017-20 and previous data of 2016-19. Thurrock continues to report quicker placement days than the published statistical neighbour and England averages, which is positive.



11.3 LA receiving court authority for placement and deciding on a match to an adopter

This chart shows the number in days (3 year average) for the period of 2016-19 and the most recent data of 2017-20. The graph below shows that Thurrock is performing better than the England average and the statistical neighbour average in 2015-18.



12. CLA Placements

12.1 Permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Placement and supporting children where appropriate to remain at home with their families is a priority and children are only looked after outside of their families if it is the only viable option.

At the end of Q1 2020, 17.5% of the total CLA cohort of 305 were under the age of five. The majority of children under five are moved on to permanency through adoption or placement with connected carers and progressing through the court.

13. 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. Below is a table showing our current position:-

Number of new carers approved between April 19 – To Date	19
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	10
Number of children currently placed in Thurrock fostering households	113

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

- Not applicable

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

- None

16. Implications

16.1 Financial:

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

There are no financial implications to this report.

16.2 Legal:

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

There are no legal implications identified within this report.

16.3 Diversity and Equality:

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

Diversity and equality implications are identified within the body of this report and specifically in sections 3-5

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

- Not applicable

17. 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

18. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author(s):

Joe Tynan	Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services
Anna Watkins	Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's

Updates and contributions:

Clare Moore	Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention
Janet Simon	Strategic Lead, Child in Need and Child Protection
Naintara Khosna	Acting Strategic Lead, Children Looked After
Daniel Jones	Service Manager – Placements

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1 September 2020	ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Fostering Statement of Purpose	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Dan Jones, Service Manager, Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is prepared to update members of the Committee regarding Thurrock Council's Annual Fostering Statement of Purpose.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That members of the Committee are informed and aware of the Council's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

2. Introduction and Background

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

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Please see the Fostering Statement of Purpose report, attached at Appendix 1.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

- 5.1 None.

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

- 6.1 None.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

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

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

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

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities, Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

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

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):

Fostering National Minimum Standards – link below:

- https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Fostering Statement of Purpose 2020/2021

Report Author:

Daniel Jones, Service Manager, Children Looked After

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THURROCK COUNCIL

FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2020-2021

1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

The Statement of Purpose is also available on the Thurrock website at www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

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

We believe that:

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

This means in Thurrock:

- Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will actively seek out their views, wishes and feelings.
- All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.

- Services will be built around children's needs, and will be inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. We recognise the diverse needs of our children and positively value and promote each child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality.
- The particular needs of children who have a disability or who have complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account.

In addition:

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

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

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services for children who are looked after by Thurrock. In adhering to the National Minimum Standards

(NMS), we want to achieve the following outcomes:

- We want our children and young people's wishes and feelings to be heard and recorded with evidence of these being acted on.
- We want our children and young people to feel able to tell us what is working for them and what is not.
- We want our children and young people to be living in a place where they feel safe.
- We want our children to know that we will look for them if they run away and worry about them until they are found, as any reasonable parent would do.
- We want our children and young people to maintain contact with their

birth family where it is safe for them to do so.

- We want our children and young people to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships.
- We want our children and young people to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement and life opportunities.
- We want our children and young people to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in any areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will:

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the diverse needs of our looked after children and young people including parent and child placements.
- Run an effective and efficient Fostering Panel which makes sound and well informed recommendation.
- Have a sound and evidence based decision making process.
- Match children with carers who can meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any of their concerns raised.
- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs.
- Ensure that there is an updated Statement of Purpose each year.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development.
- Provide learning development and continual professional development for Foster Carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Handle allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Ensure our Foster Carers receive appropriate support if they become subject to allegations and suspicions of harm.
- Pay foster carers appropriately and on time.

The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with a thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled managers to promote these values and to work within the Council's equalities policies. The staff group are also provided with the Whistleblowing Policy as part of their induction, which makes clear the responsibility of all staff to report areas of poor practice.

2.1 Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service actively seeks to provide a high quality service with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children, young people and families.

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

3. THE SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Service is based in Thurrock Civic Offices alongside all other Children's Social Care Teams and is part of the wider Children Looked after Service.

3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment Team** (the recruitment of foster carers and adopters)
- **Connected Persons Team** (including Private Fostering arrangements, assessments of Connected Persons and Special Guardianship assessments)
- **Fostering Support Team** (seeking and matching in house placements, and provision of supervision and support to our approved carers)
- **The Placements Team** (search for and, monitoring internal and external placements)

3.2 Leadership and Management of the Fostering Service

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

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

3.2.1 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker

The Corporate Director of Children's Services is Sheila Murphy.

The Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services is Joseph Tynan.

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After and **Agency Decision Maker** for the Fostering Service is Naintara Khosla.

Naintara is a registered Social Worker with many years of management experience in fostering and other areas of children's services at a senior level.

The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Dan Jones

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

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

3.2.2 Team Manager, Recruitment Team and Placements Team

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

Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team.

Carole's teams have responsibility for the recruitment of foster carers and providing placements for young people between the ages of 0-18, in foster placements, residential, and 16+ supported accommodation, as well as being

part of various panels relating to placements. Carole's Team works closely with placing Social Workers, also assisting in the monitoring of providers, ensuring that young people's needs are being met, working closely with the commissioning service around 16+ provisions.

3.2.3 Team Manager, Connected Persons Team

Alexandra Cucu is the manager of the Connected Persons Team. Alexandra qualified as a social worker in 2010 and is registered with Social Work England. Alexandra's previous experience includes working in the public sector within various social care teams. Alexandra's experience encompassed working as a Social Worker to children from 0-18 years in foster or residential care, ensuring that children and young people's holistic needs were met within their placements.

Alexandra has worked as a family finding social worker within an Adoption Team to both children and adopters and has worked as the lead professional to develop a Special Guardianship (SGO) Support Service within her previous role. Alexandra undertook and quality assured SGO assessments and support plans as well as assessments of need post SGO. Alexandra joined Thurrock as Manager of the Connected Persons Team in December 2019.

Alexandra's team has responsibility for undertaking connected person, SGO, Fostering (Form F) and Private Fostering assessments. There is a dedicated Supervising Social Worker within Alexandra's team who supports and monitors Kinship Carers both under temporary approval and full approval.

The Team also have a lead professional who holds Private Fostering cases. Alexandra's Team works closely with all front line teams from front line MASH and Family Support Teams through to Children Looked After, Placements, and Fostering and with the Post Adoption Team in Thurrock to ensure permanency planning for children is on track and delays in achieving permanency for children are avoided.

3.2.4 Team Manager Fostering Support Team

Sandra Clark is the manager of the Fostering Support Team. She qualified as a social worker in 2010 at Anglia Ruskin University in Chelmsford and is registered with Social Work England. Sandra has previously worked as a supervising social worker, working closely with foster carers to ensure they provided a high quality of care to our looked after children, as well as supporting the carers in their development, enabling them to better understand the needs of the children they cared for. Sandra has also worked in frontline social work practice, undertaking court work, SGO and parenting assessments and working with young people and their families with the aim of keeping them together wherever possible.

Sandra previously managed a supervised contact service for 4 years where she worked closely with the families of children who are looked after and their foster

carers. Sandra has been in post since August 2019.

The team is responsible for supervising and supporting foster carers in their role, and working closely with the other fostering and child care teams to achieve best outcomes for our children.

3.3 Staffing of the Fostering Service

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

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 12 Senior Practitioners
- 2 Qualified Fostering Social Workers
- 4 Business Development Officers
- 6 Business Support / Administrators

3.4.1 Student Placements

We are committed to the development of trainee social workers and offer placement opportunities to students from all backgrounds. However, due to the specialist nature of Fostering Service, we currently only offer student placement opportunities to students in their Final year placement.

3.5 Monitoring of the Fostering Service

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care for children. We adhere to Fostering Standards and monitor our performance through:

- Feedback forms from children
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Supervision of Foster Carers
- Annual Reviews of Foster Carers
- Fostering Panels
- and Case Supervision
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Case Audits
- Management Oversight Performance Data
- Ofsted

4 FOSTERING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

The Fostering Service provides a range of Foster Carers and variety of fostering

arrangements for children and young people in Thurrock.

4.1 Temporarily Approved Foster Carers

The Family Placement Service values the role of Connected Person's Foster Care wherever possible as it keeps the child or young person within the family network.

The nominated officer for temporary approval is:

- The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After who may delegate this function on a day to day basis to the Service Manager for Fostering, but maintains oversight

4.2 Foster Carers Approved for Short and Long Term Placements

These are carers who make commitment to provide accommodation, care and support to children and young people, either S20 accommodation, Interim Care Order, Care Order until they reach adulthood. It includes those connected persons who have been fully assessed and approved by the Agency Decision Maker. The terms 'Care Skills', 'Care Skills Plus and 'High needs' reflect the payment band applicable to the carer but all of these carers are approved for both short and long term placements. The details of our payments to foster carers can be found the 'Payments to Thurrock Carers Policy'.

Where required, the Fostering service assists in the approval of and provides supervision to prospective adopters who are dually approved on a temporary or full approval as foster carers and prospective adopters.

4.3 Respite, Short Term & Bridging Foster Carers

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

4.5 Parent and Child Placements:

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

The approach to supporting parents would be, wherever possible for Foster Carers to support them in transition towards moving into the community with

their children. This would be based on a model that assists, guides and directs them to care for their own children with minimal intervention except where their child is/or likely to be at risk. The general expectation would be for parents to receive allowances including all the entitlements of the child and to provide for, and meet the child's needs as they would have done in their own accommodation.

It should be noted that in certain cases only the baby or the mother are looked after. However, such arrangements would be clarified before the arrangement commences.

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

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

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

5 RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

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

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

The Recruitment Team can be contacted on **0800 652 1256** for further information about recruitment activity or information sessions or they can be contacted via the Thurrock Council Fostering Service website.

5.1 Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application

When an enquiry is received from a potential Foster Carer, an information pack

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

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

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

A decision to progress any application to stage two will be made upon receipt of all checks and references. However, there may be occasions where the stage one and two shall progress simultaneously. In such situation, the applicant would be clearly informed and process shall comply with the Independent Review Mechanism principle should a decision be made to terminate the assessment at a later stage in the stage two processes.

5.2 The Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers:

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

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

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

5.3 Approval of Foster Carers

All completed applicant foster carer's assessments are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation. Applicant Foster Carers attend the panel with their assessing Social Worker to answer questions by Panel members. The draft recommendations are communicated verbally to the applicants by the chair of the Independent Fostering & Adoption Panel on the day of the panel meeting. The Panel recommendations then go to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision of an applicant's suitability.

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

5.4 Pre-Panel Information to Applicants and Post Panel Feedback

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

5.5 Fostering Agreement & Induction

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

- The assessing Social Worker will remain the allocated Social Worker until a supervising Social Worker is allocated.
- The supervising Social Worker should be allocated prior to attendance at the Fostering Panel and should attend the panel

5.6 The Fostering Handbook and Policies

Thurrock Council provides it's Foster Carers with an up to date online hand book which can be accessed as follows:

- <https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/thurrock/>

Thurrock Council provides an online resource of its policies relating to Children's Services as follows:

- <https://thurrockcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html>
- Specific Fostering Policy can be found here:
https://thurrockcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html#fostering_adopt

6 MATCHING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FOSTER CARERS

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

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

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

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

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

Thurrock Council, its officers and Foster Carers are committed to maintaining placement stability for children. Fostering is a difficult and challenging task; where placements are facing challenge, the Team Manager for the child and/or the Fostering Team should call a placement stability meeting to ensure all possible support measures are considered. Where placements cannot be sustained moves should be planned to a further placement that has a realistic chance of sustaining longer term. Therefore:

- Foster Carers are expected to provide at least 28 days notice of their decision to end a placement

- Exceptions to this are:
 - Placements which have a fixed end date (respite etc)
 - Where there is an immediate risk of serious harm to the child, the Foster Carer or their household members
 - This *does not include* Foster Carers having to manage behaviour that is rude, unpleasant, inconvenient or disrespectful – this is recognised as difficult but should not result in an immediate move
 - Thurrock Council should assist with managing such behaviour including direct work with the child
 - Where the child stops being looked after by virtue of court order, withdrawal of s.20 or the expiration of Police Protection
 - Where there is a change of care plan that necessitates a change of placement (e.g. the child moves to a connected carer)

6.1 Safer Caring Agreements

- There should be a safer caring agreement for each child placed and this should be completed within one month of placement.
- The safer caring agreement should include the child where possible and be placed on the child's file
- The safer caring agreement should detail any actions the carer is expected to take as a result of a child's 'Criminal Exploitation', 'Prevent' or 'Missing' Risk assessment as applicable to each child placed
- A copy of the safer caring agreement should be placed on the child's and Foster Carers file

7 TRAINING OF FOSTER CARERS

The Fostering Service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities for foster carers, The service believes that quality training is an integral part of a fostering career and begins during the assessment process with a 'Skills to Foster' course. Once approved, all new foster carers are expected to complete a minimum mandatory Core Training Programmes each year, which aims to provide the basic skills and information that new carers need to perform their fostering task effectively.

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

Thurrock recognises carers skills set and value their experiences. We therefore encourage and involve foster carers in helping deliver training events. We aim to offer 'Training for Trainers' course for those who wish to undertake this task.

We believe that this is an important way for carers to learn from each other, promoting partnership working between themselves, social care staff and other professionals.

8 SUPPORT PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARERS

Foster carers receive regular in person supervision visits from an allocated supervising Social Worker as follows:

- Foster Carers with a temporary approval should be seen monthly as minimum
- Foster Carers with a full approval should be seen monthly until their first annual review of approval as a minimum
- Foster carers who have been approved more than twelve months and have short term placements should be seen every six weeks as a minimum
- Foster carers with long term placements only, should receive supervision every six weeks but the supervisor may alternate between a telephone call and in person supervision

Foster carers should receive notes of their supervision from their supervising Social Worker within two weeks of their supervision. Recordings are made about each supervisory visit using an agreed format and copies are shared with carers for factual accuracy and information for sharing purposes

Unannounced visits should be conducted at least one a year and should not be completed by the allocated supervising social worker. The unannounced visit should include a check of all relevant areas of the property

The allocated worker is expected to be aware of the demands of each placement and would be available to offer additional support and visits. Each carer's Supervising Social Worker has a duty to assess the needs of the carer and identify whether or not additional support and training may be required;

- Each Approved Foster Carer should have a training and development plan agreed with their Supervising Social Worker
- Progress against this plan should be part of the annual review of approval

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

All Foster Carers have access to a Therapist as part of the Therapeutic Support Sessions provided by the Council. This is available when they have new children or young people in placement. Foster Carers may also access Therapeutic Support Sessions at any point if there are any concerns and

difficulties in placement either via a self-referral mechanism or being referred by a supervising Social Worker.

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

9 ANNUAL REVIEW AND SPECIAL REVIEWS

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

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

All approved Foster Carers shall be issued a Fostering Agreement which will set out the terms of their fostering arrangement with the council. The validity of each agreement shall not exceed 12 months from the date of issue.

10 ALLOWANCE AND PAYMENTS SCHEME

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

The **Fee payment** is a reward payment to foster carers who have met the competency requirements as detailed in the Payments to Thurrock Foster Carers Policy

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

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

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

If the carer's expenditure on the child or young person does not appear to meet need or there is concern that proper food, clothing and the other items identified in the payments policy are not being provided, the Supervising Social Worker should arrange to discuss the carer's expenditure at a supervisory visit. This will assist the foster carer to budget accordingly or assist the Social Worker to determine if any additional financial support is required.

- **Food** - Children and young people should receive dinner money or a packed lunch as is appropriate to their needs and preferences. They should be provided with breakfast before school and a meal in the evening. Healthy drinks and snacks should be made available within reason.
- **Health and hygiene** - Young people who have reached puberty will need an allowance to buy toiletries such as tampons, deodorant and shaving equipment etc.
- **Clothing** - It is important that children and young people are provided with sufficient clothes appropriate to their age. Carers should provide opportunities for children and young people to be involved in choosing and buying clothes as they get older. It is expected that foster carers would provide young person aged thirteen and over with money to buy some clothes for themselves from the basic allowance with guidance.
- **Pocket money and savings** – Savings are automatically made each week for each child in our care at a rate of £7.15. Thurrock Council manages these directly.

It is important that children have some understanding of the responsibilities of looking after their own money from the age of seven years. Prior to this, children's pocket money should be spent under the supervision of the foster carer. The child's social worker will be responsible in partnership with the foster carer for determining the exact amount of pocket money as this will sometimes need to be considered in light of what is reasonable within the fostering family and the child's level of maturity. Carers are expected to help children to learn about savings as part of preparation for adulthood. It is therefore important for the carer to assist the child in opening up a savings account, such as a post office account, into which the child can save an element of their pocket money.

Where a foster carer is concerned about providing a child or young person with pocket money they should be referred to the supervising social worker, who will discuss ways to address the concerns.

Payments are detailed in Thurrock Foster Carers Policy.

11 PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

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

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

12 CONTACT

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

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

It's expected that Foster Carers will be provided with the details of and take note of, significant people in the child's life (parents, siblings, grandparents, best-friends etc.). This includes dates that may be important such as birthdays, significant days for their family (e.g. a national day like St David's Day) or religious observances.

13 CHILDREN'S HEALTH

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

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

14 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

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

15 SAFEGUARDING

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

Thurrock Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2020) deliver training to all carers and professionals, raising profiles and gathering intelligence in conjunction with the Police and other partner agencies with the aim to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and offering support to children and young people who are being exploited.

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

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

16 FOSTER CARERS RECORDINGS

Foster carers of all approval types are expected to keep a log for each child in placement. The frequency of recording is as follows (with the exception of

incidents or significant events which may require more detail) :

- For children aged 0-1 years, brief records should be kept for each day and submitted weekly
- For children aged 1-5 years brief records should be kept for each day and submitted monthly
- For children aged 5-18 a weekly summary is sufficient which can be submitted monthly
- All recording should be completed electronically and be uploaded to the child's and carers file.

Incidents and Significant Events

There will be occasions where a more detailed recording may be appropriate. All urgent concerns should be reported to the appropriate agency without delay via telephone; recording can be completed after the event. The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples where approved Foster Carers would make a more detailed recording.

- Missing episodes/absences relevant to child exploitation
- Unplanned attendance for medical care
- Accident or injury to the child
- Accident or injury to the carer as a direct result of the child's action or behaviour
- New Police involvement
- Arguments or disputes within the home
- Unplanned changes in sleeping arrangements
- Unplanned or sudden changes in the household
- Allegations or complaints by children against the Foster Carer or anyone else
- Upon the decision to give 28 days' notice on a placement

The incident form should be used and completed in sufficient detail that a person unknown to the situation could understand what happened and why.

Foster Carers are offered training on keeping records, their importance and implications. These issues are also explored in managing allegations training.

17 REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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

18 STAKE HOLDER CONSULTATION

The Thurrock Family Placement Service is a listening service and opened to further learning and development. We shall make concerted effort to solicit

suggestions, feedbacks, comments and views from all relevant persons, professionals and key partners.

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

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

19 PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE

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

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

20 ALLEGATIONS, COMPLAINTS CONCERNS AND COMPLIMENTS

The Fostering Team has a policy that deals with allegations, complaints and concerns against Foster Carers Procedure. All complaints are recorded and

reviewed in line with procedural guidelines. Foster carers also have access to the council's complaints procedure. Staff and carers are provided with safeguarding training as part of the ongoing professional training and development programme. The Service aims to respond to any allegation on complaint within 14 days but not exceeding 28 days.

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

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

21 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

21.1 In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the fostering services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

21.2 Thurrock Council recognise that children, their birth parents, foster carers, applicants and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

21.3 The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".

21.4 There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure

21.5 In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the social worker, as appropriate.

21.6 Any of the parties in the fostering process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:

- Any child who has been placed with our approved foster carers.
- A birth parent of a child who has been placed with our approved carers including connected persons
- Foster Carers
- Applicants during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
- One person on behalf of another e.g. a parent/advocate on behalf of a child.
- Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.

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

The IRM has the following timescales:

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

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager

Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,

Royds Hall Road

Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956

Email: irm@irm.org.uk

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

21.8 Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Corporate Complaints Department

Thurrock Council,

Civic Offices,

New Road,

Grays,

RM17 6SL

Tel: 0800 021 3016

Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

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

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

22 THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

22.1 OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. Our registration number is SC056087

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

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

This statement of purpose is subject to annual review

1 September 2020	ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Adoption Statement of Purpose	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non - Key
Report of: Dan Jones, Service Manager, Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

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

1. Recommendation(s)

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

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 17 and 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (made under Section 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 as amended.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

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

4 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

4.1 None

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

5.1 None

6. Implications

6.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications within the report.

6.2 Legal

Implications Verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social Care and Education

The Council is required to have an Adoption Statement of Purpose which complies with the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 as amended.

6.3 Diversity and Equality

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

Implications Verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities, Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

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

- None

7. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- [Adoption National Minimum Standards](#)

8. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Adoption Statement of Purpose 2020/2021

Report Author:

Dan Jones, Service Manager, Children Looked After

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THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE

Statement of Purpose 2020-2021

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

1. POSITION STATEMENT

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

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

1.6 Legislative Framework

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

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

2. AIMS OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 2.1** To ensure that the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child is at the centre of the permanency process.
- 2.2** To ensure that where it is not possible for looked after children to be reunited with their birth families they are provided with a permanent, stable alternative family.
- 2.3** To ensure that people who are interested in becoming adoptive parents are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about the assessment, approval process and support services.
- 2.4** To ensure that birth families are treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the permanency process and have access to support services.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

- 3.1** To ensure that children adopted from the care system are within the agreed timescales set by the government.

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

4. PRINCIPLES OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

Thurrock Council believes that:

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

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

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

5. THE ADOPTION SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

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

5.1 The Corporate Director of Children's Services is Sheila Murphy

5.2 The Interim Assistant Director of Children's Service is Joseph Tynan who has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service and is Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker.

5.2 The Strategic Lead responsible for the adoption services is Naintara Khosla
Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652973
Email: nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk

Naintara is a registered Social Worker with many years of management experience in fostering and other areas of children's services at a senior level.

5.3 The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Dan Jones
Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763
Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

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

5.4 The Adoption Team comprises:

- 1 Team Manager
- 6 FTE Social Workers
- 3 FTE Life Story & Letterbox Worker

Supported by:

- 1 FTE Business Support

5.5 Team Manager – Sally Medbury

Sally Medbury is the Manager for the Adoption Team in Thurrock. She qualified as a social worker in 2001 and holds the DIPSW, BSc in Social Work and the Post Qualifying Child Care Award. She has extensive experience as a social worker and has worked across Children's Services within Local Authority's across London and Essex.

- 5.6** Staff members are social work qualified with access to appropriate training, supervision and support. The social workers specialise in either family finding, adopter recruitment and assessment or adoption support work. They are able to work across the 3 teams where necessary. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.
- 5.7** Staff hold the minimum qualification of CQSW/DipSW or equivalent and nearly all staff possess a university degree.
- 5.8** All SW qualified staff are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.
- 5.9** The Adoption Team is an established and experienced team with the majority at senior practitioner level who are committed to providing a high quality service.
- 5.10** The culture of the team is of continual learning and all staff are encouraged to extend their qualifications by attending relevant training.

6 ADOPTION SERVICES

- 6.1** The Adoption Team has responsibility to provide adoption services for the council including:
- Information related to adoption for the general public.
 - Assessment and preparation of adopters.
 - Permanence planning and family finding for adoption.
 - Adoption support to all parties involved in adoption including adopters, children and adopted adults, birth parents and relatives.
 - Counselling and access to records for adopted adults.
 - Support to maintain contact where appropriate and planned between adopted children and their birth relatives and foster carers.
 - Inter-Country Adoption services.
- 6.2** The Adoption Team provides a central point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an adopter, including those who make enquiries about inter-country adoption, step-parent and relative adoption. The team along with the recruitment team actively recruits adoptive families who can meet the needs of our children needing permanence through adoption. We engage in preparation of prospective adopters, which includes pre-approval training consisting of a four day of preparation group in either stage one or early stages of stage 2. Input on Dual Approval and Foster for Adoption is included in the

preparation. In addition to the four days there is a family and friends training day.

- 6.3** Thurrock Council provides a range of information for prospective adopters and service users including families requiring adoption support. The information provided includes: recruitment brochures for adopters, booklets for our adoption support services for birth parents, adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families. The service also produces a guide to adoption for children looked after and information about attending the adoption panel.
- 6.4** The service has a website where prospective adopters or those requiring adoption support information can browse;
<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/adoption>
The service benefits from a bespoke email address to encourage enquires:
PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk
- 6.5** Various campaign activities include use of social media, advertising in local newspapers, billboards, leaflet drops, information days and adoption match exchange days. The teams are encouraged to attend events to promote adoption services for Thurrock Council.
- 6.6** The Adoption Team undertake family finding for all children in Thurrock who require an adoptive family. Family finding social workers present the adoption match to panel in partnership with the child's social worker. The family finding social worker, in partnership with the child's social worker ensures that an adoption support plan is in place for every adoptive family. They also coordinate and support introductions and placements of the child/ren once the match has been made.
- 6.7** The children's teams undertake the tasks of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption, in conjunction with the Adoption Service. Each child has a named social worker and an agreed care plan.
- 6.8** The children's teams work with the child's family during the decision making process for adoption. During this period the birth parents are offered the opportunity to speak to a member of the adoption team who is independent of their case for independent counselling.
- 6.9** The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is responsible for making decisions in relation to whether a child should be placed for adoption. The Child's Permanence Report is submitted to the ADM, who then has 7 working days to make a decision. Medical and Expert reports are provided to assist in the decision making process.
- 6.10** The children's team and adoption social workers collaborate in family finding, matching, supporting adoptive placements and in contact arrangements, until the adoption order is made. When the adoption order is made the adoption team offer support as specified in the support plan.

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

- 6.21** The adoption support social workers process new requests for adoption support assessments from adoptive families who live in the county. Families living outside the county with whom Thurrock Council has placed children are supported for a period of three years from the date of the adoption order. Financial support is subject to a means test and an annual financial review.
- 6.23** Support is commissioned for families living out of county where this is appropriate with receiving authorities for other types of support that are likely to last longer than the three year period stipulated in the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Additional services are provided to adopted adults and adopters in Bucks; these include a counselling and access to records service, support groups, training, social events and a quarterly newsletter.
- 6.24** An adoption letterbox service is managed within the team to enable adopted children to maintain indirect contact with their birth families.
- 6.25** The adoption support social workers provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out about their birth parents and adoption details.
- 6.26** Birth families have access to independent support services before adoption. The adoption support team provides support advice and guidance post order. The team also offers a monthly birth parent drop in which is led by the adoption team.
- 6.27** The adoption service works within the requirements of all relevant Council policies e.g. complaints policy, recording policy, and access to records policy.
- 6.28** Applicants to become adoptive parents, who are dissatisfied with the Adoption Panel outcome, are advised of their right to make representation to the Independent Review Mechanism in order for their case to be considered by an independent review panel.
- 6.29** Thurrock Council's Adoption Panel provides a thorough and critical consideration of all cases presented to it and makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. Its overall function and purpose is to:
- Consider and make recommendations regarding whether children should be placed for adoption only in cases where the birth parents are consenting to adoption or relinquishing babies.
 - Consider and make recommendations about placements requiring permanency through adoption.
 - Consider and make recommendations about the approval of prospective adopters, Consider and make recommendations about the proposed matches between children and prospective adopters.
 - Consider any adoption support plans submitted as part of the proposed placement.
- 6.30** The membership of the Adoption Panel aims to reflect the diversity of the local community and complies with regulations (adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

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

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

6.32 **Inter-country adoption services.** Thurrock Council aims to provide the highest quality Inter-country adoption services for those residents wishing to adopt from overseas. IAC: the Centre for Adoption provide this service on our behalf. IAC are nationally recognised experts in inter-country adoption and can be contacted on:
<http://www.icacentre.org.uk/>

7. THE RECRUITMENT AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR ADOPTERS (Domestic Adoption)

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

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

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

7.4 The enquirer's discussion with the social worker is discussed with the Team Manager.

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

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

8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES

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

9. SYSTEMS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATING SERVICE PROVISION

- 9.1** The Adoption Service is reviewed on a yearly basis through the Adoption Service Action Plan.

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

10. SERVICE DELIVERY

- 10.1 Thurrock Council is continuing to ensure that where adoption is the care plan that as many children as possible are adopted. For the year 1st April 2019 to 31 March 2020, there were 15 children made subject to Adoption Orders.
- 10.2 Thurrock Council is continuing to work towards increasing the numbers of looked after children placed for adoption within 4 months of the court authority to place.

- 10.3** Thurrock Council is planning and delivering services in accordance with the implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its associated regulations and guidance.
- 10.4** Policies and procedures are updated for the adoption and special guardianship services. These documents will ensure that the service is provided in line with new legislation, guidance and regulations.
- 10.5** Our aim is to ensure that life story work is undertaken for all children needing permanence in Thurrock Council. The Adoption Team has 3 fte worker who provides life story work post order where this is the outcome of an Assessment of Need.
- 10.6** All social workers in the team have received training on legislative changes and new practice developments.
- 10.7** The resource library for adopters and staff is continually updated to reflect current changes in legislation and practice.
- 10.8** The use of CoramBAAF forms, which reflect the changes to the regulations, are used by
- social workers, these include:
 - Child Permanence Report
 - Prospective Adopters Report
 - Adoption Placement Report Adoption Placement Plan
 - Adoption Support Plan
- 10.9** The Adoption Panel has the following responsibilities:
- To consider whether adoption should be the permanence plan for a child where the child is relinquished.
 - To ensure that the adoption plan has met the welfare checklist.
 - To advise adopters about the appropriate sharing of parental responsibility.
 - To monitor and ensure that adoption support plans are in place for all the adoptive families matched at the panel.
 - To recommend domestic adopters approval.
 - To recommend the match for a child within an adoptive placement
- 10.10** Monitoring takes place of children who are in the care system and where the care plan may be adoption. This ensures plans for children are being expedited in a timely and appropriate way.

11. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

- 11.1** In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the adoption services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers

and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

- 11.2** Thurrock Council recognises that children, their birth parents, adoptive parents, prospective adopters and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.
- 11.3** The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance **“Getting the Best from Complaints”**.
- 11.4** There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council’s complaints procedure
- 11.5** In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the adoption social worker, as appropriate.
- 11.6** Any of the parties in the adoption process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:
- Any child who has been placed for adoption or placed under a special guardianship by the council - including adults who were formally adopted.
 - A birth parent of a child who has been or is being adopted or is or will be subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
 - Adoptive parents.
 - Prospective adoptive parents during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
 - One person on behalf of another e.g. an adoptive parent on behalf an adopted child.
 - Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.
- 11.7** Applicants to become adopters who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the adoption panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

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

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager

Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,

Royds Hall Road

Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956

Email: irm@irm.org.uk

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

11.8 Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Complaints,

Thurrock Council,

Civic Offices,

New Road,

Grays,

RM17 6SL

Tel: 0800 021 3016

Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

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

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

12. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

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

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

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

1 September 2020	ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Children in Care Update Report	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Annie Guidotti, Children in Care Council/ Thurrock Opendoor	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Childrens Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Childrens Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

The Children in Care Council is facilitated and run by Open Door, who are commissioned by Thurrock Council. This update report is to update the Committee on the work done and their engagement with the Service.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the Committee note the work carried out by the Children in Care Council, the purpose and the role of the Children in Care Council, and to establish what corporate parents need to do to help the Children in Care Council achieve their aims and objectives**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Children in Care Council is a group of young people who are care leavers or cared for by Thurrock Council, which gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level. It gives young people a chance to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives, helping to shape the overall strategy for children looked after and care leavers.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Please see the attached update report from the Children in Care Council, attached at Appendix 1.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To ensure members are aware of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council.

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

5.1 None.

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

6.1 When making key decisions about corporate policies our corporate parenting responsibilities should be considered and our children and young people prioritised.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**
Management Accountant - Children's Services

There are no financial implications within this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Council must have regard to the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which include:

- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people in carrying out its functions.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities, Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

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.

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

Prioritisation of Corporate Parenting will have a direct impact on the outcomes for Children who are Looked After.

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):

- Children and Social Work Act 2017

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix 1 – Update Report from the Children In Care Council.

Report Author:

Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Childrens Services

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Children In Care Council Report Update August 2020

Current :

Chair Person : Rafael Antunes

Vice Chair : Christopher Bennett

Members in total : 11

Monthly Meetings: These have been regular with a break in August 19 for Summer Holidays . However, for August 20 we have agreed to meet due to loss of 2 meetings due to Covid 19 Lockdown and inadequate equipment to meet via Zoom until May 20.

Our meetings are due to continue to be held via Zoom until it is safe to meet in our usual meeting hall.

Visitors:

CICC have welcomed many guests over the last year who include the following
Sheila Murphy – Director of Children’s Services Early offer of Help

Janet Simon - Strategic Lead Children’s Looked After Service

Dan Jones – Senior Manager of Fostering/Adoption Placement outside of
Thurrock and Under 18 Fostering

Sandra Clark – Head of Foster Carer Team

Keeley Pullen – Head of Virtual Schools

Carly Banks - Participation and Engagement Officer

Thurrock Inspectors

Our speakers and visitors have presented The Big Wide World, Mind of My Own App and asked questions for consultation including what makes a good Social Worker, planning for 2020 Children In Care Awards Ceremony, and the Inspectors who attended Thurrock last year took a whole meeting with the members to discuss their experiences of being in care.

Meetings Attended by CICC and or Representatives

The Chair and Vice Chairpersons have attended all Corporate Parenting Committee meetings and have then reported back to the CICC members about any information they have gained about changes or plans for the future.

This has been found to be very interesting to the young people as they generally do not have information about plans and progress. Many members attended and enjoyed the Halloween Ball hosted by Thurrock Council and took part in watching the presentations, magic being performed, having a caricature drawn of themselves, the photo booth, food and festivities. A very good evening indeed.

CICC has been invited to assist in the planning for the 2020 Awards event also and have offered their thoughts and perceptions of how they feel another good evening can be planned and what can be included as well as what may not have been so enjoyable for them.

The Christmas event traditionally has been a meal out at a restaurant but this year the members requested a Christmas Party with music, traditional games such as musical chairs, charades etc and a buffet style spread to be enjoyed in combination with another group run by Open Door. We all enjoyed a fun evening and gifts were also presented as a thank you for the time and effort our members give to the Children In Care Council.

Recently two members took part in a Regional research workshop about their feelings and experience with depression and anxiety. This was hosted by a researcher at UCA University.

Topics of Discussion by CICC

Our discussions are varied and suggested by our members and include

Length of service of Chair and Vice Chair

Design of Current Leaflet to promote CICC to other young people in Care

Recruitment of new members

Dear Future Me Cards sent by Children's Commissioners

Thurrock Pledge

Preparation for further Education, University

Transition to adulthood

Discussion about what a young person in care wishes to know about a placement and what they feel the placement need to know about the individual young person.

Discussion about discomfort in school when they are taken into care

Discomfort with friends regarding after school activities e.g. visiting their friends houses or their friends visiting them.

Placement breakdowns and how frequently they might happen

Our members have discussed a number of issues and have agreed that they can be made to feel quite invisible on occasions when in meetings where their life is being discussed however on the positive side members have advised that some have great Social Workers and feel very involved. It appears to be inconsistent and dependant on the social workers, IRO's and meeting attendees.

Our members are very interested in any news that may be being disseminated to them and are happy to discuss and give their views on just about any subject.

Summary

Overall, our members have enjoyed the topics of discussion and have been happy to be able to converse directly with Managers of Thurrock Council. The lockdown has been a very big difficulty for everyone, but we have continued to meet via Zoom and have maintained the profile for CICC and the importance the young people feel is attributed to this group.

In recent months during lock down some members have struggled with the internet and that they only have their telephones to work on to connect with the group. Unfortunately, they often do not have the resources to have internet at home once they have left care. This remains an issue despite Open Door funding some tablets which have been distributed, the young person still needs access to internet connection.

Our aim that we have highlighted and discussed, will be to widen our scope of members by being able to host Zoom members along side the more local members and this will allow far more young people to attend and have their voices heard.

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1 September 2020	ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Initial Health Assessments	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director : Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

During the Ofsted Inspection in November 2019, Ofsted highlighted the delay in completing timely Initial Health Assessments. Ofsted acknowledged the work between Social Care and Health colleagues to resolve the delay but that the pace of change was too slow and said the timeliness of initial health assessments when all children come into care needed to improve.

This report is to advise Members of the Committee on Thurrock's timeliness of Initial Assessments.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about the efforts made by Health and Children's Services to improve the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children Looked After.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 When a child or young person comes into care, they must have an Initial Health Assessment (IHA). This is a statutory health assessment. The assessment is to be completed within 28 days of the child coming into care. A paediatrician or an appropriately trained medical practitioner completes the assessment.

2.2 The Initial Health Assessment identifies existing health problems and deficits in previous healthcare and provides a baseline for managing the child's future health needs.

- 2.3 This report sets out the actions taken by Children's Social Care and Health colleagues to address the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments for Children who are Looked After

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Local Authority and Health, through their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, have a duty to promote the welfare including the physical, emotional and mental health of Children who are Looked After, including those who are children placed in pre-adoptive placements.
- 3.2 Every Child who is Looked After must have an up to date health assessment so that a health care plan can be developed to reflect the child's health needs and contribute to the child's overall Care Plan.

Health assessments are a statutory requirement and must be carried out at a minimum period of:

- 6-monthly for babies and children under 5 years of age; and
- Annually for those aged 5 years and over.

- 3.3 The Originating and Receiving Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) should have arrangements in place to support the Local Authority to complete statutory health assessments for Looked After Children within statutory timescales, irrespective of whether the placement of the child is an emergency, short term or in another CCG.
- 3.4 The Local Authority should always advise the CCG when a child is initially accommodated and request an Initial Health Assessment within 5 working days of a child becoming Looked After. Where there is a change in placement, which will require the involvement of another CCG, the child's Originating CCG, and Receiving CCG should be informed, as well as the child's GP.
- 3.5 Both the Local Authority and relevant CCG(s) should develop effective communications and understandings between each other as part of being able to promote children's wellbeing. The assessment is to be completed within 28 days (20 working days) of coming into care. A paediatrician or an appropriately trained medical practitioner completes the assessment.

3.6 Before the assessment

Information is sourced from parents, carers, GPs, health visitors and school nurses

3.7 The assessment

The assessment consists of a general discussion about the young person's health and general well-being. There will be an opportunity for the young

person appropriate to their age and understanding to discuss any concerns or worries they may have.

All children and young people need to be present for their health assessment.

Parents and carers will be consulted but older young people where it is deemed appropriate will be offered time to be seen alone.

3.8 During the assessment

Advice and information may be given on:

- Child development
- Height and weight
- Emotional health
- Dental health and oral hygiene
- Vision and hearing
- Immunisations and health promotion
- Substance misuse
- Sexual health and relationships

Appointment times may vary in length, and will often be dependent on need.

3.9 After the assessment

All looked after children are reviewed periodically throughout the year and health needs are reviewed and revised.

3.10 Performance between June 2019 and June 2020

Please see Appendix 1-3

The data demonstrates the improvement in performance in making timely referrals. The capacity within health services to provide a timely paediatric appointment has been more challenging, particularly at times of higher demand and during Covid19.

3.11 Prior to Ofsted's visit in November 2019, a Review was undertaken of the Initial Health Assessment Process to identify blockages and issues preventing timely assessments and actions to address these:

- The process for arranging an Initial Assessment was complicated and the paperwork difficult to fill in within required timescales.

Action

- Streamlining of paperwork to arrange Initial Health Assessments.
- Consent for Initial Health Assessments included in the consent for children looked after.
- Flowchart developed in partnership with Health to support staff in

arranging medicals.

- Information held by Health and Social Care did not always match

Action

- A weekly meeting is held involving health and social care to discuss data and outstanding assessments and referrals and resolve any issues.
 - Thurrock have developed reports that are updated each day and live which is able to identify where the child is in the IHA journey from the date they become looked after. This information is shared with health colleagues weekly.
 - Health are in the early stages of discussing a central data base. The progress for this central data was put on hold due to COVID 19. The aim is to have one digital solution, which would show where a CYP is within the IHA pathway, this will be a live data base and have the ability to trace the child journey from when they come into care.
- Consent to Initial Health Assessment was not always sought at the time the child became looked after.

Action

- Where a child is accommodated under s20 Children Act 1989 the parent's will consent to their child becoming Looked After. The paperwork for consent to s20 Accommodation has been updated to include consent to;
 - Routine Health Assessments
 - Dental Checks
 - Optician Appointments
 - Emergency Treatment
- Parents sometimes refuse to sign consent for Health Assessment.

Action

- Where the authority has a legal order which means that they share parental responsibility with the parent, consent is given by the Strategic Lead on behalf of the authority

3.12 The impact of the actions above has been to significantly improve the timeliness of referrals to health services from social care. This had led to the identification of further issues as follows:

- There is a shortage of timely Paediatrician capacity locally and in surrounding areas.
- Appointments are not always utilised for another child if there is a

cancellation

- Where children are placed outside the local health area difficulties have been experienced with other areas not prioritising or having capacity to offer an initial health assessment to Thurrock children.
- Successfully encouraging teenagers aged 16 and over who are accommodated to engage in an initial health assessment can sometimes be challenging and this is an area we are working on to make sure their health needs are assessed
- Where the local authority does not share parental responsibility with the parent they are not able to give consent to the health assessment if the parent refuses until the local authority either gains shared parental responsibility or the parent changes their mind. This is a legal issue and not something that the local authority or health professionals can easily resolve.

3.13 There have been discussions with Health partners and there have been some improvement with local capacity. Where children are placed outside of the local authority area there have been recently emerging problems in organising Initial Assessments within timescales. This has been escalated within the CCG and arrangements made for children to be brought back to Thurrock for their assessments where appropriate. The CCG have also recently spot purchased to impact on the timeliness of Health Assessments.

3.14 Additional identified actions;

- Health assessments are regularly discussed and actions identified at the Monthly LAC Health Steering Group.
- Weekly tracking meetings are held to discuss outstanding Initial Health Assessment and referrals from social care.
- Live tracking has been developed to identify timeliness or blockages at each stage of the process of Initial Assessments.
- Clear escalation process are in place where delay is identified
- Cancelled (not required) paediatrician appointments are being used for children waiting for an appointment – a notification process is being agreed
- The process for receipt and upload of the reports once the assessment is completed is being tracked.
- Health have also more recently spot purchased IHA's for young people where they have struggled to meet the need.

3.15 Outcomes

Following the actions identified above being implemented there has been a significant and sustained improvement in the timeliness of referrals for assessments. It should be noted that between April 2020 and May 2020 there was a dip in performance for Initial Health Assessments completed and a dip in April 2020 for referrals. It is believed that this has been contributed to by Covid19. In June and July 2020 we have seen an improvement in performance in terms of referrals and assessments completed.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To ensure Members of the Committee are aware of the Statutory Duty to complete Initial Assessments for all children and young people who come into care and how we are meeting these duties.

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

- 5.1 Overview and Scrutiny and the Health and Well-being Board are aware of the issues in respect of the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments and actions being taken.
- 5.2 Health colleagues have been consulted in improving the performance in achieving timely initial health assessments.

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

- 6.1 None

7. Financial Implications

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

There are no financial implications to this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

The Council has general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of any child that it looks after under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 and it must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1(1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the detailed legal requirements in caring for Looked after Children. The timescales for health are set in regulation 7 which provides for the Council to

make arrangements by the child's first review for the health assessment to take place as soon as reasonably practicable.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities, Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

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.

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

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

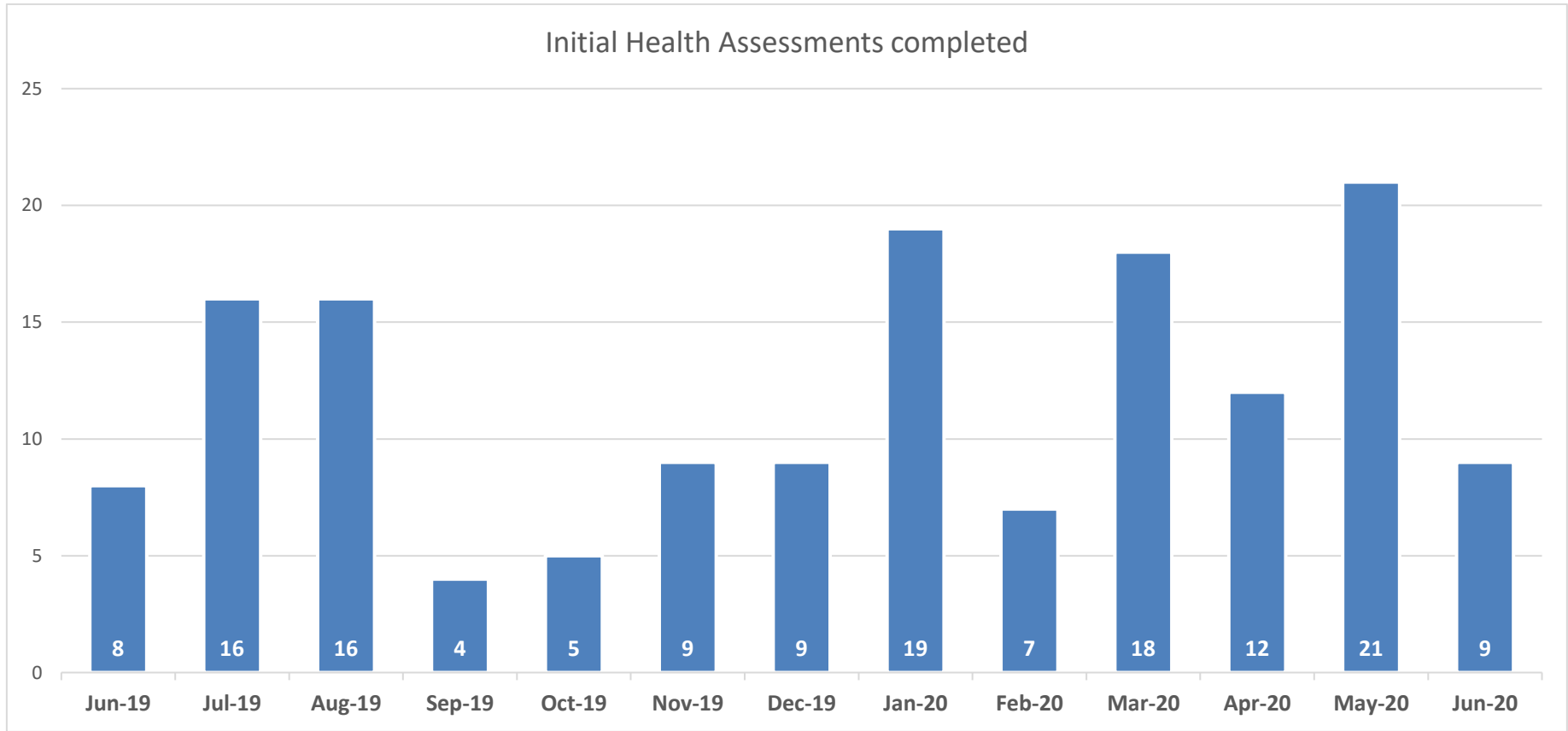
- Appendix 1 - Initial Health Assessments completed
- Appendix 2 - Initial Health Assessments completed in 20 working days
- Appendix 3 - Requests made in timescale

Report Author:

Janet Simon

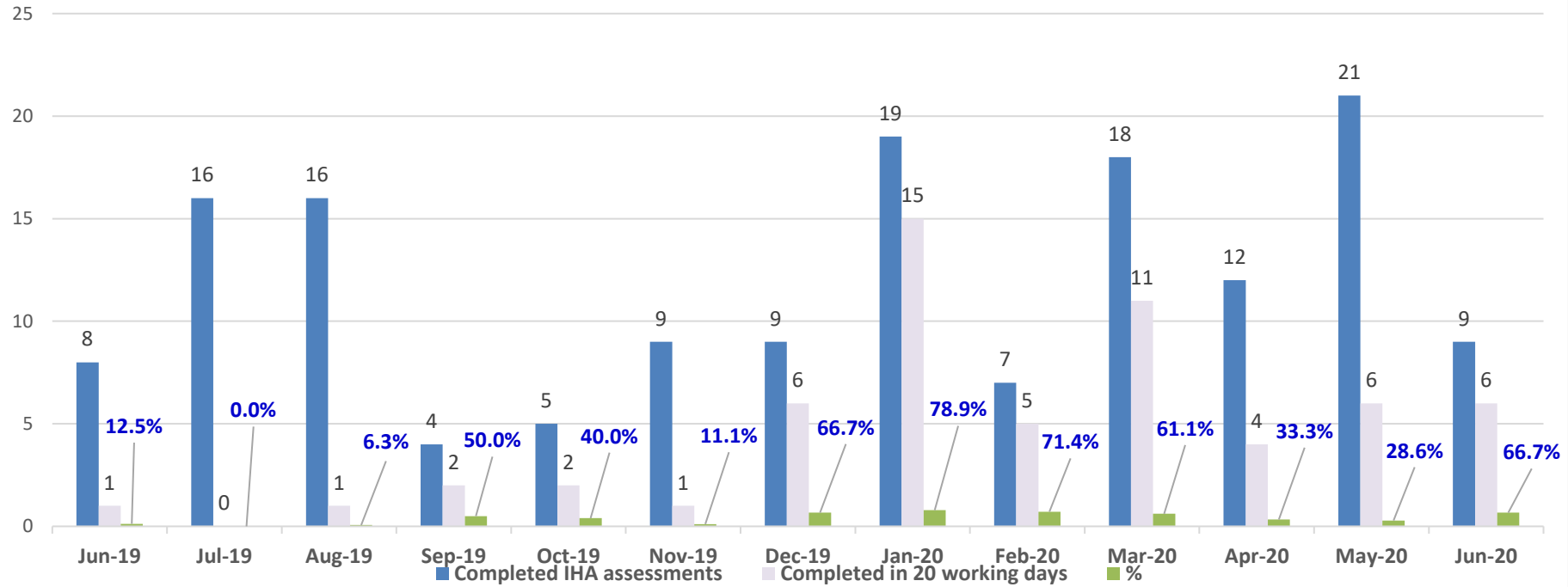
Strategic Lead, Children Looked After

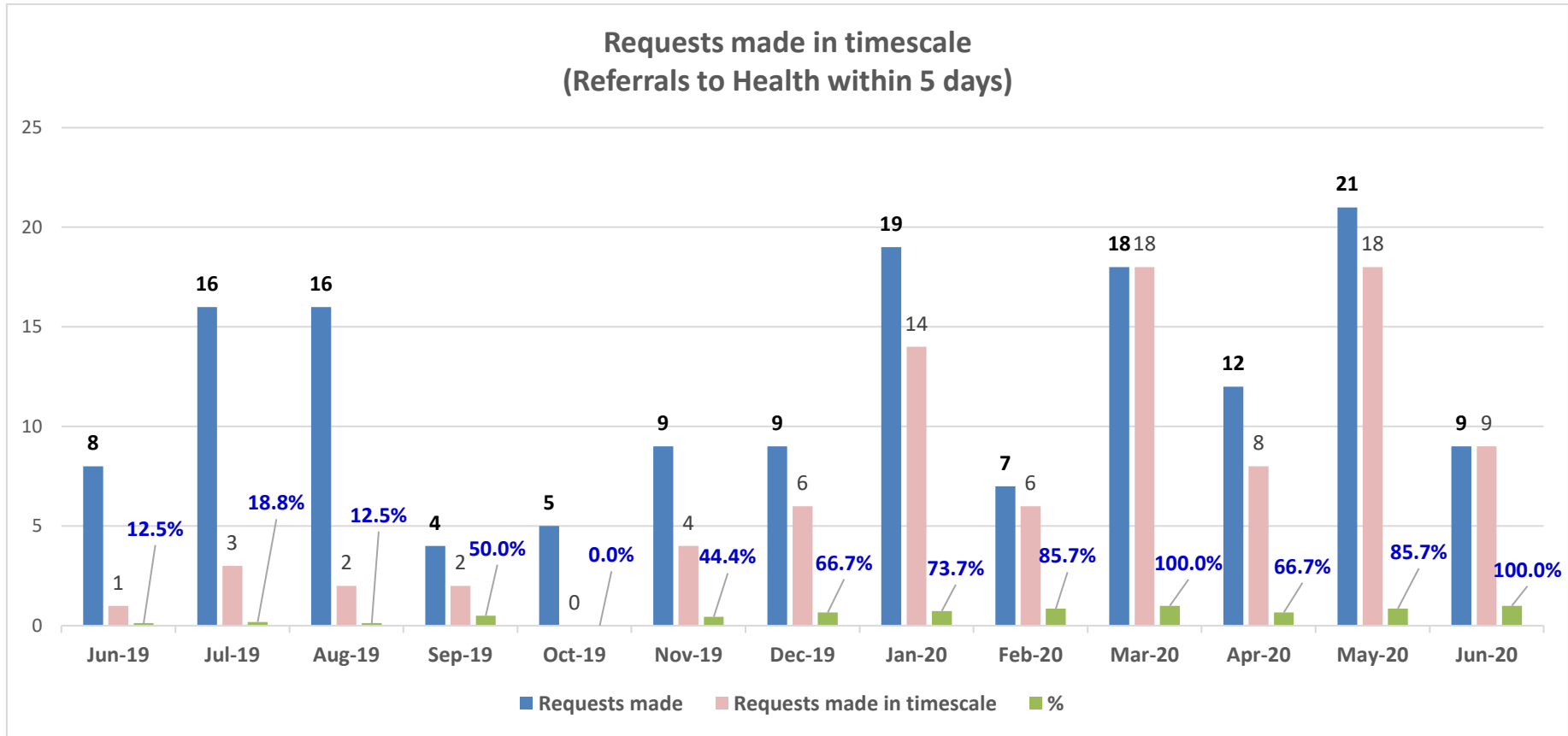
Appendix 1



Appendix 2

IHA completed in 20 working days





01 September 2020	ITEM: 10
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Looked After Children Health Report	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director, Children's Services	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 places a legal duty on CCGs to work with local authorities to promote the integration of health and social care services. The Government's Mandate to NHS England includes an explicit expectation that the NHS, working together with schools and children's social services, will support and safeguard looked-after children (and other vulnerable groups) through a more joined-up approach to addressing their emotional, mental and physical health need.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2>

This report is to advise Members of the Committee on how this duty is being met

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Members of the Committee are informed about how the above duties are being met

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Staff working with looked-after children who are delivering health services should make sure their systems and processes track and focus on meeting each child's physical, emotional and mental health needs without making them feel different. They should in particular: ensure looked-after children are able to access universal services as well as targeted and specialist services where necessary receive supervision, training, guidance and support.

The Local Authority and Health, through their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, have a duty to promote the welfare including the physical, emotional and mental health of Children who are Looked After, including those who are children placed in pre-adoptive placements.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.2 The Local Authority and Health, through their Corporate Parenting responsibilities, have a duty to promote the welfare including the physical, emotional and mental health of Children who are Looked After, including those who are children placed in pre-adoptive placements.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To ensure Members of the Committee are aware of the Statutory Duty meet and promote the health needs of Children Looked After.

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

5.1 Overview and Scrutiny and the Health and Well-being Board are aware of the issues in respect of the timeliness of the need to promote the health needs of Children Looked After.

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

6.1 None

7. Financial Implications

7.1 Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**
Management Accountant - Children's Services

There are no financial implications in this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

Under the Children Act 1989, CCGs and NHS England have a duty to comply with requests from a local authority to help them provide support and services to looked-after children.

The National Health Act 2006 (as amended) places a legal duty on CCGs to work with local authorities to promote the integration of health and social care services.

Both the CCG and NHS England must have regard the statutory guidance when exercising their functions and the Local Authority must comply with the guidance unless there are exceptional reasons to depart from it.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The increased risk of health inequality amongst LAC is set out on p3 of the report. Commissioning bodies hold a public duty in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy to promote inclusion and diversity, and to consider areas of inequality and mitigate accordingly through delivery plans.

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

- None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – NSH Health Economy Report

Report Author:

Yvonne Anarfi: Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children - TCCG
Helen Farmer: Assistant Director for Integrated Commissioning for Children,
Young People and Maternity Services
Joanne Guerin: Assistant Director Children's Services - NELFT
Ines Paris: Associate Designated Nurse – TCCG
Michael
Addo-Boateng: Safeguarding Children Specialist Nurse (Lead for CDR)/ Interim
Developmental Role (DNLAC)



Meeting date:	August 2020
Agenda item number:	
Report title:	Looked After Children (LAC) Report
Executive sponsor:	NHS Thurrock CCG
Report author:	Yvonne Anarfi – Designated Nurse Contributions from the Health Economy
Purpose of report:	To provide Health Economy LAC update
Approval route:	Chief Nurse / Childrens Commissioner
Patient & public engagement:	Nil
Report summary:	<p>This report covers LAC health update during the COVID 19 months. It attempts to cover holistic LAC, and makes note of other areas of LAC that are not fully appreciated and understand. The report also informs the committee/board the impact COVID 19 has had and continues to have on children and young people, including LAC cohort.</p> <p>The report attempts to bring partners attention to the holistic LAC agenda, and challenges partners to dive into how the holistic LAC agenda is delivered to LAC in and out of area.</p> <p>Recommendations are made to the board / committee</p>
Financial implications:	As yet not identified
Significant risks identified:	<p>System Risks identified</p> <p>The health needs of children entering care in Thurrock and Out of Area are not assessed in a timely manner, which could result in further harm to the child/ young person.</p> <p>The CCGs and the Local Authorities are not fulfilling their corporate parenting responsibilities.</p> <p>The CCGs are not compliant with statutory requirements (<i>Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children, 2015</i>).</p> <p>Scrutiny by local councillors via the local authority Corporate Parenting Board, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted could result in reputational damage to the CCGs.</p>
Report recommendations/ key points:	<p>Possible IT Digital Solution</p> <p>Possible Nurse-led IHAs</p>

	Possible Virtual Assessments
Decisions/actions required by:	Further comment/ feedback

1. Introduction

A key asset for all children is their health as it provides the basis from which children can flourish and achieve their full potential in transitioning into a successful adulthood.

The report outlines some of the challenges identified across the system and the strategies in place to address them. These have required a parallel approach to address the immediate performance issues (administrative, redeployment, capacity) while beginning the mapping of existing pathways and services and scoping the components of the offer envisaged within the LAC Strategy/Vision for what a gold standard system for 2021 should look like. As there is no additional funding currently earmarked for this project, any transformation will need to be delivered within existing resources.

The LAC services delivery/provision is a system led service where partner agencies have equal responsibilities to ensure this services to this cohort and effective and meeting statutory requirements.

The CCG commissions the Initial Health Assessments of all LAC in or placed out of Thurrock, this is commissioned through North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT). Public Health (PH) Local Authority commissions most of the LAC services and holds the performance and contract for these services. In Thurrock this is commissioned NELFT. NELFT also provides the Emotional Well-being Mental Health Services (EWMHS) for SET, and reports to a Key Performance Indicators (KPI), including LAC. Performance and contracts meetings chaired by the CCG and PH are held regularly with NELFT.

Subsequent reports to this meeting will be owned by all relevant agencies.

2. COVID-19 update – Protocols and Impact on Children and Young People (CYP)

Emerging research on the effects of COVID-19 in Children and Young People¹(CYP) is increasing our understanding of the scale of its impact so far, alongside the potential long-lasting consequences on children and young people’s future (<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-research-studies-children-young-peoples-views>). COVID-19 has affected all CYP, however, there appears to be a direct correlation between a child’s degree of vulnerability and the actual, or potential impact of COVID related measures.

This said, it comes with no surprise that Looked After Children (LAC), who are within the most vulnerable in our communities, have been deeply affected by COVID 19 in

many ways - from their education to social isolation, from access health and support services to their emotional health and wellbeing.

LAC, as a cohort, are acknowledged to be vulnerable to health inequalities, and exhibit significantly higher rates of mental health issues, emotional disorders (anxiety and depression), hyperactivity and autistic spectrum disorder conditions.

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/looked-after-children-lac> Some research into the voices of CYP and their mental health highlights concerns on how C-19 could have exacerbated low mood and other mental health conditions.

Another issue that affects LAC is how COVID-19 impacted on their ability to have face to face contact with their birth families during lockdown. However, the impact of this is currently unmeasured and will be difficult to quantify.

The greater dependency on technology during Covid-19 (from education to health appointments and social interactions) means that CYP are spending greater unsupervised time online, which also means they are likely to be exposed to greater risks of exploitation online <https://swgfl.org.uk/assets/documents/covid-19-expectations-and-effects-on-children-online.pdf>. This research also highlights that the increase in the numbers of emotionally vulnerable children poses greater risk for increased grooming by offenders. There is also early evidence of the increase in self-generated material by CYP as well as pressures to be or act in a certain way online. Furthermore, there are also added risks regarding how criminal gangs have adapted to Covid-19 and how this presents added risks to vulnerable CYP <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NYA-Hidden-in-Plain-Sight-1.pdf>

These additional risks to LAC must not be underestimated, and must be managed as a system.

In relation to the provision of health services during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to highlight:

- (1) NHS phased response to Covid-19 guidance, especially in regards to what services needed to be prioritised in detriment of others.
- (2) Redeployment of staff from Children and Young people health services to support adult services.
- (3) The move from face to face to large proportion of health contacts being completed virtually.

For our local services, for LAC, points 1-3 meant that some services (such as physiotherapy, or speech and language therapy, may not have been available for a period of time, or waiting lists for the provision of these services may have, or still be, longer than times prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Initial and Review Health Assessments (IHAs and RHAs) continued to be provided for LAC throughout, however there was a shift from exclusive face to face reviews to largely virtual appointments.

To support this, the Designated Nurses for LAC created a Covid-19 IHA assessment flowchart, to provide guidance for risk assessment/triage for virtual assessment or physical examination by Paediatrician or General Practitioner. Virtual consultations

are reported to have been well received by LAC, however, further work is ongoing to support the use of this technology moving forward.

The 2018-2020 SET LAC strategy has been completed. The Designated LAC nurses across SET are developing the 2020- 2022 strategy, and this will include mental health, transitioning and the voice of the child. Work continues in line with the statutory requirements as reset post Covid-19 progresses (SCN LAC report 07.08.20).

In the South West, safeguarding pathways (such as CP medicals, SARC pathway, Bruising Protocol) remained unaltered during the pandemic. These pathways would be used for all CYP, including LAC.

3. Commissioning Arrangements for Initial Health Assessments

There have been long term local and national challenges to delivering the CCG statutory requirements in relation to Initial Health Assessments for children and young people who become children who are looked after.

This failure to comply with statutory requirements in regards to IHA's has been identified both through the CCG Designate Leads for CLA and through the external inspection processes of Ofsted and CQC across the Southend, Essex and Thurrock Areas.

The IHA is the first opportunity to address the well cited and evidence of the poor outcomes and inequalities for this cohort of our population. This includes mental and physical health, education and offending rates. An example is the rate of mental health disorders in the general population aged 5 to 15 is 10%. For those who are looked after it is 45%, and 72% for those in residential care.

This short paper asks if colleagues in the CCGs across the Pan Essex footprint would consider and support a mandate to review and develop of a business case to look at a county wide commissioning solution.

CCG Statutory Requirement:

The requirements of the CCGs and Local Authorities is described in the publication: *Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children, Statutory Guidance for Looked After Children (March 2015)* This guidance is issued to local authorities, CCGs and NHS England under sections 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 and they must have regard to it when exercising their functions.

Some key points include:

- The initial health assessment should result in a health plan, which is available in time for the first statutory review by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) of the child's care plan. That case review must happen within **20 working days** from when the child started to be looked after.
- Where a looked-after child is placed out of area, **the receiving CCG is expected to cooperate** with requests to **undertake health assessments** on behalf of the originating CCG.

- CCGs and NHS England have a duty to cooperate with requests from local authorities to undertake health assessments and help them ensure support and services to looked-after children are provided **without undue delay**.
- The **initial health assessment** must be done by a **registered medical practitioner**.
- **Review health assessments** may be carried out by a **registered nurse** or registered midwife

The Guidance describes the principles of a good health assessment and the importance of recognising health planning and assessment as a dynamic and ongoing process. It clearly identifies the importance and requirements in relation to specialist skills, competencies and supervision for professionals assessing and working with Looked After Children. This has a sub speciality for Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers of which forms a high percentage in areas such as Thurrock and West Essex CCG.

Proposal:

To form a small task and finish group to develop a proposal for commissioning delivery of IHAs on a county wide approach. This would include a core group of Commissioners and CCG Designate Leads for LAC and Safeguarding.

The rationale for the proposal is:

1. The volume of IHAs is relatively small and due to the processes around LAC the demand is fairly constant and predictable.
2. Commissioning a provider or lead provider model for the county would allow a bespoke operational model which enables delivery of the statutory requirements.
3. Centralised monitoring, reporting and quality control would provide greater CCG assurance regarding the delivery of statutory requirements and allow identification of challenges and issues in a timely way.
4. The financial modelling and approach are guided by the National Tariff (456) and lends itself to a PbR approach.
5. Aligns with the new landscape of STPs/ICS as CCG boundaries change.
6. Central function would deliver effective utilisation of a specialist professional resource and flexibility.
7. Delivers a system for Children placed in Essex and cross charging arrangements to be consistent.

4. Local LAC Position Update

Health assessments are commissioned from the North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) as the Health Provider by Basildon & Brentwood and Thurrock CCGs. However, the process requires close working between health and Local Authority colleagues in relation to information sharing, administrative work and supporting attendance at appointments and reporting.

The Service Level Agreement (SLA) with NELFT for 2019/20 stipulates the delivery of 100% of IHA and 100% of RHA within statutory timescale. RHA Service provision for children placed out of the borough is commissioned from external providers. 0-19 Services with Public Health with the NELFT LAC Team coordinating requests and assuring quality. Although children under five years are seen six monthly for their

RHA and children aged five and over are seen annually for their RHA. However, all children are seen by a variety of professionals during the intervening period and would also be in contact with their GPs and the universal services which are for 0-19 year olds regardless of their placement location.

Problems with IHA are historical, so collectively across Essex we are in the early stages of discussing a central data base, which will be used across Southend Essex and Thurrock (SET). There are still capacity challenges to undertake the IHA assessment of Thurrock children and this has been highlighted as a problem across a number of local authorities including Basildon Brentwood and Thurrock.

It is expected that health are notified of all children entering care in Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) by working day three, with the receipt of the completed notification form and relevant consent, to complete the initial health assessment. The IHA referral form, from the social worker, is expected to be available to health by day 5. This would allow 15 working days to complete the health assessment and return the BAAF Form Part C and health action plan to the local authority.

System-wide issues have continued to impact on our collective ability to meet some health-related commissioned targets which include IHA. During Quarter One (April – June), the LAC Operational Manager for NELFT had been redeployed to support with the on-going pandemic. Data were received upon her return to her substantive post in mid-July 2020. This report covers data from mid-July – 4th August 2020.

Data provided in the period covered indicates 11 (Eleven) children placed in and out of Thurrock who were due for IHAs by the beginning of August 2020.

IHAs have been carried out for LAC children during the COVID period. It is reported that IHAs were conducted virtually. However, children were brought into clinic for face-to-face health assessments when specific health concerns were identified.

Data shows that only 2 children had their IHA paper work received within the stipulated 5-working days' period – the remaining 9 (82%) children's paper work were received outside the recommended time. Three cases had paperwork returned to the Local Authority and received on 3 separate dates – this was due to missing information. By the end of July 2020, more than 50% of cases had had their IHAs completed. Appointments for the remaining children (4) are scheduled for completion of their IHAs by mid-August 2020.

Evidence from analysing and comparing data for Q1 to Q4 2019/20 indicates that average IHA data (originating area) was 81%. In the same period, average IHA data (outside originating area) was 18.3%. The results of the data indicate poor IHA uptake. It further indicates that the current pandemic, although compounding the issue would not entirely be the reason for the poor IHA data.

Performance against the IHA indicator remains below target despite the additional clinic capacity that were introduced to reduce the backlog, in 2019/20. The trend for IHA performance and service delivery against the commissioned target of 100% which was met 5 months out of the 12 months. Although the quality of IHA is reported to have consistently remained high, the timeliness within which IHA has

been performed against the statutory timescale of 28 days of a child coming into care has not been achieved. The main weaknesses that need to be addressed are linked to the timely processing of paperwork, and the quality of information recorded on the notification/referral form to Health.

IHA Performance Data – 2019/20

Quality Requirement	Standard	Unit	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Looked After Children ("LAC") Initial Health Assessments completed within 20 working days of the child becoming Looked After where complete paperwork is received from Social Care five or less working days after the child became Looked After.	100%	Vol (Completed IHAs)	11	10	19	13	13	7	11	15	12	8	17	2
		Vol (Requests)	14	12	19	15	13	10	11	16	14	10	25	2
		Percentage	78.6%	83.3%	100.0%	86.7%	100.0%	70.0%	100.0%	93.8%	85.7%	80.0%	68.0%	100.0%

To address this, stakeholders may wish to meet again as a multi-agency group to agree an arrangement that is more resilient and sustainable.

IHA 2020/21

Quality Requirement	Standard	Unit	Apr	May	Jun
Looked After Children ("LAC") Initial Health Assessments completed within 20 working days of the child becoming Looked After where complete paperwork is received from Social Care five or less working days after the child became Looked After.	100%	Vol (Completed IHAs)	3	2	
		Vol (Requests)	3	3	
		Percentage	100.0%	66.7%	

As part of the ongoing analysis and deeper discussions, it is identified that issues relating to both the capacity of out-of-area teams to complete assessments and the need for identified systems and processes to work to the agreed timescales to ensure the timely receipt of paperwork by LAC Teams both in and out of the area. The resolution of these issues formed part of the planned review of processes and pathways which took place in 2018, however, the system-wide issues have continued to impact on our collective ability to meet some health-related commissioned IHA targets.

UASCs

During the same period snapshot (Mid-July – 4th August 2020), UASCs due IHAs by the 1st of September 2020 were 15. Amongst that number all but 13 appointments have been booked with interpreters. The remaining 2 appointments are scheduled to have their IHAs by 1st September 2020; appointments for these IHAs are yet to be arranged.

Narratives from LAC Providers Services indicate young persons' refusal to attend appointments, out-of-area capacity issues and interpreters not being arranged for the IHA or interpreters not attending when scheduled for an IHA are some of the issues impacting IHA from being completed. Additionally, the impact of paperwork not received within the recommended period appears to compound the challenges of processing IHA's in a timely manner. Ultimately, COVID-19, paperwork's not received,

redeployment and lack of capacity are undoubtedly are the reasons for the poor uptake of IHAs in the area.

5. Impact of Weaknesses in the Processes and System

There are a number of areas on which the partnership as a System should be focusing on to improve general performance and an effective holistic LAC service provision.

1) Quality and timeliness of paperwork

Poor quality or delayed paperwork from Social workers impacts on the ability for the LAC Health Professionals (Doctors and Nurses) or Out of Area providers to complete IHA within timescale. A number of strategies have been put in place jointly agreed but this continues to be of significant impact on timeliness of IHAs. From the weekly IHA NELFT data shared, where paperwork is received within timescale an IHA is completed within a maximum of 2 weeks. For a child to be appointed within 20 working days, referrals must arrive by Day 3-5, in keeping with local guidelines.

Having reviewed the 4 weeks' data shared by NELFT, The major reason for delay:

- was late paperwork (9/11 children) – that is, children not being referred to the LAC health team in time. The maximum amount of time of the delay ranged from 6 to 30 days or more in some cases.
- In 3 out of the 11 delayed IHA, the issue of late paperwork was further compounded by an additional reason that caused further delay to the appointment.
- 3/11 children were appointed in time, but no interpreter arrived.
- No delays were caused by lack of appointment availability.

2) Placement location

Reducing the number of children placed outside the borough should be looked at as a focus of the Thurrock LAC Strategy. There need to be consideration when placing Thurrock LAC more than 20 miles away from home. As practitioners may not have the ability/capacity to travel further than 20 miles to complete assessments on their originating LAC if Out of Area are unable to complete assessments.

3) Data reconciliation and reporting

Would be good practice and effective for joint Health LAC Team administrator with Local Authority Business support to meet regularly to enable joint validation of data and paperwork's reported.

4) Vulnerable groups of children - UASC

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) continue to account for a significant proportion of the looked after children cohort. These children have high health needs associated with the trauma they have experienced either in their home country or in their journey to the UK. They may also have experienced safeguarding issues such as sexual or criminal exploitation with

an increased likelihood of going missing from placements and a requirement for language support due to the language barrier.

5) LAC on remand or in custody

Information on this cohort and services provided to them will provide an extended additional data to whole LAC.

6) Children not being brought to appointments / Declining Appointments

It is unclear if data and exploratory inquiry data is available on this group. Separate process required for non-engagers/extract data for this cohort on a quarterly basis to review themes would be useful. This area could be added to the focus for the Heads of Service who are working within Health, Supervisors of social workers and foster carers to address this.

7) Placement Out of Area

As at June 2020, Thurrock had placed 200 LAC Out of Area (66%) and 103 LAC within Thurrock (34%). Reducing the number of children placed outside the area is a significant area to focus on. The Local Authority may want to consider this factor, as placing LAC nearer Thurrock will contribute to resolving the delay in some of the assessments, and practitioners may be willing to travel to complete assessment nearer Thurrock.

8) Dental Health of LAC

9) Immunisation

10) Care Leavers

The above three are equally crucial for LAC, and the board may wish to request for reports to inform them of the holistic LAC agenda.

6. Next Steps

Commissioners working on a long term solution

- 1) Early stages of discussing a central data base, aim to have one digital solution. The progress for this central data was put on hold due to COVID 19. The aim is to have one digital solution, which would show where a CYP is within the IHA pathway, this will be a live data base and have the ability to trace the child journey from when they come into care. The Information Governance Lead for the SET CCGs are involved to ensure robust information governance arrangements are in place, in view of multi-agency access to patient identifiable information.

We await another date to be rescheduled for these meetings.

- 2) COVID 19 Work Steam was developed across SET and is an ongoing process. Discussion with Providers on how best to go forwards and bring in new changes to the IHA system and utilizing the knowledge and Skill

developed during Covid 19 and taking them forward once we exit this phase. The response from the young children regarding the virtual IHA's assessment, have been extremely positive. However, it is also worth noting that some of the dangers and risks of virtual consultations and assessment are real and a concern to many. These suggestions are being looked into carefully.

An option paper has also been written and is currently been reviewed. When appropriate this will be shared externally.

3) Nurse-led IHAs

The legal position in England and Regulation 7 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010) requires a registered medical practitioner to carry out an initial assessment of the child's state of health and provide a written report of the assessment.

The suggestion of nurse-led IHAs has previously been raised with NHSE and the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), in view of additional wording within the Looked After Children: Knowledge, skills and competencies of healthcare staff. Intercollegiate document.

'If healthcare providers under clinical governance processes delegate to registered nurses to undertake initial health assessments the Royal College of Nursing and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health state they must have successfully completed a paediatric assessment module as part of a paediatric advanced practitioner programme as stated at level 4, thereby demonstrating attainment of the required knowledge, skills and competence'.

Neither the RCN nor NHS England has supported this action. To offer a service outside of the legislative framework raises concerns in relation to accountability and potentially places practitioners open to challenge.

The updated LAC Intercollegiate Document is due for publication and may provide further clarity.

Scotland

Legislation in Scotland states that: 'arrangements are in place for a registered medical practitioner or a registered nurse to offer a written assessment of the child's health and their need for health care within 4 weeks of notification'.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/guidance-health-assessments-looked-children-scotland/pages/5/>

7.Looked After Children – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities :

Thurrock clinical commissioning group works collaboratively and in partnership with the local SEND system to support all children and young people with Special Educational needs and Disabilities. This includes looked after children and ensures that their health needs are identified and prioritised in accordance with The SEND code of Practice (2015) and Working together to safeguard children (2018).

The Designated Clinical officer (DCO) and SEND health professionals actively engage in SEND processes to support and identify the needs of LAC as follows:

- COVID 19 – DCO and AD for children’s commissioner met weekly with AD for Children’s care and the Education recovery group to ensure Children with the highest needs were prioritised and individualised packages of support were arranged and families / foster carers struggled with lockdown. Health representation for Thurrock CCG at the SET area COVID response weekly meetings. These meeting specifically highlighted the disadvantages of children who were not attending school including the low levels of Vulnerable children who were not offered a school place and supported a system wide approach.
- Consistent attendance by the DCO and health professionals, at initiation and case management panel ensures that potential health needs are identified and can be efficiently referred to services / information can be gained to support the decision making process and development of the plan. The panel’s Terms of reference have recently been reviewed to ensure health and social care representatives attend and ensure accurate, timely and specialist advice is available to support the process.
- NELFT’s SEND single point of access ensures that when information is requested from NELFT services it is disseminated to all services caring for the child including School nursing and specialist LAC team. Ensuring the LAC team and school nurses were requested and provided information was a urgent action following the OFSTED/CQC Joint area inspection and was due to be audited prior to COVID 19 pandemic.
- All LAC children that are referred to health services are prioritised and offered an appointment/ review as soon as clinically possible.
- The DCO and Head of Children’s services (NELFT) are members of the task and finish group to review the quality assurance process for Out Of Borough placements to ensure all health elements are considered when assessing the quality of placement and health services available to the child. The process is strongly aligned with the Department of Education Quality assurance process for LAC in out of area placements.
- Learning disability health checks for 14 yrs +. The DCO and Designate LAC nurse started initial conversations with the specialist LAC team regarding identification of LAC children with EHCP and discussed amended the RHA paperwork to specifically identify the children with Education, health and care plans and SEN support. The LAC team identified approximately 91 young

people that would meet these criteria and as part of the RHA, the learning disability health check would be discussed and offered. Best practice regarding aligning the health check and RHA was discussed and this was escalated to the pan Essex LAC forum. This is a future ambition for the LAC cohort within Thurrock to reduce the number of health appointments and number of times the young person 'tells their story'.

- Thurrock CCG is undertaking a Learning disability awareness campaign to identify young people that meet the criteria and can be registered at the GP and offered the health check. As described above the LAC cohort identification has begun.
- The DCO is a member of the LAC safeguarding clinical forum and the COVID 19 safeguarding forum ensuring the alignment of both the SEND and safeguarding agenda.

LAC Health Passports:

- Thurrock CCG and the Children in Care council designed a hand held health passport for LAC children so they had all their health information readily available alongside a wealth of contact details and health information. The passport is now due for a review (2 years since the design and dissemination) and Thurrock CCG are working alongside NELFT to review its effectiveness. A survey will be undertaken with Young people who have used the passport and health staff who have worked alongside the young people. The survey is due for completion in the Autumn term with the intention of re producing with updated information.
- Funding has been agreed for the passports by Thurrock CCG.

Current Challenges:

- COVID 19 prioritisation and restoration plan – SEND work streams are currently resetting and new timelines are being agreed.
- Currently the LAC + EHCP /SEN support numbers are not shared with Thurrock CCG – this data is not included in the SEND dashboard and as such unknown (data has been requested). The LAC/ SEN population within Thurrock is not accurately known to the DCO. Advice is given on a case by case basis.
- Inconsistent sharing of 'draft EHCP' does not enable specialist practitioners to review prior to final sign off.
- Availability and capacity of staff to implement alignment of RHA's / health checks for example.

RCN

When considering how to move forward, services should review lessons learnt and ways of working together across agencies. Innovation and development of the 'new normal' are important, eg incorporating new technologies and other service developments into business as usual working and allowing the flexibility to engage with young people who may have previously refused assessments.

We acknowledge there is likely to be an increase in safeguarding referrals/assessments and then also an increase in the number of children in care with Initial Health Assessments (IHA) and Review Health Assessments (RHA) (in six to 12 months' time) required. Current decisions are about balancing service requirements and capacity against individual needs.

8. Conclusion

The report has provided an update to the Corporate Parenting Board in relation to the health of LAC. Health of LAC remains a corporate parenting priority and area of focus for the partnership. The commissioners and partners will continue to monitor the implementation of the delivery plan for the LAC Strategy to improve health outcomes for children in the long-term. It is anticipated that the proposal paper and recommendations will assist in ensuring that performance on IHA indicator is sustained and progress is seen against KPI targets for all areas for LAC during the next six months.

Report Ends

Author and Contributors

Yvonne Anarfi – Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children - TCCG

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1 September 2020	ITEM: 11
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Corporate Parenting Strategy	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key
Report of: Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

Corporate Parenting refers to the **partnerships between the local authority departments, services and associated agencies** who are collectively responsible for meeting the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers. Local authorities should care about children in their care, not just for them.

This informs members of their responsibilities as Corporate Parents and what work is being done to fulfil these.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Committee note their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The term 'corporate parent' is broadly understood in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. However, it is vital that all parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognise they have a key role too.

2.2 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers (collectively referred to as looked-after children and young people).

2.3 The corporate parenting principles are intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers and for the local authority to facilitate as far as possible secure, nurturing, and positive experiences for looked after children and young people and enable positive outcomes for them.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 None – Corporate Parenting responsibilities are a statutory responsibility.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 To ensure members are aware of the corporate parenting responsibilities

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 When making key decisions about corporate policies our corporate parenting responsibilities should be considered and our children and young people prioritised.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by:

Michelle Hall

Management Accountant - Children's Services

There are no financial implications to the report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by:

Judith Knight

Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

Local Authorities must, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people mentioned in subsection [\(2\)](#) Children and Social Work Act 2017, 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 a local authority, within the meaning given by section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989;
- relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of that Act;
- persons aged under 25 who are former relevant children within the meaning given by section 23C(1) of that Act

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by:

Rebecca Lee

Team Manager - Community Development and Equalities, Adults, Housing and Health Directorate

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.

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

Prioritisation of Corporate Parenting will have a direct impact on the outcomes for Children who are Looked After.

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):

- Children and Social Work Act 2017

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1: Corporate Parenting – Defined Responsibilities
- Appendix 2: Corporate Parenting Committee – Terms of Reference
- Appendix 3: Corporate Parenting Engagement Plan 2020-2021
- Appendix 4: Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020-2021

Report Author:

Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Children's Services

THURROCK COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

2020 – 2021

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The term Corporate Parenting has been enshrined into legislation through the Children and Social Work Act 2017. It clarifies corporate parenting principles which local authorities and partners are required to adhere to. When a child becomes 'looked after' the role of parenting is shared with parents and becomes the corporate responsibility of the council. This is known as corporate parenting and is a term used to describe how the council and its partners collectively carry out their support and responsibilities to all children and young people who are in our care, by seeking the same positive outcomes that all parents would want for their own children.
- 1.2 Corporate parenting is a whole local authority enterprise. It places collective responsibility on the local authority to achieve good parenting for all children in care.
- 1.3 Specifically corporate parenting requires the Council and its partners:
- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of
 - those children and young people
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - 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
 - promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives,
 - relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living
- 1.4 Effective corporate parenting requires a commitment from all council employees and elected members. Councillors have a lead role in ensuring that the Council acts as an effective corporate parent for every child in care.
- 1.5 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 that 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 We know that the vast majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve

good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families. So we have worked hard to maintain children within their family networks through robust preventative and child protection work. Our Families Together Team was formed in March 2019 and works with families and their children who may be on the Edge of Care, with an aim to reduce our looked after population through a Solution Focussed approach.

- 1.8 This Corporate Parenting Strategy provides focus and direction for our work with looked after children and care leavers. It demonstrates the Council's commitment to ensuring that the life chances of every child and young person in our care are improved in line with their peers through the provision of effective support that addresses disadvantage and enables them to reach their full potential. We will review performance against this strategy and will regularly report to, and be challenged by, the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Children in Care Council.
- 1.9 Good parents continue to support children as they become adults. Thurrock Council and its Members has very high aspirations for its care leavers. This is demonstrated in the local offer for care leavers up to the age of 25. This is a requirement under the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The local offer is crucial for making sure that care leavers experience stability into adult life.
- 1.10 The Corporate Parenting Strategy has direct links to the Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy.
- 1.11 An essential part of getting it right in Thurrock is to develop Councillors' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parents. There is a clearly defined set of responsibilities for Councillors and Officers, developed by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and supported by central government (see appendix 2).
- 1.12 The fundamental aims of this strategy are to ensure that Councillors:
 - Understand their roles and responsibilities as Corporate Parents
 - Scrutinise and challenge how the Local Authority performs in delivering its services as a Corporate Parent
 - Engage effectively, with energy, clarity and confidence with children and young people
 - Support children and young people to engage in activities that inform scrutiny and challenge, enabling them to be able to contribute to shaping how services are delivered
 - Understand that children and young people can hold them to account

2 CORPORATE PARENTING – OUR COMMITMENT

- 2.1 We are committed to improving the outcomes and life chances of the children and young people who are in our care and providing the best support to care leavers.

We want everything the best parents want for their children:

- That they are happy and healthy both physically and emotionally;
- That we keep them safe and protected from harm and

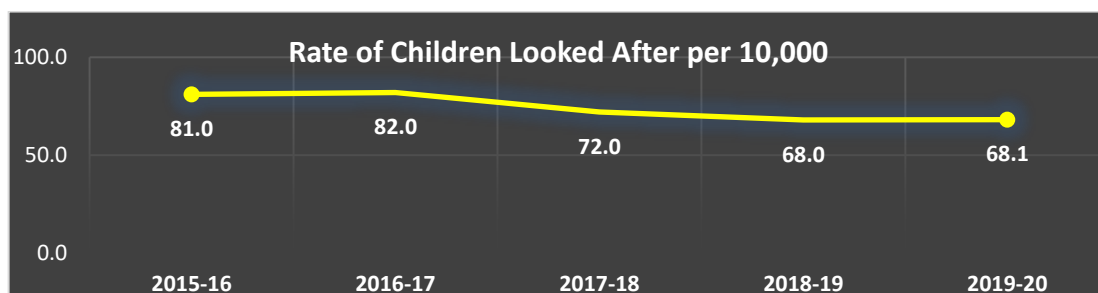
- exploitation;
- That we support them into adulthood and that we prepare them for independence;
- That children do well at school and can later access training or employment and enjoy good relationships with their peers.
- We are ambitious for our children, we want them to achieve their potential and participate in decisions which affect their lives;
- We want looked after children and care leavers to work with us and, along with parents and carers, shape the services we offer to them.

2.2 We want Thurrock Council to be an excellent Corporate Parent. This means the whole Council, not just Children's Services. Being an excellent Corporate Parent means:

- All Thurrock Council services will know about their Corporate Parenting responsibility and will acknowledge this in their business planning and delivery.
- All elected members will have opportunities to understand their Corporate Parenting responsibility and to meet with Looked-After Children and Leaving Care service professionals.
- All commissioned partner agencies will recognise Thurrock Council's Corporate Parenting commitment, understand this strategy and will support its aims and objectives. They will report formally against this through contract monitoring and evaluation.
- All Looked after Children and Care-Leavers will know about our Corporate Parenting commitment and strategy. This information will be made accessible to them in ways they can understand and use.
- We will work to a Corporate Parenting Work Programme. We will review how we are doing against these plans and report and welcome challenge from members, young people and partners

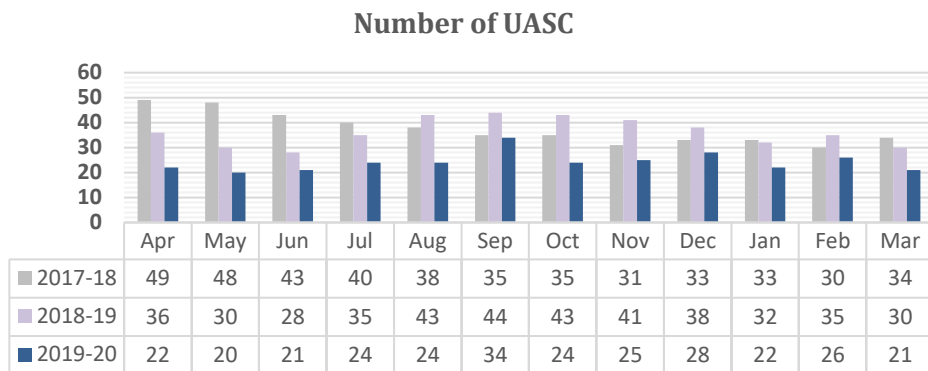
3 KEY PRIORITIES AND HOW OUTCOMES WILL BE MEASURED

3.1 On 31st March 2020 there were 298 children looked after by Thurrock. This is a slight increase on the same time last year when there were 293 children looked after. The number of Children Looked After over time can be seen in the below graph showing that there has been a consistent reduction in the number of children looked after over five years starting at 80 per 10,000 in 2015/16 to 68.1 per 10,000 in 2019/20.



3.2 Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

The below graph breaks down the number of UASC looked after. There were 21 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children cared for by Thurrock at year end 2019-20 compared to 30 at year end 2018-19. This is a 30% reduction in the number of UASC since last year and a 38% reduction since 2017-18.



4 KEY PRIORITIES

Key Priorities	How this will be measured
Children remain cared for in their family where it is safe to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in our Children Looked After numbers
Families Together successfully working with children and young people on the Edge of Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of our Children Looked After numbers. Review of children who have returned home or who have been diverted from Care. Feedback from Children, Young People and their Families.
Young people staying in their foster placements until they are ready to leave and feel prepared to live independently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased numbers of Young People Staying Put in their fostering arrangements. Young people will be prepared for independence and move on appropriately

<p>Young people will say they feel cared for and supported in their placements and are happy with the services that they are offered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will be reflected in casework records and what our children and young people tell us • Feedback from children and young people during Feedback Weeks • will demonstrate that children and young people are happy with the services that they are offered
<p>Involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives, and maximise the opportunity to make choices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance at LAC reviews Children in Care Council • Advocacy • Feedback from Children and Young People
<p>To narrow the educational attainment gap between the LAC cohort and their non LAC peers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Stage Results • Children's outcomes at school and in education will improve • More Young People entering Further Education • More Young People in Training or Employment • Increases in the number of young people going on to access higher education at university
<p>Ensure that LAC and Care leaver's rights and entitlements information is transparent and accessible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Leavers Offer • Big Wide World • Pathway Plans • Feedback
<p>Good outcomes secured through placement stability for children and young people who are looked after.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiency Strategy to understand the placement requirements of our children • Children are matched to permanent carers at the earliest opportunity • Monitoring through permanency tracking. • Less children will have to move on an immediate basis • Reduction in number of placement moves experienced by children

<p>Children and Young People's health needs are assessed</p> <p>All children are Looked After have up to date immunisations, dental care and developmental checks where required.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people will have improved health outcomes • Data Reports of Initial and Review Health Assessments completed within statutory timescales. • CLA Reviews • Pathway Plans • Supervision
<p>Increase in number of in house foster carers who are well supported and able to meet the needs of children with complex needs, sibling groups and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies • Foster carers feel better supported to continue to care for children even through difficult times • Reduction in number of children placed at distance from their home, community and school • Reduction of number of children placed in Residential settings and more children placed with families

Appendix 1: CORPORATE PARENTING - Defined Responsibilities

Services for children looked after and care leavers need to be co-ordinated, focussed and effective. Responsibility for this rests at a corporate level with Elected Members, who hold senior officers to account for the implementation of strategies and services.

In 2009, NCB created a gold-standard approach to corporate parenting, with a range of resources available to Councillors to help them design the best-fit corporate parenting model for local needs and to understand and fulfil their corporate parenting roles; [ncb corporate parenting tool-kit](#)

NCB identify three distinct levels of role responsibility for Councillors; ‘universal’, ‘targeted’ and ‘specialist’. These responsibility levels are defined below:

Universal responsibility

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

Targeted responsibility

For elected members who visit Children’s Homes or who are members of the Corporate Parenting Committee, and for managers of children’s services, their responsibilities are as for universal responsibility. In addition they will need to make sure, in partnership with those with lead responsibility in partner agencies, that they:

- Are aware of Government expectations regarding services to looked after children and young people
- Have access to and examine qualitative and quantitative information about this group
- Consider how they are going to respond to and hear the voice of children and young people and their carers/parents
- Regularly take action, in conjunction with officers and partner agencies, to improve services and respond to changing needs

Specialist responsibility

[Statutory guidance](#) on the role of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children describes how those roles set the tone for the local authority to be an effective corporate parent.

There is a responsibility for these individuals to:

- Provide leadership across the authority in safeguarding and monitoring the welfare of children looked after and young people
- Ensure governance arrangements are in place
- Undertake regular in-depth analysis of the needs of looked after children and young people and the services required to meet these needs
- Ensure strategic plans of the local authority and joint plans with partner agencies reflect the needs of children looked after and young people, particularly the Children and Young People's Plan, and the Directorate Children's Services Plan
- Keep up-to-date with national research and new performance indicators in relation to children looked after children and young people

Appendix 2: CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE – Terms of Reference

3. CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	
Appointed by: The Council under section 102 of the Local Government Act 1972	Number of Elected Members: Eight
Chair and Vice-Chair appointed by: The Council	Political Proportionality: The elected Members shall be appointed in accordance with Political Proportionality
Quorum: Three elected Members	Co-opted Members to be appointed by Council: (i) A nominated representative from Open Door (ii) Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council (iii) Chair of the Foster Carers Association (iv) Vice-Chair of the Foster Carers Association

Functions determined by Council:

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Committee exists to ensure that all elements of the Council work together to ensure that the children looked after by Thurrock get the best possible service that can be offered.
- 1.2 The Committee will serve to aid elected members to drive the improvement of the service forward including by interacting with the looked after children.
- 1.3 The Committee will monitor, review and update the looked after children strategy.
- 1.4 In carrying out this role, the Committee has set as its Mission Statement:

“We want to ensure that all children looked after by Thurrock Council are given the same opportunities, the same level of support and given the same amount of attention as would be given to our own children. We acknowledge that because children looked after have often had very difficult and damaging experiences in their lives, at times they need extra support and resources in order that they can benefit from the same opportunities as other children in our community as well as ensuring that young people have access and knowledge of their elected members who run the authority for the LAC and therefore give them a voice”.

2. Objectives

- 2.1 To champion and promote the best interests of all children and young people who are, have been in care or may be at risk of becoming looked after children, particularly in relation to the following –
 - Health and well-being
 - Ability to stay safe
 - Ability to enjoy and achieve
 - Ability and opportunity to make a positive contribution
 - Achievement of economic well-being
- 2.2 To promote the role of all councillors as corporate parents and provide the robust vehicle for their mandate to be exercised on behalf of young people.
- 2.3 To bring together members/officers/representatives of partner agencies with corporate

- parenting responsibilities, with the Chair having discretion to extend invitations to attend meetings of the Committee as appropriate.
- 2.4 To routinely examine the performance data relating to looked after children and, as necessary, seek to inquire into those areas where performance is poor or of concern.
 - 2.5 To explore the extent to which the Council as a whole is contributing to meeting the needs of looked after children and to identify and pursue areas where there could be improvement.
 - 2.6 To receive effective 'preventative' and qualitative information in order to hold senior officers to account in relation to meeting the needs and improving the outcomes of looked after children.
 - 2.7 To oversee the strategy for looked after children and ensure that the various elements within it are being delivered in a holistic and comprehensive way by all responsible.
 - 2.8 To identify and celebrate the achievements of individual children and young people who are or who have been looked after.
 - 2.9 To see the service shaped and influenced by those it serves i.e. young people.
 - 2.10 To prepare an annual report on the work of the Committee for consideration by the Council.
 - 2.11 To make recommendations to the relevant executive decision maker where responsibility for that particular function rests with the executive
 - 2.12 To report to the relevant scrutiny committee any matter which it believes that committee should give consideration to.
 - 2.13 The Corporate Parenting Committee shall be responsible for setting its own work programme, taking into account the wishes and preferences of the members of the Committee, together with any suggestions from Officers of the Council for particular topics to be considered.

Matters reserved for decision

There are no specific matters reserved to this committee.

The reason for this is that the role and function of the committee is to review and monitor the council's role as a corporate parent. This involves the participation of members on a cross political group committee. However any specific actions the committee might identify as necessary would be executive functions and need to be taken by a cabinet decision maker, in accordance with cabinet responsibility for functions.

Functions determined by Statute

Appendix 3

CORPORATE PARENTING ENGAGEMENT PLAN 2020-2021

	Objective	Actions	Evidence	Lead	Completion/Review Date
1	Ensure that all Elected Members are aware of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities	<p>Provide copy of corporate parenting strategy to all Elected Members.</p> <p>Offer Corporate Parenting training to all Elected members.</p>	<p>Strategy distributed</p> <p>Training delivered to all members</p> <p>Training evaluation</p>	<p>Joe Tynan/Janet Simon</p> <p>Joe Tynan/Janet Simon</p>	<p>June 2020</p> <p>Frequency Bi- monthly offer</p>
2	Corporate Parenting Members strengthen their links with Children in Care Council and Care Leavers	<p>Each Member of Corporate Parenting Committee (CPC) to attend the Children in Care Council (CiCC) at least annually by invitation</p> <p>Chair of CPC and Assistant Director to attend CiCC at least 6 monthly by invitation</p>	<p>Meeting minutes</p> <p>LAC more aware of CPC</p> <p>Improved collaboration and support</p>	<p>Participation Team and CPC Chair</p> <p>CPC Chair/Assistant Director Children's Services</p>	<p>Commencing June 2020 and annually thereafter</p> <p>6 monthly</p>
3	Corporate Parenting Committee Members to engage with LAC and Care Leavers to improve Services	CPC members support and attend Celebration events and appropriate activities attended by LAC and Care Leavers supported by the Participation worker	Feedback from young people and Members	Joe Tynan / CPC Chair	
4	Ensure all Children's Services Managers are aware of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities	<p>Link to Strategy sent to all CSC managers for dissemination</p> <p>Briefing to Managers</p>	Briefing delivered and Strategy shared	Janet Simon	June 2020

5	CSC and After Care managers regularly engage with LAC and care leavers to get an understanding of their lived experience of care and as a result are able to evidence an improvement in outcomes	Managers to engage in and listen to the Voice of the Child through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful Supervision • Case Auditing • Work shadowing • Attendance at reviews • Exit Interviews 	Managers at all levels in Children's Service Managers routinely attend, contribute and facilitate improvement work with children and young people through these activities and are able to evidence change as a result of their engagement.	Strategic Leads Service Managers Team Managers	Regularly throughout the year
6	Ensure partner Agencies and wider workforce are aware of the strategy and how it relates to their work,	Briefing through Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership	Minutes	Assistant Director - Joe Tynan	

Appendix 4

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2020 – 2021

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1 ST September 2020		
Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	To provide performance information on the Fostering Service
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	To provide performance information on the Adoption Service
Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 - 2022	Janet Simon/Joe Tynan	For Members to discuss and approve the strategy
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children’s Services and trends.
LAC Health Report	Anne Kavanagh/Yvonne Anarfi	To provide an update on the Health Offer to Looked After Children.
Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments	Janet Simon / Anne Kavanagh	To provide an update to committee on the performance in this area.

05 th January 2021		
Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
Virtual School Annual Report	Keeley Pullen	To report on the educational progress of Looked After Children
IRO Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	To enable the Corporate Parenting Committee to understand the work of the IRO service
Adoption Service Report	Dan Jones	To provide update and performance information on the Adoption Service
After Care Report	Luke Froment	To provide feedback on developments for Care Leavers

Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers	Janet Simon/Loretta Johnson	To report on the joint work between Housing and Social Care and the agreed arrangements for housing Care Leavers
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children's Services and trends.
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

02/03/2021

Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
LADO Report	Ruth Murdock	To provide feedback on the work of the Local Authority Designated Officer
Overview of Safeguarding Arrangements for Looked After Children	Ruth Murdock	To offer sufficient information to satisfy Elected Members that the safeguarding needs of Children including Looked After Children and Care Leavers are appropriately addressed
Placements and Commissioning Annual Report	Sue Green	To provide assurance to the Committee about the work carried out with regards to commissioning and monitoring of children's homes and supported accommodation.
Fostering Service report	Dan Jones	To provide performance information on the Fostering Service including performance and recruitment.
Children in Care Council Update		To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children's Services and trends.

Date

Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children's Services and trends.
Fostering and Adoption Panel Report	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	To provide performance information on the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Review Corporate Parenting Strategy	Joe Tynan/ Janet Simon	Progress report
Participation Report	Ruth Murdock	To provide key messages to CPC about matters of importance to looked after children and care leavers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Youth Offending Service Report	Clare Moore	To provide an overview of the Youth Offending Service to committee members

Date		
Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
UASC Report	Janet Simon/ Luke Froment	To provide feedback to committee on the work with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
Missing Report	Clare Moore / Naintara Khosla	To provide information to the committee on the work carried out to find missing children and to reduce the numbers of children who are missing.
Private Fostering Report	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	To provide information to the committee on Private Fostering Activity within Thurrock and the work carried out to ensure they are safe.
Children Looked After Initial Assessments	Janet Simon/ Anne Kavanagh	To provide an update on the performance in this area and actions being taken to ensure children are being medically examined on coming into care.
Children in Care Council Update		To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children's Services and trends.
Adoption Service Six Monthly Report	Dan Jones	To provide update and performance information on the Adoption Service
After Care Six Monthly Report	Luke Froment	To provide feedback on developments for Care Leavers

Date		
Item	Lead Contributor	Purpose
CE Report	Clare Moore / Naintara Khosla	To provide information to the committee on the work carried out with respect to children who are identified as at risk of or subject to exploitation and actions taken to reduce risks.
Early Help Annual Report	Clare Moore /Naintara Khosla	To provide information to the committee on Thurrock's Early Help Activity within Thurrock and the work carried out
Children Looked After Initial Assessments	Janet Simon/ Anne Kavanagh	To provide an update on the performance in this area and actions being taken to ensure children are being medically examined on coming into care.
Children in Care Council Update		To hear the views of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
Performance Report	Mandy Moore	To provide information on the performance of Children's Services and trends.
Headstart Housing and Inspire	Kate Kozlova-Boran	To provide an update on the work carried out by Headstart Housing and the Inspire Hub with Care Leavers

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1 September 2020	ITEM: 12
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2019/2020	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
Report of: Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Accountable Assistant Director: Joseph Tynan, Assistant Director of Children's Services	
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy Corporate Director for 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 in 2019, and as such is now a standard item on the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/2020 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 2019/2020 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 2019/2020 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 2019/2020, 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: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social Care and Education

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced the corporate parenting principles and this are subject to statutory guidance
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/>

attachment_data/file/683698/Applying_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf

The report provides assurance that the Council is fulfilling its statutory duties.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The Corporate Parenting Committee recognises the importance and role of diversity and equality issues. All work in 2019/2020 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 2019/2020

Report Author:

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

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Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2019-2020

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Corporate Parenting Committee	Pages	6-7
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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 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 another busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with a focus on external placements for young people, during which the Committee were informed the percentage of referrals received relating to a child previously referred within a 12 month period were being monitored and on average the percentage of repeat referrals had increased from 10.6% for 2017/2018 to 13.3% for 2018/2019.

It was explained the average time for a child from entering care to being placed with adopters had reduced from an average of 565 days between 2015/2017 to 423 days for 2019. This was lower than the national average of 486.

Following the Committee's previous request, Members received continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance throughout the year. In June, it was explained that children with missing episodes had reduced from 26 at the start of 2019 to 19 as of March 2019. The number of new foster carers being approved between April 2018 and March 2019 had increased, and the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training had risen from 61% 2017/2018 to 65% for 2018/2019. This was better than similar authorities where the average was 50.89%.

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

In September the Committee acknowledged a report on the Council's Pledge for Looked After Children. During this item it was discussed how all Elected Members were Corporate Parents to the Council's looked after children. It was discussed how important it was to ensure that our looked after children were able to influence and shape the services provided for them in both a statutory duty and a key priority. With this in mind the Pledge was therefore informed and developed with the Children in Care Council.

The Committee were informed the Local Government Association (LGA) had produced a resource pack on 'Support for Care Leavers' for all Elected Members in their Corporate Parenting role. It was explained the resource pack set out an introduction for Members about care leavers and statutory responsibilities for Local Authorities and Elected Members. The resource pack highlighted a number of sessions that could be of use to Members such as:

- Key Lines of Enquiry for all Councillors, which set out the issues that Members would need to consider when having oversight of services for Care Leavers.
- Case studies from Local Authorities who have tried different ways of working with their care leavers.

The Chair commented she felt the resource pack would be useful for all Elected Members and for the pack to be circulated to all Members of the Council, so they could better understand their Corporate Parenting role.

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.
- Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research – this was a report into the training provided to a range of colleagues including social workers, designated teachers and foster carers by the Virtual School.
- Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of the Council's Children's Services Directorate, where Members acknowledged the ILACS inspections by Ofsted focused on the effectiveness of local authority children's services and arrangements in four areas. At the end of the Inspection Ofsted rated Thurrock's services as Good.

Following the inspection, Ofsted left three recommendations, which the Committee were advised the Council was already working on. Members were further informed that Thurrock's children's social care last Ofsted inspection was judged to be 'requires improvement'.

It was commented that during the inspection there were up to seven Ofsted inspectors within the service. The Chair of the Committee thanked staff for the way they embraced the inspection, she had been advised that many had been preparing for weeks in advance, staying late and even working weekends.

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 2019/2020

Looking Forward...2020/2021

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 2020/2021. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 – 2022
- Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments
- Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Pupil Premium Plus Report for the Virtual School
- More direct engagement with children who are looked after and care leavers

Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2020/2021

Dates of Meetings: 2 June 2020, 1 September 2020, 5 January 2021 and 2 March 2021

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
2 June 2020		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Overview of Academic Year 2019/20	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Pupil Premium Plus report	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments	Janet Simon	Members – requested a further update following the March 2020 meeting.
Support provided to Care Leavers and Children Looked After during COVID19	Janet Simon / Luke Froment	Officers
Update on the support provided to Foster Carers during COVID19	Janet Simon / Dan Jones	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
1 September 2020		
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	Officers

Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 - 2022	Janet Simon/Joe Tynan	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
LAC Health Report	Anne Kavanagh	Officers
Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments	Janet Simon / Yvonne Anarfi (Designated Nurse CLA)	Officers
Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2019/2020	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
5 January 2021		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Sufficiency Placement	Sue Green	Officers
Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Annual Report of the Virtual Schools	Keeley Pullen	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
2 March 2021		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey

Last Updated: 30 July 2020

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