

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 **14 September 2021**

**Council Chamber, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL.**

There is very limited space for press and public to physically attend this meeting due to social distancing requirements. We advise anyone wishing to physically attend to book a seat in advance via [direct-democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:direct-democracy@thurrock.gov.uk) to ensure a place.

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### Membership:

Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Susan Little, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary and Kairen Raper

Christopher Bennett, Chair, Children in Care Council

Annie Guidotti, Open Door

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

Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

### Substitutes:

Councillors John Kent, Maureen Pearce, Joycelyn Redsell and Elizabeth Rigby

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## Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 1 June 2021.	
<b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be	

considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

<b>4</b>	<b>Declaration of Interests</b>	
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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](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)

Agenda published on: **3 September 2021**

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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 1 June 2021 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Georgette Polley, Jane Potheary, Kairen Raper and Maureen Pearce (Substitute) (substitute for Susan Little)

Chair of the Children in Care Council  
Annie Guidotti, Open Door  
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

**Apologies:** Councillor Susan Little

**In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help  
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention  
Mandy Moore, Business Intelligence and Data Analytics Manager  
Wendy Le, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

### **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 2 March 2021 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 interest.

### **4. Children's Social Care Performance**

The report was presented by Mandy Moore.

Referring to paragraph 3.4, Councillor Muldowney sought more details on the number of children leaving and entering care and the impact of Covid-19 on this. Janet Simon explained that in 2019-2020, there had been a large number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who were accommodated and this number had decreased this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She mentioned that a few large sibling groups had come into care in February 2020 which had impacted the figures and the number of children in care tended to remain static as some stayed in care longer due to the Covid-19 pandemic or because it was the right place for children at that time. The service held a weekly Placement Panel to discuss children coming into care and worked with families to try to keep children within families if possible. A number of checks and balances were in place alongside care plans and trackers to ensure the right decision was made for children coming into care and continually updated. She went on to say that if a child needed to come into care through a referral, discussions would take place with the parents to assess whether a voluntary arrangement or emergency protection order was needed for the child to come into care. The emergency protection order would enable the service 72 hours for the case to go through the court.

Referring to paragraph 7.1, Councillor Raper questioned whether there were measures in place to address the drop in care leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET). Naintara Khosla explained that the drop was a direct impact of Covid-19 in the 18 – 21 years old cohort where most of Thurrock's young people had been trying to find work. The service had a programme in place alongside Inspire Youth Hub to support young people in CVs and interviews. A bespoke panel also looked at the interests of a young person to match them with a suitable job depending on the availability of work. The service was working towards a September offer to try to encourage young people to get back into college or work and was currently making full use of the Kickstart programme.

Referring to paragraph 8.1, Councillor Potheary noted that the net gain of a foster household over a two year period was one and sought more details. She felt that it would be useful to see some contextual data behind the figures and compared against neighbouring local authorities. Naintara Khosla answered that a small gain of a foster household and not a decrease was considered successful. It was challenging to recruit foster carers and the service was doing well in the current climate to break even. She said that the service had a good marketing plan to achieve 20 additional foster households. Janet Simon added that the service also took into consideration of the number of children in care and depended on how many a foster household could take. She went on to say that fostering had been successful during the pandemic and the service worked with the foster carers to ensure this. The last three years had seen the service set higher standards for foster carers and some foster carers had withdrawn through this but the standard of care was important for the children in care.

Councillor Polley pointed out Thurrock's neighbouring local authorities and commented that she had heard suggestions before that London boroughs



gave better fostering incentives. She was pleased to see the work that the service had undertaken to ensure Thurrock's foster carers were supported. She asked which local authorities was Thurrock compared against and if there were other reasons (other than Covid-19) why foster households had withdrawn from fostering. Janet Simon answered that statistical neighbours included Medway, Bexley, Bromley, Swindon and Peterborough to name a few but not all performed the same as Thurrock in regards to the number of looked after children. She said that for foster care, the service compared themselves against bordering neighbours such as Essex and Southend in terms of pay and support. This had helped the service to review their procedures and standards to ensure the service had the right foster carers. Thurrock also offered a unique incentive which was the council tax exemption and some local authorities further away also offered this and had seen success. She also said that agency foster carers did not offer more than Thurrock.

The Vice-Chair noted the success in paragraph 5.4 and commended the service for this. She questioned the acronym of SGO in 3.5. Janet Simon explained that this was Special Guardianship Order which meant a permanency placement for a child in foster care.

Referring to page 17 on the increase and decrease of children coming into care, Councillor Muldowney asked if there were underlying factors for this change. Referring to 4.2, she also sought more details on the overrepresentation of children in youth detention from the BAME community. Janet Simon answered that the number of children coming into or leaving care fluctuated and that there was no specific reason for this. She said that last year had seen a big increase because a number of large families had coming into the borough and neglect was a significant issue.

In regards to 4.2, Clare Moore explained that this was a national issues which stemmed back to the police in the amount of stop and searches and arrests with young black males. This had led to an overrepresentation which enabled BAME children to be diverted from the criminal justice system. This diversion work enabled interventions to be provided to BAME children.

The Chair noted that there was a backlog of cases in the courts and questioned how long this would take to be resolved. Janet Simon explained that meetings were being held with the judiciary and that younger children and babies for adoption were being prioritised. The service was looking at remote hearings and spaces in court to prioritise these permanency places.

Councillor Potheary referred to section three of the report and asked that future reports include the performance data of CLA by disability as well.

## **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That Members noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

## **1.2 Noted the impact of COVID 19 on performance.**

### **5. Update on the Youth Offending Service, Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After**

The report was presented by Clare Moore.

Referring to the fifth bullet point in paragraph 3.9, Councillor Polley sought clarification on the type of changes and if this included county lines. Clare Moore answered that there had been an increase in county lines activity and violent crimes in which some related to organised crime.

Councillor Muldowney commented that she was pleased to see the improvements made to the out of court disposal. She commented that the Youth Justice Plan was a vision and felt that it was difficult to grasp what outcomes would be achieved for children. She questioned what resources were reduced as indicated on page 38 and how the service had been creative in delivering their services to young people during lockdown. Clare Moore answered that the reduction in resources related to the grant from the Youth Justice Board for young people on remand. The grant reduced every year and the service's costs increased which the Council absorbed under the placements budget. She went on to say that the service had been creative in seeing young people through online meets and meeting outside in open spaces whilst adhering to guidelines. Councillor Muldowney queried how these costs could be reduced. Sheila Murphy explained that the key was prevention in encouraging young people to not reoffend. She said that recent crimes had been serious knife crimes and the service could not predict how many young people would be on remand. She explained that costs would not be paid if a young person was not convicted and that currently the service had more young people on remand awaiting trial due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Referring to paragraph 3.3, Councillor Potheary questioned how the Council compared against other local authorities. She also asked for more information on the out of court disposal panel. Clare Moore answered that she would look into these details and email these on. She would also share more details of the Youth Justice System plan as shown in appendix one with the Committee.

Councillor Polley sought clarification on young people who moved into and out of Thurrock. She also asked if the children that was currently in Thurrock's care were residents of Thurrock or outside of Thurrock. Clare Moore answered that the children in care in Thurrock were currently Thurrock's residents. She went on to say that there had been families that had moved to Thurrock from London to move away from the young person's life of crime but some would return to that area to commit crimes. She explained that most crimes were committed outside of the borough but were residents of Thurrock.

The Chair questioned whether there were issues of knife crime in Thurrock. Clare Moore explained that the levels of knife crime in Thurrock were not on

the same level as London. However, there was an increase in young people involved in knife crime.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That Members noted the contents of this report and consider the continued improvements made.**
- 1.2 For Members to identify any specific areas that they would like additional information for any subsequent reports**

**6. Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After**

The report was presented by Clare Moore.

Referring to paragraph 3.1, Councillor Potheary asked for an update on the missing UASC and how many children were currently missing. Sheila Murphy explained that the UASC were still missing and that some UASC that arrived tended to have plans on where to go and would usually go missing within a few days of arrival. She stated that this was a national issue. She explained that missing UASC was reported to the police and meetings were held every 6 weeks to discuss the cases. If a UASC was found, the service encouraged them to come into care. Sharon Smith added that it was difficult to prevent UASC from leaving a foster home when they already had plans to leave. There were also concerns over their age particularly where they appeared much older than their given age.

Councillor Potheary was concerned that UASC that went missing were vulnerable and open to exploitation. She commented that the 6 weekly meetings seemed far apart. Sheila Murphy explained that if information was received in between meetings, action would be taken immediately. She said that the meetings were not a national requirement and was a part of the Council's practice which Ofsted (at the recent inspection) had assessed as good practice. She explained that as the UASC were not known to the Council, it was hard to track movement as the usual process was to track missing children through family and friend networks. The majority of UASC that arrived were usually placed into the service's care or to other local authorities and very few went missing.

Councillor Carter asked for the figures on the return of missing UASC. Janet Simon answered that 2019 had a larger number of UASC arrivals and that figure had decreased. She said that there were currently two missing UASC aged 16 and 17 and two other missing non-UASC were aged 16. She explained that the service tried to keep children in placements but there were various reasons why UASC would go missing.

Councillor Polley questioned whether there was a reduction of health visitors, teachers or other people that were usually the eyes and ears looking after

children during lockdown restrictions. Janet Simon answered that children referrals came from a number of resources which continued during lockdown. She stated that schools had been fantastic and vigilant during these times and that social workers continued to see looked after children.

Regarding the return home interviews, Councillor Muldowney questioned how the child's voice was fed into these. Clare Moore answered that the child's voice was the main focus and the interview was an opportunity for the child to give their opinion. This was fed back into risk management meetings and development meetings to ensure that social workers were aware of the issue to prevent it from happening again. Janet Simon added that the service aimed to have a balance between ensuring children were safe whilst giving them their freedom.

The Chair asked what measures were in place to prevent UASC from going missing and raised concerns over UASC that appeared older than their given age. Naintara Khosla explained that the service had been working with the police to advise UASC upon arrival of immigration offences. The service encouraged UASC to come into care and that they were safe. Janet Simon said that when a UASC presented themselves as a young person, the Council had to treat them as a young person an age assessment took place. Naintara Khosla explained that the police had a process to collate the biometrics of new arrivals and this would help to identify whether they had made a claim in another country.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**This report provided the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee with an overview into the work that has taken place since January 2020 and the improvement journey. There is a commitment from staff to implement these changes, with areas of good practice. Members were asked to note the contents of this report and the provision of support given to young people at risk of exploitation.**

#### **7. Corporate Parenting: Fostering Recruitment Strategy**

The report was presented by Naintara Khosla.

Councillor Potheary thanked foster carers for their hard work and care. She commented that the branding was good. She asked whether the service had followed up on people's enquiries into foster care to identify and if there was evidence that the council tax exemption had attracted more foster carers. Naintara Khosla answered that the service followed up on people's enquiries to identify why they had not progressed onto being a foster carer. She said that most people were unable to meet the requirements of being a foster carer or that it did not fit in with their lifestyle and some people did not want to enter into a detailed assessment where they would need to disclose their private lives. Following a campaign in March, there had been an increase in April which tapered off in May and the campaign had to be relentless and ongoing. The council tax exemption had helped existing foster carers.

Councillor Potheary questioned whether the service could do more to support potential foster carers such as supporting someone to upsize their home to acquire a spare bedroom for a foster child. Sharon Smith said that some people had the impression that fostering would enable them to acquire a bigger home and that this was not the right idea to have. She explained that not everyone was keen on the whole process of becoming a foster carer or the lifestyle of it as the whole family had to be involved as well.

Councillor Muldowney asked whether the branding would show ethnic diversity on posters and if the rebranding had been done in house. Naintara Khosla said that the rebranding had been done in house and that the poster branding was still being considered.

Councillor Carter questioned whether there was a key demographic group that the service was targeting to become foster carers. Naintara Khosla explained that the marketing was generic to ensure as much interest as possible. Through social media channels, different age groups were targeted in line with the age group users on each platform.

*The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders for an extra 30 minutes at 9.24pm.*

Councillor Polley sought the opinion of the Children in Care Council (CICC) on the rebranding. She also asked the Foster Carer Association Team if Thurrock was a good place to foster. The CICC representative said that the colour was appealing but that foster care was not all colourful as it was a big change to the child and the foster carers' lives. It was also not an easy process. Annie Guidotti added that Thurrock's CICC would be participating in other CICC's in the eastern region.

In answer to Councillor Polley's question, Sharon Smith said that Thurrock was a good place to be a foster carer as there was support and training in place. She said that she had been involved in the rebranding and that the colours and pictures had been chosen by a group of foster carers who felt these appealed to them. Jenny Josling said that she had joined Thurrock as a foster carer five years ago and that Thurrock had been her first choice. She felt the incentives were good and welcomed the recent council tax exemption.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 Members were updated on the Thurrock's Fostering Recruitment Strategy and the brand.**
- 1.2 Noted the marketing activities to create opportunities to develop increased recruitment of foster carers.**

**8. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2021/2022**

The Independent Reviewing Officer report was moved to September's meeting.

**The meeting finished at 9.34 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**

<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance – Quarter 1 2021-22</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is:</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good and this is within the context of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period; this report focusses on Quarter 1 of 2021-22 (April to June 2021).

Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 296 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 298 Care Leavers. Children and young people are visited regularly and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. The work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a positive focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

The Care Leaving Service reflects a trajectory of good performance. There continues to be a focus on improvement of the service, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

Children are generally placed with foster carers or where possible, with family members. To support children being placed locally in their communities and recruit foster carers there is a new fostering brand and recruitment campaign.

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning has been particularly impacted by COVID-19. There have been delays in timetabling for final court hearings. The court have agreed to prioritise cases where

the care plan is one of adoption, to prevent the delay for younger children in court cases.

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

**1.1 That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

**1.2 Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At a Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.

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

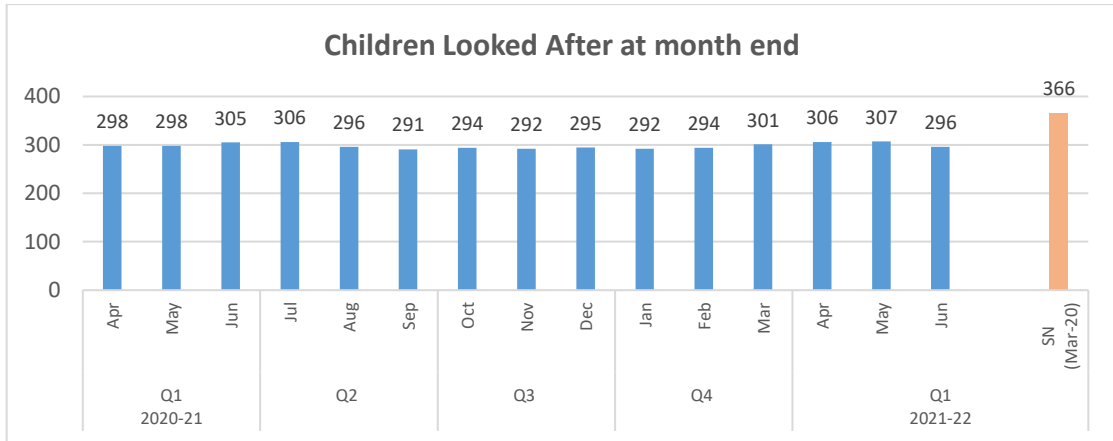
2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

## **3. Performance Data for Children Looked After**

### **3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)**

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable. The small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate.

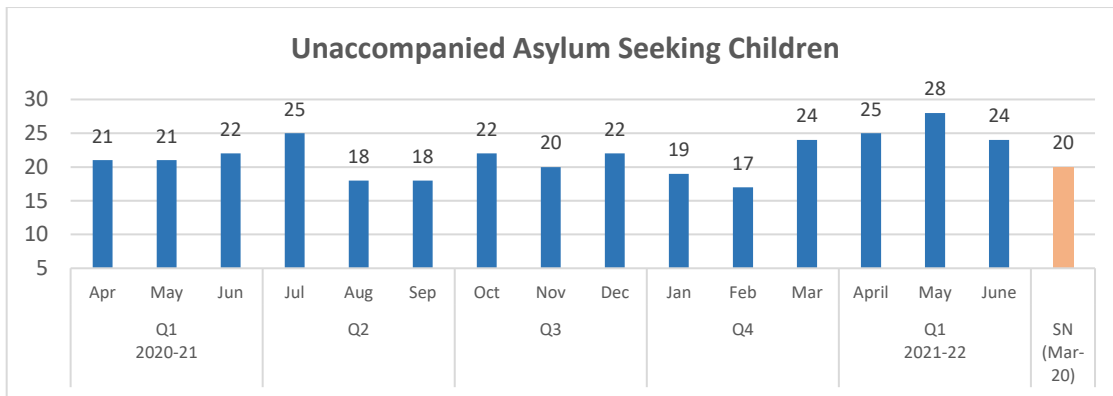




### 3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

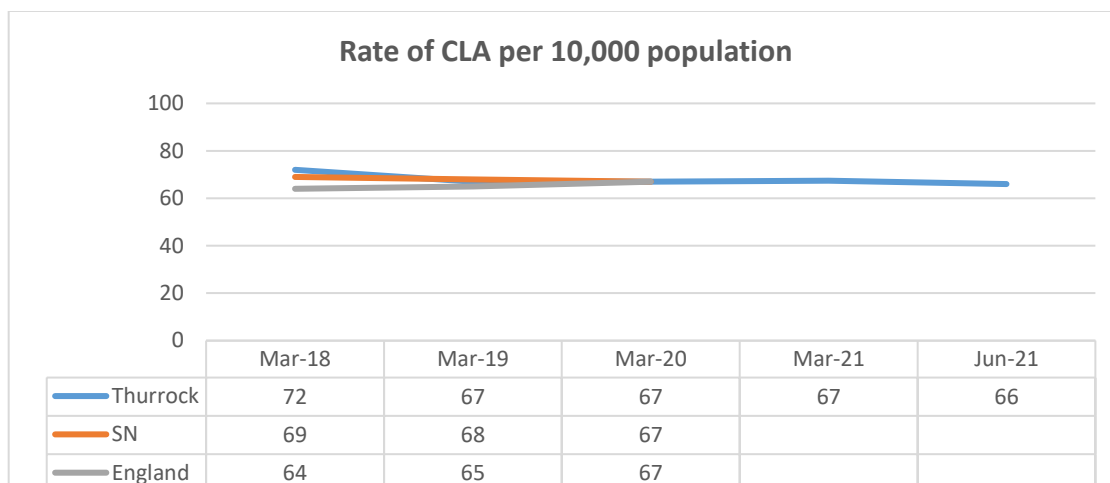
UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children.

Thurrock's allocated number was 28, however, this has now increased to 31 children. There was a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports in 2020 to 2021 as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between April and June 2021, there have been 12 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock. This has increased the CLA cohort of UASC to 24 in Q1 2021-22.



### 3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

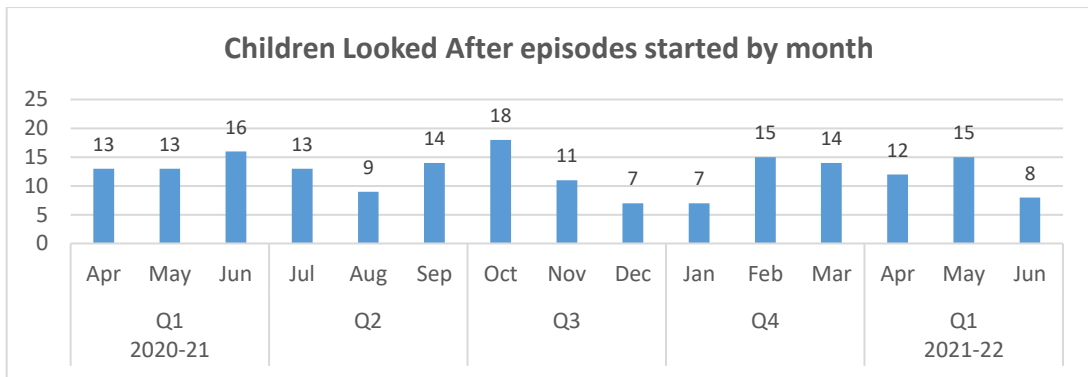
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of June 2021 there were 296 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 66.3 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on 2020 benchmarking data, Thurrock is slightly below the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 67.0 as at the end of June 2021.



### 3.4 CLA episodes started in month

It is normal for the numbers of children entering care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. There has been a decrease in the number of children entering care. For example, 35 children started to be looked after between April and June 2021 compared to 42 between April and June 2020. During the 2020-21 financial year, 150 children started to be looked compared to our statistical neighbour of 132 in 2020. This difference can be attributed to the higher number of UASC arriving in Thurrock and then becoming looked after children.

All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. The numbers of children entering care is being monitored as lock down restrictions ease.

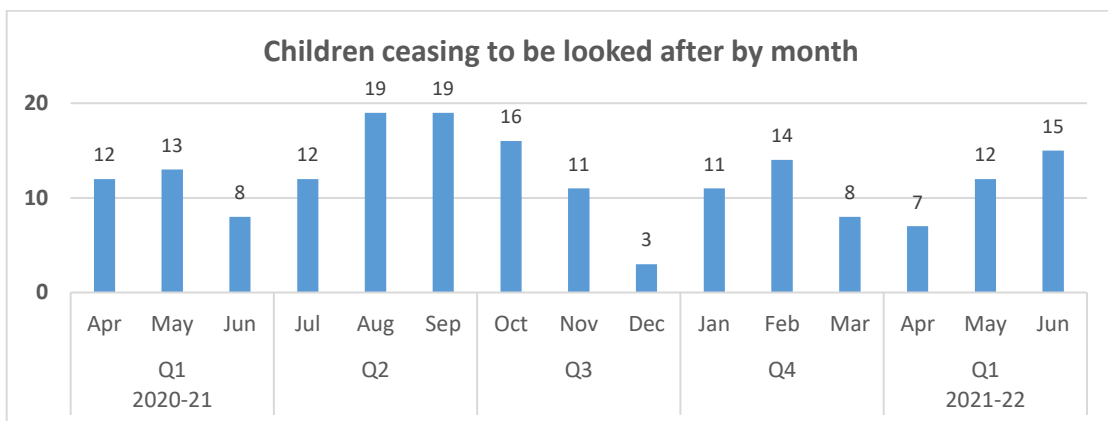


### 3.5 CLA episodes ended in month

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. The fluctuation and the relatively small numbers make it difficult to identify significant trends. Between April and June 2020 and April and June 2021, the number of children ceasing to be looked after reflect a very similar position.

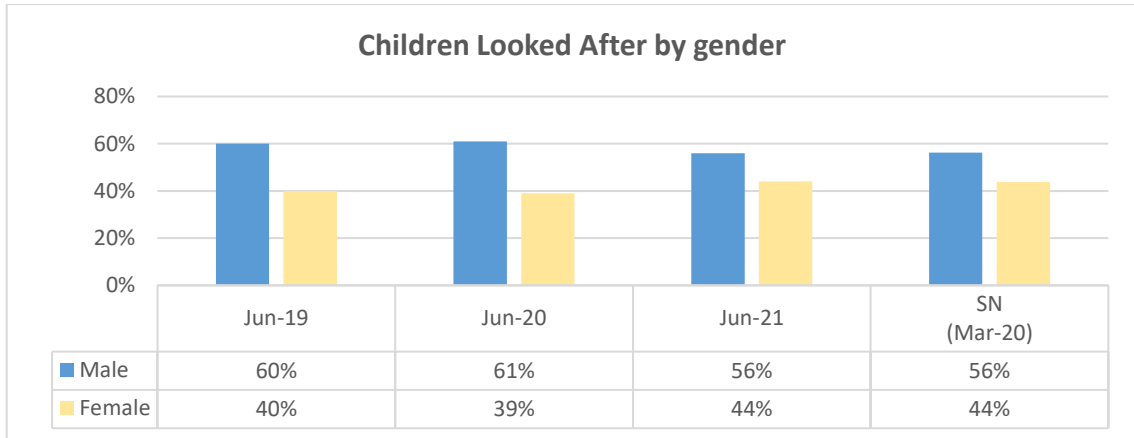
During the financial year 2020-21, the number of Thurrock children who ceased to be looked after was 180 compared to our statistical neighbour of 142 in 2020. This difference is also likely to be as a consequence of UASC children transferred within the Eastern Region.

There is currently a delay in the timeliness of court proceedings, preventing children from leaving care to their permanent placement (Adoption, SGO or returning home). This is a direct result of COVID which has caused delays in concluding proceedings for children.



### 3.6 CLA by gender

Based on the benchmarking data in 2019-20, the gender breakdown is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

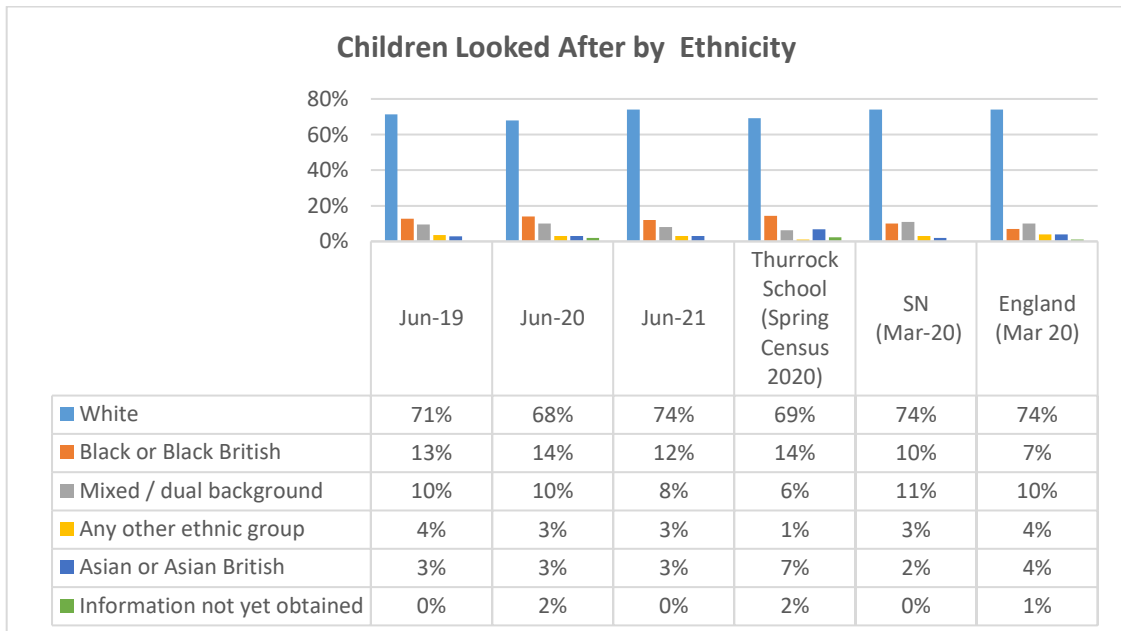


### 3.7 CLA by ethnicity

Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

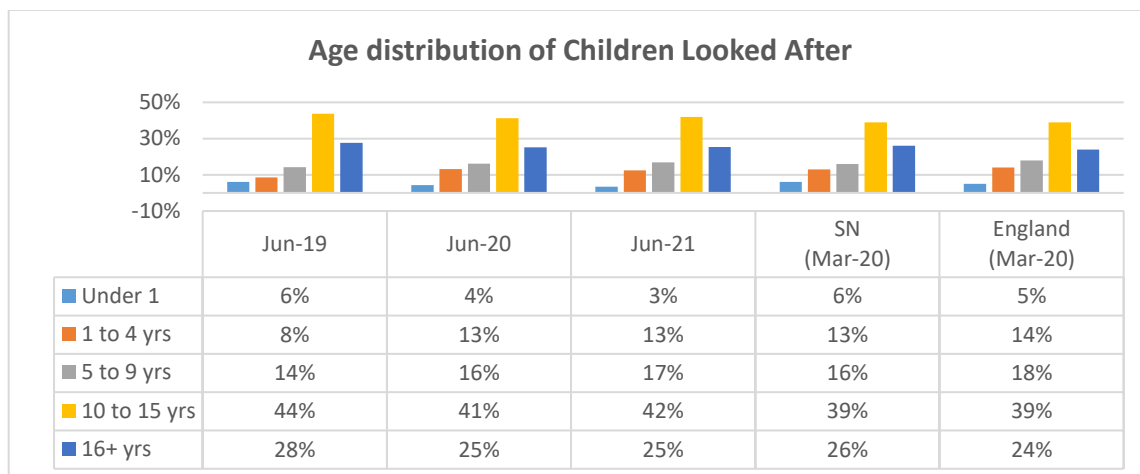
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.

While the numbers of Children Looked After who are Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British have slightly decreased since June 2019, there have been no particular issues influencing this change.



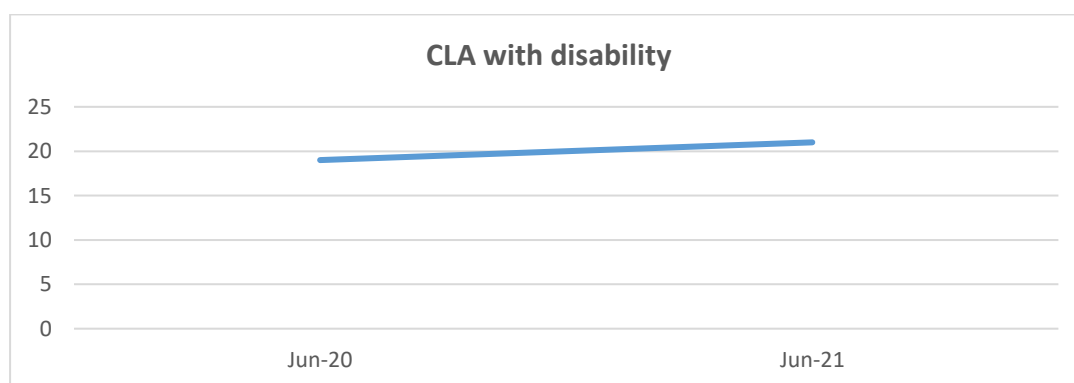
### 3.8 CLA age profile

The age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Since June 2019, the number of children aged 5 to 9 years have increased. This has partly been caused by delays in final court hearings. Children are not able to move to their final permanent placement (SGO, Adoption) where court proceedings are continuing.



### 3.9 CLA with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since June 2020. At the end of June 2021, 21 of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 17 of these children were boys aged seven and over and 4 girls aged 11 and over. 12 of these children were placed 20 miles or less from their home in June 2020 and June 2021.

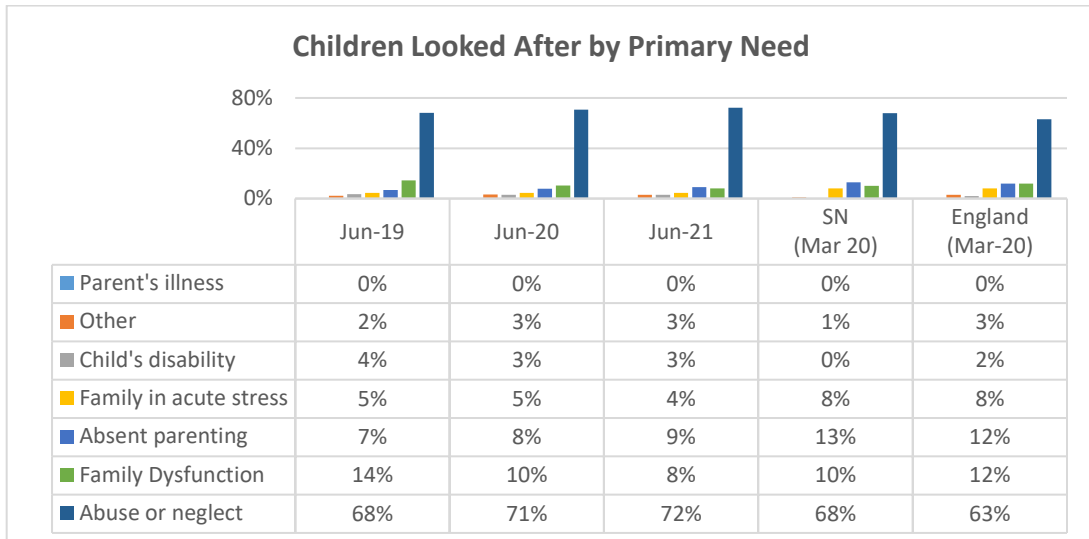


### 3.10 CLA by Category of Need

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of children becoming Looked After as a result of 'Abuse or Neglect'. The majority of children become

Looked After as a result of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care are providing support and intervention from Social Workers and the Families Together Team who provide an Edge of Care service to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary. Thurrock works to minimise the use of 'other' as a category.

Local Authorities use slightly different definitions of the categories and this makes it hard to meaningfully benchmark.



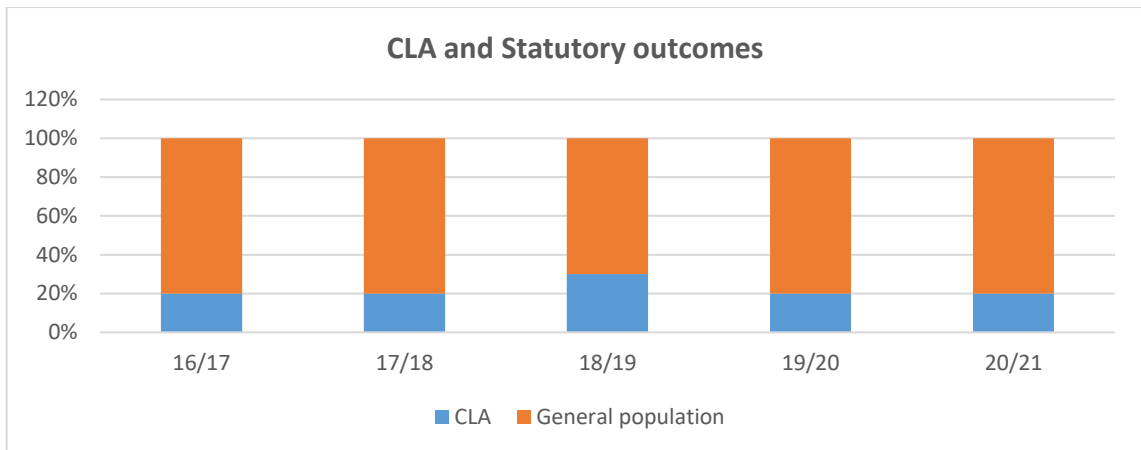
#### 4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

##### 4.1 Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is undertaken when a child has been convicted by the courts or made subject to a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution and consequently has YOS intervention.

Between April 2020 and March 2021, there were 46 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, out of which 9 were Children Looked After, representing 20%. However, 2 of these children were looked after by other authorities and placed in Thurrock.

Out of the 9 Children Looked After, 56% were from the BAME community.

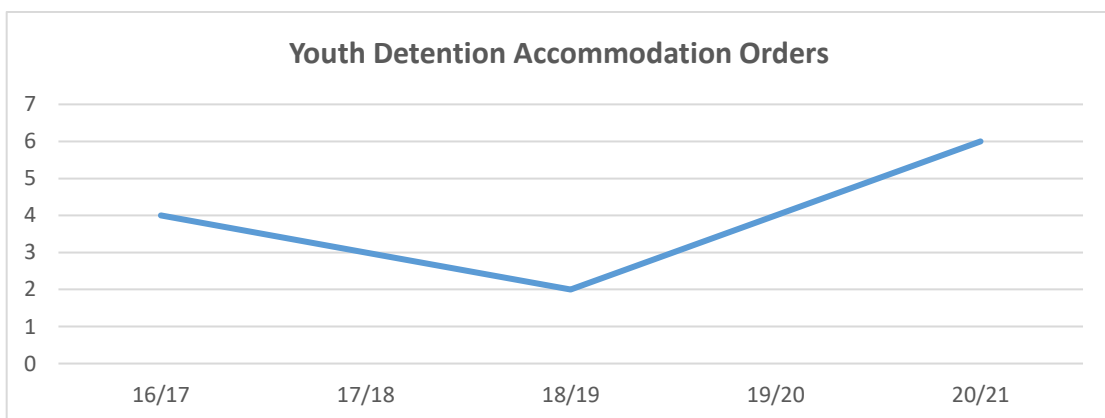


The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

The throughput of the Youth Offending Service in 2020-21 was significantly affected by COVID-19 and the closure of the Courts. This has resulted in delays of children being sentenced and lower numbers of young people being referred to YOS for statutory intervention.

#### 4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation

Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child that is made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.



Of the 6 children made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation Orders in 2020-21, 5 (83%) were from the BAME community. This is reflective of over representation of children from the BAME community in the criminal justice

system and in particular the figures in relation to children in custody, locally and nationally.

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, there were 4 Thurrock children subject to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA), 75% of these children are from the BAME community. A YDA is a remand in custody, they are not custodial sentences, and the child has yet to be convicted so have not been sentenced; there is therefore no lower disposal at that point.

The majority of the Remands into custody were made in the first four months of 2021 when there was a significant rise in gang related violence and knife crime. The types of offences that have led to Remands in Custody are, Section 18 Grievous Bodily Harm (wounding) with Intent, Murder, Robbery, possession of a bladed article and possession with intent to supply Class A and Class B drugs.

In Q1 2021-22 the number of children looked after and open to YOS has increased to 35%. The cohort consists of seven children, four of which have been remanded into custody (Youth Detention Accommodation, as above). These 4 young people became 'Looked After' as a result of being remanded into Custody and were not CLA before then. They were all remanded for serious offences that involved gang related violence and/or knife crime. One of the other children is looked after to another authority and two children who are looked after are open to YOS ongoing intervention.

The over representation of BAME young people in the Criminal Justice system is a national issue. Research into this area evidences that young black males are not always given the same opportunities for Diversion (Early Intervention), as young white males, from the Police and the Courts.

Essex wide, we are working with our partners to identify the root causes for over representation via the Essex Criminal Justice Board. Locally we are monitoring the numbers of black young men coming to the Out of Court Disposal Panel, where early intervention and diversion can be offered. The data in relation to our BAME young people in custody, on Court Orders, or receiving diversion intervention is scrutinised via the Youth Crime Governance Board on a quarterly basis and is a priority within our Youth Justice Board Plan 2021-24.

#### **4.3 Out of court disposal panel**

In 2020-21 financial year, the out of court disposal panel dealt with 43 offences relating to 33 Thurrock children, of which 5 children had looked after status. All 5 children were diverted away from the criminal justice system with identified support from the YOS partnership.



Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol<sup>1</sup> aimed to reduce the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

In Q1 2021-22 the out of court disposal panel has dealt with 22 offences relating to 15 children, none had looked after status.

## 5. **CLA missing episodes started**

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April and June 2021. Since June 2020, the number of episodes have remained relatively stable, however, the number of individual children that have gone missing has increased; this is likely to be as a result of lockdown restrictions easing. The number of missing children in April to June 2019-20 was 28 and 112 missing episodes, this reflects a pre-COVID position. In 2021-22, there is an increase of 6 young people having 119 missing episodes; which is a small fluctuation within the total number of children who are looked after. Between April and June 2021, the most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 44% of missing episodes.

There has been a strong focus on Thurrock missing children and good joint working with the multi-agency partnership. There is a weekly missing meeting with partners that includes Essex Police and liaison with Thurrock Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has been embedded which is assisting with the partnership working and social work practice. Ofsted completed a focussed visit in June 2021 and reviewed Thurrock's approach to the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial risk, including children and young people who go missing. The Ofsted Report noted:-

'Cases involving children who are repeatedly reported missing are escalated appropriately to strategy discussions for further consideration of risk and protection needs. Risk management meetings maintain oversight of missing children, ensure the timely follow-through of actions and ensure that professionals appropriately share intelligence to reduce incidents of going missing'. (Source p.3 Ofsted Report August 2021<sup>2</sup>)

The report also highlighted the good practice in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:-

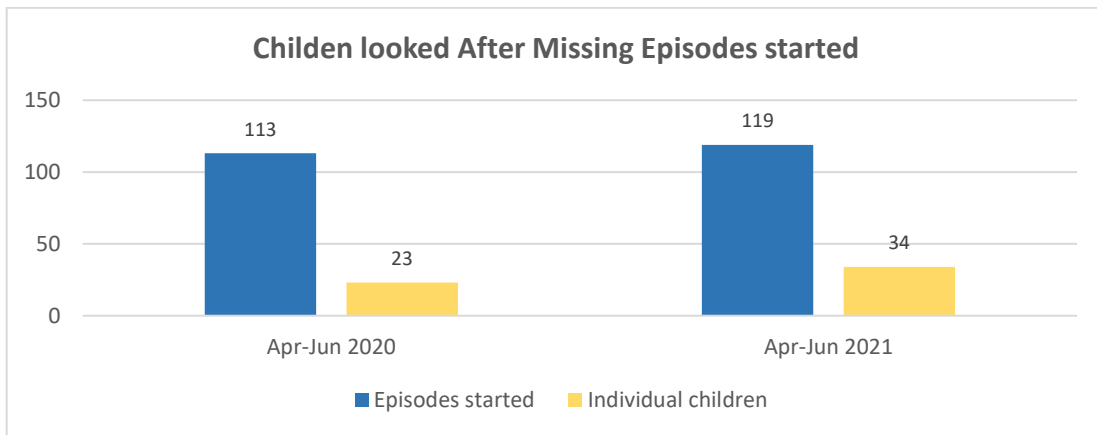
'When unaccompanied young people go missing for prolonged periods, they are kept under review. In line with good practice, staff continue to make efforts

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>

<sup>2</sup> [50167523 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/50167523)

to trace their whereabouts and follow up on any sighting leads. Checks are carried out with the National Referral Mechanism, the Home Office and other local authority areas, and new intelligence considered until their whereabouts are known'. (Source p.3 Ofsted Report August 2021<sup>3</sup>)



### 5.1 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

The offer of an RHI is not always accepted by young people. The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people. During the month of June 2021, the take up was 40% by all young people offered a RHI.

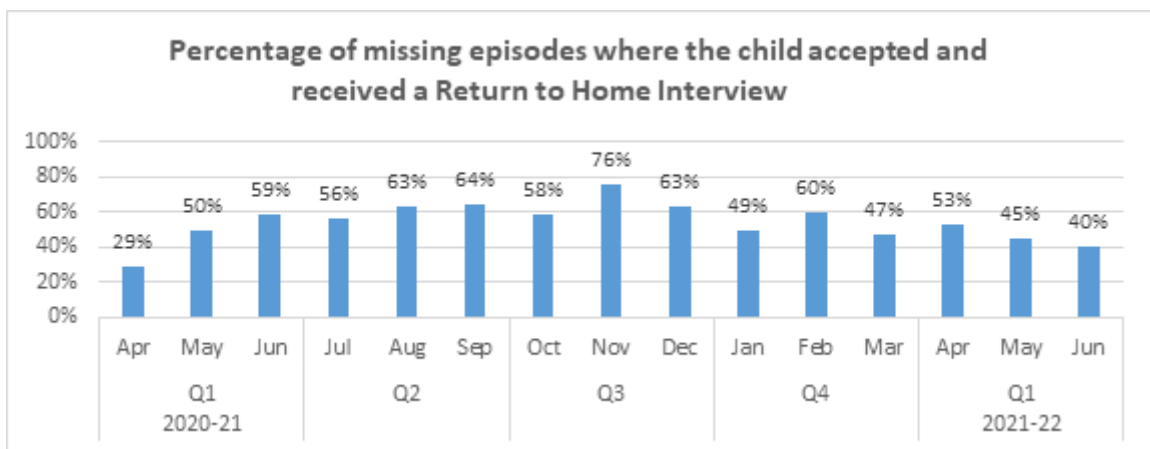
An area for development is ensuring that although the offer of RHIs is in place for all missing young people upon return, a different approach to the engagement of young people is being considered to improve the take up of that offer. RHIs are to be completed face to face by Inspire youth workers and with increased persistence, so young people can build relationships with the youth workers, who are independent to the young person's social worker.

'The Ofsted focussed visit noted the following in relation to RHIs 'All children are now offered RHIs. However, while the take-up of these interviews has improved and is currently at 58%<sup>4</sup>, it is still too low. Some children who are reluctant to

<sup>4</sup> This figure was obtained during the inspection as a rolling 12 month total

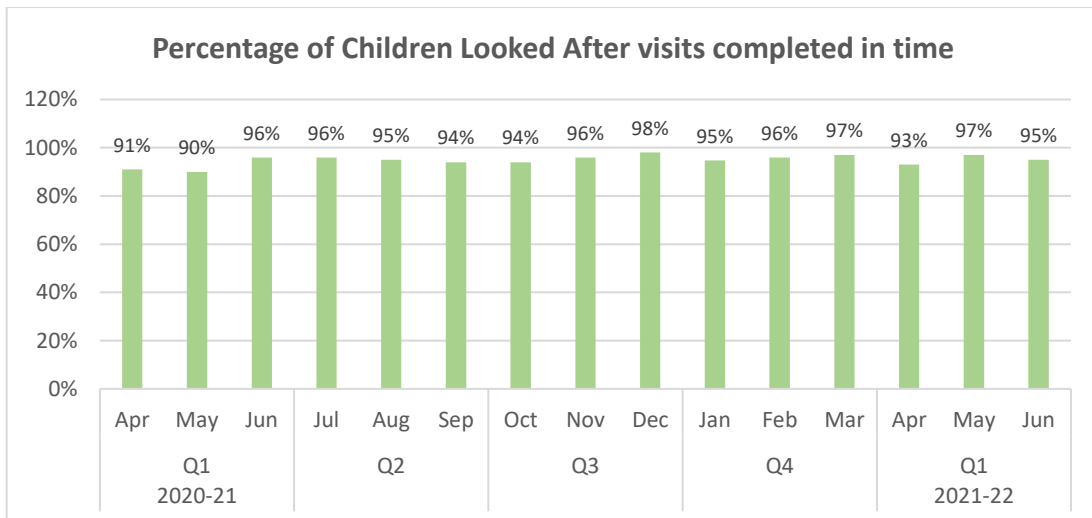
take up the RHI offer benefit from direct engagement with their social workers after each episode of going missing. However, this activity is not formally monitored; neither is it evident for all children.’ The recommended action from Ofsted relating to RHI’s was ‘To improve the involvement of children in the take-up of return home interviews and the information the authority relies on to capture activity and the impact of these interviews.’

Further work is underway looking at how we can engage young people in return home interviews. Understanding from young people what works for them, what the barriers are to taking up a return home interview and making sure that we are capturing not only return home interviews undertaken by Inspire, but also the information from visits by social workers and other professionals who may be working with young people.



## 5.2 Timeliness of social worker visits

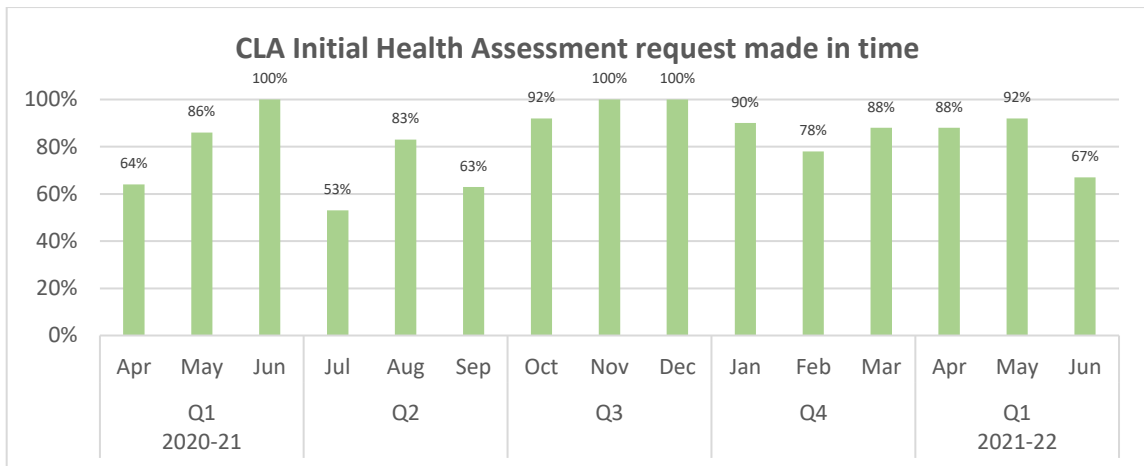
Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance to the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. Performance has improved since last year and there is focused work to ensure this performance is maintained. 95% is very good performance as there are often practical reasons for a visit being late and there are safeguards to ensure that missed visits take place quickly after the due date.



### 5.3 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

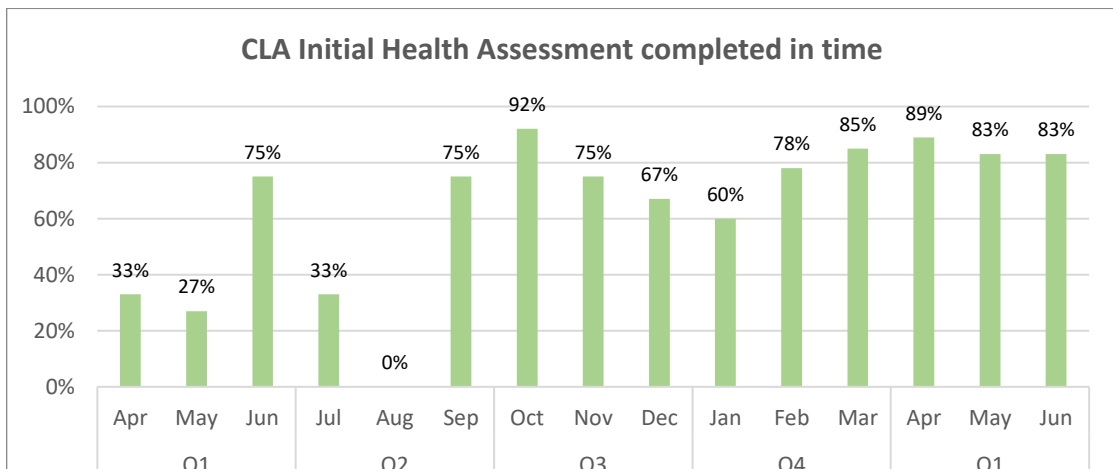
Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 working days of entering into care. To achieve good performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, the children’s families, Thurrock health care providers, and also other health providers (including those who are in Youth Offending Institutions, YOI) for children placed outside of Thurrock. Sometimes notifications for an IHA cannot be processed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to ensure that there is a focus on meeting the 5 day target to notify Health colleagues that a child has become looked after and to ensure that an Initial Health Assessment is offered and completed within 20 working days.

Performance for IHA requests being sent to Health have shown a sustained improvement in the 12 month period between July 2020 and June 2021, with over 80% of notifications being made within 5 days. Between April and June 2021, the average requests made within timescale was 85%. The numbers of IHA’s requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers. In June 2021, 2 of 6 children accounted for 33% requests made out of time.



The chart below reflects the timeliness of IHA appointments being completed within 20 days. Between April and June 2021, the average IHA completed in timescale was 85% despite there being additional pressures in the Health Service due to COVID-19 and improvements in performance have been sustained.

In some circumstances an IHA appointment was offered by Health within 20 working days; however there are occasions when the initial appointment offered was not suitable for the young person and a further appointment was provided.



#### 5.4 CLA in Education

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all national academic testing was cancelled. In line with Department for Education guidance, schools will not be publishing their data for 2021.

The annual report of the Virtual School Headteacher is a key document which must be produced as part of reporting arrangements. The 2019-20 report was presented to Corporate Performance Board in January 2021.

In addition to the annual report, the Virtual School Headteacher and her team members provide reports to the Governing Body every term. These detail a range of information such which is provided to ensure that we are held

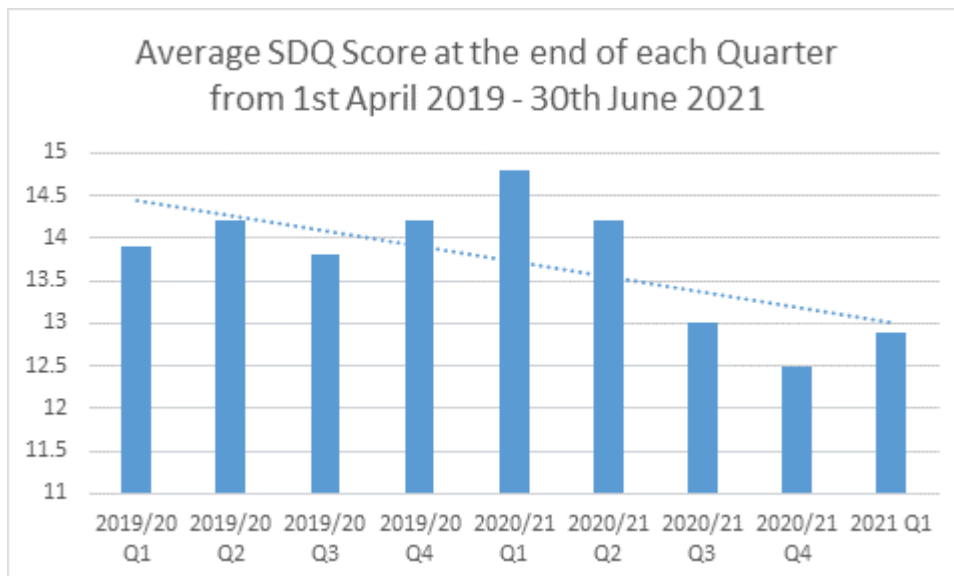
accountable and that the delivery of services is efficient. (Please see Agenda item 8 within Corporate Parenting Committee Pack January 21)<sup>5</sup>

## 5.5 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-18 who have been in our care for more than 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the Virtual School and Children's Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

For each child where their score indicates a level of need (scoring 13 or higher) their case is individually reviewed by a multi-agency panel to ensure appropriate services are in place. Children benefit from a suite of local services including EWMHS, Kooth (online Counselling) and commissioned therapeutic services. For children placed out of area NHS provision or commissioned services are secured.

Comparing quarterly average scores shows some variability but a generally improving trend. During COVID-19 the average scores have not increased and the mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



## 6. Number of children adopted

Between 01 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, a total of 8 children were adopted. 5 children currently are placed in adoptive placements and have adoption

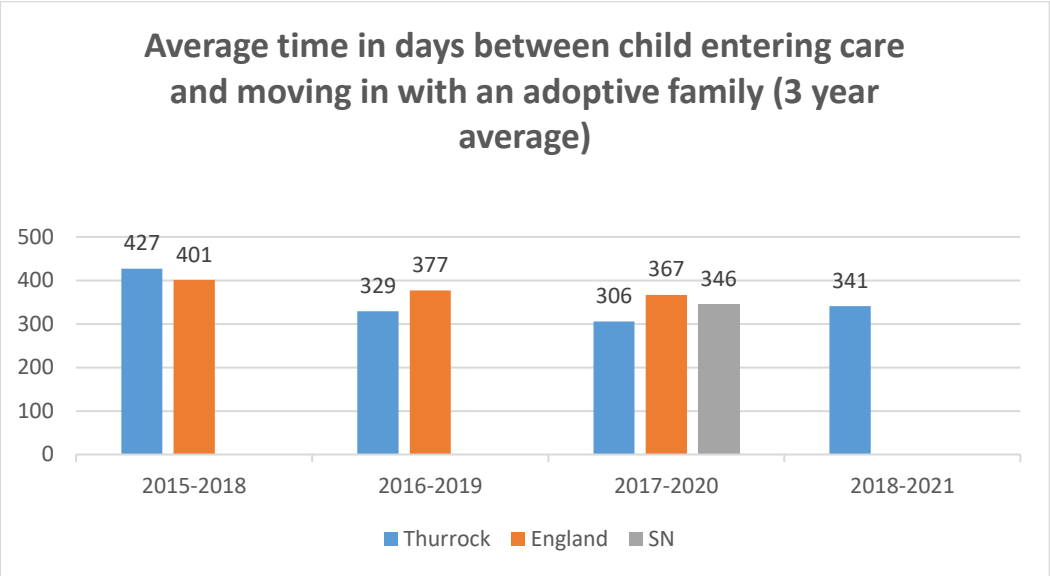
<sup>5</sup> [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Corporate Parenting Committee, 05/01/2021 19:00 \(thurrock.gov.uk\)](#)

hearings planned. There are 6 children who were made subject to Placement Orders in Q4 but are not yet placed with an adoptive family. There are 11 children who are waiting for a final hearing with a care plan for adoption (i.e. Care Order and Placement Order).

Due to COVID-19, there has been a significant delay in court proceedings which has impacted on the numbers of children adopted or placed for adoption in the period April 2020 to March 2021. There are likely to be an increased number of children adopted through 2021-22, with likely increased court hearings as the pandemic has eased.

**6.1 Timeliness of Adoption**

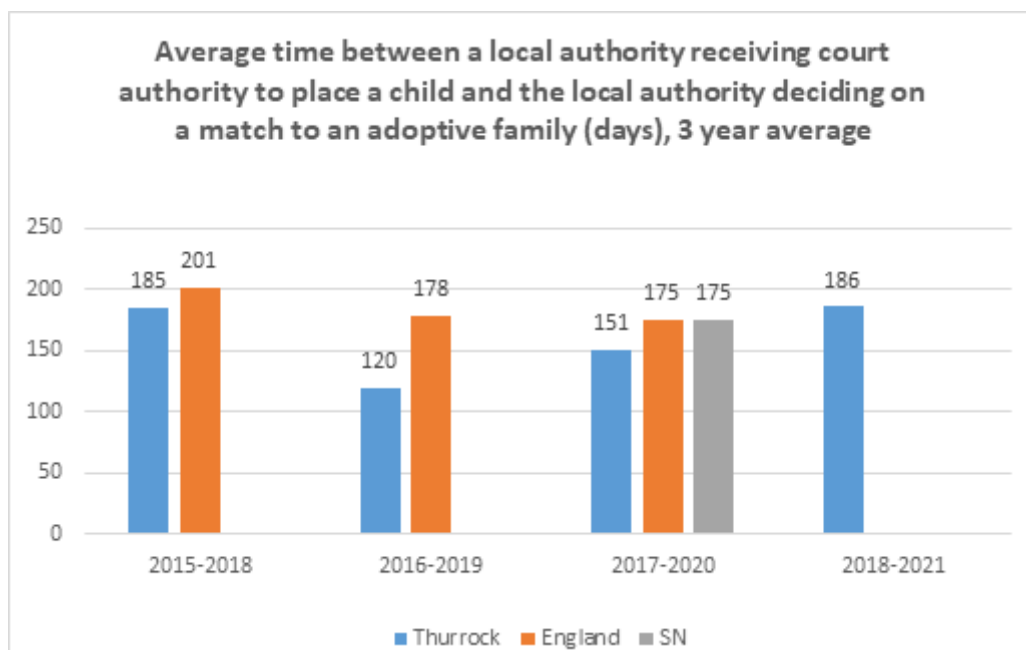
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 3 year average, it is the length of time (in days) from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of March 2021 the 3 year average was 341 days; this is below both England and statistical neighbour averages, which is positive.



When the above indicator is looked at over a 1 year period Thurrock is performing very well at 278 days against the England average of 375 and statistical neighbour average of 355 days. Benchmarking data for 2018-2021 has not yet been published.

As at end of June 2021, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 174 days, this is lower than our 2018-2021 3 year average outturn of 186 days, which is positive. This is also marginally below our national and

statistical neighbours of 175 days for 2017-2020. Benchmarking data for 2018-2021 has not yet been published.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. The impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption due to the delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay as a result of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order prevents the placement of children with adoptive families. There can be a further appeal if the birth family do not agree with the chosen adoptive placement. There have been, between April 2021 and June 2021, 5 children subject to Placement Order court appeals.

As at the end of June 2021 there were 5 children placed in adoptive placements, and 2 children had been adopted.

## 6.2 CLA permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Secure Placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption only once all family and friend options have been exhausted.

As at the end of June 2021, there were 54 (18%) children who are aged between 0-5, the total cohort of CLA being 297. The majority of children under five who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There have been significant

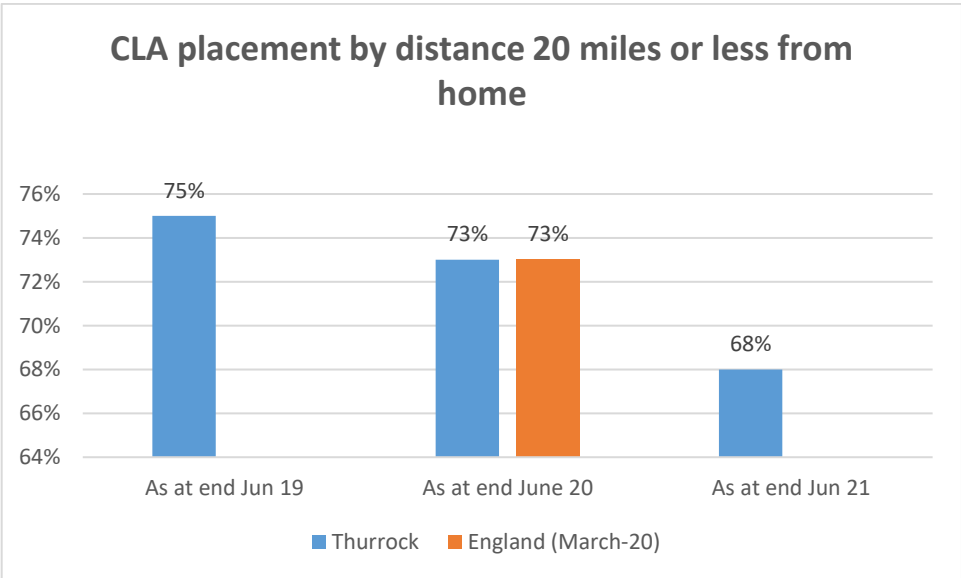


delays, as a result of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed. There are 25 cases in court proceedings over 26 weeks and 6 of these children have a plan for adoption.

### 6.3 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of June 2021, 68% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 203 of 297 children. This falls below the latest national average of 73%, which represents March 20.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care and the local authority has been seeking Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area. In June 2021 there has been an increase of 14 children placed outside of Thurrock and at a distance of greater than 20 miles from their home, in comparison to June 2020. When extending the placement distance to 50 miles from home, for June 2021, 240 of 297, 81% are placed within that radius.



## 7. Care Leaving Service

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>6</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

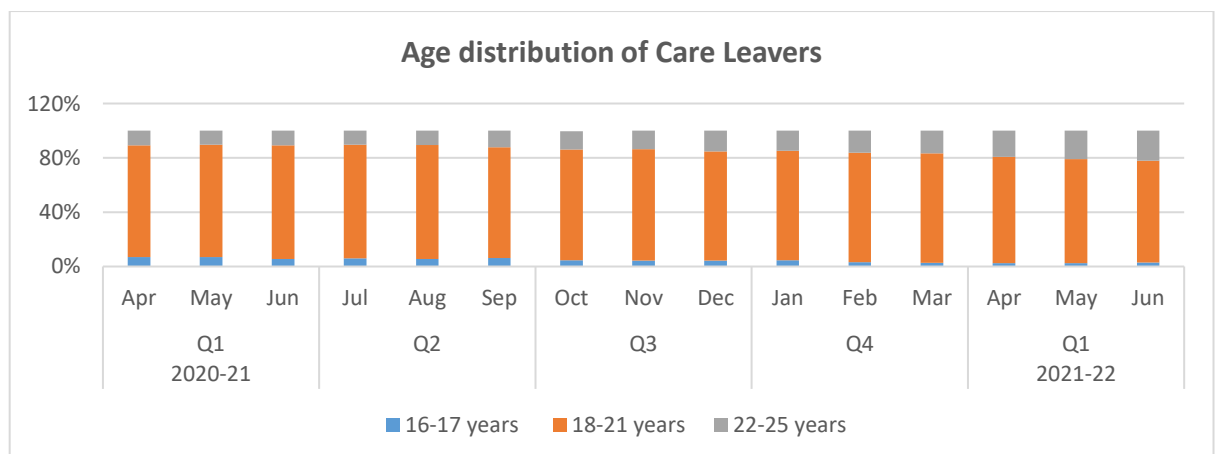
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

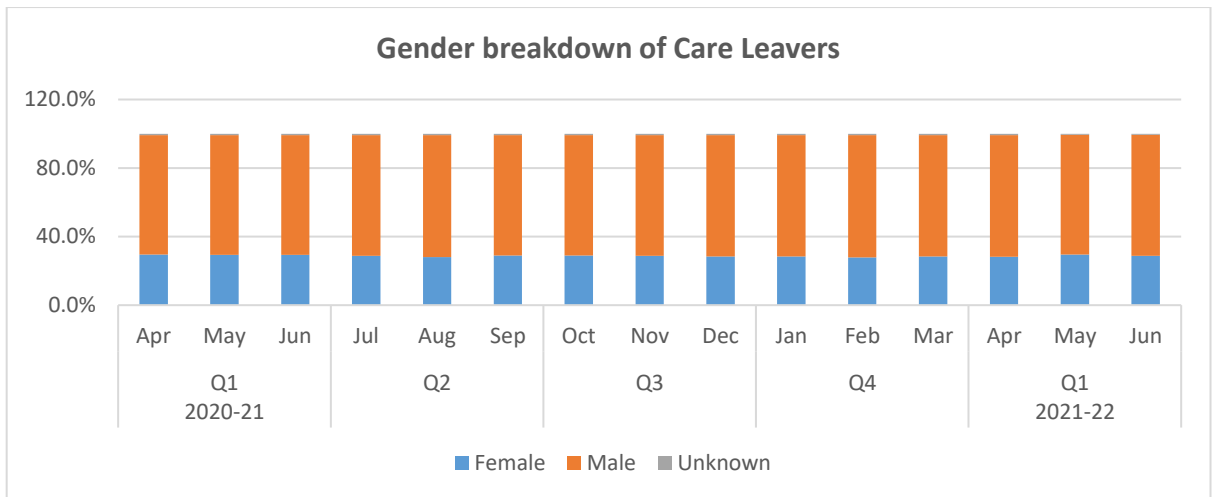
The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.

As at end of June 2021, 298 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

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

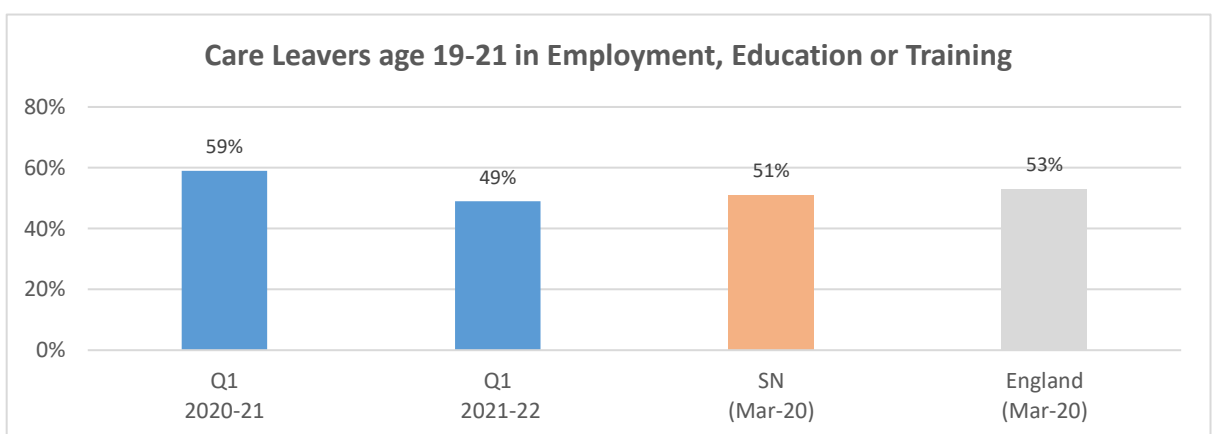


<sup>6</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>



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

At the end of June 2021, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 59% in June 2020. Compared to the statistical neighbour and England averages in 2019-20, Thurrock’s performance was good in 2019-20; the decrease in performance for 2020-21 can be singularly attributed to COVID. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18 year olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on Young People which has limited opportunities to engage in work experience and continue with employment.

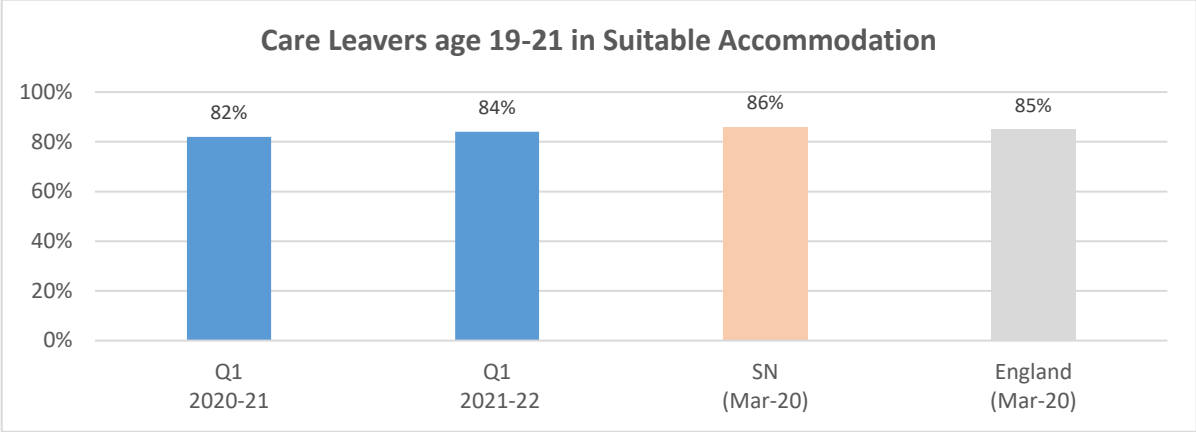


### 7.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

At the end of June 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 84%. Thurrock’s performance

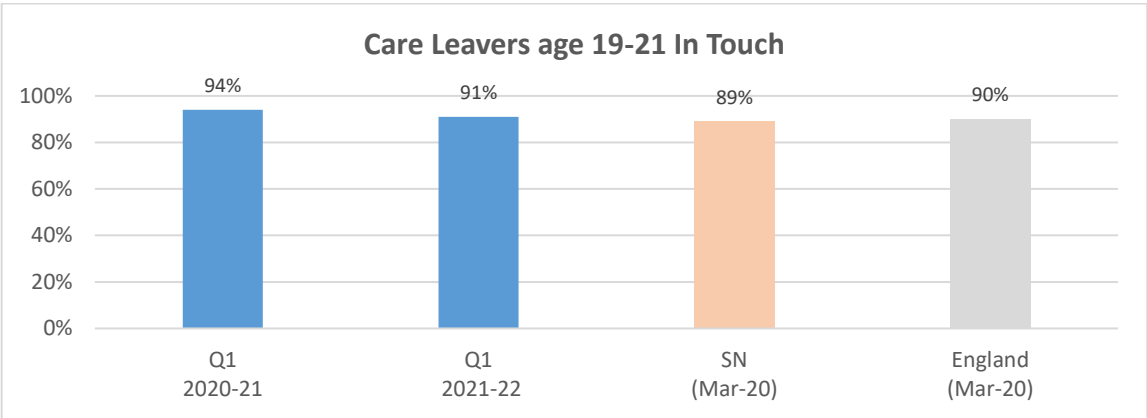
against bench marking data remains in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 86% for 2019-20 and England average of 85% for 2019-20.

Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



**7.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'**

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently. At the end of June 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 91% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is good with consistent performance above both the statistical neighbour average of 89% and England average of 90% for both 2019-20 and 2020-21.



**8. Reasons for Recommendations**

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

**9. Consultation** (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 Not applicable

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

10.1 None

**11. Implications**

**11.1 Financial**

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

No implications identified within the report.

**11.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal Social  
Care & Education**

No implications identified within the report.

**11.3 Diversity & Equality**

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

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from this report. However, the service does collect diversity monitoring data for looked after children, this data is given within this report. The data is utilised to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics.

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

- Not applicable

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

- Not applicable

13. **Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

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Daniel Jones, Service Manager, Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service, Children's Services

Jason Read, Operations Manager, Youth Offending Service, Children's Services

<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Adoption Statement of Purpose</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones, Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children's Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report is to update members of the Committee on Thurrock Council's Adoption Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

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

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Adoption Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of Standard 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulation 2 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003

2.2 Members are advised that the Adoption Statement of Purpose should be reviewed annually and the current statement is attached.

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

3.1 Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose 2021-2022 is attached.

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

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are familiar with the delivery of Adoption Services in Thurrock and the fulfilment of Thurrock's statutory duties in relation to Adoption.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 None

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

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

There are no financial implications.

##### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Local Authority Adoption Service is required to produce a statement of purpose under The Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 regulation 2 and to keep it under review under paragraph 4. The statement of purpose is required to cover the matters listed in Schedule 1 of those regulations.

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

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities**

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. Marketing and recruitment materials are designed to ensure adopters irrespective of age, sex, gender re-



assignment, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability are welcomed.

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

Increasing the recruitment and availability of adopters enables increased permanent placement opportunities for looked after children.

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

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1, Thurrock Adoption Statement of Purpose

**Report Author:**

Dan Jones

Service Manager

Fostering, Adoption and Placements Children's Services

Naintara Khosla

Strategic Lead

Looked After Children and Placements

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# **THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE**

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

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

### **1. POSITION STATEMENT**

- 1.1** Thurrock Council believes that children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family who can meet their emotional physical and developmental needs throughout their life. When children cannot live with their own birth families, Thurrock Council is committed to finding them such a family.
- 1.2** Thurrock Council is part of Adopt East, an alliance of Adoption Services and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Southend, Luton, Norfolk, Bedford Borough, AdoptionPlus and Barnados). The priorities of the Alliance are as follows:
- Decisions about placements are always made in the child's best interests
  - Service delivery has at its heart innovation and practice excellence
  - Social Workers are highly skilled professionals who make high quality evidence-based decisions and do not tolerate damaging delay for children in their care
  - Matches for children and adoptive parents are timely
  - Early Permanence (fostering to adopt) is considered at initial stages of proceedings to ensure there consideration of the early permanent offer for children.
  - 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/>
  - Adopt East supports Thurrock through Regional matching arrangements and shared best practice policies and training.
  - Adopt East provides a central hub known as the 'Front Door' for initial enquiries about how to become an adopter.
  - Adopt East is a unified resource so there is a strategy and pathway for the recruitment of adopters, the good offer of training, and adoption support services

- 1.3** Thurrock Council will work to ensure that a comprehensive range of services are provided to support birth families to provide safe and appropriate care for their children. Children, birth parents and relatives, adoptive parents and adopted people are entitled to a comprehensive service which promotes the welfare of children, supports families and treats all parties fairly, openly and with respect. This service will be planned and provided in collaboration with other relevant agencies and service user organisations.
- 1.4** The Statement of Purpose is provided upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the service, to children who may be adopted and their parents, to anyone wishing to adopt, to adopted persons and their families and to those granted or who are seeking a Special Guardianship Order.
- 1.5** The Statement of Purpose for a Local Authority is subject to formal approval by Elected Members 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 – This is usually via “IAC The Centre for Adoption” <https://www.icacentre.org.uk/> .This is a paid for service.
- 3.8 To recruit adopters irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We encourage adopters from many different backgrounds to suit the diverse needs of children requiring adoption.
- 3.9 To provide, post Special Guardian Order, support services, including, practical and financial (where there is assessed need and in line with policy).
- 3.10 To apply, where there is assessed need and within government criteria, 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 significant factors for consideration when matching a child to their 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 for adoption are expedited in a timely way to avoid delays where ever possible recognising the detrimental impact that delay can have.

- 4.12 Every child is entitled to information about her/his birth family in order to promote his/her sense of identity.
- 4.13 We recognise the importance of continuing contact for children with their birth families and will make arrangements for ongoing contact - direct or indirect - between the child and his/ her birth family unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this.
- 4.14 A range of adoption support services should be provided to all parties in the adoption process including children, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families.
- 4.15 Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals. Thurrock Council will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that the needs of all parties in the adoption process are met.
- 4.16 We continually review and improve our services within the limits of available resources.
- 4.17 All parties to the adoption process should have access to Thurrock Council Complaints Procedure.

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

Thurrock Council's Adoption Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship support. The adoption office base is Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex RM17 6SL. During the period 2020 to 2021 the service has been operating remotely as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic.

The Corporate Director for Children's Services is Sheila Murphy

- 5.1 Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director – Children's Social Care and Early Help, has overall responsibility for the Adoption Service and is Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

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

Janet is a qualified social worker and she is registered with Social Work England. Janet has worked in a number of management roles.

- 5.2 The Strategic Lead responsible for adoption services is Naintara Khosla. The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After is Naintara Khosla. Naintara is also the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service.

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231  
Email: [nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk)

Naintara qualified social worker in 1993 and is registered with Social Work England. Naintara has been a senior manager in Cafcass and Childrens Social Care since 2003, prior to this she held various positions as a Team Manager and Social Worker. Naintara has extensive experience as a senior leader across Fostering, Adoption and Placement Services for a range of local authorities

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

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763  
Email: [drjones@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:drjones@thurrock.gov.uk)

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

### 5.4 The Adoption Team comprises:

- 1 Team Manager
- 6 FTE Social Workers
- 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. Sally was the adoption family finding senior practitioner in Thurrock from 2014 and was appointed as Adoption Team Manager in 2018.

### 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 Social Work England.
- 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 (via a commissioned service).
- 6.2** The Adoption Team provides a central point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an adopter, including those who make enquiries about inter-country adoption, step-parent and relative adoption. The team along with the recruitment team actively recruits adoptive families who can meet the needs of our children needing permanence through adoption. We engage in preparation of prospective adopters, which includes pre-approval training consisting of a four day of preparation group in either stage one or early stages of stage 2. Input on Dual Approval and Foster for Adoption is included in the preparation. In addition to the four days there is a family and friends training day.
- 6.3** Thurrock Council provides a range of information for prospective adopters and service users including families requiring adoption support. The information provided includes: recruitment brochures for adopters, booklets for our adoption support services for birth parents, adopted adults, birth relatives and adoptive families. The service also produces a guide to adoption for children looked after and information about attending the adoption panel.

- 6.4** The service has a website where prospective adopters or those requiring adoption support information can browse <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/adoption>  
The service benefits from a bespoke email address to encourage enquires: [PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk)
- 6.5** Various campaign activities include use of social media, advertising in local newspapers, billboards, leaflet drops, information days and adoption match exchange days. The teams are encouraged to attend events to promote adoption services for Thurrock Council.
- 6.6** The Adoption Team undertake family finding for all children in Thurrock who require an adoptive family. Family finding social workers present the adoption match to panel in partnership with the child's social worker. The family finding social worker, in partnership with the child's social worker ensures that an adoption support plan is in place for every adoptive family. They also coordinate and support introductions and placements of the child/ren once the match has been made.
- 6.7** The children's teams undertake the tasks of planning for permanence and preparing children for adoption, in conjunction with the Adoption Service. Each child has a named social worker and an agreed care plan.
- 6.8** The children's teams work with the child's family during the decision making process for adoption. During this period the birth parents are offered the opportunity to speak to a member of the adoption team who is independent of their case for independent counselling.
- 6.9** The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is responsible for making decisions in relation to whether a child should be placed for adoption. The Child's Permanence Report is submitted to the ADM, who then has 7 working days to make a decision. Legal, 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 the facilitation of 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. All staff are suitably qualified to undertake adoption work, with appropriate supervision and oversight to those new to adoption processes.
- 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 social work teams through the review process, 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, and post, 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.
- 6.19** Financial support is provided only in exceptional circumstances and following financial assessment. Financial assessment includes an annual review of the adoptive families 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 and travel during introductions.
- 6.21** The adoption support social workers process new requests for adoption support assessments from adoptive families who live in the Borough. Families living outside the Borough 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.
- 6.22** An adoption letterbox service is managed within the team to enable adopted children to maintain indirect contact with their birth families.

- 6.23** The adoption support social workers provide a counselling service for adopted adults who wish to find out about their birth parents and adoption details.
- 6.24** The adoption service works within the requirements of all relevant Council policies e.g. complaints policy, recording policy, and access to records policy.
- 6.25** 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.
- 6.26** 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.
- 6.27** 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
- 6.28** 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.

- 6.29 Inter-country adoption services.** Thurrock Council aims to provide the highest quality Inter-country adoption services for those residents wishing to adopt from overseas. It is recognised that this is a highly specialised area of work and as such we have contracted the IAC: the Centre for Adoption to provide this service on our behalf. IAC: the Centre for Adoption are nationally recognised experts in inter-country adoption and can be contacted on: <http://www.icacentre.org.uk/>
- It is usual for adoption agencies to charge for inter-country adoption services and IAC will make a charge for this service. Thurrock does not receive any income from IAC for their provision of services to local residents.

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

- 7.1** It is the task of the Recruitment and Adoption Service to find innovative ways of encouraging people to consider adoption. All applications from prospective adopters are welcomed regardless of marital status, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- 7.2** All enquirers can access on Thurrock Council website information about adopting with Thurrock Council along with details of information events which can be booked online. Enquiries by phone are dealt with within 5 working days. Adopt East are developing a marketing and recruitment strategy for the Alliance which includes a website. This will be accessible alongside the Thurrock Website so that enquiries can be managed at a local level but also through Adopt East.
- 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 social worker will discuss potential adopters and their application 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 provide insight into areas the adopters may find more of a challenge. The panel recommends to the Agency Decision Maker whether to approve or not to approve the application. The panel can also defer making a recommendation and request additional information. The required time scales are adhered to concerning informing the applicants of the decision.
- 7.14** The decision of the Agency Decision Maker is conveyed to applicants verbally within 2 days that it is made and followed up in writing within 5 working days.
- 7.15** Approved adopters are given clear written information about the matching, introduction and placement process.
- 7.16** Before a match is agreed, adopters are given full written information to help them understand the needs and background of the child and an opportunity to discuss this and the implications for them and their family. They will be involved in discussions on how they can best maintain any links, including contact, with birth relatives and significant others identified in the adoption plan.
- 7.17** All adopters are referred to 'Linkmaker' at the start of stage two to link up with the Adopt East agencies.
- 7.18** An identified match of an approved adopter with a specific child will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration. A full matching report is completed which details the positive factors about the match, any risk areas together with an adoption support plan that details the adoption support services that will be made available to the adoptive family, the child and the birth family.



- 7.19** The assessing social worker continues to support the prospective adopter throughout the process of matching and placing a child, until an adoption order is made. This includes preparing them in advance of the child coming to live with them.
- 7.20** Adoption support services are provided by the Adoption Team who are available to provide support and advice to families and individuals who need or request assistance before, during and after adoption.
- 7.21** Where there are difficulties with the placement or the adoption breaks down, all the agencies involved co-operate to provide support and information to adoptive parents and the child.
- 7.22** Adoptive parents are informed of their right to make representations and complaints.

## **8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES**

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

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

- 9.1** The Adoption Service is reviewed on a yearly basis. The aims and performance of the Adoption Service are part of the overall sufficiency strategy for looked after children and service has a development plan
- 9.2** The Chairperson of the Adoption Panel produces an annual report that includes an evaluation of feedback received from those attending panel. This is in line with the financial year and produced by the end of the first quarter
- 9.3** Forms have been devised to monitor the achievement of government set timescales with regard to adopted children and prospective adopters.

- 9.4** The Adoption Service staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals of their performance.
- 9.5** 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.
- 9.6** 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.
- 9.7** 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.
- 9.8** 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.
- 9.9** The Agency Decision Maker meets with the Chairperson of the Adoption Panel twice yearly to discuss any issues of concern.
- 9.10** The Assistant Director for Children's Services signs off the Statement of Purpose annually or when there are any changes made to the document.

## **10. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT**

- 10.1** Thurrock Council is continuing to ensure as that children who require adoption have suitable placements at the time they need them. This is enhanced via the regional Adopt East offer
- 10.2** Thurrock Council is continuing to work towards increasing the numbers early permanent placements as well as ensuring timeliness of adoption, so that children are placed within 3 months of the court authority to place.

**The adoption service has experienced delay as a result of Covid 19 and the court backlog. This will impact the service through 2021-2022 and the timeliness will improve as restrictions are lifted and there is increased court time available.**

- 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** There are appropriate policies and procedures in place for the adoption and special guardianship services. These documents are reviewed to 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 full time family workers who provide life story work post order where this is the outcome of an Assessment of Need.
- 10.6** All social workers in the team have received training on legislative changes and new practice developments.
- 10.7** The resource library for adopters and staff is continually updated to reflect current changes in legislation and practice.
- 10.8** The use of CoramBAAF forms, which reflect the changes to the regulations, are used by social workers, these include
- Child Permanence Report
  - Prospective Adopters Report
  - Adoption Placement Report Adoption Placement Plan
  - Adoption Support Plan
- 10.9** The Adoption Panel has the following responsibilities:
- To consider whether adoption should be the permanence plan for a child where the child is relinquished.
  - To ensure that the adoption plan has met the welfare checklist.
  - To advise adopters about the appropriate sharing of parental responsibility.
  - To monitor and ensure that adoption support plans are in place for all the adoptive families matched at the panel.
  - To recommend domestic adopters approval.
  - To recommend the match for a child within an adoptive placement
- 10.10** Monitoring takes place of children who are in the care system and where the care plan may be adoption. This ensures plans for children are being expedited in a timely and appropriate way.

## **11. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE**

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

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

The IRM has the following timescales:

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

- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

## **12. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY**

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

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

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

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<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Fostering Statement of Purpose</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Dan Jones Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Placements	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children's Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	

## Executive Summary

This report is to update members of the Committee on Thurrock Council's Fostering Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually

### 1. Recommendation(s)

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

### 2. Introduction and Background

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

2.2 Members are advised that the Fostering Statement of Purpose should be reviewed annually and the current statement is attached.

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

3.1 Thurrock's fostering statement of purpose 2020-2021 is attached.

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

- 4.1 Members of the Committee are aware of the Thurrock Fostering Service and confirm the Council is meeting its statutory duties in relation to fostering.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 None

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

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

There are no financial implications

##### **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**

The Fostering Service is committed to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity. Recruitment materials are developed to attract foster carers from all communities to encourage applications irrespective of age, sex, gender re-assignment, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We encourage foster carers from many different backgrounds to suit the diverse needs of children requiring alternative homes.

### 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):

- None

### 9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose

#### Report Author:

Dan Jones

Service Manager – Fostering, Adoption and Placements

Children's Services

Naintara Khosla

Strategic Lead Children Looked After and Placements

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# THURROCK FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2021-2022

## 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 those who apply to become foster carers.

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

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

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

We believe that:

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

This means in Thurrock:

- Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will actively seek out their views, wishes and feelings.
- All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from

excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.

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

In addition:

- Decisions on use of resources will increasingly be taken jointly.
- Resources will be pooled wherever it makes sense to do so
- Services will be jointly commissioned and provided, where it is in children's interests to do so.
- We will 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 and to improve outcomes for children and young people looked after by Thurrock. We will do this by ensuring that children are suitably matched with fully trained, skilled and well-supported Foster Carers able to provide a high quality of care.

In Thurrock the Fostering Service is provided by the Fostering Recruitment Team which undertakes the assessments of Foster Carers, The Connected Persons Team which assesses and supervises connected persons and the Fostering Support Team, which undertakes support and supervision functions for foster carers once they are approved.

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

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services for looked after children. In adhering to the National Minimum Standards, we want them 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 contacts with their birth family where it is safe for them to do so.
- We want our children and young people to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships.
- We to be ambitious, with our children and young people to achieving 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 areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will:

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the diverse needs of looked after children and young people including parents with child.
- Run an effective and efficient Fostering Panel with a sound decision making process.
- Ensure that we match children with carers who can meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any of their concerns raised.

- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs.
- Ensure that there is an updated Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide each year.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development.
- Provide learning development and continual professional development for Foster Carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Handle allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Ensure our Foster Carers are supported if they become subject to allegations and suspicions of harm.
- Pay foster carers appropriately and on time.

The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with 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 is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council. Recruitment materials are developed to attract foster carers from all communities to encourage applications irrespective of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We encourage foster carers from many different backgrounds to suit the diverse needs of children requiring alternative homes.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. We are thoughtful about the matching needs and ensure there is appropriate information and support to meet the needs of cross cultural family placements.

### 3. THE SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Service is based in Thurrock Civic Offices alongside all other Children's Social Care Social Work Teams. The fostering service forms part of the Fostering, Adoption, Children with Disability and Placements Service and is included in the remit of Strategic Lead for the Children Looked after Service and Aftercare.

#### 3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment and Assessment Team** (the recruitment of foster carers who are not connected persons)
- **The Connected Persons Team** (including private fostering arrangements, connected persons assessment and special guardianship assessment)
- **Fostering Support Team** (searching for in-house placements, the supervision and support of approved carers)
- **The Placements Team** (searching for internal and external placements)

These four teams undertaking the following responsibilities;

- Recruitment and assessment of all foster carers including Connected Person's Foster Carers (friends and family carers) and Special Guardianship assessments.
- Provision of training, supervision and support to all foster carers
- Matching children to Thurrock Foster Carers
- Providing external placement resource to children and young people who cannot be accommodated by in-house foster carers.
- Ensuring the Fostering Standards are upheld and there are high standards of care for children
- Working to stabilise placement with the offer of clinical supervision
- Ensuring allegations and standards of care issue are addressed
- Direct work with children and ensuring the Voice of the Child is central to work undertaken with carers and families
- Support for family time arrangements (contact).

There are two additional posts that have been introduced to quality assure and assist in service development:

- **Senior Practitioner – Fostering Reviews.** This role is responsible for undertaking the annual household reviews, investigation of standards of care/suitability to foster following allegation and assisting the Team Managers in service development. This role is managed within the Quality Assurance Service to provide scrutiny of the work of the service and Foster Carers
- **Fostering Panel Advisor,** this role acts as the professional advisor to the Fostering Panel

#### 3.2 Leadership and Management of the Fostering Service

All managers and social workers hold recognised social work qualifications,

are registered with Social Work England, undertake post-qualifying training and have experience of working with children and families. The Service is committed to continuous professional development of all staff and therefore encouraged to attend internal and external training to develop and refresh their skills.

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

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

### **3.3 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker**

Sheila Murphy - Corporate Director for Children's Services .

Janet Simon - Interim Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

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

**Tel:** +44 (0) 1375 652231

**Email:** nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk

Naintara qualified as a social worker who qualified in 1993 and is registered with Social Work England. Naintara has been a senior manager in Cafcass and Social Care since 2003, prior to this she held various positions as a Team Manager and Social worker. Naintara has extensive experience as a senior leader across Fostering, Adoption and Placement Services for a range of local authorities

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. He joined Thurrock as Service Manager in March 2019.

### **3.4 Team Manager, Recruitment Team**

Carole Parker is the manager of the Recruitment Team. Carole is a qualified social worker and registered with Social Work England since 2000. Carole's previous experience includes working in both Local Authority and Private Sector, Carole's experience encompassed working as a Residential Social worker, undertaking family assessments, working with adolescent and post

16, and as a Registered Manager of children's homes (CH EBD), ensuring the homes were appropriately safe and sensitive to the needs of the young people being looked after. Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team.

### **3.5 Team Manager, Connected Persons Team**

Alexandra Cucu is the manager of the Connected Persons Team. Alexandra is a qualified social worker since 2010 and is currently 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. 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.

### **3.6 Team Manager Fostering Support Team**

Sandra Clark qualified as a Social worker in 2010 and is registered with Social Work England. Prior to being Social worker Sandra has experience of being a Special Constable for Essex Police. After qualifying, Sandra worked in Family Support and Fostering Services. Sandra managed part of the contact service for Essex County Council. She joined Thurrock as the Fostering Support Team Manager in August 2019

### **3.7 Team Manager, Placements Team**

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

### **3.8 Staffing of the Fostering Service**

Currently there are currently 31 staff working in the Fostering Service. They include;

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 17 Senior Social Practitioners
- 1 Qualified Fostering Social worker
- 3 Business Development Officers
- 6 Business Support / Administrators

### **3.9 Student Placements**

We are committed to the development of trainee social workers 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.

### **3.10 Monitoring of the Fostering Service**

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care for children. Performance is managed by meeting the Fostering Regulations and the provision of care is monitored through:

- Feedback forms for children (Including Mind of My Own)
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Foster Carer supervision
- Foster Carer Annual Reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Case File Audits
- Management Oversight and Case Supervision
- 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. This arrangements start on the basis of Temporary Approval of Carers under Regulations 24 of Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2010.

### **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 the payments can be found the 'Payments to Thurrock Carers Policy'.

### **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 children where the care plan is for a



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; this would be agreed in consultation with the Foster Carer.

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

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children who 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. Parents and child carers are trained to support parents on how to appropriately parent their children.

The approach to supporting parents who are care leavers would be, wherever possible for Foster Carers to support them in transition towards moving into the community with their children. This would be based on a model that assists, 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 such parents to receive allowances including all the entitlements of the child and to provide for, and meet the child's needs as they would have done in their own accommodation. Depending on the circumstances of the parent and child it may be that only one, either the parent, or the baby have the status of a 'looked after child'. The legal status of arrangements would be clarified before the placement commences.

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

#### **4.6 Fully 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 friends who knew the child(ren) before they were accommodated by the local authority.

A full assessment and approval of Connected Person's Foster Carers is completed in accordance with Standard 30 of the National Fostering Minimum Standards, 2011. All approved Connected Person's Foster Carers are 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 the children who form the 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 were held regularly (prior to Covid 19), at the Civic Offices, local shopping Centres and in other venues across the Local Authority to help interested applicants to learn more about the fostering task and the assessment and approval process. It is hoped that with the lifting of restrictions these recruitment activities can be recommenced.

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
- Financial review

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

The assessment team aim to complete Stage one and two processes within 4-6 months upon receipt of a completed application. Every effort is made to ensure there 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 its Foster Carers with an up to date online handbook 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](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. There are occasions where cross cultural and religious matching takes place. Supervising Social workers are able to assist carers so that information and assistance are provided where it is necessary to ensure the diversity needs of children are met.

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.

### **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 the 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. In light of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been a review of the training offer to ensure that diversity needs and understanding racism is sufficiently included in the training programme.

## 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. Records are maintained from 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 – 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 Fostering Network and are encouraged to join the Thurrock Foster Carers Association – The One Team. The One Team provide support to foster carers and are able to use this forum to liaise and feedback to managers in Childrens Services regarding issues arising from the fostering community.

## 9. ANNUAL REVIEW AND SPECIAL REVIEWS

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

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

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

## 10. ALLOWANCE AND PAYMENTS SCHEME

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

The **Fee payment** is a reward payment to foster carers

### 10.1 The Boarding Out Allowance

The allowance is intended to contribute towards the general costs associated



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

The allowance includes items that are purchased directly to meet the child's needs such as food, clothing and social activities. It also covers indirect costs such as family transport, family outings and any additional general household maintenance costs such as utilities including broad band 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 differs significantly from the proportions set out in the table above, the supervising social worker should arrange to discuss the carer's expenditure at a supervisory visit. This will assist the foster carer to budget accordingly or assist the Social worker to determine if any additional financial support is required.

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

This savings account is maintained and held by the carer until such time when the child leaves the placement. If the child moves placement, the savings book is then given to the supervising social worker who will ensure that it follows the child to their next home. 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.

Savings for children who are looked after is saved corporately to ensure that savings are applied consistently and that there is no disruption of savings if a child moves placement.

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

As noted above, the fostering allowance and payment rates are made up of the fostering boarding allowance and the fee payment for carers who have met the competency requirements as detailed in the Payments to 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 child's social worker consults 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. Thurrock wants to be ambitious for its young people and encourage them into further study and training so they can continue learning beyond their statutory schooling and attend University. There are more Universities recognising and supporting Looked After Children to attend University.

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

## **12. CONTACT**

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

Foster Carers will actively support, promote and facilitate safe contact

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **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 (2020/21) has been updated to ensure there is a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Foster care training includes child exploitation and contextual safeguarding. Foster carers along with other professionals, have a role in 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.

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 RECORD KEEPING**

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
- 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 notice on a placement

The incident form should be used and completed in sufficient detail that if 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 therefore peer review our practices with best performing fostering agencies. We shall also make concerted effort to solicit suggestions, feedbacks, comments and views from all relevant persons, professionals and key partners.

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.

Preparation for transition into adulthood (post 18 years), begins early so that young people are aware of what their financial entitlements, housing, education and employment options.

The Service 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 Family Placement 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 fostering 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 fostering 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](mailto:irm@irm.org.uk)  
[www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk](http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk)

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

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

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 fostering services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. Thurrock unique 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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

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

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

This statement of purpose is subject to annual review

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<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non key
<b>Report of:</b> Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing, Childrens Social Care	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report outlines the role of an Independent Visitor (IV) for Looked After children, when consideration should be given to appointing an independent visitor and how the service is provided in Thurrock.

The report also addresses the questions raised in a letter dated 26 February sent to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Committees by the National Independent Visitor Network ([ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)) hosted by Barnardo’s. The letter is presented in Appendix 1 of the report.

Thurrock Looked After children have commissioned Open Door to provide an Independent Visitor service. Open Door also provide an Advocacy service to all looked after children. An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who voluntarily gives some of their time each month to support and befriend a child or young person in care who has little to no contact with their birth family or where it is considered to be in the child’s best interest. To become an Independent Visitor there is a full assessment process and once approved, they are also supervised and supported by Open Door. Independent visitors and children/young people are matched to each other. Activities are age appropriate and child centred/child led with the expectation of a monthly contact.

This report responds to the questions raised in the open letter from the National IV Network and also provides information about how Thurrock meets the IV standards

There has not previously been a specific report to the Corporate Parenting Committee about the Independent Visiting service. It is proposed that this report is accepted by the Committee.

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

**1.1 The Committee understands the duties as Corporate Parents regarding Independent Visitors for children who are looked after.**

**1.2 The Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise practice against questions set out by the National Independent Visitor Network (ivnetwork.org.uk) hosted by Barnardo's.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The Children Act 1989 outlined that an Independent Visitor (IV) can be appointed to “advise, befriend and visit” a child in care if they had no or little contact with their birth family. Each Child Looked After (CLA) Review should address whether the child/young person would benefit from having an IV. However, in the Children & Young Persons Act 2008, the criteria for appointing an IV was extended to any child for whom it is in “their best interests” to have an IV. An IV is an adult outside of the professional network who provides a supportive relationship, as long as the child themselves wants to have an IV.

2.2 The aim is that an IV will visit, talk with, listen, share interests and hobbies, help with any worries, speak up for the child/ young person and be an adult friend. The relationship maybe be for months but can often continue for years. IVs are asked to commit to supporting children and young people to whom they are matched for at least 12 months. IV are not paid but can claim expenses.

2.3 Not all children /young people want an IV but they should be asked if it is thought it might be of benefit. The Independent Reviewing Officer, who chairs the CLA review, will give consideration to whether a referral should be made, if it would benefit the child/ young person and if they want it. In Thurrock from Sept 2019 to April 2021 13 children have been referred for an IV service, 5 declined the service immediately or stopped engaging in it after a month or two. In May 2021 there were 7 children engaged in the IV service and receiving support from an IV. The longest period of engagement has been 1 year 7 months.

2.4 In February 2021 an open letter was sent from the National Independent Visitor Network –NIVN- (which is hosted by Barnardos) to the chairs of all Corporate Parenting Committees raising the profile of IV services and asking a number of questions. This report addresses the questions raised below;

- *Duty was imposed by The Children Act 1989 and then expanded in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, for the provision of Independent*

*Visitors for children who are looked after. Does your LA have an IV provision? If not, are you aware of the reasons for this?*

Thurrock does have a commissioned IV service provided by Open Door – an independent charity which has been in operation since 1978.

- *Are you aware what percentage of your eligible children in care are matched with an IV?  
Are you aware of the value this service has given to them?*

All children who are considered eligible and would benefit from the service have been offered a service. In the CLA cohort not all children would benefit from a service as;

- they are too young,
- have not been looked after for very long,
- have regular contact with their birth families/significant adults in their network,
- have good relationships with their carers and feel part of their foster family
- do not want the service.

All children currently in receipt of the service are in foster care and we will be reviewing how the service take up can be improved for children in residential settings and supported living accommodation. Feedback will be sought from young people as part of an annual service review.

- *Do your panel or committee members and your Children in Care Council know everything they should about IVs and IV entitlement? We recommend you visit: <https://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-standards/>.*

This report will provide members with information about the IV scheme in Thurrock. The Children in Care Council (CICC) is aware of the IV scheme and the National Standards are set out in 2.5.

- *Who is running your scheme and is this provision working well and following the National IV Standards? (IV schemes are run in-house or contracted out with some LAs spot purchasing).*

The scheme is run by Open Door who is independent from the local authority and a charity. Please see 2.5- in most part the national standard is being met.

- *Is IV provision on your panel/committee agenda at least once a year? Does your LA receive an annual report from your IV service? This will help you ensure that children in care in your area are getting the support they are entitled to.*

The LA will be requesting an annual report from Open Door on the Independent Visiting Service where the National Standards will be addressed

and to ensure that all looked after children in Thurrock who are eligible are offered an appropriate IV service.

- *Do you have an action plan to ensure that your IV service in your area is well run, adequately funded and has sufficient capacity to ensure no child misses out?*

The IV commissioned service is reviewed quarterly and it is proposed there is an annual report presented to the Local Authority.

- *An NIVN campaign objective is to extend statutory provision of IV beyond 18 to 25-years, to reduce social isolation and build a positive pathway to independent adulthood. There are many examples of good practice in relation to continued and new IV relationships for care leavers, in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 corporate parenting principles. Are you aware of an IV offer to care leavers in your LA?*

Open Door offer services to children and young people up to the age of 25.

## 2.5 The National IV standards –

There are 14 standards – which are listed below and responded to

1. *All looked after children understand their right to an independent visitor. Services are promoted, publicised and accessible. Local authorities promote independent visitor services in line with their duties as corporate parents. –*

The service has been promoted with all managers to be cascaded to all staff, it has been promoted at young people events in Thurrock. In addition Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) promote the service in CLA reviews.

2. *Independent visitor services are child-led. The needs and views of the child are at the centre of all work including; referrals, matching, visits and endings.*

Involvement with the IV service is run by the young person who is receiving the service, they decide on the content of their activities, if they are happy with the IV matching and they decide when the service ends.

3. *Independent visitor services work to a high level of confidentiality between the child, independent visitor and service coordinator. Children and volunteers understand the service's policy on safeguarding and record keeping with a good understanding of why and when information needs to be shared.*

All young people sign a form of confidentiality which allows for sharing when safeguarding disclosures are made, however the remainder of the content is between the IV and young person. Independent Visitors are

provided with safeguarding training and provided with policies and procedures which include confidentiality.

4. *Children are given the opportunity to participate and be actively involved in the development of services. Children's views, opinions and skills are used*

–

Children are invited by the Participation & Engagement Officer to get involved in various engagement events and also staff recruitment. The Participation & Engagement officer gathers their views and feedbacks to managers through management and staff meetings and also training events. Children & Young people also get involved through CICC activities. The CICC are present and contribute to the Corporate Parenting Committee agenda.

5. *There is a thorough recruitment and selection process for volunteer independent visitors, which is safe and transparent. Independent visitors understand the long-term requirement of the role, with an expectation to commit to a minimum of one year.*

All IV's have been through application stage before an in depth interview. If successful they are given safeguarding training and are given the company's policies and procedures before beginning their role. All are aware of the commitments required of an IV role.

6. *Independent visitors complete a thorough induction and training process specific to the role, and receive on-going support to give them the skills and knowledge to confidently fulfil their role. –*

The induction process for IVs includes safeguarding training, policies and procedures and also case note writing and the correct use of forms. All staff have supervision monthly to raise any concerns but can also contact their line manager anytime.

7. *There is a clear and consistent process in place for referral, matching, and positive endings. –*

The process is clear to log referrals, the young person is then considered with the information included on the referral to which IV would be best suited. The young person also chooses when to end the relationship if they feel they are ready and how this happens.

8. *The independent visitor will seek to befriend the child and establish a relationship of trust through regular visits and contact with the child. –*

All young people are seen once a month for an activity of their choice but contact can happen frequently in between these via phone calls, messages etc.

9. *Independent visitor relationships are regularly monitored to make sure the child is safe, happy and developing a positive relationship with their independent visitor. –*

Each child or young person is discussed in supervision to ensure a positive relationship is forming. Also the service will be discussed with the child/ young person by the IRO prior to and during CLA reviews.

*10. Independent visitors are volunteers independent of the child's social services department. Independence of the service is important, for the child's feeling of separateness from social services, and the important safeguards this provides. –*

All IV's working for Open Door are not working under or supervised by children's social care; this ensures their independence.

*11. Independent visitor services are safe with policies and procedures in place to ensure the safety of children, independent visitors and independent visitor coordinators. –*

All staff are given the policies and procedures at the start of working for Open Door and these are always accessible for anyone to access. IVs are closely supervised and if there were any safeguarding issues these would be taken very seriously.

*12. Local authorities allocate an appropriate level of resources to the independent visitor service to ensure sufficient funding, management and staff are in place to support a wider group of looked after children in line with current legislation.*

This is a commissioned service and the resource allocation is reviewed annually. To date the service has been able to meet the need.

*13. Services have clear policies to promote equality and diversity ensuring that no child or volunteer is discriminated against. The service promotes equality when meeting the diverse needs of the CLA population –*

Policies and procedures address equality and diversity, and it is also addressed in the recruitment and supervision processes. There will be continuing efforts to attract a diverse group of IV's in order that the diverse needs of all looked after child needs can be met.

*14. There is a clear and easy to use complaints procedure. Volunteers and children know how to complain and their complaints are dealt with seriously and quickly. –*

The complaints procedures is explained to all young people at the start of the first session, when completing the introduction forms and all contact details are on the website and social media accounts. The complaints procedure is also explained to young people by the IRO and allocated SW.

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

3.1 That this report be accepted by the Committee

3.2 It is important that the Committee has an overview of the services offered to looked after children and care experienced young people, and there is an

opportunity to discuss if the services are meeting the needs of children and young people, or if they need to be reviewed and strengthened. This report provides that opportunity.

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

4.1 As the service is commissioned from an external provider and is uniquely provided by volunteers, the LA will be requesting an annual report from Open Door. This will enable a review to be undertaken by the LA annually.

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

5.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the commissioner and provider. It is proposed the annual report from Open Door will contain specific feedback from children and young people.

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

6.1 There is no specific impact on the community.

6.2 There is no specific impact on corporate policies, priorities and performance and is in keeping with the corporate drive to work in collaboration with local agencies to provide services which are relevant to the community.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

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

This is budgeted for through Commissioning Services. Open Door are commissioned to provide an advocacy and IV service

##### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Local Authority must appoint an independent visitor for a child being looked after by the authority if it appears to them it is in the child's best interests to do so – Section 23ZB(1)(b) Children Act 1989. The role and function of the independent visitor is subject of the statutory guidance on care planning, placement and review. The Local Authority must follow this

guidance unless there are exceptional local circumstances which justify departure from this.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities**

The IV service should be offered to all looked after children and young people who would benefit from it, and where possible a relevant IV matched to a young person depending on their wishes and feelings and also their interests and hobbies. The service has been commissioned and will be delivered with commitment to practice which promotes inclusion and diversity. Delivery of the service will be 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)

There are no other implications- this is a specific service for children who are looked after or who have been care experienced.

### 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):

- There are no back ground papers

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

Appendix 1 - National IV Network Open Letter to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Committee

### **Report Author:**

Ruth Murdock

Strategic Lead Quality Assurance & Reviewing  
Children's Social Care



**Championing every care-experienced child's right to  
an Independent Visitor**



**Open letter to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and Children and Young People's  
Committees**

26<sup>th</sup> February 2021

The **National Independent Visitor Network** ([ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)) is writing to all Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and committees that provide leadership and scrutiny to corporate parenting.

We wish to ensure that panel and committee members are aware of the statutory duty placed on Local Authorities to make Independent Visitors (IVs) accessible to their children in care.

All Corporate Parenting Panels are responsible for reviewing and monitoring the provision of services for children in care within their own Local Authority (LA). This includes reviewing and monitoring IV provision and ensuring that statutory responsibilities are being met and children in care are receiving the support they are entitled to.

A recent Freedom of Information request showed that access to IV is a postcode lottery, with some LA's having a very limited IV provision or no service at all ([ivnetwork.org.uk/national-independent-visitors-data-report-2019](http://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-independent-visitors-data-report-2019)).

***NIVN are contacting you to request your support to review and improve access to this vital statutory service in your LA. We kindly request you ask the following questions at your next Corporate Parenting Panel or committee meeting. The NIVN Project Team is available to provide support to help you develop your IV scheme:***

1. Duty was imposed by The Children Act 1989 and then expanded in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, for the provision of Independent Visitors for children who are looked after. Does your LA have an IV provision? If not, are you aware of the reasons for this?
2. NIVN is campaigning to achieve a minimum 10% access rate of eligible children nationwide, that is adequately resourced. We hope you will join us to support the *Right Friend* campaign vision. Access to and resourcing of IV services varies considerably around the country and impacts on capacity to achieve this vision and make a positive impact on the lives of looked after children and young people.  
Are you aware what percentage of your eligible children in care are matched with an IV?  
Are you aware of the value this service has given to them?
3. Do your panel or committee members and your Children in Care Council know everything they should about IVs and IV entitlement? We recommend you visit:  
<https://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-standards/>).

4. Who is running your scheme and is this provision working well and following the National IV Standards? (IV schemes are run in-house or contracted out with some LAs spot purchasing).
5. Is IV provision on your panel/committee agenda at least once a year? Does your LA receive an annual report from your IV service? This will help you ensure that children in care in your area are getting the support they are entitled to.
6. Do you have an action plan to ensure that your IV service in your area is well run, adequately funded and has sufficient capacity to ensure no child misses out?
7. An NIVN campaign objective is to extend statutory provision of IV beyond 18 to 25-years, to reduce social isolation and build a positive pathway to independent adulthood. There are many examples of good practice in relation to continued and new IV relationships for care leavers, in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 corporate parenting principles. Are you aware of an IV offer to care leavers in your LA?

Thank you for your help in reviewing and addressing this important responsibility on behalf of your Local Authority. Please contact the NIVN if you would like any further information or support to develop your IV scheme further.

**NIVN Project Team, Hosted by Barnardo's**

[ivnetwork@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:ivnetwork@barnardos.org.uk)

[ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)

<https://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-standards/>

<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children In Care Council Update</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non Key
<b>Report of:</b> Annie Guidotti , CICC Project Worker Open Door Christopher Bennett, Chair Children in Care Council	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is Public</b>	

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Children In Care Council with some illustration of the issues consulted about over the past year.

The report outlines that the CiCC is made up of 12 young people most of whom are older young people/ care leavers. Meetings are held monthly and over the past 12 months a range of visitors have met with the CiCC including the Director of Children’s Services, Assistant Director, Portfolio holder, Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering.

The CiCC have been consulted about the pledge to looked after children and the Services to care leavers

The CiCC work collaboratively with the Participation and Engagement Officer in Children’s Social Care, planning events and recruitment campaigns to involve more children and young people in the CiCC. Currently there is a project to involve children and young people in an animation project to create a promotional short film.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 That the report of the Children In Care Council report be noted.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council over the period of one year specifically from August 2020 until August 2021
- 2.2 Open Door, an independent Thurrock Charity, is commissioned by Thurrock Council to establish and facilitate the Children In Care Council (CICC) which meets at regular intervals, currently monthly, to inform the consultation process and enable this group to discuss, debate and have their views considered about various pertinent issues and Thurrock Council policies.

The CICC is open to Thurrock young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or Care Experienced.

The CICC receives regular visits from Council Officers who may present plans, policies and questions they wish to be considered by the young people.

They have been asked to provide their collective views on a range of issues, and have this year reviewed the Thurrock Pledge and a document issued to all Care Leavers - The Big Wide World.

CICC have discussed issues around rent difficulties, housing problems, feelings of isolation and many other topics.

The process for consultation with the CiCC is a request made to the Project Worker to create a slot in the agenda for the visitor, with detail of the subject they wish to discuss and any ask specific questions. The subject of the discussion and the questions are put to the members prior to the visit to ensure the members are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

In addition to our members, CICC also has a regular attendee, Carly Banks-Thurrock Participation Officer. Her role is to ensure the young people are being listened to should they raise any issues that may be affecting young people in care generally and to bring information to the members about any events or changes that may be happening in the future. She also takes information about issues discussed back to senior management within Thurrock Council.

While the group meetings are scheduled to take place on a monthly basis it does have the capacity to include additional special meetings. For example: the CICC members invitation made to newly elected Thurrock Counsellors to meet and discuss specific roles of each elected Cllr and how it may impact on the life of a young person in care/care leaver. This will also enable the members to ask questions around any issues or thoughts they may have about the future.

2.3 Our meetings are run by the Chairperson - Christopher Bennett was elected by the CICC members. Christopher runs the agenda to ensure we keep to time, he takes minutes and works closely with the Open Door Project Worker to produce minutes and the Agenda for the next meeting. He attends all Corporate Parenting Committee Meetings and keeps the CICC members updated on their activity.

2.4 Membership numbers stand currently at around 12 and reflect mainly those who are approaching or are cared for by After Care Services.

We have made a great effort to encourage new members to join the CICC but this has proved to be very challenging, particularly over the past year. The CICC members are anxious to encourage new members to come forward and join them and have discussed at length:

- What does a member feel about being part of the CICC
- What do you feel you want to say to encourage new membership
- Have you noticed any changes in yourself as a result of being part of the CICC.

We are currently developing a recruitment strategy which includes a letter has been written by the members to be sent out to all young people in care.

Thurrock Council recognised the difficulties in recruiting to the group and agreed to fund the animation theatre company to do some workshops with members and young people interested in animation. This will result in a short film using voices and avatars of the young people which will undoubtedly encourage new membership.

Open Door is planning to hold an activity week for young people that will help promote the CICC and encourage opportunities later in the year.

2.5 With the many restrictions put in place because of the Covid 19 pandemic it became difficult to continue face to face meetings with venues closed to us. We introduced Zoom meetings and continued to meet monthly while increasing contact with members of the group to reduce isolation. Using video conferencing tools we were able to include more members who had only been able to attend if they were in the area. We included new Thurrock members who are currently living in Leicester and Chelmsford.

During the last year it has been evident that the members were struggling from time to time due to the Covid restrictions, learning from home and not being able to socialise with friends and they have advised at meetings that they have enjoyed getting together and also having a little time at the end to chat together.

Members felt it would be good to ensure they had contact between meetings and asked for a CICC WhatsApp group could be set up which has been a good source of contact.

- 2.6 CICC have a membership of 12 members and generally can have an average of around 8 members attending each meeting. They range from students at school, college, university and employed. One member recently wrote this about his experience of CICC.

*“Being a member of CICC for the past 3 years has been one of my proudest achievements. It provided me a route and link to take my cause of advocating for Children in Care to a national level by becoming an Ambassador for A National Voice. That allows me to become a panellist to England’s independent children in care review. I also mentioned it in my University application as it demonstrates many valuable skills that they are looking for in a candidate. CICC is a great way to build your confidence and C.V.”*

This particular member has been accepted into Oxford University for History and Economics LV11 and this was confirmed when he received his grades of triple A\*

He has advised us that he intends to continue to attend CICC meetings.

The CICC have members who are currently at University, one studying Medicine and has recently brought us news of her travels and placement in Uganda. She is now home and planning the continuation of her studies to become a Doctor.

- 2.7 The Open Door Project Worker role includes attending monthly meetings Go East- Eastern Region Participation Leads where many topics of interest to CICC are discussed.

This information is taken back to our monthly CICC meetings for discussion with group members. This enables us to ensure that Thurrock CICC is also dealing with Regional issues. The Project Worker also attends local focus groups.

The Project Worker ensures during the CICC meetings that young people are being respectful of each other and they allow everyone to have their say. Recently a buddy system has been agreed for the group to ensure any new members voices are not overtaken by more confident speakers.

- 2.8 CICC members met with the Ofsted Inspectors in November 2019 and the Inspectors felt they were made very welcome. Overall, they were positive meeting the young people but felt they could become a little too focussed on their own personal experiences. This was heard and debated, and members talked about the resilience that they required sometimes to help them through

their care experience. Some had a very positive outcome and others not so positive but they agreed to keep this in mind for future discussions. From that we put in place the questionnaire that visitors to the group should complete before a meeting is agreed. This enables us to be advised in advance of the content of the questions that would arise and assists the young people to have time for thought and reflection before they welcome the visitor.

- 2.9 Members have welcomed many guests including the Assistant Director who asked what it was like to be in CICC and what they think was being done well and what could be improved.

The Chair highlighted the need for more members to come forward to help give a more balanced view.

A member of CICC advised that he felt a lack of support at his transition time from care to after care as he was still concentrating on his studies while making the move into semi independence.

When asked if members felt they were being listened to and felt they were making a difference they advised that yes in many ways they did.

After the meeting it was agreed future meetings will be extended to two hours per month with a time limit of 30 minutes for guests to attend.

We welcomed the Strategic Lead for CLA. During discussion members identified that they felt there was a gap in the provision of information provided to care leavers who wished to move on to University. A focus group was suggested, and 3 members offered to be part of that focus group as they had experience in this. We were advised that the After Care Team would be tasked with this and would make contact. Meetings were arranged by After Care and the Youth Hub to discuss all aspects of a young people's requirements on this route and the result is that a final meeting to decide how this information will be provided to all care experienced young people will take place.

In March 2021 CICC welcomed Corporate Director of Childrens Services and Cllr Halden, Cabinet Member for Childrens Services and Adult Social Care. Various topics were discussed including housing, the highs and the lows young people in the group had experienced. Virtual Schools were praised for their input especially through the last months of difficult times. Members felt teachers in general could be more positive with the aspirations of young people in care. Some members felt that positivity could come from many places including Social Workers, Personal Advisors. Our guests advised they would take this information back to Thurrock and said they had enjoyed meeting with the members. The members certainly enjoyed talking and being listened to by our guests.

The CICC was consulted on how members felt it would be best to attract new Foster Carers from the Service Manager Adoption & Fostering. He presented

possible plans for this and asked for comments. The group of members chose what they felt was the best logo and made suggestions as to where advisements could be placed in the Borough.

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

- 3.1 The report is required to update Thurrock Council of the progress of the Children in Care Council and its findings and plans for the future to ensure the voice of the child is truly being heard.

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

- 4.1 The Local Authority have a duty to ensure that children in care are supported and their views and wishes are taken into account when planning services. The Commissioned Service provided by Open Door enables Looked After Children can be involved in the CiCC.

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

- 5.1 The CiCC have been consulted in the completion of this report.

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

- 6.1 The report is compatible with the Councils policies and priorities, and consultation with looked after children and care experienced young people will improve community relationships.

### **7. Implications**

#### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**  
**Assistant Director of Finance**

The service is commissioned by the Council and this covers the costs for venue hire, refreshments, travel, activities and staff time

#### **7.2 Legal**

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

There are no legal implications within the report.



### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities**

The CiCC is open to all looked after children and care experienced young people. The practice and principles of the CiCC are in keeping with the council's policies regarding equality, diversity and inclusion.

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

Looked After Children

### 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

- None

### Report Author:

Annie Guidotti

Project Worker

Thurrock Open Door

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<b>14 September 2021</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020/2021</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director of Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	

## Executive Summary

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

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020/2021 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 2020/2021 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 2020/2021 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 2020/2021, 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 these 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](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: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities**

The Corporate Parenting Committee recognises the role and importance of diversity and equality and adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and related requirements. All work in 2020/2021 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 2020/2021

### **Report Author:**

Kenna-Victoria Healey  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

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# Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2020-2021

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## 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 an update from Councillor Halden as the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adult Social Care to update Members on the work of his Portfolio. During which he advised the Committee on the two main areas in which he wished to focus on, which were mobility and vulnerability.

At the start of the year Members received a report on the support provided to our Foster Carers during Covid-19 pandemic, it was explained how our Foster carers usually received a package of practical and financial support to meet the needs of the Councils Looked After Children. This 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 weekends

Members heard from the Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association who agreed the start of the pandemic had had a big impact on their families, along with the young people they looked after. She continued by informing the committee that Foster Carers had been home educating the young people in their care as well as their own children and supporting them with the difficulties and worries faced in regards to covid-19.

In September, I took over the reins from Councillor Redsell and the Committee acknowledged a report on the Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 – 2022. During discussions it was explained, the term 'corporate parent' was broadly understood in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. However, it was vital that all parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognised they have a key role too.

The key priorities of the strategy included:

- Children remaining cared for within their family where it was safe to do so
- Young people staying within the foster placement until they are ready to leave and feel that they are prepared to live independently
- To involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives and maximise the opportunity for them to make their own choice

January 2020 following the Committee's previous request, Members received continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance, Officers highlighted the impact on the Social Care team since the initial lockdown in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Members were advised there were 300 looked after children in the Councils care and 275 were to be Care Leavers. During discussions Members heard the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering the Borough

had reduced, as preferred routes had been through the Ports, for example through Dover.

Following on from last year the Committee were kept informed as to Initial Health Assessments (IHA) which had been improving and during September 2020 the number of completed IHA within 20 working days was now 75% compared to the 50% to the previous year.

Members acknowledged and accepted the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer which was presented in order to meet the statutory requirement. During which we discussed the timeliness of reviews and how they were being completed on time recording over 90% completed within timescales.

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

- Overview of Academic Year 2019/20
- Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments
- Sufficiency Placement
- Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers
- Corporate Parenting Communicating with Members
- Support Provided to Foster Carers during Covid-19

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the support given during the pandemic to the Council's Foster Carers. It was important that we remember the unique role they have had to play throughout the pandemic. Not only do they support children being placed into care, but also as like most children in the borough have been dealing with being in and out of school and offering them the support and guidance of being someone they can talk to. My thanks goes to all of Thurrock's Foster Carers for their continued support and for opening their homes to the borough's children who needed it most.

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 Elizabeth Rigby***

***Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2020/2021***



## Looking Forward...2021/2022

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 2021/2022. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After
- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy
- Children in Care Council Update
- Sufficiency Placement
- Annual Report of the Virtual Schools

# Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting

**Year:** 2021/2022

**Dates of Meetings:** 1 June 2021, 14 September 2021, 4 January 2022 and 1 March 2022

Topic	Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>1 June 2021</b>		
Childrens Service Performance Report	Mandy Moore	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Update on the Youth Offending Service, the Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Jason Read	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After	Clare Moore/Seema Moules	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy	Dan Jones / Naintara Khosla	Officers (Agreed with Chair)
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>14 September 2021</b>		
Children's Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Fostering Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon / Daniel Jones	Officers
Adoption Statement of Purpose	Janet Simon/Dan Jones	Officers
Children in Care Council Update	Open Door	Officers

Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children	Ruth Murdock	Officers
Corporate Parenting Committee – Annual Report 2020/21	Democratic Services Officer	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item
<b>4 January 2022</b>		
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
<b>1 March 2022</b>		
Children’s Social Care Performance	Mandy Moore	Officers
Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standard Item

Clerk: Kenna-Victoria Healey

Last Updated: September 2021