

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 **18 July 2023**

**Committee Room 2, Civic Offices 3, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL.**

### Membership:

Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Vikki Hartstean (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, John Cecil, Georgette Polley, Cici Manwa and Augustine Ononaji

Chair, Children in Care Council

Vice-Chair, Children in Care Council

Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door

Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Jackie Enifer, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

### Substitutes:

Councillors Gary Collins, Jack Duffin, James Halden, Sara Muldowney and Sue Shinnick

### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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| <b>1 Apologies for Absence</b>  |              |
| <b>2 Minutes</b>  | <b>5 - 8</b> |
| To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 21 March 2023.  |              |
| <b>3 Items of Urgent Business</b>   |              |
| To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. |              |
| <b>4 Declaration of Interests</b>   |              |

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| <b>5</b>  | <b>Children’s Social Care Performance 2022-23</b>                                    | <b>9 - 30</b>    |
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**Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:**

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Agenda published on: **7 July 2023**

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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 21 March 2023 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Adam Carter (Vice-Chair), Kairen Raper (via Microsoft Teams) and Lee Watson

Chair, Children in Care Council  
Vice-Chair, Children in Care Council  
Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door  
Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

**Apologies:** Councillors Maureen Pearce and Georgette Polley

**In attendance:** Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help  
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director for Housing Management  
Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention  
Tina Russel, Assistant Director SET CAMHS and Partnerships  
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

### **32. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 4 January 2023 were approved as a correct record.

### **33. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **34. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **35. Children's Social Care Performance 2022-2023**

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report found on pages 13-36 of the agenda.

Members discussions focused on the Initial Health Assessments and the timeliness of their completion for Thurrock's children and young people within

care. They sought assurances that improvements continued to be made including the Initial Health Assessments to be made within the timescales expected.

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for the report and for their continued focus on Initial Health Assessments.

## **RESOLVED**

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

### **36. SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Looked After Children, January 2022 - December 2022**

The Assistant Director SET CAMHS and Partnerships talked Members through the presentation which had been circulated as part of the agenda.

Members thanked officers for the report and enquired as trauma could be part of many cases for young people who were in care, however encouragement to discuss feelings and mental health was not given until adulthood, how the services provided were made aware to the young people who may need them. The Committee heard how it was important for young people and children to be informed of such services and pending on their age they could refer themselves via their social worker should they wish to speak with somebody. It was heard how leaflets which outlined all services and the range of appointments for access had been produced and circulated.

During discussions it was queried as to whether the young people referred to within the report awaiting treatment had now been assessed and treatment provided, it was confirmed it had. Members further queried as to whether fast tracking was available if required for certain services. It was explained depending on timing and whether the young person had relapsed as to the service provided, sometimes a one of consultation to assess the young person's needs could be offered.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Children Looked After, January 2022 – December 2022 is noted and reviewed by Members.**

### **37. Children in Care Council Update (Verbal)**

The Chair of the Children in Care Council addressed Members providing them with an update from the Children in Care Council since the last meeting.

Members thanked the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council for attending the meeting and for the update they provided.



The Chair of the Children in Care Council explained they were looking to produce a group letter to be able to communicate better with the Council including Social Workers and perhaps when attending such meetings as the Corporate Parenting Committee. It was also commented they were looking at considering video calls when required to meet with health professionals as well as their Social Workers and even perhaps GP appointment, as ways to improve communication.

**RESOLVED**

**That Members acknowledged the update given by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council.**

**38. The One Team, Foster Carer Association Update (Verbal)**

The Chair of the One-Team Foster Carer Association provided an update for the Committee and in doing so explained the role what the Foster Carer Association. She advised that communication between Foster Carers and the Council were continuing to improve with the Assistant Director and Strategic Lead attending their meetings regularly.

Councillor Arnold, Chair of the Committee thanked the Chair and Vice-Chair for their attendance and update. He continued it was useful to hear from the Foster Carers directly and offered his thanks to all Foster Carers looking after children within the borough.

**RESOLVED**

**That Members acknowledged the update given by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association.**

**39. Recruitment of Foster Carers**

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report found at pages 61-74 of the agenda.

Members thanked Officers for the report and commented they were pleased to see a range of methods to recruit Foster Carers being used. It was suggested that the event at Grays Beach in the summer could be a good place to have a stall to be able to provide information and leaflets.

**RESOLVED**

- 1. That Members are updated on the current progress in Fostering Recruitment**
- 2. That Members are aware of the key areas for improvements.**

3. That Members are aware of the challenges the Local Authority is experiencing in recruiting foster carers and what we are doing to address these.

#### 40. Housing Options for Care Leavers

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children presented the report found at pages 85-88 of the agenda.

During discussions the Committee heard how progress was being made to assist young people in being able to achieve Thurrock Council tenancies where appropriate and the range services which were in place if and when other arrangements were required to be made.

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for the report and commented it was pleasing to hear that Thurrock's young people were being cared for even when they were no longer technically a Looked After Child.

#### **RESOLVED**

**For the Committee to note the range of accommodations option provided to care Experienced Young people on leaving care and how Thurrock Council is discharging it's corporate parenting duty.**

#### 41. Work Programme 2022-2023

Members discussed the work programme for the next meeting.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**It was agreed that the Chair would meet with the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help and Strategic Lead, Looked After Children to decide on items for the next meeting.**

**The meeting finished at 9.04 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>18 July 2023</b>   |                                 | <b>ITEM: 5</b> |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  |                                 |                |
| <b>Children’s Social Care Performance 2022-23</b>   |                                 |                |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All   | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Non-key |                |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Dan Jones, Strategic Lead CLA<br>Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead – Business Intelligence     |                                 |                |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, 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 provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good this report focusses on data of 2022-23.

At the end of Q4 2022-23, 292 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 270 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. 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. Improvement is required in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment which is an area of focus with health partners

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, 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. Thurrock Council continues develop it’s ‘Think Family’ approach to reduce the need for children to enter care. Foster Care recruitment continues to develop local placements for children.

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

**1.1 That Members note improvements, challenges and areas for improvement in Children’s Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving 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.

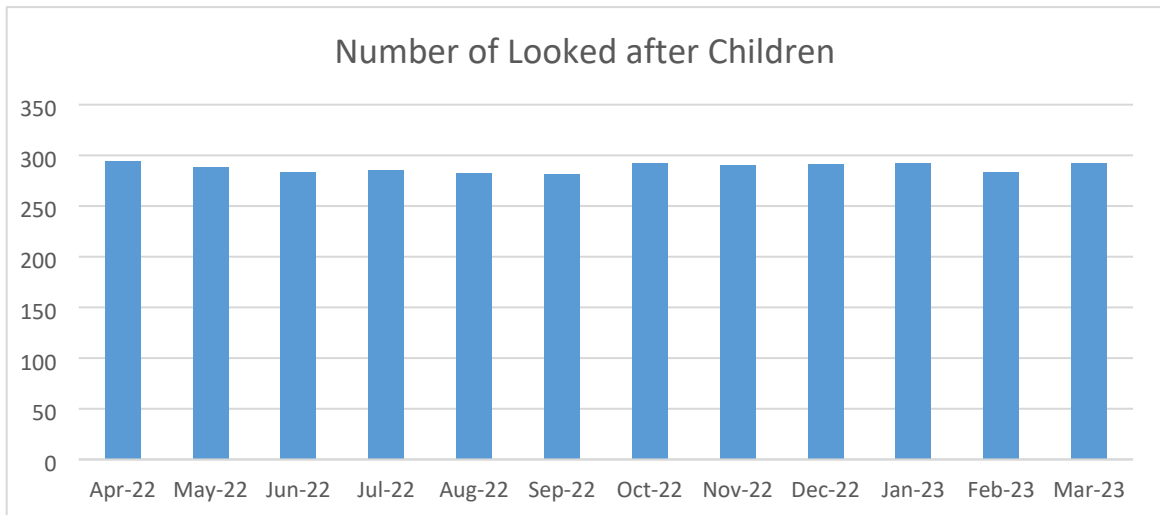
2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

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. 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. Thurrock’s Children in Care numbers have remained relatively steady year to date from 294 in April 2022 to 292 in March 2023. The service saw a reduction in care numbers from this year down to 282 in September but has seen an increase in line with the additional numbers of UASC following the increased quota for each local authority from 0.07% per child population to 0.1%. This means the overall numbers of children in our care is stable, but a larger proportion are UASC.

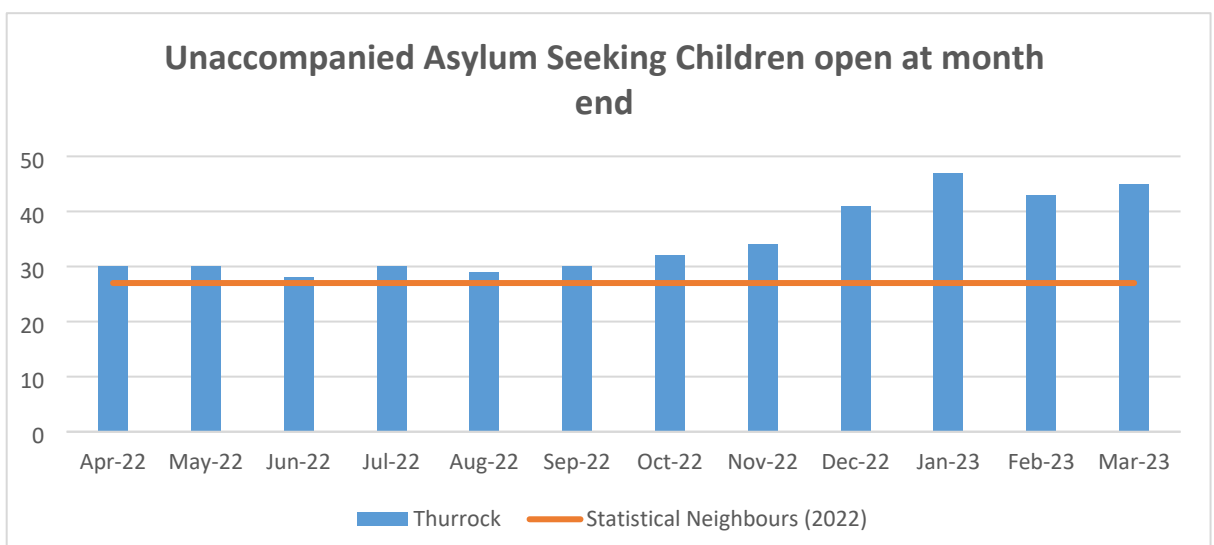


### 3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. Children either arrive in Thurrock directly and become looked after or are transferred into Thurrock via the National Transfer Scheme. Between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, there were 12 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 12 in the same period in 2022. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 Thurrock was at its limit of 45 UASC, we expect this to reduce in the next quarter due to a number of children turning 18. Further transfers are expected as a result.

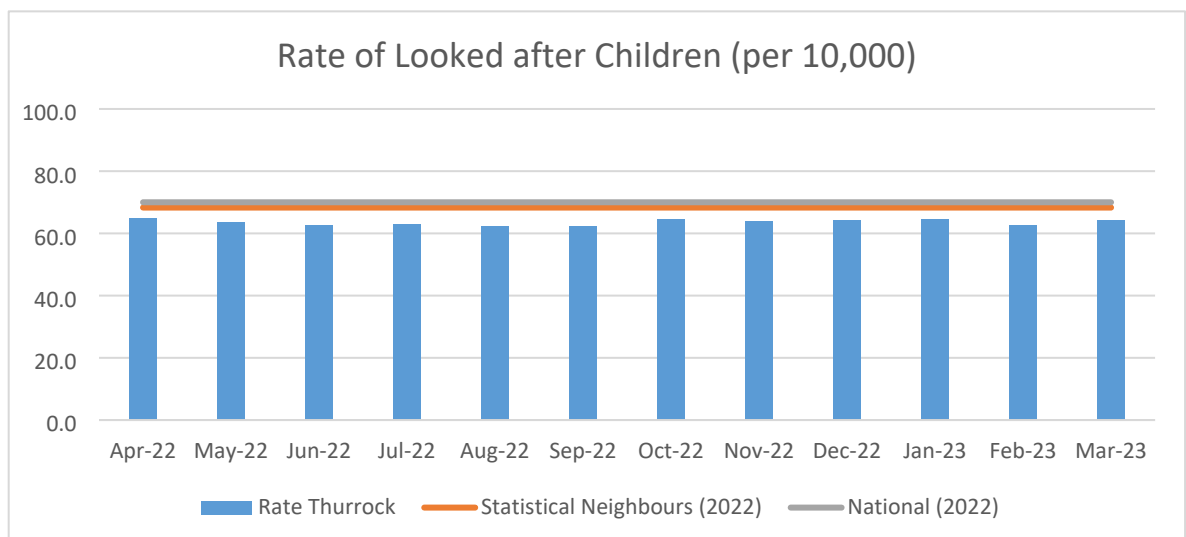
When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since April 2022.



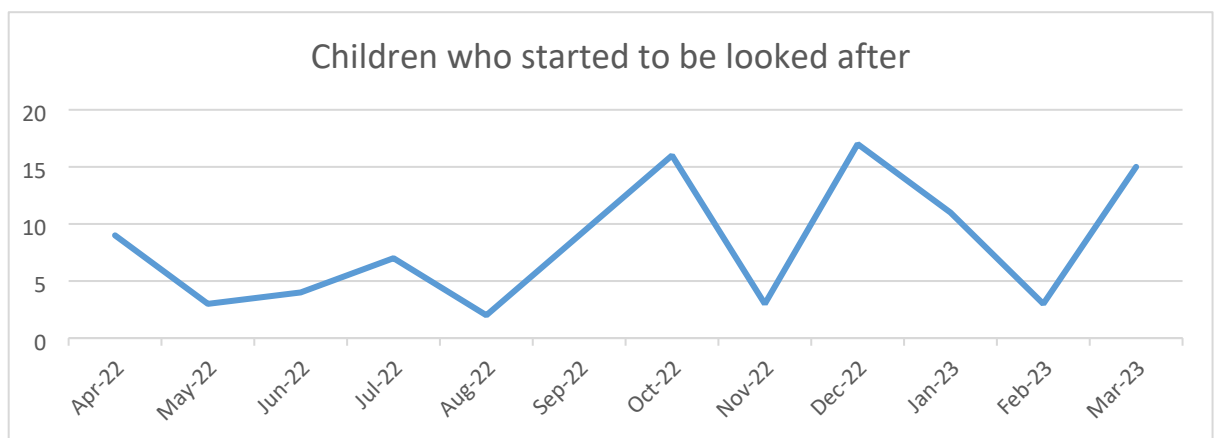
### 3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

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 March 2023 there were 292 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64.3 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68.3 and England average of 70 as at the end of March 2023. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children are coming into care and working with families to keep children within their family network/home where it is safe to do so. These lower looked after children's numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC because of the national threshold rising.

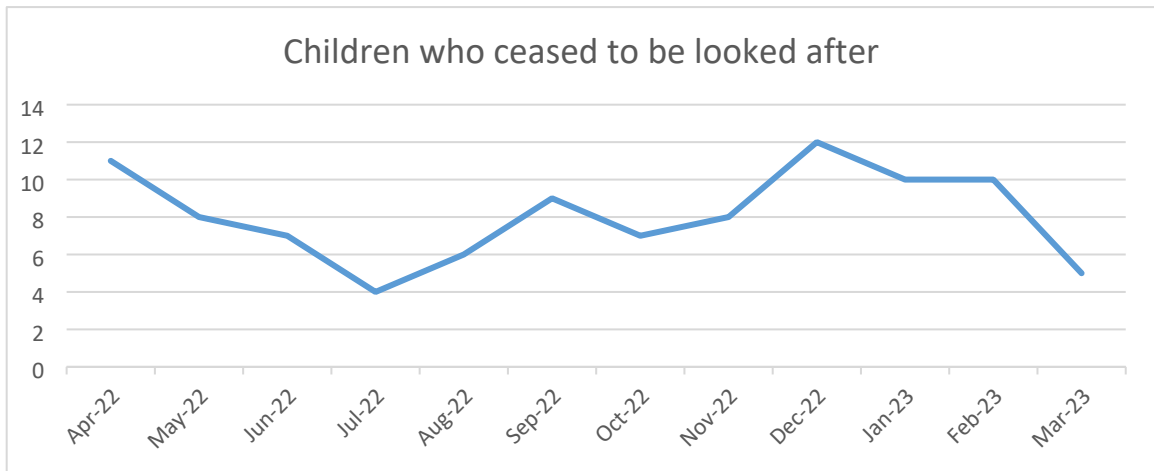


### 3.4 Children Looked After episodes ceased and started

It is normal for the number of children starting and leaving care to fluctuate.



Between April 2022 and March 2023, 97 children ceased to be looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22.:



The most common reasons for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents and those turning 18.

There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock:

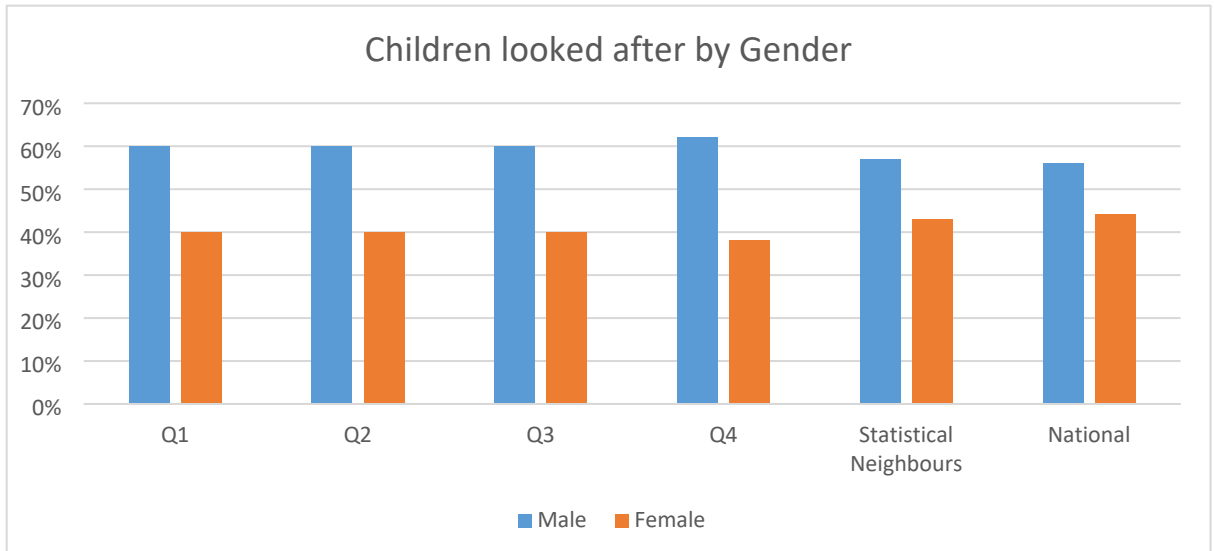
- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below charts show entries in and exits out of care over the last few years including the changing trajectory of the UASC population in line with the rise from 0.07% to 0.1%.

|  | 2018-19       | 2019-20      | 2020-21    | 2021-22      | Q4 2022-23<br>(Jan - Mar) |
|--|---------------|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Total number Entering Care                                       | 203           | 242          | 150        | 121          | 29                        |
| UASC entering Care   | 91            | 75           | 36         | 38           | 12                        |
| Exiting Care   | 211           | 235          | 148        | 122          | 25                        |
| Number of CLA at end of reporting period                         | 290           | 298          | 298        | 295          | 292                       |
| UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population) | 31<br>(10.6%) | 23<br>(7.7%) | 24<br>(8%) | 28<br>(9.4%) | 39<br>(13%)               |

### 3.6 Children Looked After by Gender

Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as of March 2023 which is likely a reflection of our percentage of UASC who are predominately males.

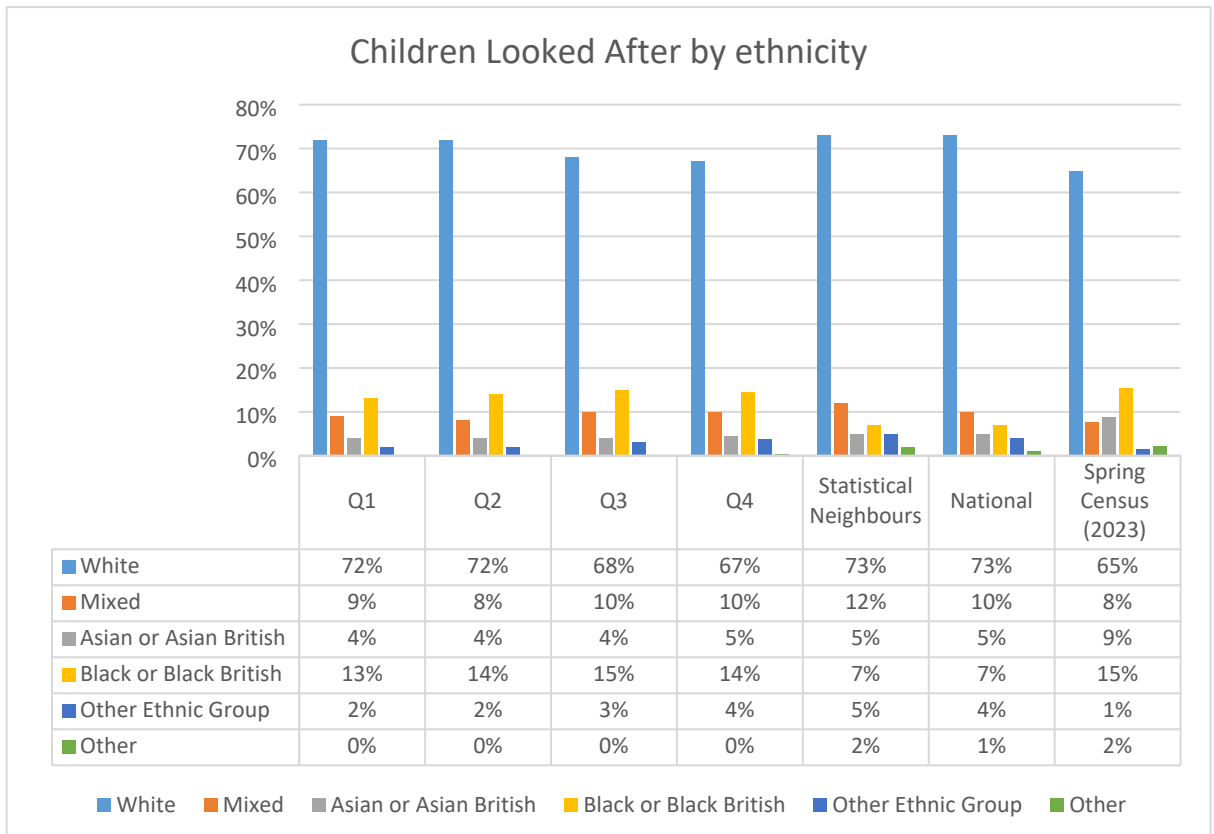


### 3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

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

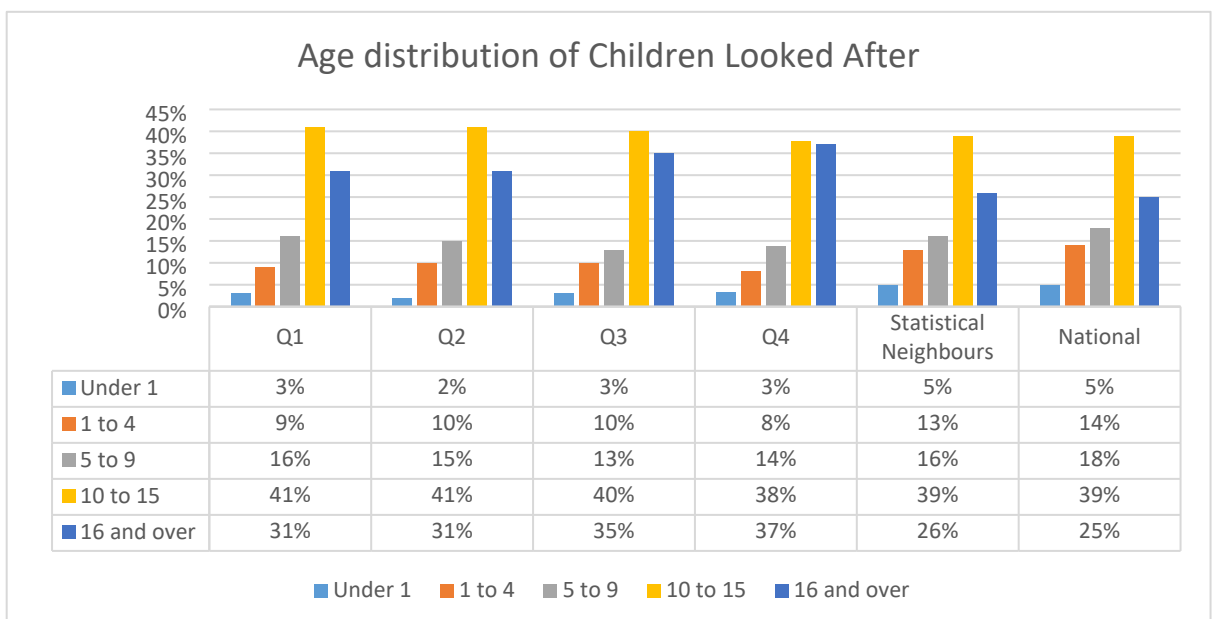
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2023 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.





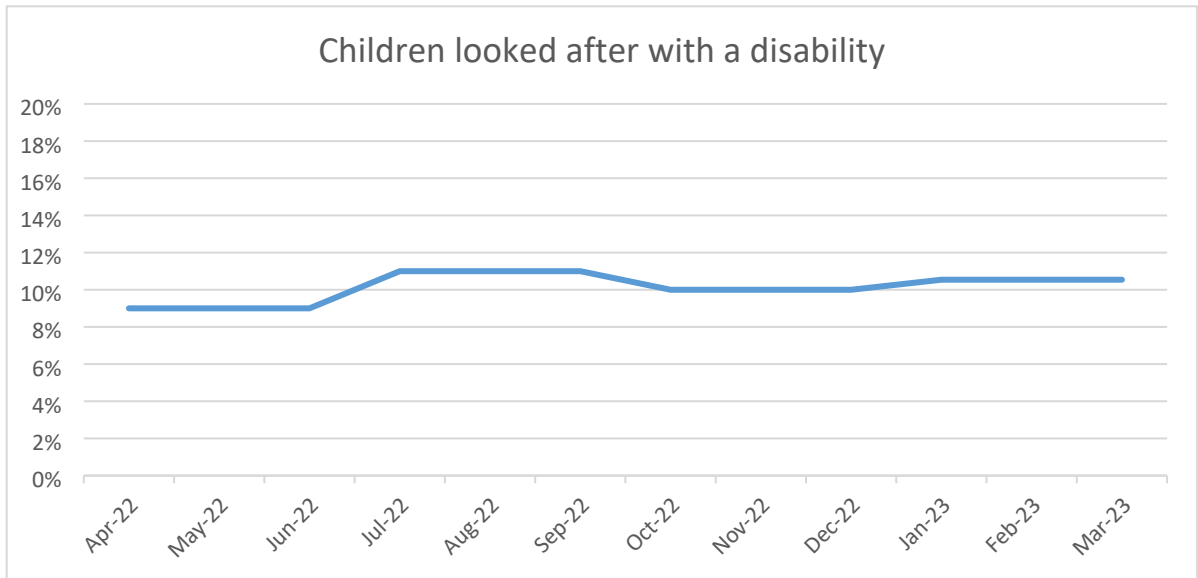
### 3.8 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2022, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. However, since April 2022, we have seen a 6% increase in the number of 16+ years. When comparing the 16+ with SN and England, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 26% and the England average of 25% as at the end of Q4 2022-23.



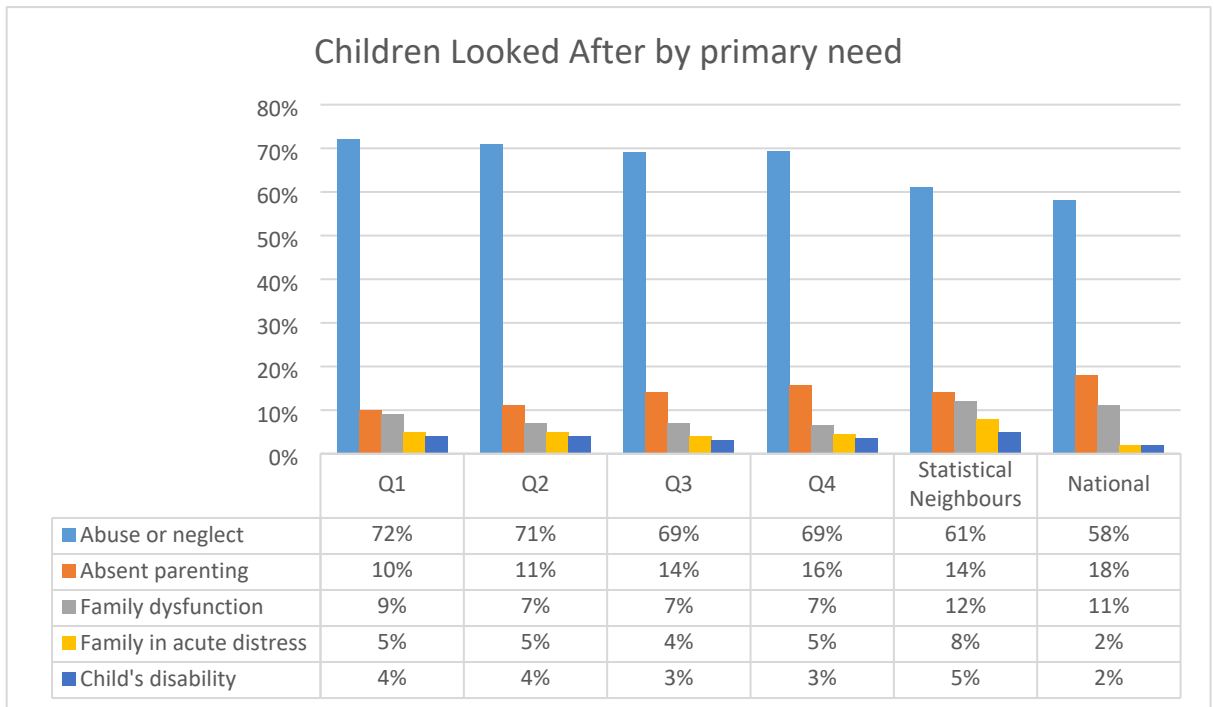
### 3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2022. At the end of March 2023, 31 (11%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 21 of these children were boys aged 5 and over and 7 girls aged 13 and over. 22 of 31 disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.



### 3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children become Looked After because of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care provide support and intervention to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when necessary.



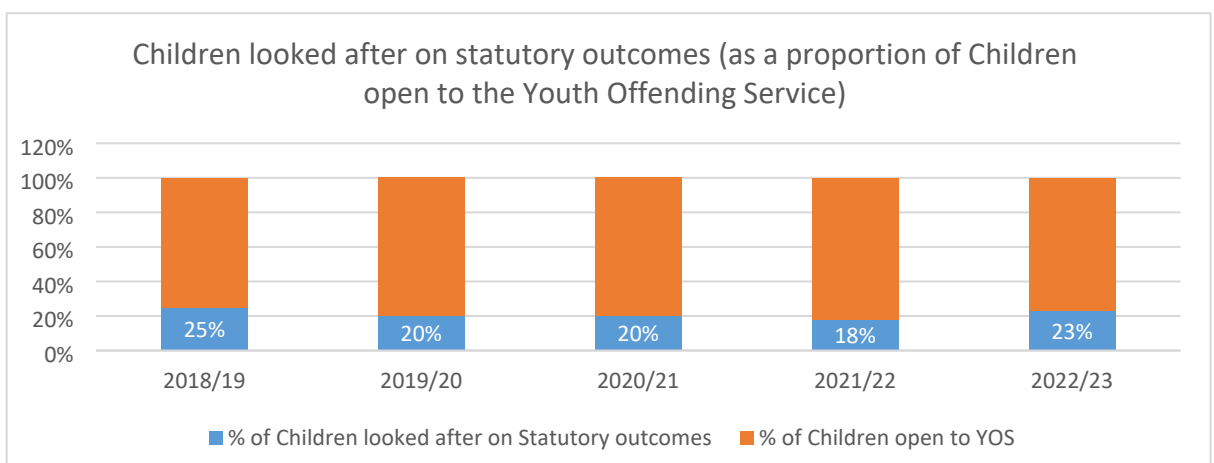
#### 4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

##### 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.

For the 2022-23 financial year there were 43 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 10 of these were looked after children. The 10 looked after children represented 23% of the young people open to YOS.

The number of Children Looked After over the last five years has been relatively static at around 20%.



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. There has been a slight increase since the last financial year but overall, the figure has remained relatively static.

#### **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.

5 children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the 2022-23 financial year.

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

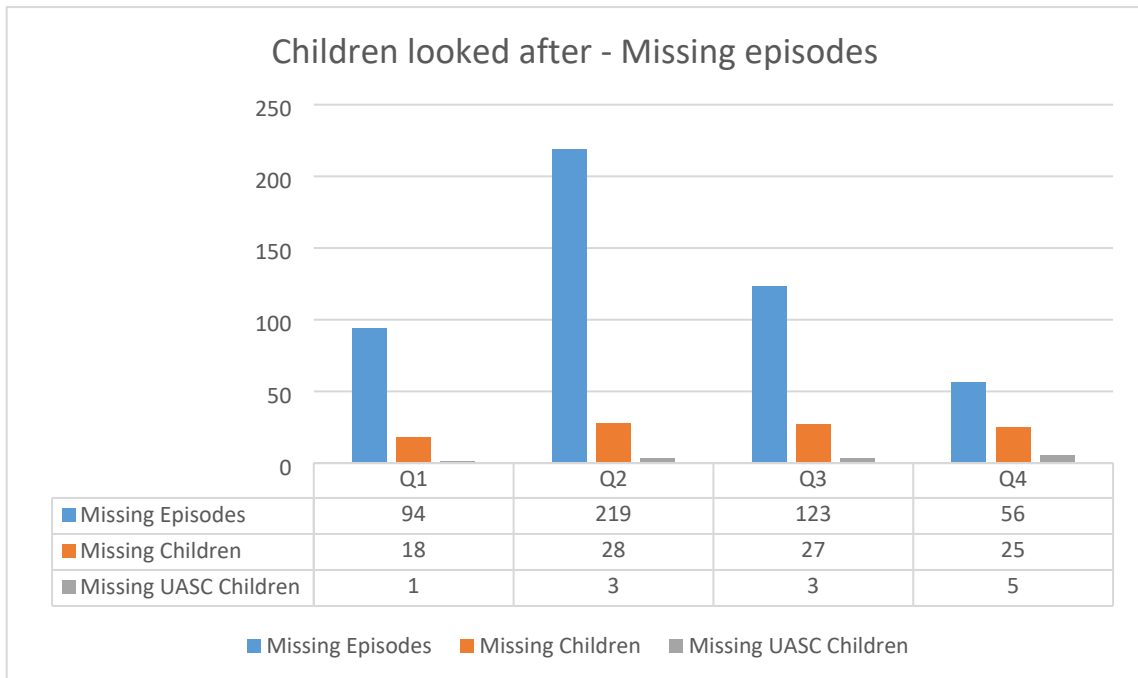
During the 2022/23 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 47 offences relating to 47 Thurrock children, of which 3 children had looked after status.

Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol<sup>1</sup> aimed at reducing 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.

### **5. Children Looked After 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 2022 and March 2023. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were total of 492 missing episodes which represented 50 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there was a total of 566 episodes.



### 5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

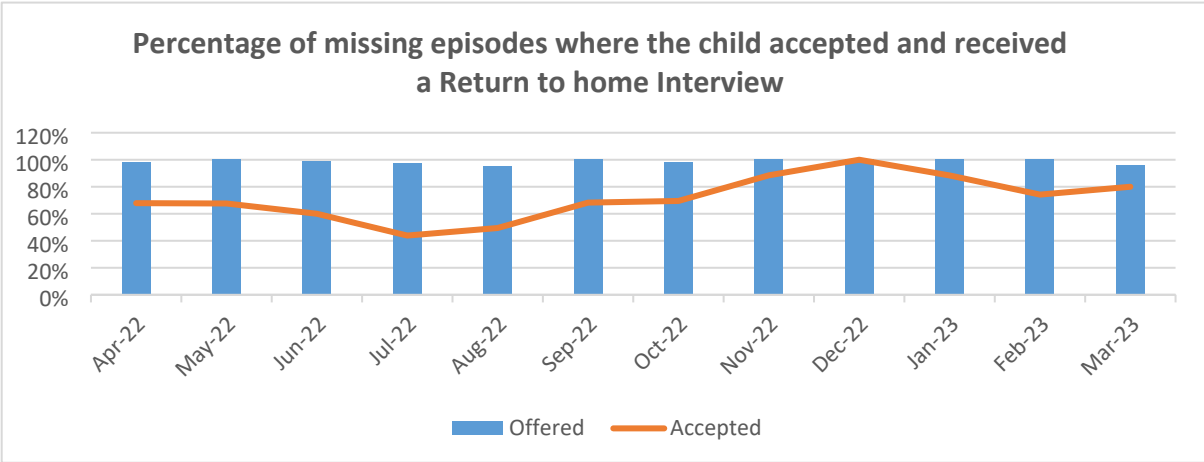
Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person’s circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will also 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.

As at the end of March 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 96% of which 80% accepted and received an interview compared to 53.1% in March 2022. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but ‘out’. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Missing Children Panel.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since April 2022 and shows an improved picture of children accepting and receiving a RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including their social worker and how this information is captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young

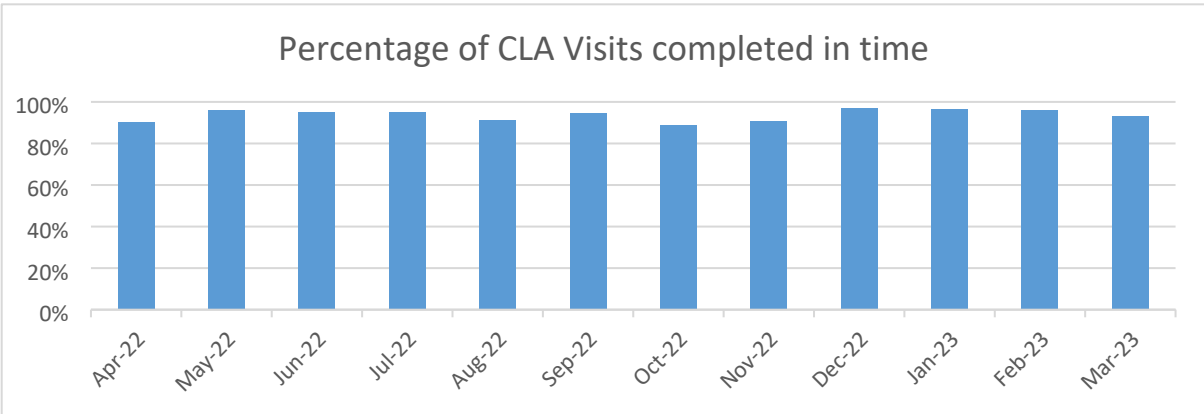
people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.

The Return Home Interview service is now being delivered and managed by the service from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2023. Bringing this ‘in house’ will enable the children to have consistency of support and build relationships with the workers to improve safety planning and reduce missing episodes.



**5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After 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 with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. The average visits completed in time between April 2022 and March 2023 was 94% compared to 91% in 2021/22 representing a 3% increase and visits in the last 12 months have consistently shown performance over 90% in time.



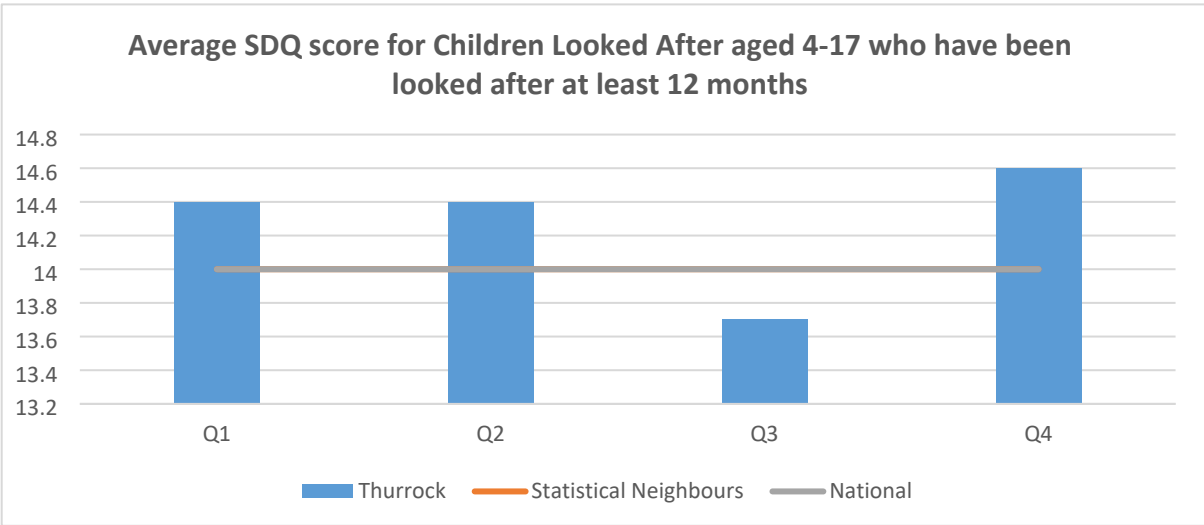
**5.3 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**

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 4-17 who have continuously been looked after for at least 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.

The average scores are 14.6 which is in line with Statistical Neighbour and Nationally. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



**6. Adoption**

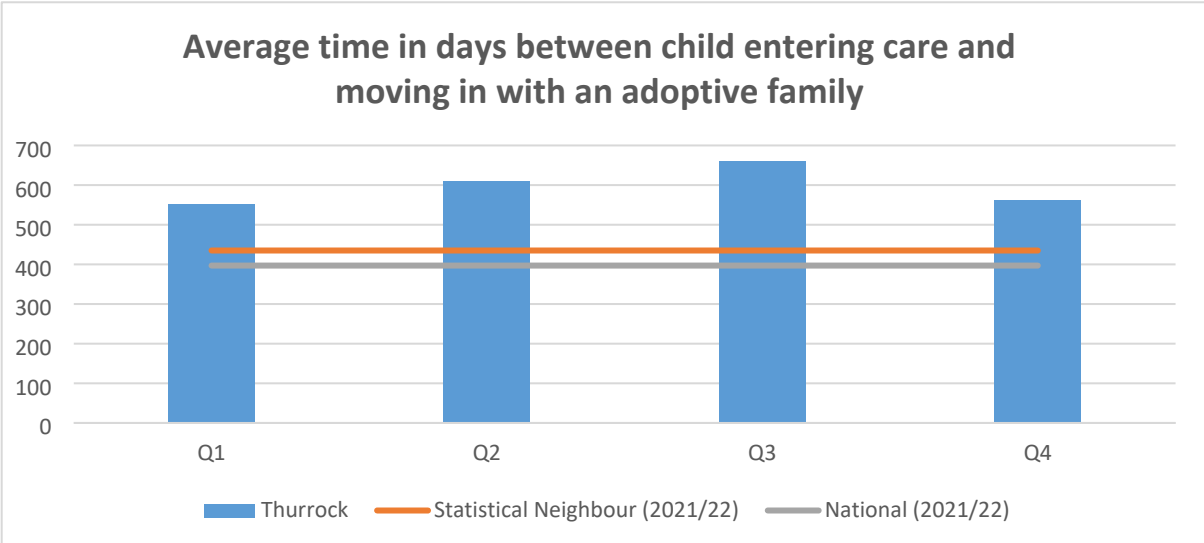
From 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, there were 14 children adopted and 14 children were matched with prospective adopters. The service continues to recruit sufficient adopters to meet the regional need as is a net contributor to our Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt East. The number of children adopted is higher than last financial year which reflects the local need in 2022/23 and the conclusion of some long-standing proceedings.

**6.1 Timeliness of Adoption**

Proceedings in the local court remain over the 26-week target and judicial capacity is limited. The average duration of care proceedings nationally is 46 weeks. This means that care proceeding take longer than they should due to court capacity Other factors such as family members putting themselves forward later or the requirement for further assessments can impact the length of proceedings. The President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline process in January 2023 with a view to reducing the length of proceedings towards the 26 weeks statutory time limit. In terms of our local

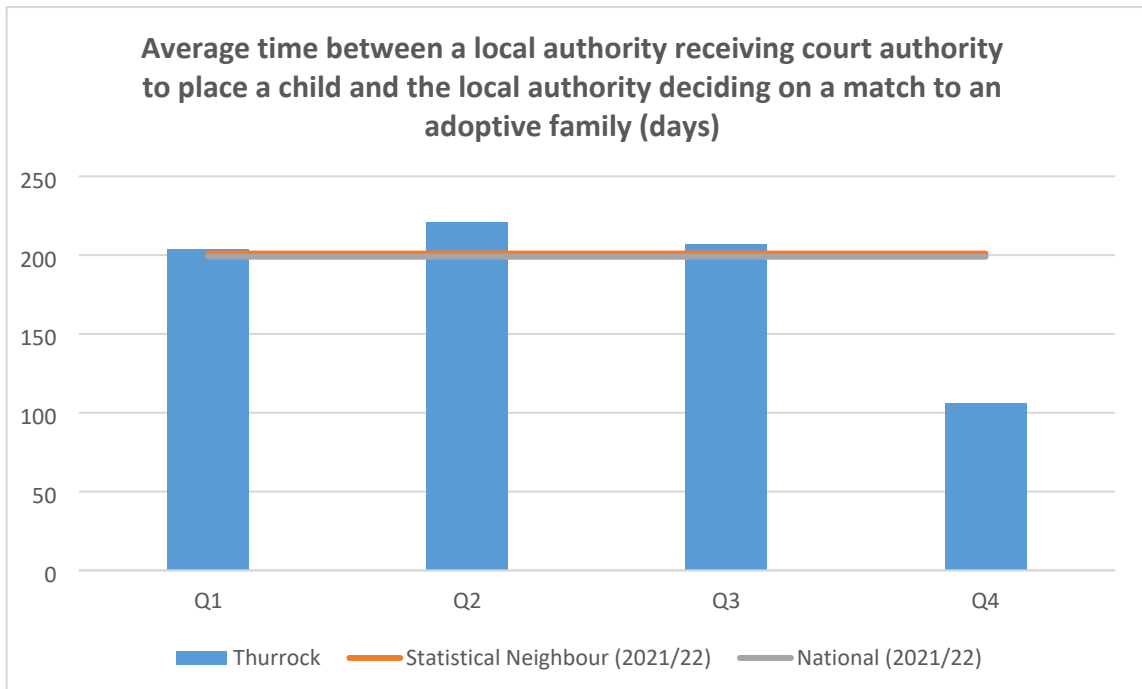
court, direct work with the lead family judge has provided a prioritisation pathway and an additional Judge has been recruited.

The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12-month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of Q4 2022-23, Thurrock's average was 560 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 397 days and above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, England average of 397 and Eastern Region of 459 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a very small number of children experiencing a delay can impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability, and family members being identified late. It is anticipated hearing capacity at the local court will be improved due to a new judicial appointment.



As at end of Q4 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 106 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 188 days and the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days.





This has been an area of focus and performance has improved with the timeliness target exceeded.

## 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. Securing 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.

Of the total CLA cohort of 292 as at the end of Q4 2022-23, 14% (42) children were aged 0-5. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers.

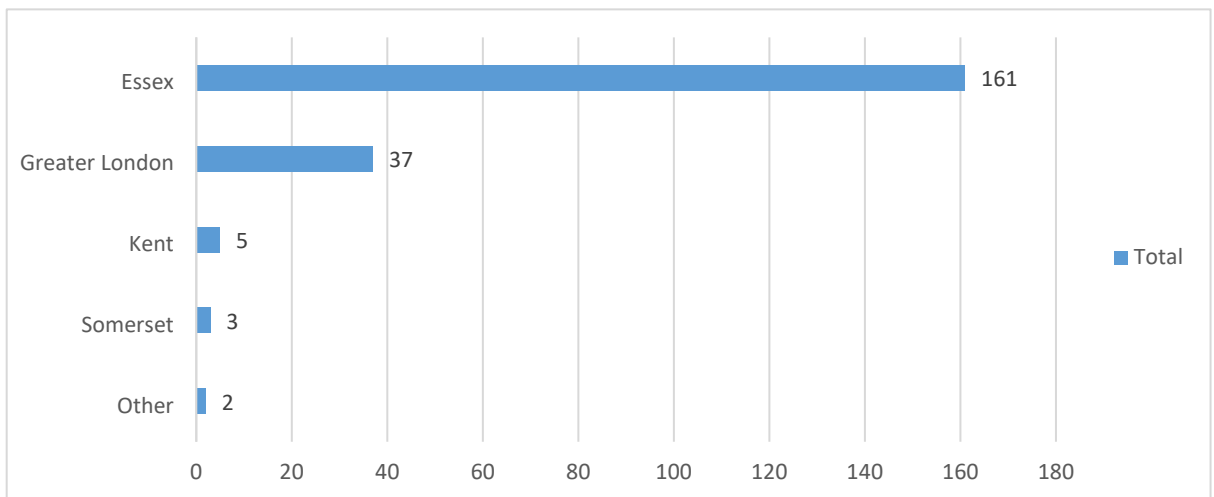
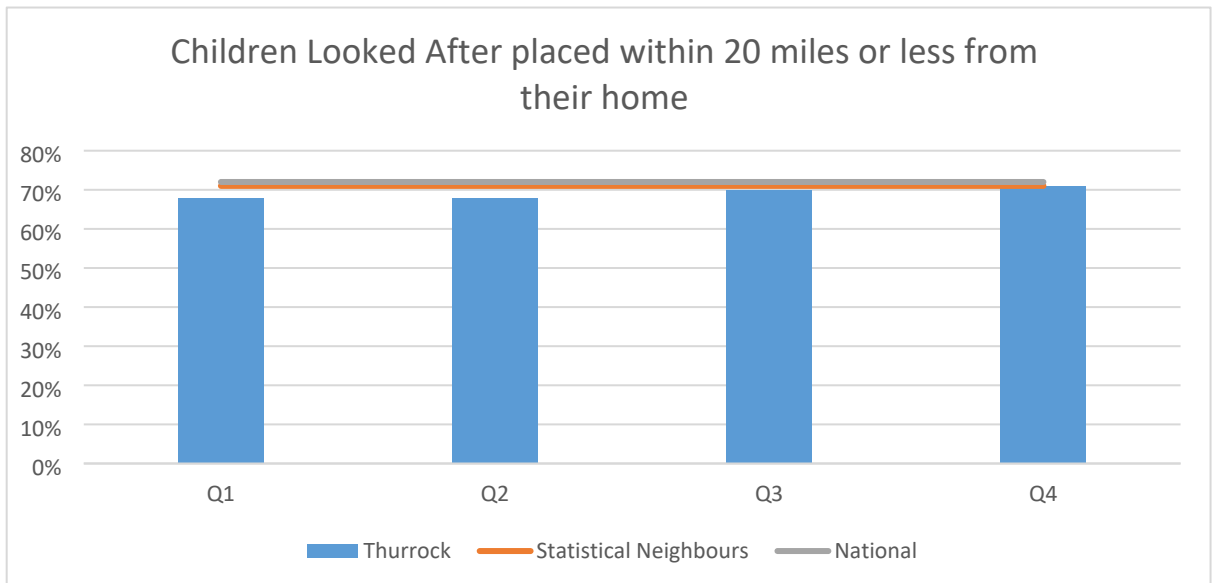
## 6.3 Children Looked After placement distance

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989. Placements out of area must be approved by the nominated person and placements 'at a distance' must be agreed by the Director of Children's Services.

At the end of March 2023 71% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 208 out of 292 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, Thurrock reflects performance close with the national average of 74%.

Thurrock is performing just slightly better than its statistical neighbours which is positive in maintaining children close to home. It is recognised that maintaining

children in their schools and communities is a priority for young people and for the Council. We continue to push for local placements for children,



## 7.0 Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year), and Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. Local authorities have a legislative duty to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers from the age of 16-21 and up until the age of 25 if required.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>1</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.

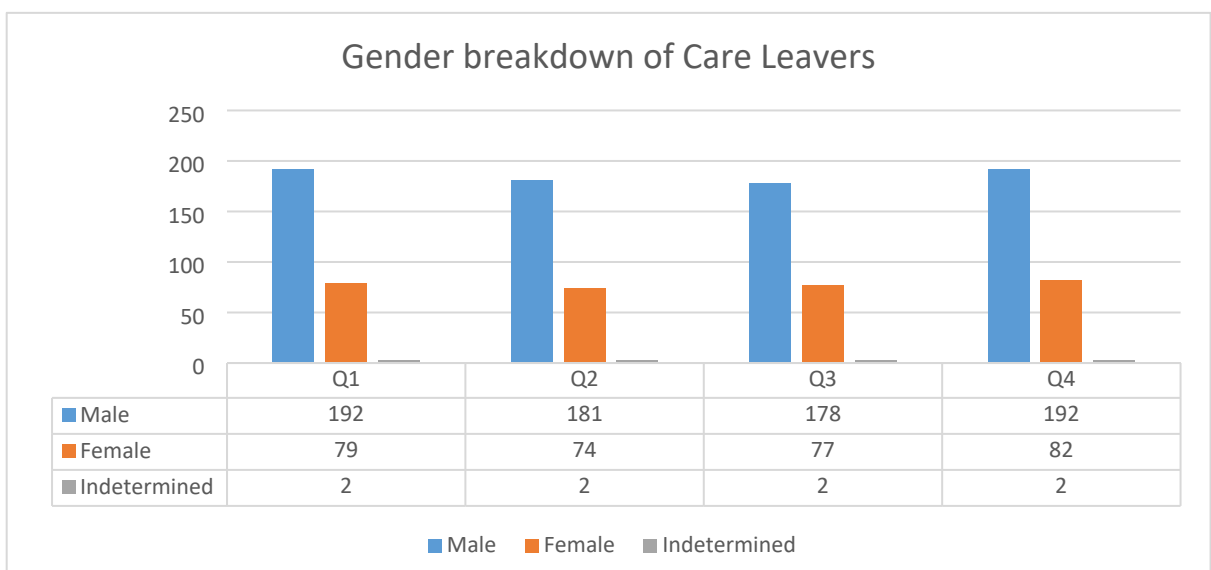
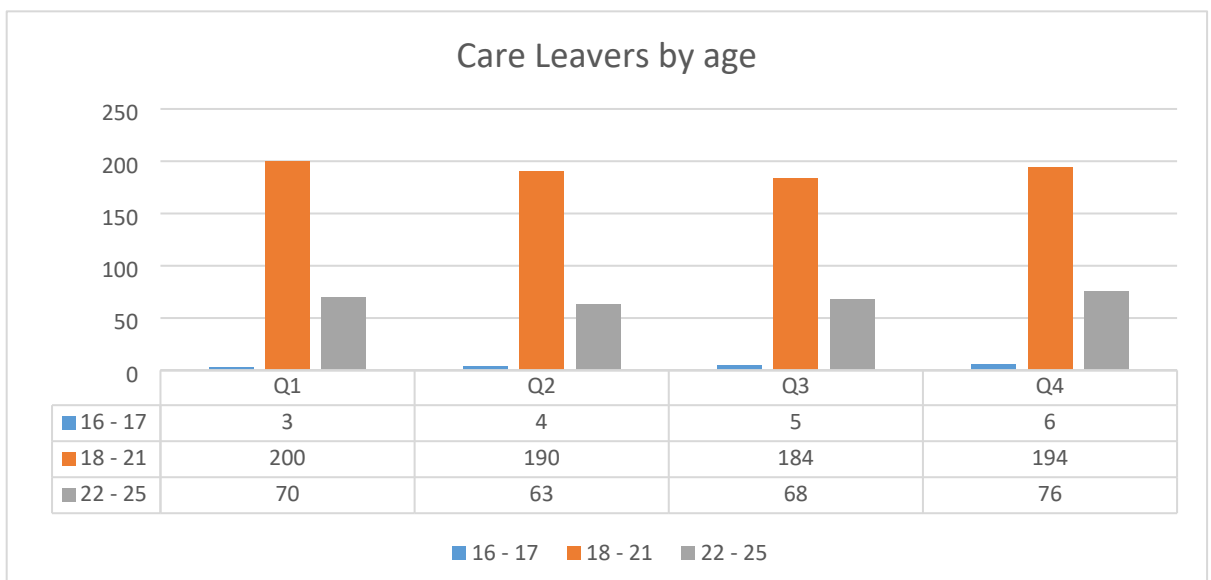
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

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.

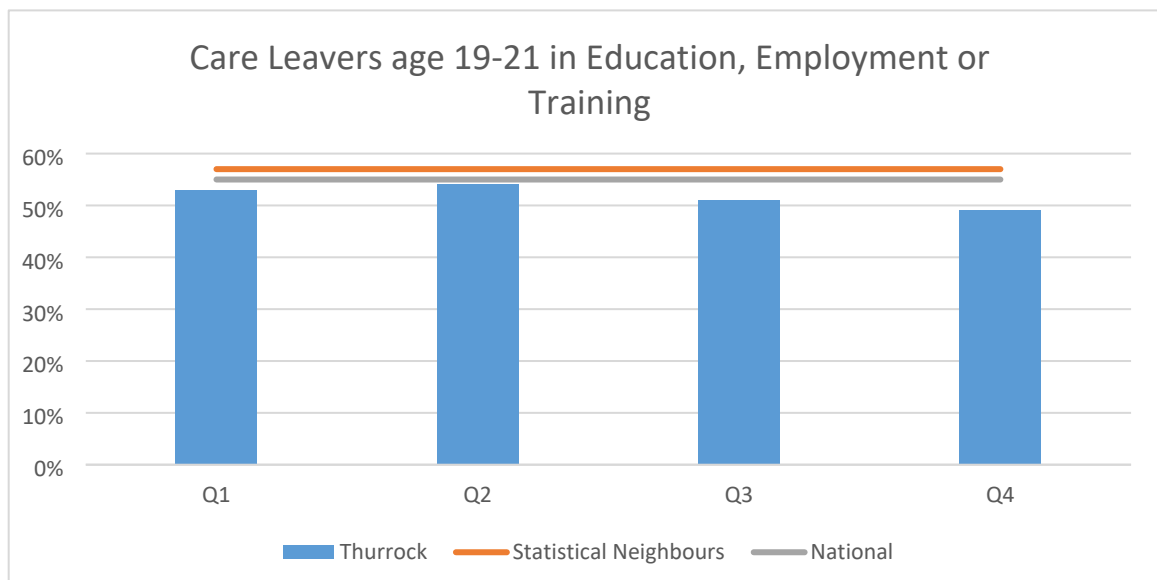
As at end of March 2023, 276 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service.

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



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

At the end of Q4 2022-23, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 52% in the same period in 2021/22 which is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. 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.

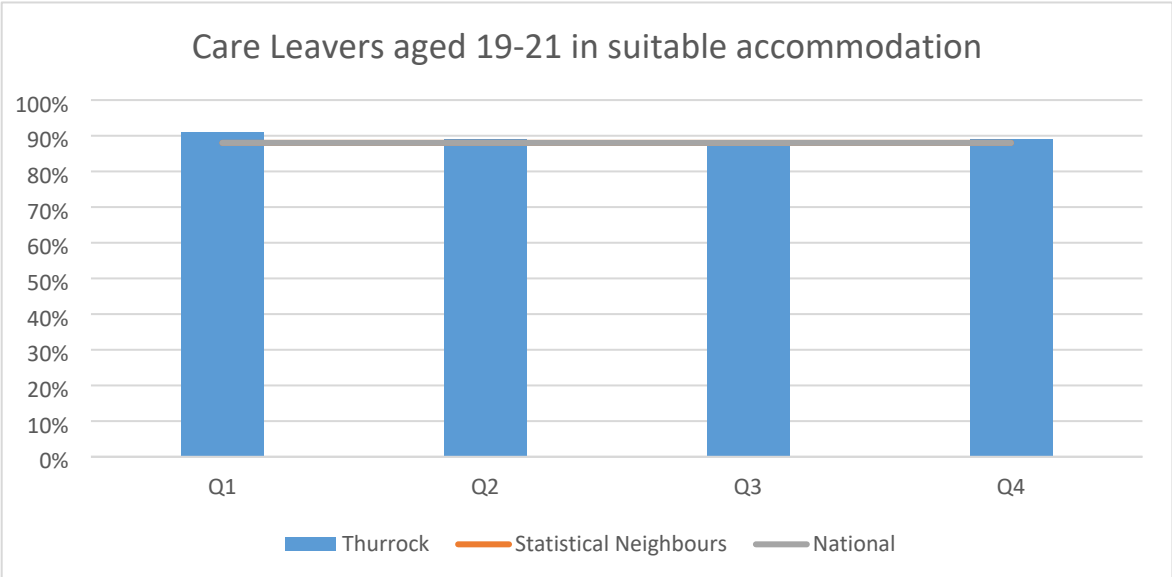


EET numbers are impacted by local economic factors and Thurrock has a higher proportion of care experienced young people who are unable to work as the result of their immigration status. Home Office decisions are delayed impacting our performance and the experience of our young people.

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

Q4 2022-23 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 89%. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 88% based on 2022 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

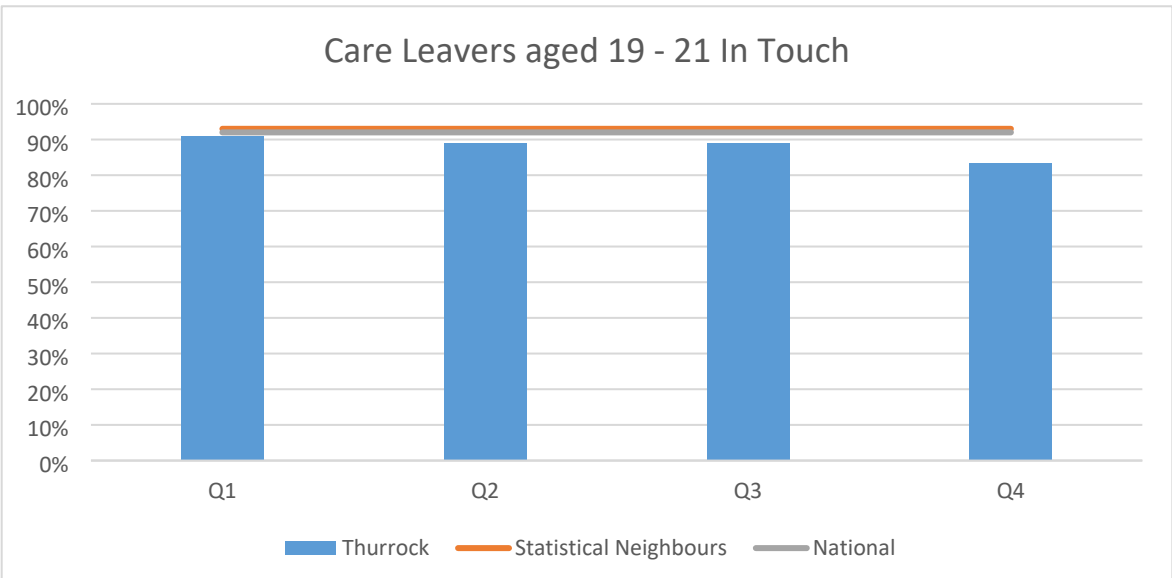
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2022, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to 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 Q4 2022-23, Thurrock was in touch with 83% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2021-22 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



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

8.1 Not applicable

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

9.1 None

**10. Implications**

**10.1 Financial**

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

No implications

**10.2 Legal**

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

No implications identified.

**10.3 Diversity & Equality**

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

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.

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

Not applicable

- 11. 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

- 12. Appendices to the report**

None

**Report Author:**

Daniel Jones, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, Youth Offending Service and Prevention, Children and Family Services

Marc Rhodes, Business Intelligence & Data Analytics Manager (PQBI)

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|   |  |                |
|---|--|----------------|
| <b>18 July 2023</b>   |  | <b>ITEM: 6</b> |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  |  |                |
| <b>Adoption Statement of Purpose</b>  |  |                |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All   | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Non-key decision |                |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Sally Medbury – Team Manager Adoption Service<br>Liz Shields – Service Manager           |  |                |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – 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 is to update members of the Committee on Thurrock Council’s Adoption Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually. The Adoption Statement of purpose is required by the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 18<sup>1</sup>. Key aspects of standard 18 are:

- 18.1. The adoption agency and adoption support agency has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by staff, volunteers, children, birth parents and guardians, prospective adopters and adopters, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance.
- 18.2. The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be outcome focussed and, for adoption agencies, show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

Thurrock is a registered Adoption Agency and in line with national expectations, delivers Adoption Services as part of a regional arrangement. Thurrock is a member of ‘Adopt East’ which is an alliance of local authorities and charitable adoption agencies. The Statement of Purpose reflects this

Members are invited to review the Adoption Statement of Purpose against the requirements of the National Minimum Standard 18.

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## **1. Recommendation**

### **1.1 That the Members of the Committee review 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 Services (England) Regulations 2003. The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole and how this impacts children and their families. As such it forms the basis for all the other policies relating to Adoption.

2.2 The adoption Statement of Purpose has a shared framework with the other adoption agencies in Adopt East. Adopt East is a regional adoption alliance which brings together the professionalism, skills and expertise of eight local authorities and two voluntary adoption agencies from across the East of England. The local authorities are Suffolk, Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Norfolk, Hertfordshire, Bedford and Luton. In addition, there are two voluntary agency partners, Adoption Plus and Barnardo's, and the charity Adoption UK. The scale of our alliance means that our adopters have access to a large number of children waiting for adoption. By working collaboratively, we are able to share best practice. This means avoiding any unnecessary delay in the making of your new family and ensuring support is central. Offering a wealth of specialist skills alongside a friendly and respectful approach, Adopt East ensures that our families receive the best service and the right support, at whatever stage of their adoption journey.

2.3 The Adoption Statement of Purpose is a publicly facing document and gives an overview of the service offered, their purpose and structure. All members of the service should work according to the Statement of Purpose and the policies it supports.

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

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

3.1 Thurrock's Adoption statement of purpose 2023-2024 is attached.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 The Thurrock Adoption Statement of Purpose is a key document that is required under the National Minimum Standards. Members are invited to review and provide comment on this.

**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 to the report.

**7.2 Legal**

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

The Local Authority is required by the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 as amended in 2005 to have a statement of purpose. The Statement of Purpose covers the information that is required by the regulations.

**7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee,**  
**Community Development and Equalities,**  
**Adults, Housing and Health**

The Adoption Service is committed to practice which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion, 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 be inclusive.

**7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and 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 Adoption Statement of Purpose

**Report Author:**

Sally Medbury – Team Manager Adoption

Liz Shields – Service Manager

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>TITLE:</b>                   | <b>Adopt East, Thurrock Council, Adoption Agency<br/>Statement of Purpose</b> |
| <b>DATE:</b>                    | <b>May 2023</b>   |
| <b>AUTHOR:</b>                  | <b>Daniel Jones<br/>Strategic Lead<br/>Children looked After</b>              |
| <b>APPROVED:</b>                | <b>Ruth Murdock<br/>Strategic Lead Quality Assurance and Reviewing</b>        |
| <b>DATE OF NEXT<br/>REVIEW:</b> | <b>May 2024</b>   |
| <b>VERSION:</b>                 | <b>V3</b>   |
| <b>Modified:</b>                |   |

**THURROCK COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE**

In Alliance with



**Adopt East  
Thurrock Council  
Adoption Agency  
Statement of Purpose**

**2023-2024**

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# 1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the principles, values and aims and objectives of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency. It contains information about the service, how it is monitored and operates to benefit children.

Our overarching aim is to provide secure and loving homes to children in need of permanence via adoption and to support those children and their families as long as is needed. We offer child-led and adopter friendly services by an experienced and motivated professional team.

Thurrock Council Adoption Service is a registered Adoption Agency and is subject to the Adoption Agency Regulations (AAR) 2005 and subsequent amendments (2012). Thurrock Council Adoption Agency is part of the Adopt East Alliance. Thurrock Council Adoption Agency is also referred to as Adopt East Thurrock, evidencing to the adoption community that they are part of Adopt East operating in the Thurrock Local Authority area. However, the registered name of the agency remains Thurrock Council Adoption Agency.

The Statement of Purpose provides information for children and young people, birth relatives, prospective and approved adopters, elected members, adoption panel members' staff, members of the public and other stakeholders.

# 2. Legal Context

The Adoption Service complies with all relevant legislation:

- The Children Act 1989
- Standard 18 of the Adoption Minimum Standards 2011 (Care Standards Act 2000)
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003
- The Inter-Country Adoption (Hague Convention) Regulations 2003
- The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- The Adoption and Children (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005
- The Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Adoption Agencies (Panel and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2012.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- National Minimum Standards (Adoption Services) 2014
- The Statutory Adoption Guidance amended 2014
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 amended by Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016

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



### 3. Aims and Objectives

The Adoption Act 2002 promotes adoption as a permanence option for Children in Care. The Act places the needs and welfare of the child at the centre of the adoption process, with the welfare of the child being the paramount consideration for a court or adoption agency in all decisions relating to their adoption.

Adopt East Thurrock supports the ethos that children and young people are best able to develop close and enduring relationships within a family setting. Adopt East Thurrock aims to ensure that all children whom they place within adoptive families will experience stability, security and quality of care throughout their childhood and into their adulthood.

Where children from Thurrock Local Authority are unable to live within their birth family and a plan for adoption is agreed, the Adoption Agency aims to identify an adoptive family who will promote the child's wellbeing through the provision of the highest possible standards of care in line with their individual assessed needs.

The objectives of Adopt East Thurrock are to:

- Meet the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, associated standards, regulations and guidance
- Ensure the needs, wishes, welfare and safety of the child are at the centre of the adoption process as outlined in the Welfare Checklist (Adoption and Children Act 2002: s1)
- Support the process of timely decision making for children in relation to permanence options including the use of Early Permanence Placements
- Promote best practice in adoption through the provision of advice and support children's social work colleagues with the care planning process
- Undertake high quality marketing, recruitment and assessment of prospective adopters able to meet the diverse needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Ensure that recruitment of prospective adopters is targeted to meet the diverse needs of children with a plan for adoption
- Offer timely information and advice to members of the public enquiring about adoption
- Ensure the assessment and preparation of adoptive families is comprehensive and robust in order that adopters are aware of and prepared to meet the needs of children for whom adoption is the plan
- Provide child centred, needs led matching, transition and placement processes for children
- Provide a comprehensive adoption support service for adopted children and young people and their parents, adopted adults and birth family members
- Support the provision of other permanent placements such as Special Guardianship
- Recognise that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore offer them the individual support and care that they need
- Ensure all staff involved in adoption have the appropriate level of skill, knowledge and experience to deliver an effective service

- Regularly review and evaluate to ensure services delivered are of the highest possible standard, are compliant with the Adoption National Minimum Standards and associated legislation, and continue to meet the needs of the children and families in receipt of our services.

## 4. Values and Vision

Thurrock Children's Services has a vision that Thurrock is a place where people of all ages, particularly the most vulnerable, are able to lead happy, independent lives and fulfil their potential. With this in mind, Adopt East Thurrock aims to provide services that meet the individual needs of Children in Care for whom adoption is the plan as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing process. This will include the identification and provision of wraparound support, education and health provision, and additional therapeutic intervention, in order to enable children to reach their full potential.

The values which underpin the work of the service as an adoption agency are outlined in the Adoption Minimum Standards 2014 which aim to ensure the following:

- The service is anti-discriminatory and anyone accessing the service is treated with courtesy, respect and dignity.
- All enquiries to the service are managed in a timely and efficient manner.
- Adopt East Thurrock will work in partnership with other Adopt East partners, Regional Adoption Agencies, Local Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to promote positive outcomes for children.
- In recognition of the lifelong implications of adoption, the service will ensure that appropriate support services are available to all those whose lives are impacted by adoption, i.e. children and young people, adopters, adopted adults and birth family members.
- All those accessing services from Adopt East Thurrock will be made aware of how to comment or complain about the service they receive and have access to external complaints mechanisms as required by legislation, regulation and guidance.
- The service recognises that all children and young people are unique individuals and therefore will offer them the individual support and care they need.

## 5. Management and Organisational Structure

Governance responsibility for Thurrock Council Adoption Agency rests with the elected members. The Adoption Agency forms part of Thurrock Children's Services directorate. The Directorate is headed by the Director of Children's Services, Shelia Murphy. The structure chart below shows the structure of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency.

Janet Simon, Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, 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's qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma Social Work and she is registered with Social Work England. Janet has worked in management roles since 2006.

The Strategic Lead responsible for adoption services is Dan Jones. Dan is also the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

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

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

The post of Service Manager responsible for the Adoption Service is Elizabeth Shields.

Liz is a qualified and registered Social Worker, having gained a MA in social work from the University of Manchester in 2007. In addition, Liz holds a Bachelor of Arts degree as well as Post Qualifying Social Work Levels 1-3 from Royal Holloway University and a Practice Educator Qualification from Brunel University. Liz has worked for CAF/CASS and then in numerous social work teams within Local Authorities, working primarily with Looked After Children, in court teams and undertaking fostering and connected persons assessments and post order work. Liz joined Thurrock on a permanent basis in January 2023.

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

Alongside the governance structure of Thurrock Council Adoption Agency, Adopt East – Thurrock also has a governance structure in place as part of the Adopt East Alliance. Through a formal collaboration agreement, Thurrock Council forms part of the Adopt East Alliance.

The Alliance has a governance structure by way of three management boards:

- Directors for Children Services Board
- Senior Leadership Board
- Regional Practice Board

## 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 Authorities 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.

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 areas where necessary. Staff members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage and are able to promote equality and diversity.

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

All Social Work qualified staff are registered with Social Work England.

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.

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

Social workers are supported in their roles by administrative/specialist staff providing dedicated support in the following areas:

- Letterbox Contact exchange
- Tracking Stage 1 and Stage 2, adoption enquiry and assessment processes
- Management information and tracking
- Processing of ASF administration
- Processing post order allowances
- Supporting with the recruitment of prospective adopters

The role of the Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is undertaken by the Adoption Manager who often delegates elements of this role to Senior Practitioners.

The service has Fostering and Adoption Panels which meet fortnightly. One Adoption Panel Advisor and administrator coordinate panel activity, including the quality assurance of reports presented to Panel, maintenance of the Panel member central list and scheduling panels to meet the needs of the service in respect of adopter approvals and matches.

# Adopt East – Thurrock Council Adoption Agency

**Dr Dave Smith** - Chief Executive

**Shelia Murphy** – Executive Director for Children’s Services

**Janet Simon** – Assistant Director of Children’s Services

**Dan Jones** – Strategic Lead for CLA

Ex Head of  
Adopt East

**Elizabeth Shields** – Fostering, Adoption, Placements and CWD Service Manager

**Andra Marc** - Adoption Panel Advisor

**2 FTE** – Fostering and Adoption Recruitment  
Officers

**Peter Turner** - Independent Adoption Panel Chair

**Sally Medbury** –  
Adoption Team  
Manager

**1 FTE Business  
Support**

**5 FTE Senior  
Practitioners**

**1 FTE Social Worker**

**2 FTE Life Story  
Workers /  
Letterbox  
Co-ordinators**

**1 FTE Financial  
Assessment  
Officer**

## 6. Services Provided by Adopt East Thurrock

The Adoption Teams deliver services that enhance the recruitment, assessment and training of adopters, the speedy and safe placement of children and appropriate follow-on support. Adopt East Thurrock recognise the lifelong implications of adoption for children, adopters and birth family members and undertakes to provide support throughout the adoption life cycle, including services for adopted adults wishing to access their birth records.

Adopt East as a whole recruit, assess and approve a range of adoptive families in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of Adopt East children for whom adoption is the plan including children with harder to place characteristics and sibling groups. Adopters are not limited to providing a family for Adopt East children but are also encouraged to look nationally for a child/children.

The service undertakes Family Finding activity for Thurrock Local Authority children to ensure early permanence planning for children where adoption is a primary or parallel plan is given appropriate priority. The service is responsible for the identification of matching requirements for children to ensure a match with the most appropriate adoptive family is achieved in a timely manner.

Adoption support services are provided for adopted children and young people, adoptive families, adopted adults and birth family members, recognising the life long journey for all parties as follows:

- Counselling, information and support for birth parents whose children have a plan of adoption.
- Counselling for adopted adults in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Those wanting intermediary service to track birth relatives are signposted to appropriate independent agencies.
- Assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order and when appropriate will make applications to the Adoption Support Fund to support the provision of therapeutic services for adopted children and their families.
- Comprehensive adoption support for those affected by adoption in line with the Adoption Support Services Regulations, both prior to and after an Adoption Order has been made. This will include adoptive families unknown to the Agency who reside in the borough and request adoption support assessments three years after their Adoption Order was granted. Likewise, the team provides adoption support to adoptive families who have placements of Thurrock children but live outside of our area for a period of three years after the granting of the Adoption Order.

## **7. Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment and Support to Prospective Adopters**

The following is a summary of Adopt East Thurrock procedure for the recruitment, preparation, assessment and support of prospective adopters.

### **Enquiries**

The Adoption Agency provides a duty service to respond to enquiries from prospective adopters. Prospective adopters contacting the service are provided with written information about adoption within five working days.

Once an initial enquiry has been completed, prospective adopters will be invited to an Adoption Information Meeting which are delivered virtually on a bi-monthly basis. At the events, enquirers will be provided with 'real time' data about the numbers of children waiting, their age groups, and if they are to be placed as siblings across Adopt East.

Following the information meeting, a social worker will contact the participants for an adopter-led discussion, to enable social workers to get to know participants better and to help them make decisions about their readiness.

Should the enquirer decide to proceed to the next stage of the process, they will be sent a Registration of Interest form and once completed and returned, the Business Support Assistant will process statutory checks and references. They will also be advised of the next steps to being Stage One.

### **Stage One Assessment**

Once the Registration of Interest is returned, the enquirer will be given further information about Stage One of the assessment process, including: the Stage One Agreement form, information about statutory checks and Preparation Training.

Every effort is made to complete the work of Stage One within two months, unless there are clear reasons why it needs to take longer, for example when a statutory check is delayed.

Stage One of the process is 'adopter-led'. Prospective adopters will be able to contact the Lead Stage One Senior Practitioner for support during this stage of the process. Adopt East Thurrock endeavour to support prospective adopters in Stage One to broaden knowledge of adoption and children's needs and offer advice on how they can build on this knowledge and experience to support their role as adoptive parents.

Prospective adopters are offered Preparation Training in Stage One with additional, optional modules prior to commencing Stage Two and post approval as appropriate. The training is designed to help prospective adopters to assess their own capacity and

motivation to adopt a child by providing information, stimulating discussion and meeting experienced adopters.

Prospective adopters will also be invited to attend an additional training session about Early Permanence, held within Adopt East. The training is designed to help people understand the role of an Early Permanence Carer, how it differs from traditional adoption placements and the foster components of Early Permanence including contact, work with parents and the role of the Local Authority. The training includes meeting with experienced Early Permanence Carers, reflecting on their own capacity and motivation to adopt a child via an early permanence arrangement. This allows an element of self-selection for prospective adopters who, having completed the Early Permanence training module, are able to decide whether or not early permanence is right for them.

Prospective adopters will also be given the opportunity to attend the Adopt East adopting siblings virtual training if they wish.

None of the Preparation Training is formally assessed. However, if specific concerns arise, these will be shared with the individual after the groups, and with the assessing social worker. The group leaders write a brief, descriptive comment on the applicant's participation in the groups for inclusion in the Prospective Adopter's Report.

### **Statutory Checks**

All statutory checks, including enhanced DBS checks and medicals are taken up as soon as the Registration of Interest is accepted. Applicants are aware that negative police/statutory checks may affect their application and, in some case, may result in rejection. References are taken up with Local Authorities where the applicants have lived over the past 10 years or longer if they have previously parented children whilst living within another Local Authority area. Applicants are advised to inform us of any adverse history or medical condition which any of these checks may reveal. If applicants work with or have previously worked with children or vulnerable adults, employers are asked whether there are any concerns of a safeguarding nature. This includes any voluntary work undertaken.

Other checks include employer checks, contacting adult children of the applicant/s and former partners with whom the applicant has lived with will also be sought.

### **Adoption Medical**

Applicants will be asked to have their Adoption Medical as soon as their Registration of Interest is received. The Medical Advisor may follow up any concerns with the GP/hospital consultant. They will provide a summary of the applicant's medical information and any contra-indications to them becoming adoptive parents. The Medical Advisor's opinion is taken into account in assessing the applicants' suitability to progress to Stage One alongside other information.



After 2 months and once all Stage One training is complete, an End of Stage One review meeting will be held with the applicants with the Lead Stage One Senior Practitioner in order to discuss the progress of the application and the applicants experience of the process so far. A Stage One report will be written to summarise the information gathered. If checks and references are not yet complete the applicants will be given additional resources and advice for further learning.

Once all statutory references and checks are returned, this information will be reviewed by the Adoption Manager and Social Worker to ascertain whether we have sufficient information for the prospective adopters to continue on to Stage Two of the adoption process. Alongside whether or not they, and the agency, feel the timing is right for them to progress with their application.

At this point prospective adopters can choose, if they wish, to take a break of up to six months between Stage One and Stage Two of the process. Sometimes as an adoption agency we may recommend a break, to also give time to resolve any housing, employment or other issues that may arise.

If a decision is made by the agency during or at the end of Stage One that the prospective adopter is not suitable to progress to Stage Two Assessment, this will be discussed with the prospective adopter and a written explanation of this decision will also be sent to them.

## **Stage Two Assessment**

The agency and prospective adopters will jointly agree a provisional start date for Stage Two. An assessing social worker is allocated and a Stage Two Agreement meeting is held with the allocated social worker to plan the assessment and schedule presentation of the assessment to the Adoption Panel.

During Stage Two, if issues arise which the assessing social worker or manager believe might mean an applicant may not be approved by Panel, we may present a 'brief report' to Panel, setting out the concerns and their reasoning. Applicants may make representations in person or writing to Panel. If Panel recommends that the application should not be completed, and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is subsequently 'minded' to decide that the assessment should not be completed, the ADM will issue a 'qualifying determination', and inform the applicants of their options. The applicants are entitled to ask for their application to be reconsidered by the Adoption Panel, or to go the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The recommendation of the subsequent Adoption Panel or of the IRM is then referred back to the ADM, who will consider all the information and reach a decision which will be final. If the applicants wish to make representations to the agency without accessing the IRM they have 45 days to make these representations in writing.

Applicants see their Prospective Adopters Report (PAR) and may contribute to it/correct factual information or attach their own written comments. They will usually have up to five

working days to complete this and are invited to attend the adoption panel at the time their suitability as adopters is considered.

In the course of the assessment, the topics listed in the PAR are covered, and if a couple, each applicant is expected to undergo at least one individual interview. Any children of the applicant/s will be involved in the assessment and their views obtained in an age appropriate manner.

### **Interviewing Members of Extended Family/Adult Children**

If members of the extended family are expected to play a particular role in an adopted child's life (e.g. by providing day care for a working parent) they will be interviewed.

Where possible adult children of the applicant/s, including those who live away from home, are interviewed. Where an interview is not possible, adult children will be written to seeking their comments on their parent's plans. The comments of adult children are taken seriously. They do not have an automatic veto, but their views are considered and followed up. If we can obtain their permission, their comments are shared with the applicants.

Where there are previous significant relationships or where applicants have jointly parented a child with a former partner, that partner will be contacted to request their view or concerns they may have about the applicant's ability to keep a child safe. If this is not possible/appropriate, an attempt to seek corroborative evidence will be made and the reason will be explained in the assessment report and the Panel will take a view of all the circumstances.

### **Referees**

At least three personal referees will be interviewed for a single applicant and four for couples. Two of these should be a family member for each applicant. Additional referees may be needed if there are issues about a particular stage in the applicant's life about which we need to obtain another view. A written summary of each interview is made. Consent to share the references will be discussed during the reference visit and also when shared in writing.

### **Second Time Applicants/Returning applicants**

Second time applicants may be eligible for a fast track process, for example the time elapsed since their previous adoption. Their assessments will build on their experience and concentrate on issues that the previous placement has raised as well as considering the needs of their existing child/ren and their needs in relation to a new placement.

Enquiries from second time adopters or foster carers wishing to be considered to adopt a child in their care will be offered an information sharing visit, sometimes called initial visit, to explore their current circumstances and the timing of their enquiry.

Following the information sharing visit, the social worker will write up a report of the visit indicating whether they recommend that the enquirer is invited on to Stage One. This will then be passed to the Team Manager for approval within 10 working days. A copy of this report and recommendation will be sent to the prospective adopter. If the decision is to invite them onto Stage One they will be sent a Registration of Interest Form (ROI). For second time adopters and foster carers, Stage One and Stage Two of the assessment process can run in parallel if appropriate following a positive recommendation from the information sharing visit.

As with first time enquirers if the recommendation is not to invite the enquirer to commence Stage One they will be informed of they will also receive a copy of the initial visit report and be advised of the reasons for the recommendation.

### **Adoption Panel**

Once the Prospective Adopter Report is completed, this is presented to the Adoption Panel to consider the application. The Panel then make a recommendation in relation to the applicants' suitability to be approved as adopters. The recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who makes the decision. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the outcome, they may make representations directly to the agency or via the Independent Review Mechanism. The procedure for applications that go to the IRM is outlined above.

Once the Agency Decision Maker has made a decision in respect of the prospective adopters' suitability to adopt, they will be advised verbally by their social worker and in writing within five working days of the decision being made.

This represents the end of Stage Two.

### **Early Permanence Placements**

Applicants who want to consider early permanence placements will be dually approved as prospective adopters and foster carers. This allows a child/children to be placed with them initially under fostering regulations, prior to the courts providing permission to place for adoption. This process will be discussed with adopters during their Stage Two Assessment and again at the point that an Early Permanence Placement is identified.

In some cases where there is an identified child, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 were amended (in 2013) to allow approved prospective adopters to be given temporary approval as foster carers for a named child as set out in regulation 25A.

### **Review of Approved Adopters**

The adoption team aim to match approved adopters and children at the earliest opportunity, working proactively with adopters to enable safe and timely placements to be

made. The focus is on securing the right placements for children which may mean there is an interval between an adopter being approved and a child being placed.

Adopt East Thurrock are members of Adopt East Regional Adoption Alliance and as such share details of children and adopters waiting for placements in order to secure timely placements of children from across the Adopt East Region. As part of this alliance, waiting adopters will be invited to attend regional events in relation to children waiting for placements and will be supported to consider potential links with these children as appropriate.

Where there is a significant change of circumstance, or if approved adopters have not had a child placed within a year of being approved (and similarly if they wait for a further period of a year without a placement) a review of their circumstances will be undertaken including:

- Placements that have been considered and why no placement resulted
- Significant changes in circumstances
- Changes in relation to the characteristics of children for whom the adopter wishes to consider
- The applicants' views and wishes
- Information from updated statutory checks – DBS updates
- Making a recommendation as to whether to continue the approved status of the adopter/s or not

If, as a result of the review, there is a recommendation to terminate the approval, adopters will be provided with a copy of report, and will be able to add their comments to it. This will then be presented to the Adoption Panel, which adopters will be invited to attend. As with the original approval process the Panel will make a recommendation regarding the adopters' continued suitability which will then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). If the adopters do not accept the ADM decision, the representations procedure or referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is available at this stage as at the initial approval stage.

### **Family Finding and Matching Children with Adopters**

The adoption team are responsible for undertaking all Family Finding activity for children referred to the service. This may include, where necessary, undertaking activity required to secure an Inter-Agency placement for a child for whom no internal match is available e.g. attendance at activity days, exchange days and referral to Linkmaker.

Decisions regarding progression of matches will be based upon the ability of adopters to meet the assessed needs of the child which will be recorded and evidenced via a linking meeting held between a combination of the child's social worker, adopters' social worker, family finding social worker, adoption and childcare team managers, and chaired by a service manager.

Adopters are supported by their social worker to make an informed decision as to whether or not a proposed match is right for them and their family. They are provided with written information and assessments about the child's needs and experiences, have an opportunity to meet the child's current foster carer and other key professionals involved with them including their social worker. They will also be provided with an opportunity for consultations with the agency Medical Adviser. Child Appreciation Days will also be convened for some children.

Matches of children with prospective adopters are made on the basis of a child's holistic needs, including age, emotional and behavioural development as well as ethnicity, race and religion. A placement will not be delayed in order to find an exact ethnic/religious match if a family is available who can meet the child's other needs. However, transracial adopters will need to demonstrate how they can promote a child's positive sense of identity and this is a key matching consideration.

Social workers within the adoption team work closely with children's social workers and foster carers to support the assessment of the needs of individual children and those within a sibling group to determine whether they are placed together or separately, and if to be separated, how each child's needs will be met in terms of attachments within the sibling groups and ongoing keeping in touch planning.

Any plans for post adoption keeping in touch (contact), direct or indirect, with the children's birth parents, siblings or relatives will be made after an assessment of the child's needs and any associated risks the birth family members may represent. Any proposed keeping in touch plans will be discussed with prospective adopters as part of the matching process.

Proposed matches between adopters and specific children will be presented to the Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will make the decision in respect of the match.

Matching and placement of children with Early Permanence Carers will follow a similar process although there is often limited information available about a child's health and development at the point that specific placements are being considered and matching will be driven by the agencies understanding of the child's background family factors and antenatal experience against the matching considerations that adopters have indicated during their assessment process that they would feel able to manage.

## **8. Adoption Panel**

### **Adoption Panel Arrangements**

The Adoption Agency Regulations require that all Adoption Agencies must establish a Panel to consider the circumstances of children who may require adoption, the suitability of prospective adopters and the placement of approved children with specific adopters.

The Panel makes recommendations to Adopt East Thurrock's Agency Decision Maker. The role of the Agency Decision Maker is undertaken by the following:

- Janet Simon – Assistant Director of Children's Services
- Dan Jones – Strategic Lead for CLA

The Adoption Agency Advisor, in consultation with the Independent Chair, will ensure that the training needs of Panel Members are regularly considered and that opportunities for training are provided.

The Adoption Agency Advisor ensures that there is a balanced representation on the Panel. In line with the requirements of the Adoption Minimum Standards, a 'Central List' of Adoption Panel Members has been established.

All Panel members, including the Independent Chairperson, will be subject to annual appraisals.

## **9. Monitoring of Children's Plans**

Adopt East Thurrock undertakes close tracking of cases, through the Gateway Stage (PLO) and care proceedings, to ensure assessments and decision making is timely, so that where a child's plan is Adoption, Placement Order applications are made within timescales.

Parallel/Permanency Planning begins at the PLO stage and is tracked by the adoption team. Permanency Tracking Panels (PTP) are also held weekly for children subject to care proceedings and enables the service to consider best options available for securing permanency planning in a timely manner.

In reaching a decision about adoption, Adopt East Thurrock will consider the views and wishes of the child, his or her family and current carers in conjunction with assessments completed of birth family or potential connected-person carers.

When considering a particular adoptive placement for a child, Adopt East Thurrock will look carefully at the assessed needs of that child and the parenting capacity of the adoptive family to ensure that it is the best available match and that it will meet the assessed needs of the child. Arrangements for transitioning children to adoptive carers will be undertaken through a planned process that takes account of the individual circumstances and needs of the child and adopters.

## **10. Preparation of Children for Adoption**

The child's social worker, family finding social worker and foster carer will work together to prepare children in an individualised age appropriate manner and may include use of the Adopt East – Guide to Adoption, story books about adoption, various direct work activities to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings.

Once a match has been identified, presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and agreed by the ADM, a family book will be provided to the child to begin the transition process. For very young children and babies, laminated pictures, toys and books with voice recordings of the adopters, and items of clothing or a soft toy from the adopters' home are also introduced to the child as a means of promoting a sensory link for them.

In line with the age and understanding of individual children, visual calendars are prepared and provided to the child to support their understanding of the process and timeframes and what will be happening on each day.

Every child placed for adoption should have a Life Story Book and a Later Life Letter within ten days of an Adoption Celebration Hearing being granted in line with Thurrock Council's policy and procedure and statutory guidance. The Later Life Letter is provided by the child's social worker and the Adoption Team Life Story Worker will provide the Life Story Books. Every effort is made to provide the child with the fullest possible family history in order to help the child make sense of their family heritage, including use of photographs and art work/drawings.

The Later Life Letter gives the child an explanation of why he/she was adopted and the reasons and actions that led up to this decision being made. This should include, wherever possible, the people involved in the decision making, and the facts at that time. The letter is in addition to the child's Life Story Book and not a substitute for the book.

## **11. Support to Placements**

All adopters have an allocated adoption social worker who, wherever possible, will be the same worker throughout their process of approval, matching and placement. Once a placement has been made, the child's social worker will hand over to the adoption family finding social worker who will then be involved in supervising and supporting the child in placement.

Children placed for adoption by Adopt East Thurrock will be subject to statutory reviews in accordance with the Adoption & Children Act 2002. This will involve an Independent Reviewing Officer from the Local Authority who will ensure that all aspects of the child's welfare and plans for his/her future are progressing satisfactorily.

Based on assessments carried out under the Adoption Support Regulations, there may be a need to provide financial support to some adoptive families, subject to certain conditions. To fulfil this, the Local Authority has a means tested scheme for the payment of financial support in specified circumstances. Any payments agreed are subject to annual review.

Where a placement for adoption ends in an unplanned way, the Adoption Agency will convene a disruption meeting to consider what has happened and to help with planning

for the future. Reports of placements that end in this way and the outcome of subsequent meetings will be shared with the Adoption Panel in order to support learning and practice development.

## 12. Adoption Support – Birth Parents

It is acknowledged that most birth parents will find it difficult to accept that they can no longer parent their children and that an adoption placement represents the best outcome for the child. As an Adoption Agency, Adopt East Thurrock fully supports the principle that birth parents and birth families are entitled to services which recognises the lifelong implication of adoption.

The child's social worker and adoption social workers have a key role in supporting birth families. Birth parents are offered counselling and support, where the purpose of the support is to ensure that the alternatives to adoption have been explored and the implications of adoption are fully discussed. It also offers birth parents the opportunity to express their views in relation to the plans for the child, and to be involved in planning for the child's future wherever possible. Where the offer of support is accepted, the social worker makes the necessary arrangements for a referral for independent support to be made.

Counselling and support to birth parents includes the following areas:

- Explaining the key stages of the adoption process and likely timescales
- Explaining the role of the Adoption Panel/Agency Decision Maker
- Explaining the role of CAFCASS in witnessing consent or acting as the Children's Guardian
- Explaining how the Adoption Contact Register works and how an adopted adult may seek information about the birth family in the future or register a wish not to be contacted
- Explaining how prospective adoptive parents are assessed
- Ascertaining the parent/s' views on the adoption plan, including the selection of the adoptive family, any specific ethnic, cultural or religious needs of the child, and any plan to separate a sibling group. Their views on these issues should be considered and balanced with the needs of the child.
- Where there is parental consent for the adoption, explaining the process for giving their written consent to an adoptive placement or advance consent to the adoption (including the role of CAFCASS), their right to state that they do not wish to be informed of an adoption application, and that they have the right to withdraw their consent to an adoptive placement at any time up to the making of an adoption application, but the restriction of their rights to do so after an adoption application has been made
- Ascertaining the parent/s' views on post-placement and post-adoption keeping in touch including whether they would wish to meet the adoptive family and, if so, how they might prepare for this



- Where birth parents refuse or decline to accept counselling and/or support, the child's social worker records the attempts made to persuade the parents and the reasons for their refusal.

## 13. Adoption Support – Adopters and Adopted Children

Adoption support is defined as including:

- Assessment of adoption support needs
- Financial support to adopters, following an assessment of need
- Priority access to social housing, and access to additional support to cover a spare room whilst adopters wait for their child to arrive in their new home
- Priority admission for school places, including academies and free schools
- Services to enable groups of adoptive children and adoptive parents to discuss matters relating to adoption
- Assistance, including mediation, with keeping in touch agreements between adopted children and their birth parents or others with whom they share a significant relationship
- Therapeutic services for adopted children
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children to support the adoptive placement and enable it to continue
- Assistance to adoptive parents and children where a placement disrupts or is at risk of disruption
- A range of support services, including access to counselling, information and advice for both adoptive parents and their children, who may have complex needs
- Applications to the Adoption Support Fund as appropriate following an assessment of their adoption support needs

Adopt East Thurrock recognises the importance of supporting adopters and their families to access a wide range of support provision, to ensure placement stability, and to help secure positive lifelong outcomes for the child. Thurrock Council provides assessment of adoption support needs via its adoption team. Referrals can be made direct by contacting [PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk) during business hours. The duty worker will take a referral and, if required, a Social Worker will be allocated to complete an assessment of need which should take up to six weeks. In some situations (e.g. where the threshold for Child in Need or Child Protection is met) a joint assessment with another team in Children's Services. The Adoption Team Manager will confirm when this is required.

At the point of matching, all children must have an adoption support plan which sets out both the prospective adopters and child support needs including one-off expenses or ongoing financial support if assessed as appropriate. Where on-going financial support is provided, the adopters will undergo a financial assessment and annual review once finance is agreed.

Following the granting of an Adoption Order, the adoptive family can approach the Local Authority for an assessment of their adoption support needs until their children are aged 18 or 25 years if they have a statement of educational need.

## 14. Adoption Support Fund

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015, the government launched the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). The fund has been established to help to pay for therapeutic services for children up to and including the age of 21 years (or 25 with a SEN statement) who have been adopted from Local Authority Care in England or adopted from Wales but living in England.

On 14<sup>th</sup> January 2016, the government announced that the fund could also be applied for to provide therapeutic support to children from the point at which they are placed with their adoptive families. It is important to note that the fund is not a right for all adopted children but is based upon assessed need.

In order to access the fund, families will need to have an assessment of their adoption support needs completed by the Local Authority. If the social worker undertaking the assessment identifies that therapeutic services would be beneficial, they can then make an application to the fund on behalf of the family and, if successful, the fund will release the money to the Local Authority subject to monthly invoicing. From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016, the fund was also made available to families who have adopted children from outside England from other UK countries and via inter-country adoption arrangements.

Adopt East Thurrock are responsible for undertaking assessments of adoption support needs pre and post order, and families and other professionals are able to refer to the service to request such an assessment by contacting the Adoption Duty Social Worker on [01375 652647](tel:01375652647) / [PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:PostadoptionSGO@thurrock.gov.uk) or pre-Adoption Order talking to their adoption social worker.

## 15. Intercountry Adoption

Adopt East Thurrock will refer applicants for intercountry adoption to a commissioned provider (The IAC) who will assess and liaise with the Department for Education when required.

Applicants wishing to adopt a child from another country will be provided with information about the IAC service and adopting domestically. Applicants must satisfy the requirements and procedures of their country of choice.

All local authorities are now required to provide a comprehensive adoption support service. Intercountry adopters and intercountry adoptive children are entitled to an assessment of their needs for adoption support. Services which may be provided include counselling, advice, information, therapeutic services, services to ensure the

continuation of a relationship, and services to assist in case of disruption of adoption placements.

The IAC Advice Line number is **020 8447 4753** or email is [info@icacentre.org.uk](mailto:info@icacentre.org.uk)

Ofsted Unique Reference Number is – SC386048

## 16. Non-Agency and Step Parent Adoption

These are adoptions which have not been arranged by an adoption agency and include step-children, adoption by other relatives/significant others and children conceived with the involvement of a donor or surrogate.

Adopt East Thurrock will give advice and guidance to those wishing to adopt a step-child or another relative/significant other and will explore with enquirers whether or not adoption is the most appropriate legal order for the child.

Checks and references will be undertaken prior to an application to the Court. An allocated worker will be assigned to undertake the assessment and complete the Annex A report for court.

## 17. Special Guardianship Support Services

Every child needs to feel secure and settled in a family that loves and values them. That means strong attachments to adults who are committed to them long-term, who support their development, and who guide them through childhood to adulthood. A Special Guardianship Order is a way of providing a legally secure foundation for those carers who are caring for a child who is unable to live with their parents. When making a decision regarding an Order, the welfare of the child is of paramount consideration.

Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002, financial support and other services may be available for the Special Guardian, the child and the birth parents. However, if a child is not (or was not) looked after by a Local Authority, then there is no entitlement to an assessment for Special Guardianship Support Services, although it is possible to make a request for this assessment.

Thurrock Council may be able to make arrangements for the provision of Special Guardianship Support Services which may include:

- Mediation to assist with new or existing contact arrangements
- Counselling and advice and information
- Access to support groups
- Therapy services
- Training for the Special Guardian to meet the needs of the child
- Financial assistance following an assessment of need

The Adoption Agency is responsible for the provision of support services for Special Guardians for duration of up to three years following granting of the Order for families who live outside of Thurrock Borough. After three years, the Local Authority where the family reside are responsible for the provision of needs assessments and services.

## 18. Complaints

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.

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.

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**”.

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

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.

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.

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)

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.

## **19. Allegations in Respect of Children Placed for Adoption**

Allegations in respect of children placed for adoption are dealt with in accordance with LSCB procedures and Adopt East Thurrock's procedures for managing allegations regarding such children.

The Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures can be accessed online at -

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/childrens-care-professionals-processes/child-protection-procedures>

## 20. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Service Manager for Adoption. This Statement of Purpose will next be reviewed in April 2024.

## 21. The Registration Authority

Quality Assurance of the Service is provided by both internally and externally. Internally the relevant managers are responsible for day to day oversight and Quality Assurance. There is the following additional functions for quality assurance:

- Adopt east (Via Matrix Management with the Executive Head)
- The Adoption Panel and Panel Advisor (Via feedback and Joint meetings with the ADM & Service Lead)
- The QA Service – (e.g. via audit)
- Commissioning (via a joint commissioning arrangement for services funded by the ASF)
- Complaints and Compliments (via thematic learning)

A report on the progress and performance of the adoption service is produced six monthly in April and October and provided to the DCS.

The service is also inspected the registration authority. The Registrations Authority is:

Ofsted Royal Exchange Buildings  
St Ann's Square  
Manchester  
M2 7LA  
Tel: 08456 404045  
Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Thurrock's Ofsted Unique Reference Number is – SC057173

## 22. Contacts

For more information about Adopt East – Thurrock's Adoption Service please contact:

Adopt East – Thurrock  
Thurrock Adoption Agency  
Civic Offices  
New Road  
Grays  
Essex  
RM17 6SL  
Tele: 0800 652 1271  
Email: [fostering.adoption@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:fostering.adoption@thurrock.gov.uk)

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

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|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>18 July 2023</b>   | <b>ITEM: 7</b>                           |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  |  |
| <b>Fostering Statement of Purpose</b>   |  |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All   | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Non-key decision |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Liz Shields – Service Manager  |  |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon –Assistant Director<br>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 is to update members of the Committee on Thurrock Council’s Fostering Statement of Purpose which is reviewed annually.

The Statement of Purpose is required by the National Minimum Standards for Fostering<sup>1</sup> under Standard 16. Key sections are:

- 16.1) The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children, and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.
- 16.2) The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

Member are invited to review the Fostering Statement of Purpose against the requirements of the National Minimum Standard 16.

### 1. Recommendation

#### 1.1 That the Members of the Committee review and note Thurrock’s Fostering Statement of Purpose

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<sup>1</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/192705/NMS\\_Fostering\\_Services.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192705/NMS_Fostering_Services.pdf)

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 The Fostering Service compiles an annual Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service and how this impacts children and their families. As such it forms the basis for all the other policies relating to fostering.

2.2 The Statement of Purpose is a public facing document and should enable parents, carers, and young people to understand how the Fostering Service operate in Thurrock. All members of the fostering service and Foster Carers should conduct their work in line with the Statement of Purpose and the policies it supports

2.2 Members are advised that the Fostering Statement of Purpose should be reviewed annually in line with the statutory guidance, and the current statement is attached.

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

3.1 Thurrock's Fostering statement of purpose 2023-2024 is attached.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 The Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose is a key document that is required under the National Minimum Standards. Members are invited to review and provide comment on this.

## **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**

Funding is provided through Children Services annual budget.

## 7.2 Legal

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

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 as amended requires the Local Authority to prepare a statement of purpose which consists of-  
a) a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and  
b) a statement as to the services and facilities (including any parent and child arrangements) provided by the fostering service. The regulations require this document to be reviewed. The Fostering Services statutory guidance provides that this review should be at least annually and published on the website.

## 7.3 Diversity and Equality

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

The Fostering Service is committed to practice which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion, 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 foster carers irrespective of characteristics including age, sex, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability are welcomed.

All information regarding Community Equality Impact Assessments can be found here: <https://intranet.thurrock.gov.uk/services/diversity-and-equality/ceia/>

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

Liz Shields – Service Manager

# **THURROCK FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**2023-2024**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

The Statement of Purpose is also available on the Thurrock website at [www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering](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 recognise 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 want our children and young people to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement and life opportunities.
- We want our children and young people to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in any areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will:

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the 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 also committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all

our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families.

### 3. THE SERVICE

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

#### 3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment 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 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
- Placement stability work and clinical supervision
- Ensuring allegations and standards of care issue are addressed

There are two additional posts established 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, Social Work England registration, post-qualifying training and other relevant experience working with children and families. The Service is committed to continuous professional development of all staff and therefore encouraged to attend internal and external training to develop and refresh their skills.

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

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

### 3.3 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker

The Executive Director for Children's Services is Sheila Murphy. Janet Simon, Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

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

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

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

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a BSc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services. He joined Thurrock in March 2019 and has Been the Strategic Lead for CLA since May 2022.

The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Elizabeth Shields.

Tel: 07720143204

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

Liz is a qualified and registered Social Worker, having gained a MA in social work from the University of Manchester in 2007. In addition, Liz holds a Bachelor of Arts degree as well as Post Qualifying Social Work Levels 1-3 from Royal Holloway University and a Practice Educator Qualification from Brunel University. Liz has worked for CAF/CASS and then in numerous social work teams within

Local Authorities, working primarily with Looked After Children, in court teams and undertaking fostering and connected persons assessments and post order work. Liz has managed fostering teams since 2014 and prior to her current role she was Operations Manager of a fostering service. Liz joined Thurrock on a permanent basis in January 2023.

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

Carole Parker is the manager of the Recruitment Team. Carole is a qualified SWE registered Social Worker since 2000. Carole's previous experience includes working in both Local Authority and Private Sector, Carole's experience encompassed working as a Residential Social Worker, undertaking family assessments, working with adolescent and post 16, and as a Registered Manager of children's homes (CH EBD), ensuring the homes were appropriately safe and sensitive to the needs of the young people being looked after. Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team.

### **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.

The Team is currently being led by Danielle Mansfield in the interim whilst Alexandra is on leave. Dani joined Thurrock in 2002 after a working in the financial sector. Prior to completing the social work degree, Dani was employed as Thurrock's Safeguarding Adult Co-ordinator; a strategic role working with partners to devise the SET Safeguarding Adult Policy. Dani qualified from Anglia Ruskin University in 2015. After qualifying Dani worked in the Children with Disability team. In 2019 Dani joined the placement assessment team, completing SGO assessments and leading on Private Fostering. Dani is a Practice Educator and is registered with Social Work England.

### **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 is currently 31 staff working in the Fostering Service. They include;

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 15 Senior Social Practitioners
- 2 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 and offer placement opportunities to students from all backgrounds. However, due to the specialist nature of Fostering Service, we currently only offer student placement opportunities to students in their final year placement.

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

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

- Feedback forms for children (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 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. These 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 S.20 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 placements where the plan is for a child to return home or move to an alternative permanent placement. These carers are usually task centred and are expected to work with a range of professionals to achieve the expected outcome. There are exceptional circumstances where a child may remain with such carers in medium to long terms. However, in such cases, it would be done in consultation and agreement with the Foster Carer.

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

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children 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. It should be noted that in certain cases only the baby or the mother are looked after. However, such arrangements would be clarified before the arrangement commences.

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

#### **4.6 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 a child or children before they were accommodated by the local authority.

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

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

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

approval process.

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

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

### **5.1 Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application**

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker from the 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 it's Foster Carers with an up to date online hand book which can be accessed as follows:

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

Thurrock Council provides an online resource of it's 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.

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.

## 8. SUPPORT PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Foster Carers can also contact the Fostering Duty Social Worker if their allocated worker is unavailable. The Foster Carer's can also access 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

## 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 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.

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

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

As noted above, the fostering allowance and payment rates are made up of the fostering boarding allowance and the fee payment for carers who have met the competency requirements 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 CYP Social Workers shall consult and include Foster Carers in the educational plans for the children in their placement. This includes attending PEP's, Education Review Meetings, Parents Evenings and School Activity /Open Days.

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

## **12. CONTACT**

The Family Contact Team (Oaktree) is the hub for all family placement contact activities. Oaktree staff and the CYP Social Worker are responsible for coordinating and supporting family contact arrangements. Foster Carers are also

expected and may be requested to supervise contact in their homes or community subject to a risk assessment. It is also important that Foster Carers are aware of the names and details of the child's network of friends and, if appropriate, supported and its consistency encouraged and maintained.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **15. SAFEGUARDING**

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



Thurrock Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2015) sets to deliver training to all carers and professionals, raising profiles and gathering intelligence in conjunction with the police and other partner agencies with the aim to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and offering support to children and young people who are being exploited.

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

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

## **16. FOSTER CARERS RECORDINGS**

Foster carers of all approval types are expected to keep a log for each child in placement. The frequency of recording is as follows (with the exception of incidents or significant events which may require more detail) :

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

### Incidents and Significant Events

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

- Missing episodes
- 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.

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**

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.

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

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**”.

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

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.

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.

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)

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

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

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>18 July 2023</b>   | <b>ITEM: 8</b>                           |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  |  |
| <b>Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2022-2023</b>   |  |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All   | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>Non-key decision |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Liz Shields – Service Manager<br>Peter Turner – Panel Advisor                              |  |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon –Assistant Director<br>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

The Thurrock Fostering and Adoption Panel provides a statutory function providing recommendations on

- The suitability of persons wishing to foster, including friends and family members of a child in care
- The continued suitability of those already approved to foster, including where there have been serious allegations or standards of care issues
- The suitability of persons wishing to adopt a child subject to a Placement Order
- The suitability of a match between a child subject to a Placement Order should be matched to a particular set of approved adopters
- Other areas are required by law

The Panel is independently chaired and all members have relevant experience in Fostering, Adoption and Children’s services. The panel is supported by a professional advisor. The attached report is the report of the Independent Chair and reflects the work of the panel

### 1. Recommendation

- 1.1 **That the Members of the Committee review the report of the Independent Chair of the Thurrock Fostering and Adoption panel.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report provides an overview of the work of the panel through the year. As noted above the Fostering and Adoption Panel has a range of duties under law in relation to the approval of adopters and foster carers. It also has certain duties to children who are relinquished for adoption or who are to be placed for adoption. The Panel makes recommendation to the 'Agency Decision Maker' (ADM) on each case and the ADM then takes the final decision.
- 2.2 The Fostering and Adoption Panel meets every other week and is composed of a wide range of panel members who have relevant experience. There is a central list which allows Panel Members to be selected for each panel according to the needs of the cases presented and the legal requirements. Panel receives detailed documentation for each case and applicants are invited to attend for their case to be heard. The relevant social worker attends for each case and the Panel is supported by a professional advisor,
- 2.3 The Fostering and Adoption Panel provides vital independent oversight of the work of the service and feedback is provided on each case. The panel and the Chair are able to escalate any issues to the Strategic Lead or Assistant Director for Children's Services. Thematic learning and areas for improvement are discussed in quarterly meetings between the Chair and the Agency decision maker. Each panel member receives training and an appraisal. References and checks are made and renewed for each panel member.

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

- 3.1 Thurrock's Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2022-2023 is attached.

## **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 Members of the Committee invited to review the report of the independent Chair and make comment

## **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**

Funding is provided through Children Services annual budget.

### 7.2 Legal

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

There are no legal implications to this report.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project monitoring Office**

The Fostering and Adoption Panel is committed to practice which promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. Panel members are from diverse backgrounds and heritage to reflect the characteristics of our Looked After Children as well as our foster carers and adopters. Thurrock Council welcomes applications from prospective carers irrespective of characteristics including age, sex, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability.

All information regarding Community Equality Impact Assessments can be found here: <https://intranet.thurrock.gov.uk/services/diversity-and-equality/ceia/>

### 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e., Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and 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 and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2022-2023

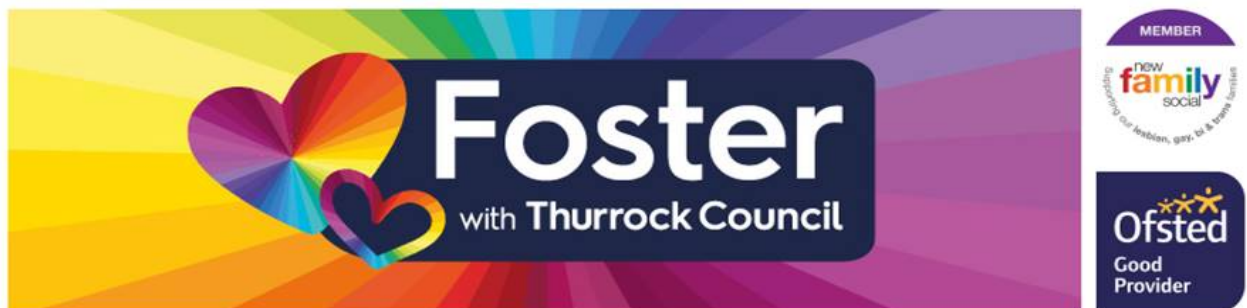
### **Report Author:**

Peter Turner – Panel Advisor

Liz Shields – Service Manager

# THURROCK ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT

April 2022 – March 2023



# Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Annual Report

2022/2023

## 1. Introduction and overview

### 1.1. General overview

This report contains details of the work undertaken by the Thurrock Council Adoption and Fostering Panel during the year 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The Panel is constituted to consider both adoption and fostering cases, which allows us to respond to the changing needs of local children.

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

The Panel is available to meet on a fortnightly basis and to hold an extra meeting if there is a need to consider any matter on an urgent basis. In 2023/2024 the Panel will continue meeting fortnightly to accommodate the increasing panel business covering both adoption and fostering. Panel members need to undertake hours of careful reading prior to the meeting making the timely dispatch of agenda papers well in advance of each meeting vital.

The Panel holds business and training sessions to update knowledge on relevant professional and legal developments in adoption and fostering. During the year the Adoption, Fostering Managers, and the Agency Advisor provided briefings to all panel members on the development of the service. In 2022/2023 training and workshops around Permanency Planning, Evidenced Analysis and Decision Making, Induction for new panel members took place, with an agenda for further training for the year 2023/2024. All panel members completed GDPR training this year. Panel members also had access to a wide range of online training opportunities. We will continue to keep under review and strengthen as necessary the central list of those available for Panel membership. The panel member appraisals will help the fostering and adoption service identify the additional perspectives that could help develop Panel effectiveness.

### 1.2. Adoption Services – Panel's roles and considerations

Thurrock Council is a registered Adoption Agency providing the full range of adoption services. Thurrock Council is also part of the Adopt East region and the Panel Chair and Agency Advisor attend regular meetings held with fellow representative within the Adopt East, with the view of comparing, aligning and keep practice up to date.

The composition of the Panel is in accordance with the Adoption Regulations 2005 and 2014. Thurrock Council has a "central list" of people with a wide range of experience and diverse backgrounds and a good mix to ensure equal opportunity and

anti-discriminatory practices. The number and background of Panel members is under continual review to reflect the makeup of the local community and bring additional experience to the Panel. Thus, a recruitment process was completed during 2022, which resulted in an addition of 6 new panel members joining since July 2022, enhancing the panel's diversity and expanding further on the skills and expertise of the panel.

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

In respect of adoption, the Panel makes recommendations on the following issues:

- The Panel considers applications from individuals and couples to become approved adopters.
- The Panel also considers applications for individuals and couples to adopt children from overseas.
- Consider the approval of a match between children and approved adopters.
- Change of approval from adoption to long term fostering.
- Annual review of prospective adoptive carers.
- The panel considers the case of every child referred to it and make recommendation to the agency as to whether the child should be placed for adoption.

The panel met the Adoption Team Manager twice during 2022, being provided with general updates and data of the service, as well the positive outcomes that some children had achieved over the last year.

### **1.3. Fostering Services – Panel's Roles and considerations**

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

Thurrock also provides a service for children and young people who are not "looked after" but usually because they have disabilities, can benefit from a short period of care by what are known as Shared or Short Break Carers. In these situations, the carers legally must be assessed and approved by the Council for whatever role they wish to undertake. Each role involves the care of children who are away from their parents and carries considerable day-to-day responsibility for vulnerable children who are sometimes going through very difficult times in their lives. Thurrock Council has invested in recruiting and supporting Foster Carers and the recruitment strategy is seeing the work of panel increase over time.

Whilst Thurrock Council needs to recruit foster carers to give such vulnerable children the security and skilled care they need, fostering is a challenging task that has a major impact on the family life of those involved and is not for everyone. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the right people are approved, properly supported and provided with ongoing training and that there are regular reviews of their continued suitability.

Thurrock is fortunate to have some very experienced and skilled carers who undertake excellent work with children and young people.

During the year, the Panel carried out the following functions. In summary, the primary duties require the Panel to:

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

The Panel has regularly met the team managers of the two Fostering Service, Fostering Recruitment Team and Fostering Support Team, with the view of being kept informed on practice and the services in general.

## **2. Panel Membership**

The Adoption and Fostering Panel consists of people with a wide range of relevant personal and professional experience. Current and former foster carers (not for

Thurrock), people who were placed in foster care themselves when children and others with experience of working in and managing children's and fostering services including children with disabilities, voluntary and community organisations. We have panel members who were adopted as children and who have adopted children bringing the appropriate lived experience to our deliberations. The number of panel members is under continual review to reflect the makeup of the diverse and changing local community in Thurrock and bring additional experience to the Panel.

An overview of the panel membership is as follows:

- Panel Chair. Previous Service Manager of children's services in neighbouring local authority
- Panel Vice-Chair. Fostered then adopted as a child within her family. Also an ex-teacher
- Panel Vice-Chair. Adoption social worker, previously Team manager of neighbouring local authority adoption service.
- Panel member. Independent social worker, previous Team Manager for CAFCAS and social worker in adult social care
- Panel member. Ex mid-wife, including manager of labour ward.
- Panel member. Ex mid-wife, nurse, family planning and sexual health advisor.
- Panel member. Elected member
- Panel Member. Birth mother, with experience in education and Chair of Trustees for Homestart.
- Panel member – adoptive parent
- Panel member – Independent Social Worker who currently is a Family Consultant and Play therapist, having experience in working with children and families
- Panel Member. Independent social worker with many years of experience in Fostering Services and also having been raised as a child in a fostering household
- Panel member – approved Foster carer and also panel member for another authority, with extensive experience in education, managing 9 London Prison's education provisions, teaching across a range of setting and working in education welfare.
- Panel member. Independent Social Worker with experience in Fostering, Management in Social Work and previously being an Independent Reviewing Officer in a neighbouring local authority. Also experience in previously working in CAMHS.
- Panel member, previously been in foster care as a child, now a training Social Workers, and multi-agency partners about familial sexual abuse. Also author of two books on the same subject.

Panel members are appraised annually by the Chair and the relevant panel adviser. These are designed to help each member reflect on their work and identify areas for further training. The reviews were helpful in discussing issues that often cannot be pursued in similar depth during panel consideration of specific agenda items, as we need to focus on the issue at hand. The review also provides an opportunity for reflection on how the Panel approaches the task. There was a clear view that team working continued to be good and that each member felt able to express her or his

views freely before an agreed recommendation was reached. The Panel Chair and Agency Adviser feel that Thurrock Adoption and Fostering Panel has a strong and experienced membership with a good range of personal and professional perspectives.

The Chair also receives an appraisal with the Agency Adviser and the Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering.

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

The Agency Adviser is Andra Marc and Panel Administrator is Sara Johnston.

### **3. Panel Practice**

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

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

Daniel Jones, the ADM for fostering, is the Strategic Lead for Looked after Children.

Janet Simon, the ADM for adoption, is the Assistant Director for Children's Services.

### **4. Adoption Services**

#### **4.1. Consideration of applications by prospective adopters**

Between April 2022 and March 2023, the panel considered 12 applicants to be approved as prospective adopters, for 11 or possibly up to 15 children, including 10 couples (1 of same sex and 9 heterosexual) and 2 single female applicants. This is a similar level as per the previous financial year, when there was a total of 13 applicants, 2 of which were for dual approval.

It is clear from reports and feedback received that prospective adopters are well



treated and prepared during the assessment process. The quality of assessment reports was of an excellent standard and there was evidence of good working relationships between applicants and social workers.

#### **4.2. Review of prospective adopters**

During the financial year 2022/2023 the panel considered 2 reviews of prospective adopters. On both cases there was evidence of work being undertaken and the prospective adopters having considered several potential matches, but none being fruitful within the 1 year of approval. One of these cases returned to panel for matching later on, with a very positive outcome.

Additionally, the panel considered one de-registration of adopters.

#### **4.3. Consideration of Matching**

This financial year there has been a significant improvement in the matching activity. The panel considered 11 proposed matches for 14 children (3 sibling groups of 2 and 8 children individually placed). This has been a marked increase from the previous financial year when panel considered 7 matches and 4 on the year before that.

The quality of the reports was very comprehensive, and it was pleasing to note that prospective carers were fully informed and aware of all the risk factors. The Panel were also pleased to see that, where needed, comprehensive support packages had been developed.

### **5. Fostering Services**

#### **5.1. Foster carers' approval**

During the year considered in the report, the Panel received 14 recommendations relating to applicants for approval: 6 households for general fostering, including 4 couples and 2 single applicants, for 6 or up to 10 children, and 8 Family and Friends' carers for 8 children. In total, the range of approvals was 9 households for children aged 0-18, 1 household for children aged 0-5, 1 household for children aged 5 to 18, 2 households for children aged over 15 years and 1 household for children aged from 2 years to 18.

Comparatively to the previous year, whilst panel received the same number of applicants for fostering, there has been a decrease in the number of applicants for general fostering, where in the previous financial year there were 11 such applications, able to provide placements for 22 children, whilst the number of Family and Friends Carers applications have doubled.

Thurrock welcomes and encourages applications from all sections of the community and the Panel met with differing ethnicities, ages and sexual orientation.

Prospective carers are usually asked questions about their experience of the

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

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

Occasionally the Panel may need to recommend that an application should not be successful. This was not necessary during the year. If the Agency Decision Maker agrees with such a recommendation, the applicant(s) have the right to appeal internally or access the national Independent Review Mechanism Panel. The final decision rests with Thurrock.

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

There is a good dialogue between the Panel and the agency concerning issues that need to be covered in the assessment reports. This has contributed to the good standard of analysis by the assessing social workers. The Panel continues to encourage the fostering service in its efforts to improve the standard of assessments and the consistent maintenance of good standards, particularly in relation to analysis.

## **5.2. Foster carers' reviews**

The Panel considered 27 foster carers' annual reviews during the year, including 7 first year reviews, 17 third year reviews and 3 reviews triggered by standard of care concerns. In all cases, the Panel was required to consider if the foster carer(s) continued to be suitable for approval. Compared to year 2021/2022, when 19 foster carers' annual reviews were considered, there has been an increase in the number of the reviews. The Local Authority have now a Reviewing Officer role, which is independent to the Fostering Team.

This financial year presented with some challenges for the Fostering Services, due to difficulties with recruiting a Reviewing Officer, which implicitly impacted on the

timeliness of the reviews of foster carers, as well as foster carers' attendance to panel for reviews. There have been household reviews that had been completed late. Nevertheless, significant efforts have been made by the department, particularly over the latter part of the financial year, which led to successfully bringing all the foster carers' annual review in date and with clear plans to manage these more effectively in the next financial year.

It was clear from the reports that all carers have an allocated supervising social worker, receive regular supervision and support and have access to ongoing training provided by Thurrock. The first review provides a focused opportunity for Panel to see how potential has developed into reality. The review reports and discussion with carers can provide a picture of what life is like for a looked after child in the foster household and help Panel identify areas for development in practice standards and further training. Panel is encouraging the fostering service to obtain and consider the views of foster children and birth children consistently. The Panel feels that this is vital, as they need to hear the voice of the looked after children and birth children who share their home. The Panel were particularly keen to ensure that newly approved carers are well supported and experience a well-structured induction programme.

The three yearly reviews provide an opportunity for longer-term reflection on how carers are developing and gaining experience in different areas of fostering. This process can lead to a reflection on changes of approval terms as the review can provide the necessary evidence for an increase or decrease in numbers or change to age range. The overall standard of review material was good and many carers provided a comprehensive written contribution. But, there is still scope for improvement in gaining feedback from fostering household members, children's social workers and the children and young people themselves.

## **6. Other Panel Duties**

The resignation of foster carers does not require Panel's formal consideration. However, Panel is notified of resignations and the reasons. The panel was notified of 11 resignations within this financial year. Foster carers are free to resign and after 28 days it takes full effect. In cases where there are matters of care concern, the foster carer's registration is brought to panel for a formal recommendation.

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

It is also good practice that Panel is kept informed and updated in terms of changes that happened in foster carers' terms of approval. As such, as from February 2023, the panel has started to be notified of all changes of approvals that have taken place, either through reviews in those cases that are not due to attend panel for review, or

where the Agency Decision Maker agreed the change of approval, outside of panel's remit.

## **7. User Feedback**

All panel visitors that have experienced the preparation and assessment process and/or are now approved adoption or foster carers are asked to complete a written evaluation of their experience with Thurrock including their visit to Panel. For this financial year, the response rate has been of 61% (we received 31 out of 51 feedback forms). 84% of the feedback received rated the overall experience of attending panel as 5 out of 5; 12% as 4 out of 5; 2 % as 3 out of 5 % and 2% as 2 out of 5%.

As from January 2023, feedback forms have also been sent to practitioners (Assessing Social Worker, Reviewing Officer, Supervising Social Workers). To date the rate of response has been 58% (10 out of 17 feedback forms received) grading the overall experience of attending panel as 60% being 5 out of 5, 30 % being 4 out of 5 and 10 % being 3 out of 5.

In relation to attendance at Panel all individuals considered they were treated respectfully, their application considered objectively, and they were given an opportunity to discuss their experience to date in some depth.

## **8. Panel Development**

Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel is experienced in all relevant matters of its work and has an appropriate level of stability. There is an ongoing commitment to continue to improve the operation of the Panel and the following represents the next steps in our development:

- Panel is able to learn from the experience of those attending. Feedback forms are being reviewed and include all attendees and also professionals attending panel. Some systematic collection and review of feedback is presented regularly to the Panel. Quarterly meetings with the ADM decision makers and the panel Chair have been implemented with the view of having regular reviews of practice.
- Good practice is identified and shared, through the systematically gathered feedback forms, completed by the panel members and shared by the Agency Advisor with the respective teams. The panel will consider a good practice bank that should include work that is identified by the panel to be of very high standard. Where the panel has identified work of a very high standard the Panel Chair in consultation with the Agency Advisor shall ask the Panel
- Panel has an active input in to the development and improvement of the service. Panel and Business meetings have been re-convened on a quarterly basis and includes the relevant adoption and fostering managers. Panel Chair and Agency Advisor also attend regular meetings with fellow colleagues within the regional Adopt East, which also contributes to improving practice and development.
- Panel membership reflects the community and current practice. Membership

is reviewed annually and efforts to recruit a former care leaver and individuals with experience in the fields of disability and mental health have been fruitful, with 6 new additions to the panel's central lists in 2022.

- The Panel standing agenda and minutes reflect the full function of the panel and the work done. The Panel agenda and minutes now more accurately reflect the cases considered and capture the wider work of the Panel.

A development plan has been put in place, outlining areas of practice that require improvement and an action plan to this effect.

## **9. Conclusions**

On behalf of panel members, I want to thank Andra Marc Panel Advisor and Sara Johnston Panel Administrator for the excellent support they provide to the Panel. It has proved to be another busy but rewarding year.

The Panel has a key focus on quality assurance, which means in practice it is a critical friend of the authority. There is much good work that passes through the panel, for example the high quality of assessment and preparation of prospective applicants for both adoption and fostering, the detailed planning of adoption placements and the diversity and richness of individuals and couples that are keen to be carers. Like all local authorities, Thurrock struggles with the retention and recruitment of good social care staff. It is concerning when we hear of looked after children experiencing continual change of allocated social workers. For children and young people that may struggle in forging meaningful relationships this experience can only do further harm.

A key challenge for the Panel is to listen more effectively to the voice of the child. We would not want to burden them with form filling which can only reinforce their feeling of difference. We do need to find ways of ensuring that they are well cared for in their adoptive or foster home. We often receive feedback from a range of professionals, but we must find more creative ways of listening to the voice of the child.

A further challenge is to ensure that the Panel membership is more representative of the community that we serve. With the recruitment of six new members to the Panel this year, we are making progress. Our new colleagues have brought a range of skills and life experiences. We must continue to build on that.

**Peter Turner Author**

**Panel Chair.**

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| <b>18 July 2023</b>   |                              | <b>ITEM: 9</b> |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>  |                              |                |
| <b>Recruitment of Foster Carers</b>   |                              |                |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All   | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>None |                |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Liz Shields – Service Manager Fostering, Adoption, CWDT and placements                 |                              |                |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – Assistant Director, Children’s Services 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 outline to the Corporate Parenting Committee of the progress in recruitment activity for Foster Carers. There has been a great deal of activity to recruit more households to foster for Thurrock. This has resulted in application and successful approvals.

The need to recruit more foster carers remains and more applications are required to meet the needs of looked after children in Thurrock. We have bench marked ourselves against our nearest competitors in order to ensure that our offer to foster carers is both attractive and competitive.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That Members are updated on the current progress in Fostering Recruitment
- 1.2 That Members are aware of the key areas for improvements.
- 1.3 That Members are aware of the challenges the local authority is experiencing in recruiting foster carers and what we are doing to address these.

## 2. Introduction and Background

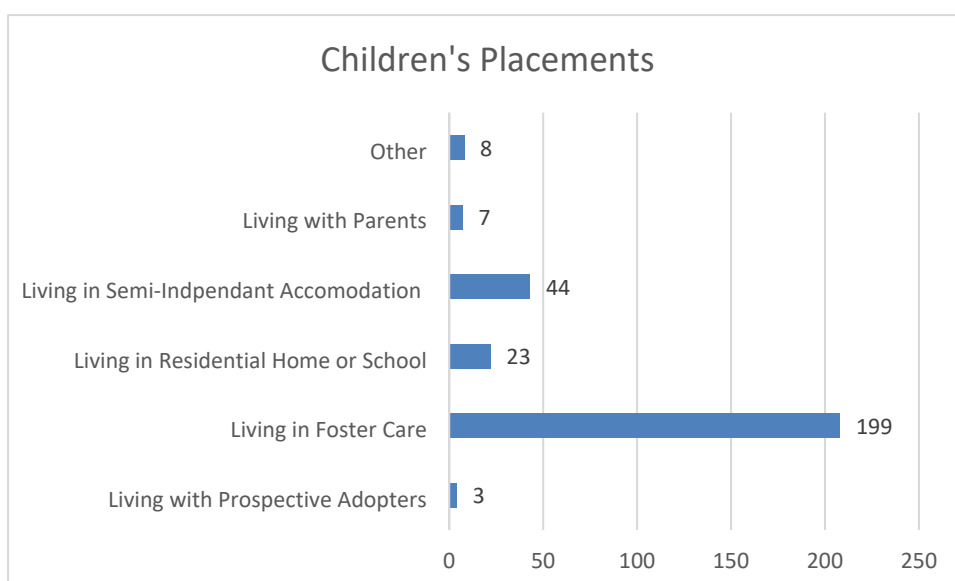
### 2.1 Sufficiency of Foster Placements

There is a statutory requirement to ensure there is sufficiency of placements for Thurrock Looked After children. The overall context for meeting the sufficiency duty is set out in the statutory guidance:

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

When a child is unable to live with their birth family there are a range of options that can be considered to meet their needs whilst they are living away from home. This could be to live with foster carers or reside in the care of family friends or family of the child (these carers are known as ‘connected persons’ approved under a fostering approval know as regulation 24); live in a residential home or, for some older children over the age of 16 years they are able to live in supported accommodation. The service is dedicated to ensuring children enter into Thurrock’s care only when they need our care and that they are looked after in the right placement and wherever possible this should be within a family setting. Young people should be able to have secure, stable, and settled placements so they can transition into adulthood with the skills to progress to independent living. This report focusses on the approach of Thurrock’s Fostering Service to ensure sufficiency of Thurrock in-house foster carers.

On 31 May 2023 there were 284 children looked after by Thurrock Council. They were placed as follows:





Of the 199 children placed in Foster Care, the breakdown is as follows:

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>31/05/2023</b>  |     |
| <b>Thurrock Approved Carers</b>                                |     |
| Total number of approved Households                            | 74  |
| Number of children placed with Thurrock Approved Foster Carers | 105 |
| <b>Independent and Other Fostering Agencies</b>                |     |
| Number of Children Placed                                      | 94  |

The number of children placed with Thurrock approved carers varies throughout the year but it is usual for the range to be between 100-120 children placed with our own foster carers.

Thurrock retains a strong financial and support package to our foster carers. Foster Carers approved by Thurrock, on average, receive a competitive financial package including the Council Tax waiver on top of the weekly allowances. Key recruitment needs are for children aged 13-18 of any gender, for sibling groups of three and for parent and child foster carers. Most applications to foster are for infants or primary age children or respite carers. These applications are welcome but can leave a gap.

In line with national challenges, we are experiencing difficulty in recruiting the volume of foster carers we would like to meet the needs of our children. There continues to be significant recruitment activity in fostering to recruit new foster carers within Thurrock and the surrounding area. A wide array of engagement events has been held in and around Thurrock and our brand is visible in the Thurrock Community.

In May 2023 we ran a 2-week focused campaign as part of the National event Foster Care Fortnight. This focused on awareness raising and local engagement in line with this year's theme 'fostering communities'. Our existing carers supported the recruitment team in holding over 17 events over the 2 weeks engaging with local businesses and community groups to engage the public. The team held face to face and virtual information sessions as well as running a targeted social media campaign. We also launched our first ever recruitment newsletter which will be sent quarterly to all households who have enquired previously but not progressed to a full assessment. This is based on behavioural insights research which tells us that most people think about fostering for many years before progressing to a full assessment. This allows us to continue to engage with the public around the ongoing need as well as providing them with useful reading and tools to increase their knowledge and skills so that they are better prepared if they do decide to progress. The campaign has shown success in terms of engagement with a large increase in reach (51,931 Facebook impressions in May 23) and clicks for social media during the period as well as the highest number of enquiries taken in one month since the start of the covid pandemic at 30 new enquiries for May 23.

As part of Foster Care Fortnight we also reiterated our pledge to our current foster carers to support them in their role by launching a new retention programme. This is being co-written with our foster carers to focus on what they need from the service to be able to continue fostering for Thurrock and looking after our children for years to come.

## 2.2 The National Picture

Ofsted provide annual statistics on the national picture for fostering<sup>1</sup>. It last reported in November 2022. Key points from the report in terms of recruitment are:

- There are fewer foster placements available nationally at 31 March 2022 than there were at the same time in 2018
- Over the last five years there has been fewer households applying to foster even when there is a good level of enquiries
- Nationally 45% of all children fostered are fostered by an independent Fostering Agency
- Foster Carers are much more likely to foster for a longer career if they are registered with a local authority

In February 2023 the Department for Education set out its response to the National Care Review<sup>2</sup>. Key highlights for fostering are:

- The Government will support a campaign to recruit 3000 more foster carers nationally, this will be piloted in the Northeast in 2023 and to other regions in 2024
- The national minimum allowance (not fees) for foster carers will increase by 12.43% in April 2023 for each area. This is funded via the existing Social Care Grant in 2023/04, the distribution of which is agreed at a local level
- Support for kinship arrangements are to be reviewed which could lower the demand for foster placements in years to come by preventing children from coming in to care and enabling more children to live with family members as private arrangements. The Government will clarify the detail of how this can be achieved later in 2023

In May 2023 the Department for Education set out a further paper with details of their pilot plans for fostering services.

The DfE writes:

We have pledged to put love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care. When care is the best choice for a child, it is critical that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022>

<sup>2</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1133537/Children\\_s\\_social\\_care\\_stable\\_homes\\_consultation\\_February\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1133537/Children_s_social_care_stable_homes_consultation_February_2023.pdf)

the care system provides stable, loving homes close to children's communities. Homes that provide consistency, stability and warmth. To start changing the way we provide stable, loving homes for children in care, over the next two years the government has pledged to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme so foster care is available for more children who need it, investing over £27 million over the next two years. This will boost approvals of foster carers in areas of specific shortage, as well as addressing retention through better support to existing foster carers.

The programme is designed to deliver end-to-end improvements that support boosting foster carer numbers: starting with attracting new leads to and expanded support offer to those already fostering. The programme includes:

- A recruitment support hub to provide information about fostering and support alongside the assessment and approval process to maximise the number of people who take forward a fostering application
- A marketing campaign to attract new foster carers
- Roll out of Mockingbird - an evidence-based programme across the region to support retention of foster carers

### **2.3 Recruitment Activity**

#### **2021/2022**

- Newly Approved Foster Carers = 11 Households
- Applications made that did not result in approval = 17 Households
- Left Fostering = 13

#### **2022/23**

- Newly Approved Foster Carers = 6 Households
- Applications made that did not result in approval = 7 Households
- Left Fostering = 11

#### **2023/24**

- 8 Households applications are being assessed as suitable to foster which should result in 12 placements if fully used.

For the last 2 years, households who ceased fostering did so for a range of reasons. The vast majority retired. A small number left for other reasons, such as, their own health, standards of care concerns and due to changes in their family circumstances. No household left Thurrock Fostering to join another fostering agency which is positive.

### **2.4 Thurrock's Fostering Demographic**

Thurrock like most authorities has an ageing fostering population which means that each year we are likely to lose some of our valuable and

experienced foster carers to retirement from fostering. The majority of our foster carers are aged 40-65. Our recruitment activity seeks to recruit enough carers to keep our number of fostering households stable and to grow our capacity. Despite significant recruitment activity, this has been challenging to do.

We are seeing a shift in new applications to some extent to families with their own younger children. We will respond to this by ensuring that there is good matching alongside their own children and support for children already living in their household to ensure that fostering does not impact on them.

**Progress of applications (year to date compared to last year):**

|   | April | May | Total YTD | 2022/23 total for year |
|---|-------|-----|-----------|------------------------|
| Number of households attending Information Sessions | 3     | 4   | 7         | 26                     |
| Number of formal Enquiries <sup>3</sup>             | 13    | 30  | 43        | 160                    |
| Number of IVs completed                             | 3     | 0   | 3         | 35                     |
| Number of Applications Received                     | 1     | 1   | 2         | 15                     |
| Number of applications dropped out                  | 0     | 1   | 1         | 9                      |
| Numbers of approved foster carers (HH)              | 1     | 1   | 2         | 6                      |

**2.5 Advertising Impact:**

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<sup>3</sup> Formal enquiries are when a member of the public shares their contact details with us. Where a general conversation is held but the member of public does not share details these are noted as informal enquiries (see appendix 1)

The following table sets out which adverts have been referred to by applicants when a formal enquiry is made for the financial year 2022/23:

| Advert  | Reports |
|---|---------|
| Thurrock Council Offices/Website/jobsite                                  | 58      |
| Facebook/Social media apps  | 40      |
| Follow up card/Calendar/Xmas card   | 3       |
| Gazette   | 4       |
| Google Search/Online  | 18      |
| Lakeside/Event/Drop-in  | 23      |
| Lamppost (Grays Bus Station)  | 2       |
| Leaflet through door (including Council Tax leaflet)                      | 2       |
| Reach/Local iQ (started 22 Dec)   | 27      |
| Nothing Noted / nothing seen  | 3       |
| Other Newspaper/Publication (including Thurrock's residential newsletter) | 3       |
| Radio (none at present)   | 1       |
| Referral (& was previous FC & word of mouth, previous enquired)           | 34      |
| Roadside Adverts  | 6       |
| School or Church (Banner or newsletter)                                   | 11      |

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

- 3.1 In terms of recruitment of foster carers, Thurrock is able to recruit and support enough foster carers to keep the current number of children placed in house stable. This is, however, not sufficient for our ambition to increase the numbers people fostering for Thurrock and making sure children are placed locally.

To improve recruitment the service is reviewing our offer to Thurrock Foster Carers to ensure that we are competitive with our nearest competitors.

Following a review of our recruitment approach the plan is to launch a combined fostering recruitment and retention programme to reflect the need to not only recruit more carers but to support and sustain the current cohort. This will especially focus on equipping those at the start of their fostering journey to have everything they need to do the role. The work will focus on the support offer and addressing any issues carers face beyond the financial element. This will include building a clear sense of being a cohesive fostering community that will not only retain those already fostering with Thurrock but will form part of the rhetoric around what you are joining when you foster with Thurrock.

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

4.1 Members to note and consider the options available

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

5.1 We consult monthly with our foster carers via a group focussed on recruitment. Their views and ideas are included into our planning.

#### **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**

The increased recruitment of foster carers will assist in the reduction of Independent Fostering Agencies and support the Council with their own cohort of foster carers. An increase in the number of internal foster carers would support the placements budget position.

##### **7.2 Legal**

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

Thurrock Council is a registered Fostering Agency and recruits Foster Carers in line with its statement of purpose. The statement of purpose sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering agency and is required to be consistent with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards 2011, and the amended regulations.

The Council has a duty under Section 22 G of the Children Act 1989, so far as reasonably practicable, to secure accommodation for looked after children in the Council area, which meets the needs of those children: where this is consistent with those children's welfare.

Section 22C specifies that the provision of a foster placement is one of the ways the Council may provide that accommodation. The placement, so as is reasonably practicable must:

a) Allow the child to live near his/her home;

- b) Not disrupt the child's education or training;
- c) Enable siblings to live together
- d) Meet a disabled child's particular needs
- e) Is within the Council's area

The successful recruitment of foster carers will assist the Council in meeting these duties

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by:

**Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project**  
**Monitoring Officer**

Applications to foster are welcomed from anyone of any background who wishes to apply. They are assessed against the National Minimum Fostering Standards and individual needs, circumstances etc. are addressed in detail.

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

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference and seeks to provide a high-quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. Increasing the numbers of foster carers provides greater choice of placements for looked after children and improved matching of children with carers. This will support our Thurrock children to fulfil their potential as they have homes providing stability.

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

- Impact on 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):

- Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose
- Payments to Foster Carers Policy
- Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation Children's Social Care Reform 2023  
[\(<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uplo>](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uplo)

[ads/attachment\\_data/file/1133537/Children s social care stable homes consultation February 2023.pdf](#))

- Fostering in England 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022/fostering-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022>)

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

- Appendix 1 – Table of Completed Fostering Recruitment Events

### **Report Author:**

Liz Shields – Service Manager



### Appendix 1: Table of Completed Fostering Recruitment Events 22/23

| <b>Date</b>         | <b>Time</b>    | <b>Location</b>   | <b>Type of event</b>                |
|---------------------|----------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Monday 15 May       | 10am to 2pm    | Sainsburys<br>Chafford Hundred                          | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Monday 15 May       | 4pm to 7pm     | c2c Chafford<br>Hundred train<br>station                | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Tuesday 16 May      | 10am to 3pm    | John Lewis,<br>Bluewater                                | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Wednesday 17<br>May | 10am to 1pm    | Tilbury Library   | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Wednesday 17<br>May | 10am to 2pm    | Impulse Leisure<br>Belhus                               | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Wednesday 17<br>May | 3pm to 7pm     | Impulse Leisure<br>Blackshots                           | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Thursday 18 May     | 10am to 2pm    | Morrisons, Grays  | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Thursday 18 May     | 10.30am to 3pm | Waitrose Billericay                                     | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Thursday 18 May     | 6pm to 8pm     | Microsoft Teams   | Virtual information<br>session      |
| Friday 19 May       | 7am to 10am    | c2c Pitsea train<br>station                             | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Friday 19 May       | 2pm to 4:30pm  | Chadwell Library  | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Saturday 20 May     | 8:30am to 10am | Park Run,<br>Thurrock, Orsett<br>Heath                  | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Saturday 20 May     | 11am to 3pm    | Sainsburys<br>Chafford Hundred                          | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Monday 22 May       | 10am to 2pm    | Asda Tilbury  | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Tuesday 23 May      | 7am to 10am    | c2c Fenchurch<br>Street station                         | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Tuesday 23 May      | 1pm to 3pm     | Civic Offices,<br>Grays                                 | In person<br>information<br>session |
| Wednesday 24<br>May | 9am to 9pm     | Lakeside Shopping<br>Centre, outside<br>Primark Level 2 | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Thursday 25 May     | 10am to 3pm    | John Lewis,<br>Chelmsford                               | Drop-in<br>information stand        |
| Friday 26 May       | 10am to 2pm    | Morrisons Grays   | Drop-in<br>information stand        |



|  |                              |
|--|------------------------------|
| <b>18 July 2023</b>  | <b>ITEM: 10</b>              |
| <b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>   |                              |
| <b>Joint Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children (Update)</b>   |                              |
| <b>Wards and communities affected:</b><br>All  | <b>Key Decision:</b><br>None |
| <b>Joint Report of:</b><br>Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA (Child Looked After)<br>Sharon Hall - Assistant Director, SET CAMHS and Children’s South Essex & Thurrock (NELFT)<br>Ines Paris - Designated Lead Safeguarding Nurse – Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board |                              |
| <b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help   |                              |
| <b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy – Corporate Director, Children’s Services   |                              |
| <b>This report is Public</b>   |                              |

## Executive Summary

A progress update on Initial Health Assessment’s (IHA’s) was requested by members at the Corporate Parenting Committee in March 2023. Initial Health Assessments is an area that requires improvement in performance. When a child becomes looked after by Thurrock Council, it is a statutory requirement that they receive an assessment of their health within 20 working days; this is known as an Initial Health Assessment (IHA). The IHA must be completed by a medical practitioner and is coordinated jointly between Thurrock Council and the NHS. Since the last Performance Report<sup>1</sup> there has been an improvement in performance, in April and May 2023 largely as the result of additional capacity. This additional capacity was commissioned by the ICB for Provide Wellbeing to complete IHA’s

- In the third quarter of 2022-23; 29% of children who became looked after received an IHA within 20 working days of becoming looked after. This was well below our target.
- In the fourth and final Quarter of 2022-23, 15% of children received an IHA within 20 working days of becoming looked after

<sup>1</sup>

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37874/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Performance%202022-2023.pdf>

- Performance has started to show an improvement in April and May 2023 with 56% children receiving an IHA within 20 working days

The report highlights further areas for improvement to achieve all children entering care in Thurrock achieving an IHA within 20 working days. These figures are for all Thurrock looked after children, irrespective of placement area, and therefore relate to a number of different Health Providers

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

- 1.1 Members note the improved performance in the first two months of the first quarter and the positive impact of the additional capacity provided by the ICB to NELFT**
- 1.2 Members are aware of the further steps being taken to improve performance**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 When a child becomes looked after by Thurrock Council there is a duty under the *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010* to undertake an assessment of their health needs within 20 working days of accommodation. This is referred to as the Initial Health Assessment. There are two steps to the completion of an IHA:

- Social Care must refer the child within 5 days of becoming looked after
- An appointment is then arranged by the health provider for the child to attend the Initial Health Assessment appointment within 20 working days of becoming looked after.

Following the appointment, a report is sent to the Social Worker and ensures those caring for the child understand their health needs.

2.2 The Health Service local to where the child is living in care is responsible for the IHA appointment. For Thurrock children placed in Thurrock, Basildon, and Brentwood, this Provider is NELFT. It is not permissible for Health Services to prioritise children from their own area. This means that Thurrock based health services have to offer Paediatric IHA appointments to all children who are newly placed in Thurrock whether they are in Thurrock's care or the care of another local authority. This is in accordance with NHS England guidance (2022)

2.3 Almost all children receive an IHA but there has been a fluctuation in the ability of health providers to deliver this within the statutory timeframe. This has been a persistent issue and was raised in the 2019 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services.

2.4 When considering IHA data it is important to acknowledge that Thurrock Children's Social Care work with different health areas:

- Thurrock Children placed in Thurrock, Basildon & Brentwood – IHA completed by NELFT
- Thurrock Children placed outside of Thurrock, Basildon & Brentwood – IHA completed by local Health Providers

Where children are placed out of the NELFT area it is the commissioning responsibility of the Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board to work with the care board local to the child to ensure an IHA is delivered within the statutory time frame. NELFT ensures that the CLA Nurse co-ordinates these initially and the CLA nurse will escalate to the ICB if needed

Children are also placed in Thurrock, Basildon & Brentwood by other local authorities - IHA completed by NELFT which impacts local capacity.

## 2.5 NELFT Data

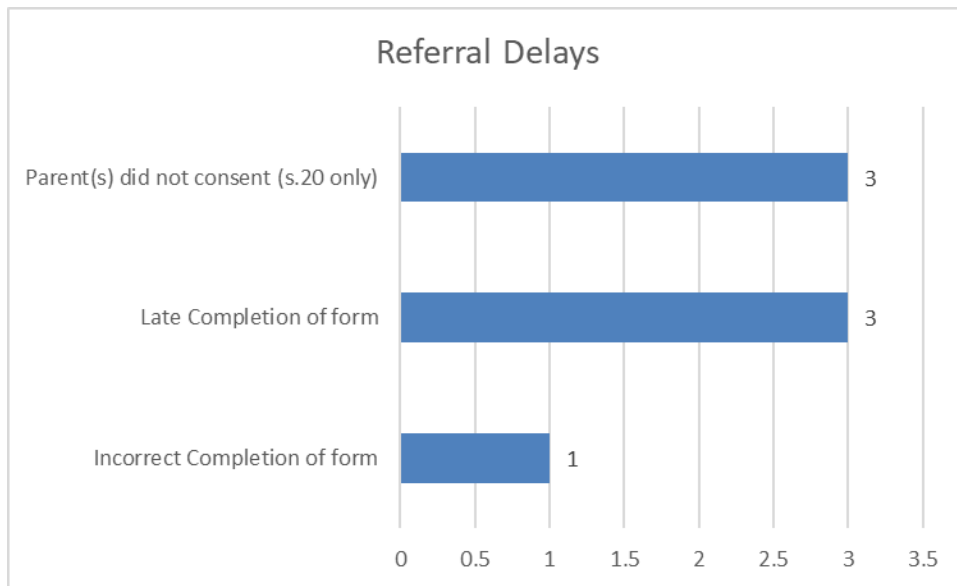
The chart below shows the total number of IHA's completed by NELFT and Provide Wellbeing – this includes all Children Placed by Thurrock in the NELFT area and Children placed by other Local Authorities cases.

Total IHA Requested for Children placed in BBT  
January 2023 – May 2023



## 2.6 Referral Performance in Q4 of 2022/23 and the first two months of Q1 2023/24 (Thurrock Children)

Thurrock Children's Social Care are required to send a referral to Health within 5 working days of becoming looked after. Performance is that 82% of referrals are made on time. Delay reasons are monitored and in a small number the reasons this target is missed are:

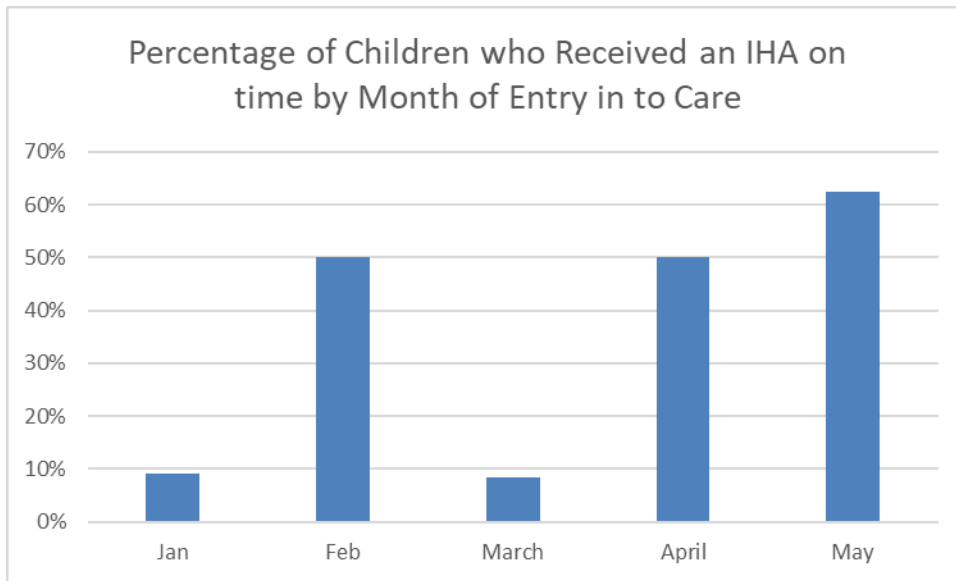


- 2.7 Of the 7 late referrals 3 were beyond the control of the local authority due to parents not providing consent (excluding children who left care in less than seven days):
- 4 were completed within 10 days of entering care
  - 2 were completed within 20 days of entering care
  - 1 was completed within 28 days of entering care

The most overdue referral was due to refusal of parental consent for the IHA

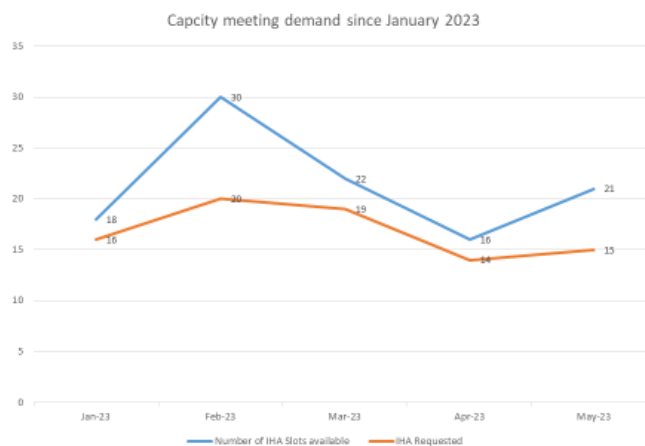
- 2.8 Where children aged 0-15 years become looked after at their parent's request (s.20); if the parent does not agree to the IHA then this can cause delay in referral as above. Equally some children may only be in care for a short period of time and leave care before a referral is due. These instances of delay fall outside of the local authority's direct control.
- 2.9. Where the form is completed incorrectly or late, this can impact the further process. This is usually due to a missing signature or incomplete information on the form. CLA administrators track this and escalate any issues. The relevant Service managers are tasked with ensuring this is addressed and that there is appropriate follow up so this is not repeated.
- 2.10 Delays in receiving the referrals impacts on the ability for NHS providers to accommodate IHA within the 20 days. On occasions where referrals have been received later, NELFT make every effort to arrange an IHA at the earliest possible opportunity, on occasion this has been within 4 days of receipt of referral. Whilst late referrals can impact, the vast majority (83%) of referrals are made correctly and on time
- 2.11 **IHA Performance in Q4 of 2022/23 and the first two months of Q1 2023/24 (Thurrock Children)**

As noted in the previous report, some time would be required for the impact of the additional appointments provided to show in the performance data. The following graph sets out IHA performance by the month children entered care:



The above graph reflects Thurrock Children’s journeys where-ever they are placed. Performance is still variable and below our target. The additional IHA appointment capacity commissioned by the ICB has begun to impact positively, as demonstrated in the April and May data above. The lower performance in March reflects the impact of higher demand in February before the additional appointments were available. The number of referrals to NELFT for all children in February 2023 was unusually high, impacting March performance. The graph below shows the overall impact across the NELFT area for all children, including those placed by other authorities

## What we have done since January

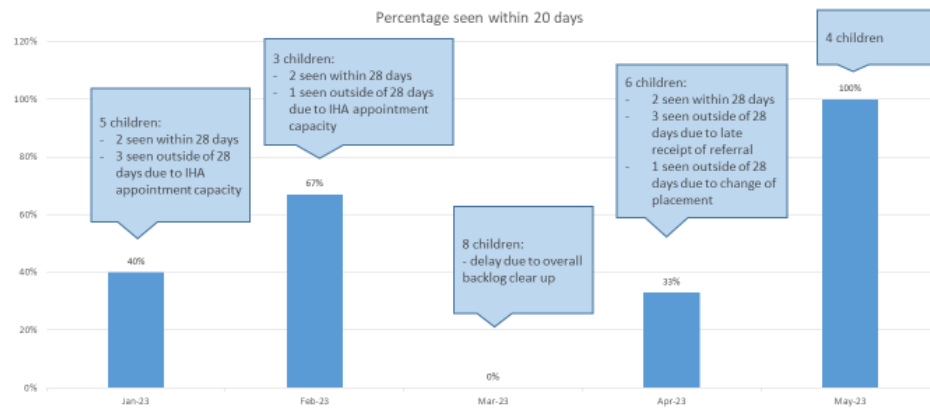


An additional 100 IHA slots have been commissioned over a 12 month period from January 2023 to supplement current capacity. Conversations about extending this have initiated.

This has reversed the trend of number of IHAs requested outnumbering IHA slots available in 2022.

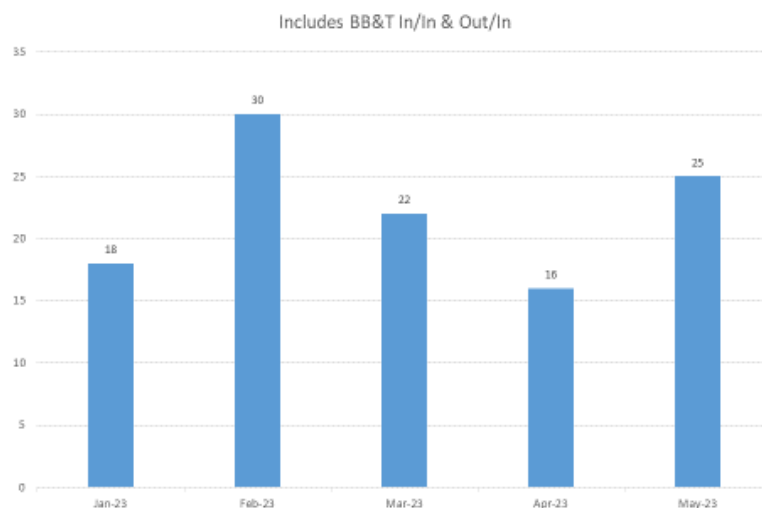
2.12 When Thurrock children are placed within the NELFT area (Thurrock, Basildon and Brentwood) performance improvement is as follows:

### Percentage Seen within 28 days – based on Thurrock in-in Children becoming looked after in every given month



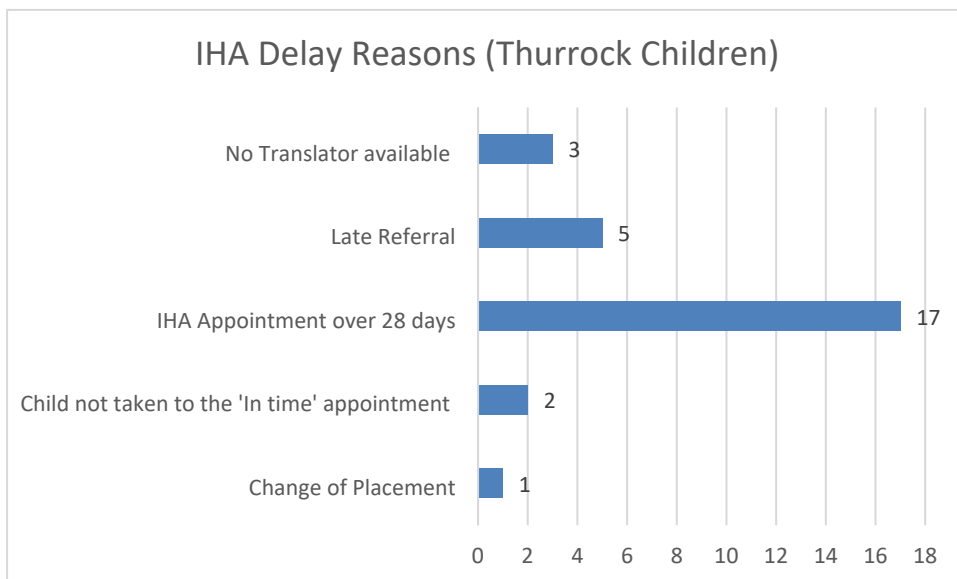
2.13 The following graph demonstrates the total number of IHA delivered across Basildon, Brentwood and Thurrock for all looked after children placed in that area by all authorities. This demonstrates the high level of demand faced by Health partners.

### All IHA Completed January 2023 – May 2023



2.14 Delay reasons are tracked and reasons for delay in IHA are as follows for all Thurrock children (in & out of area)





2.15 The majority of overdue IHA's (67%) were completed with three weeks of the due date passing. The remainder have been completed and reflect children placed out of areas or cases with particular issues of the IHA completed:

- 14 were completed on time
- 3 were completed by 5 days after target
- 6 were completed by 10 days after target
- 7 were completed by 20 days after target
- 1 was completed by 40 days after target
- 9 were completed by between 40-90 days after target

The Local Authority and NHS services will not wait for the Initial Health Assessment to take action to meet a child's health needs. All looked after children are registered with a local GP (General Practitioner) as soon as possible after placement. Any emerging physical or mental health needs will be addressed even if the IHA is not yet complete and relevant health services accessed.

2.16 The above graph reflects delay reasons since 01 January 2023 to 31 May 2023. Key themes and responses are:

- **IHA Appointment over 28 days.** This means that demand outstripped capacity for IHA's to be delivered and no IHA appointment was available within time frame. Whilst this has had a significant impact, the performance data shows this is reducing particularly when children are placed in the NELFT area.
- **Late Referrals** – This has impacted four children and the Service managers have been tasked with overseeing this. The CLA admin team track planned entries in to care and ensure Social Workers are provided with the forms and guidance. For unplanned entries this happens as soon as possible
- **No Translator** – Translation services are commissioned by Thurrock Council. On occasion translators are not available on the appointment

date and a wider range of suppliers is being sought by spot purchase to increase availability

- **Child not taken to the Appointment:** On 2 occasions children have not been taken to the appointment, this has been due to the child being ill and issues for the carers. If the carer is not available, then the allocated social worker should take the child to the appointment
- **Change of Placement:** When an emergency placement is made a child may change both placement and health area when they move to a more permanent arrangement which can cause delay as a new appointment needs to be found.

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

- 3.1 IHAs are recognised as a national and local priority, as per the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Looked After Children Health Strategy 2022-24. NHS England have launched a pilot audit looking into health assessments and this is currently being reviewed following feedback from Providers prior to its formal launch later this year. The current commissioning and delivery models across Mid and South Essex have been reviewed to ensure an improved experience and outcome for children and young people. Additional capacity in area has been effective in improving performance to 60% of IHAs in time in May 2023, however challenges remain. Designated Nurses for CLA are currently completing a SET options paper considering a separate service for Separate Migrant Children. This will assist in managing demand and ensure tailored services. Across the Southend Essex Thurrock, a video about Initial Health Assessments is being commissioned to inform CYP and carers of the IHA process and increase uptake and attendance. This will demonstrate the advantages of an Initial Health Assessment and encourage young people to attend.
- 3.2 The ICB, NELFT and the Council Officers work collaboratively to track and monitor all Thurrock children on a weekly basis. All children and young people are seen at the earliest opportunity. Regular exception reports capture the reasons for any breaches. The additional capacity has improved timeliness for Thurrock children placed in area and this is showing in the April and May data.
- 3.3 Nationally there is a shortage of Paediatricians, within NELFT there is a clear recruitment plan in place to fill the vacant posts. For children placed outside of Thurrock, the ICB proactively engages with NHS providers in their area to support transfer of care and track delivery of IHAs but have little influence on pressures on their local services.
- 3.4 The additional capacity funded by the ICB has made a difference and we should continue to see an improvement. The ICB is reviewing medium and long term plans to ensure future capacity is sufficient to demand. The new ICB landscape and the development of the Community Provider Collaborative across Mid and South Essex provides the opportunity to design a sustainable longer-term solution.

3.5 The availability of in person translators is impacting in a small number of cases on the timely completion of IHA's. It is the responsibility of the local authority to commission and arrange translators for IHA's but whether translation is in person or virtual is a clinical decision and on a case by case basis. Translators are not always available to attend the planned appointment time which can generate delay and a missed appointments. We continue to review this and look at best options to ensure this does not delay the IHA.

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

4.1 The Corporate Parenting Committee are updated on the performance in relation to Initial Health Assessments

4.2 Members are advised on the impact of the additional funding from the ICB has had on outcomes for children placed in the NELFT area. Improvement is noted in April and May 2023

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

5.1 Our Corporate target is for 90% of Initial Health Assessments to be completed in 20 working days of entering care

#### **6. Implications**

##### **6.1 Financial**

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

The are no financial implications for this report

##### **6.2 Legal**

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

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

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the detailed legal requirements in caring for Looked after Children. The

timescales for health are set in regulation 7 which provides for the Council to make arrangements for the health assessment by the child's first review, and for a written report of the health assessment to be provided as soon as soon as reasonably practicable.

### 6.3 **Diversity and Equality**

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

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. The service recognises that a range of communities and groups of people may have experienced obstruction or the impact of prejudice when accessing services including Social Care and Health services. Both Services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to access Initial Health assessments, individual arrangements are made where required to meet needs and address individual concerns

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

- Impact on looked after children

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

- None

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

- None

### 9. **Key points of interest within appendices**

- None

### **Report Author:**

Dan Jones – Strategic Lead CLA

Sharon Hall - Assistant Director, SET CAMHS and Children's South Essex & Thurrock (NELFT)

Ines Paris - Designated Lead Safeguarding Nurse – Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board

# Work Programme

**Committee:** Corporate Parenting

**Year:** 2023/2024

**Dates of Meetings:** 18 July 2023, 5 September 2023, 25 January 2024, 19 March 2024

| Topic  | Lead Officer                | Requested by Officer/Member |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>18 July 2023</b>  |                             |                             |
| Childrens Social Care Performance 22/33  | Mandy Moore                 | Officers                    |
| Adoption and Fostering Panel Chairs Report   | Dan Jones                   | Officers                    |
| Statement of Purpose Adoption  | Dan Jones                   | Officers                    |
| Statement of Purpose Fostering   | Dan Jones                   | Officers                    |
| Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children                     | Ines Parris / Dan Jones     | Members                     |
| Fostering Recruitment  | Liz Shields/Dan Jones       | Officers                    |
| Work Programme   | Democratic Services Officer | Standing item               |
| <b>5 September 2023</b>  |                             |                             |
| Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23   | Mandy Moore                 | Officers                    |
| Transitions to Adult Services for CLA  | Dan Jones/Iyobosa Osunde    | Officers                    |
| After Care Service Report  | Dan Jones                   | Officers                    |
| Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers  | Dan Jones /Housing          | Officers                    |
| CiCC – Agenda item to be agreed with CiCC – e.g. pocket money, placement moves etc | Open Door                   | Officers                    |

|  |                              |               |
|--|------------------------------|---------------|
| Staying Put – Overview and outcomes report   | Dan Jones                    | Members       |
| Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2022/2023                              | Democratic Services          | Members       |
| Work Programme   | Democratic Services Officer  | Standing item |
| <b>25 January 2024</b>   |                              |               |
| Children’s Social Care Performance   | Mandy Moore                  | Officers      |
| Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report                                      | Ruth Murdock                 | Officers      |
| Annual Report of the Virtual Schools   | Keeley Pullen                | Officers      |
| Education and Employment for Care Leavers  | Dan Jones/Kate Koslova-Boran | Members       |
| Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update                  | Ceri Armstrong /Dan Jones    | Officers      |
| CiCC – Agenda item to be agreed with CiCC – e.g. pocket money, placement moves etc |                              | Standing item |
| Work Programme   | Democratic Services Officer  | Standing item |
| <b>19 March 2024</b>   |                              |               |
| Children’s Social Care Performance 2022/2023                                       | Mandy Moore                  | Officers      |
| CLA Health Report  | Ines Parris (ICB)            | Officers      |
| SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Children Looked After    | Tina Russell (NELFT)         | Officers      |
| Children Missing from Care and Return Home Interviews                              | Mairead Morgan               | Officers      |
| CLA and the Youth Justice Service  | Clare Moore                  | Officers      |

|  |                             |               |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------|
| CiCC – Agenda item to be agreed with CiCC – e.g. pocket money, placement moves etc |                             | Officers      |
| Work Programme   | Democratic Services Officer | Standing item |

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