

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 **31 July 2024**

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

### Membership:

Councillors Mark Hurrell (Chair), Elizabeth Rigby (Vice-Chair), Ngozi Alike, Lynda Heath, Cathy Sisterson and Neil Speight

Laura Hall, Thurrock OpenDoor, Children In Care Council  
Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Jackie Enifer, Vice-Chair, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association  
Representative

### Substitutes:

Councillors John Cecil, David Day, Sue Sammons and Lee Watson

### Agenda

Open to Public and Press

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<b>2 Minutes</b>	<b>5 - 12</b>
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 19 March 2024.	
<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.	
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Agenda published on: **23 July 2024**

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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

### Non-pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature

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.



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

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.

## 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 19 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

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

Wendy Caswell and Jackie Enifer

**Apologies:** Councillors Georgette Polley

**In attendance:**

Carly Banks, Participation and Engagement Officer  
Sharon Hall, Assistant Director, SET CAMHS and Children's Services for South Essex & Thurrock  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead - YOS and Prevention  
Ruth Murdock  
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School  
Tina Russell, Area Manager, NELFT  
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help  
Ewelina Sorbjan, Assistant Director Housing and Development

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

**32. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2024 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. Thurrock Young Voices**

Thurrock's Young Voices presented their report to the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- Thurrock Young Voices has played an active part in the CLA (Children Looked After) awards.

- Looking to expand of power of participation training.

Members noted and asked the following questions:

- The Chair thanked Thurrock Young Voices and was looking forward to attending future events.
- Councillor Hartstean asked what the best thing Thurrock Young Voices is have achieved.
  - Feedback, attending and organising events and being recognised.
- Councillor Ononaji congratulated Young Voices on their skills, suggestions and noted their good ideas. He sort more detail on the carnival theme.
  - To bring together cultures to represent who we are and where we are from.
  - Different workstations, flags and masks and celebrating cultures.
- Councillor Carter asked for details on the optional survey.
  - Aim is to be more comfortable to get honest answers.
  - To create no judgement spaces.
- Councillor Manwa noted the importance of sanitary products for young people. Support for care leavers and looks forward for more improvements.
- Councillor Cecil asked if it would be helpful to have a friend in interviews.
  - Young people would love to, but young people are not always proud to be care, it is about being able to feel comfortable.
- Wendy Caswell (Co-Op) asked what assessment Thurrock Young Voices were referring too.
  - Some young people have different experiences,
  - Need to break barriers down.
  - Supportive foster cares are fundamental.
- The Chair was pleased with how Young Voices have developed over the past year.

### **36. Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2022/2023**

The Chair asked if there were any questions on the Parenting Committees Annual Report that will be presented to Full Council. The Chair added that the Parenting Committee is a good and constructive cross-party committee.

Members noted the following:

- Councillor Carter noted the good work over last two years. That the committee is non-political and congratulated the Chair for his bipartisanism. He also noted the warm nature of the committee.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/2023 be noted.**



### 37. Children's Social Care Performance 2022/2023

The Assistant Director of Children Services presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- 291 Looked after Children, 260 in aftercare.
- Numbers remain stable and good compared to statistical neighbour.
- Spike in June and July due to UAAC
- 9%-11% have a disability, figure is stable.
- Missing episodes are reducing and looking to reduce still.
- Initial Assessments remain area of improvement and focus. Task and Finish group looking into improvements.
- All children placed within a 20 miles radius.
- Majority of care leavers keep in touch; contact should be led by the care leavers.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Cecil asked if family have good relationship with GP why can't that GP do the health assessment.
  - Sharron Hall – Statutory that it has to be a paediatrician.
- Councillor Hartstean asked where UASC are placed.
  - Range of options and factors, it includes age. If under 16 then Foster Carers, if over 16 then supported accommodation depending on needs and skills of the young person. Case by case
- Councillor Hartstean asked what the youngest UASC is.
  - Youngest are age 14 years old, 8 young people under 16.
- Councillor Carter noted that 14 is a young age and wanted to know entry age and the level of care given.
  - One just turned 14 and another who is 14.
  - Support from virtual school and health needs are met, they have been registered with a GP.
  - They have the same rights as any other child.
  - Good outcome with education
- Councillor Hartstean noted 52% of care leavers go into further education and that it was lower than the statical neighbour.
  - Seeing some improvement and working to raise the number.
- Councillor Carter noted a gain and consistent improvements over time but was disappointed with low number in further education.
  - The Local Authority want as many in employment, training or further education as possible.
  - Keeley Pullen noted that a young person may not always be ready for education right away. The Local Authority can give home tuition and work to overcome initial barriers.
- Councillor Ononaji complemented the service and asked if the good rating was Ofsted graded or internally.
  - Benchmark and compared against statistical neighbours.
  - Data looked at regularly and questioned and improve.

- Councillor Ononaji asked what challenges with Initial Health Assessments
  - Challenges with shortage of paediatricians, it is a national issue.
  - Sharron Hall – Paper on IHA and is waiting for response and funding.
- Councillor Ononaji is there a requirement drive to hire more paediatricians.
- Councillor Carter asked where the IHA report will be heard at.
  - ICB possesses would not go through the Local Authority’s Overview and Scrutiny functions.
- Councillor Cecil asked how funding is arranged for UASC in schools.
  - Funding would be directed to them.
  - Needs are met for all children.
  - Support maybe needed for dialect or language.

The Chair thanks those who answered and drafted report and read the recommendation.

**RESLOVED:**

**1.1 That members note improvements in Children’s Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

**1.2 Members scrutinise the performance data and provide challenge to the service as required on how, as corporate parents we provide appropriate services, keep children and young people safe and promote good outcomes.**

**38. CLA Health Report**

The ICB sent apologies and were not able to present their report on evening.

- The Vice-Chair expressed her disappointment with the ICB.
- Councillor Carter asked if the report could come back for the next meeting to be scrutinised.

**RESLOVED:**

**1.1 The information contained within this report to be noted by Corporate Parenting Committee members.**

*The Parenting Committee decided to drop recommendations 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 & 1.6 as they were unable to scrutinise, ask questions of the ICB.*

**39. SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Children Looked After**

The Assistant Director SET CAMHS and Partnerships presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Thurrock SET CAMHS received 34 formal referrals into the service between January 2023 and December 2023.
- 33 were accepted, and 1 was not accepted.
- An audit was undertaken and 90% of referrals were dealt with within timescales.
- Monthly meetings take place between Children Services and SET CAMHS.
- Looked After Children are a priority.

Members asked the following questions:

- Councillor Manwa wanted clarification on racing scaled, how is it done.
  - Scores are done on paper and grouped by age.
  - 2 measurements are taken at minimum.
  - Self-rated.
- Councillor Carter asked for more detail on trauma work.
  - Different types of interventions: group and one to one is available.
  - Building trust is important.
- Councillor Carter sought confirmation for the acronym EM1
  - Eye movement
- Councillor Ononaji asked what type of programmes agencies provide.
  - Provision in Thurrock for a transition to Mind at adulthood.
  - Depends on needs of young people.
- The Chair if there is a follow up mechanism for those who are discharged.
  - Hotline between SW and CAMHS
  - Try to prevent relapse.
  - Prioritised LAC
- Jackie (Co-Op) asked if training for Foster Carers was available to carers outside the borough.
  - Training covers the Borough of Thurrock, Southend City and Essex County.

The Chair read the recommendation.

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 That members note and comment on the report.**

**40. CLA and the Youth Justice Service**

The Head of YOS and Prevention presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Children in Care are more likely to enter the Youth Justice System.
- Numbers of offenders is small. 31 children recorded with statutory outcome, 6 were Looked After Children.
- 17% down from 30%

- Look to divert children elsewhere where possible.

Members raised the following points and asked the following questions:

- Councillor Manwa asked a question about the decriminalisation of young people and what measures are implemented.
  - An example was given of the out of court disposal panel. The panel try to understand the background first before the young person goes to panel.
  - Looked After Children are often given option 22, which is no formal work undertaken. This is because there is a team of social workers around them already.
  - Youth Justice System provide support to Social Workers.

The Chair read the recommendation:

**RESOLVED:**

- 1.1 That members note the work undertaken to safeguard Looked After Children and divert them the Youth Justice System.**
- 1.2 That Members scrutinize the data and provide challenge in relation numbers of the children who have contact with the Youth Justice System.**

#### **41. Annual Report of the Virtual Schools**

The Head Teacher of Virtual School presented their report to the Corporate Parenting Committee:

- The service supports children aged 3 -18
- Year 5 now Year 6 have the highest level of need, 50% of pupils have a special need.
- Thurrock children are performing better. Attendance nationally is down and slowly improvement Looked after Children have better attendance rates.
- Reduced number of unauthorised absences
- 16 pupils were excluded an increase of 2% but below national average.

Members asked the following questions:

- Councillor Manwa asked if tuition is available for grammar or any specialist school.
  - Yes
- Councillor Manwa asked how children at school get access to IT and if there are issues, how are they resolved.
  - School is virtual as in there is no physical building, not online. Help schools to reach educational outcomes.
  - IT is provided by the school or pupil premium on a case-by-case bases.

- Councillor Hartstean was glad to see there were no permanent exclusions and asked if there are any concerns around erstwhile children.
  - Exclusions can create a legacy.
  - Service would challenge off rolling.
  - Education will still be provided.
- Councillor Hartstean who looks after the emotional wellbeing of those who have been excluded.
  - Find out what has triggered the exclusion.
  - EOTAS
  - Schools can off role students after 20 days if out of area
- Chair asked what alternative education packages there are and enquired about equine therapy.
  - Offsite and outreach work
  - Equine therapy working towards qualification for vocation.
- Wendy (Co-Op) thanked the Headteacher of the Virtual School and the team and the good work they do.

The Chair read the recommendation. Councillor Cater abstained due to being portfolio holder.

**RESOLVED:**

**1.1 The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2022-2023 and uses this information to evaluate, scrutinise and, if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided.**

**42. Work Programme**

Members discussed the work programme:

The Chair noted that it was the last meeting on the municipal year and gave thanks to the officers.

The Chair was aware that there was a need for an update on the situation with IHA's (Initial Health Assessments)

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking officers, committee members and co-opted members for the work they had done throughout the year.

The recording of the meeting can be found from the following link:  
[Corporate Parenting Committee - 19 March 2024, 7:00pm - Thurrock Council committee meeting webcast \(public-i.tv\)](#)

**The meeting finished at 9.39 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)**

## Thurrock Young Voices - Corporate Parenting Committee Report July 24

Corporate Parenting Report July 2024

### What have we been doing since the last Corporate Parenting Committee?



Young Voices group has been divided into two separate groups, one for children in care aged 11-16 and now a Care Leaver Forum for 16-25 year olds.

This means our conversations can be more focused and specific to our age range and needs. We also have a new Participation and Support Worker called Jo Kemp who is setting up the forum with us.

The Children in Care Group and the Aftercare forum will be held on the same evening, one after the other, which means we can all eat dinner together in between.

### Progress on our 2024 goals...

Our goals for 2024-

- To bring Back the 'Power of Participation' Workshop for workers (Run by young people)
- More activities with workers involved - football/ sports suggested
- Two big events for Young People per year, like 'Young Voices at Grangewaters'
- Young Voices Member packs including t-shirt and hoodie to be created
- Create a Young Inspectors programme

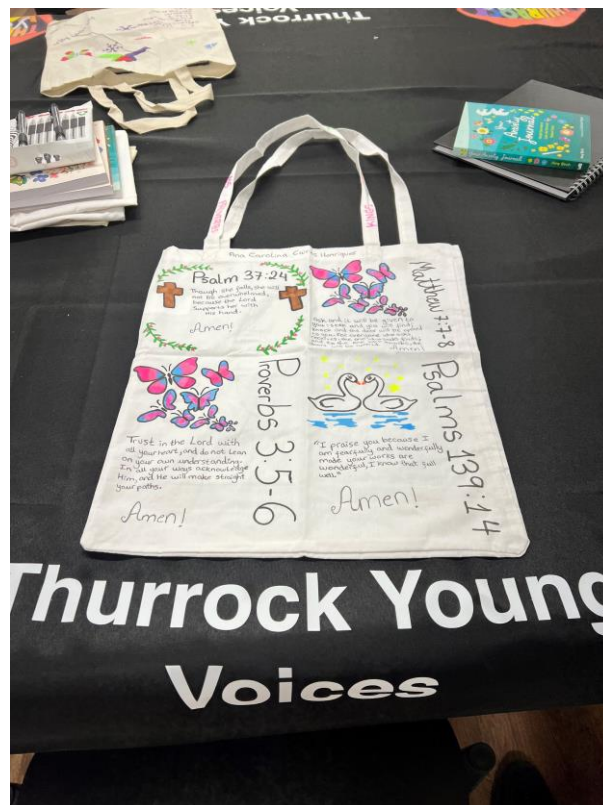
We held the first Power of Participation Workshop on 17th May 2024 (see below for further details)

There are football sessions being held every month at Blackshots fields with workers attending. So far 10 young people have been and played with the staff.

Grangewaters has been arranged for 23rd August and we are included in the planning for this. The day will focus on....

We are working on creating an 'in-person' local offer information event. This will be held on the 16th August and is young person led. This day will bring services for young people into one place so that young people can meet them and understand what is offered.

We had a arts and crafts session where we made our Young Voices bags and were given a hoodie, t-shirt, lanyard, wellbeing journal, notepad and pen.







Young people are now able to sign up to be trained to become Young Inspectors.

## Power of Participation Workshop



7 Young People facilitated the workshop for workers on 17th May 24. The training was designed by them and had a focus on relationships, endings and participation. 28 workers attended. There were extremely powerful messages delivered such as “keep us at the centre of everything”, “listen to us”, “say goodbye when you leave”. From these messages a list of promises was created that the workers signed up to.



We plan to hold two further workshops across the year, the next one is 29th July.

We received excellent feedback from the staff who attended including –

“Very good training, Good to know what young people would like to see in workers to improve their plans.”

“I found the session very powerful; it is very easy to lose yourself in your job title. This training has grounded me again and reminds us of how important the work we do is. You guys are fantastic and delivered an excellent session.”

“Excellent training. I enjoyed every part of this. It was fun and interactive.”

## Children in Care Awards 2024

We were involved in the planning of the Children in Care 2024 Awards which was held on 31st May 24. We picked the venue and the theme which was "carnival" - celebrating everyone! We had a great night, some lovely food and danced the evening away at the disco. We had a lovely time. We had young people performing on the night which was fantastic.



## What makes a good foster carer?

As part of 'Foster East' Care Experienced Young People Working Group, The Young Voices Group participated in a discussion about what makes an 'ideal' foster carer. These were the highlights..

A good foster carer is someone who:

*Has the ability to learn and adapt.*

*Understands that each child is different.*

*Is compassionate and makes children and young people feel seen and heard.*

*Is open minded, easy to talk to and approachable.*

*Is respectful, adaptable, friendly, caring and assertive*

*Is confident, soft but firm, bubbly, intelligent*

*Has life experiences, interest in psychology and understanding the brain, easy going.*

*Is therapeutic and knows how to respond to young people's anxieties and is able to read social cues, behaviours and advocate for young people the right way.*

*Listens well and makes young people feel seen.*

*Helps young people to be prepared for life after care; teaches young people things like cooking and cleaning, budgeting, taxes and everything in between.*

## 'Care Experience' as a Protected Characteristic

We would like for Thurrock Council to adopt "Care Experience" as a protected characteristic.

This is really important to us and we decided to work on this with members of the Youth Cabinet. They want to support us to take it to Full Council on 24th July to ask members to pass the motion.

### **Why should Care Experience be added to the list of Protected Characteristics?**

- Young people with care experience face discrimination, stigma, and prejudice in their day to day lives.
- People 'look down' on or feel sorry for young people with care experience which set them apart from others.
- Young people with care experience can lose out on jobs and not do well in education due to stigma.
- This can also affect them with housing, health, relationships, and the criminal justice system.
- Young People might not want to share that they are care experienced for fear of judgement.
- Young people with care experience might face unfair judgements when they become parents regarding their assumed ability.
- Making care experience a protected characteristic would help to create a better public understanding of these issues and therefore improve life chances for the young people.

## Something we would like to raise with the Corporate Parents...

Some young people feel they are not leaving care with all the skills they need to be fully independent such as cooking, cleaning, washing, making and going to GP Dentist appointments, paying bills, budgeting etc. They would want more support and commitment from the Council with further training, work experience, better job offers for care leavers to prepare them for leaving care.

<b>31 July 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Children’s Social Care Performance 2023-24</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> all	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Mandy Moore Head of Business Intelligence Strategy Engagement and Growth Elise McQueen Head of Service Children Looked After Children’s Services	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help.	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy – Executive Director, Children’ Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	
<b>Version:</b> Final	

## 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 for Quarter 4 (January to March) 2023-24.

At the end of Q4 2023-24, 290 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 269 care experienced young adults aged 18+ 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 Aftercare Service continues to focus on improving outcomes for young people as they transition into adulthood and move to independence. Areas which we are seeking to show improved outcomes for include supporting increased numbers of young people in education, employment or training and ensuring young people have the right accommodation to meet their needs at the right time.

Children are mostly placed with foster carers or, where safe and possible, with family members. Thurrock Council continues to embed it’s ‘Think Family’ approach to reduce the need for children to enter care. Foster Care recruitment continues to develop local placements for children.

### Commissioner Comment:

None

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

- 1.1 That members note improvements in Children’s Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**
- 1.2 Members scrutinise the performance data and provide challenge to the service as required on how, as corporate parents we provide appropriate services, keep children and young people safe and promote good outcomes.**

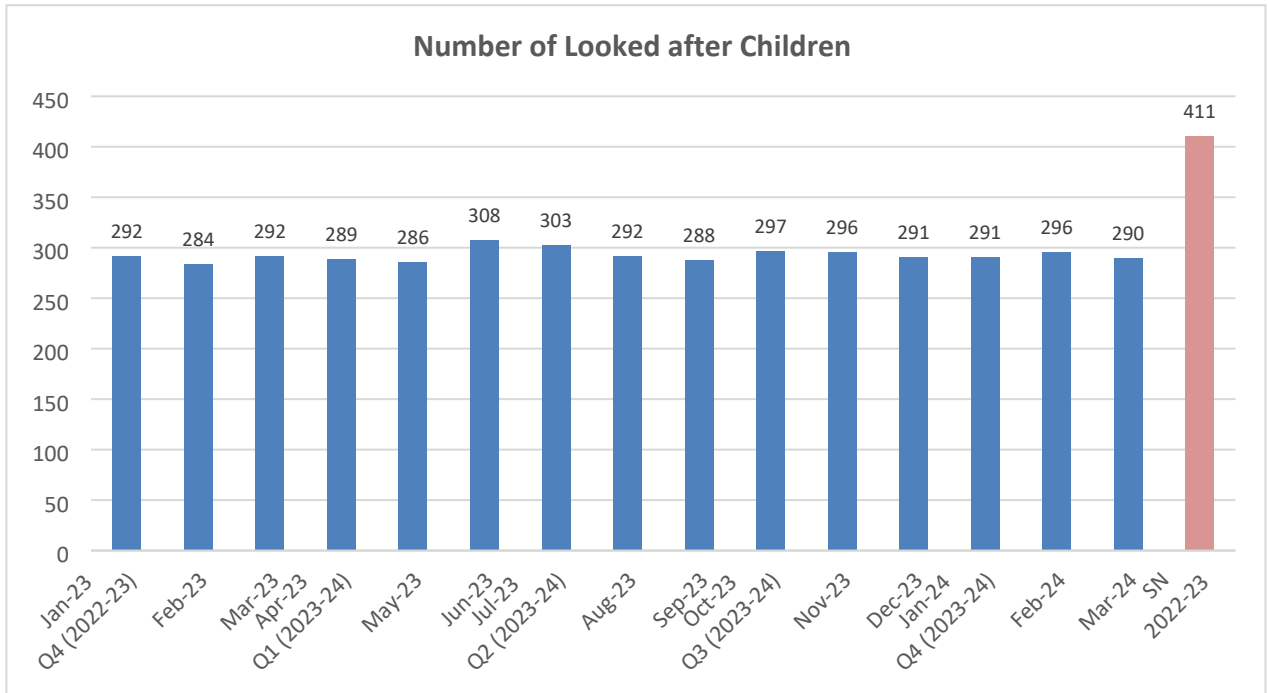
## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children’s Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After and Care Leavers, 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 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 Board.
- 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 practitioners.

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

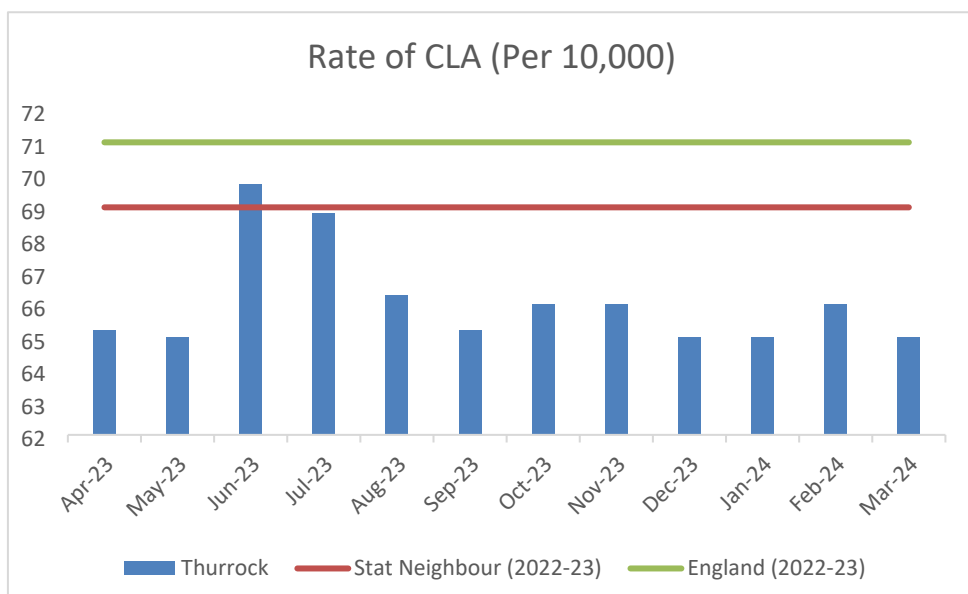
### **3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)**

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 safe and appropriate, children are supported to return to their families. Thurrock’s Children in Care numbers have remained relatively stable year to date from 288 in April 2023 to 290 in March 2024 with two peaks in June and July 2023. The end of Quarter 4 saw a decrease of 1 to 290 from 291 at the end of Quarter 3.



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

The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 of the child 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 66 per 10,000. Based on the latest available benchmarking data (2022-23), Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 69 and England average of 71 at the end of March 2024. 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 numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC as a result of the national threshold rising. 290 children looked after at the end of March 24, equates to 65 per 10,000 population, this remains below the statistical and national outturn stated above.

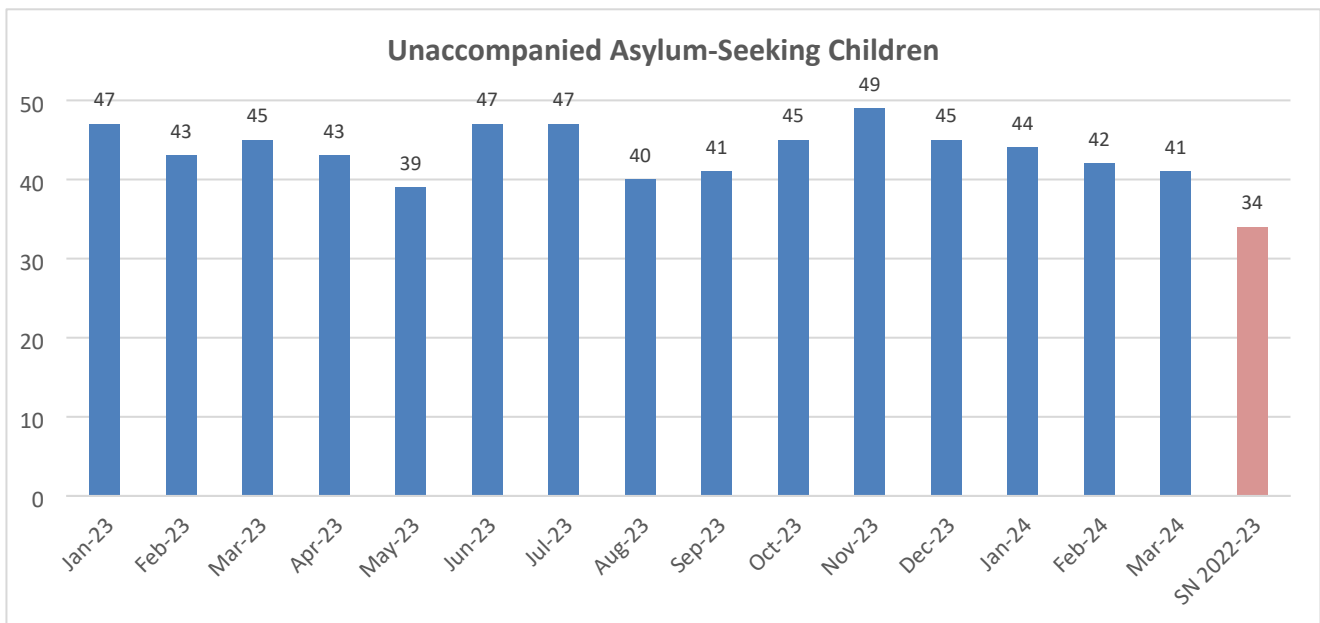


### 3.3 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. As an authority with ports of entry, Thurrock has a steady number of new UASC. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol for UASC first began operating in 2016 which formed a voluntary agreement between local authorities in England to ensure a fairer, more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities with a threshold of 0.07% of the local child population. After February 2022 all local authorities have been directed to participate in the NTS. From August 2022 the operating threshold was increased representing an increase from 0.07 to 0.1%. For Thurrock this represented an increase in both the UASC and CLA population of 17 children with the threshold rising from 27 to 44 UASC. This means that Thurrock is required to accept transfers of UASC in the scheme if we are below 44 UASC in our Child Looked After population. This represents an increased demand for placements, social work time and After Care support. As at end March 24 Thurrock had 41 UASC children.

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.

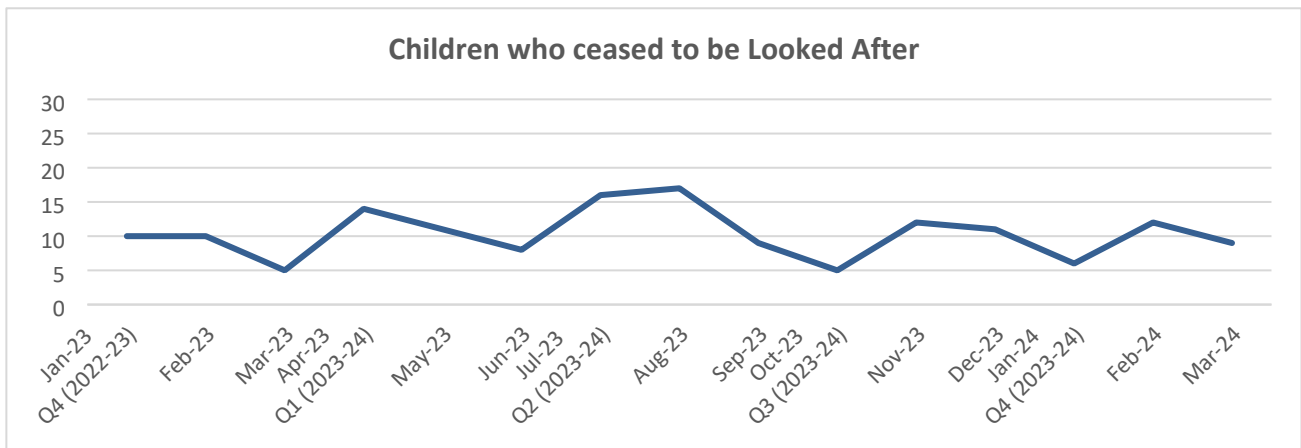
The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after as at the end of each month since January 2023.



### 3.4 Children Looked After episodes ceased

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22. From April 2023 to March 2024 131 children ceased to be looked after, which is an increase from the previous year (97 – 2022/23) and a slight increase from the year before (125 – 2021/22). 52 of the 131 children ceased being in care as they turned 18 years of age (41 males, 11 females, 21 of this number were former UASC).





Aside from young people turning 18, the most common reasons for children ceasing to be looked after was returning home to live with parents/relatives as part of care planning and children who were made subject to Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders, living with connected carers.

There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock 2023/24:

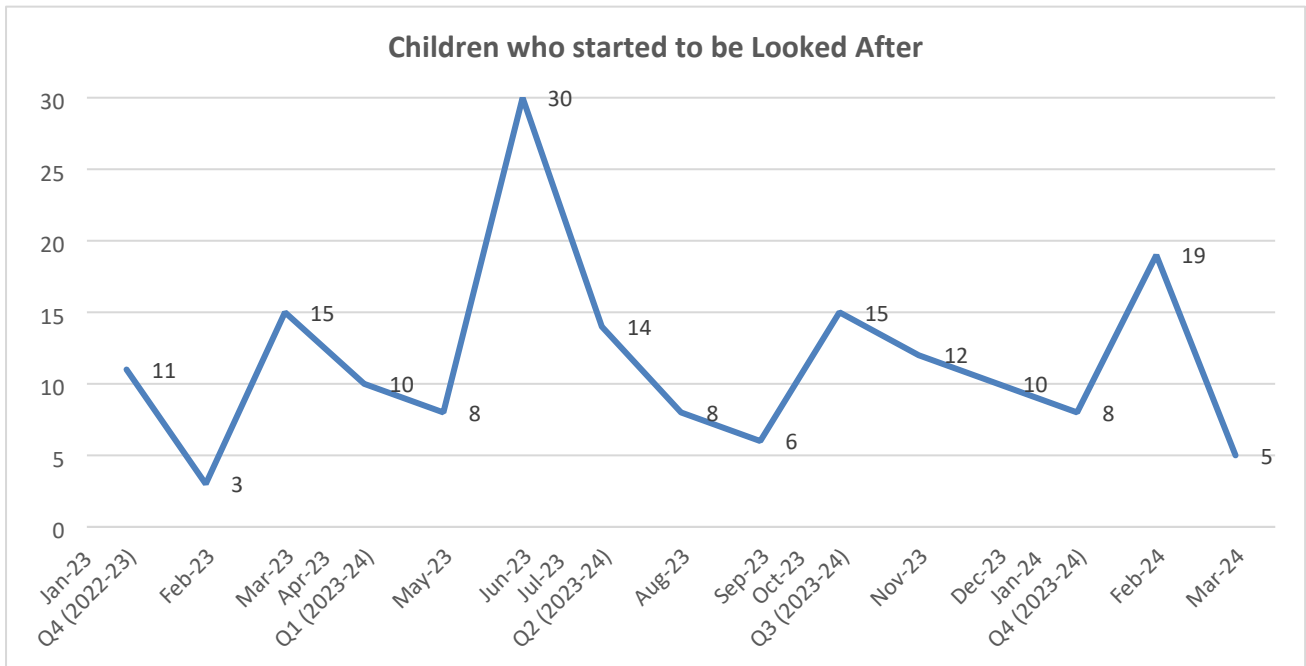
- Numbers of children entering care: 145
- Numbers of UASC entering care: 45
- Numbers of children leaving care: 131
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock: 41

The below charts show comparative data between 2018/19 to 2023/24, entries in and exits out of care, including the changing trajectory of the UASC population increasing by 46 children on the previous year (22/23).

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Total number Entering Care	242	150	121	99	145
UASC entering Care	75	36	38	33	45
Total number Exiting Care	235	148	122	97	131
Number of CLA at end of reporting period	298	298	295	292	290
UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population)	23 (7.7%)	24 (8%)	28 (9.4%)	44 (15%)	41 (14%)

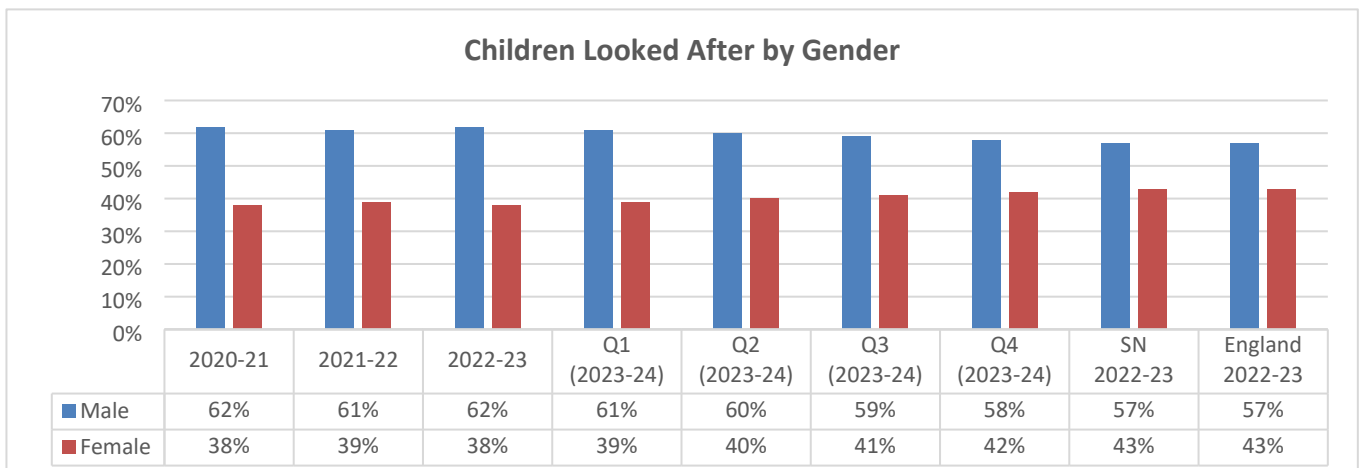
### 3.5 Children Looked After episodes started

It is normal for fluctuations to be seen with children starting episodes of care, this is shown by the graph below. There was however a sharp increase during June 2023 of 30 children starting an episode of care related to 9 UASC arrivals and larger sibling groups. In Q3 and Q4 the numbers for children starting episodes of care returned to relatively normal levels – with the exception of a smaller spike in February, 19 children. Of these, 11 children (58%) were due to safeguarding issues and children experiencing abuse or neglect.



### 3.6 Children Looked After by Gender

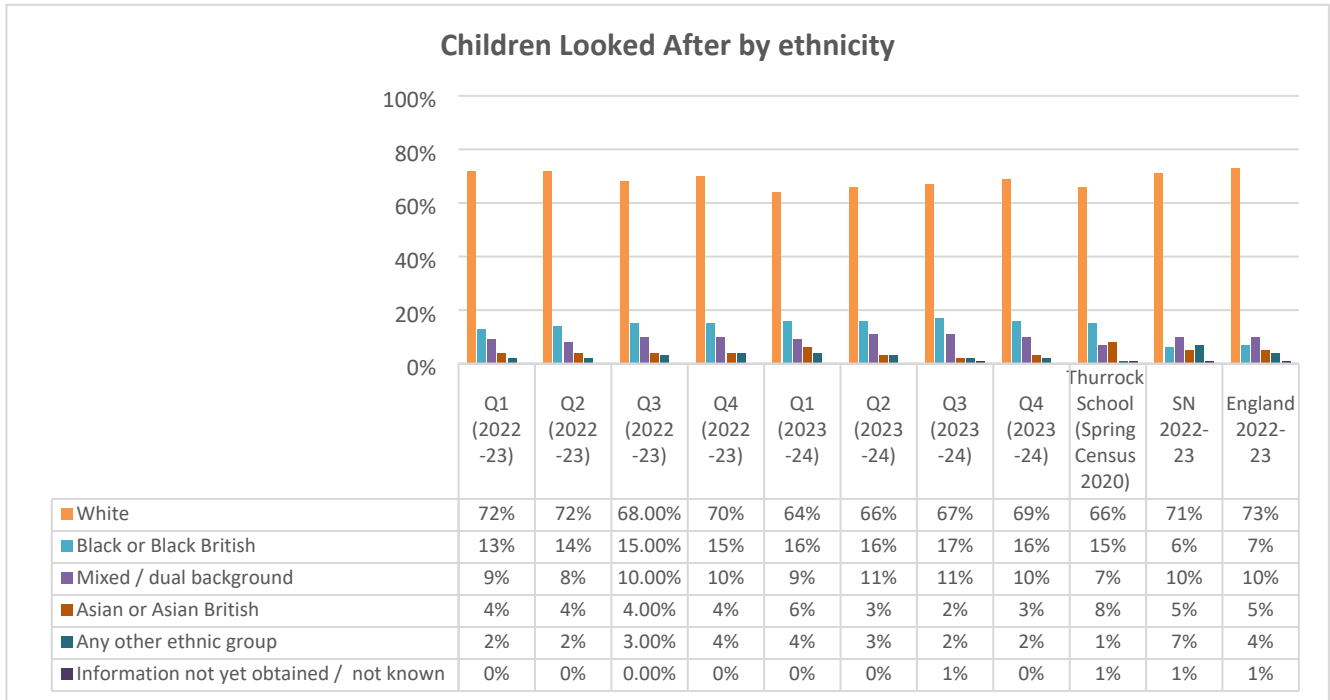
Based on the most recent available benchmarking data in 2022-23, the gender breakdown for males is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as at the end of March 2024, which is a reflection of our percentage of UASC, who are predominately males.



### 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.

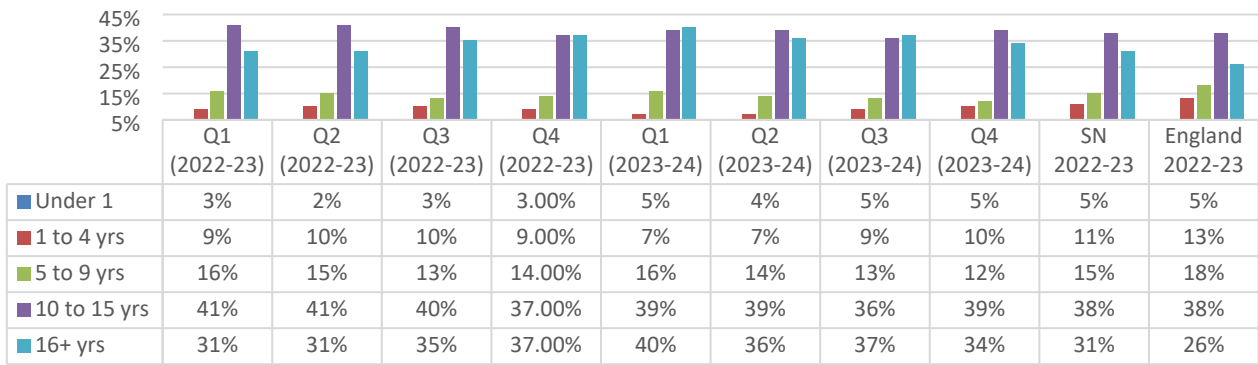
Thurrock’s Children Looked After population are predominantly White and in line with Thurrock’s School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. Quarter 4 2023-24 outturn saw a 1% increase in Asian or Asian British and a 2% increase in White ethnicity.



### 3.8 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2023, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and largely in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages with the exception of our 16+ cohort. As at March 2024, we have seen a decline in ages 16+, and are still above Statistical Neighbour and National averages. We have also seen an increase in the 10 to 15 age group, putting us slight above the Statistical Neighbour and National Averages. To some extent this reflects Thurrock’s status as a point of entry for UASC given almost all are aged 15+ years.

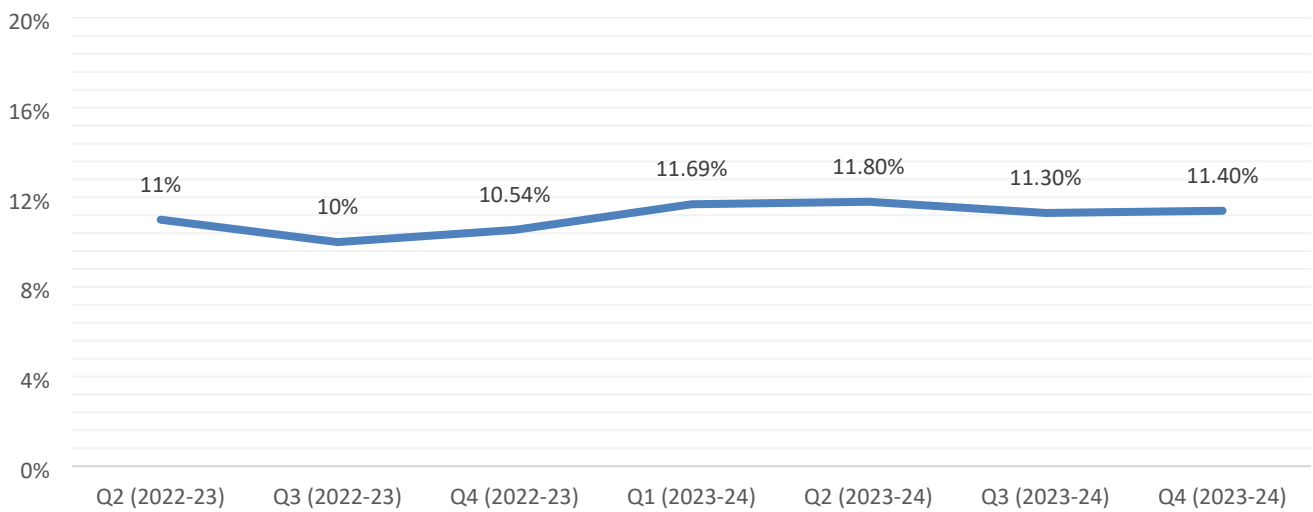
### Age distribution of Children Looked After



### 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 2024, 33 (11.4%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 23 (69.7%) of those children are male. 67% of those disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.

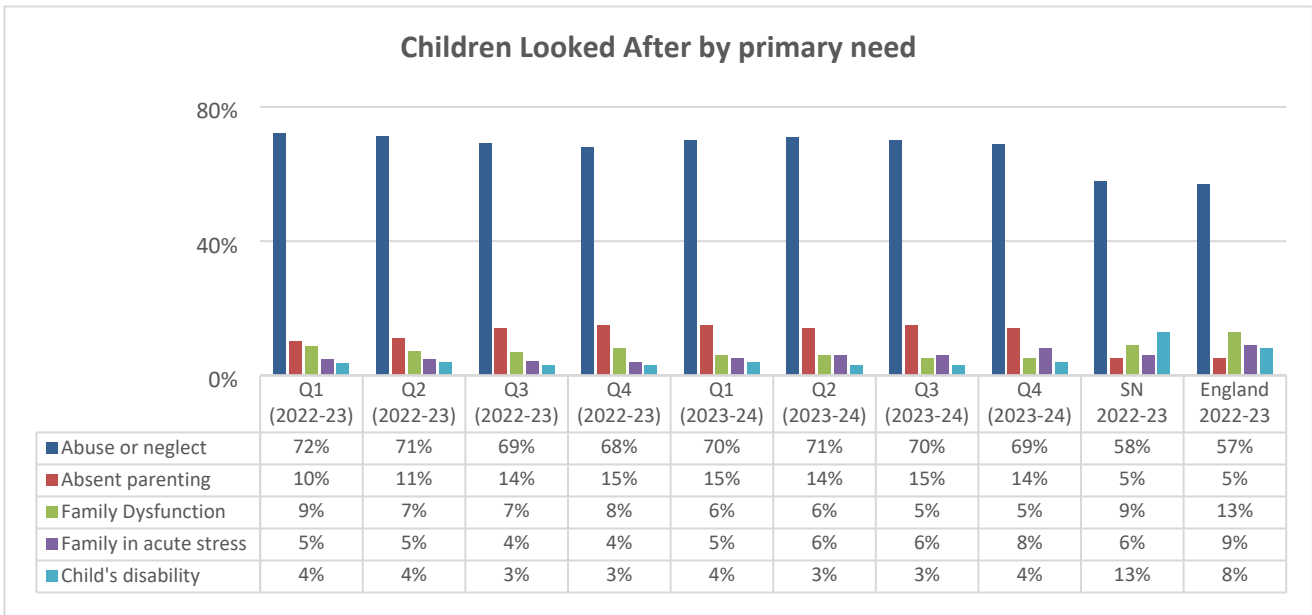
#### Children Looked After with disability



### 3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children became 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 absolutely necessary.

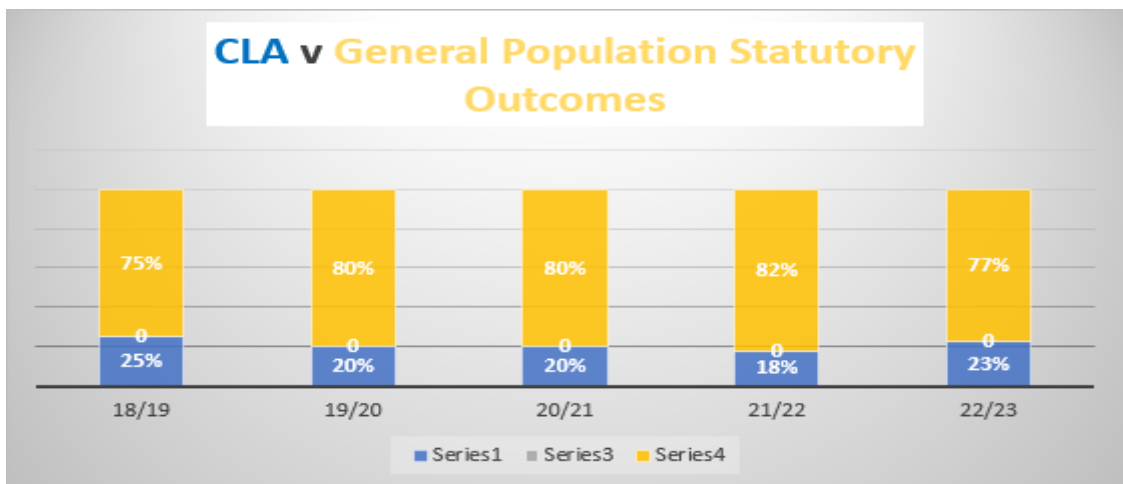
The table below shows the primary need indicated for the child in care. Thurrock has a higher percentage recorded as 'Abuse or Neglect' and lower percentage recorded as 'Family Dysfunction' than statistical neighbours and national benchmarks; this is in line with previous quarters.



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

at the third quarter of 2023/24 there were 47 children recorded as having statutory outcomes with Thurrock YJS and 9 of these children were looked after. The 9 looked after children represented 19% of the young people completing statutory interventions. This is in line with the trend for the last five years.



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 21/22 but overall, the figure has remained relatively static. It needs to be taken into consideration that the numbers overall are very small, so this will reflect the in the percentages.

### **3.12 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.

No new children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the fourth quarter of 2023/24. During the financial year 23/24 there were no new entrants subject to Youth Detention Accommodation.

### **3.13 Out of court disposal panel**

As at the third quarter of the 2023/24 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 68 offences relating to 65 Thurrock children, of which one child had looked after status.

Thurrock YJS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol 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.

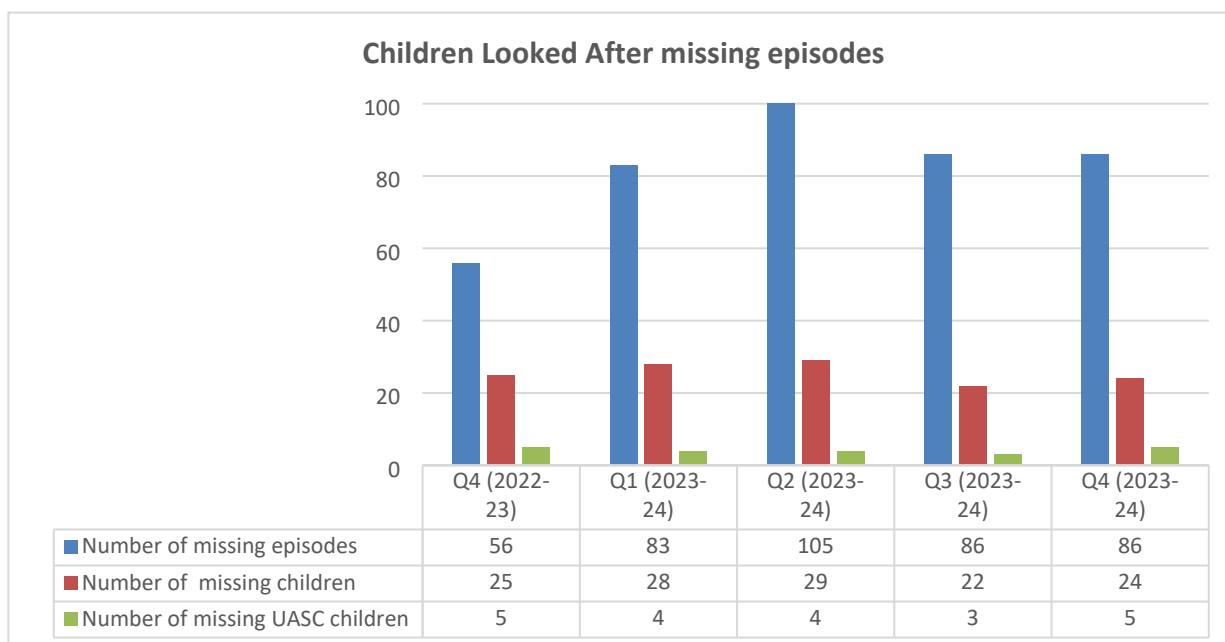
## **4. Children Looked After missing and Return Home Interviews**

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing in 2023/24. Between April 2023 and March 2024, there were a total of 416 missing episodes a reduction on 2022/23 when there were 530 missing episodes and 2021/22 when there was a total of 566 episodes.

During Quarter 4, January to March 2024 there were a total of 86 missing episodes started which represented 24 individual children.

The majority of children going missing are for short periods of time and relates to older children 16 and over, staying out later than an agreed return home time. Younger children who are missing are reported to the Police at an earlier stage of the day and all missing episodes are risk assessed. The most common reasons for children going missing is contact with family and friends (including where a child/young person goes missing in order to have contact with their family).

When children are reported missing the majority return within 24 hours, i.e. if reported at 11pm they are back in placement by the next day, (88%), most are back before the next morning. Small numbers of children may spend longer periods away from placement. There is robust response to missing children and ensuring supported by Policies and Procedures.



#### 4.1 Children Looked After return home interviews (RHI)

From April 01, 2023, the RHI Service transferred from Inspire Youth Hub to an 'In House' provision via the CE and Missing Team.

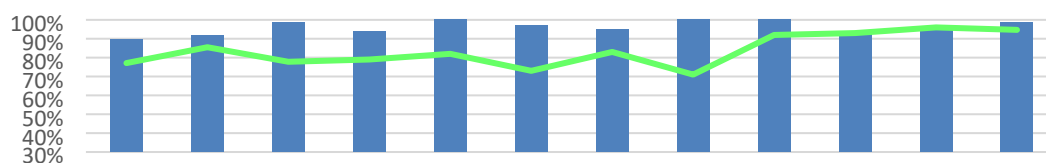
Children and young people are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing episode, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will also discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes to work with young people and reduce missing episodes.

As at the end of March 2024, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 98.7% of which 94.7% accepted and received an interview. The offer of an RHI is not always accepted by young people. Reasons for this include 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 since April 2023 and shows a consistent picture of children accepting and receiving an RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews.

We continue to review how we engage this cohort of young people and offer alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including how their social worker and how this information is captured. These approaches have increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed.

**Percentage of missing episodes where the child accepted and received a Return to home Interview**

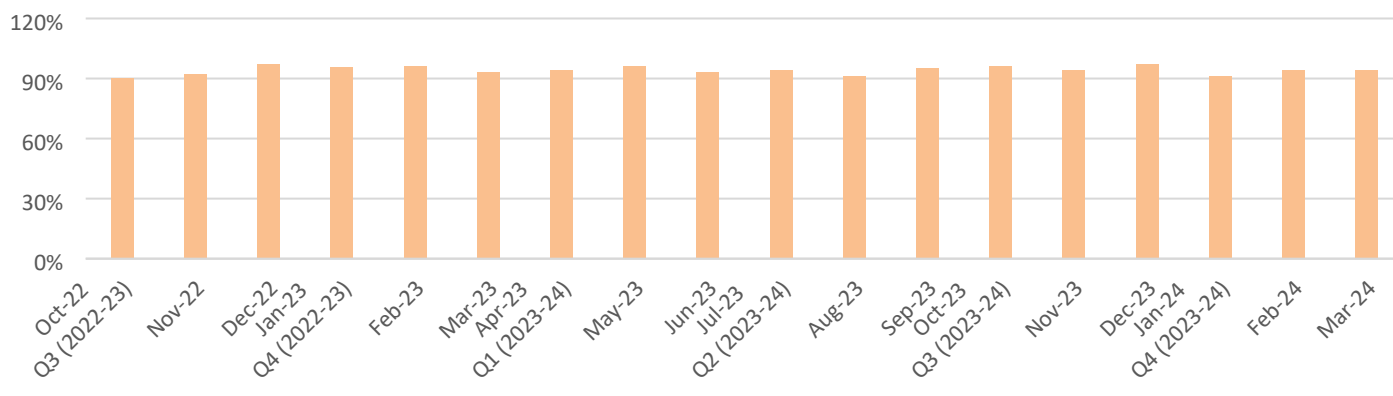


	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
RHI offered	90%	92%	98%	94%	100%	97%	95%	100%	100%	93.5%	94.3%	98.7%
RHI accepted	77%	86%	78%	79%	82%	73%	83%	71%	92%	93%	96%	94.7%

## 5. 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 working days (four weekly) to 65 (three monthly) working days, permitted within regulations. During Q4 2023/24 an average of 93.2% of visits were completed in timescale.

**Percentage of CLA visits completed in time**



## 6. Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

All children who are looked after should receive their IHA appointment within 20 working days of entering care. This target is not currently met. The service acknowledges the significance of the delays in completing Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) for Looked After Children, and recognises its statutory duty under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 and the regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles outlined in Section 1 (1) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Despite national challenges, the issue has been a concern locally, with performance consistently below statutory timelines and the councils' aspirations of a minimum of 70% completed in timescale. This matter has been escalated to the highest levels of the Integrated Care Boards (ICB). The Council, in collaboration with health partners, is committed to addressing these delays to ensure



compliance with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (regulation 7) and improve health outcomes for Looked After Children.

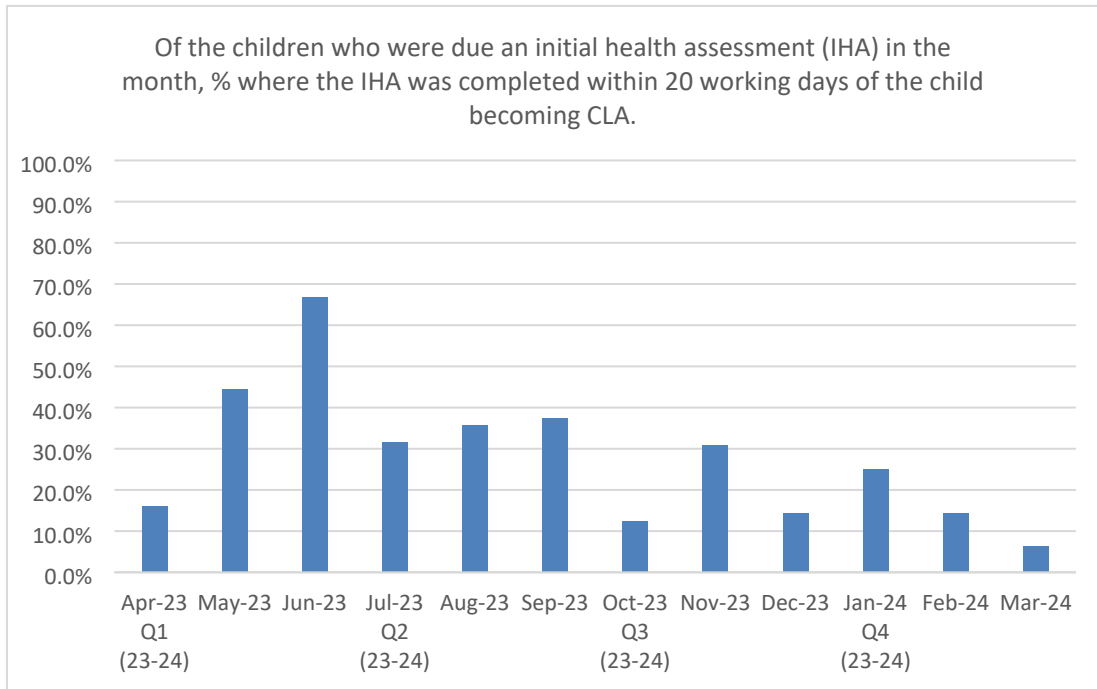
Overdue Initial Health Assessments (IHA) pose a risk of continuous non-compliance with statutory requirements. The primary factor affecting IHA performance has been the lack of capacity for paediatric appointments. Performance on children receiving an IHA in timescale was escalated by the DCS to the Chief Executive of the ICB and a task and finish group was formed, resulting in a business case and agreement for additional Paediatrician capacity to work on completing the backlog of overdue appointments and improving IHA timeliness for children coming into care. A locum Paediatric commenced employment in June 2024, the initial contract of three months has been extended to ensure all overdue children's IHA are completed and new IHA referrals are completed in timescale.

Delay in the referrals can be impacted by parents or the young person where they have capacity will not give written permission for an IHA, not completing the paperwork within five working days. The only acceptable reason for delay in a referral is where we are unable to obtain the parent or young person's consent due to refusal. To maintain robust oversight of this process within social care the Service Manager and Head of Service are notified the day a child is accommodated, to ensure there is no delay to social workers completing the IHA paperwork resulting in the referral taking place on time. NELFT (Northeast London Foundation Trust) meet weekly with the paediatric team to review all the children with a recent request for an IHA and all children with an overdue appointment, this informs a weekly oversight meeting between Senior Managers in Health and Children's Social Care, ensuring continuous monitoring and swift action on emerging issues. These multi-agency meetings ensure, even when delayed, looked after children will have an Initial Health Assessment completed.

NELFT report the completion of Initial Health Assessments in timescale has been impacted on across the region.

No child will wait for medical treatment if they have any medical needs. Children are registered with a G.P. when they come to in care and steps are taken to ensure any health needs are met from the appropriate resources (Health visitor, G.P. etc), a dental and immunisations panel takes place fortnightly, within social care, chaired by the CLA service manager, to ensure there is no delay to dental and health needs.

In Q4 31 CLA Initial Health Assessments were due to be completed, 12.9% of these were completed within the statutory timeframe (20 working days of becoming looked after), this is a slight decrease compared to Q3 when 28 CLA Initial Health Assessments were due to be completed, and 21.4% were completed in time.

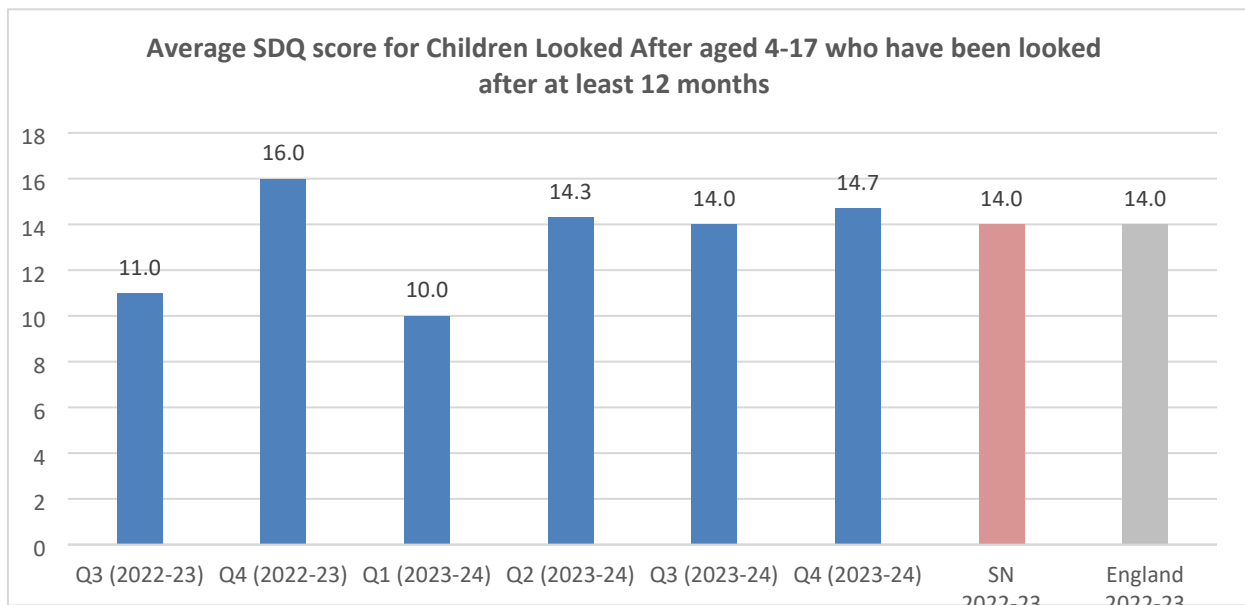


## 7. Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

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 Children's 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 for Quarter 4 2023-24 are 14.7 which is in line with our Statistical Neighbour and National benchmarks. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided, as necessary.



## 8. Adoption

- 8.1 The average duration of care proceedings nationally has been over 40 weeks. 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.

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. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days), as at end of Quarter 4 2023-24 was 781 days; this is an increase on the December 23 position of 638 days.

On 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 480 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children experiencing a delay which impacts on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays in part due to court availability, and family members being identified late. We are working towards reducing the duration of care proceedings through early planning and close monitoring.

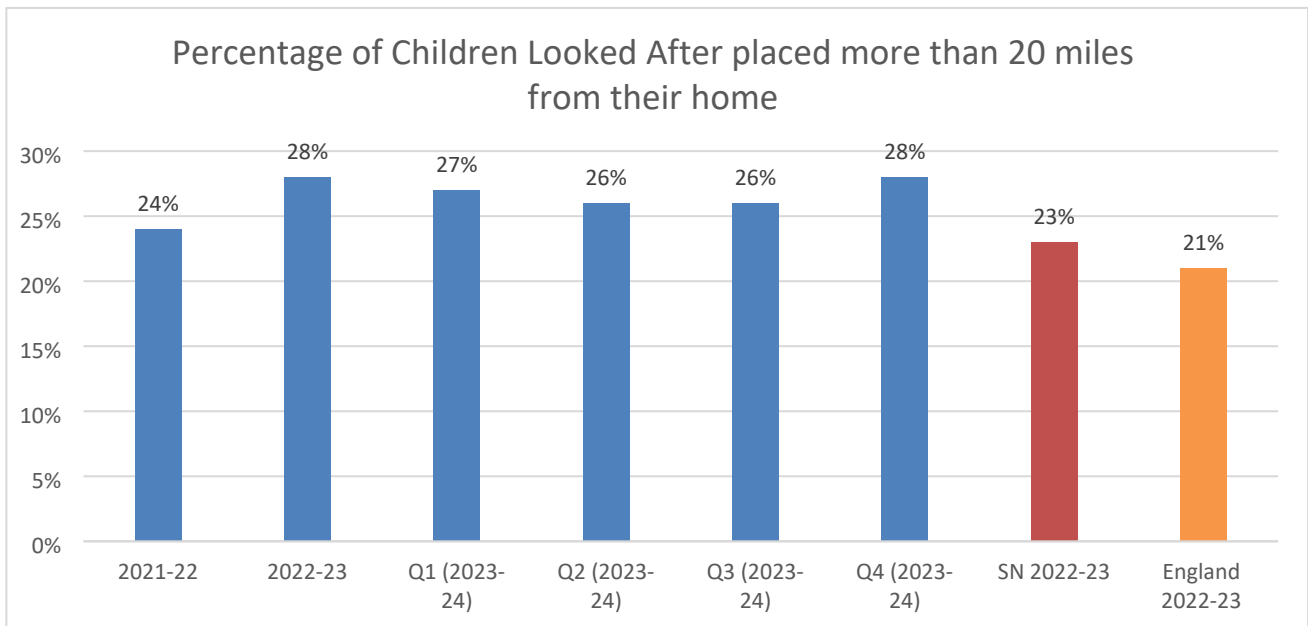
As at Q4 2023-24, the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (rolling 12 months) is 135 days, this is higher than the December 2023 average of 122. Based on 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 197 days and performance is good in this area.

## 9. Children Looked After placement distance

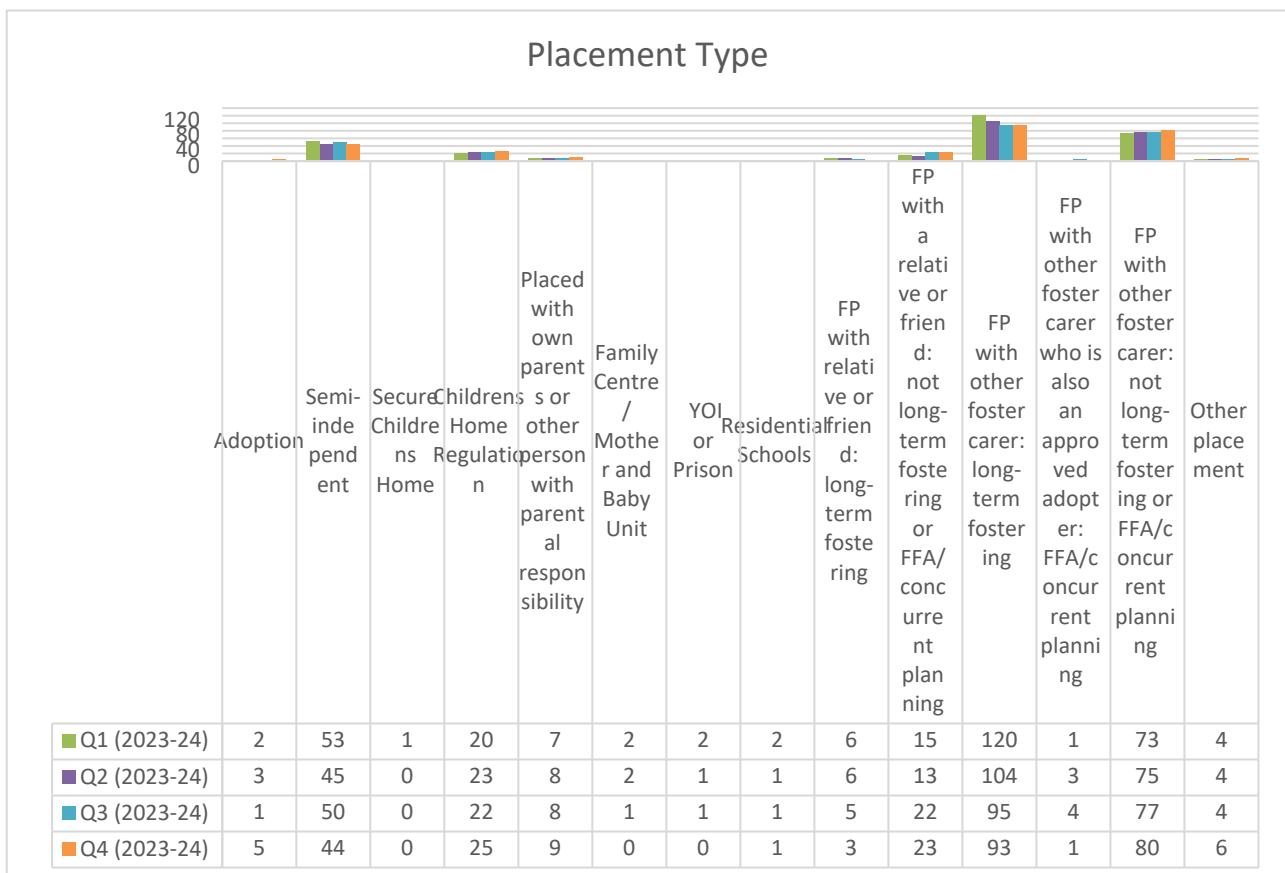
The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989.

At the end of March 2024, 72% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 209 out of 290 children looked

after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available for 2022-23, the national average for those placed more than 20 miles from their home was 21% and statistical neighbours was 23%, so at 28% Thurrock is currently above these. We continue to work hard to ensure that wherever possible, children are placed close to their community.



The chart below provides a breakdown by placement type as at end of Quarter 1 2023-24, Quarter 2 2023-24, Quarter 3 2023-24 and Quarter 4 2023-24.



## 10. Care Leaving Service (Aftercare)

The table below shows 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 (This data does not include Eligible care leavers who remain looked after)

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.

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 2024, 269 Care Leavers were being supported and receiving an Aftercare service. The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups:

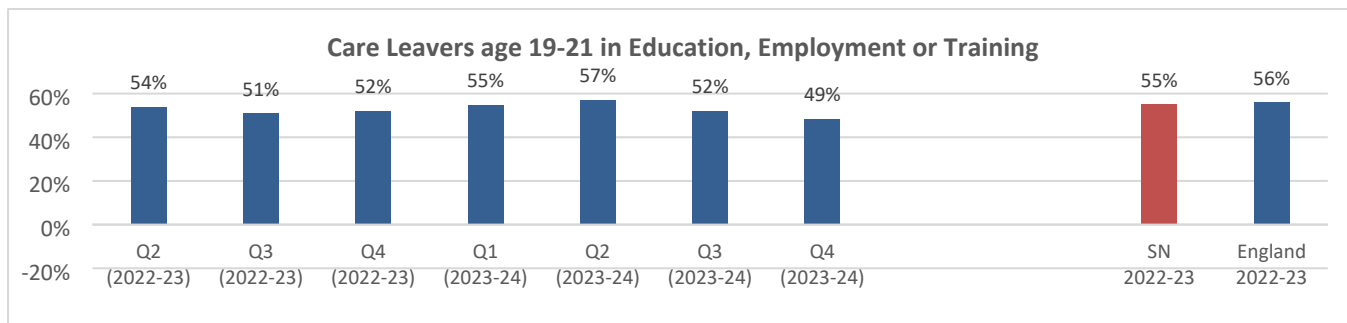
Care Leaver Age	Total	%
16	2	.75
17-18	79	29
19-21	129	47
22-25	61	23
	269	

### 10.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training

At the end of Q4 2023-24, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 52% at the end of December 23, which brings Thurrock below the Statistical Neighbour average of 55% and the England average of 56%. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET)

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

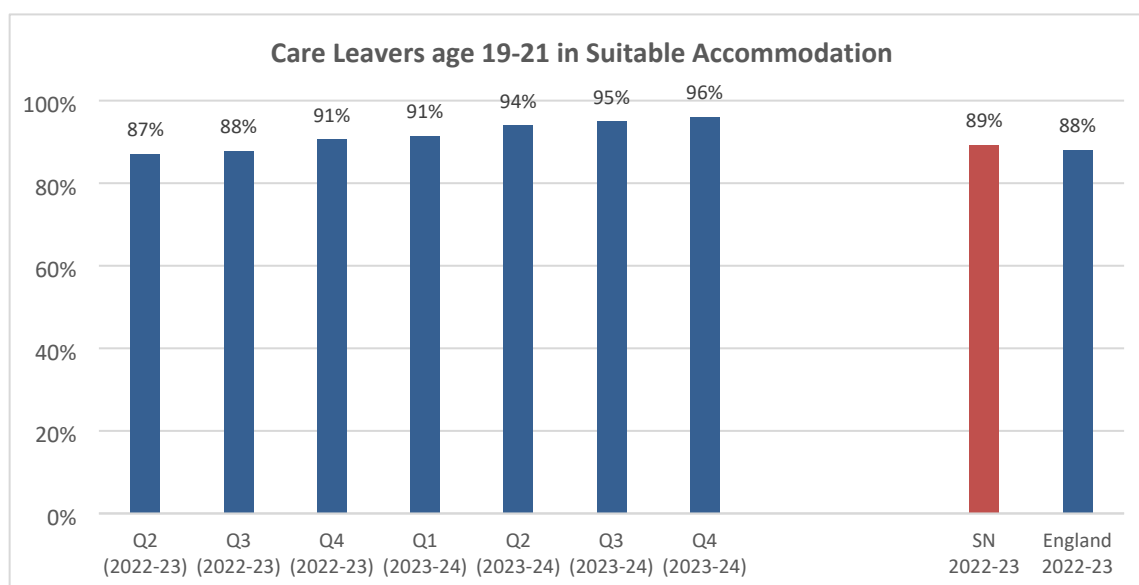
there are weekly panels which focus on pre and post 18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended and chaired by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub, and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people, identify support needs to enable the young person to engage in EET and align their interests to an EET offer. Between panels the personal advisors, of the young people, follow up on actions and recommendations suggested by the panel.



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

Q4 2023-24 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 96%. Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% and England average of 88% based on 2022-23 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.

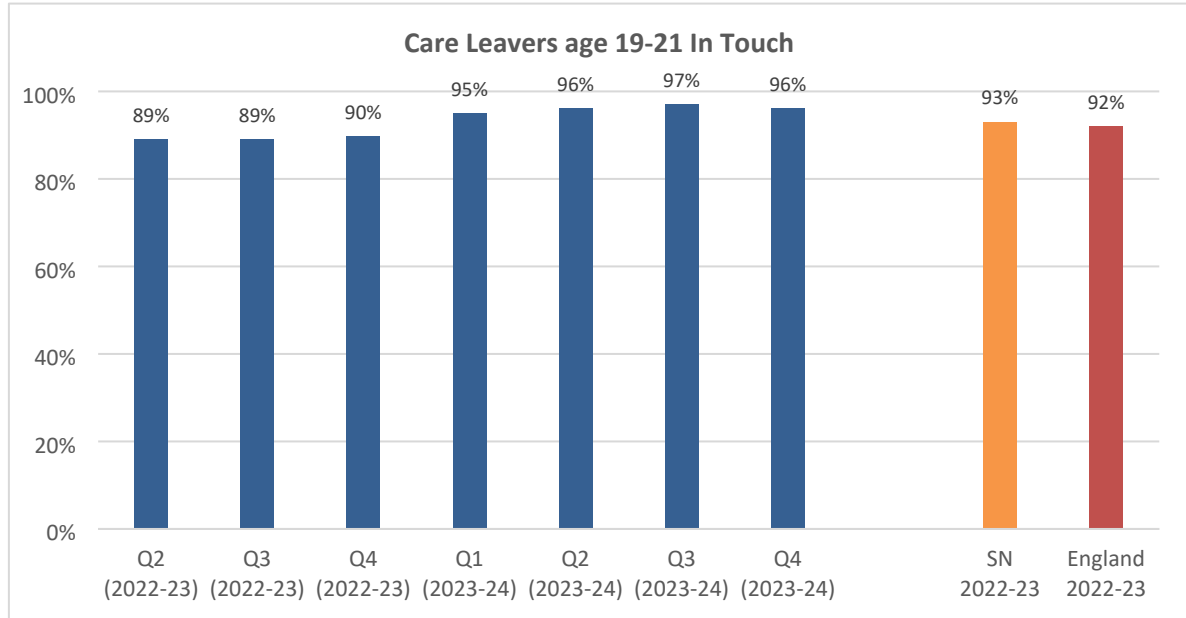
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



### 10.3 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 2023-24, Thurrock was in touch with 96% of Care Leavers aged 19 to 21, this is a 1% decrease on the December 23 outturn of 97%. Thurrock's performance is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2022-23 benchmarking data.



## 11. Reasons for Recommendation

11.1 The performance data and narrative provided sets out progress in Q4 and across 2023/24 for members to review and challenge

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

12.1 Not applicable

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

13.1 None

## 14. Implications

### 14.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Finance Manager**  
**19 July 2024**

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare focusing on data for Quarter 4 (January to March) 2023-24.

There are no additional costs associated with this report, and all costs in meeting the provision of these related services are met from within existing Children Looked After budgets; a total budgeted amount of £3.342m in 2024-25.

## 14.2 Legal

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

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

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee to explore the performance of Children's Social Care.

In relation to the data concerning the Initial Health Assessments 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.

The first review must be within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after.

The Council is subject to the statutory guidance 'Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Looked After Child'. This notes in planning services for Looked After Children that gaps in provision should be identified through the JSNA/JHWS. This should identify gaps in provision and ICB and officers in the Council should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to meet the identified health needs of Looked After Children.

The difficulties with Initial Health Assessments were identified in the JSNA for Looked After Children in 2022 and is reflected in the Brighter Futures Strategy 2021 – 2026.

The assessments should be within this timescale to comply with the Local Authority's statutory duty. The current performance is significantly below this requirement.

Health bodies have a duty to co-operate with the Local Authority under Section 27 of the Children Act 1989.

## 14.3 Diversity and 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.

#### **14.4 Risks**

Thurrock Council & Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board are not meet the statutory expectations for Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children.

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

Looked after children – as set out in the report

#### **15. 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

#### **16. Appendices to the report**

- None

#### **Report Authors:**

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<b>31 July 2024</b>		<b>ITEM: 7</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Education, Employment and Training for Care Leavers</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Kate Kozlova-Boran, Head of Service, Employability and Skills Luke Froment, Service Manager, CLA and Aftercare		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Executive Director, Children's Services		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		
<b>Version:</b> Final		

## Executive Summary

Care experienced young people should be supported to access education, employment or training by the Local Authority under The Children and Social Work Act 2017. This report sets out how Thurrock Council is executing its duties in relation to supporting young people over the age of 16 and entitled to a leaving care service to engage in education, employment, and training. This is a vital role given the challenges care experienced young people can face.

This report sets out the legal duties on Thurrock Council and the steps being taken to support Care Experienced Young People to access education and employment. It makes recommendations for further work.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training (EET) following the end of year 11 Studies.**
- 1.2 Members are invited to consider and offer challenge to the service about how it is proactive in supporting young people to access EET opportunities including apprenticeship and work experience opportunities as a corporate parent. These opportunities will be brokered via the Inspire hub.**
- 1.3 Members identify and pursue areas where the offer of apprenticeship and work experience opportunities could be improved within the Council and wider community.**

## 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council has Corporate Parenting responsibilities to care experienced young people. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced three provisions:

- A duty on local authorities which requires them to offer Personal Adviser support to all care leavers towards whom the local authority has duties under section 23C of the Children Act 1989, up to age 25. This includes care leavers who return to the local authority at any point after the age of 21 and up to age 25 and request such support.
- A duty on local authorities to consult on and then publish their 'local offer' for care leavers, which sets out both care leavers' legal entitlements and the additional discretionary support that the local authority provides.
- A duty on local authorities which requires them to have regard for seven 'corporate parenting principles', that will guide the way in which the local authority provides its services to children in care and care leavers<sup>1</sup>.

2.2 All young people receiving a leaving care service fall within one of the following categories:

- Eligible - aged 16 or 17 and currently looked after and have been for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and ending after reaching the age of 16.
- Relevant - aged 16 or 17, not currently looked after, previously Eligible but left care after 16th birthday. Relevant status ceases if a young person is living consistently for 6 months or more with a parent or someone with parental responsibility. Status resumes if this arrangement ceases.
- Former Relevant - Aged 18 up to the age of 25 who were in care on reaching 16th birthday and previously an Eligible or Relevant child.
- Qualifying for Advice and Assistance – aged 18-25 and were in care for less than 13 weeks on or after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

2.3 Nationwide statistics indicate the difference care experienced young people face compared to the general population:

- Nationally, 38% of care leavers aged 19-21 years are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), compared to 11.9% of all 19- to 21-year-olds.
- Nationally, just 6% of care leavers enter Higher Education by their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, compared to 46.8% of the wider population.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93eb3ae5274a5b87c2fde4/Applyin\\_g\\_corporate\\_parenting\\_principles\\_to\\_looked-after\\_children\\_and\\_care\\_leavers.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a93eb3ae5274a5b87c2fde4/Applyin_g_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf)

2.4 Thurrock Council works with young people to develop plans and access resources that would enable them to reach their potential and achieve their ambitions. We have an aspiration for opportunities to be of good quality, appropriate to the young person interests, abilities, and goals.

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

3.1 The following provides an overview of local performance:

- In June 2024 63.2% of care leavers aged 17-18 were in Education, Employment and Training.
- In June 2024 49.1% of Care Leavers aged 17-21 were in Education, Employment and Training.
- In June 2024 43% of care leavers aged 22-25 were in Education, Employment or Training.

3.2 Colleagues from the Aftercare Team and Employability and Skills team work cross-departmentally to enable care experienced young people to have the best possible outcome in their careers by eliminating barriers to the Employment, Education or Training (EET) and providing appropriate opportunities when the young people are ready.

3.3 The Local Offer sets out support that is available to all care leavers to engage them into education, employment, or training. The current offer includes LA's commitments to:

- Support Young Person with their Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- Help to get onto study/training courses.
- Support on young people's pathway to university and higher education.
- Provide a defined careers advice offer from our Inspire Youth Hub Service.
- Ensure a personal adviser/foster parent attends university open day visits and all travel is paid.
- Ensure your university holiday accommodation costs are arranged in advance and paid for by a grant of up to £2,750 during year 1, 2 and 3.
- Provide a careers mentor from The Inspire Hub.
- Support through our Inspire Hub to prepare a CV, complete job applications, prepare for interviews, identify apprenticeship, and job opportunities.
- Provide a financial payment to assist with interviews, e.g., travel costs and clothing.
- Provide travel costs to attend work or university until first pay cheque or student loan is available.
- Work with colleagues from Inspire to identify training or employment opportunities.

And the provision for:

- £100 per year towards books and materials for young people attending college or university.
- £500 to support living costs for young people deciding to take a gap year before attending higher education.
- £100 towards cost of clothing for first job interview.
- £100 towards prom and graduation costs.
- Support with travel costs to College or University.
- University Higher Education Bursary; £2,000 per course.
- Laptops, dependent on relevance to the study course.
- University holiday accommodation cost: £2,750 per year over the first three years of the course along with support to identify appropriate holiday accommodation if required.
- Support to apply for university bursaries and other charitable funding,

There is a weekly panel which focuses on post-18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer. The panel seeks to strengthen oversight and planning; to ensure young people have opportunities into EET, to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. Each young person is regularly reviewed at panel to monitor impact and progress. The Personal Advisors in the aftercare team have an excellent understanding of the young people's needs and seek to take a trauma informed approach to meeting their needs for education and employment. The aim is to match each young person with an offer that enthuses and motivates them. The Virtual School officer for post-16 attends this Panel to promote smooth transitions, along with the adult community college. Currently the aftercare team is in liaison seeking to add with the Recovery College based at Thurrock Inclusions to the EET panel. This is a team providing an educational learning environment for young people who experience difficulties with mental health or have an interest in mental health and well-being.

Fifteen young people have been identified to receive more targeted support into Education, Employment and Training. Progress is reviewed each month in a cross departmental monthly meeting with a focus on work placements, internships and apprenticeships within the LA and its partners. The discussions in this forum seek to address issues such as self-esteem and social anxiety that can act as barriers towards employment or education for care experienced young people. An evaluation of this will be undertaken to identify key points of learning and ways of imbedding this in future work.

Inspire attends CLA reviews when asked to be part of transition planning. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (UASC) lead meets monthly with the virtual school to review planning around education for this cohort of young people. The UASC service is being further developed with specialist Personal Advisors working with these young people alongside their allocated social worker from 16-18 to strengthen planning and support including around education.

Job and Skills club is now delivered and managed by Inspire. Referrals from DWP, Personal Advisers and other professionals are steadily growing. DWP are happy to add to clients' commitments in journal. A three-week club runs Tuesdays 10am – 12pm focusing on CV updating, cover letters, interview preparation. Two Care Leavers are attending.

The next course in development, 'Preparing for Adulthood', focuses on budgeting and preparing food on a budget. All courses are co-produced with care experienced young people and focus on an identified need and run in close partnership with the DWP and the Care leaver. Job Coach encourages the young person to attend and commit through their universal credit framework.

Music Sessions have been running in the Inspire professional Music Studio since July 2023 aimed at young people aged 15 years – 24 years. One care leaver attends regularly whose ambition is to work in the music industry. The other Care leaver moved away so could no longer attend. The sessions are run by a qualified musician upskilling the young people for their future career.

Mind currently use Inspire Youth Hub to deliver wellbeing sessions. The workshops are popular and growing. Self-referral or referral by a professional are welcomed. Government financial support to encourage employers to take care experienced young people on as apprentices, and an increase to the Apprenticeship Bursary, have recently been introduced but it is too early to judge their impact. Historically, care leavers have felt discouraged from gaining qualifications through an apprenticeship by often low wages compared with unskilled work, for example in construction or logistics, to the detriment of their longer-term employment and earnings potential. One Care Leaver has started a traineeship with NHS through the Anchor Programme sourced by Inspire with initial positive feedback.

Care leavers can now book in with CVS at Inspire. CVS search for vacancies, promote the importance of gaining new skills through volunteering, enhancing a care leaver's CV. The CVS worker supports clients in applying every step of the way to the final application. This service is available at Inspire Grays Hub monthly on a Friday. Three care leavers have engaged in appointments.

Level up' programme with the Mid and South Essex Health and Care Academy will be available to partake in from October 2024 (originally booked for June '24 but funding being held until October '24). Two Care Leavers are interested in this course.

Professionals are signposting Care Leavers to 'Forward Trust' to encourage Care leavers and clients of Inspire to discuss alcohol or drug concerns. This service is a confidential online chat and advice service (9am-5pm weekdays) supporting young people with concerns regarding alcohol, drugs, mental health or issues around housing, employment and staying well. As this is a confidential service, we cannot show how many young people are engaged.

Central Training Group and Inspire have partnered to deliver a tailored programme 'Next Steps' that combines practical training with real-world experience. Central and inspire understand that every learner is unique. This programme is designed to be flexible and supportive, catering to client's

individual needs and aspirations. Each Client will receive personalised guidance and support every step of the way. We have had two care leavers interested and one who wanted to attend but fell outside the age bracket. This young person is looking at attending The Adult Community College instead.

Inspire currently updates and sources new information for their Professional Padlet used by colleagues in the council. All colleagues from Aftercare Team and Inspire have access and can discuss information, courses, volunteering, mental health opportunities with care leavers.

To ensure Care Experienced Young People are supported into Education, employment and or training and we, as the Corporate Parent, are ambitious about the outcomes for our Care Leavers, it is recommended that an ambitious target of 70% is adopted to Care Leavers aged 17-21.

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

- 4.1 To support Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training following the end of year 11 Studies.
- 4.2 To support Members to be sighted on the offer to Care Leavers in relation to apprenticeship and work experience opportunities.
- 4.3 To support Members understanding of the role of corporate parent across the whole of the council.

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

- 5.1 As noted in the report above, young people have been consulted on the training courses and local offer for Care Leavers.

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

- 6.1 Children Looked After

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall**  
**Finance Manager**

In line with the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility, this report advises Members to be aware of the target of 70% of Care Experienced Young People to progress into Employment, Education or Training following the end of year 11 Studies.



There are no additional costs associated with this proposal, and all costs should be met from within existing budgets in cost centre CA061, CA062 and CA064 a total net amount of £2.194m inclusive of grant funding.

## **7.2 Legal**

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

This report provides Corporate Parenting Committee the opportunity to explore how the Council meets the needs of care experienced young people to access education, employment, or training.

The Council has a legal duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to set out in its Local Offer information about such services it offers to care leavers and this should include, among other things, information about services which may assist care leavers in, or preparing for, adulthood and independent living in relation to education, training, and employment.

In carrying out functions in relation to care experienced young people the Council must have regard to the corporate parenting principles.

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal duties for a Council to provide support to the extent that the care experienced young person's welfare requires it and his education or training needs require it. This is supported by The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 and the statutory guidance Volume 3 of the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations: Planning transition to adulthood for care leavers. Chapter 5 of this guidance states that care leavers should be offered work experience and other opportunities to allow them to test their career aspirations and needs, along with high quality advice, which should be included in the pathway plan. The Council should have policies and processes that support care leavers in undertaking apprenticeships, traineeships, vocational courses, or employment.

## **7.3 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 Child Looked After and Aftercare services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to be safe and well and to reach their potential. Individual needs assessments and plans are made for each care leaver taking consideration of their identity, culture, history and social needs.

The Local Offer informs each needs assessment and will be informed by a Community Equality Impact Assessment. The Anti Racist Practice standards set by Thurrock Children's Services are applicable to this report and service.

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

None

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

None

**9. Appendices to the report**

None

**Report Authors:**

Kate Kozlova-Boran, Head of Employability and Skills  
Luke Froment, Service Manager, Children Looked After and Aftercare

<b>31 July 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 8</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key
<b>Report of:</b> Peter Doherty, Head of Housing Operations Luke Froment: Service Manager, Children Looked After and Aftercare	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Executive Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	
<b>Version:</b> Final	

## Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority meets its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to support them into independent living as adults.

Protocols should clearly lay out the processes followed by Local Authorities that support Care Leavers to transition to independent living and avoid homelessness.

The joint protocol is updated annually and has been reviewed between Housing and Children Social Care. The protocol has been most recently updated in March 2024 there is also an initial draft Impact Equality Assessment awaiting sign off alongside the protocol:

- to ensure a smoother application journey
- to avoid care leavers being at risk of arrears and reduce risk of eviction.
- to ensure that the position of our young people vulnerable to homelessness is clear and arrangements for emergency accommodation are in place.
- To ensure that matters raised by officers are resolved quickly and joint meetings are used for continuous improvement.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **For the Committee to note the statutory duties of the Local Authority to support young people in obtaining suitable accommodation and how we plan to meet these duties.**

**1.2 For the Committee to have oversight of the joint protocols and to be involved in the ongoing review of delivery across Children’s Services and Housing Services.**

**2. Introduction and Background**

2.1. Local Authorities have a responsibility for developing and effectively delivering a joint protocol setting out how the authority will deliver the local accommodation offered to Care Leavers and prevent homelessness.

2.2 The Homelessness code of guidance was revised in 2018 to reflect changes introduced by the Homelessness Reduction Act. Chapter 22 of the Code focusses specifically on Care Leavers. The Code outlines the importance of joint working when planning housing options for Care Leavers and states that:

*By working together, Housing Services and Children’s Services can better ensure that as a corporate parent, the appropriate accommodation and support is available to Care Leavers. (Homelessness code of guidance -Chapter 22: Care Leavers).*

2.3 Furthermore, the guidance also advises that authorities should have in place joint protocols which clearly outline jointly held corporate parenting responsibilities for Care Leavers. Joint protocols should cover:

- arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living
- identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it
- providing a quick, safe, joined up response for Care Leavers who do become homeless

2.4 A copy of the updated Joint Housing Protocol is appended to this report in Appendix One for members’ reference. Key changes are:

- Early alert for arrears so support can be put in reduce the risk of eviction.
- Clarification of Thurrock Council’s position on care experienced young people vulnerable to homelessness or presenting as homeless.
- Amendments to Procedural aspects and the Pathway Plan to reduce administration
- Updated escalation process

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

3.1 The Joint Housing Protocol has been reviewed and updated for the financial year 2023/24. The following sets out its operational impact and highlights the effect the changes are having. It reflects the current effective joint work between Housing and Children’s Social care. Joint meetings between housing and after-care teams at an operational and strategic level are held so that there is regular

oversight of young people's progress to being allocated a Council property. Working relationships are effective and these forums work to address needs.

3.2 Prior to being offered a Thurrock Council Property, young people must demonstrate a readiness for tenancy. This is an objective of the Pathway Planning process alongside joint work from the Personal Advisor and Housing Officers. The Pathway plan should identify what the post-18 arrangements are and young person's readiness to live independently in line with their wishes. It's recognised that for some young people, they will not be ready to live independently at 18 and there are a range of alternative provisions to support them.

- Remaining with their Foster Carer under a 'Staying Put' Arrangement
- Living in semi-supported accommodation
- Living in 'Head-Start Housing'
- Choosing to live within their own family
- Attending university
- Supported by Adult Services in a CQC registered home or Shared Lives arrangements (for young adults with significant additional needs)

3.3 Housing Officers and Personal Advisors support young people through the application process and offer training on tenancy maintenance. This supports young people with the information and advice they need to obtain and maintain a lease.

3.4 In April 2023 the oversight of the HeadStart housing management function was transferred to the AHH directorate (now the Place directorate) to be placed within the Tenancy Management service. This approach ensures that the property management and compliance functions are aligned with current housing best practice, and benefit from the regulatory & operational frameworks within the housing operations service.

3.5 As part of the transfer of service, one HSH officer has moved to the Tenancy Management team and one officer remains within the Aftercare service.

3.6 The HSH officer role is focused on the housing and tenancy management function within the service. Ensuring that properties are safe and compliant, that lettings and move-on's are managed effectively, that rent due is being paid or benefit payments are being managed, that residents are complying with the terms of their license that related to looking after their property and being a good neighbor.

3.7 The role within the Aftercare service has recently been refocused. The new Housing Specialist role sits within the aftercare service and seeks to act as a bridge between aftercare and housing.

- 3.8 HSH, Housing Solution and the Aftercare team are committed to working together to achieve the shared outcomes of providing the best opportunity to care leavers to gain independence, living sustainably in safe and secure accommodation.
- 3.9 Both services have been working in partnership to deliver effective processes to enable the timely move on of Care Leavers from pre-18 supported accommodation, into a HSH property and then onto a permanent housing solution in social housing or other areas of choice.
- 3.10 For its part, HSH accommodation should be housing care leavers for 6 -12 months whilst they gain capacity to move-on to permanent independent living.

**Priority areas:**

**Move-through rates:**

Move-through rates need to be sufficient to support the timely progress of young people who need to move on from their pre-18 placements. Current move-on rates are not at the required levels and a new process has been agreed to provide a basis for a more robust approach.

We are embedding a new process for on boarding and ongoing review for residents in HSH. This approach identifies key touch points where we will be checking in with the resident on progress against key milestones that will have been agreed at the on-boarding and sign-up meeting.

These milestones will include personal progress measures as well as key actions such as getting registered on the Thurrock Council housing register and actively bidding for properties

HSH officers will work with Care Leavers and Personal Advisors to encourage, support and challenge young people in HeadStart Housing to make decisions and to become independent, resilient, and self-reliant; to move closer to employment or training; and ultimately move-on to settled accommodation by arranging removals, accessing funding, and providing settlement support in their new accommodation.

The exception to this will be if the Care Leaver is a former relevant Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Child (UASC) and they do not currently have immigration status. The lack of status means they do not have a recourse to public funds and no right to social housing or private rental accommodation.

This presents a risk as we are unable to move the former UASC Care Leavers on until their immigration status is resolved. In these cases, the Home Office is the lead agency and current capacity in these services do not allow for timely outcomes to applications.

### **Housing stock and growing capacity:**

The current portfolio of HSH properties cuts across private sector leasing arrangements and use of Thurrock Council Housing Stock.

There are currently 58 bedspaces:

<b>Accommodation Type</b>	<b>No of Bedspaces</b>	<b>Location</b>	
		<b>In Borough</b>	<b>Out of Borough</b>
Private Sector Lease	25	25	0
Thurrock Council Housing	24	24	0
Supported Housing	9	9	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>58</b>	

A key strategic priority was to bring all bedspaces into the borough – this was achieved in Q4 of 2023/4.

Current budgets do not allow for the further leasing of private rental HMO properties from local landlords or agents.

The strategic aim is to grow the available stock for HSH within the Council Housing stock – this also forms part of the Housing Strategy.

Current pressures on Thurrock Council housing stock from increased homeless presentations, reductions in social mobility, and the decant of the Blackshots tower blocks means that this has been delayed. However, the housing strategy provision shows the commitment to supporting the sustainability of the HSH portfolio in the medium term.

### **Income management:**

HSH budgets set an income target for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit Housing Element receipts.

Income in the year 2023/4 was £146,000 against an annual budget income line of £35,057. This was substantially ahead of target.

To ensure that we are maximising income levels we are moving all rent accounts onto the NEC/Northgate housing management system. This will allow greater oversight of all accounts and will identify where there are rental liabilities from working residents who are not in receipt of housing benefit or universal credit housing element.

- 3.11 In recent years, one difficulty which has been experienced by young people who have experienced care has been that they have been unable to make an

application for housing prior to their 18th birthday. Work has been undertaken with Housing colleagues to ensure that such applications can be taken, and preparations made for assessments prior to that birthday occurring, to speed up the process once the majority has been attained.

- 3.12 Care experienced young people are awarded priority banding (Band 3) on the housing register once the Registrations Team are advised that they are ready to leave semi-independent living and live independently. Forms are completed and then colleagues from Registrations and Aftercare communicate to ensure appropriate information is shared to inform future offers.
- 3.13 To provide some context in relation to the rate of re-housing, which is evident for Care Leavers at present, we can confirm that, at the end of 2023/24 financial year, there were 40 Care Leavers active on the housing register, and in that year, 27 such individuals were re-housed into social housing in Thurrock. At the end of June this year, there continued to be 40 individuals active on the Register, and six had received offers. This demonstrates that last year's average re-housing rate was around two offers per month, and this continues this year, despite reductions in stock and increasing demand from other sectors. It should be noted, however, that numbers of Care Leavers needing re-housing is not reducing, and the rate of offers is unable to keep up with this demand at this time, and so consideration of a broader offer for these individuals is likely necessary this year and has commenced.
- 3.14 There are a number of young adults already living in secured tenancies with Thurrock Council. Housing Colleagues have developed a pre-eviction process and identify young adults who are Care Leavers so that they can be jointly supported to avoid eviction. The Joint Housing Protocol has been updated to ensure an 'early alert' when Care Leavers with Thurrock Council tenancies are showing arrears. This is so financial advice, support from a personal advisor and intervention if required can be offered to a young person well before the arrears become overwhelming. Close joint working has been effective in stabilising tenancies.
- 3.15 Thurrock Council has continuing responsibility to support young people leaving care up to the age of 25 and we have a clear expectation that no care experienced young person eligible for After Care Services should be left street homeless. To this end, existing resources have been jointly pooled to provide a shared budget from which emergency accommodation can be provided to those over 21 years to the age of 25. This provides a safety net whilst their housing needs are assessed and plans for further accommodation are agreed whatever their entitlement.
- 3.16 There have been two external reviews examining support for Care Leavers in Thurrock in June 2023 and February 2024. On both occasions there was positive feedback in relation to the offer of accommodation for our young people and highlighting the effective joint work between Children's services and Housing colleagues.



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

- 4.1 To inform members of and invite members comments on, the work being carried out jointly between Children's Services and Housing to meet the housing needs of Thurrock's Care Leavers.

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

- 5.1 The protocol will be shared with Care Leavers and the Children in Care Council and their comments invited which will be incorporated into subsequent reviews

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

- 6.1. Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sima Khiroya**  
**Assistant Director, Financial Management**

This report sets out how the local authority can meet its statutory duty and responsibility to young people leaving care to support them to live independently as adults.

There is a limited availability of properties within the housing benefit element that do not require social care top-up for young people transitioning to independence. This lack of suitable housing options has created challenges for Children Services, as young people turning 18 are not being accommodated by Headstart Housing due to capacity constraints. To address this issue, Children Services is collaborating with Housing colleagues to assist young people in bidding for suitable properties and prioritise those who are actively waiting or bidding.

There are no additional costs associated with this proposal, and all costs should be met from within existing Children Services budgets for 2024-25 in cost centres CA064; with a total budget of £1.098m.

The total HSH budget for 2024-25 is £0.851m.

The expected targets for recovery of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit income have been set for 2024-25, with a total budget of £0.045m. Ensuring care leavers are active on the housing register as early as possible and stabilization of tenancies will be critical in income maximization, and therefore cost recovery.

## 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by:

**Urenna Nwulu**  
**Safeguarding Solicitor – Team Leader**

**Godwin Mangse**  
**Interim Principal Lawyer – Housing & Litigation**

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and the Homelessness Act (2002) require Local Authority Children’s Services and Housing departments to develop joint housing protocols and procedures to ensure that each department plays a full role in providing corporate parenting support to Care Leavers and to ensure the accommodation needs of Care Leavers are met.

The Local Authority must have regard to the Corporate Parenting Principles in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 in the exercise of functions in relation to Looked after, relevant, and former relevant children.

The Local Authority is required under section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to publish a local offer, which sets out the services and the support available for care leavers.

The local offer should include information on how care leavers are supported to access suitable accommodation, including the support available from housing services. Joint housing protocols should be aligned with the local offer and can help to ensure that the commitments to support Care Leavers to access and sustain accommodation are met. Local Authorities should consider providing a link to the joint protocol within the local offer so that Care Leavers, advocates, and other professionals can have access to the document.

The Housing Act 1996 as amended states that a Young Person who is threatened with homelessness, has a priority need for housing if they are a person:

- under 21 who was (but is no longer) looked after by the Local Authority between the ages of 16 and 18.
- A person 21 or over who is vulnerable because of being looked after.

The Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) places a new duty on Local Authorities to help prevent the homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need, who are eligible for assistance and threatened with homelessness.

The legal implications have also been reviewed from a housing perspective and there are no further implications to be added than those already stated.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**  
**Community Development and Equalities**

The Services are committed to practice, which promotes equality, diversity and inclusion and will fulfil duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy and is committed to support all children in council's care to be safe and well and to achieve their potential.

A Community Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers and will be subject to ongoing review and update to ensure that plans are in place to mitigate the risk of disproportionate negative impact for protected groups and all other communities the process considers. Opportunities to maximise positive impact will also be considered through the assessment process.

The Anti-Racist Practice standards set by Thurrock Children's Services are applicable to this report and service.

### 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):

Report on Housing Options for Care Leavers:

<https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/documents/s37878/Housing%20Options%20for%20Care%20Leavers.pdf>

### 9. Appendices to the report

Joint Housing Protocol 2023/24

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# **Joint Housing Protocol**

**for**

## **Care Leavers in Thurrock**

**Housing Protocol for Care Leavers who are in need of housing and tenancy related support**

## INTRODUCTION

Young people will have different emotions about leaving care and living independently. Some young people are excited about branching out on their own, taking the first steps to being fully independent. Some young people will be anxious about where they will live, some are nervous about living on their own, some are afraid they will be lonely and some young people will experience a mixture of all these feelings.

Thurrock Council are Corporate Parents for our young people who are leaving care and embarking on the journey to independence. Corporate parenting means local authorities doing the most they can for looked after children and care leavers, to give them the same opportunities as other children and promote the best possible outcomes for them.

Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service have statutory duties to young people leaving our care, and other statutory and voluntary agencies provide a range of services to support them.

The purpose of this protocol is to set out how Thurrock Council, Children's Services and Housing Services will work together to provide an effective, consistent and co-ordinated response to Care Leavers in order to meet their housing and support needs and help them get the best start in life.

As well as setting out the roles, responsibilities and arrangements for achieving planned supportive transitions to independent living for Children's Social Care and Housing Service, this protocol will help to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of young people, ensuring that, when young people are ready to live independently, their housing needs are met and that they have the skills, knowledge, help and support to sustain their tenancies.

### 1. YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THIS PROTOCOL

This protocol relates to young people who are owed a duty by Thurrock Council under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

The purpose of the Act is to ensure that young people do not leave care until they are ready and that, when they have left care, they receive the support they require.

Under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children's Social Care has a duty towards 'Eligible', 'Relevant' and 'Former Relevant' children and a duty to provide support which includes appropriate housing (see **Appendix A** for definitions).

The [DfE Statutory guidance](#) on applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers stresses the importance of joint working in supporting care leavers to navigate their way through the transition to adulthood:

Good preparation, a gradual transition and flexible ongoing support are key to helping care leavers achieve a successful move to independent living. Effective and proactive local authorities establish joint working arrangements between children's services, housing and other specialist services to help care leavers prepare for the realities of living independently, involve them in planning and decisions about their housing options, ensure suitable housing and support is in place, and are ready to respond with contingency arrangements if things do go wrong. (Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers - Chapter 2).

In Thurrock, around 80 young people, aged 16 or 17, are accommodated by Thurrock Children's Social Care are eligible for a care leaving service and will require support to access appropriate independent accommodation at the age of 18. There are also a number of young people (living in independent or supported housing, or remaining with foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement) who are aged 18 – 25, being supported by Children's Social Care and will, at some time, want to live independently and will require their own home.

## **2. SIGNATORIES TO THIS PROTOCOL**

This Protocol has been developed and agreed by Thurrock Council Children's Social Care and Housing Solutions Service. It describes the joint working arrangements that have been agreed to ensure that, in Thurrock we provide a consistent and co-ordinated response to care leavers, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), who are in need of accommodation and tenancy related support.

## **3. A CONSISTENT, CO-ORDINATED RESPONSE**

It is essential that Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service play a full and active role in assessing, assisting and supporting care leavers, and that the housing needs of care leavers are addressed and planned for before the young person leaves care.

In order to meet care leavers' housing and support needs, Children's Social Care and Housing Services must work collaboratively and proactively with housing and support providers to ensure an adequate range and supply of accommodation to meet the assessed needs of relevant children and other care leavers.

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a care setting until they are ready to live independently and will ensure that, by the time the young person is ready to leave care, they have acquired the vital skills and provided with additional support to successfully manage tenancies and live independently.

The objective is to find the most suitable accommodation for Care Leavers. This includes confirming that it is appropriate to each young person's individual circumstances and needs and that if social rented housing is required, the young person is supported to submit a housing application early enough to be offered housing when they are ready to live independently.

This Protocol aims to build upon existing good practice and will:

- Improve the way in which care leavers experience the transition from being "looked after to independence and how they are referred to, and access, housing and support services
- Improve working relationships between organisations and assist their understanding of one another's roles and responsibilities
- Ensure that Thurrock Council meets its statutory duties towards care leavers
- Standardise processes and procedures that are easy to follow
- Achieve greater consistency with support plans and access to services
- Fully utilise the skills, knowledge and resources of Children's Social Care and Housing Services in order to deliver effective and sustainable solutions for care leavers

#### **4. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THIS PROTOCOL**

All of the signatories to this Protocol have agreed the following principles:

- The safety and welfare of the young person leaving care is paramount
- Every effort will be made through a joined up response to identify homelessness risk early and act to prevent it through early intervention and effective multi agency working providing a quick, safe, joined up response for care leavers who do become homeless



- Agencies will work together to assess and meet the needs of care leavers, and they will share information effectively
- Young people leaving care will be kept informed of all progress and decisions made
- Where a care leaver is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, a lead professional will work with them. This will be their personal advisor
- Bed and Breakfast accommodation will not be used to house any 16 and 17 year olds. Children's services have a duty alongside housing and will therefore ensure they are provided with suitable accommodation that meets their needs

Support to young people will be in line with the [Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework](#) . There are five stages to the framework which reflect the journey of a young person as they leave care

- Training young people on tenancies and the housing market
- Involving young people in planning their accommodation
- Reducing the housing crisis by having emergency options
- Commissioning of a wide range of housing types
- Developing skills and confidence ahead of a move to independent living

## **5. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF THIS PROTOCOL**

To ensure that it remains relevant and effective, this Protocol will be reviewed 6 months after the date that it comes into effect, and then annually.

Children's Social Care will initiate the review and will be responsible alongside Housing colleagues for the monitoring and evaluation of the Protocol. If there are any changes to roles and responsibilities, the Protocol will be reviewed, amended and agreed by all parties.

Organisations and services involved with this Protocol are asked to provide feedback and performance information that can be collated and shared to improve services and inform and support collective commissioning intentions in Thurrock.

The Protocol can also help gather evidence to show, for example, the number of care leavers in Thurrock who are at risk of or homeless or in need of housing, and the number of care leavers whose tenancies break down. This evidence may highlight the need for new services and/or the remodelling or replacement of existing services.

## **6. WORKING TOGETHER TO ASSESS AND MEET THE HOUSING AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF CARE LEAVERS**

The success of this Protocol is dependent on the efficient and effective sharing of information between organisations.

In order to accurately assess and meet a young person's needs, information relevant to their housing and support needs must be shared between Children's Social Care, Housing Solutions and housing support providers.

The young person's written permission must be sought before the exchange of information can take place and this permission should be obtained at the earliest opportunity and forwarded to the Housing Solutions Service for their records as part of the young person's application for housing.

Not all of the information in the young person's Pathway Plan is relevant to their housing application. However, it is expected that the care leaver will give their permission for all **relevant** information to be shared.

Children's Social Care will share information about care leavers for the purpose of identifying and referring those young people and facilitating the subsequent joint assessment of their accommodation and support needs. Children's Social Care and the Housing Solutions Service will share general information in order to support the review and evaluation of the effectiveness of the Protocol.

Although all care leavers must be asked for their permission to have their details shared – and may withdraw their permission at any time – all staff need to be aware of their information sharing obligations in relation to the safeguarding of young people, and be familiar with national guidance.

All information sharing must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, Thurrock Council's Information Sharing Protocol and the relevant Housing procedures in respect of confidentiality of information.

## 7. THE PATHWAY PLAN

The young person's Pathway Plan will identify their housing and support needs and what action is required in order to prepare the young person for independent living.

The Pathway Plan must reflect the young person's current circumstances, provide a clear analysis of the needs of the young person and set out how these needs will be met.

When Children's Social Care completes the Housing Referral Form (see **Appendix D**), with the young person a copy of the relevant section(s) of the Pathway Plan will be attached and the team will work collaboratively and proactively with the Housing Allocations Team to ensure that the young person's needs and circumstances are fully understood and reflected in the Housing Needs Assessment.

The information in the Pathway Plan and Housing Needs Assessment will inform the multi- agency approach that Children's Social Care, the Housing Solutions Service and other housing and support providers will adopt in meeting the young person's housing needs.

This multi-agency assessment will identify the specific needs of the young person and will be informed, as appropriate, by meetings with all parties including the young person.

## 8. PREPARING CARE LEAVERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Children's Social Care will actively encourage young people to remain in a protective environment until they have developed appropriate life skills, at their own pace, and are ready to move to independent accommodation, rather than at a specific age.

There is a lot that can be done to prepare young people, emotionally and practically, for independence and managing on their own. Social Workers and Personal Advisers will help young people to make informed choices about the type of accommodation that is best suited to them and the nature of the support they will need in order to sustain it.

The Social Work and After Care Teams will work alongside each young person to help them plan for their future, help them develop confidence in their ability to live independently, and help them develop the skills required to successfully maintain their own tenancy. This work will be recorded in the young person's Pathway Plan.

## 9. HOUSING OPTIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS

When a young person reaches the age of 18 years they are no longer 'in care' and they can access their own accommodation and hold a tenancy. Children's Social Care's duty to provide the care leaver with regulated accommodation will end when the young person reaches the age of 18.

There is a need to review individual young people's needs through the pathway plan and to ensure appropriate oversight of accommodation support. As every young person develops at their own pace, and some young people will need more time than others, it is not assumed that all young people will be ready to live independently when they reach the age of 18.

Depending on whether or not the young person is ready to live independently, there are a number of accommodation options available to young people who are aged 18 or over including:

- Remaining with former foster carers under a Staying Put arrangement
- Moving into supported housing
- Moving into social rented housing
- Moving into other independent living situations such as shared accommodation with other young people.
- Shared Lives arrangements and;
- Where a young person remains in full time education or is at University. Children's Social Care will support the young person to access adequate funds to secure accommodation suitable to their needs during term time and will support them to access accommodation during the holiday periods.

For those young people who are aged 18 or over and are not yet ready for independent living, remaining with foster carers or moving into supported housing may offer the best options for meeting their housing and support needs.

It is important, however, that Children's Social Care sends a Housing Referral Form to the Housing Allocations Team as soon as it is agreed that the young person will join the local Housing Register.

Where an application is to be made for social rented housing, Housing Allocations will liaise with Children's Social Care and the young person to discuss the young person's housing options, the applications process and how social rented housing

is allocated. As well as helping the young person to apply for housing, the Housing Service will monitor and oversee the rehousing process to ensure that a suitable offer is made on time.

### Remaining with former foster carers (Staying Put)

Some young people may wish to remain living with their foster carer(s) when they reach the age of 18 and are no longer 'in care'.

A 'Staying Put' arrangement is only possible if the young person and foster carer are both happy with it – and it is essential that both parties understand the implications of the agreement they are entering into. Staying Put can provide the young person with the time they need to improve their independent living skills or complete their studies.

### Moving into supported housing

Some care leavers will need supported housing to meet their needs. Supported housing is provided in various forms, ranging from shared houses or flats (where young people share all or some of the facilities) to supported housing schemes where young people live together, but may have their own flat) and individual, self-contained flats and houses. Residents of supported housing are provided with on-site or floating support.

During their stay in supported housing, the young person is able to practice budgeting, cooking, cleaning and maintaining daily routines. Support that they will receive will be included in their support plan and Pathway Plan.

The experience of living in supported housing plays an important role in building the young person's confidence and ensuring that they are prepared and ready for independent living when they move into their own accommodation. It also helps Children's Social Care to identify any specific needs that the young person has and to determine how these needs can best be addressed and met.

### Moving into social rented housing

For some care leavers, social housing will represent the most appropriate housing option when they are ready for independent living. In order to be allocated a property, the young person will need to complete a housing application and join the local Housing Register. They will also need to arrange for Children's Social Care to provide the Allocations Team with confirmation that they are ready for independent living.

Thurrock Council operates a choice based lettings system guided by the Housing Allocations Policy. (See **Appendix E**). The policy recognises care leavers as a priority group and awards a reasonably high priority.

## 10. APPLYING FOR SOCIAL RENTED PROPERTY

Although care leavers can make a housing application without the active involvement of Children's Social Care or Housing Solutions Services, one of the primary objectives of this Protocol is to ensure that care leavers who require social housing are offered suitable accommodation at the time they need it and are provided with all of the advice, help and support they require in order to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.

Housing Allocations and Children's Social Care have therefore agreed that, when a care leaver requires social rented housing, Children's Social Care will complete the online housing register application with the young person. This will be followed by a completed Housing Referral Form (see **Appendix C**), attach a copy of the relevant section(s) of the young person's Pathway Plan and e-mail it to the Allocations Team mailbox [housingreg@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:housingreg@thurrock.gov.uk).

Within 5 working days of receiving the Housing Referral Form, the Allocations Team will confirm its receipt, review its contents, request any additional information or documentation that is needed, and confirm the approval.

Care leavers will be actively encouraged to agree to the involvement and support of the After Care Team in their housing application. A young person will normally only receive an offer of social housing where it is assessed that they are ready for independent living and the young person's prospective landlord is satisfied that they are going to be able to comply with their tenancy conditions.

The services will work together in the best interests of the young person and ensure that the decisions made by Housing regarding care leavers is fair and reasonable.

The Allocations Officer will ensure that:

- The young person has made an online housing application
- All supporting evidence has been provided and the young Person's housing application has been registered, assessed and verified
- The young person is eligible and qualifies for social housing
- Children's Social Care has provided written confirmation of whether or not the

Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

young person is ready for independent living and, if they are not yet ready, when they are likely to be ready

Until there is confidence that the care leaver is ready for independent living, the young person will not be actively considered for an offer of housing and they will not be able to bid for housing through the choice based lettings scheme.

## **11. Working Together to sustain tenancies for Care Leavers**

In order to ensure that care leavers get the best start in life and achieve a smooth transition to independent living, it is essential that Children's Social Care, the local Housing Service and other social landlords communicate well, work proactively and collaboratively to sustain the tenancies of young people. They will also ensure that the young person is supported in applying for benefits or the housing element of universal credit where appropriate.

Before a care leaver is rehoused, Children's Social Care and Housing will ensure that the young person is aware of their tenancy obligations such as paying the rent and service charges, keeping the property in a good and clean condition, and behaving in a reasonable manner and that they understand the likely consequences of breaching their tenancy conditions.

As part of their preparations for independent living, a care leaver will have a bank account, a birth certificate, a passport and National Insurance Number.

### How social rented housing is allocated

When there is shared understanding that a care leaver is ready for independent living, the application will be verified and made active on the Housing Register. This means that, from that point onwards, the care leaver will be actively considered for any suitable social rented housing that becomes available.

Thurrock operate a choice based lettings scheme and advertise most of the vacant social rented housing on the internet. Except where it is decided that a property should be offered to an applicant as a 'direct let', housing applicants will normally only be considered for a property if they are suitable for it and if they 'bid' for it. A shortlist will be compiled of the 'bidders' with the highest priority.

The applicant at the top of the shortlist will be invited to view the property. If it is a housing association home, applicants at the top of the shortlist will be nominated to the housing association which will then invite them to a viewing.

When a care leaver is shortlisted for social rented housing, they will be invited (with their allocated Social Worker or Personal Advisor) to an accompanied viewing of the property which will be undertaken by the social landlord's Housing Officer or Lettings Officer.

During the accompanied viewing, the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will receive a guided tour of the accommodation, will be briefed on the landlord's expectations and conditions of tenancy (including the rent and service charges), will be told about local facilities and services, and will have the opportunity to ask questions. After the viewing, the care leaver will decide whether or not the property is suitable.

### **Refusing an offer of accommodation:**

If a young person feels that the property allocated to them is not suitable, they should mention this to the housing officer at the time of the viewing, but should accept the offer of accommodation and request a review of suitability of accommodation. This will ensure that if the review goes against them, they still have a home. If they refuse the offer, and request a review which goes against them, they will not be made another offer of accommodation, and may be without a home. This is a situation that both Housing and Children's Social Care would like to avoid.

The young person will be provided with support to address concerns regarding the accommodation, where the review decision is that the property offered to the young person is a suitable and reasonable offer.

Before the social landlord is able to provide the care leaver with a formal offer of tenancy, it will need to be satisfied that the young person is ready for independent living and will be able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancy.

In order to satisfy the social landlord that the care leaver is ready, Children's Social Care will ensure that the support identified in the young person's Pathway Plan is in place and it will specify exactly who is responsible for providing the support and how it will be reviewed. It will also share with the social landlord the relevant parts of the Pathway Plan.

### **Signing the tenancy agreement**

When the social landlord is satisfied that the care leaver is ready to take on the tenancy an appointment will be made to meet with the young person and their Social Worker or Personal Advisor to complete the tenancy 'sign up'.

During the interview, the social landlord's Housing Officer will describe the contents of the tenancy agreement, the care leaver's rights and responsibilities as a tenant,



and the likely consequences of any breach of the tenancy conditions. They will also provide the young person with their contact details and information about the social landlord's services.

As part of the 'sign up', the Housing Officer will normally help the care leaver to complete an application for Housing Benefit. Proof of identity, income and savings will be required.

During the interview, the care leaver's Social Worker or Personal Advisor with the young person will talk to the Housing Officer and agree the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

In order to ensure that the young person has settled in well, and to identify the need for any additional advice, help or support, Children's Social Care will visit the care leaver in their new home within 10 working days of them moving in. The Housing Officer will also visit (with Children's Social Care or on their own) within 4 weeks of their tenancy start date.

The exact timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits undertaken by Children's Social Care and the Housing Officer during the first 12 months of the care leaver's tenancy will depend on the specific needs and circumstances of the young person. However, during the first year, it is expected that Children's Social Care will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 8 weeks and the Housing Officer will meet with the care leaver in their home at least once every 12 weeks.

### Help in setting up home

The more prepared that a young person is when leaving care, the more successful their move will be and the more confident they will become.

All care leavers are entitled to a Leaving Care Grant of £2,000 to help them set up home when they have secured an offer of independent accommodation. The grant can be used to purchase household furniture, bedding, a cooker, a fridge and other essential items. Although the money is not paid directly to the young person, their Personal Advisor will work with them to ensure that their needs are met.

When a care leaver has secured an offer of independent accommodation, their Social Worker or Personal Advisor will arrange for their 'Leaving Care Grant' monies in advance of the young person's tenancy start date.

## **12. Communication, joint working and problem solving**

It is essential that, from the outset, Children's Social Care and the social landlord  
Thurrock Housing Protocol (Care Leavers)

work proactively and collaboratively to support the care leaver in sustaining their tenancy.

Good communication, effective joint working and outcome focused problem solving will all play a vital role in ensuring that Children's Social Care and the social landlord are aware of any difficulties that the young person is having and are able to provide imaginative solutions to the problems they are experiencing.

During the tenancy 'sign up', the Social Worker / Personal Advisor and the Housing Officer will exchange their contact details and the contact details of their organisations. They will agree on the liaison arrangements and the timing and frequency of the follow-up interviews and home visits that will be undertaken by Children's Social Care and the social landlord.

As well as agreeing to work together to address any problems or concerns, Children's Social Care and the social landlord will agree to alert one another, at an early stage, if problems do occur or they are concerned about the care leaver's behaviour or wellbeing.

An early alert or referral will enable Children's Social Care and/or the social landlord to assess the care leaver's situation and work with them to address and resolve any problems before they become so serious as to put the young person's tenancy at risk.

It is the responsibility of Children's Social Care and the social landlord to work with care leavers, and with one another, to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness. Possession proceedings should only ever be initiated after Children's Social Care has had the opportunity to meet with the tenant and landlord to try and resolve any problems and there has been concerted efforts made by each responsible agency to prevent this.

Homelessness should be avoided through working together. No young person should be evicted from their home without it being clear what action has taken place to prevent this by all parties and what the subsequent plan is. If any care leaver makes a homelessness application, the Housing Solutions Service will inform the After Care Team, investigate the reasons for the young person's homelessness and decide whether or not the care leaver is owed a housing duty under the homelessness legislation. If it decides that the young person has caused their homelessness, the Housing Solutions Service will normally only be required to accommodate them for a period of up to 28 days.

If the care leaver is found to be intentionally homeless, a copy of the decision letter will be sent to the After Care Team and the young person's Pathway Plan will be updated. The After Care Team will work proactively with the young person and the

Housing Solutions Team to prevent eviction or homelessness.

## DEFINITION OF CARE LEAVERS

### Definitions

The Local Authority has a duty towards eligible, relevant, former relevant and qualifying children:

- **Eligible children** a young person still in care aged 16 and 17 who have been looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14.
- **Relevant children** a young person aged 16 or 17 who have already left care, and who were looked after for (a total of) at least 13 weeks from the age of 14, and have been looked after at some time while 16 or 17.

The leaving care provisions of the Children Act require that relevant children are provided with, or maintained in, suitable accommodation unless the local authority is satisfied that their welfare does not require it. To be suitable, accommodation must be reasonably practicable for the young person given their needs and the local authority must be satisfied as to the suitability of any landlord. These arrangements should be detailed in the young person's active pathway plan.

Generally it would not be appropriate for 16 or 17 year olds to be given the responsibility of sustaining their own tenancy without appropriate support, nor would bed and breakfast accommodation be considered suitable

- **Former relevant children** a young person aged 18-25 who have been **eligible** and/or **relevant** children in care - young people who are looked after by a Local Authority either through a compulsory care order or remanded or accommodated by voluntary agreement including accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act.

Social services have a duty to assist a former relevant child, to the extent that their welfare or education/training requires it, by contributing to the expenses of living near the place where they are working, looking for work, or receiving education or training

- **Persons qualifying for advice and assistance** a person who is aged at least 16 but is under 25, with respect to whom a special guardianship order is in force (or was in force when they reached 18) and was looked after immediately before the making of that order, or at any time after reaching the age of 16 but while he was still a child was, but is no longer, looked after, accommodated or fostered

- **Vacation accommodation**

If a former relevant child is in full-time higher education or residential further education in accordance with their pathway plan, and their term-time accommodation is not available, the responsible authority has a duty to provide accommodation during vacations, or to pay the young person enough to secure accommodation for themselves. This could enable a care leaver to continue in education and not become homeless during the holidays. The duty continues for as long as they continue to pursue the course of education.

- **Staying Put arrangements**

Where a former relevant child and their local authority foster carer wish to continue to live together after the child ceases to be looked after, the responsible local authority has a duty to monitor any such 'staying put' arrangement, and to provide advice, assistance and support to enable the arrangement to continue.

## LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

This provides a short summary of the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Parts 6 & 7 of the Housing Act 1996<sup>1</sup>, as amended).

The Leaving Care Act has two main aims:

1. To ensure that Young People do not leave care until they are ready.
  2. To ensure that they receive more effective support once they have left.
- Young people's experience of leaving care should be properly planned and Care Leavers should not become homeless when they reach the age of 18 and should have a Housing Plan.
  - Young people should be properly prepared for independent living and the monitoring / support systems should be put in place to ensure that they are able to successfully manage and sustain their tenancies.
  - Young People leaving care should not become homeless from their social rented housing.

The following list of legislation informs the duties and responsibilities of the Local Authority:

- Housing Act 1996 - [Part 6 \(Allocations\)](#) and [Part 7 \(Homelessness\)](#), as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017
- [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) - sections 1, 2 and 3

The following is a list of statutory guidance that this document refers to:

- [Homelessness code of guidance](#)
- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)

**Personal Housing Plan**

Title	First name	Surname	DOB	Gender	NI number	Customer id

Dear .....

You attended the local authority and a personal assessment of your current housing circumstances was undertaken by ..... on the ..... because you have a housing need and approached the authority for assistance. As part of the assessment the local authority has taken into account:

- The circumstances causing your homelessness
- The housing needs of you and your household
- The type of accommodation your household requires
- Any support needs you or your household need to secure and retain accommodation

Set out below is the Personalised Housing Plan detailing the outcome of the assessment including steps that we discussed and the actions you, your Personal Advisor and the Housing team of the Local Authority will take in order to address your housing situation.

**Basic assessment information**

From our basic assessment we believe your situation to be as follows:

- List of situational issues
- .....
- .....
- .....

**Other agencies**

This plan can be shown or shared with any other agencies/relatives/friends who are helping you so they are aware of your housing need and how the local authority is trying to assist you. The details below are the support needs identified as part of your assessment and who is providing support currently.

Support Needs	Agency/relative involved	Support being Offered	Date of Review

**When is the customer likely to become homeless?**

When you think you will become homeless (or threatened with homelessness):

**Actions already taken**

The action you have already taken to resolve your housing issues is:

- .....
- .....

**Wishes to resolve your housing situation**

Your wishes to resolve your housing situation:

**e.g. Assistance with finding suitable accommodation**

- .....
- .....
- .....

**Actions/reasonable steps**

We have agreed the following **Personal Housing Plan (PHP)** to help you remain in your current home or secure alternative accommodation. Please keep your allocated officer updated on what you have done. Your officer will also keep you updated.

What actions/reasonable steps the Housing Options Officer will do next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved

What actions/reasonable steps your Personal Advisor/After Care will take next:

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved



**What actions/reasonable steps you need to take:**

Action type	Content	Date to be achieved	Date achieved	Client accepted	Recommended or required

**Leaflets/website information**

Details of any leaflets / website information provided to you will be listed here:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

**Any other information/advice provided**

Any other information / advice provided to you will be listed here:

- .....
- .....
- .....

**Tailored Advice**

This is tailored advice to support you.

- .....
- .....
- .....

Date PHP to be reviewed by Officer and Customer

Location	Date and time	With office	PA present Y/N

**Appointments arranged**

Any appointments arranged for you will be listed here:

Date..... Time..... Venue.....

## A checklist of additional information required

Please provide documented proof of the following to the Council:

Type	Document	Household member	Date Provided

### Agreement

The Personalised Housing Plan has been drawn up for both you and the council to carry out all the steps that have been agreed on the plan. You should make sure you attend any appointments that are arranged for you and take any action that you agreed to do on the plan. If you cannot do something that is on the plan then make sure you tell your Personal Advisor and Housing straight away and explain why you cannot do it.

We will review this plan on the **(INSERT DATE)** in order to evaluate the appropriateness of the plan and any steps recorded. If your circumstances change, for example you become homeless or your health needs change, then your Personalised Housing Plan will be reviewed. Make sure you inform your Personal Advisor and Housing Officer as soon as you are aware of any changes in your circumstances so that they can look at the plan with you again, agree new actions or add to the existing actions to be taken.

I **(INSERT NAME)** confirm that this is an accurate summary of my housing options interview and I understand the options available to me. I agree to the actions set out for both my household and the officer agree to take.

Customer signature:

Name:

Date:

Personal Advisor signature

Name:

Date:

Housing Options officer signature:

Name:

Date:

## APPENDIX D

### HOUSING REFERRAL FORM

This is the Referral Form that Children's Social Care will send to the Housing Service (with the relevant sections of the Pathway Plan) for a Care Leaver.

Priority for Social & Welfare Grounds – Care Leavers	
Applicants Name	
Application number	
Age	
Current Address	
Type of Accommodation young person is living in and date moved in	
Brief history: (Housing history, sharing accommodation, background etc.)	
Rent Account History/ Rent Arrears: (rent arrears, adherence to repayment plans etc.)	
Current support needs / risks: (Budgeting, Maintaining a tenancy, Legal, Self-care etc.)	

Vulnerability:
What support is the applicant currently receiving:
Future required support package: (Claiming benefits, Managing accommodation etc.)
Inappropriate and preferred areas for applicant to live (Prefers Grays, areas to avoid)
Additional Comments:
Referring officer name and contact details:

Priority awarded:	
Signed	
Date	

## APPENDIX E

### HOUSING ALLOCATIONS SCHEME

The link below provides the full details of the Housing Allocation Scheme;

<https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/housing-allocation-scheme-v04.pdf>

<b>31 July 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Care Experience as a locally protected characteristic</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
<b>Report of:</b> Trevor Willis, Service Manager - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Childrens Services	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon – Assistant Director, CSC & Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy – Executive Director, Children’s Services	
<b>This report is public</b>	
<b>Version: Final</b>	

## Executive Summary

To note a motion has been received and accepted for Full Council on 24/07/2024 to consider granting young people who have experience of being cared for by the Local Authority to be granted protected characteristics locally within the Council, in line with provisions made for other groups under the Equality Act 2010. If the motion is passed, this will ensure that there is recognition by the Council of the impact of being a care experienced young person and how this can affect the opportunities afforded to them.

This report outlines the challenges, barriers and discrimination encountered by care experienced young people into adulthood which would be mitigated by their care experience being recognised as a protected characteristic. The local authority is ambitious to provide the best possible opportunities to care experienced young people – offering them equal access but also encouragement to benefit from opportunities and support as needed, such that they can reach their potential in their work lives but also their personal lives including their interests and aspirations as members of the community.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

**1.1 To note the Council motion on 24 of July 2024 and understand the benefits of granting protected status to care experienced young people.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 This report is the outcome of a meeting with the Thurrock Young Voices Group. This group consists of young people aged 11 to 25 years old who meet monthly and have experience of the Local Authority involvement. Some of the group shared their experiences of having been in care in Thurrock and how this impacts upon their future prospects. The group are aware of a significant number of other local

authorities adopting care experience as a protected characteristic, and have requested that Thurrock Council, in their role as corporate parent, commit to doing the same.

- 2.2 The definition of 'care experience' has not been universally agreed and can vary nationally. As part of this report, 'care experienced' will apply to young people who have been 'looked after' at some point in their childhood and are entitled to receive services under the Children Act 1989, Leaving Care Act 2000 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017. As such, it does not include children who have been adopted as their support and services are covered under the Adoption Act 2000. However, we also recognise that 'care experience' can be interpreted as a lifelong characteristic – which goes further than the definition of 'care leaver' attached to the statutory duty of supporting young people leaving care between 18-25.
- 2.3 The Equality Act 2010 is the legal framework designed to protect the right of equal opportunity and unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on someone's personal and protected characteristics, including race and ethnicity, pregnancy and maternity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, gender, faith or non-faith, marriage, and civil partnership. The Act does not include 'care experience' as a protected characteristic.
- 2.4 The number of children cared for by Thurrock has ranged in the last year between 288 to 308 (March 2023 to March 2024). Figures for March 2024 showed that there were 294 children and young people in the care of the local authority (65.1 children per 10,000). 58% of these children were male and 42% female. As of March 2024, there were an additional 267 care leavers who are entitled to a service from the leaving care team (aged 16 to 25)

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

- 3.1 Within Thurrock it is firmly believed that young people in the care of the Local Authority deserve the best possible opportunity to succeed in achieving their ambitions and goals.
- 3.2 Under the Children Act 1989, the local authority must provide support to care leavers. The proposal for the Council to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic locally will create a commitment from the Local Authority towards these young people in the same way as those with legally recognised protected characteristics under the Equality Act requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. This also includes to:
  - Remove or reduce disadvantages suffered by people because of a protected characteristic.
  - Meet the needs of people with protected characteristics.
  - Encourage people with protected characteristics to participate in public life and other activities.
- 3.3 The Executive Director of Children's Services, the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Council already have a statutory responsibility to act as effective and caring corporate parents for all Children Looked After and Care Experienced Young People (The Children and Social Work Act 2017).



3.4 In line with our Corporate Parenting responsibility, there has been considerable development in the care leaving services over the past 2 years, with the provision of additional personal advisors and the creation of an additional team manager post to support improvements and need in the service. Also, there are plans to realign the service to create a more bespoke team to meet the more specific needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through to adulthood.

The Local Offer to care leavers is extensive and includes support from housing, employment and financial advisors and a range of financial support for example.

- We currently help our young people by financing their prescription costs and exempting them from Council tax up to the age of 21 and there is consideration given to a further exemption from council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25 who are assessed to be extremely vulnerable.
- There is provision to support our young people over the age of 18 who have secured social housing by paying the first weeks rent as well as a £3000 grant to assist them in setting up home. The service also pays for the TV license for the first year of a tenancy as well as the first four weeks of utility bills when a young person moves into their accommodation.
- A package of support for young people attending university or planning a gap year -including provision of funding/support to visit universities accompanied by a friend, PA or carer when making choices.

In addition, there is.

- Provision of health advice and support including mental health support
- The IRO review service provides a post 18 review to assist in overseeing the transition to adulthood and to avoid the sudden end of the IRO relationship.
- Support and guidance to care leavers post 25 years who request it.

The Corporate Parenting Committee has shown considerable interest in hearing the voice of children in care and care leavers and also educating themselves in the issues facing care experienced young people.

Figures for 2023/24 showed that Care leavers within Thurrock benefit from the support offered to them from the leaving care service. 95.9% of young people open to the Leaving Care Service aged 17 to 18, 95.9% of young people aged 19 to 21 and 95% of young people aged 22 to 25 keep in touch with the team which is higher than statistical neighbours (92% for 17- to 18-year-olds and 93% for 19- to 21-year-olds). This allows workers to build and maintain meaningful relationships with young people to offer them ongoing advice and support.

These relationships allow the allocated worker to provide support to the young person in securing accommodation with 91.9% of 17- to 18-year-olds, 94.7% of 19- to 21-year-olds and 91.7% of 22 to 25-year-olds living in suitable accommodation during

the same time period, which compared positively to figures for statistical neighbours of 88% for 17- to 18-year-olds and 89% of 19–21-year-olds.

One area of continued focus remains supporting our young people in employment, education, or training (EET). Figures for 2023/24 showed that within Thurrock 56.8% of 17- to 18-year-olds, 49.6% of 19- to 21-year-olds, and 36.7% of 22- to 25-year-olds open to the Leaving care service were in education, employment, or training. This does not compare as favourably with the data for statistical neighbours who report that 63% of 17- to 18-year-olds 55% of 19- to 21-year-olds were EET during the same time frame.

Therefore, in Thurrock those young people classed as Care Leavers not in education employment or training (NEET) is slightly higher than figures for statistical neighbours and the rest of the country. It is important that in our role as corporate parents we seek to address this imbalance and explore every possible opportunity to support our young people to continue in their education or seek employment or training. As a young person transitions into adulthood the prospects of them finding employment without prior experience or training would be significantly lower and they would find themselves at a disadvantage to their peers.

Faced with an increasingly competitive job market it is important that we can provide opportunities to our young people with care experience to empower them to aspire for their future that includes gainful employment and access to services.

As a council we must continue to have high aspirations for our looked after young people and therefore it is imperative that we champion them wherever possible in all aspects of their transition to adulthood. There is the capacity and creativity within Thurrock council to provide meaningful opportunities for care experienced young people to so that we can address this imbalance. Providing protected characteristics locally for care experienced young people would be seen as the first step in giving them equality of access to experiences in employment, education, or training, and limit the disadvantages they face when compared to other children who have had more settled backgrounds.

Despite the resilience of many of our care experienced people, society too often does not take their needs into account and as Corporate Parents we have a special responsibility for providing the best possible care and support.

We want to support our young people, by offering them protected status locally to empower them in securing services, employment, training and other opportunities, within the Council.

We also want to support care experienced young people to be able to take part, enjoy and excel in other activities for example performing arts, community events and specialist interests- such that they are encouraged and supported to take part and have their voice heard.

By providing our young people with meaningful opportunities we would serve to boost their self-esteem, and sense of worth as well as provide them with the circumstances to break the patterns of previous experiences and provide them with a purpose and productive vision for their future.

If care experience is adopted as a protected characteristic it will ensure that the 'corporate parenting responsibility', (namely the collective responsibility of all elected members, staff, and partner agencies), will have a positive impact by ensuring that care experienced young people have equality of opportunity to live the happiest and healthiest life as possible so they can reach their full potential and to support their transition into adulthood.

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

- 4.1 According to Independent Review for Children's Social Care (May 2022) "Many care experienced people face discrimination, stigma, and prejudice in their day-to-day lives. Public perceptions of care experience centre on the idea that children are irredeemably damaged and that can lead to discrimination and assumptions being made." This stigma and negative representation are widely discussed in the media and popular culture, which is felt by care experienced adults themselves who have found these media stereotypes 'particularly damaging.
- 4.2 This stigma can lead to differential treatment by professionals and in society at large. This has been evidenced in the field of education, where children and young people with experience of care have reported that their teachers treated them differently, which was 'characterised by sympathy, concern, and lower expectations in terms of behaviour and engagement' (Mannay et al. 2017). Care experienced young people have also voiced how they feel the public perceive them as 'criminals' and assume their behaviour is problematic (Channel 4 News, 2015: Ofsted, 2009).
- 4.3 This stigma and stereotyping are widespread and the Care System itself contributes to its perpetuation. Young people whilst in care can be unnecessarily criminalised (Fitzpatrick, 2022). It has also been found that professionals assume a specific inability to parent and can make care experienced people go through unnecessary assessment (Care Review, 2022). The Care System itself might also put children and young people at a disadvantage because of specific provisions for children in care, such as being in unregulated educational provisions which could put them at an educational disadvantage (House of Commons, 2022).
- 4.4 Care experienced young people nationally can experience poor outcomes. It is important to both look at the available outcomes evidence, whilst noting that outcomes for care leavers are not uniform. Nationally, 25% of all homeless people were once in care and 33% of care leavers become homeless within the first two years of leaving care (Step by Step 2022). 26% of the homeless population have spent time in care; and a conservative estimate of 27% of the prison population have care experience (HM Prisons and Probation Service 2023), whilst 34% of 17- to 18-year-olds rising to 41% of 19–21-year-old care experienced young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (National data 2023). This demonstrates the importance of working with partners in the criminal justice system, housing, education, and employment colleagues if we want to make a change for care-experienced young people in Thurrock.
- 4.5 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care, led by Josh McAllister and published in May 2022, outlines several key areas to support children in care and care experienced people, which focus on improving outcomes around university

attendance and employment, reducing health inequalities, ending homelessness of care experienced young people. The missions each contain several recommendations to follow to reach the objectives set out, with some being the remit of national government and others aimed at local government, businesses, and the wider society.

- 4.6 The Care Review recognised the often-negative outcomes for young people with care experience and recommended that the government make 'Care Experienced' a protected characteristic. This is on the basis that care experienced people experience stigma and discrimination which is similar in nature to other groups that have a legally protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The Care Review acknowledges that some worry about the potential effect of this further stigmatising care experienced people. However, McAlister argues that making care experience a protected characteristic is essential to "provide greater authority to employers, businesses, public services and policy makers to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced people." and that, like other hidden characteristics, care experienced people will still be able to choose whether to disclose this part of their lived experience.
- 4.7 Care experienced young people both in Thurrock and nationally face significant barriers and challenges that impact them throughout their lives, including discrimination, and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment, and the criminal justice system.
- 4.8 They may have a deep-rooted mistrust in systems or institutions, born out of their experiences within the care system. This could result in hesitancy or difficulty in seeking out and accessing necessary services, leading to delays in receiving important support or care and missing out on, or passing by opportunities to gain experience in either education or employment or life experiences.
- 4.9 Due to their lived experience, they will often lack the family guidance that many take for granted. This could be advice on filling out forms, understanding services available, having the support of a family member when facing an intimidating process or the encouragement of a family member to try something new. The absence of this support can hinder their ability to access and navigate services and opportunities and is provided by the Aftercare Service.
- 4.10 This has a potentially cumulative effect, resulting in them facing significant challenges when it comes to social mobility. The hurdles they encounter in education, employment, housing, and other key areas can limit their ability to advance socially and economically. This lack of social mobility can create a vicious cycle that hinders access to services and opportunities.
- 4.11 At least 92 other Local Authorities have already granted care experienced young people protected status.

## **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 Consultations have taken place with Thurrock Young Voices as well as Thurrock Youth Council. Both are in full support of the proposal and the benefits that it will afford our young people.

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

6.1 This recommendation has no adverse impact upon the corporate policies, priorities or performance of the council but rather embodies foundations of the council as highlighted in the corporate policy (2024-2029) relating to people.

“More jobs, skills and opportunities for our young people, especially those with special educational needs and disabilities, care leavers and others who need extra support.”

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Sima Khiroya**  
**Assistant Director Financial Management and Procurement**

**16.07.2024**

In line with the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibility, this report recommends that Care Experience should be treated as a locally protected characteristic, to achieve success in delivery of enhancement of care leaver services in the Council.

There are no additional costs associated with this proposal, and all costs should be met from within existing budgets for 2024-25 in cost centres CA061 and CA062; a total amount of £1.096m.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

**10.07.24**

Protected characteristics are defined by the Equality Act 2010 and these do not include care experience. The Council cannot amend the primary legislation, but it is able to treat care experienced young people as if they had a 'protected characteristic'. The Public Sector Equality Duty general duty aim is to ensure public authorities have due regard to the need to:

1. put an end to unlawful behaviour that is banned by the Equality Act 2010, including discrimination, harassment and victimisation
2. advance equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not
3. foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not

Advancing equal opportunities means:

- removing or reducing the disadvantage that people with protected characteristics face
- taking steps to meet the specific needs of people with protected characteristics.
- encouraging people with protected characteristic to participate fully in all activities, especially where they are underrepresented.

Fostering good relations means you are taking action to reduce prejudice and increase understanding between different groups of people.

The Council will need to consider care leavers within any future policies or strategies in line with the Community Equality Impact Assessments.

The Council is under a legal duty under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 section 1 to apply the corporate parenting principles to care leavers. This motion will support that duty.

### 7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project Officer**  
**16.07.2024**

Consideration in coming to any decision must be taken in line with the Council's equality duties and compliments that vision of Thurrock's collaborative communities' framework in the commitment to creating a fair, accessible, and inclusive borough where everyone has a voice and an equal opportunity to succeed. A CEIA will be completed for this proposal to inform the decision making process.

Diversity and equality are fundamental to the Ethos of Thurrock and as such the experience of Care Experienced young people is hugely important in Thurrock's determination in ensuring that young people have equal opportunity to succeed and that this is interwoven in our practice and ambitions. To ensure they are considered alongside future policy, strategy or function changes and implementation a recommendation of this report is to update the CEIA templates and guidance with Care Experience as a locally protected group.

### 7.4 **Risks**

None

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

It is suggested that this proposal will have a positive impact upon Looked after Children in terms of their employment, their self-esteem and their sense of importance.

Future Care leavers will also be motivated to explore opportunities within the Council knowing that there is support available to them.

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

- None

**9. Appendices to the report**

- None

**Report Author:**

Trevor Willis, Service Manager - Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Childrens Services

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<b>31 July 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 10</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Transitions to Adult Services for Care Leavers and Children in Care</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> None
<b>Report of:</b> Iyobosa Osunde, Head of Social Work and Principal Social Worker Adult Social Care Elise McQueen, Head of Children Looked After Service, Children Social Care.	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Executive Director of Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	
<b>Version:</b> Final	

## Executive Summary

The Report and its appendix set out the role and performance of Thurrock Council in relation to supporting young people in care or leaving care to be assessed for and be provided with Adult Social Care Services.

Planning for transitions to Adult Services starts early and initial screening assessments are provided. If a full Care Act Assessment of a young person who is looked after is required, this should be completed by age 17. This enables the young person to have a clear plan and a smooth transition to Adult Services.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

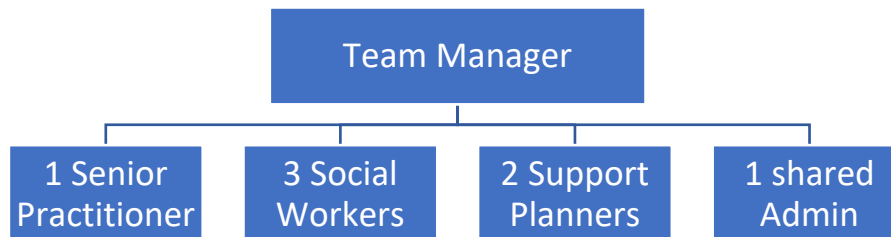
**1.1 Members of the committee review the work of the Children Looked After Service and Preparing for Adulthood Team in meeting the Council’s role as a Corporate Parent. In relation to the work undertaken for Children in Care and Care leavers to transition to adult services where it is appropriate to do so.**

### 2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) team is a dedicated team in Adult Social Care (ASC) with skilled social workers and support planners which is

particularly critical for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) which includes looked after children, so that they are supported to have a smooth and seamless transition from children into adult services where this is appropriate.

- 2.2 The Team works with professionals and carers involved with Young People to understand what their ongoing care and support needs might be when they turn 18. The team is established as follows:

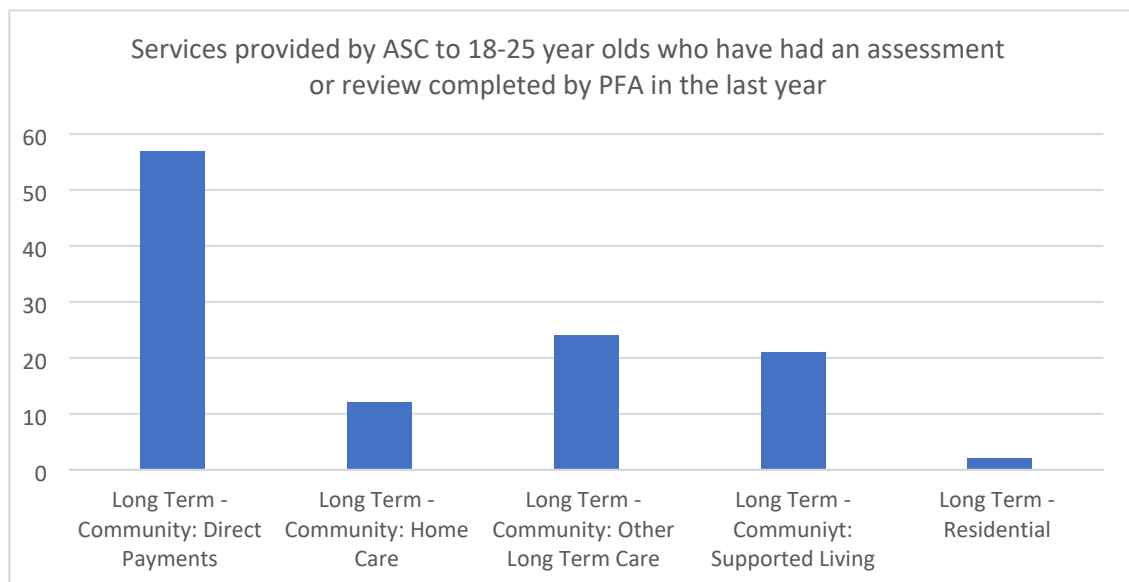


- 2.3 The team is currently carrying two vacancies and is in the process of recruiting to a senior practitioner and a support planner. This can affect the timeliness of assessments; the waiting list is overseen by management to prioritise urgent referrals. Recruitment to vacancies is active and it is hoped that the vacant posts will be filled soon.
- 2.4 The current caseload of the team ranges around 200 young people who have a variety of needs and backgrounds. Children in care and care leavers are part of the service user group and referrals are made in line with the transitions process.
- 2.5 Young People can decide to dip in and out of the service if they prefer to, however, the team provides long term case management intervention as and when required until young people are 25 and then transfer to the appropriate Community Led Support Team in ASC.
- 2.6 The Care Act 2014 offers carers more rights & protection for themselves and for the adult they care for. The PFA team, work within the Care Act 2014 guidance to ensure Young Person's wellbeing is at the centre and focus on all they do to achieve their outcomes and aspirations.
- 2.7 The Care Act places a duty on local authorities to conduct transition assessments for children, children's carers, and young carers where there is a likely need for care and support when the Young Person turns 18 and a transition assessment would be of 'significant benefit'.
- 2.8 Thurrock Council must give information and advice to Young People and families who want it, not just Young People who have their care and support paid for by the Local Authority. There are Young People that require support with signposting to the relevant organization – voluntary or governmental agencies.
- 2.9 When necessary, the team ensures that Young People are safeguarded from abuse, implementing clear risk management plans to manage and identify ways to minimize the risk.

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

- 3.1 Practitioners attend Education, Health and Care Plan meetings in year 9 with partner agencies and families to contribute to the planning of young people’s care and support plan and provide the relevant information about adult services. In most cases the PFA Team’s involvement, and the transition process begins at the start of year 10 when targets are set to meet identified outcomes.
- 3.2 Year 11 is crucial as some Young People may leave school at the end of the academic year. The Team works closely with the Young People, families, schools, and children services, Children Looked After and After Care Services to start information gathering that will inform the adult assessment.
- 3.3 For Young People transitioning that are looked after, work is jointly carried out with the Children Looked After and Aftercare teams. There is an updated Transitions Policy of Children Looked After and Care Leavers which includes a whole council approach. This helps to clarify what is expected of each service when the Young Person leaves care.

Long Term - Community: Direct Payments	57
Long Term - Community: Home Care	12
Long Term - Community: Other Long-Term Care	24
Long Term - Community: Supported Living	21
Long Term - Residential	2



- 3.4 For all children in care aged 16, as part of pathway planning a referral to adult services should be considered. When Adult Services could be required, this triggers a brief screening assessment from the Preparing for Adulthood Team. A full assessment is dependent on the outcome of this initial assessment. In the event a full assessment is required the target is to complete this prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> Birthday with a proposed package (if applicable).

- 3.5 If an Adult Social Care Service is agreed for a young person aged 17, the allocated worker from the PFA team will continue to be involved and complete a handover process. They will take the lead from age 18 supported in conjunction with the After Care Service if the young person is a care leaver.
- 3.6 The above chart highlights services delivered to young people who have had an assessment or review in the last year.
- 3.7 Adult Services provides vital support to our most vulnerable young people including those with disabilities. The commissioned services reflect those needs and the ongoing need for day-to-day support in living in the community.

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

- 4.1 The report sets out the operation of the Preparing for Adulthood process and the assessment outcomes in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- 4.2 Members of the committee have the opportunity to review the information and raise any queries.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

#### **7. Implications**

- 7.1 Financial

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

There are no financial implications to this report. The services outlined are statutory and have allocated budgets within Children and Adult Services.

- 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Petrena Sharpe**  
**Safeguarding Lawyer (Team Leader)**

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced requirements on Local Authorities to plan for looked after children so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood.

The Care Act 2014 places a duty on Local Authorities to conduct transition assessments for children, children's carers and young carers where there is a likely need for care and support after the child in question turns 18 and a transition assessment would be of significant benefit.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Strategic Lead for Community Development**

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.

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

- Looked after children and Care leavers.

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

- None

### 9. Appendices to the report

- None

### Report Author:

Elise McQueen, Head of Children Looked After Service, Children Social Care

Iyobosa Osunde, Head of Social Work and Principal Social Worker Adult Social Care

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<b>31 July 2024</b>	<b>ITEM: 11</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>	
<b>Local Offer for Care Leavers</b>	
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key
<b>Report of:</b> Luke Froment, Service Manager CLA	
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Executive Director, Children’s Services	
<b>This report is</b> Public	
<b>Version:</b> Final	

## Executive Summary

This report sets out how the Local Authority meets its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to provide a published Local Offer so Care Leavers are clear about what support will be offered to them by their corporate parent as they move into adulthood.

The published Local Offer has been updated and relaunched during the Care Leavers week in October 2023 with the aim of enhancing the previous offer to Care Leavers and adding clarity in relation to discretionary elements over and above our statutory duties.

With the formation of our new Care Leavers forum there will be ongoing consultation with our young people to ensure the local offer continues to be reviewed in line with the views and needs of our young people.

### 1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **For the Committee to note the statutory duties of the Local Authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers**
- 1.2 **For the Committee to have oversight of the Local Offer and be involved in the ongoing review of delivery across Children’s Services and Partners.**

## 2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The DfE has published guidance in relation to Section 2 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers.
- 2.2 The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority, including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support a local authority chooses to provide.
- 2.3 Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to have regard to seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers:
- To act in their best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.
  - To encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings.
  - To consider their views, wishes and feelings.
  - To help them gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
  - To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for them.
  - For those children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
  - To prepare them for adulthood and independent living
- 2.4 The local offer should set out what support all local authority departments will provide (not just Children's Services), having regard to the corporate parenting principles.
- 2.5 The local offer should include details of the services and support that may assist care leavers in, or moving to, adulthood and independent living that the local authority provides in relation to:

**Health and wellbeing:** This will include services that teach about support and enable good health and wellbeing. It should include links to, or information about, universal health services that might be particularly relevant to care leavers, as well as specific health and wellbeing services targeted at them.

**Relationships:** having strong and supportive relationships is crucially important for care leavers as they move to independent adult life. Local authorities will want to consider the services and/ or support that is available to help care leavers



develop and maintain positive social networks and to understand what positive relationships look like.

**Education and training:** Care leavers should be supported to access appropriate education or training that will enable them to fulfil their goals. This will include the statutory support available to care leavers, such as the £2,000 bursary for care leavers in Higher Education, as well as any other support from the local authority; and signpost to universal information such as careers advice and financial support for young people.

**Employment:** this will include information to care leavers about general employment support, such as careers support and links to local Job Centre Plus. Local authorities should also include any other employment support that they or partners deliver that is specifically available to care leavers, for example, any apprenticeships that the local authority offers, in particular where such opportunities are ring-fenced for care leavers.

**Accommodation:** Care leavers should be supported to access appropriate and suitable accommodation. The local authority should include relevant information about their Staying Put policy, the support available from Housing Services and any other assistance that is available to care leavers, such as advice on maintaining a tenancy.

**Participation in society:** this will include links to and information about activities, events, or volunteering opportunities available in the local area that care leavers can get involved in.

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

The Local Offer was most recently updated and relaunched during Care Leavers Week in October 2023.

There were a number of enhancements made to the offer in terms of additional practical support provided to Thurrock's young people and increased clarity in how the information is presented.

Some of the key areas that have been a focus in this enhanced offer include:

- Marking cultural celebrations; Birthdays, Christmas and Eid
- Supporting consultation work involving our young people
- Consistent support for driving lessons and obtaining a provisional license.
- Support to privately rent accommodation.
- Support with cost of utilities
- Support with educational resources
- Support with Job interviews

In preparation for the updated offer, in July 2023, there was consultation with 19 care leavers (approximately 7% of the care leaver cohort):

This work helped us to understand which elements of the proposed enhanced offer our young people felt would be most helpful:

1. What are your first thoughts about the new financial offer?

[More Details](#)

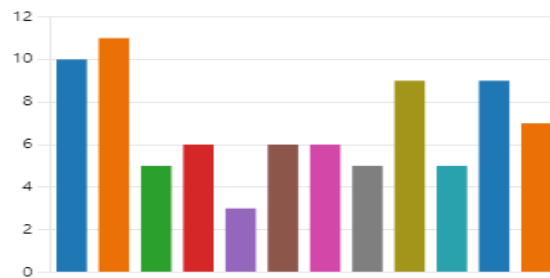
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> It's great	18
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Don't know	0
<span style="color: green;">●</span> It's not great	1



2. Which, if any, are the most important to you? (Select as many as you like)

[More Details](#)

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Birthdays – (£50 for 16,17,19,2...	10
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Driving lessons – a contributio...	11
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Christmas – All Care leavers to ...	5
<span style="color: red;">●</span> First aid box – up to £10 value ...	6
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Consultation work – Young pe...	3
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> Prescriptions – Cost of prescri...	6
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> Private renting arrangements ...	6
<span style="color: grey;">●</span> Utilities cost – Gas, electric, wa...	5
<span style="color: olive;">●</span> Job interviews - £100 towards ...	9
<span style="color: teal;">●</span> Gap year - £500 to support livi...	5
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> Books and materials - £100 pe...	9
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> Council tax – From the point a ...	7



Young people were asked to highlight any areas where they felt the support, they receive from the aftercare service, could be strengthened, and highlighted some areas that have been incorporated into the Local Offer or wider practice within the Aftercare service:

- Marking Eid
- Support for driving lessons for all care leavers regardless of circumstances.
- Continued support post 25
- Sharing the local offer widely

With the formation of our new Care Leavers forum there will be ongoing consultation with our young people to ensure the local offer continues to be reviewed in line with the views and needs of our young people. The Local offer document is shared with our young people by their allocated Personal Advisor (PA) from the age of 16 and PA's have provided hard copies of the document to their young people upon visiting them.

We have also contacted all young people under the age of 25 who are currently closed to the Aftercare but remain eligible for a service and shared the link to the digital local offer with them.

The Local Offer has also been shared at recent events including the Good practice Week Marketplace event and the Children in Care Awards.

The local offer can be found on the Thurrock website at:

[www.Thurrock.gov.uk/bigwideworld](http://www.Thurrock.gov.uk/bigwideworld)

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

- 4.1 To inform members of, and invite members comments on, the current Local Offer published by Thurrock council.

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

- 5.1 Further consultation will take place within the Care Leaver Forum. This work will inform future updates to the Local Offer.

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

- 6.1 Young People who have been in care of the Local Authority are a corporate responsibility and will have an impact on wider corporate policies and performance.

#### **7. Implications**

##### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Michelle Hall, Finance Manager**  
**19/07/2024**

This report sets out how the Local Authority meets its statutory duties and responsibilities to young people leaving care to provide a published Local Offer, that ensures Care Leavers are clear about what support will be offered to them by their corporate parent as they move into adulthood.

There are no additional financial implications arising from this report, and all costs associated with the services covered by this report, must be contained from within existing budgets in cost centre CA064; a total budgeted amount of £1.098m for 2024-25

##### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a legal duty on a Local Authority to publish its local offer which includes information about the services it offers to care leavers under the Children Act 1989, as well as other services it offers that may assist care leavers in preparing for adulthood and independent living.

The local offer must be updated from time to time as appropriate. Before publishing the local offer, or any update, the Local Authority must consult with such care leavers and other persons who would appear to be representative of care leavers in its area.

This duty is further explained in the Department of Education guidance published in February 2018.

Any specific employment schemes for care leavers will need to be compliant with the Council's obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

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

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 Child Looked After and Aftercare services are committed to support all children in the care of Thurrock Council to be safe and well and to reach their potential. Individual needs assessments and plans are made for each care leaver taking into consideration their identity, culture, history and social requirements. The Local Offer informs each needs assessment.

A Community Equality Impact Assessment for the Local Offer will be subject to ongoing review and update to ensure that plans are in place to mitigate the risk of disproportionate negative impact for protected groups and all other communities the process considers. Opportunities to maximise positive impact will also be considered through the assessment process.

The Anti-Racist Practice standards set by Thurrock Children's Services are applicable to this report and service.

### **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):

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

None

**Report Author:**

Luke Froment: Service Manager, Children Looked After.

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# Work Programme

Committee: Corporate Parenting

Year: 2024/2025

Dates of Meetings: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2024, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 & 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025

Topic		Lead Officer	Requested by Officer/Member
<b>31<sup>st</sup> July 2024</b>			
1	Children's Social Care Performance	Elise McQueen	Officers
2	Education, Employment and Training for Care Leavers	Kate Kozlova-Boran and Luke Froment	
3	Joint Housing Protoca for Care Leavers	Peter Doherty and Luke Froment	
4	Care Experience as a locally protected characteristics	Trevor Willis	
5	Transitions to Adult Services for Care Leavers and Children in Care	Iyobosa Osunde/Elise McQueen	
6	Local Offer for Care Leavers	Luke Froment	
7	Thurrock Young Voices	Carly Banks	Standing item
8	Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
<b>24<sup>th</sup> October 2024</b>			
1	Children's Social Care Performance	Elise McQueen	Officers
2	SET CAMHS	Tina Russell/Lisa Tilbury	Officers

	Thurrock Young Voices (Item to be agreed with TYV – e.g., pocket money, placement moves etc.)	Carly Banks	Standing item
	Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
<b>21<sup>st</sup> January 2025</b>			
1	Children's Social Care Performance		Officers
2	Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2023/24	Democratic Services	Members
	Thurrock Young Voices (Item to be agreed with TYV – e.g., pocket money, placement moves etc.)	Carly Banks	Standing item
	Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item
<b>13<sup>th</sup> March 2025</b>			
1	Children's Social Care Performance		Officers
	Thurrock Young Voices (Item to be agreed with TYV – e.g., pocket money, placement moves etc.)	Carly Banks	Standing item
	Work Programme	Democratic Services Officer	Standing item



Heard July 2023:

- Adoption and Fostering Panel Chairs Report
- Statement of Purpose Adoption
- Statement of Purpose Fostering
- Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children
- Fostering Recruitment

Heard September 2023:

- Transitions to Adult Services for CLA
- After Care Service Report
- Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers
- Staying Put – Overview and outcomes report

Heard January 2024:

- Independent Reviewing Officer – Annual Report
- Annual Report of the Virtual Schools
- Education and Employment for Care Leavers
- Children Looked After and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy Update
- Initial Health Assessment Update

Heard March 2024:

- CLA Health Report
- SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Children Looked After
- Children Missing from Care and Return Home Interviews
- CLA and the Youth Justice Service

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