

4 December 2018		ITEM: 11
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Yes	
Report of: Jackie Groom, Strategic Lead, Performance Quality Assurance and Business Intelligence		
Accountable Head of Service: Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report shows that:

- Children Looked After (CLA) are consistently in the region of 300 for the borough
- The number of assessments completed in the month has increased
- Demand in terms of numbers of referrals has increased
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (USAC) have increased to 44
- The percentage of placements that are considered stable is 70%
- The number of children on a child protection plan has reduced and is in line with comparator groups

This shows that good improvement has been made in key areas such as assessments completed performance, number of children of a child protection plan has reduced and stable placement performance has improved.

Focus is still needed on USAC numbers and demand in terms of the number of referrals. Both of these areas will feature in the post OFSTED focused visit action plan.

The report also summarises the outcome of the recent Whistleblowing allegations which were independently investigated and found that the allegations were unsubstantiated.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That The Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.

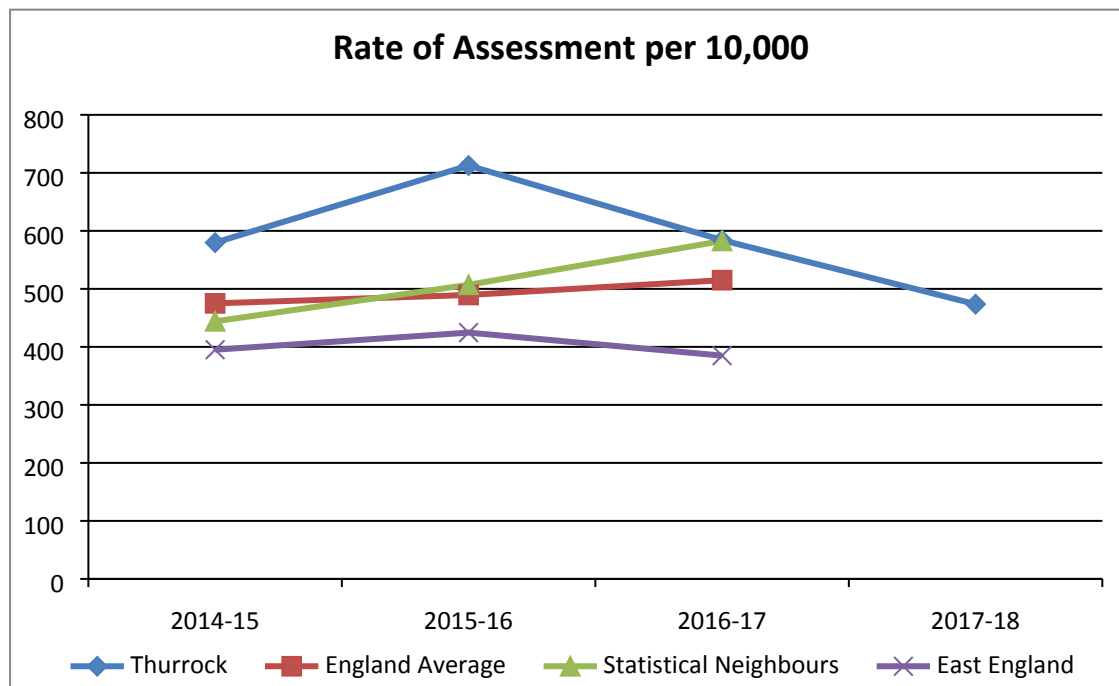
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, 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 latest performance digest (September 2018), regional benchmarking data and national data sets. This data has been presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team and the Corporate Director's Performance Group.

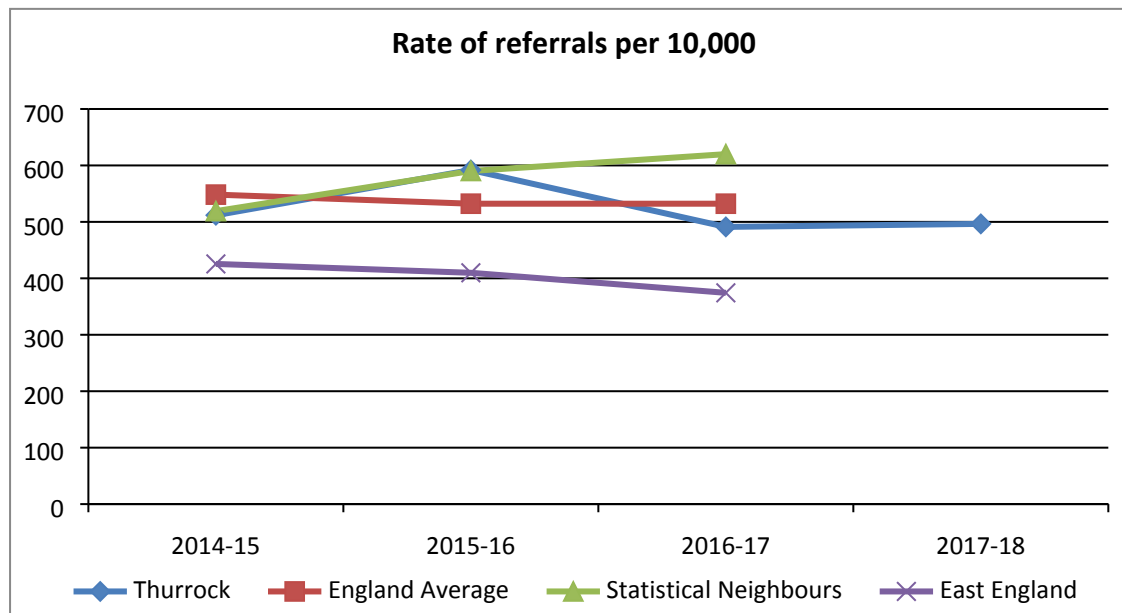
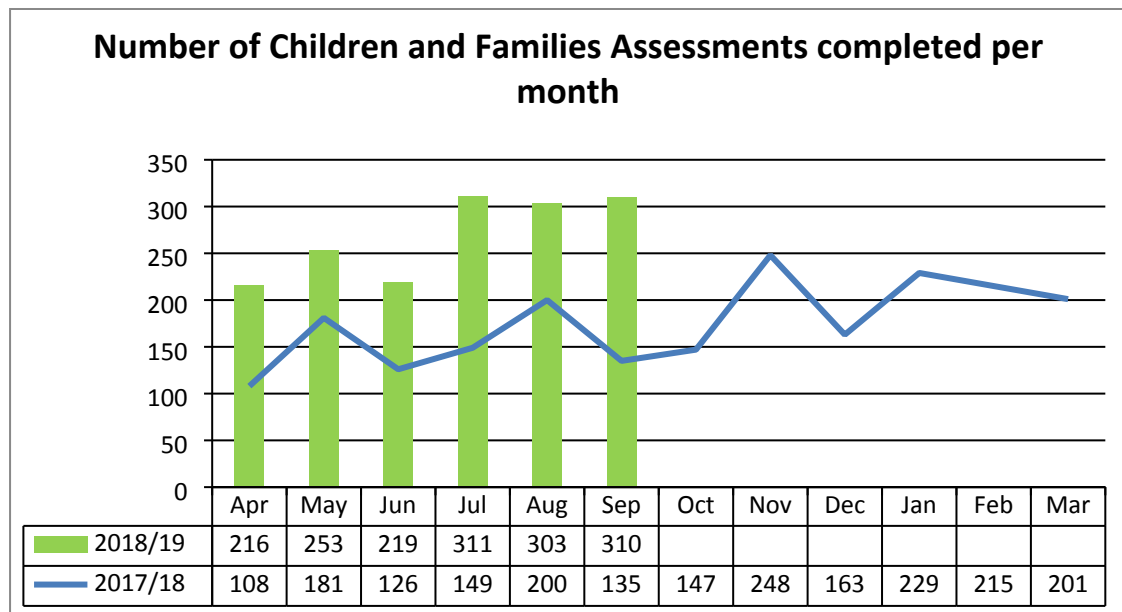
3. PERFORMANCE

3.1 Contacts and Referrals

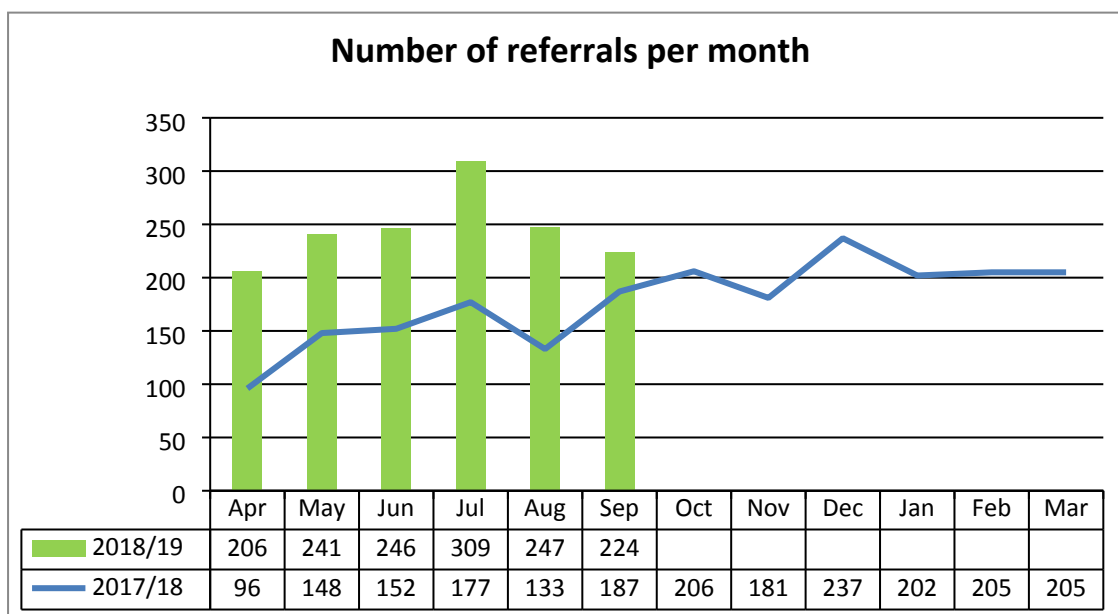
Assessment rates per 10,000 of the child population, has been reduced to 474 per 10,000 of the child population. Thurrock has also reduced its referral rate from 592 in 2015/16 to 496 in 2017/18. The latest position shows 310 completed assessments for September 2018, compared to 135 the same period last year.



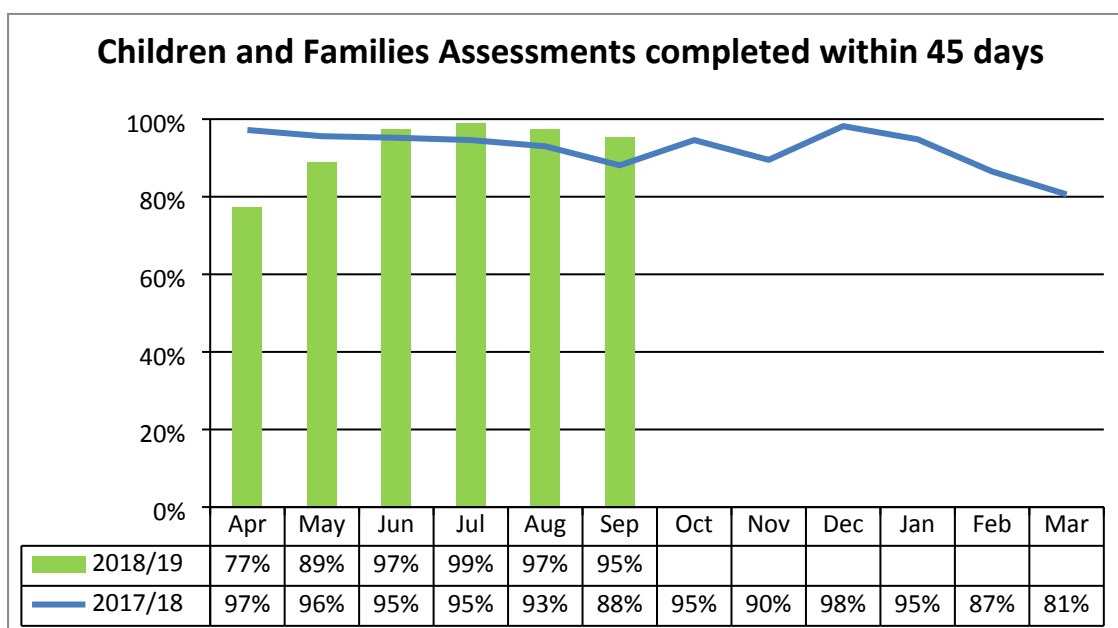
Rate of Assessment per 10,000	Year	Thurrock	England Average	Statistical Neighbours	East England
	2014-15	580	475	444	395
	2015-16	713	490	507	425
	2016-17	584	515	583	385
	2017-18	474	~	~	~



Rate of referrals per 10,000	Year	Thurrock	England Average	Statistical Neighbours	East England
	2014-15	512	548	519	426
	2015-16	592	532	590	410
	2016-17	491	532	620	374
	2017-18	496	~	~	~

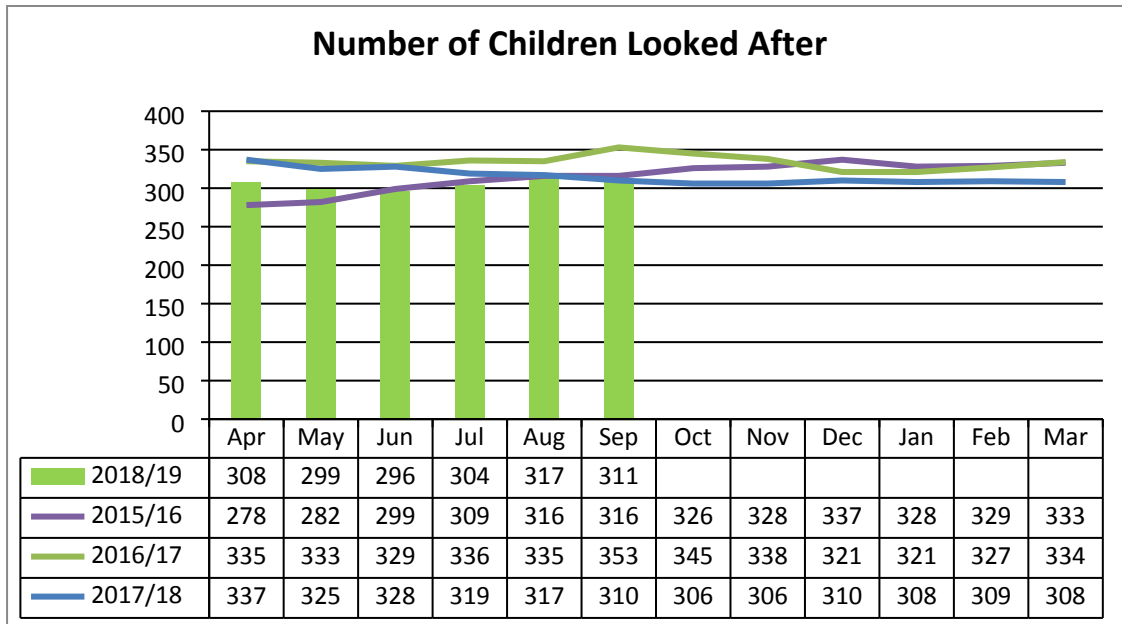


3.2 Referrals compared to this time last year have seen an increase of 37 to 224 compared to 187. This is an area of further investigation by the service to understand the reason for the referrals and therefore driving demand.

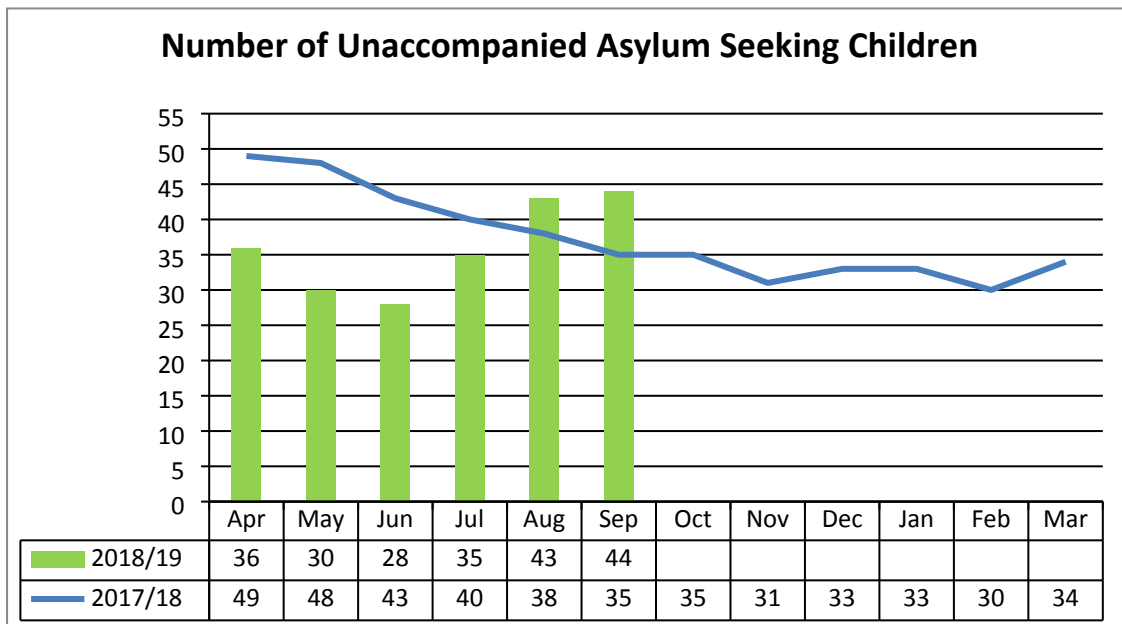


This is good performance, particularly given the recent increase in contacts and referrals.

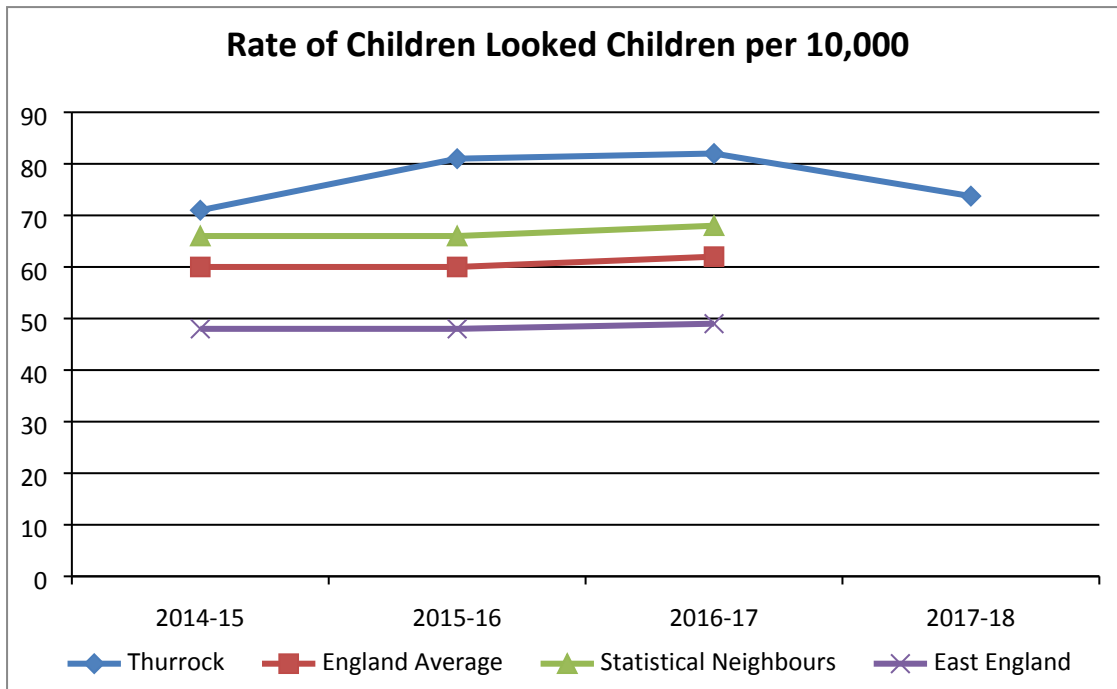
3.3 Children Looked After



September figures are comparative to the same time last year and have been consistently over 300 for the last 3 months.

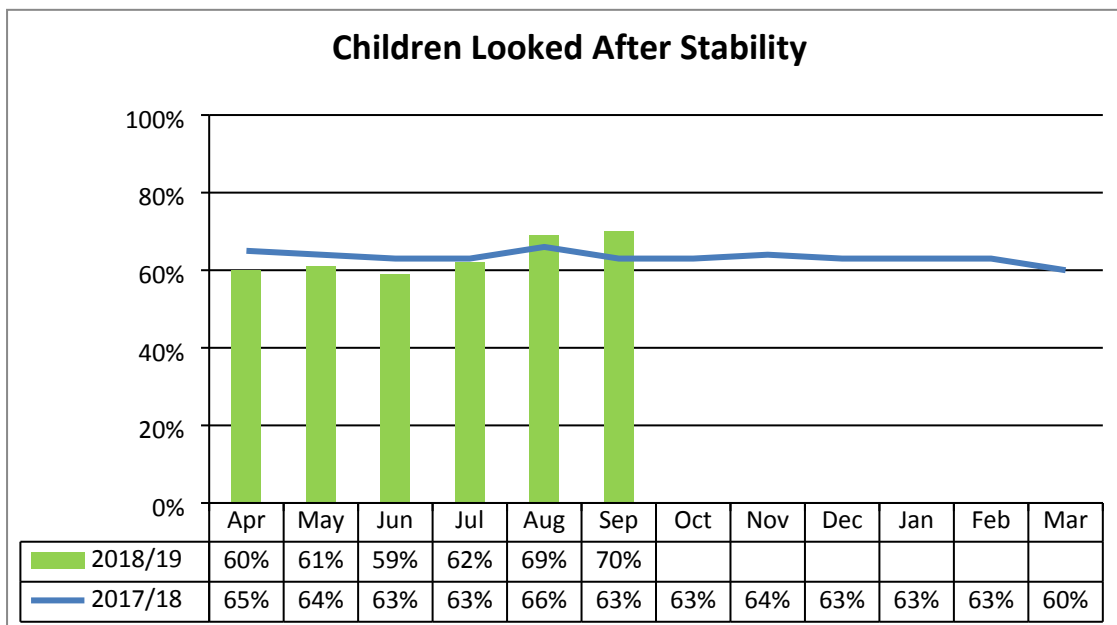


3.4 The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has increased to 44 from 36 at the start of the financial year. There are increasing numbers of UASC entering care and this is pushing up the overall care figure. However, the service is still able to transfer new arrivals to other Eastern Region Authorities through the transfer protocol.



3.5 Thurrock continues to close more Children Looked After cases than comparator groups and England average. This continues to be as a result of children returning to their families. Given the high rate of Children Looked After this is a good position and helped to reduce the rate from 82 per 10,000 of the child population in 2016/17 to 73 per 10k of the child population in 2017/18. The service continues to monitor all new looked after cases ensuring correct thresholds are being applied and children are only being looked after where necessary.

3.6 Placements- Long Term Stability



CLA long-term stability in placements has improved to 70% from a start of the year position of 60%. This is good performance and provides better outcomes for looked after children.

- 3.7 Factors which greatly affect placement stability include the amount of planning before a child comes into care and the quality of the matching of the placement to the child's needs. Where children come into care in an emergency, the initial placement choice is more likely to be determined by availability rather than need and there is a higher risk of the placement breaking down.
- 3.8 Placement stability is strongly correlated to the progress that children and young people make in care, as moves caused by placement breakdown can negatively impact on a young person's sense of worth, emotional resilience and is disruptive to developing friendship and support networks and educational achievement.

A key support to placement stability through scrutiny of placement plans is through the work on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) function.

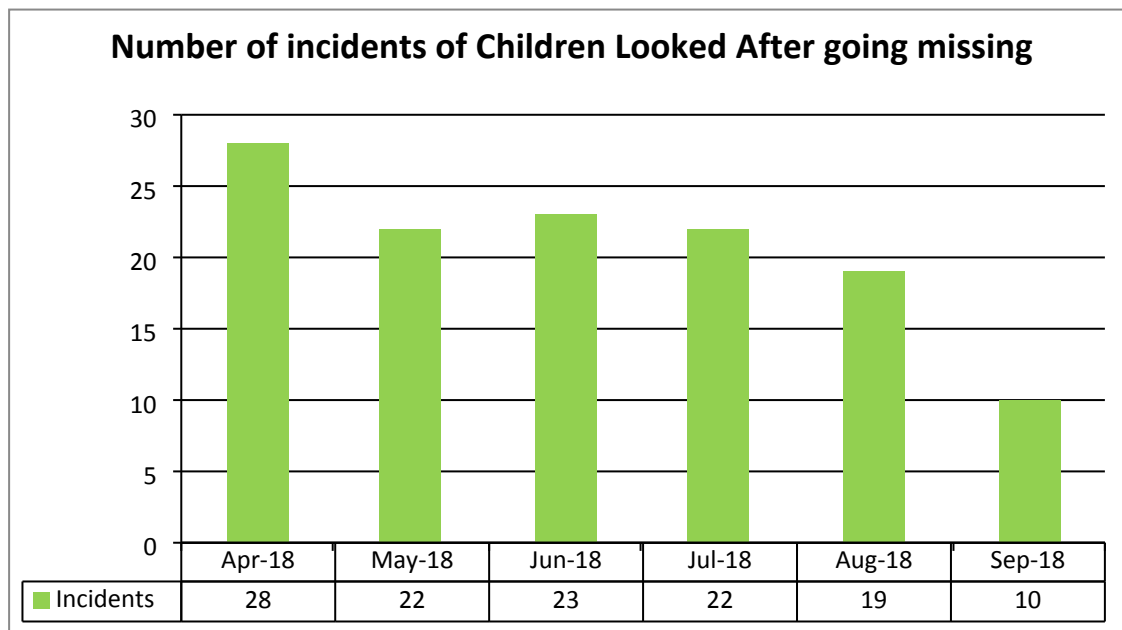
3.9 **Fostering**

Current focus is on the use of in-house foster placements as opposed to independent fostering agencies through our recruitment programme. Current performance as of August 2018 for in-house fostering provision is as follows:

Area	Number
Number of new carers approved between Apr 18 to Sep 18	4
Number of mainstream fostering applications current in progress	8
Number of current fostering households	98

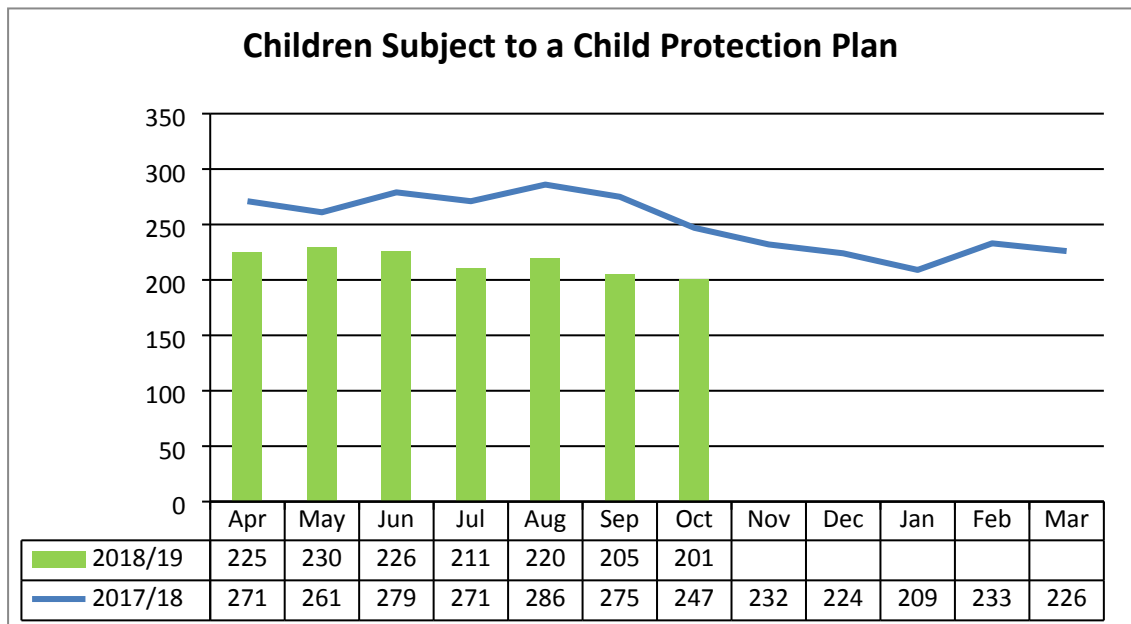
- 3.10 Following a service review, additional resources have been allocated to increase recruitment of foster care and ensure fewer children are placed out of the authority with independent fostering agencies.

3.11 Looked After Children Missing



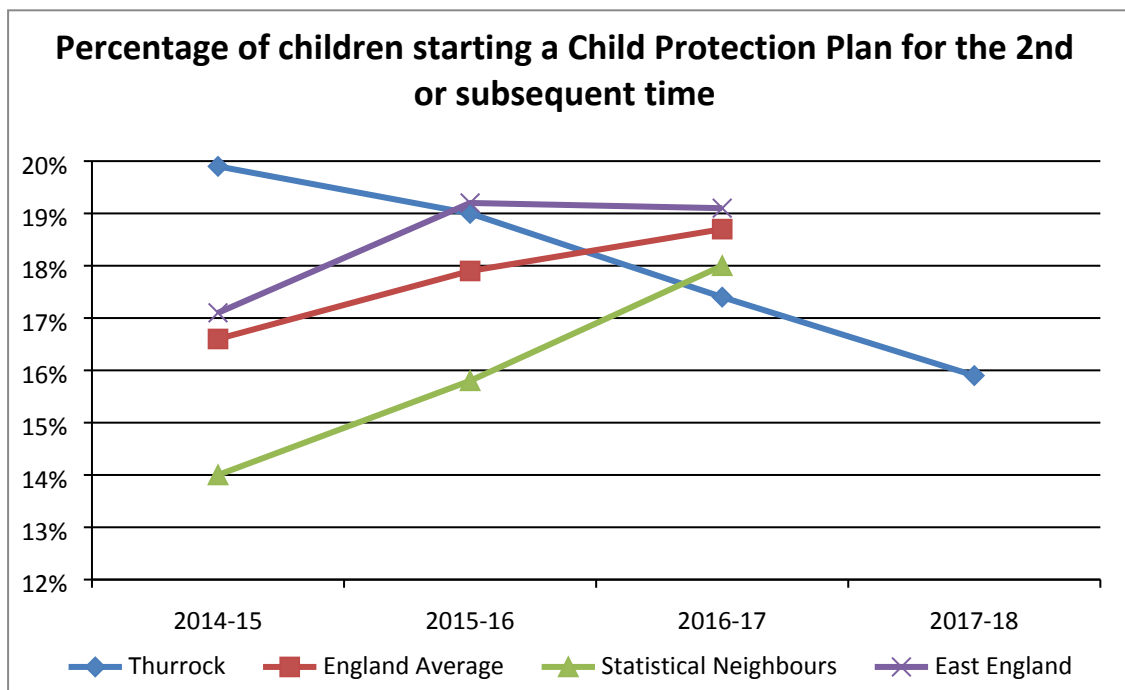
There were 10 CLA missing incidents in September 2018. This is showing a downward trend from 28 in April 2018.

3.12 Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan



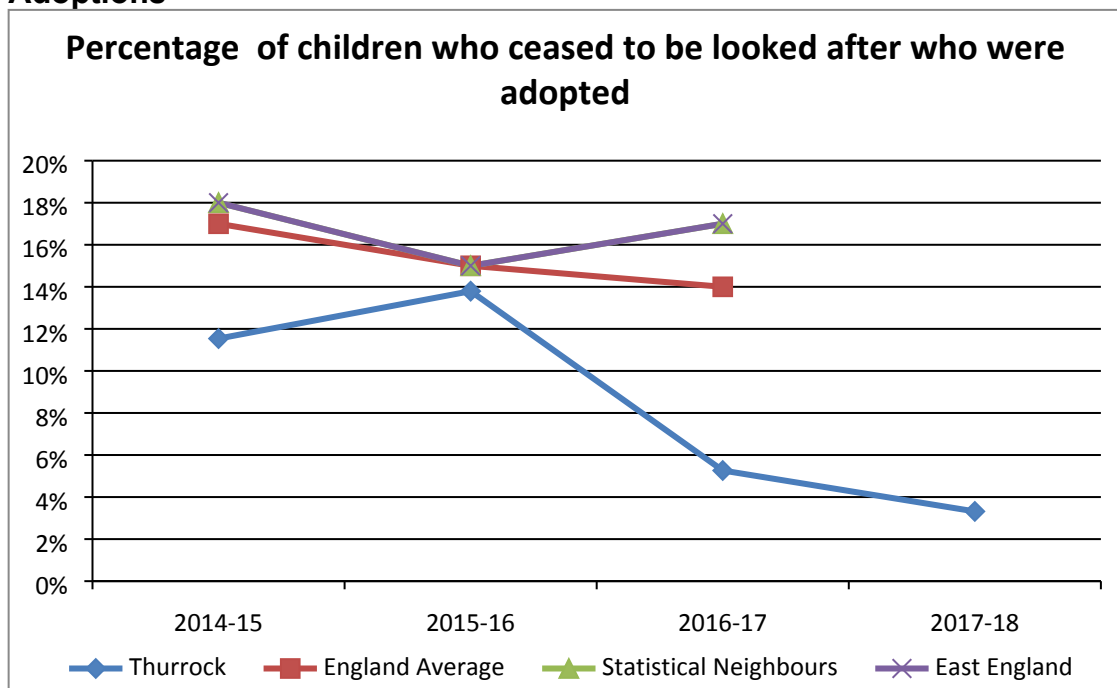
3.13 The number of children on a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 201 for October 2018. This is attributed to a reduction in the number of Child Protection Plans being started this financial year (**2016/2017: 329 2017/2018: 231**). The introduction of the Signs of Safety practice model and the development of a more strengths based approach to working with families has

helped to reduce the number of children with a plan. Given the previous high rate of Child Protection Plans this is good performance and now in line with statistical neighbours.



3.14 Thurrock's percentage of children subject to a 2nd or subsequent time on a Child Protection Plan has reduced to 16.5%. This is below our comparator group (18%). The service will continue to monitor the number going back on a plan to ensure only children that are suitable are taken off a Child Protection Plan.

3.15 Adoptions



There were 7 (3%) adoptions completed in 2017/2018. This is lower in comparison to performance achieved in 2015 where 13 children were adopted. A significant factor for this performance has been changes to case law which has stressed that adoption should only be used as a last resort where no other order will do. Due to improved permanence practice, it is anticipated that 15 children will be adopted this year.

4. Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS)

4.1 An Ofsted focused visit was carried out on the 11th and 12th September 2018 with the published letter made available on the 4th October 2018. The focused visit concentrated on Children in Need and Child Protection and inspectors interviewed social workers and examined their case files to examine the quality of practice. The letter was presented at the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Ofsted letter highlighted 3 areas for improvement which were:

- The quality and purposefulness of plans and written agreements.
- Children's access to advocacy services and opportunities and mechanisms for children to feed back their views and wishes in order to inform practice and service development.
- Workload pressures have been significant in some teams, although they are now reducing.

4.2 The letter noted that senior leaders are aware of these strengths and weaknesses, and that the development plan indicates that they have a clear understanding of what needs to be done to improve services. The areas for improvement have been incorporated into the service's development plan.

5. Whistleblowing Allegations

- 5.1 A report was presented to November's meeting of Thurrock Council's Cabinet on the outcome of an investigation into whistleblowing allegations.

A full investigation was undertaken by an independent barrister with expertise in children's safeguarding into the allegations made in whistleblowing letters received by the council this year. The investigation has now been completed with the barrister concluding that the allegations were unsubstantiated.

- 5.2 The Council treats all Whistleblowing allegations seriously, and acted quickly to ensure that a thorough investigation was undertaken by an independent expert. The investigation has been monitored by Ofsted, and the regulator has agreed that the matter has been investigated appropriately and is now closed.

6. Reasons for Recommendation

Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the current performance position.

7. Consultation

None

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

None

9. Implications

9.1 Financial

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

No financial implications

9.2 Legal

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

No legal implications

9.3 Diversity and Equality

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

No diversity and equality implications

9.4 Other implications

None.

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

None.

10. Appendices to report

None.

Report author:

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Strategy, Communications and Customer Services