

<b>1 December 2020</b>		<b>ITEM: 9</b>
<b>Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Children's Social Care Performance</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Joe Tynan, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

This report needs to be read in the context of the global pandemic Covid-19 and the impact this has had on the work carried out by Children's Social Care since the initial lockdown at the end of March 2020.

This report shows that:

- There has been an impact on the number of referrals and contacts received by Children's Social Care following Covid-19 and the initial lockdown in late March 2020. Agencies including schools from whom a majority of our referrals come, were not having consistent direct contact with a large number of children and their families until September 2020.
- In Q1 2020, the number of contacts received was 1,034 compared to 1,602 in the same quarter last year. This represents a 35.5% drop in the number of quarterly contacts received as a direct result of Covid-19 and the national lockdown.
- In Q1 2020, the number of referrals was 443 compared to 610 in the same quarter last year. This represents a 27.4% drop in the number of referrals received. This is in line with the reduction in contacts but indicates a slightly higher percentage of contacts being treated as a referral.

- In Q1 2020, 97.3% of the children and families assessments were completed in timescale compared to 95.2% in Q1 2019, an improvement in performance.
- At the end of Q1 2020-21, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 159 compared to 173 at the end of Q4 and 134 in Q1 2019-20. Since Q4, we have seen the number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan steadily reduce by 8.1%. Q1 has shown a decrease of children subject to a Child Protection Plan. Children subject to a Child Protection plan are carefully reviewed and does fluctuate each quarter, therefore this decrease does not present any concern.
- Since Q1 2019, we have seen an increase in the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help. As at end of June 2020, 39 cases were stepped down compared to 23 in 2019. This is an increase of 70% in 2020. There has been a concerted effort to ensure that children and families receive the correct support and advice following statutory involvement by Children's Social Care, where there remains a need for a lower level of support.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk.
- All data continues to be monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that decision-making within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) remains robust and ensures families are supported by the most appropriate service.

## **1. Recommendation**

- 1.1 That members review the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to date to manage demand for statutory social care services.**

## **2. Introduction and Background**

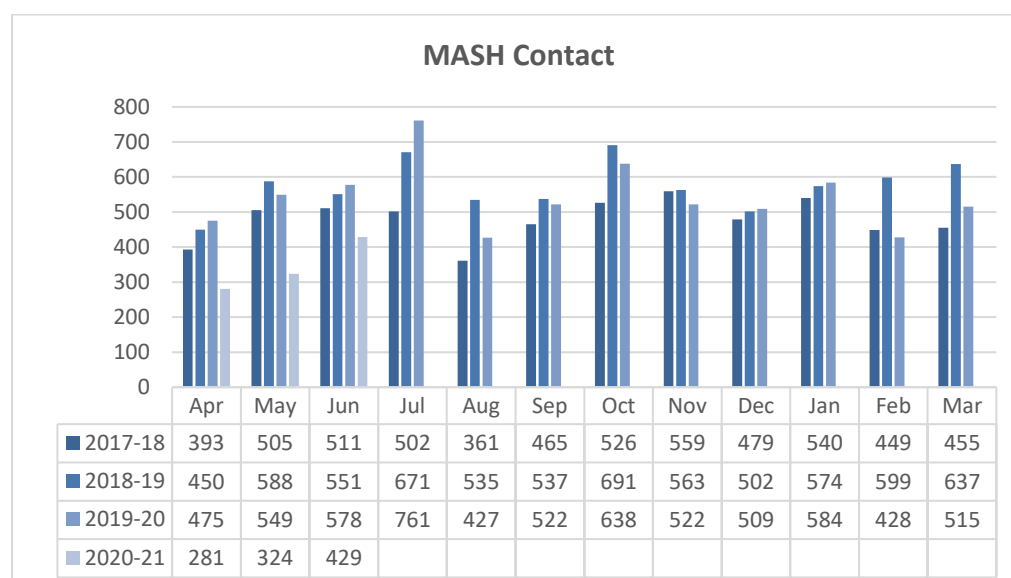
- 2.1** This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for Quarter 1 2020-21 (April to June 2020). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2** Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the 'At A Glance' monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets.

- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 This report is presented a quarter in arrears to allow for the production and ratification of the performance data and preparation of the report with input from practice leads and the Assistant Director for Children's Services; as well as the governance arrangements of ensuring the final report is presented at the Directorate Management Team meeting and Directors Board prior to Overview & Scrutiny Board.

### 3. THURROCK DATA

#### 3.1 Contacts

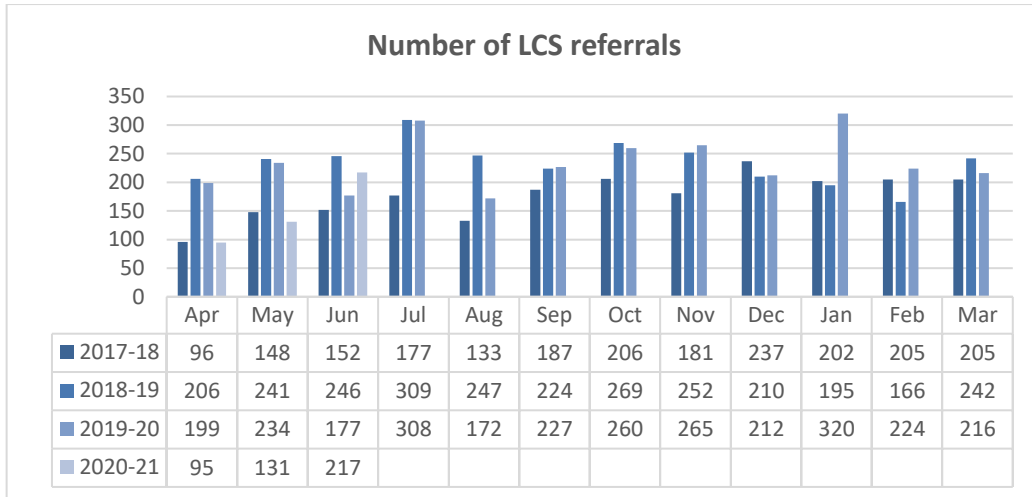
The number of contacts have reduced by 32.3% since Q4. Comparing to the same quarter of 2019-20, the number of contacts have reduced by 35.5% in Q1 2020-21. It appears this is directly in relation to the emergence of Covid-19 and the subsequent national lockdown.



#### 3.2 Referrals

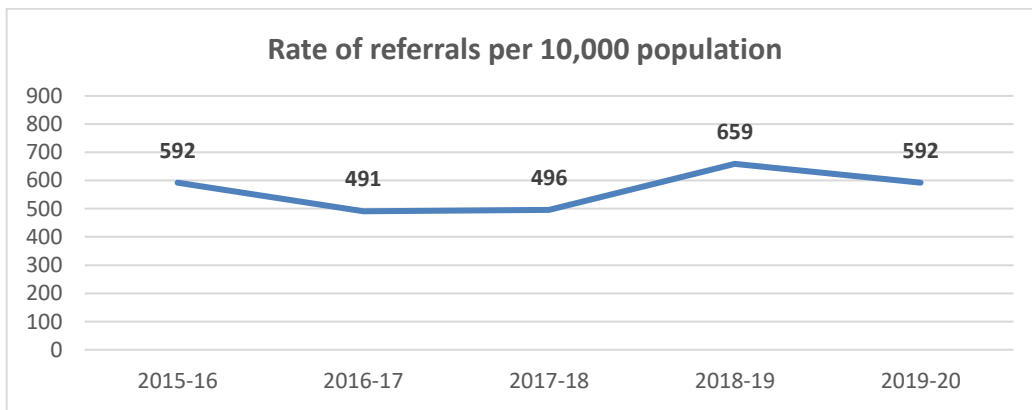
Since Q4 2019-20, the number of referrals have fallen by 41.7% from 760 to 443 in Q1. Compared to Q1 last year, the number of referrals have dropped by 27.4% in Q1 2020-21.

Of the total 443 the majority of referrals received in Q1 this year, 37% were received from the Police. This is due to the disruption of face-to-face schooling for most local children, as a result of the national lockdown, thus reducing the number of referrals usually made by schools.



### 3.3 Rate of referrals

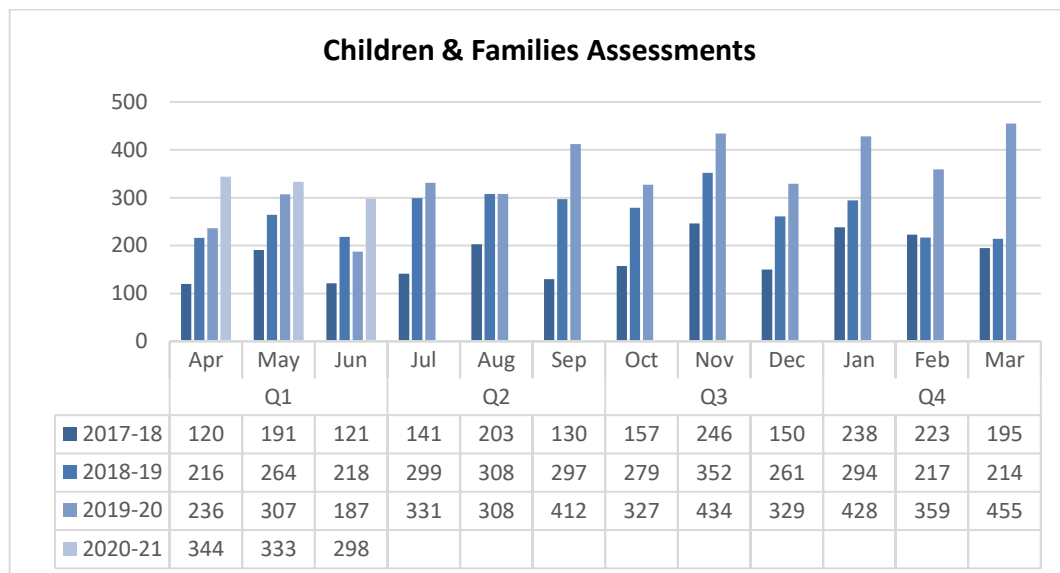
The 2019-20 year end position for rate of referrals per 10,000 was 592 compared to 659 in 2018-19. It is not currently possible to make a comparison across the referral rates of regional, national and statistical neighbours, as this information has not yet been published. There are a number of possible reasons for this increase in referral rates, however we have noted greater complexity within the contacts into the service, and while the number of contacts has reduced, the conversion from contacts into referrals, has increased.



	Thurrock	Statistical Neighbours	England Average	East England
2015-16	592	590	532	425
2016-17	491	620	548	374
2017-18	496	610	553	362
2018-19	659	663	545	364
2019-20	592	Not yet published	Not yet published	Not yet published

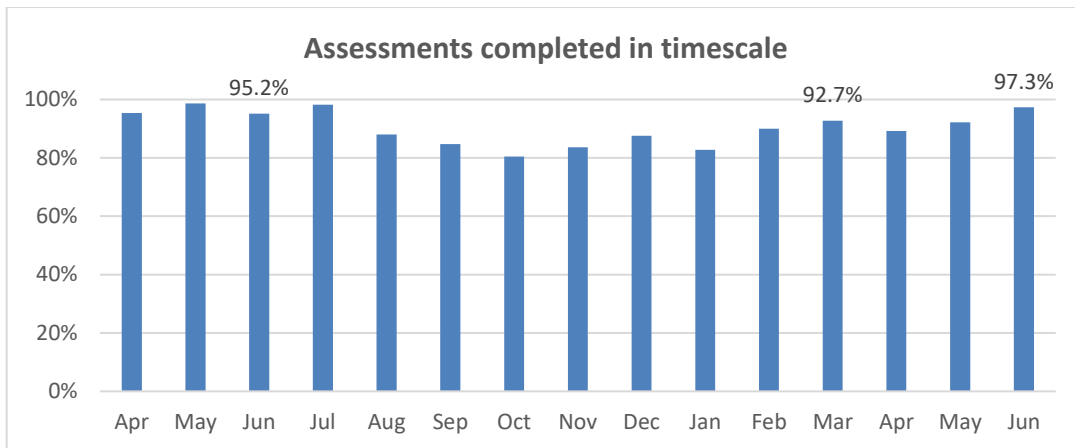
### 3.4 Children & Families Assessments

The latest position shows that there were 975 assessments completed in Q1 2020-21 compared to 1,242 in Q4. When compared to Q1 2019-20, the number of assessments have increased by 33.6% in Q1 2020-21.



### 3.5 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

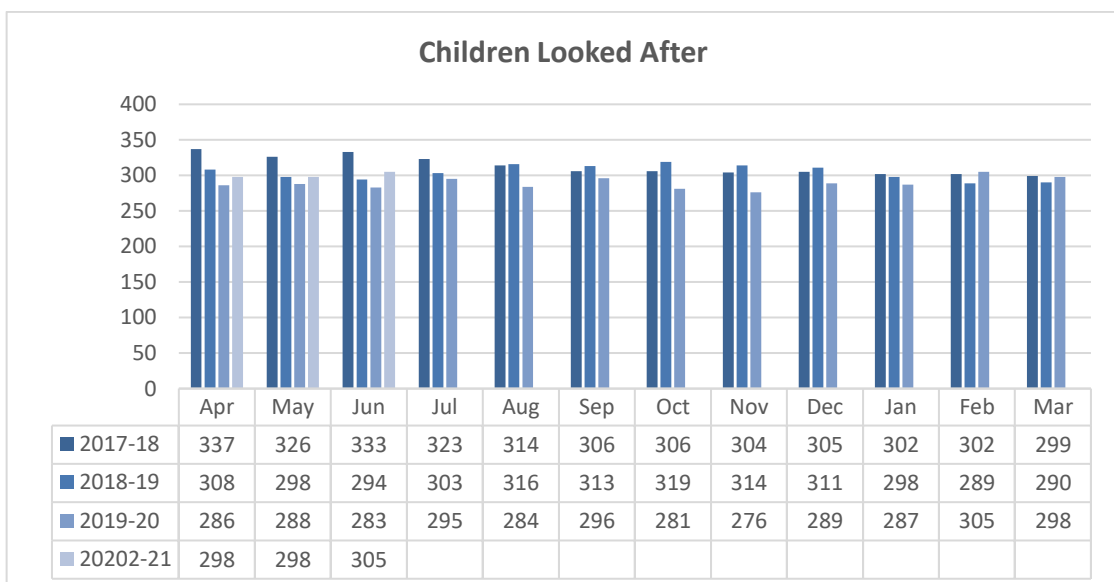
The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 97.3% at the end of Q1 2020-21. This is up by 4.6% since Q4 2019-20 and 2.1% higher than in Q1 2019-20.



### 3.6 Children Looked After

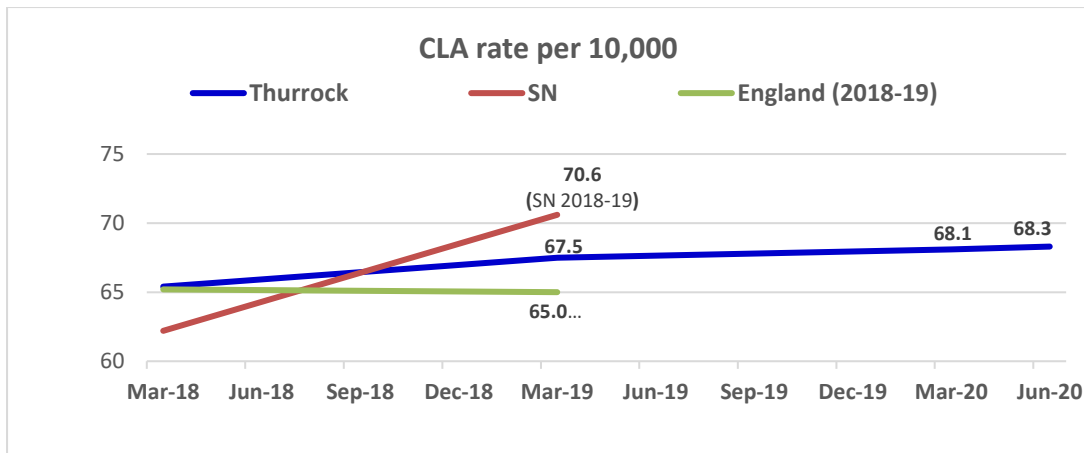
The number of Children Looked After as at Q1 2020-21 stands at 305 compared to 298 at the end of Q4.

Between 2019 and 2020, the number of Children Looked After has increased by 2.8%. According to year end SSDA903 data published by DfE, between 2018 and 2019, the average increase in local authorities across England was 4.0%. Data for this reporting year 2019-20 has not been published as yet.



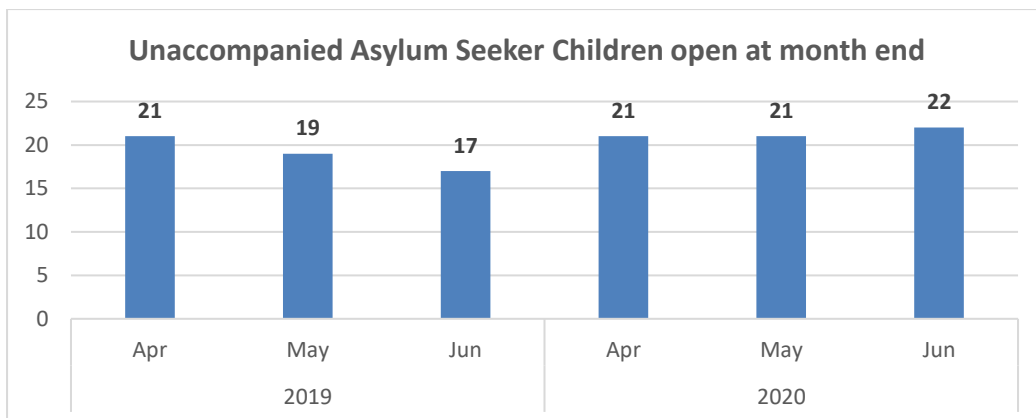
### 3.7 Children Looked After rate per 10,000

The rate per 10,000 was 68.3 in Q1 2020-21 compared to 68.1 at the end of Q4 which is lower than our statistical neighbor average of 70.6 and slightly higher than England average of 65.0 in 2018-19.



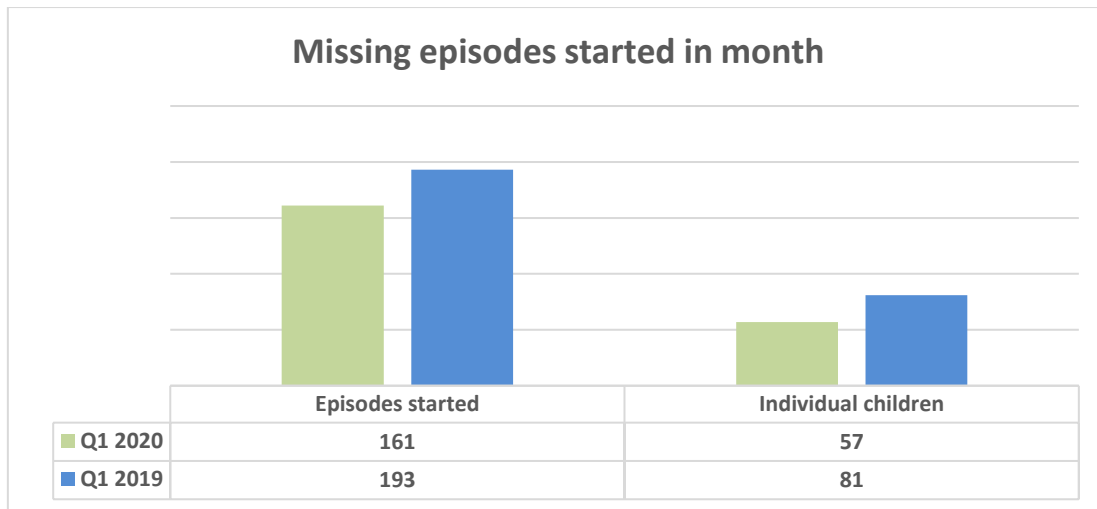
### 3.8 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children

At the end of Q1 2020-21, the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children was 22 representing an increase of 1 child since Q1 2019-20 and Q4 2019-20. Number of UASC in Thurrock is below statistical neighbours of 26.



## 4. Missing episodes of Children Looked After

4.1 In Q1 2020-21, the number of missing episodes started was 161 compared to 193 in Q1 2019-20. The episodes were made up by 57 individual children compared to 81 in Q1 2019-20.



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

## 5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan

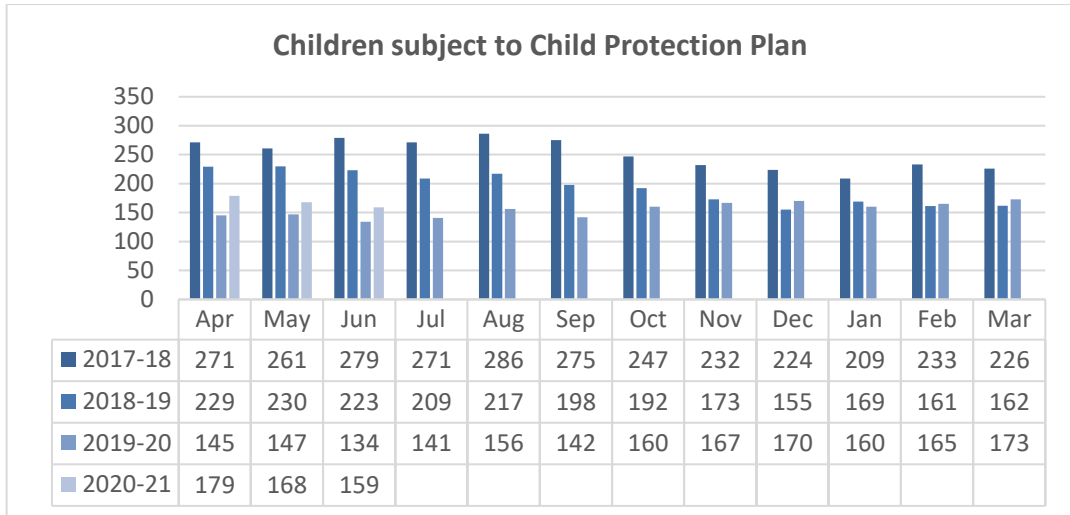
### 5.1 Number of Children

At the end of Q1 2020-21, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 159 compared to 173 at the end of Q4 and 134 in Q1 2019-20. Since Q4, we have seen the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan steadily reduce by 8.1%.

The rate of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 36.3 (per 10,000) at the end of Q1 2020-21 compared to 39.5 at the end of Q4 which is below statistical neighbour of 50.3 and England average of 43.7 based on the latest data in 2018-19.

The introduction and embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model and the development of a more strengths based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to reduce the number of children with a plan.



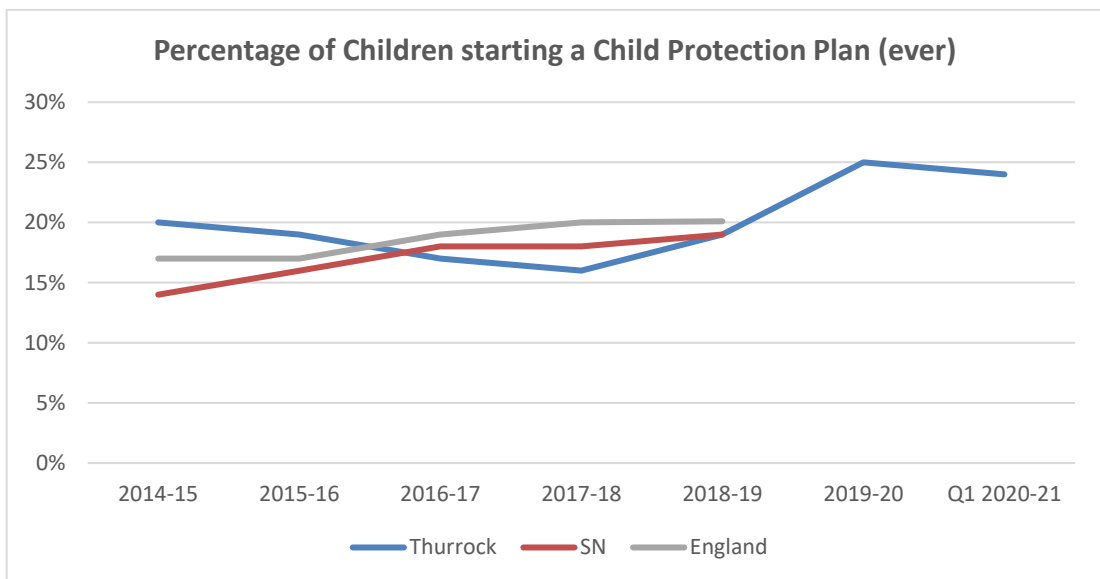


## 5.2 Child Protection reviews

Child Protection plans reviewed on time continues to show a good performance at 100% at the end of Q1 compared to 75.8% at the end of Q4, representing 24.2% increase.

## 5.3 Repeat Child Protection Plan

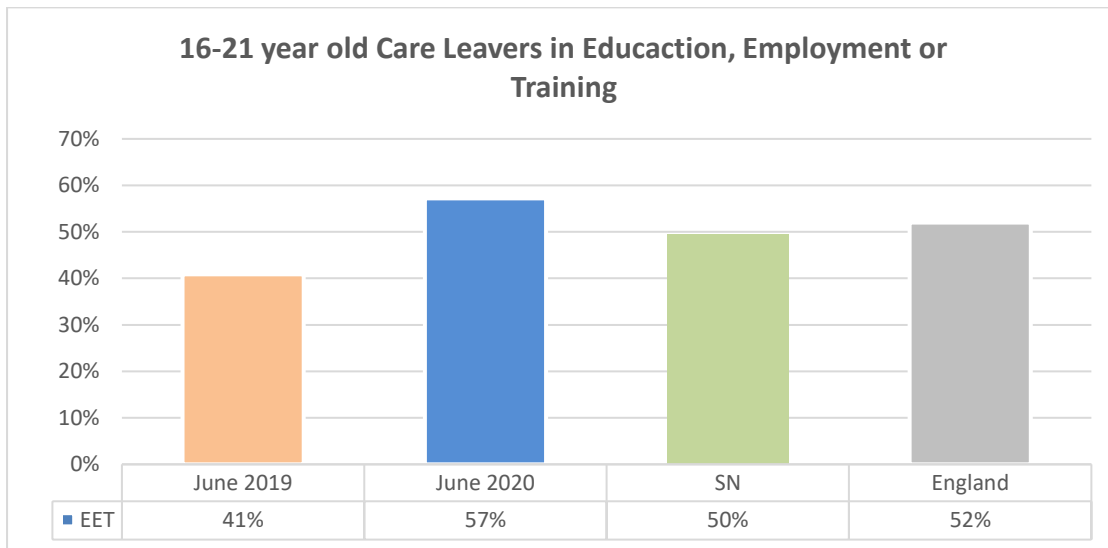
In June 2020, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 23.7% which equates to 54 children and represents 1.2% drop since Q4. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2017-18, Thurrock is marginally higher than our statistical neighbour of 19.5% and England average of 20.0%.



## 6. Care leavers

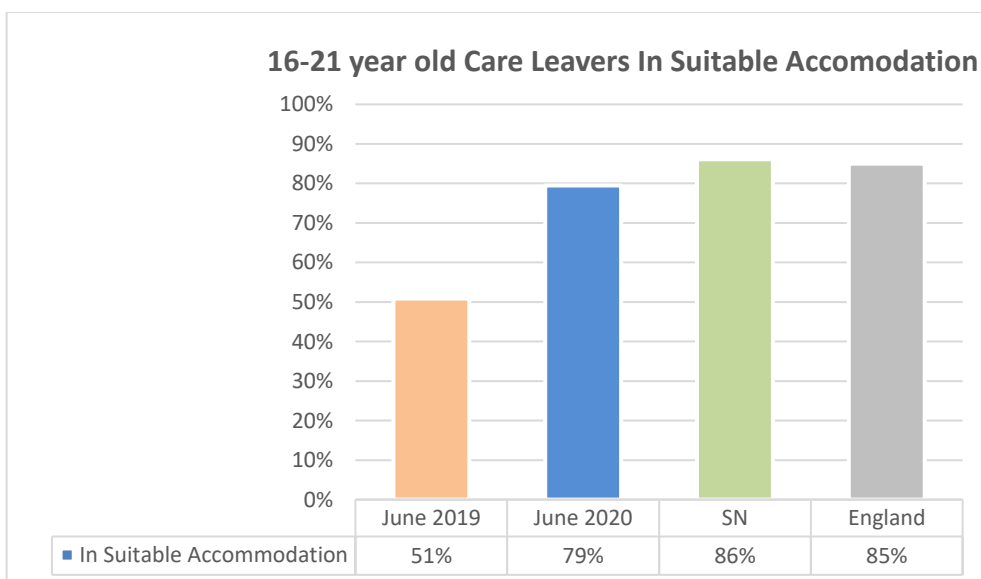
### 6.1 Education, Employment or Training

At the end of Q1 2020-21, 57% of 16-21 year old Care Leavers were in Education, Employment or Training compared to 41% in Q1 2019 representing 16% increase in 2020 and performing above our statistical neighbours and England average.



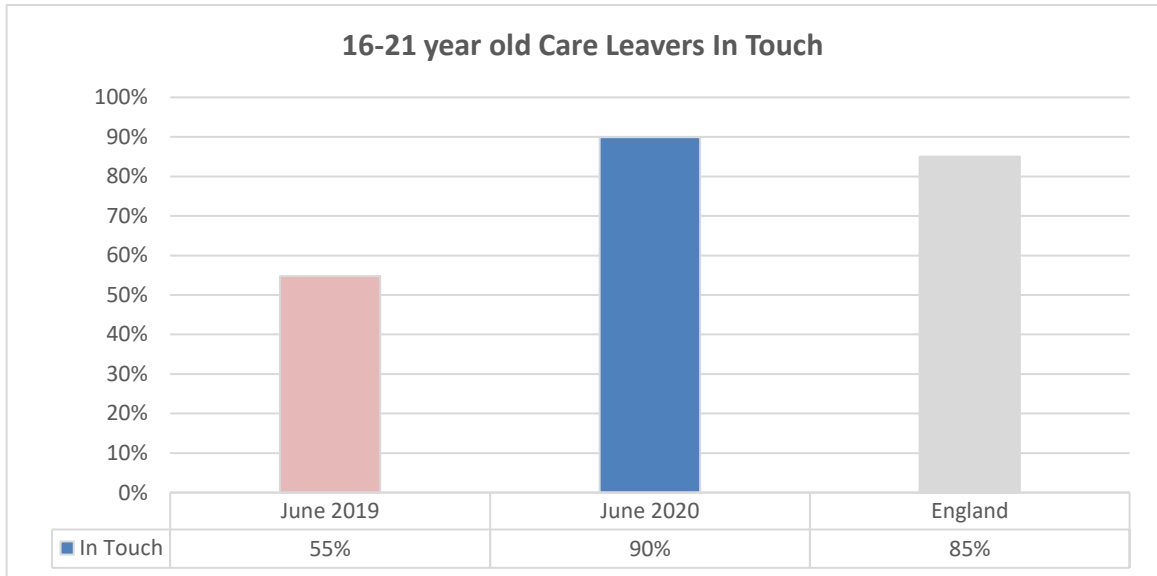
### 6.2 In suitable accommodation

79% of 16-21 year old care leavers were reported to be in suitable accommodation equating to 182 care leavers compared to 117 in the same quarter 2019. Since 2019, this represents a 28% increase in the number of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation.



### 6.3 In touch

At the end of Q1 2020-21, Care Leavers in touch was 90% which represents 35% increase when compared to the same quarter in 2019. Thurrock is performing above the national average of 85%.



## 7. Adoption

7.1 In Q1 2020, one child was adopted compared to 4 in Q1 2019. This reflects the timing of children placed, the number of Placement Orders and the impact of Covid-19 on the Court process. The adoption service has worked effectively to place children for adoption safely and we anticipate 12 children being placed for adoption by the end of Q2 2020-21.

7.2 We therefore anticipate a greater number of adoption orders in the second half of the financial year.

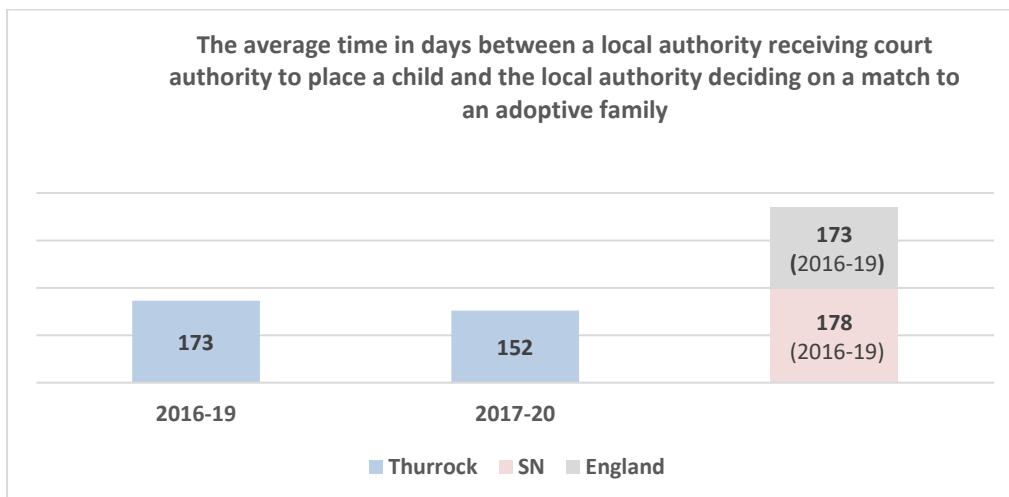
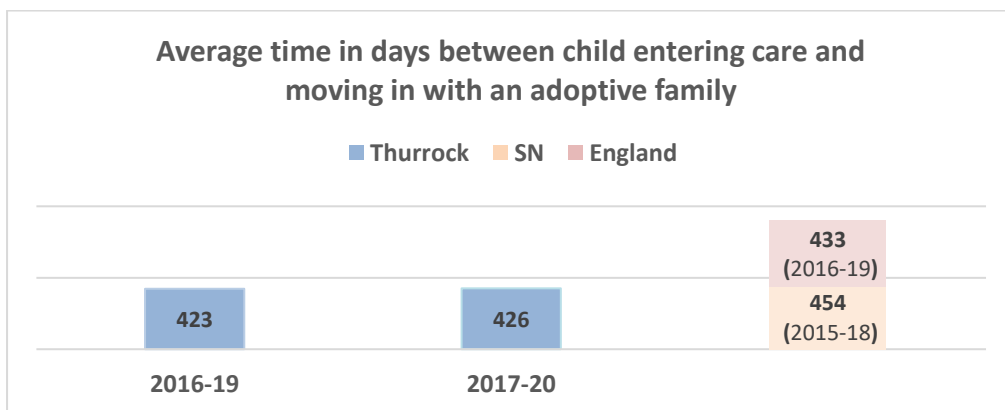
Year	Number of children adopted
2014-15	11
2015-16	19
2016-17	11
2017-18	7
2018-19	13
2019-20	15
2020-21 (Q1)	1

7.3 Further to the improved performance in 2019-20 (15 children adopted), we expect this performance to continue during the latter quarters of the reporting year.

7.4 As at the end of Q1 2020-21, our position was as follows:-

With date of decision that the child should be placed for adoption	20
Placement Orders	12
Matched	12
Placed (the same children are Placement Order, Matched and placed)	12

7.5 Thurrock is performing on target in relation to the 3 year average time for a child to be adopted. Our 2020-21 target is set at 426 days and the Q1 position is 426 days. Comparing our Statistical Neighbours and England averages below, Thurrock's performance is good.



## 8. Fostering

8.1 Most of our Children Looked After are placed with foster carers. We recruit and support our own foster carers but also have to use independent agency foster carers to get the right match for a child.

8.2 We have increased capacity in the recruitment team. As a result the rate of enquiries and resulting foster carers has increased. In 2019-20, we met our target of a net gain of 15 carers.

8.3 Table below shows our position from April 20 to end of Q1:

Number of new carers approved	19
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	10
Number of children currently placed in Thurrock fostering households	113

## 9. Reasons for Recommendation

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

## 10. Consultation

N/A

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

N/A

## 12. Implications

### 12.1 Financial

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

No financial implications.

### 12.2 Legal

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

No legal implications.

### 12.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**

## **Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities**

Whilst there are no direct E&D implications arising from this report, the service collects and utilises data to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

### **12.4 Other implications**

N/A

### **13. 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)**

N/A

### **14. Appendices to report**

N/A

### **Report Author:**

Anna Watkins

Business Intelligence Analyst