

5 January 2021		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children's Social Care Performance		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-key	
Report of: Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
Accountable Assistant Director: Joe Tynan, Assistant Director of Children Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report should 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 in March 2020.

Thurrock provides a service to approximately 300 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 275 Care Leavers. There is good overall performance and the performance of both the Children Looked After and Aftercare Services is improving. Children are being visited regularly.

There is a continued focus on improving Care Leavers keeping 'In touch' with Aftercare Service and ensuring these young people are in education or employment.

The Fostering Recruitment Service is seeking to recruit more Foster Carers in Thurrock. This will support children being placed closer to home. There have been significant delays in court proceedings as a result of the global pandemic, which has resulted in delays for some children who need adoption or alternative permanent placements.

The number of children who went missing during the period from June to September 2020 has decreased, along with the number of missing episodes.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and the work undertaken to manage demand for statutory Social Care Services.**
- 1.2 For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

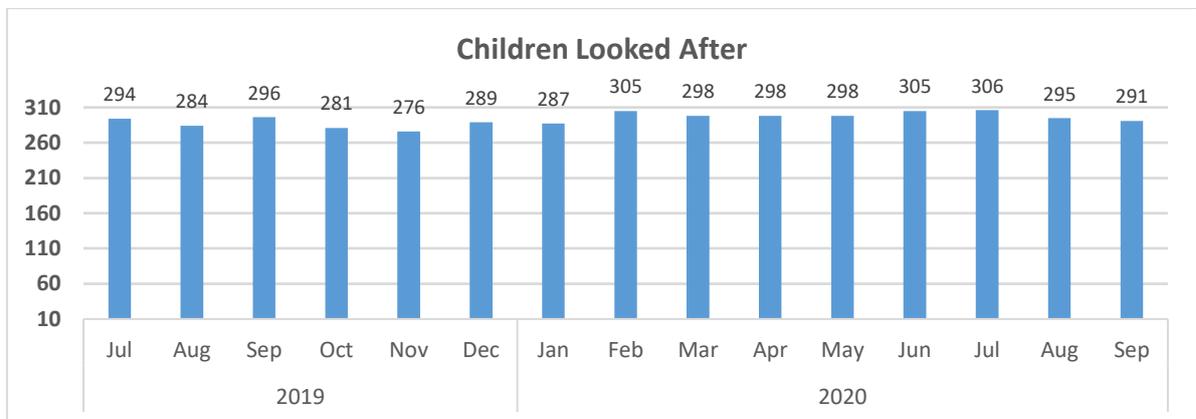
2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After, such as the number of Children Looked After, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At A Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual SSDA903 data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels and to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.
- 2.5 The data in this report is from the monthly performance reporting (At A Glance), 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. Data has not yet been published in relation to statistical neighbours and national averages for 2019-20.

3. Performance Data for Children Looked After

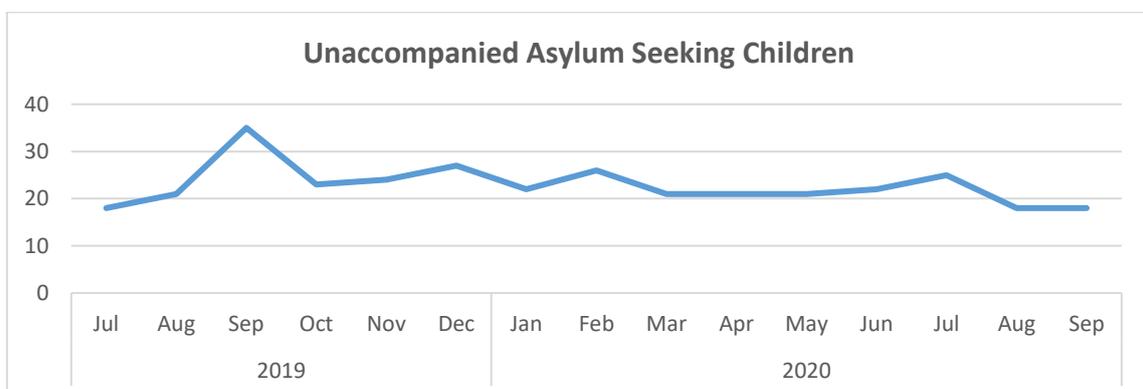
3.1 Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of Children who were Looked After (CLA) at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable. The small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate. Once a child ceases to be Looked After the council is still responsible for those children who are placed in Special Guardianship families. This is a good permanent alternative for children to remain with their families. However, the Council remains financially responsible for these children.



3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

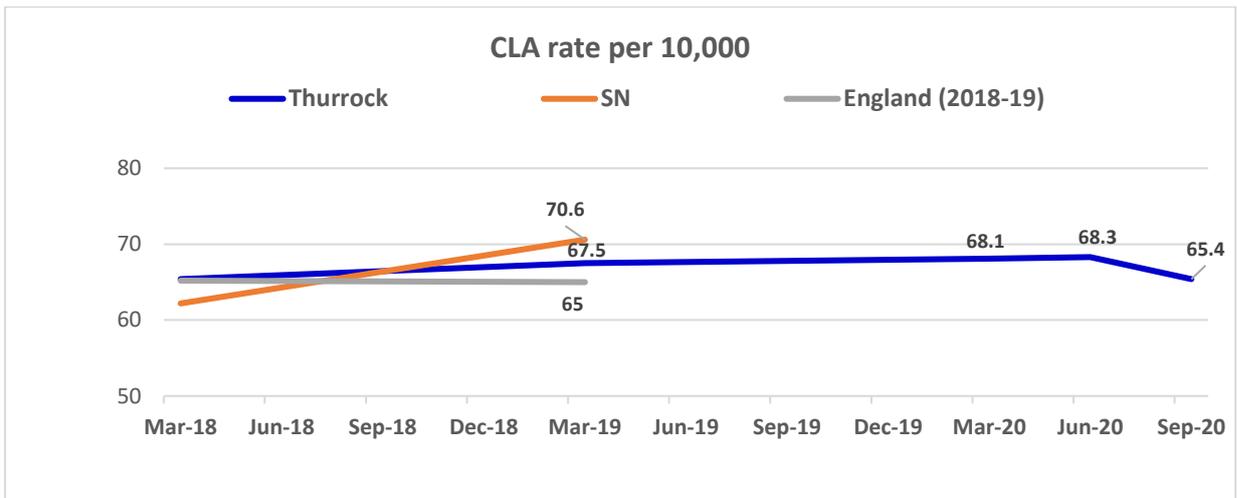
UACS are a subset of the CLA numbers above. Thurrock is part of the Eastern Region Transfer Scheme and will accept up to 28 UASC children (this number is determined by the DfE). There has been a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports as the preferred route has been through Dover. However, there is an expectation the number will increase as the weather deteriorates through the winter months.



3.3 The Rate of CLA per 10,000 population

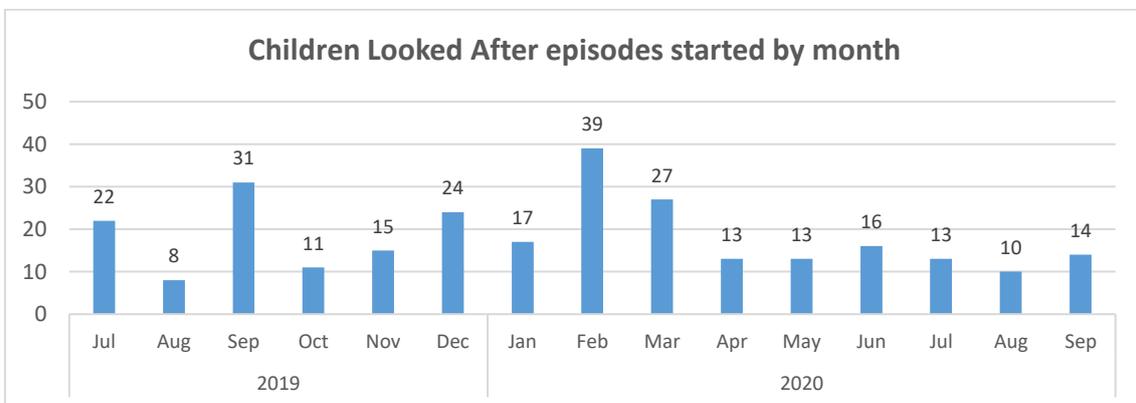
The graph below shows the rate of CLA per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock at each year end 2018, 2019, 2020 and end of quarter Q2 2020-21.

Based on the 2019 benchmarking data available, in Q2, Thurrock is below its statistical neighbours' rate of 70.6 and only slightly above the England average of 65.



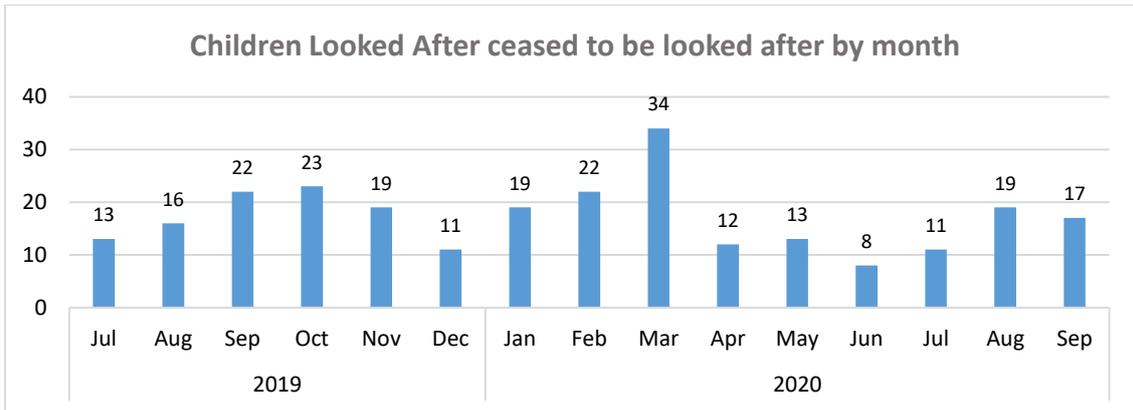
3.4 CLA episodes started by month

It is normal for the number of Children Looked After to fluctuate month to month. This fluctuation and the relatively small numbers makes it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease since the start of the pandemic. Also, of the 14 children who started to be Looked After in Q2 of 2020-21, 9 were UASC. This compares to 27 in Q2 of 2019-20. All cases are reviewed to ensure the correct children come in to care and court proceedings are only issued where necessary.



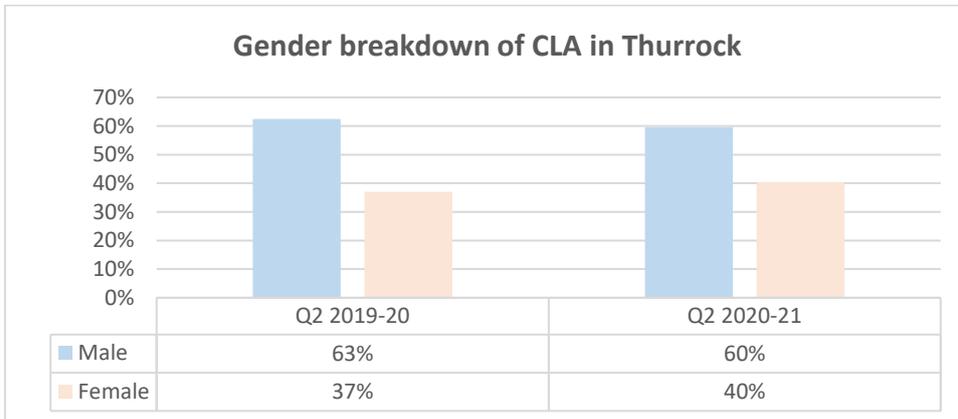
3.5 CLA episodes ended by month

Similarly, it is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. This fluctuation and the relatively small numbers makes it difficult to identify significant trends. However, there has been a decrease since the start of the pandemic. In part, this is due to a delay in court proceedings, which has prevented children from leaving care and progressing to their permanent placements (via Adoption, Special Guardianship or returning home).



3.6 CLA by Gender

Based on the latest 2018-19 benchmarking data available, the gender breakdown is in line with the England average and the 3% change since last year brings Thurrock closer to the England average.

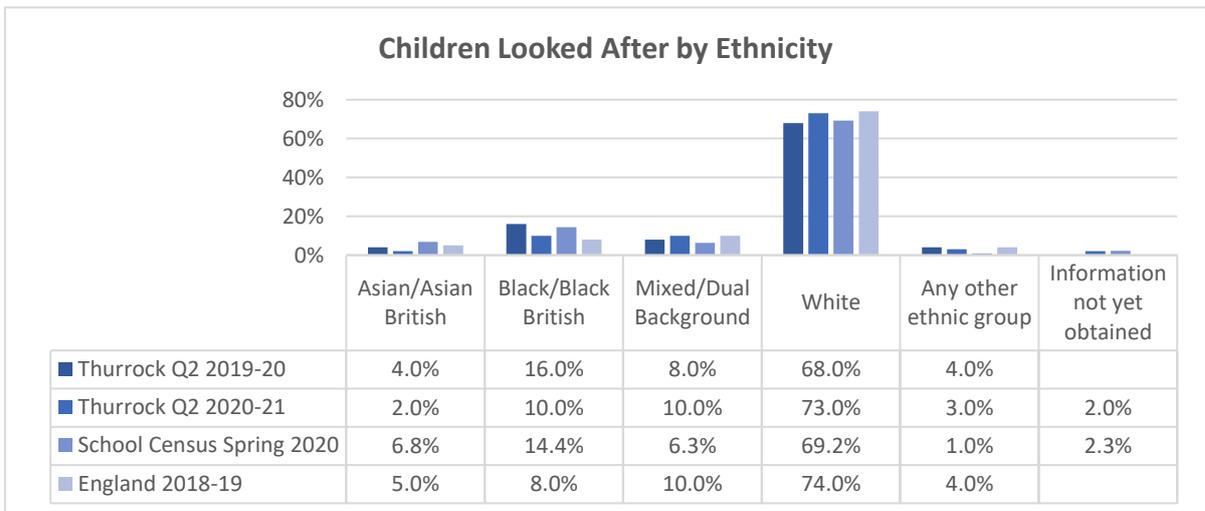


3.7 CLA by Ethnicity

Thurrock’s Children Looked After are predominantly of White ethnicity, which is in line with Thurrock’s School Census in Spring 2020 and CLA national average of 2018-19.

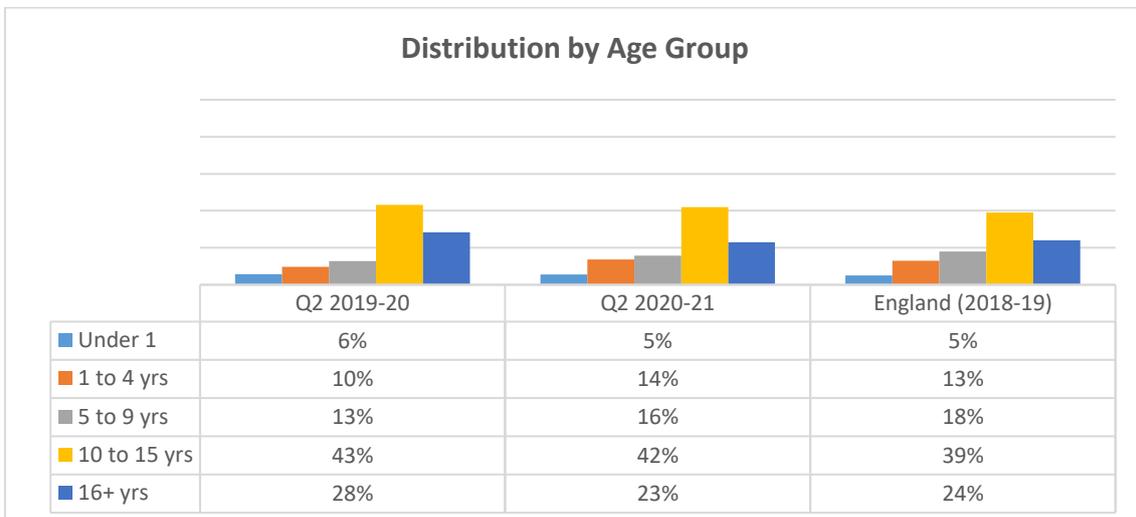
While the number of Asian/Asian British and Black/Black British children has decreased since last year, there have been no issues noted that have influenced this change.

The Black Lives Matter agenda has refocused Social Work Practice to ensure appropriate consideration of cultural issues.



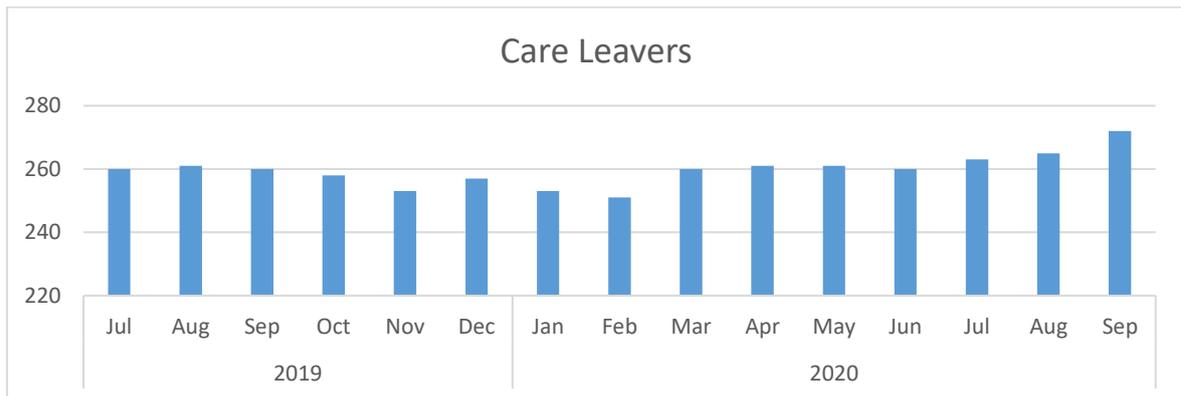
3.8 CLA Age Profile

The age profile of the CLA cohort remains mostly stable and in line with England averages. There has been an increase of the 1 to 4 and 5 to 9 age groups. This has partly been caused by delays in final Court Hearings due to the pandemic.



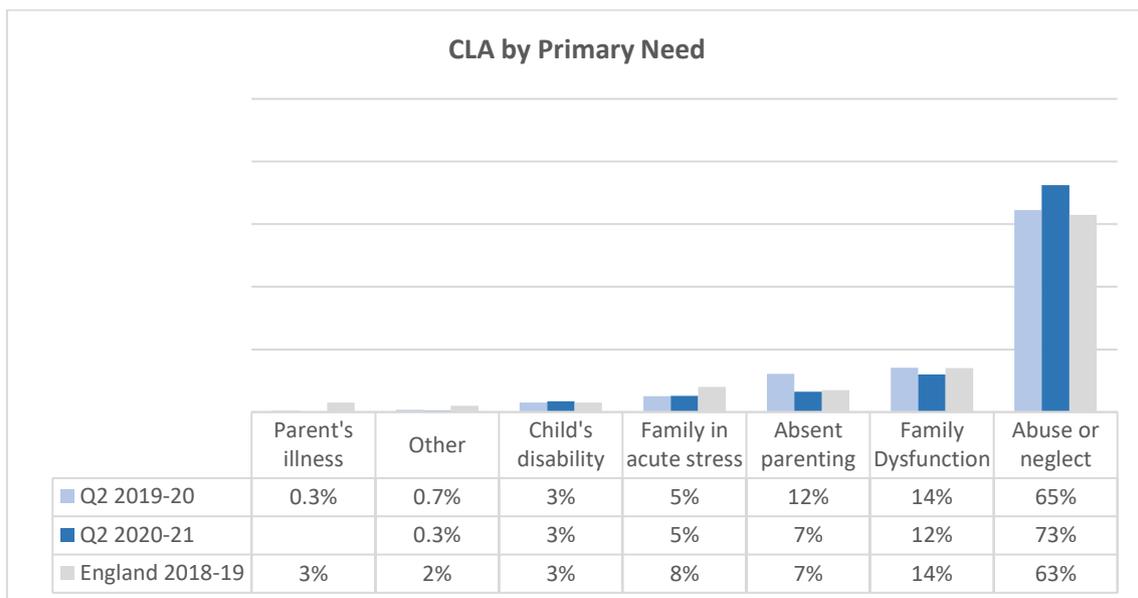
3.9 Care Leavers

The graph below shows the number of young people who receive a Care Leaving service at the end of each month. The data illustrates that the number of Care Leavers is increasing. This is partly due to legislative changes that have placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services, including the duties within the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.



3.10 CLA by Category of Need

There has been an increase in children within the 'Abuse or Neglect' category of need. This is due to most children becoming Looked After when they are at risk of significant harm. Social Care are providing support and intervention to reduce family breakdown and to enable children to remain in their families, where it is safe to do so.



3.11 Number of CLA open to Youth Offending Services

In 2019-20 there were 87 children open to Youth Offending Service (YOS), of which 13 were Children Looked After, representing 15% of the open cases. Out of the 13 children, 39% were from a White ethnic background.

In Q2 2020-21, there were 38 open cases to YOS, of which 6 were Children Looked After, representing 16% of the total open cases and 4 of these children were from a White ethnic background.

Both of the above figures consist of statutory and diversion interventions.

The throughput of the YOS has been significantly affected this year as a result of pandemic, and consequently the closure of the Youth Courts.

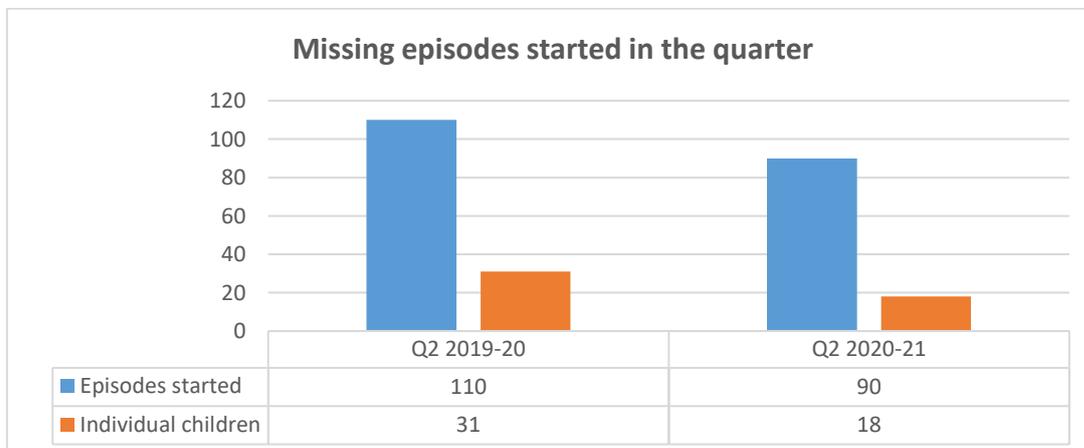
A recent analysis of Thurrock CLA and the Criminal Justice System indicated that 67% of CLA's in the criminal justice system became Looked After post offending and entering the Criminal Justice System.

The data from the 2019-20 cohort is more reflective of the recent position, with a CLA figure of around 20%. This has been relatively static over the last 5 years.

3.12 CLA missing episodes started

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started in Q2 and the count of the individual children that went missing. Both missing episodes and the number of children who went missing have reduced since last year.

There has been a strong focus on Missing Children in partnership with Essex Police and, with the Contextual Safeguarding approach being embedded, this has supported an increase of liaison with Community Safety Partners.

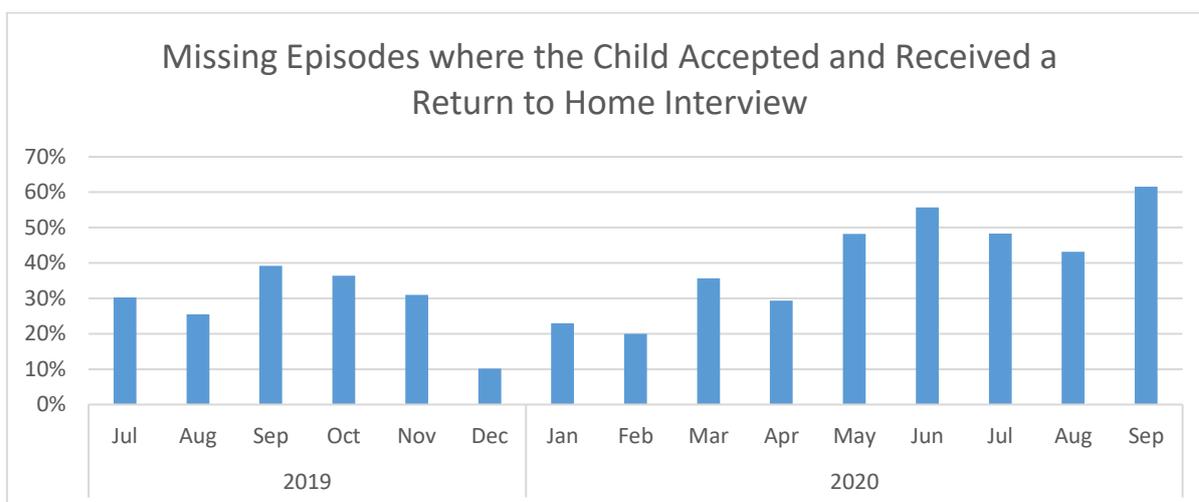


3.13 CLA Return Home Interview

All children are offered an independent Return Home Interviews (RHI) within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim to understand the young person's circumstances and the risks they may be experiencing, including modern day slavery and grooming. Since 1st April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake RHIs.

The reasons young people go missing can vary from "not being settled in placement" to the "draw of friends". Foster Carers, Social Workers and other involved key professionals discuss missing incidents with the young person. There is ongoing work to increase the engagement of young people in their return home interviews and to decrease missing episodes. The Participation Team have been engaging and seeking feedback from young people and this has been invaluable. A key message for Social Workers has been to listen and understand the issues from the young person's perspective.

During September 2020, Return Home Interviews were accepted and undertaken for 62% of Missing episodes. This compares to 39% in the same month last year.

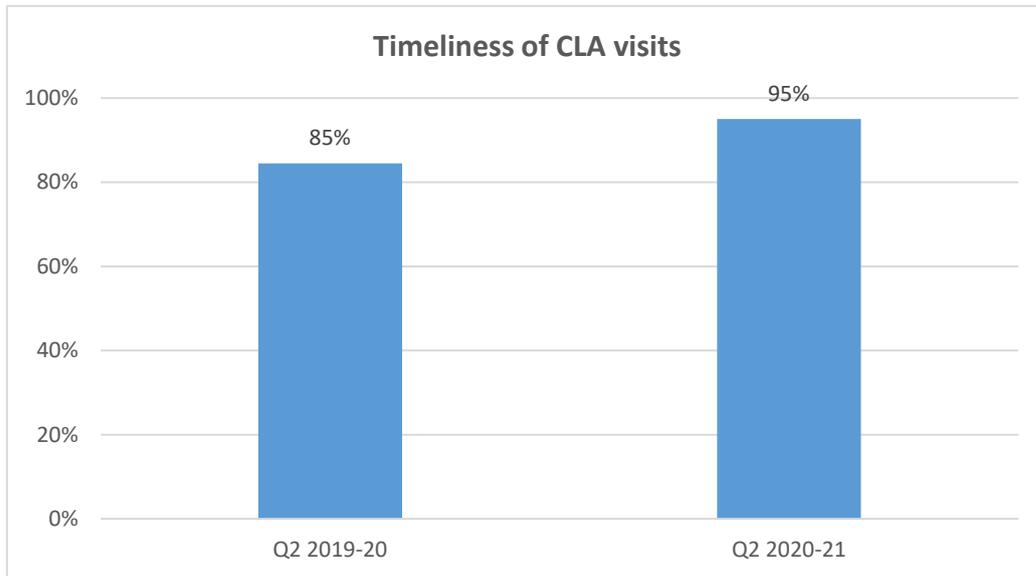


3.14 Timeliness of Social Worker visits

Social Workers are required to visit the child within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then undertaken at a frequency which is agreed within the child's Care Plan. This frequency can vary from 20 to 65 working days.

The performance has improved since last year and there is focused work to ensure this performance is maintained. The current performance of 95% of visits undertaken in timeframe is very good, however there are a few occasions when visits are sometimes undertaken late, such as due to

practical reasons. There are processes in place to ensure that overdue visits take place as soon as possible after the due date.



3.15 CLA Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) have been identified as an area for development and there has been good joint working with Health Partners to ensure that children's IHAs are completed within the timeframe of 20 working days after entering care. During September 2020 the number of IHAs completed within 20 working days was 75% compared to 50% in September 2019.

The corporate target for this Key Performance Indicator has been set at 80% and we continue to monitor our progress through monthly performance meetings.

3.16 CLA in Education

Children Looked After continue to make good educational progress with better than national average figures for attainment. Thurrock's performance this year is in the top 25% of Local Authorities.

3.17 CLA Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ)

Thurrock is required to collect SDQ scores for children who are aged between 4-18 years annually. We have set an ambition to do this more frequently to ensure regular monitoring of emotional and mental wellbeing. A high scores indicates that the Care Plan and mental wellbeing of the child should be reviewed by the SDQ panel with the aims of:

- Ensuring that all CLA exhibiting SDQ scores of 17 and above, receive a service and planned support for their emotional and mental health.
- Identifying an early intervention service for CLA with scores of 13 to 17.

The SDQ panel meets monthly and the panel includes representatives from Children’s Social Care, the Virtual School, EWMHS and CLA Nurses.

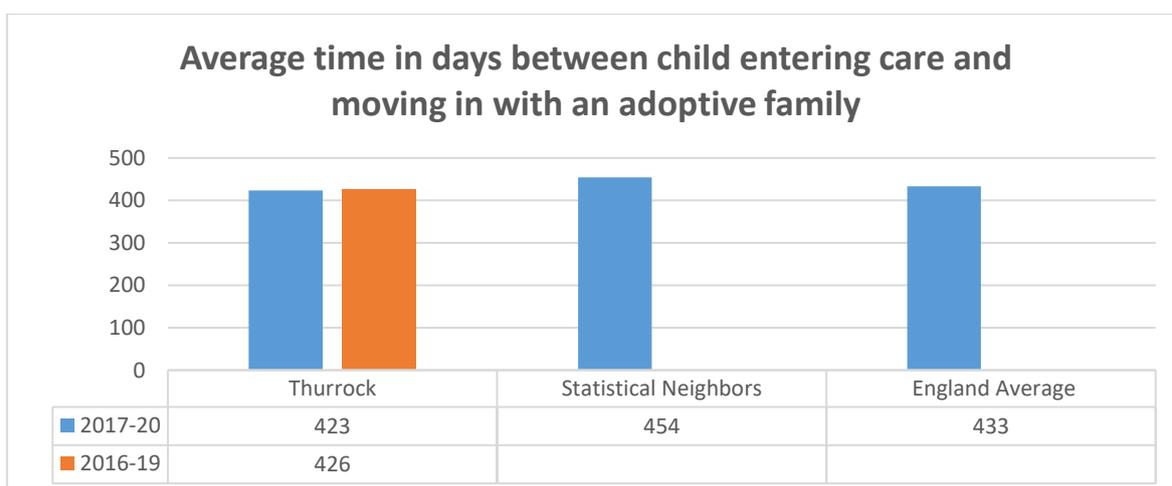
The average SDQ score in Q2 of 2020-21 was 14.3 compared to 14.2 in Q2 of 2019-20.

3.18 Number of Children Adopted

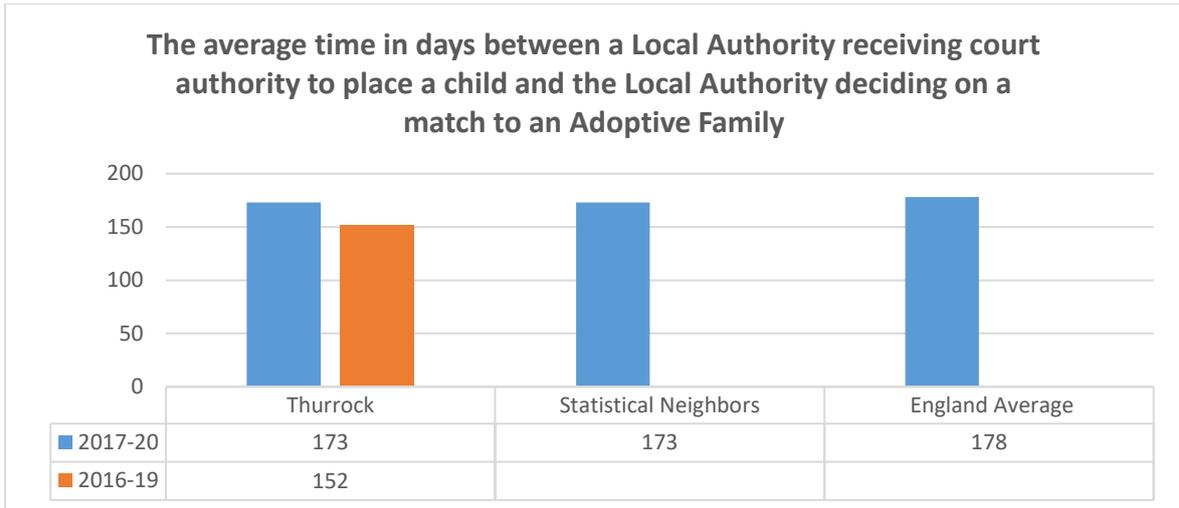
During the year 2019-20, a total of 15 children were adopted, therefore meeting Thurrock’s target of 15. The Adoption Service has worked effectively to place children for adoption. The service anticipates a greater number of Adoption Orders in the second half of the financial year, as court proceedings have been impacted by the pandemic.

3.19 Timeliness of Adoption

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 at the latest available reporting at the end of June 2020, it was 426 days. Comparing our Statistical Neighbours and England averages below, Thurrock’s performance is good.



This chart shows the number in days (3 year average) for the period of 2016-19 and the most recent data of 2017-20. The graph below shows that Thurrock is performing better than the England average and the statistical neighbour average in 2015-18.



3.20 CLA Permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Where appropriate, all efforts are made to place children within their wider family network (Connected Carers), if they can no longer live in parental care, and are only Looked After outside of their family and wider network if this is the only viable option.

At the end of Q2 2020-21, 19% of the total CLA cohort were under the age of five. The majority of children under five are moved on to permanent placements with Connected Carers or Adoptive Families and are progressed through the court.

3.21 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. In 2020-21, 72% of the CLA cohort were 20 miles or less from their homes, compared to 73% in Q2 2019-20. With the continued focus on Fostering Recruitment and the Thurrock Council Tax Rebate offered to Foster Carers, the Service has an expectation that new local Foster Carers can be recruited.

3.22 Care Leavers

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000¹, 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.

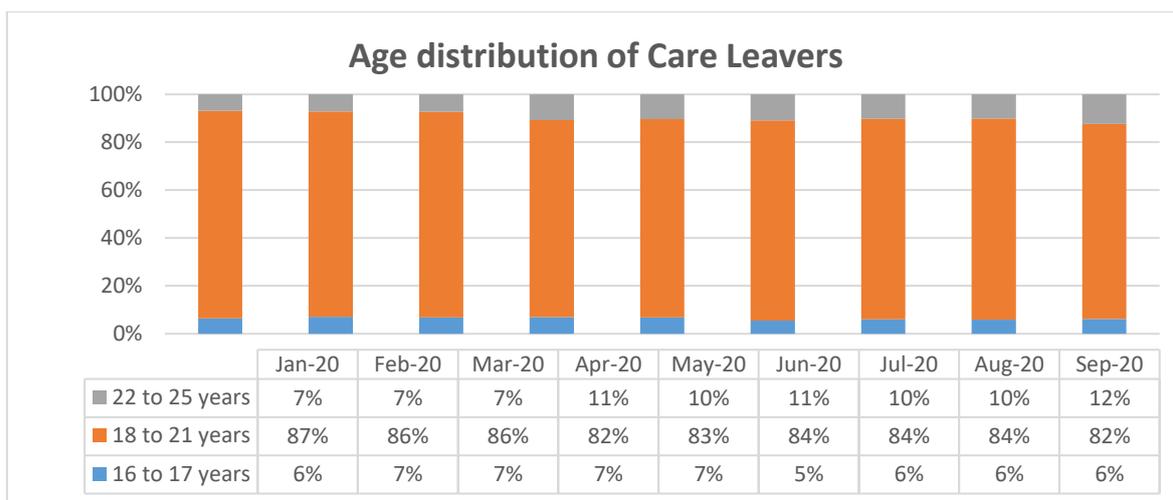
A young person's status as a Care Leaver can be divided into the following:

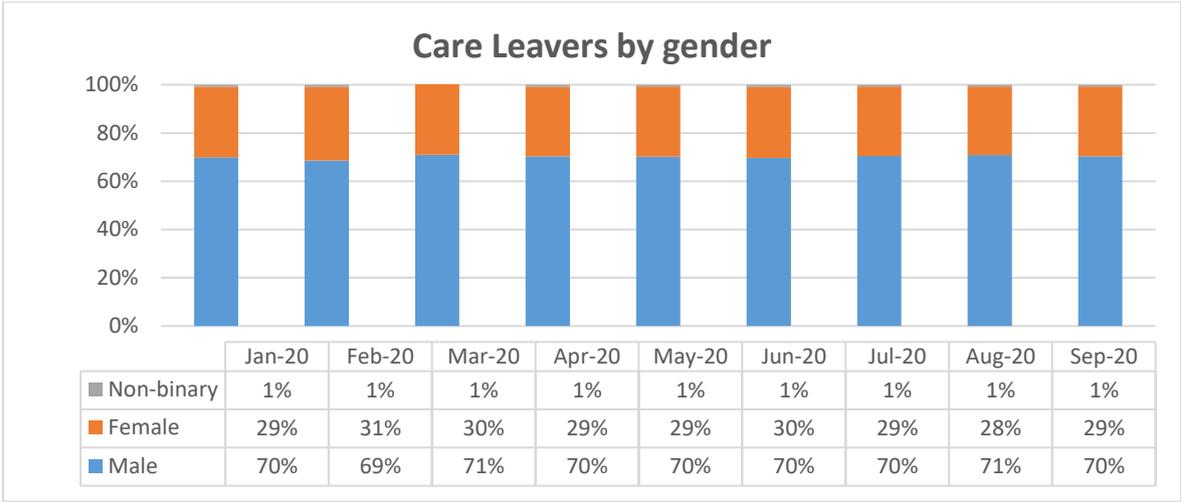
¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>

- 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 the end of March 2020, 260 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare Service. This is an increase on the numbers from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25 under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

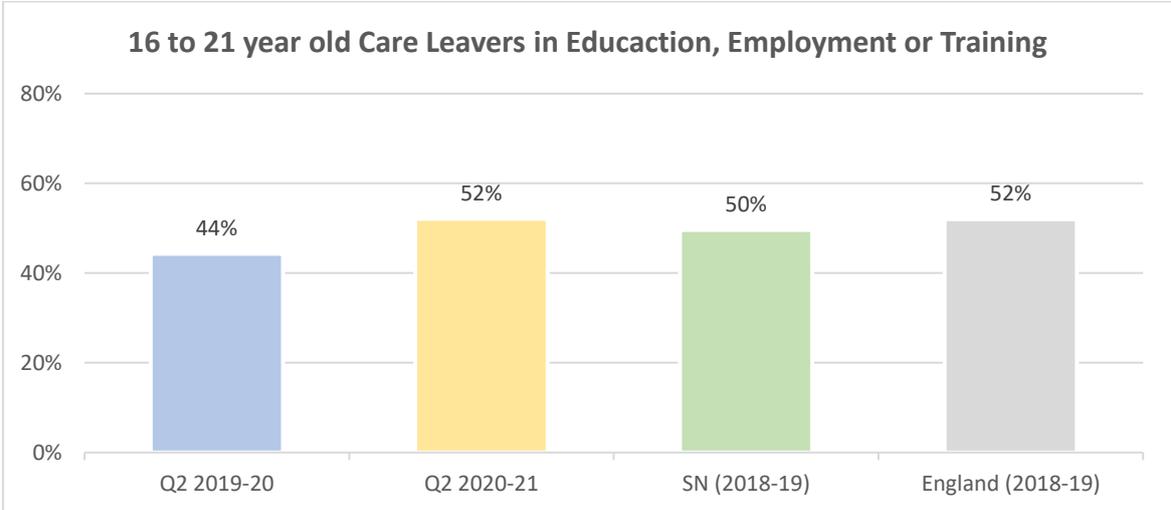
The charts below shows the Care Leaver cohort between January and September 2020 broken down by age groups and gender.





3.23 Care Leavers age 16-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

At the end of Q2 of 2020-21, 52% of the Care Leavers aged 16 to 21 years old were in part-time or full-time education, employment or training, compared to 44% in Q2 of 2019-20. In Q2 of 2020-21, Thurrock is above its Statistical Neighbours and in line with England average published in 2018-19.

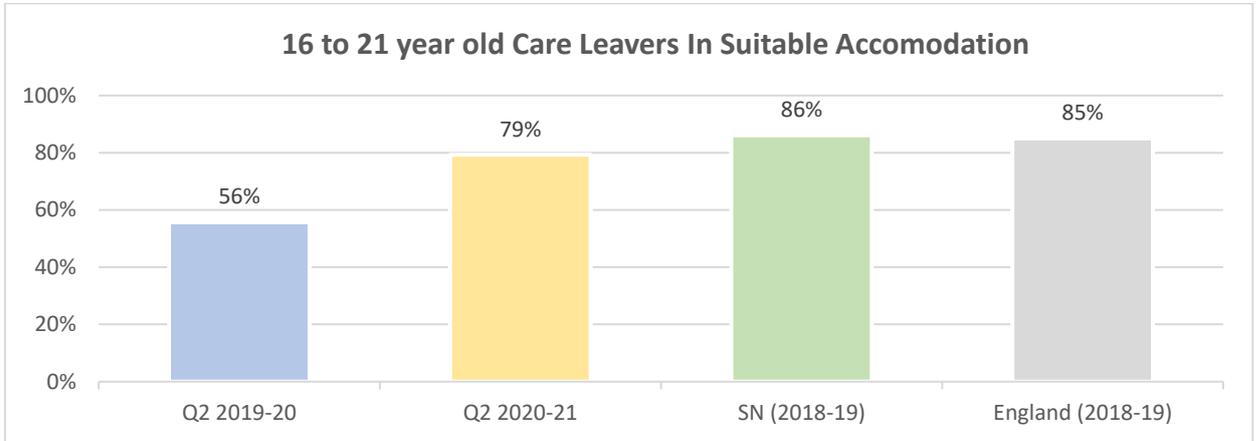


3.24 Care Leavers age 16 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

The number of 16 to 21 year old Care Leavers who were reported to be in suitable accommodation was 79% in Q2 of 2020-21. This compared to 56% at the end of 2019-20. However, this is still below statistical Neighbour's and England averages but shows an improving trajectory.

There is increased housing support to young people supported by Aftercare Service, from Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The

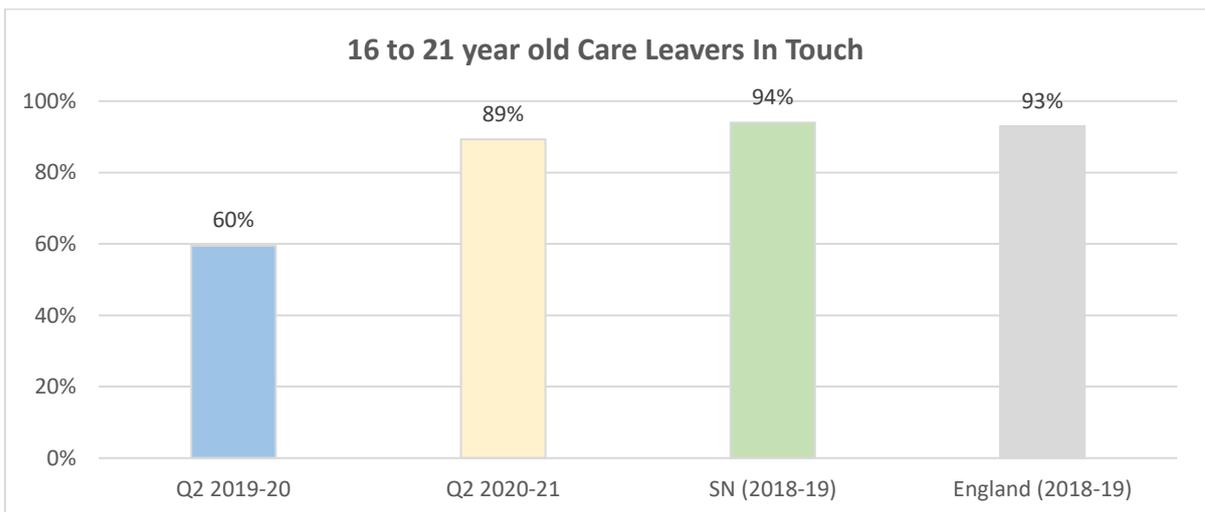
'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



3.25 Care Leavers age 16-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help the Care Leaver to transition to living independently.

At the end of Q2 of 2020-21, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers, compared to 60% in 2019-20. While the performance is improving, continued focus will enable Thurrock to be in line with Statistical Neighbours and the England average.



3.26 CLA Fostering

Most CLA are placed with Foster Carers. We recruit and support our own Foster Carers but also have to use some Foster Carers who work for

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) to get the right match for a child. In 2019-20, we met the target of a net gain of 15 carers.

Our position as at the end of Q2 of 2020-21 is as below:-

Number of new carers approved between April 20 – Sep 20 (Q2)	6
Number of mainstream fostering applications currently in progress	10
Number of children currently placed in Thurrock fostering households	113

4. Reasons for Recommendations

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

5. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

5.1 Not applicable

6. Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

6.1 Not applicable

7. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and Community impact

7.1 None

8. Implications

8.1 Financial

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

There were no financial implications identified.

8.2 Legal

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

There were no Legal implications identified.

8.3 Diversity & Equality

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

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

9. **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder**
- Not applicable
10. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):
- Not applicable
11. **Appendices to the report**
- None

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