

14 March 2023	ITEM: 6
Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee	
Annual report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
Report of: Cllr Barry Johnson, Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
This report is: Public	

Executive Summary

This report is to update the committee on the work that has been undertaken by Children's Services year to date, service priorities and savings, and to highlight the successes and challenges experienced by the service.

I will start by addressing some of the changes that have taken place in Children's Services to support the council's current financial position. In the financial year 2022/23 Children Services reduced its overall spend by £788,000. Savings of £2,857,000 were achieved by reviewing our services to deliver more efficiently and cost effectively whilst ensuring that services continue meeting statutory duties to children such as the removal of council run nurseries, and the decommissioning of parenting assessments and courses.

Over the coming two years Children's Services have identified savings of £1,415,500. Savings made to date in 2022 and planned in 2023/24 and 2024/25. An overview of the financial position in Children's Service and savings are set out in Appendix 1 attached.

EDUCATION & SKILLS – supporting our children and young people and adults to achieve.

School Effectiveness Schools

There are over 30,000 school-aged children living in Thurrock. They are served well by the 39 Primary Schools, 13 Secondary Schools, 1 Alternative Provision and 3 Special Schools that operate across the borough.

In 2022 Thames Park School moved into their new state of the art accommodation in north Grays and although there have been some delays, Orsett Heath Academy is due to open in September 2024.

We saw the first set of SATS & GCSE data since before the Covid 19 Pandemic. Children of all ages have been affected by the disruption. I am pleased to report that despite the disruption to their education, children in Thurrock performed well when compared to their peers across the country.

At the end of year 6, 62% of children reached age-related expectations in reading, writing and maths. Whilst due to the pandemic, this was fewer than in previous years, it was still higher than national averages.

Early years settings, schools and colleges should be recognised for ensuring stability, continuity and catching children up on their missed time in school. In 2022 68% of children at the end of their reception year in Thurrock attained a good level of development compared to 65% nationally.

In 2022 64.9% of children achieved a 9-4 pass in both English and Maths in Thurrock, which was slightly better than the England average of 64.3%.

It should also be noted that a higher proportion of Children in Thurrock with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and those who are Looked After by Thurrock, achieved the expected standard than their peers nationally.

Between January 2022 and January 2023 eight primary schools were inspected by Ofsted and all but one retained their previous good or outstanding judgements. The school that was graded RI (Requires Improvement) has already made significant improvements to their curriculum with the help of their Multi-Academy Trust. Currently 92% of Primary schools in Thurrock have a good or outstanding judgement from Ofsted.

There are 13 secondary schools in the borough; eleven of them have an Ofsted judgement resulting in 64% of them having a good or outstanding grade. Thames Park School recently had their first inspection but at the time of writing this report, the inspection outcome had not been published.

Holiday, Activity & Food (HAF) Programme

HAF clubs were delivered throughout Easter, summer and Christmas holidays for school-aged children who are eligible for free school meals through means tested benefits. On average, 20 clubs were held over each holiday period offering a vast range of activities for children to take part in; e.g art, drama, music, sports of all types, wellbeing, Special needs etc. They delivered healthy meals and activities, family information and advice and signposting to other services. Over 2000 family packs were distributed to help families stay active and receive support. The places are funded by grants from DfE.

Early Years

Early language development takes place in a range of settings including playgroups, parent & toddler groups, Children's Centres and through general socialisation. During

the pandemic much of this was lost and, as a result, we are seeing significant language delays in our early years cohorts in language development.

To address some of these challenges, the School Effectiveness Early Years Team is working closely to deliver training to all Early Years Providers to support them to further develop their knowledge and skills around addressing speech, language and communications difficulties and delay. Between March 2022 and January 2023 over 150 Early Years Practitioners had benefitted from this training. This work has been co-funded by the Integrated Care Board and will remain a key focus for the forthcoming year where they will be focusing on working with Children's Centres and Family Hub staff to help them to support our youngest children.

The latest published data (2022) shows that 74% of our most vulnerable two-year-olds benefitted from funded early education and childcare, which is in line with national data. The data also shows that 87% of our three and four-year-olds benefitted from funded early education and childcare.

83% of our Early Years Providers are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. The settings that are not good have not engaged with our School Effectiveness Team who deliver the statutory responsibility of the council around delivering support and advice to settings to improve. As a result, we are offering settings where Ofsted ratings have dropped further advice and support.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

In January 2023 Thurrock maintained 2097 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children and young people with SEND. These plans set out what the children's needs, aspirations and intended outcomes are and what provision must be in place to meet them.

In line with legislation, EHCPs must be issued within 20 weeks. The latest available published data shows that in 2021 in England, 59.9% of EHCPs were issued on time. However, in 2021, Thurrock issued 78.9% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks.

The SEND Service is in the process of reviewing and updating its strategy in coproduction with health, social care, college, schools and settings, children and young people and their families as well as a range of other professionals. This should be ready in draft form in the autumn of 2023 and will align with the SEND and Alternative Provision Green Paper as well as the revised Joint Area Inspection Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Framework for Inspection.

School Attendance Support Team (SAST) (previously known as Education Welfare Service)

In May 2022 the Government published new guidance for Councils, *Working together to improve school attendance*. This guidance came into effect from September 2022 and sets out clearly the expectations and responsibilities of parents, schools, governing

bodies and the local authority and partners to increase levels of school attendance. The guidance requires all Local Authorities to rigorously track local attendance data, have a SAST which provides expert advice in respect of attendance matters, share good practice, hold termly conversations with all schools in respect of pupils identified as persistent or severely absent. The service has set out clear attendance management processes for schools to follow to ensure that barriers to good attendance are identified, explore multi-disciplinary support for families and monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker.

The Guidance is expected to become Statutory no sooner than September 2023. Whilst there has been no additional funding provided by government to carry out these duties, the service has quickly embraced the new guidance, mobilised and is working with the Department for Education Advisor to develop and implement a School Attendance Strategy and action plan. Termly meetings with schools and academies have already taken place.

In addition to the attendance advisory work the SAST fulfil the local authority's statutory duties in respect of Elective Home Education (EHE). Contact is made with each new EHE case to establish the reasons for EHE and to ensure that a plan for a suitable education is in place. Cases found to be suitable are reviewed every 12 months. Cases are reviewed sooner if there is a need. Cases known to social care or those with an EHCP are given highest priority. Statutory action such as School Attendance Orders are used if there is a need to return a child to school.

In this current academic year there are currently 345 children or young people recorded as EHE. This academic year alone a further 66 children have been returned to school.

The service also issues child performance licenses, chaperone licenses and child employment licenses on behalf of the Council.

The Virtual School

The Virtual School continues to monitor and support the educational progress and outcomes for Children/Young People Looked After (C/YP LA) irrespective of where they are placed, in or out of borough. The responsibility covers pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and this includes those who have left care during an academic year. It is also required to provide information, advice and guidance to Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and their families when requested.

At the end of the academic year 21/22, there was 292 pupils aged 3-18 years in the Virtual School. This was fewer than the previous year. During the academic year, 8 pupils left care and 40 entered care. 16 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) entered care during this academic year and in total there were 35 UASC. This equates to 11% of the cohort, which was a decrease of 1% from the previous year.

In June 2021 the Department for Education published non-statutory guidance which extends the role of the Virtual School Head to support educational outcomes for

Children with a social worker. A grant of £100,000 was allocated by DfE for the academic year starting in September 2021. We have used this funding to recruit a project manager to lead on developing a Thurrock wide strategy for supporting and challenging schools and social care to improve the educational outcomes for this vulnerable group. We have also used the additional funding to provide Thurrock schools with intensive trauma and attachment training and consultancy to support all pupils in schools. In addition to this, books and licenses to the Access to Inclusion software have been purchased for all Thurrock schools to enable them to plot behaviours of pupils in their school and support them using the suggested strategies. This has proved successful with our CLA, and we have extended this to all schools to use as they require.

Inspire Employability & Skills

Inspire Employability & Skills Services are enhancing the work with young people by focusing on developing the skills young people needed to progress into the world of work. Employability and Skills team are successfully delivering on the ONTRACK and CLLD ESF funded programmes by delivering bespoke and one to one support for those young people and adults who are furthest removed from employment. Both programmes are part funded through the European Social Fund and managed by the Department for Work and Pensions. ONTRACK is a 2.5-year programme worth £3.7m to Thurrock which plans to formally engage and sign up 815 young people aged 15-25 who will be able to benefit from the range of support on offer. CLLD programme is specifically designed to deliver similar work to 203 adults in Tilbury area. Both programmes are on track to complete the targets.

In partnership with Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC) Employability and Skills Team are engaging with Career Coordinators in schools and Employability Advisers (EAs) from industry to improve delivery of careers strategy to the schools, i.e., bringing the world of education closer to the world of work. 18 secondary schools and colleges in Thurrock are engaging in the project.

Successful partnership with Make Happen is providing valuable resource to work with the most vulnerable young people to progress them to Higher Education (HE), focusing on Care Leavers. There are currently 19 (aged 18-21) care leavers at university. There are a further 11 care leavers aged over 21 at university.

Inspire Employability and Skills Team are further developing partnerships with Thurrock secondary schools by providing Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance in 8 out of the 15 schools. This work shows positive results in Thurrock's NEET figures which are below national and rank Thurrock in the top 10% of the 152 LAs.

September Guarantee 2022 stands at 100% ensuring that every 16-year-old had a place of learning reserved for them in September 2022. September Guarantee 2023 is on the same trajectory.

Grangewaters – the team have enhanced our exciting SEND offer at Grangewaters: young people with SEND access Grangewaters for a range of training sessions getting them ready for the world of work and preparing them for adulthood. New SEND schools have come on board, whilst one to one tuition has been explored and enhanced.

SEND Post 16 service is enhancing its post 16 provision by working with training providers to deliver the best possible offer to our SEND young people and its quality assurance – the service is actively working with the young people to enable provision to meet the young people’s needs.

Youth Offer have offered a range of programmes to support over 100 young people in overcoming their barriers, building self-confidence, enhancing skill sets. The Youth Team are currently focusing on the voice of young people, engaging with the Youth Cabinet, and supporting them via monthly meetings, campaign groups, national sittings, receiving guest speakers and seeking ways to engage with additional young people across Thurrock. Prince’s Trust worked with 22 YP over two programmes this year whilst the DofE Team are currently supporting 482 young people to complete their DofE awards in Bronze, Silver and Gold either via their schools or through the open centres.

Thurrock Adult Community College

Graded as Good by Ofsted and as such we offer a range of courses to support getting into employment across the Authority. The college also offers a wellbeing programme for individuals and families that develop confidence and supports people to progress into more formal learning related to their career or personal ambitions.

The work of the college is key to meeting elements of key council strategies including the Backing Thurrock Skills Plan, the Brighter Futures strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The skills agenda will remain a key focus. The college has started to realise its long-term ambition to level up access to learning by working alongside libraries in learning hubs enabling residents to develop essential skills closer to where they live. They will have a choice of online, in person or blended delivery models based on their individual preferences.

Home to School Transport

Restructure of Children’s Transport Service

This year we have brought together the operational organisation of home to school transport which was previously managed by the Passenger Transport Team under the Public Realm Directorate with SEN eligibility assessment and budget management accountability sitting within Children’s Services Directorate and mainstream eligibility assessment currently residing within the Finance Directorate into children’s services.

Home to School Travel and Transport policy update

The policy is in the process of being reviewed and any changes required will be presented to Children's Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet for approval. In addition, we have reviewed the Post 16 policy statement and made changes to the layout and order of information to enable an easier read for parents. The Post 16 policy statement will be published by 31st May 2023.

We will continue to work to ensure that we are providing sustainable transport keeping a clear focus on best value, The increase in demand has continued and this has meant challenges on the home to school transport budget.

Free School Programme and School Expansion

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that every child in Thurrock has a school place. We continue to achieve this with strong working relationships with our schools.

Since the last report Treetops Free school has opened along with Thames Park. Orsett Heath Academy is planned to open in their permanent location from September 2024. The new Harrier Primary School, part of the REACH2 Academy Trust is planned to open in September 2023 with a Reception class of 30 pupils in the first year.

In relation to pupil place planning, we are in the process of compiling the next pupil place plan which will include forecasts from 2023-2027.

This year we have developed a further two primary resource bases to support our children with additional needs this links to our strategy of keeping children with SEND within the borough, We have recently submitted a free school alternative provision application in partnership with Olive Academy the outcome will be known in the summer of 2023.

The two new Primary mainstream resource bases developed in 2021/22 are the two new bases at Aveley Primary School and Stifford Clays Primary School. Each of these bases is for 10 pupils with complex needs relating to Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC). These have been developed to meet the increasing need for specialist provision in this area of SEND.

Thurrock has 4 Secondary Resource Bases for pupils with SEND covering Speech and Language Needs and Autism; Hearing Impairment; Visual Impairment and Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

In total we have 182 places in our Special Resource Bases in Thurrock.

Access and Inclusion

We have continued the process of holding 3 weekly Primary and Secondary Inclusion Panels for all schools within the Local Authority. These panels ensure that the Fair Access Protocols are appropriately implemented ensuring that pupils who come under this, who are often particularly vulnerable, get access to a school placement in a timely

manner with a fair distribution of these pupils across all schools in Thurrock. All schools in Thurrock have continued to engage positively in this process.

The Inclusion Panels also facilitate the process of managed moves for pupils at risk of permanent exclusion to avoid where possible the need for this and enable a fresh start at a new school. The Panels also oversee the reintegration of pupils who have been previously excluded back into mainstream provision from our Alternative Provision.

Primary Inclusion Panel 21/22

Perm ex	Advice by panel	Sum of outreach/observations	Placement in Base
2	6	3	17

Secondary Inclusion Panel 21/22

Sum of Perm ex	Managed Moves	Successful moves and ongoing at end of year	Placement at Olive AP
30	48	35	86

Wellbeing and Mental Health Services

The School Wellbeing Service (SWS) has delivered a full programme of training and support to schools over the past year. This has consisted of a range of activities and support for schools across Thurrock. There has been ongoing co-ordination and work with the Health services, and Third Sector service supported by input and supervision from the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to ensure there has been a joined-up approach to wellbeing and mental health services in schools. All schools have worked through their action plans for wellbeing and have had access to a range of training and support for school staff and pupil activities with reflective sessions for staff groups being provided which have been very well received.

Dedicated Schools Grant

Nationally, all local authorities and the education system have struggled to meet the additional demand for payments in support of children with Education Health and Care plans (EHCP); for out of borough placements, independent special school residential placements and for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) top up payments.

The high needs block remained a significant issue for Thurrock, with the number of EHCP's increasing by 9%, in 2020/21. This has required both additional top up funding

to be paid to Schools and Academies and an increase in demand for specialist placements.

The DSG has a carried forward deficit into 2021/22 of £1.883m. This is a decrease of £0.095m from 2019/20. Discussions continue with the ESFA and the Schools Forum on options available to reduce demand for EHCP's and to increase Thurrock's Local Offer. A meeting is scheduled with ESFA in July to discuss Thurrock's DSG Management Plan.

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP

Children's Social Care and Early Help:

The following sets out key highlights during the year (April – December 2022) for Children's Social Care and Early Help, the work undertaken, priorities and challenges.

The most significant challenges for the service, and for the children, young people and families we work with, has been fostering recruitment and retention, placement sufficiency; the continuing effect of Covid 19; recruitment and retention of qualified social work staff and the financial pressures facing the council.

Children's social care has contributed to savings but in doing so has ensured that there is no negative impact on the effort and progress that has been made by children's social care over recent years. Caseloads and spans of control remain manageable. Following a review of the service a new operating model was introduced delivering savings and pulling some aspects of the service together to develop a Think Family approach and further develop our early help offer to support statutory social work.

Children's Social Care and Early Help have a continuous Development Plan which drives consistent good practice and good outcomes for children. The DCS chairs a monthly Development Board which I attend. This meeting provides the DCS and myself with a good line of insight into the service on progress against the priorities in the services Development Plan, challenges the service is experiencing and sets stretch targets.

The most recent LGA Employers Standards for Social Workers Report, published in February 2022, saw Thurrock as second in the Eastern Region and 12th Nationally for satisfaction amongst Social Workers against the Standards tested. We are currently awaiting the outcome of the most recent Report.

Key priorities have included:

1. Continued support to children, young people and families to ensure they receive the right service at the right time.
2. Preparing the service for regulatory external Ofsted inspections.
3. Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.

4. Embedding and ensuring good Corporate Parenting cross council.
5. Working collaboratively with colleagues in adult social care and housing to ensure that children receive a seamless service.
6. Continued recruitment to expand our Thurrock based foster carers and adopters.
7. Continued work to reduce youth violence and child exploitation.
8. Working towards the development of a Start for Life, Family Hubs model.
9. Work with young people to prevent gang membership and youth crime.
10. Development of local registered residential provision for Thurrock children.
11. Embedding a Think Family approach across Children's Social Care.

Keeping children safe

The service continues to respond quickly and, in a child focused way to provide safety and protection to our most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Quality of Practice

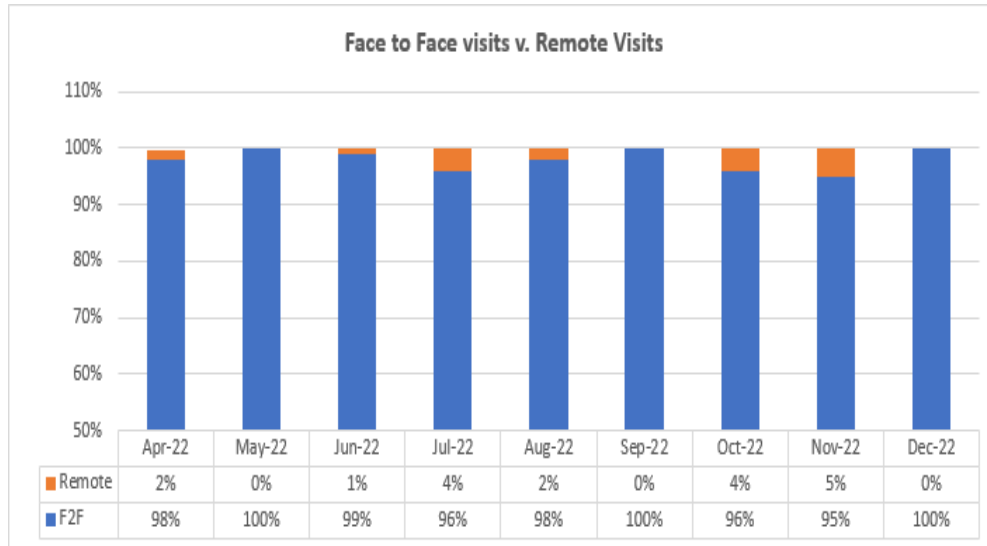
Thurrock has invested in the development of Signs of Safety (SoS) as a practice approach to provide a focus on recognition of risk, engaging family strengths to deliver safety and wellbeing. The embedding of SoS has led to improvements in practice across the service and improvements in communication and information sharing with partners. The Framework has been applied across services supporting consistency for families and a shared way of working among practitioners. Feedback indicates the SoS approach is welcomed by practitioners, partners and families providing clarity of goals of the work. A recent external review of child protection and child in need services has evidenced that the framework is embedded and integrated into most areas of practice. All social work teams receive ongoing training, both in the principles of the approach and specialist training tailored to their area of work. SOS training has also been made available to partner agencies via the LSCP and confidence has increased in using SOS practice contributing to improved assessments and more focused purposeful plans.

Quality of practice is monitored by audit, including multi-agency audits, performance data, service reports and feedback from complaints and compliments from partners and service users. 70% of Audit's are graded good or better. A mixture of themed and routine audits has been used to sustain learning from audit and to strengthen management oversight and feedback to practitioners.

Following the Covid Pandemic when all meetings were remote, Child Protection Conferences and Looked After Reviews moved to hybrid and face to face. Since September 2022 Child Protection conferences where possible have been held face to face, especially initial conferences which families have indicated they prefer. The attendance and participation by professionals at CP Conferences and Looked After Child reviews is good.

Social workers and managers are clear that children and young people need to be physically seen, to effectively safeguard them. The service has returned to face-to-face

visits unless it is not safe to do so, and a clear rationale provided and management agreement. Visits to children are mostly face to face with 98% of children having face to face visits in year, and in December 2022 100% of children were seen face to face and 95% of all children visited in timescale.



F2F is face to face visits

MASH

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has successfully maintained a consistent application of thresholds with a positive culture of providing support and challenge to partner agencies. There is a continued focus on further developing partnership relationships within the MASH. Multi-agency audits support the MASH to continuously review practice and identify what is working well and areas for development. Audit indicates a good shared multi-agency understanding of threshold in MASH and that the quality of assessments is good and plans are purposeful.

The re-referral rate year to date is 18.6% which is below (therefore good performance) Statistical Neighbours (20%) average in 2021/22 and the national average of 21.5 which is also an indication that threshold is being appropriately applied.

Early Help and Intervention:

Our Prevention and Support Service (PASS) undertakes time-limited bespoke work with families who do not require statutory intervention. There is strong partnership working between the PASS Service, statutory teams, and partner agencies. Early Help Services continue to provide intervention to families at the right time to prevent escalation into statutory services and supporting children to remain at home with their families. Allocations of children in Early Help have noticeably increased including an increase in the number of Early Help Episodes started.

In April 2022 we became one of 75 local authorities eligible to join the Start for Life, Family Hub programme. Early Help Services are integral to the Start for Life, Family Hubs Programme This programme also reflects our Think Family approach. We have reviewed our Early Help offer and mapped the existing provision for young people alongside partners to determine how best to deliver the funded elements of the Family Hub programme.

Think Family Practice approach

We adopted a Think Family approach as our operating model in April 2022, building on the effective and long established 'whole family' approach used by our Early Help services. Feedback from parents and professionals has helped shape this way of working. The approach is strengths and relationship-based and compliments Signs of Safety and our other existing practice models. Regular Family Network Meetings starting from the initial assessment is helping families to develop family plans which underpin their child's local authority plan, and importantly, give young people and families more agency in problem solving in a way that will continue to support them when our involvement ends.

By adopting this approach, we aim to increase the number of children who can remain living safely within their connected family networks, diverting children from becoming looked after or entering court proceedings. Parenting assessments and Parenting Programmes previously commissioned are now undertaken in-house This has led to tailored interventions with families with the most complex needs including extending the successful reunification and placement stability work previously undertaken by the Families Together Team. There is also a focus on engaging with fathers / males, children on the edge of care, and families before they enter pre-proceedings Public Law Outline (PLO).

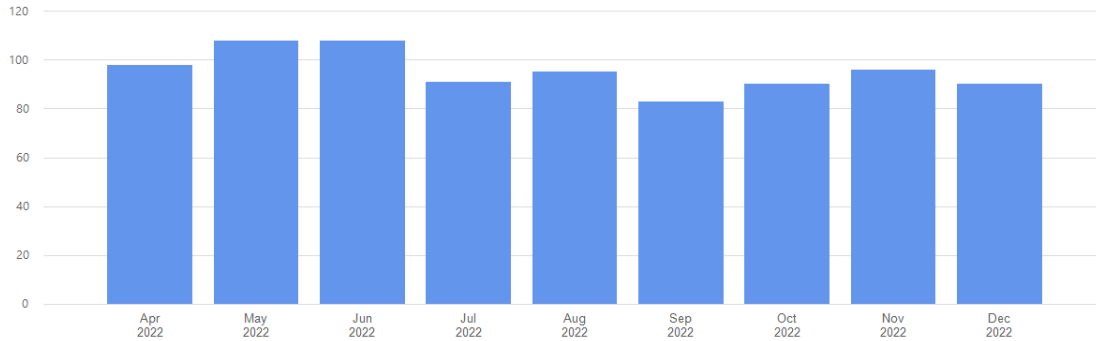
Children in Need (CIN) and Children subject to a Child Protection (CP) Plan:

Thurrock has seen a small reduction in contacts and referrals, and we continue to work closely with partners to ensure that children are not receiving a statutory service where it is not required, and universal or early help services are better placed to support children and their families.

Thurrock's CIN cohort was 388 per 10,000 in 2020/21 above statistical neighbours at 312 and National performance at 321. The rate of Children in Need has continued to show a decrease from 511 at the end of March 2022 to 412 at the end of quarter 3 2022/23. At 333 per 10,000 Thurrock's performance is more in line with statistical neighbours at 331 and National performance at 334 per 10,000 in 2021/22.

The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan has stabilised between 90-98, which is below statistical and national averages but in line with the Eastern Region. This can be attributed to a combination of factors, including appropriate application of threshold, clear and robust processes, and use of CP surgeries to provide case challenge and oversee progression.

CP Cohort - Open at Month End



	Apr 2022	May 2022	Jun 2022	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022
Open at Month End	98	108	108	91	95	83	90	96	90

Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Leavers:

The number of Children Looked After reduced from 301 in 2020/2021 to 292 in 2021/22 and has stabilised at or around this number which is slightly below the statistical neighbour and national average. We have started to see a slight increase over the three months to the end of December in CLA numbers in line with the increase of the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) cohort as identified further in my report.

Plans for all children are reviewed to ensure the correct children come into care; application of thresholds for Children Looked After (CLA) are consistently applied; and court proceedings are only issued where necessary. This oversight of care entry has been effective in supporting timely removal in the best interests of a child and ensuring all options within the family network are fully explored.

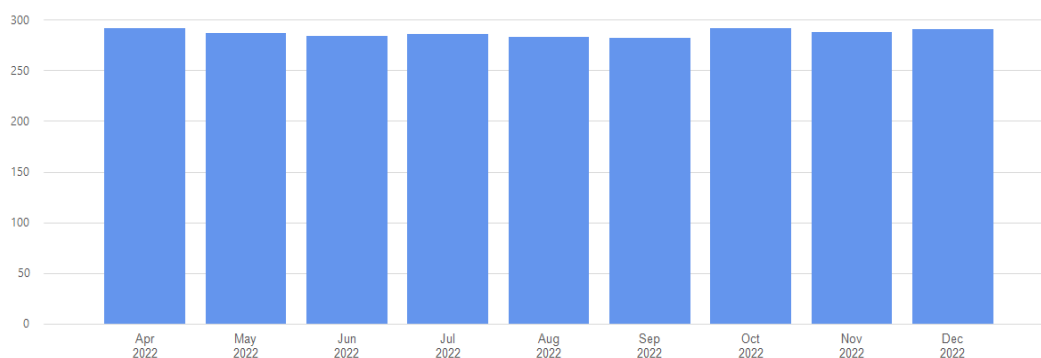
The Aftercare Service at the end of December 2022 was supporting 257 Care Leavers aged 18-25 alongside young people who are aged 16 and above who meet the criteria for a Care Leaving Service and are currently allocated a social worker. In December the Aftercare Team ran a consultation exercise with our Care Leavers alongside celebrating Christmas with Care Leavers. The team also worked closely with young people to make sure that they had clear plans over Christmas and would not be isolated.

The service has worked closely with Housing colleagues to ensure young people’s housing needs are met. Between January 2022 and December 2023, 27 young people gained social housing. Regular joint meetings and work continues between children’s social care and housing.

27 of our care leavers are in Staying Put arrangements with their previous foster carers which means they are continuing to remain “at home” in line with young people reaching the age of 18 who are not care leavers.

20 young people are at university and are supported by the local authority to ensure they have access to appropriate grants, loans, and accommodation including holiday accommodation.

CLA Cohort - Open at Month End

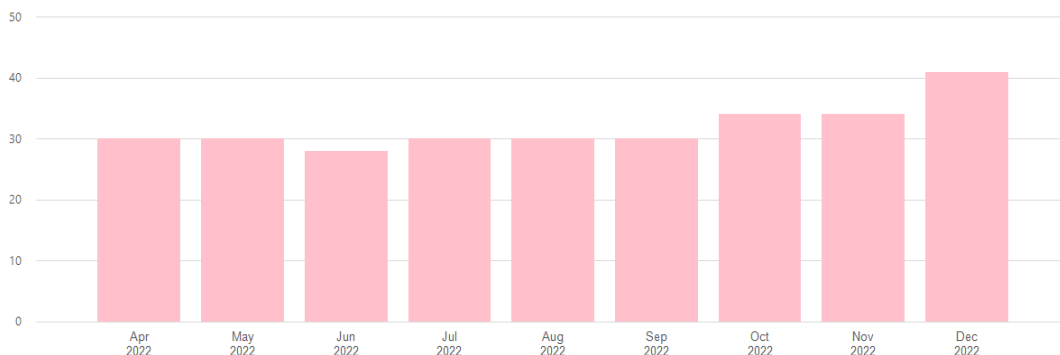


	Apr 2022	May 2022	Jun 2022	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022
Open at Month End	292	287	284	286	283	282	292	288	291

The overall number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) has increased following the uplifting of the numbers of UASC each local authority is required to accommodate from 0.07 (31) to 0.1 (45) by the Home Office. This is to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility nationally for looking after unaccompanied children. This increase in numbers will place an increased demand for placements, social work time and After Care support.

The below graphs show the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month and the rise in numbers.

CLA Cohort - UASC Open at Month End



	Apr 2022	May 2022	Jun 2022	Jul 2022	Aug 2022	Sep 2022	Oct 2022	Nov 2022	Dec 2022
Open at Month End	30	30	28	30	30	30	34	34	41

Fostering, Adoption and Placements:

Adoption recruitment continues to be positive and in line with Thurrock's need for Adoptive parents. We continue to contribute to and benefit from Adopt East. 13 children have been Adopted year to date

In line with national challenges, we are experiencing difficulty in recruiting the volume of foster carers we would like to meet the needs of our children There continues to be significant recruitment activity in fostering to recruit new foster carers within Thurrock and the surrounding area. A wide array of engagement events has been held in and around Thurrock and our brand is visible in the Thurrock Community. We have made use of a range of advertising including at the end of December and into January 2023, a targeted Google ads campaign was launched to drive enquiries. We continue to encourage residents to make the leap in to fostering. Six Households have been approved year to date and 8 Household applications are being assessed as suitable to foster which should result in 12 placements.

Like many authorities, Thurrock has faced significant challenge finding suitable and available placements. We are developing a residential home offer, tailored to specific children's needs so they have dependable care provision for their childhood in partnership with Housing and an external provider. Two homes have so far been successful in their registration application with Ofsted. The service continues to have

Careful strategic oversight of placements to ensure our resources are well used and placements appropriately supported.

Thurrock celebrated Foster Carers achievements and contribution to children's lives at a Fostering event in October 2022. As part of the Fostering Network, we also participated in the celebration of Sons and Daughters month for children of foster carers thanking them for their contribution to fostering.

Youth Offending Service (YOS):

Thurrock YOS was Inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in May 2022 which graded Thurrock Good with outstanding features. HMIP identified Thurrock's Resettlement Policy as a model of good practice, with multiple strengths and have shared the policy nationally.

The LSCP undertook a thematic review on youth violence, with a focus on learning from best practice. A multi-agency response is in place and actions are overseen by the Youth Crime Governance Board chaired by the Director of Children's Services and the Community Safety Partnership. Work has focused on awareness raising and prevention, contributing to a reduction in the number of offences of violence against a person including possession of knives.

The involvement of the Specialist Criminal Exploitation (CE) Support Worker has demonstrated the ability to engage previously hard to reach families through intensive support and tailored programmes designed to divert young people away from CE and criminal activity.

The Ministry of Justice are funding Youth Offending Services with an early intervention programme called 'Turnaround' with a focus on early intervention and prevention of offending. Violence and Vulnerability funding has also been secured via the Home Office for a Primary School Prevention Officer who will be offering support to schools and young people around prevention and diversion from youth violence. In addition, we have a Gangs and Exploitation Support Worker who works primarily with social workers, schools and young people who are at risk of exploitation also secured through Violence and Vulnerability funding.

Participation:

There have been several successful Participation and Inclusion events with cohorts of Thurrock's children such as a consultation event at an outdoor activity and a 6-session course offered to 12 children "Feel Good About You" resulting from the Mind of My Own feedback from children about their self-esteem. The service also held a Children's Looked After Award event (the first since Covid) in 2022 celebrating the achievements of the children for whom Thurrock are Corporate Parents. The Children in Care Council (CICC) has continued to meet bi-monthly as a group. Members of the Children in Care Council have attended the Corporate Parenting Committee and have also participated in children's panels for staff recruitment. The Young Voices bi-monthly newsletter which

was launched in June 2020 continues and regularly includes a young person's blog which highlights topical matters such as the importance of the social work relationship with children and young people and endings when social workers leave or move on.

Strong and Effective Partnership:

The Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) is well embedded following an update of its structure in 2019. It is well supported by its multi-agency partners. An independent Chair/Scrutineer was appointed in April 2021. The LSCP has good attendance at the various committees and subgroups and there is collaborative working evidenced in all the subgroups.

Our Brighter Futures Early Help strategy is established and led by a multi-agency Board chaired by the Director of Children's Services. The Strategy is currently being updated.

There is a multi-agency commitment to MASH. A quarterly MASH Strategic Board provides scrutiny and challenge to all partners. The governance of this has recently transferred to the LSCP.

The Youth Crime Justice Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services with full participation and contribution from partners and welcomed challenge and scrutiny.

Children Services Budget

Children & Education Portfolio	2022/23 Indicative Budget	2023/24 Indicative Budget
Children and Family Services	£32,209,526	£34,466,000
Dedicated Schools Budget	£46,288,000	£51,258,000
Education and Skills	£4,381,223	£5,185,000
Head Start Housing Service	£943,359	£955,000
School Transport	£3,291,574	£4,545,000
Children & Education Total	£87,113,682	£96,409,000
Dedicated Schools Grant	(£46,288,000)	(£51,258,000)
Children & Education Total	£40,825,682	£45,151,000

In determining the Children Services budget, the following levels of growth and savings have been applied, as reflected in the MTFS

Growth

Children Services Growth	2022/23	2023/24
Children's Placements	2,336,000	1,432,000
Children's Legal Proceedings	0	450,000
Home to School Transport	500,000	1,243,000
DSG – CSSB 20% Reduction	164,000	135,000
Total	3,000,000	3,260,000

Childrens Placements

The placements budget continues to experience increased cost and complexity of need. Significant cost pressures are generated by moves within care. Children with the most complex needs are experiencing a high level of placement instability driven by both providers giving notice on their placement and by intervention by the regulator. Thurrock is reliant on external providers for residential and complex care including SEN placements.

Childrens Legal Proceedings

Demand for legal Services in 2022/23 is exceeding base budget provision. In the last 2 financial years, additional one-off funding has been provided to cover additional costs

incurred in response to Covid backlogs in the courts. An updated budget has been prepared based on current case levels. Growth fund of £0.450m has been provided to reflect 2022/23 forecast outturn position and base budget review.

Home to School Transport

Thurrock continues to experience yearly increase in pupil numbers and Education Health and Care Plans. The increase to the Local Offer for pupil with Special Education Needs, places additional demands on the Home to School Transport budget. This is a recognized national issue.

Dedicated Schools Grant – Central School Services Block 20% reduction

The element of funding received for historic commitments made prior to 2013/14 is subject to a 20% year-on- year reduction. Funding is provided to minimise the impact of this reduction in funding. This allows Education budgets to be reviewed as part of the Council’s budget reduction proposals.

Savings

The following savings have been identified within Children Services for 2022/23 to 2024/25:

Children and Education Portfolio	Savings Narrative	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Total
Children and Family Services	Review of Children's Social Care operating model.	£1,337,000	£77,500	£233,000	£1,647,500
Children and Family Services	Out of Hours Duty Team - revised model of operation (November 2022)		£255,000		£255,000
Children and Family Services	Review of children with Continuing Health Care to secure appropriate Health contribution		£200,000	£100,000	£300,000
Children and Family Services	Increase the number of Internal Foster Carers	£300,000			£300,000
Education & Skills	Review of Education Services	£1,010,000	£126,000	£378,000	£1,514,000
Education & Skills	Cessation of Council provided Nursery Provision (August 2022)	£64,000	£46,000		£110,000
Home to School Transport	Review of Home to School Transport	£146,000			£146,000
Children & Education Total		£2,857,000	£704,500	£711,000	£4,272,500