

<b>21 March 2023</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Children's Social Care Performance 2022-2023</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-key	
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, 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:</b> Public		

### **Executive Summary**

This report provides information on the performance across Children Looked After and Aftercare. The overall performance for the service is good this report focusses on data of 2022-23.

At the end of Q3 2022-23, 291 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 257 young adults were receiving services from Aftercare. Children and young people are visited regularly, and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety. Improvement is required in the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment which is an area of focus with health partners

The Care Leaving Service continues to be a focus for improvement, particularly to keep in touch and support young people into employment or education and to ensure they have the right accommodation to meet their needs.

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

It has been previously reported to Corporate Parenting Committee that permanency planning continues to be impacted by the aftermath of COVID-19, although this is beginning to diminish as long-standing cases reach their conclusion.

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

### **1.1 That Members note improvements and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.**

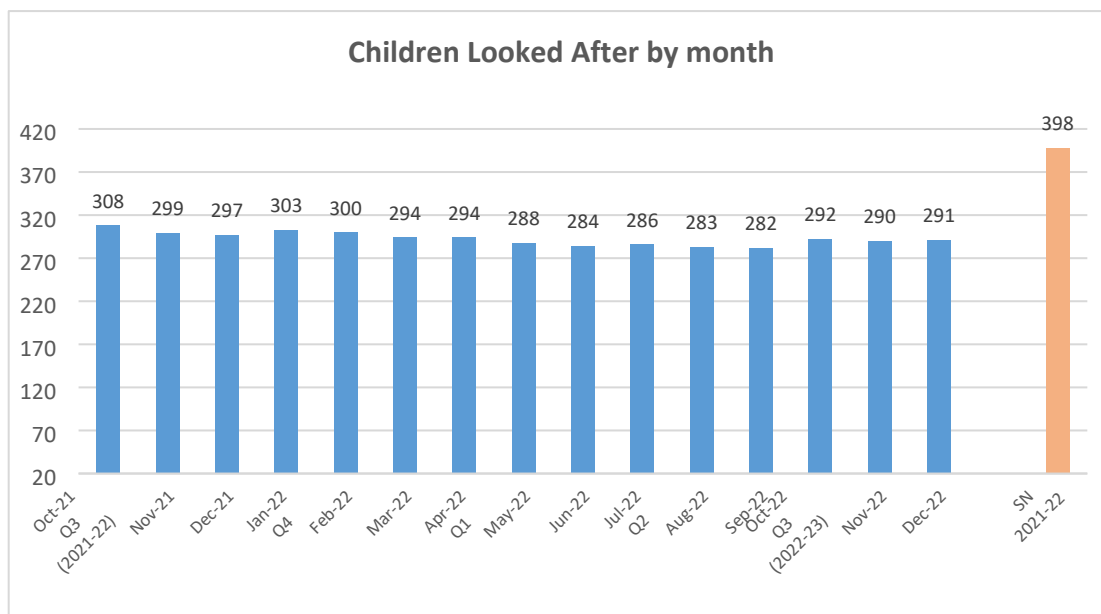
## **2. Introduction and Background**

- 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 who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.
- 2.2 Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the At a Glance monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets. External reporting requirements include the annual statutory data return to the Department for Education (DfE) that all Local Authorities must provide.
- 2.3 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 2.4 Teams and Managers use the data to understand and respond to changes in activity levels, to monitor and respond to the quality and timeliness of services and to collate information about how well children are doing. The information is also discussed with front line workers.

## **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 at the end of each month. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate. Thurrock's Children in Care numbers have remained relatively steady year to date from 294 in April 2022 to 291 in December 2022. The service saw a reduction in care numbers from this year down to 282 in September but has seen an increase in line with the additional numbers of UASC following the increased quota for each local authority from 0.07% per child population to 0.1%.

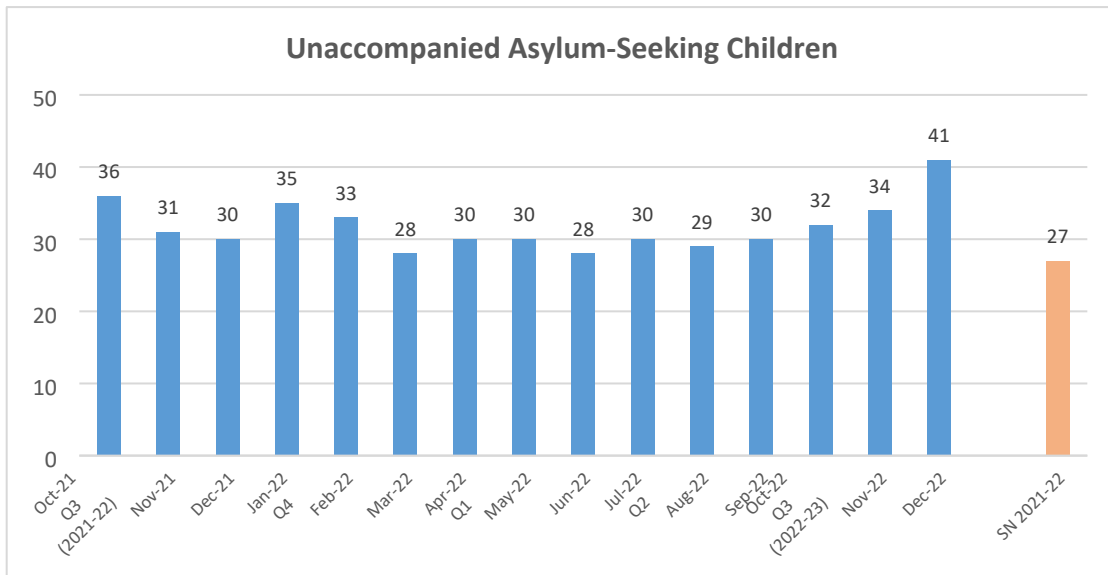


### 3.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. As an authority with ports of entry Thurrock has always had a steady amount of new UASC. The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) protocol for UASC first began operating in 2016 which formed a voluntary agreement between local authorities in England to ensure a fairer, more equitable distribution of unaccompanied children across local authorities. After February 2022 all local authorities have been directed to participate in the NTS (mandated NTS). From August 2022 the threshold for numbers of UASC in each local authority was raised from 0.07% of the general population to 0.1%. For Thurrock this represented an increase from 31 to 45. This means that Thurrock has to accept transfers of UASC in the scheme if we are below 45 UASC in our Child Looked After population. This represents an increased demand for placements, social work time and After Care support on a long-term basis. Between October and December 2022, there were 12 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock compared to 6 in the same period in 2021 and an overall increase from 31 in December 2021 to 41 in December 2022.

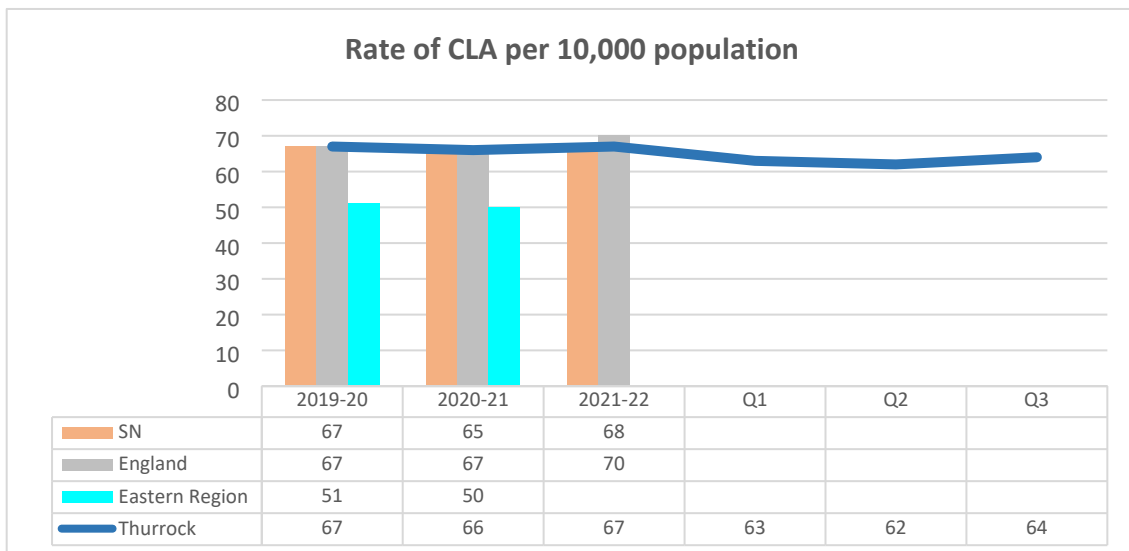
When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since October 2021.



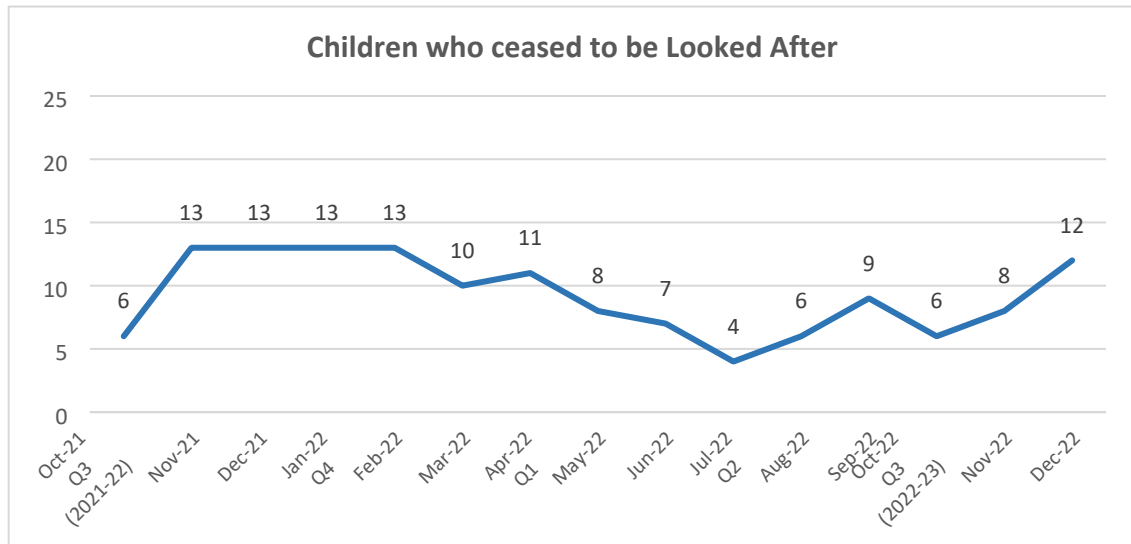
### 3.3 The Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population

The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18-year-olds in Thurrock. At the end of December 2022 there were 291 Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2021, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68 and England average of 70 as at the end of December 2022. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children are coming into care and working with families to keep children within their family network/home where it is safe to do so. These lower looked after children numbers are despite the rise in numbers of UASC as a result of the national threshold rising.



### 3.4 Children Looked After episodes ceased and started

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between October and December 2022, 26 children ceased to be looked after compared to 32 in the same period in 2021-22.



The most common reason for children ceasing to be looked after was children returning home to live with their parents.

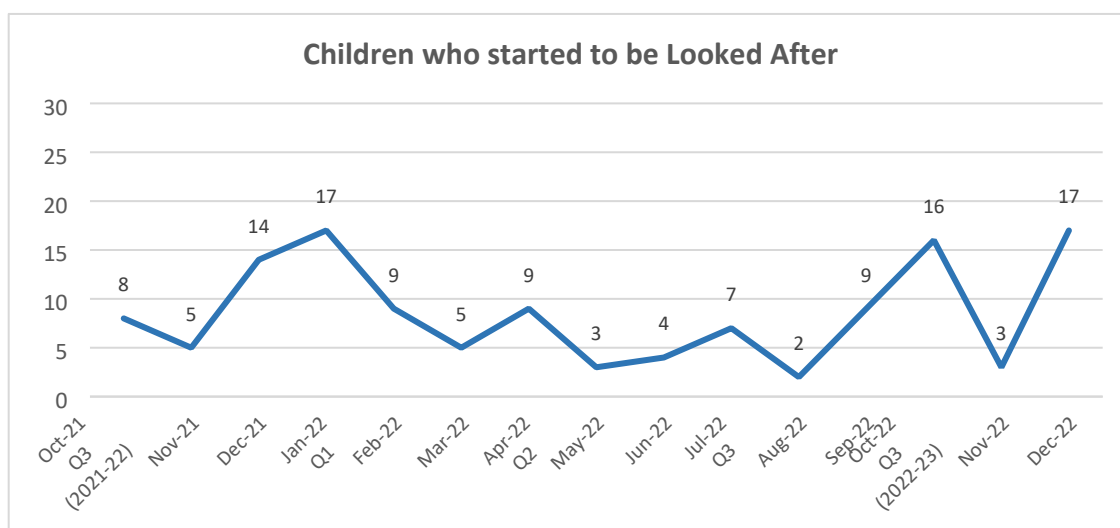
There are four factors contributing and impacting on the numbers of children in care in Thurrock:

- Numbers of children entering care
- Numbers of children leaving care
- Numbers of UASC entering care
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

The below charts show entries in and exits out of care over the last few years including the changing trajectory of the UASC population in line with the rise from 0.07% to 0.1%.

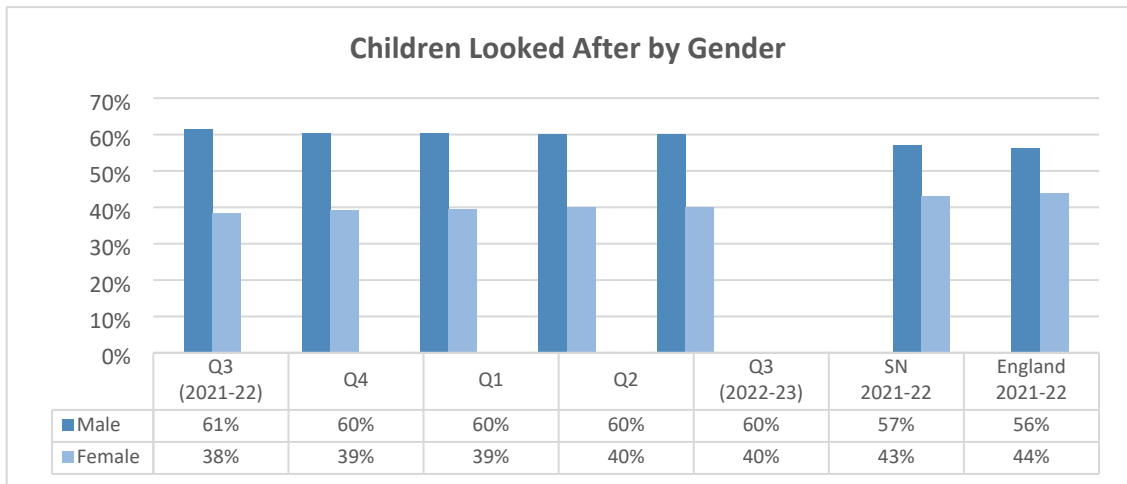
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	Q3 2022-23 (Oct- Dec)
Total number Entering Care	203	242	150	121	36 (70 year to date)
UASC entering Care	91	75	36	38	12 (21 year to date)
Exiting Care	211	235	148	122	26 (71 year to date)
Number of CLA at end of reporting period	290	298	298	29	291
UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population)	31 (10.6%)	23 (7.7%)	24 (8%)	28 (9.4%)	41 (14%)

### 3.5 Children Looked After episodes started



### 3.6 Children Looked After by Gender

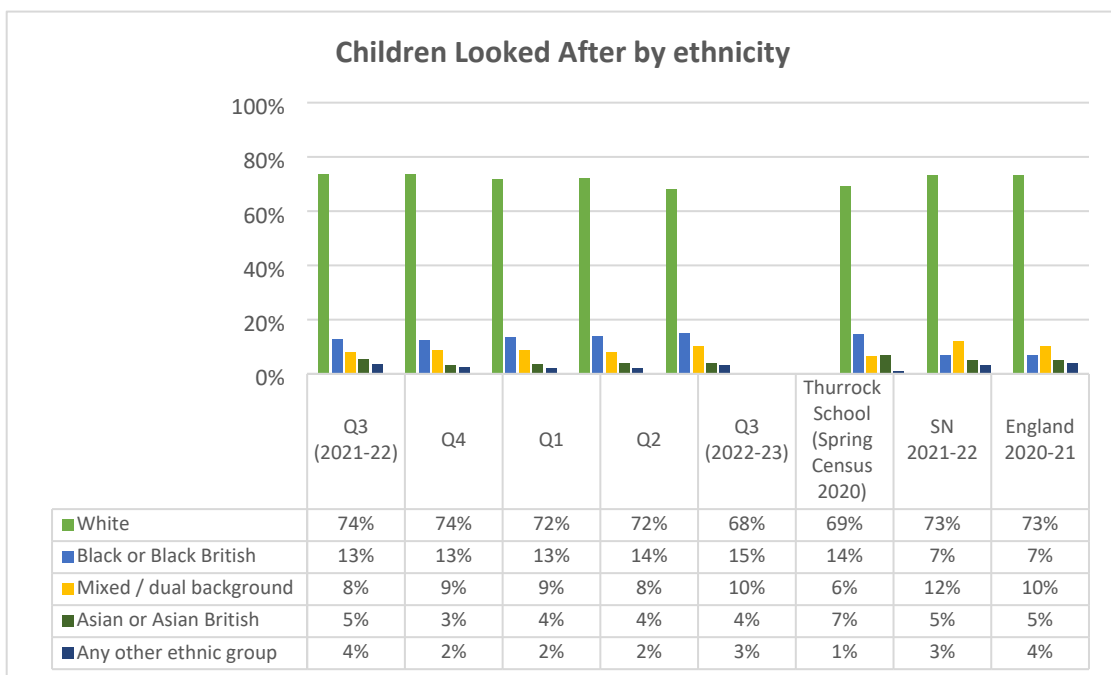
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as of December 2022 which is likely a reflection of our percentage of UASC who are predominately males.



### 3.7 Children Looked After by ethnicity

Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

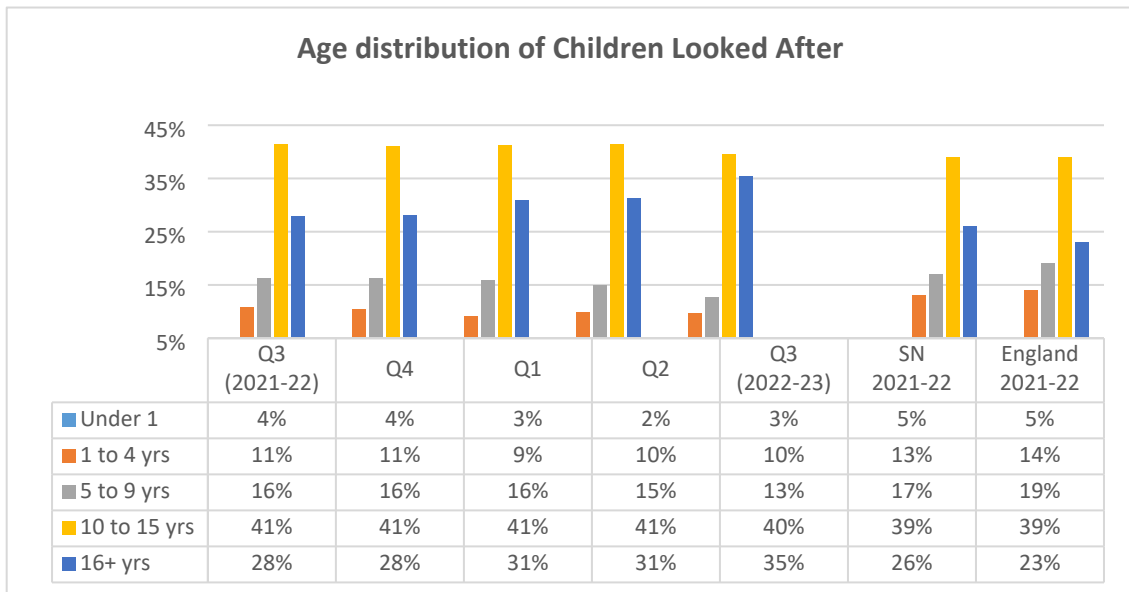
Thurrock's Children Looked After are predominantly White which is in line with Thurrock's School Census in Spring 2020 and the Statistical Neighbour and England averages.



### 3.8 Children Looked After age profile

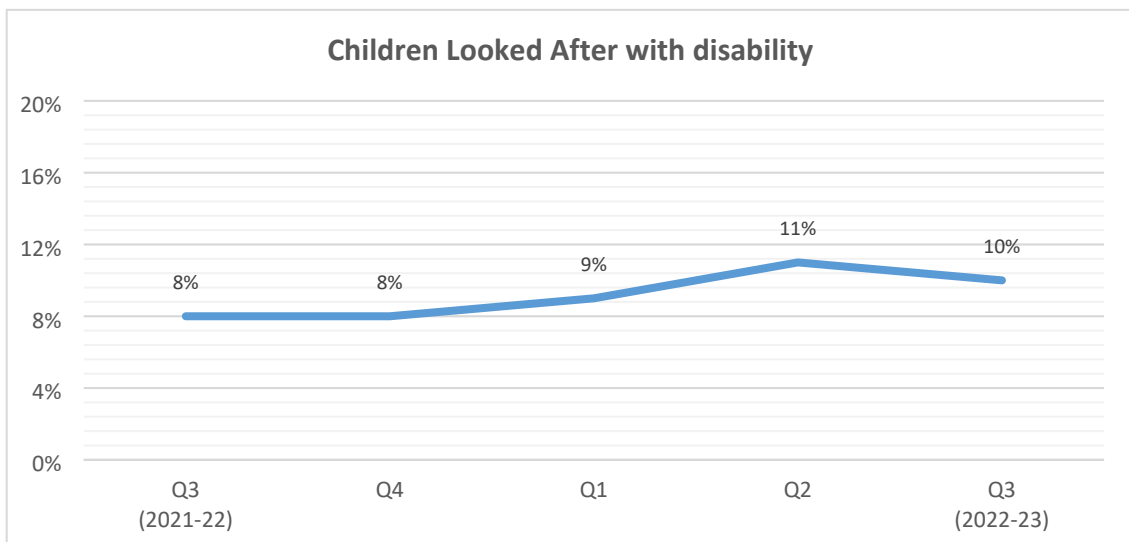
Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2022, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. However, since July 2021, we have seen a 4% increase in the number of 16+ years. When comparing the 16+

with SN and England, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 26% and the England average of 23% as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



### 3.9 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2021. At the end of December 2022, 29 (10%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. 22 of these children were boys aged 5 and over and 7 girls aged 13 and over. 21 of 29 disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.

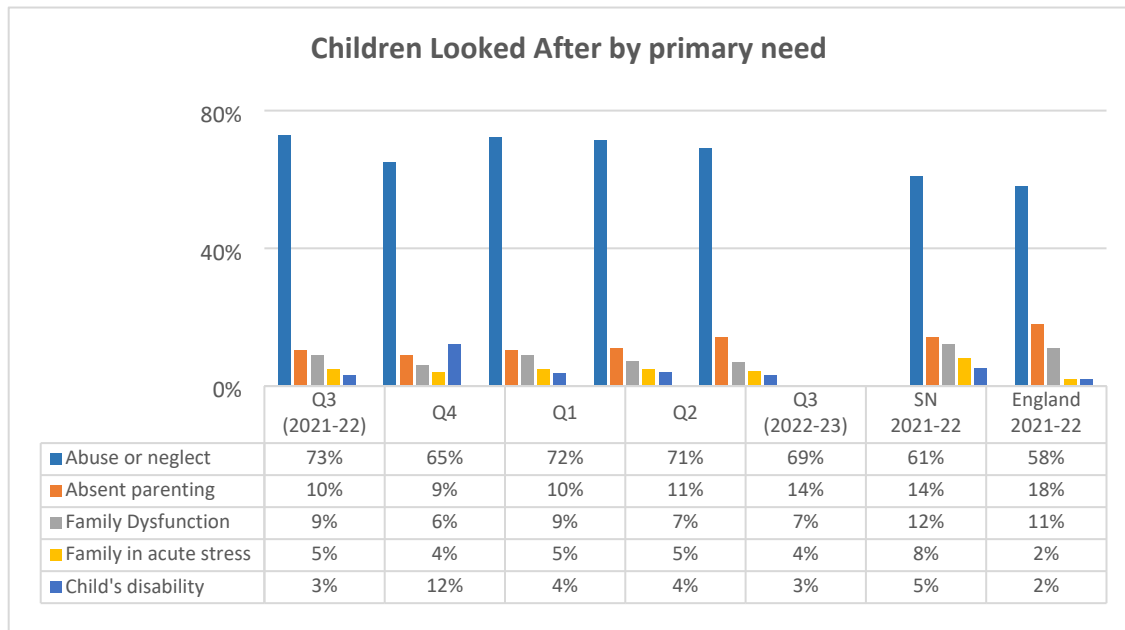


### 3.10 Children Looked After by Primary Need

Most children become Looked After because of the significant harm they are experiencing or likely to experience. Where possible, Social Care provide



support and intervention to enable families to remain together and ensure that children only become looked after, when absolutely necessary.



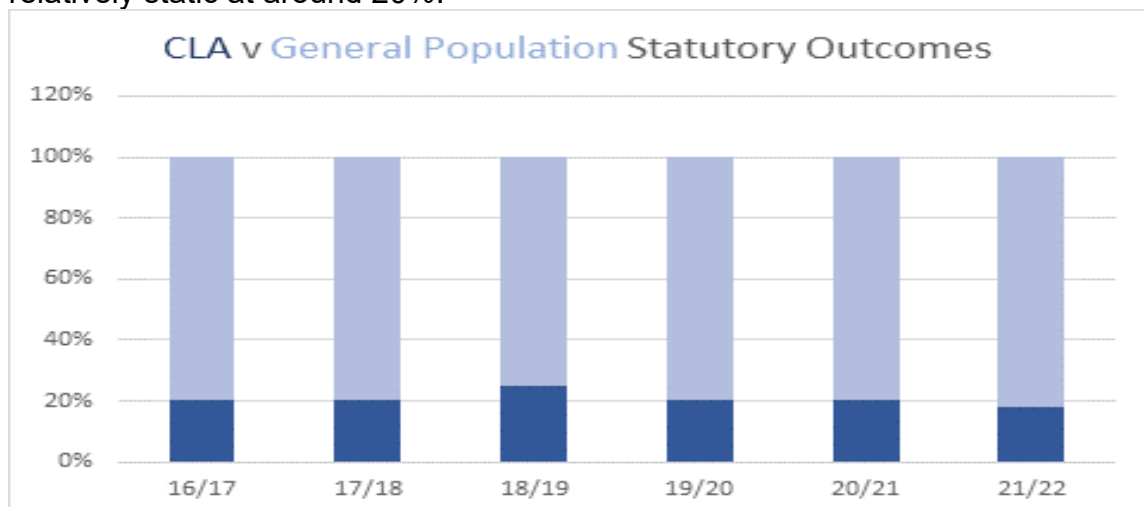
#### 4. Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

##### 4.1 Statutory Interventions

A statutory intervention is undertaken when a child has been convicted by the courts or made subject to a Youth Caution or Youth Conditional Caution and consequently has YOS intervention.

During quarter 3 of 2022-23 there were 37 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 7 of these were looked after children. The 7 looked after children represented 19% of the young people open to YOS and were all white British.

The number of Children Looked After over the last five years has been relatively static at around 20%.



The above graph represents the percentage of Children Looked After versus the total number of young people in the Youth Justice System for the last five years. Despite an increase from 20% to 30% in 2018-19 the numbers of Children Looked After has been relatively static at around 20%. There were no notable reasons for the increase in 2018-19.

## **4.2 Youth Detention Accommodation**

Under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, any child that is made subject to a Youth Detention Accommodation Order (remand in custody) by the Courts automatically becomes looked after by the local authority.

Only 1 child was made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during quarter 3 of 2022-23. This child was a white British male.

## **4.3 Out of court disposal panel**

During Q3 for 2022/23 the out of court disposal panel dealt with 34 offences relating to 30 Thurrock children, of which 3 children had looked after status.

Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol<sup>1</sup> aimed at reducing the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

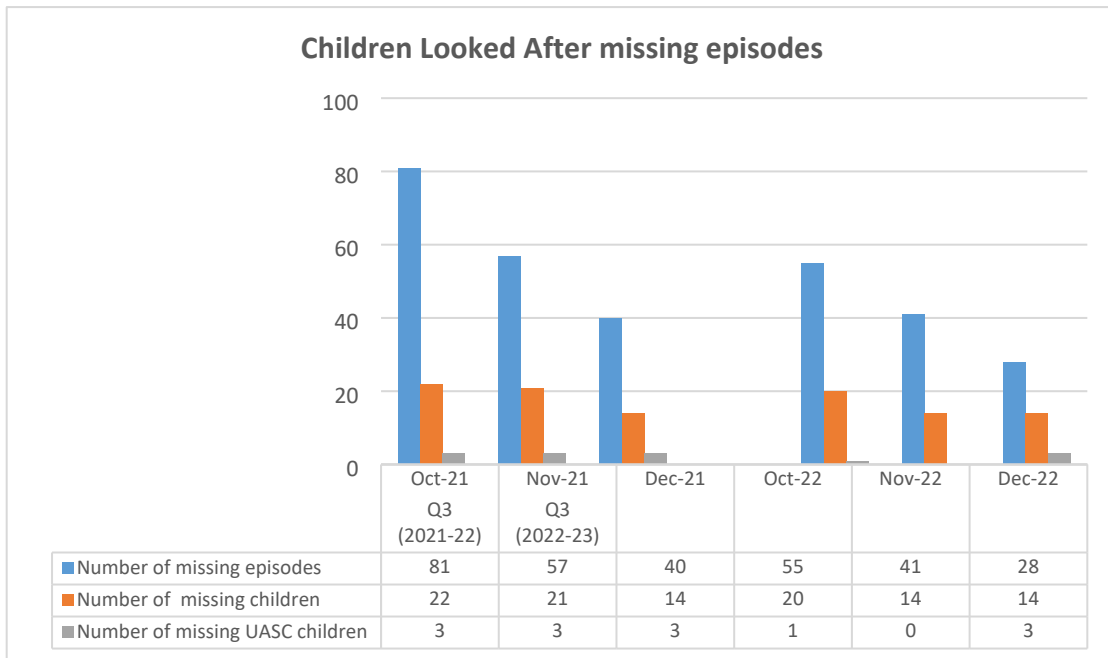
## **5. Children Looked After missing episodes started**

The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between October 2022 and December 2022 and for the same period in the previous year. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their curfew with friends or are with their families.

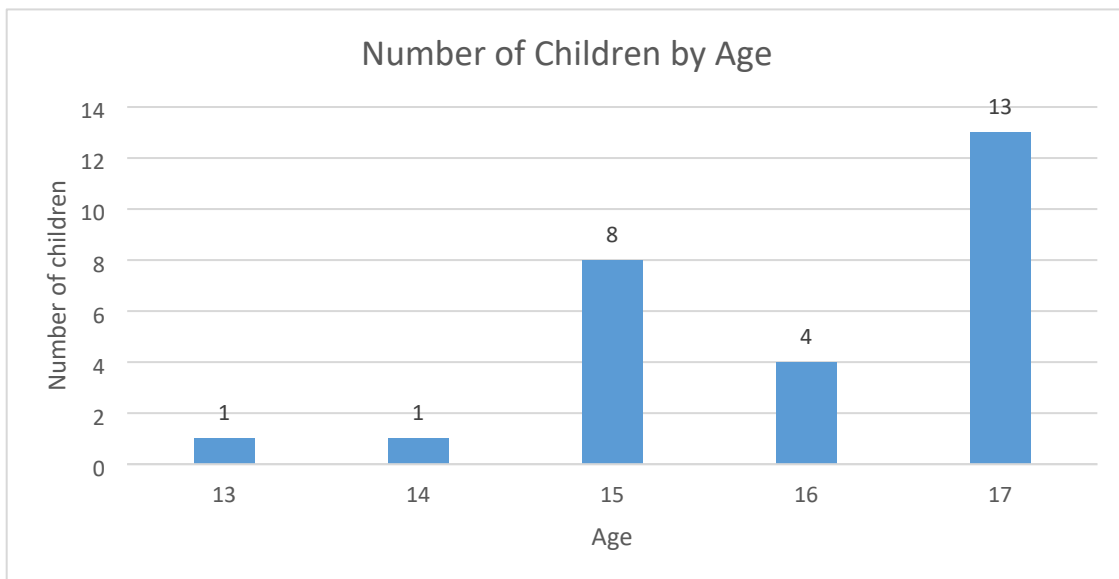
Between October and December 2022, there were total of 124 missing episodes which represented 27 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there were a total of 187 episodes.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-protocol-on-reducing-criminalisation-of-looked-after-children>



Of the 27 children who went missing in the Quarter, 13 were female and 14 were male. Their ages break down as follows:



The majority of children going missing remains for short periods of time and relates to older children (16 and over) staying out later than an agreed curfew. Younger children who are missing are reported to the Police at an earlier stage of the day and risk assessed. Strategy meetings continue to track reasons for missing episodes missing episodes are that they are all spending time with friends and/or family. Others are seeking to spend extended periods of time with friends/partners.

When children are reported missing the majority return within 24 hours, i.e. if reported at 11pm they are back in placement by the next day Most are back

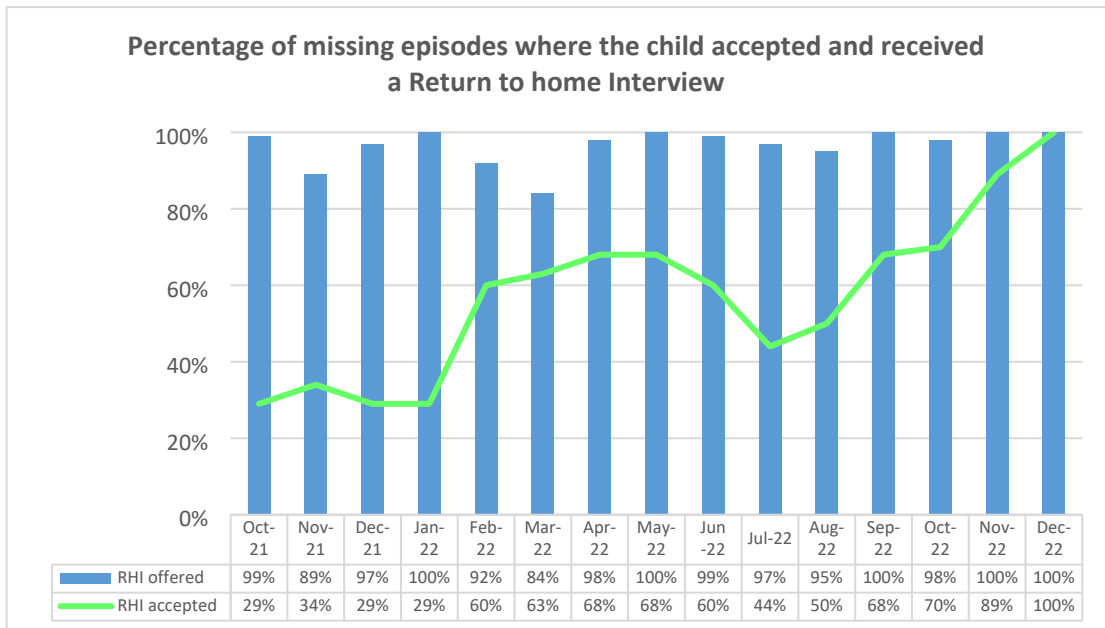
before the next morning. The majority are aged 17. Small numbers of children may spend longer period away from placement. The outcome reasons for the.

## **5.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)**

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will also discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

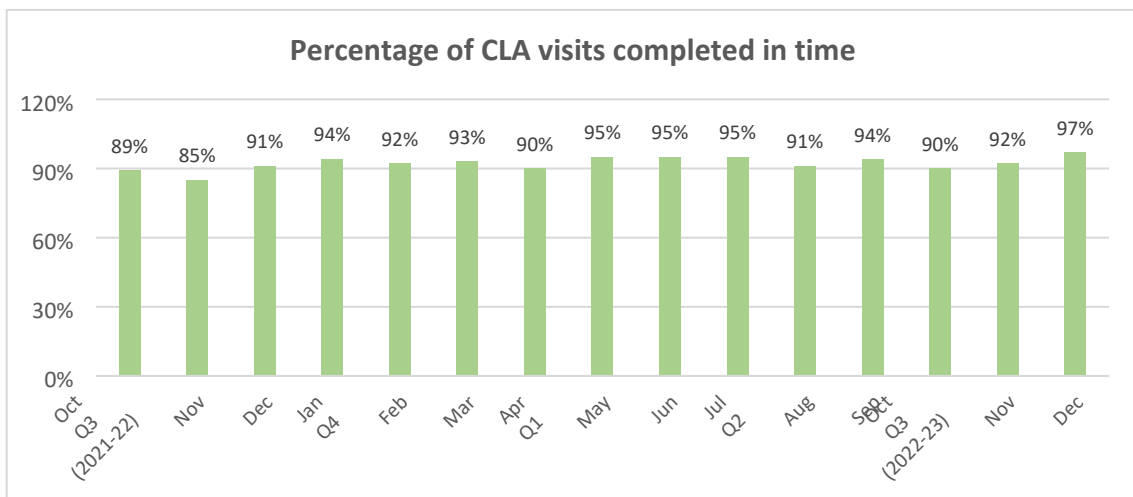
As at the end of December 2022, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 100% of which 100% accepted and received an interview compared to 52% in December 2021. The offer of an RHI via Inspire is not always accepted by young people for several reasons including not wanting to reveal their whereabouts when missing and not believing that they were missing but 'out'. All young people who have a missing episode are reviewed at the weekly Risk Management Meeting.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people through Inspire since July 2021 and shows an improved picture of children accepting and receiving a RHI. There continues to be a small number of CLA who have consistently refused return home interviews. We continue to review how Inspire engage this cohort of young people and alternatives such as whether there is anyone within the network better placed to have these conversations when they return from missing episodes, including their social worker and how this information is captured. This has increased the amount of Return Home Interviews completed and has ensured that young people are given the opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed. that offer.



## 5.2 Timeliness of Social Worker Children Looked After visits

Social workers are required to visit a child/young person within one week of the start of any placement. Visits are then due in accordance with the time agreed within the Care Plan. This can vary from 20 to 65 working days, permitted within regulations. The average visits completed in time between October and December 2022 was 93.0% compared to 88.0% in the same quarter in 2020-21 representing a 5% increase and visits in the last 12 months have consistently shown performance over 90% in time.



## 5.3 Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

IHA to be completed within 20 working days is our statutory requirement.

Every child who becomes looked after should have an Initial Health Assessment within 20 working days of entering care. To achieve good

performance for this indicator, there is reliance on working with Thurrock Social Workers, parents and placement providers, Thurrock health care providers, and other health providers for children placed outside of Thurrock.

Two performance measures inform the data for children having an initial health assessment in time:

- Whether the referral for an initial health assessment is made to health providers by the local authority within 5 working days
- The initial health assessment takes place within 20 working days of a child entering care.

Notifications for an IHA cannot be progressed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority shared parental responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to focus on meeting the need for children to have a statutory initial health assessment within 20 working days.

#### **5.4 IHA request made to health by social care within 5 working days of child becoming looked after.**

The timeliness of referrals from social care to health is important to contributing to the timeliness of initial health assessments. The numbers of IHA requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers

Between 1<sup>st</sup> October and December 2022, 36 children became looked after to Thurrock Council.

- 29 were referred within 5 working days
- 1 was referred on time but the referral was not accepted due to additional information being requested by the host authority
- 4 had late referrals due to incorrect completion of the form
- 2 Children were in care for such a short period the IHA referral was not required.

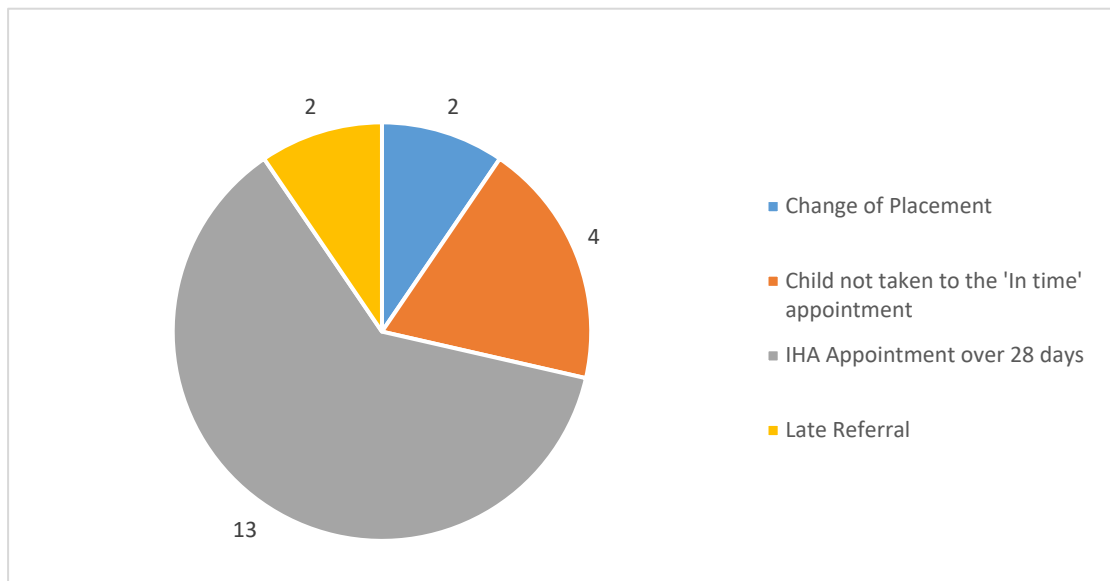
#### **5.5 Initial Health Assessment taking place within 20 working days of a child entering care**

In the third quarter of 2022-23; 29% of children received an IHA within 20 working days of becoming looked after. This is well below our target of 90%

The breaks down as follows for the 36 children who became looked after and were referred for an IHA,

- 10 received IHA appointments within 20 working days
- 2 children refused the IHA
- 2 children did not require an IHA as they left care
- 22 Children received IHA later than 20 working days

The following graph sets out the delay reasons:



IHA's are tracked weekly to ensure oversight at a senior level from Health and Social Care Colleagues. The most significant delay reason is the lack of available paediatric appointments. Our local health partner, NELFT, has commissioned additional Paediatric IHA appointments which became available from February 2023. This should improve capacity and, in turn performance. This poor performance has been escalated to our health partners, both providers and commissioners. The subject of IHA's has been a regular item on the Health and Well Being Board; pressure is being brought to bear to ensure this performance is improved.

## 5.6 Children Looked After in Education

The Virtual School monitors and supports 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.

The annual report 2021-22 of the Virtual School Headteacher details the broad scope of services provided and was previously presented to Committee.

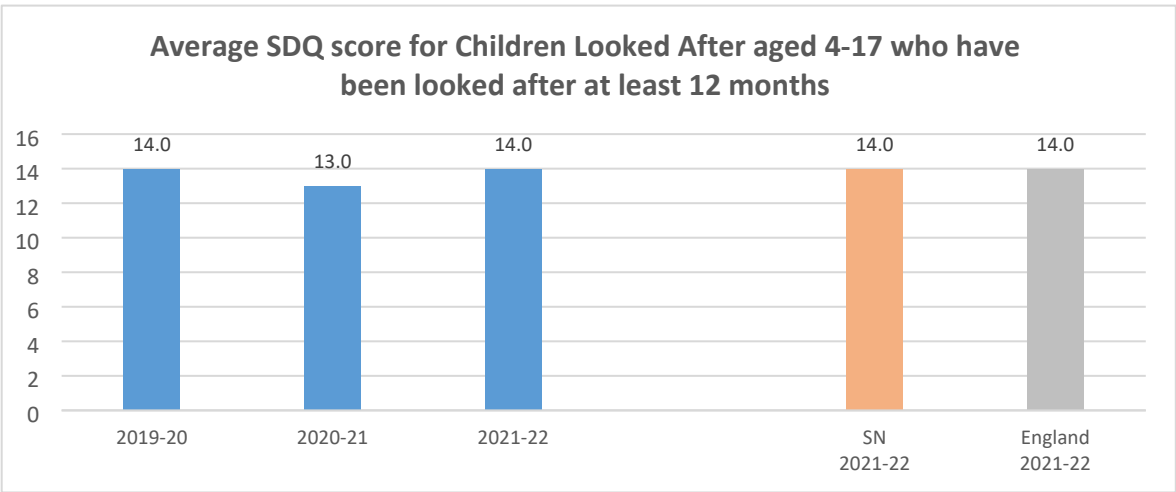
## 5.7 Children Looked After Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

SDQ scores are a measure which provides an indication of the mental wellbeing of Looked After Children. Thurrock has a statutory responsibility to collect SDQ scores annually for all children aged 4-17 who have continuously been looked after for at least 12 months. Thurrock Childrens Services collate the SDQ scores termly via the Personal Education Plan supported by the

Virtual School and Children’s Social Care collecting the views of carers, school staff and children.

For each child where their score indicates a level of need (scoring 13 or higher) their case is individually reviewed by a multi-agency panel to ensure appropriate services are in place. Children benefit from a suite of local services including EWMHS, Kooth (online Counselling) and commissioned therapeutic services. For children placed out of area NHS provision or commissioned services are secured.

The average scores are 14 which is in line with Statistical Neighbour and Nationally. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



**6. Adoption**

As at the end of Q3 2022-23, there were 7 children adopted and 5 children were matched with prospective adopters.

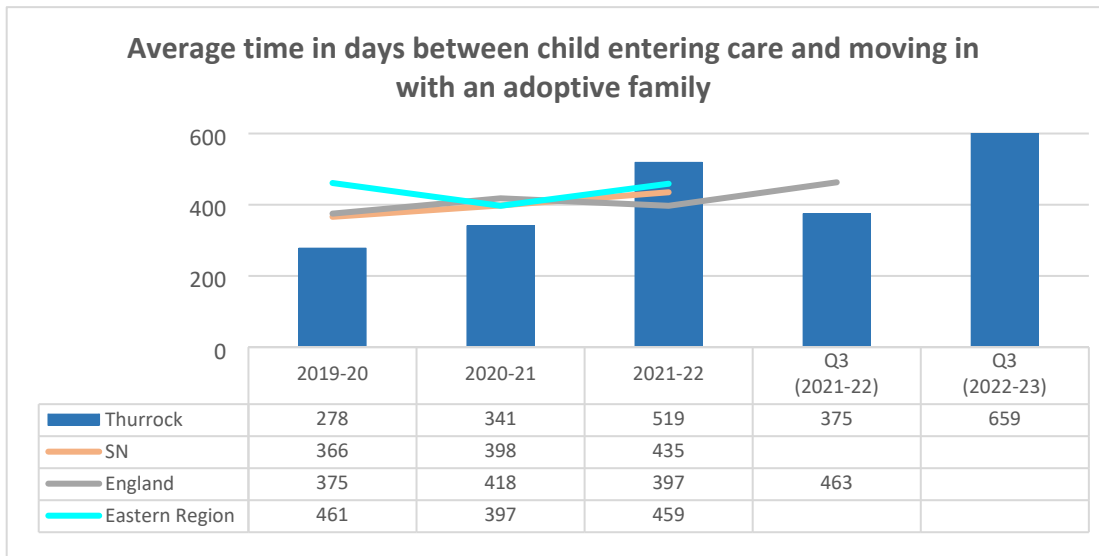
**6.1 Timeliness of Adoption**

The average duration of care proceedings nationally has been over 40 weeks. The President of the Family Division re-launched the Public Law Outline process in January 2023 with a view to reducing the length of proceedings towards the 26 weeks statutory time limit.

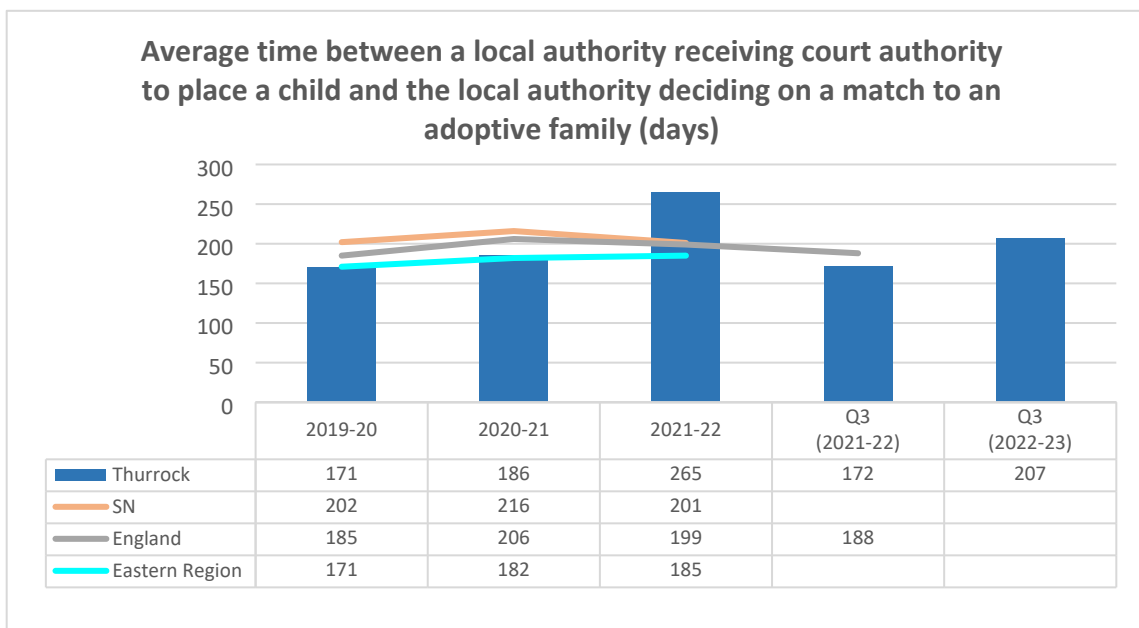
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 12-month rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of Q3 2022-23, Thurrock’s average was 659 days. Based on Q2 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 463 days and based on year end 2021-22 data, Thurrock is above the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, England average of 397 and Eastern Region of 459 days. It is important to note that this measure relates to a relatively small number of children so a very small number of children experiencing a delay can



impact on the data. Care proceedings have seen significant delays; court availability, and family members being identified late. We are working towards reducing the duration of care proceedings through early planning and close monitoring.



As at end of Q3 2022-23, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 207 days. Based on Q2 2022-23 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 188 days and based on 2021-22-year end data, Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 201 days, the England average of 199 days and Eastern Region of 185 days as at the end of Q2 2022-23.



This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. There has been delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay because of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order or appeal can prevent the placement of children with adoptive families. Due to the small numbers involved, the average can be impacted in exceptional circumstances by an individual case causing an increase in the average time between a court order being made and matching.

## **6.2 CLA permanency**

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Securing placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption only once all family and friend options have been exhausted.

Of the total CLA cohort of 291 as at the end of Q3 2022-23, 14% (40) children were aged 0-5. Most children under 5 years who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There were significant delays in court proceedings and children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed. Post covid this situation is beginning to ease.

## **6.3 Children Looked After placement distance**

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide children with placements within its area unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so under the Children Act 1989. Placements out of area must be approved by the nominated person and placements 'at a distance' must be agreed by the Director of Children's Services.

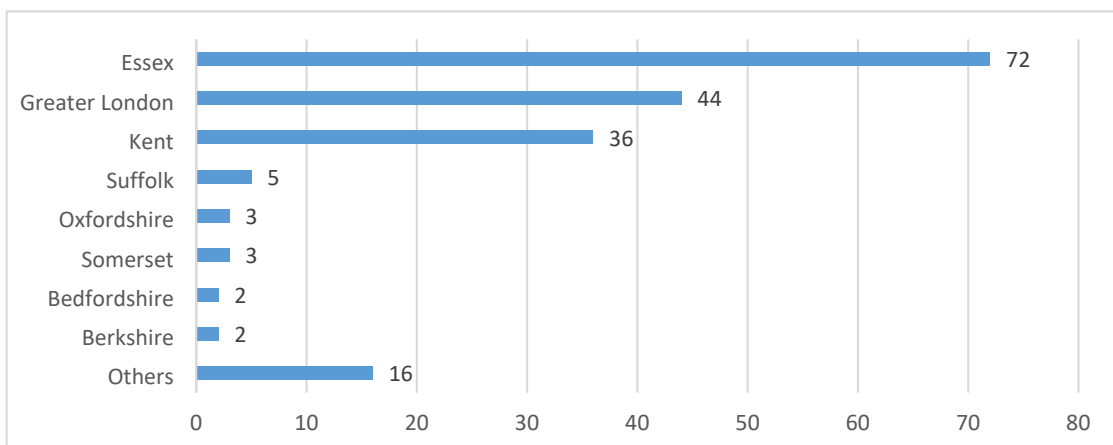
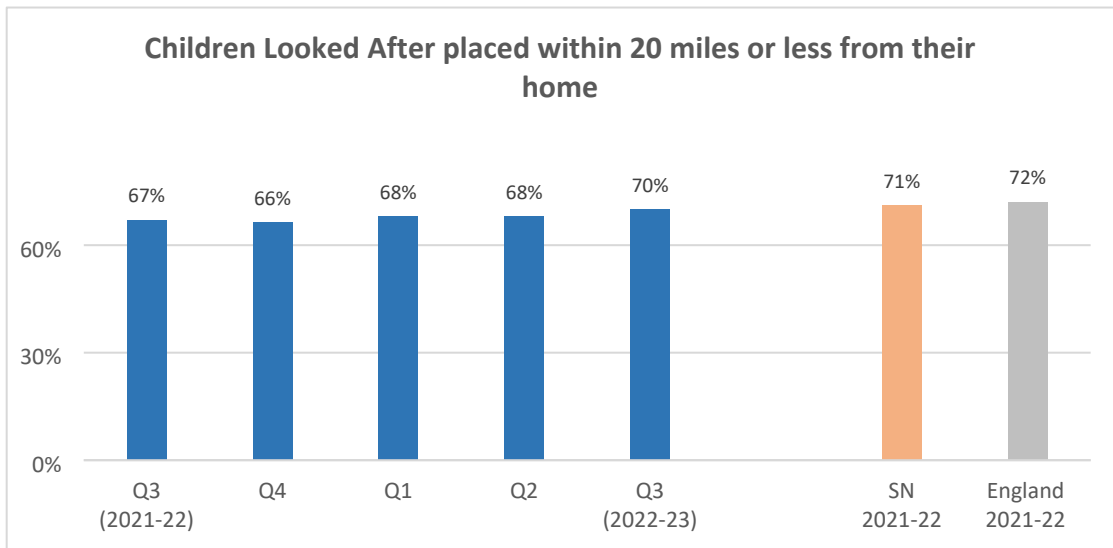
At the end of December 2022, 70% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 203 out of 291 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, Thurrock reflects performance close with the national average of 74%.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However, the challenges experienced in recruiting Foster Carers is a National issue and Thurrock are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge as well as identifying local placements with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care<sup>2</sup>, (the interim report published by the Competition and Markets

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-interim-report/interim-report>.

Authority, October 2021, has noted the pressure on Local Authority placement services.



## 7.0 Care Leaving Service

The graphs below show the care leaver cohort (Relevant and Former Relevant Children whose 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday falls within Financial Year) and Young People aged 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. Local authorities have a legislative duty to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers from the age of 16-21 and up until the age of 25 if required.

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>3</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

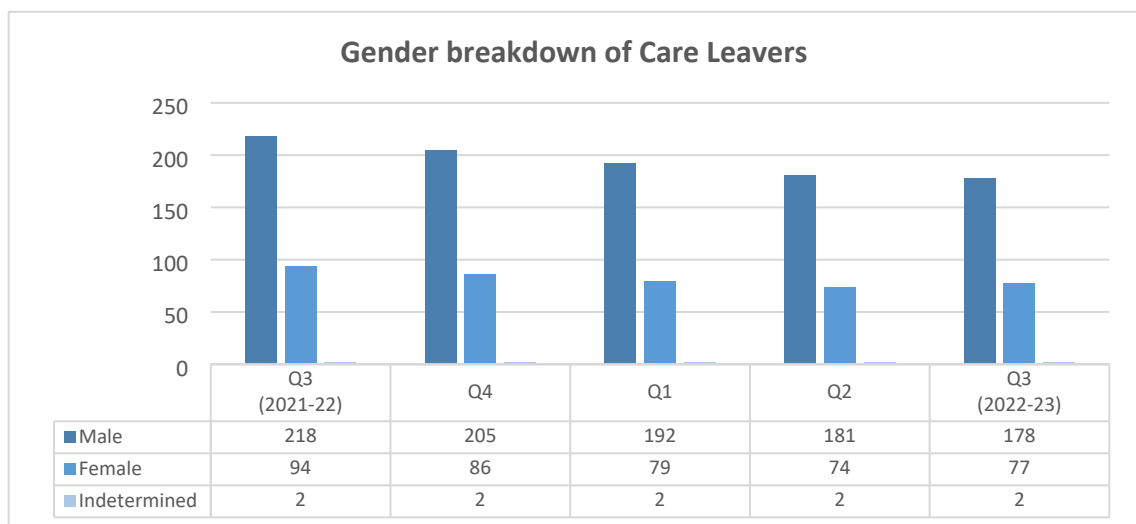
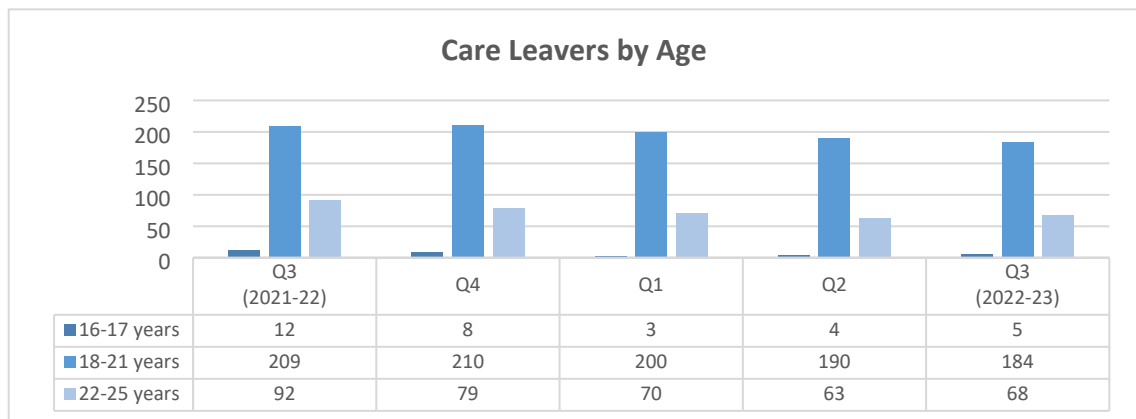
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

<sup>3</sup> <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.

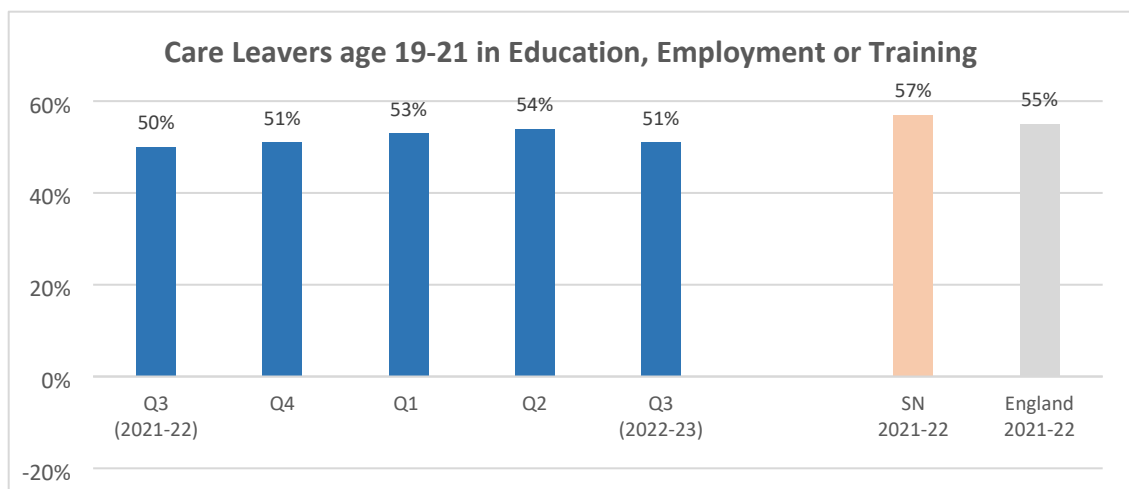
As at end of September 2022, 257 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service.

The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



## 7.1 Care Leavers age 19-21 years in Education, Employment or Training (EET)

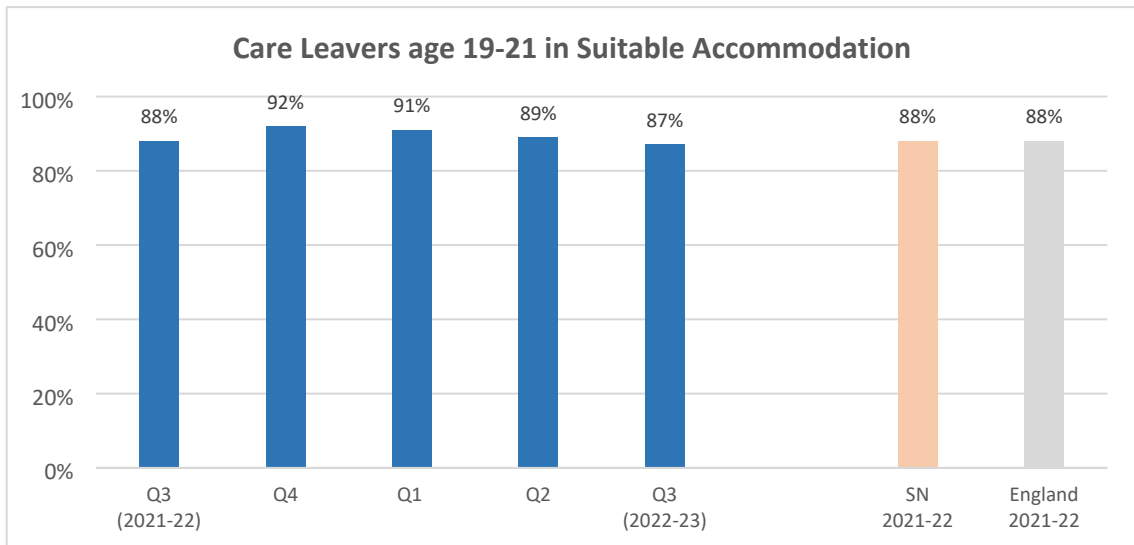
At the end of Q2 2022-23, 54% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 49% in September 2021 which brings Thurrock in more line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18-year-olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub, and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer.



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

Q2 2022-23 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 89%. Thurrock is in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 88% based on 2022 benchmarking data. There are some care leavers who are not in touch with the service, as well as those whose accommodation is unsuitable. Reasons for accommodation being deemed unsuitable include care leavers who are UASC and missing, young people declining to say where they are living or care leavers who are in prison.

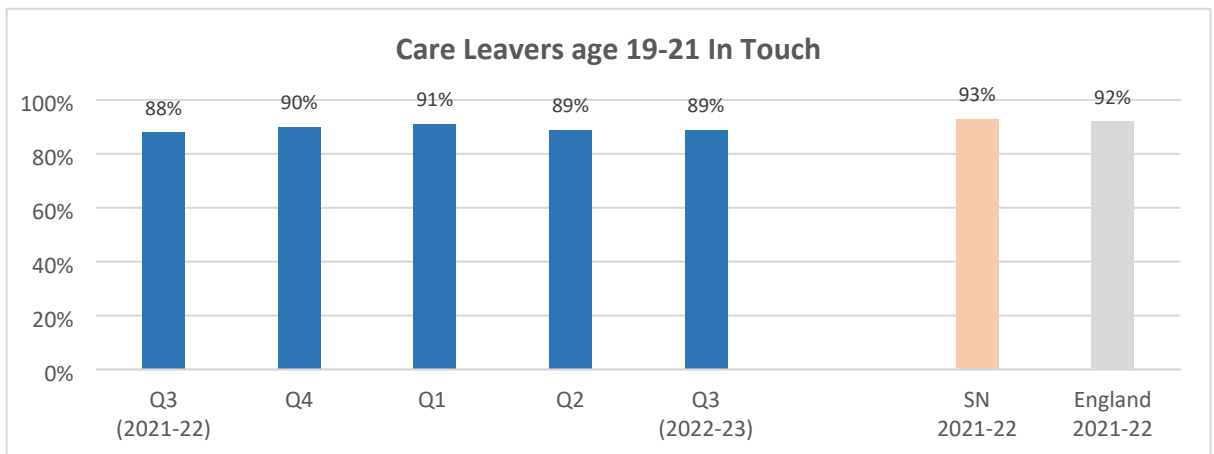
Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to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



### 7.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'

Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently.

At the end of Q2 2022-23, Thurrock was in touch with 89% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is marginally below the Statistical Neighbour average of 93% and the England average of 92% based on 2021-22 benchmarking data. The reason for the percentage that are not in touch is mainly due to the cohort of missing UASC.



**8. Consultation** (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

8.1 Not applicable

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

9.1 None

**10. Implications**

**10.1 Financial**

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

No implications

**10.2 Legal**

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

No implications identified.

**10.3 Diversity & Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**  
**Community Engagement and Project  
Monitoring Officer - Adults, Housing &  
Health**

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.

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

Not applicable

**11. 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

**12. Appendices to the report**

None

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