

Children's Social Care Performance 2023-24

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 Quarter 1 (April to June) 2023-24.

At the end of Q1 2023-24, 308 children were looked after by Thurrock Council, a further 279 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. Timeliness of Initial Health Assessment remains and area for improvement and focus with health partners.

Improving outcomes for Care Leavers remains an area of focus and development, particularly supporting young people to achieve independence and accessing education, employment and training.

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

1 Introduction and Background

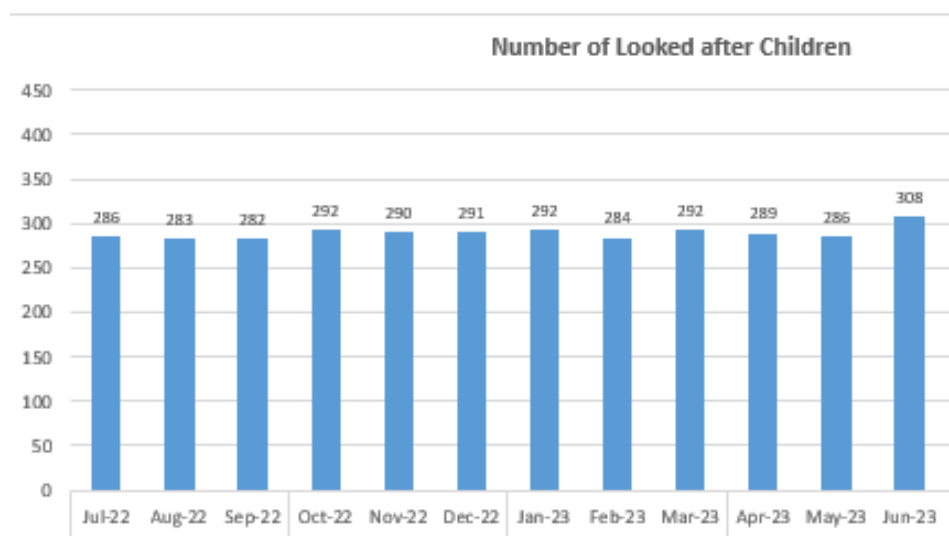
This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for children who are looked after and leaving care. It highlights key demand indicators for Children Looked After such as the number of children who are looked after, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

- 1.1 Thurrock produces a number of datasets 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.
- 1.2 This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.
- 1.3 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.

2. Performance Data for Children Looked After

2.1 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 292 in March 2023. The end of Quarter 1, as at end June 2023, saw an increase of 16 up to 308 Children in Care. During June 30 children entered care, of these 9 were UASC and the remainder entered care as the result of safeguarding action by Thurrock Council and its partners.



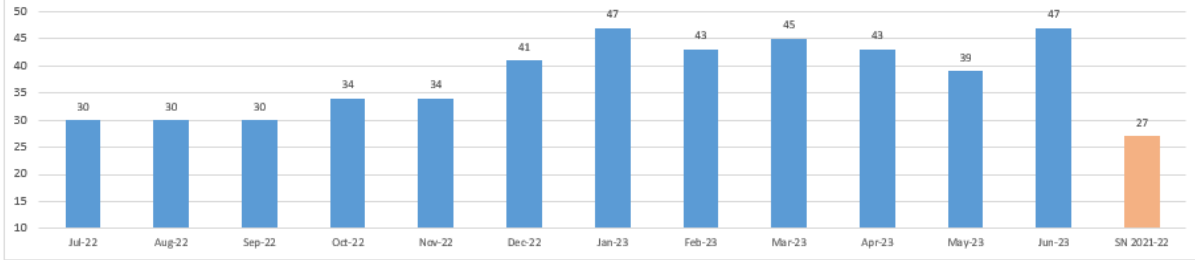
2.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of Thurrock's Children Looked After number. As an authority with ports of entry Thurrock has 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). Thurrock has quota of 44 children. This means that Thurrock has to accept transfers of UASC in the scheme if we are below 44 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. As at end June 23 Thurrock had 47 UASC children, three children were pending transfer.

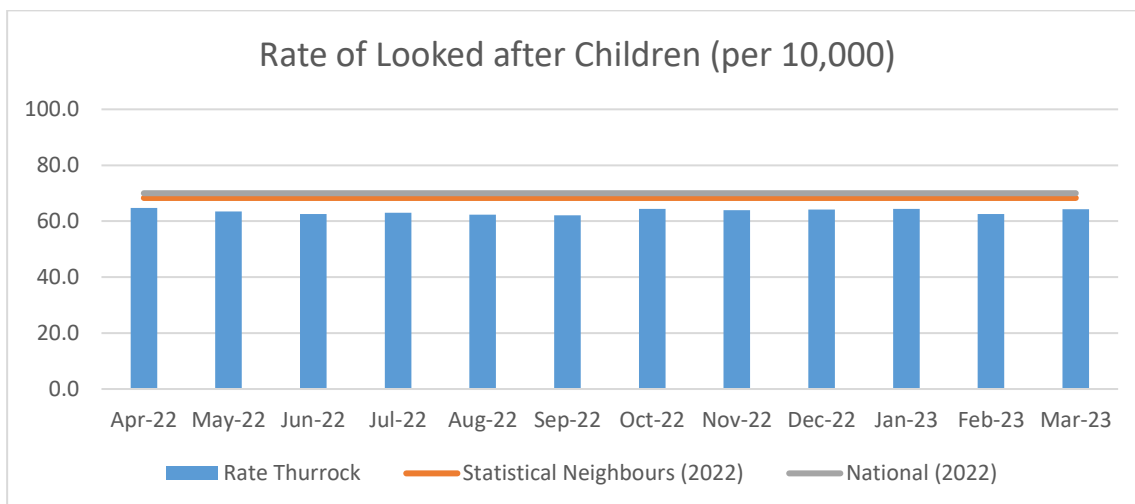
When a local authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS is operated by Central Government with the Home Office responsible for administration of the scheme.

The below graph shows the number of UASC that were looked after at the end of each month since July 2022.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children open at month end

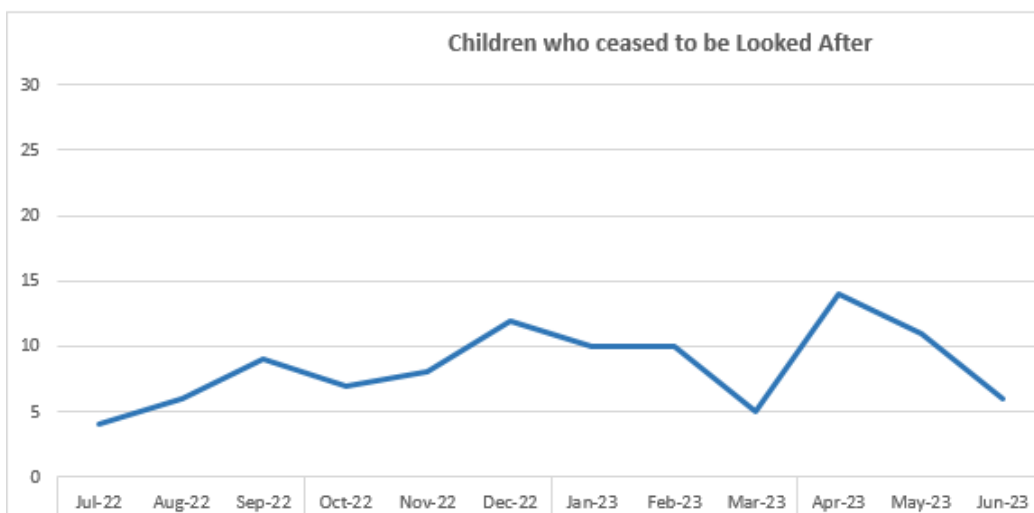


Children Looked After in Thurrock with the rate of 64.3 per 10,000. Based on the benchmarking data 2022, Thurrock is below the Statistical Neighbour average of 68.3 and England average of 70 as at the end of March 2023. This demonstrates the work throughout the service to make sure the right children 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. June's increase to 308 children in care, equates to 67.9 per 10,000 population, this remains below the statistical and national outturns stated above.



2.3 Children Looked After episodes ceased

It is normal for the number of children leaving care to fluctuate. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 97 children ceased to be looked after compared to 125 in the same period in 2021-22. During Q1 2023-2024 25 children ceased to be looked after.



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

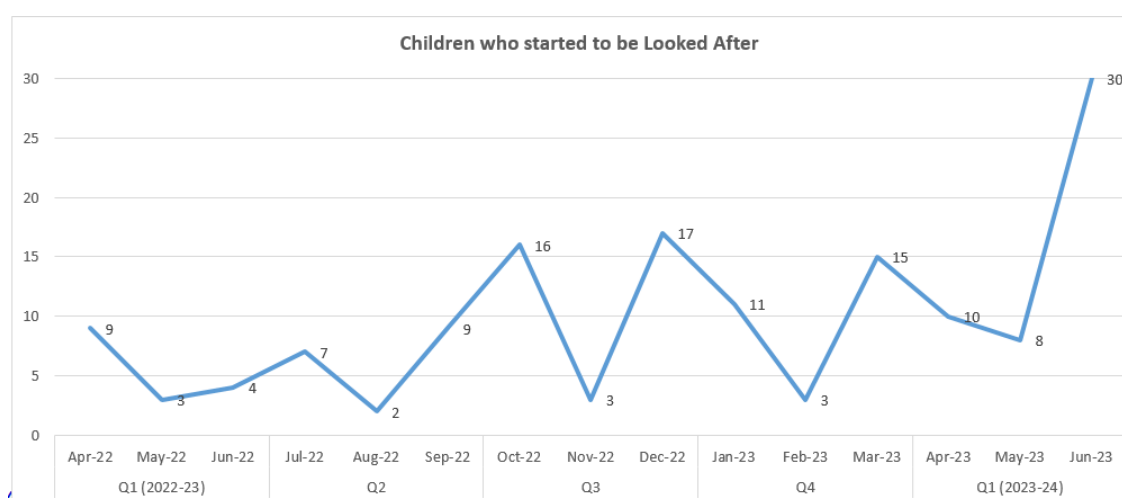
- Numbers of UASC who remain looked after by Thurrock

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 | Q4 2022-23 (Jan-Mar) | Q1 2023-24 (Apr-Jun) |
|--|------------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Total number Entering Care | 203 | 242 | 150 | 121 | 29 | 48 |
| UASC entering Care | 91 | 75 | 36 | 38 | 12 | 11 |
| Exiting Care | 211 | 235 | 148 | 122 | 25 | 31 |
| Number of CLA at end of reporting period | 290 | 298 | 298 | 295 | 292 | 308 |
| UASC Population at end of reporting period (% of CLA population) | 31 (10.6%) | 23 (7.7%) | 24 (8%) | 28 (9.4%) | 39 (13%) | 47 (15%) |

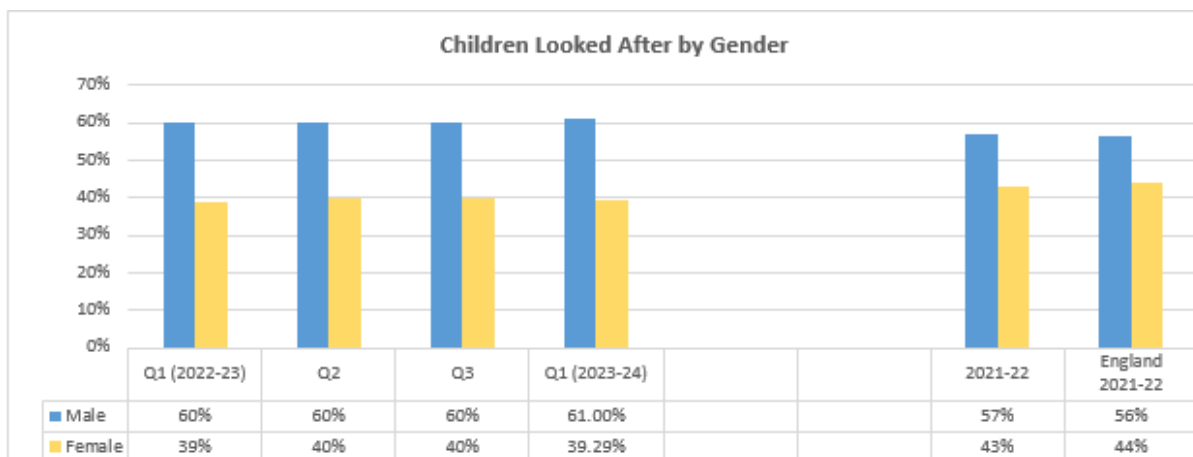
2.4 Children Looked After episodes started

It is normal for fluctuations to be seen with children starting episodes of care, this is shown by the graph below. There was however a sharp increase during June 2023 of 30 children starting an episode of care. The graph below demonstrates June was an exception month for the number of children entering care. This reflects 9 UASC children and the 21 other children reflects large sibling groups pushing up this number.



2.5 Children Looked After by Gender

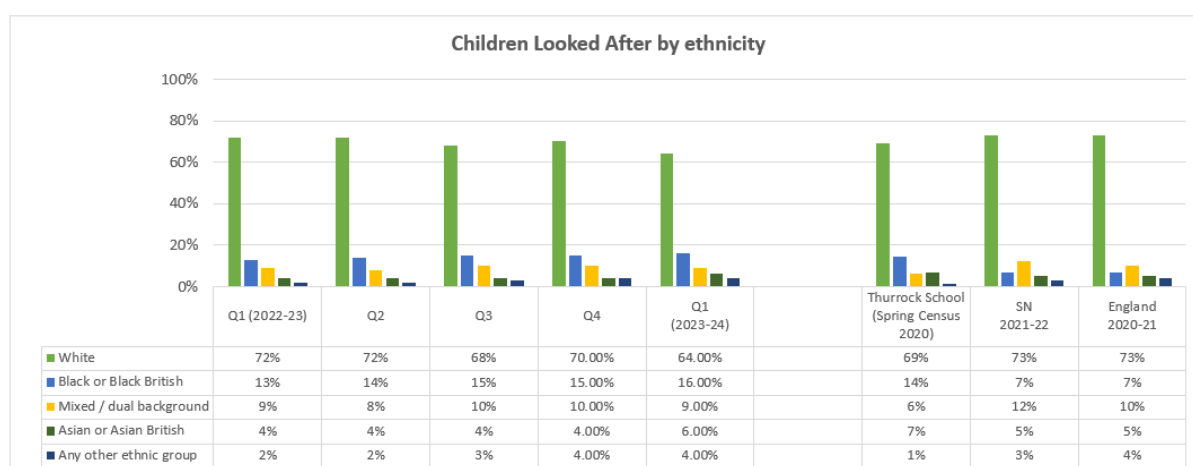
Based on the benchmarking data in 2021-22, the gender breakdown is slightly above Statistical Neighbours and England averages as of June 2023, which is likely a reflection of our percentage of UASC, who are predominately males.



2.6 Children Looked After by Ethnicity

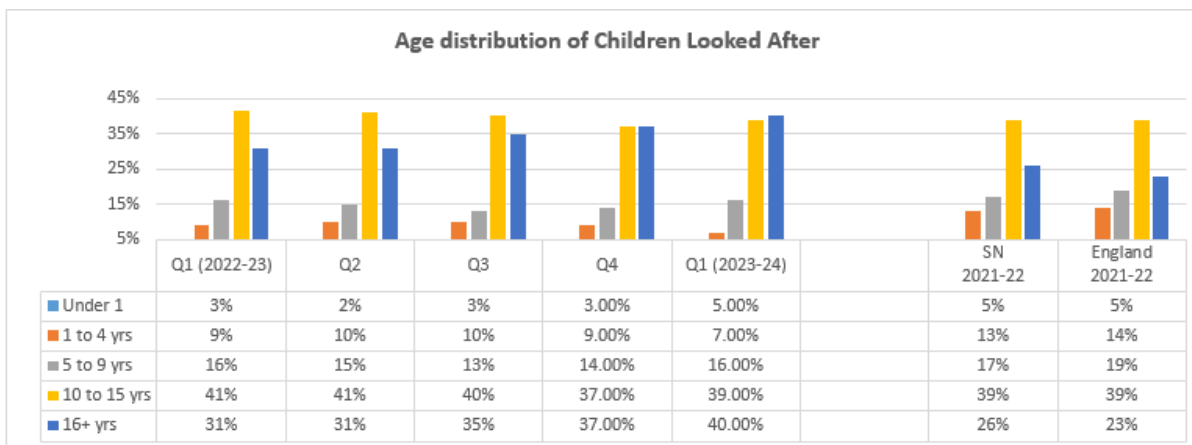
Statistical Neighbour and England averages are included. However, for Thurrock, school census data provides a more appropriate comparison, given the population of Thurrock.

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. Quarter 1 2023-24 outturn saw a slight increase in Black or Black British and Asia or Asian British, a slight decrease in Mixed/dual background and a 6% decrease in White ethnicity.



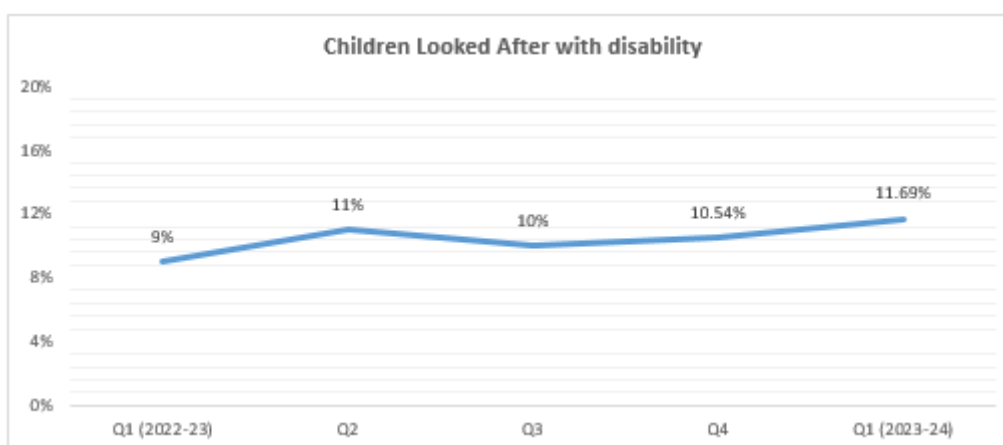
2.7 Children Looked After age profile

Based on the benchmarking data as of March 2023, the age profile of the Children Looked After cohort remains mostly stable and largely in line with the Statistical Neighbour and England averages. We are however, seeing a larger percentage in age group 16+ years a lower percentage in age group 1 to 4 years, when compared to both statistical neighbours and national outturns for 2022.



2.8 Children Looked After with a disability

The number of children looked after with a disability has remained relatively stable since April 2022. At the end of June 2023, 36 (11.69%) of the total CLA cohort were recorded as having a disability. Approximately two thirds of those children are male. 69% of those disabled children were placed within 20 miles or less from their home.

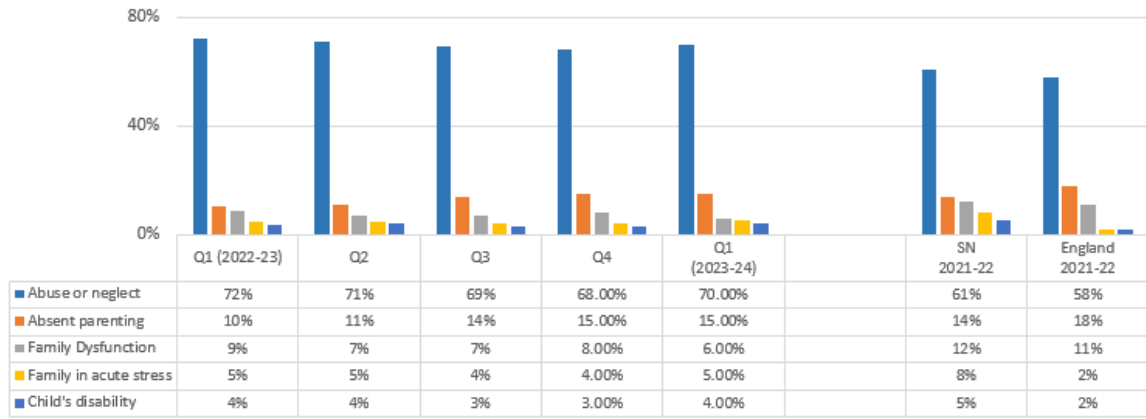


2.9 Children Looked After by Primary Need

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.

The table below shows the primary need indicated for the child to be in care. Thurrock has a higher percentage recorded as 'Abuse or Neglect' and lower percentage recorded as 'Family Dysfunction' than statistical neighbours and national benchmarks; this is in line with previous quarters.

Children Looked After by primary need



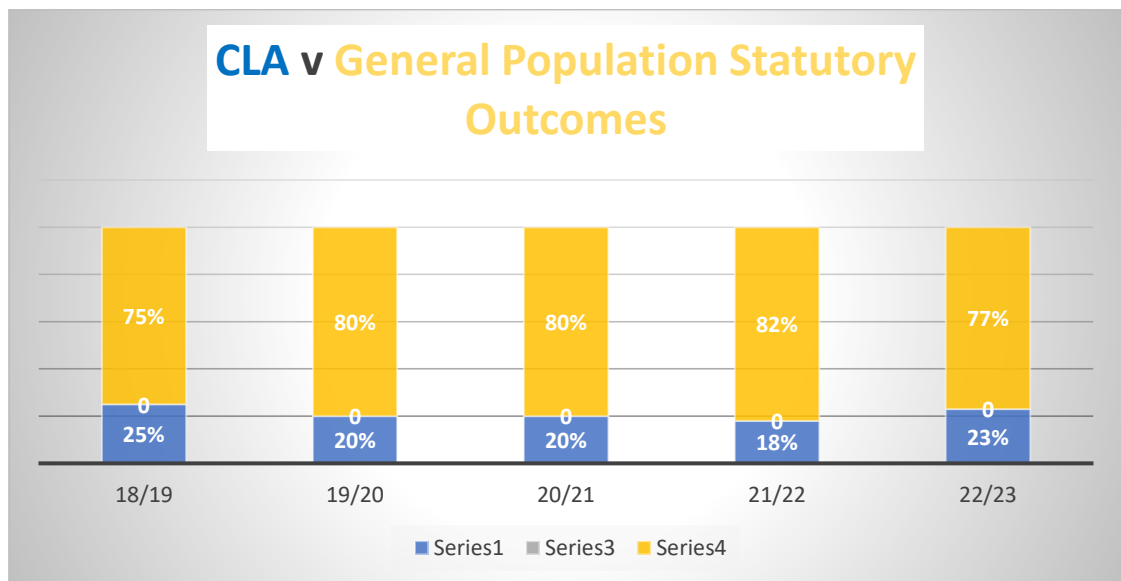
Number of CLA open to the Youth Offending Service (YOS)

3.1 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.

For the first quarter of 2023/24 there were 8 children open to the Youth Offending Service on statutory outcomes, 2 of these were looked after children at the start of their intervention. The 2 looked after children represented 25% of the young people open to YOS, however the numbers are low so this will affect the percentages.

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. There has been a slight increase since the last financial year but overall, the figure has remained relatively static.

3.2 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.

No children were made subject to Youth Detention Accommodation during the first quarter of 2023/24. However, we currently have 1 young person subject to Youth Detention Accommodation. This young person was CLA prior to the Remand in custody.

3.3 Out of court disposal panel

During the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year the out of court disposal panel dealt with 11 offences relating to 11 Thurrock children, of which no children had looked after status.

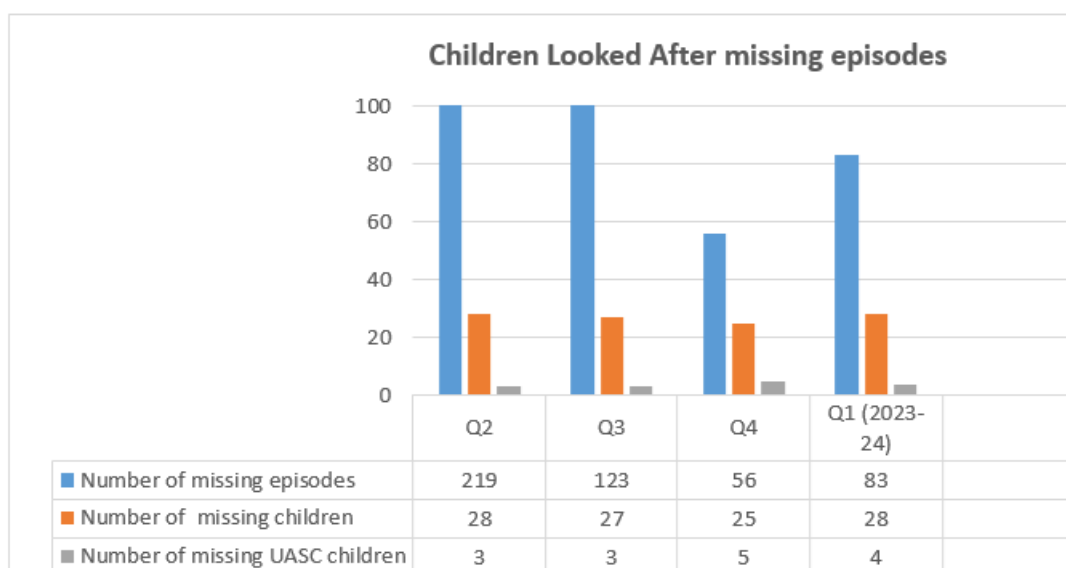
Thurrock YOS and Essex Police are committed to the national protocol¹ aimed at reducing the criminalisation of Children Looked After. This approach will be supported with a local pan-Essex protocol to ensure there is a focus on diverting any child (where possible) who is Looked After from the Criminal Justice System.

4. 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 April 2022 and June 2023. The most common reasons for children going missing is that they have stayed out past their expected return home time with friends or are with their families.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, there were total of 492 missing episodes which represented 50 individual children. This is a reduction on the previous year when there were a total of 566 episodes.

During Quarter 1, April to June 2023 there were a total of 83 missing episodes which represented 28 individual children, 4 of which were UASC.



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 return home time. 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 periods away from placement.

4.1 Children Looked After return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub were commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing episode, 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.

During Quarter 1, April to June 2023 there were a total of 83 missing episodes which represented 28 individual children, 4 of which were UASC. The below chart shows the trend for missing episodes since Q2 2022-23.

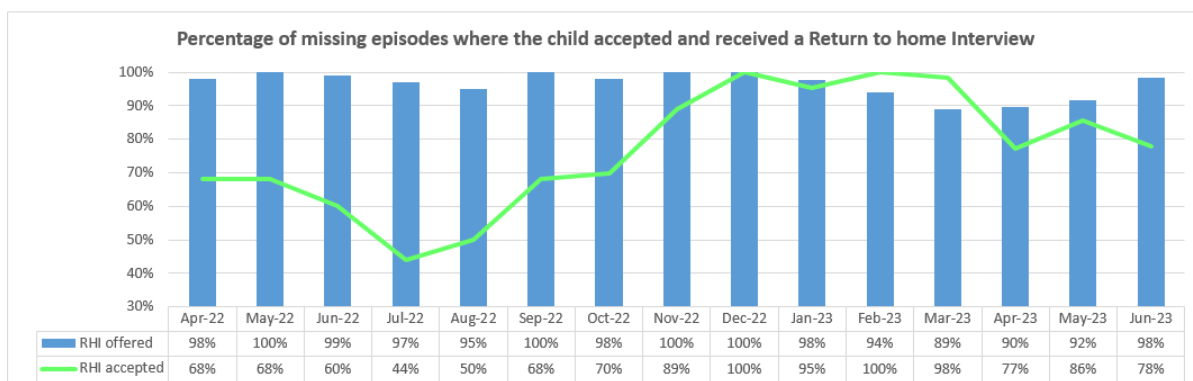
Many of the children are missing for a few hours and have stayed out later than their agreed return time. Over 90% of the children and young people were staying with friends, or family. The others have refused to say where they have been, or who with. Over 80% of the children that went missing were aged 16 and 17 years old, with the majority being male young people. The youngest children were aged 13 years and there were 2 children that went missing of that age. With 1 aged 14 and 2 aged 15 years. 12 children went missing for more than 24 hours, with all but one recorded as missing over 72 hours.

As at the end of June 2023, the percentage of children offered a return to home interview was 98% of which 78% accepted and received an interview compared to 60% in June 2022. The offer of an RHI 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 Missing Children Panel.

The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people since April 2022 and shows, in the main, 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 they 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

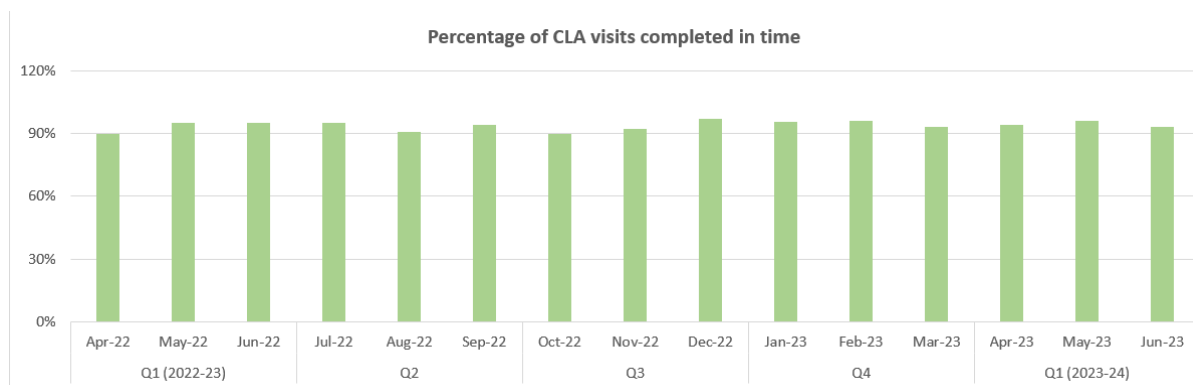
opportunities to share whether there are any safeguarding issues in relation to exploitation that needs to be addressed.

From April 01 2023, the RHI Service transferred from Inspire to an 'In House' provision via the CE and Missing Team. The interviews for these posts have taken place and the successful candidates will start in October. Allocated Social Workers, the Think Family Service and the CE and Missing Team are under return home interviews in the interim.



4.2 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 April 2022 and March 2023 was 94% compared to 91% in 2021/22 representing a 3% increase. During Q1 2023-24 95.5% of visits were completed in timescale.



4.3 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.

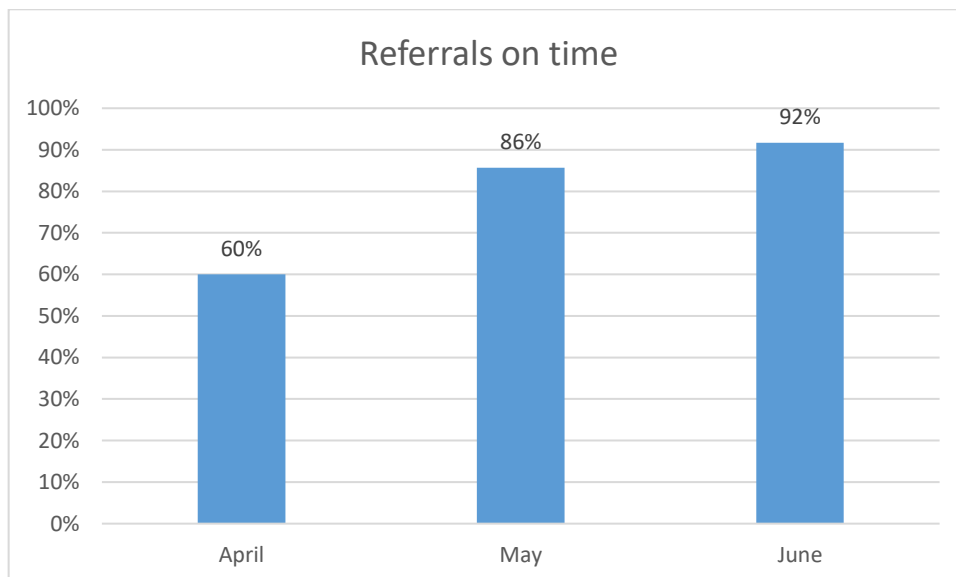
Notifications for an IHA cannot be progressed if parents have not provided consent for medical treatment and there is no court order which gives the Local Authority shared parental responsibility for consenting to health care. There is a weekly IHA tracking meeting to focus on meeting the need for children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

4.4 Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children

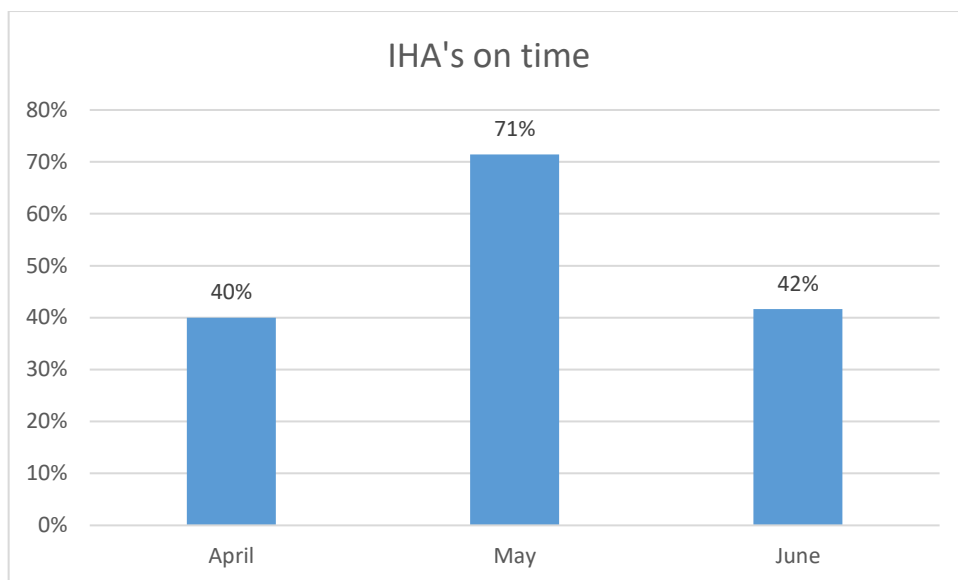
The numbers of IHA requests required each month can be small and therefore fluctuations can be impacted on by very small numbers. The following table sets out the number of children who became looked after to Thurrock Council and those who remained in Thurrock's care long enough for an IHA to be required.

| | April | May | June |
|---------------------------|-------|-----|------|
| Number entering care | 10 | 8 | 30 |
| In care less than 28 days | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Children Requiring an IHA | 10 | 7 | 24 |

The following chart sets out the percentage of IHA referrals that were completed on time



The following Chart sets out the Initial health assessments that were completed on time



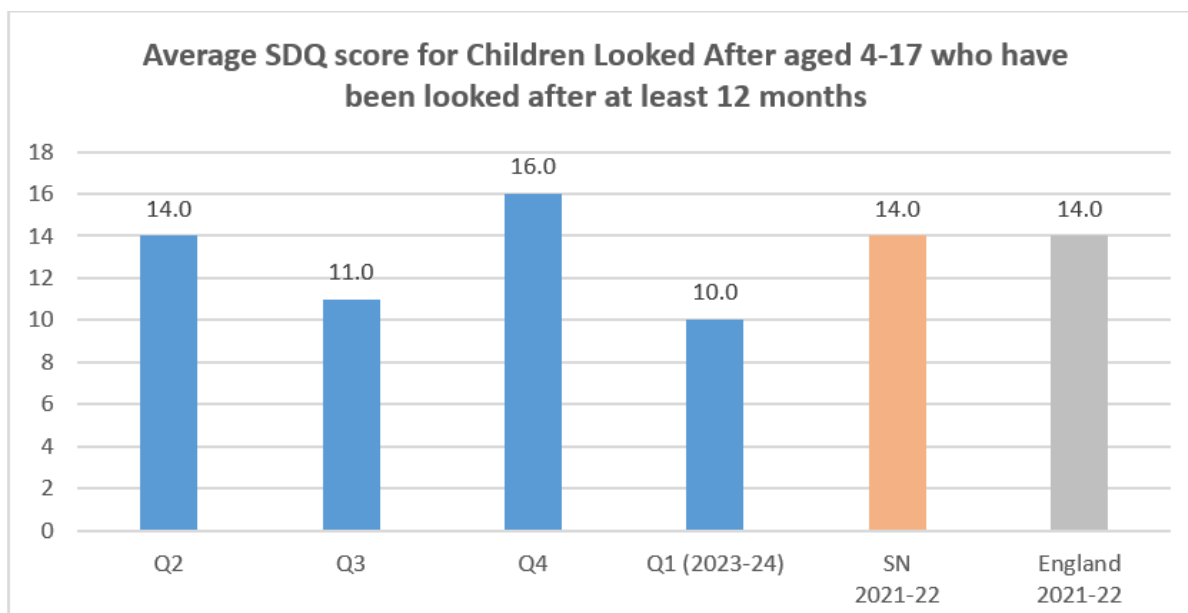
The effect of additional 'in area' capacity can be seen in some improved performance. This capacity is only available in the NELF area and when children are placed outside of this area there is still limited capacity affecting the timeliness of IHA's.

4.5 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 for Quarter 1 2023-24 are 10.0 which is below our Statistical Neighbour and National benchmarks, but in line with Quarter 3 2022-23. The mental wellbeing of Children Looked After is being appropriately reviewed, with support and intervention provided as necessary.



5. Adoption

As at the end of Q1 2023-24, there were 1 child was adopted and 5 children were placed with prospective adopters.

5.1 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 3 year rolling average, it is the length of time from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family adjusted for foster carer adoptions, for children who have been adopted (days), as at end of Quarter 1 2023-24 was 498 days; this is an improvement on March 23 position of 560 days.

Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is above the National average of 397 days and the Statistical Neighbour average of 435 days, 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.

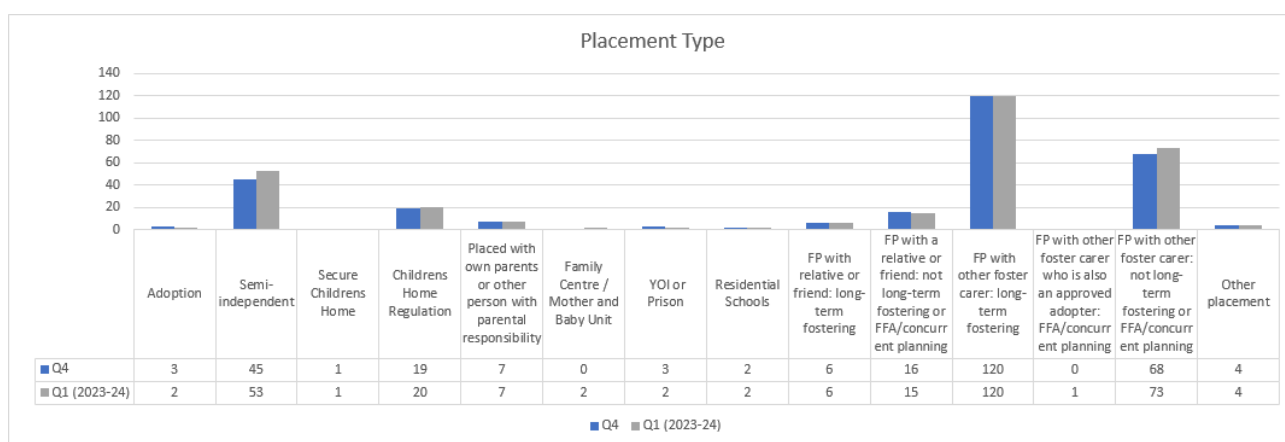
As at Q1 2023-24, the average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to an adoptive family (3 year average) is 177 days, this is slightly higher than March 2023 average of 106 but an improved position on March 2022, which was 265 days. Based on 2021-22 benchmarking data, Thurrock is below the National average of 196 days.

5.2 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 June 2023, 72% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed within 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 223 out of 308 children looked after. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in March 2022, the national average for those placed 20 or more miles from their home was 16% and statistical neighbours was 21.8%, so at 28% Thurrock is currently above those.

The chart below provides a breakdown by placement type as at end of Quarter 2 2022-23 and Quarter 1 2023-24.



6.0 Care Leaving Service

The table below shows 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 their 25th birthday if required.

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.

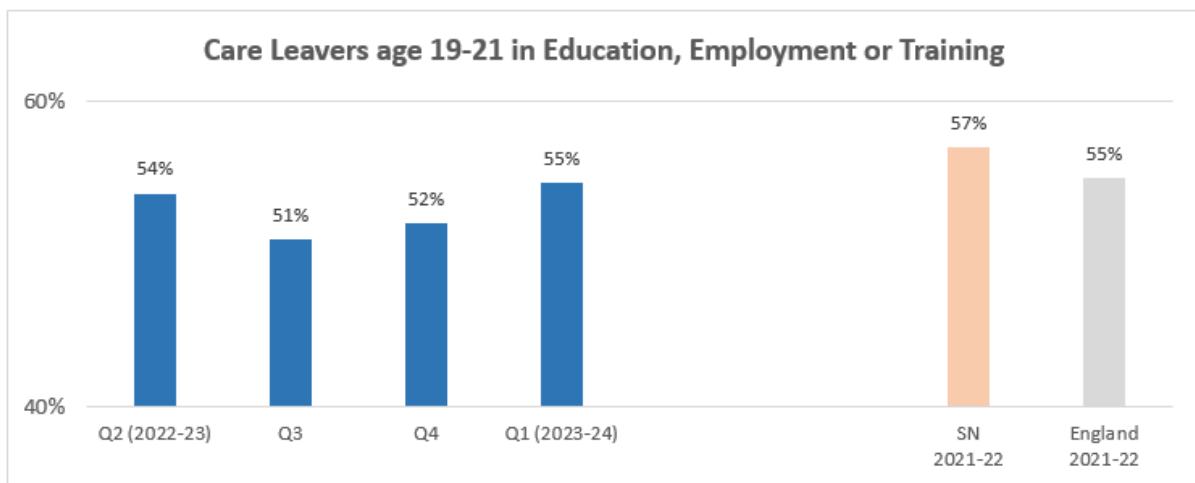
As at end of June 2023, 279 Care Leavers who were relevant or former relevant were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups:

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

| Care Leaver Age | Total | % |
|-----------------|-------|----|
| 16 | 1 | 0 |
| 17-18 | 53 | 19 |
| 19-21 | 144 | 52 |
| 22-25 | 81 | 29 |
| | 279 | |

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

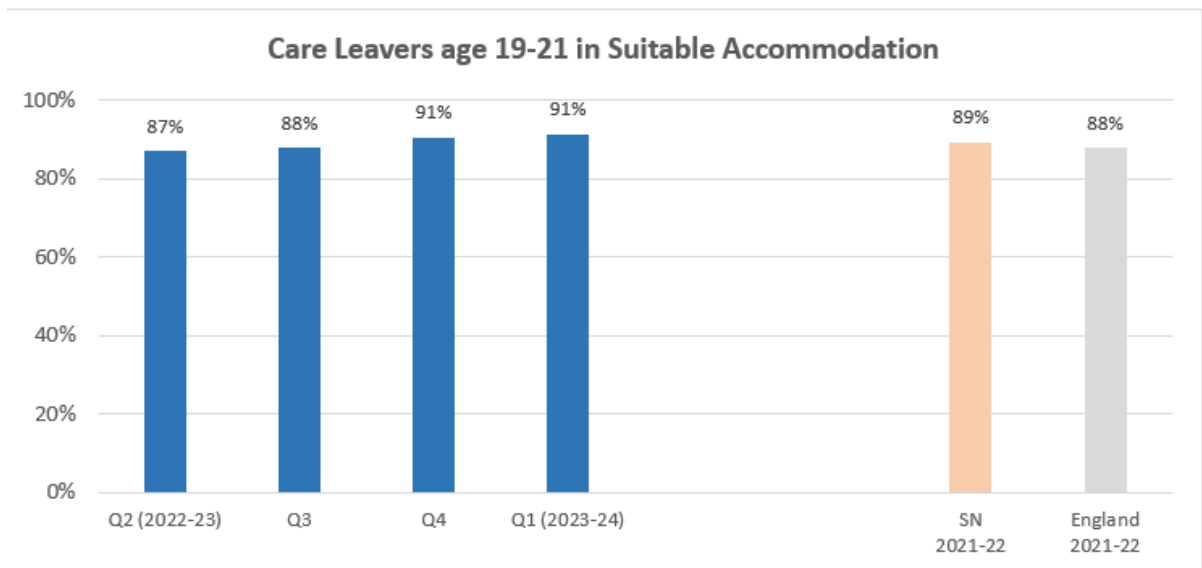
At the end of Q3 2023-24, 55% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21-year-old were in part or full-time education, employment or training compared to 52% at the end of March 23 September, which brings Thurrock in more line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 57% and the England average of 55%. To strengthen 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.



6.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

Q1 2023-24 shows that the percentage of 19 to 21-year-old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation is 91%. Thurrock is marginally above the Statistical Neighbour average of 89% 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 not in touch with the service or 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.



6.3 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 Q1 2023-24, Thurrock was in touch with 95% of Care Leavers, this is a 5% improvement on March 23 outturn of 90%. Thurrock’s performance is now above 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.

