Thurrock Council

Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2030



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Foreword

“Every child deserves a stable loving home that meets their needs up to adulthood and beyond. Every 'placement' is a child's home, their place for comfort and family life. In Thurrock, we recognise that the national sufficiency of placements has changed since our last Strategy and so has our approach.

Our vision is still to supply sufficient high-quality homes for children and young people that encourages their aspirations and ambitions and can support them to fulfil their potential. We aspire for our Care Leavers to have all the necessary skills and support they need to make the successful transition to adulthood and independence at a time that is right for them and tailored to their unique individual circumstances’’.

Janet Simon, Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help

“Vulnerable children are being failed – this should never be allowed. If we wouldn’t allow it for our own children, we cannot allow it to happen to the children for whom the state is their corporate parent.”

Rachel de Souza, Children’s Commissioner on the use of unsuitable placements.

Children Looked After Population March 2025

276 Children Looked After
6.2% have 3 or more placements
29% are placed more than 20 miles from home
38.2% of children in care have an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan)
43 are children with a disability

Age	Length of time in placement	Ethnicity
• 0-4: 17.4% • 5-11: 22.8% • 12-15: 32.6% • 16-17: 27.2%	• 0 - <1 yrs: 51.3% • 1 - < yrs: 20.2% • 2 - <3 yrs: 7.6% • 3 - <4 yrs: 5.1% • 4 - <5 yrs: 7.9% • 5+ yrs: 7.9%	• White: 74.6% • Black or Black British: 15.2% • Asian or Asian British: 4.7% • Mixed/Dual Background: 4.3% • Any other Ethnic Group: 1.2%

Care Leavers Population March 2025

273 Care Leavers
101 previously UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children)

Age	Number in age group	In touch	Suitable accommodation	EET (Education, Employment or Training)
17-18 years	70	95.7%	92.9%	68.5%
19-21 years	151	97.4%	96%	47.7%
22-25 years	50	96%	92%	40.7%

Purpose

This strategy supports everyone involved in improving outcomes for children and young people in Thurrock. The needs analysis builds a clear understanding of the profile and needs of Children Looked After (CLA), identifying strengths and gaps in accommodation and support to inform commissioning priorities and strategic planning.

Our aim is to ensure services are safe, inclusive and focused on achieving positive outcomes for every child and young person, while meeting our statutory 'sufficiency duty' under the Children Act 1989 to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, enough suitable homes within our area.

What is "sufficiency"?

Sufficiency means making sure every child has the right home, in the right place, at the right time.

It is not just about having enough homes - it is about having the right types of homes and being able to match each child to the setting that best meets their needs. Living in the right home is essential for stability, development and the journey to independence. As corporate parents, the council must plan so that our children have the homes and support they need, when they need them.

The Legal Framework

The Sufficiency Duty, Section 22G The Children Act (1989) requires Local Authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the Authority's area boundaries which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the Local Authority's area ('the sufficiency duty').

The statutory guidance of securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children states: Having the right home in the right place, at the right time, is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to better outcomes for looked after children. Duties towards that relate to the Sufficiency Duty, include:

Section 17 - to supply a range of services to children in need and their families which can appropriately meet their needs.

Section 20 - to supply accommodation for children in need where they are assessed as requiring this

Section 21 - to accommodate children who are removed from their family to safeguard them.

Section 22 requires the local authority to give preference to placing with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child who is also a local authority foster parent. Section 22 has added considerations when deciding on the most appropriate placement (not in order of priority)

Legal duties summarised

- Proximity to the child's home.
- Avoiding disruption of education.
- Where possible, placing the child with a sibling.
- To meet the specific needs of disabled children.
- Provision of accommodation within the local authority area where practical to do so.

Local Context

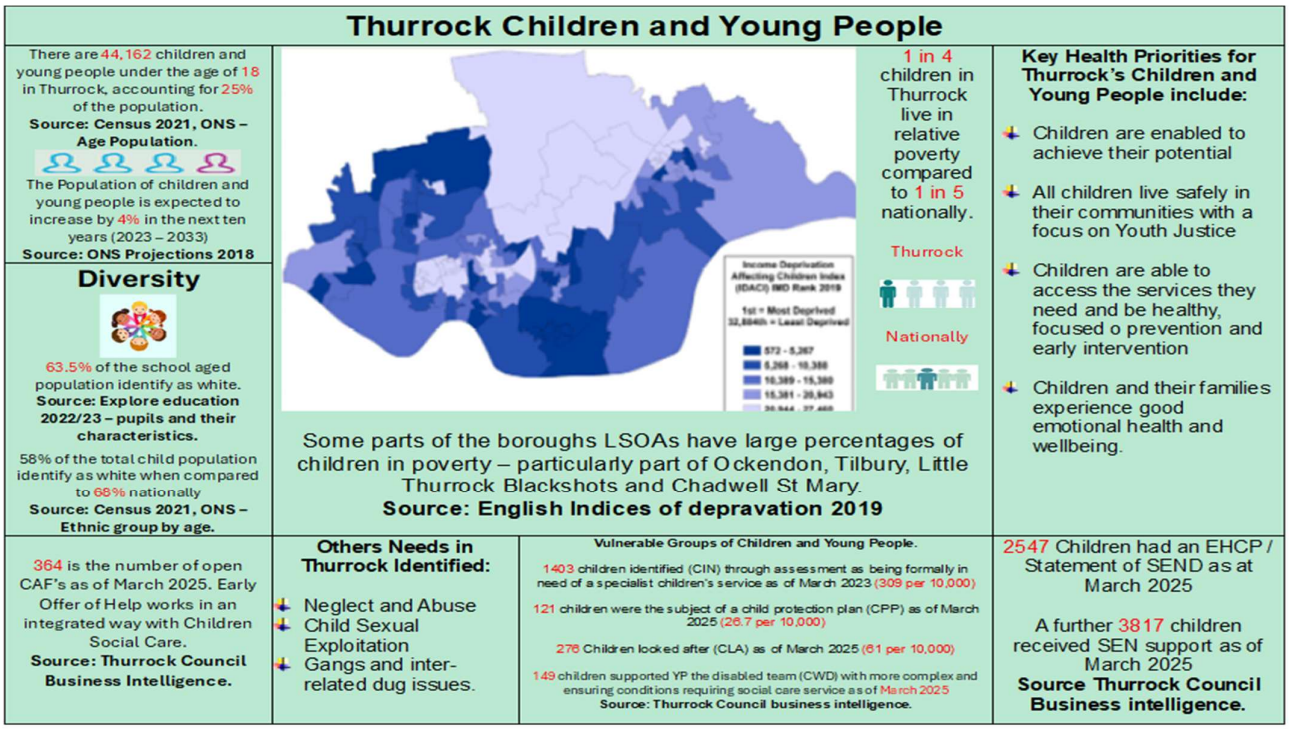
62 Children in care per 10,000 children
29% of Children in care live over 20 miles from their home
59% of Children in care are male
11% of children looked after are UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeker children)

Unlike the national trends, we rely on care less than we had done previously and less often than our statistical neighbours. Projections suggest this rate could continue to decline. We know that this is in contrast with the national trend and is as a result of our strong focus on early identification and support for families.

Though we are seeing fewer children in care, we continue to face challenges in securing sufficient and appropriate homes to meet or children's individual needs. More children than the national average live over 20 miles from home and though this is impacted by the small size of the borough, it shows that more needs to be done to ensure our children are in the right home, in the right place.

Most of our children in care are male and aged 10-15 with a growing amount of children 16+. Overall Placements are stable however those who have 3+ placements are aged 0-2 or 14+.

We are supporting 100 former UASC who are now care leavers, reflecting their progress into adulthood. The number of current and former UASC is influenced by Thurrock's geographic location and the presence of Tilbury Docks as a key point of arrival, highlighting both the challenges and the vital role we play in providing safety, stability and opportunities for these young people.



NB: LSOAs refers to Lower Layer Super Output Areas which are small areas used for statistical Reporting.

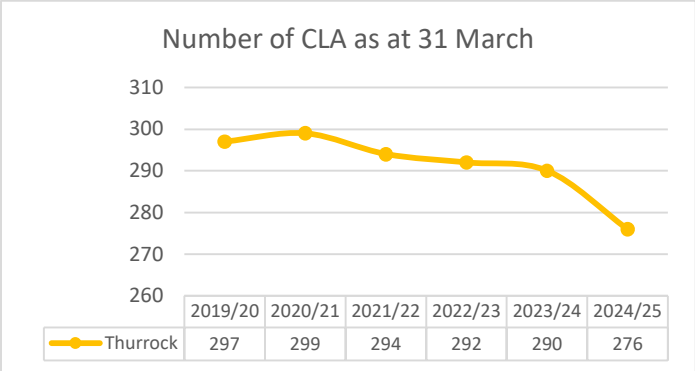
CAF refers to the Common Assessment Framework which is the tool used to work out what support may be needed for the child or family

Summary Needs Analysis

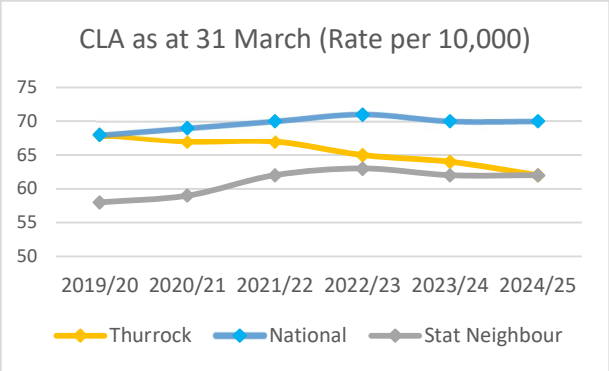
Most of Thurrock's children live in foster care, which mirrors the national picture. Nationally, 72% of children in care are with foster carers. In Thurrock, the figure is slightly higher at 73.19%, reflecting the strength of our in-house fostering service, alongside our ability to source homes through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) where needed.

Number of Children Looked After (CLA)

At the end of 2024/25, Thurrock had 276 children looked after (CLA) and 62 children in care per 10,000 population. This marks a 2% decrease from the previous year and continues a sustained downward trend dating back to 2019. Thurrock's current rate stays below that of our statistical neighbours, showing a consistently lower reliance on care. Since 2019, the total number of looked after children in Thurrock has been broadly stable, fluctuating between 290 and 300 until 2025, when the number of UASC entering Thurrock care began to decline and this is reflected in the overall current number of Looked After Children.

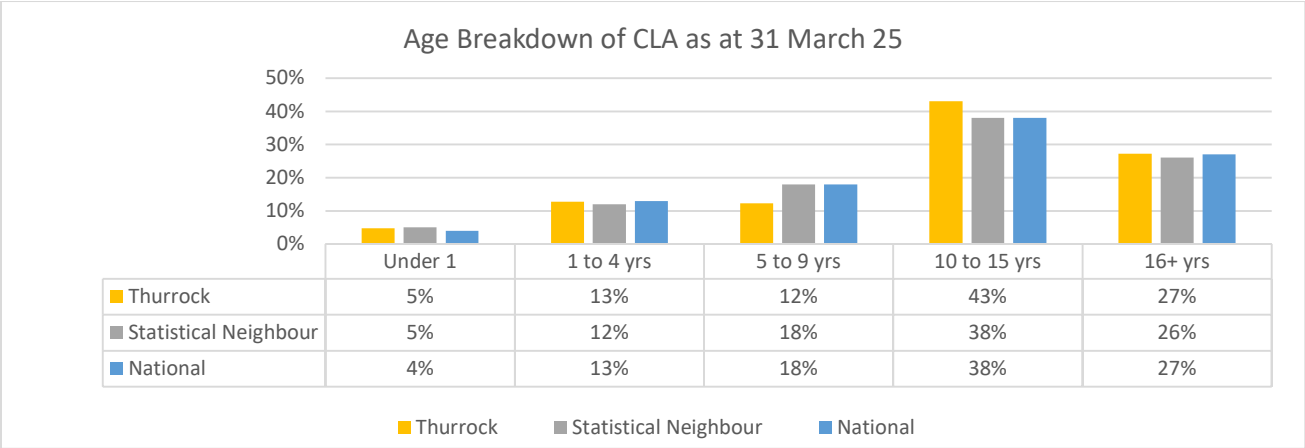


	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Thurrock	297	299	294	292	290	276



Age of Thurrock's Children Looked After

The age profile of Thurrock's Children Looked After (CLA) is broadly in line with the national picture. However, we have a slightly lower proportion of children aged 5 to 9, and a higher proportion aged 10 to 15. This provides us with an opportunity to strengthen the way we support teenagers in care. It highlights the importance of ensuring that our foster homes are well-equipped to meet the needs of older children and young people and we continue to prioritise stability so they can remain with their foster carers, wherever possible, through to independence.

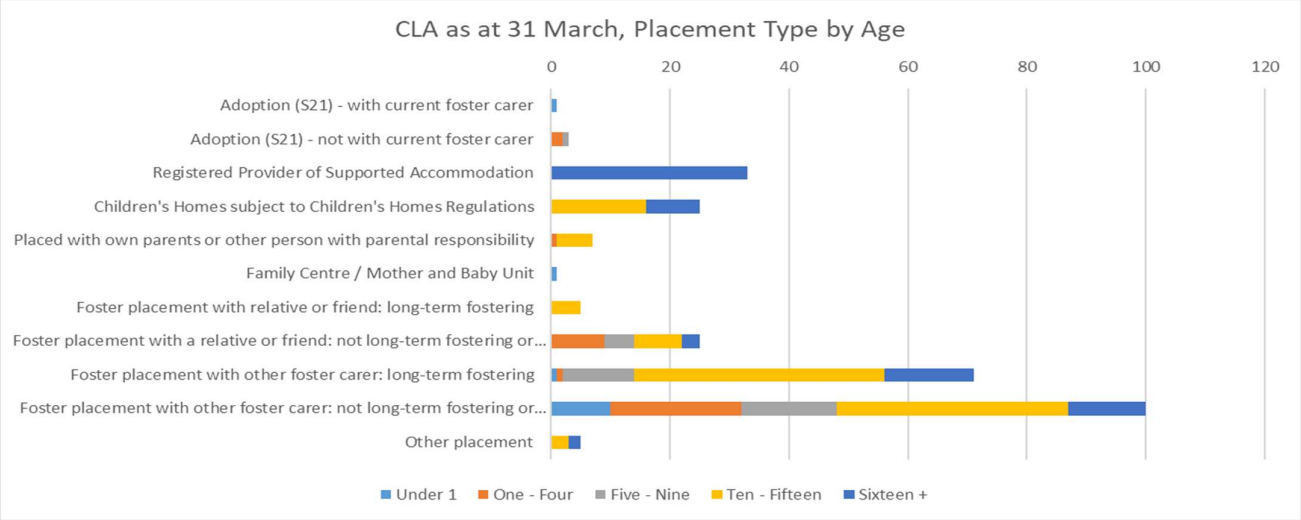


	Under 1	1 to 4 yrs	5 to 9 yrs	10 to 15 yrs	16+ yrs
Thurrock	5%	13%	12%	43%	27%
Statistical Neighbour	5%	12%	18%	38%	26%
National	4%	13%	18%	38%	27%

Placement Types

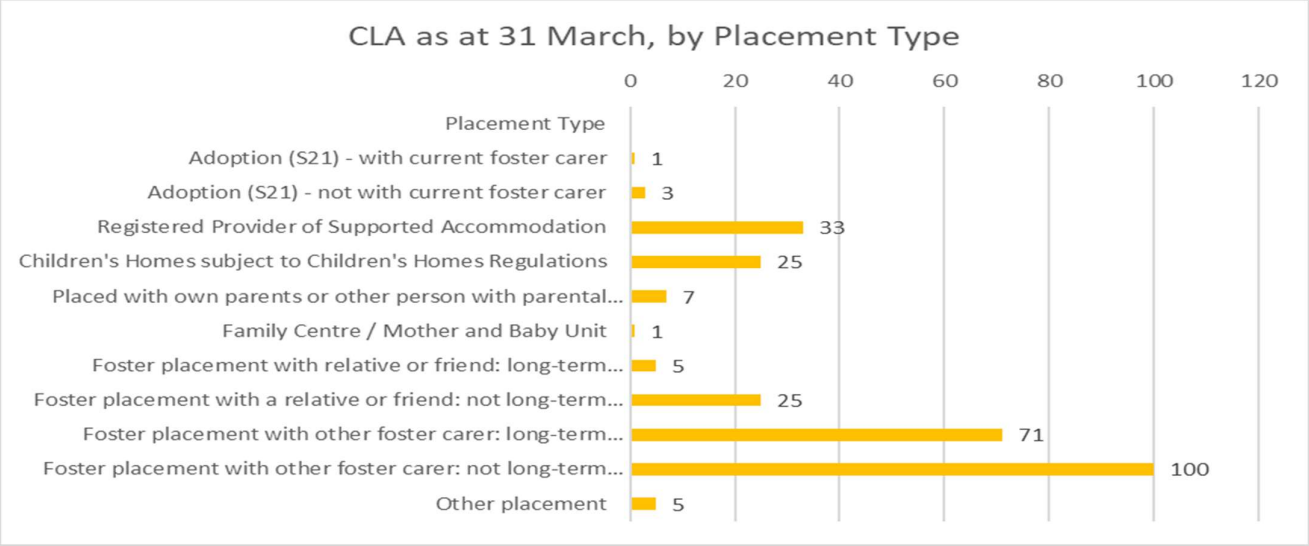
The majority of Thurrock's Children Looked After live in foster homes, which is consistent with the national trend. Across England, 72% of children in care are placed with foster carers, while in Thurrock the figure is slightly higher at 73.19%. Of this total, 10.87% of children are placed in kinship foster care.

On 31 March 2025, among those not in kinship placements, 46.51% were living with in-house foster carers and 53.49% with Independent Foster Associations (IFA).



The graph highlights sufficiency pressures within looked after system. Children in short-term foster placements (U3) is predominantly related to children in care proceedings, the notable use of regulated settings such as supported accommodation and children's homes highlight a shortfall in stable, long-term family-based care options leading to the reliance on temporary and specialist provisions, which may not always align with children's long-term needs.

There is a clear need for strategic commissioning to expand placement capacity, targeted recruitment of long-term foster carers and investment in wraparound support services.

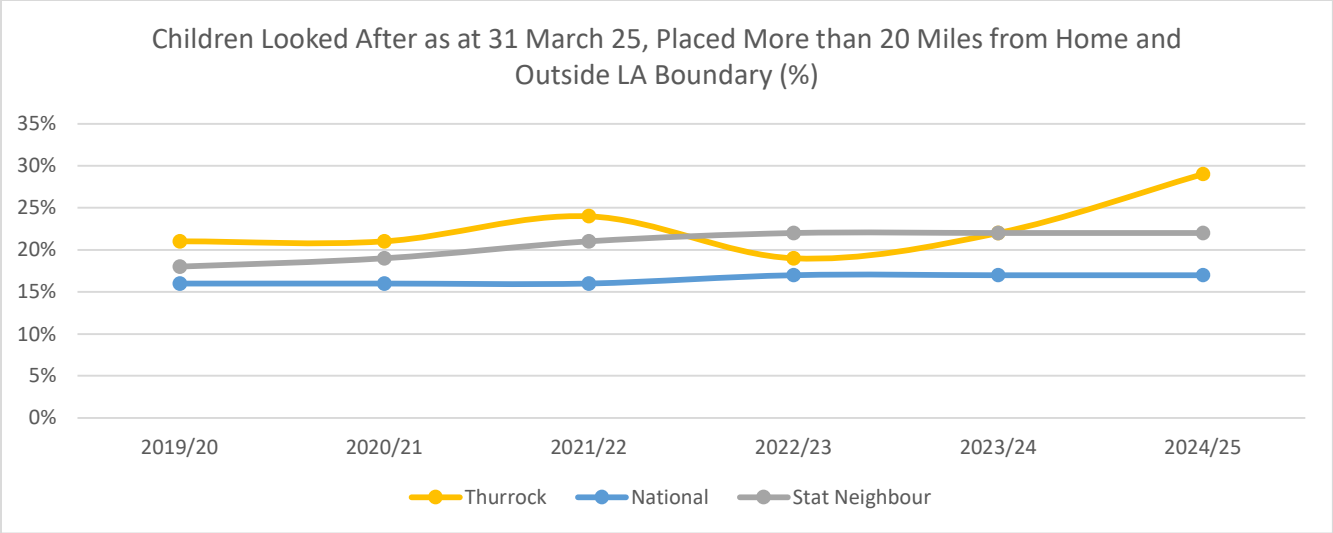


Out-of-borough and distant placements

Thurrock places more children out-of-borough and over 20 miles from home than the national average and statistical neighbours. Given our small geographical footprint, some out-of-area placements are expected, however, this also reflects a shortfall in local provision that meets the specific needs of our children.

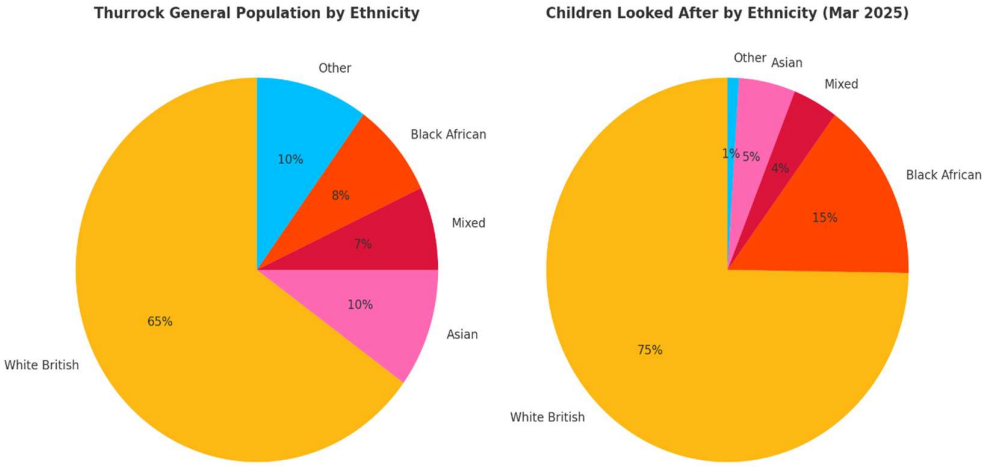
There are 170 children's home beds within a 20-mile radius of Thurrock Civic Offices, many children are placed further afield. This indicates scope to strengthen strategic local commissioning and better align provision with demand.

In response, Thurrock will work with providers throughout 2025 to improve local sufficiency. This includes block contracts and prioritising Thurrock-based carers for Thurrock children, helping more children stay closer to home.



Ethnicity

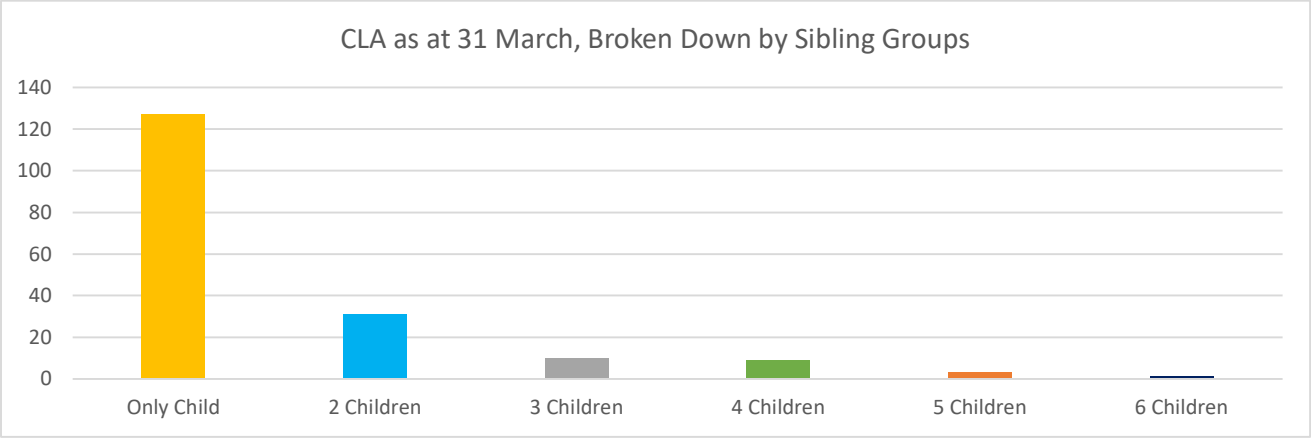
In Thurrock, we recognise that some communities - such as Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and children from Black Ethnic backgrounds are proportionally more represented in care in Thurrock. These patterns reflect national trends and may be influenced by a range of social and economic factors. We are committed to exploring these dynamics further to ensure our services are fair, culturally responsive and anti-discriminatory.



Sibling groups

As of March 2025, most children in Thurrock's care are placed individually (127), with large sibling groups entering care less frequently, when they do, finding suitable homes can be more complex.

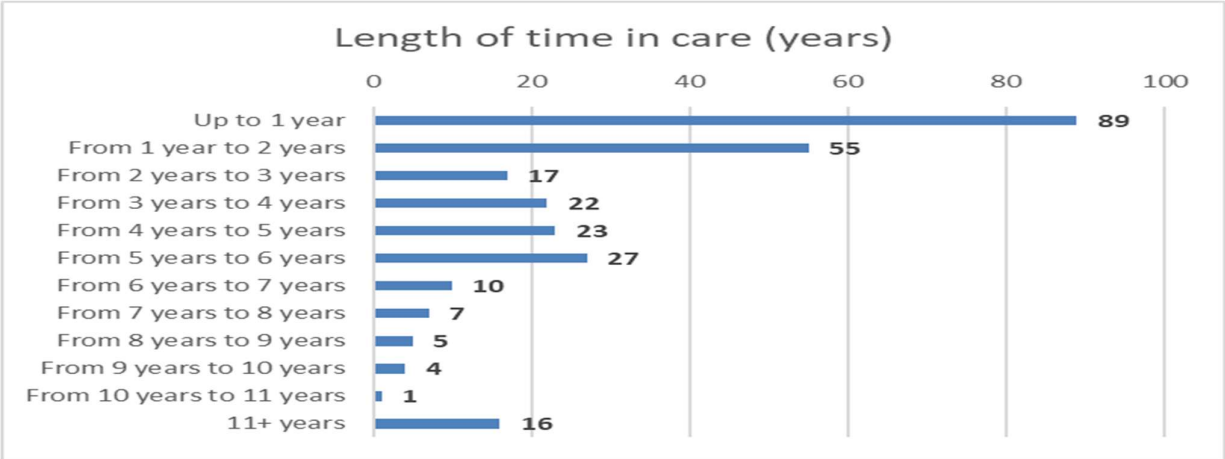
In rare cases, siblings have been separated due to limited placement options rather than assessed needs. We are working to broaden placement availability, this includes a strong commitment to maintaining sibling relationships wherever possible, recognising the critical role these bonds play in emotional stability and long-term wellbeing.



Duration in care and permanence planning

Most children in Thurrock enter care for under a year, with 31% reunified with parents—showing positive progress. A smaller group remains in long-term care, highlighting the need for strong planning and support.

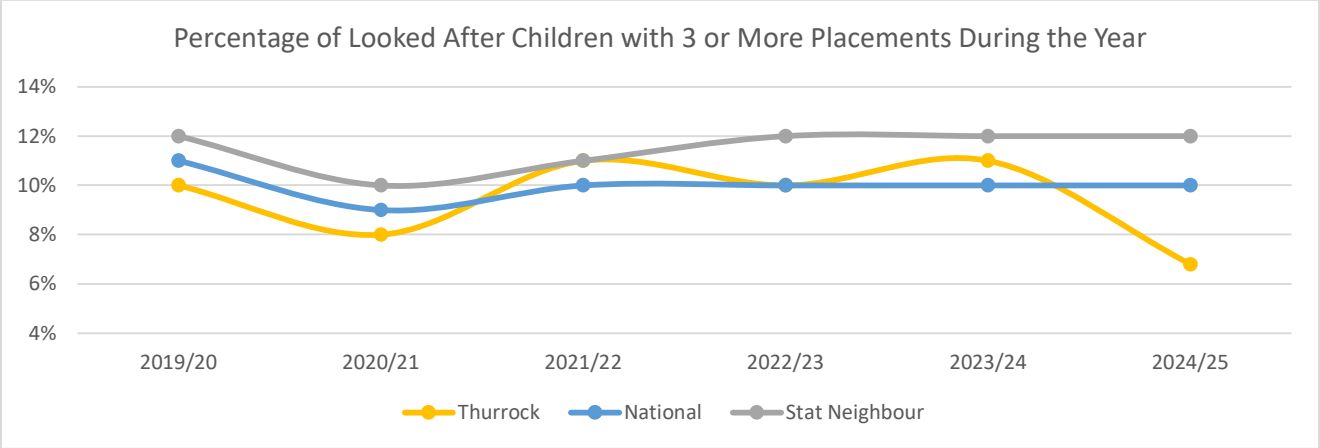
The average time in care is 38 months, above the national average, requiring sustained resources. Ofsted (2024) has praised Thurrock's permanence planning and we continue to promote stable outcomes through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAO).



Placement stability

Placement Stability in Thurrock remains strong, with only 6.2% of children (18) experiencing three or more placements—below national and regional averages. Children with multiple moves tend to be aged 0–2, or 12–17. Work is underway to better understand and respond to their needs through targeted commissioning. Thurrock performs well on long-term stability, supported by strong matching and permanence planning. As Ofsted noted: ***"Achieving permanence for children at the earliest opportunity is an absolute priority in Thurrock."***

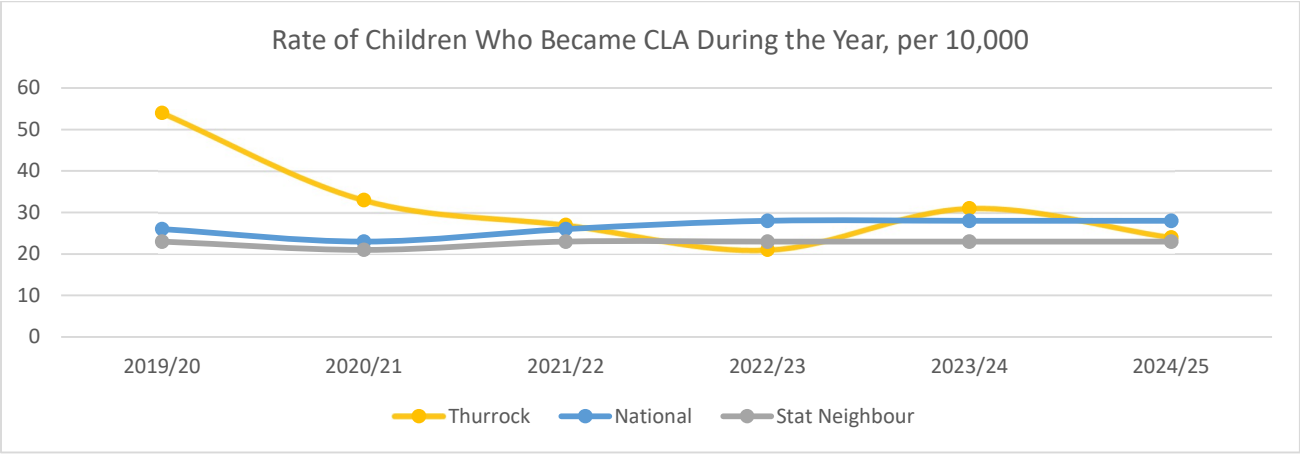
Rising external placement costs highlight the need for continued investment in local provision and strategic commissioning to ensure value and sustainability.



Rate of children who became Looked After

The rate of children entering care in Thurrock in 2024/25 was 26 per 10,000, matching statistical neighbour averages and below the national average after a period of higher variability in previous years. Entry into care has reduced slightly, in part because the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has declined. This consistency indicates that children are only coming into care, when necessary, with early help and family support preventing unnecessary entries. The most recent Ofsted inspection noted that ***"Children only come into care when it is necessary and appropriate to do so and after all other options have been fully explored."***

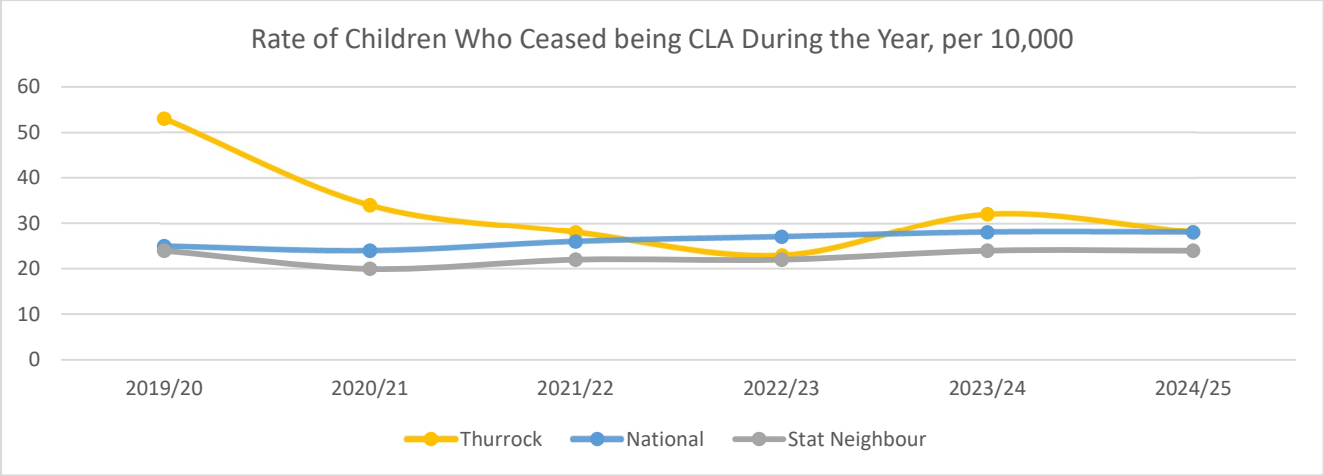
Strong permanency planning and purposeful care journeys are supporting positive exits from care, including reunification with families and other long-term solutions.



Rate of children who ceased to be Looked After

In 2024/25, 26 children per 10,000 ceased being looked after in Thurrock, bringing the local rate in line with both national and statistical neighbour averages. This steadying of previous fluctuations reflects Thurrock's approach where children leave care in a planned and timely way.

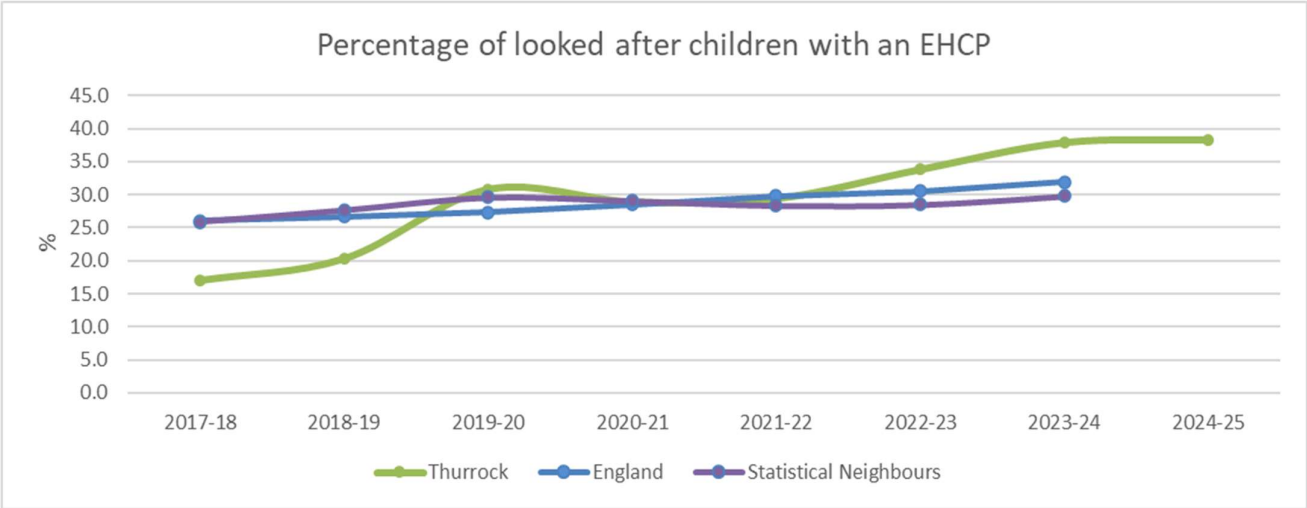
The balance between entry and exit rates demonstrates that care in Thurrock is used as a short-term, focused intervention, with robust decision-making and planning ensuring positive outcomes.



Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

In 2024/25, 38.3% of children in care in Thurrock had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) - slightly up from last year and above national and regional averages. This reflects broader local trends, including increased autism diagnoses and the presence of two outstanding special educational needs schools.

These factors shape the needs of our Children Looked After population. To respond effectively, we're undertaking further analysis to better understand their educational and therapeutic needs. This will support the development of specialist, trauma-informed homes and ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

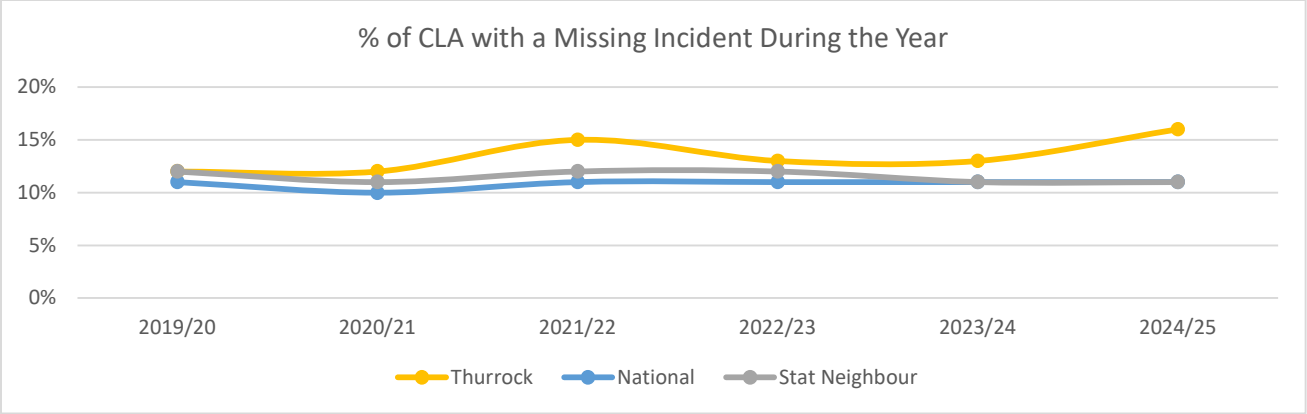


Missing Incidents

Thurrock continues to respond proactively to missing incidents among children in care. While rates remain higher than the national average, our commitment to safeguarding is reflected in the consistently high offer of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) 91% following each episode. This ensures children have space to reflect and any underlying issues are addressed promptly.

Our strong RHI practice demonstrates a robust foundation for further improvement. We are now focusing on understanding the factors behind repeat missing episodes, particularly among younger and older cohorts, to inform more targeted support.

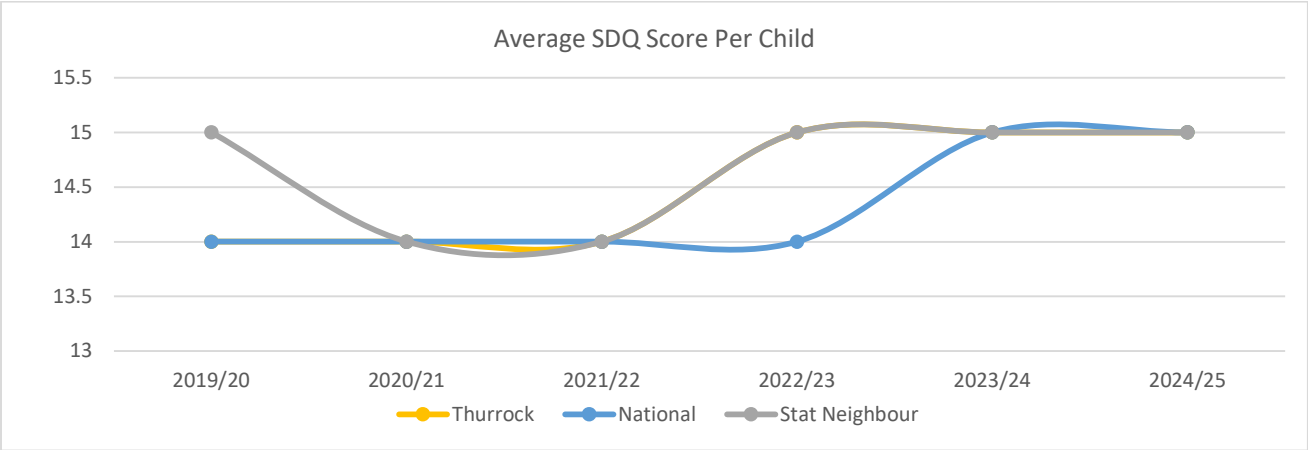
Reducing missing incidents remains a key priority. Through deeper analysis, enhanced placement stability and emotionally responsive care, we aim to strengthen engagement and wellbeing. These goals will be embedded in future service planning and commissioning.



Strength and difficulties questionnaire

The average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score for children in care in Thurrock is below both the England average and that of our statistical neighbours. This is a positive sign of emotional and behavioural wellbeing across much of the cohort.

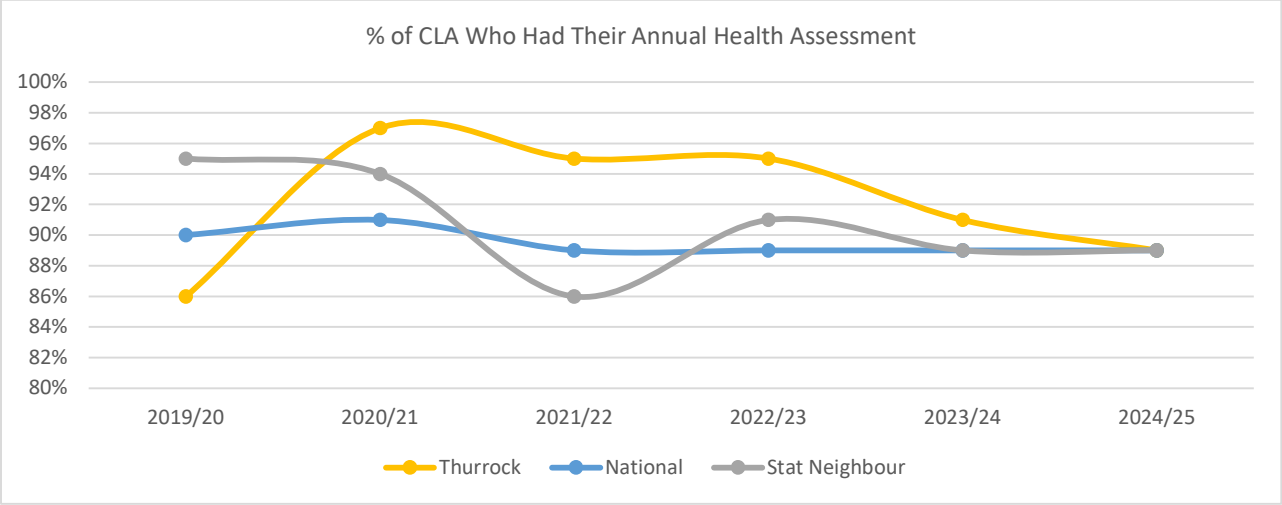
Nonetheless, we recognise that some children and young people continue to face challenges in accessing prompt and proper support. Lower average scores should not detract from the importance of individual need, and we stay committed to strengthening the availability and accessibility of emotional and mental health support for all children in our care.



Initial and Review Health Assessments

Despite Integrated Care Board (ICB) led work, Initial Health Assessment (IHA) timeliness has been poor and require improvement. National pressures contribute, but delays cannot excuse missed early health screening for children. Tackling these delays is a shared priority with the ICB to ensure every child in care receives prompt assessment and ongoing annual reviews.

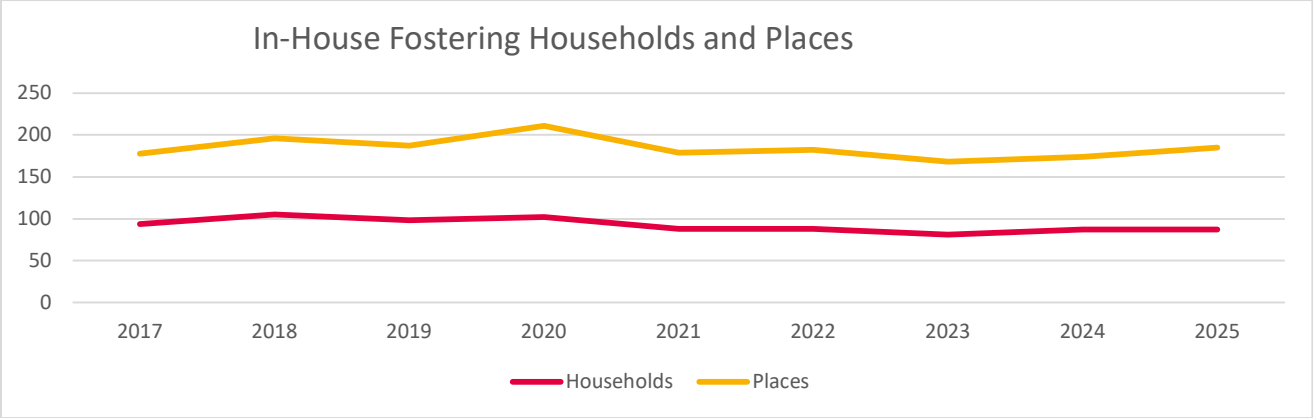
The decline in Review Health Assessments (RHA) is linked to children being placed outside Thurrock. This underlines the importance of the sufficiency strategy: increasing local placement options is critical to improving health assessment timeliness and ensuring every child in care receives prompt, high-quality health reviews.



In-house foster placements and places

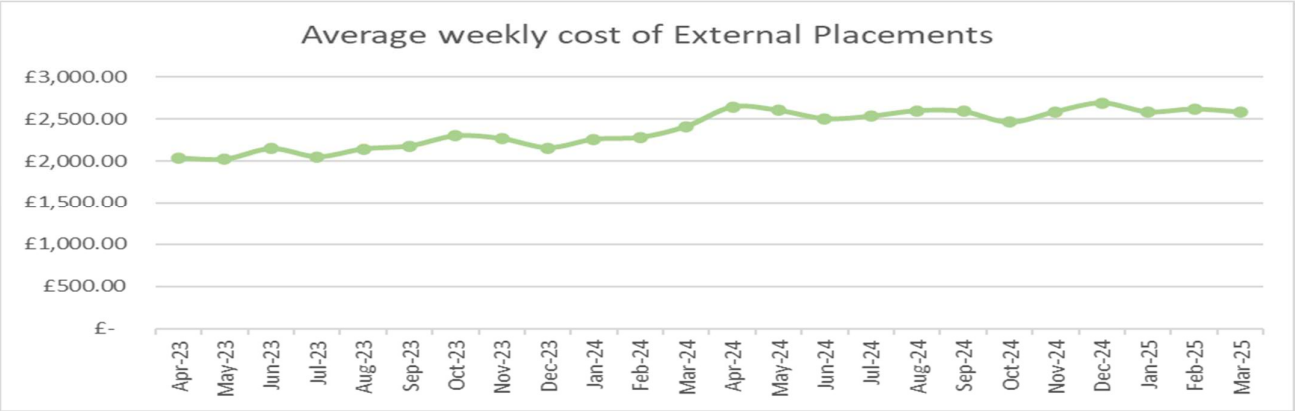
Thurrock's Fostering Service has increased the number of available fostering places since 2023 despite a slight decline in fostering households. Places are inclusive of respite placements, ensuring, where possible, children receive respite in house.

The Fostering Network now estimates that an extra 6,500 fostering families are needed nationally to meet demand. Locally, a shortage of in-house provision means children are placed through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs).



Cost of external placements

The cost of external placements for Thurrock's children continues to rise, in line with national trends. To strengthen market sufficiency and manage financial pressure, Thurrock will develop block contract arrangements with a range of providers. This will support improved value for money and enable greater alignment of placements with local needs. This commissioning approach will be applied across all care settings, including foster care, children's homes, and supported accommodation.

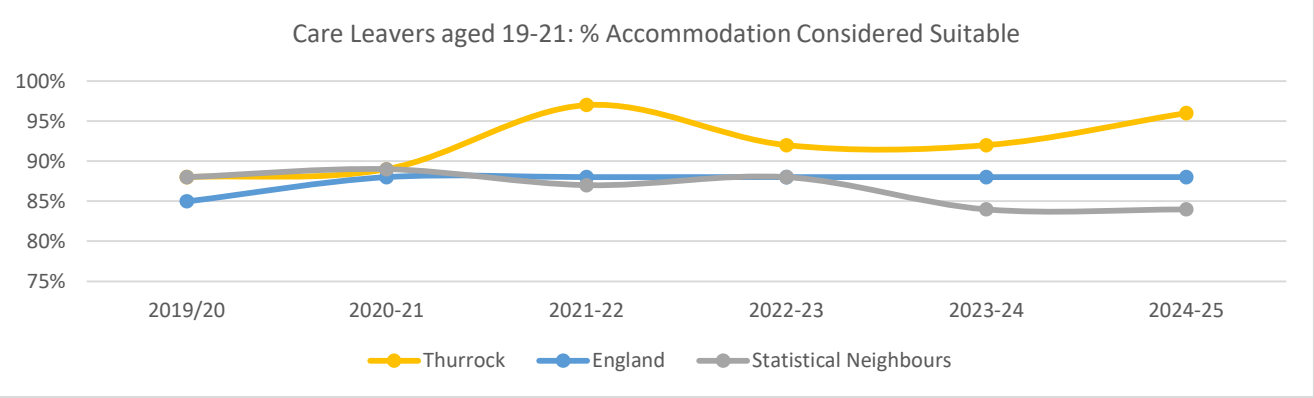


Suitable Accommodation for Care Leavers

Thurrock's sufficiency strategy is focused on ensuring that care leavers move into safe, stable, and suitable accommodation as they transition to adulthood. Performance has remained consistently strong, with around 96% of care leavers aged 19–21 in suitable housing in 2024/25, well above both the England average (around 88%) and statistical neighbours, whose performance has declined.

This success reflects proactive planning and partnership working expanding semi-independent and supported living options, strengthening relationships with housing providers and improving pathway planning to identify risks early.

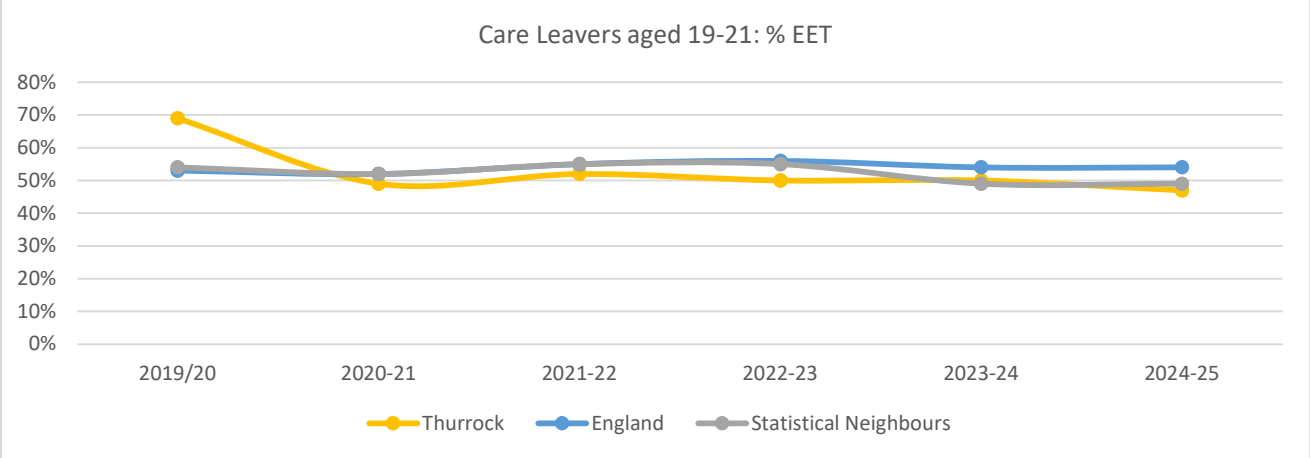
The strategy now aims to sustain quality, increase access to affordable long-term homes and respond to rising complexity in young people's needs while maintaining Thurrock's strong outcomes.



Education, Employment and Training (EET)

This chart tracks the percentage of care leavers aged 19–21 in education, employment, or training (EET) from 2019 to 2025 comparing Thurrock with national and statistical neighbour averages.

While Thurrock's performance has fluctuated over time, it has dropped significantly post COVID era and currently remains below both national and regional comparators. This highlights an ongoing challenge in supporting care leavers into sustained EET pathways. In response, Thurrock is strengthening its support offer through the Inspire Hub and embedding EET outcomes into the commissioning of supported accommodation. The implementation of the *Staying Close* model will further enhance continuity of support for young people leaving residential care, helping to improve long-term outcomes.



Overall projection

Thurrock will adopt a demand led placement strategy that prioritises therapeutic care, stability, and tailored support, especially for children with complex needs and those transitioning to adulthood.

Foster Care	• We will need approximately 230 fostering homes at any one time during the next five years • With a strategic focus on supporting family-based and in house care we anticipate needing 25 to 30 homes with kinship carers, 95 to 100 homes with in-house carers and 105 to 110 homes with IFA carers.
Residential Homes	• Over the next five years, we expect a need for approximately 30 homes in residential care at any one time.
Supported Accommodation	• We estimate a requirement of at approximately 35 – 40 places for children looked after aged 16+. We will also need an additional 20 places for 18+ care leavers transitioning to adulthood.

Health Overview: Key Considerations for Sufficiency Strategy Thurrock CLA (2025)

1. Initial Health Assessments (IHAs)

- Improving timeliness and quality of IHAs remains a focus across Thurrock and Mid and South Essex.
  ➡️ *Sufficiency Link:* Local homes are needed to enable prompt access to IHAs and follow-up care.

2. Strategic Alignment

- The SET Looked After Children Health Strategy (2022–2025) guides health service delivery, with a revised version in development.
  ➡️ *Sufficiency Link:* Placement planning should align with health strategy priorities to ensure coordinated care.

3. Service Provision

- NELFT provides 0–19 public health, pediatrics, and mental health services, with ongoing improvements in access and outcomes.
  ➡️ *Sufficiency Link:* Homes should be located where children can access these core and specialist services.

4. Clinical Leadership and Co-Production

- Named Professionals and co-production with young people are shaping more responsive and accessible services.
  ➡️ *Sufficiency Link:* Placement sufficiency should reflect young people's input and support access to clinically led services.

5. Governance and Data

- Health data and feedback are shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee to inform service planning and improvement.
  ➡️ *Sufficiency Link:* Health intelligence should guide placement decisions to meet current and emerging needs.

Our Vision

We will continue to ensure that the right children are in our care at the right time. We will provide excellent local homes including with friends or family so that children feel settled, secure and stable.
We will ensure that every care leaver has access to safe, suitable, and supported local housing options that reflects their needs and aspirations.
We are committed to helping young people build the skills and confidence they need for independence with a clear pathway into adulthood that offers security, opportunity and a strong sense of belonging
We will ensure our providers are aligned with our vision and help young people build the skills and confidence they need for independence.

Fulfilling our corporate parenting duties

Thurrock Council is proud to uphold the Corporate Parenting Principles under the *Children and Social Work Act 2017*, supporting looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 25 and beyond. This isn't just a legal duty, it's a heartfelt promise to care, support and stand by our young people as they grow.

Our Sufficiency Needs Analysis has deepened our understanding of the needs and aspirations of our children and young people. This insight has directly informed a clear and purposeful Action Plan, ensuring we meet our corporate parenting responsibilities with compassion, clarity, and ambition.

These key strategies underpin our aspirations for children and young people in Thurrock:

- Thurrock Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2022-26
- Brighter Futures Strategy –Developing well in Thurrock 2021
- Our pledge to Looked after children

Voice of Children and Young People

In Thurrock, we believe that children and young people's views, experiences and aspirations shape how we deliver, develop and improve the support we offer – Our Power of Participation Workshops, produced by Thurrock Young Voice, give professionals, elected members, senior managers and the chief executive, the opportunity to truly understand what it is like to grow up in care in Thurrock. The workshops challenge thinking and help us stay grounded to what matters most to the children and young people we work with

Young People are involved in many aspects of service improvement – from front line feedback to shaping long term priorities – from Young Inspectors grading supported accommodation following their inspection, to care experienced interview panels shaping our workforce. Our employed Care Leaver Ambassador brings lived experience into policy, practice and peer views, whilst our own internally developed feedback app and 'discord app', offer children a young people an easy and accessible way to share how they feel and what they need. Our IRO's play a critical role in making sure children are heard and we offer a post 18 review chaired by the IRO to ensure we are fulfilling our duties through the young person's transition to adulthood

Young People regularly attend our Corporate Parent Committee, contribute to local and national discussion the Eastern Region Care Leavers Forum. Recently March 2025, Care Leavers met with Mark Riddell (MBE) 'National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers', to share their experience of aftercare, transitions and housing.

We are proud to have a specialist group for care leaver parents and UASC young people and the connection we maintain with our care leavers in prison.

Next Steps: Acting on the Voice of Thurrock Children and Young People

We are launching our Looked After Children and Care Leavers Hub in November 2025 – a welcomed co-designed space where care leavers and looked after children can access support, connect with their workers, access life skills, explore wellbeing activities and build a strong sense of community and belonging as they transition into adulthood.





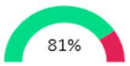
Voice of care experienced young people - what our care leavers have told us

“My PA has helped and supported me to live on my own, I am treated like an adult with more freedom”
“It really helped me to visit where I was going to live so I could plan properly everything I needed to do to feel prepared”
“I would like more help with being ready to live independently and help to manage my money”
“I want to live close to where I go to college”
“I don’t want to have to leave my home when I am 18”
“I want to live close to my friends and family”
“I want to live in the Thurrock area”
“I want someone to show me the skills I will need to live on my own, not just the basic stuff, but how to run a house and what to do when things go wrong”
“I did not feel ready to live on my own at 18, I wasn’t ready, I would have liked more support”

What children are telling us about their homes in care

How do you feel about where you live?								
53%	22%	23%	21%	22%	4%	5%	4%	 Positive v Negative
Happy	Supported	Settled	It suits me	It’s ok	Doesn’t suit	Unhappy	Unsafe	

How do you feel about your local area?										
63%	22%	50%	41%	26%	20%	9%	13%	9%	2%	 Positive v Negative
I like it	My friends are close by	Comfortable	My house is nice	Lots to do	Nothing to do	I don’t fit in	I wish I lived elsewhere	Lonely	Scared	

How do you get on with your carers?									
44%	72%	44%	39%	39%	39%	6%	11%	0%	 Positive v Negative
They care about me	Great	I enjoy our time together	I talk to them if I’m worried	They listen to me	Ok	Not well	I don’t feel heard	I don’t talk to them	

How do you feel living at your carers?										
61%	56%	22%	33%	50%	44%	22%	0%	0%	6%	6%	 Positive v Negative
Safe	Happy	It suits me	Supported	Settled	Part of the family	It’s ok	Unwelcome	It doesn’t suit me	Unhappy	Unsafe	

Our Sufficiency Ambitions

Kinship Care

Keeping children with their family when it is safe to do so.

When children cannot live with their family, we will support them to live with extended family or friends in their network.

Foster care

Actively supporting carers to care for children long term, reducing unnecessary moves and maintaining trauma informed, attachment-based caregiving.

Placement planning & stability

Ensuring every child in our care is placed in a nurturing and supportive environment that truly aligns with their individual needs.

Create a stable, lasting home where children feel safe, supported and empowered to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Homes for care experienced adults

We aim to provide a supportive and sustainable housing pathway for care experienced young people. By prioritizing local provision, we will enable smooth transitions into independent living within their own communities.

This includes developing and maintaining housing pathways that offer suitable supported and independent accommodation options tailored to our care leavers evolving needs.

Commissioned homes for children

Commission a diverse array of high-quality regulated homes that support children to remain connected with their friends, family and local community, ensuring every child can grow up with a sense of belonging

Permanence Planning

Our commitment to early permanence planning ensures children enter care only when it is necessary and receive the dedicated support, they need, to either return to birth parents or transition to stable long term homes as swiftly as possible, whether that is with family, friends, foster care, adoption or other types of supported living arrangements

Our Key Priorities

Based on our local needs analysis we have identified the actions required to strengthen placement sufficiency – and we have aligned these priorities with the expectations set out in the four national policy frameworks.

1: Kinship Care - Family and Friends Care

We aim to support families so children can stay at home. When that's not possible, we focus on placing children with extended family or close friends. This approach aligns with the government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2025 (draft) and the Kinship Care Strategy 2023, which requires local authorities to offer family group decision-making before seeking to take a child into care.

We believe that involving the extended family network early leads to better outcomes for children. By strengthening these family connections, we help children grow up in familiar, supportive homes.

As part of our commitment to the Kinship Care Strategy, we will build upon our existing offer providing comprehensive support to kinship families ensuring they have the resource, guidance and assistance they need to provide stable loving home for children they care for, including financial support, access to training, support groups and expanded educational support through the virtual school.

Our Current Practice

- Permanence training delivered by the Permanence Manager as part of the induction to embed Thurrock Culture of Permanence.
- All family assessment workers have completed systemic training.
- A local kinship support offer including:
    - Access to training
    - A growing monthly support group
    - Financial support
    - A dedicated Kinship supervising social worker
- Implemented the Coram BAAF Form K and SGO support plan (from February 2025), promoting reflection on long-term needs and tailored support.
- Support planning meetings held with child's social worker, adoption team and Think Family teams to ensure robust, child-specific plans and kinship carers assessments.
- Family Network meetings extended to SGO carers
- Encouragement for carers in assessment to engage early with support groups and training to normalise help-seeking.
- Task group reviewing post-order support, including for carers under Child Arrangement Orders, with input from the Virtual School and PASS Service.
- Delivery of practitioner workshops in May and November 2025: *Best Practice in Kinship Assessments and Beyond"* Supporting professionals to understand their roles in assessments and post-order planning.

Next Steps
Publish the Local Kinship Offer
Develop multi-agency kinship protocol aligning education, health, housing with Children Social Care Needs
Expand family network meetings to Kinship cares and embed with SGO carers
Launch a Kinship care buddy scheme
Develop designated Kinship Champion
Continue to identify Kinship options early and proactively through Family Network Meetings and Permanence Tracker Panel
Update the SGO financial policy

2: Foster Care

Children in care need continuity and security and ensuring relationships. Our strategy prioritises placement stability by supporting carers to care for children long term, reducing unnecessary moves and maintaining trauma and attachment informed caregiving

Where a foster home can meet a child's needs, we will work collaboratively with carers, social workers, education, health and support services to sustain the placement. This includes practical support, resilience building and clear care planning.

This priority aligns with our corporate parent responsibilities and reflects evidence that placement stability is strongly linked to better emotional wellbeing, educational attainment and long-term outcomes for children.

Our Current Practice

- Foster Care Forum in partnership with the Foster Carer Association ensures carer voice informs service development.
- Regular training, peer support groups, foster buddies and annual events for carers and children.
- Foster carers lead additional events, building a strong fostering community.
- Mockingbird Model in place with one hub, supporting stability and peer connection.
- Therapeutic worker provides wellbeing support and consultation to foster carers, trauma informed workshops taking place.
- Part of Foster East - accessing shared recruitment tools and learning.
- Dedicated recruitment and assessment team ensures local connections and responsiveness to enquires.
- All supervising social workers are permanent with manageable caseloads.
- Placement stability at 7%, outperforming national average (10%). Higher rates of children remaining in the same foster home for 2+ years than statistical neighbours.

Next Steps
Embed enhanced placement referral tools to improve matching.
Recruiting and retaining high-quality foster carers.
Continue to upskill carers through therapeutic and trauma-informed training.
Expand the Mockingbird Model to a second hub, subject to capacity and demand.
Use placement stability data to target support earlier, especially for children with multiple moves.
Embed child feedback into annual foster care reviews
Align supervision and support with safety, stability, health, learning and preparation for adulthood, ensuring carers are equipped to support young people as they transition to adulthood.
Launch Fostering Practice Standards

3: Homes for Care Leavers

Our ambition is to provide a supportive and sustainable housing pathway for care-experienced young people by focusing on local provision. This ensures that young people can transition into independent living within their own communities, staying close to their friends, family, and places of education. Our care leavers have expressed a strong desire to remain in the Thurrock area and to have access to supported accommodation/ accommodation with support, beyond the age of 18.

Central to achieving this vision is our strong working relationship with our housing colleagues, who share our corporate parenting duties. Together, we ensure that all efforts are aligned and cohesive, as outlined in our Joint Housing and Social Care Protocol. This collaborative approach ensures that we create housing pathways that provide stability, support and a true sense of belonging as our young people move into adulthood.

Our Current Practice

- A range of housing options tailored to individual needs, including:
  - Supported and semi-independent accommodation. Staying Put arrangements for eligible young people to remain with foster carers up to age 21. Social housing offer and priority bidding system in place
  - Two HMO pathways: Through Head Start Housing and commissioned HMOs funded by children's social care
- Housing pathways embedded in the Pathway Plan, ensuring housing needs are clearly communicated and planned for
- Specialist housing worker in the Aftercare Team supports access, planning, and sustainability
- System in place to help care leavers claim housing benefit and contribute to rent where costs exceed the housing element, financial support in place for care leavers establishing work.
- Increased provision in Aftercare; Two managers, senior social worker, specialist housing worker, increased PA provision including two dedicated UASC personal advisers.
- Participation worker and Care Leaver Ambassador ensure young people's voices shape services. Young Inspectors involved in reviewing supported lodgings and accommodation standards.
- Ongoing data tracking and multi-agency planning to respond to rising and complex housing demand, rent management meetings to avoid escalating arrears and maintain tenancy.
- Bespoke offer from Inspire and recently allocated dedicated Inspire worker for Care Leavers to improve EET attainment

Next Steps
Commission a new 16–19 supported accommodation model that promotes stability, relational support, and preparation for adulthood.
Further develop personalised housing plans and pathways to independence for all care leavers, embedded within the Pathway Plan and informed by young people's needs and aspirations.
Collaborate with housing services to prevent homelessness and ensure financial sustainability.
Develop emergency housing protocols and direct offer pathways for high-risk care leavers.
Publish a refreshed Local Offer for Independence.
Embed the voice of young people by implementing findings from the Young Inspectors' inspections into service improvement and commissioning decisions.
Implement the Staying Close model, offering continuity of relationships and practical support for young people leaving residential care.
Address the decline in educational attainment among care leavers, with continued targeted interventions and multi-agency planning.
Strengthen joint working between Children's Services and Housing, including a shared financial oversight mechanism and updated Joint Housing Protocol.
Explore rent Guarantor Scheme's for care leavers

4: Commissioned homes for children

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill highlights the importance of thoughtful commissioning to ensure that children can stay connected with their families, friends, and local communities.

By getting commissioning right, we provide homes where children develop a sense of belonging and stability, helping each child to thrive and achieve the best possible outcomes.

It remains an ambition of central government for each area to collaborate with others on commissioning homes for CLA through Regional Care Cooperatives. The details of how these will work is not yet understood and will no doubt be influenced by the upcoming Local Government Reforms.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was introduced in December 2024 and is expected to become law in 2025.

Our Current Practice

- Homes are commissioned individually as spot contracts, whilst we have 2 Thurrock Council properties which we externally commission to provide care.
- Whilst this supports us to consider all available homes, it does not enable us to develop strong partnerships with providers nor bespoke homes for our children. We currently have no block contracts in place.
- Each child in residential care has a dedicated key worker and a clear, regularly reviewed care plan tailored to their individual needs.
- Our Placements team are excellent at securing the homes our children need however it can often be difficult.
- The Council prioritises stable homes and long-term outcomes, with continued support into adulthood for care leavers up to age 25.

Next Steps
Developing and expand block contract arrangements across all care settings.
Further developing our partnership with care providers operating out of Thurrock Council properties.
Aligning commissioning with local needs and ensuring value for money.
Engaging with IFAs to prioritise local carers for Thurrock children.
Work regionally to establish simple routes to market (such as frameworks or Dynamic Markets) for all care types.
Hold regular provider network events to develop improved partnership working.
Introduce an improved Home Finding form that will better reflect our children's needs.

5: Placement planning and stability

Our ambition is to provide every child in our care with a stable, well-matched home that supports their development, identity, and long-term outcomes. Effective placement planning begins at the earliest point of involvement, with a detailed understanding of the child's needs and a commitment to matching them with carers who can provide both emotional and practical support. Stability is not left to chance - it is actively planned for and protected through strong partnership working, clear expectations, and wraparound support services.

This includes therapeutic input, educational support and placement supervision, all coordinated to help the child succeed. Independent Reviewing Officers play a vital role in maintaining oversight, ensuring that placement arrangements remain suitable and that the child's voice is central in all decisions.

Our multi-agency colleagues and social care professionals work together to provide consistent monitoring, timely reviews and responsive action where risks to stability are identified.

Placement stability is a shared responsibility and we are committed to doing everything possible to help children and young people remain in safe, loving homes for as long as they need them.

Our Current Practice

- Dedicated Placements Team with clear priorities, including use of suitable in-house carers as first preference.
- Placement Panel oversight of all children becoming looked after, ensuring robust decision-making, consistency and strategic oversight from the outset.
- Implementation of Impower's Valuing Care model for profiling, outcome alignment and smarter commissioning, especially for children in residential or out-of-borough homes.
- Regular Valuing Care Panel, to review needs and transition planning for placements of children with complex profiles.
- Use of needs-cost conversations to ensure placement decisions reflect both the complexity of need and the value of provision.
- Sibling assessments embedded as standard in permanence planning to inform joined-up, child-centred decisions.
- In-house fostering prioritised, with clear expectations for IFAs to align with local values and care planning standards.
- Stability meetings held when placements are struggling to effectively meet our children's needs.
- SDQ meetings involving health and CAMHS to review emotional wellbeing and align therapeutic planning.
- Use of child-written profiles to improve matching and understanding, supporting successful step-downs from high-cost residential to foster care.
- Successful reunification with birth families using the Think Family rehabilitation framework, leading to revocation of Care Orders where appropriate.

Next Steps
Recommissioning supported accommodation with a focus on quality and outcomes.
Planning for sufficient fostering and residential homes, including sibling groups.
Investing in trauma-informed, specialist local provision to reduce reliance on more distant external homes.
Develop placements ending review process, to understand unplanned moves through a reflective, learning lens. We will use this intelligence to inform identification of children at higher risk of placement breakdown so that we can intervene early

6: Every plan starts with permanence in mind

Early permanence is a statutory duty and a cornerstone of effective care planning. Under the Children Act 1989, and associated statutory guidance such as Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (2015) and Planning Transitions to Adulthood (2010), local authorities are legally required to secure stable, permanent arrangements for every child in care

Our approach to early permanence planning ensures that children only enter care when necessary, and that where they do, their time in care is as short and purposeful as possible. We work to understand each child's unique circumstances and prioritise family network meetings to involve extended family or connected persons from the earliest stage. We are committed to securing long-term stability and belonging for children through reunification where appropriate, or through timely progression to long-term options including Adoption. This focus gives children the emotional security and consistency they need to develop trusting relationships, succeed in education and transition confidently into adulthood.

Our Current Practice

- Achieving permanence for children at the earliest opportunity is an absolute priority in Thurrock. Social workers explore a full range of permanence options and plan concurrently until children have achieved permanence. ***Noted by Ofsted (inspection 2024)***
- For children who are unable to remain with their parents or wider family network, social workers consider alternative permanence options for them. ***Noted by Ofsted (inspection 2024)***
- Many children achieve permanence through long-term fostering, and this gives them a sense of belonging ***Noted by Ofsted (inspection 2024)***
- Permanence Tracker and weekly Permanence Panel oversight of all Looked After Children and Privately Fostered children, tracking timescales, placement stability, trends and transitions from short to long term care and reunification.
- Permanence Manager in post, providing oversight and training across the services, ensuring children's routes to permanence are timely, stable and aligned with their needs and identity

Next Steps
Addressing the decline in annual health checks through improved planning and oversight, linked to Health's proposed IHA revised model
Ensuring improved access to emotional and mental health support for children and young people.
Reduce the number of children in residential provisions with DoLs and those children requiring high staff to child ratio in solo homes, holding regular multi-disciplinary reviews to reassess the care plan and necessity of DoLS or solo homes.
Ensure Care Leavers are well matched with peers when living in group settings.
Build upon the existing priority of sibling relationships by strengthening care planning, promoting joint placements, and enabling meaningful, child-led contact where appropriate.
Preparing young people for independence and adulthood, recognising that the absence of sibling support may affect resilience.
Develop life story work model which begins from entry to care and grows with the child, forming part of how they understand their journey and identify

What we will do: Plan on a page

1. Personalised and Inclusive Care Planning	• Tailoring homes to individual needs, including age and cultural identity. • Embedding enhanced placement referral tools to improve matching. • Conducting deeper analysis of disproportionality and needs across the CLA population. • Improving timeliness and quality of Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessment by working with the ICB
2. Placement sufficiency and stability	• Recommissioning supported accommodation with a focus on quality and outcomes. • Planning for sufficient fostering, supported accommodation and residential homes, including sibling groups. • Investing in trauma-informed, specialist local provision to reduce reliance on more distant external homes.
3. Market Management and Commissioning	• Developing and expanding block contract arrangements across all care settings. • Aligning commissioning with local needs and ensuring value for money. • Engaging with IFAs to prioritise local carers for Thurrock children.
4. Workforce Development and Support	• Recruiting and retaining high-quality foster carers. • Upskilling carers through therapeutic and trauma-informed training
5. Care Leaver Transition and Independence	• Commissioning a new 16–19 supported accommodation model. • Creating personalised housing plans and pathways to independence. • Support young people to confidently contribute to their housing costs as part of building independence and long-term stability • Embedding EET outcomes in supported accommodation commissioning. • Supporting the Inspire Hub and implementing the Staying Close model.

Key risks to delivering the Sufficiency Strategy

Risk Area	Summary of Risk	Potential Impact	Key Mitigating Actions
Market Capacity	Insufficient availability of local foster carers, residential placements, supported accommodation, and specialist provision (complex needs, disabilities, unaccompanied children)	Increased reliance on out-of-area and agency placements; reduced placement choice and stability	Ongoing market engagement; regional commissioning arrangements; development of local and in-house provision
Financial Pressures	Rising placement and staffing costs exceeding budget assumptions	Inability to commission preferred or local placements; pressure on budgets; reduced investment in preventative provision	Regular market cost benchmarking; strengthened contract management; investment in cost-effective local provision
Workforce Capacity	Difficulty recruiting and retaining foster carers and skilled residential staff	Reduced internal and external capacity; over-reliance on independent providers; poorer outcomes	Targeted foster carer recruitment and retention strategies; workforce development and support initiatives
Demand and Complexity	Higher-than-forecast numbers of looked after children and increasing complexity of needs	Commissioned provision does not meet current or future demand; emergency placements; higher costs	Regular demand forecasting; flexible commissioning models; early intervention and prevention activity
Delivery and Timescales	Delays in implementing planned actions within the sufficiency strategy	Slower development of new provision; failure to realise intended benefits within agreed timescales	Clear governance and programme management; regular progress reporting and risk escalation
Quality and Regulation	Insufficient quality or regulatory compliance within commissioned placements	Placement breakdowns; safeguarding concerns; potential regulatory intervention	Robust provider monitoring; quality assurance processes; escalation and contingency planning
Partnership Dependencies	Reliance on health, housing, education, and regional partners to deliver wrap-around support	Placements become unstable or unavailable; insufficient suitable homes	Formal partnership agreements; joint planning and escalation

Governance Summary

Strategic Accountability - Director of Children's Social Care

- Overall accountability for meeting the statutory sufficiency duty.
- Provides leadership and oversight of placement sufficiency activity.
- Ensures risks, pressures and progress are escalated appropriately.

Strategic Oversight - Children's Services Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

- Monitors delivery of the Sufficiency Strategy.
- Reviews demand, market capacity, placement stability and costs.
- Agrees mitigating actions where risks to sufficiency are identified.

Operational Delivery - Commissioning and Placement Sufficiency Function

- Leads on commissioning activity and market development.
- Monitors placement availability, provider performance and cost trends.
- Aligns commissioning plans with forecast demand and service needs.

Financial Governance - Children's Services Finance and Budget Monitoring

- Oversees placement expenditure and affordability.
- Provides assurance on value for money and cost controls.
- Supports financial forecasting and medium-term planning.

Quality and Assurance

Contract Management and Quality Assurance Arrangements

- Monitors provider quality and regulatory compliance.
- Escalates quality or safeguarding concerns through established routes.
- Supports placement stability and improved outcomes for children.

Corporate and Democratic Oversight

Corporate Parenting Board / Panel

- Scrutinises sufficiency arrangements and outcomes for children in care.
- Ensures the child's voice informs strategic decision-making.

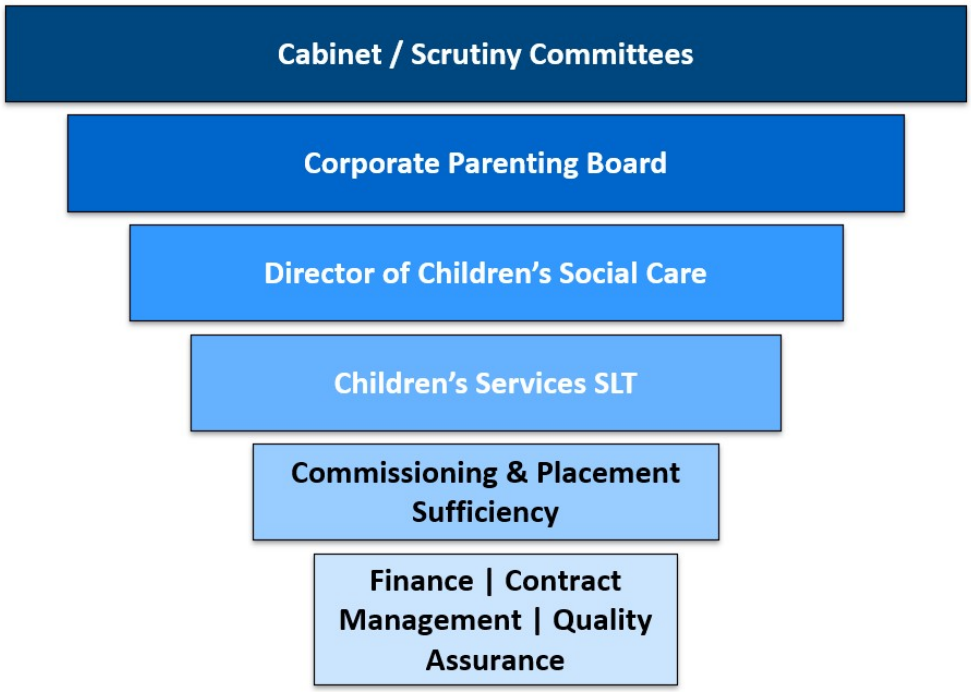
Cabinet / Scrutiny Committees (as required)

- Provide democratic oversight and challenge.
- Receive updates on sufficiency pressures, risks and performance.

Risk and Review

- Sufficiency risks are managed through the Children's Services risk framework.

Governance Structure



The Sufficiency Strategy is reviewed regularly and updated in response to demand, market changes and performance intelligence.

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