

Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy

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Contents

		Page
1.0	Introduction	3
2.0	Sufficiency Duty: Legal Context	4
3.0	Thurrock- Our Vision	4
4.0	Thurrock – The Place	5
5.0	Thurrock Priorities	5
6.0	What Children and Young People Tell Us	6
7.0	Placement Needs Analysis	8
7.1	Profile of Children Looked After	8
7.2	Age of Children Looked After	9
7.3	Gender of Children Looked After	10
7.4	Ethnicity Breakdown	10
7.5	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	11
7.6	Legal Status of Children Looked After	13
7.7	Placement Stability, SGO's and Adoption	14
7.8	Placement Stability	15
8.0	Educational Attainment	17
9.0	Children Looked After with Disabilities	18
10.0	Transition to Adult Services	19
11.0	Care Leavers	19
12.0	Placement Availability	22
13.0	Accommodation for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People	25
14.0	How Children Looked After and Care Leavers Feels About Where They Live	26
15.0	Placement Costs	29
16.0	Gap Analysis	26
17.0	Key Priorities	30
18.0	Measuring Success	39
Appendix 1	Our Pledge to Children Looked After	41
Appendix 2	Charter for Care Leavers	43

1.0 Introduction

Children and Young People in Care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is our priority to ensure that all children and young people in our care and their families receive the best possible support. This strategy outlines a review of the needs of our Children and Young People who are Looked After and Care Leavers by Thurrock Council and our approach to addressing these.

Meeting the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents and a priority across the council and its partners. It is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents, to support each of our care leavers as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their maximum potential.

Our vision is to provide sufficient high quality placements for children and young people which understand 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 to make a successful transition to adulthood and independence at a time that is right for them individually.

We want to make sure that we have appropriate placement and accommodation options, both now and in the future, that support our looked after children to achieve the best possible outcomes, whilst ensuring best use of available resources.

By working together across the service and with our partners responsible for Children Looked After we are focused on delivering the services children and young people need and deserve to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.



Joe Tynan, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help

2.0 Sufficiency Duty: Legal Context

Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) places a general duty on Local Authorities to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area, 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.

Sufficiency Duty Statutory Guidance describes the accommodation required for a Child Looked After that, so far as is reasonably practical:

- is near the child's home;
- does not disrupt his/her education or training;
- enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
- where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
- is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable.

The overall context for meeting the Duty is set out in the statutory guidance, (Sufficiency: Statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children, 2010) which states that:

"Securing sufficient accommodation that meets the needs of Looked After Children is a vital step in delivering improved outcomes for this vulnerable group. Having the right placement in the right place, at the right time is a critical success factor in relation to the delivery of better outcomes for Looked After Children."

The key areas that need to be addressed in relation to meeting the Duty are:

- The number of accommodation providers in the area
- A range of accommodation capable of meeting different needs
- That the Local Authority is active in managing the market
- That the commissioning strategy and practice is part of the "market management"
- That the Duty applies not just to meeting the needs of "Looked After" Children and young people but also children at risk of care or custody
- Sufficiency includes providing early intervention and prevention services that help support children and families

This document builds on the long term vision for the development of our sufficiency duty that was set out in the Sufficiency Strategy 2019/20. This version provides a three year plan from January 2021 to January 2024.

3.0 Thurrock – Our Vision

An ambitious and collaborative community which is proud of its heritage and excited by its diverse opportunities and future.

When a child becomes Looked After, the Local Authority becomes their “Corporate Parent” responsible for them during their period as a child who is looked after and when they leave care. Every parent wants the best for their child. In Thurrock, we believe that where possible and in children’s best interest, children should live with their families or their communities. It is not always possible for children to remain with their families due to risk of harm or because they have been harmed.

We want to ensure the right children are in our care, that they are in the right placements and that they transition into adulthood feeling support with the skills to progress to independent living. We want our Children Looked After and care experienced young people to feel settled, secure and stable and aim to do this through robust permanency planning and placement stability.

Members and senior leaders in the Council are committed to providing the best possible services and ensuring that children within Thurrock remain safe. Members from all parties support Children’s Social Care and provide support and challenge through the Corporate Parenting Committee.

4.0 Thurrock - The Place

There are 29,898 children on the school roll (School Spring Census 2020). There are an estimated 44,650 children and young people under the age of 18 years in Thurrock accounting for 25.6% of the population (ONS Mid 2019 estimates). The population of children and young people is expected to increase by 11.2% in the next ten years.

Alongside existing increases in the child population in Thurrock, there is expected to be a rapid economic and housing growth over the next decade. It is expected that the population of children and young people aged 0 – 25 years will rapidly increase as a result. It is highly likely, therefore, that the numbers of Children Looked After in Thurrock will also grow. In order to account for this expected population growth, the local Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) population projections take into account the levels of job and housing growth expected to take place in Thurrock in the coming years to provide a more realistic forecast of population growth than the standard Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts.

It is estimated that from the baseline year of 2014 the child population (0 – 17 years) will grow by 19% by 2024 and 35.4% by 2037. By comparison, the child population of England is projected to grow by just 13.3% by 2024 and 19.2% by 2037. This is around half of the rate of growth expected in Thurrock over the next 20 years.

5.0 Thurrock Priorities

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

This means:

- High quality, consistent and accessible public services which are right first time
- Build on our partnerships with statutory, community, voluntary and faith groups to work together to improve health and wellbeing
- Communities are empowered to make choices and be safer and stronger together

Place – a heritage rich borough which is ambitious for its future

This means:

- Roads, houses and public spaces that connect people and places
- Clean environments that everyone has reason to take pride in
- Fewer public buildings with better services

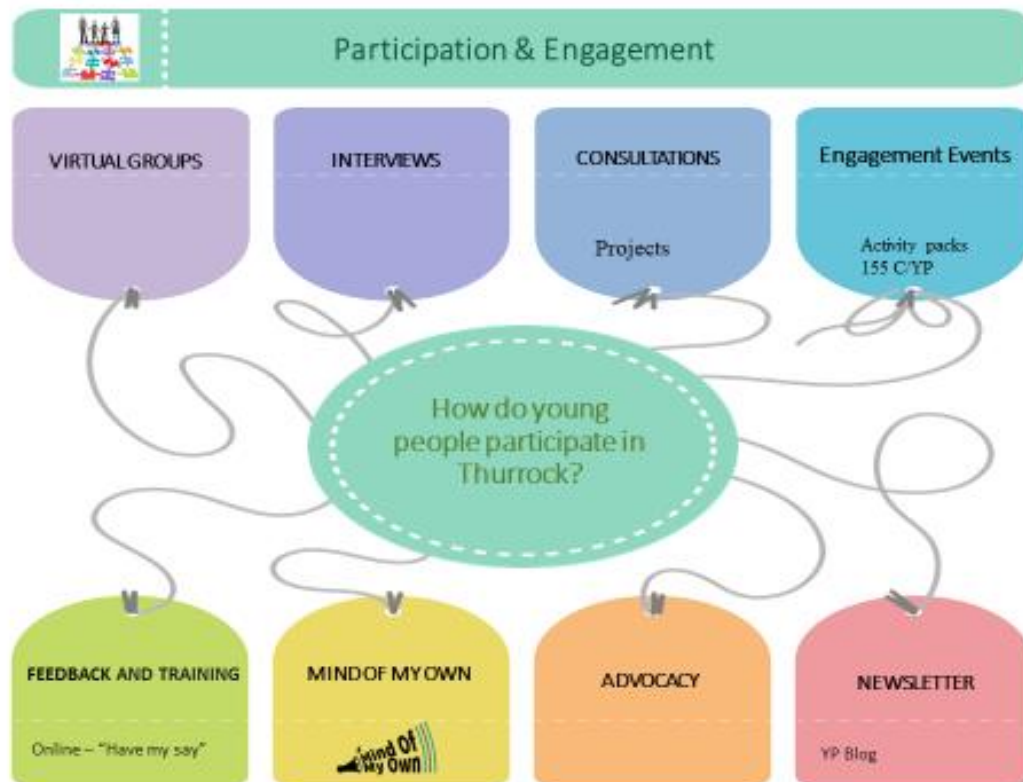
Prosperity – a borough, which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations

This means:

- Attractive opportunities for businesses and investors to enhance the local economy
- Vocational and academic education, skills and job opportunities for all
- Commercial, entrepreneurial and connected public services

6.0 What Children and Young People Tell Us

There is a commitment to create a culture of listening to children and young people; understanding what they want from the services they receive so that our work is relationship based and informed by listening to the voice of our children. This commitment includes the development of sufficient accommodation which meets the needs of Children Looked After and Care Leavers. Feedback is via the Participation and Engagement Team who routinely collect the views of children and young people through a variety of methods and use this information to ensure the voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning and delivering services. Some of the ways the Participation and Engagement Team do this are illustrated below, these were developed with children and young people:



We want all Children Looked After and Care Leavers and to be healthy, safe and happy, do well at school, training or employment and enjoy good relationships with their peers. We want our young people to be able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults into higher education, good careers and jobs, and achieve financial security.

The quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people ‘doing well’ and having stability in care. It is therefore the aim of this strategy to ensure that across all areas of our services supporting Children Looked After and our Care Leavers, we aspire to achieve the best possible placements and housing provision for our young people.

Children can be in care for varying lengths of time. Some children are unable to return to live with their parents because to do so would mean that they would likely suffer further harm, abuse and/or neglect. When children become Looked After in Thurrock, we will work hard to make sure that they are not further disadvantaged and that the care we provide is better than the care they have previously received. We will provide high quality care in a foster placements with a family or, where necessary a high quality residential setting.

We want to enable our children and young people to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, along with their parents and carers. We will work with our Children Looked

After and our young people who have left care to shape how we manage and organise the resources and services that support them.

When the Council's five year commissioning exercise commenced it included engagement and consultation with young people who experienced being "Looked After" they used the following key words to describe the features of a good service:

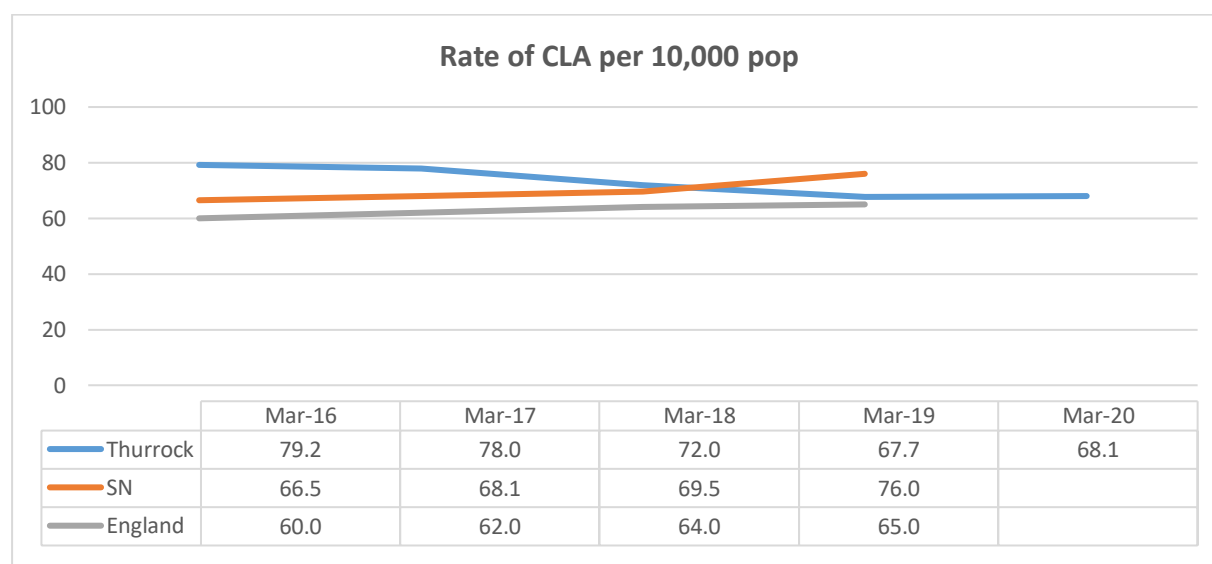
Trust	Listening	Structured
Communication	Helping	Transparency
Supporting	Understanding	Knowledge

This feedback was reflected in the specification that sets out the requirements for providers and this remains in place. The expanded participation and engagement of children and young people who are looked after and care leavers will be used to contribute the development of new placement commissioning on an ongoing basis.

7.0 Placement Needs Analysis

7.1 Profile of Children Looked After (CLA)

As at the end of March 2020 there were 298 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a reduction from 72.0 per 10,000 in 2018 to 68.1 per 10,000 in 2020, this is lower than our statistical neighbour average of 76.0 and higher than the England average of 65.0 per 10,000 based on the most recent data available (2018-19).



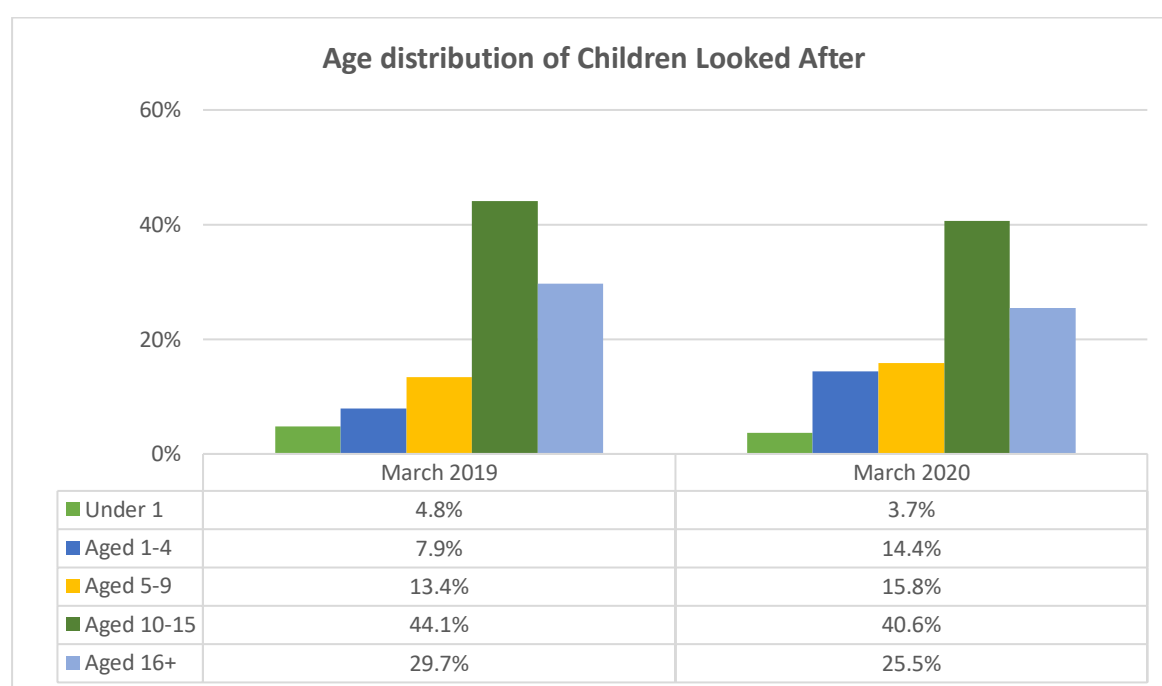
The child (0-17 years) population has been increasing in Thurrock at a much faster rate compared to the national average. This higher rate of growth is expected to continue in the future in part due to the high level of economic and housing development currently taking place. It is likely that there will therefore, be a

proportionate increase in the numbers of Children Looked After in Thurrock, even if the rate per 10,000 remains constant. The 19% predicted growth in the population of children and young people in Thurrock by 2024 compared to 13.3% for England needs to be considered when planning support and placements.

The implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy aims to provide support earlier and reduce the number of children entering the care system, alongside this is the Families Together Team who work with children and young people aged from 10-17 years and their families to help families learn together safely and learn to overcome difficulties. The investment in these programmes will help to mitigate the likelihood of increasing demand of children becoming looked after due to increased population.

7.2 Age of Children Looked After

The highest percentage of children in care in Thurrock are those aged 10-15 years, this has remained broadly stable over recent years with this age group representing 40.6% of the children in care population as at 31st March 2020.



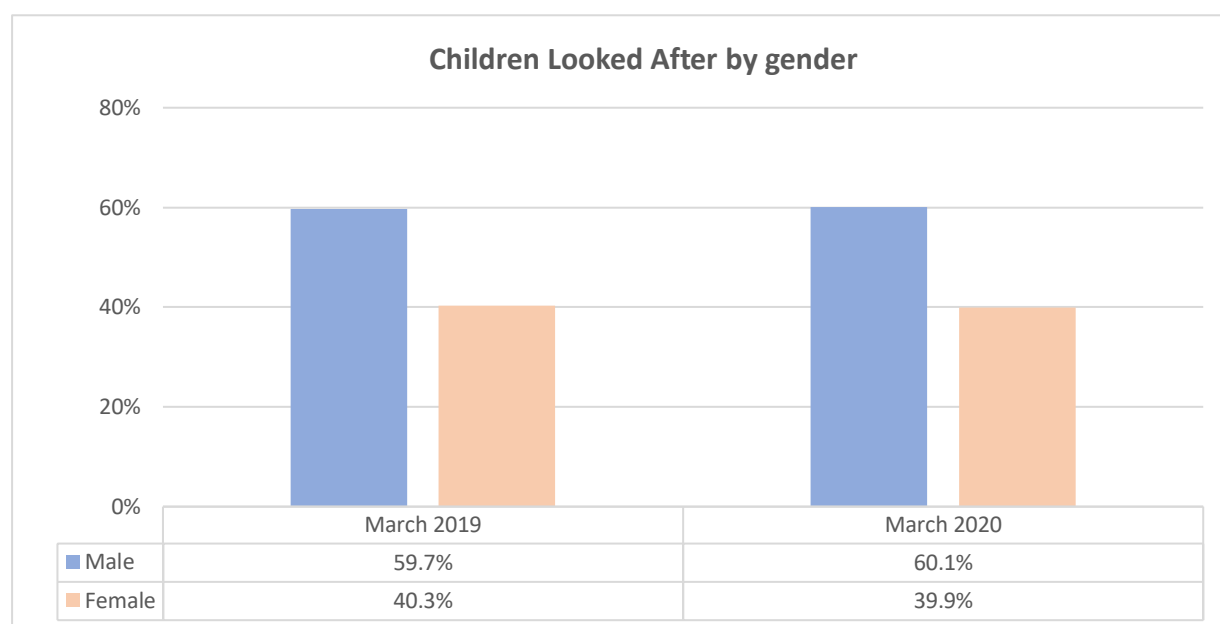
	March 2019	March 2020
Under 1	14	11
Aged 1-4	23	43
Aged 5-9	39	47
Aged 10-15	128	121
Aged 16+	86	76

This data on age breakdown is used in planning services and support. This is particularly important in planning likely demand for Care Leaver support services

including housing and wider support needs. The number of children and young people is monitored to identify the numbers that turn 16 and 18 per month along with those moving into independence, this helps with case load management and the provision of support.

7.3 Gender of Children Looked After

There are a larger number of male Children Looked After than female although the numbers remain broadly similar from 2019 to 2020.

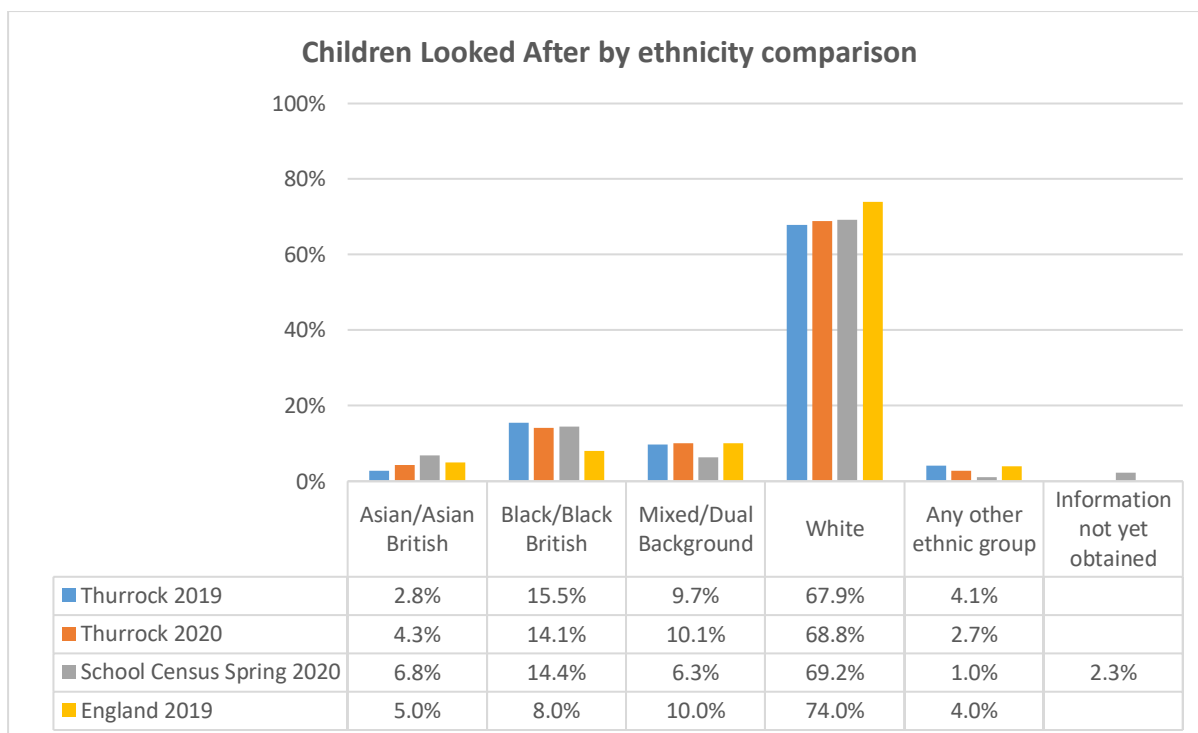


	March 2019	March 2020
Male	173	179
Female	117	119

Male Children Looked After can be more difficult to find suitable placements for and also on average adoption takes longer than for female Children Looked After. We closely monitor this data and assess any increase in risks if the gender breakdown changes.

7.4 Ethnicity Breakdown

The ethnicity of Children Looked After remains broadly similar from the data held in 2019 and as illustrated below, this is broadly similar to the general population of children in Thurrock.



Comparison with England 2019 data shows that a higher percentage of Black/ Black British children are Children Looked After, in Thurrock however this is consistent with the percentage of Black/ Black British children in the general Thurrock population. The percentage of Children Looked After who are of Mixed/ Dual background is slightly higher than the Thurrock general population data however this is in line with the England 2019 trend.

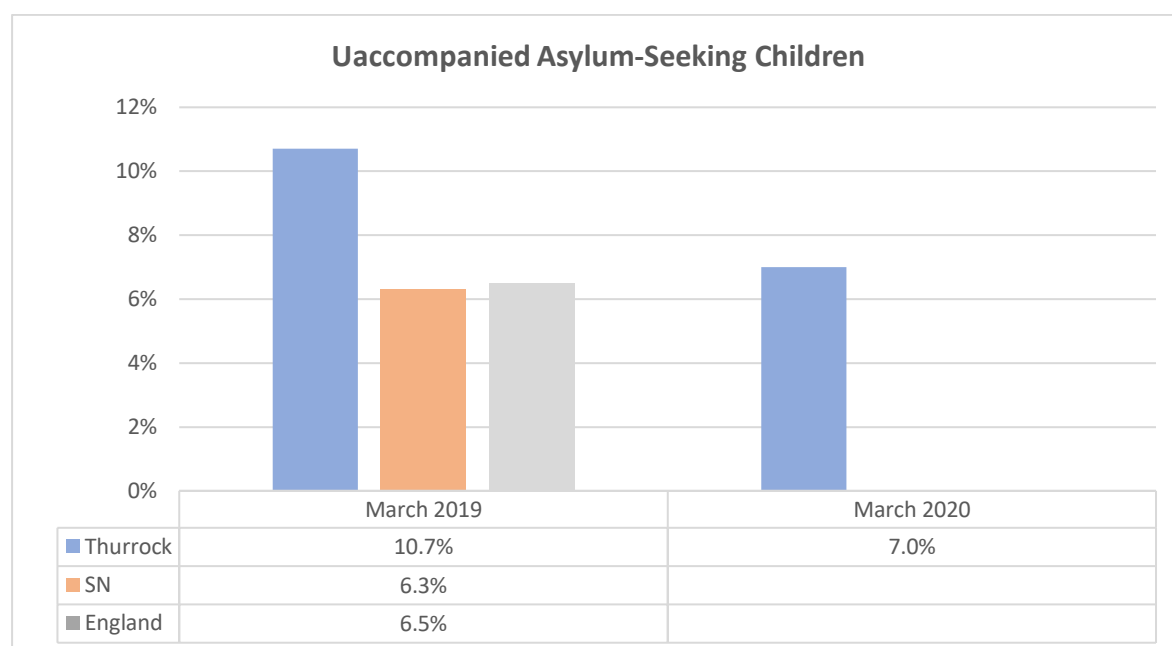
Placement planning addresses the individual diversity needs of children placed and the supervising social workers assist foster carers to ensuring appropriate oversight and supervision is in place. In some situations where a cultural match has not been possible, foster carers' support network (Independent Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, and Independent Visitors) can provide and contribute to the information and care that foster families need to provide appropriate support.

7.5 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

We have reducing numbers of UASC Children Looked After who are 16+ reducing from 25 in 2019 to 16 in 2020. The overall number of UASC has reduced representing 7.0% of our Children Looked After population. At the end of March 2019, the number of UASC was 31 compared to 21 in 2020, the majority of these children are aged 16+.

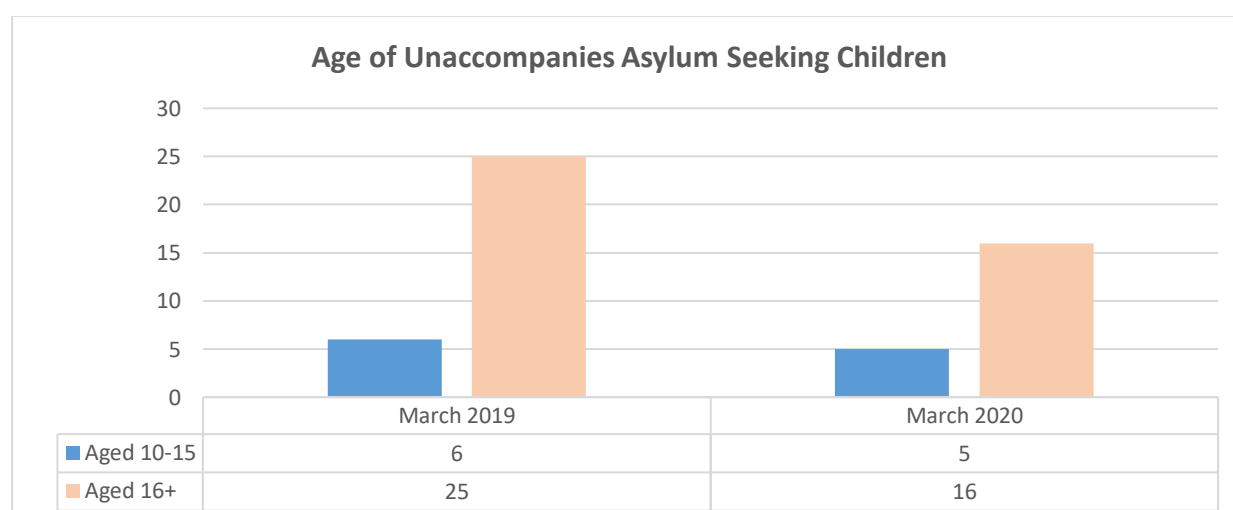
The Eastern Region Transfer Scheme provides a regional response to meeting the accommodation and support needs of UASC, this is not part of a national scheme. Through this we have an allocation of 0.07 as a part of the total cohort of UASC. Locally this translates to 28 children and young people and we continue to

accommodate and receive UASC from the Eastern Region to meet our 0.07 allocation.



	March 2019	March 2020
Thurrock	31	21
SN (2018-19)	26	not available
England (2018-19)	5,070	not available

Number of Children Looked After who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and % of Children Looked After Total.

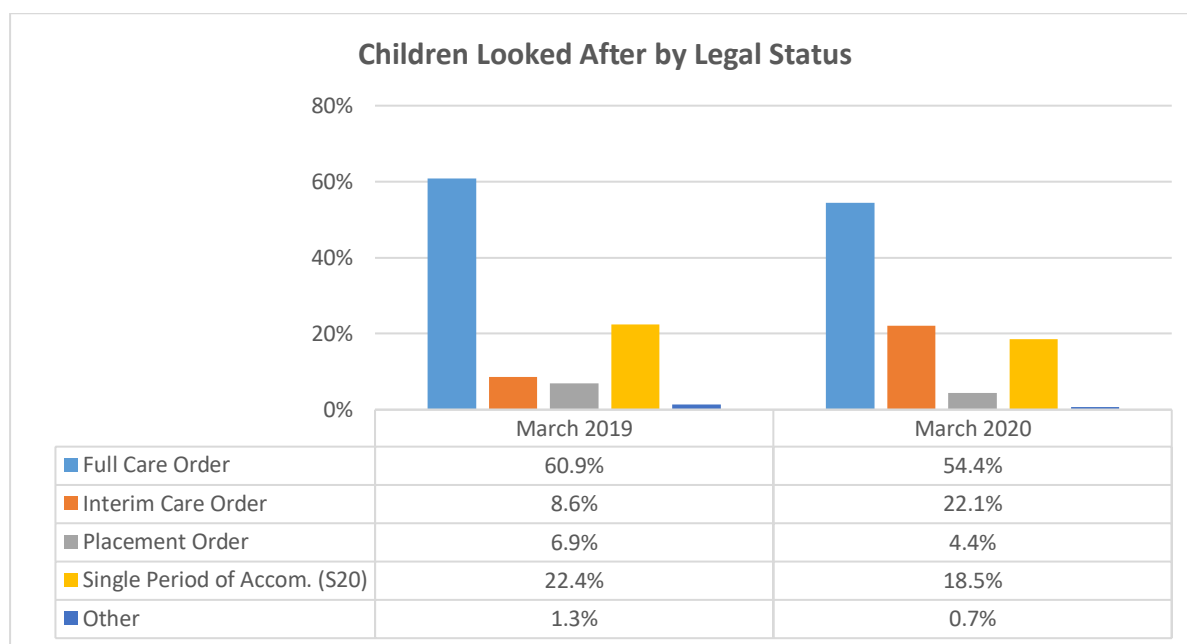


For Care Leavers who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the Headstart Housing Programme referred to later in this document has increased the availability of local accommodation. This in turn provides improved access to support, training

and employment and access to services. Additional details of the support available are outlined later in this document.

7.6 Legal Status of Children Looked After

As of March 2020 there were 66 of children who were subject to care proceedings. This is an increase on the March 2019 figure of 25. There were 176 number of children who became subject to a Care Order in March 2019 and 162 in March 2020. There is a focus on ensuring the Order reflects the status of a Looked After Child so Placement with Parents Regulations are an exceptional placement, very small numbers of children placed in this way.

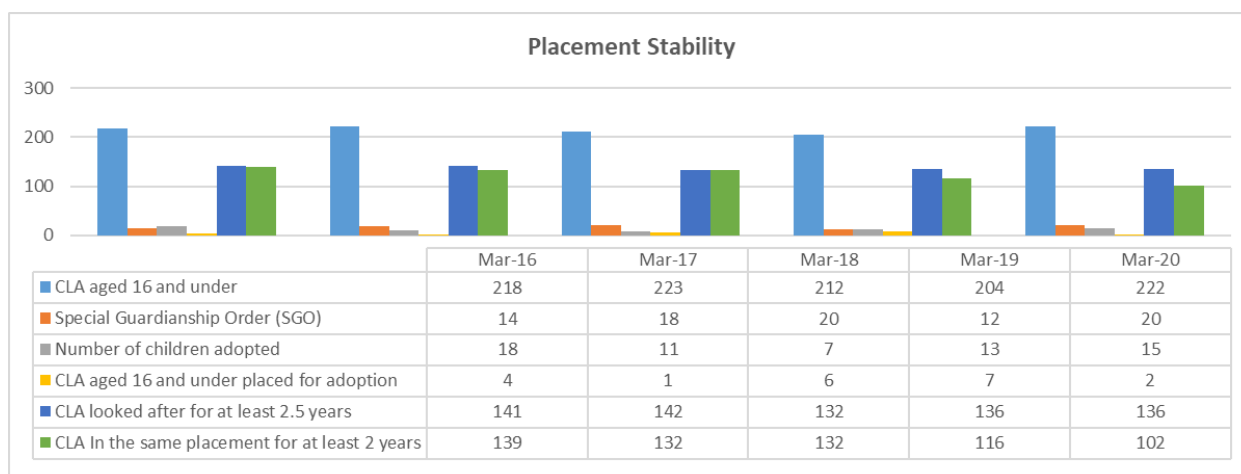


	March 2019	March 2020
Full Care Order	176	162
Interim Care Order	25	66
Placement Order	20	13
Single Period of Accom. (S20)	65	55
Other	4	2

There has been an impact on court proceedings as a result of COVID and this will impact 2020/21 adoption timescales and plans for permanency as Final Hearings have been delayed and proceedings are taking longer than the Public Law Outline of 26 weeks for conclusion.

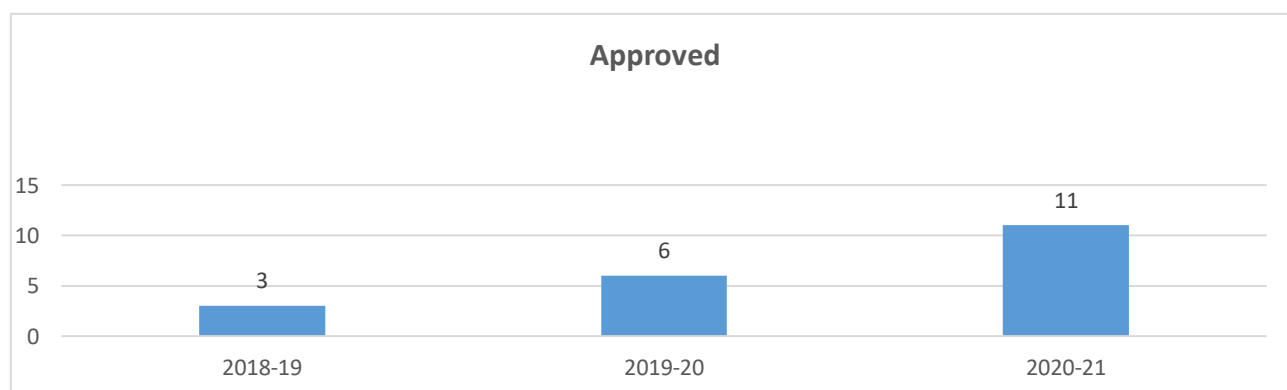
7.7 Placement Stability, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and Adoption

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2019-20 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019-20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan. A total of 15 children were adopted in 2019-20 compared to 13 in 2018/19.

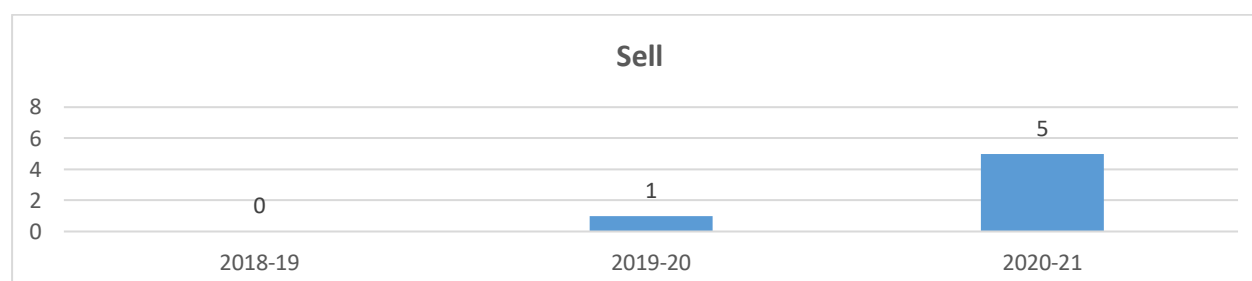


Thurrock Council are part of an alliance with Adopt East. Adopt East is a regional adoption alliance which brings together the professionalism, skills and expertise of eight local authorities and two voluntary adoption agencies from across the East of England.

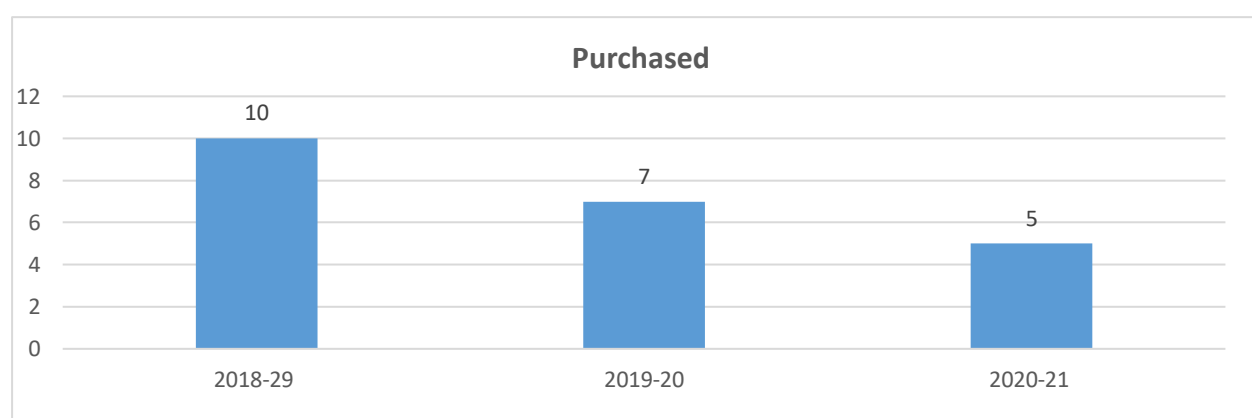
The Adopt East Alliance is committed to delivering the highest quality adoption service to children and families throughout our region. We work with families in Southend, Thurrock, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Bedford Borough, Adoption Plus, Hertfordshire and Luton. The scale of our organisation means that Thurrock children waiting for adoption have access to a large number of adopters. By working collaboratively, we are able to share best practice avoiding any unnecessary delay. Adoption performance through the in house team is reflected in the data below. There is a positive trend in the number of adopters recruited with 11 in 2020/21, a significant increase from 2018/19 (3) and 2019/20 (6).



In common with many Local Authorities in the region, where we recruit local adopters who may not want/ be suitable to adopt local children we are able to transfer these or 'sell' to other Local Authorities in recognition of the costs we have incurred in approving them as adopters. We also purchase adopters to support the matching process and increase adoptions. This data is shown below, costs vary due to many factors such as the needs of the child, number of siblings, and ages of the children.



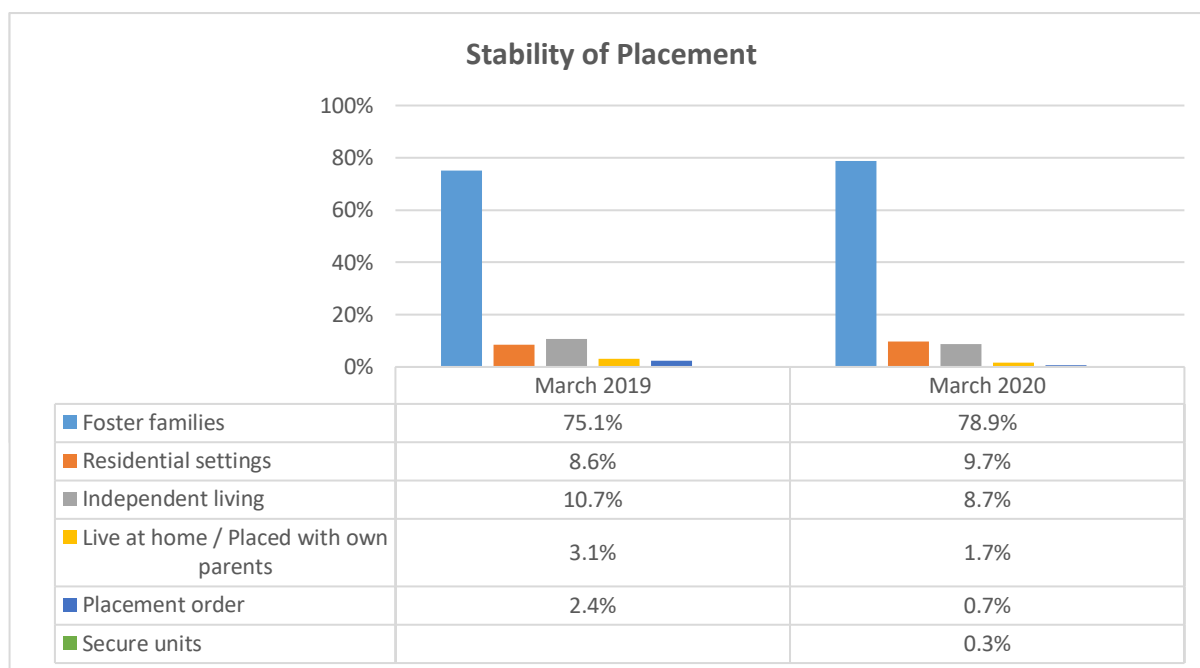
How many adopters we have purchased in the last 3 financial years. How much this has cost in 2020/21 we have also developed the Fostering to adopt programme and have an initial 3 cases that have resulted in adoption.



In 2020/21 we have also developed the Fostering to Adopt Programme and have an initial 3 cases that have resulted in adoption.

7.8 Placement Stability

Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive, we describe this as achieving permanence for that child. To achieve permanence it is essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential. We know that placement stability is an important factor in how well our Children Looked After are doing, the performance on placement stability is shown below.



	March 2019	March 2020
Foster families	218	235
Residential settings	25	29
Independent living	31	26
Live at home / Placed with own parents	9	5
Placement order	7	2
Secure units		1

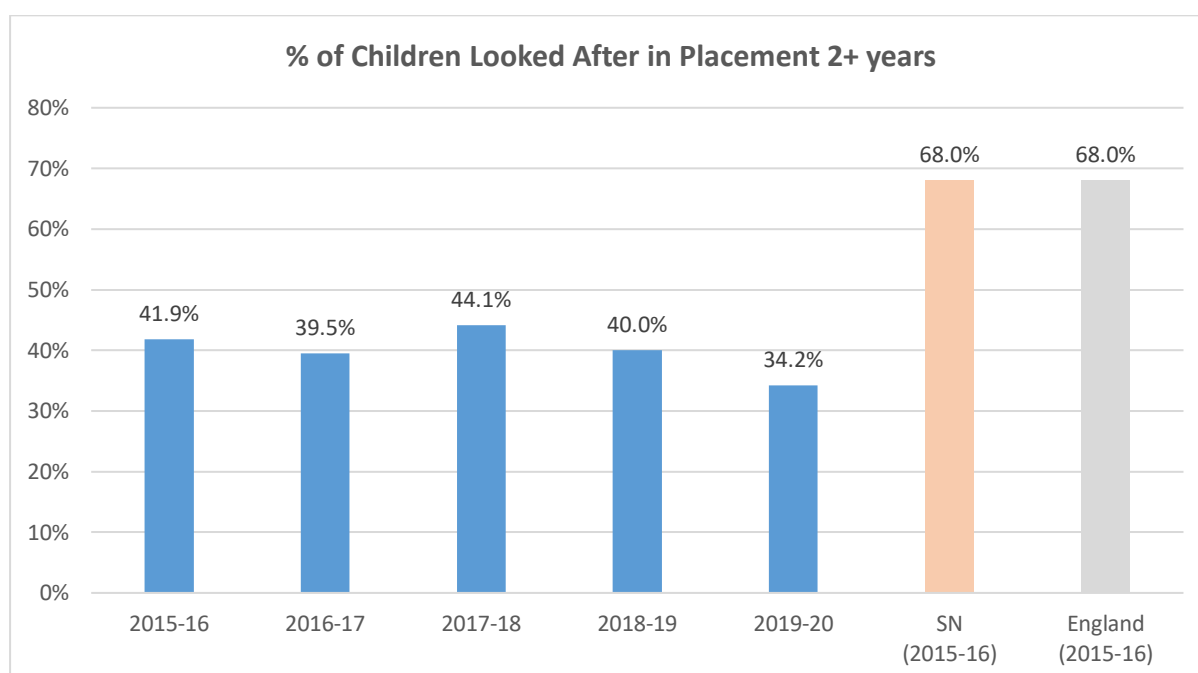
The performance across the factors shown in the chart above has remained relatively stable and maintaining and improving this is a priority.

In addition, a key measure of placement stability is also the percentage of children with three or more moves in a year. Thurrock's performance over recent years has been improving and in 2018/19 (the most recent published data) performance was better than national and our statistical neighbours. A part of achieving this is based on the quality of providers in place, the increase in in house-foster carers and the activity in recent years to set local standards and encourage providers on to the framework through the select list is a part of this.

The chart below provides a comparison of the 3 or more placements data with our statistical neighbours and national (latest published data). There has been a significant improvement over recent years, this is routinely monitored.

The percentage of Children Looked After who have been in a placement for 2 + years has reduced in recent years as permanency planning has been further developed. Thurrock has significantly lower numbers than our statistical neighbours and England data.

The chart below gives an indication of how long current Children Looked After have been in their placement and is used in permanency planning and placement stability.



	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Thurrock	139	132	132	116	102

8.0 Educational Attainment of Children Looked After

There are also strong indications that placement stability is also factor in the educational attainment of Children Looked After, whilst the factors that determine this are too diverse to measure at a child level there are some key performance indicators that provide the direction of travel. These are outlined below.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School ensures that Children who are Looked After have access to education and works closely with the Social Work teams and other professionals. They hold and publish a range of data on attainment however for the purposes of this document we are reporting on two of the key stages. School attendance data is also shown below.

School Attendance 2019	
Average attendance CLA	96.9%
All Thurrock Children Attendance	94.9%

Key Stage 2

The combined reading, writing and maths scores remain consistent with 50% of Children Looked After achieving the expected levels in 2019 and 2018. This

compares with the national level of 35% in 2018 and 37% in 2019. The comparison with all Thurrock children is shown in the table below.

2019 Key Stage 2 Exam Analysis: 12+ months in care	Thurrock CLA	Thurrock ALL	National CLA	National ALL	National Disadvantaged	National Non - Disadvantaged
Reading, Writing & Maths combined %	50%	70%	37%	64.9 %	51%	71%

Key Stage 4

The 2019 KS4 Attainment 8 Score for Thurrock Children Looked After was 23.20 compared to a national Children Looked After score of 17.9. For Thurrock Children Looked After, this is an improvement from the 2018 score of 19.7.

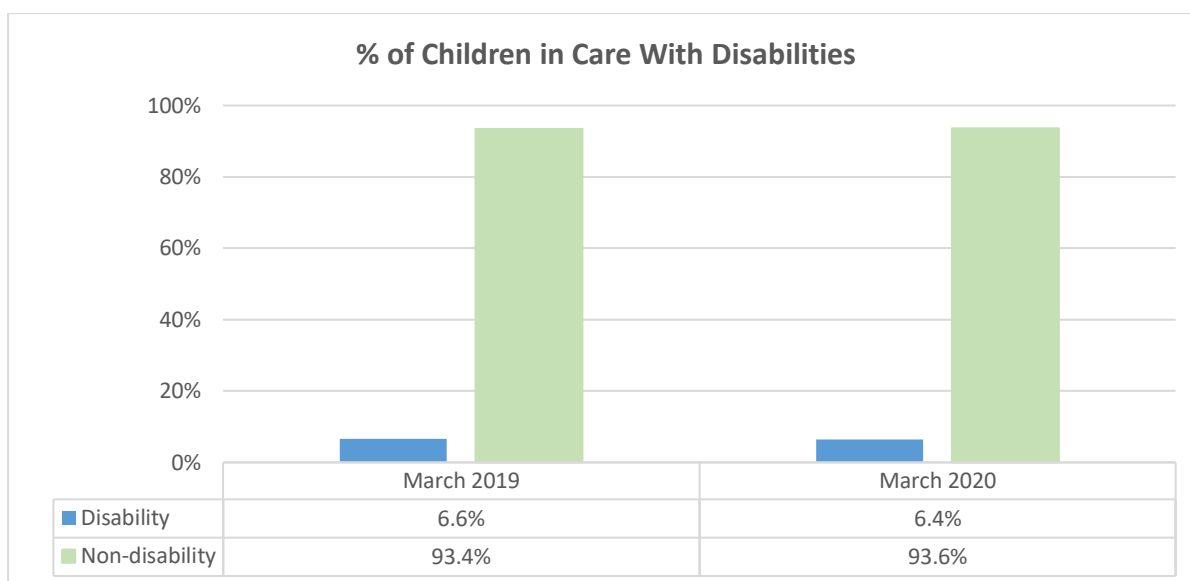
The 2019 KS4 Progress 8 Score for Thurrock Children Looked After was -1.09 compared to a national Children Looked After score of -1.47. For Thurrock Children Looked After, this is an improvement from the 2018 score of -1.42

The chart below shows the 2019 data, including a comparison with all Thurrock children.

2019 Key Stage 4 Exam Analysis: 12+ months	Thurrock CLA	Thurrock ALL	National CLA	National ALL	National Disadvantaged	National Non – Disadvantaged
Attainment 8 Score	23.20	42.90	17.90	44.80	36.80	50.50
Progress 8	-1.09	-0.10	-1.47	-0.08	-0.45	0.13

9.0 Children in Care with Disabilities

6.4% of our Children Looked After as at the end of March 2020 had a disability as defined by the Children Act 1989 (Section 17 Part 11), this number remains broadly static against previous years although there has been a slight reduction in recent months and this will be reflected in the next published data. Although this group make up a comparatively small proportion of the wider cohort of Children Looked After, they usually have complex needs and so it is essential that we can provide placements, which are able to meet their needs and provide them with the support they need to thrive. The specialist nature of the care needs of this group, the national shortage of provision and the need for an effective transition to Adult Services where appropriate make this a key group to consider with regards to planning of provision.



	March 2019	March 2020
With disability	19	19
No disability	271	279

10.0 Transition to Adult Services

Transition is complex as young people move from Children's Services into adult provision and it is important that those involved in support work closely together to reduce concerns about the change from children's to adult provision. Support across Adult Social Care Services is offered in a number of different ways guided by the Care Act 2014, ranging from support and advice, early intervention and prevention to delivery of support to meet complex needs. Most young people who utilise adult services will be those who have complex challenges such as learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health challenges. A Preparing for Adulthood Strategy has been written to support young people and their families and an implementation plan for this strategy will be developed in partnership with young people, their families, education, health, social care and the wider community. We want to ensure that young people are placed at the heart of our Better Care Together Agenda which focuses on community, place, strengths and integrated approaches. We have identified within our Market Development Strategy that there will be a steady increase in the numbers of people between 18 to 65 who will have learning disabilities and autism and as such our planning for future supports reflects this.

11.0 Care Leavers

The definition of Care Leavers includes young people who have left care post 18 but also children who have not left care but have become eligible for support post the age of 18.

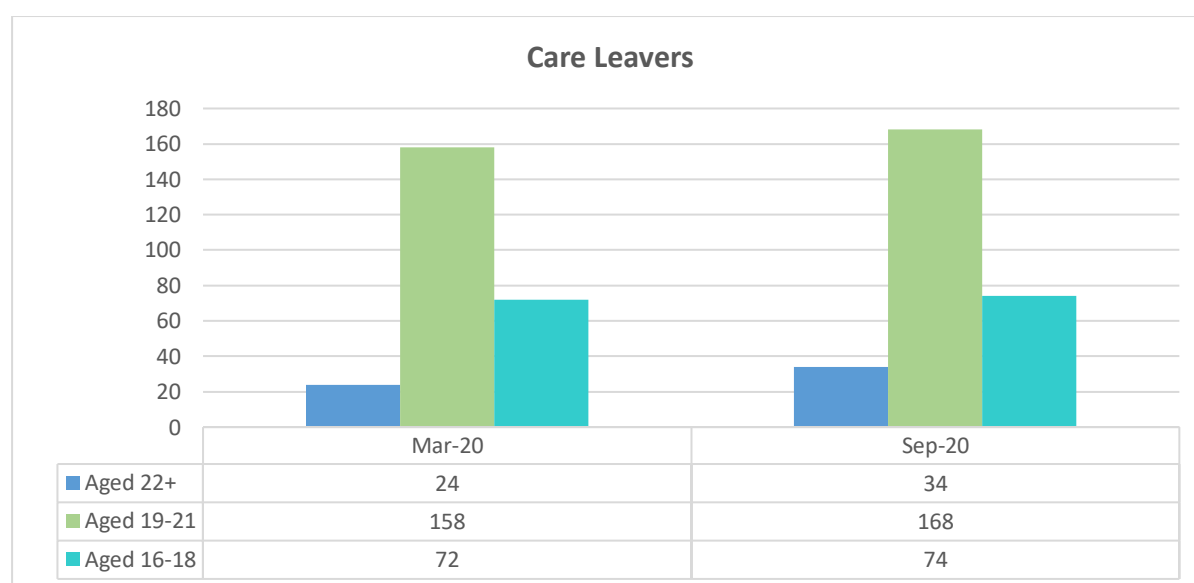
Eligible children within the meaning given by paragraph 19B of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989. Eligible children are young people aged 16 and 17 who have been

Looked After for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and are still being Looked After.

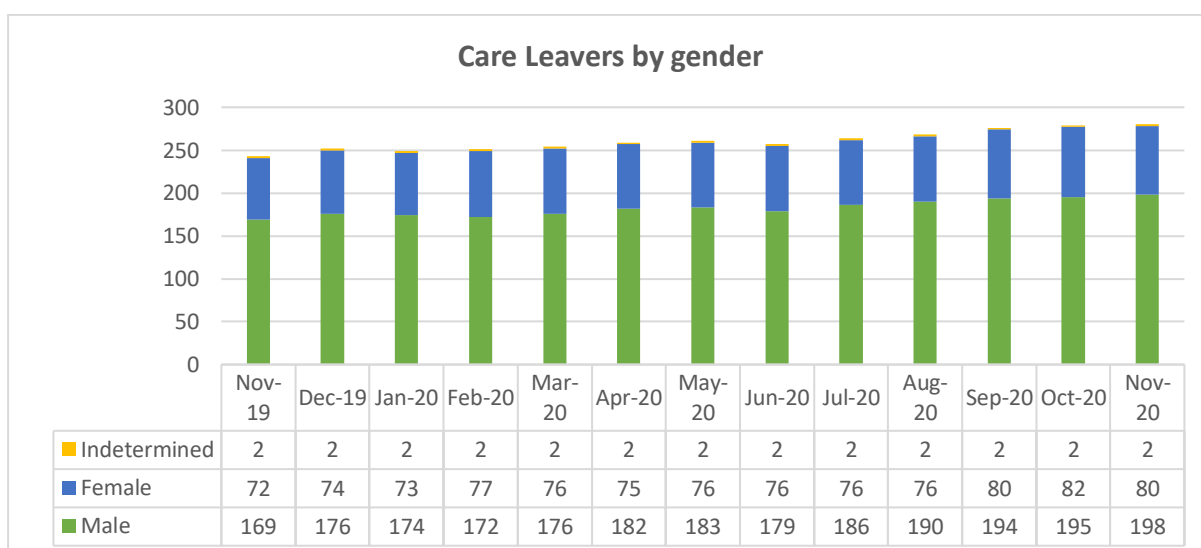
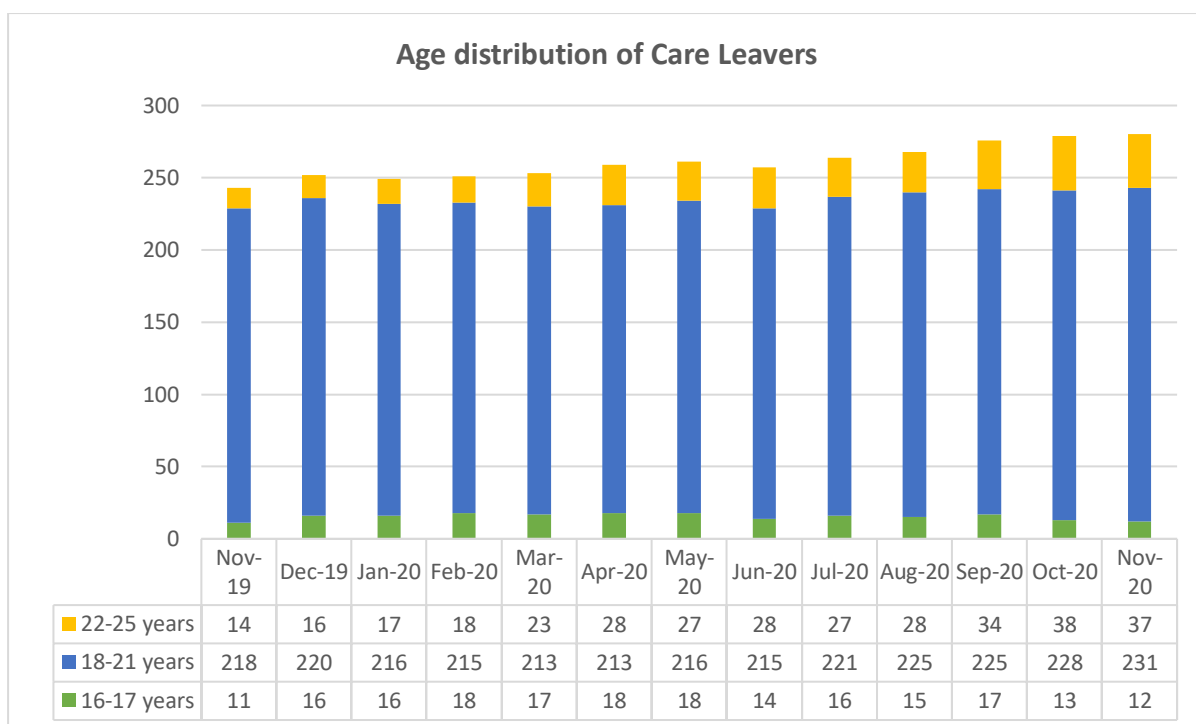
Relevant children within the meaning given by section 23A(2) of the Children Act are children who are not being Looked After by a Local Authority, but was, before last ceasing to be Looked After, an eligible child, and is aged 16 or 17.

Former relevant persons within the meaning given by Section 23C (1) of the Children Act 1989 are young people aged between 18-25 who have been either eligible or relevant children or both.

As at the end of March 2020, 276 Care Leavers, including those 16-18 being supported, were receiving an Aftercare Service, this is a slight increase from March 2019 but this is largely dependent on the age of children in care.



Getting the right support for Care Leavers is a priority for Thurrock as this supports transition into adulthood. A number of interlinked projects have already commenced that bring together partners such as Housing, Adult Services and Children's Services to identify and meet support needs and find housing solutions locally. The data below aids the planning of this as we can see that the number of 22-25 year olds increased in recent years and this will impact particularly on providing support for the move to independent living for this cohort.

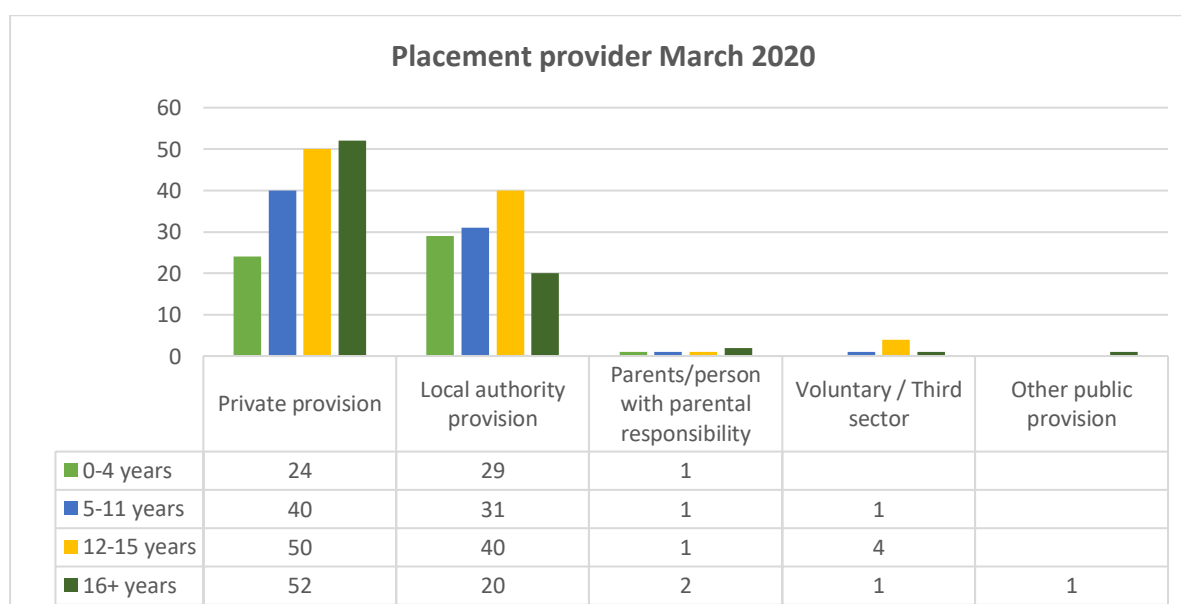
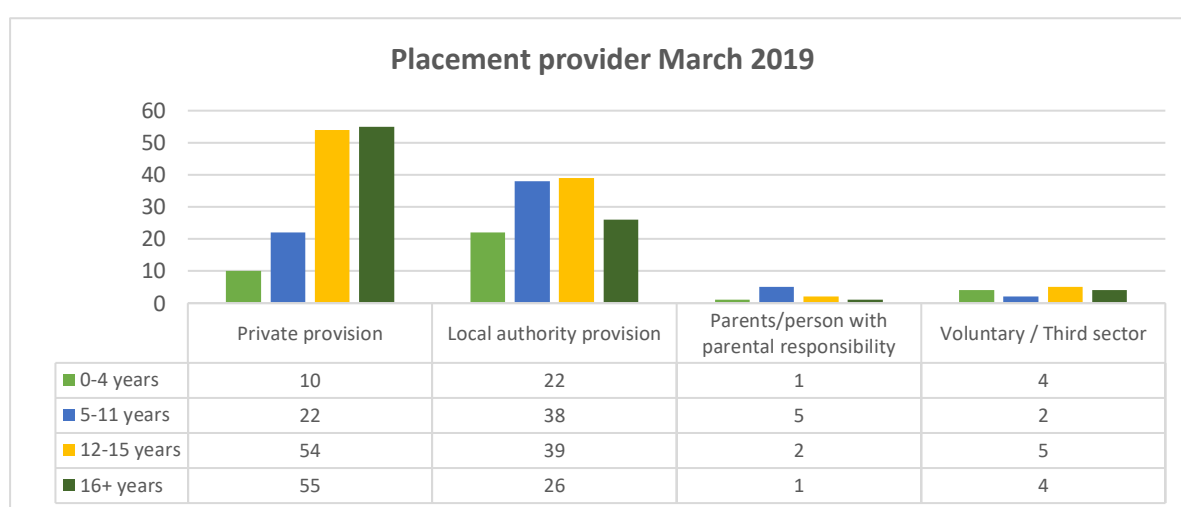


The high percentage of Children Looked After aged 10-15 years means that demand for Aftercare services is likely to remain high and due to the increasing local population this may increase over the coming years. A profile of when Care Leavers aged 16-17 years turn 18 is shown below for the period January 2021 to March 2022. This only provides an estimate due to other factors but is useful in managing support needs.

Jan -21	Feb -21	Mar -21	Apr -21	May -21	Jun -21	Jul -21	Aug -21	Sep -21	Oct -21	Nov -21	Dec -21	Jan -22	Feb -22	Mar -22
1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	2

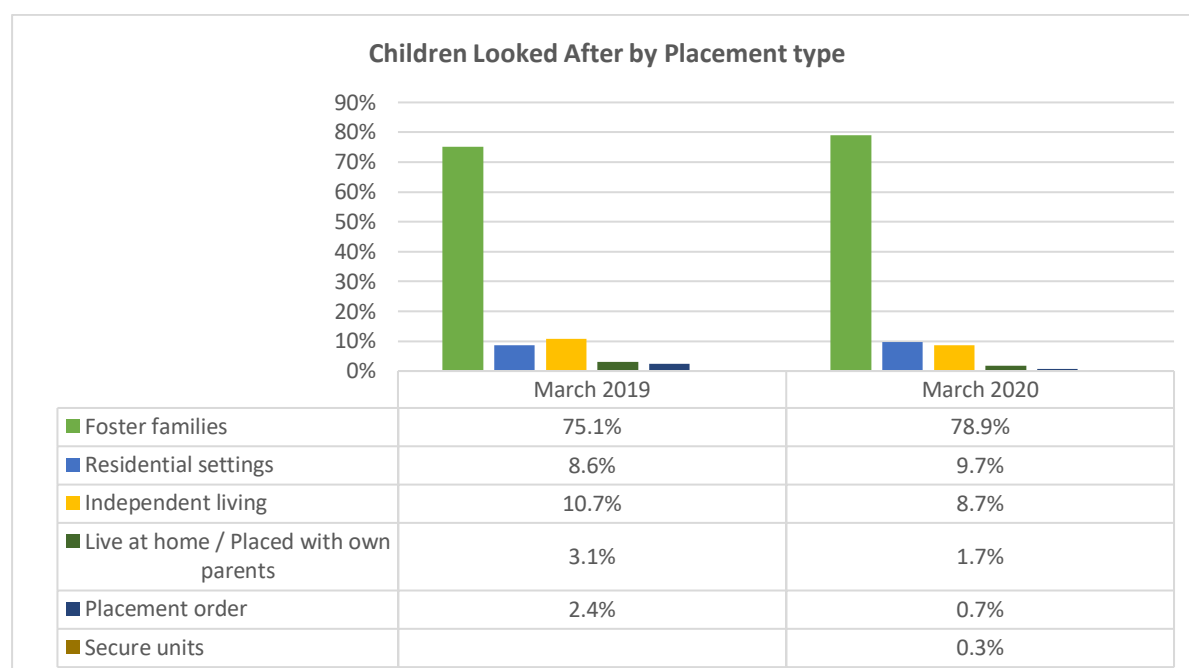
12.0 Placement Availability

As of March 2019 there were 218 of children in fostering households; 119 of which were IFA and 99 of which were in house. In March 2020 the number of children in fostering households was 235 and 117 were IFA and 118 were in house. In 2020-21 and 2021-2022 if the numbers of Children Looked After remain at 298 (as of March 2020), an increased fostering recruitment campaign would seek to increase fostering capacity by approximately 20 households and reduce the number of children placed over 20 miles from Thurrock and in other types of placement by at least 20 Children Looked After. The Thurrock placement need is focussed on the recruitment of fostering households that will be able to manage sibling groups locally as this is currently where we often have difficulty securing a local placement.



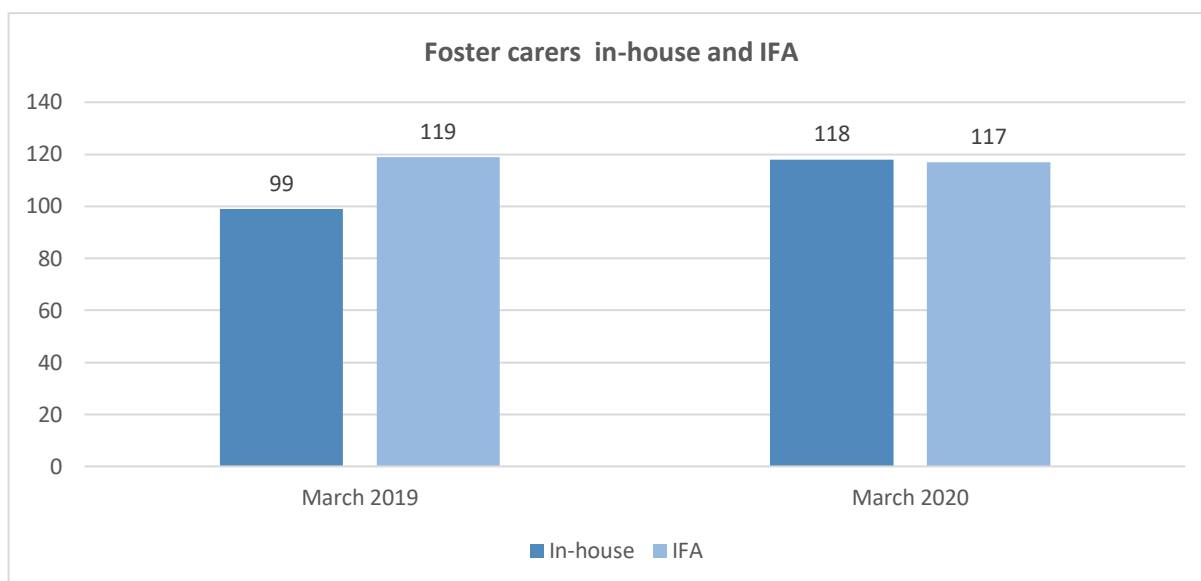
The majority of Children Looked After (78.9%) have a placement in a foster care setting, this is a slight increase from 2019 (75.1%). These placements are provided through In-house foster placements and placements through commissioned

Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) and breakdown of fostering placements is also provided.



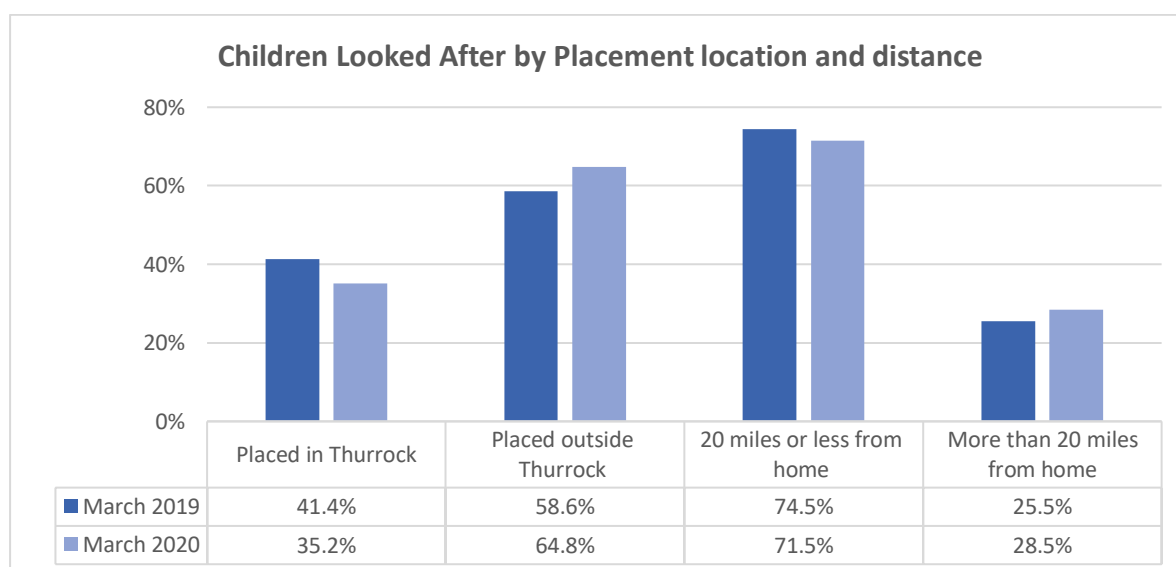
	March 2019	March 2020
Foster families	218	235
Residential settings	25	29
Independent living	31	26
Live at home / Placed with own parents	9	5
Placement order	7	2
Secure units		1

A further breakdown of the fostering placements is shown below. The increasing number of in-house foster carers reflects the recruitment activity the team have been undertaking. This supports the provision of local placements and value for money. IFA placements are recruited through the select list provision of which there is still a need however the offer of local provision that meets individual needs has priority over carers further away.



Thurrock operates a select list and annually invites providers to become a part of that framework. This has led to the development of a Thurrock specific contract that better meets the needs of children and young people in the borough. There are currently 13 Semi Independent providers, 7 Residential providers and 19 Independent Foster Agencies as a part of the framework. Placements are made under the framework where possible but where this is not possible, usually due to the need for specialist or emergency placements then they are spot purchased.

The nature of the residential care market has resulted in a lower number of this type of placement on the select list. This is replicated in Local Authorities across the Country; the majority of residential placements are spot purchased for individual children however the same terms and conditions apply regardless of the contract type. It remains a priority to recruit high quality placement types, suitable to individual needs as close to the local authority as is practicable.



	March 2019	March 2020
Placed in Thurrock	120	105
Placed outside Thurrock	170	193
20 miles or less from home	216	213
More than 20 miles from home	74	85

There is a recognition that there is a slight decrease in the numbers of Children Looked After who are placed both within the Borough and within 20 miles of their home. As at end March 2020, 71.5% of children and young people are placed within a 20 mile radius of their home compared to 74.5% in 2019 and 79.3% in 2018. The geographical size of Thurrock means that those children not placed in the Borough are generally in neighbouring or nearby authorities such as Essex, Southend, London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Placements over 30 miles tend to be of a specialist nature where there are few providers available to meet specific needs. The children who are placed in residential care have specialist needs and are unable to settle within a foster family environment. They generally have extensive trauma histories and foster families can be challenged with the presenting needs of these children. Residential care offers safe care to some older adolescence who can be subject to grooming from gangs and experience exploitation.

The renewed Thurrock fostering campaign with the additional benefits for Thurrock foster carers to receive council tax rebate will support the focus on local recruitment of carers so children can remain within their communities. This assists with the continuity of school and support ensuring links to families and environment. We are hoping that an inclusive and diverse approach to the fostering recruitment will also assist in placing children within culturally matched placements and offer familiarity with family customs and placement within familiar communities.

We now have one standard Thurrock Select List. Individual/ spot purchases will only be utilised if a placement cannot be found from the Select List, and in these cases will still be subject to a standardised set of contract terms and conditions.

The exception to this is the limited number of Special Educational Needs placements made with Residential Non-maintained Special Schools and Colleges where the National Contract is used. Thurrock is also a part of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group, this brings a collective approach to monitoring and fee negotiation to those providers who are members.

13.0 Accommodation for Care Leavers and Vulnerable Young People

The majority of Children Looked After are supported by the Aftercare Team on turning 18. At the end of September 2020, 276 Care Leavers were receiving an Aftercare service. Working closely with the Aftercare team, Headstart Housing provides transitional accommodation whilst young people develop the independence skills required to manage social housing. Now managing a portfolio of 114 beds, including

42 supported by key workers, the service provides a tailored approach to support young people to develop. The portfolio includes:

Homelessness: A joint project between Children's services and Housing is in place to offer accommodation for young people who meet the relevant criteria. For young people, this consists of:	
Hostel 1	5 beds primarily for young people aged 16/17 years who have declared themselves homeless and are assessed by Housing as being so. Mediation support is also offered to try to support the young person to return home. If rooms are empty they can be used as emergency supported accommodation while a suitable placement is found.
Hostel 2	9 beds available to Headstart Housing/ Aftercare for former Children Looked After aged 17-25 years. Support is provided to a maximum of 25 hours per week and is allocated based on individual needs.
Young Parents Support Project: This project provides accommodation and parental support	
Accommodation and Support across 2 hostels	For 20 young women plus support for a further 5 women aged 16-25 who are pregnant or who have children under 5. The project is open to Thurrock residents and any current or former Thurrock Council Child Looked After.
Move on flats	2 flats housing 4 young families
Other Accommodation for Care Leavers Where Appropriate	
Local accommodation	A mix of Council housing stock and the use of private landlords

There remains a shortage of:

- Post 18 low need 24/7 Supported Accommodation
- Post 18 medium / high need CQC Registered accommodation
- Floating support for Care Leavers aged 18-25 years old.

Joint working has already commenced across Children's, Adults, Housing and Public Health to integrate commissioning and identify opportunities to better use existing funding.

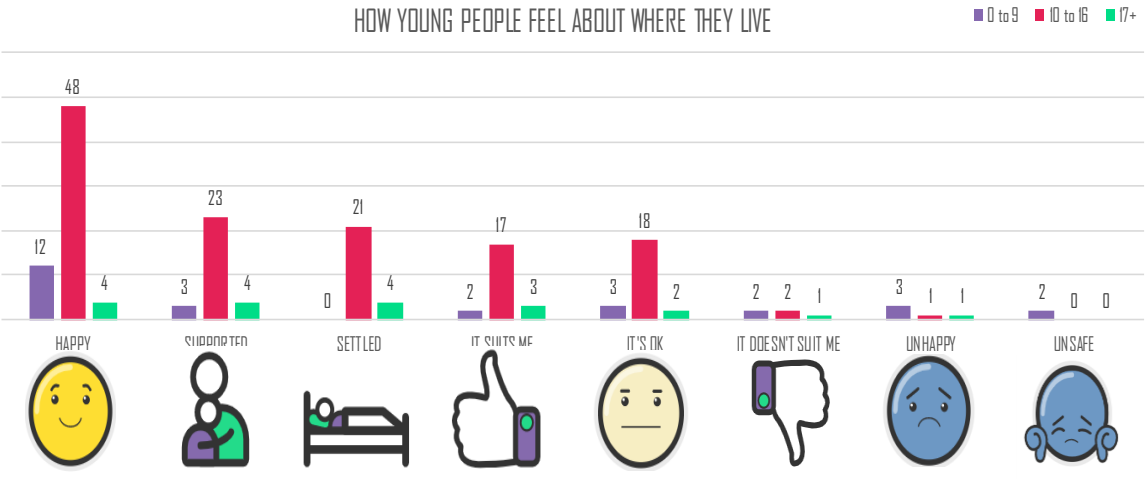
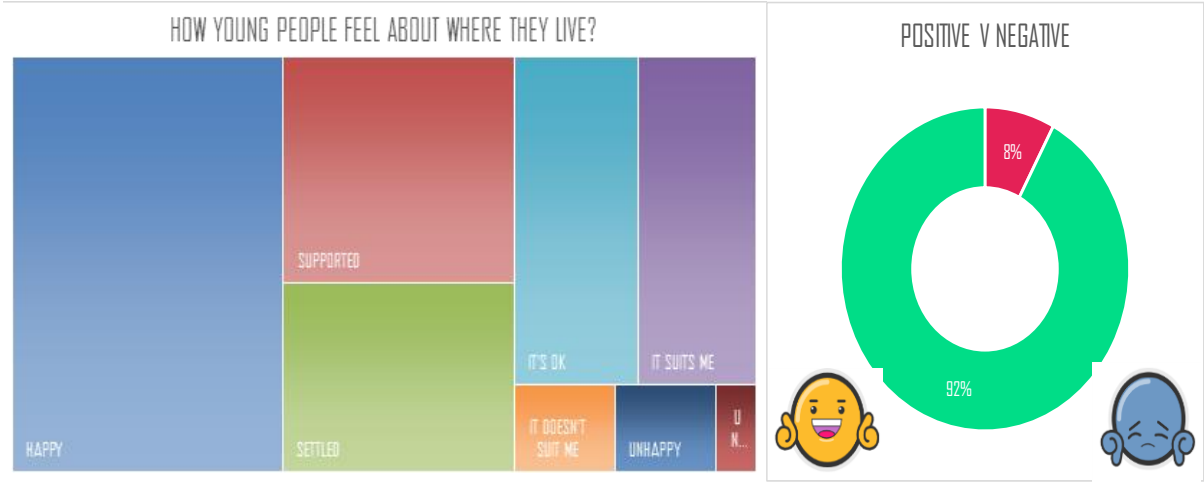
14.0 How Children Looked After and Care Leavers Feel About Where They Live

The following diagrams summarise how children and young people who are Looked After feel about where they live and their local area, they were gathered by the Participation and Engagement Team. It is broken down to show the different age groups and the individual aspects of their responses. We can see that 92% feel positive about where they live and 86% feel positive about their local area. In addition the majority of children in each age group say they feel safe where they live.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WHERE YOU LIVE?

OVERALL

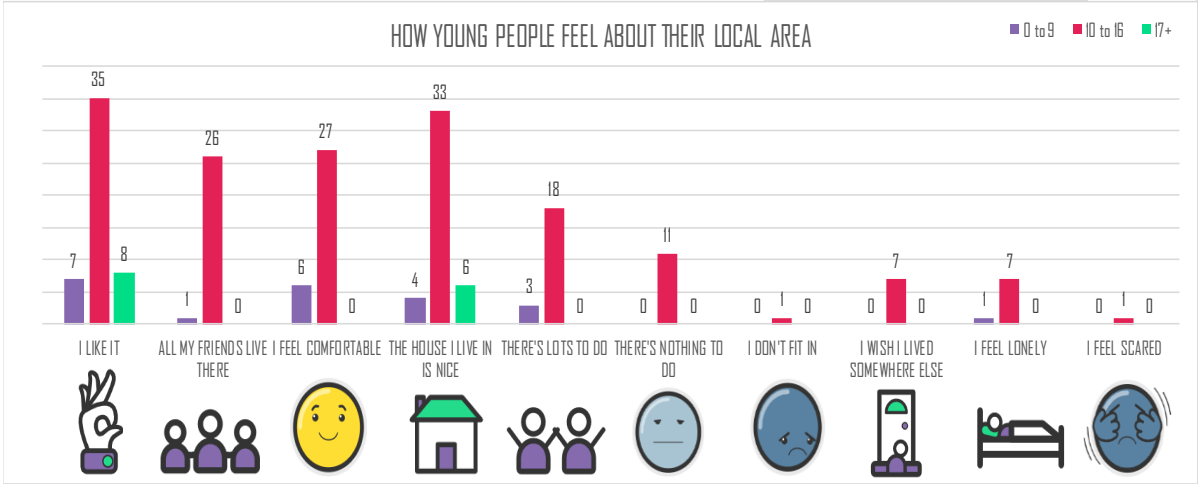
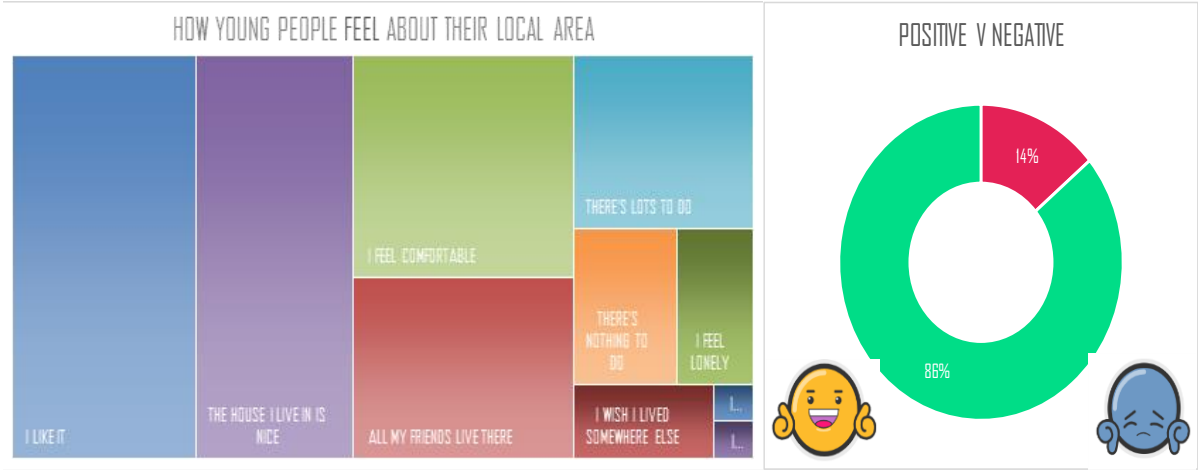
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 108



HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR LOCAL AREA?

OVERALL

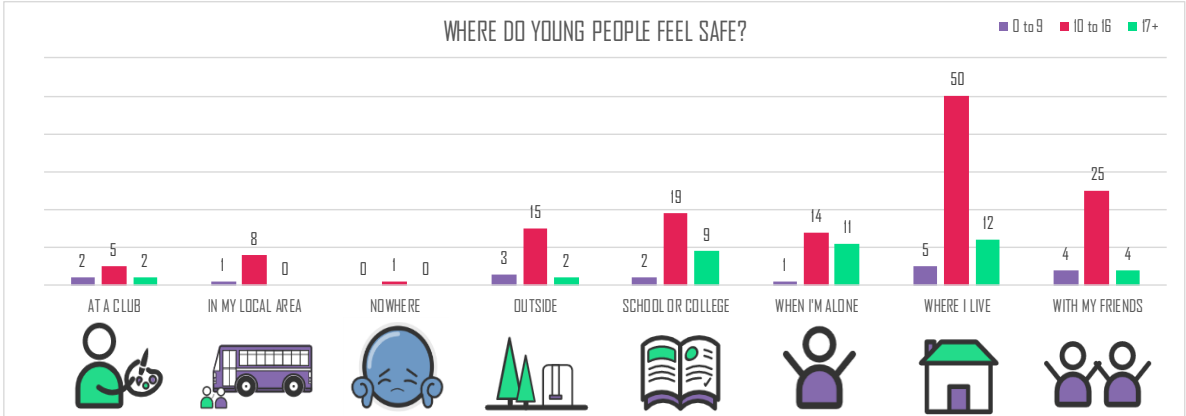
TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 77



WHERE DO YOU FEEL SAFE?

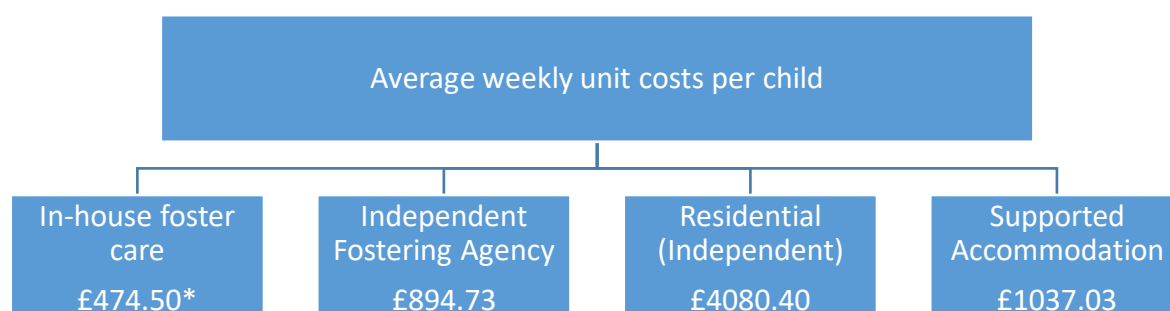
OVERALL

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES 76



15.0 Placement Costs

Provided below is the average weekly unit cost per child in each different placement type. These costs will vary based on the needs of the child and the placement type required with significant variations between the minimum and maximum cost, especially for placements out of area. This breakdown is designed to provide an overview.



In house foster placements provide the most cost efficient placement type* (support costs are met in house) and are generally provided locally, these are followed by Independent Foster Agency placements. We always seek to place children in foster care where possible with priority given, subject to the child's need, to placements within a 20 mile radius, the next level of priority is to those providers who are a part of the Select List/ framework. To support to use of foster care we have the local in house recruitment drive along with the annual select list to support an increase in Independent Foster Agencies. Residential care is only used for specialist or emergency use. The cost of all placements are based against a framework of costs dependent on the level of need. Whilst it is recognised that costs will be dependent on the need and availability a pricing framework is used regardless of if the placement is from a framework or spot purchased. It remains a priority to reduce placement costs whilst maintaining the right level of care for children and young people.

There is limited comparator data available for the last 12 months however a report 'Price Trends and Costs of Children's Homes – February 2020' indicates that the average weekly cost for an education inclusive residential placement is £3,970 which is broadly similar to the rate we currently pay. It remains a priority for us to achieve value for money and the Commissioning team work on placement costs will be ongoing.

16.0 Gap Analysis

The development of the Brighter Futures commissioned parenting offer should focus on the reduction of 10-15 year olds entering the care system by ensuring there is a clear pathway from the Children's Centre support offered into other forms of support.

Edge of care support for 10-15 year olds particularly must remain a focus as this is the consistently the largest cohort of Children Looked After.

The high levels of Care Leavers combined with the cohort of 10-15 year olds who will become Care Leavers in the coming years means that there is a risk of a shortage of post 18 accommodation in the local area, this should be a focus for development through the existing programmes.

Post 18 support has been identified as a priority through a number of areas of work along with the joint programme of commissioning to meet the increasing levels and complexity of needs. These programmes should continue to align to reduce duplication and maximise the use of resources.

Permanence remains a priority for Thurrock Children Looked After, adoption numbers are increasing however this must remain a focus to meet the demand for adoption permanency.

Whilst the Children Looked After number is lower than our statistical neighbours, the local projected population growth particularly of children means that even if our rate per 10k remains the same we are likely to see an increase in the number of Children Looked After. The development of in-house foster carers is important as these carers often allow for local placements. The recruitment activity should be matched to any % population growth and also provide opportunities for local placements for sibling groups.

We need a range of providers to meet different placement needs, currently there is a shortage of residential and IFA's providers locally who are part of the select list. Market development activity should aim to increase this when the Framework opens annually.

The majority of residential placements are more than 20 miles from Thurrock, we must work with providers based closer to Thurrock to address this.

The number of Children Looked After who experience 3 or more moves in a year should continue to be a focus, the placement development work will support this.

The costs per placement vary significantly, there is a need for improved step down processes and fee negotiation to achieve value for money to allow us to invest more of our budget in supporting our children who are looked after.

17.0 Key Priorities

Across all of the services we deliver, we seek to make sure that all decisions are centred on the views and needs of the child. We also aim to make sure that our time is focussed on achieving the right outcomes for our children who are looked after to achieve these aims.

Placement type and the age of our children in care population have recently been relatively constant. The numbers of children in care have decreased in line with our

statistical neighbours but are predicted to increase as the local population does. If we are to achieve the best outcomes for all these children we need to ensure that all our placement services are fit for purpose and continue to grow and develop.

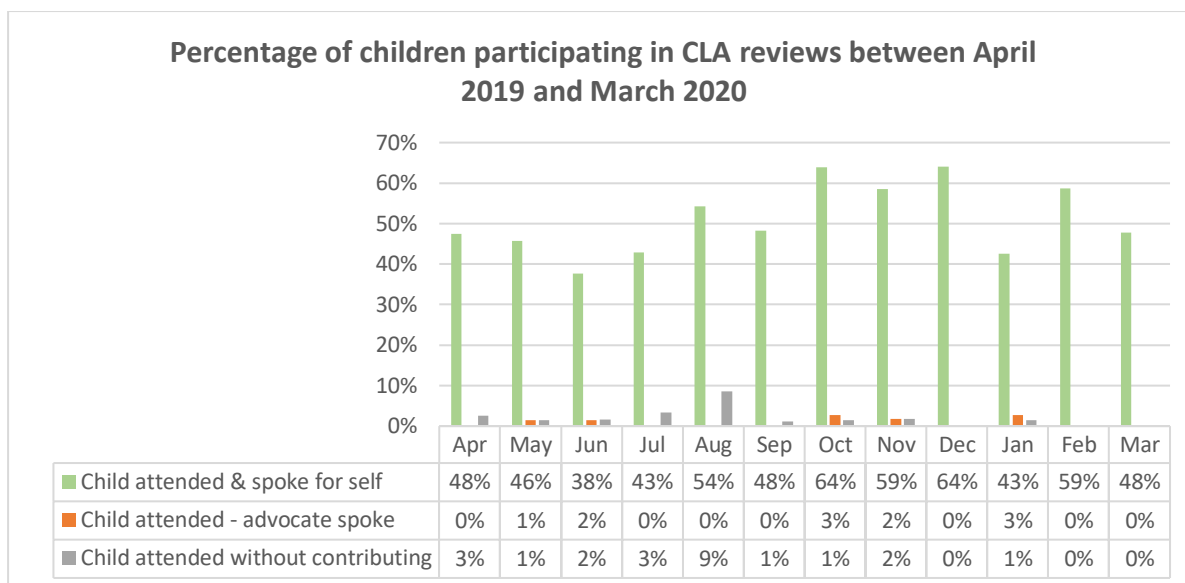
There are six main strands to our strategy, these are a continuation of the work developed in recent years:



Priority 1: The voice of children and young people is at the heart of planning.

We feel it is of importance to listen to our children and young people and this measured in a number of ways including:

- Children and young people are able to comment on their placement through the engagement of the Participation and Engagement Team
- Children and young people report that they feel happy where they live



The Mind of My Own App is one of the ways children and young people can feedback how they feel about their placement, the following comments were taken from the feedback when asked how they felt/ what they liked:

- Enthusiastic
- Get on well
- Safe, happy, part of the family
- School
- Computer access, hobbies, activities
- Personal space
- Excited
- Enjoy time together, they are good at listening
- I talk to them if I am worried, they care about me
- Calm
- The other kids, food, money, friends, school, Wi-Fi
- Safe
- Safe and settled
- Its ok, part of the family

When asked about the things we could do better, children and young people feedback the following comments below:



Young Voices



Next steps

- To create a culture of listening to children and young people and hearing back from them about the services they receive and improving our relationships with them.
- The ideas from children, young people and their families contributing to the shaping of service development and service improvements
- Ensuring the voice of the child is at the heart of assessment, planning and intervention
- Ensuring that children who are looked after and children who are subject to a Child Protection plan know they can ask for an advocate and are supported to attend/contribute to conferences and reviews
- Ensure that all internal processes are focused on the child and maximise the impact of money spent to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved.
- Ensure that all processes are efficient and minimise any potential wasting of resources.

Priority 2 – Achieving Placement Stability and Permanence

As a part of our national reporting, this indicator measures the percentage of Children Looked After aged under 16 at who have been looked after continuously for at least 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for at least 2 years, or are placed for adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement together last for at least 2 years.

More children achieved permanency through adoption in 2019-20 in Thurrock and an increased number are identified for 2019-20 with adoption as a potential permanence plan. A total of 15 children were adopted in 2019-20 compared to 13 in 2018/19.

Where possible, we want all our children to be in placements which provide them with long term placement stability, and where appropriate to leave care.

We describe this as achieving permanence for that child. Although it is sometimes necessary to move a child to provide them with a better placement our aim is to minimise the number of times each child changes placement as this can be very disruptive. To achieve permanence it is essential that all our teams work effectively together to support each placement. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways, including adoption, special guardianship order, child arrangement order or matched for long term fostering. Each of these options gives the chance for the child to achieve stability and achieve their potential.

Ensure there is sufficient support available for children to achieve their long term care plans to prevent Children Looked After remaining in placements which may not best meet their needs.

Next Steps

- Continually review all placements to understand where there is opportunity to support permanence or where a child might be better served by moving to a different placement.
- Improve the placement review process to ensure all placements are regularly brought before the placement panel for review and all options for that child are considered at this time so each child is able to move towards permanence where appropriate.
- Ensure all children who are at the edge of care and those becoming looked after are part of a Family Group Conference/Meeting.
- Put in place necessary support for our carers and children in care to enable long term placements. This covers placement support such as therapeutic intervention to ensure the carer's home can meet the needs of the children placed with them.
- Raise awareness of and assist carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders wherever suitable to ensure that this option is available to achieve permanence for children who are Looked After.
- Improve our offer of life story work for children.
- Review all approved connected carers to see whether an SGO would be more

appropriate to meet the child's long term needs.

To recruit sufficient adopters, maintain existing placements as the number of available adopters continues to fall across the UK and further develop our adoption support services to achieve and secure improvements in service delivery.

Next Steps

- Implementation of the Adoption Recruitment Strategy.
- Raise awareness of support for those who have adopted through more effective use of social media.
- Increase targeted support groups for families to allow early intervention where a placement might be at risk of breaking down.
- Maintain quality and quantity of matches through a review of processes to ensure they are robust and achieve what is right for the child
- Increase our early intervention and therapeutic offer to provide the additional support for adopters funded through the Adoption Support Fund (government funding to provide therapeutic support to adoptive families)

Priority 3 – Recruitment and Support of Foster Carers

There are three main types of foster care available to our children who are looked after. Where possible we keep children with people they already have some form of relationship with, this type of placement is Family and Friends Foster Care. When a child is first referred to us we will speak to any proposed carers to assess whether they will be able to provide the support that child needs. If we cannot find a suitable related carer, we will try to place them with one of our Thurrock 'in-house' carers. Only where we cannot identify an in-house placement to meet their needs will we then look to place them with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) as these placements are more likely to be outside of Thurrock.

It is a priority for us to significantly increase the number of children placed with Thurrock Council foster carers as placements are more likely to be local and carers will have access to local clinical support and specialist training along with local supervising social workers, however we value the role that independent fostering placements have in meeting the diverse needs of our Children Looked After. We have set a target to increase in house placements by 20 year on year and increase the proportion of children placed locally with in-house carers. The importance of placing children and young people with foster carers where appropriate means that we will also continue to recruit from the independent sector as a part of the commissioned framework.

In 2019/20 the service was successful in recruiting 19 fostering households. At the beginning of COVID-19, recruitment had good momentum. The fostering recruitment strategy highlights the key areas which result in the increased recruitment of fostering households. Enquiries are steady but progression to application is slower as applicants deal with the uncertainty of COVID-19. This is

a similar experience to other authorities and is confirmed in the feedback from our Eastern Region colleagues. The decision to provide a Council Tax rebate for Thurrock foster carers provides financial support as well as emphasising the value Thurrock places on the fostering community and the care they provide to Thurrock Children. The fostering recruitment campaign is being updated to create new marketing opportunities, the idea is to focus on our local communities, enhance the profile of Thurrock and our excellent offer to increase successfully approved fostering households.

Next Steps

- To ensure that there are more foster carers recruited than resign or are de-registered so that the total number of foster care households increases year on year.
- Increasing local engagement and raising awareness of fostering with Thurrock through an updated fostering recruitment campaign and brand.
- To increase the number of independent foster carers on the select list to further increase the availability of foster care placements

Priority 4: Commissioning and Partnership Working

Thurrock continues to place and match all those children and young people requiring a placement. Children would benefit from increased choice in placements that support their education and proximity to Thurrock. In order to support placement choice, a newly refreshed fostering campaign is being launched with the additional offer of Council Tax rebate.

The enhanced placements offer is supplemented through the annual placement commissioning review which has enabled Thurrock to develop a framework of providers who have clear quality frameworks bringing a consistent approach to the commissioned provision which includes IFAs and residential care. Whilst this has been successful, there is still a need to spot purchase foster and residential provision.

Close working such as the partnership between Children's and Housing to support Care Leavers accommodation and support is providing a range of opportunities to jointly commission provision. In addition, we work closely with the Thurrock Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) particularly for cases where there are significant care needs. Residential places are currently purchased according to need and where appropriate, agreed through a joint decision making process. It is acknowledged that where there are complex needs the market drives the cost and availability of provision, this is an issue facing local authorities across England and continues to be a priority for us to address. Placements for children with significant health needs are jointly funded with the Continuing Care team in the Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Mind of My Own app is being used to consult with young people around their health and the health services they receive in order to feed back to the Children Looked After Health Steering group.

Commissioning is an ongoing part of the development of a range of service however there are some key areas that need a specific focus, either because they are not already commissioned or where the challenges of these need a partnership approach. These are outlined below:

Next Steps

- Continue to ensure children and young people contribute to the planning and quality assurance of the services they access
- To continue to improve our market development strategies as a part of the relationship with providers and the procurement of placements
- The joint commissioning of an integrated support offer for Care Leavers and Children Looked After
- Increase the number of in-house carers to meet our ambition to place more children with Thurrock Council carers
- A higher proportion are in placements located within 20 miles of Thurrock through the development of the work with placement providers, including IFA's, residential providers, providers of supported accommodation
- Increased value for money in placements by reviewing and improving spend outcomes
- Increase placement stability through the continued development of the select list and associated quality assurance frameworks and risk assessments locally and regionally
- Pilot new models of step down approaches for residential and foster care
- To further develop placements for a higher level of complexity of need through all placement types
- To commission specialist SEND/ Residential provision in partnership with the local Clinical Commissioning Group
- To develop a joint quality assurance process across agencies to support high quality provision

Priority 5: Developing the offer for care leavers

To support young people as they move into our leaving and aftercare team we have the following services in place:

Inspire – Education Employment and Training: We have dedicated personal advisors who support young people into education employment and training, this includes our outstanding Prince's Trust team programme which supports young people who lack confidence to progress into other learning pathways.

Inspire – Headstart Housing: Recognising the need to ensure that young people entering into the Aftercare Service require suitable accommodation we have developed our own housing support team to provide a range of housing opportunities. Young people coming into the leaving care service have priority around social housing however, for some young people they are not ready to take on a tenancy and as such we provide a range of alternative accommodation until they are able to access their own social housing. A newly developed Housing

Protocol has been developed to ensure there is suitable accommodation for all Care Leavers.

Next steps

- Develop the work through joint work between Headstart Housing and Housing to improve our accommodation offer to Care Leavers and ensure that there is sufficiency of accommodation for Thurrock Care Leavers with different levels of support needs.
- As accommodation is provided through a range of different types of providers we are working to extend the processes we have implemented for semi-independent accommodation for 16-18 year olds to standardise what we offer for care leavers
- Working with the Aftercare Team and Inspire to provide a range of support for those aged 18 and over to ensure they are able to continue to meet their potential once they cease to be looked after
- To develop a jointly commissioned support offer for those aged 18+ who need additional support to be able develop independence as an adult
- Put in place a supported lodgings offer through recruitment of foster carers who can provide a bed to those who are aged 18 and over within a family environment.
- Support the early identification of young people leaving care who are planning to move to live with birth relatives.
- Integration of the Corporate Parenting Duty in the Housing Offer to ensure young people in Aftercare are no longer intentionally homeless.
- Transition planning: Work closely with Adult Services to ensure they are aware of those young people who have housing and care issues
- Develop Housing Plans for all young people in Aftercare
- Develop UASC and specific 18+ support

Priority 6: To develop the early support offer available to our most vulnerable children

Earlier support for families has been shown to prevent the escalation of issues and where possible keep children at home. It also aids families by providing advice and helps to avoid confusion and duplication for families who need information advice and help. It also provides families with the tools to help them solve their own problems and also be more resilient in the future while making sure they know where they can go for help when they need it.

This support is delivered across a range of services however the Brighter Futures and Thurrock Families Together Teams work to provide a support offer to families to prevent children and young people becoming looked after. Families Together also provide placement stability support to enable foster carers to provide consistent and enhance care. There are a range of commissioned services that also provide support including: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service with consultant psychologist offering advice on the management of trauma issues, support with parenting for carers (SGO, connected carers and foster carers). Foster carers are encouraged to access the Coram parenting support offering access to a range of accredited parenting programmes. Also, support to Aftercare and new parents to enhance their skills and prevent social care intervention.

Next steps

To continue to develop early support to address the demand driven nature of preventative work which results in us not being able to provide support early enough to some of our most vulnerable children by:

- Continued implementation of the Brighter Futures Strategy to identify opportunities for integration with partners so that we can target services more effectively to the most vulnerable.
- Providing the right support at the right time to children and their families with a focus on the commissioned offer.
- Providing Edge of Care and Reunification support for children and young people.

18.0 Measuring Success

There is not a 'one size fits all' approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Children and Young People who are looked after. Different cohorts of children require different approaches. This strategy has identified some of the key challenges we face in meeting our sufficiency duty and actions proposed to make sure we are best placed to meet these challenges and deliver financially sustainable services.

The impact of the work to improve sufficiency will be mainly measured through the outcomes for the children and young people in placements, through feedback from them as a part of their individual reviews and through different methods of participation and engagement.

We will base our success on the extent to which:

The rate of CLA per 10K population reduces year on year due to earlier intervention.
The number of children and young people placed within a 20 mile radius of Thurrock increases.
There is an increase in adoption permanence year on year.
There is a reduction in the number of children experiencing 3 or more moves per year.
The number of Thurrock in-house Fostering Placements increases by at least 20 carers.
There is an increase in all types of provider included on the Thurrock Select List and a cost analysis is completed as a part of this exercise.
A jointly commissioned support offer for care leavers is in place.

There is an increase in the availability of accommodation for Care Leavers within a 20 mile radius of Thurrock.
There is a jointly commissioned SEND/ Residential offer in place.

Appendix 1

This is the current version of the Pledge however this is due to be updated and the most recent version can be found on the Council website.

Our Pledge to Children Looked After

Our pledge

Our pledge makes 5 promises to children and young people in our care. These cover:

- health
- education
- reaching potential
- positive relationships
- leaving care

The pledge was written by young people and has been adopted throughout the council.

It applies to all children and young people, from birth to their 18th birthday, who are in our care. Some apply to those leaving care from the age of 18 up to 21 years, or 25 years in certain cases.

The pledge applies regardless of sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, age, ability or background. It applies wherever young people are placed, whether this is inside or outside Thurrock.

Our 5 promises

We promise to work to help you to develop healthily by:

- helping you to keep fit and healthy and giving you the resources and information on how best to equip yourself to continue to develop
- making sure you are given support to have regular health and dental checks
- having social workers support you in all aspects of your development and giving you every opportunity to flourish

We promise to do everything we can to keep you safe and feel important to us while in care by:

- making staff available to speak to you when you need to contact them to discuss your problems, anxieties and achievements
- involving you in decisions and plans that are made that will affect your current and future life
- not changing your social worker unless absolutely necessary
- giving you advice and support to stay safe both within your home and community

- calling you back within 24 hours

We promise to help you reach your dreams while in care by:

- celebrating your achievements and recognising your goals and helping to push you further while in care
- supporting you to attend and achieve in education
- providing you with good educational opportunities that best meet your abilities
- providing you with a translating dictionary in your language when you first come into care if your first language is not English
- giving you the same opportunities available to young people who are not Looked After

We promise to support your positive relationships and social activities by:

- giving priority when you ask to stay with friends and relatives away from your normal placement
- aiding you in having easy access to libraries, youth clubs and positive activities
- giving you access to an independent visitor/ mentors
- supporting you in being heard throughout the local authority across all departments

We promise to prepare you for adult life and leaving care by:

- supporting you financially up until the time you start work or are entitled to claim benefits
- providing you with a grant to help you settle into your own accommodation when you leave care
- supporting you in higher education at university
- helping you with support to seek employment and training
- helping you with transport for attending education and Children Looked After appointments
- supporting you to apply for all documentation and providing you with necessary

Appendix 2

This is the current version of the Charter however this is due to be updated and the most recent version can be found on the Council website.

Charter for care leavers

We have a responsibility to children and young people in our care, and to our Care Leavers.

Our charter for Care Leavers was written jointly with a group of young people. It is a set of principles and promises to care leavers.

We will respect and honour your identity

We will:

- support you to develop your own identity, respect your background and accept your culture and beliefs
- treat you as an individual, taking into consideration your own values and personal needs

We will believe in you

We will:

- support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can
- believe in you, celebrate you and help you overcome limiting barriers

We will listen to you

We will:

- respect and strive to understand your point of view
- be honest with you and place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you

We will support you

We will:

- do our best to support you in achieving your goals, dreams and aspirations
- provide you with the support that you require with education, training and employment to succeed in life

We will help you find a home

We will:

- keep you safe and well by working alongside you to help you find the most appropriate place to live and prepare you for independent living
- do everything we can to prepare you for a smooth transition to adulthood and help you to be where you want to be

We will inform you

We will:

- point you in the right direction and journey alongside you at your own pace
- help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger