

Looked After Children

Introduction

Looked After Children (LAC) are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children and young people who become looked after do so as they have experienced abuse, neglect or a family breakdown. It is acknowledged that children who are looked after are at greater risk of poor life chances and outcomes.

The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act in 1989 and refers to children who are;

- Children accommodated under voluntary agreement with their parent(s) written consent (section 20)
- Children who receive respite care which exceeds over 75 day per year
- Children who are the subject of a care order (section 31) or an interim care order (section 38)
- Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46);

and

- Children who are compulsorily accommodated. This includes children remanded to the local authority or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement (section 21)
- Children who are detained under the mental health act in a hospital environment 16+

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review sets out the functions and responsibilities of the local authority and partner agencies.

Many of these children come into care from very deprived social backgrounds, many have experienced different forms of abuse or neglect, potentially causing issues in respect to their cognitive and emotional development. This has the potential to impact on their outcomes in the longer term.

Looked After children and young people share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. They often enter care with a poorer level of health than their peers in part due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect. The duty to meet the health needs of Looked After Children for both the NHS and Local Authorities is clearly laid out in ‘Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children’ (DFE, DH 2015).

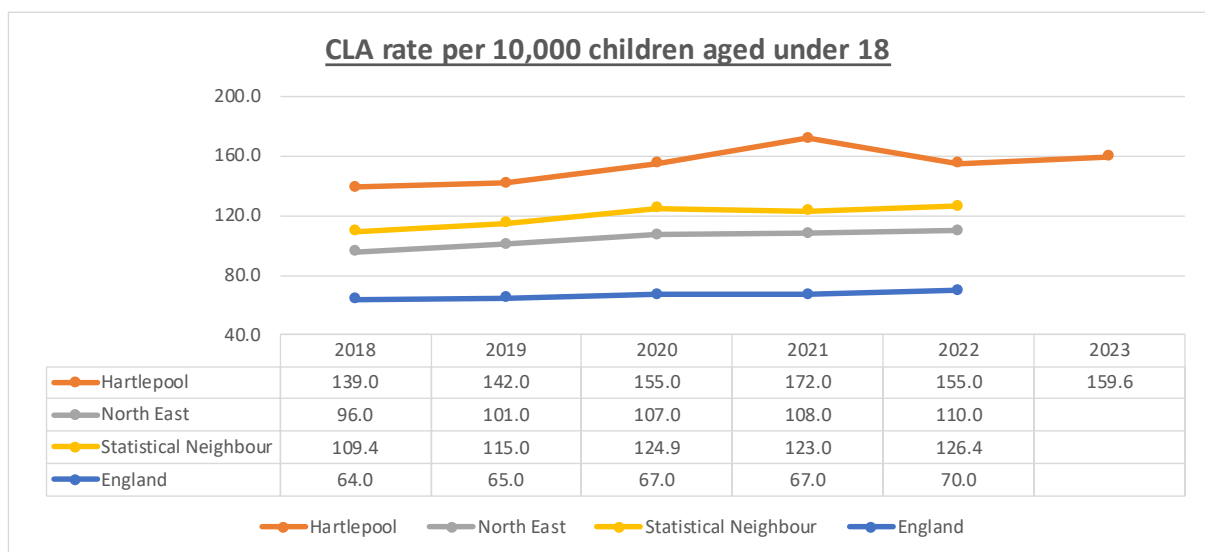
When a child becomes looked after, local authorities are responsible for making sure an assessment of the child’s physical, emotional and mental health needs is carried out. It is the responsibility of the local authority to arrange a health assessment for a looked after child in partnership with health professionals.

Clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) and NHS England have a duty to cooperate with requests from the local authorities to undertake the health assessments and all agencies including local authorities, CCGs, NHS England and Public Health England need to cooperate to commission health services for all children in their area (DFE, DH 2015).

The NHS has a significant role in ensuring health assessments are timely and that the delivery of health services is effective.

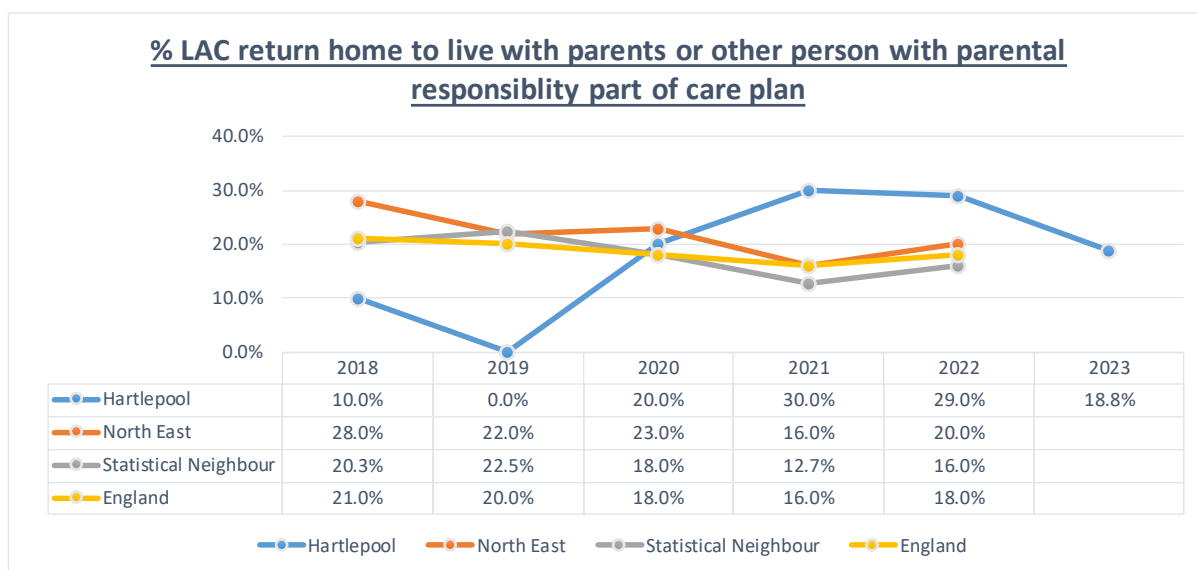
Looked after children

The following summary of the profile of LAC in Hartlepool draws from analysis of a range of benchmarked data (DfE published statistical releases).



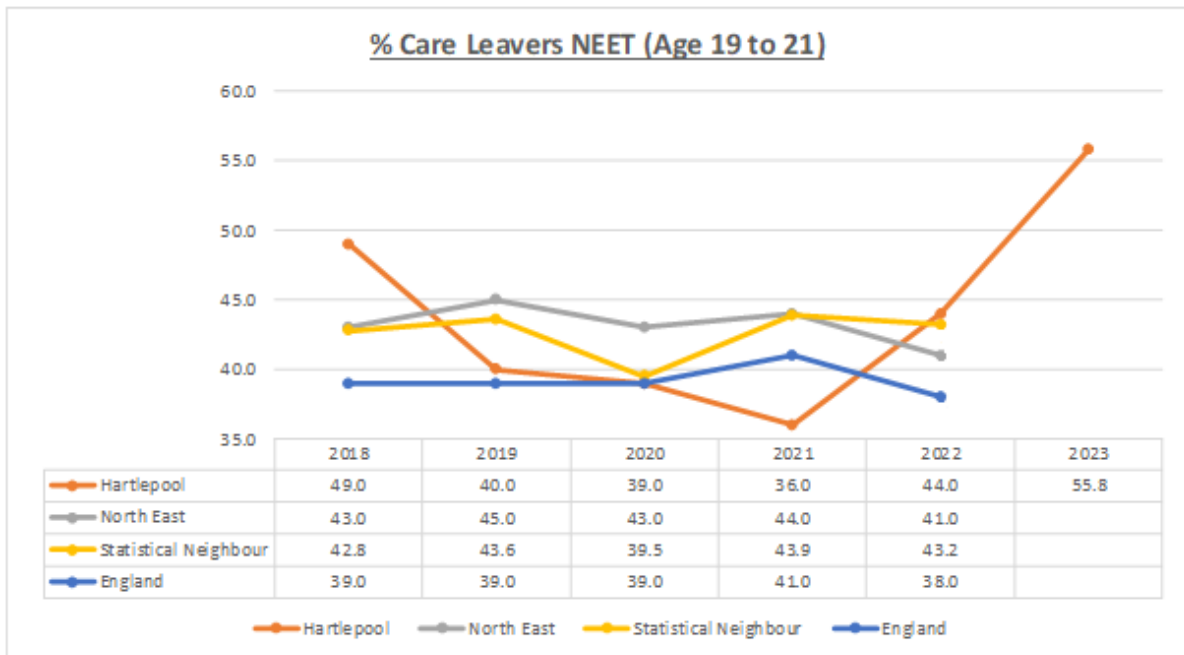
Source: Hartlepool Borough Council, 2023

Hartlepool's child looked after rate saw year on year increases from 2018 to 2021, moving from 139 per 10,000 under 18s in 2018 to 172 per 10,000 in 2021, an increase of 23.7%. Hartlepool's relatively large increase in 2021, up 11% on the 2020 figure, was not mirrored by either the regional or statistical neighbours of Hartlepool, nor by the England average, all of which stabilised in 2021. However, Hartlepool's 2022 figure fell back to its 2020 level.



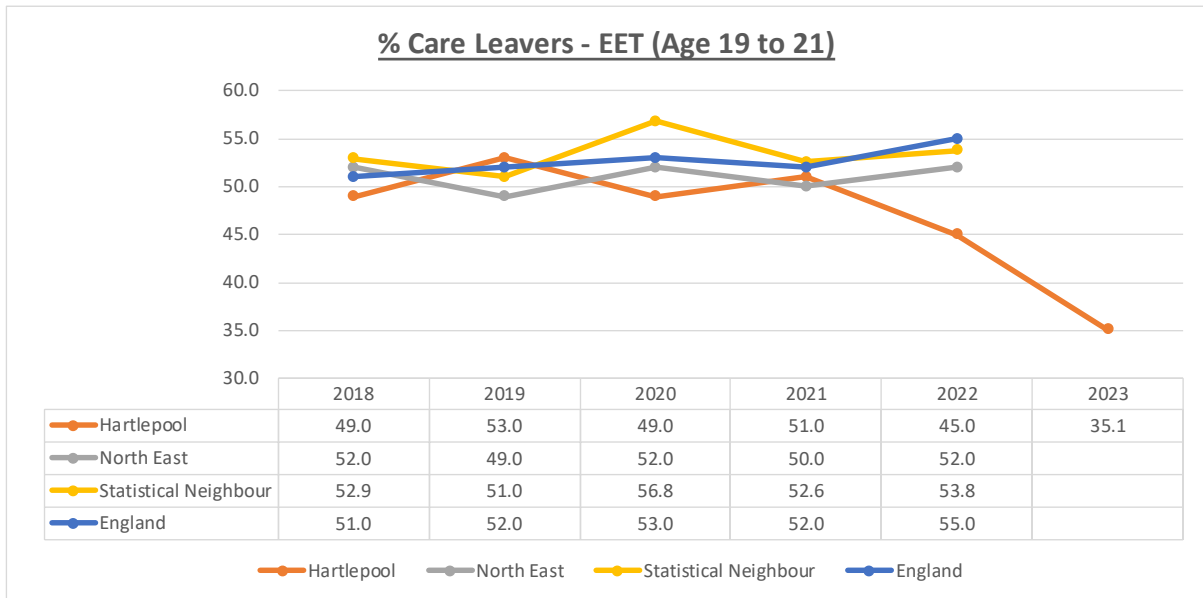
Source: Hartlepool Borough Council, 2023

In 2019 Hartlepool had no looked after children return home to live with a parent or other person with parental responsibilities as part of their care plan. However since that point Hartlepool's rate has increased to a high of 30% in 2021, which compares to 16% for both England and the north east, and 12.7% for Hartlepool's statistical neighbours. Hartlepool's rate in 2022 remained largely stable, and even with increases for England, north east and statistical neighbours, Hartlepool's rate remained the highest. Hartlepool's 2023 figure has seen a substantial decline, falling 35.2% from 29% to 18.8%, though the comparable figures for England, north east and statistical neighbours are not yet available for comparison.



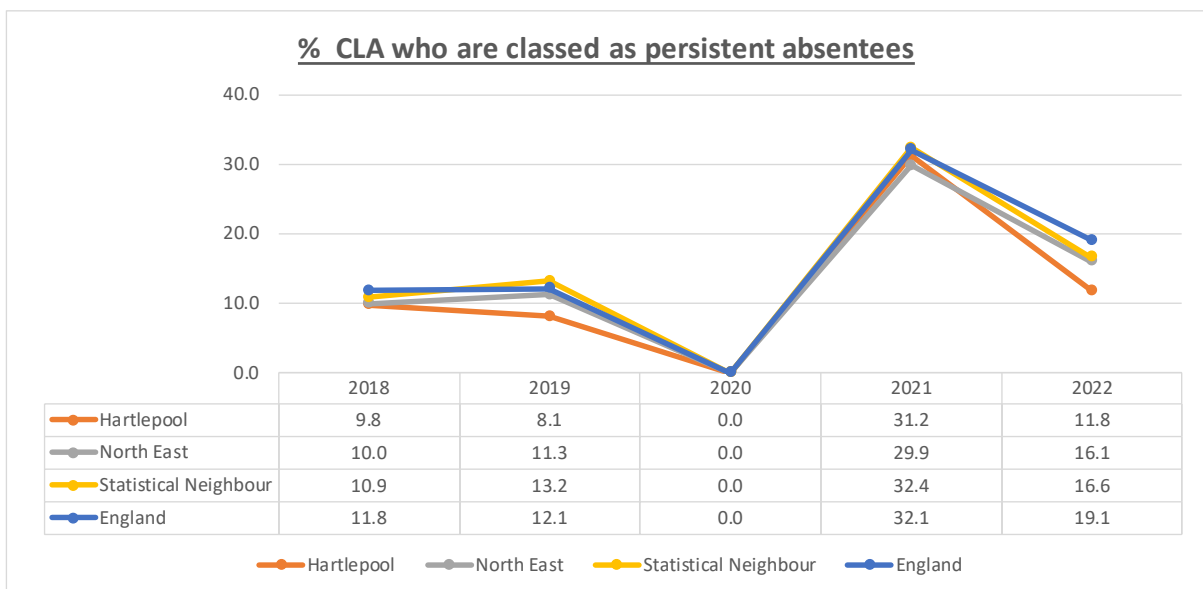
Source: Hartlepool Borough Council, 2023

In 2023, more than half of Hartlepool’s care leavers aged 19-21 were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This level of NEET follows two years of consecutive increases, from 36% in 2021 to 55.8% in 2023, and increase of 55%. Hartlepool’s trend across the reporting period 2018 to 2022, does not mirror any of England, north east or its statistical neighbours’ trends in the same period. Hartlepool’s rate underwent three years of year on year decline, falling from 49% in 2018 to 36% in 2021, a fall of 26.5%. In the same period, England, north east and statistical neighbours all remained largely stable, with no more than a 6% change in rate. Hartlepool’s recent rise in rate, comes at a time when the England, north east and statistical neighbours’ rates are decreasing.



Source: Hartlepool Borough Council, 2023

Similarly, Hartlepool has seen a recent rapid decline in the proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training (EET), falling from 51% in 2021 to 35.1% in 2023, a decline of 31.2%. This is against a backdrop of stable rates for England, north east and statistical neighbours.



Source: Hartlepool Borough Council, 2023

Persistent absenteeism for looked after children in Hartlepool, England, north east and statistical neighbours have all followed a similar pattern from 2018 to 2022. The

rates all fell to 0% during the Covid affect lockdowns of 2020, before jumping up to almost a third, 31.2% for Hartlepool in 2021, and then declining again in 2022. Hartlepool's 2022 rate is 37.8% lower than the 2021 figure, and is comparable with the pre-covid 2018 and 2019 figures.

2023 Attainment Results

Foundation Stage: of those children that were looked after for at least 12 months, 50.0% achieved 'Good Level of Development' by the end of the foundation stage compared to 64.5% of pupils in Hartlepool and 67.3% of all pupils nationally. This highlights that by the end of the Foundation Stage the attainment gap between children looked after and their peers is 14.5% and children looked after are required to make greater than average progress in order to narrow the gap.

Phonics Screening Year 1: of those children that were looked after for at least 12 months, 90.0% met the expected standard compared to 79.2% for all Hartlepool pupils and 78.9% for all pupils nationally.

Key Stage 1: of those children that were looked after for at least 12 months, 50.0% achieved the expected standard in Reading compared to 70.4% for all Hartlepool pupils and 47.5% for looked after pupils nationally; 43.8% in Writing compared to 61.9% for all Hartlepool pupils and 37.1% for looked after pupils nationally; and 43.8% in Maths compared to 71.9% for all Hartlepool pupils and 46.9% for looked after children nationally.

Key Stage 2: those children that were looked after for at least 12 months 78.6% achieved the expected standard in Writing compared to 74.1% for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and 48.7% of looked after children nationally; 78.6% in Maths compared to 75% for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and 50.3% of looked after children nationally; 71.4% in Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling compared to 72.1% for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and 50.6% of looked after children nationally; 64.3% in Reading compared to 74.1% for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and 54.4% of looked after children nationally.

Key Stage 4: of those children that were looked after for at least 12 months, 30.8% achieved grade 4 or above in English & Maths compared to 60.4% for all Hartlepool

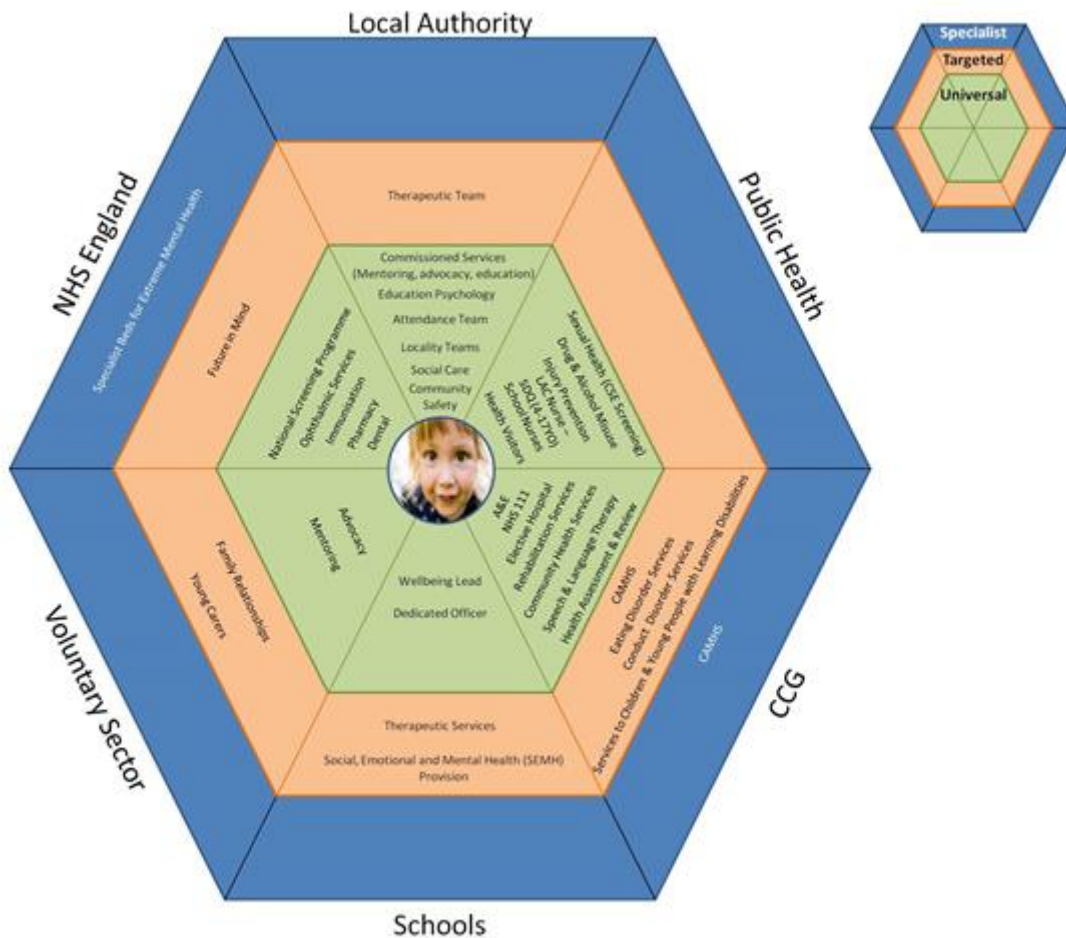
pupils and 17.8% for looked after pupils nationally. Of those children that were looked after, 15.4% achieved grade 5 or above in English & Maths compared to 37.8% for all Hartlepool pupils and 7.7% for looked after children nationally.

Attainment 8 and Progress 8 are two performance measures introduced in 2006 that look at the achievements of the pupils and the quality of the school. Attainment 8 looks at pupil's achievement across 8 qualifications, not just English and mathematics, and assigns a score based on each of the 8 grades achieved. Progress 8 looks at how pupils performed in their attainment 8 compared to how they are expected to perform based on their key stage 2 results. Pupils are rated against the average national attainment 8 performance of those in the same key stage 2 attainment group, resulting in a positive or negative score, where each full number is the equivalent of achieving 1 full grade above or below what was expected.

The attainment 8 score for children looked after for at least 12 months in Hartlepool was 18.3 compared to 42.3 for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and 17.5 for looked after children nationally. The progress 8 score for children looked after for at least 12 months in Hartlepool was -0.92 compared to -0.47 for all pupils in Hartlepool schools and -1.47 for looked after children nationally.

The above figures represent small cohorts which have a significant impact on the figures.

Current Services



Future Intentions

- Creation of integrated teams with Health as part of the Better Childhood in Hartlepool, specifically trained in mental health, domestic abuse, substance misuse as part of an early intervention approach.
- Improve recruitment drive of local carers with a particular focus on sibling groups and teenage placements
- Review supported accommodation and staying put options for care leavers.
- Undertake a comprehensive review of the Post 16 educational offer for children looked after.
- Review the From Care2Work plan.
- Undertake a review of the SEND LAC cohort to understand specific needs.

- Ensure that all children in care have timely and high quality, holistic assessments and reviews of their physical, emotional and mental health needs informed by SMART health plans which reflect the child's voice.
- Develop and support an early intervention programme for 0-2 year olds that stimulates early child development via the Hartlepool Education Commission work.