

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

## AGENDA



**Tuesday 11 October 2022**

**at 4.00 pm**

**in the Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

MEMBERS: CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

Councillors Boddy, Cowie, Groves, Harrison, Lindridge, Little, Moore.

Co-opted Members: Jo Heaton, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Mark Tilling (Secondary), David Turner (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Buchan, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**

**3. MINUTES**

- 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 *(previously circulated and published)*.

**CIVIC CENTRE EVACUATION AND ASSEMBLY PROCEDURE**

In the event of a fire alarm or a bomb alarm, please leave by the nearest emergency exit as directed by Council Officers. A Fire Alarm is a continuous ringing. A Bomb Alarm is a continuous tone. The Assembly Point for everyone is Victory Square by the Cenotaph. If the meeting has to be evacuated, please proceed to the Assembly Point so that you can be safely accounted for.

**4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

No items.

**5. KEY DECISIONS**

No items.

**6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

No items.

**7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

7.1 Annual Performance Report – Children's Social Care (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

7.2 Annual Fostering Report 2021 – 2022 and Statement of Purpose March 2022 (*Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services*)

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

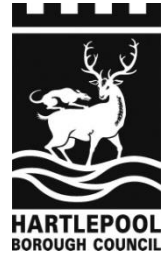
FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 15 November 2022 at 4.00pm in the Civic Centre, Hartlepool.



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

11 October 2022



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT – CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information only.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To present to Children's Services Committee the annual performance report for children's social care in Hartlepool.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Under the Children Act 1989, local authorities are required to provide services for children in need for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting their welfare. The Children Act defines a child in need as a child who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable level of health or development, or whose health and development is likely to be significantly or further impaired without the provision of services; or a child who is disabled.

3.2 In exercising its statutory duties under the Children Act 1989, local authorities undertake assessments of the needs of individual children in order to determine what services, if any, to provide. Assessments must be informed by the views of the child as well as his/her family and the wishes and views of a child must be sought regarding the provision of services to be delivered.

3.3 Some children in need may require accommodation because there is no one who has parental responsibility for them, because they are lost or abandoned or because the person caring for them is prevented from providing them with suitable accommodation or care. Under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, the local authority has a duty to accommodate such children in need.

- 3.4 Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, it has a duty to make enquiries to decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote a child's welfare.
- 3.5 Section 11 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on local agencies to ensure they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when carrying out their functions.
- 3.6 This report covers activity in children's social care for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

#### 4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 **Appendix 1** to this report is a performance report using the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT). This report provides details of the demand and activity in children's social care as well as performance against key performance indicators which are reported annually via statutory returns. The data contained within this report is a provisional outturn at this stage but is unlikely to change significantly when the statutory return is submitted.
- 4.2 The following section of this report will summarise and analyse key headline performance data.

##### Contact, referral and assessment

- 4.3 Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) continues to receive a high volume of demand for support services for vulnerable children and young people. With the number of referrals continuing the rise from a rate of 752 per 10,000 in 20/21 to 975 per 10,000 in 21/22. The police refer the highest number of children to social care followed by local authority which, in the main, relates to those cases that step up from early help as the family require statutory services. The rate of referrals per 10,000 of the child population continues to be above the national average and broadly in line with the statistical neighbour authority average. Of those referral received, 21% are re-referrals, i.e. a child who has already been referred for support and services within the previous 12 months. This is performance is in line with England and Statistical neighbour averages. We do however closely monitor re-referrals and regular audits are undertake to ensure that the work we are doing to support families is robust and we are not subjecting families to repeat interventions unnecessarily.
- 4.4 Children's social care undertake a high number of assessments, these are completed on all new cases referred to social care as well as active cases where a re-assessment of need is required, either in response to a safeguarding concern or to ensure that the needs of the child are fully understood and information is up to date. The ChAT information tells us that 95% of children are seen during the preparation of an assessment, this is an

essential element of assessment work. The remaining 5 % could be due to being an unborn baby therefore not able to be seen and evidence from file audit practice would indicate that children are seen during the preparation of an assessment and their wishes and views inform the assessment process. However managers and social workers are reminded about the importance of children being seen and that this is recorded accurately on the Integrated Children's System.

- 4.5 Performance in 2021/22 shows an improving picture in relation to the timeliness of assessment when compared with the previous year, and is in line with National and Statistical neighbours, we have seen an incremental improvement in performance in this area over the last 4 years despite there being a significant increase in the number of assessment being undertaken.

#### Child in need including those in need of protection

- 4.6 Over the past year, children's social care has undertaken 787 section 47 enquiries of which 39% proceeded to an Initial Child Protection Conference. This conversion does appear low and as a result we commissioned an audit to be undertaken by colleagues from South Tyneside to review our practice in relation to threshold and decision making, South Tyneside provided assurance that the threshold and decision making was appropriate, the differential is due to several factors for example holding a strategy meeting and section 47 enquiries for children who in our care or who are already subject to a protection plan. The information on page 7 of the ChAT report shows HBC performs well in terms of holding child protection conferences in a timely way and is in line with national and statistical neighbour averages.
- 4.7 As page 8 of the ChAT shows, in the last 12 months, a higher number of children (2605) were children in need and the rate of children who started an episode of need, 747 per 10,000 of the child population, increased significantly in comparison to previous years and statistical neighbour and national averages.
- 4.8 As at 31/03/2022 184 children were subject to a child protection plan. 76% of those who became subject to a protection plan did so under the category of neglect which is in keeping with performance in previous years and reflects the high levels of demand arising from neglect associated with adult substance misuse, domestic abuse and mental health issues. 16% of those who became subject to a child protection plan in the year had been the subject of a previous child protection plan and only 1 child had been subject to a protection plan for two or more years when the plan ended.

#### Children looked after

- 4.9 As at 31/03/2021, 312 children are cared for by Hartlepool Borough Council. As the data on page 13 of **Appendix 1** shows, there was decrease with 129 children leaving our care in this period and 94 children becoming cared for. This is a decrease on previous years however HBC continues to have high rates of children in our care per 10,000 of the child population, these rates are

higher than national average and statistical neighbours. This reflects the vulnerabilities and needs of children in Hartlepool.

- 4.10 The majority of children in our care, 84%, are looked after under a Care Order. 79% of children in care are placed with foster care and 65% are within HBC in house provision. Both of these performance measures compare favourably with the national and statistical neighbour averages. 81% of reviews for children in our care were held within timescales, this is an area where we need to improve our performance. Our focus is on ensuring that reviews are held in a timely way, but also in a way that is meaningful for children, young people, their families and their carers. This means there may be occasion when a decision is made that it is in the best interest of the child for the review to be held out of timescales. This should be an informed evidence based decision that is recorded in the child's record.
- 4.11 HBC has always performed well in relation to providing stable placements for children in care. Both our short term and long term placement stability continues to be excellent, and we perform in the highest quartile.
- 4.12 Of the children who ceased to be looked after during 2021/22, 9% were adopted. HBC adoption service is delivered by Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) which is a regional adoption agency provided on behalf of Hartlepool and the other four Tees Valley local authorities. Performance has improved in relation to timescales for a child coming into our care and being adopted which has reduced from 365 in 20/21 to 307 in 21/22 (England average is 445 days) and a significant improvement in timescales from the point that the court granting a Placement Order and a child being 'matched' with their adoptive family from 199 days in 20/21 to 118 days in 21/22 (England average is 198 days).
- 4.13 There are currently 127 young people aged 16 – 25 who are Hartlepool care leavers. Our focus with care leavers is to provide continuity of care for as long as young people need this and to keep in touch with and support them to make a successful transition into adulthood. This entails supporting them to be economically active and in education, employment or training as well as living in suitable accommodation where they are and feel safe.
- 4.14 In January 2022, Hartlepool had a Focus visit from Ofsted in relation to the 'Local Authorities arrangement for Care Leavers', the headline findings are summarised below

*'Determined senior leaders ensure that care leavers are provided with consistent practical, financial and emotional support. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, care leavers have continued to experience the same high-quality service as they did prior to the pandemic.'*

*Senior leaders have created a relational approach across the whole social work system. This has created conditions for good-quality practice to grow and flourish and has created a culture where care leavers are always in mind, and always in reach. Highly skilled and effective workers, many of whom have worked in the authority for years, have long-standing and meaningful*

*relationships with young people. They support care leavers exceptionally well to make the transition to becoming young adults in all areas of their lives. Care leavers benefit from a 'one worker' model of practice, which enables them to develop trusting relationships with workers and foster carers. 'Staying put' is actively encouraged and other accommodation options are explored with care leavers at their pace, and only when they are ready to move to independence.*

*Strong agency partnerships, and a highly effective virtual school, work closely with social workers, staff and carers to help care leavers access employment and training opportunities and achieve their ambitions. The Inspectors highlighted one area for improvement and this was 'The voice and influence of care leavers in developing and owning their individual pathway plan' were are working with young people to develop an action plan to respond to this recommendation.*

- 4.15 Over the course of the year, children's services has undertaken four 'practice weeks' where a number of managers across all levels within the department spend time based in social work teams discussing cases with social workers, observing practice and auditing case records. In addition to practice week we also under take themed audits which complete a deep dive in a specific areas of practice which are often determined through performance. We also had a Peer Audit Challenge which was facilitated by South Tyneside Council. The findings from these activities are aggregated into a Continuous Improvement Action Plan. In summary, audits identified strengths in relation to:

- Relationships with children who are being seen regularly;
- Social workers know their children and families well;
- Implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework;
- Child's voice being clearly articulated in records; and
- Supervision and reviews on cases were timely.

Areas for improvement include:

- Embed Practice in relation to Family network meetings and family safety planning;
- Improve our response and intervention with families suffering from Domestic Abuse;
- Ensure case recordings on the child file are detailed and timely;
- Improve children attendance and participation within child protection conferences.

- 4.16 Feedback from service users during practice week was mostly positive with people reporting they felt treated with respect by social workers and listened to. In terms of the practice observations, auditors gave positive feedback that people were treated with respect, reasons for visits were explained and outcomes explained. Following each practice week, an action plan is developed which outlines action to be taken to tackle areas for development, the implementation of which is monitored by the Assistant Director, Children and Families.

- 4.17 Overall the children's social care workforce is reasonably stable and managers invest in their staff to ensure they feel supported and guided in the challenging work that they do. During 2020/21 the social care workforce retention and recruitment of social care staff is challenging particularly when trying to recruit children social workers. Hartlepool has had a low dependency on agency workers and during the last year, there were no agency workers within the social care teams. Efforts were made to try and secure agency workers on occasion to cover vacancies but we were not able to find suitable workers who were willing to be paid in line with the North East region Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the rates of agency workers' pay.
- 4.18 The average social worker caseload is 17 children per social worker, this is a manageable caseload for a social worker and allows them the capacity to deliver high quality and effective social work interventions. However, maintaining manageable caseloads for social workers is a challenge in the context of the increasing demand for services as the experience level of the worker impacts on the type and number of cases they can carry. Experienced social workers take the more complex child protection and child looked after cases, these cases are usually very demanding and time consuming as they require a high level of visiting frequency as well as complex court work. Newly qualified social workers, (we have a high proportion of those workers), have a protected caseload to support their learning and professional development, they have a lower number of cases which only builds up slowly as they become more knowledgeable, confident and skilled in their role. Therefore, although the average is 17, the range of caseloads varies between 6 and 30. Head of Service monitor caseloads with team manager and social workers and actions are taken to support timely reduction in numbers.
- 4.20 HBC children's social care performs well and this reflects the findings of Ofsted in the recent inspection judgments of both children's services and our children's homes. There are high levels of need and vulnerability for children in Hartlepool and this leads to a high level of demand for statutory services. Hartlepool is has significantly above average numbers of children in need, including those in need of protection, as well as children looked after when compared to the national and statistical neighbour averages. We know that much of the demand in children's services arises from adult issues that are affecting their ability to care for and meet the needs of their children. To this end, children's services is working corporately to tackle the drivers of demand associated with parental substance misuse and domestic abuse.
- 4.21 There are substantial capacity pressures in children's services, despite increases to the number of children's social workers employed by the council. Caseloads are higher than we would like for some workers, as the teams have had to absorb the additional demand as outlined in this report. Lower caseloads provide workers with more time to deliver effective work with their families which creates sustainable improvement and the delivery of outstanding services for children and young people. The challenges of not being able to recruit agency workers to 'fill the gaps' when staff are off sick, maternity leave or to cover recruitment times has impacted upon the case



load numbers. We have developed a recruitment and retention strategy, a key part of which is increasing the number of social work apprenticeships we have in order to 'grow our own', however this is a longer term strategy and we are not likely to have the benefit on for another 2-3 years therefore the strategy also identified actions to support retention our current social worker workforce.

- 4.22 There is a national shortage of social workers and it has been recognise that the agency market is working against Local Authorities trying to recruit and retain permanent staff , the pay rates agency staff are expecting are significantly higher rates than Local Authorities are able to pay this has been compounded by the Covid pandemic as many authorities outside of our region are offering social workers the opportunity to work at home for the majority of the time and only travel to see their families perhaps one week a month with the Local Authorities covering the costs of their accommodation. In times of a cost of living crisis there is a concern in the sector that more social workers will join agencies given the significant financial rewards.
- 4.23 Despite the challenges, HBC benefits from a highly skilled and dedicated workforce who are committed to providing the best possible care and support for children and young people. Our social work practice is strong, and this means that children in Hartlepool are kept safe. Children in our care and care leavers benefit from good quality stable care, the vast majority continue to live in their home town which provides them with continuity of education, health care and social relationships.
- 4.24 Children's services is committed to continuous improvement and through our performance management arrangements scrutinises both qualitative and quantitative performance data. We identify areas of strengths but more importantly areas for development in order to continuously improve the services and support we provide to children and young people.

## **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Children's social care has a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. Failure to deliver these services well and in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance increases the risk of harm to children and young people and the reputation of the Council. Social care services are regulated by Ofsted and judgements are made on the quality of services provided. Children's social care is currently judged as good in terms of the overall effectiveness of the service.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 Children's social care services are delivered in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance as they relate to this service area.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Children, young people and their families' wishes and views are taken into account in the delivery of children's social care services and they are consulted during practice weeks on the quality of service they receive.

## **9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 The delivery of children's social care services aims to improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people.

## **10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 10.1 The delivery of children's social care services aims to improve the life chances of vulnerable children and young people.

## **11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staff considerations arising from this report.

## **12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations arising from this report

## **13. ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 13.1 No issues.

## **14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 For members of children's service committee to note the annual children's social care performance report for 2021/22.

## **15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 It is part of the Children's Services Committee's role to ensure the effective discharge of the local authority's statutory functions in relation to children's social care.

## **16. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 16.1 None.

## **17. CONTACT OFFICERS**

Jane Young  
Assistant Director Children and Families  
Direct Line: 01429 523942  
Email: [jane.young@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:jane.young@hartlepool.gov.uk)

# Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

Based on Ofsted's ILACS Annex A dataset (2020) / Inspection Report

## Hartlepool

**31 March 2022**

Quarter 4

(1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022)

Provisional Data

(Note: Pages 16 - 18 Care Leaver 'In Touch - Accommodation - EET/NEET' updated)

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## Headline figures

**Contacts**

Contacts in the last 12 months	6,735
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**Early Help / Common / Targeted Assessments**

Early Help in the last 12 months	628
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**Referrals**

Referrals in the last 12 months	1,960
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**Social Care Assessments**

Total assessments in the last 12 months	2,240
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Assessments completed in the last 12 months	1,861
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Ongoing assessments	379
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**Section 47 enquiries and Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCS)**

Section 47 enquiries in the last 12 months	787
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ICPCs that started from an S47 in the last 12 months	238
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**Children in Need (CIN)**

Total CIN in the last 12 months	2,605
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CIN started in the last 12 months	1,501
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CIN ceased in the last 12 months	1,358
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Current children in need (snapshot)	1,247
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**Child Protection Plans (CPP)**

Total CPP in the last 12 months	459
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CPP started in the last 12 months	225
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CPP ceased in the last 12 months	275
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Current children subject of a child protection plan (snapshot)	184
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**Children Looked After (CLA)**

Total CLA in the last 12 months	441
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CLA started in the last 12 months	94
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CLA ceased in the last 12 months	129
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Current children looked after (snapshot)	312
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**Care leavers**

Care leavers currently in receipt of leaving care services	103
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**Adoptions**

Children adopted, waiting to be adopted, or had an adoption decision reversed in the last 12 months	23
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Children adopted in the last 12 months	12
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Children waiting to be adopted (snapshot)	10
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Children with decision reversed in the last 12 months	1
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**Adopters**

Prospective adopters in the last 12 months	309
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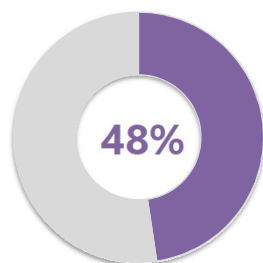
# Contacts in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

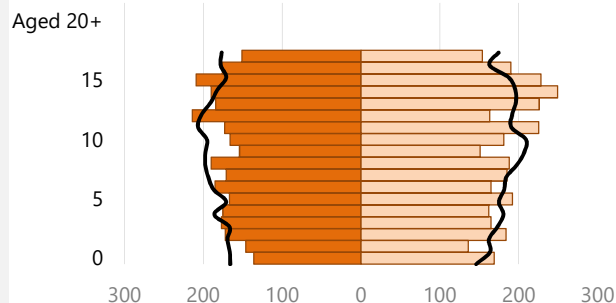
6735 contacts

## Contacts for children who also appear on Referrals list

Yes No

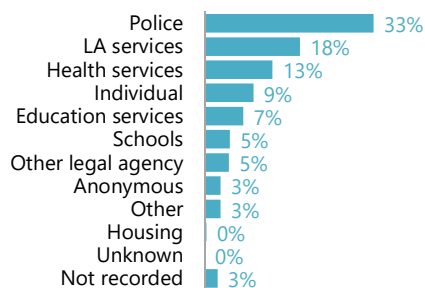


## Age and gender

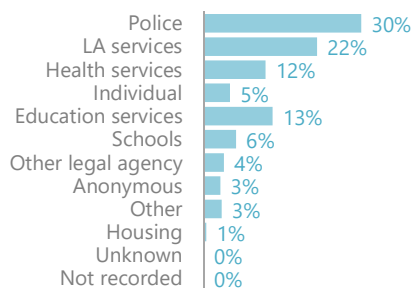
3136 Males (47%) 286 Other (not shown) (4%)  
3313 Females (49%) 0-17 population estimate


## Source of contacts compared to source of referrals

### Contact source



### Referral source comparison



## Children with multiple contacts in period



## Ethnic backgrounds

White	81%
Mixed	2%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	1%
Other ethnic group	1%
Not stated	15%
Not recorded	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

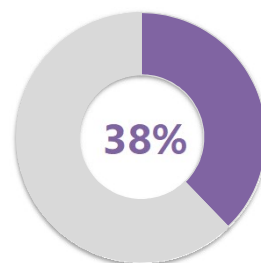
# Early Help in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

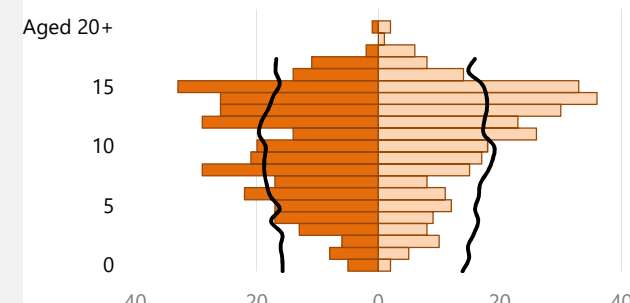
628 Early Help / Common / Targeted Assessments

## Early Help cases that also appear on the Referrals list

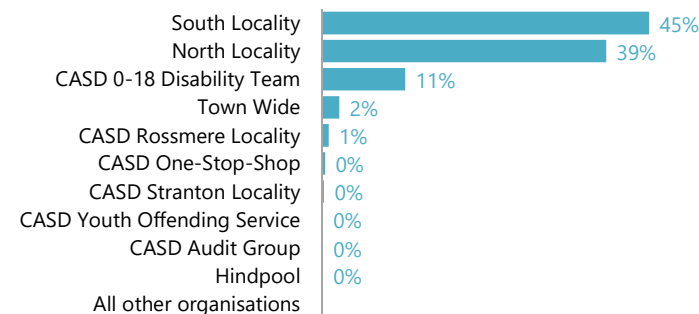
Yes No



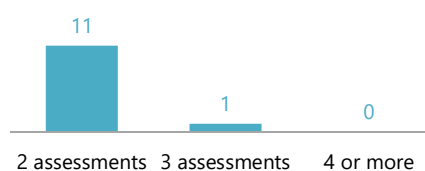
## Age and gender

331 Males (53%) 3 Other (not shown) (0%)  
294 Females (47%) 0-17 population estimate


## Organisation completing assessment



## Children with multiple records in period



## Ethnic backgrounds

White	89%
Mixed	3%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	0%
Other ethnic group	1%
Not stated	6%
Not recorded	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

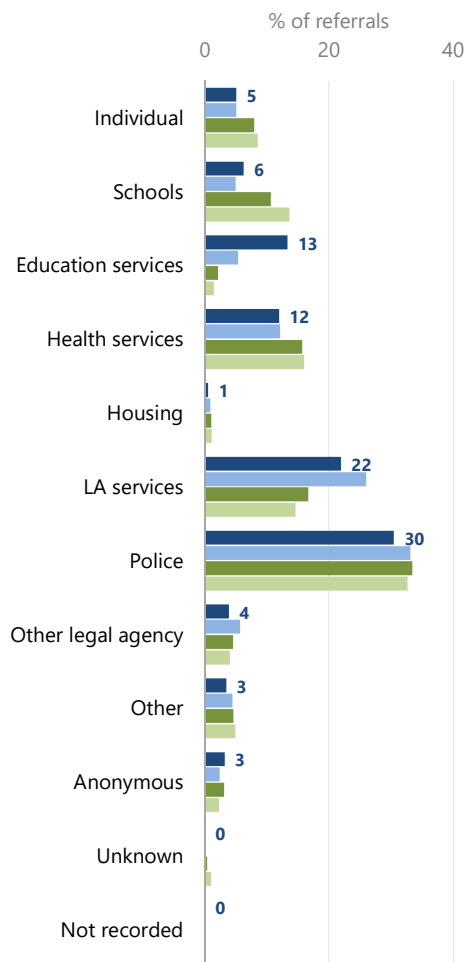
## Referrals in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

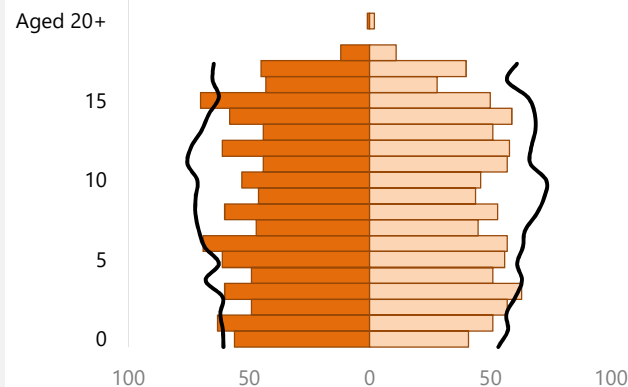
## 1960 referrals

## Source of referral

■ Last 12 months ■ LA 20-21 ■ SNs 20-21 ■ Eng 20-21



## Age and gender

991 Males (51%) 49 Other (not shown) (3%)  
920 Females (47%) 0-17 population estimate


## Ethnic backgrounds

White	89%
Mixed	2%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	1%
Other ethnic group	1%
Not stated	7%
Not recorded	0%

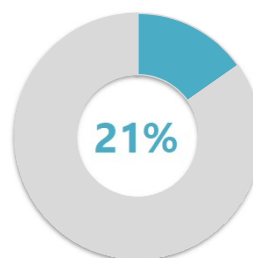
See page 22 for comparisons

## Re-referrals: children with a previous referral within 12 months of their latest referral

355 children  
with previous  
referrals within  
12 months of  
latest referral

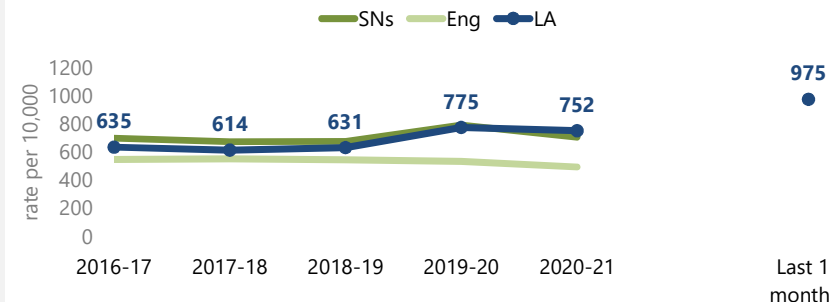
■ Re-referral ■ First referral ■ Not recorded

First referral	1,371
1 prev referral	301
2 prev referrals	45
3 prev referrals	5
4+ prev referrals	4
Not recorded	0



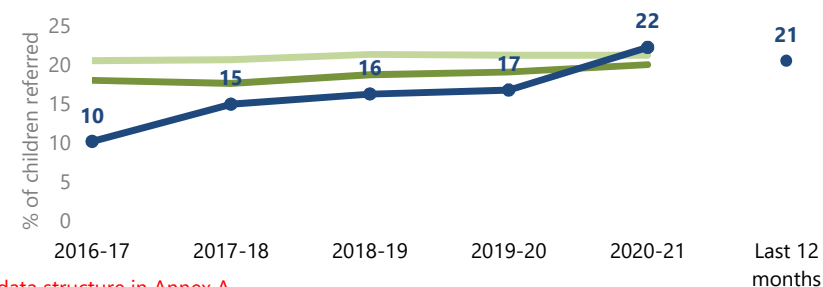
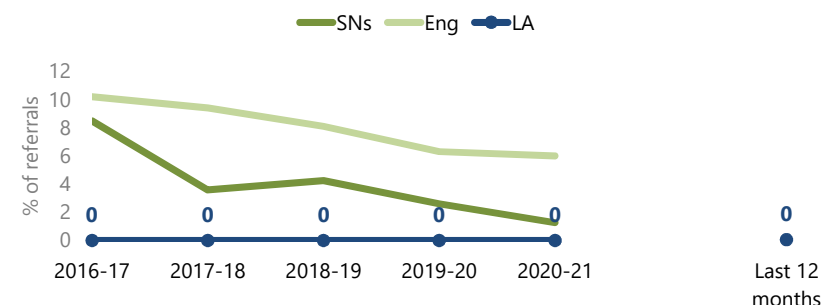
\*\*"Last 6 months" calculation differs slightly from national statistics, due to data structure in Annex A

## Rate of referrals per 10,000 children aged 0-17



\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

## Referrals with No Further Action (NFA)





## Assessments in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

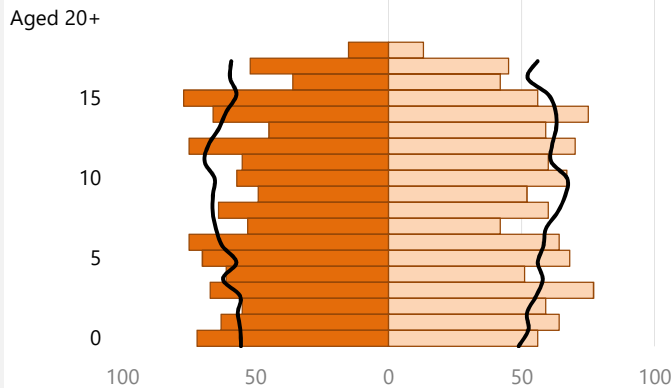
2240 total assessments

379 open assessments

**1861 completed assessments**

### Age and gender of all assessments

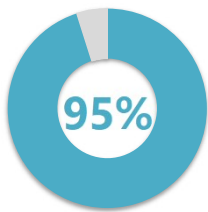
1107 Males (49%)  
1080 Females (48%)  
53 Other (not shown) (2%)  
— 0-17 population estimate



Other includes not recorded, not stated, or neither M/F

### Assessments completed where child was seen

Child seen  
Not seen  
Unknown



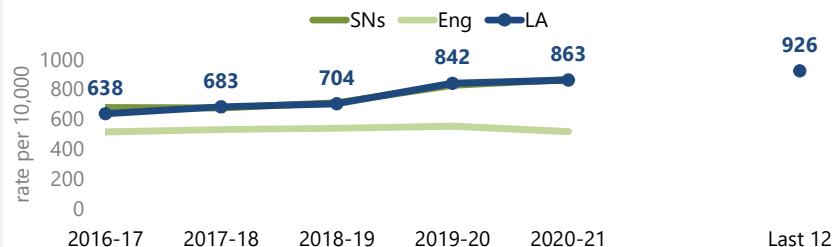
### Ethnic background

White 91%  
Mixed 2%  
Asian or Asian British 1%  
Black or black British 1%  
Other ethnic group 1%  
Not stated 5%  
Not recorded 0%

See page 22 for comparisons

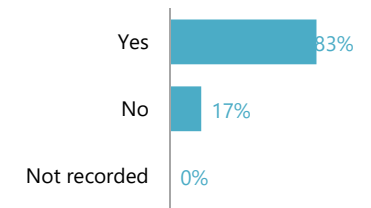
**63 assessments (3%)  
for children with a  
disability**

### Rate of completed assessments per 10,000 children aged 0-17

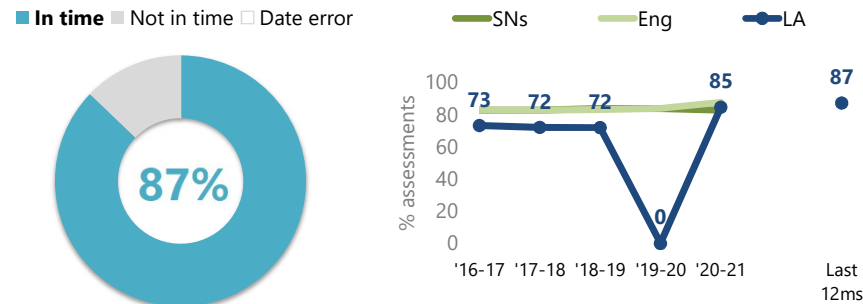


\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

### Child assessed as requiring LA children's social care support

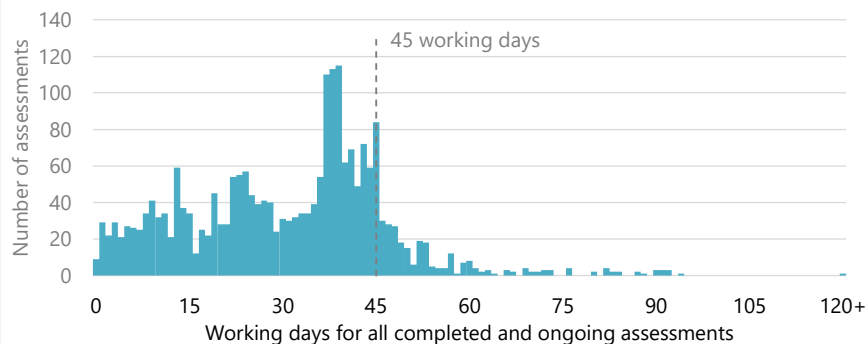


### Assessments completed in 45 working days

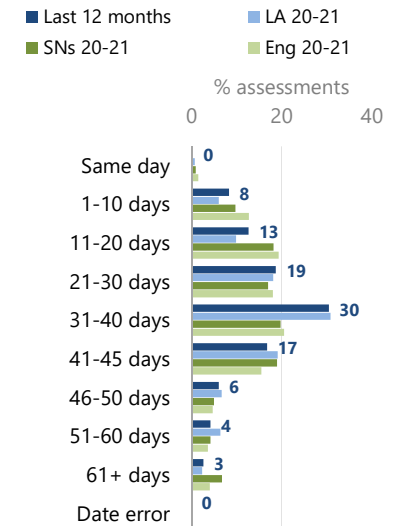


### Durations for all completed and open assessments

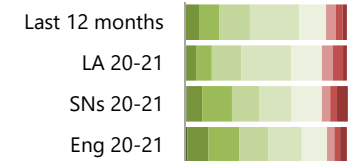
Average duration of completed assessments was 33 working days



### Comparing timeliness



### Duration categories as above

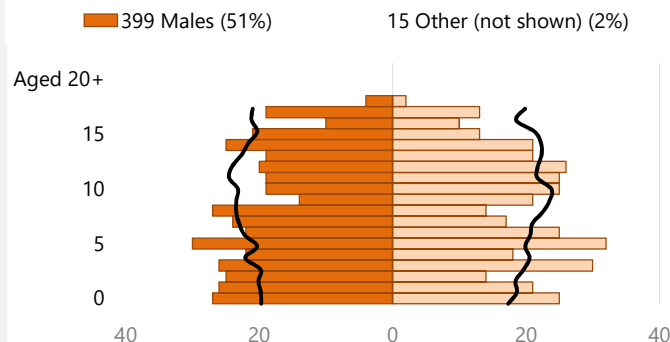


## Section 47 enquiries in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

## 787 Section 47 enquiries

## Age and gender

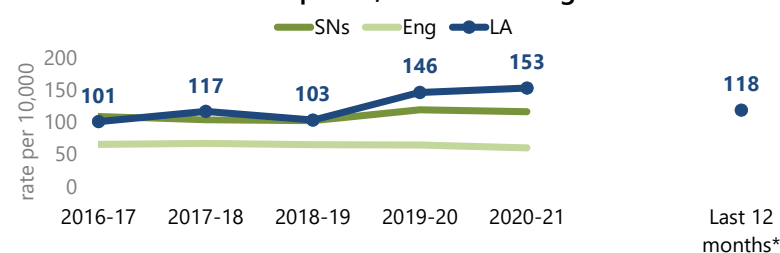


## 238 Initial Child Protection Conferences (from S47 in period)

61% of completed S47s **did not require an ICPC**

ICPC not required may include S47s for open CPP where ICPC was not required, and may exclude children where an ICPC was required but has not yet occurred

## Rate of ICPCs per 10,000 children aged 0-17



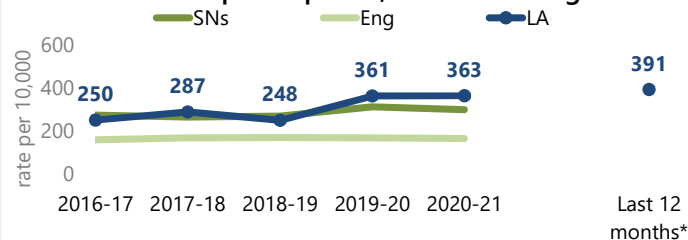
30 child(ren) with a repeat ICPC within 12 months of latest Section 47\*

\*Including where latest S47 did not result in ICPC

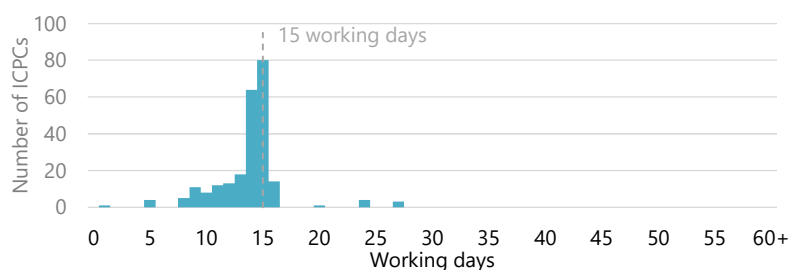
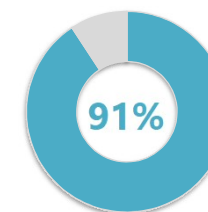
91%

of ICPCs resulted in a child protection plan

## Rate of S47 enquiries per 10,000 children aged 0-17

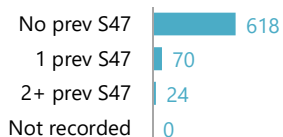


## ICPCs occurred within 15 working days of the strategy discussion date


In time  
Not in time  
Date error


## 14 S47s (2%) for children with a disability

## Children with a repeat S47 within 12 months of latest

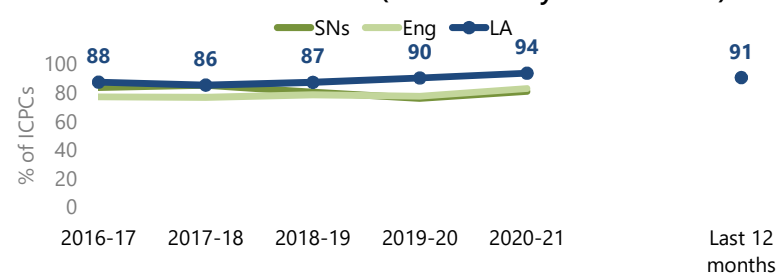


## Ethnic background

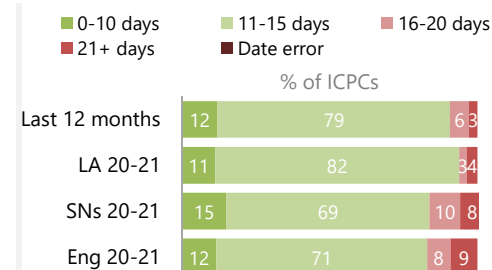
White	91%
Mixed	2%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	1%
Other ethnic group	0%
Not stated	5%
Not recorded	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

## Trend of ICPC timeliness (within 15 days of S47 start)



## Comparing ICPC durations



Children in Need (CIN) - total, started, and ceased in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022**2605 total CIN in 12 months\***

**\*Note: the numbers of children in need reported in ChAT are not directly comparable to published CIN census statistics due to an undercount of referrals and care leavers.**

The children in need census includes any child referred to children's social care services in the year as well as any open case for whom the local authority was providing services. Ofsted's Annex A List 6 largely covers this cohort, with the exception of those with only an open referral and those accessing leaving care services.

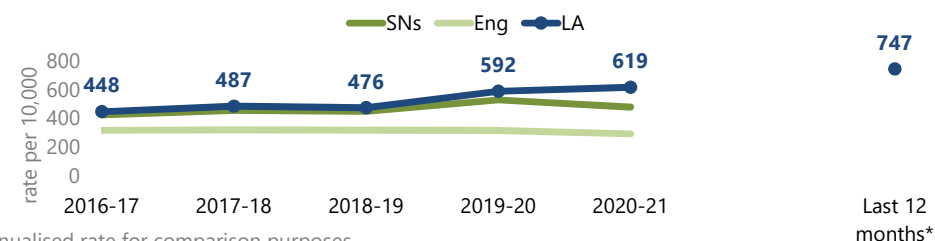
For this reason the published children in need census statistics are not directly comparable to ChAT, however there is considerable overlap with ChAT undercounting the true value as it excludes open referrals and care leavers.

**Cases included in Annex A / ChAT**

Case status of children on CIN list	Number	Percentage
Looked after child	276	11%
Child protection plan	178	7%
Child in need plan	447	17%
Open assessment	346	13%
Closed episode	1,358	52%
Case status not recorded	0	0%
Total (excluding case status unknown)	2,605	100%

**1501 CIN started in 12 months**

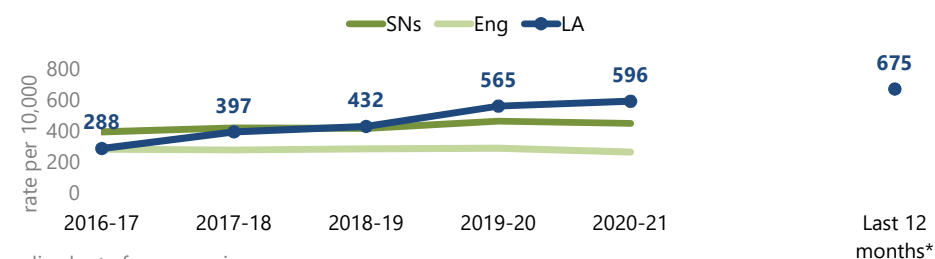
Rate of children who started an episode of need per 10,000 children aged 0-17



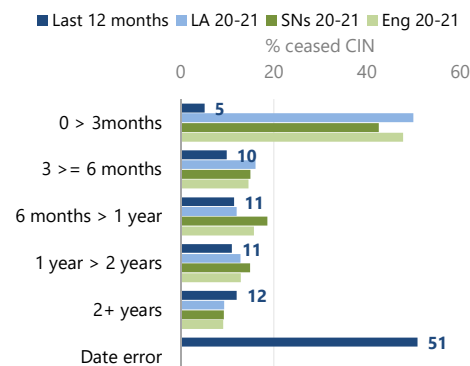
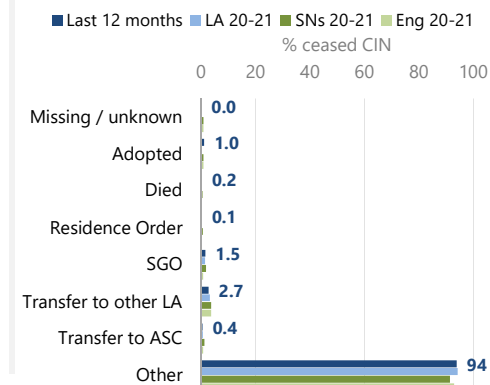
\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

**1358 CIN ceased in 12 months**

Rate of children who ended an episode of need per 10,000 children aged 0-17



\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

**Comparing CIN ceased durations****Comparing CIN ceased reasons**

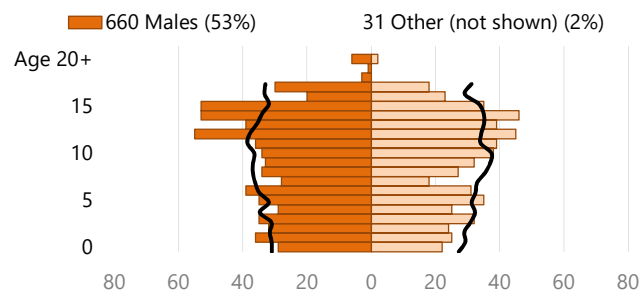
## Children in Need (CIN) with an open episode of need

Snapshot 31/03/2022

## 1247 Children in Need with an open episode of need\*

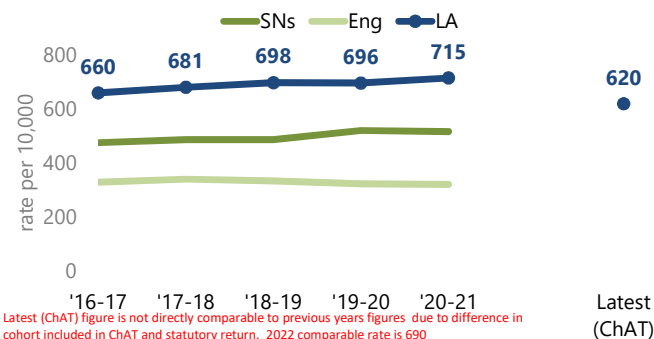
\*Note: Annex A figures in this section are not directly comparable to the published Children in need census statistics (see note on page 8)

## Age and gender

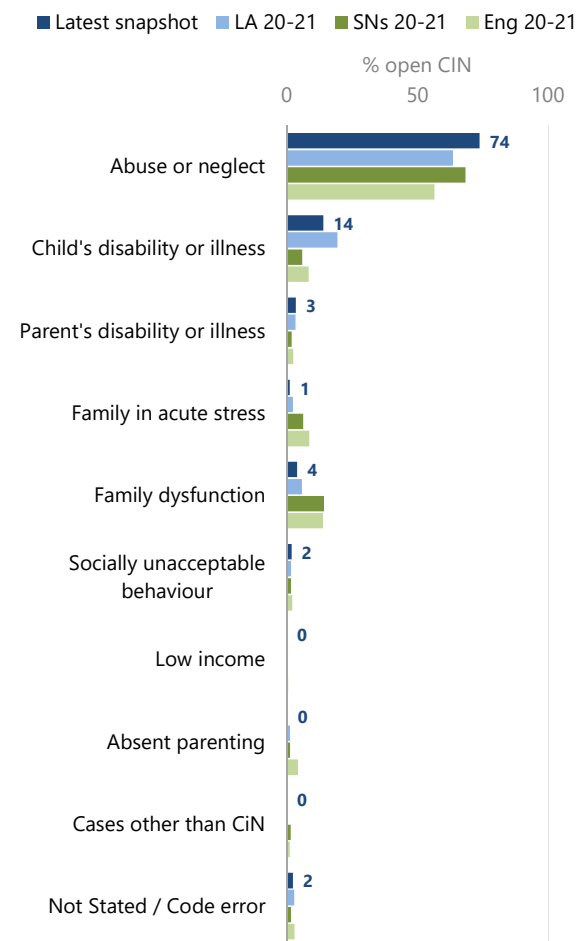


'Other' includes not recorded, not stated, or neither M/F

## Rate of open CIN per 10,000 children aged 0-17\*

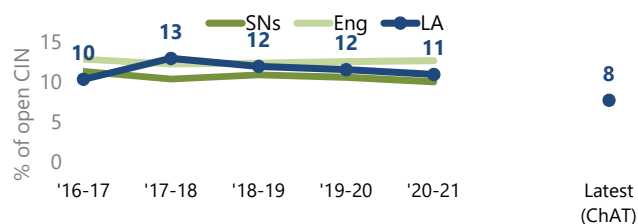


## Comparing primary need of open CIN



## 97 children (8%) with a disability

## CIN with an open episode of need with a disability

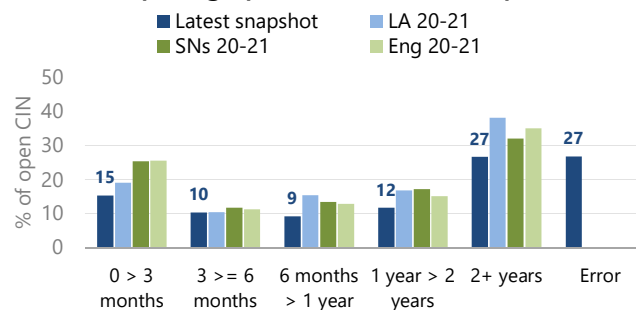


## Ethnic background

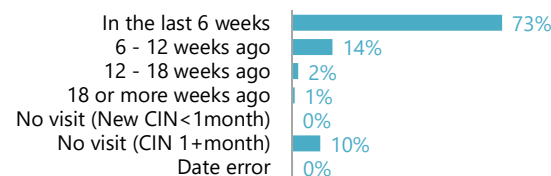
White	91%
Mixed	1%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	1%
Other ethnic group	0%
Not stated	6%
Not recorded	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

## Comparing episode duration of open CIN



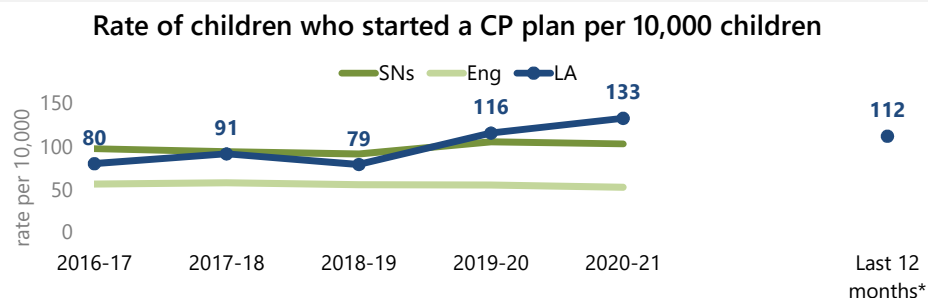
## Time since the child was last seen by social worker



## Child Protection Plans (CPP) started and ceased in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

## 225 CPP started in 12 months

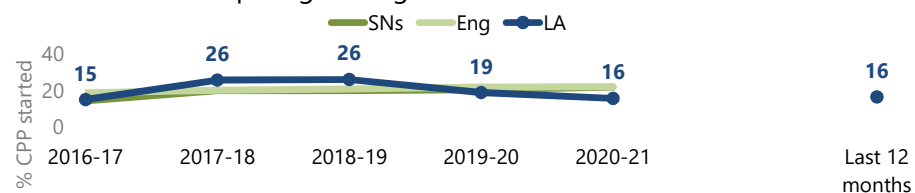


\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

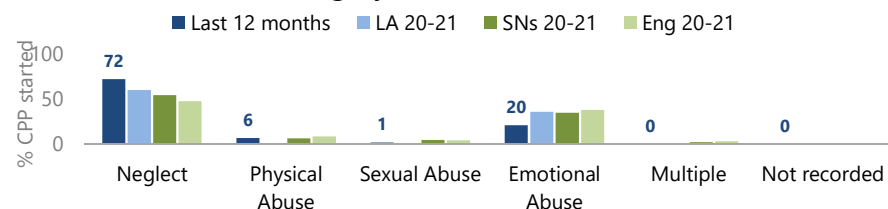
## "Re-registrations" for children who started on a CP plan (ever)



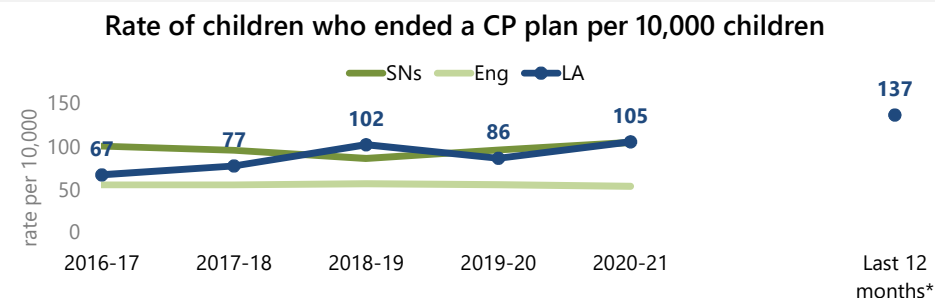
## Comparing "re-registrations" for CPP started



## Initial category of abuse for CPP started

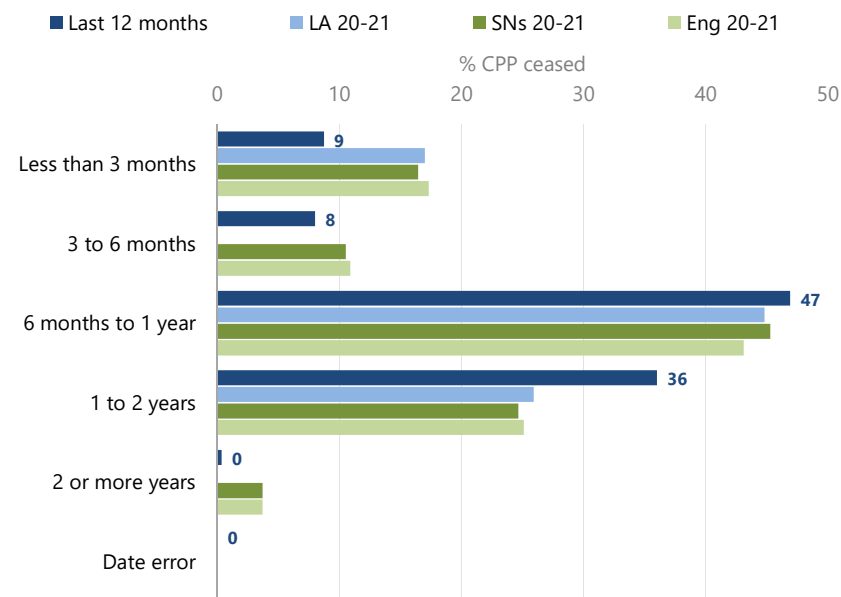


## 275 CPP ended in 12 months



\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

## Comparing plan durations for CPP ended



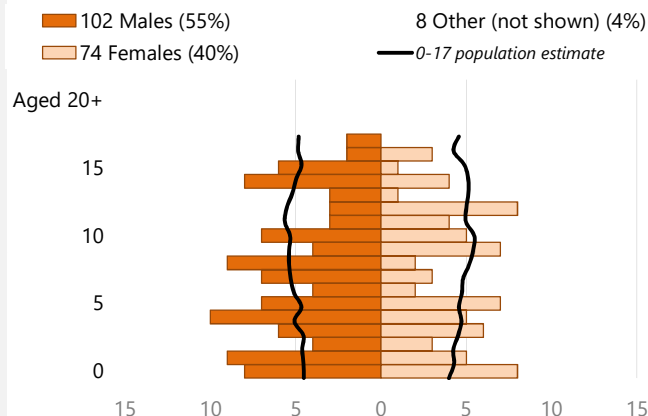
1 of 275 children ended a CP plan after 2 years or more

## Child Protection Plans (CPP) currently open

Snapshot 31/03/2022

## 184 children currently subject of a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

## Age and gender



Other includes not recorded, not stated, or neither M/F

## Ethnic background

White	88%
Mixed	2%
Asian or Asian British	2%
Black or black British	3%
Other ethnic group	0%
Not stated	6%
Not recorded	0%

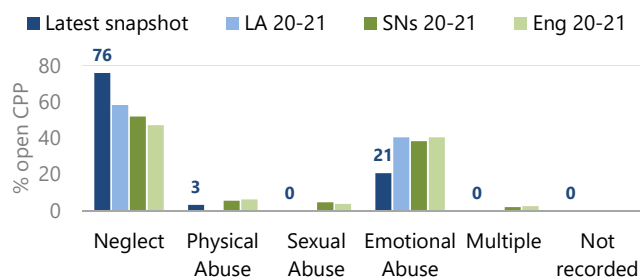
See page 20 for comparisons

## 2 children (1%)

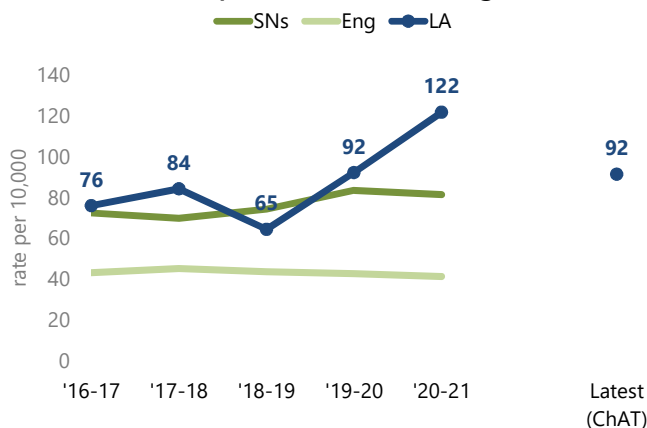
## with a disability

0 open CP subject to  
Emergency Protection Order  
or Protected Under Police  
Powers in last 6 months

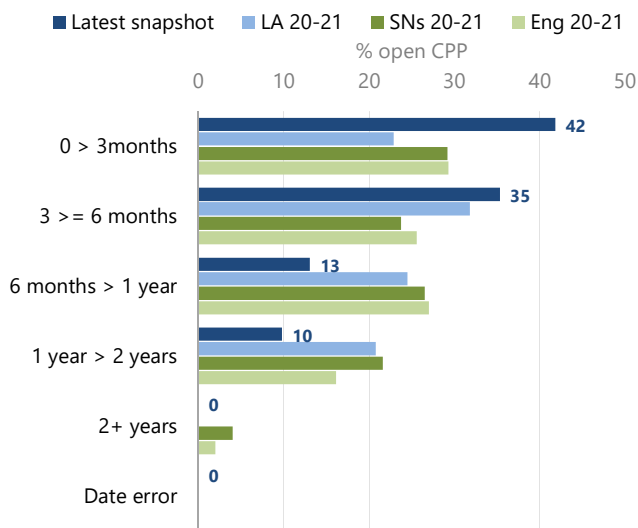
## Latest category of abuse for current CP plans



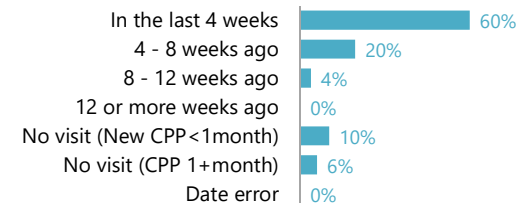
## Rate of CPP per 10,000 children aged 0-17



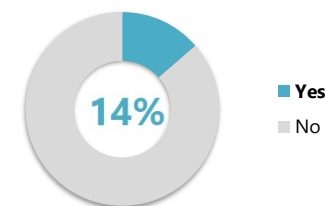
## Comparing duration of open CP plans



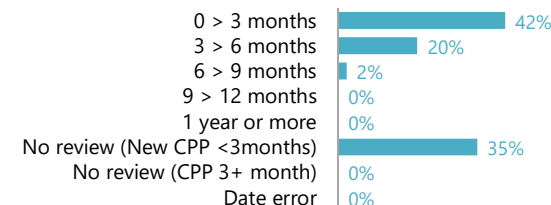
## Time since the child was last seen


Open CPP seen  
alone at their last  
social work visit

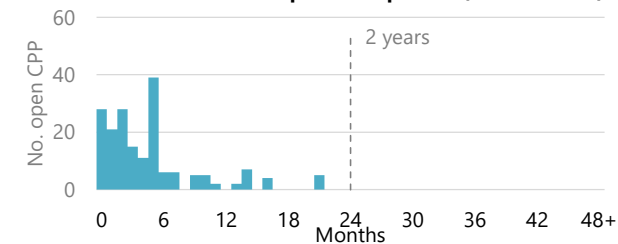
(excludes Not recorded or N/A)



## Time since the child's latest review



## Duration of current open CP plans (in months)

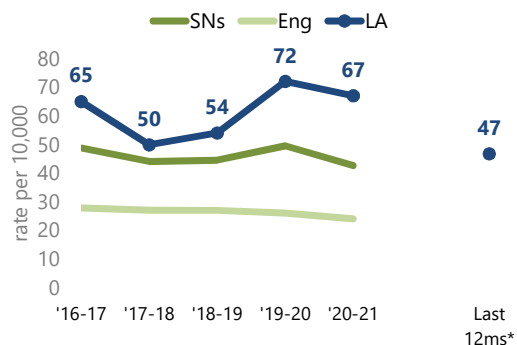


Children Looked After (CLA) started and ceased in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

## 94 CLA started in the last 12 months

### Rate of CLA started per 10,000 children

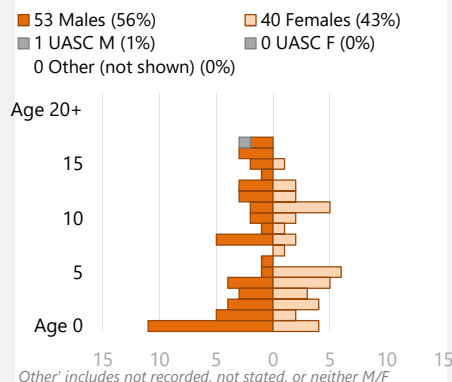


\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

1 of the 94 CLA starters were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

1%

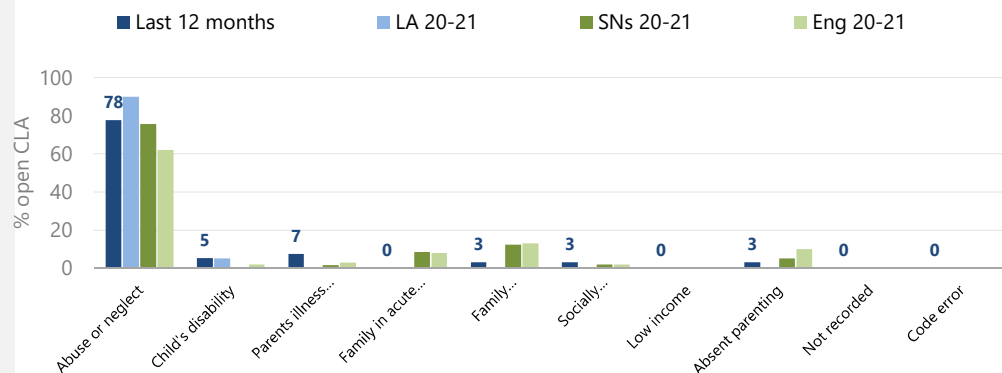
### Age and gender



4%

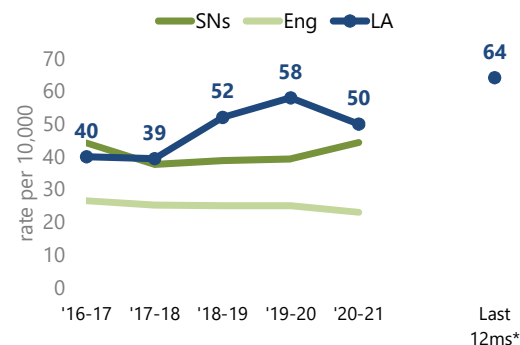
4 of the 94 CLA starters have previously been looked after

### Comparing the primary need of CLA starters



## 129 CLA ceased in the last 12 months

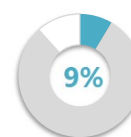
### Rate of CLA ceased per 10,000 children



\*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

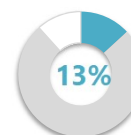
### Reason episode of care ceased

#### Adopted


Last 12 months  
9%

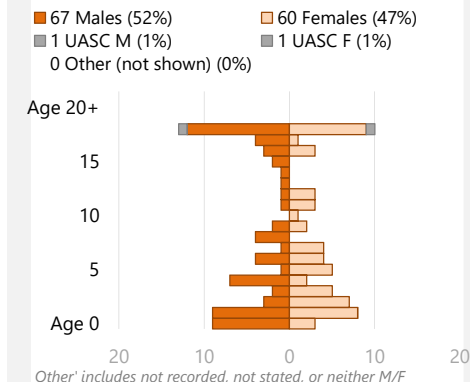
2020-21 (published)  
LA 11% SNs 12% Eng 10%

#### Special Guardianship Order

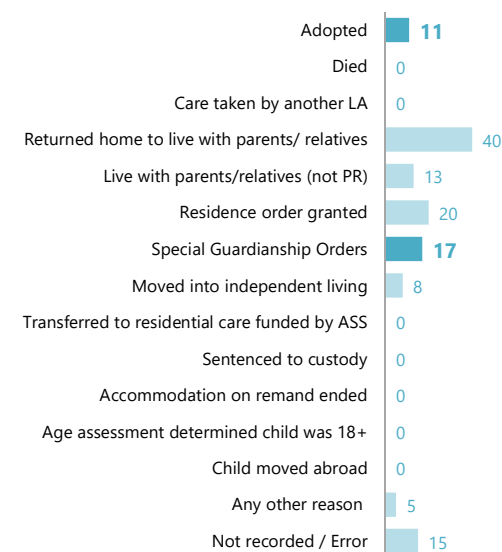

Last 12 months  
13%

2020-21 (published)  
LA 20% SNs 22% Eng 14%

### Age and gender



### Number of CLA ceased by reason in the period

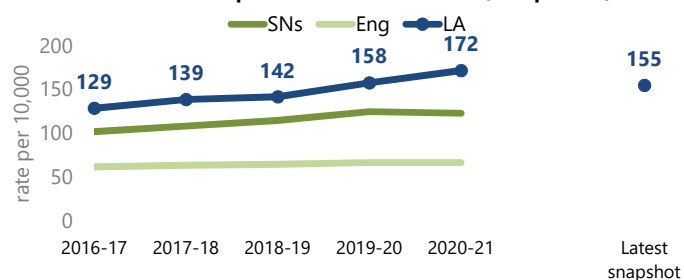


## Children Looked After (CLA) with an open episode of care

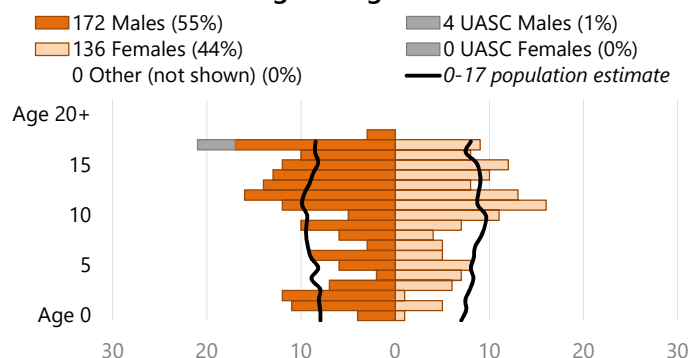
Snapshot 31/03/2022

## 312 Children Looked After (CLA) with an open episode of care

Rate of CLA per 10,000 children (snapshot)



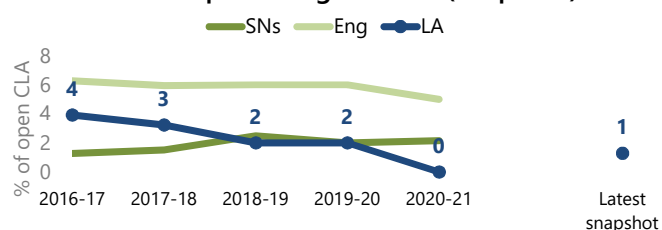
Age and gender



Other' includes not recorded, not stated, or neither M/F

## 4 open unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

UASC as a percentage of CLA (snapshot)



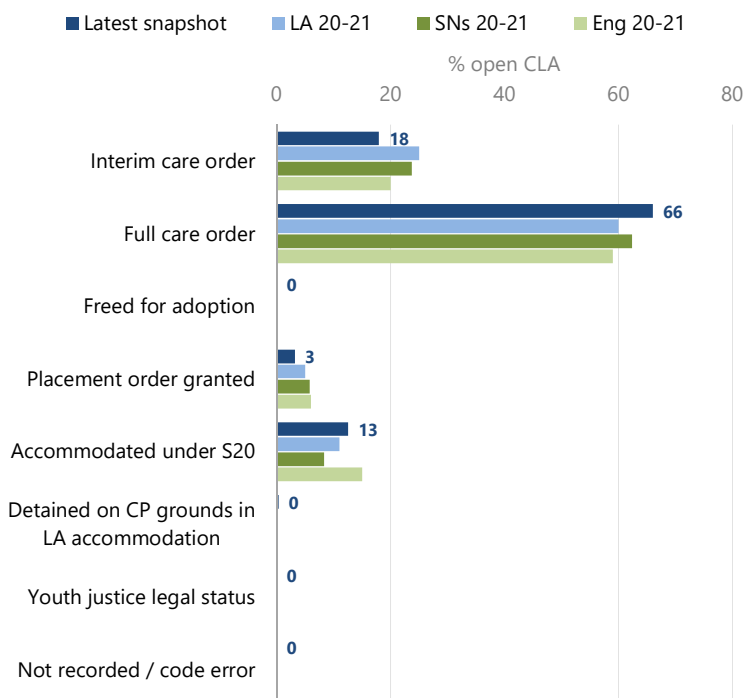
Ethnic background

	All CLA	Not UASC	UASC
White	94%	95%	0%
Mixed	1%	1%	0%
Asian or Asian British	1%	0%	50%
Black or black British	1%	1%	0%
Other ethnic group	2%	2%	50%
Not stated	1%	1%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

23 children  
(7%) with a  
disability

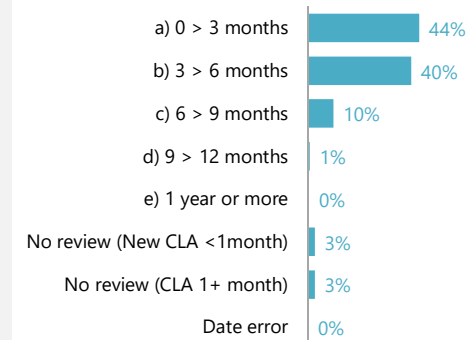
Comparing legal status of open CLA (snapshot)



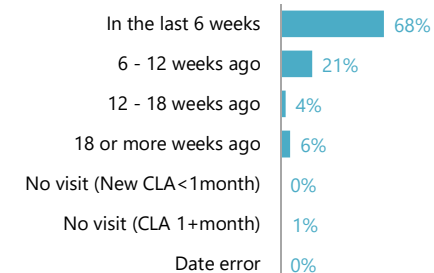
Permanence plan

	Number	%
Return to family	61	20%
Adoption	4	1%
SGO/CAO	26	8%
Supported living	2	1%
L/T residential	29	9%
L/T fostering	138	44%
Other	50	16%
Not recorded	2	1%

Time since latest review



Time since the child was last seen

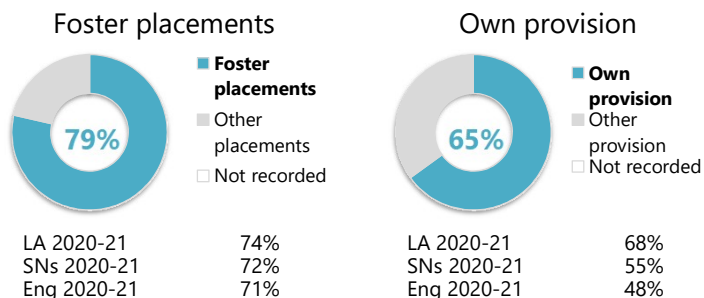




## Children Looked After (CLA) placements

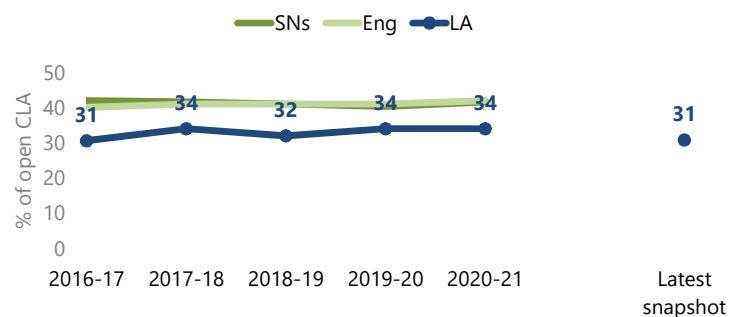
Snapshot 31/03/2022

## CLA placements by type and provision

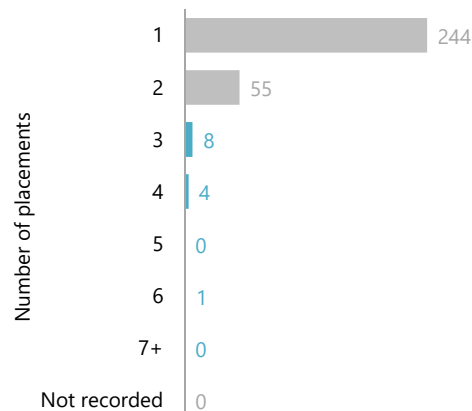


Placement type (open CLA)	Own LA	Private	Other	Total
Foster placement	194	42	9	245
Placed for adoption	1	0	1	2
Placed with parents	0	0	27	27
Independent living	0	1	0	1
Residential employment	0	0	0	0
Residential accommodation	1	6	0	7
Secure Children's Homes	0	0	0	0
Children's Homes	7	21	1	29
Residential Care Home	0	0	1	1
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	0	0
Family Centre	0	0	0	0
Young Offender Institution	0	0	0	0
Residential school	0	0	0	0
Other placements	0	0	0	0
Temporary placement	0	0	0	0
Total placements	203	70	39	312

## CLA placements out of borough

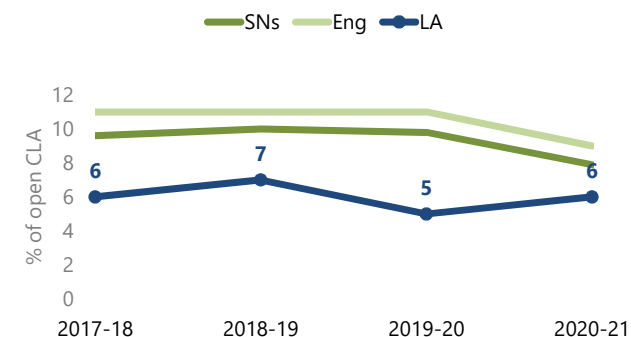


## Number of placements in the last 12 months



May include "status" changes as well as placements

## Comparing short term placement stability



Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present short-term stability alongside published statistics

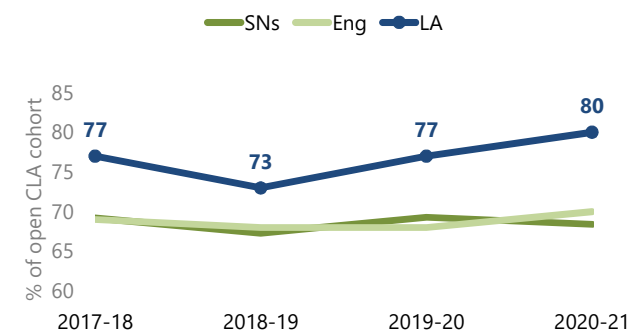
## Duration of placements

Duration of latest placement for each current CLA aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2½ years or more



May include "status" changes as well as placements

## Comparing long term placement stability



Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present long-term stability alongside published statistics

## Children Looked After (CLA) health and missing/absent from placement

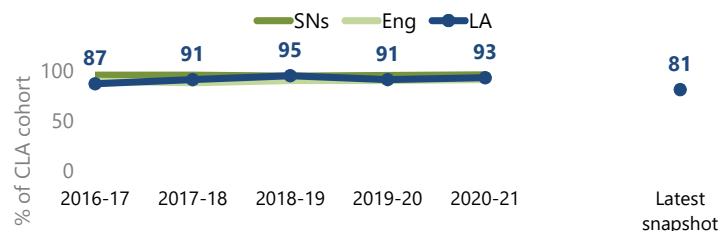
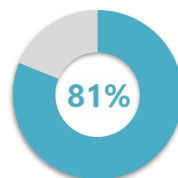
Snapshot 31/03/2022

## Health

260 current open CLA looked after for at least 12 months

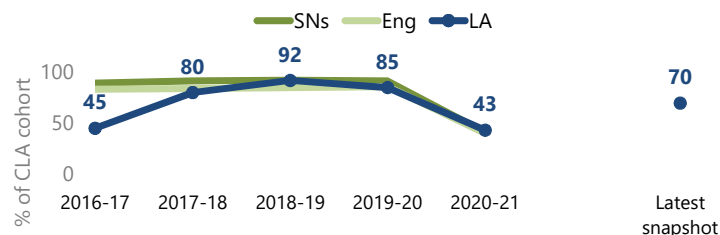
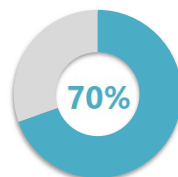
## Health assessments

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months with an up to date health assessment (in the last 6 months for CLA aged under 5, and in the last 12 months for CLA aged 5-plus)



## Dental checks

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months who have had a dental check in the last 12 months.



## Missing from placement

Number of missing episodes per CLA



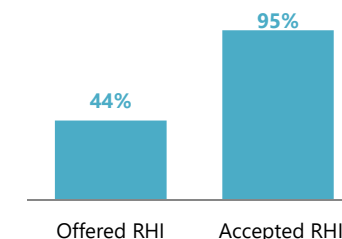
45 of 441 looked after children had a missing incident in the last 12 months

	Latest data	LA 20-21	SNs 20-21	Eng 20-21
Number of all CLA with a missing incident	45 of 441	39		
Percentage of all CLA with a missing incident	10%	9%	10%	10%
Total number of missing incidents for all CLA	204	155		
Average number of incidents per CLA who went missing	4.5	4.0	6.5	6.6

## Missing incidents - return home interviews

	Latest data	
Missing children offered return interview	20 of 45	44%
Missing children not offered return interview	1 of 45	2%
Missing children return interview offer not recorded	24 of 45	53%
Missing children where return interview was n/a	0 of 45	0%

	Latest data	
Missing children accepted return interview	19 of 20	95%
Missing children not accepted return interview	1 of 20	5%
Missing children return interview acceptance not recorded	0 of 20	0%



## Absent from placement

0 of 441 looked after children had an absent incident in the last 12 months

	Latest data	LA 20-21	SNs 20-21	Eng 20-21
Number of all CLA with an absent incident	0 of 441	c		
Percentage of all CLA with an absent incident	0%	c	1%	2%
Total number of absent incidents for all CLA	0	c		
Average number of incidents per CLA who were absent	-	c	0.5	4.0

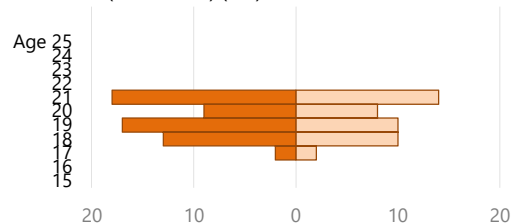
## Care leavers currently in receipt of leaving care services

Snapshot 31/03/2022

## 103 care leavers

## Age and gender

59 Males (57%) 44 Females (43%)  
0 Other (not shown) (0%)



## Ethnic background

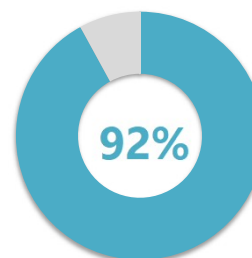
White 88%  
Mixed 2%  
Asian or Asian British 3%  
Black or black British 6%  
Other ethnic group 1%  
Not stated 0%  
Not recorded 0%

See page 22 for comparisons

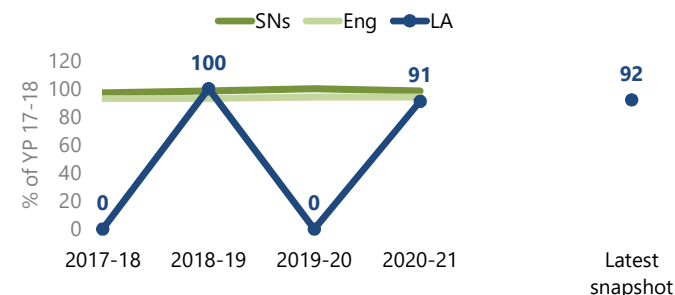
7 (7%) care leavers with a disability

## LA in touch with 17-18 year olds

ChAT	Aged 17	Aged 18	Total
Numbers in cohort	4	21	25
LA in touch with YP	100%	90%	92%

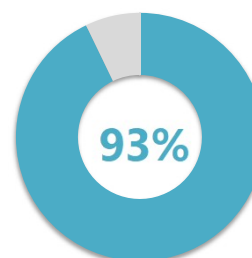


In touch  
Not in touch  
Not recorded

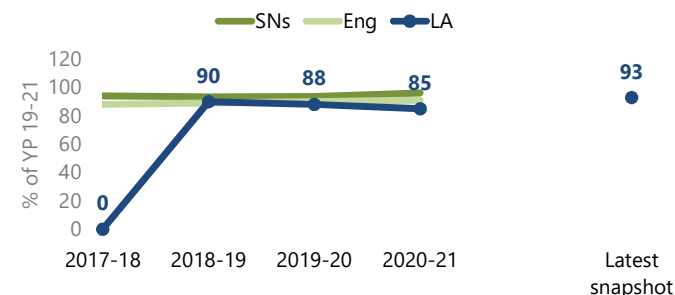


## LA in touch with 19-21 year olds

ChAT	Aged 19	Aged 20	Aged 21	Total
Numbers in cohort	23	17	30	70
LA in touch with YP	100%	100%	83%	93%

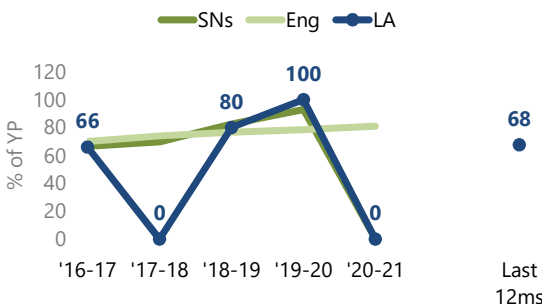


In touch  
Not in touch  
Not recorded



## Remained in care until aged 18

YP who ceased to be looked after aged 16-plus who were looked after until their 18th birthday



## Eligibility category

Relevant 4  
Former relevant 92  
Qualifying 7  
Other 0  
Not recorded 0

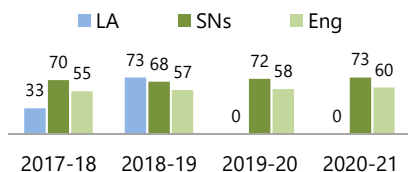
Relevant = YP aged 16-17 no longer looked after and eligible for leaving care services.

Former relevant = YP aged 18-25 eligible for leaving care services.

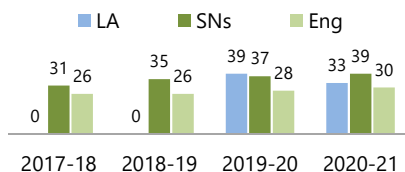
Qualifying = YP aged 18-25 in receipt of support but not eligible for full leaving care services.

## Remain with former foster carer

## Aged 18



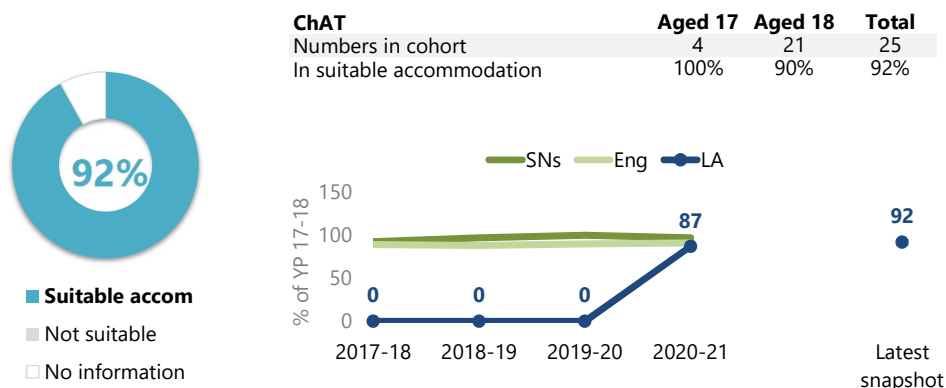
## Aged 19-20



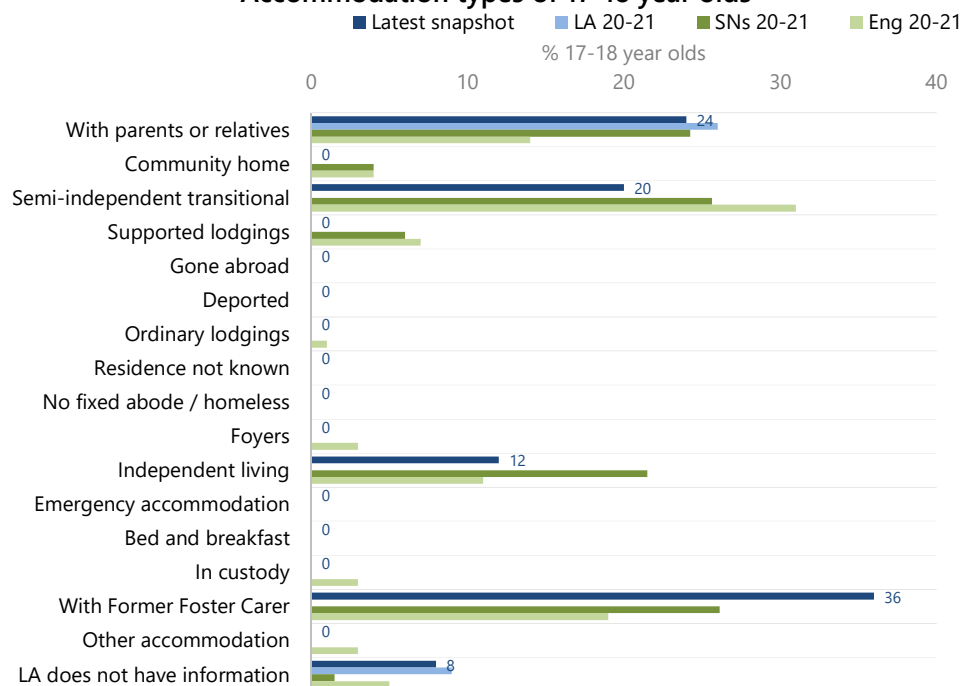
## Care leavers accommodation suitability and type

Snapshot 31/03/2022

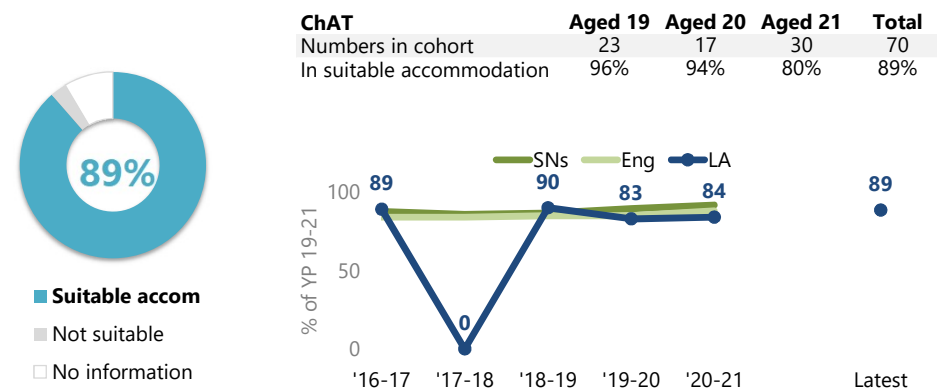
## Accommodation suitability of 17-18 year olds



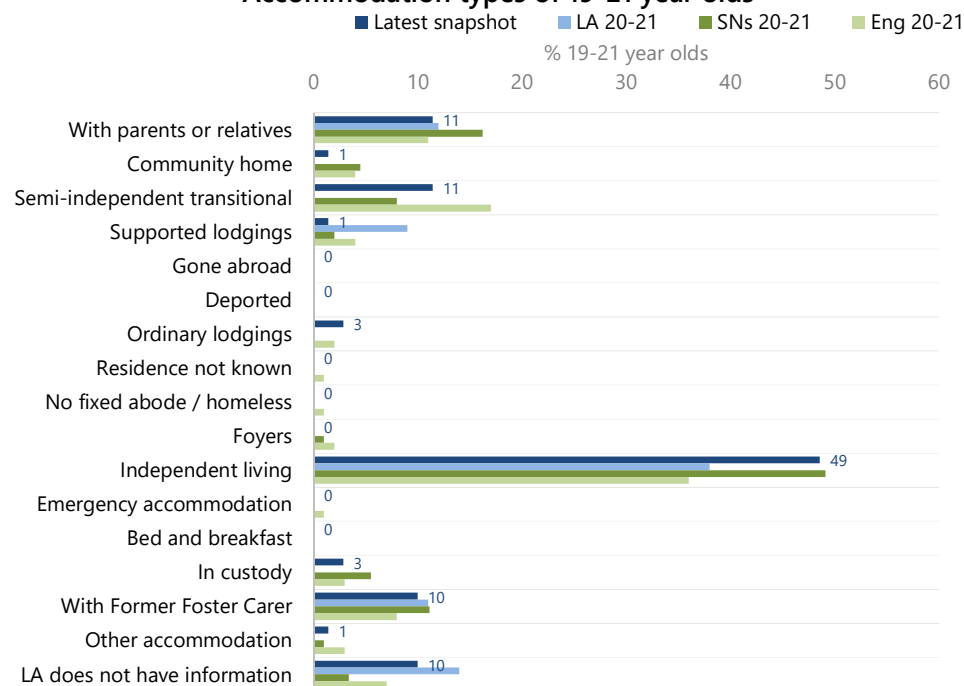
## Accommodation types of 17-18 year olds



## Accommodation suitability of 19-21 year olds



## Accommodation types of 19-21 year olds

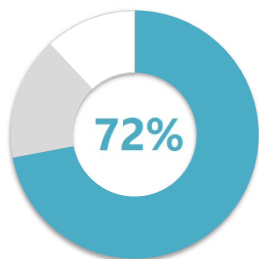


## Care leavers activity (Education, Employment, or Training)

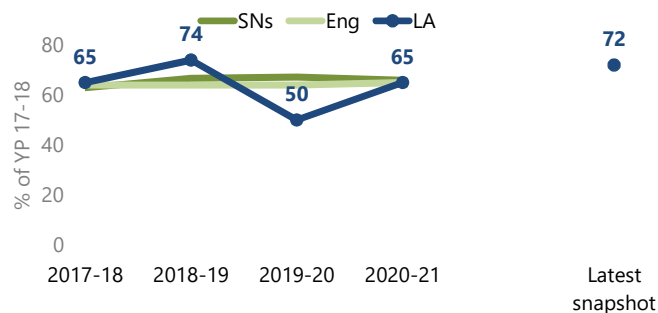
Snapshot 31/03/2022

## Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 17-18 year olds

ChAT	Aged 17	Aged 18	Total
Numbers in cohort	4	21	25
In EET	100%	67%	72%



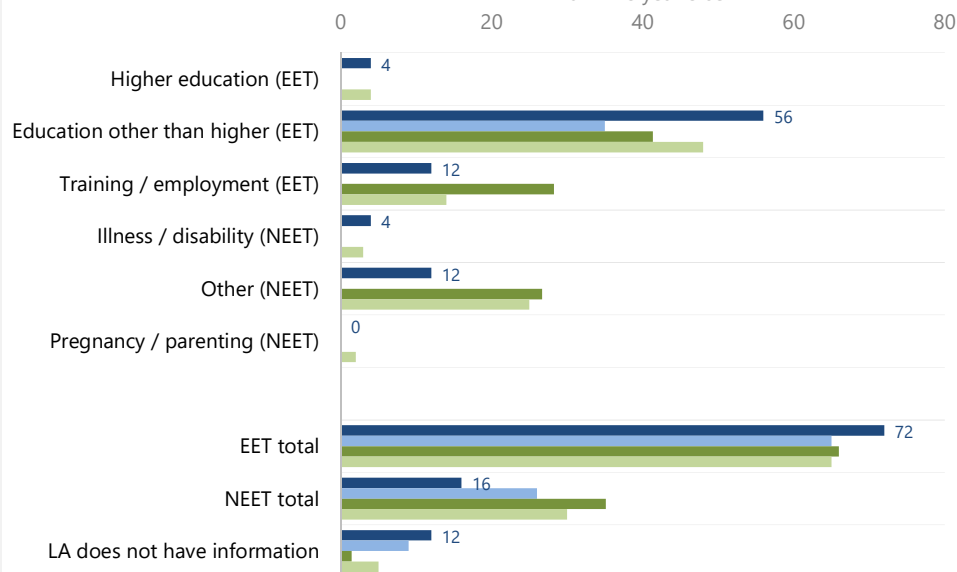
■ YP in EET ■ NEET  
□ No info



## Activity types of 17-18 year olds

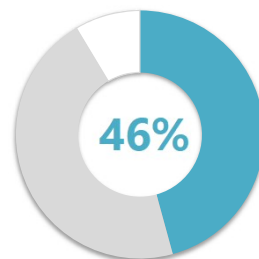
■ Latest snapshot ■ LA 20-21 ■ SNs 20-21 ■ Eng 20-21

% 17-18 year olds

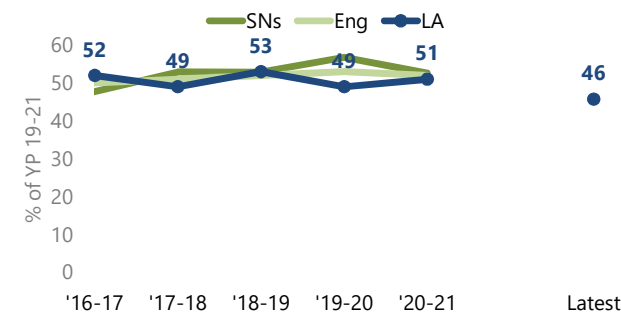


## Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 19-21 year olds

ChAT	Aged 19	Aged 20	Aged 21	Total
Numbers in cohort	23	17	30	70
In EET	48%	41%	47%	46%



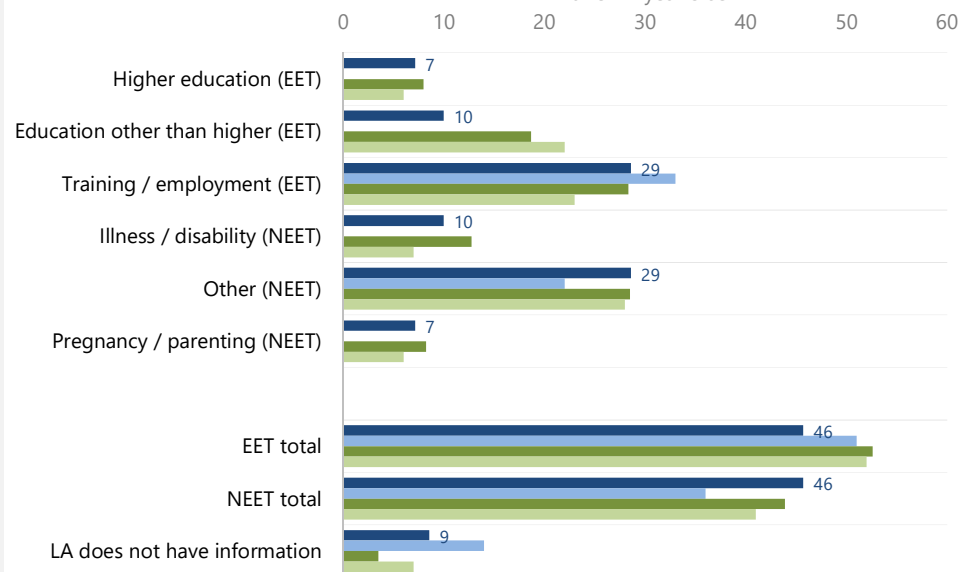
■ YP in EET ■ NEET  
□ No info



## Activity types of 19-21 year olds

■ Latest snapshot ■ LA 20-21 ■ SNs 20-21 ■ Eng 20-21

% 19-21 year olds



Children adopted, waiting to be adopted, or had an adoption decision reversed in the last 12 months from 01/04/2021 to 31/03/2022

## 23 children

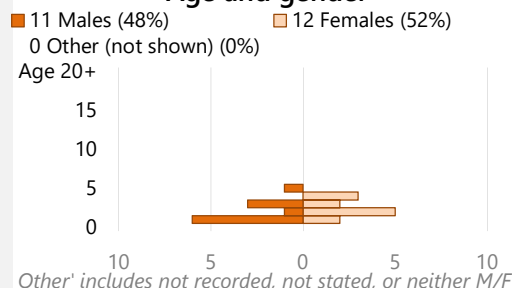
- 12 Child/ren adopted last 12 months
- 10 Child/ren waiting to be adopted
- (7 Child/ren waiting with placement order)
- 1 Child/ren with decision reversed

### Ethnic background

White	100%
Mixed	0%
Asian or Asian British	0%
Black or black British	0%
Other ethnic group	0%
Not stated	0%
Not recorded	0%

See page 22 for comparisons

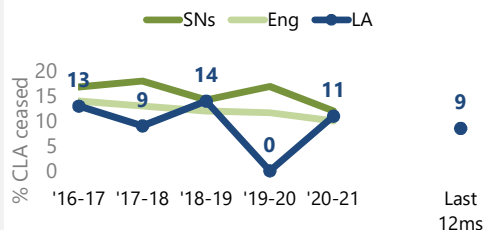
### Age and gender



0 children (0%) with a disability

## Of the 129 children who ceased to be looked after in the last 12 months, 11 was/were adopted (9%)

### Children ceased who were adopted



### Children aged 5-plus who were adopted

1.4%

1 of the 74 children aged 5-plus who ceased to be looked after in the last 12 months were adopted

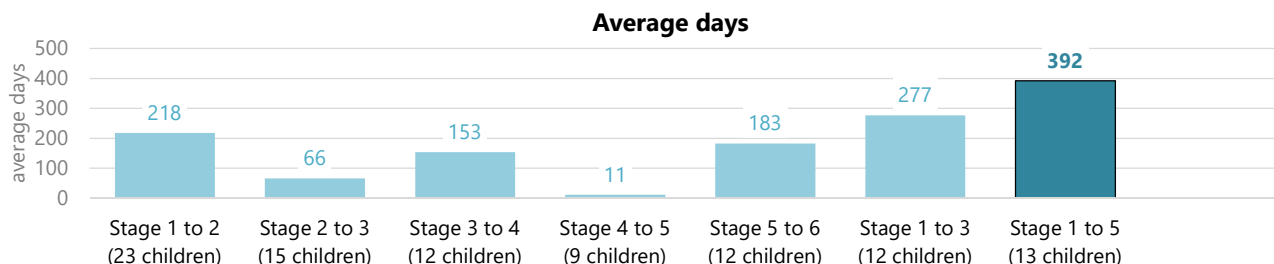
### Comparing 5-plus adoptions

LA last 12 months	1.4%
LA 2015-18 (3 yr average)	6.0%
SNs 2015-18 (3 yr average)	5.0%
Eng 2015-18 (3 yr average)	6.9%

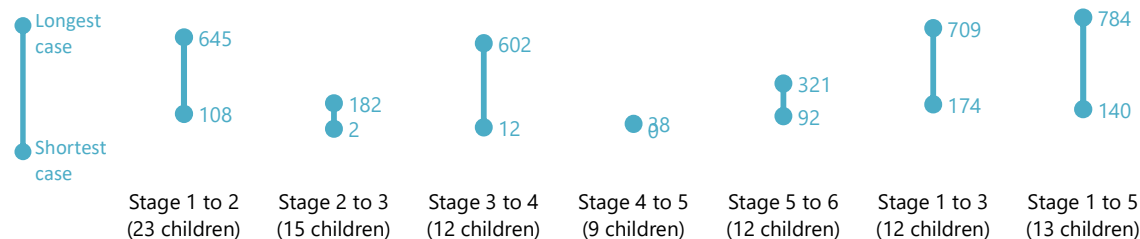
## Timeliness of each stage of the adoption process

Average duration of each stage (number of days)

- Stage 1** Child entered care
- Stage 2** Decision that child should be placed for adoption
- Stage 3** Placement order granted
- Stage 4** Matching child and prospective adopters
- Stage 5** Placed for adoption
- Stage 6** Adoption order granted



Range in days between shortest and longest cases at each stage

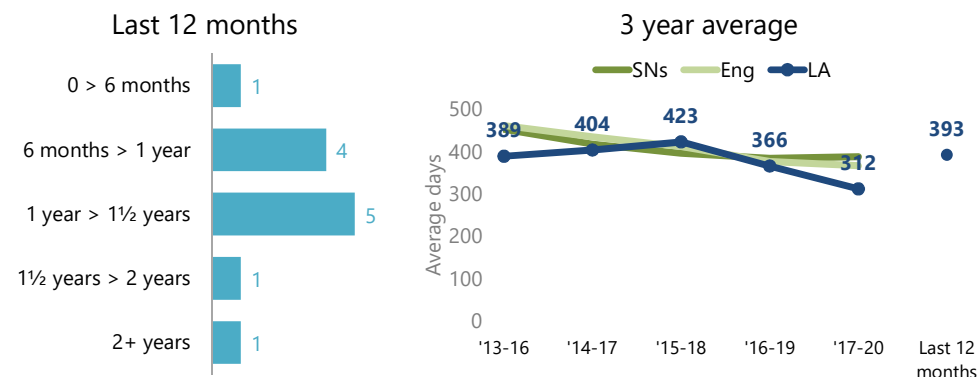


## Adoption benchmarking

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

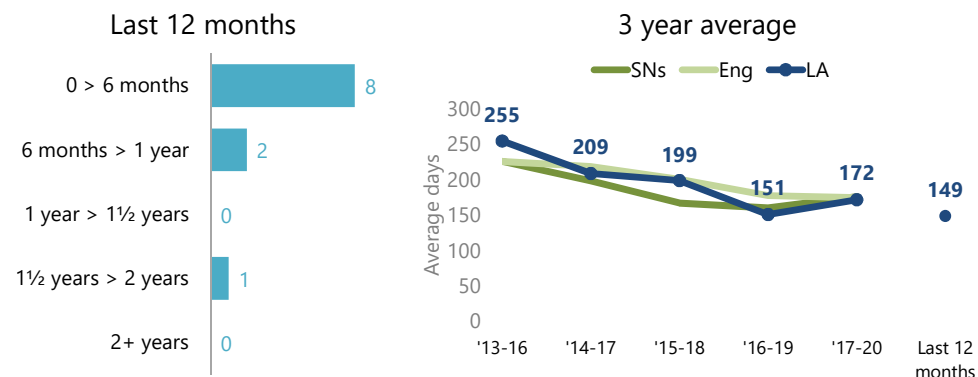
## (A10) Time between entering care and placed with family for adopted children

**393 days** Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family for adopted children (adjusted for foster carer adoptions)  
12 children



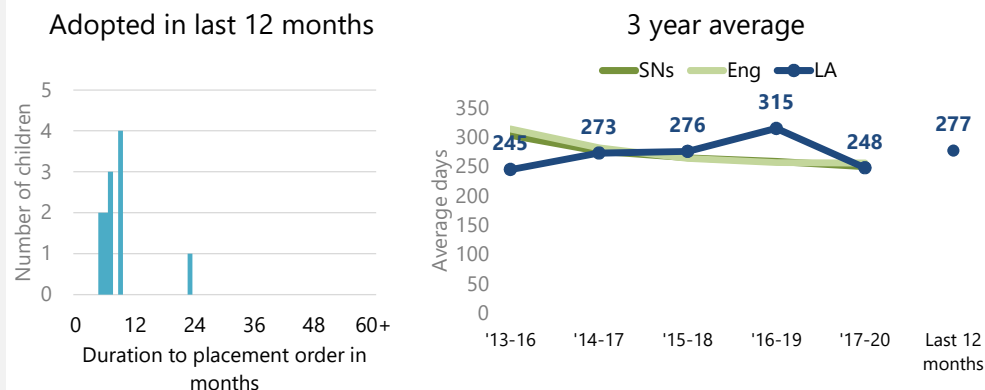
## (A2) Time between placement order and deciding on a match

**149 days** The average number of days from the date of the placement order to the date the child was matched to prospective adopters  
11 children



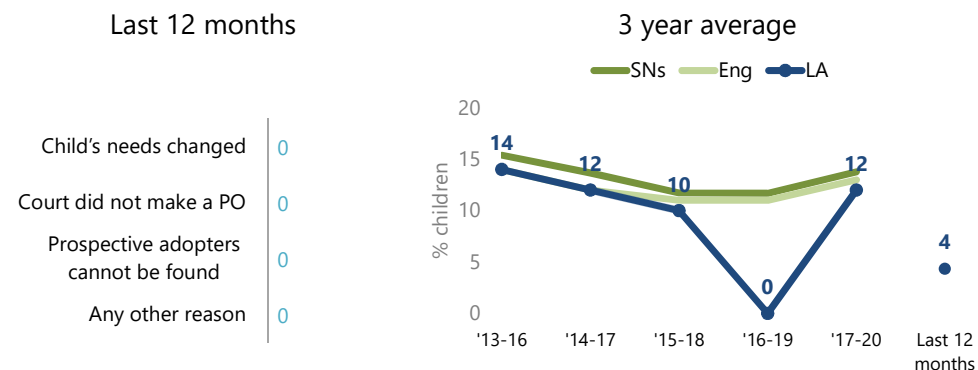
## (A20) Time between entering care and placed for adoption

**277 days** Average time between a child entering care and a local authority receiving court authority to place a child, for children who have been adopted (days)  
12 children



## (A5) Permanence decision changed away from adoption

**4%** Children where there was a decision that the child should no longer be placed for adoption  
1/23 children



Prospective adopters in the last 12 months

from 01/04/2021  
to 31/03/2022

## 309 prospective adopters (167 families)

## Prospective adopter current status

	Adults	Families
Child adopted	75	40
Child placed	72	39
Child matched	2	1
Application	123	67
Enquiry	0	0
Withdrawn	37	20

## Ethnic breakdown

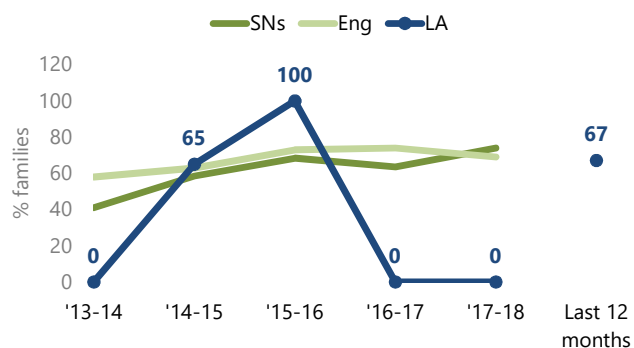
	Adults %	Children %
White	90%	100%
Mixed	1%	0%
Asian or Asian British	3%	0%
Black or black British	0%	0%
Other ethnic group	1%	0%
Not stated	5%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%

## New two-stage adoption process

<b>Stage 1 start</b>	Registration of interest
<b>Stage 1 end</b>	Decision of suitability to adopt
<b>Stage 2 start</b>	Adopter's wish to proceed
<b>Stage 2 end</b>	Agency Decision-Maker (ADM decision)
<b>Matched</b>	Family matched with child(ren)
<b>Placed</b>	Child(ren) placed with family
<b>Adopted</b>	Adoption order granted

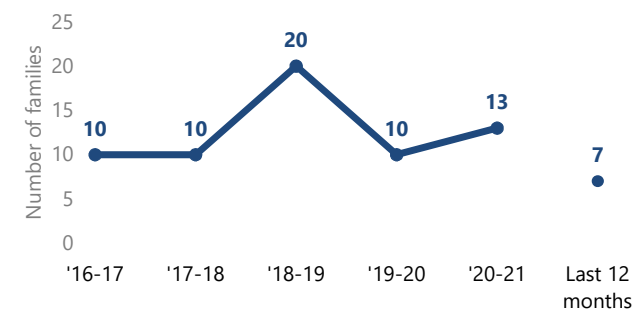
## Adoption Scorecard A12 - wait to be matched

Percentage of adoptive families matched to a child who waited more than three months between approval and matching (discontinued)



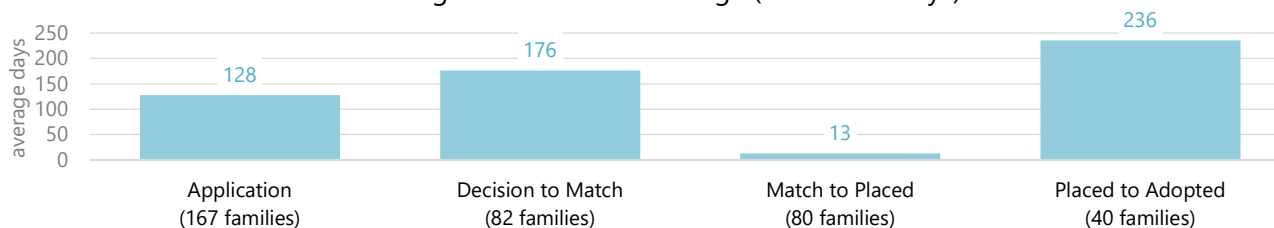
## Adoption Scorecard A15 - new ADM decisions

Number of new ADM decisions for children in the year (ADM = Agency Decision-Maker)

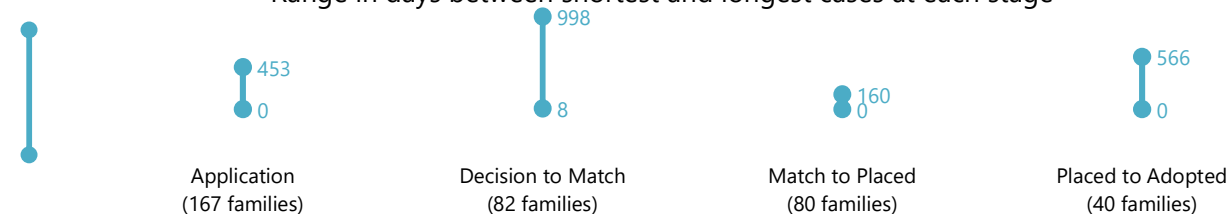


## Duration of each stage of the adoption process

Average duration of each stage (number of days)



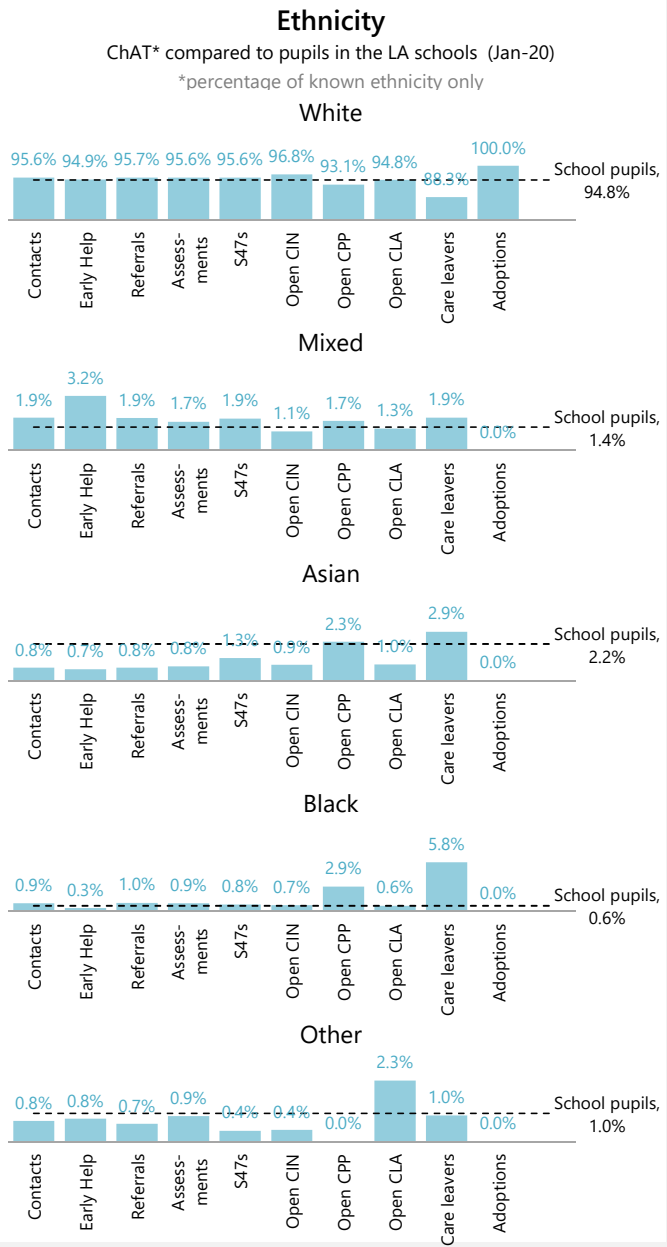
Range in days between shortest and longest cases at each stage



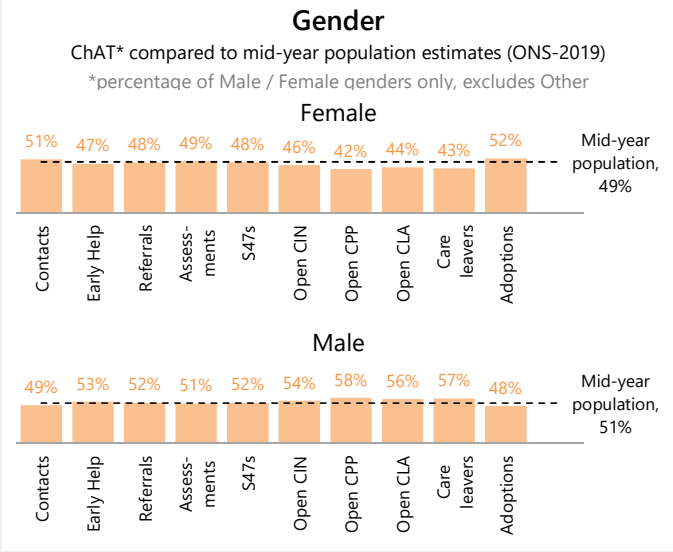
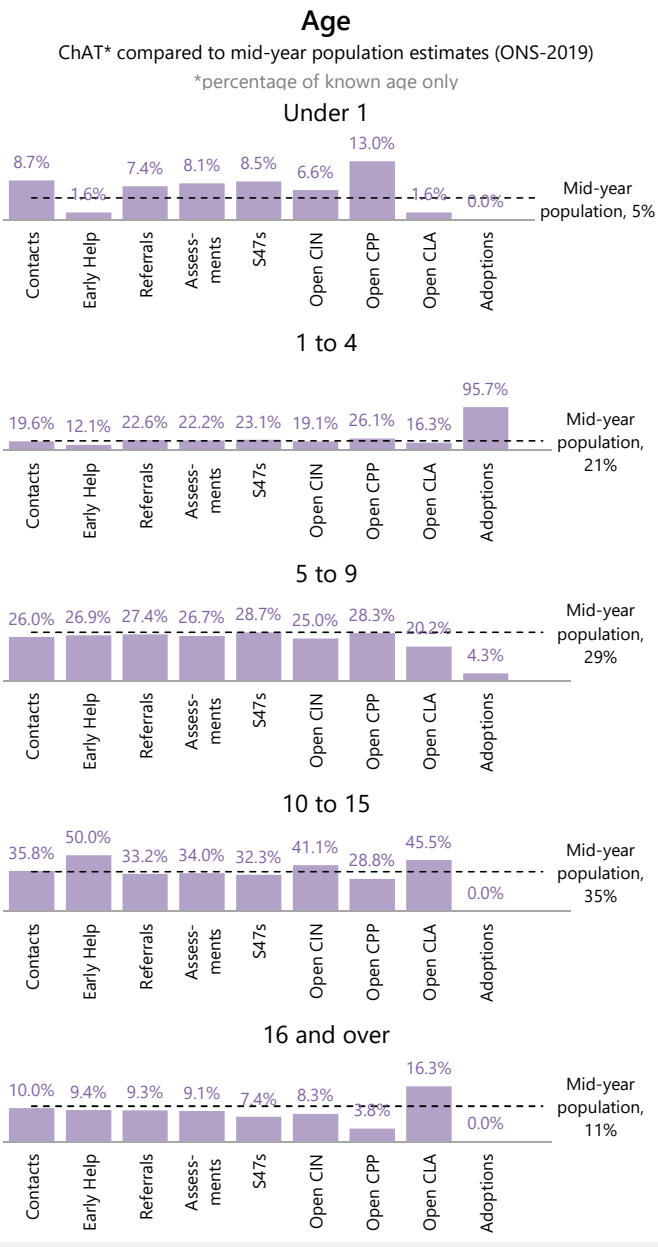


Demographics of children across all areas of children's social care

Snapshot 31/03/2022



ChAT v6.16 - Data to Insight



**Comparing CLA demographics**

CLA figures compared to published population statistics

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2020			Eng 2020		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
White	95	95	lower -1%	93	95	lower -2%	75	73	higher 2%
Mixed	1	1	lower -6%	2	1	higher 46%	10	6	higher 54%
Asian	1	2	lower -56%	2	2	lower -8%	4	12	lower -66%
Black	1	1	higher 2%	c	1		7	6	higher 21%
Other	2	1	higher 114%	c	1		3	3	higher 17%

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2020			Eng 2020		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
Under 1	2	5	lower -67%	5	5	higher 3%	5	5	no dif 0%
1 to 4	16	21	lower -21%	18	21	lower -13%	14	22	lower -36%
5 to 9	20	29	lower -30%	21	29	lower -27%	19	29	lower -35%
10 to 15	46	35	higher 29%	39	35	higher 11%	39	34	higher 16%
16-plus	16	11	higher 56%	17	11	higher 62%	23	10	higher 124%

	LA Latest snapshot			LA 2020			Eng 2020		
	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference	CLA	Pop	% difference
Male	56	51	higher 10%	55	51	higher 7%	56	51	higher 9%
Female	44	49	lower -11%	45	49	lower -8%	44	49	lower -10%

## Comparisons of headline figures and performance data to published statistics

The table below shows the Local Authority's latest data for each indicator as calculated in ChAT, and the direction of travel since the latest published statistics (where available).

Decreasing, low is good

Increasing, high is good

No change, not RAG rated

Lowest 25% quartile, low is good

Highest 25% quartile, high is good

Mid 50% range, not RAG-rated

Indicator	Latest data (ChAT)			Latest published statistics for all local authorities					
	LA	Direction of travel		LA	SNs	Eng	LA compared to mid-50% range of all LAs		Date
Referrals received (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	975	Increase	➤	752	706	494	Higher	○	2020-21
Referrals to social care that were within 12 months of a previous referral (%)	21	Decrease	➤	22	20	21	In range	○	2020-21
Assessments completed (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	926	Increase	➤	863	867	518	Higher	○	2020-21
Assessments completed within 45 working days (%)	87	Increase	➤	85	83	88	Lower	○	2020-21
Children subject to section 47 enquiries (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	391	Increase	➤	363	297	164	Higher	○	2020-21
Children subject of an initial child protection conference (annual rate per 10,000 of children)	118	Decrease	➤	153	116	60	Higher	○	2020-21
Initial Child Protection Conferences held within 15 working days of the start of the section 47 enquiry (%)	91	Decrease	➤	94	81	83	Higher	○	2020-21
Children in need (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	620	Decrease	➤	715	517	321	Higher	○	2020-21
Children who are the subject of a child protection plan (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	92	Decrease	➤	122	81	41	Higher	○	2020-21
Children who became the subject of a CP plan for a second or subsequent time (%)	16	Increase	➤	16	22	22	Lower	○	2020-21
Children who ceased to be on a CP plan whose plan lasted 2 years or more (%)	0	-	↑ ↑	c	4	4	Higher	○	2020-21
Children who are looked after (snapshot rate per 10,000 children)	155	Decrease	➤	172	123	67	Higher	○	2020-21
Children looked after who had a missing incident in the period (%)	10	Increase	➤	9	10	10	In range	○	2020-21
Children looked after who were away without authorisation in the period (%)	0	-	↑ ↑	c	1	2	Higher	○	2020-21
Children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist in the last 12 months (%)	70	Increase	➤	43	41	40	In range	○	2020-21
Children looked after who had their annual health assessment (%)	81	Decrease	➤	93	96	91	In range	○	2020-21
Children who ceased to be looked after in the period who were adopted (%)	9	Decrease	➤	11	12	10	In range	○	2020-21
Children who ceased to be looked after in the period due to a Special Guardianship Order (%)	13	Decrease	➤	20	22	14	Higher	○	2020-21
Children leaving care over the age of 16 who remained looked after until their 18th birthday (%)	68	-	↑ ↑	-	-	81	Higher	○	2020-21
Care leavers aged 19-21 in suitable accommodation (%)	89	Increase	➤	84	92	88	Lower	○	2020-21
Care leavers aged 19-21 in education, employment, or training (%)	46	Decrease	➤	51	53	52	In range	○	2020-21
A1 - Average time between entering care and moving in with family for children who were adopted (days)	413	Decrease	➤	479	454	486	In range	○	2015-18
A2 - Average time between LA receiving placement order and LA deciding on a match with family (days)	-	-		199	167	201	In range	○	2015-18

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

11 October 2022



**Report of:** Director of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT 2021 - 2022 AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE MARCH 2022

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## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For Information.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the year 2021/22. The provision of foster care is a regulated activity and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information on a regular basis and also annually.
- 2.2 This report is also to present to Children's Services Committee the Statement of Purpose and the Children's guide for this service.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for our children in care and care leavers. The National Minimum Standards, together with Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies.
- 3.2 The report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and foster carers, and the constitution of the Fostering Panel. The report also explains activity in relation to the recruitment,

preparation and assessment of prospective foster carers and the progress in relation to the priorities for the service in 2021/22 - see **Appendix 1**.

3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure the executive side of the Local Authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

## 4. PROPOSALS

4.1 The Fostering Service Annual Report provides details of the service's full activity in respect of the following:

- The team;
- An explanation regarding governance and oversight of Hartlepool's fostering service and Hartlepool's fostering panel activity over the year;
- An understanding around how placements are made and our success around stability;
- Information about our recruitment drive to encourage new foster carers to come to Hartlepool, the places where we advertise for new carers and the successes and issues we face;
- Information about how we reward our carers and how we recognise their contribution to a child's life;
- Information about Hartlepool's training programme for foster carers;
- Information relating to support and services Hartlepool foster carers can expect from the fostering service after they have been approved;
- Our priorities for 2021-2022;
- The voice of Hartlepool foster carers and children and young people who are cared for – and;
- Service development; Mockingbird, Special Guardianship Order Offer, Early Permanence.

4.2 It is a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, outlining its aims and objectives, a description of the services and facilities that are provided, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. The Statement of Purpose for Hartlepool's Fostering Service is attached at **Appendix 2** to this report.

**5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The fostering service needs to adhere to the Statement of Purpose and provide the executive side of the council information relating to the fostering service on a quarterly basis.

**6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Fostering Service has a set budget to support the year's activity. This also supports the recruitment of potential carers. The annual budget covers the cost of the Fostering Service, including social workers, fostering allowances and the recruitment of potential carers.
- 6.2 For 2021/22 the budget was £4.5m and the outturn was £4.1m, resulting in an underspend of £0.4m which was allocated to support the 2021/22 budget for residential placements budgets where there are budget pressures reflecting an increase in both the number of children cared for by the
- 6.3 Council with complex needs and the cost of this provision. As these trends are continuing the budget for 2022/23 has been realigned.

**7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations arising from this report. The Fostering Team and Service adhere to the National Minimum Standards, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies. The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted as part of its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services.

**8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Foster carers are regularly consulted and their views and comments are reflected in the Annual Report. Foster carers are subject to reviews by an independent reviewing officer. As part of this process children and young people, and their social worker, provide feedback in terms of practice in the foster home.

**9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 There are no child and family poverty implications arising from this report.

## **10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 10.1 The Fostering Service practises in a sensitive and responsive way towards Foster Carers. The Fostering Service works with carers from any ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation. This is detailed within the Statement of Purpose. (**Appendix 2**)

## **11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staff implications arising from this report.

## **12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations arising from this report

## **13. ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 13.1 There are no Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change considerations.

## **14. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the annual report for 2021/22.
- 14.2 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the Statement of Purpose (**Appendix 2**) and the Children's guide to Fostering (**Appendix 3**).
- 14.3 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the information in respect of the Foster Care annual survey (**Appendix 4**) and the summary report provided by the Chair of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Panel (**Appendix 5**).

## **15. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children in its care by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.
- 15.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in the scrutiny of activities of the Fostering Service to ensure that performance in this area is of good quality, caring and robust and relates to the statement of purpose.

## 16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None

## 17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Lisa Cushlow,  
Head of Services for Children in Care and Care Leavers,  
[Lisa.cushlow@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:Lisa.cushlow@hartlepool.gov.uk)  
(01429) 405588

Sign Off:-

Director of Resources and Development ☒

Chief Solicitor ☒

# Fostering Service

## Annual Report 2021/2022





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## Foreword

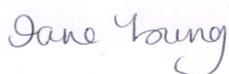
I am pleased and proud to introduce this Annual Report for Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Service. In the last year, whilst continuing to experience the challenges due to the Covid pandemic, I am pleased to say the service has continued to improve. The development of the Mockingbird Project is an exciting initiative and hopefully it will be successful in supporting current carers but also in encouraging more people to apply to be foster carers in the knowledge that there is a range of robust support available to them.

The development of the Special Guardian Offer has been a significant achievement for the service. Although still in its infancy, it has already had a positive impact in supporting, advocating and sign posting special guardian carers to services to assist them in their crucial role.

Hartlepool's Foster Care family has shown tenacity in its response to the increased demand for caring homes for children, demonstrating massive dedication, commitment and often ingenuity in the service they have given.

We continue to be determined that every child cared for by Hartlepool experiences the best quality care and positive, secure relationships and to this end the roll out of the Secure Base Model for Foster Care continued 2021/22 and the feedback from foster carers has been very positive. The model supports carers in ensuring that our children are nurtured and will grow up with a sense of identity and belonging. This is our absolute priority and one which underpins all our work with children.

I look forward to 2022/23 with confidence that the Fostering Service will continue to give its Foster Care families the opportunity to grow, get involved in service development and to strive for excellence in terms of caring for our children. Finally, I want to thank all our Foster Carers for their ongoing support and their commitment to providing the best possible care to our children and young people.



**Jane Young**

## Introduction

The annual report of the Fostering Service for Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) provides information about the activity of and outcomes achieved by the service during 2021/22. The report will reflect on the work of the team and service provided, identify changes that have taken place within the service and detail the statistical information in respect of the Fostering Service from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. Finally, the report will set out priorities for service development during 2022/2023.

The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 places a requirement upon Local Authority Fostering Services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive 3 monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the service. This Annual Report provides a full review of the service and interim progress reports will be presented to Children's Services Committee on a quarterly basis throughout the coming financial year.

The aim of the fostering service is to recruit, train and support foster carers to provide high quality placements for the children of Hartlepool. This is achieved through the following objectives:

The Fostering team works in partnership with children, young people, their families and other stakeholders involved in promoting positive outcomes for children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council in order to deliver a high quality foster care service;

The Fostering team actively seeks to involve foster carers, children and young people looked after and children of foster carers in the development and continuous improvement of the service;

The Fostering team recruits, assesses, trains, supervises and supports a suitable and diverse range of foster carers to provide quality care and placement choice for children and young people;

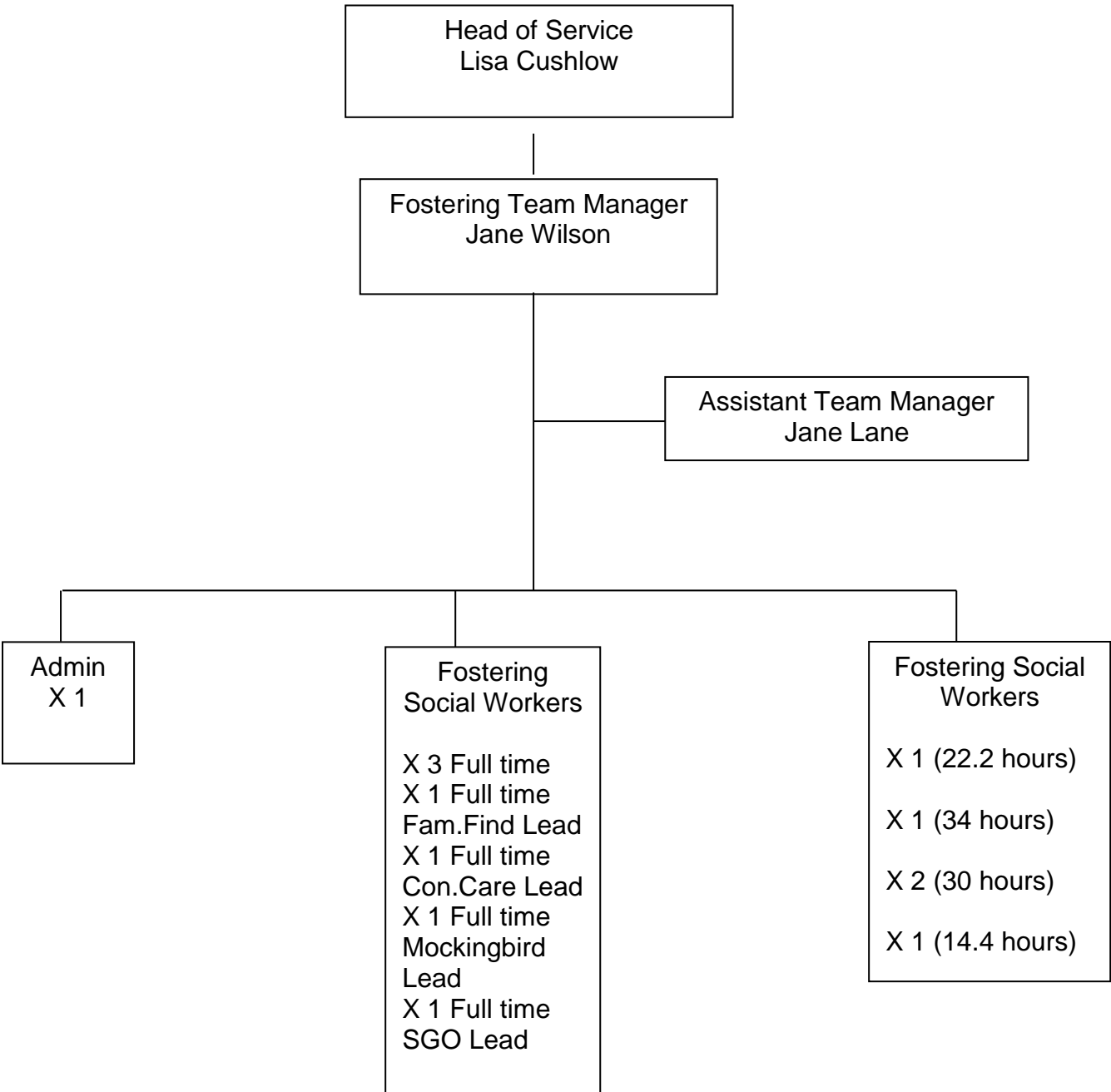
The Fostering team provides stable placements and continuity of care for children by ensuring that carers and children and young people who are cared for receive appropriate support, leading to good outcomes;

Wherever possible and appropriate, brothers and sisters will live together;

Individual children’s needs/wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to their placements.

## Fostering Team Structure

The following table provides information relating to the staffing structure of the Fostering Service:



# Governance and Oversight

Hartlepool Borough Council has established an appropriately constituted Fostering Panel which, in accordance with the Regulations, is chaired by an Independent Person and has established a 'central list' of persons who have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for ratification.

This central list (as set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards (Standard 14) includes an Independent Chair, two Vice Chairs, Agency Social Workers, an Educational representative, an Elected Member and Independent Members. The Panel also receives advice from the Local Authority Legal Advisor, Medical Advisor and Panel Advisor. The Assistant Director of Children's Services, is the Fostering Agency Decision Maker, and as such, makes the final decision in relation to Foster Carer approval, Connected Person's approval, children's best interest decisions and matches. The Agency Decision Maker is robust in their quality assurance and decision making, ensuring that the best interests of children is always at the heart of everything we do.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, Panel has met seventeen times. The panel made recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:

- For **seven** children there was a recommendation to agree a plan for them to be cared for permanently via long term foster care
- The matches of **ten** children with a long term foster carer were recommended
- **Nineteen**, foster cares have been approved, **twelve** of these are connected carer households
- **Nineteen** foster care reviews
- **Eleven** Foster Care resignations

The table below highlights Fostering Panel activity for 2020//2021 then 2021/2022:

Year	2020/21	2021/22
Panel met	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>
Matches considered by the Panel	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>
Recommendations for approval of prospective Foster Carers	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>
Recommendations for approval of connected person Foster Carers	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>
The Fostering Panel considered and endorsed the recommendations of Foster Carer Reviews	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>
Resignation of Foster Carers	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>
Recommendations to agree a plan for long term Foster Care for a cared for child (Best Interest Decision)	<b>39</b>	<b>7</b>

Panel activity reflects the work of the whole of Children's Services and demonstrates here that the safeguarding of children and productivity in terms of ensuring their plans were progressed, actually increased during the period when the nation saw its three lockdown periods; March 2020, November 2020 and January to March 2021. The number of children who became cared for during that time increased significantly. In this reporting period, the Fostering Service has seen a slight reduction in those expressing an interest in becoming Foster Carers (though recruitment activity had not reduced) and also, more positively, a continuing downward trend in terms of the number of children who are cared for.

Please see **Appendix 6** for Fostering Panel Chair's Report

# Preparation for Placement

The Fostering Service operates a duty system for responding to placement requests. Supervising Social Workers will liaise with the 'placing' Social Worker to ensure that there is a thorough understanding of the child's needs so that they are able to match him/her to the most suitable carer.

It is our usual procedure that children and young people requiring permanent placements are matched at panel prior to introductions taking place. For children and young people already in a placement and where a request is made for this placement to become permanent, the foster carers are considered within the family finding process. A thorough assessment of their suitability to meet the long term needs of the child/young person is undertaken and presented to panel.

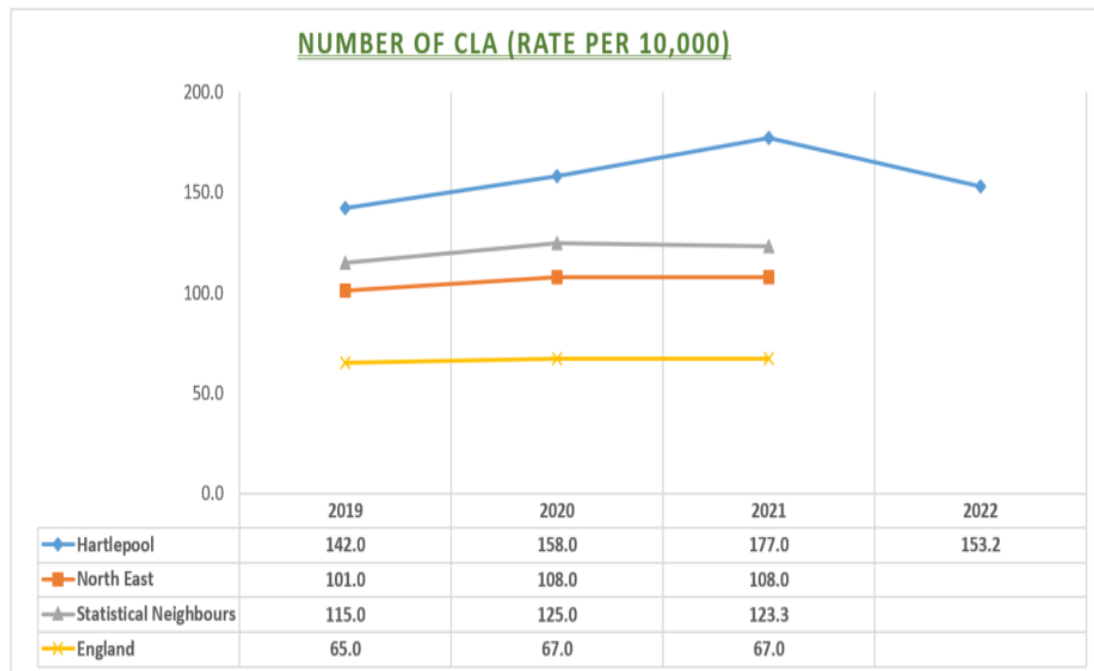
In some instances it is necessary for a child to be placed at short notice to safeguard and promote their welfare. On these occasions a planning meeting is held as soon as is practically possible following their placement.

The team takes into account the assessed needs of the child and his/her family's wishes, and wherever possible maintains sisters and brothers together in the same placement.

The service benefits from a 'family finder' role; that person becomes involved with children who have a plan for permanence through long term fostering, at the earliest opportunity. The family finder identifies appropriate matches for the children, looking firstly at internal provision before exploring matches with independent fostering providers. Hartlepool continues to provide good placement choice and stability with our foster carers – see stability data below. In this year, two children were matched to live permanently with foster carers from the independent sector and 8 with Hartlepool's own Foster Carers. Again, the latter is the Council's preferred outcome for its children, though we would not fetter a child's opportunity to be placed with the best possible families.

The family finder attends a monthly permanency tracker meeting. The function of this is to ensure all children's plans are given careful consideration with input and oversight of the Assistant Director for children's services. The tracker meeting aims to resolve any potential barriers to children being placed with the best carers and that there is no delay or 'drift' in achieving that plan.

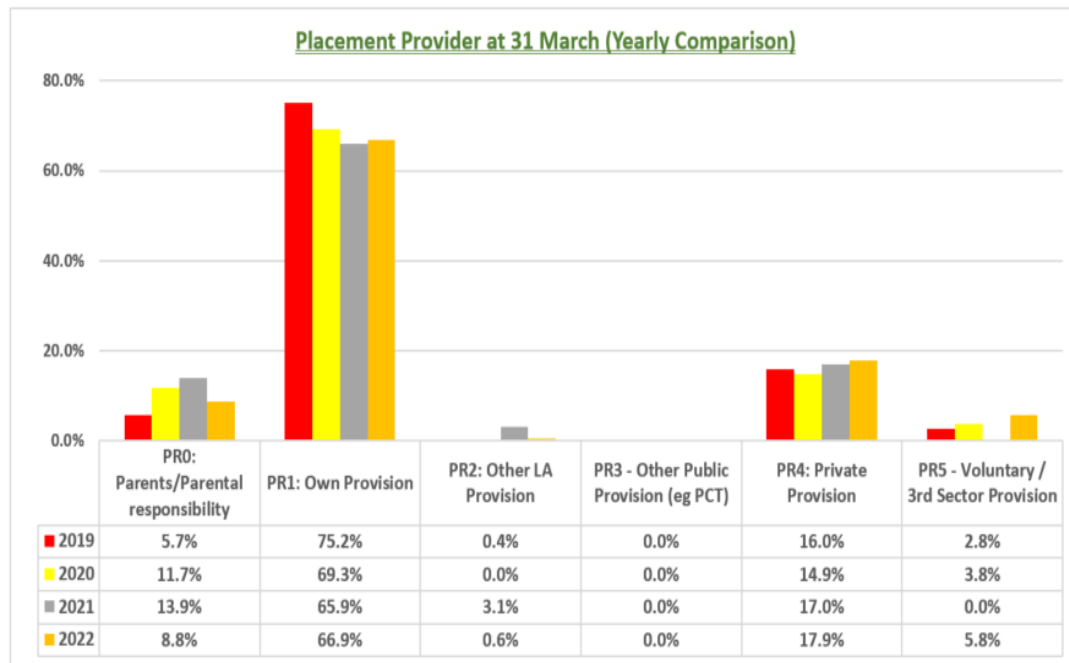
## Profile of Children and Young People Cared for in Hartlepool



Hartlepool continues to have one of the highest number of children in care per 10,000. Having peaked in 2021, the rate is now almost at that of the previous year and continues to reduce, gradually.

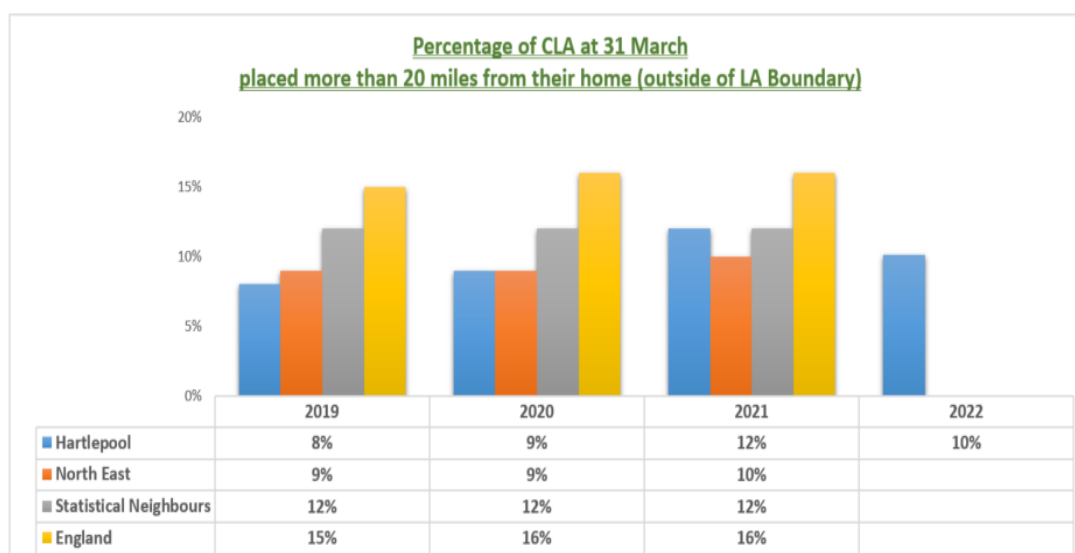


## Placement Type and Provision



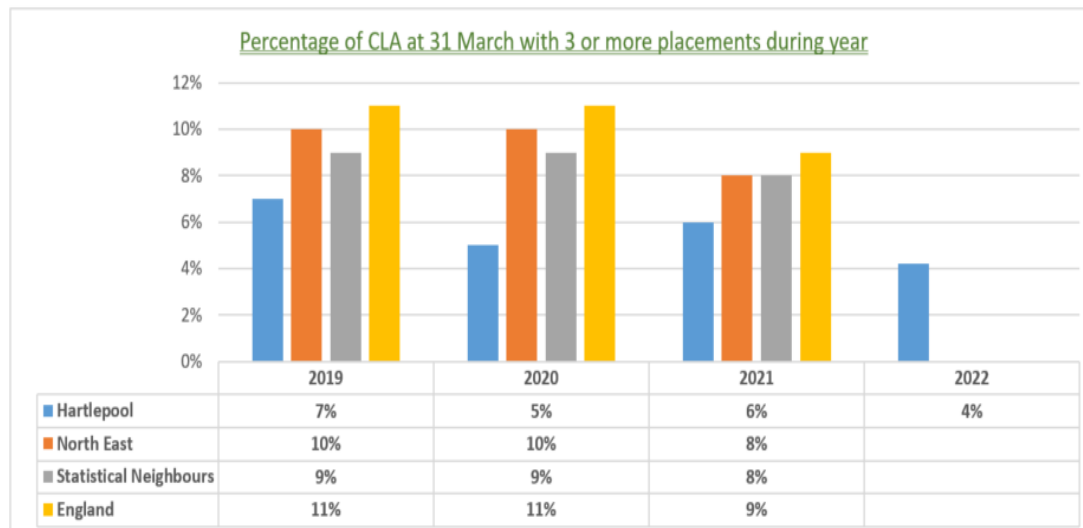
The above chart demonstrates Hartlepool's high use of fostering placements, and that the number of children living with our own Foster Carers has increased in this reporting period, which is the council's aim and aspiration for its children. The use of private and voluntary provision has risen slightly which may be a legacy of the increase in children becoming cared for in the previous year.

**Percentage of children looked after as at 31 March 2022, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside Local Authority boundary.**



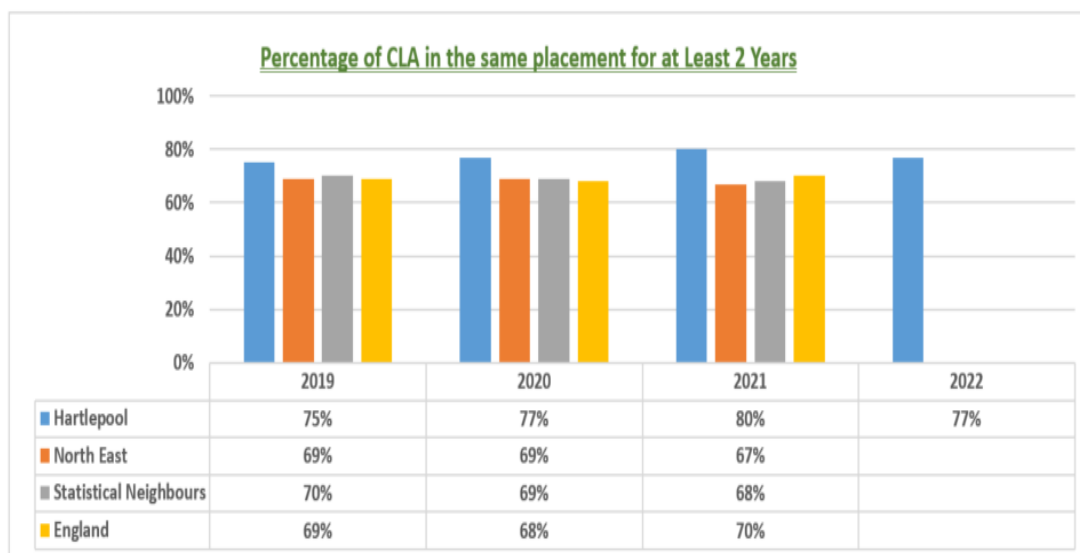
The above shows that the use of placements outside of Hartlepool is now lower than that of our statistical neighbours and the England average last year (their figures are not published at the time of writing) and has reduced by 2% in this reporting year. The service aims to keep its children close to home and will continue to strive for pre-pandemic performance in that regard.

**STABILITY - Percentage of children as at 31 March 2022 with three or more placements during the year.**



The above chart is demonstrating that, despite the increase in children becoming cared for in 2021, performance in terms of giving those children a stable and secure placement – from which comes all opportunity to thrive, develop and be happy - has improved. This may be for a combination of the increased use of our own provision and children being closer to home. It is a given that Hartlepool Foster Carers do their utmost to offer a Secure Base to children in their care.

**STABILITY - Percentage of looked after children in same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption and their adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement, last for at least two years.**



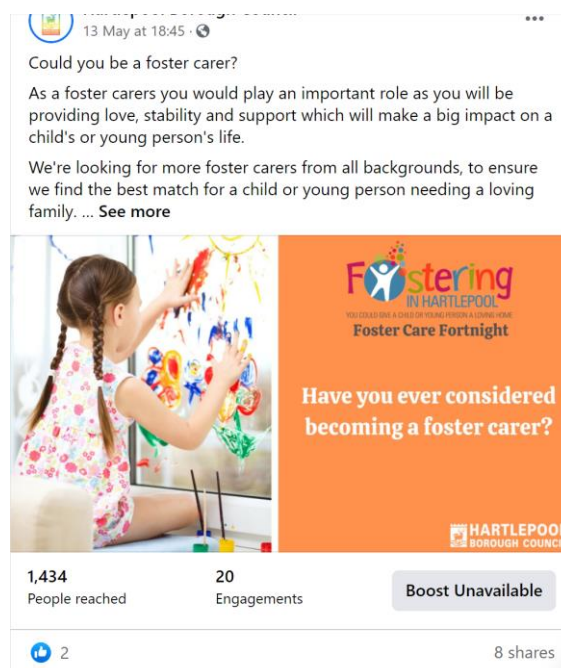
The table above demonstrates a 3% reduction in respect of placement stability (in placement two years or more) for children and young people cared for by Hartlepool, though probably inevitable it is remarkable that this is not greater, given the increased pressure upon children and their families in the town and for cared for children and Foster Care in the previous year. The stability figure is still higher than pre-pandemic level and the service will strive to retain its place ahead of national, statistical and actual neighbours in respect of offering that security to its children.

## Recruitment

The Fostering service has a recruitment strategy which uses a range of mediums to market the service to attract new foster carers. This activity takes place locally within Hartlepool, supported by Hartlepool's Marketing and Media Team.

The Connected Care and Special Guardianship Order Leads attend regional meetings which share good practice ideas and bench marking in relation to recruitment, training and key issues/ trends relating to, for example, demand around Connected Care Assessments and how this impacts upon recruitment of 'mainstream' Foster Carers.

In 2021/22 work continued to raise the profile of Fostering within the community. We used Foster Care Fortnight 10<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2021 as a springboard to get the Fostering Message out;



Local recruitment activity within the last 12 months has also included;

- ✚ A series of five videos on our social media (Facebook and Twitter) – three interviews with three different foster carers, each of whom offer a different type of foster care, talking about the rewards of being a foster carer
- ✚ Two videos with two care leavers talking about the massive difference which their foster carer families have made to their lives.
- ✚ Other generic social media posts.
- ✚ Posters produced for use around the town.
- ✚ A half-page advert in the 'Think Local' magazine in January.

- ✚ Hartbeat June 2021 – a full-page advert on the back page.
- ✚ Hartbeat August 2021 – a half-page story.
- ✚ Hartbeat December 2021 – A half-page advert.
- ✚ Full-page adverts in the Hartlepool Life in January and February 2022 and a half-page advert in March.
- ✚ Hartbeat March 2022 – A full-page story about our Care Leaver – who is also now employed in the ‘family business’ of HBC.

The greatest challenge for Fostering Services is the recruitment of new foster carers to replace those who retire from the service and to increase placement availability and choice. In 2021/22 the fostering service accepted the resignation of 11 Foster Carers (only 4 in the previous year) and approved 19 new Foster Carers - 7 ‘mainstream’ and 12 Connected Care Foster Carers. The target for recruitment for the year was 20. It is anticipated that the increased focus upon Fostering, which will be created by the introduction of the Mockingbird model and all the publicity which will surround its formal launch in Autumn 2022, will bring an (intended) positive consequence of attracting more prospective Carers to Hartlepool.

**The table below details recruitment activity for 2021/22**

<b>Initial enquiries - where did people hear about the service?</b>	29 initial enquiries  Prompted by, where stipulated: Hartbeat Word of Mouth – from already approved Foster Carers
<b>Information pack sent out</b>	<b>26</b> packs sent out
<b>Initial visits</b> - <b>How many proceeded?</b>	21 home visits completed (data incomplete @ Q2) 19 proceeded to preparation – as below
<b>Preparation Groups held:</b>	June 2021 – 5 (household) attendees

	<p>July 2021 – 6 (household) attendees</p> <p>October 2021 – 4 (household) attendees</p> <p>March 2022 – 4 (household) attendees</p> <p>In this reporting year, the Team has taken two ‘brief reports’ to panel to seek a view on the cessation of the assessment of prospective foster carers, one Connected Carer and one ‘mainstream’. Though an infrequent occurrence, this path is taken when the service does not believe the applicant meets the stringent requirements for becoming a Foster Carer. The process enables the applicant to seek recourse via representations to the agency or the Independent Review Mechanism. Neither chose to do that and accepted the recommendation of panel and the decision of the Agency Decision Maker.</p>
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## Foster Carer Retention

Hartlepool Borough Council recognises the invaluable contribution that Foster Carers make to Children’s Services, and as such views Foster Carer retention as a significant priority. In this year we have seen a net loss of Foster Carers – the greatest being of those Connected Carers who secured a legal order for the children in their care, thus also reducing the overall number of children in the care of the Local Authority. This is obviously a positive outcome for those children and their families.

The service has not been able to recruit new ‘mainstream’ carers at the rate required to maintain their numbers in this year, as we have seen six families retire (due to bereavement of a partner or to their changed circumstances) and only seven families recruited. Recruitment will remain a key focus for 2022/23.

**The table below details Foster Care capacity as at 31 March 2022**

<b>Number of foster carers</b>	146 of whom 45 are Connected Carers <i>(was 161 as at March 2021 with 52 Connected Carers)</i>
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<b>Number of placements possible if all in use</b>	261 places
<b>How many children in placement?</b>	125 within 'mainstream' placements;  71 in connected care placements  16 Young people in Staying Put placements
<b>How many unused?</b>	50
<b>How many not able to use/on hold?</b>	18 not available places

## Feedback from Foster Carers;

Foster carers are consulted on all aspects of the service and their views inform planning. Many of the priorities for the year 2020/21 came from what the carers had told us about the service and how they felt it could be improved. The Foster Care Survey regarding the Service's performance for 2021/22 was much more accessible this year, having gone out on the Council's Website on 'Your say Our Future'.

**The full survey is available – Appendix 5 - its summary states;**

*Overall, the majority of carers responding to the survey feel they get support from The Fostering Team and from their own Supervising Social Worker which is either **good or excellent**.*

*Carers appear to have a good awareness of the training available to them both online and in person. They value the training they receive, even if some would prefer training on subjects like PACE and Therapeutic Parenting to go into greater depth. Since the pandemic it seems carers are even more divided in terms of their preferred methods of accessing training: some have embraced doing more training online and independently while others still prefer face-to-face.*



*Broadly, carers feel they are consulted and invited to participate in other aspects of the service. Most would also be happy to be more involved in these areas.*

*It is concerning that a minority of foster carers have expressed frustration at not always being able to reach their Supervising Social Worker or speak to the team. As the survey was anonymous we would urge any carers to take this up with their Supervising Social Worker.*

### **Some comments from Carers;**

*'I feel that the fostering team support and encourage me by accepting my personal circumstances and helping me work round these.'*




*'The cost of living is biting hard FC deserve a 20% pay rise to cover the costs of living crisis'*

*'The decision to become foster carers is the best decision we have ever made. We would completely recommend HBC as a fostering agency as we feel that we and the children we foster are fully supported.'*

*'I'm very well supported.'*

*'Yes fostering is the most rewarding job anyone will do, it's the most difficult especially at times when us as foster carers aren't listened too. Although sometimes it's difficult I would still recommend fostering to everyone who has a big heart and the room to share and care'*

### **Actions to take from this survey include:**

-  To reinstate the Children Who Foster Group
-  To further review foster carer allowances and banding.
-  To hold some face-to-face and Teams training sessions at different times of the day, including evenings, to ensure all foster carers have the opportunity to attend.

## **The Voice of our Children**

Our children and young people are asked to give their views of their carers and of the care they receive – here are some;

*"As far as I see it, I am her child and she's my mam, her children are my sisters and brothers and her grandkids are my nieces. I love this family with my whole heart, they are my family and I wouldn't change them for the world. She's made me the best version of myself and for that I am forever grateful. They are the*

*liveliest, funniest and kindest people to be surrounded by and I have loved every year spent with them and I can't wait for many more memories with her"*

And;

*They are always here for me no matter what I do and they're always trying their best to help me and want what's best for me. I have contact with previous family members.*

*I'm with my sister....My sister finally feels part of a family and I'm so happy for her...me and Ks daughter are close and I love the grandkids and K's dog, everyone's there for each other. The good things about being fostered by this family are:*

*Feeling loved and appreciated by K and P and P is allowing me to trust men again. Even the extended family likes us and it feels real. Also when there are arguments in the house, K is a very good mediator and helps me resolve a lot of things".*

## Training

All of the Council's experienced foster carers have completed the DfE Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers and new carers are working on the standards and on target for completion within required timescales.

Prior to approval, all prospective carers undertake a 3 day preparation course run by the team following the BAAF Skills to Foster Programme. Approved foster carers play an important part in this training, which we know from feedback is greatly appreciated by prospective carers. The Preparation Training is reviewed regularly to ensure that the material remains up to date, is relevant and reflects recent research. In 2021/22 we have incorporated more information about the Secure Base Model and, in 2022/23 Mockingbird will also feature in the programme. All foster carers undergo a full assessment which serves a dual purpose – ensuring the household is suitable to Foster for Hartlepool whilst assisting the applicants to prepare for the role and to care for other people's children.

Post approval training includes access to all courses available to the children's workforce in Hartlepool and three mandatory training days for foster carers. In 2021/22 the following training was offered:

- Trauma Informed
- Mockingbird
- Participation Session
- Parent and Child Training
- Teenage Brain

- Foster Care Recording
- Child Reading
- LGBT
- Being a Teenager 'in the Care System'
- Transition to Staying Put
- FASD
- Assessments
- Foster Carer Offer, Service Progress and Priorities
- Being a Parent – delivered by Foster Carers to Foster Carers

Carers were also provided with a range of virtual training opportunities;

- Attachment (available through the OU, which also has a range of other relevant training <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/early-years/attachment-the-early-years/content-section-0>)
- [https://teeswide.melearning.university/course\\_centre](https://teeswide.melearning.university/course_centre) - Safeguarding Children is available here along with a range of other topics.
- <https://www.thefostercaretraininghub.co.uk/> - Internet Safety / Attachment and Therapeutic Parenting, First Aid are all available here.

**The Annual Foster Care Conference** was held during Foster Care Fortnight in May 2021 and focused upon The Secure Base model of Foster Care. The speaker was Dr Joan Hunt, an expert in this model, is also a Foster Carer. The training was very well attended (via Teams) and the feedback from carers was extremely positive.

It is imperative that Authority's **Fostering Panel** continues to be fit for purpose and meets all regulatory requirements – this includes them receiving at least one training session per year. This year Panel Members had input in respect of; the Independent Review Mechanism, the Fostering National Minimum Standards and the 'Mockingbird' model of Fostering.

## Post Approval Support and Participation

Each Foster Care family has an allocated Supervising Social Worker and receives a four to eight weekly supervision and support visits as well as telephone and e-mail contact. Supervising Social Workers also make a minimum of one unannounced visit per year to Foster Carers, this can be undertaken by a different member of staff to the foster carer's allocated Social Worker.

The Fostering team communicates regularly with carers; all carers have a council e-mail account so information can be shared securely and received between carers, the fostering team and the children's social workers.

The Fostering Team has a duty worker throughout the working week who is available to respond to any calls from carers. In addition to this, foster carers have access to the Emergency Duty Team, the commissioned out of hours service and an out of hours telephone support service provided by a Head of Service on a rota basis. Foster carers can contact the support phone line at any time.






The Fostering team also hosts a private Facebook group for approved foster carers, to communicate with each other, share experiences, advice and knowledge with other foster carers. This has proved to be an excellent communication tool and is an immediate means of letting the whole group know when we have children who are waiting for a suitable Foster Carer.

Looked After children and Foster Carers benefit from the support of trained Filial Therapists and Carers have access to support in relation to individual young people for whom they are caring. In 2021/22, a member of the Fostering Team embarked on training to become a systemic family practitioner. Hartlepool has supported this training so that Foster Care families and the children they look after can be supported, as a whole family, to respond to the trauma children have often experienced.

It is recognised, increasingly, that Foster Carer's own childhood experiences, upbringing and even experiences as an adult can influence how they respond to a child's 'chain of pain' – the systemic approach does not attempt to 'treat the causes' but rather to help the adults and children to create new patterns of living to enable them to grow and move on together.

The fostering service takes a lead role in ensuring that children, young people and carers have time to spend together and to celebrate their achievements and there is an annual Celebration Evening for Carers and for children cared for and a Summer Barbeque for children and young people who are cared for and for the families who care. The restrictions imposed due to COVID had reduced the opportunity for these events and this will be compensated for in 2022/23.

[The Participation Officer](#) worked hard with our Foster Carers and our young people to develop many areas of the service which needed to be improved or reviewed. Carers have shaped the following with us;

-  Placement Evaluation Documents
-  Pocket Money and Savings Policy
-  FC Training Offer
-  The renewal of Active Cards
-  FC Charter

- ✚ Foster Care Recruitment – young people on camera
- ✚ Foster Care profiles

## Service Developments and External Oversight

### Special Guardianship

Children's Services has recognised the need for greater support to be provided to families in the community who have secured a Special Guardianship Order for children in their care. Additionally, we have children who are securely and permanently placed with Foster Carers who (potentially) no longer need to be cared for by the Local Authority - with the inevitable state 'intrusion' this brings to their lives. To this end we appointed a Lead Officer to review the Special Guardianship Order 'offer' and she has made very positive progress in 2021/22. Some key developments are;

- ✚ Review of the Adoption Support Fund application process which is now streamlined and is being accessed more readily by families. The SGO lead tracks and authorizes submission and the funding ultimately provided by the government. Prior to this, the Council had underused this funding stream.
- ✚ Review of the paperwork (assessment, support plan) completed by Social Workers for court and assistance and support to Social Workers in completing those documents.
- ✚ Production of a SGO information pack with all relevant documents pertaining to the application process – for Social Workers
- ✚ Improved Quality Assurance of SGO assessments and associated support plans to ensure they are meaningful in the long term.
- ✚ Review of the process around financial assessments of prospective Special Guardian
- ✚ The introduction of support groups for those with a Special Guardianship Order.
- ✚ Development of a Newsletter – now co-produced by someone who attends the group.
- ✚ Multiple discussions with HBC and Independent Fostering Agency Carers about them becoming children's Special Guardians. From this, 16 children will become subject to SGO and each is at a different stage of the process.

### Mockingbird

Children's services secured pump priming funding to develop this model of Foster Care for Hartlepool. (**See appendix 4**). The funding was used to appoint a Lead Officer to progress the work, supported by the DfE's partner, Fostering Network. Much was achieved in this reporting year in terms of;

- ✚ Establishment of a time line for implementation and adherence to that
- ✚ Sharing information with key stakeholders in relation to Mockingbird and what it will bring to our children and their Carers
- ✚ Engagement of our Foster Carers in the process – there has been a very positive response and many Carers want to be part of the first 'constellation'
- ✚ Development of necessary policies and procedures which will underpin the implementation
- ✚ Establishment of an Implementation Working Group

## Banded Payments

The Banded Payments criteria has been reviewed to include Secure Base so that Foster Carers are better able to evidence how their care supports children to grow and thrive. Carers are also now required to complete training on recording as one of their mandatory sessions.

## Policies and Procedures

All policies and procedures have been reviewed – in consultation with Foster Carers and are being implemented.

## Early Permanence

Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) is working closely with Local Authorities to improve opportunities for children to be placed as early as possible with the family who will offer them permanence. Hartlepool has identified an Early Permanence Champion from within the Fostering Service to take that work forward on its behalf.

## Ofsted Focused Visit – Care Leavers

Ofsted undertook a focused visit relating to Care Leavers on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The outcome of this, whilst there is some learning for the Authority, was overall extremely positive – some excerpts from the Inspector's letter to the Director;

*'Care leavers are encouraged to stay put with their foster carers, even when these arrangements incur additional financial expenditure. Committed foster carers support care leavers to be prepared well for adulthood. Foster carers are well supported with staying put agreements which provide clarity about the support that they will receive'*

And;

*'This visit has evidenced a strong and stable senior leadership team whose members show determination and ambition to improve care leavers' outcomes.....The quality assurance framework provides senior leaders with a consistent line of sight to the quality and impact of practice. Audit and moderation processes are underpinned by a relational and supportive approach. Workers report that their practice is improving as a direct consequence of this approach. Enthusiastic political leadership, driven by the lead member, means that care leavers are benefiting from their needs being understood and prioritised as any good parent would. Senior leaders and members are rightly very proud of the service and are determined to improve care leavers' outcomes even further.....Staff describe feeling valued and supported by senior leaders. Many workers have worked in the authority for many years, showing unstinting commitment to young people. This culture was palpable as inspectors spoke with staff and managers. Staff unequivocally describe visible and approachable senior leaders who communicate well with them. Staff describe their caseloads as being manageable. This assists them to support care leavers exceptionally well...Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account'*

## Priorities for 2021/2022 – how did we do?

- ✚ Approve a minimum of 20 new Foster Carers – **ALMOST ACHIEVED**, approved 19
- ✚ Sustain performance in respect of placement stability at under 7% for placement moves and at or over 80% for children and young people in their placement for two years or more – **ACHIEVED** – former at 4%, latter **did not** achieve, at 77%.
- ✚ Continue the roll out and implementation of the Secure Base Model via the annual Foster Care Conference for 2021/22 - **ACHIEVED**
- ✚ Review and up-date all policies and procedures relation to the Fostering Service- **ACHIEVED**



- ✚ Provide and deliver a schedule for training to include mandatory FC recording training - **ACHIEVED**
- ✚ Improve outcomes for children subject to Special Guardianship Orders by developing the 'support offer' to families - **ACHIEVED**
- ✚ Complete work commenced on savings and pocket money for the children and young people we care for- **ACHIEVED**
- ✚ Increase the age related Fostering Allowance and the Banding Payments by 1.5% each - **ACHIEVED**
- ✚ Develop the Foster Care Focus and Consultation Group to embed the feedback loop in respect of service improvement - **ACHIEVED**

## Priorities for 2022/2023

- ✚ Approve a minimum of 20 new Foster Carers
- ✚ Re-launch the 'Children Who Foster Group'
- ✚ Launch HBC's first Mockingbird constellation
- ✚ Take part in 'The Reflective Fostering Study' (Anna Freud) to improve support offer to Fostering Households
- ✚ Review membership of Fostering Panel to improve gender balance and bring more diverse perspectives
- ✚ Develop the SGO offer to support stability for families in the community AND to reduce the number of children in our care
- ✚ Increase Foster Carer allowances (age related and banding) by 2%



- ✚ Increase capacity of in house therapeutic support for Foster Carers and Children, to include systemic family therapy
- ✚ Maintain the level of children's stability at 7% and under for those in short term placements and above 77% for children permanently placed
- ✚ Foster Care celebration event to be led by Foster Carers, at their request
- ✚ Develop the Foster Care training offer to ensure it can be accessed at various times and via a range of delivery

# Fostering Service Statement of Purpose



WE CARE ABOUT OUR CHILDREN, YOU COULD TOO

**HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL  
FOSTERING SERVICE**

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

This Statement of Purpose was initially approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council on 29 September 2003.

It was signed on behalf of the Elected Members by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

This Statement of Purpose was reviewed and updated in March 2021 and is to be approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Fostering Service no later than April 2022.

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## Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, that each fostering agency produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements and also how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support Foster Carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, Foster Carers, children and birth parents and is available on the Hartlepool Borough Council Website. A copy of this statement is also to be lodged with Ofsted. The information contained is regularly updated, and will be amended annually.

A separate Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all young people who are to be placed with Foster Carers. This is also available on the HBC website and Practice manual.

### **CHILDREN'S GUIDE**

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's guide at the point of placement and that the Foster Carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, or Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern. The fostering service will update this guide as required on an annual basis to ensure that information is current and reflects developments in the service. The service would seek to ensure that the guide is available in a format appropriate to the communication needs of the child

concerned and would access council resources such as language translation to achieve this.

## **Aims and Objectives, Principles and Legislative Framework for Standards of Care**

### **AIM**

The aim of the fostering service is to recruit, train and support Foster Carers to provide high quality placements for the children of Hartlepool. The service will support Foster Carers and family Network Carers (Connected Carers) to value, support and encourage children and young people to grow and develop as individuals, to be physically and emotionally healthy and to aim high in their education so that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the number and range of carers identified to meet the complex and diverse needs of the looked after population of Hartlepool and to ensure a choice of high quality foster placements.
- To ensure that wherever possible and appropriate sisters and brothers will be accommodated together.
- To ensure that the individual child's needs/wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to placements.
- To undertake effective timely assessments of prospective carers including Connected Persons carers within specified timescales to ensure that children are afforded safe and effective placements.
- To maintain and support the Fostering Panel to consider Foster Carer and Connected Persons assessments and make recommendations for approval of prospective Foster Carers, children's plans for long term foster care, and approval of the match of Named Children with Foster

Carers. The panel also considers the first reviews of Foster Carers and subsequent reviews where category changes are being agreed or there have been issues regarding placements.

- To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the diverse needs of this group of children and young people.
- To provide regular recorded supervision and support contacts with carers by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- To ensure that additional and flexible support is available to carers to underpin placement stability and improve outcomes for children in placement.
- To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect through safer recruitment practices and adherence to safeguarding policy and procedures in all areas of the service including for staff, carers and panel members.
- To create stability for children and young people in foster care through robust matching processes and a good standard of consistent and effective support.
- To have a Staying Put policy and procedure in place in order that young people are encouraged to remain in placements post 18.
- To achieve better life chances for children who are cared for, particularly in relation to health, education, employment and leisure activities.
- To promote the development of skills and expertise within the fostering community, to create a culture of aspiration for our children.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members, where appropriate, through creating opportunities for positive family time.

- To prepare young people adequately for when they eventually leave their foster placement.
- To increase the number of supported lodgings providers, providing greater placement choice for young people.
- To create lifelong attachments with carers in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, their parents and carers and social workers.
- Provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his or her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

## PRINCIPLES

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

1. **Child focus** – the child's welfare and needs are at the centre of the fostering process and their wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account about all aspects of their care.
2. **Partnership working** – the Fostering Service will work in partnership with children and their parents, Foster Carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
3. **Anti-discriminatory practice** – the Fostering Service will respect human rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism. The service will value diversity and promote equality.



## **STANDARDS OF CARE**

The Fostering Service will support Hartlepool Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in meeting the child focussed standards which set out what children in foster care need, as detailed in the **Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011**:

### **Standard 1: The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them**

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of any others who have important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account.

### **Standard 2: Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care**

- Children have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

### **Standard 3: Promoting positive behaviour and relationships**

- Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

### **Standard 4: Safeguarding Children**

- Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse and accident.

### **Standard 5: Children Missing from Care**

- Children rarely go missing and if they do, they return quickly
- Children who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return

### **Standard 6: Promoting good health and wellbeing**

- Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs.

### **Standard 7: Education, employment and leisure activities**

- Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities
- Children are able to make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community

### **Standard 8: Promoting educational achievement**

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

### **Standard 9: Promoting and supporting contact**

- Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and people who play a significant role in their lives.

### **Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child**

- Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

### **Standard 11: Preparation for a placement**

- Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.
- Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the Foster Carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met and they benefit from a stable placement.

## **Standard 12: Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care**

- Children are prepared for, and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their full potential and achieve economic well-being.

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – OUR VALUES**

In addition to the national standards, Hartlepool Fostering Service has adopted a vision and aspirations for children who are cared for, which underpin the Team's approach to service delivery. These include:

- The vision to ensure that every looked after child in Hartlepool experiences high quality care and stable relationships, is nurtured and grows up with a sense of identity and belonging.
- When a child becomes looked after, there must be sufficient range of accommodation options available to be able to match the child to a placement that will meet his/her needs.

## **The Service Provided**

The services provided specifically by the Fostering Team fall into two main areas:

### **1) those provided to registered Foster Carers and potential Foster Carers including Connected Persons Carers**

- initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming Foster Carers
- preparation training for applicants
- competency based assessments of applicants
- support systems for approved Foster Carers and Connected Persons carers including allocated Supervising Social Worker and regular supervisions
- post-approval training and development for Foster Carers and Connected Persons Carers
- consultation with Carers over the development of the service

## **2) those provided to children requiring a foster placement**

- a duty social worker available during office hours Monday to Friday
- provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council
- provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.
- Consultation with looked after children on all aspects of the service.

The Fostering service also works in conjunction with a number of other agencies and professionals to ensure a cohesive and effective package of support is available to children who become looked after. The agencies and partners involved with looked after children and young people including carers and young people are represented on this forum and are fully involved in its activities. The Child in Care Council plays a critical role in service development and has a valuable contribution to make in terms of feedback. The authority is committed to learning from the experiences of its children in care and to seeking improvements.

### **PROVISION OF THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

The Fostering Service receives a discreet service from the Therapeutic Social Work team and in addition commission a service from The Junction Foundation. These services provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals.

In addition, the members of the Therapeutic Social Work Team work closely with carers and often work directly with them in conjunction with the child in placement. The key objective of the work is to provide a regular, easy to use guidance and support service to all Foster Carers and to improve placement stability for children in care. They also provide training to Foster Carers, Connected Persons carers, social workers and other professionals.

### **PROVISION OF HEALTH PROMOTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

There is a named nurse identified for Looked after Children and Young People who oversees Children's Annual Health Assessments and has a proactive role

in the health promotion of Young People. They will provide support to foster carers in addressing a range of health issues which may affect children in care. They also provide advice and support to young people on an individual basis on issues such as contraception and sexual health

A dedicated consultant paediatrician advises the Fostering panel on medical issues for prospective Foster Carers and children with a plan for long term fostering.

In addition to the above, there is a named emotional Health and Well-Being coordinator and a psychologist, whose respective roles are dedicated to children who are cared for and to care leavers.

### **PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES**

The Fostering service has strong links to the educational support services for Looked after children and in particular works closely with the Virtual Head Teacher who has a strong commitment to cared for children.

### **PROVISION OF LEISURE, SPORT, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY**

Foster Carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people, and the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence. The council has a leisure offer for all children in care which is promoted by the supervising social worker and the foster carers and children have welcomed this.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism. We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. We

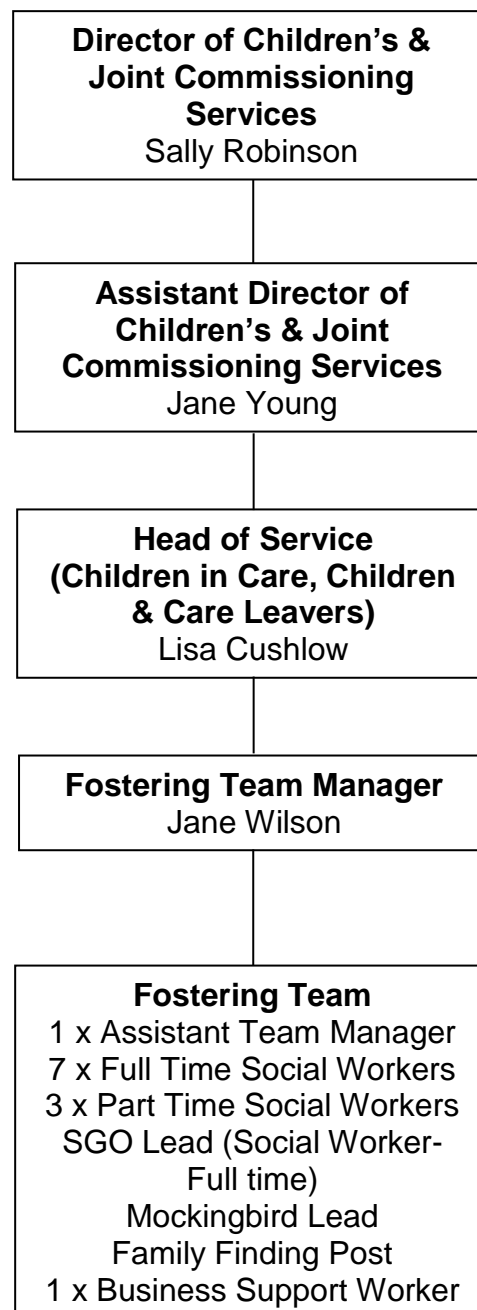
have supervising fostering social workers to help carers with issues with trans-racial and unaccompanied asylum seeking placements.

### **PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD / PATHWAY PLANNING**

The Through Care Team and the Fostering Service work closely with other professionals to provide a holistic approach to meeting young people's needs. Hartlepool is committed to supporting care leavers and ensuring that they are able to build the skills and ability to eventually live independently. The service is committed to the ethos of 'Staying Put'. We acknowledge that young people mature at different rates and we will support where possible young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life if this supports them more effectively.

## Management Structure

The Fostering Service of Hartlepool Borough Council is provided by designated workers from the Fostering Team who are part of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services



## Specific Service Information

### **NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS**

The number of Foster Carer approvals achieved between 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022 comprised of 7 approvals of mainstream carers and the approval of 12 Connected Person Carers. In the period 2021 - 2022 the fostering service accepted the resignation of 11 Foster Carers.

The total number of Foster Carers approved by Hartlepool Borough Council on 31 March 2022 was 146, which number is comprised of 101 'mainstream' Carers and 45 Connected Carers.

### **NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED**

The total number of children cared for by Hartlepool as at 31 March 2022 was 308 (as against 346 at the same time in 2021) of whom 196 were placed with Hartlepool's own foster placements. 16 young people were in a Hartlepool staying put arrangement at this time. There were 3 young people in Supported Lodgings placements.

### **DESIGNATION OF CARERS**

The majority of carers are 'mainstream', offering either short or long term care to children and young people up to the age of 18 years and 'staying put' placements for those who are over 18.

A banded payment scheme is in place ranging from band 1 to band 4. Progression is based on experience, competencies and training. This scheme also includes the potential to make the payment of a specialist fee for placements for children with more complex needs, or for groups of brothers and sisters, or a parent with their baby.

Hartlepool currently has four carers who have experience in providing 'parent and child' placements and carers who have the capacity to provide such placements in very specific circumstances. This is an area which continues to



require attention so that our resources are able to meet the demand for these placements in the most effective manner.

## Safeguarding, Complaints & Allegations

### **PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARM**

Hartlepool Fostering Service operates a safer recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency and panel members. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks are repeated every 5 years for all carers and in addition all staff and panel members are required to confirm that they have had sight of, and will adhere to, the General Data Protection Regulations, Data Protection Act 2018.

Hartlepool Fostering Service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on safe caring, health and safety, bullying, management of behaviour and Foster Carer agreements.

**Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service developments, for example:**

- Issues regarding standards of care,
- breach of foster care agreement
- child protection/safeguarding issues
- Allegations of abuse against foster carers; and
- complaints made about a foster carer

Children will know about these procedures through their social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's Rights and Advocacy Service independent of the service currently provided by National Youth Advocacy Services (NYAS).

### **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Hartlepool Borough Council Children's and Joint Commissioning Services operate a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Compliments Leaflet at the outset of the assessment, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint, and also when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement.

## **NUMBERS OF COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

In the year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 there was 1 complaint made against Foster Carers, brought by another Foster Carer in respect of an alleged breach of the Government's guidelines on COVID. This was investigated by the Fostering Team Manager at stage one and was upheld. The Foster Carer's review was brought forward in accordance with procedures and the recommendations and learning coming out of the complaints have been implemented.

## **ALLEGATIONS**

All allegations in relation to Foster Carers are investigated and actioned using Child Protection Procedures and are reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), under the procedures for Managing Allegations against people who work with children or who are in a position of trust. Foster Carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their Fostering Supervising Social worker.

## **NUMBERS OF ALLEGATIONS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 6 children (three separate sibling groups of two) made an allegation against their respective Foster Carers. One situation did not require any further action and the others were investigated under S47. The situations were referred to the LADO and managed via the Managing Allegations against people who work with children or who are in a position of trust. Three investigations were alleging physical abuse and one was emotional. Independent investigation officers for the s.47 enquiries of Foster Carers were identified and the recommendation of those informed the Foster Carer's review and were presented to Fostering Panel for consideration. In relation to two of these situations, the allegations were described as

‘unfounded’, the third was of concern and work has been completed with the Foster Carers to consider their future role.

## **Procedures and Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers**

### **RECRUITMENT**

#### **PUBLICITY**

Hartlepool’s recruitment strategy is reviewed annually. Enquirers are asked where they obtained the contact details of the service and this information is analysed in order to target specific campaigns.

The team has worked with the Public Relations Team and posters and leaflets are being displayed in council and public buildings in the town, local advertising and editorials in Hartlepool’s ‘Hartbeat’ publication, ‘Live Local’ and the council’s website. There have also been videos on social media featuring Foster Carers and young people previously cared for, sharing their experiences. Publicity materials reflect our brand, which we hope will assist in our efforts to attract new carers.

#### **RESPONSE TO ENQUIRIES**

Enquiries regarding fostering are responded to quickly. An Information pack is normally sent out within one day of the enquiry being received. Once the return slip is received from the enquirer a joint home visit is normally made within three to five working days. Information about the assessment process is given and information about the family is gathered, including their motivation to foster. They are asked to make a formal registration of interest to proceed to stage 1 of the assessment process. If no response is received within 4-6 weeks then a further contact is made to ascertain their wishes and reason for delaying or withdrawing. If the potential applicants do not respond in a further 4 weeks then the file will be closed.

### **ASSESSMENT**

## **STAGE ONE**

Stage 1 of the process to become an approved Foster Carer can last 8 weeks. The registration of interest form is signed to give consent to proceed and for statutory checks to be completed for all relevant people in the household. Once the form has been completed and returned, the applicants are required to undergo a number of statutory checks including an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, local authority checks and current employer. The purpose of these checks is to safeguard children to be placed. Personal references are also undertaken.

If an applicant has been a Foster Carer in the previous 12 months, a written reference from their previous fostering service is obtained.

A Medical examination is carried out by the applicant's doctor using the Coram BAAF medical form and returned to the Hartlepool Medical Adviser for comments and a recommendation regarding suitability to foster.

All applicants are required to attend a 3 day preparation course. The preparation training undertaken uses the Fostering Network's Skills to Foster programme including, Skills to Foster, Child Development, Separation and Loss, Attachment, Working Together, Safer Care, Moving On, Life Work, a description of the Secure Base Model of Foster Care. There is an evaluation at the end of the course and applicants are requested to give feedback.

If it is decided not to continue with an assessment because of information collected as part of stage 1, the applicant must be informed that they can complain via the fostering service's complaints process. Once all statutory checks and references are completed and no issues have arisen stage two will begin. Stage 2 of the process to become approved Foster Carers normally lasts 4 months.

## **STAGE TWO**

Stage two assessment has seen the Service use the Coram BAAF template as its process for Connected Care assessments and, this year, the Fostering

Team has completed the assessments of 'mainstream' carers using the Integrated Children's System (ICS). The topics covered for all assessments include; personal background, history and experiences; parenting experiences; birth children's views; the home environment, including dog/pet safety and; the applicant's own contributions. In addition to the assessment sessions with the applicants and their family, at least 2 personal referees are interviewed, as are the ex-partners of the applicants where it has been agreed that there was a 'significant' relationship. Children of the applicants living elsewhere will also be interviewed, with the agreement of their carer or their own agreement.

When all the necessary material is available, the Form F is completed by the social worker using contributions from the prospective Foster Carer. The report is read and signed by the prospective Foster Carer and is presented to the Fostering Panel which usually meets once every 3 weeks. Prospective Foster Carers are encouraged to attend the Panel meeting when the application is discussed. The Fostering Panel considers the report and makes a recommendation regarding the application. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Agency Decision Maker. Prospective Foster Carers are then notified in writing of the outcome of their application

If an application is not recommended by Panel and the prospective Foster Carer/s do not accept this, they can choose either to make further representations to the Panel or to have their application referred to an independent body known as the Independent Review Mechanism. The IRM will review the recommendation made by the Family Placement Panel and make its own recommendation about the prospective Foster Carer/s suitability, which the agency must then take into account when making the decision about the application.

## **SUPPORT**

Once a Foster Carer has been approved by Panel they complete a Foster Carer agreement and are provided either with the paper copy of or information to access the Foster Carer Handbook electronically. All Foster Carers are

allocated a Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Service. This person will visit the Foster Carers, provide formal supervision on a monthly basis or at an agreed level dependent upon current placement and carer capability. They will also provide directly, or facilitate access to, any practical, emotional or professional support required.

Foster Carers are provided with equipment to enable them to care for a child in placement.

Foster Carers will be invited to attend a monthly support group that is facilitated by the Fostering Team. The group is an opportunity to build networks of support amongst other carers, exchange ideas about fostering and to have the opportunity to hear guest speakers on a variety of relevant subjects. This provides a valuable forum for carers to be updated regarding service developments and to network with other professionals.

The Fostering Service operates a duty system within office hours which is staffed by a fostering service worker. Foster Carers can access support and advice from this worker if their allocated worker is not available. An out of hours telephone support service is also provided additional to the Emergency Duty Team arrangements which are in place. This telephone support is provided by the Heads of Service for Children's Services. .

All Foster Carers receive full membership of Fostering Network and access to an independent advice and mediation service should an allegation be made against them.

The Fostering Service liaises with the Foster Carers about any matters which may impact upon their role and consults with them about any necessary or proposed changes. There is a Foster Care Focus Group which is comprised of Carers who wish to contribute to any changes or developments within the service. The Fostering Service arranges a yearly Celebration event to recognise the efforts of the all carers and specifically to give thanks to the longest serving Foster Carers. Most importantly, the event aims to demonstrate

our gratitude to all our carers for their dedication and commitment to the children of Hartlepool who are cared for.

The fostering service has a Foster Carer Charter and this sets out the local authority's responsibilities to approved Foster Carers and what it will provide to carers including all support and information. It also sets out the Foster Carers' responsibilities, detailing the expectation of Carers being committed to working in partnership with the local Authority to provide the best possible care for our children and to pursue learning and their personal and service development so that there is continuous improvement.

## **TRAINING**

An annual training schedule details and supports the provision of sufficient and regular training opportunities for Foster Carers, during the approval process and throughout their Fostering career.

All Foster Carers will attend a preparation training course incorporating the Skills to Foster materials during their preparation and assessment.

An Induction programme involving the completion of the Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) workbook has been developed and all new Foster Carers will be required to undertake this piece of work within the first twelve months of their approval, or 18 months for Connected Foster Carers. Foster Carers will have the opportunity to be supported on an individual basis to complete the workbook by their Supervising Social Worker. There is also the opportunity for carers to be mentored by more experienced carers.

Foster Carers are required to complete a training portfolio and their Supervising Social Workers supports each carer to ensure they have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed as part of the Foster Carer's annual review.

Foster Carers are given support and encouragement to attend all training events that are relevant to their role. Wherever possible Foster Carers and staff

attend the same training to enhance partnership working and to ensure the best care is offered to children and young people. Carers are given information about training provided corporately, through Children's and Joint Commissioning Services.

## **REVIEW**

The registration of all Foster Carers is reviewed on an annual basis. The views of the Foster Carer are sought, together with the views of children and placing Social workers via end of placement reports and within the review documentation. The supervising social worker is responsible for collating the information and adding their own views based on the experience of, and outcomes for, children and young people who have been placed with the carer during the review period. The Supervising Social Worker will also use their observations of the carer during visits and supervision to provide an analysis of, and recommendation about, the Carer's suitability to continue in the role.

The first review is normally held after twelve months and then annually thereafter. Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who are independent of the Fostering Service. The review report is presented to the Fostering Panel by the supervising social worker for consideration after the first review and if there is a proposal to change the approval category or recommendation of de-registration, or after an allegation or complaint. Foster Carers have the option to attend panel if they wish.

The registration of Foster Carers may be reviewed by Panel at any time if there are changes of circumstances or events which indicate that Foster Carers are no longer suitable to care for children.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Foster Carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children, who are subject to National Standards and General Data Protection Legislation (Data Protection Act 2018) known as GDPR. Staff and Foster Carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest, as are panel members.



## **DE-REGISTRATION**

Most Foster Carers voluntarily withdraw from the fostering task. The details of their resignation are placed before the Fostering Panel and their de-registration is formally recorded.

There are occasions when the registration of a Foster Carer is reviewed with a view to considering the options available, i.e. changes to approval or de-registration. Foster Carers are offered the opportunity to submit a response or attend the Fostering Panel in these circumstances. If the Foster Carer is unhappy with the decision reached, they are also able to request a review of the decision or to have their case addressed by the Independent Review Mechanism.

## **THE FOSTERING PANEL**

The Fostering Agency is required by the Fostering Services Regulations to establish a Fostering Panel. The membership, role and functions of the panel are prescribed within the Regulations. Panel membership is drawn from a central list of members and quoracy dictates that at least five members are present in order to conduct business. These members must comprise the chair or vice chair, 2 social work representatives and, where the chair is not present and the vice chair who is present is not independent of the Social Work Agency, at least one of the other panel members must be independent of the Agency. Panels must also have access to medical and legal advice as required.

Hartlepool's Fostering Panel normally meets once every three weeks and considers assessments of prospective foster and Connected Persons Foster Carers, annual reviews of carers, Connected Persons Foster Carers, de-registrations and issues in relation to Foster Carers. Although not a requirement within the regulations the Fostering Panel also considers the plan for a child for long term fostering and also matching children long term with carers. The business of the Panel is formally recorded.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations that are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for consideration. These decisions are recorded and notified in writing to the prospective/existing Foster Carers.

Foster Carers who disagree with the Panel decision regarding their approval, de-registration or changes to category of approval will have the opportunity to request a review of the decision made by the Fostering Panel either through the agency or through the Independent Review Mechanism, which is provided by Coram Children's Legal Centre on behalf of the Department for Education.

The Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Panel policy and procedures document provides additional information regarding the constitution and running of the panel.

## APPENDIX 1

### **RELEVANT LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS AND STAFF**

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is delivered within the following legal framework and in accordance with the following standards:

- Fostering Service Regulations 2011
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 from section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for local authorities 2010.
- GDPR April 2018.

This Statement of Purpose is produced in accordance with the following standards and regulations;

### **NMS 2011 STANDARD 16**

- 16.1 The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by Foster Carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.
- 16.2 The aims and objectives of the statement of purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

**THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 GUIDANCE AND REGULATIONS VOLUME 4:  
FOSTERING SERVICES (2011)**

- 4.1 The Fostering service provider must compile a Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any 'parent and child arrangements'). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary , but at least annually and published on the provider's website (if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted. Copies must also be available upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service, any Foster Carer or potential Foster Carer of the service, and to any child placed with one of the service's Foster Carers and their parents.
- 4.2 The Statement of purpose is a key document which sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering service. It must be consistent with relevant legislation, Regulations, NMS and statutory guidance, be child focused and show how the fostering service will help children achieve positive outcomes. The manager of the fostering service must ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose.

## APPENDIX 2

### NUMBERS, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF AS AT 1 APRIL 2022

The staff of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Service consists of:

NAME & STATUS	DATE OF APPOINTMENT in Fostering Team			QUALIFICATIONS	RELEVANT EXPERIENCE
Lisa Cushlow Head of Service	01	09	20	DIPSW – 2006 BA – Specialist Social Work (children and families) 2013	Team Manager – Safeguarding Assistant Team Manager Safeguarding Social Worker – safeguarding Social Worker Fostering Family Support Worker
Jane Wilson Team Manager	07	01	19	CSS 1987 CMS 2001	Instructor – Adults with Learning Difficulties Safeguarding Social Worker Team Manager Fostering Head of Service for Looked after children, Care Leavers, Adoption and Fostering Panel Adviser
Jane Lane Assistant Team Manager	14	03	16	DIPSW (2003) HCPC Registered	Early help Safeguarding Family Placement Social Worker Children & Families Supervising social worker
Laura Jeffreys	17	05	21	DIPSW and Masters Sociology Degree Degree (2005) PQ1 (2006)	SGO Lead IRO Social Worker Safeguarding Permanence Social Worker

Charlotte Austin Social Worker	07	10	13	BSC Hons in SW and LD Nursing 1:1 Practice Educator	Fostering Social Worker Children and families/children with disabilities
Leanne Johnson Social Worker	01	10	17	BA (Hons) in Social Worker July 2011	Children's Safeguarding Drug and alcohol practitioner Family Placement Social Worker
Alison Bousfield Social Worker	01	07	17	MA in Social Work BSc (Hons) Sociology	Fostering Social Worker Children & Families Social Work Safeguarding Senior Practitioner Safeguarding Team
Jolene Duggleby Support Officer	25	06	19	NVQ 1, 2 and 3 in Business Administration – July 2016 Foundation Degree in Business Management 2021	Fostering - Children's and Commissioned Services
Emma Howarth Social Worker	01	10	11	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree	Social Worker Family Finder Family Resource Worker
Joanne Colledge Social Worker	08	06	18	BSc in Social Work 2013	Fostering Social Worker Safeguarding SW Family Support Worker
Suzanne Rayment Social Worker	04	05	21	BA (Hons) Social Work 2010	Social Worker Fostering Safeguarding SW
Megan Sargent Social Worker	27	08	19	BA (Hons) Social Work 2019	Social Worker – Fostering Supported Living and fostering placements
Moirra Spencer Social Worker	03	08	20	BA (Hons) Social Work (2012)	Social Worker – Fostering Social Worker – cared for, care leavers Lead n UASC Personal Advisor – Care Leavers Sessional Worker for Care Leavers
Amanda Watcham Social Worker	09	09	19	BA (Hons) Social Work (2013)	Fostering Social Worker Social Worker Children with disabilities

Paul Reynolds Social Worker	19	08	19	Masters in Social Work (2013)	Fostering Social Worker Social Worker children with disabilities Looked After children's SW Social Worker- safeguarding Adult Mental Health Social Worker
Beth Burnside	10	08	21	BA Hons in Social Work (2012) Masters Credits (2016)	Safeguarding Social Worker 4 years Throughcare 5 years Fostering 1 year

# **Appendix 3** of Annual Fostering Report

Mockingbird

## What is Mockingbird?

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme is an innovative method of delivering foster care using an **extended family model** which provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers children and young people, fostering services and birth families.



## **Mockingbird's underpinning principles**

- Active child protection
- Birth family viewed as partners and future support
- Community based care
- Continuity of care
- Cultural relevancy, identity and belonging
- Foster carer support
- Normalisation of care
- Unconditional care

## The origins of Mockingbird

- The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme delivers the Mockingbird Family Model in the UK
- Based on the concept of peer support and creating extended family for looked after children and young people to provide a secure base
- The Fostering Network was funded by the Department for Education in 2015 to develop the programme in the UK in partnership with The Mockingbird Society USA who originally developed the Mockingbird Family Model in 2004
- Evaluations by Washington University, Loughborough University and now the Rees Centre at Oxford University

# A Mockingbird constellation



## Hub home carer

- Actively protects children
- Leads the constellation
- Advocates for the children and foster carers
- Builds the community
- Communicates effectively
- Provides social and emotional support
- Supports permanency

## Hub home carer

The hub home carer provides:

- Planned and emergency support care and sleepovers
- Regular social events for families providing peer interaction and support for caregivers, children and young people.
- Constant support and mentoring for satellite carers.
- A safe, neutral environment for shared decision-making meetings, social worker, sibling and birth family visits.
- Formal and informal training and development opportunities for satellite carers.

## **Liaison worker**

- Employed by the host service as the main point of contact between the service and constellation
- Provides support and supervision for the hub home carer.
- Attends and supports planning of regular constellation meetings and events.

## Liaison worker

- Reviews the progress and needs of constellation children and young people with the hub home carer
- Liaises directly with the service manager and existing supervising social workers in the team
- Advocates for the constellation to access local resources
- Maintains fidelity and supports the collection of evaluation data.

## Satellite families

- Chosen due to skills, needs, the particular needs of the child or young person in their care or geography
- Live reasonably close to the hub home
- Commit to using support care and sleepovers as needed
- Willing to support all members of the constellation
- Attend constellation social activities and events
- Commit to their own professional development, attending and contributing to training and learning events.



## Impact

- Improved placement stability – reduced placement breakdown
- Improved experience of peer support
- Improved sibling contact
- Improved process and experience of respite care
- Improved skills, confidence and role satisfaction for foster carers
- Improved levels of carer retention and recruitment

## Impact

- A network of strong and authentic relationships able to replicate the support offered by an extended family
- A strong, robust and resilient structure able to support children, young people and fostering families through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved experience of birth family contact
- Costs saved and costs avoided.



## Hartlepool's Foster Carer Survey 2022 – Summary and Analysis

Paul Reynolds

### 1. Overall Service

The link to this year's foster carer survey was sent out by email to all foster carers and connected carers of whom 21 responded. This was a total of 36% of all visitors to the survey, which was made available primarily online through Hartlepool Your Say, Our Future website for the first time this year.

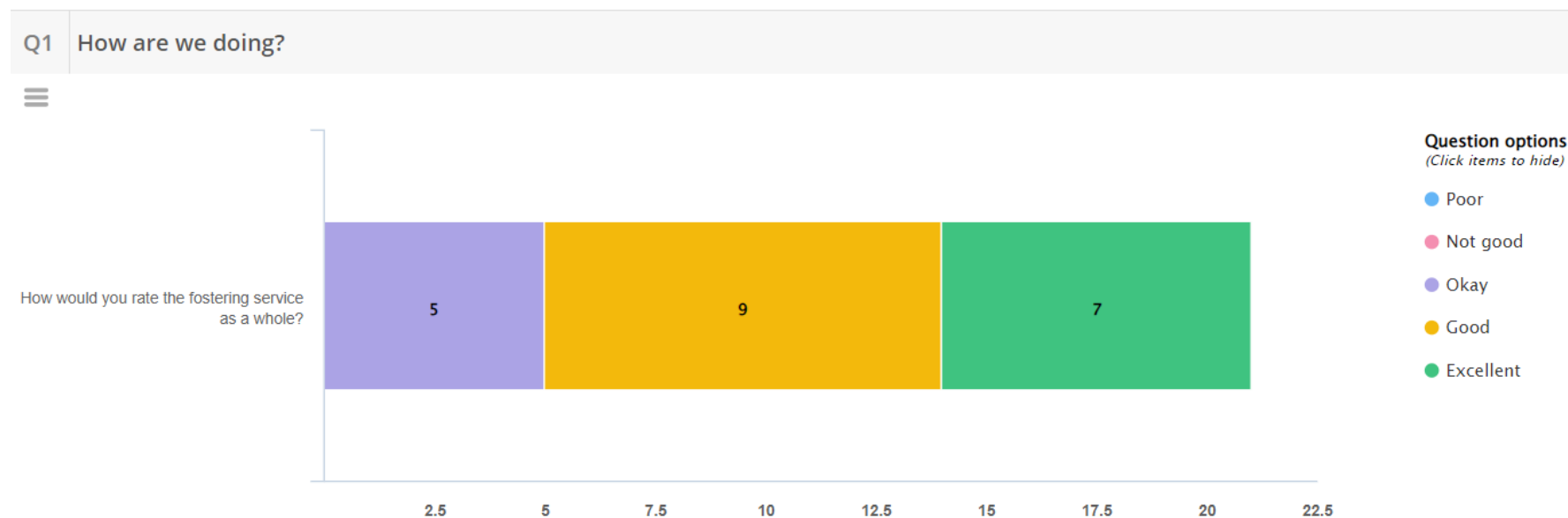
When asked how they felt the service was doing overall, none of the respondents gave a negative assessment (see FIGURE 1). Our carers had various thoughts about what was working well:

*'Phone calls and visits – always at the end of a phone if needed. Placement going really well.'*

*'Staff are approachable and willing to help when a problem arises...Training is available and the FB page is very informative in keeping carers up to date on training, what's happening and advice.'*

*'I feel the fostering service gives a great deal of care to their looked after children and going by my personal experience they provide lots of support for us foster carers.'*

FIGURE 1 – OVERALL SERVICE



At the same time, carers were also very forthcoming with what they felt the service could improve on:

*'Fostering Allowance should increase with inflation.'*

*'More support for the mental well-being of children and foster carers. Better allocation of social workers to cases to better meet the needs of children. More flexible times for training rather than school pick-up / drop-off / all during working hours.'*

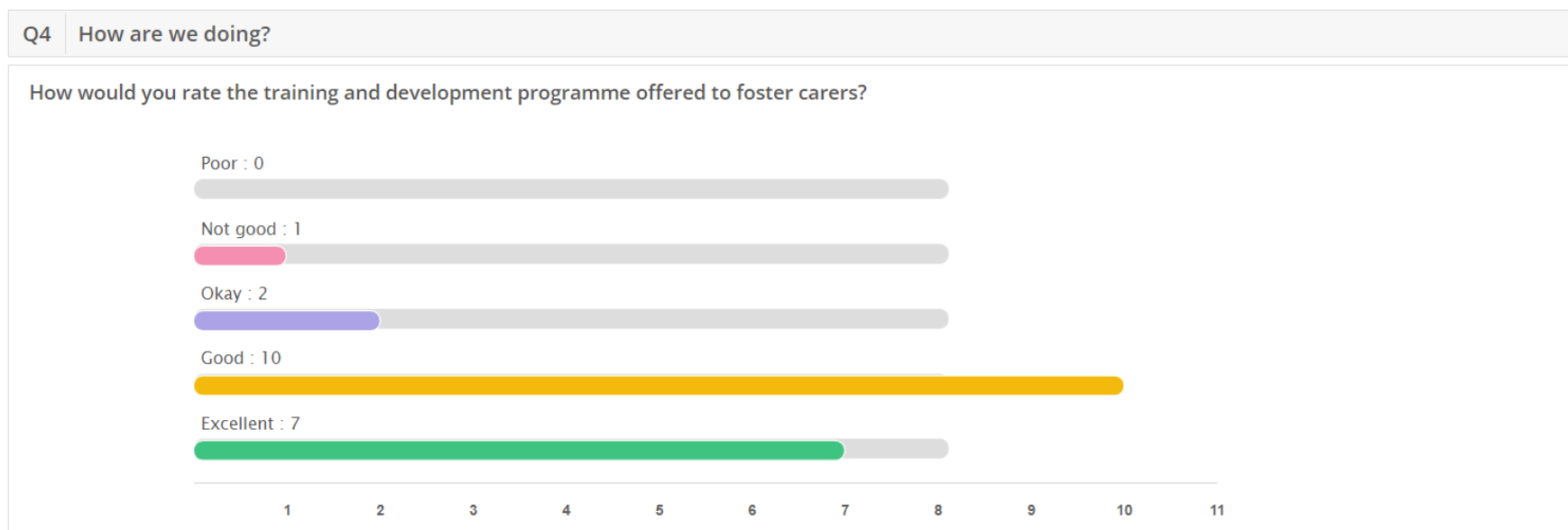
*'Inclusion and recognition of whole family who foster not just the main carer. For the past 2 ½ years nothing has been offered for children who foster. Even a birthday card or letter during the Fostering Network's National Fostering Fortnight to recognise them would be nice. More informal opportunities for carers to meet each other.'*

*'The length of time children wait for a long-term placement is too long. Not always the authorities [sic] fault.'*

## 2. Training and Development

Most respondents felt that the training provided in Hartlepool overall was either good or excellent (see FIGURE 2).

**FIGURE 2 – TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**



During the pandemic most foster carer training moved online. Carers either accessed e-learning courses via websites available to them through Hartlepool Borough Council or other local organisations, via the websites of independent providers, or conferences through Teams / Zoom. Since the easing of COVID restrictions foster carer attendance at training- whether delivered face to face or via Teams- has sometimes been highly variable. Anecdotally, a number of carers had expressed either a strong preference or dislike for particular modes of training.

With this in mind we asked carers how they preferred to access training and which of the existing websites they were aware of and had accessed:

FIGURE 3 – PREFERRED METHODS OF ACCESSING TRAINING

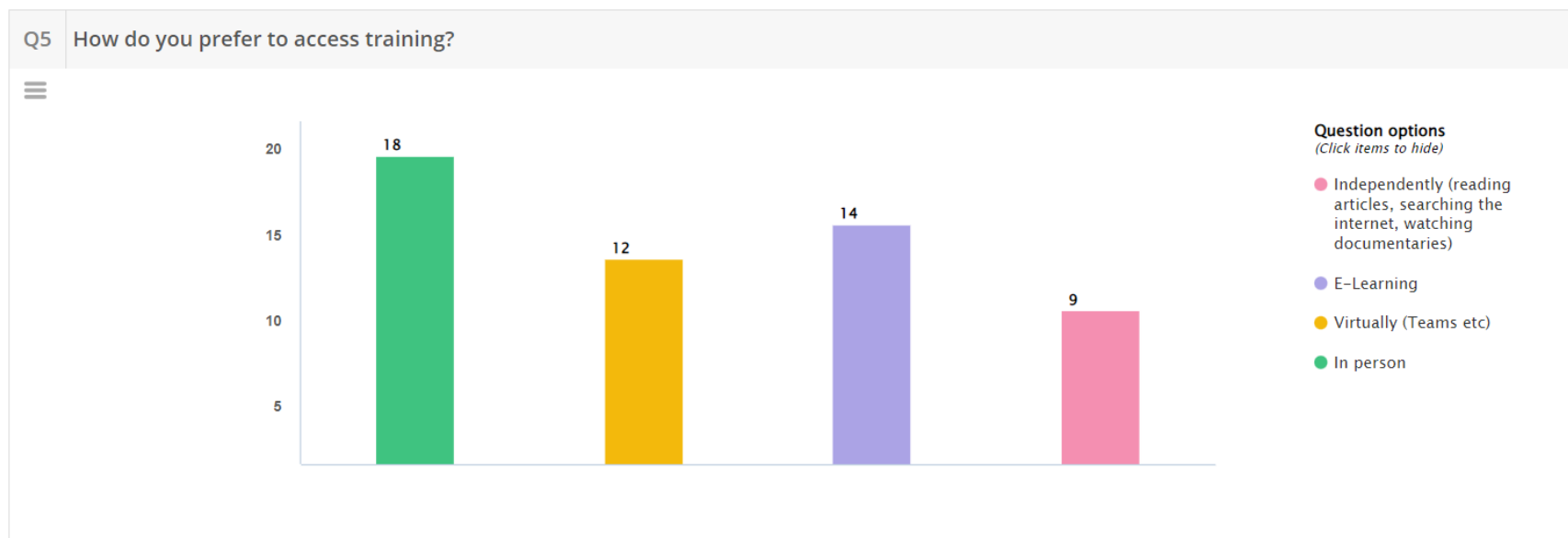
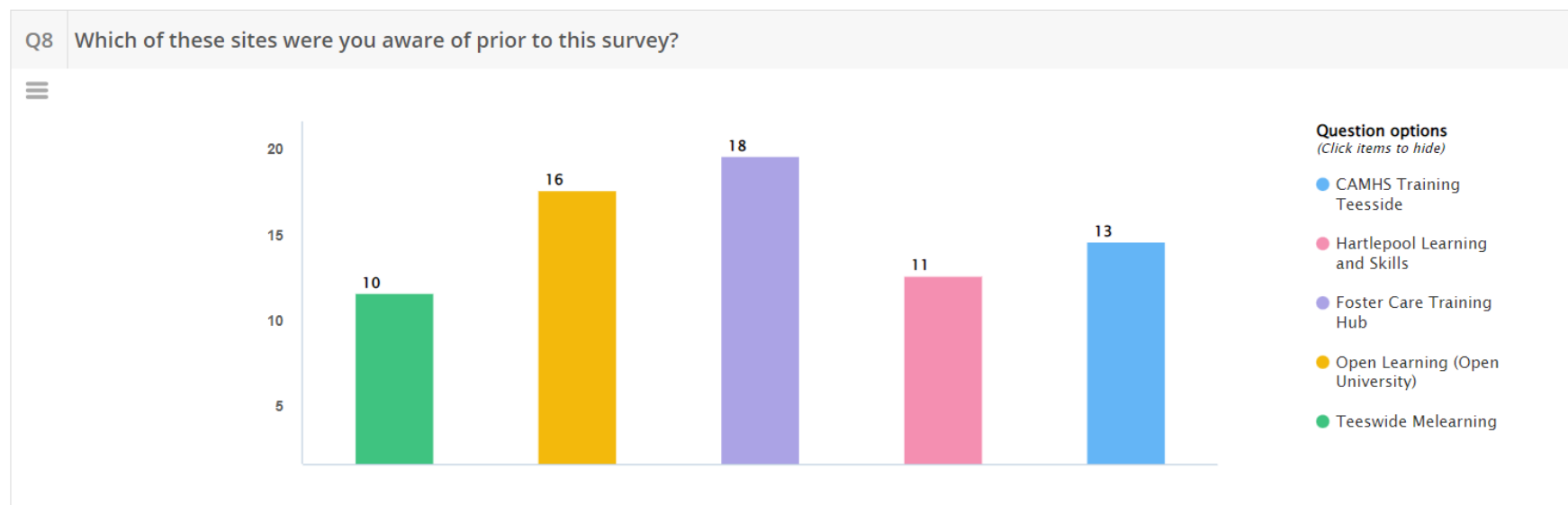
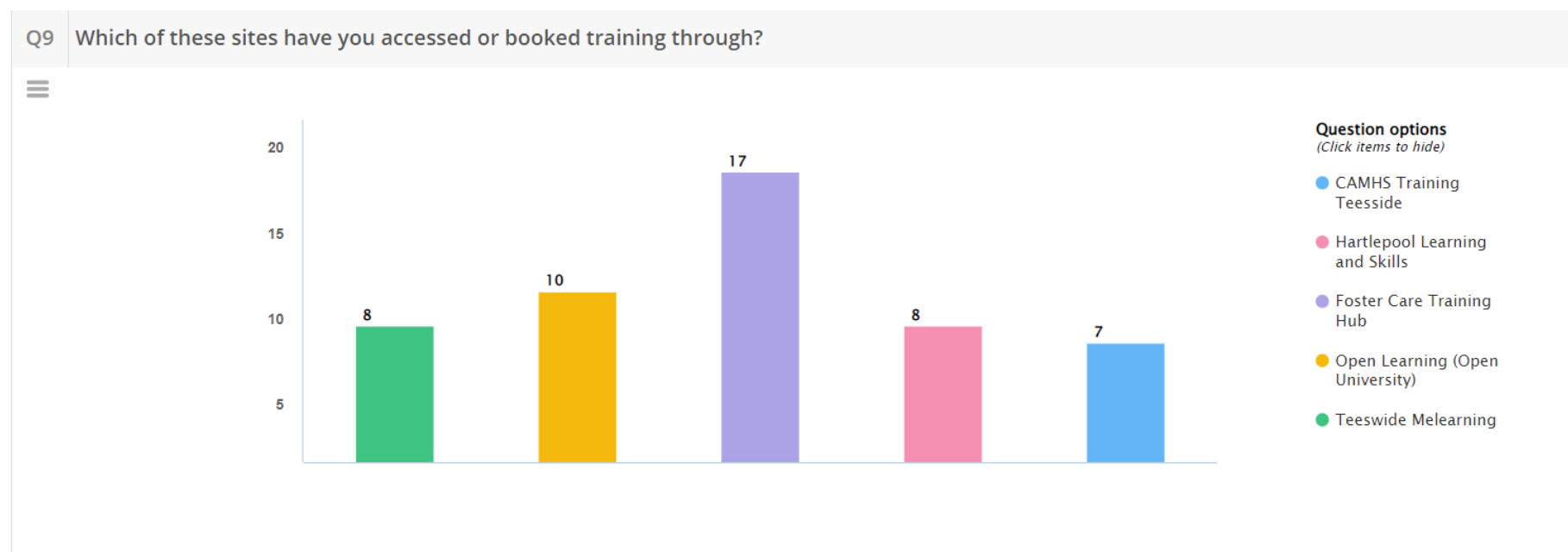


FIGURE 4 – AWARENESS OF ONLINE TRAINING PROVIDERS



**FIGURE 5 – ACCESSING ONLINE TRAINING PROVIDERS**

These figures suggest that while most carers still prefer face-to-face training, they will access training in a number of different ways. It has been somewhat surprising to find that the Foster Carer Training Hub- an independent e-learning site where foster carers can receive a limited number of prescribed training courses for free when they sign up- is the most well-known and widely accessed among respondents. Given that the Foster Carer Training Hub offers courses in some advanced subjects, it would be useful to know which courses carers have been choosing to access.

In terms of practical arrangements for face-to-face training and sessions delivered over Teams / Zoom, the majority of carers preferred training to be delivered in term-time (71.4%) during school hours (66-67%). However, we are doing our best to diversify our offer and provide training in the evenings for those who are at work during the day.

Carers were also asked about their Personal Development Plan. 48% were aware that they had a PDP and 52% were either unsure or answered that they didn't. Of those who had a PDP, all of them knew its contents. This suggests that those who have a PDP actively participated in its creation.



Foster carers were asked to comment on the training they had found most helpful. Sessions on Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, County Lines and Understanding the Teenage Brain featured prominently:

*'County lines as it is increasing Understanding the teenage brain as I have teens.'*

*'Trauma Informed Care - very relevant to role FASD - amazing training.'*

*'E safety. County lines. Domestic abuse.'*

*'Really useful training on secure base, teenage brain, PACE and therapeutic parenting techniques this year. More in depth would be great.'*

*'The teenage brain training really helped us understand some of our eldest child's behaviour in a different way. The FASD training made us question some of the assumptions we had made and gave us potential answers for some of our observations.'*

Asked what other training they would like to see offered, respondents made a number of suggestions:

*'More PACE training made available Therapeutic parenting.'*

*'Specialist issues e.g FASD, Autism etc.'*

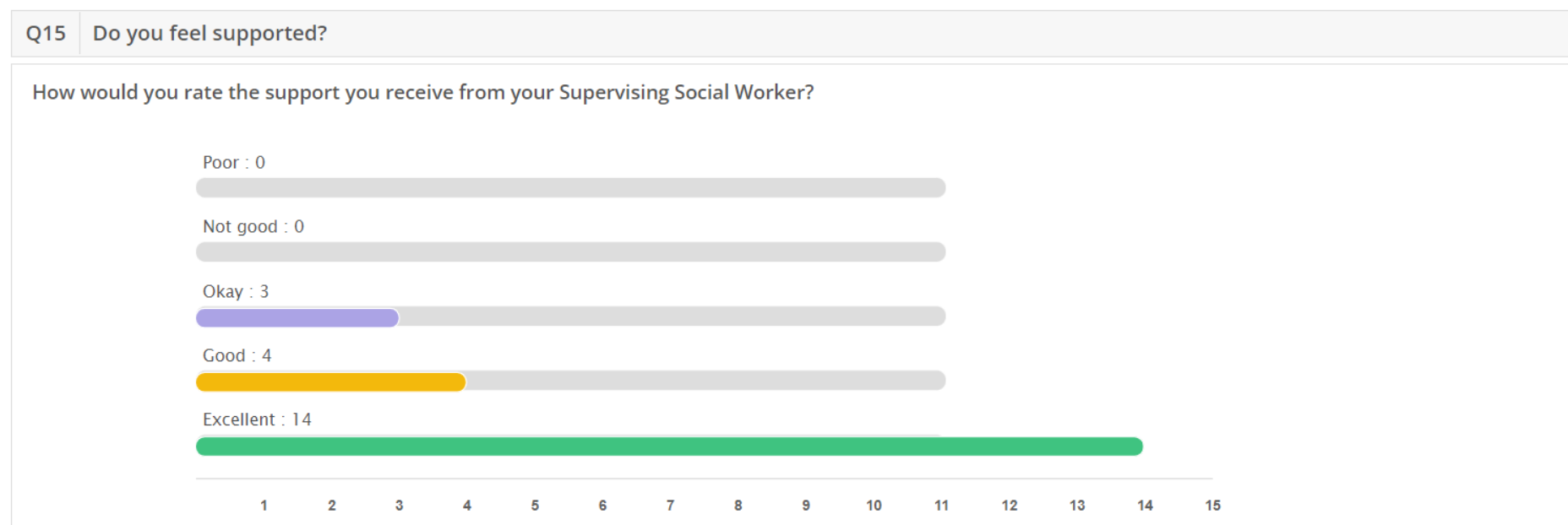
*'More on in depth on therapeutic parenting secure base and PACE for teenagers please.'*

*'Anything around Internet and also how to learn more about computers ,eg, filling out forms on line, as I sometimes struggle.'*

### 3. Support

Foster carers were asked to rate the individual support they received from their Supervising Social Worker (see FIGURE 6).

**FIGURE 6 – SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER SUPPORT**

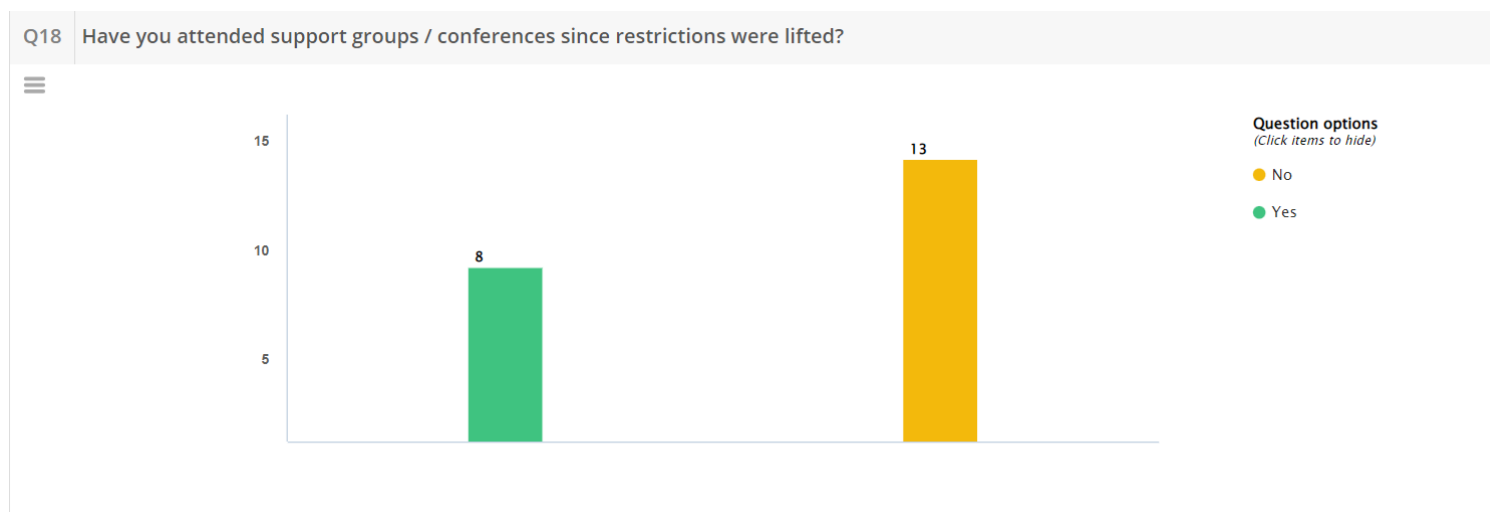
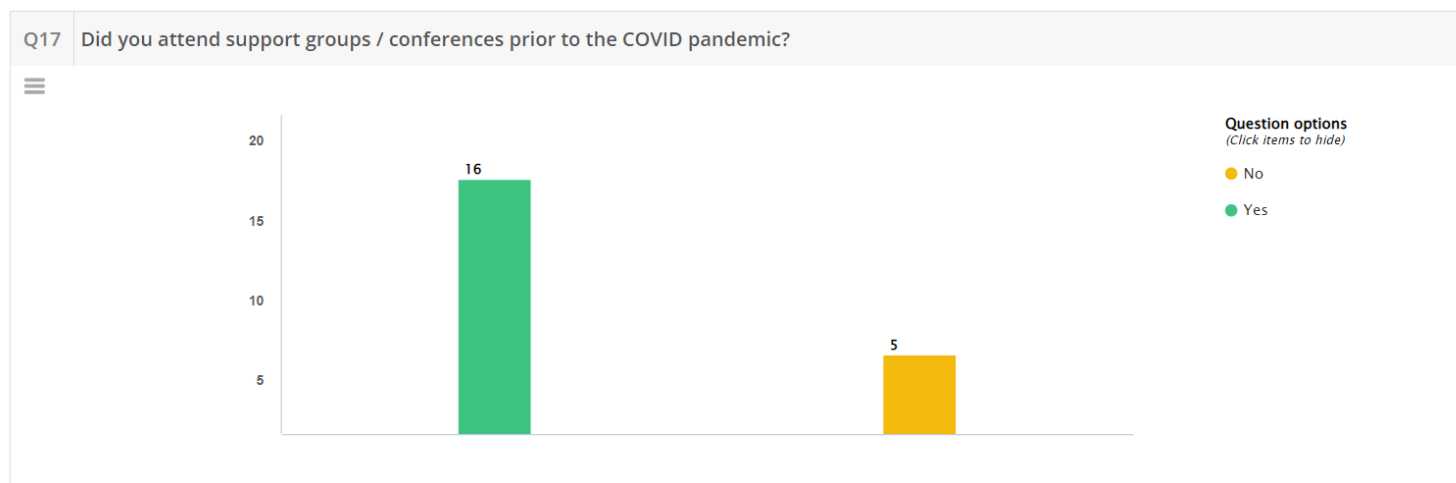


Once again, no respondents expressed a negative view on the subject of the support they receive from their Supervising Social Worker. Virtually all of the carers who responded stated that they were able to contact their Supervising Social Worker whenever they needed them.

## 4. Peer support, participation and consultation

Attendance at conferences, support groups and consultation events has also been erratic at times since the COVID pandemic. We asked about this:

**FIGURES 7 & 8 – CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE SINCE THE PANDEMIC**



It is clear that the pandemic had a discernible effect on attendance at conferences and participation events. It has obviously led some carers to conclude that online is now more convenient for them. Often the reasons for not attending were simply due to the timing and the amount of notice given:

*'Prefer online now.'*

*'Often not enough notice is given to arrange childcare to attend.'*

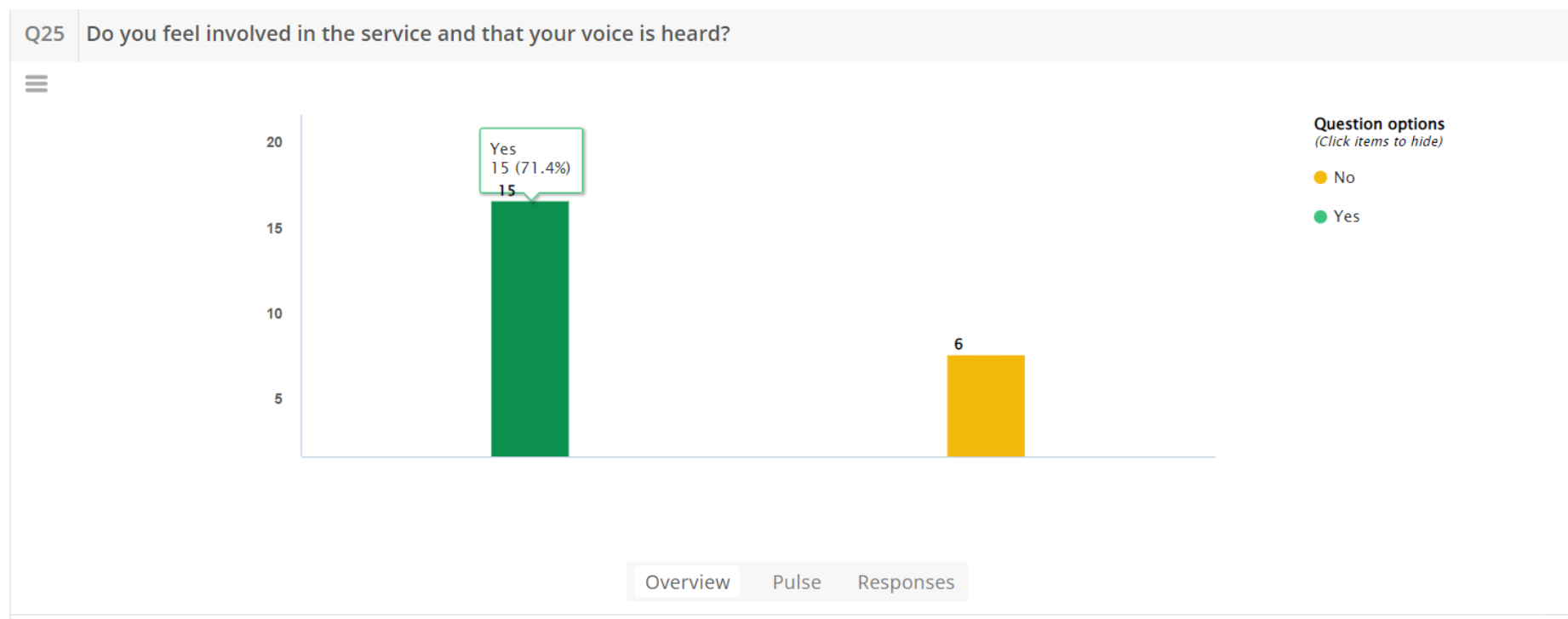
*'During working hours so unable to attend.'*

*'I still don't feel safe with COVID.'*

*'good to meet others but not always practical when you are faced with a child emergency and cannot attend which is why I prefer on-line now.'*

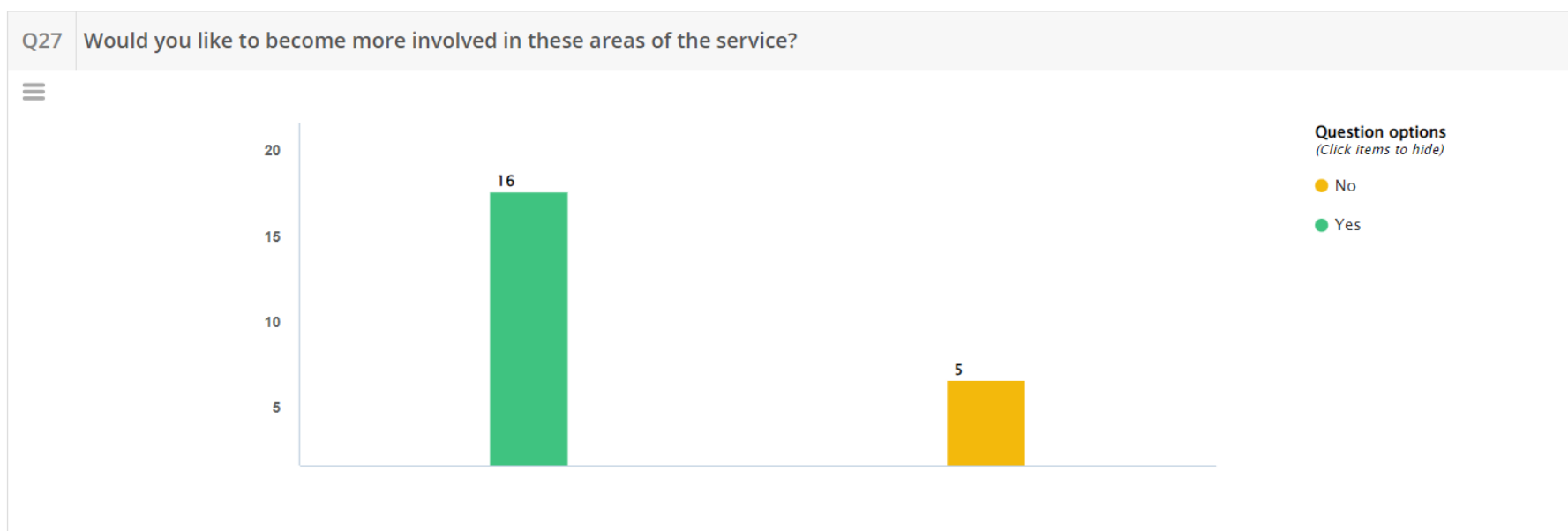
Despite this the majority of respondents said they would like to continue attending events in person (61.9%) and would prefer support groups to take place on a monthly basis (75%).

FIGURE 9 – FEELING INVOLVED



## FIGURES 10 &amp; 11– FOSTER CARER ENGAGEMENT AND INTEREST





Similarly, the data suggests that foster carers do feel that they are involved in the development of the service, are invited to be part of consultations and other events and indeed have an appetite to do more. Foster carers showed broadly equal interest in being part of several different aspects of the service, including recruitment, delivering training, focus groups and consultations and partnership working / policy development.

## 5. Suggestions and general comments on the service

Finally, respondents shared some of their suggestions and offered further reflections on the service overall:

*‘Support groups for carers with younger children to help with buddying and support for each other.’*

*‘Yes we as foster carers don’t get enough credit for what we do for our children and certainly don’t get listened to sometimes we work with our children 24/7 but sometimes feel that what we say isn’t taken into consideration.’*

*'More linked up communication would be better and easier phone contact.'*

*'I'm very well supported.'*

*'The cost of living is biting hard FC deserve a 20% pay rise to cover the costs of living crisis.'*

*'Fostering is a family thing to do and so more understanding of our own children and what part they play in fostering they often feel unimportant and ignored we are expected to bring children in and treat them as we do our own yet services often don't see birth children as the same.'*

*'I feel that the fostering team support and encourage me by accepting my personal circumstances and helping me work round these.'*

*'The decision to become foster carers is the best decision we have ever made. We would completely recommend HBC as a fostering agency as we feel that we and the children we foster are fully supported.'*

*'Yes fostering is the most rewarding job anyone will do, it's the most difficult especially at times when us as foster carers aren't listened too. Although sometimes it's difficult I would still recommend fostering to everyone who has a big heart and the room to share and care'*

## 6. Summary and recommendation

Overall, the majority of carers responding to the survey feel they get support from The Fostering Team and from their own Supervising Social Worker which is either good or excellent.

Carers appear to have a good awareness of the training available to them both online and in person. They value the training they receive, even if some would prefer training on subjects like PACE and Therapeutic Parenting to go into greater depth. Since the pandemic it seems carers are even more divided in terms of their preferred methods of accessing training: some have embraced doing more training online and independently while others still prefer face-to-face.

Broadly, carers feel they are consulted and invited to participate in other aspects of the service. Most would also be happy to be more involved in these areas.



It is concerning that a minority of foster carers have expressed frustration at not always being able to reach their Supervising Social Worker or speak to the team. As the survey was anonymous we would urge any carers to take this up with their Supervising Social Worker.

Actions from this survey include:

- To reinstate the Children Who Foster Group.
- Further review of foster carer allowances and banding.
- To ensure some face-to-face and Teams training sessions are held at different times of the day, including evenings, to ensure all foster carers have the opportunity to attend.

## **Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Panel**

### **Chair's report**

**April 2021 to March 2022**

In line with the Covid-19, virtual panels were undertaken during this period and following initial technical hitches operated effectively. Panel members, prospective foster carers and other attendees to panel maintained professionalism and confidentiality and the business of panel operated effectively

Panel members generally however prefer face to face contact with attendees to panel, feedback highlighted that panel members, social workers and prospective Foster Carers welcomed being able to discuss in person the reports presented to Panel. The easing of Covid restrictions enables face to face panels being reintroduced

Like the rest of the country new skills have been learnt in undertaking meetings virtually, some responses with humour and some with frustration at times This means whilst the majority of panels will be held face to face there can be a hybrid approach to enable some applicants(if out of area) social workers, etc to be able to join the panel virtually when needs must In addition some children/ young people have been able to give their views regarding placement matches both virtually and in person which is always pleasing for panel members to meet the children

Panel continues to have a cohort of established members and quoracy is well achieved. The electronic distribution of paperwork in advance of panel taking place has continued to be well co-ordinated with this still being made available at least seven working days before panel. Whilst the reading of papers has continued at times to be a challenge because of the volume of business being considered at some of the panels, it is clear from the breadth and depth of discussion that takes place within each panel that members have robustly read and considered the information to make informed recommendations.

There has continued to be appropriate professional attendance at panel by the assessing and foster carers, social workers, as well as the child's social worker.

The central list however needs to be more diverse and the panel advisor has been working hard to achieve a more diverse representation to panel. There are aspirations also of recruiting a care experienced young person to panel to ensure the voice of the child is woven into current processes.

Panels continue to take place every 3 weeks and extra panels can be added in line with business demands. This continues to support planning and timely decision making across all key areas.

Panel plays a part in quality assurance and frequent discussions and actions take place on how this role can be improved upon Consideration is being given to Electronic written feedback forms to be provided by panel members in advance of a scheduled

panel taking place and will be invaluable in promoting focussed and considered discussion as panel members have sufficient time to consider the areas they would like to navigate and questions they would wish to ask

The quality of Form E's, Matching Reports and Foster Care Assessment are generally good to enable panel to make an informed recommendation. Minutes of panel are also routinely capturing the discussions that have taken place in panel.

Creative and child centred approaches in seeking children's views by the social worker and subsequently captured within the document are becoming much more embedded and evident to panel and where this isn't necessarily evident within the paperwork, reassuringly, social workers are able to confidently articulate the work they have undertaken when this is navigated by the panel

Training has been provided to social workers and panel members which is always well received

In conclusion, despite what has been an unprecedented and difficult time, the fostering panels have functioned well, with a clear and unwavering commitment from panel members, social workers and prospective foster carers to ensure children are given the opportunity to be cared for by those who are committed to providing a loving, secure, lifelong family so they can grow and thrive.

**Yvonne Hamilton**  
**Fostering Panel Chair**