



CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

THURSDAY, 16 OCTOBER 2025

10.00 AM PRIORY, ROOM 2F CENTRE BLOCK, COUNTY HALL - COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillor Kathryn Field (Chair)
Councillors Colin Belsey, Bob Bowdler, Anne Cross, Sorrell Marlow-
Eastwood, Colin Swansborough and Georgia Taylor

A G E N D A

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2025 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
2. Apologies for absence
3. Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
4. Urgent items
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the end of the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgently.
5. Exclusion of Press and Public
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next two agenda items on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.
6. Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for April- July 2025 and recently published Ofsted inspection reports (*Pages 7 - 32*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
7. Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.
8. Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics (*Pages 33 - 42*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
9. Separated Migrant Children (*Pages 43 - 46*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
10. Looked After Children Service annual report (*Pages 47 - 92*)
Report by the Director of Children's Services.
11. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual report (*Pages 93 - 118*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.

12. Ofsted Focused Visit report (*Pages 119 - 126*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
13. Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

PHILIP BAKER
Deputy Chief Executive
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent
LEWES BN7 1UE

8 October 2025

Contact Summer Kelly, Governance and Democracy Officer,
01273 336654
Email: summer.kelly@eastsussex.gov.uk

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 17 July 2025.

PRESENT

Councillors Kathryn Field, Colin Belsey, Bob Bowdler, Anne Cross, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood and Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT

Carolyn Fair – Director of Children’s Services
Kathy Marriott – Assistant Director of Children’s Services
Fiona Lewis – Head of Looked After Children Services – Provider Services
Deborah Ennis – Assistant Director of Children’s Services
Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children Service – Operations
Adrian Sewell – Operations Manager, Fostering Team
Dr Isabelle Hodgson – Designated Doctor – NHS Sussex
Summer Kelly – Governance and Democracy Officer

1. ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

1.1 Councillor Field was elected Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 APRIL 2025

2.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 02 April 2025.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

3.1 Apologies were received for Councillor Georgia Taylor.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

4.1 Councillor Colin Belsey declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) CiCC officer.

5. URGENT ITEMS

5.1 There were none.

6. REPORTS

6.1 Reports referred to in the minutes below are contained in the minute book.

7. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

7.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for item 7 (see minute 8) on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.

8. CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR JANUARY - MARCH 2025 AND RECENTLY PUBLISHED OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS

8.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home report relating to all East Sussex County Council Children's Homes, including updates from Regulation 44 reports and relevant Ofsted reports.

8.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

- 1) All Registered Children's Homes relating to East Sussex County Council are now rated 'good' following recent Ofsted inspections.
- 2) Recruitment and staffing for larger homes, such as Acorns and The Bungalow remains challenging, this has been addressed through invested resource in a dedicated recruitment strategy, including a new advertising strategy.
- 3) Area of focus for the next quarter will include:
 - Opening Seaside Short Breaks (previously Acorns)
 - Embedding digital case management across all our homes
 - Focus on the experience of staff in our homes and building resilience
 - Drive towards Outstanding across the homes
 - Working with Education colleagues to ensure that all children in our homes are in school or receiving an education which best meets their needs

8.3 Following discussion, the Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

9. ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

10. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

10.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding an overview of quarter 1 data for Looked After Children.

10.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel

1) There has been gradual increase in the rate of looked after children in East Sussex over the last five years. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) does have a slightly higher rate than that of its statistical neighbours. Despite this, ESCC performance remains below the national rate for England. There has been a total of 56 children admitted to care in Q1.

2) A refreshed reunification framework has been developed, based on nationally recognised best practice, to support the operational service in maximising arrangements to enable children to live at home or within family networks.

3) The improved financial offer that ESCC has made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a significant impact on Fostering Service's recruitment.

4) ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated children. The number of separated children who were looked after was 67 at the end of Q1, a reduction of 4 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 151 asylum seeking young people who were Care Leavers aged over 18 during this period which is a decrease of 2 from the previous quarter.

5) The number of looked after children has remained relatively constant over the past 12 months. The number of children living in fostering and family placements has seen a slight decrease to 61%.

6) There will continue to be a focus on managing demand through earlier support and interventions.

10.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

11. FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT

11.1 The Panel consider a report by the Director of Children's Services, regarding Fostering Annual report.

11.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel

1) There have been a number of successes within the Fostering Service during 2024 – 2025. Including a high rate of inquiries, payment uplifts for East Sussex County Council foster carers in line with National Minimum Allowance in April 2024.

2) A 'Mockingbird Constellation' was recently launched, this is a hub for fostering families, allowing for greater practical and emotional support and advice. There is ambition to open two more constellations by end of 2026/27.

3) There will be a greater focus on recruitment and development of foster care resource and training and development. This will also improve response to the unique needs of Connected Carers.

11.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the update on the performance of the East Sussex County Council Fostering Service.

12. ADOPTION SOUTH EAST ANNUAL REPORT 2024/5

12.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services regarding the Adoption South East annual report 2024/25.

12.2 The following points were highlighted to the Panel:

1) In 2024/25, Adoption South East (ASE) placed 82 children with adoptive families, including 22 sibling groups and 20 early permanence placements during 2024-2025. Of these, 95% were placed with ASE-approved adopters, reflecting strong internal sufficiency.

2) Recruitment efforts led to 537 enquiries and 64 adopter approvals. ASE also launched the 'Becoming a Family' pilot, enhancing early placement support.

3) ASE secured nearly £4 million from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund to provide therapy for 1397 children. The Advice Hub handled 637 enquiries, and the Keeping in Touch team managed over 3000 letterbox exchanges and 80 face-to-face meetings.

4) ASE has recently demonstrated resilience and adaptability through its restructure and continued service improvements.

12.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the Adoption South East 2024/25 annual report as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	16 October 2025
Title of Report:	Looked After Children Statistics
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To provide Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of quarter 2 data for Looked After Children

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the content of the report.

1. Background

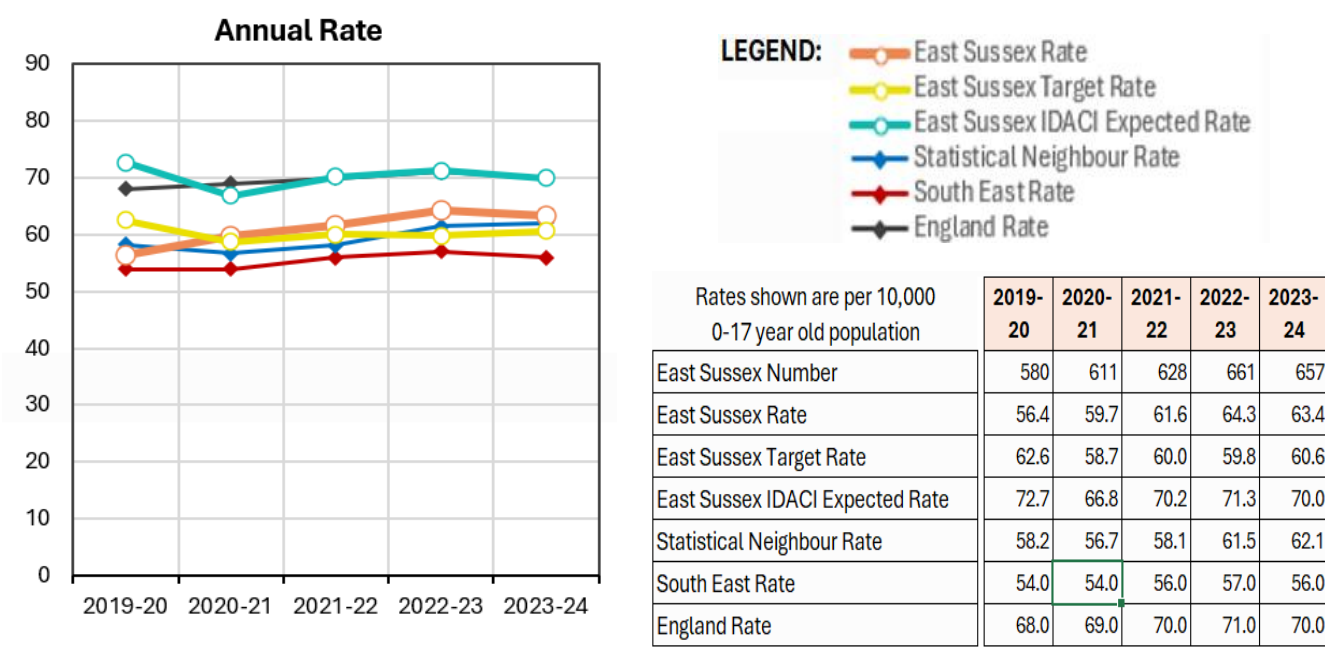
1.1. Looked After Children are children in the care of a local authority, typically as a result of concerns regarding their safety or welfare. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is responsible for safeguarding, supporting, and promoting the welfare of children in its care. This regular report to the Corporate Parenting Panel aims to provide an overview of the most recent data regarding looked after children in ESCC.

1.2. Services for Looked After Children are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's grant from the Home Office.

2. Supporting information

2.1. The data found in the charts in this report is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month within the quarter (unless otherwise stated) and some changes occur as data is cleansed within the system. Any changes made to the system will update the data as at the correct date of the activity not the date of entry. Therefore, the end of year figures produced for the Department of Education 903 collection will show the finalised ESCC figures which may appear slightly differently to the end of quarter figures presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

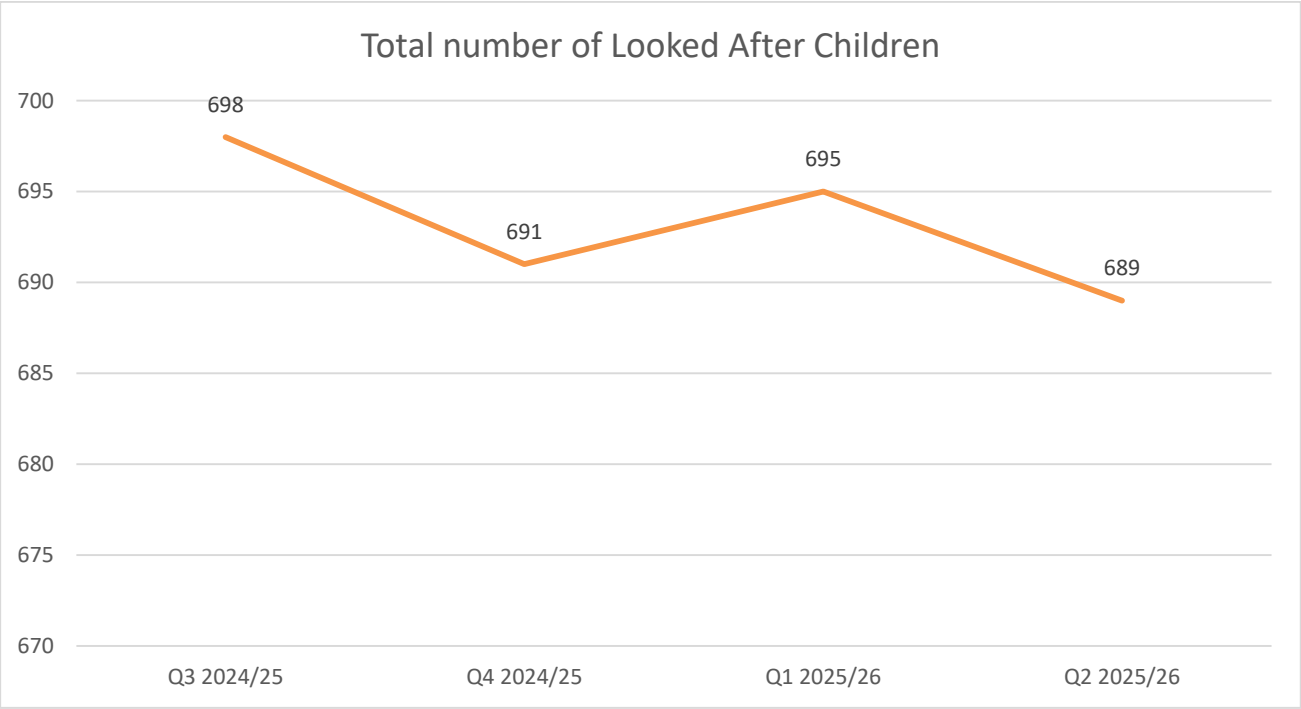
Graph 1: rate of LAC in East Sussex 2020-2025, compared with England, statistical neighbours, and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).



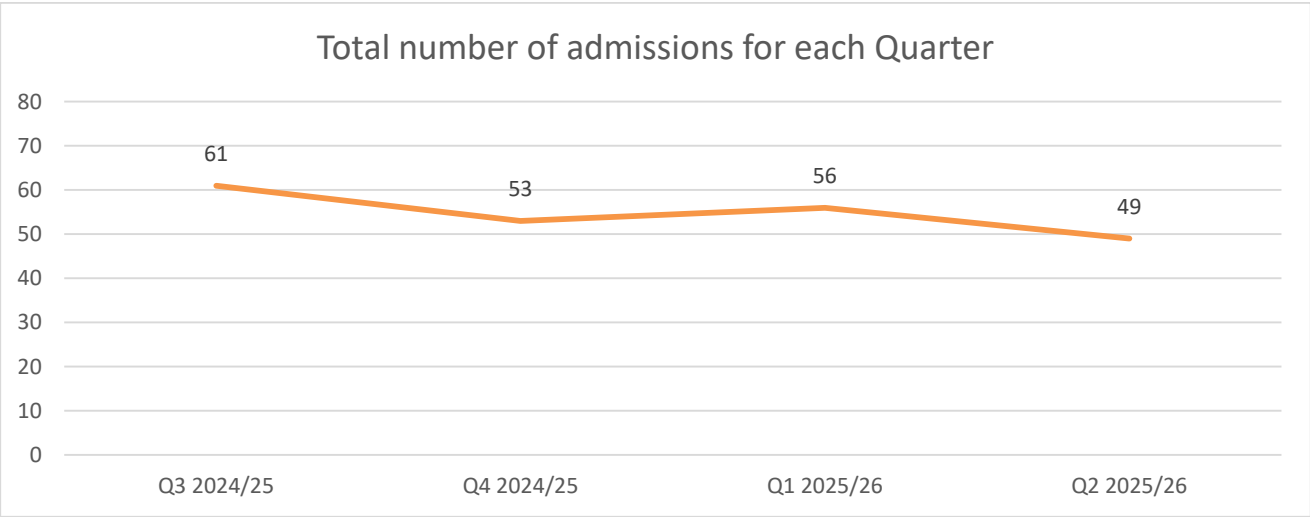
2.2. This is the most current published data available. It is updated through the Department of Education (DfE) data collection process and is due to be published in November 2025. The graph and data above evidence a gradual increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over the last 5 years. The ESCC performance remains below the national rate for England and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) (expected rates based on levels of deprivation). However, it is significantly above the South East rate and slightly above our statistical neighbours. ESCC has invested in a range of initiatives over the last 3 years to enable more children to live safely at home or within their family networks, thereby reducing the number of children who become looked after. The Valuing Care model was introduced alongside, the Connected Coaches service and the Connected Family Intensive Practice service (CFIP). In addition, a refreshed reunification framework has been developed, based on nationally recognised best practice, to support the operational service in maximising these arrangements. When children do need to come into our care the Valuing Care Panel supports the plans for our children to live in the right placement, for the right length of time and remove any barriers where necessary.

2.3. Graph 2 illustrates a decrease in the number of looked after children since the end of Quarter 1, with 689 looked after children (this includes 70 separated children-formerly known as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) at the end of September 2025 (Q2). There has been gradual reduction in looked after children over the last 12 months.

Graph 2: Total number of Looked After Children over the last 4 quarters.

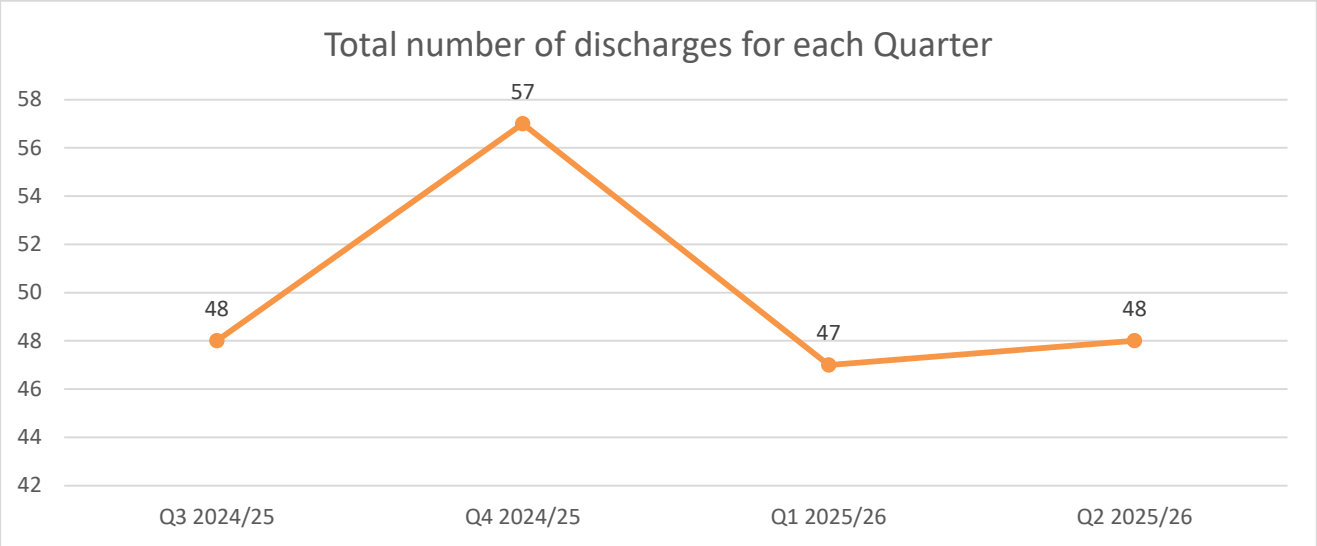


Graph 3: Total number of admissions for each Quarter.



2.4. There has been a total of 49 children admitted to care in Q2 which is a decrease on the previous quarter of 7. The admissions were made up of 5 sibling groups of 2 or 3 children, 23 single children and 15 separated children. This is an increase of 11 separated children since the last quarter. Of this cohort of children admitted to care, 25 were accommodated through Section 20 of the Children’s Act, 15 of which were separated migrant children, 9 were admitted to care through emergency orders and 13 were admitted to care through planned Care Proceedings, which is a decrease of 9 since the last quarter. The overall reduction in admissions over the last 12 months can be attributed to the impact the new initiatives outlined above, particularly from the CFIP service, which delivers evidence-based support and interventions to children and families subject to child protection planning.

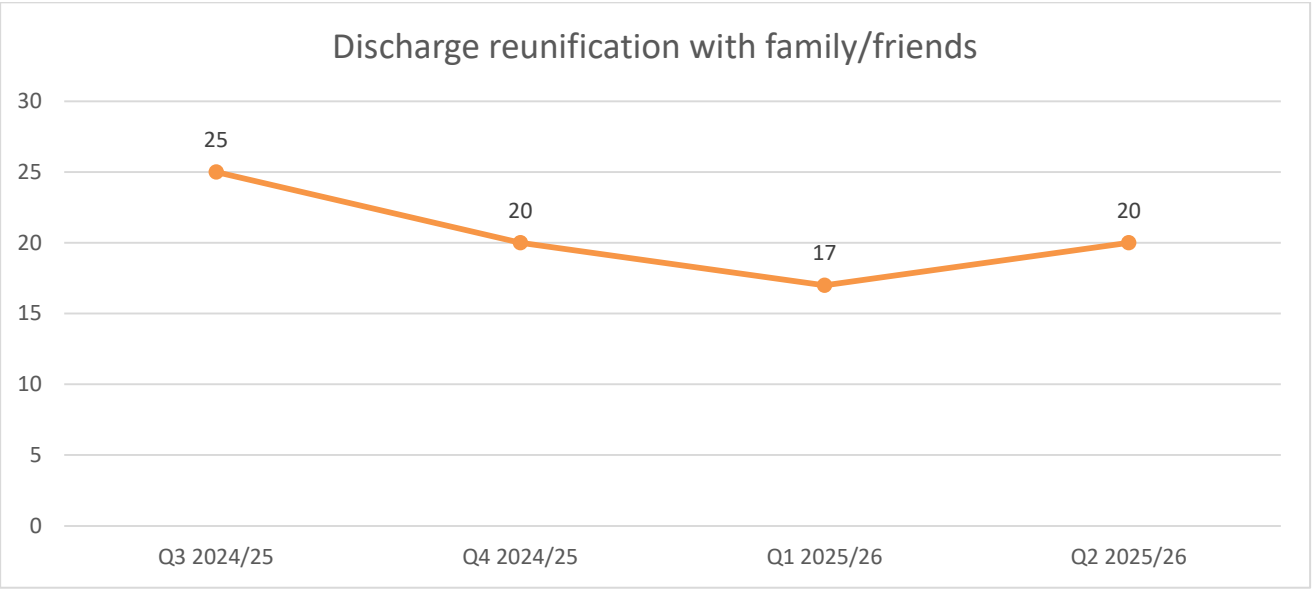
Graph 4: Total number of discharges for each Quarter



2.5. This data represents children who have left care because they have become 18 years old, have had a change in their legal status through being adopted or have had special guardianship, child arrangement or residence orders made, or have returned to their family networks. A total of 48 children were discharged from care over Q2.

2.6. As part of our approach to enable more children to live safely with their families, the service has been focused on supporting children to be reunited with their families or wider network, where it is possible to do so. In the last quarter 20 children were successfully reunified with family/friends. Graph five illustrates the number of reunifications achieved this year to date, which is showing an increase in this quarter. This increase is likely to be impacted positively by the work being undertaken by the reunification programme (Heading Home).

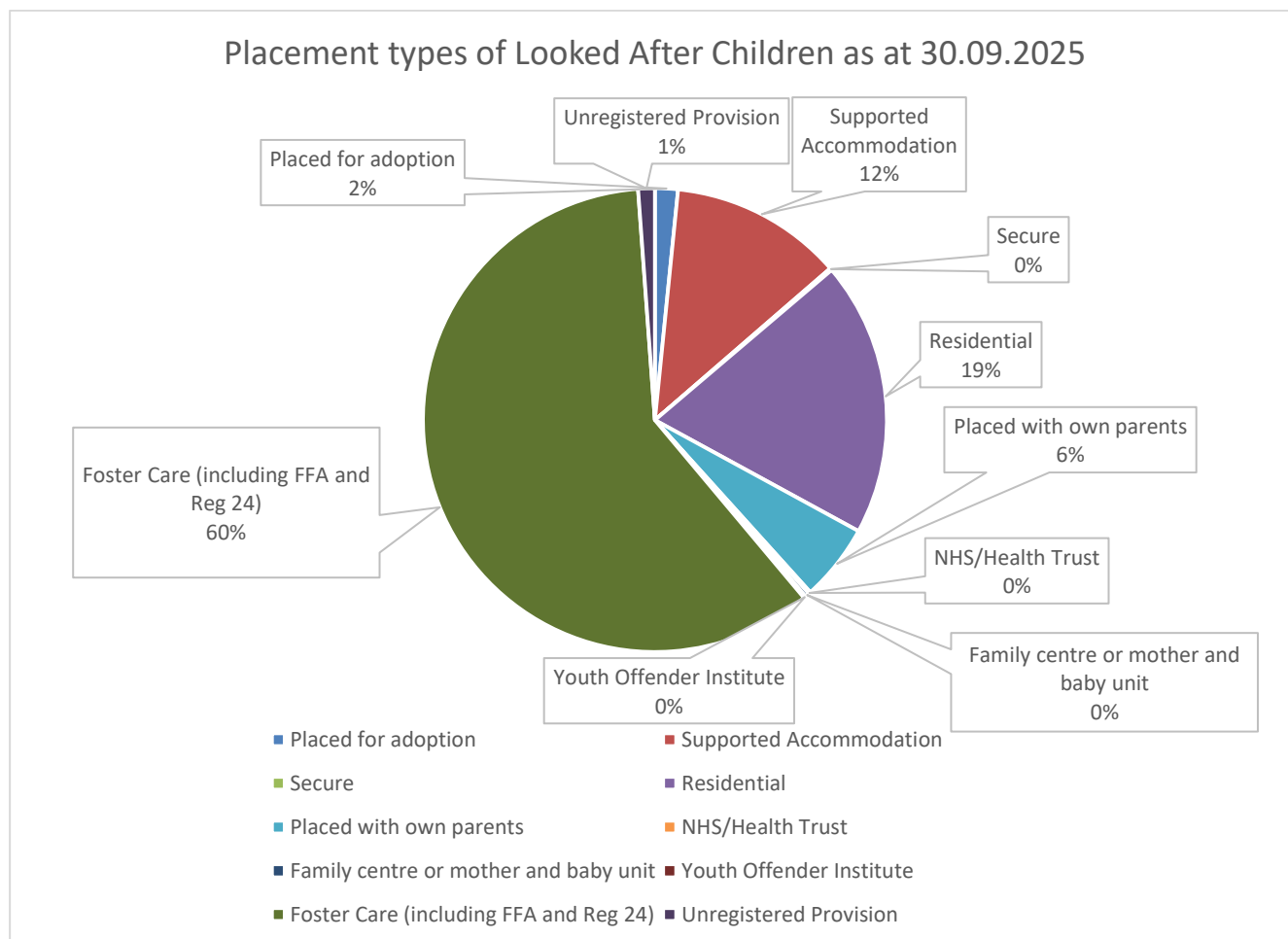
Graph 5: Number of discharges where Looked After Children were reunified with family and friends each Quarter.



3. Placements

3.1. ESCC's sufficiency strategy focuses on delivering a wide range of placements, in the right places, to meet the diverse needs of our children and young people. These include foster care (in house and independent fostering agencies), residential children's home (in house and private children's homes) supported lodgings and supported accommodation. Decisions about where children live are made with the child's best interests at the forefront, taking into account their emotional, physical, and educational needs, as well as any specific challenges they may face. The social work teams work teams, in collaboration with the commissioning service, work together to identify the best possible match for each child and home. Graph 6 provides an overview of the 'placement mix' at the end of Q2.

Graph 6: Details of the types of placements that Looked After Children are in at the end of Quarter 2:



3.2. A total of 413 children were living in foster care at the end of September 2025, this is a decrease of 13 since the last quarter. This makes up 60% of the overall total number of looked after children. Of that number, 263 (64%) were living with approved ESCC carers. This number includes 29 children who were placed long term with fully approved family and friends' carers. 4 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway. 97 children were living with external agency foster carers, and 1 child was placed with another Local Authority foster carer. At the end of the quarter, the number of children who were living with temporary approved family and friends foster carers was 48 which is a decrease of 1 since the last quarter.

3.3. There were 11 children placed for adoption at the end of September 2025 which has decreased by 4 since the last quarter. This is 2% of the overall total number of looked after children.

3.4. There were 91 young people living in supported accommodation and unregistered provision which is an increase of 2 since the previous quarter. This was 13% of the total number of looked after children. The figure of 91 included 6 children who were placed in unregistered provision, the majority of which were with providers who were in the process of registering with Ofsted. Of the 6 children living in unregistered placements there were 3 children who were under 16 years old. Of these 3, 1 provider caring for 2 children is awaiting registration with Ofsted, and 1 was a registered Children's home in Wales. These placements are only used in exceptional circumstances where no suitable alternative regulated provision is available. In these circumstances robust risk assessments and monitoring plans are made to ensure children are cared for safely.

3.5. At the end of September 2025, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased from 130 to 132. This represents 19% of all looked after children. Of these 132 children, 23 were living in ESCC run children's homes, and 109 were placed in external residential homes. This quarter has seen an increase in the number of children in agency children's homes of 2. Strenuous attempts are made to place children in families wherever possible and where children are placed in external residential homes the service remains committed to step the children down into family arrangements at the right time. In all cases the commissioning service attempts to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency placement. Rigorous negotiations on both quality and price are made when placement searches are made with external providers.

3.6. At the end of September there was 1 ESCC child placed in a Secure Children's Home. This child is placed locally within Lansdowne Secure Children's Home.

3.7. At the end of September there was 1 child remanded into youth detention accommodation, 1 child in Hospital and 2 children placed in mother and baby units.

3.8. The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC has increased from 34 to 37 since the last quarter. This represents 6% of all looked after children.

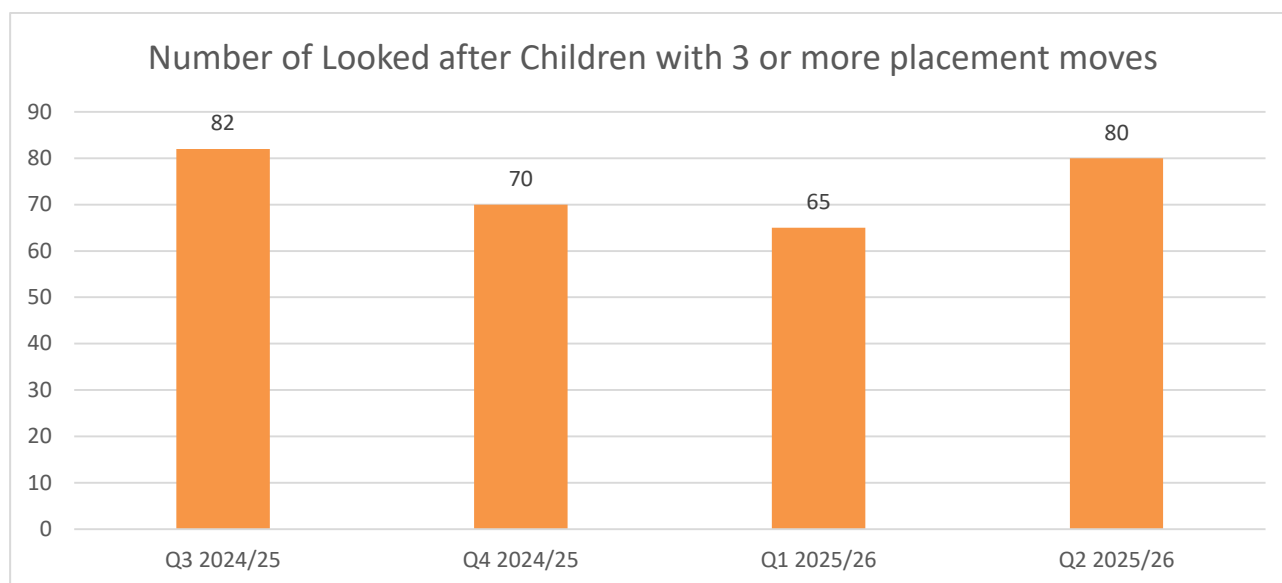
3.9. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a considerable impact on the Fostering Service's recruitment success generally. The number of fostering enquiries over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 254. The number of initial visits over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 64 which is the same as last year. The total number of approvals made were 29 and new placements were 44. An analysis of the data suggests that there are fewer numbers of potential foster carers making enquiries, but the calibre of the candidates shows them to be well informed and more likely to proceed to approval successfully. If you take into consideration that last year's data included the conversion of all supported lodgings providers, then this data shows a very significant upturn in the successful recruitment of foster carers.

The table below shows quarterly figures across previous years for comparison:

	Enquiries	Initial Visits (IV)	Approvals	Places
2023/24 Q3	54	8	15	25*
2024/25 Q3	69	18	12	17
2023/24 Q4	66	11	5	6
2024/25 Q4	68	26	6	12
2024/25 Q1	71	20	8	11
2025/26 Q1	55	6	6	9
2024/25 Q2	66	25	4	7
2025/26 Q2	62	14	5	6

* High figure due to conversions of SL providers

Graph 7: Number of Looked After Children with 3 or more placement moves for each quarter.



**Please note that this data is part of the Quarterly Reporting and not from Live data*

3.10. Graph 7 shows the trend in the number of looked after children with 3 or more placement moves. This has shown quite a steep increase in the number of children moving between placements more than 3 times this quarter. This is a worrying picture and is a result of the very challenging placement sufficiency issues nationally and locally.

3.11. ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated migrant children. The number of separated migrant children who were looked after was 70 at the end of Q2, an increase of 3 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 150 separated migrant children who were Care Leavers aged over 18 during this period, which is a decrease of 1 from the previous quarter (141 18–20-year-olds, a decrease of 5, and 9 21–25-year-olds an increase of 4 since the last quarter). This makes up approximately one third of all Care Leavers in ESCC.

3.12. The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders (CAO) was 352, and the number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was 462. Our rate of children cared for within their family networks under CAOs and SGO's is significantly higher than other areas and demonstrates our commitment to supporting children being cared for within their family networks wherever possible.

3.13. There was 1 complaint received from a Looked After Child during this period. There was also 1 complaint received from a Care Leaver.

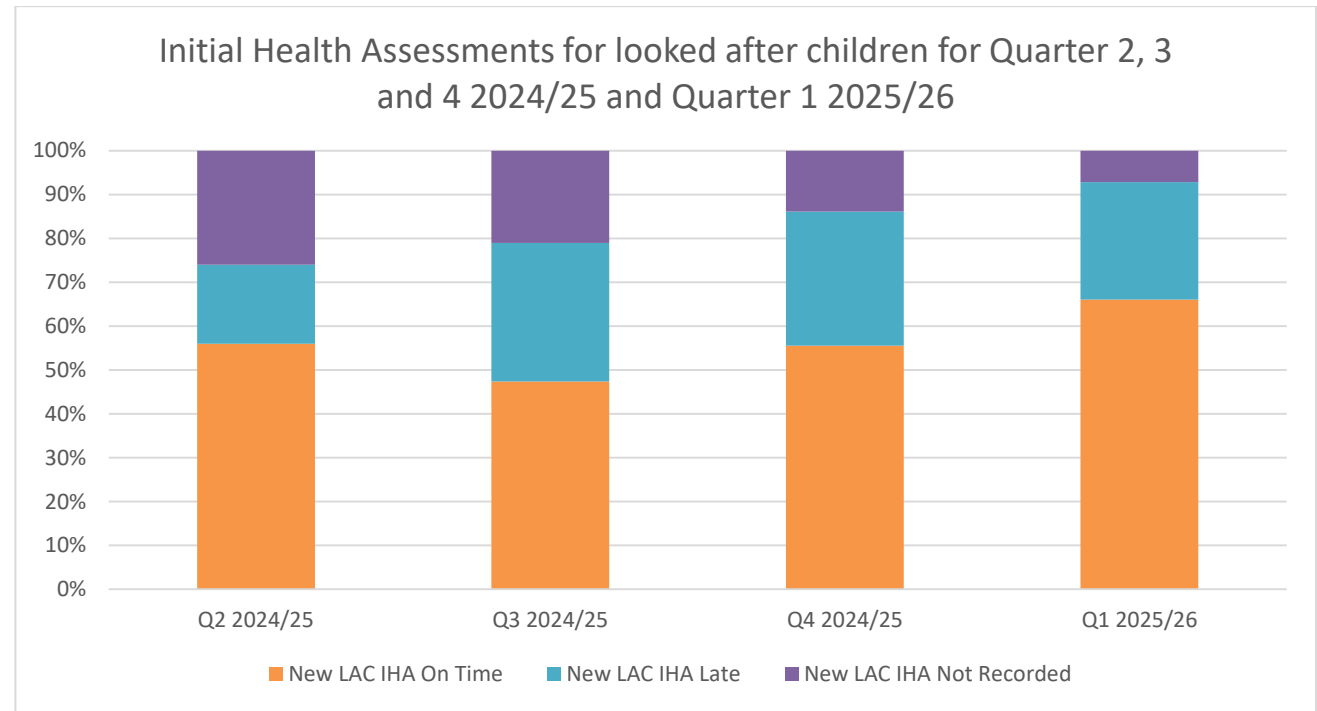
4. Health

4.1 All looked after children require an initial health assessment (IHA) within the first 20 days of becoming looked after; and a subsequent review every 6 months after the IHA if they are under 5 years old, and 12 months if they are over 5 years old. These health assessments are used to inform each child's care plan and necessary actions to be taken forward to improve their health outcomes.

4.2 The bar graph (Graph 8) below shows the percentage of IHA's undertaken within 20 days, post 20 days, or not recorded. There has been close monitoring of this area of performance this year and it is pleasing to see the improvements made to date, although there continues much to be done in improving the overall timeliness. The primary reason for IHA's being rescheduled was when the first

appointment could not be attended by the child, the carer, social worker or parent. These appointments are prioritised and rescheduled, although they can fall outside of the 20-day target. For our children placed outside of the local authority area there can be challenges in accessing IHAs within the 20-day timescale as this requires communication with Looked After Children Nursing teams in those areas. A number of adolescent children decline IHAs.

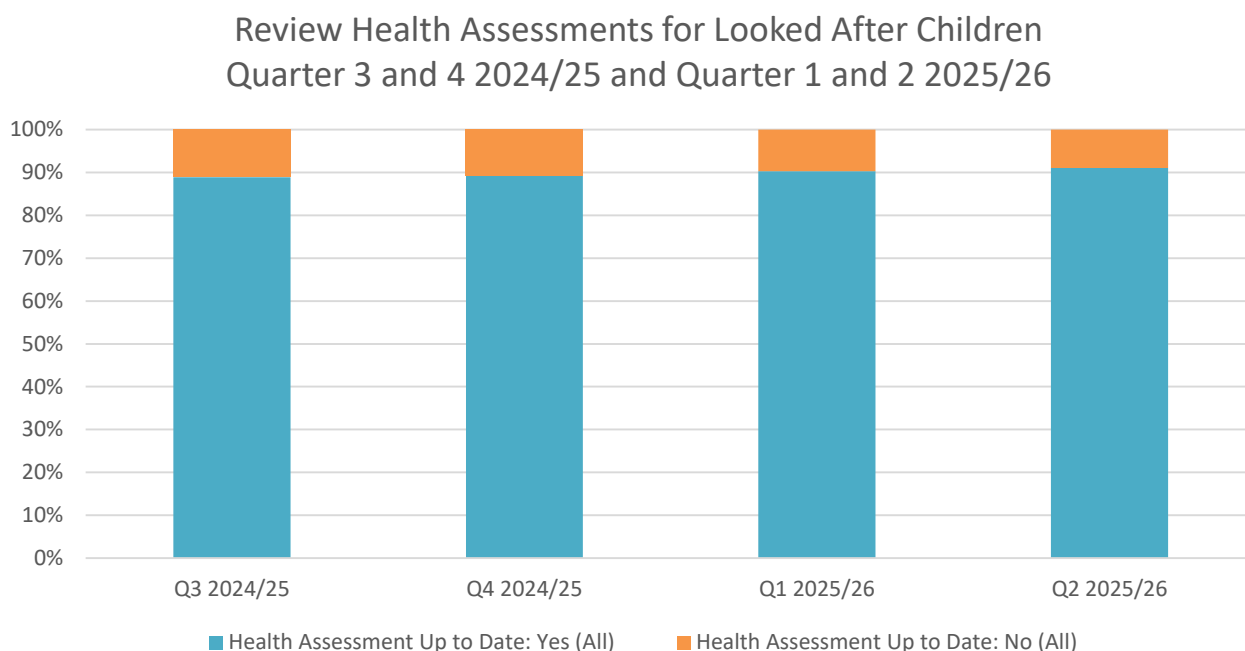
Graph 8: Percentage of Looked After Children with an Initial Health Assessment for Quarters 1,2, 3, and 4 for 2024/25.



**Please note that this Data is obtained from the Locality Dashboard and not from Live data*

4.3 Bar chart 9 below shows the percentage trend of children looked after with an up-to-date Review of their Health Assessment (RHA's). This performance remains strong even though there are a group of older children who chose to decline to take part in their review health assessments at times.

Graph 9: Percentage of Looked After Children with a Review Health Assessment for last 4 quarters.



**Please note that this Data is obtained from the LAC Dashboard and not from Live data*

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1. The combined picture of an overall reduction in the number of looked after children, the reduction in children being admitted to care, the increase in children being discharged from care and the increases in children returning to live at home or with family and friends is a very pleasing development. It indicates that the considerable investment made by ESCC into initiatives to support children and their families is having a very positive impact.

5.2. However, the sufficiency issues the service is facing remain extremely challenging and have impacted on the number of children who are moving placements 3 or more times. This is a very concerning development this quarter and will need to be closely monitored. The number of children who are living in fostering families has reduced overall which is reflective of the significant national challenge fostering recruitment is facing. The number of children living in supported accommodation has remained largely the same, but there has been an increase again in the number of children living in residential care. This is an area of focus for the service, as ESCC has a higher number of children living in residential accommodation than our comparator Local Authorities. This overall increase is a key factor in the significant budgetary pressures faced by the Children's Services department.

5.3. We will continue to focus on managing demand through earlier support and interventions (particularly through Connected Families) and our Valuing Care approach, aimed at achieving step downs from high-cost residential provision to family placements wherever possible.

CAROLYN FAIR
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott
Tel: 01273 481274
Email: Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 16 October 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Separated Migrant Children Report

Purpose: To provide an overview of the East Sussex County Council's (ESCC) work with Separated Migrant Children (also known as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children)

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the report.

1. Background Information

1.1 Separated Migrant children are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) under the age of 18 who arrive in the United Kingdom without a parent or legal guardian and seek asylum in their own right. As of March 2024, there were approximately 7,380 UASC being looked after by local authorities in England, representing around 9% of all looked-after children. The majority are aged 16–17, and their numbers have generally increased in recent years, driven by global instability and rising migration flows.

1.2 Legally, separated migrant children fall under both Immigration and Child Welfare legislation. Under UK immigration rules (paragraph 352ZD) and the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009 (Section 55), the Home Office has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in its care. Concurrently, local authorities have statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 to assess, support, and accommodate separated migrant children as children in need when they become looked-after children. Where the age of an asylum seeker is in dispute, local authorities are responsible for conducting formal, 'Merton-compliant' age assessments.

1.3 The Home Office is primarily responsible for processing asylum claims and managing initial safeguarding and placement through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which mandates the redistribution of UASC across local authorities to ensure an equitable share of responsibility. Local authorities are then responsible for delivering ongoing support, including suitable accommodation, education, health services, and protection from harm or exploitation.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 East Sussex County Council developed a specialist Separated Migrant Children's Team in 2017/18, the team operates as part of the wider Through Care Service. Children's Services have adopted the terminology of *Separated Migrant Children* in place of the more traditional term *Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)*. This change aligns with the national 'Language that Cares' agenda, which encourages the use of respectful, person-centred language and a reduction in the use of acronyms. It is noted, however, that the term UASC remains in use in some statutory literature and across other local authorities.

2.2 The team currently consists of 5 full-time social workers, 7 personal advisors, 2 case workers, and one education lead. Within the broader Through Care Service, a participation lead

and specialist mental health nurse also contribute to the holistic support of the children and young people. Leadership and oversight are provided by 2 part-time practice managers, reporting to the Operational Manager for Through care Services. This staffing structure enables the delivery of comprehensive and specialist services to a highly vulnerable group of children and young people.

2.3 The majority of referrals into the service come via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which was established to support Kent County Council in distributing responsibility for separated migrant children across the UK. The team continues to receive regular referral requests through the scheme, ensuring that local quotas are met while maintaining capacity for high-quality care and support. Since the beginning of the year, there have been 4 spontaneous arrivals, including young people who presented directly to police, were found by Border Force, or arrived on school trips and subsequently made asylum claims. As at the time of writing, the team was working with 76 children under 18, with 3 new arrivals expected week commencing 29 September 2025. In addition, 141 care leavers remain open to the team, and a further 9 young people aged over 21 are receiving continued support due to ongoing vulnerability or complex needs. Currently separated migrant children represent 11% of our total looked after children and 33% of our care leaver cohort.

2.4 Children under the age of 16 are typically placed with foster carers, while those aged 16 to 18 are accommodated in supported housing according to their assessed needs. Most placements are within East Sussex, facilitating effective oversight and support. However, a number of young people are placed out of county due to safeguarding considerations, family connections, or cultural and religious needs better met by placements elsewhere. The service supports young people from approximately 14 different countries. The majority originate from Sudan, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Vietnam, Iran, and Iraq. There has been a notable reduction in Afghan arrivals and a slight increase in young people from Eritrea. The largest groups continue to come from Sudan, and Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq, and Syria. New arrivals remain predominantly male and aged 16–17, but there has been a recent increase in female arrivals, particularly from Somalia. This culturally diverse cohort brings varying needs and experiences that inform the service's support strategies.

2.5 In terms of age verification, the team has completed 2 full age assessments and 4 brief enquiries this year. While the National Age Assessment Board (NAAB) continues to be used, significant delays have necessitated a return to in-house assessments in some cases. The closure of local asylum hotels in summer 2023 led to a temporary reduction in age assessments; however, there has been a recent resurgence in age-disputed cases during summer 2025, impacting team capacity.

2.6 Young people's asylum claims are processed by the Home Office. A caseworker is appointed and conducts an initial interview with each child/young person, interpreters are organised by the Home Office and a legal representative can also attend. If young people are granted asylum, this will generally mean that they will receive 5 years 'Leave to Remain'. After 5 years, they can apply to settle in the UK. If they are not granted asylum they will be asked to leave the UK (voluntarily, with support, or forcibly). Young people have the right to appeal this decision. The young people in this group often require intensive support, particularly those with complex needs, and Social Workers and Personal Advisors continue to provide assistance with education, skill-building, and preparation for independence. If young people are not granted asylum the team have to complete human rights assessments to identify whether the young person is still eligible for support or not.

2.7 Following the partial repeal of the Illegal Migration Act in summer 2024, the Home Office resumed processing previously paused asylum claims. This led to a number of young people in the service finally receiving initial decisions on their asylum applications. In August 2025, the Home Office resumed substantive processing of Syrian asylum claims, and the Syrian cohort in the service is now being invited for interviews. Since January 2025, there have been significant delays in asylum decision-making following interviews. More than one-third of those interviewed this year are still awaiting an outcome. Of those who have received decisions, outcomes are evenly split between grants and refusals, with the latter group progressing to appeals. The appeal process itself is facing delays, with wait times currently ranging from one to 3 years. Of the appeals heard so far, approximately half have been successful, while the remainder have been refused, contributing to

the growing number of young people facing 'All Rights Exhausted' status and requiring Human Rights Assessments to determine ongoing support.

2.8 The service has a statutory obligation to provide accommodation and subsistence to care leavers under the age of 21 who are appealing negative asylum decisions. This group has reached its highest level since the team's formation, currently comprising 27 young people, 20% of the care leaver cohort. Those turning 18 during their appeal process do not have access to usual 'move on' housing routes, placing additional strain on the service to fund and source suitable accommodation. Compounding this, Home Office funding for each young person reduces by 70% once they turn 18, meaning the cost of local placements is often not covered. Refugee care leavers over 18 increasingly turn to private house-share rentals due to a lack of supported options. The Local Offer rent and deposit scheme has seen a significant increase in uptake as a result. Five Human Rights Assessments have been completed in 2025 for young people who have become 'All Rights Exhausted' following the conclusion of their asylum appeals.

2.9 The service operates *Welcome to the UK* sessions which continue to be well received and effective in supporting newly arrived young people. A third follow-up session has recently been piloted, focusing on additional topics such as substance misuse and healthy relationships. These sessions have been highlighted by the Refugee Council as a model of best practice for other local authorities to follow. The service also runs weekly lunch groups for care leavers not in education or training, on Tuesdays in Hastings and Thursdays in Eastbourne. These groups combine English language support, careers advice, mental health input, and include peer-led cooking activities to build independence skills and promote social connection.

2.10 Work continues to broaden education access, including a new partnership with a local college to deliver a summer programme tailored to young people who are not in mainstream education or who arrived late in the academic year. Health partnerships have also developed, including access to blood screening during Initial Health Assessments (IHAs), which enables timely intervention in cases of blood-borne diseases. The team continues to monitor and respond to emerging health risks, such as misuse of prescription medications like Pregabalin. Young people continue to access *My View*, a therapeutic service from the Refugee Council. Feedback remains positive, with many reporting a beneficial impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. In addition, a health and wellbeing fund is available to young people to help them access hobbies, sports memberships, or equipment, and contributes to broader wellbeing and community integration. Religious and cultural celebrations are also actively supported, with events such as Eid and Christmas parties organised for young people, and assistance provided to access places of worship where needed.

2.11 The national discourse surrounding migration has had a noticeable impact on the wellbeing of some young people in East Sussex. A number have reported experiencing discrimination, including verbal abuse and physical assaults, these have been reported to Police. Despite these challenges, there are also encouraging examples of community and public support. The service continues to monitor areas of community tension and is working in partnership with the police and safer communities teams to strengthen local support strategies.

2.12 The service works closely with local migrant support services for adults to ensure a consistent and joined-up approach to community support, especially for care leavers. The team has continued to support unaccompanied minors from Ukraine and facilitated access to a wide range of social and recreational activities. These have included cycling, rock climbing, and football sessions with Brighton & Hove Albion, alongside a third successful residential visit to Jamie's Farm in spring 2025.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

CAROLYN FAIR

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Sally Carnie

Tel. No. 07876 037264

Email: sally.carnie@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 16 October 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Annual Report of Looked After Children Services

Purpose: To outline the performance of the Looked After Children's Service between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the Annual Report of the Looked After Children Service.

1. Background

1.1 The Annual Report is attached as Appendix 1.

2. Supporting information

2.1 During the course of 2024-25 a total of 908 children were looked after by ESCC, an increase of 20 compared to the previous year. At the end of the year there were 688 children in care, 31 more than the previous year. This increase was driven mainly by fewer numbers of children leaving care, and children remaining in care for longer.

2.2 We have continued to see high levels of complex presentation across children's mental health, neurodiversity, behaviours that challenge and complex family dynamics. These needs intersect with poor school attendance and/or children who are not able to access a suitable school place.

2.3 28% of the children in our care identified as being from an ethnic minority or mixed heritage background. 128 were separated migrant children under the age of 18 and 193 separated migrant care leavers aged 18+. 44 children came to us through the National Transfer Scheme, and the remainder were spontaneous arrivals via police involvement or directly from Newhaven Port.

2.4 We continue to find family-based homes for most children in our care and have seen very positive activity across fostering recruitment. 2024-25 saw the highest number of fostering enquiries in five years and a strong conversion rate of 33% from home visit to approval. This led to 30 new fostering households being approved in 2024/25 with 47 places, which resulted in a net increase of 17 fostering households and 25 places. Of all our children living with foster carers as at 31/3/25, 76% were placed in-house, significantly higher than the national average for 2023/24 of 60% in-house utilisation.

2.5 However, in line with national and regional trends we are placing more children in agency residential placements and more of these placements are located outside of the county. This movement is driven both by the increase in children's complex presentation and a national shortage of fostering households. This means that some children who could be placed with foster carers are living in residential children's homes which is a trend that we are working hard to reverse.

2.6 Significantly fewer children have experienced 3 or more placement moves during the year, this reflects careful matching and the skilled support provided to carers. Our in-house fostering service and commissioning team provide critical oversight to ensure the quality and sustainability of homes for our children.

2.7 Adoption South East placed 82 children for adoption in 2024-25, 21 of these were from East Sussex which was an increase of 6 children on the previous year.

2.8 Our in-house Residential Children's Homes, Children's Disability Homes and Lansdowne Secure Children's Home have been working closely together to align practice and share

expertise. In 2024-25 we increased occupancy across all homes and are caring for children with increasingly complex needs. All homes are currently rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

2.9 Health outcomes for children in care are known to be poorer than for their peers. In East Sussex we work closely with Health colleagues to address this inequality. Initial and Review Health Assessments remain an area of focus alongside the improvement in dental care. Immunisation data available at the time of writing indicates that 81% of children had received their expected vaccinations, however this is being further scrutinised as we believe the actual figure to be higher. Our Looked After Children Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (LACAMHS) offers valuable consultation and informs the therapeutic model in our residential children's homes. Completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs) has shown significant improvement following the introduction of a new process. In 2025-26 we will be working with Public Health to address learning from the My Health My School survey.

2.10 The voice of children, young people, their families and the people who care for them continue to sit at the heart of our service. The Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council offer valuable challenge to us all whilst also supporting with interviews and representing our council at regional and national events.

2.11 Children's Social Care is responding to pressures across the system to ensure that families are supported at an early stage and that where children are in care, they live locally, with carers who can meet their individual needs and who support them to 'head home' where this is safe. We continue to embed the Valuing Care approach which is helping to shape conversations with children's networks and bringing energy to care planning. The Placements and Commissioning Service is bringing increased challenge alongside positive market engagement and working with the Regional Care Cooperative to support sufficiency.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 Overall performance is encouraging, remaining consistent despite the demand pressures. However, the increase in agency residential placements, particularly high-cost placements for children with complex needs is putting unsustainable pressure on the budget. The service is attempting to mitigate this through robust scrutiny of costs, a focus on Heading Home (reunification within the family network) and building creative care plans whilst maintaining a focus on children's needs and delivering safe services. Children's Social Care Reform and Regionalisation offer exciting opportunities to develop practice and share skills.

3.2 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of the report.

CAROLYN FAIR

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Fiona Lewis

Email: fiona.lewis@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Looked After Children Annual Report 2024 - 2025



Looked After Children's Annual Report 2024-25

Fiona Lewis

Head of Service for the Fostering Service, Placements & Commissioning Service,
Residential and Provider Services

Sally Carnie

Head of Service for the Looked After Children Service, Through Care Service, Virtual
School and Adoption South East Service

October 2025



Contents

[Slide 4. Young people's foreword](#)
[Slide 5. Summary](#)
[Slide 6. Statutory responsibilities within Looked After Children's Services](#)
[Slide 7. Looked After Children's Services in East Sussex](#)

Key Performance Indicators

[Slide 8. Rates of Looked After Children](#)
[Slide 9. Profile of Looked After Children in East Sussex](#)
[Slide 10. Becoming Looked After, Leaving Care and Legal Status](#)
[Slide 11. Our Separated Migrant Children \(previously UASC\)](#)
[Slide 12. Where our children are living](#)
[Slide 13. Children Looked After Through the Disability Service](#)
[Slide 14. Key performance indicators 2024-25 ESCC performance data](#)
[Slide 15. Key performance indicators 2024-25](#)
[Slide 16. Family Finding and Adoption Support](#)
[Slide 17. Key Performance Indicators – Health](#)
[Slide 18. Results from the My Health My School Survey 2023-24](#)
[Slide 19. Mental and Emotional Wellbeing Annual figures and update](#)
[Slide 20. Key Performance Indicators – Education](#)
[Slide 21. The Safety of our Looked After Children](#)
[Slide 22. My Voice Matters](#)
[Slide 23. What the key performance indicators are telling us](#)

Corporate Parenting Panel

[Slide 24. Corporate Parenting Panel](#)
[Slide 25. How we Evaluate Practice Audit Activity 2024-25](#)

Service Updates

[Slide 26. Key Activity Across LAC Teams](#)
[Slide 27. Key Activity Through Care Services](#)
[Slides 28 & 29. Separated Migrant young people](#)
[Slide 30. Health Offer for Children in Care](#)
[Slide 31. Education & Development Support](#)
[Slide 32. Our Residential Children's Homes](#)
[Slide 33. Lansdowne Secure Children's Home \(LSCH\)](#)
[Slides 34 & 35. Placements & Commissioning](#)
[Slides 36 & 37. Fostering Recruitment and Retention](#)
[Slide 38. Children in Care Council](#)
[Slide 39. Care Leavers Council](#)

Financial implications

[Slide 40. LAC Service Budget](#)
[Slide 41. Pressures](#)
[Slide 42. Mitigation Measures and Impact](#)
[Slide 43. Priorities for 2025 – 2026](#)
[Slide 44. Children's Services Annual Reports 2024/25](#)

Hi there,

We at the **East Sussex Care Leavers Council (CLC)** wanted to share a few opening remarks and reflections for the 2025 Annual Report you are about to read through. Members of the CLC were given the opportunity ahead of this finished report to consult on sections to include and feedback on the information shared where possible. We were very grateful for this opportunity of consultation within the report as we strongly believe this to be foundational for accurate and empathetic impact reporting by including the views and experiences of children in care and those leaving it within the report.

In the report, we were interested to see that out of the 688 individuals currently being looked after by East Sussex, there were a higher amount of boys entering care than girls. Additionally, for the Key Performance Indicators for the current year we were interested to see how the performance improved in varying areas such as the % of former relevant young people aged 19-21 in education, employment or training but in other areas for that same age bracket of former relevant young people in suitable accommodation, performance has decreased.

As for the priorities for East Sussex for 2025/26, the CLC welcomes many of the priorities mentioned and would be interested to see their implementation in the coming year. While the priorities were welcomed, members of the CLC expressed concerns for the feasibility of some priorities such as the new Permanence Lead Practitioner role so we would be curious to hear more details about this when possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read through our foreword and I hope you find the Annual Report an interesting read!

Written by DW with contributions and reflections from members of the East Sussex Care Leaver Council

Summary

This report provides an overview of services for the children in our care.

It provides a profile of the children we care for, how their needs are met and their journey through care. The report includes information about our Separated Migrant Children.

The report outlines the services we provide and considers how the experience of children in East Sussex compares to the wider national picture.

Finally, the report outlines key developments over the past 12 months and our future priorities

The report should be read alongside the individual service reports appended to the end of this document.

Statutory responsibilities within Looked After Children's Services

A child is 'looked after' by the local authority if they have been provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours, or if they have been made subject to a Care or Placement Order

The Local Authority has statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care; to provide suitable accommodation and support and to ensure that their health and education needs are met. These are Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

Other agencies, including police, education and health services also have statutory responsibilities towards children in care

Children in care must have a Care Plan which is reviewed regularly by an Independent Reviewing Officer

The Local Authority must consider the wishes and feelings of the child, their parents and other relevant people when making decisions

Looked After Children's Services in East Sussex

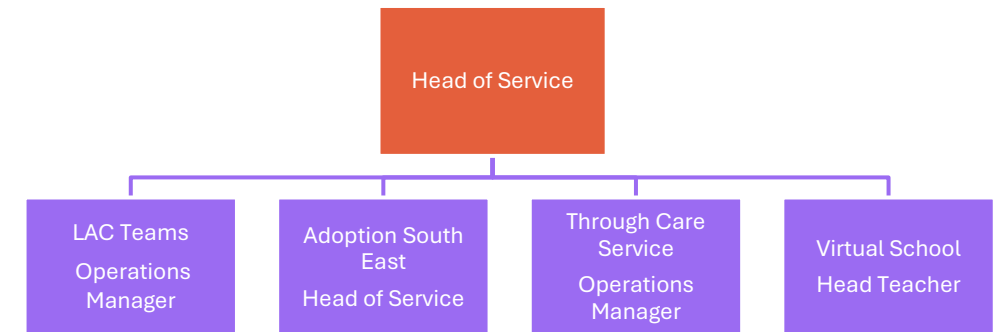
East Sussex Children's Services has 3 Looked After Children (LAC) Teams and 2 Through Care Teams with 8 social workers / senior social workers in each team. The Through Care Service also has 19 Personal Advisors (PAs) who support Care Leavers. The average caseload for a Looked After Children's Social Worker in East Sussex is 17 children.

The Head of Adoption South East and the Virtual School are embedded in our Management Team, ensuring a holistic approach to children's journeys.

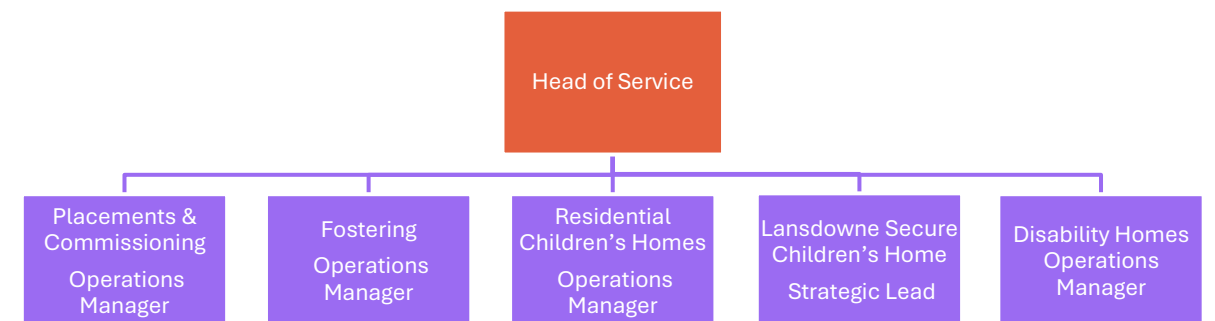
Commissioning and Provider Services work alongside the social work teams to ensure that the homes and services that we provide for children in our care are safe, local, and share our ambition for children to access opportunities and experiences which lay strong foundations for their future. This partnership approach to service delivery for looked after children drives positive outcomes and effective use of resources.

East Sussex has a robust in-house Fostering Service, 4 open Residential Children's Homes, 2 homes for Children with Disabilities and a Secure Children's Home.

Data for Looked After Children is complex and not all data was available at the time of writing. Our Digital Strategy is contributing to enhanced confidence and analysis of data as we move in to 2025-26.



LAC, Through Care, Adoption and Virtual School Teams



Placements, Commissioning Residential and Secure Services

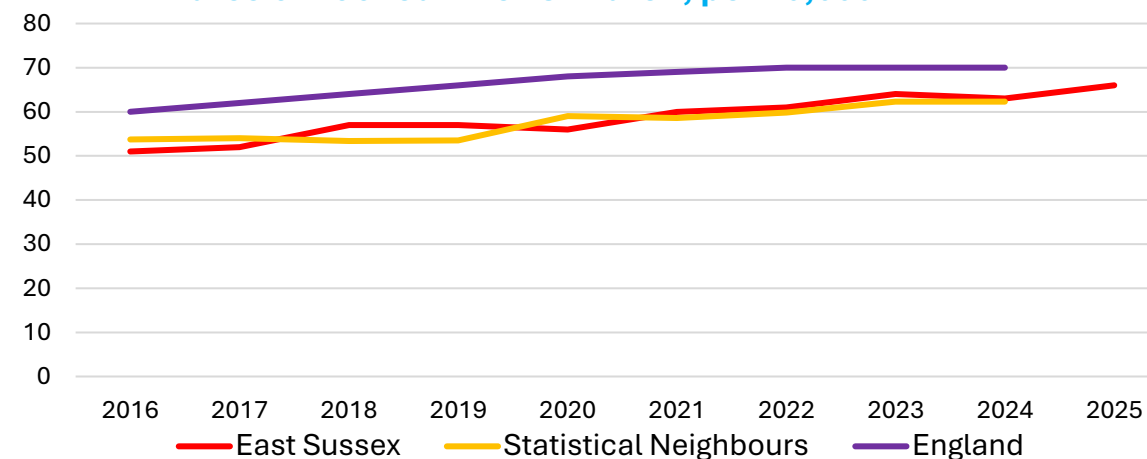
Rates of Looked After Children

The number of children in care in East Sussex has increased since last year but remains below IDACI. Whilst admissions to care increased only slightly, fewer children left care than in previous years

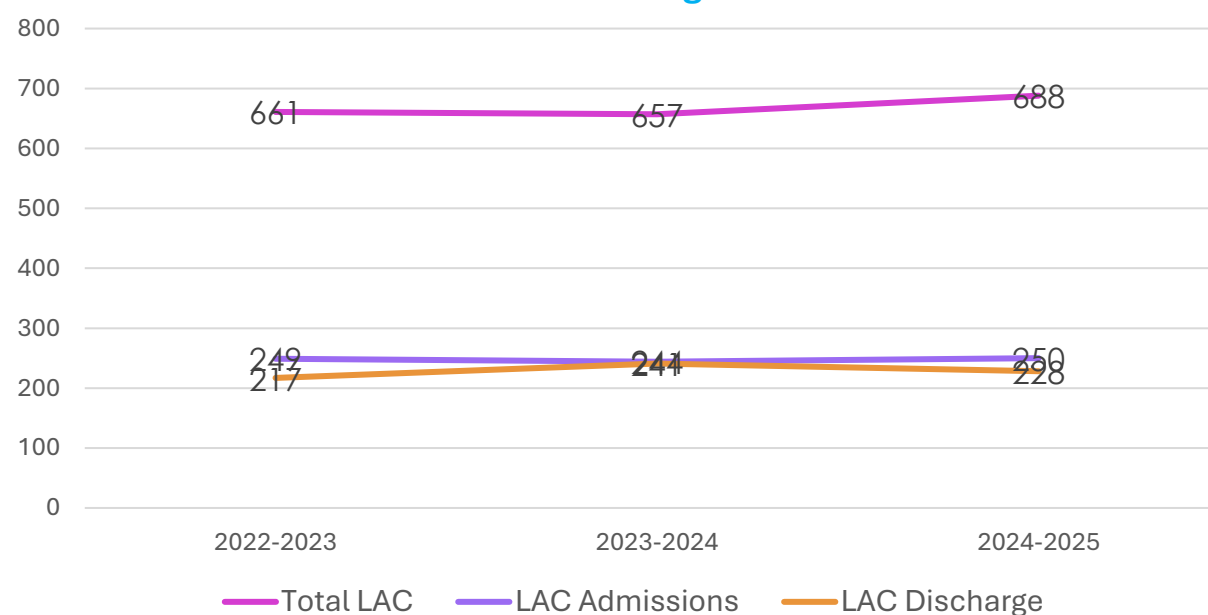
There were more children in care than for the previous 2 years

Indicative data for 2025 suggests that the rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 in East Sussex will remain in line with statistical neighbours and below the England rate

Rates of Looked After Children, per 10,000



ESCC Admissions and Discharge from Care

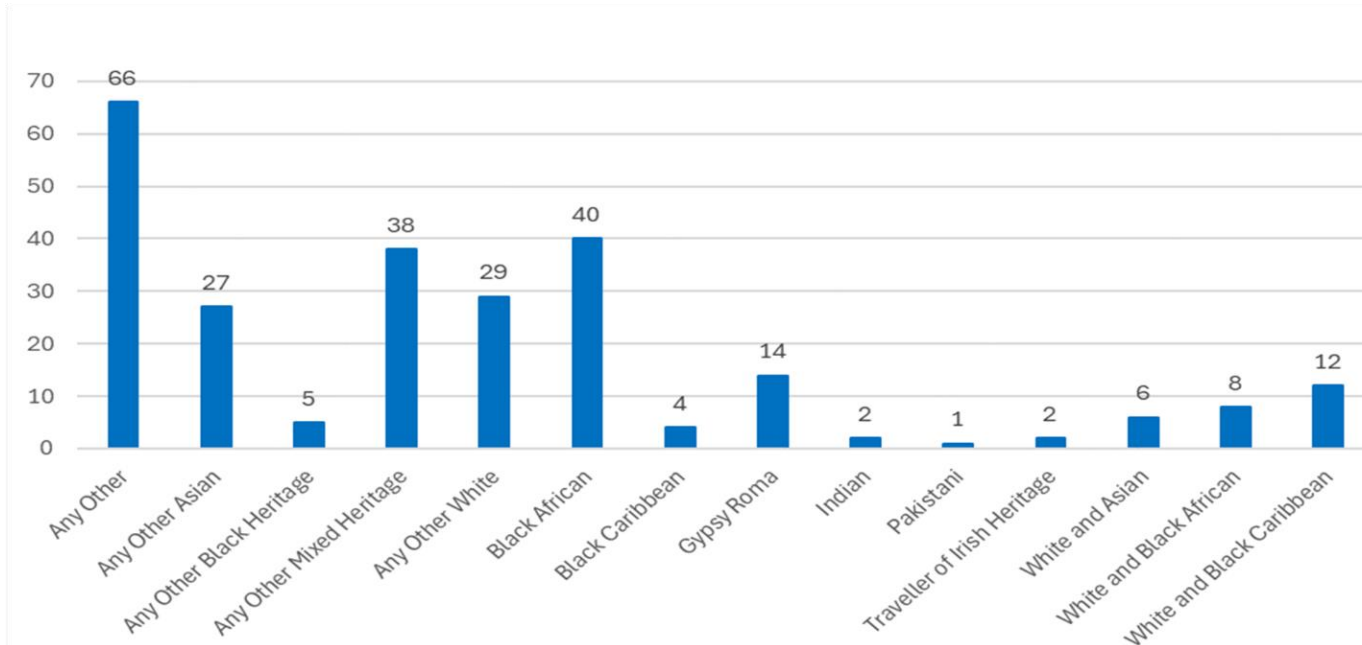
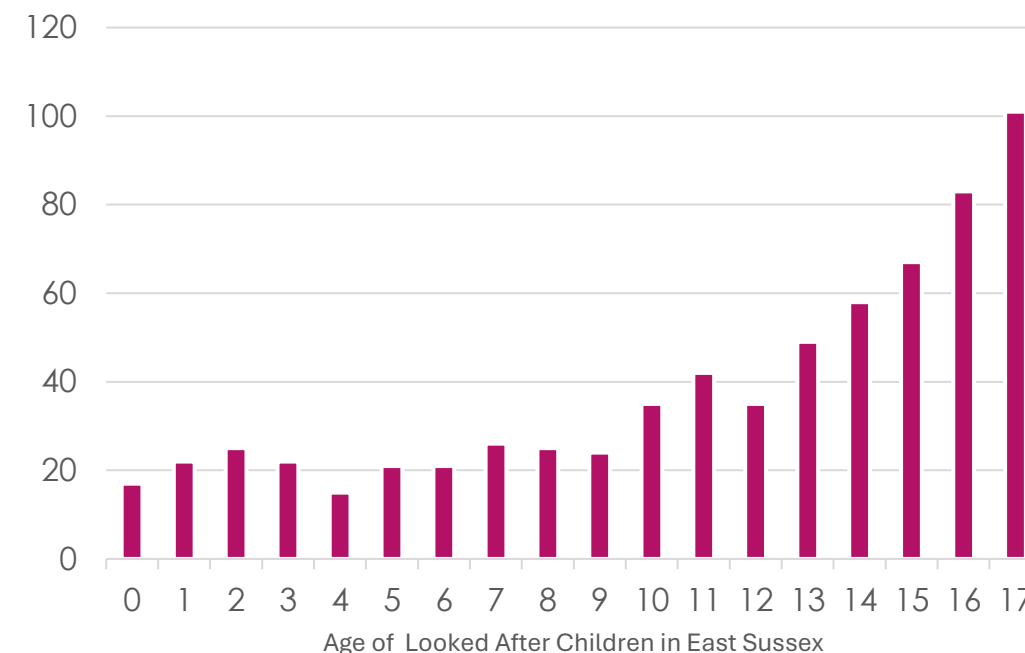
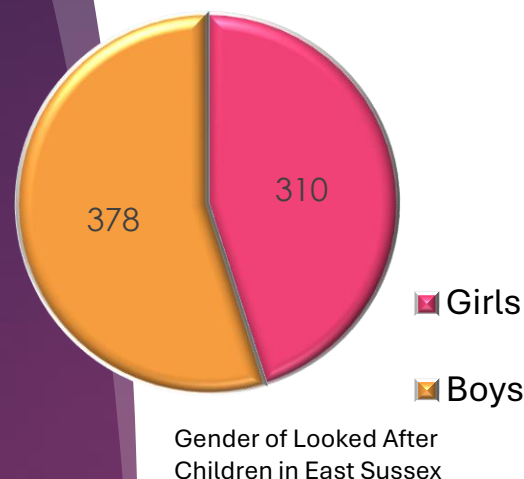


Profile of Looked After Children in East Sussex

As in previous years we have more boys in our care than girls. There are more children aged 13+ who are looked after than the younger age group.

Most of the children in our care identify as White British, this reflects the general population across East Sussex.

28% of our Looked After Children identified as being from an ethnic minority background. These children represent a diverse range of cultures and ethnicities.



Becoming Looked After, Leaving Care and Legal Status

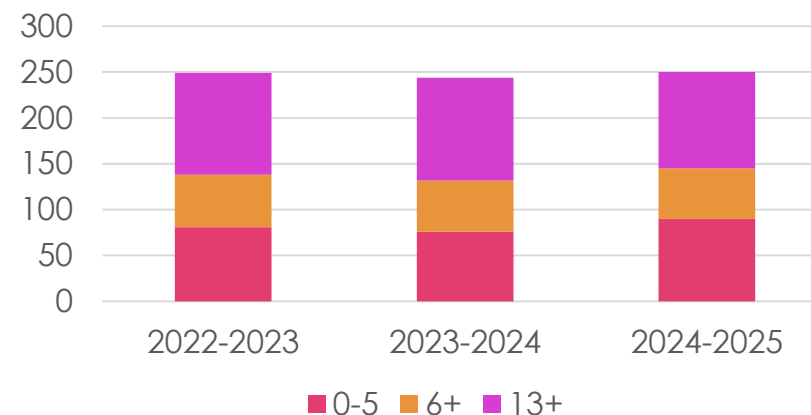
908 children came in and/or left our care during the year which was a net increase of 20 children compared with 2023-24. This reflected significantly higher activity levels across the service.

In contrast to previous years, more younger children were admitted to care than children aged 13+. Younger children were also more likely to remain in care than in previous years.

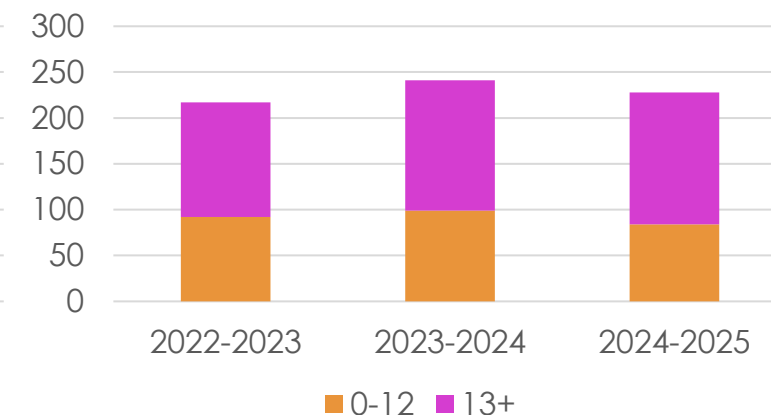
60% of children were looked after under a Care Order or Care and Placement Order compared to 26% of children cared for under Section 20.

14% of children were subject to an Interim Care Order.

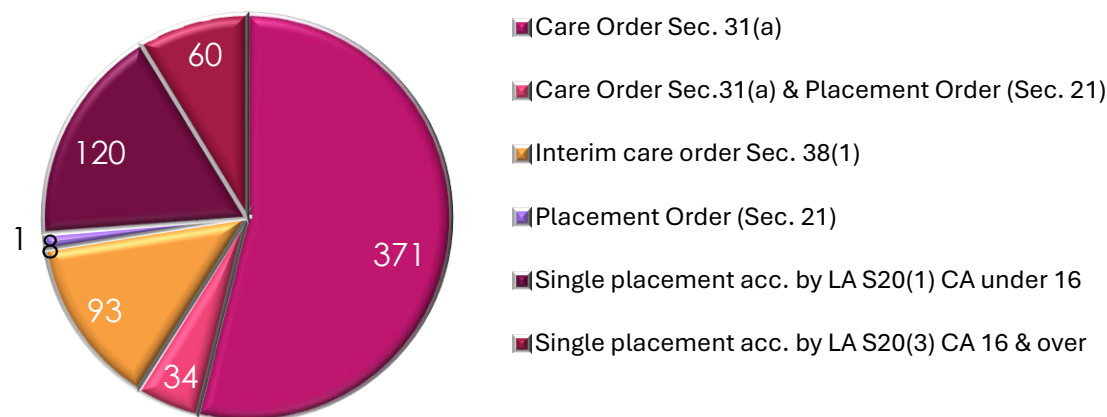
Age Profile of Children on Admission



Age Profile of Children Leaving Care



Legal Status of Children in Care in East Sussex



Our Separated Migrant Children

(previously UASC)

East Sussex County Council cared for 128 Separated Migrant Children under the age of 18 during 2024-25, this compared to 118 in 2023-24.

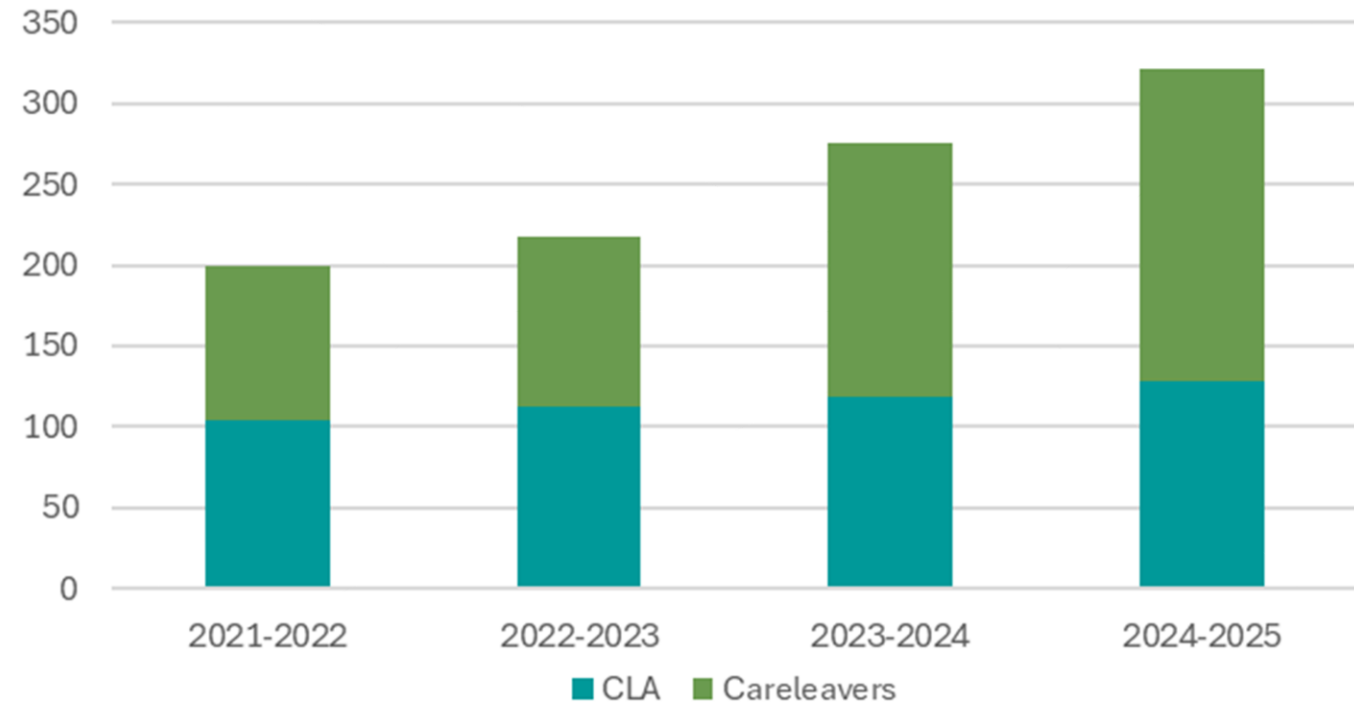
In addition, there were 193 Separated Migrant Care Leavers aged 18+ which is an increase of 36 from the previous year.

Our Separated Migrant Children were mainly male; 89% were aged 16 or over and the youngest was aged 14.

During 2024-2025 44 young people came to East Sussex through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the remainder were spontaneous arrivals via Police involvement or directly from Newhaven Port.

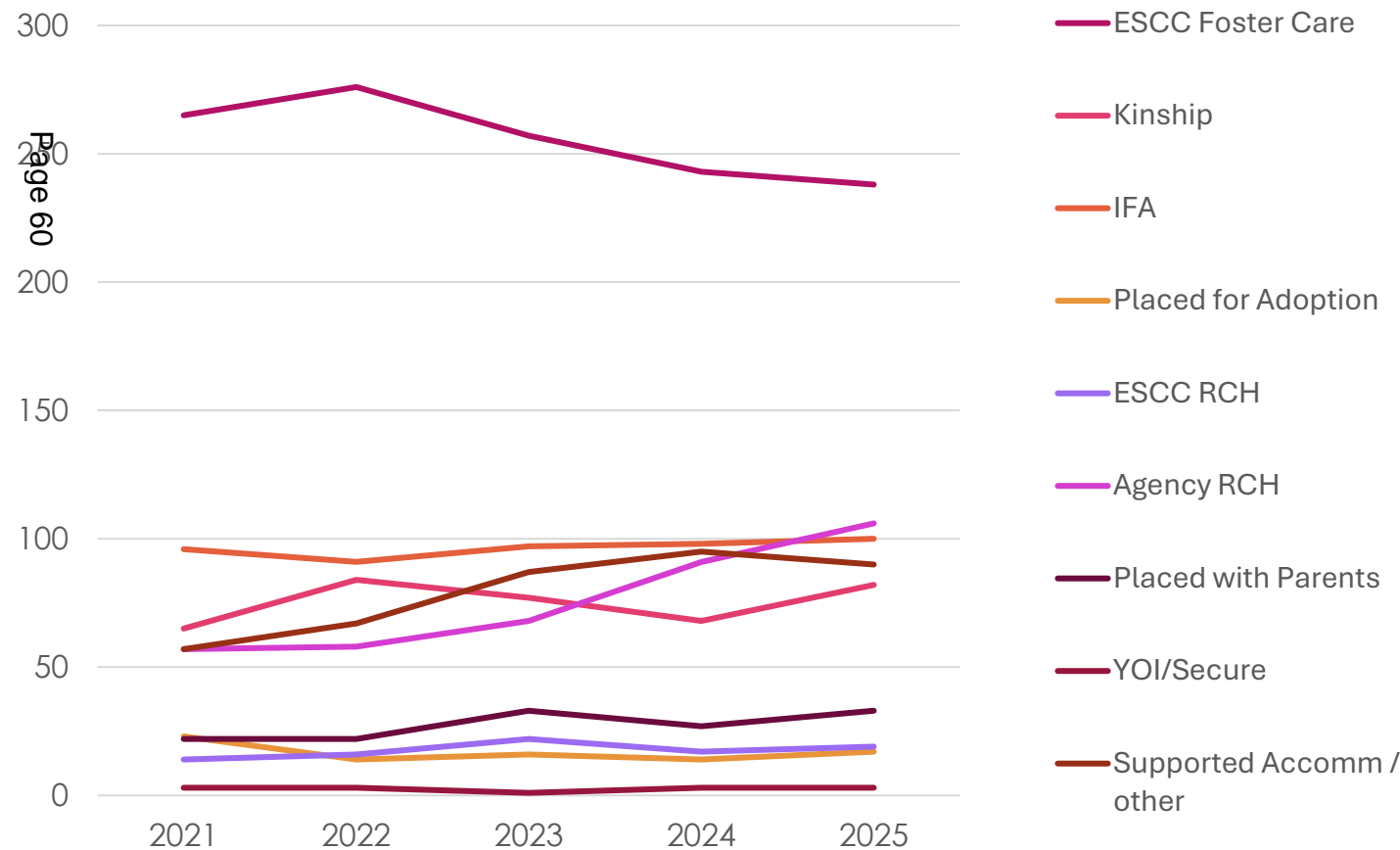
Most of these children were from Sudan, closely followed by Syria, Afghanistan and Vietnam. There were also small numbers of children from Albania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Libya, Palestine and Turkey.

Separated Migrant Children



Where our children are living

Placement Mix



*Data shows a snapshot as of 31st March 2025

East Sussex foster carers continue to offer homes to more of our children than any other category of care (35%). We also support many Connected or Kinship Foster Carers which, alongside our positive relationships with Independent Fostering Agencies, means that 61% of the children in our care are living in family-based placements. Of all our children living with foster carers as at 31/3/25, 76% were placed in-house, significantly higher than the national average for 23/24 of 60% in-house utilisation.

We continue to see encouraging rates of foster carer recruitment including carers transferring or who bring professional skills and experience which allow them to manage increased complexity of need. This means that we are supporting children in fostering households who might otherwise require residential care, but also that some fostering households are caring for fewer children.

In line with regional and national trends we are seeing a steady increase in our use of Agency Residential Children's Homes. Whilst some of this increase is due to regulatory change for 16+ accommodation, the majority reflects a national shortage of fostering households. Residential Children's Homes can be right for some children, but they can also result in children's networks being disrupted and high costs to the local authority.

Children Looked After Through the Disability Service

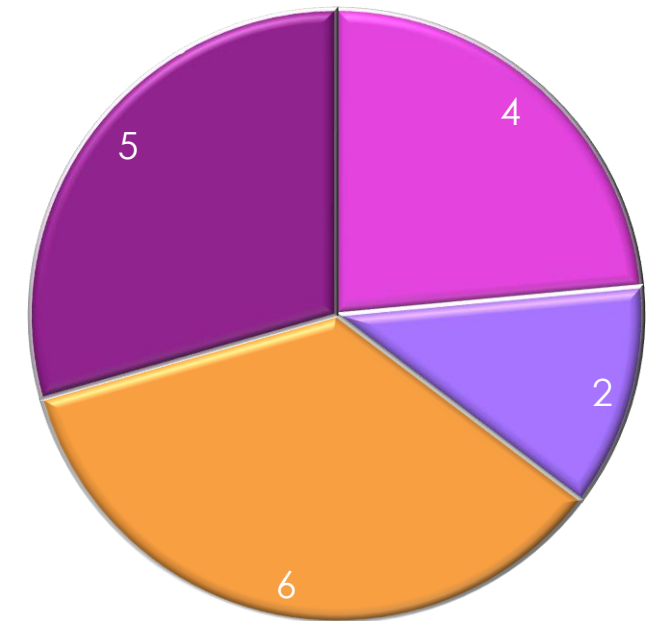
Page 61

Children who have severe and enduring cognitive delay, severe learning disability, low functional abilities and physical disabilities receive support through the East Sussex Children's Disability Service.

As of 31st March 2025, this service worked with 17 children in care; 14 children were aged 0-15 and 3 were aged 16-18. All were in receipt of full-time care. The service also provides extensive packages of support and respite to other children and their families in the community.

The Children's Disability Service social work teams ensure that letters from Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) for their children are adapted using Communicate and Print.

We also have a Life Story Ambassador with a Children with Disabilities lens who is available for consultations within the service.



■ ESCC Fostercare ■ Agency Fostercare
■ ESCC Residential ■ Agency Residential

Key performance indicators 2024-25

Where ESCC performance improved on the previous year this is shown in green, performance which dipped is shown in red

Indicator	2022/23 ESCC Value	2022/23 England	2023/24 ESCC Value	2023/24 England	2024.25 ESCC Value
Rate of children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18	64.3	70.5	63.9	69.7	66.4
Number of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year	15%	10.3%	14.3%	10.4%	10.8%
Percentage of children looked after under 16 who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more and in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption	71.4%	68.7%	66.9%	68.1%	67.7%
Percentage of children looked after at 31 st March placed outside local authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live	17.2%	16.8%	17.8%	17.4%	21.2%
Percentage of children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted	7.0%	9.3%	8.2%	8.9%	7.9%
Average time between local authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match with an adoptive family	318 days	197 days	241 days	205 days	170 days

Key performance indicators 2024-25

Where ESCC performance improved on the previous year this is shown in green, performance which dipped is shown in red

Indicator	2022/23 ESCC	2022/23 England	2023/24 ESCC	2023/24 England	2024/25 ESCC
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in suitable accommodation	92.6%	90.6%	95.2%	90.5%	96.6%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in suitable accommodation	87.4%	88.1%	92.7%	87.6%	90.7%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in education, employment or training	77.1%	65.6%	75.0%	64.1%	64.1%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in education, employment or training	55.9%	55.9%	58.1%	53.8%	59.9%
Emotional & Behavioural Health of children in care – average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Score*	16.3	14.4	15.8	14.7	16.1
Percentage of children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist	62.5%	75.5%	64.6%	78.9%	68.8%
Children looked after who received a Final Warning, reprimand or conviction	0.9%	2.0%	1.1%	2.2%	2.4%

Leaving Care Indicators are calculated using data collected at the point of each young person's 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday

*An SDQ score is required of all children aged 4-16 on the date of last assessment. A higher score indicates more emotional difficulties. 0-13 is considered normal, 14-16 is borderline cause for concern and 17-40 is cause for concern.

Family Finding and Adoption Support

Adoption South East (ASE) is a Regional Adoption Agency uniting the adoption services of Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, Surrey County Council and West Sussex County Council. We are working together to provide adoption services across our region, combining our years of experience and expertise and bringing a fresh approach to finding families for children and helping those families to thrive.

Key Indicators in 2024-25

- ▶ 82 children placed for Adoption (21 of these from East Sussex which was an increase of 6 children on the previous year)
- ▶ 64 adoption families approved across the region
- ▶ 95% ASE children placed with ASE approved families
- ▶ 24% of children were placed in Early Permanence arrangements
- ▶ Timescales for children under the age of 2½ improved to achieve the national average
- ▶ 2,000 adoptive families supported across the region
- ▶ £4m funding drawn down from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for therapy for 1,397 children across the region
- ▶ The national decline in adopter sufficiency is becoming reflected locally



Key Performance Indicators – Health

NHS Core Plus 5 – Children in Care and Care Leavers have been identified, both nationally and locally, as a group who should be included in the 'plus' cohort to ensure their health needs are prioritised across all services.

Every child in care is provided with an **Initial Health Assessment (IHA)** within 28 days of entering care. In East Sussex this is carried out at a clinic by the community paediatrician. The team ensure that high quality health assessments are offered to all children and young people who are looked after and make sure that any actions on the health care plan are completed throughout the year.

For the period 2024-2025, 211 IHAs were completed with 169 pertaining to children under the care of East Sussex County Council and a further 42 for other local authorities. These figures show an increase in the previous year.

Exception reporting of the data demonstrates mitigating factors not attributable to ESHT in compliance with the requirements that 85% of assessments are completed and distributed within time frames.

Review Health Assessments (RHA) are carried out by specialist nurses every six months for children aged under five and yearly for those aged five to 18.

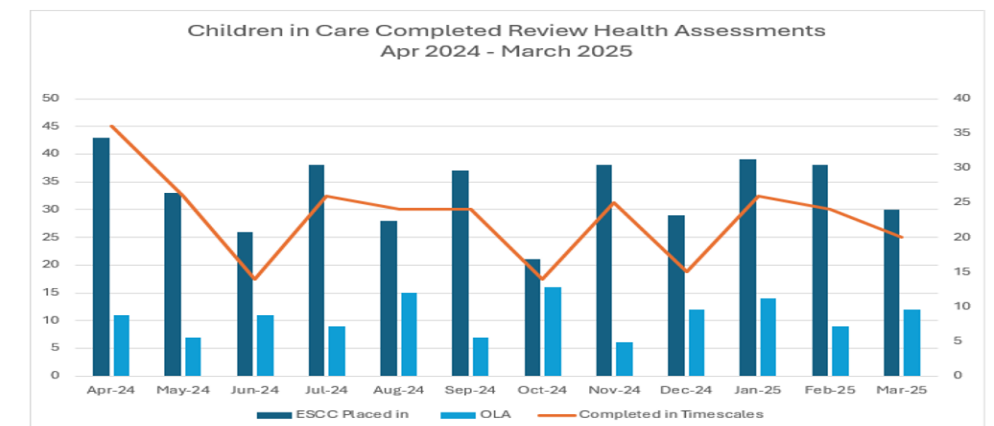
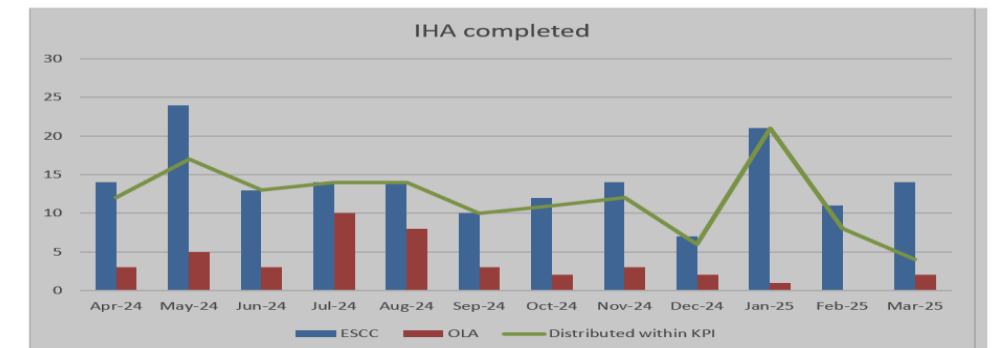
For the period 2024/2025 the Specialist Nurses completed a total of 529 RHAs, with 400 that pertained to children cared for by ESCC and a further 129 placed by other local authorities. 85% of assessments were completed and distributed within time frames. The competing demands of the caseload and OLA work has been contributed to performance, and as a result the review health assessments for the OLA cohort are now allocated to a waiting list, which has increased from three to six months.

120 ESCC children were placed out of the area and their assessments were commissioned and delivered by another provider (OOA).

The Specialist Nurses also compiled 115 **Leaving Care Health Summaries** for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Immunisations for Looked After Children for 2024/25 sat at 81%.

The completion of Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs) for children aged 5-16 for 2024/25 was at 55%, which is an improvement.



Results from the My Health My School Survey 2023-24*

*Results for 2024-25 not yet available

The 'My Health My School' survey is a student perception survey for children and young people in years 3-13. It is completed anonymously online and participation by schools, children and young people is voluntary. The survey asked 'age-tailored' questions across ten themes.

0.7% (121/16,412) of students who completed the survey were identified as children in care; these were those that responded, 'I live in a children's home' or 'I live with foster carer(s)'.

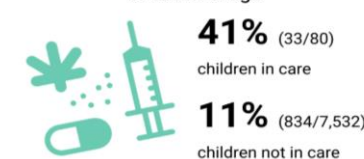
Of the 121 children and young people who identified as in care:

- ▶ 35 were primary, 80 were secondary and 6 were post-16 students
- ▶ 49 were boys, 49 were girls, 18 identified as another gender and 5 preferred not to say
- ▶ 56% (66/118) described their ethnicity within the high-level 'White' category
- ▶ 51% (40/78) described their sexual identity as heterosexual
- ▶ 39% (47/121) considered themselves to have a disability.

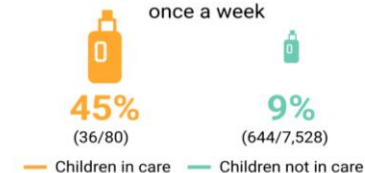
Secondary children in care are more likely to drink alcohol at least once a week



Secondary students that have ever used or taken drugs



Secondary students that vape at least once a week



29%

(23/80)
of secondary
students in care



2% (153/7,540)
of secondary
students not in care

smoke at least one cigarette per week

Have ever had sexual contact involving penetration - Year 9 - 11 only

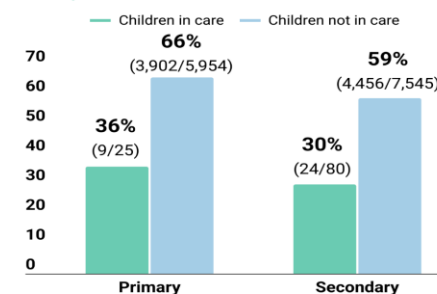
Children in care



Children not in care



'I agree, I enjoy my life'



46%

(37/80)
of secondary
students in care



6%

(462/7,540)
of secondary
students not in care

reported being bullied 'most days/every day' in the last 12 months



Have ever hurt themselves on purpose - Yes

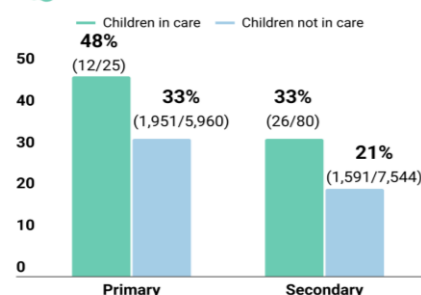
54%

(43/80)
of secondary students in care

28%

(2,084/7,534)
of secondary students not in care

Eat 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables on a school day



33% (26/80) of secondary students in care report eating no fruit and vegetables, compared to 9% (655/7,544) not in care.

Physically active for at least 60 minutes most days - all students



Screen time more than 5 hours a day - secondary students



Mental and Emotional Wellbeing annual data and update for LACAMHS 2024/2025

LACAMHS continues to work closely with our Fostering and Residential Services to ensure that the specific needs of the children in our care are understood and responded to in a timely manner

Number of initial consultations completed: 43

Number of Drop ins attended: 71

Number of young people in the service ranged from 102 (Q1) to 79 (Q4)

2 Therapeutic Parenting Groups run over the year

1 pilot Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) group offered to foster carers (Sept 2024-Dec 2024)

Fortnightly consultation at team meetings in children's residential homes

Therapeutic Parenting Groups for residential staff built in to offer

LACAMHS and LAC Management continue to work together to mitigate impact of clinical staffing issues across the region

Key Performance Indicators - Education

All current data is provisional, and progress and attainment 8 data is not yet available for Key Stage 4 (GCSEs).

Key Stage 2: Data remains provisional but suggests that outcomes are higher than last year in reading, writing, maths and GPS. They are in line with national and regional CLA results and slightly higher than both in maths. Cohorts vary from year to year, and all have their own stories. This year 37% had an EHCP and another 24% were on the SEND register.

Key Stage 4: Data remains provisional and there are no national or regional comparators. There were some good individual achievements. Students achieved level 9 in photography and Persian, and Distinctions in BTEC sport and business along with level 7 in Art, Computer Science, Science and DT, and level 6 in History, Drama and Theatre.

Post 16: We have also seen success within our post-16 cohort. Students achieved A levels or equivalent in Biology, Psychology, Criminology, IT, Gaming, Computer Science, Photography and Marketing, and 11 of our young people have gained a place at university. Others have worked hard to achieve their core GCSEs and a range of level 1 and 2 vocational courses.

Intervention: The Virtual School agreed 468 funding requests for tuition last academic year. 216 children and young people received tuition. 21% of the requests were for primary, 68% secondary and 11% Post 16. This was an increase on last year. 60% of the young people who received tutoring achieved all three targets and 100% achieved at least one target and partially met the others. 99% of all children and young people said their confidence against their targets had increased.

100% of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have taken place. In July 2024, 94.32% were recorded, 0.41% were current and 5% are overdue.

PEP quality audits over the last year rated 74% as good, 97% as satisfactory or above and 2.37% as 'need for improvement'.



The Safety of our Looked After Children

Children who went missing

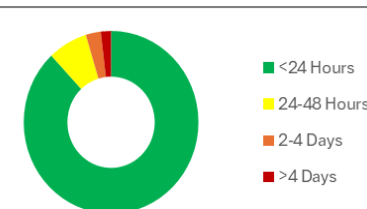
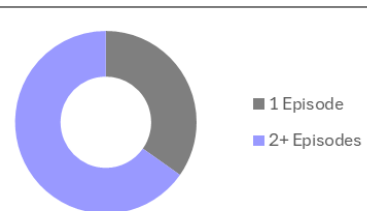
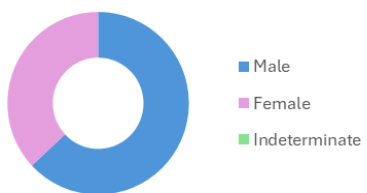
▶ 138 children who were Looked After went missing during 2024-25:

- ▶ 87 were male (63%) and 51 were female (37%).
- ▶ 90 were aged 16 and over (65%), 48 were aged 15 and under (35%).
- ▶ 90 went missing more than once (65%).
- ▶ There were 1327 missing episodes throughout the year.
- ▶ 1168 episodes where the child was missing for less than 24 hours (88%).
- ▶ 97 episodes where the child was missing between 24 and 48 hours (7%).
- ▶ 37 episodes where the child was missing between 2 and 4 days (3%).
- ▶ 25 episodes where the child was missing for over 4 days (2%).

All children were tracked by Sussex Police and by Children Services staff. Risk assessments were regularly reviewed on high profile children who went missing and where necessary, formal strategy discussions were held in line with safeguarding procedures.

Children involved with the Youth Justice Service or at risk of exploitation

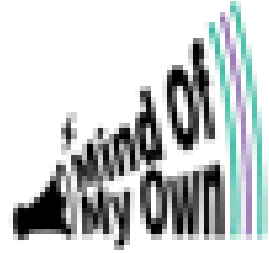
- ▶ **The Youth Justice Service worked with 20 looked after children during 2024-25.**
- ▶ A further 2 children became looked after due to being securely remanded to our care.
- ▶ 5.4% of the YJS caseload in 2024-25 were looked after children.
- ▶ Looked After Children aged 10-17 are overrepresented within the YJS cohort.
- ▶ During 2024-25 65 children were subject to ESCC SAFER operational oversight and therefore categorised as being at high risk of exploitation.
- ▶ 12 of these children were looked after by East Sussex, 8 were female and 4 were male.
- ▶ 5 of these children were deemed to be at risk of sexual exploitation and 4 deemed to be at risk of criminal exploitation. 3 children were at risk of both criminal and sexual exploitation.



My Voice Matters

Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review, as set out in the statutory guidance to the 2002 Act.

IRO Handbook



My Voice Matters is the East Sussex approach to children's statutory Looked After Review meetings. Children's voices sit at the heart of their reviews, and review documentation is prepared in a way that ensures each child can understand their plan

Independent Reviewing Officers have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to plans for some of the most vulnerable children in our county. In 2024-25 Independent Reviewing Officers had a specific focus on quality assurance of permanence planning, Life Story Work and later life letters for children

1,563 individual My Voice Matters Meetings were held in 2024-25
89% of My Voice Matters Meetings were held early or on time

This was a slight decrease on the previous year but primarily reflected decisions made in children's best interests or to ensure continuity of the IRO relationship.

Children are increasingly using the Mind of My Own App to contribute their views in advance of the meeting.

92% of Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their review process during 2024/25, which was consistent with the previous year.

What the key performance indicators are telling us

Overall performance is encouraging, remaining consistent despite the demand pressures, and there has been improvement across several key indicators

Whilst the rate of children looked after per 10,000 has increased slightly, ESCC is consistently lower than the all-England rate and below rates expected for IDACI

Although the average SDQ score has declined slightly from last year, the number of assessments completed has vastly improved, which is the result of an action plan developed to address this

The adoption data shows an improvement in performance across most timeliness measures, although with a slight decrease in the total number of adoptions

LAC with 3 or more placement moves shows a significant improvement but the national sufficiency issues regarding placement availability remain

Percentage of dental checks completed has improved again but continues to be closely monitored by the strategic health team who are trying to improve dental capacity and availability for LAC locally

Performance across the Care Leaver indicators has remained relatively constant, although there has been a reduction in EET for 17/18-year-olds

School age children who identify as being looked after also report significantly poorer levels of healthy behaviours and emotional well being; this is an area in need of focus

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel met 4 times during 2024-25 to discuss regular agenda items including:

- ▶ Regulation 44 Quarterly Summary Reports and Ofsted Inspections for our Children's Homes
- ▶ Looked After Children Statistics Report

In addition to scrutinising reports and inspection data the Corporate Parenting Panel contributed to service development and improvement through focused sessions on:

- ▶ Lifelong Links & Family Group Conferences
- ▶ Family Time (Community Family Work Service)
- ▶ The Annual Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
- ▶ Children in Care Council (CiCC) Pledge presentation by CiCC and Care Leavers Council
- ▶ Placement & Commissioning Team presentation
- ▶ 'My Things Matter' presentation by CiCC and Care Leavers Council
- ▶ Recognising Care Experience Formally As An 'Additional Category' in Equality Considerations
- ▶ Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report



**Our Elected Members
regularly support events
and visit services**

How we Evaluate Practice

Audit Activity 2024-25

All services undertake monthly audit activity across children's files. In 2024-25 this has helped us to understand issues relating to children's mental health, participation in meetings, the role of the IRO, quality of life story work and the strength of multi-agency partnerships. We also identified areas for development relating to supervision and recording.

Page 73

The Service undertook Thematic Audits focussed on Life Story Work and Pathway Plans and 2 Thematic Audits focussed on the quality and impact of Foster Carers' Supervision

Learning from Audits:

- ▶ Audits evidenced robust, child focussed practice including effective multi-agency working
- ▶ In most cases children had up to date health and dental assessments, reviews were timely, and care leavers were in suitable accommodation
- ▶ Timely completion of Placement Plans showed steady improvement
- ▶ Strong, professionally supportive relationships between foster carers and supervising social workers were clearly visible; however, areas for improvement were identified in relation to supervision records
- ▶ Foster carer supervision is now completed on an electronic form which supports better management oversight; a follow-up audit indicated improved but inconsistent practice
- ▶ Improved practice in relation to recording and review of Delegated Authority was needed, a focused audit is planned to review progress

Key Activity Across LAC Teams

Looked After Children's Teams provide services for children up to age 18 who are in the care of the local authority.

The service has strong retention which ensures that children experience long lasting relationships with workers who they know and trust.

This year has been about driving best practice across services and embedding innovation.

Refining Valuing Care
Panel and process

Developing Heading Home
– our approach to
reunification

Life story work – piloted
student project and now
embedding across teams

Lifelong links, an
expectation for all children
in our care supported by a
review of relationships at
age 15

Reviewed permanence
policy and strategy with a
view to establishing a
permanence lead to drive
this agenda across the
child's journey

Enhancing overall
performance to ensure
consistent good practice
across all children's plans,
records and experiences

Key Activity Through Care Services

The Through Care Service works with children and young people from age 14 to ensure a smooth journey towards independence. Young people move across to the service at a time that is right for them.

East Sussex County Council has adopted Care Experience as an Additional Characteristic and developments have continued to extend the wider corporate parenting role across all agencies in East Sussex.

The Local Offer has been reviewed and is shared with all young people ensuring they are aware of the support available to them.

East Sussex has strengthened support through a range of initiatives:

Housing & Accommodation:

- The Care Leavers Housing Protocol was reviewed to improve housing pathways.
- A Rent Guarantor pilot scheme has enabled access to better quality private rentals.

Relationships & Wellbeing:

- Lifelong Links promoted meaningful connections with family and significant adults.
- Health and Wellbeing Project gained national recognition.

Communication & Engagement:

- Facebook notice board and co-produced monthly newsletter keep young people connected.

Safeguarding & Risk Management:

- 18+ Risk Assessment Panel introduced to address ongoing safeguarding and exploitation risks.

Local Groupwork:

- Weekly sessions in Eastbourne and Hastings offer lunch, careers advice, and mental health support.

Transitions & Specialist Support:

- The Through Care Team (TCT) worked closely with Adult Social Care to support care leavers with mental health or trauma-related needs.

Digital Access:

- Laptops and Wi-Fi were provided to support education, employment, and family contact.

Employment & Skills:

- The Care 2 Work Strategic Group expanded training and work experience opportunities.
- The Skills Journal was launched to help track progress and development.

Separated migrant young people

Page 76

- The government started processing asylum claims again in summer 2024, reviewing elements of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 which had prevented asylum seekers progressing their claims. This has resulted in more timely decision making for young people.
- The Home Office are refusing a high number of claims made by children seeking asylum; this is across the nationalities (excluding Sudanese and Eritrean) and is resulting in increasing numbers becoming All Rights Exhausted and the team undertaking Human Rights assessments.
- There is also a delay in the system for appeals which can mean young people are waiting up to two years, this results in a higher number of over 18's without rights to rent and gain employment. Those who turn 18 under appeal are completely reliant on ESCC for housing and living costs and had no access to the usual 'move on' housing routes. This puts considerable stress on the post 18 housing provision. The funding from the Home Office drops by 70% when a young person turns 18, this amount does not cover the costs of accommodation locally.
- The Preliminary Information Meeting (PIM) system is back in place for our Sudanese and Eritrean young people, this means they are receiving more timely decisions. Those over 18 with refugee status are increasingly turning to private rental house shares due to the lack of supported move on options available locally.
- The numbers of young people age disputed dropped this year, meaning fewer age assessments were required.
- Our Welcome to the UK day continues to be a success, a follow-up third day has been trialled to cover more topics such as substance use and relationships. The Refugee Council use our Welcome to the UK sessions as their example of best practice to other local authorities across the UK.

Separated migrant young people (continued)

- The service continued to explore a range of new education offers for Separated Migrant Children, including partnering with a local college to start a summer course for those who have struggled to access mainstream education or arrived too late to start the school term.
- The EALS (English as an additional language service) attend our lunch drops ins, providing our young people not in education or training with crucial English learning opportunities.
- Joint work has continued with health colleagues to improve the health offer to our young people. Young people are now able to access blood screening at their Initial Health Assessments, which supports prompt health interventions for those with potential blood borne diseases.
- The service worked closely with the local migrant support services for adults, information sharing and seeking community support for our care leaving cohort. We have continued to support Unaccompanied Minors coming from Ukraine.
- Young people were supported to access additional social activities to improve their wellbeing in groups. This included cycling, rock climbing and football activity days with Brighton and Hove Albion.
- Our young people continue to have access to My View, a Refugee Council therapy service specifically for refugee young people. The young people's feedback remains very positive about the impact this therapy had on their wellbeing.

Health Offer for Children in Care

LAC Operational Health Partnership

Health and Social Care Managers meet quarterly to share learning, address concerns and drive forward service developments relating to the health and wellbeing of children in care.

Key priorities for 2024-2025 have been:

- Working in partnership with Health Commissioners to develop a Pan-Sussex Health Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers to better address physical and emotional health and wellbeing need.
- Dental checks and Immunisations
- Initial and Review Health Assessments
- SDQs
- Access to health care for separated migrant children
- Priority pathways and enhancing knowledge and skills to meet the needs of children with complex needs



East Sussex Healthcare
NHS Trust

The Children in Care (CIC) nursing team works in close partnership with children, young people, their carers, social workers and local authorities to ensure that children and young people's health needs are supported during their time in care and as they leave care.

The team work as health advocates and are involved with the assessment, planning and delivery of health services for looked after children and young people. All our nurses are registered nurses with additional experience and qualifications in areas such as health visiting, school nursing, sexual and mental health, and drug and alcohol support.

All ESHT children 0 -19 years have been allocated to individual specialist nurse caseloads so the children can form meaningful relationships with their specialist nurse throughout their time in care, and this model is now well embedded and favourably received from staff. There are currently 716 East Sussex Children, additionally the team undertake work for over 300 children placed by other local authorities (OLA). Work has continued around ensuring that statutory health assessments are a positive, person-centred and valuable experience, written in child centred and accessible language which is all helping to build positive relationships and improve the experience for the children we care for.

Work with colleagues across the system has embedded a one-stop clinic for unaccompanied asylum seekers

We aim to provide all young people aged 16-18 years old in care with a summary of their health since birth. The health summary is a small booklet which contains birth details, immunisation and health history (if available). The summary is unique to the child can be updated it at any time. The information in the health summary is confidential and is only shared with the child. The health summary also contains useful information about accessing health services and useful tips about staying healthy.

In addition to statutory health reviews, the nurses also offer health advice and information for children in care, their social worker and their carers, support for children in care to attend health appointments, information and support around a range of issues, including:

- ▶ stopping smoking
- ▶ healthy eating and weight
- ▶ relationships
- ▶ safe sex
- ▶ drug and alcohol awareness
- ▶ support for leaving care

Education & Development Support

‘I just wanted to let you know, B received the highest Maths score in her class, and she is also moving up a set’

‘Reports from his Maths teacher are that he is now on track to achieve a pass in Maths at the end of Year 11. A year ago, he was unable to attend Maths lessons’

The Virtual School's (VS) strategic role to promote the educational outcomes for children with a Social Worker has continued to develop and this year included children in Kinship care. The VS worked with social care and education teams across the authority on attendance, inclusion and special education needs. We provided advice and information to social workers, other support services, schools, parents of adopted children and kinship carers. We worked with the Designated Safeguarding Leads Network and SENCos in schools. We have continued to develop the Master Series in Education for Social Workers and Early Help workers and delivered training to new social workers.

The VS works in partnership with post 16 providers. This partnership involves schools and colleges, post 16 trainers, Universities, the Youth Employment Service and post 16 leads in education. Discussions within the partnership have included bursaries, Widening Participation opportunities and the use of the Vulnerable Learners Protocol to ensure that all staff in post 16 establishments are aware of the needs of our learners.

The Care to Work Group brought staff from across the LA together to ensure that our young people have access to existing employment and training opportunities and to develop opportunities. Work with Balfour Beatty and the John Lewis Partnership is ongoing. We are currently looking at how best to ensure that Care Leavers benefit from Connect to Work and other national schemes.

The VS training offer included Designated Teacher (DT) training, attachment training, Personal Education Planning training and an Education Master Series for Social Workers. 271 delegates attended training in addition to those trained as part of whole school training. The VS held Educational Psychologist advice sessions for schools, DT network meetings and a book club focused on an article of key interest e.g., FAS. We have also provided training for foster carers, residential care staff and alternative providers.

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) led a workshop activity on how care and education services can support them. They have worked with the VS to produce newsletter articles for Designated Teachers on their experiences and thoughts on effective support. The articles have been used as a basis for discussion in training.

Children In Care Achievement (CiC) Awards: Children were nominated in the categories of educational achievement, positive contribution, personal achievement and skills and talents. Awards ceremonies took place for younger and older age groups.

We also funded and supported 94 requests for Alternative Provision for 56 young people (43 last year). We worked with 21 different Alternative Providers covering a range of subjects and activities including working on a farm, martial arts, forest skills and music.

Our Residential Children's Homes



Residential Children's Homes

Brodrick House – 3 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (October 2024)

"Children say they feel safe and have established positive relationships with adults who they can trust. One child said, 'My support worker is the best, and she tries to get stuff done when I have opened up to her about things, and she has supported me well.' Children's individual needs are considered regarding education and development. Various options are explored to ensure that children remain engaged. For example, one child loves animals and volunteers two days per week at a local zoo and has tutoring alongside this."

Homefield Cottage – 4 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (June 2025)

"Staff know the children well. This is because they take time to understand the children's needs and behaviours. A positive culture of safeguarding is established in the home. Staff value multi-professional working to best support children. A professional from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) attends team meetings regularly. Senior leaders and managers are supportive of staff and each other. This has created a positive work environment where staff can learn and develop."

Hazel Lodge – 4 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (January 2025)

"Children enjoy quality time with the people who are important to them and speak positively about family time. Staff worked tirelessly to reduce risks for the child and gathered key information to help them to accurately assess and reduce the risks. Staff say that the new manager supports them well. Professionals praise the manager's calm and nurturing approach to the children and their communication with professionals."

Silver Birches – 5 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (August 2025)

"The staff team is diverse, and staff say that they feel well supported. Children are encouraged to make connections with their local community and are involved in clubs and sports, such as horse riding, martial arts and football. This provides children with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging. Staff have effectively supported children to improve their behaviours and relationships with one another. Children say that they feel safe and can talk to adults about personal matters that are important to them. Leaders and managers have effective processes in place."

Homes for Children with Disabilities

Acorns

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (May 2025)

"Children have strong relationships with staff. Children have teams of dedicated staff who provide consistent care for them. Moves have been well managed. Managers have thoughtfully assessed the impact of these moves on the children. Staff have helped the child to learn how to express their feelings and wishes safely. Staff are highly effective at working with health professionals. They work closely with specialist health professionals to monitor, assess and treat children's complex health needs."

Registered for up to 8 young people, who have a high level of complex needs and profound disabilities. In 2024-25 Acorns provided care for 2 young people whose needs required enhanced support.

The Bungalow

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (April 2025)

"The home is welcoming and homely, with the children's photos displayed proudly in the communal areas. The children's bedrooms are highly personalised, and children enjoy spending time in their bedrooms. Staff are knowledgeable about the risks for the children. They are highly informed about the children's vulnerabilities. A new deputy manager has been appointed, who is an experienced practitioner and has a wealth of understanding about the children's complex needs. Supervision sessions are of good quality and include feedback about practice, learning from incidents, and discussions about the children."

Registered for 8 children aged 7-19 providing full time accommodation and quality care to children with complex needs and disabilities.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home (LSCH)

Lansdowne provides secure care and education for up to 7 children accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Children are placed by local authorities from across the country. The home reopened in February 2024 following temporary closure.

Ofsted rated 'Good' June 2025

"Children told inspectors that they feel safe and always have someone that they can talk to if they are worried about something.

Children's care plans are informed by children's views and aspirations. Children meaningfully contribute to their plans and understand what support they will receive.

Children recognise their achievements and staff support them wholeheartedly. This assists children to grow in confidence and self-belief.

The work staff do helps children to change their thinking, attitudes and behaviours and to develop a positive outlook for their futures.

When children attend their lessons, they make considerable progress and rapidly develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that will help them to be successful in their next steps."



We have accommodated a total of 8 children over the last 12 months from six different local authorities. The average length of stay for each young person is 6 months, with 1 young person being in placement for more than 12 months.

The Health Team has significantly changed over the last 12 months following a successful recruitment drive

We participated in the SAN Games (Secure Accommodation Network) and came 3rd overall, although weighting in respect of the size of the home, announced we came 1st for the 2nd year in a row.

We have successfully implemented a new electronic recording system called ClearCare which has improved both management oversight and reporting functionality across our multi agency teams.

We have implemented a SharePoint site to hold and share multi agency policies, procedures, training and guidance which has significantly improved shared understandings and effective communication for all.

The high-quality, creative in-house Education offer led by skilled teachers and support staff is now also looking at the 52 week a year, waking day curriculum in conjunction with the care team.

Steering Groups including DfE, SAN and NHS England remains in place.

Placements & Commissioning

This year we restructured the Fostering Duty Team to create a Placements and Commissioning Service which is better equipped to meet the challenges of the current children's care market. The team has already evidenced improved processes, challenge, oversight and market engagement

Close partnership working with social work teams and providers allows the service to anticipate and contingency plan for children who are in, or on the edge of care

As part of the restructure, our new Brokerage Team will drive best value discussions, lead on commissioning, frameworks and local sufficiency; allowing Children's Placement Officers to focus on needs-led discussions with providers and ensuring that the cost of care directly benefits children

We have worked with a local partner to enhance our approach to commissioning, in 2025-26 whole staff training is planned alongside specific upskilling of relevant roles.

We continue to see value from having a mixed management team with skills drawn from across social work and residential services, we are also benefitting from closer commissioning relationships with colleagues in SEND

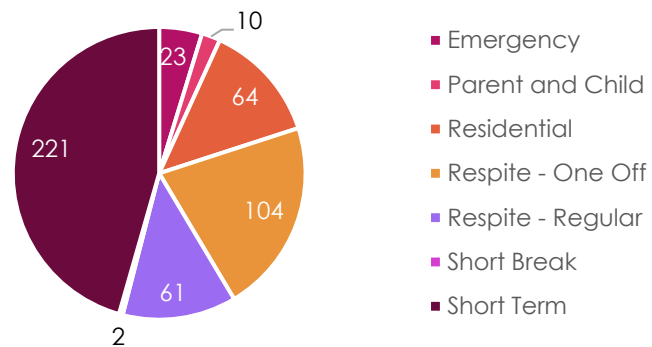
Working with providers is an essential part of our approach; we run Provider Forums and offer support with Regulatory compliance / preparing for inspection. These relationships support enhanced due diligence and quality assurance as well as ensuring that we understand regional sufficiency pressures and risks

Managers from across the Placements and Commissioning Service have been working closely with the South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to inform the development of the Pathfinder program and benefit from shared learning and engagement opportunities. RCCs were introduced in response to the DfE 2023 paper 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and 2024 Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. They aim to address escalating costs, placement shortages, fragmented commissioning and workforce challenges. The South East RCC vision is:

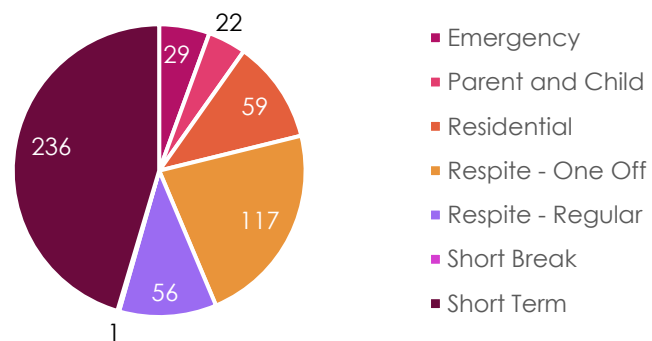
"We will provide the right care for you that is available locally and when needed. We will be loving, caring and consistent with high aspirations for you. We will listen to you, put your needs first and will not give up on you."

Placements & Commissioning (continued)

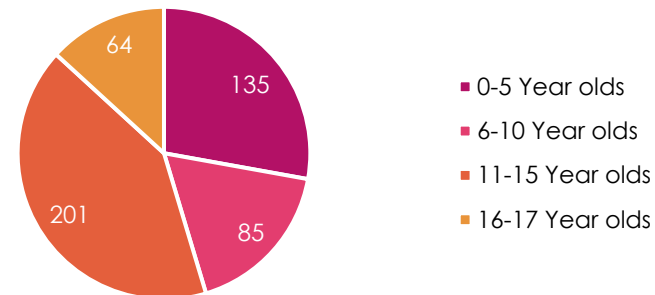
Duty referrals data 2024/2025



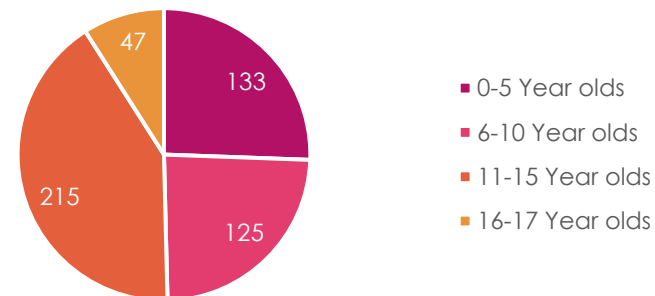
Duty referrals data 2023/2024



Referrals by age band 2024/2025



Referrals by age band 2023/2024



The Placements & Commissioning Team managed 485 Referrals in 2024/25, compared to 520 Referrals for the previous year .

Referrals relate to children who are new to care and those who need an alternative arrangement either long-term or temporarily. Not all children who move between placements will have a new referral, the team are typically working with high numbers of open searches.

Referral 'type' was broadly similar to the previous year, with most children being referred for short-term foster care. Around 30% of referrals are requests for 'respite'.

Referrals for children aged 6-10 were significantly higher than in the previous year, whilst fewer 16-17 years olds were referred.

Fostering Recruitment and Retention

East Sussex Fostering Service supports 259 active fostering households.

2024-25 saw the highest number of enquiries in five years and a strong conversion rate of 33% from home visit to approval, this led to a net increase of 17 fostering households and 25 places.

New 2024/25 ESCC system of removing the Q&A call from the recruitment process to improve response to assessment speed when relevant. This is reflected in a Q&A call volume reduction and an increase in home visits.

In 2024-25 East Sussex was part of a Regional Fostering Hub pilot scheme – moving forwards we aim to build on existing relationships with neighbouring local authority fostering services, sharing best practice and combining resources for collaborative projects whilst maintaining our distinctive identities.

Recruitment	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
Enquiries	260		228		200		274		237		276	
Q&A calls	106		95		69		79		70		23*	
Home visits (IV)	68		50		33		43		45		90*	
Approvals H/holds > places	22	39	20	30	14	21	24	40	26	38	30	47
Targets	30	44	30	44	30	44	25	44	26	44	36	50
Conversion												
Enquiry to IV	26%		21%		17%		16%		19%		33%*	
Enquiry to approval	8%		9%		7%		9%		11%		11%	
IV to approval	32%		42%		42%		56%		58%		33%*	

Foster Carers	2023/24	2024/25
Approved households/places	26/38	30/47
Deregistrations households/places	18/39	13/22
Net households/places	+8/-1	+17/+25

*New 2024/25 ESCC system of removing the Q&A call from the recruitment process to improve response to assessment speed when relevant. This is reflected in Q&A call volume reduction and increase in home visits.

Fostering Recruitment and Retention (continued)

Payments and allowances uplift April 2024 - Foster carer payments now in line with National Minimum Allowance (NMA), this is supporting recruitment and retention, improved focus on fostering and wellbeing, increased transfer enquiries

Training and development - Launched new digital [foster carer handbook](#) housing all updated policies, processes, information and guidance, a new resource bank and Learning Pool platform

Retention and placement stability - Continued development of Buddy scheme, GEM scheme (recognition awards) and Young People Who Foster council whose attendance doubled during the 2024 calendar year

Launched first ESCC Mockingbird Constellation – Year 1 funded by DfE in partnership with [The Fostering Network](#) the model creates a familiar network of six to ten fostering families around an experienced fostering household, known as a Hub Home

The Placement Support Service - continues to work with some of our most vulnerable cared for young people, helping to stabilise their placements and prevent them from breaking down



Children in Care Council



The Pledge The pledge was relaunched in September. CICC worked with designers at County Hall to rebrand it with their own vision. A section was added on LGBT+ and neurodiversity, the colour purple was used as this represents awareness for children in care.

My Things Matter The My Things Matter box was designed to be given to young people when they are moving to protect their belongings. This is a sustainable project with the boxes being returned and reused. We also provide free canvas holdalls which can be kept by the young person.

Page 86
National Participation - A National Voice (ANV) CICC have an ongoing working relationship with A National Voice. They have continued to support the 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy this year sharing their thoughts and feelings based on the areas for improvement. Their top 3 were: mental health support, building and maintaining good relationships and having enough good foster carers. These will be forwarded to the new Children's Minister Janet Daby who will include their comments in her report to Government.

Junior Consultation The CICC ran a creative session with a group of junior children aged 7 -11. They discussed the key messages that junior children feel adults working with them should know. This included what makes a happy place to live, what things make the best social worker or carer and who do they talk to if they have any worries.

Youth Voice Sussex CICC members joined other East Sussex youth voice groups for a consultation event, designed to gather thoughts and ideas to help shape ESCC resources for young people's mental health as well as discussing the quality and content of PHSE lessons in secondary schools across Sussex. They also participated in the annual Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) meeting attended by Becky Shaw – CEO and Carolyn Fair, to discuss priorities to inform planning within children's services.

Corporate Parents and Senior Management Team CICC attended the Corporate Parenting Panel twice this year, presenting the new pledge and My Things Matter. They met with Kathy Marriott and Cllr Bowdler on a separate occasion and hosted a large meeting with CPP and SMT which included an official signing of the Pledge

Recruitment CICC members continue to be involved in recruitment panels for new staff including panels for newly qualified social workers and also for the new assistant director.

Brighton University 3 CICC members facilitated their annual two-hour lecture at Brighton University for students on the social work degree course.

Virtual School CICC have worked with the Virtual school several times this past year, writing articles for their newsletters and co-hosting an event at Bedes school, for decision makers to hear the feedback from a recent survey by Coram Voice on issues previously highlighted by looked after children in East Sussex.

Funding CICC have secured an extra **£1,023** in extra funding this year from the HAF Government scheme. ESFCA have donated 60 plastic boxes for My Things Matter. Madlug have donated 600 canvas holdalls. Virtual school have funded First Aid training and Citizencard have agreed to provide these for free to any looked after child aged 16-18 in East Sussex and this will continue into 2025.

SUSS it (Speak up Sessions) Through different engagement opportunities with children and young people throughout the year, there have been **55** issues advocated for. These continue to be extremely successful giving **87** children and young people an opportunity to speak up about their own individual issues.

Care Leavers Council



The Care Leavers Council meets monthly and continues to be involved in service development, this year they have reviewed the Local Offer and are working to develop a peer mentoring scheme.



Young people took part in a variety of consultation events, such as the South East Youth Participation Collective and the Youth Cabinet,



Young people regularly participated in ESCC Corporate Parenting Panel.



Young people represented East Sussex at National Benchmarking events and one of our young people continues to attend and host national events as a Young Persons Legend.



LAC Service Budget

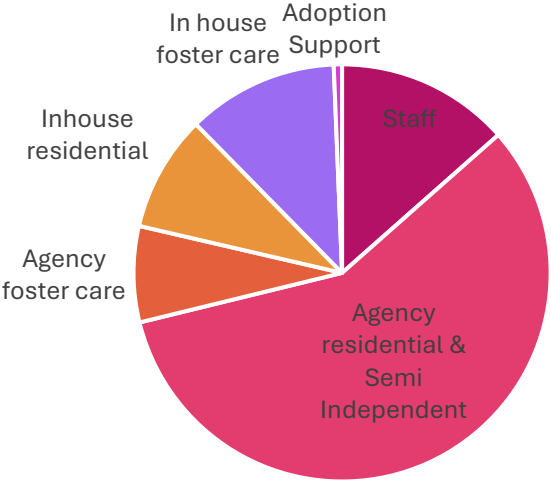
The LAC Service budget represents 35% of the overall Children’s Services budget and 9% of the council’s budget.

In 2024-5 the LAC Service budget was £68m.

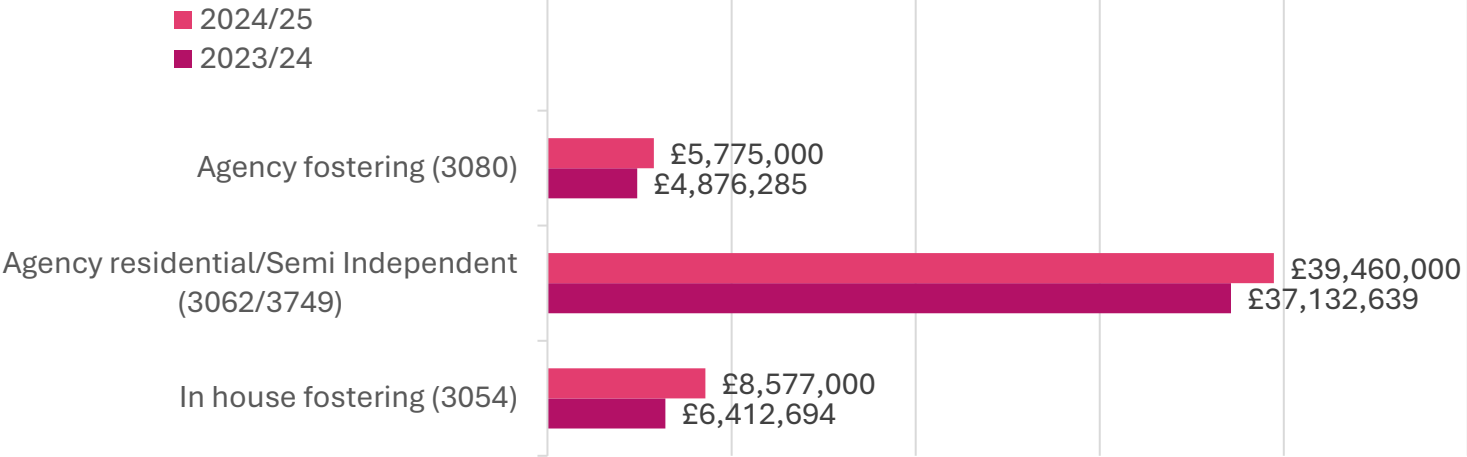
The net spend of the service exceeded the budget by £9m. A significant portion of this overspend was attributable to a small number of children with complex needs who required bespoke provision with high agency staff ratios

Agency Residential and Semi-Independent accommodation continue to represent the greatest pressure within the budget.

Use of Resources 2024/25



Outturns 2023/24 to 2024/25



Pressures

National Increase: England saw a 24% rise in looked after children from 2010 to 2020, with rates increasing from 57 to 67 per 10,000 children.

East Sussex Trends: 13% increase in looked after children from 2021 to 2025 (611 to 691). Rate rose from 59.7 to 66.7 per 10,000 — above statistical neighbours but below the IDACI expected rate of 70.0.

Complexity of Need: Post-COVID, children's needs have become more complex, prompting changes in placement types.

High-Cost Placements:

- Reflecting national trends, ESCC has seen a rise in placements costing £10,000+ per week.
- Average weekly cost of high-cost placements rose 8% to £16,063; placement duration in this category increased by 43%.
- Access to Tier 4 and Continuing Care framework remains challenging due to health service capacity.

Market Pressures:

- New Supported Accommodation Regulations have led to increased costs and risk transfer to local authorities.
- Providers' reduced risk appetite has driven up solo, high-cost placements, especially for children requiring DoLs (Deprivation of Liberty Orders) or intensive staffing.
- Local DoLs usage has increased, mirroring national trends and highlighting secure bed shortages.

Mitigation Measures and Impact

Family Support

Connected Coaches: £0.65m in savings through reunification, £6.02m in cost avoidance keeping children safely at home
CFIP: £1.86m in cost avoidance by reducing: Child Protection and Child in Need plans, assessments, re-referrals, and pre proceedings meetings

Market Management

New Placements & Commissioning Service:
Actively challenges provider price increases, strengthens accountability, expected to deliver further impact in 2025/26
Continued use of local frameworks with regional partners during RCC rollout and Regional Fostering Collaboration
In-house Fostering and Residential occupancy scrutinised through a business lens to ensure efficient use of resources

Reunification Strategy

Heading Home: Local Framework developed using evidence-based best practice
Training Programme refreshed with Webinars, operational guidance, practice-led drop-ins
Valuing Care Panel removes barriers to reunification. Strategy integrates wrap around support
Social Workers lead reunification plans with tracked timescales and reparative work

Integrated Commissioning & Care

Ongoing work to increase health contributions to care packages
Working with Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to address cost of increased complexity of need.
Regional work through SESLIP on Continuing Care framework for children and young people

Strategic Context

All actions aligned with wider change agenda: Children's Social Care reform, Devolution and Regionalisation,
Legislative change under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill
Placement spend mitigation continues as business as usual

Priorities for 2025 - 2026

Whole Service

Review and embed language that cares throughout all our documentation and when speaking to children, carers and professionals

Digital strategy – enhance overall data capture and analysis by contributing to the Data and Dashboard project / implementation of the Provider Portal / Digital Life Skills Solution / launch of ePEP and roll out of ClearCare

Continue to ensure child's needs-led discussions via a Valuing Care approach

Engage with ESCC Children's Services' Transformation Agenda, and the opportunities offered through the Regional Care Cooperative

Develop closer relationship with Public Health to better understand and respond to the mental and physical health needs of the children in our care as well as enhancing our approach to community safety, housing supply and the needs of Separated Migrant Children

Operational Services

Implement Heading Home strategy to increase the number of children successfully enabled to return to family networks

Review the Contact Service to better deliver Family Time

As part of Families First Transformation, transition care proceedings work across to LAC Services

Embed Care Experience as an additional protected characteristic

Assist key partners to understand Corporate Parenting responsibilities, how they can contribute to the local offer

Focus on ensuring opportunity and engagement in learning

Development of permanence strategy and action plan to improve conversations around permanence throughout the child's journey

Respond to the opportunities of LGR and Devolution particularly in relation to housing supply for children who are moving through care into independence

Provider Services

Strengthen market management of children's residential care to ensure services deliver value for money, while maintaining high standards of care and improving outcomes for children

Invest in closer partnership with neighbouring authorities to increase the number of foster carers across Sussex

Embed Mockingbird and deliver a second constellation,

Open Seaside Short Breaks Service for children with complex needs and learning disabilities.

Increase capacity at Lansdowne Secure Home

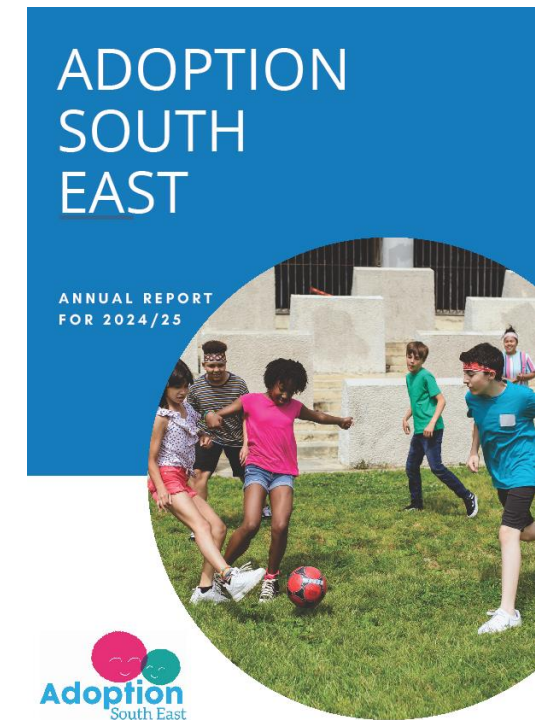
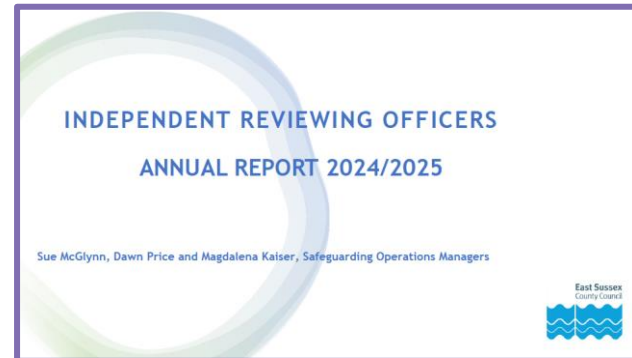
Continue to invest in a resilient, skilled residential workforce

Review the Placement Support Service to increase flexible support for children and their carers

Enhance quality and meaning of supervision

Children's Services Annual Reports 2024/25

Page 92



Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date of meeting:	16 October 2025
By:	Director of Children's Services
Title:	Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2024/25
Purpose:	To present the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report for 2024/25 to the Corporate Parenting Panel, highlighting key developments, performance and priorities.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the IRO Annual Report 2024/25.

1. Background

1.1 The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report is a statutory requirement and is presented annually to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

1.2 The report provides a comprehensive overview of the work undertaken by the Safeguarding Unit, including the performance of IROs in relation to children looked after and child protection services.

1.3 The 2024/25 report marks the first time the IRO and Child Protection Conferencing reports have been combined, offering a more integrated view of service delivery.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The report highlights:

- A stable and skilled IRO workforce with no agency staff.
- Continued improvements in quality assurance through audits and midway reviews.
- Strong performance in timeliness of My Voice Matters (MVM) meetings (89%) and child participation (92%).
- A reduction in Child Protection Plans and increased permanency through long-term fostering.
- Ongoing development of the Valuing Care model and Life Story work.
- Effective use of Issue Resolution processes to challenge and improve practice.
- Continued focus on supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) (now referred to as Separated Migrant Children) and children from ethnic minority backgrounds.
- Plans for further development in 2025/26, including improving consultation feedback, promoting reunification, and strengthening permanency planning.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The IRO Annual Report provides assurance to the Corporate Parenting Panel regarding the effectiveness of the IRO service and its contribution to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children looked after.

3.2 The report identifies areas of good practice and priorities for continued improvement.

3.3 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

CAROLYN FAIR
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott
Tel. No. 07517 466 601
Email: Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2024/2025

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

Page 95

Sue McGlynn, Dawn Price and Magdalena Kaiser, Safeguarding Operations Managers

Appendix 1

Contents

This year’s report marks the first time the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Report for Children Looked After has been combined with the Child Protection Conferencing Report, offering a more integrated view of our service delivery.

The Annual report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to Child Protection Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

The Independent Reviewing Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Executive Summary	Page: 3
Service structure	Page: 4-5
Progress on Priorities 2023/2024	Page: 6
CSU Priorities for 2025/2026	Page: 7
CPA/IRO Activity	Page: 8-11
Consultation & Feedback	Page: 12
Quality Assurance Audits	Page: 13
IRO year	Page: 14
My Voice Matters	Page: 15
Our Child data	Page: 16-20
IRO oversight	Page: 21
Continued development	Page: 22
Glossary	Page: 23

Executive Summary

Stable and Skilled Team

The Safeguarding Unit maintained a stable workforce, enhancing relationships with children, families, and professionals. All permanent posts were successfully filled, eliminating the need for agency staff.

Key developments included:

Two internal staff joined in new roles, bringing valuable experience.

One external candidate was recruited later in the year.

During this period there was one extended sickness absence and a brief period of being 0.8 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) down, however the commitment of the staffing team was present with sharing out the additional workload.

Child Protection Advisors/Independent Reviewing Officers (CPAs/IROs) undertook and delivered on a range of training events (incl. post-qualifying 'Risk and Decision Making' course with focus on midway reviews) and provided consultation as developmental leads in key areas of risk and practice.

Child-Centred Decisions

In some cases, My Voice Matters Meetings (MVMs) were delayed to avoid introducing a new IRO for a single review. Children supported this approach.

Audit and Improvement Work

CPA/IROs are involved in the monthly audit programme completed by all Children's Social Care Practice Managers.

Operation Managers (OMs) and Head of Service (HoS) meet quarterly with the Children's Safeguarding Unit (CSU) Quality Assurance OM to complete a thematic audit, at times these are completed collaboratively with other services.

Audits conducted during the review period included a thematic audit on the Effectiveness of the Missing Children Process showed most children were offered return home interviews. Safeguarding Managers audited the impact of Midway Reviews, finding positive outcomes and prompting improvements in alerting Practice Managers to outstanding actions.

Recognition and Awards

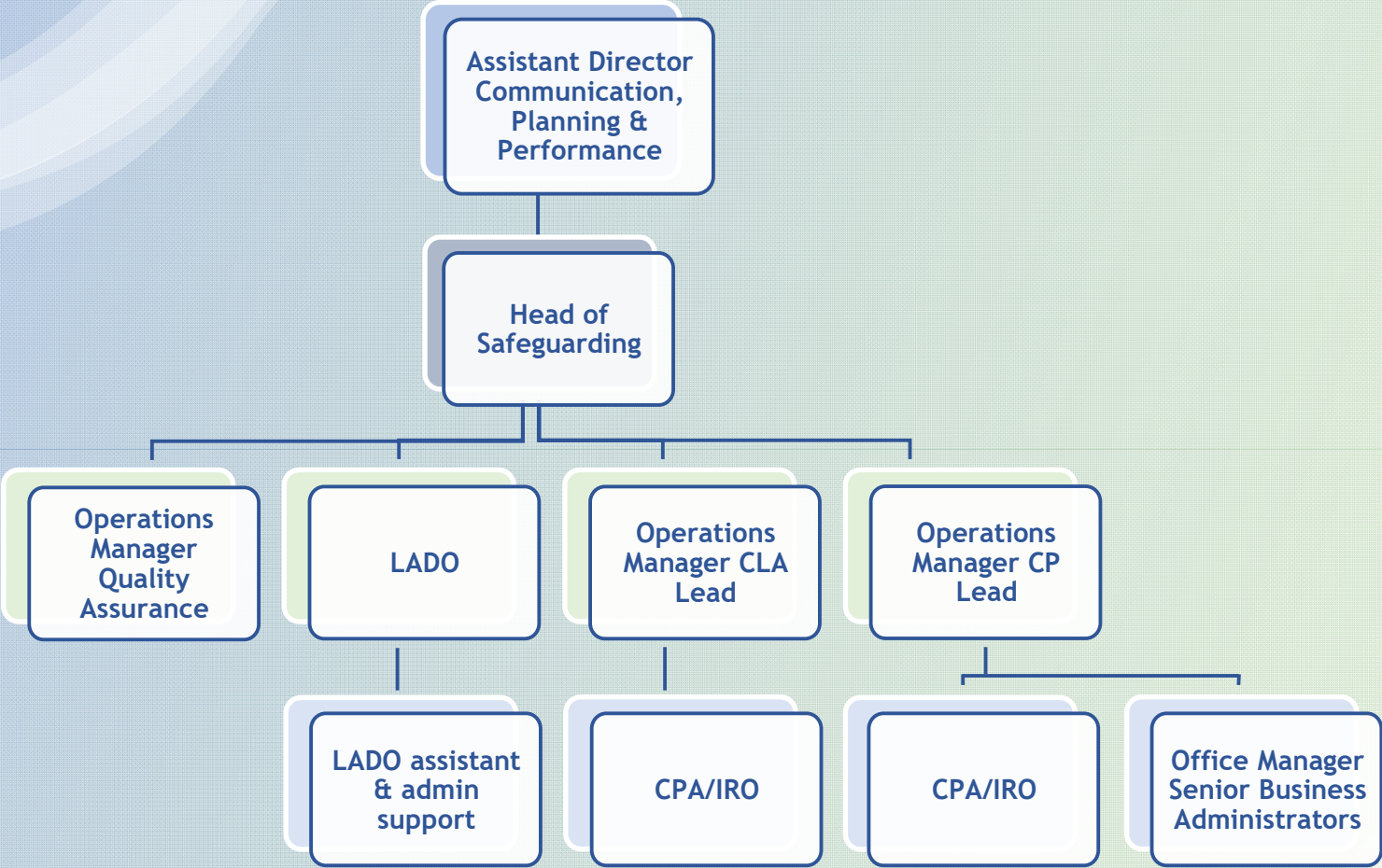
The Business Support Team and an IRO/CPA were nominated for the Outstanding Achievement Awards under the category 'Delivering a great service and focusing on outcomes that matter most', highlighting the difference they make to children and families through their work.

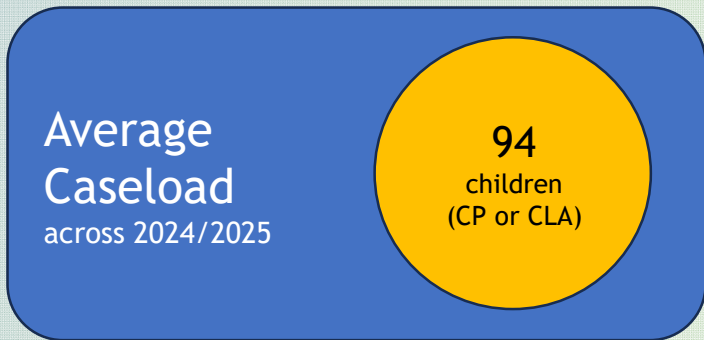
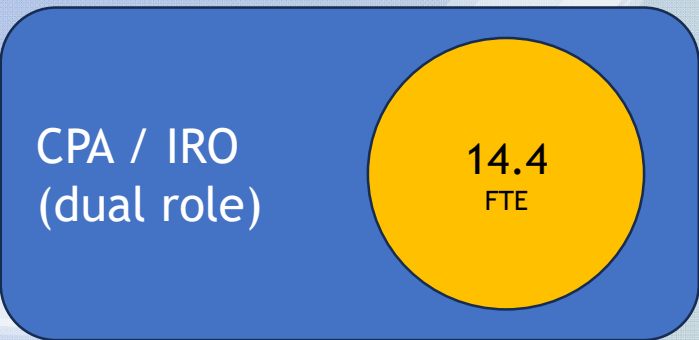
Nominations came from a team manager and a children's social worker.

Partnership with Bede's Independent School

The Safeguarding Unit strengthened ties with Bede's, where several children are boarders. The team visited the school to better understand the Boarding School Project, toured facilities, and discussed how the school meets children's needs.

Service Structure



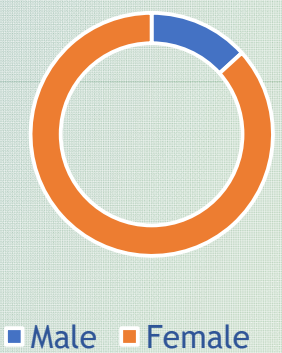


Our CPA / IROs have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to plans for the most vulnerable children in our County. We are a diverse staff group who bring a wealth of personal and professional skills along with experience to the role of chairing.

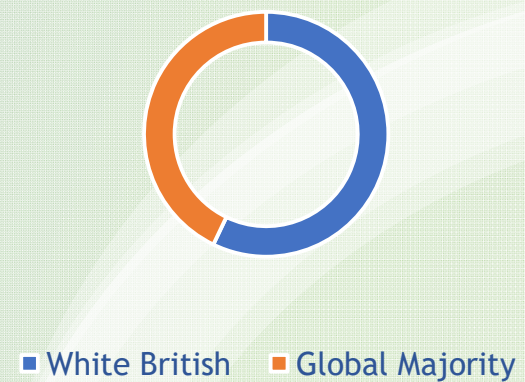
IROs chair My Voice Matters Meetings; the statutory Looked After Children review meetings. CPAs chair Child Protection Conferences; the two roles are separated by different legislation and regulatory protocols which each require a depth and breadth of expertise and knowledge.

All the Chairs fulfil a dual role thereby ensuring they retain a better sense of the child’s journey and holistic experience. Separate management streams ensure a focus on legislative and practice developments and quality assurance of each function.

Gender



Ethnicity



Review of Safeguarding Unit Priorities 2024/2025

Embed the use of the new Family Plan ensuring SMART actions within the plans

Monthly case file audits have highlighted that most cases had SMART Child's Plans, with clear roles, tasks and responsibilities outlined, but there is continued need for improvement in this area of practice.

Contribute to the Valuing Care work and develop the LCS forms accordingly

All children up to the age of 16yrs now have a Valuing Care Profile within their Care Plans.

Review the effectiveness of the SAFER Plus process for children at risk of exploitation and harm outside the home

SAFER Plus has been found to provide a robust and effective multi-agency safeguarding mechanism, for some children who are subject to or are at risk of contextual harm, as an alternative to the CP Conferencing process.

Update existing Child and Family CP Conference information documents

The Family CP Conference information leaflet has been updated. The Child's CP Conference information leaflet is due to be finalised following consultation with young people.

Evidence that the quality assurance activity is having an impact, monitor the progress and arrangements and continue the Safeguarding Unit audit activity

Increased scrutiny and reporting of the timeliness of RCPCs has resulted in an improvement of our performance in this area. An audit of ICPCs has highlighted potential opportunities to increase collaboration and innovation. Midway Reviews are completed consistently, which contributes to evidencing CPA/IRO footprint in monitoring pace and progress. OMs report on the outcome of Midway Reviews for CP Plans 18 months+ to Senior Management. An audit of Midway Reviews highlighted that the majority of Midway Reviews have a positive impact on case progression.

Ensure ICON Cope is promoted within CP Conferences where there is a new baby in the family

Prompts and guidance on utilising ICON Cope have been implemented across the children's electronic recording systems, incl. in the Child's Plan and the CPA QA section of the Conference outcome form.

Continue to implement the developments for life story work and recommended actions from the Steering Group

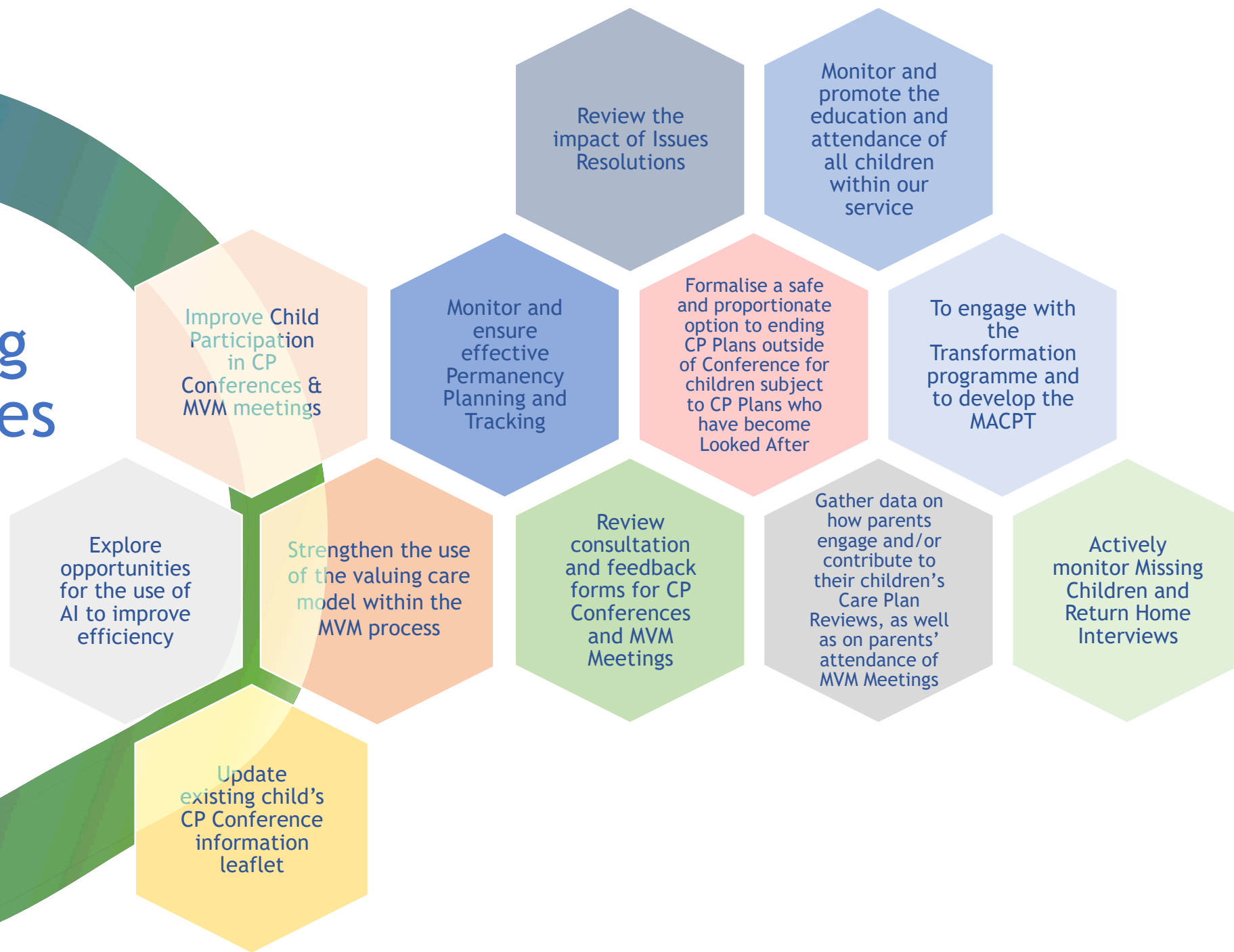
Additional Life Story and Later Life Letter monitoring and timescales have been added the IRO outcomes form.

Ensure effective permanence tracking is captured within the MVM outcome form

Permanency planning and permanent placements are both now tracked with the IRO outcome forms. This data can be accessed to support on going monitoring.

Children's Safeguarding Unit Priorities 2025/2026

Page 101



CPA/IRO Activity

Child Protection Conference and My Voice Matters Meetings

Child Protection Conferences (CPC) and My Voice Matters Meetings (MVM) are usually held as a single review involving all relevant family and professionals. However, MVMs may be held as a series of meetings to ensure that they are effective, safe and facilitate the child's needs.

In addition to their professional focus, preparing parents, carers and children for their meetings and ensuring their wellbeing throughout the process. Chairs exercise a key role in the implementation of the Local Authority's Quality Assurance Framework.

2022/23: meetings held 2719 (MVM: 1541. CPC: 1178)

2023/24: meetings held 2856 (MVM: 1569. CPC: 1287)

2024/25: meetings held 2841 (MVM: 1563. CPC: 1278)

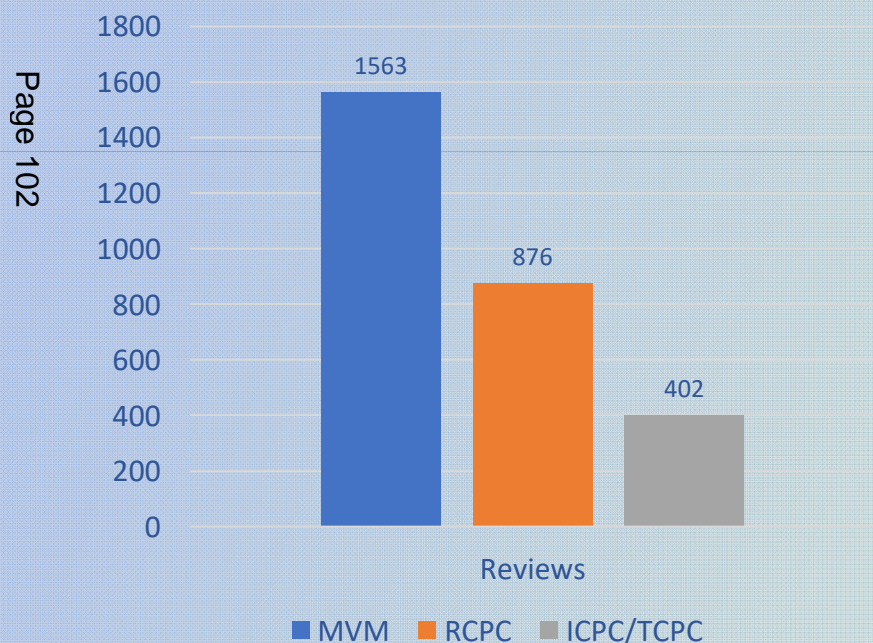
The service has chaired:

1278 CPC involving 2504 Child's Plans

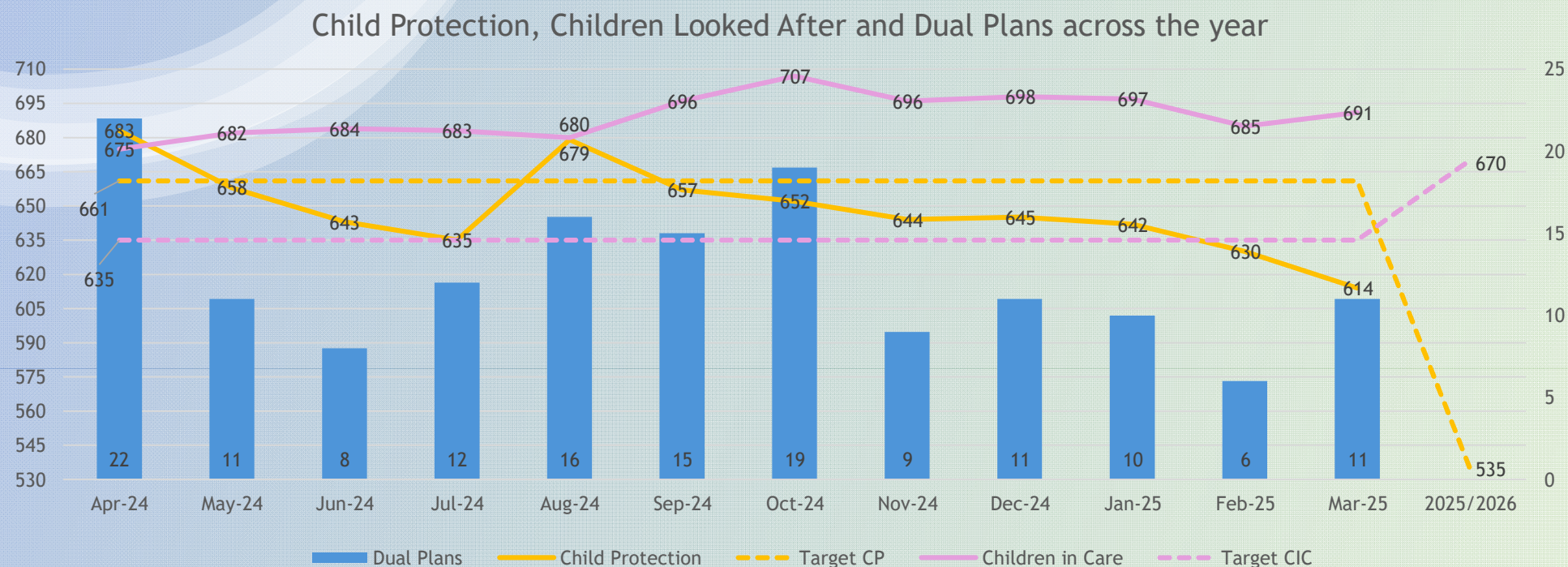
1563 individual MVM meetings (for 807 children over the year)

Equating to on average 197 meetings per Chair, (when fully staffed at 14.4)

Meetings held



Total Number of CP Plans, CLA Caseload and Dual Plans



The number of children subject to CP Plans in East Sussex has seen a largely steady but overall considerable decrease in 2024/2025 of 10% (69 Plans). CFIP support has been a key contributor to reducing CP Plans where safe and appropriate. From September 2024 through to March 2025 CP numbers have remained below the year target of 661 CP Plans.

The number of CLA has seen a largely steady and overall increase as such CLA numbers have remained consistently above the year target of 635.

Safeguarding OM has started to review all Dual Plans (CP and CLA) on a regular basis and report on this to senior managers. The majority of dual plans is limited to the period between the date the child(ren) are placed in care and the date the Initial My Voice Matters Meeting is held, because a Review Conference is usually held on the same day to consider ending the CP Plan. There are only few cases each month where a multi-agency decision was made to retain the CP Plan alongside the CLA plan due to the on-going presenting risks to the child (i.e. children subject to S.20 outside of the court arena).

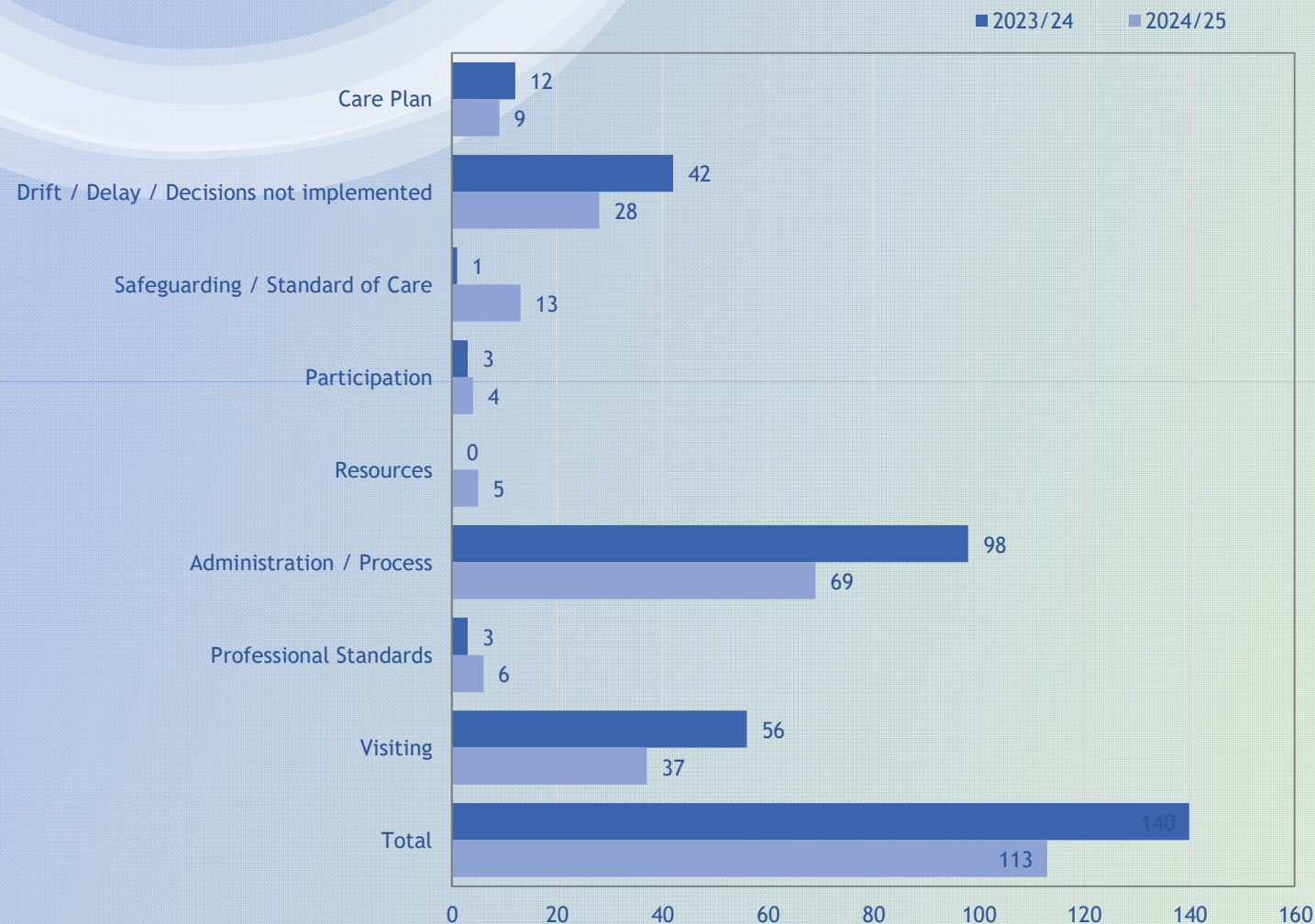
Issues Resolutions (Raised by CPAs & IROs as part of the Quality Assurance role)

Quality Assurance Monitoring and independent challenge are statutory requirements for both the CPA/IRO roles. The Safeguarding Unit ensures a consistent approach across these services, with a focus on documenting effective challenge in children's files.

- 134 Issue Resolutions (IRs) were raised and 100% were resolved by 31 March 2025.
- 91% were resolved within 20 working days.
- Resolution requires a response from the Practice Manager and agreement from the CPA/IRO.
- 9.2% of IRs were escalated to the Operations Manager, with only 1 case going beyond that level.
- Common issues include missing pre-meeting records.

Issues Resolution	Child Protection Conference	My Voice Matters meeting
Care Plan	3	6
Drift & delay	19	9
Safeguarding/standards of care	11	2
Resources	5	0
Participation	3	1
Visiting	21	16
Administration/Process	42	27
Professional standards	6	0

Issues Resolution comparison 2023/24 and 2024/25



Care Plan including when SW Team has not updated the CP/Care Plan between Conferences/Reviews. Care Plan does not identify needs.

Safeguarding includes concerns regarding robustness of plans, concerns regarding standards of care, timeliness of response regarding safeguarding issue.

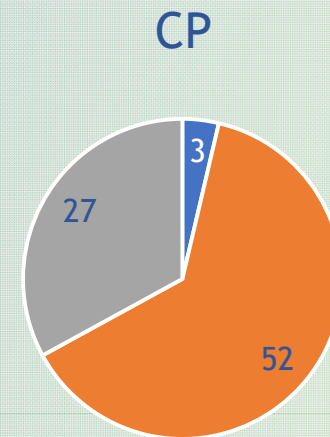
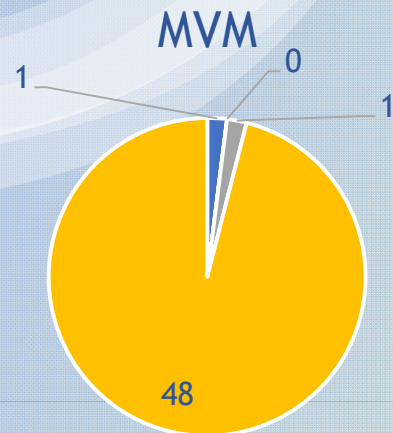
Participation can include poor core group attendance or failure to include family members e.g. fathers

Administration/process includes pre-meeting reports not completed (on time), invitations not sent or sent delayed, meeting could not go ahead because SW unavailable

Resources including Concerns arising about inadequate health or education provision. Concern around the suitability of the placement to meet the child's needs

Professional standards can include delay in allocating a social worker or concerns about professional practice.

Consultation & Feedback



■ parentscare plan consultation ■ professional feedback
■ carer/parent feedback ■ carer/parent consultation

■ carer/parent feedback ■ professional feedback
■ carer/parent consult

The consultation and feedback forms for Child Protection Conferences and My Voice Matters meetings are now used as standard.

As a Unit we made the decision not to use these forms with children as they are able to access the Mind of My Own app either with their social worker or independently.

The numbers of completed consultation and feedback forms remains low and therefore we will be looking to review, amend and improve these forms. Given the levels of feedback received it has not been possible to identify any themes on good practice or improvement. We plan to have the new forms in use by October 2025, to produce more efficient monitoring of the service.

Quality Assurance Audits

1. Monthly Audits by CPA/IROs

A total of 78 monthly audits were completed by CPA/IROs, contributing to Children's Social Care audit activity. Key findings include:

- 82% of audits showed consistency or improvement in practice.
- Improvements noted in SMARTness of Children's Plans, Core Group activity, up-to-date recording, and addressing current child needs.
- 16 Children Looked After (CLA) and 4 Care Leavers were reviewed.
- 69% of these cases maintained or improved quality of practice.
- Significant rise in Life Story work and use of the Mind of My Own app.

Areas for further development include:

- Continued expansion of Life Story work.
- Updating Placement Plans.
- Improving Chronologies to strengthen the voice of the child.

2. Thematic Audit: Midway Reviews

This audit evaluated the effectiveness of Midway Reviews in supporting the progress of the Child's Plan. Key points include:

- 16 cases audited (50% CLA, 50% Child Protection).
- Midway Reviews found to be valuable and purposeful.
- Embedded in 88% of cases with evidence of influencing progress.
- Useful tool for CPA/IROs to maintain oversight of case progression.
- Development needed to ensure outcomes and actions are connected across the system.
- Social workers report the process is helpful to their practice.

3. Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences

To maintain oversight of conferences falling outside the 15-day timescale from the strategy discussion:

- Safeguarding Unit Operations Managers conduct weekly reviews.
- Reviews provide context to factors impacting timeliness.

4. Thematic Audit: Missing Children Process

Conducted by IRO Operational Manager and others, this audit highlighted:

- Most common age of missing children: 16 years.
- Two-thirds of missing children were male.
- 49% found within the first 12 hours.
- 6% were missing for over 72 hours.
- 74% were offered a Return Home Interview.
- Majority of cases showed robust triangulation of information.

5. Quality Assurance Integration

The Quality Assurance Operations Manager:

- Attends Safeguarding Unit meetings.
- Shares audit feedback and assesses changes required during the review period.

During this year, the IRO service has been able to:

As the Operations Manager for IROs I observed some staff completing their day-to-day dual roles, it was great to see the working relationships that have been built between IROs and children. It was a pleasure to observe how child focused the MVM meetings are, how information, wishes and feelings are gathered during an engagement that didn't feel formal but did feel important to the child.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relations to the child's case.
- Participate in any review of the child's case.
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- Perform any other function as prescribed in the regulations.

Good Practice Example: Just to thank you for continuing to embrace the case audits every month despite the huge pressures on your time and capacity, as well as making the audits count. Your audits are so fab - thanks, really appreciate the effort you've put in!

- **Ensure** that the My Voice Matters Meetings remain a child-led and focussed meeting, with children being supported to say who should attend and where they take place. If required IRO will hold a series of meetings to ensure they are able to fully review the Care Plan. Both IROs and Social Workers are creative in how children participate in their My Voice Matters (Looked After Reviews) but we are aware we need to improve participation.
- **Increase** the progression of children having their permanency secured through Long-term fostering. Joint working between the Children Looked After, Fostering and IRO teams to ensure all children placed with the same foster carers for 12 months where the court proceedings have been concluded progress the care plans of Long-Term fostering. The assessment fully explores the attachments made and the carers understanding of the needs of the child. The joint working identifies children, the discussions needed or held and monitors the progression on the assessment. We have seen the positive impact of this work in this review period, with an increase of 2% more children in long-term placements.
- **Review** the timeliness of My Voice Matters meetings, recording if any delays were purposeful and seeking to understand the reasons when meetings are held late. We have also been reviewing and monitoring the timeliness of children receiving their IRO Outcomes letter, again so the meeting is meaningful and holds purpose.
- **Support** children staying in contact with people that are important to them. This has included changes in how children are able to stay connected to the people who are important to them, that seeing friends and family goes beyond just seeing parents. Lifelong Links has supported children in re-establishing relationships with people they had lost contact with.
- **Strengthen** our monitoring and quality assurance role through midway reviews to prevent drift and delay, alongside building upon working relationships with the social work teams.
- **Work collaboratively** with our neighbours, to support and share ideas around working. We meet with East Sussex Safeguarding Team quarterly. We are also members and co-chairs of NIROMP & SEIROMP.
- **Promote** reunification, and support of these plans being stronger, with clear Operational Instructions, attendance at Valuing Care Panel to address any barriers in the supports offered alongside of the allocated social worker. We have seen an increase of 1% more children being placed with their parent.
- **Recognised** that more effort and support was required to engage parents in the My Voice Matters process, especially parents who didn't attend the care plan review meetings. New consultation record created so parents could still share their views around their child's care, even if they are not able to attend the meetings. Request made to reflect in the IRO outcomes parental participation, to promote parental involvement.

My Voice Matters Meetings

This is the ESCC approach to statutory LAC Reviews.

The outcomes from the MVM meeting is written to be accessible to the individual child. An Outcomes Letter is written to each child, and copies shared with carer or placements and parents as appropriate. Outcome Letters to younger children are held on file, until they are old enough for them to be shared.



CPA/IROs encourage social workers to support children to use the app to gain their views prior to conferences and MVMs

Timeliness of My Voice Matters meetings:

89% of all My Voice Matters Meetings were held early or on time in 2024/25.

Some reviews held late to ensure IRO continuity to the child; some reviews adjourned but recorded as late on the system. Some MVM meetings were moved to priorities ICPCs, however this is now being addressed and should not impact in the next review period.

- 2022/23 - 95%
- 2023/24 - 90%
- 2024/25 - 89%

Participation: children make their voices heard in lots of different ways:

92% of Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their review process during 2024/25.

Further work needs to be completed to look at why there has been a drop in participation, to look at recording and being creative in how children participate so their voice is present and heard.

- 2021/22 - 97%
- 2022/23 - 97%
- 2023/24 - 92%

Feedback Example: I can tell, my IRO tries to get to know me, but it is hard when you only meet 2 times a year as I am not the same person I was a year ago.

Knowing our Looked After Children

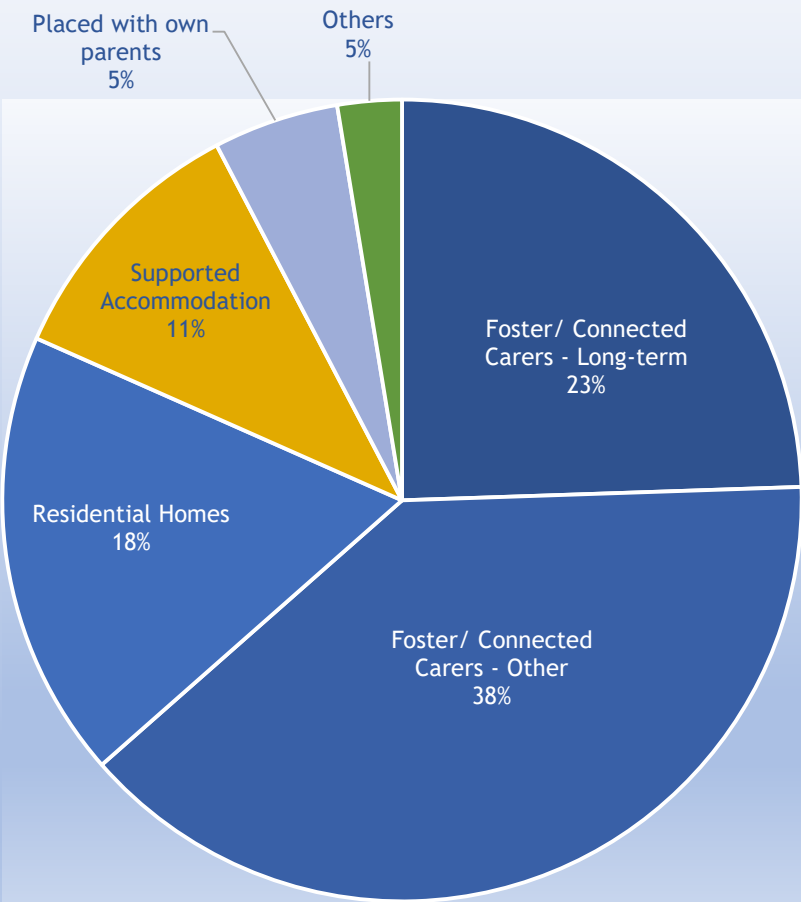
End of March 2025 66% of our children lived in family settings' this mirrors last years figures and shows the support for preferred family settings, reducing the need to place children in residential placements. Valuing Care Panel is supporting social worker in achieving step-downs back to family setting placements where it is deemed appropriate for the child based on their progress and needs.

- End of March 2023 - 69%
- End of March 2024 - 66%
- End of March 2025 - 66%

17 children looked after were allocated to the children with disabilities service. (2.5%)
 3 children were accommodated during the year under short term breaks.

55% of our looked after children were male.

Good Practice Example: IRO was newly allocated to a child, and he did not want to engage in the MVM meetings or meet with the IRO. Before each MVM the IRO would try to engage and always sent an outcome letter offering the child to attend next time. After 18mths of attempts the child agreed that they would meet the IRO if they came to watch them at trampolining club. The child was extremely happy when the IRO arrived and agreed to 'try' the MVM meeting.



Knowing our Looked After Children cont.

26% of placements for Children Looked After by ESCC were out of County end of March 2025.

- End of March 2023 - 22%
- End of March 2024 - 23%

68% of Looked After Children under 16yrs in ESCC had been accommodated in the same placement for at least 2 years (as at March 2025). This is lower than our Statistical Neighbour group (69% as at March 2024)

- March 2023: 71% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)
- March 2024: 67% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)
- March 2025: 68% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)

During the review period the numbers of looked after children has risen and fallen, with April and August having lower numbers of around 675-676 children and during October and December the highest figures seen of 701-703.

End of March 2025 we were looking after 688 children equivalent to 66.4 per 10,000.

*Feedback Example: From a social worker to the IRO
'I really like your style of writing your outcome letters to the children'*

Feedback Example: From a social worker following a MVM 'thank you so much for yesterday, you are honestly amazing with everyone, and I learn so much from you 😊'

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

End of March 2025 ESCC were looking after 72 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

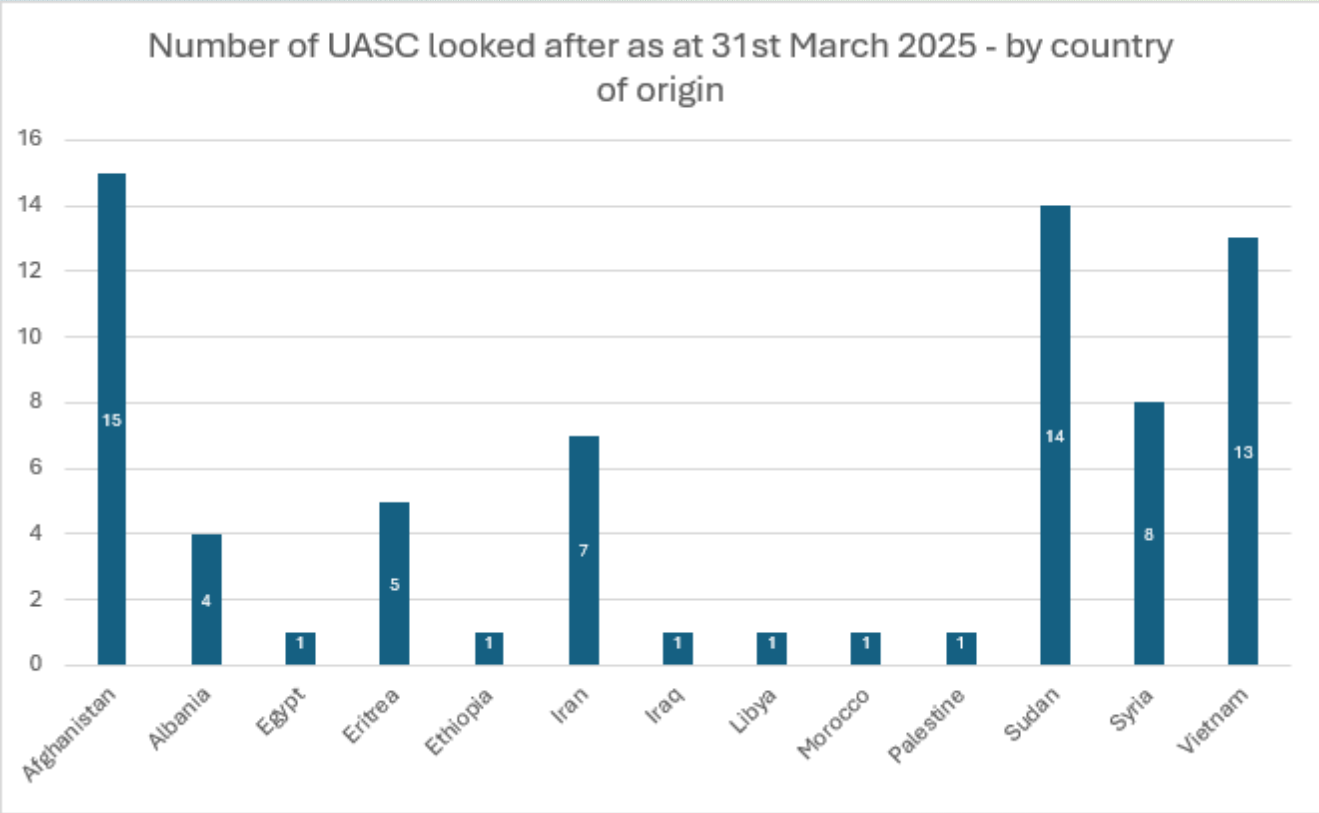
As per published DfE figures there were:
End March 2023 - 72 UASC
End March 2024 - 73 UASC
End March 2025 - 72 UASC

UASC represent 43% of all ethnic minority children looked after at 31st March 2025
As at end of March 2025 - 88.9% of UASC are male

UASC Age	Number of Children
14	2
15	6
16	23
17	41

Page 112

Good Practice Example: My IRO always sounded like he was sticking up for me in the meetings, which I liked.



Ethnicity of the children looked after population

28% of our looked after children identify as ethnic minority or mixed heritage - this includes our UASC

Row Labels	Count of CHILD
Any Other Ethnic Group	40
Any Other Asian Heritage	13
Any Other Black Heritage	3
Any Other Mixed Heritage	22
Any Other White Heritage	22
Black African	26
Black Caribbean	4
Gypsy/Roma	11
Indian	2
Pakistani	1
Traveller of Irish Heritage	2
White and Asian	4
White and Black African	7
White and Black Caribbean	10
White British	521
Grand Total	688

Good Practice Example: My IRO has tried to get to know me as a person , like who I actually am, rather than what has happened to me which is really important as I'm still me no matter what.

Achieving Permanence

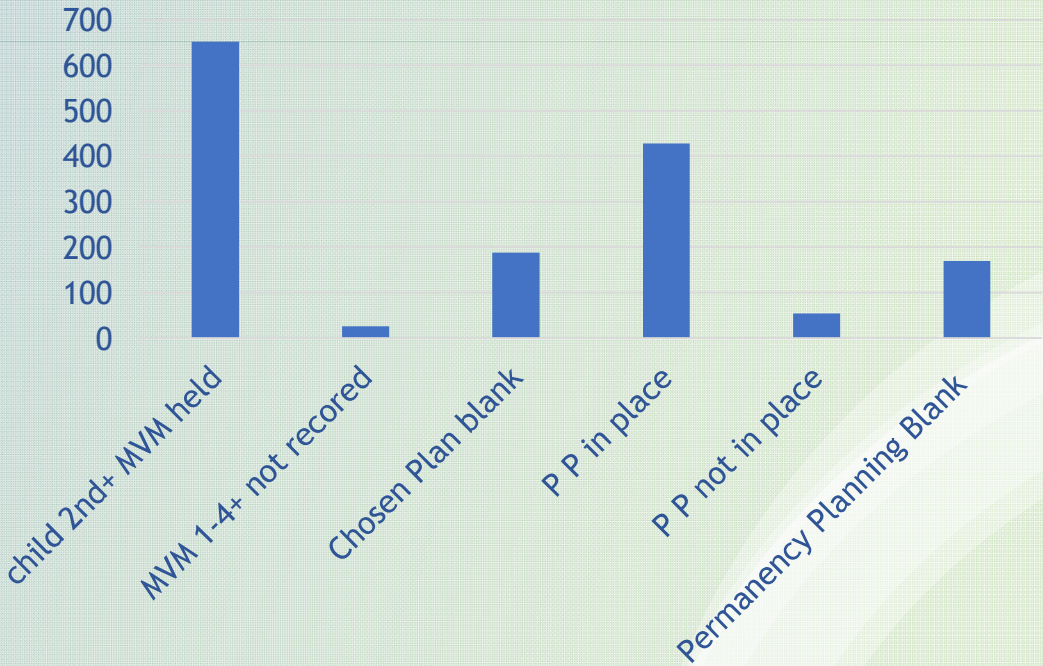
IRO Handbook: Permanence planning

3.50 - Permanence is the framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility) which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review, as set out in the statutory guidance to the 2002 Act.

The pre-meeting report/care plan and IRO outcomes were updated in August 2024, with the Permanency Planning Question added to ensure that all 2nd MVM meetings captured that permanency planning was being considered and monitored. It should be noted that the permanency planning is only captured in Care Plans & IRO outcomes for children under the age of 16yrs. Children aged 16yrs+ have Pathway Plans and different IRO outcomes.

Good Practice Example: I was given a choice between 2 IRO's which I thought was good as I felt like I had a say in it all.

31 March 2025



IRO Oversight

Midway reviews completed



Monitoring the case on an ongoing basis as noted in the **IRO Handbook**:

The monitoring role of the IRO is set out in the 1989 Act [section 25B, 1989 Act].

Between reviews, if the care plan continues to meet the needs of the child there may be no need for any communication between the IRO and social worker or the child.

However, there is a clear function of the IRO role to monitor the child’s case on an ongoing basis. In East Sussex we achieve this through the reviewing of every looked after child’s care plan and through midway reviews. The midway reviews reduce drift and delay in the decisions made within care plans.

Feedback example: From a manager to an IRO ‘I really appreciate the amount of effort you put into both building working relationships with children, families and professionals alongside staying up to date with recordings’

Continued Development - Looking forward to 2025-2026

Reunification

This will remain a focus for IROs and they will continue to promote reunification where it meets the child's needs. A tracker will be created to monitor children returned home, ensuring Care Orders are discharged within appropriate timescales. Progress will be reviewed at My Voice Matters (MVM) meetings.

Valuing Care

All children under 16 now have a Valuing Care Profile embedded in their care plans. Moving forward SW teams and IROs will use the radar tool to track progress and identify needs. IROs should promote the Valuing Care Panel to support step-downs from residential care or reunification. OM and IROs will attend the Valuing Care Working Group. A hearts and minds session will help IROs apply the profiles and radar tool effectively, in the reviewing of care plans and monitoring that children's needs are being appropriately met by the Local Authority.

Permanency Plans

We are now able to monitor that all children at their second MVM now have permanency plans recorded. Accuracy of recordings will be reviewed through audits and data analysis. New recording methods will help identify and address drift and delay. OM will continue to attend Permanency Through Long-term Fostering meetings to track Progress and ensure IROs are promoting the care plans and achieving permanency. Work with TCT to agree how permanency is recorded in Pathway Plans for 16-18-year-olds. IT and LCS will be asked to prevent blanks in permanency planning fields.

Continued Development - Looking forward to 2025-2026

Missing Children

IRO outcomes to include information about missing children, to ensure this remains on the agenda in MVM meetings and appropriate plans are in place.

IROs to remain vigilant around the reasons why children are missing, clarify return home interviews are meaningful and supports in place to reduce missing episodes and exploitation.

Share the IRO handbook 'when to inform IRO' with all CLA, TCT and locality OMs - this includes when children are missing.

Lifelong Links

OM will continue attending meetings and encourage IROs to promote referrals.

The goal is for every care leaver to have at least two supportive relationships in their lives to support them through the transition into adult hood.

Family Network Meetings and Kinship Carers

OM will contribute to the working group as part of the transformation process.

Partnership with Parents

Aim to ensure all parents are involved in care plan reviews and have access to consultation documents, even if they cannot attend the My Voice Matters meeting.

Changes made in the IRO outcomes for parental participation to be more accurately recorded.

If parents cannot attend other arrangements are made for their involvement in the review process.

Timeliness of MVM meetings & Outcome letters

Monthly tracking of reasons for late MVM meetings to be monitored and cross-referenced with LCS, to ensure accurate recordings.

Themes causing delays will be monitored and addressed.

Ensure IROs have enough time to complete meaningful outcome letters for children so meetings are meaningful and statutory timescales met.

Glossary

ASO – Administrative Support Officer
CFIP – Connected Families Intervention Practitioners
CiCC – Children in Care Council
CP – Child Protection
CPC – Child Protection Conference
CPA – Child Protection Advisor
CSC – Children's Social Care
ESSCP – East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
HR – Human Resources
ICPC / RCPC – Initial Child Protection Conference / Review Child Protection Conference
IMR – Independent Management Review
IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer
LAC/CLA – Looked After Child
LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer
LCS – Liquid logic Children's Service (IT system)
LSCLG – Local Safeguarding Liaison Group
MACE – Multi Agency Child Exploitation
MVM – My Voice Matters
OLA – Other Local Authorities
OM – Operations Manager
QA – Quality Assurance
SCR – Serious Case Review
SEIROMP/NIROMP – South East / National IRO Managers' Partnership
SESLIP – South East Sector Led Improvement Programme
TCP – Transfer CP Conference
UASC – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child

Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 16 October 2025

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Ofsted Focused Visit – July 2025

Purpose: To provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with a summary of the findings from Ofsted's focused visit to East Sussex Children's Services, conducted on 30 and 31 July 2025.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the update.

1. Background

1.1. Ofsted undertook a focused visit under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, specifically reviewing arrangements for children in need and child protection planning. Inspectors Rodica Cobarzan, Steve Bailey, and Zafer Yilkan led the visit.

2. Supporting Documentation

Headline Findings

2.1 Ofsted found that children in need and those subject to child protection plans in East Sussex are receiving services that make a positive difference to their lives. Key strengths highlighted include:

- Strong senior leadership and corporate support.
- Integrated, multidisciplinary support for children and families.
- A stable and committed workforce, with staff feeling valued and supported.
- A well-embedded model of practice, with social workers delivering thoughtful, creative, and kind support.

Areas for Improvement

2.2 Ofsted identified one area for improvement:

- Timeliness of child protection strategy meetings: While urgent cases are prioritised, a small number of children experience delays in convening strategy meetings. This can impact the early development of multi-agency plans to reduce risk.

2.3 It is important to note that this issue is not systemic. The feedback acknowledges that delays affect only a small number of children and that urgent cases are consistently prioritised.

Main Findings

2.4 The main findings are detailed below:

- Multi-agency working is a strength, particularly in cases involving domestic abuse, mental health, and substance misuse, the inspectors described this work as 'life changing'.
- Child protection plans are proportionate, well-recorded, and created collaboratively with families.
- Meetings (e.g., child in need, core groups, conferences) are regular and well-attended.
- Direct work with children is strong, with tailored visits and effective use of tools to understand lived experiences.
- Pre-proceedings and edge-of-care support are timely and transformational, enabling many children to remain safely at home.
- Private fostering arrangements are now better supported, with timely assessments and visits.
- Neglect toolkit is used effectively to inform decision-making and interventions.
- Supervision is timely but recording quality is inconsistent, and actions are not always reviewed.
- Quality assurance is robust, though improvements are needed in incorporating feedback and data system development.

Leadership and continuous Improvement

2.5 Leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development. The self-evaluation is reflective and shows a strong commitment to learning and improving practice. Performance management systems are used well, though reliance on manual data extraction may limit efficiency.

Next Steps

2.6 Ofsted will consider these findings in planning future inspections. The leadership team will continue to address the identified area for improvement and build on the strengths recognised in the report.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the findings of the Ofsted focused visit and acknowledge the strengths and progress made in children's services.

CAROLYN FAIR
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott
Tel. No. 07517 466 601
Email: Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Children's Services Focused Visit

This page is intentionally left blank

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 1231
Textphone 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofsted



1 September 2025

Carolyn Fair
Director of Children's Services
St Anne's Crescent
Lewes
BN7 1UE

Dear Ms Fair

Focused visit to East Sussex children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the focused visit to East Sussex children's services on 30 to 31 July 2025. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Rodica Cobarzan, Steve Bailey and Zafer Yilkan.

Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for children in need and child protection planning.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

Children in need in East Sussex, and those who are the subject of a child protection plan, are receiving services that make a positive difference for them and whose effectiveness is being continually developed.

The senior leadership team, with strong corporate support, continues to invest in services for vulnerable children. Leaders have continuously developed and refined services to ensure they have a positive impact on children's lives.

There is a strong focus on providing integrated, multidisciplinary support to children and families. This approach ensures that children and families benefit from consistent, high-quality practice that supports their progress and improves their lives.

There is relentless focus on supporting a stable and committed workforce, enabling staff to develop their skills and feel valued within the council. Leaders are actively creating the right conditions to strengthen social work practice and improve the quality of services for children and families.

What needs to improve in this area of social work practice?

- The timeliness with which child protection strategy meetings are held, as this is not consistently timely for all children (outcome 3, national framework).

Main findings

Children and families receive support and intervention at the appropriate level for their needs. Children benefit from ongoing assessments and interventions that are strengthened by a multi-agency approach, particularly through the involvement of specialist staff who work with adults and are focused on domestic abuse, mental health or substance misuse and family group conferences. This approach helps improve children and families' circumstances and reduce risks.

When children's circumstances do not improve, and risks increase, appropriate action is taken promptly for most children to protect them and prevent harm.

A small number of children experience delays when a child protection strategy meeting is required. However, when risks are urgent, the holding of strategy meetings is consistently prioritised. As a result, these few children do not benefit at the earliest opportunity from plans created by a multi-agency network to reduce risk while the investigation is ongoing. Once held, child protection strategy meetings are attended by the relevant professionals, who appropriately consider the level of risk and the impact on the children involved. There is timely progression to child protection conferences when required.

Children's plans are proportionate to their identified needs and provide clear information on how children and their families will be helped. Most plans have specific measurable timescales. Safety planning is proportionate, realistic and well recorded. Plans are created in collaboration with families and professionals, and build on the strengths and resources within the family's network and the wider community.

Meetings such as child in need meetings, core groups and child protection conferences are held regularly and well attended by key partner agencies and family members. These meetings support effective information-sharing and allow plans to be adapted in response to the families' changing needs. Child protection chairs provide effective oversight of plans through midway reviews. Minutes of meetings are clear. They have a strong child focus, while remaining sensitive towards parents.

Social workers build meaningful and trusting relationships with children and their families. The local authority's chosen model of practice is well embedded, with social workers consistently delivering thoughtful, creative and kind support. Visits to children are tailored to their individual needs and often take place more frequently than the statutory timescales.

Direct work with children informs their plans and reviews well, and is supported by a wide range of tools and observations that help to capture and understand children's lived experiences. This work is further strengthened by the involvement of connected family intervention practitioners and connected coaches, Swift and other adult-facing

workers who, together, form a strong network of support that delivers life-changing work for children and families.

Children's social workers involve family members from the earliest stages of interventions, even before the formal family group conferences take place. They support everyone involved to contribute to sustainable changes that the wider network is working on achieving together.

When the support provided to children by a child protection plan is not sufficient to safeguard them, there is timely escalation into the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline. This is an area of practice that has improved since the last inspection. Letters before proceedings are used appropriately to help parents or carers to understand the concerns and what actions need to be taken. There is effective oversight of children's welfare and the difference that interventions are making through the process. Families are offered an increased level of support and services from a multidisciplinary team. Kinship assessments are enabling an increasing number of children to remain safely within their family network.

Children on the edge of care but not receiving support through the pre-proceedings process can also benefit from exemplary and transformational support from an integrated multidisciplinary team of social workers, connected coaches and therapists. As a result, many children are supported to remain living at home with their families.

The local authority response to children living in private fostering arrangements has improved since the last inspection. All children now receive timely visits from social workers and assessments are completed promptly to support with decisions about these arrangements.

Social workers consistently use a neglect toolkit to better understand the impact of neglect on children and to help to ensure that support and decision-making take into account and are focused on children's lived experience. Well-co-ordinated, multi-faceted help is provided promptly, with its impact kept under regular review. Social workers remain curious about the underlying needs of parents as causal factors, when there are concerns about neglect. They build strong relationships that allow them to revisit difficult or sensitive conversations, ensuring that interventions are best targeted to promote sustainable change. For a very small number of children, interventions are less timely, and the cycle of neglect is repeated before decisive action is taken.

Social workers in East Sussex generally receive timely and appropriate supervision, although there is some inconsistency in the quality of recording. Social workers report that supervision provides valuable support and opportunities to reflect on practice. In most circumstances, records capture the necessary information to support families' progress. However, actions set in supervision are not consistently

reviewed, which limits the ability of managers and staff to effectively evaluate progress made.

The strong and comprehensive quality assurance framework is supported by a wide range of audits, including monthly systemic, thematic and multi-agency audits. These provide valuable insights that contribute to the local authority's continuous improvement plan. Leaders are aware of areas for development, including the need for greater consistency in the incorporation of feedback from children and families, as well as in how monthly audits capture the quality and impact of direct practice.

Alongside qualitative information to understand and strengthen practice, leaders are making good use of quantitative information. While existing performance management systems are used well, they rely heavily on the manual extraction of data and data analysis which is resource intensive, and does not support managers and leaders as well as they might and could act as a brake on continued progress.

Leaders have a clear understanding of their strengths and areas for development. The local authority's self-evaluation is reflective and demonstrates a commitment to learning, developing social work practice, and responding to areas where development is needed. This understanding has been used by the Director of Children's Services and her wider leadership team to drive ongoing improvement in the quality and impact of services for children.

Ofsted will take the findings from this focused visit into account when planning the next inspection or visit.

Yours sincerely

Rodica Cobarzan
His Majesty's Inspector