

Looked After Children's Annual Progress Report 2023-24

By Sally Carnie/Fiona Lewis
Heads of Service for Looked
After Children



Who did we look after?

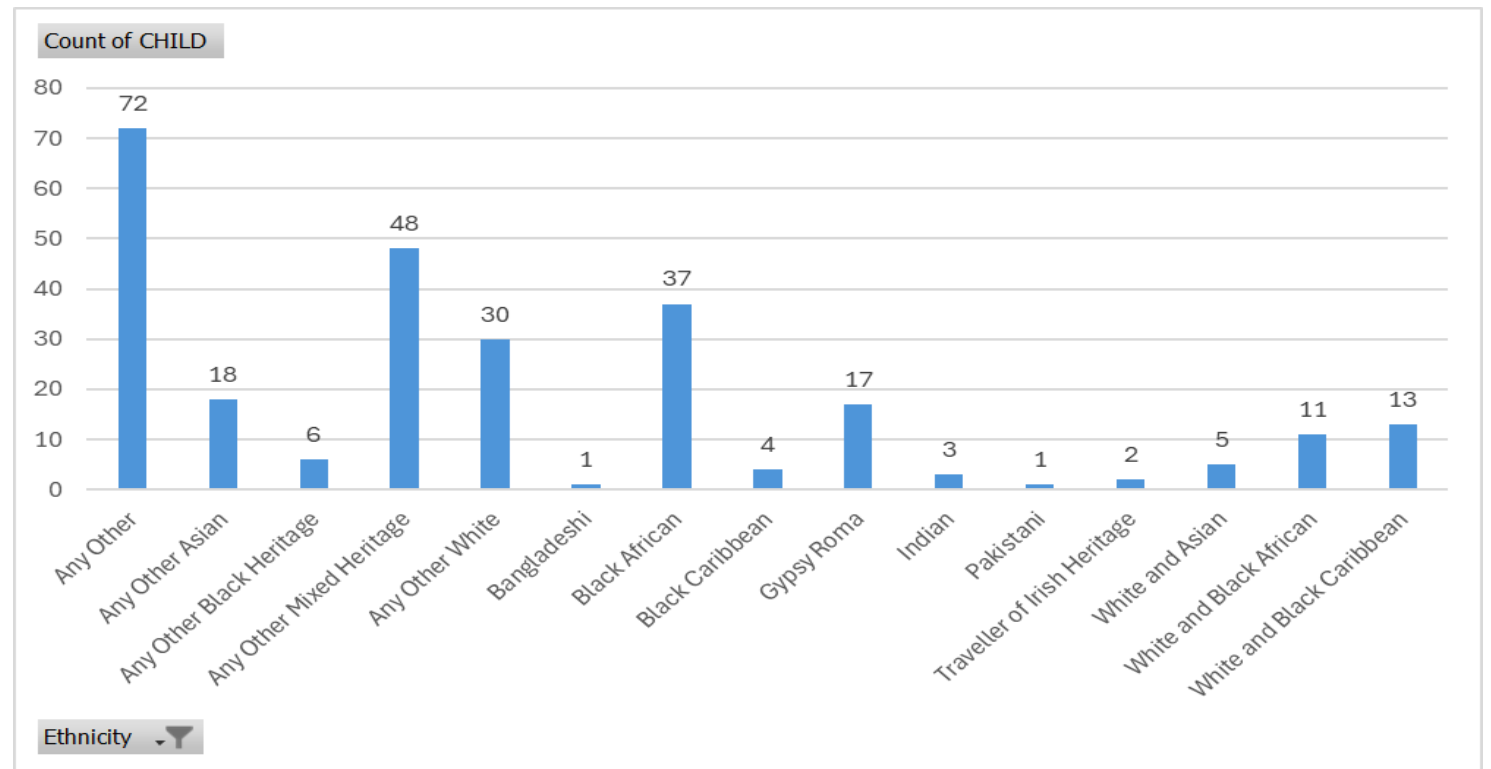
The data shows a snapshot as of 31st March 2024

- We looked after 371 boys and 286 girls.
- There were slightly fewer children in care than the previous year, although the overall total remains high compared with 2 years ago.
- There were higher numbers of children who left care in this period compared to last year and fewer children came into our care overall.
- 888 children came in and left our care during the year which is an increase of 23 as compared with 2022-23. This represents significantly higher activity levels across the service.

Statistics	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Looked After Children	628	661 (+33)	657 (-4)
Children coming into care	246	249 (+3)	244 (-5)
0-5 year olds admitted to care	81	81 (-)	76 (-5)
6-12 year olds admitted to care	71	57 (-14)	56 (-1)
13+ admitted to care	94	111 (+17)	112 (+1)
Children leaving care	228	217 (-11)	241 (+24)
0-12 year olds leaving care	94	92 (-2)	99 (+7)
13+ leaving care	134	125 (-9)	142 (+17)

Ethnicity of our Looked After Children (LAC)

30% of our Looked After Children (LAC) during 2023-24 identified as being of a global majority background.



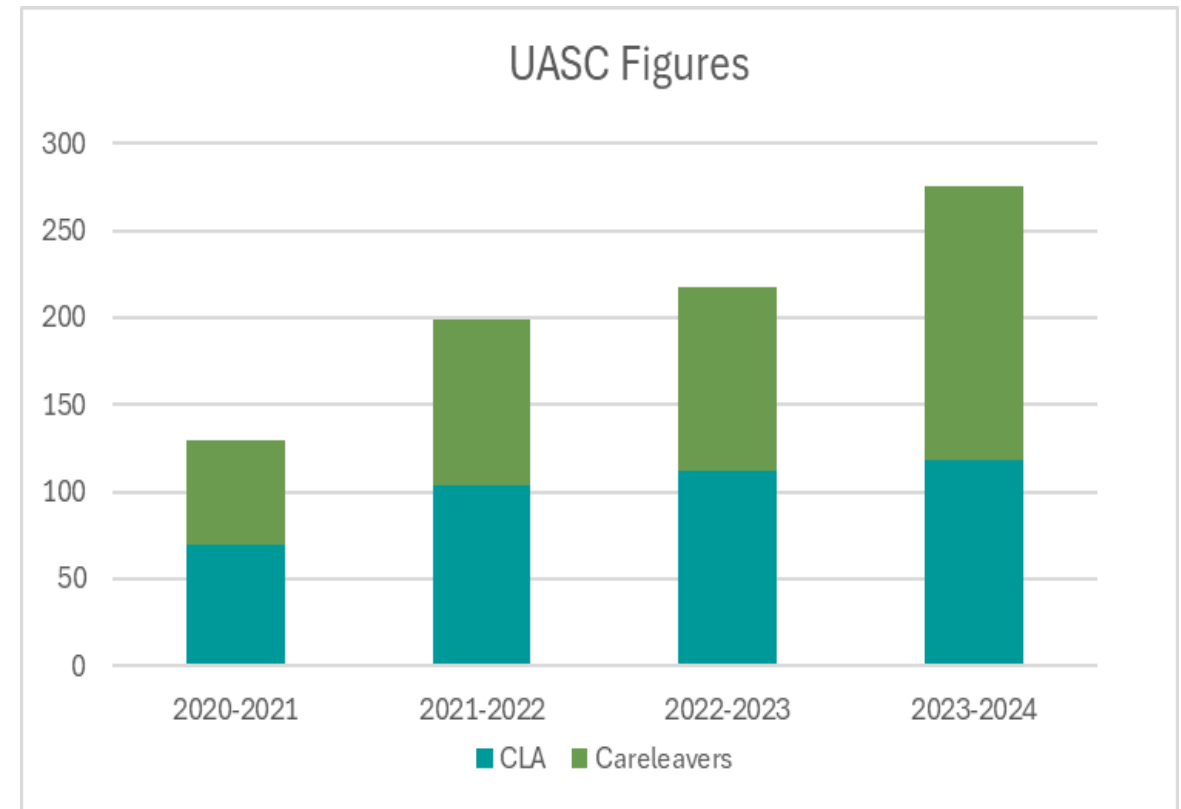
Our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

East Sussex County Council (ESCC) cared for 118 UASC under 18 during 2023-24, compared to 112 during 2022-23. In addition, there were 157 Care Leavers aged 18+ which is an increase of 51 from the previous year.

Our UASC were mainly male; 93% were aged 16 or over and the youngest was aged 13.

During 2023-2024 41 young people came to ESCC 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 Afghanistan, closely followed by Sudan, Iran and Vietnam. There were also small numbers of children from Egypt, Albania, Eritrea, Iraq, Syria, Gambia, Palestine, Angola, Turkey, Morocco and Chad.



Children looked after by the Disability Service

- The Children's Disability Service criteria for allocation is '*Children who have severe and enduring cognitive delay, severe learning disability, low functional abilities and physical disabilities*'.
- As of 31st March 2024, this service worked with 15 LAC. 14 children were aged 0-15 and 1 was aged 16-18.
- Geographically, 4 children were living outside East Sussex.
- These 15 children were in receipt of full-time care. In addition, the service provided extensive packages of support and respite to other children and their families in the community.

Placements	
ESCC foster carers	4
Agency foster carers	2
ESCC Residential Homes	5
Independent Residential Homes	4

Where our children are living

Data shows a snapshot as of 31st March 2024

Decrease in	Overall decrease in children placed with total number of foster carers, kinship and ESCC foster carers. Slight increase in children placed with agency foster carers.
Decrease in	Decrease in both children placed for adoption and children placed with parents.
Increase in	Increase in children aged 16+ living with our supported accommodation providers (both Ofsted registered and un-registered 'other placements')
Increase in	Increase in children living in agency Children's Homes.

Placement Type	31 st March 2021	31 st March 2022	31 st March 2023	31 st March 2024
With foster carer	426	451	431	409
Of these: in house carers	265	276	257	243
Kinship carers	65	84	77	68
Agency carers	96	91	97	98
Placed for Adoption	23	14	16	14
Supported Accommodation	57	63	87	73
ESCC Children's Homes	14	16	22	17
Agency Children's Homes	57	58	68	91
Agency Special Schools	1	1	1	0
Placed with Parents	22	22	33	27
Independent Living	7	0	0	0
Youth custody/secure unit	3	3	1	3
Hospital/NHS establishment	1	0	1	
Family Centre/Mother & Baby Unit	0	0	1	1
Other Placements	0	0	0	22
Total	611	628	661	657

How well did we do in 2023-24?

Indicator Ref	Description	2023/24 Value		2022/23 England	2022/23 Value		2021/22 England	2021/22 Value	
NI 58	Emotional & Behavioural Health of children in care	15.8	↑	14.4	16.3	↓	13.8	14.2	↓
Adoption 1	Percentage of children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted	8.2%	↑	9.3%	7.0%	↓	9.8%	8.5%	↓
Adoption 2	Average time between an LA receiving court authority to place a child and the LA deciding on a match with an adoptive family	241 days	↑	197 days	318 days	↓	199 days	395 days	↓
NI62 Placements 1	Number of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year	14.3%	↑	10.3%	15.0%	↓	9.8%	10.4%	↑
NI63 Placements 2	% of LAC under 16 who've been lac for 2.5 years or more & in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption	66.9%	↓	68.7%	71.4%	↓	71.0%	73.9%	↑
Placements 3	% of LAC at 31 st March placed outside LA boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live	17.8%	↓	16.8%	17.2%	↓	16.5%	15.4%	↑

Where performance has improved/increased it is shown with a green arrow ↑ and where it has dipped with a red arrow ↓

How well did we do in 2023-24? (continued)

Indicator Ref	Description	2023/24 Value		2022/23 England	2022/23 Value		2021/22 England	2021/22 Value	
Leaving Care 1 * <i>see note below</i>	% of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in education, employment or training	58.1%	↑	55.9%	55.9%	↑	55.4%	54.9%	↑
Leaving Care 2 * <i>see note below</i>	% of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in suitable accommodation	92.7%	↑	88.1%	87.4%	↓	87.8%	88.4%	↑
Leaving Care 3 * <i>see note below</i>	% of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in education, employment or training	75.0%	↓	65.6%	77.1%	↑	66.5%	71.8%	↑
Leaving Care 4 * <i>see note below</i>	% of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in suitable accommodation	95.2%	↑	90.6%	92.6%	↓	90.3%	94.5%	↓
Thrive PI 9	Rate of Children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18	63.9	↑	70.5	64.3	↓	69.9	61.6	↓
Health 1	Percentage of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist	64.6%	↑	75.5%	62.5%	↓	70.2%	70.3%	↑
PAF C81	Final warnings, reprimands and convictions of lac	1.1%	↓	2.0%	0.9%	↔	2.2%	0.9%	↑

Where performance has improved/increased it is shown with a green arrow ↑ and where it has dipped with a red arrow ↓

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

What the performance data is telling us

ESCC performance data was produced for 2023-24 and the national data contained in the tables above was for the year 2022-23. The improvement arrows therefore refer to a comparison with the ESCC data for the previous year.

Overall performance is encouraging and there has been improvement across many of the indicators.

Although the average SDQ score has improved from last year, the number completed has dipped again and as a result an action plan has been developed to address this.

The adoption data shows an improvement in performance across most timeliness measures, together with an increase in the total number of adoptions.

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

Percentage of dental checks completed remains constant and continues to be closely monitored by the strategic health team who are trying to improve dental capacity and availability for LAC locally.

There was good performance across the Care Leaver indicators with significant improvements in relation to EET and suitable accommodation.

Adoption South East (ASE)

In 2023-2024 Adoption South East (ASE) placed 104 children with their adoptive families. Of these children, 15 were from East Sussex, including 2 sibling groups of 2 and 11 single children.

The average number of children ASE were actively family finding for each month during 2023-2024 was 66. Every ESCC child with adoption as a care plan had a named Family Finding Social Worker in 2023-2024, as did all the children referred for and placed with Fostering for Adoption carers.

Early permanence has continued to be actively promoted by ASE aiming to improve the timeliness of placing children for adoption in ESCC. Of the 24 children ASE placed with Fostering for Adoption carers in 2023-2024, 7 were ESCC children. ASE provided 36 permanency consultations to ESCC Children's Social Workers, which included discussion and advice about 47 ESCC children. These 36 consultations included 9 which were specifically feasibility meetings for FFA, however early permanence is a consideration with every child discussed.

Family Finding & Linking in East Sussex	2022-23	2023-24
Number of children adopted (AOs)	18	20
Number of children approved for adoption	26	22
Number of children placed for adoption	19	15
Number of children placed for adoption by parental consent	0	0
Number of 2 sibling groups matched	3	2
Number of 3 sibling groups matched	0	0
Number of 4 sibling groups matched	0	0
Number of children matched outside of ASE	2	1
Number of children matched within ASE	17	14
Number of children placed for Foster to Adopt (F2A)	5	7

Adoption South East (ASE)

Adoption Support delivered by ASE

- Support offered to over 300 families who live in the East Sussex area during 2023-24.
- 237 applications to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund on behalf of families for therapeutic support for parents and their children.

Keeping in Touch Active exchanges in East Sussex

- 294 Letter box exchanges and 28 face to face meetings.
- 10 Family events were held in the year across the region. Teenage events and respite days have been introduced this year which have been well attended and very successful.
- A comprehensive training programme for adoptive parents was offered - 14 different courses all run by Adoption UK.
- An Adoption liaison worker continued to support adoptive parents with a monthly newsletter and direct support setting up local networks.

Adopted adults

- Support was offered to 36 adults affected by adoption from the East Sussex area.
- Developments regarding setting up a steering group and adult peer groups was underway at year end.

Fostering Recruitment

During 23/24

26 new foster homes were recruited and **38** placements were created

ESCC Fostering Service refreshed its recruitment strategy during 23/24 in order to meet the national challenge of recruiting foster carers.

A multi-channel strategy was designed by the specialist marketing and communications Officer using insights from the most recent research. The most effective routes to drive quality enquiries and recruit both experienced foster carers and new fostering applicants to ESCC were identified and actioned. Wellbeing and recognition schemes were also used to enhance loyalty and retention within our existing cohort of carers.

A new payment structure for foster carers was planned and launched on 1st April 2024. This fee structure was far more competitive in terms of fostering payments with neighbouring LA's and IFA's. This is likely to encourage more new applications and transfers, whilst also retaining the existing cohort of carers.

Recruitment	2019-	2020-	2021-	2022-	2023-
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Enquiries	260	228	200	274	236
Q&A calls	106	95	69	79	71
Initial visits	68	48	33	43	45
Approvals	22	20	14	24	26
Places	39	30	21	40	38
Conversion rate Enquiry to IV	26%	21%	16%	16%	19%
Conversion rate Enquiry to approval	8%	9%	7%	9%	11%
Conversion rate Initial visit to approval	32%	42%	42%	56%	58%

With relevant, informative messaging, enquirers and applicants were much better prepared at the beginning of the application process. This led to a significant increase in approval conversions. 58% of applicants continued their application from initial visit to panel approval.

Fostering Recruitment (Continued)

South East Regional Hub (DfE and Seslip)

It was planned that ESCC would join a partnership with 19 other local authorities to launch a new regional fostering recruitment hub with a shared goal. The virtual hub will complement existing recruitment activity across the region from July 2024.

Fostering logo refresh

The refreshed logo will ensure the ESCC brand stands out amongst other local authority fostering service logos in any regional advertising activity.

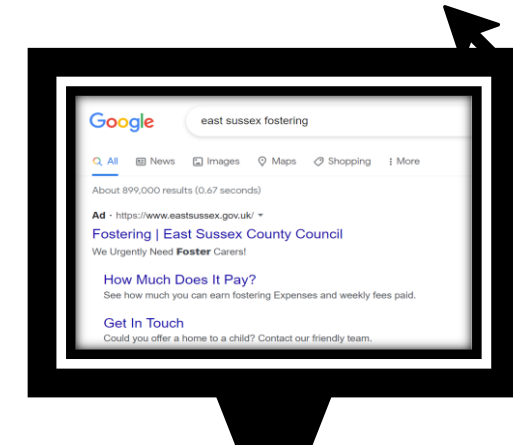
Supported Lodgings re-brand to Fostering 16+

A specialist support service for 16+ foster carers was developed during 23/24 to drive forward specific recruitment for adolescents. Whilst it continued to recruit under the overall ESCC fostering branding, it also launched a specific 16+ fostering campaign. This new service was also a response to the new Ofsted registration requirements introduced in October 2023 for 16/17yr old Looked After Children and Care Leavers living in supported living arrangements. This service was largely made up of former supported lodgings providers.

Instagram launch to increase followers and share in a younger market.

Networking 'word-of-mouth' campaigns

The use of ESCC's corporate channels and Lead Member networks has been used to promote the ESCC fostering brand and maximise exposure across the county e.g. ESCC Term Dates web page and at the Full Council Meeting February 2024 all elected members were supplied with promotional collateral kits to distribute in their parishes.



Google Adverts

Continued online search presence with sponsored ad campaigns. Vital to be visible in a crowded commercial marketplace to those considering transferring from their existing agency and those at the start of their fostering research journey.

Placement Support Service

What the Placement Support Service delivered during 2023-24

- 134 Packages of support for children
- 64 Reviews were held
- 22 Set ups were held
- Continued support our in-house Parent and Baby placements
- Support to 19 Care Leavers in the community
- Maintenance and management of 3 properties for Care Leaver accommodation
- Support to Virtual School events for 17 young people and 255 sessions

The Placement Support service offered intensive support to children living with foster carers where there was a risk of placement breakdown.

The support is offered out in the community at various activity centres, at either of the caravans in Newhaven and Crowhurst, or at Little Dunbar in Hailsham.

The service continued to work in close partnership with the Fostering Duty team to support short-term emergency placements.

The service also worked closely with the Virtual School supporting young people who were excluded or on a reduced timetable at school.

Dedicated placement support workers also supported care leavers living independently and looked after children in children's homes.

Children in Care Council

Recruitment

Members took part regularly on recruitment panels for new staff working with young people within East Sussex.

Brighton University

3 CICC members facilitated their annual two-hour lecture at Brighton University with students on the social work degree course. They discussed their CICC role and showcased many of their projects. They delivered a quiz as well as a brand new interactive “separation and loss” exercise designed by a CICC member.

APPG

CICC members attended several national zoom meeting alongside 21 looked after young people on how social workers can build meaningful relationships with young people and to best support those in care who identify as LGBTQ. The CICC have subsequently written and delivered their own training session for staff on sexuality and identity.

Corporate Parents and Senior Management Team

CICC held a ceremony at Little Dunbar to plant a tree in support of ‘Positivitree’. This was attended by Councillor Bob Bowdler and several members of the senior management team. Positivitree is a national initiative for youth voice groups to celebrate their work alongside decision makers and corporate parents.

CICC Partnership working - Pan Sussex

3 members attended the Sussex Family Justice Board's annual training event for professionals working within the family justice system. They delivered a presentation on key messages that young people in care want adults to know. This was facilitated in partnership with CICC members from East Sussex, Brighton and Hove.

Youth Cabinet

CICC have worked alongside the youth cabinet for recruitment panels and the annual RPPR meeting, in which the new CICC experienced how youth voice influences decision making within the county council around spending and services.



Children in Care Council (continued)

National Recognition

CICC were awarded second place in Coram Voice's national participation award. This was in recognition for their work and the impact it has had both locally and nationally.

Funding

CICC have secured an extra £804.88 in extra funding this year from the HAF Government scheme. This was used for 2 enriching team building activities - Bushy Wood in the Summer holidays and Ice Skating at Christmas. A further £500 funding application from Sussex Police Community fund to purchase hoodies for the new CICC to wear was also successful.

SUSS it (Speak up Sessions)

35 activities giving 71 young people the opportunity to speak out and speak up if they wanted too. Through this engagement 60 young people have asked for help with individual issues.

Digital Ambassadors

CICC digital ambassadors have continued to work with get digital. They have co delivered several training events, most recently the annual digital practice conference. They have worked hard to promote the digital hive, an online resource for supporting online resilience and safety.

National Participation

9 CICC members along with 79 young people with care experience from all over the UK, attended a day at the Coram Voice HQ in London. Workshops included Disability, Inclusion, Speaking up and Participation.



Our Children's Homes



Hazel lodge, St Leonards-on-Sea

- The home was judged as 'Good' by Ofsted - January 2024.
- Young people at the home have made positive progress.
- The staff team remains stable and has expanded in the last few months.

Brodrick House, Eastbourne

- The home was judged as 'Good in all areas' by Ofsted - March 2024
- It was noted in the Ofsted report that 'the young people are cared for by a skilled and dedicated staff team'. Another comment was that 'the children are thriving because of good quality of care'.
- There have been several changes in the staff team including a new RHM but the team have maintained a high quality of therapeutic care.
- The team are aspirational for the young people to ensure that they have the best opportunity to succeed both educationally and socially.
- The young people have experienced varied activities throughout the year including all of the young people going away on holiday.
- The home is in the process of refurbishment including the kitchen and utility room with the young people helping to choose the color scheme.

Homefield Cottage, Seaford

- The home was judged by OFSTED to be 'outstanding' in all areas in December 2023.
- The children resident in the home have all made good progress.
- Two of the children have recently sat all of their GCSEs and have college placements for September 2024.
- The children were taken to Centre Parcs at Easter for a five day holiday which they very much enjoyed.
- The staff team continue to be resilient, child focussed and have high aspirations for our resident children and young people.

Our Children's Homes (continued)



Silver Birches, Hastings

- Judged as 'Good' by Ofsted in January 2024.
- Effective systems in place to monitor children's progress including self-evaluating tools, that have been recognised by Ofsted inspector as exemplary practice.
- The home continues to support children accessing education despite significant challenges with individual requirements.
- Sensory space installed for therapeutic relaxation.
- Further development of expansive outdoor space planned to include additional decking, patio and sensory garden.
- Staff team has been expanded to include additional Senior RYSWs. Training to further develop the therapeutic skills and approaches are ongoing.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home, Hailsham

- Reopened January 2024 following a restructure.
- The Care Team are working well with the addition of some newly recruited staff, and the new structure allows for enhanced Care Planning.
- There is a high-quality, creative in-house Education offer led by skilled teachers and support staff.
- An improved Health offer will be in place from September which will support scaling up to admit more children.
- Currently looking to accept 6th admission.
- Steering Group including DfE, SAN and NHS England remains in place.

Our Children's Homes (Continued)



Acorns, Bexhill-on-Sea

- Provides care for 8 young people, who have a high level of complex needs.
- Staff work closely with colleagues in the Health, Education and Social Care around the care and pathway planning for each young person.
- Judged as 'Requires Improvement' by Ofsted in May 2023.

The Bungalow, Eastbourne

- Registered for 7 children aged 7-19 and provides full time accommodation to children with a severe level of disability and who are unable to live in a family setting.
- Most children attend local schools and all maintained contact with their families.
- The Bungalow received an Ofsted judgement of 'requires improvement' in June 2023

The health of our children

NHS Core Plus 5 - LAC 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.

There has been a gradual improvement in the timeliness of the completion of Initial Health Assessments (IHA's), albeit the performance remained below the local target for 23/24.

The Head of Locality Services implemented a robust tracking and monitoring process to improve performance, and this data was scrutinised at the quarterly Health Strategic Meetings throughout the year.

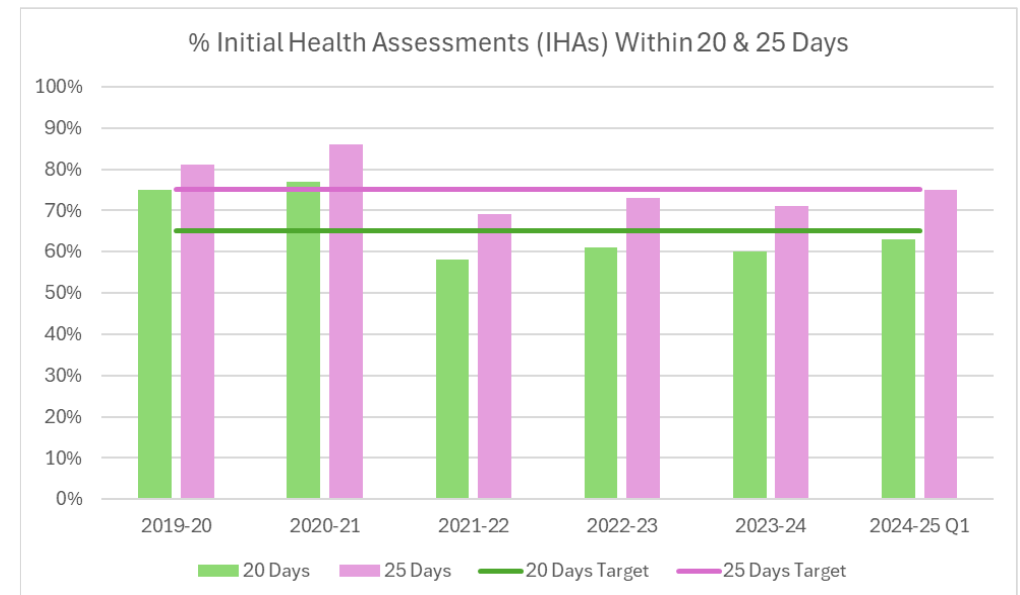
The primary reason for most delays was

- The need for IHA's being rescheduled when the first appointment could not be made for child/carer/SW or parent.

This was Followed by

- Placement outside ESCC
- Declined (by parent)
- Delay in CLA notification process
- Late forms submitted

The changes to the LAC age profile also impacted on this performance with a higher number of older children declining IHA's.



The health of our children (continued)

There has been a dramatic improvement in the timely completion of Review Health Assessments during the course of 23/24.

The ESHT Children in Care (CiC) Nursing Team had a number of staff changes including the appointment of a new 0.8FTE Service Manager (Named Nurse) who joined at the end of Q2.

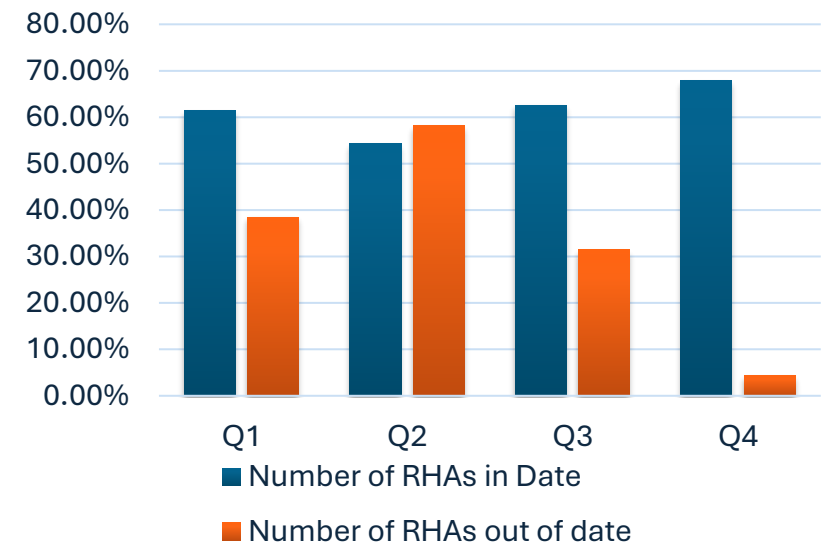
The new Service Manager undertook an immediate practice review and cleansing of the data collection systems. This resulted in more reliable and accurate data and more robust systems.

The explanation for some of the RHA's being completed out of timescales were- late requests, missing data, cancellations by Carers/Social Workers and some nursing capacity pressures.

There was a strong emphasis on collaborative working between ESHT and ESCC in Q3 and Q4. This has resulted in a number of developments to reduce delays such as rolling consent for all CiC, the introduction of a Nurse led caseload model, implementation of internal processes and disseminating findings and recommendations across both agencies.

The interagency working and changes to practice have resulted in an improvement in RHA completion as evidenced in Q3 and Q4 findings.

Review Health Assessment Data 2023-24 ESCC



The mental and emotional wellbeing of our children



The Sussex Children and Young Peoples' Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy 2022–2027 for Sussex Children and Young People up to the age of 25s produced by the Sussex Health and Care Partnership sets the direction of travel for the development of local services.



The Looked After Children's Mental Health Service (LACMHS) offered; 41 consultations to the networks during 2023-24 this was up by 6 on the previous year, 56 drop ins which was down again by 12 for 2023/24, and three Therapeutic Parenting Groups were offered to foster carers during the year which is one less than the previous year. There have been further consultations offered to the Residential Children's Home staff. The numbers of cases opened at any one time varied between 74(Q2) and 106 (Q4). This service is fully staffed although there has been an overall reduction in the clinical team due to financial pressures.



The specification for LACAMHS was finalised and was awaiting mobilisation at year end once funding issues were clarified. The new specification addresses the review findings of: longer waiting times due to increasing demand due to children coming into care, Section 20 cases, and Section 31 return home assessments; more LAC presenting with significant risk of harm to themselves or others; crisis situations, urgent assessments and interventions for high risk; the number of placement breakdowns and associated support for children affected; and the level of need arising in RCH.



The ongoing staffing recruitment challenges within SPFT for the Adopted Children's Mental Health Service (ADCAMHS) were not resolved during 2023/24. Mental Health Support for this group of children and their families was largely provided by independently commissioned therapists funded by the Adoption Support Fund. A proposal which could enhance this commissioning is currently being explored with the SWIFT service.

The mental and emotional wellbeing of our children (continued)

A specialist Mental Health Nurse has continued to support the Through Care Service to offer direct interventions to young people, and advice and guidance to their allocated workers.

The Health and Wellbeing Project for Care Leavers was maintained during 2023/24. Up until March 2024, 117 personalised health budgets had been allocated to young people.

The Named Nurse role was embedded in SPFT during 23/24 and offered safeguarding consultation to LACAMHS and the wider SPFT services in East Sussex. The Named Nurse also rolled out specialist training and supervision across the organization.

The Named Nurse completed a Quality Improvement project which focused on improving performance data and training to increase SPFT staff awareness/knowledge regarding Looked after Children and Care Leavers. The training addressed core safeguarding issues in relation to adult specialist safeguarding and specialist children's safeguarding. Improvements in the data capture has assisted the day-to-day operational management, and it also enabled the service to identify Looked After Children requiring a transfer of care to adult mental health services or primary care.

Education of our children - Headline data

- The Virtual School's (VS) strategic role to promote the educational outcomes for children with a Social Worker has continued to develop and from September 2024 will include children in Kinship care. The VS worked strategically with social care and education teams across the authority on attendance, inclusion and special education needs. The VS provided advice and information to social workers and worked with the Designated Safeguarding Leads Network within schools. The VS delivered a Master series in Education for social workers which has been developed to cover key educational issues and changes in educational policy.
- The VS continued to work in partnership with post 16 providers to ensure a joined-up approach towards improved educational planning, attendance and provision for UASC.
- The Care to Work group brought staff from across the LA together to ensure that our YP have access to existing employment and training opportunities and to develop opportunities.
- 299 blocks of tuition were provided to 53 children last academic year. 100% of all children and young people said their confidence against their targets had increased. 98% of the young people achieved at least one target and partially met the others.
- EAL tutors delivered 169 sessions of EALS additional language tuition through the year. Young people engaged well with sessions and went on to certificated courses at college.
- 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 focussed on an article of key interest e.g. FAS.
- VS funded and supported 65 Alternative Provision interventions for 43 young people to support the development of skills to support learning in school.

Education of our children (continued)

- Children In Care Achievement awards: 124 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. “It was one of the loveliest, most heartwarming evenings I have ever spent and, if there is ever another spare place, I would love to go again. It was a privilege to be there’ (Attendee).
- The Children in Care Council has worked with us 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
- **Academic Data: All current data is provisional, and progress and attainment 8 data is not yet available for GCSEs.**
- **Key Stage 2** data suggests that outcomes are lower than last year in reading, writing and maths. Cohorts year on year are very different and all have their own stories. One child achieved the highest score possible in writing and maths and others were working at greater depth. 31%, however, were assessed as working below the level of the assessment and so did not sit the tests. 37% had an EHCP and another 37% were on the SEND register.
- **Key Stage 4 Data** was similarly down from last year but better than pre- COVID results. High levels included a level 7 in French and 6s in Geography, Art, Design Technology and Food. 29% of this cohort had an EHCP
- Our post 16 YP gained A levels and BTecs in subjects including Philosophy, History, Psychology, Marketing and Drama.
- 13 Care Leavers gained University places for September. Many post 16 young people also achieved level 1 and 2 qualifications and were ready to progress onto other courses.

The Through Care Team - What we have achieved in 2023-24

- **Groupwork** takes place weekly in Eastbourne and Hastings with young people meeting for lunch, careers advice and mental health support.
- Young people took part in a variety of **consultation events**, such as a National Youth Voice event and they have reviewed Care Leaver Information Apps, some events took place in person and others remotely, thus ensuring wider accessibility and participation.
- The **Care Leavers Council** met each month remotely.
- Young people regularly participated in **ESCC Corporate Parenting Panel**.
- A **Facebook notice board** provided young people with information about upcoming events and useful links. A **text messaging service** is under development to provide another means of keeping in touch with our young people.
- Young people represented East Sussex at **National Benchmarking events** and we had our first **National Young Persons Champion** attend the national manager's event.
- Young people all had **access to laptops and Wi-Fi** in order to continue with their education, facilitate their access to employment and to keep in touch with their families.
- In consultation with young people we launched a new **Pathway Plan** which is more succinct and better captures the voice and views of the young person.
- The **Local Offer** is shared with all young people ensuring they were aware of the support available to them.
- Developments continued to extend the wider corporate parenting role across all agencies in East Sussex and the multi-agency **Care 2 Work Strategic meeting** was re-established.
- The **Health and Wellbeing Project** continued to support young people to use personalised budgets for activities designed to improve their overall wellbeing. This initiative has received widespread acclaim nationally.
-
- Young people attended a **celebration event** where their achievements were recognised

The Through Care Team

What we have achieved in 2023-24 (continued)



Placement Support Workers (PSWs) continued to work closely with our young people who were isolated in their own accommodation or were struggling to maintain their placements.



A Rent Guarantor pilot scheme was implemented to secure better quality private rental accommodation options for young people.



Young people accessed the Life Long Links service, which promoted connections with family members and other significant adults in their lives.



The (TCT) continued to work closely with East Sussex County Council Adult Social Care Specialist Accommodation Team ensuring a smoother transition for those Care Leavers with diagnosed mental health needs or trauma related diagnoses.



The Skills Journal was developed in partnership with Young People and is due to be launched in 24/25



The housing pathway was reviewed and the CSAAL launched.

Our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Developments 2023-24

- The Illegal Migration Act came into force in March 2023. The impact of this resulted in many children who arrived in the UK after that date not being able to have their claims processed and therefore remained in legal limbo. Those who turned 18 were completely reliant on ESCC for housing and living costs and had no access to the usual 'move on' housing routes. This put considerable stress on the post 18 housing provision.
- There were also an increasing number of young people who arrived in ESCC who were age disputed by the Home Office, all of which required full age assessments. The service worked closely with the National Age Assessment Board to complete age assessments in a timely manner.
- All hotels in East Sussex housing adult and unaccompanied asylum seekers were decommissioned between summer 2023 and Spring 2024.
- The team were chosen to highlight positive practice at an event held in parliament.
- After a successful initial year, the service extended My View, a Refugee Council therapy service specifically for refugee young people. The uptake of this service was high and the young people's feedback was very positive about the impact this therapy had on their wellbeing.

Our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (continued)

- The service continued to explore a range of new education offers for UASC, 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) increased its offer of personalised tuition for this group of young people.
- Joint work was undertaken with health colleagues to improve the health offer to UASC. The Initial Health Assessments were adapted to take account the specific issues for this cohort. Young people were able to access blood screening at their IHAs, which supported 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 with Brighton and Hove Albion.
- The 'Welcome to the UK' groups continued regularly during this period, building positive introductions to services such the police for new arrivals
- The second successful residential to Jamie's Farm was held in Spring 2024, with a group of young people experiencing life on a farm over the half term holiday

Our Children who went missing

In 2023-24, 136 LAC went missing:

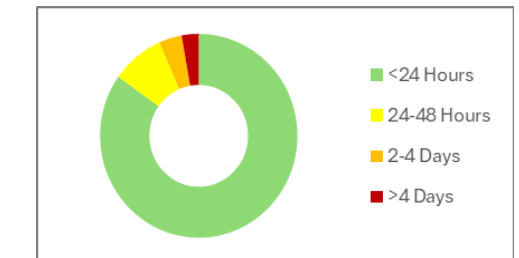
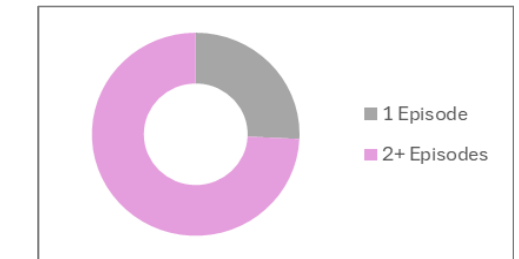
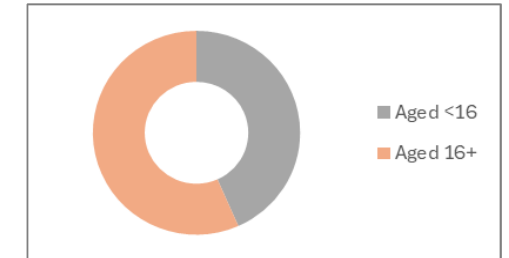
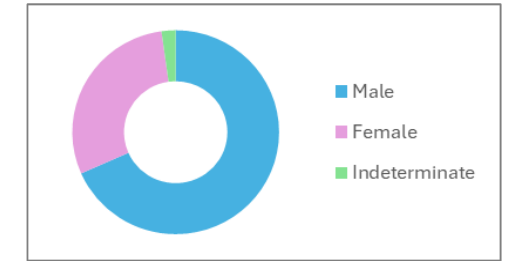
- 93 were male (68%), 40 were female (29%) and 3 were indeterminate (2%).
- 77 were aged 16 and over (57%), 59 were aged 15 and under (43%).
- 101 went missing more than once (74%).

There were 1075 missing episodes throughout the year.

- 912 episodes were where the child/young person was missing for less than 24 hours (85%).
- 93 episodes were where the child/young person was missing between 24 and 48 hours (9%).
- 40 episodes were where the child/young person was missing between 2 and 4 days (4%).
- 30 episodes where the child/young person was missing for over 4 days (3%).

All of these 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.



Our children who are at risk of criminal exploitation

During 2023-24, 68 children were subject to ESCC SAFER operational oversight and therefore categorised as being at high risk of exploitation.

8 of these children were ESCC LAC, 2 were female and 6 were male.

2 of these children were deemed to be at risk of sexual exploitation and 5 deemed to be at risk of criminal exploitation. One child was at risk of both criminal and sexual exploitation.

Our children involved in the Youth Justice Service

The Youth Justice Service (YJS) worked with 14 looked after children during 2023-24. A further 7 children became looked after as a result of being securely remanded.

5% of the YJS caseload in 2023-24 were Looked After Children.

Looked After Children aged 10 - 17 represented less than 1% of the total population of this age group across the county, however they remained over-represented within the YJS cohort.

My Voice Matters (MVM)

My Voice Matters meetings
This is the ESCC approach to statutory Looked After Children's Reviews.

The paperwork is written to be accessible to the individual child. The records outcome is written as a letter to the child and copied to adults as necessary.

There has been positive feedback about the IRO profiles that are now shared with Looked After Children; they noted that they like knowing a little bit about their IRO. Some children have also been able to choose their IRO after viewing the profiles.

Timeliness of My Voice Matters meetings

- 90% of all MVM were held early or on time in 2023/2024
- 2021/2022 97%
- 2022/2023 95%
- There was an increase in MVM meetings being held late in this review period, this was largely due to workload capacity within the safeguarding unit. Some late reviews were delayed in the child's best interests or because an essential party was unable to attend. The unit will be fully staffed by Q2 2024/2025 so it is anticipated the performance will improve.

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

- 92% of Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their MVMs process
- 2021/2022 97%
- 2022/2023 97%
- Participation performance deteriorated during 23/24. However, following some closer examination the records showed that most children even if they did not attend their meeting, did complete their views with the Social Worker. The IRO service will focus on the improvement of participation of children in their MVM meetings in 24/25.



The role of our elected members

The Corporate Parenting Panel met virtually 4 times during 2023-24 to discuss the agenda items set out below

25 April 2023

- Quarterly Registered Children's Homes Report
- Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Overview of new Ofsted sub judgement for Care Leavers
- Presentation on Post 18 education, employment and training support for care experienced young people in East Sussex

25 July 2023

- Children's Home report (including recent Ofsted inspection reports)
- LAC stat report
- Fostering Report
- CiCC presentation and Brightspots survey
- Presentation from LAC Health team
- Care Leavers -Personalised Health Budgets programme

The role of our elected members (continued)

17 October 2023

- ESCC Children's Homes Quarterly Regulation 44 summary report
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Look After Children's (LAC) Annual Report
- Children in Care Council (CiCC) Annual Report
- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report

05 January 2024

- Quarterly Registered Children's Homes Report
- Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics
- Lansdowne Secure Unit update on relaunch
- Impower presentation-Sufficiency and Valuing care

Sufficiency and Valuing Care (IMPOWER)

Sufficiency of all placement types continued to be very challenging during this period. A consequence of this was that there were occasions when children were placed in unregistered provision for short periods of time. These arrangements were subject to robust risk assessments and carefully monitored.

IMPOWER worked with ESCC from May 2023 to January 2024. The purpose of the work was to secure the right care, for the right child, for the right length of time. IMPOWER is a consultancy firm who work exclusively with the public sector.

The first phase of work

- focussed on better understanding the needs of Looked After Children in ESCC, associated pressures and the identification of opportunities to do things differently.
- This was followed by the introduction of the Children's Valuing Care Tool which focussed on their needs, strengths and outcomes, and the Fostering Valuing Care Tool which focussed on the skills and capacity of foster carers.

In the final phases

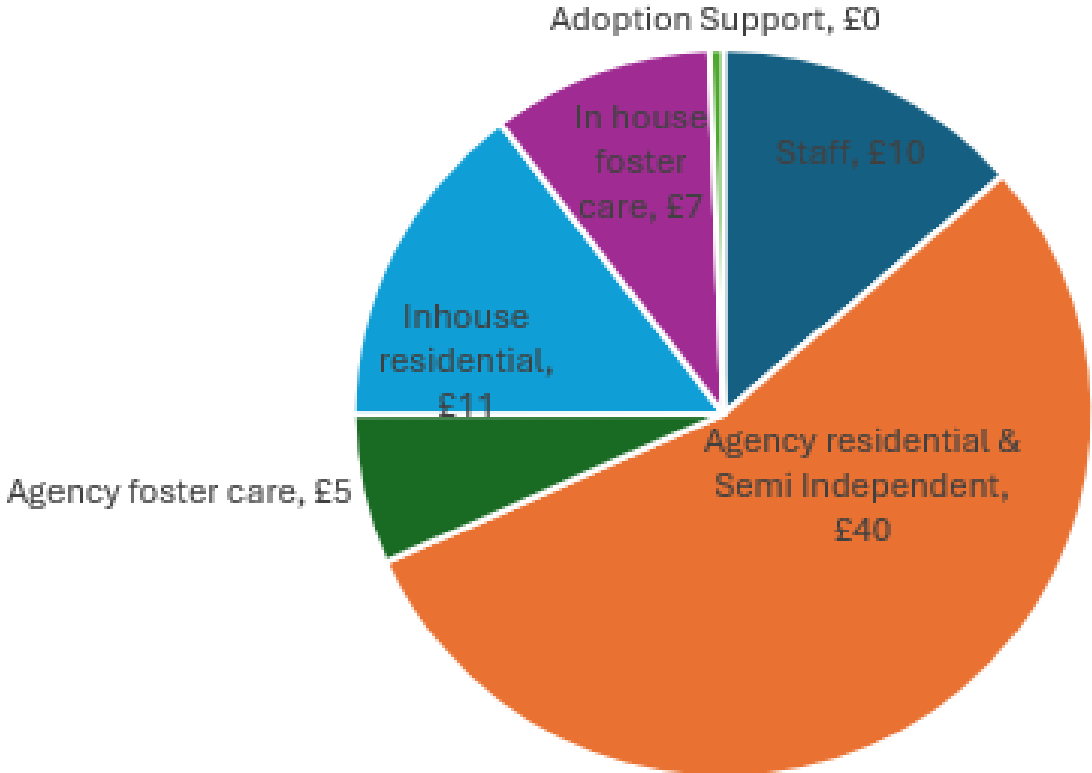
- A strategy was designed to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers locally.
- Market management and commissioning processes were enhanced by the deployment of additional resources.

Use of Resources 2023/24 £m

Budget £46m

Net spend £73m

Overspend £27m



Priorities for 2024/25



As part of the SE regional care cooperative further develop market management strategies to improve placement commissioning and sustainability.



Maximize opportunities to recruit and retain LA foster carers , including partnership with SE Fostering Hub and implementation of 'mockingbird'



Strengthen partnerships and integrated commissioning with local health providers and ICB, including in house residential provision



Encourage key partners to commit to the local offer for our care leavers including each embedding the meaningful application of the 'protected characteristics'



Maximise sources of financial support for our young people including pip, appointeeship and deputyship



Embed 'Valuing Care' approach across our service to ensure children are in the right placements that meet their needs and are value for money.

Priorities for 2024-25 (continued)



Review and refresh Housing pathway



In partnership with ASE, promote best practice in relation to early permanence, keeping in touch and post adoption support. Improved performance in relation to timeliness for children with a plan for adoption.



Digital strategy - contribution to the data and dashboard project/implementation of the provider portal/digital life skills solution/launch of ePEP/roll out of ClearCare



Consolidate practice in relation to the reunification programme to promote the safe return home for LAC



Evaluate Life Story Work Pilot

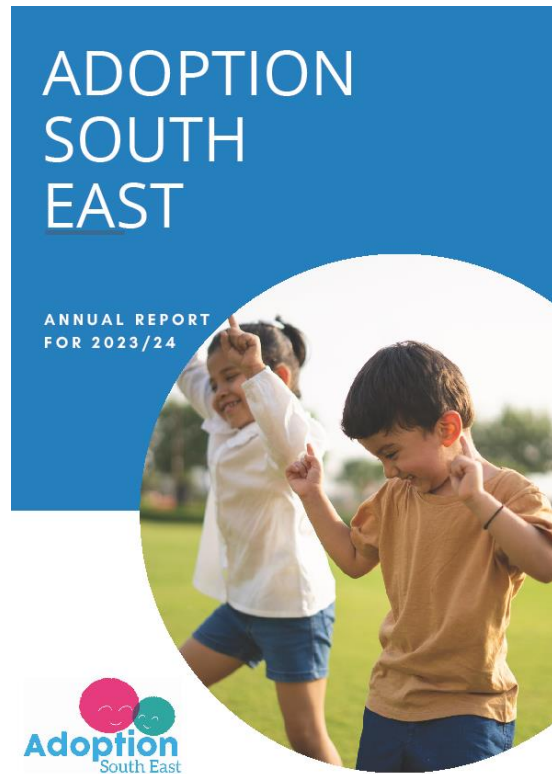


Contribute to ESCC's implementation of the Care Review



Improve recruitment and retention across our residential homes and reduce use of agency carers.

Children's Services Annual Reports 2023-24



Independent Reviewing Service
Annual Report 2023/2024

Dawn Price Operations Manager

- The Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.
- The IRO Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

• Please see Glossary for definitions