

Committee: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date: 30 January 2025

Title of Report: Looked After Children Statistics

By: Head of Looked After Children

Purpose of Report: To provide Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) with an overview of quarter 3 data for Looked After Children (LAC)

Recommendations:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the report.

1. Background – Financial Appraisal

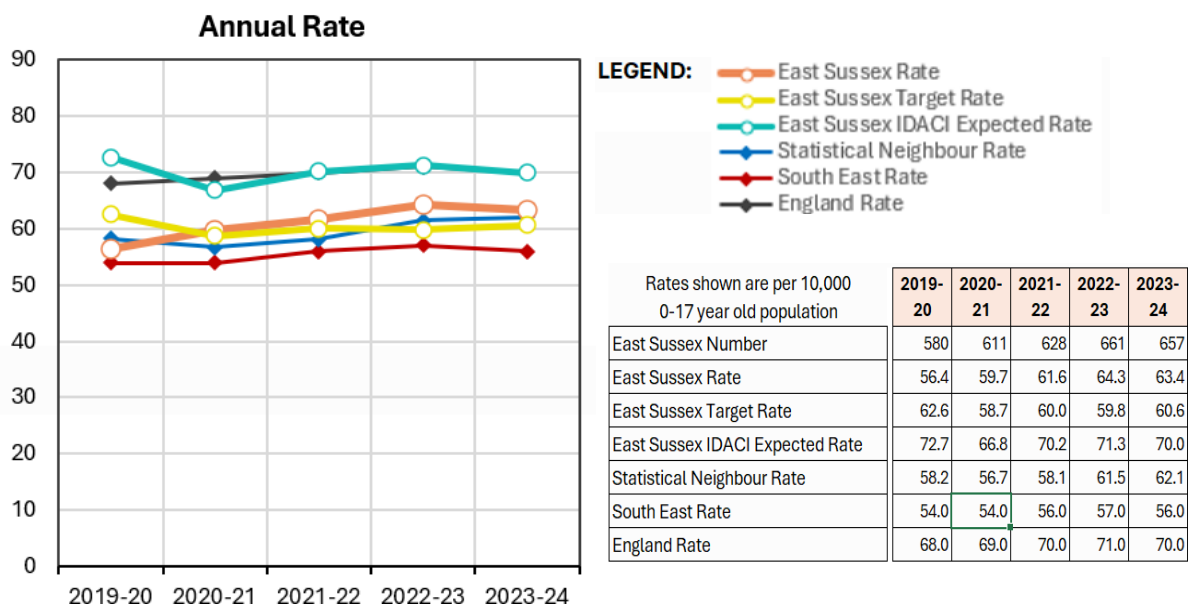
1.1. Services for Looked After Children are predominantly funded from the Children’s Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children’s grant from the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

2. Supporting information

2.1. 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 CPP aims to provide an overview of the most recent data regarding looked after children in ESCC.

2.2. Data found in the charts in this report are drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month (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.

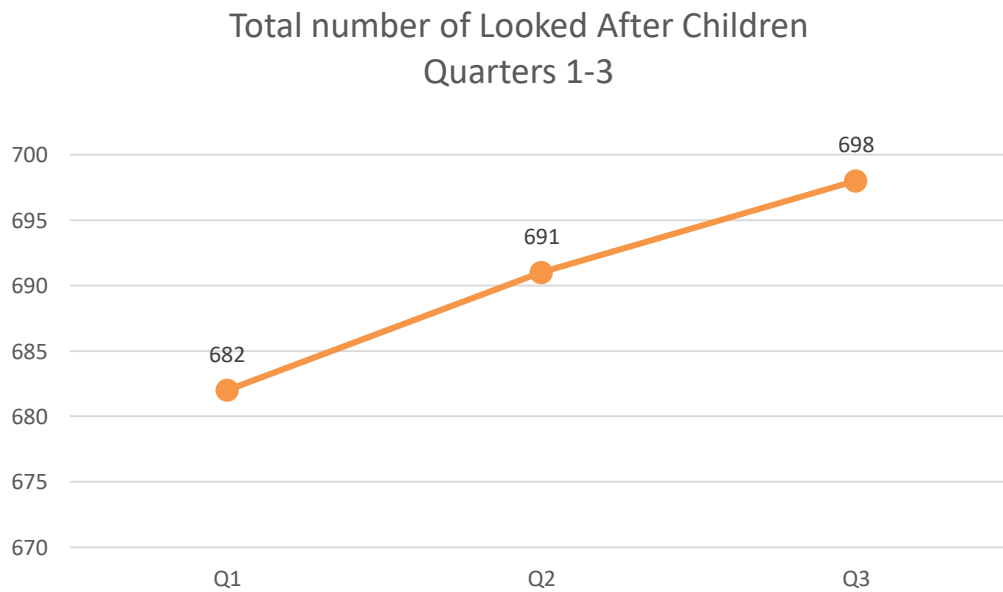
Graph 1: rate of LAC in East Sussex 2020-2024, compared with England, statistical neighbours and Income deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).



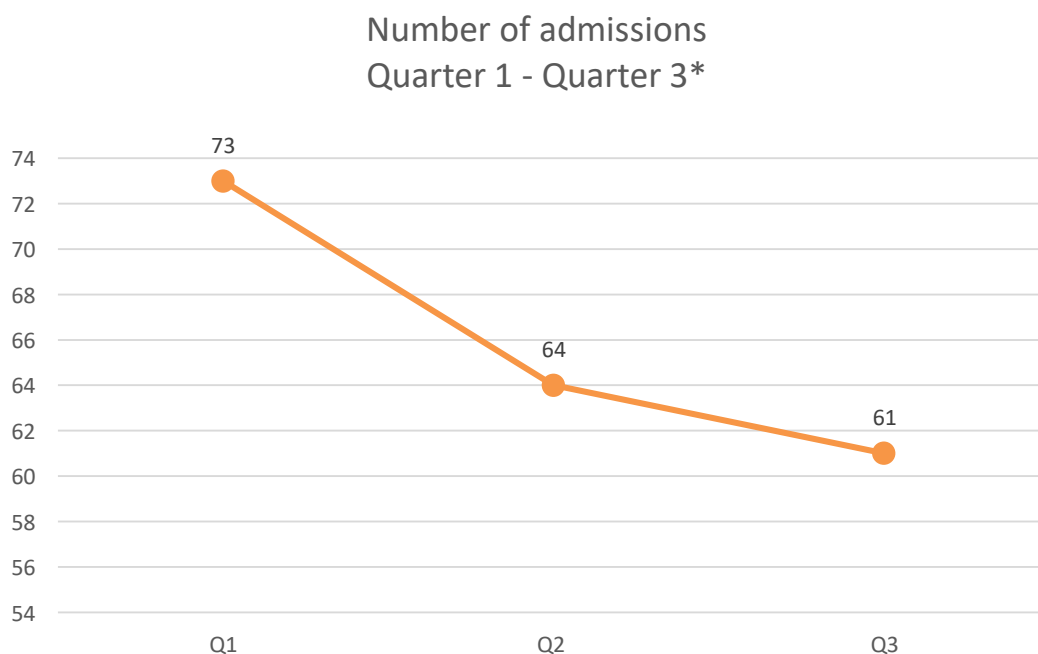
2.3. The graph and data above evidences a gradual increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over the last five years. The ESCC performance remains below the national rate for England and IDACI (expected rates based on levels of deprivation). However, it is significantly above the South East rate and slightly above our statistical neighbours. Our focus is on enabling children to live at home, or within their family networks wherever possible. When children do need to come into our care, we aim to ensure that children live in the right placement, for the right length of time.

2.4. Graph 2 illustrates a small increase in the number of looked after children since the end of Quarter 2, with 698 looked after children (this includes 77 separated children-formerly known as unaccompanied asylum seeking children) at the end of December 2024 (Q3). However, over the course of 24/25 the number of looked after children has risen incrementally quarter by quarter.

Graph 2: Total number of Looked After Children over the last 3 quarters

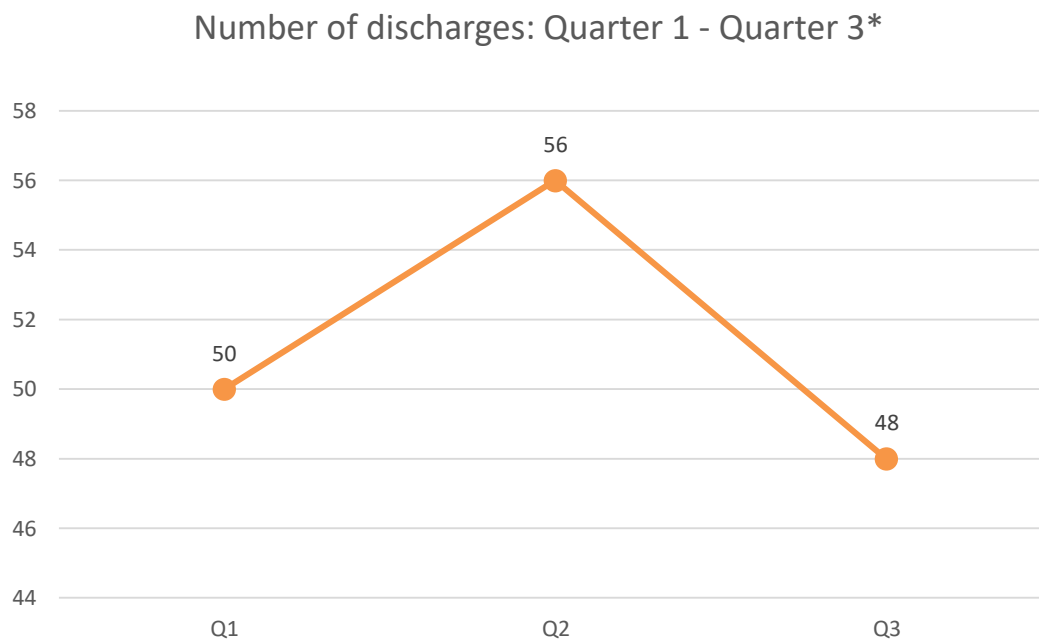


Graph 3: Total number of admissions for each Quarter



2.5. There has been a total of 61 children admitted to care in Q3. The admissions were made up of several large sibling groups, increased numbers of children being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children’s Act and nine separated children being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The gradual reduction in admissions can be attributed to impact of our Connected Families programme which is delivering evidence based support and interventions to children and families subject to child protection planning. However, the looked after children numbers remain high as the level of discharges of children from care is lower than those entering care as illustrated in Graph 4.

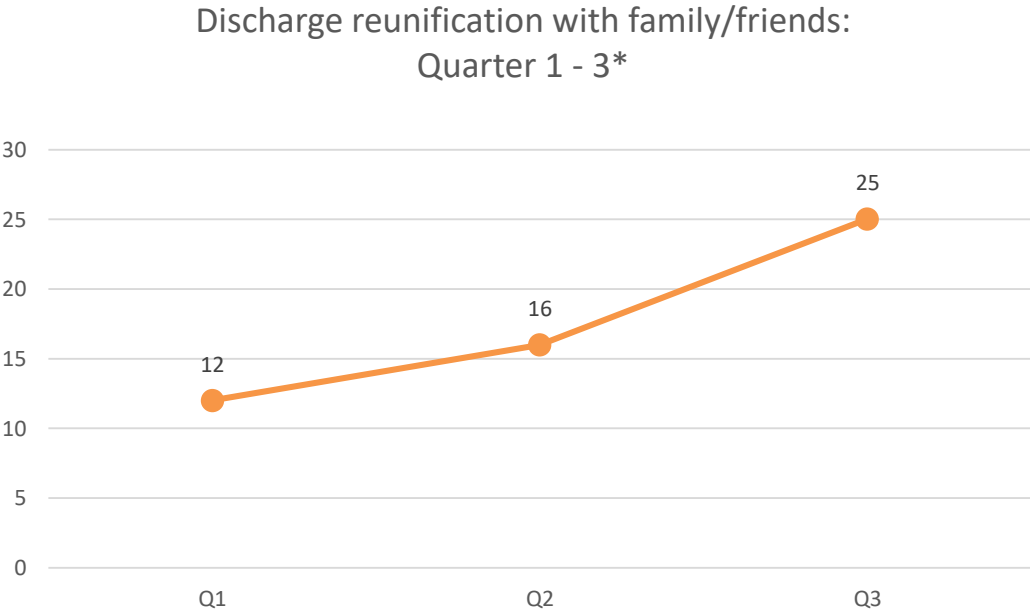
Graph 4: Total number of discharges for each Quarter



2.6. 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.

2.7. As part of our approach to enabling 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 we supported 25 children to be successfully reunified with family/friends. Graph five illustrates the number of reunifications achieved this year to date and it is pleasing to see the gradual increase in the numbers of children where this plan has been achieved.

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



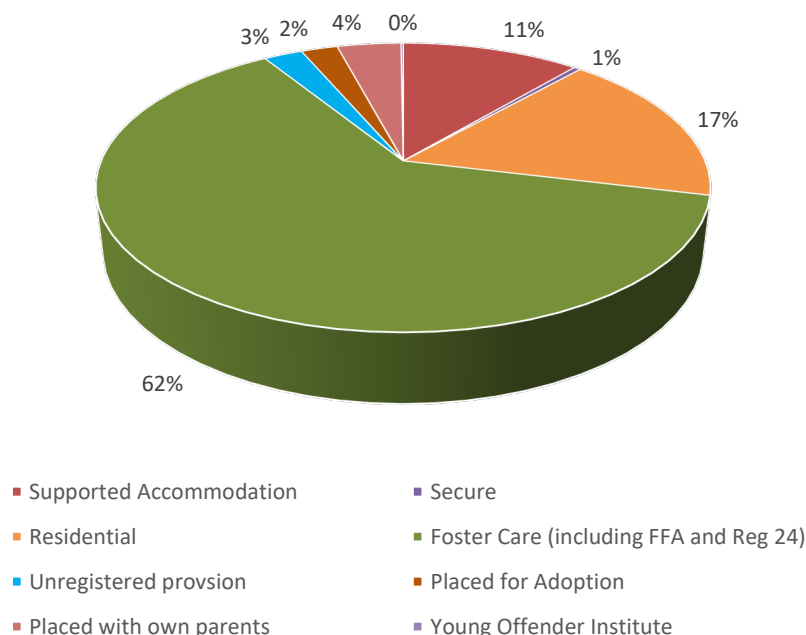
3. Placements

3.1. Children’s Services placement sufficiency aims to ensure that children in care have access to the right accommodation and services in the right places to effectively support east Sussex children, young people and families.

3.2. Part of our sufficiency strategy is focused on ensuring that we have a wide range of placements 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 are placed 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. Chart 6 provides an overview of the ‘placement mix’ at the end of Q3.

Chart 6: Details of the types of placements that Looked After Children are in at the end of Quarter 3:

Placement types of Looked After Children as at 31.12.2024



3.3. A total of 435 children were living in foster care at the end of December 2024, this is 62% of the total number of looked after children. Of that number, 259 (60%) were living with approved ESCC carers which includes 23 who were placed long term with fully approved family and friends' carers. 5 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway which includes 1 child placed in a Foster to Adopt placements with an agency adopter that is not part of the Regional Adoption Agency. 101 children were living with external agency carers. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers. At the end of the quarter, the number of children who were living with temporary approved family and friends foster carers was 68.

3.4. There were 16 children placed for adoption at the end of December 2024 which is an increase of 4 since the previous quarter. This is 2% of the total number of looked after children.

3.5. There were 95 young people living in supported accommodation and unregistered provision which is a decrease of 4 since the previous quarter. This is 14% of the total number of looked after children. This figure of 95 includes 17 children placed in unregistered provision, the majority of these unregistered placements are where the providers are in the process of registering with Ofsted. Of the 17 unregistered placements there are 4 children that are under 16 years old. 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.

At the end of December 2024, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes decreased from 122 to 120. This represents 17% of all looked after children. Of these 120 children, 23 were living in ESCC run children's homes, and 97 were placed in external residential homes. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency placement. There are rigorous negotiations on both quality and price when placement searches are made with external providers. Wherever possible ESCC attempts to find family-based placements for our children either within their own networks or with foster carers. Where this is not possible and external residential homes are commissioned, there remains a commitment to step the

children down into a family arrangement at the right time. The Valuing Care Panel introduced by Impower considers any child with a plan to step down into foster care or reunification with the child's family by removing any barriers to that plan being successfully implemented.

3.6. At the end of December there were 3 ESCC children placed in Secure Children's Homes. These children are all placed locally within Lansdowne Secure Children's Home. This is 1% of all looked after children.

3.7. At the end of December there was one child remanded into youth detention accommodation.

3.8. The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC is 28. This is 4% of all looked after children.

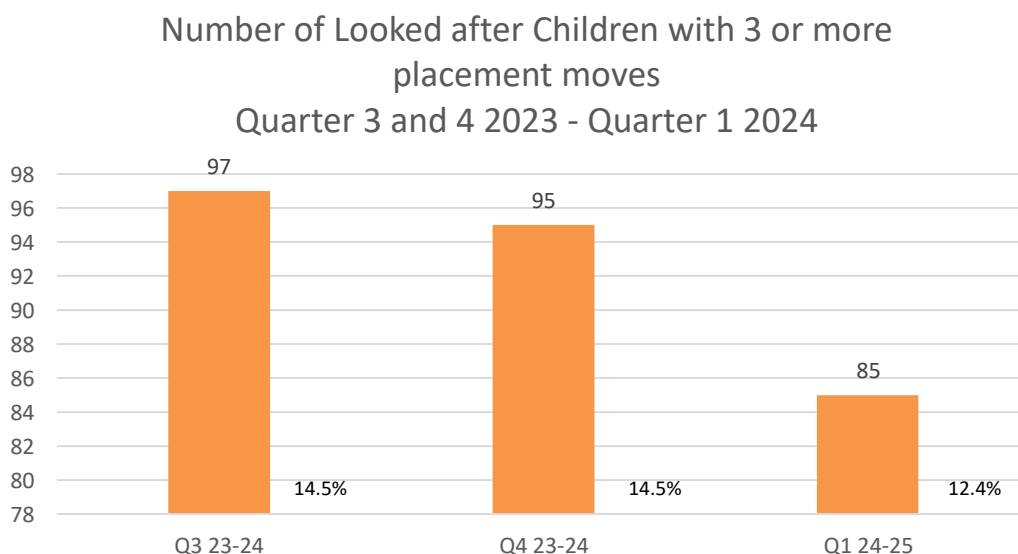
3.9. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is continuing to drive up our recruitment success. The number of fostering enquiries for Q1 to Q3 is up to 202, as compared to 171 from the same period in 23/24. The number of initial visits increased to 64 this year compared to 34 in the same period last year. The number of approvals rose to 24 at the end of Quarter 3 already exceeding last year's 4 Quarter figure. There are nine potential households to approve in Quarter 4 which if achieved will mean we have recruited 33 households in total.

The table below shows quarterly figures across the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 for comparison:

	Enquiries	Initial Visits (IV)	Approvals	Places
2023/24 Q1	47	12	3	3
2024/25 Q1	71	20	8	11
2023/24 Q2	70	14	3	4
2024/25 Q2	66	25	4	7
2023/24 Q3	54	8	15	25*
2024/25 Q3	69	18	12	17
2023/24 Q4	66	11	5	6
2024/25 Q4	17	9	TBC	TBC

* 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 is an improving picture for this cohort with fewer children moving between placements more than 3 times. Given the very challenging placement sufficiency issues nationally this is a considerable achievement.

3.11. ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated children. The number of separated children was 77 at the end of Q3, a reduction of 7 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 153 asylum seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period which is an increase of 4 from the previous quarter (125 18–21 year olds and 28 21-25 year olds). The numbers of children being referred through the NTS has reduced during this quarter with no referrals being received in November at all. Separated children's asylum claims appear to have been processed more swiftly in Q2 and 3.

3.12. The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders (CAO) was 351, and the number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was 471. 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.

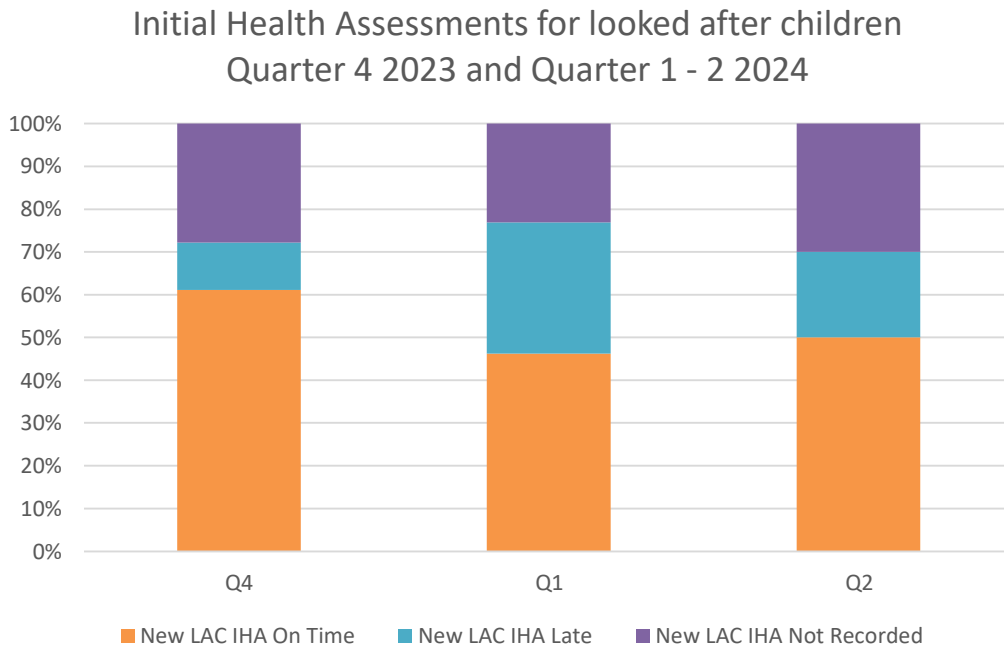
3.13. There were three complaints from Looked After Children during this period. Two of these complaints were assisted by the advocacy service and one complaint was made directly by the young person. All three are currently being investigated and not yet concluded.

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 chart (8) below shows the percentage of IHA's undertaken within 20 days, post 20 days, or not recorded. This is an area of close monitoring. 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 rescheduled and do take place although outside of the 20 days. 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. There is a robust system in place to ensure that these assessments are completed as a priority even if they do fall outside the recommended timeframe.

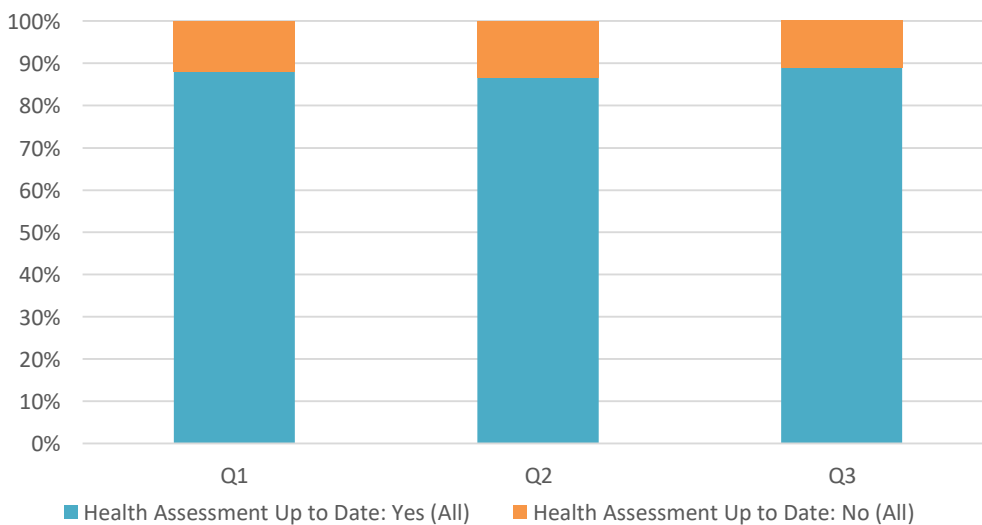
Chart 8: Percentage of Looked After Children with an Initial Health Assessment for Quarter 4 2023/24 and Quarters 1 and 2.



**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 looked after children 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.

Chart 9: Percentage of Looked After Children with a Review Health Assessment for Quarter



Review Health Assessments for Looked After Children
Quarter 1 - Quarter 3

1-3

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

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 Whilst the number of looked after children has risen slightly this quarter the benchmarking data does show that ESCC is not a significant outlier when you consider the England, IDACI and statistical neighbours performance data. The number of children living in fostering and family placements has continued to rise, whilst the number of children living in supported accommodation and residential care has shown signs of reducing. Nonetheless there are ongoing pressures in placement sufficiency particularly for children with complexity of needs. This has continued to place significant pressure of the Childrens Services budget. We will continue our focus on managing demand through earlier support and interventions (particularly through Connected Families) and our Valuing Care approach- achieving step downs from high cost residential and unregistered provision and planned reunifications.

5.2 There will be additional information made available to subsequent meetings regarding Personal Education Plans and Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None