

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Looked After Children Statistics</b>
<b>By:</b>	<b>Head of Looked After Children</b>
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	<b>To provide Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) with an overview of quarter 4 data for Looked After Children</b>
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<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the content of the report.</b>
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## **1. Background – Financial Appraisal**

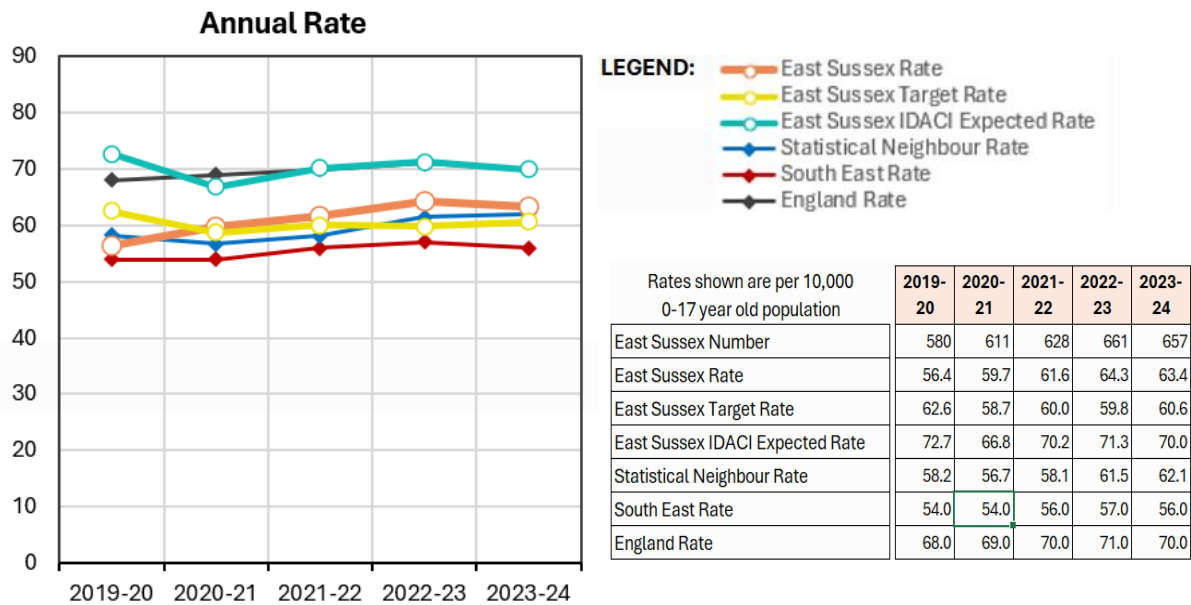
1.1. Services for Looked After Children are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's grant from the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

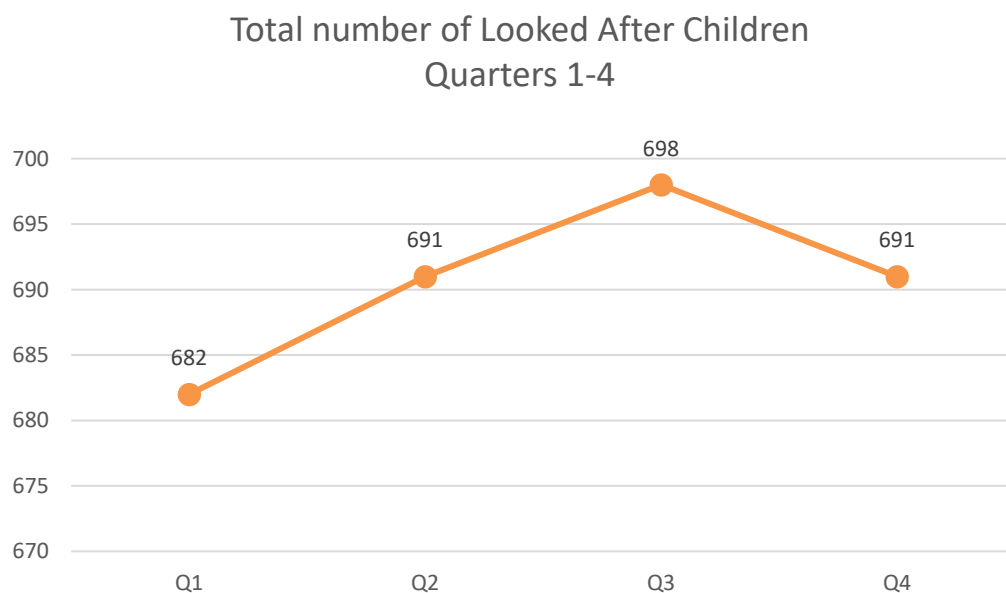
**Graph 1:** rate of LAC in East Sussex 2020-2024, compared with England, statistical neighbours, and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).



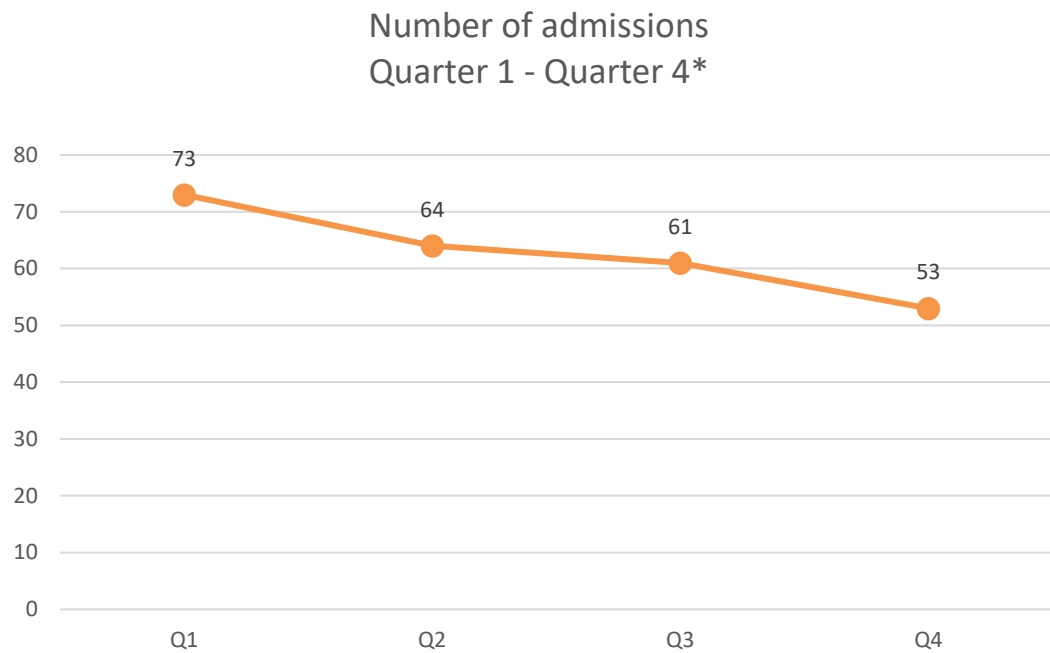
2.3. This is the most current published data available. It is updated through the DfE data collection process and is usually available in the autumn of each year. The graph and data above evidence a gradual increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over the last five years. 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 decrease in the number of looked after children since the end of Quarter 3, with 691 looked after children (this includes 71 separated children-formerly known as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) at the end of March 2025 (Q4). It is too early to be sure whether this reduction is a downward trend, but it appears to be moving in the right direction.

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

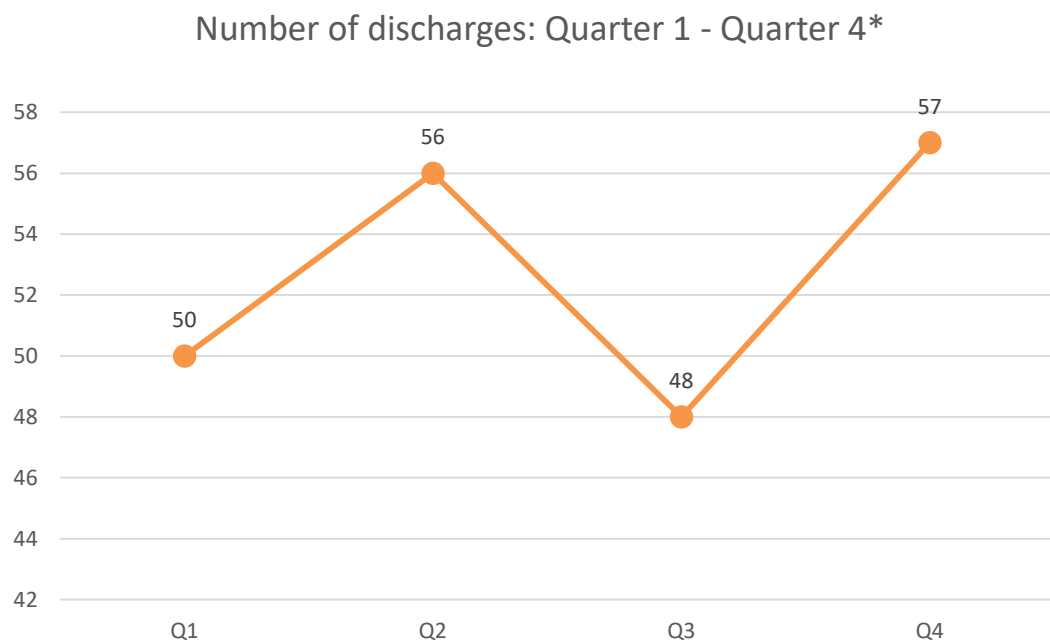


**Graph 3:** Total number of admissions for each Quarter



2.5. There has been a total of 53 children admitted to care in Q4. The admissions were made up of a small number of sibling groups, children being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act and 12 separated children, 11 being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and 1 was a spontaneous arrival. 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. It is also important to note that 17 of these children were placed within their family networks at the point they were admitted to care.

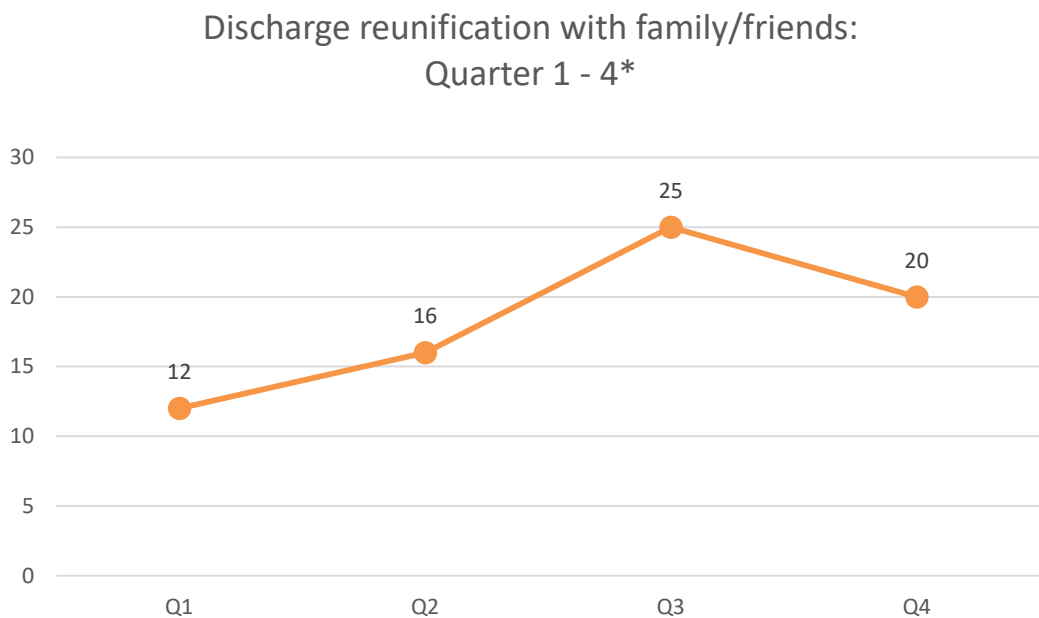
**Graph 4:** Total number of discharges for each Quarter



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 20 children were successfully reunified with family/friends. Graph five illustrates the number of reunifications achieved this year to date, and although there has been a slight dip in this quarter it is pleasing to see the maintenance of higher 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



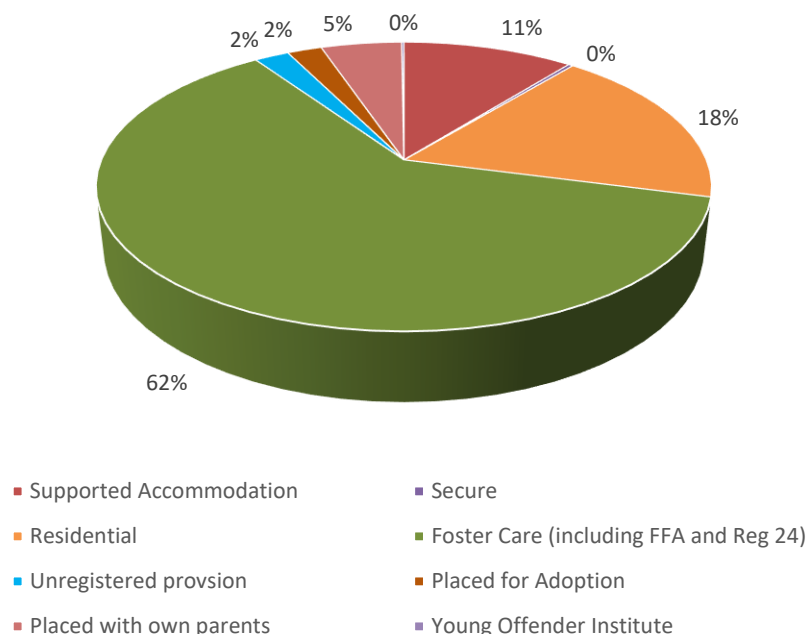
**3. Placements**

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 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. Chart 6 provides an overview of the ‘placement mix’ at the end of Q4.

**Chart 6:** Details of the types of placements that Looked After Children are in at the end of Quarter 4:

Placement types of Looked After Children as at  
31.03.2025



3.3. A total of 424 children were living in foster care at the end of March 2025, this is a decrease since the last quarter of 11. However, this still makes up 62% of the total number of looked after children, as the overall number of children in this cohort has decreased. Of that number, 261 (62%) were living with approved ESCC carers which includes 25 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. 100 children were living with external agency carers. There are currently no 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 59 which is a decrease of 9 since the last quarter.

3.4. There were 15 children placed for adoption at the end of March 2025 which is a decrease of 1 since the previous quarter. This is 2% of the total number of looked after children.

3.5. There were 89 young people living in supported accommodation and unregistered provision which is a decrease of 6 since the previous quarter. This is 13% of the total number of looked after children. 83% of those in supported accommodation are in registered provision. 15 children (17%) placed in unregistered provision; the majority of these unregistered placements are where the providers are in the process of registering with Ofsted. Of the 15 unregistered placements there were 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.

3.6. At the end of March 2025, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased from 120 to 125. This represents 18% of all looked after children. Of these 125 children, 19 were living in ESCC run children's homes, and 106 were placed in external residential homes. This quarter then, has seen a decrease in the number of children living in our in-house children's homes and an increase in children living in agency children's homes. Strenuous 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. Where children

are placed in external residential homes the service remains committed to step the children down into family arrangements at the right time. The Valuing Care Panel introduced by Impower considers all child with a plan for reunification or step down and works to remove any barriers that may impede the plan being successfully implemented.

3.7. At the end of March there were 2 ESCC children placed in Secure Children's Homes. These children were all placed locally within Lansdowne Secure Children's Home.

3.8. At the end of March there was one child remanded into youth detention accommodation.

3.9. The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC has increased from 28 to 35 since the last quarter. This is 5% of all looked after children.

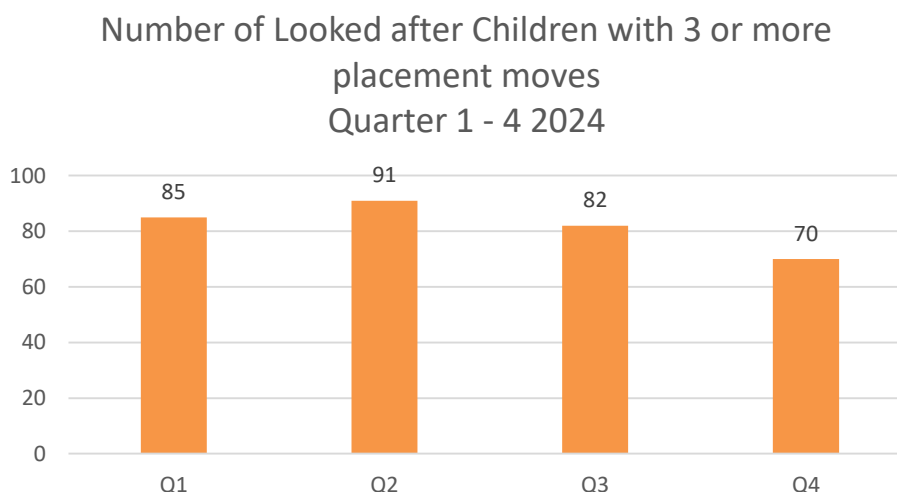
3.10. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is continuing to drive up our recruitment success. The number of fostering enquiries for Q1 to Q4 is up to 274, as compared to 237 from the same period in 23/24. The number of initial visits increased to 89 this year compared to 45 in the same period last year. The total number of approvals rose to 30 at the end of Quarter 4 exceeding last year's total figure of 26. There are a total of 47 new places approved for this year, which is a net gain of 25 places and 17 household. 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 the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 for comparison:

	Enquiries	Initial Visits (IV)	Approvals	Places
2023/24 Q1	47	12	3	3
<b>2024/25 Q1</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>
2023/24 Q2	70	14	3	4
<b>2024/25 Q2</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>
2023/24 Q3	54	8	15	25*
<b>2024/25 Q3</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>17</b>
2023/24 Q4	66	11	5	6
<b>2024/25 Q4</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>

\* 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*

3.11. 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.

3.12. ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for separated children. The number of separated children who were looked after was 71 at the end of Q4, a reduction of 6 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 (131 18–21year olds, an increase of 6, and 20 21–25-year-olds a decrease of 8). The numbers of children being referred through the NTS continued at reduced levels in the early part of the quarter but picked up dramatically in March. The Home Office has been processing separated children's asylum claims much more swiftly this year. However, with an increase in the number of negative decisions, there has developed a significant backlog in the appeals process, with them often taking up to 2 years to be heard. The total number of separated children who are care leavers is 216 (this includes under 18's). This makes up 33% of the total number of care leavers in East Sussex, which was 645 at the end of Quarter 4.

3.13. The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders (CAO) was 350, and the number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was 463. 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.

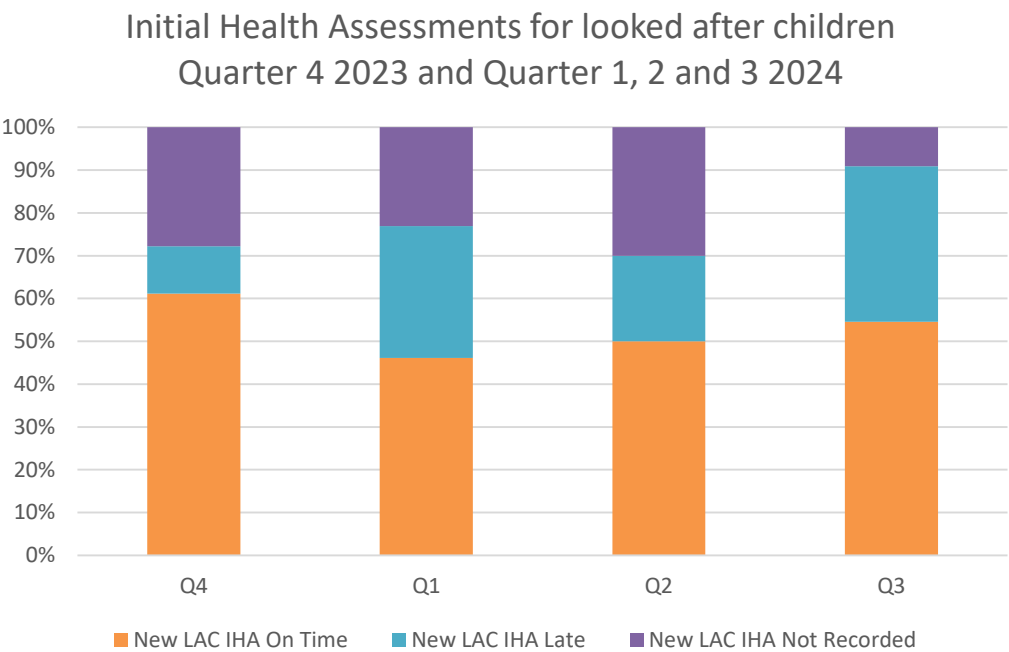
3.14. There were 5 complaints from Looked After Children during this period. 2 of these complaints were assisted by the advocacy service and 3 complaints were made directly by the young people.

## **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. 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. 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.

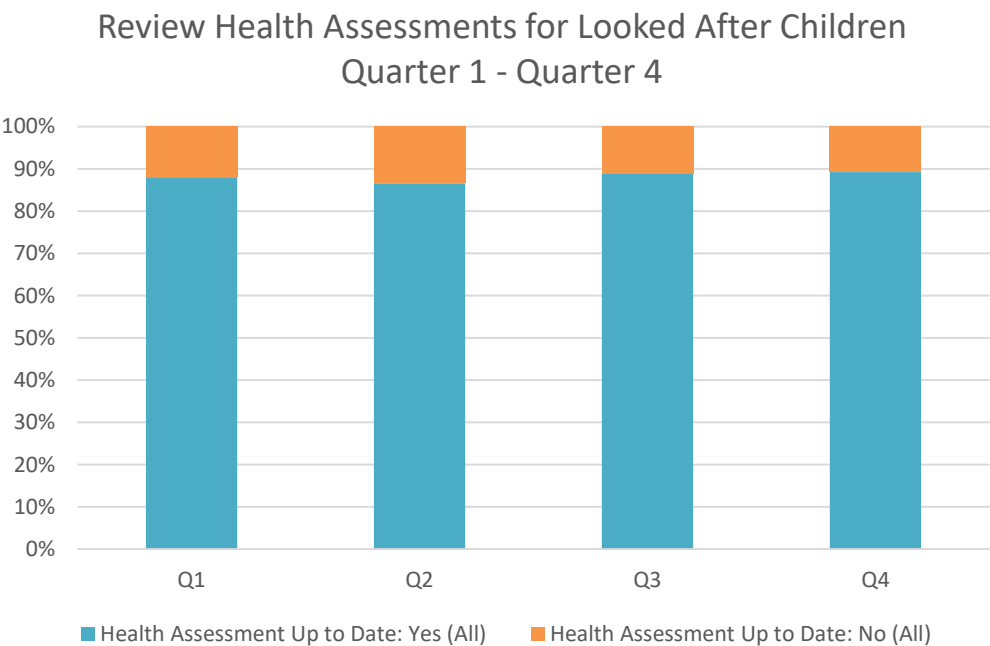
**Chart 8:** Percentage of Looked After Children with an Initial Health Assessment for Quarter 4 2023/24 and Quarters 1 and 2 and 3 for 2024/25.



*\*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 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 1-4



*\*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 decreased slightly this quarter, it is too soon to judge will be an ongoing trend. This has been achieved by fewer children being admitted to care and higher numbers being discharged from care during this period. In general, 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 been maintained at 62%, with an increase in the number of children being reunified and placed with their own parents. The number of children living in supported accommodation has decreased, but there has been an increase in the number of children living in residential care. This increase is showing primarily in children living in agency residential homes which contributes to the significant budgetary pressures faced by the Children's Service. The ongoing pressures in placement sufficiency is largely responsible for this increase particularly for children with complex needs. 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.

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### LOCAL MEMBERS

All

### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None