

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	17 July 2025
Title of Report:	Looked After Children Statistics
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To provide Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) with an overview of quarter 1 data for Looked After Children

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

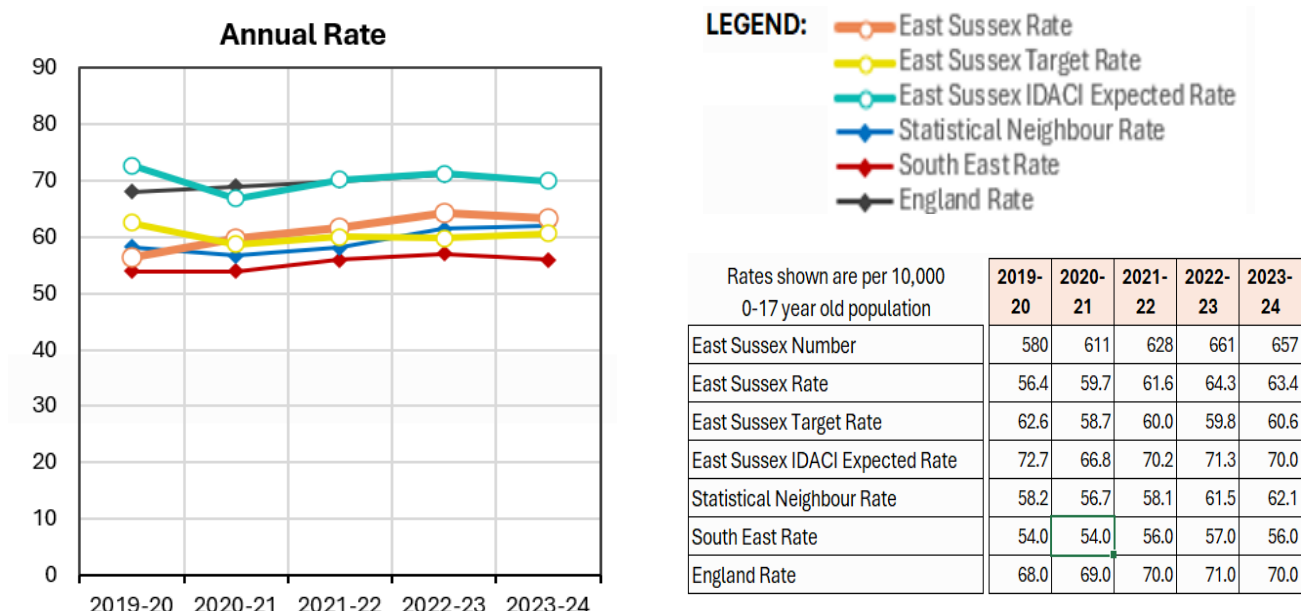
1.2. The Looked After Children Statistics report Quarter 4 has been appended to this report due to previous reporting timelines.

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 the Corporate Parenting Panel aims to provide an overview of the most recent data regarding looked after children in ESCC.

2.2. The data found in the charts in this report is 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 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) ESCC figures which may appear slightly differently to the end of quarter figures presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

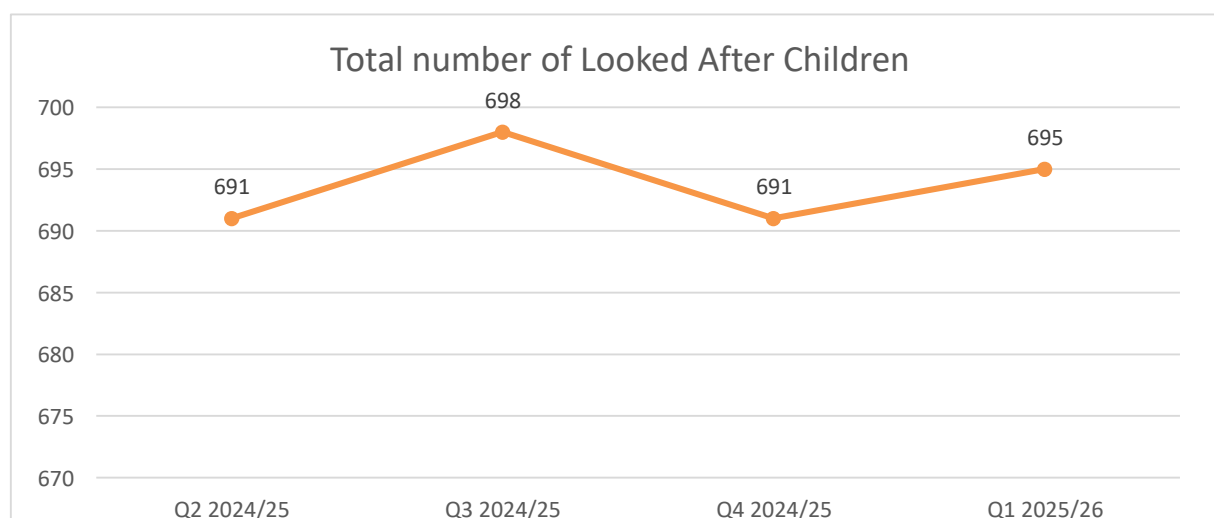
Graph 1: rate of LAC in East Sussex 2020-2024, compared with England, statistical neighbours, and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).



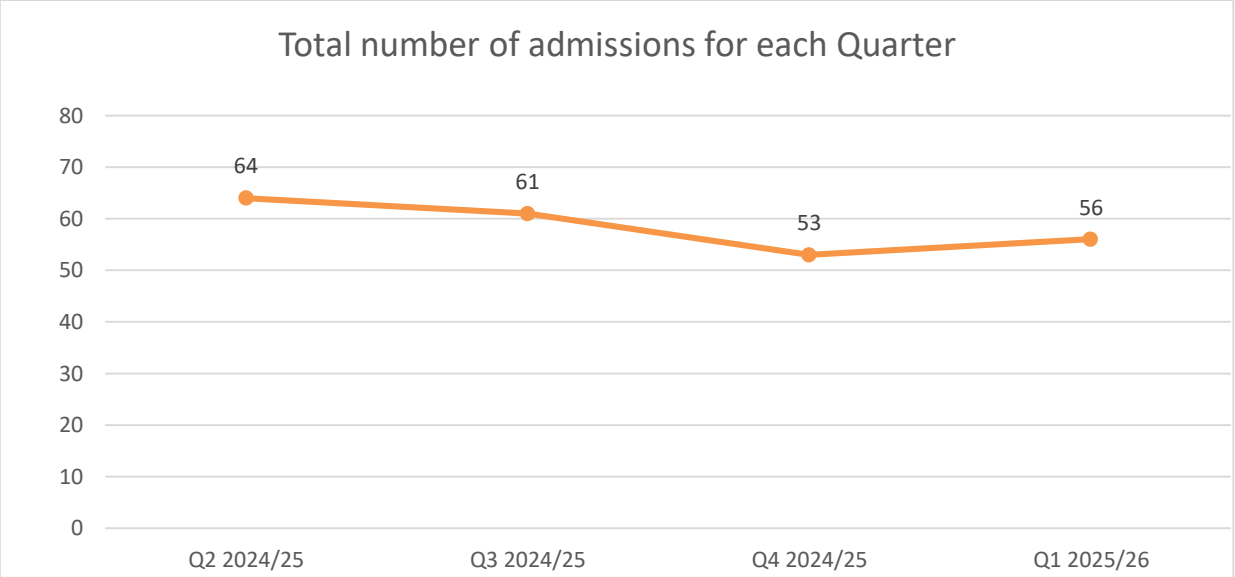
2.3. This is the most current published data available. It is updated through the Department of Education (DfE) data collection process and is due to be published in November 2025. The graph and data above evidence a gradual increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over the last 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. The Valuing Care Panel focusses on enabling children to live at home, or within their family networks wherever possible. A refreshed reunification framework has recently 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.

2.4. Graph 2 illustrates a small increase in the number of looked after children since the end of Quarter 4, with 695 looked after children (this includes 67 separated children-formerly known as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) at the end of June 2025 (Q1). The figures have remained relatively constant over the last 12 months.

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

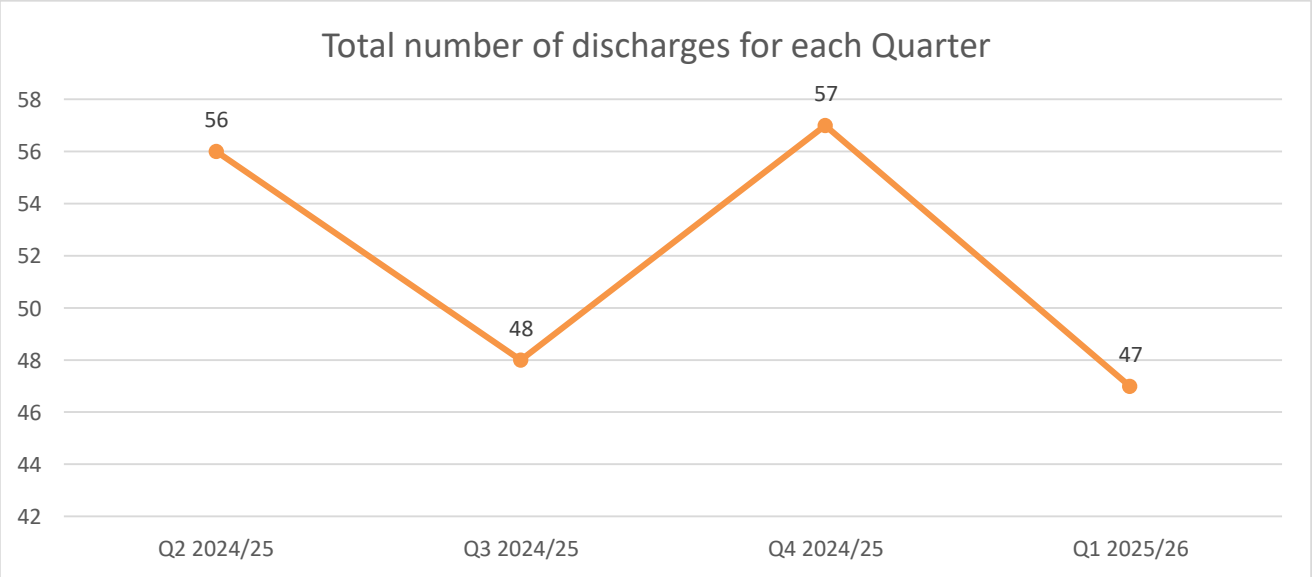


Graph 3: Total number of admissions for each Quarter.



2.5. There has been a total of 56 children admitted to care in Q1 which is a slight increase on the previous quarter of 3. The admissions were made up of 2 large sibling groups of 5 children, a significant number of smaller sibling groups of 2 and 3, a small number of single children and 4 separated children, being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). Of this cohort 27 were accommodated through Section 20 of the Children’s Act, 7 were admitted to care through emergency orders and 22 were admitted to care through planned Care Proceedings. The overall reduction in admissions over the last 12 months can be attributed to the impact of our Connected Families programme which is delivering evidence-based support and interventions to children and families subject to child protection planning.

Graph 4: Total number of discharges for each Quarter

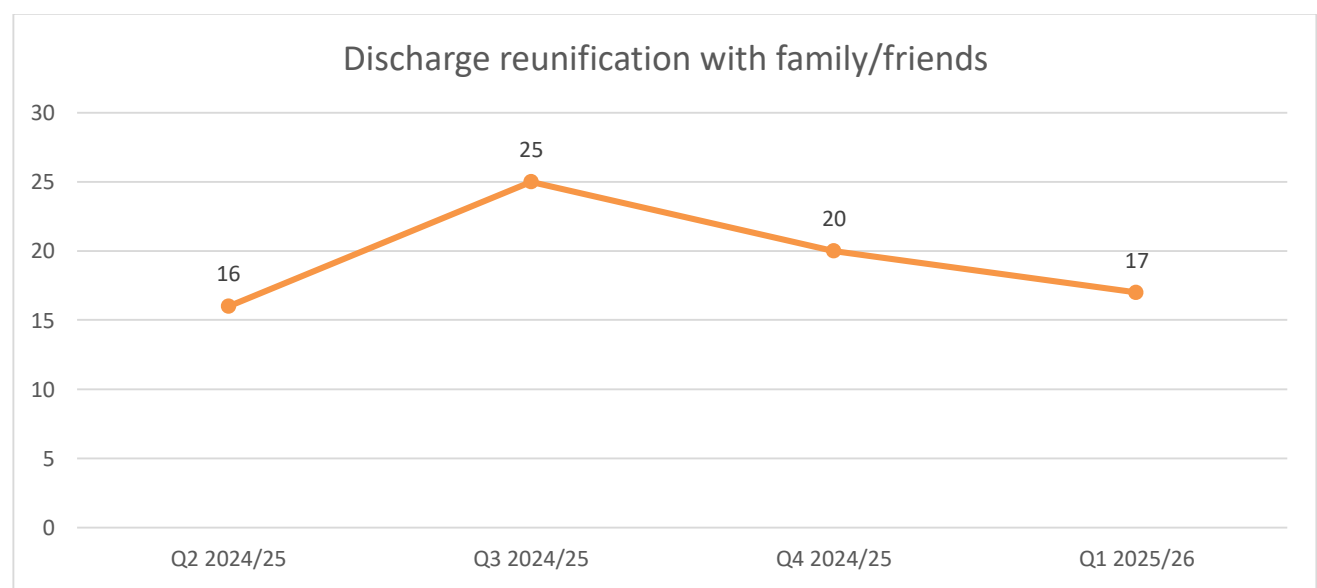


2.6. This data represents children who have left care because they have become 18 years old, have had a change in their legal status through being adopted or have had special guardianship, child arrangement or residence orders made, or have returned to their family networks. A total of 47 children were discharged from care over Q1. The gradual reduction in children being discharged from care clearly has a significant impact on the overall Looked after Children numbers.

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 17 children were successfully reunified with family/friends. Graph five illustrates the number of reunifications achieved this year to date, which is showing a slight dip in this quarter, although it remains higher than this period 12 months ago.

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

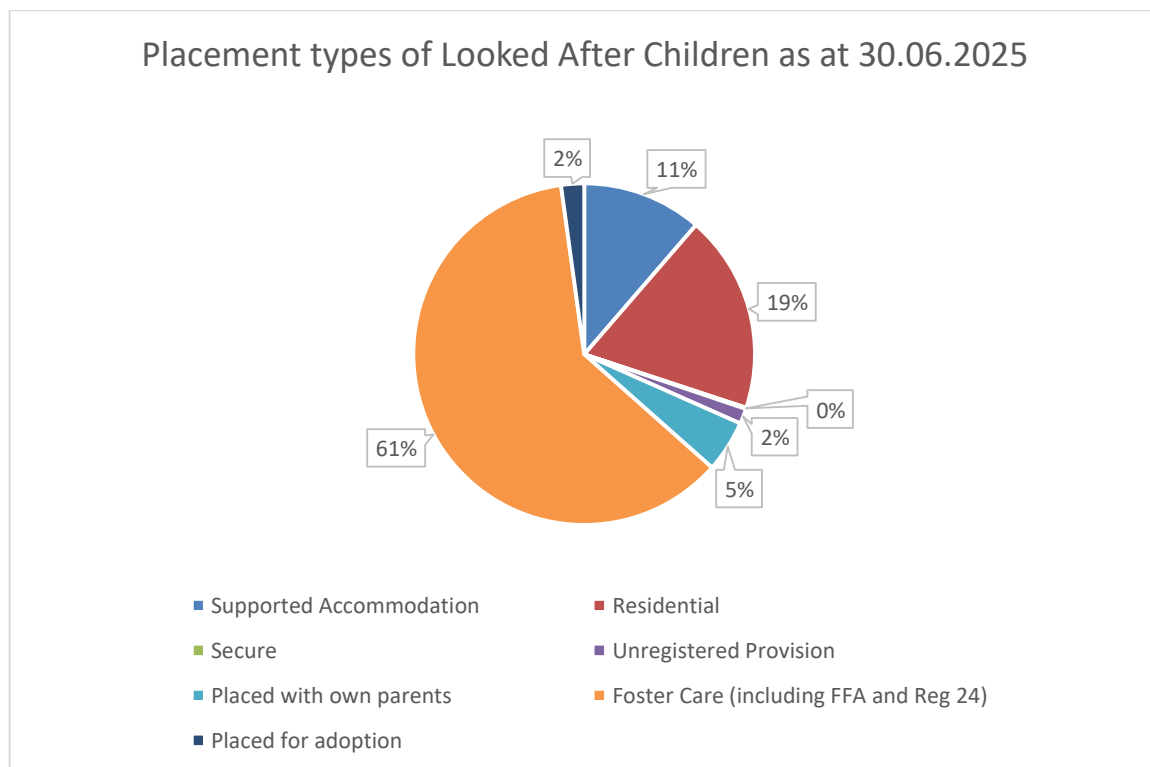


3. Placements

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 Q1.

Chart 6: Details of the types of placements that Looked After Children are in at the end of Quarter 1:



3.3. A total of 426 children were living in foster care at the end of June 2025, this is an increase since the last quarter of 2. This makes up 61% of the overall total number of looked after children. Of that number, 270 (63%) were living with approved ESCC carers which includes 29 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. 102 children were living with external agency carers, and 1 child was 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 49 which is a decrease of 10 since the last quarter.

3.4. There were 15 children placed for adoption at the end of June 2025 which has remained the same as the previous quarter. This is 2% of the overall total number of looked after children.

3.5. There were 89 young people living in supported accommodation and unregistered provision which has remained the same as the previous quarter. This was 13% of the total number of looked after children. The figure of 89 included 10 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 10 children living in unregistered placements there were 4 children who were under 16 years old. Of these 4, 2 providers were awaiting registration with Ofsted, 1 was CQC registered 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.

3.6. At the end of June 2025, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased from 125 to 130. This represents 19% of all looked after children. Of these 130 children, 23 were living in ESCC run children's homes, and 107 were placed in external residential homes. This quarter then, has seen an increase in the number of children living in our in-house children's homes of 4, and an increase in children living in agency children's homes of 1. 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.

3.7. At the end of June there was 1 ESCC child placed in Secure Children's Homes. This child is placed locally within Lansdowne Secure Children's Home.

3.8. At the end of June there were no children 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 decreased from 35 to 34 since the last quarter. This represents 5% of all looked after children.

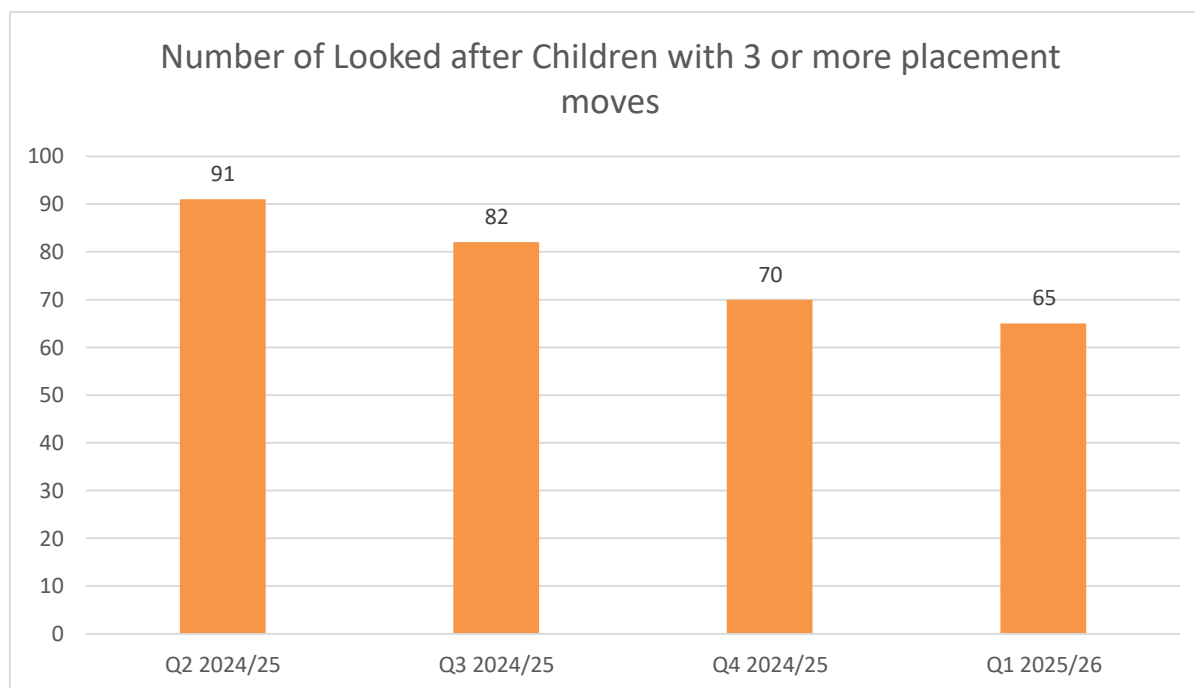
3.10. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a considerable impact on the Fostering Service's recruitment success generally. The number of fostering enquiries over the last 12 months (rolling year) was up to 258. The number of initial visits increased to 75 from 53 in the same period last year. The total number of approvals made were 28 and new placements were 45. In 2024/5 we have had a number of foster carers retire/de-register so for that year our net gain was 17 households, equating to 25 new foster care placements. 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 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	68	26	6	12
2024/25 Q1	71	20	8	11
2025/26 Q1	55	6	6	9

* 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 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 (146 18–20-year-olds, an increase of 15, and 5 21–25-year-olds a decrease of 15). This makes up approximately one third of all Care Leavers in ESCC. The number of children being referred through the NTS continued at reduced levels during this quarter. However, 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.

3.13. The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders (CAO) was 353, and the number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was 464. 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.

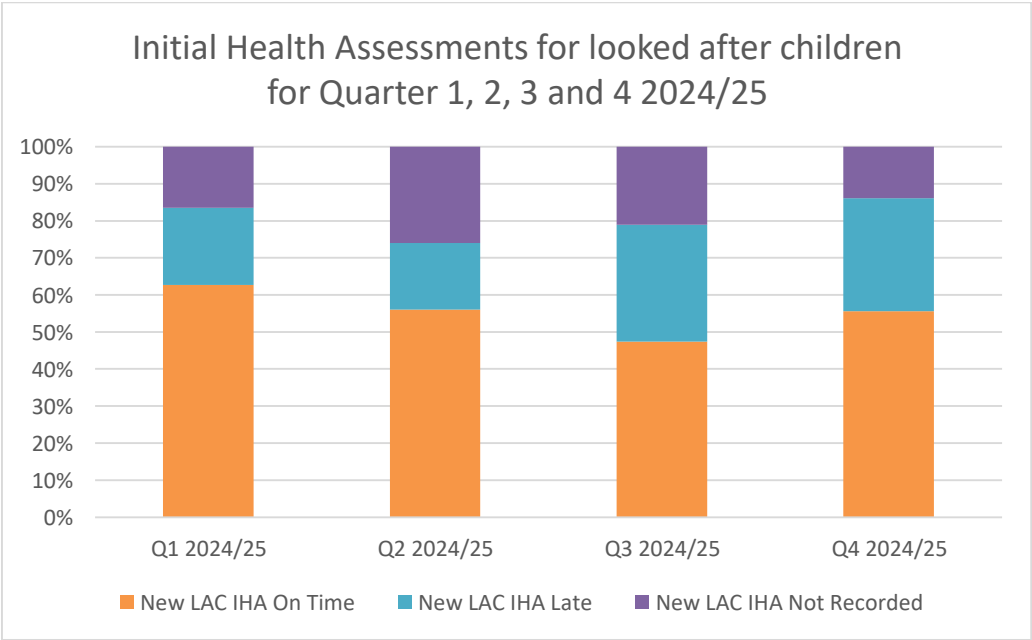
3.14. There were no complaints from Looked After Children during this period. There were 2 complaints received from Care Leavers.

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 (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.

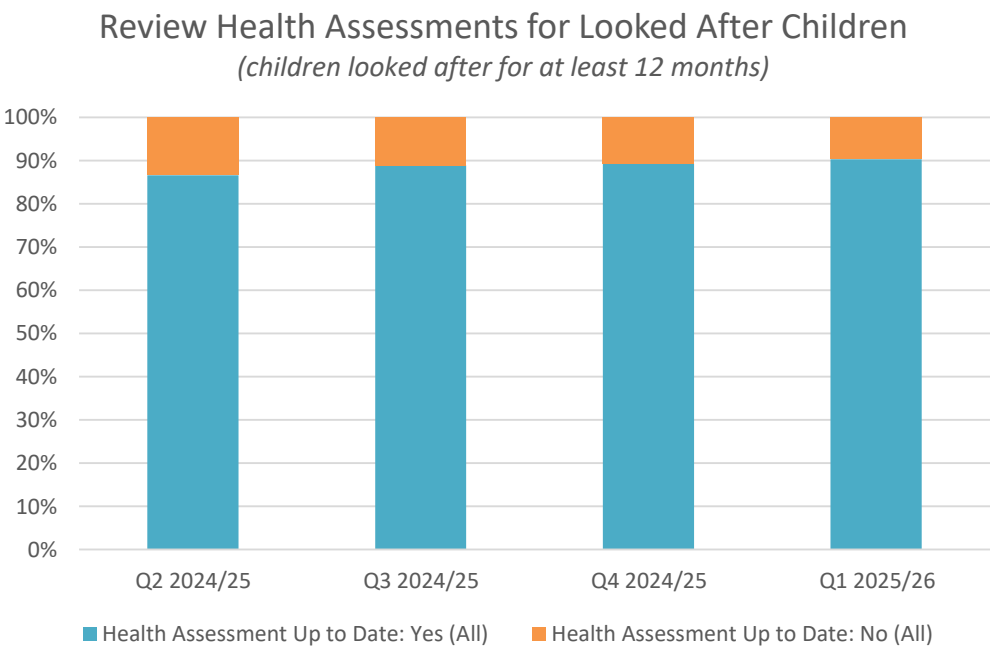
Chart 8: Percentage of Looked After Children with an Initial Health Assessment for Quarters 1,2, 3, and 4 for 2024/25.



**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 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 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 number of looked after children has remained relatively constant over the last 12 months which indicates the decrease reported in the last quarter, was likely to be a one-off data issue rather than a trend. It is very pleasing to see the significant progress made during this period in the 3 placement moves or more data as this shows fewer children with disrupted care arrangements. There was a slight increase in children being admitted to care during this quarter and much lower numbers being discharged from care during this period, which accounts for the overall rise in number. In general, ESCC is not a significant outlier when you consider the England, IDACI and statistical neighbours performance data.

5.2. The number of children living in fostering and family placements has seen a slight decrease to 61%, and a dip in the number of children being reunified and placed with their own parents. Reunification plans need to be carefully considered; children and their families well prepared and detailed support plans coordinated for the greatest chances of success. The number of children living in supported accommodation has remained the same, but there has been an increase in the number of children living in residential care. This is an area of focus for the service, as the ESCC number of children living in residential accommodation is significantly higher than our comparator Local Authorities. Whilst there was an increase in the number of children living in our own ESCC residential provision, this overall increase is a key factor in the significant budgetary pressures faced by the Children's Service. The ongoing pressures in placement sufficiency and lack of foster placements nationally is largely responsible for this increase, particularly for children with complex needs.

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