

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

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### ***RECOMMENDATION:***

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

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## **1. Background**

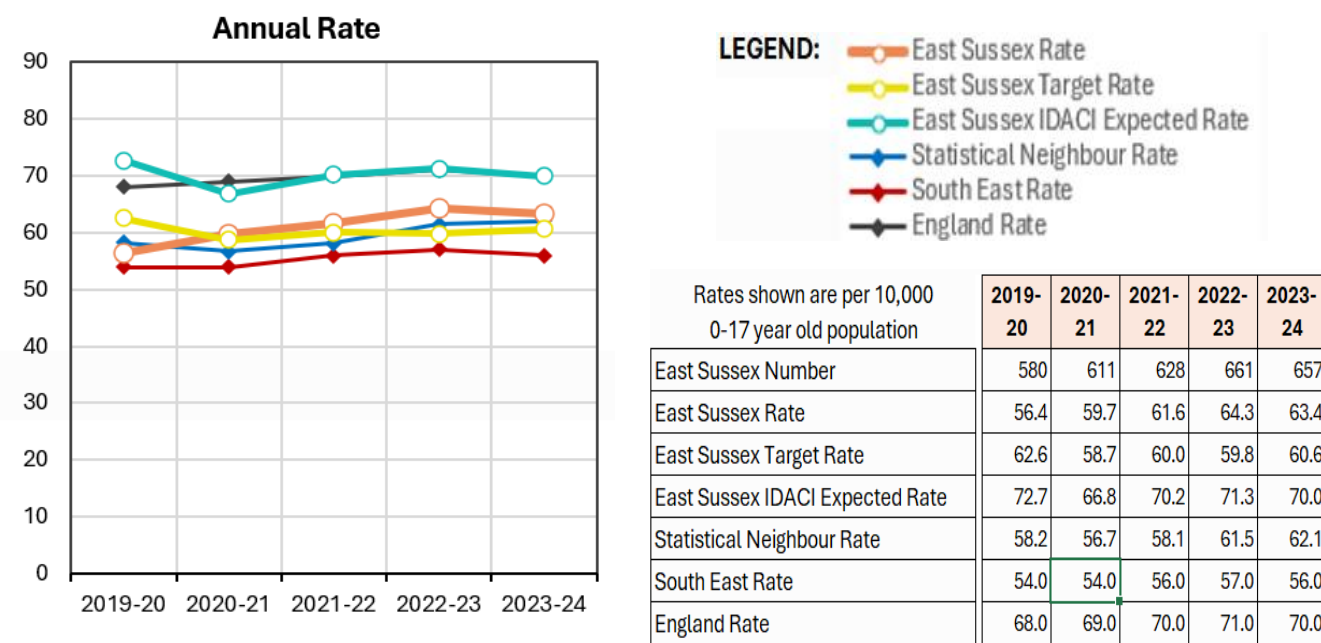
1.1. Looked After Children are children in the care of a local authority, typically as a result of concerns regarding their safety or welfare. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is responsible for safeguarding, supporting, and promoting the welfare of children in its care. This regular report to the Corporate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

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

## **2. Supporting information**

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

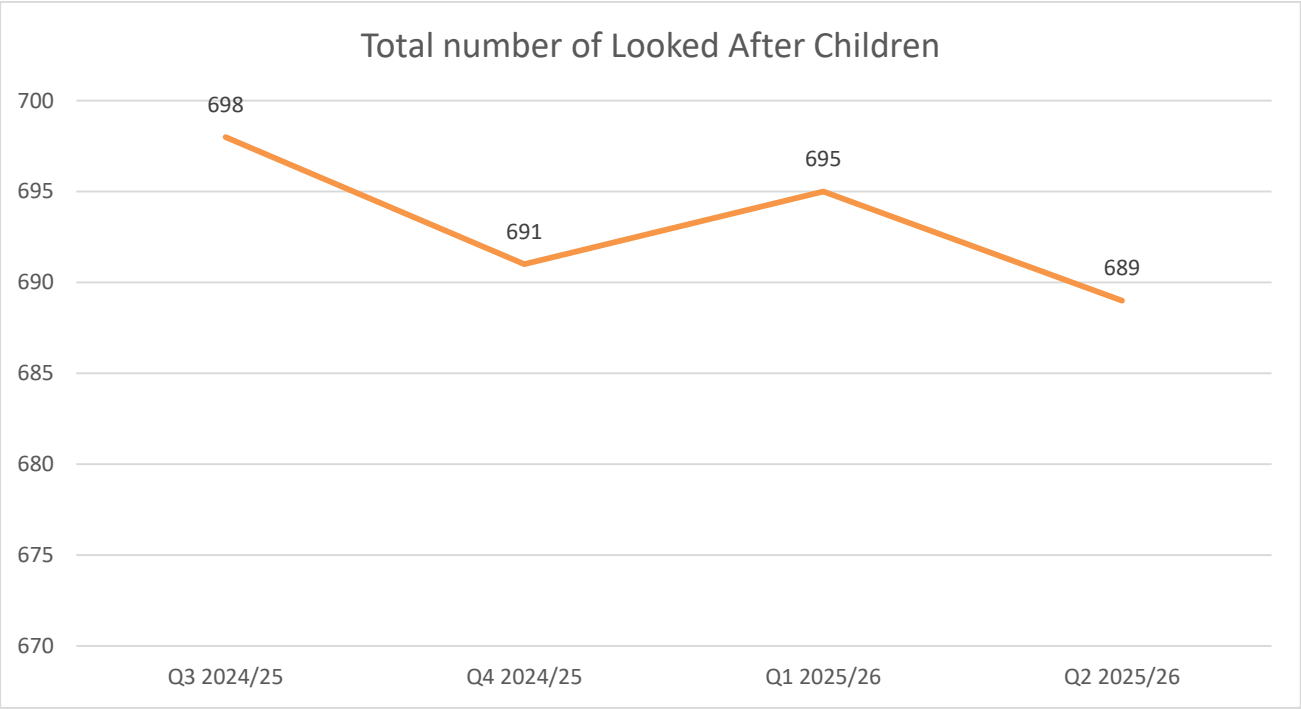
**Graph 1:** rate of LAC in East Sussex 2020-2025, compared with England, statistical neighbours, and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).



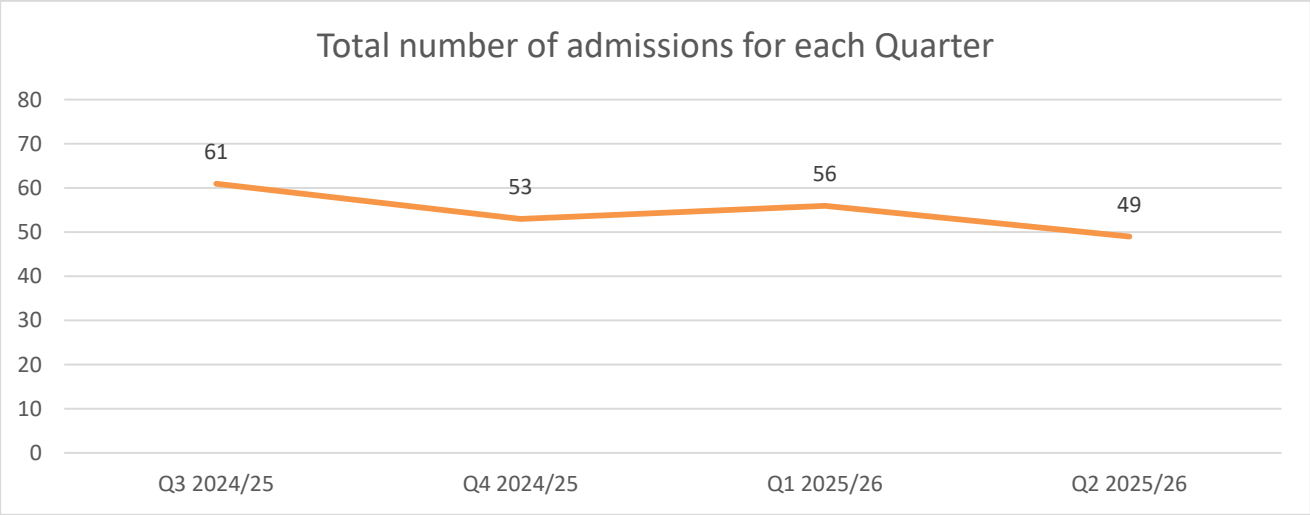
2.2. This is the most current published data available. It is updated through the Department of Education (DfE) data collection process and is due to be published in November 2025. The graph and data above evidence a gradual increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over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

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

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

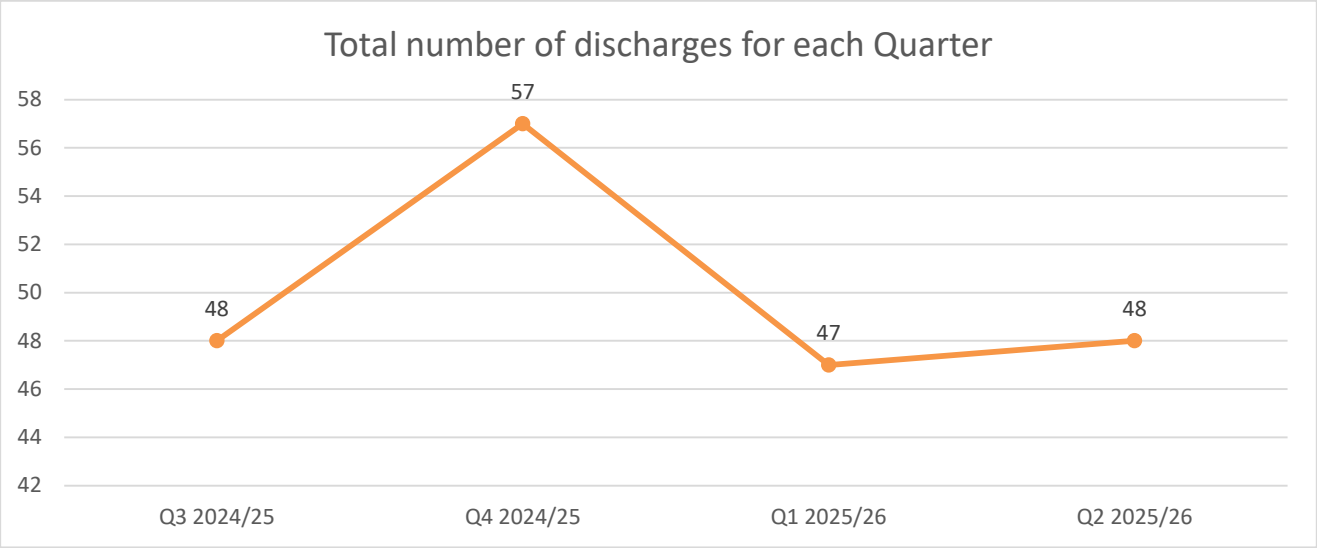


**Graph 3:** Total number of admissions for each Quarter.



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

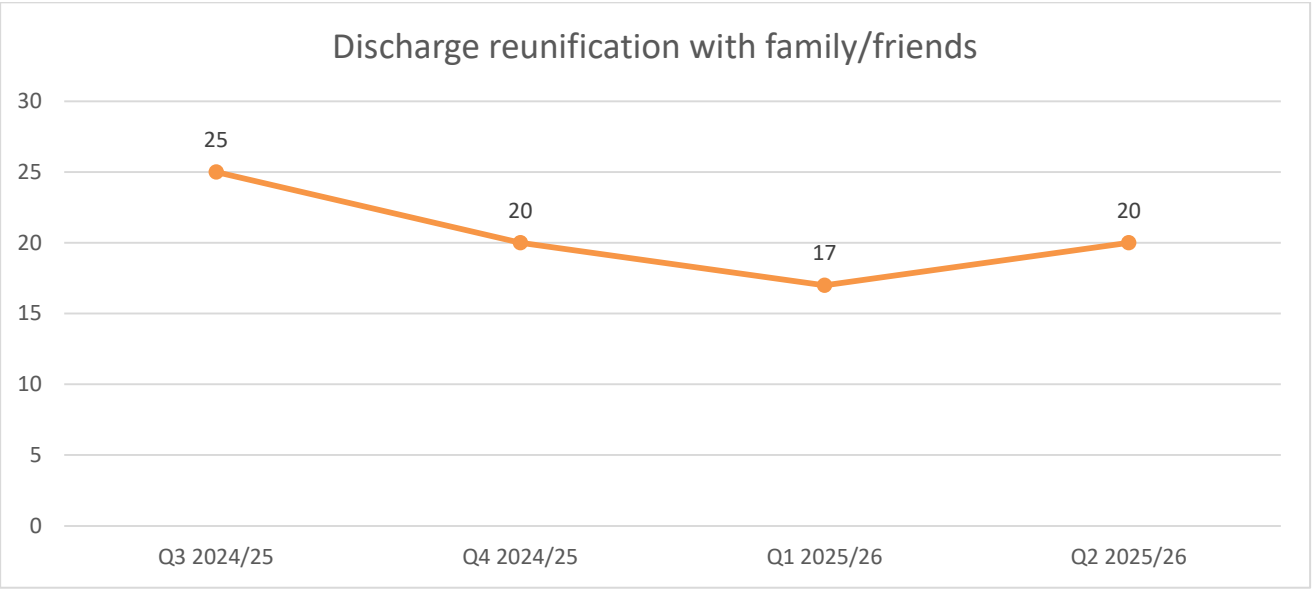
**Graph 4:** Total number of discharges for each Quarter



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

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

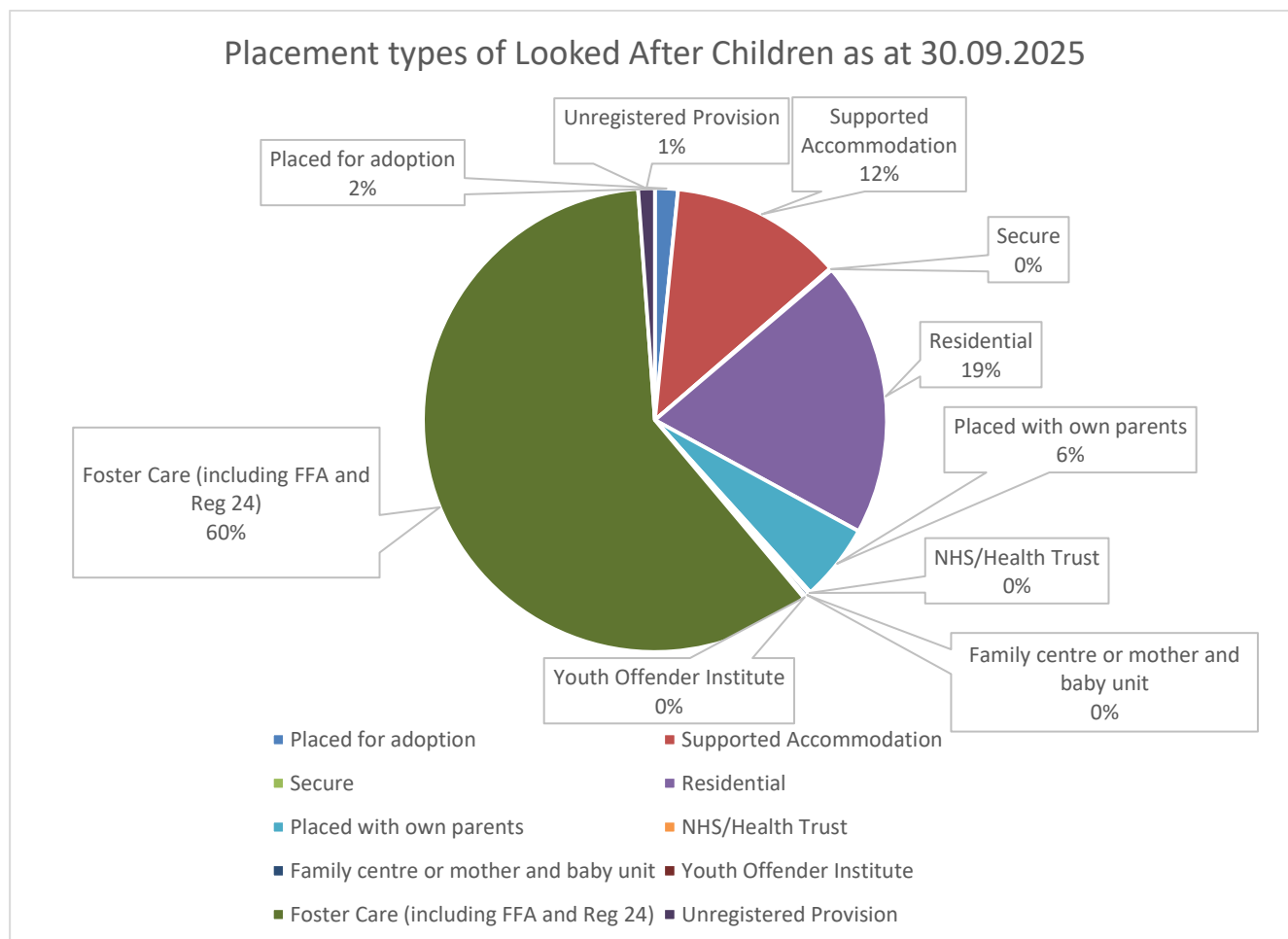
**Graph 5:** Number of discharges where Looked After Children were reunified with family and friends each Quarter.



### 3. Placements

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

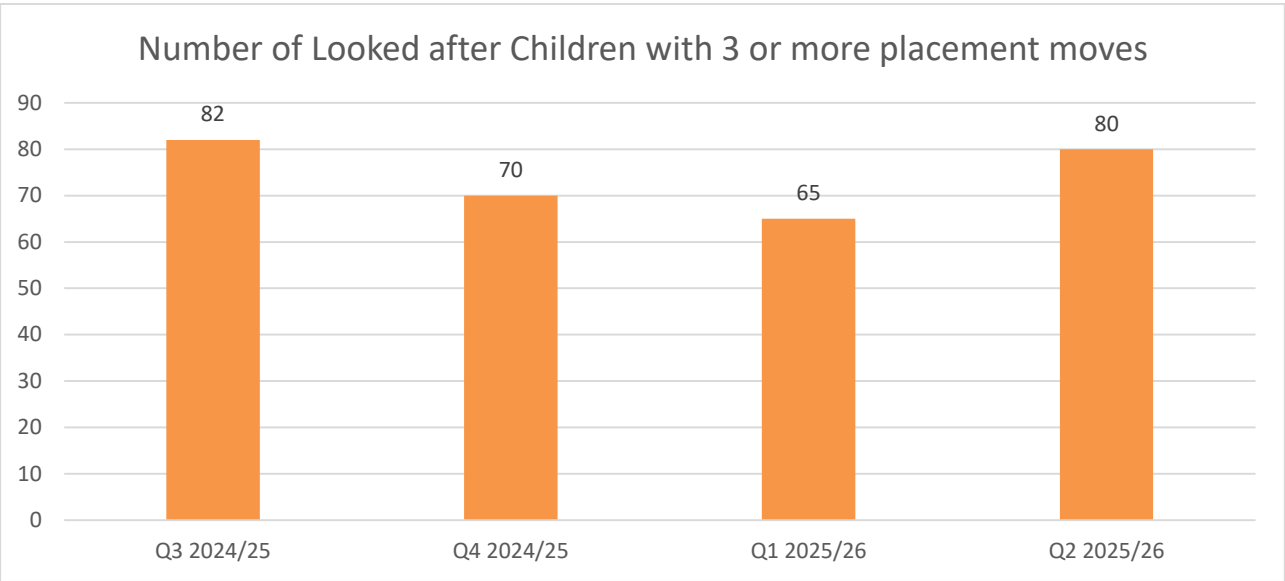
3.9. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a considerable impact on the Fostering Service's recruitment success generally. The number of fostering enquiries over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 254. The number of initial visits over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

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

	Enquiries	Initial Visits (IV)	Approvals	Places
2023/24 Q3	54	8	15	25*
<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>
2024/25 Q1	71	20	8	11
<b>2025/26 Q1</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>
2024/25 Q2	66	25	4	7
<b>2025/26 Q2</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</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*

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

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

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

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

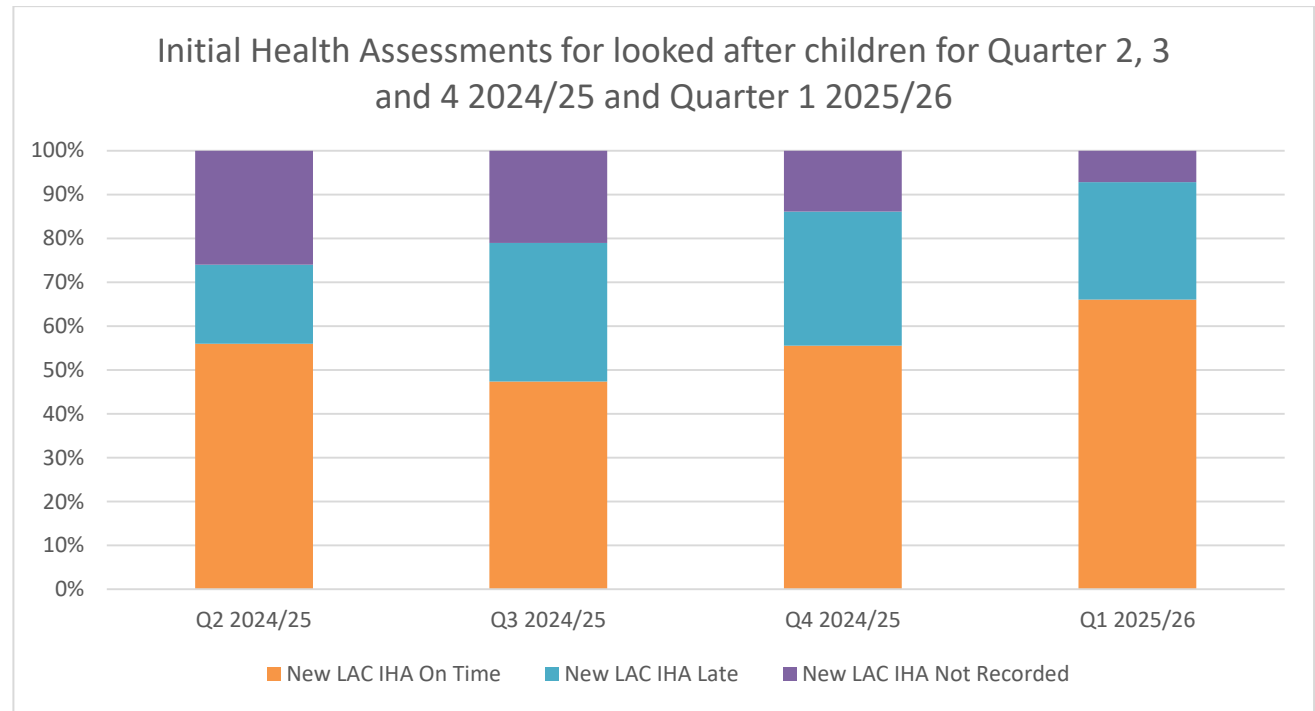
**4. Health**

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

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

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

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

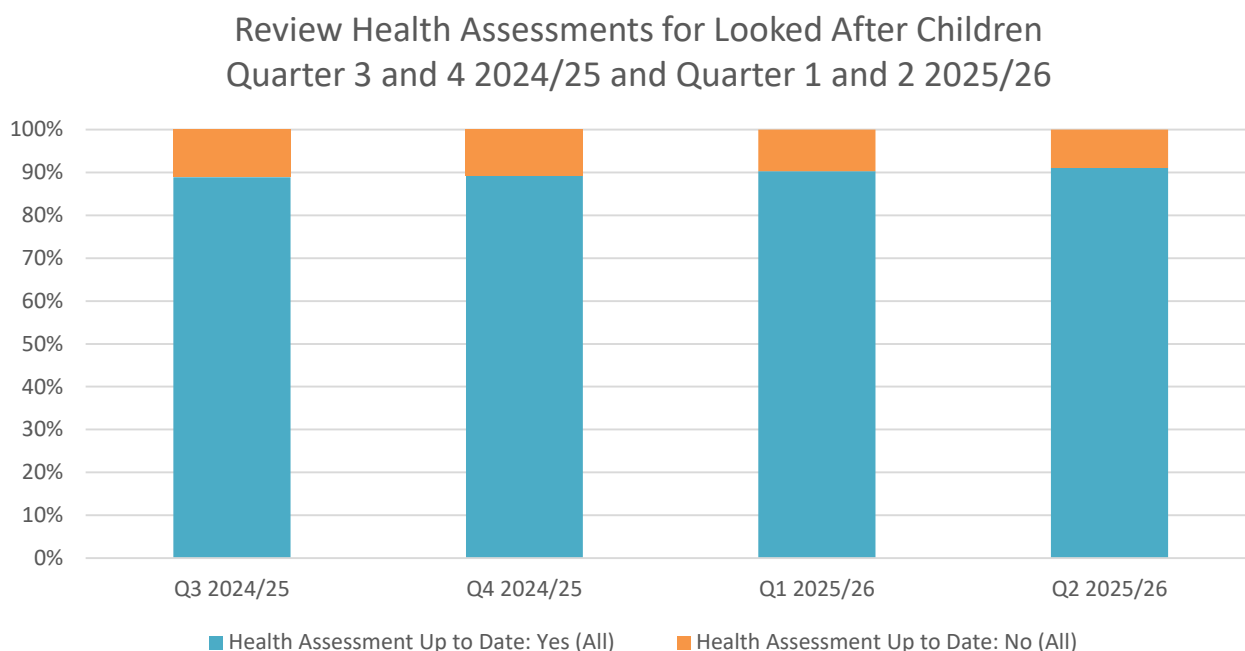


*\*Please note that this Data is obtained from the Locality Dashboard and not from Live data*

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



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



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

## **5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

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

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

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

**CAROLYN FAIR**  
**Director of Children's Services**

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott  
Tel: 01273 481274  
Email: [Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk)

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None