



Looked After Children's Annual Report 2024-25

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2024/2025



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Hi there,

We at the **East Sussex Care Leavers Council (CLC)** wanted to share a few opening remarks and reflections for the 2025 Annual Report you are about to read through. Members of the CLC were given the opportunity ahead of this finished report to consult on sections to include and feedback on the information shared where possible. We were very grateful for this opportunity of consultation within the report as we strongly believe this to be foundational for accurate and empathetic impact reporting by including the views and experiences of children in care and those leaving it within the report.

In the report, we were interested to see that out of the 688 individuals currently being looked after by East Sussex, there were a higher amount of boys entering care than girls. Additionally, for the Key Performance Indicators for the current year we were interested to see how the performance improved in varying areas such as the % of former relevant young people aged 19-21 in education, employment or training but in other areas for that same age bracket of former relevant young people in suitable accommodation, performance has decreased.

As for the priorities for East Sussex for 2025/26, the CLC welcomes many of the priorities mentioned and would be interested to see their implementation in the coming year. While the priorities were welcomed, members of the CLC expressed concerns for the feasibility of some priorities such as the new Permanence Lead Practitioner role so we would be curious to hear more details about this when possible.

Thank you for taking the time to read through our foreword and I hope you find the Annual Report an interesting read!

Written by DW with contributions and reflections from members of the East Sussex Care Leaver Council

Summary

This report provides an overview of services for the children in our care.

It provides a profile of the children we care for, how their needs are met and their journey through care. The report includes information about our Separated Migrant Children.

The report outlines the services we provide and considers how the experience of children in East Sussex compares to the wider national picture.

Finally, the report outlines key developments over the past 12 months and our future priorities

The report should be read alongside the individual service reports appended to the end of this document.

Statutory responsibilities within Looked After Children's Services

A child is 'looked after' by the local authority if they have been provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours, or if they have been made subject to a Care or Placement Order

The Local Authority has statutory duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care; to provide suitable accommodation and support and to ensure that their health and education needs are met. These are Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

Other agencies, including police, education and health services also have statutory responsibilities towards children in care

Children in care must have a Care Plan which is reviewed regularly by an Independent Reviewing Officer

The Local Authority must consider the wishes and feelings of the child, their parents and other relevant people when making decisions

Looked After Children's Services in East Sussex

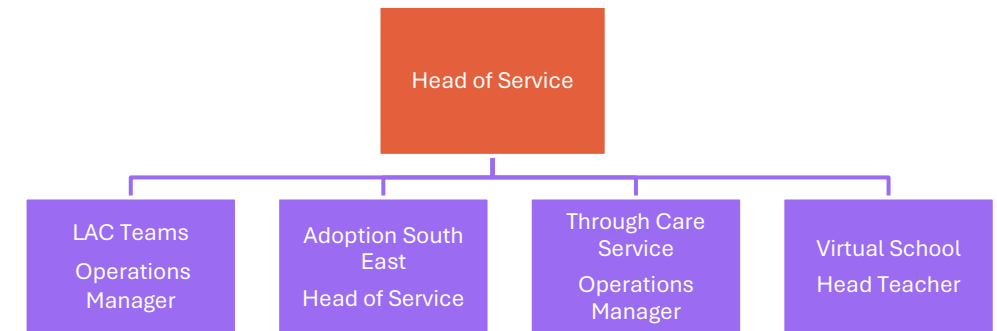
East Sussex Children's Services has 3 Looked After Children (LAC) Teams and 2 Through Care Teams with 8 social workers / senior social workers in each team. The Through Care Service also has 19 Personal Advisors (PAs) who support Care Leavers. The average caseload for a Looked After Children's Social Worker in East Sussex is 17 children.

The Head of Adoption South East and the Virtual School are embedded in our Management Team, ensuring a holistic approach to children's journeys.

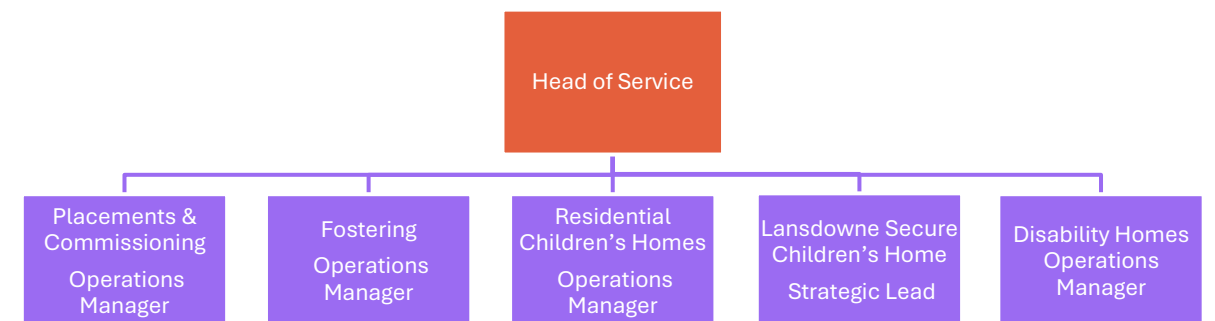
Commissioning and Provider Services work alongside the social work teams to ensure that the homes and services that we provide for children in our care are safe, local, and share our ambition for children to access opportunities and experiences which lay strong foundations for their future. This partnership approach to service delivery for looked after children drives positive outcomes and effective use of resources.

East Sussex has a robust in-house Fostering Service, 4 open Residential Children's Homes, 2 homes for Children with Disabilities and a Secure Children's Home.

Data for Looked After Children is complex and not all data was available at the time of writing. Our Digital Strategy is contributing to enhanced confidence and analysis of data as we move in to 2025-26.



LAC, Through Care, Adoption and Virtual School Teams



Placements, Commissioning Residential and Secure Services

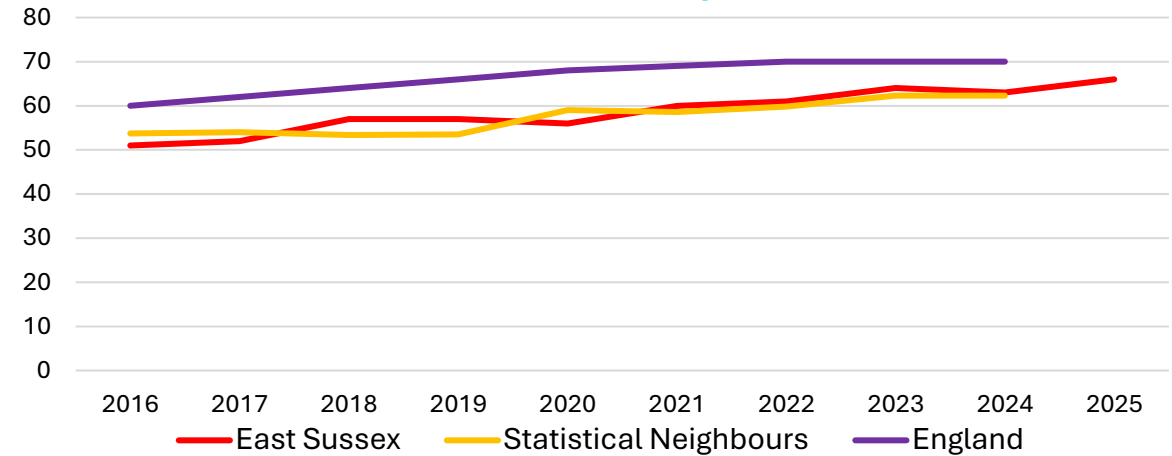
Rates of Looked After Children

The number of children in care in East Sussex has increased since last year but remains below IDACI. Whilst admissions to care increased only slightly, fewer children left care than in previous years

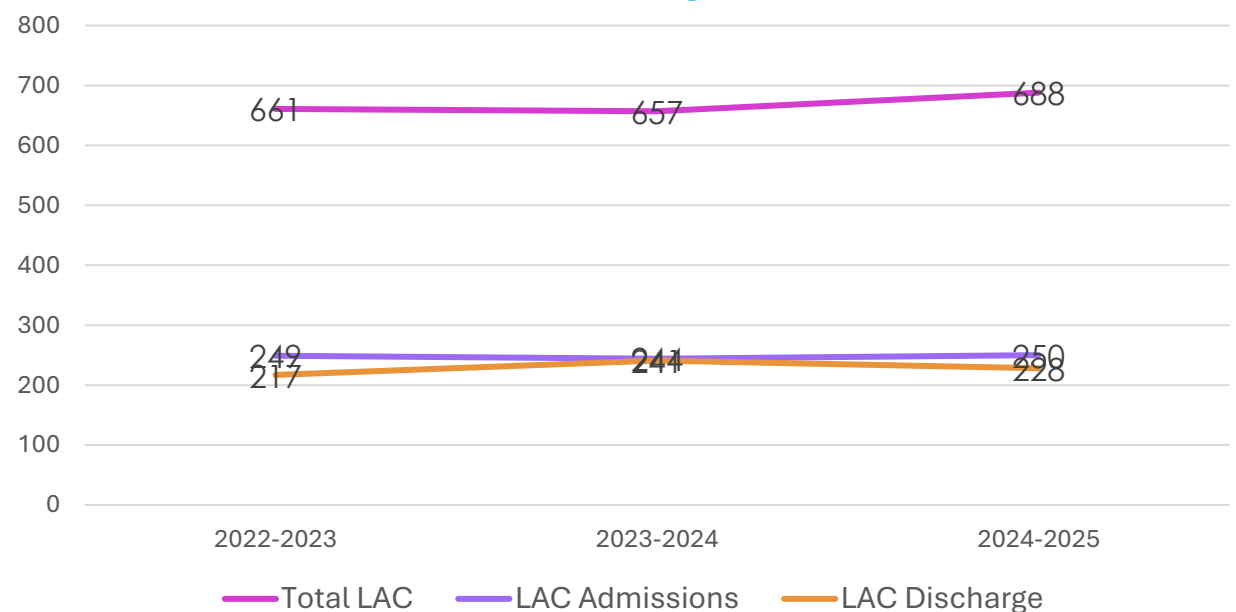
There were more children in care than for the previous 2 years

Indicative data for 2025 suggests that the rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 in East Sussex will remain in line with statistical neighbours and below the England rate

Rates of Looked After Children, per 10,000



ESCC Admissions and Discharge from Care

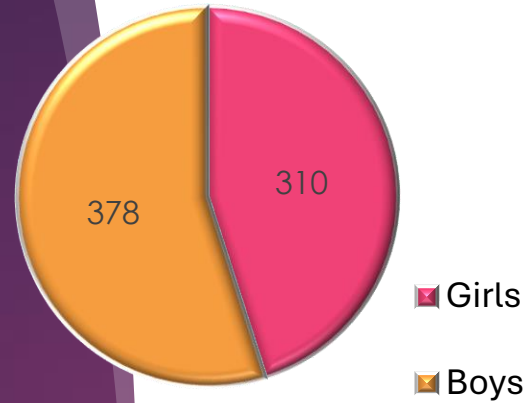


Profile of Looked After Children in East Sussex

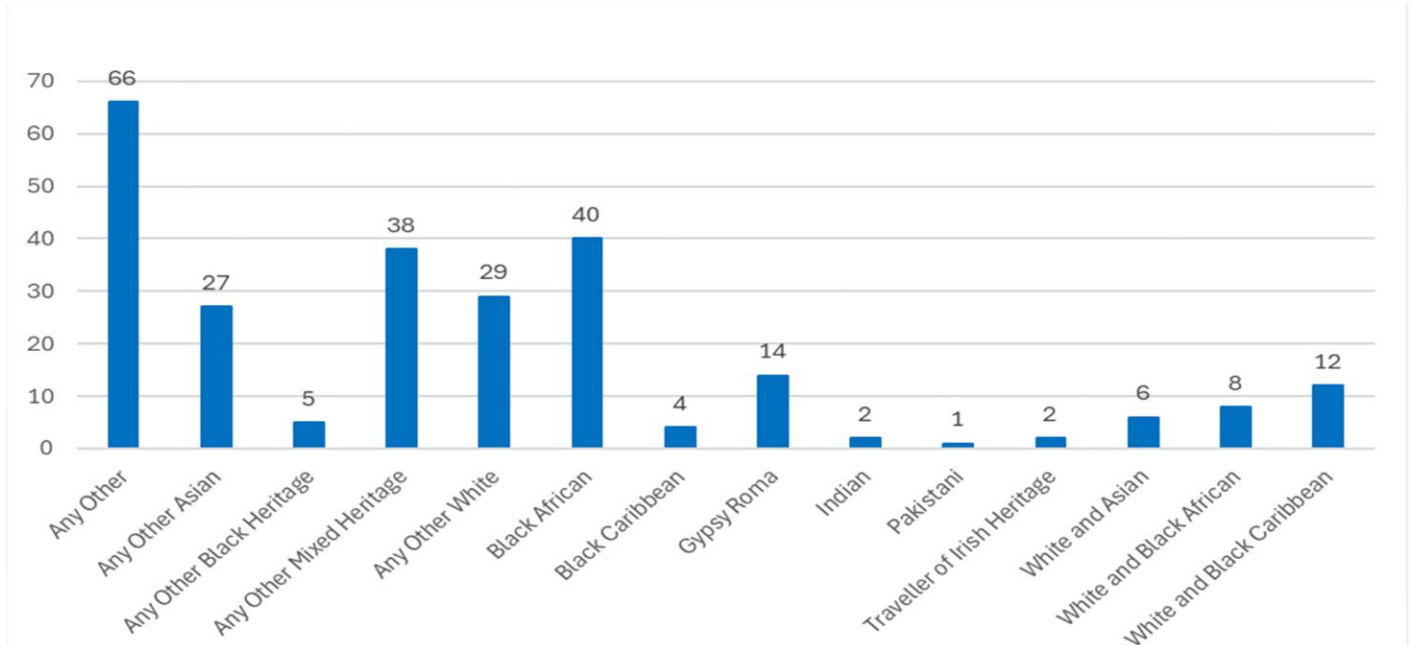
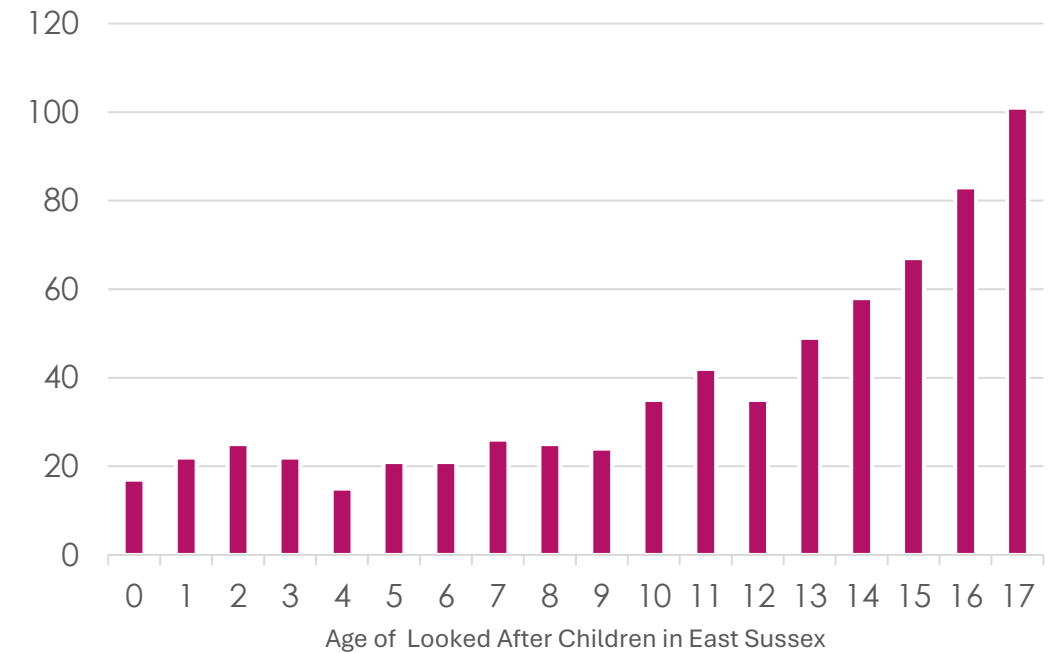
As in previous years we have more boys in our care than girls. There are more children aged 13+ who are looked after than the younger age group.

Most of the children in our care identify as White British, this reflects the general population across East Sussex.

28% of our Looked After Children identified as being from an ethnic minority background. These children represent a diverse range of cultures and ethnicities.



Gender of Looked After Children in East Sussex



Ethnicity of Looked After Children who Identified as being of an ethnic minority background

Becoming Looked After, Leaving Care and Legal Status

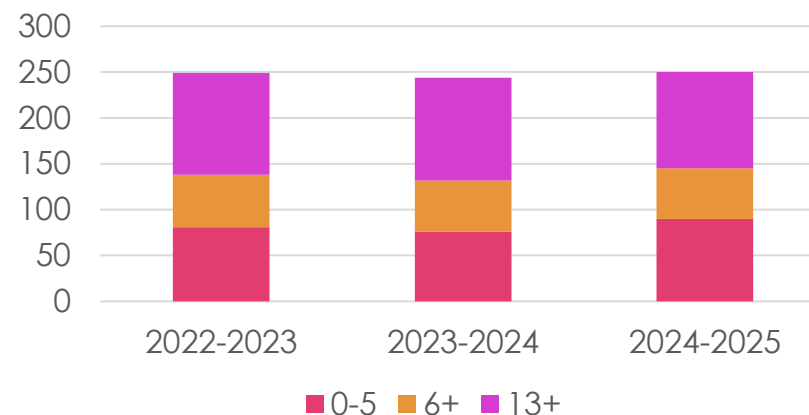
908 children came in and/or left our care during the year which was a net increase of 20 children compared with 2023-24. This reflected significantly higher activity levels across the service.

In contrast to previous years, more younger children were admitted to care than children aged 13+. Younger children were also more likely to remain in care than in previous years.

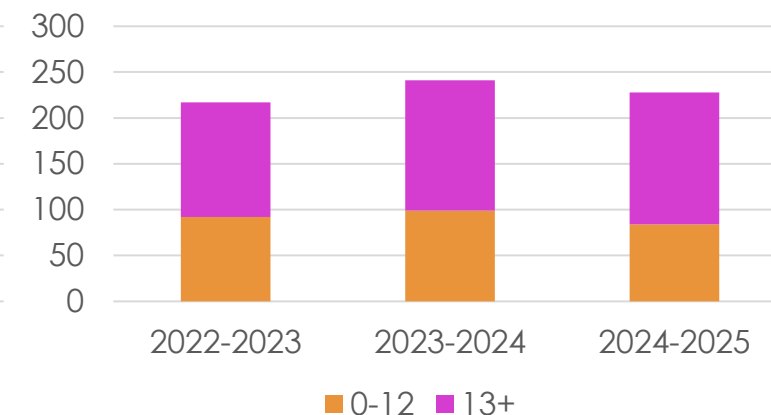
60% of children were looked after under a Care Order or Care and Placement Order compared to 26% of children cared for under Section 20.

14% of children were subject to an Interim Care Order.

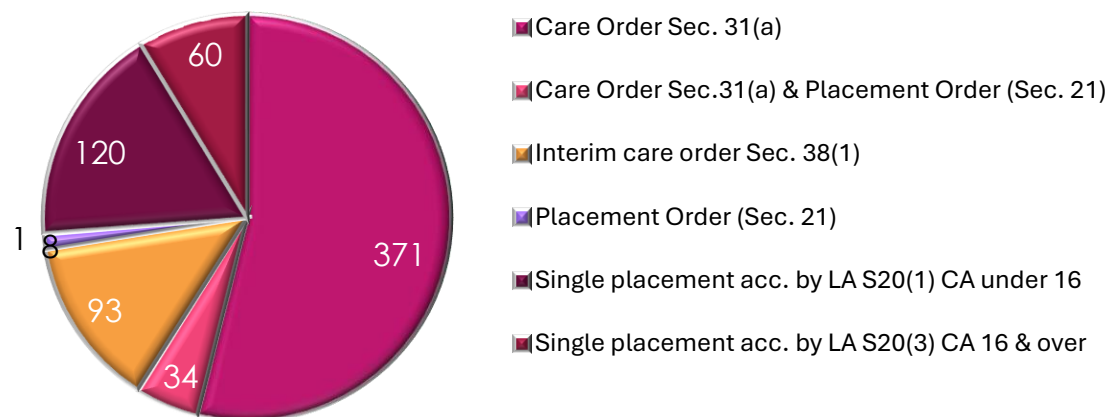
Age Profile of Children on Admission



Age Profile of Children Leaving Care



Legal Status of Children in Care in East Sussex



Our Separated Migrant Children

(previously UASC)

East Sussex County Council cared for 128 Separated Migrant Children under the age of 18 during 2024-25, this compared to 118 in 2023-24.

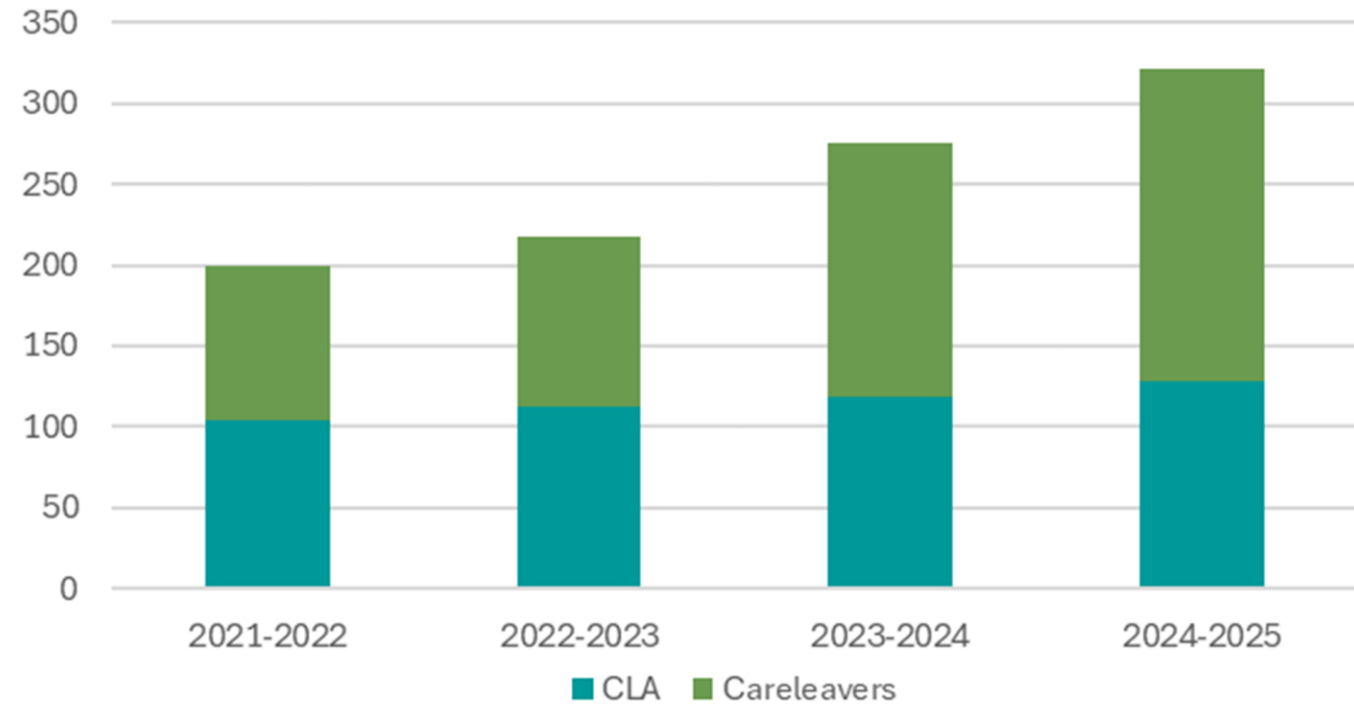
In addition, there were 193 Separated Migrant Care Leavers aged 18+ which is an increase of 36 from the previous year.

Our Separated Migrant Children were mainly male; 89% were aged 16 or over and the youngest was aged 14.

During 2024-2025 44 young people came to East Sussex through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) and the remainder were spontaneous arrivals via Police involvement or directly from Newhaven Port.

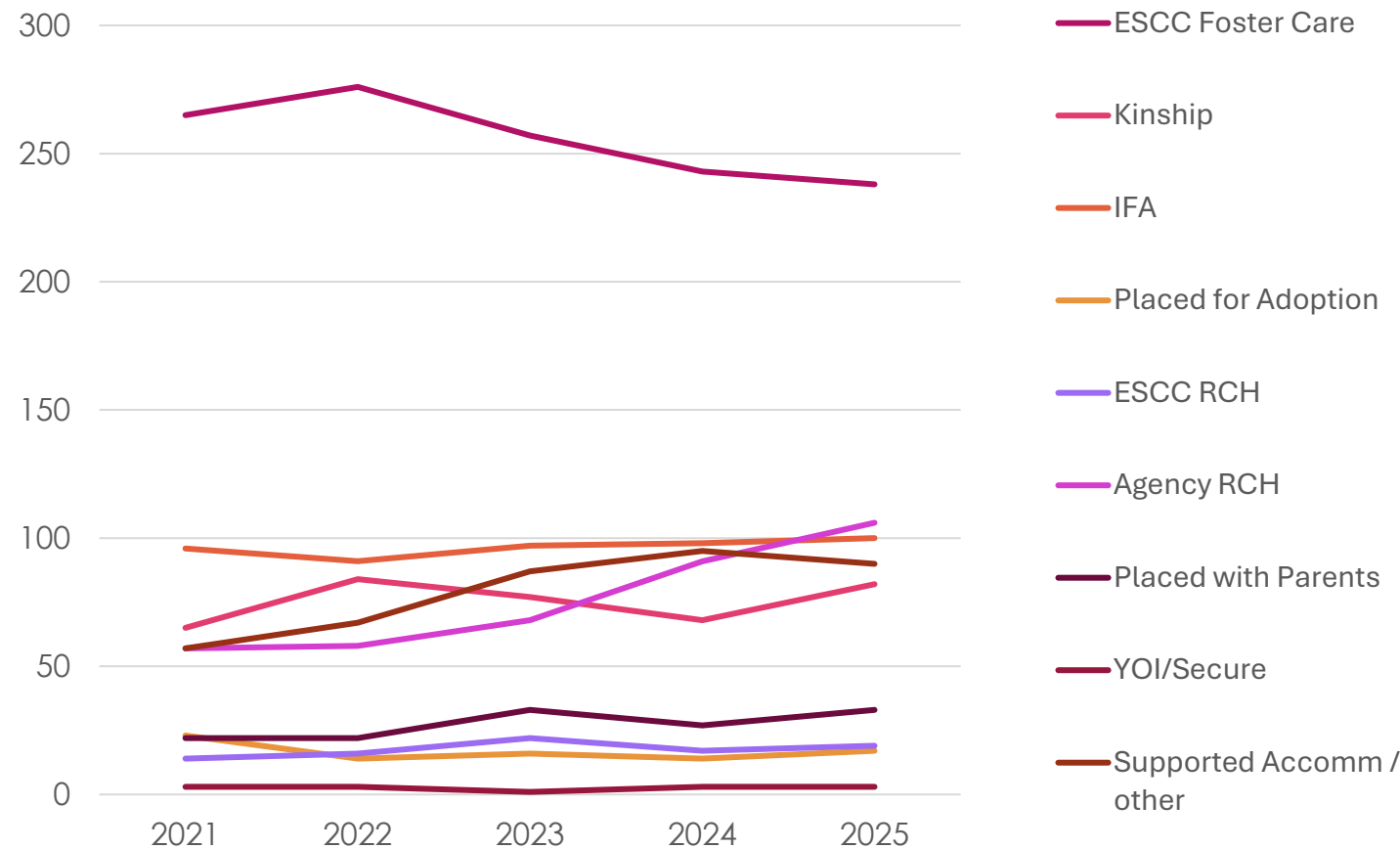
Most of these children were from Sudan, closely followed by Syria, Afghanistan and Vietnam. There were also small numbers of children from Albania, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Libya, Palestine and Turkey.

Separated Migrant Children



Where our children are living

Placement Mix



*Data shows a snapshot as of 31st March 2025

East Sussex foster carers continue to offer homes to more of our children than any other category of care (35%). We also support many Connected or Kinship Foster Carers which, alongside our positive relationships with Independent Fostering Agencies, means that 61% of the children in our care are living in family-based placements. Of all our children living with foster carers as at 31/3/25, 76% were placed in-house, significantly higher than the national average for 23/24 of 60% in-house utilisation.

We continue to see encouraging rates of foster carer recruitment including carers transferring or who bring professional skills and experience which allow them to manage increased complexity of need. This means that we are supporting children in fostering households who might otherwise require residential care, but also that some fostering households are caring for fewer children.

In line with regional and national trends we are seeing a steady increase in our use of Agency Residential Children's Homes. Whilst some of this increase is due to regulatory change for 16+ accommodation, the majority reflects a national shortage of fostering households. Residential Children's Homes can be right for some children, but they can also result in children's networks being disrupted and high costs to the local authority.

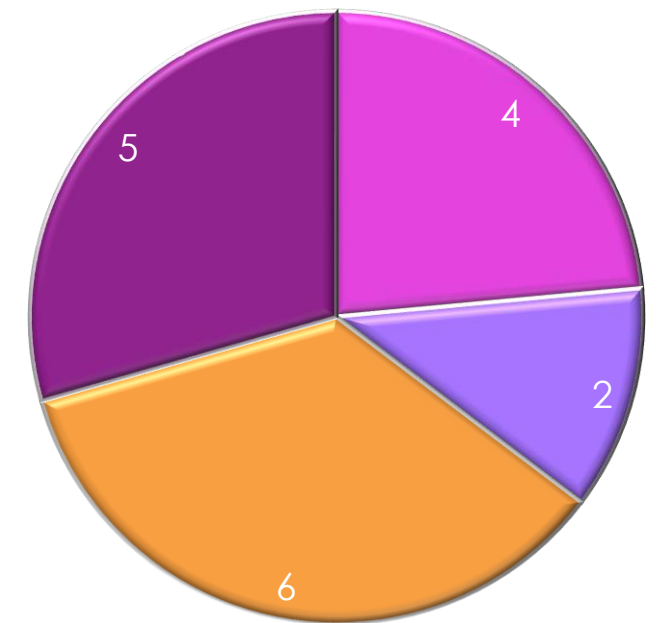
Children Looked After Through the Disability Service

Children who have severe and enduring cognitive delay, severe learning disability, low functional abilities and physical disabilities receive support through the East Sussex Children's Disability Service.

As of 31st March 2025, this service worked with 17 children in care; 14 children were aged 0-15 and 3 were aged 16-18. All were in receipt of full-time care. The service also provides extensive packages of support and respite to other children and their families in the community.

The Children's Disability Service social work teams ensure that letters from Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) for their children are adapted using Communicate and Print.

We also have a Life Story Ambassador with a Children with Disabilities lens who is available for consultations within the service.



■ ESCC Fostercare ■ Agency Fostercare
■ ESCC Residential ■ Agency Residential

Key performance indicators 2024-25

Where ESCC performance improved on the previous year this is shown in green, performance which dipped is shown in red

Indicator	2022/23 ESCC Value	2022/23 England	2023/24 ESCC Value	2023/24 England	2024.25 ESCC Value
Rate of children looked after per 10,000 population aged under 18	64.3	70.5	63.9	69.7	66.4
Number of children looked after with 3 or more placements during the year	15%	10.3%	14.3%	10.4%	10.8%
Percentage of children looked after under 16 who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more and in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption	71.4%	68.7%	66.9%	68.1%	67.7%
Percentage of children looked after at 31 st March placed outside local authority boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live	17.2%	16.8%	17.8%	17.4%	21.2%
Percentage of children who ceased to be looked after who were adopted	7.0%	9.3%	8.2%	8.9%	7.9%
Average time between local authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match with an adoptive family	318 days	197 days	241 days	205 days	170 days

Key performance indicators 2024-25

Where ESCC performance improved on the previous year this is shown in green, performance which dipped is shown in red

Indicator	2022/23 ESCC	2022/23 England	2023/24 ESCC	2023/24 England	2024/25 ESCC
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in suitable accommodation	92.6%	90.6%	95.2%	90.5%	96.6%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in suitable accommodation	87.4%	88.1%	92.7%	87.6%	90.7%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 17-18 who were in education, employment or training	77.1%	65.6%	75.0%	64.1%	64.1%
Percentage of former relevant young people aged 19-21 who were in education, employment or training	55.9%	55.9%	58.1%	53.8%	59.9%
Emotional & Behavioural Health of children in care – average Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) Score*	16.3	14.4	15.8	14.7	16.1
Percentage of children looked after who had their teeth checked by a dentist	62.5%	75.5%	64.6%	78.9%	68.8%
Children looked after who received a Final Warning, reprimand or conviction	0.9%	2.0%	1.1%	2.2%	2.4%

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

*An SDQ score is required of all children aged 4-16 on the date of last assessment. A higher score indicates more emotional difficulties. 0-13 is considered normal, 14-16 is borderline cause for concern and 17-40 is cause for concern.

Family Finding and Adoption Support

Adoption South East (ASE) is a Regional Adoption Agency uniting the adoption services of Brighton and Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council, Surrey County Council and West Sussex County Council. We are working together to provide adoption services across our region, combining our years of experience and expertise and bringing a fresh approach to finding families for children and helping those families to thrive.

Key Indicators in 2024-25

- ▶ 82 children placed for Adoption (21 of these from East Sussex which was an increase of 6 children on the previous year)
- ▶ 64 adoption families approved across the region
- ▶ 95% ASE children placed with ASE approved families
- ▶ 24% of children were placed in Early Permanence arrangements
- ▶ Timescales for children under the age of 2½ improved to achieve the national average
- ▶ 2,000 adoptive families supported across the region
- ▶ £4m funding drawn down from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund (ASGSF) for therapy for 1,397 children across the region
- ▶ The national decline in adopter sufficiency is becoming reflected locally



Key Performance Indicators – Health

NHS Core Plus 5 – Children in Care 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.

Every child in care is provided with an **Initial Health Assessment (IHA)** within 28 days of entering care. In East Sussex this is carried out at a clinic by the community paediatrician. The team ensure that high quality health assessments are offered to all children and young people who are looked after and make sure that any actions on the health care plan are completed throughout the year.

For the period 2024-2025, 211 IHAs were completed with 169 pertaining to children under the care of East Sussex County Council and a further 42 for other local authorities. These figures show an increase in the previous year.

Exception reporting of the data demonstrates mitigating factors not attributable to ESHT in compliance with the requirements that 85% of assessments are completed and distributed within time frames.

Review Health Assessments (RHA) are carried out by specialist nurses every six months for children aged under five and yearly for those aged five to 18.

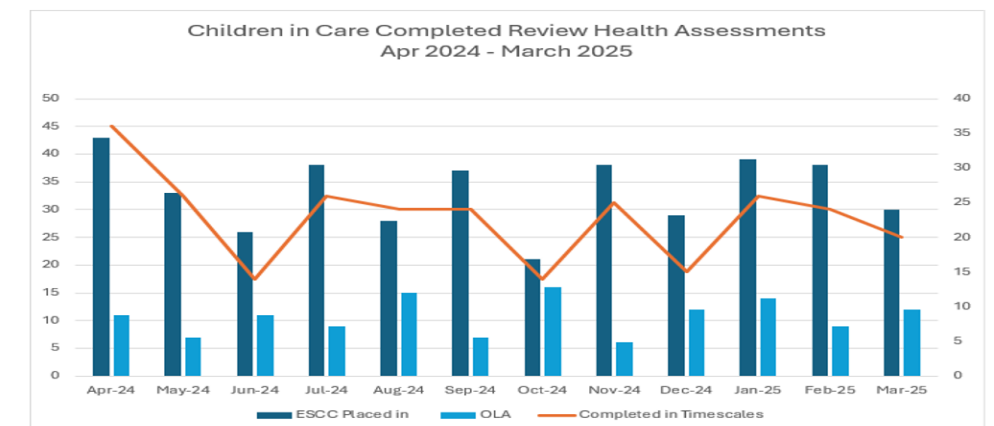
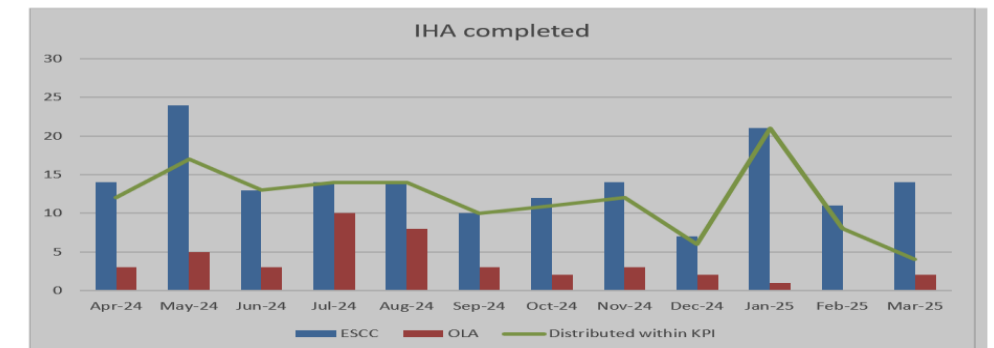
For the period 2024/2025 the Specialist Nurses completed a total of 529 RHAs, with 400 that pertained to children cared for by ESCC and a further 129 placed by other local authorities. 85% of assessments were completed and distributed within time frames. The competing demands of the caseload and OLA work has been contributed to performance, and as a result the review health assessments for the OLA cohort are now allocated to a waiting list, which has increased from three to six months.

120 ESCC children were placed out of the area and their assessments were commissioned and delivered by another provider (OOA).

The Specialist Nurses also compiled 115 **Leaving Care Health Summaries** for 16 to 18-year-olds.

Immunisations for Looked After Children for 2024/25 sat at 81%.

The completion of Strength and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs) for children aged 5-16 for 2024/25 was at 55%, which is an improvement.



Results from the My Health My School Survey 2023-24*

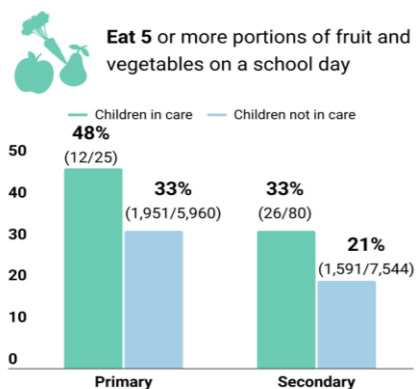
*Results for 2024-25 not yet available

The 'My Health My School' survey is a student perception survey for children and young people in years 3-13. It is completed anonymously online and participation by schools, children and young people is voluntary. The survey asked 'age-tailored' questions across ten themes.

0.7% (121/16,412) of students who completed the survey were identified as children in care; these were those that responded, 'I live in a children's home' or 'I live with foster carer(s)'.

Of the 121 children and young people who identified as in care:

- ▶ 35 were primary, 80 were secondary and 6 were post-16 students
- ▶ 49 were boys, 49 were girls, 18 identified as another gender and 5 preferred not to say
- ▶ 56% (66/118) described their ethnicity within the high-level 'White' category
- ▶ 51% (40/78) described their sexual identity as heterosexual
- ▶ 39% (47/121) considered themselves to have a disability.



33% (26/80) of secondary students in care report eating no fruit and vegetables, compared to 9% (655/7,544) not in care.

Physically active for at least 60 minutes most days - all students



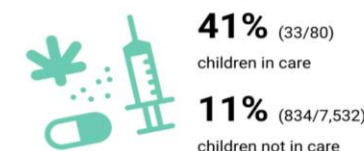
Screen time more than 5 hours a day - secondary students



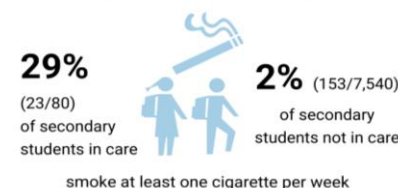
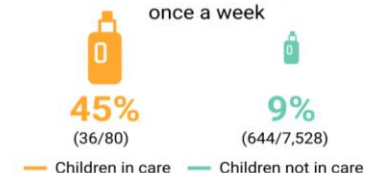
Secondary children in care are more likely to drink alcohol at least once a week



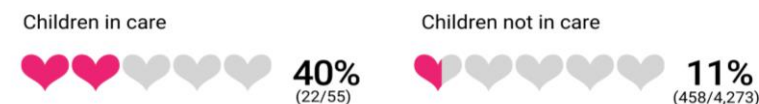
Secondary students that have ever used or taken drugs



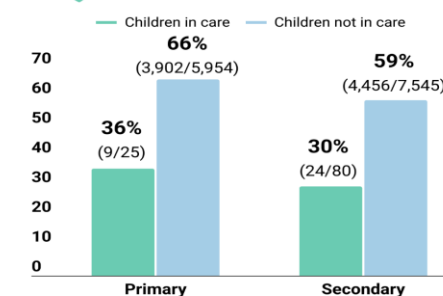
Secondary students that vape at least once a week



Have ever had sexual contact involving penetration - Year 9 - 11 only



'I agree, I enjoy my life'



46%

(37/80)
of secondary
students in care



6%

(462/7,540)
of secondary
students not in care

reported being bullied 'most days/every day' in the last 12 months



Have ever hurt themselves on purpose - Yes

54%

(43/80)
of secondary students in care

28%

(2,084/7,534)
of secondary students not in care

Mental and Emotional Wellbeing annual data and update for LACAMHS 2024/2025

LACAMHS continues to work closely with our Fostering and Residential Services to ensure that the specific needs of the children in our care are understood and responded to in a timely manner

Number of initial consultations completed: 43

Number of Drop ins attended: 71

Number of young people in the service ranged from 102 (Q1) to 79 (Q4)

2 Therapeutic Parenting Groups run over the year

1 pilot Non-Violent Resistance (NVR) group offered to foster carers (Sept 2024-Dec 2024)

Fortnightly consultation at team meetings in children's residential homes

Therapeutic Parenting Groups for residential staff built in to offer

LACAMHS and LAC Management continue to work together to mitigate impact of clinical staffing issues across the region

Key Performance Indicators - Education

All current data is provisional, and progress and attainment 8 data is not yet available for Key Stage 4 (GCSEs).

Key Stage 2: Data remains provisional but suggests that outcomes are higher than last year in reading, writing, maths and GPS. They are in line with national and regional CLA results and slightly higher than both in maths. Cohorts vary from year to year, and all have their own stories. This year 37% had an EHCP and another 24% were on the SEND register.

Key Stage 4: Data remains provisional and there are no national or regional comparators. There were some good individual achievements. Students achieved level 9 in photography and Persian, and Distinctions in BTEC sport and business along with level 7 in Art, Computer Science, Science and DT, and level 6 in History, Drama and Theatre.

Post 16: We have also seen success within our post-16 cohort. Students achieved A levels or equivalent in Biology, Psychology, Criminology, IT, Gaming, Computer Science, Photography and Marketing, and 11 of our young people have gained a place at university. Others have worked hard to achieve their core GCSEs and a range of level 1 and 2 vocational courses.

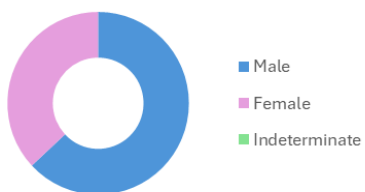
Intervention: The Virtual School agreed 468 funding requests for tuition last academic year. 216 children and young people received tuition. 21% of the requests were for primary, 68% secondary and 11% Post 16. This was an increase on last year. 60% of the young people who received tutoring achieved all three targets and 100% achieved at least one target and partially met the others. 99% of all children and young people said their confidence against their targets had increased.

100% of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have taken place. In July 2024, 94.32% were recorded, 0.41% were current and 5% are overdue.

PEP quality audits over the last year rated 74% as good, 97% as satisfactory or above and 2.37% as 'need for improvement'.



The Safety of our Looked After Children

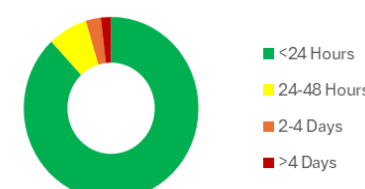
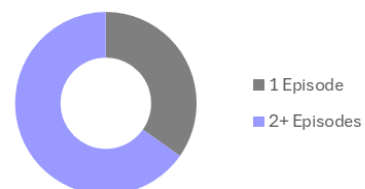


Children who went missing

▶ 138 children who were Looked After went missing during 2024-25:

- ▶ 87 were male (63%) and 51 were female (37%).
- ▶ 90 were aged 16 and over (65%), 48 were aged 15 and under (35%).
- ▶ 90 went missing more than once (65%).
- ▶ There were 1327 missing episodes throughout the year.
- ▶ 1168 episodes where the child was missing for less than 24 hours (88%).
- ▶ 97 episodes where the child was missing between 24 and 48 hours (7%).
- ▶ 37 episodes where the child was missing between 2 and 4 days (3%).
- ▶ 25 episodes where the child was missing for over 4 days (2%).

All 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.



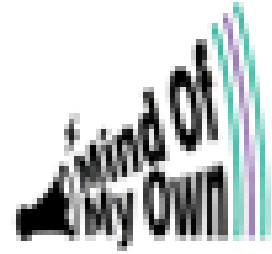
Children involved with the Youth Justice Service or at risk of exploitation

- ▶ **The Youth Justice Service worked with 20 looked after children during 2024-25.**
- ▶ A further 2 children became looked after due to being securely remanded to our care.
- ▶ 5.4% of the YJS caseload in 2024-25 were looked after children.
- ▶ Looked After Children aged 10-17 are overrepresented within the YJS cohort.
- ▶ During 2024-25 65 children were subject to ESCC SAFER operational oversight and therefore categorised as being at high risk of exploitation.
- ▶ 12 of these children were looked after by East Sussex, 8 were female and 4 were male.
- ▶ 5 of these children were deemed to be at risk of sexual exploitation and 4 deemed to be at risk of criminal exploitation. 3 children were at risk of both criminal and sexual exploitation.

My Voice Matters

Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review, as set out in the statutory guidance to the 2002 Act.

IRO Handbook



My Voice Matters is the East Sussex approach to children's statutory Looked After Review meetings. Children's voices sit at the heart of their reviews, and review documentation is prepared in a way that ensures each child can understand their plan

Independent Reviewing Officers have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to plans for some of the most vulnerable children in our county. In 2024-25 Independent Reviewing Officers had a specific focus on quality assurance of permanence planning, Life Story Work and later life letters for children

1,563 individual My Voice Matters Meetings were held in 2024-25
89% of My Voice Matters Meetings were held early or on time

This was a slight decrease on the previous year but primarily reflected decisions made in children's best interests or to ensure continuity of the IRO relationship.

Children are increasingly using the Mind of My Own App to contribute their views in advance of the meeting.

92% of Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their review process during 2024/25, which was consistent with the previous year.

What the key performance indicators are telling us

Overall performance is encouraging, remaining consistent despite the demand pressures, and there has been improvement across several key indicators

Whilst the rate of children looked after per 10,000 has increased slightly, ESCC is consistently lower than the all-England rate and below rates expected for IDACI

Although the average SDQ score has declined slightly from last year, the number of assessments completed has vastly improved, which is the result of an action plan developed to address this

The adoption data shows an improvement in performance across most timeliness measures, although with a slight decrease in the total number of adoptions

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

Percentage of dental checks completed has improved again but continues to be closely monitored by the strategic health team who are trying to improve dental capacity and availability for LAC locally

Performance across the Care Leaver indicators has remained relatively constant, although there has been a reduction in EET for 17/18-year-olds

School age children who identify as being looked after also report significantly poorer levels of healthy behaviours and emotional well being; this is an area in need of focus

Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel met 4 times during 2024-25 to discuss regular agenda items including:

- ▶ Regulation 44 Quarterly Summary Reports and Ofsted Inspections for our Children's Homes
- ▶ Looked After Children Statistics Report

In addition to scrutinising reports and inspection data the Corporate Parenting Panel contributed to service development and improvement through focused sessions on:

- ▶ Lifelong Links & Family Group Conferences
- ▶ Family Time (Community Family Work Service)
- ▶ The Annual Report of East Sussex Fostering Service
- ▶ Children in Care Council (CiCC) Pledge presentation by CiCC and Care Leavers Council
- ▶ Placement & Commissioning Team presentation
- ▶ 'My Things Matter' presentation by CiCC and Care Leavers Council
- ▶ Recognising Care Experience Formally As An 'Additional Category' in Equality Considerations
- ▶ Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report



**Our Elected Members
regularly support events
and visit services**

How we Evaluate Practice

Audit Activity 2024-25

All services undertake monthly audit activity across children's files. In 2024-25 this has helped us to understand issues relating to children's mental health, participation in meetings, the role of the IRO, quality of life story work and the strength of multi-agency partnerships. We also identified areas for development relating to supervision and recording.

The Service undertook Thematic Audits focussed on Life Story Work and Pathway Plans and 2 Thematic Audits focussed on the quality and impact of Foster Carers' Supervision

Learning from Audits:

- ▶ Audits evidenced robust, child focussed practice including effective multi-agency working
- ▶ In most cases children had up to date health and dental assessments, reviews were timely, and care leavers were in suitable accommodation
- ▶ Timely completion of Placement Plans showed steady improvement
- ▶ Strong, professionally supportive relationships between foster carers and supervising social workers were clearly visible; however, areas for improvement were identified in relation to supervision records
- ▶ Foster carer supervision is now completed on an electronic form which supports better management oversight; a follow-up audit indicated improved but inconsistent practice
- ▶ Improved practice in relation to recording and review of Delegated Authority was needed, a focused audit is planned to review progress

Key Activity Across LAC Teams

Looked After Children's Teams provide services for children up to age 18 who are in the care of the local authority.

The service has strong retention which ensures that children experience long lasting relationships with workers who they know and trust.

This year has been about driving best practice across services and embedding innovation.

Refining Valuing Care
Panel and process

Developing Heading Home
– our approach to
reunification

Life story work – piloted
student project and now
embedding across teams

Lifelong links, an
expectation for all children
in our care supported by a
review of relationships at
age 15

Reviewed permanence
policy and strategy with a
view to establishing a
permanence lead to drive
this agenda across the
child's journey

Enhancing overall
performance to ensure
consistent good practice
across all children's plans,
records and experiences

Key Activity Through Care Services

The Through Care Service works with children and young people from age 14 to ensure a smooth journey towards independence. Young people move across to the service at a time that is right for them.

East Sussex County Council has adopted Care Experience as an Additional Characteristic and developments have continued to extend the wider corporate parenting role across all agencies in East Sussex.

The Local Offer has been reviewed and is shared with all young people ensuring they are aware of the support available to them.

East Sussex has strengthened support through a range of initiatives:

Housing & Accommodation:

- The Care Leavers Housing Protocol was reviewed to improve housing pathways.
- A Rent Guarantor pilot scheme has enabled access to better quality private rentals.

Relationships & Wellbeing:

- Lifelong Links promoted meaningful connections with family and significant adults.
- Health and Wellbeing Project gained national recognition.

Communication & Engagement:

- Facebook notice board and co-produced monthly newsletter keep young people connected.

Safeguarding & Risk Management:

- 18+ Risk Assessment Panel introduced to address ongoing safeguarding and exploitation risks.

Local Groupwork:

- Weekly sessions in Eastbourne and Hastings offer lunch, careers advice, and mental health support.

Transitions & Specialist Support:

- The Through Care Team (TCT) worked closely with Adult Social Care to support care leavers with mental health or trauma-related needs.

Digital Access:

- Laptops and Wi-Fi were provided to support education, employment, and family contact.

Employment & Skills:

- The Care 2 Work Strategic Group expanded training and work experience opportunities.
- The Skills Journal was launched to help track progress and development.

Separated migrant young people

- The government started processing asylum claims again in summer 2024, reviewing elements of the Illegal Migration Act 2023 which had prevented asylum seekers progressing their claims. This has resulted in more timely decision making for young people.
- The Home Office are refusing a high number of claims made by children seeking asylum; this is across the nationalities (excluding Sudanese and Eritrean) and is resulting in increasing numbers becoming All Rights Exhausted and the team undertaking Human Rights assessments.
- There is also a delay in the system for appeals which can mean young people are waiting up to two years, this results in a higher number of over 18's without rights to rent and gain employment. Those who turn 18 under appeal are completely reliant on ESCC for housing and living costs and had no access to the usual 'move on' housing routes. This puts considerable stress on the post 18 housing provision. The funding from the Home Office drops by 70% when a young person turns 18, this amount does not cover the costs of accommodation locally.
- The Preliminary Information Meeting (PIM) system is back in place for our Sudanese and Eritrean young people, this means they are receiving more timely decisions. Those over 18 with refugee status are increasingly turning to private rental house shares due to the lack of supported move on options available locally.
- The numbers of young people age disputed dropped this year, meaning fewer age assessments were required.
- Our Welcome to the UK day continues to be a success, a follow-up third day has been trialled to cover more topics such as substance use and relationships. The Refugee Council use our Welcome to the UK sessions as their example of best practice to other local authorities across the UK.

Separated migrant young people (continued)

- The service continued to explore a range of new education offers for Separated Migrant Children, 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) attend our lunch drops ins, providing our young people not in education or training with crucial English learning opportunities.
- Joint work has continued with health colleagues to improve the health offer to our young people. Young people are now able to access blood screening at their Initial Health Assessments, which supports 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 activity days with Brighton and Hove Albion.
- Our young people continue to have access to My View, a Refugee Council therapy service specifically for refugee young people. The young people's feedback remains very positive about the impact this therapy had on their wellbeing.

Health Offer for Children in Care

LAC Operational Health Partnership

Health and Social Care Managers meet quarterly to share learning, address concerns and drive forward service developments relating to the health and wellbeing of children in care.

Key priorities for 2024-2025 have been:

- Working in partnership with Health Commissioners to develop a Pan-Sussex Health Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers to better address physical and emotional health and wellbeing need.
- Dental checks and Immunisations
- Initial and Review Health Assessments
- SDQs
- Access to health care for separated migrant children
- Priority pathways and enhancing knowledge and skills to meet the needs of children with complex needs



East Sussex Healthcare
NHS Trust

The Children in Care (CIC) nursing team works in close partnership with children, young people, their carers, social workers and local authorities to ensure that children and young people's health needs are supported during their time in care and as they leave care.

The team work as health advocates and are involved with the assessment, planning and delivery of health services for looked after children and young people. All our nurses are registered nurses with additional experience and qualifications in areas such as health visiting, school nursing, sexual and mental health, and drug and alcohol support.

All ESHT children 0 -19 years have been allocated to individual specialist nurse caseloads so the children can form meaningful relationships with their specialist nurse throughout their time in care, and this model is now well embedded and favourably received from staff. There are currently 716 East Sussex Children, additionally the team undertake work for over 300 children placed by other local authorities (OLA). Work has continued around ensuring that statutory health assessments are a positive, person-centred and valuable experience, written in child centred and accessible language which is all helping to build positive relationships and improve the experience for the children we care for.

Work with colleagues across the system has embedded a one-stop clinic for unaccompanied asylum seekers

We aim to provide all young people aged 16-18 years old in care with a summary of their health since birth. The health summary is a small booklet which contains birth details, immunisation and health history (if available). The summary is unique to the child can be updated it at any time. The information in the health summary is confidential and is only shared with the child. The health summary also contains useful information about accessing health services and useful tips about staying healthy.

In addition to statutory health reviews, the nurses also offer health advice and information for children in care, their social worker and their carers, support for children in care to attend health appointments, information and support around a range of issues, including:

- ▶ stopping smoking
- ▶ healthy eating and weight
- ▶ relationships
- ▶ safe sex
- ▶ drug and alcohol awareness
- ▶ support for leaving care

Education & Development Support

‘I just wanted to let you know, B received the highest Maths score in her class, and she is also moving up a set’

‘Reports from his Maths teacher are that he is now on track to achieve a pass in Maths at the end of Year 11. A year ago, he was unable to attend Maths lessons’

The Virtual School's (VS) strategic role to promote the educational outcomes for children with a Social Worker has continued to develop and this year included children in Kinship care. The VS worked with social care and education teams across the authority on attendance, inclusion and special education needs. We provided advice and information to social workers, other support services, schools, parents of adopted children and kinship carers. We worked with the Designated Safeguarding Leads Network and SENCos in schools. We have continued to develop the Master Series in Education for Social Workers and Early Help workers and delivered training to new social workers.

The VS works in partnership with post 16 providers. This partnership involves schools and colleges, post 16 trainers, Universities, the Youth Employment Service and post 16 leads in education. Discussions within the partnership have included bursaries, Widening Participation opportunities and the use of the Vulnerable Learners Protocol to ensure that all staff in post 16 establishments are aware of the needs of our learners.

The Care to Work Group brought staff from across the LA together to ensure that our young people have access to existing employment and training opportunities and to develop opportunities. Work with Balfour Beatty and the John Lewis Partnership is ongoing. We are currently looking at how best to ensure that Care Leavers benefit from Connect to Work and other national schemes.

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 focused on an article of key interest e.g., FAS. We have also provided training for foster carers, residential care staff and alternative providers.

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) led a workshop activity on how care and education services can support them. They have worked with the VS 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.

Children In Care Achievement (CiC) Awards: 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.

We also funded and supported 94 requests for Alternative Provision for 56 young people (43 last year). We worked with 21 different Alternative Providers covering a range of subjects and activities including working on a farm, martial arts, forest skills and music

Our Residential Children's Homes



Residential Children's Homes

Brodrick House – 3 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (October 2024)

"Children say they feel safe and have established positive relationships with adults who they can trust. One child said, 'My support worker is the best, and she tries to get stuff done when I have opened up to her about things, and she has supported me well.' Children's individual needs are considered regarding education and development. Various options are explored to ensure that children remain engaged. For example, one child loves animals and volunteers two days per week at a local zoo and has tutoring alongside this."

Homefield Cottage – 4 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (June 2025)

"Staff know the children well. This is because they take time to understand the children's needs and behaviours. A positive culture of safeguarding is established in the home. Staff value multi-professional working to best support children. A professional from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) attends team meetings regularly. Senior leaders and managers are supportive of staff and each other. This has created a positive work environment where staff can learn and develop."

Hazel Lodge – 4 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (January 2025)

"Children enjoy quality time with the people who are important to them and speak positively about family time. Staff worked tirelessly to reduce risks for the child and gathered key information to help them to accurately assess and reduce the risks. Staff say that the new manager supports them well. Professionals praise the manager's calm and nurturing approach to the children and their communication with professionals."

Silver Birches – 5 Children

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (August 2025)

"The staff team is diverse, and staff say that they feel well supported. Children are encouraged to make connections with their local community and are involved in clubs and sports, such as horse riding, martial arts and football. This provides children with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging. Staff have effectively supported children to improve their behaviours and relationships with one another. Children say that they feel safe and can talk to adults about personal matters that are important to them. Leaders and managers have effective processes in place."

Homes for Children with Disabilities

Acorns

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (May 2025)

"Children have strong relationships with staff. Children have teams of dedicated staff who provide consistent care for them. Moves have been well managed. Managers have thoughtfully assessed the impact of these moves on the children. Staff have helped the child to learn how to express their feelings and wishes safely. Staff are highly effective at working with health professionals. They work closely with specialist health professionals to monitor, assess and treat children's complex health needs."

Registered for up to 8 young people, who have a high level of complex needs and profound disabilities. In 2024-25 Acorns provided care for 2 young people whose needs required enhanced support.

The Bungalow

Ofsted grade: 'Good' (April 2025)

"The home is welcoming and homely, with the children's photos displayed proudly in the communal areas. The children's bedrooms are highly personalised, and children enjoy spending time in their bedrooms. Staff are knowledgeable about the risks for the children. They are highly informed about the children's vulnerabilities. A new deputy manager has been appointed, who is an experienced practitioner and has a wealth of understanding about the children's complex needs. Supervision sessions are of good quality and include feedback about practice, learning from incidents, and discussions about the children."

Registered for 8 children aged 7-19 providing full time accommodation and quality care to children with complex needs and disabilities.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home (LSCH)

Lansdowne provides secure care and education for up to 7 children accommodated under section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Children are placed by local authorities from across the country. The home reopened in February 2024 following temporary closure.

Ofsted rated 'Good' June 2025

"Children told inspectors that they feel safe and always have someone that they can talk to if they are worried about something.

Children's care plans are informed by children's views and aspirations. Children meaningfully contribute to their plans and understand what support they will receive.

Children recognise their achievements and staff support them wholeheartedly. This assists children to grow in confidence and self-belief.

The work staff do helps children to change their thinking, attitudes and behaviours and to develop a positive outlook for their futures.

When children attend their lessons, they make considerable progress and rapidly develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that will help them to be successful in their next steps."



We have accommodated a total of 8 children over the last 12 months from six different local authorities. The average length of stay for each young person is 6 months, with 1 young person being in placement for more than 12 months.

The Health Team has significantly changed over the last 12 months following a successful recruitment drive

We participated in the SAN Games (Secure Accommodation Network) and came 3rd overall, although weighting in respect of the size of the home, announced we came 1st for the 2nd year in a row.

We have successfully implemented a new electronic recording system called ClearCare which has improved both management oversight and reporting functionality across our multi agency teams.

We have implemented a SharePoint site to hold and share multi agency policies, procedures, training and guidance which has significantly improved shared understandings and effective communication for all.

The high-quality, creative in-house Education offer led by skilled teachers and support staff is now also looking at the 52 week a year, waking day curriculum in conjunction with the care team.

Steering Groups including DfE, SAN and NHS England remains in place.

Placements & Commissioning

This year we restructured the Fostering Duty Team to create a Placements and Commissioning Service which is better equipped to meet the challenges of the current children's care market. The team has already evidenced improved processes, challenge, oversight and market engagement

Close partnership working with social work teams and providers allows the service to anticipate and contingency plan for children who are in, or on the edge of care

As part of the restructure, our new Brokerage Team will drive best value discussions, lead on commissioning, frameworks and local sufficiency; allowing Children's Placement Officers to focus on needs-led discussions with providers and ensuring that the cost of care directly benefits children

We have worked with a local partner to enhance our approach to commissioning, in 2025-26 whole staff training is planned alongside specific upskilling of relevant roles.

We continue to see value from having a mixed management team with skills drawn from across social work and residential services, we are also benefitting from closer commissioning relationships with colleagues in SEND

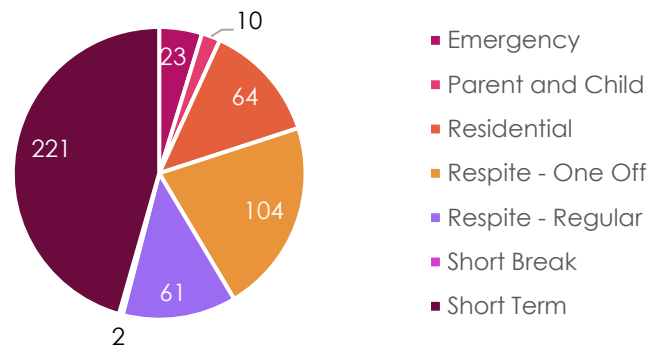
Working with providers is an essential part of our approach; we run Provider Forums and offer support with Regulatory compliance / preparing for inspection. These relationships support enhanced due diligence and quality assurance as well as ensuring that we understand regional sufficiency pressures and risks

Managers from across the Placements and Commissioning Service have been working closely with the South East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to inform the development of the Pathfinder program and benefit from shared learning and engagement opportunities. RCCs were introduced in response to the DfE 2023 paper 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' and 2024 Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. They aim to address escalating costs, placement shortages, fragmented commissioning and workforce challenges. The South East RCC vision is:

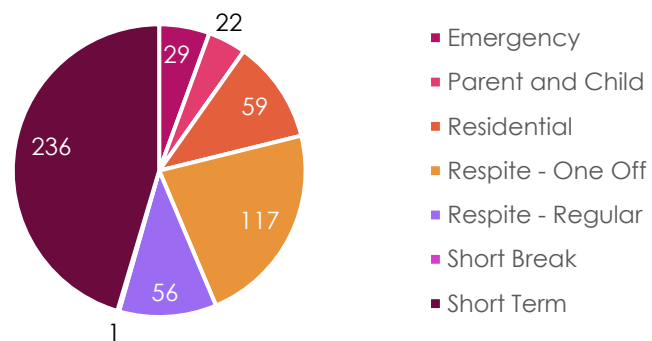
"We will provide the right care for you that is available locally and when needed. We will be loving, caring and consistent with high aspirations for you. We will listen to you, put your needs first and will not give up on you."

Placements & Commissioning (continued)

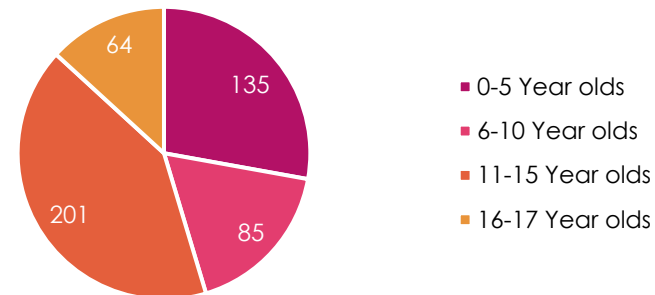
Duty referrals data 2024/2025



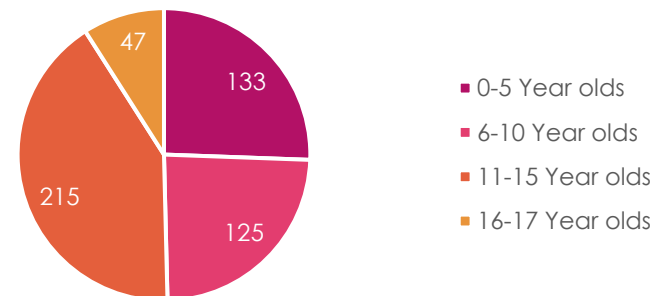
Duty referrals data 2023/2024



Referrals by age band 2024/2025



Referrals by age band 2023/2024



The Placements & Commissioning Team managed 485 Referrals in 2024/25, compared to 520 Referrals for the previous year .

Referrals relate to children who are new to care and those who need an alternative arrangement either long-term or temporarily. Not all children who move between placements will have a new referral, the team are typically working with high numbers of open searches.

Referral 'type' was broadly similar to the previous year, with most children being referred for short-term foster care. Around 30% of referrals are requests for 'respite'.

Referrals for children aged 6-10 were significantly higher than in the previous year, whilst fewer 16-17 years olds were referred.

Fostering Recruitment and Retention

East Sussex Fostering Service supports 259 active fostering households.

2024-25 saw the highest number of enquiries in five years and a strong conversion rate of 33% from home visit to approval, this led to a net increase of 17 fostering households and 25 places.

New 2024/25 ESCC system of removing the Q&A call from the recruitment process to improve response to assessment speed when relevant. This is reflected in a Q&A call volume reduction and an increase in home visits.

In 2024-25 East Sussex was part of a Regional Fostering Hub pilot scheme – moving forwards we aim to build on existing relationships with neighbouring local authority fostering services, sharing best practice and combining resources for collaborative projects whilst maintaining our distinctive identities.

Recruitment	2019/20		2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25	
Enquiries	260		228		200		274		237		276	
Q&A calls	106		95		69		79		70		23*	
Home visits (IV)	68		50		33		43		45		90*	
Approvals H/holds > places	22	39	20	30	14	21	24	40	26	38	30	47
Targets	30	44	30	44	30	44	25	44	26	44	36	50
Conversion												
Enquiry to IV	26%		21%		17%		16%		19%		33%*	
Enquiry to approval	8%		9%		7%		9%		11%		11%	
IV to approval	32%		42%		42%		56%		58%		33%*	

Foster Carers	2023/24	2024/25
Approved households/places	26/38	30/47
Deregistrations households/places	18/39	13/22
Net households/places	+8/-1	+17/+25

*New 2024/25 ESCC system of removing the Q&A call from the recruitment process to improve response to assessment speed when relevant. This is reflected in Q&A call volume reduction and increase in home visits.

Fostering Recruitment and Retention (continued)

Payments and allowances uplift April 2024 - Foster carer payments now in line with National Minimum Allowance (NMA), this is supporting recruitment and retention, improved focus on fostering and wellbeing, increased transfer enquiries

Training and development - Launched new digital [foster carer handbook](#) housing all updated policies, processes, information and guidance, a new resource bank and Learning Pool platform

Retention and placement stability - Continued development of Buddy scheme, GEM scheme (recognition awards) and Young People Who Foster council whose attendance doubled during the 2024 calendar year

Launched first ESCC Mockingbird Constellation – Year 1 funded by DfE in partnership with [The Fostering Network](#) the model creates a familiar network of six to ten fostering families around an experienced fostering household, known as a Hub Home

The Placement Support Service - continues to work with some of our most vulnerable cared for young people, helping to stabilise their placements and prevent them from breaking down



Children in Care Council



The Pledge The pledge was relaunched in September. CICC worked with designers at County Hall to rebrand it with their own vision. A section was added on LGBT+ and neurodiversity, the colour purple was used as this represents awareness for children in care.

My Things Matter The My Things Matter box was designed to be given to young people when they are moving to protect their belongings. This is a sustainable project with the boxes being returned and reused. We also provide free canvas holdalls which can be kept by the young person.

National Participation - A National Voice (ANV) CICC have an ongoing working relationship with A National Voice. They have continued to support the 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy this year sharing their thoughts and feelings based on the areas for improvement. Their top 3 were: mental health support, building and maintaining good relationships and having enough good foster carers. These will be forwarded to the new Children's Minister Janet Daby who will include their comments in her report to Government.

Junior Consultation The CICC ran a creative session with a group of junior children aged 7 -11. They discussed the key messages that junior children feel adults working with them should know. This included what makes a happy place to live, what things make the best social worker or carer and who do they talk to if they have any worries.

Youth Voice Sussex CICC members joined other East Sussex youth voice groups for a consultation event, designed to gather thoughts and ideas to help shape ESCC resources for young people's mental health as well as discussing the quality and content of PHSE lessons in secondary schools across Sussex. They also participated in the annual Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources (RPPR) meeting attended by Becky Shaw – CEO and Carolyn Fair, to discuss priorities to inform planning within children's services.

Corporate Parents and Senior Management Team CICC attended the Corporate Parenting Panel twice this year, presenting the new pledge and My Things Matter. They met with Kathy Marriott and Cllr Bowdler on a separate occasion and hosted a large meeting with CPP and SMT which included an official signing of the Pledge

Recruitment CICC members continue to be involved in recruitment panels for new staff including panels for newly qualified social workers and also for the new assistant director.

Brighton University 3 CICC members facilitated their annual two-hour lecture at Brighton University for students on the social work degree course.

Virtual School CICC have worked with the Virtual school several times this past year, writing articles for their newsletters and co-hosting an event at Bedes school, for decision makers to hear the feedback from a recent survey by Coram Voice on issues previously highlighted by looked after children in East Sussex.

Funding CICC have secured an extra **£1,023** in extra funding this year from the HAF Government scheme. ESFCA have donated 60 plastic boxes for My Things Matter. Madlug have donated 600 canvas holdalls. Virtual school have funded First Aid training and Citizencard have agreed to provide these for free to any looked after child aged 16-18 in East Sussex and this will continue into 2025.

SUSS it (Speak up Sessions) Through different engagement opportunities with children and young people throughout the year, there have been **55** issues advocated for. These continue to be extremely successful giving **87** children and young people an opportunity to speak up about their own individual issues.

Care Leavers Council



The Care Leavers Council meets monthly and continues to be involved in service development, this year they have reviewed the Local Offer and are working to develop a peer mentoring scheme.



Young people took part in a variety of consultation events, such as the South East Youth Participation Collective and the Youth Cabinet,



Young people regularly participated in ESCC Corporate Parenting Panel.



Young people represented East Sussex at National Benchmarking events and one of our young people continues to attend and host national events as a Young Persons Legend.



LAC Service Budget

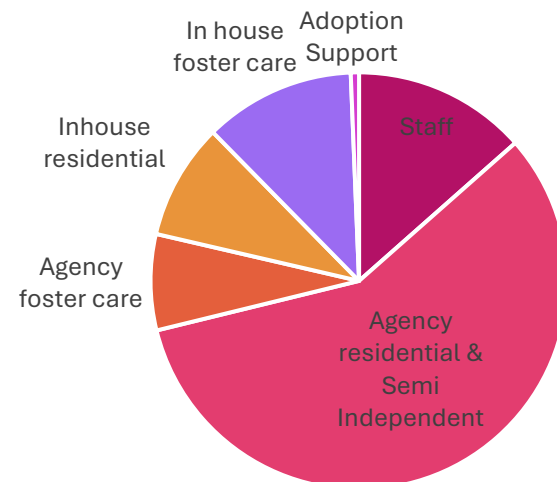
The LAC Service budget represents 35% of the overall Children's Services budget and 9% of the council's budget.

In 2024-5 the LAC Service budget was £68m.

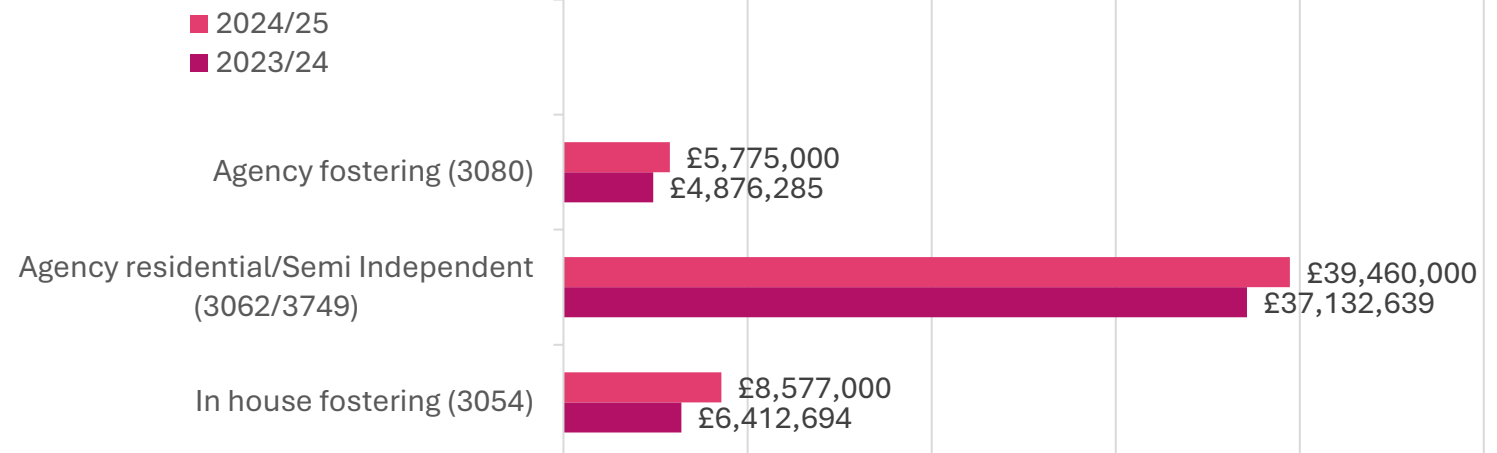
The net spend of the service exceeded the budget by £9m. A significant portion of this overspend was attributable to a small number of children with complex needs who required bespoke provision with high agency staff ratios

Agency Residential and Semi-Independent accommodation continue to represent the greatest pressure within the budget.

Use of Resources 2024/25



Outturns 2023/24 to 2024/25



Pressures

National Increase: England saw a 24% rise in looked after children from 2010 to 2020, with rates increasing from 57 to 67 per 10,000 children.

East Sussex Trends: 13% increase in looked after children from 2021 to 2025 (611 to 691). Rate rose from 59.7 to 66.7 per 10,000 — above statistical neighbours but below the IDACI expected rate of 70.0.

Complexity of Need: Post-COVID, children's needs have become more complex, prompting changes in placement types.

High-Cost Placements:

- Reflecting national trends, ESCC has seen a rise in placements costing £10,000+ per week.
- Average weekly cost of high-cost placements rose 8% to £16,063; placement duration in this category increased by 43%.
- Access to Tier 4 and Continuing Care framework remains challenging due to health service capacity.

Market Pressures:

- New Supported Accommodation Regulations have led to increased costs and risk transfer to local authorities.
- Providers' reduced risk appetite has driven up solo, high-cost placements, especially for children requiring DoLs (Deprivation of Liberty Orders) or intensive staffing.
- Local DoLs usage has increased, mirroring national trends and highlighting secure bed shortages.

Mitigation Measures and Impact

Family Support

Connected Coaches: £0.65m in savings through reunification, £6.02m in cost avoidance keeping children safely at home
CFIP: £1.86m in cost avoidance by reducing: Child Protection and Child in Need plans, assessments, re-referrals, and pre proceedings meetings

Market Management

New Placements & Commissioning Service:
Actively challenges provider price increases, strengthens accountability, expected to deliver further impact in 2025/26
Continued use of local frameworks with regional partners during RCC rollout and Regional Fostering Collaboration
In-house Fostering and Residential occupancy scrutinised through a business lens to ensure efficient use of resources

Reunification Strategy

Heading Home: Local Framework developed using evidence-based best practice
Training Programme refreshed with Webinars, operational guidance, practice-led drop-ins
Valuing Care Panel removes barriers to reunification. Strategy integrates wrap around support
Social Workers lead reunification plans with tracked timescales and reparative work

Integrated Commissioning & Care

Ongoing work to increase health contributions to care packages
Working with Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) to address cost of increased complexity of need.
Regional work through SESLIP on Continuing Care framework for children and young people

Strategic Context

All actions aligned with wider change agenda: Children's Social Care reform, Devolution and Regionalisation,
Legislative change under the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill
Placement spend mitigation continues as business as usual

Priorities for 2025 - 2026

Whole Service

Review and embed language that cares throughout all our documentation and when speaking to children, carers and professionals

Digital strategy – enhance overall data capture and analysis by contributing to the Data and Dashboard project / implementation of the Provider Portal / Digital Life Skills Solution / launch of ePEP and roll out of ClearCare

Continue to ensure child's needs-led discussions via a Valuing Care approach

Engage with ESCC Children's Services' Transformation Agenda, and the opportunities offered through the Regional Care Cooperative

Develop closer relationship with Public Health to better understand and respond to the mental and physical health needs of the children in our care as well as enhancing our approach to community safety, housing supply and the needs of Separated Migrant Children

Operational Services

Implement Heading Home strategy to increase the number of children successfully enabled to return to family networks

Review the Contact Service to better deliver Family Time

As part of Families First Transformation, transition care proceedings work across to LAC Services

Embed Care Experience as an additional protected characteristic

Assist key partners to understand Corporate Parenting responsibilities, how they can contribute to the local offer

Focus on ensuring opportunity and engagement in learning

Development of permanence strategy and action plan to improve conversations around permanence throughout the child's journey

Respond to the opportunities of LGR and Devolution particularly in relation to housing supply for children who are moving through care into independence

Provider Services

Strengthen market management of children's residential care to ensure services deliver value for money, while maintaining high standards of care and improving outcomes for children

Invest in closer partnership with neighbouring authorities to increase the number of foster carers across Sussex

Embed Mockingbird and deliver a second constellation,

Open Seaside Short Breaks Service for children with complex needs and learning disabilities.

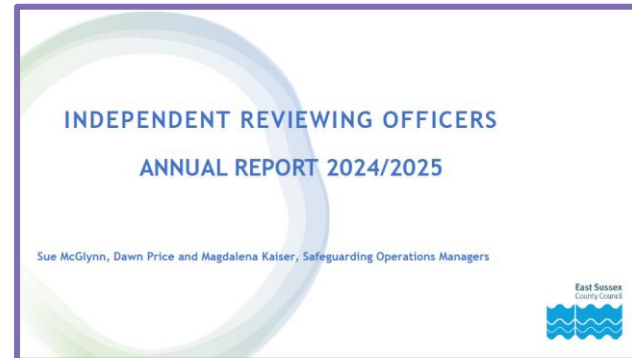
Increase capacity at Lansdowne Secure Home

Continue to invest in a resilient, skilled residential workforce

Review the Placement Support Service to increase flexible support for children and their carers

Enhance quality and meaning of supervision

Children's Services Annual Reports 2024/25



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