

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	29 January 2026
Title of Report:	Corporate Parenting Monitoring Report: Children We Care For
By:	Director of Children's Services
Purpose of Report:	To provide Corporate Parenting Panel with an overview of quarter 3 data for Children in Care

RECOMMENDATION:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the content of the Corporate Parenting Monitoring report: Children We Care For.

1. Background

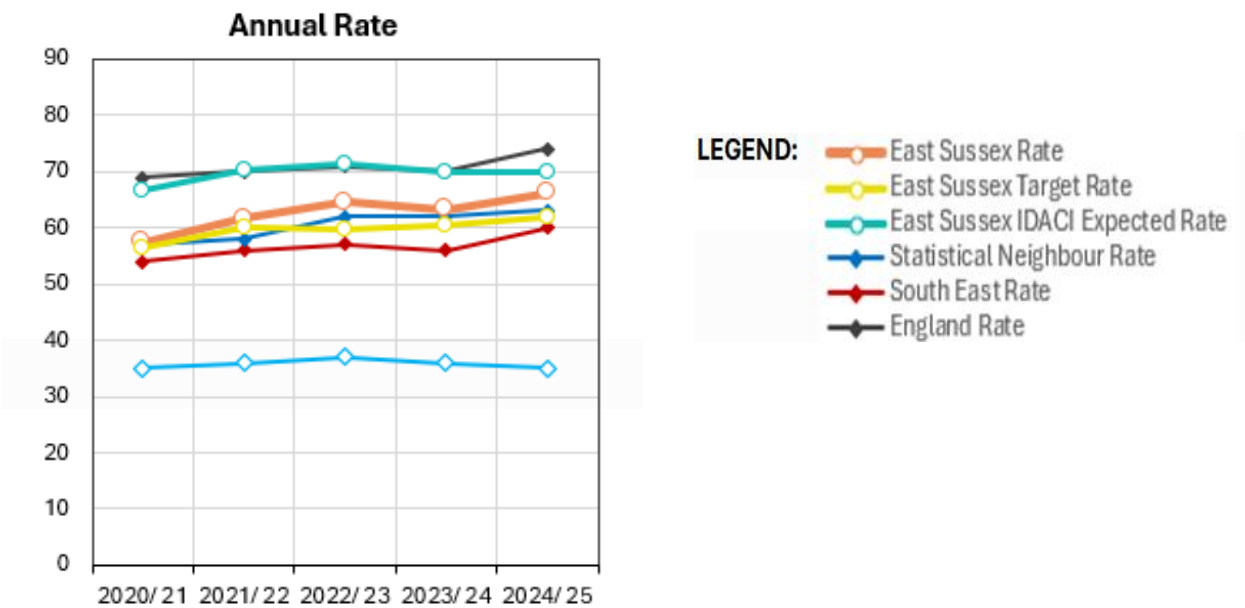
1.1. Children in Care are children who are looked after by a local authority, typically as a result of concerns regarding their safety or welfare. East Sussex County Council (ESCC) is responsible for safeguarding, supporting, and promoting the welfare of children in its care. This regular report to the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

1.2. Services for Children in Care 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 Separated 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 Children in Care in East Sussex 2020-2025, compared with England, statistical neighbours, and Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).

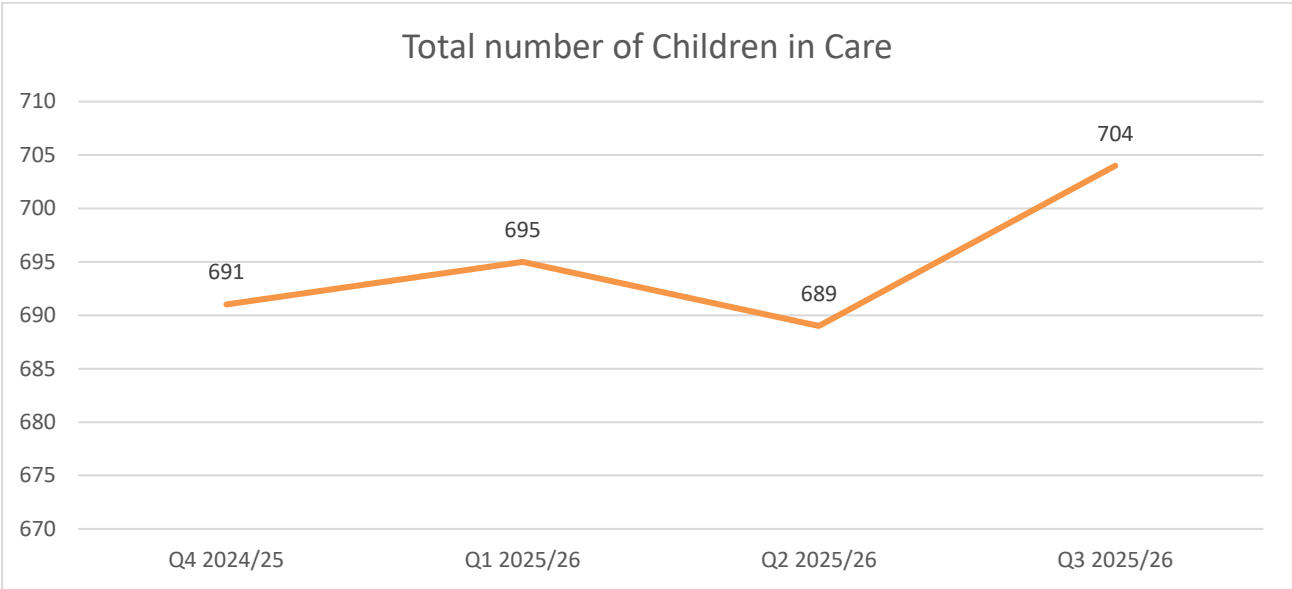


Rates shown are per 10,000 0-17 year old population		2020/ 21	2021/ 22	2022/ 23	2023/ 24	2024/ 25
East Sussex Number		208	249	241	231	242
East Sussex Rate		19.5	24.4	23.5	22.3	23.2
East Sussex IDACI Expected Rate		24.1	27.3	29.3	28.8	28.8
Statistical Neighbour Rate		20.0	23.0	28.0	28.0	32.0
Essex Rate		12.0	15.0	16.0	14.0	13.0
South East Rate		23.0	26.0	28.0	32.0	28.0
England Rate		24.0	26.0	28.0	28.0	28.0

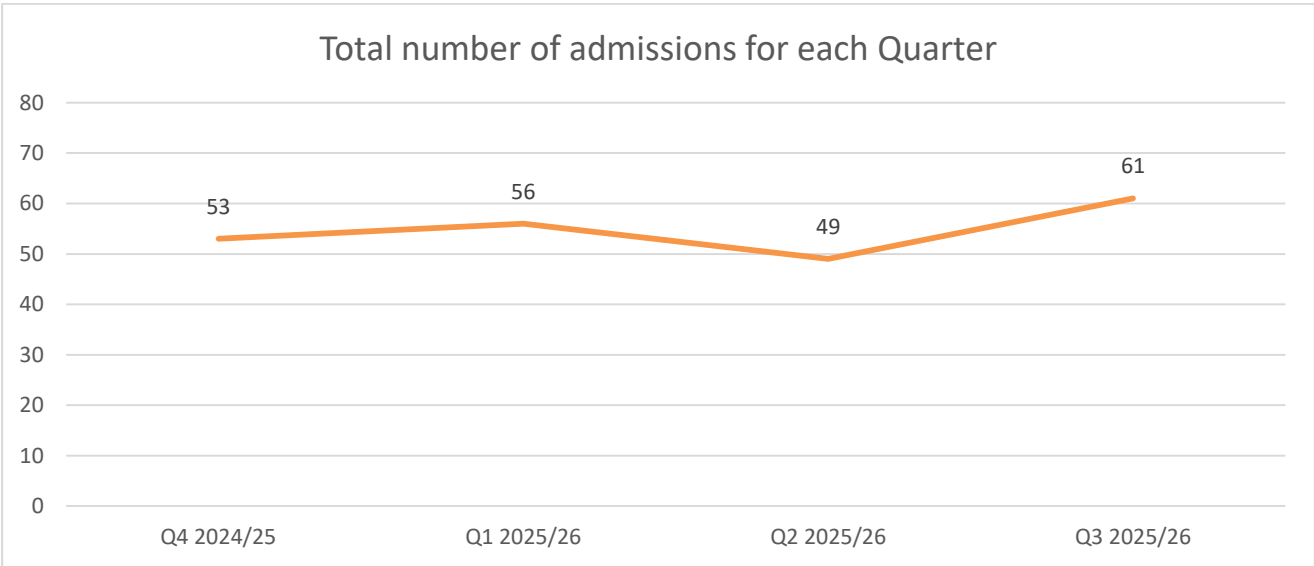
2.2. This is the most current published data available. It is updated through the Department of Education (DfE) data collection process and was published in November 2025. The graph and data above, evidences an increase in the rate and number of looked after children in East Sussex over the last 5 years. The ESCC rate of looked after children remains below the national rate for England and the expected rates based on levels of deprivation (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index-IDACI rate). However, the rate is above the Southeast rate and slightly above our statistical neighbours. The trend is largely showing the same trajectory as last year and tracking the same pattern as our comparators on the chart. ESCC has invested in a range of demand management approaches and programmes over the last three years and has continued to do so throughout 2025/26. These aim to enable more children to live safely at home or within their family networks, and to improve outcomes for children. These investments have been highlighted previously at Corporate Parenting Panel and include the Valuing Care approach, Foundations and Connected Families (CFIP). In addition, the Heading Home strategy has recently been launched to deliver further planning and support regarding reunification of children in care with their family network where appropriate to do so. Our focus remains on enabling our children to live in the right placement, for the right length of time.

2.3. Graph 2 illustrates an increase in the number of Children in Care since the end of Quarter 2, with 704 Children in Care (this includes 69 separated children who were formerly known as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) at the end of December 2025 (Q3). This shows a sharp increase from Q2. Data cleansing has identified an error in relation to four children so the actual figure at the end of Q2 was 700 Children in Care at the end of Q3.

Graph 2: Total number of Children in Care over the last 4 quarters.



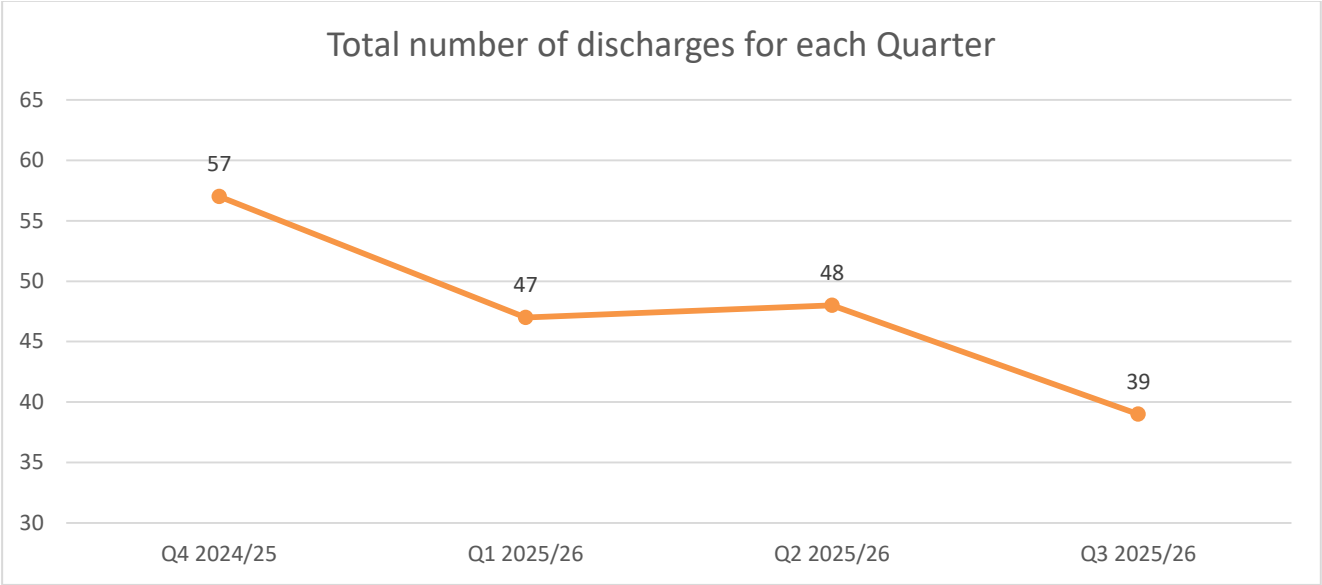
Graph 3: Total number of admissions for each Quarter.



2.4. There has been a total of 61 children admitted to care in Q3 which is an increase on the previous quarter of 12. The admissions were made up of 11 sibling groups in total, 9 sibling groups of 2 or 3 children, a sibling group of 4 children and a sibling group of 5 children. 25 single children and 6 separated children. This is a decrease of 9 separated children since the last quarter. Of this cohort of children admitted to care, 30 were accommodated through Section 20 of the Children’s Act, 6 of which were separated migrant children, 11 were admitted to care through emergency orders, which is an

increase of 2 since the last quarter, and 20 were admitted to care through planned Care Proceedings, which is an increase of 7 since the last quarter. The overall increase in admissions during this quarter can be attributed largely to a combination of factors where there has been an increase of activity across all routes into care, and an increase in the number of larger sibling groups from individual families.

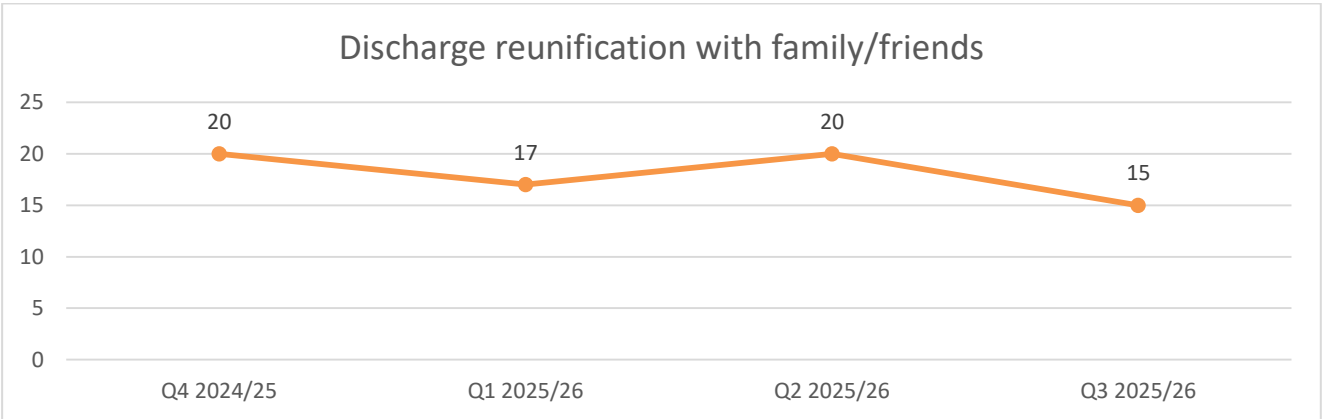
Graph 4: Total number of discharges for each Quarter



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, have had special guardianship, child arrangement orders made or have returned to their family networks. A total of 39 children were discharged from care over Q3 (the data error here means this figure should be 43) whilst this quarter has shown a reduction in the number of children being discharged from care. If you compare the year to date for 2025/26 there were 154 discharges, whereas during the same period for 2024/25 there were 87, hence a significant increase in the overall rate of discharges.

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, 15 children were successfully reunified with family/friends. This is a slight dip and most likely due to the time of year. Graph 5 illustrates the number of reunifications achieved this year to date.

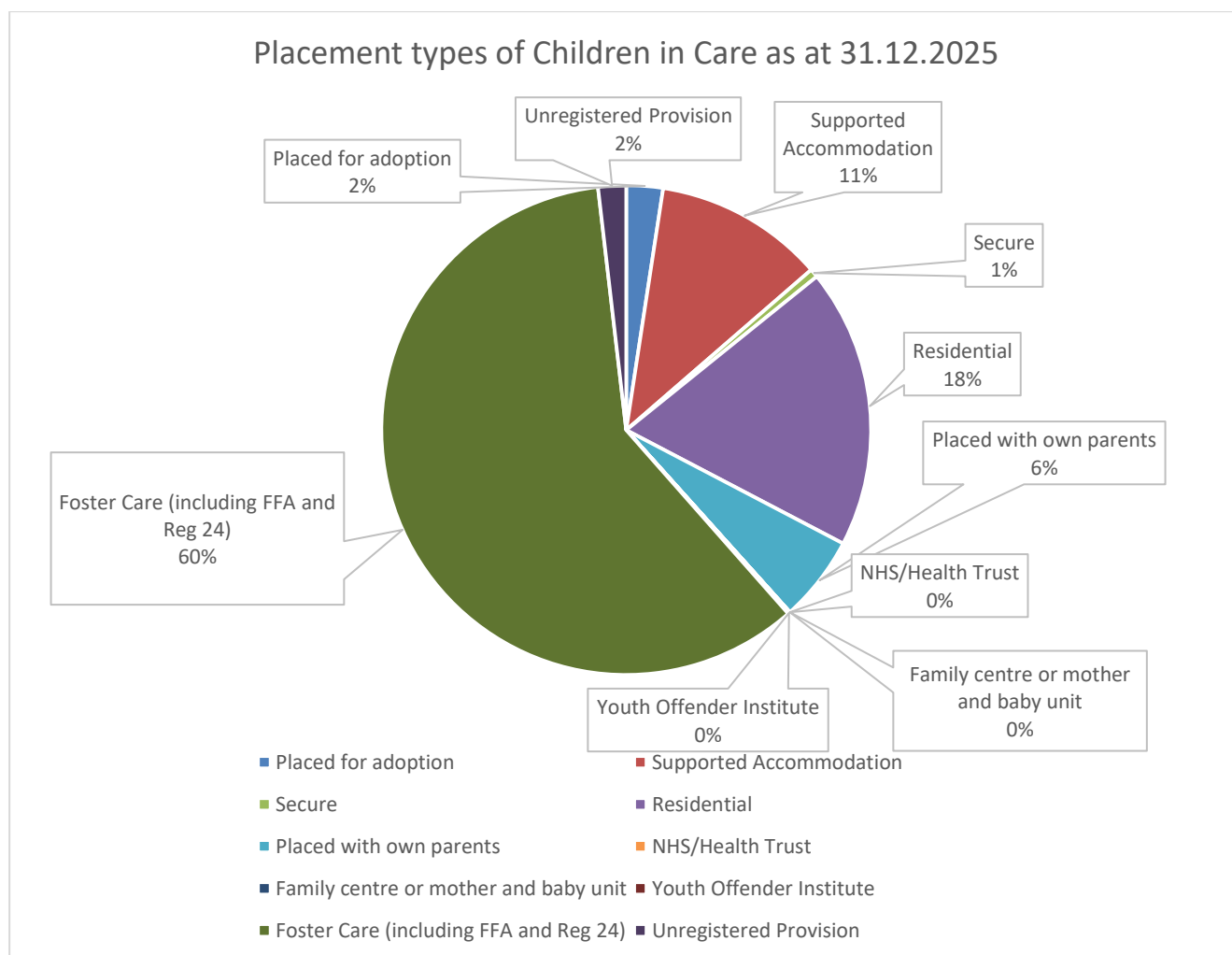
Graph 5: Number of discharges where Children in Care were reunified with family and friends across each Quarter.



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 Q3.

Graph 6: Details of the types of placements that Children in Care are in at the end of Quarter 3:



3.2. A total of 420 children were living in foster care at the end of December 2025; this is an increase of 7 since the last quarter. However, this continues to make up 60% of the overall total number of Children in Care due to the rise in the overall number of children in care. Of that number, 269 an increase of 6 (64%) were living with approved ESCC carers. This number includes 28 children who were placed long term with fully approved family and friends' carers. Two children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway. 96 children were living with external agency foster carers which is a decrease of one, and one 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 52 which is an increase of 4 since the last quarter.

3.3. There were 17 children placed for adoption at the end of December 2025 which has increased by 6 since the last quarter. This is 2% of the overall total number of Children in Care.

3.4. There were 89 young people living in supported accommodation and unregistered provision which is an increase of 1 since the previous quarter. This was 13% of the total number of Children in Care. The figure of 92 includes 10 children who were placed in unregistered provision, the majority of which were with providers who were CQC registered, and these arrangements were judged to be the best way to meet the complex health needs of these children. Of the 10 children living in unregistered placements there were two were under 16 years old. The provider they are placed with is awaiting Ofsted registration. Unregistered placements are only used in exceptional circumstances where there is no suitable alternative regulated provision 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 December 2025, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes decreased from 132 to 130. This represents 18% of all Children in Care. Of these 130 children, 22 were living in ESCC run children's homes which is a decrease of one, and 108 were placed in external residential homes, also a decrease of one. 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 December there were four ESCC child placed in a Secure Children's Home. Two children are placed locally within Lansdowne Secure Children's Home and two are placed in external Secure Children's Homes.

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

3.8. The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC has increased from 37 to 40 since the last quarter. This represents 6% of all Children in Care.

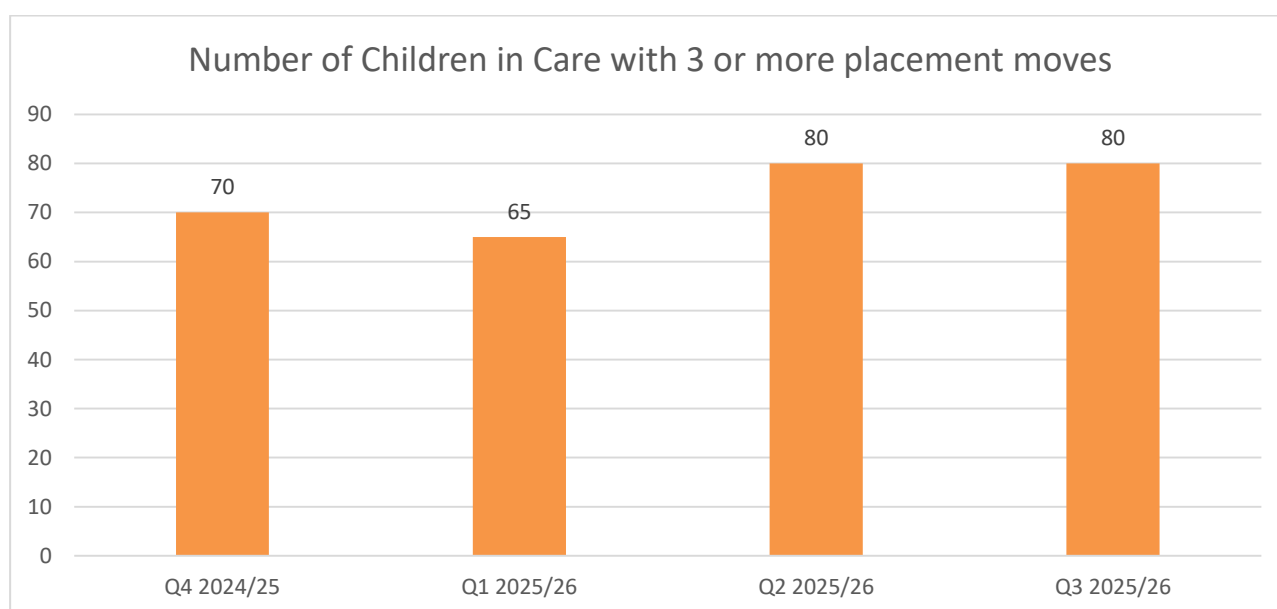
3.9. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers has made a considerable impact on the Fostering Service's recruitment success generally. The number of fostering enquiries over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 228. The number of initial visits over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 65 which is a decrease from last year of 9. The total number of approvals made over the last 12 months (rolling year) was 23, a decrease from last year of six, and new placements was 35. An analysis of the data suggests that there are fewer numbers of potential foster carers making enquiries and being processed through the system, but the calibre of the candidates demonstrates high quality applicants who have been able to step in to foster care swiftly. Table one shows quarterly figures across previous years for comparison:

Table one: Quarterly data on foster care recruitment.

	Enquiries	Initial Visits (IV)	Approvals	Places
2023/24 Q4	66	11	5	6
2024/25 Q4	68	26	6	12
2024/25 Q1	71	20	8	11
2025/26 Q1	56	10	6	10
2024/25 Q2	66	25	4	7
2025/26 Q2	63	20	6	7
2024/25 Q3	70	18	12	17
2025/26 Q3	41	9	5	6

3.10 Graph 7 shows the trend in the number of Children in Care with 3 or more placement moves. This figure has remained stubbornly high for the last two quarters but is reflective of the national sufficiency challenges the sector is facing. Nonetheless, the Children We Care For Service is working tirelessly to reduce these moves to an absolute minimum.

Graph 7: Number of Children in Care 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 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Separated Migrant Children. The number of Separated Migrant Children who were looked after was 69 at the end of Q3, a decrease of one from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 146 Separated Migrant Children who were Care Leavers aged over 18 during this period, which is a decrease of 4 from the previous quarter (124 18–20-year-olds, a decrease of 17, and 22 21–25-year-olds an increase of 13 since the last quarter). This makes up approximately one third of all Care Leavers in ESCC which was 444 at the end of December 2025.

3.12 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement Order (CAO) was 352, and the number of children subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) was 459. 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.

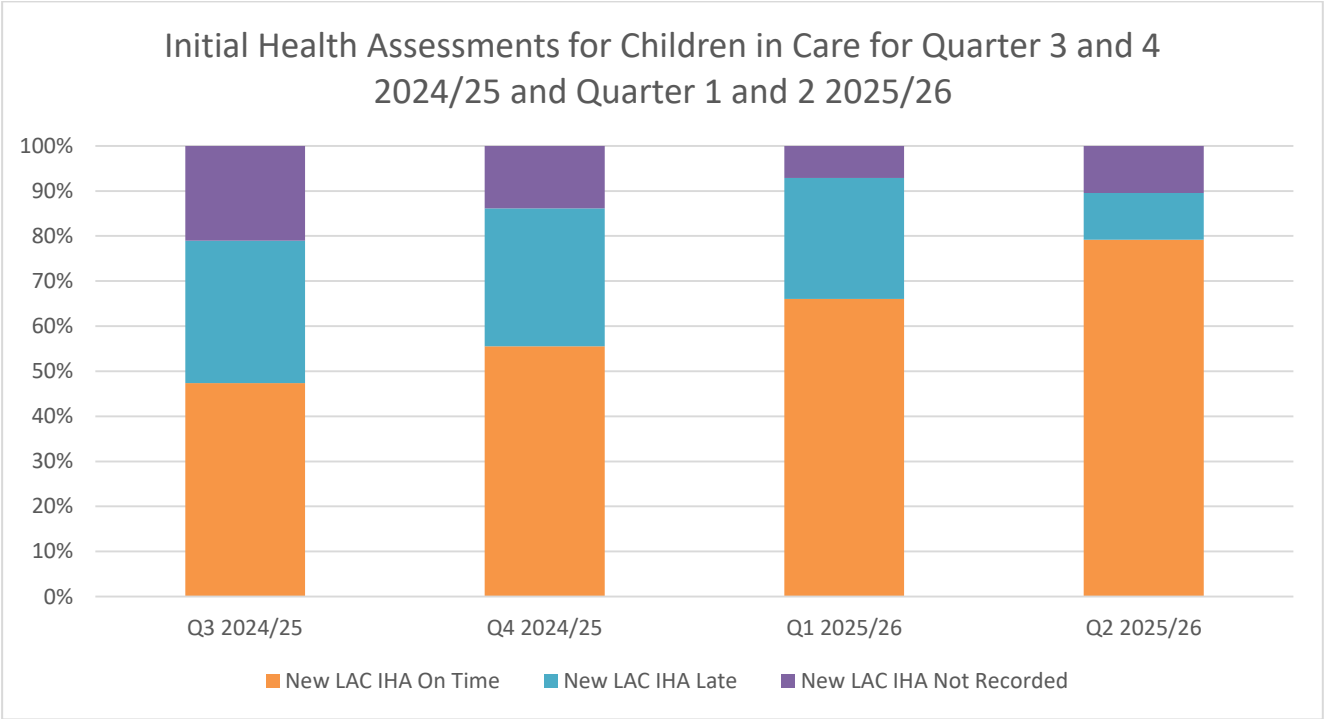
3.13 There was one complaint received from a Child in Care during this period. There were also two complaints received from Care Leavers.

4 Health

4.1 All Children in Care 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 Graph 8 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 very pleasing to see the significant improvements made to date. This is an area of close management scrutiny which will continue to ensure the progress made is maintained.. 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 Children in Care Nursing teams in those areas. A number of adolescent children decline IHAs.

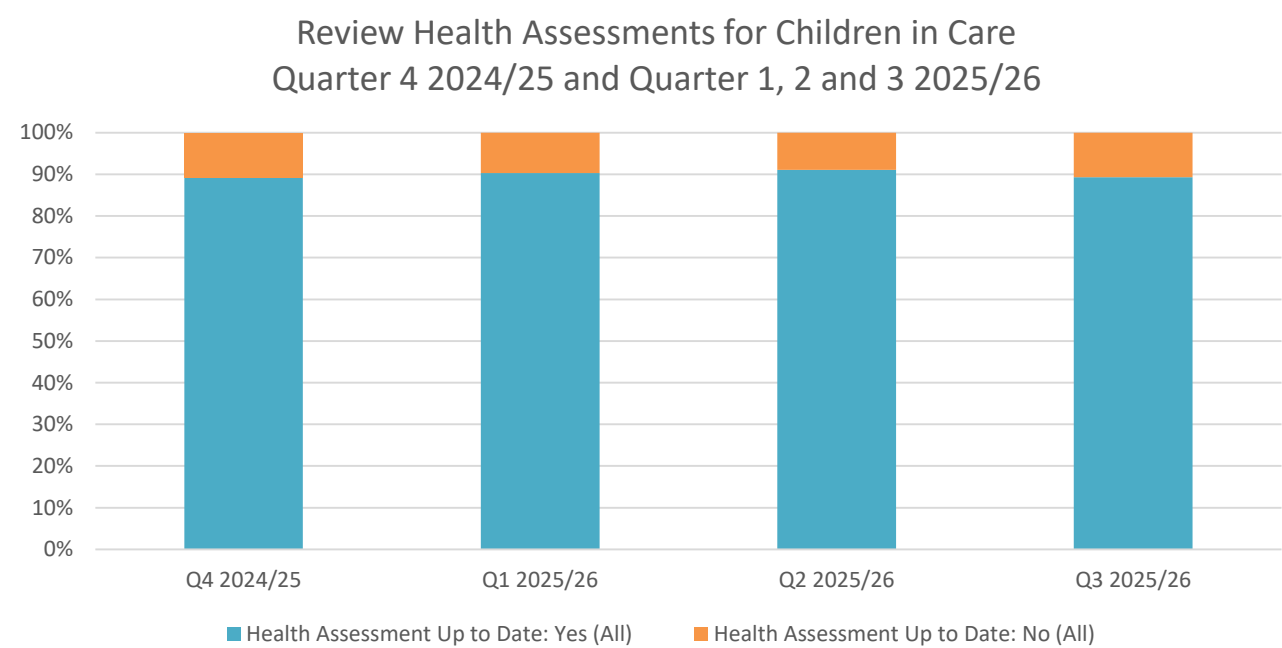
Graph 8: Percentage of Children in Care with an Initial Health Assessment for Quarters 3, and 4 for 2024/25 and Quarters 1 and 2 for 2025/26.



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

4.3 Graph 9 shows the percentage trend of Children in Care 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 Children in Care 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

5.10 This quarter has shown an increase in the overall number of Children in Care largely attributed an increase in the number and size of the sibling groups and a decrease in the number of discharges from care. It is pleasing to see the significant improvement in the overall rate of discharges from care over the last two years and the continued rise in the number of children placed at home through ‘Placed with Parents’ assessments.

5.11 The sufficiency issues that the service is facing, remain extremely challenging and have continued to impact on the number of children who are moving placements three or more times. There has been an overall increase in the number of children who are living in fostering families and a small reduction in the number of children living in Children’s Homes. These figures are small for this quarter, but nonetheless, it is pleasing to see the balance in the placement mix beginning to change. However, with high numbers of children living in Childrens Homes, this remains a key factor in the significant budgetary pressures faced by the Children’s Services department.

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

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None