

Southampton's Children and Young People's **Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023/24**

December 2024

Strong forever families,
Great outcomes for children



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Children & Learning
Making a difference



Our vision

We want all children and young people in Southampton to get a good start in life, live safely, be healthy and happy and go on to have successful opportunities in adulthood.

Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2023/24

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What corporate parenting means to us



Rob Henderson
Executive Director
Children & Learning



Cllr Alex Winning
Cabinet Member for
Children & Learning

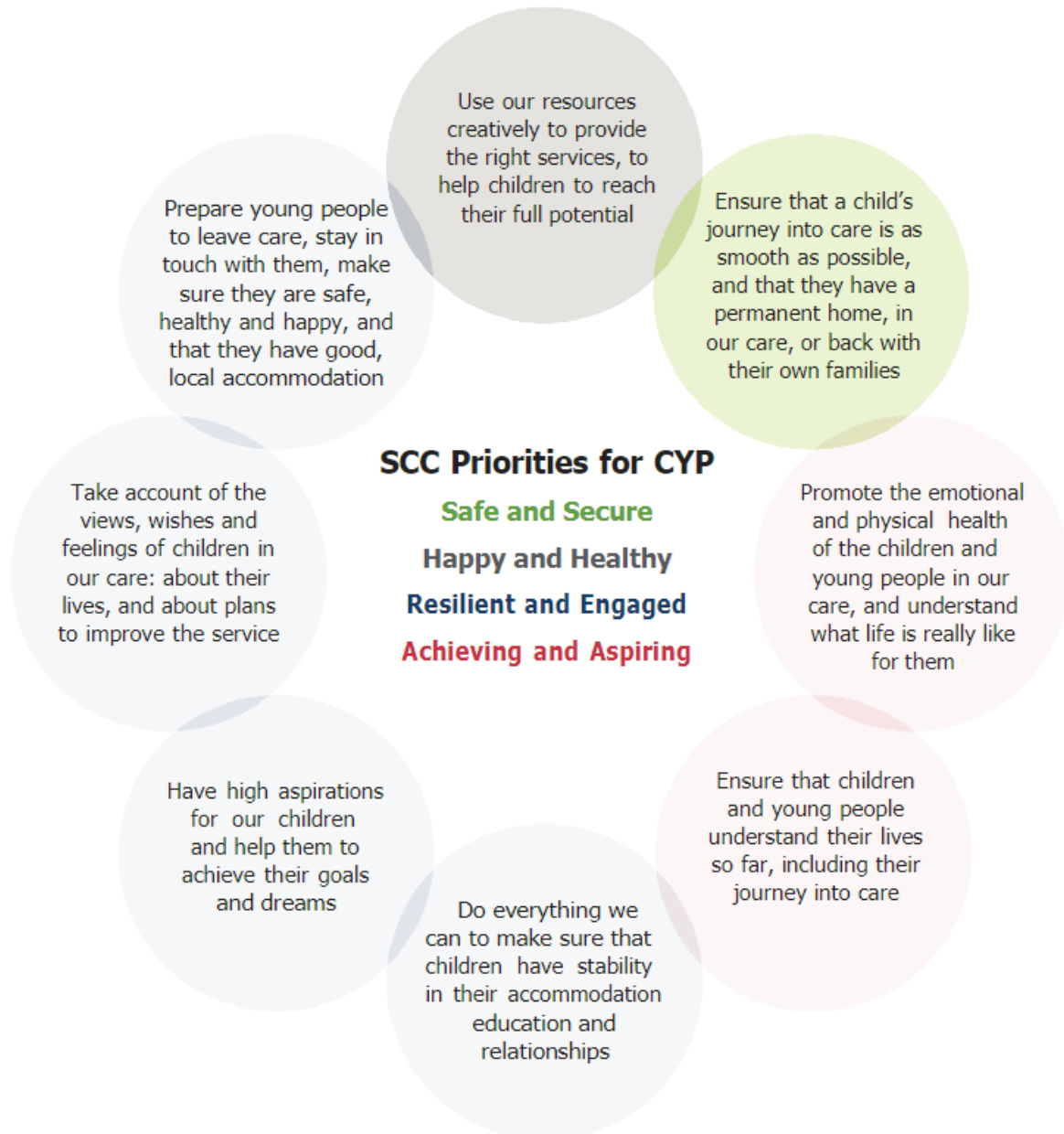
Looking after children is one of the most important things a council does. When a child comes into care in Southampton, they become their 'Corporate Parent.' This means that everyone involved with the council (the people who work in the council, the elected councillors and the managers) must make sure that Southampton City Council is the best parent it can be. Together they should act for that child in the same way as a good parent would. They should always ask themselves 'would this be good enough for my child'?

The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) provides robust assurance of the whole corporate parenting system, ensuring we are the very best corporate parent to its children and young people; and that all looked after children and care leavers can achieve their full potential. The CPP does this by putting the voice of children, foster carers and service users at the centre of everything it does. The CPP ensures that the council and its partner agencies uphold the highest corporate parenting principles. The foundation of our work is laid down in our Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out our commitments to looked after children and care leavers about how we will care for and support them.

The CPP may inquire into any service for looked after children or that contributes to outcomes for looked after children and care leavers across the system including social care, health, education, leisure, policing, housing and transport.

What corporate parenting means to us

The work of the CPP is underpinned by the Eight Corporate Parenting Principles enshrined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 below.



It encompasses other legal responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Leaving Care Act 2000 and Care Planning Regulations, outlining how local authorities and multi-agency partners must work together to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children and young people in our care and those leaving care.

In essence, it is how the entire council, and our partner agencies, see themselves as the parents of Southampton's looked after children. This is to ensure that they have a better and safer experience in our care and that they aspire, achieve, and succeed as children and as adults in our community.

What corporate parenting means to us

Elected members and senior leaders in Southampton perform our corporate parenting duty through:

- Regular meetings between the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Social Care and the Executive Director for Children's Learning and Wellbeing Service, including monthly Cabinet Member's briefings
- Scrutiny of reports at the Corporate Parenting Panel and Children and Families Scrutiny Panel
- Engaging with Representatives from Southampton Voices Unite (previously the Children in Care Council) at relevant meetings
- Supporting engagement events and using their influence to improve the lives of children in care and care leavers

This report outlines how well we have delivered on our eight corporate parenting principles that Southampton City Council has adopted throughout 2023/24 and outlines our plans for continual improvement as set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 - 2027.

We invite challenge, scrutiny, and collective celebration of success, much as a family would.

Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

The CPP examines thematic reports from multi-agency partners and services that provide a service under the corporate parenting umbrella. The Panel has several standard agenda items including a themed item on views of children and young people, Head of Service report and action tracker.

The Head of Service update provides assurance to members by providing updates on serious incidence, areas of concern for the Board and data on vulnerable groups of children & young people, including:

- Performance data
- Initial health assessments, health reviews and dental checks
- Missing and exploited children
- Update on UASC
- Education data

An action tracker monitors progress against actions and decisions of the Panel, an update is presented at each CPP.

Setting the scene

The Values we bring to setting our Vision

- We must be the strongest champions of and advocates for all our looked after children and care leavers. As resilient and persistent parents we must take an uncompromising approach to doing the best for our children and young people, going the extra mile as a good parent would.
- We should have positive regard for all looked after children and care leavers and make sure that all are nurtured, supported, are loved and feel loved.

We believe that permanence is the best foundation for children and young people to thrive in their childhoods and into adulthood.

- Looked after children and care leavers are 'our' children and young people and we must have strong ambitions and aim high for all.
- All our young people are individuals and unique and we must parent each child as such. Their birth family contexts are also unique, and we must see them in the context of their family histories and ongoing relationships.
- We must build enduring, trusting relationships with our children and young people so they feel able to give us their views and can talk to us about their wishes and feelings, their anxieties and hopes.
- We must listen to our children and young people and take account of their views on all matters which affect them.
- We want to continuously improve as corporate parents and continuously improve outcomes for our young people.

The child's journey

Listening to children and young people is fundamental to effective care planning. From the moment a child enters care, we should prioritise:

- **Consultation:** actively seeking children's or young people's opinions on specific issues or questions.
- **Participation:** encouraging children and young people to be involved in decision-making processes.
- **Involvement:** providing opportunities and support for children and young people to engage with adults in meaningful ways.

Our approach is centred on strengths, focusing on and celebrating the successes and achievements of each child. When addressing concerns, we carefully consider how to explore these matters with the child and ensure that our approach remains solution focused.

We prioritise gathering and sharing information in ways that are meaningful and contribute to each child and young person's life story.

Ultimately, we strive to understand the child's perspective, asking ourselves, 'What is life like for this child right now?' By listening to and valuing their lived experience, we gain insights that allow us to refine our services to best meet the needs of young people.

Each child in our care has a Care Plan, created through collaboration with multi-agency partners, parents, and the child. This plan represents the shared responsibility of the local authority and partner agencies (including Education, Health, and others) to deliver the highest quality care for our children and young people.

At the heart of every Care Plan is the goal of achieving permanence. This provides a child with security, continuity, commitment, and identity, ensuring they have a stable, loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.

Setting the scene

At the time of writing the Executive Director, Deputy Director, Head of Education, Head of SEND and all five Heads of Service are permanent.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, 173 children came into the care of Southampton City Council (SCC) and 187 left our care. Sufficiency of placements continues to be a significant challenge as we strive to recruit more in-house carers, source good quality registered residential provision and open our own children's homes. The number of looked after children in Southampton has been reducing gradually over the last 18 months. Pre-proceedings and proceedings are falling and there are green shoots in relation to the number of in-house own foster carers, as a result of a successful recruitment campaign. Our regional fostering recruitment hub is not yet demonstrating a positive impact on our recruitment, but it is early days.

The data in this report is a combination of financial year data and school year data, to enable us to scrutinise our performance against our statistical neighbours, but also to help our understanding of children's education progress.

Smooth Transition into Care

When children and young people enter our care, it can be a stressful and overwhelming experience. It is crucial that they are as prepared as possible, even though this can be challenging due to family circumstances. The child's social worker should introduce them to their new carer, check in with them within a week to assess their well-being, and ensure there are clear plans for their immediate and future care. Our Practice Standards lay out minimum expectations for visiting and placement planning.

An independent reviewing officer (IRO) is assigned to each child to gather their wishes and feelings, oversee their care plan, and ensure the quality and accountability of the care provided. A review meeting for the child is scheduled within 18 working days of them coming into care. Whenever possible, the child, their parents, carers, and relevant professionals like teachers should be involved in these meetings.

These professionals work together to provide comprehensive support for the child, ensuring their current and future needs are met. After the meeting, the IRO will send a personal letter to the child explaining what was discussed and what decisions were made, using language that is easy for them to understand, translated into the child's first language if needed.

The IRO is responsible for reviewing the care plan to ensure the child is in care for the right reasons. They will clarify whether returning home to their family or another connected person is an option, and what support is required to explore these possibilities. The IRO will meet with the child or young person, support their participation in the review, and ensure their voice is heard.

In 2023-24, 1377 statutory Care Plan Reviews were conducted, with 90.3% taking place within the required timeframes. In 2022-2023, 85% of review records were completed on time. All children receive a personal letter or report from the IRO following their Care Plan Review.

A key responsibility of the IRO is to resolve issues that arise during the care planning process. If the IRO is not satisfied with the progress of a care plan, they will address the issue through the Case Resolution Process. Initially, this is done informally with the social worker and their manager. If necessary, the issue can be escalated to a senior manager to ensure an appropriate outcome. Thanks to careful scheduling, the timeliness of reviews has not been negatively affected overall.

The IRO service has collaborated with the Workforce Development Team to provide e-learning, face-to-face training, workshops, and a variety of resources to guide care planning and review processes.

Quality assurance clinics, led by the Head of Quality Assurance, are now fully integrated. These clinics focus on performance and identify the underlying causes of declining or stagnating performance while also celebrating improvements. The availability and reliability of performance data has remained strong during this period.

Setting the scene

We would also like to see...

Additional support and services, for development through the Corporate Parenting Panel to include:

- Mental Health Awareness – not just support through therapy. Recruitment to our clinical lead posts.
- Housing – further opportunities for our Care Leavers
- Specific work opportunities – increasing the offer of apprenticeships that are available to our Care Experienced young people
- Help young people to understand what the council can and cannot do
- Listen to young people about their PAs or social workers
- Better communication and interactions with workers

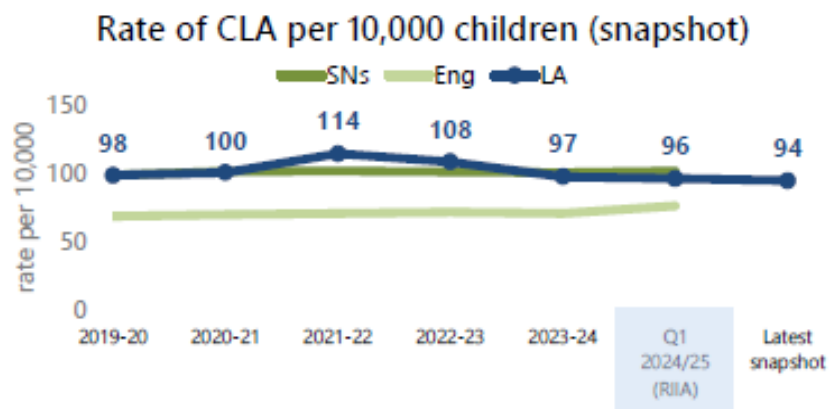
Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2027

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines our vision for CYP looked after by the Council, or formerly in care, and the values that inform the way we meet our corporate parenting responsibilities. Drawing on the requirements of the Social Work Act 2017 and the eight corporate parenting principles, it sets out our priorities and the actions we take to ensure that no child looked after by the council is 'left behind'. The strategy was developed in consultation with children and young people, carers and partner agencies from across the council.

Profile of children in care

Southampton is seeing a reduced number of children looked after. On 1 April 2023 SCC cared for 505 children, reducing to 488 on 1 April 2024. The rate of children in our care per 10k was 97 in April 2024 which is now below statistical neighbours. This is a positive improvement in comparison to previous years. This has been achieved through early prevention work within Early Health and Family Safeguarding Team, implementation of family safeguarding model as well as successful safe reunifications to family or friends to achieve permanence for children outside of care.

Children looked after at 31 March (rate per 10,000 population)

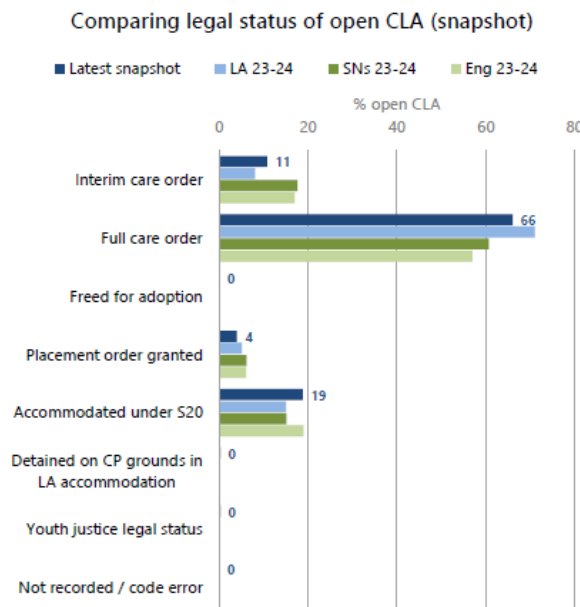


In the financial year 2023-2024, the breakdown of children looked after by their legal status was as follows:

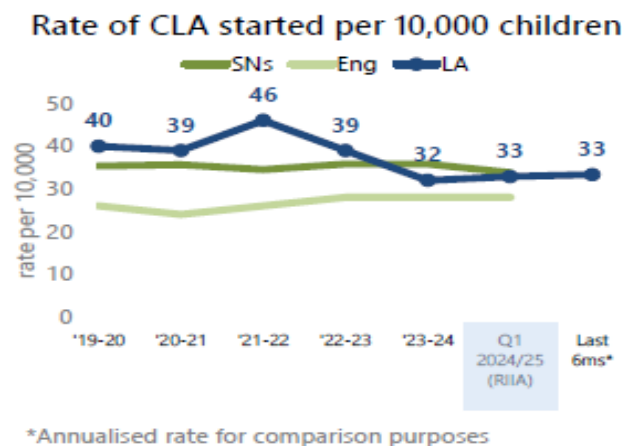
- 66% were under **full care orders**, meaning they were placed in the care of local authorities with a long-term commitment.
- 11% were on **interim care orders**, which typically indicate a temporary arrangement while decisions about their future are being made.
- 19% were under **Section 20 agreements**, where children are voluntarily accommodated by local authorities with parental consent, often on a short-term basis. This also includes the majority of our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- 4% had **placement orders** granted, meaning that a care plan for adoption had been agreed and that the Local Authority were seeking a suitable adoption placement.

This distribution reflects the different legal mechanisms for placing children under local authority care.

Children looked after at 31 March by legal status (%)

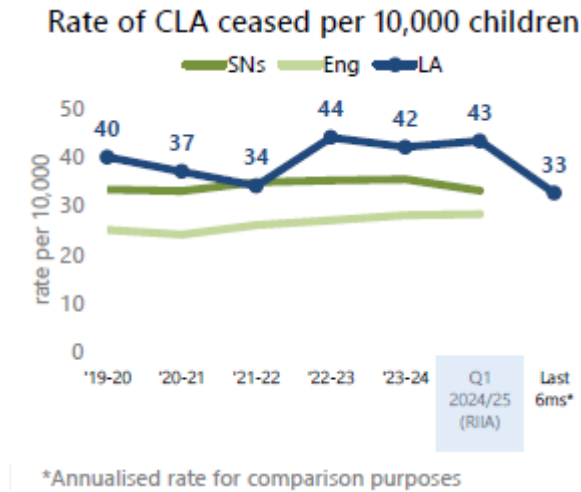


Children who started to be looked after in the year (rate per 10,000 population): This is an equal rate per 10k of children compared to statistical neighbours, although slightly higher than England.

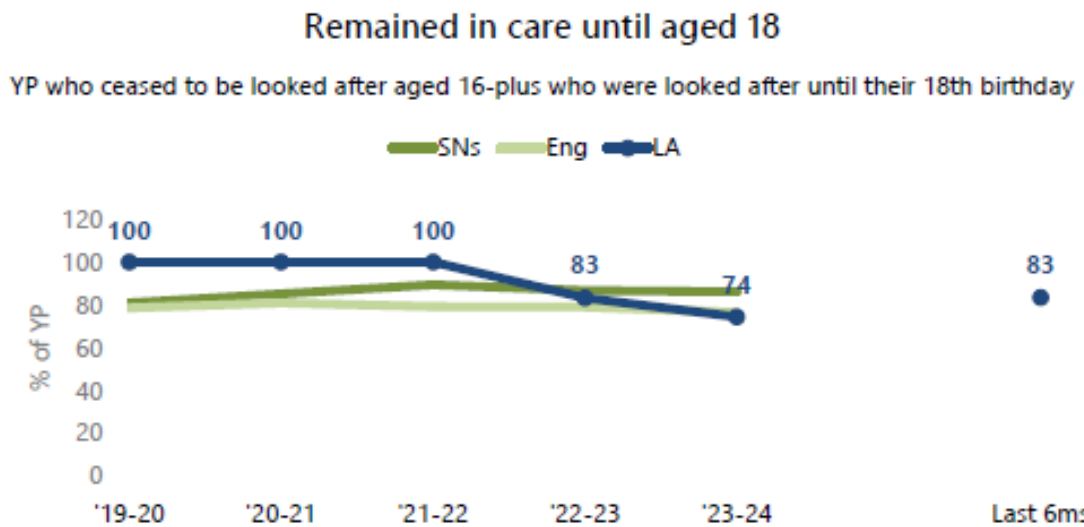


Children who ceased to be looked after in the year (rate per 10,000 population):

187 children (rate 42 per 10k) ceased to be looked after during 2023-24 continued the increased rate from previous years.



Leaving care 1: Children who ceased to be looked after aged 16-plus who remained in care until age 18 (%)



Keeping Children and Young People Safe and Secure

Representation

Children in Care as of 31st March 2024 by Gender:

57% of children in care are male, and 43% are female.

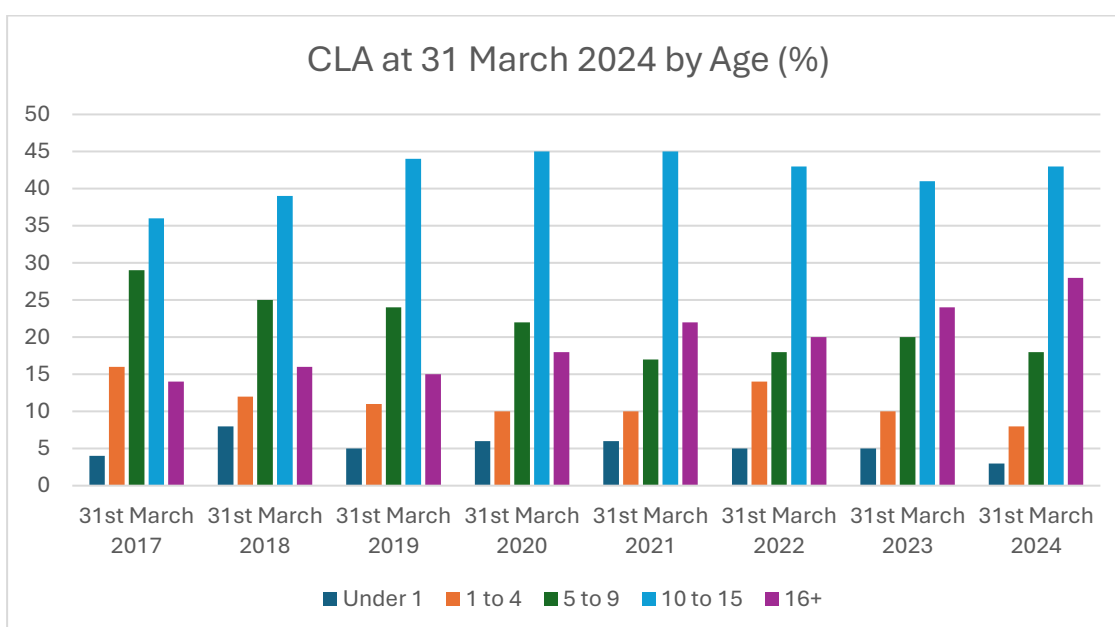
The gender distribution of children and young people in our care has remained relatively consistent over the past four years. The graph below illustrates the proportion of children in our care by gender, based on the gender they were assigned at birth, rather than their current gender identity or those who identify as non-binary.

Children in Care by Ethnicity:

- 76% White
- 13% Mixed Heritage
- 4% Other Ethnic Groups
- 3% Not Stated
- 1% Black or Black British
- 1% Other

Children looked After on 31st March 2024 by age:

- 43% ten to fifteen years old
- 28% Sixteen plus
- 18% five to nine years old
- 8% one to four years old
- 3% under one



There is an increasing proportion of young people in our care aged 16 and over. This has doubled from 14% in 2017 to 28% in March 2024. The percentage of children under one has reduced from 5% to 3% as we more proactively seek to keep children within their families. The percentage of children aged 5-9 years has also reduced from 29% in 2017 to 18% in 2024. This cohort of children appear to have aged through the system with an increase in 10-15 year olds from 2019 to 2021, which started to reduce in 2022 whilst the older cohort have increased.

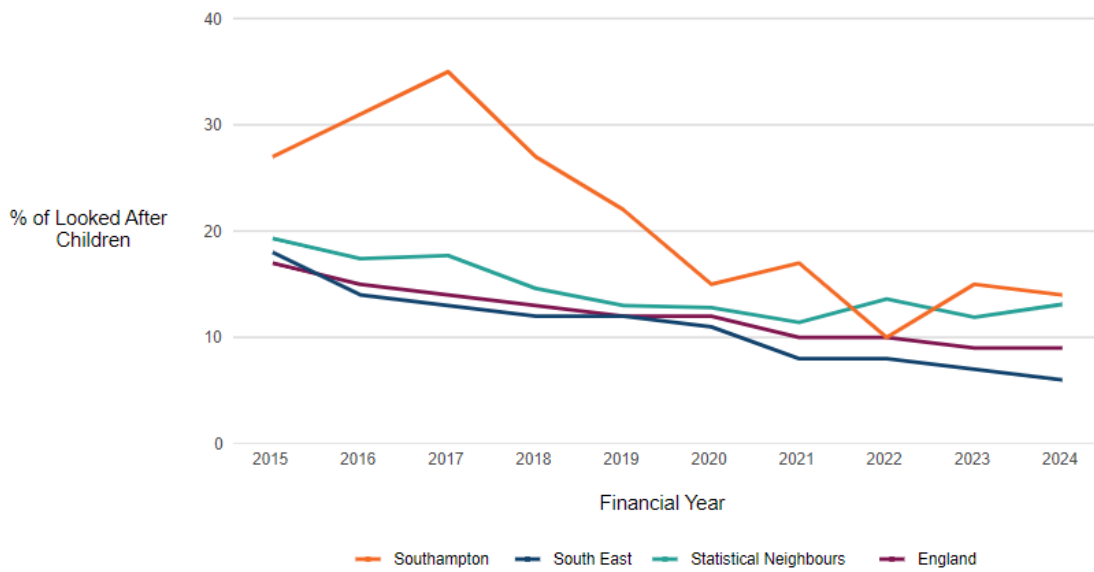
Securing permanence at the earliest opportunity

For some children and young people, permanence is attained by staying in our care. For others, it is achieved through adoption, a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) granted to a closely connected individual, or by returning to their parents, when this is the right decision for them.

The table below illustrates how permanence was secured for children and young people who have transitioned out of our care.

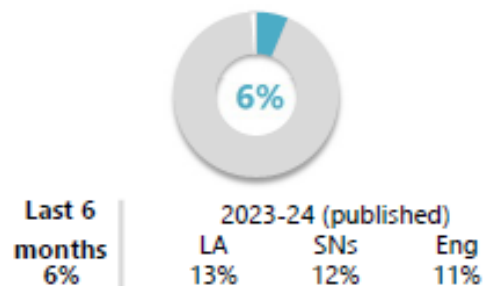
Adoption 1: Children who ceased to be looked after in the year who were adopted (%)

Children looked after who were adopted in year (%)



Adoption 2: Children who ceased to be looked after in the year due to a Special Guardianship Order (%)

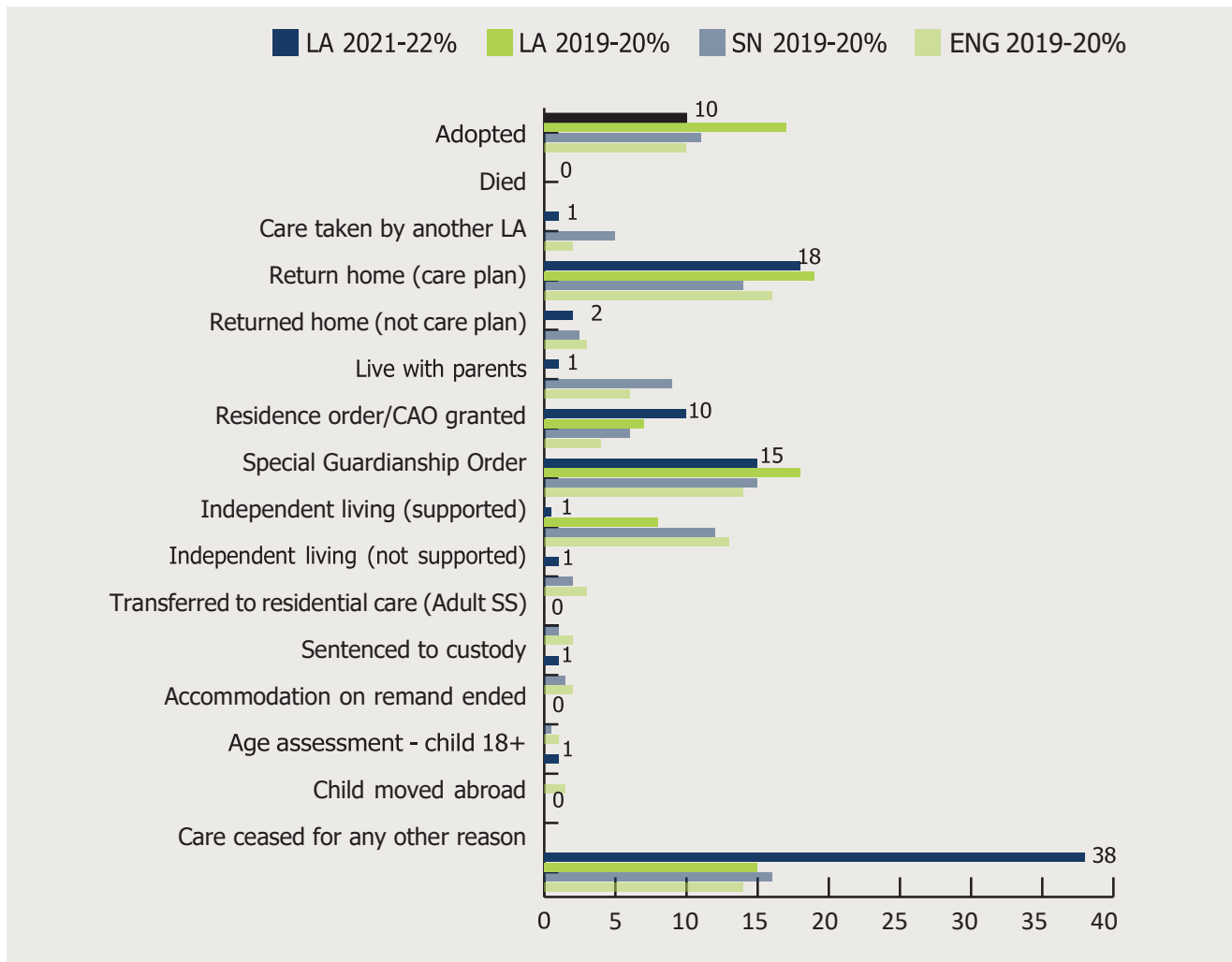
Special Guardianship Order



Stable accommodation and maintaining relationships

The following table shows a further breakdown of how many children we have found adoptive families for compared to our regional neighbours, statistical neighbours, and across the country:

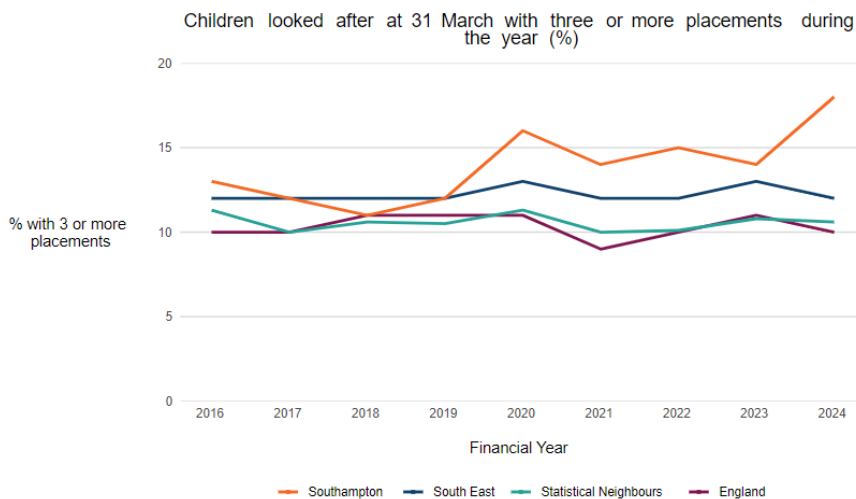
Children who ceased to be looked after in the year by reason



Placement Stability and distance from home

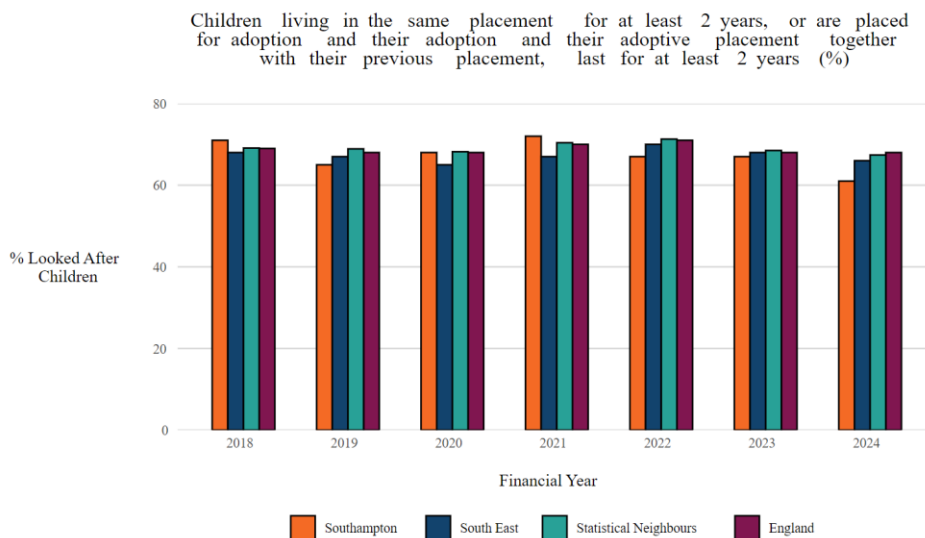
There are two measures for placement stability, the percentage of children in our care with three or more placements within the last 12 months, and the percentage of children in our care for more than 2.5 years that have been in their current placement for more than 2 years. The former saw an increase away from the national and statistical neighbour averages up to 18% following a number of placement breakdowns for our adolescent cohort and a lack of foster carer placements that could be matched to the child's needs. This trend sparked significant focus and strategic oversight on placement stability and since April 2024, this has reduced to 13% in December 2024. The latter measure of long-term stability has reduced to 61%, however, this is impacted by the improvement in our timescales of moving children onto adoption placements and reunifications with family members.

Placement 1: Children looked after with 3+ placements in 12 months (%)



While recent improvement is encouraging, it is important to note that placement stability continues to be a challenge. Achieving 100% stability is unlikely, but continued improvements will be essential for enhancing the overall outcomes for children in care. We are now holding fortnightly stability panels with the aim to improve this further over the next year.

Placement 2: Children looked after for 2.5+ years in the same placement for 2+ years (%)

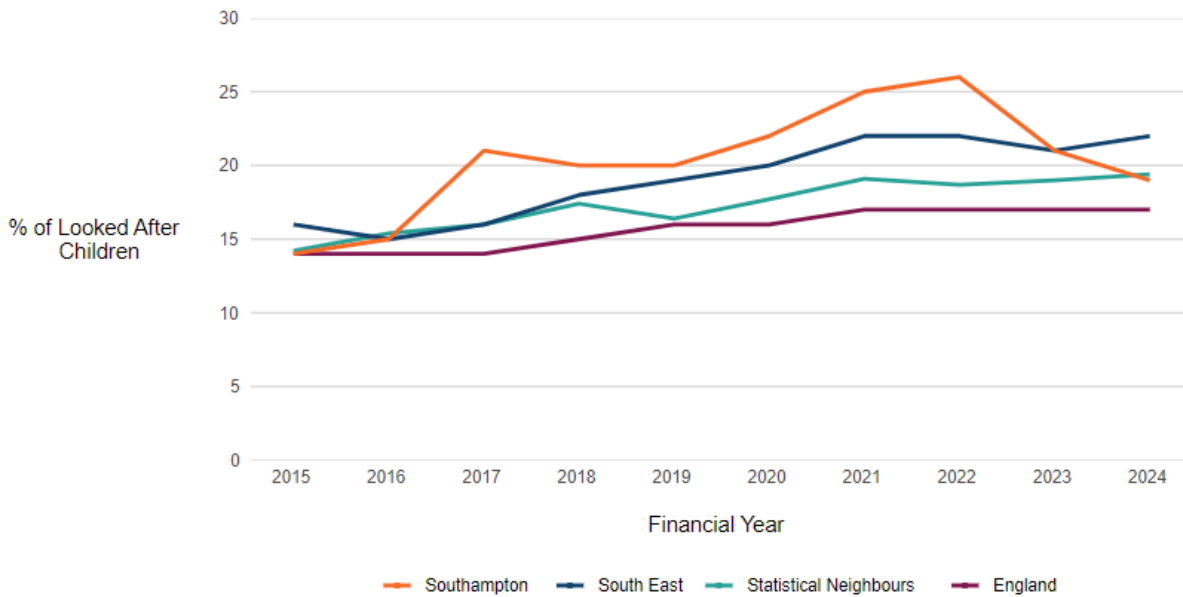


Placement distance

In 2023-24 19% of our children in care were living 20 or more miles from home, this was below the statistical neighbour and Southeast averages.

Placement 3: Children looked after placed out of borough and 20+ miles from home (%)

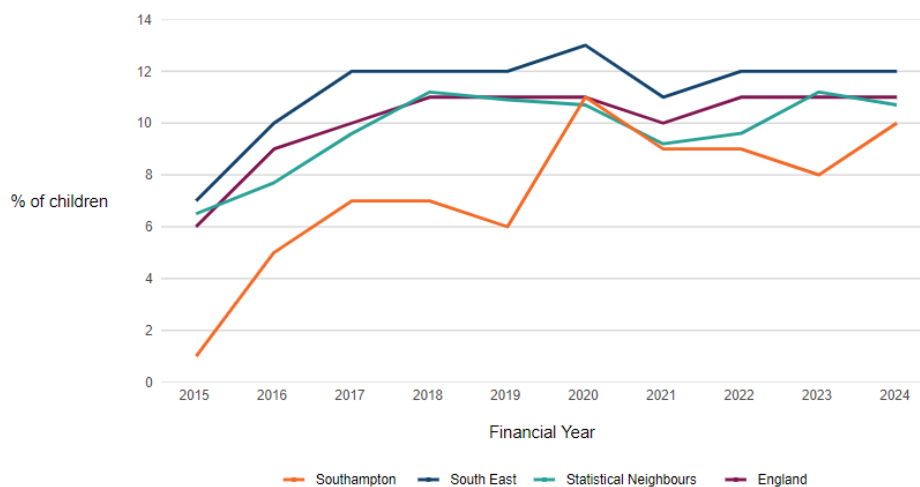
Children looked after at 31 March, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside LA boundary (%)



Children and young people who go missing from our care.

CLA with a missing incident in the year (%)

Children Looked after whom had a missing incident during the year (%)



Our data shows that during 2023-24, 10% of children and young people went missing during this reporting year. This is an increase on the previous year; however it is still below the rates in statistical neighbours, the Southeast region and England. We do know that some children and young people have a number of missing episodes during the year, whilst others have none or very few.

We meet with children and young people who go missing from our care, and we collaborate with multi-agency professionals, to explore strategies for reducing incidents and identifying the risk factors that contribute to them going missing. The police play a key role in sharing information and coordinating efforts to ensure a collective approach that helps to keep children and young people safer. They also work closely with partners to disrupt those who seek to sexually or criminally exploit them.

To better understand why children and young people in our care go missing, we offer each one a return home interview (RHI).

We extend this interview offer to nearly every child, and, on average, over 70% of them accept the offer.

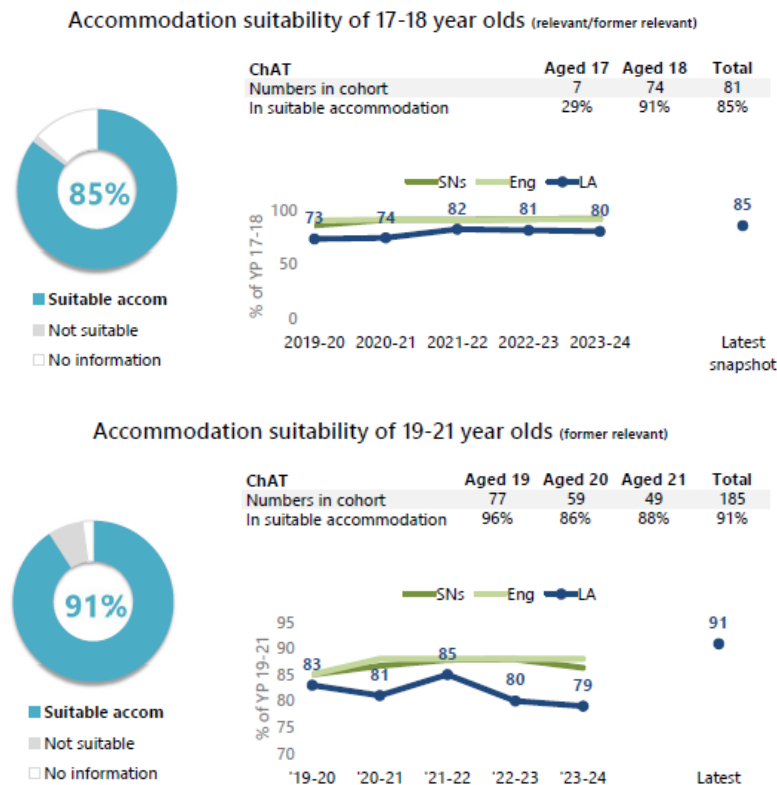
In March 2022, we launched our Young People's Service to provide a more focused response to the key issues affecting young people, particularly those related to contextual safeguarding. This initiative works in parallel with local teams offering early help support and social care, with an emphasis on minimizing changes in the professionals who work with young people and strengthening collaboration with police partners.



Suitability of Accommodation for Care Leavers

Our data for 2023-24 shows that we have increased the percentage of our care leavers who are in touch with the service and in suitable accommodation.

Leaving care 3:



The weekly multi-agency housing panel is led by the Homelessness Manager, with regular participation from the Pathways Through Care service. There is still significant work needed to ensure that all care leavers receive support to secure appropriate accommodation. For most, this involves a gradual reduction in support and increased opportunities for independence.

Placing a care leaver in bed and breakfast accommodation is considered only as a last resort, after all other options have been thoroughly explored and found unfeasible. If this becomes necessary, or a care leaver is deemed to be living in unsuitable accommodation, a risk assessment is completed by their personal advisor, which must be approved by the manager and Deputy Director. The duration of unsuitable accommodation is kept as short as possible, and the young person is then presented at the next housing panel for further review. The number of young people placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation has reduced significantly over the last year.

An agreement remains in place with the Local Authority Housing Department, allowing up to 10 care leavers annually, who are assessed to meet specific age and tenancy readiness criteria, to secure permanent tenancies in local authority housing. This is to rise to a quota of 15 in April 2025. Local housing is in high demand, and young people who have obtained tenancies through this process have so far been successful in maintaining them. The eligibility age for care leavers to secure their own tenancy has been reduced from 21 to 18, with readiness being a more significant factor than age.

The percentage of 19–21-year-olds living with a former foster carer are double those of statistical neighbours and England due to the strength of our Staying Put offer.

Happy and Healthy

Promote the emotional and physical health and wellbeing of the children and young people in our care

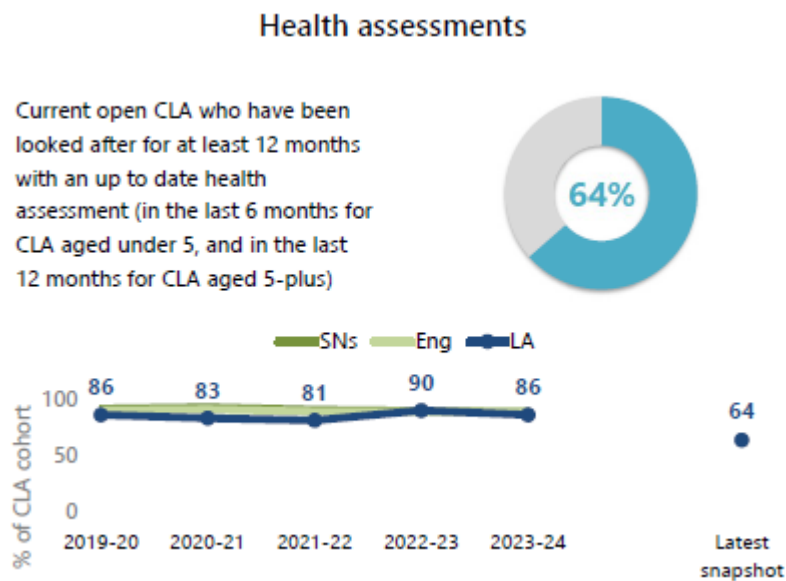
The NHS Hampshire, Southampton, and Isle of Wight Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Solent NHS Trust continue with their efforts to provide for the health and wellbeing of children and young people in our care.

- When any child comes into our care, they should have an initial health assessment within 20 working days. Thereafter, children under five will have a further review every six months and older children will be reviewed annually. Our performance in achieving the 20-day timescale is improving, and tracking of these children is substantially better, with most delays kept to a minimum and a child-by-child analysis completed each month.
- Health assessments for children and young people in care have been prioritised by Solent NHS Trust Looked After Children's Health Team and new ways of working have been utilised, including regular meetings with a named manager in the safeguarding service and PTC, and also to provide accessible appointments within the young people's hub for review health assessments for those young people over 13 years old.
- Online strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) have been completed maintaining contact with and oversight of children placed out of area and improving multi-agency involvement to help promote the emotional and mental wellbeing of children and young people in care.
- Working with community dental teams to improve dental care services for children and young people coming into care and reestablishing a mobile dental service for those with acute dental needs.
- We have undertaken joint audits with local authority partners and CAMHS to explore the access, quality, needs, and areas of improvement relating to the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people in care.
- For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), to improve health provision for these children and young people, Solent NHS Trust has developed a specialized pack and revised operating procedures. These changes have led to improvements in identifying age, physical health, immunization status (currently 83%, up from 69%), and BCG scars (currently 83%, up from 50%). Further improvements are planned in areas such as blood infection screenings, BMI recording, infectious disease monitoring, consent, drug use, emotional support, PTSD symptoms, and referrals.
- Sexual health is discussed during health assessments when relevant, and referrals to additional services are made as necessary. The Looked After Health team has received sexual exploitation training to assist with risk assessments, using Barnardo's 'Spotting the Signs' tool. When risk factors are identified, they are discussed with the young person before a referral is made to their social worker and the sexual health outreach team.
- A 'decliner pathway' with Solent NHS Trust has been approved which clarifies how health providers will seek the consent of those with parental responsibility to provide health assessments and treatment in the best interest of a child where they decline to give their own consent.

The following table shows how many of these assessments have been completed and within timescale:

- Health assessments of children in our care
- CLA who had their annual health assessment
- A drop from last three previous years and below statistical neighbours and England

CLA who had their annual health assessment (%)



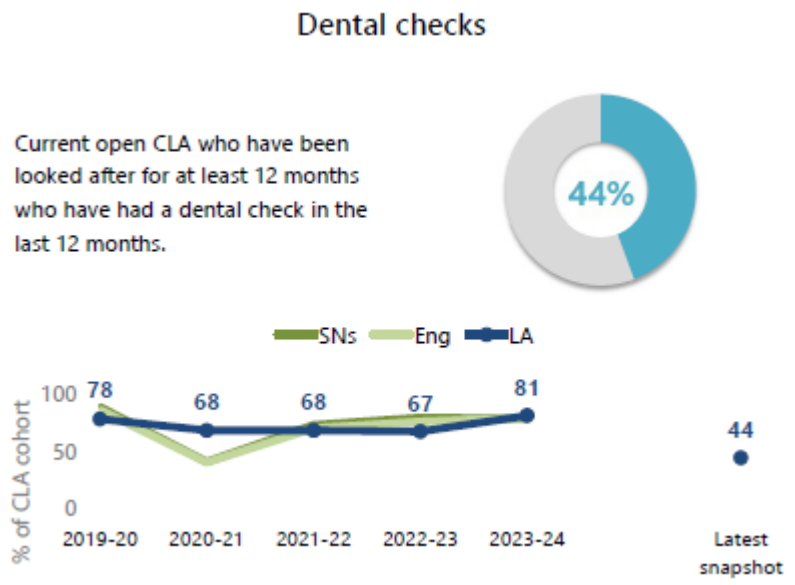
The KPI reporting data reflects the challenges that this has created with 47% of Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) being completed in timescales from April 2023 to April 2024

The three main areas of challenge in relation to IHAs being completed within timescales are:

- Delays in all relevant information, including consent, being provided to Solent by Children's Services
- Children placed out of area
- UASC, where the child is technically in our care before arriving in Southampton
- A number of steps have been taken by SCC in response to the challenges:
- A Service Manager has taken the lead role on IHAs
- The new Pathways into care process has been shared with the workforce (comms, individual team meetings, whole service meetings) alongside mandatory training for all practitioners working with children
- The new process has been included in the induction programme of all new starters
- Flowchart demonstrating tasks to be completed when a child first becomes looked after including the IHA process
- Weekly 'New into Care' meetings take place with the Pathways Through Care Head of Service chairing the meeting and Service Managers across the service, promoting information sharing, joint planning and that relevant processes have been followed
- Better communication and liaison between Health, CCG and Social Care including weekly meetings to track IHAs – any challenges for specific children are being discussed in this forum and joint solutions identified

Dental checks

CLA who had their teeth checked by a dentist (%)

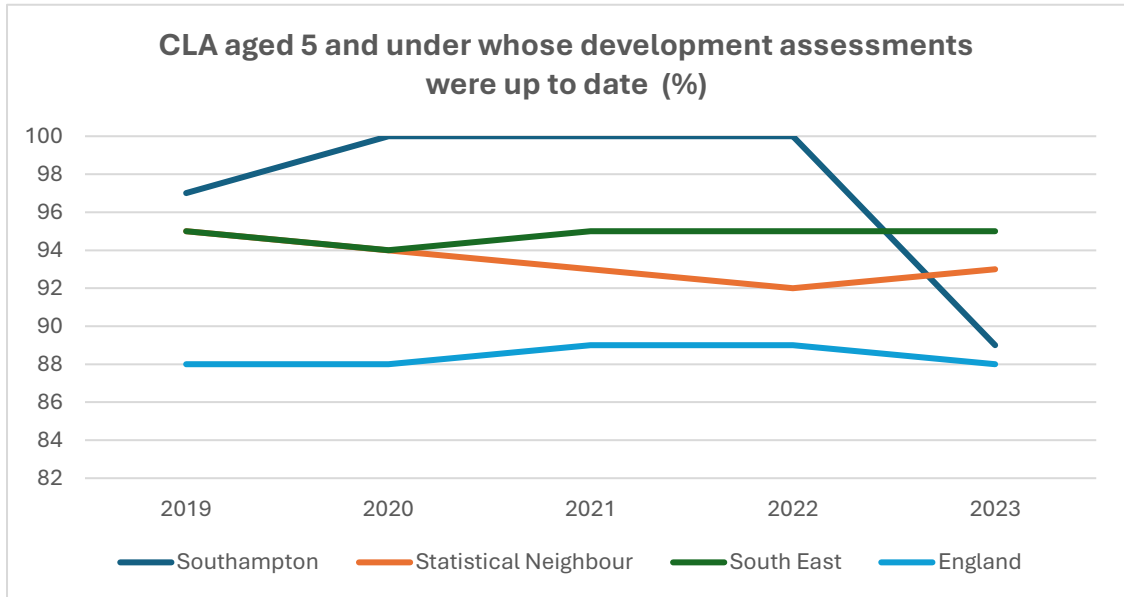


Dental care is consistently addressed during health assessments. If children and young people in care require a referral to a local dentist, this information will be provided to them.



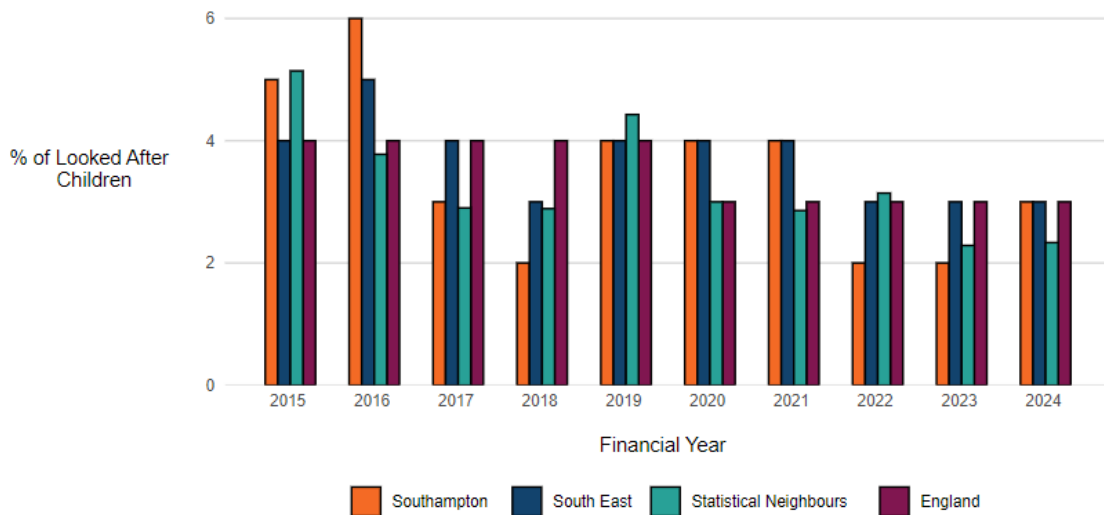
CLA under five with developmental assessments

Our performance for children in our care under 5 .



Substance misuse

Children looked after identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year (%)



Resilient and Engaged

Listen to our views, wishes and feelings and understand what life is like for me

Participation and Engagement of Children, Young People and Care Leavers

Access to Advocacy and Independent Visiting

In the 2023-24 period, children engaged in their care plan reviews through various means: 60.7% spoke for themselves during the meeting, 12.3% had an advocate present, 8.4% shared their views in writing, and 0.7% made non-verbal contributions. Additionally, 13.9% of children were under the age of 4, 11 children (0.8%) attended their review without contributing, and for 44 children (3.2%), the IRO could not determine their views.

Southampton commissions *The Advocacy People* to deliver advocacy and independent visiting services for children and young people in care. Through a needs-based, person-centred approach, *The Advocacy People* assist children in expressing their views about their care and life circumstances, while also providing a consistent point of contact to support their well-being.

The service manager overseeing the IRO service is responsible for liaising with *The Advocacy People* and attends quarterly commissioning meetings. Additionally, during the initial review, the IRO service ensures advocacy services are offered to children.

In 2023-24, the annual target set in accordance with Barnardo's recommendation, which suggests 10% of children in care receive advocacy services, was surpassed. A key change this year has been the transition to an 'opt-out' service for newly arrived children in care, ensuring that all school-aged children are fully informed of their right to an advocate.

By the end of 2023-24, 41 children had an allocated Independent Visitor, a number that grew to 60 by the end of December 2024.

Achieving and Aspiring

Have high aspirations, goals, and dreams

Preparing me for leaving care, becoming an adult, keeping in touch and to have stable housing

The Pathways Through Care team is responsible for conducting a pathway needs assessment when a child reaches 15 years and nine months of age if they are expected to remain in care and eventually transition into being a care leaver. By the time the child reaches 16 years and three months, it is expected that they will have a pathway plan in place. This plan outlines the young person's future life goals as they approach adulthood, including their housing plans, education and training goals, career aspirations, and the support they will receive regarding their health, safety, and well-being. We are steadily working towards all care leavers being allocated a PA within one month of their 16th birthday. We are also working on implementing an additional needs assessment at 20 years and nine months to allow care leavers to reassess their life goals and determine whether they would like to continue receiving support until the age of 25.

A significant percentage of pathway plans are completed on time, with 96% finalized within the set timeframe. These plans are written in clear, accessible language tailored to the individual goals and needs of each young person. They are also quality-assured by the manager of the personal advisor assigned to the young person. However, further efforts are needed to ensure that pathway plans are consistently completed on time and that young people are fully engaged in the process.

Ofsted and our internal quality assurance processes have identified areas for improvement in our engagement with care leavers. Specifically, we need to increase the frequency and quality of contact with a small number of our care leavers to promote their emotional health and ensure they are supported in maintaining education, employment, and training. We are actively prioritising this, encouraging young people to see their PA in person, unless they express a strong preference for not having such contact. When a young person chooses not to meet in person, we will continue to ensure they know that we are always available and ready to offer support whenever they feel prepared to engage with us.

Use resources to help achieve my potential in life

Savings for our Children's Futures

As good corporate parents we recognise the importance of helping support our children and young people learn the importance of savings and managing their money. We also know how important it is for us to save for their future so they can establish themselves as independent adults and have money to spend on things that can help them obtain the necessary things to achieve and succeed in life.

Some carers of our children and young people have not been good at consistently putting savings away for them. We have now developed a process to hold children's savings at source. This will be administered centrally within the council and added annually to their Junior Savings ISA accounts, which a young person can access when they turn 18 years old. We have worked with our externally commissioned providers to ensure that savings can be taken at source for our children from fees paid to providers so that we can be confident that we are managing this effectively at source. We have a revised savings policy to ensure that we have a consistent means of putting away savings and providing pocket money for our children and young people.

Achieving and Aspiring

My education, training and employment

Every local authority must have a designated headteacher of a virtual school who has overall responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children and young people in the care of the local authority. The following is a summary of the education achievement for children and young people in our care provided by the virtual head teacher, Maria Anderson.

The Virtual School action plan for academic year 2023-2024 had the following objectives:

- To promote and embed the virtual school advisory service for children with a social worker (CWSW ever 6)
- To secure improving attainment and progress
- To raise attendance
- To reduce suspensions and monitor education provision
- To promote positive participation
- To support Post-16 Transition
- To offer bespoke support for targeted cohorts of children with experience of care
- To provide support, advice and challenge for those supporting our SEND children
- To deliver appropriate training and opportunity for professional development

Virtual School Overview of the Academic Year 2023-2024

Summary

- KS4 A8 has improved by 0.1%
- 9-5 Maths
 - 0.6% measure better than national 2023 comparator
 - We have seen an improvement of 8.8% from last year.
- EBacc:
 - We have seen an increase of 3.8% of pupils being entered for this suite of qualifications.
 - Against a national comparator this is 9.5% higher.
 - % 9-5 0.3% measure better than national 2023 comparator
 - We have seen an improvement of 2.3% from last year.
 - % 9-4 2.8% measure better than national 2023 comparator
 - We have seen an improvement of 6.8% from last year.

Key Stage One Attainment

These assessments are no longer statutory, the virtual school headteacher will continue to track progress termly through the personal education plan.

Key Stage Two Attainment

CLA 1yr+	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
% Expected	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat
KS2: RWM	38	48	47	52	24	25	35	32	39	35	32	37	42	N/A	44	N/A	33	32	44	36	24	34

Achieving and Aspiring

Key Stage Four Attainment

2017	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat	LA	Nat
Measure CLA 1yr+														
% 9-5 English	5.6	16.0	16.7	16.0	12.2	(16.0)	11.8	(16.0)	20.7	20.0	14.3	18.0	6.8	(18.0)
% 9-4 English	13.9	26.0	33.3	27.0	24.4	(27.0)	29.4	(27.0)	37.9	31.0	38.1	28.0	20.5	(28.0)
% 9-5 Maths	2.8	12.0	10.0	11.0	9.8	(11.0)	5.9	(11.0)	13.8	26.0	4.8	13.0	13.6	(26.0)
% 9-4 Maths	16.7	24.0	20.0	24.0	17.1	(24.0)	26.5	(24.0)	31.0	26.0	14.3	26.0	22.7	(26.0)
% 9-4 (E&M)	5.6	17.0	16.7	18.0	12.2	(18.0)	14.7	(18.0)	24.1	22.0	11.9	20.0	11.4	(20.0)
% 9-5 (E&M)	5.6	8.0	6.7	7.0	4.9	(7.0)	5.9	(7.0)	10.3	11.0	2.4	10.0	2.3	(10.0)

Measure	Results	Additional Info
Phonics Benchmark	60.0% on/above target	10.2 % have an EHCP
KS2 Attainment (all CLA)	21.4% on/above target	22.4% have an EHCP
KS4 Attainment (CLA 1 year+)	As previous table	19.2% have an EHCP
Education Attendance (under 16s) (all CLA)	91.3%	2.5% decrease on previous year (reflects changes to attendance coding)
School Exclusions (under 16s) (all CLA)	15.9% average	1.9% increase on previous year –longer suspensions for smaller no of children
Not in Employment, Education or Training (under 18s) (all CLA)	12.5%	Decrease on previous year, snapshot based on end of academic year

The virtual school head teacher has responsibility and accountability for making sure that there are effective arrangements in place for allocating pupil premium plus funding to benefit our children. The funding is £2570 per pupil, of which £840 is dedicated to the Virtual School service. The grant must be managed by the virtual school and used to improve outcomes and “diminish the difference” as identified in the child’s personal education plan in consultation with the designated teacher for the school.

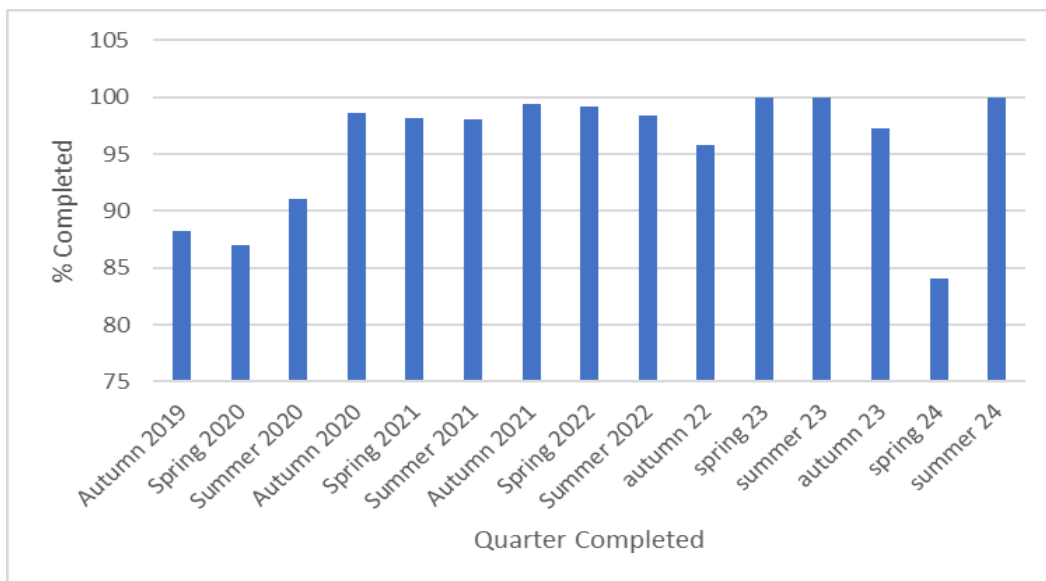
- Year 11 summer 2025 PP+ will be retained to support transitions post 16
- A PEP tracker is in place with oversight from the VSH and DHT to weekly dip sample PP+ spend
- Social care team managers and IROs will be updated monthly with any concerns related to inappropriate PP+ use
- Designated teachers will be contacted individually by the VS and Head teachers will be contacted to confirm that pupil premium plus will be withheld if PEPs are not completed. This will also be communicated in the autumn term mailing sent to all designated teachers.
- Additional tutoring support has been put in place identified children and young people through VS specific funding [School-led tutoring for looked-after children: guidance for local authorities and virtual school heads - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- Additional post-16 pupil premium has been secured from the treasury. This will enable more robust support for our young people to transition into adulthood

Achieving and Aspiring

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

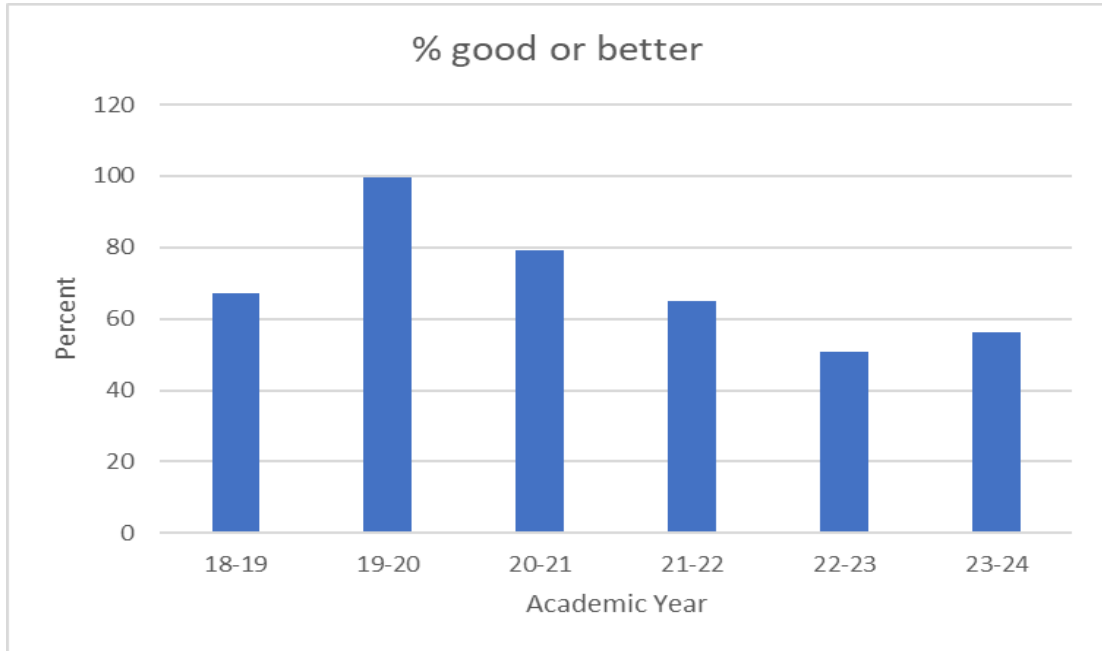
Personal education plans are mandatory and written three times a year, produced collaboratively between the child's social worker, schoolteachers, foster carers, and the virtual school. PEPs are the core means by which all these professionals work together to develop a plan that reviews the child's education progress, identifies what their ongoing learning, mental and emotional wellbeing needs are, develops plans for how they will be supported in all aspects of their learning, and sets clear targets so we know when we are making a difference.

Electronic personal education plans were introduced in September 2017 and have been revised based on feedback from children, young people, and professionals. Full training on completing PEPs continues to be provided through the virtual school to carers and professionals. Any school requesting additional support will have a bespoke offer tailored to their needs. The virtual school also has a personal education plan tracker to ensure timely completion of PEPs and to regularly review and rate their quality. The following table shows how this has contributed to our improvement in completing personal education plans for our children and young people.



The following table shows how the quality of personal education plans have been graded by the virtual school:

Personal education plans rated good or better



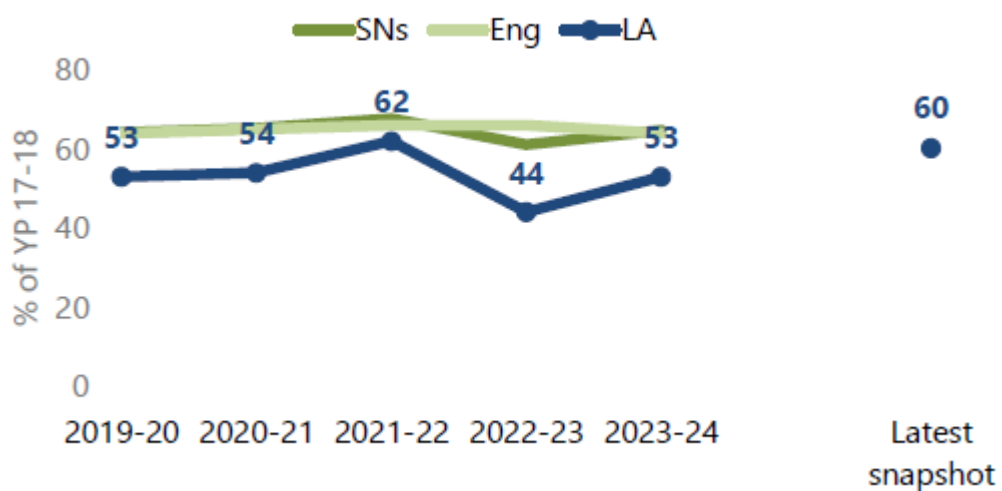
Education, employment, and training (EET) for care leavers

Figures for financial year 2023-24 show that 53% of our care leavers aged 17 & 18, and 44% aged 19-21 were in education, employment, or training (EET). That is a 7% increase compared to 2022-2023 for 17- and 18-year-olds, and a 1% decrease for 19–21-year-olds.

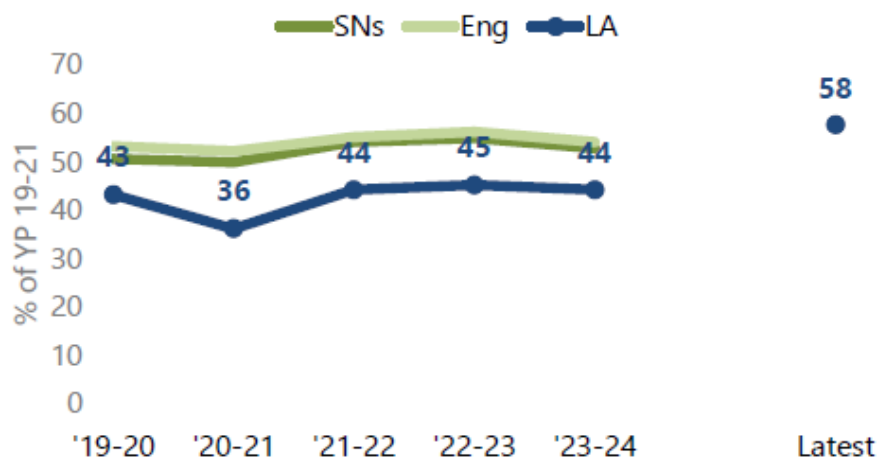
38% of care leavers were in higher education, this is significantly higher than the England average of 4%.

A significant number of our care leavers are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) due to being too unwell to be available for work. The majority of this illness relates to their emotional/mental health.

Leaving care 2: Care leavers aged 17-18 who are in Education, Employment or Training (%)



Leaving care 4: Care leavers aged 19-21 who are in Education, Employment or Training (%)



We continue to underperform in our numbers of care leavers who are in employment, education, or training on a national, regional, and statistical neighbour level. This is an area of improvement also recognised in our most recent inspection findings. Increasing employment, training, and education remain a key priority improvement area, and a range of focused activities are in place to secure better outcomes and performance:

- Improved monitoring and evaluation of personal education plans (PEPs) for our young people in year 10 and 11 transitioning towards independence to look at the timeliness and quality for preparing young people in care for independence.
- Ensured that all 'in-house' Southampton City Council Apprenticeships are advertised early for one week within the Pathways Team, prior to being advertised elsewhere. In the coming year we are going to build on this with what we refer to as the Care Leaver Guarantee, which now has executive members sign off, and which we will develop to ensure that across the whole of the Council care leavers become a priority for apprenticeship opportunities that we offer.
- The NEET panel consists of both Service managers for Pathways Through care reviewing young people with the managers and PA's / Social worker. This takes place monthly where it works in partnership with Virtual School, members of the Employment Hub and The Post 16 Manager to focus robustly on our young people who are NEET. This panel is now established and is working hard to support plans for young people.
- We have increased the number of personal advisors to ensure more targeted support to individual care leavers and to adapt to the increased workload from supporting care leavers up to the age of 25 years old.



Staffing in the Service

Since June 2023 there has been stability within the operation and strategic management team. The service was strengthened following the service redesign in June 2024, including the introduction of Assistant Team Managers giving the service additional management capacity, increasing social work capacity with two additional social work posts, family coach posts introduced to support with parenting and reunification work, and one additional team standard co-ordinator post to provide additional business support. We have also since added two personal advisor posts to meet the demands of the rising care leaver cohort, and to enable us to ensure co-allocation to children in care at 16 years old. There are 5 teams within the one service, two of which are for young people who are care experienced, 1 team is specifically working with unaccompanied children in the UK and two other teams with respective managers where they support social workers who work with our children in care under the age of 18. There is also a Staying Connected Team which provides floating support to young people over 18 in accommodation that we are responsible for. The service prides itself on having a cohesive and friendly feel who offer support to team members. Our service is child focussed and strive for each child or young person to be the best person they can be.

We have also benefited from an additional secondment to create a therapeutic role within the service to provide additional support for our children in placements.

In the last six months the agency staff have remained stable with only two social workers and one team manager who are not permanent whilst we recruit experienced workers, with Southampton values to these roles.

Key areas for improvement

- Improve placement stability for children in care
- Further embed the Care Leavers' forum to routinely gain the views of care leavers and more proactively engage them in implementing our corporate parenting priorities. Engage more young people in the weekly care leavers drop in.
- Improve analysis within supervision conversations and records, demonstrating a 'golden thread' through children and young people's plans.
- Further develop our participation offer with a wider range of participation opportunities and meaningful coproduction.
- Continue to stabilise the service with 90% permanent staffing or longer-term agency appointments to increase stability and reduce caseloads.
- Continue to strengthen our NEET panel with a demonstrable positive impact on young people's participation in Education, Training and Employment including apprenticeships
- Improve the quality and co-production of pathway plans, with a sharper focus on:
 - ❖ Updates in response to significant events
 - ❖ Multi-agency input in plans, with a particular focus on EET and health support
 - ❖ Stronger evidence of care leavers' involvement
 - ❖ Offending behaviour and strategies to divert young people from crime
 - ❖ Direct work and life story work to be supporting children regularly
- Improve the provision of health passports for care leavers and awareness of/access to the NHS app
- Increase placement opportunities and placement options for 16/17-year-olds through registration of our own 'Homes for Teens' registered provision
- Further improve transitions to adulthood, with earlier conversations and proactive planning
- Fully embed our independence skills training offer, ensuring that this includes a robust offer to care leavers who are in Staying Put arrangements
- Increase awareness and consistency of application of the Care Leavers' Local Offer
- Improve support and processes for UASC team to further enhance the support offered to our young people
- Improve placement stability and local housing options for care leavers, including access to five more council tenancies, and increase options for UASC young people to live in Southampton.

