

# Outcomes for Looked after Children

Looked after Children and care leavers who are in the care of Surrey County Council are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. The life experiences they will have been through before coming into care may have a major impact on their development and ability to grow and succeed in life. In addition, the consequences of being separated from family and community, whether through the need to protect from abuse or to support following neglect, will additionally impact on their progress.

It is essential that this group of children and young people are provided with the right services and the right support in order to support them in achieving. With so many variables that can impact on a child's development, it can be difficult to measure the impact of services provided, to be sure these are right. However, we do need to do something to consider the effectiveness of our care and so a range of indicators, both nationally and locally, are used to try to measure the outcomes for Looked after Children and young people to monitor their progress. This report will be considering the current status of these targets / indicators and considering whether progress is being made to improve outcomes for those children who grow up in our care.

## **Profile of Children in our Care**

Nationally there has been a significant rise in the numbers of children entering the care system, both through legal and voluntary routes. This is a reflection of the numbers of children subject to safeguarding procedures, where numbers have risen significantly following national incidents such as the death of Baby Peter as well as the impact of improved multi-agency working leading to earlier and better identification of children who are at risk of harm and need to be protected. In addition there has been a rise in the number of teenagers entering care following family breakdown. This is due to a range of reasons including increased instability for families from divorce and step-families, changing expectations of both families and young people, shortage of jobs and opportunities as well as poverty and neglect.

For Surrey, in line with these national trends, there has been a steadily increasing number of children who are looked after. During 2012-13 our most significant group to show a rise in numbers has been for older children – those aged 10 and above. These children usually enter care through a voluntary agreement with their parents (accommodation) rather than through legal proceedings. The rise in the number of teenagers entering care highlights the need for improvements in our partnership working through our Early Help strategy to ensure that teenagers are effectively supported in their schools and communities.

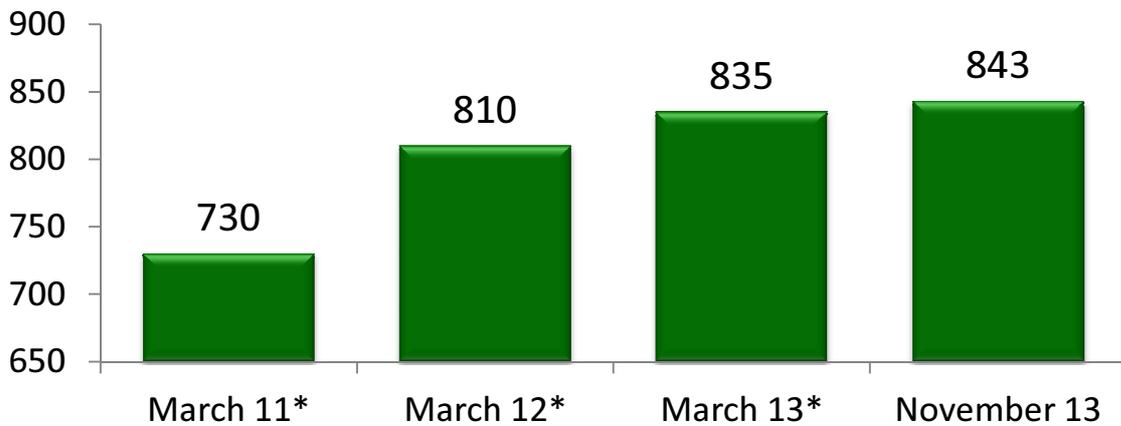
The numbers coming into our care are lower, but not significantly different, from our statistical neighbours.

"Statistical neighbours provide a method for benchmarking progress. For each local authority (LA), these models designate a number of other LAs deemed to have similar characteristics. These designated LAs are known as statistical neighbours. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned in 2007 by the Department to identify and group similar LAs in terms of the socio-economic characteristics, each LA was assigned 10 such neighbours." DfE

### Numbers of children in care

#### Looked after children

March 2011 - November 13



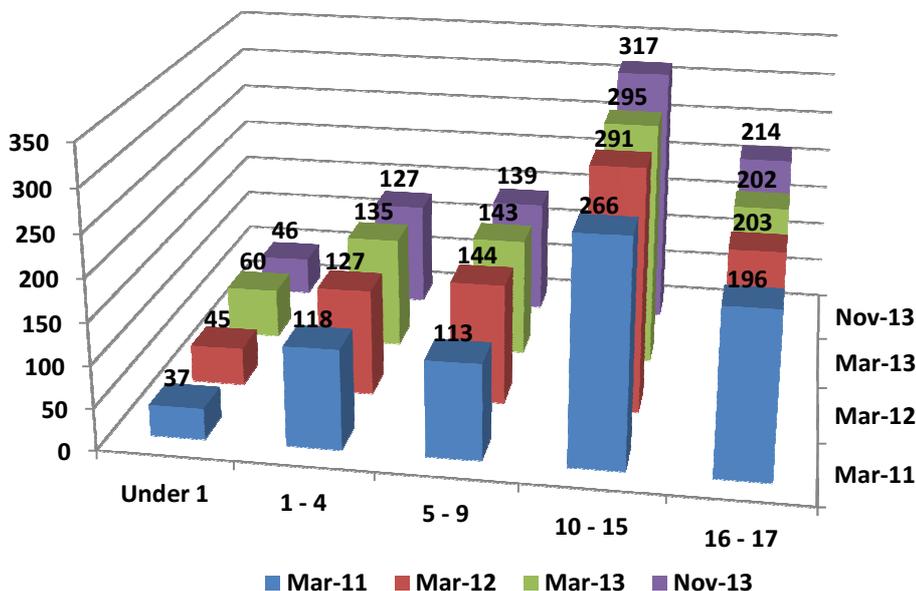
\*following validation the March 2011, 2012 and 2013 figures were revised for the statutory returns to 733 (Mar 11), 807 (Mar 12) and

■ LAC

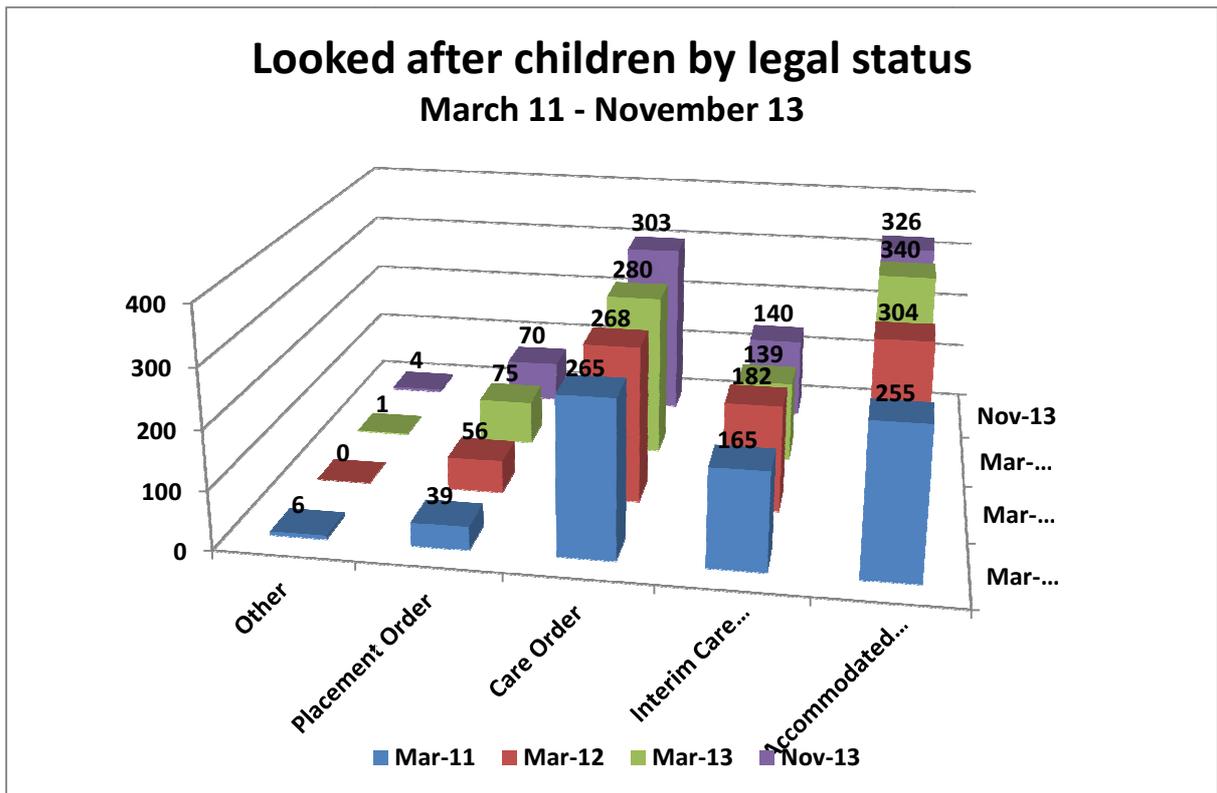
### Numbers of children in care by their age

#### Looked after children by age

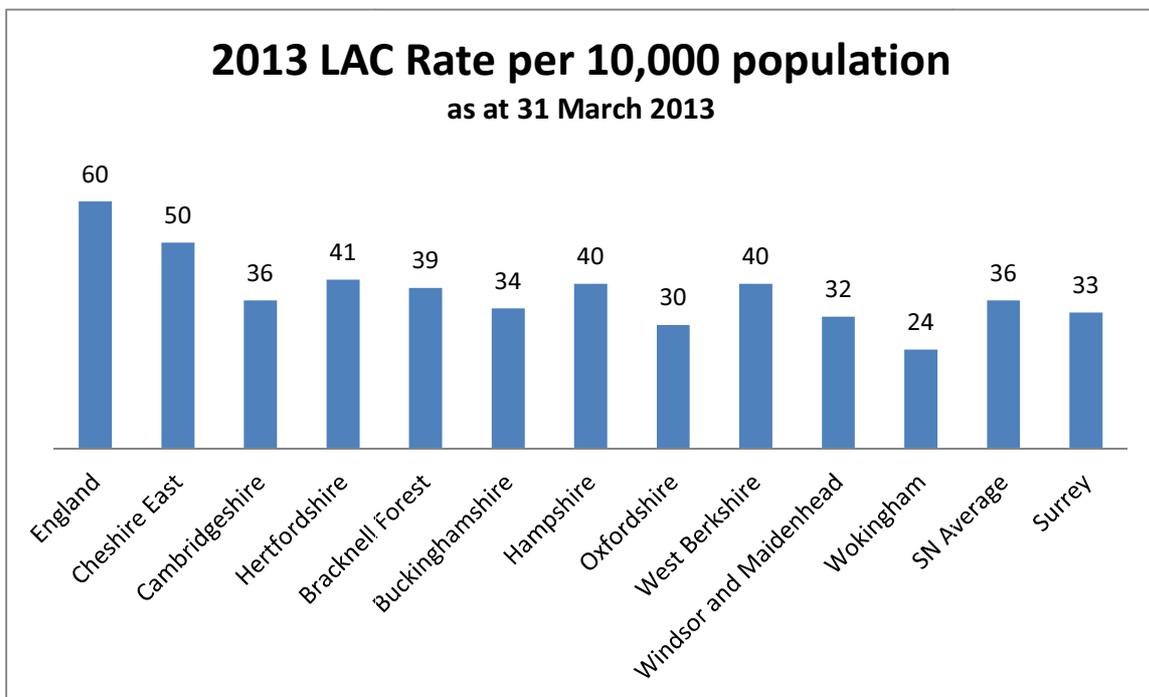
March 2011 - November 13



**Numbers in care by legal status**



**2013 LAC rate per 10,000 population**



**Key features of success**

In order to grow up successful and happy, all children and young people need key things to be in place for their development. They need to be attached to caring and

consistent carers, to live somewhere they feel safe and secure, to go to school where they are supported to achieve well and to make friends, to be healthy and happy, able to take part in all the hobbies and activities they would like to, to be a part of their community and to contribute and finally to go to university or further education, to find the right job for them and to leave home at the right time for them, to live independently as adults.

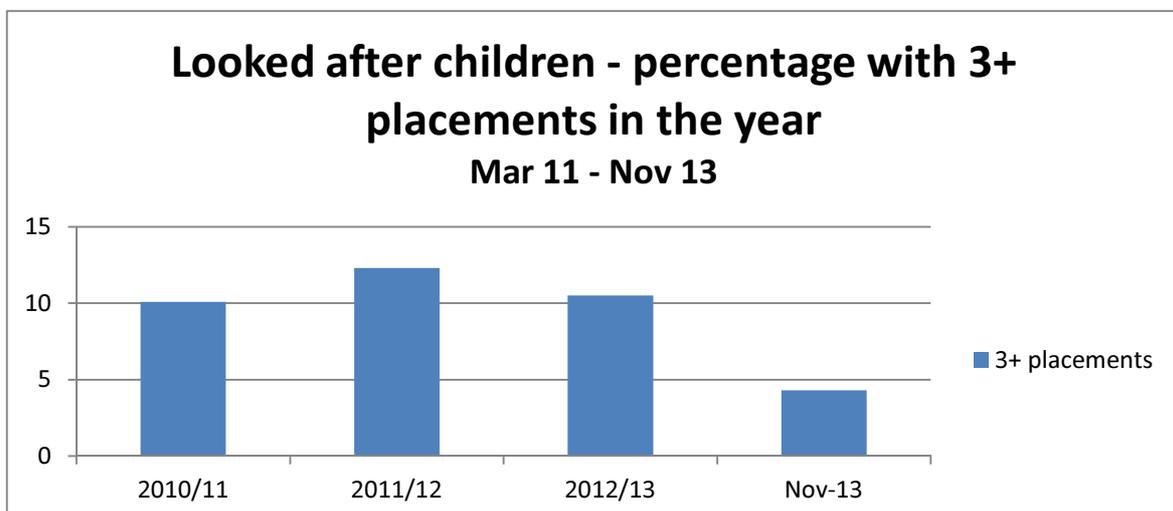
As Corporate Parents we need to check on the services and support we are providing to see if it is helping children to achieve in these ways. It is not easy to find a way to monitor the progress of 830+ children though and so a range of indicators are used both nationally and locally to track different aspects of a child's care. Whilst these do not give a full picture of outcomes for children, they do provide the basis for looking at how care is provided and may help to raise concerns or strengths that can then be examined in closer detail as needed.

### Placement Stability

The most important thing we can get right for Looked after Children is to ensure they have someone consistent to care for them and somewhere stable to live. Without these building blocks then all efforts to improve educational attainment or participation in hobbies, for example, will be at risk. It is a key priority for our Corporate Parenting Strategy and is the focus of much work to improve our outcomes

Placement Stability does not depend on one key component but is a combination of having enough placements available so that the right match to meet a child's needs can be made, providing high-quality training and support for carers to care for children and providing the right support for children whether through helping them to understand the things that have happened in their lives or support to be in school.

It can be seen that our outcomes for placement stability were poorer in 2011/12 when the numbers of children in care significantly increased and choices of placements were not as readily available. However, significant work has been undertaken both to improve placement choice and to support children, carers and placements since then and progress both during 2012/13 and to date this year is encouraging and should be sustainable and embedded.



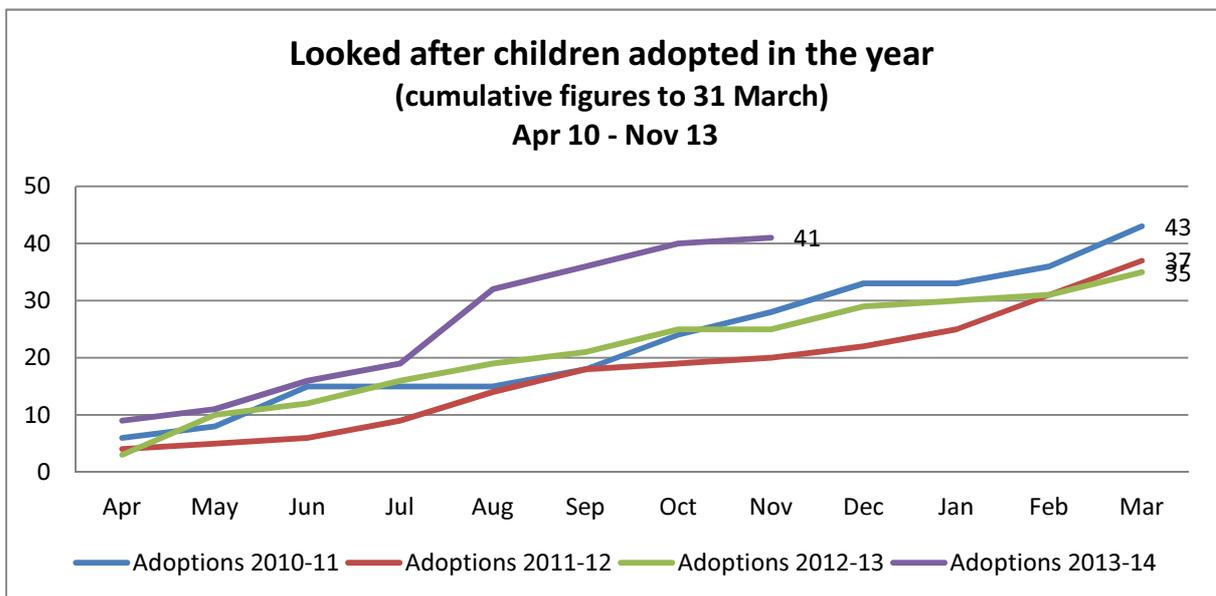
## Permanency

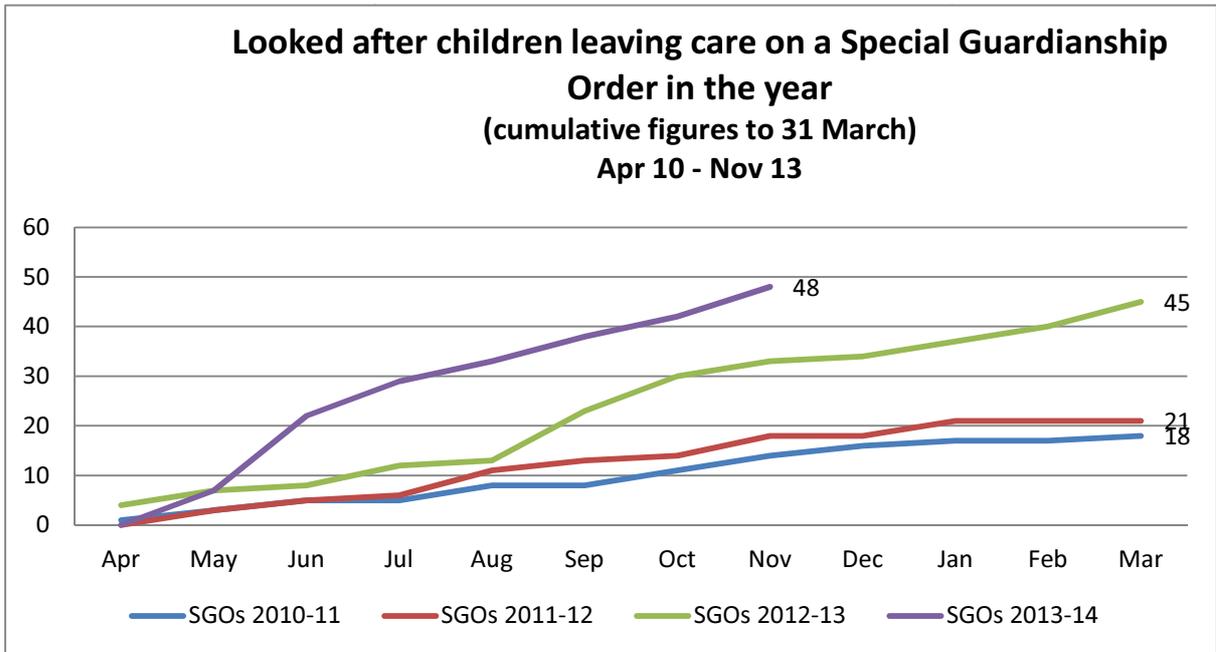
In addition to placement stability, a key feature of effective care is for children to have a strong sense of the future, of knowing where they will grow up and who will be looking after them. For some children this will mean that living in care will be a short time in their lives – that permanent plans will be put in place that mean they are cared for by a “forever” family, whether this is their own birth family or with an alternative family through adoption or special guardianship.

There has been a strong rise in the number of children who exit care through a permanency order – with figures on track to double this year. Again, this is a reflection of the conclusion of a high number of care proceedings and an improving focus on planning for permanency for children.

One consequence of this approach is the significant increase in the number of children who exit care through the making of a Special Guardianship Order. This particular order provides for the child to be placed permanently within a family (usually a member of their extended family or a foster carer who has permanently claimed them). It is a complimentary order for permanency for children, alongside adoption, without using the permanent severance from birth family that an adoption order brings.

Last year, for the first time, the numbers of SGOs exceeded those of Adoption orders granted through the year

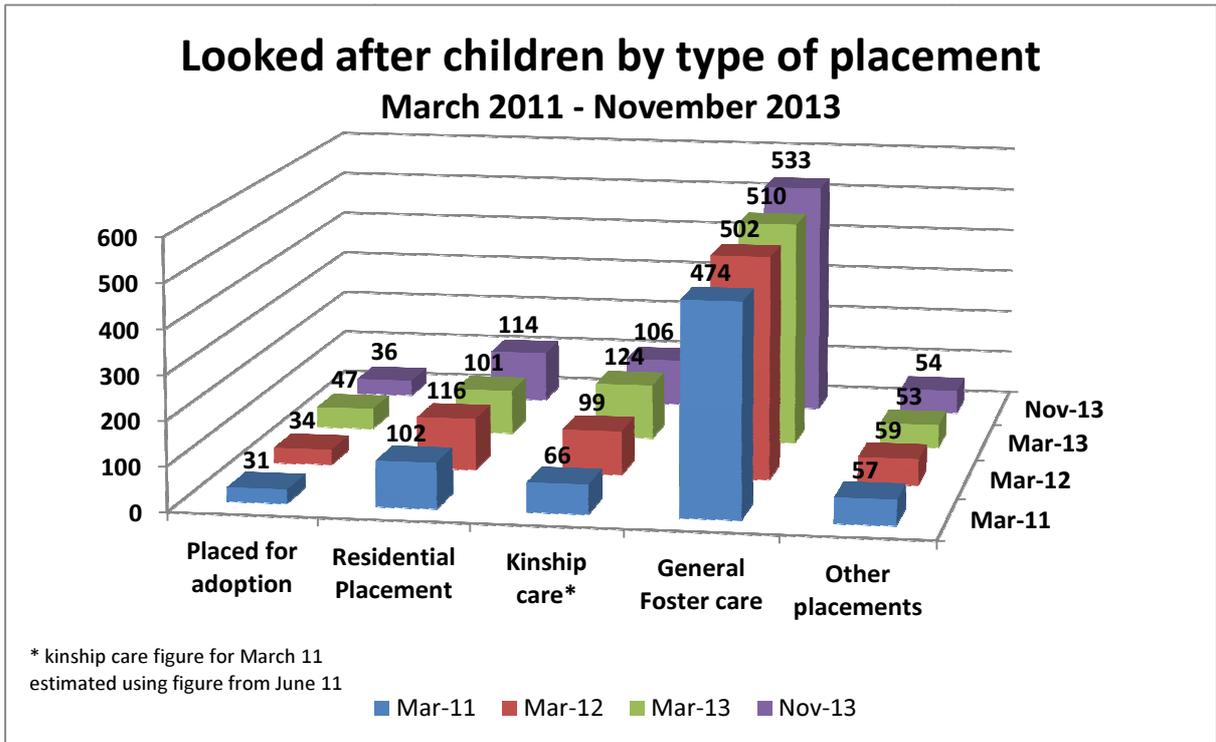




### Placements

Once they move into care, children and young people are placed in a range of settings according to need. These include foster placement with general foster carers, foster care with extended family or friends (kinship care), residential school or children’s home or specialist placement such as parent and child assessment placement or supported lodgings.

### Numbers of children in care by type of placement



For most children and young people, placement within a family will be the preferred choice of placement and it can be seen that our proportions in foster care have continued to rise. We place a high priority on the recruitment and development of high quality foster carers, working closely with our corporate Communications team to ensure that our recruitment campaigns are effective. Recruitment activity remains steady though further increases in the number of carers available locally remains a priority.

**Foster Carer Recruitment Activity - twelve months to Nov 13**

|                                                 | Dec 12 | Jan 13 | Feb 13 | Mar 13 | Apr 13 | May 13 | Jun 13 | Jul 13 | Aug 13 | Sep 13 | Oct 13 | Nov 13 |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Total number of enquiries</b>                | 15     | 36     | 28     | 39     | 30     | 34     | 23     | 27     | 18     | 30     | 47     | 33     |
| <b>Potential applicants attend open evening</b> | 8      | 9      | 21     | 20     | 8      | 24     | 3      | 17     | 13     | 20     | 19     | 10     |
| <b>Initial Visits</b>                           | 6      | 11     | 15     | 5      | 14     | 4      | 10     | 10     | 8      | 4      | 12     | 12     |

As part of considering placement within a family, wherever possible (and appropriate) it is considered best practice to place children within their extended family. This is described as either kinship care or Family and Friends care. Placement with extended family usually leads to better outcomes for children as their sense of identity is maintained and there is less disruption to their lives and relationships. Within Surrey we have developed a strong use of kinship care, in line with national trends. This is due, in large part, to the changes in care proceedings through the public law outline and the requirement to ensure that consideration has been given to the potential for care by members of the child’s extended family.

**Residential Care**

Placement within a family is not the right option for all young people who come into care though, and for some adolescents, residential care is the right and positive choice of placement for them. Nationally there has been a significant focus on the provision of residential care following criminal proceedings and subsequent inquiries into child sexual abuse and exploitation in areas across the country. This has highlighted the particular risks for children placed in children’s homes, frequently many miles away from their home authority. Young people who need residential care are those who may be most at risk, who are not able to live within a family because of challenging behaviour, complex needs, risk taking behaviour including substance misuse, sexual relationships or offending and who are frequently not attending school. Young people are likely to have emotional and mental health needs where they may be refusing to engage in support.

Within Surrey we have 7 residential homes directly maintained by the council. This has enabled us to provide placements for young people with a high level of need, within the county, and has reduced our need for placements out of county. Whilst there will always be some instances where more children require a placement than we are able to provide in-house, for the most part, those children and young people who are placed out of county in residential provision do so because of specialist

needs, such as residential schools for children with disabilities or specialist placements for those with specific needs such as sexually harmful behaviour.

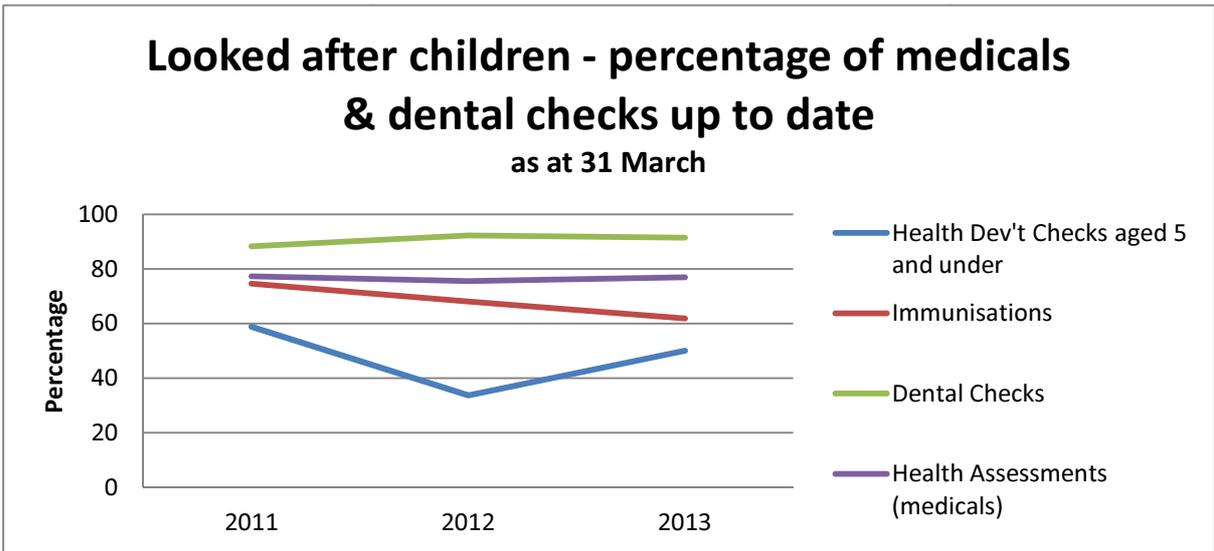
| <b>Residential Placements as at 30 November 13</b> | <b>SCC Provision</b> | <b>Other Provider</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Children's Home in Surrey Area                     | 35                   | 16                    | 51           |
| Children's Home Outside Surrey Area                |                      | 17                    | 17           |
| Secure Accommodation Outside Surrey Area           |                      | 3                     | 3            |
| Residential School in Surrey Area                  |                      | 5                     | 5            |
| Residential School Outside Surrey Area             |                      | 20                    | 20           |
| Mother & Baby Unit Outside Surrey Area             |                      | 4                     | 4            |
| NHS in Surrey Area                                 |                      | 1                     | 1            |
| Residential Care Home in Surrey Area               | 2                    | 4                     | 6            |
| Residential Care Home Outside Surrey Area          |                      | 6                     | 6            |
| Youth Offenders/ Penal Institution Out Surrey area |                      | 1                     | 1            |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>37</b>            | <b>77</b>             | <b>114</b>   |

### Health Care

One of the primary good outcomes that parents would want for their children is for them to grow up to be healthy and happy. The factors that contribute to this outcome will range from being in good health, free from major illnesses or traumas, able to take part in the activities they wish to and growing in confidence and self-esteem as they grow towards an independent adult life. For corporate parents, it presents a particular challenge to develop ways in which we can monitor and track this area of a child's life to be sure that we are providing the right support for them to grow and flourish in this way.

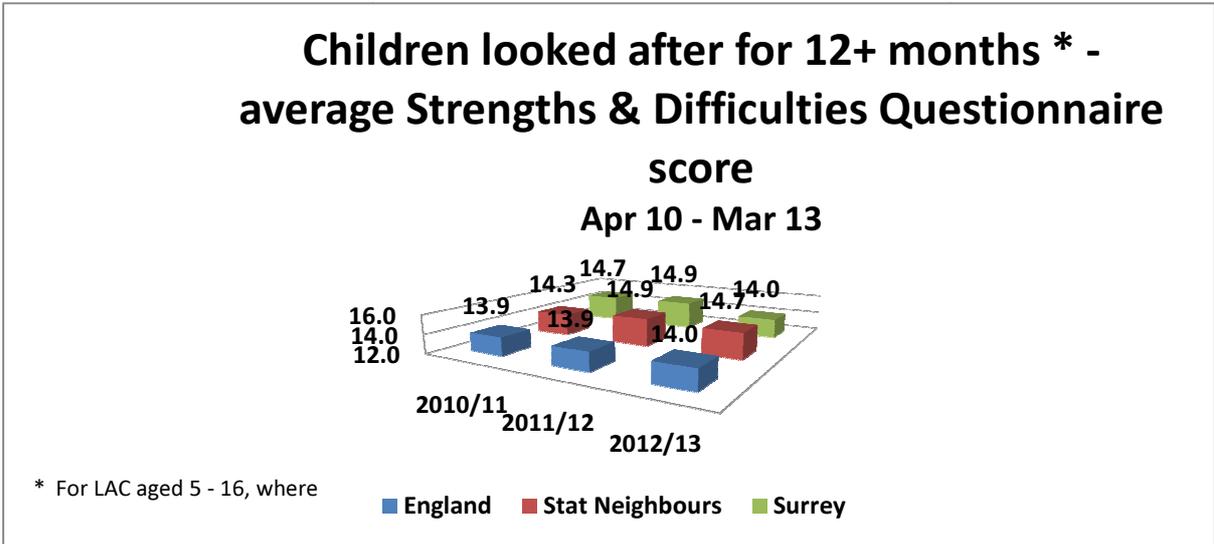
All children who are looked after are entitled to both universal and secondary care services. These include services from GPs, immunisation programmes and health promotion as well as targeted services such as therapies, hospital specialist services and Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS) as examples and as required.

All Looked after Children and young people should have an initial health assessment when they first come into care. This should provide a baseline for assessing the child's current health, including immunisations and development needs. This assessment is used to develop a health care plan, contributing to the over-arching care plan for the child, and is then reviewed annually. Children aged under 5 should have two health development checks a year. Dental care and immunisations are other indicators that are currently used as part of measuring health outcomes.



The above charts though don't tell us how healthy our children are and in order to do this we need to develop a fuller understanding of a range of information, such as what rates of obesity our children may have, are they properly informed about how to eat healthily, how do they manage risky choices such as alcohol and drugs? Further assessment is needed to be able to widen and deepen our understanding of our children's health outcomes and this will be followed up by a Health needs assessment through Public Health.

Emotional health and wellbeing is of enormous significance for Looked after Children. Nationally it is recognised that whilst one in ten children are believed to have some mental health issues, for Looked after Children this increases to approximately sixty per cent. In addition, it is a sobering fact that trauma and neglect are known to have an impact on life expectancy so it is essential that we improve outcomes for children in this area. One of the ways in which we assess mental wellbeing is through the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire. This is a series of questions completed by carers that can be used to provide an overall understanding of a child's needs. We have a specialist CAMHS service for Looked after Children who are placed in Surrey and further support can be offered as needed. Our outcomes for last year indicate that our children are in line with the national average.



## Education

Historically children in care have not achieved well and there is a significant gap between attainment levels for them and their peers. For education performance outcomes, all Looked after Children are included in the cohort. This does make direct comparison with other children difficult as the cohort includes children with severe disabilities, young people (including Unaccompanied Asylum seekers) who have absconded and may be missing long-term and children with a range of additional and complex needs as shown through their statements.

Children's learning and achievements will also be impacted by a complex range of issues, from the impact of the abuse and neglect they may have experienced prior to coming into care, the lack of consistent education both before and after their care periods, lack of expectation or aspiration for them and the emotional and mental health problems that may affect their ability to engage with learning. It is not surprising though that those children who are subject to care orders and who have been in care for significant periods of time do achieve much better than those who become looked after as teenagers. Frequently the latter young people, who are accommodated through agreement with their parents, will have been excluded from school or have extremely poor attendance for the period prior to their admission and there is limited time to support them in catching up with their peers before formal exams must be taken.

Education for children who are looked after by Surrey is supported and monitored through the Virtual School. All children in the care of Surrey are on the roll of the Virtual School as well as their own school. The Head Teacher of the Virtual school is supported by four Assistant Head Teachers who provide support in each of the four areas. Additional members of the Virtual School support tracking general progress and there is a specialist post for support towards higher education post-16.

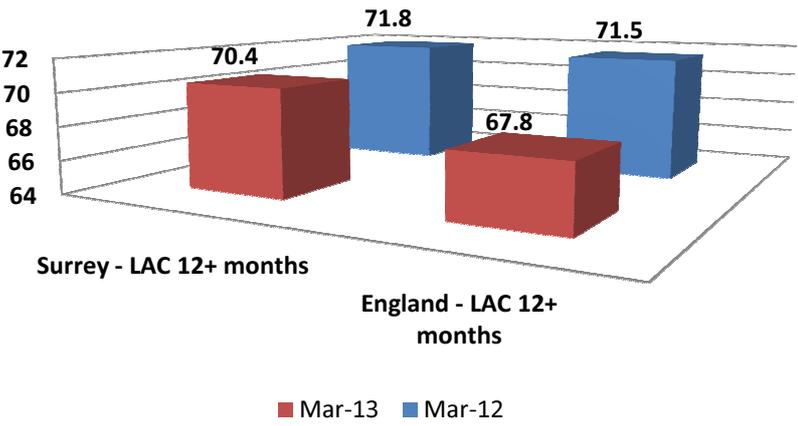
Narrowing the gap between the attainment of Looked after Children and all young people remains a high priority nationally. To support this priority the government is putting the Virtual School Head Teacher role on a statutory footing to signal how important it is for everyone to champion the education of Looked after Children, wherever they are placed. The strength of the Virtual School in Surrey provides a particular strength in our services for Looked after Children.

In terms of outcomes for Surrey's children in 2012-13 there were no permanent exclusions of Looked after Children for the third year in succession. The number of fixed term exclusions has been of concern but the priority given to this area of work across services has seen a substantial reduction from 82 cases in 2010-11 to 47 by the end of 2012-13.

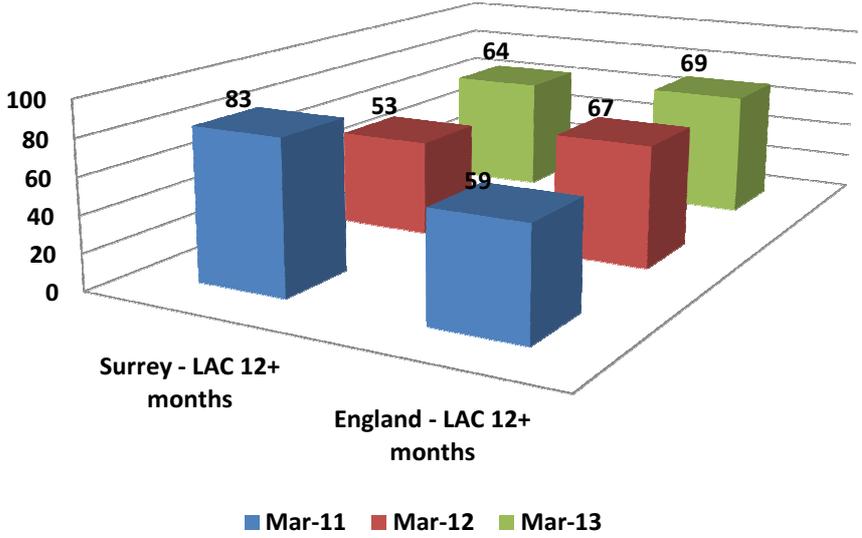
For children who are looked after by Surrey, a significant number have statements of special educational need which will impact on their attainment and learning outcomes. In the same way as for all school years, there will be different expectations for different cohorts of children – the main focus continues to be reviewing whether each child has been able to achieve at the correct level that would be expected for them, regardless of their care status or placement. We continue to have higher numbers of children with a statement of need compared

with national data. For 2012/13 progress at Key Stage 1 has improved whereas outcomes at GCSE (including English and Maths) have not been as strong. This was in line with our predictions. Work is currently underway tracking and monitoring progress for individual children for coursework and exam preparation.

### Children looked after for 12 months+ - percentage with Statement of Special Education Need Mar 12 - Mar 13

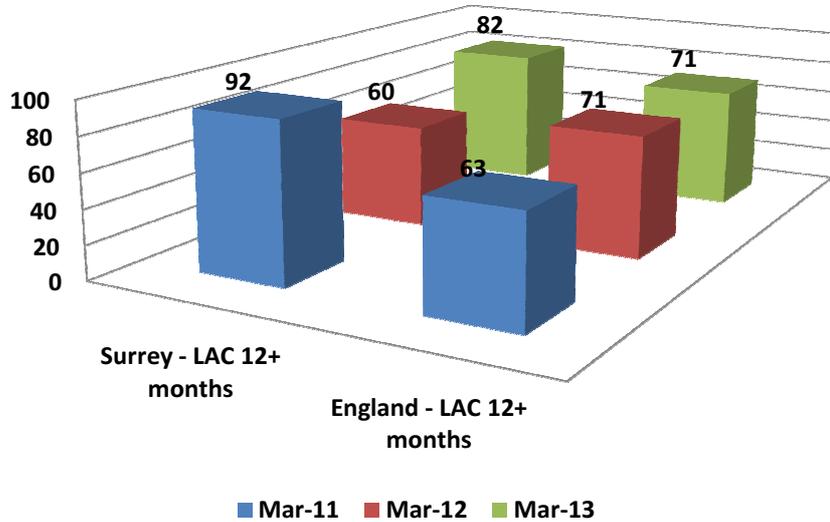


### Children looked after for 12+ months - percentage with Level 2+ at Key Stage 1 Reading Mar 11 - Mar 13

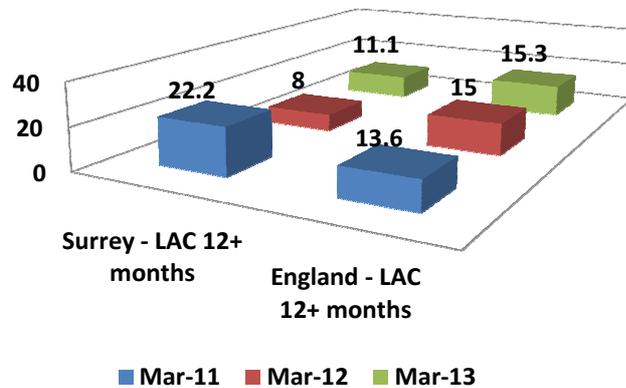


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## Children looked after for 12+ months - percentage with Level 2+ at Key Stage 1 Maths Mar 11 - Mar 13



## Children Looked after for 12+ months - Percentage with 5+ A\*-C at GCSE (inc Maths & English) Mar 11 - Mar 13



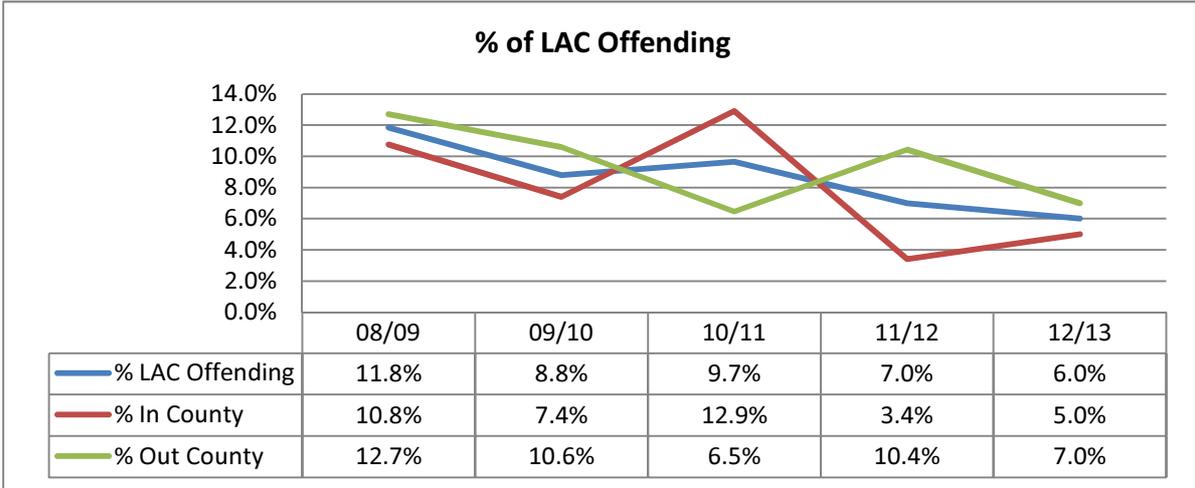
### Offending

An area of significantly improved outcomes for our children is around offending. To have a criminal record has a major impact on life chances and is not an acceptable outcome. Through close working with the police, led by the Youth Support Service (Youth Justice Service) and with significant support from our residential homes and staff, there has been a major turnaround in this area of work.

It was a sad consequence of being in care for too many young people that they were criminalised through their behaviour in care settings. Young people in

residential care, in particular, were often convicted of crimes against the home, for breaking windows for example, that would not have been applied to children in family homes. A successful outcome for 2012/13, as in the previous year, is that no young people placed in Surrey entered the criminal justice system for the first time. For those young people this has lasting positive impact for their future. We are seeking to widen the extent of this work to young people placed in out of county placements through the implementation of a regional protocol with south east authorities.

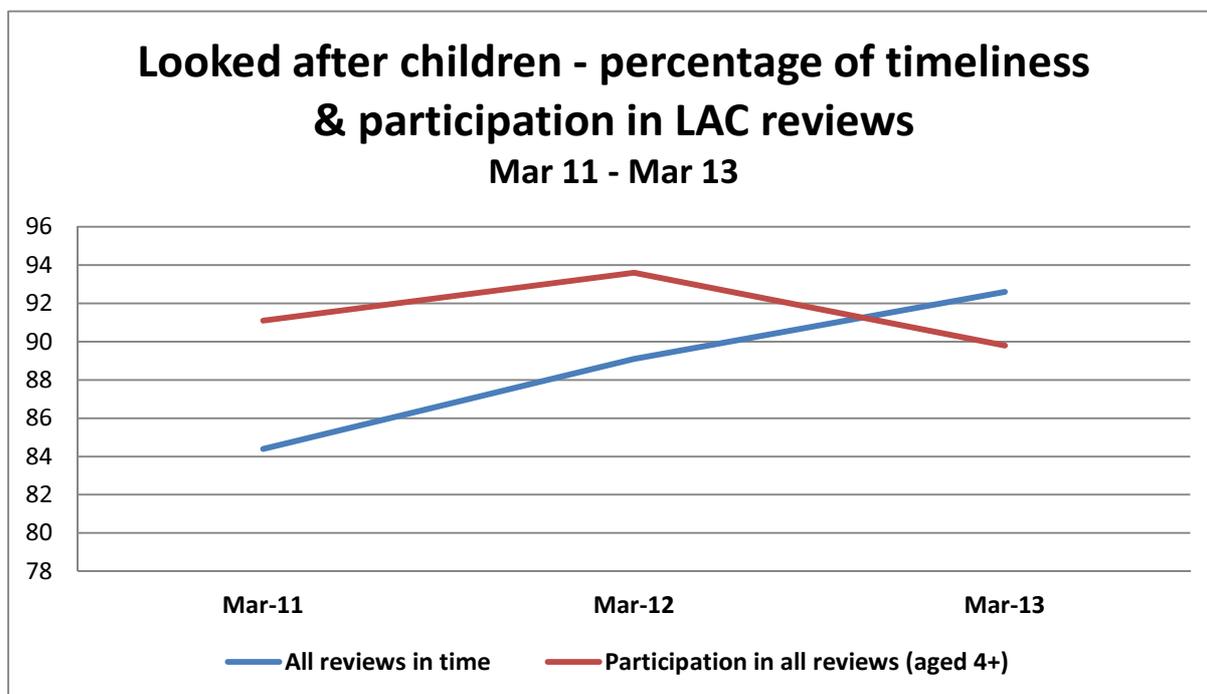
Overall 23 looked after young people were in the criminal justice system, a reduction from 36 young people in 2011/11 and 25 in 2011/12.



**Social Work support**

All children who are looked after must have an allocated, qualified social worker. The social worker plays a central role in the life of a child who is in care, as they are the lead professional with responsibility for co-ordinating the different aspects of the child’s life – from their care plan, health and education plans to supporting their placement and leading on plans for their future. It is therefore key that this person should be able to make and sustain good relationships with the child and their network.

All Looked after Children also have an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer who will meet with them and those looking after and working with them every six months to check on their progress. When a child first comes into care reviews are held more frequently to ensure everything is in place and that plans are not subject to delays. It is essential that reviews are held in a timely manner so that any difficulties are addressed as soon as possible. Our performance in ensuring reviews are held on time has shown good progress this year.



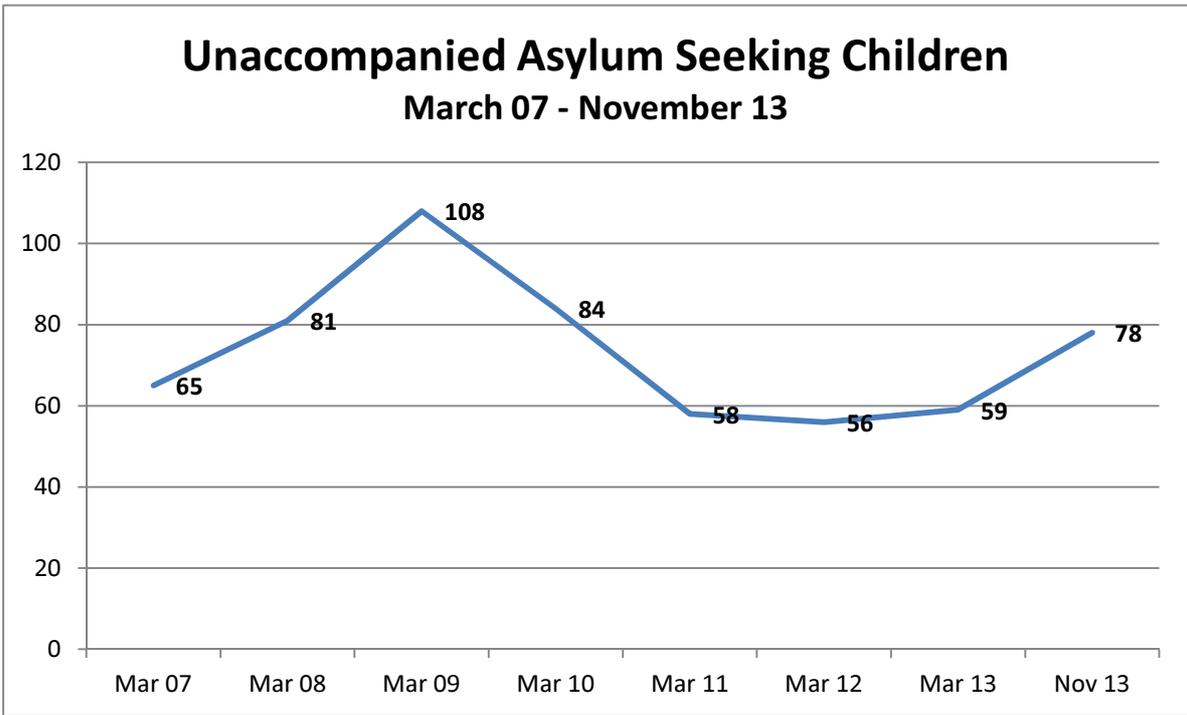
Although, there has been a drop in participation, the Independent Reviewing Service target of 90 percent has been met. The slight drop occurred because part way through the year we changed the format for consultation with young people. Although this change was at the request of young people in care, it took a number of months to fully implement; with the result that some Looked after Children were missed in the first round of consultations.

### **Children with specific needs**

#### Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Children and young people who are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) form a distinctive group of Looked after Children within Surrey's Children's Services. Whilst they will have many needs in common with all children, they may have additional needs through the circumstances of their departure from their country of origin, the journey they undertake to arrive in Britain and the adjustments necessary to cope and manage in a different culture and society. Young people may have been subject to traumatic events including rape or torture, they may have witnessed violence against family members and be unclear where parents or siblings are (or if they are still alive) or they may be brought into the UK by traffickers for either sexual exploitations or for working in drug farms or other intensive labour.

Numbers of UASC fluctuate, with no predictable pattern, although clearly there are significant areas where young people arrive from, including Africa, Afghanistan and Vietnam / China in line with world events.



Placed out of county

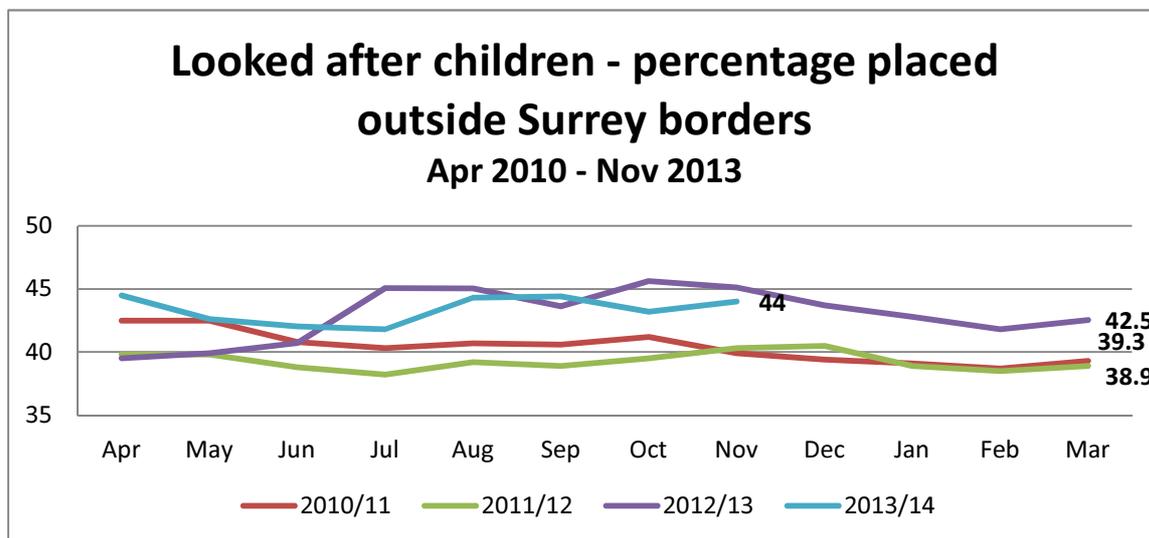
Children who are in the care of Surrey County Council may be placed in a Surrey placement that is not actually in the boundaries of Surrey County Council or an external placement that is not owned / provided by Surrey County Council for a variety of reasons. These include:

- Placement in a specialist residential resource, such as children’s home or residential school that provides care for specific categories of need such as those with profound and multiple disabilities, autism, mental health problems or challenging and risk taking behaviour, where those needs cannot be met by an existing Surrey children’s home or school
- Placement with Friends and Family carers. It may be appropriate that a family member, such as aunt or uncle, is able to provide care for a child whilst they are being looked after by Surrey. In these instances, the aunt / uncle / connected person will be subject to assessment and approval by the Fostering service as a Connected Person’s carer. Although these placements are “in-house” resources, they may not be within Surrey’s boundaries.
- Shortage of in-house provision. Whilst Care Services work to deliver a comprehensive range of placements, it is not always possible to provide for all children and young people. There are particular levels of needs, such as for 15 year old boys with challenging behaviour, where we have a shortage of local provision and need to make higher numbers of external placements.

There are a range of reasons why this group of children and young people may be more vulnerable than others within the looked after system. By being placed away from Surrey they are no longer part of their network and home environment. They may be separated from their parents, siblings, friends, school and the place they have grown up in, leading to feeling isolated and to losing a sense of belonging. Clearly if a young person is placed some distance from Surrey then there will be

issues with managing visits from social workers and family members, including unplanned or ad-hoc visits, and it is not as easy to monitor the quality of placements when they are not local or managed by Surrey County Council. Joint arrangements across authorities are not currently robust enough to support high-quality health care.

It is a high priority from the Corporate Parenting Strategy to reduce the number who need to be placed out of county, in line with national initiatives.



### Children with Disabilities

Whilst some children with disabilities will be in care following safeguarding concerns, in line with all children, for many they are accommodated as the impact of the disability can no longer be managed safely within their family or local school setting. The age and life stage at which families need support will vary for each, with some needing support from the moment of diagnosis whereas others find that the challenging behaviour that may intensify as the young person grows into adolescence requires additional help. The needs of each child and each family will vary enormously and therefore be subject to assessment to plan the way forward.

For all children with disabilities, in line with our practice for all children, the preferred option for those placed away from their families will be for care within a family setting. For those with additional / exceptional needs it may be that residential care or residential school provides the right support.

The majority of children with disabilities who are in the care system are teenagers who are placed in residential settings that combine both care and education to provide a consistent and suitable placement. Although their parents may well continue to be actively involved, with stays at home in holiday periods whenever possible for the children, they are formally acknowledged as looked after to recognise the shared responsibilities that social care and education have with the parents to make sure that this vulnerable group are cared for appropriately and safely. Their care is provided within the framework of looked after status, with the same expectations about care plans, regular social work visits and reviews by Independent Reviewing Officers.

We currently have 44 children in residential settings from the two Children with Disabilities teams and their care settings are as follows:

| <b>Children with Disabilities - Care setting as at 30 November 13</b> |  | <b>Total</b> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--------------|
| Children's Home                                                       |  | 17           |
| Residential Care Home                                                 |  | 6            |
| Residential Schools                                                   |  | 21           |
| <b>Total</b>                                                          |  | <b>44</b>    |

### Care leavers

It has long been recognised that young people who have grown up in care have significant problems to overcome as they grow into adulthood. This is directly linked to their early life experiences of abuse or neglect. Statistics sadly show that they are over-represented in the prison population, amongst those who are homeless or those with both physical and mental health problems, including substance misuse and mental illness.

The Leaving Care Act 2000 was a significant step forward in changing services for care leavers and set out legal requirements that local authorities should continue to provide a specified level of care for young people from 18 to 21 years old and that this should continue until the age of 24 for young people accessing higher education.

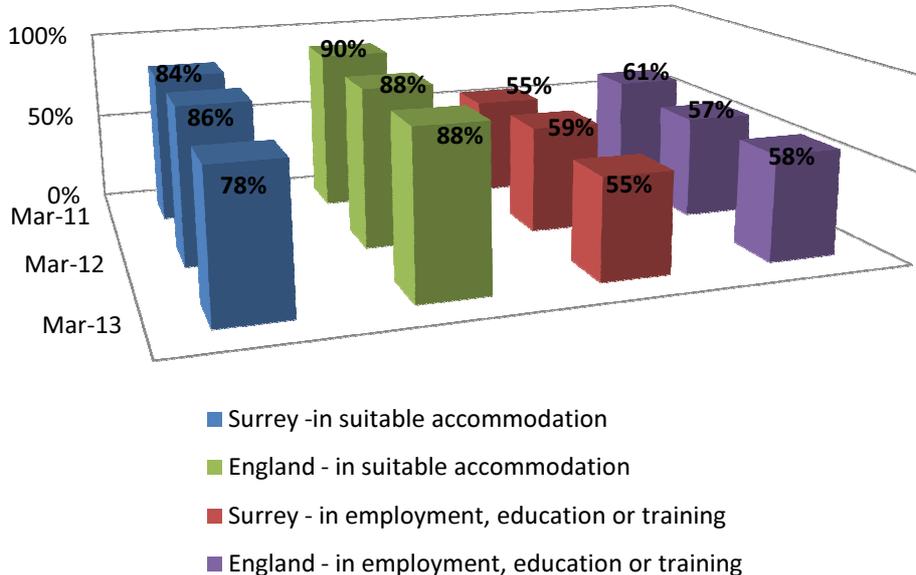
Nationally the Coalition government has placed a renewed emphasis on the need to support young people as they move towards independence and is renewing the expectations on local authorities to ensure effective support is providing for young people as they move to adulthood. For the first time, services and outcomes for care leavers will be a specific element of the new Ofsted framework for the inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

Surrey has a strong record for low numbers of children leaving care aged 16 and 17 (and usually they are returning home) which places us in a strong position to respond to these national initiatives. However, it remains a challenge to ensure adequate support is available for young people who need to be independent from a relatively young age. The average age for leaving home for all young people is now 27 years old so it can be seen that the challenge for 18 year olds to be successful in living independently is a tall expectation.

Two of the most significant measures for this group are around living in suitable accommodation and in being engaged in education, employment and training. Our outcomes are not good for this year and work is underway in a range of initiatives, such as through the resources we have from Supporting People for housing and links with Districts and Boroughs to address this. Whilst 54 of our young people are currently continuing to live with their foster families post-18, helping to provide stability and care whilst they complete education for example, further work needs to be developed to improve outcomes.

## Care leavers at age 19 - accommodation & activity

Mar 11 - Mar 13



### Care Council, Children's Participation and Impact of their Views

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 introduced the requirement for all local councils to have a Care Council for children and young people in the care of their local authority. Surrey's Care Council is a thriving group, run by our children in care with the support of apprentices who have care experience. The Care Council works hard to engage with children and young people of all ages and across all settings. The Care Council is supported through the Children's Rights and Participation team.

Care Council membership for Surrey is open to all young people and care leavers. Care Council meet once a month and members commit to attending meetings and activities. Enabling young people and care leavers actively to participate provides benefits to both the service and the individual young people. It empowers young people and the service to influence change for the better and to support young people in feeling connected and relevant. Young people actively engaged in participation activities advise that they feel positive being a part of something and are able to influence change.

Care Council Juniors caters for the younger children whilst targeted residential workshops or other events are run for particular groups through the year. The full range of work undertaken by the young people and by the apprentices can be seen in their annual report.

### Corporate Parenting Strategy and Lead Members role

All parents want the best for their children and it is the responsibility of all members to ensure that services for Looked after Children are of the highest possible

standard and good enough for their own children. Corporate Parenting is the phrase used to describe the responsibility that elected members and officers have for the children who are in care / looked after by their local authority.

In order to oversee this responsibility, a Corporate Parenting Board is in place to hold responsibility on behalf of the Council and partner agencies for ensuring services are in place for children and young people in our care. In addition, the Lead Member for Children and Families has a key statutory role as part of ensuring that Surrey delivers its Corporate Parenting responsibilities effectively. The Lead Member chairs the Corporate Parenting Board which comprises of members, officers and key representatives from partner agencies. It is a requirement for the Lead Member to provide an annual report on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board, which provides further details on the range of work undertaken to support Looked after Children and care leavers.

The Corporate Parenting Board has ownership of the Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out our priorities for providing care. The priorities from the strategy are around reducing the numbers of children coming into care through the provision of effective early help support, increasing the numbers of placements providing within Surrey to reduce the numbers who need to move out of county, whilst ensuring that those who are placed out of county are not disadvantaged by being placed away. For all children a key priority is to ensure that they are supported to do the best they can, to prepare them for a successful and fulfilling future.

Below the Corporate Parenting Board there are a range of operational groups, headed by the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and supported through Area groups, to oversee the work to improve services and to monitor and track outcomes for Looked after Children. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is attached as Appendix 1 and the Corporate Parenting Framework is attached at Appendix 2.

## **Conclusion**

This report has provided an overview of the indicators and measures used as part of our work to understand the outcomes in a range of areas for our Looked after Children and care leavers and to highlight areas of strength or development for the future. They cannot be considered in isolation but must be seen in conjunction with a range of information, including annual reports from specific services such as Adoption, Independent Reviewing Officers or Virtual School as well as wider information such as the recruitment and retention of social workers and foster carers that all impact on how good and effective our care is.

Central to all our work must be to ensure that we have the means to hear children's views and to support them in making a difference and improving the ways in which we care for them. For each individual child we need to be confident that we have provided the best support that we can to help them to grow and flourish as they move into the world of adulthood.

**Sheila Jones**  
**Head of Countywide Services**  
**January 2014**

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