Department for Education

Children looked-after by local authorities in England

Guide to the SSDA903 collection 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 – Version 1.2

October 2026

Legislation:
The data in this census are collected under section 83 of the Children Act 1989.

Contact details:

For general enquiries, please raise a data collections service request.

Please share this guide

We would like everyone who collects information for our statistical return to have access to a copy of this guide and the associated validation rules. Both these documents can be downloaded from the DfE data collection website.

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Version history

Version	Date	Update
1.0	October 2025	First version published. Aligned to 2025 to 2026 collection version 1.2.
1.1	June 2026	Aligned to 2025 to 2026 collection version 1.3
1.2	October 2026	Updates include: • 2.11.5: Clarification that activity and accommodation should only be reported for 22- to 25-year-old care leavers if they have been in touch • 2.12: Clarification that social worker episodes before the child was born should not be reported. • 2.12.1: Clarification that if an alternative ID (to SWE ID) is used for a social worker then this must be used consistently for the worker within and across reporting years.

This document is version 1.2.

Introduction

This document gives guidance on the completion and submission of the SSDA903 statistical return in England for the 2026 to 2027 year.

An SSDA903 return should be completed for every child who is looked-after during the course of the year ending 31 March 2027 and for a group of former children looked after whose 17th to 25th birthdays fell during the year.

Further copies of these notes may be freely distributed and copied. A downloadable version of this document and the associated validation rules are available on the department's website.

Summary of main changes for 2026 to 2027

A new module has been added to the collection to record the start and end dates of deprivation of liberty orders. These should be reported for any child looked after on or after 1 April 2026.

Part 1: Overview of the SSDA903 collection

1.1 Purpose of the SSDA903 return

The aim of the SSDA903 return is to collect information about children who are looked-after by local authorities during the year ending 31 March 2027; and activity and accommodation for those who have recently left care (now aged 17-25).

An SSDA903 return is required for 2 groups of children:

- every child who is looked-after by your local authority at any time during the year ending 31 March 2027
- relevant and former relevant young people whose 17th to 25th birthday falls within the collection period - for the 2026 to 2027 collection, this therefore covers young people whose date of birth fell between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2010

For children who were looked-after during the year, the information relates to their placement, legal status and adoption from care (where appropriate). For those who have recently left care, the information required relates to their current activity and accommodation. The purpose of the SSDA903 is to provide the government with the necessary information to evaluate the outcome of policy initiatives and to monitor objectives on children looked after, both during their time in care and on reaching adulthood. The data collected is used in the provision of information for research and statistical information in response to parliamentary questions.

1.2 Legal duties under the Data Protection Act

1.2.1 Data protection and data sharing

Data from which is it possible to identify children and parents/carers (in any medium, including within a management information system) is personal data.

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) put in place certain safeguards regarding the use of personal data by organisations, including the department, local authorities and schools. Both give rights to those (known as data subjects) about whom data is processed, such as children, their parents/carers and staff. This includes (amongst other information that we are obliged to provide):

- the right to know the types of data being held
- why it is being held
- to whom it may be communicated

For the purposes of data protection legislation, the terms 'process', 'processed' or 'processing' apply to any activity involving the personal data, such as

- collecting
- storing
- sharing
- destroying
- etcetera – please note: this list is not exhaustive

1.2.2 Legal duties under the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018: privacy notices

Being transparent and providing accessible information to individuals about how you will use (process) their personal data is a key element of both the GDPR and the DPA 2018. The most common way to provide such information is through a privacy notice. Please see the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) website for further guidance on privacy notices.

For local authorities, this means that you must provide clear and accessible privacy notices that inform children, parents/carers and staff:

- what data is collected about them
- for what purposes the data is collected
- how the data is used (processed)
- what the lawful basis is for processing
- for how long the data is retained
- with whom the data is shared
- why the data is shared
- whether we intend to transfer it to another country, and
- whether we do automated decision-making or profiling

The department provides suggested wording for privacy notices that local authorities may wish to use. However, where the suggested wording is used, the local authority **must review and amend** the wording to reflect local business needs and circumstances. This is especially important, as the local authority will process data that is not solely for use within departmental data collections. The privacy notice should also include a link to the gov.uk website, which provides information on how the department processes data for:

- children and young people under 18
- local authority employees

It is recommended that the privacy notice is made available to data subjects via the internet as well as handed out in paper form or placed on an accessible noticeboard. Privacy notices do not need to be issued on an annual basis as long as new children and parents/carers are made aware of the notices and they are readily available electronically or in paper format.

1.2.3 Legal duties under the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018: data security

Providers and local authorities have a (legal) duty under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 to ensure that any personal data they process is handled and stored securely. Further information on data security is available from the Information Commissioner's Office.

Where personal data is not properly safeguarded, it could compromise the safety of individuals and damage your reputation. Your responsibility as a data controller extends to those who have access to your data beyond your organisation where they are working on your behalf; for example, where external IT suppliers can remotely access your information. The 'Responsible for information' page provides further guidance and advice.

It is **vital** that all staff with access to personal data understand the importance of:

- protecting personal data
- being familiar with your security policy
- putting security procedures into practice

As such, you should provide appropriate initial and refresher training for your staff.

1.3 History of the collection

Before 1998, the SSDA903 collection covered all children looked after. Between 1998 and 2003, the SSDA0903 return covered only a one third sample of children, those with a day of birth divisible by 3. There was then an aggregate return, the CLA 100 return, which was used to provide 'fast track' data and to gross the sample data. In 2001, the AD1 (children adopted) returns was introduced and the OC3 return (19th birthday) in 2002. From 2004, the CLA100 return was discontinued as the SSDA903 reverted to covering all children looked after. Becoming a web-based data collection for the first time, the SSDA903 return also incorporated the AD1, OC1 and OC3 returns. The OC2 data (outcomes for children looked after) was introduced in 2009, the aggregate OC2 collection was discontinued the following year. Information on timings of adoption decisions was added in 2010. The OC1 data was discontinued in 2012. In 2014, the OC3 cohort was expanded to include all former relevant young people and collect information at their 19th, 20th and 21st birthdays. This was expanded further in 2016 to cover 17th and 18th birthdays and again in 2023 to cover young people up to their 25th

birthday. In 2024 the collection was expanded to collect social worker episodes for children looked after at 31 March and in 2027 to collect information on deprivation of liberty orders.

1.4 Completing the SSDA903 return

The SSDA903 return for 2026 to 2027 will be submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) via the CLA27 application, which will be placed on the internet by 1 April 2027 and local authorities will be advised in good time as to the web page location and log in procedures.

Local authorities are required to enter their CLA data return by 31 May 2027 and must clear all errors and sign off their CLA return by 30 June 2027.

Local authorities need to let DfE know when this task has been completed. It will not be possible to sign the return off when errors are outstanding. Delays in returning the submission will delay the finalisation of the statistics and therefore reduce their value to both the DfE and to local authorities. Information on how to use the children looked-after application can be accessed by the help function in the CLA27 application on the internet.

The information collected on social worker episodes can be uploaded at the same time as the main CLA data return if you wish, or you may choose to work on this data after you have completed your main CLA data return. The social worker episodes data must also be signed off by 30 June 2027 and will need to be signed off separately to your main CLA data return.

1.5 Loading data

Data can either be entered manually directly onto the screen, or data may be entered electronically, either via xml files or csv files. Guidance for the submission of SSDA903 data in electronic format are set out in the technical specification available on the website. There will be 2 portals for loading the data. The usual web portal for the SSDA903 and a new SW portal for the Social Worker data. The submission must be in the form of either:

- XML file(s) or
- a number of CSV files (the number depending on whether there are any unaccompanied asylum seeker children (UASC) looked-after during the year)

The social worker episodes data will need to be loaded separately to the rest of your return, using the SW portal. It will need to be loaded after your header file or main XML load (containing header information) has loaded on the web portal.

1.6 Amending data

Records for 2026 to 2027 may either be amended manually or electronically by deleting and then re-loading the files in the form of a re-submission. Local authorities can manually amend their own records for previous years (all years between the 2003 to 2004 collection and the 2025 to 2026 collection) but they cannot do this by deleting and reloading in the form of a re-submission.

Historical records prior to the 2003 to 2004 collection requiring correction can only be corrected by DfE. We cannot accept emails containing child level information, please note that this includes emails sent from GCSX accounts. Amendments should be preferably sent to DfE through the Children Looked After Collection system notes followed by a service request. If you decide to send a file on the secure transfer system S2S, please raise a service request using the link on page 2 of this guide and inform us of the name of the file.

1.7 Validation checks and rejected records

The children looked-after data form an important information resource, and DfE attaches a high priority to improving and maintaining the accuracy of this data. The validation checks are designed to identify possible errors by checking records for internal consistency, as well as maintaining the integrity of each child history over time by checking each year's submission with previous records.

1.7.1 Checks which are applied

When the SSDA903 returns are initially submitted, the DfE computer system submits each record to a series of checks that are designed to identify, and reject:

- unlikely or impossible combinations of legal status and placement
- unlikely or impossible sequences of dates
- information which contradicts that already held about the child, in particular details submitted for the beginning of the current year which do not match those at the end of the previous year
- information in the supplementary milestone fields that contradicts details recorded in the episode date for the same child

Any record which fails any of the validation checks will be shown as being in error and will need correcting. An explanation of each validation check and guidance on how to make corrections is provided in the document ‘SSDA903 Validation checks for 1 April 2026 onwards’.

Child histories across years

The data which has been collected on the SSDA903 since 1992 is particularly valuable since it provides a complete care history of every looked-after child. This cumulative dataset forms a unique and valuable resource which steadily becomes more valuable as the years go by because it allows analyses of time-trends in the way children are looked-after and their pattern of care. This is why we are concerned that individual SSDA903 records show consistent episode details from year to year, and DfE applies cross-year validation checks when processing each year's submissions.

1.7.2 Time limits in SSDA903 validation checks

The SSDA903 validation checks are not intended to be a method of supervising or controlling legal or social work practice; they are merely designed to identify and query statistical data that are likely to be in error. Hence, time limits are drawn more loosely in the validations than a strict adherence to the law would require.

If, for the sake of example, a child had an 'emergency protection order' (EPO) legal status for one day longer than the law allows, we want this to be accurately shown on the SSDA903 collection. We do not want local authority colleagues to 'adjust' records with false dates in order to squeeze them into legally prescribed time limits. Fully accurate and reliable statistical data is the priority. If there was, for example, a national trend for EPOs to slightly exceed the statutory time limit, accurate statistics could usefully reflect this and bring this trend to light.

On the other hand (to take the theoretical example cited above), EPO legal statuses which were recorded as being several days longer than the statutory limit would be more likely to be a result of coding errors or missing episodes on the SSDA903. The presence of the validation error on the child record means that this should be checked and any coding error or missing episodes rectified. If, after checking, the data is found to be accurate then please provide an explanation and request the error be bypassed.

1.8 Definitions used within this guide

1.8.1 Child

A 'child' is anyone aged under 18 and the words 'child' and 'children' are used in this sense throughout this guide. In most cases children cease to be looked-after on their 18th birthday.

On reaching their 18th birthday, the status of these young people changes; they cease to be children looked after and become young adults eligible for help and assistance from the local authority. Such help and assistance is usually provided in accordance with the various 'after care' provisions of the Children Act (for example section 24). For this group

of children, the episode should be closed on the child's 18th birthday and the reason episode ceased code which most accurately reflects the destination of the child should be chosen.

Exception

Young people may be accommodated by a local authority until their 21st birthday if they are in a community home which is suitable for children aged 16 and over. In practice these are few in number and tend to be young persons with severe physical or mental disabilities. See Children Act 1989, Section 20(5).

Care details for young people aged over 18 years should only be included in this data return if they are placed in a community home (which is suitable for children over 16), and if the local authority considers that it would be in the child's best interest for it to remain (for example, if to do so would safeguard or promote the child's welfare). This small group of children will have a legal status of V2 and a placement code of K2. We understand that they are generally young people with special needs who are not ready at 18 to live on their own in independent accommodation, and that most of them transfer to adult services in due course.

1.8.2 Looked-after

The term 'looked-after' has a specific, legal meaning, based on the Children Act 1989, and it is intended that the SSDA903 collection should follow this definition as closely as possible. There are a few exceptions, which have been introduced purely for statistical purposes and wherever these occur appropriate guidance is given in order to achieve consistency and comparability of data between local authorities.

Under the Children Act 1989, a child is looked-after by a local authority if he or she falls into one of the following:

- is provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, [Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21]
- is subject to a care order [Children Act 1989, Part IV]
- is subject to a placement order

It is possible that a placement order is made without a care order or interim care order being made, or the child not being subject to section 20 of the 1989 Act. For example, the local authority working with a family and believing that the child should be removed and be placed for adoption. The local authority does not have to apply for a care order first (though this would be the usual situation) and then a placement order; it could apply simply for a placement order.

1.8.3 Provision of accommodation

Local authorities can provide children with accommodation under a wide range of circumstances, for example:

- as the result of an agreement between the local authority and the child's parents or guardians that being accommodated would be in the child's best interest
- the child having been remanded to the care of a local authority by a criminal court
- because the child is helping the police with their enquiries
- the child has been placed for adoption, and the local authority is acting as the adoption agency
- the child is subject to a police protection order

In all these examples, the child will be subject to a different legal status, and the circumstances will be very different. However, in every case, the child is being looked-after under the terms of the act because he/she is being accommodated.

1.8.4 Continuous period of more than 24 hours

Section 22 of the Children Act stipulates very clearly that for a child to be looked after by a local authority, they need to be accommodated for a continuous period of more than 24 hours. Periods of being looked-after of less than 24 hours in total must not be recorded on the SSDA903.

Exception

The only 2 exceptions to the rule that for a child to be looked-after they need to be accommodated for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, relate to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (see section 1.9.7) and children with a legal status of 'V3' (short-term breaks when each break is being recorded as an individual episode). For statistical purposes, information is required for this group of children for receiving respites for periods of less than 24 hours duration, providing the periods include an overnight stay. For further information on the recording of data for children being looked-after under a series of short-term breaks see section 1.10.

1.8.5 Care order

A child is a looked-after child when subject to a care order. There are no exceptions to this rule. In these circumstances however, there is no obligation for the local authority to accommodate the child. For example, a child under a care order can be placed with their parents or other relative (see section 2.2.8).

A care order continues in force until either:

- it is discharged by a court

- the child reaches their 18th birthday
- child leaves care through an adoption order, special guardianship order or child arrangement order

A local authority cannot unilaterally end a care order, and therefore a child, once subject to a care order, will remain 'looked-after' until one of the above events occurs. However, when a placement order is made the care order no longer has effect but is reactivated if the placement order is revoked.

1.8.6 An episode on the SSDA903

For the purposes of entering data onto the SSDA903, the period of time during which a child is looked-after by the local authority is broken down into 'episodes' of care. Each episode represents a period of being looked-after under the same legal status and in the same placement and with the same placement provider. When either the legal status, the child's placement or the placement provider changes a new episode must begin. Episodes must involve at least an overnight stay, which means in effect that an episode cannot start and end on the same day.

1.8.7 When to record a new episode

A new episode should be started:

- every time a child starts to be looked-after
- when there is a change of legal status code. The renewal of an on-going legal status does not require a new episode
- when there is a change of placement. There are certain circumstances, where the change of placement is a temporary placement, where a placement change does not need to be recorded on the SSDA903 record (see notes on 'temporary placements' in section 2.2.8 of this guide)
- when the child's placement and legal status remain the same, but the placement provider changes, for example a child in an adoption placement that changes to a regional adoption agency

Where a single open episode continues unchanged from year to year, a record must still be submitted every year for that child. The actual date the episode commenced should be recorded, but the date and reason the episode ceased should be left blank if that episode is still open on 31 March.

It is unlikely, although possible, for a child to cease to be looked-after and start again on the same day. The way to record this depends on the circumstances of the child. If the circumstances of the child have not changed significantly, then the brief period of not being looked-after can be ignored (so both periods should be treated as one continuous period). A new episode will be required if the placement of the child changes from one period to the next. If on the other hand, the circumstances of the second period of care are quite different from the first, requiring at least a new 'child in need' (CIN) code, and

possibly a new legal status, then it is necessary to record the break in care on the SSDA903 record. To do this the child should be shown to have started the second period on the following day. This is of course not entirely accurate, but it is only one day in the full care history of the child, whose record in all other respects will be an accurate reflection of his or her time in local authority care.

Periods of accommodation under PACE for less than 24 hours should not be recorded on the SSDA903. Local authorities may wish to record such periods on local databases for local management purposes, but these should not be included in SSDA903 records submitted to DfE. 'Adjusting' such periods to make them appear to start on one day and finish on the next, so that they will pass DfE validations, should not be considered.

If a child is transferred to your local authority from the care of another local authority, the date the first episode commenced is the date the child started to be looked-after by your authority. This is because we do not link child histories between different local authorities.

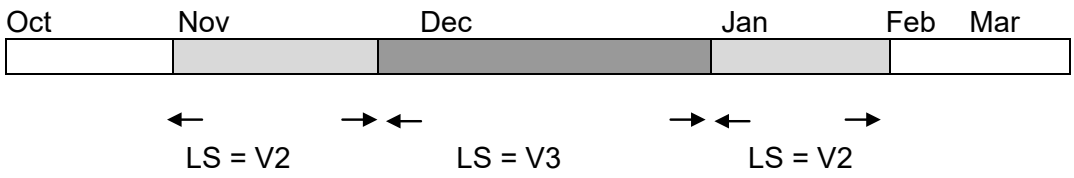
1.8.8 Period of care

Episodes of care are 'building blocks' for a period of care, which is defined as a period during which a child is continuously looked-after by a local authority. Such periods consist of one or more episodes, and their total duration must exceed 24 hours. A period of care can involve one or more placements and could consist of more than one legal status. The legal statuses of the episodes within any period must be either:

- anything other than being looked-after in a series of short-term placements (meaning not in respite care, codes 'V3' or 'V4')
- 'V3' or 'V4' (but not both)

If a child receiving respite care (legal status codes 'V3' or 'V4') becomes subject to any other legal status, that period of care effectively ceases and a new one begins. However, for recording purposes, this is only entered as a legal status change, since there is no actual break in the child's care. Similarly, when a child being looked-after under any legal status other than 'V3' or 'V4' becomes subject to a respite agreement, a new period of care will commence, even if there is no intervening period between the 2 events. In the following example, the care history of the child, although unbroken, will consist of 3 periods of care.

Figure 1: Example of period of care including respite



1 November to 2 December: legal status is ‘V2’

3 December to 4 January: legal status is ‘V3’

5 January to 6 February: legal status is ‘V2’

In summary, it follows from the above that a period of care begins when either:

- the child starts to be looked-after
- the legal status of the child changes from ‘respite’ to ‘non-respite’
- the legal status of the child changes from ‘non-respite’ to ‘respite’

and ends when either:

- the legal status changes from ‘respite” to ‘non-respite’
- the legal status changes from ‘non-respite’ to “respite’
- the child ceases to be looked-after, and either returns to the care of their parents or guardian or, if aged 18 or over, either lives independently or transfers to the care of adult social services

1.8.9 Starting to be looked-after

Because “respite care”, as described in section 1.10 of this guide, constitutes a special group of children, it is normal practice in virtually all SSDA903 outputs to exclude them from counts of children looked after. Counts of children starting to be looked-after is no exception, and therefore the term “Starting to be looked-after” is defined as the commencement of a new “non-respite” period of care, meaning those periods of care defined under the first two bullet points above.

1.8.10 Ceasing to be looked-after

Similarly, for SSDA903 purposes ceasing to be looked-after is defined as the cessation of a “non-respite” period of care. Counts of children ceasing to be looked-after exclude periods of care which contain legal statuses V3 or V4, meaning those periods of care defined under the last two bullet points above.

It is rare that a calculation of the total number of children looked-after on 31 March, plus the number of children starting to be looked-after during the following year, minus the number ceasing to be looked-after during the following year will reconcile exactly with a total figure for the following 31 March (which is produced by a count of all children looked-after on that day); it will, however, be a close approximation. The reason the calculation is unlikely to be exact is because some children have more than one separate spell of being looked-after during the year. For statistical purposes we only count the first admission within a local authority if a child started to be looked-after more than once, and we only count the last discharge within a local authority if a child ceased to be looked-after more than once.

In practice, however, analysis shows that the number of children who start more than once or cease more than once in the year is relatively small; and that the various patterns of care which result from such children tend to balance each other out. This means that a projected 31 March figure calculated in this way is likely to be a very close approximation to the actual figure reached by a count of all children looked-after on 31 March. For example, the total number of children looked-after in England on 31 March 2024, as reported by local authorities, is within 1% of a projected total figure which can be calculated by taking the figure for the previous 31 March, adding all the reported starts in the year, and subtracting all the reported leavers.

1.9 Children included or excluded

1.9.1 Children included on the SSDA903

The following groups of children will all be included on the SSDA903 return:

- children who receive a pattern of short breaks or short-term placements, under the terms of an agreement, but who otherwise live at home. These are sometimes called 'Family Link' or 'Shared Care' schemes (for more information about this special group of children and how they should be recorded on the SSDA903 see Section 1.10 of this Guide)
- children who are placed for adoption by the local authority. This is a separate placement status and must be recorded as such. The child does not cease to be looked-after until an adoption order has been made
- children aged 16 or 17 who are in supported accommodation in preparation for leaving care. Their looked-after status and the date they cease to be looked-after should be a matter of record in the care plan, and the date of ceasing to be looked-after recorded on SSDA903 should reflect this
- unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) aged under 18 for whom the local authority conclude as part of a formal decision-making process, that in order to safeguard and promote the child's welfare they should be looked-after. These children are regarded as being "accommodated" by voluntary agreement under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- children in an emergency foster placement with a relative or friend under Regulation 11. This kind of placement can last a maximum of 42 days
- children remanded to local authority accommodation as a result of an order imposed by the youth court in criminal proceedings. (This is not the same as a Children Act Supervision Order, which is not a looked-after status)
- (Since 3 December 2012, when the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPOA) came into force) children similarly remanded to youth detention accommodation.

1.9.2 Children excluded from the SSDA903

The following groups of children will not be included on the SSDA903. Please note that for some of these children the legal situation may only apply to children prior to 3 December 2012, when the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPOA) came into force:

- children who are receiving a service, or some other means of support, from social services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, but are not being accommodated
- young people who have left care and are receiving support under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989
- children subject to Children Act 1989 Supervision Orders
- children subject to Children Act 1989 Residence Orders (used until 22 April 2015)
- children subject to a child arrangement order
- children who have left care because of a special guardianship order
- children who have appeared in court and have been 'bailed to reside where the local authority directs', but who are not accommodated by the local authority itself
- children who are privately fostered[1]
- children who are not looked-after by the local authority but who are to be adopted. These applications are usually from stepparents or relatives
- children in a long stay hospital if the local authority is not accommodating them, even if they were previously looked-after. If they return to foster care/children's home on discharge they will resume being looked-after.
- the following are also not looked-after (and therefore do not appear on the SSDA903), except when subject to a concurrent care order.
- Children subject to a Detention and Training Orders, Section 233 Sentencing Act 2020
- children detained under Sections 250 to 254 of the Sentencing Act 2020, even if they are placed in local authority accommodation

1.9.3 'Section 25' children

Section 25 of the Children Act refers to the granting by a Family Proceedings Court of a secure accommodation order, to authorise the continued placement of a child in secure accommodation for more than 72 hours. The main groups of children in secure units subject to a Section 25 order are:

[1] The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

- children who are likely to cause injury to themselves or others if placed in any other type of accommodation
- children being remanded to local authority accommodation awaiting trial, or awaiting sentence following conviction (Section 92 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012)
- children detained under PACE, who are helping the police with their enquiries, prior to either being charged or released.

For all these children, a local authority is required to show that the child has a history of absconding, and is likely to abscond further, before a Section 25 order is granted. If this cannot be demonstrated, the child will be placed in a less restricted environment.

All the above 3 groups are children looked after by virtue of the fact that they are being accommodated in local authority accommodation, but Section 25 does not in itself constitute a 'looked-after' legal status. There must be a separate, concurrent legal status, for example that the child is already the subject of a care order, or interim care order (ICO) under Section 31 of the Children Act; the child is accommodated by the local authority under Section 20 or the child is remanded by the youth court under the provision of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act underpinning the fact that the child is being looked-after, and this is the legal status that would be recorded on the SSDA903. The appropriate placement code would be 'K1'.

Other groups of children who may be accommodated in a secure unit are:

- children serving all or part of a court ordered sentence in a secure unit. Generally speaking, these are children who have been convicted of a crime, but for whom detention in a Young Offenders Institution is considered inappropriate or detrimental to their welfare
- children remanded to youth detention accommodation on order of a criminal court, awaiting trial, or awaiting sentence following conviction (Section 102 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012) (see section 1.8.4 of this guide)

No Section 25 order is required for either of these 2 groups, as in both cases the decision that the child needs to be placed in a secure unit has been taken by a criminal court. The first group are not looked-after, unless they were subject to a care order prior to being charged; and the second group are not looked after unless they have been placed in local authority accommodation.

1.9.4 Children in custody

Prior to 3 December 2012, the situation regarding children sentenced to custody was the status of these children would depend on whether the child was the subject of a care order. If the child, prior to sentence, was subject to a care order then this child would remain looked-after. If a child were being looked-after under Section 20, the child would

cease to be looked-after as they would be accommodated by the juvenile secure estate and not by the local authority.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPOA), received royal assent in May 2012. This creates a new custodial remand framework for 12-17-year olds who are charged with or convicted of a criminal offence or concerned in extradition proceedings. From 3 December 2012, all children (young people up to age 18) who are remanded to youth detention accommodation as a result of being charged with or convicted of an offence will be 'looked-after' by the designated local authority.

1.9.5 Joint funding

The term 'joint funding' is taken to mean a placement which is jointly funded from 2 or more sources (such as a placement in a special school funded both by social services and the local authority). So long as the child is looked-after, it will be subject to the normal rules of placement and legal status, regardless of where the funding is coming from.

It is not the purpose of this statistical guide to pre-empt decisions which are part of social work practice, as to which children are to be looked-after. Whether a child is looked-after should be a practice issue determined locally depending on the child's circumstances and on welfare grounds, in accordance with the provisions of the Children Act.

The fact that a child is looked-after will clearly be a matter of record, as such a status has various implications (typically: drawing up a care plan, inclusion on a placement register, allocation of a social worker, carrying out of reviews). Our concern from the statistical point of view is to ensure that when an authority has identified any child as looked-after, he or she is correctly recorded as such in local records, and on the statistical returns which are derived from these records.

1.9.6 If a young woman who is looked-after has a baby, is the baby automatically looked-after?

This is a decision for social work practitioners, based on the circumstances, and the welfare of the child. The statistics should simply reflect whatever decision has been made.

1.9.7 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) on the SSDA903

Asylum seekers aged under 18 who are receiving child services from a local authority need to be considered in 2 groups; accompanied asylum seekers and unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC).

The first group will be treated in exactly the same way as any other child living with their family that may be in need, and local authorities will take decisions as to whether or not they become looked after in the same way as they would assess any other child. If they become 'looked-after', then they will need to be shown on the SSDA903, and the 903 coding of these children will be the same as for any other. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are children looked after. They become children looked after because they are without accommodation, separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who by law has responsibility to do so. Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, local authorities are under a statutory obligation to provide accommodation for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who present in their area as a child who is lost or abandoned. Once an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child has been looked after by a local authority for more than 24 hours, they become a looked-after child (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989) and should be safeguarded and have their welfare promoted in the same way as any other looked-after child. The 903 coding of these children is most likely to be N8 – Absent parenting.

UASC should be recorded on the SSDA903, in virtually every respect, as any other looked-after child. The only additional rule that applies to UASC (for data recording purposes only) is that they should be recorded as a looked-after child as soon as they come to the attention of local authorities and not only when they have been accommodated for 24 hours. This is because unlike other children, all UASC who come to the attention of local authorities will inevitably become looked-after (because they are unaccompanied) so for data recording purposes only the 24-hour rule is dis-applied for this group of children. This also means that if a UASC goes missing in those first 24 hours they should always be recorded and reported to DfE as missing from care so that the numbers of UASC which go missing can be accurately recorded.

Any looked after child that remains missing (including UASC that go missing within the first 24 hours) should continue to be reported as a missing looked-after child in the SSDA903 data return and the case should remain open until the child's 18th birthday, at which point the case should be closed using the appropriate reason code. Records must not be closed before this point.

To achieve consistency across the country in the way this special group of children is held in our database, local authorities are requested to apply the following points:

- ethnic origin code - Ethnicity is collected for all children and records the ethnicity as stated by the parent/guardian or child. To record the ethnicity of a looked-after child, the child themselves should be asked to identify which of the ethnicity codes set out below most closely matches his or her ethnicity. However, for children who are not deemed mature enough to have capacity to consent to sharing their personal data with others, the primary carer of the child should be asked to identify which of the ethnicity codes most closely matches the ethnicity of the child
- reason for new episode code - On entering care this code should be S (started to be looked-after)

- the initial legal status - this should be shown as 'V2' (single period of accommodation under Section 20), and any subsequent changes (for example, to a care order) should be recorded in the usual way as any other change of legal status
- category of need codes - In the majority of cases, the appropriate category of need code for unaccompanied asylum seekers will be code 'N8' (absent parenting)
- placement codes - The placement of unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) should be coded in the same way as the placement of other children looked after. In most cases the appropriate code will be 'K2' or 'K3', although other codes are possible
- period of looked-after care - If the period of looked-after care ceases because the child has left the country, for any reason, then code 'E16' (child moved abroad) should be used. If the period of looked-after care ceases for any other reason, then the most appropriate category should be used. In most cases this will be 'E4' (Returned home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility)
- if the asylum application of a child is rejected, the child should still be considered as 'looked-after' until they leave the country
- if the asylum application is successful, but the child continues with their looked-after status, then no changes should be reflected on the SSDA903 form, unless a change in placement or looked-after legal status has taken place

1.9.8 Children on bail or on remand

The following table illustrates the various coding possibilities on the SSDA903 of children who are either on bail or on remand prior to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPOA) which came into force on 3 December 2012.

Table 1: Coding on SSDA903 when a child is involved in criminal proceedings and is awaiting trial or sentence

Legislation	Local authority involvement	Is the child looked after and if so how to code on SSDA903
Remand on bail (Bail Act 1976)	No local authority children's social care involvement	Not looked after: Do not record on SSDA903, unless there is an existing Care Order in which case use legal status 'C1' or 'C2'.

Legislation	Local authority involvement	Is the child looked after and if so how to code on SSDA903
Remand on bail (Bail Act 1976)	Remanded on bail to reside where the local authority directs, the local authority accommodates (for example with a foster carer)	Looked after: Use legal status 'V2' unless under a care order, in which case use legal status 'C1' or 'C2'.
Remand on bail (Bail Act 1976)	Remanded on bail to reside where the local authority directs, but the local authority does not accommodate (for example the child resides at home or with relatives)	Not looked after: Do not record on SSDA903, unless there is an existing care order in which case use legal status 'C1' or 'C2'.
Remand to local authority accommodation under Section 23(1) CYPA 1969 (as cited in Section 21 of Children's Act 1989)	Local authority accommodates (for example in foster care) or the local authority places with own parents or other person with parental responsibility. May be in secure accommodation but under Section 25 of Children's Act is required after 72 hours.	Looked after: Use legal status 'J1'.
Secure remand under Sections 97 and 98 Crime and Disorder Act 1998	Must be in secure accommodation. Order under Section 25 of Children's Act is not required	Looked-after with effect from 01/04/2002, if placed in council accommodation. Use legal status 'J1' (regardless of whether under existing care order).

1.10 Respite care

Respite care is the term used to describe children who are subject to short-term break agreements and is also referred to as 'Shared Care' or 'Family Link' placements. Respite care can be provided to children for a number of reasons under either Section 20 or Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. In the children looked after data return only information on children receiving short breaks under Section 20 should be reported. Children cared for in this way normally live at home, but are accommodated by a local

authority in a pattern of short periods of care in order to give their parents (or guardians) some respite from the normal duties of looking after a child. A typical example would be a physically disabled child, who normally lives at home with their parents, but who is accommodated by a local authority every weekend.

The breaks (or short-term placements) must form part of a regular programme of support agreed between Social Services and the child's parents/guardians. Each break must include at least one night away from home but cannot exceed 17 days of continuous care. Up to 75 days of accommodation away from home may take place under a single agreement in any twelve-month period.

To note these timings changed in 2012 following the introduction of new legislation, previously these timings were 28 days of continuous care and 120 days within any 12-month period. See volume 2 of the statutory guidance on the Children Act 1989.

These children form a special group, and in order that they can be readily identified, special legal status codes ('V3' and 'V4') are used (see section 2.2.3 for a full definition). Strictly speaking these children are moving in and out of care. Under the terms of the Children Act 1989, they are only actually being looked after for those days (and nights) when they are being accommodated and are not looked after when they are back home with their parents or guardians. The decision to treat these children as a special group is therefore a concession on the part of the department, introduced to ease the burden of administration involved with a child who is endlessly starting and ceasing to be looked after.

Respite children should never be confused with other children (who are not subject to an agreement) but who nevertheless start and cease to be looked after several times during the year for a variety of reasons. Children receiving short-term (or respite care) exhibit several common characteristics, which are set out below. If the circumstances of a child are such that they cannot meet all these conditions, this should not be treated as being a respite case, but as separate periods of being looked-after under legal status 'V2'. Common characteristics of children reported on the children looked after collection as in receipt of respite care:

- respite children normally live at home, and over the medium to long term, spend more time with their parents or guardians, than being accommodated by the local authority
- there is a formal agreement in place which clearly sets out the times or circumstances when the child is to be accommodated, and the placement (either a specific foster carer, or a named residential establishment)
- there must be series of breaks (at least 2) - a 'one-off' spell of respite for a child's parents or guardians is not sufficient for a child to be classified within this group
- the legal status of these children is always Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. (A child under any other status or order cannot be the subject of a 'respite' agreement)

- there are strict limits on the duration of each break, and the total number of days care that is allowed under these arrangements in any one year, as set out in the second paragraph of section 1.10

It follows from the above, that if a child who is receiving respite care becomes subject to any other legal status than Section 20, the respite agreement must end. It also follows that the placement of the child will be the same for each and every break.

Exception

It is possible that the accommodation usually provided for a respite child is not available on a particular occasion. For example, a child might go to a specific foster carer every weekend but, for 2 weekends in August, this particular foster carer is away. As a result, for these 2 weekends the child needs to be placed elsewhere. This is allowable, and the respite status remains intact.

A child who is the subject of an agreement for the provisions of short-term placements can be recorded on the SSDA903 in one of 2 ways. Local authorities may decide which of the following methods is best suited to their needs, although it is important that once the decision has been taken, all children looked-after under a series of short-term breaks should be recorded in the same way. The 2 methods are:

- to simply record the existence of agreements using legal status code 'V4'
- to record each and every short-term placement as an individual episode with a legal status 'V3' - this option means that a child who is looked-after every weekend under an agreement will generate 52 episodes, all of which will need to be recorded. The advantage of recording short-term breaks in this way is that local authorities will have a precise record of the actual number of days of care each child receives, which may be useful when completing other departmental returns

Each local authority should ensure they are consistent within years (by choosing to use either 'V3' or 'V4' for all their children looked after in a statistical year), but we are happy for local authorities to change their approach between years. In practice, if a local authority wanted to change between using 'V4' last year's collection to 'V3' in this year's collection, for this year's collection return any respite agreement open on 31 March last year would have to be closed and a new episode started on 1 April this year (or whenever the child's next period of being looked after begins) under legal status 'V3'. While we do not like changing a child's history, the change is necessary to be consistent within years and respite agreements are excluded from almost all analysis.

1.10.1 Coding 'respite care' for children under care orders

These are children who are under a care order having regular agreed short breaks with a substitute carer or in a residential placement. These children do not follow the criteria set out above for respite children. If a child under a care order were placed at home, but having short breaks with another carer at weekends, the coding would be as follows.

The child would be regarded as continuously looked-after, usually with a legal status ‘C2’ and placement code ‘P1’. If the weekend breaks were planned, intentional breaks, and each lasted 7 days or less, and the child returned to the established placement, then under our standard coding instructions they could either be ignored for the purposes of the SSDA903 return, or coded using a temporary code (see section 2.2.8 of this guide). If a break was more than 7 days in duration, or was not a part of an intentional pattern of breaks, it would constitute a separate placement on the SSDA903 although the legal status would remain unchanged so long as the care order continued.

If a child under a care order is not placed at home, but with a foster carer, the same principle would apply. If regular planned short breaks were being taken with another carer or in a children’s home, and each break lasted 7 days or less, it can be disregarded, or recorded as a temporary placement, on the SSDA903. If a break was more than 7 days in duration, or was not a part of an intentional pattern of breaks, it would constitute a separate placement on the SSDA903 although the legal status would remain unchanged so long as the care order continued.

1.10.2 Respite breaks in hospital or other specialist NHS facilities

The general position is that if the respite breaks constitute a direct agreement between the hospital or other NHS facility and the child's parents or child's GP, this does not of itself mean that the child is 'looked-after', regardless of whether Social Services gave the parent(s) advice or other assistance which led to this arrangement being set up. A direct arrangement between the hospital or other NHS facility and the parent(s) or would not constitute an agreed series of short-term placements as defined in Reg. 13 of the Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991. It is of course possible for a child in such circumstances to be looked-after on other, separate grounds, such as the existence of a care order.

1.11 Social worker episode data for children looked after on 31 March

The Children’s Commissioner’s Office (CCO) and the Department agreed in 2021 that the Department will take ownership of the Stability Index (SI), an annual analysis exploring the instability experienced by children looked after by local authorities. Initially developed and published by the CCO, the SI aims to highlight the issue of instability in these children’s lives, allowing us to observe trends over time with the goal of driving improvements to stability in partnership with local authorities.

Instability is measured in 3 areas:

- placement stability
- school stability
- social worker stability

Information that enables us to measure placement and school stability is already collected by the Department. However, information on social worker stability was previously collected from local authorities by CCO. Following the transfer of ownership of the SI to the Department, the social worker collection has been collected by DfE as part of the SSDA903 collection since 2024. This data is now published via the Department's Stability Measures publication.

Part 2: Data items collected via the SSDA903 return

2.1 Header information – to be collected for all children

This part of the record details the child's identity and should be completed for every record. Once these items have been entered into the DfE system for a particular child, any subsequent change (for example, because data previously submitted was incorrect) will cause a validation error.

2.1.1 Child identifier

This must be a unique ID for each child (no longer than 20 characters) and should be retained from year to year. A child ID should not be reused after a period of time, it should be unique to a single child in your local authority. It can include alphabetic and numeric characters. Do not use non-numeric or non-alphabetic characters. This item is the sole means of DfE computer identification of each child record. The system is currently set to strip out any leading zeros in child identifiers. We would therefore ask local authorities not to use leading zeros in child identifiers.

If you are planning to change child identifiers, for example as part of a new computer scheme, DfE must be advised at an early stage. Child identifiers should be the same in both the CLA collection and Children in Need census.

If a looked-after child is adopted, and subsequently becomes looked-after again later, they should have 2 separate unlinked records – one for pre-adoption and one for post-adoption – with 2 different child identifiers.

2.1.2 Sex

Children looked after should have their sex reported, as recorded on a birth certificate or on a gender recognition certificate. This is a value which identifies the sex of a person as recognised in law.

Table 2: Code set for sex of child

Code	Description
M	Male
F	Female
U	Unknown

Code ‘U’ should be used when the sex of the child has not been recorded, the sex of the child is not known, or the sex of the child has not been registered. We expect the use of this code to be extremely rare in this collection.

2.1.3 Date of birth

The date of birth should be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format, for example, born 24 January 2012 enter as 24/01/2012.

If the exact day of birth is not known

Unknown dates can be a problem for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, If the day of birth is not known then assume that it was the 15th of the month. Do not use first day of the month as a dummy date of birth.

If the date of birth of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is reassessed, and:

- if the age of the child is assessed to be over 18 years, then please report the original date of birth recorded on entry into care rather than amend it to the reassessed date of birth
- if the age of the child is assessed to be under 18 years, then please report the reassessed date of birth

2.1.4 Ethnic origin code

We require data on ethnicity for all children. The local authority must not ascribe any ethnicity to the pupil. This information must come from the child, or the parent, guardian or carer.

Where the ethnicity has not yet been collected, this is recorded as ‘NOBT’ (information not yet obtained). Where a child, parent, guardian or carer declines to provide ethnicity data, code ‘REFU’ (refused) is recorded and returned.

Ethnicity should be recorded using one of the DfE main categories listed below which replicates those used in the school census and the children in need (CIN) return.

Table 3: Code set for ethnic origin

Code	Description
WBRI	White British
WIRI	White Irish
WOTH	Any other White background

Code	Description
WIRT	Traveller of Irish Heritage
WROM	Gypsy/Roma
MWBC	White and Black Caribbean
MWBA	White and Black African
MWAS	White and Asian
MOTH	Any other Mixed background
AIND	Indian
APKN	Pakistani
ABAN	Bangladeshi
CHNE	Chinese
AOTH	Any other Asian background
BCRB	Caribbean
BAFR	African
BOTH	Any other Black background
OOTH	Any other ethnic group
REFU	Refused
NOBT	Information not yet obtained

The table in Appendix 3 is offered as guidance where very specific information on a child's ethnicity is available and coders require assistance in translating extended categories into the DfE main codes listed above.

2.1.5 Unique pupil number (UPN)

Section 83 of the Children Act 1989 was amended by Section 54 of the Children Act 2004 and bought into force on 1 March 2005 by the Children Act 2004 (Commencement No 1) Order 2005 (C 18)-SI 2005/847. Therefore, as of 1 March 2005, particulars required to be transmitted to the SoS (DfE) by virtue of Section 83 of the Children Act 1989 may include particulars relating to and identifying individual children.

English schools in the maintained sector have a statutory requirement to allocate UPNs to their pupils. They are usually allocated during a pupil's first entry into the maintained school sector. Local authorities have the responsibility for allocating and maintaining

UPNs for pupils not educated in a maintained school. This data item is not required for children looked-after under an agreed series of short-term placements ('V3' or 'V4' legal status). However, we would normally expect to receive a UPN for all other children of compulsory school age. If a younger child has had a UPN allocated (for example on entry to nursery, or because they have an education, health and care plan) then please provide the UPN in your return. There may be cases where some children have Unique Learner Numbers (ULNs) instead of UPNs. (ULNs are assigned to students over the age of 14 in publicly funded education and training and the ULN are mandatory for use in English schools). Please do not report ULNs in your data return.

The UPN must be 13 characters long. The first character is a letter (but cannot be I, O or S). The remaining characters are numeric. For example, H801200001001. If the UPN is temporary, then the last character must be a letter. The UPN field cannot be left blank unless the child is looked-after under an agreed series of short-term placements.

Each local authority has several people who can access the 'Get Information about Pupils' (GIAP) website which can be used to search for UPNs of children who are placed outside your local authority. If you do not know who your contact for this website is, please contact the data collection helpdesk.

For children looked after that have been adopted and subsequently return to being looked-after, the UPN on the child's pre- and post- adoption records should be different.

If the UPN is unknown, then one of the codes below should be used. These codes are to be used within the UPN field where it is not possible to provide a UPN. They are not entered into a separate field as they are in the CIN Census.

If a child is educated outside England, please use UPN unknown code 'UN3', unless the child has a UPN from previously attending a school in England. If the child is home educated and has previously attended a mainstream school, please provide the UPN allocated earlier.

Table 4: Code set for unknown UPN

Code	Description
UN1	Looked-after child is not of school age and has not yet been assigned a unique pupil number (UPN).
UN2	Looked-after child has never attended a maintained school in England (for example, some unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)).
UN3	Looked-after child is educated outside England.
UN4	Child is newly a looked-after child (from one week before end of collection period) and the unique pupil number (UPN) was not yet known at the time of the CLA data collection return.

Code	Description
UN5	Sources collating unique pupil numbers (UPNs) reflect a discrepancy (or discrepancies) for the child's name or surname or date of birth therefore preventing reliable matching (for example, duplicated unique pupil numbers (UPNs)).

Advice to local authorities about UPNs:

Local authorities need to be aware that:

- the UPN can be included in their children services systems and files for the purpose of being able to complete the SSDA903 return (and the CIN Census) but the UPN must not be used in any operational sense for children's services activities within the local authority or for other purposes
- it is up to local authorities how they track down the UPN – if easier for them to store in their social services databases that is up to them but they must remember that under the guidance provided by the Information Commissioner, UPNs should not be used as a replacement for pupil identification systems already in place in non-educational departments
- it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that UPN information is correct. Data from the SSDA903 will be matched to school census and educational attainment data using the UPN as the primary matching key
- legal advice to local authorities should come from their own local authority's legal department but local authorities may also seek advice direct from the Information Commissioner's Office if they so wish
- further information about UPNs can be found on the GOV.UK website

2.1.6 Motherhood status

Local authorities are asked to indicate whether each looked-after girl is, on 31 March, a mother.

Table 5: Code set for motherhood status

Code	Description
0	Female child is not a mother
1	Female child is a mother

The motherhood status should be entered for all girls, this includes those currently looked-after and girls who have ceased to be looked-after.

For girls who cease to be looked-after during the year ending 31 March, local authorities are asked to indicate whether each looked-after girl was a mother

(1 = yes, 0 = no) at the time of being looked-after. A girl who ceased to be looked-after in the year ending 31 March 2027 should only be recorded as a mother if her child or children were born before she left care. The only exception to this is if the pregnancy did not result in a live birth or if the girl was looked-after under an agreed series of short-term placements.

Only data on live births is required (data on pregnancies that do not result in a live birth will not be collected). Live births exclude miscarriages and still births but include neo-natal deaths (which occur within 28 days of birth). A child should be classified as a mother even if they do not care for the child themselves (for example, if consent was given for the child to be adopted).

2.1.7 Date of birth of mother's child

If the girl is a mother, the date of birth of the first child is required. The date should be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format. This data item is not required for girls looked-after under an agreed series of short-term placements. For example,15 November 2026 enter as 15/11/2026.

(Manual amendments only may be made using DD/MM/YY but will appear as DD/MM/YYYY.)

2.2 Episode information

2.2.1 Date episode commenced

This item records the date that each episode began. For the first episode in the year, this date can be in the current data year, or an earlier data year. When loading data using CSV or XML, dates must be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format. For example, 4 November 2026 should be entered as 04/11/2026.

Exceptionally, once loaded, the dates in the episode fields will appear as DD/MM/YY (year as a 2-digit number). Manual amendments to episode dates may be made using either format DD/MM/YY or DD/MM/YYYY, though the latter will appear as DD/MM/YY when saved). This is intended to make the episodes easier to read and manually amend, particularly when a record contains several episodes.

Where episodes are consecutive, the new episode must start on the same day that the previous episode finished.

When recording an agreement to provide a series of short-term placements (legal status 'V3' or 'V4'), enter in this field the date the first placement under the agreement began. For further information about children being looked-after under a series of short-term placements see section 1.10.

Where an episode began in a previous statistical year, but is still open on 31 March, do not complete 'Reason Episode Ceased' or 'Date Episode Ceased'. The following year's record must then start with the same episode details showing the actual date the episode commenced. (If the episode subsequently closes, both the 'Reason Episode Ceased' and the 'Date Episode Ceased' should be recorded).

Episodes cannot start and end on the same day. If a child has 2 changes of legal status in one day only the second legal status is recorded. Similarly, in the unlikely event of 2 placements starting on the same day, only the status at the end of the day should be recorded. In such cases we no longer regard the first move of the day as being a placement. It follows from this that an essential component of a placement for SSDA903 purposes is that a placement must involve an overnight stay. A 'placement' that does not include an overnight stay should be regarded as a 'visit' and not shown on the SSDA903.

2.2.2 Reason for new episode of care

This changed for the 2015 to 2016 collection.

Table 6: Code set for reason for new episode of care

Code	Description
S	Started to be looked-after
L	Change of legal status only
P	Change of placement and carer(s) only
T	Change of placement (but same carer(s)) only
B	Change of legal status and placement and carer(s) at the same time
U	Change of legal status and change of placement (but same carer(s)) at the same time

Use code 'S' where a child is starting to be looked-after for the first time, or had previously ceased to be looked after, and is now starting to be looked after again. Also use code 'S' when recording agreements to provide short-term placements (legal status 'V4'), and for individual breaks under such an agreement, if these are being recorded separately (legal status 'V3').

Use code 'L' where there is a change of legal status, but the placement does not change. By 'legal status' we mean the legal status underlying the fact that the child is looked after.

Use code 'P' where there is a change of placement and carer, but the legal status does not change. This would include the following scenarios:

- move from one foster carer to another foster carer (for example, ‘U3’ to another ‘U3’ placement type code)
- move from a foster carer to a children’s home (for example, ‘U3’ to ‘K2’ placement types)

In both scenarios there has been a change of carer. When a child is living independently, a new episode should be created each time they move, and code ‘P’ should be used.

Use code ‘T’ where there is a change of placement, but the child remains with the same carer and the legal status does not change. This would include the following scenarios:

- child moves to a new house with current foster carer (either inside or outside of local authority boundary).
- child remains with same carer or within same setting but either the URN of the setting changes or the provider type changes (for example, a foster carer moves from an IFA to the local authority provider, or a placement for adoption transferring to a regional adoption agency)

In both scenarios, the child has remained with the same carer, but for some other reason, a new placement is required on the SSDA903.

Use code ‘B’ where both legal status and placement change, with a change of carer, on the same day. The 2 changes do not need to be simultaneous or consequent one upon the other. The code simply reflects that there was a change in carer and a change in legal status, for whatever reason, on the same day.

Use code ‘U’ where both legal status and placement change on the same day, but the child remains with the same carer. The 2 changes do not need to be simultaneous or consequent one upon the other. The code simply reflects that there was a change in placement and a change in legal status, for whatever reason, on the same day.

2.2.3 Legal status

The legal status code on the SSDA903 records the legal status underlying being ‘looked-after’. If a child is looked after because it is accommodated, the legal status goes some way to describe (in legal terms at least) why the child is being looked after.

There are many legal statuses arising from the Children Act, or the Youth Justice System, to which a child can be subject, but which have no bearing on whether a child is ‘looked-after’ or not. These are not recorded on the SSDA903, and no legal status codes are provided for them.

The renewal of an existing legal status does not automatically generate a new episode. If the legal status code does not change, a new episode is not required (unless there happens to be a change of placement at the same time).

Example

If a child is already looked after under an interim care order, a renewal of the interim care order does not change the legal status and no new episode is required. However, if a child looked after under an interim care order becomes the subject of a full care order, then a new episode is required to record the start of the full care order.

In certain circumstances a child being looked after can have more than one 'looked-after' legal status. In general, this happens when a child who is already 'looked-after' under a Children Act care order comes into contact with the Youth Justice System, and as a result is detained in local authority accommodation under a second legal status. Two legal statuses cannot be shown as current on SSDA903. In such cases the latest legal status should be recorded and the episode under the previous status should be closed.

Example

A child who is already subject to a care order is remanded to local authority accommodation under Section 23 (1) of CYPA 1969. The care order episode should be closed, and a new episode should start under the 'remanded to local authority accommodation' legal status code. When the episode under the remand status ends, a further episode under the care order legal status will start, unless the care order has been discharged.

We have attempted to identify and provide a code for every legal status which theoretically could underpin a child being 'looked-after'. If future changes in legislation lead to new 'looked-after' legal statuses, we will provide new legal status codes.

The 'wardship' legal status code was a possible legal status identified by some local authorities in the consultation exercise on the future of the SSDA903 codes for which we did not have an existing legal status. However, the use of this code was restricted to just a few exceptional cases where the High Court has exercised its residual power to make a child a ward of the High Court,and has directed that the child should be accommodated by a local authority. In practice such cases were found to be so extremely rare, it was felt that the use of a separate code could not be warranted. If such a case should arise, it should be coded 'C2', as the practical effects are the same.

Table 7: Code set for legal status

Code	Description
C1	Interim care order

Code	Description
C2	Full care order
E1	Placement order granted
V2	Single period of accommodation under section 20 (Children Act 1989)
V3	Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when individual episodes of care are recorded
V4	Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when agreements are recorded (NOT individual episodes of care)
L1	Under police protection and in local authority accommodation
L2	Emergency protection order (EPO)
L3	Under child assessment order and in local authority accommodation
J1	Remanded to local authority accommodation or to youth detention accommodation
J2	Placed in local authority accommodation under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, including secure accommodation. However, this would not necessarily be accommodation where the child would be detained.
J3	Sentenced to Youth Rehabilitation Order (Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 as amended by Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPOA) 2012 with residence or intensive fostering requirement)

Care orders

C1: Interim Care Order - *Children Act 1989, Section 38*

Lasts up to 28 days then must be renewed. Renewal does not cause a new episode on the SSDA903, as legal status has not changed.

C2: Full Care Order - *Children Act 1989, Section 31 (1) (a)*

Not time limited. This code should also be used for:

- deemed care order (where the child has been continuously in care since 14/10/1991) Children Act 1989 Schedule 14 par. 15 (2)
- care order extended by appeal court Children Act 1989 Section 40 (5)
- care order pending appeal Children Act 1989 Section 40 (1) or (3)
- care order transferred from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Channel Islands or Isle of Man Children and Young Person Act 1969 Sections 25 (1) and 2 6(2)

- wardship granted in the High Court and the child placed in local authority accommodation (these cases are very rare)

Placement order

E1: Placement order - Adoption and Children Act 2002, Section 21

A placement order is a court order which gives a local authority the legal authority to place a child for adoption with any prospective adopters who may be chosen by the authority. Only local authorities may apply for placement orders. The order continues in force until it is revoked, an adoption order is made in respect of the child, the child marries, forms a civil partnership or the child reaches 18. While the placement order is in force the child retains their looked-after status. Any existing Section 8 order under the Children Act 1989 - (a contact order, residence order, child arrangement order, prohibited steps order or specific issue order) or a supervision order - ceases to have effect; under Section 29(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the care order does not have effect at any time while the placement order is in force but will be reactivated if the placement order is revoked. If a care order and placement order are granted on the same day, record only the placement order on the SSDA903.

A placement order might be sought during or after care proceedings or instead of applying for a care order. As durations for children looked after are calculated by calendar difference, the care order effectively had a duration of zero days, and therefore should not be recorded on the 903, only the placement order.

Whilst relinquished babies don't have a placement order, please use 'E1' in these cases.

Voluntary accommodation

V2: Single period of accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act

Use for all instances of 'voluntary accommodation' apart from the special cases covered by codes 'V3' and 'V4'.

V3 and V4: Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks

Different terms are used to refer to this group of children, including 'short breaks', 'family link placements', 'shared care' and 'respite care'. A full description of the group of children who should be coded under either of these 2 codes is given in section 1.9.

The breaks must form part of a regular programme of support agreed between Social Services and the child's parents or guardians. The breaks must include at least one night away from home but cannot exceed 17 days' continuous care (Arrangement for Placement of Children (General) Regulations, 1991, Reg. 13). Up to 75 days of accommodation away from home may take place under a single agreement in any twelve-month period. Strict validation rules will be placed wherever possible to ensure these rules on duration are not breached.

To note these timings changed in 2011 to 2012, previously these placements could not exceed 28 days' continuous care and 120 days during any 12-month period.

Local authorities must consistently record all children looked-after under a series of short-term breaks with either legal status 'V3' or legal status 'V4'. These codes are not interchangeable (see section 1.10).

Most short-term placements under an agreement will be self-contained events. In the normal course of events, use 'reason for new episode' code 'S' and 'reason episode ceased' code 'E8' to begin and end either an individual episode or an agreement. However, if a child, whilst in receipt of respite care, became subject to another legal status, such as a care order or a youth justice code, the 'reason episode ceased' should be 'X1'.

V3: Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when recording each and every placement as a separate episode

Use code 'V3' when recording each and every break as a separate episode (see section 1.10 for further details of this option). For SSDA903 purposes, take into account any short break that involves at least one night away from home, even if it does not last 24 hours.

V4: Accommodated under an agreed series of short-term breaks, when recording agreements

Use code 'V4' when recording an agreement for a series of short-term breaks as a single episode (see section 1.10 for further information). The date episode started should be the start date of the first placement under the agreement, and the date episode ceased should be the end of the last placement.

Detained in local authority accommodation on child protection grounds

L1: Child under police protection in local authority accommodation - *Children Act 1989 section 46 (1)*

Used where the police have taken a child into protection in the course of their duties. This power is time-limited to 72 hours. The child is only looked-after if he/she is taken into local authority accommodation; if the period in accommodation is less than an overnight stay, do not record.

L2: Emergency protection order - *Children Act 1989 Sections 44 and 45*

A court order granted on application of a local authority or the NSPCC, duration is initially limited to eight days, with a possible extension of 7 days, plus non-working days. Where a child under an EPO is in hospital, treat the child as looked-after if the local authority is the applicant or the order has been transferred to the local authority.

L3: Under child assessment order and in authority accommodation - *Children Act 1989 Section 43*

A court order which allows a local authority to make an assessment of a child's state of health or welfare. The child is only looked-after if he/she is taken into local authority accommodation for the purpose of carrying out the assessment.

Youth justice legal statuses

J1: Remanded to local authority accommodation or to youth detention accommodation

From 3 December 2012, when the relevant sections of the LASPOA came into effect, any child remanded by the youth court in criminal proceedings will be looked-after, whether the child is remanded to local authority accommodation or to youth detention accommodation.

Prior to the commencement of the LASPOA children could be remanded under 2 separate pieces of legislation. These were:

- remanded to the local authority which has the responsibility to accommodate Children and Young Person Act 1969 Section 23 (1) as inserted by Criminal Justice Act 1991 Section 60 and Children Act 1989 Section 21 (2)
- court ordered secure remand and held in authority accommodation Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Section 97.

The first refers to young persons who are remanded to the care of a local authority, where release on bail has not been granted. In these cases, the local authority arranges the accommodation, which can include the young person being placed with own parents.

The second refers to young persons who were the subject of a Court Ordered Secure Remand (COSR). These children are looked-after if they are placed in local authority accommodation, including secure accommodation.

Do not use this code for remands on bail where the local authority accommodates (this is Section 20, use code 'V2').

J2: Placed in local authority accommodation under PACE - Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, Section 38(6); and Children Act 1989 Section 21 (2)

This legal code refers to children who are helping the police with their enquiries; the police have a duty to either charge or release the child as soon as possible. During this period, children may become accommodated, as no child should spend a night in police cells. If the period in local authority accommodation is less than an overnight stay, do not record.

J3: Sentenced to Youth Rehabilitation Order (Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, as amended by Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012) with residence or intensive fostering requirement

Use where a young person as a condition of a Youth Rehabilitation Order imposed by the youth court is required to live in local authority accommodation. If there is no 'residence requirement' to live in local authority accommodation, the child is not a looked-after child, and should not be shown on the SSDA903. Note that a supervision order made under Section 31 or 35 of the Children Act is not a 'looked-after' status.

Differences between a child who is looked-after under Section 20 of the Children Act and a child who is on a care order

A child who is looked after under a care order remains a looked-after child until the care order is discharged by a court, whereas a child who is only looked after because the local authority is accommodating them under Section 20 of the Children Act ceases to be a looked-after child once they cease to be accommodated. However, even for an accommodated child, the local authority may well have continuing responsibilities to the child as a child in need under Section 17 of the Act - they should assess needs and provide services accordingly.

With reference to the Mental Health Act 1983, it was also added that under Section 116, local authorities are obliged to arrange for visits to children who are admitted to hospital (whether under section or informally) whilst subject to a care order and to take any other steps that might be expected of the child's parents. Under Section 117, the relevant local authority must join with the health authority in providing after-care services to anyone who had been sectioned. This is to continue until the authorities are satisfied that the services are no longer needed.

2.2.4 Category of need code

Category of need (CIN) codes record the main reason why a child is being provided with services. This provides a further insight as to why a particular child is being looked-after. There are 8 broad CIN codes designed to describe the different sorts of pressure upon Social Services to provide services and hence to commit resources. They help provide answers as to why social service departments of local authority need to be involved with children and their families.

Use the category of need code most relevant at the time the current period of being 'looked-after' began. The same code should continue to be recorded on the SSDA903 so long as the period of being 'looked-after' continues, even if this lasts for several years.

Note that this code does not relate to the old 'reason for being looked-after' codes which changed from episode to episode to record the current specific reason for being looked-after. The category of need code relates to the reason the child originally became looked-after and should remain the same throughout their period of care.

If there is difficulty choosing between 2 or more categories of need, choose the category that comes highest up in the table below. For example, if trying to decide between 'Family in acute stress' and 'Family dysfunction', choose 'Family in acute stress'. For further explanation of the definitions, please refer to Appendix A of the children in need guide.

Table 8: Code set for category of need

Code	Description	Further explanation
N1	Abuse or neglect	Children in need as a result of, or at risk of, abuse, neglect and exploitation – inside or outside the home or online. This category also includes children at risk because of domestic abuse. Children may be experiencing one or more of these forms of harm.
N2	Child's disability	Children and families whose main need for services arises because of the child's disabilities, illness or intrinsic condition.
N3	Parental illness or disability	Children whose main need for services arises because the capacity of their parent(s) (or carer(s)) to care for them is impaired by the parent(s) (or carer(s)) disability, physical or mental illness, or addictions
N4	Family in acute stress	Children whose needs arise from living in a family that is going through a temporary crisis that diminishes the parental capacity to adequately meet some of the child's needs.
N5	Family dysfunction	Children whose needs primarily arise from living in a family where the parenting capacity is chronically inadequate
N6	Socially unacceptable behaviour	Child and family whose need for services primarily arise out of the child's behaviour impacting detrimentally on the community
N7	Low income	Child, living in a families or independently, whose needs primarily arise from being dependent on an income below the standard state entitlements
N8	Absent parenting	Child whose need for services arise mainly from having no parent(s) available to provide for them. A child whose parent(s) decide it is in the best interest for the child to be adopted would be included in this category

2.2.5 Home postcode

The postcode of the address where the child was living when they became 'looked-after'. If the child becomes looked-after while in hospital after being born, use the mother's home address.

If a child leaves and re-enters care, then the postcode of the address where the child was living when they entered care for a second or subsequent time should be recorded, rather than the postcode of the address they were living at when they became a looked-after child for the first time.

This should be returned for all placements during the latest year. Please see section 2.2.6 for further details on the groups of children for whom this data item is not required, and additional fields that will be derived from the postcode fields.

2.2.6 Placement postcode

The postcode of the location where the child is placed. This should be returned for all placements during the latest year. Please see below for further details on the groups of children for whom this data item is not required, and additional fields that will be derived from the postcode fields.

Home and placement postcodes – further notes and definitions

Home and placement postcodes should be recorded for all placements during the latest year. There is one exception to this, children looked-after under an agreed series of short-term placements (legal status of 'V3' or 'V4'). However, if a child changes to another legal status during the year (that is no longer an agreed series of short-term placements) then the postcodes should be entered for the new placement.

If the child is in a temporary placement use the postcode of the usual placement for the child, this should be the postcode of the placement that the child returns to following the temporary placement. If a child moves to a new placement after the temporary placements, then a placement move should be recorded in the usual way. The same should be applied for children who are missing from their placement.

For unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), the home postcode is not required but the placement postcode should be available. In this case, the placement postcode should be returned which will enable the derivation of 'local authority of placement' and 'placement location' fields (see below for further detail on these derived fields) but the home postcode should be left blank. Similarly, in other specific circumstances where a home postcode is not available, like for overseas children, the parents are homeless or a child from a traveller family, then the home postcode should be left blank.

The home and placement postcodes are then used to derive the following further data items for each placement:

- distance between home and placement (miles) - this is the calculated distance between the child's home postcode and the child's placement postcode. Local authorities can overwrite this manually where necessary
- local authority of placement - this is the local authority where the child is placed and gives the calculated local authority number. If the placement is not in England then the system will try to establish if the child is placed in Northern Ireland (NIR), Wales (WAL), Scotland (SCO), a confidential placement (CON) or outside the UK (NUK).
- placement location - this is whether the child is looked after inside (IN) or outside (OUT) the local boundary responsible for the child's care

Distance between home and placement (miles) - (derived from postcodes)

To calculate the distance between home and placement, local authorities must include the home and placement postcodes in the episodes CSV files or in the main body of the XML file.

The CLA collection system incorporates a distance measuring tool, but there is a possibility that the postcode in question is a recent one and has not yet been included in our system. In this case the local authority should find the closest valid postcode.

Note: The distance is calculated in the system using the following formula:

Distance (in miles) =

$$\sqrt{\left((\text{difference in 'northings'})^2 + (\text{difference in 'eastings'})^2\right)} \div 10 \div 1.6093$$

where the geographical centre of each postcode is described using the northings and eastings values of the postcode grid reference from the latest ONS postcode file. The postcode file is refreshed each year. If the central point of the postcode has changed slightly, for example if new houses are added to the postcode, then the calculated distance may differ by a small amount (perhaps by 0.1 miles) from year to year. A tolerance of 0.2 miles has been added to validation rules to allow for these small year on year changes.

When a child's home postcode is outside of England or not available, or the placement postcode is not available, please use 999.9 for the distance. This includes children from overseas, children whose parents were homeless or children who had no fixed address as they belonged to a traveller family.

Local authority of placement - (derived from postcodes)

The local authority where the looked-after child is placed will be derived from the postcode of the placement address. The CLA system will accept a valid postcode and will derive the local authority of placement from the placement postcode if the child is

looked-after in England. If the submitted postcode is not in England, the CLA system will try and find out if it is in the United Kingdom and derive the country accordingly using one of the codes in the table below. If the postcode is not in the UK then the CLA system will display the default code of NUK used for children placed outside the UK.

If the placement information is not available because a child is living at a 'confidential' address, the value should be overwritten manually using the code 'CON'. There are only a limited number of circumstances where this should be used; we would usually expect the local authority of placement to be completed for children who are placed for adoption.

If the child is placed with parents who have moved house since the child became a looked-after child, the placement address should be the current placement address and the home address should be the address of the child when they first became a 'looked-after' child - we will then see from episode information that the child is placed with parents. Some local authorities have expressed concern regarding these types of placements therefore we are continuing to collect this information to monitor the effect they may cause.

Placement location - (derived from postcodes)

For each of the placements in section 2.2.8, (except those looked-after children who have a legal status of 'V3' or 'V4'), a placement location code will be derived using the local authority of placement field derived from placement postcode. This will show whether the child is being looked-after inside or outside the local boundary responsible for the child's care. Even where the child's local authority of placement is confidential (code 'CON'), the placement location should still be provided and should be automatically derived from the postcode. The code 'OUT' should be used for placements outside of the UK.

2.2.7 Placement unique reference number (Ofsted URN)

A new requirement was introduced in the collection year 2015 to 2016, to return the unique reference number (URN) where the setting is subject to Ofsted inspections. The URN is required for any placement ongoing on 1 April 2026, or for any new placements during the collection year. For children's homes this would be the URN of the individual home and for foster or adoptive placements this would be the URN of the relevant service or agency providing the placement. For larger providers with multiple settings or branches the precise URN for the particular setting or branch is required. For supported accommodation providers, all premises run by the particular provider will have the same URN.

The data, which will cover roughly 90% of all placements, will be used to map placement use in a more accurate way than previously possible to enable better understanding of placement patterns and to help improve understanding of why children are placed in certain placements and how this can impact on them. It will give a better understanding

of the market for children's homes and the use of independent fostering and adoption providers so that government can consider appropriate policy responses to help the sufficiency of the market. It is anticipated that local authorities will find the additional data helpful, for instance by linking Ofsted quality ratings to provision.

In some cases, it will be valid to provide different information to that registered with Ofsted, for example if a child is placed at the provider but at a different postcode to the main site. This could be the case if a child is residing in a dormitory with a different postcode to the registered site. Here the actual postcode where the child resides should be reported.

The URN is in the format SC999999 or 9999999 for newly registered providers. Note that secure training centres may have both a 6-digit education URN and a 7-digit social care URN and it is the 7-digit social care URN which should be returned in the SSDA903. The code 'XXXXXXX' should be used when the provider is a regional adoption agency. It should not be used for any other provider. Where the provider is registered with the CQC only (and not Ofsted) then the placement should be reported as 'Z14' and detail of the provider should be reported in your sign off notes.

Note that a child who is placed with a provider outside of England (so the provision is not inspected by Ofsted) does not need a Ofsted URN reporting, this means that 'XXXXXXX' should not be reported (see validation rule 218). For example, a child placed in a children's home in Wales, that is inspected by the Care Inspectorate Wales, does not need any value reporting in the Ofsted URN data item.

It is possible there may be more than one URN for a provider, for instance if it was bought by another company and so re-registered, so it is important local authorities return the valid social care URN for the latest date the child was placed at the provider. If a provider has been de-registered, we expect the local authority to close the episode of care at that URN. Where the child remains with the same provider, but the URN has changed because of administrative changes, (for example, a change from the local authority's children's services to a children's Trust that is registered with Ofsted), the local authority should add a new episode and use 'T' code for reason for new episode.

Please do not use the Ofsted website to obtain provider social care URNs. It is designed to allow the general public to find inspection reports across all Ofsted remits, rather than being a general search tool. There are legitimate numbers it won't recognise and there are other inspected premises you will not be able to find (for example children's homes when searching by address details); nor will it provide both social care and education URNs where a provider has both.

Ofsted will provide local authorities with complete lists of URNs for inspected providers which are open at any point during the collection year. This is supplied to named individuals, of whom there can be up to 5 per authority. Local authorities nominate these individuals by contacting enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk and recipients will require a

government email address for access to the lists to be set up. Ofsted will support local authorities in providing this information throughout the year and when preparing their SSDA903 returns.

Validation is included in the data collection system to check the combined validity of the URN and provider details against the child's reported placement details. Where placements are of a type or in a setting not inspected by Ofsted, such as placed with parents, then no URN is expected.

Ofsted are happy to advise and confirm the URN that should be provided in the CLA return if you have any queries. As a minimum, please provide them with the setting name, address and postcode. Their contact team email address is socialcaredata@ofsted.gov.uk and their contact team telephone number is 03000 130020.

2.2.8 Placement type

This category can be defined, in a broad sense, as indicating where the child is living. Data items giving information on the provision of placements and the location where the child is being looked after are collected in conjunction with the placement for each child. Please see section 2.2.9 on placement provider and section 2.2.6 on placement location in this guide for further details.

Some care is required when coding placement types, as there can be instances where a child remains living at the same location, but the placement code changes, and a new episode is required. There are also a few cases where a change of placement should not be recorded on the SSDA903, and those where the local authority has the option of whether to record them or not.

A change of placement can happen either when a child:

- moves to a new placement, even if this does not require using a different placement code (this is the most frequent kind of placement change)
- if the child remains at the same location, but the placement code changes for any other reason (for example, a child becomes 'placed for adoption' with foster parents)

In both instances the fact that it is a change of placement is indicated by the use of 'Reason for New Episode' codes 'P', 'B', 'T' or 'U'.

Examples

A child in a foster placement moving from one foster carer to another will require a new episode (although in many cases the placement code in the new episode will be the same).

A child moving from a foster placement to a community home will require a new episode and a new placement code.

A child in a foster placement who is placed for adoption with the same foster carer will require a new episode and a new placement code (although the child is living in the same place).

All changes of placement, however short their duration, must be recorded for SSDA903 purposes, unless they are specifically excluded under the following sections:

When care of a child is regularly shared between 2 settings

Continuous care of a child may be shared between 2 settings on a regular basis, for example, at a special school and at a foster home. Where the pattern of sharing is on a stable and planned basis, for example, 3 nights in one setting and 4 nights in another, or term time in one setting and vacations in another, it should be recorded as a single continuous episode and coded according to the placement at which the child spends most time. The separate moves from one placement to another should not be included on the SSDA903.

When a foster carer moves to a new house

When a foster carer moves to a new house, either to remain within the same local authority boundary or to move across a local authority boundary, then a placement change should be recorded and a new placement postcode should be entered. In this case, code 'T' should be used for the reason for new episode as the child has remained with the same carer.

Option to record temporary placements away from main residence

Local authorities have the option of recording temporary placement moves on the SSDA903 if they so wish. If local authorities elect to record these temporary placements, a series of 5 placement codes ('T0' and 'T1' to 'T4') have been designed specifically for that purpose. Local authorities are required to use either 'T0', for recording all 4 types of temporary move, or codes 'T1' to 'T4', which individually describe the different kinds of move. It is however important that your local authority consistently uses either 'T0' or 'T1' to 'T4' for all temporary moves and that if temporary codes are recorded, they are recorded for all children.

Use of these codes will ensure that whilst these moves in and out of temporary placements are recorded on the SSDA903, they can nevertheless be separately identified and thereby excluded from local authority indicator calculations. The main advantage to local authorities in using these codes is that the SSDA903 will then contain a more precise record of where the child is placed at any given point in time. There will also be further advantages in allowing local authorities to calculate the number of care days provided in these special cases, and payments due to carers. If local authorities do not wish to record these temporary placements, they should simply be ignored, and the main place of residence treated as a single on-going placement.

Temporary codes can only be used when it is intended that the child will return to the original placement and this intention is fulfilled, i.e. we expect the placement postcode for the placement before and after the temporary placement to be the same.

If the intention is not fulfilled the 'temporary' placement must be recorded like any other placement change and a 'T' code cannot be used.

Our validation rules will not allow a temporary code to be followed immediately by another temporary code. To be a temporary episode the child must return to the original placement. In most circumstances we would expect foster children to go on holiday with their foster families, however in the very rare circumstance where a child's holiday is immediately followed by a foster carer's holiday, to prevent the record failing the validation checks the child must artificially return to the original placement between the 'T2' and 'T3' episodes. While we do not like falsifying histories, as temporary episodes are excluded from any analysis it will not have an impact.

Joint funding arrangements

If the accommodation has been arranged by the local authority, and there is social services department involvement in planning and expenditure on the placement, then for SSDA903 purposes the child will normally be regarded as 'looked-after'.

Planned periods at home when child is accommodated under Section 20

Unlike the situation when a child is under a care order (when the Placement with Parents Regulations would govern trial periods of being placed at home), it could be said that when a child accommodated under Section 20 is on a trial home break the 'period of care' is broken. In such circumstances, if the home break lasts 7 days or less, is a planned, intentional break, and the child returns as planned to the original placement, the break should be ignored and the accommodation under Section 20 treated as a single on-going placement.

Periods of 8 days or more duration should be treated as periods out of care when the child is not a looked-after child and have to be shown as breaks in the period of care on the SSDA903.

Missing children and unauthorised absences

If a child goes missing or is away from placement without authorisation, they should continue to be recorded as being at the placement they were at immediately prior to the missing incident. If they change placement following the missing episode, then a new episode and placement type should be recorded for that child in the usual way.

If a child starts to be looked-after when missing, record the placement arranged for the child had they not been missing, then add details of the missing child to the missing module.

Children who are looked after under a care order and go missing or are away from placement without authorisation should continue to be recorded as being 'looked-after' at their previous placement until their 18th birthday or until the care order is rescinded by a court. Children who go missing or are away from placement without authorisation whilst being accommodated by local authorities under Section 20, should also continue to be recorded as being 'looked-after' until either:

- their 18th birthday
- the child resumes contact with the local authority or his/her whereabouts are established

In either of these circumstances, the authority must decide as an outcome of a formal review and decision-making process that the child is no longer being looked after. A child, even when aged 16 or over, cannot unilaterally end a period of Section 20 accommodation by simply walking away. The appropriate 'reason episode ceased' code for these cases is 'E8'.

Placements with friends or relatives

If a foster placement commences as an immediate and emergency placement with a friend or relative under Regulation 11, and the carer goes on to become an approved foster carer looking after the same child, the placement should continue with the same code and a new episode should not be recorded.

Registered supported accommodation – placement type 'K3'

DfE has introduced mandatory national standards and Ofsted registration and inspection requirements for providers of supported accommodation which accommodate children looked after and care leavers aged 16 and 17. Providers began registering as supported accommodation providers from 28 April 2023, and registration became mandatory from 28 October 2023.

From 28 October 2023, local authorities were no longer permitted to:

- place children looked after aged 16 and 17 in accordance with other arrangements under section 22C(6)(d) of the Children Act (1989), in provision that is not

registered with Ofsted as supported accommodation or one of the specified exceptions; or

- arrange accommodation for care leavers aged 16 and 17 under Section 23B(8)(b) of the Children's Act (1989) in provision that is not registered with Ofsted as supported accommodation or one of the specified exemptions.

All providers who accommodate looked-after 16- and 17-year-old children and care leavers in supported accommodation are required to register. Registration opened on 28 April 2023 and became mandatory from 28 October 2023.

Code 'K3' should be used for supported accommodation placements at providers that are registered with Ofsted. Placements at these providers should include the provider URN which has been verified against the provider list, which includes all registered sites. Where a young person is placed with a registered provider but the placement postcode is not shown on the provider list (and Ofsted were not notified within 72 hours of the setting), or the premises are not in a category included in the registration, then code 'Z12' or 'Z13' should be used. The regulations allow a provider to add premises to their registration and tell Ofsted within 72 hours of adding the premises or placing the child and in these instances the code 'K3' can be used. However if the premises are in a category not included in the existing registration, then the provider will need to vary their registration and have that approved and the placement should be reported as 'Z12' or 'Z13' until the registration is approved.

Local authorities should access the lists of URNs for Ofsted inspected providers to obtain the URNs of providers with an active registration. This list is supplied to named individuals, of whom there can be up to 5 per authority. Local authorities nominate these individuals by contacting enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Table 9: Code set for placement type

Code	Description
A3	Placed for adoption with parental/guardian consent with current foster carer(s) (under Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)
A4	Placed for adoption with parental/guardian consent not with current foster carer(s) (under Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)
A5	Placed for adoption with placement order with current foster carer(s) (under Section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)
A6	Placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer(s) (under Section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)
K1	Secure children's homes
K2	Children's Homes subject to Children's Homes Regulations

Code	Description
K3	Registered supported accommodation (England only)
P1	Placed with own parent(s) or other person(s) with parental responsibility
P3	Residential employment
R1	Residential care home
R2	National Health Service (NHS)/health trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care
R3	Family centre or mother and baby unit
R5	Young offender institution (YOI)
S1	All residential schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home
T0	All types of temporary move (see paragraphs above for further details)
T1	Temporary periods in hospital
T2	Temporary absences of the child on holiday
T3	Temporary accommodation whilst normal foster carer(s) is/are on holiday
T4	Temporary accommodation of seven days or less, for any reason, not covered by codes T1 to T3
U1	Foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s) – long term fostering
U2	Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning
U3	Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are not long-term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning
U4	Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – long term fostering
U5	Foster placement with other foster carer(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning
U6	Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning
Z11	By courts under Section 38(6) with a relative or other non-assessed person

Code	Description
Z12	Unregistered carer/provider: awaiting alternative placement
Z13	Unregistered carer/provider: best interests
Z14	Other placement

Placement codes: notes and definitions

A3 to A6: Placement for adoption (supersedes A1 and A2) Adoption and Children Act 2002 - Section 18

Placed for adoption means the child goes to live with the prospective adopters who will adopt them. It does not mean that the child has been adopted. It is a placement, not a legal status. Placement of a child for adoption may only occur if the local authority has decided that the child should be placed for adoption.

A child may be placed for adoption*:*

- with the formal consent of the child's parents/guardian (Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)
- with a placement order from a court (Section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)

A child may be placed for adoption with their current foster carer or with a stranger or relative who is an approved adopter.

For SSDA903 purposes, the date to be recorded as the start of the placement for adoption should be derived as follows:

- the formal "placed for adoption" date agreed between the local authority and prospective adopters in the Adoption Placement Plan (regulation 35(2) and (5) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005). This applies whether the prospective adopter is the child's foster carer or a stranger or relative to the child
- where a child's existing foster carer applies direct to the court without the local authority placing the child for adoption with them, the date the adoption application is lodged with the court

A3: Placed for adoption with consent with current foster carer (under Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002)

When a child's placement with the current foster carer becomes a placement for adoption with parental consent (Section 19 of the 2002 Act) the local authority should use code 'A3' and record the date that the child's placement became a placement for adoption.

A4: Placed for adoption with consent not with current foster carer (under Section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002)

When a child is placed for adoption with prospective adopters who are not his or her current foster carers with parental consent (Section 19 of the 2002 Act), the local authority should use code 'A4' and report the date that the local authority placed the child for adoption with his or her prospective adopters.

A5: Placed for adoption with placement order with current foster carer (under Section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002)

When a local authority has the authority of a placement order to place a child for adoption with the current foster carer (Section 21 of the 2002 Act), the local authority should use code 'A5' and record the date the child's placement became a placement for adoption. This will be included in the notification letter to the foster carer (Regulation 35(5) of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005).

A6: Placed for adoption with placement order not with current foster carer (under Section 21 of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002)

When a local authority has the authority of a placement order to place a child for adoption with prospective adopters who are not his or her current foster carers (Section 21 of the 2002 Act), the local authority should use code 'A6' and report the date that the local authority placed the child for adoption with his or her prospective adopters.

K1: Placed in secure children's homes

Use for all instances of placement in secure accommodation, either where Section 25 of the Children Act applies (or would apply after 72 hours), or where the child is subject to a court ordered secure remand.

Do not use code 'K1' for:

- detention and Training Orders under Section 73 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998
- detention under Section 53 of the CYPA 1933.

Note that while neither of these are recorded on the SSDA903, they are counted on SA1 (secure units statistical return).

K2: Placed in homes subject to Children's Homes regulations

Children's Homes are very diverse; use for all children's homes which fall within the meaning of Section 1 of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 (except where the child is placed in a Secure Children's Home where 'K1' should be used). This code should be used for children placed in schools that are dual registered as Children's Homes, as defined in Section 1 (6) of the

Care Standards Act 2000. For further clarification see Ofsted's 'Introduction to children's homes: A children's social care guide to registration'

Any child reported as being placed in a children's home should be placed in a provider registered with Ofsted as a children's home with a URN. On a monthly basis, Ofsted provide local authorities with complete lists of URNs for inspected providers which are open at any point during the collection year. URN queries can be raised with Ofsted at any point in the year - contact details can be found in section 2.2.7 of this guide.

Please check to be sure that children reported as being in these placements are not actually better coded as being in a secure children's home ('K1') or in registered supported accommodation ('K3')

K3: Registered supported accommodation

The government has introduced new national standards and Ofsted registration and inspection requirements for providers of supported accommodation for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 and 17. These settings have often been referred to as 'unregulated' because until now such provision has not been required to register with Ofsted. Such placements were historically coded as 'H5' (semi- independent provision) . Ofsted began registering providers of supported accommodation from 28 April 2023, and registration, or having submitted a complete application and paid the registration fee in advance, became mandatory from 28 October 2023. We anticipate all settings that were operating under the transitional arrangements whilst awaiting the outcome of their application to have had the outcome of that application determined by the end of March 2026.

The 'K3' Placement code should be used for any placement in supported accommodation provision which is registered with Ofsted.

UASC accommodated in reception centres should be reported as 'K3' as reception centres are registered as supported accommodation providers.

P1: Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility

Use for any placement with a child's own parents, or other person with parental responsibility (as defined in the Children Act). This placement code is not limited to children under care orders. However, short planned home breaks for children accommodated under Section 20 should be coded in line with our instructions, and regarded for SSDA903 purposes, as periods out of care if they last eight days or more. 'P1' should be used if the child is ordered by the court S38(6) to be placed with parents.

P3: Residential employment

Use for apprenticeships and employment training where there is a clear employment component, and accommodation is provided. This includes being in the armed forces.

R1: Residential care homes Registered Homes Act 1984

Applies to Residential Care Homes and Nursing Homes that fall within the scope of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015. The services they provide will normally include an element of personal care or nursing care. 'Personal care' in this instance generally means help with personal activities such as feeding or washing. This category does not include hospitals, or facilities provided by NHS or Health Trusts. Please check children in these placements to be sure that the provider is not actually a children's home ('K2'), or NHS provision ('R2').

R2: NHS or Health Trust or other establishment providing medical/nursing care

Use for hospitals of all kinds when the child is placed there as part of the Care Plan. (Temporary spells in hospital receiving treatment for injuries or illness does not fall in this category and are not normally recorded on the SSDA903). Also use for other facilities provided by NHS or Health Trusts.

R3: Residential family centre or mother and baby unit

Use for placement in a residential family centre, as defined in Section 4 (2) of the Care Standards Act 2000, or a placement in a residential facility for mothers and babies (except hospitals and other NHS facilities). This placement type should also be used if a child is placed with their mother in a women's refuge.

R5: Young offender institute

Use for looked-after young people who are accommodated in one of these settings. These will generally be children (either on remand or serving a sentence) who have a concurrent care order. It also includes secure training centres but does not include those children in secure children's homes who should be reported as 'K1'.

S1: School

Use for any placement in a residential school, except schools that are dual registered as children's homes, as defined in Section 1(6) of the Care Standards Act 2000.

T0 and T1 to T4: Temporary placements

The use of these codes is discretionary. Local authorities have the option of either:

- recording on the SSDA903 temporary placements
- ignoring them and treating the main placement as a single on-going placement

If local authorities elect to record temporary placements, then these must be recorded for all children. When recording them local authorities have an option of codes they may use. They can either:

- use code 'T0' for all temporary moves

- use codes ‘T1’ to ‘T4’ which describes the different types of temporary move which are discounted for local authority indicator purposes

How do I treat planned temporary placements of more than 7 days?

If the temporary placement of more than 7 days meets any of the requirements set out below it can be ignored or recorded on the SSDA903 return using the placement codes ‘T0’ or ‘T1’-‘T3’ (‘T4’ can only be used for temporary placements lasting less than 7 days). In all other cases it should be recorded:

- temporary periods in hospital
- temporary absences of the child on holiday
- foster carer’s holiday (in most circumstances we would expect foster children to go on holiday with their foster families; breaks of longer than 21 days because their foster carer is on holiday, should be recorded on the SSDA903).

If more than 2 such breaks of between 8- and 21- days inclusive start during the year ending 31 March the third and subsequent breaks should be recorded.

However, where the temporary placement is at home it is necessary to consider the legal status of the child. As a rule, if a child is under a care order, that order remains in force until either it is rescinded by a court, or the child reaches its 18th birthday. It follows therefore that these children continue to be looked-after children even whilst on a temporary placement at home, and any temporary stay of more than 7 days must be shown. The appropriate placement code is ‘P1’, ‘Placed with own Parents’.

In contrast, if a child is being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act, a period at home of more than 7 days (whether school holiday, ‘trial leave’ or ‘home leave’) will break the period of care. In these cases, the child should be recorded as having ceased to be a looked-after child on their return home; and when the child returns to their established placement, they need to be recorded as having, once again, started to be a looked-after child.

T0: All temporary placements

Use this code for all types of temporary placements.

T1: Temporary periods in hospital

Use this code for periods of hospitalisation for treatment of injury or acute illness. These placements can last up to 42 days. Note that periods in hospital for the treatment of chronic conditions, where the placement in a medical environment is primarily to provide specialist care, should be coded ‘R2’.

T2: Temporary absences of the child on holiday

Use for when the child goes away temporarily, with or without their carers, for recreational purposes. This code covers the same kinds of break in the same kinds of holiday setting that a non-looked-after child might receive, including activities such as school trips and summer camps. There is no time limit for such holidays.

T3: Temporary accommodation whilst normal foster carer is on holiday

In most circumstances we would expect foster children to go on holiday with their foster families. In circumstances in which this is not appropriate or an available option, this code should be used for a temporary planned stay with a substitute carer when the child's regular foster carer is away from home on a holiday or is having a break from caring for the child. The child may move to stay with a different foster carer or to a Residential Unit or may be cared for by a substitute foster carer coming into the home of their regular carer.

Note that only 2 breaks of up to 21 days can be recorded in this way in any 12-month period. Third or subsequent carer's holidays or breaks of less than 8 days duration should be coded 'T4'. Third or subsequent carer's holidays or breaks of more than 8 days duration cannot be recorded as a temporary placement.

We expect local authorities to make every effort to reduce the instability caused due to a foster carer going on holiday. In the very rare circumstance that the care of a child is shared between 2 foster carers, and this was the intention, this can be treated as one 'T3' episode. However, if it was not planned that the care of the child would be shared, then both placements must be recorded.

T4: Temporary accommodation for seven days or less (for any reason)

Use for stays away from the established placement, not covered by codes 'T1' to 'T3', of 7 consecutive days or less for any reason, providing always there is a clear expectation at the outset that the child will be returning to their established placement.

To qualify for this code, the temporary placement must meet the following criteria:

- it must be planned, in the sense that the break is caused by, or designed to meet, a specific contingency
- there must be a clear expectation, before the move takes place, that the child will be returning to their original placement. If there is no such expectation, or if the child does not return (regardless of the intention) within 8 days, the break does not qualify as being a temporary placement

Virtually any reasonable reason for the break away from the normal place of residence can qualify as a specific contingency for the purposes of 'T4'. Examples include:

- trial home leave
- brief stays with relative to maintain contact with the child
- normal place of residence temporarily unfit due to fire or structural damage

- third, or subsequent holidays of the normal foster carer
- half term holidays from residential schools spent at home with parents or guardian

U1 to U6: Foster placements

Foster placement with relative or friend ('U1' to 'U3') includes both immediate and emergency placements under Regulations 11 and 38, and placement with an approved foster carer who is a relative or friend. Where a placement starts as a 'Reg. 11 or 38' placement and the carer then becomes an approved foster carer, do not start a new episode but retain the same code if the child continues to be placed with that carer.

Foster placement with other carer ('U4' to 'U6') should be used where the placement is not with a relative or friend, but instead with another foster carer.

'U2' and 'U5' should be used in the following circumstances:

- **Fostering for Adoption/concurrent planning** - a looked-after child placed in a foster placement with carers who are foster carers and also approved prospective adopters who, in certain circumstances, may go on to adopt the child. The carers could be family/friends or strangers. FFA/concurrent planning is not to be confused with placing a child for adoption and codes 'A3' to 'A6' must not be used in respect of FFA/concurrent planning cases. 'A3' to 'A6' should only be used when the local authority has a placement order or parental consent to place a child for adoption.
- in **concurrent planning** cases the effort is to rehabilitate the parents so that the child may return home. If that fails, and the local authority has a placement order or parental consent to place the child for adoption, the child is formally placed for adoption with the same carers who go on to adopt the child. At this stage the child's legal status changes to 'placed for adoption'.
- in **Fostering for Adoption** cases, adoption is the likely outcome: the local authority are considering adoption for the child or are satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption but do not have a placement order or parental consent to place the child for adoption, but are seeking to obtain the order or consent. In these circumstances the child is placed in a foster placement with family/friends or strangers until a placement order or parental consent is obtained to place the child for adoption. Once the placement order/parental consent has been obtained the child's legal status changes to 'placed for adoption' and the child is formally placed for adoption with the same carers who then go on to adopt the child. In these cases, the next placement type should be 'A3' or 'A5' as appropriate to the circumstances.

See Sections 22C(9A)-(9C) of the Children Act 1989 (inserted by Section 2 of the Children and Families Act 2014).

Long term foster care:

The definition of a long-term foster placement came into effect from 1 April 2015 in The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015. A "long-term foster placement" means an arrangement made by the responsible authority for the child to be placed with a foster carer where all the following conditions apply:

- the child's plan for permanence is foster care and this is recorded in the child's care plan
- the foster carer has agreed to act as the child's foster parent until the child ceases to be looked-after
- the responsible authority has confirmed the nature of the arrangement to the foster carer, birth parents and the child

A long-term foster care placement should provide for a child's current needs and likely future needs, with assessment that the long-term foster carer has capacity to continue to meet these. Long-term foster care arrangements including situations where a child is already placed with the foster carer and this placement is determined as long-term from the initial placement.

Example scenarios in which responsible authorities may determine a placement as long-term:

- a child has been identified as requiring a long-term foster care placement and is matched with a foster family approved for long-term placements, and who are able to meet the child's needs immediately and for the remainder of their time in care. This has been agreed by all parties and is determined in the child's care plan
- whilst in placement and as part of the care planning review process, the child's responsible authority and foster carer have consulted with the child and birth family and agreed that the child will not be moved for the duration of the child's stay in care. This has been recorded as a care planning decision and the placement is defined as "long-term"
- a short-term placement, which changes in nature due to a change either in circumstances or a particular connection between the child and foster family or evolves into a placement over time from which the child will not move for the duration of care, should be considered as "long-term"

The following circumstances would not be considered a long-term foster placement:

- a foster home where a child has been placed with the carer on a short-term basis either as an emergency placement, because they are waiting to return home or to move to a more permanent placement (for example a planned and agreed long-term placement, a SGO, or adoption)
- foster placements which offer respite on an ongoing basis, even over an extended period, but for short intervals at a time (one or two nights, or a weekend) would not be considered a long-term placement

Best practice determines that a long-term placement should be determined as such as soon as possible from the commencement of the placement and the care plan should be updated to record this. Clarification should be provided, and agreement sought by all parties. When the placement plan has not formally been updated to reflect the intended long-term status, but practitioners, the foster family, birth family and the child consider it to be a long term placement, it should be recorded as such for data collection purposes.

Further information about the placement of children in a long-term foster care arrangement can be found in the statutory guidance for local authorities about Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.

Z11 to Z14: Other placements

Use these codes exceptionally, where the placement does not reasonably fit any of the other categories provided above. It does not mean 'information not known' or 'not available'.

If the placement could reasonably be reported against more than one of the codes then please use the code highest up the list. For example, if the placement is both due to awaiting the availability of an alternative placement ('Z12') and because the placement is in the child's best interests ('Z13') then the placement should be reported as 'Z12'.

Where a young person aged under the age of 16 is placed in regulated supported accommodation, please choose the most appropriate code from 'Z12' or 'Z13'. On their 16th birthday their 'Z12' or 'Z13' episode should be closed, and a new episode started the same day using placement type 'K3' and using reason for new episode 'T' (placement change only (but same carers)).

If there are any young people still placed at former semi-independent providers who did not submit their application/pay their fee to Ofsted to be a supported accommodation provider by the end of 27 October 2023, who have since applied and whom have not yet had the outcome of that application determined, or the outcome from an application is that registration has been unsuccessful, or the provider chose not to apply at all, then placements at these providers should be reported against the most appropriate of 'Z12' and 'Z13'.

Where the child or young person is in a kinship placement and the carer has been negatively assessed, then you should use the most appropriate of codes 'Z12' and 'Z13'. However, if it is the case that the outcome of the assessment has not yet been determined but the carer has not been approved within the time limits, then these placements can be reported as the most appropriate 'U' code.

Z11: By the courts (S38(6)) with relative or other non-assessed person

Use this code when a child or young person is ordered by the courts under S38(6) to be placed with a relative or other unassessed person and assessment may be ongoing. If

the child is ordered by the court S38(6) to be placed with parents, then please use ‘P1’ instead.

Z12: Unregistered carer/provider: awaiting alternative

Use this code for all placements with an unregistered carer/household, or unregistered provider because you are awaiting the availability of an alternative placement.

Z13: Unregistered carer/provider: best interest

Use this code for all placements with an unregistered carer/household, or unregistered provider because the placement is in the child’s best interests. If the placement is also because you are awaiting the availability of an alternative placement then please use ‘Z12’ instead.

Z14: Other placement

Use this code for all ‘other’ placements that aren’t covered in the categories above. An example of these include where the provision is registered with the CQC (and not Ofsted).

Note ‘Z14’ should be used when a child has been placed outside of England and none of the other placement types apply. However, it should not be used if for example a child is placed in a children’s home registered in Scotland, in this case the child should be reported as placement type ‘K2 – children’s home’ but the URN field should be left blank.

For children reported in a ‘Z14’ placement additional information must be provided to explain the placement when you sign off your return. If the young person is registered with the CQC (and not Ofsted) then please provide this detail at sign off.

Note that in previous collections, UASC who are being accommodated in reception centres have been reported as placement type ‘Z1 – Other’. Where these providers are now registered as supported accommodation providers, then placements should be reported as ‘K3’- supported accommodation.

Looked-after child living with their mother in a rehabilitation facility for substance users

The nature and purpose of the placement is a social work practice decision, which will be reflected in the child’s care plan. The statistics should simply reflect whatever decision has been made. We are aware both of children being regarded as placed in the rehabilitation facility, and of children being regarded as placed with their own parent, depending on circumstances. The placement code for a rehabilitation facility would be ‘Z13’ or ‘Z14’ unless it was a registered care home (code ‘R1’) or an NHS health trust establishment such as a Drug Dependency Unit (code ‘R2’). ‘Placed with own parent(s)’ code is ‘P1’.

Residential placements outside of England

Residential placements outside England should be reported as the most appropriate category from the placement type list, including where no other category is appropriate, 'Z1- other placements'. Permitted accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds can be found in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

2.2.9 Placement provider

For each of the placements in section 2.2.8, except those children looked-after placed in temporary placements ('T0' to 'T4') or other placements ('Z11' to 'Z14') a placement provider code is required. This will record information on the party providing the placement for each and every placement for a looked-after child during the year. Children placed with their own parents do not strictly have a placement provider and should be allocated code 'PR0', only.

Table 10: Code set for placement provider

Code	Description
PR0	Parent(s) or other person(s) with parental responsibility
PR1	Own provision (by the local authority) including a regional adoption agency where the child's responsible local authority is the host authority
PR2	Other local authority provision, including a regional adoption agency where another local authority is the host authority
PR3	Other public provision (for example, a primary care trust)
PR4	Private provision
PR5	Voluntary/third sector provision

Placement provider: notes and definitions

PR0: Parents or other person with parental responsibility

Children placed with parents (placement code 'P1') is the only placement that can be associated with code 'PR0', as there is no formal provider in this case.

PR1: Own provision (by the local authority)

The placement is provided by your local authority. This can be associated with all placements except:

- children placed with parents (placement code 'P1')
- NHS or health trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care (placement code of 'R2')
- young offender institution (placement code of 'R5')

This code should be used where a child is placed for adoption through a regional adoption agency and your local authority is the host authority of the adoption agency.

PR2: Other local authority provision

The placement is provided by another local authority. This can be associated with all placements except:

- children placed with parents (placement code 'P1')
- NHS or health trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care placement code of 'R2')
- Young offender institution (placement code of 'R5'

This code should be used where a child is placed for adoption through a regional adoption agency and another local authority is the host authority of the adoption agency.

PR3: Other public provision (for example a PCT)

The placement is provided by public provision. This can be associated with all placements except:

- children in foster care placements (placement codes 'U1' to 'U6')
- children placed for adoption (placement codes 'A3' to 'A6')
- children placed with parents (placement code 'P1')
- placed in secure children's homes (placement code 'K1')

PR4: Private provision

The placement is provided by private provision (organisations run for profit). This can be associated with all placements except:

- children placed for adoption (placement codes 'A3' to 'A6')
- children placed with parents (placement code 'P1')

PR5: Voluntary/third sector provision

The placement is provided by voluntary/third sector provision – organisations which are not run for profit. This can be associated with all placements except for:

- children placed with parents (placement code 'P1')
- where the status of a foster carer changes from being a carer approved by a local authority (placement provider code 'PR1') to an agency carer (placement provider code 'PR2', 'PR4' or 'PR5'), or vice versa, it is important that this change is recorded as a change of placement for the child. Code 'T' should be used for the reason for new episode for the subsequent episode. Failure to record this change would mean that the count of children being fostered at any point in time under agency arrangements would not be correct. With an ever-increasing focus on

costs and expenditure, it is important that the Department has access to accurate and up to date information

A placement with a child's father can only be coded as 'P1 - placed with parents', if the father has parental responsibility. If the parents were married at the time of birth, or subsequently marry, both parents have parental responsibility. Unmarried fathers can acquire parental responsibility either through a notarised agreement with the birth mother or through a court order.

Deciding whether a child should be placed for adoption, assessing the suitability of prospective adopters and matching the child with approved prospective adopters can only be done by adoption agencies under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Adoption Agencies are local authorities and voluntary, non-profit making adoption societies. Adoption Societies have to be registered with Ofsted. A local authority can place a child with prospective adopters it has approved itself, ('PR1'), or 'buy' prospective adopters approved by another local authority ('PR2') or by a registered adoption society (also known as voluntary adoption agency) ('PR5').

Where the Local Authority's children's services are delivered by a Trust, the Local Authority should determine the correct placement provider code by checking if the organisation that the child is placed with is registered with Ofsted as an independent fostering agency or voluntary adoption agency. If this is the case, the provider code 'PR4' or 'PR5' should be used. If the organisation that the child is placed with is not independently registered, the provider code 'PR1' should be used.

2.2.10 Date episode ceased

This item records the date that each episode ended. This date will always fall in the current data year. Code day and month as 2-digit numbers and year as a 4-digit number. For example, 4 November 2026 should be entered as 04/11/2026.

An episode cannot start and end on the same day. Where a child has not left care, a new episode must start on the same day as the previous episode finished. If the episode does not end during the year (and the child is being looked-after on the night of the 31 March 2027), this field must be left blank.

When a child ceases to be looked-after because of adoption (reason episode ceased codes of 'E11' or 'E12'), the date episode ceased is the date the court makes the adoption order.

When a child ceases to be looked-after because they die whilst being looked-after (reason episode ceased code 'E2'), the date episode ceased must be the same as the date of death as recorded on the death certificate.

Periods of care in local authority accommodation of less than 24 hours must not be recorded on the SSDA903. The only exceptions to this rule are:

- children who are being regularly accommodated under an agreed series of short-term placements (legal status codes 'V3' and 'V4') - overnight stays of less than 24 hours may be treated as 24 hours for statistical purposes
- UASC - they should be recorded as a children looked after as soon as they come to the attention of local authorities, rather than only when they have been accommodated for 24 hours - unlike other children, all UASC who come to the attention of local authorities will become looked-after children so the 24-hour rule should not apply for this group of children (see section 1.9.7)

2.2.11 Reason episode ceased

When an episode has ended and a further episode, in the same period of care, has started, use the code, 'X1'. All other 'reason episode ceased' codes record the circumstances when a child ceases to be looked-after.

If a child ceases to be looked-after because they have turned 18, this can already be deduced from their date of birth. Therefore, the appropriate code below should be used to capture the destination of the young person.

If an episode does not end during the course of the year (and the child is being looked after on the night of the 31 March 2027), this field must be left blank.

Table 1: Code set for reason episode ceased

Code	Description
X1	Episode ceases, and new episode begins on same day, for any reason
E11	Adopted – application for an adoption order unopposed
E12	Adopted – consent dispensed with by the court
E2	Died
E3	Care taken over by another local authority in the UK
E4A	Returned home to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or (from 22 April 2014) a child arrangement order).
E4B	Returned home to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with parental responsibility which was not part of the current care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or (from 22 April 2014) a child arrangement order).
E13	Left care to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with no parental responsibility.

Code	Description
E41	Residence order (or, from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order which sets out with whom the child is to live) granted
E45	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)
E46	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)
E47	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)
E48	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)
E5	Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked-after: supportive accommodation providing formalised advice/support arrangements (such as most hostels, young men's Christian association, foyers, staying close and care leavers projects). Includes both children leaving care before and at age 18
E6	Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked-after: accommodation providing no formalised advice/support arrangements (such as bedsit, own flat, living with friend(s)). Includes both children leaving care before and at age 18
E7	Transferred to residential care funded by adult social care services
E9	Sentenced to custody
E14	Accommodation on remand ended
E15	Age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over and E5, E6 and E7 do not apply, such as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) whose age has been disputed
E16	Child moved abroad
E17	Aged 18 (or over) and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements)
E8	Period of being looked-after ceased for any other reason (where none of the other reasons apply)

Further detail on when some of the codes should be used is provided below:

E4A: Relates to a planned move where the child returns home as part of their agreed care plan. This return home has been discussed as part of the care planning process and happens within a planned timeframe.

E4B: Relates to an unplanned move - includes instances where the child's return home is immediate (for example, within 24 hours) and has not been discussed as part of the

care planning process or does not occur within the planned timeframe. This would include instances where a child under a voluntary arrangement is removed from care by their parents and this was not agreed as part of the care planning process.

E13: Left care to live with parents, relatives, or other person with no parental responsibility – this code should be used if the child left care to live with parents, relatives or another person, but this person did not have parental responsibility.

E14: Accommodation on remand ended – this code should be used if a child was remanded to youth detention accommodation and has stopped their episode of care because they are no longer remanded.

E15: Age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over and 'E5', 'E6' and 'E7' do not apply, for example, an unaccompanied asylum seeking child whose age has been disputed – this code should be used if the episode of care ended because the age was disputed, an assessment revealed the child was 18 or over and the young person was not transferred to residential care and did not move into independent living arrangements. See section 2.1.3 on which date of birth should be reported for the child/young person in these circumstances. This code can also be used if a care leaver, who was previously an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child, is age assessed and so is not entitled to care leaver services.

E16: Moved abroad – use this code if the child left care because they moved to another country, including when a child is deported.

E17: Aged 18 (or over) and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements) – use this code whenever the young person has ceased care and remains with their former carers, irrespective of placement type. Young people in foster care who are 'staying put' are only a subset of this group.

E8: Period of being looked-after ceased for any other reason – this code should never be used purely because a child has reached the age of 18 as this can already be deduced from his/her date of birth. It should only be used when none of the alternative destinations listed are appropriate. 'E8' should also be used when a child turns 18 and continues to be missing.

If a looked-after child is sentenced to custody and placed in a secure children's home, secure training centre or young offenders' institution, their status in that setting depends on the legislative framework under which the custodial sentence is applied. If the child is subject to a Care Order (Section 31 Children Act 1989) then they remain as 'looked-after' regardless of being sentenced to custody. If the child is accommodated in care by a voluntary agreement under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, then they cease to be looked-after when they are admitted to custody.

2.2.12 Reason for placement change

Introduced in the 2015 to 2016 collection, for episodes that cease due to a change in placement, there is a requirement to record the reason for placement change using the code list detailed below. The reason for placement change should be recorded against the episode that is ceasing, not against the new episode starting. When a placement ceases due to a placement change, we would expect the reason episode ceased to be recorded as 'X1' (episode ceases and new episode begins on the same day) and we would expect the reason for new episode for the subsequent episode to be 'P', 'B', 'T' or 'U'.

Some of the reasons may not be clear cut and may be a combination of factors. Social workers should make a judgement about the primary reason – for example, both a carer and a child might want a placement to end but the request may be stronger from one side and would become the primary reason.

A placement is all valid placement types, including residential care, foster care, fostering for adoption (FFA) or placement with a connected person. Carer means residential unit, foster carer, FFA carer or connected person.

Table 12: Code set for reason placement change

Code	Description	Comments
CARPL	Change to/Implementation of Care Plan	This code would be used where the change of placement is a planned part of the child's care plan and will be a move to a placement that meets the child's assessed needs on a temporary or permanent basis. This would include circumstances where a placement change was not expected but becomes necessary. The key factor is that planning takes place and the decision is recorded in the child's care plan before the change takes place. This would include moves from short to long term foster care or where a child is placed for adoption with the current foster carer. It also includes movements to semi-independence. The nature of the change in plan will be monitored through the placement codes before and after this move. This should not include changes where the foster carer has moved to a new house or where the carer is the same but has changed provider type.

Code	Description	Comments
CLOSE	Resignation/ closure of provision	This code would be used where a child has to be moved because a foster carer decides to resign or the setting closes. This code would be used in a planned move; not in an emergency. The foster carer's decision to resign may be because their circumstances have changed, for example, the foster carer becomes ill or another change of circumstances means that the foster carer is no longer able to provide a placement for the child. Circumstances may also include where the child's placement had lasted longer than expected and the foster carer is no longer able to provide a placement for the child. Use of this code would also include where a setting (for example, a children's home or a fostering service) closes and is therefore no longer a registered provision with Ofsted.
ALLEG	Allegation (s47)	This code would be used where a child has been removed from placement because of an allegation which is being investigated under s47 (Children Act 1989). This allegation may relate to the carer or another child at the setting. This code should not be used if the allegation has resulted in the setting's approval (for example, a children's home or a fostering service) being terminated – in this case, 'approval removed' should be used.
STAND	Standards of care concern	This code would be used where a child has been removed from placement by the responsible authority or provider as a result of concerns about standards of care. This does not mean a child protection investigation (s47) but a formal process followed by the provider. For example, see the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Service 2011, standard. 22. This code can be used for all types of placement such as foster care, residential care. This code should not be used if the setting's approval is terminated as a result of standards of care concerns – in this case, 'approval removed' should be used.

Code	Description	Comments
APPRR	Approval removed	This code would be used where a setting is no longer approved/registered with the appropriate statutory body (such as Ofsted). This code can be used for all types of placement such as foster care, residential care. For example, this code should be used where a foster carer's approval is terminated by the service following a s47 investigation, a standards of care issue, a complaint or for other reasons that relate to the carers' conduct. It should also be used where Ofsted take enforcement action resulting in the closure of a residential setting. This code should not be used when a foster carer resigns or a provision is closed voluntarily and they are no longer registered with the relevant statutory body (such as Ofsted).
CREQB	Carer(s) requests placement end due to child's behaviour	This code would be used where because of the child's behaviour the placement has broken down or disrupted, and the carer has asked for the placement to end and the child to be moved to another placement. There may be some planning involved and a short period of time may pass but this is not a planned move.
CREQO	Carer(s) requests placement end other than due to child's behaviour	These codes would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short or long term arrangement but has broken down or disrupted and the carer [foster carer, residential unit or connected person] has asked for the child to be moved to another placement. There may be some planning involved and a short period of time may pass but this is not a planned move.
CHILD	Child requests placement end	This code would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short- or long-term arrangement but has broken down or disrupted and the child has asked to move to another placement. There may be some planning involved and a short period of time may pass but this is not a planned move.

Code	Description	Comments
LAREQ	Responsible/area authority requests placement end	This code would be used where it was intended that the placement was a short- or long-term placement but the responsible authority has decided that the placement no longer meets the child's needs. There may be some planning involved and a short period of time may pass but this is not a planned move. There will be circumstances where the child is at risk of harm and this would be coded as an allegation or standards of care concern. Where the placement no longer meets a child's need but there is no immediate risk – this code would be used.
PLACE	Change in the status of placement only	This code would be used where there is a change of status for the placement, but the child remains with the same carer and there is no change to the care plan. Examples include a foster carer moving to a new house, a foster carer working for a local authority becomes managed by an independent fostering agency, a placement for adoption transferring to a regional adoption agency, or a child in residential accommodation moving under the same provider. Here the 'reason for new episode' code will indicate that the child is still living with the same carer.
CUSTOD	Custody arrangement	This code would be used where a child has been admitted into custody.
OTHER	Other	Any other reason not captured above. Please note that 'Other' should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

It is optional for local authorities to record temporary placements. If a temporary placement ('T0' to 'T4') is recorded, then local authorities are not required to submit a 'reason for placement change' code for either the previous placement prior to the temporary placement, or the temporary placement itself. If a child is in a temporary placement then returns to a different placement immediately afterwards, then the temporary placement ('T0' to 'T4') should be ignored and the placement move will be recorded in the same way as any other. In this case, a reason for placement change would be required.

Example 1: Code: Carer requests placement end due to child's behaviour.

Richard, 12, was placed with a family of 5; with 2 very experienced foster carers and their 3 birth children aged 14, 16 and 18. Richard had been in care for 3 years at the time of

the placement. This was Richard's second placement. His first placement broke down because his foster carers felt that they couldn't manage Richard's behaviour any longer. This placement was arranged at short notice. Richard presented very challenging behaviour when he moved in with his new foster family. He was very aggressive and got into arguments with the other children causing constant friction. This situation made the foster carers very upset and was taking a toll on the rest of the family. The foster carers frequently contacted the supervising social worker to seek help. They left numerous messages but did not get a call back or any support. The foster carers did not have access to the support and training required to meet Richard's complex needs.

It became apparent that the placement was not a good match for Richard and the foster carer expressed this to their supervising social worker.

Things to consider:

- if the foster carers requested support but the social worker made the decision to end the placement, then 'Responsible/Area authority requests placement end' code may be more appropriate
- if Richard states that he no longer wants to live with the foster carers then 'Child requests placement end' code will apply

Example 2: Code: Change to/Implementation of Care Plan

Ruby, 9, was removed from her parents and placed with emergency foster carers who had no other children in placement or birth children. This was Ruby's first placement and she quickly settled into her new home and seemed happy with her new foster carers so all parties, including Ruby, agreed that she would remain in this placement until the family assessment was completed. Ruby entered care because her social worker was concerned that she had been subject to physical abuse. Work with Ruby's family and other agencies who expressed concern was on-going to establish whether Ruby could return home with support, or if a longer-term placement would be needed. After the first few weeks in placement, Ruby's parents presented threatening and harassing behaviour towards her foster carers by phone and by turning up at the house demanding to see their child. These continued on and off for a period of four months despite intervention, clear boundaries and support for the family from the local authority. At the care planning review the issue about Ruby's safety was raised and discussed. Those present agreed that it was in Ruby's best interest to remain with the current foster carers until the local authority found her a suitable placement.

Two months later, Ruby moved to a new placement and details of her new home were not disclosed to her parents.

Things to consider:

- if Ruby's foster carers decided that they could not cope with the harassment from Ruby's birth parents and requested that the placement end, then 'Carer requests placements end other than due to child's behaviour' code would be used
- if Ruby's social worker was concerned that Ruby's parents were causing too much disruption and ended the placement then 'Responsible/Area authority requests placement end' code would be used

Example 3: Code Allegation (S47)

At 10, Reema was placed in her third foster care placement. Reema entered care when she was 8. Her first placement was a short-term arrangement which lasted 6 months. The second was a planned long-term placement which lasted 18 months. This placement ended because Reema's social worker was concerned that the placement was not meeting Reema's needs. Her foster carers were inexperienced and struggled to balance Reema's need for attention with the needs of their own birth children, aged 12 and 14. When they agreed to the placement, they did not realise how challenging it would be to look after 4 children. This placement had a planned ending.

Reema was then matched to experienced foster carers, who had a birth child, Peter, age 13. Two months into the placement Reema told her teacher that Peter was 'very touchy' and that this made her feel uncomfortable. Reema's teacher raised this with her foster carers who expressed concern and agreed it would be appropriate to raise the matter with Reema's social worker. When the foster carers raised this issue with their supervising social worker and Reema's social worker they were offered further information about statements Reema had made in her 2 previous placements about inappropriate touch. The foster carers had not been given any information about this at the placement planning stage. Reema had also made a serious allegation against her previous foster carer – a matter that had not been disclosed to her current foster carers before. The foster carers expressed concern about the placement match and the risk that they and their son had been placed at. Reema's social worker confirmed that she would speak to Reema about the comments she had made to her teacher and that the matter would be treated seriously – possibly resulting in an investigation.

The local authority removed Reema from the placement.

Things to consider:

- if the foster carers had requested that the placement end due to concerns about the risk to themselves and their son of further allegations, then the 'Carer requests placement end due to child's behaviour' code could be used
- if all parties agreed that the placement was not a good match but there was no immediate risk of harm to Reema, and the local authority would provide support to the foster family until a suitable alternative placement was found then the 'Change to/Implementation of care plan' code could be used.

2.3 Review information

To be collected for children looked after for at least 20 working days during the year ending 31 March. Information on how the timeliness of reviews is calculated can be found in the CLA system help document.

2.3.1 Date of each statutory review

The dates of each statutory (children looked after or adoption) review during the year will be recorded for all children looked-after excluding those looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements. At least one review should be recorded for children who have been looked after continuously for at least 20 working days where this period of care falls partly or wholly in the year to 31 March 2027. Further information under the terms set out in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.

All dates should be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format. For example, 15 November 2026 enter as 15/11/2026 (manual amendments only may be made using DD/MM/YY but will appear as DD/MM/YYYY).

Do not include dates of other reviews such as secure reviews.

2.3.2 Method of participation in each review

For each statutory review date submitted the method of participation in that review is required.

Table 13: Code set for method of participation

Code	Description
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (Attendance).
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf. (Attendance views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer (IRO))
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (Attendance symbols)
PN4	Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her (Attendance without contribution)
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (Views represented by advocate or independent reviewing officer (IRO) through texting, written format, phone, audio/video, viewpoint)

Code	Description
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (Texting the chair, written format, phone, audio/video, viewpoint)
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review

Definition of an advocate

An advocate can be an independent advocate from a national organisation, an independent advocate attached to a local authority children's rights service, or someone of the child's choice (for example a friend, relative, teacher or social worker). It is important that children and young people have an advocate of their choice, but there may be circumstances where an 'unprofessional' advocate may not have the skills or experience required and so the child should be assisted by the Children's Rights Officer, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or equivalent member of staff, to understand the choices available to them. For more information, please refer to the national standards for the provision of children's advocacy services.

Definition of 'making a meaningful contribution'

By participation we essentially mean 'make a meaningful contribution'. It is part of the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role to determine whether the child has made a meaningful contribution and complete the statistical return accordingly.

For example, if a child attended the review but only said "it's raining outside" throughout the review, this would be taken as not participating (and coded PN4, child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her views symbolically, and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her). However, a child nodding when asked "Would you like to stay with your foster carer?" could be taken as participating (and coded 'PN3', child attends and conveys his or her views symbolically).

To note Viewpoint is interactive computer software especially designed to capture the views and wishes of children and young people.

2.4 Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

Information on whether a child is UASC should be collected for all children looked after on the SSDA903.

An unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is defined by paragraph 352ZD of the Immigration rules as one who is:

- under 18 years of age when the claim is submitted

- claiming in their own right
- separated from both parents and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so

If, whilst being looked after or whilst being a care leaver a young person has been age assessed as over 18 then information on how to record this change can be found in sections 2.1.3 and 2.11.3.

2.4.1 UASC status - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC)

If the child has been an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) at any time in the collection year, then this must be recorded.

Table 14: Code set for unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC)

Code	Description
0	Child was not an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) at any time during the year
1	Child was an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) at any time during the year

2.4.2 Date UASC status ceased

The unaccompanied asylum-seeking status of a child recorded in 2.4.1 will cease if the child is granted refugee status, Humanitarian Protection or UASC leave (discretionary leave for young people whose asylum claim) is refused. If UASC status ceases the day, month and year should be recorded. In all other circumstances, this field should be left blank.

The loss of UASC status should only be entered if it occurred in the current statistical year. In all cases, UASC status will cease on a child's 18th birthday.

2.5 Adoptions (AD1)

2.5.1 Purpose of items collected relating to children adopted from care

There are 6 key data items to be completed in respect of children adopted from care during the year ending 31 March 2027 see below 2.5.8 to 2.5.13 of this guide for details of each item). The purpose of these items is to collect detailed information about every child who was adopted from care during the year. This data relates to both the child and his or her adoptive parents.

2.5.2 Children for whom these data items should be completed

These items on the SSDA903 should be completed for all children who ceased to be looked after at some point during the year ending 31 March 2027, on the granting of an adoption order. All these children will have been placed with their adoptive parents before the making of the adoption order. During this period, they should be treated as being 'placed for adoption' and should only be recorded as ceasing to be looked after on the day the adoption order was made.

If a child has been adopted during the year, it is important that all six data items relating to the adoption are completed.

If the adoption was without the approval of the local authority (private), enter the date that the adoption application was lodged with the court in date placed with adoptive family and date matched fields.

2.5.3 Validation

The data will be checked for consistency in the order of the dates regarding the adoption process.

2.5.4 Stages of an adoption

Before a looked-after child can be adopted, the local authority must first make the decision that adoption is in the child's best interest. This is known as the 'date should be placed' in the SSDA903 CLA application. Suitable prospective adopters are then found before the child is placed for adoption for at least 10 weeks before the adoption order is granted and the child ceases to be looked after.

It therefore follows that:

- the date the child started to be looked after in the latest period of care will generally be before the date should be placed; however, it is feasible for a placement order to be obtained instead of a care order
- the date should be placed must be before or the same as the date of matching the child and prospective adopters
- the date of matching the child and prospective adopters must be before or the same as the date the child was placed for adoption

2.5.5 How should a S84 order for a child adopted outside England be recorded? And what if they subsequently return to be looked after in England?

Although a S84 Order is not the same as an adoption order, the child should be treated in the same way as if an adoption order had been granted. The child should be recorded as ceasing care with reason episode ceased as 'E11' or 'E12' as appropriate and the

additional adoption items should then be completed in the usual way. If the child returns to England to be looked after, for any reason, a new child record should be created for their new period of care with a different child ID to retain confidentiality.

2.5.6 Special guardianship orders

The information referred to in this section for a looked-after child who was adopted is not required for those children who cease to be looked after due to the making of a special guardianship order. Local authority contacts do not need to provide the date when the decision to adopt the child was made, or the date of matching the child with the prospective adopters or any information on the prospective adopters. However, if the decision has previously been made that the child should be placed for adoption or that decision has been reversed then these details should be included in the relevant section (see section 2.6). Similarly, information on children who have returned to care after previously being the subject of a special guardianship order should be included in the data items relating to previous permanent arrangements (see section 2.7). Special guardianship orders should also be recorded as a reason why a child is no longer looked after, where applicable.

2.5.7 Dates

Two out of the 6 data items required for children adopted from care are dates, and refer to the various steps in the adoption process. In each case, the date required is the final decision date of your local authority, and not the date of the Adoption Panel's recommendations. There is a logical sequence to these decisions, which should be reflected in the dates on which they occur – (see above section 2.5.4 on 'Stages of adoption' in this guide).

All dates should be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format. For example, a date of 15 November 2026 should be entered as 15/11/2026.

Manual amendments only may be made using DD/MM/YY but will appear as DD/MM/YYYY.

2.5.8 Date of decision child should be placed for adoption

This is the date on which the local authority formally decides that a child should be placed for adoption. This decision must not be confused with the one made at the statutory review, that is the 4-month statutory review when adoption might be considered the preferred option for permanence (otherwise referred to as the Adoption Plan). At this point, the local authority is only considering adoption and will begin to complete the child's permanence report for consideration by the local authority's decision maker. This date could be during the current year or in previous years. This date should be consistent with that defined in paragraph 2.6.1.

If the child is adopted by the foster carer or relatives with whom they are already placed and the adoption went ahead with the approval of the local authority then the date should be entered as the date of the decision that the child should be placed for adoption. If the adoption was without the approval of the local authority, the date that the adoption application was lodged with the court should be used to complete this item.

2.5.9 Date of matching child and prospective adopters

This is the date on which the local authority formally decides that the child should be placed for adoption with the particular prospective adopters - the date the foster placement converts into an adoption placement. This is not the date that the matching panel recommends a match.

2.5.10 Whether child adopted by former foster carers

It should be recorded if a child was adopted by former foster carers, the code-set used here is as follows.

Table 15: Code set for whether children adopted by former foster carers

Code	Description
0	Child was not adopted by former foster carer(s)
1	Child adopted by former foster carer(s)

2.5.11 Number of adopters

The number of person(s) adopting the looked-after child should be recorded as 1 or 2 adopters.

Table 16: Code set for number of adopters

Code	Description
1	Child has been adopted by 1 person
2	Child has been adopted by 2 people

2.5.12 Sex of adopters

The sex of adopters, both single and couples, should be recorded:

Table 17: Code set for sex of adopters

Code	Description
M1	The single adopter is male

Code	Description
F1	The single adopter is female
MM	The adopting couple are both males
FF	The adopting couple are both females
MF	The adopting couple are male and female

2.5.13 Legal status of adopters

The code set for the data item 'Legal Status of Adopters' was extended following the Royal Assent to the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in July 2013, allowing same-sex marriages to be performed from summer 2014. As of December 2019, it is possible to have mixed sex civil partnerships.

Table 182: Code set for legal status of adopter(s)

Code	Description
L0	Single adopter
L11	Different sex married couple
L12	Same sex married couple
L2	Civil partnership couple
L3	Different sex unmarried couple
L4	Same sex couple not married or in a civil partnership

A civil partnership is a legal relationship formed by 2 people who are of the same sex (Civil Partnership Act 2004).

2.6 Children who should/should no longer be placed for adoption

This section on the SSDA903 should be completed for children for whom the decision is made, either during the current year or in a previous year, that the child should be placed for adoption or for whom the decision is made during the year that the child should no longer be placed for adoption. Two out of the 3 data items required are dates. Collecting this information will enable the Department to analyse where there has been a change in the permanence plan for the child.

All dates should be recorded in a DD/MM/YYYY format. For example, 24 January 2027 enter as 24/01/2027.

2.6.1 Date of decision that the child should be placed for adoption

This is the date on which the local authority formally decides that a child should be placed for adoption. This decision must not be confused with the one made at the statutory review, that is the 4-month statutory review, when adoption might be considered the preferred option for permanence (otherwise referred to as the Adoption Plan). At this point, the local authority is only considering adoption and will begin to complete the child's permanence report for consideration by the local authority's decision maker. This date could be during the current year or in a previous year. This date should be consistent with that defined in paragraph 2.5.8.

2.6.2 Date of decision that the child should no longer be placed for adoption

This is the date the local authority formally decides that the child should no longer be placed for adoption. This decision would be taken after a review has been made of the child's case under Regulation 36 of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005. If it is decided that the child should no longer be placed for adoption, the local authority should revise the child's Care Plan and apply to the court to revoke the placement order. Any care order will be reactivated.

The local authority is required to regularly review the child's case. The local authority may decide to remove the child from the home of the prospective adopters, or the prospective adopters may return the child to the local authority. If either scenario happens, it does not automatically mean that adoption is no longer the plan for the child. The local authority may well place the child with other prospective adopters.

2.6.3 Reason why the child should no longer be placed for adoption

For each child for whom the decision has been taken that they are no longer to be placed for adoption, record the reason for that decision via the codes below.

Table 19: Code set for reason for reversal of decision to adopt

Code	Description
RD1	The child's needs changed after the decision
RD2	The Court did not make a placement order
RD3	Prospective adopters could not be found
RD4	Any other reason

2.7 Return to care after or during previous permanent arrangement

This should be completed for all children who start to be looked after at any point in the latest year. We would expect that local authorities would gather this information about the child's background and family history when they assess the child and assemble the care plan for the child.

Information is collected for children who previously ceased to be looked-after due to the granting of an adoption order, a special guardianship order, residence order (until 22 April 2014) or a child arrangement order. The following should be included:

- children who start to be looked after due to respite care arrangement
- children who start to be looked after under section 20 (legal status of V2)
- all children who start to be looked after following a previous adoption, special guardianship order (SGO) or residence order (RO) (or, from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order which sets out with whom the child is to live) even when the child then ceases to be looked-after and returns home following the episode of care.

The information is required only once, the first time a child returns to care after the previous permanence order was granted, even if that was in a previous year. If the child subsequently leaves care (other than for adoption, SGO or RO) and returns gain, this information is not required for the subsequent return.

This module will include 3 data items, pervious permanence option (2.7.1), local authority code where previous permanence option was arranged (2.7.2) and date of order (2.7.3).

2.7.1 Previous permanence option

Table 3: Code set for previous permanence option

Code	Description
P1	Adoption
P2	Special guardianship order (SGO)
P3	Residence order (RO) or child arrangements order (CAO) which sets out with whom the child is to live.
P4	Unknown
Z1	Child has not previously had a permanence option

'P4' should be used when it is not known to the local authority whether the child had a previous permanence option. This information can be updated in the collection system if information comes to light at any stage in an episode of care. Do not include any

adoptions/SGO/ROs/CAOs previously granted where the child was not previously looked after.

2.7.2 Local authority code where previous permanence option was arranged

The code of the local authority who arranged the previous permanence option, if this information is not available then the code '999' should be used.

Table 4: Code set for local authority of previous permanence

Code	Description
nnn	A valid local authority code, or 999
NIR	Northern Ireland
NUK	Outside of the UK
SCO	Scotland
WAL	Wales
999	Information not available

If local authority boundaries have changed since this option was arranged, please use the code at the time of the adoption/SGO/RO/CAO.

If a child was adopted by an adopter found through a voluntary adoption agency (VAA) record the local authority which was previously looking after the child. Similarly, if a child was adopted by a foster carer who applied directly to the court to adopt the child, then record the local authority which was previously looking after the child.

2.7.3 Date of order

Record the date of the order if known in the form DD/MM/YYYY.

If the exact date is unknown record the month and year in the form zz/MM/YYYY, using zz as the day, for example for May 2026 with the exact date being unknown enter zz/05/2025.

If the month is unknown please record the year in the form zz/zz/YYYY, for example, where the year of 2026 only is known enter zz/zz/2026. If no information is known about the date of the order please record as zz/zz/zzzz.

2.8 Children missing from care

This module collects data on children who are missing from care or away from their placement without authorisation. All such episodes during the year should be recorded, regardless of duration, along with the start/end date of the incident.

2.8.1 Missing

Record each episode where a child was 'missing' or 'away from placement without authorisation' during the year according to the following definitions:

- M - Missing from care - a looked-after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (for example school) and their whereabouts is not known
- A - Away from placement without authorisation - a looked-after child whose whereabouts is known but who is not at their placement or place they are expected to be and the carer has concerns or the incident has been notified to the local authority or the police.

Any children who were missing from care or away from placement without authorisation for any length of time between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027 should be recorded. This includes children who were missing from care or away from placement without authorisation before the start of the year if the episode was ongoing into the year. It also includes children who went missing from care or away from placement without authorisation during the year and where the episode continued after 31 March 2027, as well as those who returned during the year.

Further details on supporting children who are missing or away from placement without authorisation are provided in statutory guidance on children who runaway or go missing from home or care, published in January 2014.

2.8.2 Missing episode start date

The missing episode start date should be completed for both missing episodes and episodes where the child was away from placement without authorisation. It should be the date the child left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). For this purpose, a responsible adult is either the child's carer, or a professional directly associated with the child's welfare or education (like a doctor, school-teacher or social worker). The missing episode start date could be in a previous year.

Any UASC that go missing before being accommodated for 24 hours for data collection purposes should still be recorded as missing[2] with a start date as the date in which they left his or her normal placement or the date the child was last seen by a responsible adult (whichever was the latest). For this purpose, a responsible adult is either the child's carer, or a professional directly associated with the child's welfare or education (like a doctor, school-teacher, home office official or social worker).

Unresolved cases should remain open and the child included in the SSDA903 until the child's 18th birthday, at which point the case should be closed using the appropriate reason code. Records must not be closed before this point.

2.8.3 Missing episode end date

The missing episode end date should be completed for both missing episodes and episodes where the child was away from placement without authorisation. It should be the date that the child was found (where whereabouts are unknown) or the date that the child returned to their normal placement (where whereabouts known). If the child was still missing or away from placement without authorisation at the end of the year, then this field should be left blank.

Additional Notes

If a missing from care or away from placement without authorisation episode starts and ends within the same day, then the same date should be returned for the start and end dates. Similarly, if more than one missing episode occurs within the same day, separate episodes should be recorded but these should have the same start/end dates.

If a child is away from placement without authorisation, but they subsequently become missing (meaning their whereabouts become unknown), this should be recorded as 2 separate episodes, but the end date of the away from placement without authorisation episode should be the same as the start date of the missing episode. This should be the point at which the child's whereabouts became unknown. Equally, there may be some circumstances where the whereabouts of a missing child become known such that they are no longer considered to be missing, but the child is still not where they are supposed to be. A new 'away from placement without authorisation' episode should be recorded, and this would have a start date consistent with the date of the end of the missing episode. This should be the date the child's whereabouts became known.

[2] See section 1.9.7 for a full explanation of this circumstance.

For children who start to be looked after when missing, record the placement arranged for the child had the child not been missing, then add details of the missing child to the missing module.

If a child ceases to be looked after whilst still missing (for example they turn 18) then please enter an end date for the missing/away from placement without authorisation which is equal to the date the child ceased to be looked-after.

2.9 Children who were the subject of Deprivation of Liberty Orders

This module collects data on children who were the subject of a Deprivation of Liberty Order (DoLO). Only the dates of DoLOs for children looked after should be included in this return. All such occurrences during the year should be recorded, regardless of duration, along with the start/end date of the order.

2.9.1 Deprivation of Liberty Orders

Record each episode where a child was subject to a DoLO during the year. Any children who were subject to a DoLO for any duration between 1 April 2026 and 31 March 2027 should be recorded. This includes children who were subject to a DoLO before the start of the year if the order was ongoing into the year, and/or when the order continued after 31 March 2027.

The cohort of children are those up to 18 years of age, who are legally referred to as 'looked-after children' - those who are being cared for by the local authority, whether that is under Section 20, or Sections 22 and 31 of the Children Act 1989 and who, because their behaviour/wellbeing is of such concern that they are not considered to be safe without restrictions to their liberty, and/or have been subject to a deprivation of liberty order being granted by the inherent jurisdiction of the high court.

Those out of scope are:

- Over 18s
- Those on any other deprivation of liberty authorised by another process or body such as the court of protection
- Those who are detained under the Mental Health Act
- Those who lack capacity and are detained under the mental capacity act
- Those on a Section 25 order for a secure children's home

2.9.2 Deprivation of liberty order start date

The start date should be the date the DoLO was granted by the court (not the application date). The date could be in a previous collection year.

2.9.3 Deprivation of liberty order end date

The end date should be the date that the DoLO ceases. If an application is made to extend the order then only the date where the order ceases should be reported. If the child was still subject to a DoLO at the end of the year, then this field should be left blank.

If an application to extend an order is made and approved, then the end date reported should be the date the extended order ceases, not the end date of each individual application that was approved.

If the child ceases to be looked after then the date the DoLO ceases should be the same date as the date the child ceased to be looked after.

Additional Notes

Only the start and end dates of the DoLO need to be reported, not the dates of individual application to extend a DoLO, for example if a DoLO is granted, but then an application is made to extend the DoLO then only the initial start and final end dates should be reported in your return.

Example 1:

An application to the court is granted, at the end of the time period another application is made to extend the DoLO for a further week, i.e.

Application 1: Start Date 3/4/2026, End Date10/4/2026

Application 2: To extend the DoLO for another week, so End Date 17/4/2026

Report in your CLA return one DoLO:

DoLO start date: 3/4/2026, DoLO end date: 17/4/2026

Example 2:

There are two separate DoLOs granted, but they are separate applications., i.e.

Application 1: Start Date 13/7/2026, End Date 20/7/2026

Application 2: New DoLO: Start Date 17/11/2026, End Date 27/11/2026

Report in your CLA return both as they are separate DoLOs, i.e.

DoLO1 start date: 13/7/2026, DoLO end date: 20/7/2026

DoLO2 start date: 17/11/2026, DoLO end date: 27/11/2026

Placement type

In most cases we expect children and young people who are the subject of a DoLO to be placed within a children's home ('K2'). Placements should not be reported as a supported accommodation placement ('K3') as such placements do not provider the level of care and support required. Children and young people placed in such provision should likely be reported as either 'Z12' (Unregistered carer/provider: awaiting alternative placement) or 'Z13' (Unregistered carer/provider: best interests). If the child or young person is placed in provision inspected by the care quality commission, then 'Z14' should be used and you should request a bypass to validation error 709.

2.10 OC2 (to be collected for children continuously looked-after for 12 months on 31 March)

2.10.1 Merging the OC2 return into the SSDA903

Some of the information previously collected via the Outcome Indicators for Children Looked-After (OC2) Return was previously added to the children looked-after return (SSDA903). Except for data on attainment, absence and exclusions, since 2009 to 2010 collection of the SSDA903 return has been the source for all other data items previously collected via the OC2.

2.10.2 Children covered by this return

This return only applies to children who were looked-after on the 31 March 2027 and had been looked after continuously by your local authority for at least twelve months on that date (those looked-after continuously since at least 1 April 2026). Such children will automatically be picked up by the CLA application and the further information described below will be requested.

Include 'missing' children. Children who are missing from their agreed placement and do not return to the care of your local authority, should be regarded as remaining in care until their 18th birthday and included in this return accordingly.

Include children placed for adoption. Children placed for adoption (placement codes 'A3', 'A4', 'A5' or 'A6') are still looked-after until the adoption order has been made, thus your local authority should continue to collect information until the adoption order has been made.

Include unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) who are looked after. Unaccompanied asylum seekers (UASC) who are looked-after in accordance with the provisions of the Children Act 1989 should be included in each section even if the information is unknown, for example, if they have no medical record.

Do not include children subject to a 'respite care' agreement. Exclude any children who had been looked after at any point during the twelve-month period ending 31 March 2027

under an agreed series of short-term breaks. This represents legal status codes 'V3' or 'V4'.

2.10.3 Child convicted during the year

To be completed for all children aged 10 or over on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. This would include such children who were born on or before 31 March 2017. Record whether the child was convicted or subject to a youth caution (including a youth conditional caution) under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 during the year for an offence committed while being looked-after.

Include offences committed before 1 April 2026 if the charge was not brought until some point during the 12 months ending 31 March 2027 and the offence was committed while the child was looked after. Do not count offences committed while the child was not looked after.

A breach of an order is not regarded as a new offence unless it relates to a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. In the case of a breach of a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), a new offence is deemed to have occurred.

Table 22: Code set for child convicted during the year

Code	Description
0	Child has not been convicted or subject to a youth caution (including youth conditional caution) during the year
1	Child has been convicted or subject to a youth caution (including youth conditional caution) during the year

2.10.4 Health surveillance checks up to date

To be completed for all children aged under 5 on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. This would include such children who were born on or after 1 April 2022. Record whether the child's health surveillance or health promotion checks[3] were up to date.

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthy-child-programme-schedule-of-interventions

Include in this count children who missed earlier health checks, provided they had received their later checks. These health checks are covered by 'Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked-after children' statutory guidance[4].

A child is considered up to date if their child health surveillance or child health promotion checks have taken place by 31 March, even if they took place later than they should have done. If a child has missed all their previous health checks except the most recent, they should still be counted as being up to date.

Table 23: Code set for health surveillance checks

Code	Description
0	Child's health surveillance or health promotion checks were not up to date
1	Child's health surveillance or health promotion checks were up to date

2.10.5 Immunisations and vaccinations up to date

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. Record whether the child's immunisations and vaccinations were up to date by the end of 31 March.

For the purposes of this collection 'up to date' means that by 31 March the child has had all the immunisations that a child of their age should have received, according to NHS vaccination schedule[5]. It is not a requirement of this question that they were received strictly at the ages set out in the NHS vaccination schedule, but rather that by 31 March the child's immunisations and vaccinations had been brought 'up to date', even if they were given late according to the schedule.

This question is not restricted to immunisations and vaccinations which were due while the child was looked after, and includes those that should have been given before the child became looked after.

In cases where children have not received their vaccinations because of parental refusal, for health reasons, or because the young person refuses, they should be counted as not being up to date. Children undergoing 'catch up' programmes, if not completed, should be counted as not up to date. Children for whom the local authority are not sure if immunisations are up to date, for example an asylum-seeking child whose early

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

[5] https://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/

vaccination history is not known, or whose origin vaccination requirements are not known, should also be counted as not being up to date.

Assessing whether a person's vaccinations are up-to-date is primarily a clinical decision and we do not expect staff of social services departments who do not necessarily have the relevant clinical training or access to the child's medical records to make this decision on their own. For the purposes of this collection, a clinical opinion from a doctor, looked after children's specialist nurse, practice nurse, school nurse or health visitor that a young person's vaccinations are up to date is sufficient.

Table 24: Code set for immunisations

Code	Description
0	Child's immunisations and vaccinations were not up to date
1	Child's immunisations and vaccinations were up to date

2.10.6 Teeth checked by a dentist

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. Record whether the child had their teeth checked by a dentist in the year ending 31 March. Treat children who declined to have their teeth checked as not having received a dental check.

All children covered in this cohort can be expected to have their teeth checked. Very young children should still have an oral examination even if their teeth have not yet developed. For very young children the examination does not have to be undertaken by a dentist and an examination by a paediatrician or other healthcare professional which included an oral examination may be counted.

Table 25: Code set for teeth check

Code	Description
0	Child did not have their teeth checked by a dentist
1	Child did have their teeth checked by a dentist

2.10.7 Annual health assessment up to date

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. Record whether the child received their annual statutory health assessment from a doctor or other suitably qualified professional during the year ending 31 March, as set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) regulations 2010. Treat children who declined to have a health assessment as not having received an annual health assessment

Health assessments must be carried out twice a year for those under 5 years of age. Both these assessments must be carried out in order for the Annual Assessment requirement to be satisfied for under 5s. The assessment should be carried out once in every period of 6 months before the child's fifth birthday. This means that one assessment should be carried out in the first 6 months and one in the second 6 months. For those aged 5 or over, a single annual assessment fulfils the requirement.

Table 5: Code set for annual health assessment

Code	Description
0	Child did not have their annual health assessment
1	Child had their annual health assessment

2.10.8 Child identified as having a substance misuse problem

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months. Record whether the child was identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year ending 31 March.

The term 'drug' is used to refer to any psychotropic substance, including illegal drugs, illicit use of prescription drugs and volatile substances. Young people's drug taking is often inextricably linked with the consumption of alcohol. Therefore, the term 'substance' refers to both drugs and alcohol but not tobacco or nicotine. Here problem drug use is defined as 'intoxication by (or regular excessive consumption or dependence on) psychoactive substances, leading to social, psychological, physical or legal problems'. It includes problematic use of both legal and illegal drugs (including alcohol when used in combination with other substances).

Table 6: Code set for substance misuse problem identified

Code	Description
0	Child was not identified as having a substance misuse problem
1	Child was identified as having a substance misuse problem

2.10.9 Child received intervention for substance misuse problem

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months who were identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year ending 31 March (meaning those which had a code of '1' for the previous question). Record whether the child received an intervention for their substance misuse problem (further information on intervention, is included at Appendix 1). For those children who had a code of '0' for the previous question please leave this blank.

For children with more than one type of substance misuse problem, record '1' in this item if they received an intervention for any of them. This is irrespective of whether they did not receive an intervention for any of their other substance misuse problems. If they did not receive an intervention for all of their substance misuse problems, then record '0'.

Table 28: Code set for intervention received for substance misuse

Code	Description
0	Child did not receive an intervention for their substance misuse problem
1	Child received an intervention for their substance misuse problem

2.10.10 Child offered intervention for substance misuse problem

To be completed for all children on 31 March 2027 who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months who were identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year ending 31 March but who did not receive an intervention (meaning those which had a code of '0' for the previous 2.10.9 question in this guide). Record whether the child was offered an intervention for their substance misuse problem but refused it or whether they were not offered an intervention. For those children who had a code of '0' for the question in section 2.10.8 or a code of '1' in the previous question (2.10.9 of this guide), please leave this blank.

For children who had more than one type of substance misuse problem and who did not receive an intervention for all of them, record '1' in this data item if they were offered an intervention for any of them, but refused. If they were not offered an intervention for all of their substance misuse problems, then record '0'. Only count an intervention as being refused if it hasn't been previously or isn't subsequently accepted.

Table 29: Code set for intervention offered for substance misuse

Code	Description
0	Child was not offered an intervention for their substance misuse problem
1	Child was offered an intervention for their substance misuse problem but refused it

More detailed guidance on the collection of the substance misuse data items may be found in Appendix 1.

2.10.11 Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) score

Purpose of the Return

Evidence suggests that mental health problems are over 4 times more likely for children looked after compared to their peers. A 2024 survey by the Care Quality Commission[6] shows that young people continue to report that they find it difficult to access appropriate child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). The Government sees it as critical to address the issue of mental health of children in care to improve both their outcomes and life chances. This data item covers the emotional and behavioural health of looked-after children, as recorded by a main carer in the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ).

Statutory guidance on 'Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children'[7] (paragraphs 14, 47 and Annex B) sets out that all local authorities should ensure that a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is completed for each of their looked-after children. The SDQ provides valuable information as part of a child's statutory health assessment, but collecting the score data also provides a national-level overview on the emotional and behavioural health of children looked after. It should not be seen purely as a data collection exercise as its primary purpose is to give social workers and health professionals information about the emotional and behavioural needs of individual children.

While local authorities may also use other screening or diagnostic tools to monitor aspects of the emotional, behavioural or mental health and wellbeing needs of the children in their care, the completion of the SDQ in line with the statutory guidance (referenced above, is required. A score should be returned for every looked-after child.

Children covered by this return

For the purpose of the data collection, this information will be required for all children (and young people) who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months on 31 March 2027 and who were aged between 4 years old and 16 years old (inclusive) on the date of the child's last statutory health assessment. Therefore, children aged between 4 years and 16 years 364 days at the time of their last assessment will be included.

Any child looked after at any point during the 12-month period ending 31 March 2027 under an agreed series of short-term breaks should not have a SDQ score submitted in this return.

Data submitted

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[6] Community mental health survey 2024 - Care Quality Commission https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/surveys/community-mental-health-survey

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

Local authorities will collect data through a standard strengths and difficulties questionnaire. Further guidance is available at Appendix 2.

A single score (0–40), or a reason for the score not being returned is required for each child looked after continuously for at least 12 months on 31 March 2027 aged 4–16 on the date of the last assessment.

2.10.12 Reason for not submitting SDQ score

Whilst an expectation to complete the SDQ is set out in statutory guidance, and local authorities should make every effort to enable, support and ensure its completion, in rare, exceptional circumstances this may not be possible. If it is not possible to collect the SDQ score for a looked-after child, then please record the reason using the codes below.

Table 30: Code set for reason for not submitting an SDQ score

Code	Description
SDQ1	No form returned as child was aged under 4 or over 16 at date of latest assessment
SDQ2	Carer(s) refused to complete and return questionnaire
SDQ3	Not possible to complete the questionnaire due to severity of the child's disability
SDQ4	Other
SDQ5	Child or young person refuses to allow a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) to be completed

Summary

Children aged 4 or 17 on 31 March may or may not have been in the age group for whom an SDQ score is required at their last statutory health assessment. The following table summarises the information that should be entered depending on the child or young person's age at the date of their last assessment and 31 March.

Table 7:Summary of SDQ information required by child age

Age at last statutory health assessment	Age on 31 March	Data to be returned
3 or under	3 or under	Leave both SDQ score and reason empty
3	4	Leave score empty, use SDQ1 as the reason for no score
4-16	4-16	Enter an SDQ score (0-40) or a reason for no score (SDQ2-SDQ5)

Age at last statutory health assessment	Age on 31 March	Data to be returned
16	17	Enter an SDQ score (0-40) or a reason for no score (SDQ2-SDQ5)
17	17	Leave score empty, use SDQ1 as the reason for no score
17 or over	18 or over	Leave both SDQ score and reason empty

2.11 OC3 (care leaver's information)

Information should be returned for relevant and former relevant children whose 17th to 25th birthday falls within the collection period (see definitions of 'relevant' and 'former relevant' children below).

2.11.1 Purpose of data items for children who have recently left care

There are 4 key data items that we are asking local authorities to provide in relation to care leavers: whether the local authority is 'in-touch' with them; the young person's activity status; and what type of accommodation they are living in (and whether it is judged to be suitable accommodation). These data are used to monitor whether care leavers are receiving the support they need to make a successful transition to adulthood.

2.11.2 Young people for whom this information is required

We are collecting information on relevant children and former relevant children whose 17th to 25th birthdays fell within the collection year. For the 2026 to 2027 collection, this therefore covers young people whose date of birth is between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2010

Relevant children are defined under Section 23A(2) of the Children Act 1989. A relevant child is:

- a young person aged 16 or 17
- is no longer looked after
- before last ceasing to be looked-after, was an 'eligible child' (see definition below)

OR

- a young person aged 16 or 17
- not subject to a care order
- detained, or in hospital on their 16th birthday

- immediately before being detained or admitted to hospital had been looked after for at least 13 weeks which began after they reached age 14

Former relevant children are defined under Section 23C (1) of the Children Act 1989. A former relevant child is one who is:

- aged 18 or above,

AND EITHER

- has been a relevant child and would be one if he were under 18

OR

- immediately before he ceased to be looked after at age 18, was an eligible child.

The definition of eligible children is given below for information, because relevant and former relevant children will have been an eligible child in the past. Please note we are not collecting OC3 information for current eligible children.

An eligible child is:

- a young person aged 16 or 17
- who is looked-after, and
- has been looked-after for at least 13 weeks which began after they reached the age of 14
- and ended after they reached the age of 16

For young people who turned 17 or 18 during the latest year, care leaver information is required if they left care before or on their birthday (for example, if a young person turned 17 or 18 in the latest year and left care before their 17th or 18th birthday then care leaver information is required; or if a young person left care on their 17th or 18th birthday in the latest year, then care leaver information also is required). However, if the young person is still in care on their 17th or 18th birthday, then care leaver information is not required. For example, if a young person turned 17 or 18 in the year, and was in care on their 17th or 18th birthday, but left care the day after, then we do not require care leaver information for this young person.

The 'in touch', 'activity' and 'accommodation' information provided in relation to 17 and 18-year-old care leavers should always reflect the situation after they have left care.

For young people who turned 22, 23, 24 or 25 during the latest year, activity and accommodation is only reported if the young person requested and received support from you. If the young person has not requested and received support then you should return a record for them with 'NREQ' in the in touch data item. We do not expect local authorities to be in touch and initiate contact with young people over age 21 who have not requested or received support during the reporting period. The purpose of collecting this data is to record the numbers of older care leavers who are accessing their

entitlement to support and to better understand their activity and accommodation status. The information reported should be related to the last time the young person contacted you during the collection year. Note that this is different to the timing of the data for 17- to 21-year- olds where the information reported should relate to contact on or around their birthday.

The 13 weeks can be a continuous period or a series of episodes. In calculating the 13 weeks, pre-planned short breaks of less than 17 days (which do not exceed 75 days in any 12-month period), where the child was not in the care of a local authority and afterwards returned to live with someone with parental responsibility should not be included. However, pre-planned short breaks that do not meet this test should be included in the calculation of the 13 weeks.

A child who has lived for a continuous period of 6 months or more (whether that period commenced before or after they ceased to be looked after) with their parent, someone who has parental responsibility or, where they were in care and there was a residence order (or, from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order) in place immediately before the care order was made is not a relevant child.

In this case, local authorities should include this young person in their OC3 return, but they should be recorded with 'in touch' code of 'RHOM – Young person returned to live with parents or someone with parental responsibility for a continuous period of 6 months or more'. However, if this arrangement then breaks down and the child ceases to live with the person concerned, he/she once again becomes a 'relevant child'.

If a young person was an eligible child, but then died whilst in care, this child should not be returned in the care leaver data. Additionally, if the young person was an eligible child but their care transferred to another local authority (reason episode ceased = 'E3'), then they should not be included in the data for your authority.

2.11.3 Local authority in touch

Select the code which most accurately answers the question – was the local authority in touch with this young person?

For young people aged 17 to 21 years, to be counted as 'in touch' for the purposes of this data item, there should be contact between your local authority and the young person around 3 months before and one month after the young person's birthday.

For young people aged 22 to 25 to be counted as 'in touch' for the purposes of this data item, they should have contacted your local authority for support at some point during the year.

The OC3 data collection is designed to monitor the situation of young people when they have left care, rather than their situation immediately before they left care. Because the guidance says that the local authority should be in touch with the young person in the

period 3 months before, to one month after the birthday, it is possible that the local authority will have been in touch with the young person while they were still in care.

If the birthday in question is the 17th birthday, then it should be recorded whether the local authority was in touch with the young person AFTER they had left care. Information should be returned if the young person left care before or on their 17th birthday, but not if they left care after their 17th birthday.

If the birthday in question is the 18th birthday, then we want to know whether your local authority is in touch with the person AFTER they left care and at some point up to 3 months after their 18th birthday. The accommodation and activity should reflect the most up to date information you have available up to the age of 18 years and 3 months. Information should be returned for young people who turned 18 in the year and left care before or on their 18th birthday.

If your local authority is in contact more than once during the relevant time period, the most up to date information on the last occasion of contact should be recorded for activity and accommodation.

Statutory guidance is clear that the Personal Adviser (PA) must have regular face to face contact with every care leaver they support. The pathway plan must set out expectations for the PA to see the care leaver and, if relevant, arrangements for staying in touch in other ways, which could include regular exchanges of text messages, emails and phone conversations between the PA and the young person. Further guidance on keeping in touch is given in chapter 4 of the Planning Transitions to Adulthood Guidance for Care Leavers.

For care leavers aged 17- to 21-years-old, if your local authority has contacted a young person, and the young person has responded by stating that they have no desire to supply your local authority with any information, and do not want to be contacted by your local authority again, this is should be coded as ‘REFU - young person refuses contact’. Similarly, if the young person has moved outside the local authority boundary and has chosen not to tell the local authority where they have gone, you still need to have been in communication with the young person to be able to count them as “in touch”.

Where a young person has previously been receiving Leaving Care Services but has now decided that they no longer require a service, this should be coded as ‘NREQ – Young person no longer requires services’. ‘NREQ’ should also be used for young people aged 22 years old and over who have not taken up the offer of Personal Adviser support.

Note, if the young person died (since leaving care) following their relevant birthday in the collection year, the information as at their last birthday should be provided including whether they were in touch or not at that point. If the young person died before their relevant birthday in the collection year, the code ‘DIED’ should be used. If a young person died whilst in care, OC3 information is not required.

Children who have returned to live with parents or someone with parental responsibility for a period of more than 6 months are no longer 'relevant children' so the 'in touch' code used should be 'RHOM' However, if this arrangement then breaks down and the young person ceases to live with the person concerned, they once again become a 'relevant child' and 'RHOM' should not be used.

If a care leaver, who was an unaccompanied asylum-seeking children prior to leaving care, has been age assessed as being older and so were not a child when in care and so are not eligible for care leaver support, then their last care episode can be closed with the reason for ceasing code 'E15' to prevent them being included in the care leaver cohort.

Table 8: Code set for in touch

Code	Description
YES	Yes – in touch
NO	No – not in touch
DIED	Died after leaving care
REFU	Young person refuses contact
NREQ	Young person no longer requires children's social care services
RHOM	Young person returned to live with parents or someone with parental responsibility for a continuous period of 6 months or more

2.11.4 Contact through a third party

For 17 to 21 year olds, contact through a third party is acceptable if you are satisfied that this represents a genuine exchange of information between the care leaver and your local authority. It is your responsibility to judge whether such contact is sufficient to qualify for definition as 'in touch'. For example, if someone mentions that they have met the young person in passing and the young person appeared well, then this is not defined as 'in touch'. However, if a third person passes a note from the young person to your local authority, then this would be classified as being 'in touch'.

Contact through a third party who is working with the care leaver in a professional capacity is classified as 'in touch'; for example, a young person's advisor not directly employed by your local authority. It is expected that contact through a third person who works with care leavers in a professional capacity will be frequent.

2.11.5 Main activity

If the young person is aged 17 to 21 years, record the code that most accurately reflects the young person's main activity status on or around their birthday if you were in touch

with them. If you were not in touch with the young person but are certain of their activity on their birthday, then please record this. Such examples might include where the young person was in a stable and ongoing activity such as posted abroad in the armed services, or where they have retrospectively confirmed that they had remained on an ongoing education course during the period. If you were not in touch with them and do not know their activity, or the young person has died or returned home to live with parents or someone with parental responsibility for a continuous period of 6 months or more (in touch code 'RHOM'), enter 0 (zero).

If the young person is aged 22 to 25 years and has been in touch with your local authority at some point during the year, then please report their latest known activity. If the young person has not been in touch with your local authority, then do not report their activity or accommodation.

Normally the young person should be asked what their main activity is. If their response is not clear and it is known that they are involved in more than one of the activity categories listed on the guidance notes, choose the one that is highest in the list. The list is ranked so that in general, if the young person is involved in both education and employment, education will be recorded as the main activity.

Table 33: Code set for main activity

Code	Description
F1	Young person engaged full time in higher education (for example studies beyond A level)
P1	Young person engaged part time in higher education (for example studies beyond A level)
F2	Young person engaged full time in education other than higher education
P2	Young person engaged part time in education other than higher education
F4	Young person engaged full time in an apprenticeship
P4	Young person engaged part time in an apprenticeship
F5	Young person engaged full time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)
P5	Young person engaged part time in training or employment (not apprenticeship)
G4	Young person not in education, employment or training because of illness or disability
G5	Young person not in education, employment or training: other circumstances

Code	Description
G6	Young person not in education, employment or training due to pregnancy or parenting

Main activity codes: notes and definitions

Please note that if a young person in custody is engaged in a programme of education their activity should be recorded with an activity code that most accurately reflects this, for example part-time education. Before 2016 the guidance specified that a young person in custody should have an activity code of G5 (not in education, employment or training).

Full Time: The activity engages the young person for at least 16 hours a week.

Part Time: The activity engages the young person for less than 16 hours a week.

F1 and P1: Young person engaged in higher education (meaning studies beyond A level): 'Higher education' means all studies at a higher academic level than A level. This includes degrees, diplomas in higher education, teaching and nursing qualifications, HNDs, ONDs, and BTEC levels 4-5. The educational course does not have to be residential.

F2 and P2: Young person engaged in education other than higher education: This means all other education not covered by code 'F1' and 'P1'. The educational course does not have to be residential.

F4 and P4: Young person engaged in an apprenticeship: Includes apprenticeships only.

F5 and P5: Young person engaged in training or employment: 'Training' includes government-supported training (other than Apprenticeships), such as Traineeships or Supported Internships. 'Employment' includes paid employment, self-employment, and voluntary unpaid work.

G4: Young person not in education, employment or training, because of own illness or disability: Refers to young people where none of the above applies, specifically because the young person's own illness or disability has prevented them from participating in any of these activities.

G5: Young person not in education, employment or training (other circumstances) Refers to young people not covered by any of the other categories. However, this should not include young people who are not able to participate in any of these activities because of pregnancy or because they are parents or carers – these young people should be coded under G6.

G6: Young person not in education, employment or training due to pregnancy or parenting: Refers to young people who are not able to participate in any of these activities because of pregnancy, or because they are parents or carers.

2.11.6 Accommodation

The code for accommodation is a two- digit alphanumeric code (for example: B1):

- the first digit is alphabetical, and represents the type of accommodation that the young person is living in on or around their 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th or 21st birthday, or the accommodation the young person is living in at the time of their latest contact during the year if they are aged 22-to-25-years-old.
- the second digit is numerical, and indicates whether you judge the accommodation to be 'suitable' or 'unsuitable'
- If you were not in touch with the young person and do not know their accommodation, or the young person has died, or returned home to live with parents or someone with parental responsibility for a continuous period of 6 months or more, (in touch code 'RHOM') enter '0' (zero)

Table 9: Code set for type of accommodation

Code	Description
B	With parent(s) or relative(s)
C	Community home or other form of residential care such as an National Health Service (NHS) establishment
D	Semi-independent, transitional accommodation (like a supported hostel, trainer flats); self-contained accommodation with specialist personal assistance support (for example, for young people with disabilities, pregnant young women and single parents); and self-contained accommodation with floating support. Includes all 17 year olds in supported accommodation, except those in supported lodgings who should be coded as 'E'.
E	Supported lodgings (accommodation, usually in a family home, where adult(s) in the "host family" provide formal advice and support)
G	Gone abroad
H	Deported
K	Ordinary lodgings, without formal support
R	Residence not known
S	No fixed abode / homeless
T	Foyers and similar supported accommodation which combines the accommodation with opportunities for education, training or employment. Note: not applicable to care leavers aged 17 years old.

Code	Description
U	Independent living, for example independent tenancy of flat, house or bedsit, including local authority or housing association tenancy, or accommodation provided by a college or university. Includes flat sharing
V	Emergency accommodation (like a night shelter, direct access or emergency hostel or hotel)
W	Bed and breakfast
X	In custody
Y	Other accommodation
Z	With former foster carer(s) - where the young person has been fostered and on turning 18 continues to remain with the same carer(s) who had fostered them immediately prior to their reaching legal adulthood, and where the plan for their care involves their remaining with this former foster family for the future. This code should not be used for 17-year-old care leavers. If the foster carer is also a relative this code should be used rather than 'B - with parents or relatives'.

Note: If a care leaver is 'Staying Close' then please record the most appropriate accommodation type for the young person.

2.11.7 Suitability

We accept that there are no hard and fast rules on whether accommodation is deemed 'suitable'; the decision will depend on the circumstances of the individual case and you will have to use your judgement.

Table 10: Code set for suitability of accommodation

Code	Description
1	Accommodation is considered suitable
2	Accommodation is considered unsuitable

The following table provides a guide to the presumed responses for each of the accommodation types. However, there may be individual circumstances where these may not be the case. Accommodation is to be regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people. Accommodation that clearly exposes the person to risk of harm or social exclusion by reason of its location or other factors should be coded as 'unsuitable'.

Table 11: Summary table of accommodation types and status of suitability

Accommodation type	Status of suitability	Reason
B, C, D, E, K, T, and U ('Parents or relatives', 'Community home or other form of residential care', 'Semi-independent', 'transitional accommodation', 'Supported lodgings', 'Ordinary lodgings' without formal support, 'Foyers and similar supported accommodation' and 'Independent living')	Should be judged 'suitable' in the main For those young people taking part in an agreed flat-share with friends – typically involving a formal tenancy agreement – these situations should be classified under code U. A separate judgment should be made as to whether this is suitable according to individual circumstances.	Safe, Secure and Affordable accommodation (includes short- term accommodation designed to move young people on to stable long- term accommodation but excludes emergency accommodation used in a crisis).
V and W ('Emergency accommodation' and 'Bed and Breakfast')	Should be judged 'unsuitable' in the main.	Potential to expose the person to risk of harm or social exclusion by reason of its location
S ('no fixed abode/homeless') and X ('custody')	Wholly 'unsuitable'	Potential to expose the person to harm or social exclusion by reason of its location
Y ('Other Accommodation')	Should be judged unsuitable in the main, but could be either. Those who are homeless and temporarily staying with friends as an emergency measure. should routinely be coded as Y2. This situation should be judged as 'unsuitable' in the main. Stays in hotels, even where meals are provided on site should generally be considered 'unsuitable'.	

Accommodation type	Status of suitability	Reason
G, H and R ('gone abroad', 'deported' and 'residence not known')	Should be judged unsuitable in the main	The standard of accommodation is likely to be unknown. These categories will be removed from calculations when measuring the percentage of care leavers in suitable/unsuitable accommodation.
Z ('Staying put arrangements')	Should be judged 'suitable' in the main	

Further guidance is also available in Chapter 7 of *Planning Transition To Adulthood* for care leavers in the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010.

2.12 Social worker episodes for children looked after on 31 March

This module (on the SW Portal) collects information on primary social worker episodes for children looked after on 31 March 2027, excluding those solely looked after on respite care (legal statuses V3 and V4). For each child, this information will be linked to the care history provided in the rest of the CLA data return.

For every child looked after on 31 March 2027, information for primary social worker episodes within your local authority in the reporting period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2027 should be included – this should include any social worker episodes in periods within this timescale where the child was under section 17, section 47 and section 20. Changes in social worker do not have to occur only while a child is looked after. They can occur at other times – such as on entry to care, on exit from care, or while not in care – these may also represent significant changes and transition points for a child. We therefore request information on all changes in primary social worker that occur during the reporting period whilst the child is under section 17, section 47 and section 20. This may therefore include episodes held by non-qualified social workers. It should not include Family Help support which is not section 17, for example targeted early help.

Social worker episodes ending before a child is born should not be included. If a social worker episode started prior to a child being born and is ongoing at birth, the episode start date should be set as the date of birth.

Primary social worker

The 'primary social worker' is the primary member of local authority staff responsible for managing the child's case. This may be known across authorities as 'allocated case worker', 'key worker' or 'lead practitioner'. Please note: for episodes where a child is not in care this may also include non-qualified social workers/caseworkers without a Social Work England (SWE) number.

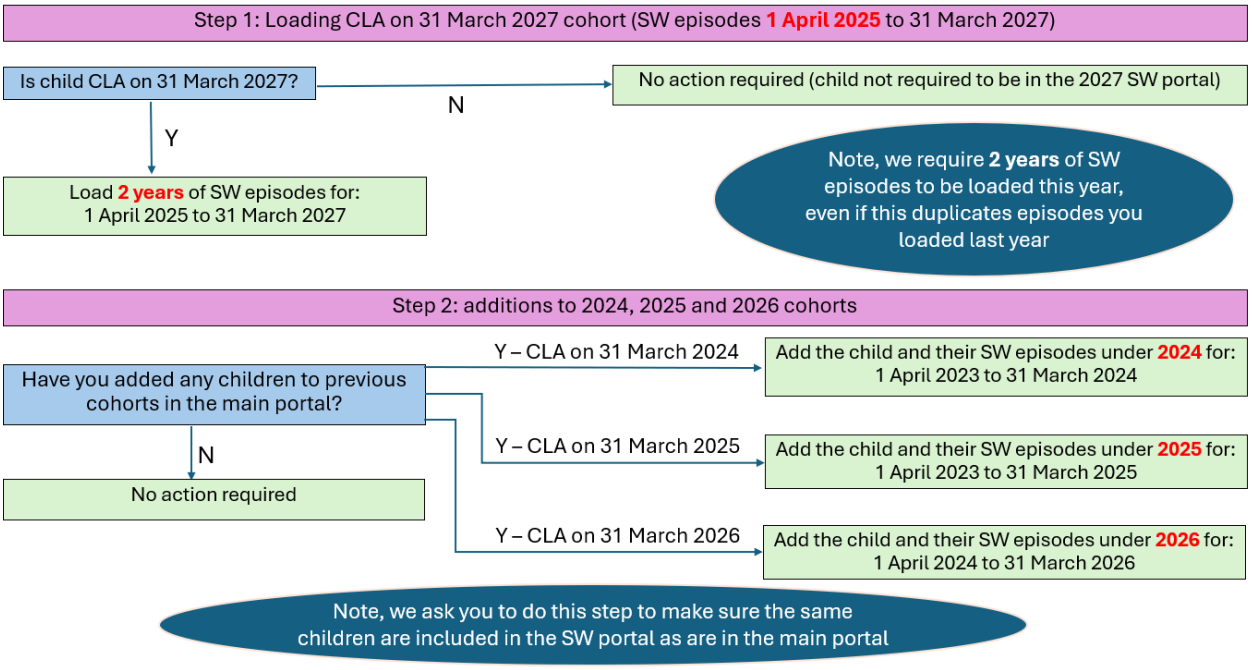
Many local authorities allocate a team of social workers to each of their children looked after. In those instances, the primary social worker is the individual who has the key responsibility of the child's case or is the one 'holding' the case.

Where a child's case is passed to a social worker's manager for a very short period (e.g. 1-2 days as part of case supervision and management), and then returned back to the social worker, do not record this as a separate episode. For our purposes, the social worker has remained the one lead professional who held the child's case throughout that period. Therefore, this would count as one unbroken social worker episode – until the child's case is allocated to another social worker on a longer-term basis.

In situations where a team leader is holding a child's case, or the child's case is in a duty tray, until a new primary social worker is allocated, that should be counted as separate episode.

If a social worker has moved teams, but the child has stayed with the same social worker, then you do not need to report a new episode, as new social worker episodes should only be reported if the child has moved to a different social worker.

2027 SW portal – CLA on 31 March 2027: SW episodes 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2027



2027 SW portal – CLA on 31 March 2026: SW episodes 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2027

Step 3: making changes to episodes after loading

You only need to complete this step if you need to make changes to episodes on the system **after loading** (for example, making a change to an existing episode or deleting/adding episodes). This is likely to be either because:

- You need to make a change to an episode to clear an error reported by a validation rule trigger on the system
- You yourself have noticed that a change needs to be made

We only expect you to make a change to an episode **once**, in the most recently reported year in which it appears, even if it also appears in an earlier year on the system. For example, where a child appears in both 2026 and 2027 because they were CLA on 31 March in both years, if you delete an episode from 2027, you do not also need to delete it from 2026 if it also appears there.

Child is CLA on 31 March 2026	Child is CLA on 31 March 2027	Action required (changes to 2027 can be made via a new data load or on the system, changes to 2026 will need to be made on the system)
	✓	Any changes should be made to the **2027 record** for the child
✓		Any changes should be made to the **2026 record** for the child
✓	✓	Any changes should be made to the **2027 record** for the child, unless: ➢ the episode only appears in the 2026 record for the child (because it ended before 1 April 2025) – in which case make the change in the **2026 record**

For step 3: Unlike the main collection, we are only asking you to make changes to the current cohort (CLA on 31 March 2027) and the previous cohort (CLA on 31 March 2026). This will be ongoing in future years.

If you're not sure, please ask!!

Step 1: Loading CLA on 31 March 2027 cohort (SW episodes 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2027).

If child is not CLA on 31 March 2027, then no action required.

If child is CLA on 31 March 2027 then load 2 years of SW episodes for 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2027.

Step 2: additions to 2024, 2025 and 2026 cohorts.

If you have added any children to the CLA on 31 March 2024 cohort in the main portal, then add the child and their SW episodes under 2024 for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

If you have added any children to the CLA on 31 March 2025 cohort in the main portal, then add the child and their SW episodes under 2025 for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025.

If you have added any children to the CLA on 31 March 2026 cohort in the main portal, then add the child and their SW episodes under 2026 for 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2026.

Step 3: making changes to episodes after loading

You only need to complete this step if you need to make changes to episodes on the system after loading (for example making a change to an existing episode or deleting or adding episodes). This is likely to be either because:

- you need to make a change to an episode to clear an error reported by a validation rule trigger on the system
- you yourself have noticed that a change needs to be made

We only expect you to make a change to an episode once, in the most recently reported year in which it appears, even if it also appears in an earlier year on the system. For example, where a child appears in both 2026 and 2027 because they were CLA on 31 March in both years. If you delete an episode from 2027, you do not also need to delete it from 2026 if it also appears there.

If child is CLA on 31 March 2027 (and is not CLA on 31 March 2026), any changes should be made to the 2027 record for the child.

If child is CLA on 31 March 2026 (and is not CLA on 31 March 2027) any changes should be made to the 2026 record for the child.

If the child is CLA on both 31 March 2026 and 31 March 2027, any changes should be made to the 2027 record for the child unless the episode only appears in the 2026 record for the child (because it ended before 1 April 2025) in which case make the change in the 2026 record.

Example

For a child who is CLA on 31 March 2026 and CLA on 31 March 2027, this is an example of their social worker episodes loaded on the SW portal:

2027 processing year – social worker episodes between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2027

SW ID	Start date	End date	Reason for change
SW02	03/09/2024	10/05/2025	MANAGE
SW03	10/05/2025	12/06/2026	TSPROC
SW04	12/06/2026	[NULL]	LEFTRL

2026 processing year – social worker episodes between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2026

SW ID	Start date	End date	Reason for change
SW01	02/05/2024	03/09/2024	FCONTA
SW02	03/09/2024	10/05/2025	MANAGE
SW03	10/05/2025		TSPROC

Note, for a child who is CLA on 31 March 2026 and CLA on 31 March 2027, their SW episodes during the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 should look very similar. However, they may not be identical, given the instructions in step 3 above.

2.12.1 Social worker ID code

A social worker ID code will allow identification of episodes with the same social worker and will allow us to link social workers across episodes. This data item should be in the format ‘AAnnnnnn’, a minimum of 4 digits, and is up to 12 digits.

Where a child’s primary social worker/caseworker is a qualified social worker, for each episode record the child and family social worker Social Work England (SWE) number (formerly HCPC code). For social workers this will start ‘SW’. This will allow us to link to the Children’s Social Work Workforce Census, for example to pick up information on social worker characteristics.

Where this primary social worker is not a qualified social worker (or does not have an SWE number for another reason – such as being qualified in Scotland) please provide an alternative unique identifier for the worker. It must start with 'XX' to prevent inadvertent matching with the Social Work Workforce Census but this can be any alphanumeric code. It should also be consistent across the social worker's episodes in the data (including across different reporting years). Likewise, this should be done if a primary social worker is a qualified worker but it is not possible to provide their SWE number.

Where a worker has qualified in year or their SWE number has changed during the year, please use their latest SWE number for all episodes.

2.12.2 Date social worker episode started

This item records the date that each social worker episode began. For the first episode in the year, this date can be in the current data year, or an earlier data year. Dates must be recorded with the day and month as 2-digit numbers and year as a 4-digit number, i.e. DD/MM/YYYY format. For example, 21 May 2026 should be entered as 21/05/2026.

Where episodes are consecutive, the new episode must start on the same day that the previous episode finished. An episode cannot start and end on the same day, and in most cases, will be a minimum of 3 days.

2.12.3 Date social worker episode ended

This item records the date that each episode ended. This date will always fall in the reporting period. Dates must be recorded with the day and month as 3-digit numbers and year as a 4-digit number, i.e. DD/MM/YYYY format. For example.4 November 2026 should be entered as 04/11/2026.

An episode cannot start and end on the same day. Where a child continues to be under the responsibility of a social worker, a new episode must start on the same day as the previous episode finished. If the episode does not end during the year this field must be left blank.

2.12.4 Reason for social worker change

For each episode, please provide the reason that that episode has started and so there has been a change in social worker.

Reporting the reason for any social worker episodes already open prior to 1 April 2023

If a social worker episode was already open prior to 1 April 2023 (the date at which the social worker data collection first started), and the reason for change has not been recorded, then for this first episode please leave this value blank [null]. If you know the

reason, then you can include this instead. If a new social worker episode began on the 1 April 2023 then this should be recorded separately with the relevant reason provided.

Table 12: Code set for reason for social worker change

Code	Description
MANAGE	Managing caseloads
FCONTA	First contact or re-referral
LEFTRL	Previous social worker left role
ORGRST	New social worker assigned following organisational restructure
TSPROC	New social worker assigned following child transfer due to standard process
ABSENC	Absence cover or return from absence
CHCHAN	Child requested change from previous social worker
PCCHAN	Parent/carer requested change from previous social worker
SWDIED	Previous social worker died
OTHERS	Other reason

Reason for social worker change: Notes and definitions

MANAGE – Managing caseloads

Child transferred to a new social worker to balance social worker caseloads. This could be because the previous social worker's caseload was too high, or the newly assigned social worker needed new cases.

This code should also be used where a social worker has been covering a social worker absence, but the child's case does not return to the absent social worker on their return but another social worker. For example, an agency worker has been covering a maternity leave absence but the child's case is then transferred to another social worker rather than the social worker returning from maternity leave.

This code should also be used in situations where a team leader has been holding a child's case until a new primary social worker is allocated.

FCONTA – First contact or re-referral

This code should be used for the first social worker assigned to the child within the local authority under section 17, section 47 or section 20 (whichever occurs first), or the first social worker assigned to the child following a re-referral to the local authority under section 17, section 47 or section 20 (whichever occurs first), where the child had previously left the care of the local authority or was no longer section 17, section 47 or section 20. If a child's case is initially held on a temporary basis for administrative purposes, for example, an 'on duty team manager' or a 'referral worker', before being assigned a social worker, then this should not be included. This initial process will be different for all local authorities, but as a general principle, please record the first social worker episode as the one in which the social worker will begin to have direct contact with the child.

LEFTRL – Previous social worker left role

Use this code when the previous social worker left their current role, either to take up a new role in the local authority (including promotion or internal transfer), or left the local authority, and so a new social worker was assigned to the child.

ORGRST – New social worker assigned following organisational restructure

Child transferred to a new social worker following an organisational restructure.

TSPROC – New social worker assigned following child transfer due to standard process

Child transferred to a new social worker following a transfer to another service within the local authority, for example from an assessment team to a CIN team, or a move from the CIN team to the long-term CLA services.

ABSENC – Absence cover or return from absence

Previous social worker is on leave and a new social worker is assigned to formally 'hold' the child's case, e.g. previous social worker is on long term annual or sick leave, maternity, paternity, adoption or bereavement leave, sabbatical, or other absence.

This code should also be used when a social worker is reassigned a case following their return from an absence, during which another social worker was formally 'holding' the child's case. For example a social worker returns from maternity leave and is reassigned their previous cases.

If the primary social worker is temporarily absent (e.g. annual leave, etc.), this should not be recorded as a change in social worker episode unless they are no longer 'holding' the child's case and a new primary social worker is formally 'holding' it.

CHCHAN – Child requested change from previous social worker

The relationship between the child and social worker has broken down or been disrupted and the child has asked to change to another social worker.

PCCHAN – Parent/carer requested change from previous social worker

The relationship between the child and/or parent or carer and the social worker has broken down or been disrupted and their parent or carer [foster carer, residential unit or connected person] has asked to change to another social worker.

SWDIED – Previous social worker died

Previous social worker died.

OTHERS – Other reason

Any other reason not captured above. To sign off your data, additional information will need to be added to your return to explain any reasons you report as other. Please note, this code should no longer be used for social worker episodes beginning prior to 1 April 2023 (see above).

Appendix 1: Substance misuse

This guide document has been written to support local authorities with the data collection in relation to substance misuse.

Background information

Increased vulnerability to substance misuse

Evidence suggests that children in care are 4 times more likely than their peers to smoke, use alcohol and misuse drugs. (Meltzer et. al. 2003). Looked after children and young people who have experienced parental drug and alcohol misuse may view excessive drugs or alcohol use as 'normal' (Ward and others 2003, Newburn and Pearson 2002).

Substance misuse (what constitutes a problem?)

The Health Advisory Service (HAS) report (1996) states 'one off and experimental use of drugs and alcohol cannot in itself be seen as indicative of having caused actual harm or being related to any personal disorder'. In other words, the fact that a young person has taken a substance should not lead to the automatic conclusion that there is a problem or condition to be treated. However, it is essential to recognise that all substance taking by young people carries potential harm.

Guidance published by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE)[8] offers the following definition of substance misuse as "Dependence on, or regular excessive consumption of, psychoactive substances, leading to physical, mental or social problems".

Drugs, alcohol and substances

For the purpose of this data collection, the term 'drug' is used to refer to any psychotropic substance, including illegal drugs, illicit use of prescription drugs and volatile substances. Young people's drug taking is often inextricably linked with the consumption of alcohol. Therefore, the term 'substance' refers to both drugs and alcohol but not tobacco.

A range of interventions - identification and assessment

The identification and assessment of substance misuse should take place within the context of the assessment of the young person's overall needs and not as a standalone activity. Therefore, the range of interventions made available to the young person should

[8] https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng64/resources/drug-misuse-prevention-targeted-interventions-pdf-1837573761733

meet the holistic assessment of need. There are 3 possible options following the Initial Assessment process

- no need is identified but the assessment process is recorded
- need is identified and a plan for support is agreed, substance misuse being one issue which the young person requires support with and can be provided by a generic practitioner or children and young people alcohol and drug worker; or
- substance misuse is identified requiring an intervention from a specialist worker, such as a children and young people alcohol and drug worker, focussing on a substance misuse-based support plan

Wherever possible, support should be provided 'in house' by staff known to the young person including Social Workers, carers and other staff. This should include support for the identified substance misuse problem and other problems identified in the assessment.

What is an intervention?

Intervention can include such activities as information, advice and guidance, brief interventions, positive activities, therapeutic support, targeted support including support with a range of problems which are causing the young person difficulties and may be exacerbating the young person's substance misuse including family contact, placement stability, school attendance, emotional and mental health problems.

Interventions can cover a wide range of information, advice, support and services. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has guidance on targeted interventions for drug misuse prevention[9], and UK guidelines on clinical management for Drug misuse and dependence are published on gov.uk[10].

Some young people with more serious substance misuse problems will need more specialist services. These services should be well known to the Children's Services and clear referral protocols established between the department and the specialist agency.

Data collection and associated issues

The publication of substance misuse related data for the first time in 2006–2007 highlighted the need for more clarity around a number of important issues. These include:

Looked-after children aged under 10 - Information on substance misuse should be collected from all children regardless of age. However, in line with understanding of

[9] https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng64/resources/drug-misuse-prevention-targeted-interventions-pdf-1837573761733

[10] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a821e3340f0b62305b92945/clinical_guidelines_2017.pdf

treatment data which suggests that substance misuse problems develop from the age of 10 onwards, calculation of the national percentage of looked-after children with substance misuse problems will be expressed from the number of LAC aged 10 to 17, rather than those aged 0 to 17.

Recording and counting process - The publication of substance misuse related data highlighted some anomalies in the data collection process. In some areas the numbers accepting or refusing interventions exceeded the numbers identified with problems. For purpose of clarity, every young person identified with a drug or alcohol related problem should be recorded once, irrespective of the number of times they have been offered interventions over the 12-month period. The database will be amended to reject incidents where numbers do not add up thus allowing local authorities to recheck figures.

Placements outside the local authority area - The responsible authority is required to ensure that all looked-after children receive a Health Assessment in line with statutory requirements, irrespective of where they are placed. It is expected that problems with substance misuse will be identified an addressed within the Health Assessment and actions recorded on the health plan.

Appendix 2: Guidance on data collection on the emotional health of children looked after

Local authorities should make sure that the full guidance is disseminated to everyone in the local authority who is involved in the SDQ process. It is particularly important that social workers have copies of the guidance as well as those who are dealing with the data returns so that they have all the background information they need to understand the process.

Introduction

From April 2008 all local authorities in England were required to provide information on the emotional and behavioural health of children and young people in their care. These data are collected by local authorities through a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and a summary figure for each child (the total difficulties score) is submitted to the Department for Education through the SSDA903 data return.

History of the SDQ collection

Children looked after have significantly poorer mental health problems than their peers. Foster carers frequently report that there are problems associated with the emotional wellbeing and mental health of the young people in their care. Evidence suggests that children looked after are nearly 5 times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children.

The information contained within this annex should be read in conjunction with the statutory guidance, *Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children*[11], and in particular Annex B of the statutory guidance. Using this information, local authorities will be able to set up a procedure that will; collect the information; inform all participants what their role is and why it is important; collate the information and send it to the DfE as part of the SSDA903 return; and use the information to develop their strategies to identify and support children looked after who have emotional and behavioural problems.

Local authorities should be satisfied that there are robust systems in place to ensure that this data return is as accurate as possible.

Action for local authorities

Local authorities are required to ensure a short behavioural screening questionnaire (SDQ) is completed for each of their children looked after. Data is collected for those

[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

looked after children between the ages of 4 and 16 inclusive. Not completing a questionnaire is not an option unless there are very good reasons why it is not possible. For the purposes of this collection the questionnaire should be completed by the main carer, preferably at the time of the child's statutory annual health assessment. The authority will need to distribute and explain how to use the questionnaires to each carer.

The local authority is responsible for:

- the collection of completed questionnaires
- marking the SDQ
- storing the data
- and returning the data to the DfE as part of the SSDA903 data collection

The authority will need to collect and score each questionnaire in order to obtain a single score (the Total Difficulties Score) for each of their children looked after. Scores for children looked after who have been continuously looked after for at least one year should be submitted for each child as part of the SSDA903 return. Details of what the local authority and the main carer should do are set out in the questions below.

What is the strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ)?

The SDQ is a short behavioural screening questionnaire. It has 5 sections that cover details of emotional difficulties; conduct problems; hyperactivity or inattention; friendships and peer groups; and also positive behaviour, plus an "impact supplement" to assist in the prediction of emotional health problems.

Which element of the questionnaire do I use?

Local authorities are required for the purpose of the SSDA903 statistical return to use the 'main carer' questionnaire element of the SDQ. However, although the results don't feed into the SSDA903 annual collection, if the SDQ completed by the carer suggests that the child's total difficulties score is outside the normal range (i.e. a borderline score of 14-16 or a score of 17+, considered as giving cause for concern), the child may benefit from triangulating the scores from the carer's SDQ with those of his or her teacher and (if they are aged 4 to 17) the self-evaluation. Social workers and Virtual School Heads should consider arranging for this to be done in order to provide more comprehensive information for the health assessment. If triangulation of those scores confirms the carer's score, consideration should be given to using a diagnostic tool to enable an appropriate intervention to be identified..

Which children are included in the data collection?

For the purpose of the SSDA903 data collection, local authorities must return a single 'Total Difficulties Score', ranging from 0 to 40, for all children looked after aged between 4 and 16 (inclusive) at the date of their latest assessment and who have been looked-after for at least 12 months on 31 March.

However, to ensure that data are available for this group of children, the SDQ should be completed for all of the authority's children looked after within this age range (meaning aged between 4 and 16 inclusive) as it is not possible to predict in advance which children will spend a year of more in care.

Local authorities should:

- include in the SSDA903 statistical return all young people who were under 17 at the time of their SDQ assessment even though they became 17 between their assessment taking place and 31 March. For example, a young person aged 16 who had the SDQ carer assessment at their annual health review in September and become 17 in the following January. We are collecting the information for this group of children so that we can distinguish between 2 groups: 1) those who had SDQ assessments during the year and who were still 16 by 31 March; and 2) those who were 16 on the date of their assessment but turned 17 during the year. Given that the SDQ assessment could be made at any time in the year, it is very possible for a child to be assessed the day before their 17th birthday and we would like to capture this information)
- include in the statistical return children who have recently become 4 (as at the 31st of March) but who have not yet had an SDQ assessment. They should be recorded as not having a return completed because they were under 4 at the date of the latest assessment (see below)
- exclude children who are looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements

Who completes the questionnaire?

The questionnaire must be completed by the child's main carer. For most children looked after and young people this will be either a foster carer or their residential care worker where the child is in residential accommodation. However, it is possible for the questionnaire to be completed by a parent or other family member if they are looking after the child.

What if a child has changed carers?

For children who have changed carers during the year, local authorities should assess which carer is best placed to carry out the assessment.

What training or guidance should social workers offer to carers about completing the questionnaire?

The carers' SDQ questionnaire is designed in such a way that no formal training should be necessary. It is sufficiently straightforward to enable them to complete the questions easily. However, the carer needs to feel confident that they know what they are being asked to do and how to do it. If they are unclear about what they need to do, then this could affect the quality of the data returned. Where a carer has difficulties in

understanding or completing the questionnaire the local authority may want to offer assistance, for example, by discussing the questionnaire with the carer.

Whoever gives the questionnaire to the carer to complete (this will usually be the social worker) should:

- explain what the questionnaire is for and why it is important for them to complete it
- check that they understand what they need to do and by when
- explain that it is important to be honest in their assessments and that the SDQ is a screening tool to help the child and is not an assessment of or reflection of how well they care for the child
- make sure the carer knows the child well enough to be able to give meaningful insights in responding to questions
- agree a completion and return date for the questionnaire
- make sure the carer knows to whom the completed questionnaire should be returned

When is the questionnaire completed?

It can be completed at any point during the year. However, to help ensure completion and reduce administration required by the local authority, and help inform the understanding of the child or young person's support needs in the context of their physical and mental health, it is recommended that the questionnaire is completed as part of the child or young person's statutory annual health assessment. For those young people who have recently come into care, the carer may need time to establish a relationship with the child before they will be in a position to carry out the assessment. Local authorities (usually this will be the social worker) will need to make a judgement on a case by case basis to ensure the SDQ is completed accurately and in a timely manner. Information is required for the SSDA903 returns for those children and young people who have been in continuous care for at least 12 months (on 31 March) even if they have had more than one carer during that time.

What arrangements do we need to make for completing the questionnaire?

Local authorities (usually the social worker) should make arrangements for issuing the SDQ to the child's main carer. This should be accompanied by an explanation of how it should be completed and who within the authority it should be returned to (completed questionnaires should not be sent directly to the DfE and this needs to be made clear to carers).

The SDQ requires carers to read a series of statements and judge how well it describes the young person by ticking one of 3 or 4 boxes for each question. Completion should take between 5 to 10 minutes.

Local authorities should ensure that the carer has sufficient time to complete the questionnaire in advance of the child or young person's statutory health assessment (one

month is recommended). Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the questionnaire is completed and returned for each applicable child or young person.

The SDQ is a screening tool to assess whether the child or young person has, or may develop, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Whilst the primary carer SDQ does not require input from the child or young person we expect it to be undertaken with the knowledge of the young person involved.

What if the questionnaire cannot be completed?

Completion of the SDQ is straightforward and there should only be rare exceptions where it cannot be completed. Having learning difficulties should not prevent a child from having a questionnaire completed that relates to them. Local authorities should make every effort to enable, support and ensure the SDQ's completion. However, in the rare circumstance that a score cannot be obtained, the data return contains a field for the local authority to provide the reason. The SSDA903 data collection uses the following codes for this purpose.

- SDQ1 - No form returned as child was aged under 4 or over 17 at date of latest assessment
- SDQ2 – Carer(s) refused to complete and return the questionnaire
- SDQ3 - Not possible to complete the questionnaire due to severity of the child's disability
- SDQ4 - Other
- SDQ5 - Child or young person refuses to allow an SDQ to be completed

What does the carer and local authority do with the completed questionnaire?

Following completion of the questionnaire by the child's carer, they should return it to the local authority. The completed questionnaire should also be shared with the registered medical practitioner, registered nurse or registered midwife undertaking the child or young person's statutory health assessment, in line with the statutory guidance on information sharing outlined at paragraphs 37 to 39 in '*Promoting the health and wellbeing of looked after children*[12]'.

The local authority should calculate the child's Total Difficulties Score. The Total Difficulties Score is generated by totalling the scores of the emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems sub-scores; it does not include the pro-social score – do not include this in the calculation.

[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

Local authorities should first generate the child's score for each of the 4 relevant sub-score domains (5 questions in each) and then generate the Total Difficulties Score (between 0 and 40).

When scoring the SDQ, authorities should take care to ensure that the total score is generated without errors.

What is the end-product?

Following scoring of the SDQ, local authorities should keep a record of the Total Difficulties Score (that is, the overall score ranging from 0 to 40) for each relevant child and submit these as part of the SSDA903 data collection.

Using the SDQ as a screening tool

It is recommend that the SDQ is used to help decision-making about links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Referral to specialist mental health assessment and treatment should be considered in the context of routine assessment of health needs, including through the child or young person's statutory annual health assessment and their statutory health plan, as well as existing assessment as part of placing a child or young person in care.

Social workers should consider the need to make a referral to specialist CAMHS or, where they exist, specialist teams that have been set up in partnership with local mental health providers. Where social workers are unsure of the need for referral, or how to make one, they should seek advice on local care pathways and CAMHS eligibility criteria. CAMHS may also be a useful source of expertise in the use and interpretation of the SDQ. The local CAMHS Partnership will want to be informed of the levels of mental health difficulties in the children in care population. This information is valuable in making thorough local needs assessments.

While children who are looked after under an agreed series of short-term placements are excluded from this indicator, social workers may consider whether these children might otherwise benefit from having an SDQ assessment. In such circumstances, social workers should discuss this with those who have parental responsibility for the child.

The full SDQ also includes a questionnaire for teachers and a self-reporting questionnaire for children and young people aged 11 to 16. While these are not required as part of this data collection, local authorities may wish to use these questionnaires to improve their understanding of the needs of their looked-after children, particularly to find out how the child or young person feels about their own emotional wellbeing.

The SDQ will provide predictions about how likely it is that a child or young person has significant mental health problems – unlikely, possible or probable – to do this it must include the "impact" questions on page 2 of the questionnaire. We recommend that if the main carer SDQ suggests a possible or probable problem that an SDQ is completed by a

teacher who knows the young person and the young person themselves if they are aged 11 or over. The allocated social worker may wish to discuss any problem areas highlighted by the SDQ with the carer and young person. However, the SDQ is only a screening tool. Where a problem is identified the local authority should use a diagnostic tool such as the Development and Well-Being Assessment (DAWBA) to enable an appropriate intervention to be identified and to consider a referral to local voluntary or statutory mental health services.

Frequently asked question on SDQ scores

What is my role in the SDQ process…

…as a local authority looked after children health official?

Your general role is as the person responsible for administering the completion of the SDQ as described above. However, it is up to local authorities to determine exactly who does what.

It is important that the carer feels comfortable with the task they are asked to do and that they have enough knowledge of the young person to answer the questions. The questionnaire should go with a note explaining what is needed and offering guidance as necessary. You can use information contained in this guidance as well as a contact name/number if the carer is experiencing difficulties in completing it. When the SDQ is returned it is important to note that all questions have been completed as missing questions can invalidate the score. One problem has been an abnormal number of zero scores. In the general population we would expect an average score of 8.

While it is certainly the case that there are children who will have a zero score these should be few. If you find you are receiving more of these zero scores than expected, then you will need to check that the SDQ is being completed correctly. From 2009/10 there is a new validation rule in the SSDA903 return that will flag up when an SDQ score of zero has been recorded. The record will be in error but if the local authority is sure that the score is correct, then they can contact the DfE to bypass the error. This will ensure that an SDQ score of zero is recorded only when the score is zero as opposed to when a score is not known.

… as a carer?

Completing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is about assessing the child to see if they have any problems that may indicate a potential emotional/ behavioural difficulty. This is very important as picking up such problems early can mean that support is put in place to help the child.

As a carer you will be ideally placed to answer the questions that the SDQ asks as you have that day-to-day knowledge about the young person. The Questionnaire has been

designed to enable it to be answered by all parents/carers. However, it does mean that you need to know the young person. If you feel you have not known the young person long enough to provide an answer, please tell your local authority contact as there may be someone in a better position to complete the questionnaire.

Some young people have indicated that their views about how they are feeling are not taken into account enough because the national data collection requires only the main carer element of the SDQ to be completed. It is important to be clear that the carers' responses to the questionnaire are their assessment of how they see the emotional and behavioural health of the child. The questionnaire must not be completed in collaboration with the carer – to do so would invalidate the responses. However, any carer completing the questionnaire should be satisfied that at the time they complete the questionnaire they:

- are not basing their answers on the child's behaviour on a particular day(s) which will result in a skewed score that doesn't reflect how the child is most of the time
- have an understanding of how the child or young person perceives their behaviour and emotional wellbeing
- talk to the child's or young person's social worker or lead health official where they know that their responses to questions differ significantly from what they know to be the child's or young person's views about whether or not the social worker should ask the young person to complete an SDQ if they want to

The SDQ requires you to read a series of statements and judge how well it describes the young person you look after by ticking one of 3 or 4 boxes for each question. Completion should not take too long - about 5 to 10 minutes on average, although it occasionally may take a little longer. However, it is important that you understand the questions asked within the SDQ and how the young person in your care is feeling. Without knowing how they feel you may find it difficult to accurately answer the questions. If you have any problems completing the form, please contact the person in the local authority who sent you the form and talk through any difficulty you may have. If necessary, they can assist you in completing the form (however it is important that you answer the specific questions). There are versions of the SDQ in alternative languages if that would be helpful – please ask your local authority contact about this.

The completed SDQ should be sent back to the local authority (they should tell you who to send it back to). Once they have completed the scoring process this information will feed into the annual health review for the child you look after. Any further action will depend on the score obtained and any other information as discussed at the annual health review.

Isn't this just more internal administrative burden?

Evidence clearly suggests that looked-after children are nearly 5 times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children. While there is a degree of administrative burden in obtaining information for this indicator, the benefits in being able to identify

problems and support needs for these vulnerable children, both individual and as a cohort, is an overriding consideration.

What do local authorities get out of this?

Of primary importance to local authorities (given their role as the corporate parents) is that undertaking an SDQ questionnaire early in a child's care history will quickly highlight the likelihood that the child either has or could develop significant mental health problems. This should then assist in accessing and commissioning appropriate intervention to support the child. In addition, local authorities will be able to build up management information regarding the scale of emotional and behavioural problems of looked-after children in their area which will therefore help inform the appropriate levels of service provision. In the longer term, data from SDQ returns will give an indication on how effective the service provision provided is in meeting the needs of looked-after children.

How does this link with the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?

Should there be any particular individual case where a CAF is being implemented for a looked-after child, then the SDQ could be one of the tools that will help inform that assessment.

Can the SDQ be used as a commissioning tool?

This is a matter for the local authority to decide. Guidance recommends that that the SDQ is used to help decision-making about links with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Referral to specialist mental health assessment and treatment should be considered in the context of the existing assessment of the health, social and educational needs of children and young people as part of placing a child or young person in care. Social workers should consider the need to make a referral to specialist CAMHS or, where they exist, specialist teams that have been set up in partnership with local mental health providers. Where social workers are unsure of the need for referral, or how to make one, they should seek advice on local care pathways and CAMHS eligibility criteria.

Why only the parent (carer) assessment? Why not use the young person or the teacher assessment as well?

For the purposes of obtaining information to provide data that will inform this indicator, using the parent/carer questionnaire is sufficient. However, this does not mean that local authorities cannot use the full range of the SDQ if they so wish and our guidance[13] does

[13] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-looked-after-children--2

recommend that both the teacher questionnaire and where appropriate the young person (self-evaluation) questionnaire should be used if the parent/carer questionnaire indicates that there are concerns.

Should we obtain consent from the young person?

One of the options for not completing a questionnaire is where a young person has refused to allow one to be completed. The SDQ is a screening tool to assess whether the child or young person has, or may develop, emotional or behavioural difficulties. Whilst the primary carer's version of the SDQ does not require input from the child or young person we expect it to be undertaken with the knowledge of the young person involved. How local authorities wish to approach this issue is up to them, but a formal "consent" process may be overly bureaucratic. Undertaking the SDQ should be part of the process by which the health and wellbeing of all children looked after are monitored and assessed and most young people will understand the importance of this when it is explained to them.

Do we include young people who are 16?

Yes, the SDQ should be completed for all looked-after children up to aged 16 inclusive. When compiling returns to the Department include those young people who were under 17 at the time of the assessment but who became 17 between the assessment taking place and 31 March. We are collecting the information for this group of children so that we can distinguish between 2 groups; those who had SDQ assessments during the year and who were still 16 by 31 March; and those who were 16 on the date of their assessment but turned 17 during the year. Given that the assessment could be made at any time in the year, it is very possible for a child to be assessed just before their 17th birthday and we would like to capture this information.

Who should complete the questionnaire if the young person is in independent living?

There are a number of options that could be used and would depend on individual circumstances:

- Ask the previous carer to complete the questionnaire. There may be a number of problems with this, too much time may have gone by (it could be almost a year), there may be a relationship problem between carer and young person (young person may refuse permission to have it completed). However, there may be times when this is the most appropriate way forward
- Social worker to complete the questionnaire. Once again this may not be appropriate in all cases but where there is a relationship between social worker and young person that means the SW could reasonably answer the questions then this would be acceptable
- Another 'responsible' adult (but not a teacher). It may be the case in certain circumstances that a looked-after young person has a trusted adult in their lives

other than an ex-carer or social worker that is close enough to the young person to be able to complete the questionnaire. If all are agreed, then this could be an acceptable alternative

- If none of these options are appropriate, then the questionnaire cannot be completed and a note to that effect should be put on the data return for that young person.

What training do carers need to carry out this exercise?

No specific training should be needed to undertake this exercise. Foster carers do not require specialised knowledge as the questionnaire was designed so that all parents can complete it. Both the set of 25 questions plus the impact questions only require that the foster carer has known the child for a sufficient period of time, and has been responsible for their day-to-day welfare, so that they are able to make an informed judgement regarding any behaviour displayed (much as any parent would of their children). Guidance does suggest that the questionnaire given to the foster carers should be accompanied by an explanation of how it should be completed. Additionally, where a carer has difficulties in understanding or completing the questionnaire the local authority may want to offer assistance, for example, by discussing the questionnaire with the carer.

What if the carer feels this is an exercise directed at their ability to care for a child?

It should be made very clear that the purpose of completing the SDQ is not about monitoring the ability of the carer to care for the child. This exercise is about assessing the child to see if they are presenting with any problems that when taken together may indicate a potential emotional/ behavioural difficulty, so this is an assessment of the child not the carer. It is the carer who is best placed to answer the questions contained in the questionnaire as they have that day-to-day knowledge that others do not. We are collecting this data so that nationally we have an overall indication of the level of difficulty there might be in the looked-after population and this data will inform the national indicator.

What does the ‘total difficulty score’ mean in practice?

The scoring range is between 0 and 40. On an individual basis a score of 13 or below is normal and 17 and above is a cause of concern (between 14 to 16 is borderline). For local authorities, their overall average score will give an indication of the level of "concern" there is across the local authority. From a strategic point of view, a high score will mean that more looked-after children are displaying such problems. This is useful management information as it will give an indication of where resources may need to be allocated. Over time it will also give an indication of how effective services put in place are addressing these issues. For individuals, information from the SDQ can lead to considering possible further investigation or intervention. Over time records can show a child’s progress - whether difficulties identified remain or, if appropriate interventions have been put in place, whether they have eased.

Can it be used as a basis for discussion with Virtual School Heads and the child's education setting about educational needs in relation to Pupil Premium funding?

It is up to Virtual School Heads to determine how they will allocate Pupil Premium funding to their looked-after children. While the SDQ is mainly a tool to help identify emotional and behavioural concerns, it could also feed into any assessment for Pupil Premium funding if Virtual School Heads found that useful.

What about 17/18-year olds?

The SDQ has been designed specifically for those young people who are aged 4 to 16 inclusive. However, if the local authority wishes to continue to use the questionnaire for those who are 17 and beyond then that is a decision for them to take. Local authorities will need to consider whether the questions asked continue to be relevant for those who are aged 17+.

Appendix 3: Further Guidance on coding a child's ethnicity

The table below is offered as guidance where very specific information on a child's ethnicity is available (as given in column 2) and coders require assistance in translating extended categories (columns 1) into the DfE Main codes (column 3) listed above. Please record a child's ethnicity using the DFE Main code only, do not use the extended codes – these are provided below for information only.

Table 13: Summary table of ethnicity codes and descriptions

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WBRI	White - British	WBRI	White - British	White	
WCOR	White - Cornish	WBRI	White - British	White	
WENG	White - English	WBRI	White - British	White	
WSCO	White - Scottish	WBRI	White - British	White	
WWEL	White - Welsh	WBRI	White - British	White	
WNIR	White – Northern Irish	WBRI	White - British	White	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WOWB	Other White British	WBRI	White - British	White	
WIRI	White - Irish	WIRI	White - Irish	White	
WIRT	Traveller of Irish heritage	WIRT	Traveller of Irish heritage	White	
WOTH	Any other white background	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WALB	Albanian	WOTH	Any other white background	White	Excluding Kosovan.
WBOS	Bosnian-Herzegovinia n	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WCRO	Croatian	WOTH	Any other white background	White	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WGRE	Greek/ Greek Cypriot	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WGRK	Greek	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WGRC	Greek Cypriot	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WITA	Italian	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WKOS	Kosovan	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WPOR	Portuguese	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WSER	Serbian	WOTH	Any other white background	White	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WTUR	Turkish/ Turkish Cypriot	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WTUK	Turkish	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WTUC	Turkish Cypriot	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WEUR	White European	WOTH	Any other white background	White	
WEEU	White Eastern European	WOTH	Any other white background	White	Including Russian, Latvian, Ukrainian, Polish, Bulgarian, Czech, Slovak, Lithuanian, Montenegrin and Romanian.
WWEU	White Western European	WOTH	Any other white background	White	Including Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Scandinavian.
WOTW	White other	WOTH	Any other white background	White	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WROM	Gypsy / Roma	WROM	Gypsy / Roma	White	This category includes children who identify themselves as Gypsies and or Romanies, and or Travellers, and or Traditional Travellers, and or Romanichals, and or Romanichal Gypsies and or Welsh Gypsies / Kaale, and or Scottish Travellers / Gypsies, and or Roma. It includes all children of a Gypsy ethnic background or Roma ethnic background, irrespective of whether they are nomadic, semi nomadic or living in static accommodation. It should not include Fairground (Showman's) children; the children travelling with circuses; or the children of New Travellers or Bargees unless, of course, their ethnic status is that which is mentioned above. Schools would use this where they do not wish to identify Gypsy and Roma children separately
WROG	Gypsy	WROM	Gypsy/Roma	White	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
WROR	Roma	WROM	Gypsy/Roma	White	
WROO	Other Gypsy/Roma	WROM	Gypsy/Roma	White	
MWBC	White and Black Caribbean	MWBC	White and Black Caribbean	Mixed/Dual background	
MWBA	White and Black African	MWBA	White and Black African	Mixed/Dual background	
MWAS	White and Asian	MWAS	White and Asian	Mixed/Dual background	
MWAP	White and Pakistani	MWAS	White and Asian	Mixed/Dual background	
MWAI	White and Indian	MWAS	White and Asian	Mixed/Dual background	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
MWAO	White and any other Asian background	MWAS	White and Asian	Mixed/Dual background	
MOTH	Any other mixed background	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MAOE	Asian and any other ethnic group	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MABL	Asian and Black	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MACH	Asian and Chinese	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MBOE	Black and any other ethnic group	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MBCH	Black and Chinese	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
MCOE	Chinese and any other ethnic group	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MWOE	White and any other ethnic group	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MWCH	White and Chinese	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
MOTM	Other mixed background	MOTH	Any other mixed background	Mixed/Dual background	
AIND	Indian	AIND	Indian	Asian or Asian British	
APKN	Pakistani	APKN	Pakistani	Asian or Asian British	
AMPK	Mirpuri Pakistani	APKN	Pakistani	Asian or Asian British	
AKPA	Kashmiri Pakistani	APKN	Pakistani	Asian or Asian British	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
AOPK	Other Pakistani	APKN	Pakistani	Asian or Asian British	
ABAN	Bangladeshi	ABAN	Bangladeshi	Asian or Asian British	
AOTH	Any other Asian background	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
AAFR	African Asian	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	Including East and South African Asians.
AKAO	Kashmiri other	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
ANEP	Nepali	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
ASNL	Sri Lankan Sinhalese	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
ASLT	Sri Lankan Tamil	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
ASRO	Sri Lankan other	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
AOTA	Other Asian	AOTH	Any other Asian background	Asian or Asian British	
BCRB	Black Caribbean	BCRB	Black Caribbean	Black or Black British	Including Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago.
BAFR	Black - African	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BANN	Black - Angolan	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BCON	Black - Congolese	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BGHA	Black - Ghanaian	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
BNGN	Black - Nigerian	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BSLN	Black - Sierra Leonean	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BSOM	Black - Somali	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	
BSUD	Black - Sudanese	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	Including Sudanese of Egyptian origin.
BAOF	Other Black African	BAFR	Black - African	Black or Black British	Including Black South African, Zimbabwean, Ethiopian, Rwandan and Ugandan.
BOTH	Any other Black background	BOTH	Any other Black background	Black or Black British	
BEUR	Black European	BOTH	Any other Black background	Black or Black British	
BNAM	Black North American	BOTH	Any other Black background	Black or Black British	Include Black North American and Canadian.

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
BOTB	Other Black	BOTH	Any other Black background	Black or Black British	
CHNE	Chinese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
CHKC	Hong Kong Chinese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
CMAL	Malaysian Chinese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
CSNG	Singaporean Chinese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
CTWN	Taiwanese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
COCH	Other Chinese	CHNE	Chinese	Asian	
OOTH	Any other ethnic group	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OAFG	Afghan	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
OARA	Arab other	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	Include Palestinian, Kuwaiti, Jordanian and Saudi Arabian.
OEGY	Egyptian	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OFIL	Filipino	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OIRN	Iranian	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OIRQ	Iraqi	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OJPN	Japanese	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OKOR	Korean	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OKRD	Kurdish	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	Include Kurdish children from Iraq, Iran and Turkey.
OLAM	Latin/South/ Central American	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	Include all children from Central/ South America, Cuba and Belize.
OLEB	Lebanese	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
OLIB	Libyan	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OMAL	Malay	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any Other Ethnic Group	Including Malaysian other than Malaysian Chinese.
OMRC	Moroccan	OOTH	Any Other Ethnic Group	Any other ethnic group	
OPOL	Polynesian	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	Including Fijian, Tongan, Samoan and Tahitian.
OTHA	Thai	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OVIE	Vietnamese	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OYEM	Yemeni	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
OOEG	Other ethnic group	OOTH	Any other ethnic group	Any other ethnic group	
REFU	Refused	REFU	Refused	Refused	

DfE extended codes	Approved extended categories	DfE main code	Sub-category	Main category	Comments
NOBT	Information not yet obtained	NOBT	Information not yet obtained	Information not yet obtained	

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