

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2020 – 2021



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¹ Picture by Lekenya Simpson 2021

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1. Introduction

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their statutory functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children. As part of this statutory guidance there is a requirement for the manager of the IRO Service to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Purpose of Service and Legal Context

Every child who is looked after by Derby City Council must have a care plan which details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made by Derby Childrens & Young Peoples Services (CYP) to meet the child's day to day needs. All local authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review the care plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010)

The appointment of an IRO for every looked after child is a legal requirement under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The role of the IRO was strengthened in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

From December 2012 the Looked After Children (LAC) population was extended to include those children placed on remand in secure units or youth offending institutions under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) arrangements. This Act places a responsibility on Local Authorities to treat all children remanded to custody as looked after children up to the age of 18 years with each young person having a remand plan which is the equivalent of a care plan.

The IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and Independent Reviewing Officers on Reviewing Arrangements for Looked after Children specifies the following requirements:

Every child in care should have a named IRO to provide continuity in the oversight of the case and to enable the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child. The child's care plan must be prepared before the child is first placed by the local authority or if this is not practicable, within ten working days of the start of the first placement. The IRO must be appointed to the child's case within 5 days.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case
- participate in any review of the child's case
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority, and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authorities legal responsibilities towards the child.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- i. Chairing the child's review; and
- ii. Monitoring the child's case on an on-going basis

3. IRO Service

The IRO service in Derby at year end 2020/21 had a total establishment of 7.8 fte IRO's and a 0.5 fte specialist IRO for children receiving short breaks. The IRO team headcount is 9 IRO's, with 2 males and 7 females.

There has been a couple of staffing changes over the last year with one permanent IRO leaving and another IRO who was in temporary one year post also successful in securing a permanent team manager position elsewhere. The IRO service has responded swiftly to the developments and was able to appoint to both of the posts. The temporary post was made permanent, given the increasing numbers of children in care it was recognised investment was required to ensure balanced caseloads and effectiveness of the service. Both posts were recruited to successfully. Both posts were appointed to with a very experienced social worker, in one case an experienced IRO in the other.

The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 82. This is more than desired however given the appointment of an additional IRO in the team this has significantly helped to keep the individual caseloads to this level.

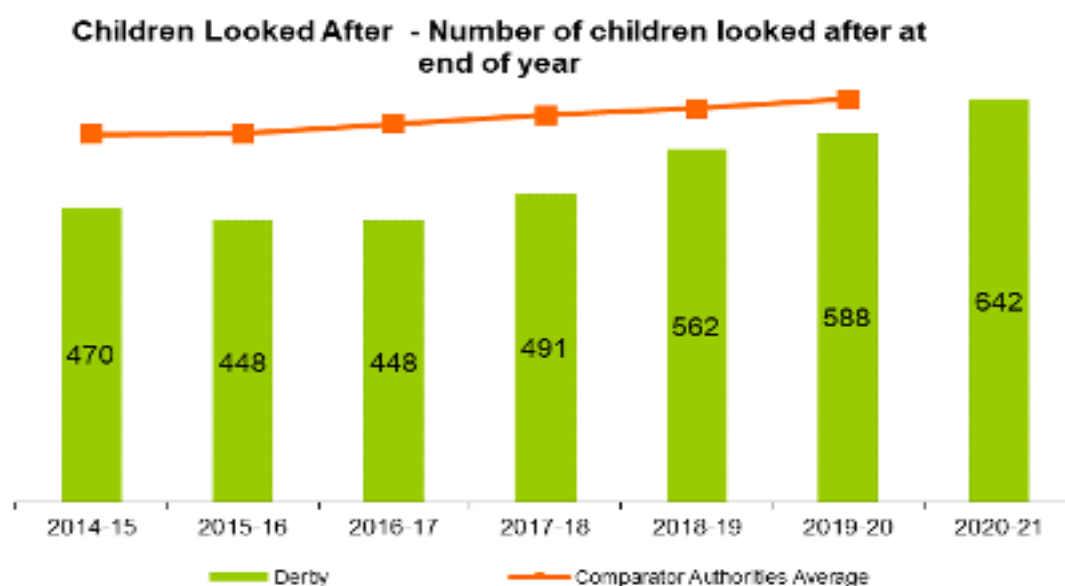
The working average case load at the end of 2020/21 was 82, in 2019/20 was 86, in 2018/19 it was 82. There has been a gradual increase of children in care numbers over 2020/21 to 642. The IRO service is based at the Gatehouse with the rest of the Quality Assurance Service, including Child Protection Managers and Children in Need Reviewing Officers. The service has a strong identity and staff work very well across the Quality Assurance Service.

The IRO service piloted the implementation of writing CLA review reports in a more child friendly format in March 2021. The format is focused on making the review report easier for young people to follow and understand. The report is written to the young person, using child friendly language and tone. The pilot went well, with positive feedback. As from June 2021 all children looked after review reports are now written in a children centred format, with a focus on the review report being written to the young person.

4.0 Children in Care over the last seven years

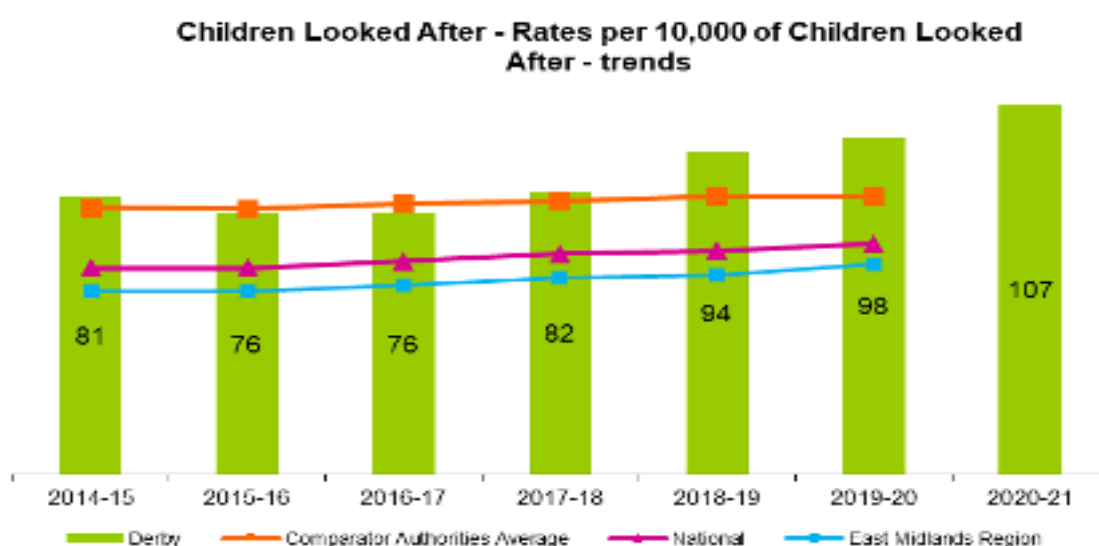
The table below illustrates the quarterly changes in the number of children in care throughout the last seven years.

There has been a continuing increase in the numbers of children in care over the last seven years. At the end of 2017/18 there were 491 children in care rising to 562 at the end of 2018/19 and 588 at the end of 2019/20. At year end of 31 March 2021 Derby had 642 children in care. This was an increase from 588 children at seen at the previous year end. This is an additional 54 children and equates to a 9.2% increase.



Derby City has a higher child in care rate per 10,000 population compared to its comparator authorities and nationally.

At year end 31 March 2021 Derby had 107 children in care per 10,000 people aged under 18. Derby's rate (107) is above the 2019-20 comparator authority average of 81 per 10,000, above the national rate of 67 per 10,000 and above the East Midlands average of 61 per 10,000.



5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2020/21 are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 242 or 38% of the total. The numbers of babies aged less than 1 has remained consistent with 2019/20 to 5% of the overall cohort. The number of children aged 1 to 4 years old, group equates to 17% of the overall cohort. There has been a big increase in the number of children aged 5 to 9 age group, as at year end it stood at 144 young people a total of 22% increase from the previous year. The number of children aged 16 or over has continued to remain consistent with 111 young people or 17% of the total number of young people in care.

It would be expected the majority of the children that are under five to have a plan for either adoption or other permanence exit, including a return home. As children get older it becomes more difficult to secure permanence through adoption and hence it is very unlikely that children in banding of 10 and over will leave care through this exit route, this banding makes up 55% of children in care. For these children it is important, where appropriate and safe to consider options for a return home or to extended family and friends via a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. Permanence can also be achieved through fostering. For children that are leaving care age it is important to provide support, advice and training to prepare for independent living. Derby Childrens and Young People Services have a 'Staying Put' policy. This allows young people to stay in their foster placement beyond 18 as long as the foster carers agree and criteria are met. Whilst the young person is no longer in the care of the authority and the foster placement loses its status, the placement is funded through a combination of council funding as well as benefits. This provides continuity and stability for the young person to move to independence when they are ready.

Age Band	31/03/2020	31/03/2020
Under 1	36	6%
1 to 4	109	17%
5 to 9	144	22%
10 to 15	242	38%
16+	111	17%
Total	642	100%

More of the children in care in Derby at year end 2020/21 were male, 342 making 53.3% of the total with 300 females which equates to 46.7% of the total. Having looked at historical data dating back for the last three years, these figures in relation to gender of children in care seems to remain fairly consistent.

	31/03/2020	31/03/2020
Male	342	53.3%
Female	300	46.7%
Total	642	100%

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2021 out of the 642 children in care, the largest group of children, 473 were reported as being White British, which was a total of 74% of all children in care, last year it was 58%, this is an increase of 16% percent from last year . The next largest group were children of dual heritage who made up 14% of the population with 89 children in care.

Ethnicity Recorded	Number	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	38	6%
Black or Black British	33	5%
Dual Heritage	89	14%
Other	9	1%
White British	473	74%
Total	642	100%

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2021, 355 or 55% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 149 children or 23% that were on interim care order, this means that these cases were still in proceedings pending assessments or other work and a final outcome was yet to be determined through the courts.

There were 57 children or 9% of the total population who had a placement order granted, this means that a care plan for adoption had been agreed through the courts for these children. 79 or 12% of the total population were voluntarily accommodated under s.20. Voluntary accommodation is when children are accommodated at the request of and or in agreement with parent/s or those with parental responsibility or were over 16 and had requested to be accommodated under the homelessness policy.

Legal Status	31/03/2021	31/03/2021
C1 Interim Care order	149	23%
C2 Full Care order	355	55%
E1 Placement Order Granted	57	9%
J1 In Local Authority on Remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence	2	0.3%
V2 Accommodated under Section 20	79	12%
Total	642	100%

8. Entrants and Exits from Care

Analysing the number of children entering and exiting care provides useful information about the reasons why children and young people have come into care and also how we exit them from the care system.

When analysing the reasons for children starting care the most overwhelming reasons for each quarter throughout 2020/21 has been abuse or neglect, this was also the case in 2019/20 and 2018/19.

There were 239 children entering care in 2020/21 compared to 223 children and young people entering care in 2019/20. Out of this, a total of 176 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 74%% of all entrants. This is 6% more than last year 2019/20 when it was 68%. 6 children came into care due to parental illness/disability, this is a reduction of 9 from 2019/20, when this has been broken down this has included parents abusing alcohol and drugs, parental disability, parents with problems and parents with learning disability. 17 children and young people came into care due to disability and a further 11 for absent parenting; this is a decrease from last year when it was a total of 18 young people. The decrease can be attributed to the reduction in unaccompanied asylum seeker children coming into care. There were 14 children that came into care for socially unacceptable behaviour, last year this was 5.

Reasons for children starting care	31/3/2021
Abuse or Neglect	176
Disability	17
Parental Illness/Disability	6
Family in Acute Stress	9

Family Dysfunction	6
Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	14
Low Income	0
Absent Parenting	11
Total	239

According to the data currently available in 2020/21, 177 children and young people exited care. This was a decrease from 2019/20 when there 192 young people that exited care. There was a big increase in the number of children adopted a total of 31 when compared to 2019/20 when there 19. 53 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons, this was a significant increase from 2019/20 when there 34.

Quite a large number, 34 young people, exited care by moving into independence, this made 19% of the total number. The number of children and young people exited through the use of Special Guardianship Orders has increased from 14 last year to 22. There continues to be a decrease in the number of child arrangement orders from 13 in 2019/20 to 10 in 2020/21

There were 14 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, this may need further investigation regarding accurate recording with a further 4 exiting through being sentenced to custody, and this is the same as last year when there were 4. There have been 2 exits through the age assessment process whereby the person was assessed to be over 18 years old.

Adopted	31
Child Arrangement Order	10
SGO	22
Returned Home with Parental Responsibility (PR)	25
Returned Home with no PR	28
Independent Living	34
To Adult Social Care	7
Any other reason	14
Sentenced to custody	4
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	0

Age assessment determined 18 or over	2
child moved abroad	0
Accommodation on remand ended	0
Died	0
Total	177

9. Children in Care Placement Provision

At the end of March 2021 there were a total of 465 young people placed in foster placements. There were 37 young placed in adoptive placements and 29 young people placed with parents. There were 87 young people placed in residential homes, secure units and hostels and 4 in other residential settings. There were 20 young people in other placements.

Placement Provision

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2021
Foster Placements	465
Homes and Hostels (K2)	87
Independent Living (P2)	0
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	370
Placed with Parents (P1)	29
Other Residential Settings	4
Other Placements	20
Total	642

10. Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews

The IRO team completed over 1,462 reviews in 2020/21. The number of reviews that have been completed within timescales has improved from 2019/20 which was 92.7%. The 99% is above our target of 97% for the year. The 99% is a great achievement and is our highest figure for timeliness of reviews.

The IRO service will continue to prioritise this area of work and work hard to maintain that all reviews are held within the statutory required timescales.

11. Number of Children Participating in their Reviews

The IRO service has continued to work hard to ensure children and young people participate in their review. In 2020/21 95.5% of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This is slightly below our target for of 97%.

The service has worked very hard over the year to maintain participation given the challenges of covid and undertaking reviews remotely, as well as this sometimes even after discussion with their IRO and SW there is still some young people who do not wish to participate in their reviews, in these cases this is recorded as non-participation and hence does affect the overall figures. In situations like this the IRO always tries to meet with the young person before the review to ascertain their wishes and feelings and ensures that these are reflected in the review. Furthermore, children and young people are sent review consultation documentation which they are asked to complete before their review and send back to their IRO. There is a separate documentation for children from 4 to 11 years of age and 12 to 17 years. The consultation documents are used to inform the discussion that the IRO has with the young person and also on the agreement of the young person to inform the discussion at the review.

12. Dispute Resolution Process – Quality Assurance Notification Forms

Where an IRO has significant concerns about practice or other issues affecting a child's care plan then the IRO can instigate the QA notification process:

In the first instance if appropriate the IRO will raise an Informal QA Notification, this will be in the form of an Informal Notification Case Note on Local Childrens System (LCS). The Case Note will generate a notification for the Social Worker (SW). The SW and TM are expected to respond in 72 hours.

The informal notification can be completed anytime and may cover

- Poor practice - this can include the SW not following up a decision from a statutory review, not keeping the IRO informed about changes, lack of preparation for the review, poor quality reports or failure to complete required tasks or lack of progress
- Non-attendance - SW not attending statutory review
- No reports – reports not generated through LCS on time for the review
- Child not supported to participate in the review process

If any of the above criteria for Informal Notification is repeated or where there are significant concerns a Formal QA Notification is instigated. The formal process has four internal stages, initially when the IRO has a serious concern about practice or issues affecting the care plan for the child (or the informal process has not been successful) the IRO instigates stage one of the process. This involves the IRO generating an electronic QA notification on LCS this

generates a notification to the social worker and team manager. The IRO follows this up with an email to the team manager for a response to the issues raised; the manager has ten days to respond to the notification. The response has now been developed as a form on the LCS system. If there is no response or the response is unsatisfactory then the issue will go to stage two of the process whereby the Deputy Head of Service will meet with the deputy head or head of service responsible to agree an action plan with a view to resolving the issue. If an agreement is not reached, then the notification can be escalated to the third stage of the QA notification process. This involves a meeting between the head of service (QA) and head of service (Operational) and if required they can call a professionals meeting. Finally, if there is still no satisfactory resolution then the head of service QA will discuss concerns with service director or strategic director as appropriate, to agree if any further action can be taken before a referral to CAFCASS is made for external scrutiny and resolution.

There is a list of criteria that IROs use when deciding whether to use the dispute resolution process. To make the process consistent and more transparent it has been agreed that IRO's must raise a QA notification when:

- There has been drift or delay in implementation of the care plan
- Failure to complete significant tasks agreed in reviews within the review period where this will have a detrimental impact on the child
- Failure by any agency to comply with statutory requirements e.g. visits, sharing of court documents, school provision etc.
- Poor practice which is repeated or has a significant impact on child
- Example of excellent practice which has achieved a good outcome for the child

In 2020/21 there were 47 formal QA notifications. This is 33 less than in 2019/20 when there were 80. In 2018/19 there were 91, in 2017/18 when there were 93, whilst in 2016/17 there were 84, in 2015/16 there were 107 and 2014/15 there were a total of 53 QA notifications.

The numbers of formal QA notifications have generally been consistent over the previous three years, however over the last year there was a decline, this is because due to the covid pandemic to support the unprecedented pressures on services in the initial few months it was agreed that formal QA notifications would be paused. The formal QA notifications were paused at the start of the initial lockdown on 23 March 2020 to 8 June 2020, whilst there was a pause on formal QA notifications IRO's have continued to raise informal challenge and discussion with social workers and team managers. They have continued to ensure they have a good footprint on the system and have regular communications with case social workers. The good communication has allowed the formal QA's to be lower than previous years, by having thorough discussions and early informal challenge this will have resulted in the need for less formal QA notifications.

The notifications were made up as follows:

Reason	Number
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Drift or Delay	6
Excellent Practice	6
Non completion of Significant Tasks	12
Persistent Poor Practice	5
Statutory Requirements Not Met	18
Total	47

The greatest numbers of QA notifications 18 a decrease of 35 from 2019/20 when there were 53, were raised for statutory requirements not met; these would include cases where there are concerns that a child has not been visited as per the statutory requirements or statutory assessments not completed or completed in a timely way.

The second largest number of QA notifications were for failure to complete tasks, with a total of 12, this is increase of 1 from 2019/20 when there were 11. These included tasks such as contact not being agreed between siblings and/or parents or medical assessments/appointments not undertaken or completed in a timely manner.

There were 6 formal QA notifications, was generated for drift and delay, this is a decrease of 3 from 2019/20. These have included concerns regarding progressing of permanence or revoking particular orders or discharging care orders.

The number of QA notifications for excellent practice was a total of 6, this is a slight decrease from last year when there was a total of 8 for the whole year. Whilst it is important for IRO's to raise concerns about poor practice it is equally important to highlight where practice has been excellent and has had a good impact on the outcomes of a child, this is particularly important in generating a culture of continuous improvement.

There were 5 notifications for persistent poor practice, where there may be a number of actions that that have not been completed over review period or beyond.

There were no cases which were escalated to stage two of the dispute resolution process (decrease of 4 from last year's report); This is very positive as it suggests that the formal QA notifications were responded to and satisfactorily completed at stage one of the formal QA notification process.

13. Case Tracking

In addition to monitoring the child's care and progress within the plan at statutory reviews, IROs have a responsibility to monitor between reviews. In order for this to be effective and transparent in Derby the IRO Service has a tracking system.

Cases are identified as High, Medium and Low priority. The level is agreed and recorded at the review

High: where the IRO has concerns that time-critical elements of the care plan are becoming subject to drift or delay, and this is likely to have a significant impact on outcomes for the child, the IRO may set an early date for review, require an up-date from the social worker at regular intervals, and/or monitor activity on the child's file. They may also complete a QA notification and where the concern includes the manager's oversight of the case, they will alert the DHoS. Examples include delay in issuing proceedings, delays in home finding, critical assessments not completed impacting on permanence planning.

Medium: where the child or the situation would be vulnerable to any drift or delay, though none identified at present, or where less critical elements of the care plan are not being progressed, the IRO may require an interim up-date from the relevant member of staff, and/or check the child's file between reviews.

Examples include children with plans for adoption who may be hard to place or a placement has not been found by the second review post PO, criminal injuries claims, delays in arranging therapy or a school place, PEP not completed revocations of orders in PWP.

Low: where the child is in a stable permanent placement and/or the plan is progressing well, and the IRO is confident with the worker and management oversight.

Examples include the majority of children in long-term care and children subject to care proceedings

The case tracking process has now been implemented since April 2014. The IRO service is of the view that this has helped to identify cases that need closer monitoring and action. Depending on the priority level, especially when it is high, IRO's are feeding back that they are having increased communication, monitoring and discussion with the case social workers. In many cases due to the IRO following up on actions with the social workers this is ensuring that decisions from reviews are being actioned and hence reducing the need for QA notifications at the subsequent statutory review.

As part of the case tracking the IRO service has been working on evidencing the effective work that they do. With this in mind the service has worked on ensuring that there is a clear footprint of the IRO involvement within the child's or young person's LCS record. Whilst the IRO service strives to improve on this, there has been considerable improvement in this area over the last year.

14. Feedback from Young People and Parents

As well as using consultation forms for young people and parents, the Derby IRO service has introduced forms to gather feedback after the review. In 2020/21 we received 10 feedback forms from young people, 18 feedback forms from parents and 25 feedback forms from professionals.

On reviewing the feedback forms from young people, they have been almost unanimous in stating;

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.
- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Some of the comments stated:

I liked having the meeting by Skype at home in my foster home. I prefer this to coming into a meeting. I can concentrate better this way. I have ADHD and this was better as I can sit in the kitchen at the table

Reviews would be better if McDonalds were supplied

On reviewing the feedback forms from parents, they have been positive.in parents stating:

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.
- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Some of the comments back from parents stated:

I felt listened to and did at the first review too. I can participate better by phone and it was nice to hear nice things about my children. I wish I could participate by phone for court as I struggle in court

I felt listen by the IRO

Nothing, we felt 100% supported

P was advised at the end of the review feedback from parents was being gathered in order we can see how parents are finding reviews. P advised she felt listened to and the review was alright 'duck'.

F noted her contact with the IRO prior to the review was useful. F reported she felt listened to. F feels since corona virus she has been out of the loop in some respects. The IRO suggested a monthly update from the SW may help with this. The IRO has asked the SW to provide a brief monthly email to F.

Paul listened to me more in 5 minutes and sorted things out in one meeting than anyone else had done so far.

For attention of your manager if i could give a trust pilot review star rating Paul would certainly have a 5.

Nothing I was happy with the meeting today was fair I had my say

Some of the feedback from foster carers stated:

Meeting worked well and everyone had a voice. It would be easier if parents faces could be seen next time

It was good to see that parents were able to participate and join virtually with everyone

I thought Jane managed the meeting well and allowed everyone to have their say and feel listened to. She followed-up on a couple of points that I thought needed clarity and allowed discussions which was positive.

The meeting went well given the situation we are currently in. Attendees were all very patient and understanding to the fact that my child invaded briefly!

There's nothing I can think off to improve the meetings at the moment. We always feel that Jane listens and supports the boys and it's very assuring for the boys and us to have had Jane from the beginning of the boys placement, both boys know and feel confident with her.

Think it was a good review and all areas covered and everyone given a chance to contribute.

No, the meeting went as smoothly as possible given the current circumstances with Covid-19. The meeting was child focused and everyone was able to express their views and opinions appropriately

Everything was done very professionally

15. Health Assessments

The IRO team continue to have a good working relationship with the children in care nurses, health visitors, lead nurse and designated nurse.

The Deputy Head of Service continues to attend the Children in Care and Adoption (CICA) steering group on a quarterly basis (paused through covid lockdown). This is a meeting which includes the lead doctor, LAC nurse and other key professionals to discuss and improve health issues and processes for children in care. As well as this the Deputy Head of Service meets with the designated LAC nurse on a quarterly basis.

The 2020/21 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows;

- Derby's completion rate of annual health assessments has increased from 93.5% in 2019-20 to 93.8% in 2020-21, an increase of 0.3 percentage points. The 2020-21 percentage is the second highest percentage that has been achieved in Derby over the past seven years. The 2020-21 percentage is higher than the 2019-20 national, comparator authority average and the East Midlands average.
- Derby's completion rate of development assessments has increased to its highest performance seen in Derby over the past seven years. 96.6% of children in care had up to date Health Development Checks in 2020-21. This is an increase from 90.2% seen in 2019-20. Derby is above the 2019-20 national and comparator authority average.
- Derby's completion rate of immunisations has increased from 92.1% in 2019-20 to 93.1% in 2020-21, an increase of 1.0 percentage points. Derby's 2020-21 performance remains higher than the 2019-20 national comparator and East Midlands averages for the seventh year running.

- Derby's completion rate of dental checks has decreased significantly during 2020-21. This is due to most dental practices being closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. 29.2% of children in care had a dental check during 2020-21. This is a decrease from 92.3% in 2019-20
- Derby's percentage of children for whom an SDQ score has been submitted has decreased slightly from 92.2% (2019-20) to 91.8% (2020-21), a change of -0.4 percentage points. Derby performed higher than the 2019-20 national average, 91.8% compared to 80.7%. Derby's SDQ average score per child has increased from 14.7 in 2019-20 to 15.0 in 2020-21, an increase of 0.3 points. Derby remains higher than the 2019-20 average score of 14.1. The national average has been very stable over the years 2014-15 to 2019-20, ranging from a low of 13.9 to a high of 14.2.

The Department for Education requires a minimum completion rate of 75%. Derby achieved 91.8% which is well above the 75% target

It is encouraging to see that progress is being maintained in all areas, except for dental checks which was significantly affected due to Covid 19 and dental practices being closed.

All health assessments for children placed in or very near to Derby (apart from the initial assessment which is done at the Royal Hospital) are done at Sinfin Health Centre. The initial health assessment has to be done within 20 working days of the child coming into care and then depending on the age of the child if they are under five they have six monthly development checks and if they are over five they have annual health assessment. Whilst children and young people are encouraged to have a health assessment if they decide to then they can decline.

16. Personal Education Plans

All children and young people that come into care and who are of school age have to have a personal education plan (PEP) completed for them. This is usually done by the school in conjunction with the social worker. The PEP outlines the educational needs of the child or young person and what will be done to ensure that the child or young person is supported to achieve best outcomes. Connected with the PEP is the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), this is specific funding of £1900 for each academic year for a child in care to support his/her educational attainment. The Virtual School Head Service leads on ensuring that PEPs are completed and are of a good standard and the funding is also disseminated by the service. The IRO has a key role in the chairing the statutory review to go through the educational needs of the child or young person and review the PEP as well as ensure that the PPG is appropriately used.

17. Liaison with Social Care Teams and Learning and Development

Each IRO is linked to a Locality/ Children in Care (CiC) team or service, including Youth Offending Service, Leaving Care Service and The Lighthouse (Children's Disability Service). An IRO also attends the Residential Managers meetings.

Work continues to strengthen the working relationship between IROs and Children's Guardians team.

The Deputy Head of Service meets quarterly with the Service Manager at CAFCASS and the IRO manager of Derbyshire County Council to discuss issues and improve partnership working. There is a quarterly regional IRO managers meeting which the Deputy Head of Service attends. As well as this there are regular events organised by the regional managers which the IRO team attend.

There have been a number of learning and development opportunities for IROs in 2020/21 these have included:

- Regional workshops which many of the team members have attended. Topics for these have included:
 - IROs role in delivering excellence in pathway planning
 - Intra Familiar Child Sexual Abuse and Gender Identity
- Several IRO's also involved in training including the Journey of the Child and fostering Training
- IRO service providing regular induction training to other social care staff as well external agencies.

18. Business Support Arrangements

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance stating the local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective review process, enabling review meetings to take place in accordance with the Regulations and good practice. Invitations to reviews and consultation documents should be sent out to all those participating in the review at least ten working days before the meeting and the record of the review should be distributed within the required timescales.

Business support focus their efforts on ensuring that review reports are circulated in a timely manner as well arranging initial reviews and facilitating the written consultations from young people in care and their parents.

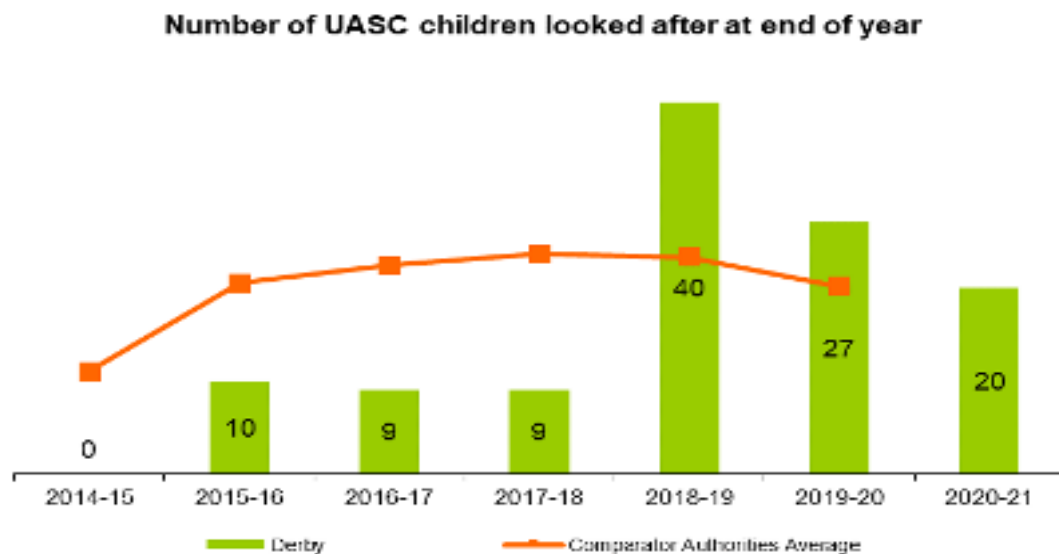
19. Children's Right's Service

The services for children's rights is commissioned to CGL (Care, Grow and Live) this excludes the role of the Participation Officer who provides support for the children in care council. The commissioned services to CGL cover:

- Independent advocacy for all children in care
- Independent advocacy for all initial CPC conferences where agreed
- Independent visitor service, priority given to children placed out of authority and at a distance
- Independent advocacy for children that are privately fostered

20. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) decreased in Derby during 2020-21. At year end 31 March 2021 Derby had 20 UASC children in care. This compares to 27 at the previous year end and equates to a 26% decrease.



21. Key Successes and Challenges in 2020/21

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. Due to Covid 19 for the whole of 20/21 the IRO service has had to be home based. The IRO's have taken on these changes in their stride and have continued to offer a quality review service electronically as well as having contact with young people and other professionals.
2. The number of IRO's have increased by one. This will provide much needed additional capacity in the service to meet the demand of steadily increasing numbers of children in care
3. The service continues to collect feedback forms completed by young people, parents and professionals. The feedback remains positive and complimentary about their experience of the review process.
4. The service has had its best year for timeliness of reviews. Timeliness of reviews for 2020/21 were 99%, this is significant increase from last year when it was 92%. 99% timeliness of reviews is above our target of 97%.

5. Even through lockdown, the service has also maintained very good participation of young people in their reviews. In 2020/21 there 95.5% children have participated in their reviews. This is slightly shy of our target of 97%.
6. The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the new IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 82. The service has appointed an additional full time IRO to manage the increased demand.
7. There is a regular partnership meeting with CAFCASS and Derbyshire IRO's to improve partnership working. This includes planning and facilitating an annual workshop for IRO's in Derbyshire and Derby with CAFCASS officers to improve working together, practice and learning. The relationship and partnership working between IRO's and Cafcass Officers in Derby continues to improve.
8. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council. Deputy Head of Service as well as IRO's regularly attending the Children in Care Council meetings to discuss care issues with young people and progress any matters.
9. The IRO service has focused on writing child centred CLA reports, these reports are aimed at the young people. These reports are written in a format and style so that the young people, for who the review is, undertaken the information contained in the review report. The feedback for the reports has been very positive.

22. IRO Service Action Plan 2020/21

Objectives	Action	Lead	Timeframe
Children in care achieve an appropriate plan for permanence, through safe family arrangements, adoption or other means, as soon as possible, and receive high quality services whilst in care to promote good outcomes, including education and health.	Ensure all children in care have an appropriate permanence plan; including opportunities for children to safely return to their families are kept under continual review and challenge.	Deputy Head of Service/IRO's	2021/22
	Ensure all children have appropriate legal status, specifically: Placement Orders are discharged when the plan	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) DHoS	2021/22

	changes from a plan of adoption; Care Orders are discharged appropriately when children return home (within a year); Proceedings are issued promptly when young children are removed.		
Quality assurance of individual casework is robust, with both recognition of outstanding practice and challenge of poor practice or decision-making across the partnership, escalated as necessary, and challenging management for evidence of action and learning.	Continue to build on the use of notifications to partner agencies where appropriate	IRO	2021/22
	Meet with DHoS CiC on a bi monthly basis to discuss QA notification issues and themes as well as practice issues	DHoS	Bi Monthly
	Meet with Cafcass on a quarterly basis to discuss and improve working together between IRO and Cafcass officers	DHoS	Quarterly
Participation by children, young people and parents is expected, through input into their individual plans, and into wider partnership quality assurance, to improve practice and services	Embed Child Centred Review Reports across the IRO service. Ensure CLA review reports are focused on the child	IRO DHoS	2021/22
	Continue to improve on obtaining views of service users about review meetings; analyse and use to inform improvements in practice.	IRO DHoS	2021/22
	Update/review the consultation paperwork that is sent to young people 11/17 years old before the review	IRO DHoS	December 2022

Quality Assurance staff and Business support staff work effectively together to ensure internal processes are compliant, consistent, high quality and efficient.	Ensure every child in care is seen either at their review or prior to/ after their review. This will include the use of electronic technology e.g. Microsoft Teams	IRO DHoS	2021/2022
	Monitor business support to ensure adequate level of support is available to meet the needs of the IRO service	IRO DHoS	2021/22
	Take part in joint training events with CAFCASS/ Derbyshire IROs/ CPMs and attend regional events to promote and share good practice.	IRO DHoS	As available
	Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO contacts on child's file.	DHoS	2021/22
	IRO's to continue to be involved in audit activity	IRO	Twice yearly