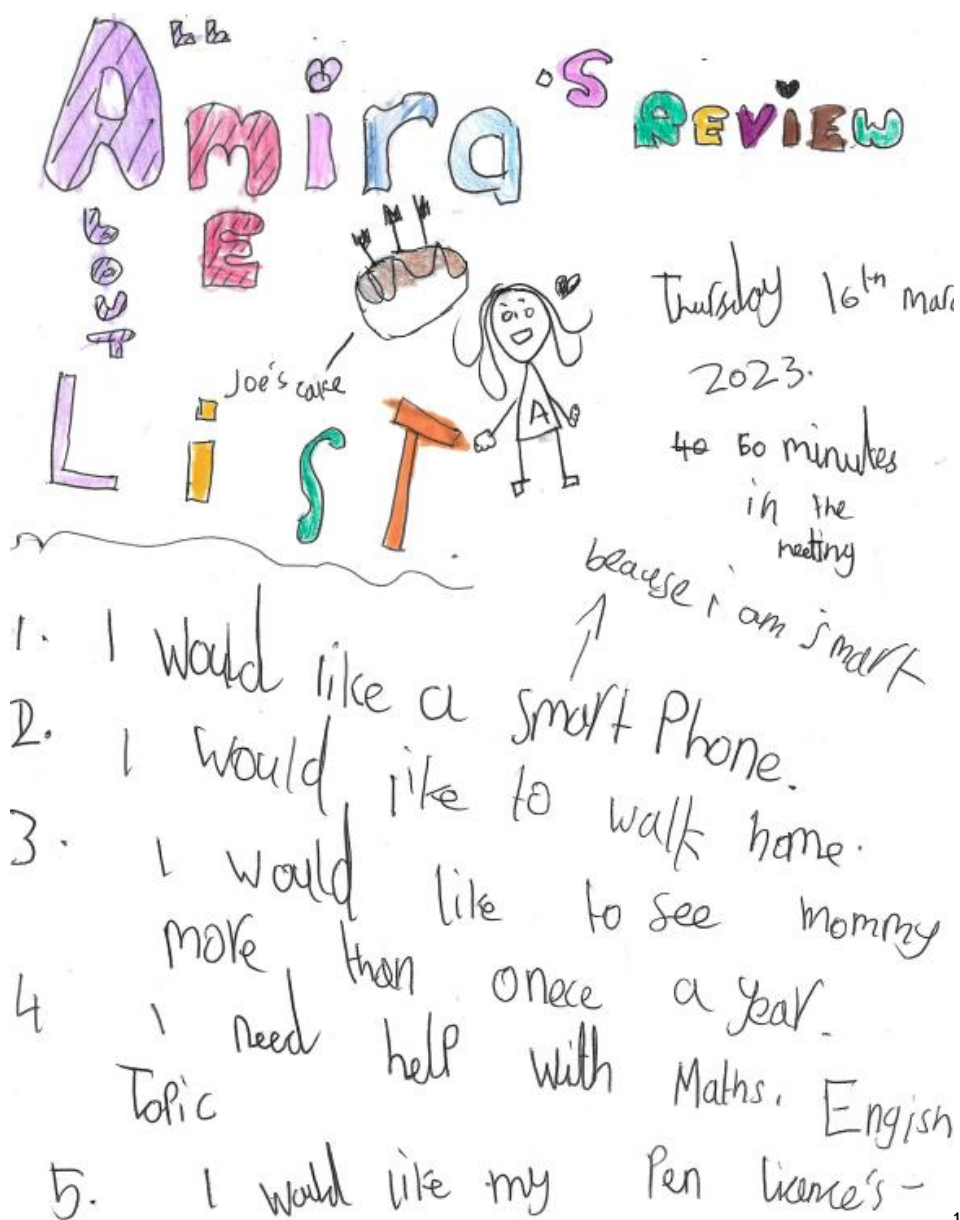


Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2022 – 2023



Pervez Akhtar
Deputy Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance
July 2023

¹ Agenda for Children Looked After Review prepared by Amira (9 years old) for her review. The review was chaired by Amira with a little help from her IRO.



Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Purpose of Service and Legal Context	2
3.	IRO Service	3
4.	The Children in Care Population	3
5.	The Age and Gender of Children in Care	4
6.	The Ethnicity of the Children in Care	6
7.	The Legal Status of Children in Care	6
8.	Entrants and Exits from Care	7
9.	Children in Care Placement Provision	9
10.	Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews	10
11.	Number of Children Participating in their Reviews	10
12.	Dispute Resolution Process	10
13.	Case Tracking	13
14.	Feedback from Young People, Parents and Professionals	14
15.	Health Assessments	17
16.	Personal Education Plans	18
17.	Liaison with Social Care Teams and Learning and Development	18
18.	Business Support Arrangements	19
19.	Childrens Rights Service	19
20.	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children	19
21.	Key Successes and Challenges in 2020/21	20
22.	IRO Service Action Plan 2022/23	21



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 (CSC) 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 2022/23 had a total establishment of 8.8 fte IRO's and a 0.5 fte specialist IRO for children receiving short breaks. The IRO team headcount is 10 IRO's, with 2 males and 8 females.

The team is made up of experienced professionals and has been stable throughout 2022/23, there has been one IRO that left at the end of 2022/23, this vacancy was advertised promptly and appointed to, with a view to the new IRO starting in July 2023.

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 71.

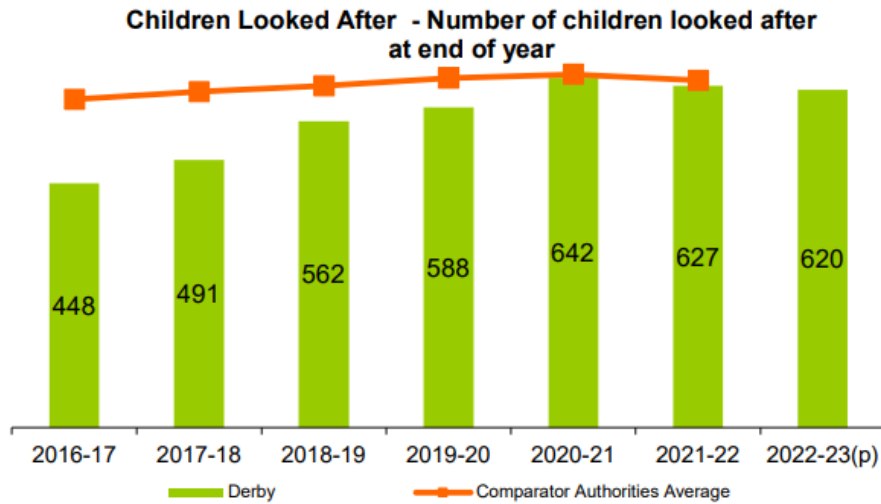
The IRO service is based at the Gatehouse with (undertaking a hybrid approach of IRO's predominantly working from home and travelling to chair reviews) the rest of the Quality Assurance Service, including Child Protection Managers. The service has a strong identity and staff work very well across the Quality Assurance Service.

The IRO service continues to implement the writing of CLA review reports in a more child friendly format. 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. There has been considerable positive feedback on the child centred reports from young people, carers, other professionals and Ofsted.

4.0 Children in Care

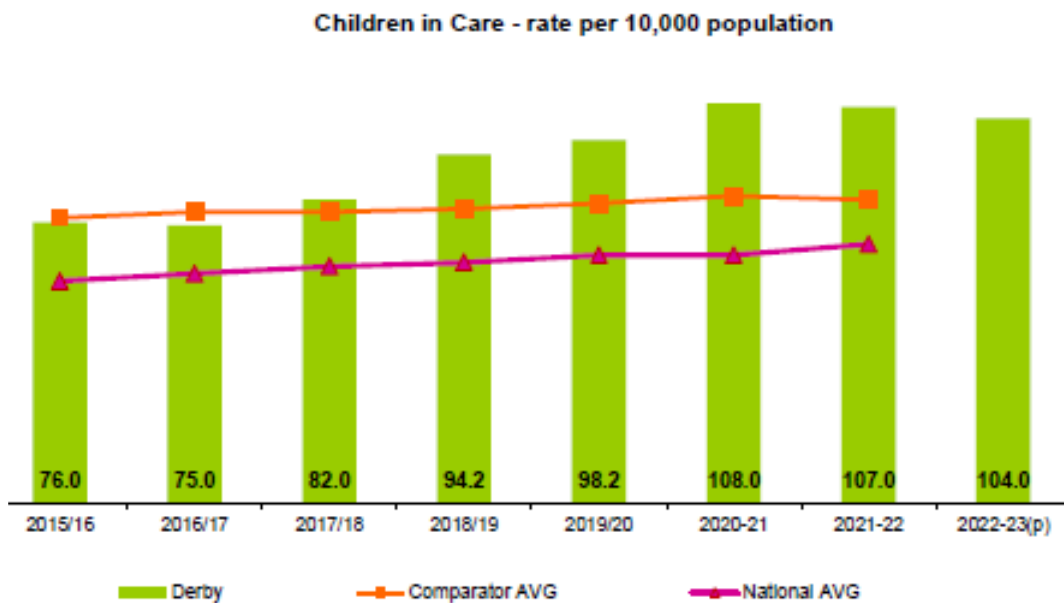
The number of children in care in Derby over the last few years has had a mixed trajectory. At the year end of 2019/20 it was 588 children in care, at the end of 2020/21 it had gone up to 642 and at the end of 2021/2 it had gone down to 627. There has been a continuing slight decline over the last year, at the end of March 2023 it was 620. In the third quarter of 2022/23 there were 647 children in care however at the year end of 2022/23 a significant number of children (27) exited care with the final number in care being 620.





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

At year end 31 March 2023 Derby had 104 children in care per 10,000 people aged under 18. Derby's rate (103.9) is above the 2021-22 comparator authority average of 83 per 10,000, above the national rate of 67 per 10,000 and above the East Midlands average of 64 per 10,000.



5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2022/23 are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 249 or 40% of the total. The numbers of babies aged less than 1 has decreased

from 2021/22 from 8% to 4.7% of the overall cohort. The number of children aged 1 to 4 years old, group equates to 15.5% of the overall cohort. There has been reasonable consistency from 2021/22 in the number of children aged 5 to 9 age group, as at year end it stands at 112 young people a total of 18.2% just down from 20%. The number of children aged 16 or over has continued to remain consistent with 131 young people or 21.6% of the total number of young people in care.

It would be expected most 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 62% 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	31/03/2023	31/03/2023
Under 1	29	4.7%
1 to 4	96	15.5%
5 to 9	112	18.1%
10 to 15	249	40.2%
16+	1134	21.6%
Total	620	100%

More of the children in care in Derby at year end 2022-23 were male, 344 making 55.5% of the total with 276 females which equates to 44.5% 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 consistent.

	31/03/2023	31/03/2023
Male	344	55.5%



Female	276	44.5%
Total	620	100%

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2023 out of the 620 children in care, the largest group of children, 431 were reported as being White British, which was a total of 69.5% of all children in care, last year it was 70%, this is the same percentage as last year. The next largest group were mixed (this is new categorisation) who made up 16% of the population with 99 children in care. There were 39 (6.3%) Asian or Asian British children in care which is same amount for Black or Black British children.

Ethnicity Recorded	Number	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	39	6.3%
Black or Black British	39	6.3%
Other	12	1.9%
Mixed	99	16%
White British	431	69.5%
Total	620	100%

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2023, 383 or 61.8% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 90 children or 14.5% 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 59 children or 9.5% 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. 80 or 12.9% 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	31/03/2023	31/03/2023
C1 Interim Care order	90	14.5%



C2 Full Care order	383	61.8%
E1 Placement Order Granted	59	9.5%
Youth justice legal statuses	3	0.5%
Detained on child protection grounds in LA accommodation	5	0.8%
V2 Accommodated under Section 20	80	12.9%
Total	620	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 2022/23 has been abuse or neglect, this was also the case in 2021/22 and 2020/21.

There were 211 children entering care in 2022/3 compared to 229 children entering care in 2021/22. Out of this, a total of 125 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 59.2% of all entrants. This is the same as in 2021/2 6 children came into care due to parental illness/disability, this is a decrease of 10 from 2021/22, when this has been broken down this has included parents abusing alcohol and drugs, parental disability, parents with problems and parents with learning disability. 8 children and young people came into care due to disability and a further 39 for absent parenting; this is the same as last year when it was a total of 40 young people. There were 11 children that came into care for socially unacceptable behaviour, last year this was 14.

Reasons for children starting care	31/3/2023
Abuse or Neglect	125
Disability	8
Parental Illness/Disability	6
Family in Acute Stress	19
Family Dysfunction	3
Socially Unacceptable	11



Behaviour	
Low Income	0
Absent Parenting	39
Total	211

According to the data currently available in 2022/23, 225 children and young people exited care. This was a significant decrease from 2021/22 when there 242 young people that exited care. The number of children adopted slightly increased from 34 to a total of 37. 54 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons, this was a slight decrease from 2021/22 when there were 59.

A large number, 47 young people, exited care by moving into independence, this made 20.9% of the total number. The number of children and young people exited through the use of Special Guardianship Orders has decreased from 30 last year to 24. The number of child arrangement orders decreased from 15 in 2021/22 to 11 in 2022/23

There were 4 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, with a further 4 exiting through being sentenced to custody, and this is less than last year when there were 7. There have been 1 exit through the age assessment process whereby the person was assessed to be over 18 years old.

Reason Ceased (grouped)	31/3/2023
Adopted	37
Child Arrangement Order	11
SGO	24
Returned Home with Parental Responsibility (PR)	58
Returned Home with no PR	10
Independent Living	52
To Adult Social Care	3
Any other reason	4
Sentenced to custody	4
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	0
Age assessment determined 18 or over	1



child moved abroad	1
Accommodation on remand ended	2
Died	1
Age 18 and remained with current carers	17
Total	225

9. Children in Care Placement Provision

At the end of March 2022 there were a total of 441 young people placed in foster placements. There were 27 young placed in adoptive placements and 31 young people placed with parents. There were 105 young people placed in residential homes, secure units and hostels and 4 in other residential settings. There were 12 young people in other placements.

Placement Provision

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2023
Foster Placements	441
Homes and Hostels (K2)	105
Independent Living (P2)	0
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	27
Placed with Parents (P1)	31
Other Residential Settings	4
Other Placements	12
Total	620

10. Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews



The percentage of reviews in 2022/23 that have been completed within timescales is 97.7%. This is above the 97% which was our target for the year.

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 2022/23 97.2% of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This is in line with our target of 97%.

The service has worked very hard over the year to maintain participation, 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

- Practice not meeting required standards- 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, quality of reports or non-completion of care plan actions leading to unnecessary drift and delay for the child or young person.
- 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 ensure consistency across the Childrens Quality Assurance Services (Independent Reviewing Service and Child Protection Management Service) a formal QA notification system has been developed in LCS at the start of 2021/22, hence the categories for the formal QA notifications are broader as they cover both services, The system also allows us to download all the formal QA notifications from LCS, this is more accurate whereas previously the IRO manager had to manually count all the formal QA notifications. When the data is downloaded from LCS it can be split for each service. The new formal QA notification categories are:

- There is evidence of excellent practice and working together with improved outcomes for the children
- The voice of the child was captured by the use of direct work tools and there is evidence of positive impact on outcomes
- Analysis of good decision making and rationale for decision making for this child
- Your agency has not provided a service or undertaken an action, agreed in the plan, which has had an impact on the child's progress.
- There has been drift and delay in implementation of the plan, which has had an impact on outcomes for the child
- Failure to Comply with Stat Requirements (S47s etc)
- There is no evidence of a chronology being collated on this case
- There is no evidence of the father of the child being consulted in the plan
- Other



In 2022/23 there were 134 formal QA notifications from the IRO service, 15 more than there were in 2021/22 when there were 119.

The notifications were made up as follows:

Reason	Number
There is evidence of excellent practice and working together with improved outcomes for the children	22
The voice of the child was captured by the use of direct work tools and there is evidence of positive impact on outcomes	6
Analysis of good decision making and rationale for decision making for this child	8
Your agency has not provided a service or undertaken an action, agreed in the plan, which has had an impact on the child's progress.	7
There has been drift and delay in implementation of the plan, which has had an impact on outcomes for the child	14
Failure to Comply with Stat Requirements (S47s etc)	55
There is no evidence of a chronology being collated on this case	0
There is no evidence of the father of the child being consulted in the plan	1
Other*	44
Total	157 ²

*Note that almost all 'other' notifications were due to lack of paperwork being completed prior to the review.

The majority of notifications within this period were for non-compliance to statutory requirements, and a large proportion of these relate to the statutory expectation that reports are provided for reviews. Reviewing officers have completed a number of notifications, as well as informally recognising, the significant number of reviews where the Review of Arrangements was not completed in advance of the review and therefore was not available. The absence of a clear report was seen to limit the ability to clearly determine progress against the plan, as well as being able to provide a clear overview and analysis of any emerging risks. In addition, the delay in completing review paperwork also meant that parents and young people were not routinely given a copy of the report in advance of the meeting.

² The reason total is higher than 134 as in some cases the QA notification may have been made for more than one reason

Visits were not always carried out in accordance with the plan, or statutory requirements, though managers highlight that in some cases this was due to a lack of recording, or due to absence of staff and competing demands. However, in some cases this had been for a significant period, particularly for Looked After Children, and therefore this was considered to have an impact on driving the plan. Notifications were also made about visits not always being 'in person' where this would have been most appropriate in terms of relationship building, or in response to SEND.

Reviewing officers shared praise for workers being tenacious, child focused, and driving the plan with clear and targeted intervention which is solutions focused. Workers demonstrate a positive mindset which allows issues to be explored and unpicked with a calm approach.

There are examples of workers developing effective working relationships by offering empathy, compassion and empowering parents and young people to be part of their own solutions, with communication that has been considered to be sensitively challenging, where this has been required.

Social workers have demonstrated that they are passionate about the care of children and have been clear in their evidencing of voice of the child; encouraging meaningful engagement and participation within their plans and a collaborative approach to driving progress.

The work with multiagency partners and agencies has been effective and has been supported by meaningful communication which has demonstrated a clear understanding of the impact of interventions offered by the wider network.

Responses were made to 119 out of the 134 notifications; and these demonstrate that managers are taking the opportunity to discuss and reflect the concerns or compliments with workers and usually being proactive in responding to issues and compliancy requirements where needed. Issues were not further escalated in any of these cases.

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, Parents and Professionals

As well as using consultation forms for young people and parents, the Derby Childrens Quality Assurance service has introduced a new electronic system to gather feedback after meetings. We use the internal, corporate technology to send out web-based forms for the three key groups, which has been shared via email/text/meeting notes or in paperwork. These forms can be used on computers, as well as portable devices, tablets and phones, increasing accessibility and ease of use and completion.

The new system allows us to collate information in the following key areas:

- Parent/carer feedback from reviews/conferences
- Young person feedback from reviews/conferences
- Multiagency feedback from reviews/conferences (e.g., police/health/education/voluntary agencies)

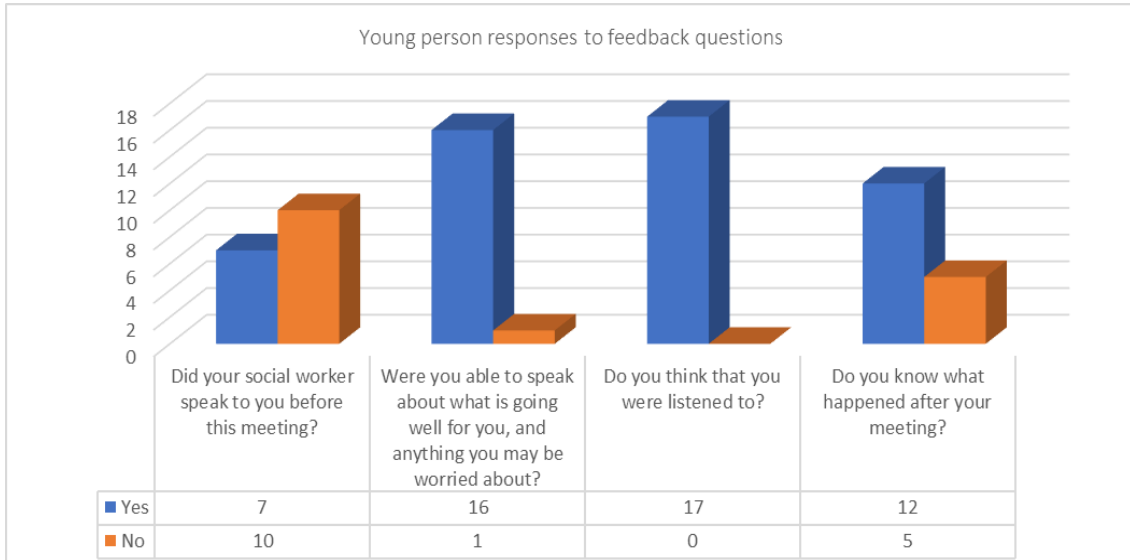
Feedback findings

Feedback has been provided by:

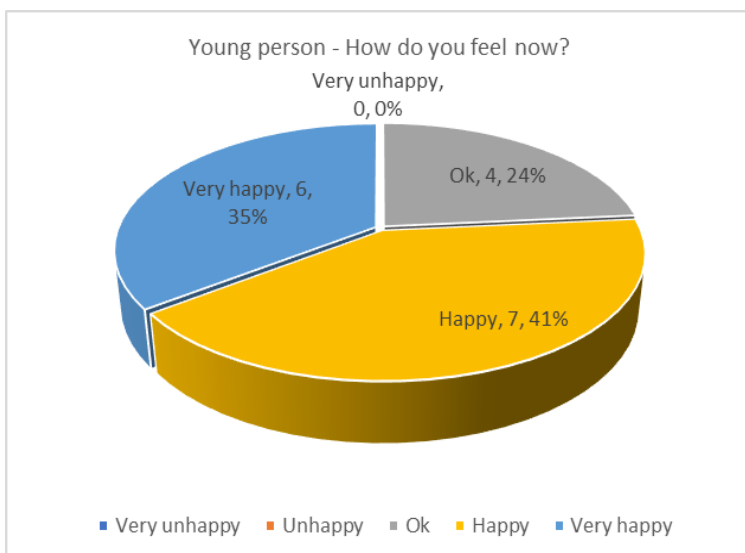
- 17 young people



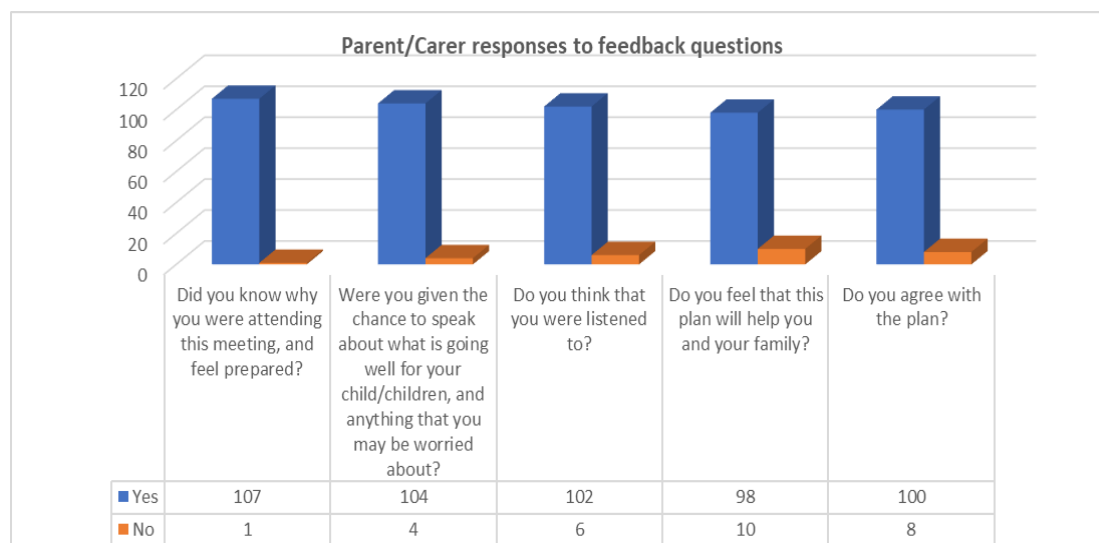
- 108 parents/carers
- 184 multiagency partners



On the whole feedback from young people was very positive, however a couple of areas require further consideration, in particular social workers speaking to young people before meetings and IRO being clearer with young people about what will happen after the CLA review meeting. A large majority of you people were either happy or very happy with their review there were no young people who were unhappy with their review. We will continue to build on increasing the number of young people feeding back over the next year



Parent/Carer

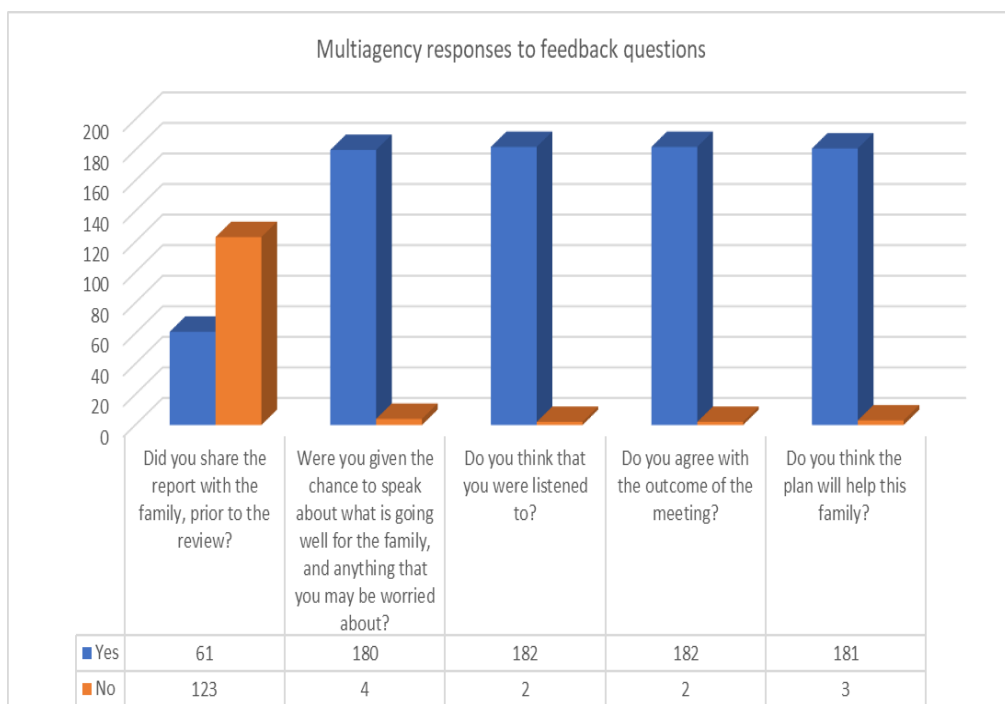


Multi-agency

Feedback came from a number of multi-agency partners including 41% from health and 46% from social care. There was 3% from voluntary sector, 9% from health and 1% from housing.

On the whole feedback from agencies was positive in relation to the CLA review meetings, however a significant number of them did not share reports with the family prior to the review. This point is more significant for CP meetings rather than IRO Review meetings and in some CLA cases this may be wholly appropriate as the family may not be in contact with the professionals or it may not be appropriate to share the report in case of adoption or where parents choose not to be involved an/or it is not known where they live.





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 2022/23 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows.

- Derby's completion rate of annual health assessments has slightly increased from 92.6% in 2021-22 to 92.9% in 2022-23. Derby's 2022-23 percentage is higher than the 2021-22 national average (89.2%) and the regional average (87%) but it would be lower than the comparator authority average of (94%)
- Derby's completion rate of development assessments has significantly increased from 86.9% in 2021-22 to 98.6%. This is an increase of 11.7 percentage points. This is the highest Derby has seen over 7 years. Derby would be above the national and comparator authority averages for 2021-22.
- Derby's completion rate of immunisations has increased from 94.1% in 2021-22 to 95.3% in 2022-23 an increase of 1.2 percentage points. Derby's 2022-23 performance remains higher than the 2021-22 national average (85.2%), comparator authority average (92.6%) and the East Midlands average (87.7%).
- Derby's completion rate of dental checks improved further during 2022-23 after an extremely low performance during 2020-21. This was due to most dental practices being closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. 90.6% of children in care in Derby had a dental check during 2022-23. The sharp increase in dental check completion rates during 2021-22 was also seen regionally (68.1%) and nationally (70.2%). Derby performed above the national and regional averages in 2021-22.



- Derby's SDQ average score per child has increased from 15.2 in 2021-22 to 15.3 in 2022-23, an increase of 0.1 points. Derby remains higher than the 2021-22 national average score of 13.8. The national average has been very stable over the years 2016-17 to 2021-22, ranging from a low of 13.7 to a high of 14.2.
- The Department for Education requires a minimum SDQ completion rate of 75%. Derby achieved 90.6% in 2022-23 which is well above the target. Derby has achieved at least 90% for the past six years.

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 manager 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 2022/23 these have included:

- Regional workshops which many of the team members have attended.
- Joint Training with Cafcass and Derbyshire IRO service on kinship care and communication between IRO's and Cafcass Officers
- Several IRO's also involved in training including the Journey of the Child and Fostering Training and LGBT Awareness as well as care planning 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:

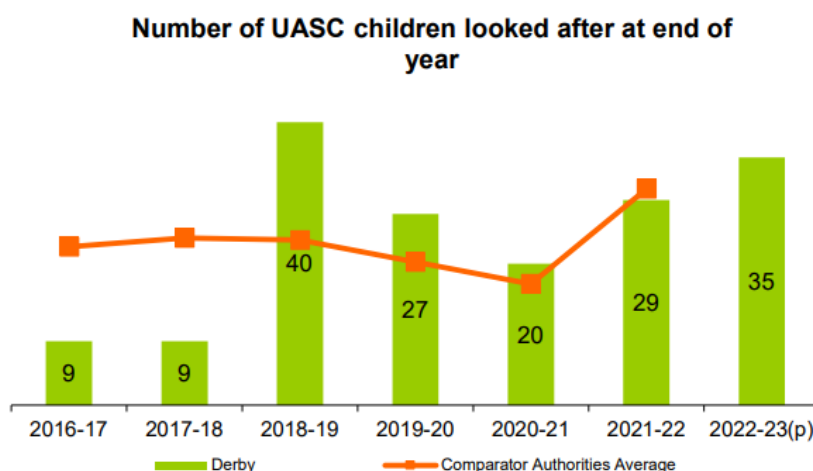
- Independent advocacy for all children in care
- Independent advocacy for all initial CPC conferences were agreed
- Independent visitor service, priority given to children placed out of authority and at a distance
- Independent advocacy for children that are privately fostered

20. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children

There were 35 UASC in care on 31 March 2023. This equates to 5.6% of the overall cohort.



There were 29 UASC in care 12 months ago on 31 March 2022 (4.6% of the overall cohort). There has been an increase of 6 UASC in care over the last 12 months, however as can be seen in the graph below this has fluctuated over the year.



21. Key Successes and Challenges in 2022/23

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. The IRO service has continued to be predominately home based. The IRO's have continued to offer a quality review service both electronically and face to face reviews. The service uses MS teams to chair virtual meetings as well as having direct contact with young people and other professionals.
2. There service continues to remain stable and continues to strive to meet the demand of steadily increasing numbers of children in care
3. The service continues to collect feedback by young people, parents and professionals. The feedback is now collected electronically after each review, this provides more confidentiality and confidence in the ability to provide honest feedback. The feedback remains very positive
4. The service continues to perform excellently for ensuring timeliness of reviews. Timeliness of reviews for 2022/23 were 97.7%, this exceeds our target of 97%.
5. The service has also maintained very good participation of young people in their reviews. In 2022/23 97.2% children have participated in their reviews. This is in line our of 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 71.
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 remain good.



8. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council.
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 continues to be very positive.
10. The IRO Service led on completing the Quality and Safety Reviews in October 2022 arising from the 'Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: national review into safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings.' All the reviews were undertaken within the required timescales following the national panel guidance. A report was presented to Derby City Council Corporate Board as well the Safeguarding Partnership Board assuring that young people were suitably placed.

22. IRO Service Action Plan 2023/24

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	2023/24
	Ensure all children have appropriate legal status, specifically: Placement Orders are discharged when the plan 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.	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) DHoS	2023/24



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	2023/24
	Meet with DHoS CiC on a regular 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. To organise and lead on the annual training event for IRO's 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	Continue to build on the e process of obtaining views of service users about review meetings; analyse and use to inform improvements in practice.	IRO DHoS	2023/24
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	2023/2024
	Monitor business support to ensure adequate level of support is available to meet the needs of the IRO service	IRO DHoS	2023/24
	Take part in joint training events with CAF/CASS/ Derbyshire	IRO DHoS	As available



	IROs/ CPMs and attend regional events to promote and share good practice.		
	Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO contacts on child's file.	DHoS	2023/24
	IRO's to continue to be involved in audit activity	IRO	As required

