

Safeguarding and Performance
Independent Reviewing Officer Service
LAC Annual Report
1st April 2021 - 31st March 2022



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1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) sets out the current performance for the service in 2021-2022 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The IRO Handbook (7.11) sets out the requirement for an annual report on the delivery of service and the impact of the IRO service on the outcomes for children in care.

For the purpose of this report, the term LAC (Looked After Child) will be used for statutory related references to children looked after by the local authority and all other references will refer to Children in Care (CiC).

Our response to COVID19

The Coronavirus pandemic presented a time of severe pressure across all of society, and we know this specifically presented a higher level of risk for some children. Within Leicestershire County Council, we recognised it was especially important that children and young people across Leicestershire continued to receive the services and support that they need and are effectively safeguarded during this pandemic.

In response to the pandemic the Safeguarding and Performance Service rapidly adapted and changed the way we have delivered services to reflect the COVID19 circumstances, which have evolved since 2020. For a prolonged period we were delivering our services virtually in line with government guidance and also the local picture and circumstances. This was closely monitored and services responded accordingly to the circumstances presented.

During this reporting year, April 2021 – March 2022, restrictions did begin to lift, however there were concerns raised due to a further strain of the virus, Omicron which delayed the planned move to more face to face meetings. However, we were pleased that from March 2022, we were able to confidently initiate our Future Ways of Working Model and implement a mixture of face to face, hybrid and virtual ROA meetings. Our expectation is that all ROA's should now be convened face to face, unless the child / young person share that they want their meeting to be held virtually, or there are exceptional circumstances such as a key person attending testing positive for COVID in which case a hybrid model can be applied.

In addition, IRO's are now visiting children and young people in preparation for their ROA meetings and also using technology as a way to build those relationships. We recognise that for some children and young people, having the option to engage in meetings virtually is more suited to them, as well as using video calls as a means of developing relationships. Ultimately, the service provided is based on the views and wishes of the child and how they wish for their review process to be facilitated.

Corporate support for staff and managers has been strong throughout the pandemic with strong communication and support for staff wellbeing, funds for provision of working from home equipment and implementing safe working arrangements in key buildings where staff have continued to respond to service need.

Staff and leaders in Leicestershire have worked tirelessly in the face of this unprecedented time to support the most vulnerable children during this period and have put arrangements in place to ensure scrutiny of the safety and well-being of children and young people we support and care for.

Quality assurance and learning improvement activity has continued during the pandemic with all planned activity being delivered, to ensure senior management oversight of the quality of service being delivered. Audit activity has included, but not exclusive to writing to the child, IRO

oversight and tracking, LAC health assessment and Placement Order audit. This is addition to the thematic audits completed by all CFS areas.

As a service we are proud of how our workers have adapted to the unprecedented times and the quality of service they have continued to deliver to our children and young people throughout the last few years. We are pleased we are now working within our Future Ways of Working model and resuming face to face meetings and having direct contact with children and young people.



2. Introduction

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) sets out the current performance for the service in 2021-2022 for IRO services, identifying our priorities for the forthcoming year.

The service provision of the Safeguarding and Performance Service is driven by our vision and mission statement and is underpinned by the shared values and behaviours of the Children and Family Services.

We recognise the role of the IRO service as being central to driving forward the Continuous Improvement Plan and promoting the key goals and behaviours set out in the Road to Excellence.

Continuous Improvement Plan 2021 - 2023
The Road to Excellence



Our Vision

For Leicestershire to be the best place for all children, young people and their families

Our Ambitions for 2021 - 2023

- Help every child to get the best possible start in life
- Help children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity
- Help children in Leicestershire to live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments
- Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential.



Core Values and Behaviours that underpin everything we do

- | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Aspirational
We value high aspirations for our Children and Families. | Being Curious
We value being curious and paying attention to detail. | Collaboration
We value collaboration based on building strong working relationships. | Behaviours | Listening
Understand trauma and it's effects on children and families we work with as well as on our workforce. | Building Relationships
Signs of Safety (SoS) supports our approach with children and families. | Outcome Focussed
Striving to improve the lives of the children and families we work with. | Being Accountable
Everyone is responsible for delivering high quality services. |
|---|--|--|-------------------|---|--|---|---|



Our pledge for children

Each member of staff pledges that:

- We will put you (children and young people) at the heart of everything we do and celebrate your uniqueness and diversity
- We will listen and value what you tell us and your voice will inform decision making and help us design services
- We will help you to feel safe and where possible this will be with your family
- We will visit you regularly and help you to understand why we are helping you and your family
- We will make sure you always have a timely and detailed plan and support your aspirations for your future
- If you are not able to be in the care of your family we will make decisions about your long-term plans without delay. (see our promise to children in care).

Our leaders and managers pledge to:

- Challenge and support plans at all levels to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people without delay
- Value and enable good relationships between front line practitioners and families by prioritising a stable workforce
- Create a culture where relationship-based practice can flourish using high quality regular supervision offering high-support and high-challenge
- Understand trauma and it's effects on children and families we work with as well as on our workforce
- Know what is happening in frontline practice through direct observation and conversation with our staff.

How we will do it

Embedding excellent practice

- Intervention informed by robust evidence based decision making
- A joined up approach built on consistent high quality targeted Early Help and Social Care advice within Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans
- Reflective supervision to support effective practice with challenge and robust management oversight
- Clear records to capture the child's journey in language they understand.

Taking the right action at the right time

- A strong whole family approach based on effective relationships between staff, children and families
- Strong multi-agency partnerships across all tiers of intervention
- Preventing delay at all stages especially permanence
- Creating sustainable exit plans and building on family networks keeping families together where this is safe
- Commitment to our preventative work in early support related services (Early Help).

Developing policy and performance

- Practice led recording systems to allow staff to focus on time with children
- Up to date policies, procedures and standards that underpin consistent practice
- Well commissioned services for children in care including alternative education provision
- Strategic approach to support recruitment and retention of staff
- Defining children's services for the future based on staff expertise and innovation.

Being a learning organisation

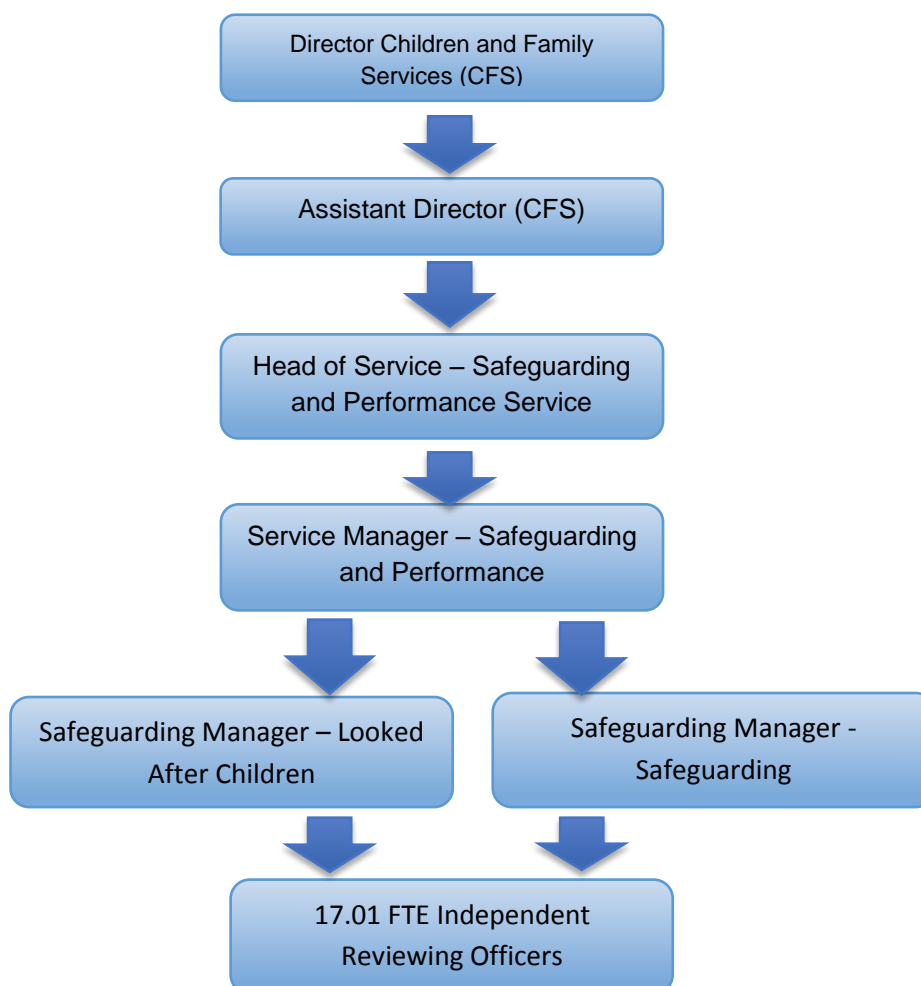
- Using data and audit to know ourselves well and inform our learning
- Establish a shared value base, owned by our workforce
- Sustain a stable and well supported workforce, celebrating diversity and delivering excellent training and development.
- Being risk sensitive, based on valuing family strengths and using effective safety planning.

What success will look like

- Effective early help and support will reduce the number of children requiring social work intervention or support through an EHC Plan
- Children and families will tell us that we have made a positive difference to their lives
- Performance indicators evidence improving outcomes for children and young people
- Routine audit shows consistent application of thresholds, improved quality and timeliness of assessment and robust care planning driven by strong management oversight
- We will have examples of where children and families have helped us to develop our services
- Staff will tell us that streamlined systems and processes mean that they can spend effective time with children
- We will retain a highly skilled, committed workforce who have shared values
- Where children and young people cannot safely live at home decisions about legal and emotional permanency are robust and timely.



The IRO Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service. Whilst the service sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS) and is part of the management structure of Children's Social Care (CSC); it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams. The independence of the IRO ensures that they are able to advocate and challenge for children and families to receive the right service at the right time to both protect and support them.



Previously, IRO's had a dual role and responsibility for both child protection and children in care functions, through their role in child protection conferences and processes, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) work with children and young people and Looked After Reviews and care planning. All IROs have a combination of Child Protection cases and Looked After Children.

However, in May 2021 we launched a new structure within the service of two Focus Teams. One Focus Team for Child Protection Conference Chairs and one Focus Team for IRO's chairing ROA meetings. Thus, two teams have expertise in one area, CP or LAC and drive forward the development plan for that area. This has enabled the teams to become experts in the area of work, focus on driving forward the improvement plans and achieving positive outcomes for children. The two teams also lead on their individual development areas identified within our Service Delivery Report, resulting in a robust, efficient Independent Reviewing Officer Service. With the focus teams, invested growth in the IRO service, this has enabled caseloads to be aligned with the IRO handbook recommendations.

The benefits of having IRO and CP Chairs has enabled the service areas to drive forward the areas of improvement required and provide a highly effective, specialist service to our children and families.

The quality assurance role of IRO's is critical to the development and improvement of the intervention that we provide to children and families and the impact that we have on the outcomes we achieve. IRO's have key duties that scrutinise and support the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy, care planning and permanence. IRO's are central to identifying and sharing good practice and checking the quality and consistency of provision across the areas of Looked After Children.

IRO's have a statutory role to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are captured clearly, central to planning and given full consideration. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case. Through these changes the IRO has an effective, independent and holistic oversight of the child's case and ensures that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

This oversight provides opportunity for independent challenge in decisions identified as not being in the best interests of the child or where drift or delay has an impact on outcomes. An effective IRO service will drive forward improved outcomes for children and young people and will ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

This report outlines the contribution made by the IRO Service in Leicestershire, to quality assurance and the improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2021 to March 2022. It is an evaluative report considering how effectively the Safeguarding and Performance Service has fulfilled the responsibilities of its role and the impact that this has had on children and families of Leicestershire. It is an opportunity to identify areas of good practice and those in need of development and improvement. It highlights emerging themes and trends, providing information that contributes to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. The performance measures used to measure success are both qualitative and quantitative data from all areas of quality assurance undertaken throughout children's services.

3. Context

The legal framework and statutory guidance for the IRO role for children in care is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.

The Handbook requires an Annual Report to be written and is prescriptive as to content and format (which this report follows) and the expectation that the report is made available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as accessible as a public document.

The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

‘The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing’.

4. Profile of the IRO Service

Safeguarding and Performance Service

1x FTE Service Manager

2x FTE Safeguarding Managers

17.01 x FTE IRO

There are significant benefits of the IRO service being located within Children’s Social Care whilst maintaining their independence. The position allows IRO’s to have a good understanding of the key performance indicators and the context in which the Local Authority operates. Enabling understanding of the changing demands and pressures in the Department, including the impact of recruitment and retention.

To be successful, the role of the IRO must be valued by senior managers and operate within a supportive service culture and environment. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, supervise the social worker or devise the care plan, but to have oversight to ensure that the child’s plan is achieving change and creating positive outcomes for children and families.

IRO’s have established professional relationships with social work teams and senior managers which are vital to their quality assurance role, enabling them to provide constructive feedback and challenge where needed, as well as promoting their need to have comprehensive oversight of the strengths and needs of the department. In addition, the role is essential to championing good practice. This in turn enables contributions to improvement activity which have a direct impact on improved outcomes for children and families.

The Safeguarding and Performance Service continues to be very well supported by senior leaders and this is evidenced by the support for the service to continue to grow, with 17.1 FTE IRO’s in post, an increase from 16.1 in 2020-2021. This highlights the recognition of the pivotal role the IRO’s have in undertaking statutory duties such as chairing meetings and the broader quality assurance role which supports driving and improving practice.

The quality assurance role of the IRO is central to strengthening the implementation of Signs of Safety. IRO’s are Practice Leads role modelling and apply the Signs of Safety approach, our identified values and behaviours and being experts in planning and using networks to strength support and protection to our vulnerable children and enhance how we build the wellbeing for out LAC children. This is underpinned by our Signs of Safety practice framework which underpins our work to improve the lives of children and families living in Leicestershire. Therefore, it is critical that their Signs of Safety knowledge and skills remain comprehensive.

The IRO service received support to undertake a bespoke specialist three-day training course, which was delivered by two independent trainers from Birmingham University. The course outline consisted of:

Day 1: evaluating and assessing plans –attention to chronologies, assessing plans and documentation against set criteria; biases and heuristics in decision making under conditions of uncertainty; risk; safe uncertainty; safety planning; and assessment from an attachment minded perspective.

Day 2: individual and group processes –chairing from a narrative perspective; thinking about and managing anxious systems; decision making and group processes; and shame within meetings.

Day 3: participation and challenge – a review of the major models of participation; Ofsted and challenge; styles of conflict management and conflict management strategies.

The course also looked at trauma informed systems and the impact of the pandemic, as well as applying learning to Leicestershire models of practice. The course was facilitated for each focus area, enabling the learning to be applied to their particular area of specialism, LAC or CP. This was an excellent opportunity for our IRO's to further develop their knowledge and skill base, as well as reflective opportunity to consider their roles independently but also within the leadership group of the Local Authority.

IRO's play a significant role in the development and delivery of high-quality interventions to children in care and in need of protection. The IRO Service in Leicestershire remains committed to this responsibility. This commitment is supported by the implementation of a service specific Learning Audit Framework (2021-22) which highlights areas of need and provides a framework of observation, peer audit and audit analysis to inform learning and drive forward best practice.

Challenge Meetings – IROs, Assistant Director (AD) & Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

The Service Manager for the Safeguarding and Performance Service and the Agency Decision Maker meet each month for a Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting, to discuss cases and themes of concern. It is then considered whether these cases / matters need to be taken to the Challenge Meeting with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, or if further actions can be taken in the first instance. A tracking spreadsheet is kept with a log of these discussions and the cases / themes are followed up with the allocated IRO during supervision or during Team Meetings if necessary.

Following the Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting, the managers from the Safeguarding and Performance Service meet with the ADM and Assistant Director monthly to discuss identified areas of concern. Cases discussed in this forum are cases which have followed the full escalation process. Given the quality assurance role of the ADM, particularly in respect of permanence, this working together forum is key to identify themes and areas of practice which need further development.

The increasing number of QA Alerts supports with greater oversight and scrutiny earlier in the process. IRO's discuss all QA's and cases of concern with their manager each month in supervision with a view to escalating to the Pre-Challenge process if necessary, however as the QA process has been further embedded during this period there are far more examples of issues being resolved promptly without the need for senior management oversight and intervention.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)

The IRO service continues to maintain a good working relationship with CAFCASS Children's Guardians, at both IRO and management level. IRO's routinely liaise with Children's Guardians during Care Proceedings and ensure their views on the care plans are represented. Guardians routinely write to the Safeguarding and Performance Service to confirm when they have been allocated a case under an Interim Care Order and are then invited to children's reviews. In addition to the liaison with the Guardian, the IRO also completes an IRO legal view on the proposed final Care Plan. It is positive that CAFCASS management has expressed a strong commitment to continuing to build productive working relationships between IRO's and Guardians. The Assistant Service Manager who oversees the line management of the LAC IRO's attends meetings with the managers from CAFCASS to discuss any identified themes and to ensure the working together remains a strong partnership.

Family Justice Board

The Safeguarding and Performance Service Manager attends the Family Justice Board meetings. This enables the IRO Service to have a direct connection into Family Justice Board and the Performance Subgroup of the Board. This assists with the IRO service being kept up to date with any issues arising from the Public Law work that in turn influences IRO practice. It also enables IRO's to continue to be up to date with changes to legislation, policies and procedures, enhancing their oversight of the practice and performance of the local authority in respect to children who are subject to care proceedings. This in turns helps ensure timely care planning and better outcomes for the children. The Service Manager ensures the IRO service is updated of key information via Team Meetings, emails and supervision.

Regional IRO Forums

The IRO Service has continued to engage in the East Midlands Regional IRO forums and has had the benefit of quarterly tailored training and networking days over 2021/22. Each IRO Regional Day has a key theme running through the day with a variety of speakers delivering presentations as well as there being opportunities to work in small groups with colleagues from other areas, to share good practice and reflect on ways to improve services for children and their families.



5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children

Being a Corporate Parent

The IRO Service within Leicestershire operates within the context of the council acting as 'Corporate Parents' for all of the children and young people that are placed in the care of the Local Authority. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that council do and it is the council's responsibility to ensure that our children are given the care, support and stability that they deserve.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy states:

We strive for children and young people of Leicestershire to be afforded positive, stable and safe care within their families, where they are well connected to their communities and supported to access support services where needed.

In circumstances where children are unable to live with their family, our priority is to ensure they are provided with safe, stable and secure care and permanence is secured within a timely way. We want children to be afforded with opportunities to ensure they inspire to have high aspirations which are supported, thus having successful childhood experiences, which are the foundations to their adulthood.

In Leicestershire we are committed to our Children in Care and Care Leavers and are determined to ensure that we carry out our duty and responsibilities as a Corporate Parent with genuine passion, ambition, enthusiasm and care. This is underpinned by Our Promise which sets out our commitment to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

We understand that all of our children have individual needs and goals and our care planning and planned support offered to all of our children reflects this. We advocate and champion for diversity and ensure our children and young people are provided with inclusive services which values and respects their individual identity needs.

We are committed to the voice of our children and young people informing all areas of decision making, underpinned by a "You Said, We Did" approach. Participation is central to all services delivered to our children and young people and is championed in effective children and young people led forums including our Children in Care Council, Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC), our Corporate Parenting Board and many more participation events.

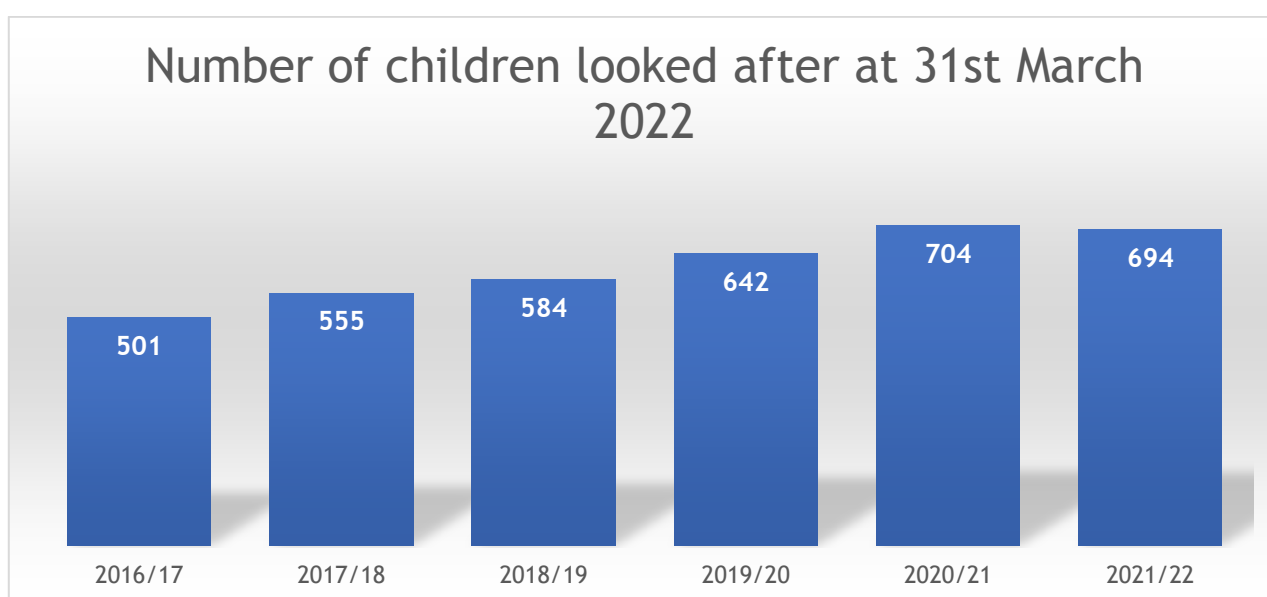
The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the responsibilities of Leicestershire County Council as corporate parent to children in care. The Strategy outlines the expectations and key principles that provide the framework for a cohesive and effective corporate parenting response for children in care and Care Leavers. To hold ourselves to account to achieve this Leicestershire developed 'Our Promise' (April 2019) with our children and partners and this underpins the expectations for all.

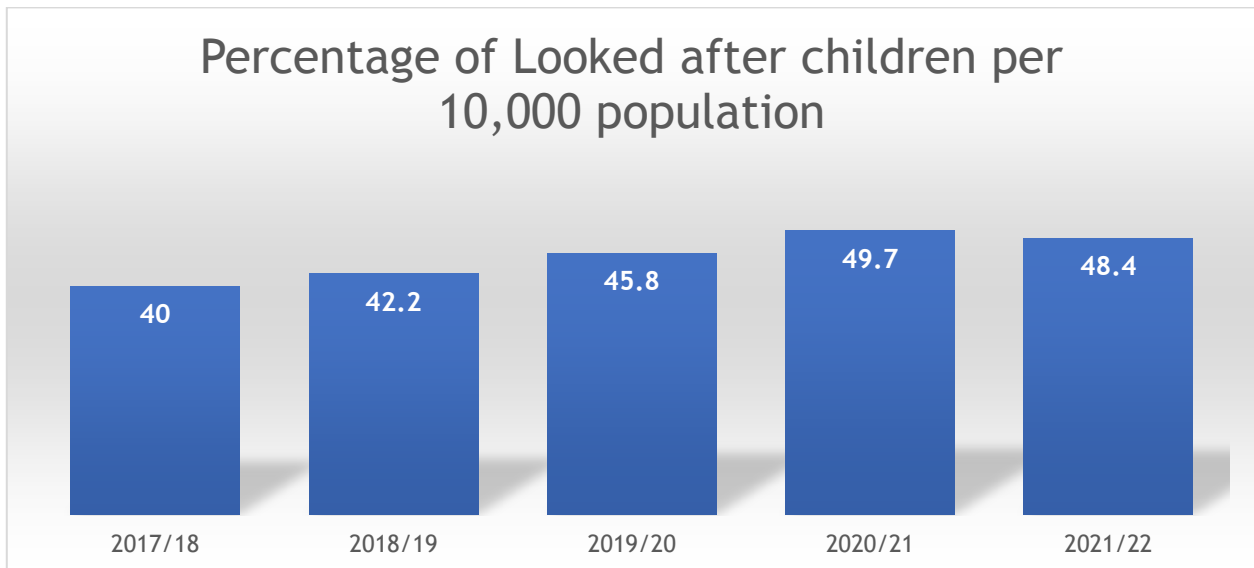


6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO - Looked After Children's Service?

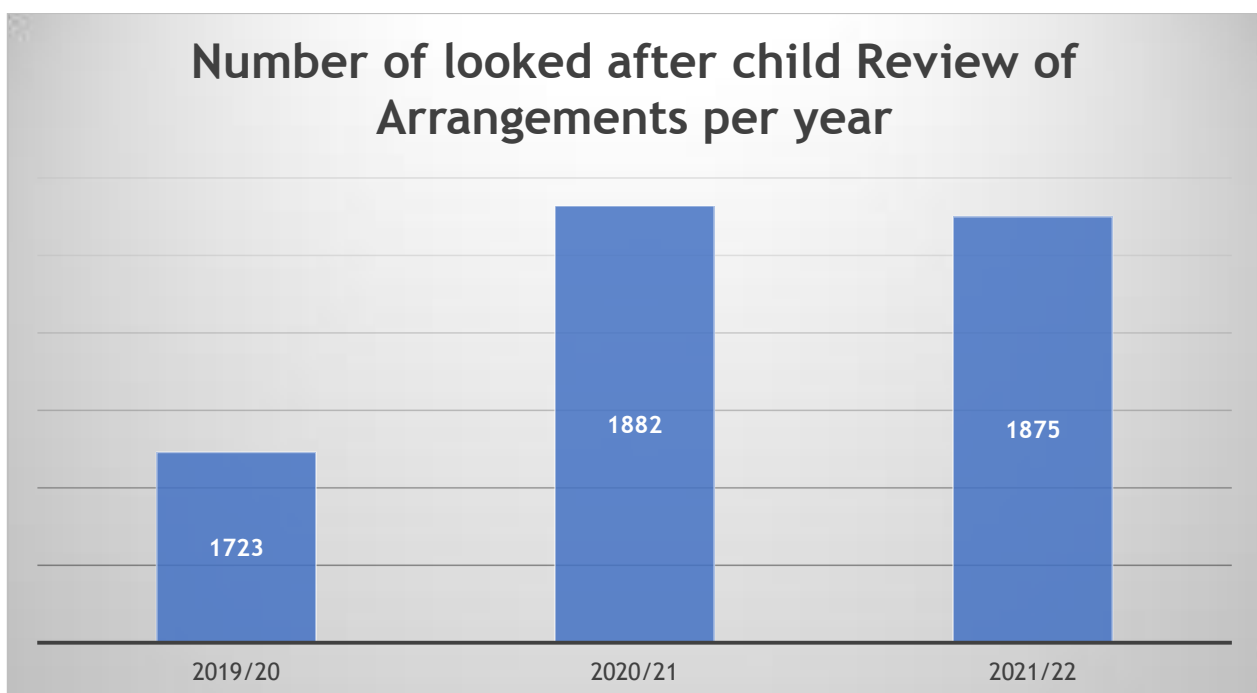
Children in Care

There were 694 children in care on 31st March 2022, a decrease of 11 children (1.6%) from 705 children in care on 31st March 2021. This represents the first annual decrease since 2016. 694 children are equivalent to 48.4 children per 10,000 population aged 0 to 17 in Leicestershire. This compares to an average of 56.1 children in care per 10,000 children in Statistical Neighbour authorities, and 67.0 for England as of 31st March 2021.





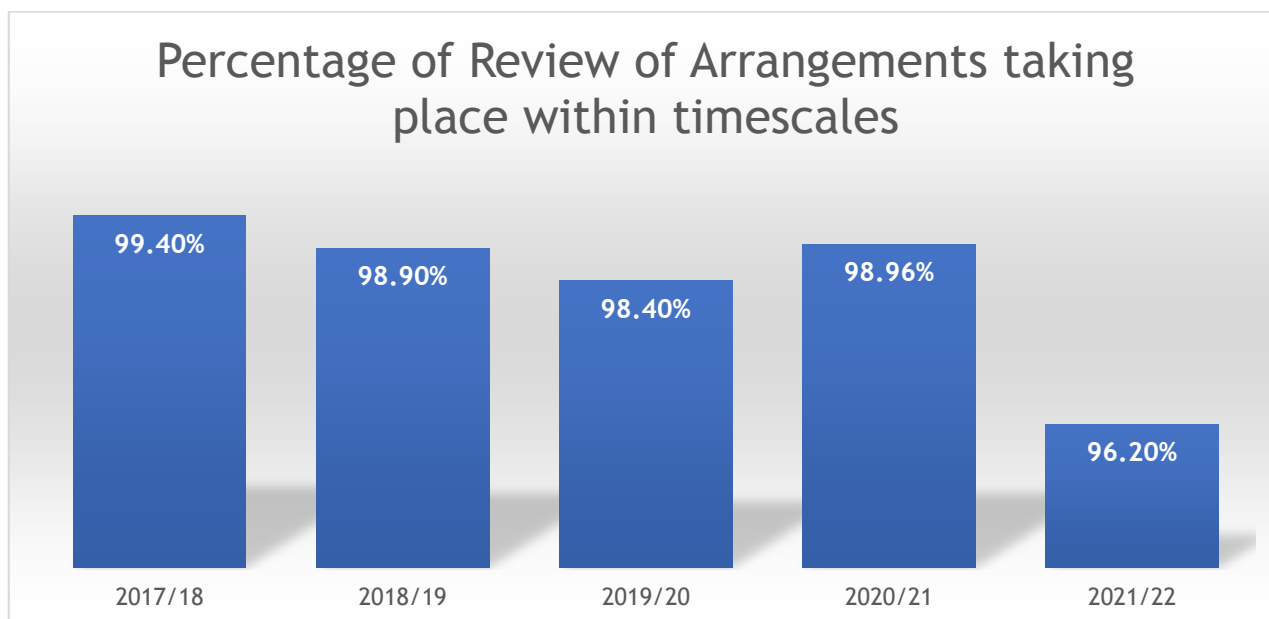
As suggested by the lower number of children in care on 31st March 2022, the average number of children in care over the year was slightly less over the twelve-month period. As might be expected there were also a lower number of children's Review of Arrangements in the last year, although the decrease was only slight, down from 1882 ROA's in 2020/21 to 1875 in 2021/22.



This has not decreased as much as might have been expected due to the lower number of children in care, however part of the explanation for this is that there was a slight increase in the number of children entering into care, from 230 in 2020/21 up to 250 in 2021/22 and also a significant increase in those that left care from 195 in 2020/21 to 275 in 2021/22. All children that enter care must have a ROA within 28 days and a further review at three months, it is also important to have an additional review as a child leaves care, particularly if they have reached 18 to ensure that all the necessary services are in place to support them as an adult.

In addition to the statutory reviews, IRO's can also arrange additional meetings for a number of reasons including; to review a case earlier due to concerns about drift and delay, because there

has been a change in the child's care plan or following an unplanned change of placement. The fact that the number of ROA's decrease by such a low number could be seen as evidence of greater IRO oversight of children's care planning in the past twelve months.



Performance in relation to timeliness of ROA meetings has been consistently strong over recent years, with improved performance noted in 2020/21 whereby 98.96% of all reviews were held within timescales although this figure has dipped slightly in 2021/22.

At the year ending 31st March 2022, the IRO Service had completed 1875 Review of Arrangement meetings of these 1804 were within timescales which equates to 96.2% of all reviews being held on time. Although this appears to be substantially more than in previous years part of the explanation for this has been identified as data errors in that this year's date has been taken from the tableau report based on what has been input into the child's file on mosaic. It has been found that on a significant number of occasions the dates of reviews were entered incorrectly when the review was held in two parts which then showed as the review having been conducted late when in fact it was completed on time. However, it was not possible to correct these manually therefore the overall figure has remained the same. This is an area of development we will be working to address moving forward to ensure accuracy in the data reporting.

The Safeguarding and Performance Service keep an 'out of date log' to record the reason for each case which does not take place in time, and when cross referencing with the number of cases recorded by the administration team as out of timescales the figure appears to be much closer to the 98% figure of previous years. Nevertheless, it is important to understand reasons why reviews do not take place on time. In 2021/22 by far the most common reason was sickness of those recorded in the out of date log, on six occasions it was due to IRO sickness, five occasion was social worker sickness as well on one child being unwell and one foster carer. Although not all the sickness was related to Covid 19 but many of the absences were, this was especially the case in the winter/ spring of 21/22 which reflects the national picture whereby there was a huge spike in cases between January and March 2022.

A significant improvement in the IRO Service during this year has been the introduction of the formal midway tracking process. IRO's have always tracked the progress of cases between reviews and recorded their views on care planning where it was seen as necessary. However, it was found that there was some inconsistency in this approach in that whilst some cases were tracked closely others had little evidence of the IRO footprint. The IRO Service has developed a

mid-way case tracking template which is now completed on each case at the half-way point between reviews. This can be completed as a file review, case discussion with the social worker or both. The main areas the IRO looks at in these reviews include:

Are all the recommendations from the most recent ROA being progressed in the agreed timescales.

- Are there any other concerns about drift and delay?
- Is there an up-to-date care plan/ pathway plan on the child or young person's file?
- Has the child been visited within statutory timescales?
- Is there evidence of the child's voice recorded in case notes since the last review?

This has had a significant impact in particular if there has been drift and delay, as this will be picked up at a much earlier stage. IRO's will routinely complete Quality Assurance Alerts following a mid-way review to ensure the necessary remedial action is taken to get things back on track before the next review. This process is demonstrating rigorous IRO oversight and challenge between ROA meetings.

Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to the care planning. As always IRO's continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. However, due to the COVID19 restrictions during 2020/21 and 2021/22 it was necessary to move all ROA's to being held virtually, which has had a significant impact in the way children and young people participate in their reviews. Although the restrictions started to be lifted during 2021/22 the majority of ROA's continued to take place virtually. In the autumn of 2021, it had been planned to return many of the reviews to face to face however due to the concerns in relation to what was then the new covid strain known as Omicron these plans had to be put on hold. Since spring 2022 the IRO Service has aimed to hold face to face ROA's for all children that want their meetings to take place in person however, these changes have taken place too late to have an impact in this year's report.

In every year it is acknowledged that not all children will want to attend their meeting and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways however as the table below show, there had been a consistent pattern of children increasingly attending their ROA's up until 2020/21, which we believed is in no doubt linked to the covid restrictions. Although it is perfectly acceptable for children to participate in their reviews in any other way they chose such as via an advocate, sending their written views or asking their carers or social worker to speak on their behalf, nevertheless IRO's always value seeing children and young people face to face and getting to know them and understanding the issues that are most important to them and supporting them to share their views in their review meetings. In 2021/22 there has been a slight upward trend with an additional 29 occasions when a child or young person attended their review, however this is still significantly below the pre pandemic level.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
PN0: Children under the age of 4	363	363	370	404	405	367
PN1: Children who attend their reviews and speak for	550	554	632	659	561	590

themselves						
PN2: Those who attend but communicate via an advocate	13	4	10	7	18	23
PN3: Those who attend and convey their views non- verbally	3	2	3	0	4	3
PN4: Those who attend but don't contribute	4	11	10	11	7	4
PN5: Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf	70	52	98	87	81	118
PN6: Do not attend but communicate their views by another method	399	415	296	450	636	623
PN7: Those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way	50	87	163	103	118	147

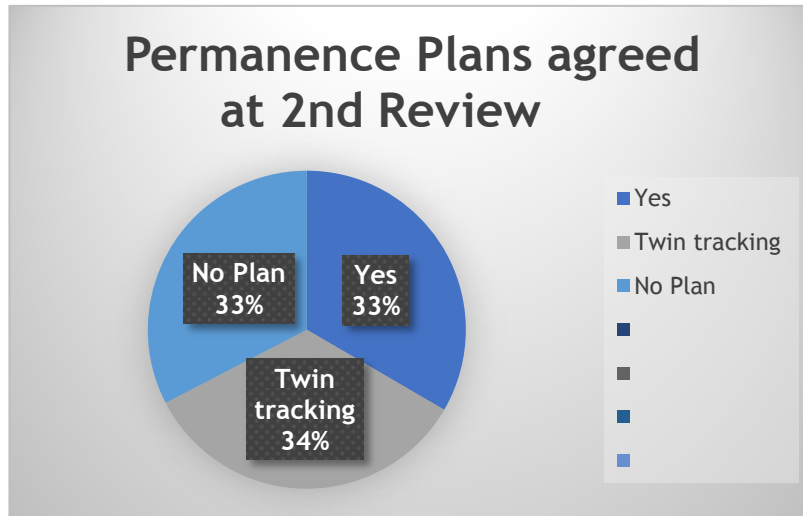
One area of concern is that there has been a slight upturn in the number of children and young people who have not participated in their review in any way: PN07, this is up from 118 to 147. Although we don't have any statistical information to identify if this relates to a particular age range, the anecdotal information from the IRO's is that it could be that this is mainly children aged 5 to 11 as it has been found that many older children have been comfortable to engage virtually with many saying they prefer it. As the Covid restrictions have finally lifted IRO's are now more minded to hold ROA's in school, when the child is happy for this to happen, which will enable children to take part in their reviews as much or as briefly as they feel comfortable with. Pre pandemic many children were supported to chair or co-chair their own reviews, however this has been much more difficult to achieve in virtual meetings. It is hoped that as the number of face-to-face reviews increased during 2022/23 children's participation in this age group will also significantly increase.

Another important area within children and young people's participation is the use of the 'My Review' booklet. This is a document written and designed by the Children in Care Counsel to help children and young people prepare for their review or be submitted to the IRO as a written record of their views. This has traditionally been used as a hard copy paper document however we now have a new online version, which it is hoped will be much easier to access to enable more children to complete. A link to the review for will be sent to each child and their carer in advance of the meeting, which they can complete either by themselves or with the support of their carer, social worker or Children's Rights Officer. Once it is complete, they press submit and it will be sent to the relevant IRO who will be able to discuss this with them before their review. In addition to the link being sent directly before the review it can also be found on the LCC Corporate Parenting page as per the link below:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/social-care-and-supporting-families/services-for-looked-after-children-and-young-people/corporate-parenting>

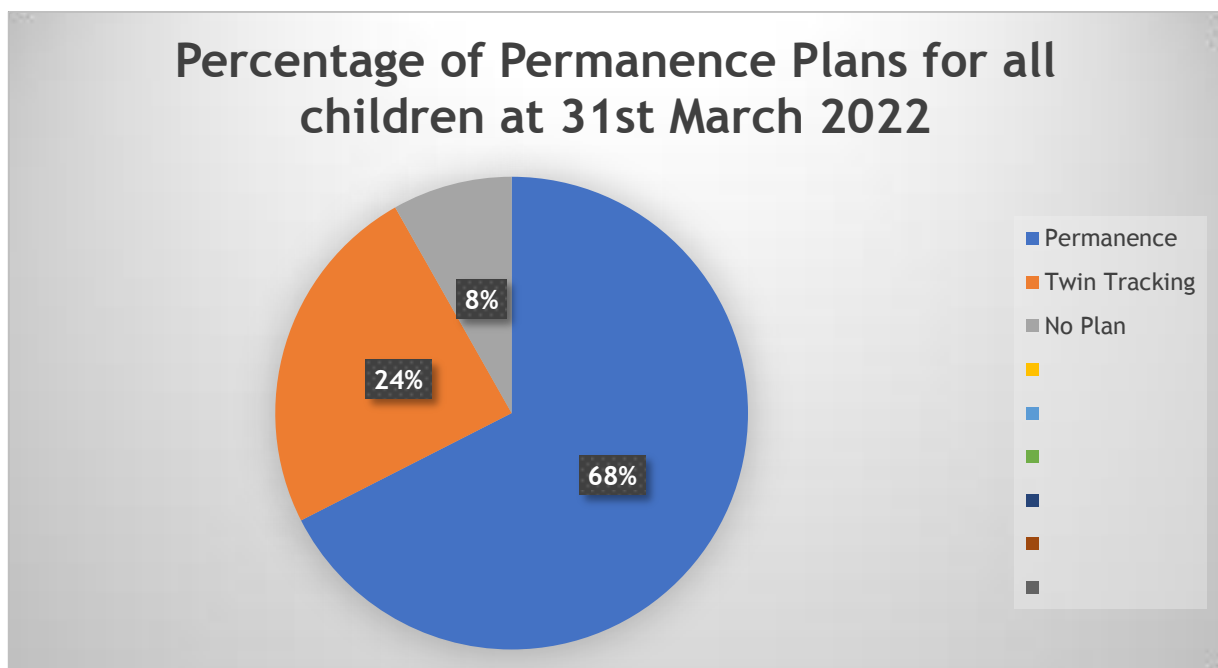
Permanence

Permanence is described as the long-term plan for the child's upbringing. It aims to ensure a framework of emotional, physical, and legal conditions that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.



Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. In 2021/22 in a cohort of 239 children, 33% of children had a permanence plan at second review this is a significant increase on the figure for 2020/21 which was 27%, although slightly lower than in the previous year whereby 35% of second reviews included a permanence plan. Unfortunately, there are lots of reasons why permanence cannot be agreed at the second review, which may include further assessments needing to be carried out to identify if it is safe for a child to return to live with the parent or carer with whom they lived before coming into care and if this is not possible then what would be the best permanence option for their long-term care.

Having tracked the above cohort after the second review to look at plans at subsequent reviews it was found that 30.1% of the cohort or 72 children had a permanence plan at a further review. This being: 44 children at third review, 20 children at fourth review and 8 at fifth review.



In 2020/21 at subsequent review i.e. all those who had already had a first and second ROA, the percentage of children with permanence plans was recorded as 72%. Unfortunately, due to a change in our reporting it has not been possible to compare like for like figure with the current year. Therefore, to make the closest comparison possible we have shown above the percentage of all children in care who had permanence plans on 31st March 2022. This data is taken from the full cohort of 694 children in care as of this date, therefore this includes some children who have only recently come into care and had yet to have their first or second Review of Arrangements. Therefore, to have 68% of all children in care with permanence plans would suggest that this is in line with previous years. Of the 8% of cases with not care plan i.e. 56 children on 31st March 2022, having subsequently track the cases it has been found that 24 are now subject to twin tracking and 28 now have permanence plans with only 4 cases where a clear care plan has been set out, although further investigation has shown these to be data recording errors.

IRO Challenge & Escalation

Practice improvement and quality assurance is a central role for the IRO Service. Since September 2016, the Quality Assurance Alerts (QA's) have been used by the IRO service effectively to identify areas of good practice as well as areas of concern, including quality and timeliness of reports, drift or delay in care planning, concerns regarding statutory duties not being met and areas of practice which need developing. As a service, we have routinely reviewed the Quality Assurance Alerts to help identify any key themes or areas which need to be addressed; this is then shared within the Senior Management Group.

From the 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 there were 575 Quality Assurance Alerts completed in respect of Children in Care. Of these there were 138 for good practice and 437 highlighting areas of concern. This compares to the previous year whereby there were 41 for good practice and 89 for concern. This is an almost four-fold increase for good practice and a more than four-fold increase for concern. As a Safeguarding Service we would see this a very positive step as we have worked hard to develop a highly robust quality assurance process. Two key areas of development since the last report being firstly that the management information system has now been fully implemented to ensure that all QA's completed are captured and reported on as the QA's are entered onto a step in mosaic which is them documented in the Tableau system. Previously QA's were uploaded as work documents and recorded by the Safeguarding Administration team on Excel.

Secondly and more importantly the IRO Team has regularly discussed and reviewed the processes of QA's, working against an agreed set of bottom lines which has developed a far higher degree of consistency within the team, although there will inevitably remain some variance as the process has to involve a degree of professional discretion.

A further value in the new system is that it can identify in real time how many QA's are open, how many have been completed and at what stage each was resolved.

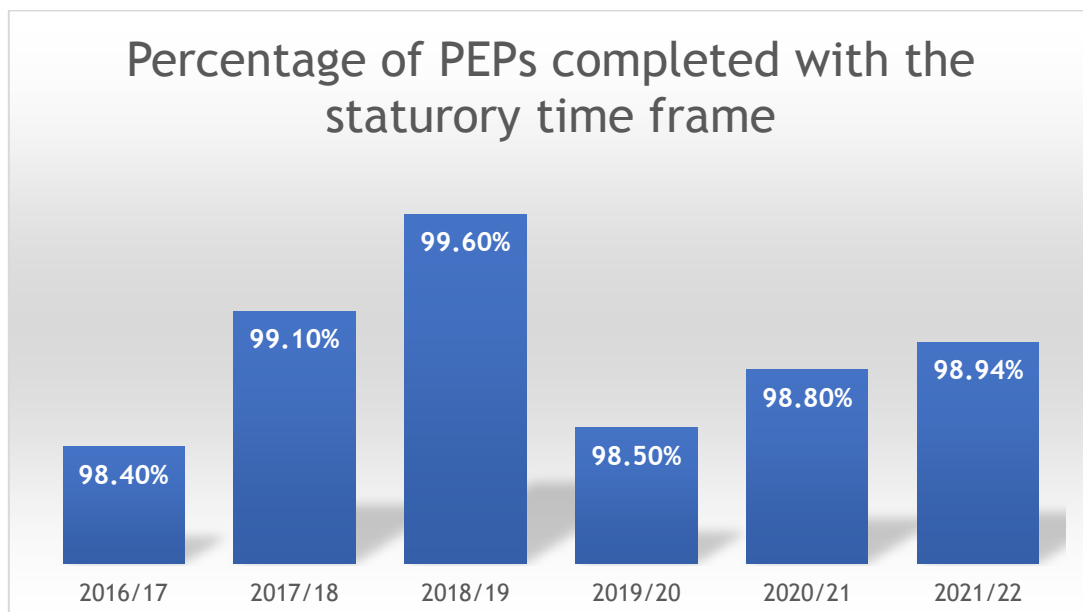
The QA's system is highly valued by management as it not only highlights positives and concern in relation to individual cases to help and support the work of the local authority to ensure we achieve the best outcomes for children and young people but also with comprehensive level of QA management information now available managers can identify areas of good practice and share these with their teams to support professional development, and quickly identify and themes in areas for development and quickly take the necessary remedial action.

For the positive QA's there is no requirement for a manager to provide a response however for area's of concern it is necessary for a manager to respond and the IRO to be satisfied that the response is adequate before the QA is formally resolved. Stage one being with the Team Manager, Stage two with the Service Manager, Stage Three with the Head of Service and Stage four with the Assistant Director. A final stage would be with the Director of Children's social care, although no cases were required to be escalated to this level during the year 2021/22. The stages at which each case was resolved were as follows:

QA's for good practice	QA for concern resolved at Stage One	QA for concern resolved at Stage Two	QA for concern resolved at Stage Three	QA for concern resolved at Stage Four
141	320	70	29	5

Additionally, as part of the escalation process, if an IRO has sufficient concern in relation to a child or young person's care planning they can refer the case to either Cafcass or request independent legal advice, neither of which was required during 2021/2022.

Personal Education Plans

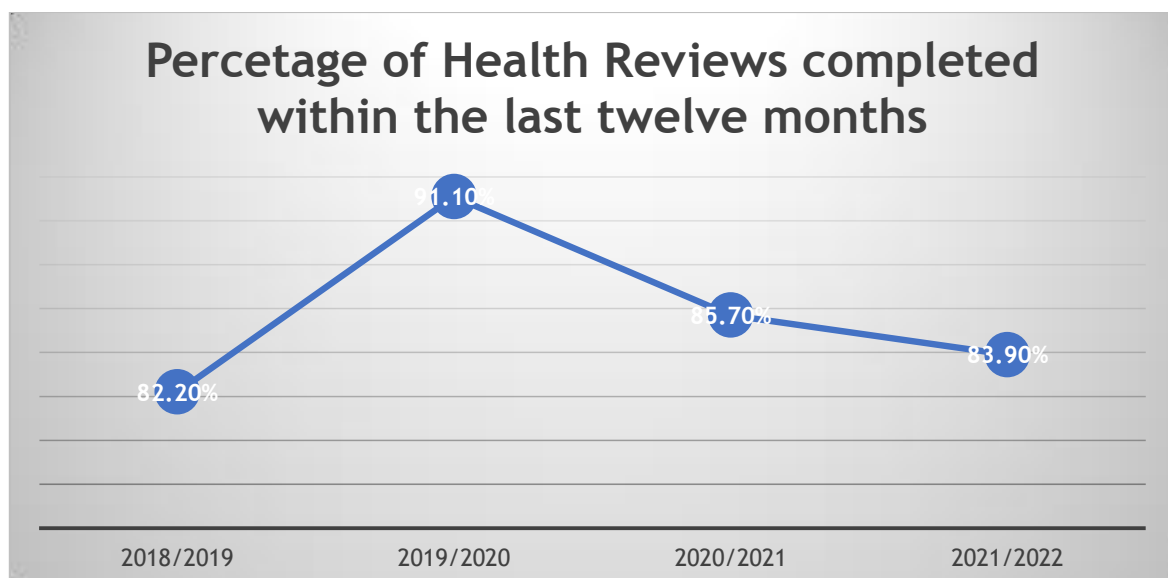


The above graph shows the average PEP completion rate over the academic year from September to July in each year with the final column representing the average completion rate from September 2021 to 31st March 2022. As the graph indicates we have seen continuous improvement in this area over the past three years, with each of the last six years showing strong performance at over 98% in each year.

At ROA meetings IRO's routinely confirm if PEP meetings have taken place, that all recommendations are being progressed and if this is sufficient or whether further action is necessary. Completion of PEP's is seen as high priority as they are fundamental to ensuring each child has access to the right educational support to enable them to achieve their potential. To this end IRO's work closely with the Virtual School, with the Education Improvement Officers regularly attending the child's ROA.

Children and young people's education takes a high priority within the IRO service. In each IRO's supervision all cases are reviewed whereby the child has been identified as not in education, employment or training (NEET). This process was implemented some years ago due to concerns that as children moved placement there may be delays in identifying suitable education provision, however for those in mainstream statutory education this has not been identified as an area of concern for some time as the Virtual Schools are proactive in working with schools and colleges to ensure that young people's needs are met. For those over the age of statutory education if there are concerns about a young person being NEET they will check that the Leicestershire Inclusions Service is involve or relevant other provider if they are out of county such as Connections in Leicester City. It is seen as essential that young people understand what their options are and they are helped to think creatively of how they would like to engage in education or training. As part of the review process IRO's will also ask what other support is being offered if young people are not presenting as ready to engage in formal education, this may include getting support for their mental health or getting them involved in activities to help them get into good routines which could then help them to find education more accessible in the future.

Health Check's completed within twelve months



In 2021/22 83.90 of children had their health reviews completed within timescales, this is a dip on the previous year's figure by 1.8 % although still above the rate of 2018/19 when 82% had a health reviews within timescales. A key reason why some health assessments do not take place is because the young people chose not to undertake this, which is their right to make that decision. However, there could be several other reasons for assessments taking place including late referrals being submitted to LAC Health. This is reviewed via a performance dashboard on monthly basis and presented to the Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Multi Agency Operational Meeting and then at the Multi Agency Strategic Meeting.

As part of the Safeguarding Service annual auditing process the assistant service manager undertakes two Health Audit's per year along with the Designated Nurser for Looked After Children. In the most recent audit in March 2022 there was some positive findings including:

- Five out of six of the young people were offered to be seen alone in their RHA, of which 3 took up this opportunity.
- All but one of the young people reviewed had seen a dentist within the 6 months prior to the review, with the exception reporting that their delay was due to Covid restrictions preventing them attending.
- In many of the reviewed cases, the general health of the young person was discussed in the ROA, and there were examples of specific health needs and appointments being acknowledged and moved forward.

There were also a number of challenges highlighted in this audit, two of the most significant being firstly that although health assessments had been completed there took place outside of timescales, one reason for this being that there is currently a significant pressure on staffing levels within the looked after health service both locally and nationally. A second area for improvement being the use of the Strength's and Difficulties Questionnaire. This is an assessment checklist that can be completed for all children between 4 and 16 to gain greater understanding of their emotional wellbeing. This can help the LAC Health Nurse to understand any concerns in relation to emotional wellbeing and then signpost them or refer for any relevant support services. The audit reports set out a number of recommendations and these are shared with Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Multi Agency Operational Meetings.

Dental checks within a twelve-month period

As with health reviews dental checks are viewed with high importance in contributing to children and young people's well-being. In 2019/20 there were 407 or 87.6% of children who had a dental check within the last twelve months. Although this is an area which is routinely scrutinised by IRO's within the ROA's the performance dipped considerably in this area during 2020/21 with only 28.4% of all looked after children having their dental checks completed within the previous 12 months, this was undoubtedly due to the COVID19 restrictions being in place with dentist only having capacity to see patients for emergency treatment for much of the year. However, it is pleasing to see this figure has risen significantly in 2021/22 moving up to 58.0 % of children having had routine dental checks. Nevertheless, by comparison to pre pandemic levels there is still much room for improvement.

7. What is the impact for our children and families?

Looked after children

During the pandemic anecdotal information from IRO's indicated that virtual meetings and contacting children via Skype had worked very well for some children and young people whilst for others it has been more difficult. Prior to COVID19 restrictions IRO's would regularly encourage young people to chair their own meetings, although this may require some initial preparation work, once the child or young person has had a positive experience of chairing their meeting they would happily do this routinely, however chairing a virtual meeting has a different feel to it and IRO's have reported that young people have been far less keen to do this and in some cases said the virtual meeting has felt so different they have chosen not to attend.

Since the easing of restrictions, the IRO's have been undertaking far more face to face reviews and getting out to see children. As stated above in November 2021 it had been planned to revert back to most ROA's being face to face unless there was a reason not to however due to concerns in relation to the Omicron variant significant restrictions were once again put in place therefore face to face reviews only started to be the norm again towards the end of the 2021/2022 review period.

In the early part of 2022 IRO's were inviting children decided if they would like their review virtual or face to face, although more recently this has raised concern that for many children they have not had experience of face to face reviews or have faint recollection of them. The IRO Service now has a clear line that all initial ROA's should be face to face as well as all adoption meetings, and all other reviews should be held face to face unless there are exceptional reasons not to. The recent feedback on this has been very positive, with several IRO's reporting how well children are now engaging in their reviews, giving their views and asking questions which they may not have done in a virtual meeting. It is anticipated face to face meetings will become far more embedded into IRO practice through the 2022/23 review period.

Permanence

The IRO Service places a high level of importance on children having permanence plans and will always raise concerns in relation to drift and delay in this area. It is recognised that first and foremost it is essential that the right decisions are made in the best interests of children but delay in such cases is unacceptable. In the past twelve months it is pleasing to see that the number of permanence plans at second review has increased, although there is no room for complacency.

IRO Challenge & Escalation

The Safeguarding Service has continued to work hard to embed Quality Assurance Alerts into practice and become part of Leicestershire's culture of continuous improvement. It has long been recognised that it is important that when an alert for concern is raised that these are written in a clear and objective manner that highlights any work that needs to be done whilst acknowledging positives and difficulties in achieving the right outcomes. IRO's are aware of the pressures colleagues in social care may be working in and aim to ensure that any QA is not written as a criticism of the worker but rather to highlight the importance of the local authority getting things right for the child or young person. To underline this the Safeguarding Service has been writing the alerts to the child for the last year. This has been seen as a very positive step in that each QA not only sets out what the concern is but why it has been raised and what is the impact for the child.

An example of this being Child A, whereby the IRO raised concern that that statutory visits had been missed, however the alert was written in a way that not only brought this to the attention of the manager but if the child were to look at their record they would be able to understand why this was raised as a concern as the IRO explained that the regular visiting pattern should be in place to enable right level of oversight to ensure the child's needs are adequately being met

now and in the future. The Team Manager responded with a clear commitment that all future visits were undertaken within timescales and set out the date the next one should take place and who would be doing this.

As indicated in the table on page 11 not all QA's are resolved at stage one by the team manager but some need to be escalated to Service Manager or beyond. One such case being Child B who had been presenting with harmful sexual behaviours. There had initially be a discussion about a referral being submitted by the social worker to the Safeguarding Service for a HSB meeting to be held with a view to looking at any potential support or intervention being required, however it was then decided not to progress the referral as there was a current police investigation related to some of these behaviours and additionally the young person was nearing 18 years of age and it was felt that there would be insufficient time to undertake work before the young persons 18th birthday. However, this was challenged by the IRO, who eventually escalated the case to the Head of Service who was able to take the decision that the young person should be referred to for a HSB meeting as a matter of urgency. This example highlights the advantage of the IRO being able to escalate concerns to the right level of management as sometimes it is only those in a more senior capacity who can take a decision to override the usual processes and practices if it is in the best interests of a child.

Health Assessments

Health assessments are always seen as a vital aspect of the local authorities corporate parenting responsibility and our Health partners routinely report on this at the Corporate Parenting Board. These are seen as vital not only to ensure children and young people's physical health needs are met but also the health review is a key opportunity to ensure that their emotional well-being and mental health needs are being met. In 2021/22 there has been a far greater emphasis on the importance of the SDQ being completed to ensure that all needs are met in relation to emotional well-being. Leicestershire County Council Children and Family Service is striving to be a trauma informed organisation and it is with this in mind that the IRO Service has a clear focus on the importance of understanding how trauma and other early life experiences may impact on children and young peoples current and future well-being therefore it is essential to gain as much understanding about these issues as possible and ensure that the right support is in place at the right time.

Feedback from children

The main way the IRO Service has had feedback from children has been via the Children in Care Council (CICC). They have worked hard in developing a set of expectations for their review of arrangements, known as the ROA Expectations Document, which has now been widely shared within children's services and its use is regularly reviewed by Safeguarding. A key issue the young people have feedback is the importance of good communication, in particular to enable them to prepare adequately for their review. This has really underlined the importance of the new online consultation document and the need for it to be provided to children and young people with sufficient time to make considered decisions about their review, from where and when they want it to be held, who they would like there and what key issues do they want to discuss. Consistency continues to be a theme which children have feedback on, and there have been some great examples of communication with IRO's such as one young person who does not like to attend their review of talk directly to their IRO but they routinely record a short video on their phone before the review to explain how they are feeling, what they have been doing and what is important to them.

Feedback from professionals

The IRO Service values feedback from professionals and acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with colleagues to get the best outcomes for children.

Feedback received by the safeguarding manager on the IRO service from professionals is often linked to their experience of receiving quality assurance alerts. There is a very clear message that social workers value the positive QA's and appreciate when IRO's take the time to highlight and document when a good piece of work has been completed.

In relation the QA's for concern in many respects managers appreciate the feedback about concerns and welcome the opportunity to look at areas for improvement and take any necessary action. Managers generally feedback that they appreciate it when IRO's ring team managers and discuss issues and explain what their concerns are and what the IRO believes actions need to take place. However, it has to be acknowledged that as the IRO's have become more diligent in raising issues in relation to practice standards this has become increasingly challenging to managers and workers as the IRO Service has been looking in detail at the management of cases.

Recent feedback has led the IRO Service to review the relevant area whereby QA's are submitted and consider how best to use performance data to address some areas with the IRO focused being specifically in relation to drift and delay and care planning issues as it is seen as essential that when QA's are raised social care or partnership agencies always give them the priority that they need.

8. What can we do better?

Leicestershire IRO Service has for a long time been proud of its participation work and we have worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Team, both the Participation Officers and the Children's Rights Officers to this end. It is particularly disappointing then that we have seen only a slight increase in the number of children attending their reviews during 2021/22 and there has been an increase in the number of children who did not participate in their reviews at all. The IRO Service has therefore taken the decision to aim to hold all 28 day ROA's in person unless there is a significant reason not to. This is regarded as particularly important as the initial stance after the Covid restrictions were lifted was to give the children and young people the choice if they would like to have their reviews virtual or face to face, however it has been found that for many children and young people it is difficult for them to make an informed choice as they have only ever known reviews to be virtual. It is now hoped that with the right level of planning, support and reassurance that IRO's will once again be able to encourage children to not only attend their reviews but share their voice and even chair their reviews, with even higher numbers participating in their meetings than before the Covid pandemic.

Good communication with our children and young people is essential and the IRO Service will be striving to improve this even further in the coming year. The new online consultation document will be a vital component in this, ensuring it is sent out in good time, with children always knowing when their reviews are and giving them the opportunity to have a say in how they want them to be managed including, where and when they want them to be held, who they want present and what they want to talk about and what they don't want to be discussed. The use of the consultation documents will be reviewed during 2022/23 and we will be working with the Children in Care Council to assess their impact.

Another area that the IRO Service is mindful to improve is that of ensuring all health needs are met in a timely manner, with the main challenge being for social care to coordinate the completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires in line with when the looked after child health reviews are completed. In health audits it has been noted that IRO's are checking the SDQ's and health assessments are completed and actions followed up however it has been

raised that coordination of the two is essential to enable the looked after health nurses to get the best understanding of a child's emotional wellbeing at the time of their review. Therefore, it has been agreed that all SDQ's must be completed within three months prior to the health assessment. For this to be successful it will be necessary for foster carers to complete this promptly once they are sent and any delays are followed up by the child's social worker of the foster carers supervision social worker. To fully embed this process the IRO Service has been working with the Looked After Children's Designated Nurse and relevant partners to develop an SDQ animated video which will explain what the SDQ is, why it is important that it is completed on time, what the benefits are and what positive outcomes can be secured for children and young people as a result. It is planned for this to be launched in November 2022.

9. What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

Over the next 12 months, we wish to continue to embed the areas of specialism and expertise within the IRO LAC Focus Team, ensuring a high-quality service is delivered to our children and young people, a service which is focused on ensuring their needs are met, that these are represented and addressed within their Care Planning, along with promoting their individual sense of identity, belonging, thus ensuring an inclusive service is provided. That our IRO's advocate for and challenge where necessary to ensure the Local Authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities, but in addition we are being proud Corporate Parents for the care being afforded to our children, in line with our Corporate Parenting Strategy – 2022 – 2025.

A major development for the IRO Service is to pilot the recording of ROA's, if successful this will enable a full record of the meeting to be stored on an audio file should it be required at a later date whilst at the same time the written record normally produced by the IRO can be substantially shortened and written directly as a letter to the child or young person. This process has several advantages, firstly by having a full recording there is a complete and comprehensive record of the meeting, whilst a shortened summary of the meeting written to the child will be more accessible for children and young people. This will be sent to the child along with a bullet point outline of the actions agreed.

A further advantage of this process is to reduce the amount of time IRO's spend on administration tasks and enable more time to go out and see children. This is a major objective for the IRO Service as outlined above.

Building on the strengths of the quality assurance process the IRO Service plans to develop greater links with the Senior Management Team, we are therefore introducing Performance Cycle meetings chaired by our head of service, whereby themes that have been identified by the IRO's can be raised at the meeting and any strategic response can be fed back to the IRO's. This will improve the current process in that as soon as remedial actions are identified these can be shared with the IRO's, the IRO's will then be able to give immediate updates as to if the actions are having the required impact. This is also really important for the social workers and other frontline staff to see that if they are receiving quality assurance alerts that have been completed linked to particular areas of difficulty the IRO's are able to have a dialog which reflects that senior management take seriously any difficulties and concerns and set out what improvement steps are being taken.

The IRO Service is fully committed to further embedding the principles of the Safeguarding and Improvement Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. In part this is further developing our knowledge and understanding to be more culturally competent. This includes arranging training for the team, undertaking individual learning, having guest speakers attend team meetings and reflecting in team meetings and supervision about how we can best ensure

that the diverse needs of our children in care are being met. One area of work which we are progressing is in working with identity issues for trans young people to ensure that their identity is fully acknowledged, such as their chosen pronoun, preferred name is used both in discussions and is reflected in documentation.

Another area for development is working with the Children In Care Council in relation to the Language in Care, it has been identified for some time that there are certain words and phrases that professionals use that can be uncomfortable for children and young people to hear, however it has been recognised that different words have different means for individual children, an example being home and placement, to some children home is with birth family but to others living with their foster family or residential is their home. In the coming year we will be looking at developing better systems to ensure we get the language right for each child without them having to have the same discussions many times over.



10. Independent Reviewing Officer - Service Delivery Plan 2022-2023

Action No.	Issue	Dept Plan/ CIP refs*	What's working well?	What are we worried about?	What needs to happen? (Action)	By When	What difference will this make? (Impact)
					<i>Please provide detailed actions and deadlines. Information from these columns will be copied into the quarterly report template for your service</i>		
1 All Services	Mandatory All staff are fully aware of the responsibilities they have, in their day-to-day roles in services and with colleagues at work, for advancing the council's equality and diversity objectives	All	<p>There is good attendance at the Practice Lead sessions by IRO's to further develop their skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Signs of Safety is fully embedded into the IRO service, both in CP and LAC.</p> <p>All IRO's have been on the 5-day Sign of Safety Training. They are confident and competent in using and developing the framework.</p> <p>IRO's have been supported to attend a 3-day specialist IRO training, one cohort on CP and another on LAC.</p> <p>There has been staffing additionality within the IRO service supporting managing the increasing CP and LAC population.</p> <p>The Safeguarding Service is very well established with strong</p>	Audit activity has identified the need for improvement in the application of safety networks and testing Safety Planning.	<p>Staff access mandatory and bespoke equality and diversity training</p> <p>Staff are supported to attend training events and opportunities to further enhance their skills, knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p>	The safeguarding service provides a work environment where all staff can access support, build positive career pathways, thus enabling consistent, effective and meaningful engagement and progress for children and families.

			retention of staff.				
2 All Services	Mandatory Work towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to understanding and tackling inequalities (including relevant research, data, QA activity and engagement with children, young people and families)	All	The Equality and Diversity Guidance has been launched and shared with all staff for application in practice. EDI remains a standing item on all team meeting and supervision agendas, enabling staff with opportunity to discuss any matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.	The EDI action plan is underrepresented with colleagues across the service, and we need to receive greater input into championing the action plan and accountability for actions, with representatives from all four service areas.	Equality and Diversity remains as a standing team mtg agenda item and discussed within supervision. EDI action plan which covers all four services within Safeguarding and Performance. Equality, Diversity and Challenge week to be held in January across CSC services, with the review of the EDI guidance. Implement the new Welfare process.	March 2023 March 2023 January 2023 June 2022	Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion remains high on our agenda, with workers feeling empowered to have a voice and influence future ways of working, in addition to celebrating diversity and individually challenging ourselves as well our processes / structures to ensure they align with our We Care and EDI guidance. Thus, providing a fully inclusive working environment for all staff and an inclusive service for our children and families. Thus, enabling staff to feel safe and supported within the Safeguarding and Performance Service to challenge ADP and advocate on behalf of our children, families and colleagues regarding any

							issues.
3 IRO Service	IRO's provide a specialist service, with expertise on Child Protection and Looked After Children, ensuring rigorous oversight of planning, practice and service delivery, whilst holding the LA to account for their statutory duties, providing challenge where appropriate.	All	<p>Quarterly report on repeat planning completed within the Safeguarding and Performance Service provides analysis to the impact of intervention both during Child Protection planning and previous/subsequent intervention. Aligned with this is clear processes for analysis of all repeat CP cases.</p> <p>Writing to the child is well embedded and consistently applied within the IRO service.</p> <p>There has been significant development in the intervention for Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). Regular audit activity is completed to review the effectiveness of the processes and identify any areas of development.</p> <p>Clear structure in place for IRO's to endorse planning decisions.</p> <p>Permanence is a critical element of the Review of Arrangement process, providing</p>	<p>% of children subject to repeat child protection plans continues to be above our target of 19%.</p> <p>QA alerts are not consistently being completed to raise concerns regarding drift, delay and / or good practice. This results in needs actions not being identified in a timely way, thus causing potential delay for children and their care planning. This also reduces the identification of development need and opportunity for learning across CFS.</p> <p>Audit activity identifies plans continue to not be "SMART".</p>	<p>Report on repeat planning completed within the Safeguarding and Performance Service provides analysis to the impact of intervention both during Child Protection planning and previous/subsequent intervention.</p> <p>Joint action plan to be completed across IRO service, FRCD and localities to address the concerns regarding the timeliness of ICPC's – aligned with findings from previous audit.</p> <p>IRO's to utilise QA Alert process in relation to the impact of supervision and management oversight. IRO individual supervision to provide additional challenge and oversight of the QA role of the IRO – aligned with Ofsted Focus Visit feedback.</p> <p>Focused development session to be held with IRO's regarding SMART planning – aligned with Ofsted Focus</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p>	<p>Children have timely targeted high-quality intervention to maximise their outcomes and services are provided appropriately to address the identified need. Strong evidence of IRO oversight and challenge is visible on children's files, demonstrating robust IRO service delivery.</p>

		<p>IRO oversight and ratification of the permanence plans.</p> <p>Strong advocacy support via the Children’s Rights Officers is available for Looked After Children to ensure that their voice is represented and informs permanency decision making.</p> <p>Pre-challenge and challenge process are part of the quality assurance process and audit reporting against this element of the process is now in place</p> <p>Safeguarding Service Manager attendance at Family Justice Board Meetings.</p> <p>The connection of the Pre-challenge and Challenge process as part of the QA Alert process and the need to evidence impact has improved, with ADM also using the QA process.</p> <p>Mid-way reviews are well evidenced on CP and LAC cases to ensure robust IRO oversight. Signs of Safety is fully embedded into the IRO service, both in CP and LAC.</p>		<p>Visit feedback.</p> <p>Process for CP chairs chairing complex CIN meetings is developed and implemented, once capacity allows.</p> <p>Trauma Informed practice to be embedded into the IRO service. Explore the use of scaling within CP conferences and ROA’s and how this linked to a trauma informed approach.</p> <p>IRO service to explore embedding “belonging” into practice and consider application in both CP conferences and ROA’s.</p> <p>IRO Focus Teams to continue to develop team identity and vision as leaders and leading by example with practice excellence.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>July 2022</p>	
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Date: 23/08/2022