

# Safeguarding and Performance Independent Reviewing Officer Service LAC Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023



# Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Context
4. Profile of the IRO Service
5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children
6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO – Looked After Children’s Service?
7. What is the impact for our children and families?
8. What can we do better?
9. What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
10. Independent Reviewing Officer – Service Delivery Plan 2022-2023

## 1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) sets out the performance for the service in 2022-2023 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The IRO Handbook sets out the statutory 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).

This reporting period has been the first in what can be considered - post Corona virus pandemic - a period when efforts have been made to return to more business as usual service delivery. This has involved trying to retain some of the flexibility of new ways of working developed during the pandemic whilst we continue to meet our ambition to deliver high quality services to our children in care.

In response to the pandemic the Safeguarding and Performance Service rapidly adapted and changed the way we delivered services to reflect the COVID19 circumstances, and our ability to meet these challenges grew during 2020 to become a new business as usual. During 2022/23 we have aimed to return to a model of delivery largely focused on face to face meetings though this has included listening to the child and using hybrid approaches to our meetings if this has allowed the child and other agencies to be present and heard.

This has meant that we have seen an increase in meetings held face to face and those mixing both online and face to face opportunities. For some children and young people, having the option to engage in meetings virtually continues to be more suited to them, as well as using video calls as a means of developing relationships.

The nature of the IRO role means that they have continued to work flexibly and from home though more generally the social work workforce has seen a shift to working more from an office base.

We have faced some new challenges with the shift of our recording into a newer version of the recording system Mosaic from December 2022. The impact of this on day-to-day practice and our staff should not be underestimated with extensive training and re-working of our key processes. This has created gaps in our reporting which has meant further work on tracking work manually.

There has also been a change in management of the service. The Service Manager has taken a period of Maternity leave from December 2022 and an interim manager has been in post from that date to continue the work to drive improvement following a period of introduction and shadowing. The Safeguarding Manager left the service in February 2023 and recruiting to this post took longer than expected. This has caused some delay in actions being fully implemented which will be fully implemented over the 2023/2024 review period. This post was successfully appointed to on a 4-month secondment from an IRO post within the team in May 2023.

Key areas of development this year have focused on delivering our aspirations as set out in our Departmental Road to Excellence Plan (21-23). This alongside our promise to our children in care provides the aspiration, vision, values and behaviours which embody the IRO service. We have seen particularly emphasis on understanding the trauma that children in care are likely to have suffered both in their experiences before becoming looked after but

also in their experiences in care when they are separated from their family networks. Our IROs have all accessed the necessary training to underpin trauma informed approaches to supporting children and in particular, to inform how they coordinated and manage meetings and support the participation of children and their families.

Quality assurance and learning improvement activity continues to tell us how we are doing as a service and forms a key part of understanding the lived experience of children in care, the quality of social work services they have in place, arrangements for their day-to-day care, time with their families and achieving permanency. The service has continued to conduct regular audit of its own service but also to provide a key role as a crucial friend to operation colleagues by the implementation of the informal and formal QA process. We have aimed to have a strong IRO footprint on children's records to capture how the IRO is actively supporting high quality services – the quality and timeliness of our plans and ensuring that we are driving for best outcomes including where appropriate to achieve permanency.

The year 22/23 has been a period of transition and consolidation for the service. This has impacted on the pace of delivering some of our ambitions however our overview of the year gives us confidence that we are in a strong position to further enhance our services into 23/24.



## 2. Introduction

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) sets out the performance for the service in 2022-2023 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 Focused**  
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.

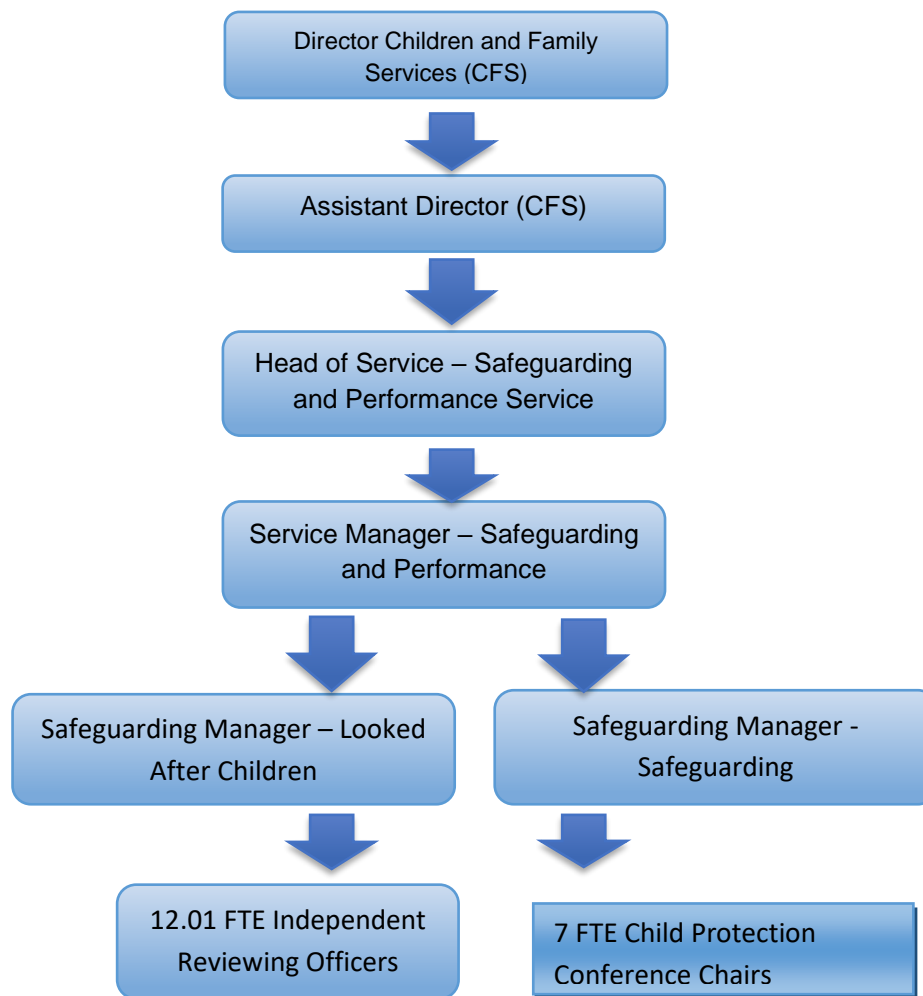
### What success will look like

- 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.



2/06

The IRO Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service and works closely with our child protection chairs to bring consistent approach to planning and practice standards for our most vulnerable children. 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.



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

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 achieved. 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 2022 to March 2023. 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 – 'what is working well' and those in need of development and improvement – 'what needs to happen'. 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, IRO focus team**

1x FTE Service Manager (covers both focus teams)

1x FTE Safeguarding Manager- Looked After Children

12.01 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 continued effort to recruit and retain our workforce. This is 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 and the increased number of young people seeking asylum who require care planning.

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, completed over 3 days in March, May and June 2022. 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 (2023-23) which highlights areas of need and provides a framework of observation, peer audit and audit analysis to inform learning and drive forward best practice. The service in addition has monthly Improvement Cycle meetings to challenge and evaluate performance data to support rigorous responses to emerging performance trends and direct action for improvement. This is overseen by the Senior Management Team and monthly performance meetings.

### **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 in each 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. Prior to COVID19, there would be 6 monthly meetings arranged between IRO's and Cafcass Guardians, including managers to review and support working relationships, share information and updates and ensure any matters arising were able to be dealt with. This is due to resume over the next review period 2023/2024.

### 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 turn 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 2022/23. 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?

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, Leicestershire introduced a new Mosaic system which has changed the workflow, practice, and performance reporting. This has been introduced in a phased approach over the services. First Response started to use the new workflows from the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, and the Child in Care Service are due to be phased over to the new mosaic in May 2023. The team has worked really hard to ensure the data on Mosaic is as accurate as possible, and this was reflected in the year end performance figures. The change in our recording and reporting has meant that some of the data used to measure impact has been unavailable, during full implementation and therefore, the report has been adapted to ensure as much data as possible has been retained.

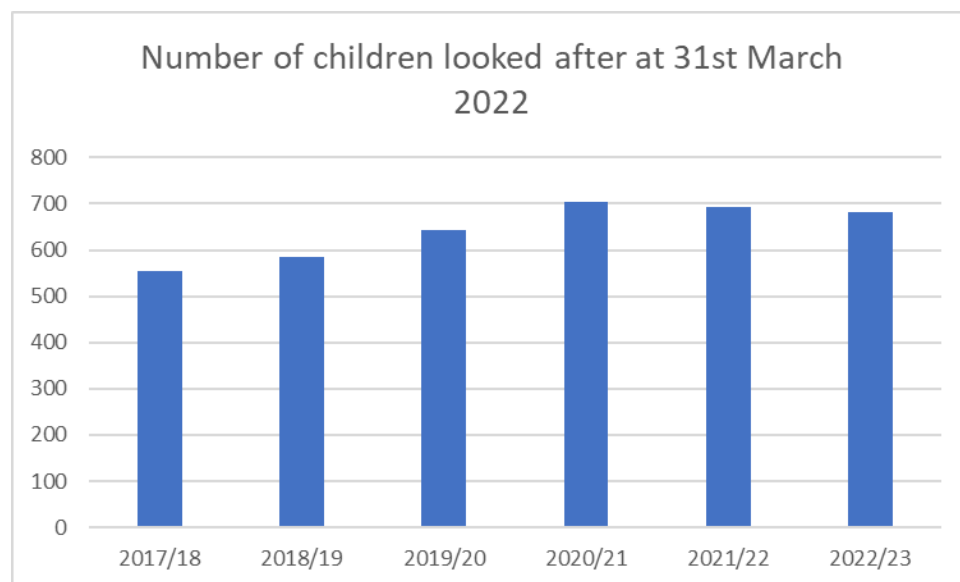
Where possible data has been collected from the previous Mosaic, and now the new Mosaic, however our data over this reporting year is from different sources including the IRO diary spreadsheet which holds the majority of information about review meetings, the amount held and timeliness. This need to use adapted data means it is difficult to compare like for like data to our previous reporting year. There has also been a separate log for Quality Assurance alerts sent and these were recorded on the previous version of Mosaic until December 2022, and the spreadsheet since whilst we wait for this Mosaic dashboard to be finalised. This has been a key area of development over the period of review.

### Children in Care

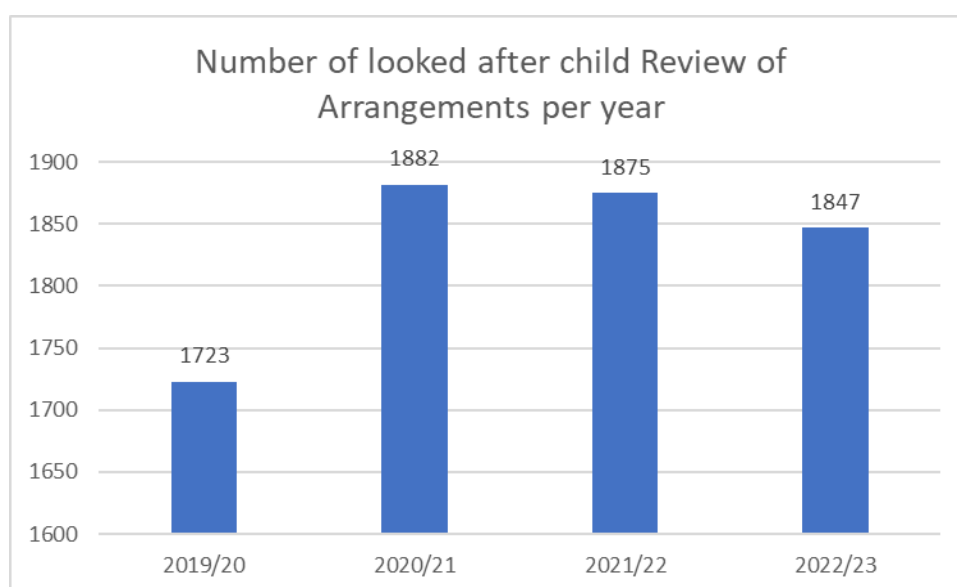
There were 681 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, a small decrease of 13 children from 694 children in care on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. 681 children are equivalent to 48.4 children per 10,000 population aged 0 to 17 in Leicestershire. This compares to an average of 56.1 children in care per 10,000 children in Statistical Neighbour authorities, and 67.0 for England as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. We implement robust review of our threshold decisions for children becoming looked

after and work hard to maintain and strengthen family networks including by seeking permanency to reduce the length of time a child may remain in care.

Of the 681 children in care on 31st March 2023, 419 (62%) were Male and 262 (38%) were Female. This represents a further increase to the proportion of Males compared to 31st March 2022, (410, 59% Male and 286, 41% Female) and 31st March 2021. The age profile of Males in care has increased overall in the last year; The number of Males aged 1 to 4 has decreased from 65 to 52 (-20%), whereas age groups 10 to 15 and 16 to 17 have increased by 6 (5%) and 17 (15%) respectively. Conversely, the age profile of Females has seen decreases in the age groups 10 to 15 and 16 to 17 by 15 (-12%) and 9 (-13%) respectively.



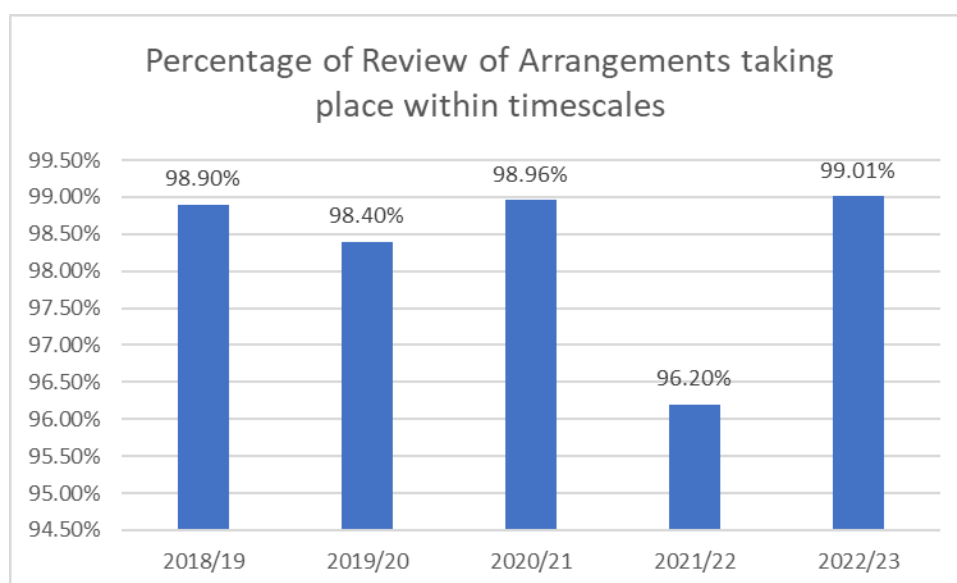
There were 1,847 Review of Arrangements meetings in the last year, this shows a small decrease in ROA's meetings over two consecutive years, from 1882 ROA's 2020/21 to 1875 in 2021/22.



The review meetings being completed have decreased by 28 over this last year, the number of children entering into care has remained stable at 251, compared to 250 over 2021/2022. There has also been a similar amount of children leave care over this review period, with 271 children discharged from care, compared 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.

Over this review period there has been the successful introduction of the midway tracking form completed by the IRO's, meaning they are formally tracking each child in care between their 6 monthly reviews, and therefore not arranging review of arrangements meetings unnecessarily early. At the midway review any concerns regarding a child's care plan are raised and resolved and only when the IRO views there need to be an additional review of arrangements meeting will this be arranged, but generally all issues can be dealt with at the midway review. This aims to both improve quality and avoid drift and delay in planning permanency for children which has continued to be a focus for the service in this period.



At the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the IRO Service had completed 1847 Review of Arrangement meetings of these 99.1% were completed within timescale. This is a significant improvement from 21/22.

Over December and January 2023 there was a higher number of reviews held in two parts, and following an audit of part one ROA's in January 2023 it was found that 27% of ROA were held between 12 December 2022 and 20th January 2023 were in two parts. This being a total of 41 review meetings.

Although the vast majority of decisions to hold the review in two parts were compliant with the IRO Handbook there is still concern that this was a high number. The impact of these being it is unsettling for children and families when planned meetings do not go ahead, difficulties to rearrange within timescales to ensure all relevant participants can attend as well as delays in care plans being updated. Recommendations were made and this started to reduce to the number of reviews held in two parts and our Annual Report for 2023/2024 will show our progress in this area as key service development action.

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,

previously 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 if there has been drift and delay identified, the consistent approach to midway reviews being completed allows this to be identified at an 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. This has been a major achievement for the service in this period.

## Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to care planning. As always IRO's continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. Whilst all reviews were held virtually during the COVID19 restrictions and this had an impact on children's participation, 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 as well as all 28 day reviews.

Since Spring 2022, 34.4% of review meetings have been held face to face, 12.3% held in a hybrid style, with those attending the review meeting either in person or virtually and 53.3% held virtually. We can see our participation numbers have increased over this review period and for children aged over 4, 90.84% have engaged in their review this year either directly or indirectly. This is very positive as part of our drive to have the child at the center of their planning.

Since children's reviews are increasingly being held in person, we have seen a decrease in children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf, do not attend but communicate their views by another method and those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way. This shows us that by completing the review in the style which most works for the child encourages their participation in the most meaningful way.

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. Over this review year, the IRO's have been creative in how they gain their children and young people's views, for example one young person sends her IRO a series of voice note sharing her views to inform her review meeting.



We also encourage our children to chair their review meetings which supports them to feel empowered and in control of their care planning. In 2022/23 we have seen significant increases of children attending their reviews and speaking for themselves and children participating more in their review meetings and the IRO's strive for their children and young people to be part of their review meeting.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>PN0: Children under the age of 4</b>	363	363	370	404	405	367	329
<b>PN1: Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves</b>	550	554	632	659	561	590	714
<b>PN2: Those who attend but communicate via an advocate</b>	13	4	10	7	18	23	48
<b>PN3: Those who attend and convey their views non-verbally</b>	3	2	3	0	4	3	4
<b>PN4: Those who attend but don't contribute</b>	4	11	10	11	7	4	14
<b>PN5: Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf</b>	70	52	98	87	81	118	104
<b>PN6: Do not attend but communicate their views by another method</b>	399	415	296	450	636	623	495
<b>PN7: Those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way</b>	50	87	163	103	118	147	139

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 council to help children and young people prepare for their review or be submitted to the IRO as a written record of their views. This continues to be sent out electronically to the social worker, who forwards the document to the foster carer. However, return rates have not been as we would have expected them to be, and more work is required to improve the visibility of this document.

As a result, the IRO's are now sharing this document in every review and raising the profile of this booklet for the children to complete their views in. As well as this, there is a link to the booklet which continues to 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, it is hoped the completion will increase for the next reporting period.

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>

At the start of 2023, the Children in Care Council developed a survey regarding the language of care to be completed by their peers in care, seeking to gain their views on professional language used. The findings of this are due to be published and we look forward to how the IRO service can implement a more personal approach to the preferred language of our children in care as this work is brought to completion during 23/24 period.

## 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.

<b>Permanence Plan (at second review)</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to Family	42	6.93%
Adoption	93	15.35%
SGO/CAO	25	4.13%
Supported living in the community	93	15.35%
Long-term residential placement	29	4.79%
Long-term fostering	278	45.87%
Twin Tracking (Other)	46	7.59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>92.41%</b>
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7.59%</b>

<b>Plan agreed before second review</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3.25%</b>
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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. There has been a significant improvement in children having their permanence confirmed at their second review of arrangements meeting with 92.41% having this. There has also been a significant reduction in no plan from 33% in 2021/22 to 7.59% this year which includes twin tracking. The IRO's are raising questions of permanence and longer term planning at the first 28 day review meeting and there has been a greater increase in children having permanence by their second review meeting. This focus reflect departmental ambitions.

<b>Permanence Plan (ALL LAC)</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to Family	46	6.79%
Adoption	93	13.74%
SGO/CAO	25	3.69%
Supported living in the community	106	15.66%

Long-term residential placement	30	4.43%
Long-term fostering	282	41.65%
Twin Tracking (Other)	46	6.79%
No Plan	49	7.24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>85.97%</b>
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>14.03%</b>

In 2022/23, the data has been used from the full cohort of children in care and 85.97% children had a permanence plan agreed, with 14.03% without permanence agreed but out of those 7.2% hadn't had their second review and 6.79% had their care plan as twinned tracking. Therefore for all children who have had their second review, and whereby assessments to determine their permanence plan have been finalised have a permanence plan. There were 3.25% (22 children) who had their permanence plan agreed before their second review.

Due to the permanence planning data being taken from a different sources and different point in time to the LAC figures, we are unable to compare these children like for like. Although the difference in the two sets of data are not significant it cannot be easily compared. Therefore, we need to add a caveat that the permanence plans total (677) cannot be compared like for like to the total number of LAC (680) and therefore the totals will not balance.

### 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.

Over this review period there has been a change to how our Quality Assurance Alerts are completed and the new Mosaic system implemented in December 2022 has given the opportunity to review how our challenge and escalation is recorded. This has meant our data sources for Quality Assurance alerts are being pulled from different sources at different points in time meaning we are unable to compare like for like. We continue to hold Data Quality meetings monthly to review our data. With oversight by the Head of Service. During 23/24 it is planned for all reporting to have stabilised within the new system.

Over this review period, the IRO service has continued to use a preparation for review template which informs what constitutes a challenge in practice to the social work team and through the procedures how this escalates until it is resolved. From November 2022 the IRO service has shifted focus to quality rather than compliance-based assurance on the basis that improved reporting for Local Authority Children and Family Service teams means greater visibility of key performance issues such as supervision and visits. Senior Management oversight to these key measures has taken place monthly.

As the new Mosaic system has been implemented over this review period, the management information system has continued to record our formal escalation alerts and responses, however whilst the new system is being implemented the data base for our positive challenges hasn't been finalised and our Safeguarding Administration team hold these on Excel.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March there have been 279 Quality Assurance Alerts completed in respect of Children in Care, with 185 being of concern and 94 for good practice. A further 77 positive challenge alerts have been sent for compliance concerns.

The IRO Team has continued to regularly discuss and review 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.

We are working to ensure the data management system within the new Mosaic implemented in December 2022 provides a similar standard of live data information to our previous one as the QA's system is highly valued by management.

This system also highlights positives and areas of concern to individual cases to help support the work of the local Authority to ensure we achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people.

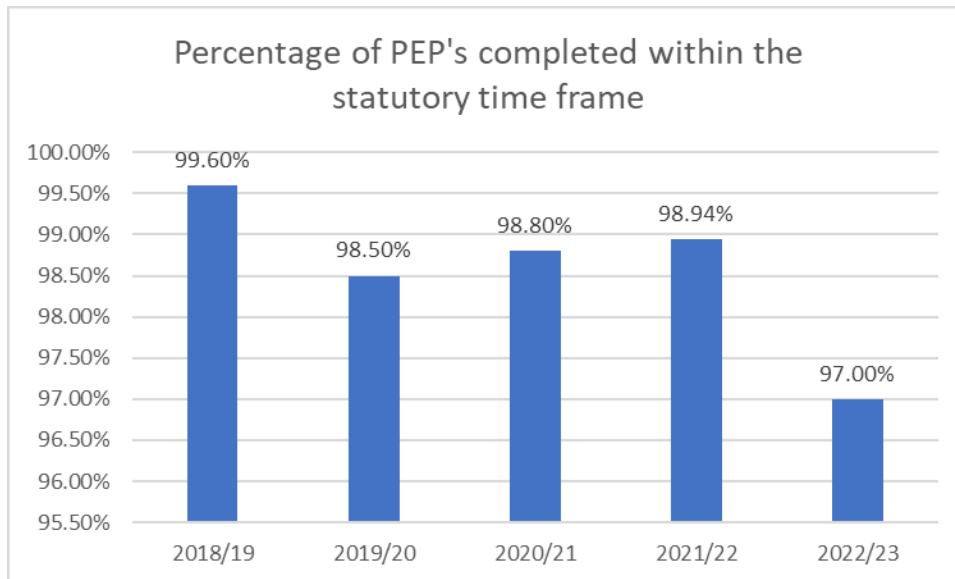
Whilst this is being developed, managers are working from their own dashboards of data which is reviewed monthly on compliance matters. It is expected that over the 2023/2024 review period the QA process will be further refined to allow managers to manage their compliance data and QA's would only be raised on these matters if drift and delay was identified. This will allow IRO's to focus on more qualitative matters relating to children's care planning rather than quantitative.

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 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 2022/23. The stages at which each case was resolved were as follows:

<b>QA's for good practice</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage One</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Two</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Three</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Four</b>
94	176	18	5	1

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 2022/2023.

## Personal Education Plans

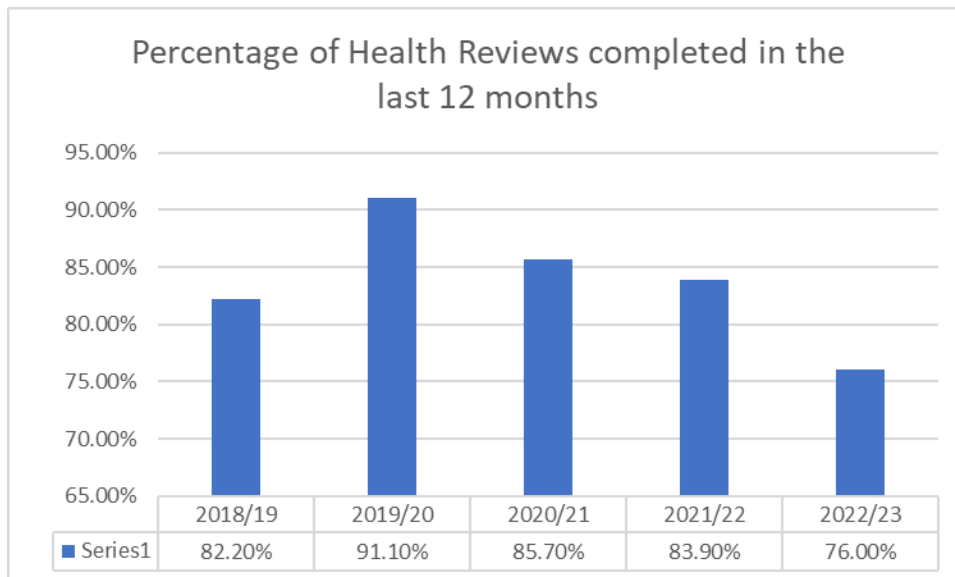


The above graph shows the average PEP completion rate over the academic year from September to July in each year with the final column representing the average completion rate. From September 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, 97% of children have had a PEP meeting.

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 continue to work closely with the Virtual School, with the Education Improvement Officers regularly attending the child's ROA.

Children and young people's education continues to take 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.

### **Health Check's completed within twelve months**



In 2022/23, 76% of children had their annual health reviews completed within timescales, this is a dip of 7% compared to 2021/22 data.

Audit work continues in this area with our Designated Nurse for Looked After Children in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, with our last audit completed in February 2022 and commented on in our Annual Report 2021/22. Recommendations are still being progressed regarding the IRO's raising health assessments in children's review meetings, and there has been a focus on Strength's and Difficulties Questionnaires being spoken about in review meetings to ensure they are being completed.

The Looked After Children's Health Service has been working on a prioritisation model over 2022/23 due to the impact on their staffing and IRO's have been raising directly with the service where there are significant health concerns noted with no review health assessment completed in date. Improvement work is overseen by the Corporate parenting board where health colleagues are held to account for service delivery. Improvement in completion of health assessment will be key to track over 23/24.

### **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. Over this reporting year, 85.5% of children had their teeth checked by a dentist. This compares to 58% in 2021/22, and 28.4% in 2020/2021 which was significantly impacted by the COVID19 restrictions.

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

### **Well managed meetings**

Over this review period, the IRO's have been undertaking far more face to face reviews and getting out to see children. Whilst face to face reviews have started to be the norm again over this review period, there is a greater emphasis on the young person choosing how they would like their review meeting to take place. The IRO Service has continued to have clear guidelines that all initial ROA's should be face to face, as well as adoption reviews and where a child or young

person wishes for their review to be in person rather than virtually. For our initial ROA meetings there has been strong encouragement for the young person to be part of this meeting and the IRO to have spoken with the young person first. We aim for all families and children to experience positive focused and well managed meetings which are focused on the plan – have the child's voice heard and captured and for families to maintain an understanding of what the child needs to have best outcomes. We are confident that our move to face to face meetings alongside the evidence of better participation by children in their meetings has strengthened the experience of all participants and the effectiveness of our planning.

### **Permanence**

Our focus on permanence and timing planning means that children experience less drift and delay in achieving outcomes – whether this is to return to their family network to achieve permanency in care or by adoption. 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, as well as in some situation's permanence agreed at the young person's initial review, although there is no room for complacency.

### **Celebrating success**

We celebrate our children's successes. This may be small individual messages of congratulations by individual IROs or more whole service wide gestures. In September 2022, we held our Celebration of Achievement Awards celebrating our Children in Care and their successes, our first one post Covid19. This event was held over two evenings at the Leicester Space Centre and was well attended. Our Celebration of Achievement Awards has been greatly missed during the pandemic and it was a lovely opportunity for our children and young people to celebrate their successes together. There were performances from Beacon Choir, our Children in Care choir as well as the opportunity to go into the Rocket Tower. This event is planned to take place again this year in September 2023 and will continue to be held yearly.

### **IRO Challenge & Escalation**

Our child friendly quality assurance alerts have been further enhanced this review period and is now embedded in practice which will mean that service to children are good or outstanding. The Safeguarding Service has continued to work hard to embed Quality Assurance Alerts into practise 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 two years. 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. It has also been a positive step that the managers and service managers are reviewing their own data against performance on a monthly basis.

An example of this being Child A, whereby the IRO raised a concern that supervision 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. The IRO explained that regular supervision should be in place to enable

the right level of support to the social worker. Furthermore, management oversight to provide reflective and thought through care planning to ensure the child's needs are adequately being met now and in the future. The Team Manager responded with a clear commitment that future supervision will be undertaken within timescales.

As indicated in the table on page 19 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 has learning difficulties, and his placement broke down meaning he was residing with his grandparents on a temporary basis until another home could be found for him. This was classed as an unregulated placement.

The IRO raised concern that limited support had been provided to grandparents to support their grandson's needs given his additional needs and vulnerability, he had no school place and also his social worker had left the Local Authority. The IRO appropriately challenged this with his social worker and manager, but felt the concerns were serious enough to need service management oversight. The IRO allowed ample opportunity for the service manager to respond, but when this wasn't received, the alert escalated to the head of service. This also was not responded to, which meant it escalated to the assistant director who provided a positive response with clear management oversight to support this young person in his care planning.

Performance Cycle meetings chaired by our head of service have been introduced 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. There has also been the introduction of the Wellbeing Concern process which IRO's were instrumental in recommending this be put in place, and other staff members can use.

The key objectives are:

- To ensure workers feel they have a process in which concerns regarding staff welfare can be raised early and for support to be provided to link to existing processes or identify additional support.
- To provide an opportunity for independent support to be provided which assists staff raising concerns which may sit outside standard processes or to facilitate conversations with line managers so that support can be explored.
- To ensure that any emerging themes of welfare needs can be identified so that targeted support can be coordinated to individuals/ teams or groups of staff
- To provide oversight of emerging staff welfare issues to SMT so that any strategic responses can be coordinated.

Leicestershire County Council are committed to ensuring the wellbeing of their staff and ensuring concerns are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity.

### **Feedback from children**

One of the main ways 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.

This document also affords them the opportunity to decide where and when they want it to be held, who they would like to attend and what key issues do they want to discuss. The children also feedback to their IRO their views which is important to ensure we capture this more formally in order to continue to improve our service.

More children are being involved in their care planning and their review meetings as indicated on the participation table and the IRO's continue to be positive about their children's involvement in review meetings.

In early 2023, our Children in Care Council created a survey 'Language of Care' which they asked to be completed across Leicestershire's children in care population. The Children in Care Council devised the questions themselves and wanted fellow children in care to help them identify how some of the words and professional language we use made them feel.

This has now been completed and the Quality Assurance Improvement Team (QAIT) along with the Child In Care Council are putting together the final findings. Initial feedback has shown positive and constructive comments about the language professionals use, including questioning why PEP meetings aren't called parents/carers evenings and regarding contact, a number of young people would prefer to name the person they are seeing such as 'mum time, dad time etc'.

This has been a really important survey completed by and for our children in care and it has generated more wider conversation about more personalised language for each of our children in care based on their preferences which would be seen throughout their social care file, reports and language used in visits.

### **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.

The focus 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. In response to this, IRO's use Positive Challenge to raise issues in relation to practice standards issues where initial drift or delay has started to be identified, and the respective managers and service manager with their heads of service have started to review their own data monthly to address any issues relating to practice standards.

## **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. 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 online consultation document needs to be further pushed and will be a vital component in this, ensuring it is sent out in good time. This will allow children to know 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. In addition to this, they can share who they want present and what they want to talk about and what they don't want to be discussed.

It is disappointing that the use of the consultation documents hasn't been as widely used as expected. The IRO service has added the consultation document to the invites sent out for ROA meetings to support the increase in use. The IRO's will further push this to be used and we will continue to raise the profile of this consultation document with our young people and raise this within ROA meetings. This will be reviewed during 2023/24 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. 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 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 and the foster carers supporting social worker.

As part of the wider approach to our Children in Care, the IRO service is committed in children's reviews to recommend and take into consideration the young person's cultural genogram and consider their network. We know how important a network is to our children and young people, particularly when they are going through a difficult time or moving into independence. We recognise that their family, friends and professional network are critical to supporting with this, and we need to continue to promote this more during our time with our children and young people.

We need to continue to enhance our access to data and use the new forms and workflow to support the development of additional or consolidated reports during the period 23/24 to further enhance our measure of impact of our service.

## 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. Increasingly we are focused on the impact of trauma as key to understanding children's needs.

A service which is focused on ensuring their needs are met, represented and addressed within their Care Planning, along with promoting their individual sense of identity, belonging thus ensuring an inclusive service is provided. The 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, this started to be considered over 2022/2023 however due to reservations of its compatibility with existing IT services provided. the development was paused. We hope this can be considered again over this review period to consider whether it would have the intended benefits noted previously in the Annual Report 2022/2023.

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 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 their identity is fully acknowledged, such as asking their chosen pronoun, and preferred name is used both in discussions and is reflected in documentation.

The IRO service is committed to the quality of ROA meetings, and there is a planned update of Mosaic framework from December 2022, with all Children in Care being bridged over from May 2023.

This will change the way social workers, managers and IRO's record care plans, reports to ROA meetings and the IRO report of the ROA meeting. In line with this planned change, there will be the introduction of the 'IRO Bottom Lines' which sets our clear standards to ensure the quality of ROA meetings are maintained.

The Mosaic workflow for Looked After Children needs to be embedded into practice now it has been introduced in May 2023 and for the IRO's to drive quality care planning for all of our children, and young people. For performance data to link from the new Mosaic to Tableau to ensure our data is accurate and reflective of our children in care population.

For the IRO focus team to continue to build on children and young people taking part in their review meetings, and consistently sharing their views to inform their care planning. For IRO's to keep in touch with children between their ROA meetings and to ensure they have a positive working relationship with the child that best meets their situation and needs.

A further area for development is continuing to work with the Children In Care Council in relation to the Language in Care. Now the survey has been completed and once findings are finalised we need to consider how this is implemented into our practice. 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 HEADLINES

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>	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.

			The Safeguarding Service is very well established with strong 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

202

							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>% 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 too 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</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>Permanence is a critical element of the Review of Arrangement process, providing 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>regarding SMART planning – aligned with Ofsted Focus 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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			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.				
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**Date: 13 October 2023**

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