



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

**Birmingham Independent Reviewing Officer
(IRO) Service
Annual Report
April 2023 – March 2024**

**FULL REPORT
with Executive Summary**

July 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Overview

- 1.1 This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service within Birmingham Children’s Trust during the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024, as required by statutory guidance. Overall, the information and data describe an established and quality service which continues to support Birmingham Childrens Trust with providing good outcomes for children and young people in care. The report includes key information outlining the work of the service with and for children in care.
- 1.2 The IRO service has a collaborative approach, based on an understanding that the role and functions of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will contribute to achieving good outcomes for children in care. The service seeks to work alongside other BCT services and partner organisations through a relational approach underpinned by “High Expectation, High Challenge, High Support” and embedding Connections Count.
- 1.3. The IRO Service continues to contribute positively towards Birmingham Children’s Trust’s development journey ensuring that most children and young people in care have timely and good quality care and permanence plans. The IRO Service Quality Assurance framework continues to provide added value and evidence to support the Trust’s Quality Assurance arrangements.
- 1.4 The report considers the profile of children in care of Birmingham Children’s Trust during the year. There were 2,943 children and young people who spent some time in the care of Birmingham Children’s Trust during the period April 2023 to March 2024. On 31st March 2024, there were 2300 children in care, compared to 2201 children on 31st March 2023, an increase of 99 children. This reflects a steady increase in the number of children in care by 206 children over the last 2 years. The report provides a more detailed profile about children in care, including their age, gender and ethnic background, the length of time in care, their legal status and type of placement.
- 1.5 Between April 2023 and March 2024 there were 5,981 Child in Care (CIC) reviews completed. 94% of CIC reviews (5622) were held within statutory timescale.

2,943 children and young people spend a period in the care of Birmingham Children’s Trust during 2023-24

5,981 Reviews took place during 2023-24, 5622 (94%) of which were within statutory timescales.

The views of children and young people in care were available in 94% of all Reviews, with the number of children attending their review being 52.1%

1.6 The participation of children and young people in their reviews is examined in more detail. The views of children and young people were available in 94% of reviews. In 52.1% of reviews held the child or young person attended the meeting, this is the same as the previous year but we strive for attendance to be higher.

- 1.7 The continued increase of the numbers of children in care has impacted the workloads of the service - we have assimilated two additional IRO posts in year, and average caseloads for IROs have been between 73 and 76 children, with most caseloads being between 75 and 80 children through the year. These figures are higher than recommended caseloads in the IRO Handbook.
- 1.8 The report details the impact of the IRO use of resolution and escalation. There were 162 formal escalations during the year, a decrease from 185 in 2022-23. The timeframe for resolution is on average 22.9 days with 54% of escalations resolved within the required 20 working days. These timeframes for resolution in both average working days and disputes resolved within timeframe are similar to the previous year after sustained reduction in timeframes over previous 4 years. Most escalations arise from delay in progress of plans for some children, establishing suitable and permanent accommodation, or establishing suitable contact with family members, and impact of delay from social work turnover. IROs continued to informally raise issues of concern with 999 such escalations in the year. These are due to similar issues.
- 1.9 The report considers the quality-of-care planning, informed by data and service audits. IROs identified that in nearly 94% of reviews (or 19 out of 20 children) the child had a suitable and clear plan for permanence, health, education and family and social relationships. Where this was not the case IROs had escalated concerns for delay. In 2nd reviews or 4 months after entering care, IROs identified that 86% (or 17 out of 20 children) had a clear plan for permanence.
- 1.10 Feedback for children and young people suggests that included 95% were happy that their IRO listens to them and involves them in decisions with 84% all the time, 67% were happy with the involvement of their IRO, 50% said they understand all decisions and the other 50% some of the decisions. 77% had attended a least one review since being in care.
- 1.11 74% of our children in care at 31.03.24 had abuse and harm as an issue as to why they entered. In year we identified that safeguarding issues were present for 13% of children in care during the year. These were mainly due to episodes of being missing from care, NEET, risk of sexual and criminal exploitation, involvement in criminal activity and gangs, and substance misuse. As well with varying allegations of harm in care addressed with LADO. This indicates that overall, we are doing well to safeguard our children in care.

In 94% of CIC reviews the child has a clear plan for their permanence

In 86% of 2nd CIC Reviews held 4 months from coming into care the child has a clear plan for their permanence

In survey 95% of children said their IRO listened to them and 95% said they were involved in decisions

2. Achievements and Progress during 2023-24 (including priorities from previous annual report)

- 2.1 The report highlights a range of achievements and a summary of progress in 2023-24, which include:
- Every child is allocated a named IRO within 72 hours of the service being notified that the child is in care.

- Most children and young people's reviews are held within statutory timescale and children and young people are routinely able to contribute their views to their reviews, with solid levels of participation and attendance at review meetings.
- The service has moved forward on work with young people and the Rights and Participation Service, in developing our delivery to promote more child led participation. This has included promoting the use of Mind of My Own, direct contact between the IRO and the child and the use of "Have Your Say" consultation documents. [This was a service development priority for 2023-24.](#)
- The Service has made use of animated video to communicate to children and young people; the role of their IRO, what is and why they have a CIC review and how they can participate - <https://vimeo.com/750399636/2cca109b4d>. [This was a service development priority for 2023/24.](#)
- The Dispute resolution and escalation process has continued to work successfully to address some difficult care planning issues for some children and has seen continued effective use. We continue to develop our challenge processes linked to the Trust Connection Count practice model.
- The Long-Term Fostering Early Ending work continues to support learning and practice development for the Trust around permanent foster placement planning for children and improvements are now routinely agreed with the Children in Care Service and Practice Hub.
- A continued stable, highly skilled and knowledgeable team of practitioners working with children and young people and developing links to support social workers.
- Increasing awareness and use of performance data and information to inform and improve practice both within the service and for individual IRO practice. This has now become a routine element of our work to inform our oversight of IRO practice as well as inform the wider quality assurance work of the Trust. [This was a service development priority for 2023-24. .](#)
- IROs have maintained excellent continuity for children and young people in care, in 90% of reviews held during the year children had the same IRO. This continuity has assisted consistency of planning, where social worker continuity has not always been possible.
- The service has effectively worked within the Trust to promote better outcomes for children, for example, in respect of processes for SGO assessment and agreement, contribution to Life story practice, Health assessment process and arrangements, equalities and diversity development work and Trust QA developments. The service has contributed to the various working groups in the areas detailed to develop practice.
- Other priorities from 2023-24 included aligning practice with connection count practice model and this work continues. We have concluded establishing savings and personal finance policy and arrangements for children in care are now being rolled out. Some development work including linking CIC reviews with EHC Planning for children will remain a priority for the coming year.

3. Practice Improvement Themes

- 3.1 The IRO service identifies practice themes to improve care planning. These are communicated regularly to the Trust through the IRO QA reporting arrangements.
- 3.2 The themes for practice improvement should be seen in the context that the vast majority (94% of reviews) of children in care had suitable permanence plans in place and IROs identify in 87% of reviews that progress is being made towards suitable permanence arrangements and care arrangements to meet the child's needs. The issues of concern are found in less than 10% of reviews.
- 3.3 For those children where issues have been escalated there are some common themes. We are assured that these issues are being suitably addressed.
- Whilst we have very small numbers of children living in unregistered settings, we have experience challenges in securing suitable accommodation for some children with more complex needs, meaning that a few were living in unregistered provision for longer than we would want. The Trust has developed robust assurance arrangements to address the needs of these children.
 - Some children are not helped soon enough to understand their life story.
 - Some children have not return home as quickly as they could. Equally some children's legal status does not change (to SGO) as quickly as we would want. The discharge project is seeking to bring traction to this, but we are not yet progressing plans for some children as quickly as we would like.
 - Whilst the vast majority of children experience placement stability, for a very small number of children we have struggled to find the right the right type of accommodation for them despite best efforts.
 - Some children have experienced more changes in social worker than we would want for them. In some situations, this can result in delays in progressing their plans in a timely manner.
 - Not all children have an up-to-date written needs assessment presented to their review. Some children have experienced delay in progression of key assessments to inform their care plan.
 - There is more to do to increase the number of fostering households, which will help a small number of children currently living in residential care to live with a foster family.

4. Service Priorities for 2024-25

4.1 The IRO service priorities are to continue to promote and enhance our service provision in these areas:

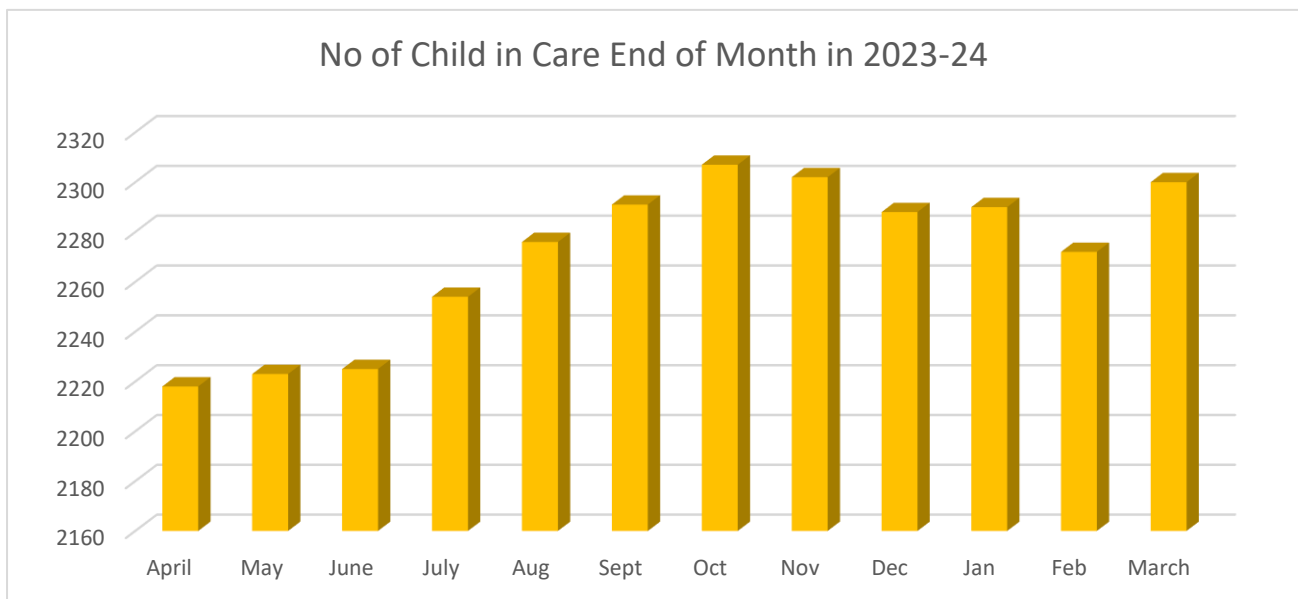
- Continue to strengthen the participation of children and young people within their review and promote all reviews being conducted in person, unless in exceptional circumstances.
- Continue to promote escalations as a tool to improve outcomes for children and develop ways to measure the impact of these processes.
- Work with BCT and partners to ensure more cohesive and integrated reviewing and progressing of plans for children in care, specifically with additional education and health needs.
- Work with YOS to promote an improved care offer for children in care and involved with youth justice system including those in custody.
- Work with the Trust children in care and care leaver service to improve pathway planning offer for 16/17 yr olds and care leavers, including roll out of IROs remaining involved with some care leavers post-18.
- Develop our own service-learning framework using complaints, service audits, Early Ending Conversations and wider Trust Practice Evaluation to continually improve our own practice
- Work with the Trust to improve the timeliness and quality of written assessments to inform care planning

Quantitative information – Children in Care Population

2. Profile of Birmingham's Children in Care

- 2.1 Birmingham's Children in Care population stood at **2300** children and young people on the 31st of March 2024. This is a rise of 99 children compared to the previous year (2201 as of 31st March 2023) and represents a continued upward trend.

Number of Children in Care in Birmingham at end of each Month 2023-24 (Diagram 1)



- 2.2 There continues to be an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through the year with 184 UASC in care at 31/03/2024, but from a peak of 226 in October 2023 there was reduction in admissions in the 2nd half of the year. There is a steady trend increase over 3 years from 168 children at 31/03/23 and 68 at 31/03/2021, but this did slow in this year. These young people have heightened levels of trauma often as a result of injustice, war, and have often experienced bereavement meaning they have complex care and emotional needs.
- 2.3 As of 31st March 2024, the rate of Children in Care in Birmingham was 80 per 10,000 children, which is above the previous year end rate at 77 per 10K, and continued trend increase from 67 per 10K at 31/03/2021, and Birmingham continues to be above the March 2023 national average for England (71 per 10,000). This rate of children in care however remains lower than our regional neighbours (at 90 per 10K at 31/03/23). In the table below it is noticeable that in the rate in the south of the city, whilst reduced, and other areas have increased rate, remains much higher rate than other areas. In year the Trust saw greater admissions to care from children living in NWC area highlighted in figures below.

Rates of Children in Care per 10,000 (Table 3)

Birmingham Children's Trust	Mar -22	Mar -23	Mar 24
East	46	48	61
NW & Central	56	58	66
South	124	127	97
City Total	73	76	80
England	70	71	
West Midlands	88	90	

- 2.4 There continue to be more boys than girls in the children in care population with 56.7% boys compared to 43.3% girls. There is around 0.9% change increase for boys and decrease for girls. Currently systems do not record non-binary.
- 2.5 Of the 2300 children in care on the 31st of March 2024 the majority 59.8% are 10 years and over. It is noticeable that there is a continued increase in 16- and 17-year-olds in care making up a quarter of the care population. The table compares percentage at 31/03/23.

Age of Children in the Care on 31-03-2024 (Table 4)

Ages of Children in Care at 31/03/2024					
	Under 1	1 to 4 Years	5 - 9 Years	10 - 15 Years	16/17 years
Number (& March 23)	98 (111)	394 (381)	433 (379)	797 (809)	578 (521)
Percentage of CIC & (March 23)	4.3% (5%)	17.1% (17.3%)	18.8% (17.2%)	34.7% (36.7%)	25.1% (23.7%)

- 2.6 The ethnic profile of the care population differs to that of the child population in Birmingham. There has been an increase in "other" being recorded as ethnic origin. Dual heritage children in care continue to be proportionally significantly higher than the local population and at a higher rate than the proportion in care across the UK. The proportions of White and Black children in care reflect the city population, whilst Asian children are under-represented in the care than the city population.

Children in Care by Ethnicity March 2024 (Table 5)

Ethnicity					
	White	Asian/ Asian British	Black / Black British	Dual Heritage	Other
BCT CIC Mar 24	1088 (47.3%)	279 (12.1%)	282 (12.3%)	508 (22.1%)	143 (6.2%)
BCT CIC Mar 2023	1088 (49.4%)	288 (13.1%)	262 (11.9%)	509 (23.1%)	54 (2.5%)

Birmingham Pop 2021 census	48.6%	31%	11%	4.8%	4.5%
England CIC Mar 2023	71%	5%	7%	10%	5% (+2% not recorded)
England Pop (2021 census)	74.4%	9.3%	4%	2.9%	2.1%

2.7 Table 6 below shows a snapshot of the children in care population on the 31st March 2024 by legal status. This shows after a number of year-on-year numerical increases of young people are in care subject to a legal order, compared to arrangements through a voluntary arrangement (S20) with their parents. Birmingham figures remain comparable with national data.

Percentage of type of legal status March 2024 (Table 6)

	31 st Mar 2022	31 st Mar 2023	31 st Mar 2024
Birmingham CiC through Legal Orders	84% (1760)	83.1% (1828)	83.7% (1925)
National CIC Through Legal Order	83%	81%	
Birmingham CiC through voluntary arrangement (s20)	16% (334)	16.9% (373)	16.3% (375)

2.8 On the 31st March 2024, 6 young people were in care by virtue of their remand status and a further 4 young people already in care were remanded to YOI. These young people are a distinct and vulnerable group within our children in care populations, whose liberty is curtailed prior to conviction and require support within the setting and circumstances in which they are living In year we have seen children already in care being remanded, which has not been noted previously.

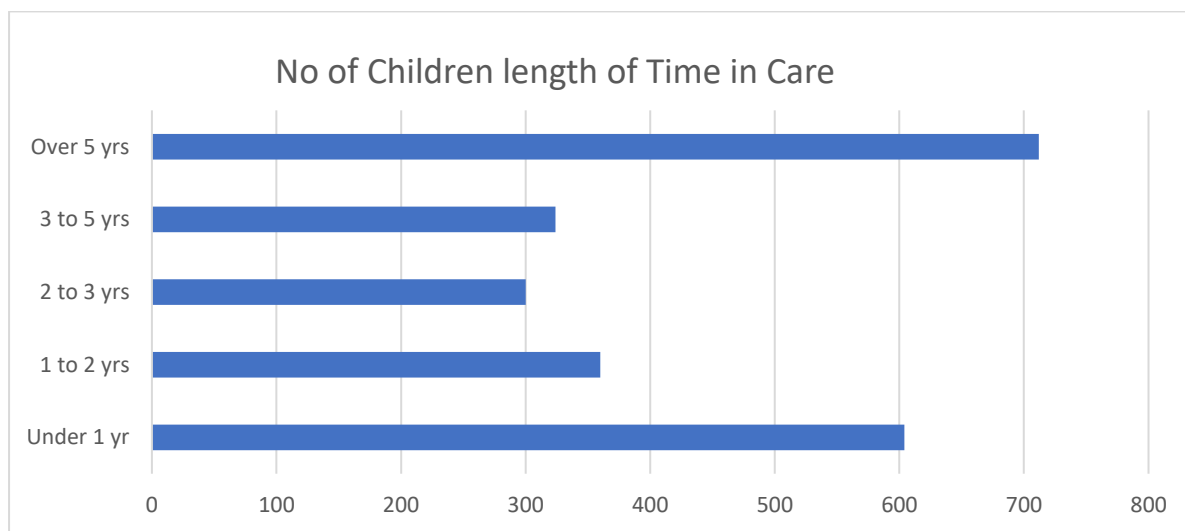
2.9 The total number of new admissions in year 2023-24 was 742 children, which was an increase from the 701 children being admitted to care in 2022-23, but around the same as 756 in 2021-22.

2.10 Between the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024, whilst 742 children were admitted to care, 659 this is more than the previous year at 610, but based on number admitted this accounts for the increase in numbers of children in care in year.

2.11 In all 2,943 children and young people spent some time in care over the year 2023-24, 148 more children than in 2022-23 with a significant number entering and leaving the system all the time.

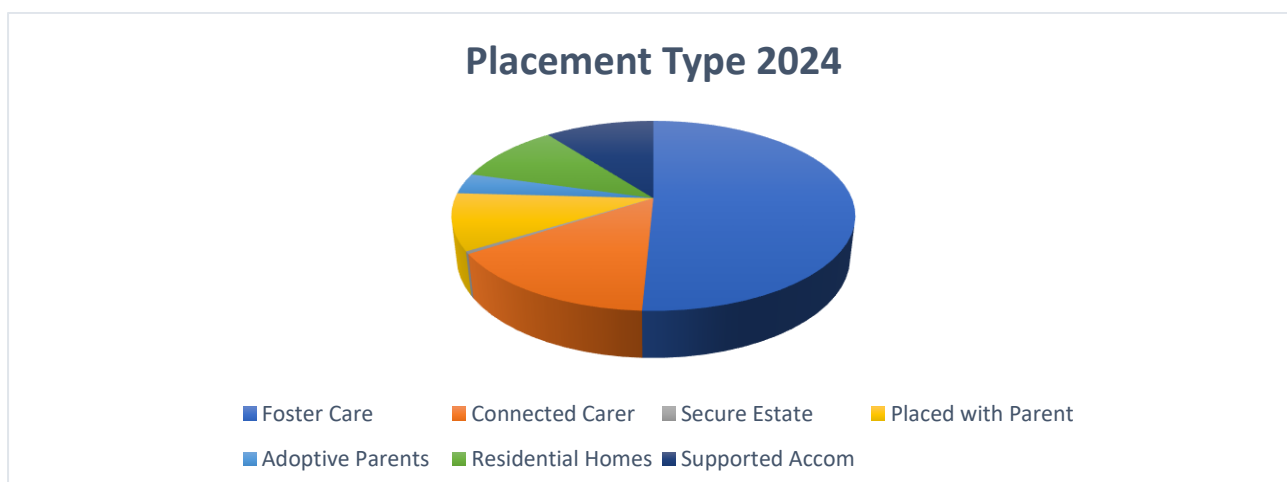
2.12 Of those in care on the 31st of March 2024, 604 children (26.2% of children in care on that day) had been in care for less than a year. Whilst 712 children and young people (31%) had been in care for over five years. Overall, 1036 (45%) children and young people in the profile have been in care for a period of 3 yrs and over. The Trust has significant corporate parenting responsibility for these children who have spent a large part of their childhood in care.

Length of time in care on 31st March 2024 (Diagram 2)



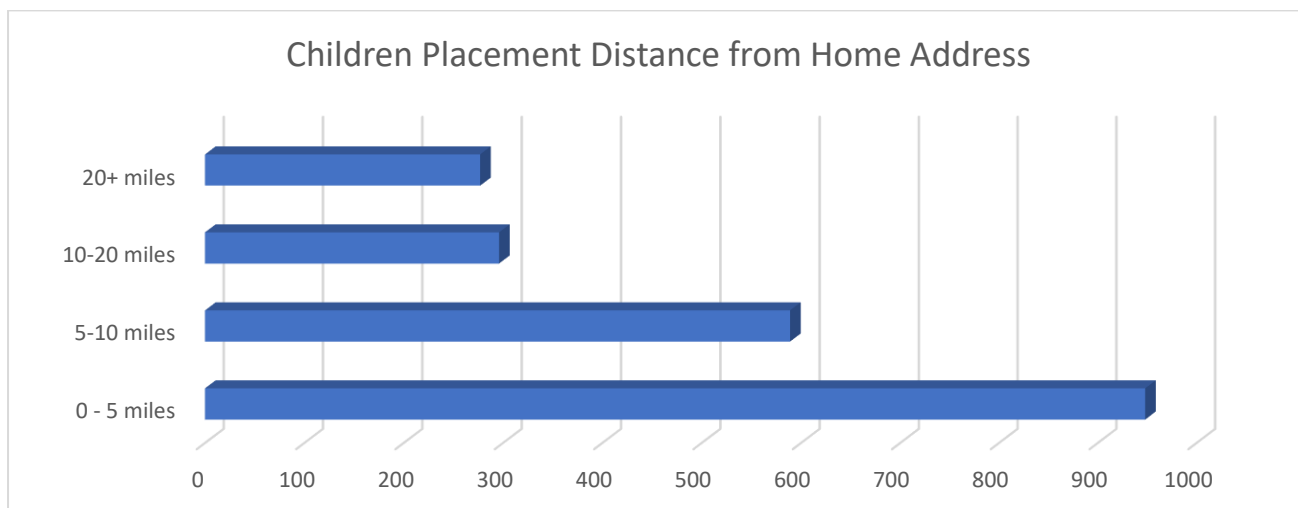
2.13 On 31st March 2024, the majority (78.9%) of children and young people in the care of Birmingham Children’s Trust are placed in a family-based placement; this is a small reduction from 2023 of around 1%. This includes (as a percentage of the whole 50.7% placed in foster care, 15% in the care of family or connected foster care, 9.7% in the care of parents and 3.5% are placed for adoption. The remaining 21.1% are in respect of 10.1% are placed in residential care, 10.4% in supported accommodation and 0.4% in the secure estate). Changes from snapshot on 31st March 2023, note a decrease in foster care by 6%, but this is offset by a 3.4% increase in connected carers and 2% increase in children placed with parents.

Placement Profile of Children in Care (diagram 3)



2.14 The majority (76%) of the children in care of Birmingham Childrens Trust are living in accommodation within 20 miles of their home address, this is reduction from 88.4% of children at 31/03/23. This compares closely with national figures from 2023 where 70% of children in care in England 75% of children in care in the West Midlands, lived within 20 miles of home address. (see Diagram 4 below for Birmingham children).

Distance Children Placed from Birmingham (diagram 4)



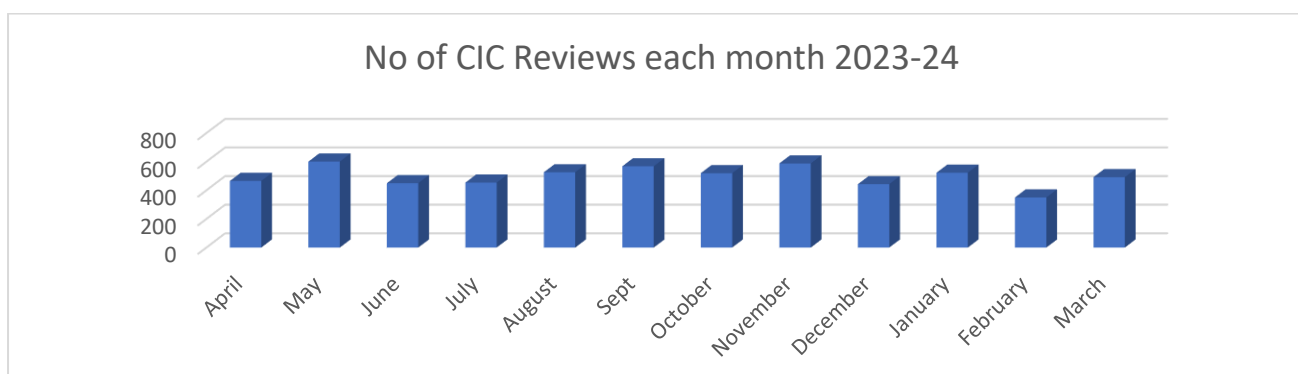
Quantitative information - The IRO Service

3. Child in Care Review Timescales and Frequency

3.1 The IRO service completed **5,981** reviews between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, which reflects continued increase over the previous 3 years (with 5,864 in 2022-23, 5,397 reviews in 2021-22 and 4,932 in 2020-21), which reflects the increase numbers of children in care and increased responsiveness by IROs to children’s unplanned accommodation moves.

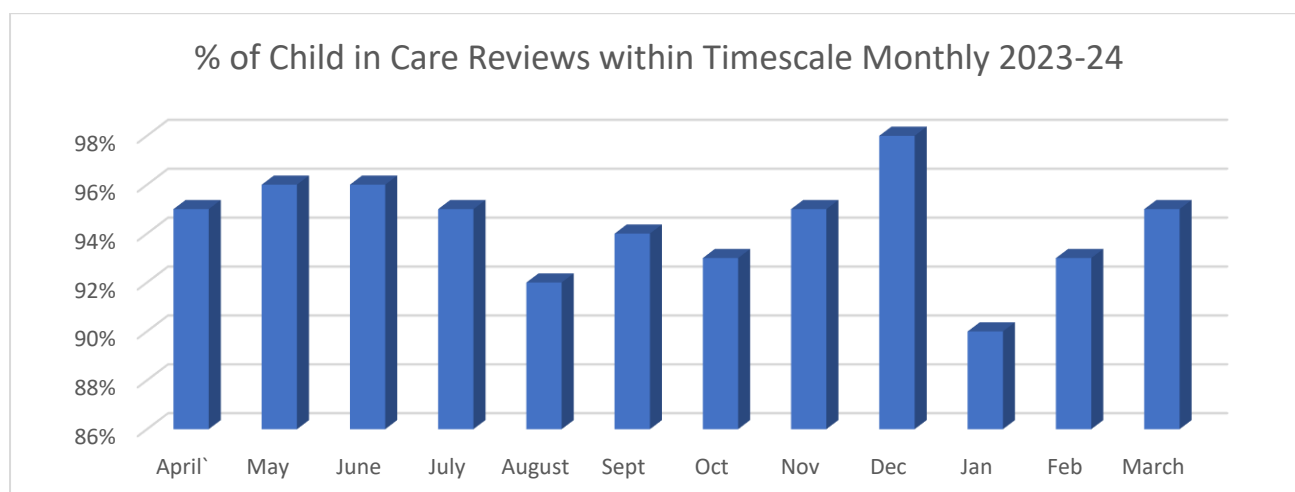
3.2 On average there are **498** reviews chaired each month with peaks of 601 in May 2023 and 588 in November 2023, with the less busy months being February 2024 and December 2023 where there were 350 and 443 respectively. (See Diagram 5 below).

Numbers of Statutory CiC Reviews held per month (Diagram 5)



- 3.3 94% of CIC reviews (5622) were completed within statutory timescale in 2023-24, which means that 359 reviews were out of timescale during the year. This demonstrates that despite the increase in the number of reviews being held, performance in respect of timeliness has remained good. We need to address some issues of late notification of new admissions to care which has influenced timeliness of 1st CIC review, 92 (or 26%) of the 359 reviews out of timescale were 1st reviews and 63 were 2nd reviews (18%).
- 3.4 In respect of venues we have sought to increase the number of reviews taking in place whilst utilising the technologies available to enable some reviews to take place virtually or as hybrid meetings (partly in person and partly virtual). Venues for reviews have been a key issue - in a sample taken in final quarter of the year January to March 2024, 33% of reviews took place where the child lived, 14% at the child's school, 8% at an office venue, (55% completely wholly in person), 4% hybrid virtual and in person and a larger than expected 41% virtual online. It is now expected that CIC reviews will take place in person, and we continue to seek to move away from meetings being held virtually. Work is required across the system to support in person reviews for children. Going forward we will be monitoring and tracking venues on a monthly basis in order to support in person meetings.

Timeliness of Statutory CiC Reviews (Diagram 6)



4 Timeliness of Review Records Availability

- 4.1 The service has continued to look at timeliness of completion of review records as a key measure of our effectiveness, i.e., for children's plans to be progressed effectively the reviews and records that drive the plans need to be available in a timely manner to support social workers and team managers.
- 4.2 Our data and figures for 2023-24 (see table 7 below) show the average days for review recommendations being available to Team Managers, completion of Review Records, and distribution of review records are all averaging well above our statutory expectations. There have been administrative capacity issues which are now being rectified and we recognise that in year we had a higher than usual turnover and new IROs acclimatising to completion of records according to timescale.

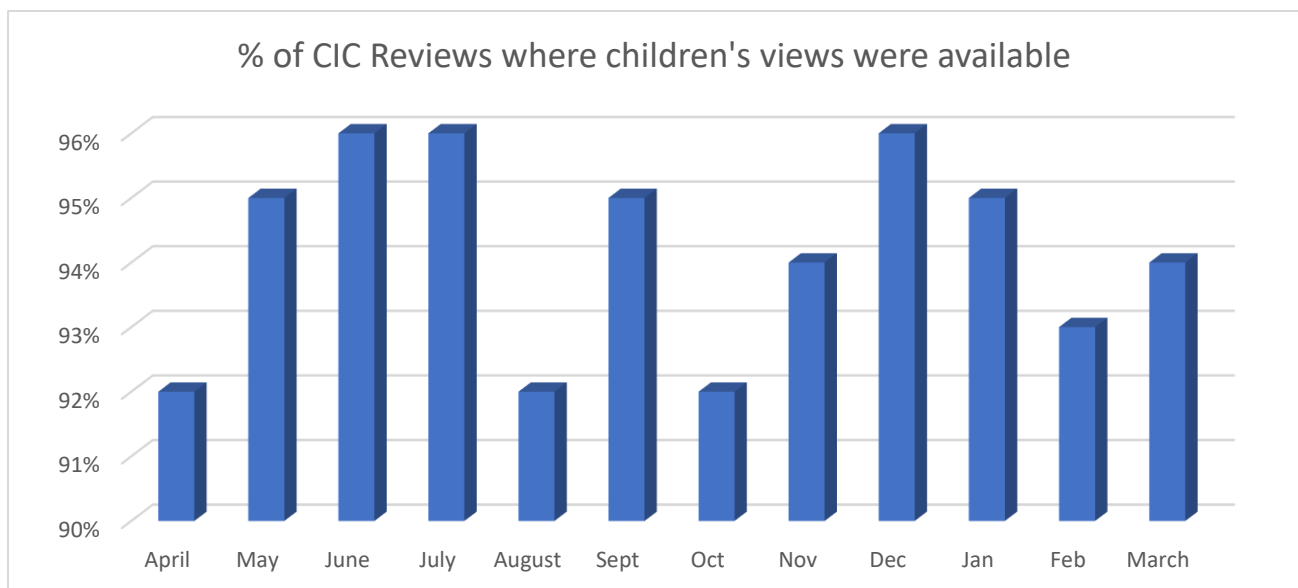
Working days to complete statutory tasks for Review Records. (Table 7)

	Review to TM informed	Review to Record completed	Review to Record distributed
2023-24	8.4 working days	20.9 working days	37.5 working days
2022-23	6.6 working days	18.8 working days	28.2 working days
2021-22	5.82 Working days	14.58 working days	26.05 working days
Statutory Timescales	5 working days	15 working days	20 working days

5. Voice of the Child and Child and Young People Participation.

- 5.1 A primary objective of the IRO is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident in their care plans. A key element in delivering this objective is the measure of the young person’s participation in the Statutory Review of their care plan and care arrangements. Across the year from April 2023 - March 2024, 94% of Children in Care aged 4 yrs and over had participated and had views presented clearly in their reviews.
- 5.2 The overall figure takes into accounts the full range of methods of participation agreed by the DfE (see diagram 7 below). All methods of participation add value to the review process and for some young people it can take considerable effort from them and those working with them to achieve it.

Young Peoples 4-18 Participation in CiC Review totals (Diagram 7)

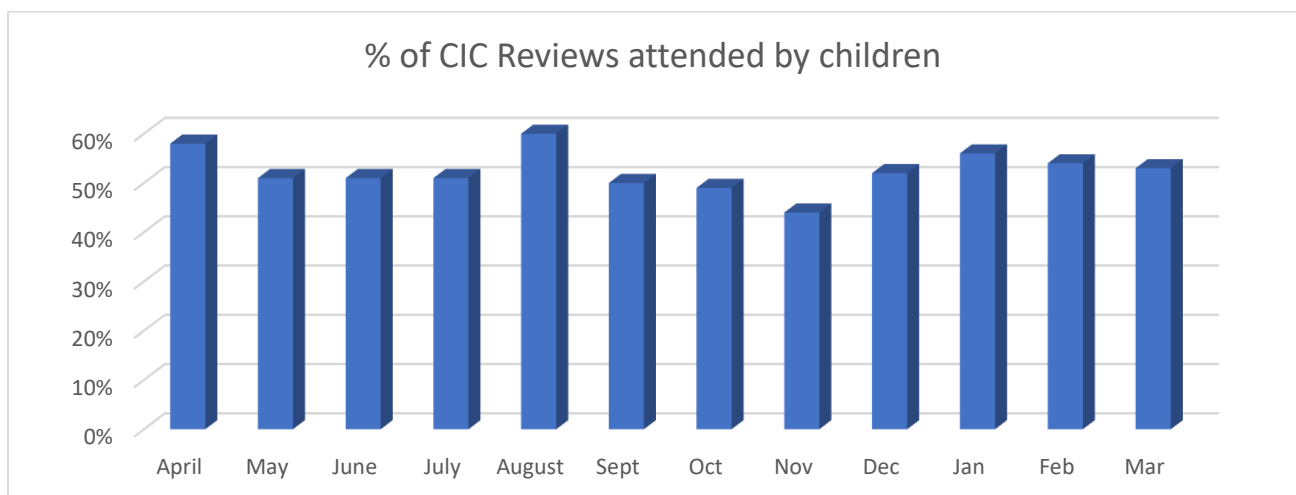


- 5.3 A closer look at the ways that children and young people have taken part in their review (Diagram 8) tells us that in 52.2% of reviews were attended by the child or young person.

This represents the same figure as in 2022-23. We have noted increased attendance as we have moved to more in person meetings. We continue to work to seek to increase attendance, balancing this with feedback surveys that indicate 77% of children and young people surveyed attend at least one review each year and around 84% say they are involved in decisions. Going forward the IRO Service is using learning from participation research concluded at the start of the year to inform practice. The service also values the specific feedback contained in the survey, ie about supporting children doing other activities of interest to them and moving reviews when necessary due to this.

- 5.4 We continue to value development work co-producing with children and young people from Rights and Participation to support greater participation including involvement in deciding venue and who attends., increasing use of “mind of my own” app as a means to convey views in a structured way and the animated video advising on the role of the IRO and functions of the CIC review for children and young people, also available in most frequent languages used by unaccompanied young people – link to video - <https://vimeo.com/750399636/2cca109b4d>. The service continues to use “Have Your Say” consultation documents and use of advocacy.
- 5.5 There is no single reason why children are not motivated to participate. IROs have identified that where the child or young person has not attended in two thirds of these occasions, this was the child or young person’s choice not to attend, and survey findings have suggested for the most part those who chose not to attend do so because they are satisfied about how the review will function and what it will do, but also we have identified a number of children do not attend because the review meeting clashes with an activity they enjoy doing. Supporting children to participate has become more trauma informed.

Children and Young People Attendance at CiC Review (Diagram 8)



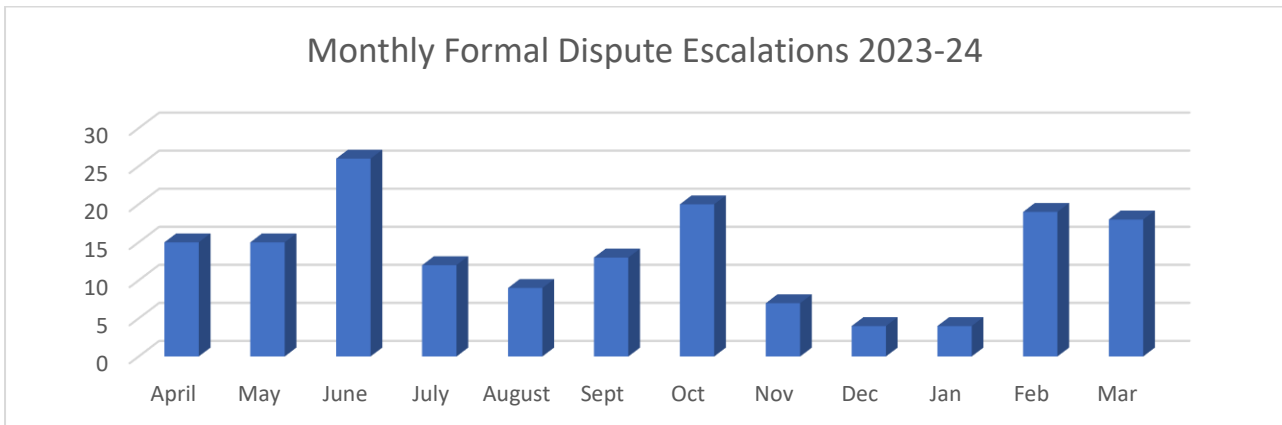
5.6 The key findings from the continuous online feedback survey for children and young people about their CIC reviews remain largely positive, identifying that:

- Feedback was obtained from children and young people of multiple ages and who attended some all or none of their meetings, suggesting we are capturing a good range of experiences.
- The key reasons for not attending reviews: **(i) doing something else**, and **(ii) find them boring**.
- Young people who attended **overwhelmingly reported positive feelings**, predominantly feeling **involved, supported, listened to**, and **happy**.
- **84%** said their IRO **listens to them** and **involves** them in **decisions** all of the time.
- **50% always understand the decisions made** during review meetings and **50% sometimes** do.
- **88%** said someone **contacts them for their views** either sometimes or always when they **cannot attend** their reviews; 71% said this always happens.
- **72%** said they were **always informed** about **what happened** at their review **if they did not attend**, and **22%** said this happened **sometimes**.
- **67%** said they **happy** with **how often they see and talk to their IRO**, while **24% would like to see them more and 10% would like to see them less**.

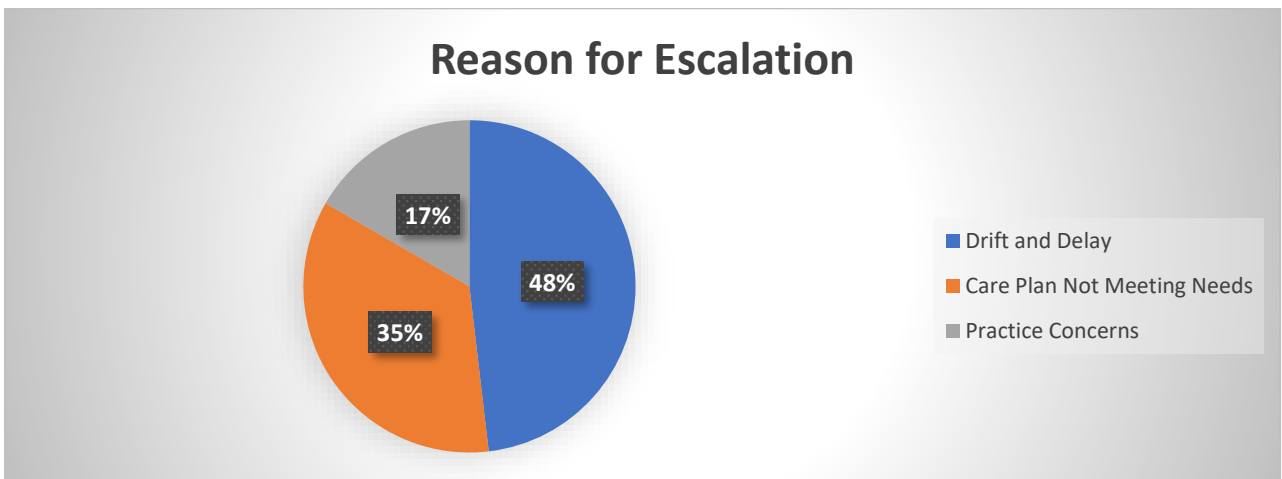
6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 6.1 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO is to raise issues affecting a child's care with the social work service where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's plans progressing, and their needs being met. There is an established Resolution and Escalation process available in Trust procedures and practice. IROs continue to seek resolutions informally to issues through collaborative dialogue with the social worker and team manager before and at each stage of the procedure, but if no resolution is achieved the dispute can, and should be, escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the Trust Director of Practice/Chief Executive and or Cafcass. The process is supported by IRO managers advising Assistant Directors of escalations that are outside of timescales.
- 6.2 There have been 2,943 children in care and there have been 162 formal escalations (a decrease of 13% from previous year).. This shows that in 17 out of every 20 reviews there are no identified issues of delay or concern requiring an IRO escalation. **The reasons for escalations are summarised below and inform the practice improvement themes outlined within section 3 of this report.**

Dispute Resolutions made monthly in 2023-24 (Diagram 9)



Dispute Resolution Reasons for Escalation 2023-24: (Diagram 10)



- 48% of escalations relate to delays in planning and timeliness of progressing various aspects of the child’s care arrangements
- 35% relate to the care plan not meeting the child’s needs
- 17% relate to practice concerns that impact on the care planning and needs of the child.

6.3 The vast majority (60%) of escalations are resolved at either Stage 1 (Team Manager level) or Stage 2 (31%) at Head of Service level, with only 9% progressing to Assistant Director or Director level (Stage 3 and 4).

6.4 The timeliness for resolving of disputes remains fairly stable. The average timescale is 22.9 days from the start to resolution in 2023-24. 54% of escalations (88) were resolved within 20 working day timeframe

6.5 In keeping with the service working within a relational high challenge, high support ethos, IROs are encouraged to positively influencing social work practice and improve outcomes for children through dialogue, negotiation and resolution meetings. Usually this will make resolutions timelier for the child. There were 999 informal escalations reported at 5,981 reviews through the year, which accounts for 16% of reviews.

IRO Service Qualitative information - Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

7 Independent Reviewing Service Quality Assurance Framework and Data Set

7.1 As part of the Quality Assurance Framework, a data set of relevant information in respect of children in care is used to inform us about the effective working of the IRO Service. Performance information is now available through the Eclipse case record system and Performance data collection through Power BI.

7.2 The IRO data set includes details such as:

- a) timeliness and timescales for CIC reviews,
- b) timeliness of completion of review records and sharing of key decisions and outcomes,
- c) availability of social work reports and plans for children,
- d) the participation and attendance of children and young people at reviews, as well as parental involvement,
- e) whether the child has a suitable plan for permanence and CIC reviews and specifically at 2nd CIC reviews,
- f) whether the child's views have been suitability considered in their plans
- g) whether a midpoint check has been undertaken and progress of planning
- h) details of children in care population
- i) details as to escalations both formal and informal,
- i) suitability of care plans and pathway plans being implemented
- j) details about IRO visits and IRO footprint on case record.

The data set is reported to IRO managers monthly and is subsequently reported to the Trust quarterly through quarterly Quality Assurance framework report.

7.3 The Data Set, alongside service audits, learning from resolution and escalations, feedback from children and young people and feedback from IROs and learning from early endings of placements is used to form the Trust's overall QA Framework and reporting.

7.4 Routine monthly service audits focus on 4 areas of practice linked to the needs of the child and overall practice:

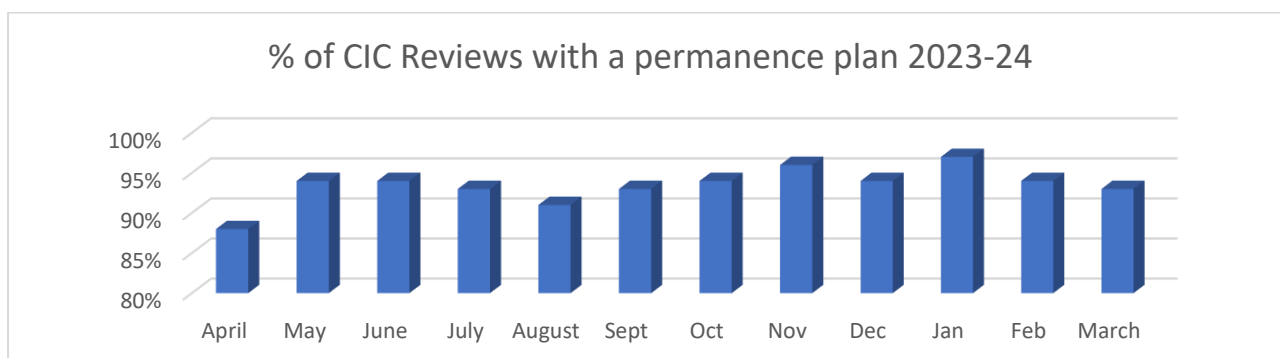
- 1) Timeliness and effectiveness of CIC review meetings and review records, 2) care planning for the child (findings from these are detailed in the quality of care planning in section 11 above)
- 3) the Voice of the Child (some finding identified Voice of the child and participation in section 8 above)
- 4) Monitoring and oversight of children's circumstances and cases.

These are completed monthly and audit previous 12 months involvement with the child, and wider learning is reported quarterly through a report.

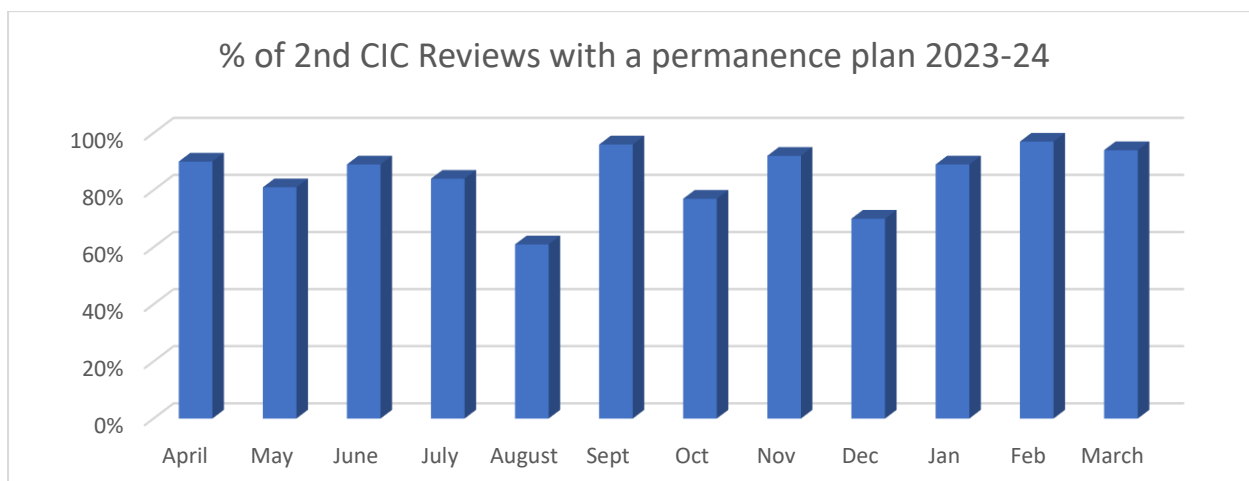
8. Overview of Permanence and Care Planning

- 8.1 The IRO Quality Assurance data identifies if children have a plan for permanence at each review and have recorded each month reviews where a child has a permanence plan. Overall, in 93.7% of reviews in year a permanence plan was in place this compares the same as 2022-23 (93.9%) , with Diagram 11 below identifies the percentage for each month (to the nearest whole number). Overall, of these plans for permanence 86% were single track, 10% twin track and 5% triple track. (rounded to nearest whole number) With multi track plans being mostly at 1st and 2nd reviews.
- 8.2 In addition, a permanence plan for the child is a statutory requirement at their 2nd CIC Review. Overall, there were 85.5% of 2nd CIC reviews where the child had a permanence plan in place, which is like 87.7% in 2022-23. Diagram 12 below identifies the percentage for each month (rounded to nearest whole number).
- 8.3 The data for permanence plans indicates generally continuing good practice to ensure children have suitable and timely permanence plans. IRO observation is that plans are clearer when social work practitioners have used care planning meetings have been effectively used. Additionally social worker turnover has impacted some delay in progressing plans.

Percentage of CIC Reviews in 2023-24 where a permanence plan was in place (Diagram 11)



% of 2nd CIC Reviews in 2023-24 where a permanence plan was in place (Diagram 12)



- 8.4 The level of specific types of permanence plan identified for children and young people in reviews as a percentage of all reviews are:
- Adoption as single-track plan in 9.8% of reviews and as part of parallel plan in a further 4.6% of reviews
 - Long-Term Fostering as a single-track plan in 37.3% of reviews and as part of a parallel plan in a further 8.4% of reviews
 - Long Term Residential Home as a single-track plan in 7.1% of reviews and as part of a parallel plan in a further 1.9% of reviews
 - Return to family or parents care as a single-track plan in 7.3% of reviews and as part of a parallel plan in a further 11.6% of reviews.
 - SGO/CAO as a single-track plan in 5.1% of reviews and as part of a parallel plan in a further 4.1% of reviews
 - Supported living in the community was a single-track plan in 11% of reviews and a parallel plan in a further 2% of reviews (reflecting this is a plan usually for 16 and 17 yr. olds and would not be considered for parallel planning for children and young people below that age).

- 8.5 Some of the findings from service audits in relation to care and permanence plans were:
- In audits overall in 92% of reviews a plan of permanence is in place and most of these had a single-track plan, often the reasons for no plan being available was lack of clarity and articulation of the plan rather than no plan.
 - 78% of children live with a permanent carer, and two thirds of these that required formal matching had been matched.
 - Audits were confident that care arrangements were suitably covered in all reviews.

We plan to ensure our audits are more focused on the analysis of quality of care and permanence plans

- 8.6 IROs ensure in reviews that the legal status of the child remains appropriate for the child's care plan and also maintain a significant role in reviewing plans for court to ensure that they meet children's needs and that undue drift and delay is avoided. IROs have direct access to Independent Legal Advice to enable them to effectively challenge plans. The IRO service's footprint is more visible in care plans to court and in communication with Guardians, and there are references to their recommendations in social work statements.
- 8.7 The LTF Early Ending work has continued to contribute to learning and information in respect of the quality of some care plans for children. The key findings identified have been extensive, however in noting key issues below it should be noted that this concerns a more limited number of children's cases and is concerned with a default position of a disrupted permanent placement which would likely indicate some more negative impacts for the child or young person or aspects of practice. Learning has focused on a) Issues

for Foster Carers b) Assessment and Support for Foster Carers c) Practice Issues for Social Workers d) Family and Relationship Issues. We have worked with colleagues in Trust Practice Hub, Children in care Teams and Fostering service with action planning learning.

8.8 Key learning is regularly shared with the Trust - examples of areas of practice improvement identified include:

- Greater clarity of how decisions are made about placement and plans for the child, not just reliant on CIC review records and care plans.
- When consideration as to the needs of children remaining and loss they experience when a sibling moves from a permanent placement where the siblings have been placed together.
- In respect of above develop of shared narratives of family respective of each child's age and development
- There needs to be greater clarity of significant people in a child's life, significant people no longer in their life, and important memory and memorable dates.
- Identified learning has been used by teams across the Trust to inform working with children and carers in permanent fostering arrangements.
- In long term foster placements children aged between 12 and 15yrs are most vulnerable to early endings, this is reflected in a high proportion due to changing gender identity and some cultural issues not being wholly considered in permanence matching.

9. Analysis of Safeguarding Issues for Children in Care

9.1 Of the 2300 children in care at 31/03/2024, 1703 (or 74%) of the children had experienced some form of abuse or neglect that had contributed to their need to be in care. Therefore, for a large majority of children in care the impact and trauma of experiencing abuse and neglect requires intervention and support to establish protection from further harm, and emotional support to address the trauma and impact.

9.2 We would ordinarily expect that accommodation and care planning for children will be mindful of safeguarding needs and ensure that the children and young people receive the care, safety and protection they require. We positively promote that where appropriate the impact of trauma and abuse is addressed through therapeutic work such as that offered by TESS.

9.3 Our data indicates that for most children in care in Birmingham they are safeguarded and cared for with issues of trauma and harm being addressed through interventions. We note then for most children their accommodation and plans are acting to ensure their safety and wellbeing. Our CiC Reviews provide an effective forum to consider the safety and welfare of our children in care. We know that in 518 reviews the child's safety was considered to be requiring specific attention by the Trust and/or its key partners, whereby IROs have subsequently sought assurance that these risks have been mitigated and addressed.

- 9.4 For those children and young people where they are experiencing a specific or multiple safeguarding concerns at the time of the review, these related to:
- children and young people being missing from care
 - Children being exposed to risk due to child sexual exploitation and child abuse, and in all situations IROs were ensuring due safety planning is in place.
 - Children involved in criminal activity, affiliation to gangs and risk of child criminal exploitation.
 - Children at risk as a result of substance misuse issues
 - Children identified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) who were usually 16 and 17 yr. olds and therefore at risk of involvement in concerning relationships and lifestyle.
 - Other matters including mental health issues including self-harming, experiencing bullying, concern in respect of online including safety sending and receiving explicit abusive images, matters where children had made allegations against carers or previous carers, exposure to relationship domestic violence, and sexually harmful behaviour.
- 9.7 The Trust is aware of these issues and have services to support children and young people including EmpowerU (exploitation hub), ensuring missing from care receive return interviews, and working with Youth Offending Service for those involved with the criminal justice system. There is also focused support through PEPs for those children and young people not in education or training

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