



# **Torbay Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report**

**2023-24**

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## Executive Summary

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The Annual Report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. It evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the Independent Reviewing Service in the planning and outcomes for Torbay's cared for children and young people and ensures that Torbay Council, as a corporate parent, is discharging its statutory responsibilities towards them and remains ambitious in what it achieves with its cared for children and young people in Torbay. The Independent Reviewing Officers have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that care plans for children effectively address their needs, consider Torbay's cared for children and young people's ascertainable views and opinions and improve outcomes for them.

The report demonstrates the continuous development of the Independent Reviewing Service over the last year and its role in the continuous journey of practice development in Torbay. The report also identifies areas of strength and areas for further development.

The stability of the service has been enhanced as all vacant posts have been filled and it is positive to report that the service has continued to be supported by a permanent IRO workforce.

Further to the above, both the Service Manager and Head of Service have been in post for a significant period of time, ensuring further stability for the service as a whole. Service stability is undoubtedly a factor in the continued progress of the IRO service and delivering better outcomes for cared for children across Torbay. An example of this is the increase in efficiency, with 803 cared for reviews taking place in 2023/24. This is an increase from the 740 reviews which took place the previous year. The timeliness of reviews has also increased to 96% within statutory timescale, compared with 94% the previous year and slightly exceeds the target set for this year of 95% of reviews being within statutory timescale.

The number of cared for children decreased over the year and stood at 298 as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 compared with 314 at the same point the previous year. The decrease was due to a combination of preventative work that reduced the number of children becoming cared for in the year along with a substantial reduction in unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) presenting in Torbay.

The number of babies being cared for has remained relatively stable. There were 28 children under the age of two that became cared for in the year compared to 24 in the previous year.

With regards to gender, this shifted significantly from the previous year with 54% of newly cared for children being male in 2023/24 compared to 65% being male in 2022/23. 0.3% identified as non-binary, with the remaining 45.7% being female. However, it should be noted that this is against a trend whereby all the unaccompanied asylum seeking children presenting to the Local Authority in 2022/23 were male. Therefore, the data relating to gender last year was somewhat skewed.

There has been a shift back towards boys being more likely to go missing than girls with a ratio of 57% boys versus 43% girls of all missing cared for children in the year 2023/24

Foster placement sufficiency in Torbay continues to be a challenge with the number of children placed more than 20 miles away still being significantly above the statistical neighbours and national average. The figure of 34% for 2023/24 is slightly higher than the previous year (31% in 2022/23).

There is evidence to suggest that permanency for Torbay's cared for children has continued to improve, with further progress in adoptions and staying put arrangements coupled with SGOs all out performing statistical neighbours and national averages.

Although long-term stability overall remained similar to the previous year, the picture fluctuates significantly by age group with the 12-14 year old children experiencing more instability in terms of more than one placement in a two year period. This could possibly be attributed to the fact that these

early teenage years are pivotal in young people's lives and are critical in terms of their development and crucial transitions such as into secondary education. It may also be indicative of needs not being captured effectively via regular assessments to inform care planning.

43 young people ceased to be cared for in the 2023/24 year who were aged 18 or over at that point. 25 of those were in foster placements at the point they ceased to be cared for. Of those 25, 13 remained Staying Put with their foster carers. That is 52% of children in foster care ceasing to be cared for aged 18 or over who Stayed Put. Of the remaining 12, 2 left care to live with a person with no parental responsibility, 7 went on to live in an independent living arrangement and 3 were listed as 'ceased for any other reason'.

There has continued to be challenges within the partnership in terms of promoting the health of our cared for children. Last year, there was an improvement in all areas of health related key performance indicators compared to 2021/22. Annual review health assessments have dropped from 91% to 79% as of the end of March 2024. Dental checks have dropped significantly from 83% to 42% as of the end of March 2024. Immunisations have also dropped from 82% to 55%. All of these are now below the national average and require further and immediate investigation and action.

A long-standing challenge and an area identified again for continued improvement over the next year is children and young people's participation in their cared for reviews. However, this year there has been an improvement in participation. In 2022/23, participation was 79%, whereas this year (2023/24), it has increased to 87%. Advocacy sufficiency has been identified as a potential contributory factor here and this is an area of commissioning that is a current focus.

The report concludes with a review of the previous year's action plan along with a set of key improvement objectives for the service over the year 2024/25.

# 1. Introduction – Purpose of Service and Legal Context

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1.1 The Safeguarding and Reviewing Service consists of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). The Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook (2010) and is linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which was introduced in April 2011.

1.2 The functions and requirements of the IRO and the service as a whole are:-

- To ensure all Cared for Children and Young People have a named IRO who, as far as reasonably possible, remain a consistent figure in the child's life, during their journey through care.
- There should be the same IRO for sibling groups where this is reasonably possible and appropriate.
- The IRO should chair the child or young person's Cared for Child Reviews (within 28 days of the child being in care, then within 3 months after the initial review, and every six months thereafter).
- The IRO should promote, and ensure that due regard is given to, the voice of the child in their cared for child review, care plan, permanence planning and care arrangements.
- The IRO should ensure that plans for the child are based on a detailed and informed assessment, which is up to date, effective and provides a real and genuine response to each individual child's needs.
- The IRO should meet with the child and consult with him or her, making sure that the child understands what is happening to them, can make a genuine contribution to their plans, fully understands the implications of any changes, and understands how an advocate could help them in their cared for child reviews.
- The IRO should ensure the child is aware of his or her entitlements from the Local Authority.
- The IRO should ensure the child is aware that they are entitled to legal representation (either directly or via a court appointed CAFCAS guardian).
- The IRO should be alive to, and if necessary, take action to prevent any unnecessary delays in care and permanence planning for children in the care of the Local Authority as well as the delivery of services to them.
- The IRO should have full oversight of the Local Authority as the corporate parent in order to ensure care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes, feelings, needs and aspirations.
- The IRO should provide challenge and support to social workers and their managers to ensure the best life chances for children via the delivery of purposeful social work that has clear outcomes leading to positive impacts for children.
- The IRO should have access to an effective means of challenging the Local Authority including, a Dispute Resolution Procedure, with the ability to convey concerns to CAFCASS and access to independent legal advice where appropriate.

## 2. Profile of Torbay's Independent Reviewing Service

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- 2.1 The Safeguarding and Reviewing Service is a Local Authority wide service that sits within the Children's Services Directorate of Torbay Council. However, the service is managed independently to the statutory social work services to maintain objective oversight and provide appropriate challenge and support to social workers and Team Managers, to ensure the needs of children are placed above any other matters that may give rise to conflicts of interest for the Local Authority.
- 2.2 Management capacity in the IRO Service includes a permanent Head of Service (appointed in December 2021) who reports to the Divisional Director for Safeguarding, and a Service Manager who reports directly to the Head of Service. This has provided the service with the management capacity to lead and develop the service and provide the levels of support, supervision and monitoring necessary to deliver high quality practice.
- 2.3 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service had a staffing establishment of 7.7 FTE IROs. The team consisted of:
- Permanent staff (7.3 fte).
  - Vacant posts (0.4 fte).
- 2.4 The amalgamation of the 0.4fte vacancy (that has strategically been held vacant for the last year) and a 0.6fte post, due to an IRO retiring in April 2024, has resulted in the successful appointment of a full time IRO who will be in post at the beginning of July 2024.
- 2.5 The service continues to have no reliance on agency staff, which in turn has increased stability within the team and has had a positive impact on Torbay's cared for children as a result of children having a consistent IRO. Furthermore, there has been no turnover of IROs during the last year and the only planned leaver going into April 2024 is due to an IRO retiring after lengthy service in Torbay.
- 2.6 Ensuring staff wellbeing is a management priority in the IRO service. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 38 days sickness had been recorded for the year across the entire service. This is an increase from 17 days on the previous year however this is due to a known personal issue relating to one member of staff, who is being appropriately supported. The IROs flexible approach and willingness to ensure reviews are covered has resulted in minimal impact on children's care planning and reviews arising from sickness.
- 2.7 All IROs are skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced children's social workers, with clear minimum requirements of five years post qualifying and some social work management experience being essential elements of the role. Some of the IROs in the Service have more than 20 years' practice experience.
- 2.8 The average allocation of children for an IRO in Torbay has risen slightly against what is recommended within the IRO handbook. This is due to an increase since December in children being made subject to child protection plans as opposed to an increase in cared for children. However, it is anticipated that when the new IRO is in post this will again reduce to the recommended level.
- 2.9 It should also be noted that the IROs have a dual role as Child Protection Chairs. However, this particular aspect of their role is not commented on in this report which is confined to cared for children.

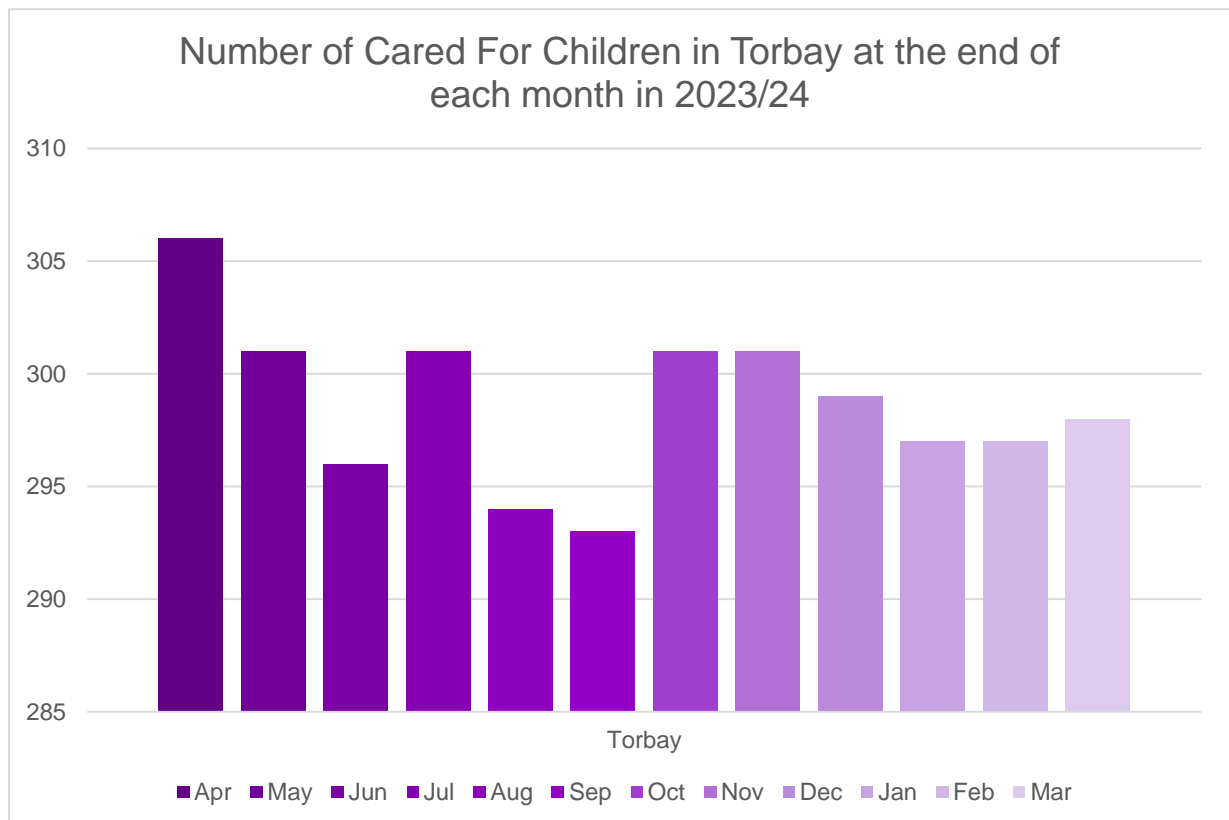
### 3. Profile of Torbay's Cared for Children

- 3.1 Torbay's cared for population stood at 298 children and young people on the 31st March 2024. This is down from 314 at the same time in 2023.
- 3.2 The rate of cared for children decreased by 2% over the year, but is still 23% higher than the SN average.
- 3.3 The rate per 10,000 children also remains significantly higher than the national average, at 118 compared to 71 nationally. However, this is slightly down on last year's 124 per 10,000

#### Number of children cared for during the year by calendar month

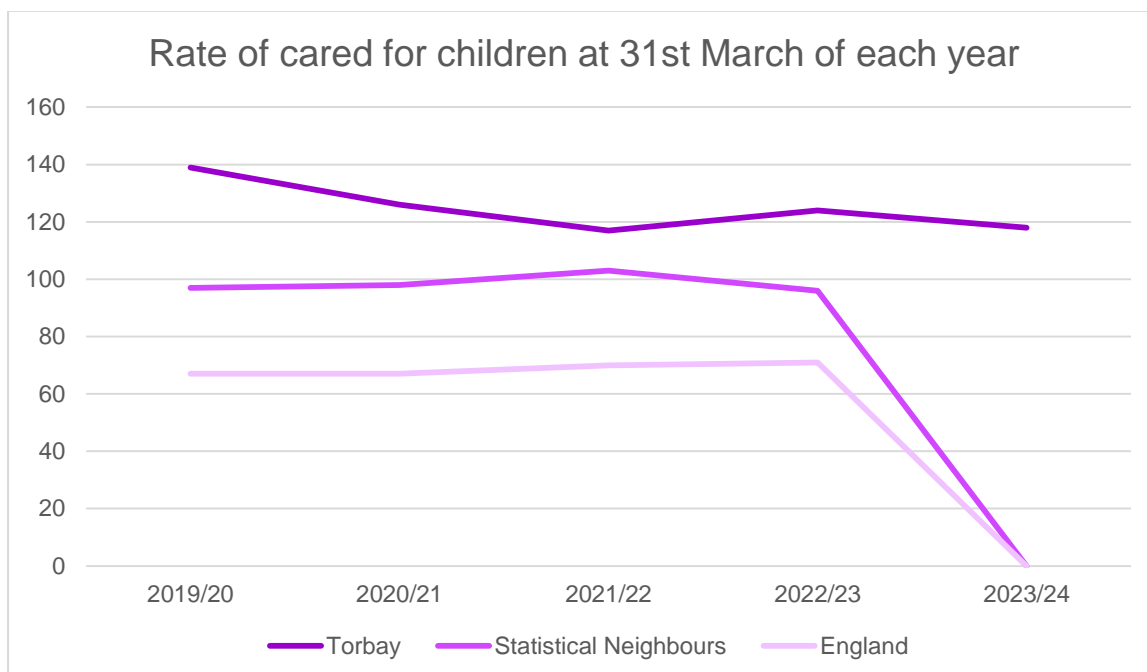
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
<b>Torbay</b>	306	301	296	301	294	293	301	301	299	297	297	298

- 3.4 As can be seen from the graph below, Torbay's cared for population fluctuated at the start of the year but stabilised to just below 300 from December 2023. This is in part a consequence of a number of the UASC that presented the previous year at the assessed age of 17 turning 18 at the end of 2023.



### Rate of cared for children per 10,000 children on 31<sup>st</sup> March each year

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torbay	142	139	126	117	124	118
Statistical Neighbours	83	97	98	103	96	-
England	65	67	67	70	71	-

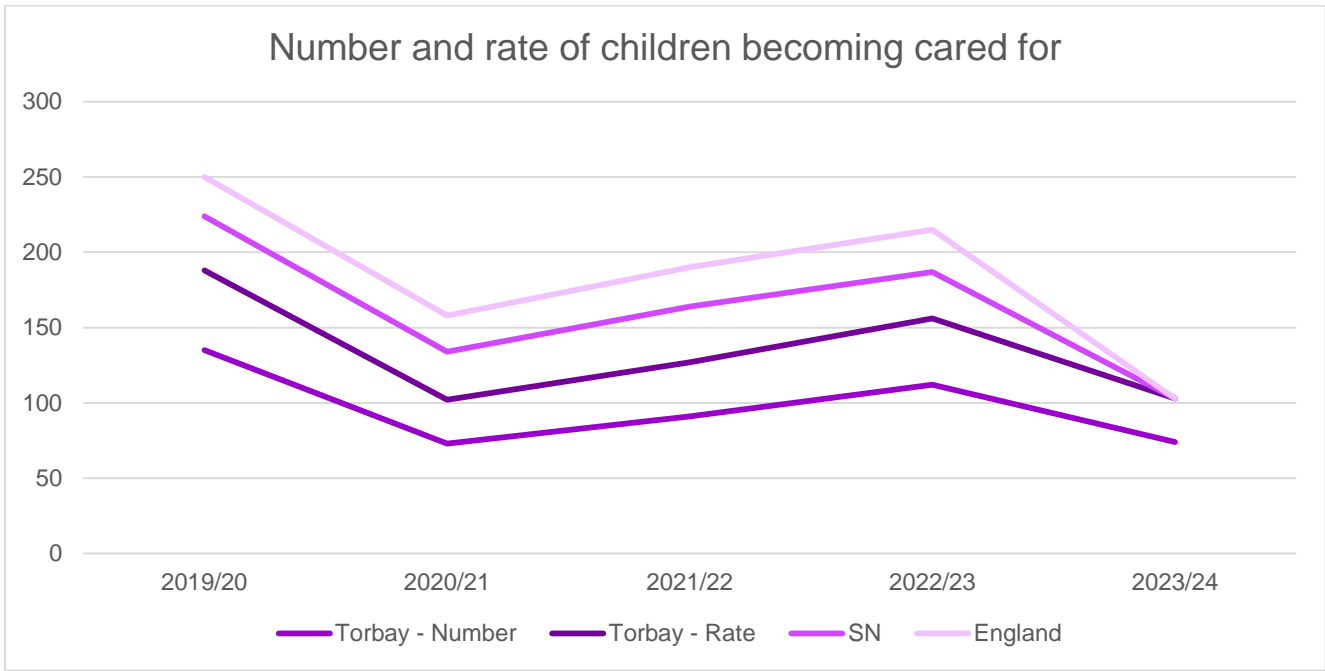


3.5 The rate of children becoming cared for children decreased significantly in 2023/24, with 74 new children becoming cared for during the year compared to 112 in the previous year. This brings the rate in which children are becoming cared for in line with SNs and National average. However, due to the legacy of historically high numbers of cared for children, Torbay's rate of cared for children per 10,000 children (see above) is projected to remain high for some years to come. The focus here, alongside preventative work, is reunification where safe to do so, as well as other forms of permanency such as SGO.

### Children becoming cared for children

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torbay - number	135	73	91	112	74
Torbay - rate	53	29	36	44	29
SN - rate	36	32	37	31	-
England - rate	26	24	26	28	-

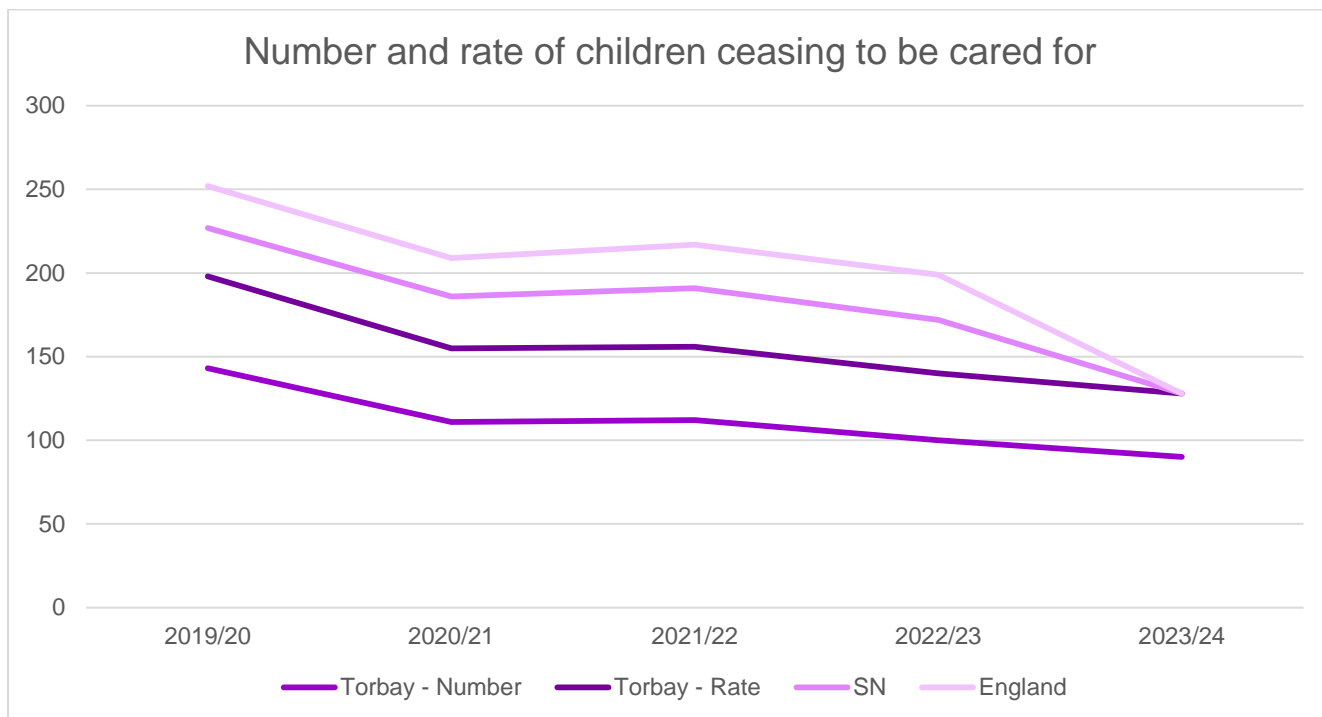




3.6 The rate of children ceasing to be cared for fell by 5% compared to 2022/23 and continues to remain favourable compared to SNs and the National average. This has been a trend for the last three to four years but accelerating the decrease in cared for children in Torbay remains a significant challenge in the main due to the legacy high cared for numbers along with historically higher levels of new into care over previous years.

**Children ceasing to be cared for children**

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Torbay - number	143	111	112	100	90
Torbay - rate	55	44	44	40	38
SN - rate	29	31	35	32	-
England - rate	25	23	26	27	-



3.7 The proportion of children in foster care has risen slightly from 73% in 2022/23 to 75% in 2023/24. This has increased now to above the national average of 74%. This is most likely a result of a number of the UASC presenting in the previous year who needed to be placed in other care placements, such as semi-independent accommodation, who then turned 18 years old in the year 2023/24.

3.8 There were 11 children adopted throughout the year 2023/24 out of 97 total children who ceased to be cared for, equating to 12%. This compares favourably with the Torbay figure of 4% in 2022/23 and 3% in 2021/22 and demonstrates the strength that Torbay is showing in leading the way across the South West Peninsular with regards to adoption performance.

#### ***Cared for children on 31st March 2024 by placement type***

<b>Placements at 31st March 2024</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Foster placement with relative or friend	Inside local authority	23	8%
	Outside local authority	16	5%
Placement with other foster carer:	Inside local authority	109	37%
	Outside local authority	76	26%
Secure unit		0	0%
Homes and hostels (residential care, K2 code)		16	5%
Hostels and other supportive residential placements (H5 code)		15	5%
Residential schools		0	0%
Other residential settings (codes R1, R2, R3, R5)		1	0%
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)		5	2%
Placed with own parents		24	8%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently		0	0%

Placements at 31st March 2024	Number	%
Other placements (Z1) ( <i>DfE guidance suggests use for unregulated foster care only</i> )	13	4%

The national picture is as follows:

	2021/22	2022/23
Foster care (U codes)	70%	54%
Placed for adoption (A codes)	3%	3%
Placed with own parents (code P1)	7%	9%
Children's homes (code K2)	16%	21%
Hostels / Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes regulations (code H5)		
Secure units (code K1)		
Residential schools (code S1)	-	-
Other residential (adult residential care homes, NHS provision, family centres, mother and baby units, YOIs or prison - R codes)	1%	4%
Independent living (code P2)	2%	5%
Other (mostly unregulated foster placements with family / friends, code Z1)	2%	4%

**NOTE:** The national data groups several codes together (K2 children's homes, H5 supported living and K1 secure units), so comparisons are not straightforward, but in general the national and local pictures are similar.

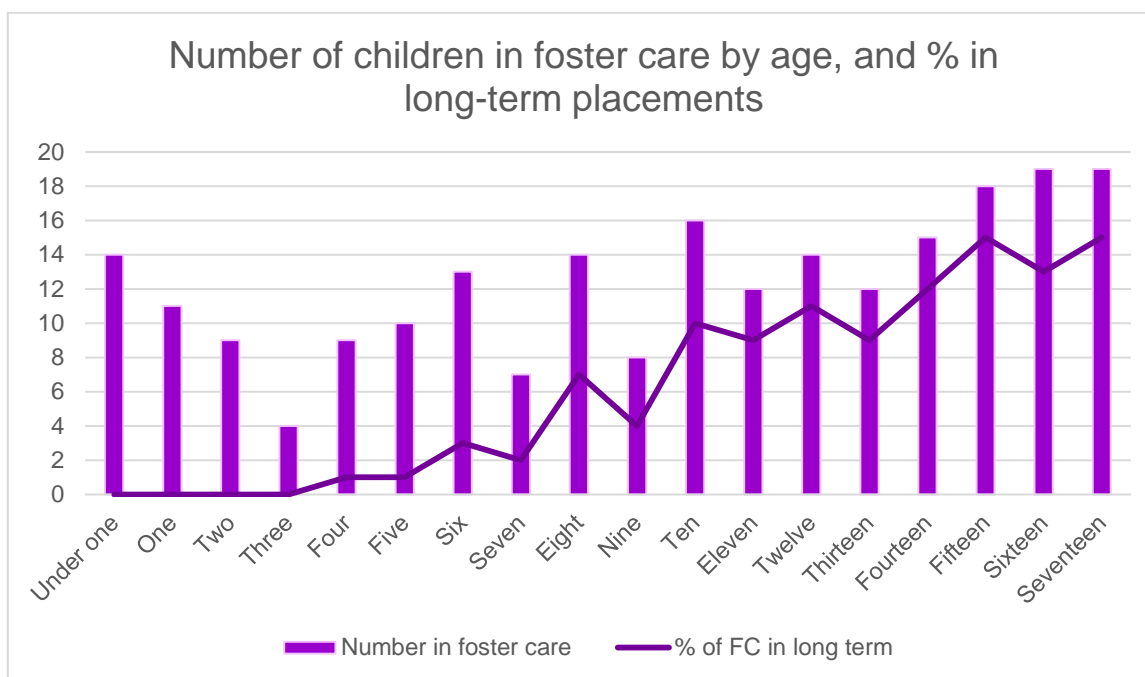
### In-house foster care

- 3.9 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, 77% of children in foster care in Torbay were in in-house provision. Although this is now close to the national average of 76% and substantially higher than last year's figure of 57%, there remain challenges with in-house foster placement sufficiency connected to factors such as the aging profile of long-term foster carers who have retired and the challenges in recruiting new foster carers against a backdrop of a cost of living crisis.
- 3.10 49% of children in foster care were in long-term placements at the end of the year, an increase from 39% in the previous year and this is a reflection of more robust permanency planning and tracking through Permanence Panel. Long-term matching also allows decisions to be made with children and their foster carers around reduced visiting which in turn allows cared for children to experienced childhoods that feature less intrusion from the Local Authority.

Placement type	Own provision	Private	Voluntary / third sector	Total children in placement type
U1 Foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s) – long term fostering	3	0	0	3
U2 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	0	0	0	0
U3 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	22	0	0	22
U4 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – long term fostering	9	10	1	20
U5 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	11	0	0	11
U6 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	63	21	0	84
Number by provider type	108	31	1	140
% by provider type	77%	22%	1%	
England % by provider type, 2023	76%	18%	6%	

### *Number and % of children in long-term fostering placements by age*

Age	Number of CfC	Number in foster care	Number in long-term FC	% of FC in long-term
0	17	14	0	0%
1	11	11	0	0%
2	11	9	0	0%
3	5	4	0	0%
4	11	9	1	11%
5	13	10	1	10%
6	14	13	3	23%
7	8	7	2	29%
8	14	14	7	50%
9	9	8	4	50%
10	18	16	10	63%
11	15	12	9	75%
12	16	14	11	79%
13	16	12	9	75%
14	28	15	12	80%
15	28	18	15	83%
16	27	19	13	68%
17	37	19	15	79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>49%</b>



3.11 The number of babies aged under 1 becoming cared for children as a percentage of all newly cared for children has increased to 28% from 21% the previous year. The high percentage of babies becoming cared for strongly suggests that care proceedings are being initiated in a timely manner and children are being safeguarded at the outset of their lives, not left to experience chronic neglect and/or abuse over their formative years. It also indicates the effective use of the Unborn Baby Panel and assessments being completed pre-birth in order to inform care planning immediately following birth. It is also encouraging to see that the percentage of children aged 13 to 17 has reduced to 16% from 41% last year. However, there is a need to facture in the significant reduction of UASC this year compared to last year. Nevertheless, the trend is showing a slight downward trajectory which is important given the correlation between children coming into care late on in their childhoods and poor outcomes as they transition into adulthood along with other issues such as placement stability. This is also likely to reflect the impact of investment and focus on high quality edge of care services, provided through the Building Futures team.

**Number of children becoming cared for in 2023/24 by age**

Age year	Number of children becoming cared for	%
0	19	23%
1	5	6%
2	6	7%
3	4	5%
4	5	6%
5	5	6%
6	5	6%
7	4	5%
8	5	6%
9	2	2%
10	6	7%

Age year	Number of children becoming cared for	%
11	1	1%
12	2	2%
13	4	5%
14	3	4%
15	3	4%
16	1	1%
17	2	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	

3.12 Looking at the proportion of children ceasing to be cared for by end reason in 2023/24 compared to the England average, Torbay's proportion of children adopted was higher than the national average, 12% compared to 9% nationally. The proportion of young people Staying Put post 18 was also higher than average, 18% compared to 13% nationally. The proportion ceasing to be cared for due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted was in line with the national figure, at 14% compared to 13% nationally. The majority of SGOs made in 2023/24 made were to connected people (17 out of 24), however there were still 6 children who had special guardianship orders made to previous foster carers who were not family or friends. Overall, this demonstrates a positive picture for cared for children in terms of permanency within a forever family during childhood.

### *Children who ceased to be cared for in 2023/24 by end reason*

End reason and code	England 2022/23	Torbay	
		Number	%
Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	-	1	1%
Adopted (E11, E12)	9%	12	12%
Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (UASCs) (E15)	1%	8	8%
Aged 18 and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements) (E17)	15%	17	18%
Care ceased for any other reason (E8)	10%	5	5%
Care taken by another local authority (E3)	4%	2	2%
Child moved abroad (E16)	-	0	0%
Died (E2)	-	0	0%
Left care to live with parents, relatives or other person, who had no parental responsibility (E13)	6%	3	3%
Moved to independent living (with no formalised support) (E6)	3%	3	3%
Moved to independent living with supported accommodation (E5)	12%	9	9%
Residence order or child arrangement order granted (E41)	3%	2	2%
Returned home to live with parents or other person with parental responsibility which was not part of the care planning process (E4B)	4%	1	1%
Returned home to live with parents or other person with parental responsibility which was part of the care planning process (E4A)	17%	10	10%
Sentenced to custody (E9)	1%	0	0%
Special guardianship order to former FCs who are relatives or friends (E45)	12%	15	15%
Special guardianship order to former FCs who are not relatives or friends (E46)		6	6%
Special guardianship order to relatives or friends who were not former FCs (E47)		2	2%
Special guardianship order to people who were neither relatives or friends or former FCs (E48)		1	1%

End reason and code	England 2022/23	Torbay	
		Number	%
Moved to residential care funded by adult children's social care (E7)	2%	0	0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>97</b>	

**For special guardianship orders specifically –**

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
The number of children leaving care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order in the year	19	14	18
The number of children ceasing to be looked after in the year	112	100	90
% of children leaving care as a result of an SGO	17%	14%	20%

3.13 A smaller percentage of children returned home in a managed way this year, 10% compared with 13% last year. This will need further work in terms of IRO oversight in ensuring all cared for child reviews consider the viability of reunification within the annual cared for review and ensuring that plans for children returning home are made in a timely way and monitored closely to prevent drift and delay. A piece of cross service work that triangulates the social work care planning with Building Futures interventions as well as IRO oversight will be developed over the next year to promote improvements in this area of work, alongside the creation of a specific Reunification Policy and training schedule.

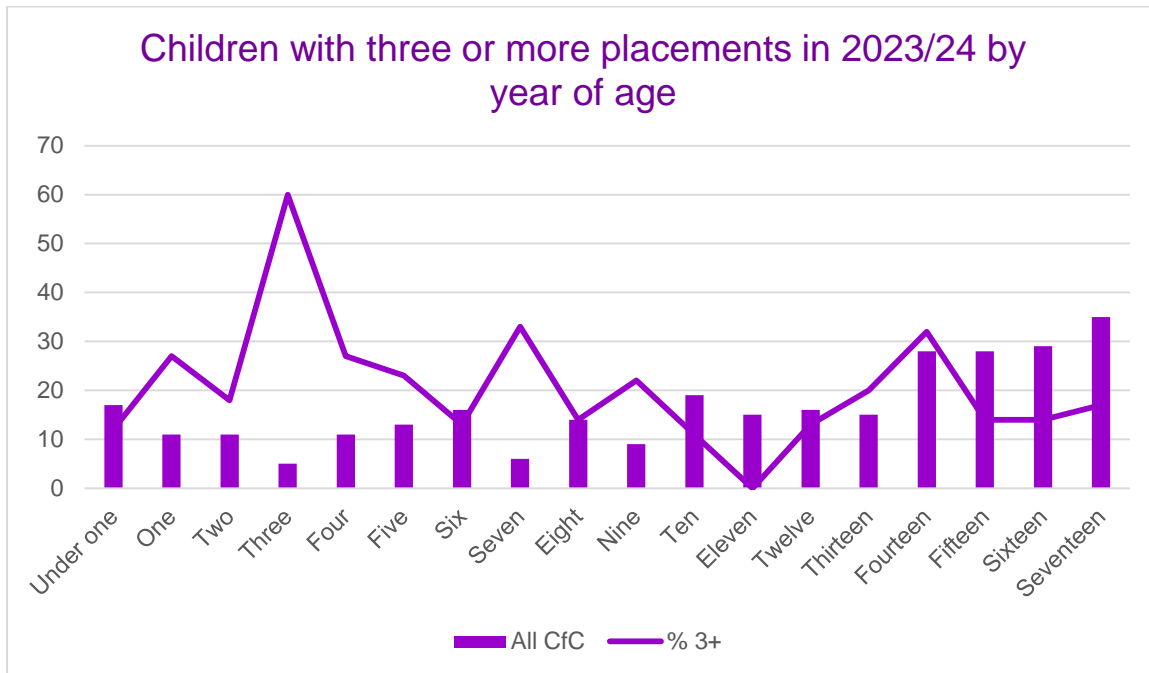
3.14 The number of young people aged 18 that remained in their foster placements as a Staying Put arrangement has reduced slightly this year (18% for 2023/24 compared to 22% the year prior, and 13% the year before that). This inevitably provides stability for these young people as they transition into adulthood. However, this needs to be balanced against the impact on placement sufficiency going forward.

3.15 Short-term stability has improved slightly in 2023/24 with 18% of children having three or more placements compared with 21% in 2022/23. This now compares favourably to the national figure which stands at 22% and that of SNs, which stands at 20%. As can be seen from the table below, the age group most likely to experience instability is the 14 plus cohort (taking the three and below out of the equation where placement changes are usually due to planned moves from emergency to foster care and then final placement such as a connected carer).

**Short-term stability at 31st March 2024 by age**

Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
0	17	2	12%
1	11	3	27%
2	11	2	18%
3	5	3	60%
4	11	3	27%
5	13	3	23%
6	16	2	13%
7	6	2	33%
8	14	2	14%
9	9	2	22%
10	19	2	11%

Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
11	15	0	0%
12	16	2	13%
13	15	3	20%
14	28	9	32%
15	28	4	14%
16	29	4	14%
17	35	6	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>18%</b>



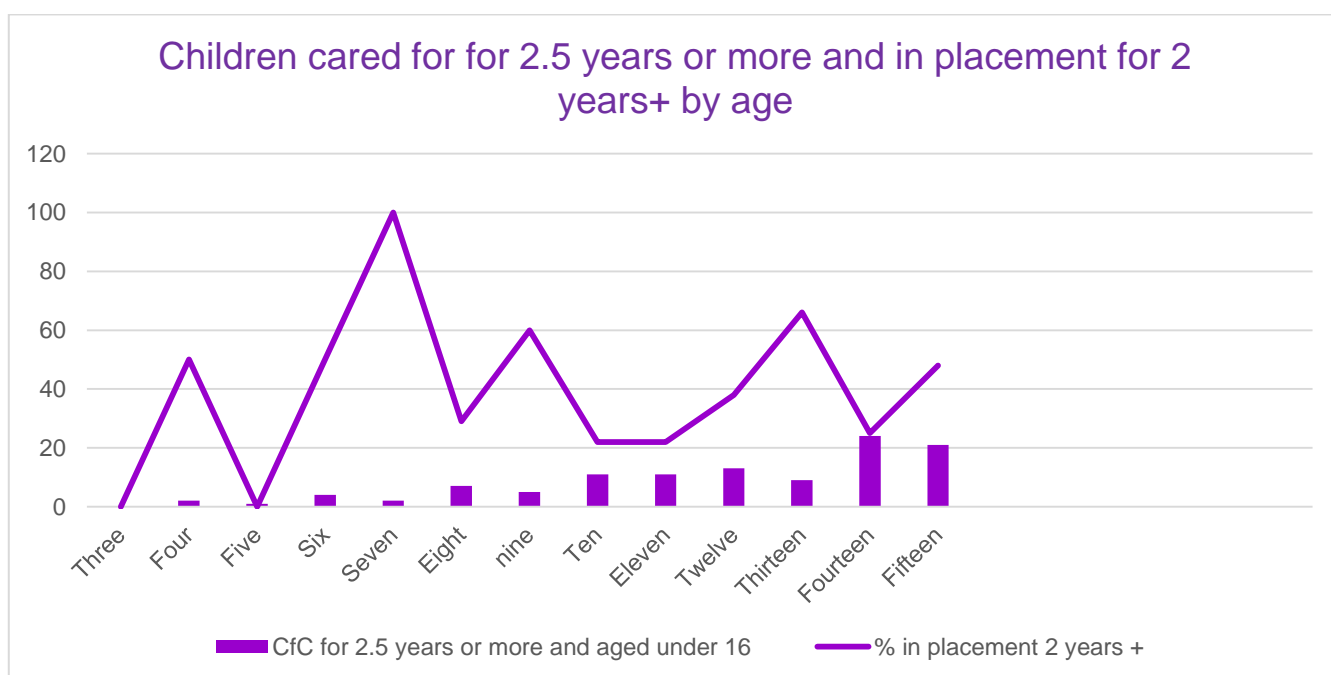
3.16 Whilst previously recognising the increased percentage of children in long term placements, overall long-term stability stands at 41% as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, compared to 62% at the same time last year. This is now significantly below the national rate of 69% and that of our statistical neighbours at 73%. There are however noticeable improvements for children aged 7 years with stability over the year for this age at 100% compared with 0% in 2022/23. However, there is significant reduction in stability for the 12 and 14 year-old cohorts, from 67% and 68% in 2022/23 to 38% and 25% respectively in 2023/24. This appears to correlate with the challenges for the adolescent cohort with regards to three or more placements.

3.17 Further to the above, foster care sufficiency and resilience is acknowledged and the impact this will have had on stability for the 12 and 14 year old cohort in particular. Work is being undertaken including the implementation of the Mockingbird Programme and preventative stability intervention for fostering placements through the Building Futures team. It is also important to consider children’s views and where reunification is being expressed as an aspiration by a child, then this is considered appropriately, and decisions made via robust assessment of need and risk. IROs will need to ensure the planning is appropriate and timely in order that placements do not break down as a result of children becoming frustrated resulting in them leading on their care planning in an uncontrolled manner. To support this matter, the IROs have begun to challenge more robustly where there is drift and delay in Schedule 3 assessments being completed and or in progression to the legal arena when Care Orders could safely be revoked.



### Long-term stability of placement at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 by age

Year of age	Children cared for for 2.5 years or more and aged under 16	In placement for 2 years or more	%
3	0	0	0%
4	2	1	50%
5	1	0	0%
6	4	2	50%
7	2	2	100%
8	7	2	29%
9	5	3	60%
10	11	4	22%
11	11	4	22%
12	13	5	38%
13	9	6	66%
14	24	6	25%
15	21	10	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>41%</b>



3.18 There has been a decline in performance in terms of promoting and monitoring the health of our cared for children. Last year, there was an improvement in all areas of health related indicators from 2021/22. However, health checks have dropped from 91% in 2022/23 to 79% as of the end of March 2024. Dental checks have also dropped significantly from 83% to 42% as of the end of March 2024. Immunisations have also dropped from 82% to 55%. All of these are now below the national average and this needs further investigation and addressing. There is an acknowledgement that, within Torbay, identifying an appropriate dentist is currently very challenging and this is the focus of ongoing work in conjunction with our Public

Health and ICB partners. Furthermore, there has also been a reduction in health professionals attending cared for children's reviews which may have had an impact on the health needs of the cared for children. However, it is acknowledged that many cared for teenagers choose to opt out of any form of health check and do not want certain professionals at their cared for meetings. Nevertheless, the IROs are often best placed to encourage this cohort to address their health needs as they often have the one of the most established relationship with these young people.

### **Health and Dental Checks and Immunisations**

	2023/24			England average 2022/23
	Cohort	Number	%	
Health assessments	298	235	79%	89%
Dental checks	298	125	42%	76%
Immunisations	298	164	55%	82%

3.19 The proportion of cared for children for whom an SDQ score was received was low at 8%. This figure stood at 27% the previous year. It is also significantly below the England average of 75%. This is an area of challenge for the IRO service and should be highlighted at cared for reviews and again at the midpoint checks. It is acknowledged that the Cared for Children's Teams are looking at this matter with Health partners to explore ways the SDQ can be integrated into the Single Assessment that should be completed on an annual basis for cared for children. This work has already resulted in significant increases in SDQ completion in data provided for April 2024.

3.20 The gender split for missing episodes within our cared for children cohort in 2023/24 has seen a widening of the ratio between boys and girls with 43% of the missing episodes being related to girls as opposed to 57% for boys. In 2022/23, the ratio was 48% girls to 52% boys.

### **Missing Episodes by Gender, 2023/24 figures**

	Number	%
<b>Children with an episode of missing or away from placement</b>	<b>46</b>	
Female	20	43%
Male	26	57%
<b>Number of children cared for at any point in the year</b>	<b>395</b>	
Female	175	44%
Non-binary	2	1%
Male	218	55%

3.21 46 cared for children had an episode of missing in the year, which equates to 12% of all children cared for in the year. This is an increase on 2022/23 that stood at 38 children (9% of the cared for cohort). However, this is on a par with the National figure of 11%.

3.22 As with previous years, more than half of children who went missing had one or two episodes, 65% compared with 55% in 2022/23. However, the number of children with chronic missing episodes (31 plus episodes) increased to 3 from just one child the previous year. This may of course be reflective of enhanced reporting, tracking and monitoring of this vulnerable cohort.

### *Cared for children going missing*

Episodes of missing - Torbay 2023/24	No of children	%
1 or 2	30	65%
3 to 5	5	11%
6 to 10	6	13%
11 to 15	2	4%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 to 30	0	0%
31+	3	7%
<b>Total children</b>	<b>46</b>	

**NOTE:** The above figures do not include episodes of 'away from placement', as opposed to missing, of which there were 87 in the year. This is children who are absent from placement but their location is known.

### *Cared for children going missing*

Duration of missing incidents	% of incidents of missing	
	Torbay 2023/24	England 2021/22
Incidents where duration is less than 1 day	70%	35%
Incidents where duration is between 1 and 2 days	22%	56%
Incidents where duration is between 3 and 7 days	8%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 8 and 10 days	0%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 11 and 15 days	0%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 16 and 20 days	0%	8%
Incidents where duration is between 21 and 30 days	0%	1%
Incidents where duration is more than 30 days	0%	0%

- 3.23 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from the address from which they came into care has risen slightly since 2022/23, to 34% from 31% the previous year. The England average figure is 21%. It should be noted that the definition does not include unaccompanied asylum seeking children, as they have no home address in the UK.
- 3.24 Reasons for Torbay being 13% higher than the national average is in the main a reflection of placement sufficiency in the immediate locality, as well as this being reflective of some deliberate decision-making in respect of placements aligned with the wishes and feelings of young people, particularly unaccompanied asylum seeking children who have a preference for a more urban setting.

### Distance from home

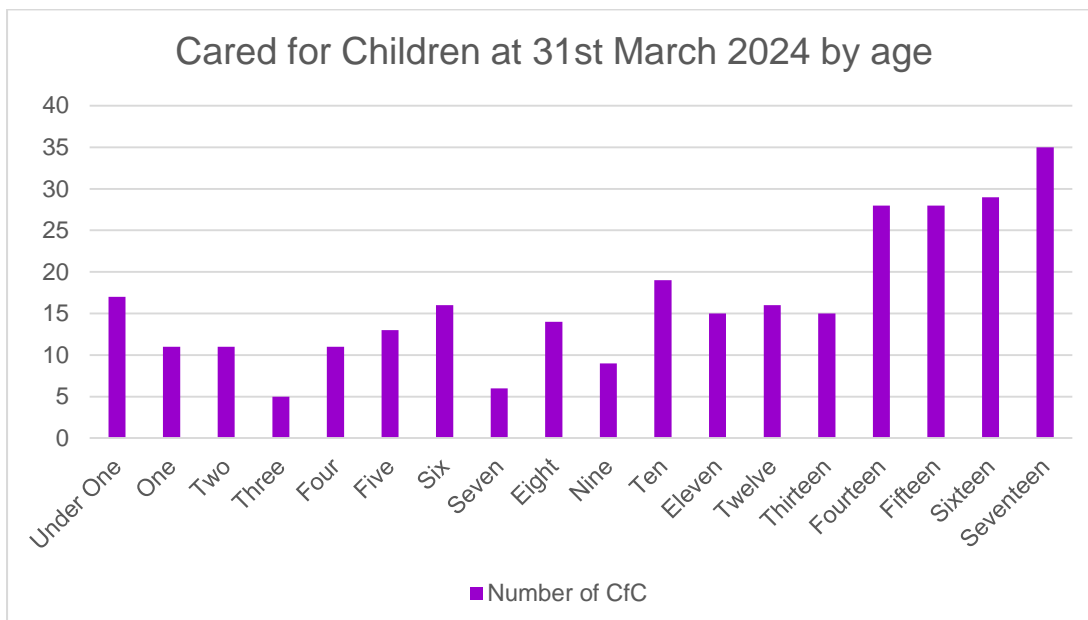
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
The number of children in care placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	91	97	100
The number of children in care on 31st March	299	314	298
% placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	30%	31%	34%

3.25 Children aged between 10 and 15 continue to be the highest represented within the Torbay cared for population at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 with children under 1 years old being the lowest represented. This is in line with the national average for year 2022/23. Torbay has a lower proportion of children aged 16 and 17 than the national figure. However, this will most likely align with the national average next year with the rising cohort of 16 year olds.

### Cared for children age ranges by %

	England	Torbay	
	2022/23	2022/23	2023/24
<b>Under 1 year</b>	5%	5%	6%
<b>1 to 4 years</b>	13%	13%	13%
<b>5 to 9 years</b>	18%	18%	19%
<b>10 to 15 years</b>	38%	40%	41%
<b>16 years and over</b>	26%	25%	21%

Age year	All CfC	% by age
0	17	6%
1	11	4%
2	11	4%
3	5	2%
4	11	4%
5	13	4%
6	16	5%
7	6	2%
8	14	5%
9	9	3%
10	19	6%
11	15	5%
12	16	5%
13	15	5%
14	28	9%
15	28	9%
16	29	10%
17	35	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>298</b>	



3.26 The 2022/23 IRO annual report noted that there were 57% of boys compared to 43% of girls in Torbay’s cared cohort on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This gap between boys and girls has decreased in 2023/24 to 55% boys, and 44% girls. The remaining 1% is made up of two children who identify as non-binary. However, taking out the cohort of UASC that remain cared for, the ratio would be very near to 50:50.

3.27 White British remains the largest represented ethnicity (87%) by far at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 (which reflects the ethnic profile of Torbay being predominantly White British), compared to the national average which now stands at 71%. The decrease in other ethnic groups compared to last year is linked to the number of asylum-seeking children, which has decreased over the year as many turned 18 in 2022/23.

#### ***Cared for children by ethnicity***

	England	Torbay	
	2022/23	2022/23	2023/24
White	71%	84%	87%
White and Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean	10%	8%	8%
Asian or Asian British	5%	2%	1%
Black or Black British	7%	0.3%	1%
Other ethnic groups	5%	5%	2%
Refused or information not yet available	1%	1%	1%

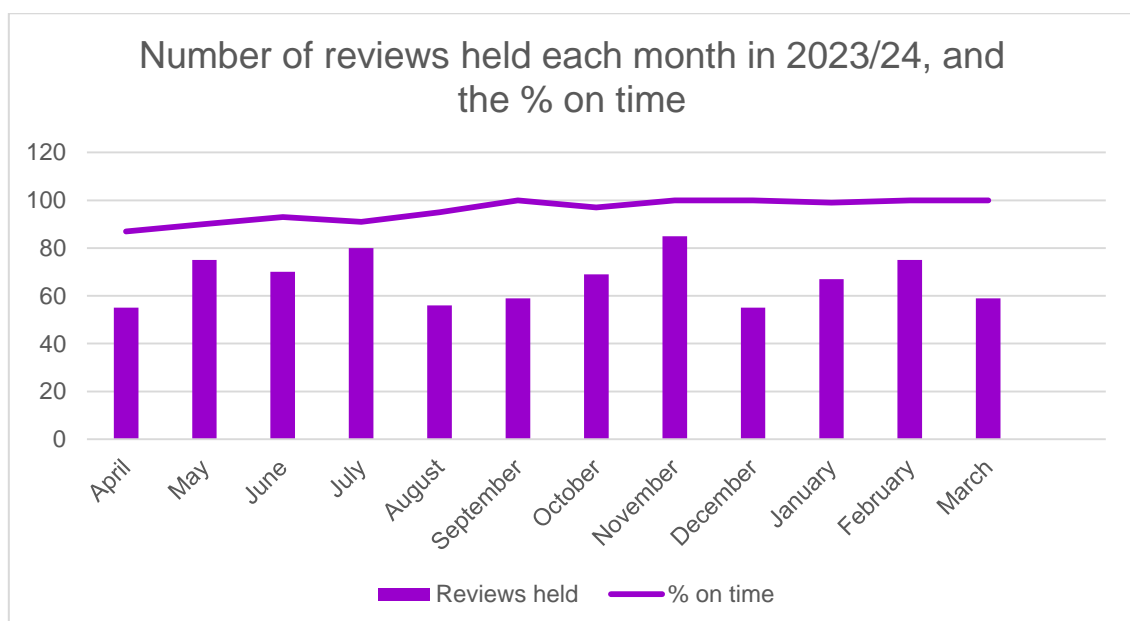
## 4. Timeliness of Review Records Completion

4.1 803 cared for reviews were held between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This is an increase from the 740 reviews held in 2021/22. This not only reflects the timeliness of reviews as a service wide focus but also that additional reviews are being held to support placement stability and changes to care plans.

Review timescales		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Numerator	The number of reviews taking place in the year which were <b>not</b> held on time	84	95	44	32
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year	685	816	740	803
%		12%	12%	6%	4%

### Reviews over the year in Torbay

Month 2022/23	Reviews held	On time	% on time
April	55	48	87%
May	75	66	90%
June	70	65	93%
July	80	73	91%
August	56	53	95%
September	59	59	100%
October	69	67	97%
November	85	85	100%
December	55	55	100%
January	67	66	99%
February	75	75	100%
March	59	59	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>803</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>96%</b>



- 4.2 The service has continued to look at timeliness of completion of review records and sees this as a key measure of our effectiveness: for children's plans to be progressed effectively, the reviews and records that drive the plans need to be available to support moving plans forward and to ensure that the impact of the plan on children is maximised.
- 4.3 Work to ensure timeliness of reviews has continued throughout 2023/24, building on previous work. This year there has been a modest increase of cared for reviews within statutory timescale to 96% from 94% in 2022/23. Nevertheless, the positive progress here has seen the service exceed the overall local target of 95% in time reviews.
- 4.4 It can be seen from the table and graph above that, in 2023/24, timescale performance was reasonably consistent month on month with minor dips in April and May which were predominantly due to managing sickness.
- 4.5 The system remains in place in terms of achieving timeliness of reviews. That is, the only time a review can go out of timescale is where is purposeful delay has been agreed for example the child not being able to attend. This must be agreed by the HoS and agreed only when all other options have been explored. This robust approach will hopefully enable us to reach the maintain the target of 95% or above.

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

- 5.1 A primary objective of the IRO role is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident within 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.
- 5.2 Across the year from April 2023 - March 2024, 87% of cared for children aged 4 years and over had participated in their reviews. Although an increase on last year's figure of 79%, there clearly continues to be room for improvement and plans are in place to encourage more children to not only participate in their reviews but to also co-chair them in line with our commitment to deliver restorative reviews. The stability within the IRO service should encourage more children and young people to participate in their reviews as IRO's are often the most consistent professional in their lives whom they can form trusting relationships with.

### Participation in reviews, 2020/21 to 2023/24

Review participation		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Numerator	The number of reviews taking place in the year where child was aged 4+ at the date of review where child participated in the review (all codes except PN4 and PN7)	401	527	484	611
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year where child was aged 4+ at the date of review	467	641	614	705
%		86%	82%	79%	87%

### Participation in reviews – all categories of participation

Detailed review participation	2022/23	2022/23 %	2023/24	2023/24%
Child under 4 at the time of the review (PN0)	126	17%	98	12%
Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (PN1)	185	25%	199	25%
Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf (PN2)	14	2%	21	3%
Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (PN3)	2	0%	2	0.2%
Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her - attendance without contribution (PN4)	6	1%	2	0.2%
Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (PN5)	140	19%	297	37%
Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (PN6)	143	19%	89	11%
Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review (PN7)	124	17%	92	11%

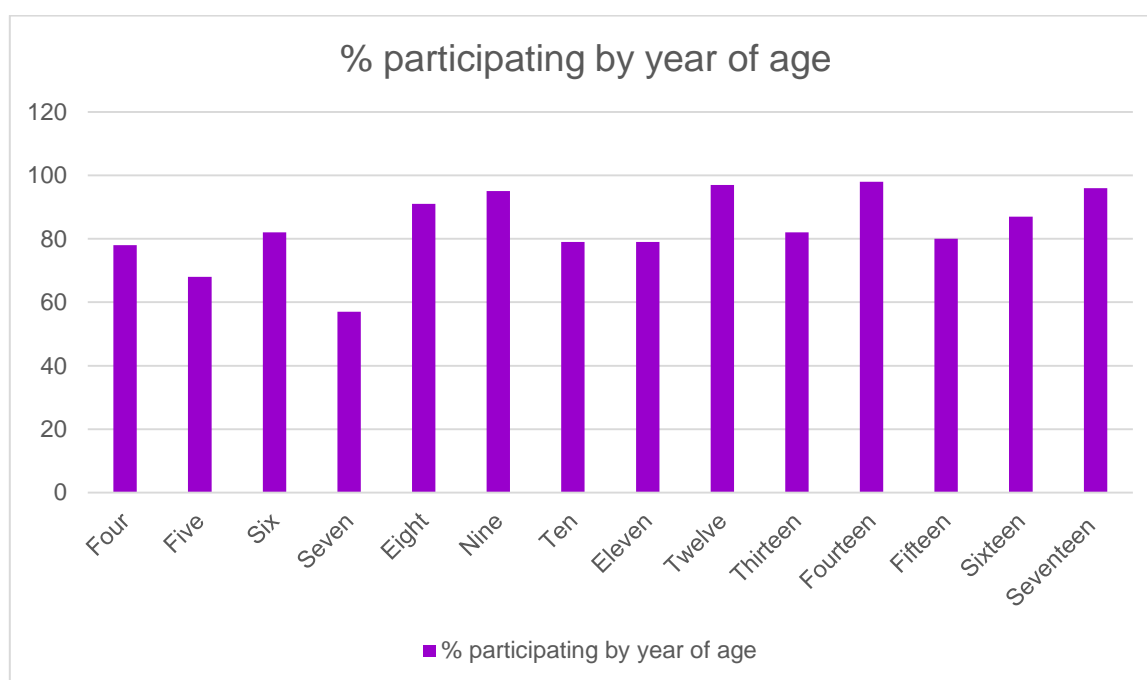


Please note there were 3 additional reviews that took place over 23/24 where the participation code has been listed as 'null'. These have been included in the participation calculation but are not listed in the table above. 803 reviews occurred in total.

### Participation by age

Age of child	Reviews	Attended and participated		Attended, did not participate		Did not attend or participate		Did not attend, participated		Participated	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
4	37	1	3%	0	0%	2	5%	28	76%	29	78%
5	38	1	3%	0	0%	12	32%	25	66%	26	68%
6	34	2	6%	0	0%	6	18%	26	76%	28	82%
7	30	5	17%	0	0%	12	40%	13	43%	17	57%
8	33	5	15%	0	0%	3	9%	25	76%	30	91%
9	21	5	24%	0	0%	1	5%	15	71%	20	95%
10	47	8	17%	1	2%	9	19%	29	62%	37	79%
11	33	7	21%	0	0%	7	21%	19	58%	26	79%
12	34	11	32%	0	0%	1	3%	21	62%	33	97%
13	38	13	34%	0	0%	7	18%	18	47%	31	82%
14	66	23	35%	0	0%	1	2%	42	64%	65	98%
15	69	29	42%	1	1%	13	19%	26	38%	55	80%
16	63	25	40%	0	0%	8	13%	30	48%	55	87%
17	91	46	51%	0	0%	4	4%	41	45%	87	96%
<b>Total</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>85%</b>

**NOTE:** The participation column in the above is the sum of those attending and participating, or not attending but participating indirectly (via an advocate or other trusted adult).

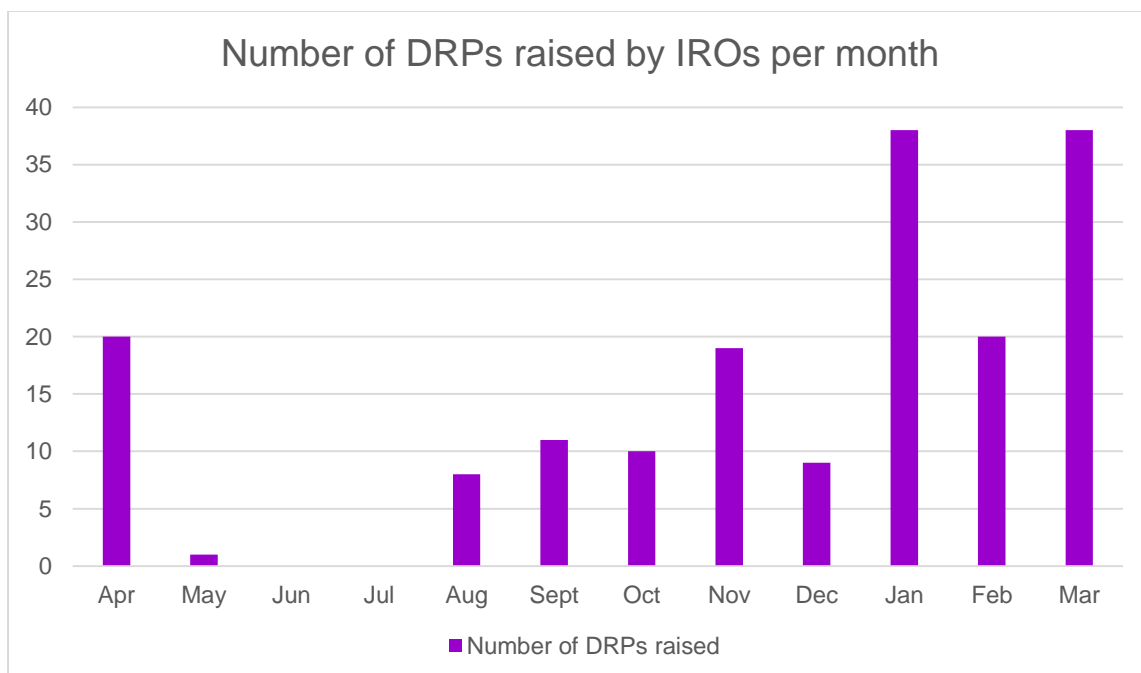


## 6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 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.
- 6.2 There is an established Dispute Resolution and Escalation process available in Torbay’s procedures and practice standards. IROs continue to seek resolutions informally to issues through dialogue with the social worker or their manager before and at each stage of the procedure, but if no resolution is achieved the issue can and should be escalated to the attention of senior managers.
- 6.3 Between April 2023 to March 2024, there were 174 formal DRP escalations completed across all the IROs which is significantly higher than the 2022/23 figure of 100.
- 6.4 It should be noted that during the first quarter of 2023/24, a new DRP process has been remapped on the Liquid Logic case recording system. It is evident that the new streamlined process has resulted in more DRP escalations along with resolutions achieved in a timelier manner. This is beginning to become embedded and whilst there is still some fluctuation in terms of the number of DRPs being raised, there is a noticeable upward trajectory towards the latter end of the year.

### *Number of Dispute Resolution Processes raised by IROs each month*

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2022/23	0	5	1	3	16	9	12	14	8	7	7	18
2023/24	20	1	N/A	N/A	8	11	10	19	9	38	20	38



## 7. Achievements and Impact of the IRO Service and Summary of Progress

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- 7.1 The IRO Service is continuing to make steady and purposeful improvement on many of its key activities. Children and young people continue to be provided with an IRO within three working days of becoming cared care or within two days of notification to the service, and changes in IRO have reduced and have been kept to a minimum during the year.
- 7.2 The IRO service continues to challenge through formal and informal escalation means whenever there are concerns about children's care plans not being effective or there is delay in plans being pursued. In addition, the IRO footprint on children's files as continued to improve. The introduction of mid-point check alerts on LCS has improved the level of IRO oversight on children's files. Case summaries are comprehensive as to are cared for child review minutes. In line with restorative practice, the IRO's are now writing review minutes to the child.
- 7.3 The Head of Service has been in post since December 2021 and the service manager since January 2023. Furthermore, the IRO service is now completely staffed by permanent workers who are committed to Torbay and the children they are allocated to.
- 7.4 Performance with regards to statutory reviews continues to improve and is now 1% above the local target of 95%, an increased from 94% in 2022/23.
- 7.5 Performance meetings continue to happen on a regular basis with data being looked from a child's lived experience perspective.
- 7.6 The IROs have continued to develop good links internally and externally with each IRO being tasked with being the link into other services throughout the statutory care services in Torbay. These links have now extended to partners such as Health and in particular Education where a significant amount of joined up work is being done with the Virtual School to improve educational outcomes for cared for children. The service manager attends the TSCP contextual safeguarding forum with a view to developing a contextual child protection model. The IRO service is also represented at Adopt South West's adoption panel and on the Mockingbird implementation group.
- 7.7 The IROs profile within Torbay has continued to develop over the last year and, working within the framework of restorative practice, their high level of support and challenge is now very much evident on children's files through case recordings, midpoint reviews and care for children's review minutes.
- 7.8 The IROs have been setting a positive example with regards to audit completion with an 100% in time completion rate for the department across the year 2023/24.

## 8. Independent Reviewing Service Performance Planning Procedure

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- 8.1 The IRO data set includes the following:-
- Timeliness and timescales for CfC reviews,
  - Timeliness of completion of review records and sharing of key decisions and Outcomes,
  - Availability of social work reports and plans for children,
  - The participation and attendance of children and young people at reviews,
  - Whether the child has a suitable plan for permanence,
  - Whether a midpoint check has been undertaken and progress of planning,
  - Details as to escalations both formal and informal,
  - Timeliness of health assessments.
- 8.2 The data set is reported to the Head of Service for Safeguarding, Early Help and Business Intelligence on a monthly basis and used as a basis for scrutiny and discussion during the monthly performance meetings.
- 8.3 Areas for learning and improvement are identified during the performance meetings and the minutes and plans shared with the Divisional Director for Safeguarding.
- 8.4 Supervision is an essential activity for providing support and development to individual IROs and to work toward creating consistency across the service in terms of practice, process, and overall service performance. The team's supervision consists of both case and personal.

## 9. Progress Against Areas for Development noted in the 2022/23 Annual Report

- i. **Ensure reviews are held within Statutory timescales** – This objective met with reviews in timescale at 96% set against a local target of 95%.
- ii. **Increased participation** – This objective has been met as there has been an increase in participation. However, this can be improved upon. The IRO's are moving towards more face-to-face reviews and away from using a solely virtual platform. IRO's are increasingly visiting children between reviews which will encourage children to be part of their reviews or at least enable them to have the opportunity to discuss with their IRO any concerns they may have along with the opportunity to express their views. Furthermore, in line with the restorative model of practice, cared for reviews minutes are routinely written to the child.
- iii. **Parent and child feedback** – This objective has not been met with the online feedback forms not being used as consistently as we would like. This remains an area for further development. More focus is required on socialising the online feedback form and mechanisms with children and parents so that their opinions are fed into the development of the service and in particular the development of the restorative model of practice.
- iv. **Practice improvement** – This objective has been met via a number of channels. The new DRP process affords the IRO's more control over the more formalised challenges in relation to social work practice. The IRO's routinely contribute to training programmes such as the child protection training that forms part of the induction for new social workers. Consideration is also being given to whether the IRO's could contribute to the legal training given that two of the IRO's have previously been employed by CAFCASS. The IROs also lead the way on completion of audits and dip samples that contribute to the wider learning across all service areas.
- v. **Use data more effectively** – This objective is partially met. The IRO PBI dashboard has now been developed and is in the final testing stage. The initial feedback is positive as it focuses exactly on what the IROs need to see on their individual case load to track their own performance and link that to what it means for individual children they are working with. This data, and how it informs practice, will be used to inform the discussions at the monthly IRO performance surgery.

## 10. Areas for Development 2024/25

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- i. **Practice Improvement** - each IRO to have / develop a particular area of interest which will potentially be used for further training and development in teams across all area of service.
- ii. **Apply more Learning from DRPs** – Themes from DRPs to be identified and used as a means of highlighting areas for practice development and fed into the Practice Improvement Forum (PIF).
- iii. **IRO Oversight to be Further Enhanced** – This to be facilitated by all cared for children having mid-point reviews, EDS notifications to be followed up by IROs, Placement notifications/information to be followed up by IROs, missing notifications to be followed up by IROs, New into Care Meetings to be followed up by IROs, cared for child health reviews and other health related matters to be followed up by IROs. Furthermore, further assurance to be applied via Service Manager and HoS oversight to these matters.
- iv. **Increased participation** - There is a need to continue to work with Operational and Regulated Services to ensure that children and parents have access to social work reports in a timely way before reviews. Alongside this, gaining parent and child feedback is paramount to ensuring adequate feedback loops are present within the participation system. This will require a 'relaunch' of the online feedback form.
- v. **Data** - The IRO PBI dashboard to be made live and embedded in practice and used routinely. Data to be analysed at IRO monthly performance meetings.

Report authored by:	Shaun Evans (Head of Service) and Emma Thomas (Service Manager)
Date:	24 <sup>th</sup> May 2024