

**Thurrock Children's Services  
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

**01 April 2020 – 31 March 2021**

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## 1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Committee, established by the IRO Handbook (2010).
- 1.2 Following presentation to the Thurrock Corporate Parenting Committee and the Thurrock Safeguarding Children's Partnership, this report will be placed on the Council website as a publically accessible document.
- 1.3 Where possible, this Report refers to Children Looked After (CLA). Such use reflects the views and wishes of children and young people about their own identity and the way in which they prefer to be referred to by professionals.

## 2. Reporting period

This report covers the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2020 until the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 and includes in year data and year end data.

## 3. The Legal, Statutory and National context of the IRO role

- 3.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 3.2 In March 2010, the IRO Handbook was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IROs should discharge their duties. Significantly, the Handbook stated:

*The IRO has a new role conferred upon them to monitor the child's case as opposed to monitoring the review, effectively monitoring the implementation of the Care Plan between reviews (at para. 3.74)*

The Handbook goes on to state that the primary role of an IRO is:

*To ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child (at para. 2.10)*

- 3.3 In discharging this role, the Handbook notes (at para. 2.14) that the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:
  - *Promoting the voice of the child*
  - *Ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment; are up to date; effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;*
  - *making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;*
  - *offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for children looked after and the delivery of services to them; and*

- *monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands*

#### **4. Local context – Thurrock Council as a Corporate Parent**

4.1 As a Corporate Parent, the Council is ambitious to ensure that children achieve their best possible outcomes while in the care of the authority. It is acknowledged that wherever possible children should be cared for either within their own family or networks. However, when it is felt that this is not a safe or suitable option all children are helped to find a long term permanent home.

The IRO service plays a key role in monitoring and supporting plans to achieve this ambition.

#### **5. Thurrock Council IRO Service**

- 5.1 During this reporting period, the IRO services remained stable. There have been no periods of prolonged absence or sickness.
- 5.2 The service is comprised of five, permanent full time members of staff. All five IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced checks. All IRO's have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience.
- 5.3 There are two female and three male IRO's from diverse backgrounds, ensuring young people in our care can be allocated to an IRO's across a range of ethnic groups.
- 5.4 IRO's act independently to the local authority and are not involved in preparation of children in care plans or the management of children in care cases nor do they have any control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 During the reporting period the IROs were line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

## 6. IRO Caseload and Service Performance

### 6.1 IRO caseloads

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/2020	2020/21
Average caseload	56	67	67	61	62	60	60
Caseload range	58-62	62-67	60-68	62-65	44-68	57-62	58-61

6.2 The average IRO caseload remained identical to the previous year, with IRO's having on average 60 cases, ranging between 58 and 61 cases.

6.3 To contextualise the caseloads, the IRO handbook suggests that an average IRO caseload should be between 50 - 70 children and young people for a full time post (FTE). Children and young people's circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and the distance which needs to be travelled to placements can vary considerably. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or have a placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long term settled foster placements. There needs to be enough flexibility in the service to respond to peaks in demand and associated workload, whilst maintaining a focus on quality and oversight.

6.4 The caseloads within Thurrock are manageable based upon the the number suggested in the IRO handbook and the complexity of the role carried out by the IRO. In addition IRO's contribute to panels, support the delivery of training and are part of the management audit programme.

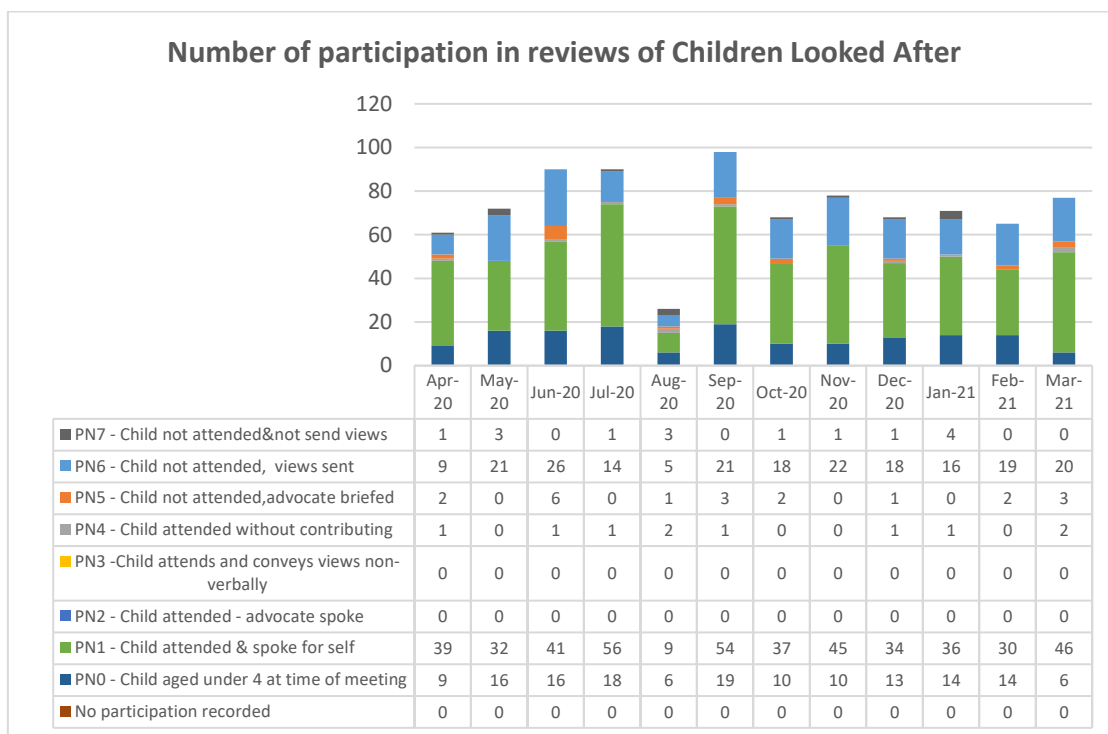
## 7. Number of Child and Young Person in Care Reviews

	2020									2021			Year to Date
Due in month	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	
Total held	61	72	90	90	26	98	69	78	69	73	59	79	864
Total held In timescale	61	72	89	90	23	97	63	77	69	72	58	79	850
Percentage of total due held in timescale	100%	100%	99%	100%	89%	99%	91%	99%	100%	99%	98%	100%	
Held In quarter	223			214			216			211			864
Percentage held in timescale	99.5%			98%			97%			99%			Average % 98.4

During 2020/21, the IRO service conducted a total of 864 reviews. This is a decrease of 76 reviews (8%) when compared to the number of reviews conducted the previous year. There are factors that will contribute to this decrease in numbers such as a reduction in the numbers of children entering care (children on entering care have reviews more frequently in their first year of being looked after). 164 children entered care in 2020/21 in comparison to 242 during 2019-2020. The performance in respect of reviews being held within timescale, improved during the year, with the final average being 98.4% of reviews held within timescales an increase of 0.9% from the previous year.

Wherever possible, reviews are held in a timely manner and are arranged to take place 1 month before their due date so as to accommodate any unexpected postponements or delays. There will always be factors that result in reviews being delayed such as sickness or the need to change the date of a review so as to meet the needs and requirements of the child or young person.

## 7.1 Children and Young People's Participation in Reviews



The represented views of the child in each review is a priority and children and young people are encouraged wherever appropriate, to take part in their reviews. There are occasions where children are either unable or unwilling to attend their review meetings and when this happens efforts are made by the IRO service to support children's views being shared at the meeting. This may be done through the use of the Mind of My Own Application, through face to face visits, or phone conversations. Attendance for children at their Reviews is not mandatory. The service is exploring other ways to creatively obtain the views of children and young people in a meaningful way. This may involve undertaking an activity with a young child or young person.

From the data in the chart above it is clear that the vast majority of reviews are well attended by children who spoke for themselves or young people sent their views. This reflects the proactive approach taken by the IRO service in ensuring that the child remains at the centre of every meeting.

<b>Participation</b>	<b>Total 2017/2018</b>	<b>Total 2018/19</b>	<b>Total 2019/2020</b>	<b>Total 2020/2021</b>
Not Recorded	105	0	0	0
PN0 Child aged under 4 at time of meeting	85	100	142	151
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	332	372	439	459
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	5	3	10	0
PN3 Child attends and conveys his/her view symbolically ( non-verbally)		2		0
PN4 Child attended without contributing	4	5	14	10
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	12	3	59	20
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	122	159	163	209
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	83	103	40	15
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>747</b>	<b>1,137</b>	<b>864</b>

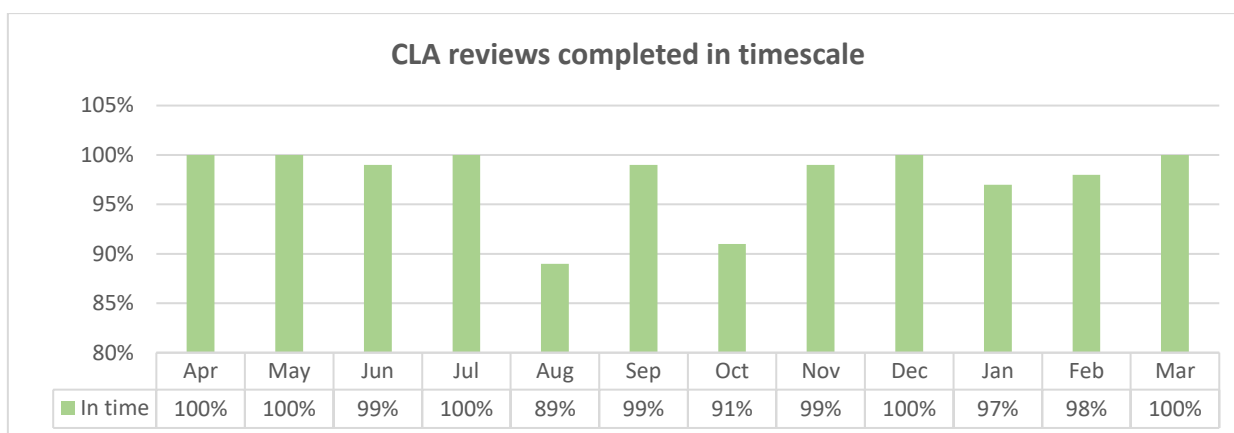
The yearly totals indicate that there has been a continued increase in the number of children and young people attending their meeting to express their views. Encouragingly there has also been a decrease in the number of children who neither attended nor sent views for their meeting (PN7). Contributing to this improved performance is the increased focus and prioritisation of children's participation along with reviews being held virtually over Microsoft Teams during lockdown which for some young people is a more acceptable way of attending and participating in their meetings.

All children and young people are offered the use of an Advocacy Service. The use of the Advocacy Service this year to support a child's views being represented at their review when compared to previous years has fallen (PN5). It is not clear what the reason for this has been but contributory factors may be the impact of Covid on the ability of Advocates to meet face to face with children and the use and take up of hybrid meetings facilitating the contribution of some young people.

The number of young people who have not attended or sent their view has reduced in 2019/20 and 2020/21 by over 60%. Although only a relatively small number it is important to the reasons for this. Feedback obtained from the IRO's with regards to this indicates that often this is due to older young people who do not wish to take part in their reviews or a small number of young people who are missing at the time of the review. In each case the IRO will attempt to speak to the young person either face to face or over the telephone to obtain their views and ensure that these are shared at their Review.



## 7.2 Completion of Review Reports



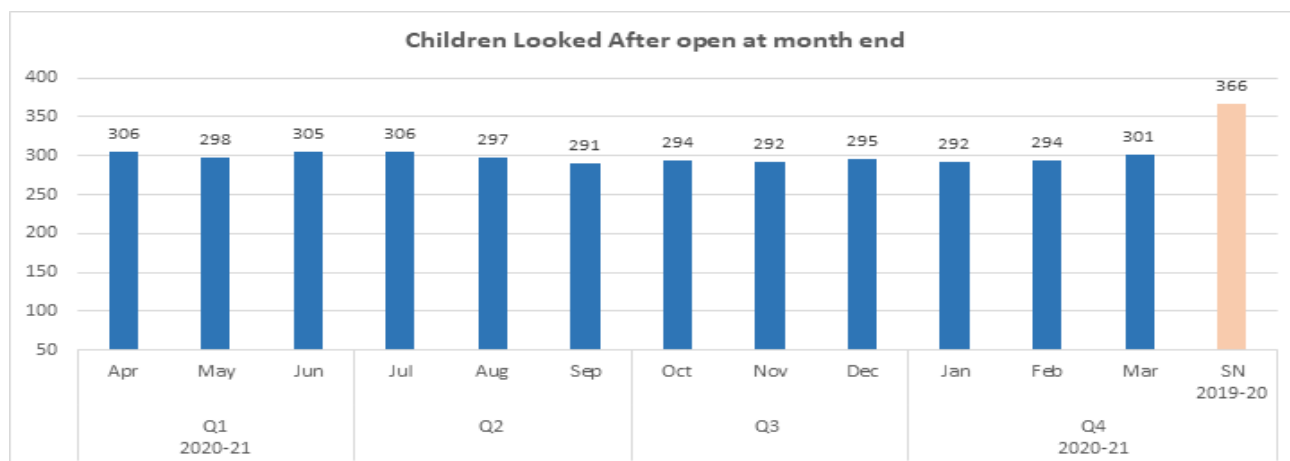
On completion of the child's review the IRO completes a report on the children's social care recording system (LCS). The report provides a record of the review and its discussions, the outcomes and recommendation made in the review. The target for having these review outcome reports completed and distributed to young people, parents and professionals is within 20 working days of the review. An average of 97.6% of reviews were completed within timescale during 2020/21. The reduced percentage of reviews completed within timescale during August (3) is due in part to summer holidays and the impact of annual leave and in October (6) short term staff sickness. Timeliness and providing reports to young people within time scales is a priority and the timeliness of social work reports is regularly scrutinised by the IRO service and where appropriate, issues of late reports are brought to the attention of the Service Manager and acted on as a priority.

## 8. The Use of Feedback and Consultation forms

Efforts are being made to encourage children and young people to make use of the "how was my meeting" feature on the Mind of My Own App. During the upcoming year, we are seeking to find out more about children's views through engagement events, both face to face and virtually.

## 9. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in Thurrock

### 9.1 Numbers of Children in Care



The monthly breakdown for the numbers of children looked after has remained relatively stable and consistent throughout the year ranging from 291 to 306. Thurrock's rate of Looked after Children per 10,000 in March 2021 represents 67 children per 10,000; this is in line with national and statistical neighbour data for 2019/20 (67 per 10,000). Total cohort figures for this year are the same as figures for year-end last year and the rate per 10,000 remained the same.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Total cohort - At year end	284	333	334	308	293	298	298
Rate per 10,000 population – At year end	71	81	79	72	68	67	67
Number of UASC - At year end	39	64	55	32	30	20	24
Adopted - At year end	13	7	9	7	13	14	8

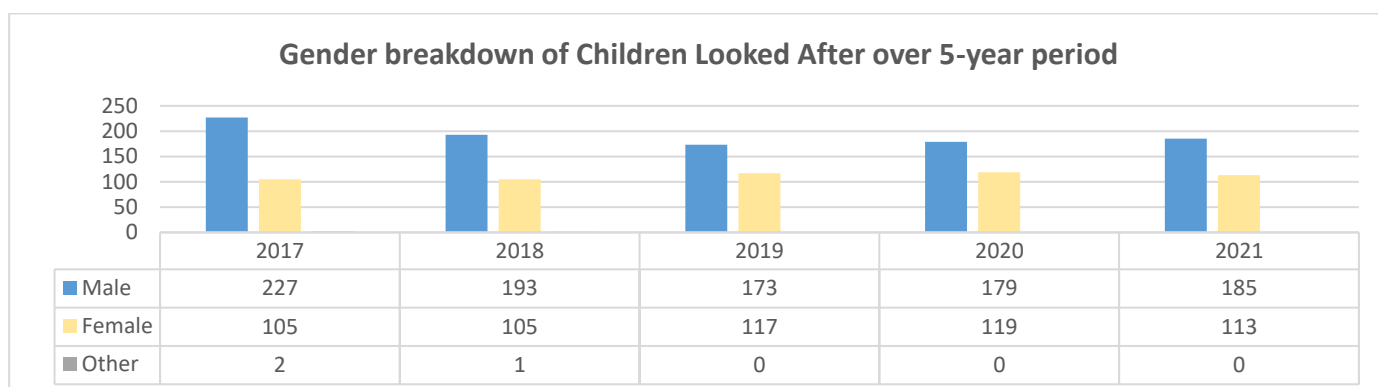
The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children at year end has risen slightly by 4 from the previous year and the UASC population represents 8% of the total cohort.

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number as identified above. Local Authorities through agreement have a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children. Thurrock's allocated number is 31 children. When a local

authority reaches its allocated number there are arrangements in place for new arrivals to be transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The NTS replaced, the Eastern Region<sup>1</sup> Transfer scheme in July 2021 which worked efficiently and effectively with the transfer of UASC usually within 10 days of arrival.

The number of children adopted has fallen by just over 2.2% from the previous year. Nationally figures have fallen by 4%. Thurrock has been impacted by delays in the court process during the Covid-19 Pandemic (e.g. limited judicial availability, delayed expert assessment etc.). This has meant fewer proceedings concluding with placement orders within the year. Continued oversight and tracking has assisted in ensuring that delay is minimised and at the time of writing this report there are no children with placement orders who are not linked for adoption.

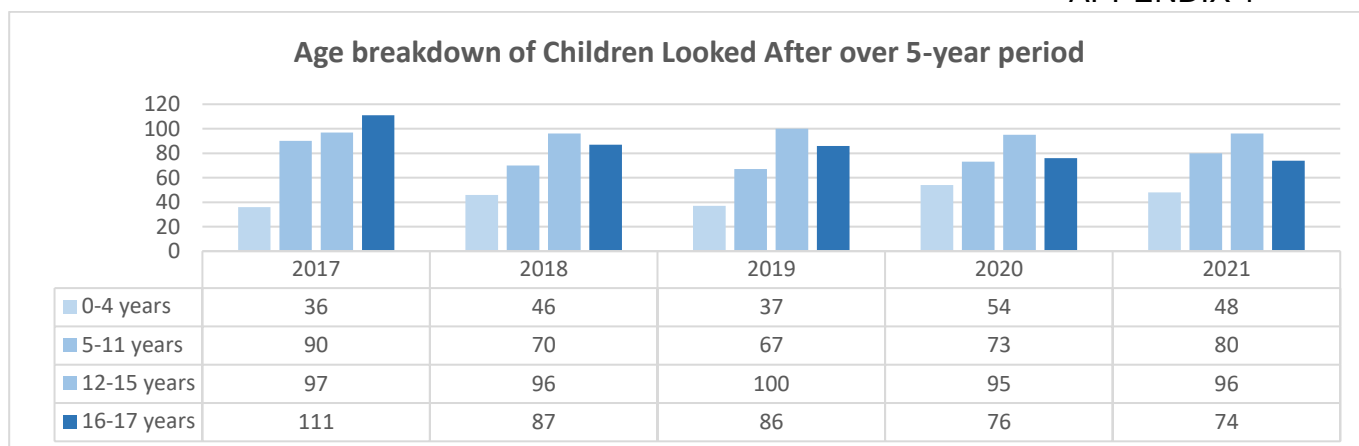
## 9.2 Gender of Children and Young People in Care



The number of males in care continues to exceed the number of females. The number of males in Care has risen slightly, however the number of females coming in to care has fallen for the first time since 2018. Figures for 2021 indicated that 62% of children in care were male, whilst 38% were female.

Nationally, just over half are male (56%) and 44% are female, similar to previous years, there is still a higher proportion of boys looked after in Thurrock. Factors which can be affecting this relate to boys and young men being more predisposed to issues such as youth offending, aggression, violence and non-school attendance, all of which put boys at higher risk of coming into care.

<sup>1</sup> The Eastern Region comprises of Bedford Borough, Cambridgeshire, Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Luton, Norfolk, Peterborough, Southend, Suffolk and Thurrock local authorities



The age distribution of children looked after continues to see children in the 12 to 15 year old age bracket represent the largest proportion of children looked after.

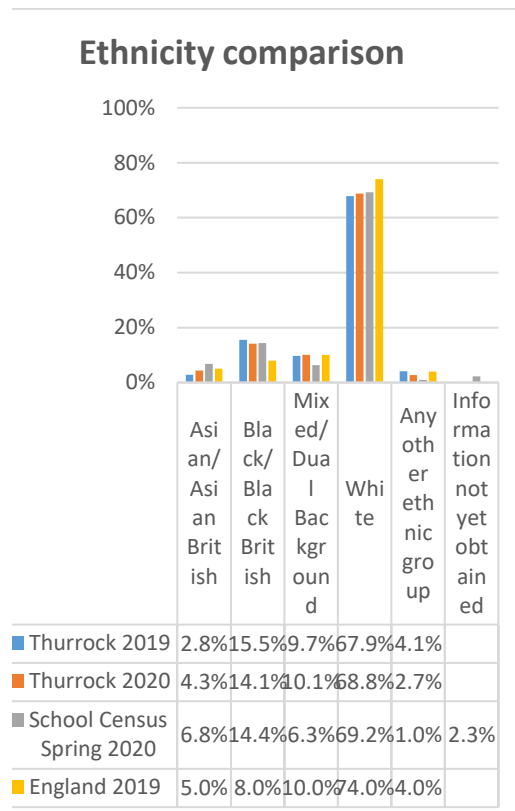
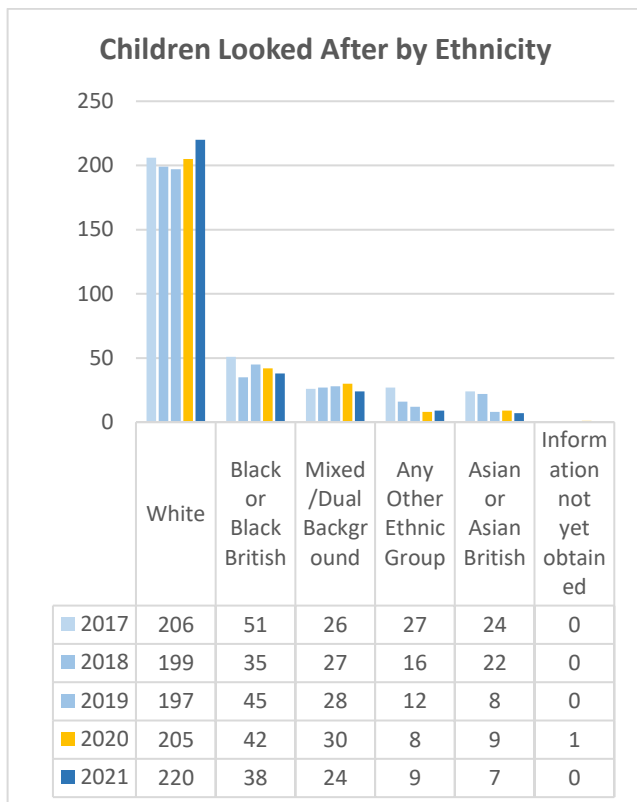
The numbers of children looked after in the 16 to 17 year old age bracket has remained stable over the last two years and this has demonstrated a sustained shift over the last five years. In 2017 children aged between 16 and 17 years represented the highest number of children looked after. Since then this age bracket has continued to be the second highest. Numbers of children looked after aged 5-11 has shown a sustained growth over the last three years.

### 9.3 Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care

Identity is a core factor considered within the dimensions on developmental need (Care Planning Guidance 2015). This domain concerns the child's growing sense of self as a separate and valued person. It is important for a child who is in care to know who s/he is and where s/he has come from, and to understand, as far as s/he is able, why s/he is being cared for away from home. Race, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability all contribute to a child's sense of identity, as well as feelings of belonging and acceptance by family, peer group and wider society, including other cultural groups. The importance of understanding who we are and where we come from is recognised in good social work practice, for example through undertaking life story work or other direct work.

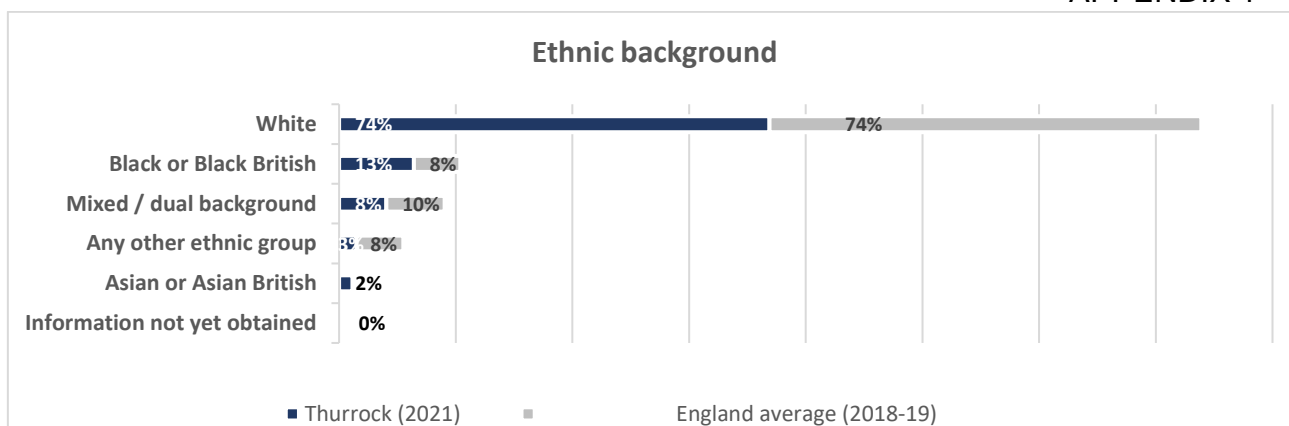
Racial and cultural identity is an important aspect of identity for many Children Looked After. The assessment of each individual child's needs alongside the child's own views will determine the actions which should be put into the care plan to ensure that s/he is able to develop a strong sense of identity and self-esteem. This will act not only as a strong protective factor against unhealthy risk taking behaviours, but enable the child to maximise his/her talents.

Disabled children may also need particular help in developing a positive sense of identity in the face of negative public stereotypes about disability.

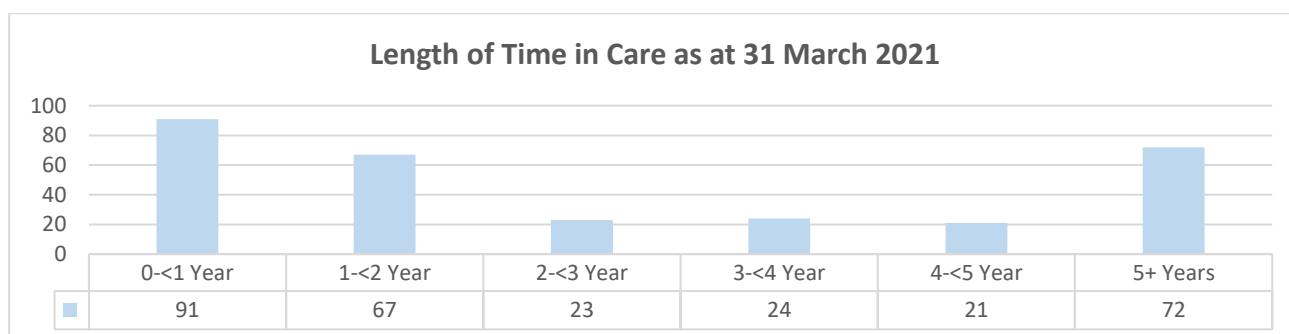


The recorded information regarding the demographics of the ethnicity of children and young people Looked after has shown little or no change on a yearly basis with children who are recorded to come from a “white” background representing the vast majority of children Looked After in Thurrock (74%). Nationally this figure is in line with the rest of England.

The percentages of Black or Black British children in care in Thurrock is 13%. This figure is 5% higher than the figures for the rest of England. When looking at these figures it is important to consider the demographic of the ethnic population within Thurrock, especially when compared to other parts of Essex with Black or Black British children representing 14.1% of the relevant population in Thurrock in the 2020 census, 6.1% higher than the figures for England recorded in 2019 (most recent data) . It is however important to ensure that the intervention offered to families from a Black or Black British background is equitable and consistent with regards to expectations and application of thresholds.



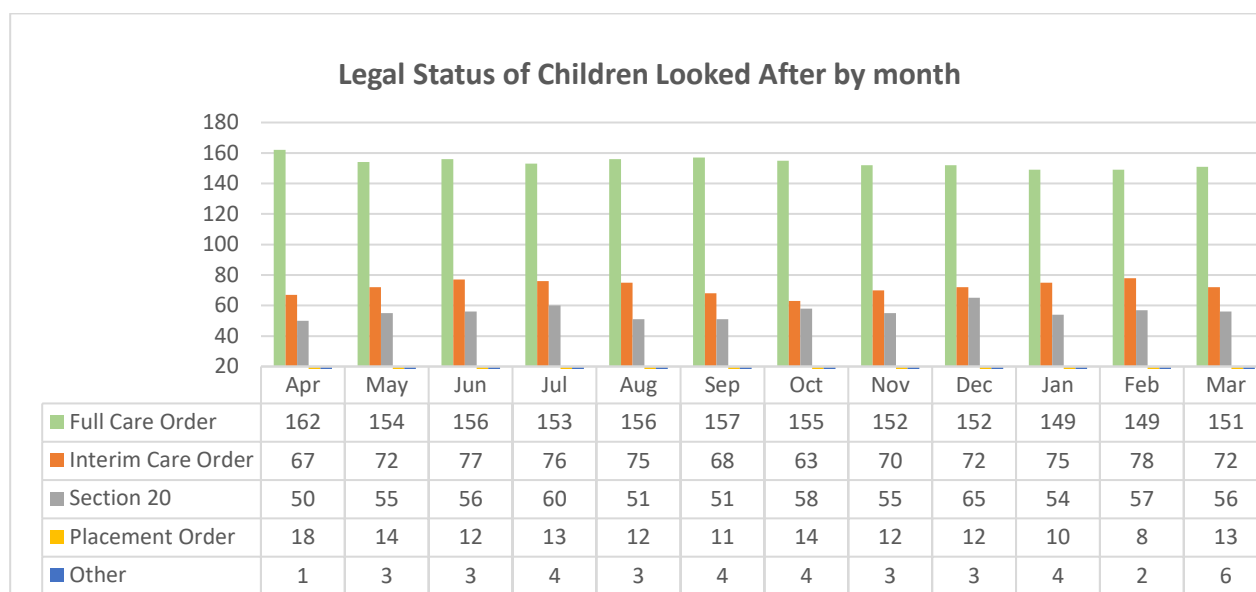
## 9.4 Time in Care for Children and Young People



It is recognised that the best place for children is placed within the care of their families, as long as this is safe. The longer that children remain in care the more problematic it becomes for them to return to the care of their families. It is therefore important that the IRO service continue to scrutinise the care plans that are put in place for children and young people to ensure that planning does not drift and that children do not remain in care for any longer than is absolutely necessary.

Where children have been in care for several years, it is particularly important that the IRO's closely scrutinise the care plan that has been developed for the young person and explore whether there more appropriate ways of ensuring permanency for a young person, such as working with foster carers to explore the possibility of a Special Guardianship Order where children have been in placement for a long time.

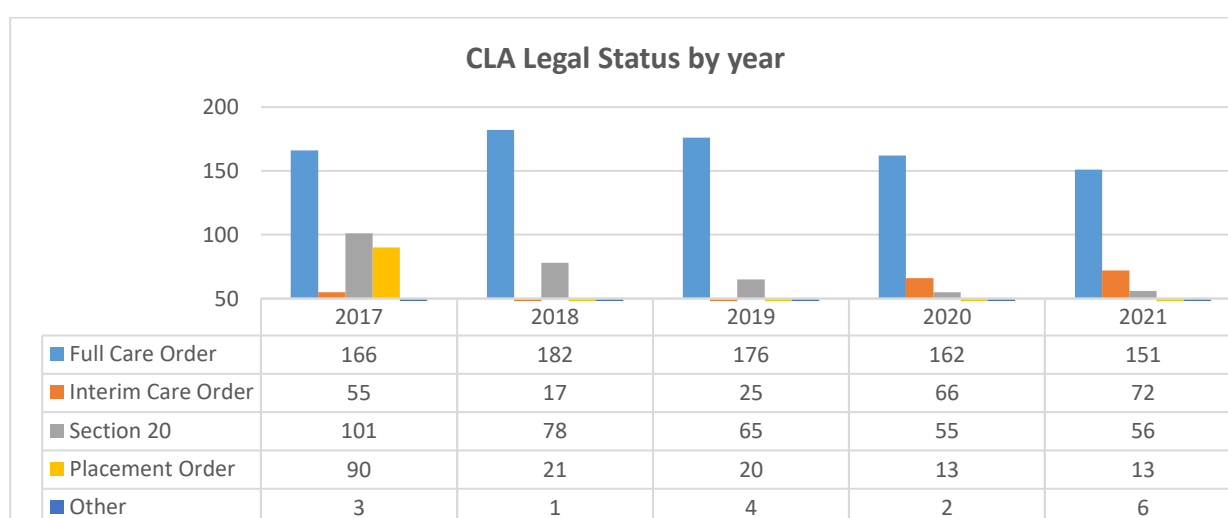
## 9.5 Legal Framework for Children in Care



Nationally 77.0% of Children Looked After were cared for under a Care Order (Full or Interim Care Order), 17.0% under Section 20, 6% on a Placement Order and less than 1% on other types of orders.

Thurrock shows similar results with 74.8% of children cared for under a Care Order, 18.8% under Section 20, 4.3% on a Placement Order and less than 1% on other types of Order.

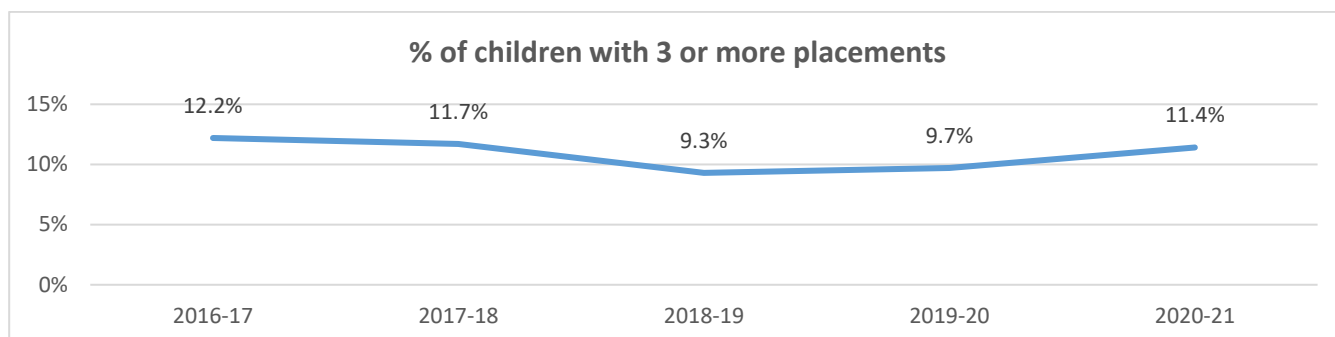
The majority of Children Looked After by Thurrock are/have been subject to legal proceedings where they have suffered some form of abuse or neglect and the accommodation is being used to protect them from further harm and to secure permanency for these children.



A priority for the IRO service is ensuring that Care Plans which are developed for children in care are progressed and carried out within reasonable timescales and that the legal framework that children are placed under does not have an impact upon the

stability that is required to allow them to achieve successful outcomes. Year-end figures evidence a sustained decrease in the use of section 20 and an increased use of Care Orders to secure stability, security and permanency for children.

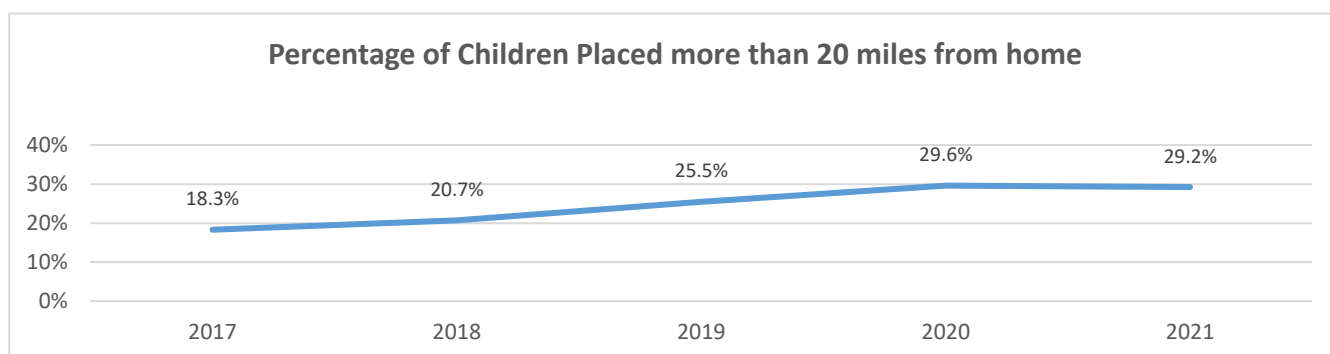
## 9.6 Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care



The percentage of children who have had three or more placements in the years 2020/21 has increased slightly by 1.7%. The number of placement moves a child experiences will impact on the security and stability that a child can achieve when provided with a consistent placement and regular access to education, friendship groups and local amenities as well as providing the opportunity to build positive relationships with carers.

During Covid lockdown significant strain was placed upon all families and this experience would have been the same for children placed in the care of Thurrock Council, and in particular those children placed in residential children's homes. It is felt that the impact of Lockdown restrictions, may, in part provide an explanation for the slight increase in placement moves. In addition and impacting on this is to this there has also been a lack of foster and residential placement sufficiency nationally.

## 9.7 Placement location of Children and Young People in Care



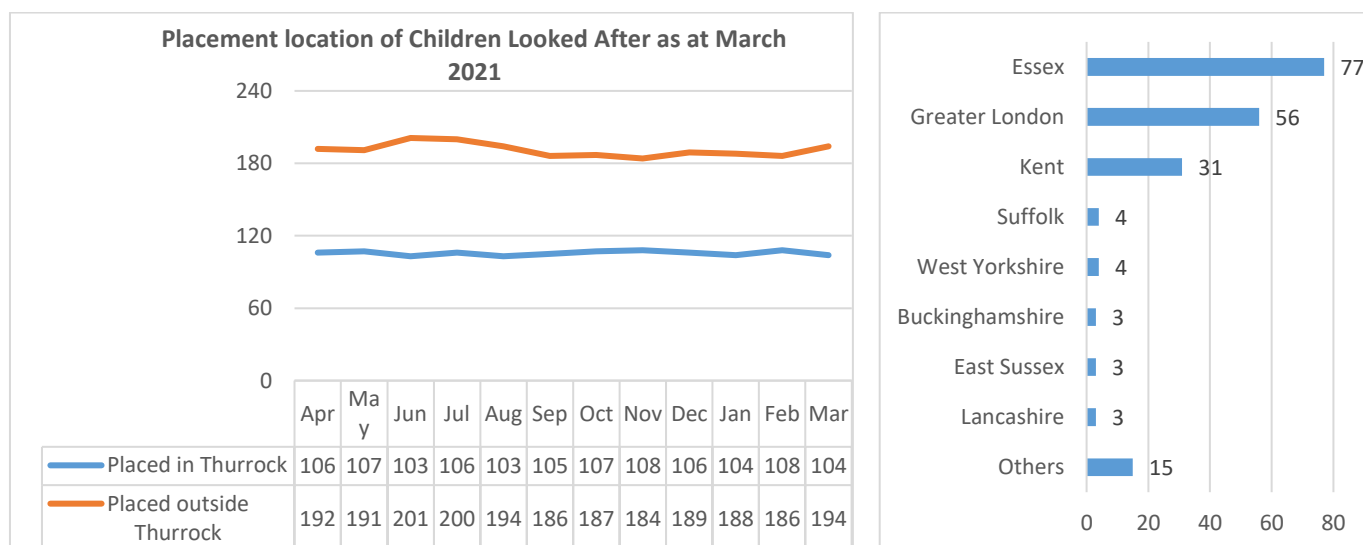
Given their life experiences, there are a number of children who are looked after who have complex needs whether these be behavioural or emotional. It is important that all children looked after are supported in the right environment where their needs will be appropriately met. At times to achieve this there are times when children are placed a long way from home.

71% of children looked after by Thurrock are placed within 20 miles of their home with the majority of children and young people placed within Thurrock, Essex, Greater London and Kent. The number of children placed more than 20 miles away from their home has



fallen slightly by 0.4%. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place children as close to their home community as possible as well as ensuring that they have continued access to specialist therapeutic services and appropriate education provision.

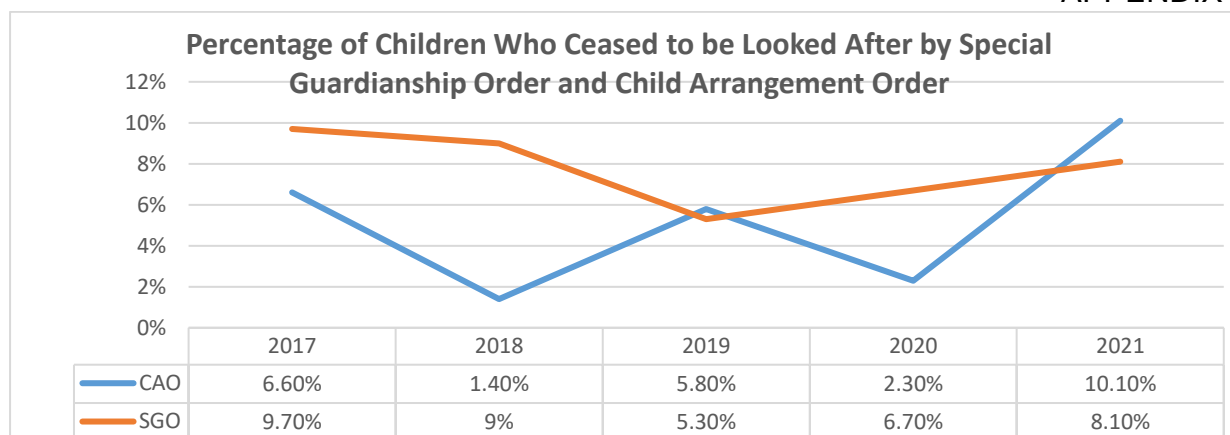
Consideration needs to be given to the number of available services with in Thurrock that have the capacity to meet the complex needs of children coming into the care system as well as the need for some of these young people to be placed placed at distance to meet their needs; to ensure their safety and continued development. The IRO service offers independent scrutiny over placements to ensure that they meet the needs of children and young people.



### 10. Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'special guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

It is a more secure order than a Child Arrangements Order (CAO) because a parent cannot apply to discharge it unless they have the permission of the court to do so, however it is less secure than an Adoption Order because it does not end the legal relationship between the child and his/her birth parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders. Both an SGO and CAO are routes to permanence for looked after children.



Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders can be used in care proceedings when looking at placing the child away from parents with friends or family members and offer a child a more “normal” childhood experience. They are also used to convert long term fostering arrangements, providing for a higher degree of commitment from the carer and a better chance of long term permanency for the child.

Compared to last year in Thurrock, 8.10% of children left care through special guardianship in 2020/21 representing an increase of 1.4%.

Numbers for children subject to a child arrangement order have increased significantly from 2.3% to 10.10% this represents a 7.8% increase. Scrutiny over the use of child arrangement orders indicated that the use of family group conferences and family network meetings have identified family members to care for their children, family members coming forward when they heard about the cases going to court or during the public law outline (PLO) process.

In addition, the Local Authority supports families with a one off legal fee to seek legal advice to consider CAO or SGO. This enables them to make an informed decision of the order that is most appropriate for them and the child. The increase in numbers of children leaving care through orders other than care or placements orders that demonstrates a continued improvement of children leaving care through orders which provide permanency

A Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order may not always be suitable for children, and it is important that the IRO service continues to robustly scrutinise the situation of each child and young person to ensure that children and young people do not remain in care unnecessarily and experience stability and security.

## **11. IRO Service impact on the Outcomes for Children and Young People**

### **11.1 Dispute Resolutions and Escalation**

One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority. This responsibility is outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2015 and IRO Handbook 2010. Every child in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are

consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care.

An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person in relation to planning for the care of the child, or the implementation of the plan or decisions relating to it, resource issues or poor practice by the Social Worker. When this happens, the IRO is required to seek a resolution.

Resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. The child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance with the IRO Handbook 2010 there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process. Thurrock's IRO's manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively and on an informal basis. More often than not, discussion with social workers and their managers is effective in achieving the progress required.

### **11.2 Formal Disputes Raised 2020-2021**

As identified above wherever possible it is the intention of the IRO service to resolve any disputes informally, discussing concerns with social workers and team managers to try and reach an agreeable resolution as quickly as possible. It is, however, recognised that there are occasions when this is not possible and in line with the guidance in the IRO handbook, the IRO will undertake a formal dispute.

The IRO Service recorded, 11 completed dispute resolutions, which were about the following issues.

<b>Number</b>	<b>Area of Practice Raised</b>
1	Challenge raised regarding provision of education not meeting the needs of the child/young person.
10	Issues raised with regards failure of the Local Authority to adequately develop/progress the agreed care plan for the child/young person.

There were no disputes which had to be referred to the Corporate Director of Children Services or CAFCAS.

### **11.3 IRO Compliance Checklist**

An IRO Checklist was introduced in July 2018 and has been used as a way of providing a monthly dip sample into the quality of services provided to Children Looked After.

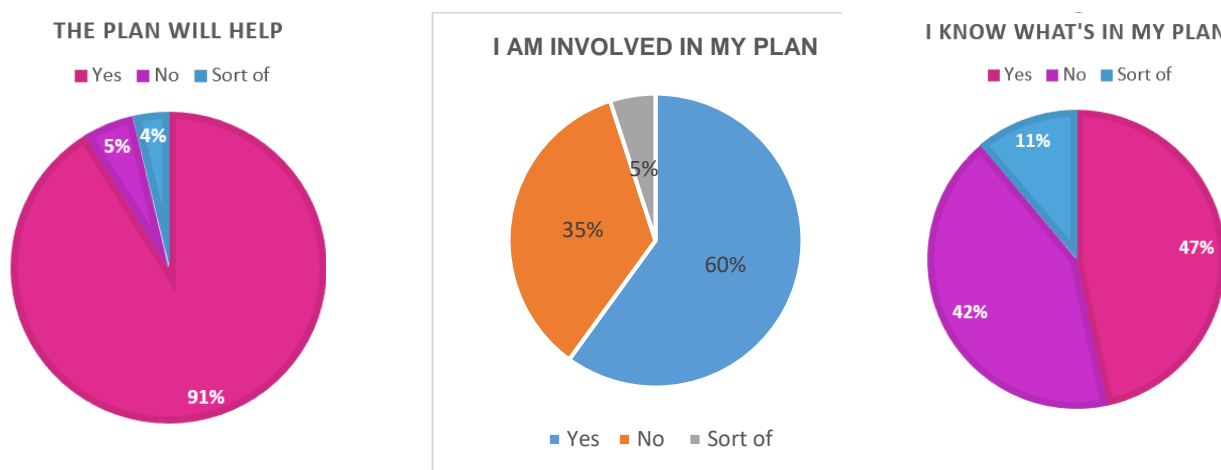
Information from the IRO compliance checklist is regularly presented at management and performance meetings. It is intended that the checklist is to be used as a tool for learning,

highlighting positive practice as well as areas for development. One aspect where the compliance checklist has been particularly useful has been in working with teams to address issues of timeliness relating to the provision of social work reports for review meetings.

## **12. Feedback from the Children in Care about the IRO Service**

At a recent involvement event a number of young people were asked about their views surrounding their care plans. 95% of children were optimistic about their care plans believing that they would either help or sort of help them. 65% of children were either involved or sort of involved in the development of their plans.

Only 58% of children knew or sort of knew what was in their plan and it is the focus of the IRO service to ensure that moving forward reviews clearly indicate to children and young people what their care plan is and how they can be involved in the development of this plan.



Anecdotally children and young people were asked by the service manager about their IRO and the feedback was extremely positive with young people indicating the in the main they knew who their IRO was and had a positive relationship with them.

## **13. IRO Service objectives in: 2020-2021**

### **1. IROs to play an active role in promoting Mind of My Own to children and young people and encouraging them to open and use their own accounts.**

There has been 57 accounts opened by young people this year (an increase of 79%) resulting in 251 contacts with the Mind of My Own service. This has enabled the involvement service to gather information regarding the experiences of children and young people about their reviews, their emotional wellbeing as well as information about their placements and relationships.

**2. The IRO Service to become actively involved in linking with the frontline teams in a consultancy capacity and attending team meetings at least quarterly, to provide information regarding the Looked After process.**

The IRO service has taken an active role in forming relationships with frontline teams. This has involved attending team meetings to share information with regards to expectations from the IRO service with regards to the role of the social worker in the Review Process. The impact on Lockdown restrictions has meant that some of these meetings have taken place virtually rather than face to face.

**3. To provide assistance and advice regarding housing transitions for young people leaving care and becoming 18 years, for both mainstream leaving care and children with disabilities transitioning to Adult Social Care.**

The IRO service now sit on placements and transition panels to provide independent advice and oversight for young people leaving care and transitioning to adult social care

**4. IROs to work proactively with Social Workers and Managers to minimise escalations, to avoid tension between the Social Workers/Managers and IRO Service.**

Wherever possible disputes are resolved at an informal level through the use of conversations with social workers and managers. The dispute resolution process that has been built in to LCS allow for a number of “pause points” to allow for reflection for the IRO to ensure that any disputes raised are done so in line with the guidance in the IRO handbook and seek positive solution focused outcomes for children and young people. It is not envisaged that this process was to ever be used to inhibit the IRO service from raising disputes or providing challenge where appropriate however it was recognised that disputes needed to be raised in such a way that empowered and promoted the ongoing role of the allocated social worker.

**5. IRO’s to design a child-friendly CLA Review record which will be more accessible to children.**

A lot of work has been undertaken in this area and records of reviews are now being presented using caricatures and pictures as well as letters based upon a child or young persons age and status.

**6. The IROs to play an active role with Social Work teams to ensure permanency is achieved for Children Looked After without delay.**

This is an ongoing goal. The IRO service recognise that it is important that children and young people do not remain unclear with regards to their plan and wherever possible decisions regarding their long term future are made quickly and safely. IRO’s continue to use the Review process, midway reviews and where necessary the dispute resolution process to achieve this. The majority of disputes raised during this period were with regards to the lack of progress made on a young persons Care Plan, indicating the focus of the IRO service to address issues of delay for children and young people when it comes to ensuring permanency.

**IRO Service Objectives 2021-2022**

1. To fully embed new ways of presenting minutes from reviews.
2. To utilise new technologies to assist in communicating with, and, conducting reviews for children and young people in line with their views and wishes.
3. To play an active role in the assessment and reduction in the use of un-regulated placements.
4. To contribute proactively to the transitions process for children and young people on the verge of leaving care.
5. To assist in the development of support packages available to children attending university.
6. The IRO service to work with the involvement service at the Young Voices Consultation days to obtain specific feedback about what they want from their reviews and IRO and act on this as appropriate.