



Children's Services

Independent Reviewing Service

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2021 - March 2022

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the role and impact of the Independent Reviewing Service in Buckinghamshire Council for the period

1 April 2021-31 March 2022

Report Owner

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work of the Independent Reviewing Service for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Headline Data

- Buckinghamshire Council had a corporate parenting responsibility for 502 children 'looked after' as at 31 March 2022.
- During this reporting year the IRO service held 1285 Childrens reviews.
- 99% of children's reviews were held within statutory timescales.
- Numbers of children over 4 years old and participating in their review has remained constant at 84% of the total number over the last year.
- The number of IRO formal escalations using the resolution tool on a child's electronic record has increased by 100%.

In December 2021, Ofsted completed an inspection of Buckinghamshire Children Services, and the report was published in February 2022. The overall rating improved from Inadequate to Requires Improvement. As part of the Inspection the work of the Independent Reviewing Service was noted as:

"Review meetings for children in care take place on time and the appropriate professionals and family members are usually involved. Children's views are presented, either in person or by someone who knows them. The regular footprint of the IROs is present on children's files, but formal escalations are not consistently recorded to address drift in care planning".

Ofsted made recommendations for improvement which included:

"Improve the impact of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in decisively escalating children's cases when there is drift and delay in the progress of their care plans."

The team has maintained good performance in holding children's statutory reviews on time with high levels of participation. IRO's have remained focused and determined in performing the key functions of their role despite the challenges presented by the covid pandemic, including adapting to agile working, and responding as required to ensure scrutiny of children and young people plans. IRO's returned to visiting children in person and undertaking children's reviews within their home or agreed venue as soon as it was safe to do so.

The service has sought to improve delivery on behalf of children via the implementation of the IRO practice standards and IRO escalation / resolution policy and procedure. IRO's have continued to exercise advocacy and representation for children and young people in care which is demonstrated by the 100% increase in the use of the formal resolution process. The service has proactively encouraged opportunities to seek feedback from children, young

people, their families, and professionals via the implementation of questionnaires regarding the quality of their experience within the child's review process to inform service improvements.

The IRO workforce has undergone some changes but overall stability for children receiving a consistent IRO has remained high. There are nine IRO's across the service, the majority of which have been within the service since March 2021. All IRO's are experienced social work professionals who have previously undertaken management roles within children social care. The range of skills, knowledge and experience across the team benefits children and young people. This extends to the wider workforce, with the IRO's recognising the importance of collaboration and developing positive working relationships with Social Work teams including the IRO link role.

Recommendations

- When IROs escalate cases (as a result of drift and delay) the IRO will set specific actions which are time bound and attributed to the relevant professional including the IRO. They will maintain oversight until a satisfactory resolution has been reached.
- The IRO's will continue to focus on building strong and effective relationships with the social work teams with a focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for children in care.
- The service will develop systems to enhance understanding of IRO activity and their impact on the quality of care received by children and young people including the function of mid-way reviews and direct feedback.
- The service will improve the use of data to enable effective monitoring, tracking and assurance pertaining to IRO performance and impact on children's plans, including timeliness of IRO escalations.
- The service will increase audit / dip sampling activity to ensure the consistency and quality of the IRO footprint and impact on the child's care plan, care journey and outcomes.
- The IRO's will share best practice to improve consistency across the IRO service when challenging and seeking to improve practice.
- The service will increase feedback received from children and their families regarding how children's reviews are held, their involvement and impact this has had.

What will be the impact?

- Childrens care plans will be aligned to their individual needs and plans for their future will be progressed at pace.
- Children and young people will receive consistent and effective interactions from professionals involved in their lives that are collaborative and focused towards achieving the best possible outcomes.

- IRO's will have a clear understanding and insight into their contribution and influence in children and young people's lives and their care experience. They will be focused and purposeful in exercising their professional duties and supporting to remove barriers to achieving high quality care plans and outcomes for children and young people.
- Increased levels of scrutiny will ensure and test IRO impact and the effectiveness of their contribution in overseeing children and young people. These will take into account children and young peoples wishes and feelings and be conducive to their long-term plans.
- Children and young people will receive interactions from their IRO which are influenced by best social work practice and their views will be actively sought and directly inform and influence how they experience their time in care.
- Increased understanding of how children and young people feel about their reviews and increased involvement of families to strengthen their views which in turn influences service delivery.

Introduction and background

This report summarises the key activity undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

The primary role of the IRO is to ensure that a child's plan fully reflects their current needs and that the actions within the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's corporate parenting responsibilities towards a child looked after, and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The key Department for Children School's and Families documents, 'IRO Handbook' (2010) and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities in relation to case management and review for looked after children.

The IRO Service Profile

The IRO service is part of the Quality Standards and Performance Service that includes Child Protection Advisors (CPAs), Allegations Management Team (LADO), Safeguarding Partnership, Independent Panel Chairs, AYSE Social Work Academy, Principal Social Worker and the Training and Development Team. IROs ordinarily are physically located in the Aylesbury, Amersham and High Wycombe offices to strengthen relationships with the individual social work teams located in those areas. IROs spend a significant part of the working week seeing children wherever they live including those out of county.

The IRO service consists of a full-time Service Manager and nine IROs (equivalent to 8.3 Full Time Equivalents). The IRO manager and IROs are social work qualified with a minimum of five years post qualifying experience and all IROs have previous management experience. There have been some changes in personnel but overall the service remains consistent.

Incorporated within the IRO service are 4 Business Support Administrators (2 full time, 2 part time). IRO caseloads have been stable within the recommended range of 50-70 as set out within the IRO Handbook.

The IRO service has monthly meetings and bimonthly practice development sessions to focus on areas of improvement. Each IRO has monthly supervision with the manager, and an annual performance appraisal in line with the Council's performance appraisal system (Coaching for Performance). Additional touchdown meetings are held as part of a communication strategy that includes regular email and verbal updates.

Service data analysis 2021-22

This section provides data that summarises the key activity relevant to the Independent Reviewing Service during the period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. The total number of reviews completed as at 31st March 2022 was 1285. 99% were completed within statutory timescale.

Number of children 'looked after' by the local authority

Buckinghamshire Council was responsible for **502 children 'looked after'** as of 31st March 2022, as noted in the graph below, along with the number of children looked after between 2014-2022.

Looked after children as at 31st March

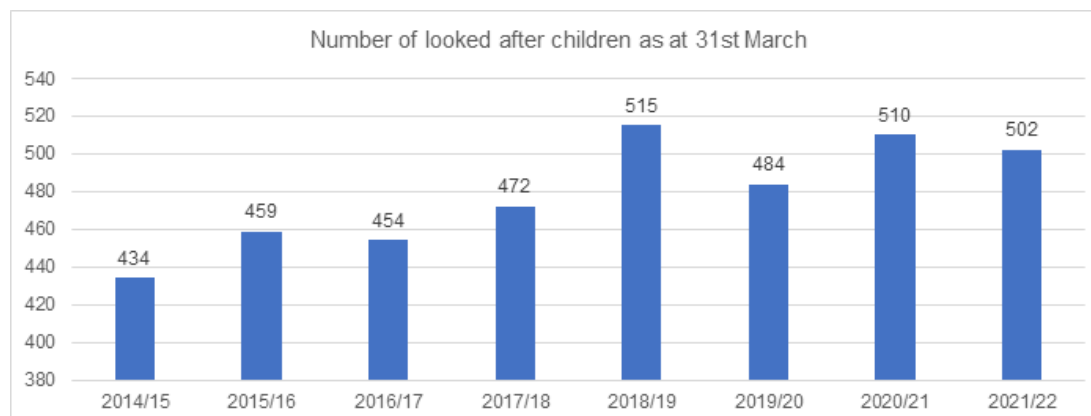


Table 1

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Number of looked after children as of 31st March	459	454	472	515	484	510	502

Table 2

Age profile of children 'looked after': 2016 – 2022

The age profile of children (shown separately for boys and girls) looked after across the last 7 financial years is broken down by gender in table 3.

Age on 31 st March	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Boys							
Under 1:	17	8	8	9	17	13	12
1 - 4:	38	36	28	29	28	33	31
5 - 9:	48	46	46	42	40	43	42
10 - 15:	92	100	113	123	112	124	125
16 - 17:	53	63	70	73	79	77	75
Total	248	253	265	276	276	290	285

Table 3

Age on 31st March	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Girls							
Under 1:	9	10	12	12	12	14	8
1 - 4:	28	29	22	33	21	21	22
5 - 9:	38	37	29	36	28	31	35
10 - 15:	90	88	93	96	96	97	87
16 - 17:	46	37	52	62	51	57	65
Total	211	201	208	239	208	220	217

Table 4

Children aged between 10 – 17 years continue to account for the highest proportion of the looked after population; in 2021/22. Notably, there is a minimal amount of change caused by the time of the pandemic.

Age of child at the point of becoming ‘looked after’ between 1st April 2021-31st March 2022

Table 5 sets out the age of a child on the day they became ‘looked after’ during this reporting period. The highest number of children per age are babies under the age of 1 year. The second highest being 54 children age 4 years. There were between 41 – 48 Children aged 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16 years. Between 32-39 children aged 5,9,10, 11, 12 and 13 years. There were below 28 children aged 1, 2, 3 and 17 years old.

Age when came into care	Number of children
0	87
1	19
2	22
3	28
4	51
5	36
6	43
7	42
8	41
9	37
10	36
11	33
12	39
13	32
14	48
15	44
16	48
17	25
Total	711

Table 5

Overview of looked after children by gender: 2016 – 2022

The overall % of boys who are looked after was 57% in 2021/22 compared to 43% of girls.

Gender of CLA On 31 st March	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Boys	248	253	265	276	276	290	285
Girls	211	201	208	239	208	220	217
Total	459	454	473	515	484	510	502

Gender of CLA on 31 st March	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Boys	54%	56%	56%	54%	57%	57%	57%
Girls	46%	44%	44%	46%	43%	43%	43%

Table 6

Figure 1 shows a slight increase of boys and girls over the 7 year period. Since 2020 gender statistics have been very consistent at 57% and 43% respectively.

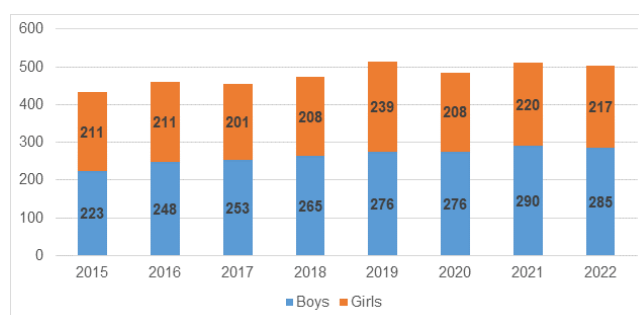


Figure1

Legal status of looked after children

Every child who is looked after by the local authority must have a care plan, which details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made by the Local Authority to meet their day to day needs. All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review that care plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010). Table 7 and figure 2 of the report summarises the legal status of the 'children looked after' supported by the Local Authority.

		2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Care Orders	Interim	71	89	58	62	55	99	84
	Full	227	240	291	299	290	293	302
Voluntary agreements under S.20 (single period of accommodation)		113	97	92	112	102	84	97
Placement Order		45	26	29	39	34	32	18
On remand, committed for trial, or detained		2	2	2	3	3	2	1
Emergency orders or police protection		1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		459	454	472	515	484	510	502

Table 7

Children Looked After on 31 March by legal status (% of total)

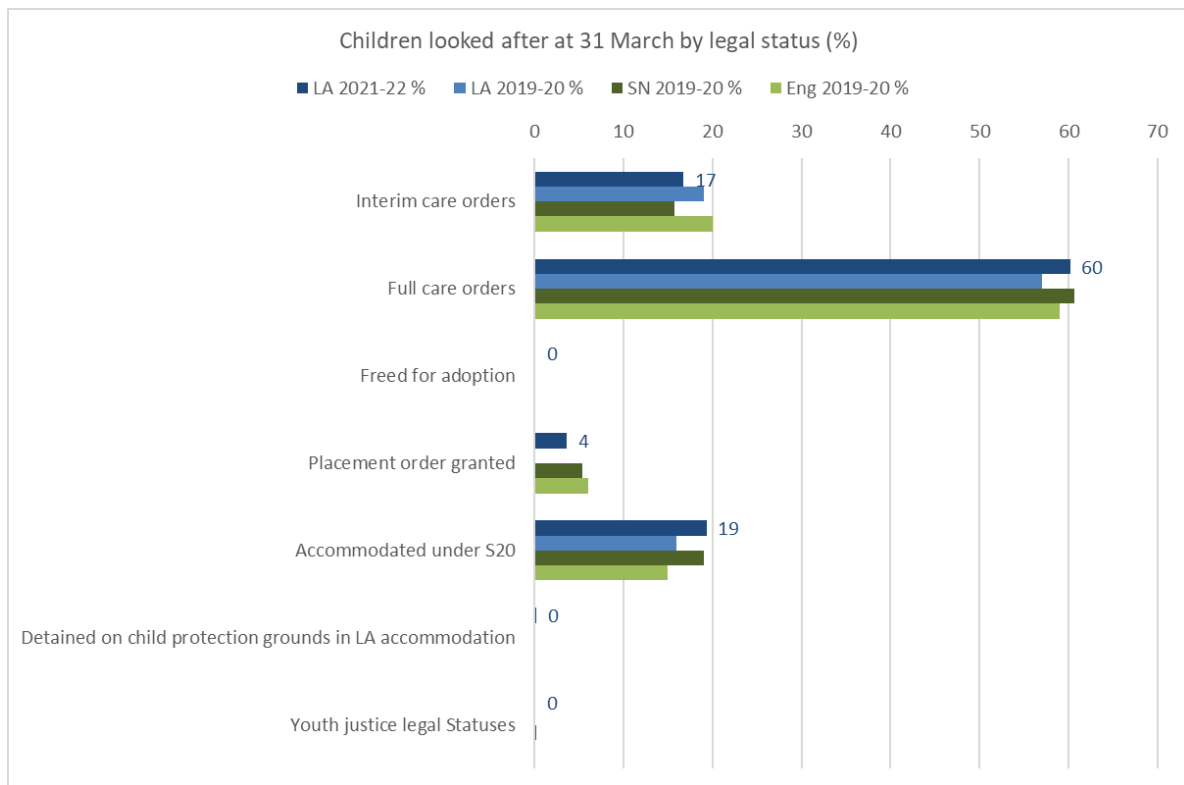


Figure 2

There was an increase in the number of care orders granted year on year; the number of interim care orders is less than last year yet full care orders are at the highest number in the last seven years since 2015/16.

The significant reduction in Placement Orders leading to adoption is likely to be explainable in the context of increased Connected Persons permanency for children. Case law now dictates that the threshold for a Placement Order is “nothing else will do”. Essentially the court must be satisfied that there is no measure less than adoption that will meet the child’s needs and promote their welfare.

Children Looked After as on 31st March 2022 by placement location

There are a range of placement options for children looked after. The number of children placed with foster carers continues to be higher than other placement types which is positive with more children experiencing family placements. There are around approximately a third of children looked after who are living outside of the local authority area. This impacts on their family time arrangements and on care planning. As part of the child’s review the Independent Reviewing Officers will see the child and visit them in their environment.

Children Looked After as on 31 March by placement type (% of total)

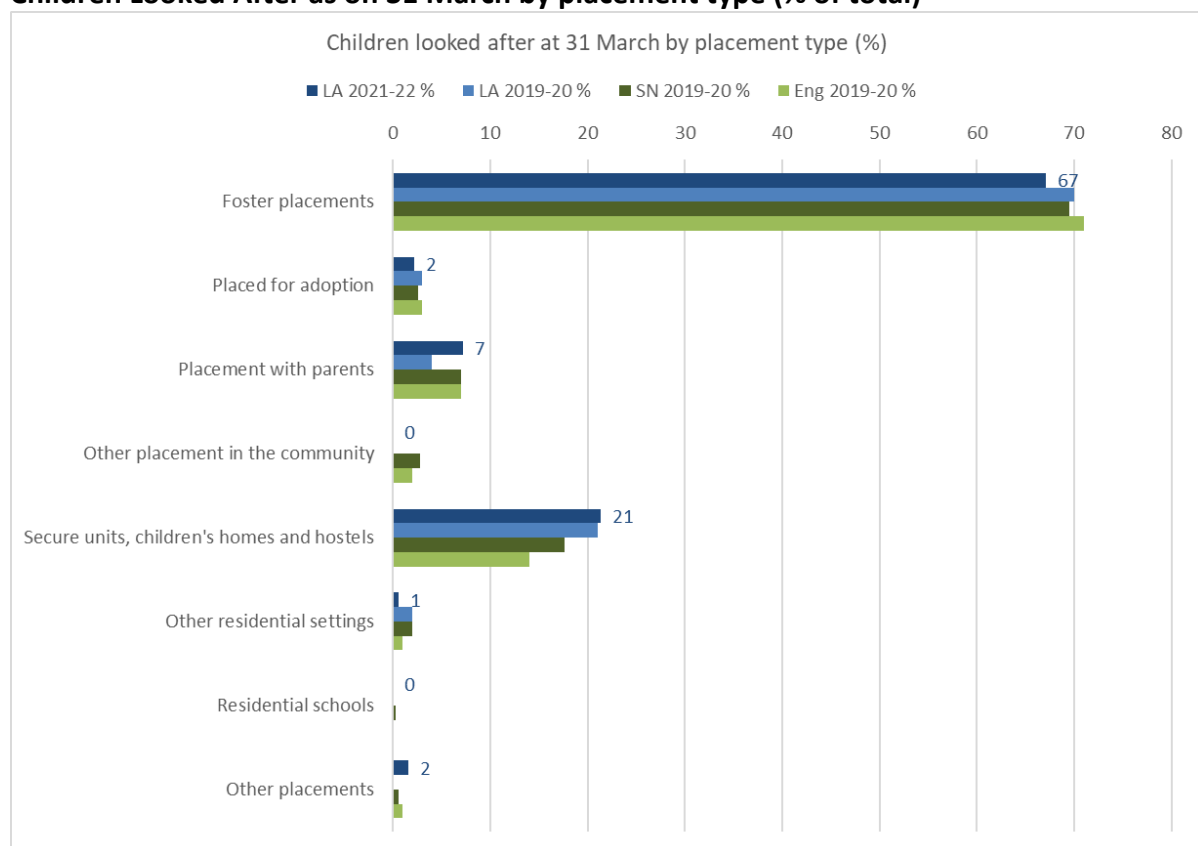


Figure 3

Children Looked After as on 31st March by placement type

	2020/21	2021/22
Foster placements (other)	152	126
Concurrent planning foster placements	5	1
Foster placements with relative(s) or friends(s)	81	68
Foster placements confirmed as permanent (long term)	119	142
Placed for adoption	13	11
Placement with parents	21	36
Other placement in the community	1	0
Children's homes, secure units and hostels	108	107
Other residential settings	8	3
Residential schools	2	0
Other placements	0	8
Total	510	502

Table 8

Looked After Children as at the 31st March by Placement Location

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Under 20 miles and inside LA boundary	215	210	202
Under 20 miles and outside LA boundary	80	78	60
Over 20 miles and inside LA boundary	31	20	25
Over 20 miles and outside LA boundary	158	182	187
Distance not known or not recorded	0	20	28
Total	484	510	502

Table 9

Children who ceased to be looked after during the year by reason (% of total)

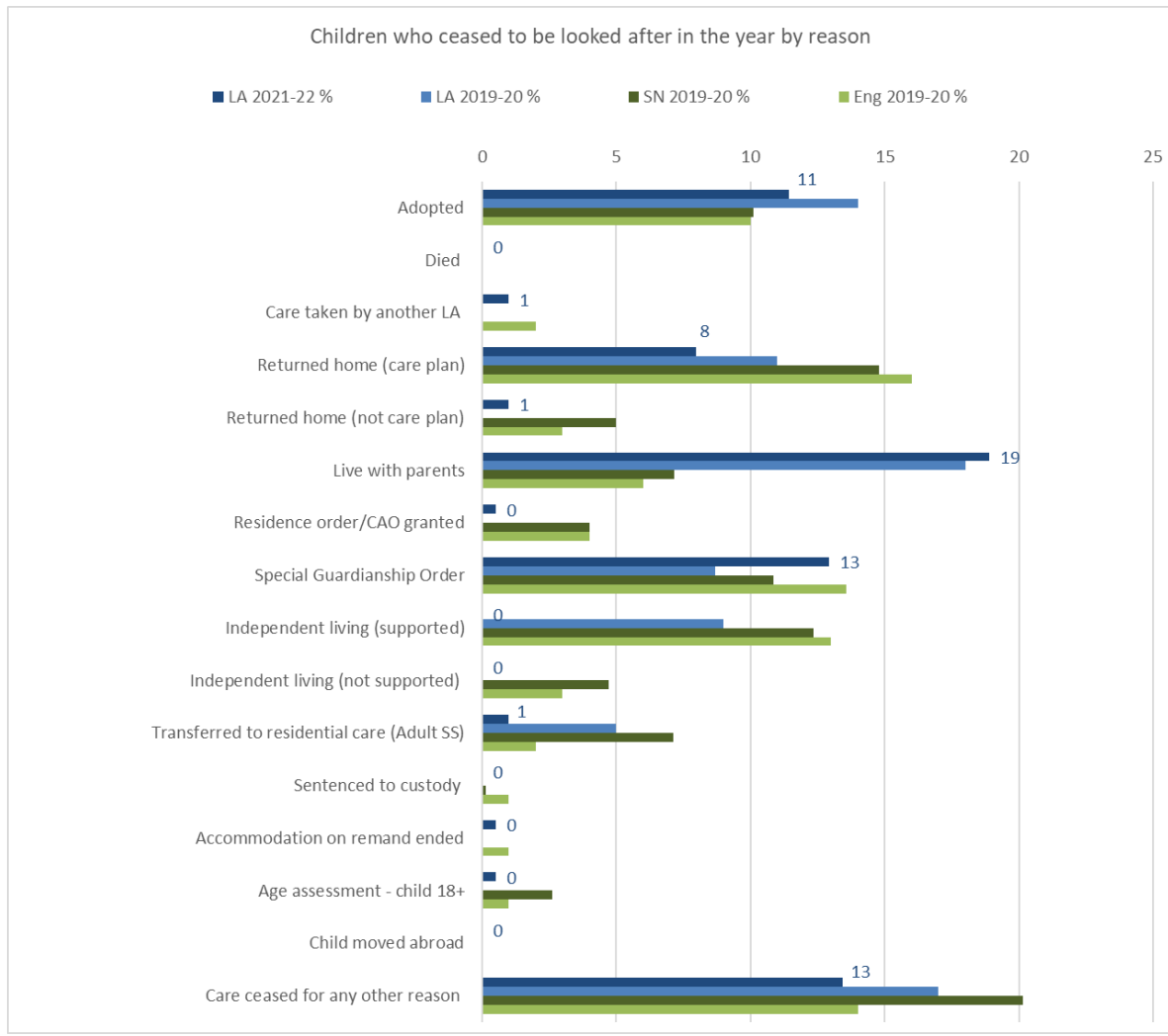


Figure 4

Children Looked After ceased during the year by reason

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Adopted - consent dispensed with	23	26	23
Died	0	0	0
Care taken by another LA	3	0	2
Returned home to live with parents or relatives as part of care planning process	19	20	16
Returned home to live with parents or relatives not as part of care planning process	6	2	2
Left care to live with parents, relatives or other person with no parental responsibility	61	27	38
Residence order / Child arrangement order granted	7	2	1
Special guardianship order	24	16	26
Moved into independent living (with support)	15	17	0
Moved into independent living (with no formalised support)	0	1	0
Transferred to residential care funded by adult social services	10	9	2
Sentenced to custody	2	1	0
Accommodation on remand ended	1	0	1
Age assessment determined child was 18 or over	2	1	1
Child moved abroad	0	1	0
Aged 18 (or over) and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements)	N/A	N/A	62
Care ceased for any other reason	59	62	27
Total	232	185	201

Table 10

The number of young people who became 18 years old during this reporting period and ceased to be Looked After was 62. There were 38 Children and Young People who ceased to be looked after and went to live with their parents, family relatives or non-family members. There were 26 children made subject to Special Guardianship.

Children looked after as on 8th May 2022 by permanency plan

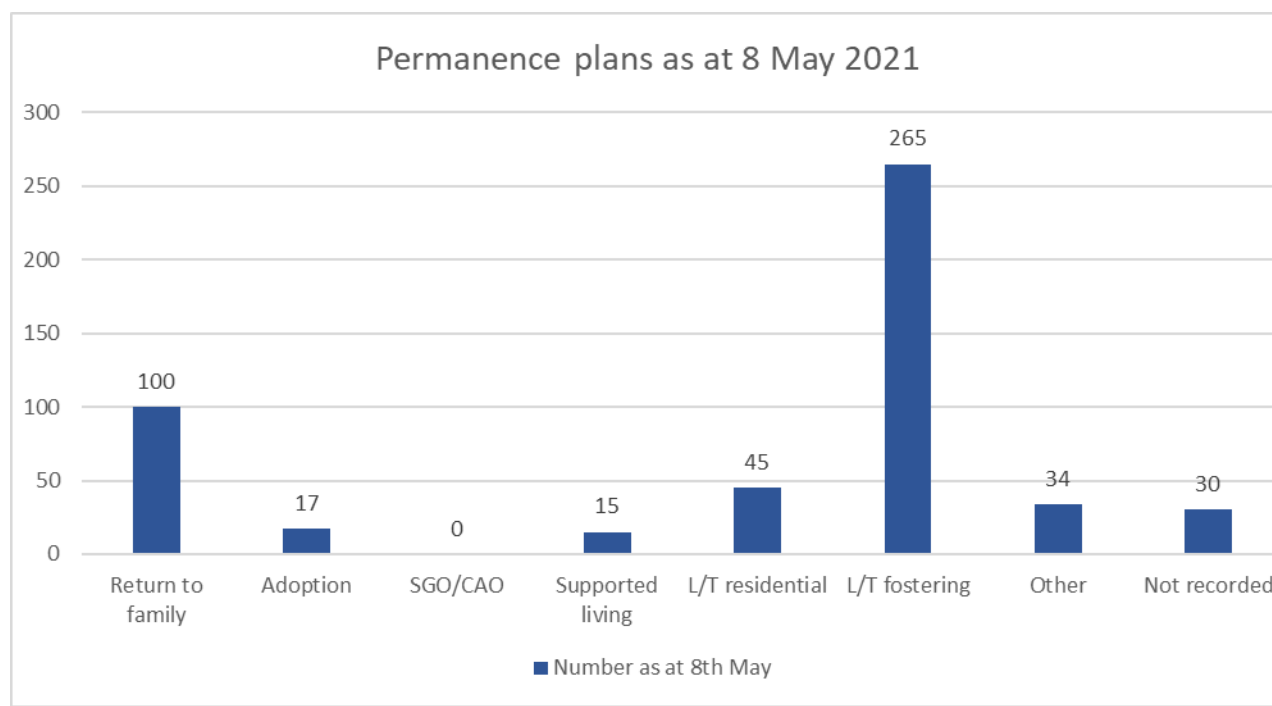


Figure 5

Children Looked After as on 8 May 2022 by permanence plan

Permanence plan	Number as at 8th May	%
Return to family	100	20%
Adoption	17	3%
SGO/CAO	0	0%
Supported living	15	3%
L/T residential	45	9%
L/T fostering	265	52%
Other	34	7%
Not recorded	30	6%
Total	506	100%

Table 11

The IRO Manager attends the permanency tracking panel to reflect the individual views of IRO's. All children cared for have a permanency plan in place by their second review. This is

recorded by the IRO choosing from a series of stated permanency options to tick within the IRO report on LCS, the children’s electronic recording system.

The IRO Manager was an independent participant on a one-off placement matching panel set up specifically to address the backlog of children whose long-term foster placements required matching. IRO’s are expected to have oversight of these plans and identify any drift and delay and escalate as appropriate. The IRO manager participates in the weekly resource panel to ensure IRO views are captured, and cases of concern are fed back to IRO’s to ensure oversight and challenge drift.

Placements starting during the year

Placements Started	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Long Term Fostering	30	30	52
Adoption	22	15	19
Total No. of Placements Started	512	429	626

Table 12

Whilst adoption figures have decreased slightly the number of confirmed Long Term matched foster homes has increased by approximately 2/3s in the last year.

265 children had a permanence plan of long-term fostering on 8 May 2022, although 128 children are yet to be long term matched. Of the 128, 107 (84%) have been looked after for more than 12 months.

Duration of care for children not currently Long-Term Fostering but whose permanence plan is to be Fostered Long Term

Duration of Care	No. of children
0-6 months	5
7-12 months	16
1-3 years	55
3-5 years	20
5-7 years	18
7-10 years	8
10 years +	6
Grand Total	128

Table 13

Children who are looked after and made an application for asylum in the UK as on 31 March in each year:

The table 14 shows the number of children under 18s who had an immigration status of unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child (at any time between 1 April and 31 March) who were looked after on 31 March of each year.

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Application for Asylum	20	15	35	29	21	21	26

Table 14

Due to national developments in how Local Authorities support children who are unaccompanied and seeking asylum in the UK, Buckinghamshire Children services are expecting an increase in the number of children supported in the coming financial year.

One year on

Emerging from the Covid 19 pandemic

During the Covid 19 pandemic the IRO's continued to deliver a service to children looked after and adjusted to the challenges of national and regional lockdown, social distancing, and use of personal protective equipment. Staff adapted to working from home, managing self-isolation and coping with absence in the team due to Covid 19 infections.

Children's reviews and contact visits continued throughout the lockdown period either in person or via means of MS Teams. Formal meetings with children, their families and their professional networks were mostly uninterrupted during this challenging period.

Since November 2021 IROs increasingly resumed visiting children in their homes. By the end of this reporting period all children were being visited in person by their IROs and CLA Reviews were being conducted either in person or with some professionals and family members choosing to access the meeting via MS Teams using a hybrid model.

IRO Service Activity

The Independent Reviewing Service conducted 1285 Childrens reviews during 2021/22. 1267. Childrens reviews were held within statutory timescales. The remaining 18 were held outside of the statutory timescale due to unforeseen circumstances relating to the IRO, social work team or the child.

Voice of children and young people

It is set out in statutory guidance that the Local Authority Independent Reviewing Service must provide for the full participation of both children and parents within the child's review process where possible and appropriate. It is essential that the child's voice is captured as part of their review.

The participation of children in their reviews was 71% overall in 2021/22. 14% of children declined to participate in their review or were unable to and a further 15% were aged under 4 years old. 84% of children who would be expected to participate took part in their reviews. Participation rates are presented in the pie chart below. All IRO's encourage Childrens participation and try to resolve any barriers.

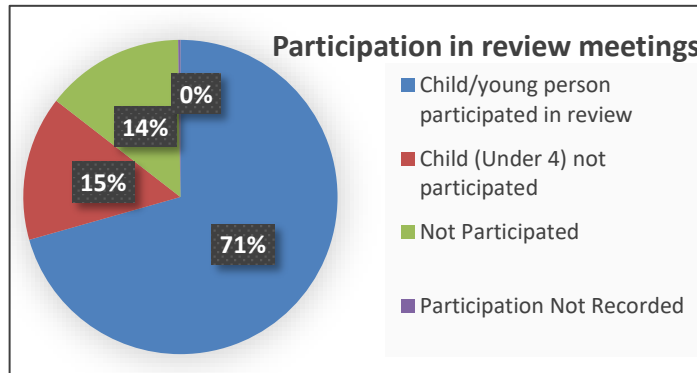


Figure 6

Advocacy

Every child in care has access to an advocate via National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS). During 2021/22 NYAS provided advocacy on 103 occasions, this was a decrease of 35 from the previous year. In 2021/22 NYAS provided an advocate as part of the child’s Looked After Review on 33 occasions, which again was a decrease of 10 in the previous year. This may be attributed to IRO visit and children’s reviews returning to being held in person.

Below is a summary of the issue-based advocacy requests received by NYAS.

Assigned Issue	Apr 19 – Mar 20	Apr 20 – Mar 21	April 21 – Mar 22
Child looked After Review	31	43	33
Placement Moves	15	18	13
Issue in Placement	7	18	17
Complaint Against Local Authority	6	6	7
Education	6	0	6
Family Time Arrangements	0	10	5

Table 15

NYAS also provides independent visitors for Buckinghamshire children looked after. Each independent visitor is carefully matched to a child and commits to befriending and visiting a child or young person for a minimum of two years. Between April 2021 and March 2022, NYAS matched 68 independent visitors to children or young people. This is two more than last year.

Improving outcomes for children

A key function of the IRO is to resolve problems arising from the child’s care plan and ensure all necessary actions are effected in a timely manner. Where problems arise in relation to care planning, implementation or decision making the IRO will, in the first instance, attempt to resolve the issue in an informal way through discussion and ‘notification’ of concern to the Social Worker and Team Manager.

The Formal Resolution Process

Should the concern be significant or not resolved to the satisfaction of the IRO, the concern will be escalated to the attention of the Team Manager (Stage one) Head of Service (Stage two) Service Director (Stage three) for ‘resolution’ Corporate Director (Stage four) or referral to CAFCASS for resolution (Stage five).

The Resolution Process is designed to be a proactive tool to advise Social Workers, Team Managers and Senior Managers that standards defined by Children’s Social Care have not been adhered to. A Resolution procedure is a statutory requirement for children who are Looked After and the IRO has the mandate to refer to CAFCASS at any point in the process. This system is also used to highlight areas requiring action by practitioners and managers to prevent drift and delay.

If the issues cannot be resolved by a Team Manager, the resolution tool will be escalated to the relevant Head of Service. At this level a Head of Service will chair a resolution meeting to address the practice issues and prevent the resolution from escalating to stage three of the Resolution Process.

Table 16 shows the number of IRO resolutions raised per month, which totalled 213 occasions during the 2021/22 reporting year. As demonstrated in the table below there has been over 100% increase in the number of formal escalations during this period.

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-28	2020/21
Resolutions raised by IROs	28	32	14	13	10	14	9	17	18	13	17	28	213
	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	2020/21
Resolutions raised by IROs	4	2	2	5		11	31	7	6	2	7	5	82

Table 16

IRO resolutions raised per social work team

Key Team	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	2021/22
Children in care team	16	24	8	9	8	10	7	8	12	6	6	14	128
Court Team	11	3	2	3	2	0	0	4	5	6	7	8	51
Children & Young Adults Disability 0 – 25 service	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	6
Care Service – Aftercare Wycombe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Help & Protection Aylesbury	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	5
Help & Protection Chilterns	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1	1	8
Help & Protection High Wycombe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2	6
Help and Protection Project	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Social Work Academy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wycombe Assessment Team	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Aylesbury Assessment Team	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Chiltern & South Bucks Assessment Team	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Table 17

It is to be expected that a higher number of formal IRO resolutions would be raised within the children in care teams and the Court Team as they support a higher number of children looked after in comparison to other social work teams. The IRO Manager meets on a two-weekly basis with the Team Manager from the Children in Care team and monthly with Court Team Manager to review all active IRO resolutions. Independent Reviewing Officers are linked to social work teams to strengthen communication and working relationships. IRO Team Meetings provide for individual feedback from IRO's linked to specific teams and opportunity for wider discussion regarding consistency and themes of formal escalations.

Table 18 and bar chart (Figure 7) represents the resolution by themes in the last reporting period.

Themes	Apr 21	May 21	Jun 21	Jul 21	Aug 21	Sep 21	Oct 21	Nov 21	Dec 21	Jan 22	Feb 22	Mar 22	20 21/22
C&F assessment not completed in timescales before CPC / CLA Review	16	13	7	8	5	7	2	4	5	1	5	10	83
C&F assessment not shared with family in timescales before CPC / CLA Review	3	4	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4	3	17
C&F assessment not signed off by manager before CPC / CLA Review	3	4	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	15
Children not being seen / seen alone	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Decisions / Actions not carried out	2	8	3	1	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	4	27
Drift in permanency planning	0	4	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	9
IRO not notified of significant events	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Lack of management oversight / supervision on child's record	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Missing / incomplete / poor standard of documentation	16	13	1	3	2	0	3	7	9	10	10	14	88
No SW or ATM / TM attended Review / Conference	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	5
Other	1	4	6	2	2	3	1	3	3	1	5	3	34
Plan 'drifting' or not agreed by IRO	0	0	1	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	0	5	13
Visits or Core Groups not being done	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Education/PEP	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Health Assessment	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
No Theme recorded	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2

Table 18

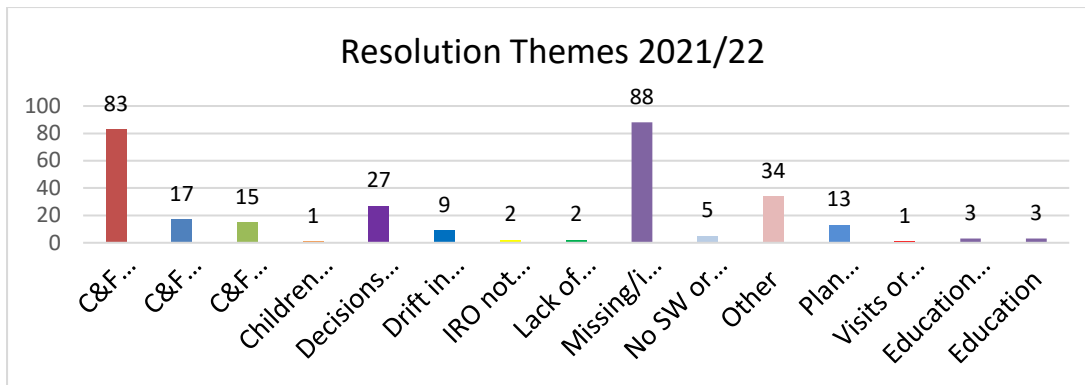


Figure 7

Based on the resolutions raised by IROs during 2021/22, the main practice themes identified were;

- Missing/incomplete/poor standard of documentation (88 resolutions were raised relating to this in total), Children and Families Assessment not completed within timescales (82 resolutions raised) as well as decisions/actions not carried out (27 raised under this theme).
- There were 34 resolutions raised under 'other' where the issue did not fit into a specific category such as: a specific request from a child, an issue relating to the intervention if an outside agency or a one off issue.
- Resolutions that were completed in 2021/22 mostly took less than one week to resolve (62%) this is approximately a 20% improvement from last year.
- Resolutions that took over 4 weeks to resolve (7% of the total) was an area for improvement in 2021/22 and improved by 75%.

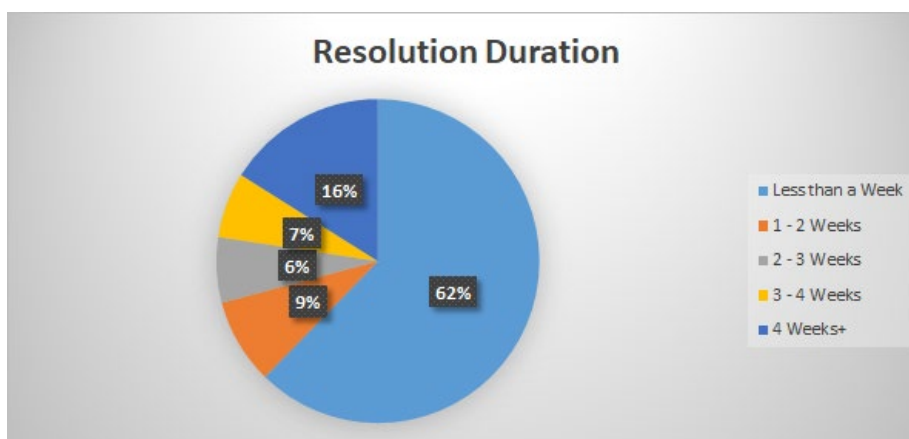


Figure 8

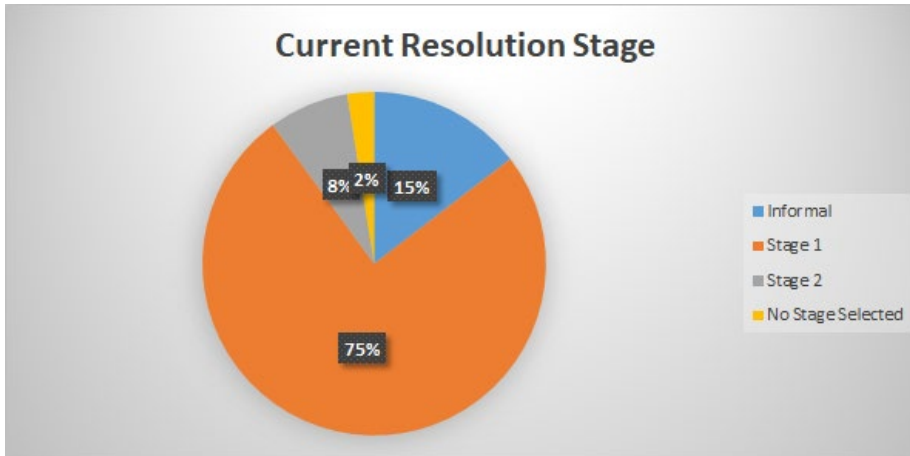


Figure 9

The majority of resolutions were raised and resolved by a Team manager at stage 1. This equates to 75%. A further 15% were raised and resolved by the social worker at the informal stage and 8% were resolved by a Head of service at stage 2. Within this reporting period there were no escalations to the Service director at stage 3 or above and no escalations to CAF/CASS.

Impact and Outcomes

Every child or young person who is supported by the Local Authority as a Child Looked After has had an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) allocated on the day their looked after journey began. The initial Child's Review is held within 20 working days. Second and subsequent Reviews are held within statutory timescales and in agreement with the family and professional network. This enables children and young people to have a stronger voice in planning for the future having quickly established a rapport with their Independent Reviewing Officer and know how to contact them.

During this year the IRO Service has reviewed and updated the IRO Resolution Policy and IRO Practice Standards. This is enabling greater level of consistency amongst IROs using the policy and guidelines. Consistency of report writing, and documentation is an area for continued growth within the service. The IRO Resolution Policy and Practice Standards has been shared with Social Work Teams to enable colleagues to understand the role and function of the IRO Service and Social Worker and manager expectations in respect of responding to IRO input and challenge. These important documents require regular re-visiting to ensure they are fully embedded.

The IRO Service has implemented a formalised process to strengthen monitoring and oversight of Care Plans and Pathway Plans between Review meetings. IRO's regularly meet with Social Workers between Review meetings and confirm progress of the outcomes from the previous review. A recording template has been implemented to create consistency. Social Workers have shared that they have found this monitoring opportunity helpful and an opportunity to reflect on progress made.

During this year IRO's returned to conducting reviews and visits face to face with children and young people and positive feedback has been received. This feedback enables the service to get a better understanding of a child's personal lived experience, strengthen relationships

between children and their Independent Reviewing Officer and places the service in a stronger position to promote that child's welfare.

Some children and young people have welcomed communication virtually via phone, text and MS Teams. Those children have continued to be able to contact their Independent Reviewing Officer in this way demonstrating flexibility of approach.

What people who have taken part in a child's review have said about the IRO Service

I would like to thank you for all the support and advice throughout all this process. It was a lot to take in but with your views and support it made it more clear and easier to deal with it.
(Parent)

An excellent interactive review where everyone had their chance to express their concerns, experiences and opinions.
(Professional Colleague)

The IRO did a good job its just that the placements keep changing so not sure where my child is ending up. However, the meeting itself went very well and we have a good IRO. (Parent)

Thank you for listening to me and coming to my home
(child)

'All in all, regardless of outcome, I want to thank you for all your work getting me here. While it may seem to you like just a job, you have managed to get my name out there and fight my side. Without you or your team I wouldn't have been able to get this far this quickly and for that I thank you. Thank you so much' (Child)

The IRO made the effort throughout to include the young person's wishes. She was approachable and inclusive of all professional participants. Great communication as well.'(Professional Colleague)

Appendices

1) Independent Reviewing Officer Practice Standards



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2) Independent Reviewing Officer Dispute Resolution policy



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