



Torbay Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report

2022-23

Contents

Executive Summary.....	page 3
1. Introduction - Purpose of Service and Legal Context.....	page 5
2. Professional Profile of the Torbay IRO Service and Workload.....	page 6
3. Profile of Torbay’s Cared for Children.....	page 7
4. Timeliness of Review Records Completion.....	page 21
5. Voice of the Child and Young People Participation.....	page 23
6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation.....	page 25
7. Achievements and Impact of IRO Service and Summary of Progress.....	page 26
8. Independent Reviewing Service Performance Planning Procedure.....	page 27
9. Progress Against Areas for Development noted in the 2021/22 Annual Report....	page 28
10.Areas for Development 2023/24.....	page 29

Executive Summary

The Annual Report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. 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.

During the period relevant to this report, we emerged from a global pandemic that forced the service to work differently and enabled us to find different ways to connect with children and young people. 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 was impacted on during the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in higher than usual staff sickness, long-term staff sickness for reasons other than Covid-19, and an over-reliance on agency staff that were not as invested in Torbay as permanent staff tend to be. There was also a gap at Service Manager level. However, it is positive to report that during quarter 4 of the reported financial year we were able to appoint to vacant posts and the service is now 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 740 cared for reviews taking place in 2022/23 and although this was down on the number that took place last year timeliness of reviews was at 94% in time compared with 92% the previous year.

The number of cared for children increased over the year and stood at 314 as of 31st March 2023 compared with 299 at the same point the previous year. This increase was anticipated with the impact coming from the increase of unaccompanied asylum seeking children that stood at 23 at the end of the year compared with 6 the previous year. This was a result of the combination of the National Transfer Scheme coupled with a significant number of individuals placed in the area by the Home Office disputing their age and the age assessments running over the year end period. Therefore, taking this factor into account (i.e. removing unaccompanied asylum seeking children from the equation) there would have been a reduction of in the cared for population of 8 children.

The number of babies being cared for remained stable at 24 children under the age of two becoming cared for in the year compared to 25 in the previous year. However, this year's figure is lower in proportion to the overall number of children that became cared for in the year which stood at 112. That equates to 21% being under two compared to 27% the previous year. As noted previously, the higher number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children has impacted significantly on the amount of children becoming cared for in 2022/23 compared to the previous year.

With regards to gender, this remained similar to the previous year with 65% of newly cared for children being male in 2022/23 compared to 66% being male in 2021/22. However, it should be noted that this is against a trend whereby all the unaccompanied asylum seeking children were male and therefore, taking this factor into account, identifies a new trend of females being the majority group of new entries into care in real terms over 2022/23.

There has been a shift back towards boys 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 2022/23.

Foster placement sufficiency in Torbay continues to be challenge and although the number of children placed more than 20 miles away is still significantly above the statistical neighbours and national average, the figure of 31% is similar to the previous year. However, this needs to be contextualised by the impact of the National Transfer Scheme, and the wishes and feelings of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who express a wish to be placed in more urban settings.

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 13 year old children fairing worse in terms of more than one placement in a two year period.

44 young people ceased to be cared for in the 2022/23 year who were aged 18 at that point. 20 of those were in foster placements at the point they ceased to be cared for. Of those 20, all but two remained Staying Put with their foster carers. (Of the other two, one went to live with family and the other moved to live independently.) That is 90% of children in foster care ceasing to be cared for aged 17+ who Stayed Put.

The findings presented in this report demonstrate that more focus has been placed on the health of Torbay's care for children over the last year with significantly more children having health assessments, dental checks and immunisations compared with the previous year. It is noteworthy that despite the challenges finding dentists, this year's figures are significantly above the national average.

A long-standing challenge and area identified again for continued improvement over the next year is children and young people's participation in their cared for reviews. Participation in 2022/23 was 79%, reduced from 82% in the previous year.

The report summarises with a review of the previous year's action plan along with a set of key improvement objectives for the service over the year 2023/24.

1. Introduction – Purpose of Service and Legal Context

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

- 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 independent of 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 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 31st March 2023 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).

The above compares favourably with the service staffing arrangements of the previous year as follows:-

- Permanent staff (4.3 fte).
- Agency staff (2.3 fte).
- Vacant posts (2.3 fte).

It should also be noted that the decision has been taken to manage the 0.4fte vacancy and not recruit to that post immediately. It is proposed that this post will be amalgamated with a 0.6fte post that will become vacant towards the end of the 2023/24 year when an IRO plans to retire. It is considered that a 1.0fte equivalent post will be easier to fill and more effective than having two part-time posts.

- 2.4 During Quarters 2 and 3, Covid-19 related sickness impacted on two of the permanent IROs coupled with one IRO being on long-term sickness for a known physical health condition. This inevitably impacted on the productivity of the service and was compounded by the impact a vacant Service Manager post during that time. Capacity was further impacted upon by a high reliance on agency IROs who were not as flexible and reliable as permanent staff. However, as previously stated all these matters were resolved by the end of the financial year following an aggressive recruitment and sufficiency planning programme alongside deploying appropriate human resource procedures to significantly reduce the sickness levels. Of the workforce as of 31st March 2023 only 17 days sickness was recorded (taking Covid related sickness out of the equation). This compares favourably with the previous year whereby non-covid related sickness exceeded 100 days.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 The average allocation of children for an IRO in Torbay fell within the recommended levels set out within IRO handbook, with allocations reducing steadily over the year as the numbers of children subject to child protection plans decreased across all services and the IRO capacity increased.

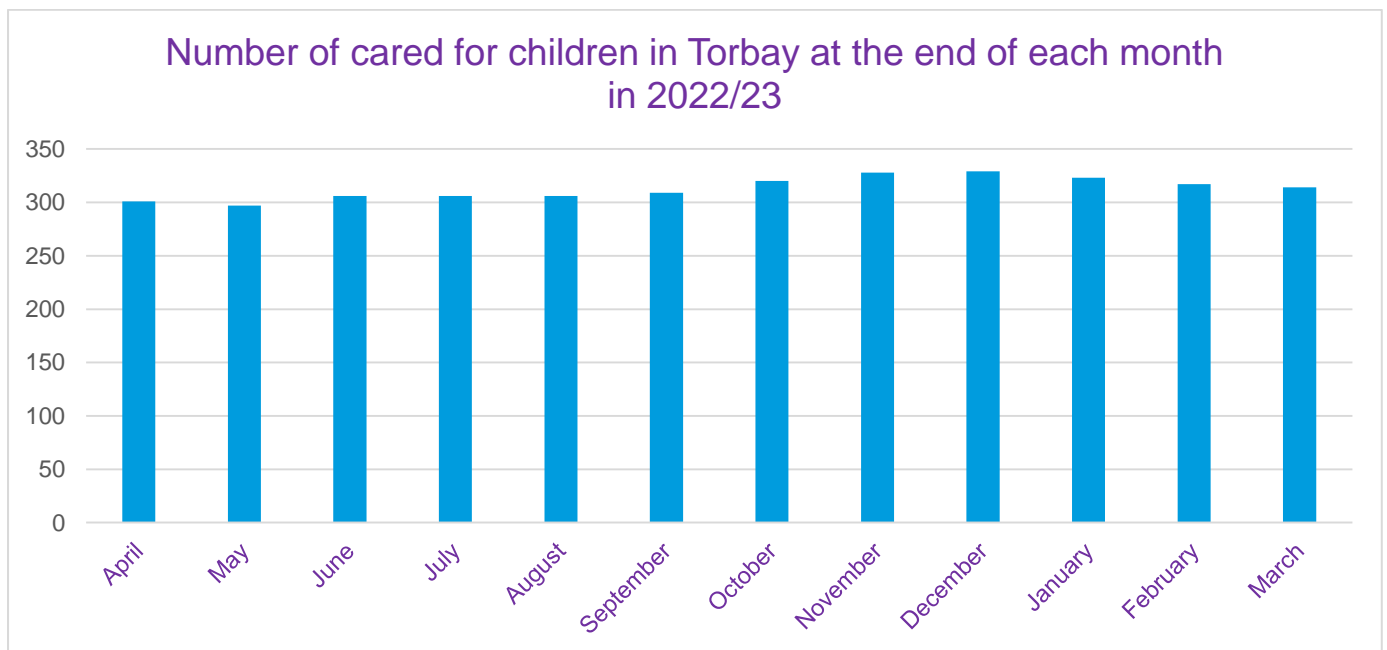
3. Profile of Torbay’s Cared for Children

- 3.1 Torbay’s cared for population stood at 314 children and young people on the 31st March 2023. This is up from 299 at the same time in 2022.
- 3.2 The rate of cared for children increased by 5% over the year and is 21% higher than the SN average.
- 3.3 The rate per 10,000 children also remains significantly higher than the national average, at 124 compared to 70 nationally.

Number of children cared for during the year by calendar month

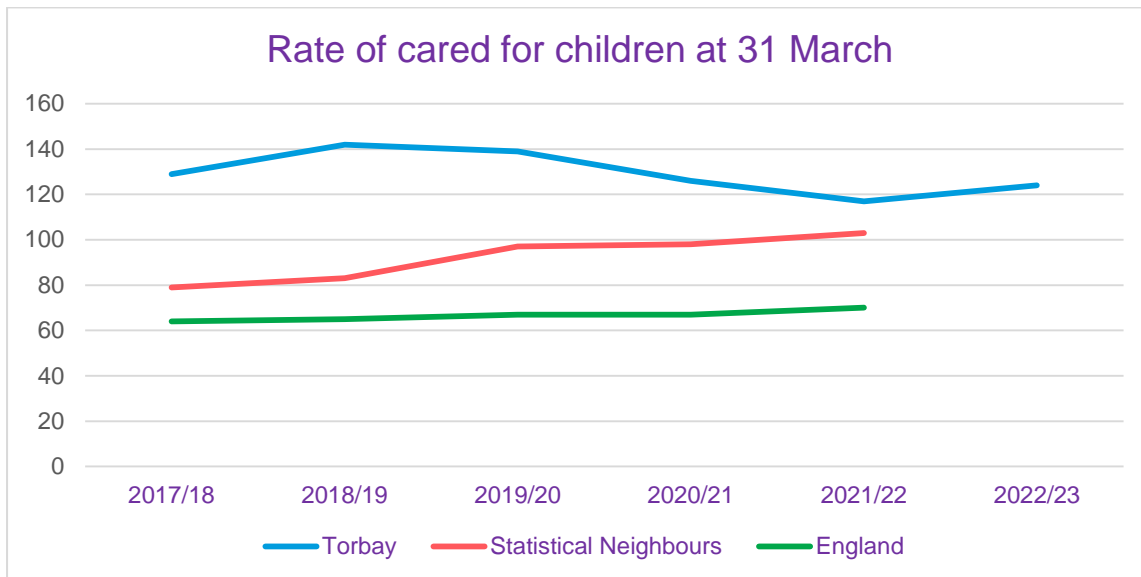
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Torbay	301	297	306	306	306	309	320	328	329	323	317	314

- 3.4 As can be seen from the graph below, Torbay’s cared for population remained relatively stable until October 2022. At this point the establishment of an asylum hotel in Paignton impacted on the numbers significantly with a sudden influx of individuals disputing their Home Office age assessments. This resulted in a peak of 329 cared for children in December 2022 whilst age assessments were undertaken. Although increases were predicted in the 2021/22 IRO Annual Report, this sudden influx was not and resulted in challenges across the whole children’s social care system as well as the IRO service.



Rate of cared for children per 10, 000 children on 31st March each year

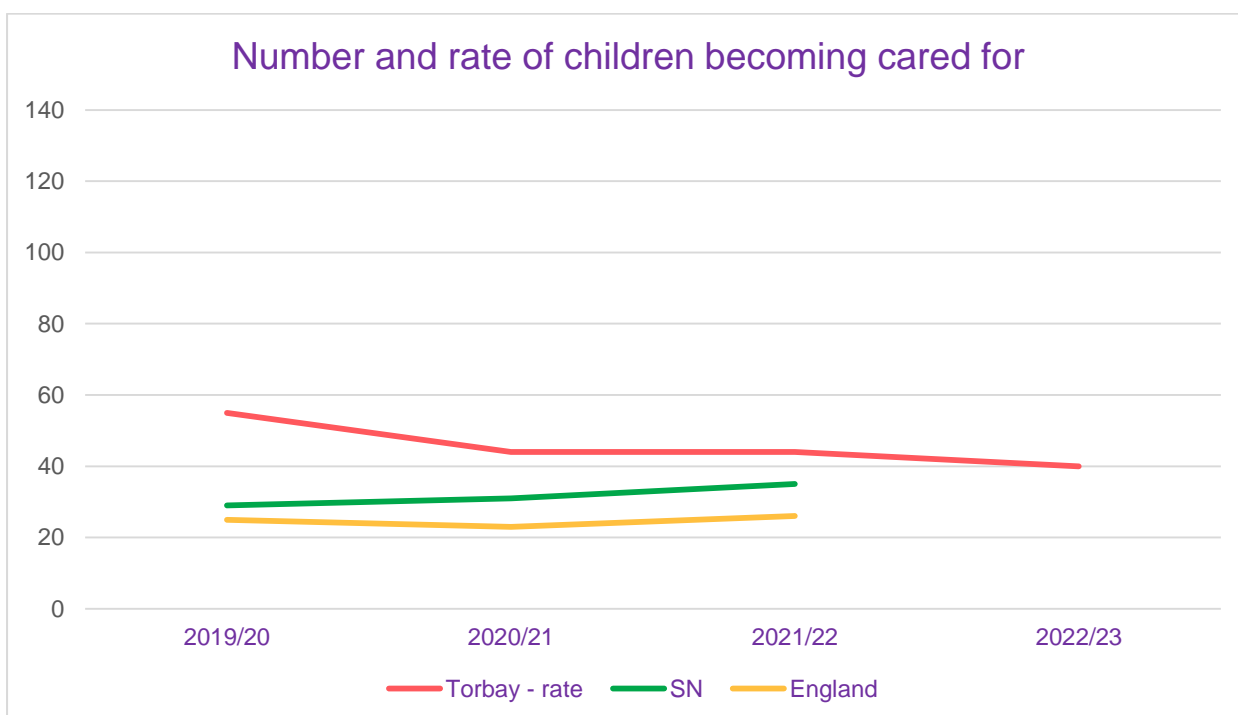
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Torbay	129	142	139	126	117	124
Statistical Neighbours	79	83	97	98	103	
England	64	65	67	67	70	



3.5 The rate of children becoming cared for children increased by 23% in 2022/23 with 112 new children becoming cared for during the year. As noted above, the National Transfer Scheme for UASC and the establishment of an asylum hotel in Paignton was undoubtedly the primary contributing factor here. To contextual this, 32 children who became cared for in 2022/23 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Children becoming cared for children

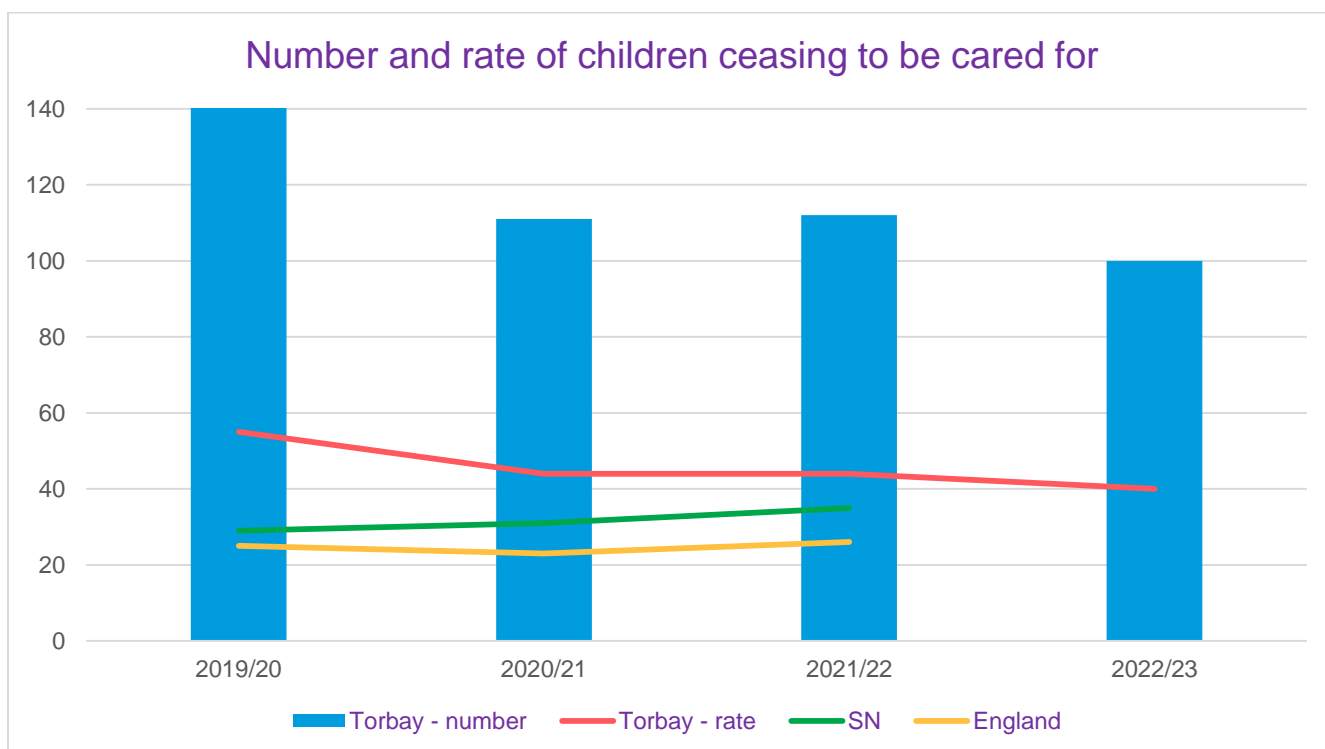
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Torbay - number	135	73	91	112
Torbay - rate	53	29	36	44
SN	36	32	37	
England	26	24	26	



3.6 The rate of children ceasing to be cared for children fell by 9% compared to 2021/22.

Children ceasing to be cared for children

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



3.7 The proportion of children in foster care fell from 76% in 2021/22 to 73%. However, this continues to remain above the national average of 70%. Again, factors contributing to the decrease here on the previous year are linked to unaccompanied asylum seeking children who invariably are placed in non-foster care accommodation.

3.8 The proportion of children placed for adoption at the end of the year was 4% in 2022/23, a slight increase from 3% on the previous year and consistent with continued improvement in the overall adoption performance for Torbay.

Cared for children on 31st March 2023 by placement type

Placements at 31st March 2023		Number	%
Foster placement with relative or friend	Inside local authority	24	8%
	Outside local authority	23	7%
Placement with other foster carer:	Inside local authority	99	32%

Placements at 31st March 2023		Number	%
	Outside local authority	83	26%
Secure unit		2	1%
Homes and hostels (residential care, K2 code)		17	5%
Hostels and other supportive residential placements (H5 code)		26	8%
Residential schools		0	0%
Other residential settings (codes R1, R2, R3, R5)		1	0%
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)		8	3%
Placed with own parents		18	6%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently		0	0%
Other placements (<i>DfE guidance suggests use for unregulated foster care only</i>)		13	4%

The national picture is as follows:

	2021/22
Foster care (U codes)	70%
Placed for adoption (A codes)	3%
Placed with own parents (code P1)	7%
Children's homes (code K2)	16%
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%
Independent living (code P2)	2%
Other (mostly unregulated foster placements with family / friends, code Z1)	2%

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

At 31st March 2023, 57% of children in foster care in Torbay were in in-house provision. This is below the national average of 76%. This demonstrates the ongoing 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.

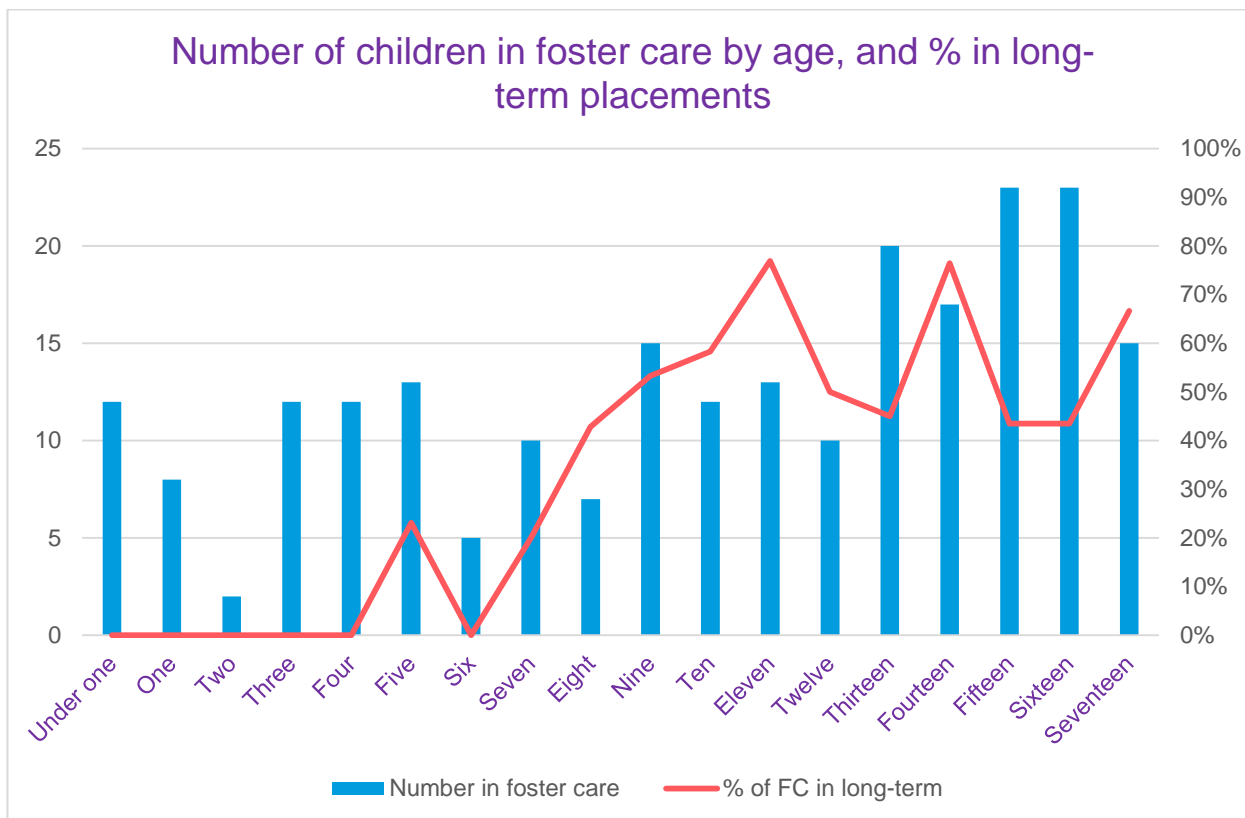
Placement type	Own provision	Private	Voluntary / third sector	Total children in placement type
U1 Foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s) – long term fostering	12	0	0	12
U2 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	0	0	0	0

Placement type	Own provision	Private	Voluntary / third sector	Total children in placement type
U3 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	33	2	0	35
U4 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – long term fostering	42	36	0	78
U5 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	2	0	0	2
U6 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	52	48	2	102
Number by provider type	141	86	2	229
% by provider type	57%	33%	0%	
England % by provider type, 2021	76%	18%	6%	

3.9 39% children in foster care were in long-term placements at the end of the year, a decrease from 47% in the previous year. However, this needs to be considered against the number of particularly younger children (10 years old and under) placed in foster care whilst care proceedings were ongoing. The profile for children aged 11 years and over remains similar to that of the previous year with regards to being in long-term foster placements.

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	14	12	0	0%
1	12	8	0	0%
2	4	2	0	0%
3	13	12	0	0%
4	12	12	0	0%
5	14	13	3	23%
6	7	5	0	0%
7	11	10	2	20%
8	9	7	3	43%
9	16	15	8	53%
10	14	12	7	58%
11	15	13	10	77%
12	12	10	5	50%
13	27	20	9	45%
14	28	17	13	76%
15	29	23	10	43%
16	40	23	10	43%
17	37	15	10	67%
Total	314	229	90	39%



3.10 In 2021/22 it was reported that boys were more likely than girls to be in long-term foster placements. That was not the case in 2022/23, with both sexes equally likely to be in long-term foster care placements. However, it should be noted that boys are slightly less likely to be in foster care placements at all (75% of girls, 71% of boys). Again, this matter is linked to the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, who were all male, tend to be older and are not usually in foster care placements.

Number and % of children in long-term fostering placements by sex

	Number of CfC	Total in foster placements	Total in long-term foster placement	% in long-term foster placement
Female	136	102	41	40%
Male	178	127	49	39%
Total	314	229	90	39%

3.11 The number of babies aged under 1 becoming cared for children as a percentage of all newly cared for children increased significantly from 9% the previous year to 18% in 2022/23. This is against a backdrop of significant numbers of older children becoming cared for as a result of higher than usual numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Indeed 29% of children becoming cared for in 2022/23 were 16/17 year olds. The high percentage of babies becoming cared for strongly suggests that care proceedings are being initiated in a timely manner and children being safeguarded at the outset of their lives and not left to experience chronic neglect and/or abuse over their formative years.

Number of children becoming cared for in 2022/23 by age

Age year	Number of children becoming cared for	%
0	20	18%
1	4	4%
2	4	4%
3	8	7%
4	7	6%
5	5	4%
6	2	2%
7	4	4%
8	3	3%
9	4	4%
10	1	1%
11	1	1%
12	4	4%
13	4	4%
14	3	3%
15	6	5%
16	19	17%
17	13	12%
Total	112	

3.11 Looking at the proportion of children ceasing to be cared for by end reason in 2022/23 compared to the England average, Torbay's proportion of children adopted was significantly higher than the national average, 22% compared to 10% nationally. The proportion of children Staying Put post 18 was also higher than average, 22% 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. In 2021/22 all SGOs made were to connected people, but that was not the case in 2022/23 with 6 children having special guardianship orders made to previous foster cares 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 and also beyond via staying put arrangements. However, it should be noted that despite staying put arrangements representing positive outcomes for care experienced young people, this does impact on foster care placement sufficiency.

Children who ceased to be cared for in 2022/23 by end reason

End reason and code	England 2021/22	Torbay	
		Number	%
Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	-	0	0%
Adopted (E11, E12)	10%	22	22%
Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (UASCs) (E15)	1%	1	1%
Aged 18 and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements) (E17)	13%	22	22%
Care ceased for any other reason (E8)	11%	1	1%
Care taken by another local authority (E3)	3%	1	1%
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%	5	5%

End reason and code	England 2021/22	Torbay	
		Number	%
Moved to independent living (with no formalised support) (E6)	3%	4	4%
Moved to independent living with supported accommodation (E5)	12%	12	12%
Residence order or child arrangement order granted (E41)	4%	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%	3	3%
Returned home to live with parents or other person with parental responsibility which was part of the care planning process (E4A)	14%	13	13%
Sentenced to custody (E9)	1%	0	0%
Special guardianship order to former FCs who are relatives or friends (E45)	13%	7	7%
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)		1	1%
Special guardianship order to people who were neither relatives or friends or former FCs (E48)		0	0%
Moved to residential care funded by adult children's social care (E7)	2%	0	0%
Total		100	

For special guardianship orders specifically –

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
The number of children leaving care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order in the year	20	19	14
The number of children ceasing to be looked after in the year	111	112	100
% of children leaving care as a result of an SGO	18%	17%	14%

3.12 A smaller percentage of children returned home in a managed way this year, 13% compared with 19% last year. However, the rate for Torbay is still comparable with the national average of 14%.

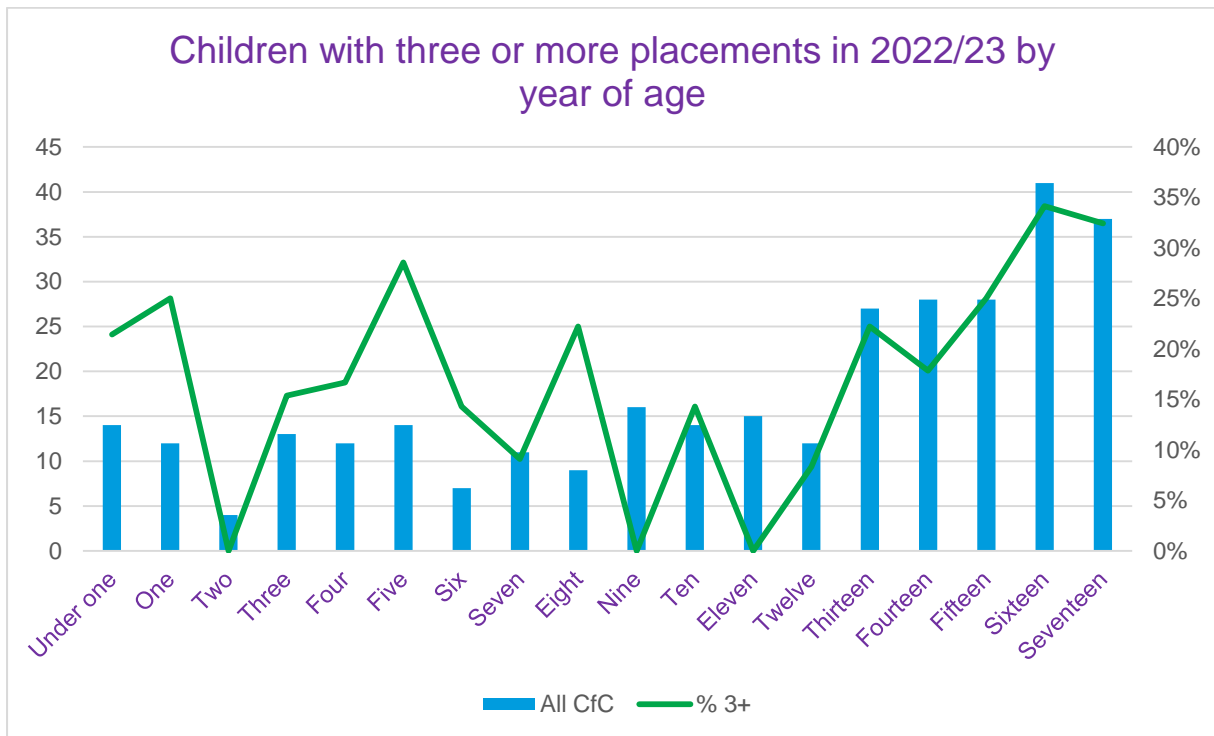
3.13 The number of young people aged 18 that remained in their foster placements as a Staying Put arrangement has increased significantly over 2022/23 to 22 from 13 the previous year. This inevitably provides stability for these young people as they transition into adulthood. However, as noted earlier, this needs to be balanced against the impact on placement sufficiency.

3.14 Short-term stability is down in 2022/23 at 21% of children having three or more placements from 14% in 2021/22. This does not compare favourably with the national and statistical neighbour trends of 10%.

Short-term stability at 31st March 2023 by age

Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
0	15	3	20%
1	11	3	27%
2	4	0	0%
3	13	2	15%
4	12	2	17%
5	14	4	29%
6	7	1	14%
7	11	1	9%

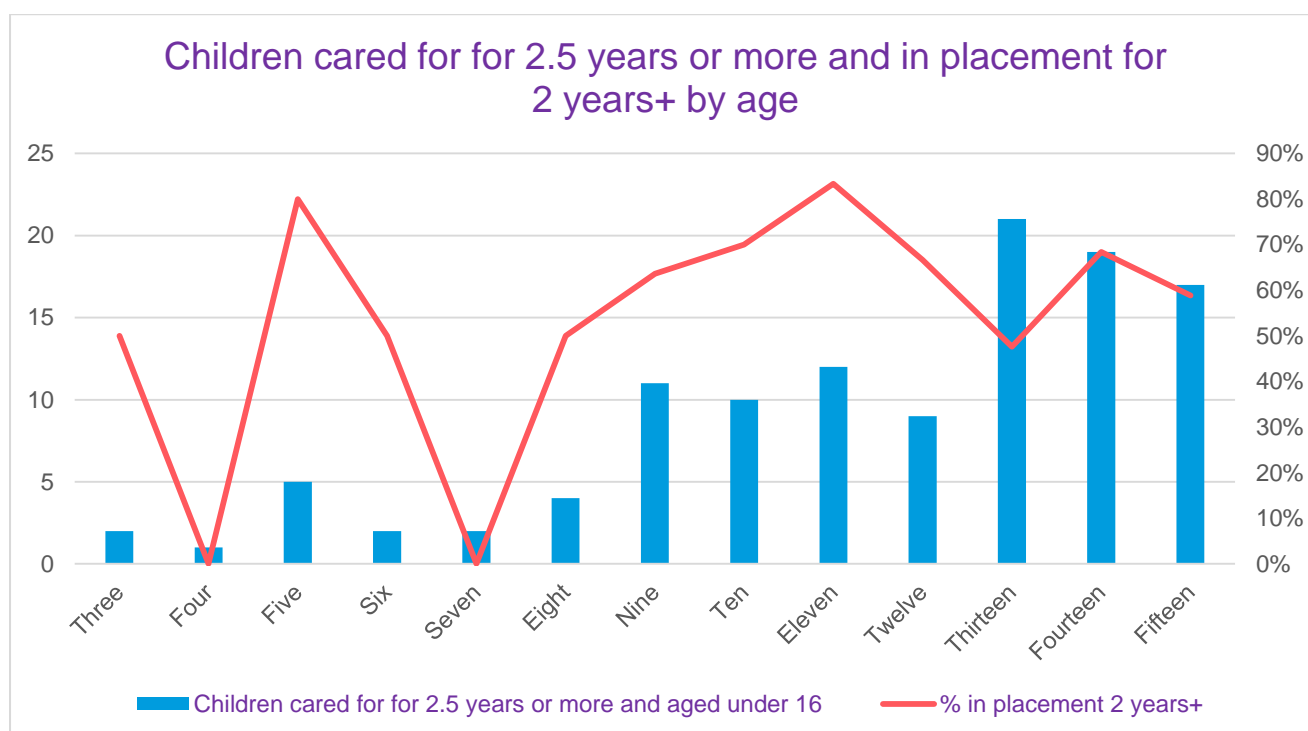
Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
8	9	2	22%
9	16	0	0%
10	14	2	14%
11	15	0	0%
12	12	1	8%
13	27	6	22%
14	28	5	18%
15	28	7	25%
16	41	14	34%
17	37	12	32%
Total	314	65	21%



3.15 Long-term stability remains similar to 2021/22 at 62% compared with 63% last year. However, this is still below the national and statistical neighbour rates of 71%. There is a noticeable improvement for children aged 11 years with stability over the year for this age group at 83% compared with 60% in 2021/22. This bodes well for maintaining stability as children and young people transition to adolescence, and in particular the transition from primary to secondary school. However, there is a reduction in stability for the 13 year old cohort from 80% in 2021/22 to 48% in 2022/23. This is an area that warrants further investigation to ensure the care planning is appropriate to the needs of the children concerned.

Long-term stability of placement in 2022 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	2	1	50%
4	1	0	0%
5	5	4	80%
6	2	1	50%
7	2	0	0%
8	4	2	50%
9	11	7	64%
10	10	7	70%
11	12	10	83%
12	9	6	67%
13	21	10	48%
14	19	13	68%
15	17	10	59%
Total	115	71	62%



3.16 During 2022/23, Torbay's corporate parenting responsibilities with regards to promoting the health of cared for children improved significantly compared to 2021/22. At the end of 2022/23, dental checks, health checks and immunisations had all increased. Health checks increased from 73% in the previous year to 91% as of the end of March 2023. Dental checks increased from 35% to 83% as of the end of March 2023. Immunisations increased from 76% to 82% as of the end of March 2023. Health and dental checks are above the England averages. However, immunisations remain slightly below the England average.

Health and Dental Checks and Immunisations

	2022/23			England average 2021/22
	Cohort	Number	%	
Health assessments	224	204	91%	91%
Dental checks	224	186	83%	70%
Immunisations	224	183	82%	85%

- 3.17 The proportion of cared for children for whom an SDQ score was received was low at 27%, the same figure as the previous year and below the England average of 77%. The average score is 16.3, which is higher than the England figure of 13.8; this represents a higher level of need, but because the group of children for whom scores were returned is so small, they may not be representative of all Torbay cared for children.
- 3.18 Eleven cared for children were recorded as having a substance misuse difficulty. This is a slight decrease on the thirteen recording in 2021/22.
- 3.19 There has been a gender shift with regards to the proportion of cared for children going missing in 2022/23 compared with the previous year with 53% of boys going missing versus 48% of girls. In 2021/22, the ratio was 48% boys to 53% girls. However, these figures need to be read in conjunction the fact that the number of girls cared for is significantly less than boys. Therefore, the vulnerabilities reported in relation to girls and missing episodes in the 2021/22 annual report remains.

Missing Episodes by Gender, 2022/23 figures

	Number	%
Children with an episode of missing or away from placement	40	
Girls	19	48%
Boys	21	53%
Number of children cared for at any point in the year	411	
Girls	175	43%
Boys	236	57%

- 3.20 38 cared for children had an episode of missing in the year, which equates to 9% of children cared for in the year. This compares to 40 children in 2021/22, 10%. The national figure for 2021/22 was 11%.
- 3.21 As with previous years, more than half of children who went missing had one or two episodes, 55% compared with 58% in 2021/22.

Cared for children going missing

Episodes of missing - Torbay 2021/22	No of children	%
1 or 2	21	55%
3 to 5	8	21%
6 to 10	3	8%
11 to 15	3	8%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 to 30	2	5%

31+	1	3%
Total children	30	

NOTE: The above figures do not include episodes of away from placement, as opposed to missing, of which there were 50 in the year.

- 3.22 The duration of missing episodes for cared for children in 2022/23 was generally in line with the national average, although the small number of episodes lasting three to seven days made up a higher proportion than nationally.

Cared for children going missing

Duration of missing incidents	% of incidents of missing	
	Torbay 2022/23	England 2021/22
Incidents where duration is less than 1 day	40%	35%
Incidents where duration is between 1 and 2 days	56%	56%
Incidents where duration is between 3 and 7 days	4%	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 1.2% of Torbay's cared for population (2 children) received a conviction in 2022/23, the same as the previous year. This is lower than statistical neighbours and the England average based on 2021/22 data (Statistical neighbour 5%, England average 2%).
- 3.24 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from the address from which they came into care has increased by one percentage point since 2021/22, to 31%. The England figure is 22%. It should be noted that the definition does not include unaccompanied asylum seeking children, as they have no home address in the UK.
- 3.25 Reasons for Torbay being 9% 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

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
The number of children in care placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	90	91	97
The number of children in care on 31st March	319	299	314
% placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	28%	30%	31%

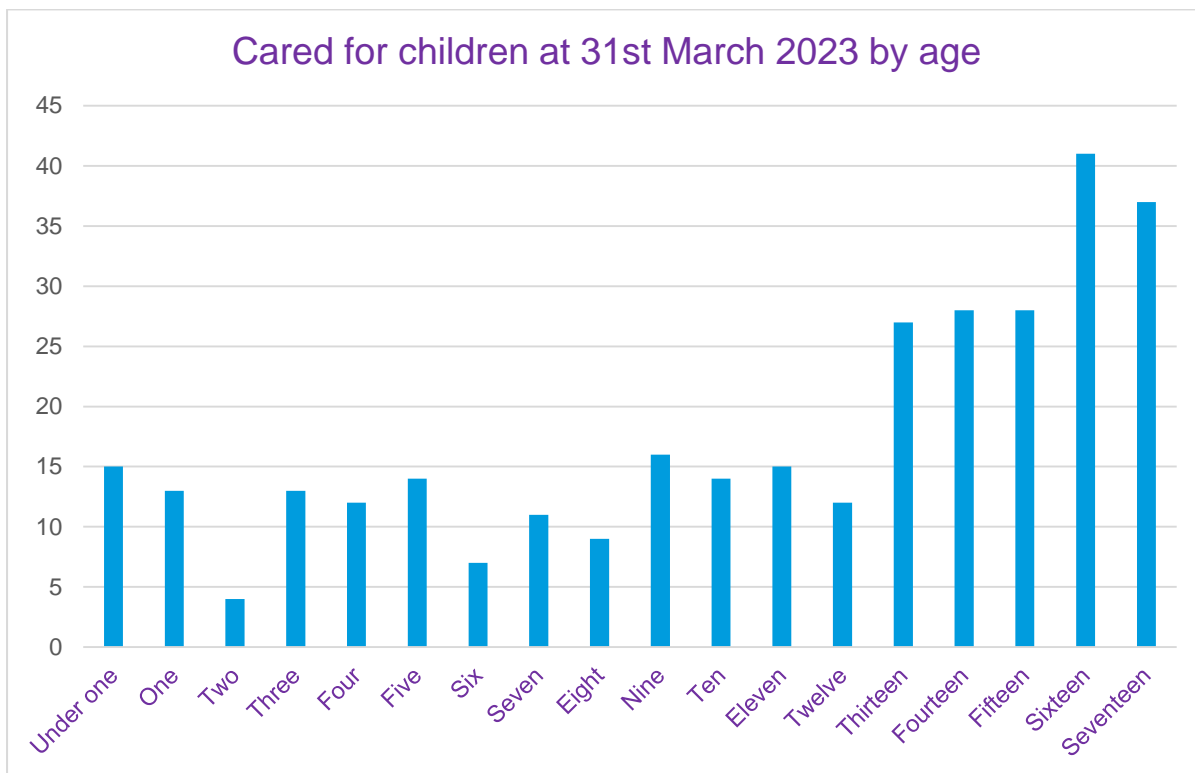
- 3.26 Children aged between 10 and 15 continue to be the highest represented within the Torbay cared for population at 31st March 2023 with children under 1 years old being the lowest represented. This is in line with the national average for year 2021/22, although Torbay has

a higher proportion of children aged 16 and 17 than the national figure. Again the latter being a consequence of the impact of unaccompanied asylum seeking children which in Torbay is a relatively higher proportion to the overall care for population compared to other areas.

Cared for children age ranges by %

	England	Torbay	
	2021/22	2021/22	2022/23
Under 1 year	5%	5%	5%
1 to 4 years	14%	13%	13%
5 to 9 years	18%	17%	18%
10 to 15 years	39%	45%	40%
16 years and over	25%	20%	25%

Age year	All CfC	% by age
0	15	5%
1	13	4%
2	4	1%
3	13	4%
4	12	4%
5	14	4%
6	7	2%
7	11	4%
8	9	3%
9	16	5%
10	14	4%
11	15	5%
12	12	4%
13	27	9%
14	28	9%
15	28	9%
16	41	13%
17	37	12%
Total	314	



3.26 The 2021/22 IRO annual report noted that there were 55% of boys compared to 45% of girls in Torbay’s cared for on 31st March 2022 which demonstrates a significant increase in boys being cared compared to girls relative to the 51% boys to 49% girls in 2020/21. This has increased further in 2022/23 to 57% boys, 43% girls. Again, this is linked to the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who have all been boys.

3.27 White British remains the largest represented ethnicity (84%) by far at 31st March 2023 which reflects the ethnic profile of Torbay being predominantly White British compared to the national average which has remained constant at around the 74% to 75% for the last four years. This compares to 88% in 2021/22; the increase is in Other ethnic groups and is linked to the number of asylum-seeking children.

Cared for children by ethnicity

	England	Torbay	
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
White	75%	88%	84%
White and Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean	10%	8%	8%
Asian or Asian British	4%	1%	2%
Black or Black British	7%	1%	0.3%
Other ethnic groups	3%	0%	5%
Refused or information not yet available	1%	3%	1%

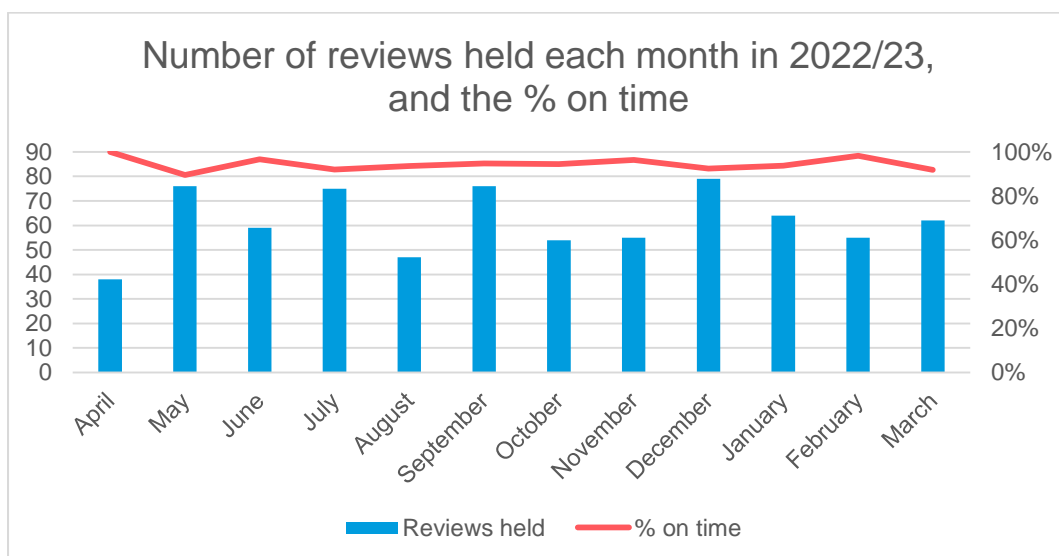
4. Timeliness of Review Records Completion

4.1 740 cared for reviews were held between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. This is down on the 816 reviews held in 2021/22.

Review timescales		2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Numerator	The number of reviews taking place in the year which were not held on time	108	84	95	44
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year	701	685	816	740
%		15%	12%	12%	6%

Reviews over the year in Torbay

Month 2022/23	Reviews held	On time	% on time
April	38	38	100%
May	76	68	89%
June	59	57	97%
July	75	69	92%
August	47	44	94%
September	76	72	95%
October	54	51	94%
November	55	53	96%
December	79	73	92%
January	64	60	94%
February	55	54	98%
March	62	57	92%
Total	740	696	94%



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 maximised.

- 4.3 Work to ensure timeliness of review records has continued throughout 2022/23, building on previous work. This year there has been a modest increase of cared for reviews within statutory timescale to 94% from 92% in 2021/212. The positive progress here is moving us closer to the local target of 95% in time reviews.
- 4.4 It can be seen from the table and graph above that In 2022/23, timescale performance was reasonably consistent month on month. However, May was the lowest figure, at 89% and can be attributed to the hangover from Covid related sickness that impacted on the first quarter of the 2022/23 year.

5. Voice of the Child and Young People Participation

- 5.1 A primary objective of the IRO is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident 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 2021 - March 2022, 79% of cared for children aged 4 years and over had participated in their reviews. 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.
- 5.3 From the graph below, it can be seen that participation increases generally with age. However, there is a gap in the 9 to 12 year old cohort that requires further attention to ensure this group of cared for children are supported to participate in their cared for reviews. There may also be a link here with stability for children in the 13 year old age bracket which has previously reported is the most unstable group in terms of placement stability.

Participation in reviews, 2019/20 to 2022/23

Review participation		2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
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)	457	401	527	484
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year where child was aged 4+ at the date of review	564	467	641	614
%		81%	86%	82%	79%

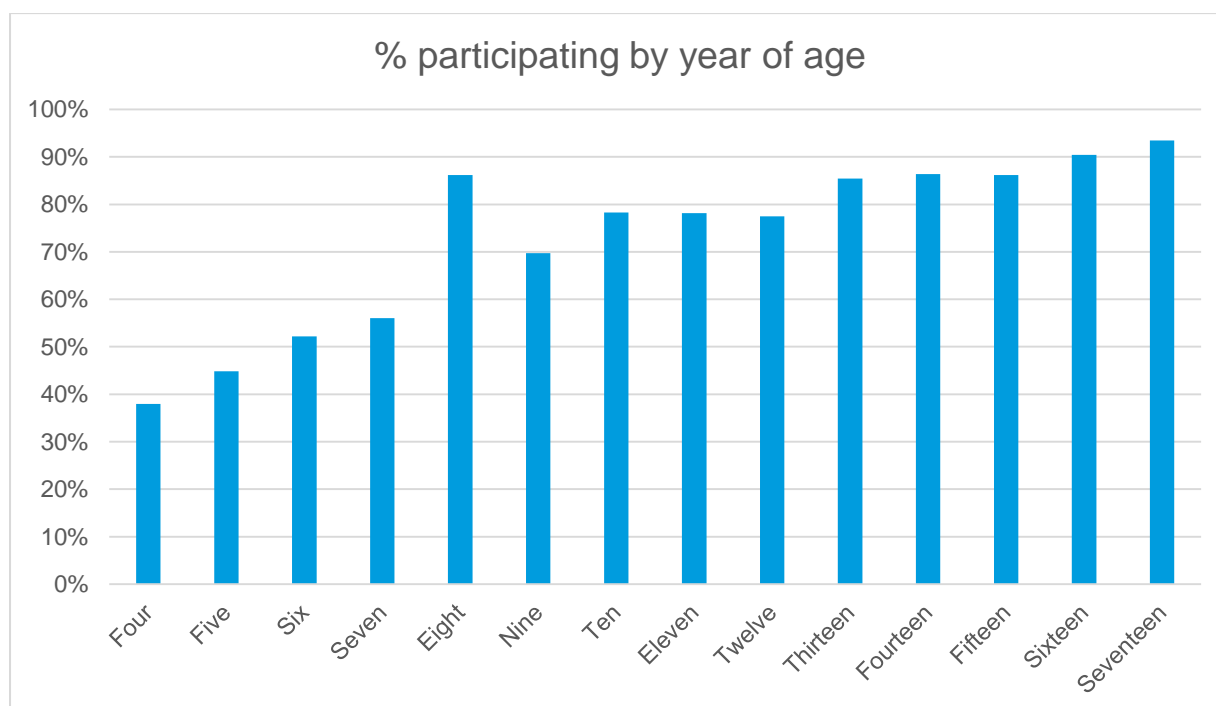
Participation in reviews – all categories of participation

Detailed review participation	2021/22 %	2022/23	2022/23 %
Child under 4 at the time of the review (PN0)	17%	126	17%
Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (PN1)	33%	185	25%
Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf (PN2)	1%	14	2%
Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (PN3)	1%	2	0%
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)	1%	6	1%
Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (PN5)	8%	140	19%
Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (PN6)	25%	143	19%
Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review (PN7)	14%	124	17%

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	29		0%	1	3%	17	59%	11	38%	11	38%
5	29		0%		0%	16	55%	13	45%	13	45%
6	23	2	9%		0%	11	48%	10	43%	12	52%
7	25	4	16%	1	4%	10	40%	10	40%	14	56%
8	29	2	7%		0%	4	14%	23	79%	25	86%
9	33	7	21%		0%	10	30%	16	48%	23	70%
10	23	5	22%		0%	5	22%	13	57%	18	78%
11	32	6	19%		0%	7	22%	19	59%	25	78%
12	40	8	20%	1	3%	8	20%	23	58%	31	78%
13	55	18	33%	1	2%	7	13%	29	53%	47	85%
14	66	26	39%		0%	9	14%	31	47%	57	86%
15	65	29	45%	2	3%	7	11%	27	42%	56	86%
16	73	41	56%		0%	7	10%	25	34%	66	90%
17	92	53	58%		0%	6	7%	33	36%	86	93%
Total	614	201	27%	6	1%	124	17%	283	38%	484	79%

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).

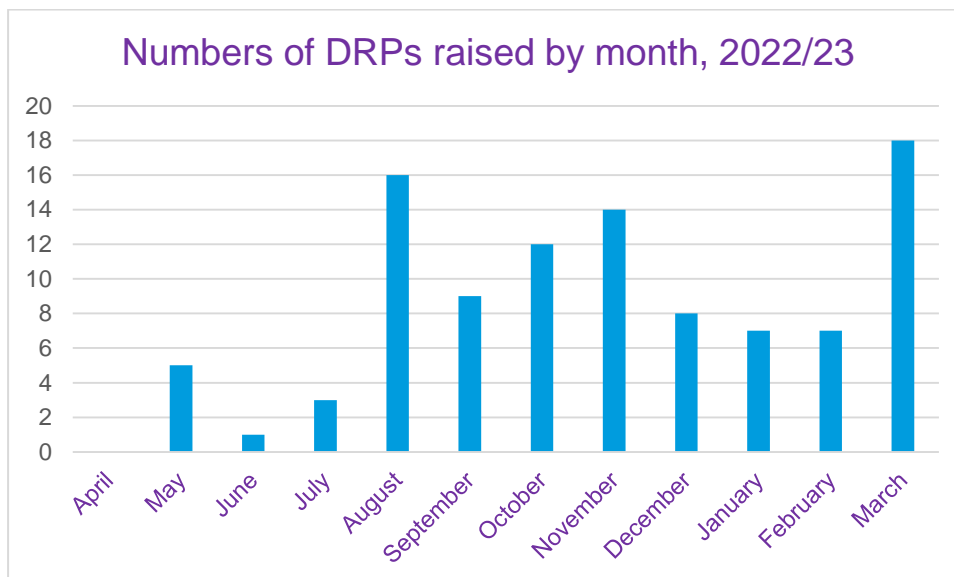


6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 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 problem can and should be escalated to the attention of senior managers.
- 6.3 Between April 2022 to March 2023, there were 100 formal resolution and escalations completed and escalated across all the IROs which is significantly lower than the 2021/22’s figure of 183
- 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 envisaged that the new streamlined process will result in more DRP escalations along with resolutions achieved in a timelier manner.

Number of Dispute Resolution Processes raised by IROs each month

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2021/22	1	0	11	21	7	13	14	21	27	29	32	7
2022/23	0	5	1	3	16	9	12	14	8	7	7	18



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

- 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. Case summaries are comprehensive as to are cared for child review minutes.
- 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 just 1% off the target of 95% of reviews within timescale.
- 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.
- 7.7 The IROs have been instrumental in developing newly qualified and international social workers over the last year by delivering training ranging from effective care planning to delivering therapeutic life story work.
- 7.8 The IROs profile within Torbay has developed significantly 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.
- 7.9 The IROs have been setting a positive example with regards to audit completion with an 80% in time completion rate for the department across the year 2022/23.

8. Independent Reviewing Service Performance Planning Procedure

- 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 2021/22 Annual Report

9.1.1 There were several areas identified for development across the Independent Reviewing Service for 2021/22 with the progress noted as follows:-

- i. **Service stability** – This objected has been fully met with the appointment of a permanent Service Manager as well as filling all vacant and agency posts with permanent IROs.
- ii. **Address the long-term sickness issues** – This objective has been fully met with sickness in the year at its lowest for the last 5 years.
- iii. **Ensure reviews are held within Statutory timescales** – improvements continued during the year 2022/23 with the local target of 95% in timescale reviews falling short by just 1%. There is confidence that the target will be met in the year 2023/24.
- iv. **Increased participation** – This work needs to be continued over the next year and amalgamated with the proposed restorative reviews work (see section 10 below).
- v. **Partner attendance at reviews** – This objective has been fully met with work completed with partners such as Health and Education.
- vi. **Cared for children’s health needs are met** – This objective has been partly met with significant improvements seen with health assessments, dental checks and immunisations. This is a result of IRO influence and the introduction of new into care review meetings
- vii. **Restorative relational work** – This objective has been fully met with all IROs having a specialist link role to either internal or external partners. All IROs have also completed the Restorative Practice training.
- viii. **Parent and child feedback** – The implementation of an online feedback form has been slow to take off and requires more work and focus over the next year so that we can understand the care planning and reviewing from children and parents’ perspectives.
- ix. **Practice improvement** – The delivery of training to the newly qualified and international social workers has helped here but the somewhat challenging old DRP process meant DRPs were often not responded to. The new process re-mapped into Liquid Logic means the IROs have more control over the process and eliminates the risk of non-compliance when a DRP is raised. There will be a need to monitor the effectiveness of the new DRP process and its impact on practice over the next year.

10. Areas for Development 2023/24

- i. **Ensure reviews are held within Statutory timescales** – build on this year’s improvements by understanding more the reasons for late reviews. Meet the target of 95% in times reviews.
- ii. **Increased participation** – This work to be accelerated amalgamated with the plan to develop a restorative model of practice across the IRO Service to include restorative reviews whereby children lead on these routinely.
- iii. **Parent and child feedback** – More focus 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** – Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the new DRP process and its impact on practice. Continue to explore new ways to use the IRO’s experience to develop the practice of less experienced social work practitioners.
- v. **Use data more effectively** – An IRO dashboard to be developed using PBI that focuses on measures that are routinely discussed in the IRO monthly performance surgery.

Report authored by:	Shaun Evans (Head of Service – Safeguarding, Early Help and Business Intelligence)
Date:	24th July 2023