



Torbay Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report

2021-22

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Executive Summary

The Annual Report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022. 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 remained in the midst of 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 year due to Covid-19 related 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, the appointment of a permanent Head of Service during the end of quarter 3 brought some much needed stability and relief to a service that has had a significant turnover in terms of Heads of Service over the previous two and half year period. The lack of IRO and management stability is evident in the lower than acceptable performance across quarters 2 and 3.

Despite the above reported challenges, a significant increase in reviews were undertaken this year (709 compared to 541 the previous year). 12% of the reviews were held in March 2022. Furthermore, there was a slight increase in reviews being held on time compared to the previous year which arguably demonstrates the service was starting to stabilise during the final quarter of the year.

The number of cared for children decreased over the year and stood at 299 as of 31st March 2022 compared with 320 at the same point the previous year. There was however a steady increase in numbers towards the end of the year which can be partly attributed to the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. It is noted that this matter may result in a continued upward trajectory of cared for children running through the period 2022/23.

The number of babies being cared for decreased significantly compared to the previous year. With regards to gender, there was an increase in boys becoming cared for compared to girls. However, there was a shift towards girls going missing more than boys during the year.

Foster placement sufficiency is still identified as a key challenge in Torbay, and this is reflected in the still higher than England average number for children being placed more than 20 miles from their family home. This also however links to the National Transfer Scheme, and the wishes and feelings of UASC who express a wish to be placed in more urban settings. This percentage was down on the previous year which demonstrates some improvement here and the start of what appears to be a positive trajectory.

There is evidence to suggest that permanency for Torbay's cared for children has improved significantly over the year with an increase in Connected Carer foster arrangements being converted to Special Guardianship Orders, long-term stability increasing significantly for the 13 year old age group and a greater proportion of 17 year olds transitioning into adulthood with the familiarity and security of Staying Put arrangements in place.

The findings presented in this report demonstrate that more work needs to be done so that Torbay's cared for children remain healthy, with health assessments conducted in time slightly lower than the previous year. However, there has been a significant increase in dental checks, with both the timeliness of health and dental assessments impacted significantly by COVID-19, and the overall results from Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaires (SDQs) are higher than the England average and Torbay's statistical neighbours.

A long-standing challenge and area identified for continued improvement over the next year and beyond is children and young people's participation in their cared for reviews. The findings identified a particular concern with 17 year olds and non-attendance at their final cared for reviews which is considered extremely important in ensuring their needs are fully met and they are appropriately supported as they transition into adulthood either on a semi or fully independent basis.

The report summarises with a set of key improvement objectives for the service over the year 2022/23.

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, remains 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 plan 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 delay 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 new 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. It should be noted however, that the service was without a Service Manager during quarter 4 of 2021/22 whilst a recruitment to the position of permanent Service Manager was ongoing.
- 2.3 As of 31st March 2022 the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service had a staffing establishment of 7.1 FTE IROs. The team consisted of:
- Permanent staff (4.3 fte).
 - Agency staff (2.3 fte).
 - Vacant posts (2.3 fte)
- 2.4 During Quarters 3 and 4, 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.
- 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 has remained slightly higher than that recommended by the IRO handbook, but allocations reduced over the year as the numbers of children subject to child protection plans and the numbers of cared for children decreased across all services. Nevertheless, allocation of children to IROs were within the manageable range throughout the year despite having to manage higher than normal levels of sickness.

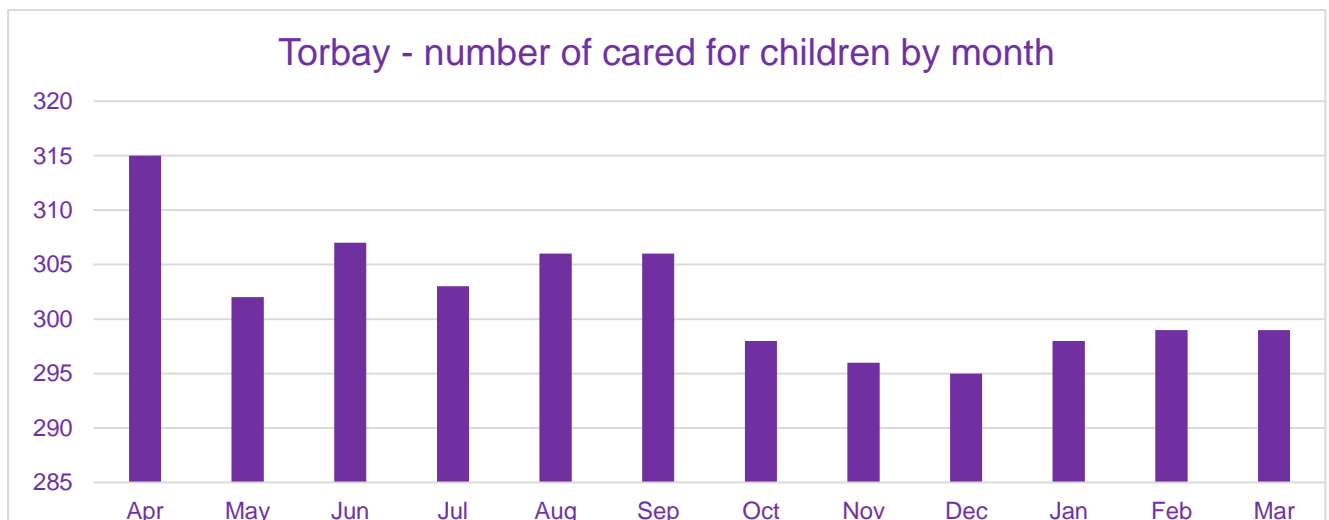
3. Profile of Torbay's Cared for Children

- 3.1 Torbay's cared for population stood at **299** children and young people on the 31st March 2022. This is down from 320 at the same time in 2021.
- 3.2 Although the rate of cared for children fell by 6.5% in 2021/22, it remains 23% higher than the statistical neighbour (SN) average.
- 3.3 The rate per 10,000 children also remains significantly higher than the national average of 177 in Torbay against 70 nationally.

Number / rate of children cared for during the year

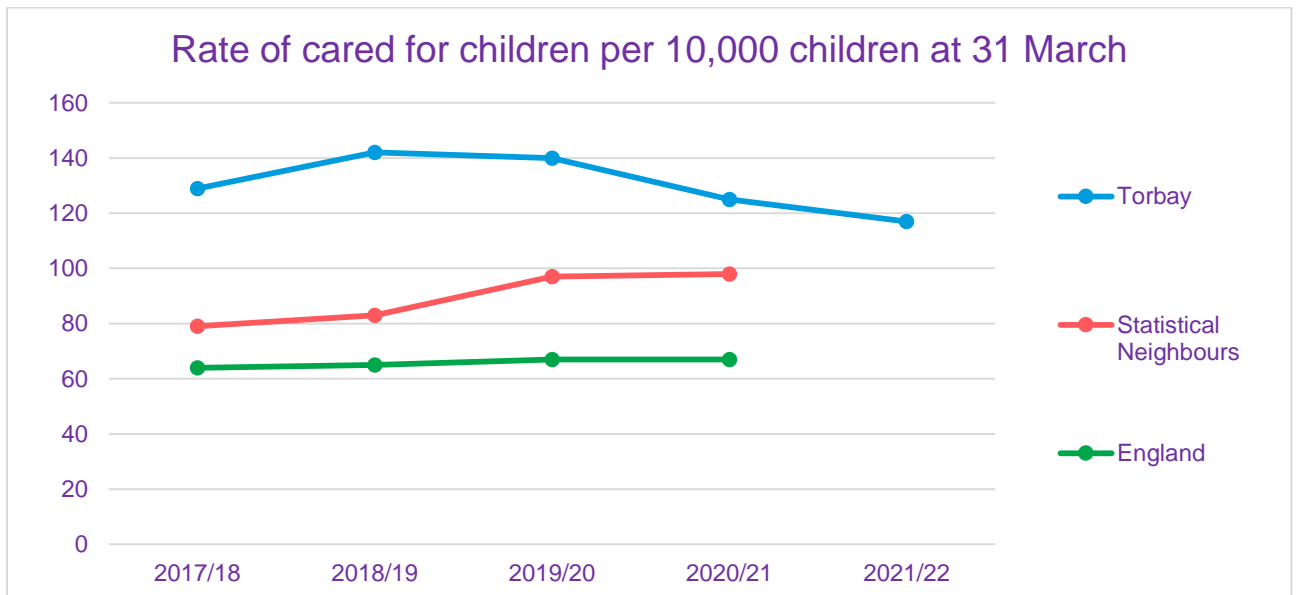
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Torbay	315	302	307	303	306	306	298	296	295	298	299	299

- 3.4 As can be seen from the graph below, a steady increase in cared for children commenced in January which is most likely a result of an influx of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) via the National Transfer Scheme. This is a matter that is projected to impact on the care for numbers going into 2022/23.



Rate of cared for children per 10, 000 children on 31st March 2022

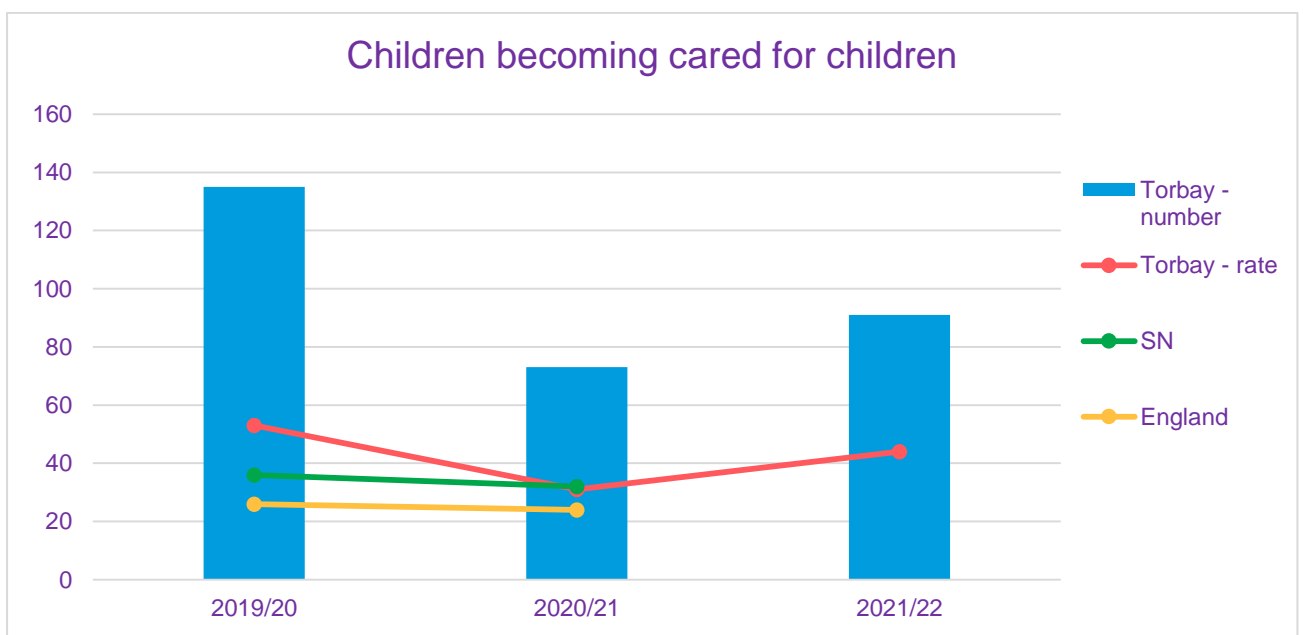
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
	Rate per 10,000 children aged 0 to 17				No
Torbay	129	142	140	125	117
Statistical Neighbours	79	83	97	98	
England	64	65	67	67	70



3.5 The rate of children becoming cared for children increased by 16% in 2021/22 with 91 new children becoming cared for during the year. As noted above, the National Transfer Scheme for UASC is a likely contributing factor here.

Children becoming cared for children

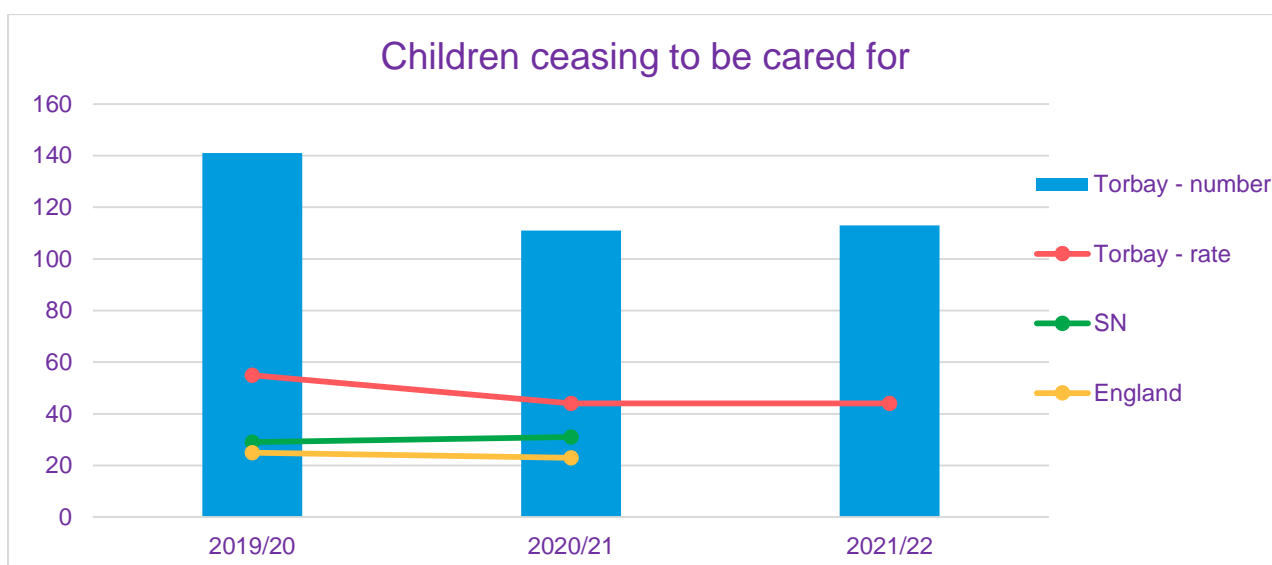
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay - number	135	73	91
Torbay - rate	53	31	36
SN	36	32	
England	26	24	26



3.6 The rate of children ceasing to be cared for children was similar to the previous year.

Children ceasing to be cared for children

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay - number	141	111	112
Torbay - rate	55	44	44
SN	29	31	
England	25	23	26

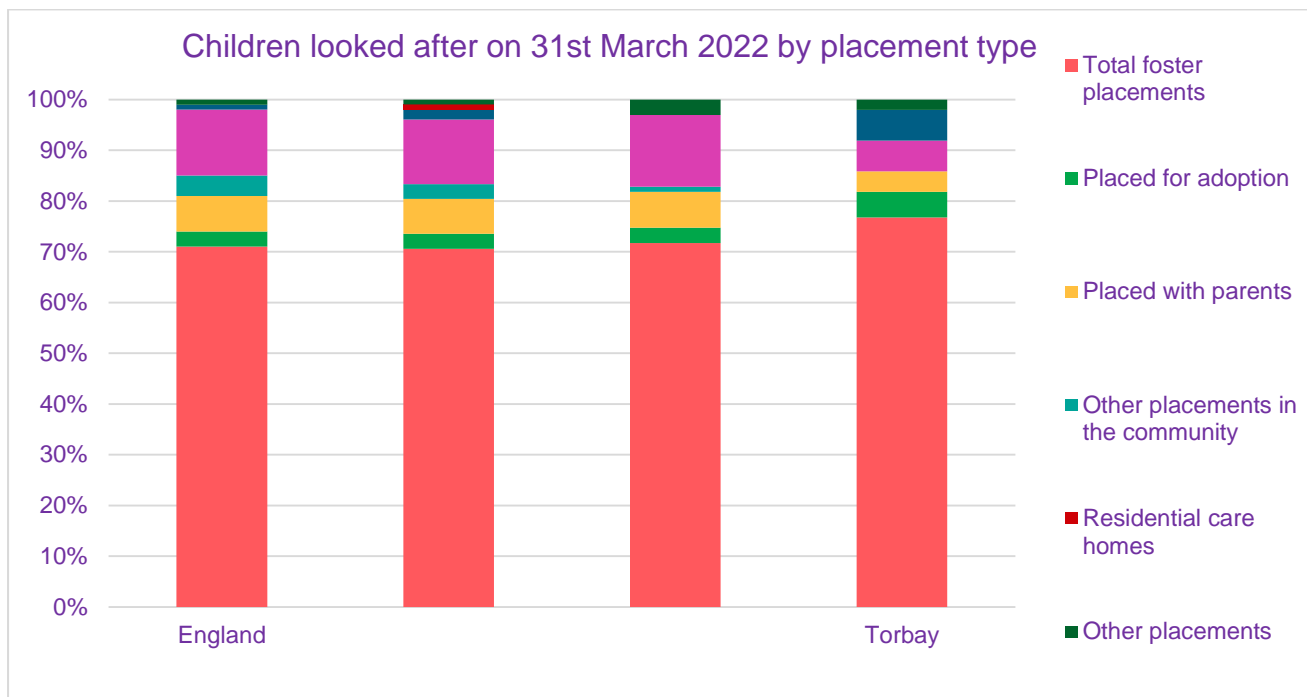


3.7 Torbay had a higher percentage of cared for children in foster care at the end of the year – 76% compared to 72% nationally. This is down slightly from 78% the previous year.

3.8 The number of children placed for adoption has increased from 3% the previous year to 5% in 2021/22.

Cared for children on 31st March 2022 by placement type

	Number	%
Placed for Adoption	15	5%
Residential accommodation	18	6%
Children's Homes	19	6%
Placed with parents	13	4%
NHS	1	"
YOI	1	"
Foster placement - relative / friend	41	14%
Foster placement - other	184	62%
Other	7	2%
Total	299	



In-house foster care

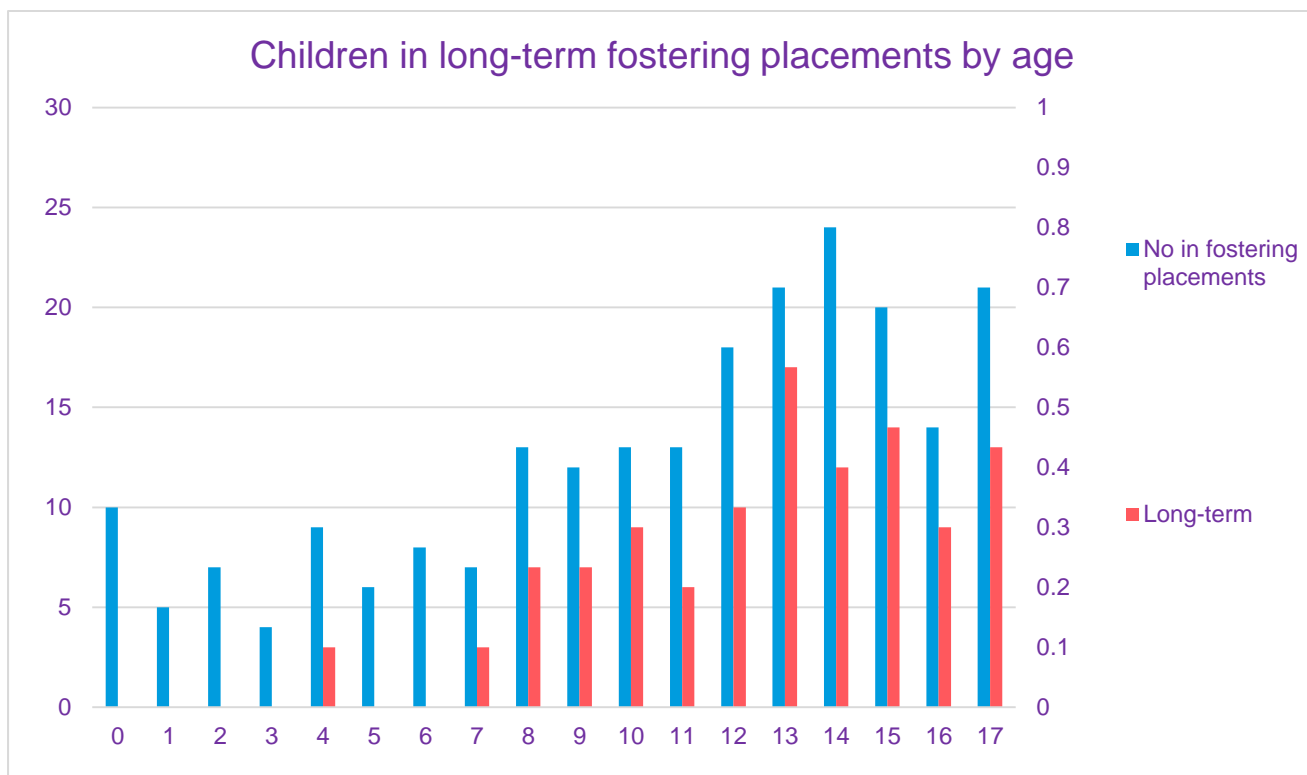
<i>Placement type</i>	<i>Own provision</i>	<i>Other LA</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Voluntary / third sector</i>	<i>Total children in placement type</i>
<i>U1 Foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s) – long term fostering</i>	15	0	0	0	15
<i>U2 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning</i>	1	0	0	0	1
<i>U3 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are not long term or fostering for adoption</i>	24	0	1	0	25

<i>/concurrent planning</i>					
<i>U4 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – long term fostering</i>	54	0	41	0	95
<i>U5 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning</i>	3	0	1	0	4
<i>U6 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning</i>	46	0	39	0	85
Number by provider type	143	0	82	0	225
% by provider type	57%	0%	33%	0%	
England % by provider type, 2021	48%	1%	37%	6%	

3.9 32% children in foster care were in long-term placements at the end of the year which is comparable with the previous year; boys were more likely than girls to be recorded as in long-term placements.

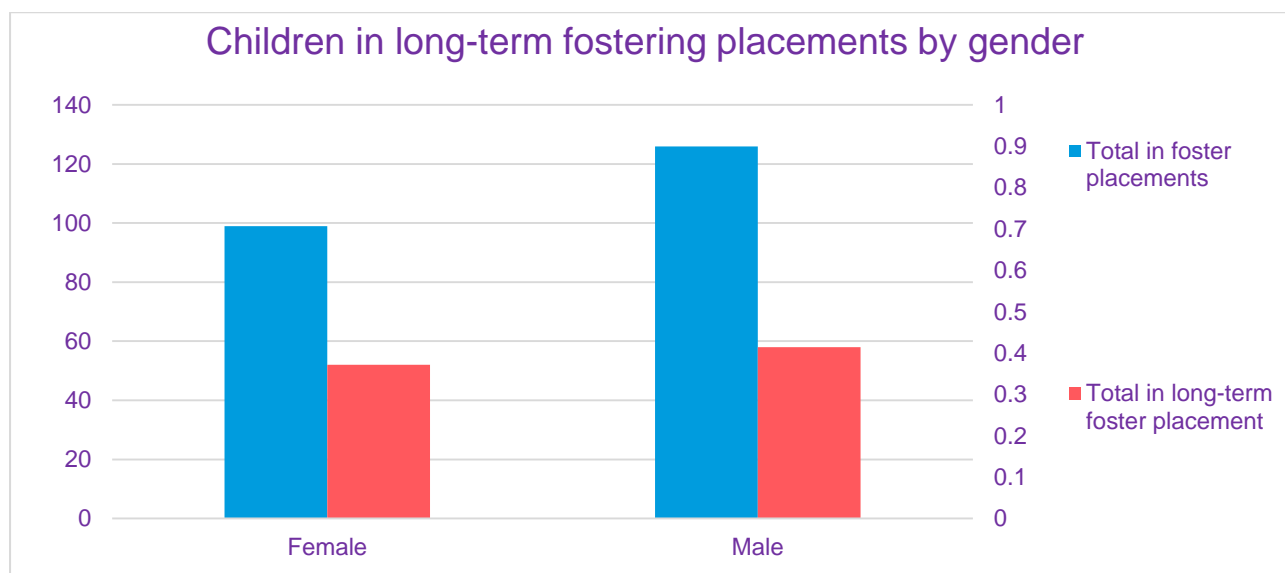
Number and % of children in long-term fostering placements by age

Age	No of CfC	No in fostering placements	Long-term
0	14	10	0
1	12	5	0
2	9	7	0
3	5	4	0
4	12	9	3
5	7	6	0
6	12	8	0
7	6	7	3
8	14	13	7
9	13	12	7
10	14	13	9
11	13	13	6
12	24	18	10
13	27	21	17
14	30	24	12
15	28	20	14
16	27	14	9
17	32	21	13
Total children	299	225	110



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

	Number of CfC	Total in foster placements	Total in long-term foster placement	% in long-term foster placement
Female	156	120	49	31%
Male	165	132	56	34%
Total	321	252	105	33%



- 3.10 The number of babies aged under 1 becoming cared for children as a percentage of all newly cared for children fell significantly from 26% the previous year to 9% in 2021/22. Again, this is likely to have been impacted upon by the National Transfer Scheme, with UASC transferred through the scheme mainly aged sixteen and seventeen years old.
- 3.11 Looking at the proportion of children ceasing to be cared for by end reason compared to the England average, Torbay continues to have a higher proportion of children ceasing to be cared for because SGOs were made to former foster carers, friends, or relatives. There has been a significant increase here to 17% of all children ceasing to be cared for being made subject to SGOs compared to 3% the previous year. This suggests a high number of Connected Carer foster placements being converted SGOs at the final order or thereafter, as part of ongoing work through the Former Foster Carer SGO Offer. Thus, allowing children a greater level of permanency.

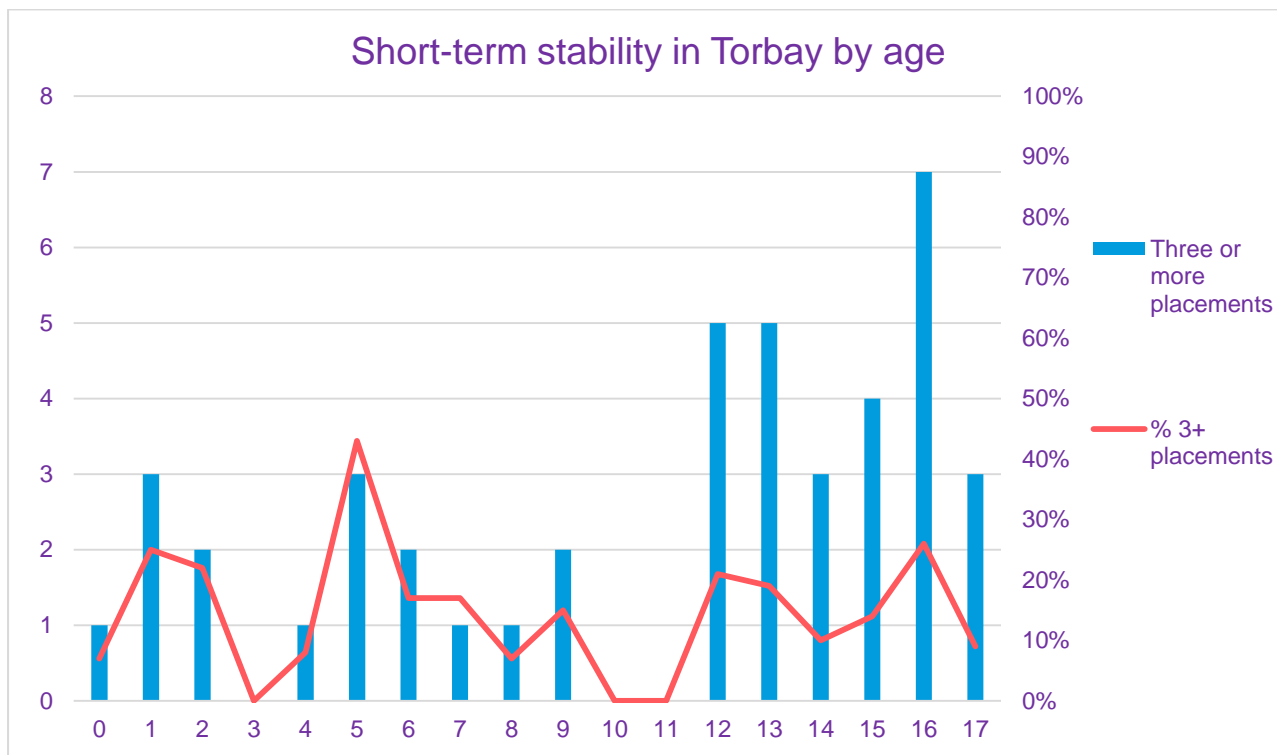
Reason for leaving care

Code	Description	Torbay: number of periods of care ending	Torbay %	SN 2019/20	England 2019/20
E2	Died	0	0%		
E3	Care taken over by another LA	1	1%		
E41	Residence order or Child Arrangements order	4	4%		
E45	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	19	17%	7%	7%
E46	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)	0	0%	3%	1%
E47	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	0	0%	5%	4%
E48	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)	0	0%		
E4A	Returned home, planned	21	19%	15%	18%
E4B	Returned home, unplanned	4	4%	7%	4%
E5	Independent living - supportive accommodation	6	5%		
E6	Independent living - no formal support	0	0%		
E7	Transferred to residential care funded by adult social care services	2	2%		
E8	Other	18	16%		
E9	Custody	0	0%		
E11	Adopted - unopposed	7	6%	7%	6%
E12	Adopted - consent dispensed with	9	8%	9%	5%
E13	Left care to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with no parental responsibility	9	8%		
E14	Accommodation on remand ended	0	0%		
E15	Age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over	0	0%		
E16	Moved abroad	0	0%		
E17	Aged 18 and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements)	13	12%		

- 3.12 A smaller percentage of children returned home in a managed way this year, 19% compared with 24% last year. However, the rate for Torbay is still favourable compared to the national average and SN.
- 3.13 The number of young people aged 18 that remained in their foster placements as a Staying Put arrangement has increased significantly over 2021/22 to 13 from zero the previous year. This inevitably provides stability for these young people as they transition into adulthood. However, this needs to be balanced against the impact on placement sufficiency.
- 3.14 Short-term stability is down in 2021/22 at 14% of children having three or more placements from 12% in 2020/21. The number of younger children (aged 5 and below) experiencing instability has increased significantly over 2021/22 compared to the previous year. However, the percentage increases need to be considered against the relatively small numbers in some of the age categories.

Short-term stability - three+ placements in 12 months

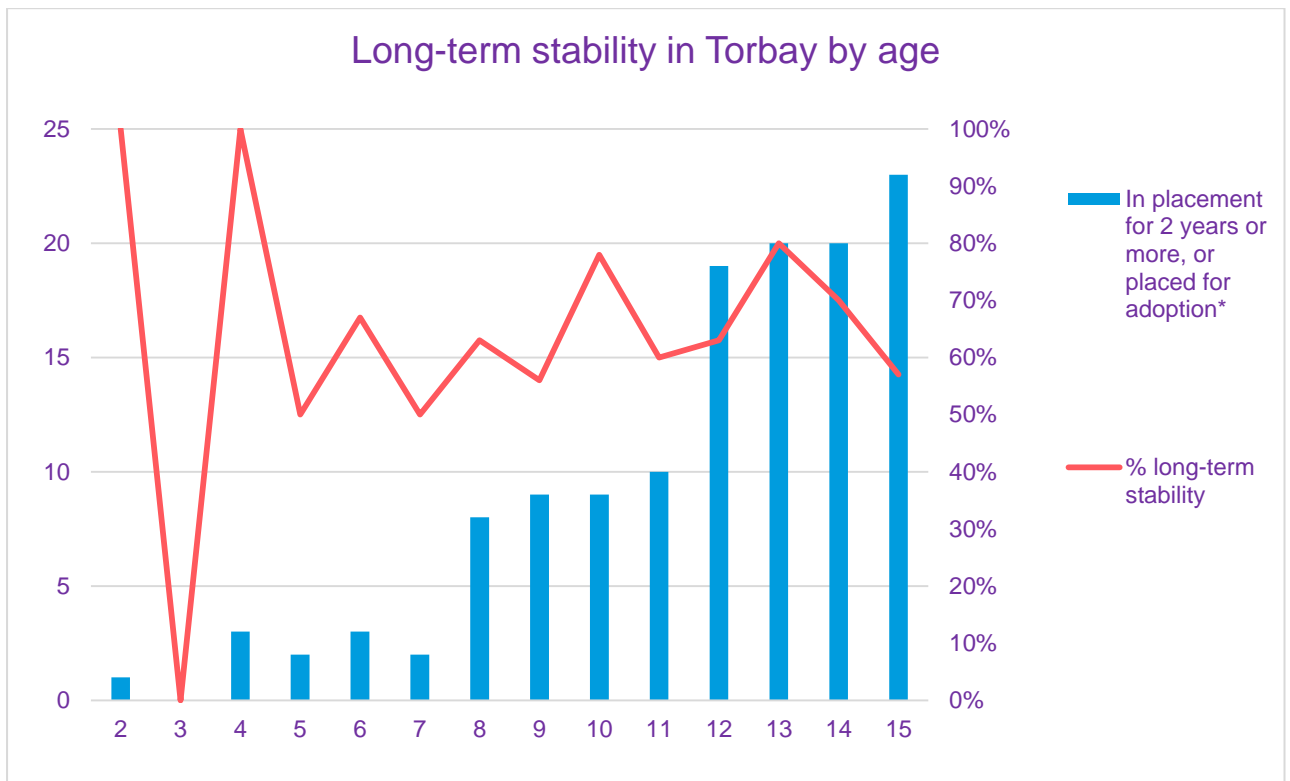
Age	Total children	Three or more placements	% 3+ placements
0	14	1	7%
1	12	3	25%
2	9	2	22%
3	5	0	0%
4	12	1	8%
5	7	3	43%
6	12	2	17%
7	6	1	17%
8	14	1	7%
9	13	2	15%
10	14	0	0%
11	13	0	0%
12	24	5	21%
13	27	5	19%
14	30	3	10%
15	28	4	14%
16	27	7	26%
17	32	3	9%
Total	299	43	14%



3.15 Long-term stability has improved slightly in 2021/22 with 67% of children remaining in placement for 2 years or more compared with 66% in 2020/21. There is a noticeable improvement for children aged 13 years with stability over the year for this age group at 80% compared with 60% in 2020/21. This bodes well for maintaining stability as children and young people transition to adulthood.

Long-term stability - three+ placements in 12 months

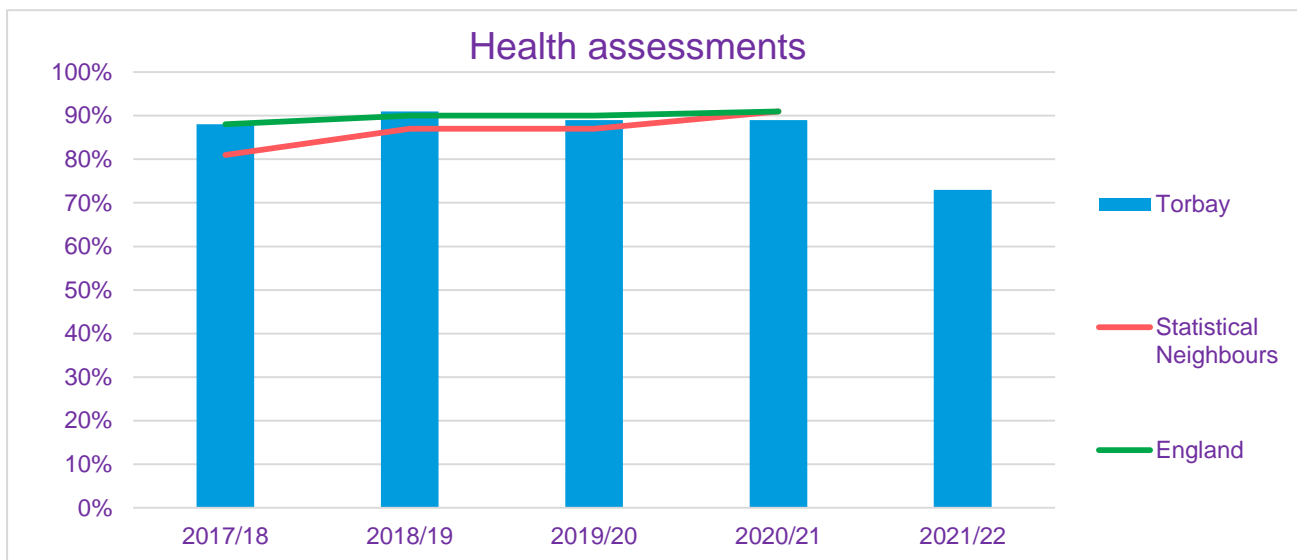
Year of age	Total children looked after for 2.5 years or more, and aged under 16	In placement for 2 years or more, or placed for adoption*	% long-term stability
2	1	1	100%
3	0	0	n/a
4	3	3	100%
5	2	1	50%
6	3	2	67%
7	2	1	50%
8	8	5	63%
9	9	5	56%
10	9	7	78%
11	10	6	60%
12	19	12	63%
13	20	16	80%
14	20	14	70%
15	23	13	57%
Total	129	86	67%



3.16 73% of children who had been cared for continuously for a year at the end of the year had up-to-date health checks which is down significantly on 2020/21 which was at 89%. Dental checks continue to remain low at 35% which is a consequence of a wider challenge within Torbay regarding dental practices taking new patients and the ongoing recovery from COVID-19. However, this figure is a marked increase on 2020/21 where only 8% of children cared for continuously for a year had dental checks and is comparable with our SN. Immunisations is slightly down in 2021/22 at 76% compared to 79% in 2020/21.

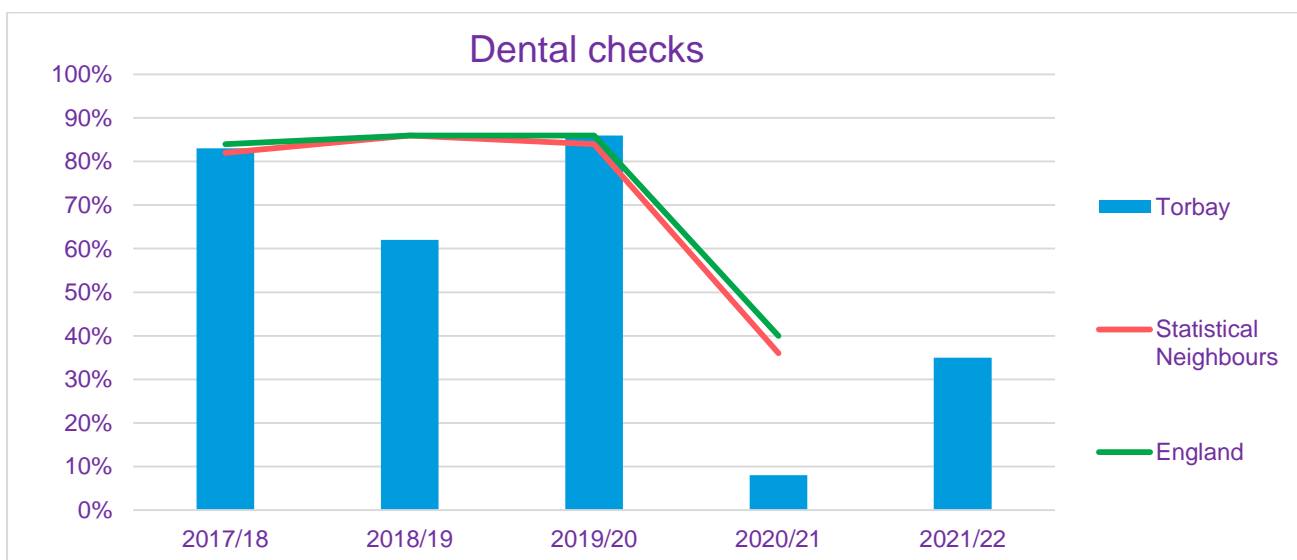
Health and Dental Checks and Immunisations

	2021/22		
	Cohort	Number	%
Health assessments	233	169	73%
Dental checks	233	82	35%
Immunisations	233	178	76%



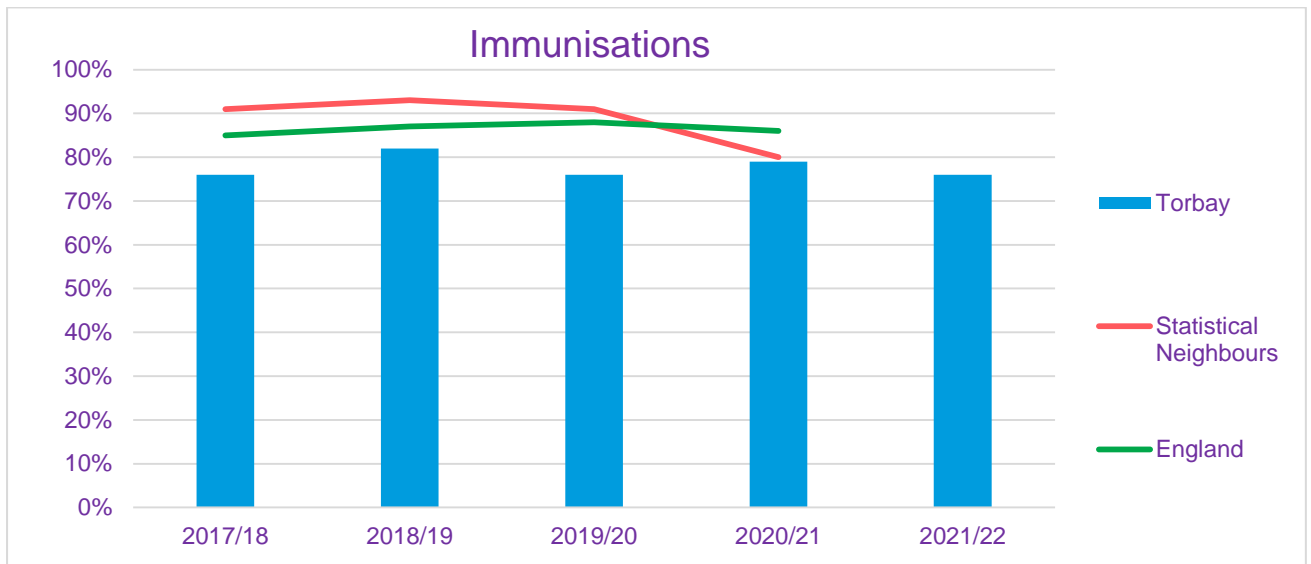
Dental checks

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay	83%	62%	86%	8%	35%
Statistical Neighbours	82%	86%	84%	36%	
England	84%	86%	86%	40%	



Immunisations

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay	76%	82%	76%	79%	76%
Statistical Neighbours	91%	93%	91%	80%	
England	85%	87%	88%	86%	



3.17 The proportion of cared for children for whom an SDQ score was received continued to fall and is much lower than the England average and SN. However, the average SDQ score has increased on the previous year and continues to be above that of the England average and SN.

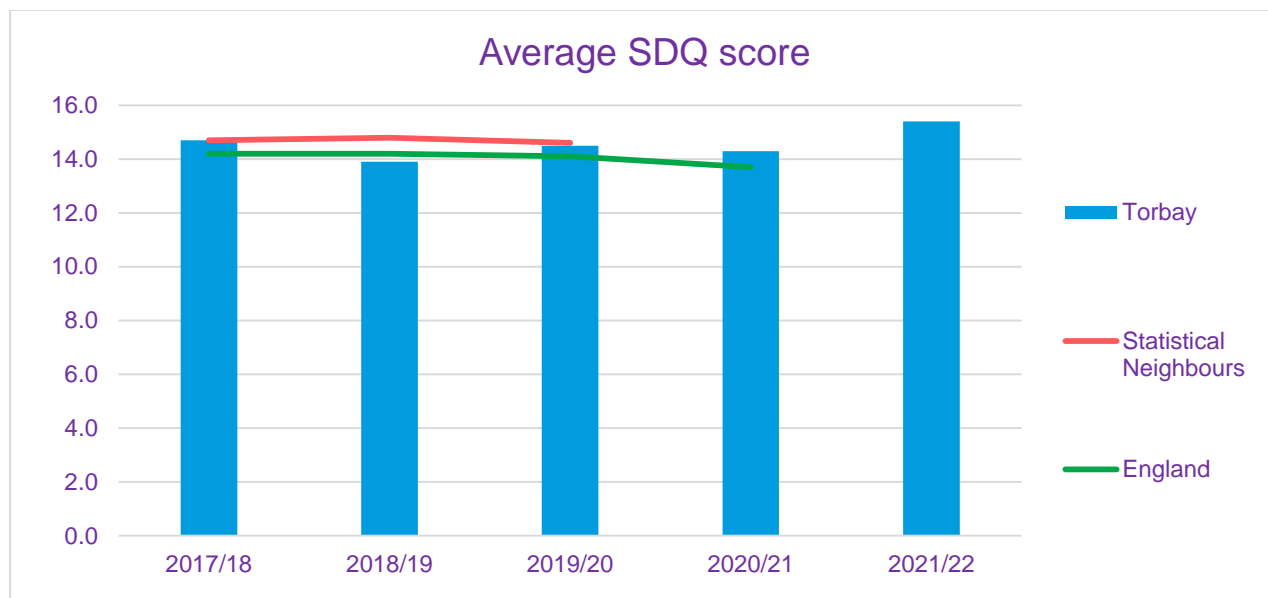
Children for whom an SDQ score was received

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay	69%	57%	60%	49%	30%
England	78%	78%	81%	78%	



Average SDQ Score

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay	14.7	13.9	14.5	14.3	15.4
Statistical Neighbours	14.7	14.8	14.6		
England	14.2	14.2	14.1	13.7	



3.18 Thirteen cared for children were recorded as having a substance misuse difficulty. This is a significant increase on the zero recording from 2020/21 but this is now considered to have been an inaccurate report.

3.19 There has been a gender shift with regards to the proportion of cared for children going missing in 2021/22 compared with the previous year with 48% of boys going missing versus 53% of girls. In 2020/21, the ratio was 55% boys to 45% girls. Cared for girls in Torbay going missing have now moved above the national average whereas boys have moved below the national average.

Cared for children going missing

	Children going missing by gender	
	Boys	Girls
England 2020/21	56%	44%
Torbay 2021/22	48%	53%

3.20 Children going missing as a percentage of all cared for children remains in line with the national average of 10%

Cared for children going missing

	Children going missing as a % of all cared for children after in the year
England 2020/21	10%
Torbay 2021/22	10%

3.21 As with 2020/21, the vast majority of cared for children going missing related to 1 or 2 episodes with this figure being static at 58%. Missing episodes related to 40 children in 2021/22 which is comparable with 2020/21 at 41 children.

Cared for children going missing

Episodes of missing - Torbay 2021/22	No of children	%
1 or 2	23	58%
3 to 5	6	15%
6 to 10	4	10%
11 to 15	2	5%
16 to 20	4	10%
21 to 30	0	0%
31+	1	3%
Total children	40	

3.22 The duration of missing episodes for cared for children over 2021/22 remained in line with the national average. However, it is noteworthy that the percentage of children going missing between 3 and 7 days increased to 7% from 2% in 2020/21.

Cared for children going missing

Duration of missing incidents	% of incidents of missing	
	Torbay 2021/22	England 2020/21
Incidents where duration is less than 1 day	38%	35%
Incidents where duration is between 1 and 2 days	55%	56%
Incidents where duration is between 3 and 7 days	7%	8%
Incidents where duration is between 8 and 10 days	0%	1%
Incidents where duration is between 11 and 15 days	0%	1%
Incidents where duration is between 16 and 20 days	0%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 21 and 30 days	0%	0%
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 during the year which is significantly lower than SN and the England average based on 2020/21 data. This is also lower than the 2.4% (4 children) in 2020/21.

Offending

	Number
OC2 Cohort	233
CfC aged 10+	168
CfC with convictions	2

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Torbay	-	-	-	2.1%	1.2%
Statistical Neighbours	5.5%	4.4%	4.0%	5.0%	
England	4.0%	3.0%	3.0%	2.0%	

3.24 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from the address from which they came into care fell but remains relatively comparable with 2020/21. However, this is still approximately 10% higher than the national average and 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 UASC who have a preference for a more urban setting.

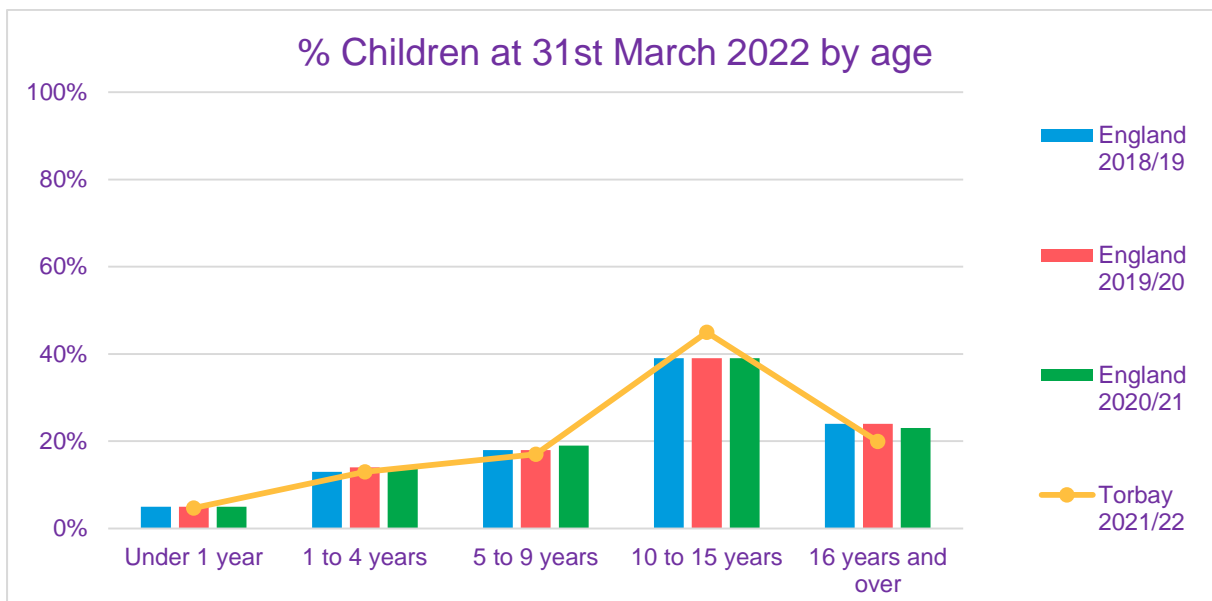
Distance from home

Cared for children on 31 March placed more than 20 miles from the address from which they came into care - Torbay 2020/21	Number	%
No	209	70%
Yes	90	30%
Total	299	

3.25 Children aged between 10 and 15 continue to be the highest represented within the Torbay cared for population with children under 1 years old being the lowest represented. This is in line with the national average for year 2020/21.

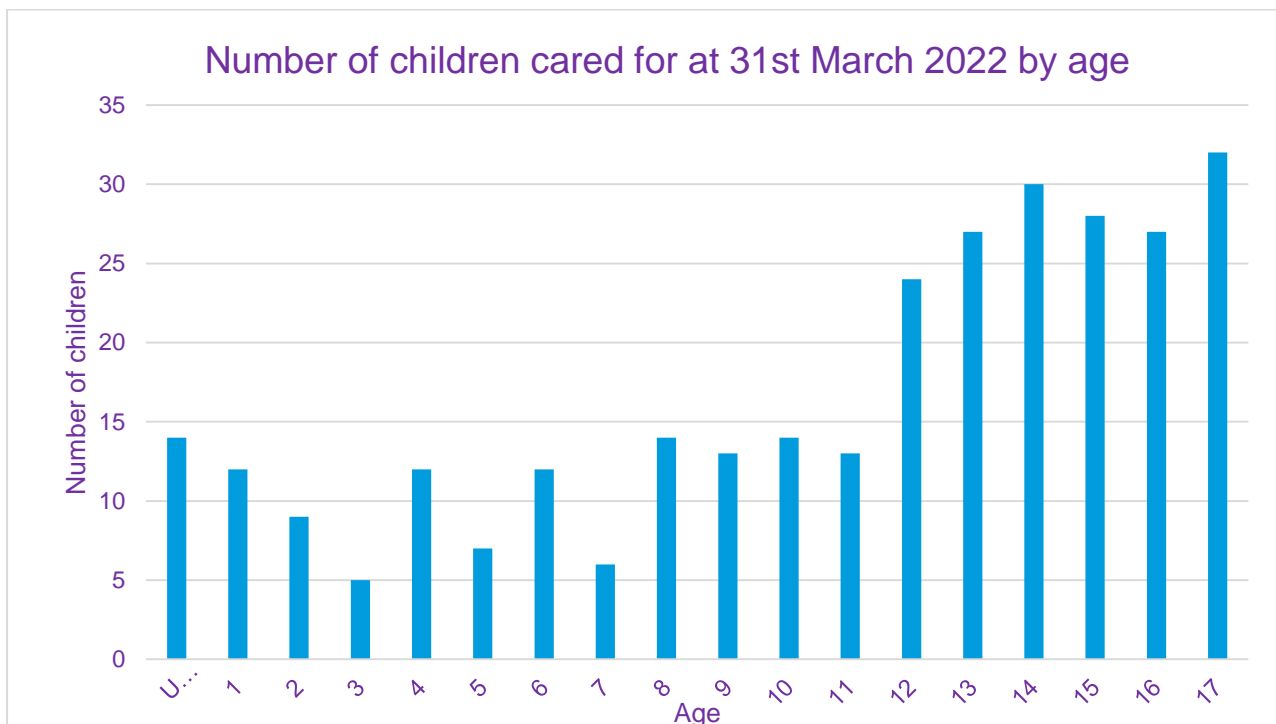
Cared for children age ranges by %

	England			Torbay
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Under 1 year	5%	5%	5%	5%
1 to 4 years	13%	14%	14%	13%
5 to 9 years	18%	18%	19%	17%
10 to 15 years	39%	39%	39%	45%
16 years and over	24%	24%	23%	20%



Cared for children age ranges by age and number

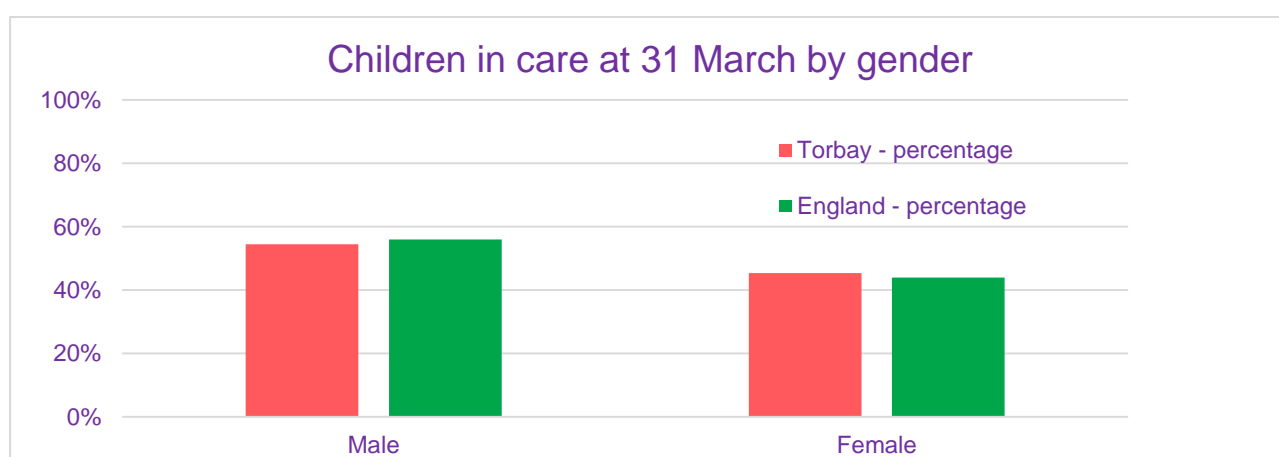
	Number
Under 1	14
1	12
2	9
3	5
4	12
5	7
6	12
7	6
8	14
9	13
10	14
11	13
12	24
13	27
14	30
15	28
16	27
17	32
Total	299



3.26 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.

Profile of cared for children on 31st March by gender and ethnicity

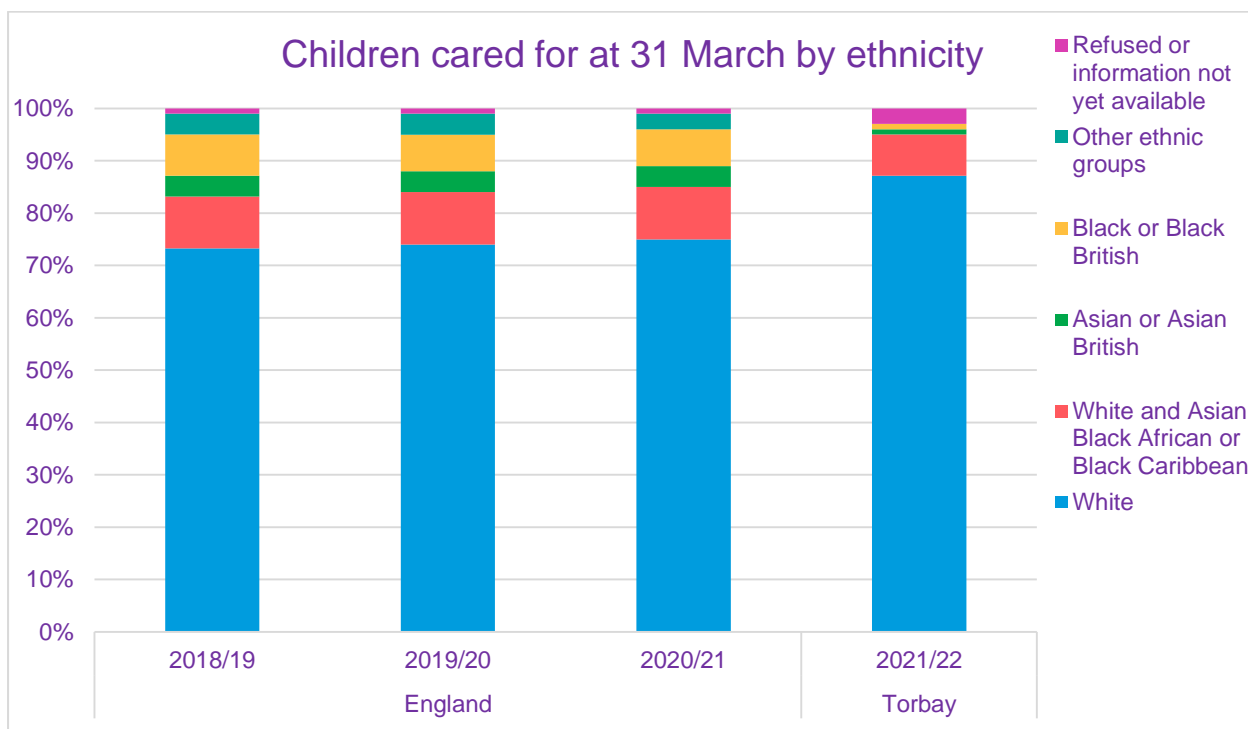
	Male	Female
Torbay - number	163	136
Torbay - percentage	55%	45%
England - percentage	56%	44%



3.27 Whites British remains the largest represented ethnicity (88%) by far 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 figure is comparable to the 89% White British in 2020/21.

Cared for children by ethnicity

	England			Torbay
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
White	74%	74%	75%	88%
White and Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean	10%	10%	10%	8%
Asian or Asian British	4%	4%	4%	1%
Black or Black British	8%	7%	7%	1%
Other ethnic groups	4%	4%	3%	0%
Refused or information not yet available	1%	1%	1%	3%

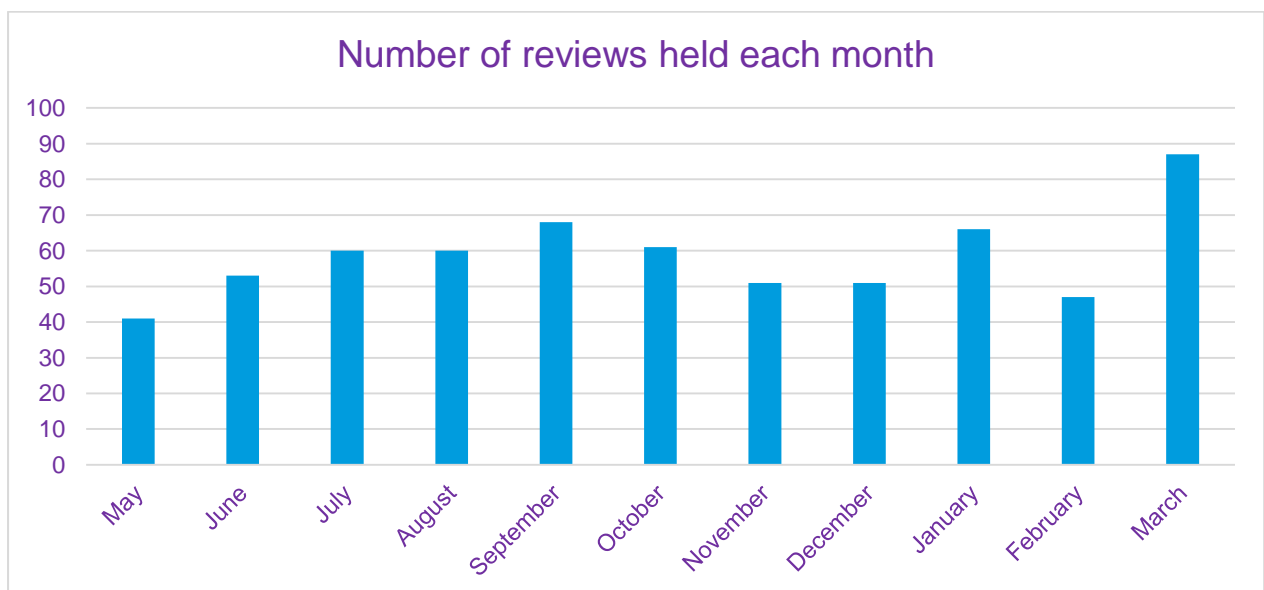


4. Timeliness of Review Records Completion

4.1 709 cared for reviews were held between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021. This is significantly higher than the 541 reviews held in 2020/21. 12% of all the reviews were held in March 2021.

Reviews over the year in Torbay

Month	Number of reviews held
April	64
May	41
June	53
July	60
August	60
September	68
October	61
November	51
December	51
January	66
February	47
March	87
Total	709



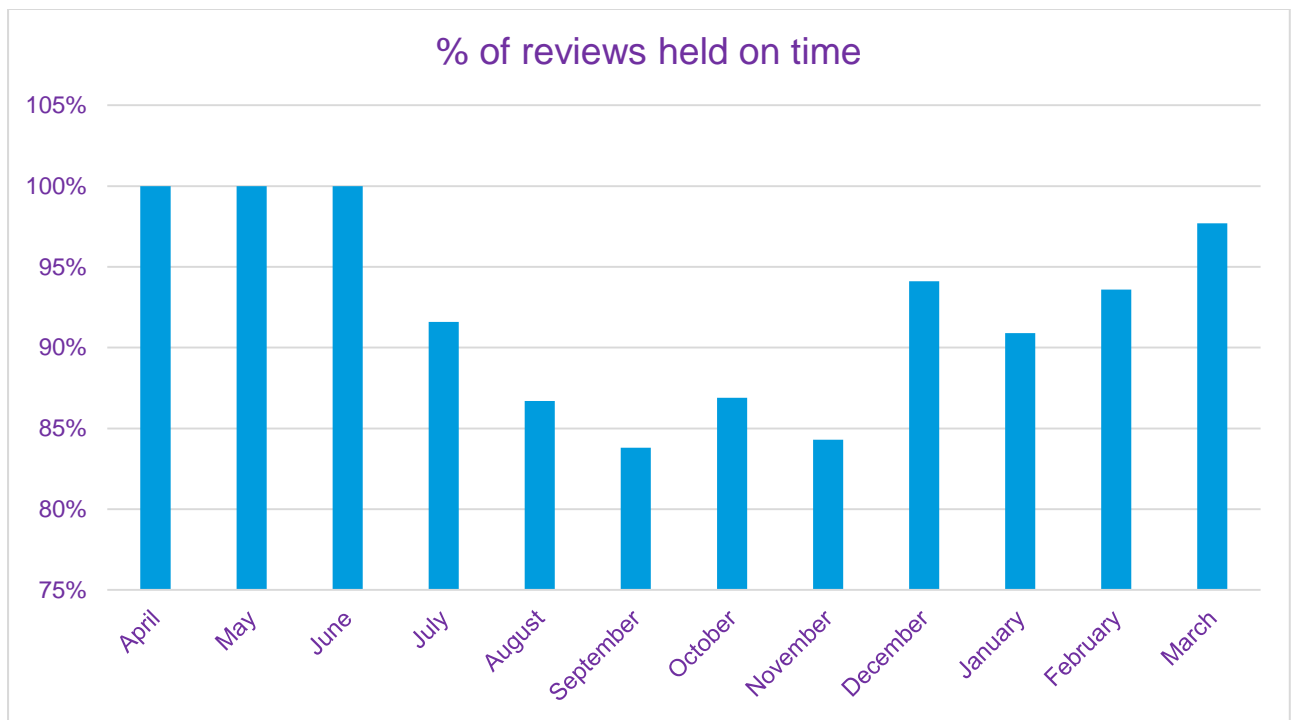
4.2 The service has continued to look at timeliness of completion of review records and sees this as a key measure of our effectiveness: for children's plans to be progressed effectively, the reviews and records that drive the plans need to be available to support moving plans forward and to ensure that the impact of the plan on children maximised.

4.3 Work to ensure timeliness of review records has continued through 2021/22, building on previous work. This year has seen relative a steady increase of cared for reviews within statutory timescale to 92% from 88% in 2020/21. Although good progress has been made here, we are still short of our local target of 95%.

4.4 It can be seen from the table and graph below that there were significant decreases in the timeliness of reviews over the quarters 2 and 3 which is a reflection of instability at both management and IRO level at that time as noted in previous sections of this report.

Percentage of reviews held on time

Month	% of reviews held on time
April	100%
May	100%
June	100%
July	92%
August	87%
September	84%
October	87%
November	84%
December	94%
January	91%
February	94%
March	98%

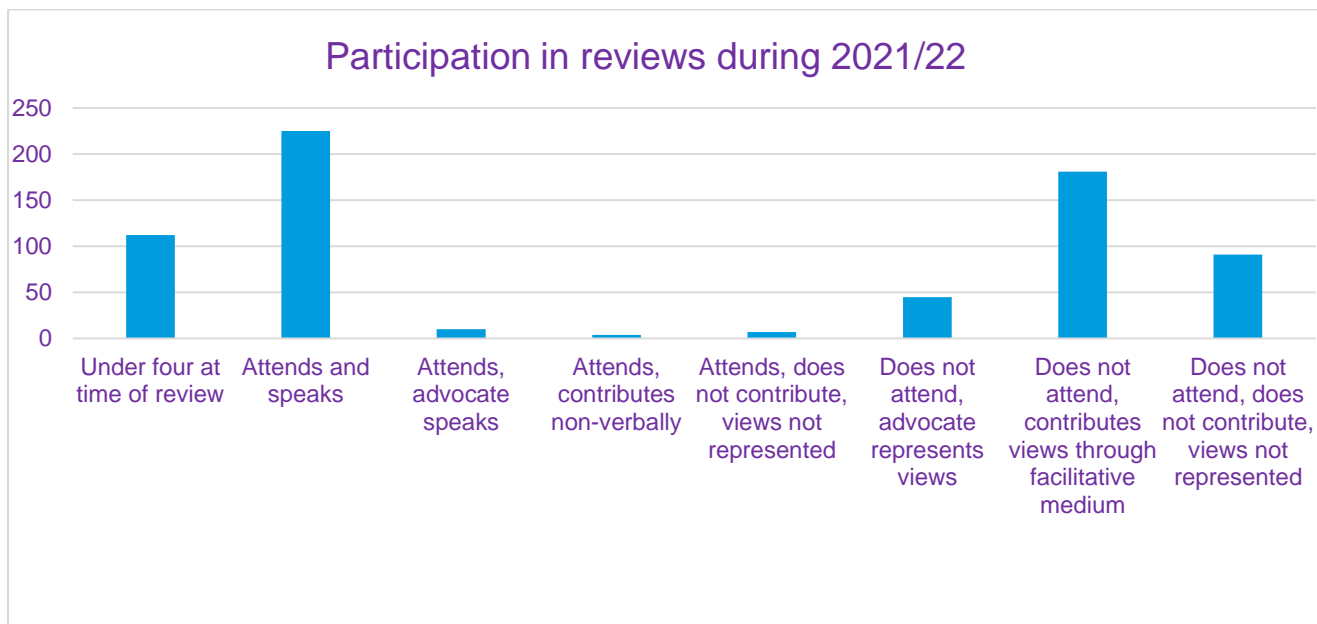


5. Voice of the Child and Young People Participation

- 5.1 A primary objective of the IRO is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident in their care plans. A key element in delivering this objective is the measure of the young person's participation in the Statutory Review of their care plan and care arrangements.
- 5.2 Across the year from April 2021 - March 2022, 81% of cared for children aged 4 yrs and over had participated in their reviews. This demonstrates a drop from an already relatively low base of 88% in 2020/21. There 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 A further factor to be mindful of is the number of 17 year olds that did not attend their reviews. It is of paramount importance that this age group is supported to attend what is most likely going to be their last cared for child review before their transition to adulthood. This review needs to ensure all pathway and transition planning has been conducted and is robust and appropriate to the young peoples' needs. Lack of attendance by the young people at their final cared for reviews carries the risk of their needs such as education, health and housing not being fully considered as they move towards more independent living.

Participation - all reviews across the year

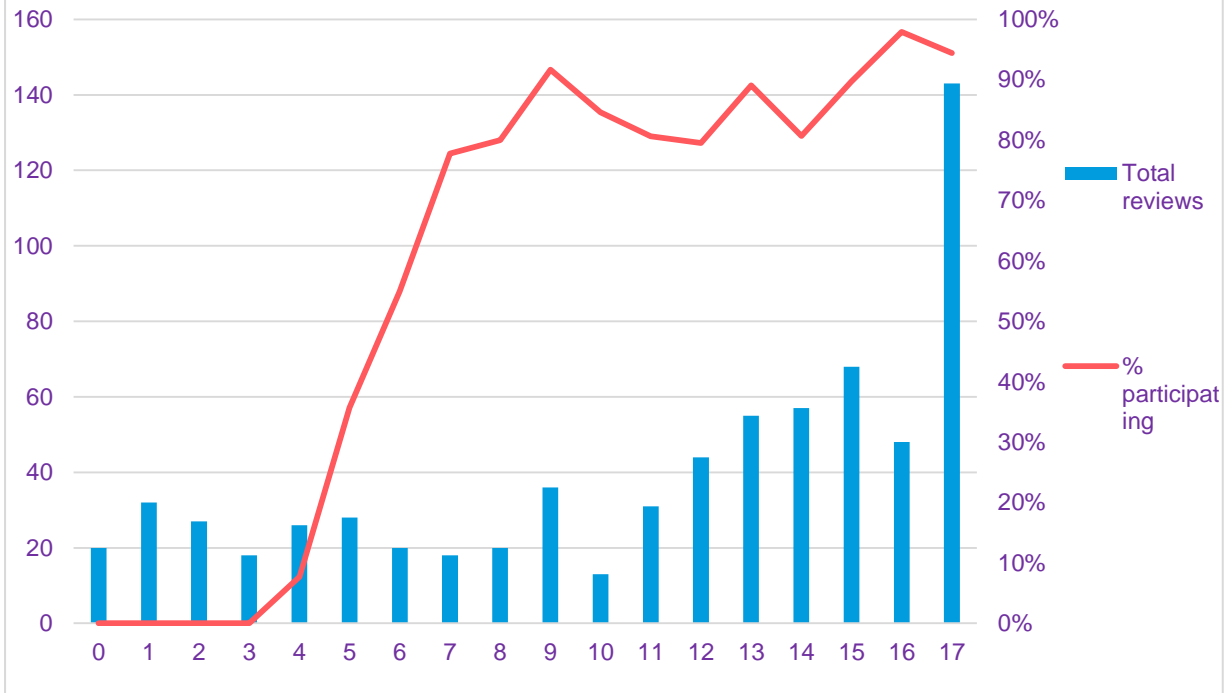
Participation code	Description	Number of reviews
PN0	Under four at time of review	112
PN1	Attends and speaks	225
PN2	Attends, advocate speaks	10
PN3	Attends, contributes non-verbally	4
PN4	Attends, does not contribute, views not represented	7
PN5	Does not attend, advocate represents views	45
PN6	Does not attend, contributes views through facilitative medium	181
PN7	Does not attend, does not contribute, views not represented	91
Blank		34
Total		709



Participation by age

Age	Attended but did not contribute	Did not attend, did not convey views	Too young	Participated	Total reviews	% participating
0			20		20	n/a
1	3		29		32	n/a
2		1	25	1	27	n/a
3		1	17		18	n/a
4		3	21	2	26	8%
5		12		10	28	36%
6		9		11	20	55%
7		4		14	18	78%
8	1	3		16	20	80%
9		3		33	36	92%
10		2		11	13	85%
11		6		25	31	81%
12		9		35	44	80%
13	2	6		49	55	89%
14		11		46	57	81%
15	1	7		61	68	90%
16		1		47	48	98%
17		13		135	143	94%
Total	7	91	112	496	706	
Total excluding under 4s	4	86	0	381	471	81%

Participation in reviews by age during 2021/22

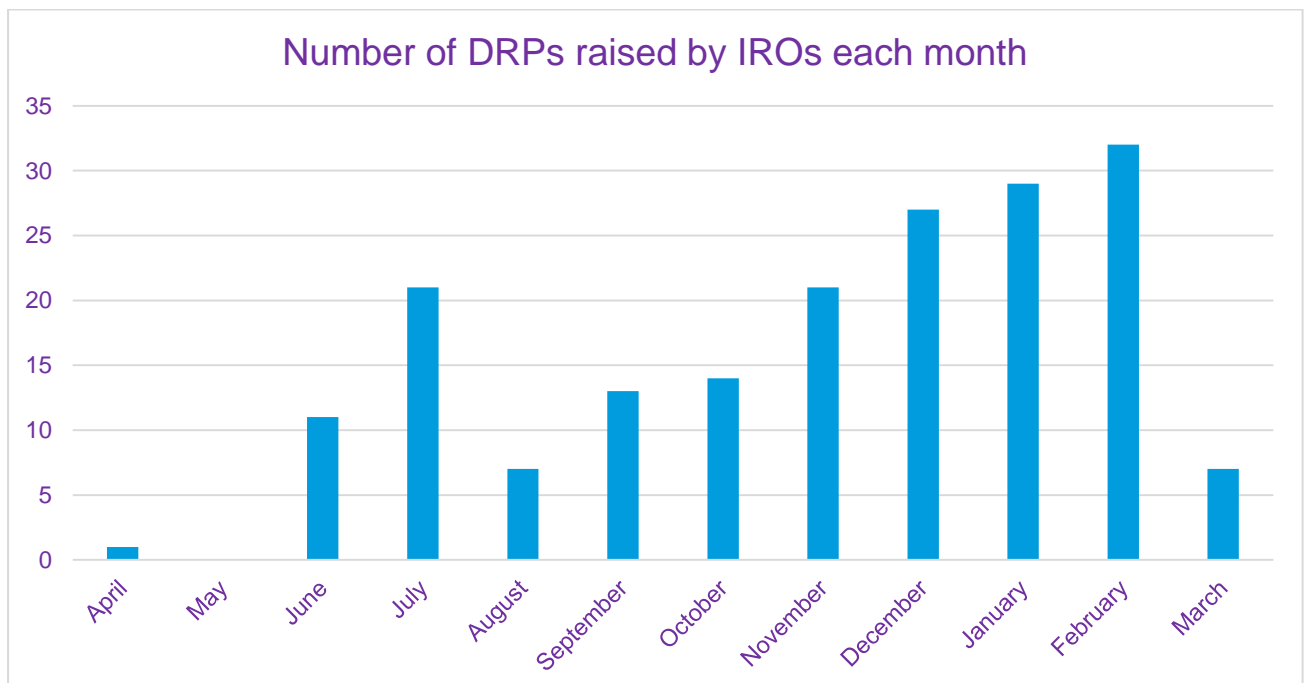


6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 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 2021 to March 2022, there were 183 formal resolution and escalations completed and escalated across all the IROs which is comparable to 2020/21’s figure of 185
- 6.4 It is noteworthy that between August and September, the number of DRPs is relatively low whilst at the same time the number of cared for reviews conducted within statutory timescales was also low. This suggests a lack of IRO and/or management oversight during this period resulting in an impaired level of service performance and challenge.

Number of Dispute Resolution Processes raised by IROs each month

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Number of DRPs	1	0	11	21	7	13	14	21	27	29	32	7



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 is improving, albeit from a low baseline.
- 7.3 The new Head of Service has been in post since December 2021 and has undertaken a full evaluation of the service and has created a service plan reflective of key improvements required, including the commitment to having a full team of permanent IROs in post along with a permanent Service Manager by January 2023. This will not only provide the IRO service with stability and consistency but also provide all cared for children an IRO that will follow them through their cared for journey in a way that agency workers may not be able to.
- 7.4 The IRO Service has adapted effectively and well during the year to respond to the demands of social distancing because of the need to contain infection during the coronavirus pandemic. The service has operated through and developed methods for undertaking effective reviews through technology enabling meetings to take place virtually. Throughout this year, the service has maintained effective reviewing of children's care plans and functions of the IRO to support outcomes and wellbeing for children in care, and at no point have had to accept less quality in our work with children. Learning here will be taken forward to develop a hybrid meeting model going forward.
- 7.5 Performance meetings now 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.

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, Reviewing and Early Help 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. The latter ensured staff wellbeing was maintained during the latter part of the Covid 19 pandemic.

9. Areas for Development 2022/23 and beyond

9.1.1 There are several areas that have been identified for development across the Independent Reviewing Service for 2022/23 and beyond as follows:-

- i. **Service stability** – this will include the appointment of a permanent Service Manager and the appointment of a full crew of permanent IROs to replace all agency staff by the start of Quarter 4.
- ii. **Address the long-term sickness issues** – this will include the utilisation of the Human Resource absence review mechanisms for current staff on long-term sick as well as monitoring and addressing further absenteeism as it arises.
- iii. **Ensure reviews are held within Statutory timescales** – this will include a revision of the invite reminder system and tracking of reports that inform the reviews to ensure they are completed prior to the reviews and reduce the risk of reviews being rescheduled.
- iv. **Increased participation** – This will be a piece of work allocated to the new Service Manager to ensure all children have access to advocacy and further work is undertaken to support children to chair their own reviews.
- v. **Partner attendance at reviews** – work will be completed with partner agencies to ensure the right professionals are present to inform reviews and care planning for children.
- vi. **Cared for children’s health needs are met** – more work to be undertaken with social workers and health partners to ensure health assessments, dental checks and immunisations are completed in a timely manner.
- vii. **Restorative relational work** – more link work to be completed across all service areas to ensure more improved understanding of the IRO role across service areas through stronger relational and partnership working.
- viii. **Parent and child feedback** – the implementation of an online feedback form so the service can learn from the experiences of children, young people and their parents regarding the care planning and review processes.
- ix. **Practice improvement** – this will include more wider use of the DRP procedure to ensure poor practice is identified and addressed appropriately by translating concerns into learning opportunities across all the service areas.

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Date:	1 st December 2022