



Torbay Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report

2024-25

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Executive Summary

This Annual Report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025. It evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the Independent Reviewing Service in the planning and outcomes for Torbay's cared for children and young people and ensures that Torbay Council, as a corporate parent, is discharging its statutory responsibilities towards them and remains ambitious in what it achieves with its cared for children and young people in Torbay. The Independent Reviewing Officers have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that care plans for children effectively address their needs, consider Torbay's cared for children and young people's ascertainable views and opinions and improve outcomes for them.

The report demonstrates the continuous development of the Independent Reviewing Service over the last year and its role in the continuous journey of practice development in Torbay. The report also identifies areas of strength and focus, in order to further enhance the effectiveness and impact of the service on outcomes for our children and young people.

The stability of the service has been maintained over this review period and the service has continued to benefit from a permanent IRO workforce, including a longstanding Service Manager and Head of Service. This helps to promote outcomes for our children and young people in a variety of ways including through ensuring consistency as our children benefit from maintaining relationships with their IROs for lengthy periods of time.

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 811 cared for reviews taking place in 2024/25. This has slightly increased compared to the 803 which took place the year prior despite the number of cared for children reducing, thus evidencing increased numbers of reviews being held to ensure effective planning for children at significant points in a child's journey including when children have a change of placement. The timeliness of reviews has also increased to 99%, compared with 96% in 2023-24. This performance exceeds the target set for 95% of reviews being within statutory timescale.

The number of cared for children decreased over the year and stood at 280 as of 31st March 2025 compared with 298 as of 31st March 2024 and 314 as of 31st March 2023. This continued reduction is due to a combination of continued investment in early help and preventative work as well as high quality edge of care provision, which prevents children from becoming unnecessarily cared for. There is also a service wide focus on promoting legal permanence including through kinship arrangements, Special Guardianship conversion and reunification packages which safely enable children to return and ultimately result in the discharge of Care Orders.

The number of babies becoming cared for has increased. There are 26 children under the age of two that have become cared for in the 2024-25 year compared to 24 children who became cared for in the previous year. However, this year's figure is lower in proportion to the overall number of children under two that became cared for in the year which stood at 97 (27%) compared to 83 (29%) children in 2023/24. That equates to 27% children being under two compared to 29% the previous year.

With regards to gender, 57% of newly cared for children identified as male in 2024-25 compared to 54% in 2023-24. 0% identified as non-binary, with the remaining 46% identifying as female.

The gender split for missing episodes within the cared for children cohort in 2024-25 has seen a widening of the ratio between boys and girls, with 57% of the missing episodes being related to girls as opposed to 43% for boys. This is in comparison to 2023-24 when the ratio was 43% girls to 57% boys. Exploitation continues to be a key focus for Children's Services and work is presently being undertaken with the Independent Reviewing Officers in regards to their role in exploitation identification and response, and how they can more effectively have oversight of any associated risk within this area of planning for our cared for children.

Foster placement sufficiency in Torbay continues to be a significant challenge, mirroring the national picture; this is reflected in the fact that 32% of cared for children are placed more than 20 miles away as of 31st March 31st 2025. Whilst this has reduced from the 2023-24 figure of 34%, this is still significantly above the statistical neighbours at 13% and the national average of 17%. There is evidence to suggest that permanency for Torbay's cared for children has continued to improve, with further progress in adoptions and SGOs all outperforming statistical neighbours and national averages with Staying Put rates outperforming the National Average (Statistical Neighbour information is not available for comparison for this measure).

Long-term stability has improved: as of 31st March 2025, this stood at 64% compared to 41% at the same time last year, which marks a significant improvement in Torbay. The picture fluctuates significantly by age group, with some age groups experiencing more instability in terms of more than one placement in a two year period. Steps are being taken by the service to promote stability including implementation of a new disruption policy which will come into effect on 1st June 2025; this will assist the service in identifying key learning and recurring themes to inform the strategic planning for enhancing stability moving forward.

Thirty-five young people ceased to be cared for in the 2024-25 year who were aged 18 or over. Eighteen of those thirty-five young people were in foster placements at the point they ceased to be cared for. Of those eighteen, fifteen remained in Staying Put arrangements with their foster carers, one went into an independent living arrangement, one transferred to adult social services and one ceased 'for any other reason' which relates to a UASC young person transitioning into semi-

supported Young Devon accommodation whose former foster carers sadly could not offer them a Staying Put arrangements. As a percentage that equates to 83% who Stayed Put, compared to 52% in 2023-24 which is a significant increase, attributable to multiple factors including increased oversight and scrutiny of transition planning and a focus on ensuring timely pathway planning is undertaken from fifteen years and nine months and that they are regularly reviewed in conjunction with young people.

There continue to be some challenges within the partnership in terms of promoting the health of our cared for children. The percentage of cared for children who have been subject to a review health assessment in the last twelve months has improved from 81% in 2023-24 to 87% as of the end of March 2025. The percentage of cared for children who had been subject to a dental check in the last twelve months however has decreased significantly from 60% in 2023-24 to 48% as of the end of March 2025. Whilst Torbay's performance in respect of review health assessments are slightly below the national figure (89%), dental checks fall significantly short of this (79%). There has been a cross service focus on promoting the health outcomes for our cared for children over the last year, and the ICB have led a specific piece of work in respect of commissioning additional dental provision for cared for children; more recently, a specific provision has been identified in Torbay, as opposed to the wider Devon footprint, however the impact of this is not yet being seen in performance. The Local Offer for our Care Experienced Children and Young People has been updated in this review period and this now includes multi-agency input from health services, including increased efforts to understand and resolve barriers in relation to children participating in their review health assessments, which we know can particularly impact on those cared for young people aged sixteen and seventeen.

This year, there has been an improvement in the participation of cared for children within their reviews. In 2022/23, 79% of children participated in their cared for review and in 2023/24, this increased 87%. Participation remains a key area of focus for the Independent Reviewing Service and as part of learning from a recent quality assurance auditing cycle, it was recognised that there is a need for greater IRO oversight to be added to children's files. The service leads have developed plans to ensure significant improvements are evidenced in this critical area including utilising the Dispute Resolution Process available to Independent Reviewing Officers when there is no evidence of advocacy being considered by the children's social work teams.

Overall, there has been continued improvement in terms of the impact and effectiveness of the independent reviewing service as evidenced within this report such as permanency planning which ensures our children benefit from stability and security in their care arrangements to further enhance their wellbeing. However, the service remains very ambitious and strives for excellent outcomes for

all our children and young people, therefore this report also contains a full review of last year's action plan along with a set of key improvement objectives for the service over the year 2025-26.

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 20 working days of the child being in care, then within 3 months after the initial review, and every six months thereafter). Cared for reviews should be brought forward if there are any significant changes to a child's life and if a change of placement happens, a review should again take place within 20 working days as this is a new review cycle.
- 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 them, 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 benefit them in their cared for child reviews. If the operational teams have not ensured advocacy for a child prior to their review, the IRO role is to challenge this.
- The IRO should ensure the child is aware of his or her entitlements from the Local Authority including ensuring the operational team have shared the Local Offer with our cared for children who reach 16 years of age and that this is embedded within their pathway planning to support their successful and supported transition into adulthood.
- The IRO should ensure the child is aware that they are entitled to legal representation (either directly or via a court appointed CAFCASS guardian).

- The IRO should be alive to, and if necessary, take action to prevent and address 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's duties as a corporate parent to ensure care plans have been thoroughly considered and weight given 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 and timely social work practice that has clear child focused outcomes contributing to positive outcomes 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 sits within the Children's Services Directorate of Torbay Council. However, the service is managed independently to the statutory social work services to maintain independent and 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 The management structure within the IRO Service includes a permanent Head of Service (appointed in December 2021) who reports to the Divisional Director of Safeguarding, and a Service Manager who reports directly to the Head of Service. This has provided the service with the management support and direction 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 2025, the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service had a staffing establishment of 6.81 Full Time Equivalent (fte) IROs. The team consisted of:
 - 5 IROs (full time)
 - 2 IROs (part time)
- 2.4 The service continues to be permanently staffed, which has ensured stability within the team and has had a positive impact on Torbay's cared for children who have benefitted from a consistent relationship with their allocated IRO. In addition, there have been no unplanned leavers during 2024-25 within the service, except for the retirement of a longstanding Torbay IRO which was reported upon in the Annual Report on 2023/24.
- 2.5 Ensuring staff wellbeing remains a management priority in the IRO service. As of 31st March 2025, 85 days sickness had been recorded for the year. This is an increase from the previous year, however the majority of these were accrued by one staff member in a single period of absence who was appropriately supported by process and procedure. All IROs are passionate, dedicated, flexible and collaborative in their approach which has resulted in minimal impact on children's care planning and reviews and any potential sickness is managed to ensure minimal disruption for children. Processes are in place to ensure all

critical tasks are effectively managed in the planned or unplanned absence of the child's allocated IRO.

- 2.6 All IROs are highly skilled, knowledgeable and experienced children's social workers, with a minimum of five years post qualifying experience 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 and all IROs contribute positively and supportively to a learning culture within the team and wider service.
- 2.7 The caseloads of our IROs are regularly reviewed and are consistently aligned with the recommendations set out within the IRO Handbook; this is important as this allows all IROs to effectively carry out all aspects of their role.
- 2.8 It should also be noted that the IROs have a dual role as Child Protection Chairs. However, this aspect of their role is not reported upon as this report relates only to our cared for children.

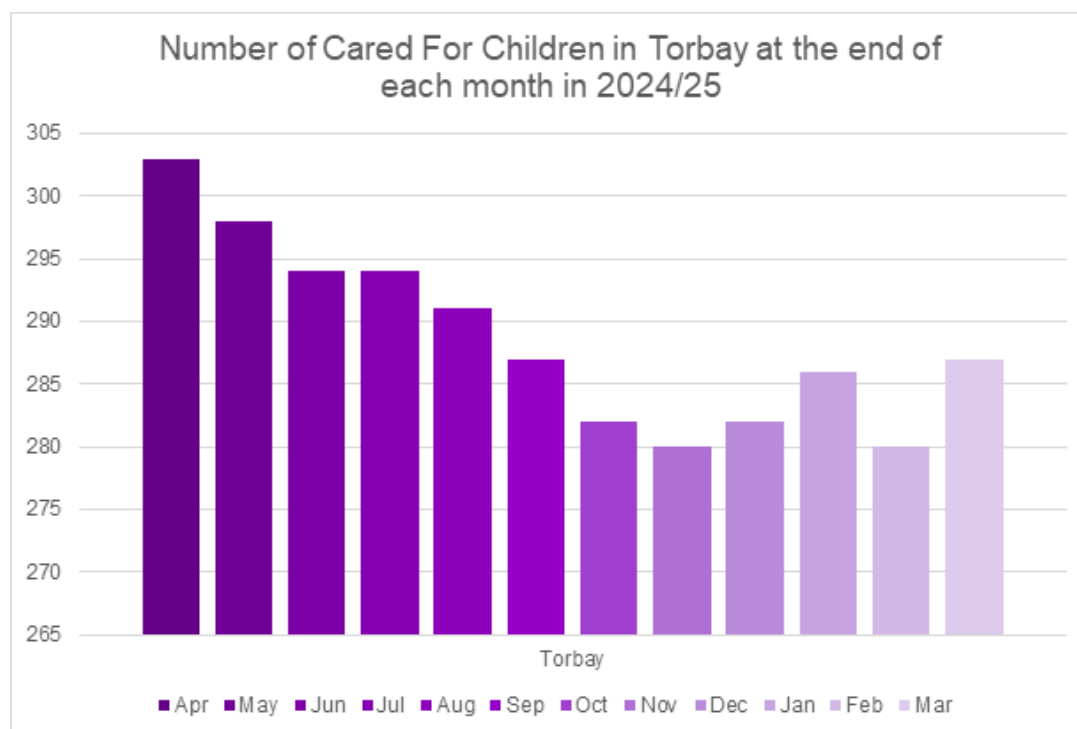
3. Profile of Torbay's Cared for Children

- 3.1 Torbay's cared for population stood at 280 children and young people on the 31st March 2025; this is reduced from 298 children in March 2024 and further reductions from 314 in March 2023.
- 3.2 The rate of cared for children within Torbay decreased from 118 children per 10,000 of all children and young people in Torbay in 2023/24 to 111 over the 2024/25 year; however still remains higher than both the National and Statistical Neighbours Figures (70 and 109 respectively). This evidences a positive move forward in becoming more aligned to the National and Statistical Neighbour averages.

Number of children cared for during the year by calendar month in 2024/25

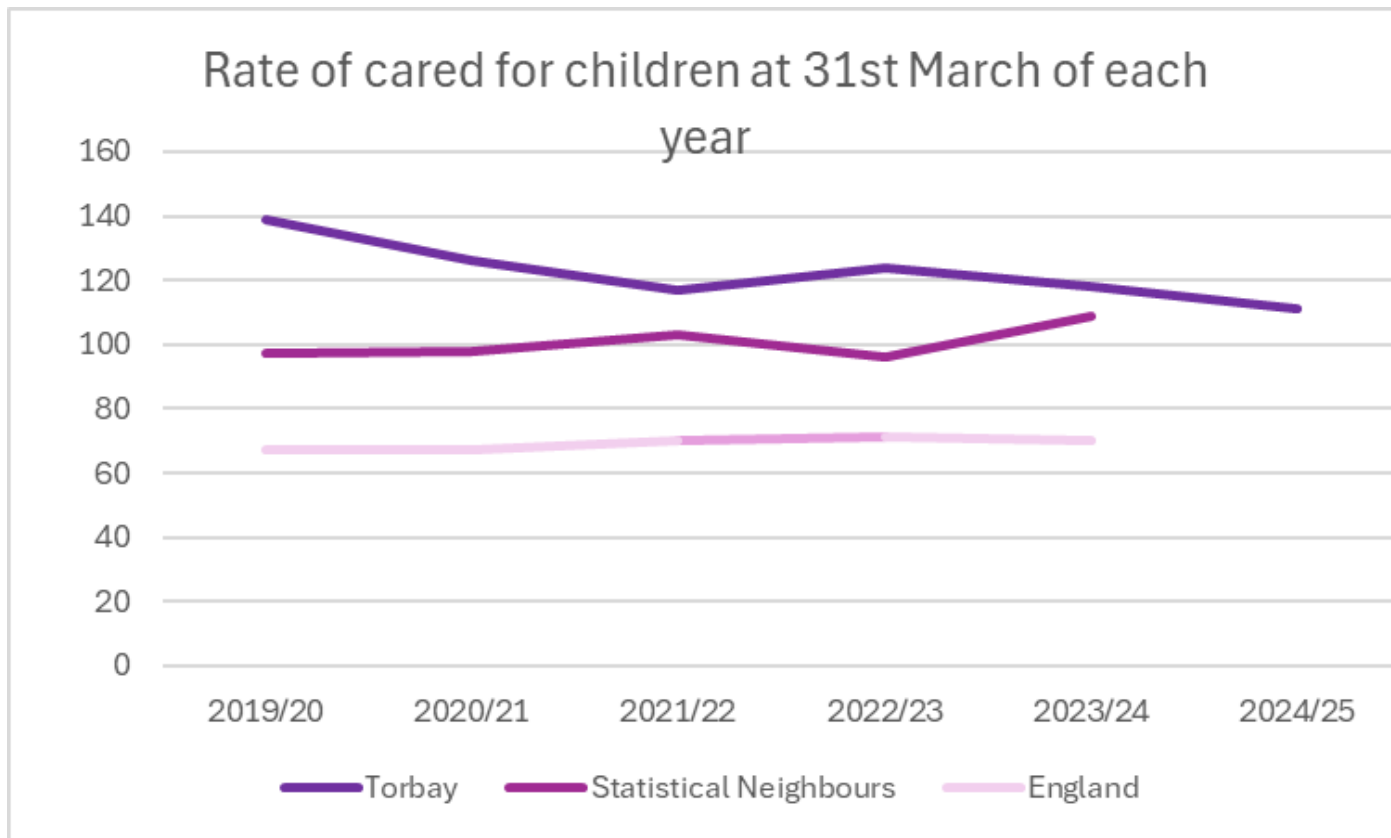
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Torbay	303	298	294	294	291	287	282	280	282	286	280	280

- 3.3 As can be seen from the graph below, Torbay's cared for population has largely followed a downward trend with a more significant decrease between July and November 2024.



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

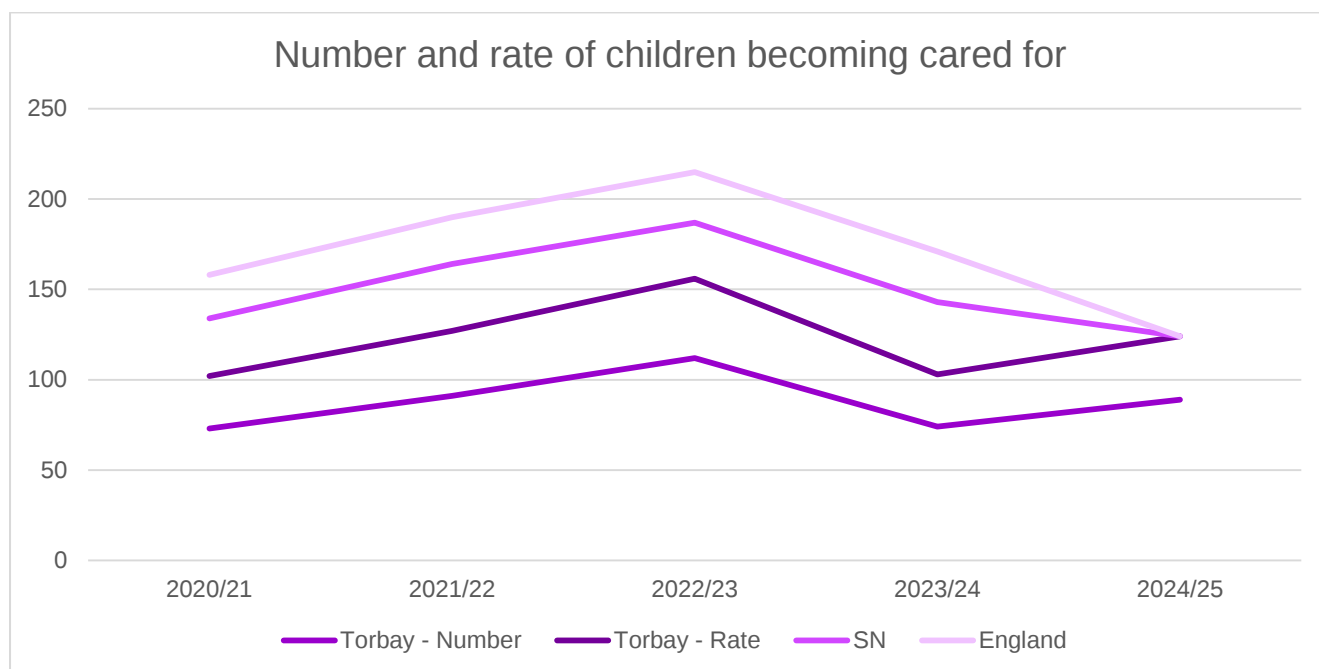
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Torbay	142	139	126	117	124	118	111
Statistical Neighbours	83	97	98	103	96	109	Not Released
England	65	67	67	70	71	70	Not Released



- 3.5 The rate of children becoming cared for has increased in 2024-25, with 89 new children becoming cared for compared to 74 children in 2023-2024, however this remains a significant reduction compared to the 2022-2023 figure of 112 children. This the number of children becoming cared as a rate per 10,000 of all children and young people in Torbay to 35, which is below our Statistical Neighbours and is now more aligned to the national average. However, due to the legacy of historically high numbers of cared for children, Torbay's rate of cared for children per 10,000 children (see above) is projected to remain high for some years to come. It will therefore be important not only to ensure only those children whose safety and best interests demand it become cared for and that legal permanency is continuously sought as part of the cared for review process, for example plans of reunification where safe and possible, Special Guardianship conversion where possible and continued exploration of a child's wider family network in consideration of kinship placements.

Children becoming cared for children

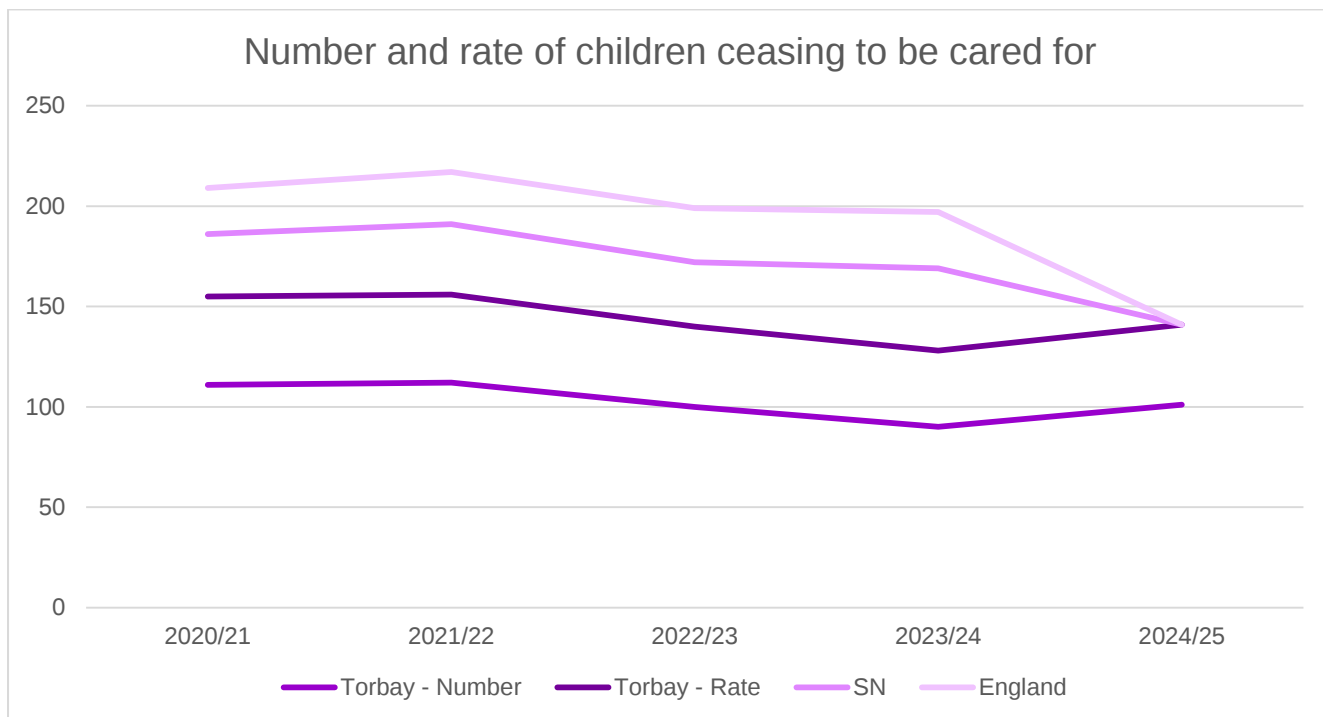
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Torbay - number	135	73	91	112	74	89
Torbay - rate	53	29	36	44	29	35
SN - rate	36	32	37	31	40	Not released
England - rate	26	24	26	28	28	Not released



3.6 We have had a 5% increase in our figures for 2024/25 where children have ceased to be cared for compared to 2023-24. The trajectory for our children continues to remain favourable compared to our Statistical Neighbours. This is important for Torbay's children to ensure as many as possible are safely discharged from care into either parental care, the care of extended family, through adoption or they have reached an age of majority where they are now adults and transition to independent care. The IRO plays a key role in ensuring plans are progressed, that the voice of the child is captured and that there is no drift and delay for children / young people.

Children ceasing to be cared for children

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Torbay - number	143	111	112	100	90	101
Torbay - rate	55	44	44	40	38	40
SN - rate	29	31	35	32	41	Not released
England - rate	25	23	26	27	28	Not released



- 3.7 The proportion of children placed within foster care has decreased from 75% in 2023/24 to 72% in 2024/25. This is now below the national average of 74%. As the number of Torbay cared for children placed in residential settings has not significantly increased, this means that other placement types such as placed with family, parents or placed for adoption has increased, thereby decreasing the proportion of children in foster care placements.
- 3.8 There were 10 children adopted throughout the year 2023/24 out of 101 total children who ceased to be cared for, equating to 10%. This compares very positively with the Torbay figure of 4% in 2022/23 and 3% in 2021/22 and demonstrates the strength that Torbay is showing in leading the way across the South West Peninsular regarding adoption performance. Adoption performance is incredibly important as this form of legal permanence provides children with stable and loving homes whereby they develop lasting attachments to promote their holistic wellbeing and encourage confident, bright and secure futures,

Cared for children on 31st March 2025 by placement type

Placements at 31st March 2024		Number	%
Foster placement with relative or friend	Inside local authority	21	8%
	Outside local authority	14	5%
Placement with other foster carer:	Inside local authority	88	31%
	Outside local authority	79	28%
Secure unit		0	0%
Homes and hostels (residential care, K2 code)		17	6%
Hostels and other supportive residential placements (H5 code)		11	4%
Residential schools		0	0%
Other residential settings (codes R1, R2, R3, R5)		1	0.4%
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)		11	4%
Placed with own parents		18	6%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently		0	0%
Other placements (Z1) (DfE guidance suggests use for unregulated foster care only)		8	3%
Supported Accommodation for CFC and Care Leavers aged 16-17		8	3%
Unregistered carer/provider: awaiting alternative		3	1%
Unregistered carer/provider: best interest		1	0.4%

The national picture is as follows:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Foster care (U codes)	70%	54%	Not released
Placed for adoption (A codes)	3%	3%	Not released
Placed with own parents (code P1)	7%	9%	Not released
Children's homes (code K2)			Not released
Hostels / Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's Homes regulations (code H5)	16%	21%	
Secure units (code K1)			Not released
Residential schools (code S1)	0%	0%	

Cared for Children on 31st March 2025 by Placement Type and Provision is as follows:-

Placement type	Own provision	Other LA Provision	Private	Voluntary / Third Sector	Total children in placement type
U1 Foster placement with relative(s) or friend(s) – long term fostering	18	0	0	0	18
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	0
U3 Fostering placement with relative(s) or friend(s) who is/are not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	16	0	1	0	17
U4 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – long term fostering	39	1	27	0	67
U5 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) who is/are also an approved adopter(s) – fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	4	0	0	0	4
U6 Foster placement with other foster carer(s) – not long term or fostering for adoption /concurrent planning	54	4	38	0	96
Number by provider type	131	5	66	0	203
% by provider type	65%	2%	33%	0%	100%
England % by provider type, 2024	75%	0%	17%	8%	100%

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

In-house foster care

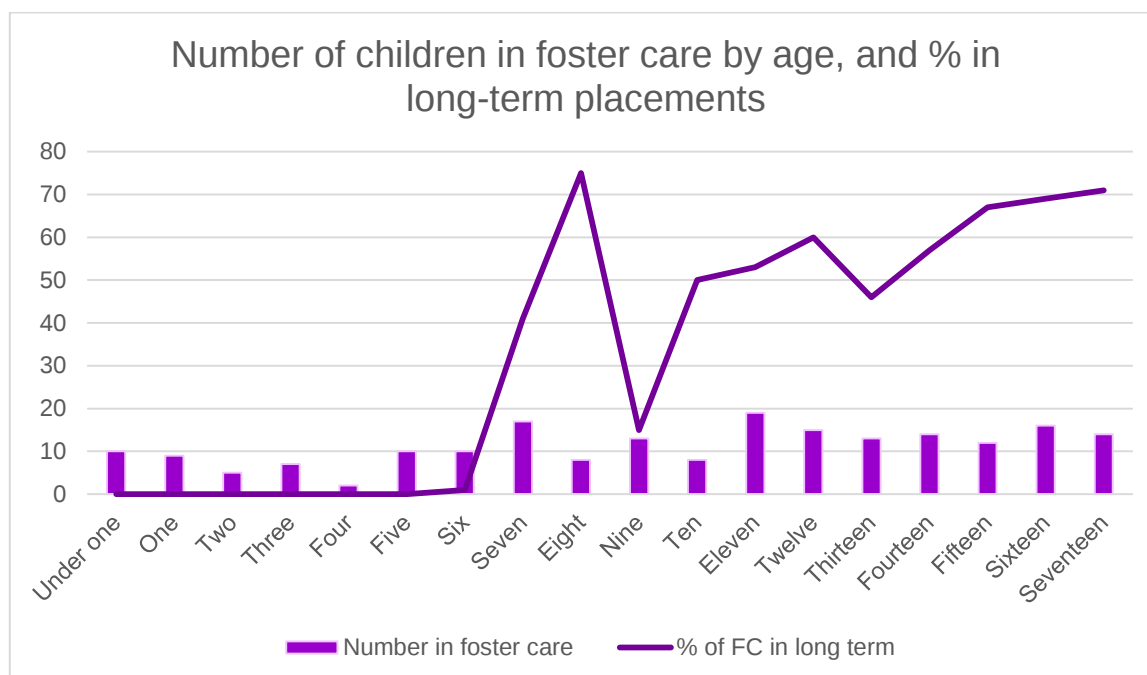
- 3.9 As of 31st March 2025, 65% of children in foster care in Torbay were residing with 'in-house' provision. This is lower than the national average of children placed within in-house provision level of 75% as well as being lower than last year's figure of 77%. There remain challenges with in-house foster placement sufficiency connected to various factors such as retirement, the ageing profile of long-term foster carers and the challenges in recruiting new foster carers. These challenges compounded the national placement sufficiency challenges. However, with

the recent introduction of Mockingbird and the Regional Fostering Hub we hoping to mitigate the impact of this moving forward.

- 3.10 42% of children living in foster care were placed in long-term placements as per the National Definition at the end of the year, a decrease from 49% in the previous year but still higher than the 2023 figure. This figure correlates to the increased number of children who remained Staying Put this year, whereby 12 out of the 15 were previously long term matched to their foster carers. The remaining 3 were in foster placements but did not meet the criteria for being long term matched. We are hopeful that more robust planning around convening stability meetings at pertinent points and the implementation of the new and updated Disruption Policy, that we will see an increase to this number in the 2025/26 reporting.

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	13	10	0	0%
1	16	9	0	0%
2	7	5	0	0%
3	7	7	0	0%
4	2	2	0	0%
5	12	10	0	0%
6	10	10	1	1%
7	18	17	7	41%
8	8	8	6	75%
9	16	13	2	15%
10	11	8	4	50%
11	19	19	10	53%
12	18	15	9	60%
13	19	13	6	46%
14	16	14	8	57%
15	25	12	8	67%
16	30	16	11	69%
17	33	14	10	71%
Total	280	202	85	42%



3.11 The number of babies aged under 1 becoming cared for children as a percentage of all newly cared for children has decreased to 20% from 23% the previous year. The higher percentage of babies becoming cared for in 2024/25 compared to any other age group strongly suggests that care proceedings are being initiated in a timely manner and children are being safeguarded at the outset of their lives. It also indicates the effective use of the Unborn Baby Panel for tracking purposes and assessments being completed pre-birth to inform care planning. The impact of investment and focus into enhancing the quality of the edge of care services from our Building Futures team, who also assist in understanding the strengths and areas of perceived risks in any family unit and provide input into pre-birth assessments.

Work is however needed to understand why there has been a 12% increase in children 11 years and older becoming cared for, compared to last year's figures given the correlation between late entry into care and poor outcomes such as their ability to achieve placement stability. However, of note, 10 of those 31 children becoming cared for aged 11 and older were aged 16 and 17 yrs, 8 of which 10 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People.

Number of children becoming cared for in 2024/25 by age

Age year	Number of children becoming cared for	%
0	19	20%
1	7	7%
2	5	5%
3	4	4%
4	3	3%
5	4	4%
6	7	7%
7	4	4%
8	6	6%
9	1	1%
10	6	6%
11	4	4%

Age year	Number of children becoming cared for	%
12	5	5%
13	5	5%
14	3	3%
15	4	4%
16	6	6%
17	4	4%
Total	97	

3.12 Looking at the proportion of children ceasing to be cared for by the end reason of 2024/25 compared to the England average, Torbay's proportion of children adopted was higher than the national average (10% compared to 9% nationally). The proportion of young people Staying Put post 18 was also much higher than the national average (21% compared to 13% nationally). The proportion ceasing to be cared for due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted was much higher than the national figure (24% compared to 13% nationally). The majority of Special Guardianship Orders made in 2024/25 made were to connected people (24 out of 28), with the remaining four children being made subject to Special Guardianship Orders granted to the child's previous foster carers. Overall, this demonstrates a very positive picture for cared for children in terms of permanency outcomes for our children and young people. This improvement correlates with Torbay's mature use of family network decision making meetings and enhanced efforts to explore all viable family placements for children, including commissioning appropriate services to support these arrangements of care.

Children who ceased to be cared for in 2024/25 by end reason

End reason and code	England 2023/24	Torbay	
		Number	%
Accommodation on remand ended (E14)	-	2	2%
Adopted (E11, E12)	9%	12	10%
Age assessment determined child aged 18 or over (UASCs) (E15)	1%	0	0%
Aged 18 and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements) (E17)	16%	24	21%
Care ceased for any other reason (E8)	8%	17	15%
Care taken by another local authority (E3)	6%	0	0%
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%	1	1%
Moved to independent living (with no formalised support) (E6)	3%	2	2%
Moved to independent living with supported accommodation (E5)	13%	1	1%
Residence order or child arrangement order granted (E41)	3%	12	10%
Returned home to live with parents or other person with parental responsibility which was not part of the care planning process (E4B)	3%	0	0%
Returned home to live with parents or other person with parental responsibility which was part of the care planning process (E4A)	17%	16	14%
Sentenced to custody (E9)	1%	0	0%
Special guardianship order to former FCs who are relatives or friends (E45)	11%	19	16%
Special guardianship order to former FCs who are not relatives or friends (E46)		4	3%
Special guardianship order to relatives or friends who were not former FCs (E47)		5	4%

End reason and code	England 2023/24	Torbay	
		Number	%
Special guardianship order to people who were neither relatives or friends or former FCs (E48)	1%	0	0%
Moved to residential care funded by adult children's social care (E7)		2	2%
Total	100%	117	100%

For special guardianship orders specifically –

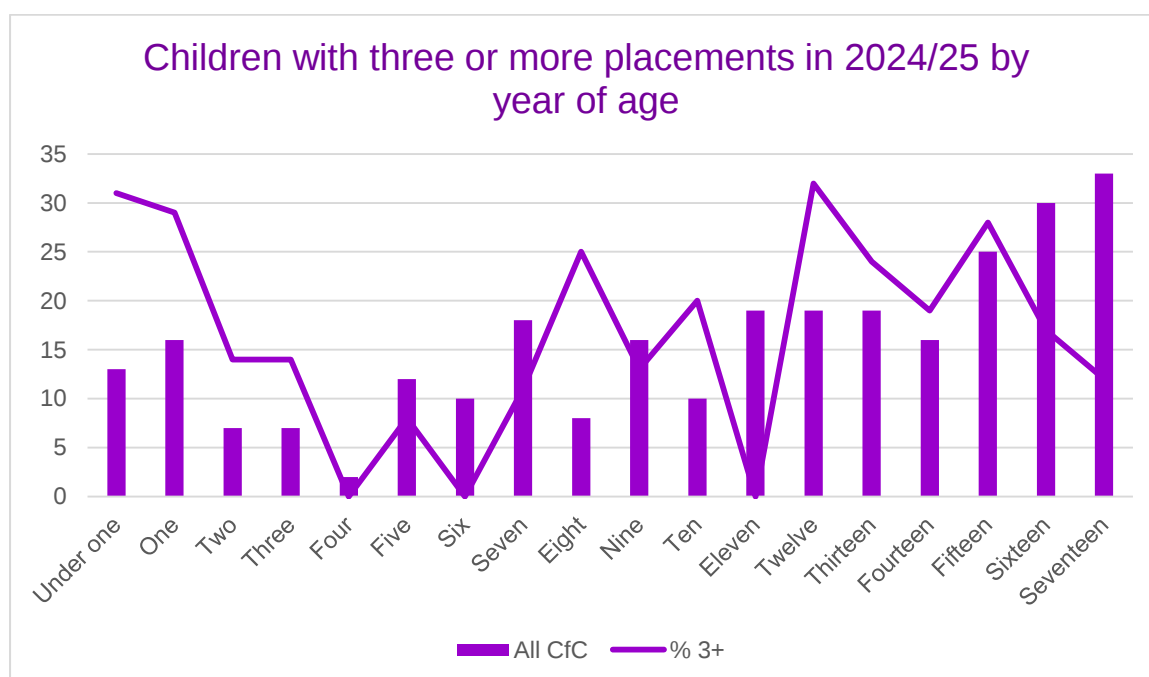
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
The number of children leaving care as a result of a Special Guardianship Order in the year	14	18	28
The number of children ceasing to be looked after in the year	100	90	117
% of children leaving care as a result of an SGO	14%	20%	24%

- 3.13 The number of children who returned home this year has increased to 14%, compared with 10% last year. This has been supported by a piece of cross service work to enhance our reunification policy and associated support, including a triangulation of social work care planning with Building Futures interventions as well as IRO oversight. The service have also focused on the identification of reunification viability, the timeliness of Schedule 3 assessments and the development of bespoke support packages to promote stability and positive long term outcomes for children who return home.
- 3.14 The number of young people aged 18 that remained in their foster placements as a Staying Put arrangement has increased this year (21% for 2024-25 compared to 18% for 2023-24). This inevitably provides stability for these young people as they transition into adulthood. However, this needs to be balanced against the impact on placement sufficiency going forward, given our rates of children residing within in-house foster care placements having reduced as 7 in house fostering placements are no longer available as at 31st March 2025 due to the staying put arrangements in place.
- 3.15 Short-term stability has improved slightly in 2024-25 with 16% of children having three or more placements compared with 20% in 2023-24, this still does not compare favourably to the national figure and Statistical Neighbours which both stand at 10%. As can be seen from the table below, the age group most likely to experience instability is the 14+ cohort (taking the three and below out of the equation where placement changes are usually due to planned moves from emergency to foster care and then final placement such as to a connected carer). With the efforts the fostering recruitment strategy and the introduction of our new and more robust Disruption Policy, we are hopeful this will impact positively on short term stability for those children who experience multiple placement moves within a 12 month period.

Short-term stability at 31st March 2025 by age

Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
0	13	4	31%
1	16	2	29%
2	7	1	14%
3	7	1	14%
4	2	0	0%
5	12	1	8%

Age year	All CfC	3+ placements	% 3+
6	10	0	0%
7	18	2	11%
8	8	2	25%
9	16	2	13%
10	10	2	20%
11	19	0	0%
12	19	2	32%
13	19	6	24%
14	16	3	19%
15	25	7	28%
16	30	5	17%
17	33	4	12%
Total	280	44	16%



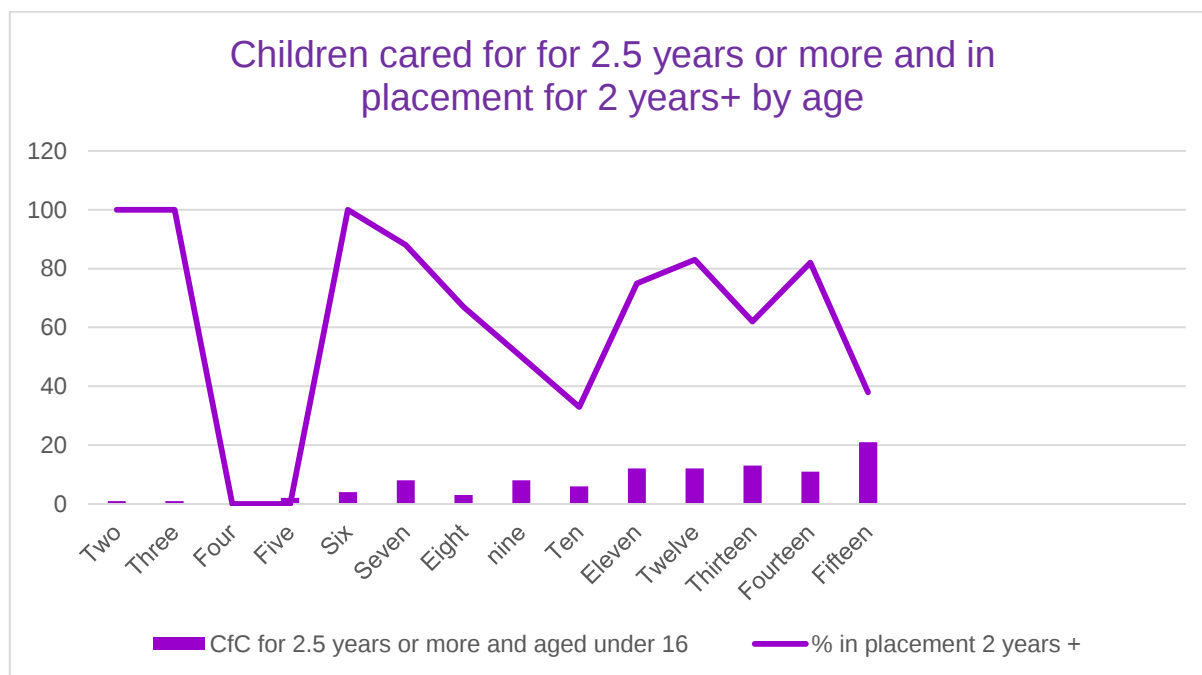
3.16 Long-term placement stability for cared-for children is defined as cared-for children for 2.5 years or more and who are aged 15 or under, the proportion who have been in the same placement for 2 years or more, or who are currently placed for adoption and their current placement plus their previous one totals two years or more. Whilst previously recognising the increased percentage of children in long term placements, overall long-term stability stands at 64% as of 31st March 2025, compared to 41% at the same time last year, which marks a significant improvement for Torbay. Whilst this figure remains slightly below the national rate and Statistical Neighbours performance at 68%, the gap has significantly reduced and evidences a positive trend for Torbay. There are noticeable improvements for children aged 2 and 3 years, with stability over the year for this age at 100% compared with 0% in 2023/24.

3.17 Further to the above, foster care sufficiency challenges and resilience support needs are acknowledged and the impact this will have had on stability for the 12 and 14-year-old cohort in particular. Work is being undertaken including the recent implementation of Mockingbird and preventative stability intervention for fostering placements through the Building Futures team. It is also important to consider children's views and where reunification is being expressed as an aspiration by a child, then this is considered appropriately, and decisions made through robust assessments of need, strength and risk. IROs will need to ensure the

planning is appropriate and timely to promote opportunity for proactive reunification work to take place prior to any move where possible. To support this matter, the IROs have continued to challenge more robustly where there is identified and delay in Schedule 3 assessments being completed and/or in progression to the legal arena when the discharge of a Care Order is deemed safe, proportionate and congruent with the wishes of our children and young people.

Long-term stability of placement at 31st March 2025 by age

Year of age	Children cared for - 2.5 years or more and aged under 16	In placement for 2 years or more	%
2	1	1	100%
3	1	1	100%
4	0	0	0%
5	2	0	0%
6	4	4	100%
7	8	7	88%
8	3	2	67%
9	8	4	50%
10	6	2	33%
11	12	9	75%
12	12	10	83%
13	13	8	62%
14	11	9	82%
15	21	8	38%
Total	102	65	64%



3.18 The percentage of children who have been subject of health checks in the last twelve months has improved from 81% in 2023/24 to 87% as of the end of March 2025. The percentage of

children who have been subject of dental checks in the last twelve months however has decreased from 60% in 2023/24 to 48% as of the end of March 2025. Whilst health assessments are similar to the national figure (89%), dental checks fall short of this (79%). There is an acknowledgement that, within Torbay, identifying an appropriate dentist with capacity is currently very challenging and this is the focus of ongoing work in conjunction with our Public Health and ICB partners. Furthermore, there has also been a reduction in health professionals attending cared for children's reviews which may have had an impact on identifying and reporting the health needs of our cared for children. The Head of Service is actively working with health to address these challenges through escalation to the Designated Nurse and the Health Steering Group. However, it is acknowledged that a large amount of our cohort of adolescent cared for young people choose to opt out of any form of health check and do not want certain professionals at their cared for meetings. Nevertheless, the IROs are often best placed to encourage this cohort to address their health needs as they often have the most established relationship with our young people due to stability within the team offering consistency of involvement. Health indicators are now regularly monitored by the IROs including during their mid-point reviews and any outstanding actions are raised appropriately with the social worker and team manager informally and by way of Dispute Resolution process if necessary.

Health and Dental Checks and Immunisations

	2024/25			England average 2023/24
	Cohort	Number	%	
Health assessments	280	244	87%	89%
Dental checks	280	134	48%	79%
Immunisations	280	166	59%	82%

3.19 The proportion of cared for children for whom an Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire score was received has improved significantly this year, standing at 87% at end of March 2025. Last year, this figure stood as low as 8%. This figure is now significantly above the national average of 77%. Significant work was undertaken to address the issue and this has clearly been a successful area of focus. This is subject to ongoing monitoring and review by the senior leadership team and virtual school colleagues.

3.20 The gender split for missing episodes within our cared for children cohort in 2024/25 has seen a widening of the ratio between boys and girls with 57% of the missing episodes being related to girls as opposed to 43% for boys. In 2023/24 the ratio was 43% girls to 57% boys.

Missing Episodes by Gender, 2024/25 figures

	Number	%
Children with an episode of missing or away from placement	37	N/A
Female	21	57%
Male	16	43%
Number of children cared for at any point in the year	399	N/A
Female	182	46%
Non-binary	0	0%
Male	217	54%

3.21 37 cared for children had an episode of missing within the year, which equates to 12% of all children cared for in 2024-25. This is a decrease compared to the 2023-24 figure which stood

at 46 children but in percentage terms remains static at 12% due to the reduction in cared for children. This figure is only 1% higher than the National figure of 11% and marks evident progress in terms of our exploitation response.

- 3.22 As with previous years, more than half of children who went missing had one or two episodes, 57% compared with 65% in 2023/24. The number of children with chronic missing episodes (31+ episodes) decreased to just one child in 2024/25 from three children in the previous year.

Cared for children going missing

Episodes of missing - Torbay 2024/25	No of children	%
1 or 2	21	57%
3 to 5	11	30%
6 to 10	2	5%
11 to 15	1	3%
16 to 20	0	0%
21 to 30	1	3%
31+	1	3%
Total children	37	

NOTE: The above figures do not include episodes of 'away from placement', as opposed to missing.

Cared for children going missing

Duration of missing incidents	% of incidents of missing	
	Torbay 2024/25	England 2022/23
Incidents where duration is less than 1 day	68%	35%
Incidents where duration is between 1 and 2 days	22%	56%
Incidents where duration is between 3 and 7 days	8%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 8 and 10 days	0%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 11 and 15 days	0%	0%
Incidents where duration is between 16 and 20 days	0%	8%
Incidents where duration is between 21 and 30 days	0%	1%

Incidents where duration is more than 30 days	0%	0%
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- 3.23 The proportion of children placed more than 20 miles away from the address from which they came into care has remained somewhat static: 34% in 2023/24 and down to 32% in 2024/25. The national average figure is 21% and therefore Torbay is sitting significantly above this. It should be noted that the definition does not include Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children, as they have no noted home address within the UK.
- 3.24 Torbay's position in regards to being an outlier relating to children placed at a distance is 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 our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who often have a strong preference for a more urban setting which is better aligned to meeting their cultural needs.

Distance from home

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
The number of children in care placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	91	97	100	89
The number of children in care on 31st March	299	314	298	280
% placed more than 20 miles from where they used to live	30%	31%	34%	32%

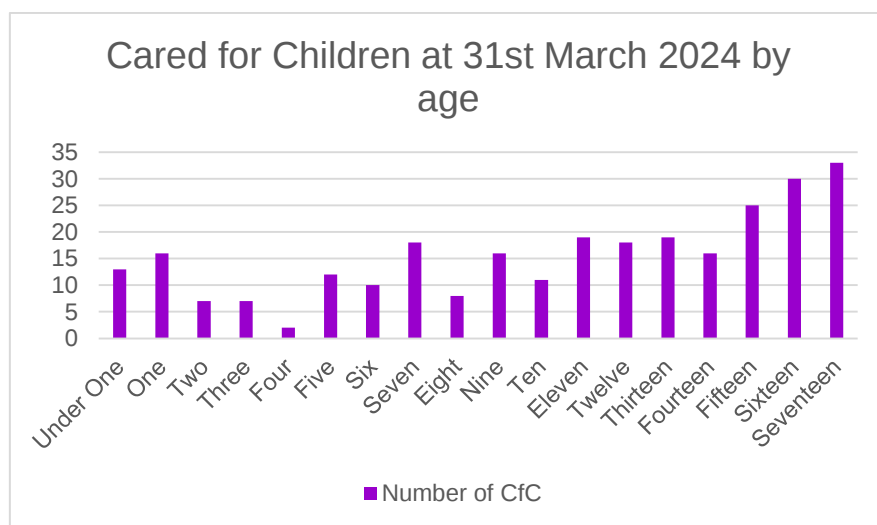
- 3.25 Children aged between 10 and 15 continue to be the highest represented within the Torbay cared for population as at 31st March 2025 with children under 1 years old being the lowest represented. This is in line with the national average for year 2023/24. Torbay has a lower proportion of children aged 16 and 17 than the national figure. However, this will most likely align with the national average next year with the rising cohort of 16 year olds.

Cared for children age ranges by %

	England	Torbay		
	2022/23	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Under 1 year	5%	5%	6%	5%
1 to 4 years	13%	13%	13%	11%
5 to 9 years	18%	18%	19%	23%
10 to 15 years	38%	40%	41%	39%
16 years and over	26%	25%	21%	22%

Age year	All CFC	% by age
0	13	5%
1	16	6%
2	7	3%
3	7	3%
4	2	1%
5	12	4%
6	10	4%

7	18	6%
8	8	3%
9	16	6%
10	11	4%
11	19	7%
12	18	6%
13	19	7%
14	16	6%
15	25	9%
16	30	11%
17	33	12%
Total	280	



3.26 The 2023-24 IRO annual report noted that there were 55% of boys compared to 44% of girls in Torbay's cohort of cared for children on 31st March 2024. This gap between boys and girls has decreased in 2024-25 to 52% boys, and 48% girls.

3.27 White British remains the largest represented ethnicity (84%) as at the 31st March 2025 (which reflects the ethnic profile of Torbay being predominantly White British), compared to the national average which now stands at 71%.

Cared for children by ethnicity

	<i>England</i>	<i>Torbay</i>	
	<i>2023/24</i>	<i>2023/24</i>	<i>2024/25</i>
<i>White</i>	71%	87%	84%
<i>White and Asian, Black African or Black Caribbean</i>	10%	8%	10%
<i>Asian or Asian British</i>	5%	1%	0%

Black or Black British	7%	1%	1%
Other ethnic groups	5%	2%	4%
Refused or information not yet available	1%	1%	0%

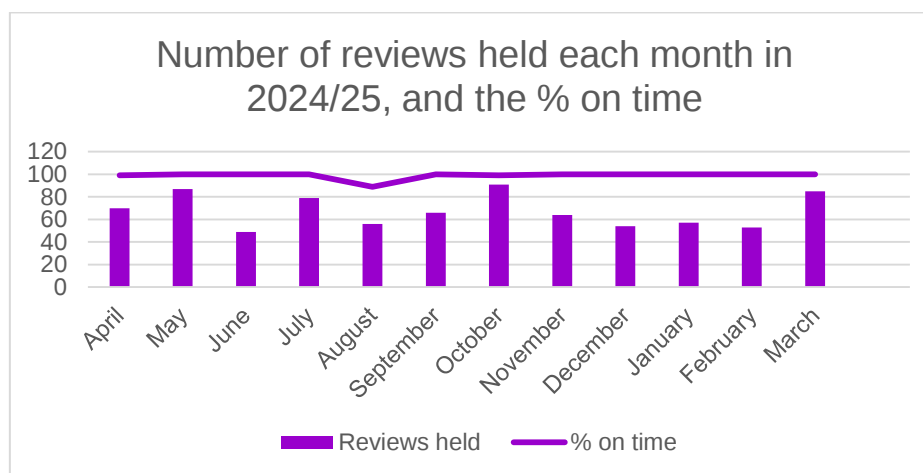
4. Timeliness of Review Records Completion

- 4.1 811 cared for reviews were held between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025. This is an increase from the 740 reviews held in 2021-22 and 803 reviews held in 2022-23. Additionally, there was a significant decrease in the number of reviews not being held within timescales, which for 2024-25 had decreased to 8 from the 32 in 2023-24. From the data, we can see that six of these eight occurred in the month of August 2025 which is a very challenging time for the IRO service in convening quorate meetings as this falls within the summer holiday period where many schools cannot be in attendance and there is a high level of annual leave amongst the wider professional group. However, overall, the figures reflect the timeliness of reviews as a service wide strength but also that additional reviews are being held to support placement stability and changes to care plans.

Review timescales		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Numerator	The number of reviews taking place in the year which were not held on time	84	95	44	32	8
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year	685	816	740	803	811
%		12%	12%	6%	4%	1%

Reviews over the year in Torbay

Month 2024/25	Reviews held	On time	% on time
April	70	69	99%
May	87	87	100%
June	49	49	100%
July	79	79	100%
August	56	50	89%
September	66	66	100%
October	91	90	99%
November	64	64	100%
December	54	54	100%
January	57	57	100%
February	53	53	100%
March	85	85	100%
Total	811	803	99%



- 4.2 The service has continued to look at timeliness of completion of review records and sees this as a key measure of impact in order for children's plans to be progressed effectively. The reviews and records that drive plans need to be available to support moving plans forward and to ensure that the impact of the plan for children is maximised. The HOS is working closely with operational Heads of Service and the Divisional Director for Safeguarding to further promote the timeliness and maintenance of progress made.
- 4.3 Work to ensure timeliness of reviews has continued throughout 2024-25, building on previous work. This year there has been a significant increase in cared for reviews held within statutory timescale to 99%, from 96% in 2023-24. The positive progress here has seen the service exceed the overall local target of 95% reviews held in timescale.
- 4.4 An effective system remains in place in terms of sustaining the timeliness of reviews. The only time that a review can go out of timescale is when there is clear evidence that this is purposeful delay or in the child's best interest, for example to enable a child to attend and participate. This delay must be agreed by the HOS and in the event all other options have been explored. This robust approach will hopefully enable us to reach and maintain the target of 95% or above. Efforts are also being made to schedule reviews further in advance of their statutory due dates to enable sufficient time to reschedule within timeframes, in the event this is required.

5. Voice of the Child and Young People Participation

- 5.1 A primary objective of the IRO role is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident within their care plans. A key element in delivering this objective is the measure of the young person's participation in the statutory review of their care plan and care arrangements.
- 5.2 Across the year from April 2024 - March 2025, 90% of our cared for children aged 4 years and over participated in their reviews. Although this is an increase on last year's figure of 87% and that of the 2022-23 figure of 79%, there continues to be room for improvement and plans are in place to encourage more children not only participate in their reviews but to also co-chair them in line with our commitment to deliver restorative review processes. The stability within the IRO service will encourage more children and young people to participate in their reviews as IROs are often the most consistent professional in a cared for child's life and someone with whom they can build trusting relationships with. Development work is being undertaken within the IRO Service around robust management of ensuring advocacy for our children.

Participation in reviews, 2020/21 to 2024/25

Review participation		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Numerator	The number of reviews taking place in the year where child was aged 4+ at the date of review where child participated in the review (all codes except PN4 and PN7)	401	527	484	611	602
Denominator	The number of reviews taking place in the year where child was aged 4+ at the date of review	467	641	614	705	667
%		86%	82%	79%	87%	90%

Participation in reviews – all categories of participation

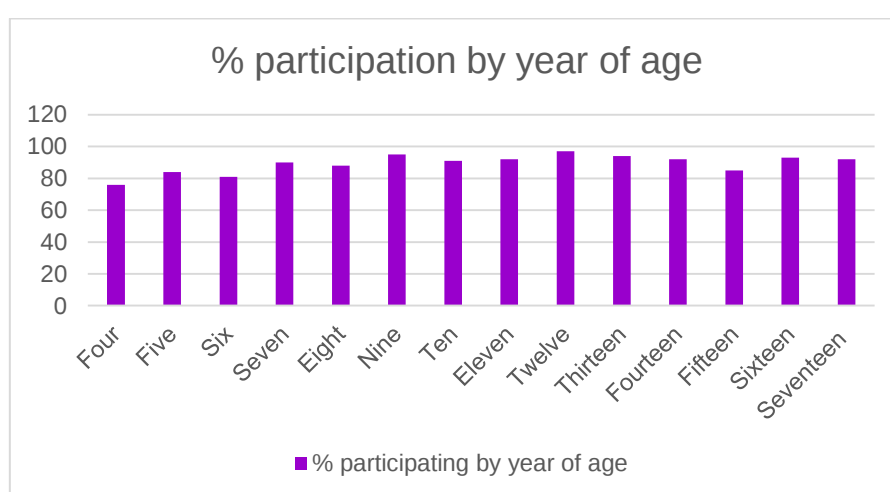
Detailed review participation	2022/23	2022/23 %	2023/24	2023/24 %	2024/25	2024/25 %
Child under 4 at the time of the review (PN0)	126	17%	98	12%	115	14%
Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself (PN1)	185	25%	199	25%	187	23%
Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf (PN2)	14	2%	21	3%	17	2%
Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) (PN3)	2	0%	2	0.2%	2	0.2%
Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her - attendance without contribution (PN4)	6	1%	2	0.2%	0	0%
Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her (PN5)	140	19%	297	37%	310	38%
Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium (PN6)	143	19%	89	11%	86	11%
Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review (PN7)	124	17%	92	11%	60	7%

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	21	1	5%	0	0%	5	24%	15	71%	16	76%
5	31	1	3%	0	0%	5	16%	25	81%	26	84%
6	32	2	6%	0	0%	6	19%	24	75%	26	81%
7	40	1	3%	0	0%	4	10%	35	88%	36	90%
8	32	3	9%	0	0%	4	13%	25	78%	28	88%
9	37	11	30%	0	0%	2	5%	24	65%	35	95%

10	35	6	17%	0	0%	3	9%	26	74%	32	91%
11	49	10	20%	1	2%	3	6%	35	71%	45	92%
12	36	9	25%	0	0%	1	3%	26	72%	35	97%
13	50	15	30%	0	0%	2	4%	32	64%	47	94%
14	61	21	34%	1	2%	3	5%	35	57%	56	92%
15	59	25	42%	1	2%	8	14%	25	42%	50	85%
16	94	47	50%	1	1%	6	6%	40	43%	87	93%
17	90	54	60%	0	0%	7	8%	29	32%	83	92%
Total	808	206	25%	4	0%	59	6%	396	49%	570	71%

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). This does not include the 3 children with participation listed as Null.



6. Dispute Resolution and Escalation

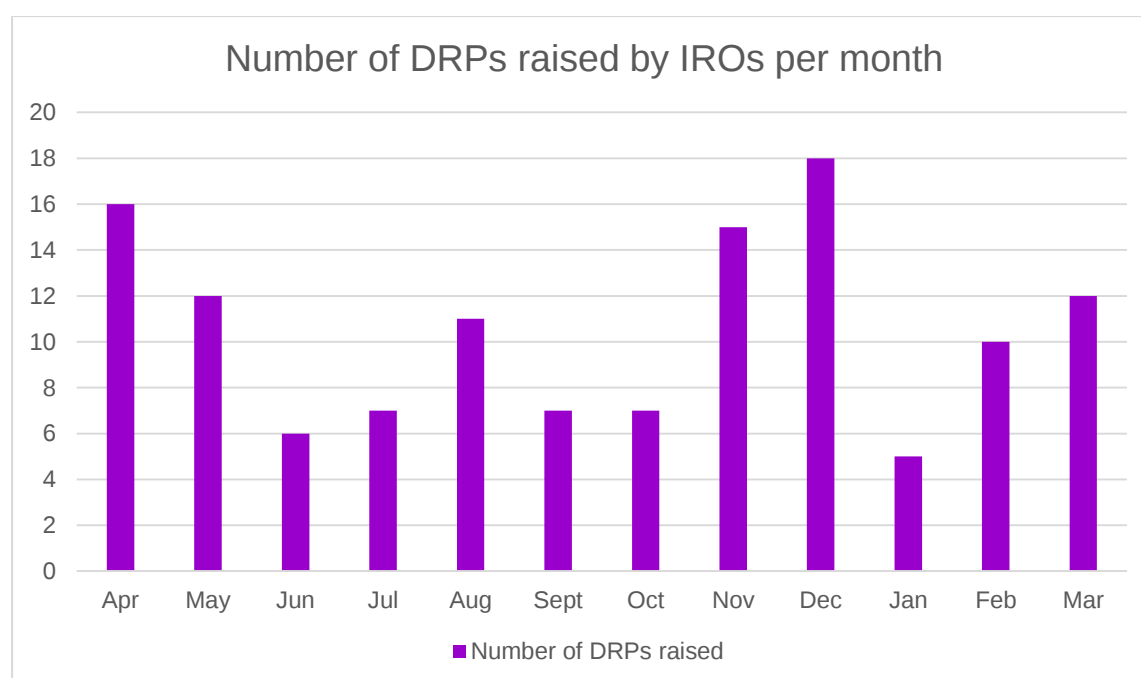
- 6.1 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO is to raise issues affecting cared for children with the social work service, for example when performance issues, care planning challenges and resource issues are affecting the child or young person's needs being met and preventing their plans from progressing.
- 6.2 There is an established Dispute Resolution and Escalation process available in Torbay's procedures and practice standards, which is due to be updated in June 2025. IROs continue to seek resolutions to issues informally through a relational and collaborate approach and dialogue with the social worker or their manager before and at each stage of the procedure. If, however, no resolution is achieved in a timely manner (five working days), the issue is escalated to the formal DRP process to ensure timely action by social workers to directly improve the quality of our children's lived experiences. We are currently undertaking work to ensure that the IRO challenge and advocacy is clearly evidenced for our children within their social care records and the service are seeking to address cultural beliefs within operational practice in regards to this process being seen as punitive and blaming. As an IRO service, we strongly believe that the IRO role is not just one of a reviewer however the role is a critical safeguard for the child's voice and care plan. Every delay in responding to an IRO challenge

is potentially another day of our children living with uncertainty. As such, ensuring prompt responses to IRO challenge is a key area of focus for the service in 2024-25.

- 6.3 Between April 2024 to March 2025, there were 126 formal DRP escalations completed across all of the IROs which is significantly less than the 2023-24 figure of 174. The service expect to see an increase to this in 2025-26 as part of our service response to enhancing participation and supporting contextual safeguarding practices, such as delays with exploitation toolkits being updated within timescales. However, the work being undertaken to seek to resolve IRO challenges informally and to support a cultural shift in responses to DRPs may well balance this figure. In terms of trends and patterns, there does not appear to be any identifiable ones when reviewing the monthly figures over the last three years, with each month being variable.

Number of Dispute Resolution Processes raised by IROs each month

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2022/23	0	5	1	3	16	9	12	14	8	7	7	18
2023/24	20	1	N/A	N/A	8	11	10	19	9	38	20	38
2024/25	16	12	6	7	11	7	7	15	18	5	10	12



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 against many of its key activities. Children and young people continue to be provided with an IRO within three working days of becoming cared for 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 whenever there are concerns about children's care plans not being effective or there is delay in plans being progressed. In addition, the IRO footprint on children's files has continued to improve. The introduction of mid-point checks is now embedded into IRO practice and provides the

service with enhanced oversight to ensure any issues are addressed at an earlier point. The IRO service have now had changes made to the social care system, allowing for informal IRO challenges to be recorded and captured more effectively.

- 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 entirely staffed by permanent workers who are committed to Torbay and the children they work with. This has provided invaluable stability and consistency for the service and has significantly supported positive impact and outcomes for our cared for children.
- 7.4 Performance with regards to statutory reviews continues to improve and is now 99% within timescales, well above the National Average and exceeding our own target of 95%.
- 7.5 Performance meetings continue to be convened on a regular basis, with data being reviewed from a child's lived experience perspective. The meetings have developed over the course of the year with IROs reflecting upon what impact they are having on children's outcomes and where their practice can be further enhanced including service development work with other services around the importance of the DRP process in ensuring our cared for children consistently receive the service they deserve.
- 7.6 The IROs have continued to develop good links internally and externally, with each IRO being the link into other services throughout the statutory care services within 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 carried out with the Virtual School to improve educational outcomes for our cared for children. The Service Manager attends the TSCP contextual safeguarding forum with a view to developing a contextual child protection model; this project work is now approaching its final stages and will be implemented later in 2025. The IRO service is also represented at Adopt South West's Adoption Panel and was involved in the Mockingbird implementation group which has now gone live.
- 7.7 The IRO profile within Torbay has continued to develop over the last year and the service continue to work within the framework of restorative practice, including the 'language that cares' relational language policy. Their high level of support and challenge is further evident on children's files through case recordings, midpoint reviews and cared for children's review minutes.
- 7.8 The IROs have been setting a positive example with regards to audit completion, with 100% in timescales for the service across the year 2024-25. This contribution through an IRO lens is vital in ensuring we are contributing to a culture of learning and continuous development across children's services.

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 the appropriate plan for permanence
- Whether a midpoint review 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 is 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 and the Head of Service for Quality Assurance. The areas for learning and improvement are also identified through thematic discussions with IROs around their experiences as well as the quality assurance auditing processes which regularly focus on specific areas such as advocacy and participation. These help to shape our discussions within performance meetings to agree ways of working and to 'close the loop' by responding to the learning identified for the service. Feedback from other professionals, parents/carers and our children is also shared and utilised within the IRO team to support learning, development and improvement.
- 8.4 Supervision is an essential activity for providing support and development to individual IROs and to work towards creating consistency across the service in terms of practice, process, and overall service performance. The team's supervision consists of both case and personal supervision. Case supervision includes looking at children of high concern, children who are placed at home under placement with parents regulations and potential delays in achieving permanence.

9. Progress Against Areas for Development noted in the 2023-24 Annual Report

- i) **Practice Improvement** – One IRO is a member of the Adoption Panel for Adopt South West. Another IRO was part of the Mockingbird implementation group. Further areas for practice improvement have been identified and incorporated within the 2024/25 development plan as set out below.
- ii) **Apply more Learning from DRPs** – Themes from DRPs have been identified using Power Bi and this has been used as a means of highlighting areas for practice development to be fed into the Practice Improvement Forum (PIF). Two IROs presented to the All Staff meeting on the importance of child participation within their cared for reviews.
- iii) **IRO Oversight to be Further Enhanced** – Midpoint reviews are now firmly embedded within IRO practice. These are signed off by both the Service Manager and Head of Service which also provides enhanced oversight. EDS notifications are followed up by IROs. Placement notifications / information and missing notifications are followed up by IROs. The Service Manager attends the exploitation performance surgery for continued oversight of this critical area of practice. Furthermore, IROs are expected to ensure that Initial Health Assessments are completed in timescale for children who are newly cared for. The Service Manager and Head Of Service continues to have oversight to these matters. IRO challenge has been much more evident this year and plans are in place to further enhance this.
- iv) **Increased participation** - There is a need to continue to work with Operational Services to ensure that children and parents have access to social work reports in a timely way before reviews. IROs continue to attempt to make direct contact with a young person prior to their cared for review. IROs have formed positive

relationships with their children/young people and routinely visit those young people who are in unregulated and unregistered placements outside of Torbay to provide additional support and ensure planning continues to be effective. Gaining parent and child feedback is paramount to ensuring adequate feedback loops are present within the participation system. This will require a 'relaunch' of the online feedback form.

- v) **Data** - The IRO Power Bi dashboard is now live and is embedded in practice and used routinely. This data forms part of the monthly performance meetings. There is now a DRP dashboard where themes can be analysed at performance meetings and fed back to the operational teams.

10. Areas for Development 2025-26

- i. **Increased Participation/Advocacy** - To further improve on participation, IROs need to ensure that, as part of their pre-review preparation, advocacy has been offered and implement where appropriate and all necessary discussions and actions around this are clearly recorded on the child's file by the allocated social work team. A DRP is to be raised immediately if this hasn't happened, as it is really important that we involve and empower children in their planning and ensure their wishes and feelings are fully appreciated within decision making processes. Use of interpreters is key for seeking the views of our children where English is not their first language.
- ii. **DRP consistency** - This process needs to be fully understood by the operational teams so that it can be applied effectively. The IROs need to ensure that they are consistent in terms of when a DRP is raised and when it needs to be escalated, for example when a practice standard has been breached or when a human rights issue has been identified. There is some work for the IRO service to undertake to promote a positive culture across operational teams as to the essential function that IROs and the DRP process play in our children's lives, as the DRP process is a tool for advocacy and action as opposed to a tool used for blame. The DRP policy is to be updated by June 2025 and is to be presented by the IRO service in forums such as Team Meetings and the all Staff Meeting, if deemed appropriate. The Service Manager and Head of Service will be tracking and monitoring DRPs as well as working with the systems team to ensure Power Bi DRP reporting is effective in supporting oversight.
- iii. **Practice Improvement** - IROs will be encouraged to develop a particular area of interest with a view to not only improving their own practice, but that of others. Better links with education via the Virtual School and health now need to be further included in participation over the coming year. A further area of service focus will be IROs evidencing their oversight of children and young people at risk of exploitation, including providing challenge to social work teams for high risk children with overdue exploitation toolkits, ensuring strategy meetings following missing episodes are being undertaken in accordance with the defined timescales and relevant policies and ensuring those children who are placed out of our area have the appropriate exploitation oversight.

- iv. **Disruption meetings** – A new Disruption Policy is coming into effect on 1st June 2025 and IROs will contribute to disruption meetings by attending and providing the chair with any themes that have been observed. The IRO Service Manager will chair these meetings and provide feedback in terms of any learning to the Learning Academy and Quality Assurance teams to ensure this is fed into strategic action planning. It is hoped that this new policy will lead to an improvement in terms of placement stability for our children and young people both in the short, medium and longer term arrangements of care.

Report authored by:	Angela Hornby (Head of Service), and Lucy Reeves (Service Manager).
Date:	16th June 2025

Acronym list:

CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)

CP (Child Protection)

DD (Divisional Director)

DFE (Department of Education)

DRP (Dispute Resolution Procedure)

FTE (Full Time Equivalent)

HOS (Head of Service)

IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer)

SARS (Safeguarding and Reviewing Service)

SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)

SGO (Special Guardianship Order)

SM (Service Manager)

SN (Statistical Neighbour)

UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children)