

# Public Document Pack

## Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr

### Bridgend County Borough Council



Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Stryd yr Angel, Pen-y-bont, CF31 4WB / Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

*Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg.  
Rhowch wybod i ni os mai Cymraeg yw eich  
dewis iaith.*

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#### Cyfarwyddiaeth y Prif Weithredwr / Chief Executive's Directorate

Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line /: 01656 643148 /  
643694 / 643513

Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Democratic Services

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Eich cyf / Your ref:

**Dyddiad/Date:** Wednesday, 28 August 2024

Dear Councillor,

#### **CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING**

A meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting will be held Hybrid in the Council Chamber - Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB / Remotely by Microsoft Teams on **Wednesday, 4 September 2024 at 10:00.**

#### **AGENDA**

1. Apologies for Absence  
To receive apologies for absence from Members
2. Declarations of interest  
To receive declarations of personal and prejudicial interest (if any) from Members/Officers in accordance with the provisions of the Members' Code of Conduct adopted by Council from 1 September 2008.
3. Approval of Minutes 3 - 14  
To receive for approval the minutes of 08/05/2024
4. Employability Bridgend Update For Care Experienced Young People 15 - 20
5. Regional Children's Advocacy Service 21 - 50
6. Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2023-2024 51 - 84
7. Urgent Items  
To consider any other item(s) of business in respect of which notice has been given in accordance with Part 4 (paragraph 4) of the Council Procedure Rules and which the person presiding at the meeting is of the opinion should be reason of special circumstances be transacted at the meeting as a matter of urgency.

**Note: This will be a Hybrid meeting and Members and Officers will be attending in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Angel Street Bridgend / Remotely via Microsoft Teams. The meeting will be recorded for subsequent transmission via the Council's internet site which will be available as soon as practicable after the meeting. If you would like to view this meeting live,**

**By receiving this Agenda Pack electronically you will save the Authority approx. £1.68 in printing costs**

please contact [cabinet\\_committee@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:cabinet_committee@bridgend.gov.uk) or tel. 01656 643148 / 643694 / 643513 / 643159.

Yours faithfully

**K Watson**

Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy

Councillors:

F D Bletsoe  
E L P Caparros  
RJ Collins  
P Davies  
M J Evans

Councillors

N Farr  
J Gebbie  
M Jones  
M Lewis  
J E Pratt

Councillors

JC Spanswick  
T Thomas  
HM Williams

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING HELD HYBRID IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND, CF31 4WB ON WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 2024 AT 10:00

Present

Councillor HJ David – Chairperson

N Farr

J E Pratt

HM Williams

Present Virtually

F D Bletsoe  
T Thomas

JPD Blundell

W R Goode

M Lewis

Apologies for Absence

J Gebbie and JC Spanswick

Officers:

Steve Berry

Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer

Christa Bonham - Griffiths

Nimi Chandrasena

Democratic Services Officer - Support

Nicola Echanis

Head of Education & Family Support

Mark Lewis

Group Manager - Integrated Working

Claire Marchant

Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing

Stuart Osborne

Team Manager - Just Ask Plus

David Wright

Family Support Services Manager

Declarations of Interest

None

**45. Approval of Minutes**

Decision Made	<b>RESOLVED</b> : That the minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting dated 01/02/2024 be approved as a true and accurate record.
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

**46. Basic Income Pilot Scheme Exit Strategy**

Decision Made	<p>The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services presented a report which provided the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with an update on the exit strategy of the Welsh Government's Basic Income Pilot (BIP) Scheme for eligible care experienced young people.</p> <p>A Member asked :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The purpose of the pilot scheme</li><li>• The Welsh Government's intention for the scheme and if successful, was there a plan to roll it out indefinitely to care leavers.</li></ul> <p>He referred to point 3.7 of the report asking for clarification on the plan and support for the transition where basic payments came to an end.</p> <p>The Member also queried about the housing tenure of the 25 participants and asked if there could be an elaboration of positive outcomes of the scheme.</p> <p>The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services responded that the intention of the Welsh Government made reference to an evaluation looking at the impact of what the basic income pilot scheme had achieved for care leavers. It was an assumption that it would inform of steps to be taken as a result of that</p>
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	<p>evaluation. The Evaluation was expected to provide a better indication as to what the Welsh Government's proposals would be.</p> <p>With reference to the point around the planning and looking at what would happen once the payments came to an end, the Deputy Head of Children and Family Services referred to a pathway plan, the transition of which was expected to be the key aspect determining the way the team, the personal advisor, the champion and the social worker would work very closely with the young person and other partners to determine what would be required next. This process was expected to identify any gaps linked to benefits claims, housing issues, education, training and employment.</p> <p>In relation to the point around the housing tenure of the 25 young people, The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services stated that they would have to report back to committee as there were many living at home with family members and some within supported accommodation.</p> <p>The Team Manager - Just Ask Plus provided some figures in relation to current housing tenures :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5 young people receiving “compiler tour” meaning they remained with their foster carers post 18</li><li>• 11 who had decided to move in with family or friends post 18</li><li>• 1 young person resides in a hostel</li><li>• 3 young people in supported living accommodation</li><li>• 1 Young Person in a shared lives provision</li><li>• 5 young people in rented accommodation.</li></ul> <p>The Team Manager- Just Ask Plus stated that there were three young people currently engaged in employment. Those three young people had saved their basic income pilot monies, one of whom had saved £20,000 and was hoping to put that towards a deposit on his own property.</p> <p>A member inquired if there was a link with Employability Bridgend to which the The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services responded to state that there was a “Multiply” worker who was part of the employability service placed within the team and had close links with the Team Manager - Just Ask Plus, the champion social workers and personal advisors within the 16 plus service. The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services added that there were workshops planned to be held through the summer holidays for young people involving the Youth Development Service, which did a lot of work around education, training and employment.</p> <p>He also stated that the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Department for Work and Pensions were to be a</p>
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	<p>part of the workshops. He stated that this was expected to be a real opportunity for young people under the Local Authority to gain clarity in terms of support available them to either remain engaged in education, training, employment or access opportunities around education, training and employment.</p> <p>A discussion took place between a member and the Team Manager – Just ask plus with reference independent financial advice being available to the young persons. It was brought to light that the only financial advice being made available was through the Citizen’s Advice Bureau. It was agreed that this may be sufficient for some young people but others may benefit from a higher level of advice. The Team manager assured the member that if the requirement to provide higher financial advice was identified as part of their pathway planning, that would be pursued by the team.</p> <p>A Member asked for clarity on how many of the Local Authority’s care leavers were unemployed whilst receiving the basic income. He stated that if combined with the national minimum wage, it was a lot of money that individuals were receiving with the premise that the income was going to disappear when the scheme came to its end. He stated that it was important that the Young People explored Financial management advice because it was comparable anyone losing their employment which would result in financial difficulty.</p> <p>The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services stated that the key aspect was the pathway plan and the importance of reviewing that pathway plan while considering options that were available. He stressed that the role of the personal advisor or the social worker of the Young person was critical in reviewing that plan and making sure the young person was clear about their rights, knowing what they had access to and points of contact on who was best placed to advise and guide. He also stressed the importance, accessibility and impact the roles of employability workers, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Department for Work and Pensions could have on young people.</p> <p>The Leader asked if there was a figure available based on education and employment prior to the launch of the pilot scheme. The Team Manager- Just Ask Plus responded that the outcome of an analysis done in the previous year was 65%.</p> <p>A Member inquired about Key Performance indicators in place to measure the progress of the scheme. The Deputy Head of Children and Family Services responded that his understanding was that information will be drawn out from impact a payment of £1600 has had on a young person accessing education, training, employment, permanent housing, and the kind of arrangements in place to set them up. He stated that he felt it was important to obtain feedback from the evaluation not just for Bridgend but across Wales and bring back the information to the committee for a further discussion. The Corporate Director, Social</p>
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	<p>Services and Wellbeing stated that the Interim Evaluation Report had been published by Cardiff University where seven impact outcomes were being measured in terms of the impact on the young people who benefit from the pilot. Namely, their well-being, Financial literacy and security, community cohesion and engagement, the impacts of poverty, access to labour and education markets, volunteering and life skills and physical and mental health. She stated that it would be helpful to share with committee the interim report and then bring back the final evaluative report when it is available, to enable tracking progress in Bridgend in relation to their outcomes compared to the All Wales outcomes.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED :</b> It was agreed that the interim evaluation report from Cardiff University would be shared with the committee. The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting considered and noted the progress and exit strategy relating to the Basic Income Pilot Scheme.</p>
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

**47. A 3 Year Sustainability Plan To Improve Outcomes For Children And Family Services In Bridgend - Year 1 Report On Progress 2023/24**

Decision Made	<p>The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing presented a report which updated the Committee on service progress against milestones identified for improvement within the 3-year sustainability plan to improve outcomes for Children and Family Services in Bridgend at the end of Year 1, September 2023 to March 2024.</p> <p>A member made the following inquiries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An explanation of the colours on the RAG status.</li> <li>• The number of agency staff compared to the year before</li> <li>• The outcome of the Carer’s Assessment, were there any specific needs identified and where the Service would need to meet those needs</li> <li>• How the new Media Communication Officer was going to link in with the Council’s communication team</li> <li>• What was being done to ensure that staff training on Safeguarding is at 100%</li> </ul> <p>The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing responded explaining the ‘Key’ on the RAG status. She also stated that the Service moved from 73 agency workers as at the 13th of March 2023 to 50 agency</p>
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workers at the end of February 2024, resulting in a reduction of 41% agency workforce. In relation to the carer's assessments, the 100% achievement in offering a carers assessment, the service would like to make significant improvements in terms of uptake of carers assessments. They were continuously looking at ways to encourage a higher uptake of the assessments. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that she did not have exact figures at the time of the meeting but would look to get this information to the committee at a later date. In response to the query around the Media Communication Officer, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that the Officer was based within Central Communications Team the role was funded through an earmarked reserve.

In relation to the question on staff training on Safeguarding, the Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that achieving 100% was a challenge within the service owing to meeting day to day needs within the service. She stated that she envisioned a training strategy reflective of staff being trained in safeguarding to the appropriate level for their role, rather than requiring all staff to have the basic training. She stated that this would involve a range of potential changes to policy around Safeguarding. She also stated measurement of progress was key and as such means of measurement would also have to be put in place.

A member asked what percentage of those that are eligible to take part actually did take part and how often did they meet, he also asked for an example of where the improvements had been made to the service as a result of the meetings within the forum.

The Corporate Parenting and Participation officer responded that with regards to actual feedback, there are 36 individual unique points of contact with young people in care. He stated the service was mindful to be respectful of how they feel about providing feedback, but on a regular basis they offer good opportunities to join in the forum, respond to surveys and also have contact with the social worker. He mentioned that care experienced young people have access to the complaints and compliments officer . Additionally, the team have met with the forum to further promote the voice of the child and look at how their role can be better promoted in the future for the care experience population.

A member asked clarification on what the single point of access meant. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing stated that this related to their restructure around early help education services from the Education Directorate to Social services and wellbeing which thereby provided the users two points of access which would relate to each other.

There was a further discussion about the arrangements made with South Wales Police in relation to referrals raised by them which were not always a matter for the Social Services and Wellbeing directorate. The benefits of 'Joint Screening' was discussed and the Deputy Head of Children and Family Services



	<p>stated discussions between Social Services and Wellbeing, Police, Education and Early help were taking place to determine best practice that could be adopted around joint screening.</p> <p><b>RESOLVED</b> : It was agreed that the committee would be provided with progress figures in relation to Carer’s Assessments. The Committee discussed the progress made by Children’s Social Care Services against the milestones identified in the Year 1 Action Plan.</p>
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

**48. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Inspection Of Foster Wales Bridgend**

Decision Made	<p>The Group Manager - Placements &amp; Provider Services presented a report which updated the Committee on the outcome of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspection of Foster Wales Bridgend November 2023. The report was be accompanied by a presentation on the work of Foster Wales Bridgend to address the sufficiency issues in foster care capacity in the county borough.</p> <p>She stated that one of the areas highlighted by the inspectors was about the strain on placements with numbers of children that were moving at the point of the writing the report. The figures were unavailable at the time of the meeting, however, she stated she could confirm that the service has had a 47% reduction over the year where children had three plus placement moves. The reduction being almost half and was therefore seen as an improving picture . She stated that there was work to be done and the service were in active discussions about ways they could enhance their offer of support to foster carers and have tailored support packages to meet the individual needs of children which included looking at complex training needs.</p> <p>A Member asked :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process followed when having to remove a child, if the decision to place with family and friends was explored and was Fostering considered as at the first or last resort</li> <li>• Who makes the decisions regarding funding for fostering</li> <li>• In relation to moving children during fostering, what support was available to foster carers who manage children with challenging behaviour.</li> </ul>
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The Group Manager - Placements & Provider Services responded stating that the service had produced practice guidance for all social workers, outlining steps to be taken when looking at moving a child. She stated that there were usually several reasons behind a planned move. Social workers have the opportunity to carry out a thorough assessment, updating the needs of the child so that there is a clear indication of support required and thereafter a placement which would best meet those needs, enabling the matching process. She stated that there was a constant level of movement for children and young people. Social workers actively review family systems because families change over time. As examples, she stated that people could be with different partners, others may have joined families and blended families. Social workers conduct reviews proactively to determine if there were any family options for children because children's outcomes were best improved when they were supported to remain with their families or support a return to families. There were times when there were foster carers appropriately matched to enable children to be supported on a short-term basis. She explained situations where the process would be at its inception and the beginning of care proceedings where there would be multiple assessments of family members and children's needs. It was therefore often that the service would have foster carers to support children on a short-term basis. In the event the service were unable to return children to the care of a family member, they would then look to match them to an appropriately approved longer term foster carer. In response to the members question, the Deputy Head of Children and Family Services confirmed that the service look towards placing the child within the family network as it was known to provide a better outcome and look at foster placements as the last resort.

The Group Manager - Placements & Provider Services stated that there were systems in place for funding arrangements. The social worker who knew the child best would consider the match alongside any partners. Social Workers would in the first instance determine if it was a viable option for a young person and see how best the service could support it. The proposal was then passed to a team manager and then up to senior manager depending on the nature of the placement that was requested. She stated that there was potential to then escalate up to assistant head of service, director level and head of service level if required. She stated that it depended on the placement type, the implications and the placement service.

A Member asked what work had been undertaken to map the age profile of the base of Foster carers as Bridgend has much older demographic of foster carers the expectation was that there would be a drop in figures. He also inquired what work had been undertaken to support younger people to take up foster care as while it is rewarding it was complicated and also difficult at times.

The Group Manager – Placements & Provider services responded that Bridgend had a foster Wales funded placement referral officer within the team who has undertaken a mapping exercise and had highlighted that most of Bridgend's carers were in the 50 plus age bracket which was expected to be an issue over the next 10 years. The Service have adapted their recruitment and retention activity in order to

	<p>better enable younger people to come into fostering. The service were also looking to enhance the support packages to support carers enabling them to support children, enhancing the training available and looking to expand support to cover out of hours arrangements as well. She mentioned their intention to go into more detail during the presentation.</p> <p>The presentation was made by the Regional Development Manager of Foster Wales for Cwm Taf Morgannwg.</p> <p>A Member asked about considerations that had been made in terms of data protection with the introductory app that was expected to be available online. He also asked if the data collected has been utilized to manage a child’s emotional needs or any other needs within the school system. The Regional Development Manager clarified that the App was more for the benefit of the child and was a means of getting to know their foster families through their profiles.</p> <p>The Group Manager – Placements &amp; Provider services stated when a search was conducted to determine placement for children, one of the key parts of the document used was called an All Wales referral. Part of this form was a pen picture of the child and where possible this was completed in the child's own words. Young Commissioners were consulted on it and the information that needed to be enclosed and the language used. She stated that Bridgend had a child-focused way of putting children's profiles into placement searches and provided that to carers to accompany the All Wales referrals. She stated that they utilize a template called “All about me” where children want to contribute information.</p> <p>A Social worker would sit with the children and complete the document with them. The children had the option to draw pictures, talk about specific interests, hobbies. While Bridgend did not have the technology yet, there were systems in place already to enable young people to have a part in that matching and finding process for their placement.</p> <p><b><u>RESOLVED</u></b> : The Cabinet Corporate Parenting Committee agreed to note the outcome of the CIW Inspection of Foster Wales Bridgend and the work that was being progressed which would then be presented to Committee to improve sufficiency of foster carers in the county borough.</p>
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

49 Page 12 Youth Justice Service Update on Care Experienced Young People

Decision Made	<p>The Strategic Manager - Youth Justice presented a report which updated the Committee on the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (BYJS) provision available for care-experienced children who enter the criminal justice system.</p> <p>She stated that one of the main aims of the service was to establish pathways to improve the outcomes of those children most at risk of offending behaviour or harm-related behaviour. The service aimed to ensure that children between ages 10 and 18 who were at risk of offending, were identified and a robust assessment plan and pathway for those children that enter the service was formulated to try and reduce that offending. She mentioned the service had a responsibility to comply with the Youth justice Strategic Plan, which was a three-year plan and also comply with frameworks such as the Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales, which very much focused on a child being a child 1st and an offender second. To ensure this, the service aimed to divert those children from being stigmatized by criminalization.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Education, the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Housing commended the Youth Justice team for progress made. He related that progress to the team's success at being the only Youth Justice Service in Wales who benefited from UK Government funding.</p> <p>A Member referred to the recent death of a 17 year old inmate at Parc Prison in Bridgend and inquired what work is being undertaken by the Youth Offending unit to address the increasing concerns regarding inmates at Parc Prison.</p> <p>The Group Manager (Early Years and Young People) responded that the company G4S were part of Bridgend's youth Justice Service Management Board, which was due to meet the day after the committee meeting and the Service were seeking updates on a strategic level with a view to gaining reassurance. The Strategic Manager, Youth Justice added that a senior practitioner had been appointed specifically the purpose that Bridgend needed to provide safety planning for all children under the service. The practitioner met regularly with other designated social workers across the country to discuss cases and safety planning. She stated that whilst there was a lot of media attention at the moment around Park Prison, the young person's area at the facility was a positive one in terms of what the service could see.</p> <p>The Chairperson and Leader added that his office had written to the Minister responsible in the Ministry of Justice in regards to the recent very sad deaths at Parc Prison. They have had a response and were continuing a dialogue. They were seeking an urgent meeting with the Governor of the prison to discuss measures being put in place to make the prisoners safe as they can be, particularly for young people who</p>
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	<p>were resident. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing added that in relation to the directorate's role as the safeguarding authority, they had a role around any issues relating to individuals at risk of harm, be that children or adults at risk. The Service progress individual safeguarding cases for anyone resident for a period in Parc Prison as they would do for any other part of the Bridgend population.</p> <p>The Chairperson and Leader commended the process to enable young offenders to undertake work in the community thereby giving them a sense of purpose and value. The Strategic Manager - Youth Justice, agreed that one of their main responsibilities was to ensure that the needs of victims were also met as per the victim code of practice. Thereafter they were asked whether they wished to participate in a restorative opportunity.</p> <p><u>RESOLVED</u> : The Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting agreed to note the contents of the report.</p>
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

**50. Urgent Items**

Decision Made	None
Date Decision Made	8 May 2024

To observe further debate that took place on the above items, please click the following links

[Part 1](#)

[Part 2](#)

The meeting closed at 12:41.

**This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg**

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<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>4 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>EMPLOYABILITY BRIDGEND UPDATE FOR CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR - COMMUNITIES</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>GEMMA HAYNE EMPLOYABILITY BRIDGEND TEAM LEADER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>This report provides an update on the service Employability Bridgend provides to Care Experienced Children.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>As an externally funded project, we have to abide by our funders’ restrictions, which mean we are only able to support residents of Bridgend County Borough who are 16+ and not in full-time education, with no upper age limit. For the Multiply project, this is 19+ with no upper age limit.</b></li> <li>• <b>Employability Bridgend is committed to providing individualised support, including mentoring, training, volunteering, employment and in-work support. There are a small number of declared Care Experienced Children supported by the Employability Bridgend project, and the project continues to build internal Bridgend County Borough Council relationships to provide more support for this client group.</b></li> </ul>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Corporate Parenting Committee about the service offered to Care Experienced Children (CEC) with Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) by Employability Bridgend.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The end of the European Social Fund, as the United Kingdom left the European Union and is no longer eligible for support, created a need to replace funding especially that which focuses on employability. Employability Bridgend is funded externally with no BCBC core funding and thus has to respond to the requirements of funders.
- 2.2 The UK Government (UKGOV) established a new fund called the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which was split into three priorities – People and Skills, Communities and Place, and Supporting Local Business, covering the 2022-23 to 2024-25 financial years. Local Authorities put together bids for funding under the three streams with Bridgend County Borough Council's Local Investment Plan presented to Cabinet in July 2022. Cabinet also approved in July 2022 that Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council (RCTCBC) would assume the role of the 'Lead Local Authority' for the UKSPF for the Cardiff Capital Region. The total SPF allocation for Bridgend is £23,106,591.
- 2.3 The Employability Bridgend project was allocated £4,374,172 from the People and Skills element of SPF. As the agreement for the UKSPF was not received and signed off until the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023, it was not possible for BCBC to undertake projects and schemes in year 1 as planned. The Employability project was therefore set to operate from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, supporting the residents of Bridgend to access employment advice, training & qualifications, volunteering and job opportunities.
- 2.4 The SPF monies align with the Communities for Work+ (CfW+) funding through Welsh Government, which has been renewed annually since 2018. For 2023–24 £1,221,446.86 was allocated with £737,240 allocated in 2024-25. To ensure there is no duplication of provision across the two funding streams, the cohorts for SPF Employability Bridgend and CfW+ are different in terms of level of support required, distance from the labour market and employment status.
- 2.5 A separate part of the SPF monies was ringfenced for a UK Government mandated project called Multiply. The funding for this was £3,990,295 of the overall SPF monies. The aim of this project was to support people aged 19+ living in the Bridgend County area with numeracy skills, up to and including Maths GCSE. There are various cohorts for this project, including parents, those with debt issues and young people and this is supported by various sub-contractors, such as Bridgend College and Citizen's Advice, as well as other departments within BCBC.

## **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 There are 296 16–25-year-old Care Experienced Children (CEC) in BCBC as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Of these, 88 are not engaging with offers of support from BCBC services at all and many of the rest will be in full-time education or in employment. Since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2022, all 18+ CEC were on a Welsh Government pilot Basic Income scheme. The number of Employability Bridgend participants who have declared that they are CEC as of August 2024 is 16. We are aware of projects within the Education Directorate that engage with CEC at earlier ages and provide ongoing training and employment support from 11 to 25 years of age, such as Bridgend Youth Support.



Employability Bridgend provision for CEC is improving the confidence in 'soft' skills, as well as vocational training, qualifications, and employment prospects, as well as improving access to other support agencies. The project has been successful thus far in engaging participants to improve valuable life skills, which has positively impacted social isolation, confidence, and labour market position of participants.

Employability Bridgend offers support out in local communities, in venues such as libraries, life centres, community centres, Memorial Halls, for both 1:1s and group support. Employability Bridgend Marketing and Engagement team organise regular engagement events such as Family Fun Days, Creative Connections and Digital Festivals as well as the annual jobs fair in conjunction with Job Centre Plus, to be able to engage with participants and partners to ensure that support is targeted correctly for the participant and the local business need.

Multiply provision within Social Services for Care Experienced young people is improving the confidence in numeracy skills, qualifications, and life chances of participants. This is especially the case for those who may have had a low attendance and attainment whilst at school. The project has been successful thus far in engaging and supporting young adults to improve valuable life skills, which has positively impacted financial independence, aspirations, and job prospects of participants. The Multiply Engagement and Skills Project Officer works closely with BCBC's Social Workers, Personal Assistants, Council departments and supported living providers to ensure that numeracy support is targeted to the needs of individuals. External partnership working with housing providers, such as Dewis and Pobl who provide supported, semi-supported and independent accommodation, has also been imperative to the successful engagement of participants. Support offered includes 1:1 sessions and group sessions, which are completely flexible; sessions are held at home addresses (where appropriate), community centres, libraries, and external supported living accommodation.

There have been several engagement events and courses which have been devised and implemented to target the needs of care experienced young adults. Many of the courses have supported numeracy life skills, such as financial budgeting, cooking on a budget, confidence building and Essential Skills Wales Qualifications. A specifically devised Escape Room which incorporated core numeracy skills was delivered to encourage hard-to-reach young adults to engage with the project, with further fun activities planned soon; this was successful and resulted in new participants to the project.

The unique style of delivery, with the Multiply and Skills Project Officer working alongside the Social Services team, has been beneficial in supporting the young people's well-being needs to allow them to access the educational opportunities on offer, moreover the flexibility of delivery has been paramount to supporting the care experienced participants.

- 3.2 To date there have been 16 CEC engaged on Employability Bridgend projects, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to August 2024 and the following 3 case studies demonstrate the support they have received.

Case study 1: Participant A aged 18, who was a care leaver and living in supported accommodation. He was struggling with access to computers and interview techniques. He was supported with interview techniques; he was given prompt cards to use in interviews as he would often go off on a tangent. He was successful at gaining at interview with Pobl, which was online. His Employability Bridgend Mentor provided him with the use of a laptop and set him up in the reception room in the Employability Bridgend Porthcawl hub. This allowed him to have a quiet space and the technology for the interview. He was successful at interview and gained a position of 'Support Worker'. He is always recommending Employability and talks to others about what support we offer when he volunteers in the foodbank. Employability Bridgend consequently supported a friend of his into work following a recommendation from participants.

Case Study 2: Participant B had a baby whilst in care and has spoken about sitting her exams in her foster care, holding the baby whilst she sat her maths exam. The participant is a single mum to 2 children. The participant has also enrolled onto the Multiply project and is having support with maths that will benefit her children as her eldest is just about to start school. The Employability Bridgend Mentor managed to build a rapport with her, and they are exploring what work she could do when her youngest goes into nursery. The Mentor has also supported her to get proof of her national insurance that she did not have before.

Case study 3: Participant C was living at North Lodge care home at the time of enrolment and exit. He was referred by Awen Cultural Trust. It was identified from the enrolment that he had a number of barriers and was some distance away from work, lacked confidence and self-esteem. He was not keen on attending a confidence course, so the Employability Bridgend Mentor's aim was to build his confidence during their appointments. He has some behaviour issues, so it was a case of building a rapport with him, so he felt comfortable and at ease. Over time, he started to be more relaxed and started attending appointments on his own without a support worker. A new CV was completed, and he restarted a placement at B-Leaf and Bryngarw Country House.

There was a period where he missed several appointments and after re-engaging, he confirmed that he was not work ready but was keen to start a college course. He wanted to start a business skills course. His Mentor managed to source a course for him at Bridgend College, supported him with the application and a start date was confirmed. He was still actively engaging at B-leaf and with the course close to starting, it was agreed to close and exit him from the programme.

Multiply Case Studies: Since the Multiply Engagement and Skills Officer has been in post (September 2023), four care experienced young adults have achieved formal qualifications, with a further four working towards a qualification. In addition, three participants that have achieved formal qualifications are currently working towards higher level numeracy qualifications.

Three participants have gained employment since enrolling and engaging on the project. One learner is now job hunting following an extended period out of work, due to the confidence gained from sessions.

One participant has progressed onto a full-time course with Bridgend College. Four participants have moved from supported living providers' Step-Down provision to private rental accommodation.

A care experienced participant achieved Entry Level 3 in numeracy, which he has said will help his job prospects. This is particularly exceptional since he never went to school as a child and arrived in the UK just over 4 years ago as a 16-year-old, unaccompanied asylum seeker who could not speak English. This participant is currently working towards a Level 1 qualification through Multiply and hopes to run his own business in the future.

3.3 BCBC referrals represent less than 1% of our overall referrals, with the rest coming from external sources such as Job Centres, Foodbanks, and self-referrals, despite the many attempts that been made to encourage more referrals internally. These attempts at internal referral building will continue as Employability Bridgend's offer can enhance well-being and employment and life prospects for many BCBC service users. We do not want eligible residents of Bridgend County area to miss out on support which could improve not only their own lives but also their families and communities.

3.4 A representative of Employability Bridgend attends the Corporate Parenting Board meetings, and the programme has signed up to the Corporate Parenting Charter and has committed to adjusting paperwork to ensure that more information on CEC is collected to be able to report back in future. By asking if the participant is CEC on the enrolment questionnaire, this will be participant declaration and only if they are willing to make that disclosure.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 The Employability Bridgend project demonstrates the sustainable development principle by ensuring that by meeting the needs of the present they do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs this is evidenced through the 5 ways of working:

- **Long term** – it is important that CEC are provided with support in early adulthood which sets them up for their lives.

- **Prevention** – working with BCBC colleagues and other agencies to ensure that CEC are referred to Employability Bridgend for support.
- **Integration** – It is important that BCBC departments work together to ensure that support for vulnerable Care Experienced Children and Young People is joined up.
- **Collaboration** – working together to ensure that Employability Bridgend has the right offer to support CEC is vital to the Corporate Well-being aims of helping people become more healthy and resilient, and supporting a successful economy.
- **Involvement** – Employability Bridgend will continue to attend the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that the support offer is up-to-date and shared and the voices of CEC are respected and actioned where possible.

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There are no climate change implications resulting from this project. However, we are committed to supporting the implementation of the local authority's 'Bridgend 2030 – Net Zero Carbon Strategy' and Welsh Government's carbon reduction commitments.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 Employability Bridgend has a commitment to the Safeguarding Policies and Procedures of Bridgend County Borough Council and Welsh Government, establishing and maintaining effective ties with pivotal areas, including the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), and safeguarding leads. Managers and staff integrate safeguarding into team meetings and have undergone safeguarding training to ensure consistency of service delivery to participants.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 The Employability Bridgend project is fully funded by the UKGOV Shared Prosperity Fund and Welsh Government Communities for Work+ in 2024-25.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 It is recommended that: the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting considers and notes the service offered to Care Experienced Children (CEC) with Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) by Employability Bridgend.

## **Background documents**

None

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>4 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>REGIONAL CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY SERVICE</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>SHEREE DIXON, GROUP MANAGER CASE MANAGEMENT AND TRANSITION</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>Summary of annual service delivery for 2023-24 of statutory advocacy for children and young people.</b></p> <p><b>The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) was introduced by Welsh Government in July 2017. The overall aim was to provide a consistent and standardised approach to the delivery of advocacy services and ensure that all children and young people whose care planning is underpinned by statutory guidance and regulation have access to this.</b></p> <p><b>Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides advocacy services across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. They are a well-established provider across Wales.</b></p> <p><b>There is evidence of the service provider working as a proactive and innovative regional partner in delivering statutory advocacy, alongside other services that help children, young people or their families.</b></p>

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with a summary report to highlight the key aspects of service delivery from our regional provider of advocacy service, Tros Gynnal Plant. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2023-2024

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The regional service is based on the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA), which is prescribed by Welsh Government. The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) for children and young people in Wales was introduced in July 2017. The national approach ensures that children and/or young people whose care planning is underpinned by statutory guidance and regulations have a clear entitlement to the offer of advocacy services. This enables children and young people to have an increased voice in their planning and to have their rights upheld under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The national approach aims to standardise advocacy, its eligibility criteria, and provision across Wales.
- 2.2 When a child or young person aged five and over becomes care experienced or subject to child protection proceedings, they are eligible for the Active Offer of Advocacy (AO) and there are statutory responsibilities to ensure that all eligible children and young people are made aware of their rights to access this service. For children under five years of age, a referral to advocacy services is determined on a case-by-case basis following the social workers assessment of their ability to understand the information shared within the meeting. The Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) element of the advocacy service is intended to provide support to a child or young person to address a particular issue or situation.
- 2.3 Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg. TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and is a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.
- 2.4 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) receives an element of Welsh Government funding towards this service, which is administered by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC), on behalf of the CTM region. RCTCBC are also the contracting authority for this regional service. TGP provides quarterly and annual reports both to individual local authorities and across the region as a whole. Additionally, there are quarterly meetings to discuss their content, service development and provide opportunities for partnership working to continuously improve service delivery.

## **3. Current situation / proposal**

- 3.1 Detailed quarterly performance reports are provided by TGP. TGP also provide an annual report for both Bridgend locality and the CTM region. They cover the key service aspects of the Active Offer (AO) of advocacy and Issue Based Advocacy (IBA).
- 3.2 In BCBC, during 2023/2024, 262 children and young people became eligible for the AO. 216 were eligible due to becoming subject to child protection procedures and 46 were eligible due to becoming care experienced. Out of the 262 eligible for AO, 71 were referred to the service. This equates to 27% of the eligible cohort. 65% of the total number of referrals were for care experienced children and young people and 35% were for those who had become subject to child protection procedures. Of the 71 children and young people referred, 64 AO meetings took place. 56 accepted the AO and subsequently received IBA. In comparison to the previous year, whereby 33% of those eligible were referred, this does demonstrate a decrease in the overall referral rate. There are a number of reasons for children and young people refusing the AO which are reported to be including, but not exclusive to, feeling they are able to share their own wishes and feelings and a preference for their allocated social worker to support them in this area. Children and young people also have requested that they have further discussions regarding advocacy services at a later date so wish to take the time to consider the offer It should also be recognised that BCBC have seen an improved picture in relation to staffing within the social work teams over the past year. There has been an improved performance across teams which relates to stability in the workforce and less reliance on agency staff. This has therefore resulted in consistency of social workers for children and young people with increased opportunities to develop relationships with social workers who they feel can advocate on their behalf.
- 3.3 With regards to demographics of those accessing the AO during 2023/2024, 38 were female and 33 were male. The 12-16 age group represented the highest number of referrals at 33, closely followed by the 6-11 age group at 30. There were 4 referrals from both 0-5 and 17-19 age group.
- 3.4 Following the referral for the AO, 63% received this within 5 working days. Where there were delays to the AO being received, the primary factors for this were due to requests from children, young people and carers to meet at timescales outside of this.
- 3.5 During 2023/2024, 145 children and young people accessed the IBA service, presenting with 172 issues. Of the 145 children, 56 were subject to child protection procedures, 65 were care experienced, 18 were open to the LA on a care and support basis and 6 were care leavers over the age of 18. This has been a shift from the previous year whereby the majority of children and young people who accessed IBA were subject to child protection procedures.
- 3.6 The number of children and young people accessing IBA has decreased significantly compared to the previous year, whereby 224 accessed the service. The number accessing IBA in 2023/2024 is however more closely aligned to the two years preceding where 155 and 135 children accessed the service in those years.
- 3.7 In 2022/2023 there was a particularly high number of children who were care experienced and subject to child protection procedures which is likely to have contributed to significant increase in referrals to the IBA service for this year in

particular. This coincided with the challenges being faced within Children's Social Care linked to staffing and recruitment issues.

- 3.8 In 2023/2024 with regards to gender, 80 referrals for IBA were female and 65 were male. The 12-16 age group represented the majority of referrals with 79, which was almost double the second highest number of referrals per age group for 6-11 years which was 40. The 0-5 age group had 5 referrals for IBA, 17–19-year-olds accounted for 16 referrals and 20–25-year-olds equated to 5 referrals.
- 3.9 With regards to the referral source for IBA, the majority of these were self-referrals with 79 of the 145 overall total. The second highest referral source was from social services at 47. This demonstrates good awareness of the service amongst the young people it is designed for.
- 3.10 A total of 172 issues were recorded across the IBA referrals. There were a wide range of issues that young people need support with but contact with family was the most prevalent with 37 children and young people requesting support with this issue. 34 young people raised issues relating to their placement and 33 with issues relating to home life.
- 3.11 One role of an advocate is to support young people to share their views, wishes and feelings at meetings. Support at meetings was highlighted 21 times during 2023/2024, however, advocates supported children and young people at 62 meetings. The type of meetings young people were supported with include Child Protection Conferences, LAC Care-Experienced Children Reviews, Core Group meetings, and Family Group Meetings.
- 3.12 There has been ongoing work between TGP and BCBC in relation to ensuring the offer of advocacy is made to aa eligible young Partnership work continues to raise awareness and ensuring that all eligible children and young people are aware of their rights to advocacy services.
- 3.13 TGP continues to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group is to allow care-experienced young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board, whilst sharing their views, wishes and feelings in relation to what matters to them with the overall aim to support with service design and delivery.
- 3.14 TGP continue to develop new and innovative ways for young people to provide feedback to help improve the advocacy service, e.g. through the use of a QR code that they can scan from their mobile phones and which links to a short questionnaire. They have also introduced a monthly prize draw whereby children and young people who provide feedback have the chance to win a gift voucher.
- 3.15 There is a close partnership working between TGP and BCBC with a view to improving service delivery and develop strategies which will support an increase in the take up of the service. This has included TGP attending relevant team meetings to raise awareness of the service, discuss referral routes and the roles and responsibilities of staff within this process. The performance team are liaising with team managers on a quarterly basis to share information on those who have become eligible for the AO and gather data on the response to the offer, whether



the referral has been made and any reasons for refusal. TGP are also raising any particular issues with the Group Manager for Case Management and Transition directly to ensure that these are addressed promptly.

- 3.16 TGP, like most social care service providers, have experienced some challenges with recruitment and retention. However, they have used their regional capacity to ensure service continues to be delivered and have now successfully appointed to a number of key vacancies.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report; therefore, it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report.

**Long Term.** The operation of a statutory advocacy service is prescribed by Welsh Government and the service operates in a similar way across Wales and into the long term.

**Prevention.** Advocacy includes providing people with information, advice, and support to help people prevent issues from escalating further.

**Integration.** The regional service operates across the 3 CTM local authority areas as a single service.

**Collaboration.** The regional authorities work in close partnership with our service provider.

**Involvement.** One of the basic principles of advocacy services is the inclusion and involvement of the children and young people who use the service. Voice and choice are key principles of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, and the overall aim of advocacy services is to achieve this.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 Beyond necessary staff travel and operational administration activities, there is no direct impact on Climate Change through the provision of this advocacy service.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 The provision of statutory advocacy is a key element in ensuring the safety and welfare of children and young people.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting considers and notes both Annual reports in relation to the regional advocacy service.

## **Background documents**

None

## National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

### Local Authority Report - Bridgend 2023 - 2024

#### Collated Annual Report

April 23 - Mar 24

#### Headline Report

During the year, 145 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 172 issues. This represents a notable decrease in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year, when 224 young people accessed IBA in Bridgend. Some 76 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 123 in the previous year. Active Offer (AO) referrals also decreased, with 71 received this year, compared to 101 last year.

##### Active Offer

According to information received from Bridgend, 262 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year. A total of 71 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 27% of those eligible were referred, compared to 33% last year.

Of the 71 young people referred, 64 AO meetings took place, and 56 young people accepted the AO and went on to receive IBA, 24 less than in the previous year.

Children and young people in the CP arena made up 65% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 85% in the previous year. Although we have noted a decrease in AO referrals for children and young people in the CP arena, AO referrals for Care Experienced young people rose from 15 in the previous year, to 25 this year.

As in the previous year, most AO referrals were for females making up 54% of the total number.

Most young people referred for AO were aged between 12 and 16 years, although this age group was followed closely by those aged between six and 11 years. Referrals across all aged groups decreased this year, except for those aged 17 years and over, rising from one in the previous year to four in this year.

Some 63% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Most delays throughout the year happened when carers or young people themselves asked to postpone a visit, usually because they wanted to wait until after a school holiday to be visited in school. Some young people changed their mind about meeting with an advocate following an AO referral, and some visits were delayed as the advocate had to wait for a suitable room to be available at school.

##### Issue Based Advocacy

This year, there has been a notable decrease in young people accessing IBA with 145 young people being referred this year, compared to 224 in the previous year.

In the previous year, most children and young people referred for IBA were in the CP arena and made up over 50% of IBA referrals. This year, Care Experienced young people make up the majority of young people referred for IBA, following a significant decrease of 70 referrals for children and young people in the CP arena, and a small increase in IBA referrals for Care Experienced young people. Referrals for young people subject to Care and Support plans and Care Leavers also decreased this year.

Despite a decrease in referrals for both males and females this year, the gender split remains as it was in the previous year with most IBA referrals being made for females.

This year, we observed a decrease in referrals for all age groups. The largest decrease in referrals was for those aged six to 11 years, falling from 107 in the previous year, to just 40 this year. This means the majority of IBA referrals were made for young people aged between 12 and 16, making up 54% of the total number of IBA referrals, compared to 43% last year. We have however, noted what could be the recovery of CP referral rates in the previous two quarters, and plan to meet with team managers to discuss promotion of the advocacy service to this age group.

'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals. This year, 14 IBA referrals were also made by third sector organisations, mostly TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing Service. Only 3% of referrals came from other sources, and they were made up of parents, carer and foster carer referrals.

Contact was recorded as the main issue for 37 young people this year. Some young people wanted to raise contact issues relating to more than one person meaning 37 young people asked their advocate to share wishes and feelings about contact arrangements with individuals or groups of individuals 46 times. Most young people shared that they wanted to spend more time with family, this was 21 times in relation to parents, eight times in relation to wider family and five times in relation to siblings. Wanting to stop contact or spend less time with someone was raised just nine times, eight times in relation to parents, and once in relation to wider family. One young person requested that time spent with their father was supervised.

Two young people wanted arrangements in place to spend time with family members to remain unchanged. This type of contact issue usually comes about when a family member suggests to the local authority that a young person wants more or less time with a family member, but following exploration and discussion with their advocate, the young person shares they are happy with current arrangements.

This year, 'support at meetings' was the main issue only 21 times, however, advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 62 meetings, 43 of which they attended all or part of in person. The meetings were made up of 19 Child Protection Case Conferences (CPCC), 15 CLA Reviews, 12 Core Group meetings, seven Family Group Meetings, three Care and Support meetings, three school meetings, two placement meetings and one complaints meeting. This year, advocates have noted an increase in face-to-face meetings, as well as an increase in young people's attendance at their meetings.

During the year, 78% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

### **Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)**

We are pleased to report face-to-face visiting advocacy has now been established in all four Bridgend community homes. RVA in Sunnybank and Meadowview is currently being undertaken by TGP's Bridgend participation worker, who will also support young people living in these homes to access the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum if they want to. These visits will continue monthly in discussion with home managers. The Managers of Bakers Way and Harwood House have advised the advocate to call monthly, and staff will assess at the time if a visit will be appropriate that week. The visiting advocate has contacted the manager of both Harwood House and Bakers Way to offer to attend a team meeting to share knowledge about the Non-Instructed Advocacy (NIA) service.

A review of the RVA services was postponed previously to allow us to concentrate on recruitment and advocacy capacity. The current residential visiting advocate plans to retire in the next quarter and we have recruited a new advocate to continue the RVA in RCT. The new advocate will be responsible for completing the review of the service in both RCT and Bridgend which will start during the next quarter.

**Service Information**

TGP Cymru continue to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group is to allow care experienced young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board. TGP Cymru participation officer Zoe Morgan, along with Steve Berry, supported BYV to facilitate the programme for the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy Launch, which was held in the Heronston Hotel on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April.

Following a request in May from Laura Kinsey, we were able to facilitate two young people under 11 years old who had been subject to safeguarding procedures to speak with the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangement (JICPA) inspectors. This involved CTM advocates contacting all young people they had previously worked with, who also fit the criteria requested. When the two young people had been identified and had agreed to take part, one advocate contacted their schools, and arranged for suitable rooms to be able to facilitate the conversations with the inspectors via a video call on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, the advocacy team manager facilitated a workshop; 'Listening to our children and young people; Involving them in decision making that affects them' at the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Engagement Event held in Kenfig Hill Rugby Club. The event set out the activities that will be undertaken in individual organisations, and collectively, to carry out Corporate Parenting responsibilities and bring the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy to life. During the workshops, the advocacy team manager was able to promote the advocacy service to many different Bridgend organisations and teams, and plans are in place for TGP Cymru to attend the LAC Nurse team meeting in July, and the Kinship carer coffee morning in September.

In November, the advocacy team manager met with the Bridgend Group Manager for Case Management and Transition, Sheree Dixon, to discuss advocacy referral rates and AO take up rates. We agreed that the advocacy team would be invited to both the children's services' team manager meeting and the IRO team meeting in the new year to promote and share information about the advocacy service and referral routes. Sheree has supported the team when advocates have difficulty in contacting or getting a response from social workers, on behalf of the young people they are advocating for.

The advocacy team manager has also been in touch with Bridgend's Deputy Head of Children's Social Care and is hoping to make links with some Bridgend Social Care team managers to share information about and promote the advocacy service over the next quarter.

Unfortunately, following a period of sickness in quarter two, our senior advocate decided to retire at the end of December. Following recruitment in quarter four, a new full time senior advocate role has been created, and the successful candidate is due to take up the post at the beginning of April, along with a newly recruited Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) who will be working 30 hours per week. A casual advocate has also been recruited to take over the residential visiting advocacy (RVA) role when the current RVA retires during the next quarter. We are confident this will ensure no gap in service. A new full-time IPA was also recruited this year, following the resignation of another advocate following medical advice after a period of ill health.

During quarter three, one staff member began the Level 4 Independent Advocacy Qualification in partnership with Gower College.

During quarter four, the CTM team completed first aid training provided by the Red Cross, and three team members completed training provided by Pause, relating to supporting mothers through Care Proceedings.

We have arranged internal training in Non-Instructed Advocacy and Restorative Engagement to take place during the next quarter.

Previously, advocates have reported difficulty in obtaining feedback for young people when they have sent wishes and feelings reports to some social workers. On receipt of referral, social workers are made aware that the expectation is that the recipient of any wishes and feelings report will respond to the young person's wishes and feelings and the advocate will then visit the young person again to discuss the response. With support from the LA, advocates have reported some improvement in this area over the last year.

**Young People's Feedback**

As a team, we are continuing to discuss different ways of making it as easy as possible for young people to evaluate the service they have received from TGP Cymru. Young people can scan a QR code which allows them to fill in a short questionnaire about the advocacy service on their own mobile phones. Advocates carry this code with them, and they are also sent to young people following the end of a piece of work. A paper copy of the feedback form is also sent by the Quality Assurance Officer at the end of a piece of work along with a Freepost envelope. Young people can either post the form, scan the code or take a picture of the filled in form and email or text it to the service.

Advocates also carry the Freepost envelopes with them in case a young person wants to fill in the form during a final or closing visit and are encouraged to remind young people their thoughts and opinions about the service they receive are very important to TGP Cymru and they are welcome to share them in whichever way they feel comfortable. To further encourage young people to share their feelings about the advocacy service we have also introduced a monthly prize draw, whereby children and young people who provide feedback will have the chance to win a £20 gift voucher.

This year, the number of young people providing feedback has increased, with the service receiving feedback from 18 young people, compared to 14 in the previous year. Feedback from the 18 young people who completed the consultation forms throughout the year has been overwhelmingly positive.

Of those 18:

17 stated they found the service helpful; 16 felt the service made a difference to their situation, 16 felt they knew more about their rights, 15 felt more confident since receiving support, 16 felt more included in decisions, and 18 felt their views were fully considered and their rights represented. 17 of the 18 young people providing feedback this year stated they would use the service again, while one person felt they wouldn't need to use the service again.

One young person said:

*"I know more about my rights than I did before the service and I am feeling positive after the support of the service."*

While explaining why they felt the service was helpful, one young person said:

*"Because you said things when I could not."*

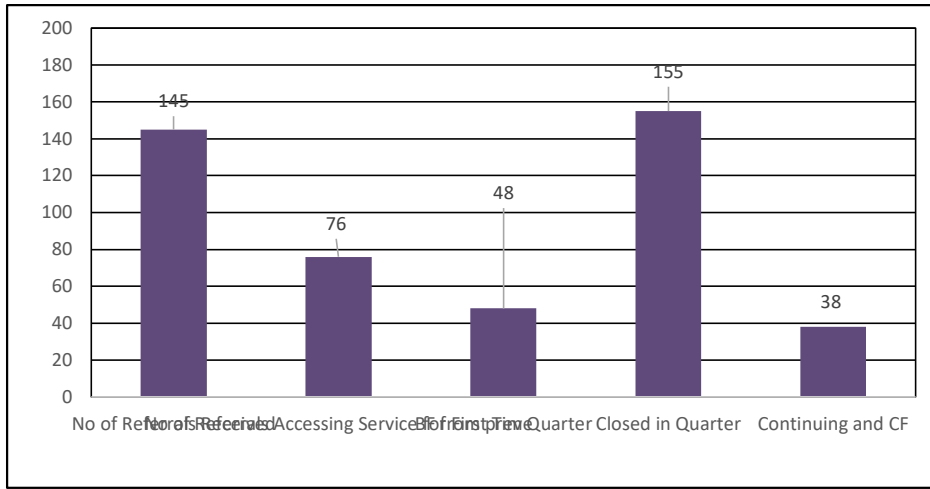
While explaining why the service made them feel more confident, one young person said:

*"I can say what I think and people can listen."*

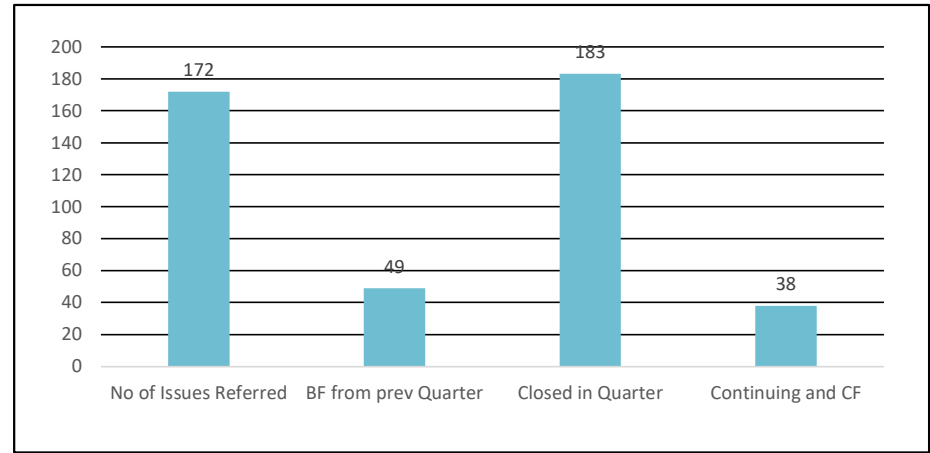
And another said:

*"I feel like I do have a right to speak and be included in decisions."*

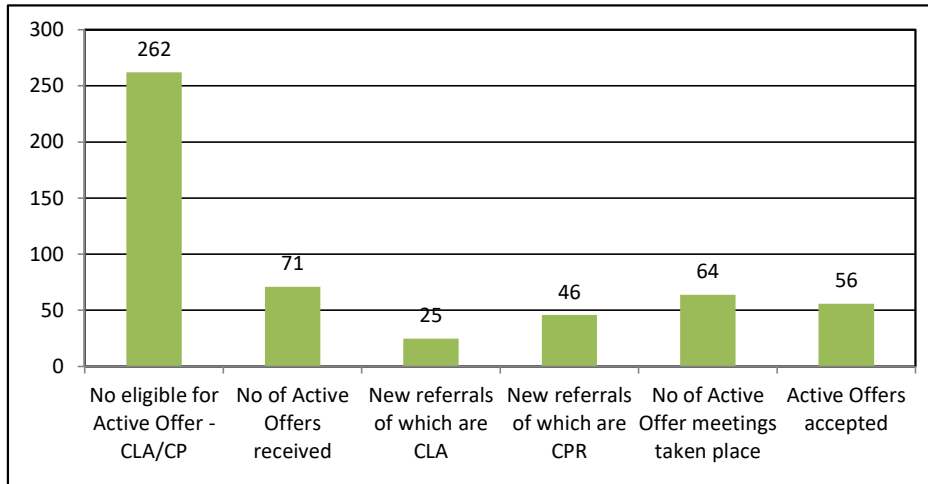
**1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy**



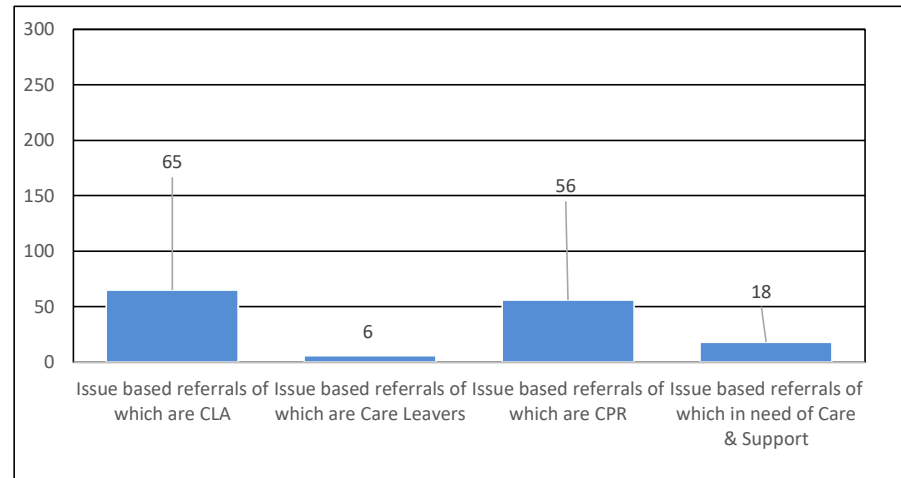
**1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy**



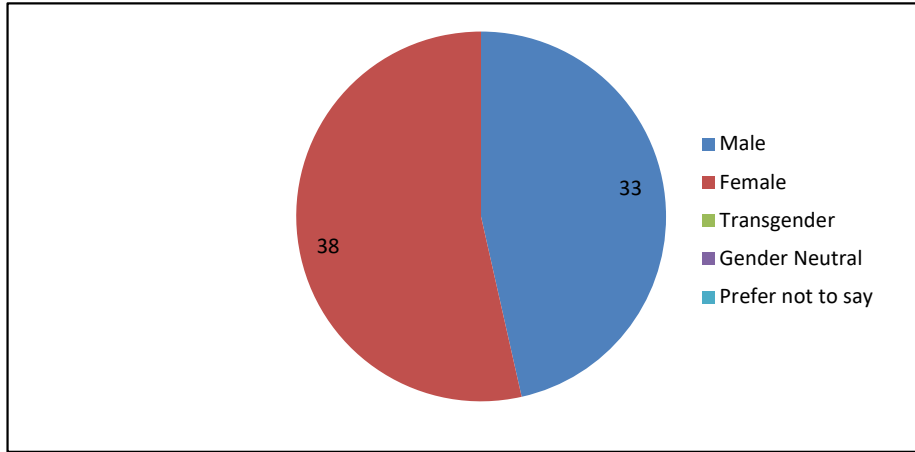
**2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer**



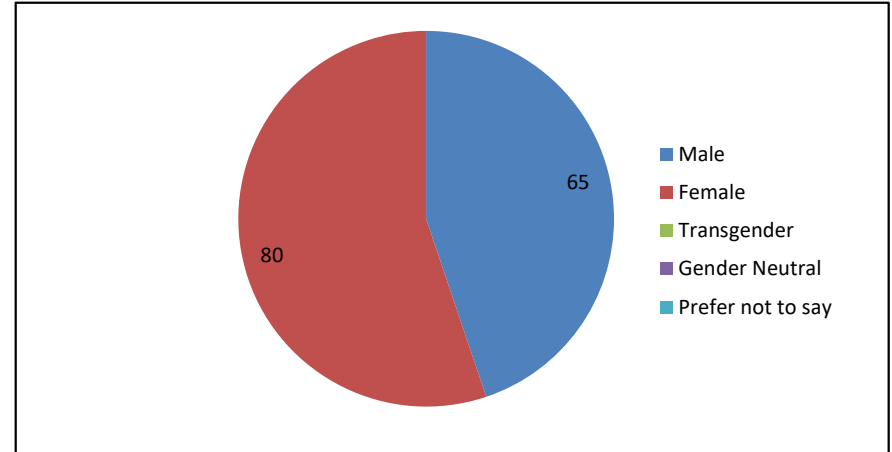
**2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based**



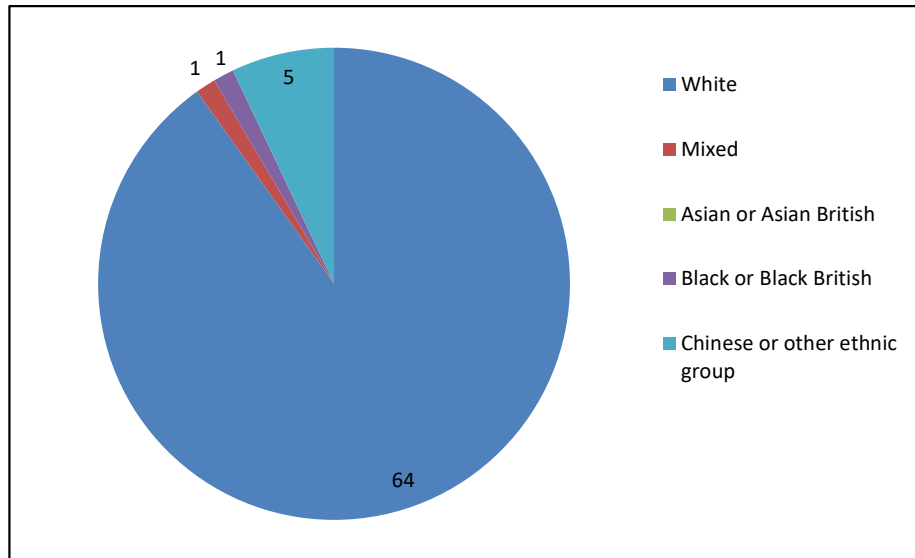
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



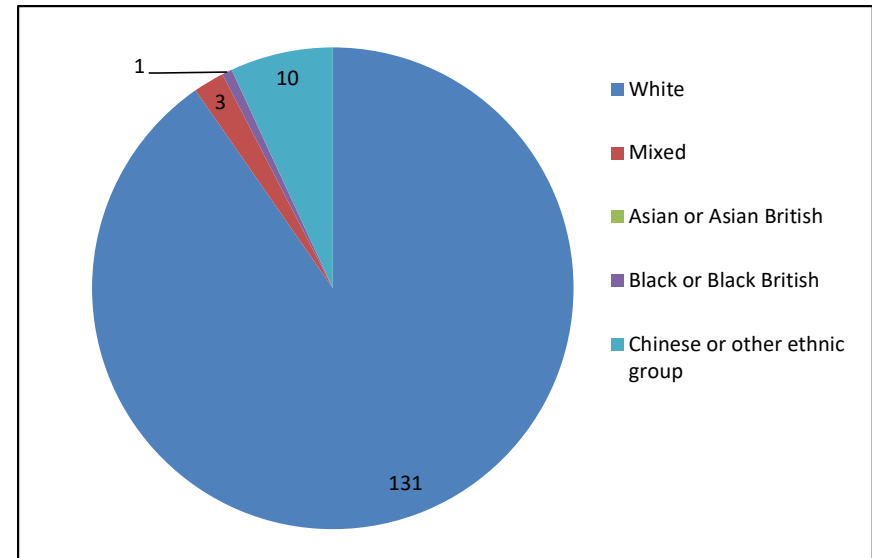
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer

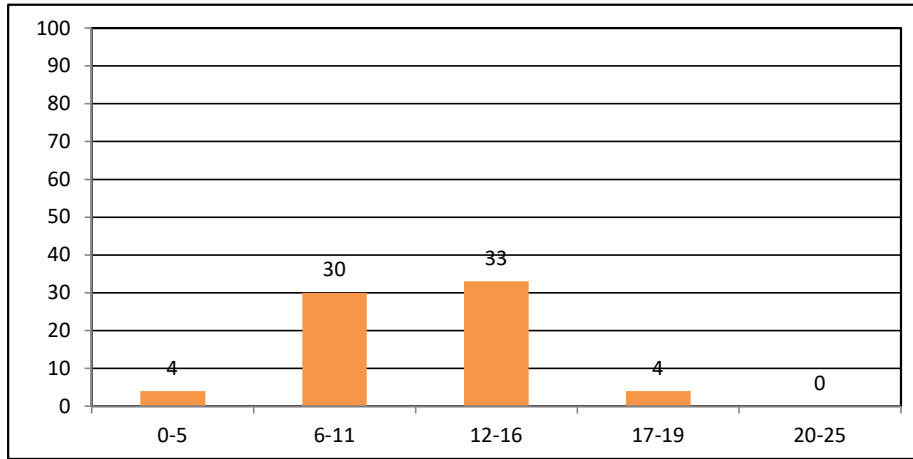


3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based

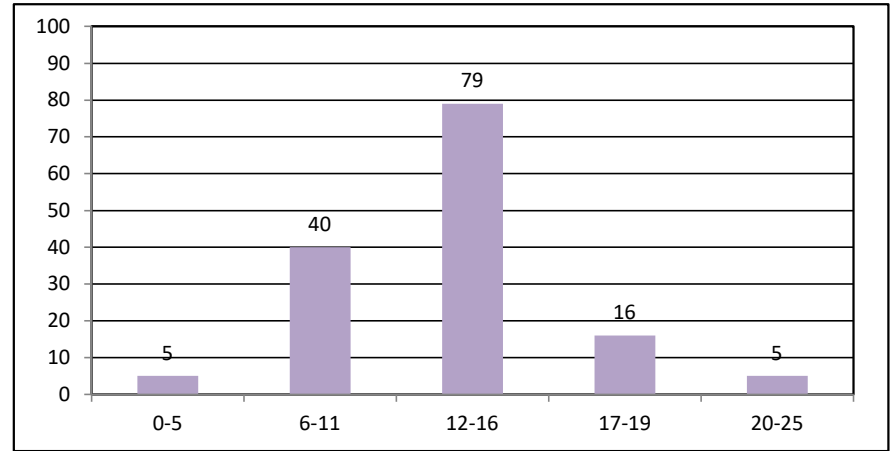




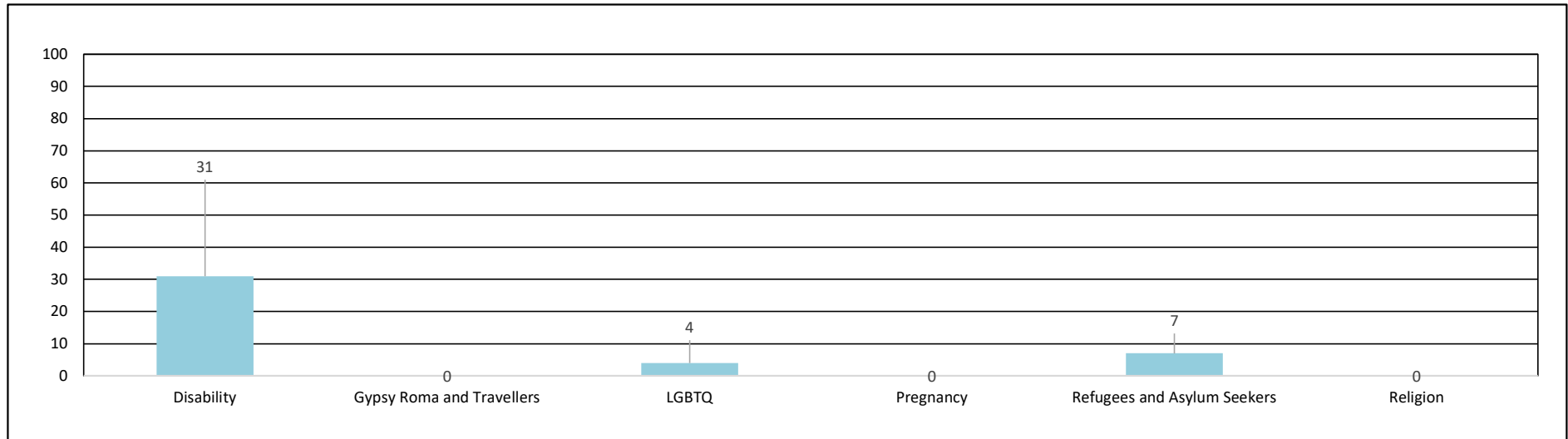
### 3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



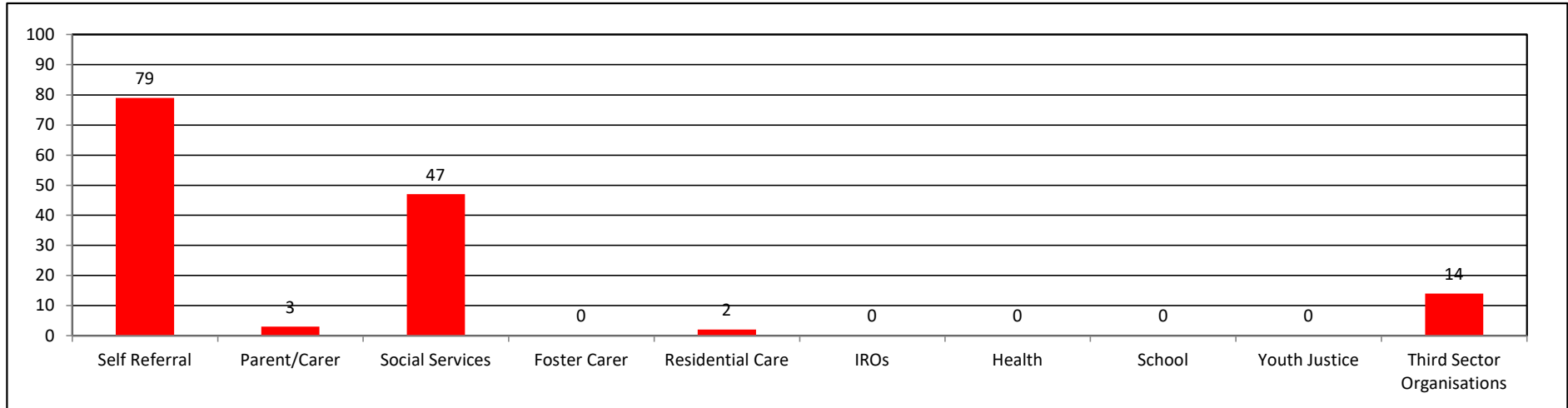
### 3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



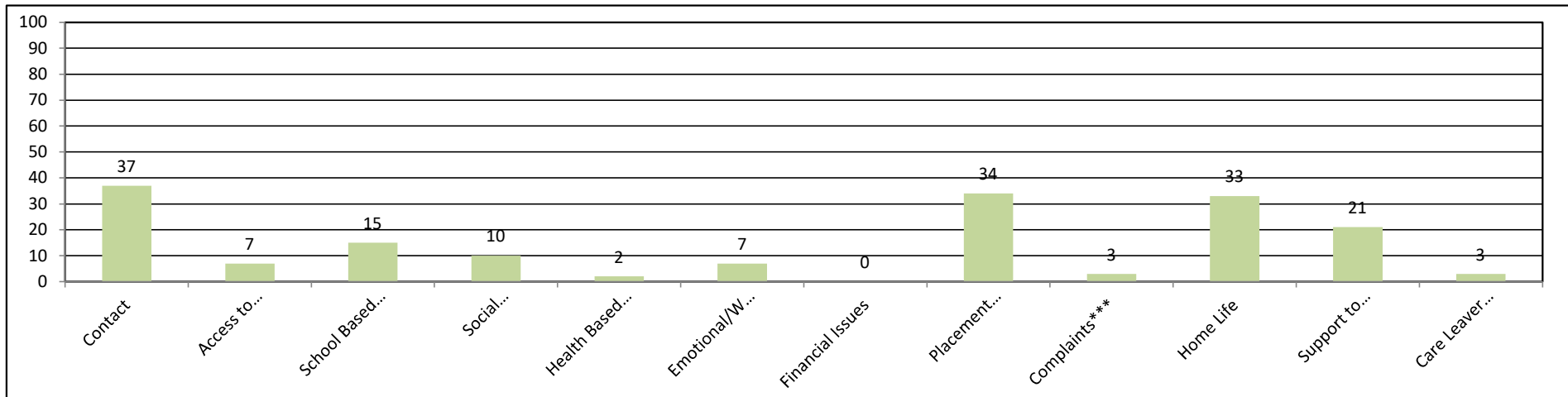
### 4. Protected Characteristics



### 5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



### 6. Issues Presented

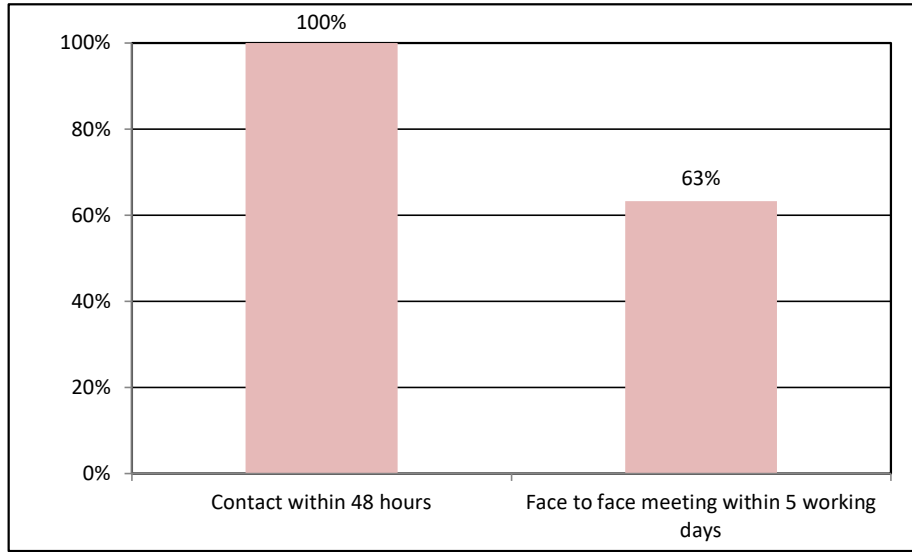


\* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

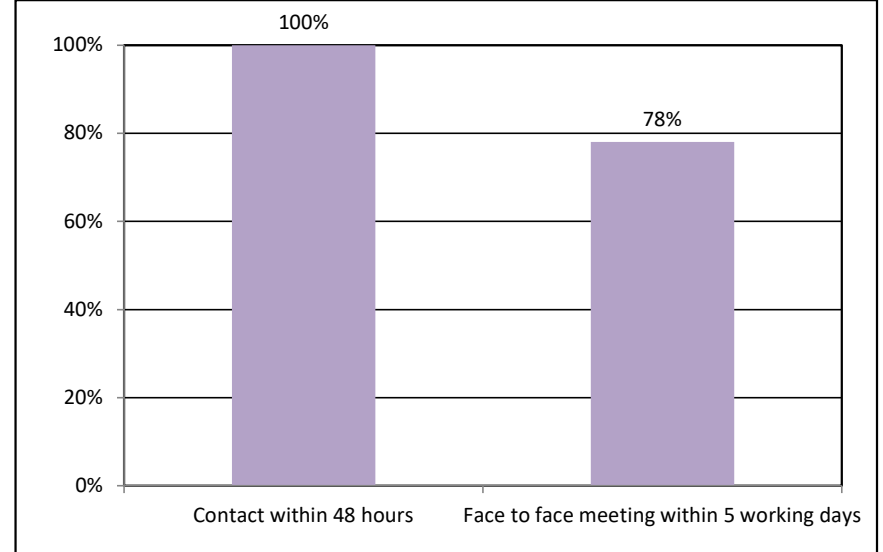
\*\* Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

\*\*\* Complaints refer to any complaints made against statutory services, including Social Service, Police, Health, YJS

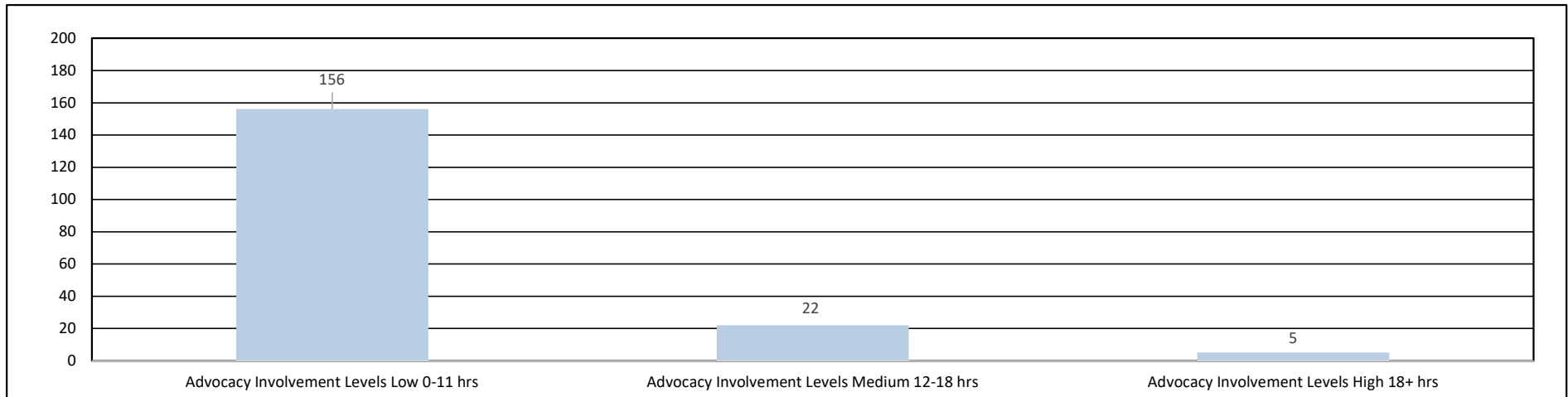
### 7. Service Performance - Active Offer



### Service Performance - Issue Based



### 8. Level of Advocacy Intervention at point of Issue Closure



## 9.Outcomes: linked to The National Advocacy Standards & Outcomes Framework

		Comments
<b>Outcome 1</b>	<b>Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible.</b>	<p>This year, across the two service areas 71% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of referral.</p> <p>Advocates continue to support young people placed out of county, both virtually and in person if requested. Most young people live in neighbouring authorities but we have also received referrals for young people living in, Monmouthshire, Newport and Lancashire among others this year.</p> <p>As soon as a new advocacy referral is received, our administrator posts a comprehensive advocacy pack to the child or young person. The pack includes lots of information about advocacy, our service and other support services available in Cwm Taf. The advocate is then able to follow up on this during their initial meeting and use the pack as a resource to introduce some of the key concepts such as advocacy and Children's Rights, directly with the child or young person. The young person is then able to keep the pack and have access to this information, even if they choose not to continue with advocacy support.</p> <p>As detailed above, the review of our RVA service will restart when the new RVA takes up his post at the end of the next quarter. This will ensure young people living in community homes in Bridgend have access to good quality and effective visiting advocacy services, supported by community home staff.</p>

<p><b>Outcome 2</b></p>	<p><b>Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.</b></p>	<p>Direct work with young people continues to take place during face-to-face visits, although occasionally advocates will contact young people over the phone. This sometimes happens following a request from a young person, or it might be offered if a visit cannot be arranged before a specific meeting. The advocate will always offer a follow up face-to-face visit in this situation.</p> <p>We ask the referrer to tell us where the young person would like to meet the advocate at the point of referral, and the advocate will always attempt to visit the young person at a place they have specified. This is usually in their home or at school, and advocates report many young people find it easier to share how they feel about their home life while at school, where privacy and confidentiality is often easier to maintain.</p> <p>This year, we have continued to receive requests from referrers and young people themselves to meet outside of the home when a school visit is not an option, as they are aware that maintaining confidentiality in the family home may be difficult. If the advocate does take the young person out in their car, this is always fully risk assessed and the advocate will always confirm with the young person that this is what they want.</p> <p>Examples of this are when one young person was not attending school, she asked her advocate to take her to a local cafe where she said she would find it easier to talk than if they had met at her home. Another young person requested his advocate take him outside of his residential home as he wanted to talk freely about his feelings about the staff.</p> <p>We continue to offer virtual contact to those few young people who prefer to engage over the phone or via a video call. Advocates report some older young people prefer to engage via phone and email, especially if they have work or education commitments.</p> <p>No safeguarding referrals were made in Bridgend this year.</p>
<p><b>Outcome 3</b></p>	<p><b>Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.</b></p>	<p>During this year, we have provided IBA to young people with a wide range of disabilities and learning needs. Young people diagnosed with anxiety disorders, ADHD, and ASD have also received IBA this year, along with young people diagnosed with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Hearing Impairment and Arthritis.</p> <p>When young people have additional learning needs, advocates always take advice from their social worker and others who know them best to communicate as effectively as possible.</p> <p>We have received seven referrals for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people this year, and advocates have supported them to receive the service in the language of their choice.</p> <p>Young people identifying as LGBTQ have also accessed IBA in Bridgend this year.</p> <p>One Active Offer was delivered in Welsh.</p>

<b>Outcome 4</b>	<b>Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.</b>	<p>As highlighted in the feedback section above, most young people who access IBA feel more included in decisions when they are able to share their views. This often proves to be the case, even when the decision made is not what the young person originally wanted.</p> <p>During this year, we have noted an increase in young people attending virtual and face to face meetings with the support of their advocate. In most cases, the advocate and the young person prepare for the meeting beforehand, and the advocate then reads out the wishes and feelings at the meeting.</p> <p>Young people consistently tell us they feel empowered to speak up for themselves following advocacy intervention and advocates always encourage young people to speak for themselves when they feel able to do so. One young person read the wishes and feelings report he had prepared with the support of his advocate at his CLA Review, and two unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people were supported in person at their CLA Review's to share their advocacy reports which were translated by an interpreter.</p>
<b>Outcome 5</b>	<b>Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.</b>	<p>The CTM Advocacy Service Participation Lead will continue to be responsible for keeping up to date with participation and consultation opportunities within Cwm Taf Morgannwg.</p> <p>All young people receiving advocacy support will continue to be offered the opportunity to feedback to TGP Cymru to allow us to monitor the services provided and make improvements where needed. We will continue to make changes to our feedback process to ensure young people experience no barriers in expressing their views about the service they have received.</p> <p>As detailed above, we hope to restart a piece of consultation work with young people living in local authority community homes to capture their thoughts about visiting advocacy. Following this consultation, we will, in partnership with managers of the homes make any necessary changes to ensure all young people are able to access an effective visiting advocacy service.</p> <p>A Care Experienced member of the BYV forum was invited to be a member of the interview panel during the recruitment of a new Independent Professional Advocate during quarter four. He engaged in asking questions, scoring, and discussion following the interview, and offered invaluable insight into the skills and qualities he felt were needed to provide a quality advocacy service. The new IPA will take up her post in the next quarter.</p>

## National Approach to Statutory Advocacy

### Local Authority Report CTM Regional 2023 - 2024

#### Collated Annual Report

April 23 - Mar 24

#### Headline Report

During the year, across Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM), 413 young people accessed the issue-based advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 483 issues. Some 254 young people were referred for Active Offer (AO).

##### **Active Offer**

According to information received from CTM, 768 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year. A total of 254 children and young people were referred, meaning that if we assume those referred became eligible in the year, 33% of those eligible were referred. This compared to 32% of eligible young people being referred in the previous year.

Of the 254 referrals received, 213 AO meetings took place, and 170 young people accepted the AO and went on to receive IBA.

Children and young people in the CP arena made up 74% of those referred for AO throughout the year, compared to 78% in the previous year. AO referrals for both Care Experienced young people and those in the CP arena increased when compared to the previous year.

As in the previous year, this year, most AO referrals were for females, although the split was more even, with only three more referrals for females than males.

In a change from the previous year, most young people referred for AO were aged between 12 and 16, with referrals increasing by 28 across the year, and making up 48% of the total. Referrals for young people aged between six and 11 decreased by 14 and make up 39% of the total number of AO referrals this year.

Some 55% of young people referred for the AO received it within five working days of referral. Most delays were due to carers and young people requesting visits take place after school holidays, young people changing their mind about meeting with an advocate following the referral and being unable to contact parents or carers to arrange a visit.

##### **Issue Based Advocacy**

This year, there has been a decrease in IBA referrals across the region, falling from 476 last year, to 413 this year. This is almost entirely due to a notable decrease in IBA referrals in Bridgend. 231 of the 413 young people referred for IBA this year were accessing advocacy for the first time.

As in the previous year, most children and young people referred for IBA this year were in the CP arena, however we observed the largest decrease in referrals for this group children and young people, falling by 50 when compared to last year. IBA referrals for care experienced young people decreased slightly and make up 35% of the total this year. There was also a small decrease in referrals for care leavers but a small increase in referrals for young people subject to Care and Support plans.

As in the previous year, most young people accessing IBA this year were female, making up 53% of IBA referrals, the same percentage as last year.

This year, we have observed a notable decrease in IBA referrals for young people aged between six and 11 years, falling by over 100 from 244 last year, to 140 this year. In the same period, referrals for young people aged between 12 and 16 years increased by 35 and made up the majority of IBA referrals with 53%. We also observed an increase of 12 referrals for young people aged 17 years and over, while referrals for young people aged five and under fell by three.

As in the previous year, 'Self-referral' continues to be the most popular route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals and third sector referrals. Self-referrals are usually the result of young people accepting the Active Offer, or young people who have previously used the service contacting their advocate directly to access the IBA service for a new issue. Most third sector referrals came from TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing and Restorative Approaches Service.

As in the previous year, this year, the most popular issues young people wanted support with were contact and issues relating to where young people live; placement and homelife. 'Homelife' is mostly used when young people want to share general wishes and feelings about their homelife in CP meetings, while 'placement' is used to describe specific issues care experienced young people may have in relation to their foster or residential home.

Contact was recorded as the main issue for 105 young people this year. Most young people shared that they wanted to spend more time with family, usually parents, grandparents, or siblings. Of those who share they wanted to stop seeing or spend less time with family, this was mostly in relation to a father. Several young people requested that arrangements in place for them to spend time with their mother remain unchanged. This type of issue usually comes about when a family member suggests to the local authority that a young person does want more or less time with a family member, but following exploration and discussion with their advocate, the young person shares they are happy with current arrangements. More detail on contact issues is available on individual LA reports.

This year, 'support at meetings' was the main issue 77 times, however, advocates supported children and young people to share wishes and feelings at 256 meetings, 160 of which they attended all or part of in person or virtually. The meetings were made up of mostly Child Protection Case Conferences, Core Group meetings, CLA Reviews and Family Group Meetings. Advocates have reported an increase in young people attending their meetings, both virtually and in person this year.

During the year, 79% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of the IBA referral being made.

#### **Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA)**

Residential Visiting Advocacy (RVA) is now taking place in nine Local Authority community homes across CTM. The five homes looking after young people with significant additional needs have advised monthly visits are not appropriate and have requested the advocate visits every two months and stays connected via telephone contact instead. The visiting advocate in Bridgend has offered to attend a team meeting to promote and discuss our Non-Instructed Advocacy (NIA) service.

A review of the RVA services was postponed previously to allow us to concentrate on recruitment and advocacy capacity. The current RCT residential visiting advocate plans to retire in the next quarter and we have recruited a new advocate to continue the RVA in RCT. The new advocate will be responsible for completing the review of the service in both RCT and Bridgend which will start during the next quarter.

#### **Service Information**

This year, advocacy quarterly progress reports have been shared at Corporate Parenting Boards (CPB) in RCT, Bridgend and Merthyr Tydfil.



Unfortunately, following a period of sickness in quarter two, our senior advocate decided to retire at the end of December. Following recruitment in quarter four, a new full time senior advocate role has been created, and the successful candidate is due to take up the post at the beginning of April, along with a newly recruited Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) who will be working 30 hours per week. A casual advocate has also been recruited to take over the residential visiting advocacy (RVA) role when the current RVA retires during the next quarter. We are confident this will ensure no gap in service. A new full-time IPA was also recruited this year, following the resignation of another advocate following medical advice after a period of ill health.

During quarter three, one staff member began the Level 4 Independent Advocacy Qualification in partnership with Gower College and in quarter four, the CTM team completed first aid training provided by the Red Cross, and three team members completed training provided by Pause, relating to supporting mothers through Care Proceedings.

We have arranged internal training in Non-Instructed Advocacy and Restorative Engagement to take place during the next quarter.

Previously, advocates have reported difficulty in obtaining feedback for young people when they have sent wishes and feelings reports to some social workers. On receipt of referral, social workers are made aware that the expectation is that the recipient of any wishes and feelings report will respond to the young person's wishes and feelings and the advocate will then visit the young person again to discuss the response. Advocates have reported some improvement in this area over the last year.

Further detail about events attended this year, including panels, and promotional visits, can be found on individual LA reports.

#### **Young People's Feedback**

As a team, we are continuing to discuss different ways of making it as easy as possible for young people to evaluate the service they have received from TGP Cymru. Young people can scan a QR code which allows them to fill in a short questionnaire about the advocacy service on their own mobile phones. Advocates carry this code with them, and they are also sent to young people following the end of a piece of work. A paper copy of the feedback form is also sent by the Quality Assurance Officer at the end of a piece of work along with a Freepost envelope. Young people can either post the form, scan the code or take a picture of the filled in form and email or text it to the service.

Advocates also carry the Freepost envelopes with them in case a young person wants to fill in the form during a final or closing visit and are encouraged to remind young people their thoughts and opinions about the service they receive are very important to TGP Cymru and they are welcome to share them in whichever way they feel comfortable.

To further encourage young people to share their feelings about the advocacy service we have also introduced a monthly prize draw, whereby children and young people who provide feedback will have the chance to win a £20 gift voucher. Although less young people provided feedback in this quarter when compared to quarter three we are confident that young people are able to provide feedback in a way that is accessible for them.

We are pleased to report an increase in young people providing feedback to the advocacy service this year, rising from 39 last year, to 55 this year.

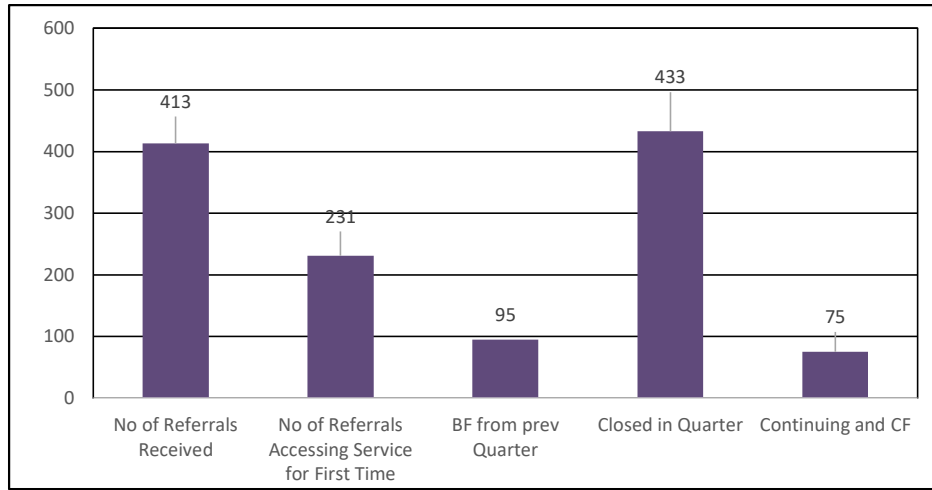
Feedback from the 55 young people who completed the consultation forms throughout the year has been overwhelmingly positive, with 52 of 55 stating they would use the service again.

While explaining why they felt the service was helpful, one young person said:

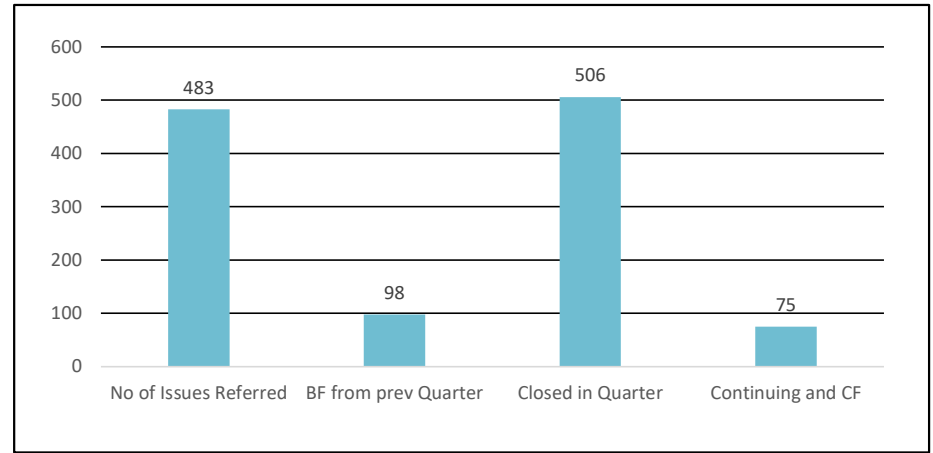
*"Because you said things when I could not."*

Further detail about young people's feedback, and examples of work undertaken by advocates this year, can be found in individual LA reports.

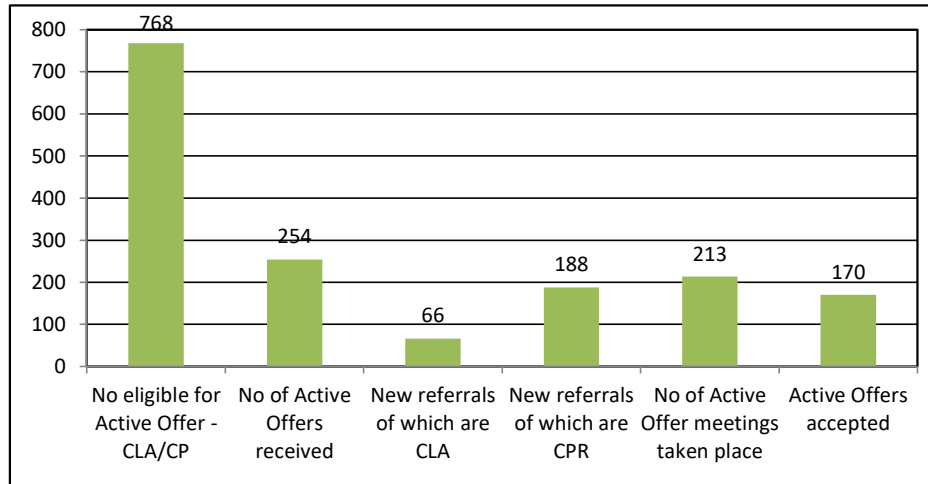
**1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy**



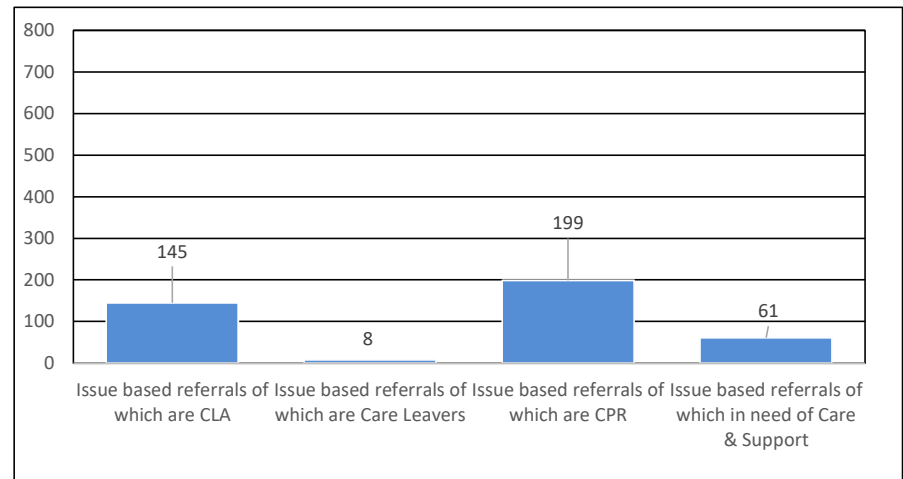
**1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy**



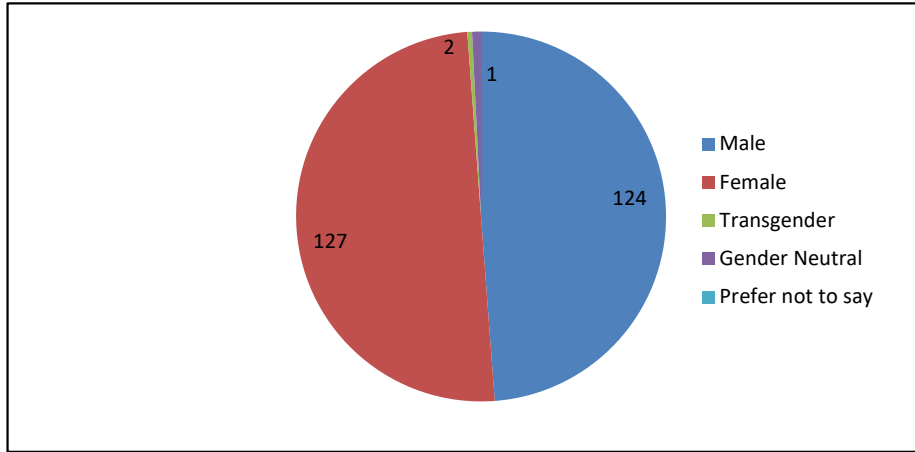
**2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer**



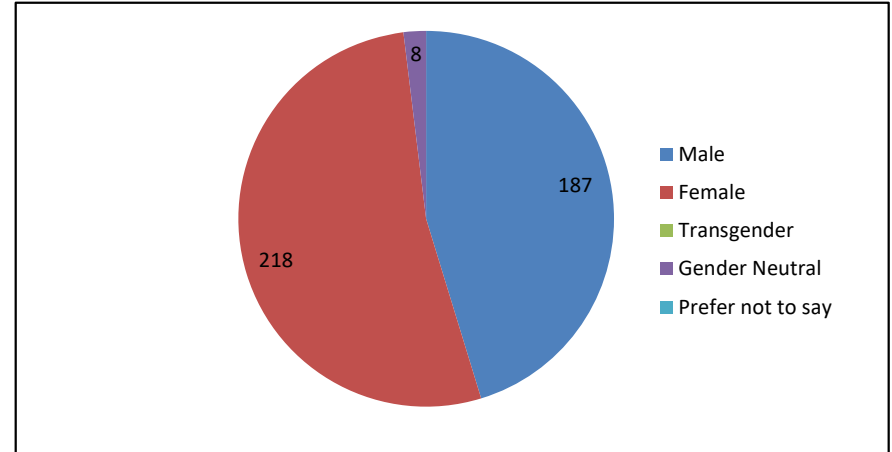
**2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based**



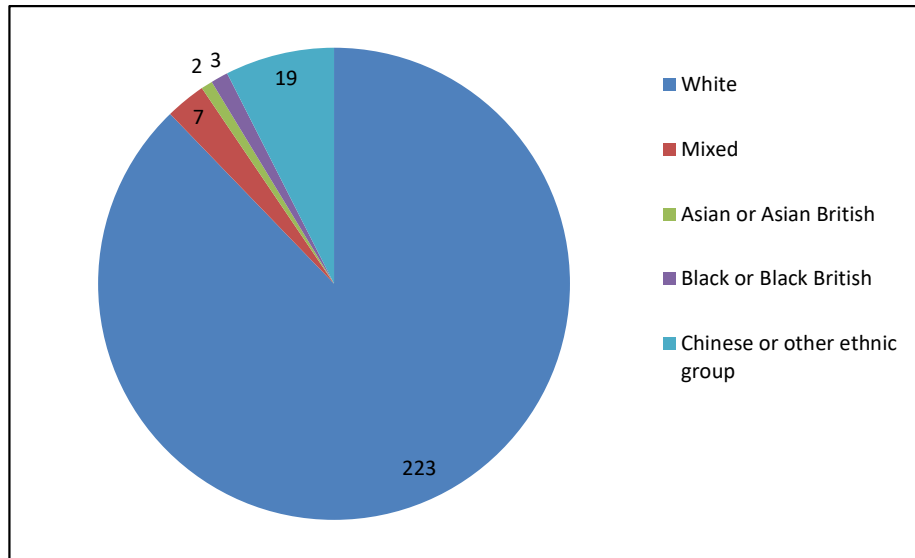
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



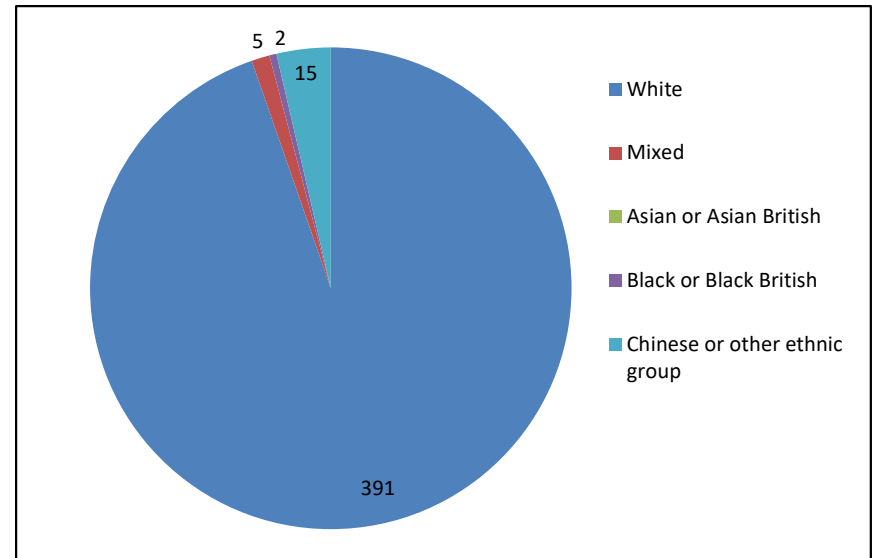
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



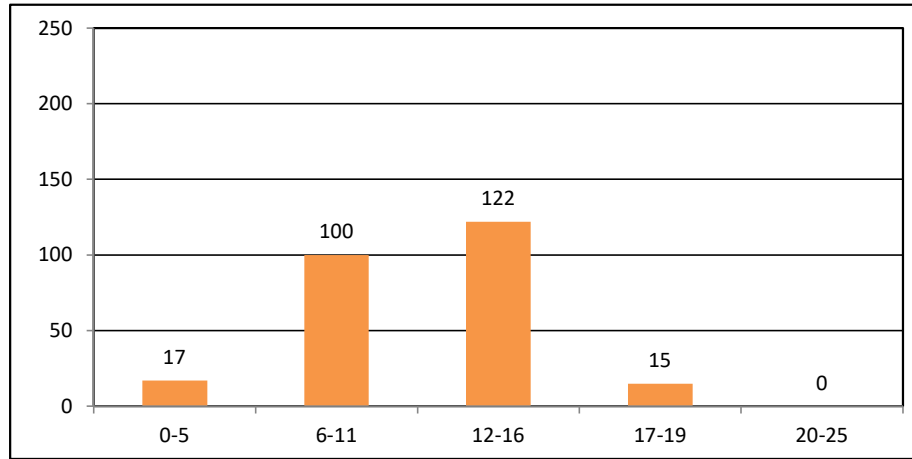
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



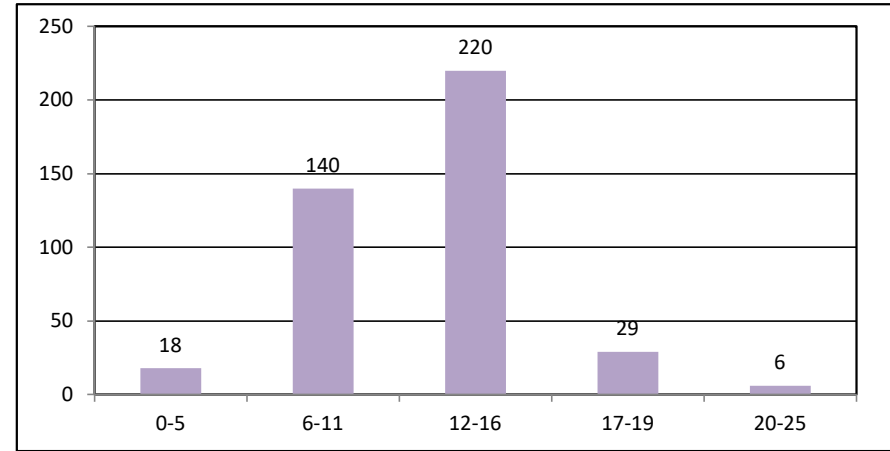
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



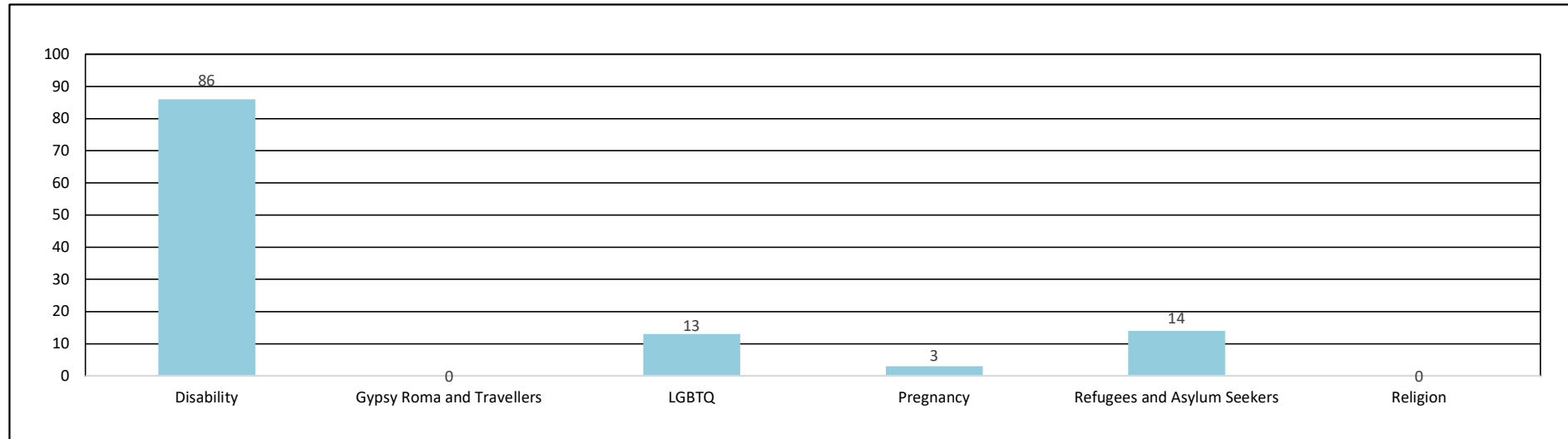
### 3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



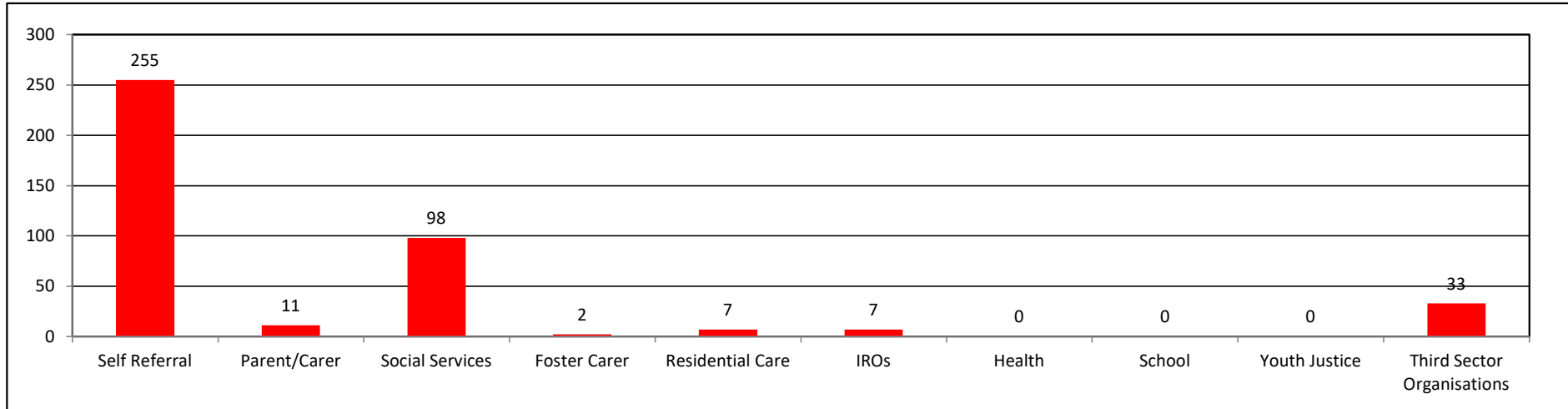
### 3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



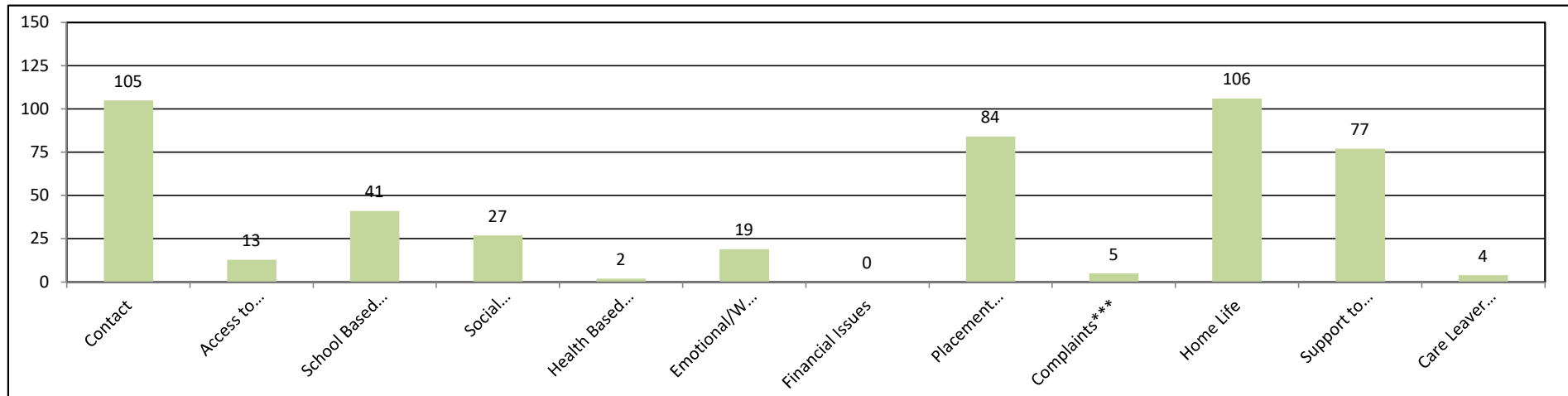
### 4. Protected Characteristics



### 5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



### 6. Issues Presented

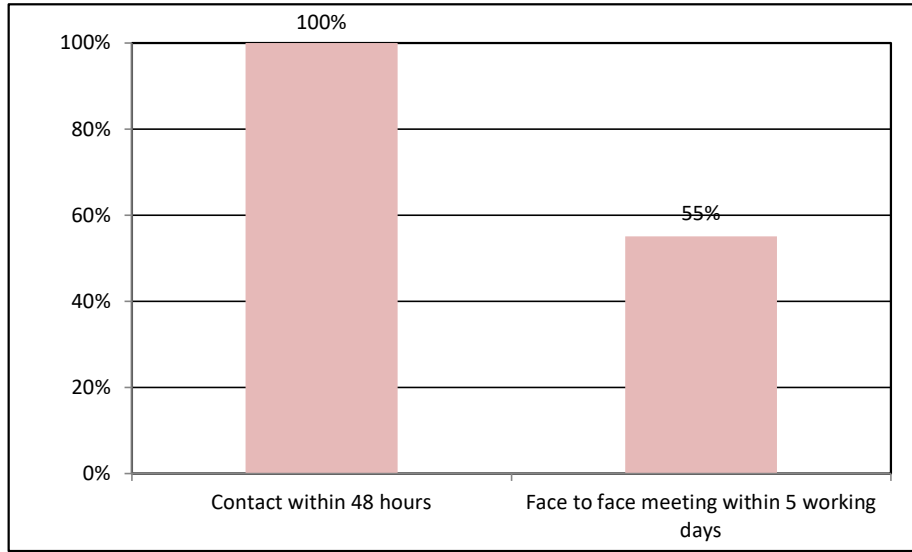


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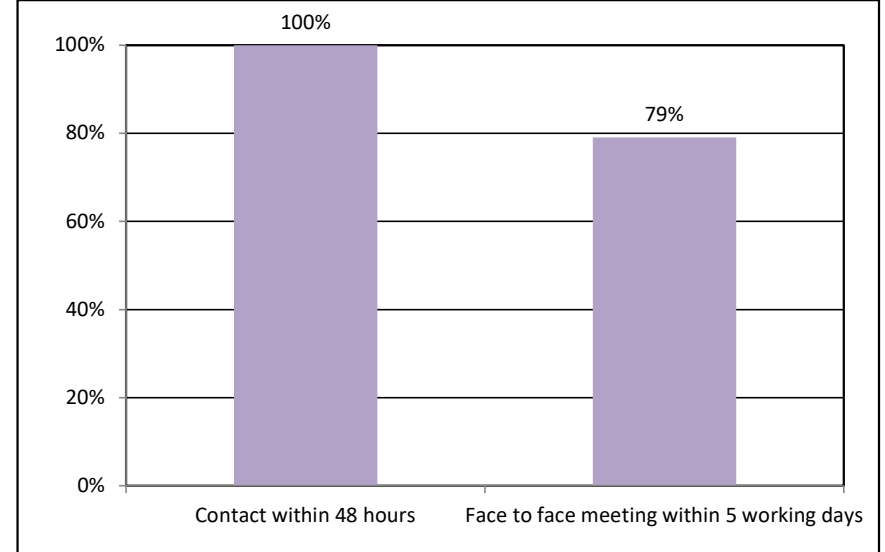
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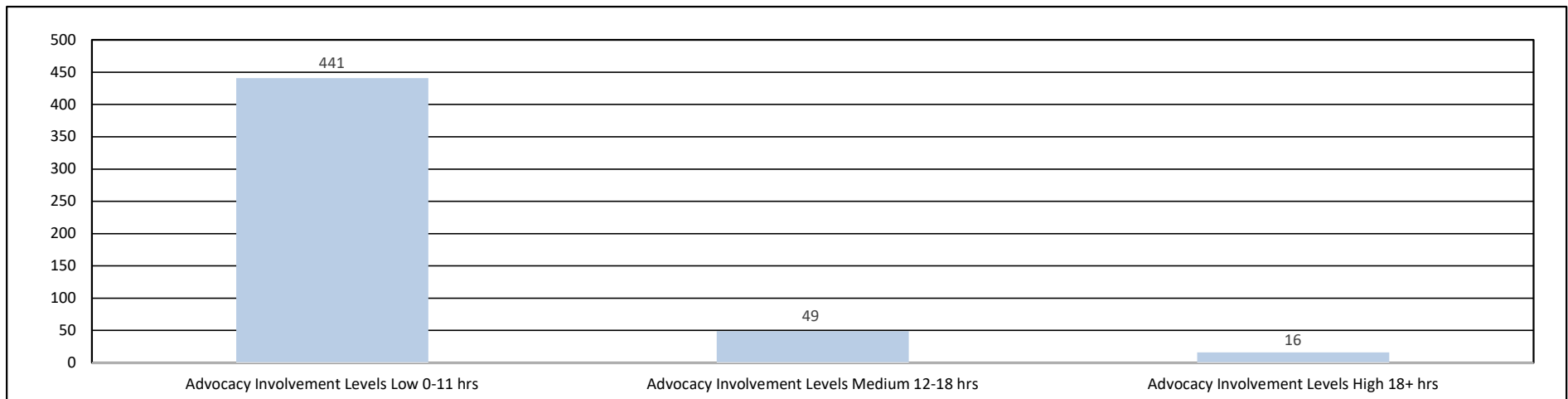
### 7. Service Performance - Active Offer



### Service Performance - Issue Based



### 8. Level of Advocacy Intervention at point of Issue Closure



## 9.Outcomes: linked to The National Advocacy Standards & Outcomes Framework

		Comments
<b>Outcome 1</b>	<b>Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible.</b>	<p>Across the two service areas, 67% of young people had contact with their advocate within five working days of referral.</p> <p>Advocates continue to support young people placed out of county, both virtually and in person if requested. Most young people lived in neighbouring authorities, but we have also received referrals for young people living in Pembrokeshire, Powys, Gwynedd and Lancashire among others this year.</p> <p>As soon as a new advocacy referral is received, our administrator posts a comprehensive advocacy pack to the child or young person. The pack includes lots of information about advocacy, our service and other support services available in Cwm Taf. The advocate is then able to follow up on this during their initial meeting and use the pack as a resource to introduce some of the key concepts such as advocacy and Children's Rights, directly with the child or young person. The young person is then able to keep the pack and have access to this information, even if they choose not to continue with advocacy support.</p> <p>As detailed above, the review of our RVA service will restart when the new RVA takes up his post at the end of the next quarter. This will ensure young people living in community homes in CTM have access to good quality and effective visiting advocacy services, supported by community home staff.</p>
<b>Outcome 2</b>	<b>Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.</b>	<p>Direct work with young people continues to take place during face-to-face visits, although occasionally advocates will contact young people over the phone. This sometimes happens following a request from a young person, or it might be offered if a visit cannot be arranged before a specific meeting. The advocate will always offer a follow up face-to-face visit in this situation.</p> <p>We ask the referrer to tell us where the young person would like to meet the advocate at the point of referral, and the advocate will always attempt to visit the young person at a place they have specified. This is usually in their home or at school, and advocates report many young people find it easier to share how they feel about their home life while at school, where privacy and confidentiality is often easier to maintain. This year, we have also received multiple requests from referrers and young people themselves to meet at alternative venues such as cafés and LA offices when a school visit is not an option.</p> <p>We continue to offer virtual contact to those few young people who prefer to engage over the phone or via a video call. Advocates report some older young people prefer to engage via phone and email, especially if they have work or education commitments.</p>

<b>Outcome 3</b>	<b>Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.</b>	<p>During this year, we have provided IBA to young people with a wide range of disabilities and learning needs including young people diagnosed with anxiety disorders, hearing impairment, ADHD, and ASD.</p> <p>When young people have additional learning needs, advocates always take advice from their social worker and others who know them best to communicate as effectively as possible.</p> <p>We received 13 IBA referrals for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people this year, and advocates have supported them to receive the service in the language of their choice.</p> <p>Four IBA referrals were received for pregnant young people this year.</p> <p>Young people identifying as transgender, gender neutral, and LGBTQ have also accessed IBA services this year.</p>
<b>Outcome 4</b>	<b>Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.</b>	<p>Young people consistently tell us they feel empowered to speak up for themselves following advocacy intervention and advocates always encourage young people to speak for themselves when they feel able to do so. This is reflected in young people's feedback, with 48 of the 55 young people providing feedback saying they felt more confident following advocacy support.</p> <p>This year, advocates have noted an increase in young people attending virtual and face to face meetings with the support of their advocate. In most cases, the advocate and the young person prepare for the meeting beforehand, and the advocate then reads out the wishes and feelings at the meeting. Often the young person is happy to speak themselves when asked any follow up questions with the support of the advocate.</p> <p>Young people report this as a positive experience and feel more confident about speaking because of the preparation and the attendance of their advocate.</p>



<b>Outcome 5</b>	<b>Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.</b>	<p>The CTM Advocacy Service Participation Lead will continue to be responsible for keeping up to date with participation and consultation opportunities within Cwm Taf Morgannwg.</p> <p>All young people receiving advocacy support will continue to be offered the opportunity to feedback to TGP Cymru to allow us to monitor the services provided and make improvements where needed. We will continue to make changes to our feedback process to ensure young people experience no barriers in expressing their views about the service they have received.</p> <p>As detailed above, we hope to restart a piece of consultation work with young people living in local authority community homes to capture their thoughts about visiting advocacy. Following this consultation, we will, in partnership with managers of the homes make any necessary changes to ensure all young people are able to access an effective visiting advocacy service.</p> <p>A Care Experienced member of the BYV forum was invited to be a member of the interview panel during the recruitment of a new Independent Professional Advocate during quarter four. He engaged in asking questions, scoring, and discussion following the interview, and offered invaluable insight into the skills and qualities he felt were needed to provide a quality advocacy service. The new IPA will take up her post in the next quarter.</p>
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# Agenda Item 6

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>4 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES &amp; WELLBEING</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>RAEANNA GRAINGER GROUP MANAGER, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE SERVICE &amp; SAFEGUARDING</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There are no effects on the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<p><b>The report details the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service between April 2023 to March 2024.</b></p> <p><b>The reports sets out the legislative framework that governs the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service. Primarily the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role is to ensure the child's care plan is appropriate and meeting their developing needs, that they challenge any issues of delay in achieving the objectives of the care plan and/or any issues of delay. The role has a strong emphasis on quality assurance and challenging the Local Authority when they are not satisfied in areas of decision making.</b></p> <p><b>The IRO's in Bridgend also undertake the chairing of Child Protection Conferences, their role is to ensure professionals make decisions based on evidence and safeguarding procedures. Most importantly the IRO Service must ensure the child's voice is central to decision making and that they are informed of their rights and their circumstances.</b></p> <p><b>There is a strong focus on qualitative data in the annual report and compliance rates but also strengthened processes and how the service has met the annual plan objectives.</b></p> <p><b>The report considers how the service has responded to increased demand and rising numbers of children subject to the Child Protection registration and what is being done to reduce this figure.</b></p>

	<b>The updated annual plan can be read in Appendix 2, and this highlights the aims for the next reporting period.</b>
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## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a report to Corporate Parenting Committee in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: IRO Annual Report 2023-2024

Appendix 2: IRO Action Plan

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The report considers the focused work undertaken in the reporting period to reduce the number of children subject to the Child Protection Register and care experienced. It identifies areas of compliance and the work being undertaken to fully embed the Signs of Safety practice model.

## **3. Current situation/ proposal**

- 3.1 The report highlights a wealth of improvements in the service, including recruitment and reduced numbers of children subject to the Child Protection Register. Significant strides have been made in the implementation of Signs of Safety compliant conferences and in how the service is taking forward communication with children and families.

## **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report; therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

## **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances,

the well-being goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – The IRO Service has a legal requirement to assure the quality of care planning is achieved for children and young people enabling them to reach their full potential in life.
- **Prevention** –the IRO service works closely with safeguarding practitioners and Early Help services in developing a comprehensive outcome focused plan for the child or young person, to maximise their opportunities and identify focused support at the earliest stage.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, to ensure care, support and protection of all and more specifically its most vulnerable. The report evidences consultation between professionals and partner agencies with a specific focus to the safe care planning and protection for children and young people within the County Borough of Bridgend.
- **Collaboration** – This is currently managed in order to provide the best possible intervention for children and young people across Bridgend.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the care experienced children and young people of Bridgend. The IRO service’s engagement with these individuals is essential to ensure their voices are heard and included in their meetings. The IRO service speak to children and young people and utilise consultation documents, quality monitoring forms, complaints process and advocacy services to support this. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard and responded to.

## 6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no specific climate change implications arising directly from this report.

## 7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 One of the core functions of the IRO Service is to promote children’s rights, ensure they receive a quality service and that their voice and the voice of their family is central to decision making.

This report sets out the work undertaken by the IRO Service in respect of safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children, young people and families.

The report sets out the role of the IRO Service in ensuring there are effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

**8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

**9. Recommendation(s)**

9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee notes this report and the IRO Service Action plan.

**Background documents**

None.

**Independent Reviewing Service**  
**Annual Report for the period**  
**April 2023 to March 2024**



**Report Context:**

- Introduction
- Legal Context
- Core IRO Functions
- Composition of the IRO Service
- Review Activity – Children subject to Child Protection
- Review Activity – Care Experienced children
- Number of Reviews and Timeliness
- Reviewing Performance
- Caseloads
- Business Support

**General Themes**

- Consultation
- Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints
- Achievements and Challenges
- IRO Service Development and Achievements
- IRO Service Priorities



## **Introduction**

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality-of-care planning is achieved. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) (2004) states this report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

This Independent Reviewing Service report focuses upon the work of the IRO Service from April 2023 to March 2024. As part of the service's quality assurance role, the report contains performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are Care Experienced, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also includes information on children subject of Child Protection plans and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.

The report also includes information that relates to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution of case disputes; IRO caseloads; participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period and service priorities for 2024-2025.

## **Legal Context**

The appointment of the IRO Service by local authorities is a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by the legal regulatory framework outlined below:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (detailed the requirement on local authorities in respect of the appointment of IROs)
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004
- Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015
- Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

## **Core Functions**

The Independent Reviewing Service has an important quality assurance function and works towards ensuring all children within the care of Bridgend County Borough Council have a robust effective care plan. This plan is aimed towards improving outcomes for children and young people in providing a stable and secure childhood where their health, education and emotional wellbeing is promoted through effective care planning. It is the function of the Independent Reviewing Service to ensure the care plan is appropriate and progresses safeguarding for children and young people whilst ensuring all their identified needs are being met.

Independent Reviewing Officers are required to independently review the care plans of all Care Experienced children (CEC) and those children with a Child Protection Plan and whose names are on the Child Protection Register (CPR). The Review meeting will include consultation with and attendance of relevant agencies (health, education, and Police etc.) and will usually include the child/young person, their Social Worker, carers, and family members.

Time scales for Reviews are set out in the Children Act (1989) and Section six of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014), with the first review taking place within 20 working days of placement. The next review is held within three months following the initial review and then subsequent reviews are held within six months from the second review. Subsequent reviews are

held every six months unless there has been an unplanned change of placement where a Review must be held within 20 working days.

The IRO Service has a statutory responsibility under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the IRO Guidance for Charing Child Protection Conferences and multi-agency Care Experience Reviews (CER), including those children placed for Adoption. Within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service has the following roles and responsibilities:

- To review and oversee the effectiveness and the appropriateness of the care plans for those children and young people for whom the local authority has responsibility and who are subject of a child protection plan and those children and young people within its care.
- The IRO Service are responsible for ensuring all CERs, Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) and Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC) take place within compliance as outlined in regulations. To provide a report for each meeting to include recommendations as to any changes to the child/young person's care plan.
- To monitor the progress of the care plan by tracking cases between reviews, to hold a Mid-Point Review with the Child's Social Worker of the recommendations with a view to following up where actions are not completed.
- To ensure the child/young person's rights are protected and enhanced.
- To ensure the voice of the child is heard throughout the care planning process and to monitor the child's wishes and feelings and ensure they are recorded and documented throughout the care planning process.
- To support and advise through a mentoring and coaching role to social work staff in relation to effective care planning.
- To raise IRO concerns through the agreed resolution protocol and to escalate unresolved concerns regarding care planning to the appropriate level of the local authority management structure. To consider the need to seek independent legal advice and possible referral of a case to CAF/CASS.
- The Quality Assurance function of the IRO Service aims to highlight concerns around specific cases and any trends relating to care planning practice. It also has a duty to highlight good practice within the service. The IRO Service will be linked to service wide Quality Assurance strategy.
- To ensure all CEC and young people are subject of health plans to promote health and development. The IROs have the responsibility to ensure the health plans are monitored and meeting the children's needs with the CER process.
- All CEC and young people are subject to Personal Education Plans (PEP). The social worker and school are responsible for ensuring this is in place, but the child's IRO will ensure this and make any recommendation and timescale in the CER should a PEP not be in place.
- Under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) 2014, the role of the IRO has expanded to cover for the child's case and not just the review and this is set out in the IRO Standards.

### **Composition of the IRO Service**

The current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience, and all have been qualified social workers for a substantial period. Since March 2024 There is a new Full Time permanent Manager in post. Currently the team is comprised of:

One full-time Manager (Permanent)

Seven full-time IROs (permanent)

One permanent member of staff who works three-and- a half days per week

One permanent member of staff who works three days per week.

One permanent member working 2.5 days a week.

Two agency staff members one full time one 3 days per week.

During the period under review, the team has experienced long-term sick leave, and one full time person remains on sick leave. In response to the changes in Signs of Safety practice model, and increased demand in 2022-23, the local authority has agreed funding for three full time IRO posts for the team. This recruitment process is almost completed and will be in post before December 2024.

### **Caseloads**

The average full time IRO caseload is currently between 55 - 65 cases and part time equivalent which is significantly lower than the previous report period where this was 80 - 90 cases. The Previous report for 2022-23 highlighted the caseload pressures and high caseloads in Bridgend comparatively to other local authorities and the comparative data. During the financial year from April 2023 to March 2024 the caseloads have slowly decreased meaning referrals to our service for an allocated worker have also reduced. This is due to a service wide focus on strategies to reduce and look for alternative family-based safety plans for children.

Since the Covid pandemic, the IRO Service has undertaken its duties virtually via MS Teams. As a team we have successfully managed to meet our statutory duties in terms of compliance in both the Care and Child Protection arena. This continues to work well; many children, young people, and parents opt to continue with this method. However, there is now more flexibility with IRO's offering face to face meetings where a child has stated a preference or if family circumstances require this such as with BSL interpreters. IROs as of September will be committing to being office based twice a week full time equivalent, to ensure there is opportunity for connecting, networking and advising.

The IRO Standards require the IRO to undertake far greater levels of tracking in between CERs, this also includes a mid-point review to ensure the recommendations are on-track and to ensure progress is being made and the child's care plan continues to reflect their needs. The IROs continue to complete quality assurance documents following every CER or Child Protection Conferences, this document requires cross reference against the child's file and is used to identify any outstanding pieces of work or documents to which the child's/young person's social worker and team manager are alerted. There will be further work in 2024-2025 period to ensure this fits within an agreed Quality Assurance framework currently being developed within the Local Authority.

An over-arching principle of the service has been to maintain the same IRO wherever possible so that children and young people have an element of continuity in their lives. Often the IRO is the only person who has remained consistent for the children who are often faced with changes of social workers, team structures and placements. This strategy also ensures that valuable information held by IROs, particularly knowledge of the child's history and family dynamics is not lost.

In the last report 2022-2023 the Service saw an "*unprecedented increase in the number of children whose names are on the CPR*". The highest point was in January 2023 at 306. Since January 2023, we have seen a gradual reduction in the numbers of children whose names are on the CPR; and this is currently 160.

### **Signs Of Safety Model**

The Signs of Safety model of whole system Social Work practice that the Local Authority has committed to will require Child Protection Conferences to be held in person, with families, their safety network and our partner agencies. The belief for our Service is that this model of practice is a way to support family safety planning and strengthen existing practice. The IRO Service are trained in Signs of Safety and continue to develop month by month, currently preparing our practice and systems to be in alignment with the model. We are aiming to go live with this practice model for all Initial Conferences in October 2024 using existing rooms in Civic for our meetings with families. The

Service is offering joint sessions with other teams and Business Support to develop Signs of Safety practice before this date.

The model requires the IROs to spend greater time preparing and liaising with the family and partner agencies prior to the conference. Certainly, initially we envisage this to be more time consuming and will require the IROs to have greater capacity in terms of the caseloads. However, we have successfully appointed two IROs recently, once they are in post this will enable us to let go of our agency IROs and allow for greater capacity in the team and meet our commitment to caseloads in the region of 50.

The previous Annual report 2022-23 identified that *“We continue to meet our statutory responsibilities however many areas of the IRO service have not had the focus we would like, and we recognise to continue to improve standards across the board, we need to invest in the staff and provide them with the tools and time to undertake their duties to the highest standards. This includes IRO specific training, reflection time, and sufficient time in the working day to undertake meaningful work.”* The team are now committed to meeting in person regularly, to working together to embed the new model of practice and to continue to address areas that need development. IRO Team Manger has met with Training and development to explore additional training, the team are attending the IRO specific All Wales Conference in September and there will be regular sessions offered during the month to look at specific areas of practice.

In this period the IRO Service has developed an animation to explain the process of a Signs of Safety conference to children, their family and partner agencies.

The service has fully embraced the model and is utilising many elements of the model in meetings already. The reason for not holding Signs of Safety conferences up until now has been the challenge of identifying suitable rooms, however this has now been resolved.

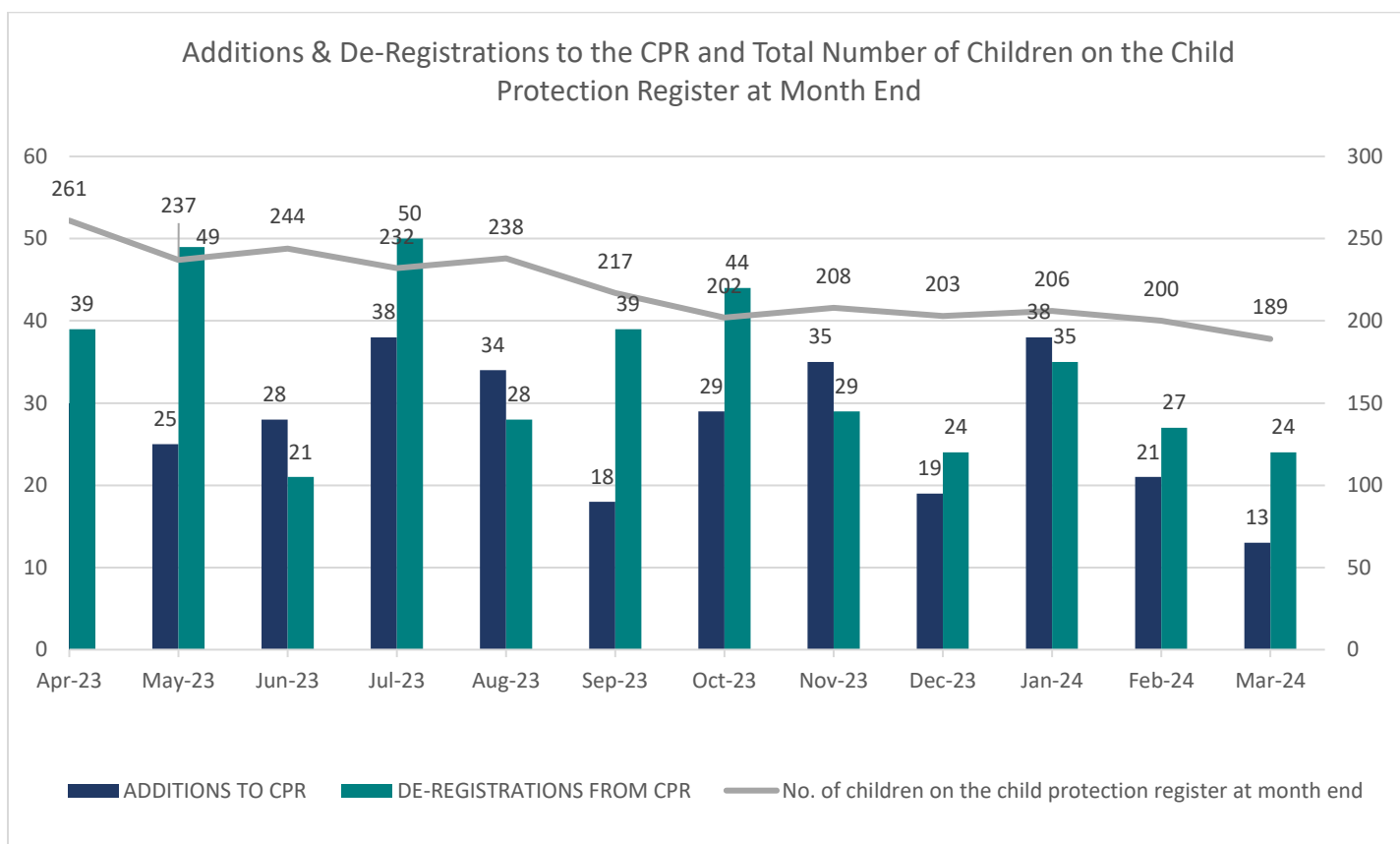
### **Continuous improvement strategy**

In this period some changes have been implemented to support the local authority’s objectives of reducing the length of time children’s names remain on the CP register:

- Monthly meetings between the IRO Service Manager and the Group Managers and relevant personnel looking at Continuous Improvement
- IRO Service Manager attends panel for children who are currently Looked After under Section 76, or in High Cost out of County Placements with a view to sharing information and having oversight of planning and quality assurance issues.
- Weekly reflection meetings with Service manager Safeguarding and core personnel in connection with targeted themes- this commences with identified group of children removed from register at first review.
- Signs of Safety meaningful measures meetings with regards to the workstreams for Signs of Safety implementation and learning.
- IRO Service Manager audits all cases of request for an ICPC is received and looks at whether there are any qualitative issues and link into the relevant team.
- Where IRO’s identify cases at the second RCPC where limited progress has been made, they inform the Group Manager of their concerns. The Group Manager then examines the case and where appropriate arrange a consultation with the Social Worker to consider all options to progress the plan.
- If a conference chair recommends legal advice should be sought, they will inform the Group Manager to raise awareness of the cases being escalated.
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## Child Protection Register (CPR) Population

Chart 1 – Child Protection Register Data from APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2024

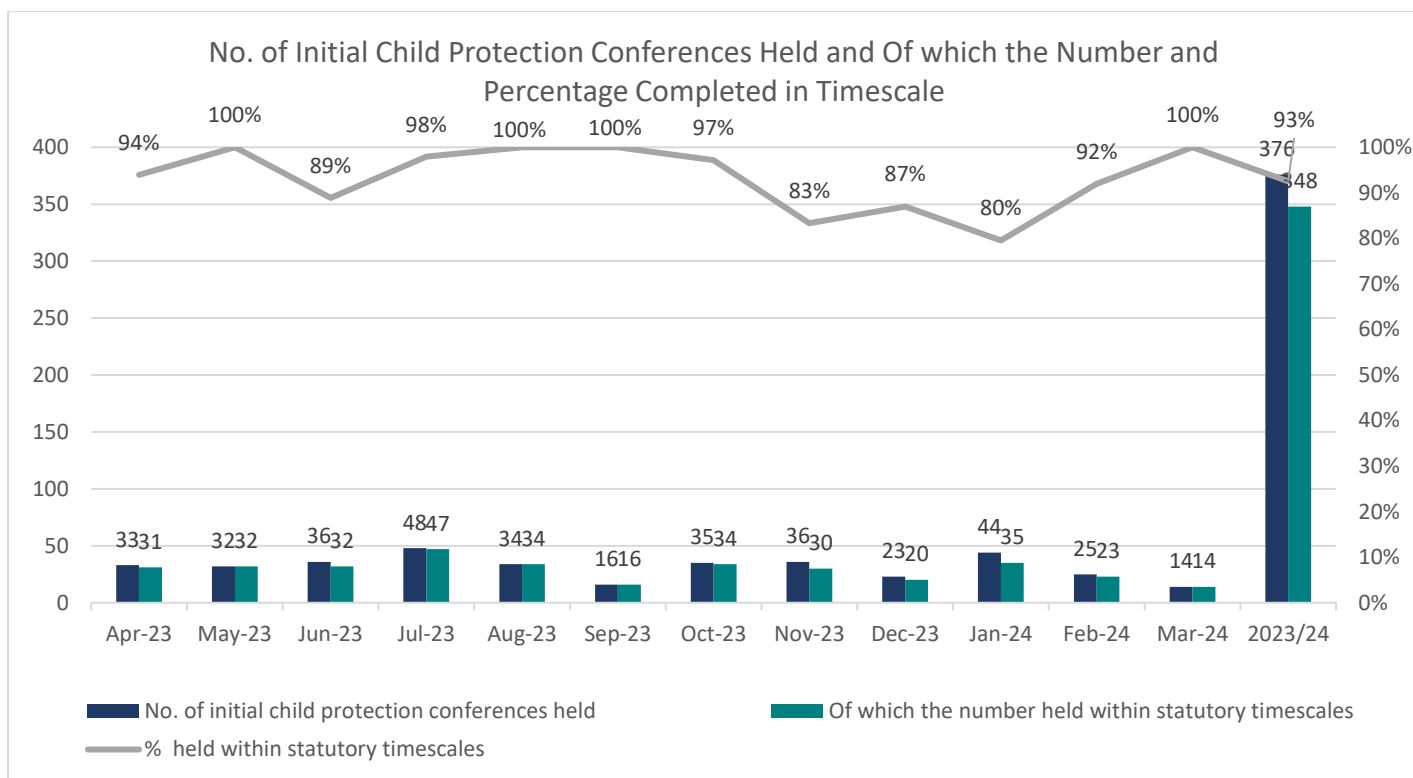


The number of children subject to Child Protection registration continued to decrease throughout this period with the highest end of month figure being in January 2023 at which time there were 306 children’s names on the CPR. This steadily decreased through 2023 – 24 to 189. In total, there were 328 children’s names added to the CPR and 409 names removed from the CPR during this period.

The reduction has been steady and consistent and is a result of targeted work and the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model.

The strengthened workforce in the Safeguarding Hubs has also assisted as changes in Social Workers has been reduced. The Signs of Safety model has enabled practitioners to slow down their thinking and been very clear about the risks to a child. This has resulted in more children being open on a Care and Support basis and being diverted from the CPR.

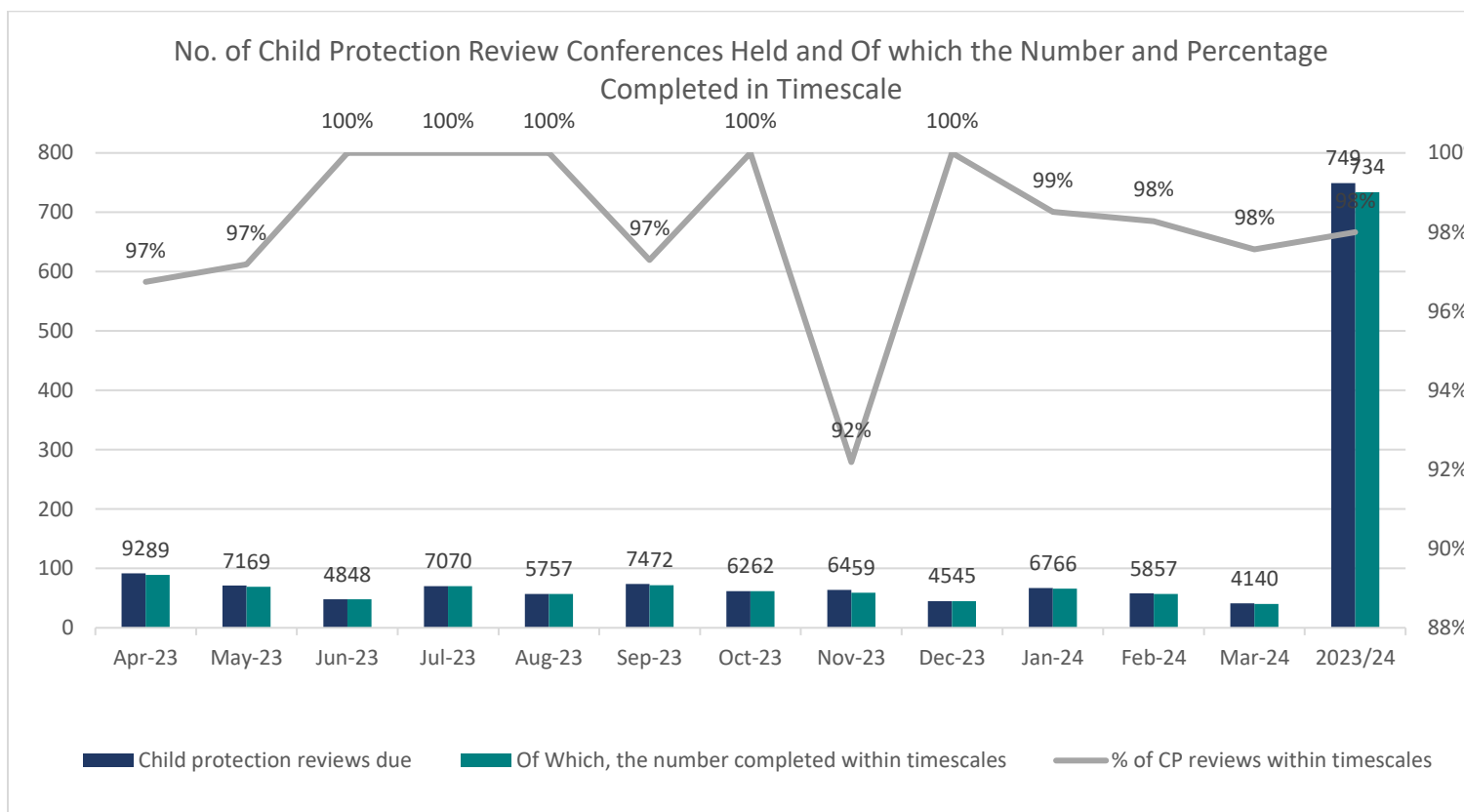
**Chart 2 – Number of ICPCs and Number Held Within Statutory Timescales**



During the period of April 2023 – March 2024, the IRO Service chaired 376 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) of which 93% were held within statutory timescales. Whilst performance remains in the top quartile, there has been a decrease of 4% convened within statutory timescales in the same period 2022-2023.

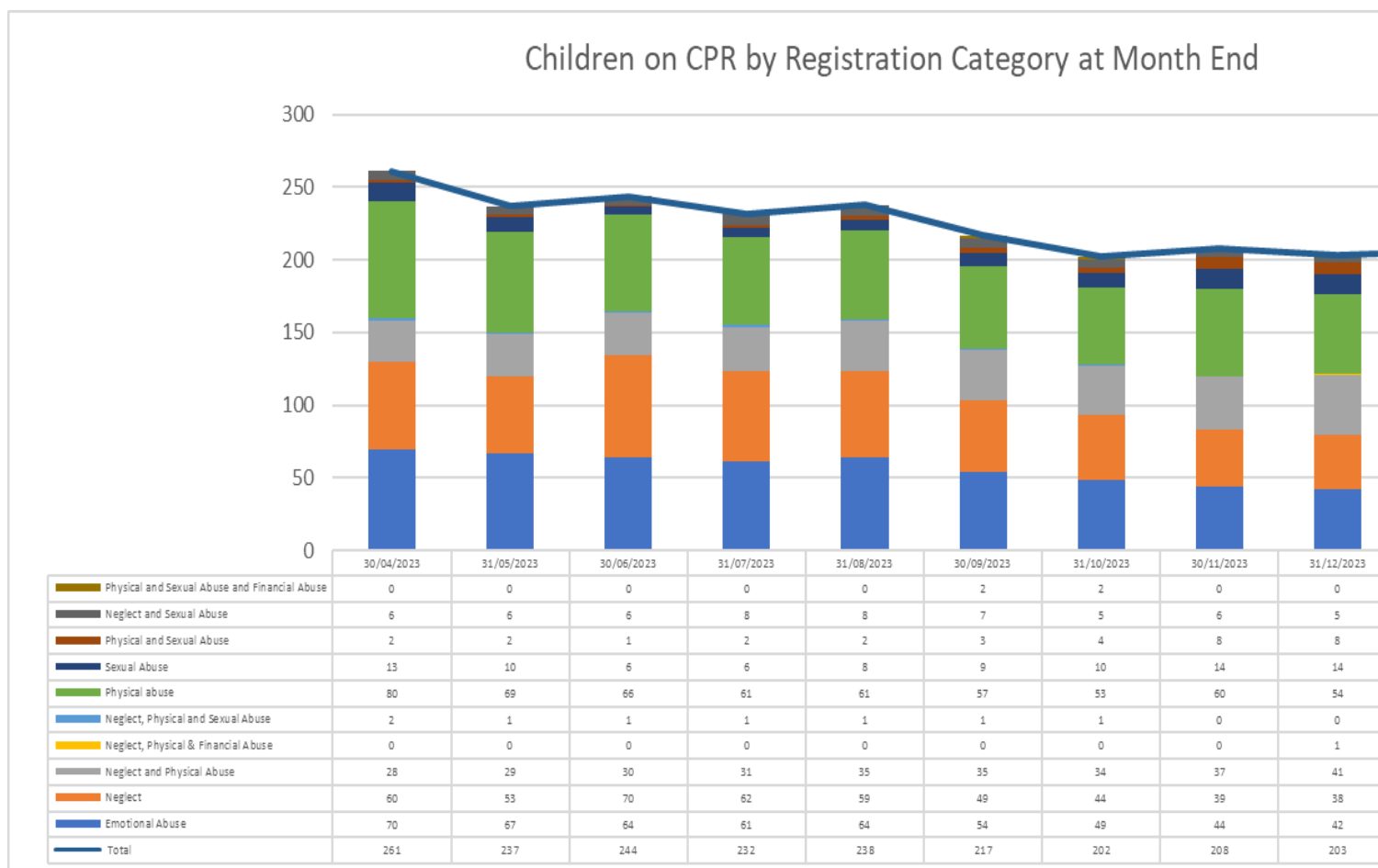
It has been recognised that the early stages of the change to our business support model impacted on performance. This is being closely monitored and addressed with colleagues (more detail is provided under the Business Support section at page 20).

**Chart 3 – No. of CP Reviews Held and No. in Compliance**



The IRO Service held 749 Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC) in the period compared with 659 and 508 in the previous reporting years. This represents an increase in the service despite reducing numbers on the Child Protection register. Despite the increase in the numbers of RCPCs, the IRO Service was able to convene every RCPC within overall 98% statutory timescales. There was a significant dip in November 2023 in performance, this was because of sickness in the IRO Service which resulted in conferences not being reconvened within timescales.

## Chart 4 – CPR Categories



As can be seen from this chart, there has been a change since the previous report in that Physical Abuse is the most common category of registration overall. However, if we consider the data overall and combine the categories which include Neglect, it remains high throughout the period under review. It is common that Emotional Abuse is frequently used when the issue of the case is parental domestic abuse.

### Definitions of the Categories of Abuse:

#### Physical Abuse

Physical abuse means deliberately hurting a child or young person. It includes physical restraint, such as being tied to a bed, locked in a room, inflicting burns, cutting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, or choking, stabbing, or shooting, withholding food or medical attention, drugging, denying sleep, inflicting pain, shaking, or hitting babies, fabricating or inducing illness (FII).

#### Emotional or Psychological Abuse

This describes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or financial abuse (and includes abuse taking place in any setting, whether in a private dwelling, an institution, or any other place).

#### Sexual Abuse

There are two different types of child sexual abuse. These are called contact abuses and non-contact abuse. Contact abuse involves touching activities where an abuser makes physical contact with a child, including penetration. It includes sexual touching of any part of the body whether the child's wearing clothes or not, rape or penetration by putting an object or body part inside a child's



mouth, vagina, or anus, forcing, or encouraging a child to take part in sexual activity, making a child take their clothes off, touch someone else's genitals or masturbate. Non-contact abuse involves non-touching activities, such as grooming, exploitation, persuading children to perform sexual acts of the internet and flashing. It includes encouraging a child to watch or hear sexual acts, not taking proper measures to prevent a child being exposed to sexual activities by others, meeting a child following sexual grooming with the intent of abusing them, online abuse, including making, viewing or distributing child abuse images allowing someone else to make, view, or distribute child abuse images, showing pornography to a child, sexually exploiting a child for money, power, or status (child exploitation).

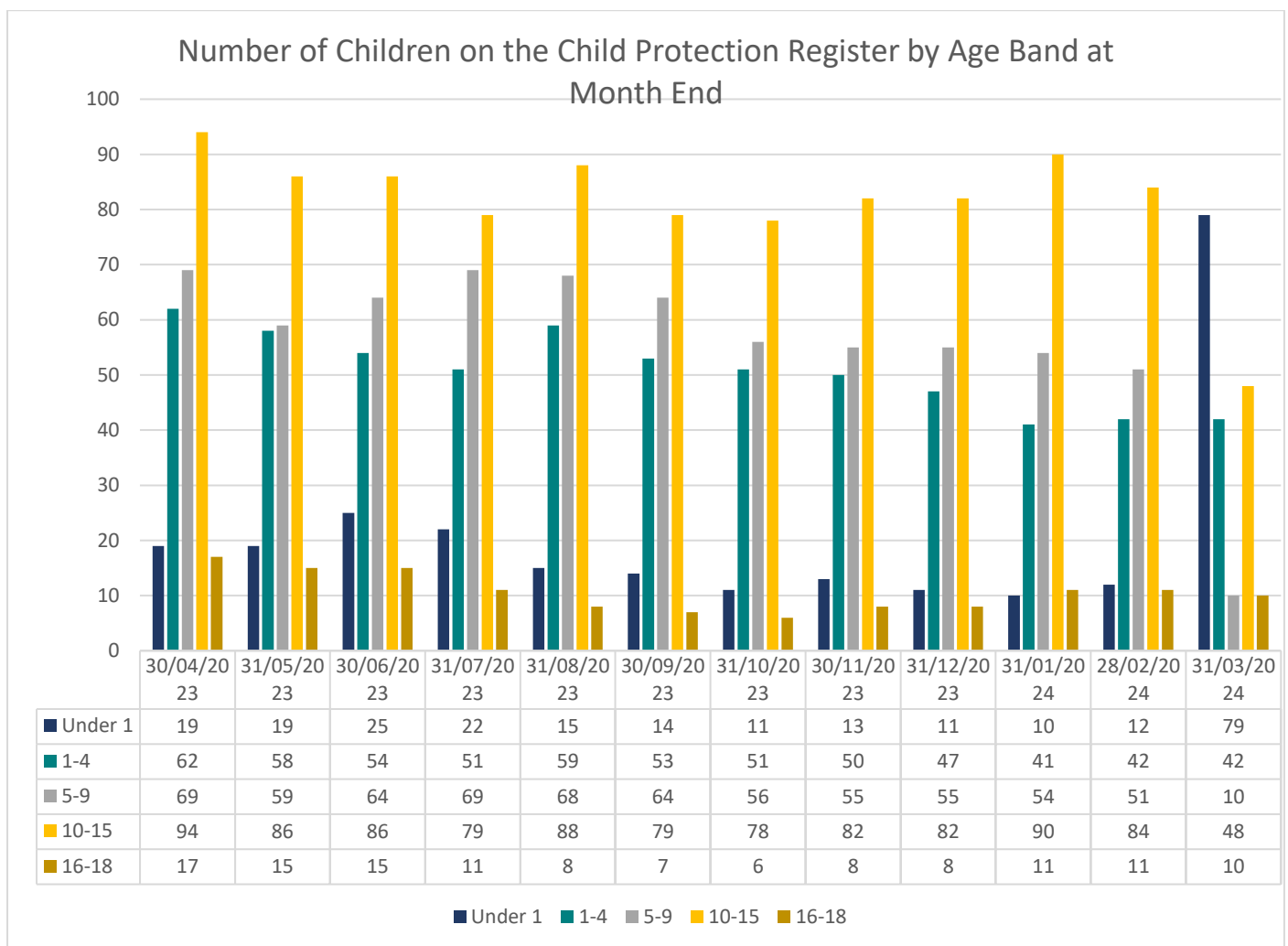
### Financial Abuse

Financial abuse includes theft, fraud, pressure about money, misuse of money.

### Neglect

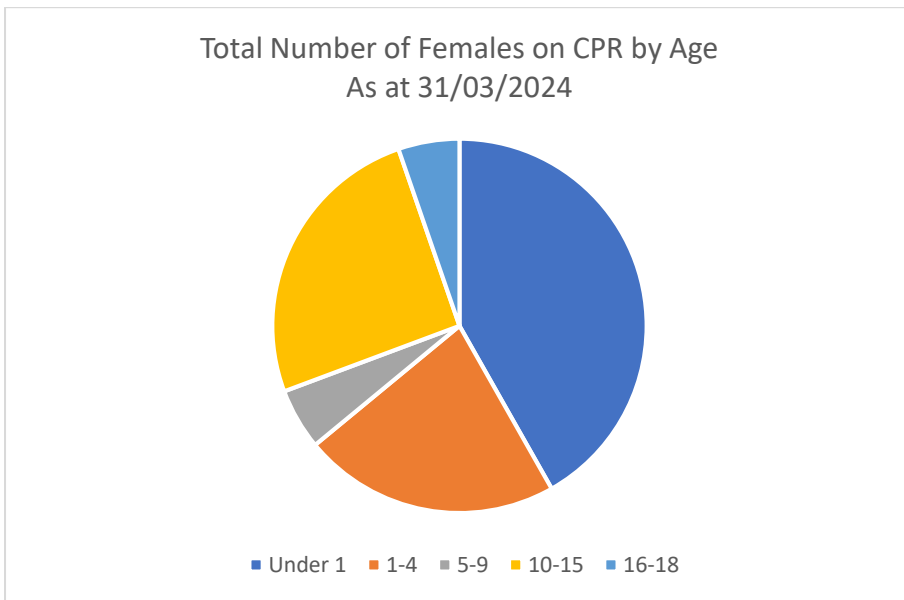
This means failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional, social, or psychological needs, which results in an impairment of the child's wellbeing (for example, an impairment of the child's health).

### Chart 5 – CPR – Gender and Ages

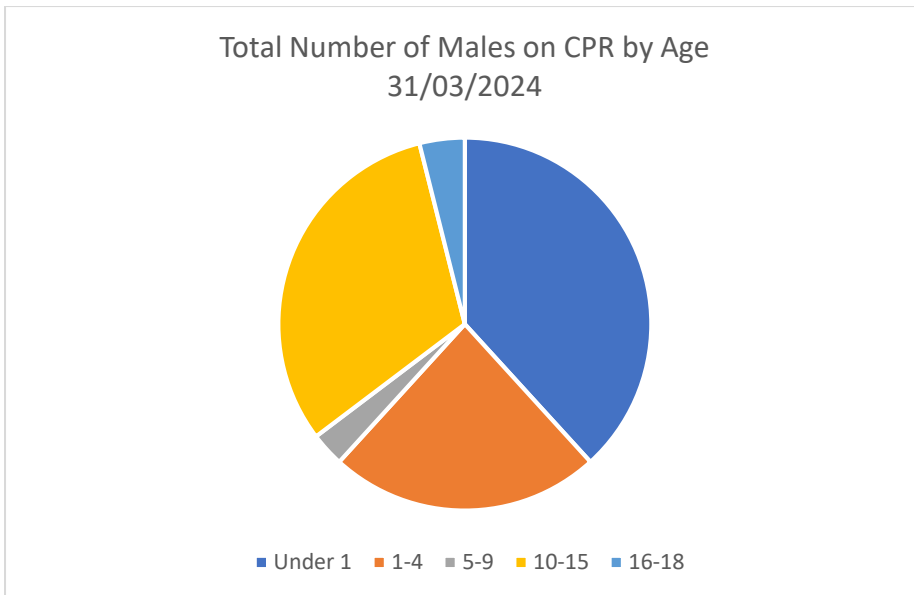


In Chart 5, we can see that on average each month, children between the ages of 10-15 years make up the majority of those on the Child Protection Register. Similarly, Chart 6 and 7 indicates that female children between the ages of 10 - 15 years make up most children whose names are on the Child Protection Register. This is a slight shift from previous year in which this was male same age group.

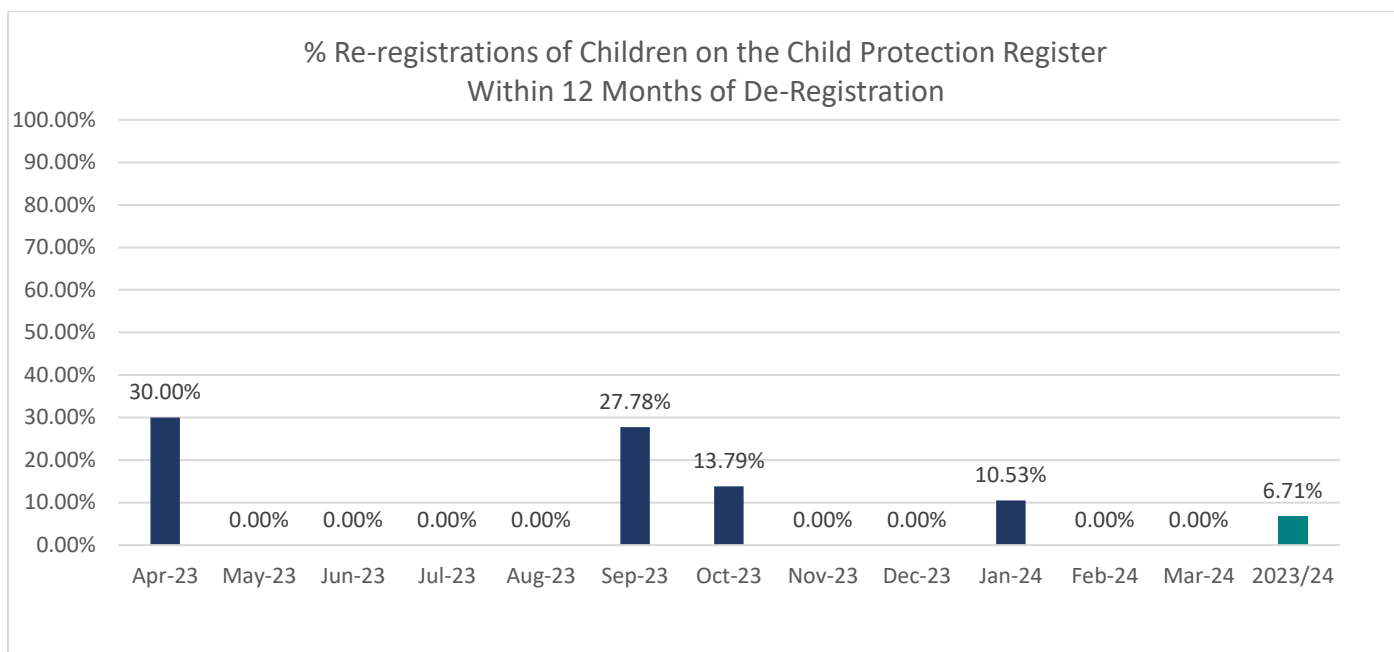
**Chart 6 – Total No. of Females on CPR as at 31/03/2023 by age**



**Chart 7 - Total No. of Males on CPR as at 31/03/23 by age**

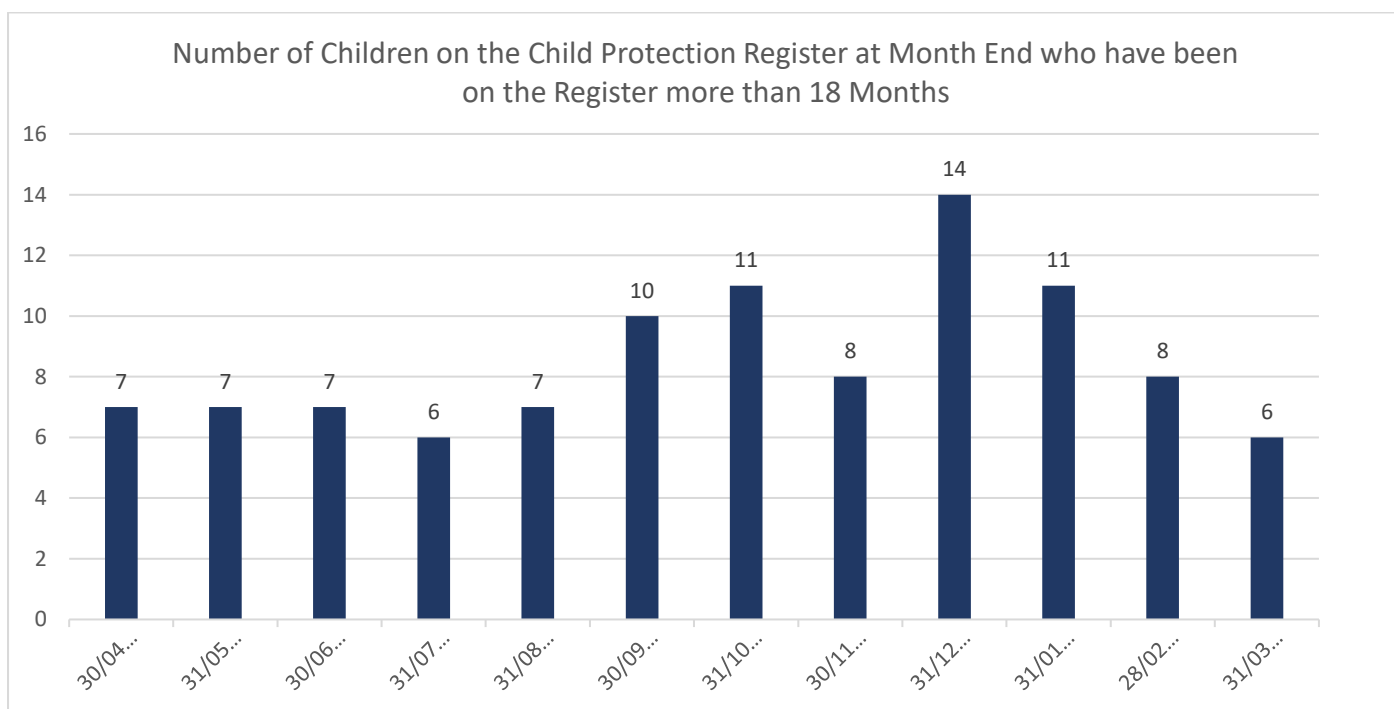


### **Chart 8 – Re-registration within 12 Months of De-registration**



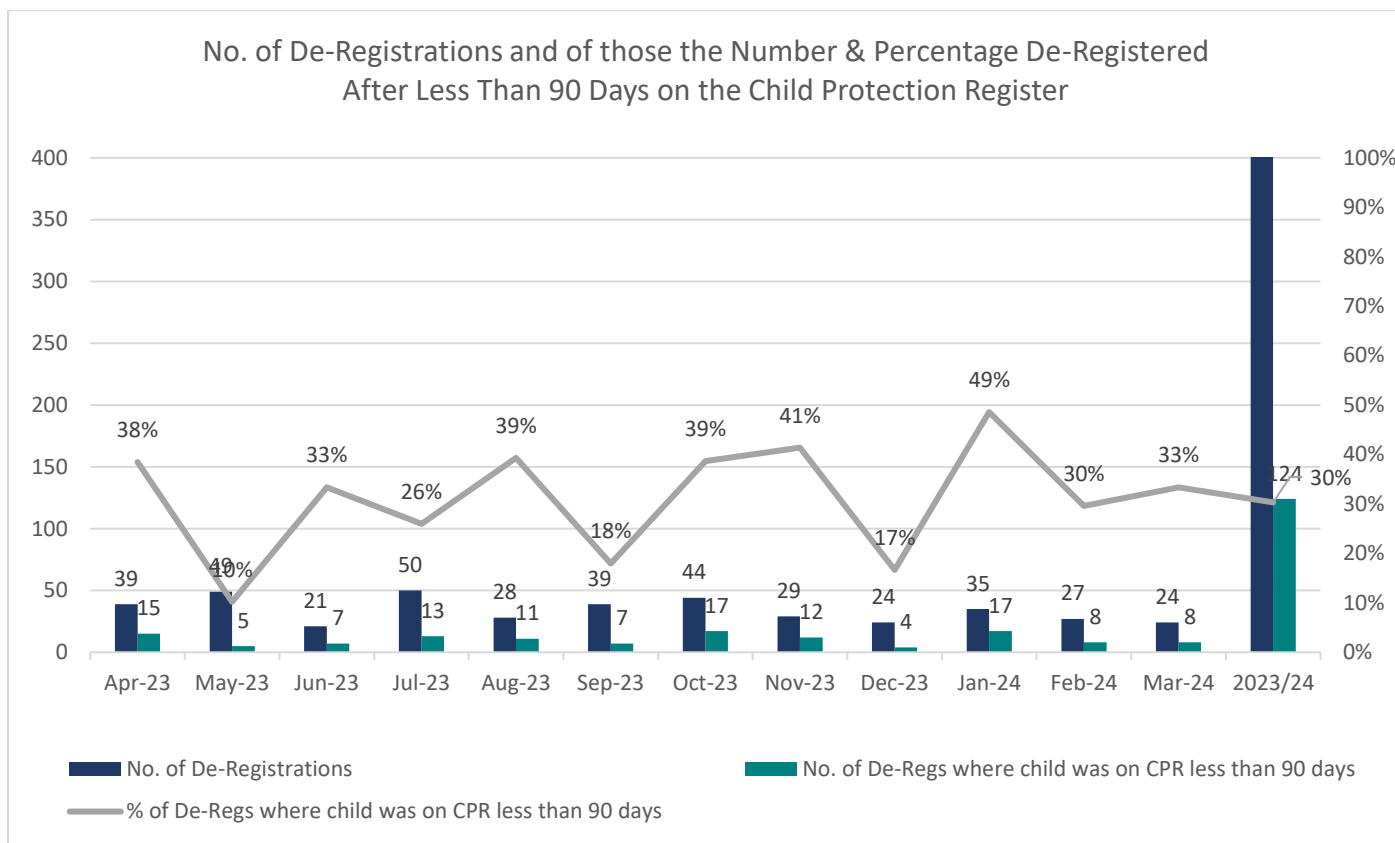
Any case that returns to an ICPC within 12 months of being de-registered will be audited by the IRO Service Manager to scrutinise the processes that were followed and consider themes and any lessons that can be learnt. There has been a reduction in re-registration from the previous year period. Our numbers of re-registrations compared to our regional partners is significantly lower. This evidences we are removing children from the CPR safely and appropriately with the right support and strategies in place to prevent an escalation and a further period of registration within a year.

### **Chart 9 - Children subject to the CPR for more than 18 months.**



The IRO Service Manager and the Principal Officer for the Safeguarding Hubs have agreed to meet monthly to consider the children who have been subject to the CPR for more than 18 months. The Principal Officer will then hold case mapping sessions with the Social Workers to assist in moving the case on and creating change.

**Chart 10 - Children whose names were removed from the child protection register at first review conference (less than 90 days on CP register)**



When a child is de-registered from the CPR at the first review, this suggests they were made subject to the register prematurely or inappropriately, we have identified too many children have followed this path and as such specific audit work is being undertaken to look at themes and learning. One identified explanation is our previous Agency Managed Team-Innovate. They experienced a change of Team manager in this reporting period and with that change came a shift in threshold. Essentially many more cases were put to an ICPC that in hindsight and after case mapping and dip sampling we identified there were missed opportunities to work with the family on a Care and Support basis. The Innovate contract was ended in August 2024 as such we hope to see greater consistency in the IAA Teams in the next reporting period.

**Children’s Participation at Child Protection Conferences**

Children’s participation at their ICPC and RCPC is hugely important and something we would like to see an increase in. The Signs of Safety model will support this, and we plan to commence holding Signs of Safety conferences in October 2024. We accept it may not be appropriate for children or young people to attend part or all the meeting but there are mechanisms in place to enable them to attend part of the meeting, the use of advocates will also support children to attend and understand their meeting.

It was identified last year that the IRO Team will lead on the development of a new consultation document to better support hearing their voice. However, this was postponed due to the implementation of Signs of Safety and the much greater use of direct work with children to ascertain their wishes and feelings. Surveys have however been developed to be undertaken with families around their experience of child protection conferences. We will use the survey data as a baseline for comparison following the roll out of Signs of Safety conferences. Once this is embedded, we plan to undertake surveys with children and young people who attend their conferences to consider how we can improve and to recognise what is working well.

## Care Experienced Population

All children who are placed with Foster Carers are allocated a named IRO on the same day the IRO Service receive the notification from the Childcare Teams. This is a statutory requirement and is consistently met by the service.

**Chart 11 – Number of Child who became looked after and those who ceased to be looked after**

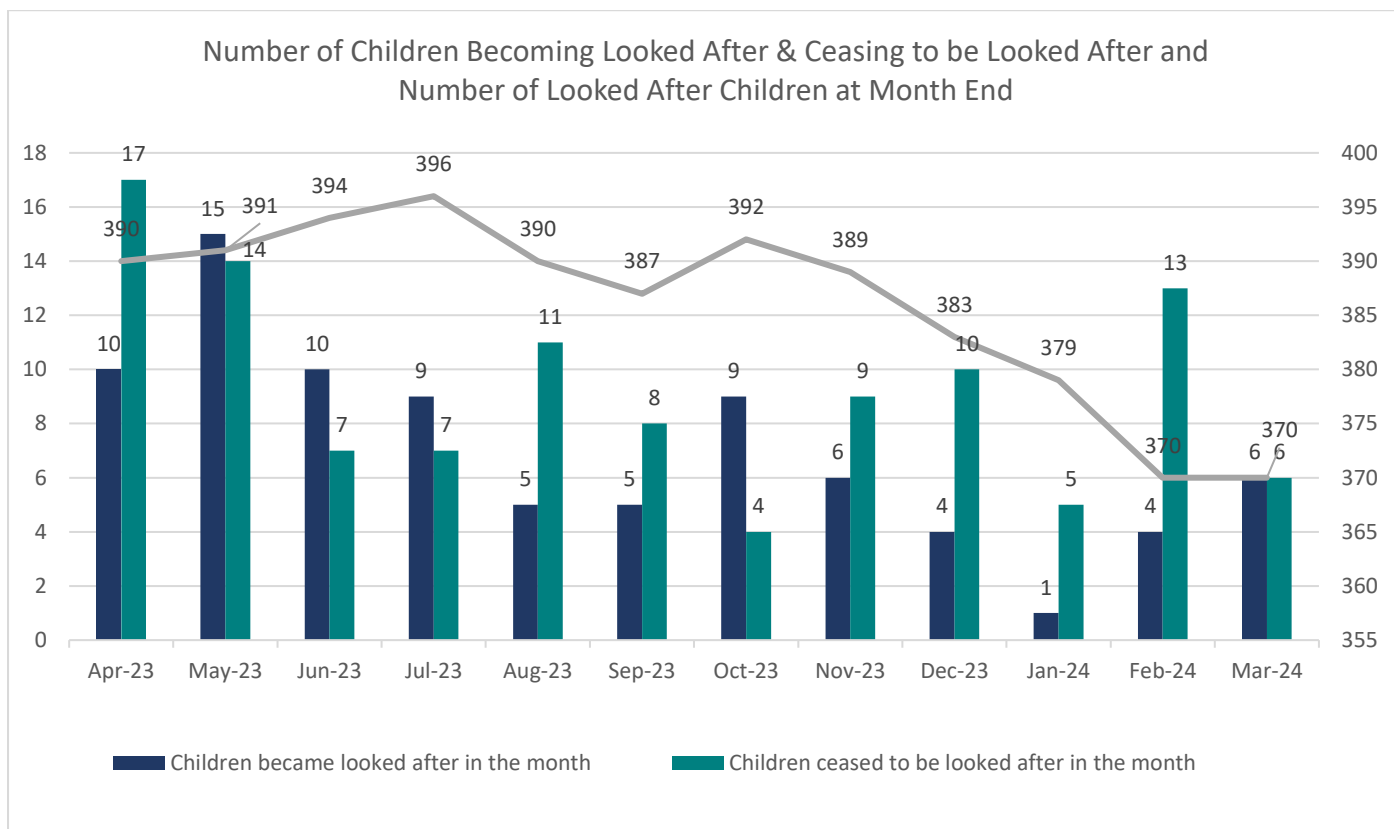


Chart 11 details the number of children who were in the care of Bridgend County Borough Council over the period from April 2023 – March 2024. This is a decrease from the same period in 2022 - 2023 which peaked at 400. Chart 9 highlights the number of admissions and the number of children who ceased to be looked after by Bridgend County Borough Council. In total 84 children came into the care of the local authority whilst 111 children left the care of the local authority.

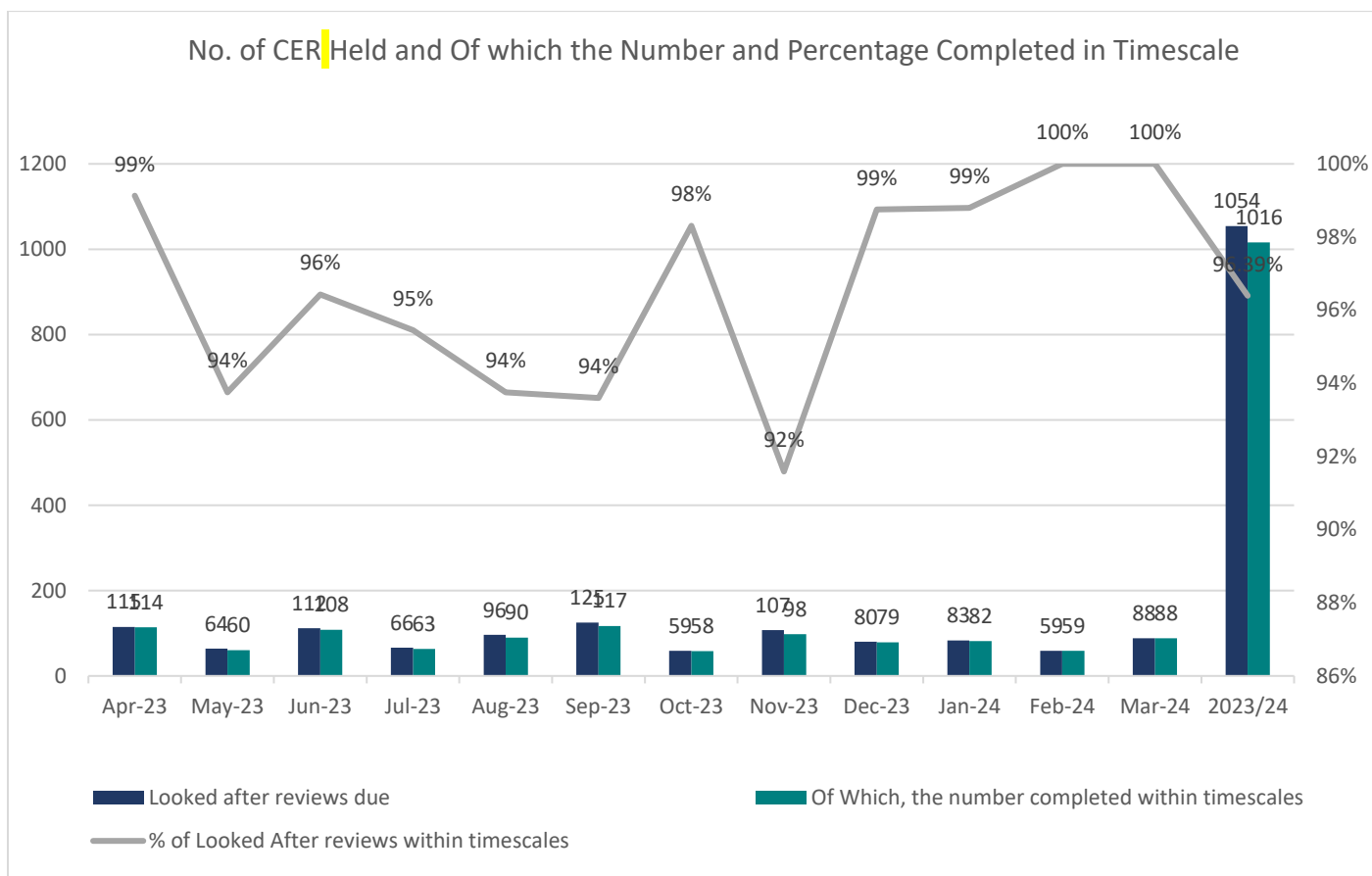
There is targeted work in place to ensure that children who can remain with family or return home, do so in a planned and safe way.

The Signs of Safety model also supports children being diverted from becoming care experienced. The model emphasises the importance of families finding their own solutions to problems within their own network of family members, friends and community services. The model makes identifying the risks much clearer but also recognises the strengths and what is working well. This enables families to feel empowered and part of the solution.

Research tells us families working with statutory services often feel ‘done to’ and largely powerless, the Signs of Safety model seeks to change this and puts families in the centre of decision making and change. When families feel confident and take greater ownership of the situation we see greater buy-in and a greater determination to work with services. This can often prevent the child from becoming care experienced or requiring a child protection plan. We work with families to develop safety plans whilst building on the existing strengths, growing their confidence, resilience and ability

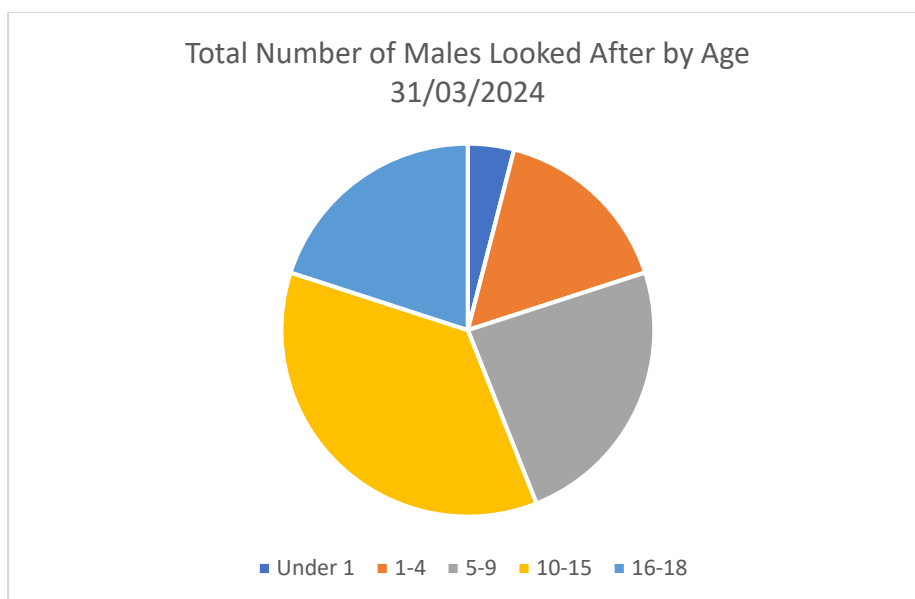
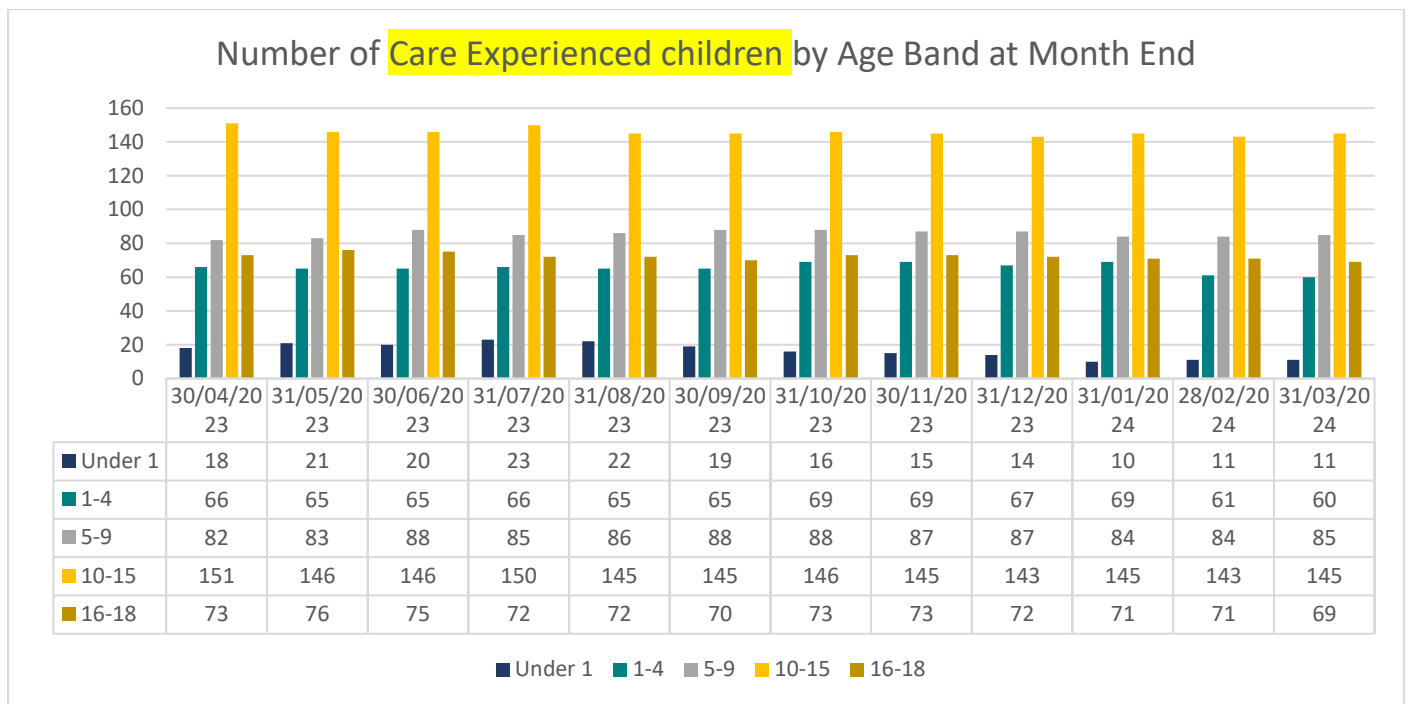
to manage their own problems without an over reliance on services. We are seeing the benefits of this model in our reduction of child protection registrations and numbers of care experienced children.

**Chart 12 – No. of Care Experience Reviews (CER) and No. Held in Compliance**



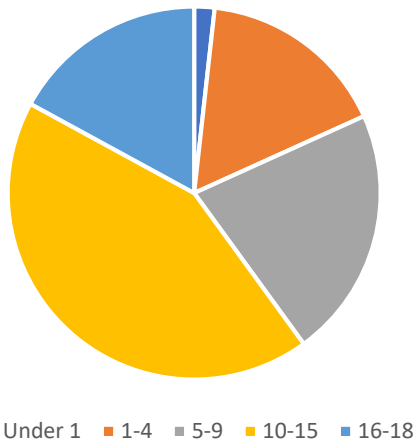
In total, over the period under review, there were a total of 1054 CERs of which, 96.39 % were convened within statutory timescales. This is a decrease in percentage from the last reporting period again from 21/22 and 22/23. Every effort is made to arrange the review within timescales, but this is not always possible due to a multitude of factors including social worker availability and changes in the Care Experience Team. The IRO Manager is monitoring this, and highlights concerns to senior managers where necessary.

**Chart 13 & 14 – Care Experienced Children (CEC) by Gender and Age**





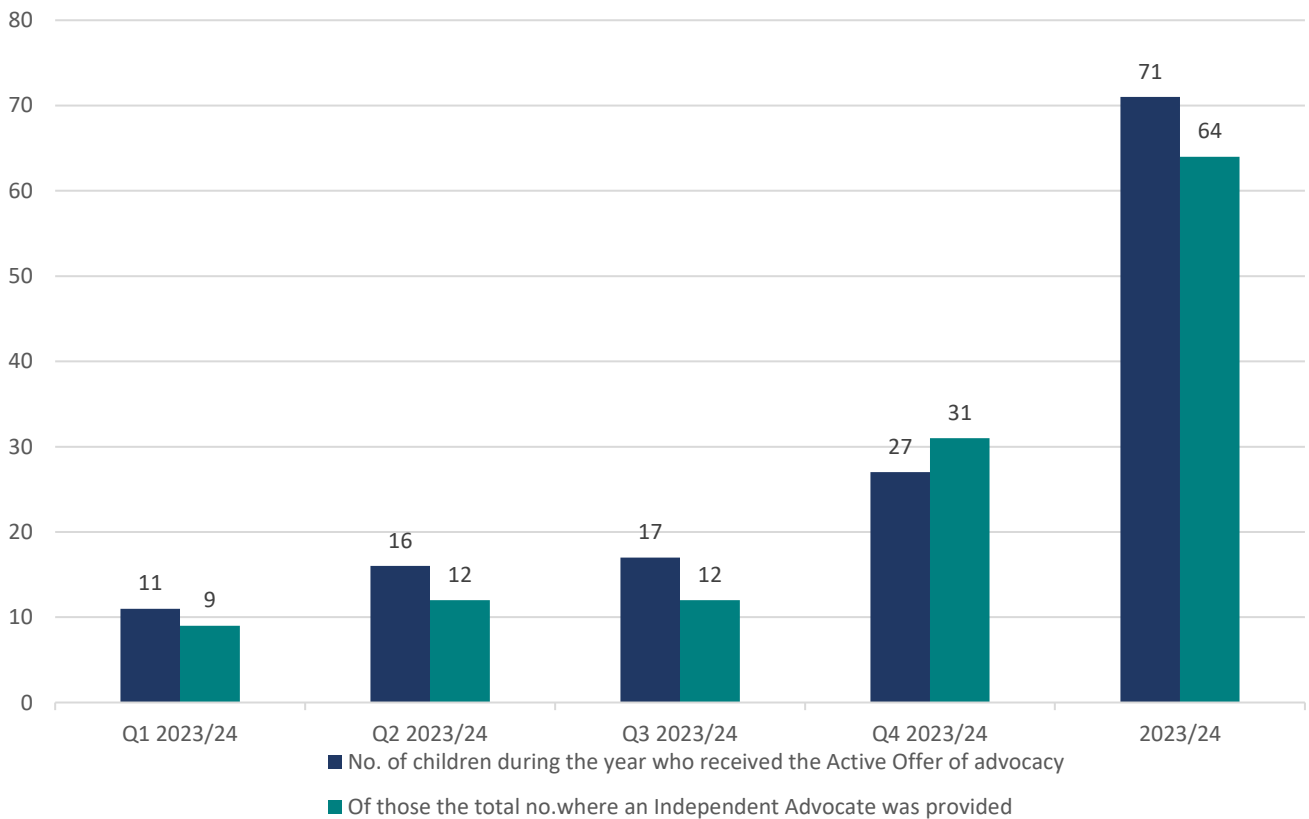
Total Number of Females Looked After by Age  
As at 31/03/2024



In respect of female CEC, the largest age group continues to be those between the ages of 10-15 years. From Chart 14, one can see that the trend continues whereby the largest cohort of male CEC are those between the ages of 10– 15 years.

**Advocacy**

Number of Children during the Year who Received the Active Offer of Advocacy and  
Of those the Total Number Where an Advocate was Provided



During this reporting period our referrals to Tros Gynnal Advocacy have significantly decreased from 224 young people in period 2022 -23 and 155 in 2021-22 to just 64 receiving a service in 2023 – 24

Active Offer (AO) referrals also decreased significantly, from 101 in 2022-23 to this year. The disparity between the figures is because some children received advocacy support from a family member or friend, this is not considered 'independent advocacy'.

As part of the IRO consultation with young people, they consistently raise the offer of advocacy. The Signs of Safety model places much greater emphasis on direct work with children as the IRO Service is seeing evidence of direct work consistently across all the teams. This naturally will lessen the requests for advocacy from children because they have greater opportunities to talk to their Social Worker about their views, lived experience and wishes going forward.

One area of focus for the next year is the offer of advocacy for parents whose children are subject to the CPR or are care experienced. This is a developing area and is being discussed nationally. There is very good evidence that parents with learning difficulties or a learning disability are consistently offered advocacy, however, it is not routinely offered to parents without additional needs.

### **Business Support**

A review of the Business Support roles that support the front-line Children's Social Care practitioners was carried out and as a result of this, in December 2022 the role of the Social Work Support Officer (SWSO) was introduced. As an outcome of this, there is no dedicated Business Support for the IRO Service and this has slightly impacted on compliance rates, whilst we fully embed this model.

To mitigate the challenges, the IRO Service and Business Support have frequent interface meetings to address any low level issues and monitor compliance. This will continue to be monitored and issues addressed via the managers of both service areas. Several workshops have been held with the SWSO's and IRO Manager to help ensure consistency and accuracy across the service. Regular meeting data is presented to the Silver Meeting which details the performance of the SWSO's and the IRO's in approving the minutes. We are currently part of a procurement exercise for a replacement to our current WCCIS system and hopefully the new system will have additional functionality to support and monitor the IRO service including compliance dates more effectively.

### **Team Meetings**

The IRO Service continue to have monthly in person team meetings. The meetings provide a shared learning space for the team and enable learning, themes and practice guidance and directorate priorities and changes to be disseminated.

The IRO Service Manager continues to have quarterly meetings Western Bay Adoption Service, Cafcass Cymru, and other attends forums with regional partners in Cwm Taff Morgannwg. Links have been made with the IRO Team managers for neighbouring Local Authorities to share development and learning for Signs of Safety.

### **Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints**

In this period the formal case resolution process has not been initiated. Any escalating concerns have been resolved at an informal stage. There have been complaints managed at team level and feedback has been received regards complaints made via the stage two and independent investigation. The service has received compliments also from colleagues and families.

### **IRO Quality Assurance Audit**

The IRO's complete quality assurance audits after every CER, ICPC and RCPC. The quality assurance audit form provides data on practice standards and captures data and information relating

to the IRO standards. Once completed by the IRO following the meeting, the form automatically goes to the Safeguarding Team Manager of the case holding team for their scrutiny and management oversight. This form also alerts the Safeguarding Team Manager to any outstanding pieces of work, compliance issues and identifies areas of good practice and this has continued during this period.

The IRO Service Manager is also meeting regularly with the Quality Assurance Officer to identify a shared process within the Local Authority for themes, learning and improving practice. The IRO Team Manager will be an active participant of the Reflective Sessions that have been introduced and are commencing this month.

### **IRO Standards**

The IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019. Since this time the IRO Service has worked to improve tracking and monitoring of children's care plans, this includes holding mid-point review meetings for all care experienced children.

The standards set out the requirement that for CERs, the IRO must inform the Team Manager of the case responsible team of the recommendations within 5 days of completing the CER and that Team Manager has 5 days to respond to these recommendations. This is now embedded and working well within the service quickly identifying any area of disagreement and enabling these issues to be resolved at the earliest stage. IROs are holding mid-point review meetings with the allocated social worker, and this is also supporting the identification of drift at an early stage. It is identified that the IRO Service will be improving the recording and timeliness of mid-point review meetings.

### **Independent Legal Advice**

The reciprocal agreement with Neath Port Talbot remains in place and enables the IRO Service to have independent legal advice when needed. This has previously been used on several occasions but not in this reporting period.

### **Cafcass Cymru**

The IRO service has a positive working relationship with Cafcass Cymru, and quarterly interface meetings are held.

The resolutions protocol allows the IRO Service to refer a case to Cafcass if the IRO believes the child's human rights are not being met by the local authority and they have been unsuccessful in resolving this via the resolutions protocol. In this period the IRO Service has not referred any case to Cafcass, however, they do liaise with Cafcass regularly and ensure Cafcass is invited to CERs for any children who has an allocated Cafcass officer. As a result, IROs are alerted more quickly to issues arising in the court process and can liaise at an earlier stage where disputes arise with the Local Authority. This relationship provides Children's Guardians with the means to communicate issues arising directly with the IRO that are relevant to the on-going development and monitoring of a care plan, either during proceedings or following an order being granted. IRO's are required to give feedback on Court Care Plans and ADM decision making. IRO feedback is sought when care planning for children changes such as when a Placement with Parents is being considered for a Care Experienced child or when a Child is Placed for Adoption.

**Lisa French-IRO Service Manager.**

Appendix 1-Action Plan

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Appendix 2.

Service Priorities – Action Plan

<b>B</b>	Completed
<b>R</b>	A problem needs serious attention and action now
<b>A</b>	Issues are being managed and if addressed should not affect delivery
<b>G</b>	On track, in progress, any minor risks/ issues being managed
<b>NYS</b>	Not Yet Started

IRO Service								
	Owner	Due date	Recommendation	Action	Evidence	Update	Last RAG	RAG
1	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	<b>Signs of Safety.</b> To fully implement the Signs of Safety model of practice into child protection conferences and increase contact between IRO and child/YP.	Each IRO will ensure they give the child/YP the opportunity to meet with them to discuss their CER or CP Conference.  Sign off conference animation.  Work with business support to ensure they understand their role in the conferences.  Support teams and partner agencies in their	This is monitored in Supervision between the Service Manager and each IRO.  QA to be undertaken by the QA Officer and via the surveys. This will feed into the Meaningful Measures forums.	Animation is signed off. Live date agreed for Oct 2024.  IRO consistently make the offer to meet with children, but further dip sample work is required.  Parental and agency surveys have been rolled out. The next phase post Oct will be for YP surveys to go live.  Business Support are attending the mock	<b>Amber</b>	

				<p>understanding of the model in conferences.</p> <p>To developing reflective sessions and provide a shared learning space for the IRO Team</p>		<p>conferences to support their training and learning.</p>		
2	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	<p><b>Quality Assurance.</b></p> <p>To collate thematic practice trends identified from the quality assurance forms and surveys.</p> <p>To implement recommendations from audit activity</p> <p>Improve compliance for Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences (ICPC &amp; RCPC)</p>	<p>IRO Service Manager attends the Meaningful Measures forum to support the implementation of quality assurance work.</p> <p>Service Manager to continue to meet with Business Support to improve compliance.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager to work with the Quality Assurance Officer to support the dissemination of learning.</p>	<p>Dip sampling and data analysis will inform the success of QA learning.</p> <p>Group Manager quarterly performance reports will consider performance improvement.</p>	<p>Monthly interface meetings are taking place between the Service Manager and Business Support Managers.</p> <p>Group Manager and Service Manager attend the Meaningful Measures forum.</p> <p>The Quality Assurance forms are being used currently to identify out of date Care Plans as a theme and this is being addressed by the IROs with the Social Workers and their Team Managers.</p> <p>Audit work has continued in this period and has evidenced good practice in terms of direct work with children and timeliness of decision making.</p>	Amber	

			Improve compliance for CER.					
3	Service Manager and all IROs.	Sept 2025	<p><b>Child's Voice.</b></p> <p>To continue to promoting advocacy services the IRO Service will ensure it provides an 'Active Offer' of advocacy to children. The IROs will make these referrals where consent has been given to support the child/young person's voice.</p> <p>Ensure the child's voice is present when undertaking the IRO Monitoring form.</p> <p>To develop the consultation/survey process for children and</p>	<p>Dip sample audit work to be undertaken by the IRO Service Manager.</p> <p>The child surveys will inform the rates of children feeling they have been heard and central to decision making.</p> <p>This will form part of the Quality Assurance Officer role and wider audit framework.</p>	<p>Quarterly audit activity and performance reports will inform success rates.</p> <p>IRO monitoring forms will identify trends and themes.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will raise in supervision and IRO Team Meetings to ensure this stays on the agenda.</p>	<p>The IRO Service sits on the Meaningful Measures forum and works closely with the Quality Assurance Officer.</p> <p>Surveys are due to commence post Oct 2024.</p>	Amber	

			young people to ensure that there are a range of methods offered to every child to meaningfully participate in their meetings.					
4	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	To work alongside safeguarding colleagues to achieve permanency for all children and reduce the numbers of Care Experienced Children within a safe and appropriate plan.	<p>IROs to check at the 2<sup>nd</sup> CER the plan for the child is clear. If the plan isn't clear, the IRO will track the case and inform the appropriate Safeguarding Team Manager.</p> <p>IROs to ensure they consider all appropriate options for Care Experienced Children such as SGOs and/or a return to their family.</p>	<p>IRO Service Manager to attend the CER reduction Strategy Meeting held on a bi-monthly basis.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will identify any children who may be suitable for alternative Orders and will discuss this with the allocated IRO.</p>	<p>This process is currently working well. IRO Service Manager has identified several cases where alternative care options could be considered resulting in the child no longer being Care Experienced.</p> <p>Over this period the rates of Care Experienced children have decreased as has the number of children subject to the CPR.</p> <p>Cases where there isn't a permanency plan at the second review is due to care proceedings not being finalised.</p> <p>Group Manager IAA &amp; Safeguarding attends a monthly interface with the Legal Team where these</p>	<b>Green</b>	



						cases can be discussed in detail.		
5	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	To work alongside Safeguarding Teams and the training department to improve practice around Care Experienced Children and their meetings.	<p>IROs will ensure they complete the IRO Quality Assurance document following every CER. This will automatically be sent to the Safeguarding Team Manager for their scrutiny.</p> <p>Should the IRO identify concerning practice, they will raise this with the IRO Service Manager and the Safeguarding Team Manager. They will track the progress to a resolution and initiate the IRO Protocol where necessary.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will facilitate training alongside the Training Department to support and improve practice.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will facilitate induction sessions to new starters and newly qualified Social Workers to support their professional development.</p>	IRO Service Manager will attend all IRO protocol Meetings to support the IROs and facilitate resolution.	<p>IRO Service Manager continues to raise cases of concern with the individual Social Workers, their Team Managers and Group Manager where appropriate.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager continues to present training alongside the training department and is facilitating introductory sessions to new starters and newly qualified staff.</p> <p>The IRO Service regularly send compliments and good practice examples to the Complaints and Compliments Officer and present these at the Continuous Improvement Group.</p>	<b>Green</b>	

6	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	To ensure appropriate care plans are progressing in a timely manner to prevent and avoid drift in children's cases.	<p>At every CER the IRO will check the child has a Care Plan that is up to date and meets the child's needs. The IRO will recommend at each CER that the Care Plan is updated to reflect the changes agreed at the current CER.</p> <p>The IRO will track each child and ensure their Care Plan has been updated. The IRO will hold mid-point meetings to prevent drift and act where drift is identified.</p> <p>Each IRO will complete the IRO Quality Assurance form following each CER as this informs the SW and their Team Manager of any out-of-date Care Plans.</p>	<p>The rates of IRO Quality Assurance forms being completed is increasing and this will continue moving forward.</p> <p>IROs are holding mid-point meetings for each child who is Looked After, however, there are times the child's SW does not respond. In these cases, the IRO will raise this with their Service Manager and the safeguarding Team Manager.</p>	<p>As the workforce in the Hubs and the Care Experienced Team has stabilised over this period, we have seen improvements in the numbers of Care Plans being completed and updated within timescales.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager ensures when attending the Care Experienced Reduction Strategy meeting and monthly Performance meeting that for any child who is discussed, the date of their Care Plan is checked to ensure it is up to date and where not it is flagged with the Safeguarding Team Manager.</p>	<b>Green</b>	
7	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	Sept 2025	To continue to focus on increasing consultation and participation of children and young people at CERs.	IROs to ensure they offer to consult with each CER child as appropriate for their age and level of understanding and to use a means of communication that the child chooses. This includes face to face	This is monitored in Supervision between the Service Manager and each IRO.	<p>The implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model and the roll out of Signs of Safety conferences will require the IRO to meet with the child before each conference.</p> <p>IRO consistently make the offer of a meeting to children who are Care Experienced.</p>	<b>Amber</b>	

				meeting, phone and MS Teams.				
8	Group Manager and IRO Service Manager	Sept 2025	Parents to be fully supported in CP Confernces and be provided with the offer of advocacy.	Advocacy options for parents to be explored to ensure parents are supported in these meetings.	Group Manager to discuss at a senior management level and with Adult Services our offer/contract with adult advocacy services.	Parents who have learning difficulties/disabilities are routinely offered advocacy for child protection confernces. However, moving forward this offer should be extended to all parents.	<b>Red</b>	

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