

**Independent Reviewing Service
Annual Report for the period from
April 2022 to March 2023**



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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 2022 to March 2023. 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 2023-2024.

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)

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.

Within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service has the following roles and responsibilities:

- The IRO Service has a statutory responsibility under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, Wales Safeguarding Procedures and the IRO Guidance for Chairing Child Protection Conferences and multi-agency Care Experience Reviews (CER), including those children placed for adoption.
- 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 and to monitor the progress of the care plan by tracking cases between reviews.
- 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.
- 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

During the financial year from April 2022 to March 2023 there was a significant increase in the number of referrals to the IRO Service. This has meant a significant increase in the number of cases held by individual IROs. Currently the team is comprised of one full-time Manager, seven full-time IROs who are permanent members of staff (one of whom has been on maternity leave throughout much of the year), one permanent member of staff who works three-and-a-half days per week and one permanent member of staff who works three days per week. In response to the increased demand, the local authority has agreed funding for just over three (FTE) agency workers for the team.

The current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience, and all have been qualified social workers for a substantial period of time. In February 2022 the Service Manager was re-deployed to the position of interim Group Manager. Since this time the IRO Service Manager has been filled by an agency personnel.

Caseloads and Increased Demands

The average full time IRO caseload is currently between 80-90 cases whilst part-time staff are holding average caseloads between 50-60. During the period under review, the team had two members of staff on long-term sick leave and one person on maternity leave. Whilst the previous report did not raise any concerns about the numbers of cases held by the IRO's in Bridgend, the pressures placed on the team has highlighted the lack of capacity and resilience across the team during times when there is added pressures due to sickness or other long-term leave. In response to these pressures the Service Manager carried out consultation with IRO services across Wales to make comparison of caseloads. The consultation revealed the IROs in neighbouring authorities have an average caseload of 40-70 which is significantly lower than Bridgend.

The Service Manager consulted with IRO Services across Wales and obtained responses from 13 Local Authorities about their caseload numbers. In North Wales they have an average of 75 cases per full time IRO. Two of the 5 Local Authorities were funding an additional 5 IRO roles to reduce caseload numbers.

Only 2 Local Authorities from Mid Wales responded, and their caseloads range from 55-64 per full time IRO. In South Wales there is quite a mixed picture with caseloads ranging from 40-100. However, only two other Local Authorities have similar caseload numbers to Bridgend and one of these areas said they were not meeting their statutory duties because of their high numbers.

In Bridgend, we strived to have caseloads held by IROs capped to no more than 90 per IRO (FTE).

Since the Covid pandemic, the IRO Service has largely undertaken its duties virtually via MS Teams. This has and continues to work well; many children, young people, and parents report that they prefer this way of working. As a team we have successfully managed to meet our statutory duties in terms of compliance in both the Care and Child Protection arena. However, as with many areas within Children's Social Care, we face several challenges and increases in workload demands.

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. This tracking and monitoring process requires the IRO to liaise with the child's/young person's social worker and often the team manager and in some cases other professionals. This is a time-consuming piece of work, it requires lengthy reading of the child's file and recording of the discussions held.

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. IRO are now visiting children face to face so need to factor travel time into their week to enable them to do this.

Covid restriction initially delayed our work with creators of a Phone App to assist in consultation with young people and since restrictions were lifted the App is not being used by other Local Authorities.

A priority of the IRO Service as set out in the Action Plan is to increase our rates of consultation with children and young people subject to the CPR or being discussed at a Child Protection Conference for the first time. This will also impact on the workload of the conference chairs. There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of children whose names are on the CPR. This has resulted in a significant increase in the IRO chairing Conferences. The highest point was in January 2023 at 306. We have seen an increase in the complexity of cases coming through the front door in our Information, Advice and Assistance Service (IAA). This requires more input from the conference chairperson and a greater level of planning and preparation prior to the CP conference. Since January 2023, we have seen a gradual reduction in the numbers of children whose names are on the CPR; but have not reached our pre-Covid numbers.

As a result of the challenges in recruitment and retention in Children's Services, greater demands have been placed on the IRO Service. The combination of changes of social workers and at times lower staffing levels in some areas has required the IROs to undertake more tracking, increased rates of initiating concerns, chasing reports/information, addressing areas of practice. We are also aware the revised Public Law Outline (PLO) guidance will have an impact on the role of conference chair, and will require much like LAC cases, a greater emphasis on tracking and monitoring in-between conferences.

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.

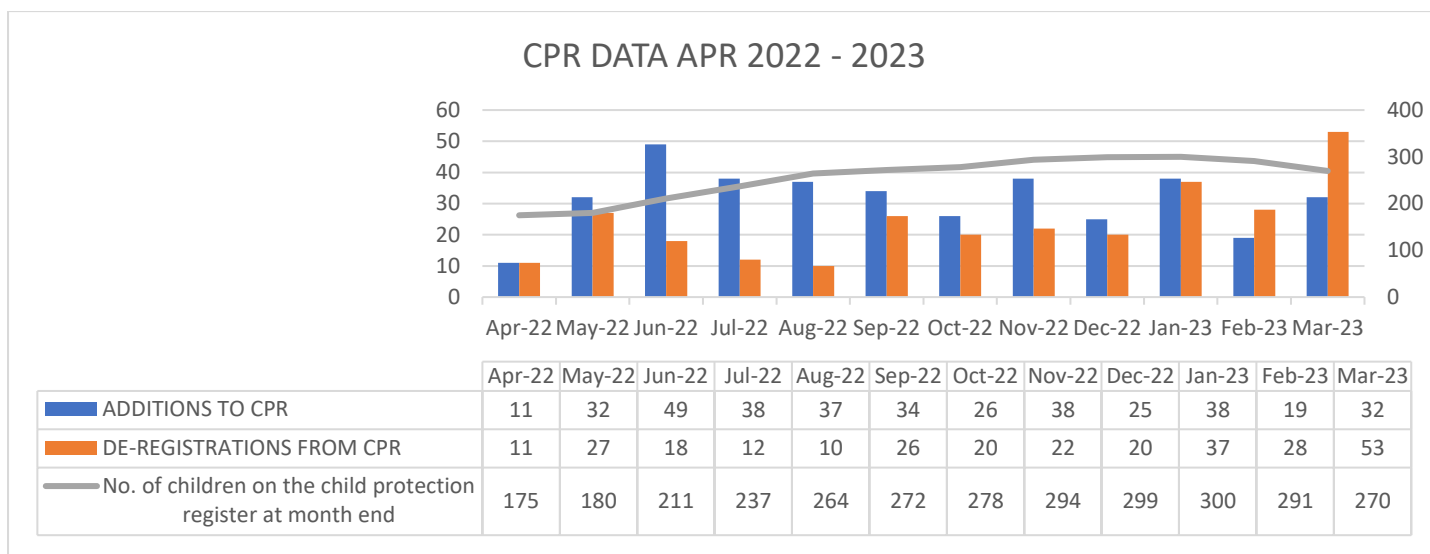
Process Involvement

In this period some changes have been implemented to support the LA'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 Manager for the safeguarding teams take place to consider all the children subject of the CPR for more than 18 months.
- IRO Service Manager audits all cases of re-registration when the request for an ICPC is received and looks at whether lessons can be learnt.
- 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.
- The IRO Service Manager audits all requests for CP conference to consider themes and potential gaps in support services.
- If a conference chair recommends legal advice should be sought, they will inform the Group Manager to raise awareness of the cases being escalated

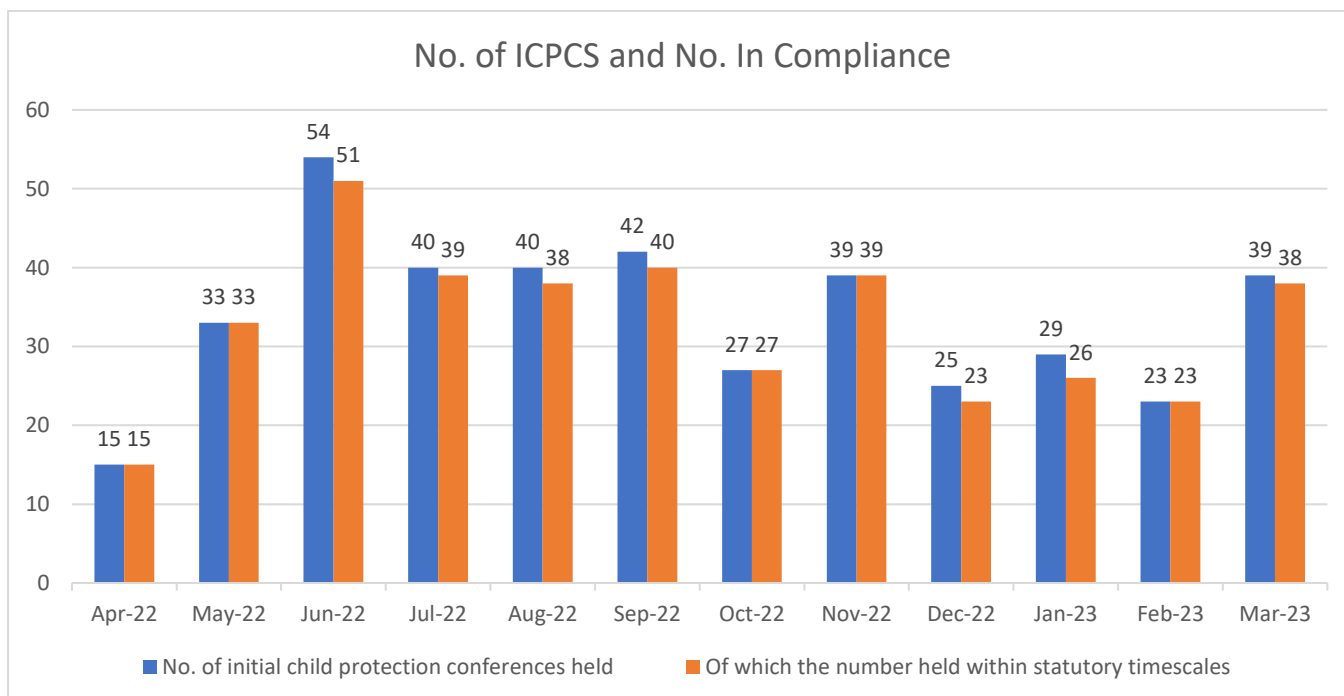
Child Protection Register (CPR) Population

Chart 1 – Child Protection Register Data from APRIL 2022 – MARCH 2023



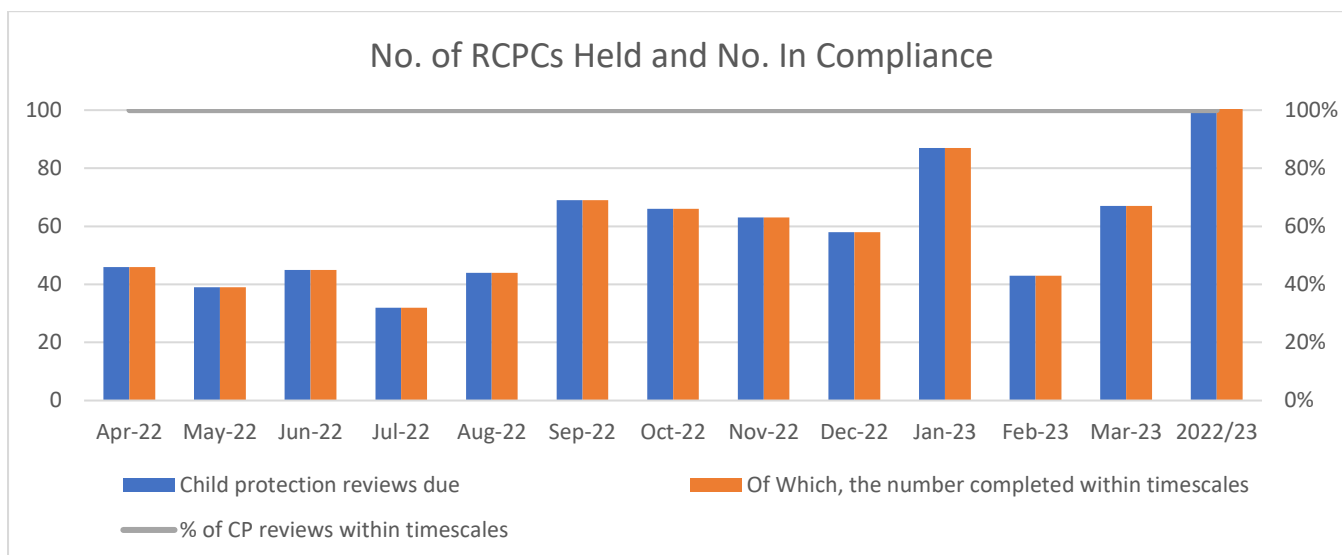
The number of children subject to Child Protection registration continued to increase significantly throughout this period with the highest end of month figure being in January 2023 at which time there were 300 children's names on the CPR. In total, there were 379 children's names added to the CPR and 284 names removed from the CPR during this period.

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



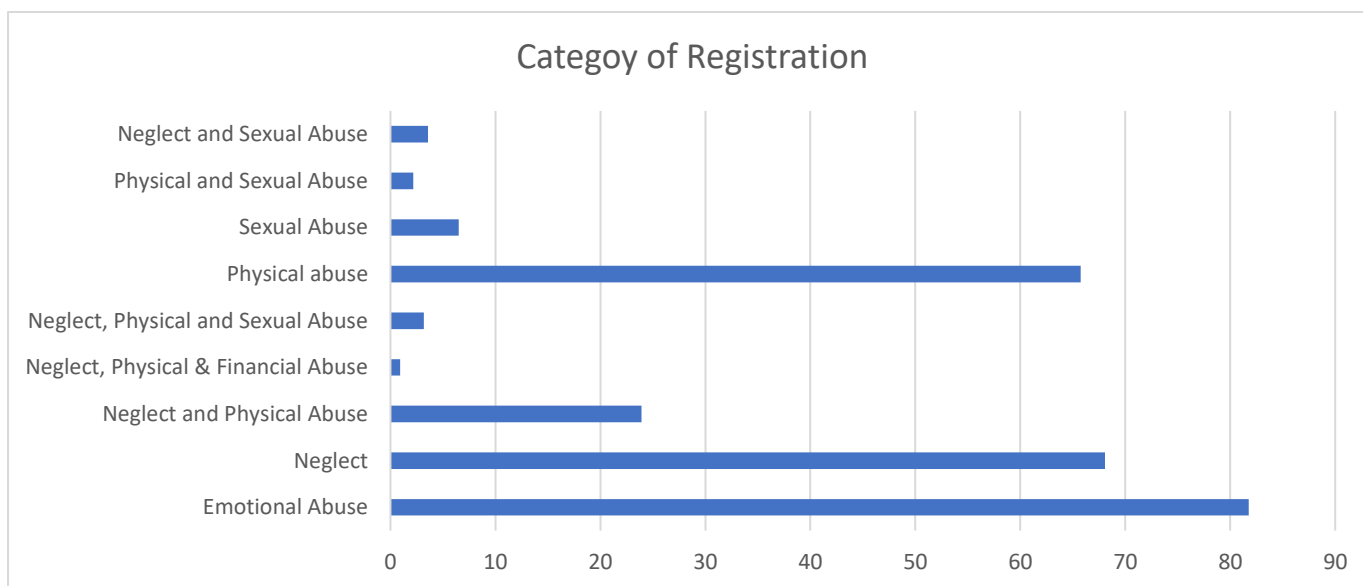
During the period of April 2022 – March 2023, the IRO Service chaired 406 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) of which 392 were held within statutory timescales. Which means that despite the large increase of meetings, 97% were convened within statutory timescales. In the same period 2021-2022, there were 200 ICPCs convened. This represents an increase of over 51% in the number of ICPCs.

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



The IRO Service held 659 Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC) in the period compared with 508 in the previous reporting year. This represents an increase of over 23%. Despite the increase in the numbers of RCPCs, the IRO Service was able to convene every RCPC within statutory timescales.

Chart 4 – CPR Categories



As can be seen from this chart, there has been a change since the previous report in that Emotional 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).

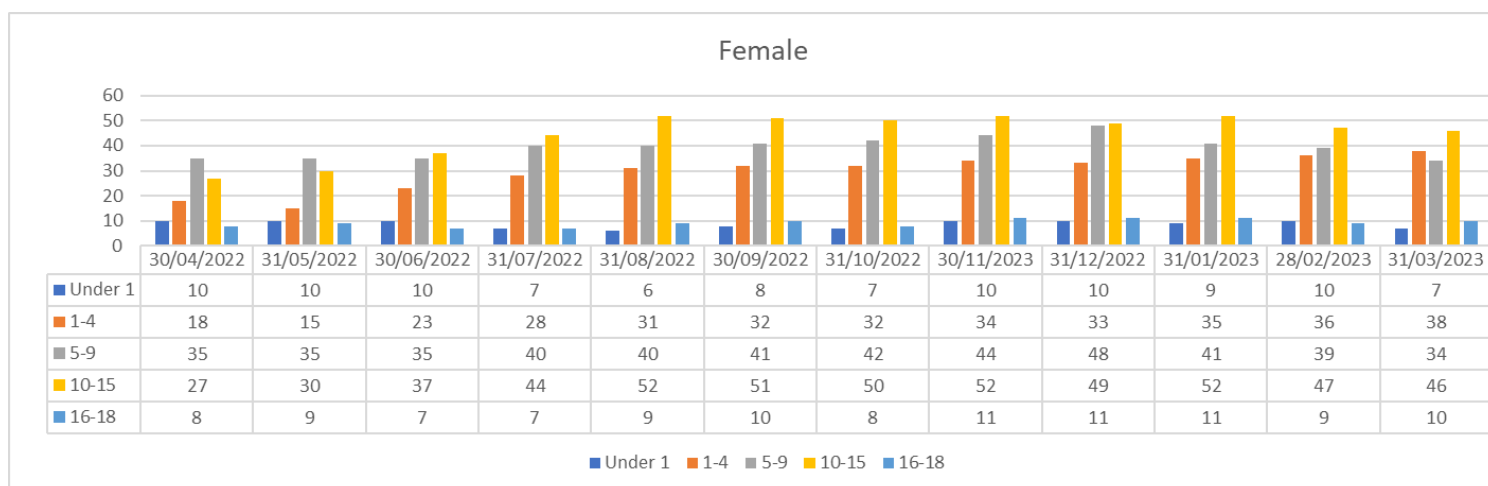
Financial Abuse

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

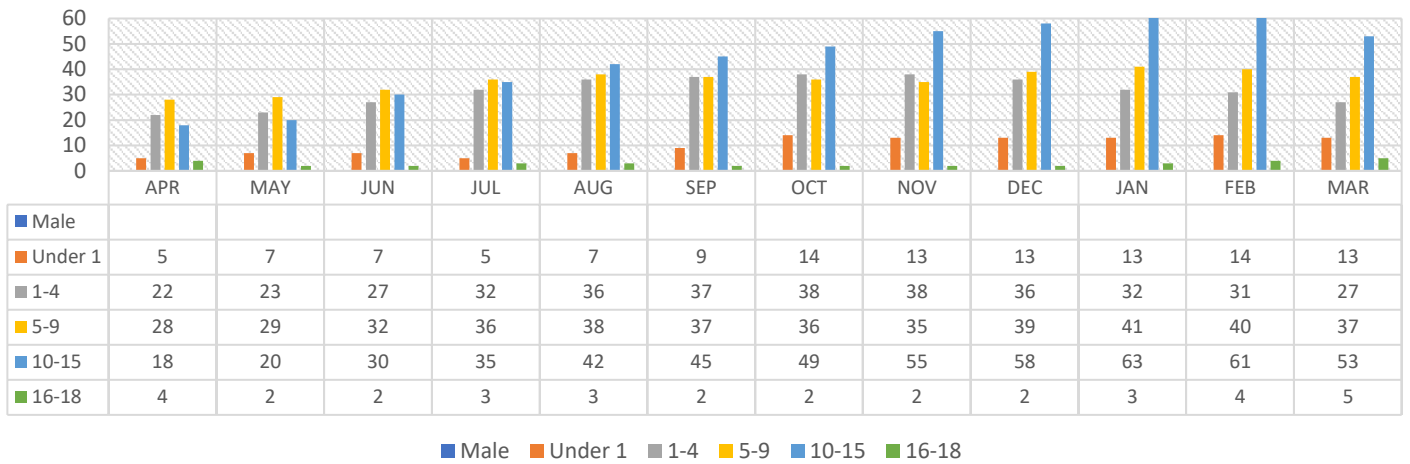
Neglect

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 & 6 – CPR – Gender and Ages



Male



In Chart 5, we can see that on average each month, female children between the ages of 10-15 years makes up the majority of those on the Child Protection Register. Similarly, Chart 6 indicates that male children between the ages of 10 - 15 years make up most children whose names are on the Child Protection Register.

Chart 7 – Total No. of Females on CPR as at 31/03/2023 by Age

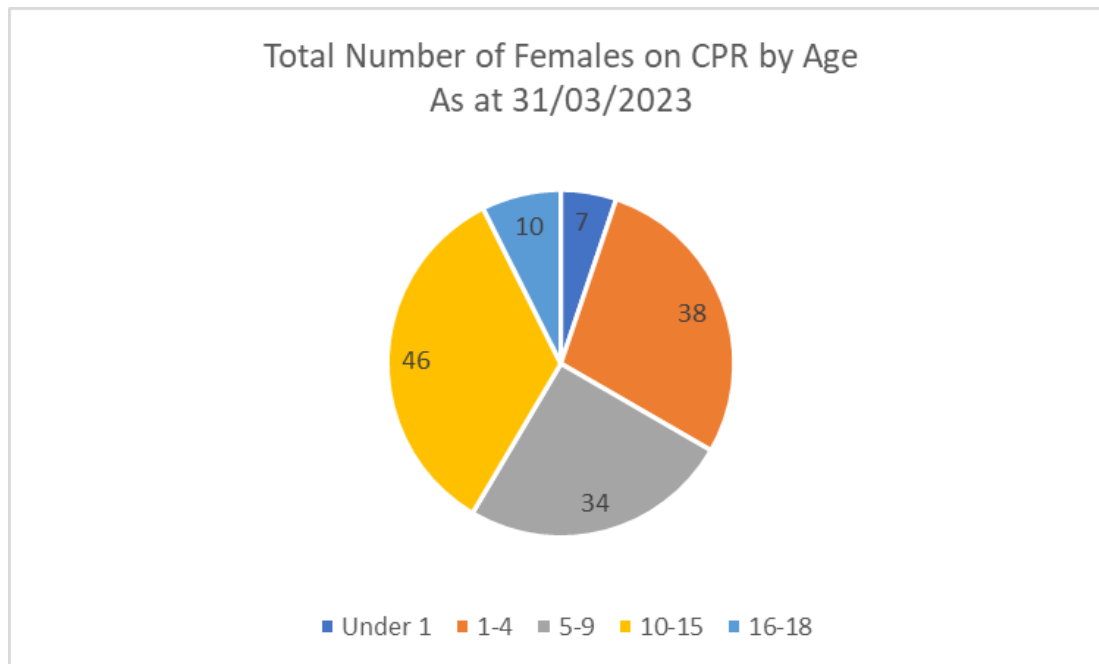


Chart 8 - Total No. of Males on CPR as at 31/03/23 by Age

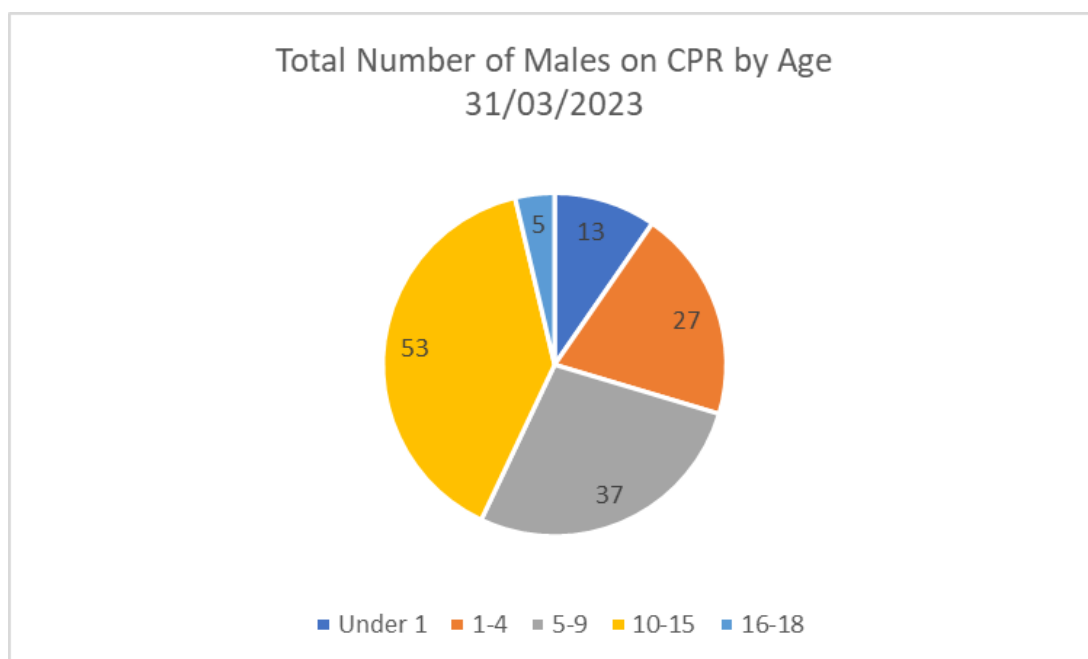
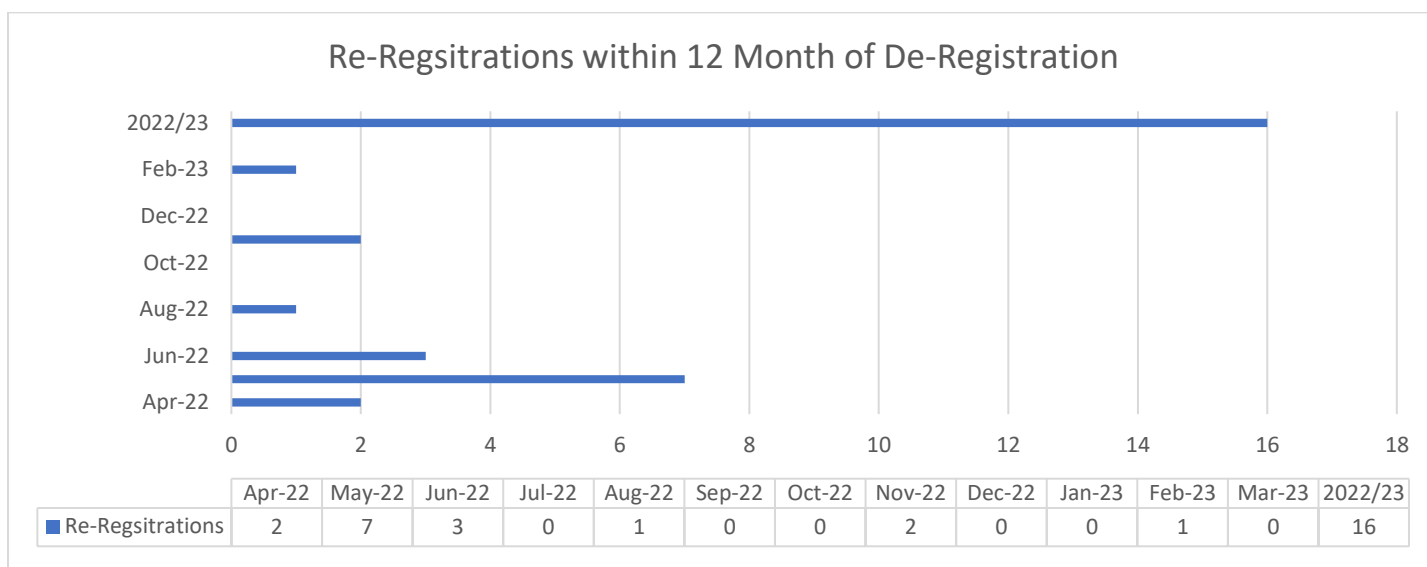


Chart 9 – Re-registration within 12 Months of De-registration



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 an increase of one case where re-registration has taken place within the year.

Children subject to the CPR for more than 18 months.

The IRO Service Manager and the Group Manager plan to meet on a monthly basis to consider the children who have been subject to the CPR for more than 18 months. Given the changes to the SMT membership, there has been some disruption to this meeting taking place consistently. A new Group Manager for the Safeguarding Teams is starting in the role in August and this will support a more consistent approach to these meetings.

The IRO Service Manager completes a comprehensive audit of these cases prior to the meeting and during the meeting actions are agreed to progress these cases. General themes have become apparent from undertaking the audits:

- No stand-alone Child Protection Plans
- Child Protection plans not being SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and tie-bound) plans
- Changes in allocated Social Workers creating a delay while the new Social Worker gets to know the case and the family

The lack of stand-alone Child Protection plans is a concern, this is the document that sets out the objectives, the expectations on a parent and what will be provided by Children's Services and partner agencies to mitigate the identified risks. This plan should be provided to all parties and discussed, reviewed and amended at the 4-6 weekly Core Group meetings. Without this plan there is no clear direction and simply put, progress cannot be achieved if nobody is clear about what the objectives are for the child.

The IRO Service identifies all cases that do not have a stand-alone Child Protection plan and highlights this to conference and in their Quality Assurance document which informs the Team Manager of the childcare team.

Children's Participation at Child Protection Conferences

Children's participation at their ICPC and RCPC is hugely important, however it is recognised it may not be appropriate for children or young people to attend any or all the meetings but there are mechanisms in place to enable them to attend part of the meeting and meet with the chairperson separately.

The pandemic and all the challenges it brought has exacerbated difficulties already recognised in respect of receiving consultation documents from children, young people, and their parents/carers. The previous way consultation documents were sent out was not possible during the pandemic as it relied upon face-to-face interaction. Since the pandemic, most of the meetings continue to be convened remotely as the anecdotal feedback from service users is that this is preferable to face-to-face meetings. However, this means that there continues to be a difficulty in using consultation documents. However, to address this issue, one IRO will be asked to take the lead on developing a new consultation document which is easy to use but one that provides useable data on how the service can improve and ensure that all service users' voices are heard; and most importantly the voices of the children and young people.

Signs of Safety

Bridgend has launched the Signs of Safety practice model; this will support how we support the children and families we work with. The approach expands the investigation of risk and encompasses family and individual strengths, periods of safety and good care that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen a child's and family's situation.

Signs of Safety places greater emphasis on consent and co-production, building of relationships with both families and professionals. It values simplicity of language and focuses on 'what works' in the family's situation. The model will help to create a practical and realistic plan which will protect the child/ren.

Signs of Safety will result in a significant change to the way the IROs undertake the management and chairing of meetings. We expect to see a greater number of children and young people who attend their meetings.

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.

Chart 10 – Care Experienced Data from April 2022 – March 2023

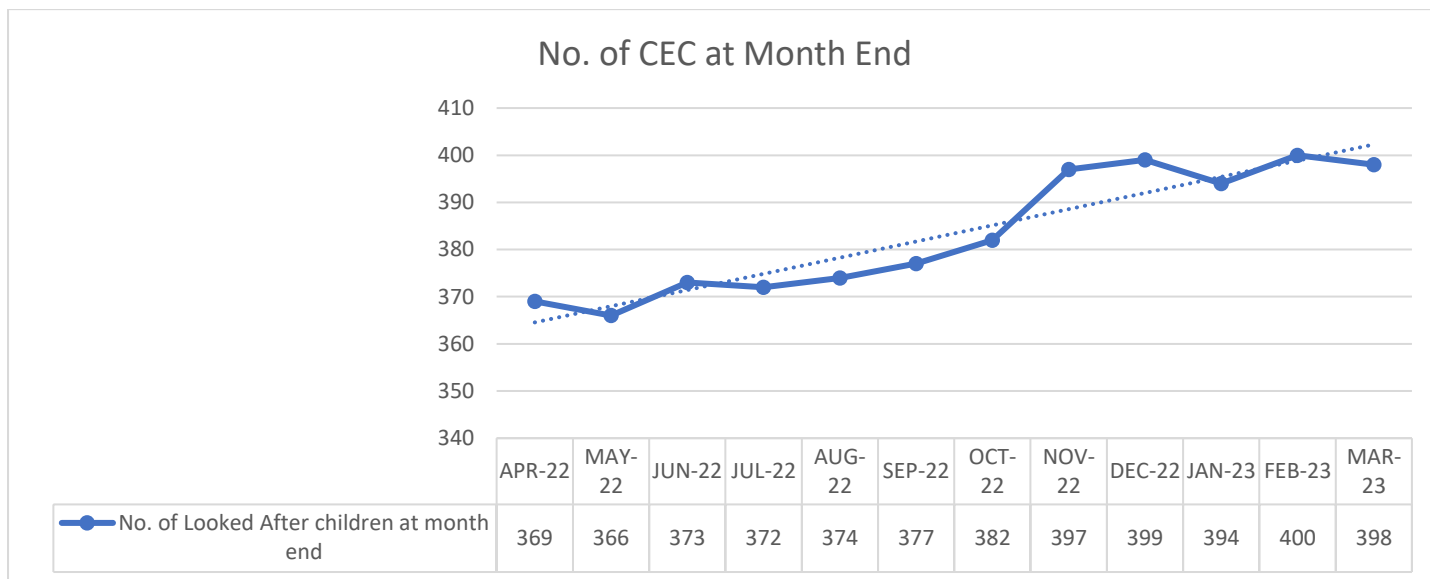


Chart 11 – Number of Child who became looked after and those who ceased to be looked after

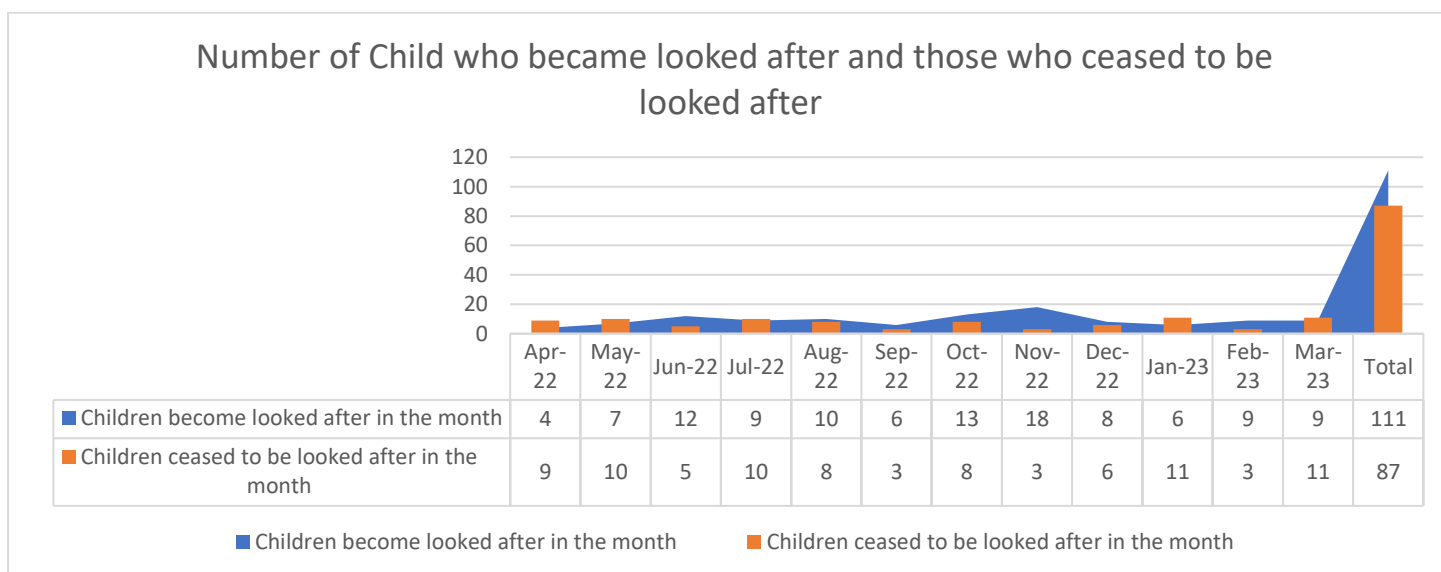
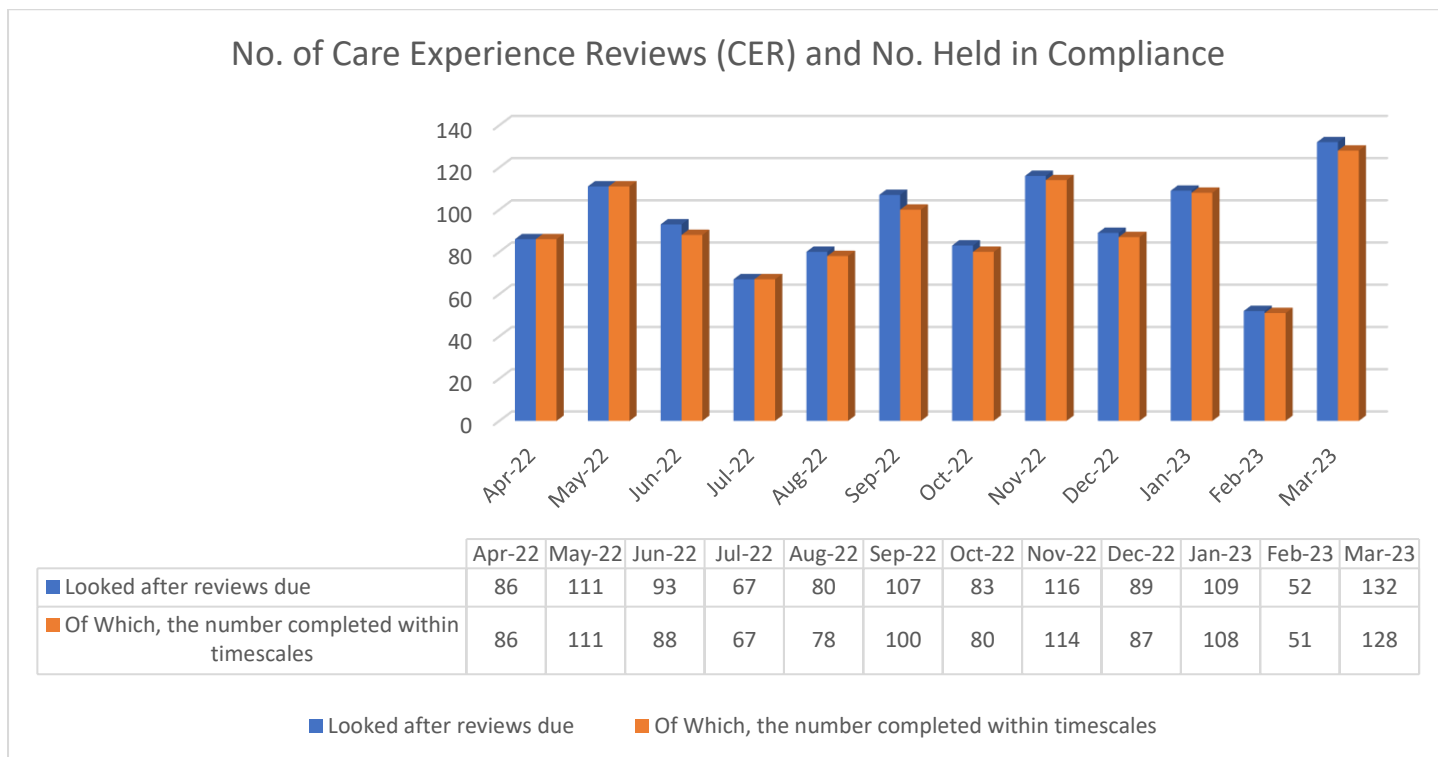


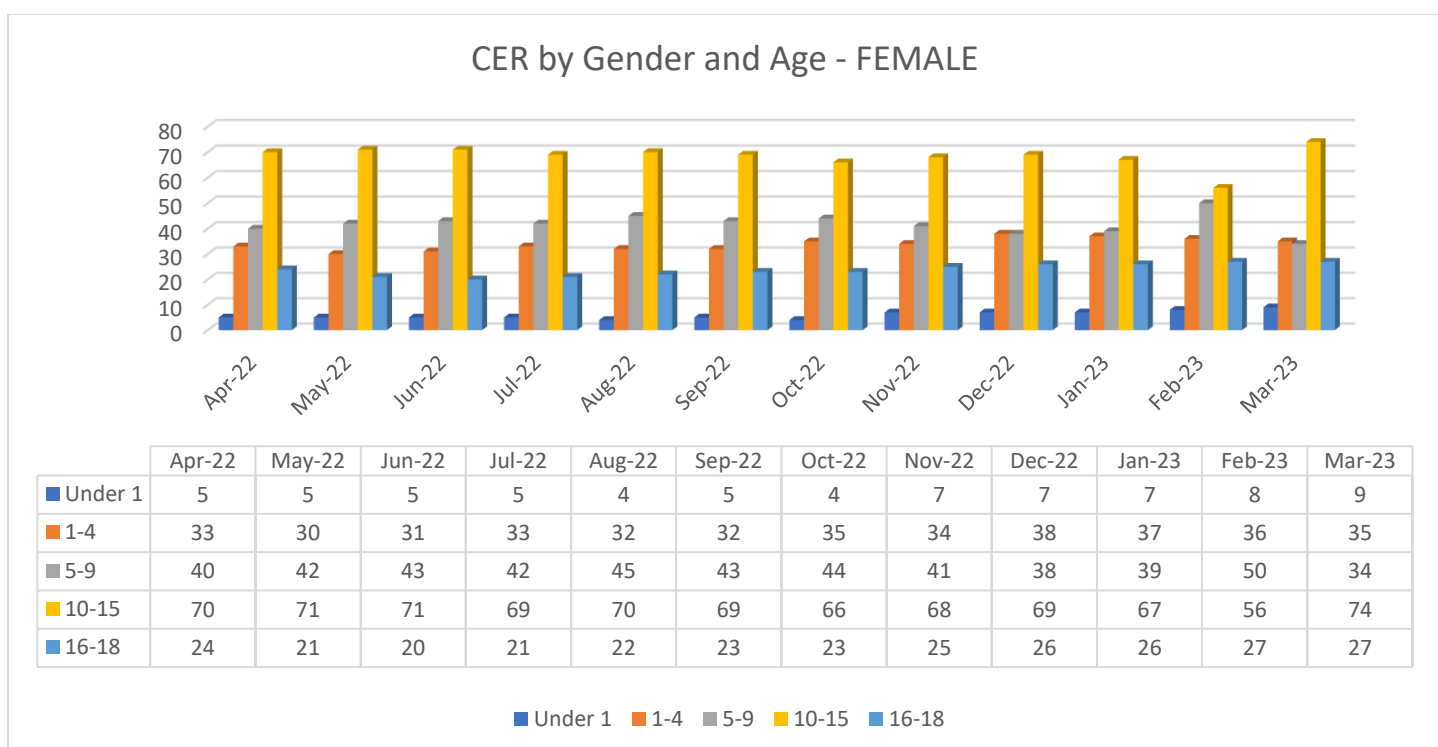
Chart 8 details the number of children who were in the care of Bridgend County Borough Council over the period from April 2022 – March 2023. The monthly average is just over 383 children throughout this period. This is a decrease from the same period in 2021 -2022. Chart 9 highlights the number of admissions and the number of children who ceased to be looked after by Bridgend County Borough Council. In total 111 children came into the care of the local authority whilst 87 children left the care of the local authority.

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

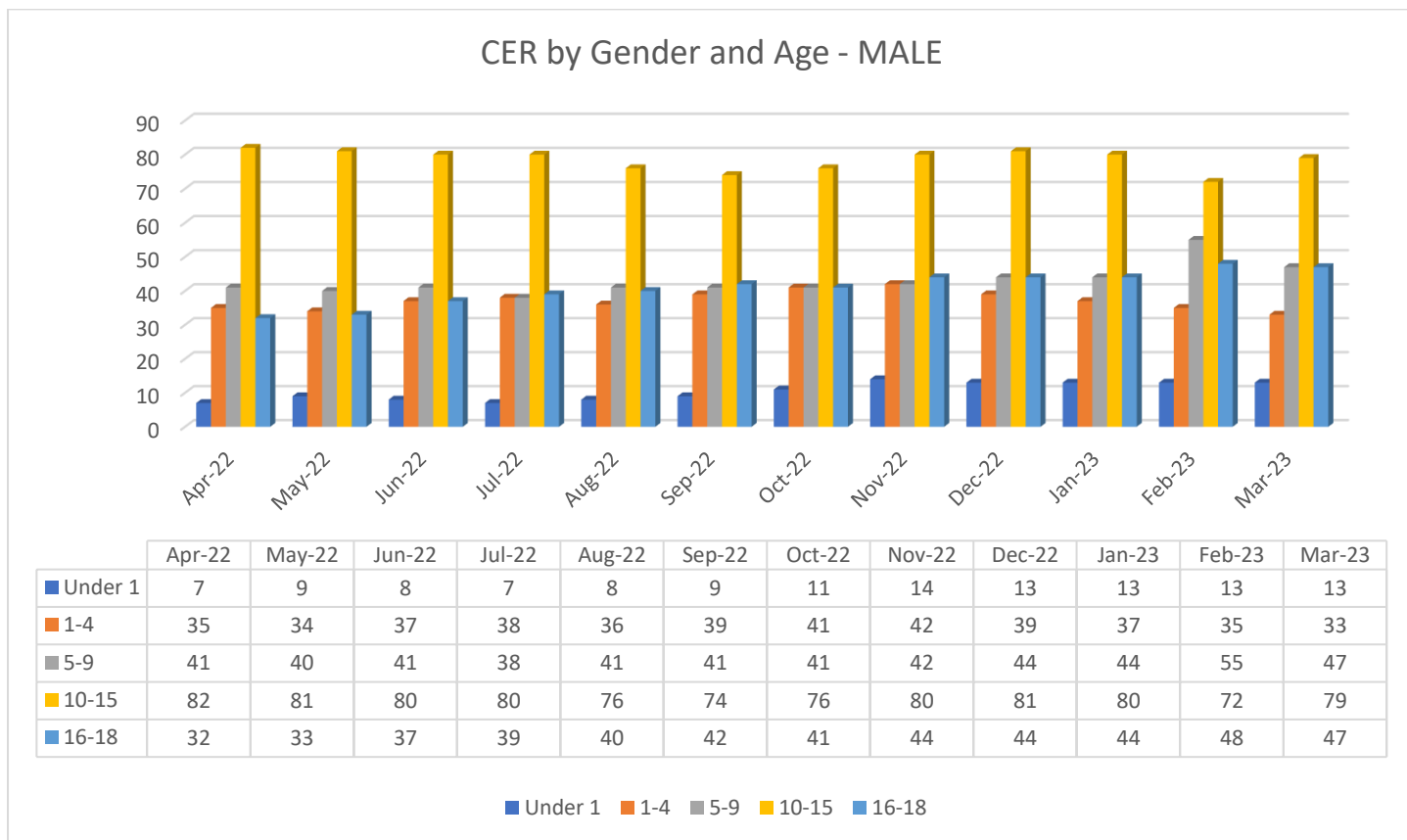


In total, over the period under review, there were a total of 1125 CERs of which, 1098 were convened within statutory timescales. This represents 97.6% of the total convened CERs. This is a decrease in percentage from the last reporting period. The IRO Service believe that part of this decrease can be attributed to the lack of stability within the social worker workforce. Some cases have seen numerous changes of social worker and when this happens, dates of reviews are missed, or the social worker has a pre-existing commitment at the time of the scheduled review. Every effort is made to arrange the review within timescales, but this is not always possible. The IRO Manager is monitoring these cases and will highlight concerns to senior managers as necessary.

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



In respect of female CEC, the largest age group continues to be those between the ages of 10-15 years. However, for female CEC there is less disparity than between the other age groupings except for child under one year.



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

During this reporting period our referrals to Tros Gynnal Advocacy have increased. 224 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 275 issues compared to 155 young people presenting with 204 issues in 2021-22. This represents a notable increase in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year. Some 123 young people accessed the service for the first time, compared to 67 in the previous year. Active Offer (AO) referrals also increased significantly, more than doubling from 37 in the previous year, to 101 this year.

310 children and young people became eligible for the Active Offer during the year, of this figure 101 children and young people consented to a referral being made.

Of the 101 young people referred, 86 Active Offer meetings took place, and 80 young people accepted the Active Offer and went on to receive issue based advocacy, 47 more than the previous year.

Children and Young People in the CP arena made up 85% of those referred for the Active Offer throughout the year, compared to 84% in the previous year.

Active Offer referrals for Care Experienced Young People rose from 6 in the previous year, to 15 this year, while referrals for those children and young people in the Child Protection arena increased even further from 31 in the previous year to 86 in this year.

It remains a priority for the IRO Service to ensure all children involved in the Child Protection process or Care Experienced Children can access advocacy support. The IRO's ensure they discuss this when they consult with children and young people. They raise the issue of advocacy at all meetings and record advocacy numbers in the quality assurance audits. The IRO's ensure every child or young person receives an Active Offer for Advocacy services. The Active Offer ensures the Social Worker has explained what Advocacy is and how it can support them. Children and young people who become looked after and/ or are being discussed at a Child Protection Conference are entitled to receive an Active Offer of advocacy support. However, the Active Offer should be consistently and regularly revisited with children and young people.

Business Support

Business Support have continued to support the core functions of the IRO Service during this period. The IRO Service and Business Support have frequent interface meetings to address any challenges and monitor any issues of compliance. During this period, there has been an ongoing consultation to consider the configuration of our Business Support colleagues and how they can best support, not only the IRO Service but the other services and teams throughout the local authority.

Team Meetings

The IRO Service continue to have monthly team meetings to ensure that any issues are identified and addressed and to impart news from the wider local authority. The IRO Service manager continues to have quarterly meetings Western Bay Adoption Service, Cafcass Cymru, and other meetings with our regional partners in Cwm Taff Morgannwg.

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 has been one stage two complaint which was primarily involving the safeguarding team, but the role of the IRO was considered.

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 also sits on the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Quality and Performance sub-group. This group undertakes audits and seeks to identify themes, learning and improve practice. In this period a Domestic Abuse audit was undertaken and at our next meetings we will share the learning from this.

IRO Standards

The IRO guidance and practice standards were introduced at the beginning of 2019. IRO's have worked to improve tracking and monitoring as advised within the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide. Arrangements for Independent legal advice for IRO's have been agreed with a reciprocal arrangement between Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot legal departments. The IRO's have accessed this support on several occasions. However, the standards have introduced a new process to completing CERs which includes the involvement of the Team Managers. This is achieved when the IRO sends the Team Manager the meeting recommendations within 5 days of completing the Review 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 meetings with the allocated social worker, and this is also supporting the identification of drift early.

Cafcass Cymru

The IRO service has a direct relationship with Cafcass Cymru and can, if required, refer matters of concern or report directly to Cafcass Cymru where deficits in care planning for care experienced young people cannot be resolved locally but are sufficiently significant as to impact on the outcomes for children and young people. To date, the IRO service has had no cause to refer to Cafcass Cymru but liaises with them regularly on individual cases within the public law arena. IROs in Bridgend work to a standard that has improved liaison between the Cafcass Cymru children's guardians and Safeguarding Social Workers within family proceedings. 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.

Service Priorities

- To fully implement the Signs of Safety model of practice.
- To recruit sufficient IROs to enable us to achieve best practice caseload numbers.
- To increase the contact between the IRO with children and young people.
- 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.
- To ensure appropriate care plans are progressing in a timely manner to prevent and avoid drift in children's cases.
- To continue to focus on increasing participation of children and young people at their meetings.
- To ensure every Care Experienced Child and Young Person has a stand-alone and in date care plan.
- To ensure that the IRO is fully involved in all aspects of a child's care planning.
- To collate thematic practice issues identified from the QA's and use these to develop learning themes and improve practice
- IROs will continue to promote advocacy services and the Active Offer to children and young people and make these referrals where consent has been given to support the child/young person's voice.
- To implement recommendations from independent audits.
- Consider and implement any IRO specific recommendations from the Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA) inspection.

Service Priorities – Action Plan

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

IRO Service								
	Owner	Due date	Recommendation	Action	Evidence	Update	Last RAG	RAG
1.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	To increase the contact between the IRO with children and young people.	<p>IRO Service Manager will continue to be involved in the progress of the MUSE App.</p> <p>Each IRO will ensure they give the child/YP the opportunity to meet with them to discuss their LAC review or CP Conference.</p>	<p>IRO Service Manager will attend all consultation meetings in relation to the development of this APP.</p> <p>Data collection of consultation rates will be included in the 6 monthly IRO Report.</p>	<p>Due to the Covid pandemic work focussing on a consultation APP ceased and is yet to be restarted.</p> <p>However, progress has been noted in terms of IRO consultation with young people and this is felt to be as a result of virtual platforms being preferred by many children and</p>	Amber	Amber

						teenagers.		
2.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	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 2nd LAC Review 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.</p>	<p>IRO Service Manager to attend the LAC 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 a number of cases where alternative care options could be considered resulting in the child no longer being Looked After.</p> <p>In IRO Supervision on the IRO Team Manager ensures discussion takes place around the children who have been identified as possible candidates for an</p>	Green	Green

						<p>alternative Order such as a Special Guardianship Order which would end their LAC status. The IRO Service Manager attends the monthly LAC Reduction Strategy meetings and provides updates.</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 & Safeguarding attends a monthly interface with the Legal Team where</p>		
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						these cases can be discussed in detail.		
3.	IRO Service Manager	April 2024	The development of child and young person consultation and participation through a more accessible medium.	IRO Service Manager will continue to be involved in the progress of the MUSE App. Each IRO will ensure they give the child/YP the opportunity to meet with them to discuss their LAC review or CP Conference.	IRO Service Manager will attend all consultation meetings in relation to the development of this APP. Data collection of consultation rates will be included in the 6 monthly IRO Report.	All work around an App ceased in Covid. Signs of Safety will increase our rates of consultation.	NYS	NYS
4.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	To work alongside Safeguarding Teams and SCDWP to improve practice around Care Experienced Children and their meetings.	IROs will ensure they complete the IRO Quality Assurance document following every LAC Review. This will automatically be sent to the Safeguarding Team Manager for their scrutiny. Should the IRO identify concerning practice, they will raise this with the IRO Service	The rates of completed QA forms will increase in the next year and the data will be included in the IRO 6 month report. IRO Service Manager will attend all IRO protocol Meetings to support the IROs and facilitate resolution.	IRO Service Manager continues to raise cases of concern with the individual Social Workers, their Team Managers and Group Manager where appropriate. IRO Service Manager continues to present training	Green	Green

				<p>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>		<p>alongside the training department and is facilitating introductory sessions to new starters and newly qualified staff.</p>		
5.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	To ensure appropriate care plans are progressing in a timely manner to prevent and avoid drift in children's cases.	At every LAC Review 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 LAC Review that	The rates of IRO Quality Assurance forms being completed is increasing and this will continue moving forward. IROs are holding mid-point meetings for	In this period the IROs identified all children whose Care Plan was out of date and informed the respective Social	Green	Green

				<p>the Care Plan is updated to reflect the changes agreed at the current LAC Review.</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 take action where drift is identified.</p> <p>Each IRO will complete the IRO Quality Assurance form following each LAC review as this informs the SW and their Team Manager of any out of date Care Plans.</p>	<p>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>Workers and Team Managers and provided a timescale for completion. On the whole progress was made but not in every case. IROs will continue to monitor all children's Care Plans and where there is a Care Plan that is out of date or not reflective of the child's circumstances they will raise this appropriately and track to ensure completion.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager ensures when</p>		
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						attending the LAC 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.		
6.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	To continue to focus on increasing consultation and participation of children and young people at Looked After Children Reviews.	IROs to ensure they offer to consult with each LAC 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 meeting, phone,	The IRO Quality Assurance form captures the consultation data and this will be included in IRO 6 month report. IRO Service Manager will during Supervision sessions discuss the importance of consultation and ensure it	Since Covid restrictions have been in place IROs have found many young people prefer to be consulted via virtual means such as Skype.	Amber	Amber

				Skype and MS Teams.	remains a priority for each IRO.	<p>IROs report many young people have attended their LAC reviews while in the lock down period as they have had greater availability to attend.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager has added Consultation as a Supervision agenda item to ensure it is discussed in Supervision sessions with each IRO.</p>		
7.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	To ensure every Care Experienced Child and Young Person has a stand-alone and in date Care Plan.	At every LAC Review 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 LAC	<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</p>	In this period the IROs have continued to identify drift on cases and where care plans are	Green	Green

			<p>Review that the Care Plan is updated to reflect the changes agreed at the current LAC Review.</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 take action where drift is identified.</p> <p>Each IRO will complete the IRO Quality Assurance form following each LAC review as this informs the Social Worker and their Team Manager of any out of date Care Plans.</p> <p>The IRO will enquire whether a child's care plan has been shared with it's carers.</p>	<p>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 Team Manager and the safeguarding Team Manager.</p>	<p>not up to date.</p> <p>On the whole progress was made in this area.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager ensures when attending the LAC 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 that this is flagged with the Safeguarding Team Manager.</p>		
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8.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO	April 2024	To collate thematic practice issues identified from the QA's and use these to develop learning themes and improve practice.	The data will be scrutinised for the 6 monthly IRO Report.	<p>Any practice themes identified will be provided to the Training Department and Team Managers at the weekly Team Meeting.</p> <p>If required the IRO Service Manager will be available to support the Training Team in facilitating training sessions to address these deficits.</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>We also have two independent audits being undertaken around our LAC and CP decision making. The recommendations and learning will be fully considered at the completion of these pieces of work.</p>	Green	Green
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9.	IRO Service Manager and each IRO.	April 2024	IROs will continue to make children and young people aware of the advocacy service.	<p>This is currently monitored via the IRO Quality Assurance form and will be scrutinised for the IRO 6 month report.</p> <p>IROs will ensure when consulting with young people they ask if they would like the support of the Advocacy Service.</p> <p>IRO Service Manager will liaise with the Group Manager for Case Management and Transition periodically to check the referral rates have not decreased.</p>	<p>The referral numbers to Tros Gynnal from Bridgend are the highest in the Western Bay area.</p> <p>IROs report good evidence of advocacy discussions and offers being made between Social Workers and Children.</p>	Advocacy referral rates have significantly increased.	Green	Green
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