

**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 CAFCASS.
- 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.

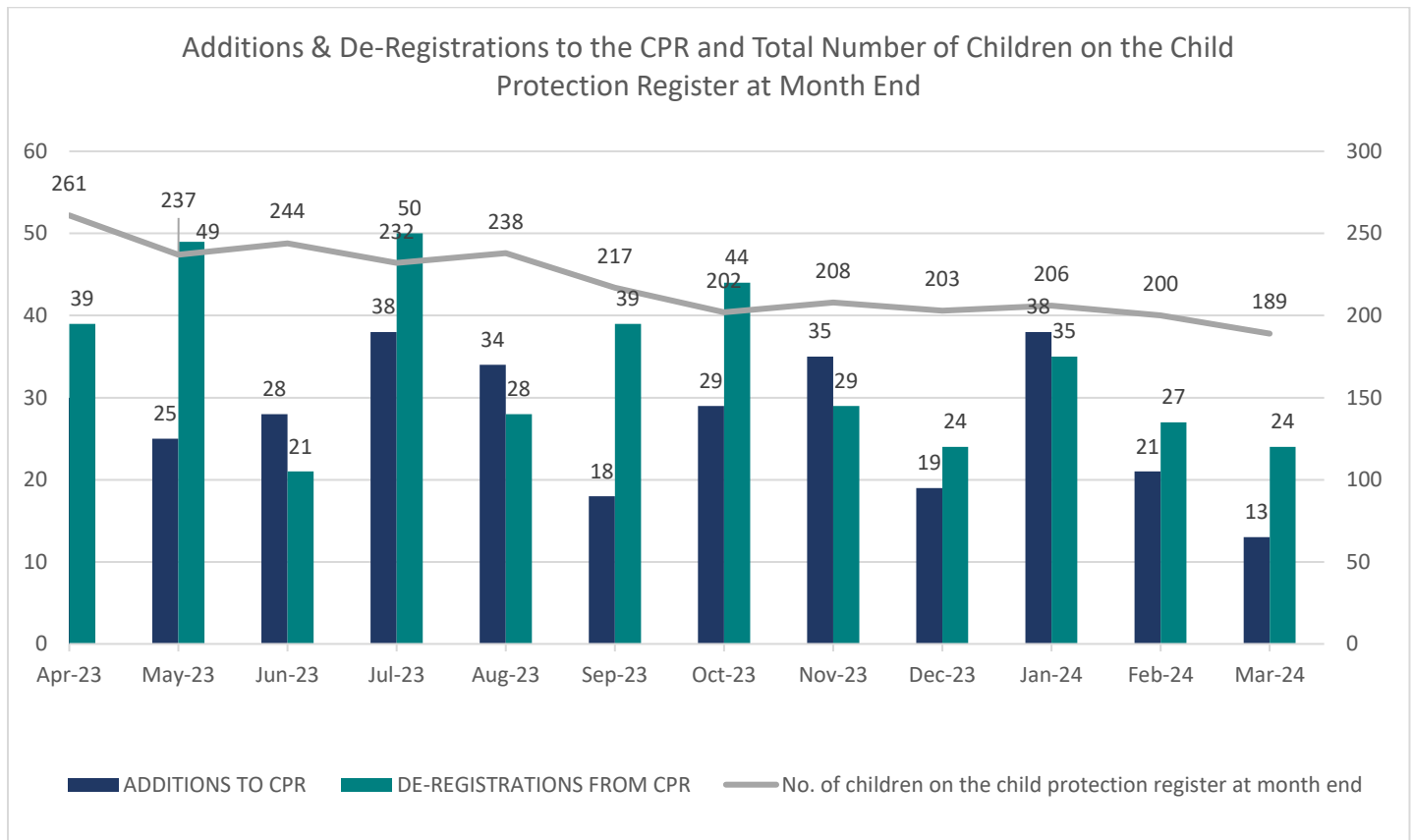
### **Continuous improvement strategy**

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

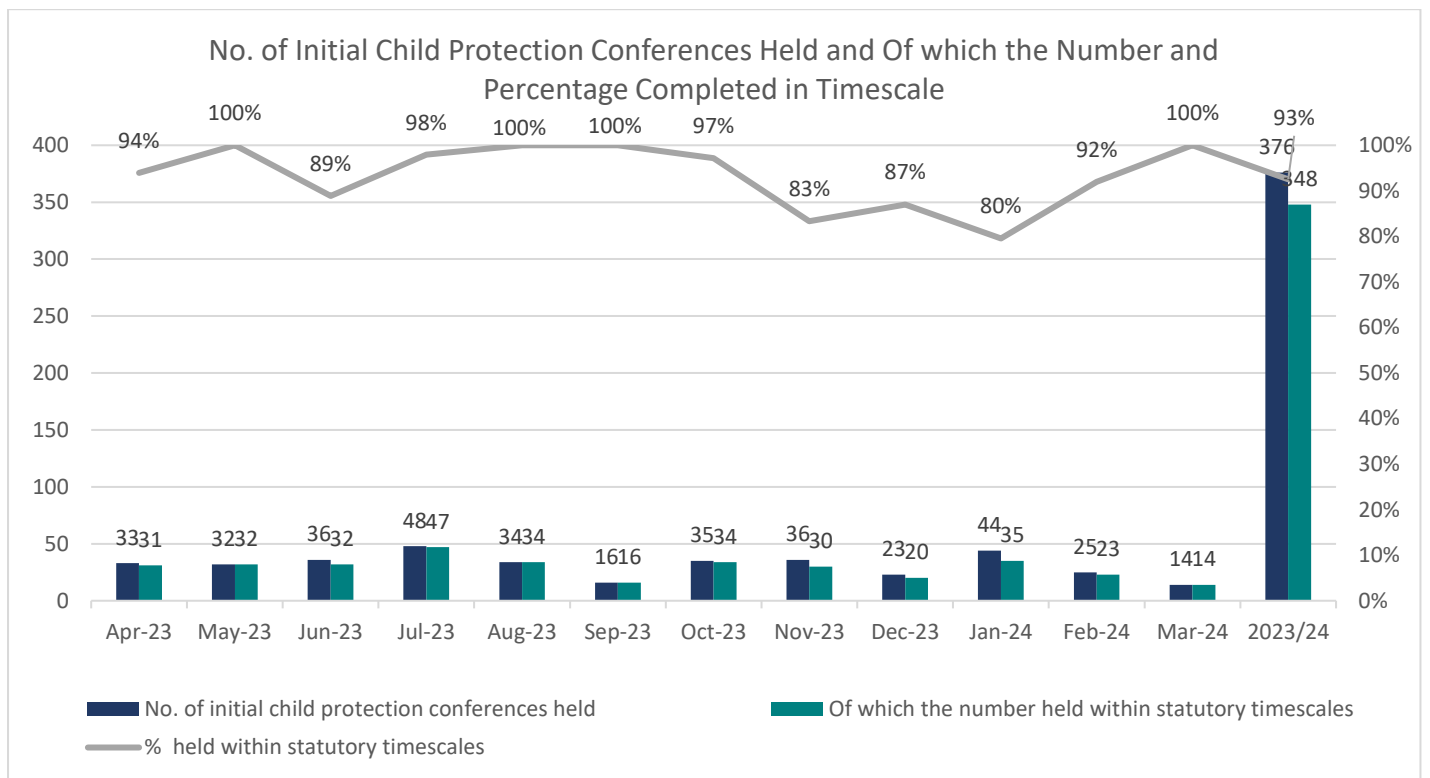


The number of children subject to Child Protection registration continued to decrease throughout this period with the highest end of month figure being in January 2023 at which time there were 306 children's names on the CPR. This steadily decreased through 2023 – 24 to 189. In total, there were 328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

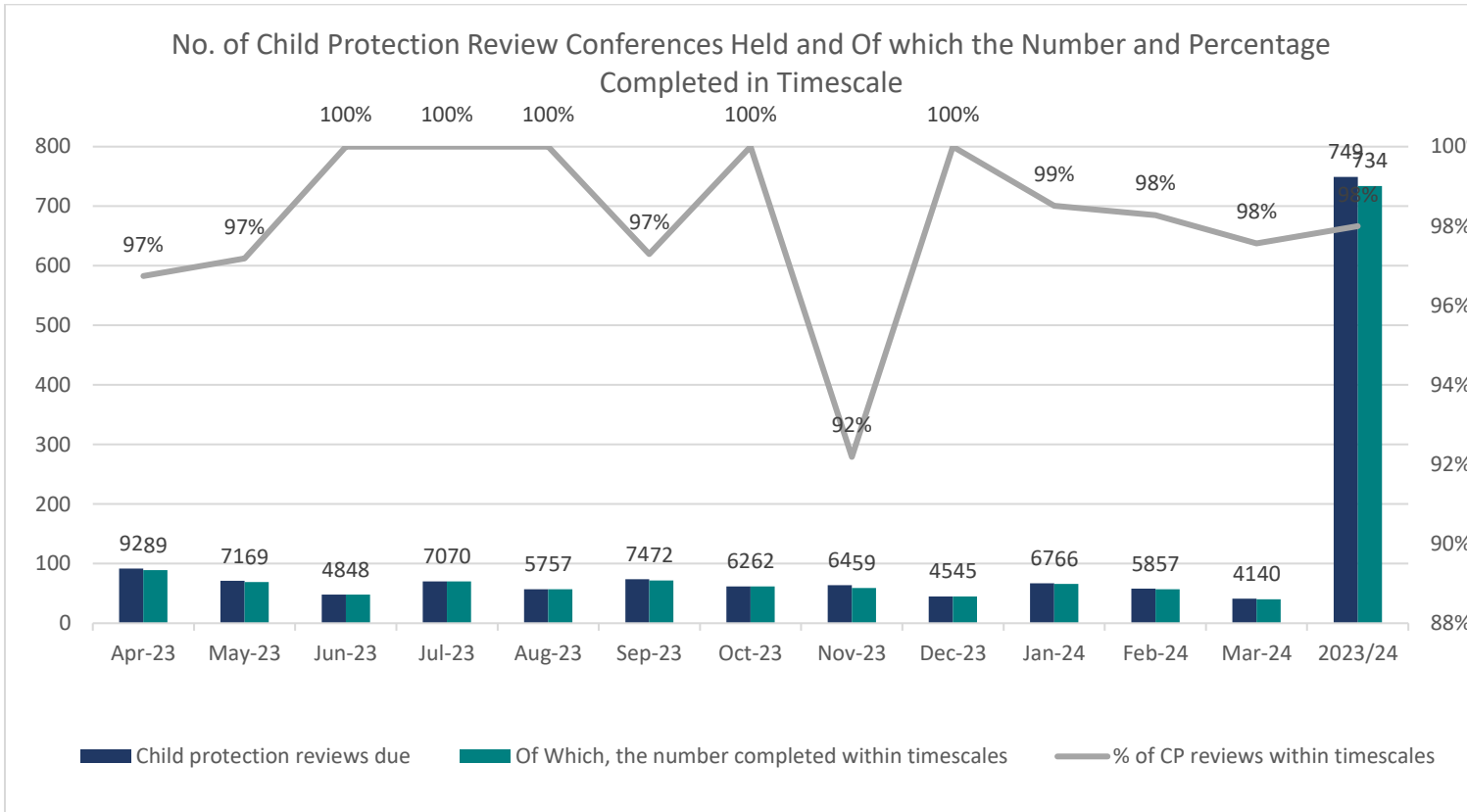


During the period of April 2023 – March 2024, the IRO Service chaired 376 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) of which 93% were held within statutory timescales. Whilst performance remains in the top quartile, there has been a decrease of 4% convened within statutory timescales in the same period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

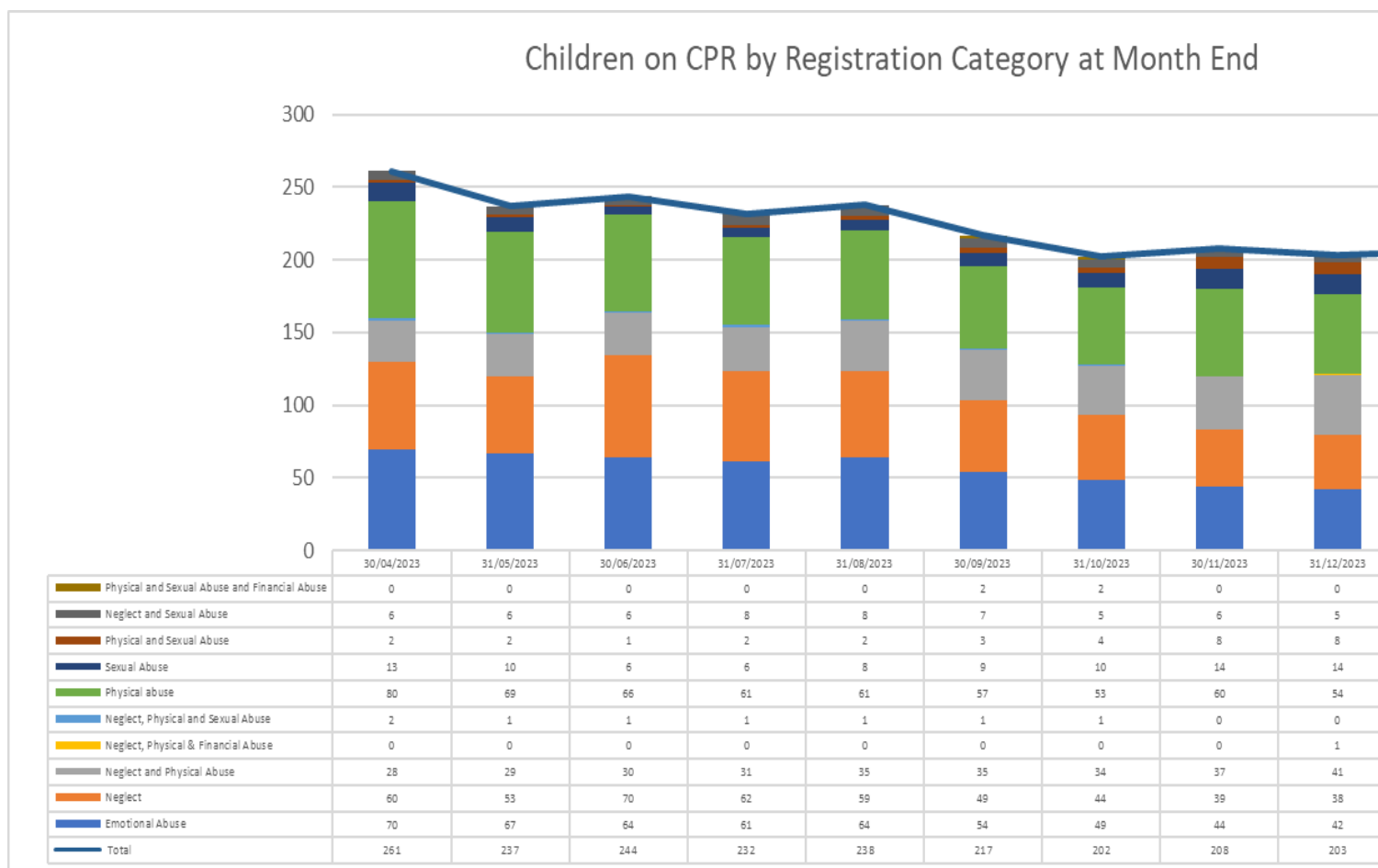


**Chart 3 – No. of CP Reviews Held and No. in Compliance**



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).

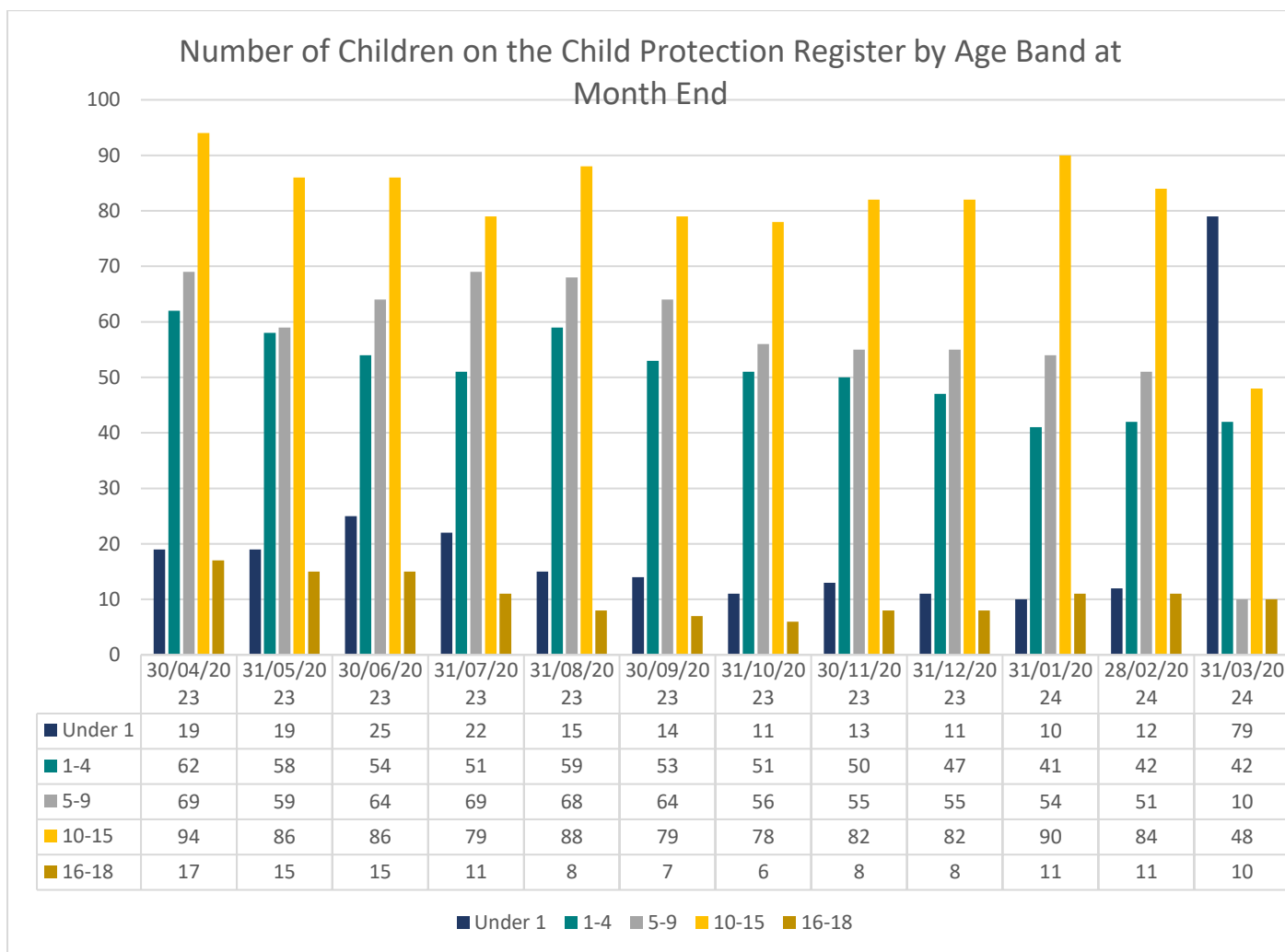
### Financial Abuse

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

### Neglect

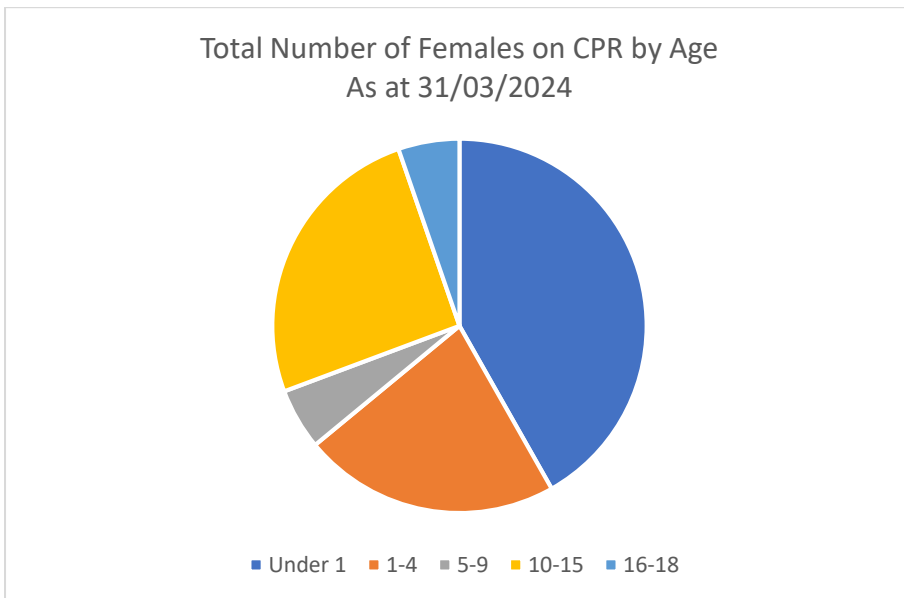
This means failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional, social, or psychological needs, which results in an impairment of the child's wellbeing (for example, an impairment of the child's health).

**Chart 5 – CPR – Gender and Ages**

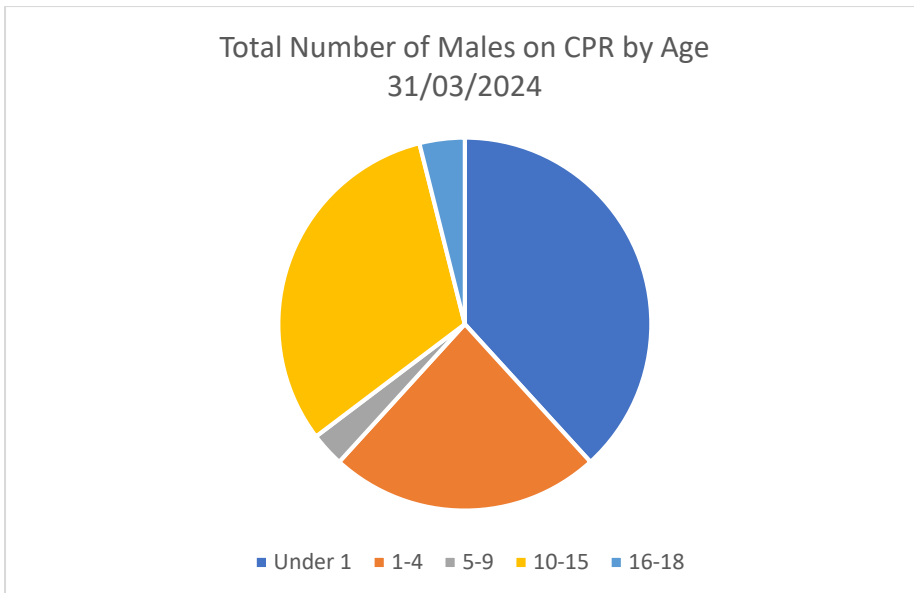


In Chart 5, we can see that on average each month, children between the ages of 10-15 years make up the majority of those on the Child Protection Register. Similarly, Chart 6 and 7 indicates that female children between the ages of 10 - 15 years make up most children whose names are on the Child Protection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

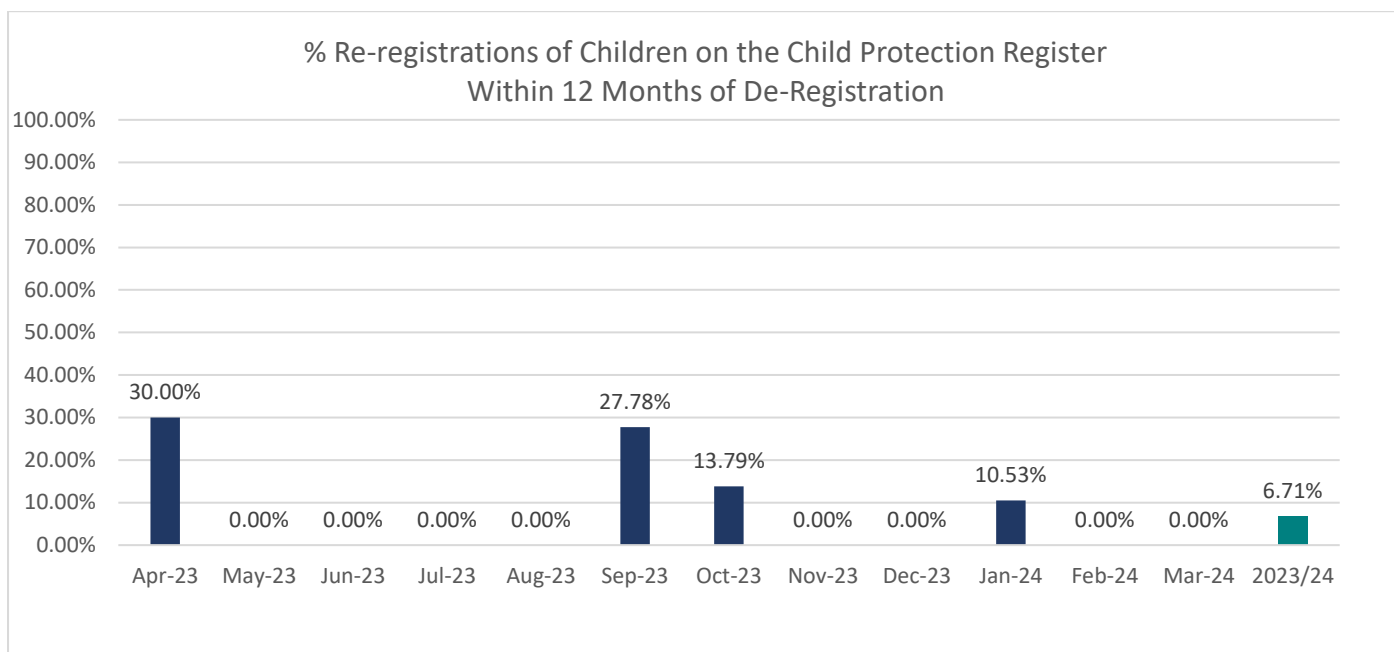
**Chart 6 – Total No. of Females on CPR as at 31/03/2023 by age**



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

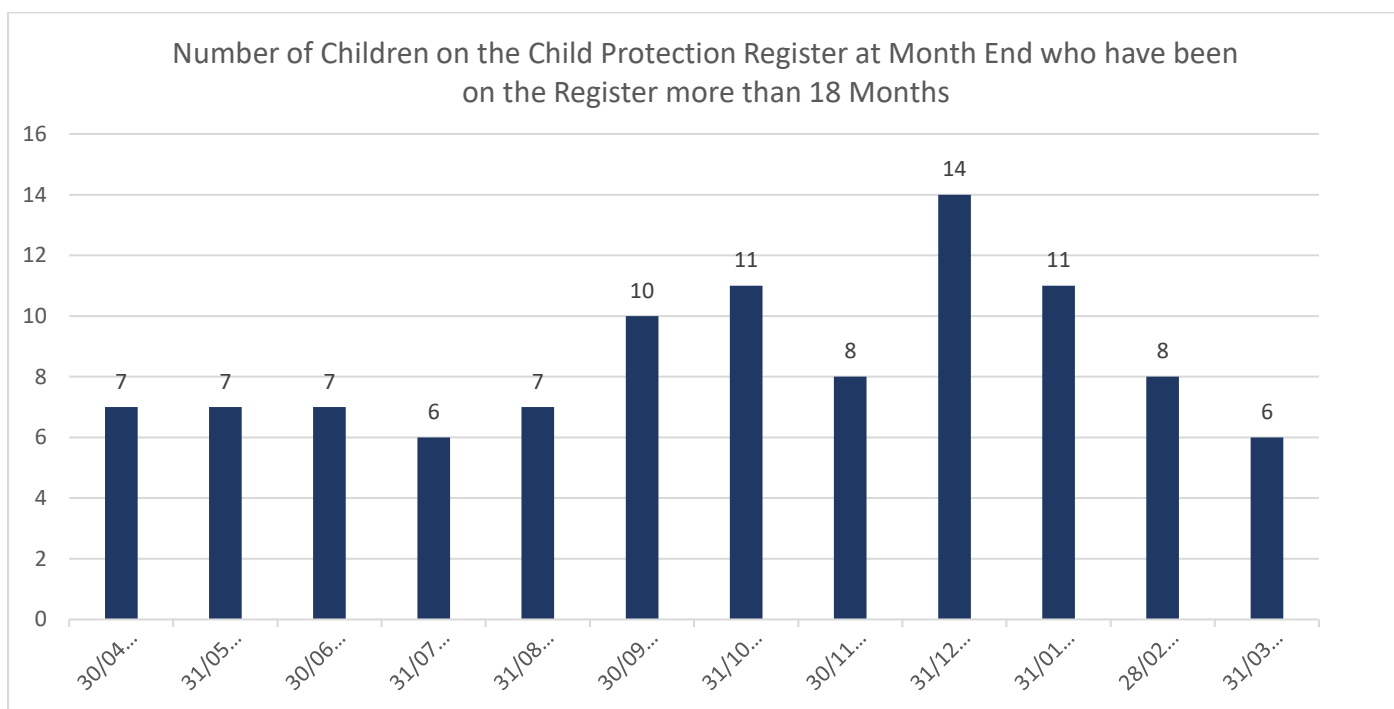


### **Chart 8 – Re-registration within 12 Months of De-registration**



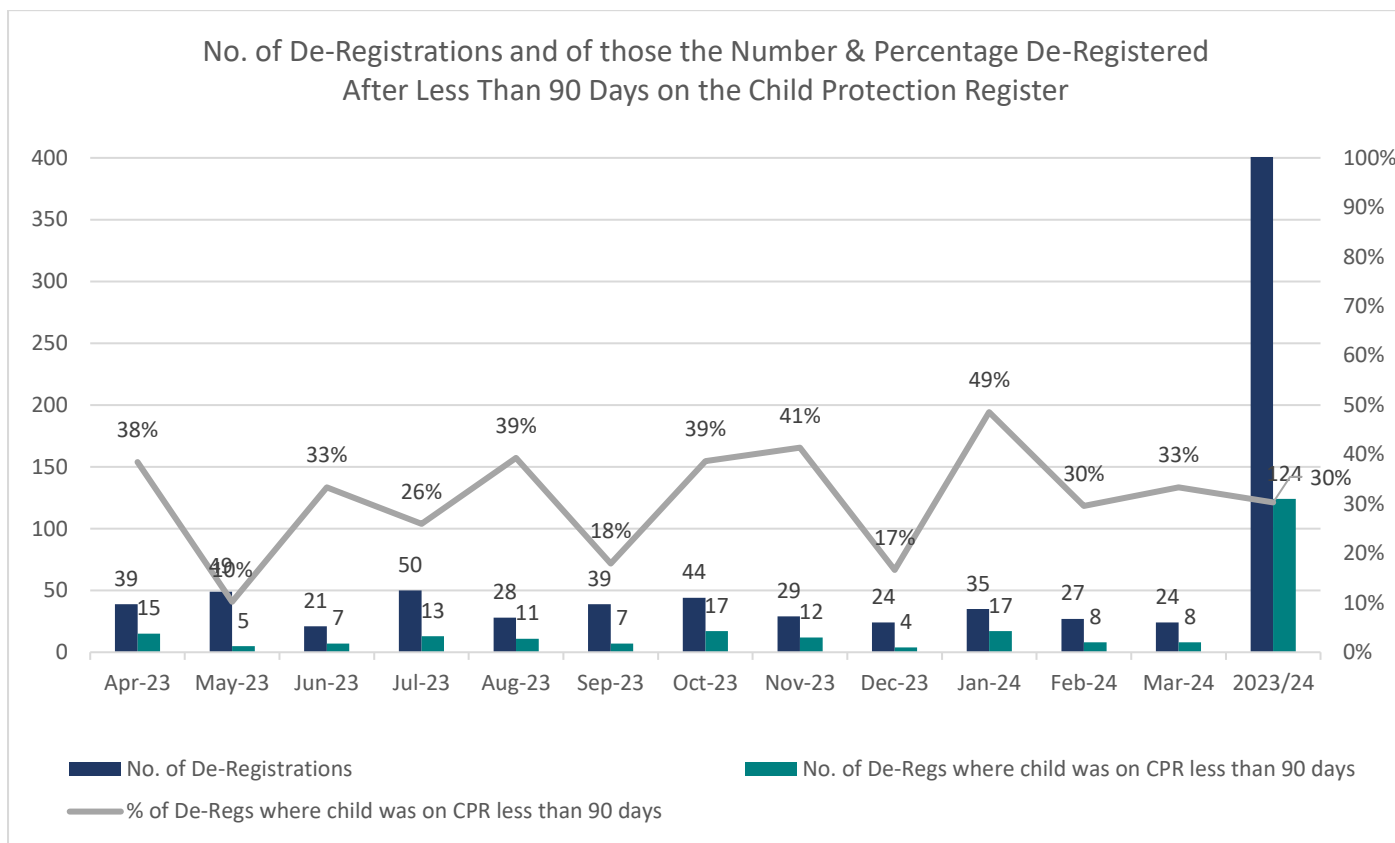
Any case that returns to an ICPC within 12 months of being de-registered will be audited by the IRO Service Manager to scrutinise the processes that were followed and consider themes and any lessons that can be learnt. There has been a reduction in re-registration from the previous year period. Our numbers 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**

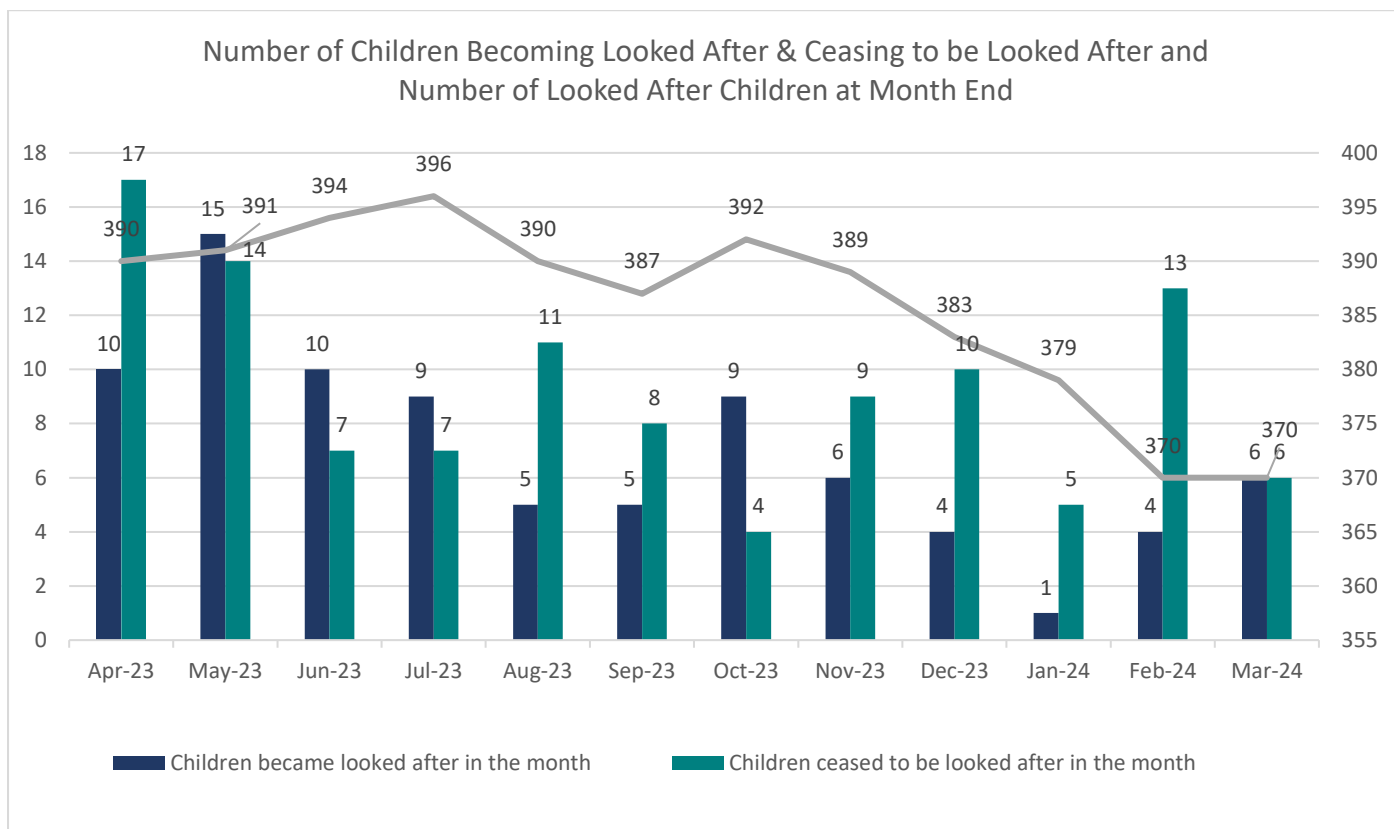


Chart 11 details the number of children who were in the care of Bridgend County Borough Council over the period from April 2023 – March 2024. This is a decrease from the same period in 2022 - 2023 which peaked at 400. Chart 9 highlights the number of admissions and the number of children who ceased to 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.

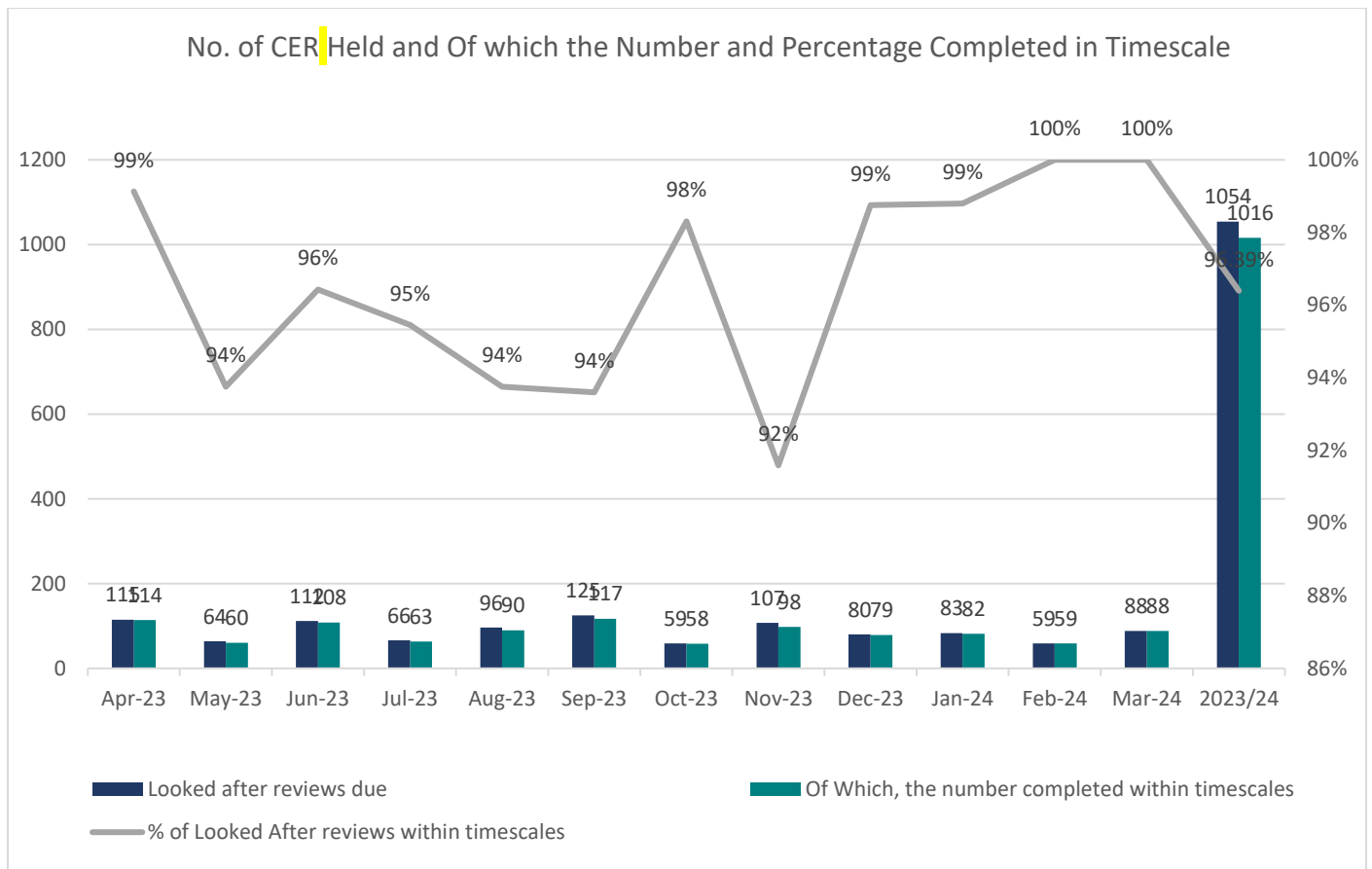
The Signs of Safety model also supports children being diverted from becoming care experienced. The model emphasises the importance of families finding their own solutions to problems within their own network of family members, friends and community services. The model makes identifying the risks much 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



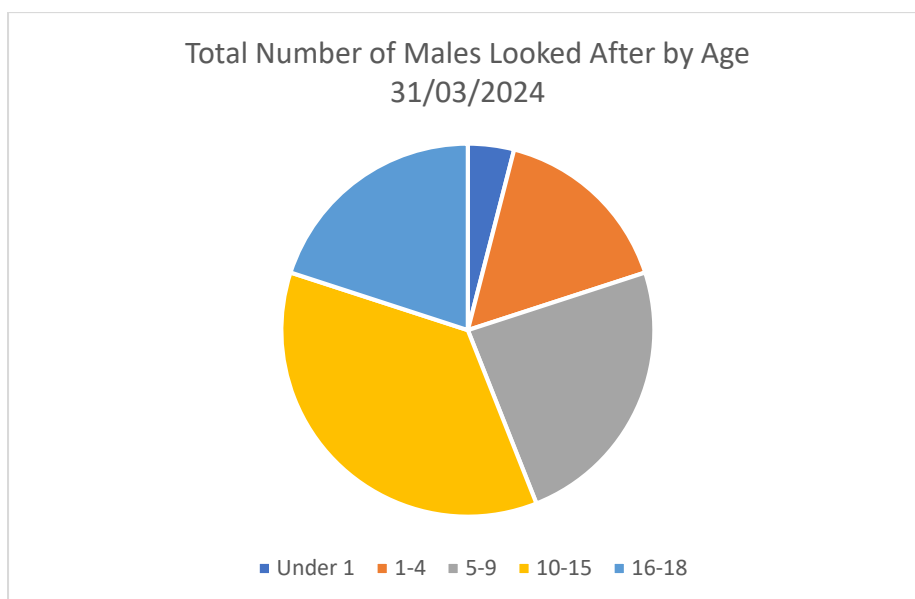
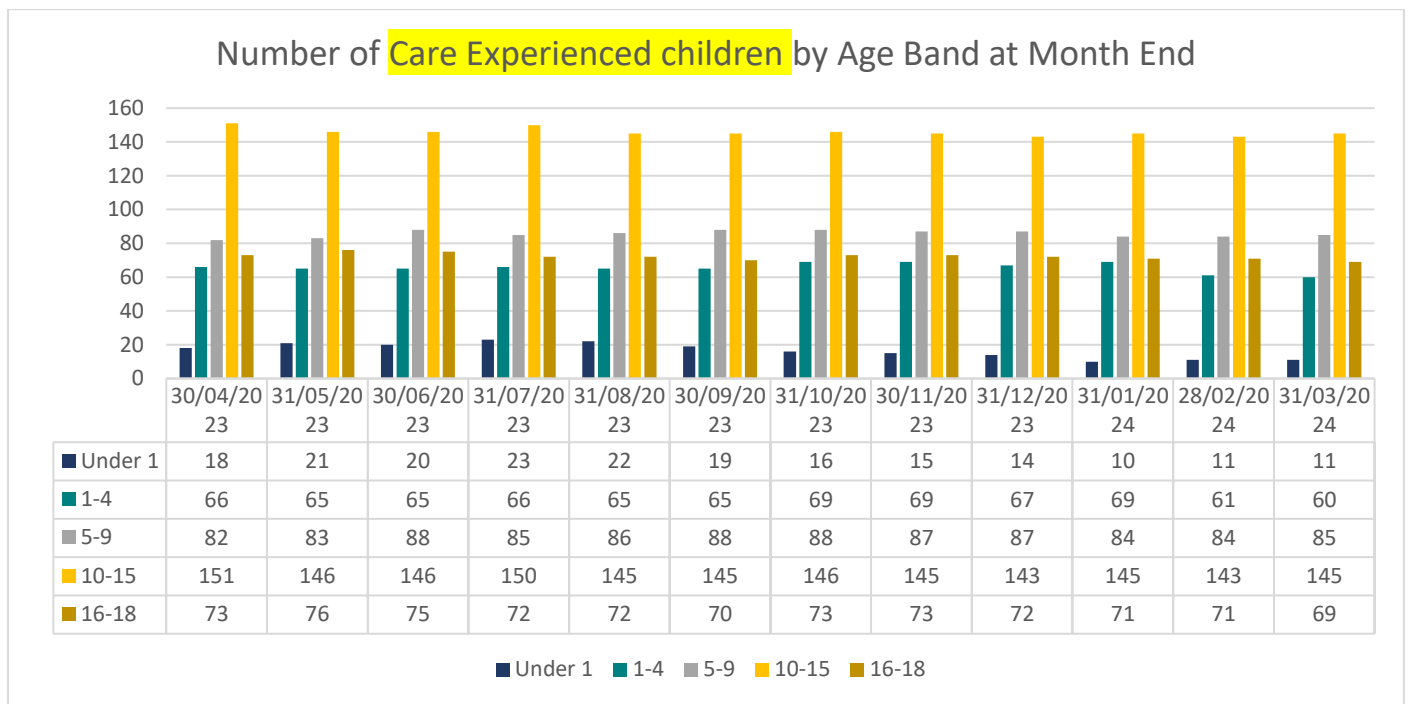
to manage their own problems without an over reliance on services. We are seeing the benefits of this model in our reduction of child protection registrations and numbers of care experienced children.

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

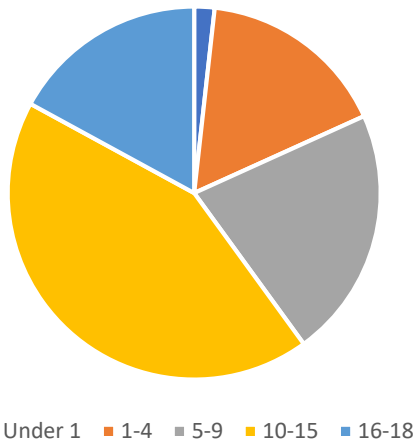


In total, over the period under review, there were a total of 1054 CERs of which, 96.39 % were convened within statutory timescales. This is a decrease in percentage from the last reporting period again from 21/22 and 22/23. Every effort is made to arrange the review within timescales, but this is not 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



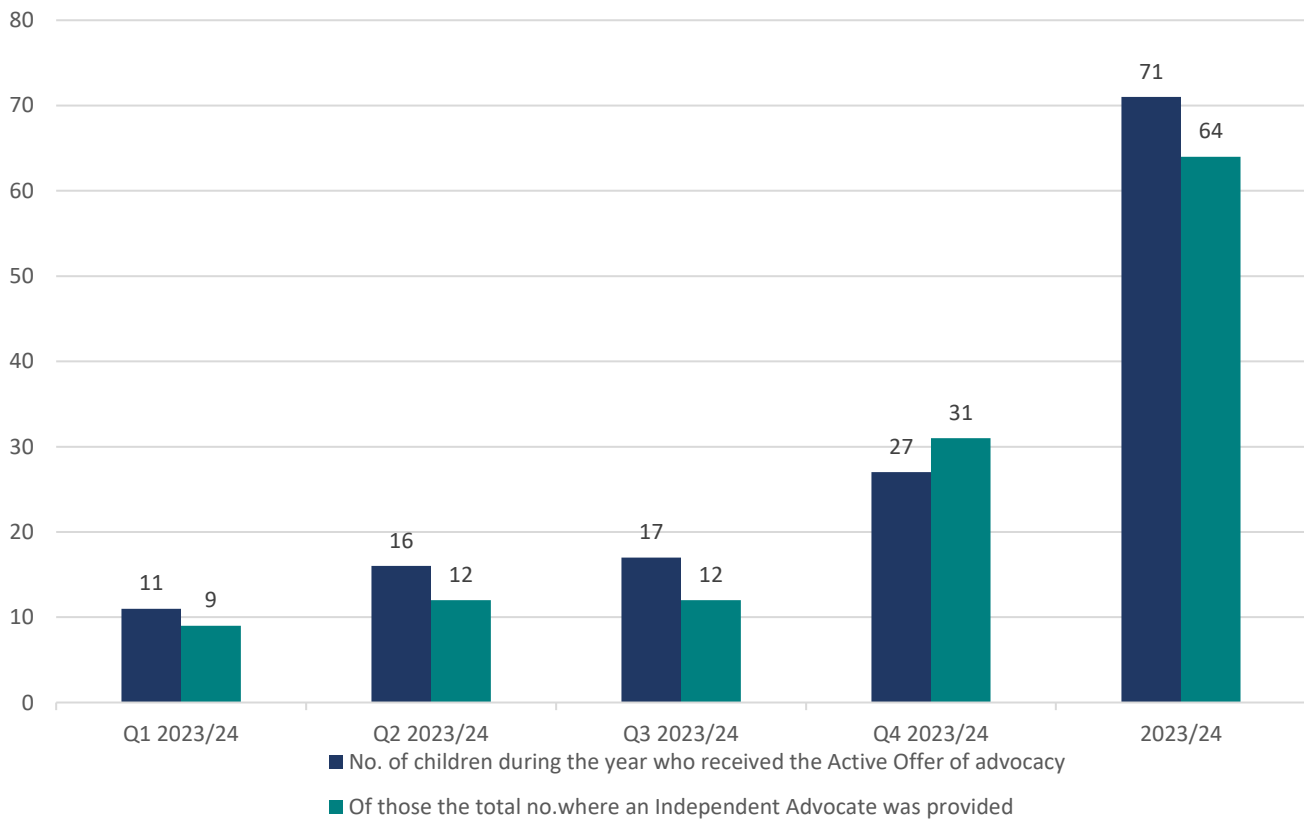
Total Number of Females Looked After by Age  
As at 31/03/2024



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.**