

Corporate Parenting Board

Meeting to be held on: **4 April, 2023 AT 6.00 PM**

Meeting to be held: Council House, Walsall.

MEMBERSHIP:

Chair: Councillor Elson
Vice Chair: Councillor Jukes
Councillor Hicken
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor Mazhar
Councillor Worrall

ADVISOR

Alison Jones (NHS Walsall ICB)

Note: Walsall Council encourages the public to exercise their right to attend meetings of Council, Cabinet and Committees. Agendas and reports are available for inspection from the

Democratic Services, Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact: Mrs N Gough ☎ 01922 654767 E-mail nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk

ITEMS FOR BUSINESS

Part I – Public session

1. Apologies and Substitutions
3. Declarations of interest and party whip
4. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)
5. Minutes of meeting held on 10 January 2023 – copy **enclosed**
6. Engagement Session with Young People action plan – copy **enclosed**
7. Performance monitoring (Quarter 3) – copy **enclosed**
8. IRO Annual Report – copy **enclosed**
9. Independent Visiting Service Annual Report – copy **enclosed**
10. CPB Annual Report - copy **enclosed**
11. Future of Corporate Parenting Board – **to follow**

Date of next meeting – to be confirmed

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The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority: (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge): (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.

Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>
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Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.

7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
 - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Corporate Parenting Board

Tuesday 10 January 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Hicken
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor Mazhar
Councillor Worrall

Officers Present

Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Elise Hopkins	Director, Customer Engagement
Jo Manning	Group Manager
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Jenny Cockcroft	Group Manager
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School
Mark Burrows	Group Manager (Fostering and Adoption)
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Walsall ICB)

Welcome

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present. She also noted that the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage.

15/23 Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies or substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

16/23 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

17/23 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Committee agreed to receive item 8 - The Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022 prior to item 6 – Young People Engagement.

18/23 The Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022

The Group Manager (Fostering and Adoption) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the report summarised the activity of the fostering service from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The structure of the fostering service was described, along with the changes that had been made to the staffing structure.

The Board was advised that there had been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Walsall over the last 5 years, from 645 in 2017 to 648 on 5 December 2022. However, at the end of March 2022, there were 196 approved internal fostering households. In 2021, the Fostering Service introduced a referral fee of £500 which on approval of the applicant by Fostering Panel, was payable to the referrer.

The Group Manager described the connected foster carer and special guardianship arrangements – many connected foster carers were assessed and approved on the basis that they would go on to apply to be the child's special guardian. This arrangement prompted legal permanence for the child.

The Mocking Bird model was described to the Board; Members were informed that this model was progressive for a Local Authority the size of Walsall.

Officers were congratulated on achieving foster friendly status for the Council. The Board asked for an update on the recommendations made by the Board during the previous municipal year. The Director stated that there had been a recommendation relating to the advertisement of independent fostering agencies

using roundabout advertisement space. Work had taken place to ensure that this would no longer happen, and that there would be an increase of advertisements for the Councils fostering service.

In response to Member questions, the Director stated that the Council branding would be reviewed to ensure that the profile of the service was raised. There had been more in person engagement including, supermarkets, Walsall Pride and leisure centres.

A discussion ensued on the level of interest being expressed by staff in response to the fostering friendly status, and the promotion of this at other organisations. A Member requested a glossary of terms for inclusion in reports where acronyms were used.

Resolved

That the Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022 was noted.

19/23 Young People Engagement

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

The Board discussed member attendance at 'Total Respect' training and how this could be increased in the future. It was agreed that bespoke training would be offered for Elected Members and consideration would be given to how this can be tailored.

Further information was provided on the children in care council activity, including their input into the future celebration events. It was noted that although the face-to-face group would continue, a virtual group would be restarted to encourage participation.

Members were informed that feedback from care leaver's week had been positive and indicated that young people would welcome the opportunity to interact with senior leaders and elected members.

A Member suggested that opportunities may be available for children in care to use the Bryntysilio Outdoor Centre.

Resolved

1. That the Young People Engagement be noted.
2. That a bespoke 'Total Respect' training session is developed for Elected Members.

20/23 Children's Residential Service

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an overview of changes to the current service model through expansion and aims to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Board were informed that Cabinet had endorsed the plan by Children's Services to open and run two new children's homes. These homes would focus on the more complex, hard to place and therefore more costly placements. They would also be used for children in the process of being able to return home or step down to foster care.

The Board was informed that the Councils looked children population had increased and continued to grow since 2019, there had been a gradual reduction in children in care over the last 12 months. However, the number of children accommodated in residential provision had doubled since 2019, from 37 to 75 in the last three years.

The Board was informed of legislation that made it unlawful to place children under the age of 16 in unregistered accommodation. It was stressed that this was a complex process and a discussion ensued on the process and procedure of placing a child in unregistered accommodation – stressing that a higher level of management oversight was carried out.

It was hoped that the residential homes would be operational in May/June; the service was in the process of applying for planning permission and in the process of registering with Ofsted. In response to Member questions, the Board was informed that where possible children would attend the same school, if the child was out of school, work would be done with the virtual school to identify the most appropriate educational provision. The Head of the Virtual School confirmed that she had met with the Manager of one of the new homes and the Designated Nurse confirmed that she had also provided training to the Manager.

Councillor Jukes provided feedback on her visit to Hilton Road:

- The home was clean and welcoming.
- The staff were knowledgeable.
- Young people were provided with the opportunity to speak in a way in which they were comfortable.
- Requests made by Young People would be fed back to Senior Managers.

The Board challenged if the FLASH service had been restored. The Group Manager stated that a more robust service was being sought and was a work in progress; contingency plans were in place until this happened.

The Young Persons champion had met with young people in residential care to seek their feedback. It was reported that three of the five young people in the home had been spoken with, and expressed that they felt happy and well cared for – they felt that they could speak up about issues

Resolved

That the Children's Residential Service be noted.

21/23 CCG Assurance Report

The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an overview of the statutory responsibilities of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in relation to Looked after Children and the performance of these responsibilities. Further information was provided to the Board on the ICB, and the benefits that it would bring to Walsall – through equalisation of resources.

The Board considered the data in relation to initial health assessments, and the reasons for this included:

- Late notification of coming into care.
- Carers overlooked the appointment.
- Children missing/refused.
- Extended hospital stays.
- Cancellation due to Covid-19.
- An increase of children coming into care.

It was noted that the percentage of dental checks completed had declined due to Covid-19. This continued to be monitored and was beginning to recover. The Board was informed that NHS England were developing pathways for this cohort. It was confirmed that a health app had been developed for children leaving care, which contained their health summaries.

In response to questions from Members, the Designated Nurse stated that it was difficult to forecast pressures as it was dependent on how many children came into care however extra clinics were arranged where necessary. It was noted that there were situations, which could not be controlled, and it would be difficult to consistently hit 100%. It was also stressed that children with known health needs were prioritised.

It was noted that the next meeting would be an engagement session with young people, and would be held at the TLC hub.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Signed

Date

Engagement session with CICC and CL forum Action Plan

Executive Summary:

The Council4Kids, the “Children in Care Council” (CICC) and The Care Leavers forum, are the forums where Walsall’s children and young people in our care and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive.

On the 13th February 2023 the Corporate Parenting Board met with 14 young people in our care and care leavers and they set out areas for development that they would like to see progressed. It was agreed at this meeting that an action plan would be developed to address the areas that the young people felt were important to improve the lived experience of children and young people in our care and those who are moving into independence.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the proposed action plan developed following their meeting with the children in care council and care leavers forum.

Recommendations:

That the board notes the action plan and requests an update at an appropriate juncture so they can ensure progression of the proposed activity.

A child friendly version will be shared with all children and young people in our care and care leavers.

Background papers:

Previous Young People Engagement reports.

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

Walsall is committed to ensuring that children and young people are involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives through.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven Corporate Parenting Principles and 2 of the principles focus on the involvement and participation of children and young people:

- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child says that children and young people have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously and taken seriously.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

None.

Performance management:

The Children's Champion works with children in care and our care experienced young people to ensure that our CICC is a rich and engaging forum. Regular reports are provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:

The children in care council seeks to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Consultation:

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

Contact Officer:

Full Name – Jenny Cockcroft, Head of Service for Practice Quality and Improvement

Email: jenny.cockcroft@walsall.gov.uk

Action plan following Children in Care council meeting with Corporate Parenting Board – March 2023

Aim	Actions	Lead	By when	Update
Help us to understand what our carers can agree to and what they can't and why.	Sleepover policy and supporting promotional material to be developed in partnership with CICC.	Jo Manning (Group Manager Corporate Parenting and TLC) CICC/David Hughes	June 2023	
	Work with CICC to develop a child friendly form which could be completed by child's social worker so they know who has what responsibility in terms of delegated authority.	Jo Manning or delegated CP manager CICC/David Hughes	June 2023	
	In first instance review with fostering service current offer regarding pets for children living with our own foster carer and consider if policy and promotion required to support the implementation of this.	Mark Burrows (Group Manager Fostering) CICC/David Hughes	June 2023	
Make sure we have a fair offer of support	The ask is a review of birthday, Christmas and pocket money given cost of living increase and whether they can be increased – in first instance seek to understand regional offer from other LAs.	Mark Burrows/ David Hughes via Participation Network	May 2023	
	As part of the regional care leaver offer, review our care leaver offer in line with regional LAs and identify any areas where we may want to improve our offer. Bring report to CPB outlining our offer comparable with the wider regional offer.	Jenny Cockcroft/Jo Manning	Date to be confirmed	
	Meet with leisure services to consider extending offer of free access to plus one for care leavers	Jenny Cockcroft	May 2023	

	<p>Corporate Parenting Board may wish to consider hearing reports annually from Leisure and Housing/WHG around how they meet their corporate parenting responsibilities – help promote sense of accountability.</p> <p>Review the promotion of the care leaver offer to our young people who have left or will be leaving our care so they can understand their entitlement</p> <p>Develop leaflet for care leavers about how they can access their files, their rights in relation to this, the support available to them.</p> <p>Newsletter for care leavers and for children in care to be sent out quarterly which will provide opportunity to promote young people's understanding of the offer of support. Newsletter to be sent out for both cohorts in May 2023 for Expert by Experience month.</p> <p>Building on the success of the care leavers football events – TLC to develop offer regarding other positive activities for young people to share together – suggestions included walking group and cookery class/club.</p> <p>Continued development of the care leavers forum in partnership with TLC to ensure a wide range of young people are involved in</p>	<p>Cllr Elson</p> <p>Andy Caville (Team Manager TLC) Comms team CL forum/David Hughes</p> <p>Andy Caville CL forum/David Hughes Print and Design</p> <p>David Hughes Print and Design Andy Caville</p> <p>Andy Caville/David Hughes</p> <p>Andy Caville David Hughes/CL forum</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p> <p>By Aug 2023</p>	
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	<p>the co-production of service including the care leaver offer.</p> <p>Develop a range of videos with young people that talk about the different experiences they have in care –such as PEPs, child in care reviews, advocacy etc.</p>	David Hughes/CICC/CL forum		
<p>Help us to feel more like we fit in, in school.</p> <p>Help us to have more opportunities like work experience and apprenticeships and understand what our options are.</p>	<p>Survey to be developed in partnership with virtual school for all school aged children in care to understand their experience of education. Particularly thinking about experiences of stigma and how we can work with schools/SW to reduce this.</p> <p>Virtual school to develop offer of work experience within council via Endless Possibilities or own bespoke offer.</p>	<p>Lorraine Thompson Participation</p> <p>Lorraine Thompson</p>	<p>April 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>	
<p>Help us to have better lasting relationships with our family whilst in care.</p>	<p>IRO's to undertake a review of the current family time arrangements for all children subject to a care order.</p> <p>Implement keeping in touch tool as expectation for any child with plan of adoption prior to final review. Consider adapted model for children subject to proceedings with proposed plan of long term fostering or SGO.</p> <p>Pathway regarding how advocacy is promoted to be developed to help support children to be able to speak up if they are not happy about the family time they have</p>	<p>SRS</p> <p>Jade Read</p> <p>Jenny Cockcroft</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p> <p>May 2023</p>	

	by improving the promotion of advocacy service.			
Talk to us in a way that doesn't make us feel different and is respectful	Review the fostering annual review form to consider how this can better reflect commitment to language that cares. Implementation of language that cares action plan	Charmain Lewis CICC/David Hughes Jenny Cockcroft	May 2023 Ongoing	

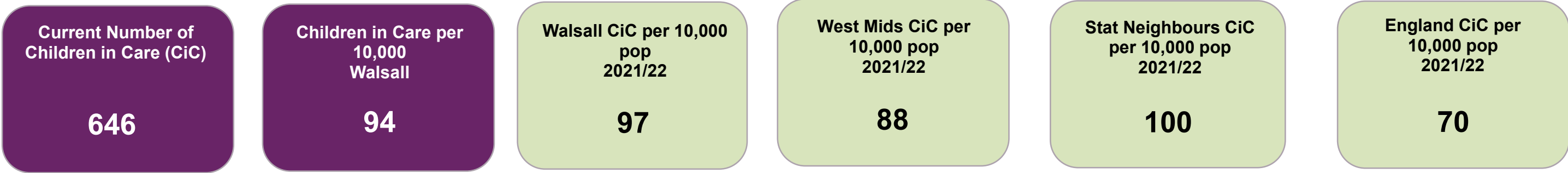
Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 3



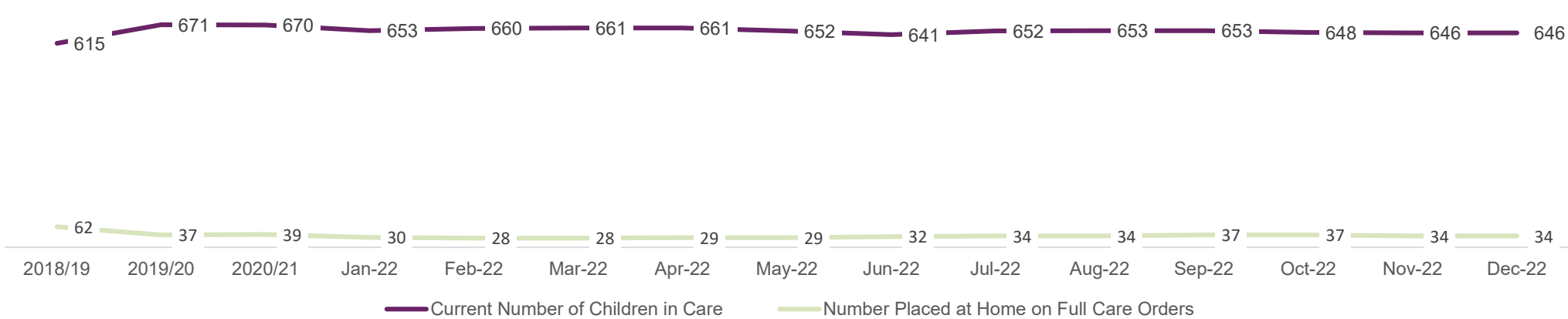
Walsall Council

PROUD OF OUR **PAST** OUR **PRESENT** AND FOR OUR **FUTURE**

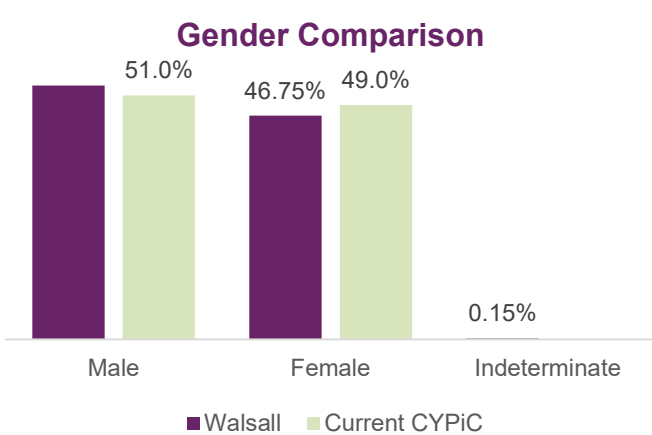
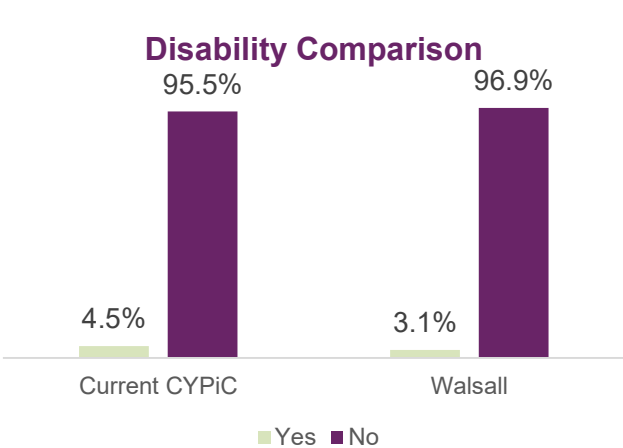
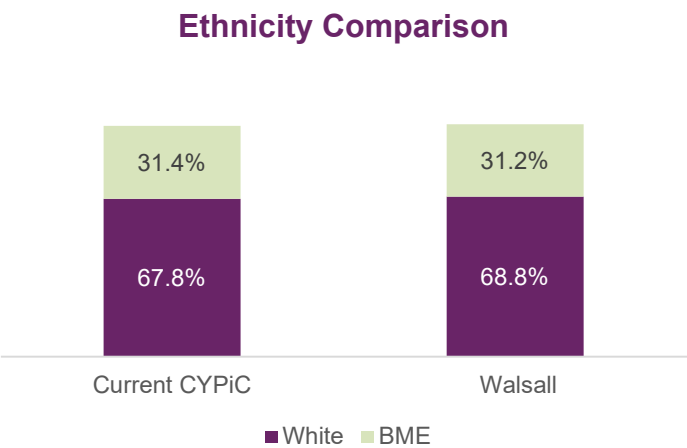
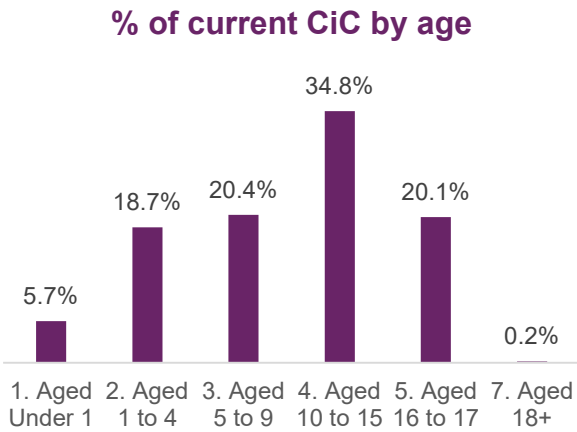
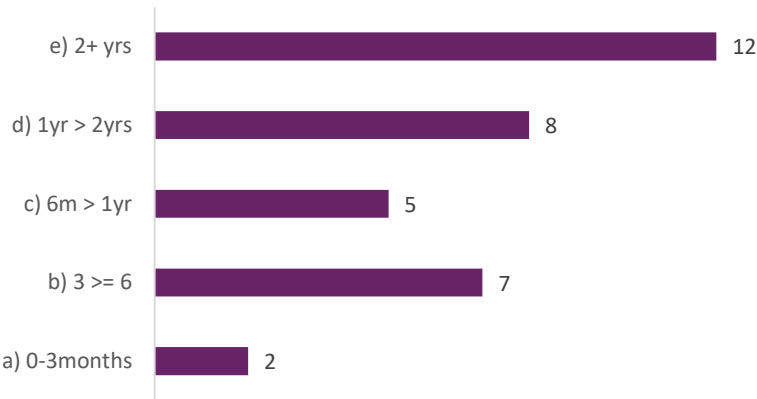
Current Children in Care (CiC) Profile



Number of Children in Care in Walsall (12 Month Rolling)



Length of Time placed at home on full care orders

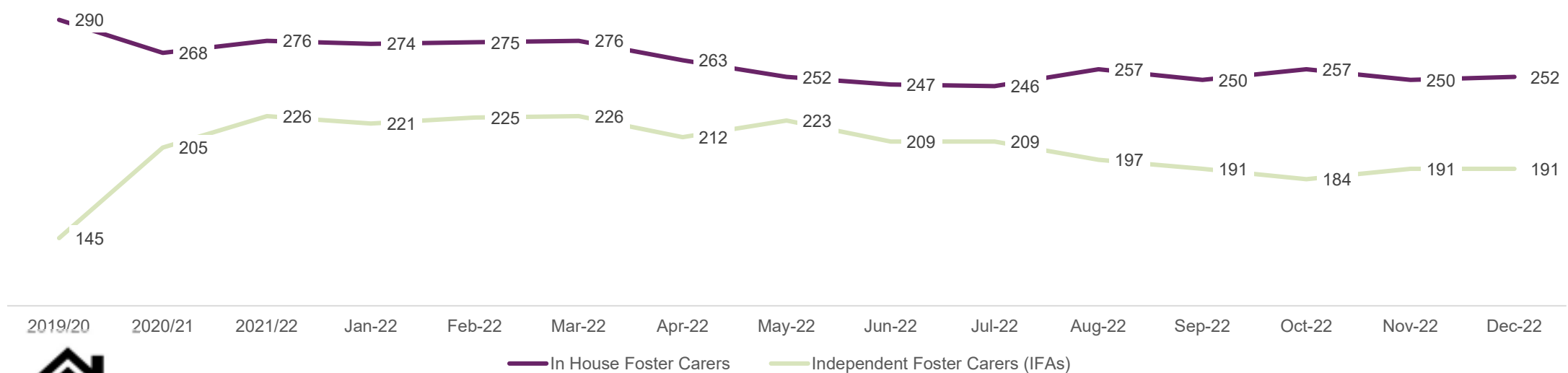


Commentary

Demographic data has been taken from the 2020 mid-year population estimates. A slightly lower proportion of Children in Care are from BME backgrounds compared to the Walsall Child and Young Person population (0-17s). A slightly higher percentage of Children in Care have a disability (4.5%), compared to the overall 0-17 population (4.3%). A slightly lower percentage of Children in Care are male (51.0%) compared to the overall 0-17 population of Walsall (52.4%).

The current Children in Care population has continued to decrease slightly from 661 at the end of 2021/22 to 646 at the end of Q3 of the current year (2022/23). The current rate of 95 per 10,000 remains below that of our statistical neighbours but is still higher than the 2020/21 England and West Midlands averages. We currently have 34 children placed at home on full care order, this is a slight decrease from 37 at the end of Q2. 20 of the 34 have been placed at home for over a year. Work is continuing with the courts [Page 18 of 24](#) for children who are placed at home where appropriate.

Breakdown of Foster Placements (12 Month Rolling)



The number of CiC placed with in house foster carers and IFA's has increased but remains fairly stable.



% CiC placed 20 mile+ from home, outside of LA boundary

103

16.5%

2021/22 Walsall = 14.0%
2020/21 Walsall = 12.0%
2021/22 West Midlands = 15.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 16.0%
2021/22 England = 16.0%

% CiC 3 or more placements in a year

58

9.0%

2021/22 Walsall = 7.0%
2020/21 Walsall = 7.0%
2021/22 West Midlands = 9.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 8.1%
2021/22 England = 10.0%

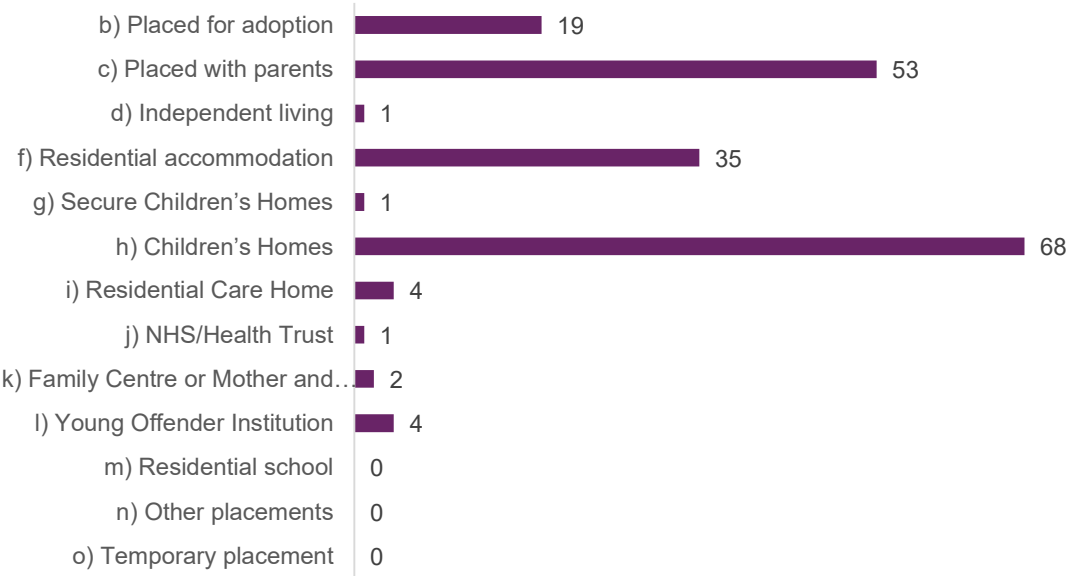
% of CiC in same placement for over 2 years if CLA for over 2.5 years

203

70.5%

2021/22 Walsall = 69.0%
2020/21 Walsall = 68.0%
2021/22 West Midlands = 71.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 72.3%
2021/22 England = 71.0%

Current CiC by Placement Type (non-fostered)



Commentary

Trends for children placed with in house foster carers have remained stable during the third quarter of 2022/23. Currently Walsall has 252 children placed with in house foster carers, lower than the out-turn for 2021-22. Walsall has 191 children placed with independent fostering agencies.

16.5% of Walsall's CiC are placed 20 plus miles from their home address this is an increase on the 2020-21 out-turn. 9.0% of the CiC population have had 3 or more placements within a year. This is also higher than the 2020-21 out-turn. The percentage of CiC in the same placement for over 2 years if CiC for over 2.5 years (70.5%) is slightly lower than regional and statistical neighbour averages for 2020/21.

Statutory Visits and Reviews



% Visits undertaken to timescale

Where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the childs plan.

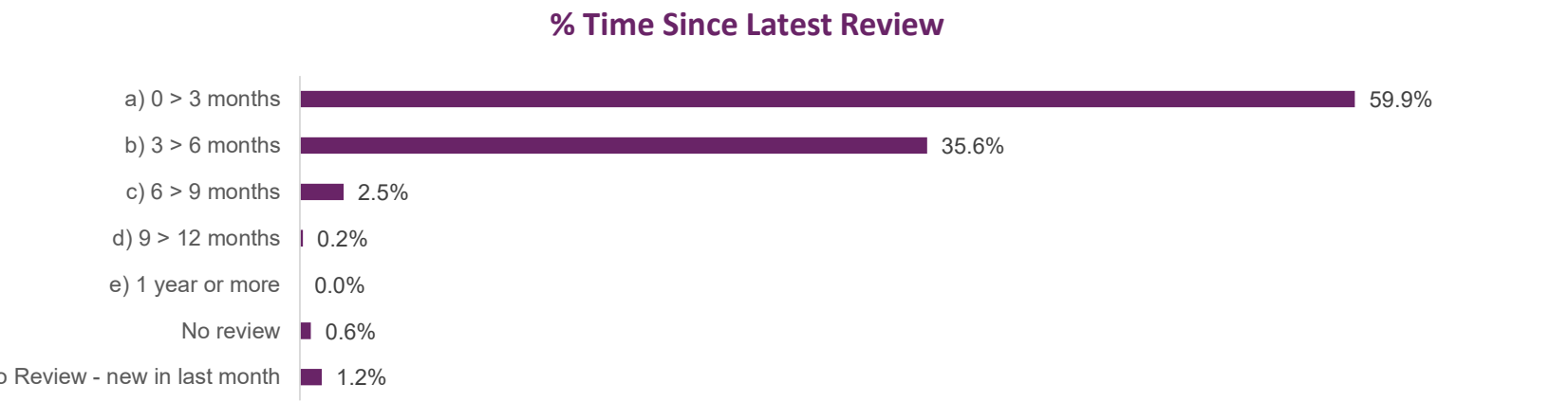
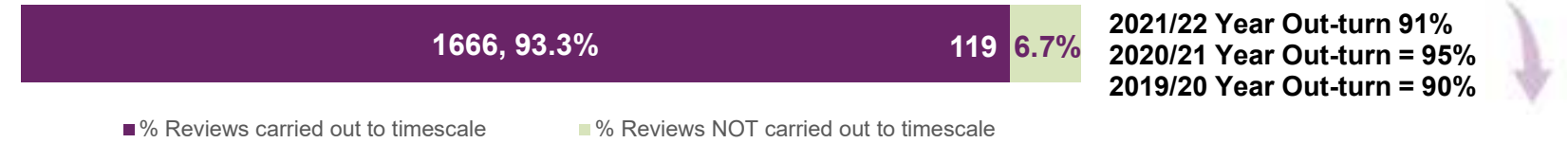
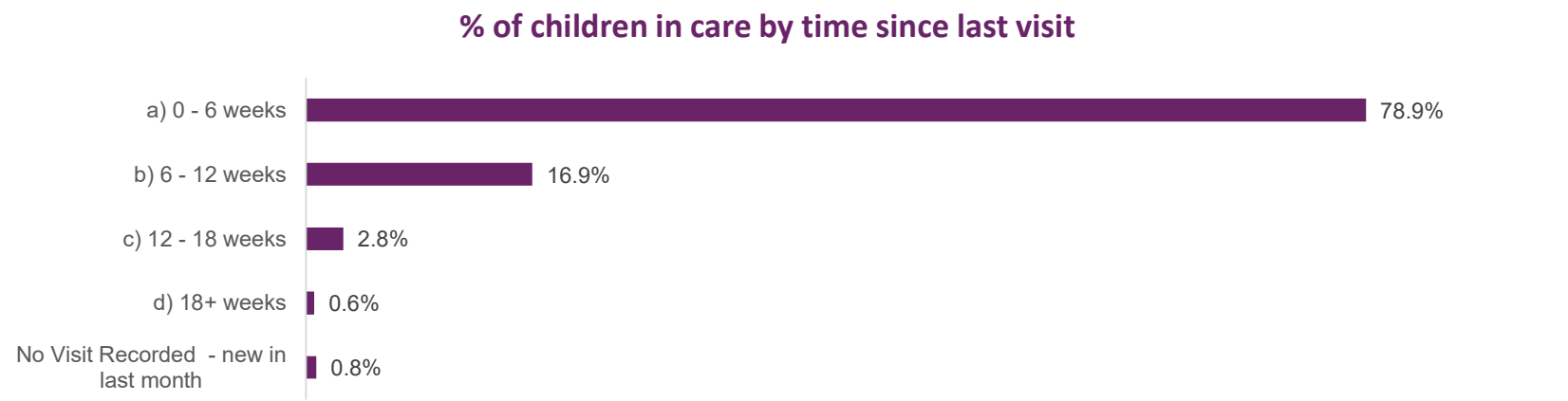
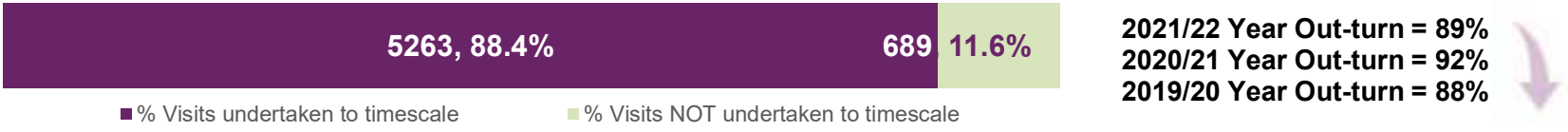
Time Since Last Visit Undertaken	Number	%
a) 0 - 6 weeks	510	78.9%
b) 6 - 12 weeks	109	16.9%
c) 12 - 18 weeks	18	2.8%
d) 18+ weeks	4	0.6%
No Visit Recorded - new in last month	5	0.8%
Total	646	100.0%



Reviews carried out within timescale (12month Rolling)

Where reviews for children looked after are carried out within timescale

Time Since Latest Review	Number	%
a) 0 > 3 months	387	59.9%
b) 3 > 6 months	230	35.6%
c) 6 > 9 months	16	2.5%
d) 9 > 12 months	1	0.2%
e) 1 year or more	0	0.0%
No review	4	0.6%
No Review - new in last month	8	1.2%
Total	646	100.0%

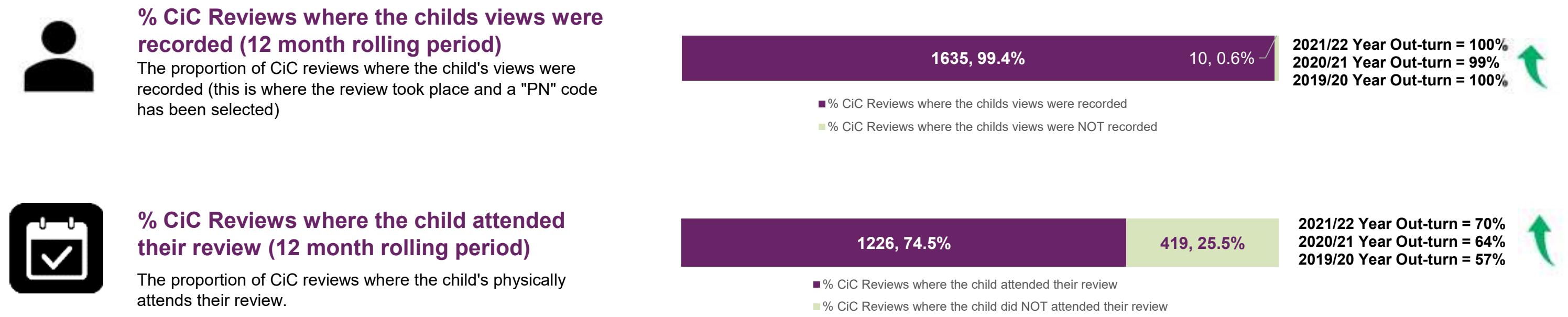


Commentary

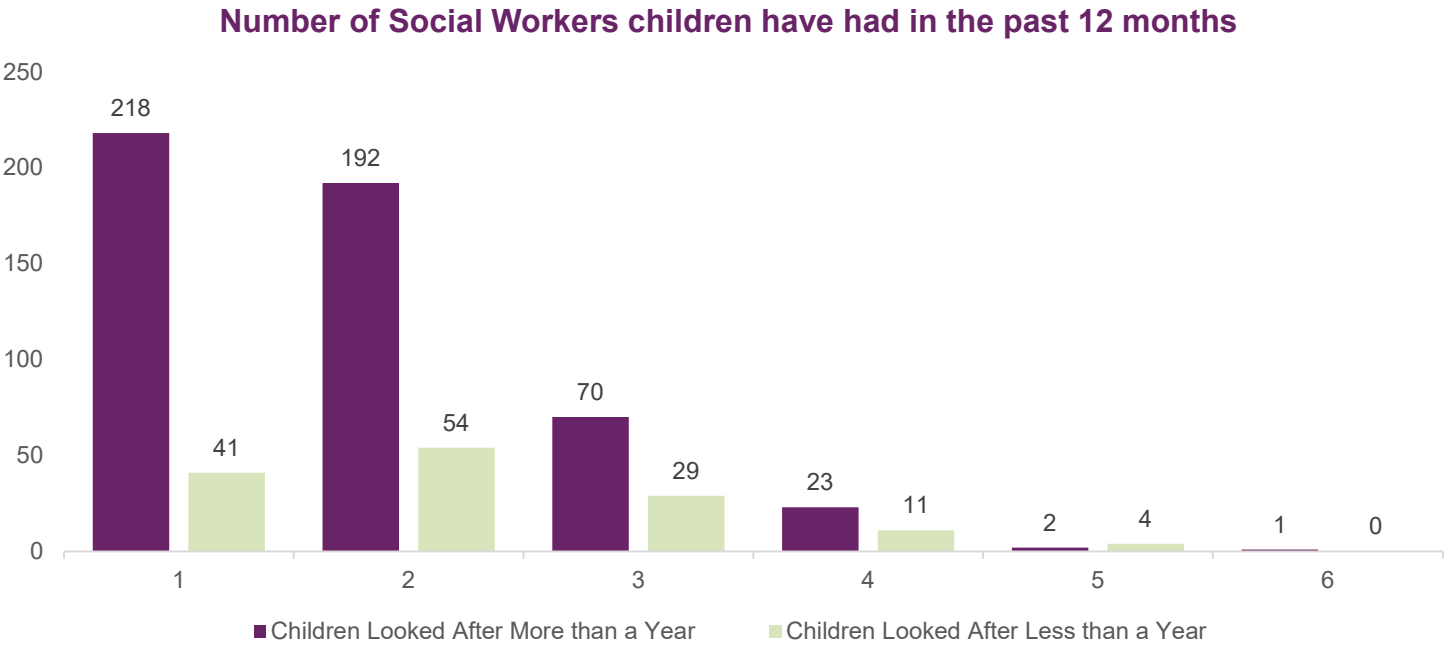
The proportion of CiC where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child’s plan is 88.4% with 78.9% seen within 6 weeks of the previous visit or coming in care. There were 5 CiC with no visits recorded as 31st Dec 2022, these children would have entered into care during the month.

93.3% of reviews have been undertaken within timescales. 96.6% of current Children in Care have had a review within the last 6 months. 1.2% (8) children currently have no review because they were new into care during the last month, however, this review will have been completed on time and will be in the process of being recorded (IROs have 20 working days from the date of review to write their reports).

Views of the child



Type of Participation at Review (12 month rolling period)	Number	%
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	419	N/A
PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves	724	59.1%
PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them	36	2.9%
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	13	1.1%
PN4 - child attends; does not speak for themselves / convey their views	38	3.1%
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	115	9.4%
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference	239	19.5%
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to the conference	23	1.9%
PN8 - where IRO visits/talks to the child to obtain their views for the meet	28	2.3%
Total Reviews	1645	
No Participation Code Reported	10	0.8%



Commentary

The child's views were recorded at 99.5% of CiC reviews. This is similar to the out-turns for the previous three years, this remains very positive performance.

69.5% of children attended their review in the previous 12 months. This is a increase compared with previous years and has been supported and enabled through the increased use of technology.

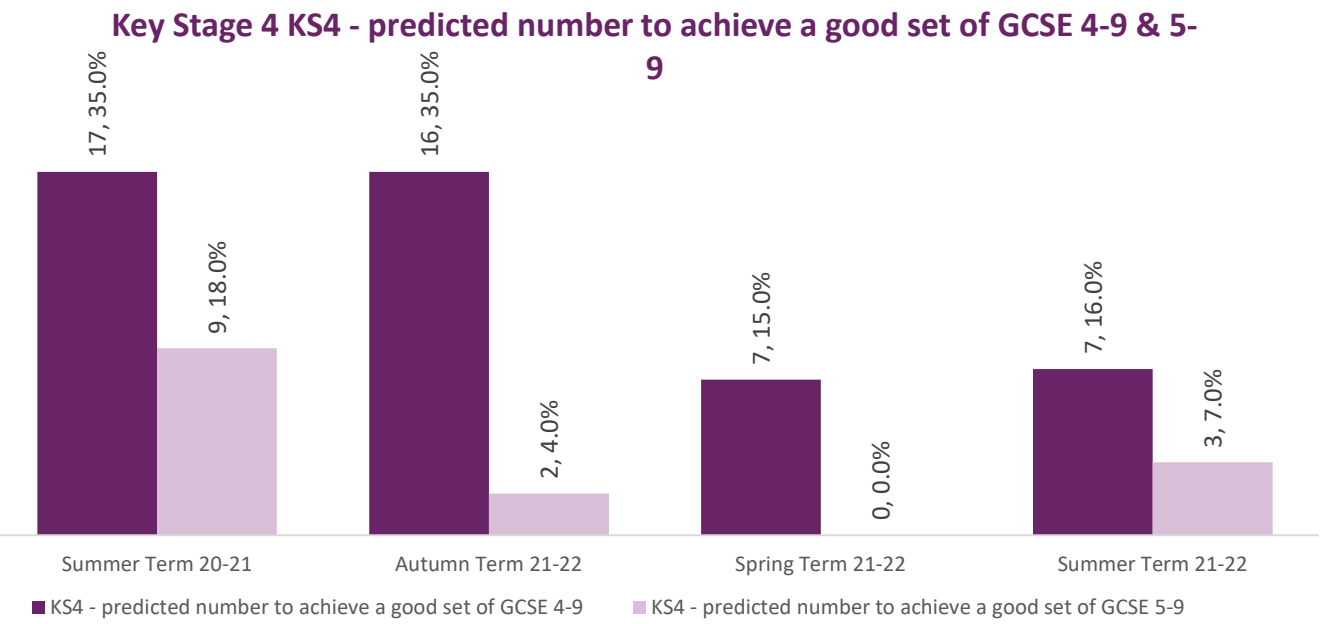
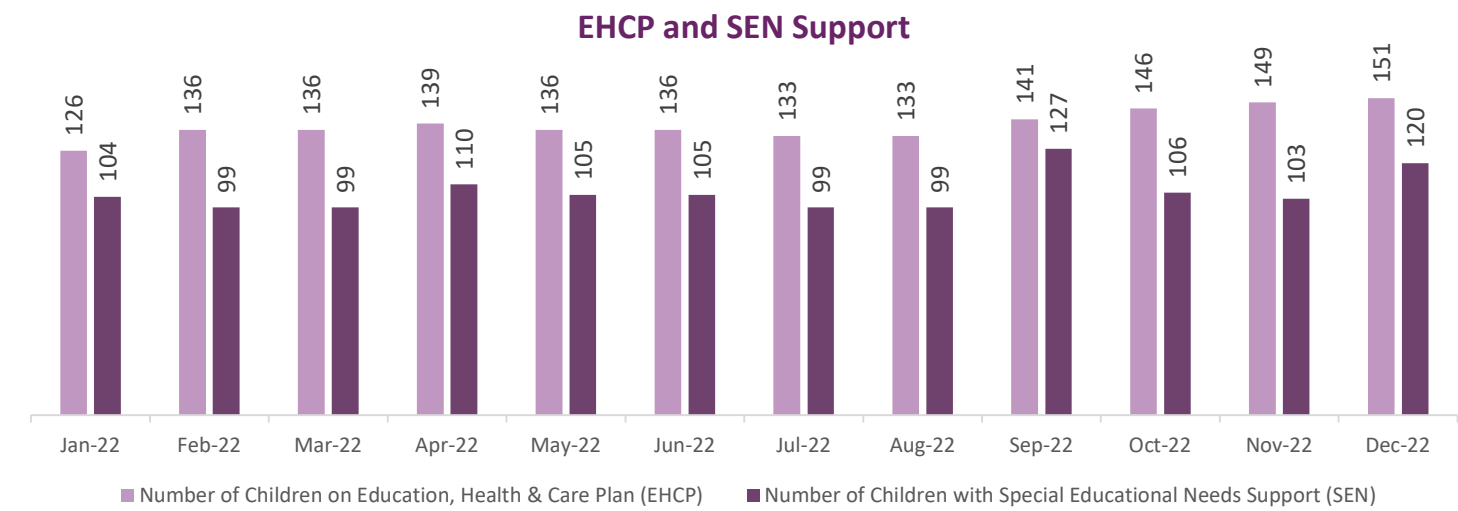
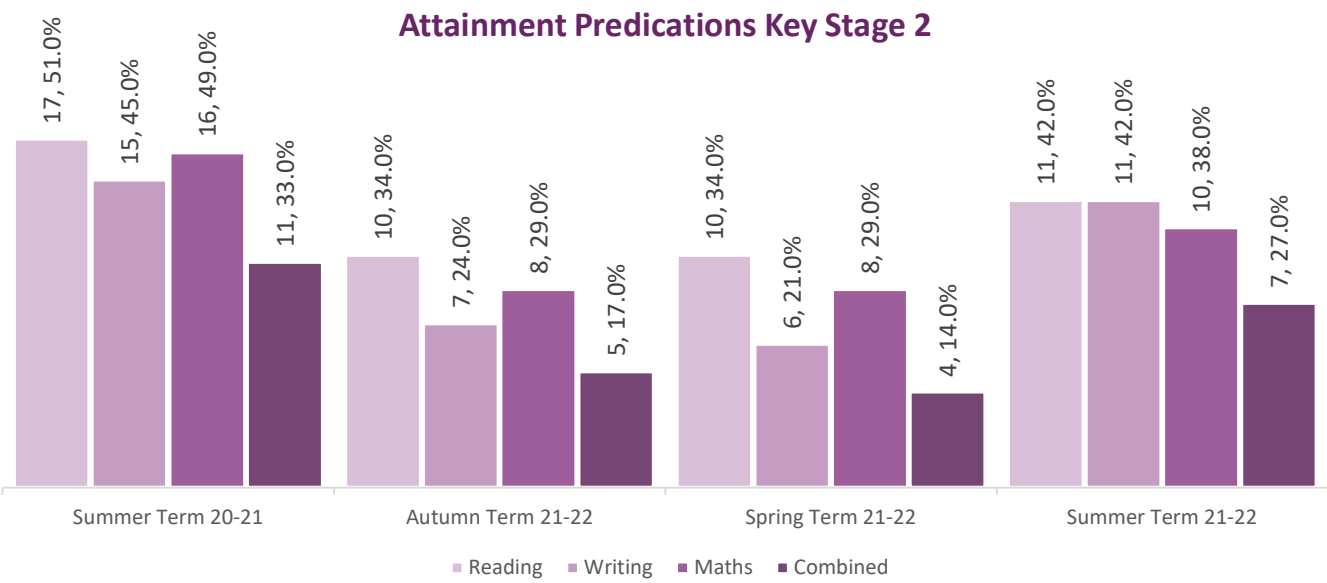
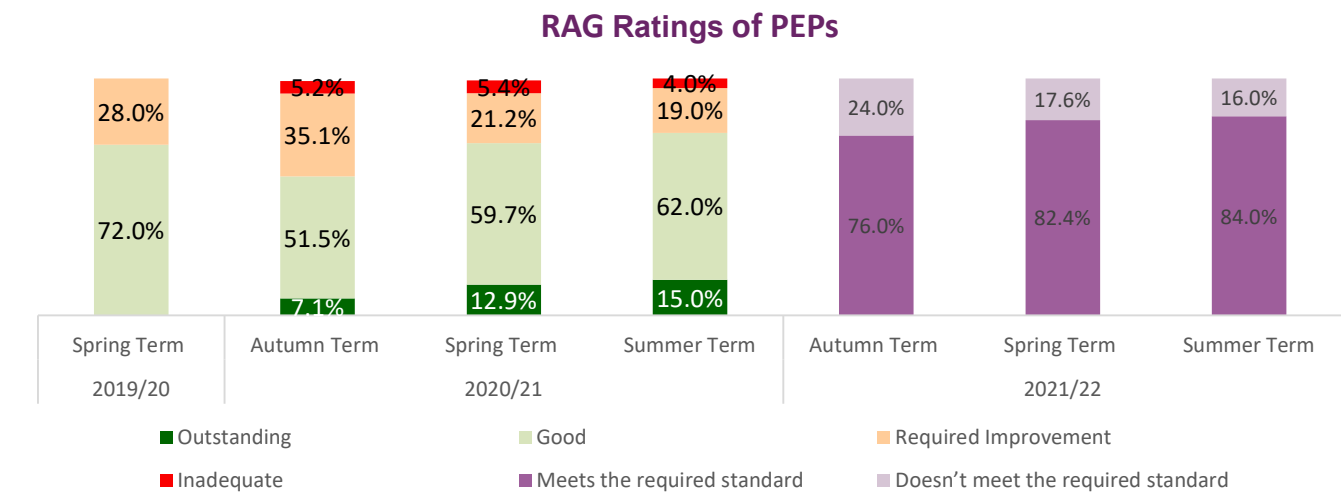
The number of children experiencing a change of social worker has decreased slightly compared to the previous quarter. The number of CiC for more than 1 year who have remained with the same social worker for the past 12 months is 218. This has decreased slightly from 223 at the end of the previous quarter.

Education



RAG Ratings of PEPS

The quality assurance process changed in 2021/22 from being rated inadequate, requires improvement, good and outstanding, to meets the required and standard and doesn't meet required standard this enables us to distinguish between very good and very poor PEPs'.



Commentary

Please Note - The quality assurance process for the rating of completed PEPs has changed from a "RAG" system to "Meets the required standard" and "Doesnt meet the required standard"

KS2 -The percentage of children predicted to achieve the expected level of attainment for KS2 combined in reading, writing and maths in spring 2021-22 was 27% which is a significant Increase compared to spring 2021-22 (14%), but is slight lower than the same period last year (33%)

KS4 -The percentage of children predicted to achieve a good set of GCSE (4-9) reported in summer 2021-22 was 16% which is a decrease compared to summer 2020-21 (35%). The percentage of children predicted to achieve a good set of GCSE (5-9) reported in Summer 2021-22 is 7% which is a significant decrease compared to summer 2020-21 (18%).

The number of children with an EHCP has been remained stable throughout the year but has seen a increases month on month since September and is at curently at 151, compared with 126 in January 2022.

The number of children with SEN support has decreased from 127 in September 2022 to 120 in December 2022. September 2022 (127) was the highest month in the year.

Health and Well-being

% Initial Health Check Completed in Timescale



Assessments in timescale of CiC admission for those in care for 28 days or more (12 month rolling figure)

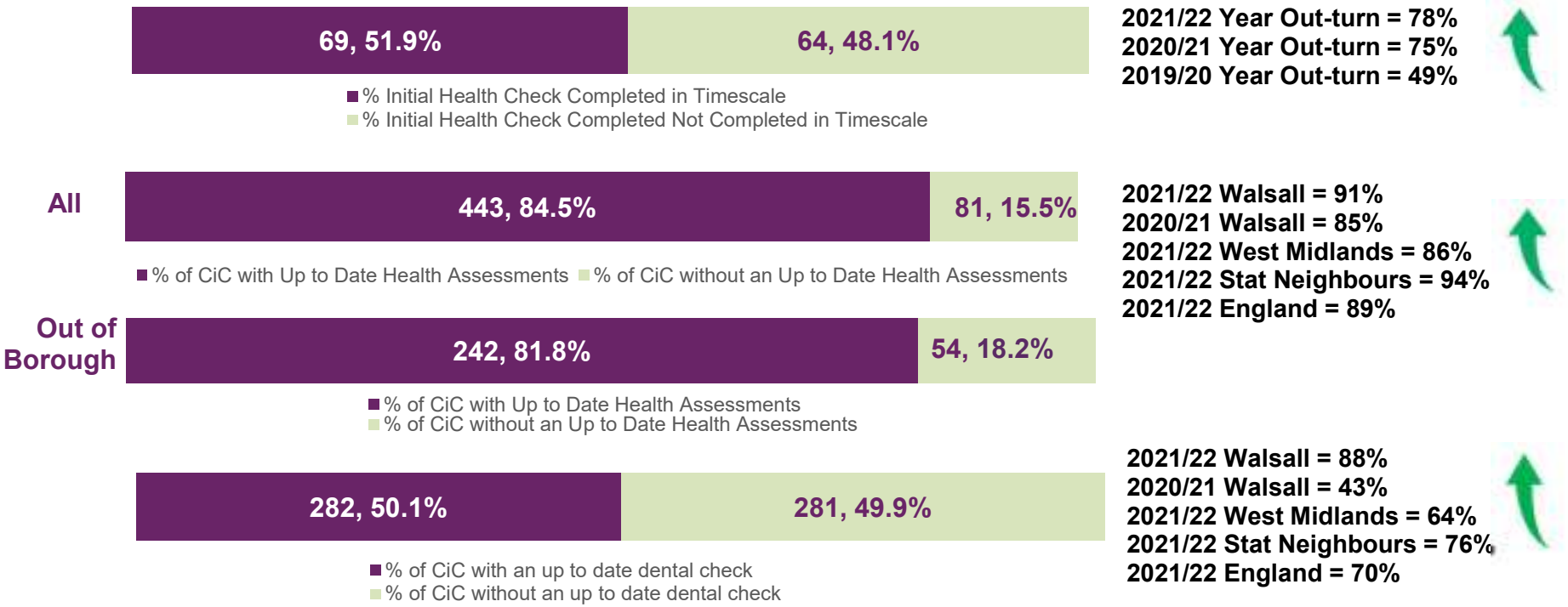
% of CiC with Up to Date Health Assessments

Where the child is over 5 and has been in care for over a year



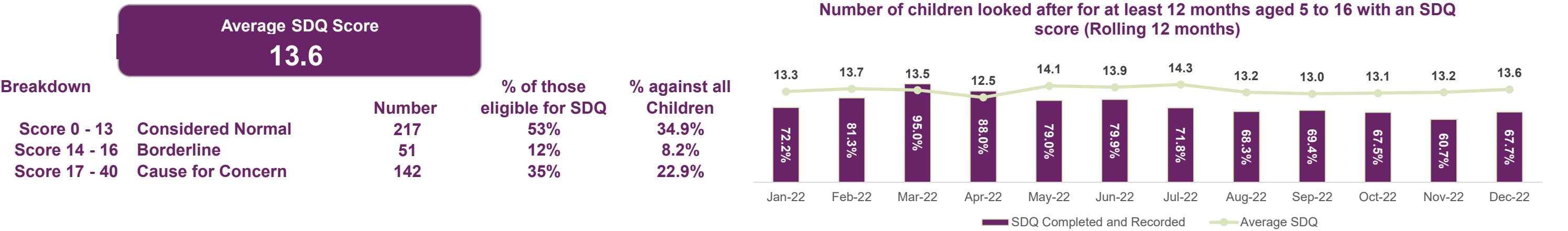
% of CiC with an up to date dental check

Where the child is over 5 and has been in care for over a year



Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire should be completed for every child looked after for at least 12 months and aged 5 to 16 years-old.



Commentary

Performance shows a slight increase in the number of children in care have up to date health checks just under 84.5%, compared to 82.1% at the end of quarter 2. There has been a decrease in the percentage of children whose initial health checks are done on time 51.9% currently compared to 63.7% at the end of Q2 2021/22. Social Care and Health colleagues continue to work closely together to ensure that processes for notifying health when a child enters care are robust and the finalisation of health assessments is timely. The Dental checks indicator is an indicator that increases month on month, so you should see significant impact quarter upon quarter, for example Q2 was 27.0% this has now increased to 50.1%.

The proportion of SDQ's completed and recorded has decreased significantly from March (95%) compared to 67.7% Dec 2022. The average SDQ score is currently 13.6. This remains relatively consistent. 142 children currently have an SDQ score that suggests there may be a cause for concern in their emotional and mental well-being based on the answers they gave to the questionnaire.

Care Leavers



Care Leavers in touch

Care Leavers where the local authority is in touch aged 19-21



Care Leavers in suitable accomodation

Care Leavers whos accommodation is classed as suitable for ages 19-21 (excluding 'gone abroad', 'deported' and 'residence not known')



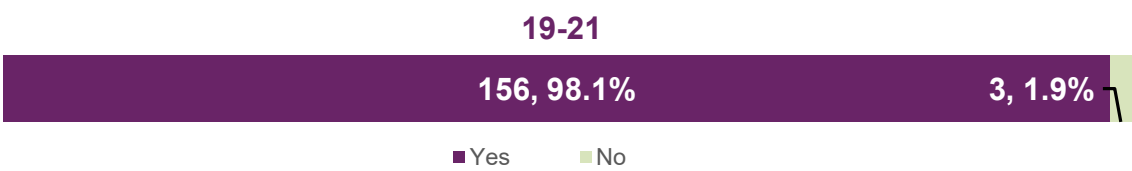
Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

Education, Employment and Training of Care Leavers aged 19-21

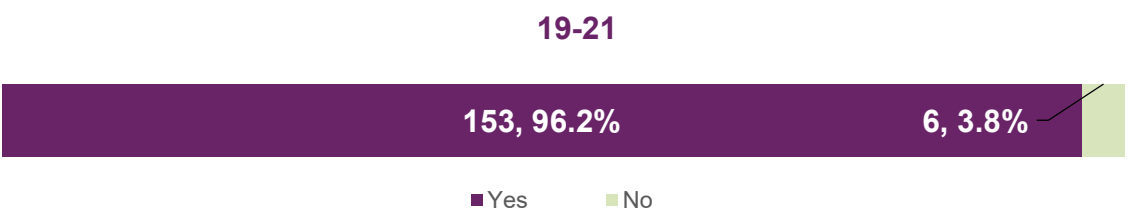


Care Leavers available to work - All Ages

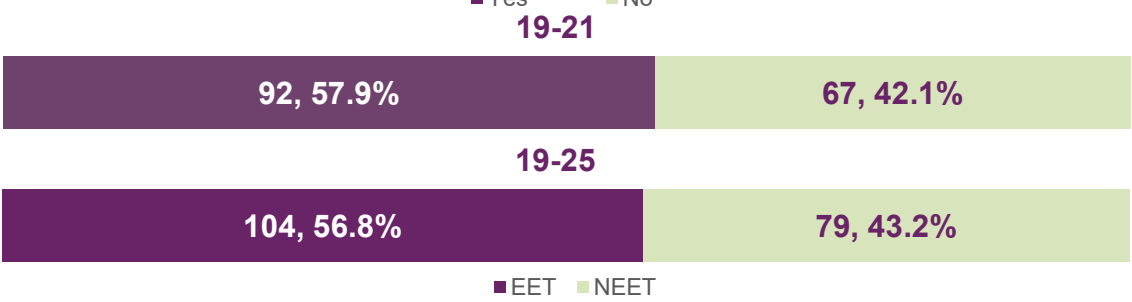
Care Leavers who are availble to work this excludes all those that are not available for the labour market due to illness/disability, pregnancy or young mothers or being in custody. (NALM)



2021/22 Year Out-turn = 95%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 95%
2021/22 West Midlands = 94%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 98.5%
2021/22 England = 95%



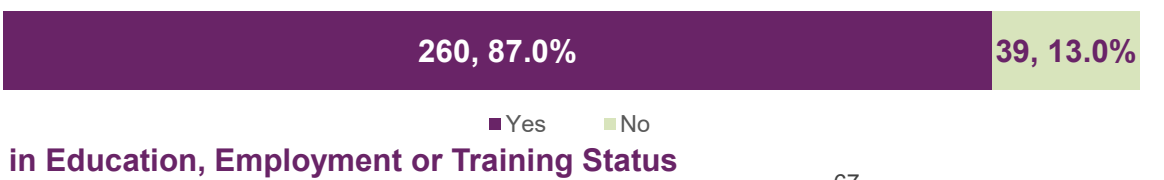
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 91%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 90%
2021/21 West Midlands = 86%
2021/21 Stat Neighbours = 89.5%
2021/21 England = 88%



2021/22 Year Out-turn = 54%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 51%
2021/22 West Midlands = 52%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 49.6%
2021/22 England = 55%



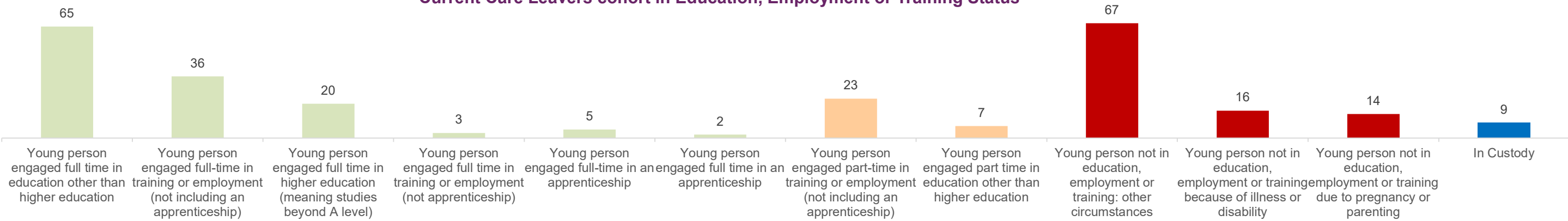
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 57%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 54%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 74%



2021/22 Year Out-turn = 87%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 86%
2019/20 Year Out-turn = 86%



Current Care Leavers cohort in Education, Employment or Training Status

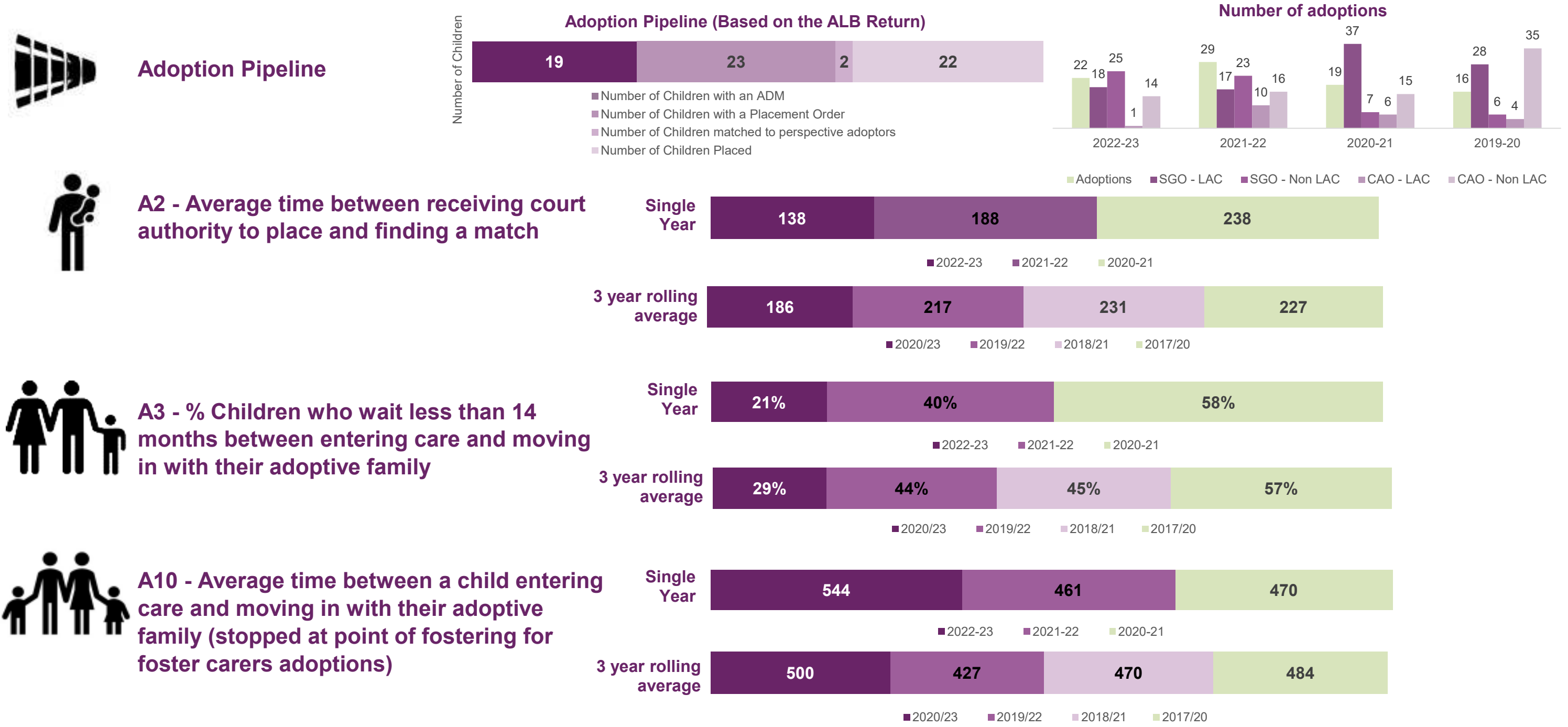


Commentary

The percentage of 19-21 year old care leavers in education, employment or training at the end of quarter 3 of 2022-23 was 57.9%. This has increased compared to 2021-22 out turn of 54%. The 19-25 cohort is similar to last years out turn, with 56.8% care leavers in Education, Employment or Training compared with the 57% 2021/22 outturn.

87.0% of care leavers are available to work - excluding those not available for the labour market (NALM) due to illness, disability, pregnancy or being a young mother or because they are in custody. 9 of Walsall's care leavers are currently in custody. The number of of care leavers in suitable accommodation remains high with 96.2%

Adoption and Permanency



Commentary

There were 29 adoptions during 2021/22 this based on the latest ALB data. In 2022/23 so far 22 were children were adopted.

So far during the current year, children had a currently waiting less time than in 2021/22 between receiving court authority to place and finding a match - this was 138 days compared to 188 days in 2021/22. 21% of Children wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. Between April 2022 and Dec 2022, 43 Children have ceased to be looked after due to special guardianship orders (18 - LAC and 25 - Non LAC) and 15 due to child arrangement orders (1 - LAC and 14 - Non LAC).

Independent Reviewing Officer annual report 2021/22

Executive Summary:

Walsall Council have statutory responsibility for overseeing and ratifying the care plans for Children and Young People in Care via the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers. As a result, the service is duty bound to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an annual report that outlines the activity of the service, the impact for children and recommendations for service improvement that will enhance young people's experiences.

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 reinforced and strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), enabling more effective independent oversight and scrutiny of the child's case. It has ensured that the child is able to meaningfully participate in planning for their own care and that the care plan that the local authority prepares for them is based on a thorough assessment of the individual child's needs.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers in 2021-22.

Recommendations:

That the board notes the Independent Reviewing Officer annual report.

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

The relevant legislation is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

There are no direct implications arising from this report

Performance management:

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- It acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- The mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively move on to live independently

Reducing inequalities:

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022/2025 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Children in Care and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Consultation:

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level, the IRO service attend regularly and there is a direct line between the service and the Children's Champion.

Contact Officer:

Full Name – Jenny Cockcroft, Head of Service for Practice Quality and Improvement

Email: jenny.cockcroft@walsall.gov.uk

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The IRO Handbook (2010) is the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of children and young people in care. It states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It should also be available to the public on the Council website.
- 1.2 This report captures the performance for 2021/22 and the next steps of the IRO service for 2022/3. The report provides an evidence base for what is working well and where we need to develop and sets out our priorities for the coming year.

2.0 Context of the IRO Service

- 2.1 The responsibility of Local Authorities is to provide Children in our Care and Care Leavers the best possible experiences in life and support their hopes, wishes and aspirations as any good parent should.
- 2.2 The Children Act 1989 [amended 2004] and the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 specify the duties of the Local Authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) when a child first comes into the care of the Local Authority. The IRO should ensure that the Local Authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child and the IRO has a responsibility to monitor the Local Authority's performance of its functions in relation to the care planning for the child.
- 2.3 The regulations clearly specify circumstances when the Local Authority should consult with the IRO, for example, proposed change of placement, change of education plan, or serious incident. They also specify the actions that the IRO must take if it is felt that the Local Authority is failing to comply with the regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child. The statutory duties of the IRO are to (section 25b (1), 1989 Act)
 - Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's care journey.
 - Participate in any review of the child
 - Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration
 - Perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations
- 2.4 The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs, ensure those actions in the care plan are consistent with the LA legal responsibilities towards the child. There are two clear and separate aspects of the function of the IRO.
 - Chairing the child's review meeting and monitoring the child's care journey on an ongoing basis.

- The monitoring function should include identifying any areas of poor practice or drift and delay in care planning that impacts directly on the child and should be appropriately escalated. Equally the IRO should also recognise and celebrate good practice that has positively impacted on the child's care experience.
- 2.5 All children and young people in care, including children who are in an adoptive placement prior to an adoption order, are covered by the legislation. This applies to all children who are the subject of a Care Order (under section 31 of the Children Act 1989), or who are voluntarily accommodated for a period of more than 24 hours (section 20 of the Children Act 1989), including in Short Break Care, or who are placed for adoption under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Also, those who are in care because they are remanded by the court to local authority accommodation. These young people require an allocated IRO and reviews in their place of custody.
- 2.6 To summarise, in the words of children consulted by the former Children's Rights Director for England, the role of the IRO is:

“to make sure that everyone does what they are meant to, make sure the child gets their say and make sure things get done”.

3.0 Workforce & Management

- 3.1 The IRO service in Walsall Council is situated in the Safeguarding and Review Service, alongside the Workforce Development team. In Walsall Council the IRO hold a dual role and also have the responsibility of Child Protection Chair.
- 3.2 The Group Manager for the service Debra Sylvester retired in February 2022. The role was been successfully appointed to by an internal candidate Jenny Cockcroft and commenced in this role in June 2022. The expectations and remit of the role have been reviewed and the post is now titled Group Manager for Quality and Practice. This role will continue to focus on the development of the safeguarding and review service. However, they will also now be the professional lead for the quality of practice framework in Children's Social Care and responsible for identified key areas of audit and learning. They will also be the lead for participation in children's social care. The line management of the IROs is shared between the Group Manager and the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer. The Service is under the overall direct management from the Principal Social Worker and Head of Service Safeguarding and Review Antony Schaffarczyk.
- 3.3 The IRO Service is fully staffed. (12 FTE and 1 PT 0.8). Our IRO's bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the service, some have been Team or Service Managers previously, all are experienced social work practitioners, some of our service have been IROs for a number of years, the longest standing member of our team has been with the service for over 19 years.
- 3.4 Each IRO receives monthly supervision with their line manager, either the Group Manager for Quality of Practice or the Principal Social Worker. In addition to

supervision there are a number of opportunities for sharing information and practice development in the service:

Weekly Team Meetings: Chaired by the IROs these are an opportunity to share information, discuss service developments, share learning from training and network with other services. It has been agreed that once a month these will not include the Group Manager and Principle IRO to create a peer reflection space.

Monthly seminar: Each seminar has a different focus led by a member of the service and create a space for reflection and learning, over the last few months these have included anti-racist practice and sexual abuse.

Service Development Days: These provide an opportunity to spend a day focused on a specific area of practice that we want to promote and develop.

Regional Meetings: All IROs are invited to the regional training meetings with other IROs to share practice. One of our IRO's is the co-chair of the West Midlands regional IRO forum. The Group Manager and Principal IRO attend the regional IRO managers meeting which enables us to be part of the sharing of best practice and learning from our regional colleagues.

4.0 Workload

- 4.1 In Walsall the IRO's hold a joint responsibility for chairing child protection conferences alongside their responsibilities as an Independent Reviewing Officer. We see this as a real strength as it offers consistency for families when children sadly are unable to remain living with their families and move from the child protection arena into the care of the Local Authority. Typically we ensure that brothers and sisters are allocated the same IRO regardless of whether they reside together to ensure a consistent approach which considers the holistic needs of the family.
- 4.2 The IRO Handbook recommends that workloads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. Currently our IRO's have an average of 51 children in our care allocated to them in their role as IRO and an average of 15 children open on child protection plans. Therefore currently the average total number of children allocated at the time of writing this report is 66 children per chair which is well within expected workload and provides them with the capacity to provide a good quality service to our children in care.

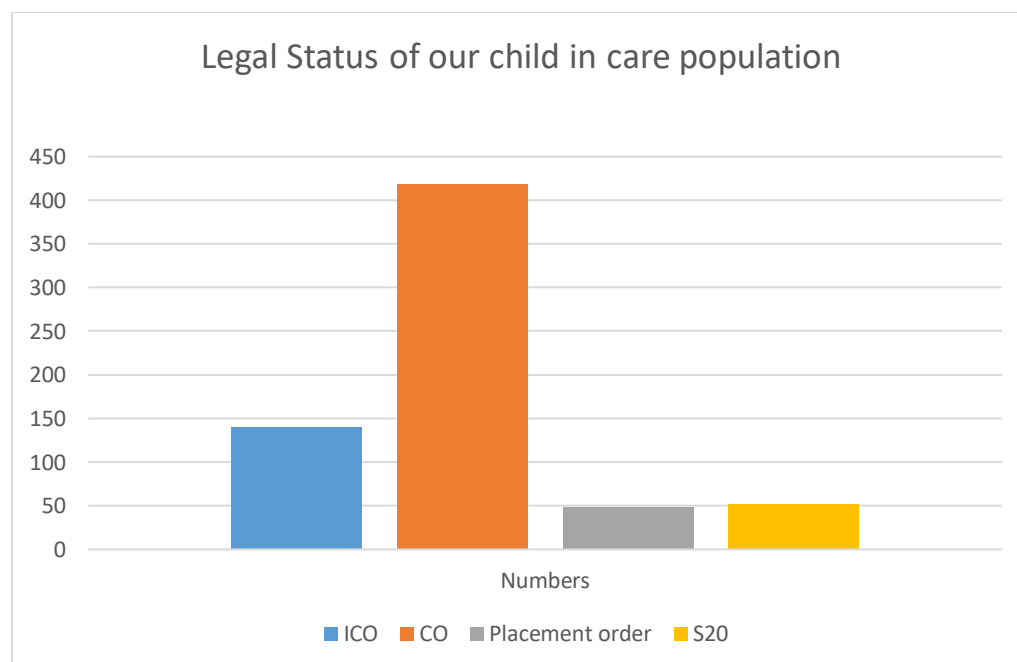
5.0 Considerations Post Covid

- 5.1 During the height of the pandemic in 2020 we moved to a much greater use of virtual approach to meetings and visits in order to safeguard the health of our children in care and workforce, however, throughout this period where there was a need to hold face to face meetings these were completed. In the earlier period of 2021 as we emerged from the restrictions there was a gradual shift back to face to face meetings, initially with appropriate safeguards such as social distancing in place and use of hybrid meetings with some professionals attending virtually.

- 5.2 As a service we are trying to capitalise on the benefits of the virtual way of working which came about as a result of Covid whilst recognising the importance and value of working with families in person. During the latter part of 2021 and in to 2022 we moved back to our primary offer being face to face meetings, whilst still offering the opportunity for virtual or hybrid child in care reviews. The expectation is that the meeting should be held in person unless there is a child/family led reason for this not to happen. The determination for the format for the review is done in consultation with the child or young person and there should be a clear child centred rationale if the decision is made to hold the review virtually. We know from some of our older young people in care for example, that they can prefer to have the meetings virtually as it can feel less intimidating or anxiety provoking for them, in circumstances such as this we will continue to support this way of working. However, the IRO will also typically visit the child in person prior to the review so that they are still maintaining the in person connection. Because of the way IRO visits are currently recorded we are unable to track this activity, we are working with MOSAIC to address this and building a process and hope to be able to report on this positive activity next year. This is current reviewed via supervision and dip sample audit activity.

6.0 Overview of our children in care population

- 6.1 As of March 2022 there were 661 children who were in the care of the local authority, this is a decrease from 2020 and 2021. In the table below you can see the legal status of the population of the children in our care.



- 6.2 The number of child in our care reviews held at end of March 2022 was 1789 which is on average 137 reviews per IRO this year, this figure is a reduction from 2020/21 but is reflects the number held in 2019/20 and previous years. It is possible that the impact of covid in 2020/21 meant there was an increase in the number of additional reviews required.

7.0 Key Performance indicators

7.1 Timeliness of child in our care reviews

7.2 The local authority is required to carry out review meetings in line with timings specified in the Regulations [regulation33]:

- the first review of a child's case within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after (or has a move to a new home);
- the second review no more than three months after the first;
- the third and subsequent reviews no more than six months after the previous one;
- a review whenever the IRO directs; and
- a review in all other circumstances as specified in the regulations

7.3 The timeliness of our child in care reviews is a key indicator, we know that this enables effective and timely care planning for our children and young people. In 2022 91% of our child in care reviews were held in timescale. In understanding this figure, we know some of this was due to recording, the majority of other delays were due to sickness of the social worker or IRO which created slight delay in meeting being held. We will expect to see an improvement in this in 2022/23 as work has been done with the IRO in terms of recording of their reviews to ensure they reflect timeliness.

7.5 It is an expectation that the IROs speak with the social worker 15 days before the meeting to plan the review and also ensure there are not any barriers to the completion of the required reports to inform the decision making. Where necessary this is escalated with the management team and dispute resolution utilised.

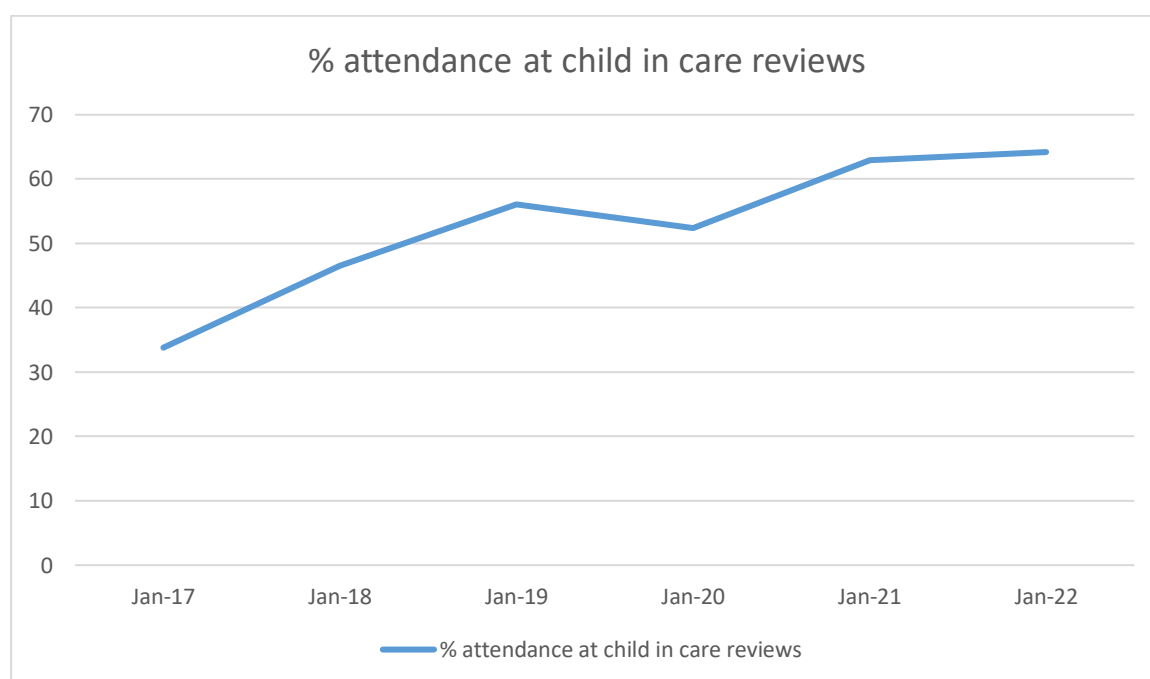
7.5 Participation in reviews

7.6 The involvement of children in their own reviews is regarded as an essential part of the process. *A key task for the IRO will be to ensure that the review processes, and particularly review meetings, remain child and family focused* (IRO Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002). The IRO plays a key role in ensuring the child can make a meaningful contribution to their review, either by attendance in person, by having someone else convey their views or making a written contribution to their meeting.

7.7 In 2021/2022 **98.5%** of all our children contributed to their children in care reviews, this has remained consistent since 2020, but this does include contributions via the social worker, and we are driving a move from this to more direct participation of children. Prior to 2020, this was an area for development for the service, with figures showing 45% of children aged five and over attending their reviews in 2018, rising to 55% in 2019. An improvement to over 60% in the year up to March 2021 and 64% in March 2022 was achieved through practice improvement work within the IRO service, with worker-level data discussed in supervision and a focus at service development days on developing more child-focused children in care reviews. The focus of service development now is to increase children's attendance at their meeting to 75%.

- 7.8 As a service we recognise the importance and value of children not just contributing but physically attending these meetings. Research tells us that children's active participation in decisions about their lives helps improve their self-esteem and confidence and it can help to counter feelings of powerlessness. Ultimately they are the experts in their own life and should be central to the decisions made for and about them.
- 7.9 In financial year 2021-22 64% of children in our care attended their review which is in line with attendance figures in 2020/21 and an increase from previous years. It is likely that this increase in attendance is due to the introduction of new virtual ways of working during Covid alongside a continued service drive to improve attendance for children in care at their reviews. We know that some young people have a strong preference for meeting virtually, it can feel less intimidating and more comfortable for them. For some young people this will be a gateway into us moving towards returning to face to face meetings and for others this may be their continued preference. We know that meeting in person can better help to build connections and relationships and that can be more difficult when held virtually. We need to continue to capitalize on this virtual way of working where it is beneficial for our children and families whilst not losing the benefits of working with children and young people face to face.

Attendance at CIC reviews (children aged 5 and over) 2017-2022.



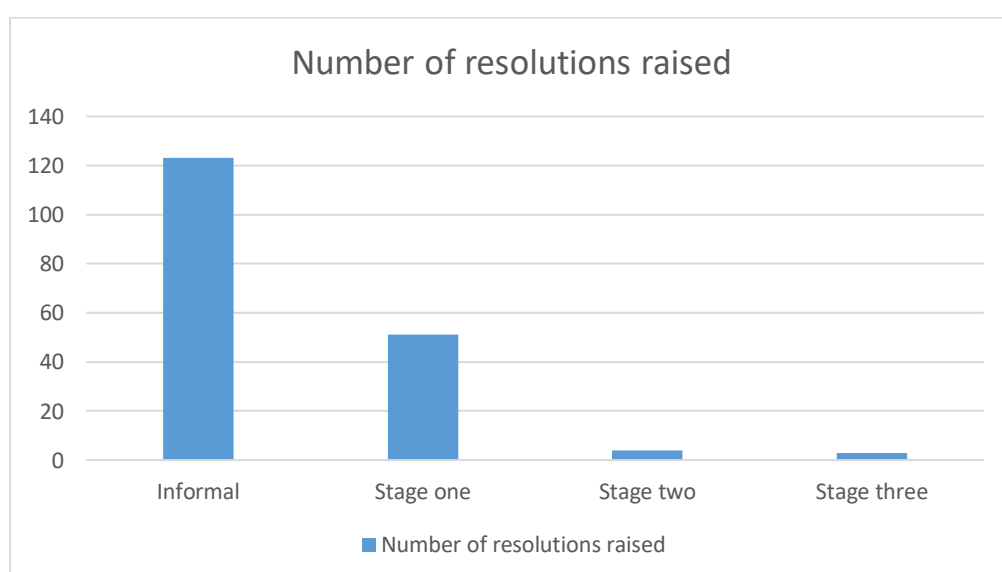
- 7.10 We recognise that this is an area of development for us as a service and will be one of the key priorities for the new group manager to address when they start in post. As previously stated the newly appointed Group manager will now have responsibility to lead on the participation and co-production of our children and young people with a social worker including those in our care. We recognise that the effective engagement

and participation of children in their reviews is not something owned solely by the Safeguarding and Review service and requires development across the services. One of the key priorities for this year will be the development and implementation of a participation and co-production plan for all children with a social worker. As part of this we will think with our children and young people in our care about their priorities and consider what is working well and what they want us to develop. We will also consider the learning drawn from our quality of practice activity to inform this planning.

- 7.13 A noted area of strength for the service is the quality of the written record of the reviews to the children in our care, these are written to the child in a way that are child focused and sensitive. Ofsted commented that the IRO's records *"are of high quality, child-focused and sensitive"*. As a service we are committed to embedding 'language that cares' in our practice. By this we mean avoidance of language that can stigmatise or obfuscate meaning (for example use of jargon) and using language that is easy to understand by children and families and this will continue to remain a priority for us a service area.

8.0 Scrutiny and Good Practice recognition

- 8.1 A key role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to quality assure, scrutinise and the work of the Local Authority. We have a clear dispute resolution policy in Walsall, with the use of informal, Stage 1, 2 and 3 resolutions available to the IRO depending upon the significance of the concern. Stage one resolutions are addressed by team manager, stage two resolutions are addressed by group manager and stage three resolutions by head of service.
- 8.2 In 2021/22 the IRO service raised 181 dispute resolutions regarding children in our care. The chart below demonstrates the numbers of resolutions opened at the different stages, it is positively noted that the majority of issues are resolved at an earlier point, with only one child requiring escalation to stage 3 this year. This is in line with the number of escalations raised in 2020/21.



- 8.3 The themes for the resolutions have been grouped into key findings below:
- Drift and delay – 39
 - No care or pathway plan – 12
 - Child not seen/not seen at home – 22
 - No SDQ/HA or PEP – 9
 - Risks not effectively enough addressed – 8
 - Care plan presented on the day – 13
 - Assessments to progress permanency plan not completed - 18
 - Lack of appropriate family contact – 3
 - Experiences of child not recorded – 7
 - No permanency plan – 5
 - No placement plan – 3
 - No life-story work - 4
 - Other – 38
- 8.4 What we can see from the findings is that almost a third of our resolutions are related to issues that would affect the timely permanency planning and decision making for children. It is proposed that the use of resolutions will be reviewed by the new Group Manager when in post and they will complete dip sample activity to understand the effectiveness and how we can continue to progress in this area.
- 8.5 Following a child in care review all IROs will RAG rate the current care plan. The overall percentage of children with a RAG rating of green in 2021/22 was 81% of children in care with the 18% of children's care plans being rated as amber following the review and 1% rated as red.
- 8.6 The Principal IRO completes reports reviewing the RAG ratings. These were at monthly intervals during the period covered by this report, more recently they have been completed quarterly. The RAG reports consider aspects of Care Planning including progress with key recommendations, liaison with partner agencies and completion of plans and assessments, with a focus on whether the process is meeting the child's needs and whether this is drift and delay.
- 8.8 A key issue emerging over the period has been the robustness of RAG ratings. With over 80% rated as Green it is likely that IROs were not effectively reflecting issues of drift and delay. Audit activity indicated that there were issues with the driving of permanence plans, this did not align with the RAG ratings. To address this, there have been discussions in supervision and at a service development day on applying a robust approach to the completion of the RAG rating reports. The need for a clear focus on the wider care planning process, as well as the Child in Care Review, has been established. This will remain an area of focus and development for the service in 2022/23 and there is
- 8.10 The RAG reports showed consistent progress in terms of engaging parents in the child in care review process. 68% of parents were consulted/attended their child's Review during the period, a significant increase on previous years. This reflects a drive in the service to develop and maintain the connections between children and care and their families.

- 8.11 It will be important that moving forward work is completed with the IRO service to ensure that the RAG ratings are accurately reflecting the practice being observed and they are being used consistently and robustly.
- 8.12 Improving the scrutiny of social work practice by the IRO service will be a key area of focus and development for the service in 2022/23. The work completed in terms of the RAG reports has identified a need for a stronger focus on these quality assurance aspects of the role. Work is already underway with the Group Manager and Principal IRO undertaking a range of activity to understand the services strengths and areas for development in this area and deliver a development plan to drive this forward and this can be reported on in the next annual report.
- 8.13 Midway reviews are an important part of the IRO role, they allow the IRO to keep a clear overview of practice across the review period and pick up and address any potential issues of drift and delay in terms of the progression of the care plan at an early point. What we know is that when midway reviews are completed effectively these help to drive meaningful planning for the child, however, at present they are not always consistently being utilised. Within this year work has been completed during supervision and through team meetings to help drive improvements. Again the Group Manager and Principal IRO are currently undertaking activity to understand the current effectiveness around the use of Midway reviews and how this can be improved to support more effective quality assurance; this will remain an area of focus for the service in 2022/23.
- 8.14 The IROs contribute to quality of practice activity by regularly undertaking audit activity. There are regular discussions about areas of quality of practice within team meeting and service development days and themes and trends identified are shared across the system. This is an area we will seek to develop and make more systematic over 2022/23 with the Group Manager and Principal Independent Reviewing Officer attending interface meetings with other managers across the system routinely. The IRO's are very alert to seeking out best practice and will routinely share recognition of this which is then shared across the services within the Weekly Brief.

9.0 Feedback

- 9.1 During Covid the collection of feedback forms from children, family and professionals at child in care reviews stopped. There is an identified need for these to be developed in partnership with our children in council to help inform our understanding of our practice and areas for development.
- 10.2 It is pertinent to draw attention to the findings in relation to the IRO service in our recent OFSTED inspection of Children Services, October 2021. They found that:

Children's wishes are prioritised and taken into consideration when decisions are made about care planning. Children are supported to attend and participate in their review meetings. Independent reviewing officers' (IROs) recording of children's reviews are written directly to the child. These records are of high quality, child-focused and sensitive. IROs ensure that children have a clear understanding of why decisions are made. Due consideration is given to different care planning options and the rationale for the preferred plan for children is clearly recorded. IROs ensure that

the vast majority of children's permanence plans are appropriately in place by the second review.

10.3 During the year the IROs have received a number of compliments for their practice, some examples are detailed below:

- *I wanted to share good practice of X who has shown her dedication as an IRO. It is always a pleasure to work X as her passion for the children she supports is always evident.*
- *In a nutshell, to start with I was really impressed by her introduction and explanation about what the meeting was about and then throughout the meeting how calm, restorative and child focussed she was throughout.*
- *The IRO was kind, empathetic and patient and allowed mother the time she needed to be in a place to be able to be fully present in the meeting. I wanted to share my praise for her practice to hold a meeting that was truly centred on the family's needs – what a fabulous IRO.*

11.0 Priorities 2022/23

11.1 During this report we have considered some of the proposed areas for focus for the service in 2022/23. In summary the identified key priorities are

- To develop a participation action plan which will support the increased engagement of children in care (aged 5 and over) attending their reviews.
- To continue to improve the quality of care plans to ensure they are consistently SMART, clear and concrete.
- To review the current practice in terms of scrutiny by IROs on the care and permanency planning through midway reviews, robust care planning, RAG rating and use of resolutions. To implement development plan to help the continued improvement in this area.
- To develop the use of feedback forms for children, carers, families and professionals.
- To support the service to move to a more appropriate office space which is more child and family centred and also encourages better joint working with social work practitioners.
- To ensure all IROs have completed training in relation to motivational interviewing and to undertake service day specifically considering how a relational approach is embedded in meetings with our children and families.

12.0 Conclusion

12.1 In conclusion, this report has highlighted the work of the IROs in Walsall Council for the period of April 2021 to March 2022. The information in this report evidences the work of the service and how it is focussed on improving outcomes for the children and young people in our care that we support. It also identifies a number of areas where we seek to continue to develop our practice and our priorities regarding this for 2022/23.

Independent Visitor Report 2021/22

Executive Summary:

An Independent Visitor is a trained volunteer who is there to “befriend and support children and young people in care”. Independent Visitors are generally considered for children and young people in care aged 8. An Independent Visitor can be a significant person in a child’s life where there may be few constant or stable relationships, or Independent Visitors may be important and significant for a child at a particular point in their lives. Independent Visitors provide consistency within the lives of young people who may be experiencing a number of changes. They will be a source of information and guidance, encouraging and supporting young people to achieve their full potential and access the full range of opportunities that are available to them, for example helping young people develop new interests, skills and hobbies or participating alongside them in leisure interests. Independent Visitors’ are truly ‘independent’ as they are outside the care system but provide the young person with continuity (a minimum 2 years commitment is required) which is something not always possible with changing carer’s and social workers.

Statutory and local guidance outlines how an Independent Visitor should be considered for any child in care when it appears to be in the child’s interests to have one, and where a child or young person wants one. This should occur as part of the development of the child’s care plan and child in care review process. Independent Visitors should in particular be considered for a child or young person who has limited or no contact with their family, if they are living far from their home area, if they are unable to go out independently, experience difficulties in building relationships, have had a lot of change, and are at risk due to being likely to form inappropriate relationships.

Change Grow Live (CGL) is the Walsall’s Independent Visitor provider and this is as part of a sub-regional contract in partnership with Dudley, Sandwell and Telford and Wrekin. The service is reviewed in line with the contractual arrangements and involves commissioners and strategic managers across the four Local Authorities. The Programme Manager provides quarterly reports and there is a sub-regional quarterly meetings to review take up of the service. Walsall’s strategic lead is the Group Manager for the Safeguarding and Review Service.

The Independent Visitor action plan developed in 2021/22 primarily focused on increasing the numbers of children in care referred for an Independent Visitor. This has been actioned, Independent Visitors are now regularly discussed at child in care reviews and social workers within the Corporate Parenting teams have a good understanding of the offer; this has resulted in an upward trend of referrals. At the end of 2019/20 there were 7 children with an allocated Independent Visitor with 3 waiting to be matched. At the end of 2020/21 there were 11 children with an Independent Visitor with 5 waiting to be matched.

As of March 2023 we have 14 children matched to an Independent Visitor with a further 11 referred awaiting allocation, which will take us beyond the current proposed target of 20 children in our care with an Independent Visitor. We currently compare favourably to the other 3 commissioning local authorities with both more children matched and more referred awaiting match (as of Q3).

There are however, currently some challenges in matching all children referred with an appropriate volunteer. CGL report post Covid that a shortage of volunteers, they report this is a national issue and is a sector wide challenge, not specific to the role of the Independent Visitor. Regular assurances are sought from CGL regarding the activity undertaken to recruit volunteers and they are able to provide evidence of regional and Walsall specific promotional activity. As Local Authorities we are working to support CGL in the recruitment of volunteers through external promotions and an agreement has been made across all four commissioning authorities to undertake a targeted promotion campaign to council staff. There is robust scrutiny on volunteer recruitment within all service contract review meetings.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

This report is to provide an update regarding the uptake and engagement with the Independent Visitor programme by children and young people in care in Walsall for 2021/22. This report also sets out a proposal to attract Walsall council employees to volunteer as Independent Visitors.

Recommendations:

That the board notes the Independent Visitor annual report.

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

The relevant legislation is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.

- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

There are no direct implications arising from this report

Performance management:

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- It acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;
- The mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively move on to live independently

Reducing inequalities:

The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022/2025 sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and families. By being effective Corporate Parents for Children in Care and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

Consultation:

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

Contact Officer:

Full Name – Jenny Cockcroft, Head of Service for Practice Quality and Improvement

Email: jenny.cockcroft@walsall.gov.uk



Walsall Independent Visitors Service

Annual Report

April 2021– March 2022

Prepared by:

Peshva Sharif, Volunteer Coordinator, Change Grow Live

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Section 1 – Introduction to the project

The Black Country Independent Visitors Service is run in partnership between Change Grow Live and the local authorities for Dudley, Walsall, Sandwell, Telford and Wrekin. The project supports looked after children living in the Black Country Telford, Wrekin and the surrounding areas as well as those living out of county.

The project is funded on a payment by results arrangement by the 4 local authorities and allows them to meet their statutory independent visiting obligations to children and young people looked after. The project works with children and young people aged 8 - 18.5 years old who are 'Looked After' by the Local Authority and who choose to have an Independent Visitor.

The young people are effectively "matched" with an adult volunteer when one has been recruited for them specifically, to become their Volunteer Independent Visitor. The volunteer and young person relationship is expected to be maintained for a minimum period of two years. This can be extended with agreement between both parties. As in previous years of delivery, the Volunteer Independent Visitors see their young person for a one to one, community-based visit once a month. The main aim is to provide the young person the opportunity to develop a relationship with a trusted adult outside of the paid, formal network of professionals. The young people are encouraged and supported by their Volunteer Independent Visitor to choose an activity they would like to do during their monthly sessions.

Independent Visitors continue to be recruited in the areas where the young people are waiting for an IV. The recruitment process is comprehensive and integrates a variety of methods within which an applicant is tested and trained. All IV's volunteers once "matched" with a young person, are encouraged to provide written or verbal feedback on how they see the relationship going, any positive changes they would like to see in their young person's life and to share any concerns with project staff. A short session report is provided by the volunteer to project staff, alongside their expenses claim for the activity. Young people can also add their comments after each visit and are encouraged to do so as this provides project staff with some service feedback. The sessions are regulated and delivered in accordance with key policies and procedures including safeguarding, data protection, health and safety and volunteer boundaries.

Section 2 – Young People

Section 2.1 – Young People's facts and figures

Service users supported 2021-2022	19
Service users referred	19
IV direct mentoring sessions delivered	125.0
Caseload on 31/03/2021	16

Section 2.2 – Young People's Support Hours

	TOTAL	Hours	
Independent Visitors (direct session hours)	375	Per visit	3.0
Independent Visitors (indirect hours, research, admin, phone calls)	63.0	Per visit	0.50
Total	438.0	Per visit	3.50

As of the 31st March 2021 we had 16 Walsall children and young people attached to the project receiving service:

Of these 10 are Male and 6 are female

	Males	Females	Total
5-10	3	1	4
11-15	2	2	4
16+	5	3	8
Total	10	6	16

6 (37.0 %) live within their local authority area whilst 10 (63.0 %) live out of county

Length of matches

Length of relationship / %	
<i>Under 6 months</i>	20
<i>6 months to 1 year</i>	40
<i>1- 2 years</i>	30
<i>2-3 years</i>	
<i>3-4 years</i>	10
<i>4-5 years</i>	
<i>Over 5 years</i>	
<i>Total</i>	100

It's worth noting that the longest relationship is 41.25 months and the shortest is 24 days to March 2022

Accommodation status

Accommodation	
<i>Lac Fostering</i>	12
<i>Lac Residential</i>	2
<i>Lac Disability Residential</i>	0
<i>16+ Accommodation</i>	2
<i>Total</i>	16

Section 2.2 – Young People's information

In this period, the split between male and female was not equal, with 62.5% male which is slightly less than last year, and 37.5% female matches which is slightly higher than last year. The majority of referrals this year were within the 16+ age bracket which is different to last year.

The process for staff to meet young people has remained largely the same with a staff member making an initial assessment visit to the young person to meet them and find out more about what their interests are and to make sure they understand what it means to have an IV. Where possible and in line with the young persons' preference, the staff visits have largely been face to face in light of more relaxed Covid restrictions.

The current young peoples' marketing leaflet is based on their feedback, it is however likely to be changed again due to some rebranding taking place within the project.

proceed with. If it isn't then both parties are advised as to the next steps and the process for matching both will begin again.

Why use the Independent Visitor Service? It helps to integrate children and young people into their local community and reduces isolation. Drawing volunteers from their local area helps build relationships, encourages compassion and in turn improves community cohesion.

Section 3 – Walsall Volunteers

Volunteer Profile: DN, Independent Visitor

"I decided to volunteer when I retired from the police. During my career I had often worked with young people and wanted to continue this in a voluntary capacity.

I don't really feel that I have faced any challenges, the young person has at times had challenging behaviour, but I have felt that I have managed this well. I recognised early on that my role was not to problem solve but to be a friend to him, playing sports etc. In doing this it supported his foster family by giving them some respite.

The best thing about volunteering is seeing the young person excel in different sporting activities and growing in confidence and self-esteem. I have enjoyed these activities as well as I am very sporty. We have a lot of fun together and even though at times he has misbehaved, he always listens and responds positively when I've needed him to be. Also I have learnt from him; I am a bit of a dinosaur in regards to technology and the young person has explained how gadgets in the car work.

What has surprised me is how much he enjoys the visits. It was initially a couple of hours but this has now increased to a full day. It was lovely to hear that he didn't want me stop visiting, even when given the choice of having a younger volunteer and when I was unable to visit for a while due to an accident I was involved in. He wanted to wait for me to come back.

I enjoy the visits and it is very rewarding seeing how much he has improved in various skills and abilities. I am proud that he knows that I am there for him and that he has been able to vocalise this. He comes across that he is confident and secure in the friendship that has developed."

Section 3.1 – Volunteer Facts and Figures

New Registered volunteers 2021-2022	19
In Recruitment March 2022	2
Registered volunteer pool on 31/03/2022	19

As of the 31st of March, we had 16 active Walsall volunteers supporting children and young people. We are routinely advertising for prospective volunteers using a range of recruitment platforms such as on the Change Grow Live web site; Facebook Jobs (paid and free) [Do.it.org.uk](https://www.doit.org.uk); Charity Jobs UK, word of mouth, Indeed and on social media. We are always looking for opportunity to raise awareness of the volunteer role and more recently, have agreement with a supermarket chain to display our information on their community boards.

All potential volunteers are required to be over 18 years of age, and all go through the same robust recruitment process. This begins with an initial interview which will ascertain the volunteer's skills, knowledge, and motivation for volunteering; this will be followed by 9 hours of virtual training over 4 x2 hour sessions and followed up with a 2nd interview.

We continue to reward and recognise the contributions made by volunteers. We run a programme of celebration events throughout the year, this includes events to tie in with National Volunteer Week in June. We also send out a thank you gift and card to volunteers and this year we also had a group volunteer trip to Dudley Canals for independent visitor as a small way to say thank you for their support.

Challenges facing the Independent Visitor Service: 2021-2022 continued to be another challenging year for the project: maintaining contacts for the existing matches, and recruiting, training and matching volunteers.

Positive outcomes from the pandemic: Volunteer recruitment and training has become more agile; everyone having to quickly adapt to working remotely and getting to grips with new technology. Appreciation of the service, certainly by carers and by the young people we support has risen.

Volunteer feedback:

"I wasn't sure about the role but then I was told that I could change my mind after the training if I didn't think I wanted to be an IV. I am very glad I attended the training as it was exactly what I needed! To think I

nearly changed my mind! The support from staff has been excellent and I am matched with a young person who liked my profile and wanted to meet me. So far everything is going well, we have fun on our activities and I look forward to the relationship continuing for many years! LS, Walsall.

“The young person I am matched with has moved homes a lot through no fault of his own. I am just fortunate that he hasn’t gone too far away as I know this happened to other young people. I can still meet him once a month and it really helps as he has a familiar face and some consistency with my visits” WH, Walsall.

Section 4 – Communication

Change Grow Live has been providing a service in partnership with the four commissioning local authorities since March 2018, in which time we have been able to build strong positive relationships with professionals in a variety of different roles and teams.

We continue to have quarterly contract meetings, discussing project updates including young people matched, waiting, staffing updates and volunteer recruitment. We discuss good news stories and up and coming events as well as any issues or concerns that we have dealt with in the quarter along with any opportunities for future development within the service.

There are also regular IV guests at contract reviews so that commissioners can hear directly about the IV experience from volunteers themselves. IV's are encouraged to be honest about their journey to volunteering as well as sharing how they have observed their yp to benefit from the IV sessions. Equally important is the need to ensure the volunteer feels heard and is able to share with Project staff what they do not feel works well.

The 2-project staff team are continuing to liaise with partners to raise awareness of the IV service. Throughout this period, we have attended 7 Walsall Council unit meetings and 23 referrer meetings. This sits alongside other awareness raising activities including local campaigns promoting the IV role and the service to young people.

Section 5 – Best Practice

Staff have benefited from being embedded within CGL's wider Children's Rights Services (CRSs) governance/resources structures. This brings with it an automatic membership to the Midlands recruitment Hub and collaboration with other IV services within the organisation.

CGL invest in staff and volunteer wellbeing via:

- Out of hours young people and volunteer support phone line
- Office hours – online chat and support
- Online Wellbeing Hub.
- Supportive family/leave policies.
- 24/7 Employee and Volunteer Assistance Programme
- Connect Skills – training portal.
- Discount schemes e.g., Blue Light Card Scheme

The Project has applied to Cash4Kids within the period 2021-22 for help with funding for a group event for young people and their volunteers. The outcome is as yet unknown however it is hoped that at least 25 young people and their volunteer will be able to benefit from this opportunity if funding is granted.

We have recently taken part in the National Independent Visitor Network Survey 2021 and completed a Freedom of Information activity as part of the survey. The survey results will be made available later in the year, the focus is firmly placed on raising awareness within the sector and further afield, of the challenges that children and young people looked after face and how these challenges be addressed by everyone supporting children and young people.

Section 6 – Young Person and Volunteer Feedback

“My IV is friendly, catering and funny” LC, young person.

“I enjoy my visits with my IV and don’t think anything can be done to make them better” NK, young person

“I always decide where we go for my visit and my IV is always very helpful” LW, young person

“A good question to ask when you are interviewing a new volunteer ; do you think an independent visitor will benefit them (young people)?” PM, young person

“I always ask my young person to mark the visit out of 10. She wrote down 100 out of 10!” JL, Independent Visitor

“The young person loved the visit and was excitedly telling the foster carer all about it when her dropped her home” BD, Independent Visitor

“The young person loved the bowling; she was very encouraging when I was bowling too. She was also gracious in defeat when I won the first game. She won the second game and she was very happy. I always give my young person the opportunity to make all the decisions but do steer he back if there is something she wants that we cannot do and she is very understanding in these situations! KL, Independent Visitor

Section 7 Acknowledgements

There are two project staff on the service with one of these part time, to cover the 4 local authority areas including Walsall. Staff have worked hard to raise the service profile with social workers in Walsall and with local people in Walsall. This is reflected in the increased number of children and young people being referred for an Independent Visitor. Of the 4 local authorities, Walsall has the highest number of referrals and requests for young people to be matched with a volunteer.

We face our challenges head on, the demand for the IV service increases as does the need for more local volunteers. Volunteers are the bread and butter of this service, their generosity, kindness and compassion is greatly valued. We will continue to look ahead and plan to support more children and young people in Walsall and equally, look to increase our volunteer numbers to meet this growing demand.

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 – 2023



Walsall Council



Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the 2022/2023 annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board. As corporate parents, we take our responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers seriously and are committed to providing the best possible support to meet their needs and to improve their outcomes.

The Corporate Parenting Board aims to provide a welcoming forum for children in care and care leavers, where we celebrate their achievements and listen to their concerns and challenges. We have endeavoured to ensure that the way we engage with young people is meaningful, and where feedback has suggested that this has not been the case, we have asked Officers to review this and considered how this could be made better in the future. A recent engagement session held at the TLC hub aimed to make young people more comfortable in their engagement with the Board. Moving forward we aim to review the way we engage with young people and to be more flexible in our approach to seeking input from young people.

It is my view that the Corporate Parenting Board has made great progress in listening to the views of children in care and care leavers and that it uses these views to influence services available for young people who are in the care of the local authority and leaving care.

On behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board, I would like to thank the young people, and the families that care for them, for their engagement, time and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Board throughout the year. Without the involvement of the Young People, we would not be successful in meeting its aims.

I would also like to thank council officers and External Partners for their hard work, which has helped the Board to achieve the outcomes that are set out within the report.



Councillor S. Elson
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children in care and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their full potential. Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board provides a welcoming forum for children and care leavers to discuss and influence the full range of services available to them. The Corporate Parenting Board convenes six times a year and comprises seven councillors (as below) together with the following advisors:

- The Designated Nurse LAC (Health)
- The Head of the Virtual School (Education)
- The Director Customer Engagement (Housing).

Advisors provide crucial contribution and expertise, in relation to their specialist areas, which are important to the lives of all children in care and care leavers. Other attendees include the Executive Director (Children's Services), the Director of Children's Social Work and the Children and Young Peoples Champion, together with officers from children's services and other directorates whom attend when requested to discuss key issues. By including these advisors we are helping to ensure that Walsall Council and partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.



Councillor S. Elson
Chair of the Board



Councillor T. Jukes
(Vice-Chair)



Councillor A. Hussain



Councillor A. Hicken



Councillor I. Hussain



Councillor R. Worrall



Councillor F. Mazhar

Work Programme

The Board has considered a number of matters during the 2022-2023 municipal year. All reports and associated minutes are available to view on the council's website. Items considered have included-

- Young People Engagement.
- Quarterly Performance information.
- National review of children with disabilities and complex health needs.
- Care Leaver Health History Report.
- Residential Homes.
- Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.
- The Fostering Annual Reports.
- Therapeutic Support to Children in Care.
- Adoption@Heart Annual Report.
- CCG Assurance report.
- Support to Young People.
- Virtual school annual report.
- Participation Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Annual report.

The Board considered it of great value for Elected Members to attend 'Total Respect' training. In order to encourage increased participation, the Board recommended that bespoke session be designed for Elected Members – with this later offered out to all Elected Members.

Hearing the Young Persons Voice

The Board is passionate about improving outcomes for children and young people and strives to improve engagement with young people. The Children and Young Persons Champion supports the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and provides a valuable link between the Corporate Parenting Board and young people. The CiCC is the forum where Walsall's looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the care and support that they receive. The forum enables young people to build friendships and peer networks whilst learning new skills.

At its first meeting the Board considered 'hot topics' for young people, which had been identified as issues that they wanted the Board to consider, they were added to the Corporate Parenting Boards work programme for the year:

- Mental Health and wellbeing (Therapeutic Support to Young people).
- Living alone and isolation (Support to Young People).
- Budgeting and getting by (Support to Young People).

A number of Board Members agreed to visit residential homes on a six monthly basis and be the link Member to a residential home – building a relationship with staff and young people. These visits had commenced, and positive feedback had been received.

A report on 'Young People Engagement' is taken to each Corporate Parenting Board meeting, the report highlights activity at CiCC, key updates, partnership working and it also details celebrations and achievements of young people. This report is the first item on the agenda as it is critical to the Board meeting its strategic objectives.

Young People raised concerns that the setting up home grant provide by the Council to Care Leavers was not adequate, in response to this, the Board received a briefing paper on the options for increasing the grant. After considering the issue, and the options presented by Officers the Board recommended that a mechanism for the incremental increase of the 'setting up home grant' was included in the formal budget setting process. The Board have been advised that any increases will be considered during April 2023 with implementation in April 2024 due to the 'Government's Response to Care Review. The Board were assured that the household support fund had been used to alleviate cost of living pressures.

Consideration has been given as to how young people viewed their involvement with the Corporate Parenting Board. Because of this feedback, the participation team have worked with the Children in Care Council to refresh the way they operated – the following approach was agreed:

- Young people's priorities for issues considered by the Board would be sought via an engagement session at the beginning of the municipal year (to inform the setting of the work programme).

- Corporate Parenting Board reports should be shared with the appropriate children's participation forum in a child friendly way – with the report amended where necessary (as a result of feedback).
- The Children in Care Council and Care Leaver's Forum would be supported to feedback their views about reports in the most suitable way for the young person.
- A schedule of informal meetings would be held with the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers forum and the Children's home forums.

Building on this approach, the first informal engagement session was held with children in care and care leavers at the TLC hub in February 2023. This was a positive session, which generated feedback from young people on how support to them could be improved. At a future meeting, an action plan will be considered to respond to issues and feedback given by young people.

Areas of Focus

Performance

The Corporate Parenting Board monitors the progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children through a quarterly performance report. This contains a dashboard of measures detailing the direction of performance. Members provided challenge on those measures where performance had dipped and sought reassurance that action had been taken to rectify any issues. The measures included in this presentation, provided Young People with the opportunity to raise concerns and detail issues they may have experienced. For example the provision of housing to care leavers.

Fostering and Adoption Service Annual Reports

The Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report of the adoption service, which is provided through Adoption@Heart – a regional adoption agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council and became operational in April 2019. Information provided to Members included the number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and the length of time waiting and the number of children adopted and details of the recruitment of new adoptive parents. Members provided challenge to this information and sought assurances.

The Board also receives an annual report of the fostering service. The Walsall Fostering Service is located within the Children's Services Directorate of Walsall Council. A range of information is provided to the Board, including the challenge of recruiting new foster carers. The Board was advised that there had been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Walsall over the last 5 years, from 645 in 2017 to 648 on 5 December 2022. However, at the end of March 2022, there were 196 approved internal fostering households. In 2021, the Fostering Service introduced a referral fee of £500 which on approval of the applicant by Fostering Panel, was payable to the referrer. The Board was supportive of the Council achieving foster friendly status.

The Board recommended Walsall Council review the advertising of independent fostering agencies on traffic islands and that Walsall Council identify advertising space for the Council fostering service (free of charge). This was raised at the appropriate Proud programme work stream and work had taken place to ensure that independent fostering agencies would no longer advertise on traffic islands, and there would be an increase of advertisements for the Councils fostering service.

Integrated Care Board (ICB) Assurance Report

The Corporate Parenting Board has a responsibility to ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers. The ICB assurance report provides an overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the ICB in relation to children in care and provided further

detail of action taken to deliver on-going improvements to health outcomes for looked after children.

The Board considered the data in relation to initial health assessments, and the reasons for this included:

- Late notification of coming into care.
- Carers overlooked the appointment.
- Children missing/refused.
- Extended hospital stays.
- Cancellation due to Covid-19.
- An increase of children coming into care.

It was noted that the percentage of dental checks completed had declined due to Covid-19. This continued to be monitored and was beginning to recover. The Board was assured that NHS England were developing pathways for this cohort.

Therapeutic Support to Children in Care

A key concern for young people, as reported to the Corporate Parenting Board, was mental well-being. To respond to this concern, Members requested information on the therapeutic support provided to children in care who are at greater risk of suffering poor emotional well-being or mental health that their peers not in care, often resulting from their early childhood experiences and trauma.

Therapeutic support to children in care is provided through the FLASH service. Foster Carers were empowered to meet children's needs through the Mocking Bird service.

In delivering therapeutic support to children in care, the FLASH Service:

- Undertakes direct work with children and young people who are looked after.
- Delivers support to children and young people living in foster care, children's homes or supported accommodation in Walsall and within 20 miles.
- Provides evidence based therapeutic support.
- Delivers an evidence based therapeutic approach to trauma and attachment if available.
- Provides support in the 'community' or homes where children live.
- Provides drop-in and consultation for Care leavers at transition and Leaving Care Team
- Delivers consultation clinics for carers, social workers and other relevant professionals to support the child in their home.
- Reviews the progress of the intervention and the impact on the outcomes for the children.

Referrals to the service are made by the social workers and are prioritised on the risk of placement breakdown. Young people whose care is at risk of immediate breakdown are classed as priority and followed up with social worker and other professionals involved to determine the nature of the response. All referrals accepted into the service are offered a consultation session for social worker and/or carers to more fully explore concerns and presenting needs.

Challenge was provided from Members in relation to the status of the service, they were informed that a review of the service was undertaken in 2020/2021 and a revised specification has been developed in collaboration with the CCG and the Trust. The specification sets out the requirements for the service to provide a targeted therapeutic service from registered professionals to undertake direct work with children who are looked after and whose early childhood experiences of trauma are impacting on their emotional well-being and secure attachments to carers.

The Corporate Parenting Board received assurance that the service specification included key performance indicators and that these will provide both quantitative and qualitative information about the impact of the service and outcomes for children, this will include children referred to service and stepping down from specialist Child Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Members were supportive of the mental health practitioner funded by the Virtual School (since 2021), to work with children to better support them in school settings. The mental health practitioner who is a qualified social worker is located in the FLASH team.

National review of children with disabilities and complex health needs

As part of their responsibility to monitor progress on outcomes for looked after children the Board received feedback on the review of children with disabilities and complex health needs in Walsall. The review focussed on children who were looked after children with disabilities and complex health needs and were placed in residential specialist schools, which were registered as children's homes. The conclusion of the review was that there were no significant concerns and the quality of care was good. There was evidence that children had developed and there was excellent communication between those involved in the child's care.

Residential Homes

Walsall's children's residential service provides care to children from across the Borough who are unable to reside with their families and for whom foster care is not considered a suitable option at that time. In June 2021, Cabinet endorsed a plan by Children's Services to open and run two new children's homes. These homes would specifically focus on the more complex, hard to place and therefore more costly children, and those who were in the process of being able to return home or step down to foster care. The Board was supportive of this development, as it would improve outcomes for children and young people in care.

Supporting unaccompanied asylum seekers Children (UASC)

The Corporate Parenting Board considered an item on the responsibilities of the Council in relation to children in care who had arrived in this country as unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Members heard that children who had fled and claimed asylum often had additional needs such as language and culture, extreme and traumatic life experiences, fear and uncertainty about the outcome of their immigration proceedings. This group were vulnerable to criminal exploitation and modern slavery. Members considered the services available to this group and the future service development.

This information developed the Board's knowledge and awareness of the experiences and concerns of looked after children.

Virtual School Annual report

The Corporate Parenting Board has responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children, and to monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual School. To this end, Members considered the Virtual School annual report, which outlined the activity of the Virtual School and reported on the 2020-21 educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children.

Members expressed their satisfaction that the 2021 GCSE results were the best ever GCSE results reported for children in care. The number of young people gaining five or more 4-9 GCSEs (or equivalent) passes has increased from 29% in 2020 to 38% in 2021. Alongside a rise in the number of young people achieving five to nine GCSEs from 15% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. Which was better than regional, national and statistical neighbour reported outcomes.

Looking Forward to 2023 - 2024

In 2023/24 the Board will continue to deliver its remit and in particular:-

- Review the governance and function of the Board to ensure that opportunities to hear from children and young people are maximised.
- Champion a bespoke version of Total Respect training, for Elected Members.
- Refresh the approach to engagement with young people to make engagement meaningful.
- Build relationships with children and young people in care and care leavers and be an advocate for them.
- Attend future events and activities with young people to further develop relationships.
- Challenge services and partners to ensure that young people are receiving the best services and given every opportunity to succeed.
- Monitor the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and associated action plan, and set the Boards remit around its priorities.
- Consider the effectiveness of the Board and revise the approach to its function accordingly.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Membership

7 Members of the authority as determined by the Council to include:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Chair);
- The Chair of Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Note: A representative from the NHS shall be invited to each meeting as an advisor.

Substitution

Substitute members may be nominated to the Committee in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Council procedure rules (Part 4), subject to them having undertaken the relevant training as detailed below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Chairman shall be the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

The Vice-Chairman will be appointed at the Annual Council meeting for the municipal year.

Quorum

The quorum of the Board shall be one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of two.

Meetings

The Board will meet every eight weeks or thereabouts and will usually meet at the Council House, Walsall at 6.00 p.m.

Access to information

The Board will comply with the Access to Information Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

Purpose

To assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential.

Remit

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board shall:

- (1) Provide clear strategic direction in relation to corporate parenting to improve the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and care leavers.
- (2) Ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.
- (3) Make a demonstrable commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people.
- (4) Set objectives for monitoring the work of and evaluating the progress of the Officer level 'Operational – Corporate Parenting Steering Group'.
- (5) Develop and sustain clear linkages with Children in Care Council, 'Council 4 Kids', Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board, Walsall Foster Care Association and Partners to include the Police, the NHS and education providers and others.
- (6) Approve a work plan with clear aims and objectives which reflect the terms of Walsall's Corporate Parenting pledge.
- (7) Monitor progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children.
- (8) Submit reports to the Council, the Executive, Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee or such other body as the Board considers appropriate or necessary.
- (9) Submit an annual report to Council in April each year.
- (10) Listen to, consult with and involve looked after children and care leavers and their carer's in the assessment, development and delivery of services, including inviting them to act as advisers to the Committee on a regular basis.
- (11) Develop knowledge and be aware of the experiences and concerns of looked after children and care leavers.
- (12) Promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people and show ambitions and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers.
- (13) Champion the provision of Council based work placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people.
- (14) Monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual school.