IRO annual report (April 2024 – April 2025)

Overview

It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure children in our care and care leavers receive the best possible support to achieve their goals and aspirations whilst navigating their own lived experiences. Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) and the wider Safeguarding and Review Service are instrumental in ensuring children and young people are at the centre of their care planning to ensure we are meeting their diverse and changing needs with the overall aim of improving outcomes for children and young people.

The Safeguarding and Review Service continues to contribute positively towards Walsall's Children Services strategic journey ensuring that children and young people in care have timely and good quality care and achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. Quality assurance processes within the IRO Service continues to provide added value and evidence the robustness of support offered, test threshold for the intervention and ensure that care plans are progressed in a timely manner without drift and delay. The IRO should ensure that the Local Authority gives due consideration to all views expressed by the child.

It is the legislative duty of the Local Authority to appoint an IRO when a child first comes into the care of the Local Authority under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Safeguarding and Review service operates within the framework of the IRO Handbook. This is statutory guidance issued to local authorities in 2010. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement and quality assurance of the care planning for children in our care and in challenging any drift and delay. IROs have a responsibility to ensure that plans are timely, effective and achieve good outcomes for children and young people. They have a responsibility to promote best practice and promote high professional standards across children's social care. IROs make an important contribution to the consistency of practice from all those who have a corporate responsibility for children in care. They have a duty to prevent drift and delay in care planning and ensure that the Local Authority's efforts are focused on meeting the needs of children and achieving the best possible outcomes. IROs monitor the activity of the Local Authority as a corporate parent, in ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to meet the child's assessed needs, and that the Local Authority is operating in line with care planning regulations. In meeting these legislative requirements IRO's hold six core functions which centralise around the rights of children and young people, ensuring they are central in effective planning with their voice and views paramount to the reviewing process.

This annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the Safeguarding and Review Service within Walsall Children Services during the period 01 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, as required by statutory guidance. Overall, the information and data indicate that the Safeguarding and Review Service are a collaborative service,

working with the children that they serve, professionals and families to achieve good outcomes for children and young people in care. Walsall aim is to work alongside partner agencies, families and children in systemic and relational approach.

Profile of Walsall Safeguarding & Review Service

Walsall's IRO service is situated within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service in Walsall and benefits from holding dual roles as Child Protection Conference chairs. It is also closely aligned with the Local Authority Designated Officer. The Head of Service, Hannah Thompson has been in post since July 2024. The Principal IRO Dhyal Samra has been in post since November 2023 who leads on LADO service and the Group Manager Jenny Cockcroft since June 2023 who takes lead on Quality and Assurance. The Principal IRO and Group Manager share the supervisory roles for the service which include 11 permanent full time IRO's, 1 IRO that holds a dual role as IRO and LADO, and 1 LADO and 1 agency IRO. The service also benefits from administrative support which includes 5 minute-takers and 1 senior Business Support Officers (BSO's). BSO's support with booking Initial CIC reviews, travel, collation and dissemination of reports.

In January 2025 in line with Families First for Children we have created the role of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner. LPCC's are currently aligned with the East and West locality and assume the role of child protection conference chair amongst their wider role in ensuring expert multi agency child protection investigations. There has therefore been a reduction within the dual roles undertaken by IRO's within the service within these two localities.

During this reporting period we have had a two of changes within the team due to secondments one to a senior management role which ended in January 2025 and a second to Families First for Children as a senior LCPP which is ongoing. With this said the Safeguarding and Review Service currently have a permanent and secure workforce with only 1 agency member of staff who has been with the service for 12 months. Within the wider workforce there have been some changes in social work practitioners and managers which has at times contributed to challenges in convening review meetings. IROs have throughout the year continued to demonstrate their commitment to the children they serve, despite changes in the practice system and creation of the LCPP role. The IRO service sits in the Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement Directorate, meaning IROs are within a service whose aims are to quality assure and develop practice for children across children's social care.

Fortnightly Team Meetings are chaired by the Group Manager and/or Principal IRO; these meetings are an opportunity to share information, discuss service developments, share learning from training and network with other services. Reflective seminars are held monthly whereby each session has a different focus, led by the team or needs of the service, creating space for reflection and learning, inviting guest speakers and collaboration with other service areas such as children in our care teams. The recent areas of focus have been midway reviews, supporting children's attendance at their

review's participation within CIC reviews and scrutiny on care planning. Service Development Days take place twice annually and are an opportunity to spend a day focused on a specific area of practice that the team feel would be beneficial to promote and develop. IRO's are also invited and attend regional safeguarding network training meetings with regional peers to share practice.

Allocations and Children in Care

During the period 01 April 24 - 31 March 25 there were 575 children and young people in the care of Walsall Children Services. Within that period there were 117 new entrants into care (inclusive of 575 children). Of the 117 children, 76 of these children were male and 41 females, 23 children/young people were subject to child protection plans prior to entering care and 16 of these children within the reporting period were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

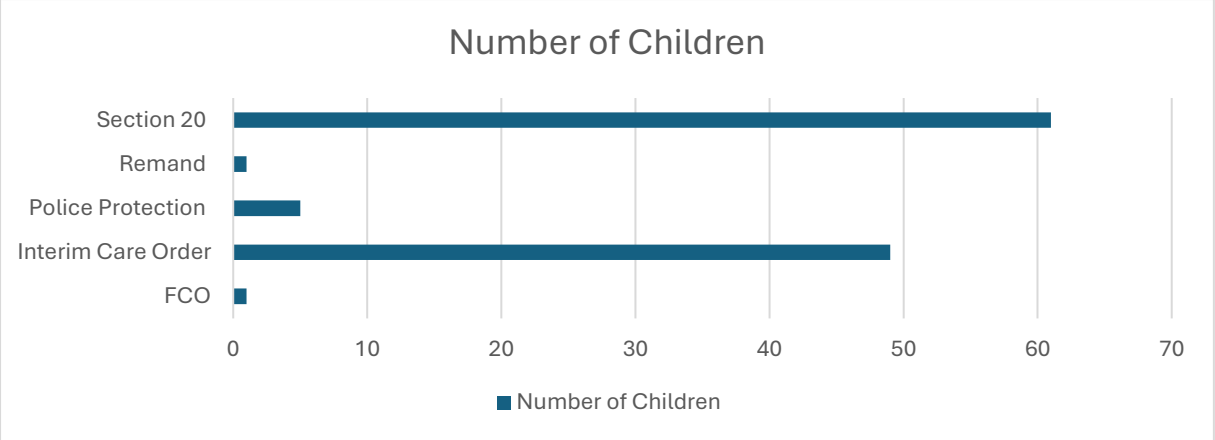
In comparison between 01 April 23 until 31 March 24 there were 665 children and young people in our care, a decrease this year of 92 children. The decline in number is evidenced across this reporting year in each month. The report provides a more detailed profile about children in our care, including their age, gender and ethnic background, the length of time in care, their legal status and type of placement.

The recommended average caseload as set by the IRO Handbook for an IRO is between 50 and 70 children. Within the reviewing period the average case load has generally been 72 children in their dual role capacity as IRO and CP chair, with on average 55 children in our care allocated per IRO.

Within this reporting period (01 April 24 - 31 March 25) there were 1632 Child in Care (CIC) reviews completed, of which 1454 (89.1%) were held within statutory timescales of which 431 were held in person, 933 were held virtually and 245 were hybrid; the percentage of meeting held within timescales are reflective of last year's reporting period.

Profile of Walsall Children in Care

As of 31 March 2024, there were 83,630 children in care nationwide. During this reporting period, Walsall had 575 children in care, including 117 new admissions. There has been a gradual decline in the number of children entering care and an increase in the number of children on Child Protection Plans during this period. Specifically, the number of children in care decreased from 661 on 1 April 2024 to 575 in March 2025. Of the 117 children who were new entries into care:



The summary below provides an understanding of the placements and provisions required for the 117 new entrants into care within this reporting period:

- 1 child was placed in an unregulated residential accommodation
- 1 child was placed in a secure accommodation
- 15 children were placed in registered children's residential provisions
- 12 were placed in regulated supported accommodation for children aged 16 plus
- 19 children were placed with carers or other persons with parental responsibility, including on a care order
- 1 child was placed in independent living
- 1 child was placed within an NHS/Health trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care
- 2 children were placed in a family centre or a mother and baby unit
- 1 child was placed within a youth offender institute
- 4 children were placed within a foster placement (with family/friend) as long-term fostering
- 10 children were placed in a fostering placement (with family/friend) who were not deemed as long-term carers
- 4 children were placed in a foster placement (not with family/friend) that has been agreed as long-term fostering
- 44 children were placed with foster carers (not with family/friend) and not agreed as long-term
- 2 children were placed in other placements

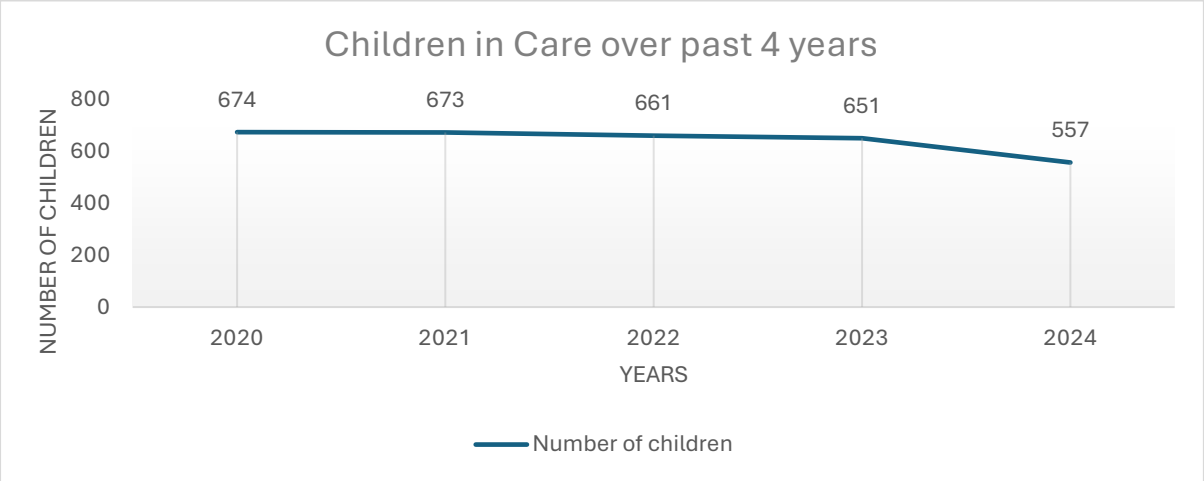
Across 2024-25, there have been significant changes in the numbers of children in care and subject to a Child Protection Plan. This has followed a four-year period where the numbers for both have been relatively stable. For children in care, there has been a reduction from 661 children on 1st April 2024 to 575 children in care on 31st March 2024.

Over the preceding four years, the numbers of children in our care in Walsall has fluctuated a little but overall has been consistent.

2020	2021	2022	2023
674	673	661	651

Children in our care figure 1st April

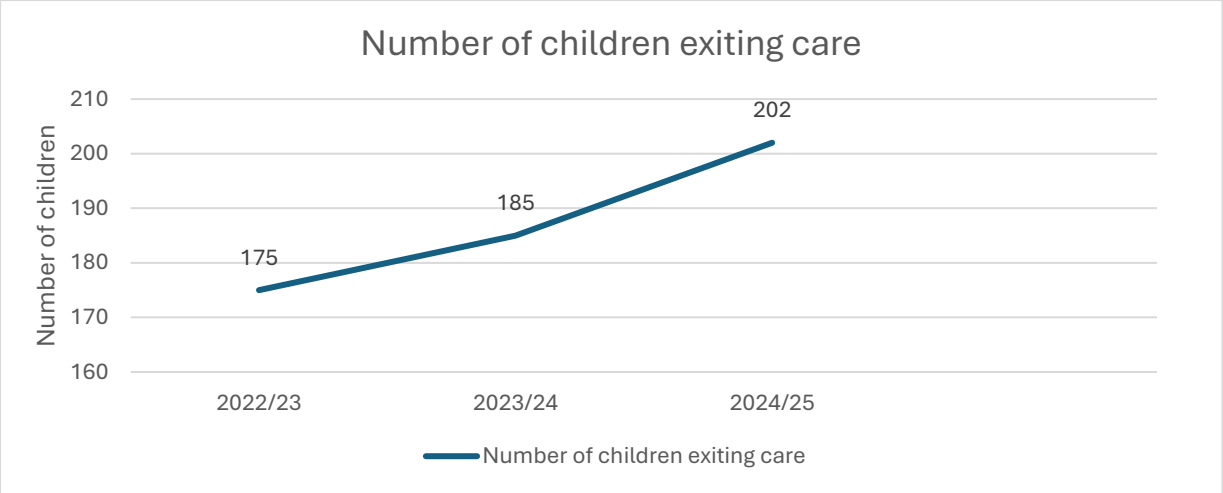
Within the reporting period there were 140 children subject to Interim Care Orders (24.35%), 422 children subject to Care Orders (73.39%), 77 children subject to Placement Orders (13.39%), 4 children remanded to LA accommodation or youth detention accommodation (0.70%), 4 children subject to Police Protection and in local authority accommodation (0.07%), 128 children subject to a single period of accommodation under section 20 (22.26%) and 1 child accommodated under an agreed period of short term breaks (0.17%). There was a total of 776 orders, this increased number is a result of dual orders., these are noted where children are subject to Care and Placement orders with respect prospective adoption



There has been a reduction in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children from 22 in 2023/24 to 15 in 2024/25, representing a decrease of 7 children within this reporting period. Within this review period 65% of the new entrance into care were subject to child protection plans prior to their care journey this demonstrates a greater proportion of children entering care having had been on a Child Protection Plan rather than any other lower level of intervention and/or support. Additionally, there is an increase in children entering care but staying with their parents or someone with parental responsibility, with 33% remaining with family in 2024/25

There has been an observed increase in the number of exits from care over recent years. Within 2024/25 there were 202 children that left care, of which July peaked having had 25

CIC exit care. There is a high number of CIC ends in 2024/25 which could be aligned to a combination of factors: a number of children turning 18 and naturally leaving the care system due to reaching adulthood, a higher rate of children returning home, or leaving care via a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangements Order (CAO) and there were 44 Adoptions Orders secured within this reporting period. In summary the reduction in the CIC numbers is due to fewer children entering care, with an increase in children leaving care or securing permanency.

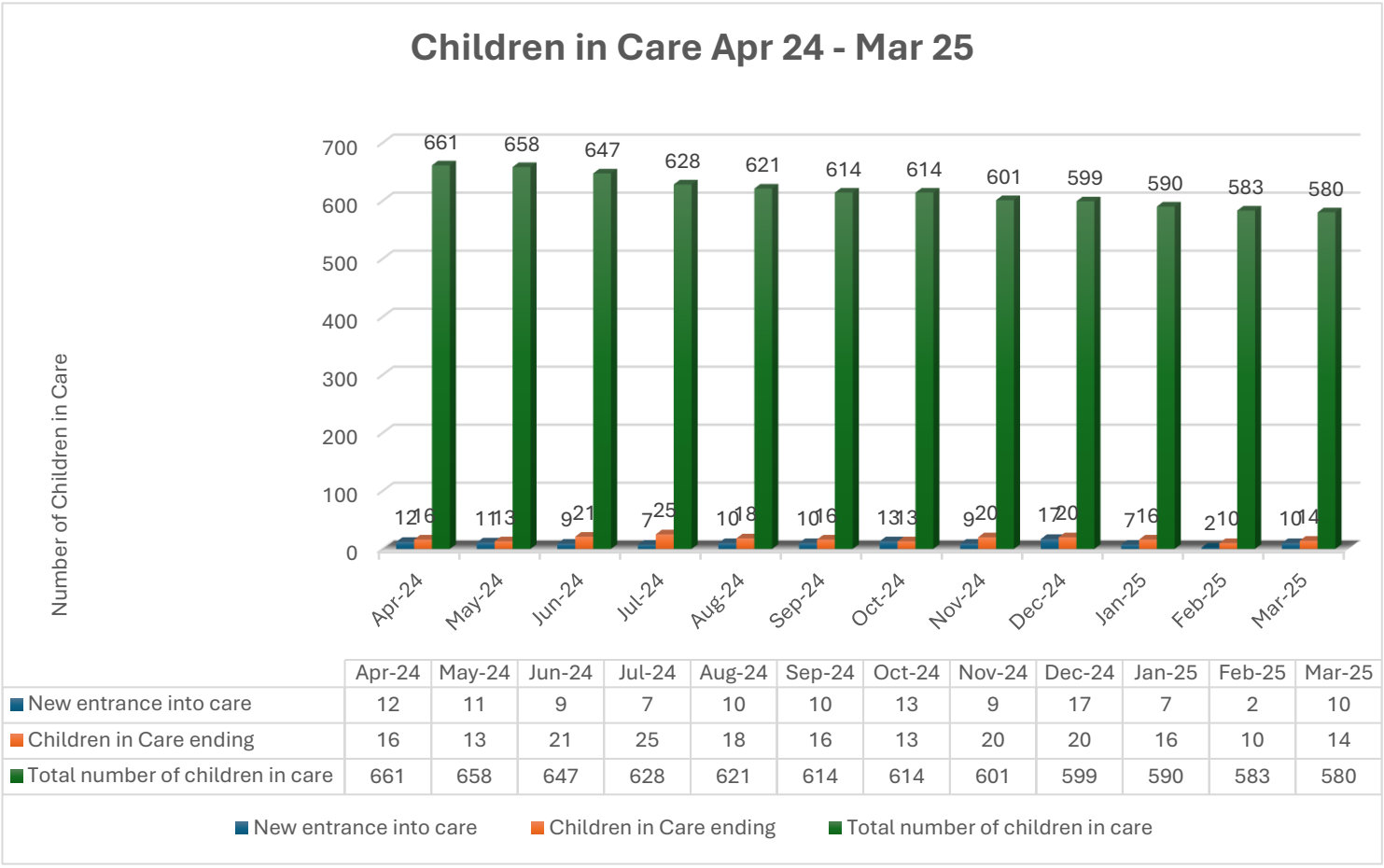


Number of children who have exited care and rationale

Number of Children	Outcome
47	Returning to parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process
44	Successfully adopted
22	Moved into independent living with no formal support arrangements
18	Reached the age of 18 and remained with their current carers under stay and put arrangements
18	Moved into independent living arrangements with support such as semi supported accommodation providing formalised advice/support arrangements
9	Period of being child in care ceased for any other reason
8	Secured permanency under the Special Guardianship Order made to carers, other than former foster carers who were a relative or a friend
7	Accompanied asylum seeking child age was disputed and determined to be over the age of 18

7	Child Arrangements Order
5	Special Guardianship Order made to former carers, who were a relative or a friend
4	Left care to live with parents, relatives or other person with parental responsibility which is not part of the current care planning process
4	Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Care
3	Sentenced to custody
1	Care taken over by another Local Authority in the UK
1	Special Guardianship Order made to carers, other than former foster carers, other than relatives or friends.
4	Returns home to live with parents, relatives or other persons with parental responsibility

Number of Children in Care in Walsall at end of the each month April 24 - March 25



	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25
New entrance into care	12	11	9	7	10	10	13	9	17	7	2	10
Children in Care ending	16	13	21	25	18	16	13	20	20	16	10	14
Total number of children in care	661	658	647	628	621	614	614	601	599	590	583	580

New entrance into care Children in Care ending Total number of children in care

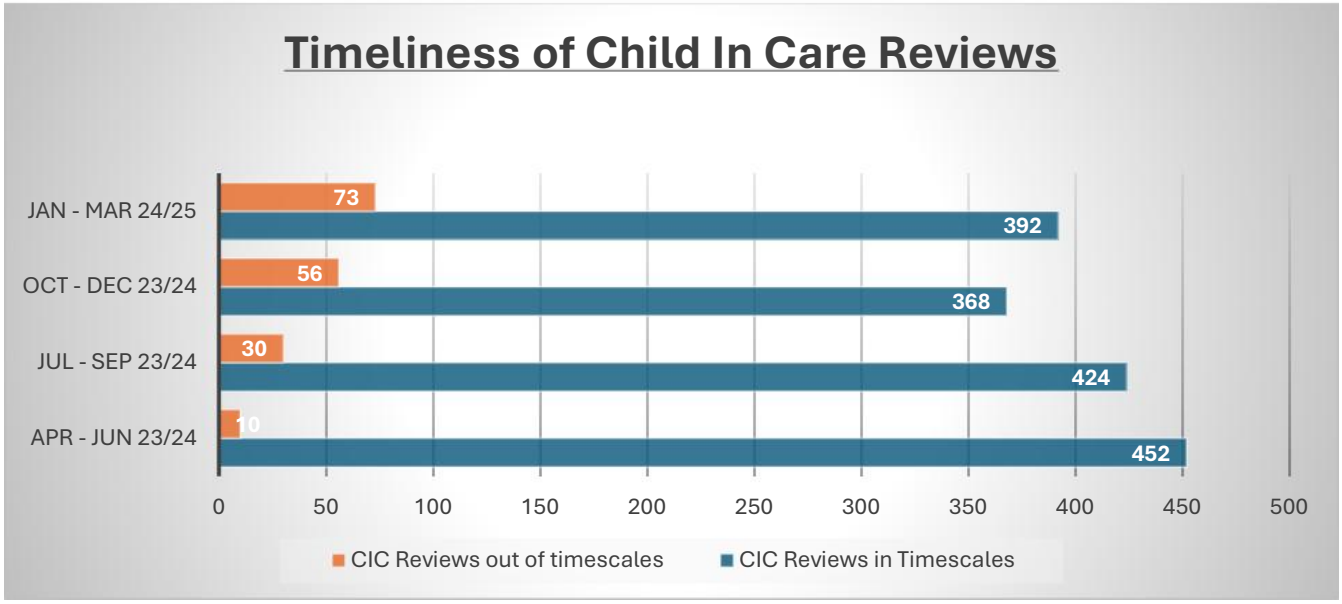
Child In Care Reviews Timeliness

The Local Authority is required to carry out review meetings in line with timings specified in the Regulations [regulation33]:

- the initial CIC review should be held within 20 working days of the date on which the child enters care (or has a move to a new home).
- the second review no more than three months after the first.
- the third and all 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

There were 1805 child in care reviews that took place in 23/24 of which 1636 (91%) were held within the statutory time scales and 169 were held out of timescales. In comparison there were 1632 CIC reviews held in 2024/25 which would be reflective of the reduced child in care number. Of these, 1454 (89 %) reviews were held within the designated timeframes, while 178 were held outside of the expected timeframes. The slight increase in the number of CIC reviews held out of timescales can be attributed to long term sickness of 2 staff members and the transition period between the departure of 4 permanent staff members and the recruitment of new permanent IRO's. This demonstrates that despite the challenges within the service, the resilience within the team has allowed performance in respect of timeliness to remain good.

Timeliness of Children in Care reviews each quarter April 24 - March 25



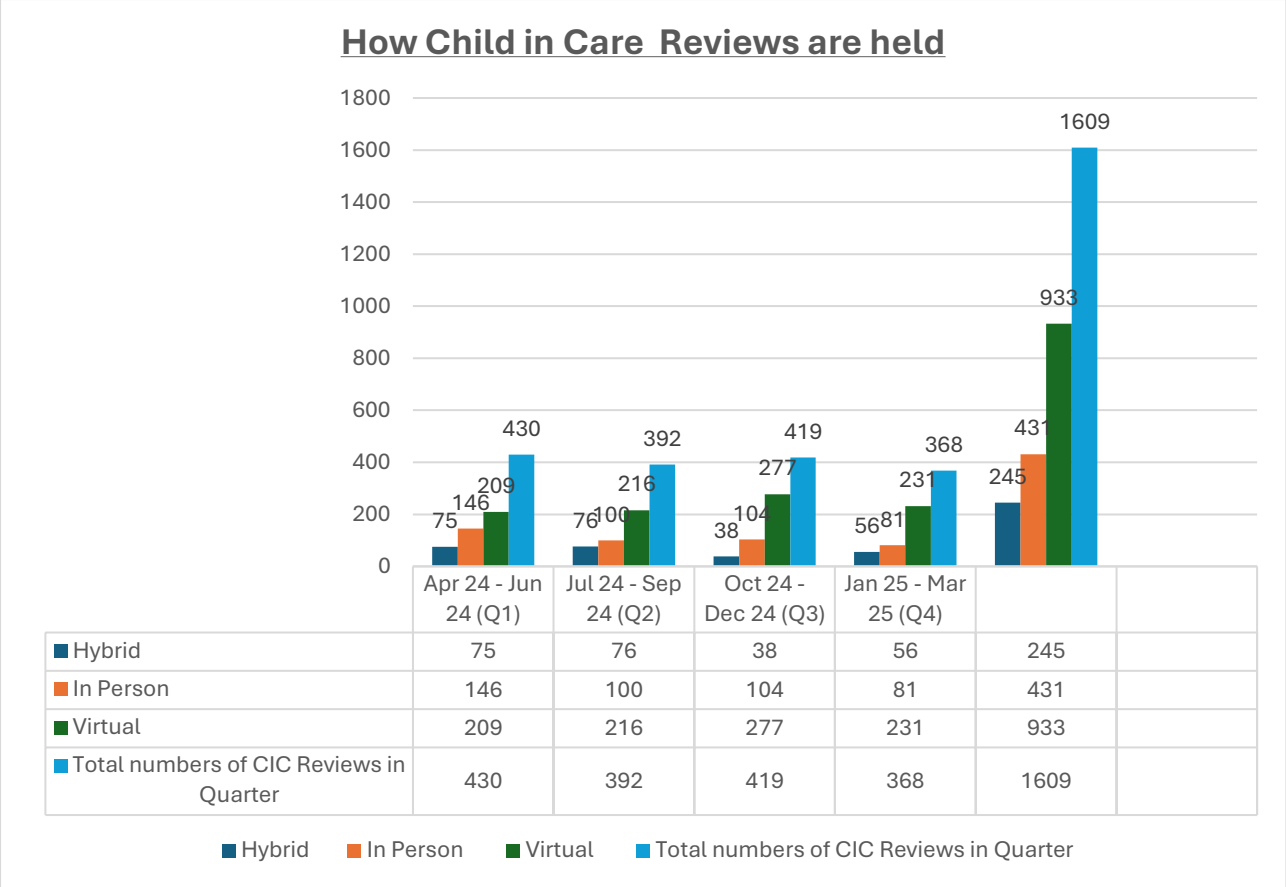
IRO's are expected to receive all documentation at least three days prior to reviews to allow them the capacity to speak with parents, carers and young people in advance of reviews. The determination of where a CIC meeting is held should be made in consultation with the young person. Feedback from the CIC Council indicates that most children are being asked where and when they would prefer their meetings to take place, resulting in a combination of in-person, virtual, or hybrid (partly in-person and partly virtual) meetings.

There has been a decrease in the number of CIC meetings held in 2024/25 (1632) compared to 2023/24 (1805). This decrease is reflective of the reduced number of CIOC during this period, as such this decline was anticipated. In 2023/24, approximately 41.8% of the meetings were held virtually, 41.8% in person, and 16.3% in a hybrid format. In the current reporting year there have been on average 134 CIC meetings chaired each month, with the greatest number of meetings being held in quarter 1 and peaking at 162 reviews within the month of October. Within the current reporting period 58.% of the meetings were held virtually, 26.8% in person, and 15.2% in a hybrid format.

The hypothesis for the increased number of virtual meetings suggests that older children are choosing this format more frequently. Dip sampling and audits have provided reassurances that, although there are a higher number of virtual meetings taking place, the IRO's are completing home visits and creating protected time before a CIC meeting to ensure that young people are consulted, and views are considered. The increase in the number of reviews held virtually within this reporting year requires greater consideration and focus over the next 12 months. Reviews should ideally be held in person with children and young present for all or part of their review, the current virtual and hybrid options alongside in person reviews has supported 83.6% of children and young people to participate directly within their reviews. This is a significant increase from 2022/2023 when it is noted 68.1 % of children and young people participated directly within their reviews, with the reporting period of 2023-24 noting a decares in this figure.

IRO's continue to encourage children to attend their reviews in person and this area continues to be monitored closely, with ongoing work being undertaken with Council4Kidz and our advocacy service to explore how best we can promote children's participation in reviews.

How Child in Care Reviews are held (April 24 - March 25)



The service has continued to look at timeliness of the completion of child in care review records/minutes as a key measure of our effectiveness; measuring how effective the reviews drive care planning forward and help to unblock any barriers. It is noted that the Care Plan recommendations are available to team managers and social workers within 5 working days and the Child in Care Review minutes are completed and distributed within 20 working days. The distribution of minutes continues to be supported by the Safeguarding and Review admin support team. There has been a decline in the completion and distribution of minutes within this period. Dip sampling evidenced that some of the data is reflective of human error whereby the minutes have been completed within the required timescales however the newer members of team where unfamiliar to the system as such resulting in system process not being following impacting the data.

Since January 2025 practitioners within the service have been piloting AI in the form of co-pilot. Co-pilot has been utilised to support IRO completing minutes of child in care reviews, writing letters to children and completing notes after visits have bene undertaken. Feedback from practitioners has indicted that this has reduced the time required in completing mandatory recording:

"Co-pilot has been extremely useful; it has reduced my need to type by at least half when recording"

"When I leave a visit, I dictate to it whilst everything is fresh in my mind, so when I get back to the office copilot will produce my visit for me, I can ask it to record my visit under any headings I like too."

"I use it for writing my letter to the child, writing visits, rewriting difficult paragraphs that I might want to say in a more sensitive way."

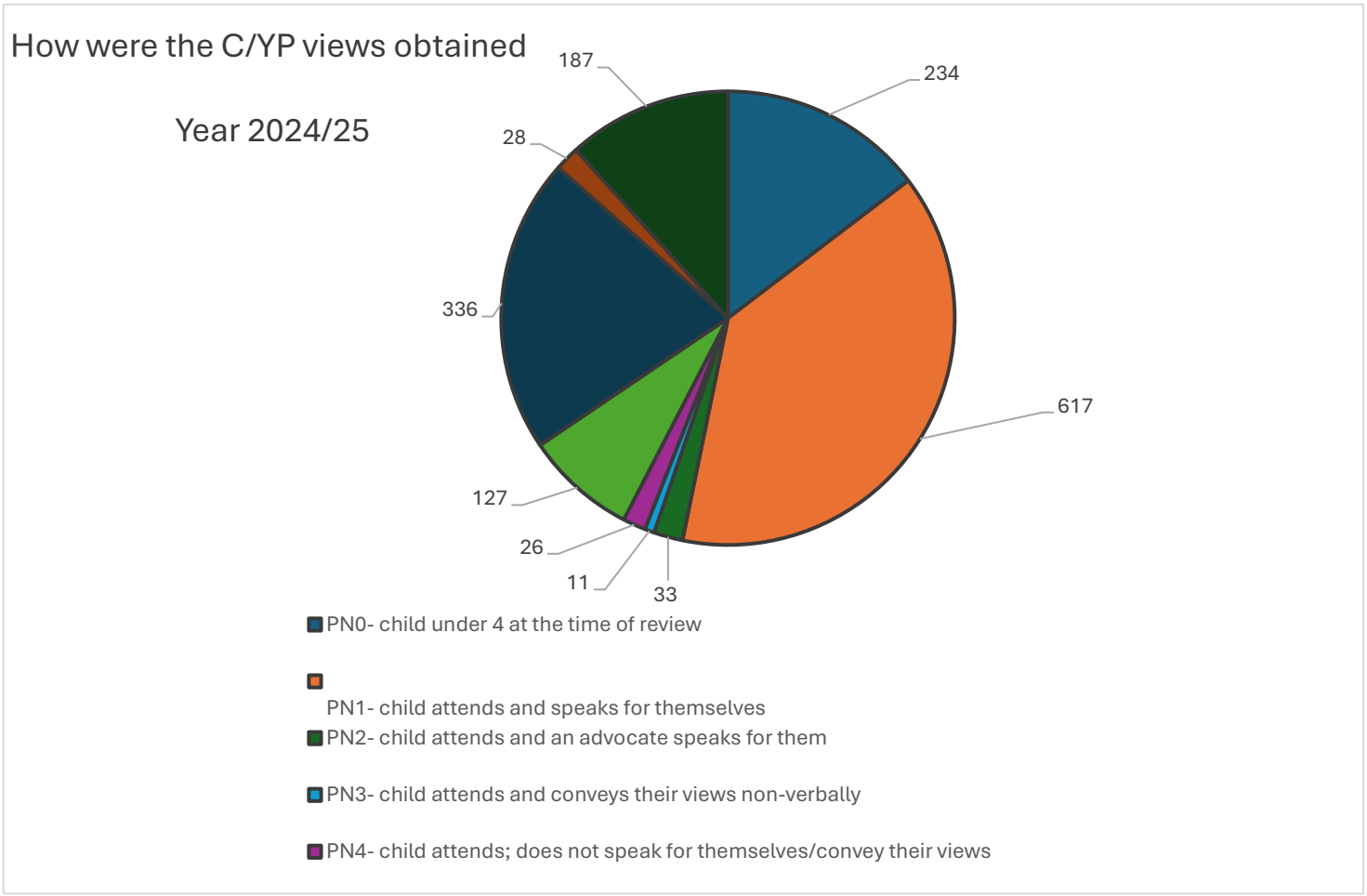
The use of AI has increased the time that IRO's have to spend directly with children in our care and further develop their capacity to have regular reflective discussions with practitioners.

Workflow Steps in Time	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	Total
No	68	51	74	75	35	67	81	68	61	71	64	72	787
Yes	77	82	78	80	62	72	80	65	66	64	58	55	839
Grand Total	145	133	152	155	97	139	161	133	127	135	122	127	1626
	53.1%	**61.7%**	**51.3%**	**51.6%**	**63.9%**	**51.8%**	**49.7%**	**48.9%**	**52.0%**	**47.4%**	**47.5%**	**43.3%**	**51.6%**

Child In Care Reviews participation & Voice of the child.

Child participation can take place both within a CIC meeting and the IRO can communicate with then in a different way if this helps the children to convey their feelings. The IRO's continue to promote and encourage child participation and attendance at child in care reviews. A primary objective of the IRO is to ensure children are central to decisions about them and that their voice is evident in their care plans. A key element in delivering this objective is the measure of the young person's participation in the Statutory Review of their care plan and care arrangements.

Across the year from April 2024 - March 2025, the views of children and young people were available in 98.7 % of CIC reviews; of which the majority (83.6%) of children attend and actively participate or have support for their participation, peak attendance was shown in the months of April 24 (63.3%) and October 24 (61.3%). Dip sampling evidence that when children have chosen not to attend their CIC review the IRO has made concerted efforts to gain views prior to the meeting. The Safeguarding and Review Service are coproducing new consultation forms this year with the CIC Council which shall be promoted and encouraged to distribute and upon completion uploaded on the children's records. The data indicates an improvement in child participation.



The Child in Care Council continue to support, promote and encourage other children to attend their CIC meeting via new innovations and projects that they are co-producing with the Children's Champion David Hughes. Some of the Key findings from the feedback received from Walsall children in care council who are of varying age groups shared the following comments:

- *"Children should attend reviews because it beneficial, I would be annoyed if I was not allowed to attend as they are about me. I would choose to have my meeting at home or in school during a lesson. I get a choice to attend my reviews, it would be wise to attend reviews, certain things happen and you need to know before these things happen"*
- *"My meeting are virtual, they are mainly at home but they can be at school. I would choose to have the meetings at school, I'd prefer to have then at school. Kids should not be scared to speak out as it makes you have more courage to speak for yourself."*
- *"I am able to reach my IRO when I need to, I have had the same IRO for 4 years which is a good IRO. At first I wasn't too sure about my IRO but its better now. Personally I don't go to my reviews because I feel like I don't need to. No one will*

force you to go but for me it's because my voice needs to be heard and tailored to what I want"

- *"I know things are met when things are changing and have changed"*

The children within the CIC council share, varied views ranging from some children finding their meeting boring, overwhelming with too much information being shared, not wanting to attending due to conflicting commitments, making a choice not to attend for no specific reason to other children sharing that they enjoy attending and building a positive repour with their IRO sharing that they felt listened to and that their CIC meeting resulted in changes for them.

Children participation in their reviews in total

2023/24

	Apr 2023	May 2023	Jun 2023	Jul 2023	Aug 2023	Sep 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023	Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	YTD
Child Participates	**104**	**115**	**114**	**117**	**96**	**124**	**96**	**104**	**113**	**105**	**104**	**143**	1335
Total Over 5	**105**	**119**	**118**	**122**	**96**	**135**	**101**	**108**	**115**	**112**	**110**	**151**	1392
%	99.0%	96.6%	96.6%	95.9%	100.0%	91.9%	95.0%	96.3%	98.3%	93.8%	94.5%	94.7%	95.9%

2024/25

	Apr 2024	May 2024	Jun 2024	Jul 2024	Aug 2024	Sep 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Mar 2025	YTD
Child Participates	**97**	**98**	**110**	**114**	**76**	**109**	**116**	**99**	**103**	**102**	**96**	**78**	1198
Total Reviews	**99**	**102**	**117**	**123**	**79**	**116**	**124**	**105**	**105**	**110**	**99**	**78**	1257
%	98%	96%	94%	93%	96%	94%	94%	94%	98%	93%	97%	100%	95%

Midway Reviews

It is expected that most children on the 6-month review cycle will undergo a midway review, typically around three months after the CIC review meeting; exceptions may occur if an early CIC review has been convened. The Safeguarding and Review service is required to identify instances where children have not been regularly monitored by the social worker or IRO (through Midway Reviews, early CIC reviews, or resolutions) to

ensure effective management of IRO performance and to prevent drift and delay by the Local Authority.

IROs are expected to routinely utilise midway reviews as a mechanism to assess the progress of care planning and to identify and escalate delays via the resolution process. These midway reviews are regularly discussed during supervision and team meetings. Additionally, the weekly data performance report allows IROs to track when these reviews need to be completed. There is substantial evidence that midway reviews positively impact the progression of care plans, challenging delays in assessments, and driving forward progress in life story work. During the 2023/24 reporting period, IROs completed 958 midway reviews; this number increased to 1127 within this reporting period 2024-25, despite a decrease in CIC Review meetings. This suggests IRO are placing a greater emphasis on scrutinising children's care planning within this reporting period.

IROs also evidence their oversight and footprint by ensuring they record any activity outside of reviews, midways and resolutions, as case notes on children's files. This activity can include attendance at professional meetings, contact with children and families outside of the review process, and advocating for children at critical times in their lives.

Resolutions and Quality Assurance.

One of the key responsibilities of the IRO is to address issues impacting a child's care with the social work service, including performance matters, care planning, and resource allocation. These factors can affect the progression of the child or young person's plans and their needs being met. Walsall procedures and practices incorporate a well-established Resolution and Escalation process. Aligning with relational practice principles, IROs are encouraged to cultivate positive relationships with social workers and team managers to support, shape, and influence social work practice and improve outcomes for children. This is facilitated through open discussions and dialogue before initiating resolutions, typically resulting in more timely resolutions for the child.

Resolutions are employed to tackle specific issues, closing the resolution once actions are agreed upon or when progress is reviewed. If delays persist, the resolution can be escalated within the management structure. The most common reasons for stage one escalation include lack of progress in care planning, failure to complete specific actions previously agreed upon at Children in Care (CIC) meetings, and issues related to safeguarding or safety planning. IROs strive to achieve informal resolutions through collaborative dialogue with social workers and team managers before and during each procedural stage. However, if no resolution is reached, the dispute may be escalated to senior managers' attention, ultimately involving the Director of Children's Services and then Cafcass.

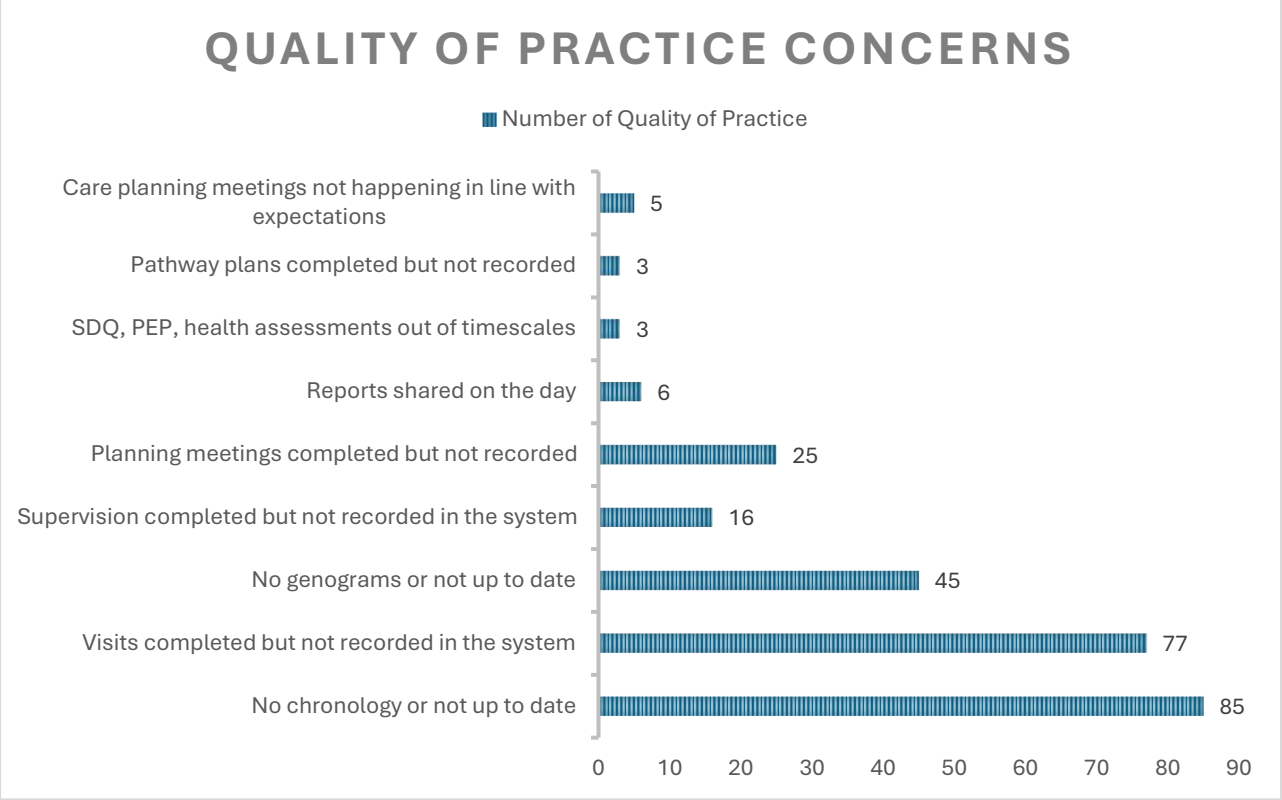
During this reporting period, 60 formal resolutions were completed. Of these, 40 were resolved at the Team Manager level (Stage 1), 15 at the Group Manager level (Stage 2),

and 5 at the Head of Service level (Stage 3). None were escalated to the Director level (Stage 4), and no referrals to CAFCASS were required for further advice.

The resolutions at Stage 3 were escalations from Stage 1 through Stage 2 and were resolved at the Head of Service level. These escalations were primarily due to drift and delay in permanency planning, as well as pending or delayed assessments, which subsequently caused delays in the progression of the care plan. None of the resolutions were raised due to safeguarding concerns.

During this reporting period, there has been a focus on distinguishing between recording delays which are now captured within the Quality of Practice forms and practice concerns resulting in delays in care planning which are addressed formally via the resolution process. Within this period, 121 Quality of Practice forms were raised of which the highest percentages were for; no chronology or not up to date (70.3 %) and visits completed but not recorded in the system (63.6%), of the 121 Quality of Practice forms 3 were escalated to a resolution.

Number and reason a Quality Of Practice is being raised



Achievements and Progress during 2024/25

Time scales: a significant portion of child in care reviews are held within the statutory timescales and there is clear evidence of child participation in views being obtained either prior to or at the review meetings. The service has moved forward on work with the

child and care council in developing our delivery to promote more child led participation. This has included promoting the use of feedback forms, direct contact (in the form of visits or virtual catch up's) between the child and their IRO, Principal IRO routinely attending the children in care council to seek feedback. This shall remain a service priority for 2025/26

Scrutiny and oversight: There has been a greater emphasis placed on the IRO oversight ensuring that plans are robust and reducing any delay in care planning. Dip sample audits have been completed on midway reviews ensuring that there is a focus on evidencing the effectiveness of the progress of care plan, supervision and purposefulness of statutory visits. This is also disused routinely in supervisions. The IRO service has and continues to develop a positive working relationships with team managers with safeguarding service and children in our care service; as such this has enables the facilitation of open dialogue and challenge to remain child centred. Discussions are routinely held with the social worker practitioners and team managers at the earliest opportunity at the lowest threshold, however escalation to Quality of Practice and formal resolutions are professed in accordance with practice standards. Dispute resolutions are written to the child, remaining child focused on impact for our young people rather than being task centred/process driven.

Quality Assurance and supporting practice: Walsall Safeguarding and Review service a largely a permanent workforce with highly skilled and knowledgeable IRO's working with children and young people and developing links to support social workers. Their increasing awareness and use of performance data and information to inform and improve practice both within the service and for individual IRO practice. This has now become a routine element of our work to inform our oversight of IRO practice as well as inform the wider quality assurance work. The Quality and Assurance framework support to inform practice development and insight into quality and effectiveness of practice; there has been develop and implementation of a Quality Assurance plan which was progressed throughout this period with reporting expectations clearly establishing and agreeing to include monthly child journey audits including focus group and thematic audits. The audit templates were aligned with 2025 practice priorities and Walsall embed feedback loops to ensure learning and actions are undertaken across the service to evidence how the learning from quality of practice is driving forward practice and system change. An audit tracker supported to collate and analyse audit actions from across Quality Assurance framework

Valuing care: Valuing Care is now implemented for all children in care. There has been a development of workflows for the Valuing Care Assessment which is closely aligned to the IRO workflow "All About You child in our care minutes" as such there will be a seamless process of information being shared and reflected within the two processes.

The new format shall now allow the IRO's to write personalised letters to children in sharing information about their meetings and their care plan in a child friendly and bespoke way. The decision to incorporate the letter from IRO was made in partnership with the Children in Care Council who have played an instrumental role in supporting the creation of the from.

Improved data reporting: there has been a focus on developing the Safeguarding and Review data reporting system. The ongoing development of Power BI shall assist with the visualisation and interpretation and allow tracking system to ensure that the data provided reflects an accurate account of live data and to identify trends and timescales. There has been progress made on key areas of reporting such as the timeliness of meetings, participation of children in care, resolutions raised.

Participation and Advocacy: there have been consultations and discussions held with child in care council to collaborate in promoting attendance in child in care review. The Children in Care Council have been actively involved in producing short video's whereby they have shared their experiences and views the benefits of attending child in care reviews, they have also supported with creating feedback forms for children in care to enable the service to further understand what additional changes can be made to encourage and promote attendance, which needs to be a decision made by the child. The advocacy offer remains with Black Country Advocacy, there are advocacy working groups and there is the development service wide to promote advocacy and support better access for children and young people. There continues to be an Independent Visitor offer however it is recognised that there are some restrictions with current capacity, Walsall are currently focusing on capacity and recruitment to further strengthen this area.

Systemic improvements to support children in our care

- There are currently nine children residing in unregistered settings due to difficulties in finding appropriate accommodations that address their complex needs. This situation is subject to thorough review through stringent assurance processes, thematic audits, weekly visits, and regular management oversight, including supervision and documented management decisions.

- Children in our Care service and Safeguarding and Review Service shall be working collaboratively to consider strategies to strengthen Life Story work as some children are not helped soon enough to understand their life story.

- Whilst the vast majority of children experience placement stability, for a very small number of children we have struggled to find the right the right type of

accommodation for them despite best efforts work is currently being undertaken within the wider fostering review.

- Some children have experienced more changes in social worker than we would want for them. In some situations, this can result in delays in progressing their plans in a timely manner. This has on the main been noted due to long term sickness within the children in our care team and pre-planned maternity leave.

- There is more to do to increase the number of fostering households, which will help a small number of children currently living in residential care to live with a foster family.

Practice Improvements & Service Priorities for 2025/26

- **Letters to children post review**- In May 2025 amendments were made to the child in care review documents within mosaic this was a change to include a letter to the child following review
- **Valuing care "my needs" assessment-** In May 2025 the "My Needs assessment" valuing care was built into the "all about me prepared by social workers ahead of child in our care reviews. Over the course of the upcoming reporting period IRO need to ensure the informtion held within the "my needs assessment" directly links to care plans for children and young people to ensure they are needs led and evidence the full integration of valuing care within our practice.
- **Increase connectivity between IRO's and social care teams-** IRO's are deemed as independent within their roles in terms of oversight of care planning; to support practice improvement and the quality-of-care planning for children in our care IRO's need to be more visible and connected to the wider social work teams, with increased presence within locality offices to support reflective discussion with practitioners

- **Participation in reviews** Continue to strengthen the participation of children and young people within their reviews and promote all reviews being conducted in person, unless in exceptional circumstances. Work will continue with council 4 Kidz to improve participation and understanding of the review process to ensure the review process meets both statutory requirements to review care plans and the voice of children and young people.

- **Scrutiny and oversight** Continue to promote escalations as a tool to improve outcomes for children and develop ways to measure the impact of these processes. Continue to close the loop to evidence effective change and impact. This however is twofold with the service needing to ensure clarity regarding the

oversight of care planning and expectations of both IRO's and social workers to ensure timely and robust care planning for children in our care

- **Service transformation in line with Families First for Children- with the review of the current dual role Cp conference chair and IRO.** In line with national reform the role of the LCPP is enhancing our child protection practice. Over the course of the last year LCPP's are working across 4 teams, Children in our Care, Children and Young people with disabilities and the East and West locality. This has seen a decrease in the nature of the dual role within the safeguarding and review service. As we evaluate the positive impact of the LCPP consideration in line with transformation is required regarding the nature of the IRO role within Walsall as a single functional post

Dhyal Samra

Principal IRO

September 2025