



Walsall Council

Corporate Parenting Board

9th January 2024 at 18:00

Conference room 2 at the Council House, Lichfield Street, Walsall

Membership:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor V. Waters
Councillor R. Worrall
Vacancy

Non-Elected

Non-Voting Advisor:

NHS Walsall
Head of Virtual School
Director, Customer Engagement

Quorum:

3 Members

Democratic Services, The Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW
Contact name: Nikki Gough Telephone: 01922 654767 Email: nikki.gough@walsall.gov.uk
[Walsall Council Website](#)

**If you are disabled and require help to and from the meeting room,
please contact the person above**

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	<p>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.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>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:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
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	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
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>

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.

Part 1 – Public Session

1. Apologies
2. Substitutions
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. Minutes
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 4th September 2023 and 13 November 2023.
(Enclosed Pages 1 - 7)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report
(Enclosed Pages 8 – 22)
7. Care Experienced Status as a Protected Characteristic
(Enclosed Pages 23 - 27)
8. Health Services Children in Care Assurance Report
(Enclosed Pages 28 - 48)
9. Independent Visitor Annual report 2022 - 2023
(Enclosed Pages 49 - 61)
10. Quarterly Performance report
(Enclosed Pages 62 - 71)
11. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-25
(Enclosed Pages 72 - 92)
12. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting will be 12 February 2024 (engagement session).

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The date of the next meeting will be 12 February 2024 (engagement session).

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 4th September 2023 at 6.30 p.m.

Conference room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor R. Worrall

Officers Present

Rita Holmer	Interim Director, Children's Social Work
Colleen Male	Interim Executive Director, Children's Services
Zoe Morgan	Head of Service
Catherine Masterson	Designated Children in Care Nurse - Black Country ICB
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School

6 **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Latham.

7 **Substitutions**

Councillor A. Nawaz substituted for Councillor Latham for the duration of the meeting.

8 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2023, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2023, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

9 **Future Governance of Corporate Parenting Board**

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

Members questioned why the recommendations within the report differed to those previously suggested, and Officers confirmed that there was not an appetite for de-constituting the Board at this time. It was stressed that it was important to ensure that young people were engaging with the Board, and it was hoped that Walsall could pioneer a new approach at some point in the future.

Members challenged how other local authorities operated their Corporate Parenting Boards, Officers confirmed that there was no clear best practice model operating. The proposed way of working was described and the difficulties experienced by young people attending formal Board meetings was acknowledged.

It was agreed that the effectiveness of the Board in 'engaging young people' would be on the agenda for the first meeting of the new municipal year to ensure that this was satisfactory.

Members expressed satisfaction with the options proposed within the report and agreed that engagement with young people was very important. Officers agreed that the action plan (detailing feedback from engagement sessions) would be 'rolling' and included on each agenda.

Resolved that:

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Board remains a committee meeting. Reports, minutes, and the meeting will remain in public and/or private depending on the sensitivities and/or participants for each meeting.**
- 2. That the arrangements for engaging with young people are reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board in 12 months time.**

10 Placement Sufficiency Strategy and action plan

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the report presented the Childrens Sufficiency Strategy for the next three years. Members were asked to consider and comment on the approach and implementation of the 2023-2026 sufficiency strategy.

The aims of the placement sufficiency strategy were described by the Head of Service alongside the summary of needs and trends in Walsall. This included an increase in boys and Black and Asian ethnic groups entering care. Members were informed that there had been a reduction in the number of children living in foster homes (in the previous year) due to a shortage of available foster carers. The service intentions in relation to fostering, residential, supported accommodation, and permanence were detailed along with the priorities and action plan.

In response to a question around unregistered placements Officers confirmed that it was a residential home which was not registered with Ofsted. The legalities of this were discussed and the Board was informed that in such circumstances the Local Authority would work with providers to support this registration. Members were informed that there were not a sufficient number of locally registered providers.

In response to challenge around the right children becoming looked after, the Interim Executive Director stated that through the family safeguarding model families were supported to ensure that children remained in their own homes as this produced better outcomes for the child. The turning point service, which was aimed at adolescents, had been successful in supporting families to stay together. It was stressed that services needed to evolve to respond to societal changes.

A discussion was held on the need for children to be living in communities and to be supported appropriately to do so. Training was carried out through the safeguarding partnership and extensive teamwork took place with partners. Further information was provided on the capital grant scheme, Members were informed that small grants, for building work, could be provided to connected carers to ensure children could remain within extended families.

Further to Member questions, Officers stated that analysis suggested that an increased number of foster carers were needed for boys, older children, sibling groups of 2/3 and more complex children.

Resolved that:

- 1. That the Placement Sufficiency Strategy and action plan be noted.**
- 2. That the Placement Sufficiency Strategy be reviewed in 6 months.**

11 Quarterly Performance Report

The Interim Executive Director presented the report (annexed), highlighting the salient points. The key quarter 1 performance for Children's Services for 2022/23 (relating to children in care and care leavers) was described.

A Member questioned the percentage of children in care who had received a dental check and asked what action was being taken to improve this figure. Officers confirmed that there had been difficulties accessing dental care however a dental pathway had been put in place to improve this issue as such it was expected that it would incrementally improve.

In response to a question the Head of the Virtual School confirmed that there were around 20 care leavers at university. It was agreed that once this information was collated that it would be shared with the Board (via e-mail).

Resolved that:

- 1. The Corporate Parenting Board note the report.**
- 2. The number of care leavers at university will be shared with Board Members once available.**

12 Work Programme 2023/24

Councillor Jukes provided feedback on her visit to Hilton Road residential home, all of which was extremely positive. She read a poem written by a young person in care.

Members discussed the work programme, and were reminded by the Chair that the next meeting would be held at the TLC Hub and would start at the earlier time of 5.30pm to accommodate young people.

Resolved that:

The following changes were made to the work programme:

- The Virtual School Annual report would be moved to April.**
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy would be considered at the next meeting.**

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Signed

Date

Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held in TLC Hub.

Monday 13 November 2023 5.30 PM

Committee Members present:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice Chair)
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor V. Waters

Officers Present:

Colleen Male – Executive Director, Children’s Services
Rita Homer – Director, Children’s Social Work
Elise Hopkins – Director, Customer Engagement
David Hughes – Children’s Champion
Zoe Morgan – Head of Service
Lorraine Thompson – Head of Virtual School
Jivan Sembi – Head of Service
Mark Burrows – Group Manager
Jenny Cockcroft – Head of Service
Simon Green – Adoption at Heart
Catherine Materson – Walsall ICB

13. **Apologies**

Apologies were submitted on behalf of Councillor R. Worrall.

14. **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions submitted for the duration of the meeting.

15. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

16. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

There was no information in private session.

17. **Engagement session with Children and Young People**

The Head of Service for Practice, Quality and Improvement introduced the action plan created by young people and described action that had been taken and the next steps planned. The actions on the plan were described along with feedback on conversations with children and young people.

The fostering service annual report 2022-23 and the adoption service annual report 2022-23 was presented by Managers, with the salient points detailed. Members held small discussion groups with children and young people, feedback was provided to the group, which would be included in the action plan.

Members had the opportunity to hear from young people and sought their views on issues raised.

Resolved

The following reports were noted:

- Update on action plan created by young people.
- Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-23.
- Adoption service report 2022-23.

18. **Date of next meeting**

The Corporate Parenting Board Strategy and Action Plan was deferred to the next meeting. The date of the next meeting was 9 January 2023.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.20 pm.

Signed:

Date:

**Corporate Parenting Board
9 January 2024**

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report

Executive Summary:

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

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 their care. It states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for producing 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.

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative data relating to the IRO Service within Walsall during the period 1st April 22 to 31st March 2023, as required by statutory guidance. The report captures performance between these dates and next steps for the IRO service across 2023/24. The report provides an evidence base in terms of describing an established and quality service which continues to support Walsall Children's Services and is key in providing good outcomes for children and young people who are looked after in Walsall. The report sets out where we need to develop and priorities for the coming year.

Recommendations:

That:

Members consider the work of the IRO service as per statutory expectation.

Corporate Parenting Pledges

This report correspondences to all areas of the pledge as the IRO has responsibility to ensure the holistic needs of all children in our care are met.

Resource and legal considerations:

No resource implications.

The Local Authority has a statutory responsibility to provide each child with an Independent Reviewing Officer and to have this work scrutinised annually.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

The key priority this report relates to is children in promoting and supporting children in our care to have the best outcomes they can, however, it also relates to people and communities in its support to parents, carers and in preparing young people as they move into independence.

Citizen impact:

Children in care have a statutory responsibility to have an IRO provided to them, this report sets out how this is met.

Environmental impact:

None identified

Performance management:

None identified

Reducing inequalities:

We know that children in our care experience a number of inequalities, the IRO service aims to help drive forward improved aspirations and outcomes for this cohort. There are no specific inequalities issues arising from this report.


Consultation:

No consultation required for this report

Background papers:

None identified

Contact Officer:

Donna Green, Group Manager Quality and Improvement
 01922 650521

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 their care. It states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for producing 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 Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative data relating to the IRO Service within Walsall during the period 1st April 22 to 31st March 2023, as required by statutory guidance. The report captures performance between these dates and next steps for the IRO service across 2023/24. The report provides an evidence base in terms of describing an established and quality service which continues to support Walsall Children's Services and is key in providing good outcomes for children and young people who are looked after in Walsall. The report sets out where we need to develop and 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 children in care and care leavers.
 - 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.

In doing this, the IRO must:

- promote the voice of the child.
- ensure there is an up-to-date, effective plan for the child(ren), based on a detailed, informed assessment.
- identify any gaps in the assessment process or provision of service.
- make sure the child understands that they are entitled to an advocate and how they could be helped by one.
- prevent any 'drift' in care planning and the delivery of services.

- monitor the activity of the Local Authority as a corporate parent, ensuring care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings.

2.4 IRO's make an important contribution to the goal of improving outcomes for children in care. Their primary focus is to quality assure the care planning process for each child or young person, to identify any poor practice and any drift and/or delay that impacts directly on the child and which should be escalated appropriately. 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.

3.0 Workforce & Management

3.1 The IRO service in Walsall Council is situated in the Safeguarding and Review Service. Those employed by Walsall Council hold a dual role both undertaking the duties of IRO and having the responsibility of Child Protection Chair.

3.2 Management capacity in the IRO Service includes Head of Service, Group Manager for Quality of Practice and Principal IRO. The Principal Independent Reviewing Officer Michael Morris retired from the service in August 23. The role has been successfully appointed to by an external candidate who will join the service in November 23. The Group Manager for the service Jenny Cockcroft was appointed as Interim Head of Service in April 23, and Donna Green has been appointed as Interim Group Manager for Quality of Practice in May 23. The expectations and remit of the role of Group Manager will continue to focus on the development of the safeguarding and review service. However, they are also the professional lead for the quality of practice framework in Children's Social Care and responsible for identified key areas of audit and learning. 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 of the Interim Head of Service Safeguarding and Review, Jenny Cockcroft.

3.3 The IRO Service is fully staffed. (12 FTE and 1 PT 0.8). Of the 13 IRO's we have in the service 12 are permanent, with the 1 agency IRO (covering maternity) now also taking a permanent position, giving us a fully permanent team for 2024. Overall, the workforce is stable with recruitment being successful and staff retention is excellent. 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 have previously undertaken

roles within Walsall in different service areas, and some have been IROs for several years, with the longest standing member of our team being in the service for over 20 years.

- 3.4 Each IRO receives monthly supervision with their line manager, with either the Group Manager for Quality of Practice or the Principal Social Worker. In addition to supervision there are several other opportunities for sharing information and practice development within the service:

Fortnightly 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 these meetings will alternate between virtual and face to face to ensure that we continue to connect as a team. The Group Manager and/or Principal IRO also attend these meetings.

Monthly seminar: Each seminar has a different focus, led by a member of the service, and creates a space for reflection and learning, over the last few months these have focused on family time arrangements, assessments, family goals leading to SMART plans.

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.

- 3.5 We recognise the experience and skills that our IRO's bring, and some have had the opportunity to share their knowledge and assist or deliver training to Social Workers around Motivational Interviewing, Child Sexual Abuse, language that cares and writing to the child, LADO procedures and introduction to child protection as part of induction.

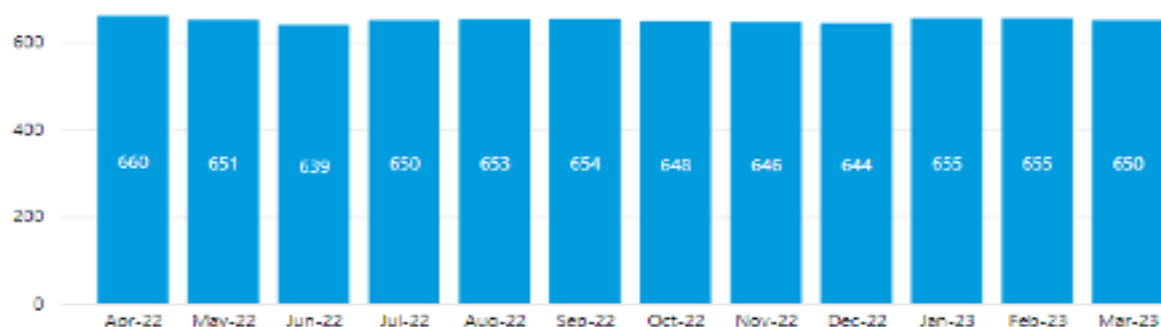
4.0 Workload

- 4.1 In Walsall the IRO's hold joint responsibility for chairing Child Protection Conferences alongside their responsibilities as 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.
- 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 17 children open on child protection plans. Therefore, currently the average total number of children allocated at the time of writing this report is 68 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 Overview of our children in care population

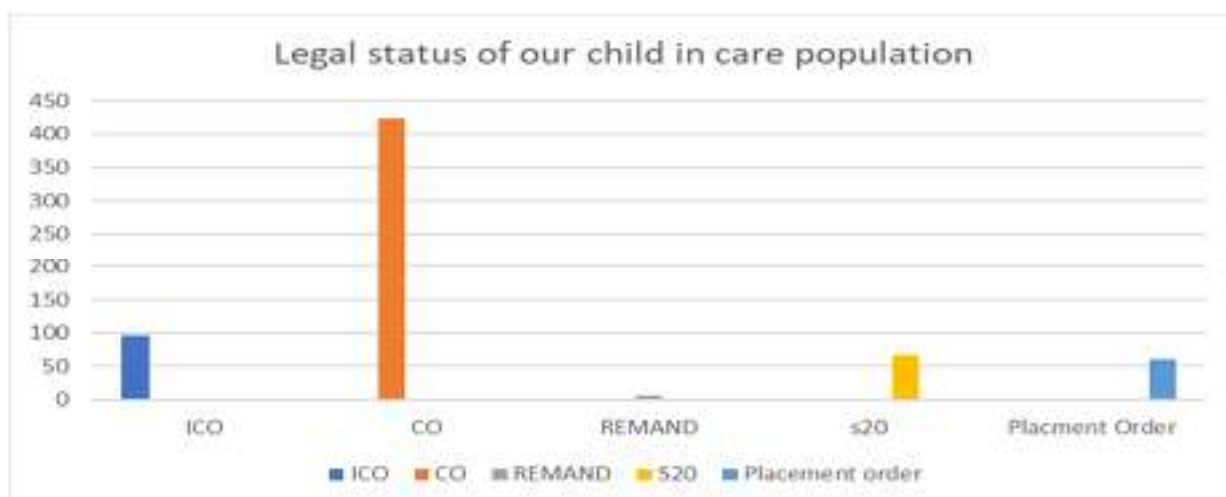
5.1 As of March 2023 there were 650 children who were in the care of the local authority, this is a slight decrease from years 2022 and 2021.

Children Looked After, by Month/Year (#)



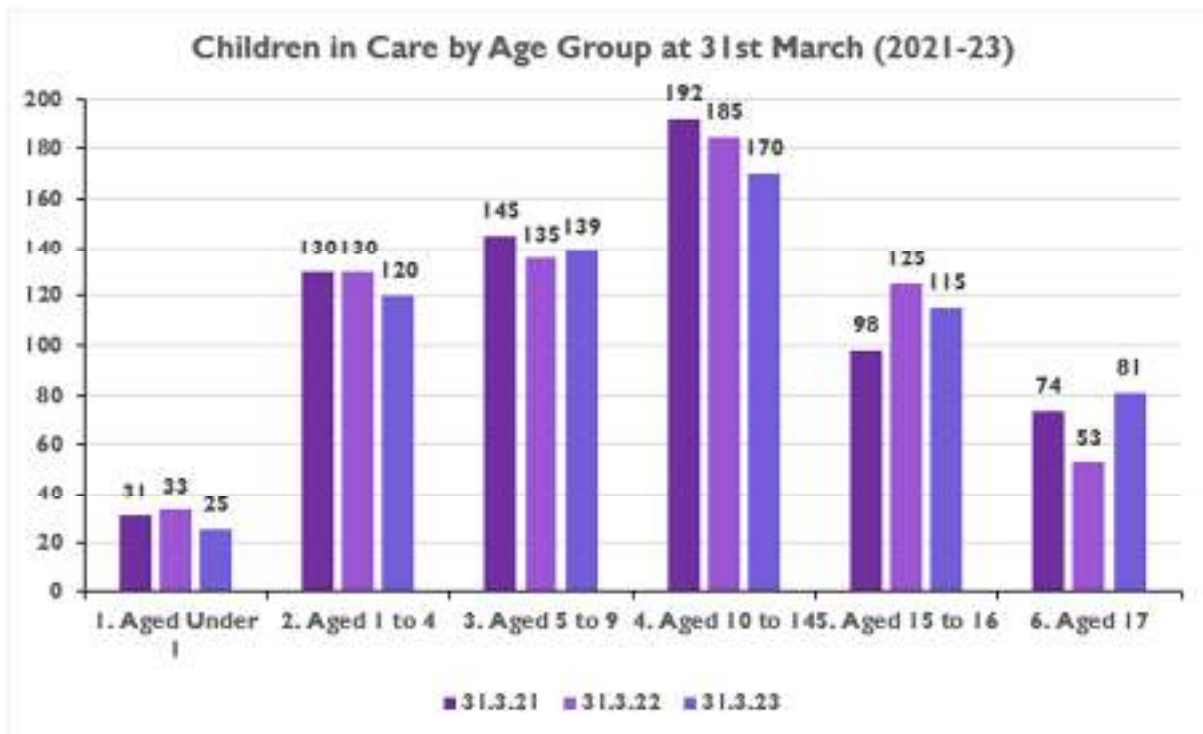
5.2 As of 31st March 2023, the rate of Children in Care in Walsall was 95 per 10,000 children, this figure has seen a decrease from 96.8 per 10,000 children in 2022 and 97.1 per 10,000 children in 2021.

5.3 In the table below you can see the legal status of the population of the children in our care as of 31st March 23. Those subject to full care order (426), ICO (94) S20 (72), Placement Order (65) Remand (12) with 19 ceasing care in the month of March 23.

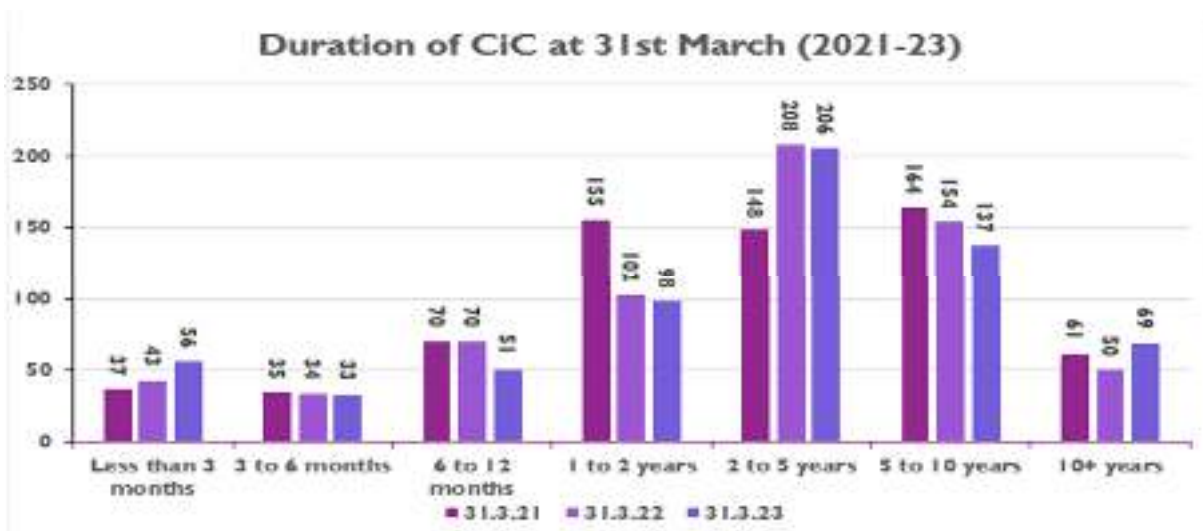


5.4 There continues to be more boys than girls in the children in care population with 52.7% boys compared to 47.8 % girls.

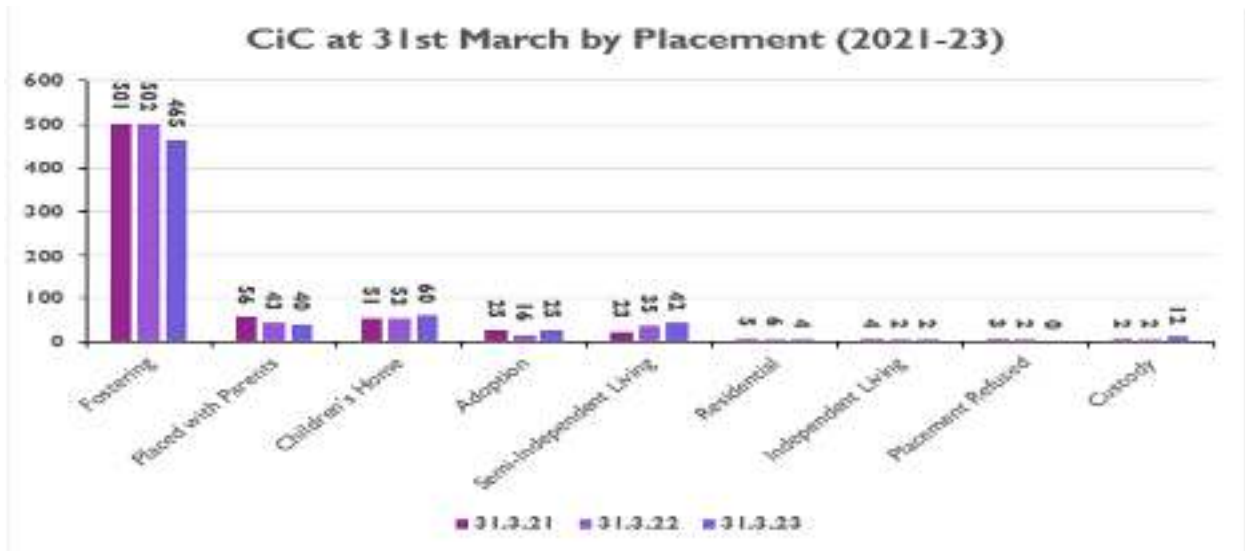
5.5 In the table below are the age groups of children in our care as at 31st March for 2021, 2022 & 2023. These figures are variable over the last 3 years and quite consistent.



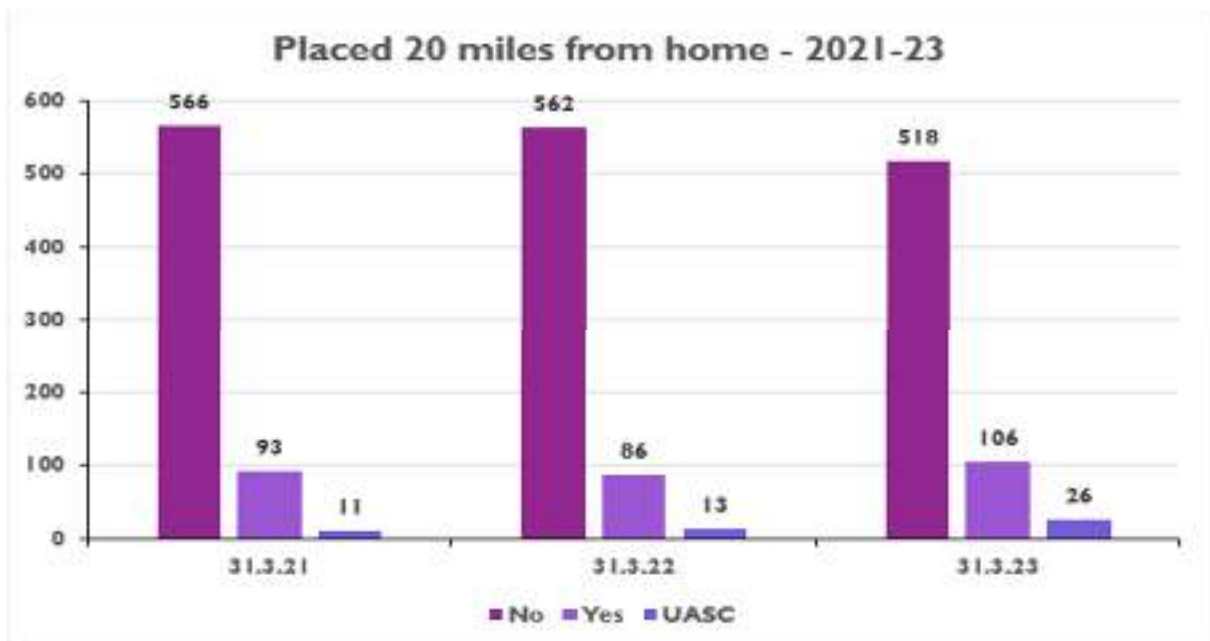
5.6 In the table below is the period that children remain in our care against the previous 2 years-2020-2021. There is an increase in terms of those leaving care in under 3 months which may indicate that support is utilised at an earlier stage in terms of reunification work.



5.7 The table below give details of the types of homes in which our children in care live and gives a comparison over the previous 2 years. We see a reduction in those living in a foster placement and those placed with parents under a care order. But we see increases in those living in a children’s home, semi-independent living, those to be adopted and young people who are remanded.



5.8 The table below details children in our care placed 20+ miles away from home as at 31st March for 2021, 2022 & 2023. We have seen a slight decrease in those living within 20 miles of home, but this may be in line with the lower numbers of children in our care.



5.9 The number of children in our care reviews held at the end of March 2023 was 1782 which is on average 137 reviews per IRO this year, this figure is almost identical to those in 2022, but a reduction from those figures in 2020/21.

6.0 Key Performance indicators

Timeliness of child in our care reviews

6.1 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

6.2 The timeliness of our child in care reviews are a key performance indicator, we know this enables effective and timely care planning for our children and young people. In the period 2022-23 considered in this report 94.7% (1687) of our child in care reviews were held in timescale. This is an increase from last year which stood at 91%. The 5.3% of those out of timescale were due to sickness of the Social Worker or IRO which created a slight delay. We have also needed to address some late notifications of new admissions to care which has influenced the timeliness.

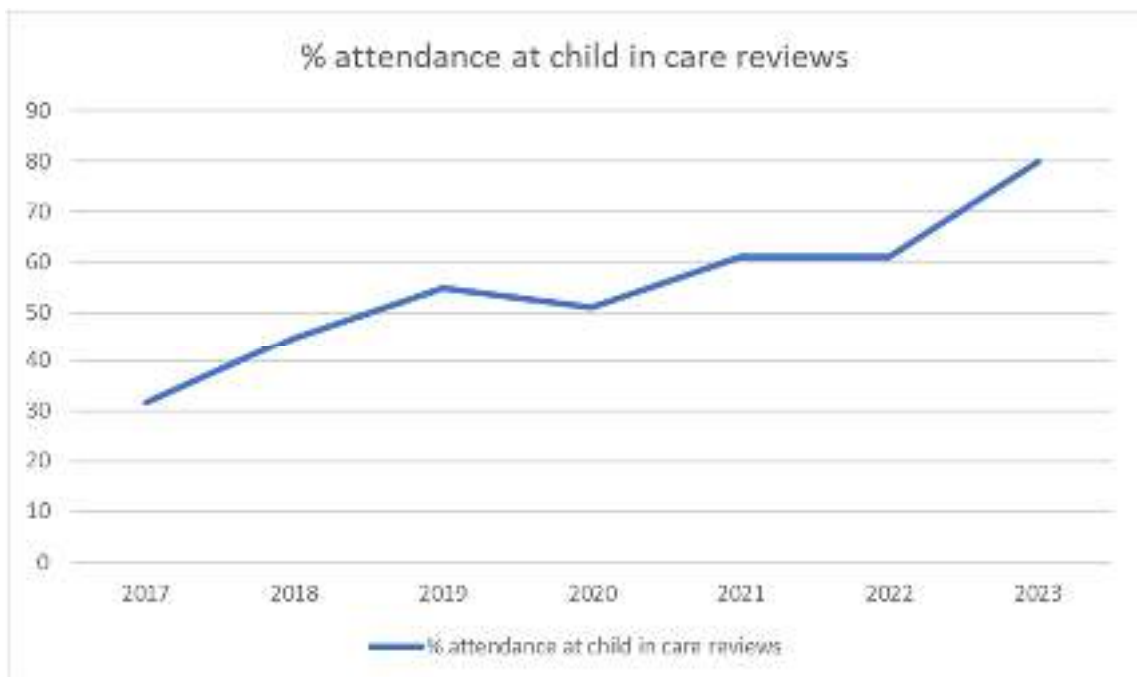
6.3 It is an expectation that the IROs speak with the social worker 15 days before the meeting to plan the review and ensure there are not any barriers to the completion of the required reports to inform the decision making. Where necessary this is escalated with the management team and dispute resolution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

6.4 Participation in reviews

6.5 The involvement of children in their own reviews is regarded as an essential part of the process. A primary objective of the IRO is to ensure children can make a meaningful contribution to their review and are central to decisions made about them, ensuring their voice is evident and heard within their care plans. Participation may be either attendance in person, by having someone convey their views or by making a written contribution to their meeting. A key element in delivering this objective is by the measure of the young person's participation in the Statutory Review of their care plan and care arrangements. In 2022/23 almost 100% of all our children contributed to their child in care review in some way, this has

remained consistently high, following 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. 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. The focus of service development was to increase children's physical attendance at their meeting to 75%. In 2022/23 there were 80% that attended in person to share their views, of these 81.9% were over the age of 5 years. This is a positive increase from 61% in both 2021/22 and exceeds our expectation of the target set the previous year of 75% following development of the workforce.

Attendance at CIC reviews (children aged 5 and over) 2017-2023.

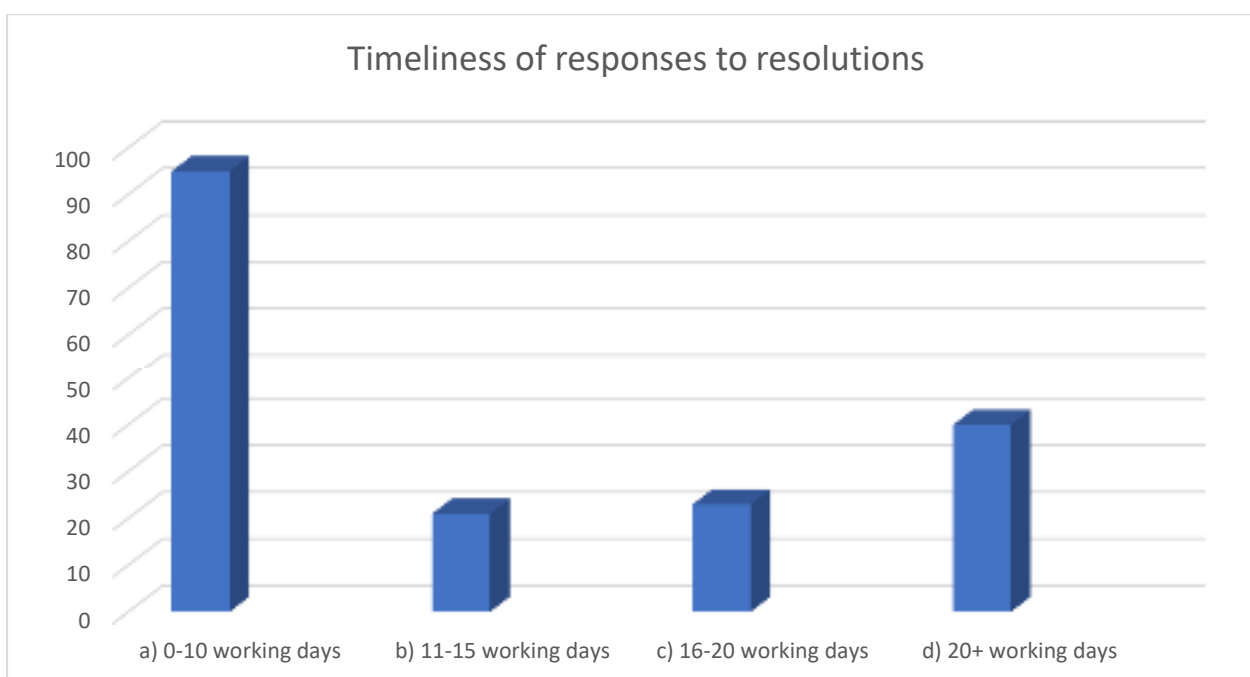
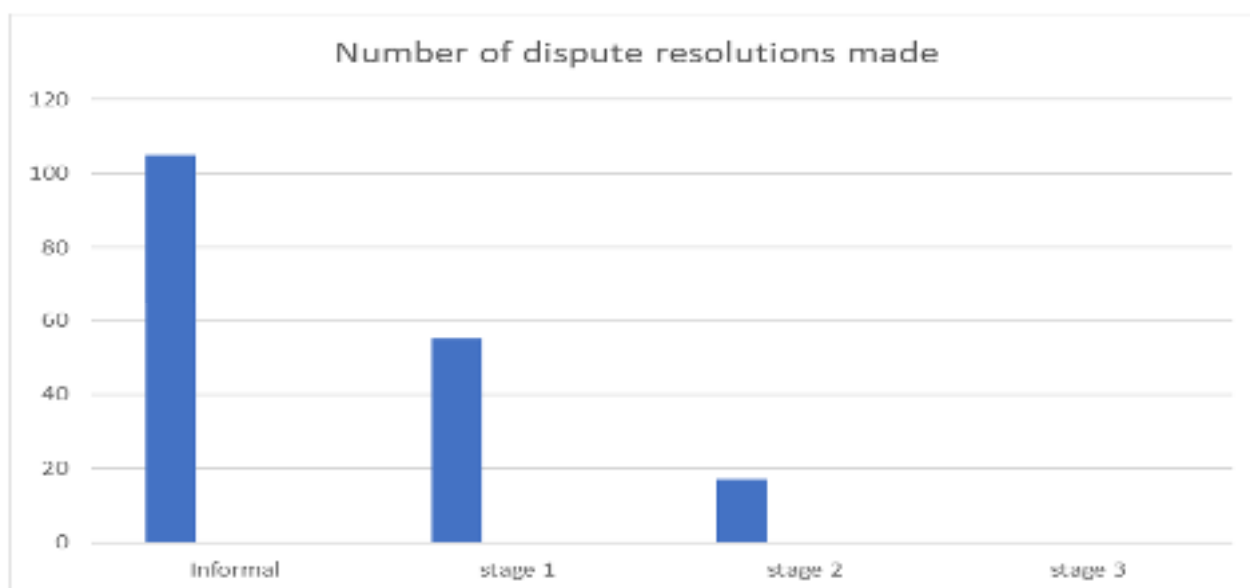


7.0 Scrutiny and Good Practice recognition

7.1 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO is to raise issues affecting a child's care with the Social Work service where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's plans progressing and their needs being met. There is an established Resolution and Escalation policy in Walsall. IROs continue to seek resolutions informally to issues through collaborative dialogue with the Social Worker and Team Manager before and at each stage of the procedure, but if no resolution is achieved there are 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.

7.2 Between April 2022 to March 2023, there were 179 dispute resolutions regarding children in our care. This is not too dissimilar to year, 2022/21. The chart below demonstrates the numbers of resolutions opened at the different stages, it is positively noted that most issues are resolved at an earlier point, with no children requiring escalation to stage 3. It is further noted that the vast number of responses to resolutions are generally with 0-10 working days.



7.3 The themes for the resolutions have been grouped into key findings below:

- Drift and delay (39)
- No care or pathway plan (28)
- Risks not addressed effectively (17)
- Child not seen/not seen at home (14)
- No health assessment (10)
- Care plan presented on the day (10)
- Lack of appropriate family contact (5)
- Assessments not completed to progress permanency plans (5)
- No PEP (3)
- Child not seen at home and bedroom not seen (2)
- Everyday life experience of child not reported (2)
- There is lack of engagement with those important to the child (2)
- No placement plan (1)
- No SDQ (1)
- Other (40)

7.4 We can see from the findings that there are various resolutions being raised. From audit activity and monitoring from the Group Manager and Head of Service it is clear resolutions are not being raised consistently where they should be. Discussions with IROs around this matter have heard that reasons resolutions are not raised is because of confidence in executing the challenge and the need to work on ways to help us do this more effectively. In considering this area, work has been undertaken with IROs in terms of writing the resolution to the child, this helps us remain focused on the child and allows us to understand the impact on the child rather than the challenge being felt to be directed at the practitioner. This will continue to be an area of focus within our priorities for 2023/24.

7.5 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 2022/23 was 79% of children in care with 19% of children's care plans being rated as amber following the review and 2% rated as red. There is work being undertaken in terms of revising the QA forms to ensure that they are being used effectively, these are currently being built and tested in the system.

7.6 The Principal IRO or Group Manager completes reports reviewing the RAG ratings. These are to be completed quarterly. The RAG reports considers 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 there is drift and delay.

7.7 A key issue that has continued to emerge over the period has been the robustness of RAG ratings. With nearly 80% being rated as Green it is likely that IROs are not effectively reflecting issues that would usually be raised via the dispute resolution process, as we believe these numbers are incorrect. To address this, there are continued discussions during

supervision and during team meetings in terms of applying a robust approach to the completion of the RAG rating reports. Again, work has been completed to rationalise this form and ensure it supports effective reporting and this is currently being finalised in mosaic. It will be important that moving forward continued 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.

- 7.8 Improving the scrutiny of Social Work practice by the IRO service will continue to be a key area of focus and development for the service in 2023/24. Work is already underway with the Group Manager and Principal IRO in undertaking a range of activity to understand the services strengths and areas for development, a development plan has been identified to drive this forward and this will be reported on in the next annual report.
- 7.8 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, they help to drive meaningful planning for the child, however, we know that staff are not consistently undertaking the midway reviews. Within this year work has been completed during supervision and through team meetings to help drive improvements. The Group Manager and Principal IRO continue to undertake activity in trying to understand the current effectiveness around the use of midway reviews and how this can be improved upon to support more effective quality assurance; there has been a revision of the QA forms, midway review and resolution forms to facilitate more effective quality assurance of practice, including development of QP practice resolutions to replace informal resolution, this currently remains in process. This will remain an area of focus for the service in 2023/24.
- 7.9 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 meetings and service development days and themes and trends identified are shared across the system. This is an area we have developed with the Group Manager attending interface meetings and offering quarterly quality of practice feedback sessions with other managers routinely across the system. The IRO's are very alert to seeking out best practice and will routinely share recognition of this which is then shared across the wider services within the Weekly Brief.

8 Feedback

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

"I've had my IRO for years and that has been good, and I have her number now because I didn't have it before." L says she will contact her IRO directly now if she needs any help or if there are any problems with her care plan or social worker. (child)

The IRO spent a long time at our home getting to know the children and our family life, she was very thorough, understanding and child centred. (foster carer)

The positive thing about my IRO was how she got me to share my views and moved things on, my IRO worked behind the scenes. My IRO supported me to remain in my SEN school which helped me as it was small school and has small classes. (child)

L stated her children's IRO, has been lovely. L added that she has been supported by the IRO throughout her children's journey. L shared that she has no concerns with how she's been spoken to or treated by the IRO. L stated that she has been treated with respect, if there is anything she disagrees with she will talk to the IRO. (Mother)

My IRO is amazing, I like her she listens to me and does her best and gives me 100%. (child)

9.0 Priorities 2023/24

9.1 During this report we have considered some of the proposed areas for focus for the service in 2023/24. In summary the identified key priorities are;

- To improve scrutiny – IRO's need to provide robust oversight and scrutiny and act as role of critical friend to ensure children are safeguarded and to prevent drift and delay. There will be further practice development regarding scrutiny and how to utilise the new QA forms effectively, and further support for IRO's in how to interrogate performance data to inform scrutiny of practice. To also include thematic audit of practice following implementation of new QA forms.
- To improve the use of RAG rating through implementation of new form. The IRO service to ensure that the RAG ratings are accurately reflecting the practice being observed and they are being used consistently and robustly.
- To implement use of new forms to support the continued development of the the Dispute Resolution process to ensure these are being used effectively to identify and challenge poor practice and help avoid drift and delay for the child.
- To continue to improve the quality-of-care plans ensuring that that plans are purposeful- IRO's have key part to play in supporting the development and implementation of purposeful plans. All IRO's to continue to have reviews observed to inform practice improvement. We will also revise the IRO induction programme to include a presentation around purposeful planning and signposting to the safeguarding network training on purposeful planning.
- Continued implementation of the Participation Plan to ensure continued high levels of engagement with children and parents/carers. Clear focus on ensuring the active involvement in decision making by children and their parents in reviews.

10.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this report has highlighted the work of the IROs in Walsall Council for the period of April 2022 to March 2023. 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. There are also several areas where we seek to continue to develop our practice and our priorities for 2023/24.

Donna Green Nov 23

Corporate Parenting Board

9th January 2024

Care Experienced Status as a Protected Characteristic

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposal that Walsall Council treats individuals with care experience as a Protected Characteristic.
- 1.2 This report is part of a wider focus by our Corporate Parenting Board on what additional measures can be put in place by us here in Walsall to further improve outcomes for children that we hold corporate parenting responsibility for.
- 1.3 This report outlines the proposal that Walsall Council join over 58 councils who have now introduced care experience as a protected characteristic, recognising the disadvantages faced by those with care experience when it comes to health, education, housing, employment, and criminality amongst other inequalities.
- 1.4 This will demonstrate our commitment as a Corporate Parent to ending the disparity and inequality faced by care experienced young people by going beyond our statutory requirements and ensuring that the needs of care experienced young people are at the heart of all our decision-making, alongside other groups who formally share a Protected Characteristic.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Corporate Parenting Board recommend one of the following options: -

- A) That Council be recommended to approve 'Care Experienced as a local protected characteristic'; or
- B) That no further action be taken.

3. Resource and legal considerations

3.1 Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in the following legislation:

Children Act 1989
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
Children and Social Work Act 2017

3.2 Walsall is committed to ensuring that our care experienced young people have their rights protected. The Equality Act 2010 is intended to eliminate discrimination and specifically references 9 protected characteristics for that purpose, including (but not limited to) age, disability, race and religion. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 addresses the corporate parent principles and the duties of the local authority, in addition to the related duties under The

Children Act 1989. Acknowledging a personal characteristic, such as care experience, as being akin to a protected characteristic furthers the principles of the Equality Act in the absence of legislative change and the addition of a further protected characteristic.

4. Performance management

4.1 Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen. Regular reports are provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Parenting Board.

5. Reducing inequalities

5.1 Our Corporate Parenting Strategy 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 Looked After Children and Care Leavers, we collectively seek to redress the disadvantage that looked after children and care leavers face.

5.2 It is within our power to create a society that embraces the unique journeys of care experienced individuals and protect them from discrimination and disadvantage. By making care experience a protected characteristic, we send a powerful message of inclusivity and empathy to not just our young people but the wider community of Walsall.

5.3 That the Council recognises that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination and that future decisions, services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact Assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience, alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic.

5.4 As part of our continued work in reducing these inequalities for our care experienced young people, they themselves have advised us that they welcome such a motion that allows them to feel valued and supported by us as their corporate parent. This goes much wider as taking such a move also supports our corporate grandparent agenda as the impact of this will ultimately serve both our young people now and their own families in the future.

6. Introduction and background

6.1 Walsall currently has 657 children in care, and we are supporting 285 young people that have now left our care. This is in line with a national picture of an increase in children entering care over the past decade.

6.2 The outcomes of children and young people in care have been extensively researched, with a clear pattern of lower educational attainment of care experienced children and young people, in comparison to their non-care experienced peers. They are also an overrepresented group within our prison population and account for 26% of the current homeless population.

- 6.3 Despite targeted policy developments to support educational attainment for children and young people in care, for example, the development of virtual schools and the pupil premium plus, they continue to be less likely to transition to higher education at the ages of 18 and 19 years old, compared to their non-care experienced peers. They remain a largely marginalised group within society and are extremely vulnerable as a consequence.
- 6.4 The Independent Review of Children's Social Care by Josh McAllister was published in May 2022. This national report included recommendations that the 'Government should make care experience a protected characteristic'. It also notes that making care experience a protected characteristic would provide greater authority to employers, businesses, public services, and policy makers to put in place policies and programmes which promote better outcomes for care experienced people. It would make the UK the first country in the world to recognise care experienced people in this way. Whilst this was not fully endorsed by Central Government, Local Councils across the country have since passed their own motions to treat care experience as a protected characteristic.
- 6.5 Care experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives and despite their resilience, society often does not always take their vulnerabilities into account. As such, care experienced people often face discrimination in all facets of their lives including access to housing, health, education, relationships, employment and as an overrepresented group within the criminal justice system.
- 6.6 'Care Experience' is a term used to describe people who are, or who have been, in the care of a Local Authority. Care experience is not currently deemed to be a protected characteristic in law but with more councils now treating care experience as if it were a protected characteristic, it means that those Council's must actively take the needs of this cohort into account in all future policy and decision making. This will include a requirement to undertake Equality Impact Assessments that explicitly considers the needs of this cohort of people.
- 6.7 The Public Sector Equality Duty is a duty imposed on all UK public bodies by Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, to take equalities considerations into account when exercising any of their functions and making decisions. This includes a requirement to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is because of the advantages as outlined above that we feel this is an important stance to take when considering the needs of some of the most vulnerable young people in our community. The aim is that by treating those with care experience as a protected characteristic, this will go some way in addressing the imbalance that currently exists.
- 6.8 In practice, this would mean that the council will need to consider Care Leaver in line with the other protected characteristics that exist in law. So, for example it can provide them greater opportunities in accessing work and training opportunities as their status would define them as needing additional consideration. Whilst we do already have pathways in place to support our care leavers, this is largely a process

that is championed by us in children's services rather than the wider corporate parenting duty that should sit within the wider council.

6.9 Another element of our local offer that would be strengthened by this motion being approved is our housing pathway. Whilst we currently have bespoke contracts in place with WHG to support some of our care leavers, the additional element of Care Leaver status being protected means that this process is much more robust and leaves no room for our young people to be discriminated against when struggling to maintain tenancies owing to their past trauma and specific levels of need.

6.10 In addition to above, the data we could collect as part of our equality duties will further illuminate where care experienced people struggle the most which will assist in determining future policies and service delivery. Essentially, this should mean all areas where discrimination can be a factor in determining services. For the young people themselves this should mean that services are easier to access as their needs are better recognised.

7. Regional Picture

7.1 There has been growing support both regionally and nationally in regard to the recommendation made within the National Review undertaken last year by Josh McCallister and as such, 58 councils have endorsed this recommendation with many more in the process of doing so. This demonstrates the importance placed on how we best support our care experienced young people in adult life to ensure that they have the best possible outcome that any good parent would expect for their child. The national system must, and is, attempting to promote the responsibilities that comes with community corporate parenting and how our safeguarding partners need to share in the responsibility with us to do so. By treating care experience as a protected characteristic as part of our own equality duty sends a good message to not only our young people that we are responsible for, but the wider society as a whole.

8. Decide

Option 1:

Approve 'Care Experienced' as a local protected characteristic by Walsall Council (Recommended).

By formally recognising care leavers as a protected characteristic the Council are acknowledging those with care experience can face discrimination, stigma and prejudice. The recognition demonstrates the council's commitment to advancing equality of opportunity between those with care experience and those without. By making 'care experience' a protected characteristic we are demonstrating our commitment to Care Leavers now as opposed to waiting for national reform to impose these changes on our behalf.

Option 2:

Not Approve 'Care Experienced' as a protected characteristic by Walsall Council (Not Recommended).

Future national reform may introduce care experience as a characteristic under the Equalities Act in the future. This was a key recommendation from the Care Review in 2022 but was not endorsed and is currently being implemented by several Local Authorities nationally.

9. Next steps

9.1 Subject to approval of the recommendation being made at this stage, the next step will be to present this proposal to Council with the support of the Corporate Parenting Board and Cllr Elson as the Portfolio Holder for Childrens Social Care.

9.2 In consultation with our Strategy, Policy and Performance Team, we have agreed that if this proposal is endorsed, there needs to be more guidance available to officers completing Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) forms in order to take into account this as a protected characteristic. The team are in full support of this being included and have stated that officers completing EqIAs in the future may need to seek further assistance from someone who deals with this cohort for advice and clarification, should they need to do so. As such, this is something that can be supported should the motion be successfully passed by the council.

Contact Officer

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BLACK COUNTRY ICB

Corporate Parenting Board

**Health Services for Children in Care (CIC) Assurance Report
April 2022 – March 2023**

Date of Meeting: Tuesday, 9th January 2024

TITLE OF REPORT:	Health Services Children in Care (CIC) Assurance Report 2022/23
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To provide assurance to members of the Corporate Parenting Board that action is being taken to deliver on-going statutory responsibilities of health for CIC.
REPORT WRITTEN BY:	Catherine Masterson Designated Nurse Looked After Children BC ICB Walsall Catherine.masterson@nhs.net Dr Manju Kannath Designated Dr Looked After Children manju.kannath@walsallhealthcare.nhs.uk
REPORT PRESENTED BY:	Catherine Masterson/ Dr Manju Kannath
KEY POINTS:	The report was collated with information provided by Walsall Healthcare Trust and Black Country Healthcare Trust.
Report Purpose	An overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the ICB in relation to children in care, including performance of these responsibilities. To provide assurance to members of the Corporate Parenting Board that action is being taken to deliver on-going improvements to health outcomes for CIC. To include: Adult and children’s medicals for Fostering and Adoption Leaving Care Summaries/Health passports. Health Priorities 22/23

RECOMMENDATIONS:	To note the report and identify any further information required.
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ACTION REQUIRED:	Decision Approval ✓ Assurance



Main Report

1.0 Introduction

Most children become looked after because of abuse and neglect. Although they have many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of these is often greater because of their life experiences. The NHS has a major role in ensuring the timely and effective delivery of health services to looked after children (and, by extension, to care leavers) by commissioning effective services, delivering through provider organisations, and through individual practitioners providing coordinated care for each child (Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children 2015). There may be some use of interchangeable terms for Looked After Children/Children in Care in this report.

1.1 Leadership

Statutory guidance states that ICBs should have access to Designated Doctors and Nurses for Children in Care whose role is to assist commissioners in fulfilling their responsibilities to improve the health of Children in Care. Providers of health services are expected to identify a Named Doctor and Named Nurse for Children in Care to coordinate the provision of services for individual children and provide advice and expertise for fellow professionals.

The Designated Doctor for Children in Care participates in Black Country wide Safeguarding forums and the Designated Nurse for Children in Care is an active member of the regional Designated Nurses for Children in Care Forum. This group influences the care of Children in Care as there are some challenges which are regional issues in some of the commissioning arrangements.

2.0 An overview of the statutory responsibilities of the ICB in relation to children in care, and the performance of these responsibilities.

2.1

Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Looked-After Children (2015), provides statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England.

The NHS contributes to meeting the health needs of Children in Care by:

- Commissioning effective services.
- Delivery through provider organisations.
- Individual practitioners providing co-ordinated care for each child, young person, and carer.



The core activities that require commissioning from the ICB for Children in Care relating to statutory duties are:

- **Initial Health Assessments** - The IHA should take place in time to inform the child's first CIC health review within 20 working days of entering care.
- **Review Health Assessments** - The review of the child's health plan must take place once every six months before a child's fifth birthday and once every 12 months after the child's fifth birthday.
- **Care Leaver Summaries/Health History documents** - Care leavers should be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. They should have a summary of health records (including genetic background and details of illness and treatments), with guidance how to access a full copy if required.
- **Adoption Reports** - the collation of reports for adoption and fostering panel.

3.0 Current Commissioning Arrangements

3.1

The Designated professionals for CIC recommend that Black Country Integrated Care Board Walsall place commission a service that ensures appropriate arrangements and resources are in place to meet the physical and mental health needs of all Walsall Children in Care regardless of where they are placed.

3.2

The current health provider service in Walsall is Walsall Healthcare Trust, the Trust delivers statutory health assessments for Walsall Children in Care placed below a 50-mile radius and hosted children from other areas.

3.3

The ICB commission health assessments for those CIC placed further afield. The reliance on other areas comes with some challenge, which includes the timeliness and quality of interventions. All health assessments are quality assured by the Named Nurse/Designated Nurse against the national screening tool before being approved and shared with the local authority. Challenges remain around meeting statutory timescales, particularly for those children placed further afield. The Named Nurse continues to monitor and escalate individual cases where there are significant delays by liaising with the local CIC health team and Designated Nurse where the child is placed.



3.4

The Children in Care Health Team consists of a Named Nurse for Children in Care, who has the responsibility for coordinating provision of clinical services for children, providing advice and expertise to fellow professionals. There are also two Nurse Advisors, one of which works to primarily supporting transition and leaving care.

The team not only complete and follow up on the health needs of children but some of their other duties include:

- Support training and supervision for health care staff on the needs of Children in care.
- Quality Assurance of health assessments.
- Audit and performance monitoring.
- Report writing and analysis.
- Development of key policies and pathways with multi-agency professional
- Support Children and young people to access health services
- Offer support to foster carers/residential settings
- Offer expert health advice and signposting
- Offer emotional health support programmes, and work in association with other health services, school health, sexual health and teen pregnancy advisors.
- Work in collaboration with other safeguarding professionals within health

4.0 Statutory Responsibilities.

Initial and Review Health Assessments (IHA & RHA) are commissioned from Walsall Healthcare Trust (WHT) as the Health Provider by Black Country ICB. However, the process requires close working between health and Local Authority colleagues in relation to information sharing, supporting attendance at appointments and reporting. The agreed Key Performance indicators with WHT stipulates the delivery of 85% of IHA's and 85% of RHA's within statutory timescales. RHA's service provision for children placed out of the borough are completed by other external providers over a 50-mile radius with the WHT CIC Team coordinating requests and assuring quality.

Numbers of Walsall Children Entering Care 2022/23

WHT CIC Health team were notified by Walsall Local Authority of 151 children entering care from 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023



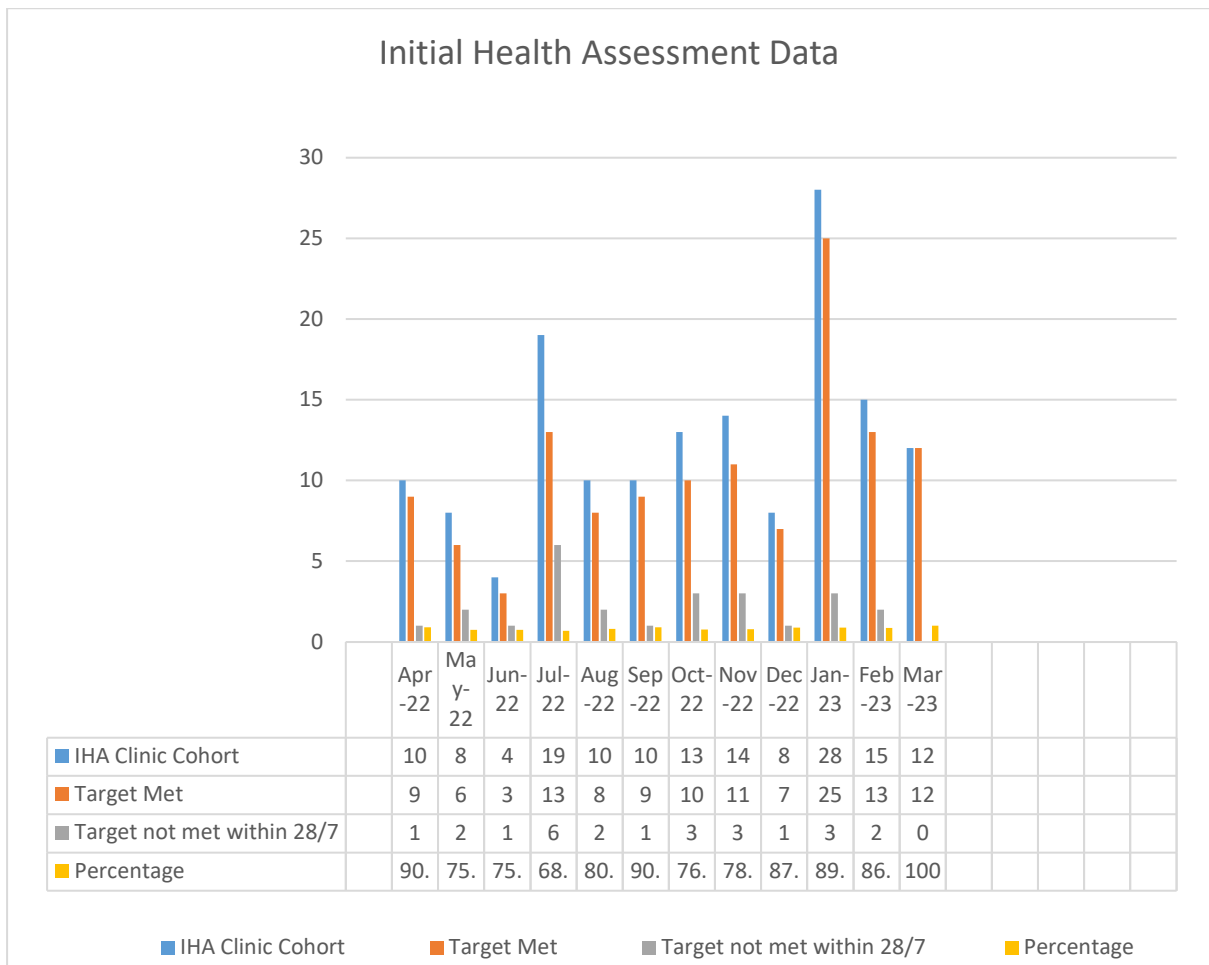
IHA Data 22/3

Numbers of children requiring an initial Health Assessment 2022-23 (WHT Data)

Month	IHA Clinic Cohort	Target Met	Target not met within 28/7	Percentage
Apr-22	10	9	1	90.0%
May-22	8	6	2	75.0%
Jun-22	4	3	1	75.0%
Jul-22	19	13	6	68.42%
Aug-22	10	8	2	80.00%
Sep-22	10	9	1	90.00%
Oct-22	13	10	3	76.92%
Nov-22	14	11	3	78.57%
Dec-22	8	7	1	87.50%
Jan-23	28	25	3	89.29%
Feb-23	15	13	2	86.67%
Mar -23	12	12	0	100.0%
Total	151	126	25	83.44%

As previously indicated, current commissioned requirements are targeted at 85% of the Initial health assessments within 20 working days (28 days total of entering care), of coming into care. The cohort seen within 20 working days of entering care is currently at 83.44% over the year in Walsall.

Completion rates are reported quarterly to the ICB via contract performance reports, and this is reviewed by the Designated Nurse for CIC and discussed at the WHT CQRM. Exceptions are also reported to the ICB if children and young people are not seen within the 20 working days with full details of the reasons and any mitigation.



There were some children not seen with the timescales. There are sometimes challenges in meeting the requirements, this year to date this has included-

- late notifications of entering care (not within 5 days)
- Carers overlooked the appointment
- children absconded/missing/refused
- extended hospital stays.
- Increase in numbers of Children coming into care (20 clinic slots per month)

Concerns resolved locally on Individual case by case basis and seen at next available appointment.



Review Health Assessments

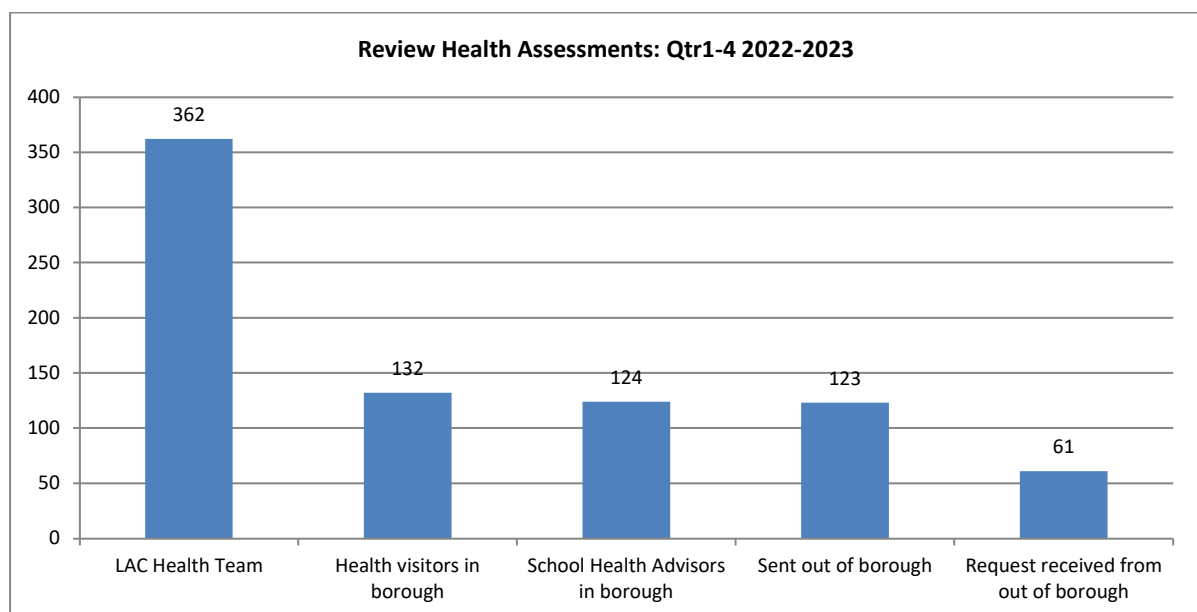
In Walsall, the model for Review Health Assessments(RHA's) is that children and young people of 5 years and over are seen annually by a School Health Advisor or Nurse Advisor from the CIC health Team. Children under the age of 5 years old are seen by a member of the health visiting service every 6 months. This provides a degree of choice for young people and assists in accessing some of the harder to reach and non-engaging children and young people. The RHA performance is commissioned to reach a target of 85%, although the quality of both IHA and RHA has remained high, the timeliness within which RHAs are completed has not always been achieved. This has largely been related to children who are hosted in other areas and children who have multiple moves of placement. There were 730 review health assessments required in 2022/23, all were completed see data below.

The Walsall CIC team use a dashboard developed by the Black Country ICB Designated Nurses for CIC, which reflects the KPI's for services commissioned by the ICB, this has been implemented for the purposes of reporting across the Black Country to standardise reporting and reduce variation.

National picture

Healthcare (for those in care 12 months on 31 March)	England	SNs	West Midlands	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of children who had their annual health assessment	89%	94%	86%	85.0%	91.0%	85.6%

The table below demonstrates individual team activity in relation to RHA's during 2022/3



The Walsall CIC team use a safeguarding dashboard developed by the Black Country ICB Designated CIC nurses which reflects the KPIs for services commissioned by the ICB, this has been implemented for the purposes of reporting across the Black Country.

The dashboards are recorded and reported to Quality leads at monthly governance meetings.

5.0 Information sharing across the health economy

Data is collected on the input of health information from General Practitioners. The provider received 640 completed requests from GPs of shared health information to inform the health assessment. The GP information received was 95% GP and with timeframes to support the Childs IHA/RHA. This represented an increase compared to last year. Given the pressures in primary care following Covid this has been a positive input to the health assessments of the cohort.

Developments and improvements of processes in practice.

- Continued working with the Local Authority to improve timeliness is in place.
- Good access to the Local Authority dashboards by CIC health team to improve information gathering.
- Health and Social Care have monthly meetings to address reporting issues
- ICB Dashboards for reporting data are now being utilised across the black country CIC providers.

6.0 Health of Children in Care Strategic Group.

6.1

This group meets to monitor and improve the delivery of health outcomes for Children in Care. Its aims to ensure the ICB are meeting statutory duties under the 'Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked-after Children' (2015) statutory guidance. It focuses, on not only children placed locally but also the health needs of CIC placed outside of area/borough and that their needs are being met. All partners, providers and relevant commissioners attend meetings as agreed, to provide a holistic system for the provision of health care for Children in Care.

6.2

The Designated Doctor and Designated Nurse for Children in Care have identified Priorities for the next 12 months 2022/2023 for consideration at this forum.

- 1- Review Pathways for transition to adult services for care leavers.
- 2- Implement the pathway to ensure young people placed in therapeutic care homes have assess the suitability of those placements from a health perspective.
- 3- Strengthening the relationship between CIC and Primary Care including support of medicals for fostering and adoption.
- 4- Development a creative and interactive Black country wide health APP for care leavers to be promoted to support the young person to access the appropriate health services.



- 5- Consider and review waiting times for children who require autism assessments and develop pathways.

6.3

The Designated Nurse CIC is an active member of the regional CIC forum, and a member of the NHSE National Group. Attendance at this forum will enable Walsall ICB to:

- Participate in clinical service planning and delivery for our CIC cohort on a national level.
- Debate and be involved in developing clinical recommendations that improve services for CIC nationally.
- Be involved in innovate new models of care and service delivery.
- Participate in regional workstreams to improve health service delivery.

7.0 Dental health

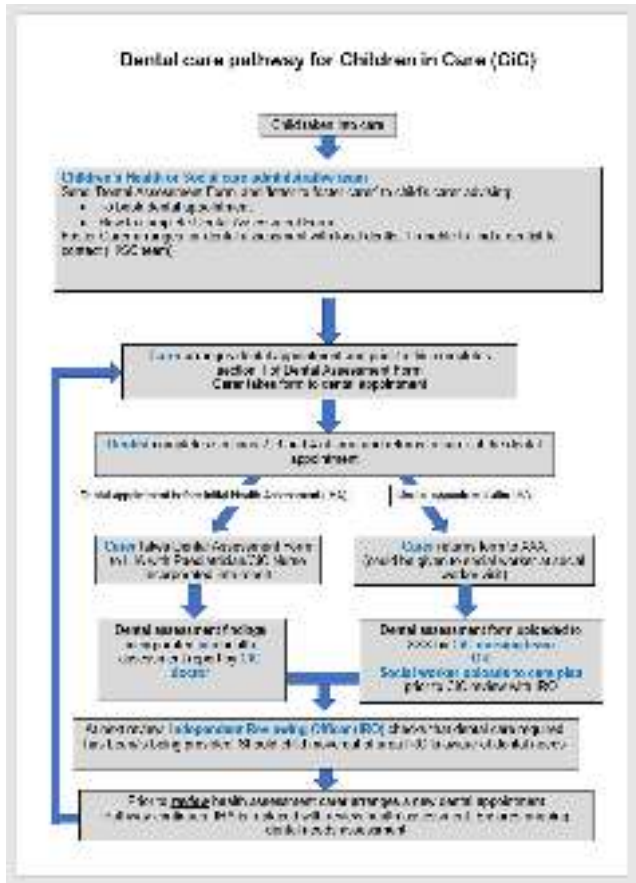
7.1

The percentage of up-to-date dentals checks completed has improved over the last year following the decline that was seen during the Covid pandemic. This continues to be closely monitored through statutory health assessments, and 100% of cases identified where a child needs a dental intervention are addressed and actioned within their health plan. Any issues that have arisen and in need of escalation have been addressed by the Designate Nurses, who have liaised directly, and effectively, with dental practices.

National picture

Healthcare (for those in care 12 months on 31 March)	England	SNs	West Midlands	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist	70%	77%	64%	43.0%	88.0%	87.5%

The Designated Nurse for CIC has been liaising with NHS England who have developed dental pathways. The pathway will be implemented with the collaboration of local authority and CIC team see example pathway below:



8.0 Immunisations

8.1 All health assessments for children and young people will record immunisation status, immunisations have been completed for all children and young people.

Healthcare (for those in care 12 months on 31 March)	England	SNs	West Midlands	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
Number of children whose immunisations were up to date	85%	92%	83%	92.0%	100.0%	100.0%

9.0 Adoption/Fostering Medicals

9.1

The Named Doctor and Designated Doctor for CIC are Medical Advisors and provide advice to prospective adopters, adult health reports for fostering and adoption, Child adoption medical reports, and attend adoption panel as expert health advisors.

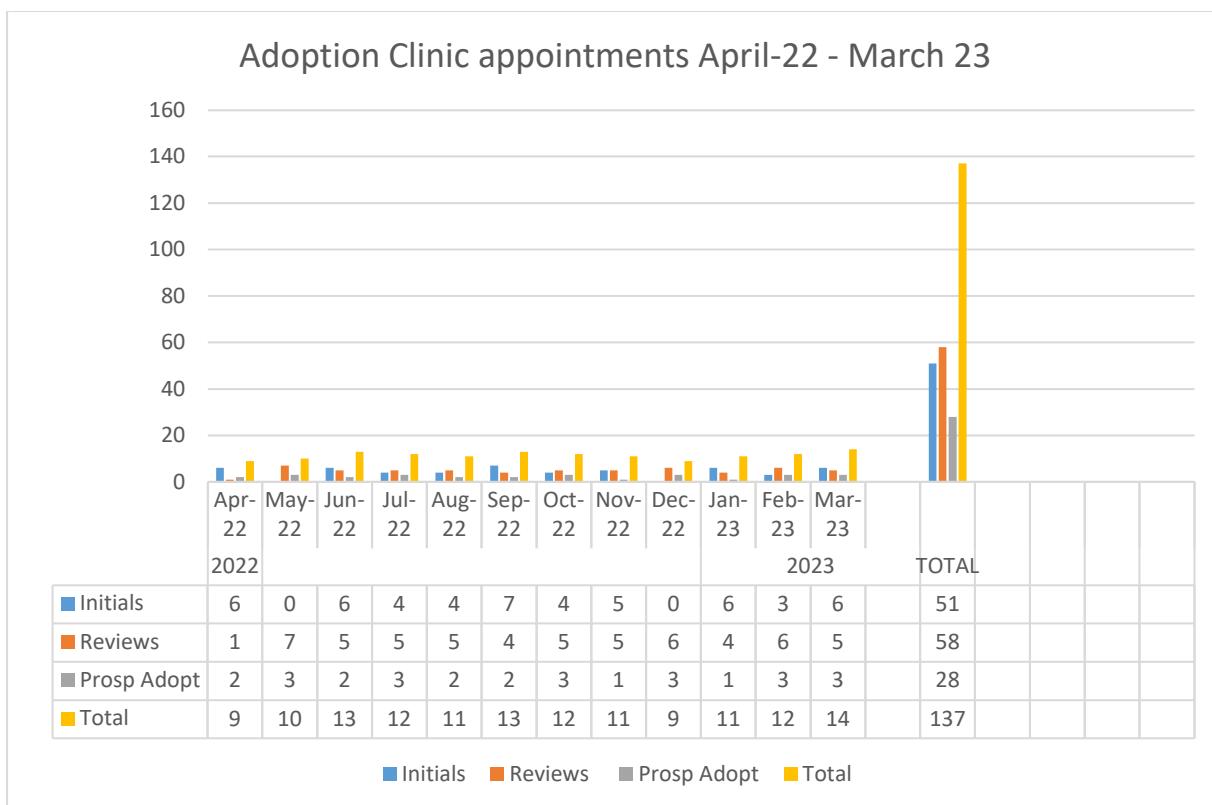
See below the current adoption reports to date for Initial medicals, reviews, and prospective adopter's discussions.

Adoption, Review Medicals & Prospective Adopter consultations April 2022 to March 2023

Current data –

	Month	Initials	Reviews	Prospective Adopter consultation	Total
2022	April	6	1	2	9
	May	0	7	3	10
	June	6	5	2	13
	July	4	5	3	12
	Aug	4	5	2	11
	Sept	7	4	2	13
	Oct	4	5	3	12
	Nov	5	5	1	11
	Dec	0	6	3	9
2023	Jan	6	4	1	11
	Feb	3	6	3	12
	Mar	6	5	3	14
TOTAL		51	58	28	137





General practitioner's complete adult adoption and foster carer medical forms. Following completion of the medical forms, these are reviewed by the medical advisor and a summary report and recommendation for the suitability to become an Adopter/foster carer is made.

There have been some challenges in getting general practitioners to complete these forms. However, the ICB continues to work closely with Adoption at heart and the local authority to ensure these processes have remain business as usual.

10.0 Mental Health Services Offer for Children and Young People in Care

10.1

The emotional wellbeing and mental health of Children in Care is of paramount importance. It is widely documented that Children in care are likely to experience increased susceptibility to mental health difficulties other than the general population due to being exposed to early adverse childhood experiences. Black country Mental health trust will report current support offered to Walsall CIC. The designated Nurse for CIC responds to any escalations for this cohort and will liaise with mental health commissioners as required.

The Designated Nurse for Children in care participates in discussions when children in care feature on the Transforming Care Programme (TCP) risk register to ensure this cohort have the support, they require by mental health services.

11.0 Mental Health Outcomes (SDQ scores)

The SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire about 4–16-year-olds. All versions of the SDQ ask about 25 attributes, some positive and others negative. These 25 items are divided between 5 scales: SDQs are completed by the local authority for Looked after Children aged between 4 and 16 to evidence that they are taking into account the potential emotional and behavioural difficulties of children. The higher the score, the more pronounced difficulties that child will face emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and behaviour. The SDQ generates a score, and this can be used to inform Clinical assessments. It is recognised that a robust process for the completion of SDQs is required in order to improve the completion rate. There are plans to implement a joint pathway across health and social care to ensure SDQs are completed in preparation for health assessments.

12.0 Exploitation

12.1

Children who have been taken into local authority care are at greater risk of becoming victims of Exploitation - Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Contextual Safeguarding including county lines, and association with substance misuse. The ICB host the Health Exploitation group, the transition nurse from the CIC health team is a member of this group and attends other multi-agency meetings to promote the needs of Children in care. The Health Exploitation group has attendants from all areas of the health economy.

13.0 Leaving care Health Summaries

Care Leaver Summaries/Health History documents - Care leavers should be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. They should have a summary of health records (including genetic background and details of illness and treatments), with guidance how to access a full copy if required. Walsall had 51 young people leave care in 22/23. 86% of this cohort received copies by the end of March 2023.

14.0 Care leavers Covenant

The Chief people officer Shajeda Ahmed has signed the Care Leaver Covenant on behalf of the Black country Integrated Care system in January 2023.






Shajeda Ahmed, Chief People Officer for the Black Country Integrated Care Board, signing the Care Leaver Covenant on behalf of the Black Country Integrated Care System.

The care leaver covenant is a national inclusion programme through which organisations pledge to provide support for leavers aged 16-25 to help them live independently. Joining a workplace can be intimidating for any new starter but for care leavers, without the necessary report the experience can be overwhelming. That's why we want people leaving care to have better access to a career in the NHS. By signing the covenant, the ICB is committing that care leavers will have improved access to employment, education and training in a welcoming environment across the black country.

15.0 Care Leavers Health passport app

The Care Leavers mobile app is a user -friendly Health information store for Care leavers which enables care leavers to keep important information about your health, appointments, health history, immunisations in one secure place making it accessible at the click of a button when you need it most. Created/Designed by young people leaving Care, the app gives care leavers instant access to the health information.





Contacts – Keep all your important Health and other contacts in one place makes appointments direct from your GP, Dentist, Optician or maybe your gym.

All your health information accessible and to hand – Important information including your:

Health history – Do you sometimes forget your medications, Medical History, Allergies?

This APP keeps all the information in one place. It is a useful tool if visiting the doctor and you want access to information quickly. This APP has the NHS APP embedded within it, and within the NHS APP you can check your symptoms, book and cancel appointments, order repeat prescriptions, view your medical record and secure access to your medical record. You can choose how the NHS uses your data – register your decision on whether it can be used for research and planning.

Immunisations - All your childhood Immunisations are in one place – it's great to keep track of your immunisations if you are due to go abroad, you can add an appointment with your clinic.

16.0 Free Prescriptions

Care leavers in the Black Country, who are not entitled to free prescriptions, will soon be able to apply for a pre-payment certificate so they don't have to pay for prescribed medication. The ICB has provided this resource for as Care leavers as this was requested at Corporate Parenting Board. This will help care leavers get the best start to their adult lives.

Sally Roberts, Chief Nursing Officer for the NHS Black Country ICB, said:

“It’s fantastic that eligible young care leavers in the Black Country no longer will have to pay for any prescribed medication.

“We know that this cohort of young people are more likely to experience additional challenges in terms of both health and wellbeing, and financial hardship. Many do not have support from extended family who can help with daily living costs, and so the additional cost of a prescription may result in medication not being collected and health needs not being met. We believe that care leavers should have a fair start in life and providing free prescriptions for this vulnerable group will help support their access to healthcare and help reduce health inequalities.”





17.0 Placement Provision for Children with complex health needs.

There continues to be ongoing work with the local authority in relation to joint funding for specialist placements for Children in care, with complex health and social needs placed in and out of Walsall, this has continued during 2022/23. System led operational and strategic panels are in place, designed to ensure the most appropriate decision is made regarding the health input to placements to meet the complex health needs of LAC.

18.0 EHCP to inform health assessments.

Walsall Healthcare Trust have updated local forms that request for information about children coming into care. This now requests information on whether a children or young person has an Education Healthcare plan in place. The information can then be requested to support the completion of the Initial Health assessment.

19.0 Autism and Neurodevelopment (Area of Priory)

- There are various local improvements and Black Country developments associated with different aspects of strengthening the autism offer and pathways for children and young people. These consider pre- and post-diagnosis, focus on the diagnostic assessment pathway with better information plus embedding co-



production and ensuring using and hearing the lived experience of children and adults with autism, those on the assessment journey and their families. (More details can be supplied).

20.0

Key Achievements and Developments 2022/23

- Free prescriptions to be rolled out in 2023.
- Plan for implementation of dental pathway with NHSE support
- Joint production, funding, and preparation for care leavers app
- Development of enhanced service specification of CIC health team
- ✓ Maintenance of the robust delivery of the operational service ensuring the safe delivery of health assessments.
- ✓ Strategic input into the Corporate Parenting Board.
- ✓ Audits continued to be completed demonstrating high quality standardised practice.
- ✓ Continued Training and support to GP's.
- ✓ Maternity services now provide “The Not forgotten Boxes”, they are given to women who have had a child removed/potentially removed are offered a box, which contains items to support positive memories of their child.

21.0

Key health priorities for the coming year, 2024/5 are:

- ✓ Delivery of ICB statutory duties as a commissioner and a host ICB for CIC in Walsall.
- ✓ The ICB will continue to monitor KPI's relating to the commissioning of Health care assessments for CIC.
- ✓ Delivery of all aspects of the Looked after Children's Physical service specification by Walsall Healthcare Trust. Participation in the vulnerable parent's pathway to ensure the health needs of children are known and to inform placement planning.
- ✓ Strengthening the Partnership meetings to improve the health outcomes of Looked after Children, Health of Looked After Children Strategic Group and Corporate Parenting Board.
- ✓ Health Exploitation meeting – Continue to raise awareness of any themes and trends identified to specifically CIC cohort.
- ✓ Facilitate and collate specific service user feedback regarding the health provision.
- ✓ All children to have health regularly checked and continue to enhance our monitoring of emotional well-being and health trends to inform on-going healthcare provision.

- ✓ Support the specific needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children- to review current pathway with regional colleagues.

22.0 Voice of Child.

The CIC nurses use the “me and my health” visual tool to capture the child’s voice in review health assessments. This Tool has recently been adapted to meet the learning needs of children, following some feedback from a 12-year-old child who is Autistic who could not understand one of the questions.

The tool can be adapted for different age ranges under 5s and 5 – 16 years.

Some other comments from Children in care following health assessments -

- A six-year girl “I like the tool because I can see the questions, they are nicely coloured and people know what I want to say and what is important to me, it is good”.
- Her twin sibling commented “two questions mean the same” which was correct, and team immediately amended tool.
- A 16-year-old who has ADHD commented “I haven’t liked to complete any health assessments in the past because they are boring, at least I am in control of what is said this way, and you can get what’s in my head” On review of this young person’s previous health assessments he struggled to engage fully with the process. The team adapted the process and had a telephone consultation prior to his face-to-face consultation this improved engagement.



“Me and my health” visual tool



The CIC nurses identify health concerns as part of Review health assessments. A recent example of this was when a child with additional needs, attending a special school in Walsall was identified as doubly incontinent. The care giver was providing pull ups and managing this without any support. The Child in care nurse completed the assessment and referred to the community children’s nursing team and Walsall school nursing team for a full assessment of the child’s continence needs. This led to the correct products and treatment being prescribed.



Vision for the Future.

Health Partners across Walsall are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of our Children in care whether they live in Walsall or further afield. We aim not just to meet these standards but also to pursue excellence to give our children and young people the opportunities they need to grow and develop into adults with fulfilling lives.



Corporate Parenting Board

9th January 2024

Title of the report: Independent Visitor Report 2022/23

Executive Summary:

Independent Visitors are trained volunteers who befriend and support children and young people up to the age of 18 who are in the care of the Local Authority. All children in care should by law, be offered the chance to have an Independent Visitor.

An Independent Visitor can be life changing for a young person in care, being a consistent and supportive person in their life, helping them learn to trust, have fun, and grow. They can be significant in a child's life where there may be few constant or stable relationships, or during stages in a young person's life in helping to provide some consistency.

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's 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.

The Volunteer Independent Visitor 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. The Independent Visitor Service 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.

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 children in care in the Black Country, Telford & Wrekin, and the surrounding areas as well as those living out of county. 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 meeting to review take up of the service. Walsall's strategic lead is the Group Manager for the Safeguarding and Review Service.

As of March 2023, we have 13 children matched to an Independent Visitor with a further 12 referred awaiting allocation and awaiting a match, which will take us beyond the current proposed target of 20 children in our care with an Independent Visitor. Again we currently compare favourably to the other 3 commissioning local authorities with both more children matched and more referred awaiting match (as of Q4).

There have continued to be some challenges faced in 2022-2023 such as recruitment and matching. Across the volunteering sector and in line with the same challenges that other organisations are experiencing, the cost-of-living crisis has impacted the number of volunteer applicants we would normally see coming through. The dip in numbers has undoubtedly added to the wait times for young people who have been referred in. Also, to note that there have been some positive outcomes from the COVID 19 pandemic which has seen that Volunteer Independent Visitor recruitment and training has become more agile; with 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. Evidence of this is being collated via the young person's bi – annual survey.

The 2-project staff team are continuing to liaise with partners to raise awareness of the IV service. Throughout this period, we have attended 19 Council unit meetings and 31 referrer meetings. This sits alongside other awareness raising activities including local campaigns promoting the IV role and the service to young people.

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 also a proposal put forward in terms of the approval of a corporate volunteer programme targeted at increasing numbers of Independent Visitors. For any agreed proposal there would be a cross council promotion of this opportunity.

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 2022/23. An update will also be provided in terms of where we are at with 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 – Donna Green Group Manager for Quality of Practice

Email: donna.green@walsall.gov.uk



Independent Visitors Service

Annual Report

April 2022– March 2023

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 2022-2023	51
Service users referred	28
IV direct mentoring sessions delivered	239
Caseload on 31/03/2023	43

Section 2.2 – Young People's Support Hours

	TOTAL Hours	Hours	
<i>Independent Visitors (direct session hours)</i>	680.48	Per visit	2.84
<i>Independent Visitors (indirect hours, research, admin, phone calls)</i>	316.05	Per visit	1.32
<i>Total</i>	996.53	Per visit	4.16

As of the 31st March 2023 we had 40 children and young people attached to the project receiving service:

	Males	Females	Total
5-10	2	2	4
11-15	15	8	23
16+	7	6	13
<i>Total</i>	24	16	40

55% of children and young people live within their local authority area whilst 45% live out of county.

Length of matches

Length of relationship / %	
<i>Under 6 months</i>	17.5
<i>6 months to 1 year</i>	17.5
<i>1- 2 years</i>	40
<i>2-3 years</i>	10
<i>3-4 years</i>	
<i>4-5 years</i>	
<i>Over 5 years</i>	15
<i>Total</i>	100

It's worth noting that the longest relationship is 98.00 months and the shortest is 24 days to March 2023.

Accommodation status

Accommodation	
<i>Lac Fostering</i>	33
<i>Lac Residential</i>	3
<i>Lac Disability Residential</i>	0
<i>16+ Accommodation</i>	4
<i>Total</i>	40

Section 2.2 – Young People's information

In this period, the split between male and female was not equal, with 60% male which is slightly less than last year and 40% female matches which is slightly higher than last year. The majority of referrals this year were within the 11-15 years 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. Staff visits have been face to face after the pandemic restrictions.

Whilst we have observed some pre ordained design parameters based on corporate identity, we consulted with young people on the design for the current young peoples' information leaflet.

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 – 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 2022-2023	19
In Recruitment March 2023	6
Registered volunteer pool on 31/03/2023	46

As of the 31st March we had 40 active 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 3 x 3 hour sessions and followed up with a 2nd interview, reference checks assessment and some self-directed learning.

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: 2022-2023 continued to be another challenging year for the project: maintaining contacts for the existing matches particularly with those matched young people being moved suddenly. Across the volunteering sector and in line with the same challenges that other organisations are experiencing, the cost of living crisis has impacted the number of volunteer applicants we would normally see. The dip in numbers has undoubtedly added to the wait times for young people who have been referred in.

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. Evidence of this is being collated via the young persons bi – annual survey.

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, IV.

“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, IV.

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 19 Council unit meetings and 31 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 eg, Blue Light Card Scheme

The Project has applied to Cash4Kids within the period 2022-23 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 volunteers will be able to benefit from this opportunity if funding is granted.

We have 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 were circulated to commissioners, the focus was 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 can be addressed by everyone supporting children and young people. Key to the work of the Network is the need for local authorities to look at extending IV service provision beyond 18 to 21 years old as a minimum.

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 she 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 her 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 area. Staff have worked hard to raise the service profile with social workers and with local people in our areas. There is further work being developed to raise the profile of the service with referrers and young people. This is reflected in the increased number of children and young people being referred for an Independent Visitor. Of the 4 local authorities, Dudley has the highest number of longest serving IV's and Walsall has the highest demand for an IV.

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 and equally, look to increase our volunteer numbers to meet this growing demand.

Corporate Parenting Board

Tuesday 9 January 2024

**Agenda
Item No.**

10.

Walsall Children's Services Q2 Performance Report

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Cllr Stacie Elson

Report:

The reports sets out the key Q2 Performance for Childrens Services, relating to children in care and care leavers.

Recommendations:

To note and identify any further information required by the Board.

That:

1. CPB to note the report.
2. Identify any information required by the Board.

Contact Officer:

Rita Homer
Director of Childrens Social Work
Rita.Homer@walsall.gov.uk

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

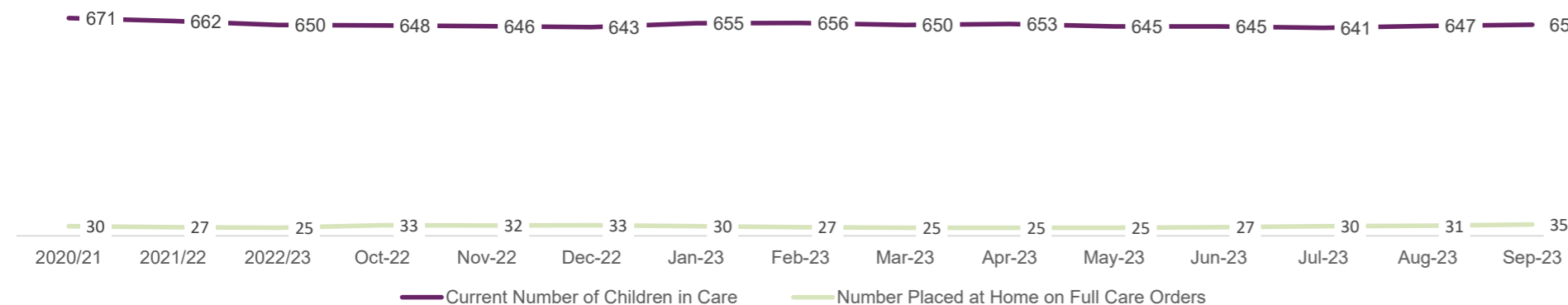
Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 2 - 2023/24



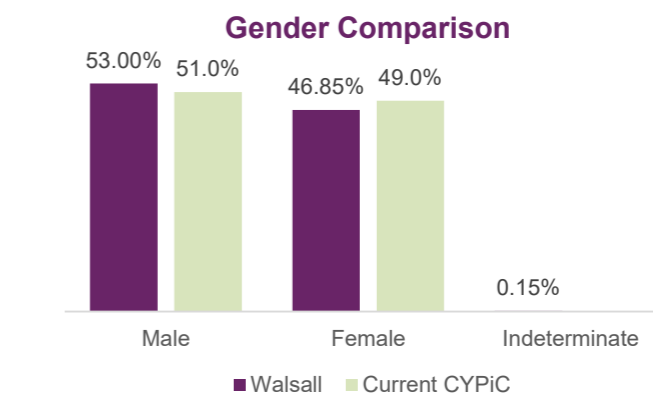
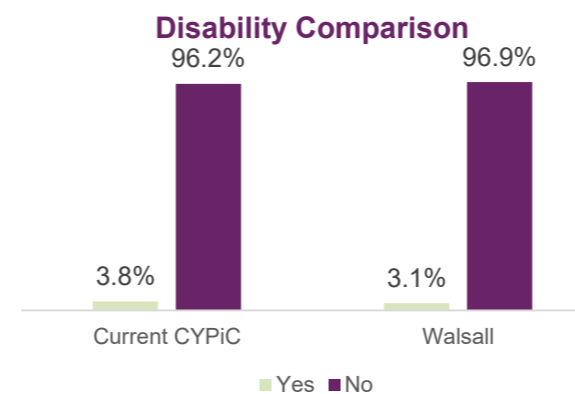
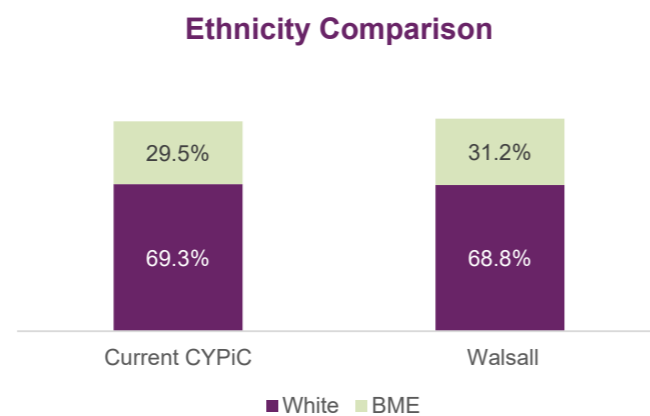
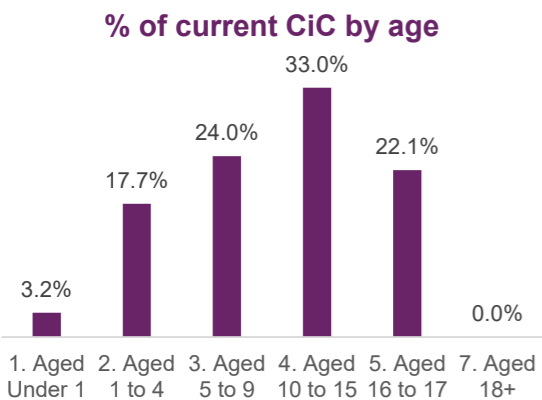
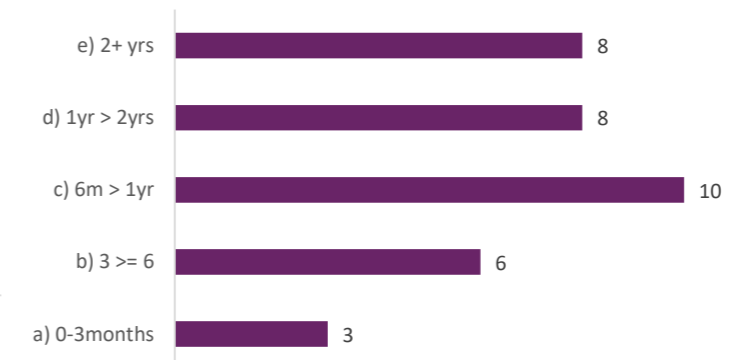
Current Children in Care (CiC) Profile



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



Length of Time placed at home on full care orders



Commentary

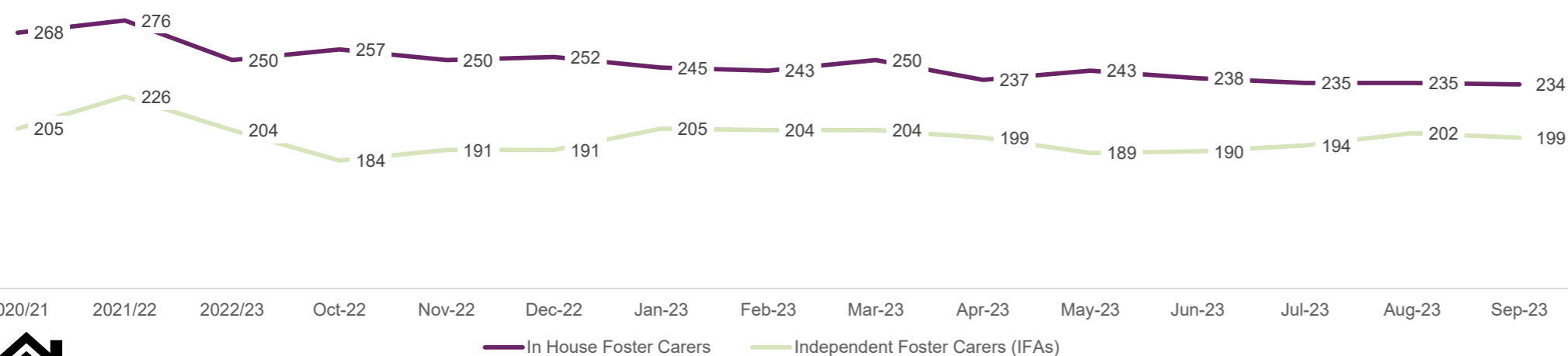
Demographic data has been taken from the 2020 mid-year population estimates. The proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds other than white is increasing, largely within the Asian and Other groups. This is more generally driven by the increasing number of children seeking asylum. A slightly higher percentage of Children in Care have a disability (3.8%), compared to the overall 0-17 population (3.1%). A slightly lower percentage of Children in Care are male (51.0%) compared to the overall 0-17 population of Walsall (53.0%). The number of boys entering care has increased by 16.9%, whereas the number of girls entering care has reduced by 31.9%. The increase in children in remand and seeking asylum contributes to this. Boys are more likely to move into residential care either as a first placement or as a placement move.

Overall the number of children who are entering care is falling. In 2022-23 just 163 children entered care (23.5 per 10,000) compared with 180 children entered care in 2021-22(26.0 per 10,000 population) This is a reduction of 9.4% on 2021-22 and 31.2% on the number that entered care in 2019-20.

The current rate of 94 per 10,000 remains below that of our statistical neighbours but is still higher than the 2022/23 England and West Midlands averages. We currently have 35 children placed at home on full care order, this is a highest its been in a 12 month period. 16 of the 35 have been placed at home for over a year. Work is continuing with the courts to revoke care orders for children who are placed at home where appropriate.

CiC Placement Analysis

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

**108
17.4%**

2022/23 Walsall = 18.0%
2021/22 Walsall = 13.0%
2021/22 West Midlands = 16.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 16.1%
2021/22 England = 17.0%

% CiC 3 or more placements in a year

**53
8.1%**

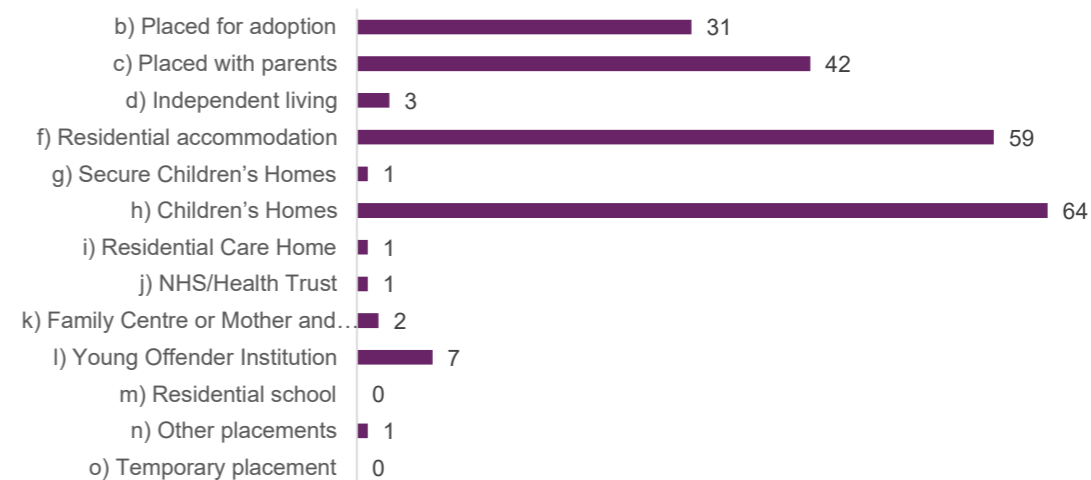
2022/23 Walsall = 9.0%
2021/22 Walsall = 7.0%
2021/22 West Midlands = 10.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 9.7%
2021/22 England = 10.0%

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

**173
61.6%**

2022/23 Walsall = 67.0%
2021/22 Walsall = 68.0%
2022/23 West Midlands = 69.0%
2021/22 Stat Neighbours = 68.2%
2022/23 England = 69.0%

Current CiC by Placement Type (non-fostered)



Commentary

We are seeing a fluctuating picture of children who enter a residential children's home as a first placement. The proportion of children who entered a residential children's home as a first placement was relatively low, prior to 2021-22, with the number of children ranging from between seven and nine. In 2021-22 this increased to 14 (7.8%) but in 2022-23 the number fell back to six (3.6%).

17.4% of Walsall's CiC are placed 20 plus miles from their home address this is a slight decrease on the 2022-23 out-turn of 18%. 8.1% of the CiC population have had 3 or more placements within a year. This is also lower than the 2022-23 out-turn of 9%. The percentage of CiC in the same placement for over 2 years if CiC for over 2.5 years (61.6%) is lower than regional and statistical neighbour averages for 2022/23.

An increase in children remanded to custody in 2022-23 with 14 children entering care compared to 3 in 2021-23. Whilst this increase can be attributed to a significant incident the Youth Justice Partnership are undertaking needs assessment of all children involved in serious violence to influence wider partnership strategy.

Statutory Visits and Reviews



% Visits undertaken to timescale (12 month rolling)

Where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child's plan.

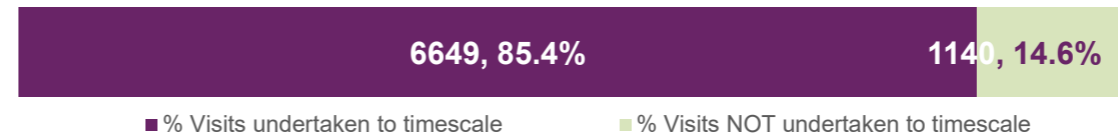
Time Since Last Visit Undertaken	Number	%
a) 0 - 6 weeks	546	83.9%
b) 6 - 12 weeks	75	11.5%
c) 12 - 18 weeks	16	2.5%
d) 18+ weeks	1	0.2%
No Visit Recorded - new in last month	13	2.0%
Total	651	100.0%



Reviews carried out within timescale (12 month Rolling)

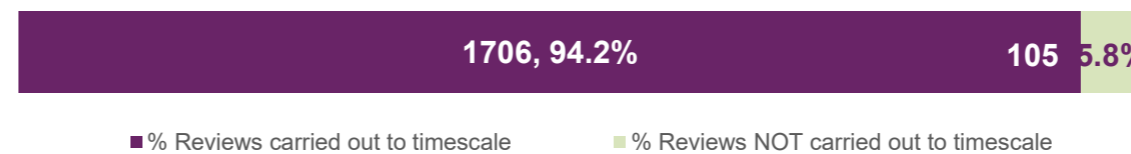
Where reviews for children looked after are carried out within timescale

Time Since Latest Review	Number	%
a) 0 > 3 months	406	62.4%
b) 3 > 6 months	220	33.8%
c) 6 > 9 months	6	0.9%
d) 9 > 12 months	0	0.0%
e) 1 year or more	0	0.0%
No review	1	0.2%
No Review - new in last month	18	2.8%
Total	651	100.0%



2022/23 Year Out-turn = 87%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 89%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 92%

% of children in care by time since last visit



2022/23 Year Out-turn 95%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 91%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 95%

% Time Since Latest Review



Commentary

The proportion of CiC where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child's plan is 85.4% with 83.9% seen within 6 weeks of the previous visit or coming in care. There were 13 CiC with no visits recorded as 30th Sept 23, these children would have entered into care during the month.

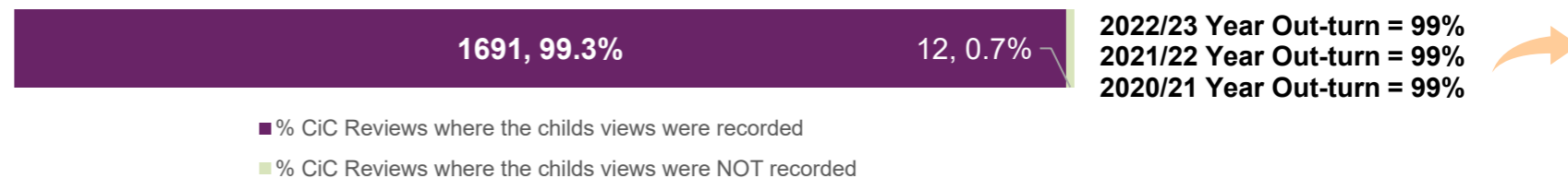
94.2% of reviews have been undertaken within timescales. 96.2% of current Children in Care have had a review within the last 6 months. 2.8% (18) children currently have no review because they were new into care during the last month, however, this review will have been completed on time and will be in the process of being recorded (IROs have 20 working days from the date of review to write their reports).

Views of the child



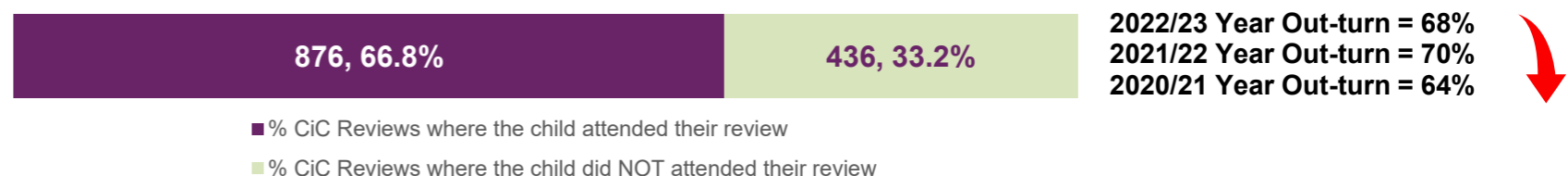
% CiC Reviews where the child's views were recorded (12 month rolling period)

The proportion of CiC reviews where the child's views were recorded (this is where the review took place and a "PN" code has been selected)

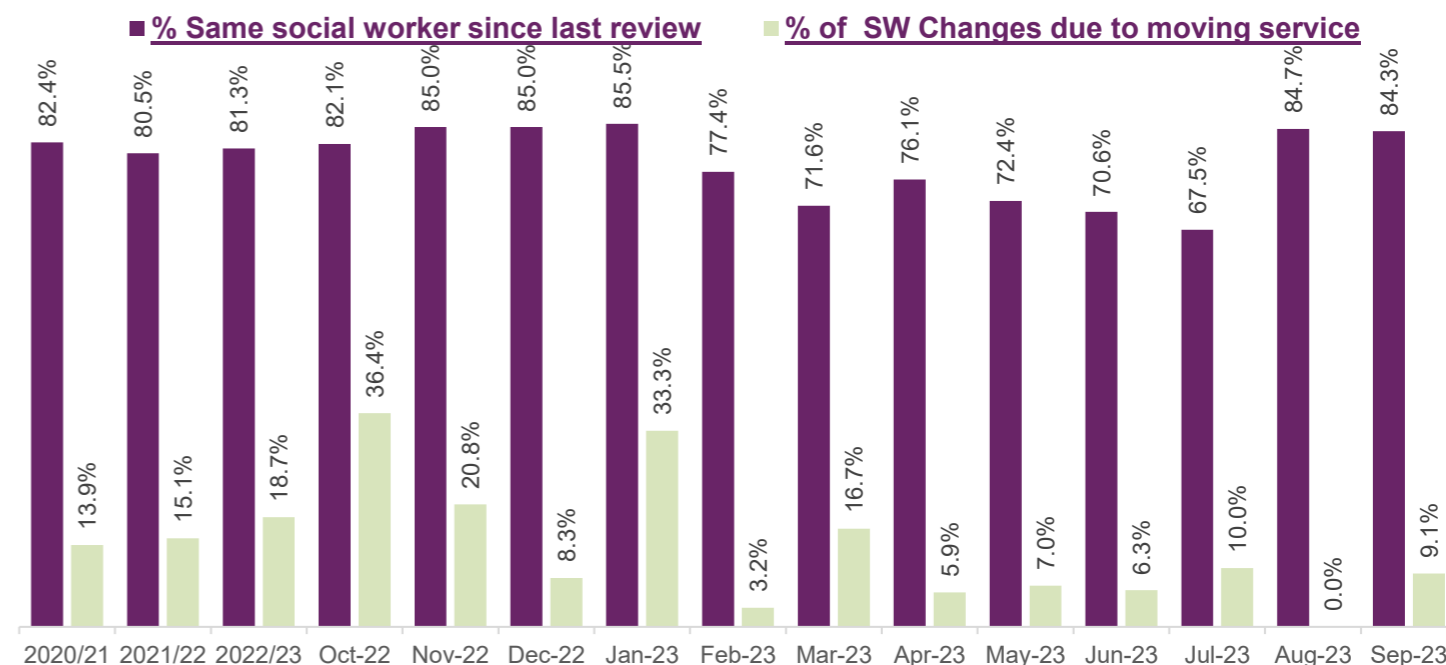


% CiC Reviews where the child attended their review (12 month rolling period)

The proportion of CiC reviews where the child's physically attends their review.



Type of Participation at Review (12 month rolling period)	Number	%
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	380	N/A
PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves	811	61.3%
PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them	36	2.7%
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	15	1.1%
PN4 - child attends; does not speak for themselves / convey their views	20	1.5%
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	86	6.5%
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference	215	16.3%
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to the conference	11	0.8%
PN8 - where IRO visits/talks to the child to obtain their views for the meeti	118	8.9%
Total Reviews	1703	
No Participation Code Reported	11	0.8%



Commentary

The child's views were recorded at 99.3% of CiC reviews. This is similar to the out-turns for the previous three years, this remains very positive performance.

66.8% of children attended their review in the previous 12 months. This is a slight decrease compared with previous years.

The percentage of children who have kept the same social worker since the last review has remained stable over the last two months for the first time since January 23. Since February 23 the percentage has ranged from a high of 77.4% to a low in July 23 of 67.5%. The 67.5% in July 23 was the lowest it has been in a 12 month period.

The percentage of social worker changes due to moving services has fluctuated throughout the year and in September this was at 9.1%. There were no social worker changes in August 23.

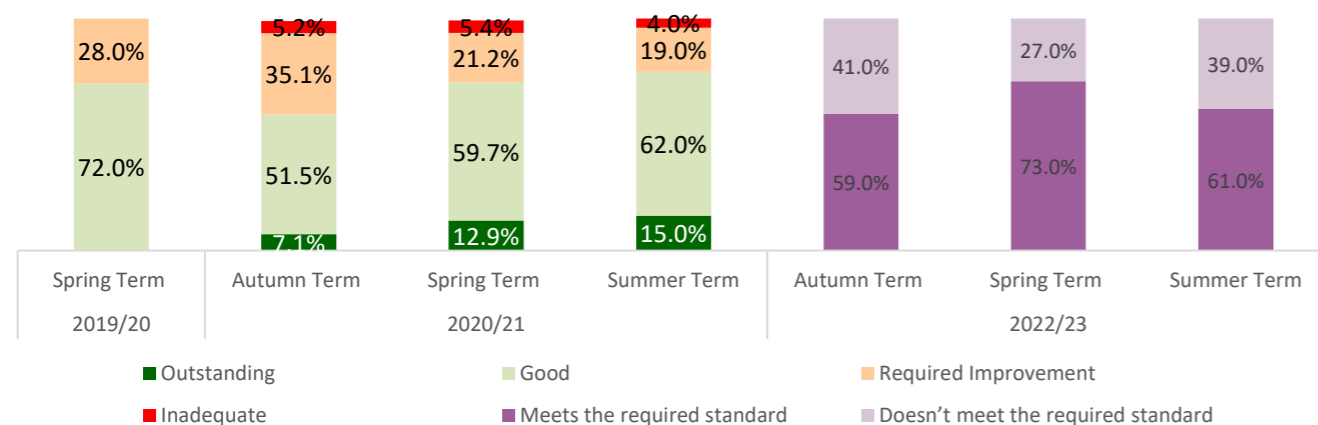
Education



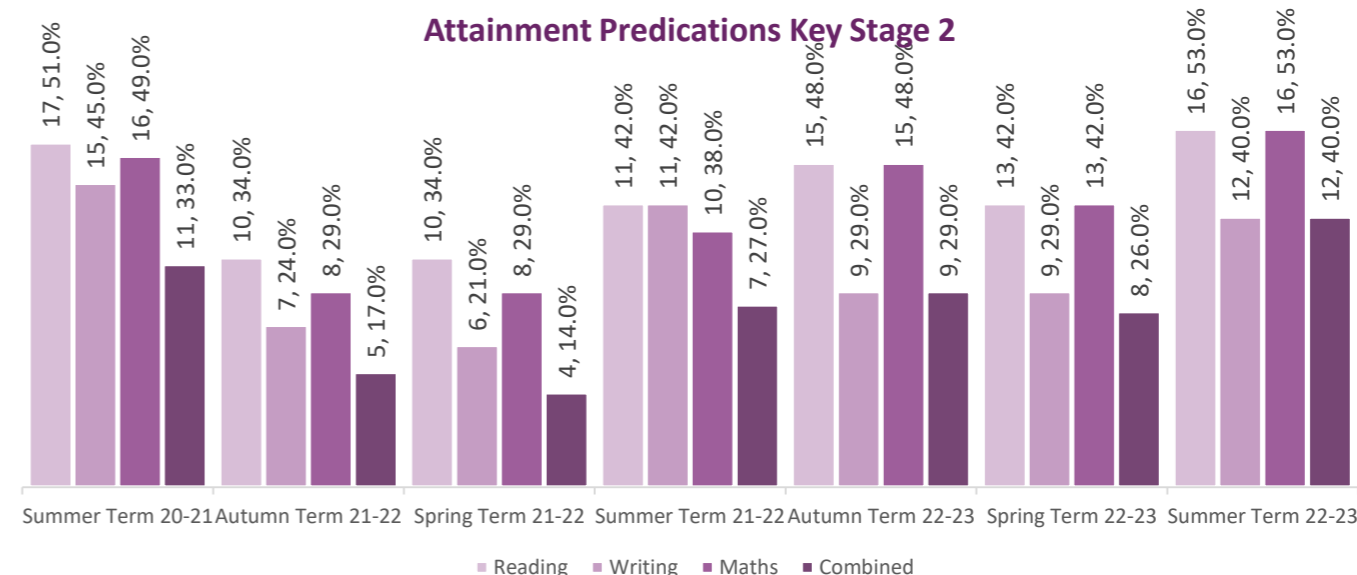
RAG Ratings of PEPs

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'.

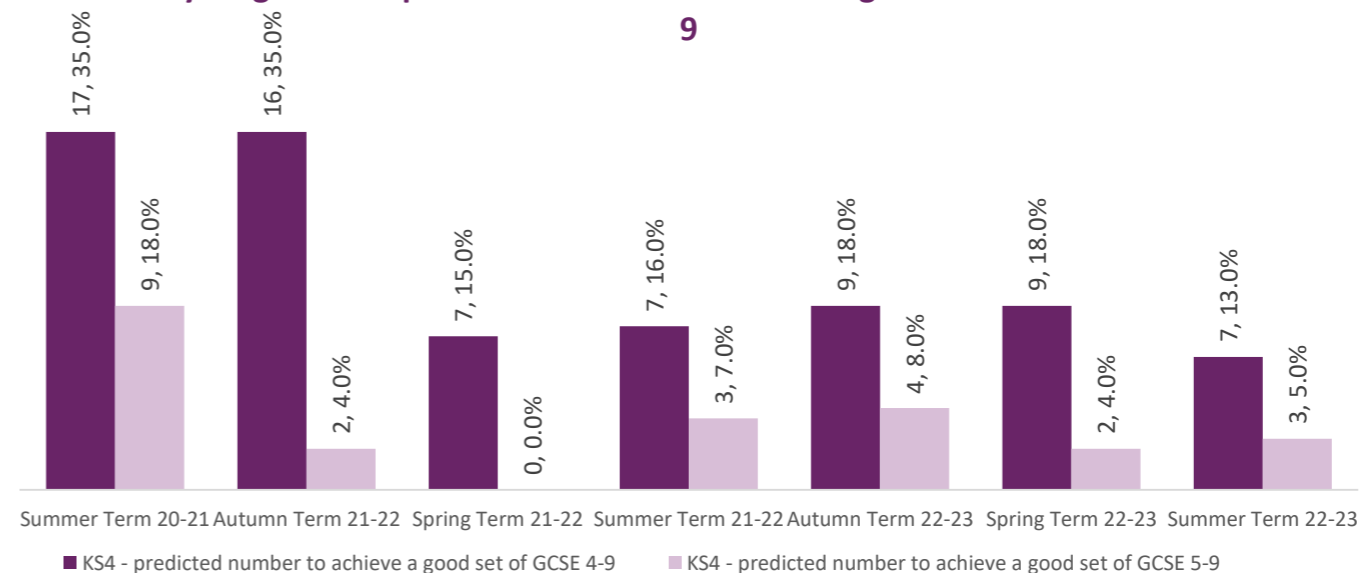
RAG Ratings of PEPs



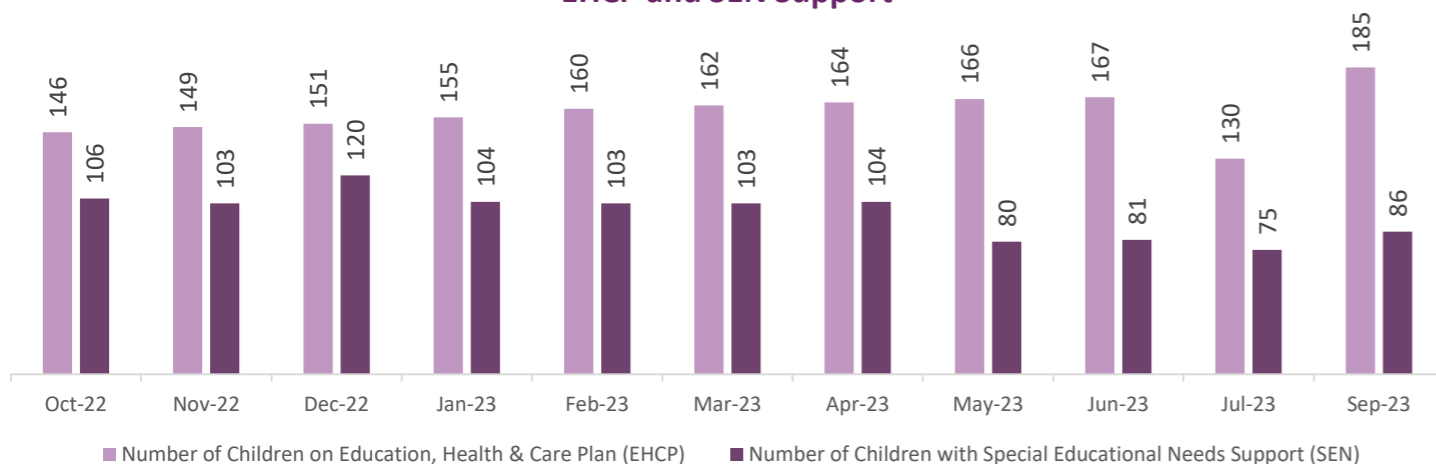
Attainment Predictions Key Stage 2



Key Stage 4 KS4 - predicted number to achieve a good set of GCSE 4-9 & 5-9



EHCP and SEN Support



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 "Doesn't 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 summer 2022-23 was 40% which is a significant Increase compared to summer 2021-22 (27%), and also higher than the previous term (26%)

KS4 -The percentage of children predicted to achieve a good set of GCSE (4-9) reported in summer 2022-23 was 13% which is a decrease compared to summer 2021-22 (16%). Likewise the percentage of children predicted to achieve a good set of GCSE (5-9) reported in summer 2022-23 is 5% which is an decrease compared to summer 2021-22 (7%).

The number of children with an EHCP has increased throughout the year from 146 in October 2022 and is currently at 185.

The number of children with SEN support has decreased from a high of 120 in December 2022 to 86 in September 2023.

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)

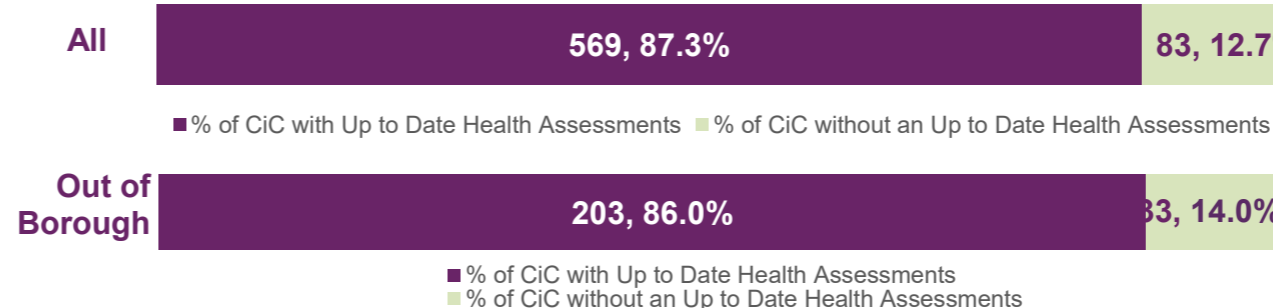


2022/23 Year Out-turn = 66%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 78%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 75%

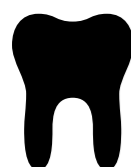


% of CiC with Up to Date Health Assessments

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

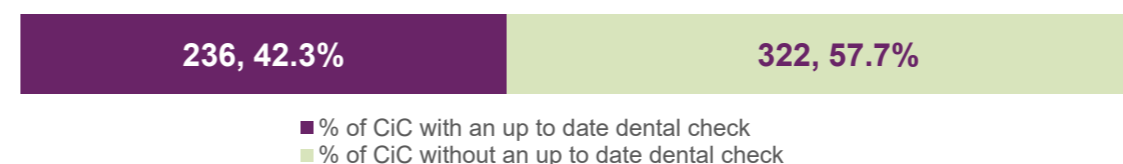


2022/23 Walsall = 86%
2021/22 Walsall = 91%
2022/23 West Midlands = 83%
2022/23 Stat Neighbours = 91%
2022/23 England = 89%



% of CiC with an up to date dental check

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



2022/23 Walsall = 88%
2021/22 Walsall = 88%
2022/23 West Midlands = 70%
2022/23 Stat Neighbours = 79%
2022/23 England = 76%



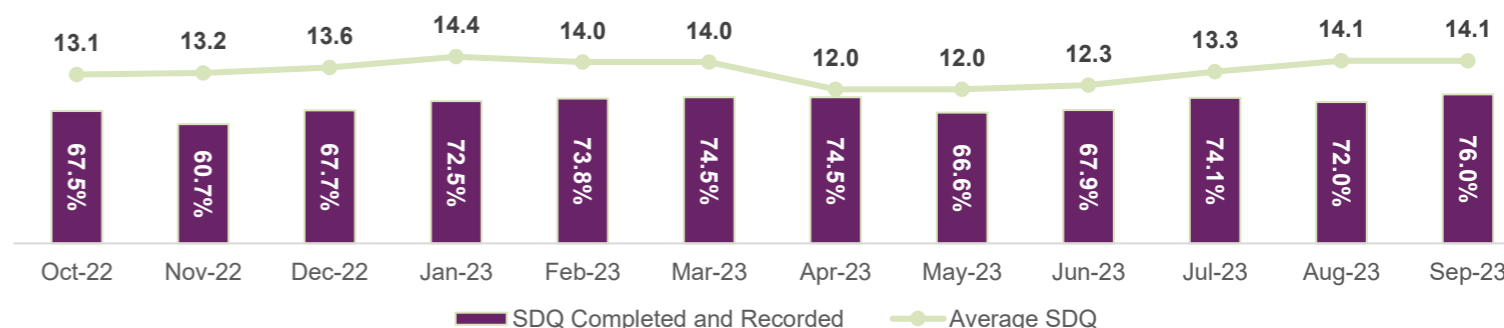
Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)

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.

Average SDQ Score
12.3

Breakdown	Number	% of those eligible for SDQ	% against all Children
Score 0 - 13 Considered Normal	178	49%	28.4%
Score 14 - 16 Borderline	54	15%	8.6%
Score 17 - 40 Cause for Concern	133	36%	21.2%

Number of children looked after for at least 12 months aged 5 to 16 with an SDQ score (Rolling 12 months)



Commentary

More children, coming into our care, have complex support needs, with high levels of need associated with exploitation, mental health difficulties, and have required Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards. Performance shows a increase in the number of children in care have up to date health checks with 87.3%, compared to 86% at the end of quarter 4 2022-23. There has been an increase in the percentage of children whose initial health checks are done on time 62.7% currently compared to 66% at the end of Q4 2022/23. 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. At the end of Q2, the figure is 42.3%. However, the figure for Q4 2022/23 was 88%.

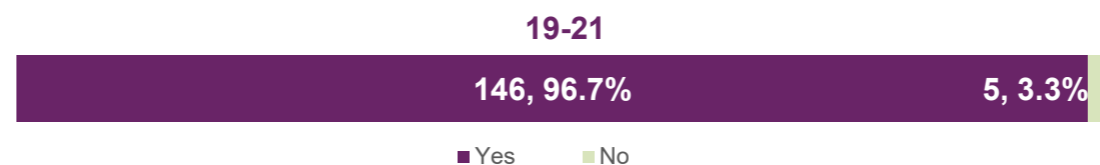
The proportion of SDQ's completed and recorded has fluctuated throughout the period, with 76.0% in September 2023. compared with 67.5% in October 2022. The average SDQ score is currently 12.3. This remains relatively consistent. 133 children currently have an SDQ score that suggests there may be a cause 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

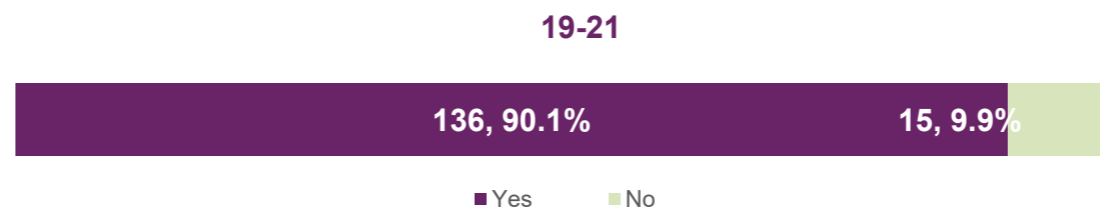


2022/23 Year Out-turn = 99%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 95%
2022/23 West Midlands = 96%
2022/23 Stat Neighbours = 96%
2022/23 England = 96%



Care Leavers in suitable accommodation

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

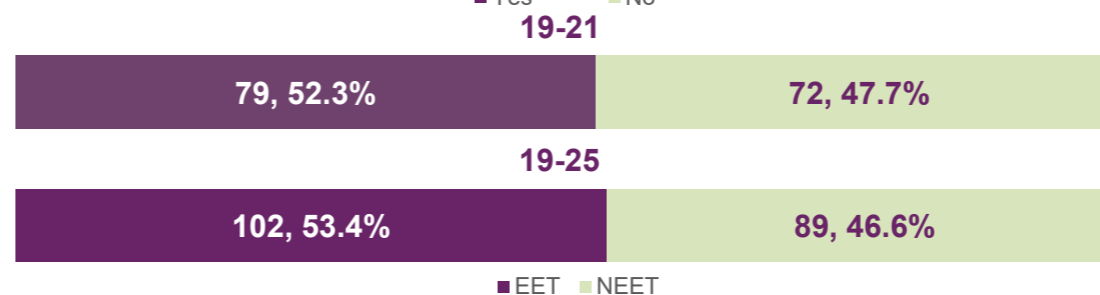


2022/23 Year Out-turn = 96%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 91%
2022/23 West Midlands = 88%
2022/23 Stat Neighbours = 90%
2022/23 England = 88%



Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training

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

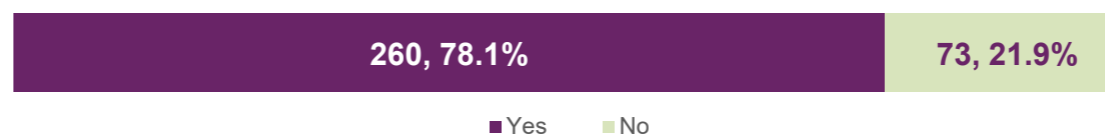


2022/23 Year Out-turn = 54%
2021/21 Year Out-turn = 54%
2022/23 West Midlands = 55%
2022/23 Stat Neighbours = 52%
2022/23 England = 55%



Care Leavers available to work - All Ages

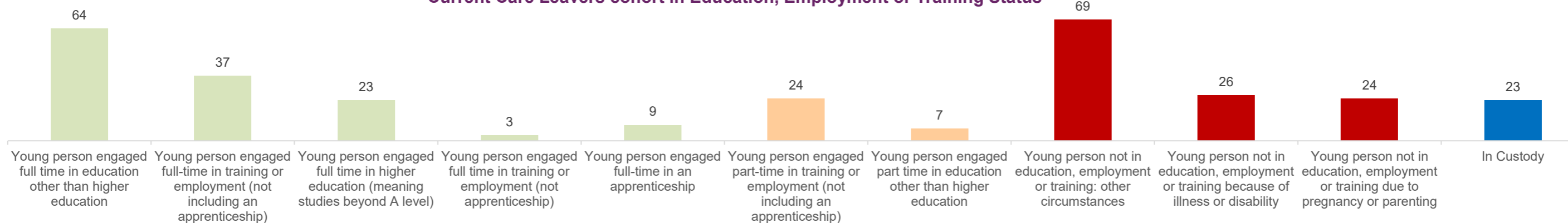
Care Leavers who are available to work this excludes all those that are not available for the labour market due to illness/disability, pregnancy or young mothers or being in custody. (NALM)



2022/23 Year Out-turn = 83%
2021/22 Year Out-turn = 87%
2020/21 Year Out-turn = 86%



Current Care Leavers cohort in Education, Employment or Training Status



Commentary

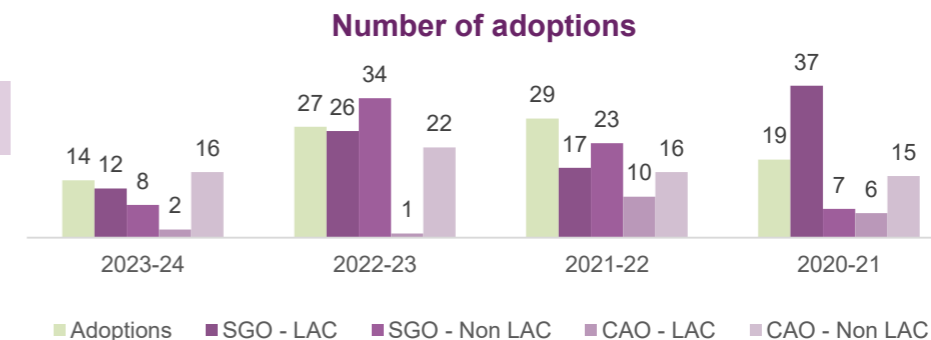
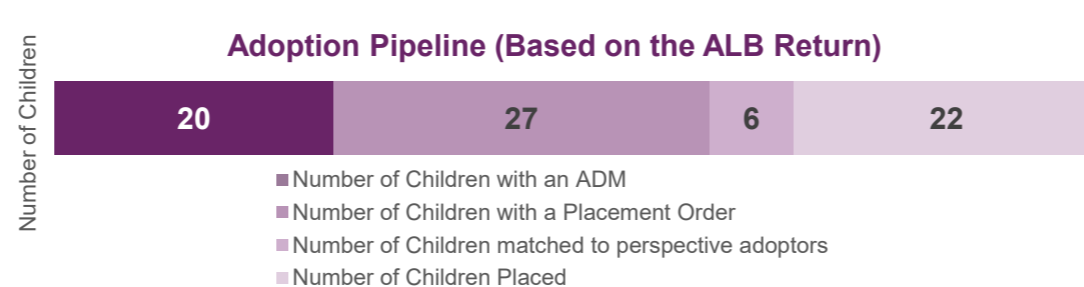
The percentage of 19-21 year old care leavers in education, employment or training at the end of quarter 2 of 2023-24 was 52.3%. This has decreased slightly compared to 2022-23 out turn of 54%. The 19-25 cohort is similar to last years out turn, with 53.4% care leavers in Education, Employment or Training.

78.1% 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. 23 of Walsall's care leavers are currently in custody. The number of care leavers in suitable accommodation remains high with 90.1%, although this has decreased from 96% at the end of March 2023.

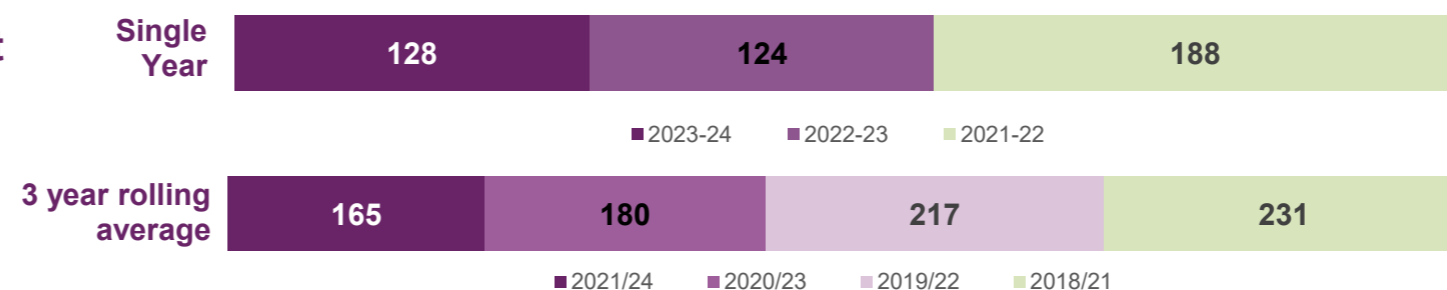
Adoption and Permanency



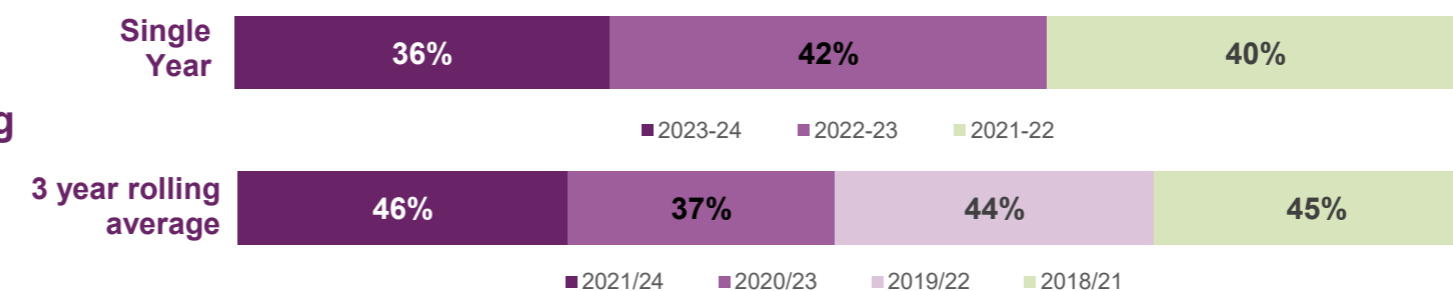
Adoption Pipeline



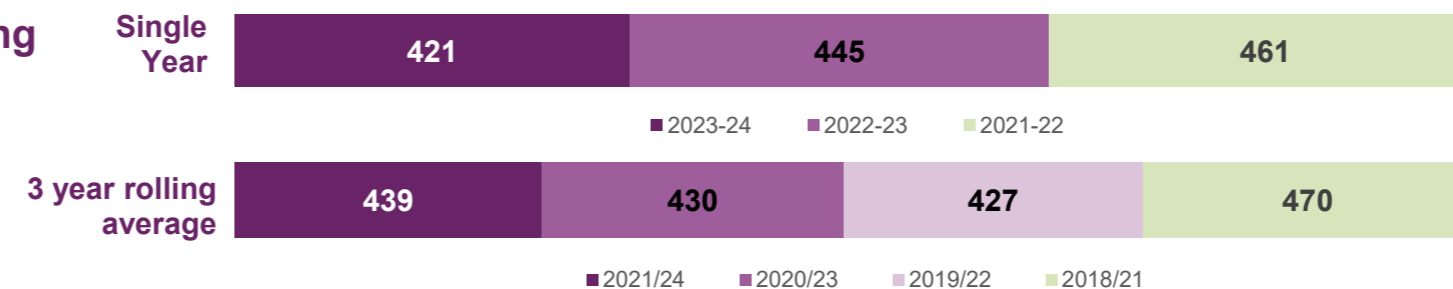
A2 - Average time between receiving court authority to place and finding a match



A3 - % Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family



A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (stopped at point of fostering for foster carers adoptions)



Commentary

There were 27 adoptions during 2022/23 this based on the latest ALB data. In 2023/24 so far 14 children were adopted.

During 2023/24, children were waiting marginally longer time than in 2022/23 between receiving court authority to place and finding a match - this was 128 days compared to 124 days in 2022/23. 36% of Children wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

For many children and young people in care, SGOs are a positive way to provide a loving and caring home and enable children to leave care, supporting closer links to their birth families, siblings and wider family and friend networks and, where this is right for the child or young person, we will provide the support needed to enable an SGO to be put in place. In 2022/23 60 children ceased to be looked after due to special guardianship orders this is a significant increase on the 40 in 2021-22. Between October 2022 and September 2023, 20 Children so far have ceased to be looked after due to special guardianship orders (12 - LAC and 8 - Non LAC) and 18 due to child arrangement orders (2 - LAC and 16 - Non LAC).

**Corporate Parenting Board
13 November 2023**

Title of the Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Executive Summary:

Walsall Council has a duty to seek out every opportunity to support children and young people in our care. The 3-year strategy and the action plan were approved by the Board in January 2022. This report provides an update on the progress against the action plan for 2022/23 and the proposed action plan for 2023/24. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and revised Action Plan is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for approval and assurance that we will deliver our ambition to support children in our care and care experienced leavers.

This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.

The Council works in partnership with others to ensure that families who need support in the community to care for their children within their family and family network. For some children this is not possible, and they become children in our care. Every councillor and officer within a council has a statutory responsibility to make good decisions for children in our care and care experienced young people (also known as care leavers) as a parent would for their own child, in this context councillors are Corporate Parents.

The corporate parenting strategy sets out our ambition for our children in care and care experienced young people, and how this will be achieved. The Corporate Parenting Action Plan will make the ambition in the strategy a reality.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To agree the Board's shared partnership ambition for children in our care and care experienced young people

To support Walsall Council in meeting its legal responsibilities in regard children in our care and care experienced young people.

Recommendations:

The Board members are asked to

1. The Board committee note the progress against the action plan for 2022/23
2. Agree the priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

There are no resource implications associated with the development of the strategy.

The Council has various duties under the Children Act 1989 to children in its care and to children and young people who leave its care. It also has a duty under s 1 Children and Social Work Act 2017, in carrying out functions in relation to the children and young people in its care and formerly in its care who meet statutory criteria to have regard to the seven corporate parenting principles.

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 environmental implications associated with the development of the strategy.

Performance management:

The delivery of the strategy will be monitored through the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:


Successful delivery of a strategy to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers will have a significantly positive impact on the outcomes of one of the most vulnerable groups.

Consultation:

The children in care council is one of the key forums through which services for children in our care and care experienced young people 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: Jivan Sembi

 01922 658412/0555

Jivan.sembi@Walsall.gov.uk

Report: Corporate Parenting Strategy and Our Action Plan	
1.0	Background
1.1	This strategy highlights the collective responsibility we all have in fulfilling our duty as corporate parents. The strategy outlines the mission, vision and values that we will uphold and sets out our key priorities and actions we will take to achieve them, identifying measures that will tell us whether we have been successful.
1.2	Corporate parenting refers to the shared responsibility across the Council to ensure that children and young people in our care or leaving care are supported to thrive. Children in our care and care experienced young people are vulnerable individuals who often have difficult and traumatic experiences in some of the most formative years of their lives.
1.3	This Corporate Parenting Strategy is informed by the views of Children in Care Council and was agreed by the Board in 2022. It is aligned with Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 guides the actions of corporate parents towards children in care and care leavers. These are covered in detail in Walsall's Corporate Parenting Strategy,
1.4	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out how the Council will deliver its role as a corporate parent and ensure that children and young people have the support, care and encouragement to reach their full potential. This report informs the Board of the performance of the Council as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in its care from April 2022 to March 2023.</p> <p>Revised Strategy can be found in Appendix 1 The Action Plan for 2022/23 can be found in Appendix 2 The Action Plan for 2023/24 can be found in appendix 3</p>
2.0	Policy, Legislative & Regulatory Context
2.1	<p>The Children and Social Work Act 2017, defines in law, the role of corporate parents and set out seven corporate parenting principles that require all services within a local authority, including staff, elected members and partner agencies, to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide.</p> <p>Our Corporate Parenting Strategy seeks to embed these principles within the council and beyond with our Partners and broader community The principles underpin everything we will do and explain how the collective ambitions for children and young people will be made real.</p>
2.2	The seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people</i> • <i>to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings</i> • <i>to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people</i> • <i>to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners</i> • <i>to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people</i> • <i>for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and</i> • <i>to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.”</i>
2.3	<p>The key policy change for children in care and care experienced young people since 2022 is set out in the Government’s publication of Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy which addresses the recommendations to reform Children’s Social Care, as set out in the Independent review of children’s social care: Final report; Child Protection in England; and the Children’s Social Care market study.</p>
2.4	<p>The Stable Homes, Built on Love Implementation Strategy is built around six key pillars.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families 2. A decisive multi agency child protection system 3. Unlocking the potential of family networks 4. Putting love, relationships and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care 5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one 6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data
2.3	<p>Pillar 4 which focuses on improving how we care for our children and care experienced young people has six key “missions” to improve the care system</p> <p>1. Ensure strong, loving relationships for care-experienced children. The government will provide funding to increase the number of local authorities with family finding, befriending and mentoring programmes. They will also explore ways for care-experienced people to legally formalise a lifelong bond with someone they care about.</p> <p>2. Increase the number of local, high-quality, stable and loving homes. The government will work with local authorities to deliver a fostering recruitment and retention programme. It will set up an expert group to review standards of care, regulations and guidance and explore ways to increase financial oversight of large providers of homes. It will also pilot a regional approach to care provision through Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs)</p> <p>3. Strengthen and extend corporate parenting responsibilities across the public sector. The government has consulted on corporate parenting principles to identify areas in need of improvement and the possibility of extending the range of bodies the principles apply to.</p> <p>4. Improve education, employment and training outcomes.</p>

	<p>The government will look at expanding the Virtual School Head role to children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. It will increase the funding of post 16 education for children in care and establish an accreditation scheme for providers of further education to aspire to when working with care leavers. Plans also include expanding the number of jobs and apprenticeships available to care leavers.</p> <p>5. Increase suitable accommodation for care leavers and reduce homelessness.</p> <p>Plans include increasing the leaving care allowance and removing the local connection requirement for care leavers seeking access to social housing.</p> <p>6. Reduce disparities in mental and physical health outcomes and improve wellbeing.</p> <p>Existing guidance on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care will be updated and extended to cover care experienced young people up to the age of 25. The government will also look at supporting the training needs of social care practitioners around mental health.</p>
<p>2.4</p>	<p>Stable Homes, Built on Love sets out key milestones for delivery. Phase 1 (up to the end of March 2025) will focus on addressing urgent issues, setting the national direction and laying the foundations for reform. Phase 2 will focus on embedding reform, subject to funding, parliamentary time and the outcomes of related consultations.</p> <p>These changes will inform the revision of our Corporate Parenting Strategy in 2024/25</p>
<p>2.5</p>	<p>The Corporate Parenting Strategy has 5 key strategic priorities: Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Safety and Permanency: All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.</i> 2. <i>Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing: We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.</i> 3. <i>Education and Employment: We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.</i> 4. <i>Transitions and Independence: Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.</i> 5. <i>Influence and Involvement: Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation</i>
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Summary</p> <p>At the core of the strategy is our intention to drive the corporate parenting principles and delivery for our children, young people, and young adults into all areas of the Council and our partners, and to unashamedly leverage all opportunities to improve the life chances of</p>

children in care and those who have left care. It reflects the high aspirations that we have and what can be achieved by everyone working together to promote the best interests of children in care and those that have left care.

It is an aspirational strategy, which will be delivered through the development of an annual delivery plan and by championing this work across the whole Council and with the wider community of partners across Walsall who can make a difference to the lives of our children and young people.

Walsall has a significant record of investment in services for our children in care and our care experienced young people, we have a partnership that is committed to achieving improved outcomes for our children. The strategy sets a high ambition for how we can continue to build on that investment and see meaningful transformation in the life chances of the most vulnerable in society.

Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025

Our promise to you

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FOREWORD BY PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The council's relationship with children we care for and care experienced young people is unlike any other relationship we have with people living in Walsall. We know that there is no greater responsibility than as a corporate parent. Because we are your 'Corporate Parents' we have legal and moral responsibilities towards you just like we have towards our own children. We need to be good parents and try to be the best possible parents we can be for you all.

We know that getting the best start in life is crucial as early experiences have lifelong impacts and shape our futures. We support all children we care for and care experienced young people to thrive and flourish; reach and exceed their potential and expand their life chances.

When it is time we help you leave our care to become resilient and independent adults. We have big ambitions for you and take a 'whole council' approach to caring for you and raising you, involving staff who work at the council, carers and Elected Members and our Partners alike.

We do this together, bringing together all of our resources and capacity so that we are able to achieve the best possible outcomes for you. We are passionate about doing the best for children we care for and care leavers and we want everyone connected to the council and all of our partners to share this passion.

We have identified priorities and actions to show how we plan to deliver on the promise. We understand that each child in our care is an individual and our approach reflects this. We are ambitious for every child in our care and will encourage them to achieve their full potential, by overcoming challenges to progress well in education, learning and training.

This document is all about the promise we have made to you, children in our care and care experienced young people which is based on your views. It is this promise that has shaped our vision and how we plan to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities.

For us, this is not just about fulfilling duties, but about ambition and aspiration. We value and care for you, not only through those who look after you on a daily basis but also through those who make decisions that affect your lives.

Councillor Elson, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

Colleen Male Interim, Executive Director Children's Services

Introduction

Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board brings together all services and provides a welcoming forum for our children in care and care experienced young people to influence the shape of range of services available to them.

To secure the best possible outcomes we need the collective commitment from the whole Council, all elected members, council employees, as well as our partners - Health services, Police, Probation, Housing Providers, Schools and Colleges and voluntary sector. We all act as good parents, committing resources and working together to improve the lives of children in our care and care experienced young people. Alongside our corporate parenting principles, there are a number of priorities that underpin this strategy and the services that both ourselves and our partners provide children in our care and young people in our care.

This strategy outlines our priorities for supporting children in our care and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. Delivery against our commitments will be monitored diligently by the Corporate Parenting Board.

We know all children are unique and have individual needs and circumstances. We work closely with children in our care and care experienced young people and ensure that their 'Voice' is truly heard. Members will listen to young people and check that they are happy and healthy, receiving a quality education and have access to training and employment opportunities, as well as their own home to go to when the time comes to live independently.

Our relational approach means we engage directly and routinely with our children, their carers and care experienced young people as well as our staff who support them, encouraging them to share experiences so that we can better understand the issues they face and adapt services to meet their needs. Children's experiences will always form the centre of our approach in Walsall.

This means it is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to

- Keep our cared for children safe and secure, we stick with them and go the extra mile for them
- Create a culture where we know and believe in all our children and young people. We help them to achieve their goals and ambitions - by recognising their needs, talents and aspirations
- Listen and make our children and young people's ideas happen, ensure their lived experiences improve practice and make sure they know and understand their story and their plans
- Believe in our children and young people and help them to be the best they can be both now and, in the future
- Embrace and celebrate the individuality of our children and young people
- We want our children and young people to be healthy and happy
- We will listen to our children and young people's worries and work with them to find solutions
- We want our care experienced young people to become confident and resilient adults living within their own community with support from trusted adults

Children and Social Work Act 2017 – Corporate Parenting Principles

There are seven corporate parenting principles, which always guide our work

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

How does Walsall compare Nationally?

	Nationally	West Midlands	Statistical neighbours	Locally
	at 31 March 2022			31 March 2023
Number of children we care for	82,170 70:10,000	88:10,000	100: 10,000	650 93.7:10,000.
Number of children living with foster families	70%	73%	74%	75%
Number of olds care experienced young people that we support.	33,590 19 - 21 year olds			236 18 -25 year olds
Percentage of care experienced young people In Touch (19 - 21-year-old)	92%	91%	95%	92%
Percentage of 19 -21 year old care experienced young people in education, employment or training	55%	52%	50%	54%

Our Promise to You - Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People:

Our Promise to You is a list of commitments developed with young people and children's services decision makers to ensure that our children in care and care experienced young people get the right services and support. Our 'Promises' form our Pledge to You as children in our care and care leavers. A pledge is important. It tells our Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.



The Promise
Younger children
5 – 11 years

Sometimes children are not able to live with their parents and so they may need to be placed in our care. When this happens, there are a number of things that we will do to make sure that you are safe and well cared for. We call these our 'promises to you'.



Education

- We promise to help you to play and learn at a school that is right for you
- We will help you join clubs and after school activities near to where you live
- We will help you to make friends
- We will tell you how well you are doing and let you know how proud we are of you

Keeping you safe

- We promise to make sure you live somewhere safe where there will always be someone to take care of you
- We will make sure you can keep things that are important to you like your favourite toys.
- We will make sure you always have someone that you can talk to when you are feeling sad
- We will listen to what you like and don't like

Keeping you healthy

- We will make sure you stay well and can see a Doctor when you are poorly
- We will help you to eat healthy food and drinks that will make you grow big and strong
- We will help you to be happy and feel good about yourself
- We will help you to play safely outside and enjoy exercise

Keeping in touch

- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care and will keep a story of your life for you to look at
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We will help you stay in touch with Foster Carers and friends if you want to and will tell you if this can't happen
- We will make sure that you have a social worker that you can talk to

 **Walsall Council** 

The Promise

Older children
12 - 15 years



Every child in our care will be treated fairly and respected as individuals. We will always seek to do everything we can to support and inspire you to be the best you can be. Through everything we do, we will help you to develop strong and meaningful relationships with your family, friends, carers, teachers and social workers so that you are given the very best support available.

Education and Training



- We promise to make sure that you have the best education possible and help you to plan for your future
- We promise to help you to enjoy new experiences and develop your own interests and hobbies
- We promise to celebrate your achievements and tell you how proud we are of you
- We promise to try and make sure that you don't have to change school
- We promise to make sure that you get all the help and support you need to learn, achieve and succeed

Keeping you safe



- We promise to provide you with a safe and comfortable place to live
- We promise to listen to you and involve you in decisions that affect your life.
- We promise to help you feel safe, both in and out of your home.
- We promise to encourage and support you to express your views
- We promise to provide you with a trusted adult that can help you if you are feeling worried
- We promise not to do anything that will make you stand out as a child in care

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to support and encourage you to have a healthy lifestyle
- We promise to make sure you are cared for by people who can keep you safe and healthy and will teach you how to learn to look after yourself as you get older.
- We promise to help you to access a range of leisure activities
- We promise to listen to any health issues you may have and will help you to get the support you need

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to understand the reason why you are in care
- We promise to help you keep in touch with your family and friends, if it is safe to do so.
- We promise to respect you as individuals and listen to what you want
- We promise to help you keep a record of important events, achievements and people in your life that are important to you
- We promise to help you take part in things you want to do such as school trips and fun activities



The Promise Older children and Care Leavers aged 16-25

By listening to our care experienced young people, we have developed a list of 'Promises' that form our Pledge to you as children in our care. A pledge is an important part of running a service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It tells Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their Corporate Parents.

Education, Training & Employment



- We promise to help you with your education and with finding the right employment and training opportunities.
- We promise to encourage and support you into college or university and give you clear information about the support you can expect.
- We promise to ensure that you have opportunities for work experience and employment such as apprenticeships and traineeships.
- We promise to support you to have different experiences and access to activities that may interest you.

Keeping you safe



- We promise to help you to decide where you want to live and will help to keep you safe and comfortable.
- We promise to help you to stay with your foster carers if this is possible.
- We promise to help you to manage your money and ensure you have financial stability ready for your future.
- We promise to help you to get important documents like passports and driving licences.
- We promise to pay for your council tax, even if you live outside of Walsall Council.
- We promise to provide you with opportunities to build your confidence so that you are able to make your own decisions about your safety.

Keeping you healthy



- We promise to help you to access health services and have access to your health passport.
- We promise to go with you to health appointments and support you if you need it.
- We promise to help you to access local leisure facilities to help you keep fit and well.
- We promise to make sure you have someone to talk to or can access support with your mental wellbeing.

Keeping in touch



- We promise to help you to keep in contact with people that are important to you.
- We promise to celebrate your achievements with you.
- We promise to respect you as individuals and have high aspirations for your future.
- We promise that you will always have someone to contact.



Walsall Council



Our priorities

Our priorities respond directly to Our Promises to You, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

- Safety and Permanency
- Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Employment
- Transitions and Independence
- Influence and Involvement

Safety and Permanency

All of our children and young people will be safe from harm, with stability provided through secure homes and excellent carers.

Walsall works hard to ensure the right support is provided at the right time so that children can remain with their families. We always celebrate our family successes and we will support children to remain at home if it is safe to do so. However, if concerns about safety or wellbeing persist, swift action is taken to ensure the child has a safe and secure place to live, even if this means having to go into the care of the Local Authority.

We have a duty to ensure to ensure our young people have a safe place to stay. As corporate parents, we listen to and train our carers to have all the tools they need to be the best carers to our young people. We also understand the importance of support networks and make sure our young people have adults that they can rely on and provide as much stability as possible.

We know that uprooting children from their homes or having to change placements can be tough, so we work hard to find long and suitable families and homes for our young people that will allow them to flourish and make a success of their lives.

We commit to:

- Provide young people with a safe home to live with carer who are suitable and well trained. Young people will be happy and taken care of, and only moved again if absolutely necessary.
- Our Turning Point service will continue to make a direct contribution to helping children to remain with their families
- We will ensure that social work plans are child focused, culturally informed and consider the perspectives of partners in health and education.
- We will continue to help our children find stability, build trust with professionals and identify risks early to avoid young people entering the criminal justice system.
- We will give our young people all the information we can about their new family, home and where they will be living. They will be given information about the support available from youth services, including on education, training and careers.
- Ensure continuity of care for our young people so that they maintain a sense of stability and do not experience too many different professionals.
- We'll draw on the rich experience of our foster carers and enable them to provide best possible care for looked after children and young people.
- We will continue to challenge ourselves to offer the best services and develop our approaches.
- Continuing to explore family and friends in order for children to return to family and not remain in care for longer than necessary if appropriate.
- Promote and champion the specific needs of unaccompanied and separated young people including support with acquiring citizenship.

Physical and Mental Health and Wellbeing

We will educate our young people to encourage a happy and healthy lifestyle, making sure that professionals work together to ensure that all their health needs are met.

Often our children have had tough starts in life and many children and young people experience the trauma of being separated from their families and communities. Being happy and confident in identity is a key factor in looking after our mental wellbeing, particularly when it comes to race, sexuality, disability and gender. It's therefore crucial that we encourage our young people to be comfortable in who they are and demonstrate sensitivity and inclusivity of difference for our young people to thrive.

We are commit to:

- Care planning will consider the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our children and care leavers
- We will support our children and young people to understand the importance of their health assessments and ensure that no one misses out on healthcare, with regular assessments to help identify need.
- We'll encourage all young people to attend their assessments by offering flexible arrangements both face to face and virtual appointments. Medical appointments will be kept even if the young people live outside of Walsall.
- Provide a holistic health assessment within four weeks of a child entering care, and annually thereafter (or six-monthly for Under 5's). Our health team will listen to their problems and understand their needs, reviewing their physical health, growth and development.
- We will ensure and promote access to mental health services. For those with specific needs will be offered support from the FLASH Team for those who live within Walsall or within 20 miles. We will work with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or other providers to secure support.
- We will educate our young people and encourage a happy, healthy and active lifestyle, providing free access to leisure facilities. Maintaining an open dialogue about all aspects of their health; from healthy eating, exercising and staying safe, to sexual health, smoking, alcohol and substance misuse.
- We will support young people with substance misuse issues and intervene early to provide all the support they need.
- We will ensure that our children and young people know how to access their health records.
- We will ensure that the information about their health is kept confidential and only shared with people who need to know.

Education and Employment

We will champion our young people and help them succeed in education and training, supporting lifelong learning and the pursuit of their interests.

Ensuring that our children in care and care experienced young people are in good education, employment, apprenticeships and training will always be a priority for us as we know they offer the greatest opportunities for our young people to build a successful career.

All our young people are unique and have different interests and hobbies which provide opportunities to improve confidence, mental wellbeing and feel connected to something they love. In Walsall we maintain high aspirations for our young people and help them to make the most of their talents.

Walsall's Virtual School has high expectations and helps the children in our care and leaving our care to achieve the very best. Although the pupils attend many different schools and settings, we operate as if they all attend one school. We have high aspirations for their education, employment and training and we expect schools and settings to provide a quality learning environment which meets their needs and encourages and develops their ambition.

Virtual School monitors, supports and challenges academic achievements and attainment in partnership with schools, carers, social workers and personal advisers. We hold schools to account for the impact of the provision on pupil's progress through the education system using Personal Education Plans and monitoring the use of Pupil Premium plus .

The Virtual School is committed to ensuring that the Voice of the child will be reflected in our planning to effectively support all pupils and their views are sought at every Personal Education Plan meeting.

Virtual School deliver a variety of out of school activities throughout the year for children and young people of all ages. Some examples of the positive activities provided through the School are Summit2success Programme, Aspire to University and our Year 6 residential. We use pupil premium to fund sport, art and music activities and provide 1:1 tuition and other bespoke educational packages when needed. We celebrate the success of our children and young people through annual celebration events.

We have a Governing body, like any school, we provide reports on the work of the school and the progress and achievements of the children.

We commit to:

- Social workers and personal advisors working with our Virtual School, which ensures monitoring, support and advice for young people throughout the year.
- We'll help to ensure all children and young people achieve their full potential through education, training and good quality employment, making the most of their talents.
- We will identify any Special Education Needs (SEN) and meet these needs through an Education Health Care Plan or other SEN support, helping our young people overcome barriers to education attainment.
- Making sure they have a place at a good school or college and attend regularly.
- We will guarantee that every young person has access to digital devices, study resources, tuition and a high quality Personal Education Plan. They will also have excellent support from a Designated Teacher at their school.
- Ensuring our care experienced young people have a Pathway Plan that has clear information about what support is available once they leave care, go to university or undertake vocational training and apprenticeships. Also connecting them into training, coaching and other opportunities through *Endless Possibilities* and *Walsall Works*.

Transitions and Independence

Our young people will be prepared for the world of work and supported to become active citizens when they leave care. They will be prepared for independence in the best way possible.

Leaving care, like leaving home, is a critical transition for our young people and supporting them through this transition into adulthood is a major responsibility for us as corporate parents. This is not simply a matter of helping young people acquire a checklist of life and independent living skills – although it is those things – but also helping young people develop resilience, have a comfortable sense of self and have options for their futures. We recognise that young people mature at different paces and that some young people will struggle to gain independence and struggle in independence.

Working with our partners in health, education and CAMHS and Walsall Housing Group we are developing services so that young people remain living in the borough where they grew up with access to wrap around support while developing their independent living skills.

In Walsall we listen carefully to our care experienced young people and assess their needs to make sure they have all the services required for a successful transition into adult life. This includes making sure they have suitable accommodation while preparing for independence.

We commit to:

- Ensure that all young people in our care over the age of 16 years have a pathway plan specific to their needs and aspirations.
- We will make every effort to help young people remain living with their foster carer after 18 and up to the age of 21 if they wish (Staying Put)
- Once a young person leaves school, we will help them to make the most of their opportunities in training, further education and employment.
- From the age of 17, you will have a personal advisor to help them to become independent. Care experienced young people can continue with this support up until the age of 25 if they wish to do so.
- Care experienced young people will have the best housing and support offer we can give them. We want all our young people to live in our borough and have access to their communities
- We will ensure our care experienced young people are given as much help as possible to find suitable housing, supported to move and settle into their new home, with provisions made to ensure they're happy, safe and are able to sustain the tenancy.
- We will help our care experienced young people learn the practical skills needed to live independently, such as managing budgets and applying for jobs.
- We will ensure that individual needs are taken into account and the needs of young parents are supported through their transition.
- We will ensure that our care experienced young people know what their entitlements are and provide leaving care financial support, setting up home grant and other forms of financial relief (eg from council tax) in line with our financial assistance policies.
- We will ensure that all young people understand and have access to our local offer
- Young people will continue to receive advice as they gain independence; developing personal resilience as they journey into adulthood.
- Fully support any young person who wishes to pursue higher education to obtain places and apply for student loans. We will fund vacation accommodation for young people as necessary.
- Continue our work with further education colleges, employment training providers, Walsall Works and Endless Possibilities to help young people access high quality training and apprenticeships.
- Challenge ourselves and our partners to provide specific internship, apprenticeship and employment opportunities for our looked after young people and care leavers.

Influence and Involvement

Children and young people are at the heart of service design, delivery and evaluation

Children and young people's Voices must be at the centre of our approach to corporate parenting. We want mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with our children and young people. This means embedding a culture of fully involving young people in all matters affecting them, welcoming and encouraging their participation, actively listening to and genuinely taking account of their views.

The Children in Care Council (CICC) is a voice group for children in care and care experienced young people in Walsall. They meet every month to discuss what improvements need to be made to the support young people receive, particularly those in care or are care leavers. The CiCC meets and invites the Director of Children's Services, senior managers and Councillors to let them know what they are doing and ensure that young people are consulted on matters which affect their lives. The CiCC is regularly involved in decision making at various levels and hold decision makers to account. With the direct purpose of representing Walsall's children in care and care experienced young people the CiCC has had a clear and effective impact on the support that our children receive.

As Corporate Parents, we know that we cannot make effective decisions for young people and provide the support they need without their help, thoughts and views.

We commit to:

- An active Children in Care Council ensuring that the voices of children and young people is central to our work
- Appoint Care Ambassadors to strengthen the voices of children and young people
- We will ensure that children in care and care experienced young people participate in their planning and reviews
- We will ensure we learn from complaints received from young people
- We will ensure care experienced young people are engaged in their pathway planning and reviews
- Our independent reviewing officers will meet our children and young people
- We will enable access to advocacy

Leadership

Our Corporate Parenting Board will take lead responsibility for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and action plan in each of the five key priorities.

The Board will:

- Be a forum for regular, planned and detailed discussion of thematic presentations
- Be a positive link with cared for children and care leaver forums
- Be a mechanism to listen to our cared for children and care leavers; to promote their voice and have influence in decision making
- Receive regular progress reports, service plans and performance reporting aligned to the corporate parenting action plan.
- Consider areas of good practice, developing services and make recommendations to support continued improvement and development
- Provide a governance structure for corporate parenting which provides strong challenge and scrutiny

How will we know that we are doing a good job!

We need to make sure that we do all the things that we have said we will do. Often this involves many people from different organisations across education, care and health and so it is important that we check in with each other. Sometimes we need to ask each other difficult questions, particularly if we think something is not working well or when something goes wrong?

The Corporate Parenting Board and elected members of the council will ask for updates about how well things are going. Corporate Parenting Board will bring together updates from our children in care council and our young people leaving care forum.

The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, Head of the Virtual School, Partners and managers will regularly offer to attend our children and young person meetings and may be 'called in' by the children to do so.

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will regularly be asked to think about the Promise and the ways in which services that help them have changed for the better. This information will be feedback to the Corporate Parenting Board will seek to ensure that current and future priorities, decisions and services will reflect the needs of cared for children and care leavers. The first question the Board will ask of themselves, is, "would this be good enough for my child?"

The Corporate Parenting Strategy will be monitored and evaluated by the Board through:

- Children and young people feel valued and able to shape and influence services
- Performance data will be provided to support and evidence progress on the five priorities
- Our audits telling us about the lived experience of children and young people
- Assurance reports for:
 - Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report
 - Annual Fostering Report and Statement of Purpose
 - Annual Adoption Report
 - Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Annual health of Children in Care Assurance Report
- Improved placement stability and reduction in unplanned endings
- Placement Sufficiency Strategy and Action Plan
- Increased number of care experienced young people entering education, training or employment
- Review and revise our Local Offer for Care Experienced young people