

Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2022/2023

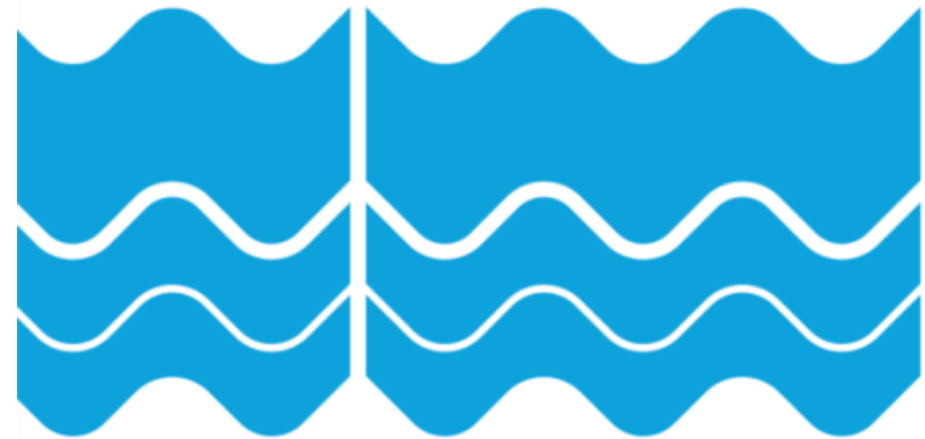
Dawn Price Operations Manager

The Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

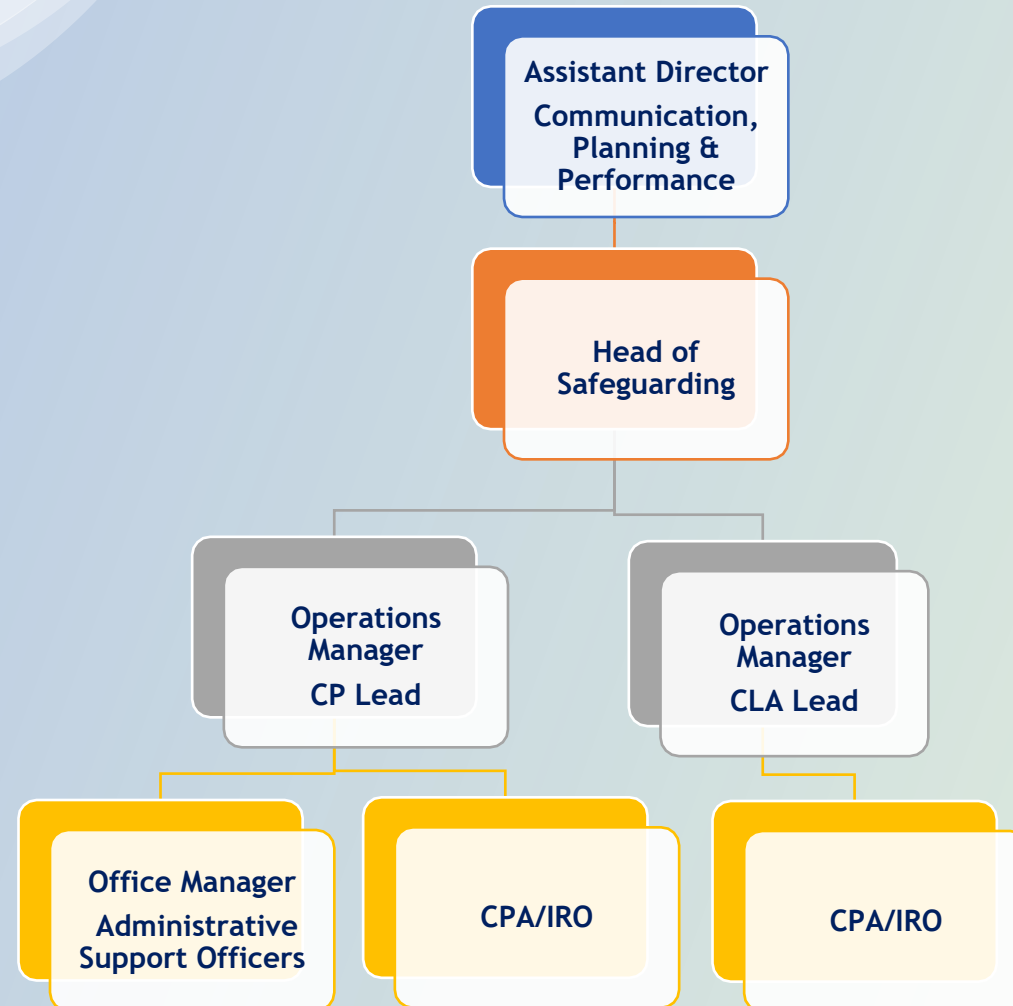
The IRO Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Please see Glossary for definitions

East Sussex
County Council



Children's Safeguarding Unit: Reviewing Service



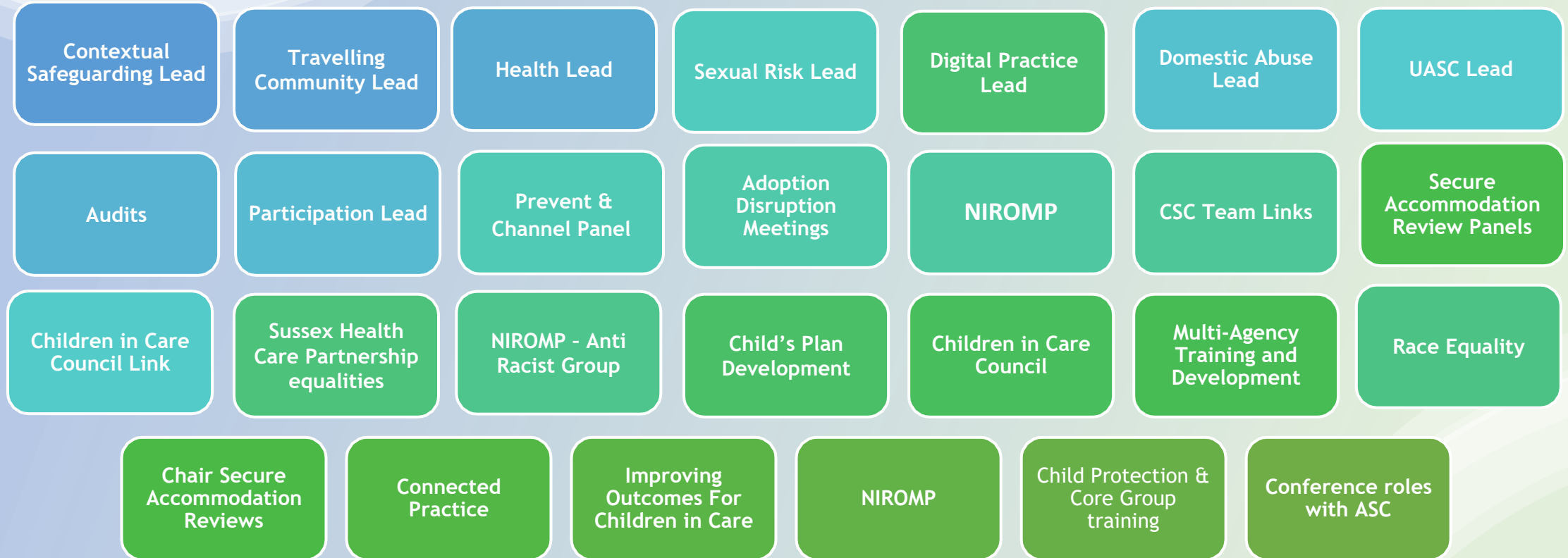


Profile of the Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers

- IRO/CPAs are registered social workers with extensive experience. They have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to plans for the most vulnerable children in our County.
- We are a diverse staff group who bring a wealth of personal and professional skills, along with experience to the role of chairing.
- IROs chair My Voice Matters Meetings; the statutory Looked After Children review meetings. CPAs chair Child Protection Conferences; the two roles are separated by different legislation and regulatory protocols which each require a depth and breadth of expertise and knowledge.
- In common with some OLAs most of the Chair's fulfill a dual role thereby ensuring they retain a better sense of the child's journey and holistic experience. Separate management streams ensure a focus on legislative / practice developments and quality assurance of each function.
- Strategic management of case-loads combined with recruitment of temporary staff and increased hours of current staff, successfully resulted in minimal disruption to service delivery.

CPA & IRO additional roles

CPAs/IROs undertake a range of additional responsibilities including:



Operations Managers additional responsibilities

ESSCP sub group chair - LSCLG	Child Plan Development Group	Get Digital Steering Group	LADO Cover
SEIROMP	Life Story Steering Group	Quality Assurance Performance Reporting & Audits	HR & OFSTED Checks
London CP Managers Forum	Transition Panel	Reviewing Lansdowne Restraints	SESLIP CP Chair subgroup
Group Supervision	Contributing to Safeguarding Practice Reviews	ESSCP Learning & Development subgroup	Mind of My Own steering group



Dual role caseloads

- Chairs in the Safeguarding Unit hold a dual role; reviewing both Child Protection Plans and Care Plans. Chairing an average of 5 conferences or My Voice Matters meeting each week, alongside other duties.
- The Unit operates a caseload weighting system using a formula to calculate workload points. The formula recognises that whilst IROs have additional responsibilities for children looked after, Child Protection caseloads can be more dynamic, meetings and often involve multiple children involving a higher level of risk. Proficiency in both roles necessitates an advanced depth and breadth of professional knowledge.
- Whilst CPA caseloads are not set in legislation the government has set statutory good practice guidance of a caseload of 50 - 70 children per for full time equivalent IRO (The IRO Handbook DfE).
- An increase in Child Protection Conferences and Children becoming Looked After has led to higher caseloads in this review period.
- In this review period the team have on average held a caseload of 101 children, which averages at 86 workload points. The number of children on an average caseload remains higher than the IRO Handbook recommendations. Additional resources agreed in 2022/23 for increased staffing in 2023/2024

Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

In its response to the care review, the DfE pledged to retain both the IRO role and that of regulation 44 visitors, it pledged to “review and strengthen” both roles.

It is a legal requirement for every Looked After Child to have a named IRO. IROs quality assure the Care Planning process for children who are Looked After and ensure that their wishes and feelings are understood.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the performance by the local authority’s of their functions in relations to the child’s case.
- Participate in any review of the child’s case.
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- Perform any other function as prescribed in the regulations.

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child’s current needs and that actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority’s legal responsibilities towards the child.

The Independent Reviewing Service contributes to East Sussex’s Core Offer for Children’s Social Care:

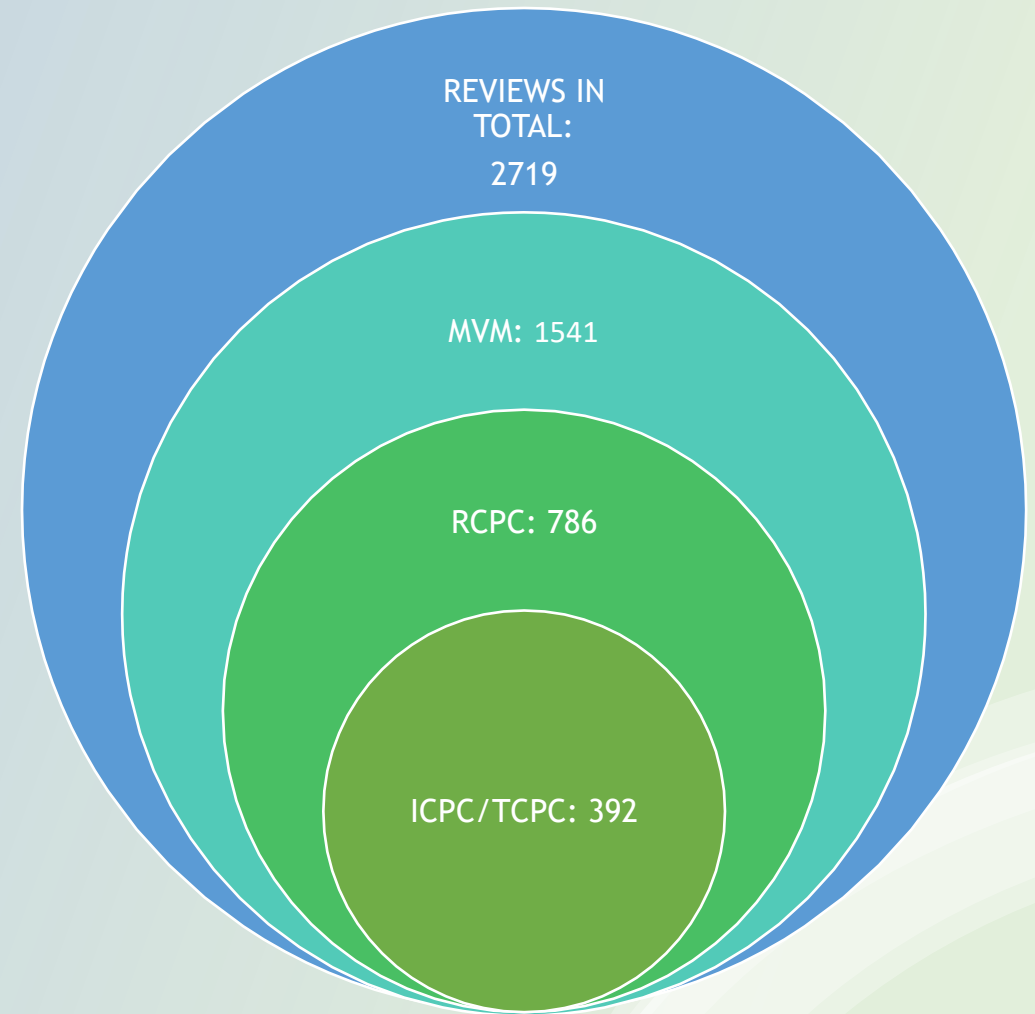
Provide care and support for children where there is evidence that they have suffered significant harm or are at immediate risk of significant harm and provide an alternative home for children who are unable to live with their parents or in their extended family.

Conferences and My Voice Matters Meetings are usually held as a single review involving all relevant family and professionals. However meetings may be held in two or more parts to ensure that they are effective, safe and facilitate the child's needs.

In addition to their professional focus, preparing parents, carers and children for the meeting and ensuring their wellbeing throughout the process; Chairs exercise a key role in the implementation of the Local Authority's Quality Assurance Framework.

2020/21: reviews held 2698 (MVM - 1467. CP - 1231)
2021/22: reviews held 2621 (MVM - 1498. CP - 1123)
2022/23: reviews held 2719 (MVM - 1541. CP - 1178)

The service has chaired:
1178 Conferences involving 2385 Child's Plans
1541 individual My Voice Matters Meetings
Equating to on average 202 meetings/conferences per Chair



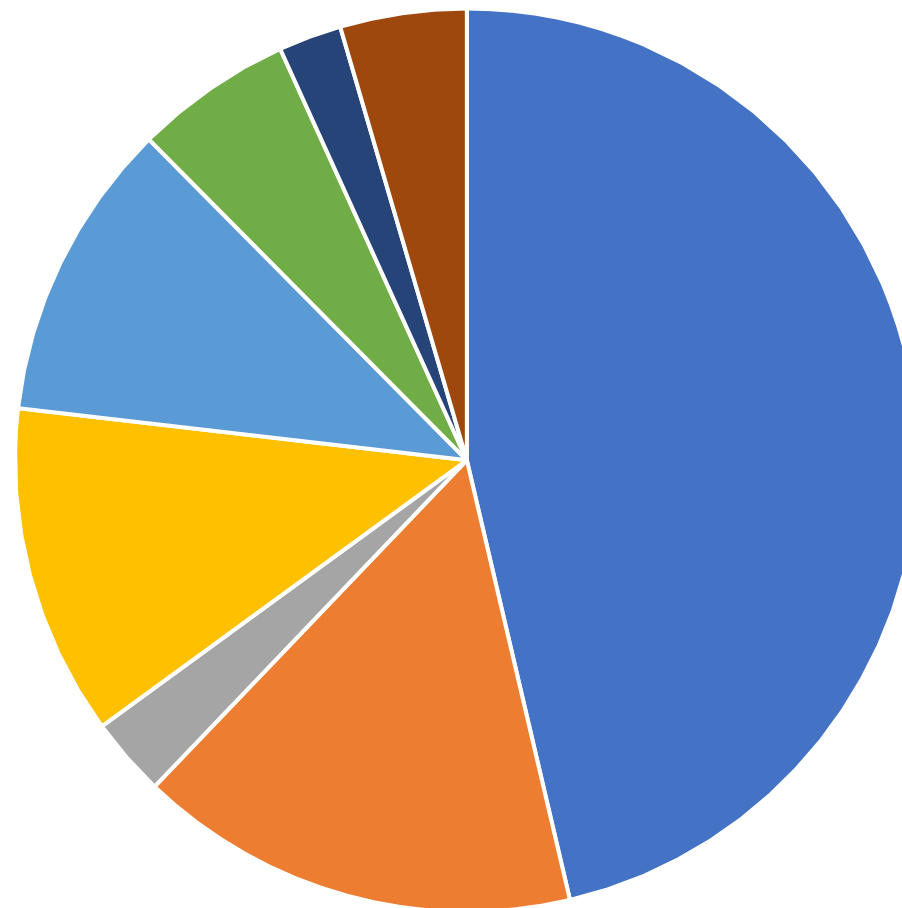


Issues Resolution

- Quality Assurance Monitoring and evidence of independent challenge via a locally agreed dispute resolution process is a statutory requirement of both the CPA and IRO function. The Safeguarding Unit operates a consistent process across the CPA/IRO service
- It is important that there is evidence of effective challenge by CPAs/IROs on a child's file.
- In this review period 118 Issues Resolutions were raised by the CPAs & IROs.
- 86% of the Issues Resolutions were resolved within 20 working days. To resolved the Practice Manager needs to reply and note the action that will be taken, and the CPA/IRO needs to agree the action is sufficient. When the Issues Resolution is about historic events, for example visiting the IR is closed when the PM agrees to review, address any concerns and monitor.
- 8% Issues Resolutions were escalated to the Operations Manager before being resolved, this includes sibling groups who share the issue being raised.
- No Issues Resolutions were escalated beyond Operation Manager level.

Issues Resolution

Raised by CPAs & IROs as part of the Quality Assurance role.



■ admin process

■ care plan

■ resources

■ visiting

■ drift, delay, decisions

■ professionals standards

■ participation

■ safeguarding/standards of care

Consultation & Feedback: email & QR codes

The consultation and feedback forms for Child Protection Conferences and My Voice Matters meetings, have been in place for this review period. As a Unit we made the decision not to use these forms with children as they are able to access the Mind of My Own app either with their social worker or independently. We continue to work to increase the consultation and feedback, but the figures are a significant increase from previous years; since introducing digital options which include the use of the QR code.

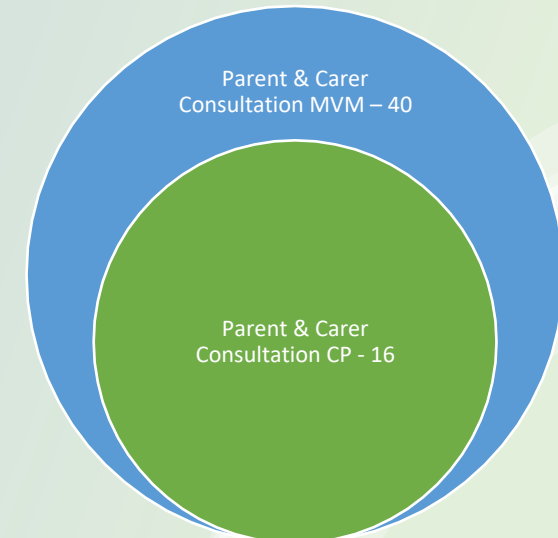
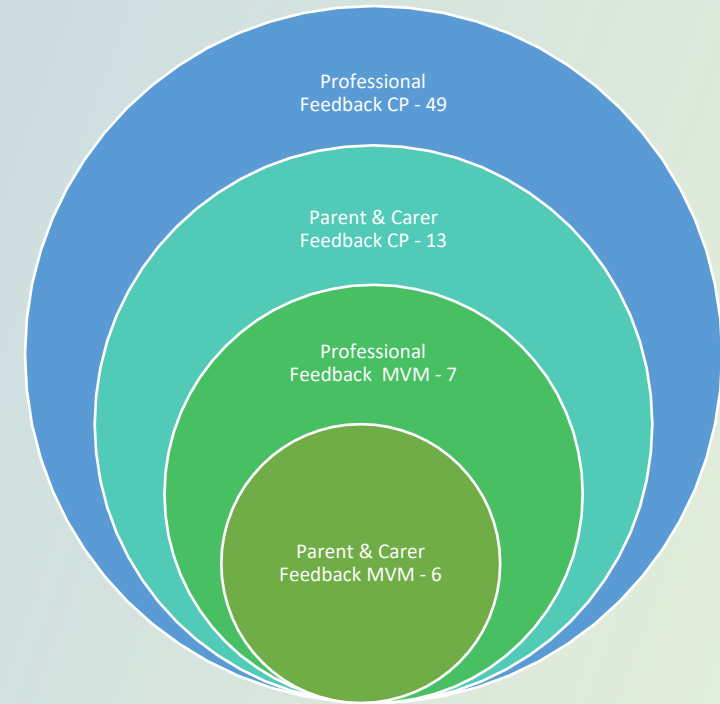
Mind of My Own:

The CPA/IROs encourage social workers to support children to use the app to gain their views prior to conferences and MVMs.

Children are using the app to prepare for their MVM meetings, used 102 times, with the conference app being used 10 times.

70% of children use the app with their social worker.

The My Life and This is Me app have been used 133 times, this holds key information that can be used by chairs to support positive engagement with children.



Knowing our Looked After Children

At the end of March 2023 ESCC was looking after 661 children, equivalent to 65 per 10,000.

This was an increase on the previous years:

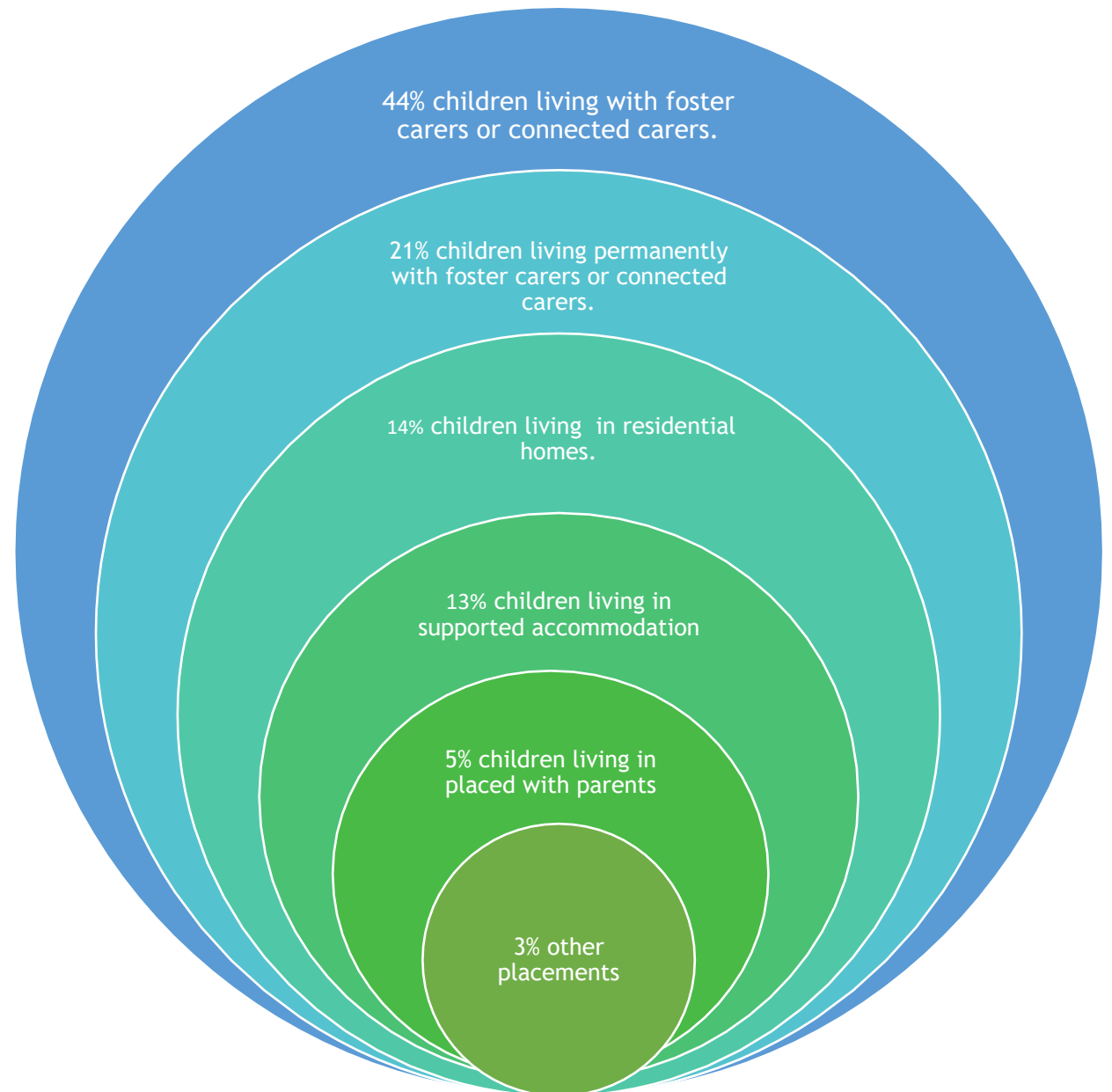
end of March 2020 - 592
end of March 2021 - 611
end of March 2022 - 623

12 children who are held in the children with disabilities service were also looked after.

57% of our looked after children were male.

69% of our children lived in a family setting at end of March 2023.

End of March 2022 73% of our children lived in family settings.





Knowing our Looked After Children

22% of placements for children Looked After by ESCC were out of County in 2022/2023.

68% of Looked After Children under 16yrs in ESCC had been accommodated in the same placement for at least 2 years. This is slightly higher than our Statistical Neighbour group* (66%)

IROs particularly scrutinise those plans where children have had a series of moves or where their placement appears fragile.

ESCC continues to promote children having long term relationships with the same IRO and ensuring that brothers and sisters have the same IRO where appropriate.

March 2020: 62% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)

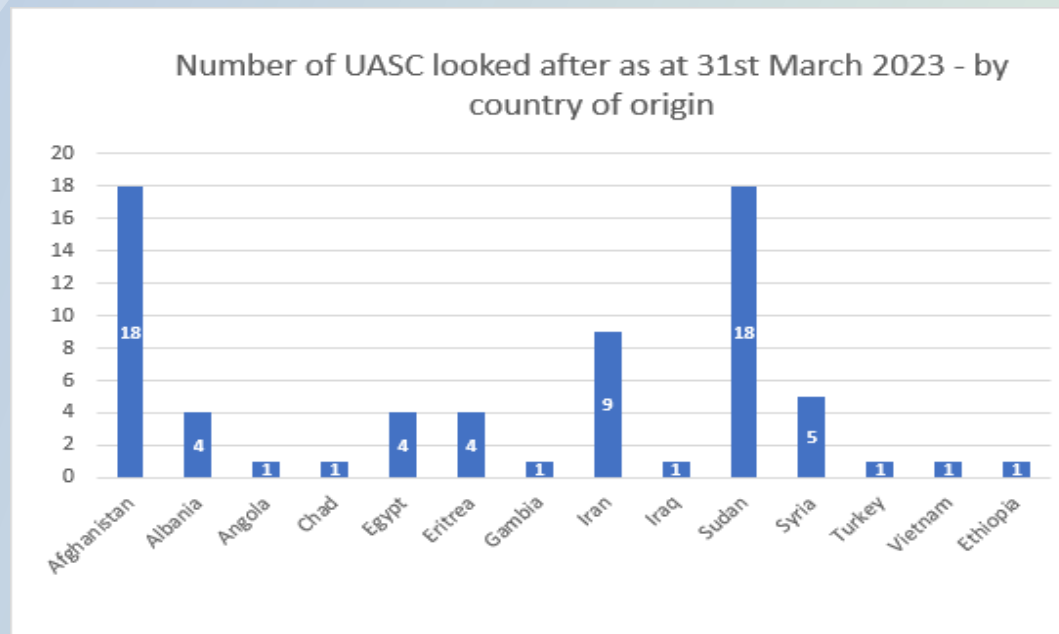
March 2021: 64% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)

March 2022: 73% same placement for at least 2yrs (under 16yrs)

In November 2022 there was an unusual increase of children admitted to care; 40 children becoming looked after compared with average monthly figures of between 15-23 children. This led to an increase in demand for placements and 1st MVM meetings.

End of March 2023 ESCC were looking after 69 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children



UASC	Age at Mar23	Count of CHILD
	12	1
	14	2
	15	6
	16	23
	17	37

As per published DfE figures there were:

End March 2022 - 59 UASC

End March 2021 - 56 UASC

- For UASC coming in to care during 22/23, 24 were aged 17 (9 of these were at least 17½)
- UASC represent 38.3% of all ethnic minority children looked after as at 31st March 2023
- 9% of UASC end March are aged less than 16
- 96% of UASC end March are male

Ethnicity of the children looked after population.

(31st March 2023)

27.2% of our looked after children identify as minority ethnic or mixed heritage - this includes our UASC

Ethnicity	Count of CHILD
African	26
Any other Asian background	6
Any other Black background	2
Any other ethnic group	43
Any other mixed background	34
Any other White background	21
Caribbean	3
Gypsy / Roma	16
Pakistani	1
Traveller of Irish Heritage	2
White and Asian	5
White and Black African	8
White and Black Caribbean	13
White British	481

My Voice Matters Meetings

Timeliness of My Voice Matters meetings:

95% of all My Voice Matters Meetings were held early or on time in 2022/2023.

2019/2020 - 92%

2020/2021 - 95%

2021/2022 - 97%

6 MVM meetings were held within 4 weeks of the scheduled date. Most late reviews were delayed in the child's best interests or because an essential party was unable to attend.

Participation: children make their voices heard in lots of different ways:

97% of Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their review process;

2019/2020 - 91%

2020/2021 - 95%

2021/2022 - 97%

There has been positive feedback about the IRO profiles that are now shared with Looked After Children; they noted that they like knowing a little bit about their IRO

This is the ESCC approach to statutory LAC Reviews.

Paperwork is written to be accessible to the individual child. The records outcome is written as a letter to the child and copied to adult as necessary.

Outcome letters to children support their understanding in making sense of their experiences

Next year around January time, a Judge (Wise Owl) and a jury (a group of grown ups specially chosen) are going to hear all the information about the injuries you had when you were a baby. They will then decide whether they think that daddy caused these or not. This is called a trial. Your Social Worker has now made an application for criminal injuries on your behalf because of the injuries you suffered. Any money awarded to you will be kept in a trust fund until you are an adult. (3yrs)

BW gave an update on where things are with your Asylum claim. You are at the early stages and your first interview with your solicitor is scheduled to explain the Asylum process. RW also confirmed that you have received your ARC and that you can now open a bank account and start saving money yourself. You shared you are a practising Muslim and have everything you need in order to practise your faith. You also confirmed that you have spoken with your family back home in Afghanistan and they're OK and they know you are safe. (16yrs)

We heard that you have not seen or spoken to your mum for quite a long time as she has been needing to try and get help for herself. You have had some video calls with your dad. We spoke about how important it is for you to have time with mum and dad and for this to be a positive experience for you. There are worries that this has not always been the case with your mum and dad and we agreed some things to try and make sure this happens in future. (6yrs)

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Children's voices and achievements are captured in their outcome letters

We are all really pleased how things have gone over the last six months. Your confidence has increased, which has enabled you to attend things like the FS programme and we had great feedback from the staff too. It's really positive you taken on the role of peer mentor in school. It's an important job for sure, and I think you're very good at it too. (15yrs)

It was fun to see you today, we had an enjoyable time talking about Harry Potter and you gave me a very good quizzing of my knowledge - I thought I knew a lot about HP but you know even more! I really liked some of the questions you asked that went behind the thoughts and motivations of the characters, such as what certain characters would do in different situations, very creative and insightful. You were really good at staying the whole way through the meeting, and sometimes you covered yourself with a blanket and nodded, nudged me, or put your thumbs up to keep communicating - what a clever idea, you are getting so good at finding different ways to manage how you are feeling. You have a good relationship with your fostering family, particularly MW and you told me today that you trusted and love MW, MW said she trusts and loves you too. (13yrs)

Thank-you for helping me in the meeting by asking questions and using the finger puppets I gave you to help you be so actively involved, you were a star. I was so pleased to hear how well you are doing at school and that you are doing fantastically with your spellings and reading. You do lots of fantastic things like going for walks to the park, swimming and you recently went to Bewl water and to Bodiam Castle for an Easter Egg hunt. You said love watching films and you still love Elsa and Lion King. (7yrs)

You are a keen cricketer and JS is going to see if he can secure some funds for some cricket kit for you. EW also shared that you are a polite, respectful, fun-loving young person and great to be around. We talked about Ramadan and how you and some other boys will be sharing shopping, cooking, and eating together for the sunset breaking of fast. (17yrs)

Thanks so much for making us all so welcome. Thank you for talking through your feelings and views for your meeting that you had recorded via the App. It was good to hear you have so many good things in your life including talking about you having an amazing family, friends and teachers at school. You are very busy as usual with all your clubs and activities. We heard that you continue to do well at school, working hard on your learning and individual targets. Well done! We ended your meeting with you performing an amazing song for us. It was very special; you are so talented and it's a real joy to hear your music. Thank you so much! (10yrs)

Children,
Carers,
Parents &
Social Workers
share that
MVM meetings
and outcome
letters are
child focused
& meaningful

“After you left, both K and FC said how much they liked the review with you. K said you were very kind and easy to talk to and they both felt they got a lot from the review.”

“It was a breath of fresh air seeing you on the floor with KP and writing your notes in that way. I have to say, it was the most child focused and inclusive review I have experienced. I am very pleased to have you on board.”

“I just wanted to drop you a line to say what a lovely MVM Review that was. Meeting new people can be a big thing for SC, but I could see how relaxed she was with your approach. What a pleasure it is to have you as the IRO.”


“Great letter, I can see DP having a little laugh about big foot whilst reading that. He feels able to ask JC to call you or me and set up a meeting and most of all; you do all the jobs he asks you to do for his MVM Meeting.”

2I went to see JS yesterday and was able to have some time with the carer, she said how impressed she was with you and described you as the best IRO she has worked with. Your breadth of knowledge came through and she just thought you were amazing.”

“Good news to report H stayed over at mum’s last night! Spoke to him this morning and he was beaming he’s like a different kid. I asked him if he enjoyed attending the meetings and being able to have a voice and he said he did. He said that when it was a split decision and you asked him to score about how he felt and then agreed with the plan that he wanted, that he felt really good (empowered) as he felt like he counted. He has asked to attend every meeting.”

“I would also like to thank you for making me feel at ease for the duration of the review.”

“You have a lovely nice and warm approach with the young people, it is lovely.”



Children in Care Council shared feedback with IRO link.

- Most of the CiCC agreed that they get a choice of where to hold their MVM meeting.
- Some of them shared that at times they had felt ‘pushed’ into agreeing who should come to the MVM meeting.
- They all agreed it was important to be asked about their MVM meetings; and then their wishes to be put into practice
- They said that they liked having in person meetings again.
- They like it when snacks are available at the MVM meetings.
- They said that short and less formal MVM meetings are better.
- They do not like it if they only come to part of their meeting, feeling that people are talking about them rather than with them.
- The group said they had not had the opportunity to chair their own MVM meetings, but they would like to.
- Most of the CiCC could name their IRO.
- There was mixed feelings about speaking/seeing their IRO outside of the MVM meeting.
- None of the CiCC had used an advocate for their last few MVM meetings.
- They had mixed feelings about using the Mind of My Own app; they questioned if the responses were read or used.

The points raised by CiCC will be shared with IROs and SWs to continue to improve the MVM meetings. The link will review with CiCC if they have seen an improvement in the points made.

Care Plans In court and Beyond

Providing properly informed IRO views within Care Proceedings can be challenging, given the nature of Court directed timetables and the need for IROs have the opportunity to fully consider all evidence
There have been a number of instances Nationally where Local Authorities have been criticised due to IROs failing to robustly monitor and comment on cases

Working with the Legal Department we now have a system that enables the IRO to have full access to the Court Bundle throughout the case, ensuring that they are able to take proper account of all assessments when considering the Care Plan

The IRO should feel confident that s/he is being kept fully informed of the progress of the child's case, during and at the conclusion of the proceedings...The legal department of the local authority should...provide copies of all relevant court documents to the IRO... (IRO Handbook)

Increase the use of Midway Reviews:	IROs are reporting higher use of midway reviews. They are now being used for CP Plans too and CPA/IROs receive an alert to complete the review.
Utilise the Issues Resolution reporting system to identify themes, establish a mechanism for feedback to CSC managers:	There had been a significant delay in creating the data dashboard, this is now in place and the next phase will be sharing the information with CSC manager. The themes are included in this report.
Monthly QA audits of MVM letters & Midway Reviews, include timeliness and content: Embed and support the refreshed QA framework:	<p>This has been achieved, 3 CPA/IRO audited each month.</p> <p>This has been achieved and CPA/IRO are part of the monthly audits. OM offered to visit all social work teams and as part of the visit share the QA part of the IRO role. Work has begun to outline a QA guidance sheet for pre-meeting reports and care plans.</p>
Promote the Health Lead Link:	The health lead link has built good relationships with the health teams. The link updates the SGU on relevant health issues and can be available for discussions or advice to IROs.
Build a robust referral pathways for UASC under National Transfer Scheme:	This has been achieved and is in place in LCS to ensure that timescales are adhered to.
Increase the numbers of children supported by the Advocacy Service in the MVM process:	This review period the advocacy service worked with 77 looked after children; including 5 UASC. They supported several children to share their views about placement moves. The advocacy service, Asphaleia was awarded the contract in August 2021; this year 2022-2023 being their 1 st year of reporting. The data they provide shows a slight increase in the numbers of children looked after being supported in their MVM meetings; Jan-March 2022 - 7 children, Jan-March 2023 - 8 children. It remains a priority that IROs promote the use of an advocate, the details of the service are including the in the IRO information leaflet sent to all children looked after.

Progress on 2022-2023 service priorities

Implementation and promotion of the revised child protection plan process:	plans for CPAs to led on the training & promote in link meetings with SW teams.
Embedding the use of mid-way CP reviews:	review the percentage being completed and assess impact on the length of CP Plans.
Further develop service user feedback and voice of the child including the use of Mind of My Own, use of the parental contribution tools and promote advocacy:	plan to highlight in unit meetings, continued member in the steering group for MOMO, update the invites to encourage parental contributions.
Embed the Safeguarding Unit's quality assurance role:	plan continued attendance in unit meetings and quarterly themed audits.
Reviews to have a focus on school attendance, EHE and children missing education:	plan to ensure all chairs keep this items on their agenda and to raise concerns as appropriate. Audit within this review period.
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Identify looked after children where safe reunification with a family member could be a possibility:	reviewing care plans & contact plans, requesting appropriate FGC, being mindful from proceedings about parents who may have capacity to change outside of the court/child's timescales.
Promotion of life story work:	plan to have unit members in the steering group and promote in link meetings to raise awareness.

Reviewing Service Priorities 2023-2024

Glossary

ASO - Administrative Support Officer
BASW - British Association of Social Workers
CiCC - Children in Care Council
CP - Child Protection
CPA - Child Protection Advisor
CSC - Children's Social Care
ESSCP - East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership
GPDR - General Data Protection Regulation
HR - Human Resources
ICPC / RCPC - Initial Child Protection Conference / Review Child Protection Conference
IMR - Independent Management Review
IRO - Independent Reviewing Officer
LAC/CLA - Looked After Child
LADO - Local Authority Designated Officer
LCS - Liquid logic Children's Service (IT system)
LSCLG - Local Safeguarding Liaison Group
MACE - Multi Agency Child Exploitation
MVM - My Voice Matters
OM - Operations Manager
QA - Quality Assurance
SCR - Serious Case Review
SEIROMP/NIROMP - South East / National IRO Managers' Partnership
SESLIP - South East Sector Led Improvement Programme
Social GRRRAACCEESSS - Gender, Geography, Race, Religion, Age, Ability, Appearance, Culture, Class, Education, Ethnicity, Spirituality, Sexuality, Sexual orientation
TCP - Transfer CP Conference
UASC - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child