

Appendix 1



**Nottingham City Council
Independent Reviewing Service, Annual Report
2016/17**

Purpose of Service and Legal Context.

The service is based in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Section of Nottingham City Children's Integrated Services Directorate. The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service operates within the framework of the updated version of the IRO handbook, national guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and the national guidance for Fostering.

Children in Care

The primary focus of the IRO is to critically examine and quality assure the Care Planning and interventions of the Local Authority in respect of each child or young person in care. Central to this is ensuring that the child's wishes and feelings are given full consideration in planning.

The primary focus therefore is to ensure;

1. There is robust challenge regarding decisions, if there is underlying poor professional practice and concern that decisions are not being taken in the children's interests
2. To challenge the quality of analysis being undertaken, to ensure it identifies the children's needs
3. That views of children, parents, carers and other professionals are given sufficient weight in care planning

Child Protection

Within the child protection system, IROs manage Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences to ensure that there is effective multi-agency planning and activity to improve outcomes for children and young people subject to a protection plan. These requirements reflect the responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) and the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

The IRO Service is also responsible for organising and chairing complex special circumstances meetings. This includes for examples strategy meetings to consider the safety of young people identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) operates from the IRO service and is managed by the Principal Manager (CP).

Fostering

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (fostering) is to ensure that Nottingham City Council foster carers provide suitable care for children in care the IRO is responsible for reviewing all foster carers in line with the Fostering Regulations 2011 and departmental policy.

Action taken to address key issues of 2015 - 16

The IRO Annual Report 2015-16 identified the following areas for development during the course of 2016/17.

1. Finalise the Team establishment in order to recruit to permanent posts. IROs who work with children in care will be the priority to promote good working relationships for children in care with their IRO.

IRO posts were re-graded and permanent funding was identified for all of the established positions. During the course of 2017 the team establishment has been further expanded in response to a recommendation made in a pilot Ofsted inspection that took place in January/February 2017. Further information with regard to this inspection is provided later in the report. Even taking into account this additional capacity significant progress has been made in recruiting permanent staff into the service. At year end most of the IRO team that primarily work with children in care was comprised of permanent staff. It is anticipated that the whole team will be comprised of permanent staff during the second quarter of 2017/18. Further recruitment for the team that focuses on child protection work will take place in early 2017/18.

2. Maximise the opportunities for children and young people to contribute to plans and meetings about them

At the end of Q2 over 90% of children contributed to their Looked After Review. The introduction of the new IT system has temporarily compromised our ability to report on this since that point but we anticipate that performance will have been maintained. We now also include, where appropriate, young people in meetings to discuss concerns about the possibility that they are being sexually exploited. This innovation has proved highly successful in enabling young people to understand why agencies/family members are concerned about their welfare.

3. Support the implementation of new case recording system and ensure that this meets the needs of the wider service area, including the LADO

We worked with colleagues across the department to introduce Liquid Logic, the new case recording system. The new system is significantly different to the previous one and we have encountered some challenges in adapting to this. That said we can already see the benefits the system will bring and continue to support the work that is underway to improve our compliance with what is expected. The new system contains a specific work space for managing the LADO function and we plan to start using this fully in 2017/18. The move to this element of the system was delayed by vacancies within the wider LADO team.

4. Work with the Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator to provide information and intelligence to further strengthen the local response to sexual exploitation

We have established a standard data set that is considered monthly in the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel. The CSE Coordinator has also worked closely with colleagues from

the Police to provide reports to the Safeguarding Children Board, Crime and Drugs Partnership and contributes to the departmental quarterly performance report.

5. Refine and further develop the Causes for Concern process and the Efficacy Framework.

We have completed a detailed review of the Efficacy Framework. This identified that the system was extremely resource intensive and failed to focus on some key issues such as Personal Education Plans and Health assessments. As a consequence the system has been replaced with what we refer to as a live audit tool. In this system each IRO focuses on key issues that impact on the life chances and outcomes for children in care. This system was introduced towards the end of 2016/17 and will allow us to provide quarterly performance reports.

The Ofsted inspection identified the need to increase capacity to ensure that IROs were able to better perform their scrutiny function. Immediate action was taken to increase capacity by 1.5 posts and work will be undertaken during the course of 2017/18 to permanently fund these posts. This additional capacity has all been located within the team that focus' on work with children in care. We plan to fully revise the cause for concern process during the first half of 2017/18.

6. Work in partnership with the Head of Children's Social Work to ensure that action is taken to address the key areas identified as causes for concern.

Please see the section below that relates to the Pilot inspection:

Additional areas of development

In addition to the above we have also supported the development of:

- A new way of structuring the minutes for children in care reviews. The new approach sees the minutes written for the child (e.g. the minutes talk about "your" care plan rather than "the" care plan). Children in care have helped shape this approach and report positively about the change made.
- Team standards which set out what is expected of IROs.

The increase in capacity in the service reported in the 2015/16 Annual report has been increased and the staffing establishment is

- Principle Manager – 2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
- IRO – 15.5 FTE
- LADO – 1 FTE

All of the above posts apart from the 1.5 posts that were added following the Pilot inspection are permanently funded. The LADO post continues to be funded by the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board given the multi-agency focus of this post.

The extra capacity created in Business Support Service has also been maintained and the diary manager posts are now permanent.

Quantitative Information

This section reports upon the activity that the IRO Service has been involved in over the past year. It does not include the role of the LADO which will be subject to a separate Annual Report specifically analyzing activity, themes and context separately for the Safeguarding Board. The figures below relate to specific circumstances (strategy meetings) meetings that are held to consider issues such as Sexual Exploitation and Historical Abuse. It should be noted however that there has been significant increase in demand for such meetings which has impacted on IRO capacity.

Meetings held

	Looked After Reviews	Child Protection Conferences	Total
2016/17	1,619	1,582	3,201

It should be noted that the figures above are likely to be under reporting as they are based on a manual count. This is a consequence of the transfer to a new IT system during the course of the year.

Child Protection

On 31st March 2017 there were 480 children and young people subject to a protection plan. This represents a rate per 10,000 of the population of 72.8. The figure for 31st March 2016 was 564. The target for 2016/17 was to reduce the number of children subject to a protection plan.

The average rate in our statutory neighbor group per 10,000 was 59.

Breakdown

Category of plan			
	2015	2016	2017
Physical abuse	9%	11%	6%
Sexual abuse	3%	4%	3%
Emotional abuse	47%	49%	27%
Neglect	36%	36%	36%
Multiple categories ¹	5%	0%	27%

¹ Work is underway to examine the reasons for the significant increase in the use of multiple categories. It seems likely this is a recording issue linked to the new IT system.

As will be seen from the information in Appendix 1 there were slightly more boys than girls in care, with children from a White British background forming the largest cohort. This was the same as the position on 31st March 2016.

Of the cohort of children and young people who were subject to a Child Protection Plan that was closed during the year less than 1% had been subject to a plan for 2 years or more. The most recent available figures for performance in this area by statutory neighbors were 4.3%. There was a significant increase in the proportion of children made subject to a protection plan for a second or subsequent time in Q1 of 2016/17, which impacted on the outrun for the year of %, which is a significant increase on the position in 2015/16 of 8%.

At the end of Q2 98% of reviews were within timescale. Again the implementation of the new IT system has temporarily impacted on our ability to produce performance information in relation to this but we anticipate that performance continued to be at that level

Children Looked After

On 31st March 2017 there were 605 children and young people in care. This represents a rate per 10,000 of the population of 92. The figure for 31st March 2016 was 589.

The rate in our statutory neighbors per 10,000 was 96.5.

Just over 84.8% of children in care were placed within 20 miles of Nottingham, which represents an improvement when compared to the previous year (80.2%)

As will be seen from the information in Appendix 1 there were slightly more boys than girls in care, with children from a White British background forming the largest cohort. This is similar to the position reported in the IRO annual reports for the last two years

Qualitative Information

Causes for concern

One of the key functions of the Independent Reviewing Officer service is to quality assure work undertaken with children and families to promote good outcomes. One element of this work is to escalate a case where there are issues which need to be addressed in order to achieve this. This process is referred to as the cause for concern process.

Proportionally the majority of causes for concern were raised in relation to work with children in care. This is unsurprising as the requirement to have an escalation process in relation work with children in care has been in place for some time. It is important to see this figure in context as the IRO will initiate a process after a meeting and, as will be seen from the figures above this indicates that such processes are only initiated in a small minority of cases.

Key themes from this process are:

Child Protection

- Work not being completed in a timely way
- Reports not being available in advance of meetings

Children in care

- Failing to progress contact arrangements
- Work not being progressed/completed in a timely way
- Care plans not being submitted in advance of meetings

Complements

The IRO service highlights examples of good practice where these are identified as it felt these provide an excellent opportunity for wider learning. This process is not as well embedded as the Cause for concern process so numbers are comparatively low. Strengthening the approach to capturing positive practice will be addressed in the refreshing of the Cause for Concern process. Examples of the types of positive practice identified have included

- Excellent work to progress a complex child protection plan in a timely way
- A persistent and tenacious approach to implementing an adoption plan for a young person who was difficult to place
- High quality reports

Inspection Findings

As indicated above in January/February 2017 Ofsted piloted their new inspection framework in Nottingham City. As this was a pilot inspection the report will not be published by Ofsted however we are able to reference the findings. The inspection focussed on services to children in need of support/protection and children in care.

The overall judgements were:

- The impact of leaders on practice with children and families – Good
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – Good
- The experiences and progress of children looked after and care leavers, and achieving permanence – Requires Improvement²
- Overall Effectiveness – Good

Key findings from the inspection which are directly relevant to the IRO service area were:

² The key issues which impacted on this judgement were in relation to the way in which the leaving care service sustained engagement with harder to reach young people and capacity in the IRO service.

- Plans for children promote their safety and welfare. The plans set out clearly what needs to happen to improve children's circumstances. This is particularly the case in child protection planning, where parents are helped to understand the concerns for their children.
- When children are made subject to child protection plans, partner agencies work effectively with families to improve children's circumstances. Partners use the local authority's adopted model of social work practice well in child protection conferences.
- Partners contribute fully to child protection planning and parents understand exactly what needs to happen.
- Children looked after live in stable and secure homes where they are supported to live full and enjoyable lives.
- Carers are supported to provide high-quality homes that can look after brothers and sisters together. Very careful consideration is given to children living with carers who can meet their needs.
- When placement issues arise, appropriate action is taken to address and resolve them.

Moving Forward

Priorities for 2016/17

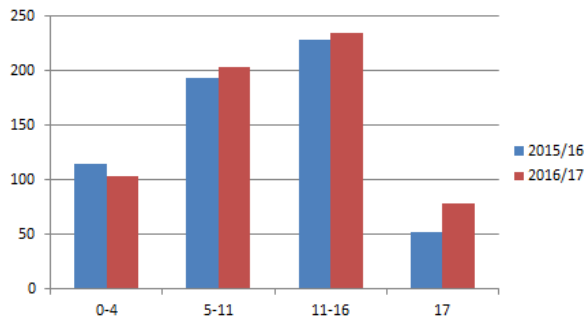
1. **Finalise the Team establishment in order to recruit to the additional post permanent posts.**
2. **Finalise the review of the cause for concern process and ensuring that the approach to learning from positive feedback is strengthened.**
3. **Collate live audit information to use as a basis for performance reporting in relation to children in care**
4. **Finalise the development of the live audit tool for use in child protection planning.**
5. **Contribute to the ongoing strategic analysis of risks associated with child sexual exploitation.**

Eve Hailwood
(Principle Manager, Quality Assurance)

Alison Plaitkw
(Principle Manager, Quality Assurance)

Appendix 1 – Profiles.

Age of Children in care



**Gender of children in care
2015/16**

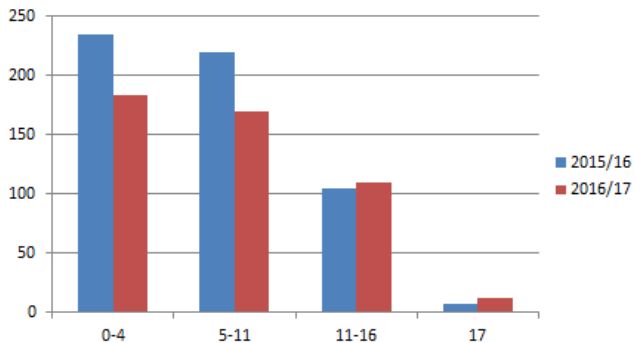


**Gender of children in care
2016/17**



Ethnicity of Children in Care 2016/17	
Any other ethnic group	16
Arab	3
Asian / Asian British / Bangladeshi	1
Asian / Asian British / Pakistani	13
Asian / Asian British / Indian	3
Asian / Asian British / Any other Asian background	17
Black / Black British / African	29
Black / Black British / Caribbean	20
Black / Black British / Any other Black background	6
Chinese	0
Gypsy / Roma	3
Mixed White & Black African	8
Mixed White & Asian	6
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	71
Mixed any other mixed background	26
Unknown	5
White British	362
White Irish	7
White any other White background	24
Total	620

Age of Children Subject to a Protection plan



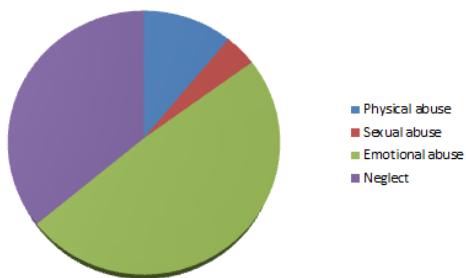
Gender of children subject to a protection plan 2015/16



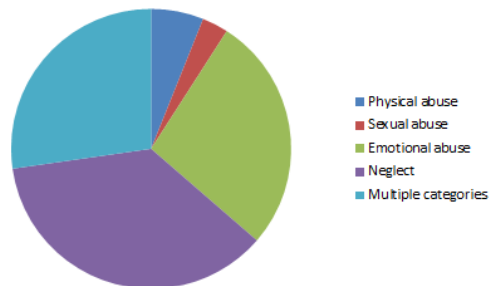
Gender of children subject to a protection plan 2015/16



Category of Plan 2015/16



Category of plan 2016/17



Ethnicity of children subject to a Protection Plan as at 31st March 2017

Any other ethnic group	5
Arab	0
Asian / Asian Brit - Bangladeshi	0
Asian / Asian Brit - Indian	1
Asian / Asian Brit - Pakistani	15
Asian / Asian Brit -Any other Asian background	8
Black / Black Brit - African	9
Black / Black Brit - any other black background	1
Black / Black Brit - Caribbean	11
Client refused to specify	0
Gypsy / Roma	0
Mixed - any other mixed background	13
Mixed - White & Asian	19
Mixed - White & Black African	1
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	49
Traveler of Irish Heritage	0
Unknown	6
White - Any other White background	15
White British	323
White Irish	1