

Nottingham City Council

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service

IRO Service

Children in Care & Child Protection

Annual Report
2019 – 2020

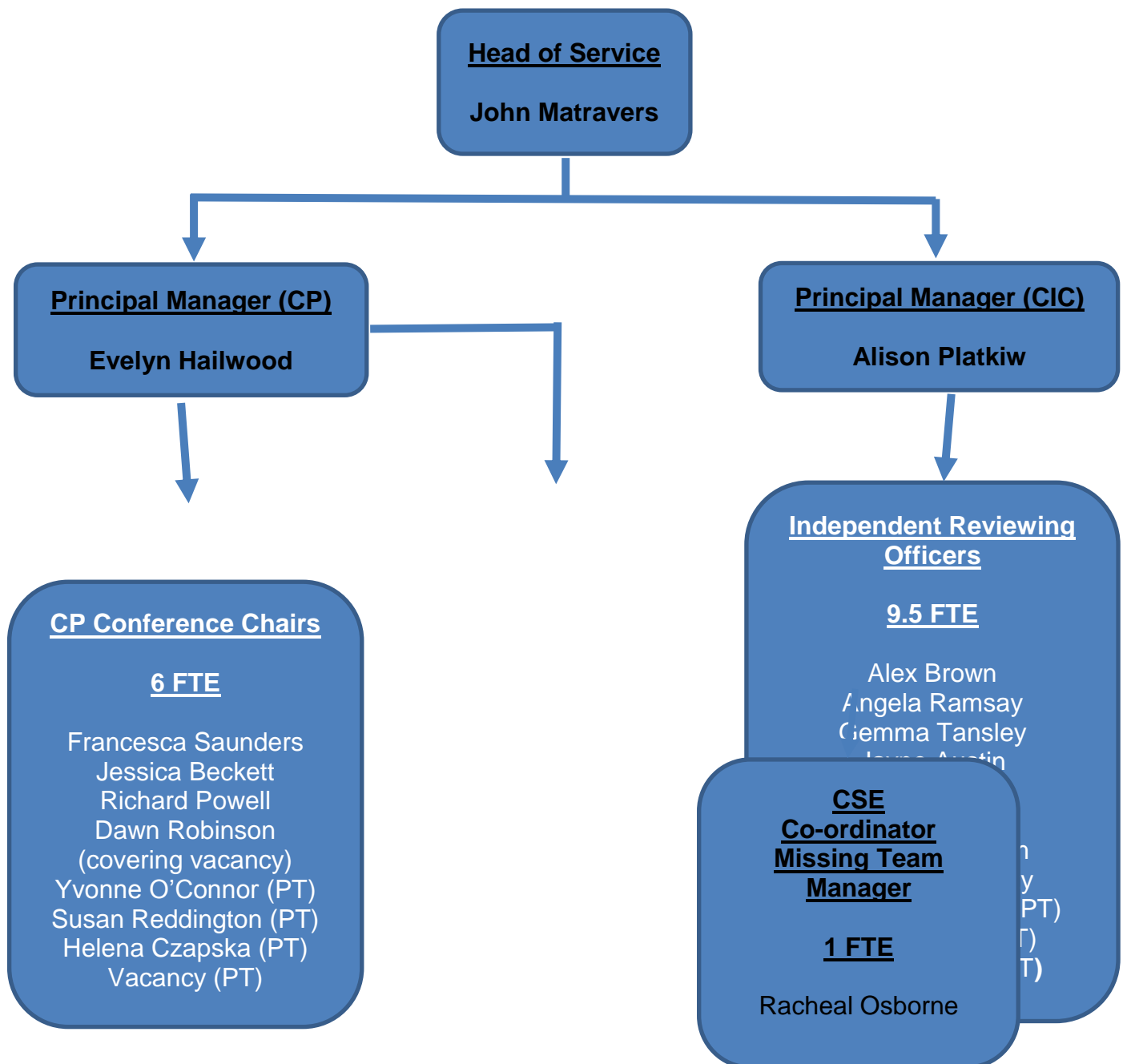


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City Council

IRO and Child Protection Coordinators Service structure chart:



Children in Care Service

This report sets out the contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officers to quality assuring and improving services for children whom Nottingham City Council are responsible for.

This Annual Report provides evidence relating to the services in Nottingham City as required by statutory guidance.

The core business of the team includes the chairing of Children in Care reviews and monitoring the activity of the Local Authority as outlined in the IRO Handbook 2010.

The IRO Annual Report will be presented to The Corporate Parenting Board and the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership(NCCSP).

Purpose of Service and Legal Context

The service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service of Nottingham City Councils Children's Integrated Services Directorate. The Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance, which were introduced in 2015.

The Responsibility of the IRO (Children in Care)

The responsibility of the IRO changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case. This includes regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews.

The IRO

- Plays a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children in care.
- Ensures a process for challenging drift and delay.
- Ensures that the views of the children, parents and carers are given sufficient weight in Care planning.

Professional Profile of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO)

The IRO Service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service offering independence to the role. There are two Principal Managers responsible for Children

in Care and Child Protection. Both sides of the service sit together to maintain some team cohesiveness.

To offer clarity of the roles and enable the development of specialisms each side of the Service is responsible for different elements of the service. To further promote clarity Independent Reviewing Officers undertaking Children in Care Reviews are known as IRO's.

All IRO's are qualified Social Workers, sufficiently experienced with a wide range of Social Care experiences which brings a positive level of depth and knowledge to the service.

Independent Reviewing Officers

Every child who is '*looked after*' (Nottingham City use the term children in care) by Nottingham City Council must have a care plan. This document details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing, and the arrangements made by Nottingham City Children's Integrated Services to meet the child's day-to-day needs. All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to review the Care Plan regularly, within legislative timescales, as stipulated in the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations.

It is a legal requirement for every child who is in care to have an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to them under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook (2010) outlines the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children in care. The handbook specifies that the Independent Reviewing Officer should provide continuity in the oversight of matters relating to a child being in care and that they should strive to establish a consistent relationship with the child. The statutory duties of the Independent Reviewing Officer include the following:

- Monitor the performance of the Local Authority and their function in relation 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.
- Perform any other function, which is prescribed by the regulations.

From December 2012, the children in care population was extended to include those children placed on remand in a secure unit or youth offending institution under the terms of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. This legislation placed a responsibility on all Local Authorities to treat the child as a child in care, up to the age of 18 years, who is remanded into custody. Each of these children is required to have a Remand Plan, which is equivalent to the Care Plan.

Independent Reviewing Officers role in Short Breaks

The Statutory Guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks 2010 focuses in particular on the decision as to whether overnight short breaks should be provided under section 17 or section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and the consequences in relation to '*looked after*' status if section 20 provision is made.

The guidance states (para 3.19) that reviews for children who are receiving short breaks under S20 arrangements but who are not looked after should take place at least every six months. Reviews for looked after children must take place in accordance with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and be undertaken by an IRO.

Within Nottingham City Council Short Breaks Services Policy is that IRO's are responsible for chairing all reviews where children are accessing Short Breaks for 36 nights or above.

Management Team and Staffing

The Head of Service remains as John Matravers, who has now taken this role on permanently.

We continue to have a permanent staff team of both full and part time workers. We have had no changes to the current IRO's in post.

As a service, we have attempted to provide a balance between male and female workers. We have a culturally diverse team, which reflects the diverse population of Nottingham City.

IRO's work flexibly from home and can access other offices across the city to meet the needs of the service. There are fortnightly team meetings, but IRO's communicate with each other for support and advice and their Principal Manager between these meetings.

These steps contribute to ensuring a highly motivated integrated and well-supported team.

Supervision and Training

IRO's have monthly supervision and informal supervision when required. All IRO's have a yearly performance appraisal and are encouraged to attend training in line with the requirements of Social Work England. All IRO's are required to evidence their training and development each year as part of the Social Work England Practice Standards for continued practice on the new online site. The team has the opportunity to attend regional workshops for IRO's, which are held four times a year and include the East Midlands regional partners IRO Services.

Team members are able to access the training provided by the NCC learning and development team as well as the LSCB training opportunities. Partner agencies also offer a variety of training courses, which can be accessed.

Additionally, the Children in Care IRO's have two sessions per year with Cafcass. Within these seminars, we look at themes agreed by the Managers from Cafcass and the IRO Service. This has increased communication and understanding of respective roles and continues to be fully attended by all parties.

Updates on priorities set 2019-2020

1. Develop a new child contribution paper

This has been further refined following consultation with the Children in Care Council and Essex County Council as part of the Ofsted Improvement Plan. They are more child focused in line with Signs of Safety and will be relaunched in January 2021.

2. Develop a Parent/Carer and Foster Carer contribution paper

This is complete and will be launched with the contribution paper in January 2021.

3. To relaunch the Dispute Resolution Policy due to changes in staff teams

Due to Covid-19 pandemic this has been delayed. However, the dispute form is being further developed. Future disputes raised will be on the child's file on Liquid Logic to clearly evidence the concerns raised and Social Care's responses in dealing with the disputes.

4. Launch the Coming into Care Packs in September 2019

This has been further refined following consultation with the Children in Care Council and Essex County Council as part of the Ofsted Improvement Plan. They are more child focused in line with Signs of Safety and will be relaunched in January 2021.

5. Launch a new child friendly minutes' template on Liquid Logic

This has now been completed and is available on Liquid. These minutes are now written to the child as it is the child's review and information.

Children in Care Data 2019-20

Children in Care Population and the IRO Service Data

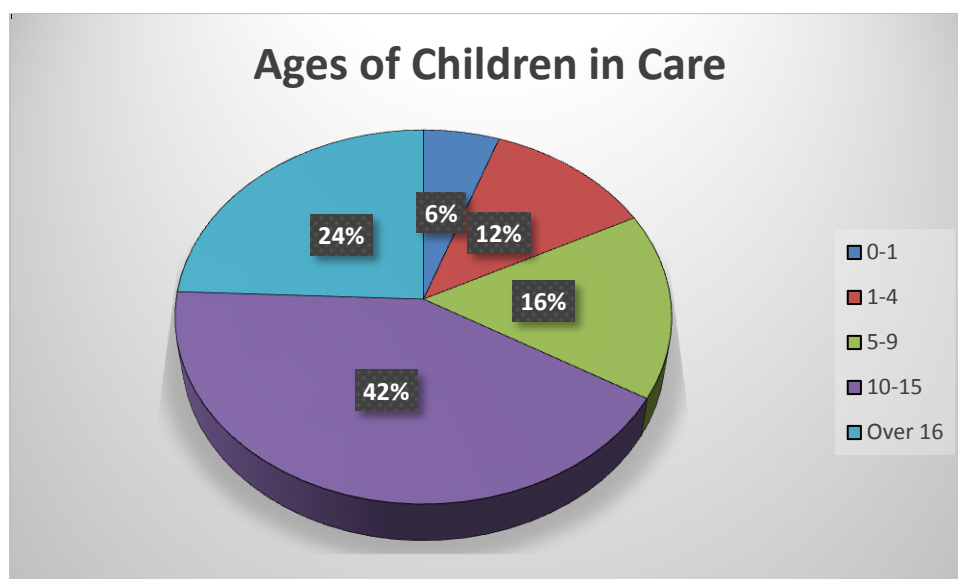
The Children in Care population for 2019-20 within Nottingham City Council was 656 excluding 57 short breaks. Caseloads are marginally more than as specified in the IRO handbook, which denotes a caseload of 50-70 per IRO as being manageable. At present 8 full time IRO's hold caseloads of around 75-80, with 3 of the posts being part time holding caseloads of around 30-34 cases.

In terms of outcomes during 2019-20, there were 26 Adoption Orders granted, 23 Special Guardianship Orders granted (SGO) and 7 Child Arrangement Orders issued.

Furthermore 68% of the population have remained in the same placement for at least 2 years or more.

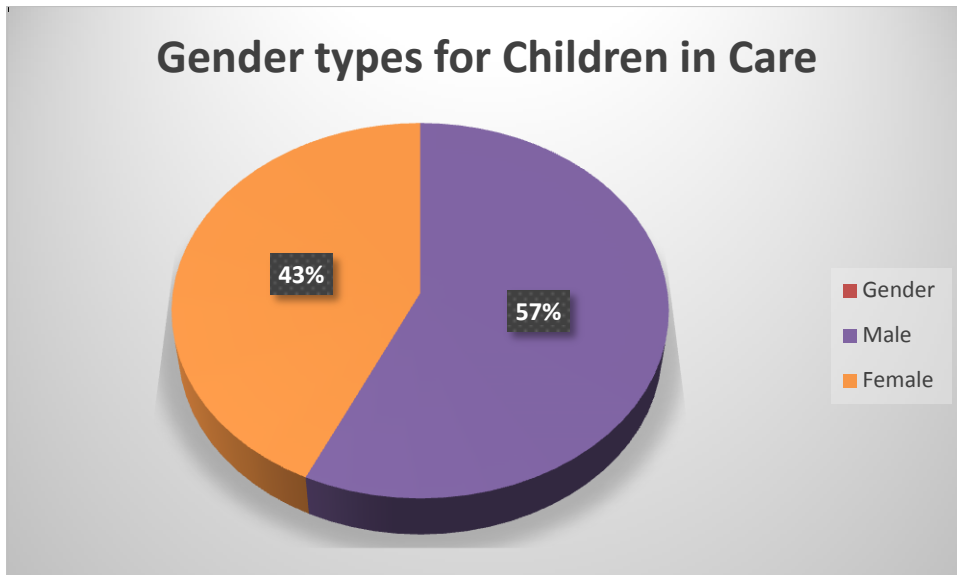
We can look at the data for children in care in age groups, ethnicity and gender as highlighted below:

Age	2017	2018	2019	2020
Under 1	6.7%	5.3%	6.4%	6%
1 - 4	9.7%	12.3%	10.2%	12%
5 - 9	18.5%	16.7%	14.9%	16%
10 - 15	41.2%	41.6%	42.1%	42%
Over 16	23.9%	24.1%	26.4%	24%



Ethnicity of Children in Care	2017	2018	2019	2020
Arab	3	24	0	4
Asian / Asian British / Bangladeshi	1	1	3	3
Asian / Asian British / Pakistani	13	13	11	11
Asian / Asian British / Indian	3	3	3	0

Asian / Asian British / Any other Asian background	17	18	26	19
Black / Black British / African	29	23	35	31
Black / Black British / Caribbean	20	23	20	25
Black / Black British / Any other Black background	6	5	8	6
Gypsy / Roma	3	3	8	7
Mixed White & Black African	8	8	9	7
Mixed White & Asian	6	5	5	14
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	71	78	68	88
Mixed any other mixed background	26	31	27	26
Other ethnic group	16	0	20	19
Unknown	5	1	2	3
White British	362	356	348	361
White Irish	7	7	4	3
White any other White background	24	19	32	35
Total	620	618	629	662



Advocacy

The commissioning of advocacy services remains with the Children's Society. They have been to a team meeting to introduce their service. Additionally, the Children's Society leaflet is included in the coming into care pack. IRO's this year have actively accessed this service on behalf of children or have encouraged them to access this service.

Timeliness of Children in Care Reviews

90% of Children in Care Reviews took place within the statutory timescales.

Children's and Young People's Involvement in Reviews

94% of children in care participated in their review process through a number of forums either by attending the meeting, completing the contribution paper or for some having contact either by phone, email or a home visit with the IRO before their review is held.

IRO's continue to support and encourage young people to chair their own meetings or set their own agenda's where appropriate.

Contact with young people between reviews continues to improve as caseloads allow. Due to this IRO's have been able to develop relationships that are more meaningful and are being creative about this. Through a variety of mediums furthermore an IRO can now record a home visit within a child's file on case notes allowing them to have a clear voice on the child's file and their contact can also be monitored in terms of performance development.

IRO's make a conscious effort to further increase the participation of children by undertaking child friendly reviews, which are individualised to each child's needs and abilities. Furthermore, children are reassured in between reviews or before the review starts to give them, the confidence needed to participate fully in their own review.

Progress and Activity between Children in Care Reviews

During this reporting period, the IRO's have been able to monitor the progress of their allocated children. This brings them into line with their duties outlined in the IRO Handbook (2010). Therefore, they have been able to monitor the progress of the Care Plan and intervene to escalate issues should there be a need. This has also improved communication with the Social Work teams.

All children at their initial meeting are given the contact details of their allocated IRO and every effort is made to ensure the IRO chairs any subsequent meeting, offering a level of consistency moving forward. Given the stable staff team this is working well for children as they now have strong relationships built with their IRO. Additionally, we are also now able to monitor through case notes when an IRO has undertaken case oversight actions in terms of performance management.

Audits

IRO's contribute to the learning and improvement framework, which covers the auditing of selected case. Analysis is drawn from this information and action identified and addressed where applicable. This reporting year IRO's have audited cases on the following themes.

- 4 - Children Living with Alternative Carers.
- 2 - CCE & Youth Violence.
- 1 - Neglect.
- 1- Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in Care.

Management Oversight

Statutory Guidance states that operational Social Work Managers must consider the decisions from the Review before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are completed, the Manager has 5 days to raise any queries or objections. Managers rarely ask for any amendments to be made so at present this process appears to work well.

IROs have continued to monitor the quality of care plans, adoption plans and pathway plans and social worker reports. Where any issues were identified, the IRO's have attempted initially to deal with the matter informally to address these and on a few occasions have formally escalated concerns.

Dispute Resolution Data 2019-20

Dispute Resolution Policy

Throughout the majority of the year formal escalations have been responded to but the timeliness of these responses can vary. However, performance is improving in this area. Plans for closer links between IRO's and social work teams will help to improve this further. The IRO's follow through all dispute resolution's raised through the formal policy that has now been in place for two years. This helps to ensure that young people are safeguarded appropriately in line with their care plan and the recommendations made at reviews are swiftly completed.

Over the last reporting year, the service as a whole has raised 78 concerns. This is a significant increase compared to 2018-19 in which 25 concerns were raised. This is due to an increased focus on delay and we anticipate that with the new measures in place performance improvements will show to be effective and that formal numbers should decrease as improvement work embeds. All concerns have been resolved by Service Manager or Head of Service involvement. From the data currently analysed there are themes developing around disputes the IRO's are raising.

The main contributing factors to the disputes are:

- Issues around placement suitability.
- Delays in legal planning meetings.
- Change of Social Workers.
- Reports not completed in a timely manner for the CIC review.
- Lack of communication between professionals around the child.

Delving into a few of these disputes with different issues, we can see the impact this has made to the outcomes for the children in question.

Compliments from the IRO Service

The policy also incorporates a system for IRO's to raise good practice in the course of their work. The IRO completes a compliments form and sends to all Senior Managers in order to share the positives that are seen out in practice. This reporting year 14 compliments have been sent to Senior Managers about Social Workers whom IRO's have felt their work has been exceptional they wanted it to be formally acknowledged.

Some examples below:

1. *'If I were a child in care, I would want Cheryl to be my social worker. She cares by the bucketful. It shows in the things that she does, in the things that she says and in her professionalism.'*
2. *'The foster carer, Liz said that she wanted to thank Natalie for her support and with any challenges. Natalie has been quick to action anything raised by the carer. Liz can also see how Aaron has confidence in his social worker. It is very evident that Natalie cares about Aaron and is ensuring that all of his needs are being met.'*
3. *'Anthony came with me to do a joint visit yesterday as the duty social worker. Yet again he has demonstrated what a caring, supportive colleague and professional person he is. Well done Anthony again; you are credit to the children and young people of Nottingham.'*
4. *'On 08 October 2019, I chaired a child in care review in respect of CC. I have been CC's IRO since 04 April 2018. CC's step-dad father has never held a particularly high opinion of children's social care or CC's previous social worker. It was significant, therefore, when step-dad commented upon the working arrangement with Leanne- CC's social worker since 16 July 2019.*

Step-dad said Leanne "listens and understands.... work together with Leanne... get on well with her". It was clear that in a very short space of time, Leanne had established a positive working relationship with step-dad and had earned his respect. This is testament, in my view, to Leanne's open and honest communication style. She also follows through on actions and gets things done.'

Annual Work Programme and Key Themes for April 2020- March 2021

1. Ofsted improvement plan to be implemented by re-designing how we conduct CIC Reviews and minute these focusing on a more child focused delivery.
2. Child Contribution paper to be revised and used at every review.
3. Case review form to be embedded into practice around IRO's addressing statutory requirements for care planning are quality assured and notifications given to Team Managers for response to bring up standards.

Child Protection

This report sets out the contribution of the Child Protection Coordinators to Quality Assuring and improving services for children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Nottingham City.

This Annual Report provides evidence relating to the services in Nottingham City as required by statutory guidance.

The core business of the team includes the chairing of, Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences, Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation Strategy Meetings. Where appropriate this report contains information for all these areas.

Purpose of Service and Legal Context

The service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service of Nottingham City Councils Children's Integrated Services Directorate.

The Responsibility of the Safeguarding area of the Service

- Chair Initial and Review Child Protection conferences.
- Chair Child Sexual Exploitation strategy meetings.
- Chair Criminal Exploitation strategy meetings.
- Chair Complex strategy meetings.
- Chair Child Death strategy meetings (where abuse or neglect is suspected).
- Chair Secure Panel meetings.
- Take part in Service Audits

- Write reports for Legal planning meetings where this has been a recommendation and requested by Service Managers.

Professional Profile of the Child Protection Coordinator(CPC) Service

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is also positioned within this service and is line managed by the Child Protection (CP) Principal Manager.

All CPC's are qualified social workers, sufficiently experienced with a wide range of Social Care experiences which brings a positive level of depth and knowledge to the service.

The Chair

- Should be a professional who is independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case; and
- Should meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the Purpose and the process.
- Where possible the same person should chair subsequent Child Protection Conference Reviews.

Management Team and Staffing

We continue to have a permanent staff team of both full and part time workers. We have had one change to the current CPC in post as one resigned due to ill health. As a service, we have attempted to provide a balance between male and female workers. We have a culturally diverse team, which reflects the diverse population of Nottingham City.

CPC's work flexibly from home and can access other offices across the city to meet the needs of the service. There are fortnightly team meetings, but CPC's communicate with each other for support and advice and their Principal Managers between these meetings.

These steps contribute to ensuring a highly motivated integrated and well-supported team.

Supervision and Training

CPC's have monthly supervision and informal supervision when required. All CPC's have a yearly performance appraisal and are encouraged to attend training in line with the requirements of Social Work England. All CPC's are required to undertake

five days training /development each year as part of the Social work England requirements for continued practice.

Team members are able to access the training provided by the NCC learning and development team as well as the LSCP training opportunities. Partner agencies also offer a variety of training courses, which can be accessed.

Nottingham City offer over and above the standard training required.

Updates on priorities set 2019-2020

1. Develop a system to manage conflict resolution disputes more effectively and share these findings with the wider directorate – we have a system in place that works well as the resolved dispute now goes to the Principal Managers for oversight – **Complete.**
2. Develop a system for obtaining feedback form children/young people for case conferences – **Under revision following further consultation with Essex County Council. This will be launched in January 2021.**
3. Liaise with advocacy services to enable this area of responsibility to be improved and reported on – **Complete.**
4. Revise Liquid Logic to collect a variety of work streams/data for reporting purposes – **Complete.**

Child Protection Data 2019-20

Cumulative number of CP Conferences

Number of Children	ICPC	CPR
Apr 19 - June 19	196	330
July 19 - Sept 19	241	326
Oct 19 - Dec 19	225	380
Jan 20 - March 20	242	367

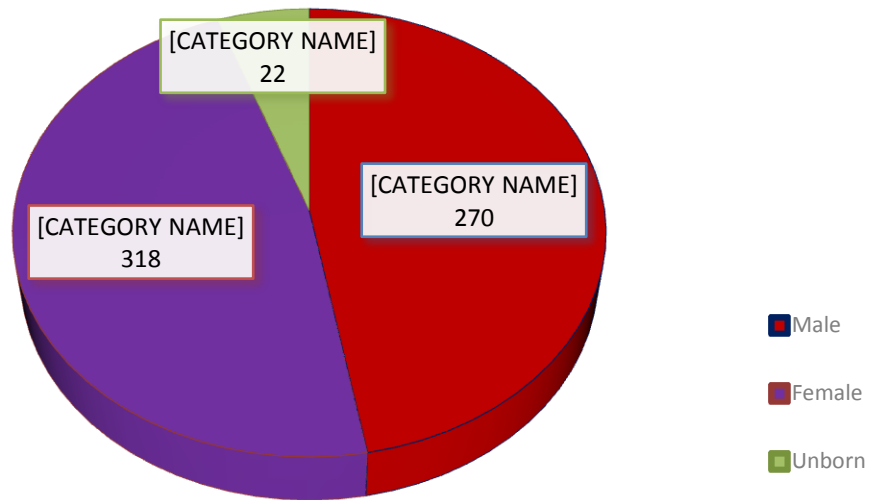
Category of Plan	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Physical abuse	6%	4% (24)	6% (33)	11% (65)
Sexual abuse	3%	1% (8)	1% (6)	4% (26)
Emotional abuse	27%	33% (189)	31% (161)	36% (219)
Neglect	36%	40% (230)	42% (222)	41% (248)
Multiple Categories	27%	22% (128)	20% (104)	9% (55)

Ethnicity	Number on Plan
Any other ethnic group	6

Arab	2
Asian / Asian Brit - Bangladeshi	1
Asian / Asian Brit - Indian	3
Asian / Asian Brit - Pakistani	33
Asian / Asian Brit -Any other Asian background	10
Black / Black Brit - African	27
Black / Black Brit - any other black background	5
Black / Black Brit - Caribbean	23
Mixed - any other mixed background	17
Mixed - White & Asian	26
Mixed - White & Black African	21
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	55
White - Any other White background	24
White British	360
White Irish	2
Unknown	4

Age	
Under 1	30
1	47
2	33
3	37
4	51
5	42
6	25
7	22
8	31
9	34
10	46
11	29
12	29
13	29
14	34
15	33
16	22
17	34

GENDER OF CHILDREN SUBJECT TO CHILD PROTECTION



Number previously on a plan = 35%

Length of Plan

Over 2 years' = 39

18 months to 2 years = 26

1 year to 18 months = 46

6 months to 1 year = 171

3 months to 6 months = 101

Less than 3 months = 243

Longest 45 months

Timeliness of Reviews

91% of child protection meetings were held within timescale.

Advocacy

We have consistently requested that social workers are involving advocacy services for child protection conferences however we have had very few advocates at the meetings and this is being progressed with the Community Social Work Service.

Children's, Young People Preparation, Involvement in Initial, and Review Conferences

Those children of an appropriate age are encouraged to attend their conferences and empowered to participate. Young people who do not attend are invited in most cases to meet with the chair outside of the meeting process. We will also write to young people introducing ourselves in the hope of encouraging them to attend further meetings. There are good examples of children writing to chairs outlining their wishes and feelings. Whilst this report only captures the start of the pandemic, initial feedback suggests that young people prefer meetings over teams as they feel it is less inhibiting.

Progress Monitoring Activities between Child Protection Reviews

Child Protection Chairs (CPC's) will monitor the outcomes in between reviews whenever possible. This gives them the opportunity to raise concerns, which are then recorded on the child's file.

Number of Different Meetings Chaired Per Quarter

Date range	ICPC	CPR	CSE	CCE	Complex Strat	Secure	Child death
Apr 19 – Jun 19	101	201	25	25	14	4	1
Jul 19 – Sep 19	114	197	47	21	12	1	1
Oct 19 – Dec 19	105	214	21	28	10	1	1
Jan 20 – Mar 20	145	223	39	36	15	1	1
Totals	465	835	132	110	51	7	4

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

As a service, we work collaboratively with the CSE Co-Ordinator. The CP Principal Manager is the Co-Chair of the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel Meetings. We have continued to have a filter meeting for referrals into the service and meet alongside the CSE Co-Ordinator with the Police to consider high-risk young people who are on CAROSE (Police Database).

When it is identified that more than two young people are linked we have a system of mapping to ensure all relevant links including adults of concern are highlighted and assessed for further action and safeguarded. All young people are encouraged to attend their strategy meeting and when this has not happened visits have been made to the young person to explain the worries their professionals have and to discuss the safety plan in place. (Wherever possible).

Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

The numbers of children identified as at risk of criminal exploitation has continued to rise as identified in data above and the Local Authority continue to respond positively. Referrals have nearly doubled over this reporting year.

The CCE tool kit is a helpful tool for professionals to refer for a strategy meeting. We also have continued to have regular Child Criminal Exploitation Panel (CCEP) Meetings to address and quality assure the process.

Secure Panels

As already stated the procedures state that secure panel meetings are chaired by the Principal Manager. Both Principal Managers share this responsibility. Seven panel meetings have been held within this reporting period.

Complex Strategy Meetings

119 children have been subject to a complex strategy meeting. This is mainly because of mapping exercises that have identified further young people during CCE and CSE strategy meetings. We jointly meet with Nottinghamshire when young people overlap into both areas.

Audits

The Quality Assurance Service contributes to the learning and improvement framework, which covers the auditing of selected case files. Analysis is drawn from this information and action identified and addressed where applicable.

Dispute Resolution Data 2019-

Dispute Resolution Policy

Throughout the majority of the year formal escalations have been responded to in a timely manner. The process includes an informal dispute process within 5 days or the matter will be escalated. This has resulted in improved responses in timescales.

CPC's follow through all dispute resolution's raised through the formal policy that has now been in place for 2 years. This helps to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded appropriately in line with their child protection plan and the recommendations made at conferences are swiftly completed. The service has raised 13, none of these have had to be escalated beyond Service Manager Level.

The main contributing factors to the disputes are

- Lack of professionals in attendance – whether that is Social Worker or other professionals
- Lack of progress in a Child Protection Plan
- Change in Social Workers
- Practise issue

Compliments from the IRO Service

The policy also incorporates a system for CPC's to raise good practice in the course of their work. The CPC completes an email to all Senior Managers responsible for the matter in order to share the positives that are experienced in practice. Some examples raised have been in relation to support and professionalism of individual Social Workers, well-written and presented reports and the positive Social Worker, child relationships observed.

Ofsted

Ofsted visited NCC in February 2020 as a result of this visit NCC were given a "requires improvement" judgement. In respect of the safeguarding unit there were two areas that they wished for us to work on.

1. That there were too many recommendations on our plans that could make it confusing for parent/carers.

We recognised as a team that we were being too prescriptive and cautious. As a team we amended our plans to be more family friendly and not so onerous for parent's/carers young people and professionals.

When Ofsted next visit I believe they will see a marked improvement in the Outline Plan that are developed during the conference process.

2. That we used more than one category of abuse which did not act as a primary risk and again could be confusing.

We have addressed this and the data is positive in evidencing that we have completed this action.

Annual Work Programme and Key Themes for April 2020- March 2021

1. To continue to embed the use of one category in the child protection plan process
2. To continue to embed child centred outcome plans for children and families.
3. To develop a new framework for Minutes of child protection conferences.
4. To pursue all CPC to be recognised as Signs of Safety champions for NCC
5. Further develop a feedback system for young people to provide feedback on meetings.
6. To support the children's service integrated service plan to improve outcomes for children



Alison Platkiw
Principal Manager (CIC)



Eve Hailwood
Principal Manager (CP)



John Matravers
Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Partnerships