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Report Title	Overview of Child in Care and Child Protection Reviewing Services
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Introduction

The reviewing services are divided into two distinct service areas:

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) are responsible for quality assuring and improving services for children who are in the care of Nottingham City Council. 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 statutory duties of the IRO are to monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions 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 concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and to perform any other function which is prescribed in these regulations.

Child Protection Coordinators (CPC's) are responsible for quality assuring and improving services for children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Nottingham City.

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.

This report will address Children in Care and Children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

The Reviewing Services sit within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service area offering independence to the role. There are two Principal Managers responsible for Children in Care and Child Protection.

All IRO's and 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.

We continue to have a permanent staff team of both full and part time workers with 2 additional temporary agency IRO's.

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.

The pandemic has significantly affected the way that we currently deliver services and has led to an online approach for all reviews. This initially was a challenge due to the lack of development

time to undertake this approach and parents and carers need to have appropriate technology. However, engagement across the partnership and with families has been strong and where Microsoft Teams has not been able to be accessed by families, their views and support has been provided before and after meetings (as some families have participated by phone). Some strengths have been identified with this approach and these will continue to be applied when we resume to a more traditional approach to reviewing services (for example, many children have preferred the engagement online as it feels less intimidating). There is a positive benefit for resources by reducing travel time for partners and enabling some agencies who have previously struggled to attend reviews to participate more consistently. We are undertaking a formal review of this approach so that we capture positive aspects and continue to improve the services that we provide for our Children in Care.

The virtual reviews have been observed by the Independent Scrutineer for the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership in February 2021. She identified *“Both Conferences were well chaired by the Child Protection Chairs (CPCs) who clearly had a good grasp of their respective cases. Both supported parental involvement and encouraged contributions by agencies. They were also child centred and avoided the meetings becoming overly focussed on the needs of parents. There was very good agency attendance at both Conferences.”*

Roles and Responsibilities for an IRO when reviewing Children in Care

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.

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.

Children in Care Data 2020-21

(Data for 2019/20 is in brackets)

The Children in Care population for 2020-21 within Nottingham City Council was 684 (656). This shows an increase of 4.2% from the previous year. The East Midlands has also seen an increase in this population ranging from Derby +10%, Leicestershire +7% and Derbyshire +4%.

Caseloads are marginally within the limits specified in the IRO handbook, which denotes a caseload of 50-70 per IRO as being manageable. At present 9.5 full time equivalent IRO's hold an average caseload of 69.

In terms of outcomes during 2020-21, there were 24 (26) Adoption Orders granted, 28 (23) Special Guardianship Orders granted (SGO).

Stability of placement is an important factor for children in care and a key performance indicator. In Nottingham 64% (68%) of our children in care have remained in the same placement for at least 2 years or more.

Reviews within timescale were at 95% (90%) which shows an improvement against the previous year. And is above/below our target.

Child participation in their review was 92% (94%). Participation includes attending the meeting or where the child does not wish to by providing their wishes and feelings in a written format. This shows a slight drop and we have identified that the issue here is participation in the first review and have taken steps to address this. Nevertheless, this is still a strong performance given the obvious challenges presented by the pandemic.

IRO's continue to support and encourage young people to chair their own meetings or set their own agenda's where appropriate. This is dependent on the age and understanding of the child but is essential work as we continue to develop our reviewing services to be meaningful to the children in our care.

Contact with young people between reviews continues to improve as caseloads allow. This has been assisted by online contact and the additional capacity provided that has brought caseloads closer to those recommended in the IRO handbook. 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, namely, online, by phone, face to face and using the app. ["Mind Of My Own"](#) 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. The newly launched coming into care pack also supports this.

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.

Developments implemented in 2020/21

- We are re-designing how we conduct CIC Reviews and we are on an improvement journey to make all reviews more child focused. This includes child friendly minutes and inviting who the child wants to be at their review.
- We are engaging with the Child in Care Council to help us understand how the language we have traditionally used affects them and what language they prefer.

- The Child Contribution paper has been revised and is used at every review.
- We have launched a 'coming into care' pack for all children and young people that helps them to understand what is happening and why. It also introduces their IRO in a relationship based way that includes personal characteristics that the IRO is happy to share.
- We are using a case review form to review all statutory elements of the review process. This is an internal document and we share learning across Childrens Services to further strengthen practice.

The IRO service is undergoing a significant transformation process. We ensure that all IRO's have a child focused ethos ensuring we give the child a voice so they feel they have some control over their lives.

We have worked hard in our virtual reviews to ensure we have continued care planning, which does not drift during the pandemic and as a team we are committed to improving outcomes for children and always consider their views within this.

We are strong advocates for children's rights and feel as IRO's we have a good rapport with children and professionals around the child however this can and will be further strengthened.

We challenge the Local Authority to ensure the best outcomes for children and we champion the needs of the children we work with. This is demonstrated by addressing issues including; placement stability, progressing care plans for adoption and increased family time.

Priorities for 2021/22

- We will relaunch the IRO Service to the wider social care community and children's partnership so that we can ensure an understanding of the role and functions in the care planning for children. It will also support an understanding of the challenges and roles of all working to support our most vulnerable children.
- As the IRO we aim to visit every child before their 20 day Children in Care Review to talk to them about what is a review and gain their wishes and feelings.
- We will offer training sessions and observation sessions to all our social work community so they can see what the role and function of the IRO actually is outside of chairing a review.
- We will further strengthen our relationship with the social work community.
- We aim to ensure that reviews should only go ahead where there is a completed and shared pre-meeting review report.
- We are undertaking training on our minutes to ensure quality and consistency across the service.
- We will support young people so that they will feel they have the confidence to chair their own meetings.
- We will continue to embed the use of modern technology to engage children more in their review process.

Overview of the reviewing of children subject of a Child Protection Plan

The requirement for the Local Authority to provide independent reviewing of work with Children subject of a Child Protection plan largely mirrors that for Children in Care, with the following requirements specified in the [Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures](#) of Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnerships

- The Child Protection Chair should be a professional who is independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case.
- The CPC should meet the child and parents in advance of the review to ensure they understand the purpose and the process.
- Where possible the same person should chair subsequent Child Protection Conference Reviews.
- They ensure there is a process for challenging any drift and delay identified.
- They ensure that the views of the children, parents and carers are given sufficient weight in planning for the protection of the child.
- 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.

Child Protection Data 2020-21

(Data for 2019/20 is in brackets)

The number of children subject to a child protection plan at the end of 2020/21 was 616 (609). This shows an increase of 1.1% from the previous year. However, the increase from 2018/19 was 100 which showed a rise of 19.6%. This rise followed the Ofsted inspection that highlighted concerns with the identification of neglect. Currently 89 children per 10,000 are subject to a CP plan in Nottingham compared to our statistical neighbours (SNG) who show 63 per 10,000. This highlights that we have significantly higher numbers of children subject to CP plans. However, auditing of thresholds has identified they are appropriately subject to a plan. The work undertaken by Children's Services is leading to better assessment, planning and a strength based relationship approach should start to see these numbers reduce over the next 12 months. It is right that plans are not ended prematurely as we must see sustained evidence of a positive impact on the lived experience of children before a plan can end.

The 6 full time equivalent CPC's currently hold an average of 103 cases but they also collectively chair on average 250 CSE/CCE strategy meetings per year.

Initial Child Protection Conferences' held in timescale has shown a marked improvement this year and we achieved 93% (66%). This also compares favourably with the Statistical Neighbourhood Group average of 79%.

Reviews in timescale also showed an improvement against the previous year as we achieved 95% (90%) and again this compares to the SNG of 90%.

Children subject to a CP plan for over 2 years is 3.7% which is in line with SNG of 4%. We have also audited all of these cases to ensure there is no drift and delay and where this is found appropriate action has been taken.

Children becoming subject to a CP plan for a second time was 27% (32%). This is a significant measure as it indicates those cases where children's lives have not significantly improved following a previous time where they were subject to a Child Protection Plan. Whilst in some cases this will reflect a new risk to the child, it may indicate that for some children improvement may not have been sustained from their first episode of Child Protection. The SNG figure is 24%. We have work to do on this across service areas. The improvement journey should see this figure continue to fall as we will see better quality assessments and plans ending when sustained improvement for the child has been achieved.

Priorities for 2021/22

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

Conclusion:

The two independent reviewing functions perform a crucial role in assuring appropriate and timely planning and intervention for children in care and children who are subject of a child protection plan.

This report provides evidence of the current performance of the service to key performance measures. It also notes the improvement activity which has been undertaken and the further developments planned during this year.