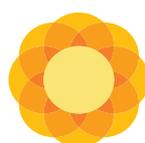


Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

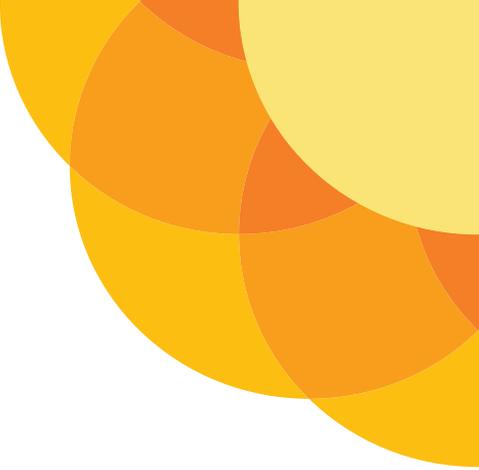
Annual Report Shorter Report

April 2022 - March 2023



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST

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Introduction

This Annual IRO report provides information about the IRO Service within Birmingham Children's Trust between April 1 2022 and March 31 2023.

Overall what we see seems to demonstrate a generally quality service which continues to work to support good outcomes for children and young people in care in Birmingham.

The Government say that every child in care should have a named IRO, who is independent of your social worker and their managers, and who should chair your review and make sure that the Trust:

- has supported you with a good care plan that meets your needs;
- has found the best permanence plan for you and arranged for you to live in the best place for you;
- ensures that your plans and needs are not delayed in being done; and
- provides an independent view from your social workers of your plan.

As well as the above the IRO Service should produce a report to show how well the Trust is doing what it says it should do for children and young people who are in the Trust's care.

The IRO service tries to have a relational 'work with' approach based on an understanding that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) challenge and role works much better when we speak with people and work closely with them.

We continue to model an approach based upon 'High Expectations, High Challenge, and High Support' in our work with social work colleagues and agency partners to ensure the needs of children in care are met.

We work with the Childrens Trust's Corporate Parenting Board, the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers' Forum within the Rights and Participation Service to work with children and young people in care and with them developing frameworks for more relational child focused review practice.

Paul Nash

Head of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service, Birmingham Children's Trust.



Section 1

Some important facts and figures to know about our work this year

We expect that if you are reading this and in care, you will know the name of your IRO and how to contact them.

If you don't know who your IRO is, and you are in care please contact me directly on

07774 337284 or **paul.nash@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk**

About children and young people in the care of the Trust

- There were 2795 children and young people who spent some time in the care of Birmingham Children's Trust during the period April 2022 to March 2023.
- At the end of the year (31 March 2023) there were 2201 children in care.
- There was a substantial increase from 2094 children at the end of March 2022, to 2201 at the end of March 2023 with continuous increases throughout the year.
- Of these children and young people around 56% were boys and 44% girls.
- 60% of the children and young people in care were aged 10 yrs and over,
- 695 children and young people had been in care for 5+ years, and 548 for less than one year.
- 701 children and young people came into care in the year 2022-2023.
- 610 children and young people left care in the year 2022-2023.



Section 1 ctd.

Some important facts and figures to know about our work this year

About Children in Care (CiC) reviews that took place

- Between April 2022 and March 2023 there were 5864 CIC reviews that took place.
- The busiest months for reviews were November 2022 and March 2022 with 566 and 621 reviews respectively.
- 95.6% (5609) of reviews that were held took place within the required timescale, so most children and young people had their reviews in a timely way.

About children and young people participating in their CIC reviews

- The views of most children and young people were available in 94% of reviews, although around a third of views were presented to the review by carers or social workers not from the child or young person directly.
- In 52% of reviews held the child or young person attended the meeting in person, which is an increase from 46% from the previous year. Of those who do not attend IROs are confident that two thirds of these children and young people did not attend from personal choice. But we are working with young people and will be using recently completed participation research to develop our practice around participation.

- The service online feedback survey for children and young people after their review is anonymous continues to provide feedback. Findings indicated 73% always attend, or attend one of their reviews in the year, 95% advised they are always asked their views and involved in decisions and 65% receive feedback and have time for reflection on outcomes.

Link for feedback survey for children and young people attending review

www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/childrens-trust/young-people-review-survey

or scan the QR code below:



There are consultation documents available for children and young people to use to communicate views.

The link is:

www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/yourviews-forms

or scan the QR code below:



Section 2

Information about IROs escalating matters for children and young people

- There were 185 formal escalations during the year 2022-23, which is an increase of 20% from previous year.
- There were 918 informal escalations between April 2022 and March 2023, which is an increase of 6% from the previous year.
- Most escalations arise from drift and delay in establishing suitable and permanent accommodation, lack of progress of plans, delays in accessing suitable school or other education arrangements, or delays in accessing therapeutic provision and delays in establishing suitable ways for seeing family members.



Section 3

Things the IRO service found about how children's plans were progressed

IROs main concern is to make sure that children and young people in care have a good, effective and timely care plan that meets their needs.

The annual report looked at whether children and young people had suitable plans for care and permanence.

- In 94% of reviews the child or young person has a clear plan for permanence, some were twin or triple track, with 84% single track plans.
- In addition, in 87.7% of 2nd CIC reviews IROs in quality assurance role indicated that the child had a clear plan for permanence.
- In 89% of CIC reviews the child or young person has remained living in the same accommodation, and in 90% of reviews there was no concern about stability of where the child lived.

- IROs provide a level of stability and continuity for many children in care, with examples of IROs supporting children and young people well through their care planning and navigating difficulties in this.



Section 4

What the IRO Service has done in 2022-23

- Every child is allocated a named IRO within 72 hours of the service being notified that the child is in care.
- Most children and young people's reviews are held within statutory timescale and children and young people are routinely able to contribute their views to their reviews, with increased participation and attendance at review meetings.
- The service has worked with young people and the Rights and Participation Service, to reflect on and look at developing our delivery to promote more child-led participation.
- The service has commissioned, and is now successfully using, an animated video to communicate to children and young people; the role of their IRO, why they have a CIC review and how they can participate.
- Updating and refresh of Review Record, simplified and more focused on views of children and young people.
- The Dispute resolution and escalation process has continued to work successfully to address some difficult care planning issues for some children and has seen a marked improvement in effectiveness this year.
- The Long-Term Fostering Early Ending work continues to support learning and practice development for the Trust around permanent foster placement planning for children and improvements are now routinely agreed with the Children in Care Service and the Practice Hub.
- A continued stable and highly skilled and knowledgeable team of practitioners working with children and young people and developing links to support social workers.

Link to video

<https://vimeo.com/750399636/2cca109b4d>

or scan this QR code:



- Increasing awareness and use of performance data and information to inform and improve practice both within the service and for individual IRO practice.
- The service has effectively worked within the Trust to promote better outcomes for children, for example, in respect of children's personal finances and savings, supporting the mental health and wellbeing for children in care, and implementing the Trust's participation strategy.

Section 5

What the IRO Service told Birmingham Children's Trust about helping children and young people in care

- Concern about the number of children under 16 years being placed in unregulated accommodation and young people 16 and 17 years being placed inappropriately in supported accommodation. IROs have worked with the Trust to effectively embed processes to support statutory regulations.
- Delays in establishing life story work and other life narrative work for some children requiring this, led to a Trust refocusing project on progressing life story work.
- Protecting young people's personal allowances from deductions paid to accommodation providers.
- Delays in progressing assessments for children returning home or in progressing the revocation of care orders to discharge children from care who are living at home with their parents. The Trust has now established a focused project to improve progressing of discharge from care.
- Delays for some assessment and plans to place children with connected carers and secure their permanence or in the timely placement of children for adoption including early permanence.
- Concerns about limited social worker availability, and continuity, for some children in care and delays this causes for progressing their care and permanence planning.
- Delays in progressing pathway planning for young people in care aged 16 and 17.
- Placement sufficiency issues resulting in some children being placed in inappropriate accommodation resulting in increased instability and continuity of care.



Section 6

IRO service priorities for 2023-2024

- Continued development of the use of performance information to improve practice both within the service and across the Trust (linked to embedding of the Quality Assurance Framework as a means of identifying improvements and issues).
- Using findings of commissioned research, a refresh of the participation work and direct work with children and young people, to:
 - Implement systems to help ensure children and young people are fully consulted and lead on the location, attendance and timing of their reviews.
 - support children and young people to have stronger relationships with their IRO.
 - creatively use apps such as Mind of My Own to support children and young people to more fully participating in reviews.
 - enable records to be more child focused and written more directly to the child or young person; and
 - refresh how we support children and young people to chair or directly lead review meetings.
- Establishing IRO Profiles and making these accessible to children and young people.
- Streamlining plans for children and young people with care plans and EHC Plans.
- Working with the Trust to implement new arrangements for children and young people in care savings and personal finances.
- Working with the Trust Practice Hub to enable learning from IRO QA Framework to be integrated with the Trust's Quality Assurance work, to enable more timely and relevant improvements to practice.
- Embedding the adoption of the Trust 'Connections Count' practice model within IRO practice.
- Working with Trust projects to develop life story work, improving arrangements for Health Assessments and supporting exiting care for children living within their birth or extended families.

Paul Nash

Head of Service, Independent Review Service
Birmingham Children's Trust
September 2023



Contact us

If you are a child or young person in care, and have any comments to make about this report, please feel free to email or ring Paul Nash:

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07774 337284

www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk/yourviewsforms