



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CYNGOR BWRDEIS TREF SIROL RHONDDA CYNON TAF**

A virtual Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Board** will be held
on

13 September 2021 at 10.00 am

Contact: Emma Wilkins - Council Business Unit, Democratic Services

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

2. MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on the 23rd July 2021.

(Pages 5 - 10)

**3. YOS REPORT -YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT
2020- 201**

To receive the report of the Group Director, Community and Children's Services providing Members of the Board with an update on the work of the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) for 2020/21.

(Pages 11 - 16)

4. HOUSING OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

To receive the report of the Group Director Community & Children's

Services providing Board members with information about how 16+ looked after young people and care leavers are provided with move on accommodation and support.

(Pages 17 - 24)

5. TROS GYNNAL QUARTERLY REPORT

To receive the Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru quarterly progress report.

(Pages 25 - 36)

6. RESILIENT FAMILIES SERVICE

To receive the presentation of the Head of Community Wellbeing and Resilience in respect of prevention work and the Resilient Families Service.

(Pages 37 - 52)

7. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE MONITORING REPORT TO THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

To receive the report of the Group Director Community and Children's Services providing information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for children looked after (CLA) for the period 1st January 2021 – 30th June 2021.

(Pages 53 - 74)

8. TO CONSIDER PASSING THE FOLLOWING UNDER-MENTIONED RESOLUTION:

"That the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended) for the next item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act."

9. SOCIAL SERVICES QUARTERLY COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS

To receive the report of the Group Director, Community & Children's Services providing the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation and effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure.

(Pages 75 - 90)

10. REGULATION 73 REPORTS

To receive the report from the Group Director, Community & Children's Services, containing exempt information

(Pages 91 - 142)

Circulation:

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)
Councillor G Hopkins (Vice-Chair)
Councillor J Rosser
Councillor S. Rees-Owen
Councillor E Griffiths

Councillor S Rees
Councillor L Hooper

Officers:

Paul Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Christian Hanagan, Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Cara Miles, Childcare Solicitor
Ann-Marie Browning, Head of Children's Looked After Service
Annabel Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ceri Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Jayne Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services

Tros Gynnal Plant Cymru – Electronic copy

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on Monday, 12 July 2021 at 10.00 am

County Borough Councillors - Corporate Parenting Board Members in attendance:-

Councillor C Leyshon (Chair)

Councillor G Hopkins Councillor E Griffiths
Councillor S Rees

Officers in attendance

Ms C Miles, Childcare Solicitor
Ms A Browning, Head of Children's Looked After Service
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Mrs. J Allen, Children and Young People's Service Manager
Ms J Thomas, Complaints & QA Manager, Social Services
Ms R Ceshion – Childcare Delivery Team Manager, Children and Young People Services.

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed Members and Officer to the first Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board for the Municipal Year 2021/2022.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillors J Rosser, Lhooper and S Rees- Owen.

2 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

3 Minutes

To approve as an accurate record, the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on the 22nd March 2021

4 Corporate Parenting Board -Draft Work Programme for the 2021 - 2022 Municipal Year

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board received the Draft Work programme for the 2021/ 2022 Municipal Year. Officers explained that the programme acts as a useful method of managing the Board's work load and is a fluid document which can be amended throughout the year to reflect any changing priorities the Board may have or wish to consider.

Members **RESOLVED** to acknowledge the topic for consideration and agree with

the suggested topics for future meetings.

5 Corporate Parenting Board - Annual Report

The Chair provided Members with the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report for the 2020/2021 Municipal Year. The Annual Report highlighted the vast amount of work considered by the Corporate Parenting Board over what has been an exceptionally challenging year as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic.

The Chair took the opportunity to thank the staff across the service for all their hard work adjusting to the fast changing situation the pandemic had caused and commended them all for all their hard work keeping our service users safe.

It was explained that should Members approve the draft report, it would be presented to Scrutiny for information and to Cabinet for final consideration.

Members of the Board echoed the Chair acknowledgement of the work that had been carried out and asked for their thanks to be recorded.

The Director of Children's Services highlighted that the work that had been achieved over the year was remarkable and the service adapted quickly to the ever changing situation caused by Covid -19. The Director continued and explained that we need to build on the work that has been done.

The Director continued and explained to the Board that there is new legislation coming forward from Welsh Government, which indicates that Corporate Parenting Boards will need to consider the voice of the young person more and this may need to be included within the Terms of Reference in the future.

After further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Approve the Corporate Parenting Annual Report: and
- Thank Staff across the Service for all the hard work during the Covid 19 – pandemic.

6 Young Carers Annual Report 2020/ 2021

The Service Manager – Carers, Engagement and Direct Payment welcomed the opportunity to present the Board with an update on the work that had been carried out with young carers in Rhondda, Cynon, Taf. The Service Manager also highlighted the vast amount of work that had been carried out during the pandemic.

Members of the Board were reminded of the reviews that had been carried out since 2018 in relation to the care support services in RCT and the Service Manger highlighted some key point below which the Board were asked to acknowledge:

- The young carers support service changed their support during the pandemic to provide more one-to-one session instead of group support. The most vulnerable were prioritised. At times when restrictions were eased, they were able to bring young carers together in smaller groups. Online support has worked well for the older young carers (aged 11+) but is not a substitute for face-to-face support.

- Referral rates for assessment of young carers dropped during the lockdowns and were closely linked to whether or not the schools were open. During Q1 2021/2022 the referral rate was above average.
- Securing online access for young carers was a priority during the pandemic and was achieved in many ways, including liaising with schools, delivering Chromebooks with mobile Wi-Fi and facilitating grant schemes for purchase of digital equipment.
- Efforts are being made to secure ongoing funding and resources to deliver specific support to sibling carers, who often have different needs to young carers. During 2021/2022 a pilot project will be funded to deliver outcome-focussed support over an intensive 6-week period. The course will concentrate on emotional wellbeing.
- RCT launched the Young Carer Card in March 2021. The card is a Wales-wide initiative led by Welsh Government and RCT were one of the early adopters of the scheme. A promotional video was launched during Carers Week 2021. The card allows young carers to highlight their role to education and health professionals without needing to tell their full story, and in time it is envisaged the card could be used to receive discounts and other benefits.

The Service Manger concluded her report by explaining that young carers were significantly affected by the pandemic and support services going forward will need to focus on dealing with ongoing consequences. The service will aim to adopt an all age cohesive service approach to unpaid carers. The Service Manger highlighted the commissioned young carer service due to co-locate with the Cares Support Project from September along with the new National Plan for unpaid carers will inform regional and local carers strategies and priorities. The Chair thank the Officer for her comprehensive report and open up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

Members requested clarity on the numbers of referrals during the first stage of the pandemic and asked if going forward there would be a return to face to face support. In reply the officer explained that going forward there would be a hybrid approach which seems to work more effectively with older young carers. If a young carer needed a more one to one approach then this would be put in place to accommodate their needs.

Members praised the ID cards for young carers and complemented the National Scheme. Officers again highlighted the promotional film of Young Carers and welcome the opportunity to watch and share it with a wider audience.

Further discussion to place and Members **RESOLVED** to:

- Acknowledge the information within the report; and
- Receive the link to the film around Young Carers and the Young Carer Project.

7 Registered Childcare Provision - Quality Update Report

Members were presented with the report by the Childcare Delivery Team

Manager, Children and Young People's Services. The officer explained that the purpose of the report is to update Members of the Board on the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) registered childcare settings overseen by the Community, wellbeing and resilience Service (CWRS).

The Team Manager explained that the Covid 19- pandemic has had a significant impact of the delivery of the childcare to ensure that those most in need of childcare had access to it. Below are some of the changes that have been made during this time:

- Children aged 0- 5 years (as opposed to 2- 3 years under normal circumstances);
- Full days between 07:30 – 18:00 (rather than sessional care of 2.5 hours daily);
- Available to children of critical workers and the children of the most vulnerable families (not only Flying Start eligible children)

The Team Manager continued explained the key changes since the report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board in May 2019, it was highlighted that significant service developments have taken place in respect of childcare provision across RCT and during this period a new purpose – built Flying Start childcare setting has been established on the Llwynypia campus of Coleg Y Cymoedd. This has replaced the Flying Start provision in the previous Ynyscynon Primary School Site. It was also highlighted that Flying Start Tonyrefail was transferred to an external provider to deliver the service.

The Officer continued and brought to Members attention that in 2019 a consultation exercise was held with internal setting staff, commissioned setting staff and Flying Start Families regarding the 42 week offer and whether it was favourable to reduce to 39 weeks and offer 15 family fun days during the school holiday. The Officer explained that the overwhelming response was to reduce to 39 and after further discussion with Scrutiny, Cabinet and trade unions the 39 week offer was introduced in September 2019.

Members of the Board also received an overview of the quality reports for the Local Authority Childcare Settings and the work carried out against the Action Plan, along with areas of strength and areas for development.

After concluding her the Team Manager opened the meeting up for Members questions

The Chair thanked the Officer and also complimented staff for all their hard work during the pandemic and adapting to change in what was a fast changing situation.

Members echoed the Chairs thanks and the Board Members were pleased to see that work was being carried out on a wellbeing strategy to support the Children and Young People of the County Borough as a result of the pandemic. After further discussion Members **RESOLVED** to note the report and agreed to receive further updates when appropriate.

8 Pupil Development Grant - Evaluation of Cluster based Model.

The Regional Lead PDG LAC Central South Consortium presented Members

with an update on the evaluation of the school cluster model for the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children during the financial year 2019/20 in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

The Officer reminded Members that the Children Looked After Education Team (CLAET) works in collaboration with the Central South Consortium (CSC) to ensure that there is a consistent approach, based on good practice, to support children who are looked after in our schools.

Member of the Board were also reminded that the grant continues to be managed by the CSC. The Directors of Education from each local authority have agreed key priorities to enhance the education opportunities for Children Looked After;

- Raising attainment/achievement
- Improving attendance
- Reducing exclusions
- Enhancing the capacity of schools to improve the outcomes for pupils through training and support, through school to school working and the sharing of good practice (through a cluster-based model) and
- Ensuring that partnerships across the region continue to develop within CSC, schools, Social Care and other agencies.

The Officer explained the current position in relation to allocation of funding. The cluster plan grant allocation for RCT in 2018/19 was £366,686, £357,893 in 2019/20 and £395.026 for 2020/21 and highlighted that schools have continued to make application for funding on a cluster basis in line with expectations from Welsh Government to regionalise PDG LAC funding throughout the four education consortia.

Members were pleased to see that as part of the PDG LAC the Consortium also has a bursary fund to ensure Local Authority Looked After Children in Education teams can respond to additional needs that arise due to moves in placement and school and complex emotional /social difficulties. Members also acknowledge the approach RCT has focused on.

The Board considered the evaluation of the PDG LAC cluster Model Approach and welcomed the increase in the number of RCT schools which are undertaking the CLA Friendly Schools training and found it pleasing school cluster have been very proactive with their cluster planning for the financial year 2019/20 and acknowledged that a more rigours and comprehensive evaluation process will need to be established in order to evaluate the fully effectiveness of a cluster based approach to allocating PDG LAC to our schools in light of the Coivd -19 pandemic and as a result of the wider impact on all learners in RCT schools.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and put forward many observations, Members commented that there is a lot content to the report but would requested that future reports have a more outcome focus this would in turn show the Board Members any schools that are finding pupils with a whole host of needs.

Discussion ensued and Members of the Board **RESOLVED** to note the contents of the report.

9 Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru

With the Agreement of the Chair and the Board this item was deferred to a future meeting.

10 To consider passing the following under-mentioned Resolution:

It was **RESOLVED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act (as amended) for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of the exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Part 4 of the Schedule 12A of the Act.

11 Social Services Quarterly Complaints and Compliments

The Service Improvement, Engagement & Complaints Manager provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the operation of effectiveness of the statutory Social Services complaints procedure between 1st January 2021 – 31st March 2021.

The report contained information on the number of complaints received, the nature of the complaints and any lessons learnt, as well as detailing Councillor, A.M and M.P enquiries and the number of complaints received.

12 Regulation 73 Reports

The Residential Services Manager provided the Board with an update on the Regulation 32 visits undertaken at the three children's homes – Beddau, Bryndar and Nantgwyn.

The officer outlined a summary of the inspection outcomes and it was **RESOLVED:**

- a) To note the contents of the report

13 Any Other Business

The Board took the opportunity of thanking Ms Anne-Marie Browning for all her hard work throughout her service to the Authority and wished her well in her new working adventure.

This meeting closed at 11.50 am

**Cllr C Leyshon
Chairman.**



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13th SEPTEMBER 2021

CWM TAF YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

REPORT OF GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON

Author: Lyndon Lewis, Head of Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service
Tel: 01443 827300 / 01685 724960

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work of the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service (YOS) for 2020/21. This includes a summarised response to the Covid 19 pandemic, and to inform members of future service challenges/risks.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that members:
- 2.2 Acknowledge the proposed/potential changes within the Youth Justice System and potential impact upon the work of the YOS.
- 2.3 Receive further reports in due course in order to be satisfied of the progress and improvements being made as a result of the service restructure.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service is a statutory partnership legislated by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and provides services across two local authority areas, namely Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. The local authority YOS areas merged to form Cwm Taf YOS in August 2014. The aim of the service is to prevent the offending and re-offending of children and young people. The statutory partners are: South Wales Police; Cwm Taf Morgannwg Health Board; HM Prison and Probation Service; and the local authority areas of Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. These partners provide financial and staffing contributions to the Youth

Offending Service. The Youth Offending Service also attracts external grant funding from the Youth Justice Board, Welsh Government and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC).

- 3.2 Overall governance is facilitated by the Regional Cwm Taf Offender Management Board (OMB) which meets quarterly to hold the service to account, examine performance, and to monitor the delivery of the service.
- 3.3 In addition to the scrutiny provided via the Offender Management Board, the Youth Offending Service also reports its performance on a quarterly basis to the Youth Justice Board (YJB), and to the Welsh Government in relation to its prevention work. The YOS is also subject to an inspection regime carried out by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP).
- 3.4 As a result of Covid 19, The YOS were not required to provide an annual Youth Justice Plan for the financial year 2020/21. However, the Youth Justice Board instead requested that YOS complete a self-assessment and action plan in relation to a new set of National Standards for Youth Justice. This work began in September 2019. The National Standards work is linked to the Structure and Governance of the service and will be overseen by the Offender Management Board. The YOS has sought operational and strategic 'buy in' from partner agencies represented on the Board and this work is ongoing. This year, the YOS submitted a Youth Justice Plan for 2021/22, (see attached document) some of the content of which is summarised in this report.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 As with our partner agencies, for much of 2020/21, many YOS staff have undertaken their day to day tasks remotely. This has meant reduced face to face contact with young people and families whilst adjusting to working in a more agile way from home. Initially, this created some difficulties with the normal day to day business and many staff experienced problems, mainly related to access to technology in order to undertake tasks in an efficient manner.
- 4.2 However, during this time, YOS staff continued to support young people who appeared in the law courts (including a Remand court based in Cardiff), who required an appropriate adult (AA) at the police station when arrested, or who agreed to attend for interview on a voluntary basis. Face to face contact with young people assessed as 'high risk' or subject to 'intensive supervision and surveillance' also continued during this time and the input of experienced sessional workers ensured that contact with this cohort took place during evenings and weekends as necessary. Importantly, since May last year, the YOS has continued to work with a skeleton staff from its office base in the Merthyr Tydfil Law Courts and this arrangement provided invaluable managerial and peer support for those who most required it. The numbers of staff available to offer physical one to one support has fluctuated as Covid restrictions have been eased and then reimposed during this time, yet it is pleasing that the core/critical business of the service was maintained throughout. The YOS has also continued its reparation work with young people in the community in a safe manner, whilst contributing alongside the YOS police officers to facilitate face to face

mediation in care homes where some children have experienced difficulties, many of which were/are linked to restrictions relating to Covid 19.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 At the present time, all YOS staff are equipped with the resources to function more effectively and most staff can see the benefits of working in a more flexible and agile manner. However, the onset of Covid has brought new challenges in relation to managing risks both to the public and to the children known to our service, and more recently there has been a significant increase in referrals for prevention services.
- 5.2 Following a lengthy delay as a result of Covid, the YOS has now completed the process of restructuring the service in order to meet future demands on the service. The significant changes includes the creation of two area based prevention/early intervention teams based in Merthyr Tydfil and RCT to enhance the quality of prevention services for those most at risk of antisocial and/or offending behaviour. Prevention activity within YOS is increasingly involved in the management of more complex cases, and subsequently these teams will include social work and senior practitioner oversight to ensure children and families receive the right support at the right time. In addition, this aspect of the service will also be allocated more management capacity across the Cwm Taf region.
- 5.3 To some degree, the restructure of the service is a response to the development of a WG/YJB led 'Blueprint for Youth Justice for Wales' and a Blueprint Implementation Plan has been drafted with an outline vision of the changes in the short, medium and longer term. Early Intervention and Prevention and a trauma informed, child focussed approach is central to the contents of the Blueprint, and a Project Board, incorporating several workstreams is taking this work forward. However, Cwm Taf YOS has already begun to embed a trauma informed 'relationship based' approach within current practice to better meet the needs of young people who enter the into the youth justice system and who have experienced a number of adverse childhood experiences (ACE's).
- 5.4 The YOS utilises the Welsh Gov't Children and Communities Grant to develop, deliver and coordinate prevention services across the Cwm Taf area. Some of this work is coordinated alongside the Resilient Families Service (RFS) and ensures that the Cwm Taf YOS Prevention Service can provide a swift and proportionate response to antisocial behaviour (ASB), Restorative Justice Street Disposals (YRD's) and respond quickly to crisis referrals from the Children's Services Dept. Outreach work engaging with young people in identified hotspot areas resumed in July last year, and this work continues alongside our police colleagues in identified 'hotspot' areas during evenings and weekends.
- 5.5 The YOS education training and employment (ETE) team has continued to support young people through the past 10 months and have trained a group of community volunteers to engage with individuals (remotely and face to face) to help them to achieve their potential. The YOS management have raised concerns and made presentations to the OMB to highlight some of the barriers that young people known to our service face in relation to accessing education, training and employment.

Management have made progress alongside partners, including education, to try to resolve some of these issues, and this work will be prioritised during 2020/21.

- 5.6 The YOS continues to expand its use of a Viewpoint data feedback system to ensure the voice of service users is heard and which will inform the future development of the service. The YOS currently completes a specific online questionnaire with children who offend and a separate restorative justice survey for victims of youth crime.
- 5.7 The YOS has recently negotiated CAMHS provision with Senior Health Managers to provide increased support for staff dealing with young people who present with more complex well-being issues, and work continues in order to strengthen links with psychology, neuro development and speech and language provision. Health services to YOS was an issue for concern by the HMIP inspectorate in 2017, and so this provision is being monitored by the Offender Management Board and is retained as a priority for this financial year within the Youth Justice Plan.

6.0 **FUTURE CHANGES AND IMPACT ON SERVICE**

- 6.1 Following an unsettled period for YOS during the past 17 months, the situation has more recently improved with staff more confident to undertake their work as normal lifestyles and routines return. However, it should be recognised that YOS business is very much linked into local authority recovery and delivery plans for this year, and future arrangements regarding accommodation, whereby staff can meet safely with children, families and partner agencies in a range of community venues/offices, will be a main priority going forward.
- 6.2 The most immediate priority of the restructure of the YOS is now complete, and we are better prepared to respond effectively to the demands of early intervention and prevention in the medium to longer term.
- 6.3 Further priorities includes securing the necessary health provision for the YOS to ensure the service can maintain and build upon embedding trauma informed practice into its day to day business. As mentioned above, this work is currently being negotiated.
- 6.4 As mentioned in 3.4, the monitoring of the National Standards for Youth Justice in Wales alongside our partners will be central to the future effectiveness and governance of the service and improve accountability for ASB and offending across the partnership. The YOS also recognises that it needs to develop better communication and awareness raising both ways between operational practice on the ground and how it relates to the work of the Offender Management Board, and wider elected members.
- 6.5 The priorities set out in this year's plan will allow us to improve our understanding of the needs of the cohort and contribute to better outcomes (see attached plan).

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The new structure seeks to ensure improved capacity and ideas across the Cwm Taf region and increase staff and management resilience within the prevention arena. In line with the Blueprint recommendations, we need to ensure that any change will promote consistency within our practice and deliver a more targeted needs led service that continues to be effective and outcome focussed.
- 7.2 The potential impact linked to some of the issues outlined above and the risks associated with potential changes to grant funding will need to be monitored closely. Following the restructure, Cwm Taf YOS should be better placed to meet the aims and objectives to deliver better outcomes for young people who offend or who are at risk of becoming involved in offending behaviour, and victims of crime.

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document (s)	Date	Document Location
Cwm Taf Youth Justice Plan 2021/22	01/07/21	

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13th SEPTEMBER 2021

LOCAL AUTHORITY'S OFFER OF ACCOMMODATION AND HOUSING SUPPORT TO CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Author(s): Annabel Lloyd, Director, Children's Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board members with information about how 16+ looked after young people and care leavers are provided with move on accommodation and support.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the information contained within the report.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This is an information report.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 Section 78 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 imposes a duty upon a local authority to safeguard and promote the well-being of each child it looks after. Under sections 104 – 118, a local authority has similar duties to promote the well-being of care leavers.
- 4.2 The role of a corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. Local authorities in Wales have a legal and moral duty to provide such support to the children it looks after. Elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that children looked after by a local authority are able to thrive, are nurtured, supported, educated, and prepared for adult life in the way any parent would want for their own children.
- 4.3 Section 1.34 of the Welsh Government's Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness Guidance (March 2016) confirms Local Authorities

have a range of duties to care leavers who represent a particularly vulnerable group and require Children's Services and Housing to work together to work together to meet the needs of young people in care as they move to independent living.

- 4.4 This report sets out the process for identifying suitable accommodations and support for Care Leavers.

5. The Housing Options that are presently available, and the impact of the Pandemic.

Mercury Project.

In response to the recommendations of the Mercury Group a housing officer has been identified to provide a single point of contact for care leavers. The role will work closely with the 16+ Team and young people leaving care at an early stage to help identify all available housing options in consideration of their housing and support needs. This will include supported accommodation, Housing First and general needs accommodation in both the social and private rented sector. It is recognised that needs of young people will change throughout their journey of leaving care and the housing officer will offer person centred support to the young person to review their housing options in consideration of their needs.

Social Housing

The Community Housing Department manages the gateway to social housing in RCT in partnership with six social housing landlords. Care leavers can apply directly for social housing with applications considered by the Move On Panel, who determine if the young person is ready to live independently. If approved care leavers are placed in Band A which is the highest priority band and are then able to bid for 1 bedroom accommodation in the areas of their choice. It must be noted that the demand for one bedroom accommodation is very high and outstrips supply particularly in the south of the borough.

20 care leavers were approved by the Move On panel in 2020/21 and assisted to access social housing in RCT.

Private Rented Accommodation

The availability and affordability of private rented single person accommodation in the private rented sector remains an ongoing challenge in the borough. The Council has received Welsh Government funding to set up a Social Housing Letting Agency (SLA) in Rhondda Cynon Taff. This is a pilot scheme which aims to improve access and support private landlords to

offer long term affordable and good quality accommodation with support in the private rented sector. The scheme is in the early stages of development, but it is hoped going forward it will increase the supply of affordable single person accommodation to offer real housing options.

Supported Accommodation

The Housing Support Grant currently commissions units of emergency and supported accommodation for young people as illustrated in the table below. However, in recognition that young people are one of the highest needs in the Housing Support Grant Local Commissioning Plan additional units of supported accommodation are currently being explored.

Existing HSG People funded Young People Projects

Project Name	Area	Support Provider	Service Model	No. of units
The Grange	Taff	Pobl	Emergency Accommodation	10xself contained units.
Queen Street	Taff	Llamau	Emergency Accommodation Shared	5 Units Shared property
Old Bakery Aberdare	Cynon	Pobl	24/7 Supported Accommodation young people aged 16 -24	5 self-contained units
Supported Lodgings	RCT	RCT Council	Supported Lodgings	13 units currently but will increase to 26 by 2024.
Ty Rhondda	Rhondda	Llamau	24/7 Supported accommodation. Young People aged 16 -24.	3 plus emergency room
Dunraven Street.	Rhondda	Llamau	Step down Project	3 units of shared housing
Bridgit Young Woman's	Taff Ely	Hafan Cymru	24/7Supported Accommodation. Young females aged 16 -24.	3 units of Shared housing
Boys Shared House Penycraig	Rhondda	Hafan Cymru	24/7 Supported Accommodation.	3 units of shared

			Young males aged 16 -24.	housing
Martins Close	Cynon	Pobl	24/7self contained Supported accommodation for male and females 18+	13 self-contained units
Semi independent accommodation. (Low Level)		Hafan Cymru	Young People aged 16 -24	6 units

Floating Support

The RCT Locality based Floating Support project provides person centred support to young people who already have their own accommodation or who are in the process of moving into a property from a permanent full time care setting.

This service supports young people to further develop their independent living skills and help them to sustain their tenancies

Housing First Project

The Housing First Project in RCT is partnership between RCTCBC and Llamau and provides a rights-based intervention for young people who have high support needs and who will find living in supported accommodation and general needs accommodation without support a challenge.

The project is designed to address the needs of young adults by providing them with immediate access to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate, and the necessary and age-appropriate support that focus on health, wellbeing, life skills, engagement in education and employment, and social inclusion. The project is currently supporting 9 young people which includes 4 care leavers in their own accommodation

Supported Lodgings

13 units of supported accommodation are currently commissioned by the Council to provide young people with a safe home and to offer practical advice and help to manage their lifestyle and become independent. During 2020/21 19 people were offered a supported lodgings placement.

Get Ready and Move On Project (GRAMO)

Early intervention and prevention are viewed as a fundamental and a common theme which connects directly to the Housing Act Wales, Social Services and Wellbeing Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

The GRAMO project provides an early intervention pre-tenancy learning environment for all individuals to develop and evidence the skills to manage a tenancy. The learning is tailored to the client attending each session. Areas covered in each session include money management, understanding a Tenancy Agreement, Life skills, managing a home and digital inclusion.

Sessions for care leavers are held on a 121 basis to help support their learning and understanding of living independently prior to leaving care.

During the financial year 2020/21, 10 care leavers were referred to the GRAMO Project with 6 completing the course. As from April 2021, 7 referrals have been received with 3 care leavers completing the course to-date

The Pandemic

The Impact of the Pandemic has not significantly impacted on the housing options available to young people with many of the Housing Support Grant funded projects operating as normal and receiving referrals. However as mentioned above, the availability of single person accommodation in both the social housing and private sector remains an on-going challenge, which has been made worse by the pandemic in limiting even further the options available to young people.

6. The Housing Options in Development for Care Leavers and Young People.

Investment of **£140,00** of Housing Support Grant (HSG) has been awarded to Children Services in 2021/ 22 to extend Supported Lodgings by 13 units to bring the project up to 26 units. The project is still under development and will be reviewed by the HSG Contract Monitoring Team.

Additional HSG funding of **£161,000** has also enabled the new development of a new 24/7 project for young people aged 16 -24 in the Penygraig area offering 4 x4 bedroom self- contained flats. The project will be managed by Hafan Cymru and will be an extension to their existing young person's project in Penygraig which offers supported accommodation to young males aged 16 -24.

In addition to the above projects **£68,000** of HSG has been available in 2021/22 to provide 2 mentoring posts to support care leavers on their journey from leaving care to independent living.

The Housing Support Grant Local Commissioning Plan has identified the high demand for young person's accommodation in RCT. The HSG Team and Housing Strategy Team are currently discussing a new build project in the Taff area which if successful will provide an additional 4-5 bedspaces of supported accommodation.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This is an information report.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 This is an information report.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The report was brought before Scrutiny as part of the governance arrangements outlined in Regulation 22 of the Local Authority Adoption Service (Wales) Regulations 2007 and section 15(c) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (Joint Adoption Regulations) (Wales) Directions 2015.

11 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

11.1 The business covered in this report contributes to the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsible Wales

12 CONCLUSIONS.

- 12.1 key policy changes such as raising the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the provision of Welsh Government funding to increase the supply of both temporary and permanent accommodation have helped. Despite this progress, the pandemic has further exposed the severe shortage of single person accommodation.

Whilst a considerable amount of work has been undertaken to address the immediate housing and support needs of young people leaving care. Further work is needed to reduce young people being placed in bed and breakfast accommodation and to explore more sustainable long-term support and accommodation options.

It is also vital we work in partnership with health and our third sector partners to ensure appropriate support services are in place to address complex needs such as substance misuse and mental health.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

SEPTEMBER 2021

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13th SEPTEMBER 2021

TROS GYNNAL PLANT (TGP) CYMRU UPDATE

1. **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Board with an update of progress made by Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) Cymru.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the work undertaken by TGP Cymru, the content of which is attached at Appendix 1.

3. **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 It is important for Members to note the progress, themes and issues highlighted by the TGP Cymru, in order to work in partnership to ensure the best possible outcomes are reached for those in our care system.

4. **BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 As part of the Board's Terms of reference, TGP Cymru are invited to attend meetings to enable both the TGP Cymru and Children Services to discuss issues that affect service delivery in the community on a strategic level and to work in partnership to provide improved and better outcomes.

5. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not needed because the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

6. **CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 There is no consultation required for this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

9. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

9.1 The work of the Corporate Parenting Board links directly to the Council's Corporate Plan priority – 'Rhondda Cynon Taf's Children will receive a great start in life...'

9.2 The work of TGP Cymru links to the Future Generations Well-Being Goal of a more equal Wales, by ensuring that children and young people are supported when decisions are being made about them. This ensures that young people have access to a range of information in order to fulfil their potential.

9.3 In addition to the duty to listen to young people and involve them in decisions, the Part 10 Code of Practice (Advocacy) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 sets out the duties to consider the provision of independent professional advocacy in certain circumstances for:

- Children who are looked after (who should benefit from an active offer of professional independent advocacy) or have previously been looked after
- Children who are subject to an assessment of need or a care and support plan or child protection enquiries

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 TGP Cymru are invited to attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board, to provide a broader understanding and contribution into the services available to young people and vulnerable adults.

National Approach to Statutory Advocacy
Local Authority Report RCT 2021 - 2022
Collated Quarterly Report
Quarter 1: April - June 2021

Headline Report

During quarter one, 29 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 38 issues. Active Offer (AO) referrals have continued to decline with only six young people referred in this quarter, less than half when compared to the previous quarter. We have also observed a decrease in young people accessing the IBA service, although as in the previous quarter, over two thirds of young people working with advocates are accessing Issue Based Advocacy for the first time.

Active Offer

During the quarter, 94 children and young people became eligible for the Active Offer:

CP:	5-9 yrs x 41	10 - 15 yrs x 37	16+ yrs x 5
CLA:	5-9 yrs x 7	10 - 15 yrs x 2	16+ yrs x 2

A total of 38 children and young people rejected the offer of an Active Offer meeting when it was suggested by their social worker, while 14 accepted. Of the 14 who accepted:
two later decided they did not want to proceed
three were referred for the Active Offer
nine were unfortunately incorrectly referred for IBA.

However, we received six Active Offer referrals, three for young people who were not included in the monthly eligibility reports received from RCT. It is also unclear how the remaining 42 responded to the discussion with their social worker.

Of the six AO referrals received, there were an equal number of Children Looked After and those in the Child Protection (CP) arena. In the previous quarter, young people in the CP arena made up 85% of referrals. Four were male and two were female. More females than males were referred for AO during the quarter, and the majority were aged between six and eleven. In the previous quarter, there were an equal number of young people aged between six and eleven, and twelve and sixteen.

Advocates were available to provide the Active Offer to all young people referred within five working days during this quarter although only 67% of young people referred had contact with an advocate within five working days. Reasons for delay include additional risk assessments for face-to-face visits, specifically waiting for responses from venues in order to complete the assessment. One young person declined a virtual meeting within five working days and requested a school visit. 83% of young people received the Active Offer within six working days of referral, and one young person was not able to be contacted on any of the numbers provided. A letter did not result in a response and the referring social worker was informed. TGP Cymru have recently implemented a more streamlined approach to the internal risk assessment process, which should minimise future delays while planning face-to-face visits with young people.

Issue Based Advocacy

Advocates worked with seven young people living outside of RCT in areas including Caerphilly, Swansea and Cardiff. Of the 29 referred, 10 young people were CLA, 13 young people were CP, and six were open to Care and Support. This represents a small decrease in referrals for young people in the CP arena and a significant decrease in referrals for CLA, less than half of those received in quarter four. The gender split this quarter was fairly even, with 13 males and 16 females. This is a similar gender split as that of the previous quarter.

The age category with the highest referral rate was the 06-11 group with 18, followed by the 12-16 age group with nine. This a decrease of four for the 06-11 group when compared to the previous quarter and only half as many referrals for the 12-16 age group.

Social services made the highest number of referrals during this period with 18 young people referred this way. Nine referrals came from young people directly. Self-referrals have previously made up the majority of issue-based referrals, as they often follow a successful Active Offer meeting. Two issue-based referrals were made by Independent Reviewing Officers.

Meetings continue to be the largest issue advocates support young people with, making up over half of the 38 issues referred. Advocates supported more young people with Case Conferences than any other meeting, followed Core Group Meetings and CLA Reviews.

76% of young people accessing the issue based service had a conversation with their advocate, either face to face, by video call or phone call within five working days of the IBA referral being made, rising to 83% within six working days. Reasons for young people not receiving this contact within five working days include one young person changing their mind about speaking to an advocate, and two young people not being available when the advocate had arranged to call. One young person, who required a face to face visit due to complex needs, met with his advocate within seven working days of the referral being made, despite the advocate having to complete several risk assessments both internally and those of the placement.

Service Information

The team manager attended the Corporate Parenting Panel evening event, to introduce the service to wider members and key stakeholders. An operational advocacy meeting with RCT also took place this quarter and both the team manager and director attended the CLA Quality Assurance panel. Discussion at this meeting focussed on the Active Offer (AO) and it was felt by senior managers present that young people are routinely offered the AO meeting and that reasons for declining this offer are recorded. RCT have agreed to collate and provide this information which will be included in future reports.

Visiting Advocacy continues in four Local Authority community homes across RCT. Support continues to be virtual at present with weekly contact. During this period, 48 telephone contacts were made across the four units.

TGP Cymru have recently implemented a new consultation process and employed a Quality Assurance Officer to oversee it. Although this has allowed young people to provide feedback more independently, it has resulted in less feedback being received, as there are now not as many young people completing feedback forms with their advocates. TGP Cymru plan to adopt multiple methods of collecting the views of young people in the future and CTM will pilot a system in which young people will be able to fill in a feedback form online. Eleven young people completed feedback forms during quarter one.

Feedback from young people in relation to TGP Cymru's Advocacy Service has again been overwhelmingly positive:

Ten stated they found the service helpful.

Seven felt the service made a difference to their situation.

Nine felt they now know more about their rights.

Nine felt more confident since receiving support.

Nine felt their views were considered.

Nine young people providing feedback stated they would use the service again. One young person commented:

"It was good to have someone to talk to and say how I am feeling"

Another stated:

"My social worker knows how angry I am now"

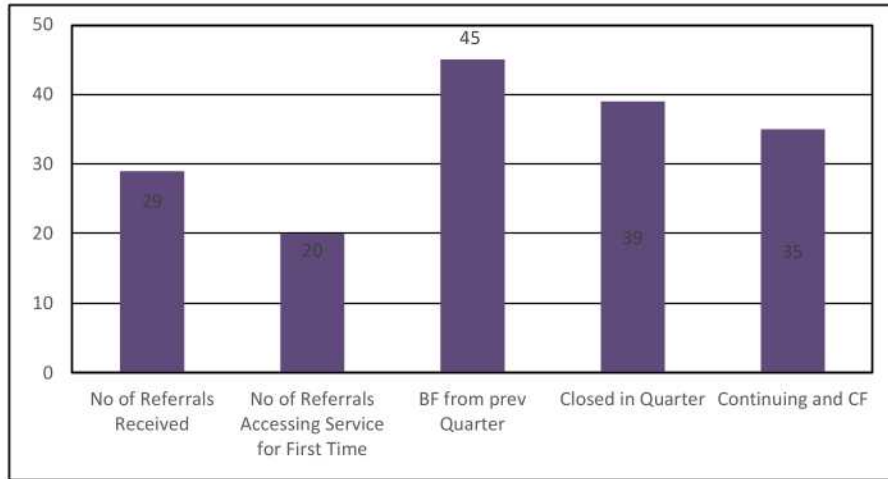
Please find below an example of advocacy work undertaken during the quarter from within RCT. The name has been changed to protect the young person's identity.

Situation: Mel is 15 years old and lives in a residential home. Mel wanted contact with her friend who lives in Pontypridd.

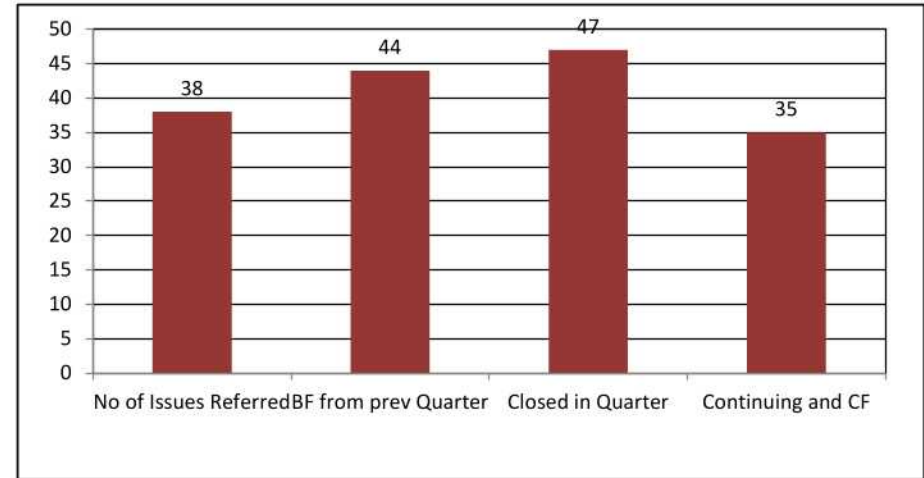
Action: The advocate contacted Mel's social worker and asked if contact could be arranged, suggesting that if the social worker had any concerns around this, she consider supervised contact, at least in the first instance. The advocate explained that the staff from Mel's residential home had suggested they were willing to supervise contact.

Outcome: Mel's social worker completed the necessary checks on Mel's friend and supervised contact was arranged. It will take place on a weekly basis, which Mel is very happy about.

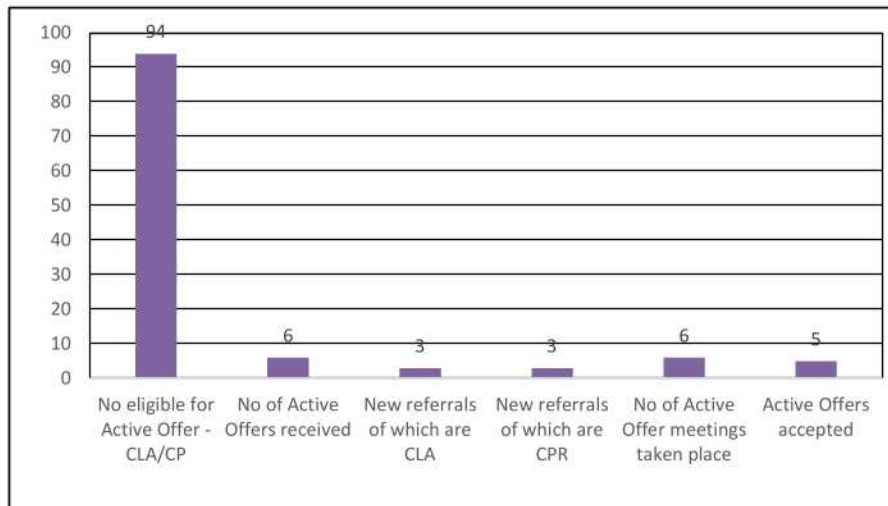
1a. Advocacy Cases - Young People - Issue Based Advocacy



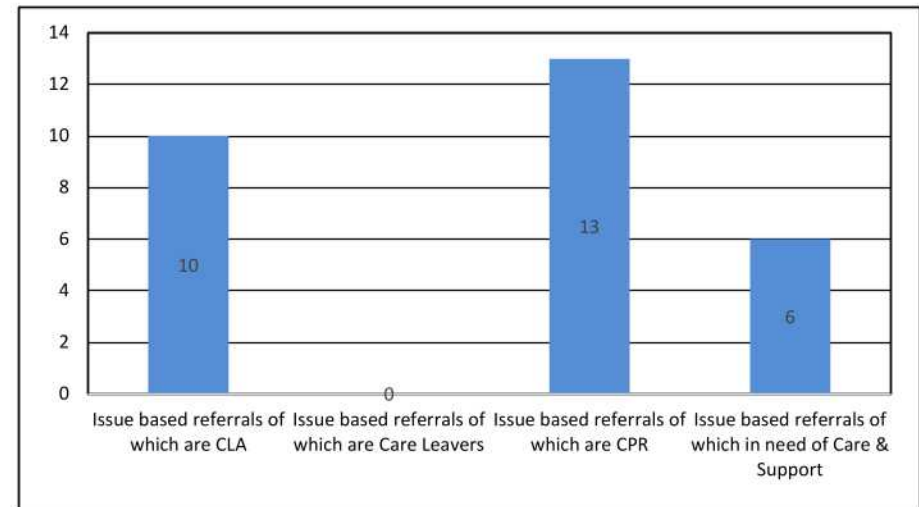
1b. Advocacy Cases - Interventions - Issue Based Advocacy



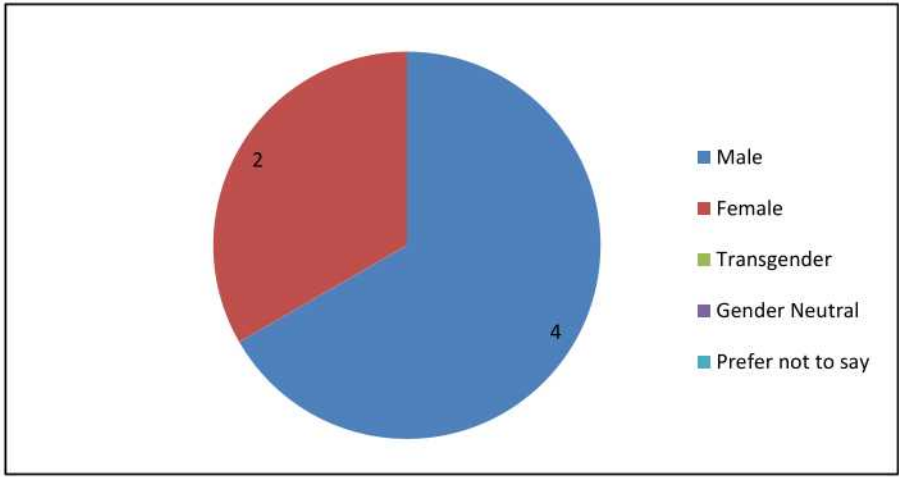
2a. Eligibility Criteria: Active Offer



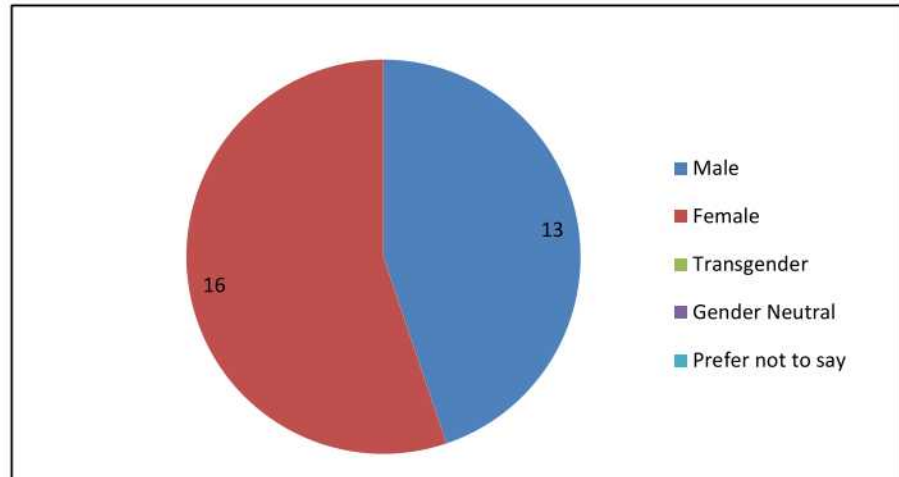
2b. Eligibility Criteria: Issue Based



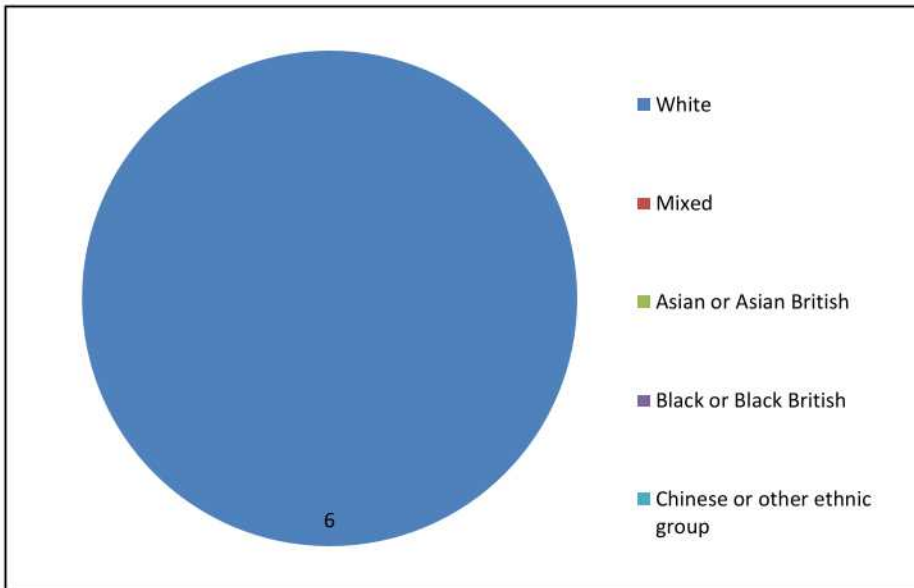
3a. Demographics: Gender - Active Offer



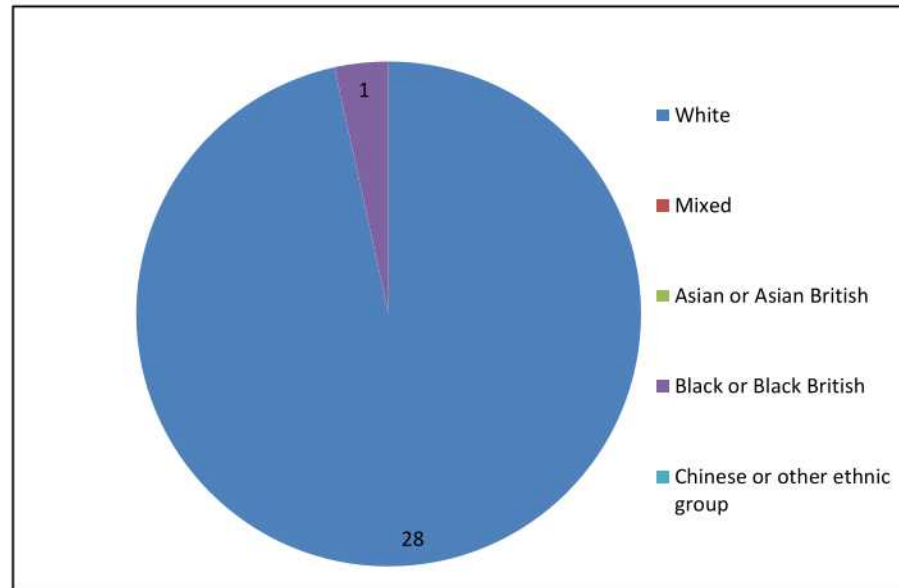
3b. Demographics: Gender - Issue Based



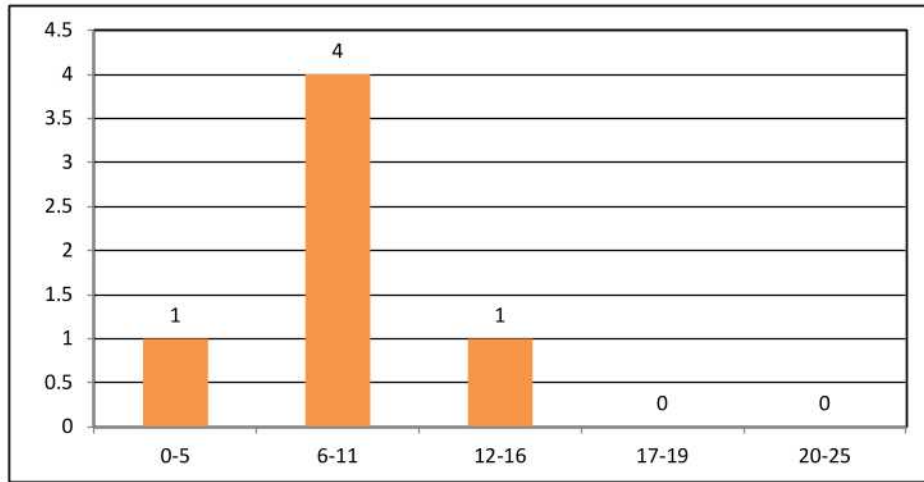
3c. Demographics: Ethnicity - Active Offer



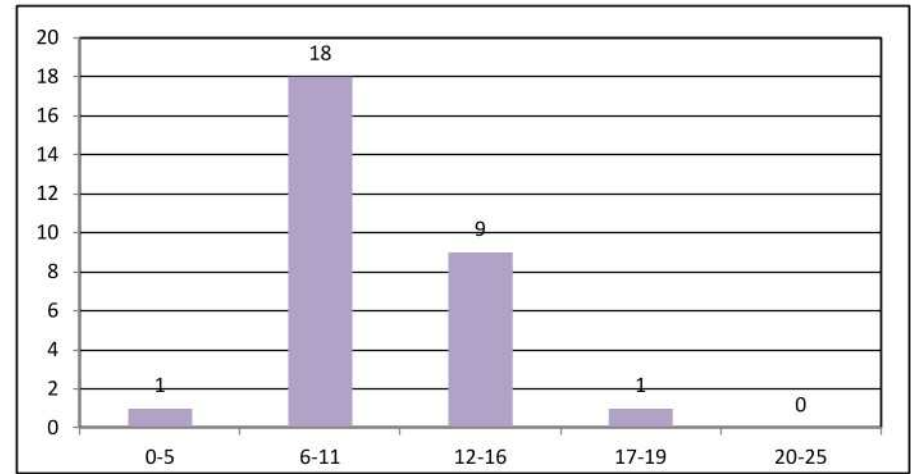
3d. Demographics: Ethnicity - Issue Based



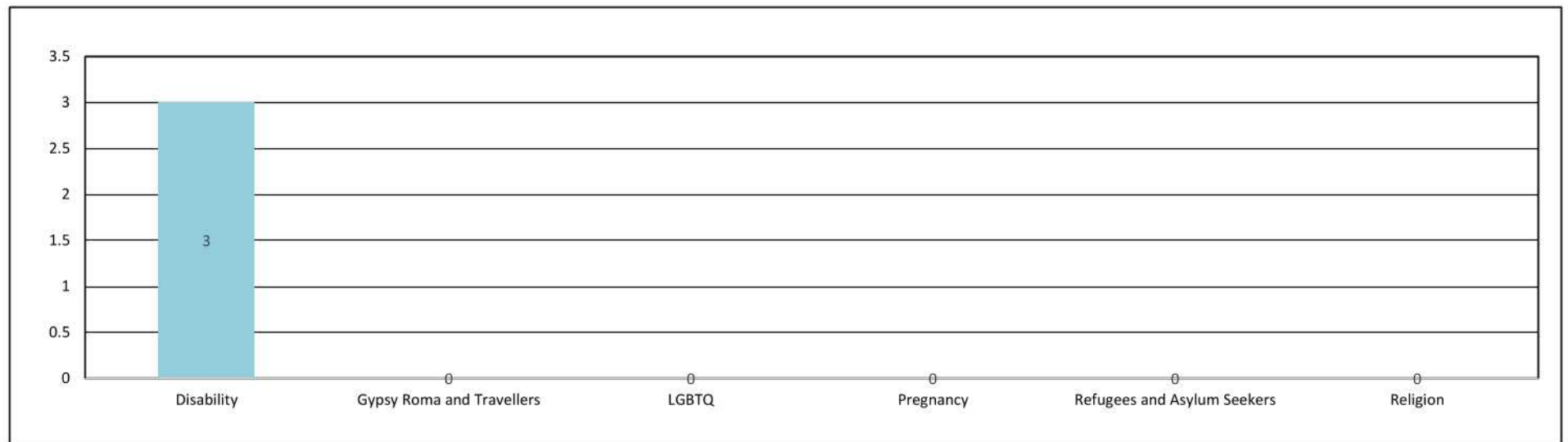
3e. Demographics: Age - Active Offer



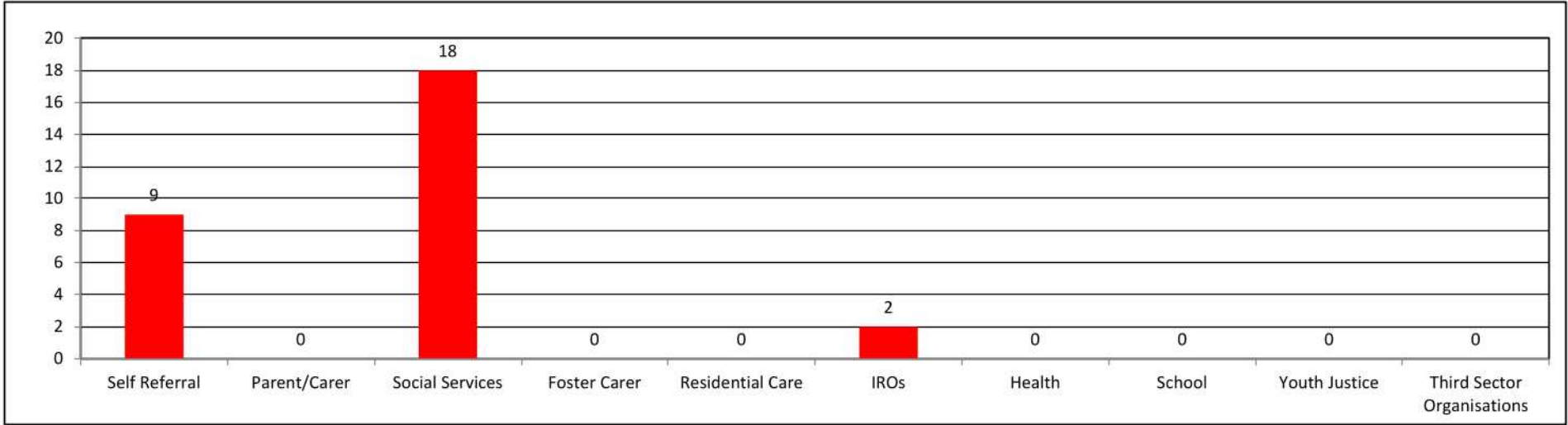
3f. Demographics: Age - Issue Based



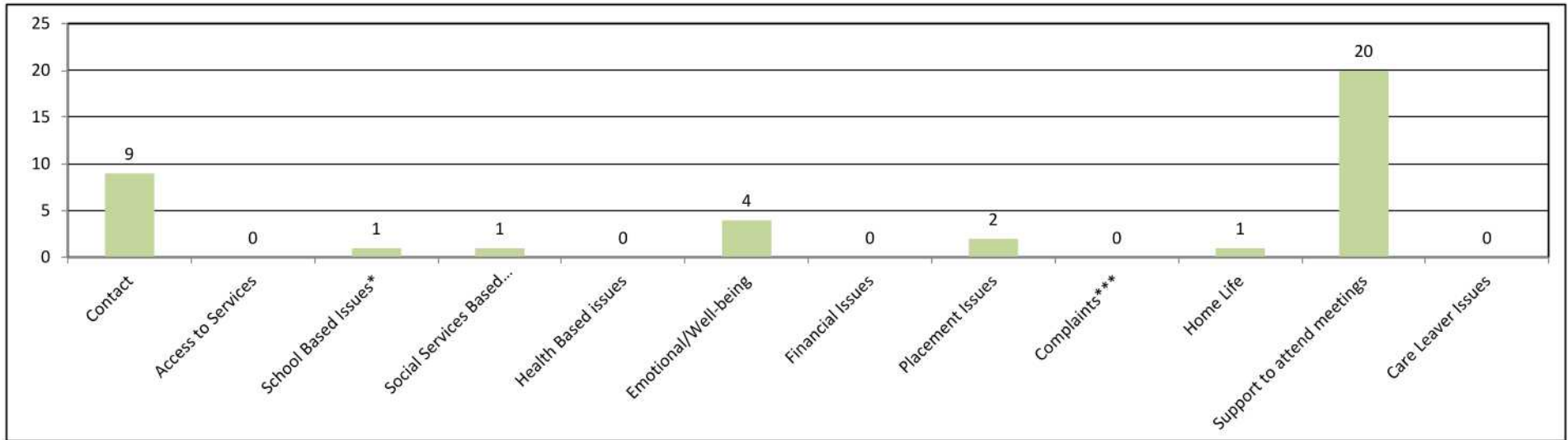
4. Protected Characteristics



5. Referral Source per young person - Issue Based only



6. Issues Presented

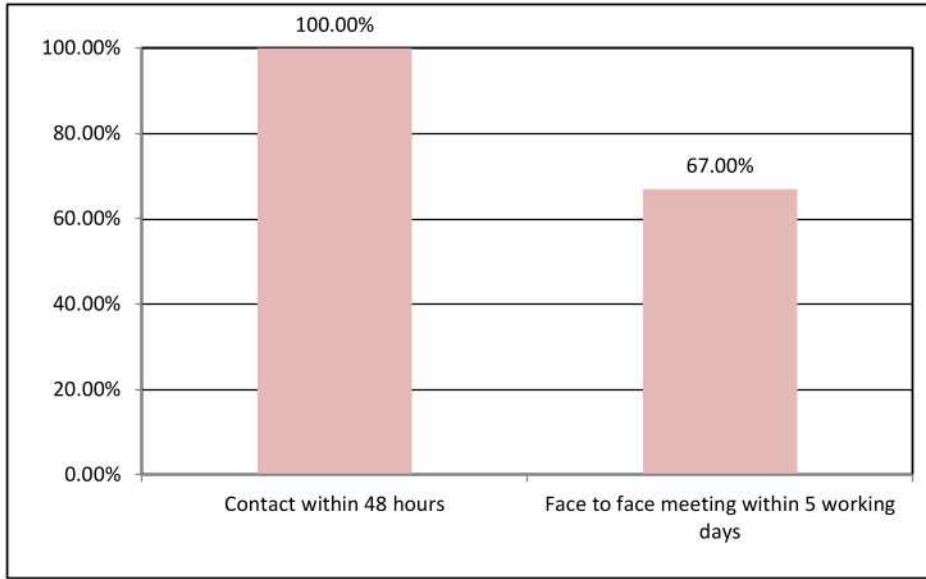


* School based issues including: SEN/ALN, exclusions, bullying, transport.

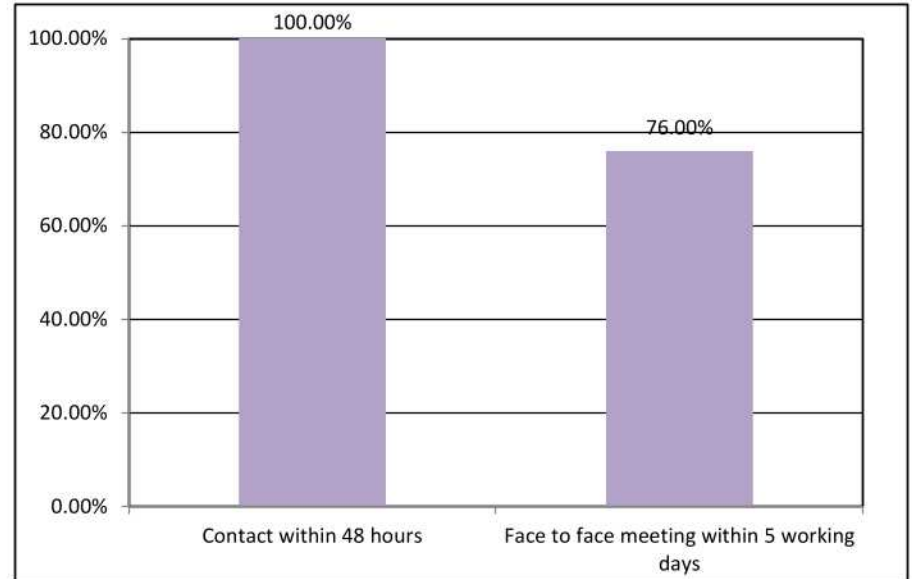
** Social Services based issues including: relationship with worker, care plan, service provided.

*** Complaints refer to any complaints made against statutory services, including Social Service, Police, Health, YJS

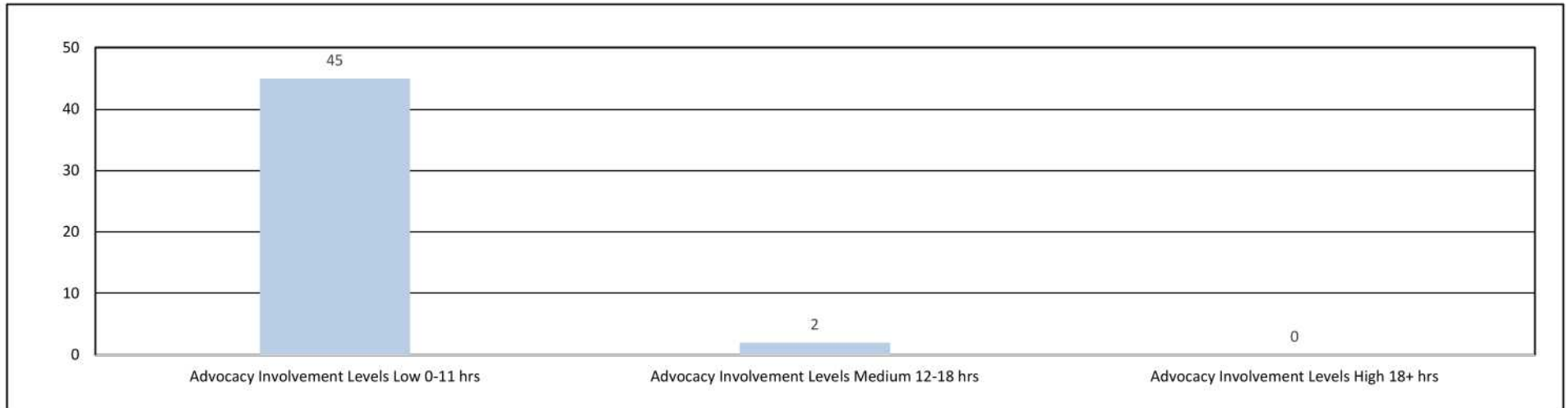
7. Service Performance - Active Offer



Service Performance - Issue Based



8. Level of Advocacy Intervention at point of Issue Closure

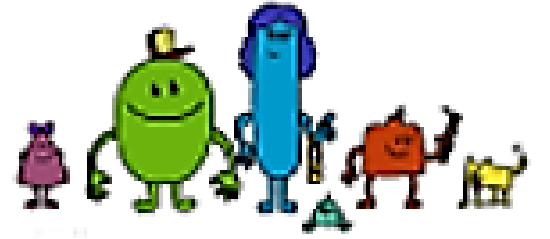


9.Outcomes: linked to The National Advocacy Standards & Outcomes Framework

		Comments
Outcome 1	Children and young people find good quality independent advocacy easily available and accessible.	<p>TGP Cymru are continuing to adapt to the changing COVID situation and because of this, more face-to-face visits have taken place during this quarter.</p> <p>The service aims to be as responsive as possible, however the increase in face-to-face advocacy, and the risk assessments that go along with it, is partly responsible for a decrease in young people meeting with their advocates within five working days. TGP Cymru have recently implemented a new internal risk assessment process which we are confident will help to overcome this issue.</p> <p>The team manager provided an overview of advocacy and the RCT perspective to the Corporate Parenting Board and attends quarterly meetings.</p>
Outcome 2	Children and young people have their privacy and confidences respected and their wellbeing safeguarded and protected.	<p>Advocates have become skilled in building relationships with young people virtually, but are also alert to the possibility that some young people are unable to conduct conversations privately. There could be several reasons for this, including a lack of somewhere private to engage in a virtual conversation, or being concerned a parent or carer could hear what they are saying, even when in a different room.</p> <p>Advocates remain flexible, and led by young people when arranging times and dates for virtual calls, but are also happy to request to undertake a face-to-face visit when they feel it is needed to maintain the integrity of the advocacy</p>
Outcome 3	Children and young people are valued for their diversity, treated with respect and all forms of discrimination against them are challenged.	<p>During this quarter, three disabled young people received issue-based advocacy, all three are diagnosed with ASD.</p>
Outcome 4	Children and young people are empowered to take the lead in relation to advocacy services and their rights, wishes and feelings and championed.	<p>Young people consistently tell us they feel empowered to speak up for themselves following advocacy intervention. One RCT young person described how she now had "someone else" to help her tell her social worker how she was feeling during this quarter. Below is a selection of direct quotes from young people's completed feedback forms:</p> <p><i>"I can have an advocate who will be my voice"</i></p> <p><i>"I have an advocate who can speak to other people about how I feel"</i></p>

Outcome 5	Children and young people participate in the design, planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy services.	<p>All young people who have received advocacy continue to be asked for feedback in order for TGP to monitor the services provided and make improvements where needed.</p> <p>A new, more independent and streamlined service has been implemented which we feel has allowed young people to provide honest opinions without worrying about offending the advocates they have worked with. We will continue to monitor and adapt this process, to allow as many young people to tell us how they feel about the advocacy service as possible.</p>
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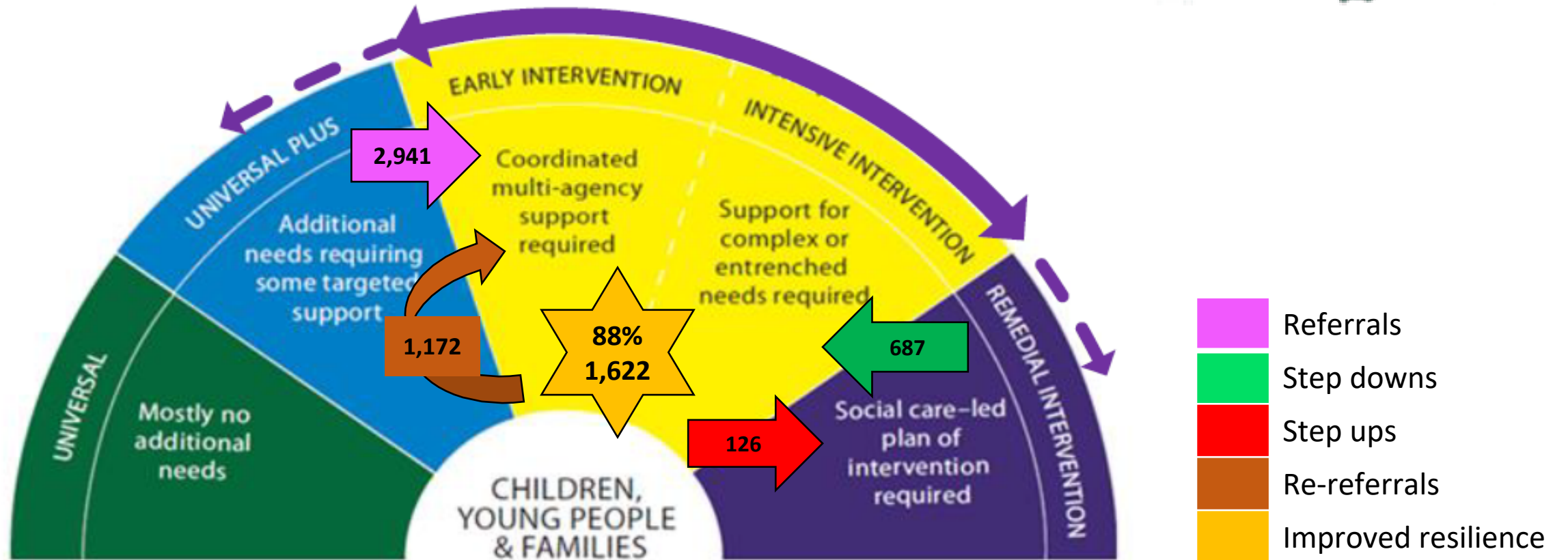
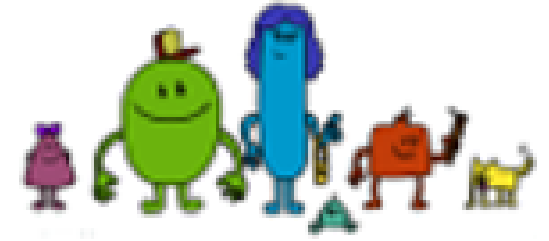
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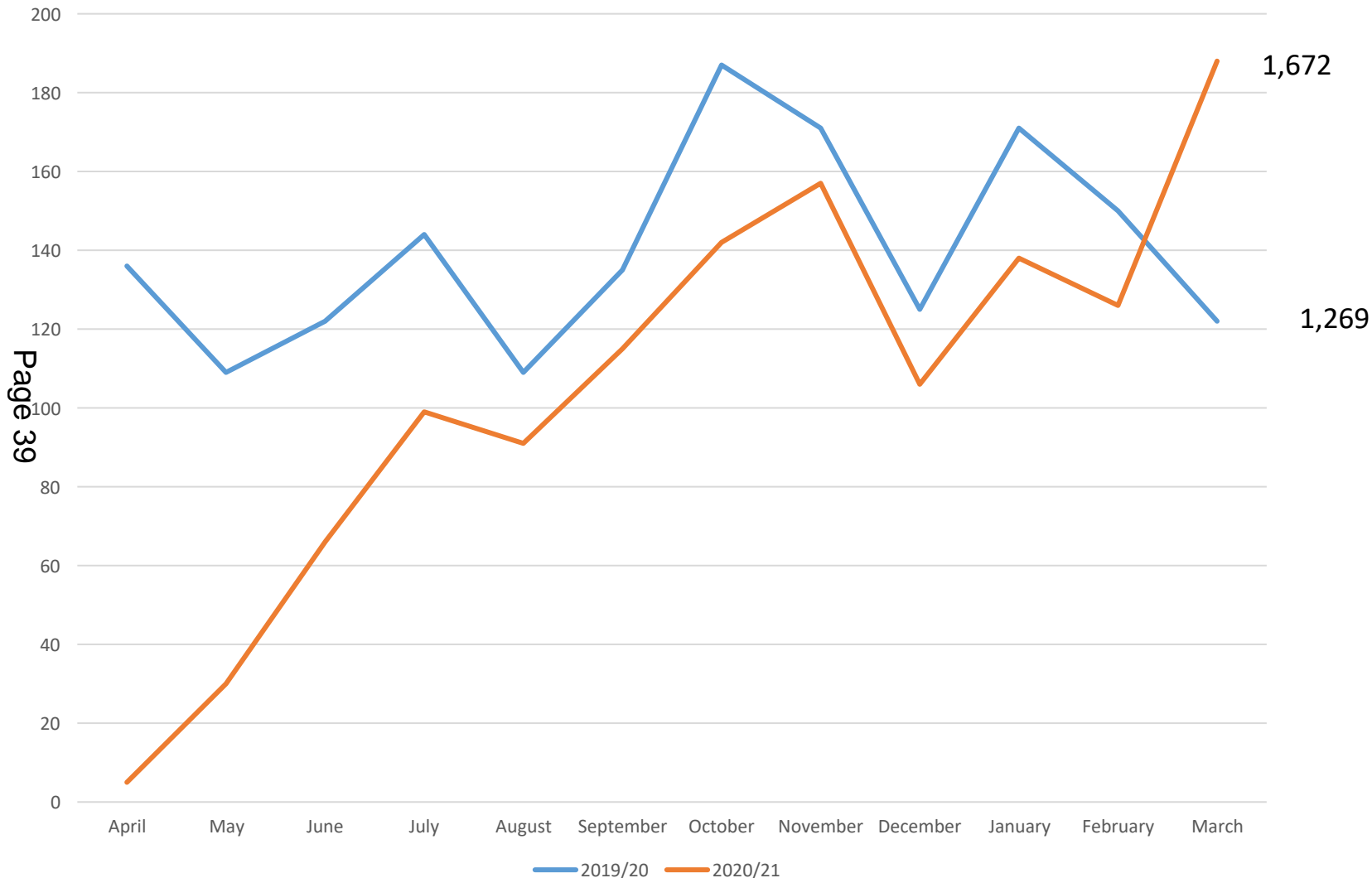
Resilient Families Service Review Data 2019/20 and 2020/21

Corporate Parenting Board
September 2021

Performance for 2019/20 and 2020/21



Referrals into RFS



The total number of referrals received into RFS decreased by over 24% between 2019/20 and 2020/21 to 1,269.

As the chart demonstrates the number of referrals received each month fluctuates significantly but comparing this data with previous years we are starting to see a trend with increased numbers received during October, November and January.

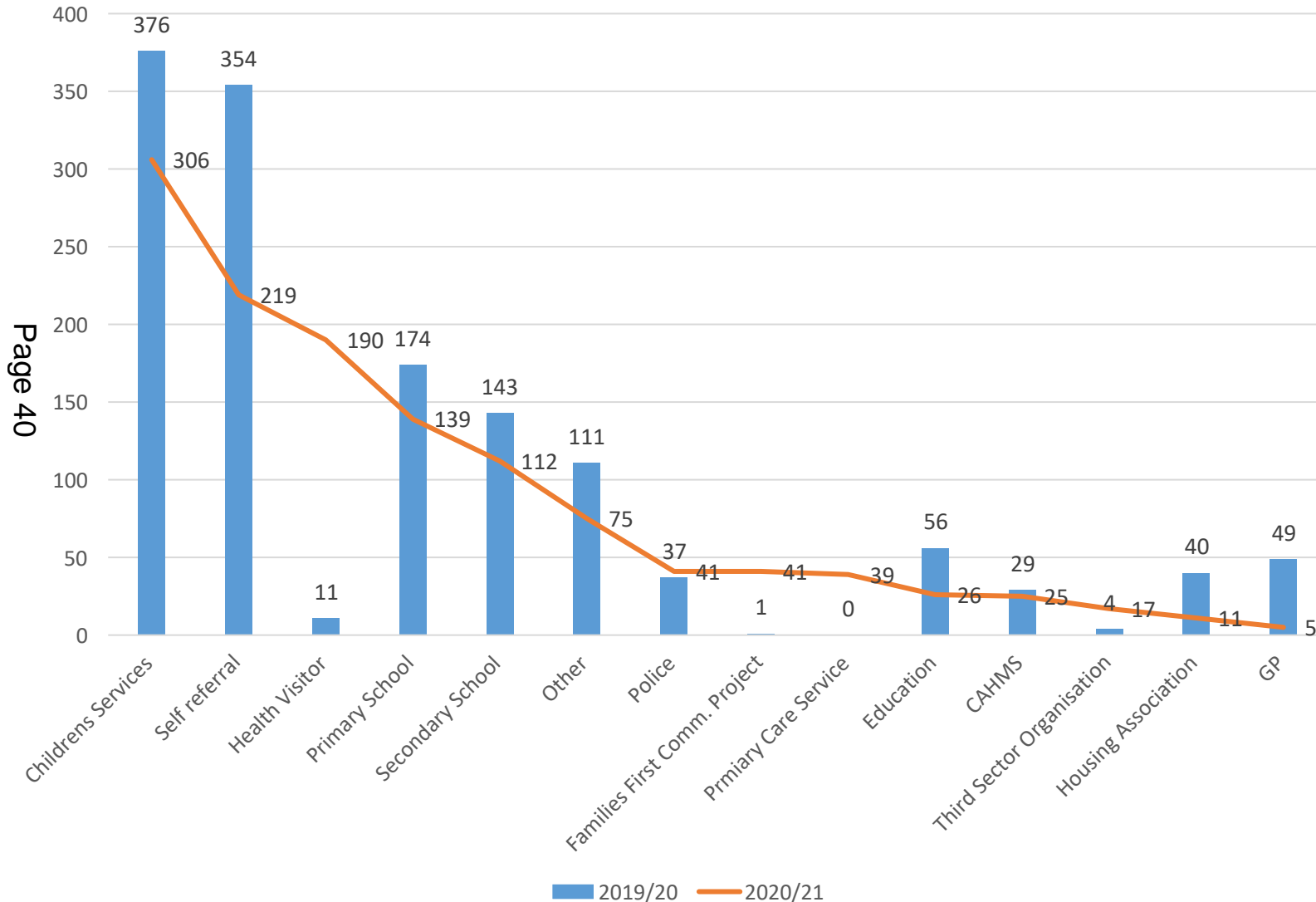
The average number of referrals received per month was:

2019/20 – 139

2020/21 – 106

(Currently @ July 2021 – 240)

Referral sources

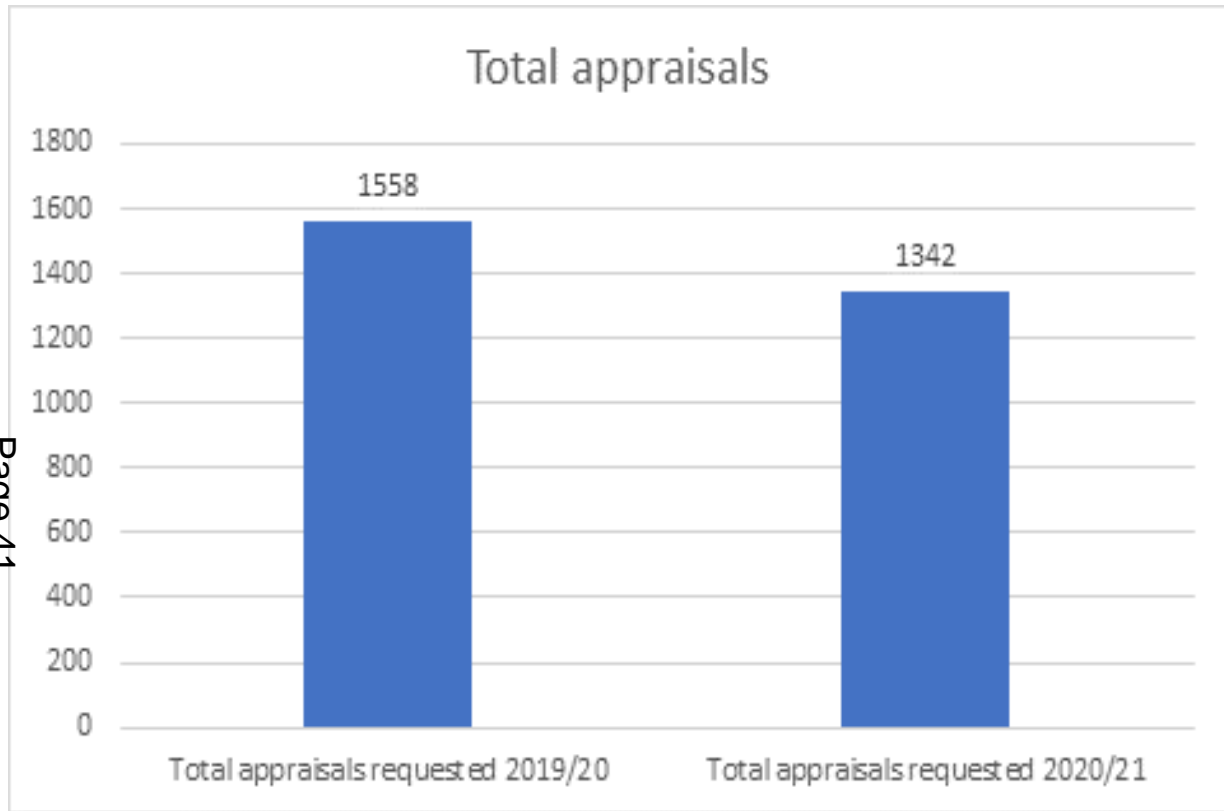


During this 2 year period although referral rates from sources has changed the highest areas remain:

	2019-20	2020-21
Children's Services	22%	24%
Self referrals	21%	17%
Health Visitors	1%	15%
Primary Schools	10%	11%
Secondary Schools	9%	9%

2020-21 saw an increase in referrals from community based services who remained in direct contact with families during the pandemic

Appraisals



The chart above indicates that there was a reduction in the number of appraisals completed in 2020/21 when compared to the previous year, a decrease of 14%. This is due to the reduction in the number of referrals and the change in the nature of support required as a result of covid

<u>Appraisals</u>	2019/20	2020/21	Difference
Parenting	317	421	104
Education	430	261	-169
Health	193	210	17
Finance	248	155	-93
YEPS	218	142	-76
Childcare	35	65	30
Housing	54	50	-4
YOS	63	26	-37

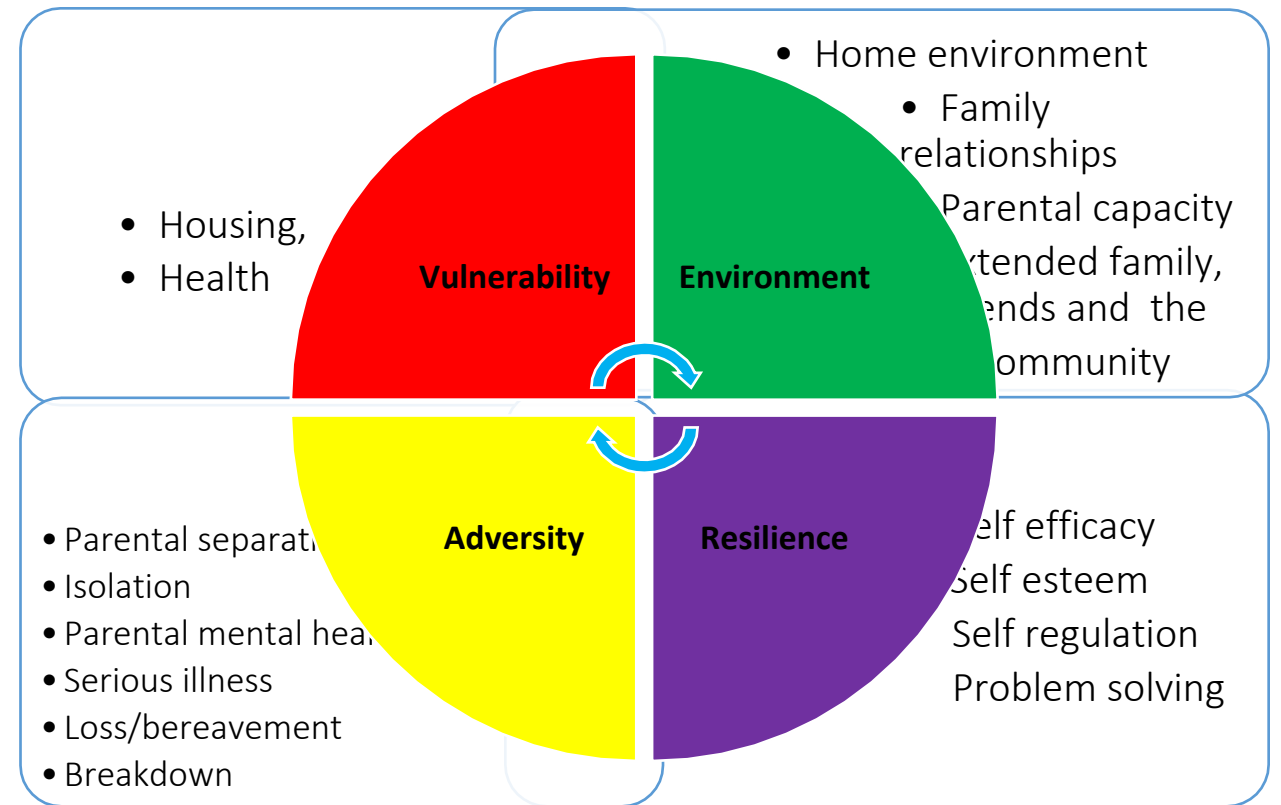
The table above provides a breakdown of the different appraisals undertaken over the 2 years. It highlights that there has been a significant increase in parenting appraisals and a slight increase in health appraisals.

Due to the restrictions of the pandemic all the other appraisals have reduced. To combat the longer term impact of covid, financial appraisals are now automatically requested for all referrals.

Changing needs

The table highlights the areas that have seen the greatest increases and decreases in the number of families identifying them as an issue for them between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

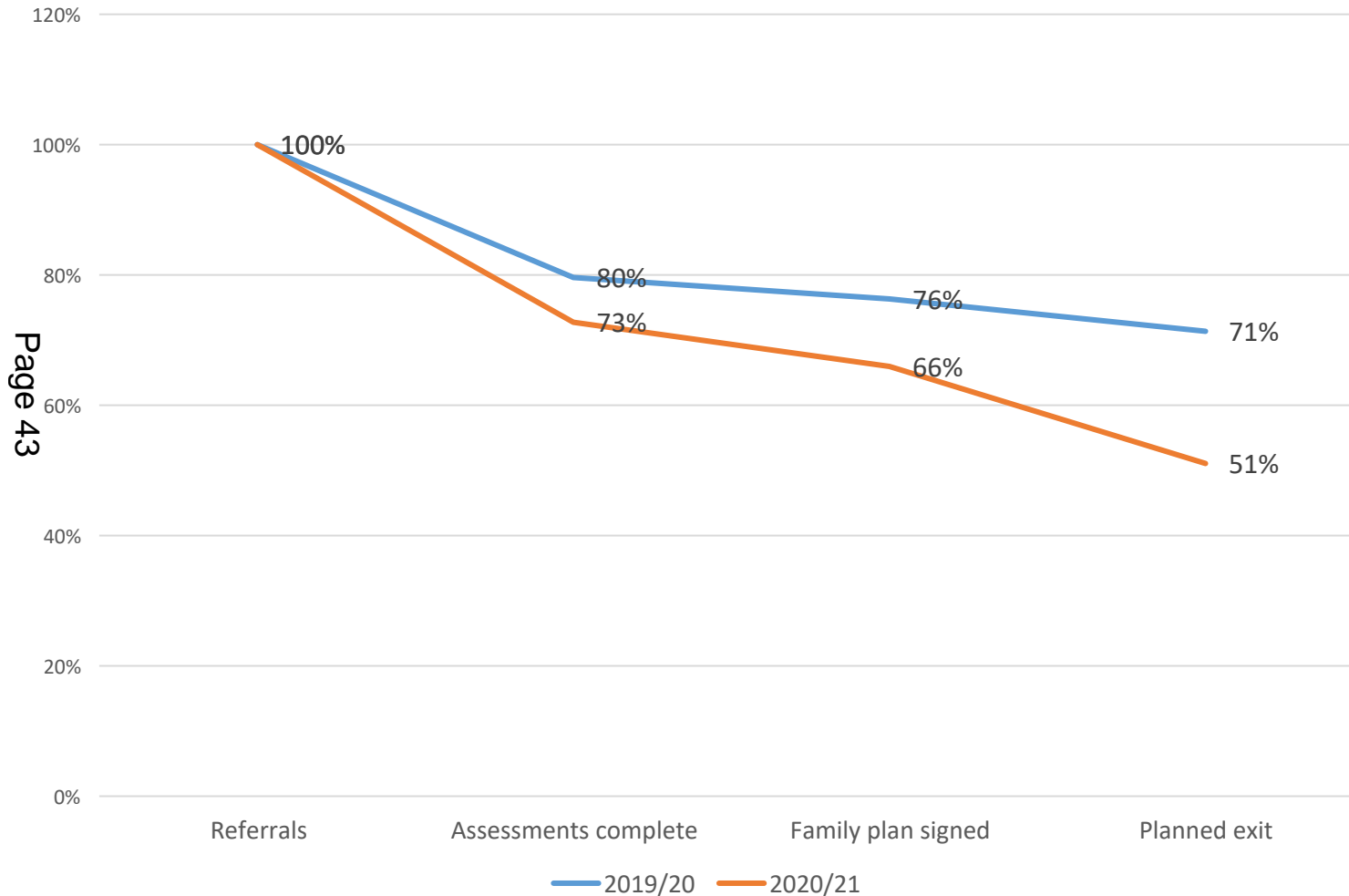
The areas of need recording the greatest increases closely relate to the effects of Covid lockdowns. A higher proportion of families are experiencing high levels of stress and require intensive support within the home.



Top 5 areas for increased levels of need	% shift	Top 5 areas for decreased levels of need	% shift
High/intense level of support to address challenges	10.8%	Positive relationship with school	-4.8%
Current levels of stress within family	6.9%	Family experiencing financial difficulties	-2.3%
Health vulnerabilities	4.6%	Drug and/or alcohol use	-0.9%
Engage in leisure/sport/community activities	4.3%	Parenting/caring skills	-0.6%
Learning from previous mistakes	3.6%	Family is a strong and confident unit	-0.5%

Retention

Retention at key stage of RFS intervention



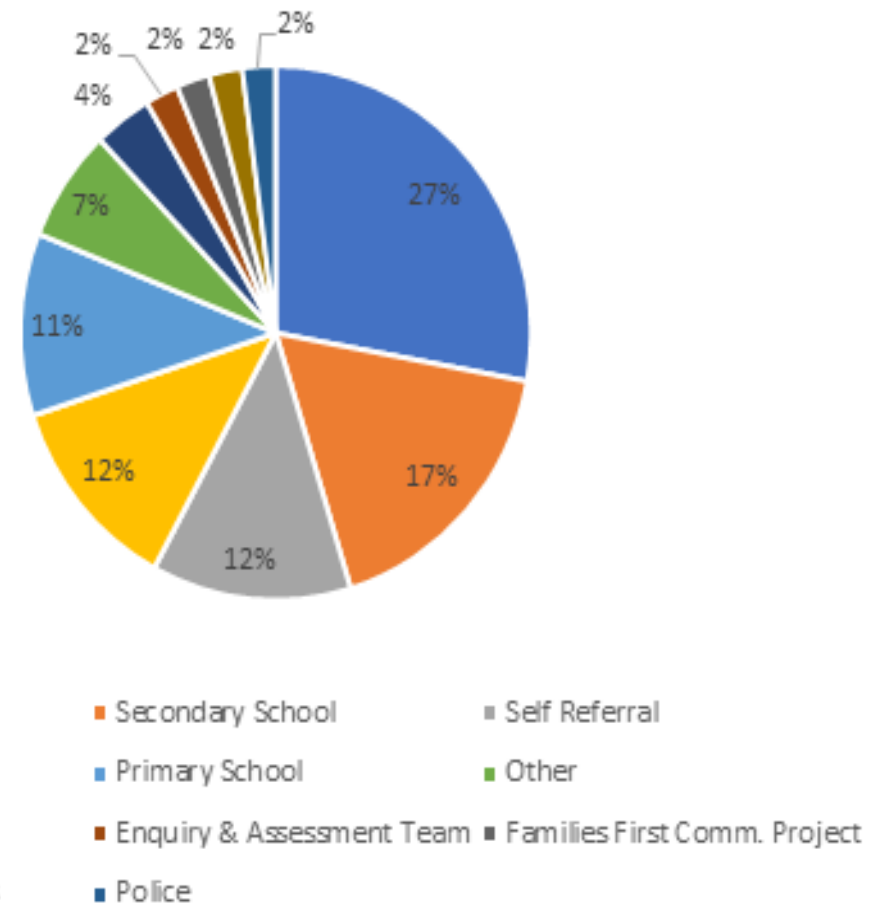
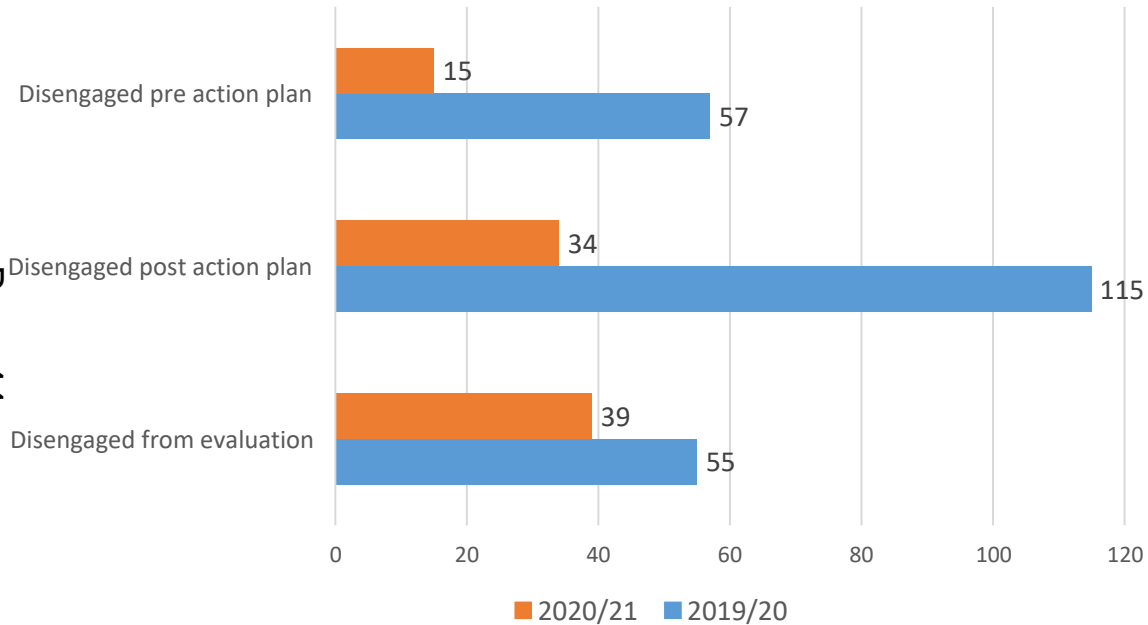
The chart illustrates the retention rate of families at each of the key stages of the RFS model.

Up to the point lockdown started in March 2020 RFS were on course to follow the trend of previous years and record a continuous improvement in the retention rate.

The significant restrictions placed on the service during 2020/21 had a major impact on our ability to provide the services families required and therefore the retention rates dropped to our lowest level. A number of families struggled with virtual support which contributed to the fall in retention rates during the intervention stage

Disengagement

Disengaged from RFS



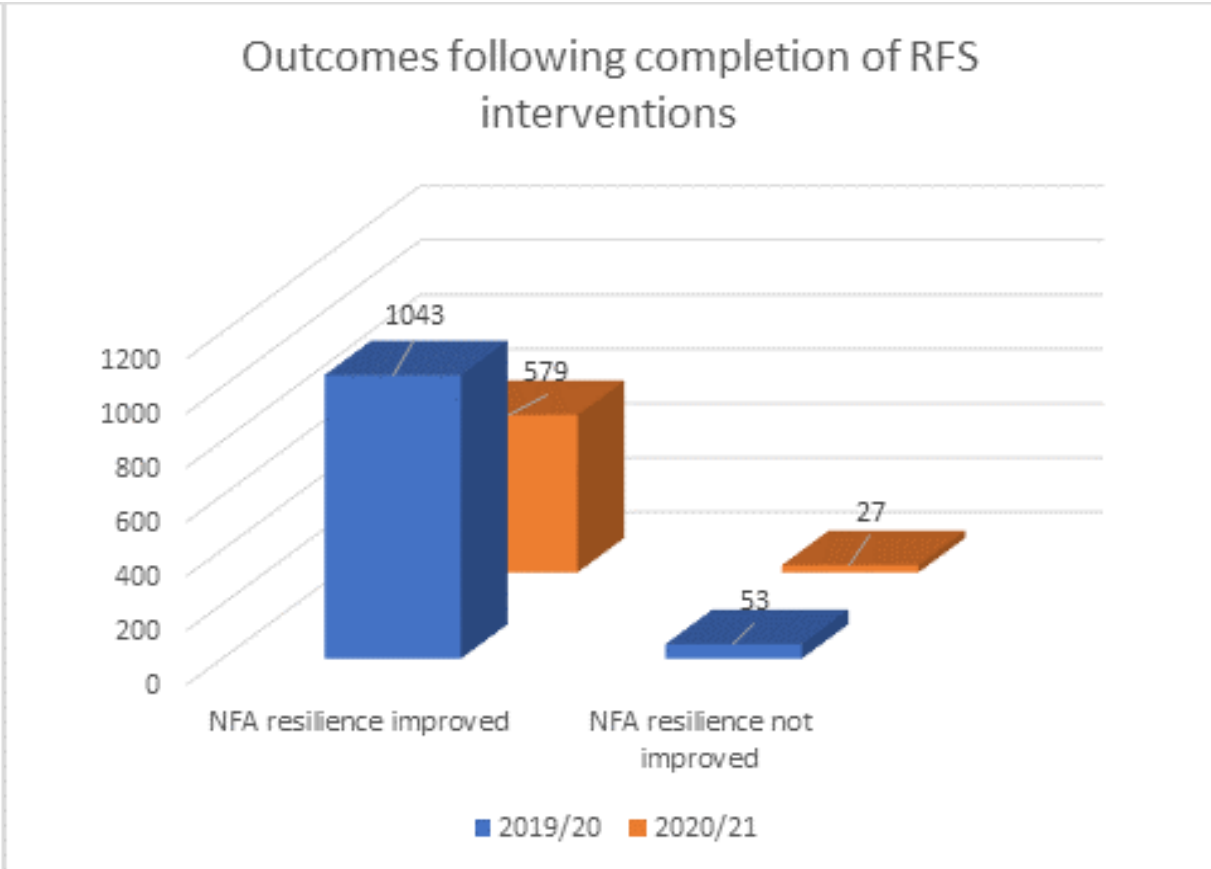
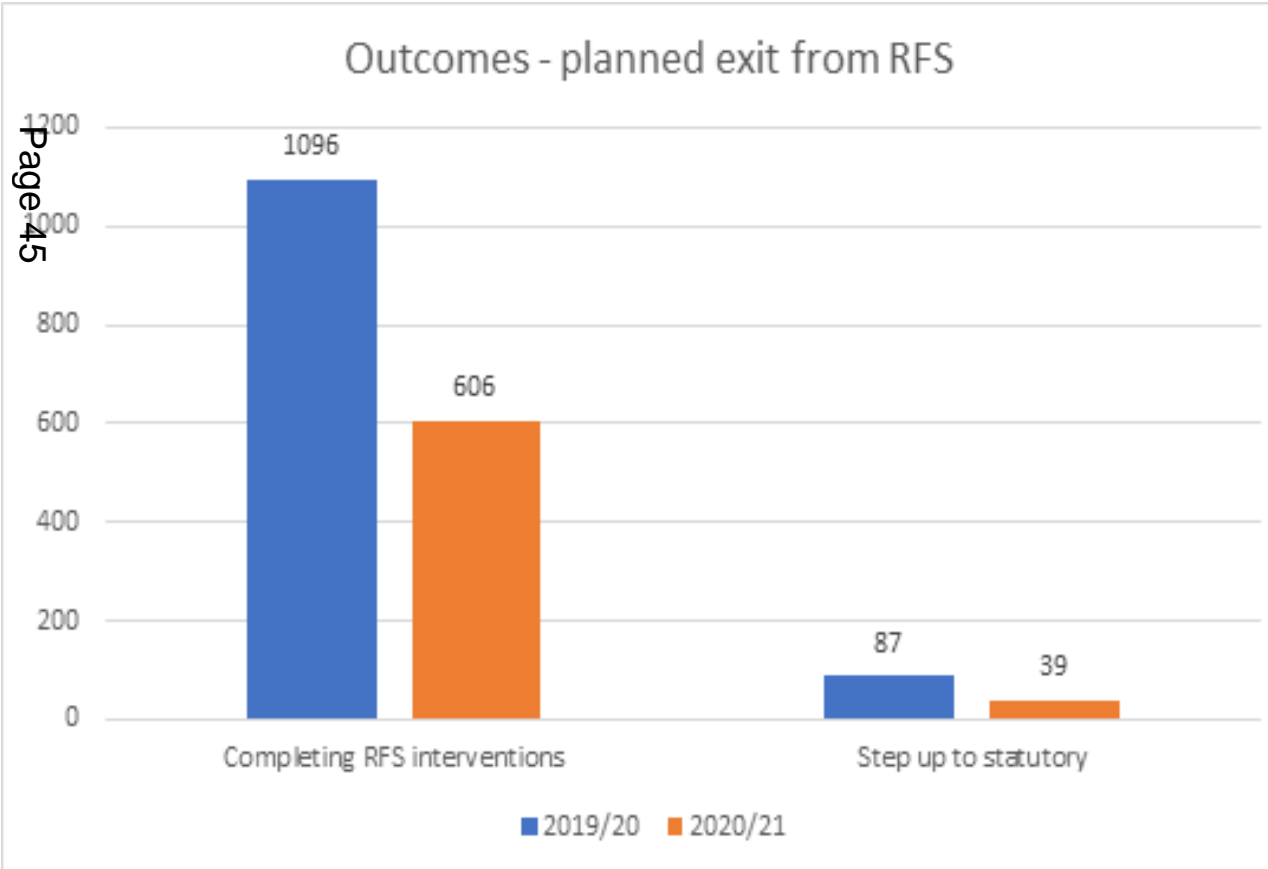
The families disengaging represented 14% of referrals in 2019/20 and 7% of all referrals in 2020/21.

Further analysis of the referral source for families who disengaged from RFS at the pre action plan stage during 2020/21, shows that 34% were step down cases from Children's Services (58 families). This is attributable to the voluntary nature of engagement with RFS.

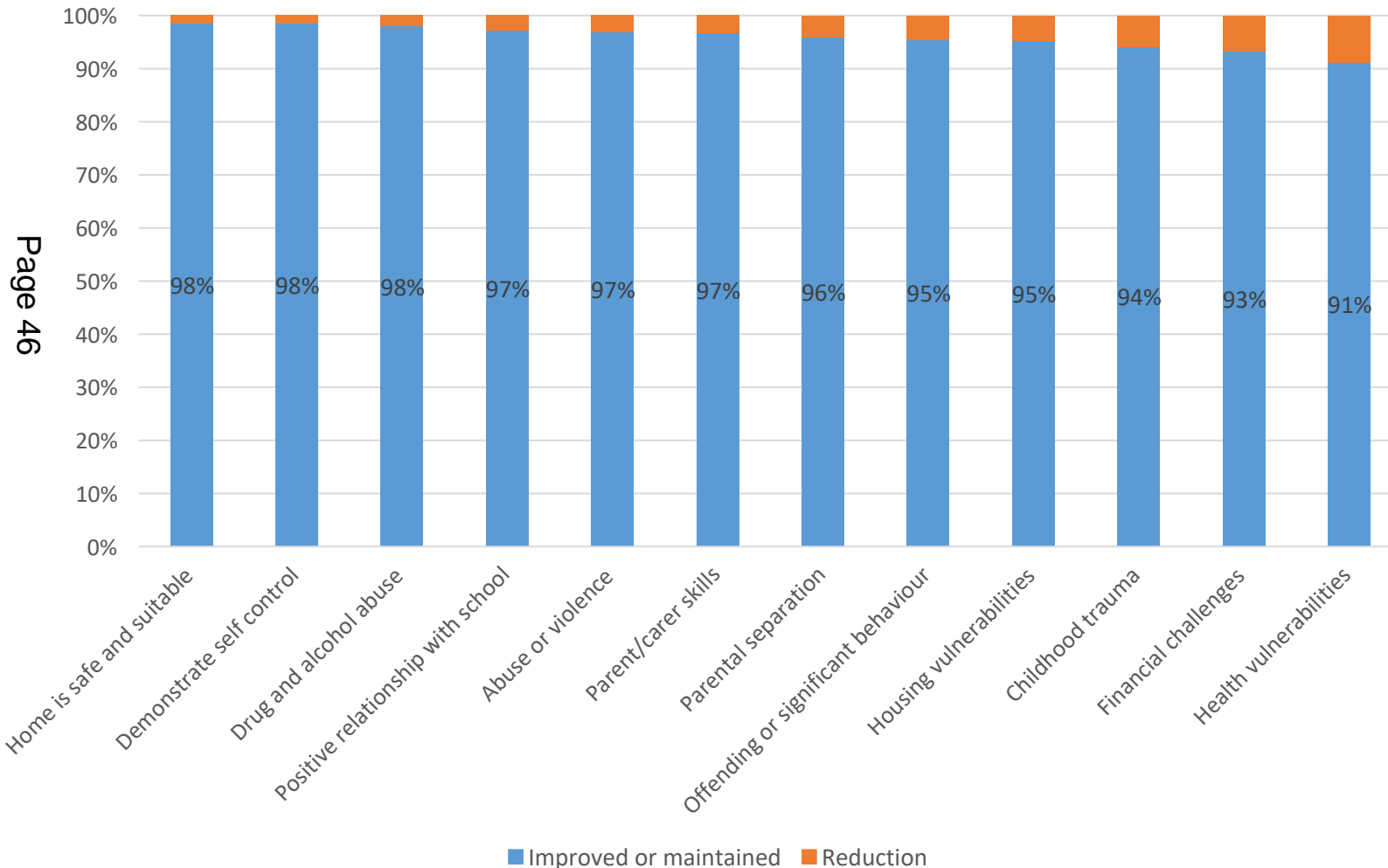
Outcomes

Of planned exits, 92.6% in 2019/20 and 94% in 2020/21 of families completed full RFS package of intervention with the remainder requiring a supported step up to statutory services due to increased levels of need/risk.

Of those families completing a full RFS package of intervention, 95.2% in 2019/20 and 95.5% in 2020/21 recorded improved resilience



Enhancing protective factors to mitigate against Adverse Childhood Experiences – 2020/21



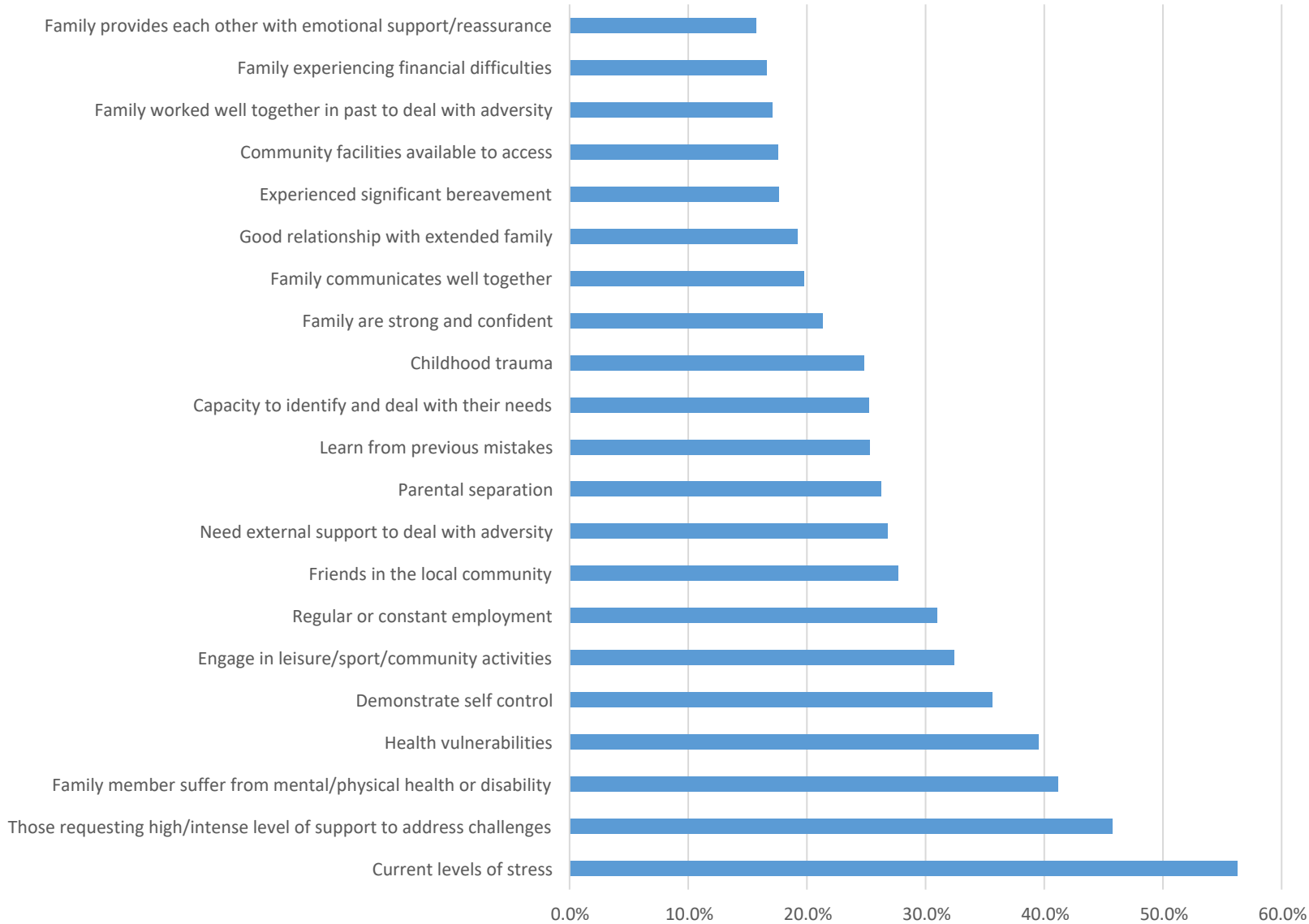
The measures in this chart have been identified as areas where improvements can have a significant impact on mitigating against ACE's or reducing the impact of ACES for family members.

The areas where the greatest impact is realised are:

- **Home is safe and** (98.5% improved or maintained)
- **Demonstrate self control** (98.5% improved or maintained)
- **Drug and alcohol use** (98% improved or maintained)
- **Positive relationship with schools** (97.2% improved or maintained)

RFS is able to demonstrate intervention is disrupting the cycle of impact of ACE's

Levels and type of support identified – 2020/21



The chart provides an overview of the responses to the resilience assessment questions asked, specifically highlighting those areas where families scored high or very high support requirements.

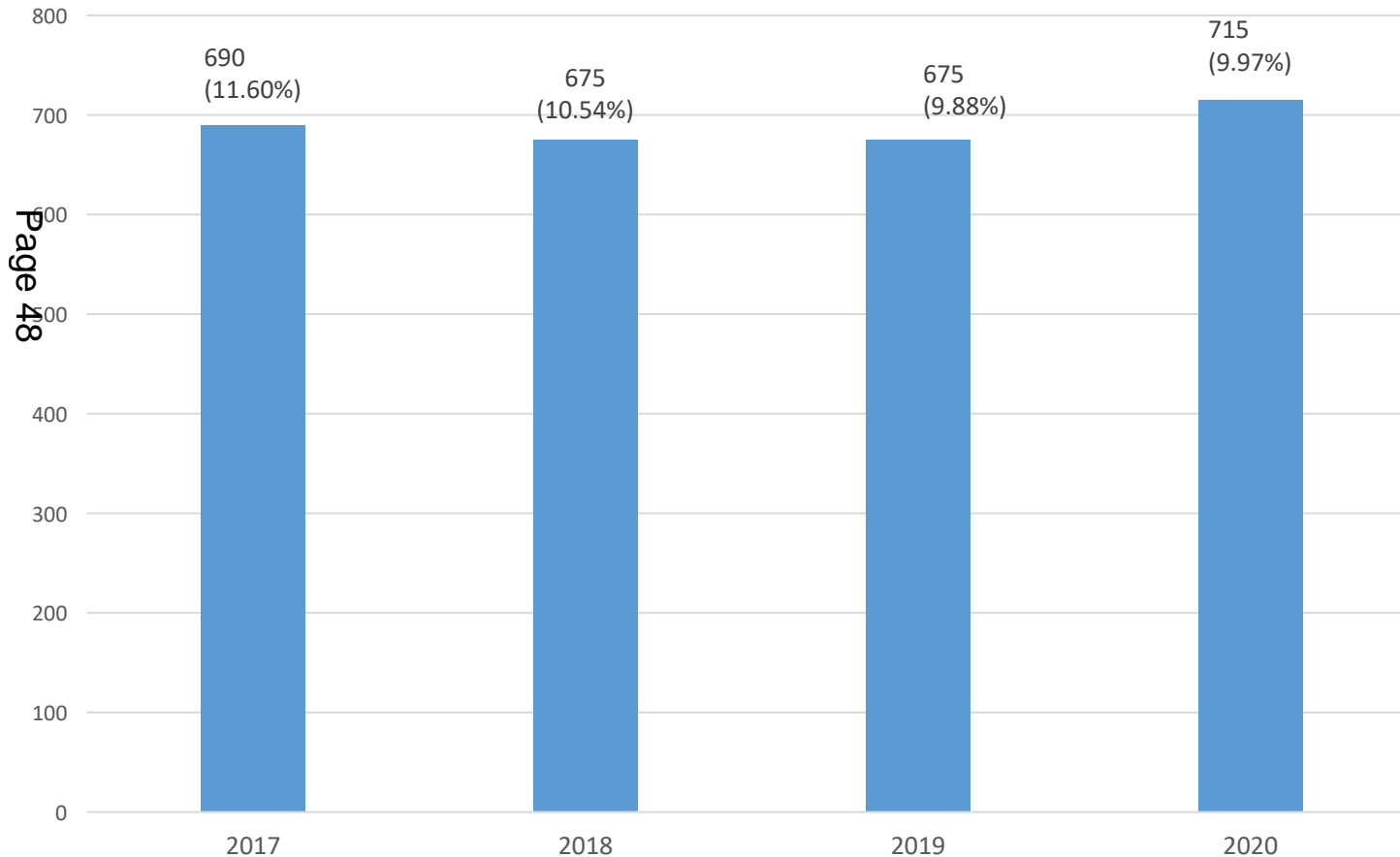
The areas with the highest percentage of families scoring high or very high are:

- **Current levels of stress (56.3%)**
- **Requires intense support to address challenges (45.7%)**
- **Health vulnerabilities (41.1%)**
- **Ability to demonstrate self-control (39.5%)**
- **Engage in leisure/sport/community activities (35.6%)**

Clear evidence of the impact of covid on presenting needs

Contributing towards reducing the number of Children Looked After (As of 31st March)

Number of Children Looked After (RCT)



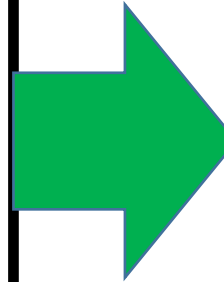
Since the introduction of the RFS in 2018 as a new model for providing early intervention support, the Local Authority initially recorded a reduction in the number of Children Looked After but this slightly increased last year.

Over the 3 year period, the number of CLA as a percentage of the Wales total has reduced. Whilst the number of CLA in 2020 saw an increase from the previous year, as a percentage of the Wales total the increase was only 0.09%. RCT CLA rates remain proportional to increases across Wales and better than pre RFS.

Case study – Family A

- The family unit consists of A (mother) and Child B (age 2)
- Referred by health visitor. Child B is presenting with social communication difficulties, the referral advises that 'he is showing signs of ASD'.
- A has suffered with ill mental health since her teenage years, during her pregnancy her anxiety and depression escalated, and struggles to bond with child B. A has had mental health support from the Perinatal Mental Health Team and Psychiatrist as following Child B's birth she was diagnosed with Post-Partum Psychosis.
- A is struggling to understand Child B's behaviours and feels that he 'does not like her' and his lack of response to her is her own fault, as a result, A's attempts to engage with Child B are lessening as she see's little improvement in their communication with each other.
- Child B is on the waiting list for the NDT, SALT, and also for the Enhanced play team, he attends the local Meithrin although A questions if the Welsh medium nursery is the right placement for him.
- Support for A to understand Child B's behaviours and the underlying causes for them, Mother wishes to be confident in her parenting of him and explore methods to engage with him

Page 49



FAMILY PLAN GOALS

To support child B's social and communication development through provision of childcare

- Ensure strategies in place to for setting to meet Child B's needs and address sensory issues and social /developmental skills.
- To encourage attendance at childcare setting

To support improvements in parent / child attachment

- Provision of RFS Specialist HV intervention
- Encouragement to implement advice from RFS Specialist HV
- Introduce the use of activities designed to promote attachment

To support mum to maximise family income

- CAB to provide one to one financial advice and support to access relevant benefits

Case study – Family A

To support child B's social and communication development through provision of childcare

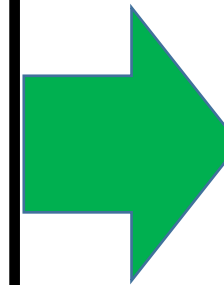
- Child B settled very well in childcare setting
- Evidence of social and communication development as a result of nursery attendance and one to one support provided.
- Educational Psychologist strategies in place to use with Child B to tackle some of his sensory issues and his social /developmental skills
- Mum able to cope better with time to herself as well as seeing child B's development

To support improvements in parent / child attachment

- Direct work with Mum by RFS Specialist Health Visitor focused on coping strategies to maintain good mental health and self-care skills
- Watch Wait Wonder programme with mum and child B and he is making progress
- Mum is persevering daily with the activities given to her
- Mum more confident to play with Child B
- Mum more engaged with Child B and has made an application for primary school admission next year

To support mum to maximise family income

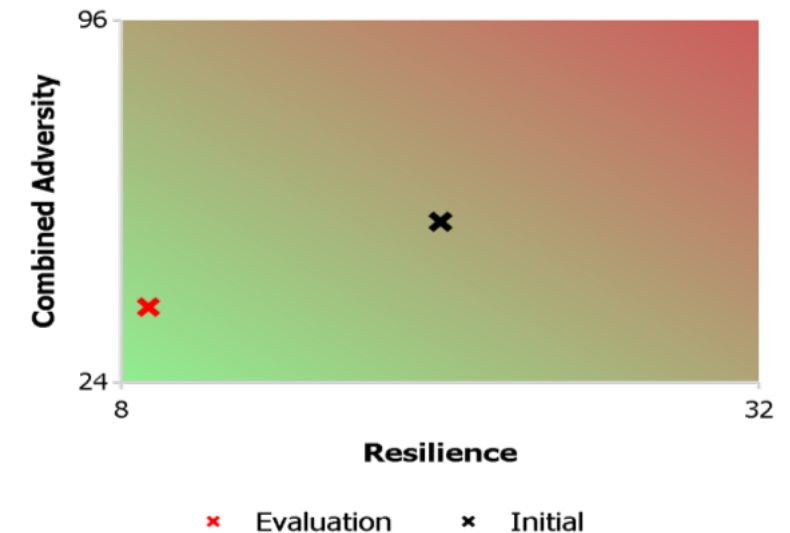
- Mum supported to make application for Disability Living Allowance for child B and application for housing benefit made
- Application made to charity to fund specialist pram awarded
- Mum is now receipt of all her entitled benefits

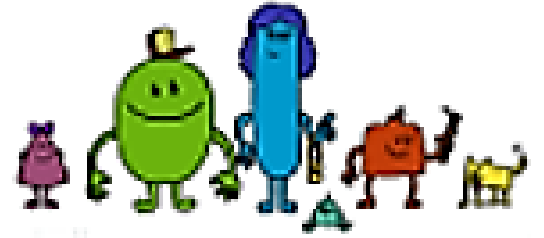


OUTCOMES

Resilience Assessment Click for breakdown			
	Initial Assessment	Evaluation Assessment	Change
Environment	17	10	↓
Adversity	23	17	↓
Resilience	20	9	↓
Vulnerability	16	12	↓
Combined Adversity	56	39	-17

Resilience Matrix





Any Questions?

Corporate Parenting Board
September 2021

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13TH SEPTEMBER 2021

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE MONITORING REPORT TO THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

**Authors: Emma Walters, Service Manager Safeguarding
Ceri Mann, Reviewing Team Manager, RCT Childrens Services
Tel: 01443 490120**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide the lead Director for Children and Young People with information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for children looked after (CLA) for the period **1st January 2021 – 30th June 2021**. Report is also presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Corporate Parenting Board Members are already familiar with the IRO role from prior reports and going forward, the context for that will be provided in an Appendix document included in the agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board note the information contained within this report.

3. THE REVIEWING SERVICE

The Reviewing Service currently sits within the remit of the Head of Service for Safeguarding. It currently comprises 12 IRO full-time posts (up from 11 following the additional P-T hours agreed), 4 of which are filled by 8 part time staff, 2 Business Support staff who are responsible for taking notes in complex CLA Reviews, and a Team Manager who is line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding.

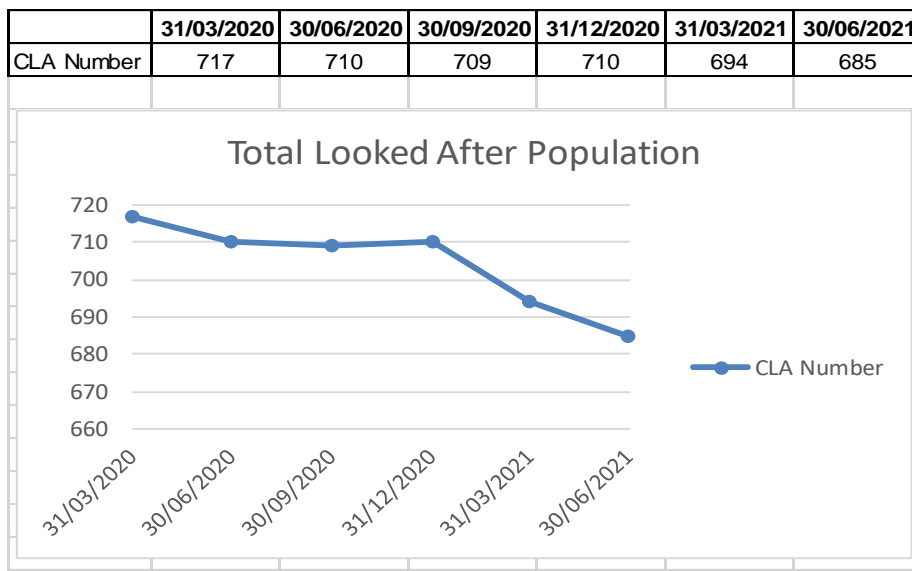
As a result of COVID all the service functions are currently being delivered remotely. Whilst necessary under the circumstances, this creates challenges for the service as best practice is that these meetings should be held face-to-face and at the child's preferred venue (e.g.,

placement, school). The service continues to use MST to hold meetings virtually, however we are continuing to strive toward a ‘hybrid’ approach to ensure children and families have choice of their preferred style of meeting. The service has very recently seen the implementation of 5 digital packs within our corporate buildings and a further ICF bid has been made for additional digital packs that can be used within community setting to promote greater participation in accessible, child friendly settings.

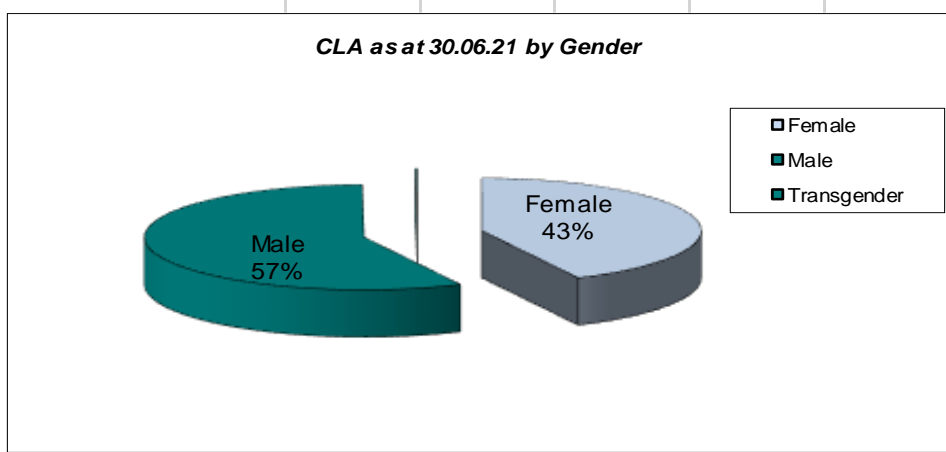
IRO’s continue to WFH, chairing complex and emotionally charged meeting remotely and whilst the technology remains unreliable on occasions, they remain committed to ensuring high quality and inclusive meetings. The service has continued to operate to the same capacity and despite the many challenges faced since the beginning of the pandemic their commitment and professionalism remains resolute in ensuring the best outcomes for children looked after.

4. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (30th June 2021)

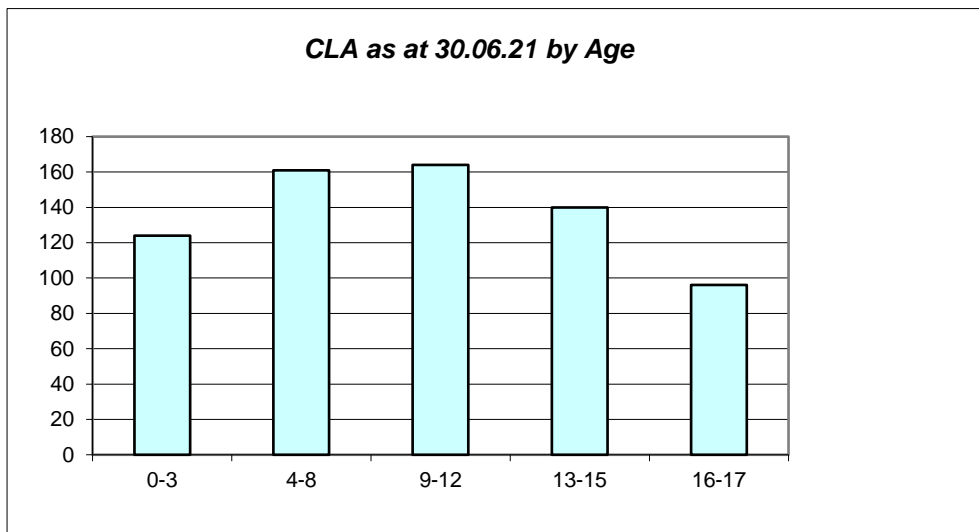


Looked After Population by Gender

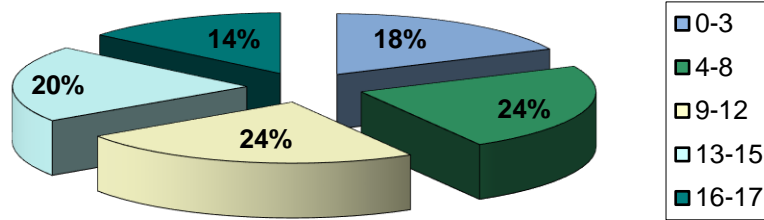


	CLA as at 31.03.20 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.20 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.20 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.20 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.21 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.21 by Gender
Female	303	297	302	301	296	293
Male	414	413	407	409	397	391
Transgender	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	717	710	709	710	694	685

Looked After Population by Age Group

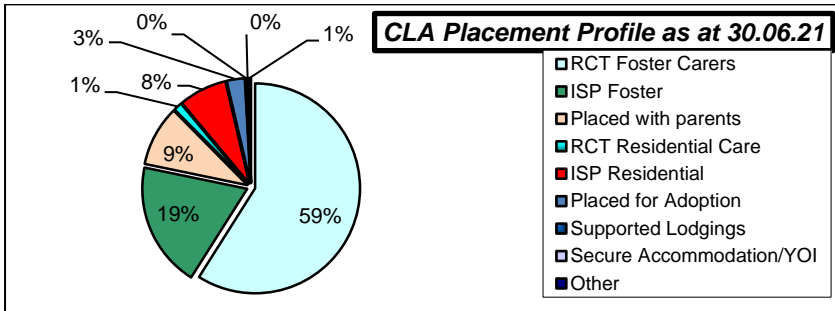


CLA as at 30.06.21 by Age



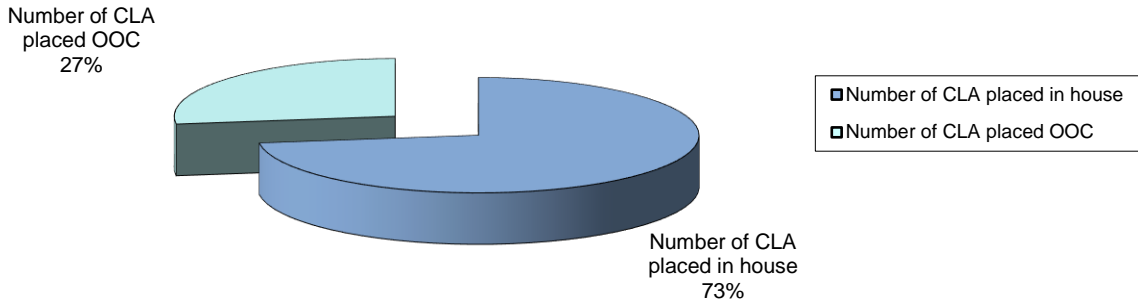
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.03.20 by Age	133	174	170	136	104	717
CLA as at 30.06.20 by Age	134	172	162	137	105	710
CLA as at 30.09.20 by Age	132	175	167	137	98	709
CLA as at 31.12.20 by Age	139	165	174	145	87	710
CLA as at 31.03.21 by Age	126	163	174	142	89	694
CLA as at 30.06.21 by Age	124	161	164	140	96	685

Placement Details – including numbers in foster care, residential placements, placements within and external to RCT, those provided by Independent Agencies etc.



	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21	Jun-21
RCT Foster Carers	394	399	393	392	404	404
ISP Foster	161	152	152	145	139	132
Placed with parents	70	67	65	77	70	64
RCT Residential Care	11	11	10	7	11	9
ISP Residential	52	52	55	57	50	51
Placed for Adoption	22	25	29	26	16	19
Supported Lodgings	6	3	3	3	1	2
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	1	1	1	1
Other	1	1	1	2	2	3
Total	717	710	709	710	694	685

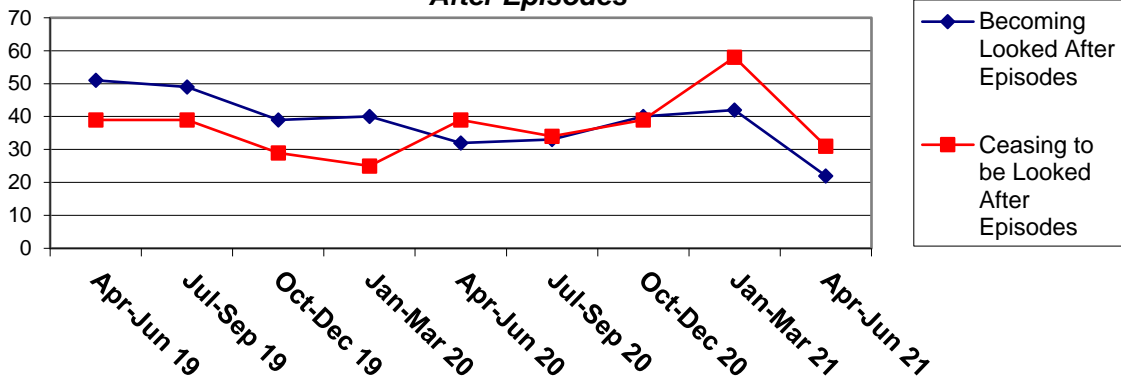
Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 30.06.21



	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21	Jun-21
Number of CLA placed in house	503	514	495	499	508	499
Number of CLA placed OOC	214	196	214	211	186	186
Total CLA	717	710	709	710	694	685
% OOC	29.8%	27.6%	30.2%	29.7%	26.8%	27.2%

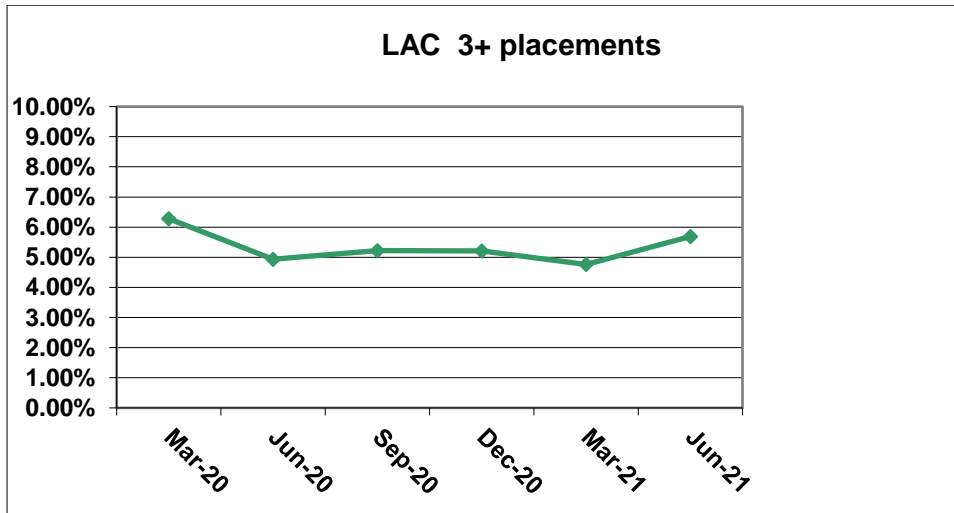
Admissions and Discharge Information

The number of Becoming Looked After & Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes



	Apr-Jun 19	Jul-Sep 19	Oct-Dec 19	Jan-Mar 20	Apr-Jun 20	Jul-Sep 20	Oct-Dec 20	Jan-Mar 21	Apr-Jun 21
Becoming Looked After Episodes	51	49	39	40	32	33	40	42	22
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	39	39	29	25	39	34	39	58	31

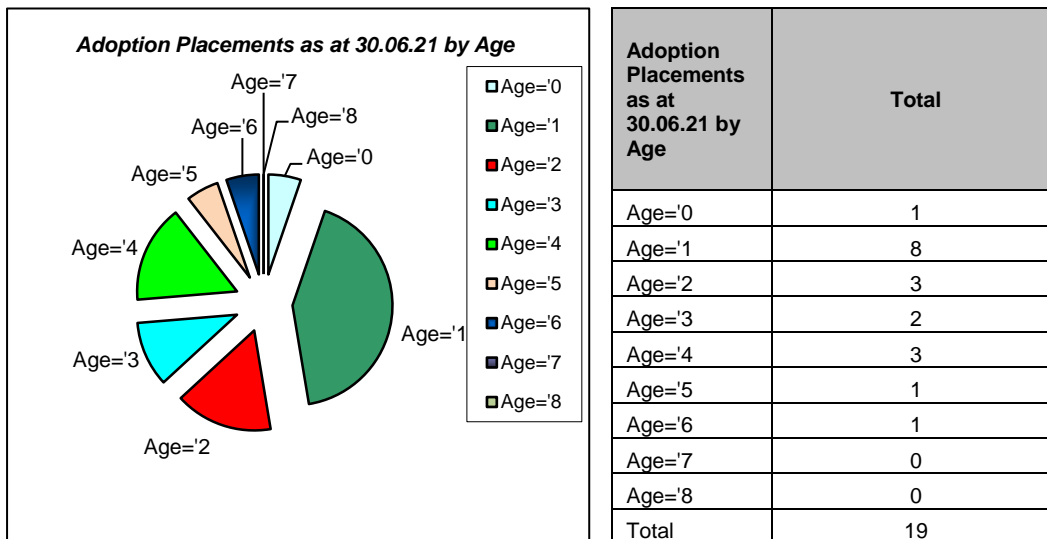
Placement Stability

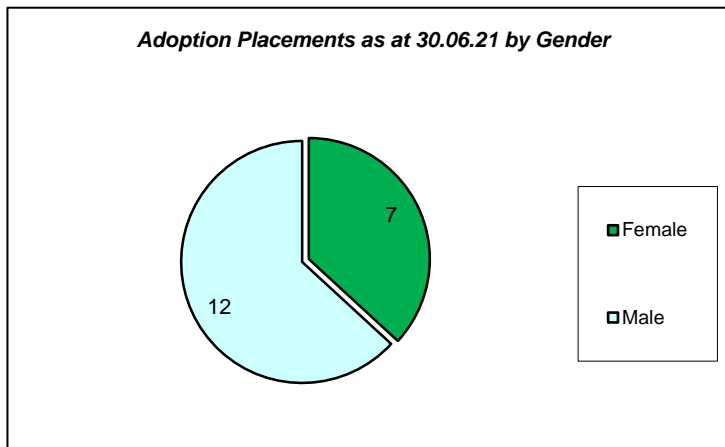


	Mar-20	Jun-20	Sep-20	Dec-20	Mar-21	Jun-21
% 3+ placements	6.28%	4.93%	5.22%	5.21%	4.76%	5.69%

Adoption Information

Total numbers of children placed for adoption or adopted, including age and gender breakdown





Adoption Placements as at 30.06.21 by Gender	Total
Female	7
Male	12
Total	19

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.06.21	19
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.07.20 - 30.06.21	23
Number of Children adopted between 01.07.20 - 30.06.21	29

5. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1st January 2021 – 30th June 2021

CLA Numbers:

Overall, we are seeing a reduction in admission figures, and the number of CLA admissions during the period January 2021 to June 2021 decreased by 25 when compared to the same period in 2020, a 4% decrease in admissions.

During this reporting period (covering Q 4 & Q1) the total number of children looked after fluctuated between 710 and 685 - a reduction in overall numbers on the previous reporting period. During the current year, numbers of admissions fluctuated with our lowest figure being 7 in numerous months and the highest of 22 in December 2020. Given the impact of lockdown on families and the challenges this has presented the LA in terms of finding placements, moving children between and out of placements safely and in line with WG procedures, the reduction and stability of number is not surprising.

CLA By Age:

As of the end of 30.06.21, 33% of admissions are children aged under 1 year old. The numbers have increased by 6 when compared to the same period in 2019-20 and the trend shows that this age group continues to have the highest number of admissions. 23 out of the 45 babies (under 1) becoming looked after were boys

The number of children aged 1-4 becoming looked after has decreased by 9 compared to last year's figures, from 36 (23%) children in 2019-20 to 23 (17%) children in 2020-21.

The number of children being brought into care aged 16+ has decreased by 4 when compared to the same period from 12 in 2019-20 to 8 which is 6% of the overall figure in 2020-21.

Based on current CLA numbers the highest number are in the 10-15 age group. This age group is consistently the highest percentage.

Placement Details:

At the end of 30.06.21 most children are placed with Relative Carers (35%). This figure includes approved and non-approved kinship carers. The number has increased by 2 when compared to the same time last year.

In House Foster Care placements continue to be higher than Independent Sector Foster Care. The number of Independent Foster Care placements has decreased by 12% when compared to last year.

The number of Mother and Baby placements has decreased from 8 to 3 over the last 12 months.

The number of children placed with parents has remained the same when compared to last year.

73% of looked after children were residing within RCT on the 30.06.21. 186 children were in placements outside of RCT, a 5% decrease when compared with the same reporting period last year, and of these, 12 were residing outside Wales.

Placement Stability:

This is a Welsh Government Performance Indicator that we report on quarterly and the target for 2019/20 was 6%. Performance has dropped slightly since Quarter 4 2020/2,1 where we achieved 4.8% at year end.

Children move placement for a variety of different reasons & some of the 3rd placements will relate to children's moves to a permanent long-term placement.

Performance can also be affected by the continued high number of children looked after, which can put pressure on placement availability.

Admissions and Discharges:

64 children became looked after between 01.01.21 & 30.06.21. This is a 11% decrease in numbers compared to the same reporting period in 2020.

89 children ceased being looked after between 01.01.21 & 30.06.21. This is a 28% decrease in numbers compared to the same reporting period in 2020 - where 64 children ceased to be looked after.

In relation to where the children reside upon leaving care, 47% of children returned home to Family/Extended Family during the period, which is the highest percentage.

29 children (18%) had Adoption Orders granted, so now reside with their adoptive families.

40 children (25%) remained with foster carers, either as a 'When I'm Ready' arrangement upon turning 18, or through a Special Guardianship Order. Independent living accounted for 12% and these are young people aged 16+.

In relation to the ages of children when they cease being looked after, more children left care aged 18 years - accounting for 29% of the total number.

The second highest age group were aged 1 – 4 years, accounting for 27% of the total. Out of the 44 children in this age group, 61% were adopted and 36% returned home to parents.

The 13 children aged 0-15 who ceased to be looked after, but remained with foster carers, stayed there due to a Special Guardianship Order being granted.

36% of all children that ceased being looked after over the last 12 months were aged 16+.

There are currently 298 care leavers open to the 16+ teams, aged between 18-25 years. 50% of these young people reside in Independent Living placements, which is the highest percentage rate. 49% of the young people in Independent Living placements are aged 18-21 years.

16% of Care Leavers reside with Family or Relatives, and 12% remained with their Foster Carers as part of a 'When I'm Ready' arrangement. There have been 104 young persons placed in When I'm Ready placements since the scheme started in 2015. 51% (53) of these young people remained with their former independent foster carers, 29% (30) with RCT foster carers and 20% (20) with relative carers. Five former WIR placements still return to their carers from University during holiday breaks.

5 young people aged 18-21 years are not engaging with 16+, and their whereabouts are currently unknown.

Of the 285 care leavers aged 18-25 years, 15 have a category of homeless recorded. Some of the reasons for homelessness can relate to care leavers leaving home due to relationship breakdowns (that result in them moving frequently between friends and family), being unable to remain in housing due to affordability problems, mental health issues or leaving prison with no home to go to.

Adoption:

22 children have had a Placement Order granted between July 20 to June 21. Of these children, 11 have been placed with prospective adopters and the remaining 11 children are residing in foster care placements.

In comparison to the previous year, there has been a 16% increase in the number of Placement Orders granted.

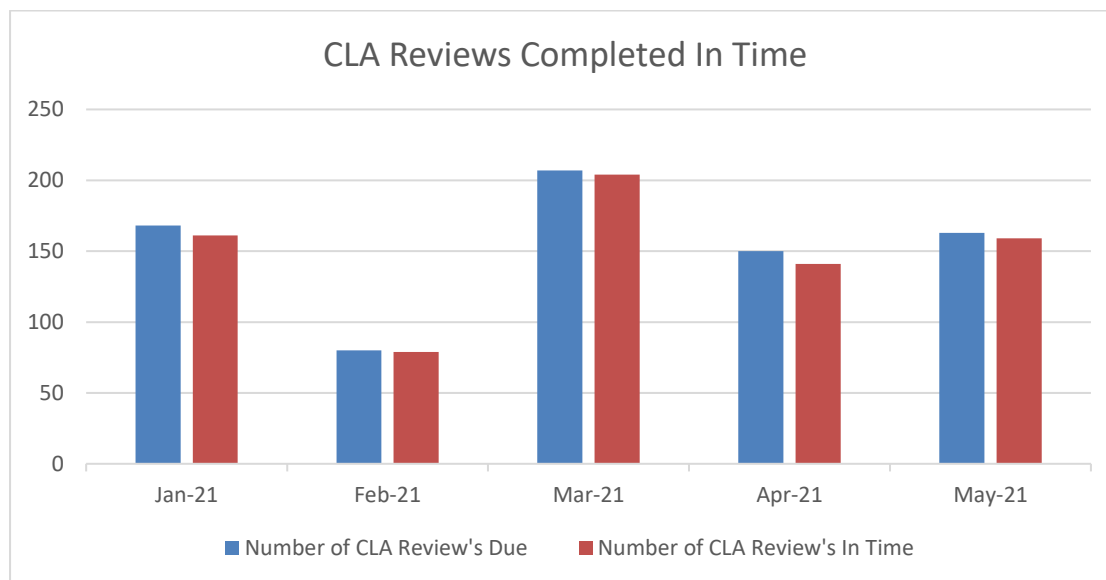
A total of 23 adoption placements were started between Jul 20 to Jun 21, which is a 4% decrease compared to the previous year.

29 Adoption Orders have been granted over the last 12 months which is a 71% increase compared to the previous year.

CLA Reviews

CLA Review's in Time 1st January 2021 – 30th June 2021

918 CLA review meetings were due in this 6-month period, and our CLA Review performance was at 97% at the end of June 2021.



	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Total
Number of CLA Review's Due	168	80	207	150	163	150	918
Number of CLA Review's In Time	161	79	204	141	159	144	888
% In Time	96%	99%	99%	94%	98%	96%	97%

In addition, IROs chaired **12** combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences, to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register *and* held **8** IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews.

6. REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

Only 30 Reviews were not held in time between January 2021 to June 2021, which has remained stable since the last reporting period, and is a significant achievement considering the circumstances facing the service. Every effort is made to ensure that cancelled reviews are reconvened within time, and when this isn't possible permission to go out of time should be sought from a Service Manager or Head of Service. This is reflected in the significantly lower number of reviews that have gone out of time to those that have been rearranged within time.

The reasons for cancellations / delays vary, but a number are undoubtedly due to the impact of Covid on the availability of family, social workers, IRO's and other professionals - where services and service provision has had to adapt throughout the pandemic. Further reasons for CLA reviews needing to be cancelled, relate to allowing newly allocated workers an opportunity to meet with the children and their families to ensure that the review is affective, or to combine the CLA Review with a Review Child Protection Conferences - thereby reducing the number of meetings for families and professionals.

Quarter Comparators (over this reporting period)

Qtr. 4 - January - March 2020

424 Reviews held within timescale and 23 outside. **Total 447 = 94.85 %**

Qtr. 4 – January - March 2021

444 held within timescale and 11 outside. **Total 455 = 97.58%**

Qtr. 1 April - June 2020

456 Reviews held within timescale and 12 outside. **Total 468 = 97.44 %**

Qtr. 1 April - June 2021

444 Reviews were held within timescale and 19 outside. **Total 463 = 95.72%**

7. CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE REVIEWING SERVICE

During this reporting period, the reviewing service sought and gained agreement to convert a full-time post into 2 part-time posts, following the request of a full time IRO to reduce his hours. The new working arrangements will come into effect on the 1st September 2021. We have successfully appointed a new part time IRO, and it is hoped their employment will commence on 6th September 2021. Another part time IRO will be leaving the service on the 1st September 2021, following their successful interview for a secondment to a full-time Adoption Senior Practitioner role. Whilst we were hopeful that agency back-filling cover would be available to commence on the 1st September, to avoid any deficit within the team, Randstad have been unable to provide this within the specified timeframe and we have since had confirmation that they will start on the 13th September 2021. The late start date of these appointments will likely cause some additional pressures on the service, whilst the new members of staff commence their employment and have the appropriate induction periods. There will be a transition of cases to the newly appointed IRO's, and it is recognised that some unavoidable delays are probable. This will be carefully monitored by the Reviewing Team Manager and where possible done with as little disruption to children, their families, carers, and practitioners.

We continue to experience ongoing sickness absence within the service, including amongst business support colleagues, which has resulted in

remaining staff having to take on more work, which has clearly had an impact on the completion of paperwork within timescales. Where necessary to cover work and meet statutory timescales, we have offered additional hours to existing part time staff. We have also used the agency Safeguarding Officer, brought into cover 0.3 of the vacant permanent post to chair CLA reviews as required.

During this reporting period and despite the demands placed upon our service, it is important to share with Corporate Parenting Board the extensive work that has been undertaken to address issues relating to the historical backlog of paperwork. Each IRO has had an individual supervision and a backlog plan drawn up with a completion date of 1st September 2021. We recognise as a team that we need to be efficient in disseminating the records of meetings within the statutory timescales, and IRO's have worked tirelessly to ensure this is completed. In the main, most IRO's are on target to complete this, if they have not already done so. The progress is regularly reported to the Head of Service and Service Director as part of the QALF plan.

The new paperwork that is discussed further in this report will assist in more timely completion of paperwork, as well as regular monitoring by the Team Manager and Service Manager, who will ensure robust oversight of this moving forward to avoid any unnecessary delays and build-up of backlogs in the future.

Despite high CLA numbers, the recent IRO appointments have ensured that every Looked After Child is allocated a named IRO from within the service. The IRO's are currently carrying caseloads higher than we would consider ideal, because of the staffing gaps that have existed (England has set IRO caseload targets that Wales has not) and our new appointments will hopefully assist in seeing numbers reduce, contributed to by the positive downward trend of children becoming looked after evidenced within the body of this report. It was noted in the last reporting period that the service has experienced an increase in late requests for meeting changes, attributable in part to the impact the pandemic is having on multi-agency capacity and operational delivery; all of which creates additional bureaucratic demands on the service as meetings must be rescheduled. Whilst this continues to cause some issues for the service, we are continuing to work closely with our colleagues in Intensive Intervention and DCT to establish robust processes and systems to avoid any unnecessary postponements and/or cancellations.

8. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IRO'S APRIL 2020 - DECEMBER 2020

In total **13** resolutions were raised in this reporting period, 2 more than previously reported. This continues to be a very low percentage in terms of the total number of Care and Support plans that are reviewed by the IROs.

Whilst this would indicate that most children are having their needs met, it should be noted that during the pandemic IRO's have continued to be mindful of the demands and challenges experienced by frontline social workers as they adjusted to the agile working practices, and they have sought to resolve issues informally wherever appropriate.

Theme: Adult Respite Provision

Many of our children remain in their placements under 'When I'm Ready', or 'Shared Lives'. It is expected that assessments will be completed in a timely manner and resources identified and agreed before the child's 18th birthday. Where a child has needs or disabilities, they will often require additional support and resources to those provided by the 16+ Service

Resolution: The Adult Services Panel had agreed in 2020 to fund a respite placement for a child beyond their 18th birthday in 2021, but the process of identifying respite provision was delayed by the impact of Covid and subsequent lockdowns - when respite was only being provided to meet critical need and emergencies. However Adult Services did give an undertaking to identify a provision before the child's 18th birthday, but this was still outstanding with her 18th birthday fast approaching, and the carers did not feel confident that they could meet her needs without respite provision.

The IRO therefore raised a resolution with Adult Services, asking that respite provision be identified as a matter of urgency.

Outcome: Adult Services identified a respite provision within a few weeks of the resolution, and had arranged for the child and carers to visit. Both were pleased with the setting and assessment visits were arranged, along with a date for the first overnight stay.

Resolution: Failure to inform the IRO of significant change

Staff of the LA are required to alert the IRO of any significant changes to the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, or of any significant failure to implement decisions arising from a review (Reg.43 of the CPPCR Regulations). A significant change would include changes to a child's permanence plan, such as a placement breakdown or unplanned move. Where well established arrangements for a child suddenly break down, the IRO should schedule a new review with all involved parties to consider a new short-term plan and the options that are to be considered for longer term objectives

Resolution: The IRO was informed in a CLA review that a 17-year-old young man had moved placements 3 months earlier and was now living with his mother. The IRO had not been informed, and furthermore Placement with Parents had not been completed. Whilst the IRO acknowledged in the resolution that in reality the young man would likely refuse to leave his mother's home, it was the recommendation of the CLA review that a robust agreement should be drawn up with the family to ensure that his needs were met and there were clear expectations agreed by the child, parent and practitioners.

Outcome: The IRO received reassurances that risk assessments had been undertaken and that the information had been shared and agreed with the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) along with an acknowledgement that this should have been discussed with the IRO in a timely manner. As a result of the IRO's resolution, a robust contract of expectations was written and agreed with family members.

Theme: Placement with Parents meetings not having taken place.

When a child who is subject to a Care Order is returned to the care of a parent, they should do so with the agreement of the Head of Service under Placement with Parents Procedures (PWP). An assessment should be completed, and the views of partner agencies sought to ensure that the ADM is able to make an informed decision. There is an expectation within RCT Children's Services that PWP meetings will be held with the family, social worker, and relevant professionals at 6 weekly intervals to review the progress of the plan.

Resolution: During a discussion with an Assessor Care Manager for a child placed at home under Placement with Parents, it was evident that these meetings had not been taking place and that the worker wasn't aware of the expectations that 6 weekly meetings should be taking place. The resolution was raised to inform the Team Manager.

Outcome: Supervision was brought forward in response to the resolution, to enable the Team Manager to ensure that the expectations were formally discussed and recorded with the Assessor Care Manager.

Theme: Life Journey Work

A recurring theme in respect of resolutions is the need for life journey work. During this reporting period, 3 resolutions have been raised in relation to completing life journey work. Life journey work is a sensitive and emotive piece of work that will explain to a child why they became looked after, who looked after them, as well as why certain decisions were made on their behalf that will have had a significant impact on the rest of their lives. It is a document that they will carry with them throughout their childhood and into adulthood. It will include not only photographs of the significant people in their lives, but also important memories.

Resolution: The permanence plan for the child was for an application to be made for a Special Guardianship Order and it was agreed that life journey work needed to be completed before the SGO was granted. The IRO was informed in the subsequent review meeting that the life journey work had not been completed, although the application for the SGO was going to be filed imminently.

Outcome: Whilst the response to the resolution explained that the application for the SGO was not at the stage the IRO had been led to believe, the Team Manager nonetheless agreed that the work needed to be prioritised and agreed timescales with the IRO for this to be done, so as not to delay the process unnecessarily. The IRO received confirmation that the work had been completed within 4 weeks of the resolution being raised.

9. DEVELOPMENT WORK

During this reporting period, the reviewing service held a face-to-face development day with IRO's to evaluate their roles and responsibilities, current policies, and procedures, including the Resolution Protocol. We are hopeful to finalise these protocols in consultation with key stakeholders in the next CLA QAP.

It was reported in the last report to the CPB, that measures were being introduced to ensure that Mid-Point Reviews, as detailed in the AFA Cymru best practice guidelines, are being held. From September 2021, each IRO will undertake this review and record this on the child's record. It is envisaged that this will alert the IRO to any drift in care planning that may require a resolution or consideration of a CLA review being brought forward.

Hybrid Meeting:

As noted in the body of this report, we are continuing to strive toward a 'hybrid' approach to ensure children and families have choice of their preferred style of meeting. Whilst Child Protection Conferences are a priority for the service currently, some IRO's are starting to facilitate 'hybrid' CLA Reviews if requested by the young person and/or their carer's.

Developing a new CLA Review document:

It was reported previously that the Reviewing Team had drafted a new CLA review document, but that its introduction has been delayed as frontline teams managed the challenges of agile working during the pandemic. The documents are currently being reviewed before their introduction, to ensure that they clearly capture the voice of the child and any themes relating to what is going well for the child and what may not be going so well. It is envisaged this will allow us to draw out quantitative data in respect of the child's voice - to complete more qualitative and thematic audits to improve service delivery and highlight the lived experience of looked after children.

Consultation Documents:

The consultation documents are being updated with the support of RCT's Research and Information Officer. It is hoped that the new consultation documents will enable children looked after to raise questions about their own wishes and feelings, as well as sharing their experiences whilst in care.

Work has also concentrated on the appearance and the accessibility of the documents. Whilst the Consultation documents themselves are nearing completion, we are looking at incorporating "widgets" (emoji type graphics), which are used in different settings, including education, as a communication tool for children with disabilities.

The consultation documents will be readily accessible to children on both the 2 Sides Website and the WICCID website. They will also be embedded in the invitations send out for review meetings.

The progress of this continues to be monitored in CLA QAP.

Adoption Review Documentation:

Considering the recommendations of a Child Practice Review, Children's Services and the Reviewing Team were part of a task and finish group to produce an adoption review document that will be used by RCT, Merthyr, Cardiff, The VOG, as well as VVC. This work was piloted in early 2020 with the expectation was that it would be reviewed in May 2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic has meant that the pilot has not yet been reviewed as planned, although we have continued to use the pilot documentation, which

we consider to be an improvement.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

This is an information report therefore no Equality and Diversity Assessment is required.

11. CONSULTATION

This is an information report therefore no consultation is required.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

None

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

This is covered in the Appendix document.

14. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The statutory responsibilities and good practice standards of the Reviewing Service compliment the Council's Corporate Priorities to promote independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf children and young people will receive a great start in life.
- Where children and young people are unable to live to live with their own parents, we put in place the care arrangements, including specialist accommodation, which will keep them safe and well. We will ensure that we listen to the voices of these children and young people by involving them in monitoring the action plan to address a child's journey through care from admission to exit.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 2016 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

RCT staff guidance has been issued in respect of the SSWB Act Code of Practice part 6; the Role and Responsibilities of the IRO, and the IRO Resolution Protocol.

RCT Guidance has been prepared in response to the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide issued by Welsh Government and AFA Cymru: Reviewing and Monitoring of a Child or Young Person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan. This is currently under review and will be taken to the policy review board for consideration imminently before disseminating to all staff.

The CPPCR Regulations specify:

- The general duty of the responsible local authority to review all Looked After children's cases.
- The responsible authority must not make any significant change to a child's care and support plan unless the proposed change has first been considered at a review of the child's case, unless this is not reasonably practicable.
- The circumstances in which the local authority must consult the IRO.
- When the IRO must consult with the child.
- The actions that the IRO must take if the local authority is failing to comply with the CPPCR Regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way. In RCT, this is addressed through the Resolutions process, which may include making a referral to CAFCASS in accordance with section 100(3) of the SSWB Act.

The SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice sets out the requirements of the IRO and the responsible authority in more detail. The key functions of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the local authority's performance in relation to the child's case.
- Review the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan (CASP) in line with the Regulations.
- Ensure that the child's wishes, and feelings are taken into consideration.
- Perform any other function prescribed in the Regulations.

Legislation and good practice guidance require an IRO to chair reviews of children who are: -

- Looked After subject to an Interim Care Order or a Care Order under Section 38/31 of the Children Act 1989.
- This includes children who are placed with a parent or a kinship carer as well as children placed in foster care, residential care and secure establishments.
- Accommodated with the agreement of parents (S76 SSWB Act)
- In an Adoptive Placement prior to an Adoption Order being granted.
- Detained in a Young Offender Institutions and subject to a Care Order or remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation.
- 18 years and under and have a Pathway Plan.
- All Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) plans are also reviewed by an IRO.

The most recent practice standards and guidance focus on strengthening the monitoring of care planning between CLA Review meetings, ensuring that the voice of the child is heard throughout the reviewing process, and that there is a transparent and robust process in place for addressing significant concerns raised by the IRO regarding a child/young person's care and support plan.

THE REVIEWING SERVICE

The Reviewing Service currently sits within the remit of the Head of Service for Safeguarding. It currently comprises 12 IRO full-time posts (up from 11 following the additional P-T hours agreed), 4 of which are filled by 8 part time staff, 2 Business Support staff who are responsible for taking notes in complex CLA Reviews, and a Team Manager who is line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding.

APPOINTMENT OF IRO'S

The CPCCR Regulations require the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers and specify the categories of persons that the Local Authority may **not** appoint to carry out the IRO function (regulation 54(3) of the CPCCR Regulations). These are:

- A person involved in preparing the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan or the management of the child's case.
- The child's social worker or personal adviser.
- The representative of the Local Authority appointed to visit the child.
- A person with management responsibilities for any of the above.
- A person with control over the resources allocated to the case.

PURPOSE OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER REVIEWS

Each child who is Looked After must have a Care and Support Plan (referred to as a Part 6 Care and Support Plan). This must be based on a current assessment of the child's needs and be focussed on the well-being outcomes for the child as specified in the SSWB Act. These are:

- Protection from abuse and neglect.
- Promotion of physical and mental health and emotional well-being.
- Promotion of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development.
- Maintenance or development of family or other significant personal relationships.
- Involvement in education, training and recreation activities.
- Development and maintenance of social relationships and involvement in the local community.
- Social and economic well-being (including not living in poverty).
- Living in suitable accommodation.

The Part 6 Care and Support Plan details what needs to happen to achieve the child's agreed outcomes and should be formulated in consultation with the child and their family, wherever possible. The review of the plan is a key component of care planning and is a continuous process as it includes monitoring the progress of the plan between Review meetings and responding to any significant change in the child's circumstances. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider how the plan is meeting the well-being outcomes for the child, monitor progress and make decisions to amend the plan or reconfirm previous decisions as necessary considering changed knowledge and circumstances. This takes place in consultation with all those who have a key interest in the child's life, including the child.

Key issues to be addressed in the review process are:

- The child's participation and involvement, including providing the child with clear explanations of the reason for any changes.
- The appropriate involvement of other agencies.
- Supervision and oversight by responsible managers.
- The extent to which progress is being made towards achieving the identified outcomes.

As well as an overall review of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan, the specific areas that must be covered in a Review meeting include:

- For all children who do not have a Permanency Plan, what is being done to enable them to return home.
- Is the placement meeting the child's needs, and are any services being provided at an additional to the basic cost of placement appropriate/still required.
- The views of all involved in the Reviewing process, including the child, parents and carers.

- Has the child been visited as required both by the CPPCR Regulations, RCT CLA Schedule of Visiting Guidance and by the needs of the child.
- The child's perception of their relationship with their social worker.
- Has an active offer of advocacy been made and the child's communication/preferred choice of language been addressed.

The planning and reviewing processes must promote the participation of the child and their family.

The IRO has specified responsibilities, set out in the CPPCR Regulations and practice guidance, for monitoring the progress of the responsible LA in implementing a child/young person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan. IROs are now required to track the progress of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan between Review meetings, and to consult with the child at any time that there is a significant change to the Plan. Local authority staff are required to alert the IRO to any significant change to the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, or of any failure to implement decisions arising from a Review.

The IRO has the authority to determine when a Review meeting should be convened in the light of a change of circumstances. IROs are also required to raise concerns within the LA up to Chief Executive level and refer unresolved concerns to CAF/CASS as appropriate. This is explained more fully under the section dealing with the IRO Resolutions process.

FREQUENCY OF REVIEWS

Children Looked After (CLA) review meetings must be conducted at the following frequency:

- Within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After or having an unplanned change of placement.
- Subsequently within 3 months.
- 6 monthly thereafter.
- Reviews of family plans produced by the Integrated Family Support Service are held three times per year. The initial review is held 28 days after the start of the intensive phase, the second review 3 months later and the final review after 6 months.

Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, there are issues around the child's safety or there has been a failure to carry out an important aspect of the plan.

In cases where a child is placed for the cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family.

THE RESOLUTIONS PROCESS

The IRO has responsibility to monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to care planning for individual children and to raise areas of good practice as well as problems and issues. IROs also forward compliments and positive comments to staff and managers to ensure good practice is recognised.

The IRO Resolution Protocol sets out the process for raising and resolving issues within set timescales that are intended to avoid unnecessary drift and delay in care planning. The protocol recognises the need to resolve issues as quickly as possible but allows for resolutions to be escalated where agreement cannot be reached or where there continues to be drift and delay.

There are currently 5 stages to the process:

- Stage 1: Resolution through discussion with the Team Manager.
- Stage 2: Resolution put in writing to the Team Manager.
- Stage 3: Resolution meeting with Service Manager
- Stage 4: Escalation to Head of Service.
- Stage 5: If the issue remains unresolved, referral to the Service Director, Group Director Community & Children's Services, Chief Executive and CAFCASS are additional steps to be taken by the IRO if required.

In practice, stages 1 and 2 are frequently having to be conflated to avoid unnecessary drift.

Some Resolutions involve concerns about the actions or lack of action by other agencies, and these will either be raised with the Children's Services Manager to address, or where necessary directly with the agency involved or via the CLA Quality Assurance Panel.

Raising Resolutions is one of the key responsibilities of the IRO, which has been reinforced by recent case law which has determined that the IRO can be held personally liable if there have been failures in the care planning or an abuse of the child's human rights, and the IRO has not raised this appropriately. It is critical that the IROs are supported by the Local Authority recognising that this aspect of their role is crucial both in terms of flagging up any concerns about the L.A's performance as a Corporate Parent and to ensure that no child's human rights are being violated as a result of a failure in implementing their Care and Support Plan.

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