

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

2ND OCTOBER 2023

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

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Corporate Parenting Board with information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for children looked after (CLA) for the period **30th June 22 – 30th June 23**.

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 Partnerships (previously referred to as Head of Safeguarding). It comprises of 11 IRO FTE posts of which 1 post is vacant but appointed too. Despite some changes, the service has continued wherever possible to maintain established trusted relationships with IRO's. There is continued assistance from 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.

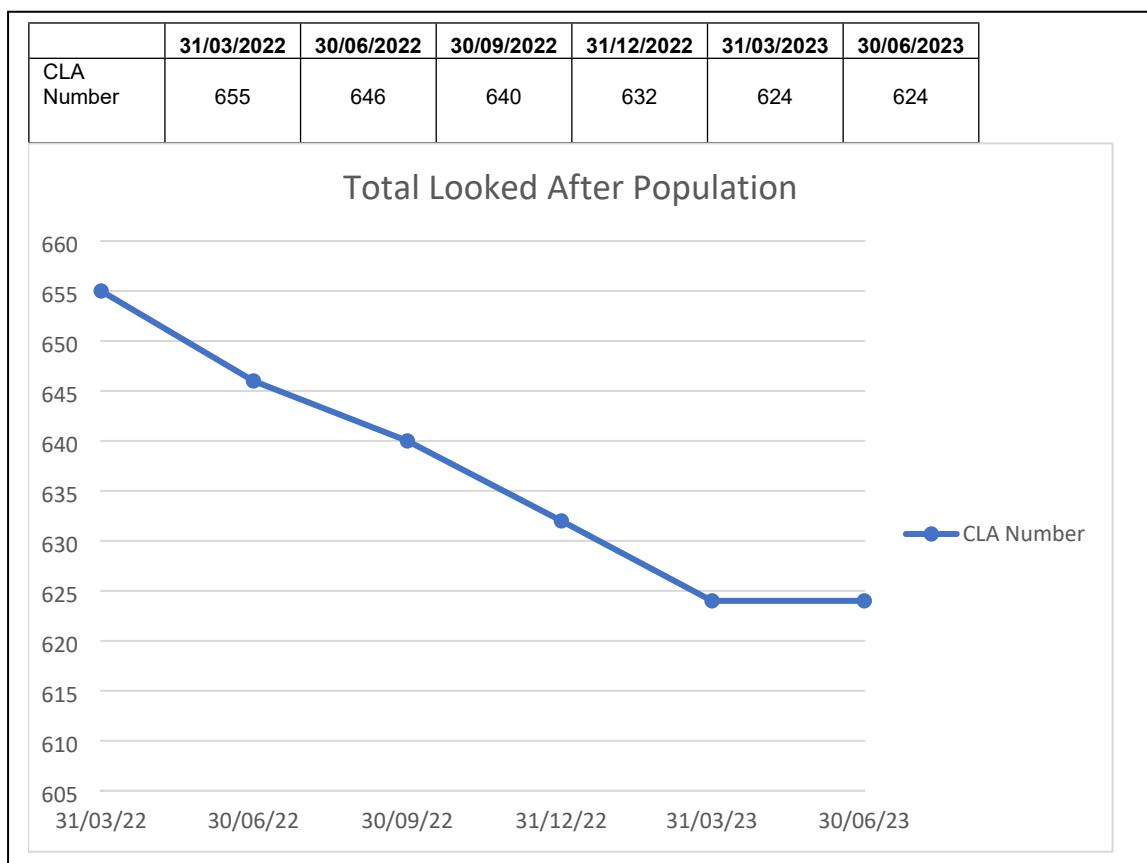
At the time of the last report, the reviewing service were operating to a remote delivery of service in line with the national guidelines as a result of the pandemic. Since moving into a pre-pandemic delivery, we are currently operating under a hybrid model of service delivery. We recognised the value and convenience of the remote technological infrastructure that we were reliant on throughout the pandemic, however as noted in previous reports, due to the nature of our service are, face to face meetings have always been our preferred option in line with best practice.

The hybrid model allows for children, young people and their families/carers and practitioners to request their chosen preference to the meeting. Any face-to-face request are being accommodated in a suitable venue. As a reviewing service, we are promoting the transition back to more 'face to face' meetings.

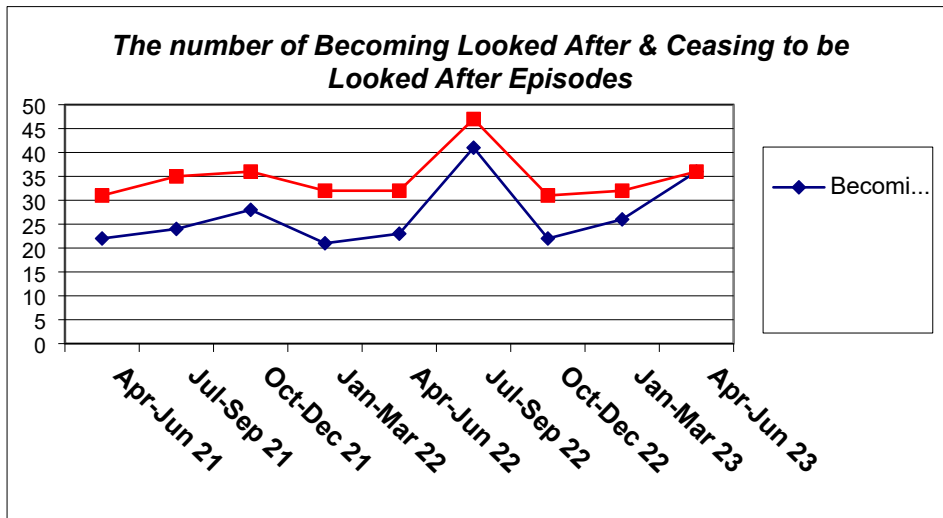
As noted above, the service has faced some significant changes in staffing, including a new head of service and more recently, service manager however, we have continued to operate to the same capacity and despite the many challenges faced since the beginning of the pandemic the commitment and professionalism of IRO's remains resolute in ensuring the best outcomes for children looked after.

4. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population

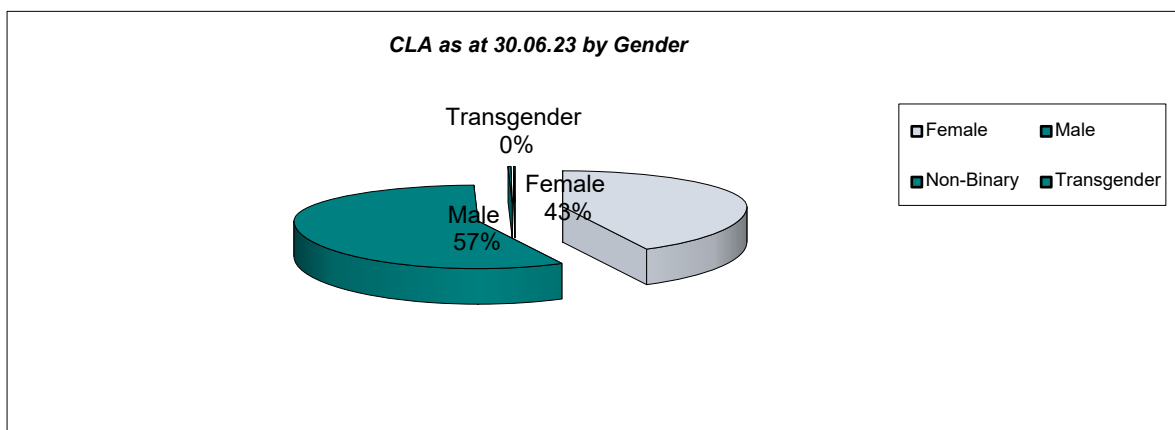


Children Becoming Looked After and Ceasing to be Looked After



	Apr-Jun 21	Jul-Sep 21	Oct-Dec 21	Jan-Mar 22	Apr-Jun 22	Jul-Sep 22	Oct-Dec 22	Jan-Mar 23	Apr-Jun 23
Becoming Looked After Episodes	22	24	28	21	23	41	22	26	36
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	31	35	36	32	32	47	31	32	36

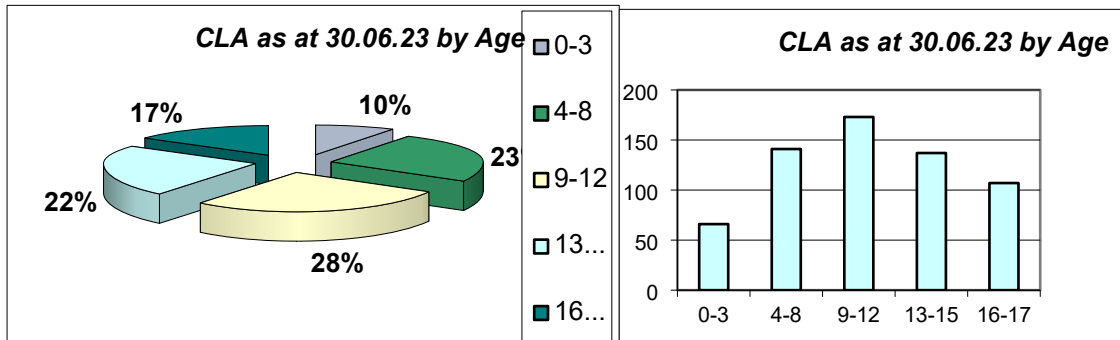
Children Looked After by Gender



CLA as at 31.03.22 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.22 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.22 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.22 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.23 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.23 by Gender

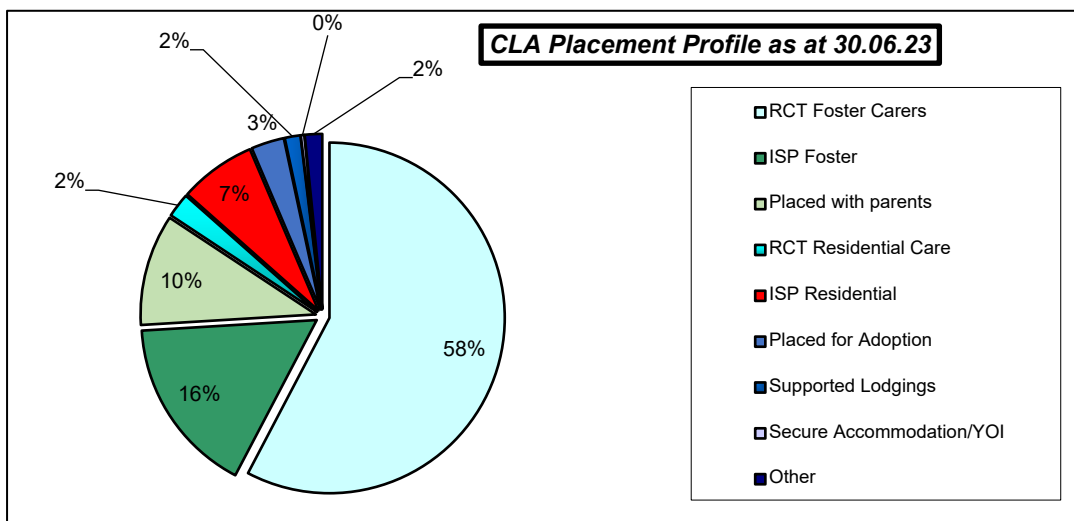
Female	284	273	267	263	264	265
Male	371	369	368	364	357	356
Non-Binary	0	2	2	2	2	2
Transgender	0	2	3	3	1	1
Total	655	646	640	632	624	624

Children Looked After by Age



	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.03.22 by Age	96	148	164	145	102	655
CLA as at 30.06.22 by Age	92	146	167	146	95	646
CLA as at 30.09.22 by Age	76	148	173	145	98	640
CLA as at 31.12.22 by Age	67	146	170	145	104	632
CLA as at 31.03.23 by Age	69	135	170	131	119	624
CLA as at 30.06.23 by Age	66	141	173	137	107	624

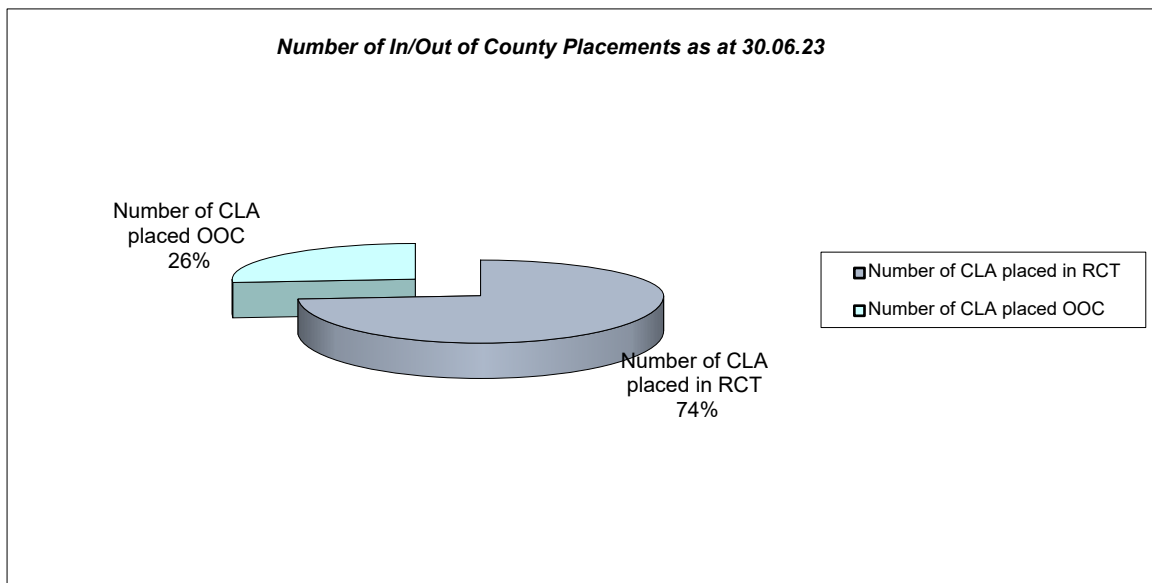
Placement Profile



	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23
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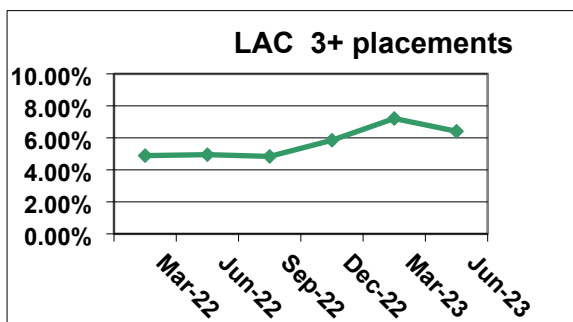
RCT Foster Carers	382	379	371	356	359	360
ISP Foster	119	113	109	108	103	102
Placed with parents	66	60	69	70	63	64
RCT Residential Care	10	12	12	11	9	14
ISP Residential	52	48	51	50	54	44
Placed for Adoption	17	22	15	20	22	19
Supported Lodgings	6	7	6	12	8	9
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	1	0	1	2
Other	3	5	6	5	5	10
Total	655	646	640	632	624	624

Number of In/Out of County Placements



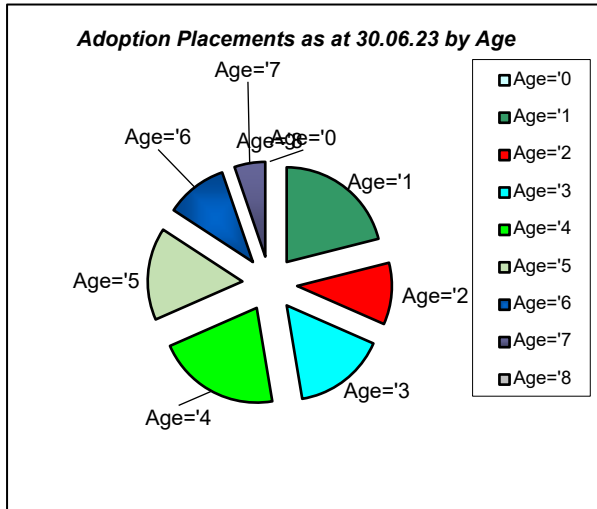
	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23
Number of CLA placed in RCT	473	465	466	455	458	461
Number of CLA placed OOC	182	181	174	177	166	163
Total CLA	655	646	640	632	624	624
% OOC	27.8%	28.0%	27.2%	28.0%	26.6%	26.1%

Children Looked After Placement Moves

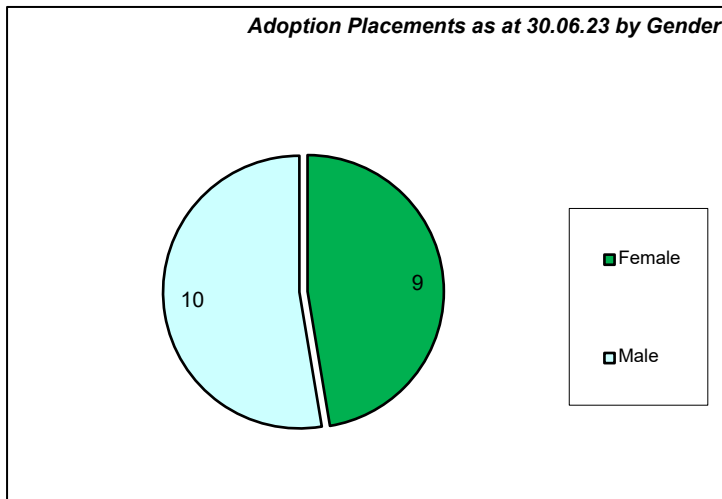


Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23	Jun-23
4.89%	4.95%	4.84%	5.85%	7.21%	6.41%

Adoption



Adoption Placements as at 30.06.23 by Age	Total
Age=0	0
Age=1	4
Age=2	2
Age=3	3
Age=4	4
Age=5	3
Age=6	2
Age=7	1
Age=8	0
Total	19



Adoption Placements as at 30.06.23 by Gender	Total
Female	9
Male	10
Total	19

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.06.23	19
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.07.22 - 30.06.23	17
Number of Children adopted between 01.07.22 - 30.06.23	20

5. **REVIEW ACTIVITY 30th June 2022 - 30th June 2023**

CLA Number:

Overall, we are continuing to see a reduction in the number of children looked after. Comparative to end of Qtr 1 data 2022, this has reduced by 3.4 % however when compared to 30.03.20 when the number was 723 this has reduced by 13.6%. The number of children becoming looked after in 22-23 increased by 17.8% compared to the previous year (95/112).

Admissions and Discharges:

Our lowest number of monthly admissions was 4 children in December 22 and 17 children in August 22. When considering the monthly admissions there are no apparent themes that come out, however August may be considered a pressure point for some families due to the summer period.

145 children ceased being looked after between June 2022 and May 2023. This is a 3% increase in numbers compared to the same period June 21 - May 22 where 140 children ceased being looked after.

In relation to where the children reside upon leaving care, 51% of children returned home Family/Extended Family during the period which is the highest percentage. 19 children (13%) had Adoption Orders granted so now reside with their adoptive families. 32 children (22%) remained with foster carers either as a 'when I'm ready' arrangement upon turning 18 or subject to a Special Guardianship Order. Independent living accounted for 12% and these are mainly young people aged 16+.

41% of all children that ceased being looked after over the last 12 months were aged 16+. In relation to where the young people reside upon leaving care, 20 out of the 26 YP remain with their foster carers in 'When I'm Ready' arrangements and 6 children were open to DCT and have remained with their foster carers after transitioning to Adults Services. 17 YP left care and went into Independent Living placements which accounts for 29%. 15 children have returned to Family/Extended Family.

CLA by Gender:

When making a comparative to same Qtr last year Female CLA population has reduced by 2.9%. If compared to the same period in 2021 this has reduced by 9.5%.

When making a comparative to the same Qtr last year Male CLA population has reduced by 3.5%. If compared to the same period in 2021 this has reduced by 8.9%.

Males represent the highest proportion of the CLA population.

When considering gender and age group in children becoming looked after in 22-23, males represented 59.4 % of children BLA and were the only gender in the age groups, 6 (6), 11 (8), 12 (1), 16 (2), 17 (5) and females represented 39.6% of children BLA and were the only gender in the age group 8 (3).

2 children identified as non-binary and 3 as transgender.

CLA by Age:

As at the end of 30.06.23, 22% of admissions are children aged under 1 year old. The number has decreased by 4 when compared to the previous year and the trend shows that this age group continues to have the highest number of admissions.

The number of children aged 1-4 becoming looked after has increased by 3 compared to last year's figures, from 20 (21%) children in 2021-22 to 23 (20%) children in 2022-23.

The number of children being brought into care aged 16+ is 7 (6%) a decrease by 1 compared to the same period last year.

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:

Based on current CLA numbers, most children reside with Relative Carers (34%). The number has decreased by 12 when compared to the same time last year. Relative placements are the highest % among CLA aged 1-15. 69% of children aged under 1 are placed with RCT foster carers as at 15/06/23.

In House Foster Care placements continue to be higher than Independent Sector Foster Care. The number of Independent Foster Care placements has decreased by 9.7% when compared to Qtr 1 last year, from 113 to 102.

The number of children placed in external residential placements has decreased by 4 when compared to Qtr 1 last year (from 48 to 44). 67% of current external residential placements are occupied by 10-15 year olds.

YP aged 16+ have the highest % among CLA placed in Foster Care Ind. Sector.

The number of Parent & Child placements has increased by 1 when compared to the same period last year however remains the same number as in Qtr1 in 2021 (3).

The number of children placed with parents increased by 4 when compared to the same period last year.

74% of children looked after are residing within RCT. The number of children residing out of county has reduced by 2% when comparative with same Qtr last year. For many children and young people who reside out of county this may be with family members or in secure long-term placements where they are settled and/or a provision of specialist placement provision.

Placement Stability:

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 had dropped from 5.9% at the end of December 2022 to 7.2% at the end of March 2023 although you will see an increase at end of Qtr 1 to 6.4%

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

Adoption:

13 children have had a Placement Order granted between June 22 and May 23. 6 children are currently residing in foster care placements and 7 children are placed with potential adopters.

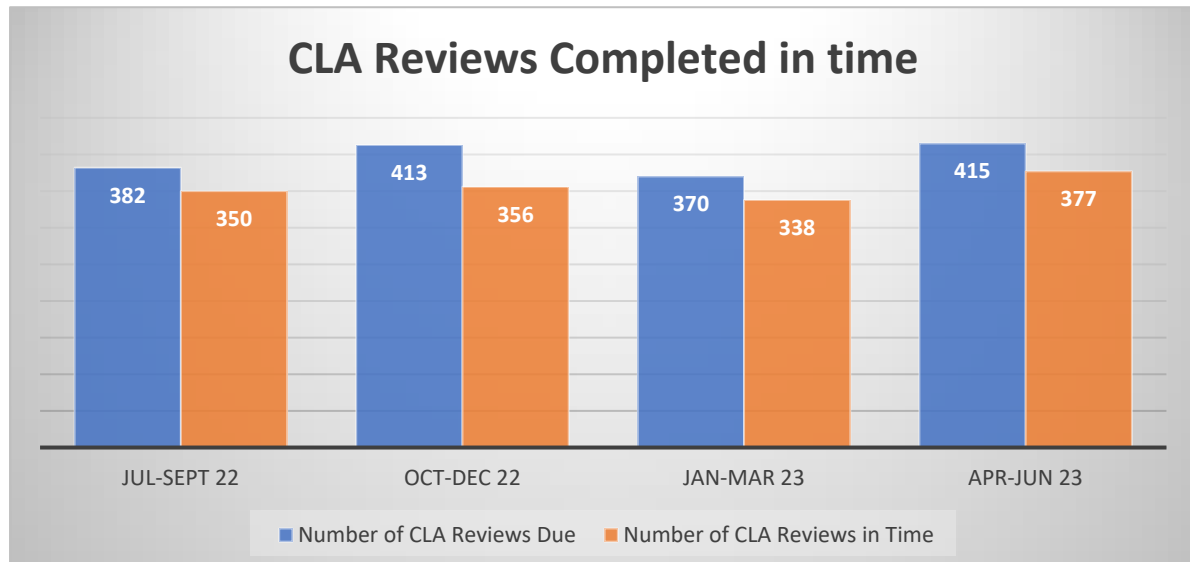
In comparison to the previous year there has been a 57% decrease of Placement Orders granted during 2021-22.

A total of 20 adoption placements were started between June 22 - May 23 which a decrease of 4 compared to the previous year.

19 Adoption Orders have been granted over the last 12 months which is a 21% decrease compared to the same period in 2021-22.

CLA REVIEWS

CLA Reviews in Time 30th June 2022 – 30th June 2023



	Jul-Sep 22	Oct-Dec 22	Jan-Mar 23	Apr-Jun 23
Number of CLA Review's Due	382	413	370	415
Number of CLA Review's In Time	350	356	338	377
% In Time	92%	86%	91%	91%

Quarter Comparators 2021 (over this reporting period)

	Jul-Sep 21	Oct-Dec 21	Jan-Mar 22	Apr-Jun 22
Number of CLA Review's Due	412	411	396	441
Number of CLA Review's In Time	386	376	363	408
% In Time	94%	92%	92%	93%

In addition, IROs chaired 16 combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register.

6. REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

156 CLA Reviews were not held in time between July 22 - June 23. The reporting period 4 (Jan-Mar) 2022 was our best quarter with only 28 reviews out of time. Reporting period 3 (Oct-Dec) 2022 seen the most reviews go out of time at 57. Every effort is made to ensure that cancelled reviews are reconvened within time, and where this isn't possible permission to go out of time is 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. For example, in reporting period 3, only 20% of cancellations went out of time (28/143) 115 meetings were rearranged in time. In reporting period 4, 31% of cancellations went out of time (57/181) 124 meetings were rearranged in time.

The reasons for cancellations and postponements vary although this year we has seen staffing resources have an impact on those meetings that are held out of time with 27.5% (43/156) rearranged due to no chairperson being available. 14.1% (22/156) due to the key worker not being available and 11.5% (18/156) due to other professionals not being available. The availability of professional's overall accounts for 53% of reviews being held out of time. Other change of circumstances account for 21.1% (33/156) and families and/or child's availability accounted for 10.2% (16/156).

7. CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE REVIEWING SERVICE

Whilst a considerable amount of work has been undertaken on optimum IRO caseloads in line with research and evidence of best practice, where necessary we are continuing to go above these to ensure our statutory duties continue to be met particularly when the availability of external chairs has become more difficult to source. We are continuing to undertake a monthly case load analysis and are utilising supervisions to monitor individual performance in respect of completion of paperwork. It is hoped that the new IRO appointment due to commence in October will provide further resilience and stability within the team.

Despite the staffing issues and demand, it is important to share with Corporate Parenting Board the extensive work that has been undertaken within the service including the successful introduction of mid-point reviews in line with AFKA Cymru Best Practice Guidelines – Reviewing and monitoring of a child or young person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan. This allows for more robust monitoring by the IRO and where appropriate timely resolution to issues that require formal escalation. Other key development work can be found below.

8. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IROS

In all the reviewing team have raised 16 resolutions over 2022 – 2023 with 7 of these being raised in reporting period 4. Of the 16 resolutions raised 8 were responded to within timescales. Where a response hasn't been received the Reviewing Team Manager has contacted the relevant team manager to request a response and on 4 occasion the Service Manager / Head of Service has taken discussions forward. 4 resolutions have been raised in Qtr 1 of 23-24 and one Stage 2 resolution meeting was held.

Some themes included:

Delay in Life Journey Work – IRO identified in midpoint review that work had not started the work that was required before child made transitional move to

secondary school. Outcome: Manager to address with work and case transferred to another team to commence work to avoid further drift and delay.

Delay in agreement for PWP – IRO concerned about drift as agreed actions in respect of overnight visits had not commenced. Outcome: HOS liaised and it was noted that additional information had been sought by HOS and this had been resolved and the matter was moving forward.

Statutory Visit and Planning – Visits to the child had not taken place in line with statutory requirements and kinship carers reported they felt unsupported. Mother to child had not received parenting assessment to make representations on negative outcome despite SGO for grandmother nearing completion. Outcome: Team Manager acknowledged concerns and gave reassurance that visits were now taking place alongside multi agency meetings and a package of support and confirmed mother had received a copy of the relevant assessment.

Child not in Education – Child not in school due to cross boundary issues. Some home tutoring had began. Child has ALN but did not have an Individual Development Plan. Outcome: IRO escalated and RCT Virtual School arranged to liaise with all professionals and facilitate a PCP meeting in order to draft IDP.

9. **DEVELOPMENT WORK**

The Reviewing Service has continued to work on service developments throughout the year despite facing a number of challenges linked to staffing as a number of experienced IRO leaving the service area too pursue career development in other fields.

Some of the key areas of development nearing completion that will ensure the voice of the child is encapsulated throughout our practice include:

10. **IRO Roles and Responsibilities Practice Protocol**

This protocol seeks to improve outcomes for children looked after by providing guidance to independent reviewing officers (IROs) about how they should discharge their distinct responsibilities to children looked after by Rhondda Cynon Taff. We have aimed to keep the voices of children and young people and their rights consistently in mind as we have drawn up this protocol. Once this has been signed off at CSMT, IRO's will create a short training presentation that can be delivered across the teams and the wider multi agency network.

IRO Resolution Protocol

This in final draft and will be sent for sign off at CSMT imminently.

Becoming Looked After and IRO One Page Profile

First draft of the IRO BLA letter for young children and older children, young people has been completed and additional drafts are in progress to ensure it is accessible and informative using child friendly language for children with additional needs or disability. Most one-page profiles are completed, and it is anticipated that these will be enclosed in the BLA letter. Before final version is agreed we will consult with children and young people to gain their views in respect of the proposed drafts and consider any proposed amendments and ensure they are involved in co-producing these moving forward.

Equality: Public facing documentation will be available in English and Welsh and will note that they can be made available in different languages and formats on request.

Parent and Child Feedback Form

We have created a short feedback form that will be sent to parents/carers and children who attend their reviews. The purpose of this is to gain the lived experience of those accessing our service in order to continuously reflect, develop and improve our service.

CLA Review of Arrangements

This is in final draft version and is ready to be sent to Information Management to set up a tester form on Beta (WCCIS) for us to pilot. A complimenting child friendly agenda for CLA reviews is also nearing completion and child friendly version of this will be finalised and shared with children and young people.

The adoption review documents currently in use are those that were piloted in 2019 however these were never formally reviewed and finalised because of the disruption caused by the Covid pandemic. A regional face to face meeting was arranged in June 2023 and work is now progressing on the new template.

YEPS & 2 Sides

The information has now been uploaded to the 2Sides pages on the YEPS website and includes links to both the My Voice My Review consultation document and the "Is Anyone Listening" advocacy animation. We have recently shared the link with the childcare teams and invited them to provide feedback.

Updating the bespoke 2 Sides Website is on hold until discussions within the Participation Strategy, task and finish group have considered how the Local Authority will host its public facing information moving forward and whether 2 Sides should remain as a standalone site or whether the information would be better presented alongside other public facing pages.

My Voice My Review.

We have continued to experience challenges with the online platform that facilitates the My Voice -My Review consultation as there were technical errors with the link and the reporting mechanism. Continued consultation with the relevant department has taken place and on the recommendation of the Customer Improvement and Development Manager a request was made to consider whether a new digital process could be developed to meet our service needs. In recent months we have met regularly in order to progress this, (. In-house developers are confident that they can design a bespoke questionnaire that will meet our needs. This is under construction, and we will consult further with children and young people as soon as it is constructed. We are continuing to work closely with colleagues in DCT to create a version that will meet the needs of children with disabilities and/or additional needs.

Children's Rights

We have recently started to develop child friendly information sheets using the 7-minute briefing format. We have completed a Guide to Children's Rights and Making a Complaint-A Child Friendly Guide. We will consult and share these with children and young people and if they find them useful, we will ask them what other topics they would like to see and ensure they are involved in co-producing these moving forward.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

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

12. CONSULTATION

This is an information report therefore no consultation required.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

None

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

This is covered in the Appendix Document

15. 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.