



Conference & Review Unit Annual Report 2012/13

Safeguarding Advisory Service
30 West Road, Wellington, TF1 2BB

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1. Foreword

This Annual Report highlights the progress made during 2012/13 in strengthening the IRO role within Telford & Wrekin, whilst acknowledging the challenges faced by the service and recognising the areas for development. It also seeks to celebrate achievements and successes in improving outcomes for children.

The IRO has a duty to fulfil their corporate parent role on behalf of individual children. This involves negotiating best outcomes and at times challenging decision making, timeliness as well as working in partnership with parents. The work of the IRO has been recognised nationally by both young people and carers and national debates continue about how best to ensure IROs are able to fulfil their role to the fullest capacity.

As each IRO in Telford & Wrekin also has responsibilities and duties towards children with child protection plans this report is also an account of the child protection planning activity in Telford & Wrekin and the wider quality assurance management activity set within the context of the operation of the Conference and Reviewing Unit.

The core functions of the Conference & Reviewing Unit can be summarised as follows:

- Chair Child Protection Conferences and Statutory Reviews for children in care.
- Review children's care plans, and promote corporate parenting to enable positive outcomes for children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Carry out short break care reviews of services provided to children with disabilities.
- Ensure that the voice of the child is heard and given appropriate weight within care planning.
- Ensure that the child's care plan and placement is appropriate to their needs.
- Monitor, scrutinise and challenge when necessary the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to looked after children's individual cases.
- Facilitate the development of outline child protection Plans at Child Protection Conferences.
- Monitor children's child protection plans and cases in between Conferences – offering advice and challenge as required.
- Active involvement in the work of the LSCB including quality assurance and auditing of children's cases with particular attention to the quality assurance of Child Care (CIC) Care Plans.
- Independent oversight and view on all matters relating to children's welfare.

2. Legal Context

The Independent Reviewing Service undertakes the chairing of Child in Care (CIC) Reviews in accordance with section 26 of the Children Act 1989; and Initial Child Protection Conferences and Reviews in accordance with Telford & Wrekin's Safeguarding Children Board procedures, and Working Together 2013.

Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced a new statutory role of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with responsibility for the process of reviewing looked after children's cases. Local Authorities are required by regulation to appoint IROs to participate in the review of children's cases; monitor the authority's function in respect of the review; and refer a case to the Children and Families Court Advisory and

Support Service (CAFCASS) if the failure to implement the care plan might be considered to breach the child's human rights. All children looked after, including those in adoptive placements prior to an adoption order being made, are covered by these regulations.

The Children & Young Peoples Act 2008, which came into force April 1 2010, strengthened the role of the IRO, and related guidance contained within the "IRO Handbook" requires the monitoring of the function and performance of the Local Authority in relation to outcomes for children for Looked After Children. The IRO's responsibilities were extended from monitoring the performance of the Local Authority of their functions in relation to a looked after child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

In November 2011 the Family Justice Review reported on the role of the IRO, their findings are as follows:

- The role of the IRO is an important one therefore the priority should be to improve the quality of the function and ensure the effectiveness and visibility.
- It was recommended that Local Authorities review the operation of the IRO Service to ensure that it is effective. In particular they should ensure that they are adhering to guidance regarding case loads of not exceeding a maximum of 70 cases per IRO.
- It was recommended that the Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for children receive regular reports from the IRO on the work undertaken and its outcomes. LSCBs should also consider such reports. There is further comment about this later in the report.

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishing of Offenders Act (LASPOA) introduced a new framework for youth remand which commenced in December 2012 and stated that all young people who are remanded into the either local authority or youth detention accommodation (YDA) are now looked after children.

3. About the Team

The Conference and Reviewing Unit is located within the Safeguarding Advisory Service based at 30 West Road, Wellington, Telford, TF1 2BB. There is a full time Service Delivery Manager who has overall responsibility for this Service area which also includes being the Safeguarding Children Board Manager.

There are 5.4 WTE (whole time equivalent) IROs of which one full time IRO contract is temporary until March 2014. The IROs are managed by a full time manager (Principal Officer Child Protection) who is also a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Officer of the LSCB and Council lead for Safeguarding in Child Sexual Exploitation. During this reporting period the team has enjoyed stability in terms of staffing and management with no prolonged absence impacting upon service delivery..

In addition to the IROs there are 3.5 WTE note takers for Child Protection Conferences and Secure Accommodation Reviews. The notes of Child in Care Reviews are recorded by the IROs.

The maximum number of children allocated to each IRO should if complying with the Care Planning Regs/IRO Handbook and Family Justice Review not exceed 70. It is reported in the 2011/12 Annual Report that the IROs have an approximate 'caseload' of about 120 - 140 children per full time equivalent and this will consist of a mixture of Child Protection and Children in Care cases as they each work with both groups of children. In order to reduce numbers of children allocated to IROs the additional temporary post along with a newly introduced weighting system has enabled individual IRO during the period 2012/13 to hold a case load of approximately 90 children.

Although the IROs are employed by Telford & Wrekin Council they are not involved in the line management or responsible for case management decision making on any child's case, and are therefore able to achieve a level of independence that allows the IROs to remain objective when reviewing a child's care plan or child protection plan. This independence is viewed as a significant factor to improving the care planning and in undertaking the quality assurance function that is central to the IRO role.

The IRO service has further maintained its independent scrutiny and challenge function through:

- The IRO service being located in a separate building to any of the local operational children's social work teams.
- Having clear protocols for reporting concerns to managers.
- IROs speaking directly to children and young people to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings.
- IRO's speaking directly to parents and caregivers to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings.
- The Safeguarding Advisory Service has an input into the arranging and organising of all Child in Care Reviews and Child Protection Conferences.
- The IRO's are managed by the Conference and Review Unit Manager who is independent from the children social care team managers.
- The Conference and Review Unit is now managed from within the Education & Parenting Service.

A development this year has been the beginning of a transition process for the Unit to become responsible for the provision of an Independent Reviewing Officer who will undertake all of the internal annual foster home reviews. This is seen as a very positive step which can only support the ongoing quality of service for our looked after children. However, this role has so far proved difficult to recruit to.

4. DATA and Performance

4.1 Children subject to Child Protection Plans (see appendix One for data)

From 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013 the IROs have collectively chaired 484 Child Protection Conferences involving a total of 874 children. This is a 12% decrease in numbers of children being presented overall to Conference compared to last year. Of these, 197 children have been the subject of an Initial Child Protection Conference which compared to last year is a decrease of 27%. There have been 677 children presented at Review Child Protection Conferences this reporting period a decrease of

7% compared to 2011/12 period. When comparing the numbers of children at year end that are subject to a child protection plan this is a 35% decrease to the number of children in the 2011/12 reporting period. Although this is a significant decrease it is in line with our statistical neighbours compared to last year which was notably too high.

The lower number of children subject to child protection plans is not due to a higher number of plan cessations in 2012/13. During this period 276 children were de-planned which is 6 children less than last year. What the data clearly highlights is that the numbers of children being presented to Initial Child Protection Conferences has decreased significantly. This may be due to a number of initiatives that have taken place during the year such as:

- Wider discussions taking place between the Manager of the IROs and other Team Managers about whether the criteria for an Initial child protection conference on some cases have been met or whether alternative support mechanisms might be more appropriate.
- A strategy to reduce children having a dual status in 2012/13 - some children who would have previously been made subject to child protection planning have solely become looked after children or subject to Care Proceedings as opposed to having a dual status. In 2011/12 there were 15 children who were accommodated and subject to a child protection plan at year end (dual status) as opposed to only one child in this reporting period.

Of the initial conferences held 97.5 % were held within timescale with 100% of the Review Conferences being completed in timescale. When considering the length of time children are subjected to child protection plans it is of note that a total of 59 children only remained on a child protection plan for a maximum period of three months. The breakdown of categories for these children is:

Emotional abuse	15
Neglect	26
Sexual abuse	8
Physical abuse	10

Further analysis is underway particularly into the neglect and emotional harm categories as this seems a very short time for children to be considered no longer in need of a protection plan due to the very nature of these types of abuse which often prove to be the most complex and difficult to influence positive changes for the children.

In relation to the overall categories of abuse given to children who are subject to child protection plans neglect remains the highest category followed by emotional abuse. The age of children subject to a child protection plan shows a slight increase in the older age group. Gender trends remain fairly static, with a slight increase in boys. This may be linked to numbers of children within families who are subject to child protection plans due to neglect. There is also much more awareness amongst professionals about the significant harm that children may suffer as a consequence of living in families where chronic neglect and/or domestic abuse is present although it is noted that data would suggest that there has been a decrease in the numbers of children with child protection plans who are known to be living in homes where there is domestic abuse occurring.

This Service is currently leading on the development of a new model of working with children and their families where chronic and significant neglect is present. This is discussed further in this report.

The Community Social Work Team presented to Initial Child Protection Conference 25% of the total numbers of children. The majority of which would be due to issues relating to neglect. The percentage and the reasons behind the data requires further exploration as to why this is the case. In addition to this it is well documented in research that the most vulnerable children will be our disabled children however, it is also of note that only 4% of children presented to Initial Child Protection Conference were disabled. This also requires some exploration to understand further the meaning behind this data.

4.2 Children in Care (See Appendix Two for Data)

Telford & Wrekin children in Care numbers remain high and at year end were 320. Whilst the new episodes of care have fallen in the year 2012/13, the overall numbers of children in care has increased overall by 6% which is due to children remaining in care for a longer period. Analysis of the data compared to 2011/12 highlights:

- There were 58% less children returned home within a 3 month period of first being looked after.
- There were 21% children less overall leaving care.
- There was a 19% decrease in children who had been subject to either Police Protection or Emergency Protection Orders returning home.

When considering the overall child in care population 86.6% of children are from a White British ethnicity background and 13.4% of looked after children being from ethnic minority background. This is a slight increase in children from ethnic minorities however, this remains below the all England average.

This reporting period the IROs have collectively chaired 702 Child In Care Reviews of which 98% of children had their review within timescales a slight improvement in performance compared to last year's 97%.

The majority of children in care at year end were between 10-15 years of age and whilst there are more boys than girls in this particular age group, overall genders are evenly split. This is similar to the previous year.

The IRO Service makes an important contribution to good performance against key performance indicators in the National Indicator Set: C63 (participation at Reviews) and N166 (timeliness of Reviews) are prime examples. In addition to this the IROs also contribute to other performance indicators through quality assurance and collection of data or raising issues on cases at appropriate levels to minimise poor outcomes eg drift in care planning, placement stability, educational achievements, health appointments ect. (See Appendix 3) During 1013/14 the IROs will focus on promoting stability of placements for children as this is an area where performance has dipped slightly compared to last year although there was excellent performance in adoptions of children.

4.3 Children & Young People Participation

Children's participation at child in care review. Children over 4 years.	Percentage of children
Child attended & spoke for self	54%
Child attended - gave views non verbally	0.1%
Child attended without contributing	0
Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	29%
Child not attended, views sent	15%
Child did not attend or participate in their review	1.5%

During 2012/13 97% of children and young people participated in their Review, this percentage is the same as the last reporting period. There has been a slight increase in children and young people directly attending their Reviews however, there is more work to be done to encourage children and young people to attend. IROs strive to establish the reasons why individual children and young people choose not to attend their Review. This has been made easier with the additional IRO post enabling case loads to reduce and more capacity to directly engage with children and young people between their Reviews. As highlighted in the 2011/12 report for some children and young people parents due to attend the Review will impact on whether the children and young people attend or not. IROs have on some occasions held the Review as a series of meetings to encourage children to attend and remove known barriers to non attendance.

The IROs are visiting more children and young people between Reviews however; IRO capacity still impacts on their ability to be able to do this for all looked after children. The IROs have to select carefully the children and young people that they target for visits in between Reviews.

There are increased examples where with the support of their IRO children and young people are chairing their own review.

Very few young people have attended Child Protection Conferences. This is an area of on going development. Additional staff have had formal advocacy training to enable an increase of the numbers of people able to support not only the children and young people in care but to also support those young people prior to, during and following Child Protection Case Conferences should they wish to attend.

There are some good practice examples of IROs visiting and/or writing to children and young people following a CIC Review or Child Protection Case Conference to talk to them directly about what took place and what has been agreed. When considering social work practice there is an excellent example of a social worker supporting an 8 year old child to write and produce her own child protection plan for presentation at a Review Conference. Steps are being taken to invite this young person along with others to join the IROs' children and young people participation working group.

4.4 Young People's Feedback

Those children and young people who had a review in March 2013 were sent and invited to complete a review consultation questionnaire. There was a 20% completion and return of this questionnaire. Below is a summary of the findings from the questionnaires.

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes	Comment
Do you go to your review	11	3	1	
If no are you able to share your views some other way	4			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to carer and IRO • Text & Phone • Complete the review letter. • I put it in my form and they read it out for me if I'm not there.
Do you have a say about where and when your reviews are held	7	6	1	
Do you have a say about who comes to your review	9	2	1	
Did the people invited attend	10		5	
Do you feel you can talk and say what you want in your review.	11	1	3	
Do you feel listened to	14	1		
Do you know who your IRO is	15			
Do you get to talk to them alone	10	3	1	
Do you get on with your IRO	15			
Do you get a choice of chairing your review	6	10		2x6 say no
Could your review be made better – if yes how	4	8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know • Some nice refreshments –cake ect. • Finding things to help me • Food being available
Do you get a copy of the notes from your review meeting	8	7		
Did the things decided at your last review happen – if not do you know why not.	8	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't know • IRO talked to my social worker about this. • Wanted to see my brother
Do you know what your care plan is	15		Yes and	

			no	
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How do you feel about your reviews?

- Don't like having them (child aged 7yrs PB)
- Happy (child aged 6yrs)
- Happy (child aged 7yrs)
- Happy and excited (child aged 10yrs)
- OK (child aged 15yrs)
- Fine (child aged 15yrs)
- I enjoy my reviews I always have my say and things get done quickly and efficiently. (Young Person aged 17yrs)
- Happy because I get to have my say on how I feel. (child aged 15yrs)
- Happy my chance to talk (child aged 11yrs)
- Happy (child aged 10yrs)
- Really good (child aged 12yrs)
- I feel alright about them but not all the time happy (child aged 10yrs)
- Ok (child aged 10yrs)
- They're alright (child aged 14yrs)

Any comments or questions?

- Request for reviews not to be arranged for days that the young person is due to attend activities.
- I would like to learn to play the piano (child aged 6yrs)

The feedback from the children and young people on the whole was very reassuring that IROs were completing their core duties appropriately and that the children were happy with their Review. It also highlights some of the areas that need to be focussed upon such as making sure that the children are not hungry, that they have a say about where their Review should take place and supporting more children to chair their own Reviews.

Meet Your IRO Day

IROs invited children in care to spend time informally with them this was seen as an opportunity to get to know the children and young people (and for them to get to know the IROs) in a different setting. IROs organised activities for the children. The sessions were very well attended and feedback very positive. There are plans to repeat this periodically throughout the year.

In addition to the work relating to Child in Care Reviews and Child Protection Conferences during the year IROs have also:

- Continued direct involvement with looked after children (Care Council and Hot Shots)
- Assisted with the development of several policies and procedures.
- Contributed to the development of the revised documentation and information pack given to all children and young people admitted into care.

- Provided induction training to new staff on a multiagency basis relating to professional responsibility in Child in Care Reviews and Child Protection Conferences.
- Facilitated interagency training - child protection and Core Group Working.
- Attended a variety of professional meetings relating to collective and individual children.
- Direct involvement in the development of a new model of working with families who neglect their children (Child's daily lived experience) in conjunction with Prof Jan Howarth and Sheffield University.

5. Quality Assurance

5.1 Child in Care Reviews

IROs seek to ensure good outcomes for children. They do this formally through their quality assurance role in Children in Care Reviews by completing a quality assurance document (started June 2012) which for individual children identifies good quality care plans as well as highlighting care plans that require attention. The collation of information enables wider reporting and assists in service and practice development. This quality assurance document also provides a mechanism to monitor the quality and consistency of the work undertaken by the IROs. The IRO makes a judgement as to whether the Care Plan is:

- Green - Considered to be progressing well and any issues arising can be addressed through the usual review process
- Amber - The Review identifies concerns that require priority intervention
- Red - The Review identifies a serious concern and requires immediate action.

Findings are for 2012/13 reporting period:

Care Plan status	Percentage of all RAGs
Green	81%
Amber	15%
Red	4%

Positive practice noted included themes relating to:

- Child/young person having a good relationship with the social worker.
- Young person being fully included and engaged with the Care Plan
- Foster carer fully meeting the needs of the children and young people.
- Comprehensive Core Assessment being available to the Review
- Meeting children's cultural and identity needs.
- Good pathway planning and co working between social work teams.
- Children's health and education needs being met appropriately.

Reasons for Amber ratings:

- Lack of life story work
- Lack of Care Planning Meetings
- Contact issues

- Education issues
- Drift impacting on Care Plan
- Health issues
- Matching issues
- Care Plan not clear
- Decisions from previous review not completed.
- Long term matching issue
- Exit Plan not in place for a young person to leave Secure Unit.

Reasons for Red ratings:

- No allocated social worker from Transition Leaving Care Team at time of the Review.
- Permanence Plan not in place
- Lack of statutory visits.
- Exit Plan not in place for a young person to leave Secure Unit.
- Assessment delay
- Delay in applying to Court for child's current legal status to be revoked.
- Child not seen or consulted with since the previous Review.

All of the above issues IROs have raised with social workers and/or their team managers with a view to issues highlighted being rectified and resolved for the child. There is much evidence that this quality assurance model is now well embedded into the practice of the IRO, having said that this quality assurance model is under continuous development to improve the standard of the IRO role and the impact on outcomes for the children. In addition to the quality assurance that is undertaken following a child in care review IROs also monitor children's cases ongoing.

5.2 IRO challenges

A key component of the IRO role is that they monitor the child's case, Care Plan and Child Protection Plan and that they challenge as necessary. The robustness of this activity is influenced by:

- Capacity to monitor away from the actual meetings. If not monitoring will not be challenging. It is noted during this reporting period that the additional capacity with the temporary IRO post has relieved some caseload pressures enabling IROs to monitor more cases and highlight and challenge as necessary.
- The confidence to challenge. This links to organisational culture and understanding of role and responsibility. If the IRO has been overly involved in care planning activities it becomes very difficult to challenge as have been part of the decision making in the first place. The IRO needs to be confident in knowing that he/she will be supported with this challenge. In Telford & Wrekin the IROs are fully supported by their managers who also will challenge in their own right and on behalf of IROs in various meetings and settings. The IROs are all assertive and confident professionals well able to challenge as

required. IROs are clear about their roles and responsibilities – this is an area that has been developed significantly the past two years.

- The IRO needs to have the skill and experience to know when to challenge on behalf of the child. All of the IROs in Telford & Wrekin are very experienced social work practitioners with most having had management roles within social work. Collectively the IROs are extremely skilled and experienced.

See Appendix 3 for some examples of IRO challenge covering both children in care and children subject to child protection planning.

5.3 Representations and Escalations

Where there are concerns relating to implementation of the Care Plan, resources or poor practice, IROs will initially liaise with the social worker or team manager and seek to resolve things informally. A record of this is added to the child's record using the developed IRO case note facility to enable IRO activity to be visible. There are cases that have required be escalating to Service Delivery Managers and needed to be brought to the attention of the Children's Safeguarding Assistant Director. All have been resolved through discussion which is a very positive statement as Telford & Wrekin is a small authority one would hope that communication would be good between professionals and that issues are able to be resolved swiftly for the children. The response and support for the IRO role from senior managers and the Director of Children's Services is excellent.

There is a Dispute Resolution procedure for escalation of concerns available for use which has been reviewed and updated this year (see appendix 4). Although there has not been the need to progress the Dispute Resolution formally there has been 2 occasions this year where IROs have formally frozen the child's placement as on both occasions the IRO was not satisfied that to move the children was in their best interests. These issues were resolved quickly and both children remain in their respective placements which was the best outcome for them.

5.4 Child Protection Conferences

A quality assurance document is completed by the IRO following each Conference. Any significant individual concern relating to a Conference is addressed immediately by the IRO. The 2012/13 data analysis from this has informed the content of Practice Standards which have been developed which cover child protection activity as well as children in care.

6. Themed audits

A number of themed audits have taken place this reporting year these include:

6.1 Parents invited to Child in Care Reviews (October 2012)

Out of 71 reviews 38 parents were invited with 14 parents actually attending. There were 29 parents who were not invited the reasons given for this was:

- There was a Placement Order in place.
- Children indicated that they did not want their parents to attend.
- Care Plan was Adoption so parents not involved.
- Parents have minimal involvement with the children thus do not attend child in care Reviews.

What was unclear was whether parents were consulted or seen separately from the main review. There is a responsibility upon the local authority to inform parents of their child's progress and whilst there may be a Placement Order in place good practice would involve the IRO making attempts to consult with the parent to both update them and canvas their views.

6.2 Children subject to dual status follow up audit August 2013

The audit completed 2011/12 led to a change in practice in that children if becoming accommodated or being made subject to a Interim Care Order will no longer be subject of a child protection plan. Obviously consideration to this is given on a child by child basis as there may be the exceptional circumstance where a child protection plan is still required.

A follow up audit was completed in August 2013 as numbers of children who were subject to dual status appeared to have increased. The audit revealed a flaw in the authorisation process within the Social Care children's electronic record programme which by default built in a delay preventing the Conference & Reviewing Service from being able to progress the deplaning of children subject to this status. This has since been discussed with managers.

6.3 Children subject to child protection plans due to chronic neglect

Work has progressed on developing a new model of Core Group working and the facilitation of Child Protection Conferences for children who are suffering chronic neglect. IROs are directly involved in this pilot working closely with the LSCB Training Officer and Principal Officer Child Protection. The focus is built around the daily lived experience of the child as mentioned earlier in this report. Children and parents like this approach and the quality of information gained is far superior using this model when working with the family.

7. Quality Assurance/Unit Self Awareness

There are a number of mechanisms in place to quality assure the service of the Conferencing & Reviewing Unit. These include:

1. There has been direct observation of the IROs chairing child protection meetings. IRO chairing and safeguarding practice is evaluated by the Team Manager and Service Delivery Manager and feedback given to the individual IRO. Through this practice of observing child protection conferences improvements to this area of the service have been made.

The Findings:

Positive practice noted included:

- Good preparation of family attending the Conference.
- Care taken to involve parents in the Conference.
- Care taken to involve all participants
- Key missing safeguarding information being picked by the Chairs as new neglect model influences the Chairs line of questioning and focus.

Key area for development included:

- More IRO challenge at review conferences in relation to lack of progress of key tasks within the child protection plan.
 - More focus on the review of child protection plan.
2. Child in Care reports and Child Protection notes have been sample audited by the Team Manger and Service Delivery Manager with feedback provided to individual IROs. In addition to this changes have been made to both Child Protection Conference note templates and the Child in Care report template. Currently the newly developed Child in Care template is being piloted with the focus being placed on capturing the child's voice and ensuring identify needs are being discussed thoroughly.
 3. In addition to this colleagues from our Corporate Parenting Team have also audited a random selection of 30 Child in Care Reports. This audit was undertaken by the Children in Care's Designated Nurse and the Virtual Head Teacher. The purpose of this audit was to consider the quality and quantity of health information recorded and to also ensure that the children's health needs are being met.

The findings:

- In all cases health was considered
- Content varied in terms of quantity of information.
- Most reviews focused on general questions about health
- It was clearly noted when a young person refused any health assessment.

- Not always clear whether health professional attended the review
- Little evidence of direct reference to the content of the last health assessment.

A number of recommendations were made to assist the IROs improve upon the quality of the child's review. IROs have found this helpful.

4. Performance data is used to inform quality assurance for example if there is a rise in numbers of children who became subject to child protection plans the Team Manger and Service Delivery Manger would consider investigating the reasons for this. Individual and collective team performance data is scrutinised and used to highlight and resolve any barriers as well as being used to celebrate good practice.
5. There is a dedicated quality assurance computer programme in place where IROs record and store all RAG documentation (the quality assurance documents that are completed by the IRO following each child's Child in Care Review.) These RAG documents are sample audited or/and theme audited as part of the ongoing Service Quality Assurance Framework. IRO threshold is visible and enables this to be reviewed and consistent in approach to that agreed by the Team.
6. Feedback from others

Team Managers and Social Workers have been asked for their views about the Conferencing & Reviewing Service. Some felt that IROs were informal in their approach, equally there were comments that the IROs were very challenging and some professionals find this difficult to deal with. What is apparent is that this service area requires promotion to enable all professionals to understand the role and responsibilities of the IRO as set out in the Care Planning Regs and IRO Handbook.

The Named Nurse for Safeguarding representing Health Visitors and School Nurses felt that everything was fine and had no developmental comments to make.

The Police representative made comments relating to the organisation of Conferences for example concurrent meetings result in no police attendance at some Child Protection Conferences. This issue has already been addressed successfully.

Business Support Officers had some very useful and constructive comments relating to the organisation of Conferences which have been taken forward.

8. Service Review

A service review has been undertaken as requested by Ofsted in their Inspection Report August 2012. The Service Review also was required due to this being a recommendation from the Family Justice Report as mentioned previously.

The Service Review Report has been presented to the Council's Senior Leadership Team and all of the recommendations made have been accepted. The recommendations:

1. Consideration is given to relocating the management responsibility of the IRO Conference and Review Service from Safeguarding to Education and Skills. This would enable a more robust and independent quality assurance role to be established whilst still being accountable to the Director of Children & Families. Therefore meeting the requirements of Working Together 2013.
 - **Key Update**
This Recommendation has been achieved as from 1st July 2013.
- 2 IROs retain a mixed caseload of children in Care and children subject to child protection planning
 - **Key Update**
This recommendation has been accepted IROs continue to retain a mixed caseload of children in Care and children subject to child protection planning.
- 3 Consideration is given to funding on a permanent basis one additional IRO post to enable caseloads to reduce for individual IROs. This will not result in caseloads of the upper level (70) as stated in the IRO Handbook however, in combination with other capacity maximising initiatives it may be suffice to enable the IRO Team to complete their duties.
 - **Key Update**
There continues to be one additional IRO post above base staffing levels. The visible impact is that along with a case load weighting system IROs' caseloads have reduced approximately by 25% to 90 children per IRO. This enables IROs to provide a better quality service to the children and young people looked after by the LA and those living at home supported by a Child Protection Plan.
- 4 Consideration is given to using differently existing resources in terms of BSO support to the IROs in the form of CIC Review note taking which will form the CIC Report. It may be more productive to remove or support an area of responsibility that clearly is responsible for using a high proportion of IRO time.
 - **Key Update**
There are in place a number of different activities involving the BSOs supporting IROs in their work. There is the option for IROs to request BSO support in note taking for complex CIC Reviews.
- 5 The Lean event is completed with representation from all service areas involved in the process of Child Protection Conferences and Child in Care Reviews and those professionals take forward in a timely manner agreed changes identified at the Event.
 - **Key Update**

Service changes involving BSOs have taken place therefore this exercise needs to be repeated.

- 6 Practice standards have been agreed for IRO activity within Child Protection and Children in Care. Consideration is given to widening out these practice standards to include operational social work staff and their supporting BSO. This would then enable all concerned to be very clear about expectation and detail of role.
 - **Key Update**
It has been agreed that Practice Standards will include operational social work staff and their BSOs
- 7 The IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations are promoted within social work teams.
- 8 The current Dispute Resolution process is reviewed and updated so that it is a robust functional process that works with the main Care Plan quality assurance document and tool (RAG Document) once reviewed the Dispute Resolution process under goes refreshed implementation and embedding across the LSCB Partnership.
 - **Key Update**
The Dispute Resolution process has been agreed.
9. A training programme is made available tailored to the training needs of the Telford & Wrekin IROs with the focus being on all aspects of their dual child protection and child in care roles and responsibilities. Particular emphasis and focus on the challenge aspect of the IRO role both within Children in Care Activities and Child Protection Conferences activity.
 - **Key Update**
IROs have completed this training in relation to a bespoke training event on Child Protection Conference. There is a similar event planned for Children in Care training. IROs will also be invited to submit application forms January 2014 to enrol on a IRO module and qualification being facilitated by Birmingham University.
- 10 Following the Family Justice Review 2011 there will be the implementation of a new Public Law Outline (PLO) in October 2013. This along side the changes in organisation and roles within the CAFCAS Service particularly in relation to a Child's Care Plan the current protocol that is in place between the IRO Service and CAFCASS is to be reviewed and updated in readiness for these changes.
 - **Key Update**
The Protocol with CAFCASS has been updated.

9. Complaints Received 2012 -2013

There has been one formal complaint received during this period. The complaint formed part of a larger wider complaint involving children's social care and was investigated

under Children Act 1989 by an independent professional who had been commissioned to do so by Telford & Wrekin's Customer Services.

- a) The complainant held the view that incorrect information was presented to the Child Protection Conference resulting in his children becoming subject to Child Protection Plans.

Finding:

This element of the complaint was not upheld.

- b) The parents left the Conference prior to it concluding. The complainant held the view that fabricated information was presented in his absence.

Finding:

This element of the complaint was not upheld

- c) The complaint said that the Conference Chair misrepresented the family's position and was not prepared to listen to them.

Finding:

This element of the complaint was not upheld.

- d) The children were de planned at the 3 month review the investigating officer raised this as an issue due to the short time frame in which significant neglect was assessed as having reduced sufficiently for the children not to require child protection plans. The complainant was of the view nothing for his children had changed.

This element was upheld with a recommendation that the practice of de planning after 3 months children who were subject to neglect was reviewed.

10. Key Successes in 2011/12 have been:

- IRO capacity has been increased which has had a positive impact for the children as the IROs have been able to monitor and take action as required in supporting the children during and in between their Reviews.
- Retained a full and stable team of IROs providing consistency for the children.
- The embedding of a quality assurance framework used for Children in Care Reviews and Child Protection Conferences. This has also developed working relationships between social care team managers and IROs.
- The development of regular reporting meetings with the Director of Children's Services.
- The development of a new model of working to reduce neglectful parenting and environments for children.
- The development and implementation of the Social Work report for child in care reviews. This assists greatly in the quality of the child's meeting.
- Outline Child Protection Planning which takes place at the Conference has been developed using a format that enables clear understanding for the family and professionals attending exactly what this outline plan contains, what outcome is needed, what exactly needs to be done, who is to do it and in what timescale. The plan is outcome focused for the child.

- The review and further development of a working protocol with the local Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- Changes to the Child in Care format to ensure that they are compliant with Schedule 7, Care Regs 2010.

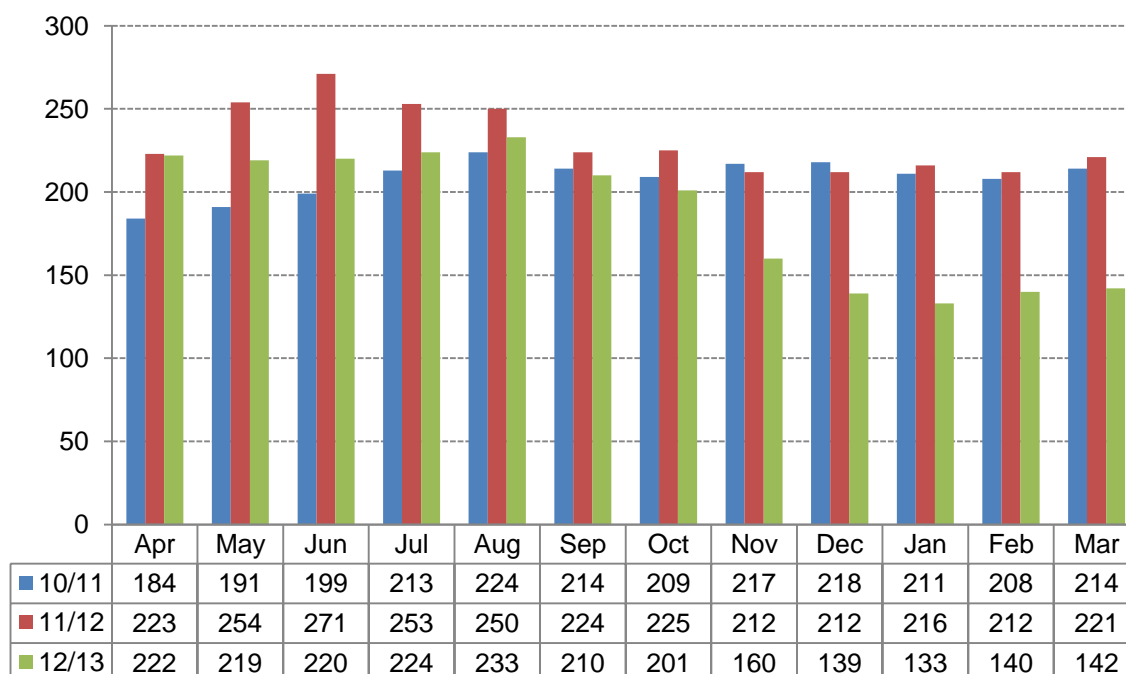
11. Recommendations / Key Priorities for the IRO Service in 2012/13:

- To continue to focus and further develop children's participation in relation to child protection as well as children in care. To do this by:
- Review and further develop the mechanisms for capturing children and young people's (including parents) views about the service that they receive or would wish to receive. Including a wider range of mechanisms for contact between the children and the IROs.
- To directly involve children and young people in the service development
- To work with children and young people in removing any barriers preventing them from attending their Child in Care Reviews.
- For each IRO to develop an area of speciality.
- Embed the Practice Standards.
- Develop further the quality assurance framework with particular focus being on how to measure the impact of the IRO service on children's outcomes.
- An area of focus for IROs will be the looking at children's stability within their placements.
- To promote the role and responsibilities of the IRO to key front line teams.

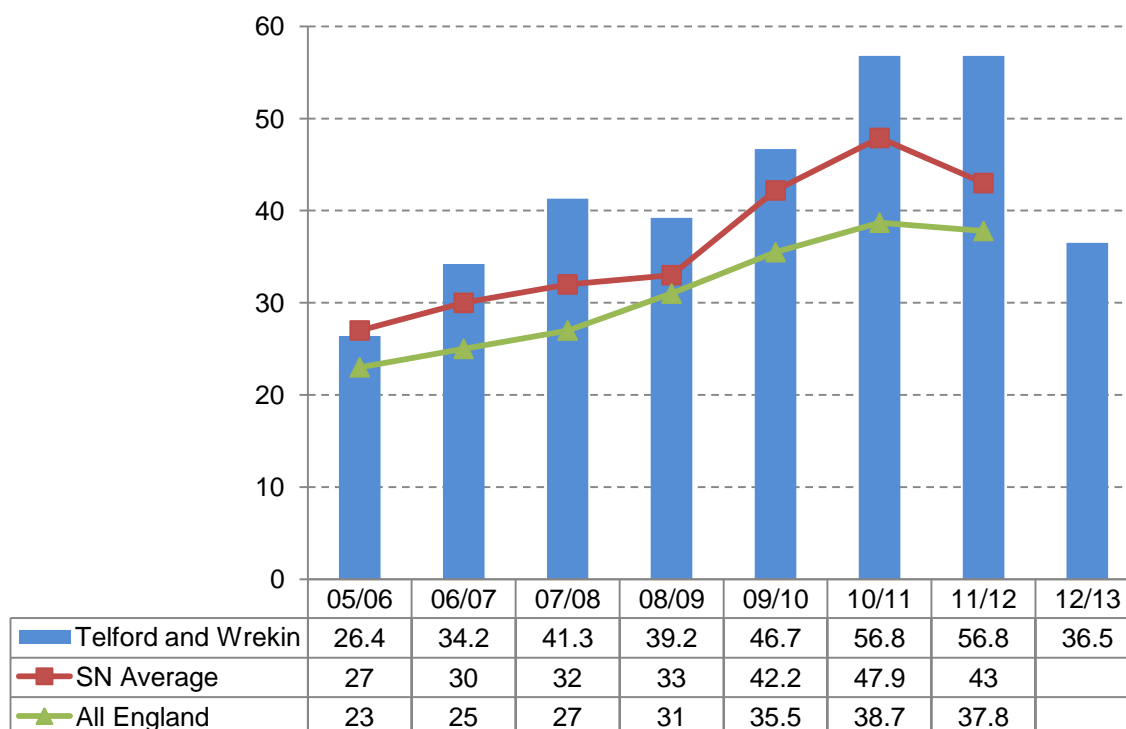
Appendix One

Child Protection Data

**Number of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan at month end
01/04/2010 - 31/03/2013**

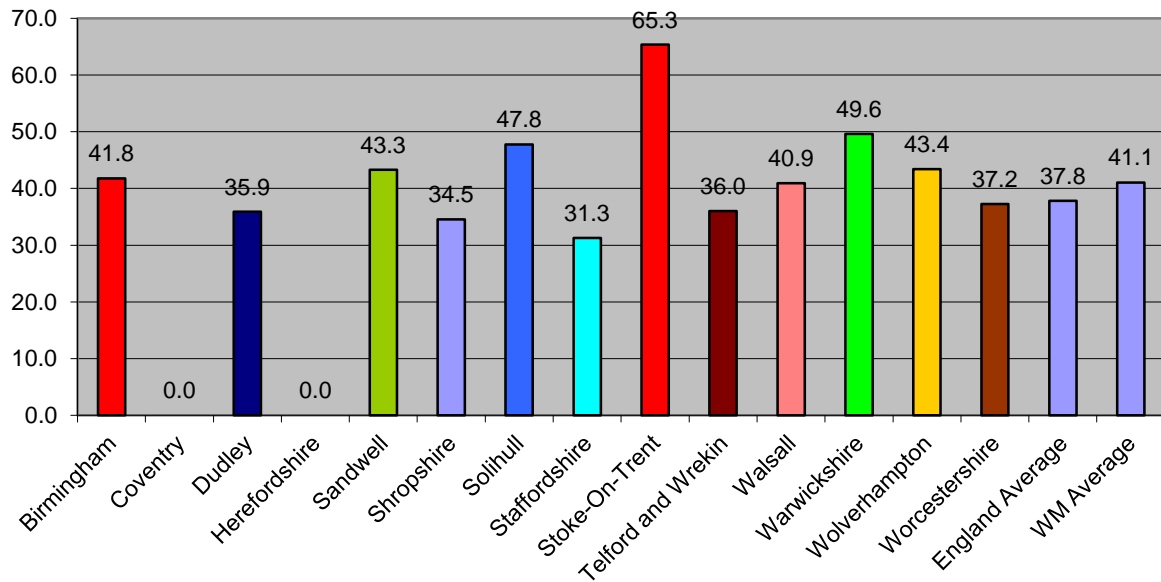


**Children with a Child Protection Plan at Year End (Rate per 10,000) -
Trend Data and Benchmarking against All England 2005 - 31/3/2013**

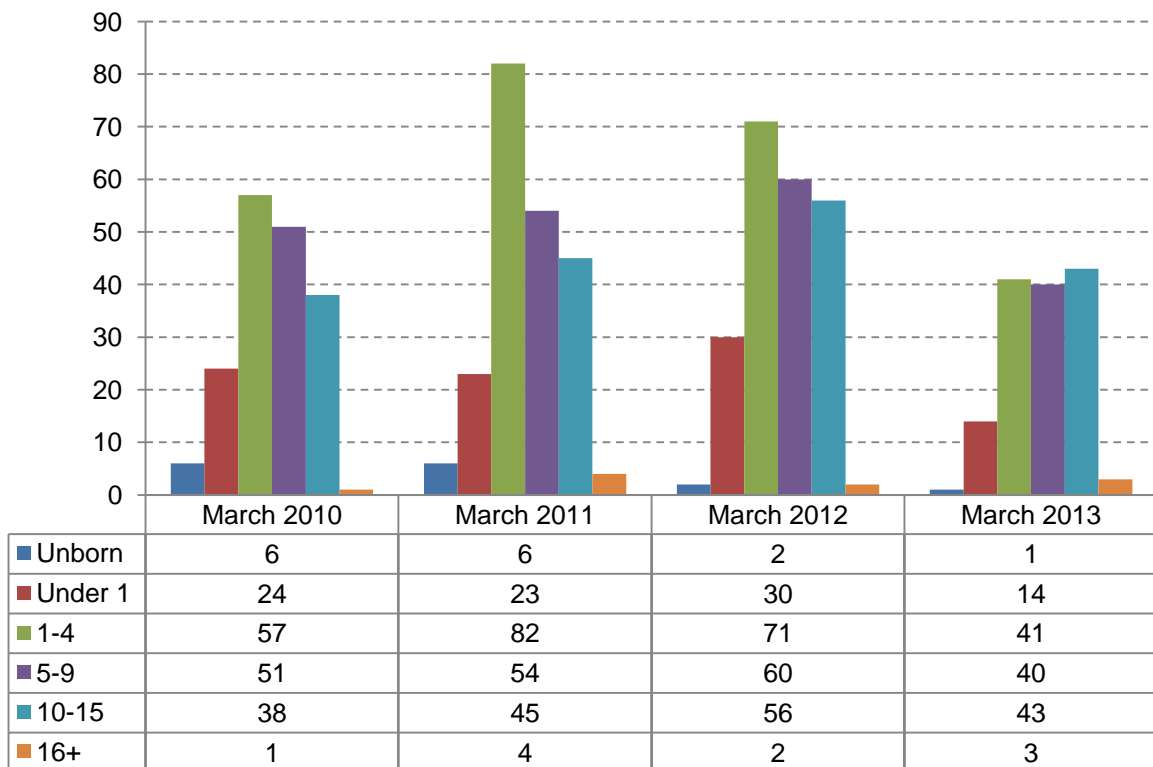


CPP Rate per 10,000 Population - West Midlands

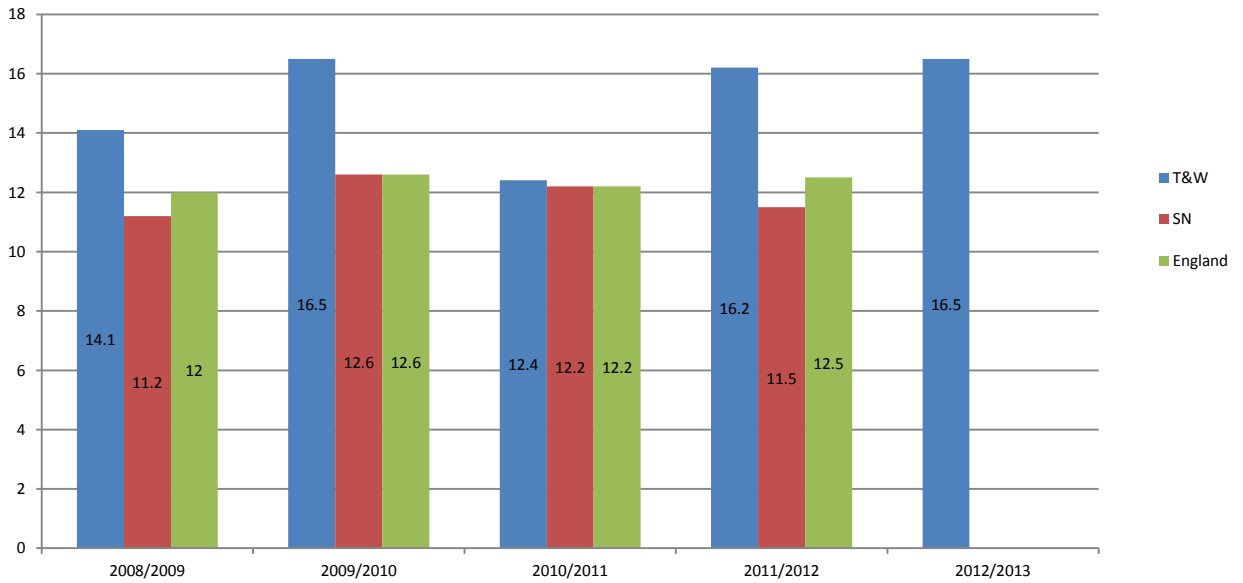
(Number of Children on a CP Plan / Under 18 Population Figure (as at))



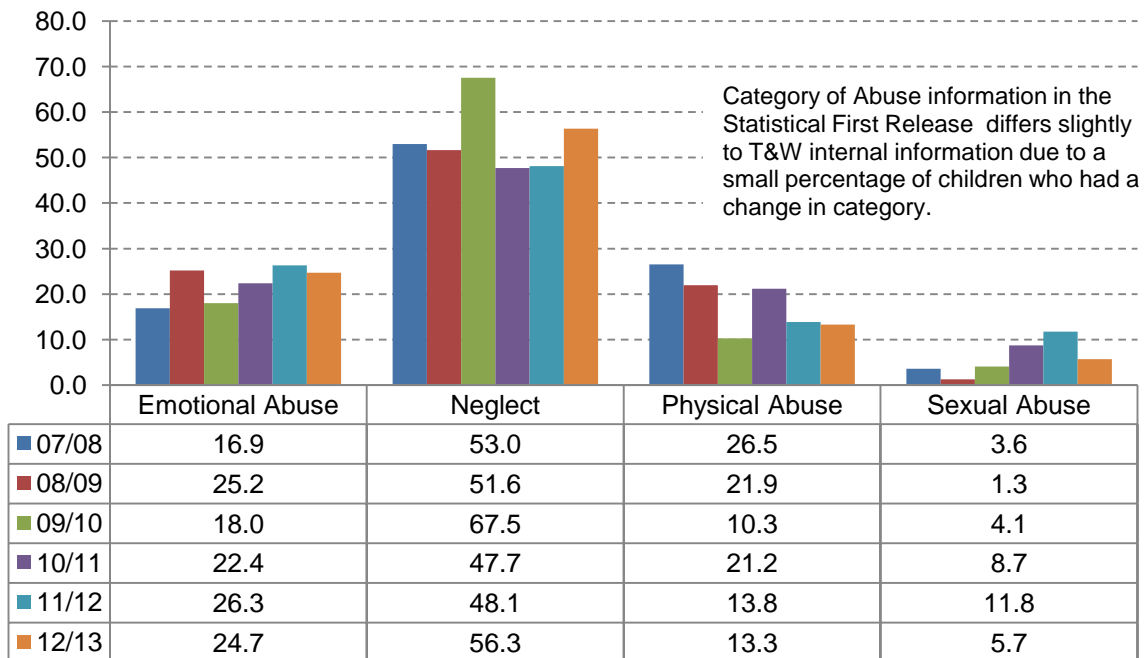
Number of Children Subject to CP Plans by Age Group March 2010- March 2013



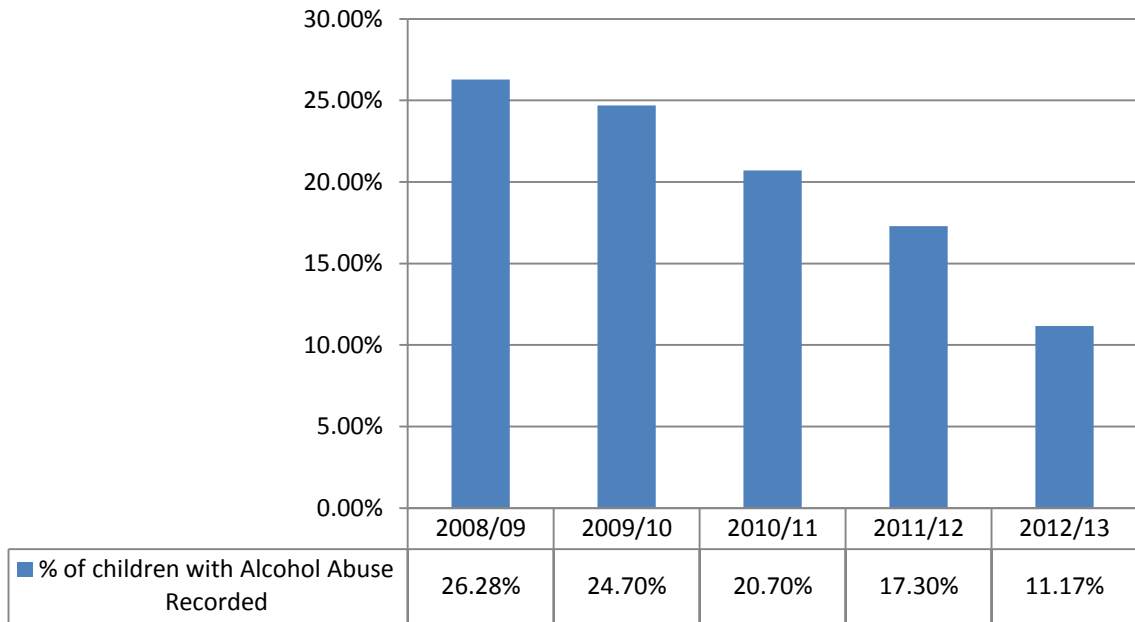
The percentage of children becoming the subject of a CP Plan for second or subsequent time as at 31/08/2013



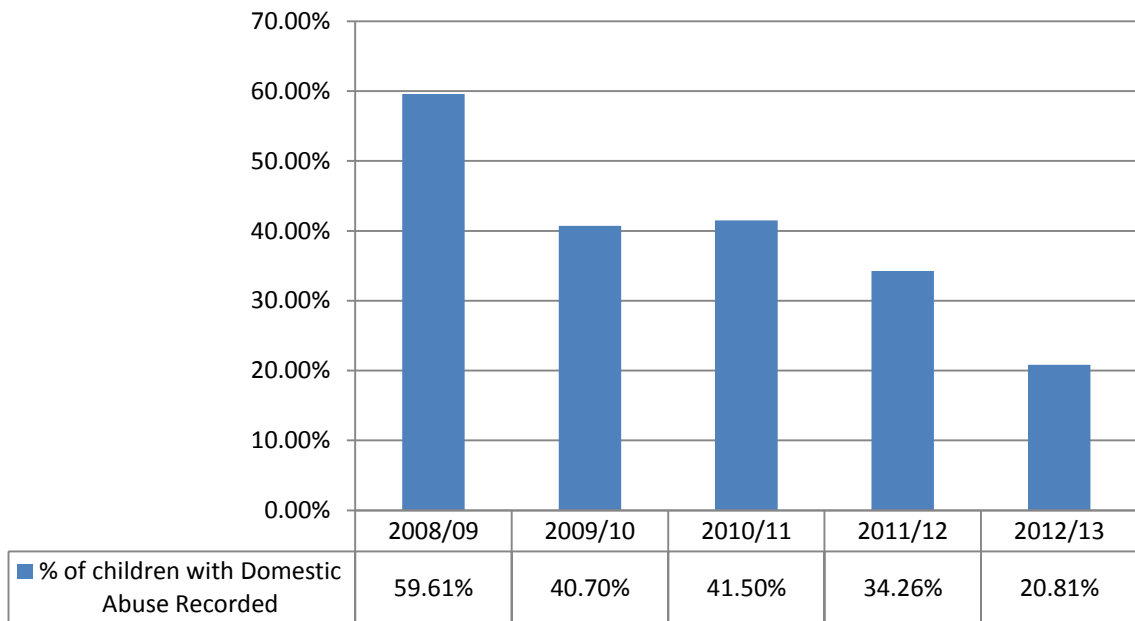
Children who became subject to a Child Protection Plan by Category (Percentage) 2007/08 - onwards



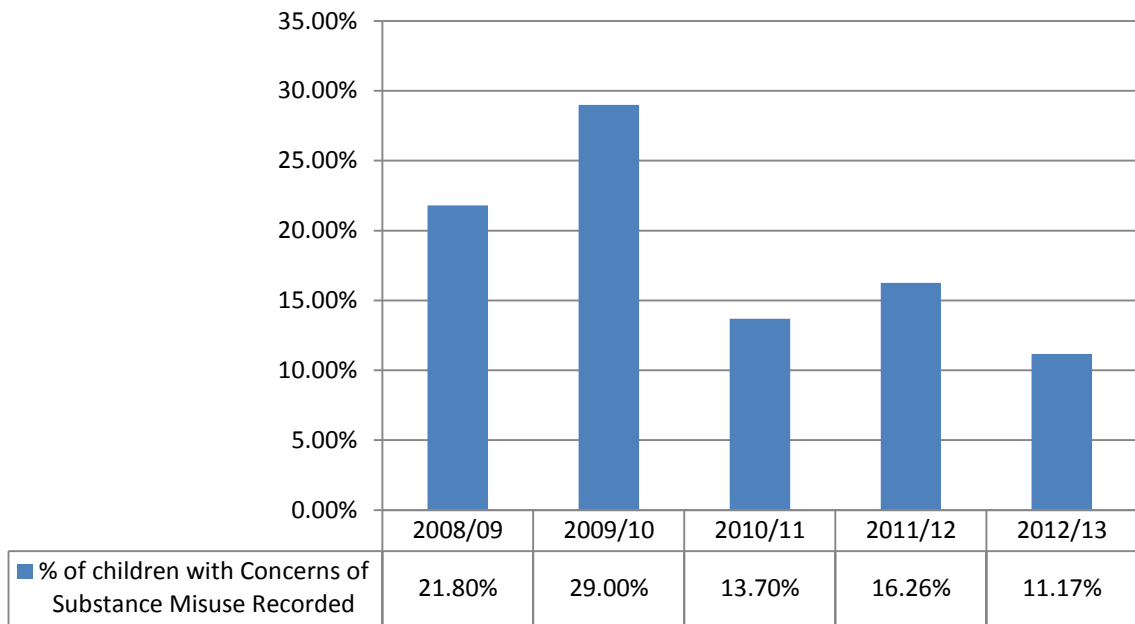
Of the total number of children who became subject to a CP Plan during the year, the percentage of those with a concern of Alcohol Abuse recorded following the ICPC



Of the total number of children who became subject to a CP Plan during the year, the percentage of those with a concern of Domestic Abuse recorded following the ICPC



Of the total number of children who became subject to a CP Plan during the year, the percentage of those with a concern of Substance Misuse recorded following the ICPC



Number of children who were de-registered or whose Child Protection Plans were discontinued (ceased) during the year ending 31-March-2012, by length of time as the subject of a plan (registered)

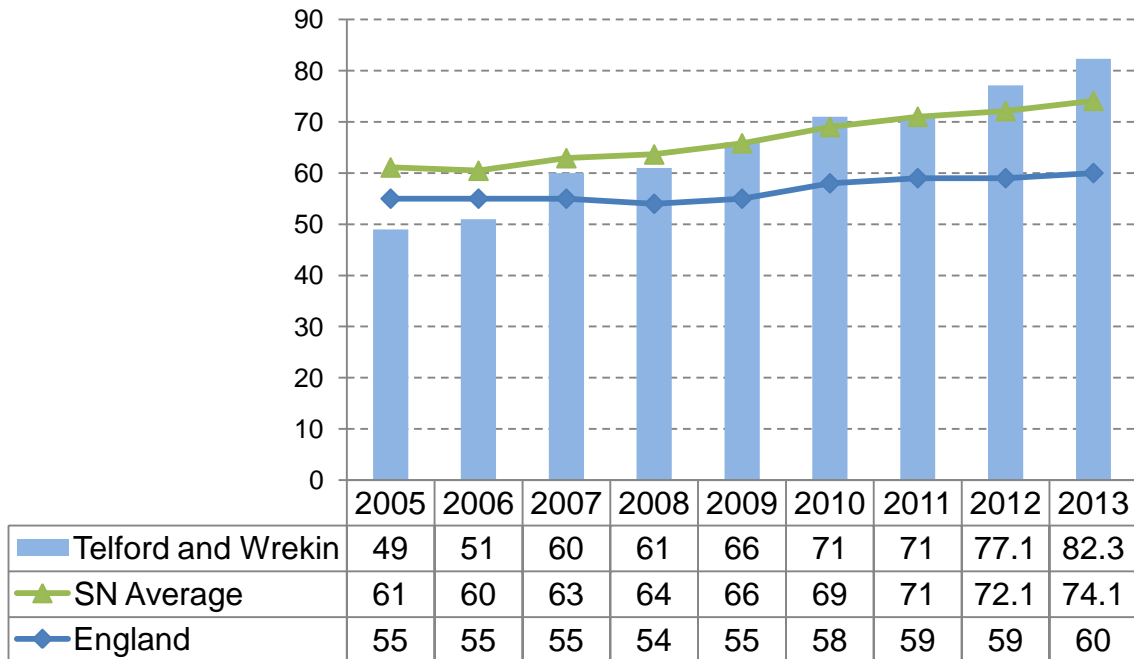
Length of time with a Child Protection Plan (registered)	Number of plans discontinued			
	Boys	Girls	Unborn	Total
Under 3 months	38	35	0	73
3 months but under 6 months	12	21	0	33
6 months but under 1 year	60	47	0	107
1 year but under 2 years	23	34	0	57
2 years but under 3 years	4	5	0	9
3 years and over	1	2	0	3
Totals	138	144	0	282

Number of children who were de-registered or whose Child Protection Plans were discontinued (ceased) during year ending 31-March 2013, by length of time as the subject of a plan (registered)

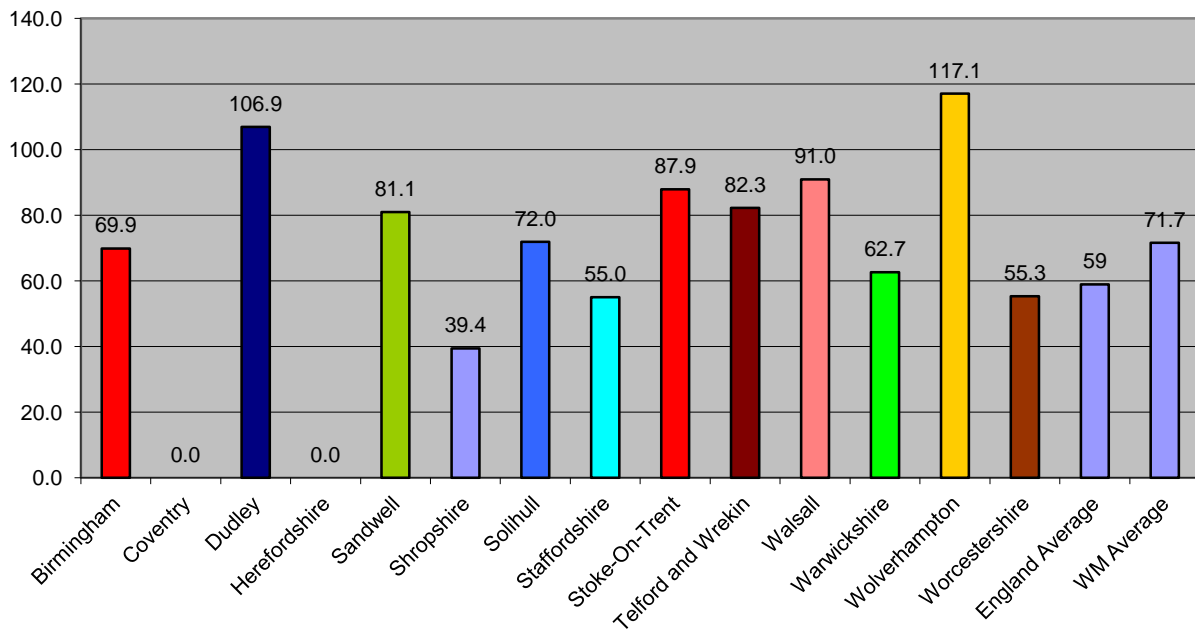
Length of time with a Child Protection Plan (registered)	Number of plans discontinued			
	Boys	Girls	Unborn	Total
Under 3 months	31	28	0	59
3 months but under 6 months	12	6	0	18
6 months but under 1 year	51	47	0	98
1 year but under 2 years	43	43	0	86
2 years but under 3 years	4	5	0	9
3 years and over	4	2	0	6
Totals	145	131	0	276

Appendix Two CIC Data

Children In Care - 2005-2013 Rate per 10,000
Trend Data including Statistical Neighbour and All England Comparison

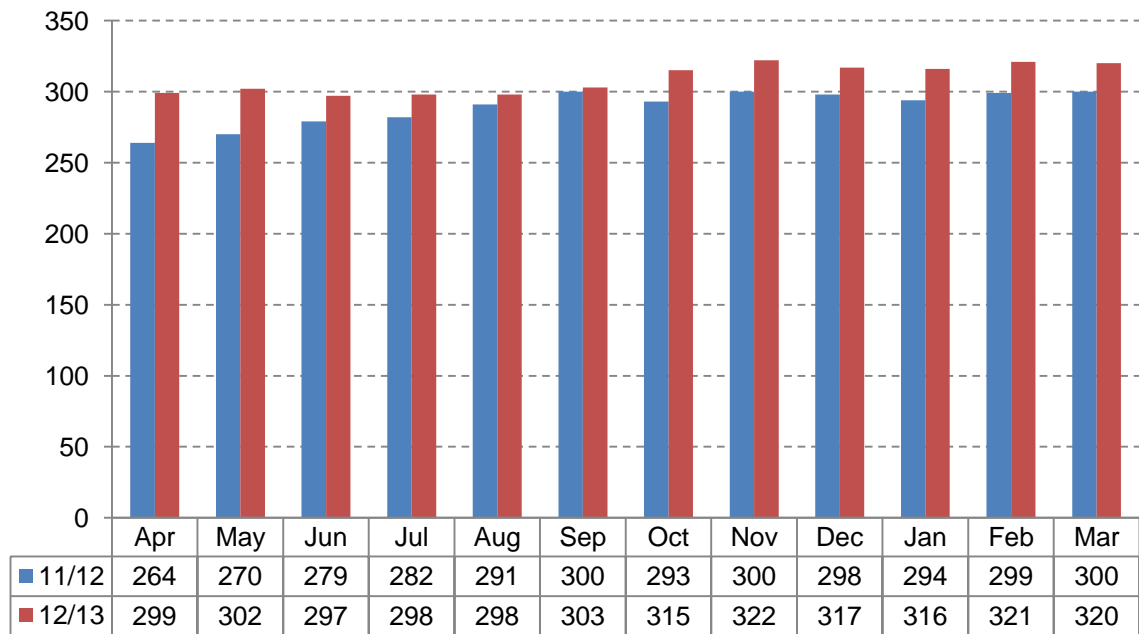


CiC Rate per 10,000 Population
(Number of Children in Care/Under 18 Population Figure (as at))

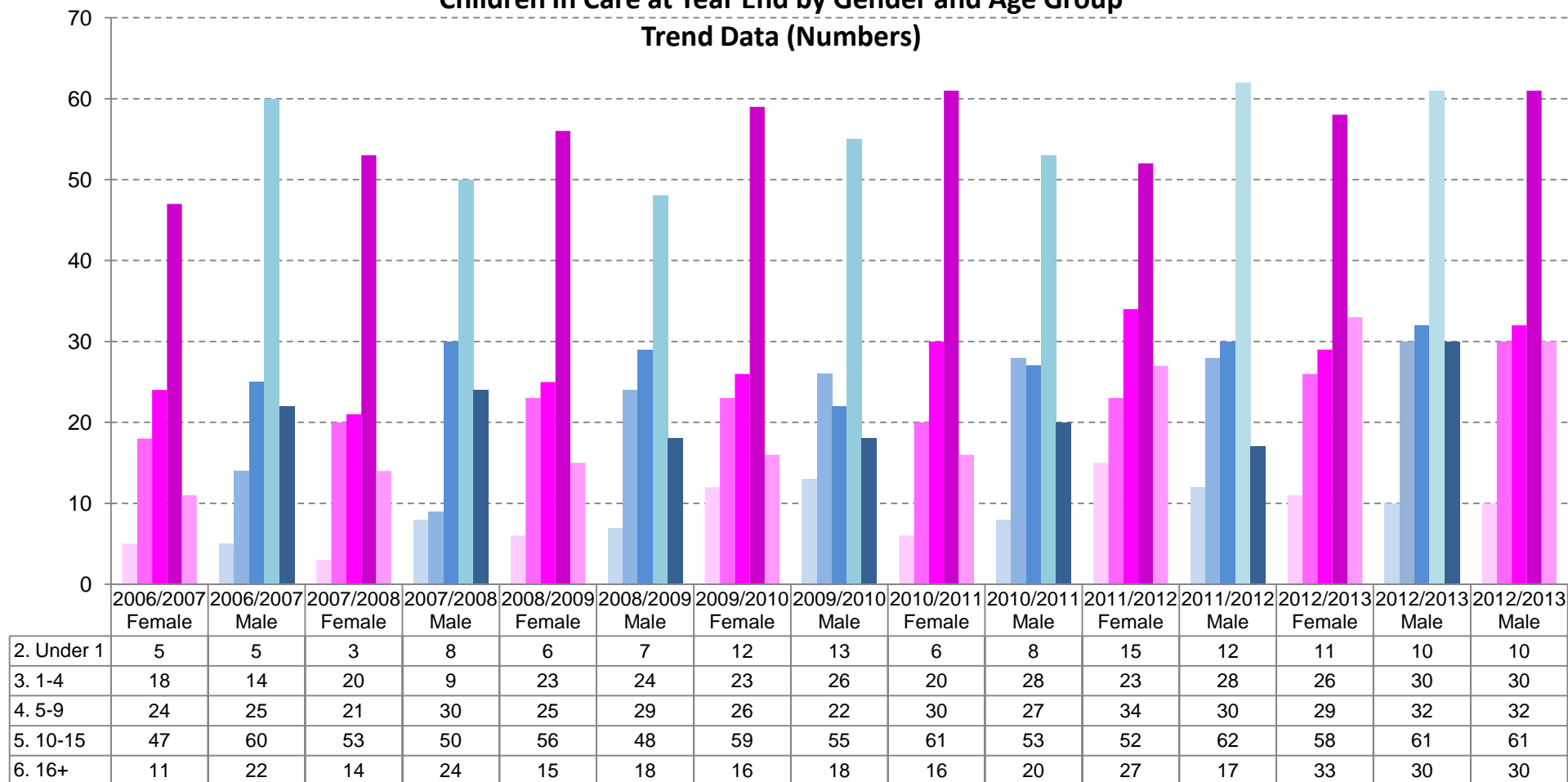


Number of Children In Care at Month End

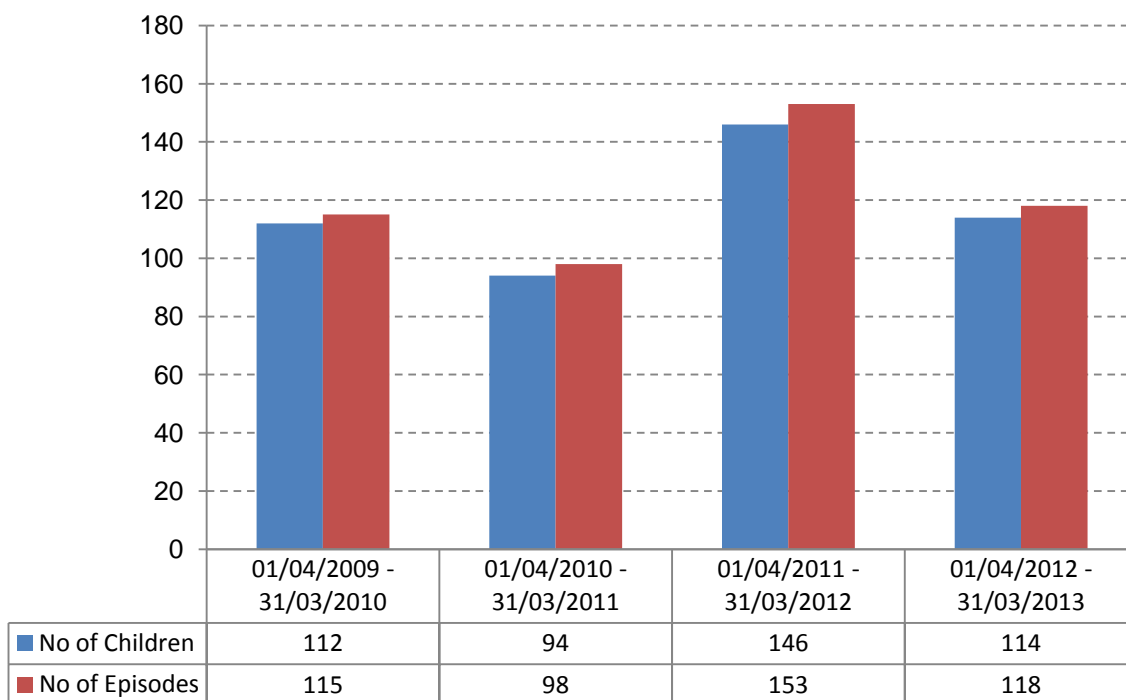
(Please note: these figures were accurate at the time of reporting, however may vary slightly due to changes in recording)



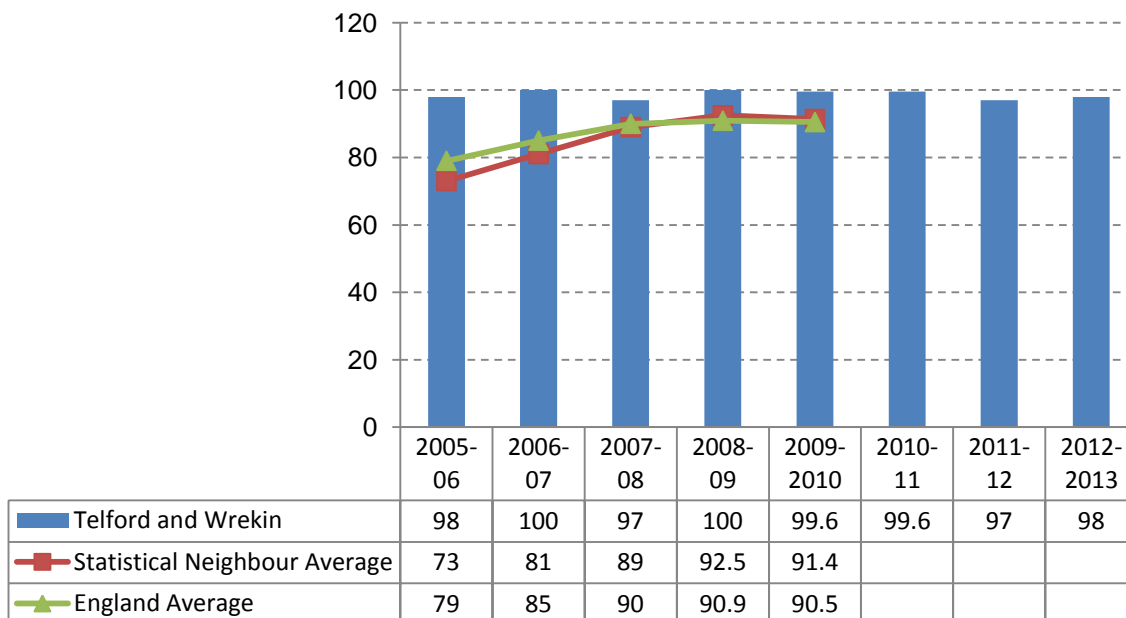
Children In Care at Year End by Gender and Age Group
Trend Data (Numbers)



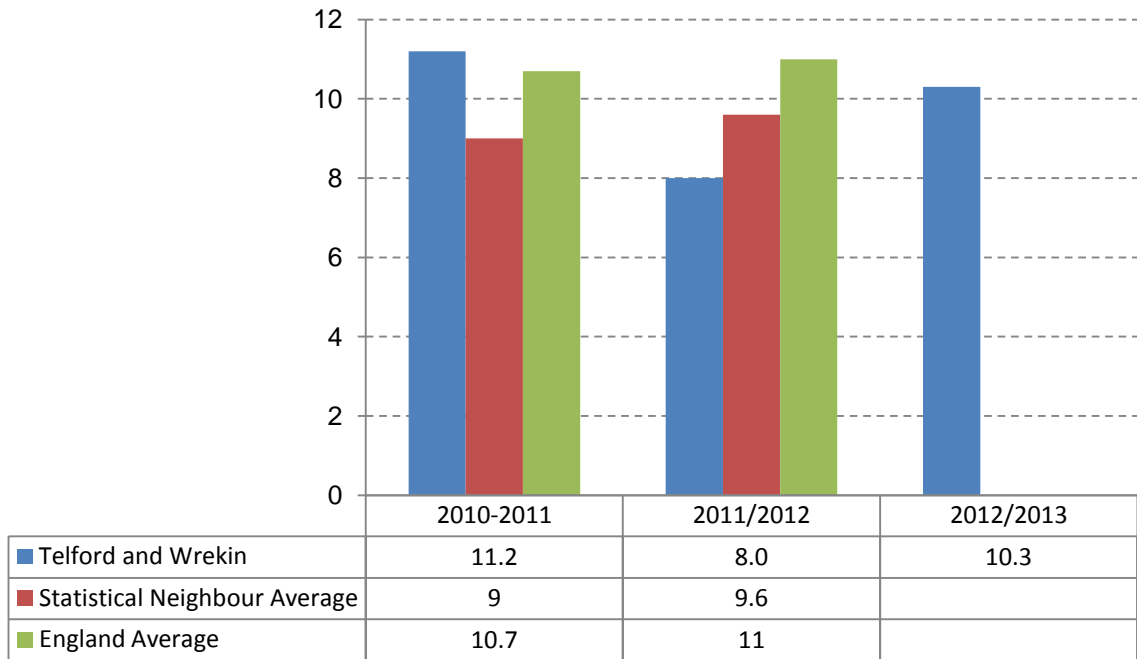
New Children In Care and New Children In Care Episodes - Yearly Data



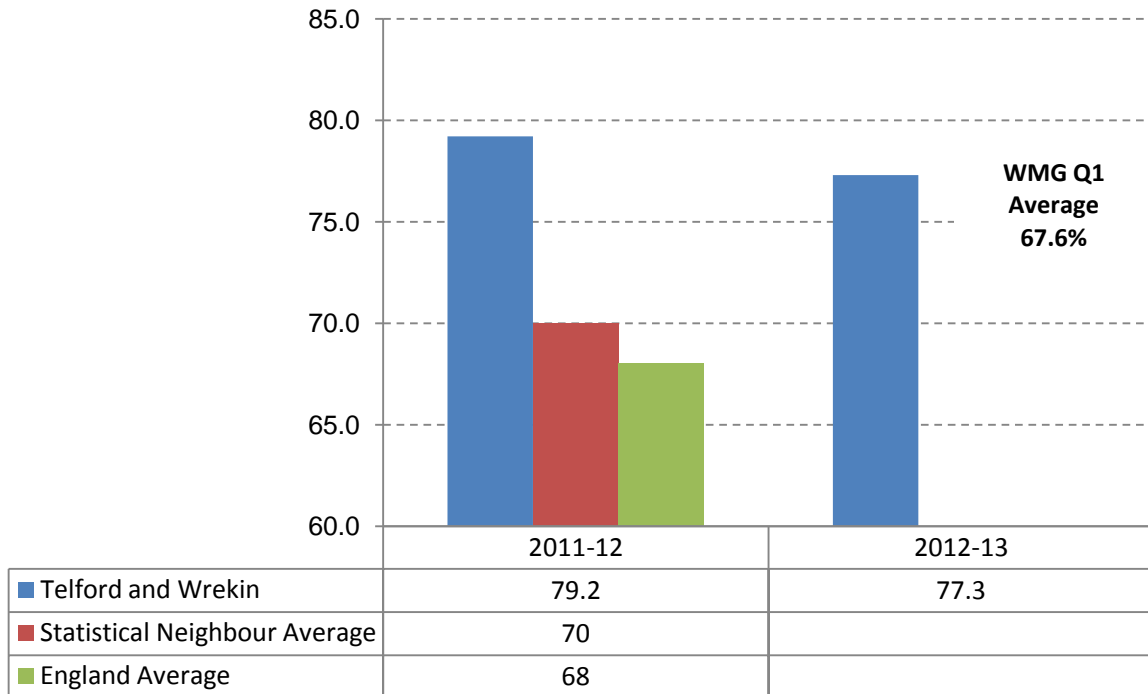
The Percentage of Children In care who have had their Review within timescale by Year 2005 - 2013



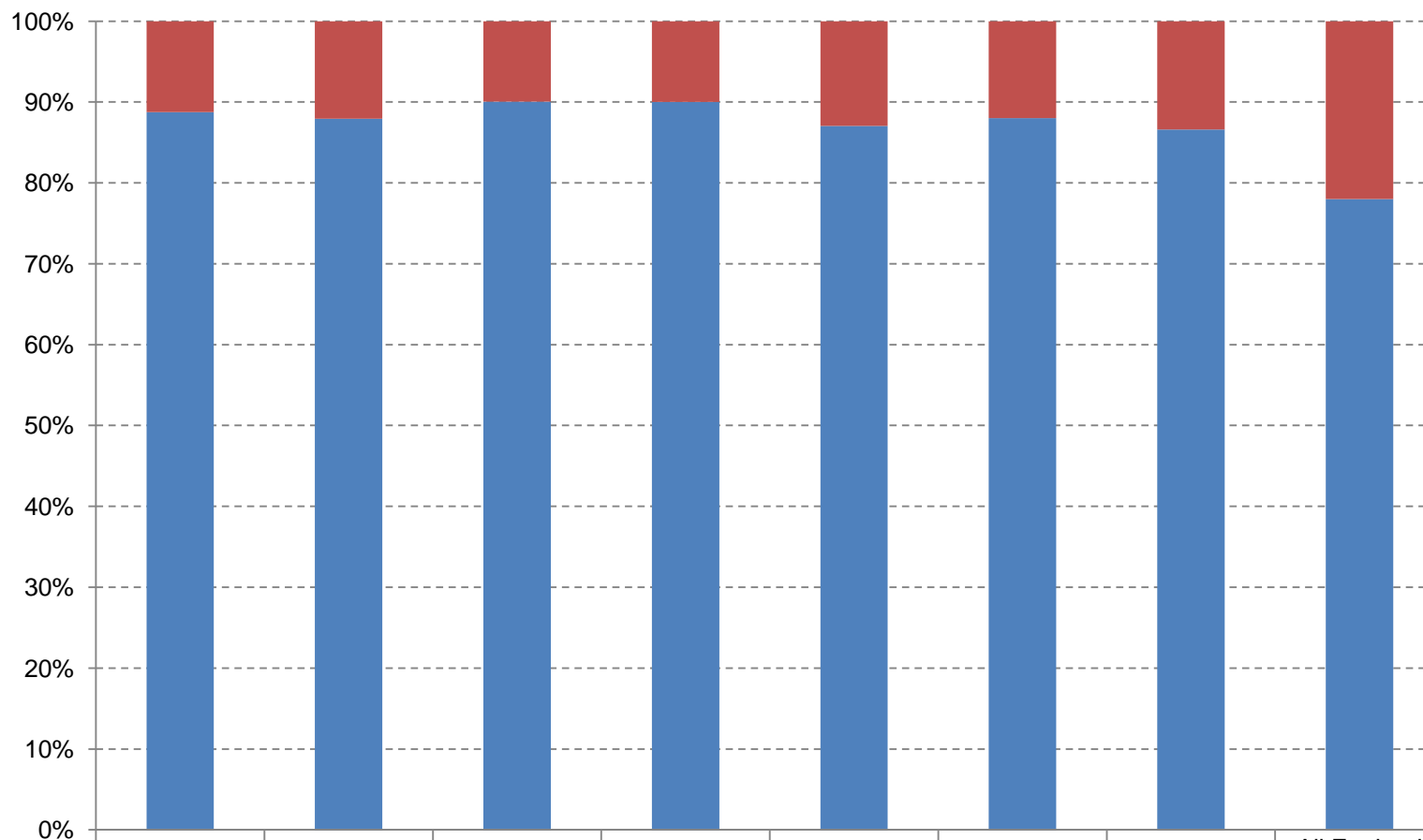
Percentage of Children In Care looked after who had 3 Placements Plus within the year



The Percentage Of Children in Care aged under 16, who have been looked after for 2½ years and in placement for 2 years - Trend Data



The Percentage of Children In Care at Year End - Ethnicity Summary Trend Data with Benchmarking Data



	31/03/2007	31/03/2008	31/03/2009	31/03/2010	31/03/2011	31/03/2012	31/03/2013	All England 2011/2012
Other ethnic background	11.3%	12.1%	10.0%	10.0%	13.0%	12.0%	13.4%	22%
A1 - White British	88.7%	87.9%	90.0%	90.0%	87.0%	88.0%	86.6%	78%

Indicator	Previous Year outturn	2012-13 outturn	Benchmarking where available	
LAC 12 months plus with annual health assessment and who had attended dentist	93%	95.4%	84.3 SN(11/12)	Higher is better This is excellent performance for T&W, for both health and dental. Robust measures are in place to monitor.
			81.7 E (11/12)	
% of children with 3 placements or more within the year – this does include if a child returned home and then came back into care and moves to adoptive placements	8.3%	10.3%	10 SN(11/12)	Lower is better. Whilst our year end outturn our figures are in line with benchmarking available. An action plan is in place to promote stability of placements.
			11 E (11/12)	
			11.3% WM (2012/13)	
Children who have been in care for 2.5 years or more and have been in the same placement for at least 2 years	79.2%	77.3%	70 SN (11/12)	Higher is better. Whilst our year end outturn our figures are in line with benchmarking available. An action plan is in place to promote stability of placements.
			68 E (11/12)	
			66.5% (2012-13)	
Children aged 10 but under 16 in foster placement or placed for adoption	78%	81.6%		Higher is better. Children who were not in foster placements or placed for adoption were in other establishments appropriate to their needs.

Adoptions within best interest timescales – this is from when a decision is agreed by the delegated decision make that adoption is in the best interests of the child	96.1%	100%	72 SN (11/12)	Higher is better. 27 children were adopted in 2012/13
			74 SN (11/12)	
			60.6% WM (2012-13)	

Appendix 3

Examples of IRO challenge.

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
15yr Female	CIC s20 Vol accommodated.	LA looking to move placement of the young person which IRO felt was not in young person's interests.	Service Delivery Manager (SDM) Fostering, SDM Safeguarding, Team Manager Child in Care Team.	Social Worker and SDM re-examined issue and acknowledged what the negative impact would be on the young person if having to move placement. It was agreed that the young people did not need to placement.
14yr Male	CIC Care Order	During a Child in Care Review the IRO became increasingly concerned with the presentation of the foster carers which led the IRO to note that the Foster Carers were clearly impacting upon the young person's emotional wellbeing.	As above plus Social Worker	Professionals meeting convened, young person moved placement due to the concerns identified. Fostering Team following up issues relating to the foster carers.
16yr Female	CIC S20 Vol accommodated.	Young Person pregnant and her Social Worker's absence from work resulted in a delay in identifying the appropriate placement for the young person and her baby when born..	Team Manager Child in Care	Alternative social worker allocation and placement identified and a move planned for the young person.
16yr Female	CIC S20 Vol accommodated	Education professional raising in a CIC Review that the young person was unable to continue with current College course as the young person was pregnant	Social Worker & – Head Teacher	At a re-scheduled CIC Review it was confirmed that the YP was able to continue at the Education setting.

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
		and this contravened Health & Safety policy for the college.. IRO challenged.		
14yr Female	Child Protection Plan	<p>Child's social work arrived with incomplete unauthorised Child Protection Conference Report to present at Conference – No written recommendations included within the report.</p> <p>Verbally the social worker was sharing his view that the child protection plan should end – this view seemed to have been taken in isolation from the Core Group. Information was limited and would not have been adequate to support the social worker's view.</p>	Raised with Team Manger Disabled Children Team (DCT), SDM DCT	<p>Conference was rescheduled until proper information was able to be made available.</p> <p>Resulting in an informed meeting taking place where the child protection plan continued and legal proceedings commenced for the child.</p> <p>Good safeguarding impact for the child.</p>
1 yr female	CIC Care Order	Child was placed at home under a Care Order. There was an inadequate placement with parents report completed to support this placement. IRO concerned about the wellbeing of the child in such an arrangement.	Raised with Case Manager, Team Manager, SDM,	<p>Report redone comprehensively. Outcome for child – safety was maintained as monitoring and support plan was increased.</p> <p>Challenge continued due to number of changes of social worker allocation. Child now</p>

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
				has consistent and robust case management in place.
16yrs female	CIC s20 Vol accommodation	LA was planning to move the young person from her placement due to concerns having been raised about the Residential Unit during an Inspection.	<p>Raised with Rights & Representative so that young person's wishes and feelings could be actively sought.</p> <p>Brokerage and Director of Company to discuss progress of Ofsted recommendations.</p> <p>Challenged LA continued view that young person should move. This had been the single most stable placement for the young person for anytime in her life.</p> <p>Steps needed to be taken to make placement good rather than just move her.</p>	Stayed in placement. When explored changes had been made by the Unit. Young person retains her stability of placement.

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
16yrs female	CIC MHA s3	Multiple case managers in quick succession. Failed CIC Reviews due to this. Rights of young people compromised - ie should have been receiving weekly allowance – this not in place. Expected that young person would use her savings.	Challenged treatment of this young person – Team Manager CIC.	Resolved weekly allowance established. Young person now has stable case manager
16yrs male	CIC Care Order (now)	<p>In CIC Review 3 issues raised as unclear. When raising with the LA was informed that final Care plan had been lodged in Court. However, Guardian still had his report to lodge.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IRO Contacted the child's Guardian as there was Psychological report suggesting that the YP could live in family and this did not appear to have been properly explored. 2. LA applied for CO but mother not opposing child aged 16 yrs IRO couldn't see logic for this couldn't get answer from sw. 3. Issue about contact with his siblings. Psychologist said that YP could have more contact with his siblings but the YP did not want this – so unclear why this 	Asked Guardian to consider before putting in his report.	<p>No change for the child Guardian agreed with LA. .</p> <p>IRO's view is that fostering should have been explored rather than a plan of Residential Care.</p> <p>This used as an example of when a Care Plan is before the Court involving CAFCAS how IRO challenge is limited. However, with the Family Justice Report changes to the PLO (Court process) from October 2013 Courts will concern themselves with the primary business of threshold for an Order and the detailed Care Plan will remain with the Local Authority therefore IRO input into this will increase.</p>

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
		was being perused.		
2yrs female	Child Protection	Challenging an agency regarding their attendance at the Conference given that they were clearly saying they would not contribute to the decision re child protection planning	Discussed Manger to Manger. Discussed at the LSCB Executive. Review of agency safeguarding policy	Changes made to agency policy outlining role of attendees at conference.
15yrs x2 16 yrs	Child Protection 1st Review	<p>YP with child protection plans due to neglect. Day before meeting the Conference Chair had a meeting with the SW who said a recommendation would be put forward for the children to no longer be subject of child protection plans. SW and his manager had decided this.</p> <p>At Conference the Chair held the view that cp plan had not been achieved - and said children can not come off plans whilst these significant issues remained.</p>	Challenging in Conference.	<p>Children remained on plans. Recently one of the YP has been involved in a significant accident and is now in care of LA.</p> <p>Good safeguarding challenge by the Chair - relevant and appropriate challenge.</p>

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
13yrs Female	CIC S20	IRO preparing for review. No Care Plan in place.	<p>Raised with the Team Manager who was identified as lead worker. Response back - going to use review as catch up have not seen child yet.</p> <p>Child Protection Team say they do not do Care Plans.</p> <p>Due to the above the Child in Care Review adjourned by IRO and issues taken further.</p>	Case allocated and Care Plan now in place.
Male 16ys	CIC Remanded into LA Care	Following 1 st Child in Care Review the Care Plan was one of discharge from Care – with the YP going into semi independent accommodation. When IRO discussed with Case Manager and TLCT there was confusion as to who should have case responsibility for the YP. IRO concerned that YP would be left without support.		YP Remaining in Care and placement secure.

Age & Gender	CIC/CP	Issue	Who contacted	Outcome
		IRO refused to have the Review until the yp's situation was secured.		

Appendix Four

Dispute Resolution Protocol/Referral to Children and Family Court Advisory Service (CAFCASS)

The Safeguarding Advisory Service has a Dispute Resolution Protocol that links with the Review Quality Monitoring system to ensure that practice issues and problems relating to care planning for children are addressed in a timely manner.

The Protocol also links with issues and problems identified outside of the Child in Care Review that may be highlighted as part of the IROs ongoing monitoring of the Childs case.

The Protocol supports the authority of the Independent Reviewing Officer to refer a child's case to Cafcass in situations where there are concerns about the Plan (or aspects of the Plan) and potential breach of a child's human rights.

The IRO may bypass any stage and progress the dispute to a level s/he considers most appropriate; the IRO should notify the Service Delivery Manager for the Safeguarding Advisory Service, Assistant Director for Children's Safeguarding and the Director for Children's Safeguarding. IRO is able to refer the matter to Cafcass at any point in the process and may consider it necessary to make a concurrent referral to Cafcass at the same time that s/he instigates the dispute resolution process.

The individual IRO is personally responsible for activating the dispute resolution process, even if this step may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings but may in the IROs view be in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his/her human rights.

The IRO should ensure that all actions s/he takes in an attempt to resolve a dispute are recorded on the child's case record.

Review Quality Monitoring – Link To Dispute Resolution Protocol

1. Issues arising directly from the child/young persons review are recorded in the Review Quality Monitoring (RAG) Document .All “red” actions identify that serious concern exists and where immediate action is required to safeguard a child and/ or prevent a possible breach of human rights.
2. The IRO is responsible for ensuring that timescales for resolution are clearly identified in the RAG document and distributed to the social worker and social workers line manager within 24 hours of the date of the review.
3. The social worker (or manager with responsibility for the case in the absence of the social worker) is responsible for notifying the IRO of the outcome of all actions identified in a red RAG rating within the timescale specified.
4. Where concerns are not resolved within the timescale specified in the RAG document, this will trigger the formal Dispute Resolution Protocol.
5. Quality Monitoring Reports (RAG rating) are entered on to the child’s electronic file and collated Red and Amber ratings are available to senior managers as part of the monthly Quality Assurance Dashboard.

Issues arising outside of the Child In Care Review – link to Dispute Resolution Protocol

6. It is expected that the IRO establishes positive working relationships with the social workers of the children for whom they are responsible. Where problems are identified in relation to a child’s case the IRO will in the first instance seek to resolve the issue informally with the Social Worker or the social workers manager. The IRO should place a record of this initial informal resolution process on the child’s file.
7. The IRO is responsible for ensuring that the timescales for agreed actions are clearly identified recorded and shared with Social Worker / or Team Manager. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child’s needs the IRO should consider taking formal action and trigger the formal dispute resolution process.