

Engagement, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report 2024- 2025.



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Haringey Council – Children’s Services

IRO Annual Report 2024-25

Executive Summary

This Annual Report produced by the Independent Reviewing Service is prepared in accordance with the statutory requirement to inform the Corporate Parenting Board and senior leaders about the Council’s performance in respect of children in the care of the local authority. The report covers the reporting period April 2024 to March 2025. This report's data is derived from Liquid Logic, the data system utilised by Haringey Children’s Services

At the end of March 2025 Haringey had 320 children looked after in our care. There has continued to be a continued decrease in the number of children entering care compared to previous years, along with an increase in the number of children who reached 18 years of age. During the same period in 2023/24, 334 children were looked after compared to 370 children in 2022/23. Full demographics are contained below.

In this context the IRO Service has continued to provide high levels of support to children and young people, our review timeliness is high, and we have taken the learning from different areas to improve our services to children in our care. We recognise areas where performance can be further strengthened, and we are actively implementing action plans to drive continuous improvement and deliver even better outcomes.

We remain a very stable service which has contributed to our children having a consistent relationship with their IROs over the long term. Having a consistent IRO over many years provides children in care with stability, continuity, and a trusted adult who understands their history and needs. It helps build trust, ensures the child’s voice is heard, and supports better care planning by allowing the IRO to track progress, challenge delays, and advocate effectively. This consistency can be especially reassuring for children who have experienced frequent changes in professionals or placements.

Purpose of service and legal context

The Independent Reviewing Officer has been a vital statutory function since 2004, and the role was updated through the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2021). Over time, the role of the IRO has evolved to encompass not only the coordination of review meetings but also a broader responsibility for ongoing case oversight including when safeguarding issues arise, regular monitoring and proactive follow-up between reviews to ensure children's needs remain at the forefront. The strengthened function includes a responsibility to consult the child about his/her care plan at each review and at any time that there is a significant change to the care plan.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to [section 25B (1), 1989 Act]:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case.
- participate in any review of the child's case.
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

The core tasks of the IRO are defined as follows:

- The IRO ensures that as corporate parents, each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.
- The IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern. Where IROs identify more general concerns around the quality of the authority's services to its children looked after, the IRO should alert senior managers. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- chairing the child's review; and
- monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

The Haringey Context

Haringey is the twelfth most densely populated of the London Boroughs, with an estimated population of 293,503 people living in approximately 29.6 square kilometres based on Census 2021 dataset. Based on this data, there is estimated to be 54,422 children aged 0-17, which makes up 19% of the population. We have 29,800 female children under the age of 18 and 30,000 male children. Haringey has the fourth highest number of children across all London local authorities.

Haringey Council's strategy is set out in [The Corporate Delivery Plan 2024-2026](#). Some of Haringey's key ambitions for children and young people are for them to have:

- The 'Best Start in Life'
- Have 'Happy, healthy and Secure childhoods'
- Have 'Successful Futures'

Haringey's Corporate Parenting Board provides robust assurance of the whole corporate parenting system, ensuring Haringey is an outstanding corporate parent to its children; and that all children looked after and care leavers can achieve their full potential in life. Haringey's Corporate Parenting Board puts children looked after and care leavers at the heart of everything we do. The [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) has been reviewed and the Strategy 2023 to 2026 covers:

- Our vision and high aspirations for our children.
- How we plan to achieve our aims.
- Explains how we will fulfil our corporate parenting responsibilities to all our children and young people in care and care leavers.

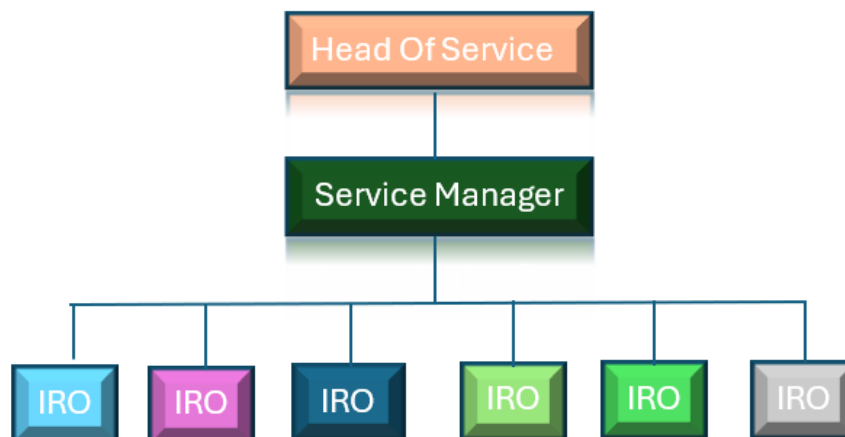
The Local Offer for Care Leavers is accessible [online](#).

The Independent Reviewing Service in Haringey

The Independent Reviewing Service sits within the Engagement, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. It is made up of 6 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). Presently, the team consists of six highly experienced IROs bringing diverse expertise to the table.

The diversity within the IRO Service reflects the cultural backgrounds of the children looked after in Haringey. With proficiency in eight languages, the staff's linguistic abilities enrich the service's communication capabilities, especially when engaging with children are not yet fluent in English, utilising alternative communication methods where necessary such as interpreters or online translating services.

IRO Service Structure

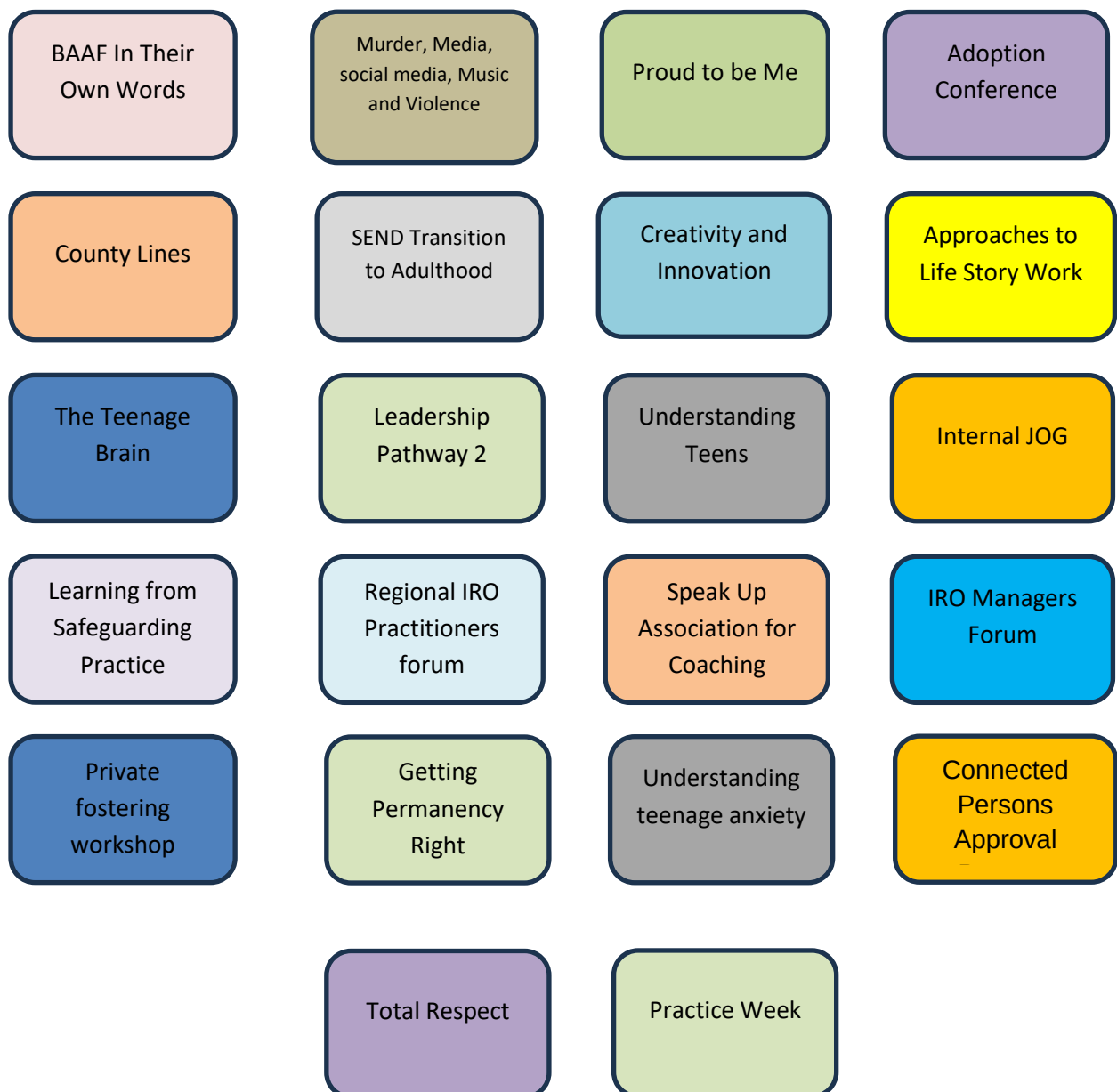


The average caseloads for 2024/25 have been just under the recommended range as set out in the IRO Handbook (2011) for children looked after. Within the team, there is a range of specialist knowledge and expertise, including knowledge of children with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), care leavers, fostering and child sexual and criminal exploitation.

Training & Professional Development of the IRO Service

Haringey Children's Academy, Tri-X online procedures, Research in Practice, Making Research Count, My Learning and workshops organised via the Haringey Safeguarding Children's Partnerships form the professional development offer provided to IROs regarding research developments, policy and legislative updates in addition to training opportunities both virtually and face to face.

Some of the learning and development by IROs in 2024-25 includes:



There are three fully qualified Practice Educators within the service, all of whom have supported social work students in 2024-25.

Additionally, the IRO service collectively utilises external resources and shares acquired knowledge and learning with colleagues, thereby enhancing the quality of service for children in the care of the

local authority. For example, team meeting briefings have been conducted on topics such as the Proud to Be Me Project, Social Care Reforms and reflective group case discussions.

Key Areas of Focus 2024-25

The IRO Service has made significant strides to enhance the outcomes for children looked after and young people. Key areas of focus, as highlighted in the IRO annual report 23/24 are being actively addressed to provide meaningful and lasting improvements:

Priority 1: To place children and young people at the centre of everything we do.

IROs place children and young people at the heart of their practice, ensuring their voices, experiences, and needs shape every aspect of care planning and review. This child-centered approach is evident in the many ways IROs advocate for and support those they work with. For example, IROs actively promote relationships by facilitating and maintaining contact between brothers and sisters, recognising the emotional importance of these bonds. They also provide support beyond their formal responsibilities. For example, by helping to ensure children's belongings are safely and respectfully moved when they transition between homes, preserving their sense of identity and continuity.

In addition, IROs advocate for families to receive the financial support they are entitled to, ensuring that assessments of their ability to care for their children are fair and not influenced by economic hardship. This reflects a commitment to keeping families together where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Children's participation is also a key focus, with IROs encouraging young people to chair or co-chair their own reviews—88 such reviews took place this year—empowering them to take ownership of their care journey. IROs continue to prioritise lifestory work, offering guidance to practitioners and making recommendations to ensure children understand their personal histories. This collective commitment was recognised by Ofsted during their February Focused Visit, which praised the quality and impact of the lifestory work being undertaken.

Together, these examples demonstrate how IROs consistently champion the rights, voices, and well-being of children and young people, ensuring they remain central to all decisions made about their lives.

Priority 2: Listen to and respond to children and young people

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) consistently demonstrate a strong commitment to listening to and acting on the voices of children and young people, placing them at the center of care planning and decision-making. Observations of CLA reviews in 2024 by Service Managers and Practice Week observers provided clear evidence of this child-focused approach in action.

"The most prominent learning for me was the young person was at the center. Although professionals and family shared their views/thoughts, The IRO ensured that the young person constantly shared his views, what he was willing to try."

Observer

“Think was an excellent observation for my learning. The IRO chaired this meeting with a very open approach that really felt comfortable for all to share their views and thoughts. It did not feel formal, which I feel set a good environment for the attendees to speak openly, particularly the young person and his family.”

Observer

IROs ensure that review meetings are welcoming and inclusive by keeping them small and involving only those central to the child’s care, helping young people feel safe and comfortable. They come well-prepared, familiar with each child’s Personal Education Plan, health assessments, and support needs, which allows them to advocate effectively and ensure that all aspects of a child’s well-being are considered.

Established, trusting relationships between IROs and young people have been key to encouraging participation. For example, when children have expressed a desire for more time with sisters and brothers, or to see wider family members, IROs have actively promoted increased family time and ensured these wishes are reflected in care plans. Where there are concerns around placement provisions for children looked after then they will raise challenge and advocate on their behalf.

IROs have also responded to children’s emotional cues, such as behaviors indicative of trauma, by working with professionals to strengthen support around the child or explore more suitable options. In one instance, an IRO helped delay a planned goodbye family time session, to ensure the child had more time to process the change and say farewell in a way that felt right for them.

Flexibility is another hallmark of IRO practice. They adapt review formats—whether in-person, virtual, or hybrid—based on the child’s preferences, and use a variety of engagement methods including video calls, phone calls, social media, and face-to-face visits. For children unable to attend meetings, IROs make time to speak with them separately, ensuring their views are still heard and considered.

To make reviews more engaging, IROs have introduced creative activities like cooking, drawing, or dressing up, helping children feel more at ease and encouraging meaningful participation. These thoughtful, responsive approaches reflect the IROs’ unwavering focus on ensuring that every child feels seen, heard, and valued in their care journey.

Priority 3: We will be ambitious for Our Children

IROs continue to demonstrate high aspirations for children in care, driving improvements and championing opportunities that support each child’s potential. One of the most significant achievements this year has been the improvement in the timeliness of reviews, rising from 70% in 2023/24 to 92% in 2024/25. This ensures that children’s needs are identified and addressed promptly, allowing for more responsive and effective care planning.

In response to Ofsted's 2022 feedback, we prioritised consistency in midway reviews. A total of 262 midway reviews were completed this year, supported by a dip sample audit to assess the quality of recorded information. These reviews have been instrumental in progressing permanence, as reflected in the increased number of children matched with long-term carers. The audits also highlighted that midway review reports were written in a consistent use of language that cares.

IROs are ambitious not only in process but in practice. They have advocated for young people to access life-changing opportunities, such as advocating for a young person to access a springboard scholarship and assisting her in accessing the right support to sit exams that would enable her to access a selective school. This kind of advocacy reflects a deep commitment to helping children overcome barriers and achieve their aspirations. IROs have also supported young people stepping down from residential care into more family-based settings, ensuring that transitions are well-planned and that the right support is in place to promote stability and success.

For children in secure accommodation, IROs have maintained a positive and forward-thinking approach, focusing on long-term goals and ensuring that care plans remain aspirational. They have also challenged placements in areas where risks are heightened, advocating for safer alternatives that better meet the child's needs and reduce exposure to harm.

The voice of the child remains central to IRO practice. Audits captured rich, personal details about children's lives, including their interests, dislikes, and significant milestones—such as receiving a new bicycle or exploring post-18 care options. When children have expressed a desire for more time with brothers and sisters or to see wider family members, IROs have responded by promoting increased family time and ensuring these wishes are reflected in care plans.

Practitioners have responded positively to IRO recommendations, with minimal delays in implementation. Where delays have occurred, IROs have used the Dispute Resolution Process to escalate concerns and ensure timely action. Ongoing quality assurance through supervision continues to focus on the quality of review minutes, ensuring that the child's journey is clearly captured and that our practice remains ambitious and child-centred.

Ofsted Focus Visit

Ofsted undertook a Focused Visit to Haringey in February 2025.

The area of practice that inspectors looked at was, 'the effectiveness of permanence planning for children in care'. This is the area that was judged, 'Requires Improvement to be Good,' in the full inspection that took place in February 2023 where Haringey was judged Good overall.

It was delightful to learn that inspectors could see great improvement since the last inspection.

The visit took place over two days and during that time inspectors spoke with many professionals and reviewed children's case files.

The letter is glowing with positivity about the work we do for children and young people and how we care for them and the outcomes that they achieve.

In their feedback on their final day on site, inspectors spoke very highly of our social workers and of their child centred practice that was creative in finding ways to help children in our community.

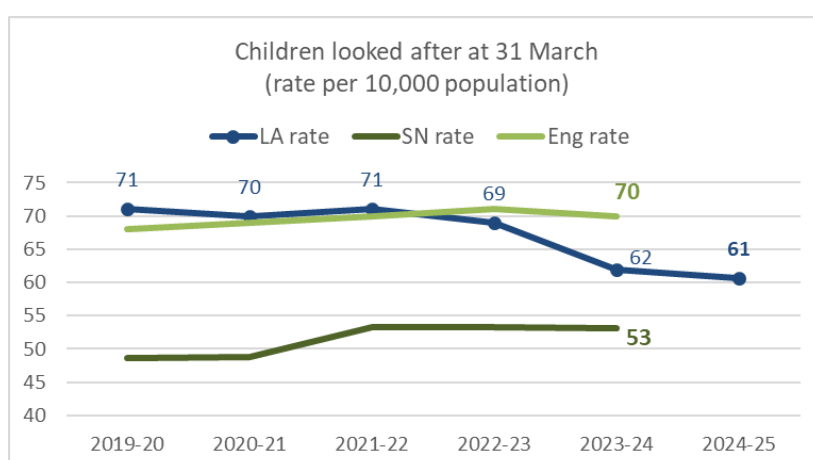
“Children’s progress is supported by effective IROs, who develop meaningful relationships with children. Mostly, IRO summaries following reviews are written to the child in age-appropriate language. Careful scrutiny and challenge from IROs have led to impactful changes in children’s care plans. Creative social work intervention promotes the well-being of children who haven’t achieved permanence or who face instability” – Ofsted Letter, March 2025

The full letter can be seen here: <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/80498>

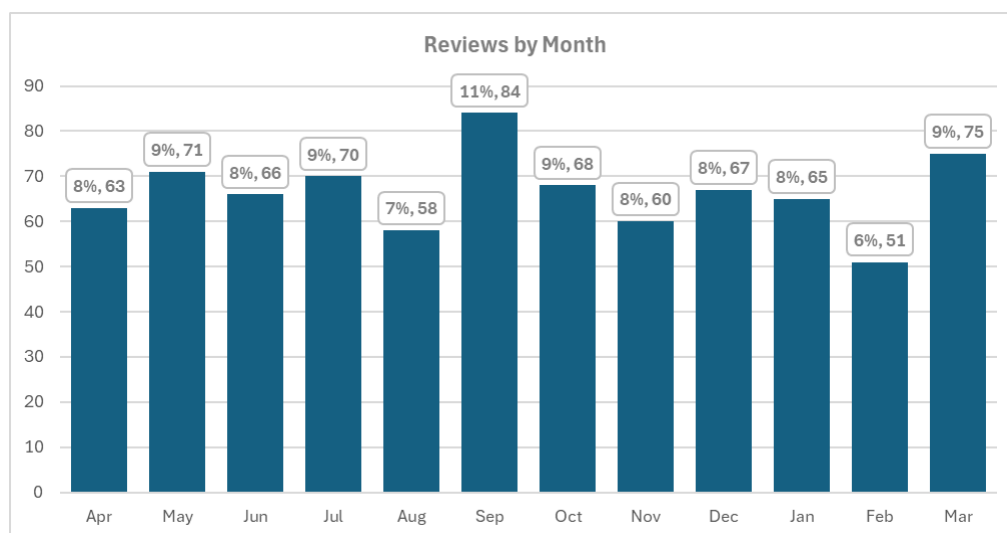
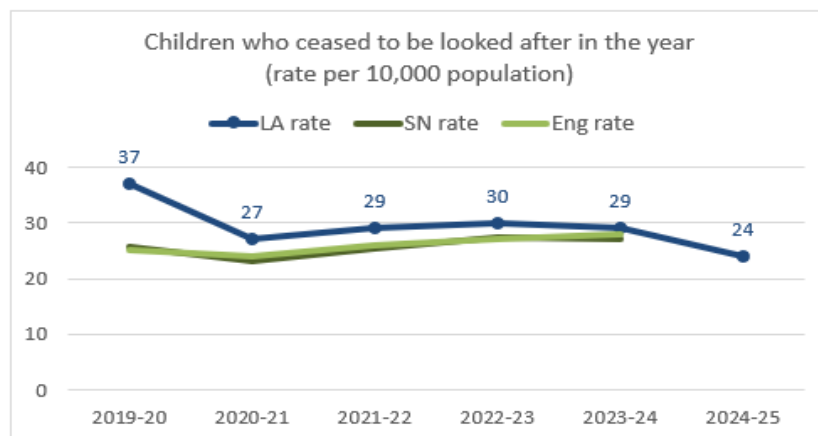
Our continuous focus is on achieving permanency for our children looked after. Through the year we have strengthened our permanency planning with permanency planning meetings being held within respective services and overview through the Permanency Tracking Panel, to ensure care plans for children are robust and where appropriate and possible, they can be cared for within the family network.

Children Looked After Reviews April 2024 – March 2025

At the end of March 2025, 320 children were looked after in Haringey. There has been a continued decrease in our looked after population compared to previous years. This is attributed to both fewer children becoming looked after and more children ceasing to be looked after. Over the last year Haringey Children’s Service have continued to embed the Early Help offer and robust Edge of Care Panel, which focusses on working with our children and families to deliver better and more timely interventions at an earlier stage. This in turn has enabled more children to remain within the family or support networks where it is safe to do so.



The data indicates a decrease in the number of Children Looked After during the 2024-25 reporting period, from 334 in April 2024 to 320 in March 2025. This reduction reflects the positive impact of Early Help and frontline services in providing effective support, thereby reducing the necessity for children and young people to enter care as well as young people aging out of care.

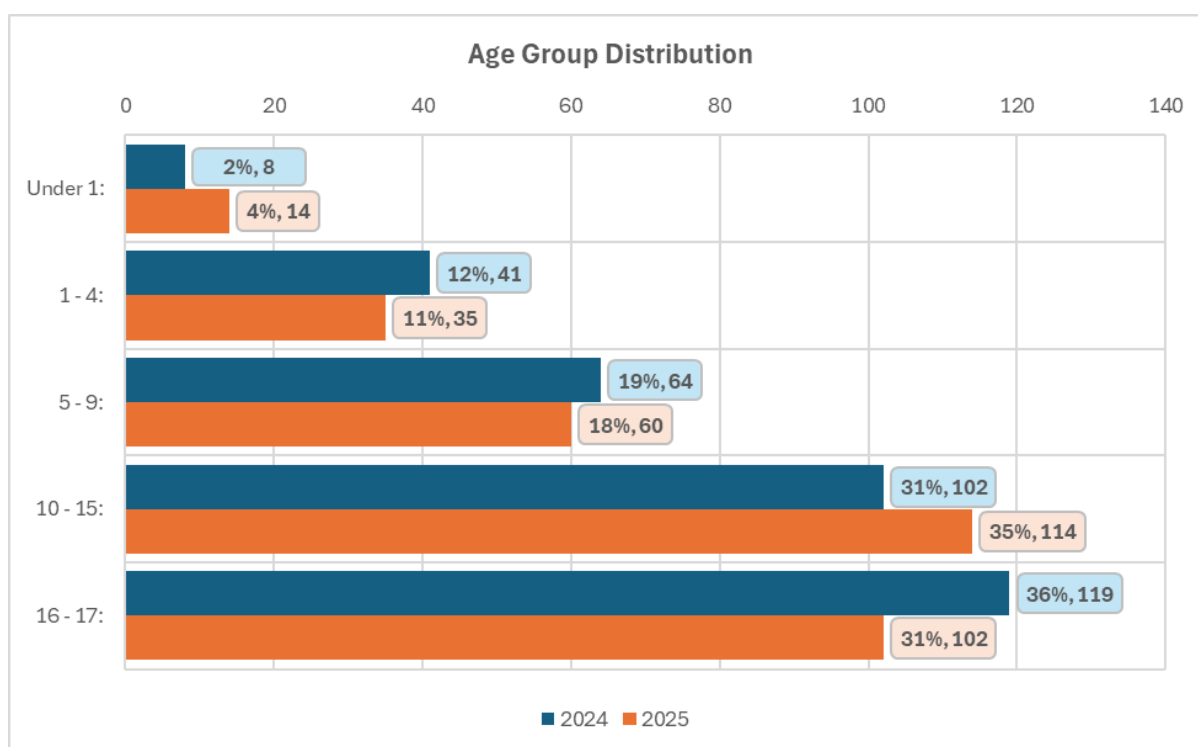
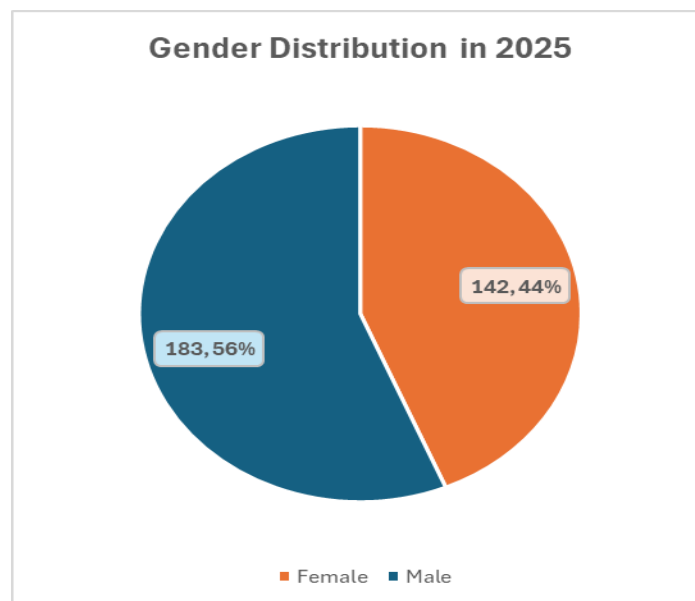


13 children left care before their first review. By the second review, 14 children and young people were reunified with their families, with an additional 21 reunified by the third review. This demonstrates the effective collaboration between IROs, practitioners, and the HART service in supporting reunification efforts.

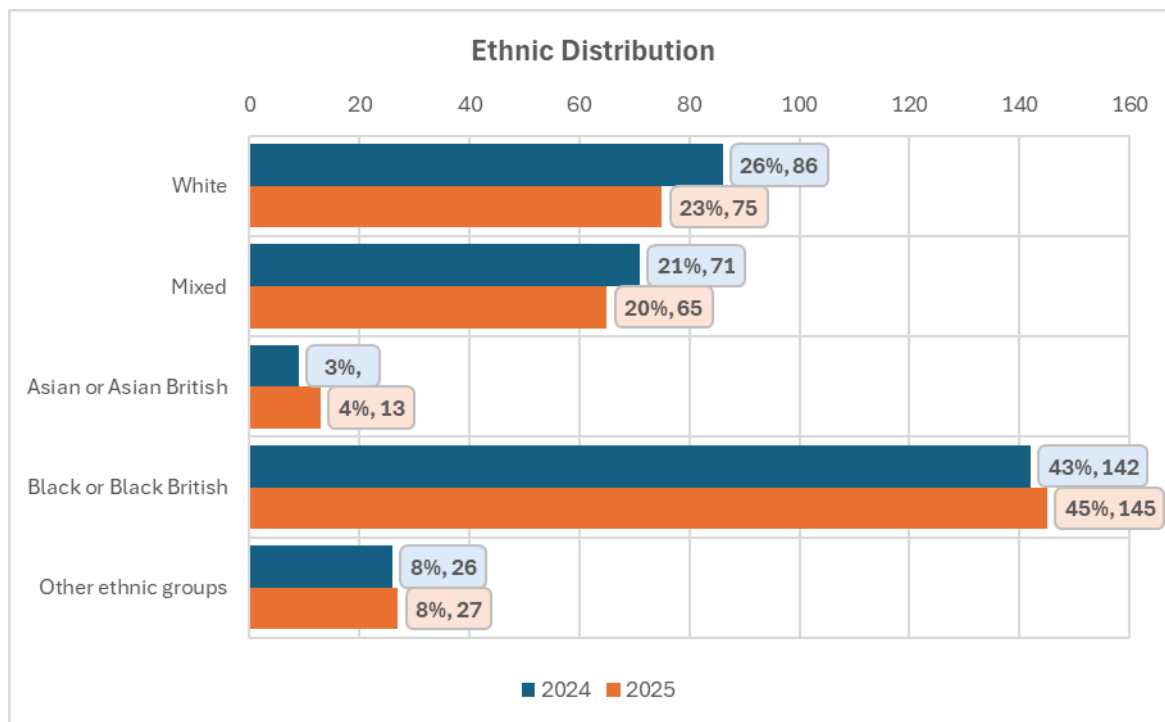
Family Group Conferences (FGCs) have played a pivotal role in supporting reunification for children who entered care. Of the 123 children who came into care during 2024/25, 68 FGCs were convened. As a result, 21 children and young people successfully returned home, and tracking over the subsequent 12 months confirmed that none of them re-entered care. Notably, FGCs have also contributed to a reduction in the level of statutory intervention required. In many cases, children's circumstances shifted from child protection or Public Law Outline processes to child in need support, helping to divert children from entering care and easing pressure on the wider system.

Looked After population during 2024-25.

There has not been any meaningful change in the gender breakdown of Haringey's children looked after. The data shows that we continued to have more boys than girls in our care, with 56% (183) in the 2024-2025 period, reflecting a small decrease from 59% in the previous year. Additionally, 66% of the children and young people in our care during this period were aged 10 or older, marking a slight decrease from 67% in the previous year.



The age profile of children in Haringey has remained similar to last year and broadly in line with national figures. Our largest age groups are aged 10-15 years and those over 16 (102 children), each representing 31% of our looked after population.



The demographic breakdown of children and young people in care in Haringey reflects a rich diversity, with 26% recorded as white, 42% as Black, 21% as having mixed heritage, 3% as Asian, and 9% identifying with other ethnicities. These figures are consistent with those from the previous year. In comparison, 20.5% of Haringey’s population is made up of White British, 61.9% Asian, mixed or other ethnic groups, and 17.6% Black African and Black Caribbean (Census 2021).

While the IRO service recognises the overrepresentation of Black children and young people within the children in care population, it also acknowledges the greater challenges that come with supporting these children and families. These challenges stem from systemic inequalities such as poverty, racial bias, and limited access to culturally appropriate services. Black children can experience care environments that fail to reflect their cultural identity, which can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection.

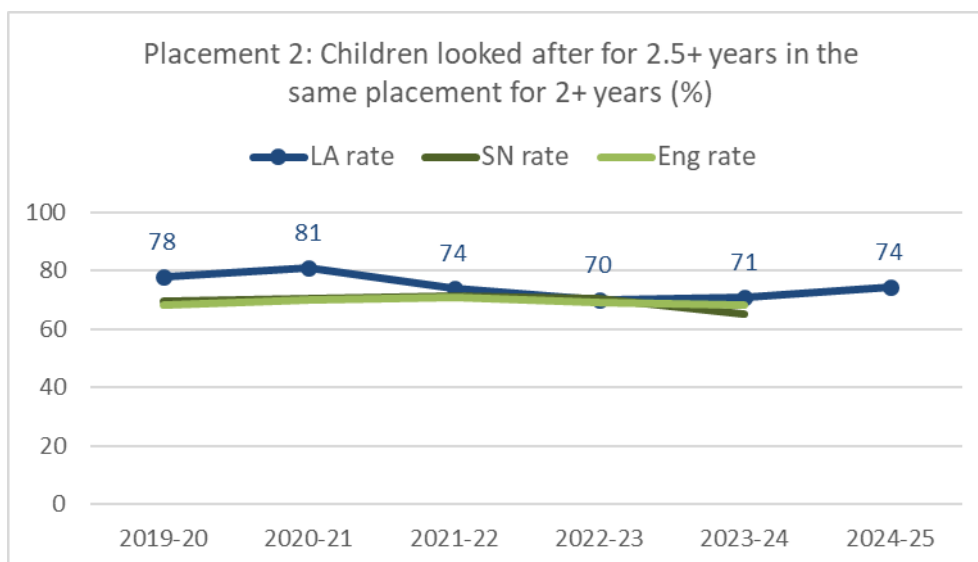
In response, IROs advocate for culturally sensitive care planning, challenge poor practices, and escalate concerns when necessary. They also attuned to improving cultural competence, promote identity and belonging in care placements, and collaborate with community-based services. The IRO service is committed to providing tailored support and advocacy to ensure that all children in care, regardless of their ethnic background, have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

Independent Reviewing Service Performance

Once a child becomes looked after, their first review should take place within 20 working days, with the second review taking place within three months of the first review and the third and subsequent reviews are held within six months of the previous review. A child's review meeting can be completed as a single meeting or a series of meetings. The child should be central (taking into consideration age and ability) in making the decision on how they would like their review meeting to be held and who they would want to be part of it and present for their meeting. They may also choose to meet with their IRO separately and then for the rest of their network to meet without them; or have everyone together at the same time.

IROs have 5 working days to complete their outcomes or recommendations from the child's Looked After Review and 15 working days to complete the review record following the completion of the review process.

IROs completed 798 looked after reviews during 2024/25. This is fewer reviews compared to the 901 completed 2023/24, which would correspond with the decrease in the number of new children looked after and higher number of children whose care journey ended during 2024-25. It could also be contributed by the improvements in placement stability over the year, which means fewer children required additional reviews during the year due to change in care plans or unplanned placement moves. IROs have contributed to the stability of children looked after by maintaining consistent oversight of care plans, advocating for timely interventions, and ensuring that placements are supported to meet children's needs, thereby reducing the frequency of disruptions and unplanned moves.



IROs continue to evidence their footprint on children's records, undertaking their Quality Assurance (QA) function through completion of IRO Monitoring forms following reviews, providing commentary and analysis of areas such as quality of social work reports and recorded visits, as well as engagement with children in reviews.

In addition to fulfilling their core statutory responsibilities, IROs have played a key role in supporting the learning and development of social work professionals and students. Several IROs are qualified practice educators and have actively contributed to the training of social work students, offering valuable insights into care planning, review processes, and child-centred practice. Their involvement helps shape the next generation of practitioners with a strong foundation in safeguarding and advocacy.

Throughout the year, IROs have continued to promote professional development by delivering targeted workshops on key topics such as the health needs of children looked after, understanding Children Looked After (CLA) processes. These sessions have helped practitioners deepen their knowledge and improve the quality of care provided to children and young people.

Having an IRO on the fostering panel brings a valuable child-centred perspective to decision-making. The IRO can draw on the teams' direct experience of the quality of foster homes to help inform panel outcomes and decisions. Additionally, IROs can highlight patterns or concerns from their oversight role, contributing to more informed, reflective, and holistic panel discussions that ultimately support better outcomes for children in care.

IROs have also ensured that the voices of children and young people are represented in multi-agency forums, such as strategy meetings, exploitation and stability panels, where they advocate for child-centred approaches and contribute to strategic decision-making. Their presence in these panels reinforces the importance of safeguarding and ensures that care planning is informed by lived experiences.

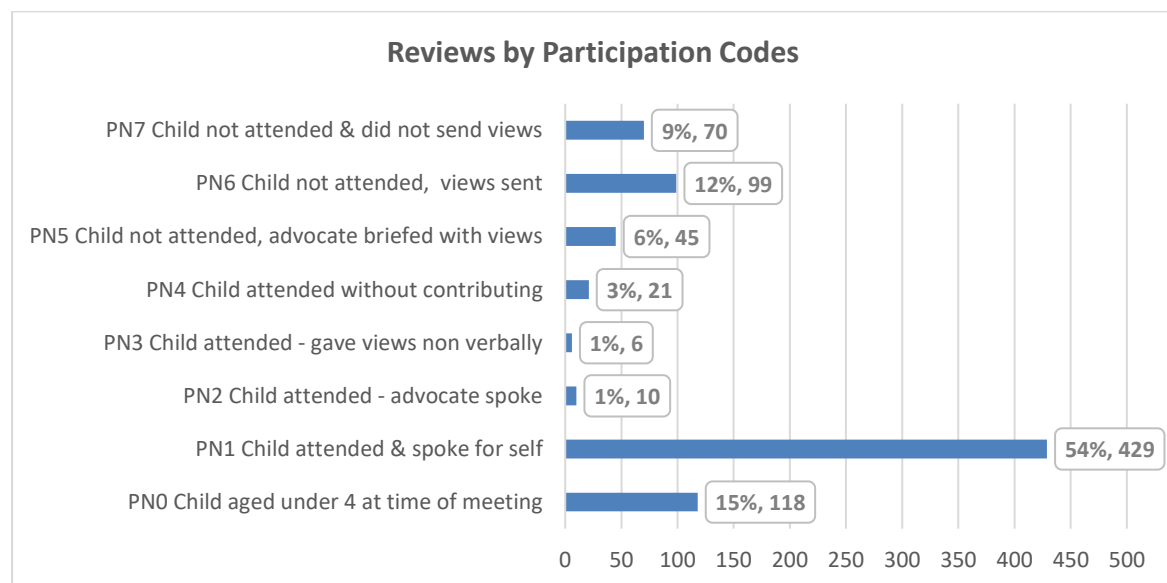
Furthermore, IROs consistently offer practice support and guidance to social workers, helping to strengthen reflective practice and improve outcomes for children. Whether through supervision, informal consultation, or structured learning opportunities, IROs remain committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration across the service.

Timeliness of Review Meetings

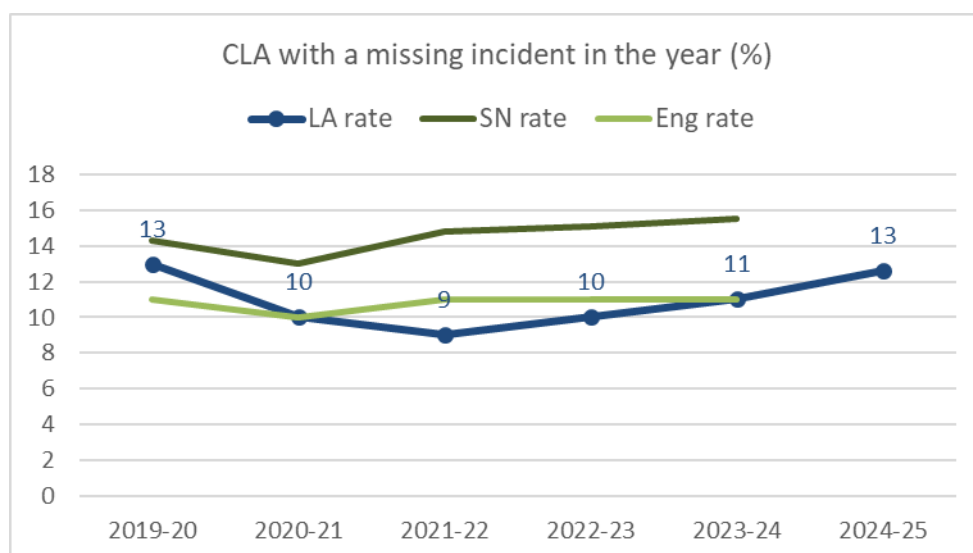
We saw a marked improvement in the timeliness of completing looked after reviews during 2024/25, with 93% of children having an up-to-date review by the end of the financial year—an increase from 70% in 2023/24. Additionally, a further 6% of reviews were held within the required timescales, with only a delay in recording them on our electronic system, reflecting strong performance in practice and a continued focus on improving data accuracy.

We continue to make progress in improving the timeliness and quality of looked after review records. Ongoing oversight by Service Managers, alongside regular practice observations and reflective supervision, is helping to drive consistency and strengthen the overall quality of our review processes.

Children and young people’s participation in reviews



During the year ending March 31, 2025, 90% of children aged over four participated in their Looked After Child reviews through various methods, including attending meetings, sharing views with IROs or trusted adults, or using consultation documents and advocates. For children under four, IROs relied on observations and routine information to interpret their perspectives. While 54% of older children attended and spoke for themselves, others used alternative methods such as text or symbols, or had their views represented by advocates. Although 9% were recorded as not participating—an increase from the previous year—this figure was affected by data inaccuracies, highlighting the need for improved coding and training. Some non-participants were also facing complex challenges, reinforcing the importance of trauma-informed and tailored support to re-engage them in their care planning.



To maintain contact with these vulnerable young people, they are offered a choice of having a return Home Interview through their social worker or our dedicated Exploitation Team when they are reported missing. These interviews play a crucial role in re-establishing communication and promote safety. Despite the challenges presented by these circumstances, IROs are unwavering in their efforts to stay connected with this group, ensuring they continue to be supported. However, it is important to note that many of these young people frequently change their contact details when they go missing, which can make it increasingly difficult to maintain consistent communication.

IROs are deeply committed to empowering children and young people to take ownership of their care planning. Of the 798 reviews held 20 young people chaired their own review with 5 young people chairing their review twice this year and 63 children and young people co-chaired their review with the IRO, with 14 young people co-chairing more than one review. 146 children and young people were offered the opportunity but declined. For the remaining reviews it was not felt appropriate due to age or complexity of issues discussed.

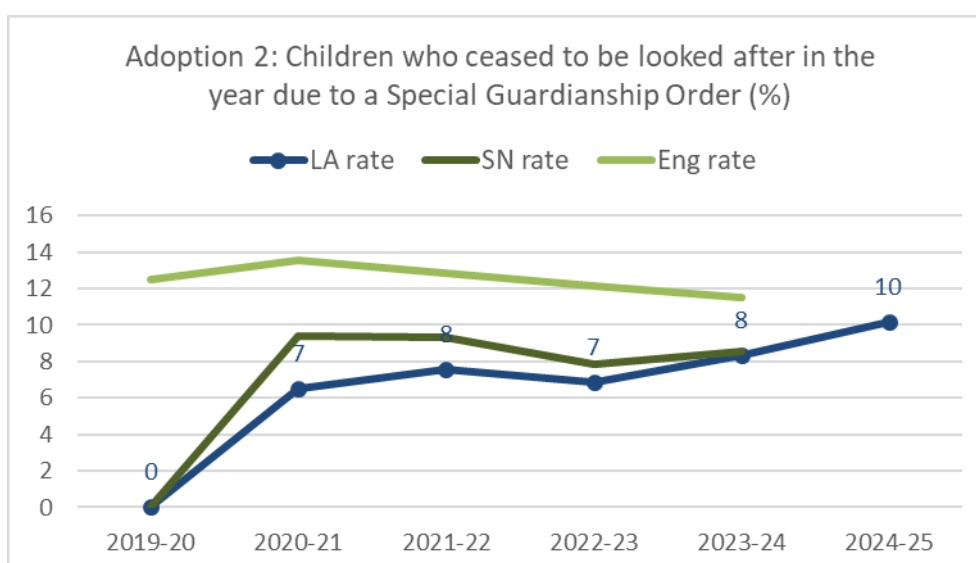
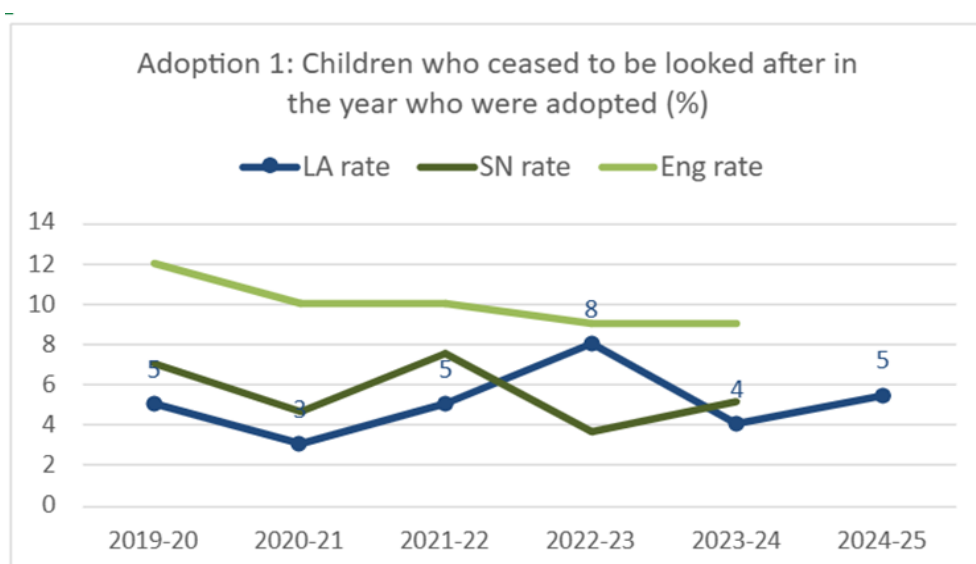
IROs also ensure that young people with additional or complex needs have every opportunity to communicate effectively, using methods that best suit their individual needs. For those, whose communication is not verbal, IROs actively explore a range of alternative communication methods, including eye gaze technology, communication boards, PECS, speech-generating devices, and other augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools. This personalised approach ensures that every child has a means of communicating in their care planning and review process. 98% of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (32 young people, 62 out of 63 reviews) attended and participated in their review meetings with the support of an interpreter.

Driving forward to achieving Permanence

IROs play a key role to ensure timely permanence is secured for children looked after. The traction of the permanency plan for a child is reviewed by their IRO through their looked after review meetings and midway reviews. They provide data through completed IRO Monitoring forms and provide feedback to permanency planning meetings and the Permanency Tracking Panel.

The first consideration would be for the child to return safely to their parents' care. Or where this is not possible, that suitable family members or connected carers are identified to ensure the child can continue to grow up within their family network. This could either be through Special Guardianship or a Child Arrangement Order. Foster carers may consider permanency through Special Guardianship Orders for a child as well. Where it has been assessed that the parents, family, or friends are unable to provide a long-term home for a child, permanency through either adoption or long-term fostering should be secured as timely as possible.

For 7 children permanency was secured through adoption, an increase from 2023/24 (6). Permanency was also achieved for a further 13 children through Special Guardianship Orders, another increase from 2023/24 and higher than our statistical neighbours. These permanency arrangements that see children exiting the care system within secure family arrangements are good evidence of the efforts made to secure positive outcomes that support children to remain within a family environment.



In 2024/25, we exceeded our target by achieving 43% (99) of children and young people being matched with long-term foster carers—an increase from 35% in 2023/24 and above the national average. This progress reflects our commitment to providing children with the reassurance and stability that long-term placements offer.

IROs played a key role in this achievement, using their oversight and advocacy to ensure that care plans prioritised permanence and emotional security. Notably, IROs successfully matched 14 young people aged 16 and over with long-term foster carers through their CLA reviews. These matches are particularly significant, as they offer older young people a sense of belonging and continuity as they prepare for adulthood.

Consideration is also given, where appropriate, to reunification within the family network when children have been in care for an extended period, and where family circumstance may have changed. IROs have recommended for a family group conference, to explore who within the child's family network could offer safe and suitable long-term care and support. There has been significant success for work completed with families by practitioners, 48 children (7%) and young people have returned, and remained at home with their birth family by their third review. Through the Edge of Care Panel, there has also been an increase in referrals to the Family Group Conference (FGC) Service to explore what support may enable families to continue to care for children within their own network thereby reducing the need for becoming looked after.

IROs further support achieving permanency for children in a timely way through regular contributions at Permanency Planning Meetings (PPM) and Permanency Tracking Panel. IROs feed into these meetings through the Service Manager and if there are any concerns re. drift and delay, this is raised.

IROs also recognise the significance part that Independent Visitors can play in the lives of our children in care. At the end of this reporting year 16 children were matched with an IV. Several of our young people have benefited from the support of an IV for up to 8 years, indicating the strength of the relationships formed. These young individuals have enjoyed a wide range of activities with their IVs, such as shopping, meals, mini-golf, rock climbing, sports games, museum visits, and many others.

With the continued success of the YP/IV relationships, Haringey continues to see the value these relationships bring in enriching the lives of children and young people in care.

For more detailed information about the IV Service and how Independent Visitors support children in care, often over the long term, please see the Independent Visitor Service Annual Report.

Dispute Resolution Process

The IRO Handbook emphasises the vital role of the Dispute Resolution process in Haringey, particularly in addressing challenges that arise from the care planning process for our children. A well-established process is in place that both IROs and Social Work teams understand. IROs proactively seek to manage issues arising through effective communication. If matters remain unresolved, IROs use the Dispute

Resolution stages until resolution is achieved. This escalation path includes Team Managers, Service Managers, Heads of Service, Assistant Director, Director, and CAFCASS.

Through the reviewing of care plans/pathway plans for a child's review, the review itself, the midway meeting held between statutory reviews, all contribute to the timely progression of a child's care provision and meeting that child's needs. With the additional oversight of an IRO, any areas of drift or delay should be highlighted as quickly as possible, to address and resolve.

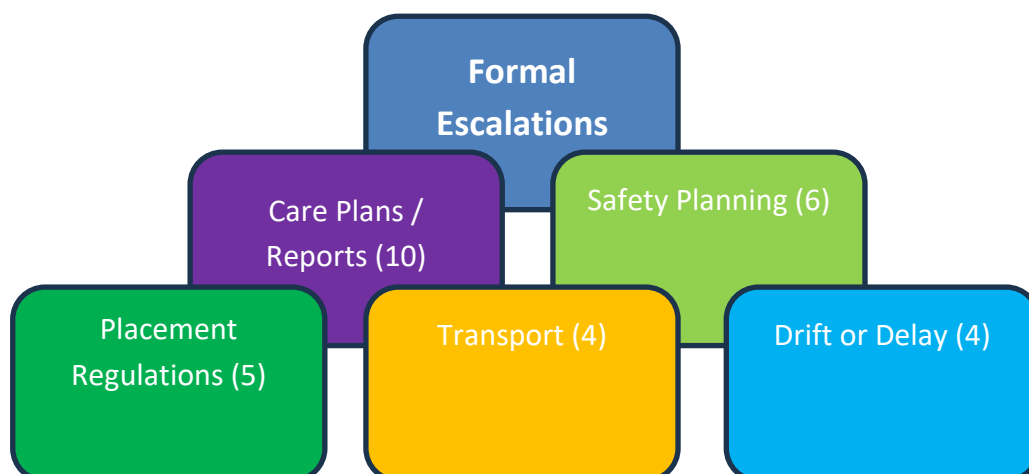
IROs collaborate with colleagues across Social Work teams to resolve issues whenever possible swiftly and informally. If a timely response is lacking or resolution remains outstanding, the matter will progress through the six-stage process. The overarching goal is to ensure that issues are consistently resolved within a 20-working-day timeframe, aligning with the statutory guidance outlined in the IRO Handbook.

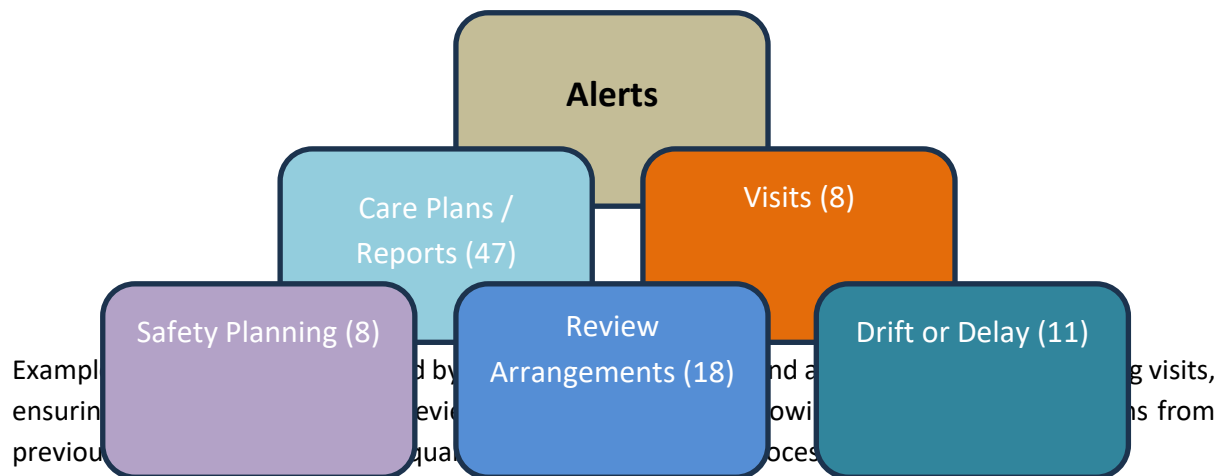
During the period from April to March 2025, the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) was utilised a total of 181 times, comprising 124 informal alerts (93 children) and 57 formal escalations (40 children). Comparing this with the same period in 2023-2024, there has been a slight decrease of 9% in the initiation of the dispute resolution process.

The Ofsted Focused Visit positively affirmed that our strategy of encouraging IROs to engage in more conversations and discussions with social workers, team managers, and service managers has effectively reduced the need to use the DRP. correct punctuation: We have found that quite often there is no dispute as such, between the IRO and operational teams, but discussions have helped progress matters for our children in care. IROs have recorded such discussions in activity case notes.

IROs have continued to champion the needs of children and young people by initiating dispute resolutions that have led to meaningful outcomes. These include securing senior management support to ensure continuity in education for a young person following a placement move, ensuring timely and coordinated responses when young people go missing from care through strategy discussions and safety planning, initiating necessary regulatory assessments for kinship placements, and addressing delays in achieving permanency. These actions reflect the IROs' commitment to safeguarding, stability, and the best interests of the children they support.

The top five reasons for use of the DRP in the period April 24 -March 2025 are:





Overall, the views expressed by IROs is that they can see a steady improvement in service delivery for our children looked after, which correlates with the decrease in informal and formal alerts. More Alerts were raised at and resolved at a lower level than last year.

Feedback

IROs work tirelessly alongside social workers, our children's carers, parents, educational staff, health professionals and any other professional or volunteer supporting our children, to ensure that they have the right care plan that meets their holistic needs. IROs will attend additional meetings where this is appropriate to ensure the care plan is right for the child. They work collaboratively to try and resolve any issues of concern as soon as this is identified. They will escalate through the formal process when needed.

There is a range of methods we use to collate information to assist in evaluating impact such as the dispute resolution process, feedback through complaints, feedback from service users, informal feedback shared by children and their network with IROs and their managers and so forth.

The feedback received shows that the IRO service is viewed as a consistent, collaborative, and child-focused team that plays a vital role in advocating for children and young people. IROs are recognised for their effective communication and partnership working, particularly in escalating concerns when care plans are not progressing. Their consistency provides valuable continuity, especially during social worker changes, and their individual strengths contribute to a well-rounded, skilled team. Overall, the feedback reflects a service that is trusted, responsive, and committed to ensuring the best outcomes for children in care.

The stability and consistency of the Independent Reviewing Service provide a reliable foundation for our children looked after, ensuring they receive continuous and dependable support. This consistency helps build trust and fosters a sense of security, which is crucial for their well-being and development.

Below are some examples of commentary or reflections of good practice and positive feedback shared by young people, IROs, parents, carers and professionals:

“Think was an excellent observation for my learning. The IRO chaired this meeting with a very open approach that really felt comfortable for all to share their views and thoughts. It did not feel formal, which I feel set a good environment for the attendees to speak openly, particularly the young person and his family.” – **Practice Week Observer**

“I felt listened to by the IRO and my views were taken into account” – **Parent**

“This was M’s final review. It was very positive as M is doing very well, which was noted by the IRO who brought attention to positive progress and made appropriate recommendations.” – **Social Worker**

“Review was well chaired, actions were clear, and all voices were heard. Ending the meeting by asking attendees to share something positive/one thing that they are proud of regarding the young person was positive and child focussed.” – **Carer**

“It was also really lovely to see when we all entered the lunch hall, C pointed at you and yelled “that’s my social worker”. He was very proud and testament to your dedication to him. Your planning for his move was meticulous and very child centred. Thank you so much”. – **IRO**

“I liked the people at the meeting, and I would keep everything the same – I was happy with everything” – **Young Person**

“My IRO was very straight forward, clear and very nice” – **Young Person**

“There was a relaxed atmosphere conducive to gaining positive outcomes” – **Manager.**

Summary & IRO Service Priorities 2025-26

The IRO Annual Report 2024–2025 has been produced to provide a detailed and balanced overview of the service’s performance in supporting Haringey’s looked after children. It highlights a clear trajectory of improvement, especially in review timeliness (up from 70% to 93%) and in achieving stable, permanent outcomes for children through adoption, special guardianship, and long-term fostering. The report reflects a child-centred culture, with strong examples of advocacy, inclusion, and flexible engagement. The service has also been commended by Ofsted for its relationship-based practice and meaningful contributions to care planning.

The report demonstrates transparency about challenges, such as maintaining engagement with children experiencing complex needs or who are missing from care, and recognises areas for ongoing development—particularly around improving data accuracy, strengthening communication methods for children with disabilities, and increasing co-chairing opportunities for young people. The IRO team’s stability, cultural competence, and collaborative approach with partners and families underpin

the progress made. Overall, the report reflects a mature, reflective service committed to continuous improvement and delivering better outcomes for children and young people in Haringey.

Our key areas of focus for 2025/2026 include:

1. IROs will ensure that children's voices are central to all planning and review processes, promoting meaningful participation through child-led or co-chaired reviews, inclusive communication tools, and personalised engagement tailored to each child's needs and preferences.
2. IROs will ensure that risks of child sexual exploitation are identified early, by maintaining oversight of safeguarding measures, advocating for timely assessments, and challenging care plans that do not robustly address risk, safety planning, or trauma recovery.
3. IROs will ensure that care planning reflects a strong understanding of children's digital lives, including online risks, and that support is in place to promote digital resilience, protect against online harm, and address any exploitation concerns raised in reviews.
4. IROs will ensure that the cultural, linguistic, and identity needs of every child are fully reflected in their care and placement plans, particularly for children from Black, global majority, and underrepresented backgrounds, in line with anti-racist and inclusive practice.
5. IROs will ensure that reviews reflect the wider context of family vulnerability, such as parental mental health, domestic abuse, or substance misuse, and will challenge plans that fail to consider the impact of these issues on the child's lived experience or future support.
6. IROs will ensure that the views of children and young people who do not participate in their reviews are represented and given due consideration.