

Engagement, Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

# Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report 2025- 2026.



Author: Nazim Hussain

## Contents

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary                                      | 3  |
| Purpose of Service and Legal Context                   | 3  |
| The Haringey Context                                   | 4  |
| The Independent Reviewing Service in Haringey          | 4  |
| Training & Professional Development of the IRO Service | 5  |
| Key Areas of Focus 2025-26                             | 6  |
| Ofsted Inspection Visit                                | 7  |
| Children Looked After Reviews 2025-26                  | 7  |
| Looked After Population during 2025-26                 | 9  |
| Independent Reviewing Service Performance              | 11 |
| Quality of Review Minutes                              | 12 |
| Timeliness of Review Meetings                          | 13 |
| Children and Young People's participation in reviews   | 13 |
| Driving forward to achieving Permanence                | 16 |
| Dispute Resolution Process                             | 17 |
| Feedback                                               | 18 |
| Summary and IRO Service Priorities 2026-27             | 18 |

# **Haringey Council – Children’s Services**

## **IRO Annual Report 2025-26**

### **Executive Summary**

This report provides assurance on the performance and impact of Haringey’s Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service from April 2025 to March 2026.

At 31 March 2026, Haringey cared for 296 children and young people, compared with 320 in April 2025. The reduction reflects fewer children entering care, young people reaching adulthood and work across services to support children safely within family networks where appropriate.

The IRO Service maintained strong statutory performance, with 96% of children having an up-to-date review and 88% of children aged over four participating in their reviews. Ofsted recognised reviews as timely and purposeful and highlighted the value IROs add through children’s participation and child-centred planning. The report also identifies areas for further development, particularly participation, permanence and matching, cultural competence, adolescent safeguarding and stronger evidence of service impact.

Service stability remains a key strength. Consistent IRO relationships provide continuity for children and enable effective oversight, challenge and tracking of care plans over time.

### **Purpose of Service and Legal Context**

The IRO Service is a statutory safeguard for children in care, established under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (as amended). IROs chair statutory reviews, monitor care planning between reviews, ensure children’s wishes and feelings are considered, and provide independent challenge where progress, permanence or outcomes are at risk.

- Monitor the performance of the local authority’s functions in relation to the child.
- Participate in reviews for the child.
- Ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
- Undertake any additional responsibilities prescribed in regulations.

Through oversight across individual children, IROs are also well placed to identify recurring themes, escalate concerns and highlight effective practice to senior leaders.

- Chairing and facilitating the child’s statutory review.
- Monitoring the child’s progress and care planning on an ongoing basis between reviews.

### **The Haringey Context**

Haringey has approximately 264,300 residents, including 54,422 children and young people aged 0–17 (21%). It is one of London’s most ethnically diverse boroughs, with more than 180 languages spoken. At 31 March 2026, Haringey was caring for 296 children and young people, equivalent to approximately 54 children looked after per 10,000 children under 18. [State of the Borough profile – March 2026](#)

## **The Independent Reviewing Service in Haringey**

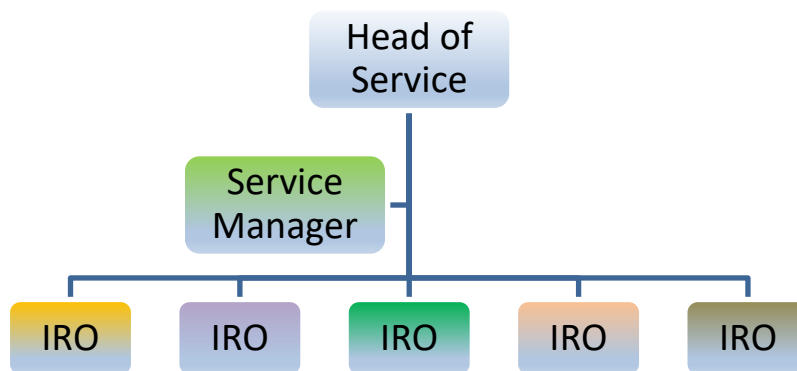
The Independent Reviewing Service sits within Engagement, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and comprises five experienced IROs. Average caseloads during 2025/26 remained just below the recommended range in the IRO Handbook, supporting effective oversight and timely intervention.

The team reflects the diversity of Haringey and collectively speaks eight languages, with interpreters and translation services commissioned where required to support effective engagement with children and families. The team benefits from a broad range of professional expertise across key areas of practice, including children with disabilities, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), care leavers, fostering, and child exploitation.

This expertise is embedded within the IRO Service through dedicated oversight and advocacy for children with complex needs, those transitioning to adulthood, and children with varied care experiences. The service includes IROs with specialist knowledge of disability services, UASC pathways and immigration-related considerations, and care leaver planning and permanence. The team also benefits from having an IRO who sits on the Fostering Panel, providing valuable insight into fostering standards, matching, permanence planning, and the experiences of foster carers and children.

The team has developed experience in supporting children at risk of exploitation through IRO participation in exploitation and risk management forums, relevant professional development and previous practitioner experience. During 2026/27, this knowledge will be further developed and used more systematically within strategic partnerships, quality assurance activity and practice development.

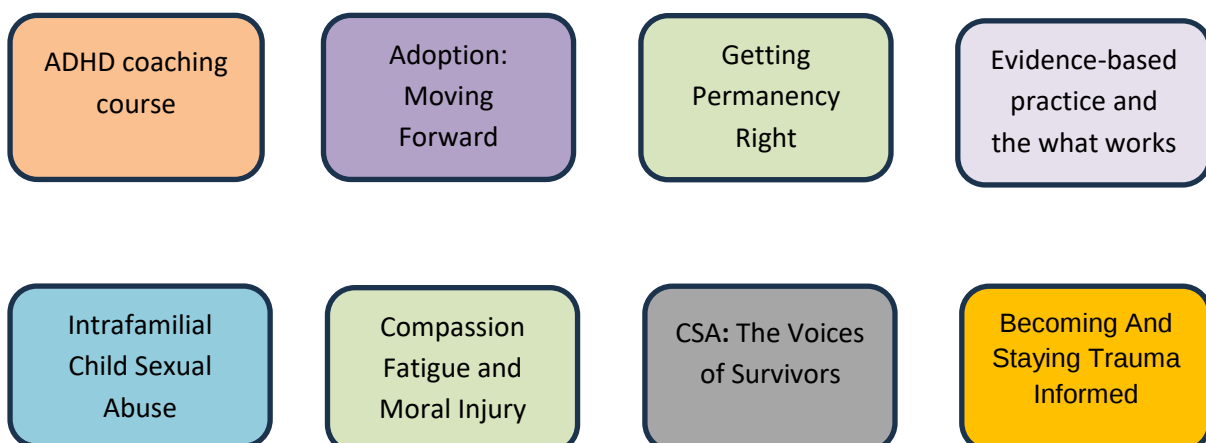
### IRO Service Structure



Average caseloads throughout 2025/26 remained just below the recommended range outlined in the IRO Handbook (2011), supporting effective oversight and timely intervention where concerns, delay, or drift are identified.

## **Training & Professional Development of the IRO Service**

Professional development during 2025/26 focused on learning that develops specialist expertise and reflective practice beyond core statutory requirements. Key areas included trauma-informed practice, intrafamilial child sexual abuse and survivor voice, adolescent mental health, permanence and adoption, compassion fatigue/moral injury, evidence-based practice and coaching. Three IROs are qualified Practice Educators and supported social work students during the year.



Team meetings and regional/practitioner forums provide further opportunities for reflective learning, case discussion and application of emerging research and reform.

## Key Areas of Focus 2025-26

The priorities set for 2025/26 focused on participation, exploitation, digital safety, identity and culture, family vulnerability and ensuring the views of children who do not attend reviews remain visible. Progress against these themes is summarised below and explored through the performance sections of this report.

**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.**

Participation remained a strength: 97 reviews were chaired or co-chaired by young people and Ofsted positively recognised children's involvement in their reviews. The next step is to use participation data more actively to understand non-attendance and increase direct involvement.

**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.**

IROs maintained oversight of exploitation and contextual risk through reviews, challenge and multi-agency forums. During 2026/27, the service will strengthen the visibility of specialist IRO expertise in adolescent safeguarding and evidence the difference this contribution makes to planning and outcomes.

**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.**

IROs continued to consider online activity and contextual risk within reviews, challenging plans where online safety and exploitation concerns required stronger multi-agency responses.

**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.**

IROs continued to scrutinise how identity, culture, language and heritage are reflected in care planning. Cultural competence and challenge around disproportionality will be a specific priority for 2026/27, including stronger evidence of the IRO view in permanence, matching and other decision-making forums.

**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.**

Reviews continued to consider parental mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse and their impact on children's lived experience, with challenge where care plans did not sufficiently address these factors.

**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.**

Where children did not attend reviews, IROs sought their views through direct contact, visits, advocacy and alternative communication. During 2025/26, IROs undertook 29 visits and 56 additional communications outside review meetings. The service will analyse reasons for non-participation and set measurable improvement expectations for 2026/27.

## **Ofsted Inspection Visit**

Ofsted's January 2026 inspection judged Haringey Children's Services Outstanding overall and services for children looked after Good. Inspectors described statutory reviews as "timely and purposeful" and recognised that IROs add value by supporting participation and keeping plans child-centred.

**"IROs add value by supporting children's participation and ensuring that plans remain child centred."**

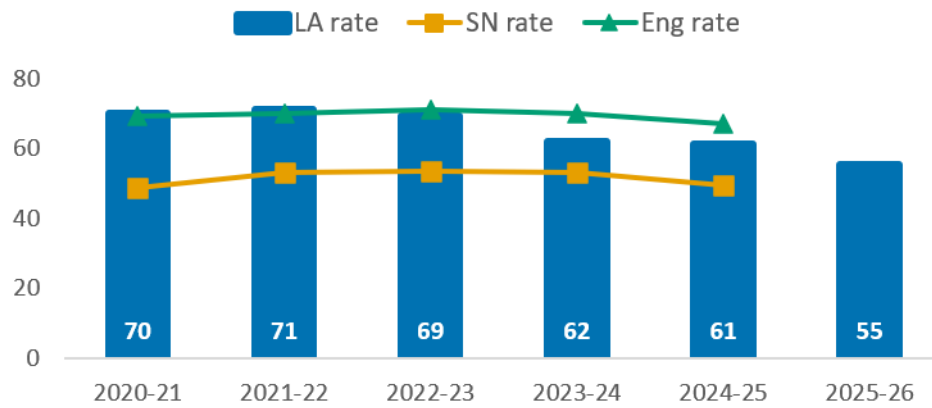
IRO oversight added strength to the quality and effectiveness of care and permanence planning, contributing to greater stability and improved outcomes for children and young people. Inspectors recognised that care planning is now "strong and purposeful", with a clear focus on children's lived experiences and long-term needs.

The full report can be seen here: <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50295650>

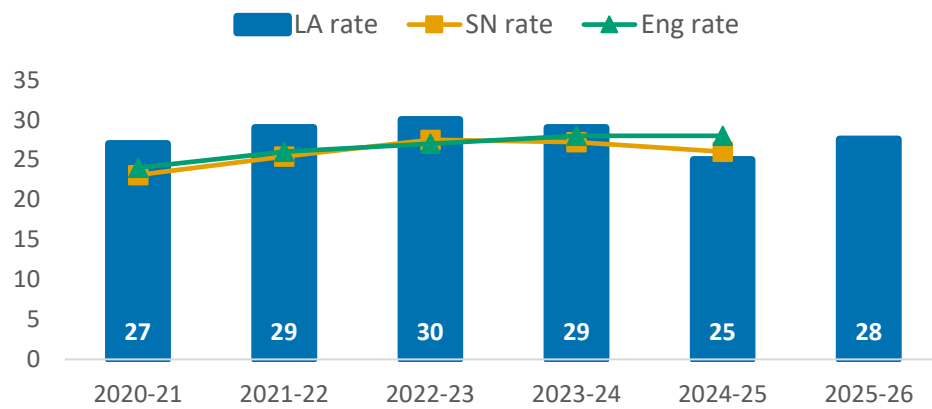
## **Children Looked After Reviews 2025-26**

At 31 March 2026, Haringey cared for 296 children and young people, compared with 320 in April 2025. The reduction reflects fewer children entering care, young people reaching adulthood and work across services to support children safely within family networks where appropriate.

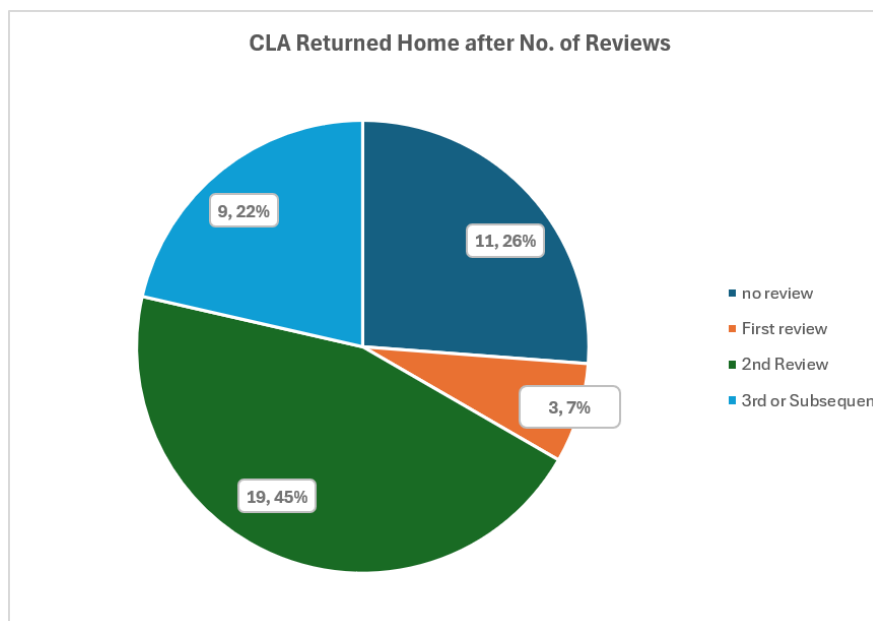
Children looked after at 31 March  
(rate per 10,000 population)



Children who ceased to be looked after in the year  
(rate per 10,000 population)



CLA Returned Home after No. of Reviews



The source data used for this report records 42 children and young people returning home to live with parents, relatives, or another person with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process by their third review.

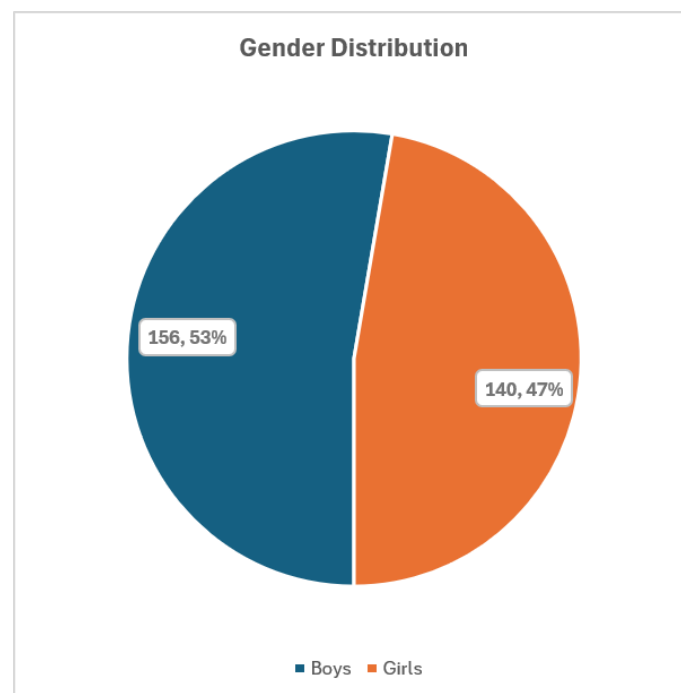
- Of the children supported through Family Group Conferences during the year, 8 children and young people successfully returned home.
- 6 children became subject to Special Guardianship Orders.

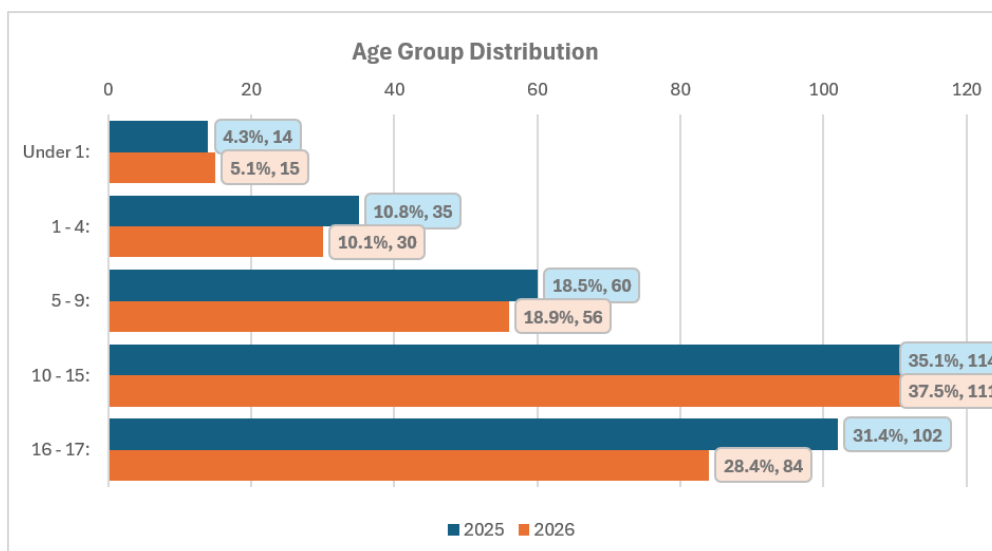
The report also records 13 children who exited care in the previous year as having been tracked during 2025/26 without re-entry with one young person re-entering care.

## Looked After Population during 2025-26

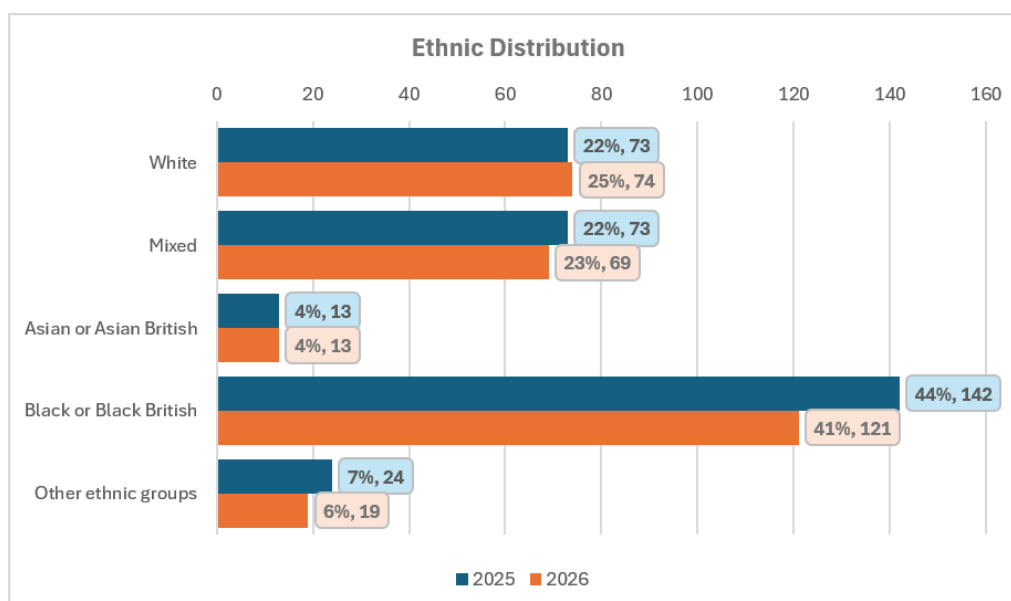
The profile of Haringey's children looked after population has remained broadly stable during 2025/26, while continuing to reflect the diversity and complexity of the borough's communities.

Boys continue to represent a higher proportion of children in care, accounting for 53% (156) of the looked after population, a slight reduction from 56% in the previous year.





The age profile has also remained consistent with both previous years and national trends. Children aged 10–15 and those aged 16 and over continue to represent the largest groups within the looked after population, each accounting for 37.5% of children in care. Overall, 66% of children and young people looked after during 2025/26 were aged 10 or above, reflecting the continued need for targeted support for adolescents and young people preparing for adulthood.



Haringey's children in care population reflects the borough's rich cultural diversity. During 2025/26:

- 41% identified as Black.
- 25% identified as White.
- 23% identified as Mixed Heritage.
- 4% identified as Asian.
- 6% identified as belonging to other ethnic groups.

These figures remain broadly consistent with the previous year. In comparison, Census 2021 data shows Haringey's wider population comprises 20.5% White British, 61.9% Asian, Mixed or Other ethnic groups, and 17.6% Black African and Black Caribbean residents.

The IRO Service remains mindful of the overrepresentation of global majority children and young people within the looked after population and the wider inequalities that may affect outcomes. IROs continue to promote culturally responsive and inclusive care planning, ensuring children's identity, heritage, language and lived experiences are reflected in care and placement plans and appropriately challenged where this is not the case.

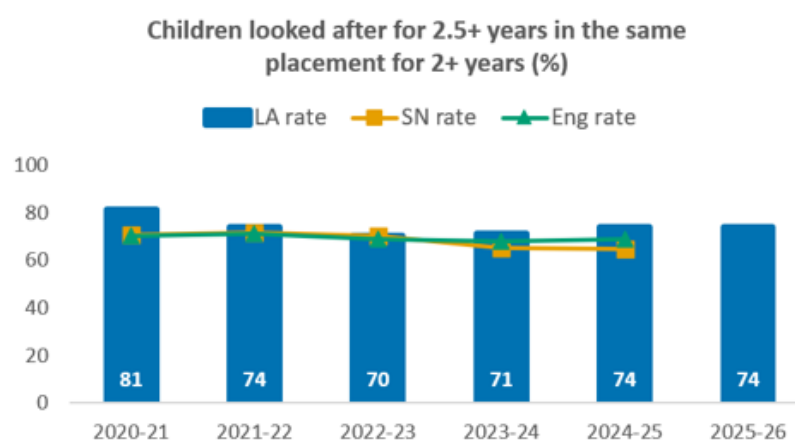
## Independent Reviewing Service Performance

Once a child becomes looked after, their first review must take place within 20 working days, the second review within three months of the first, and all subsequent reviews within six months of the previous review. Reviews can take place as a single meeting or through a series of discussions, depending on the wishes, needs, age, and understanding of the child or young person.

Children and young people remain central to decisions about how their reviews are held, who attends, and how they choose to participate. Some young people attend and lead their own reviews, while others prefer to meet separately with their IRO or contribute in ways that feel more comfortable and inclusive for them.

IROs are required to complete review outcomes and recommendations within five working days and finalise review records within 15 working days following the completion of the review process.

During 2025/26, IROs completed 756 Children Looked After Reviews, compared with 690 in 2024/25. This increase reflects additional reviews being required due to placement changes, disruption or significant changes in children and young people's lives.



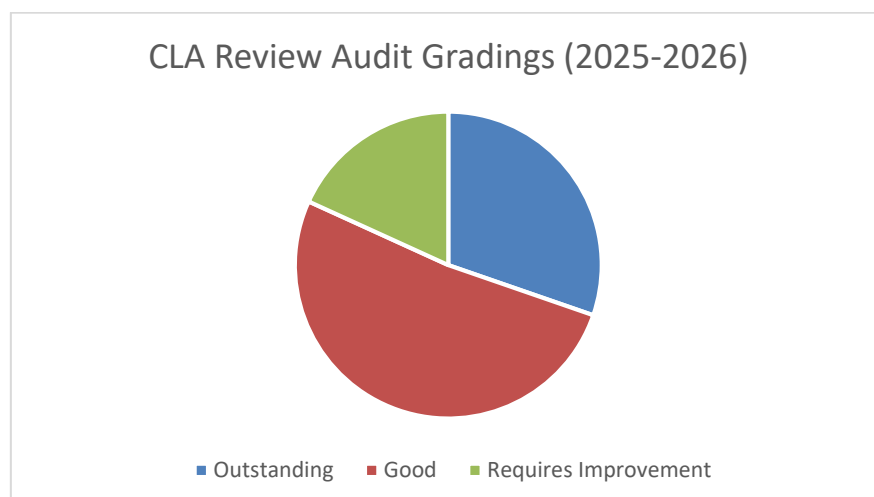
The service continues to demonstrate a strong quality assurance function through the completion of IRO Monitoring Forms following reviews. These provide oversight, analysis, and challenge in areas including care planning, statutory visits, the quality of social work reports, and children's participation within reviews.

IROs attended a workshop focused on improving health outcomes, including immunisations. This has increased the service's focus on immunisation status within social work reports; however, the impact on outcomes has not yet been evaluated. During 2026/27, the service will work with health colleagues to establish a baseline and monitor improvement. An IRO has also co-delivered 'Introduction to Health' workshops with the Whittington Health Paediatrician to help raise awareness of health services available to carers and young people.

IRO participation in fostering, exploitation, risk management and stability forums provides independent scrutiny and enables themes affecting children in care to be identified and escalated. During 2026/27, the service will strengthen how it records and evidences impact arising from IRO contribution to these forums.

## Quality of Review Minutes

During 2025/26, 33 CLA reviews were audited: 10 were Outstanding, 17 Good and 6 Requires Improvement, with none graded Inadequate. The sample demonstrates a positive position but represents less than 5% of reviews; the service will increase the annual audit sample to approximately 10% of reviews in 2026/27 to strengthen assurance.



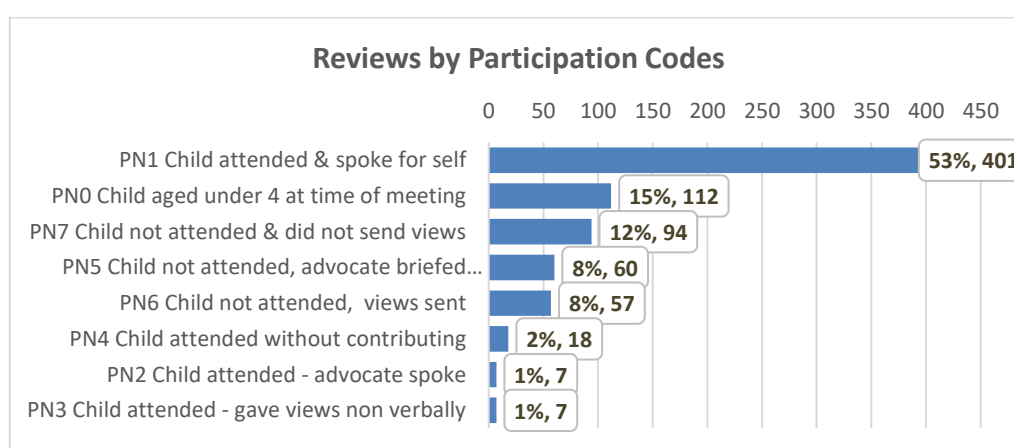
Audits identified strengths in child-centred and trauma-informed practice, accessible recording, participation and oversight of care planning. Development areas included parental engagement,

clearer attention to identity, diversity and culture, recording impact on health and education outcomes, and more consistent escalation where delay persists.

## Timeliness of Review Meetings

We saw a marked improvement in the timeliness of completing looked after reviews during 2025/26, with 96% of children having an up-to-date review by the end of the financial year—an increase from 93% in 2024/25.

## Children and young people’s participation in reviews



During 2025/26, 88% of children aged over four participated in their reviews. 53% attended and spoke for themselves. Participation was supported through direct attendance, meetings with IROs, consultation, advocacy and communication methods tailored to individual need.

In 12% of reviews, the child did not attend and no views were recorded as having been provided. During 2026/27, the service will analyse the reasons for non-attendance, test different engagement approaches and monitor whether this proportion reduces.

The service remains strongly committed to empowering children and young people to take ownership of their care planning. During 2025/26:

- 24 young people chaired their own reviews. (increase of 4 from 24/25)
- 10 young people chaired more than one review during the year.
- 73 children and young people co-chaired reviews alongside their IRO. (increase of 10 from 24/25)
- 17 young people co-chaired more than one review.
- 144 children and young people were offered the opportunity to chair or co-chair their review but chose not to do so.

Over the coming year we will work in collaboration with our Fostering Service to look at how foster carers may help improve our success in children and young people chairing or co-chairing their reviews. For some younger children, or where particularly sensitive or complex issues were being discussed, it was not considered appropriate for them to lead their review.

Children with additional communication or neurodiverse needs were supported through tailored approaches including AAC, eye gaze, communication boards, sensory resources and trusted adults. UASC participation remained high: 48 of 50 reviews (96%) were attended by the young person, with interpreter support where required.

For children and young people with neurodiverse needs, or for those who may feel anxious about attending meetings, IROs use activities, toys, and sensory resources to help create a relaxed, engaging, and child-friendly environment. These approaches help reviews feel more inclusive, supportive, and meaningful, ensuring every child has the opportunity to participate in decisions about their life in a way that feels safe and comfortable for them.



IROs actively recognise and celebrate children's achievements and milestones during reviews. This strengths-based approach promotes confidence, resilience, positive identity and aspiration while ensuring children's successes remain central to care planning and decision making.



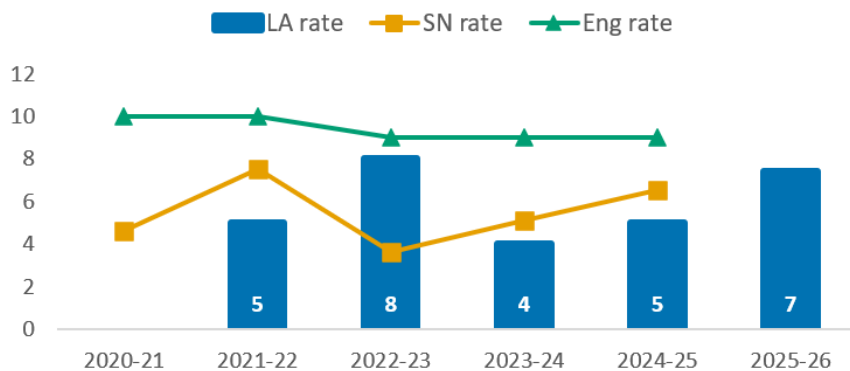
## Driving forward to achieving Permanence

IROs monitor permanence through statutory and midway reviews, monitoring forms, Permanency Planning Meetings and the Permanency Tracking Panel, challenging drift and delay and ensuring children's wishes, identity and relationships inform planning.

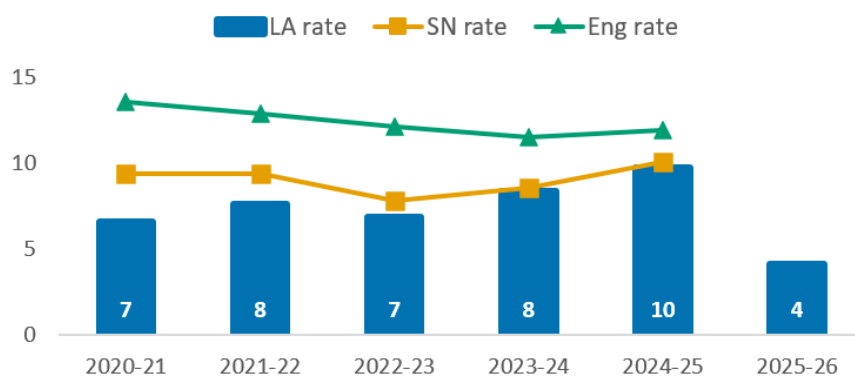
During 2025/26:

- Permanence was secured for 11 children through adoption, an increase from 7 in 2024/25, exceeding both the previous year's performance and that of our statistical neighbours.
- A further 6 children achieved permanence through Special Guardianship Orders.

Children who ceased to be looked after in the year who were adopted (%)



Children who ceased to be looked after in the year due to a Special Guardianship Order (%)



Long-term fostering remained a strength: 91 children and young people (42%) were matched with long-term foster carers. The service will strengthen the visibility of the IRO contribution to matching decisions, including consideration of identity, culture, heritage and lifelong relationships.

IRO oversight contributed to progressing long-term fostering arrangements for 14 young people aged 16 and over through the CLA review process, helping to ensure that permanence, identity, relationships and emotional security remained central to planning. These arrangements are particularly significant for older young people as they prepare for adulthood.

## Dispute Resolution Process

The Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) provides a formal route for IRO challenge where concerns about care planning, delay or outcomes cannot be resolved through professional dialogue. The service seeks early resolution while retaining escalation through senior management and, where necessary, CAFCASS.

Between April 2025 and March 2026, the Dispute Resolution Process was initiated on 123 occasions, including:

- 92 informal alerts relating to 81 children.
- 31 formal escalations relating to 28 children.

This was a 32% reduction in DRP activity compared with 2024/25. The data indicates more concerns were resolved through earlier professional dialogue, although the service will continue to monitor whether reductions in formal escalation reflect timely resolution and improved outcomes.

- Securing senior management support to maintain educational stability following placement changes.
- Ensuring coordinated safeguarding responses when young people went missing from care.
- Progressing delayed regulatory assessments for kinship placements.
- Addressing drift and delay in permanence planning.

The top five reasons for use of the DRP in the period April 25 -March 2026 are:



## Feedback

Feedback is gathered through reviews, audits, complaints, dispute resolution and direct engagement. Themes during 2025/26 included strong child-centred practice, clear communication, effective chairing and valued independent challenge.

*“Thank you IRO, it was a lovely review, so good to see YP taking part and talking about his views.” – Team Manager*

What would you keep the same about the CLA Review? *“The open and clear communication. Information is shared clearly helping me to feel well informed. The opportunities to raise concerns and celebrate progress... I would keep everything the same” - Young person*

*As s new Court Guardian I have been in close contact with the CSW and IRO and we have been keeping each other up to date with any changes. It has been positive so far...-IRO very helpful ...-IRO are good... inviting the CG to looked after child reviews, planning meetings, other professionals meeting; request for discussion receives prompt responses. – feedback from Guardians via CACASS*

## Summary and IRO Service Priorities 2026-27

In 2025/26 the IRO Service maintained strong statutory performance and contributed to Haringey’s wider improvement journey. The next phase is to demonstrate more clearly how IRO oversight adds value: what changes as a result of challenge, how specialist expertise is used, and how improvement is measured year on year.

The 2026/27 priorities therefore focus on areas where the service can demonstrate a specific contribution and measurable improvement, aligned with Families First, adolescent safeguarding, participation, permanence and quality assurance.

### Key Priorities for the Independent Reviewing Service

#### 1. Strengthen Family Network and Relationship-Based Care Planning

Strengthen oversight of reunification, kinship and family-network planning, with clearer IRO input into permanence and matching decisions. Impact will be assessed through evidence of timely permanence, the quality of matching considerations and reunification outcomes.

#### 2. Enhance Multi-Agency Safeguarding and Contextual Risk Oversight

Increase the visibility and contribution of IRO specialist expertise in exploitation, extra-familial harm, serious youth violence, missing and child sexual abuse. Evidence impact through case audit, escalation themes and examples of changes to safety and care plans arising from IRO challenge.

### **3. Strengthen Oversight of Health, Education and Wellbeing Outcomes**

Strengthen scrutiny of health, education and wellbeing outcomes, including school attendance, SEND provision and immunisation uptake. Work collaboratively with Health and Children in Care services to establish relevant baselines, identify areas for improvement and monitor whether IRO oversight contributes to measurable progress.

### **4. Improve Participation and Inclusive Practice for Children with Complex Needs**

Use participation-code data to understand why children do not attend or contribute to reviews; test targeted engagement approaches; and demonstrate year-on-year improvement in direct participation, chairing/co-chairing and the experience of children whose voices are harder to hear.

### **5. Strengthen Quality Assurance, Oversight, and Impact of Reviews**

Increase the annual review-minute audit sample to approximately 10% of reviews. Introduce targeted audit of how identity, culture and heritage are considered within care planning, permanence and matching, and use findings to identify themes requiring service-level challenge. Track the impact and timeliness of IRO escalation and oversight, reporting not only activity but what changed for children as a result.