Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2024-25

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Reporting Period: 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Improving People's Lives

Key Service Changes

Reporting Structure

The Head of Service will permanently report to the newly appointed Director of Children's Services starting September 2025.

Staffing Update

Q3/Q4 saw disruption caused by the departure of two Independent Chairs and one fixed-term Chair.

Temporary agency cover was arranged, though some children experienced brief periods without an allocated IRO.

Future annual reports

As of 2026-2027, the IRO annual report will be available in Q2

IRO core responsibilities:

Chairing statutory reviews: lead a review meeting for all children in care at required intervals, ensure care plans are up to date, specific and address the child's needs

Promoting the child's voice: Ensure the child's wishes and feelings are heard and reflected in planning and build positive, trusting relationships with children and young people

Quality Assurance and Oversight: Monitor progress against care plans and statutory timescales, identify drift or delay and challenge poor practice using the dispute resolution protocol.

Safeguarding and escalation: Act promptly if concerns arise about a child's safety or welfare, escalate unresolved issues to senior managers or, if necessary, to CAFCASS.
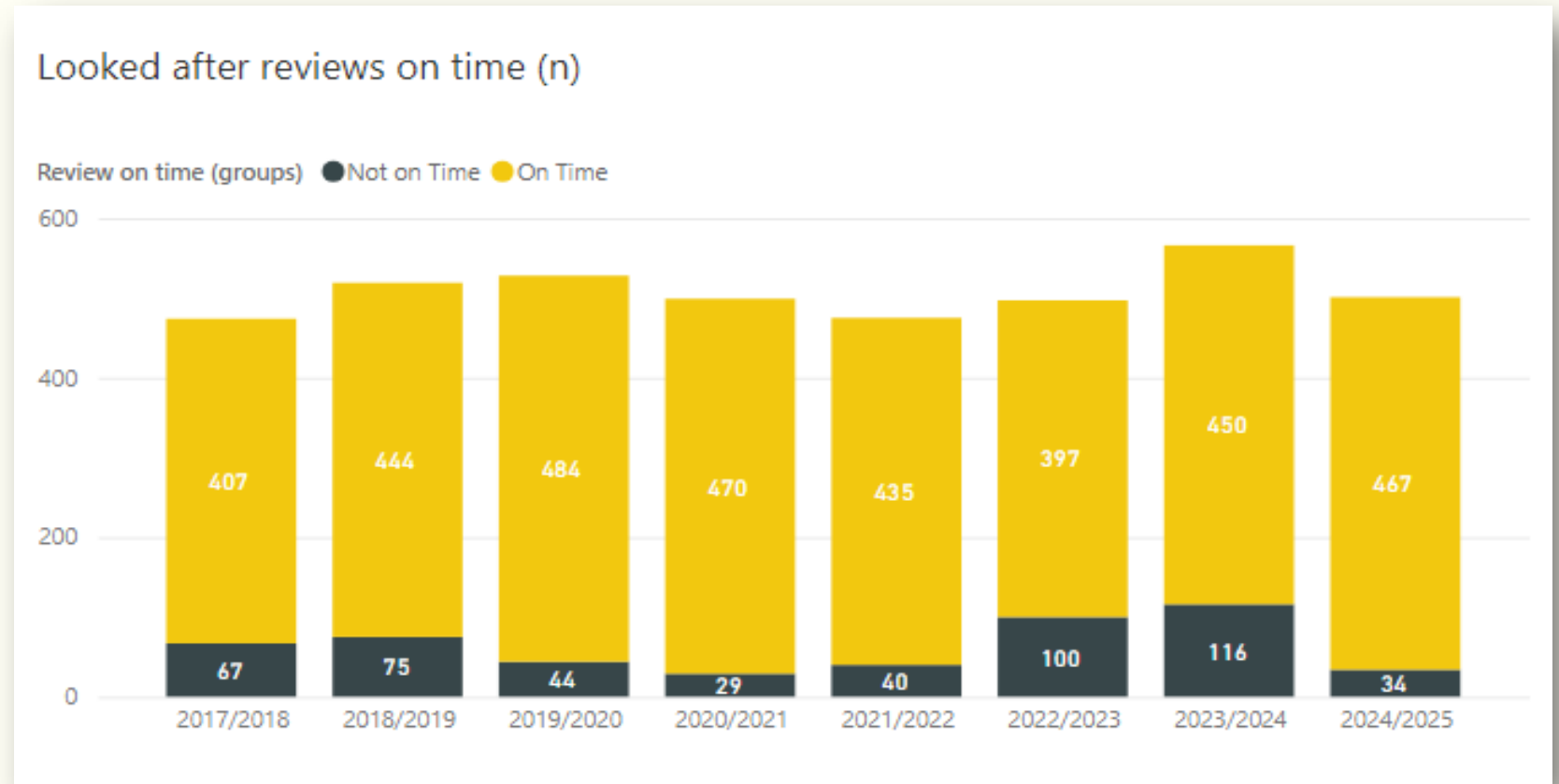
Numbers of children in care

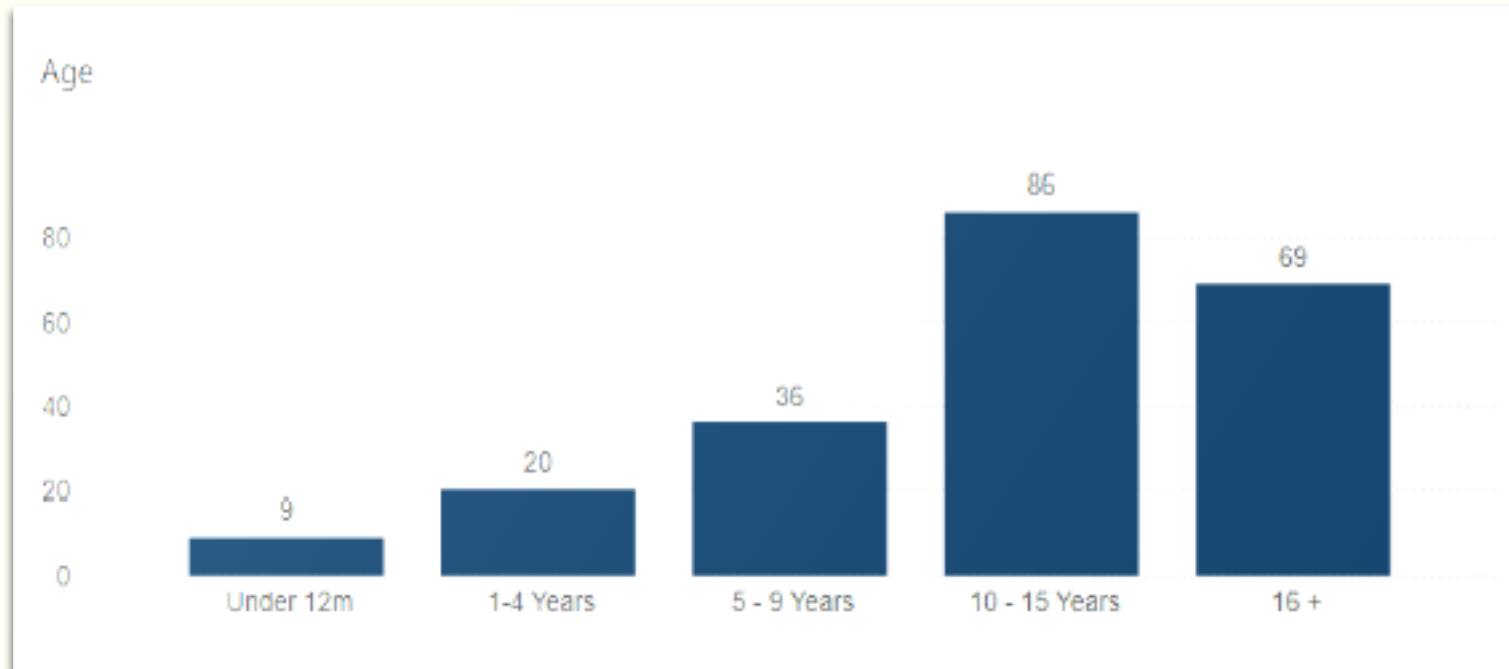|	March 2025	March 2024	March 2023	March 2022	March 2021
No. Children in Care	220	217	228	197	181
CLA start	76	77	95	77	52
CLA end	73	91	65	61	54
% Increase of children in care from previous year	1.4	-4.8	16.3	+9	0

- Number of children in care has remained stable, only 1.4% increase on last year.
- Children entering and leaving care are aligned.
- Mostly children leave care when becoming 18, but other reasons include reunification, adoption and special guardianship.

Timeliness of child in care reviews

- IRO service led 501 child in care reviews in this reporting period.

- 87% of reviews were completed on time, 16% improvement from 2023 -2024

Looked after reviews on time (n)

Review on time (groups) ● Not on Time ● On Time

Year	On Time	Not on Time
2017/2018	407	67
2018/2019	444	75
2019/2020	484	44
2020/2021	470	29
2021/2022	435	40
2022/2023	397	100
2023/2024	450	116
2024/2025	467	34

Ages of children in care

- 70% of children in care are over 10 years old
- 4% under 12 months old

Children with a disability

17% of the child in care population were deemed to have a disability

35% of these children in care due to their disability and with parental agreement (s20)

54% of children with a disability subject to a Care Order

8% subject to a Placement Order (adoption the care plan)

Placement stability

Number of placements during financial year (as selected above)
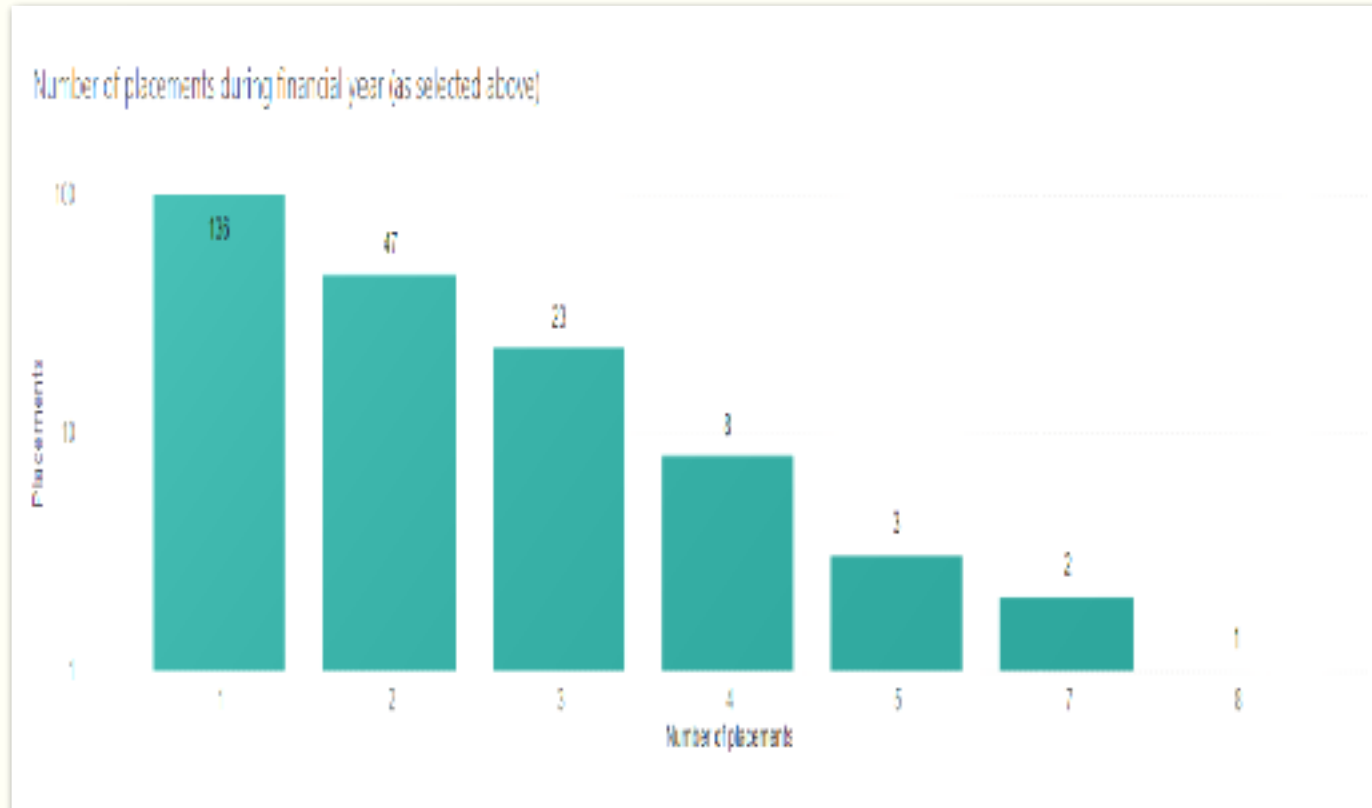
- 37 children experienced three or more moves in the year.
- 137 of 220 children were placed more than 20 miles from home.
- Improving local placement options and fostering sufficiency is area of focus for Children's Services

Dispute Resolution Protocol

Q3 (Oct – Dec 24/25)		
Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
8	10	5
Stage 4	Stage 5	Total
1	0	24
Q4 (Jan – March 24/25)		
Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
14	5	3
Stage 4	Stage 5	Total
7	1	30

Reasons for use of DRP

- No Social Work report
- Care Planning
- Frequency of visits
- Outstanding recommendations, assessment or PWP
- Recording
- Repeat Concerns

Voice of the child, participation and feedback

Our child was listened to and IRO kept parents updated.

The review was 'wonderful', child focused and led, children enjoyed and contributed.

IRO's records were a significant aid in capturing child's experiences

IRO's approach engaged the parent and contributed to plans progressing

Our daughter was herself for the first time

Internal Audit

IRO Service awarded an assurance rating of '*Level 4 -Substantial Assurance.*

The three areas of assessment were assured as:

Assessment	Key Control Objectives
Good	Independent Review Officers (IRO) are promptly allocated to Children in Care and reviews are carried out in line with statutory timescales and regulations.
Excellent	The view and wishes of Children in Care are heard and considered when decisions are being made about them.
Good	The IRO function contributes to positive outcomes for Children in Care.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to improve timeliness of child in care reviews – 90% target
- Timeliness of CIC review records – 75% target
- Social Work reports – 90% target
- Pre meeting discussion and planning – 15 days before review
- Midway reviews – reinstate and evaluate impact
- Strengthen practice in regards to reunification
- Embed feedback strategy
- Develop data reporting for service (allocation, QA activity, review record timeliness, midway reviews, use of DRP)
- Practice Standards