

YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Date: Thursday 3rd April, 2025
Time: 5.00 pm
Venue: Mandela Room

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Evacuation Procedure

In the event the fire alarm sounds attendees will be advised to evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Care Experienced Youth Update 3 - 28

The Voice and Influence Manager and Care Ambassador(s) will be in attendance to present the report.
5. You Matter to Us - Performance 29 - 40

The Director of Children's Care will be in attendance to present the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) data.
6. Adoption Tees Valley - Bi-Annual Report 41 - 60

The Adoption Tees Valley Service Manager will be in attendance to present the report.
7. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 61 - 90

The Head of Quality, Learning and Review will be in attendance to present the report.
8. Missing from Care - Police/Internal - Six-Monthly Update 91 - 98

The Head of Partnerships will be in attendance to present the report.

9. Care Leavers' Hub - Verbal Update

The Director of Regeneration will be in attendance to provide an update.

10. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered.

Charlotte Benjamin
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall
Middlesbrough
Wednesday 26 March 2025

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors C Cooke - Elected Mayor (Chair), P Storey (Vice-Chair), E Clynch, L Henman, D Jackson, L Mason, M Nugent, Z Uddin, L Young and O'Connor

Assistance in accessing information

Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Chris Lunn, 01642 729742, chris_lunn@middlesbrough.gov.uk

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
YOU MATTER TO US (CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD)

Report of:	Kathy Peacock – Voice and Influence Manager
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Submitted to:	You Matter to Us - 3 rd April 2025
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Subject:	Care Experienced Youth Voice February 2025- March 2025 Participation Strategy 2024-2027
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Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy
Your Home
Your Family and Friends
Your Education
Your Adult Life
Your Health and wellbeing
Your Voice and Influence

Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?

No

What is the purpose of this report?

To update the Corporate Parents on what care experienced young people have achieved and plans for 2025.

To share with them the Participation strategy

Report Background

N/A

Appendices

Report attached

Recommendations

N/A

Why is this being recommended?

N/A

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

N/A

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)

N/A

Legal

N/A

Financial

N/A

Policy Framework

N/A

Equality and Diversity

N/A

Risk

N/A

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

N/A

Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Contact: Kathy Peacock

Email: Kathy_peacock@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Care Experienced Youth Voice

February - March 2025

Middlesbrough Council facilitates open, safe, inclusive spaces and opportunities for people to tell us what is important to them. We capture this information and support them to tell key decision makers, so improvements are made to the support they and others receive.

We support our cared for and care experienced young people/adults to be engaged in a variety of different ways.

Care Ambassadors

- Two care experienced young adults who are co opted onto the 'You Matter to Us' Corporate Parenting Board. These roles and roles for general volunteering, can involve our care experienced young people to have an opportunity to support all the engagement activities with cared for and care experienced young people. They also have opportunities to support the wider engagement work - Working with students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, the Youth Council and Parent/Carer engagement as part of the Family Hubs. We currently have two Care Ambassador vacancies and three Volunteers.

'We Matter' (Middlesbrough's Children in Care Council)

- Care experienced young people aged 11 - 16 years meet fortnightly at Easterside Hub 17:00 - 18:30pm.
- Members include six young people.
- They have fun, have a voice and create events to hear from their care experienced peers
- They share their views with key decision makers who act on what they say and positively change services to meet their needs.

'Voice, Influence and Change'

- Older care experienced young adults 16-25 years meet monthly at the Live Well centre 17:00-18:30pm.
- Members includes three care experienced adults.

The groups are supported by:-

Kathy Peacock - Voice and Influence Manager

Adam Hart - Care experienced volunteer

Caitlin O'Connor - Care experienced volunteer

Abiola Dodo- Non care experienced adult volunteer for We Matter

Care Ambassadors and Volunteers

- The two care experienced young adults who have been Care Ambassadors for nearly two years have ended their involvement, to allow two more care experienced young adults to have this opportunity. The roles are currently being advertised and if interested they have been asked to write why they want the role and what they think they could offer. The deadline for returns is the 4th April.
- Adam one of the volunteers will give the Corporate Parents a statistical update of our achievements over the past year.
- Caitlin who continues to volunteer for us, will support the new care ambassadors to find their feet in their new role.

'We Matter'

- The group has worked on creating a fun Easter activity event for cared for young people and a sperate event for children who foster. These events are being supported by the fostering and the Independent Reviewing service.
- During the group in March they were asked their views on the best way we can communicate with them - They said, to have consistent social workers, talk to care ambassadors and to be sent a comic style newsletter telling them about opportunities.

'Voice, Influence and Change'

- We have arranged a fun event on the 9th April where we are going to Level X and going for food afterwards. We can chat with the young adults and tell them more about the Voice, Influence and Change group.

Current Plans for 2025

Themes for the year · Safe and stable homes, Opportunities to succeed, Support to be healthy and happy, A strong sense of identity and connection, Direct input into their plans and the Development of services for them.

1.

Voice, Influence and Change (V.I.C) group - Monthly, first Wednesday of every month.

- V.I.C Social events - Once every two months. First one on the 9th April
- Care Leavers Week - 27th - 31st October 2025 - To include Scream Factory and a celebration activity.
- More activities to be decided as more young adults join the group

2.

We Matter:

- Easter activity events - 16th April
- Regional CiCC residential -25th-27th April
- May activity event - 27th May
- Football event -25th July (to include with older care experienced young people)
- Picnic in the Park - 5th August
- Halloween party - 30th October
- Christmas Party - 10th December



Participation Strategy 2024-2027



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Introduction

Our **vision** is that Middlesbrough will be a local authority which will empower all children, young people and families to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Services will be shaped by our children, young people and families to ensure we are meeting their needs effectively.

Our **values and behaviours** are the thread that runs through all the work we do with young people. Middlesbrough Council follows a 'One Children's Services' approach. We all work together to deliver on our mission, strive towards our vision, and we always keep our values and behaviours in mind. Below is how we, as a participation team, the whole children's services, and wider council services will use our values to deliver on our vision and strategic priorities.



1. Passionate

- a. Treat children I work with like those in my family
- b. To show love even if children don't yet know how to accept it
- c. Nurture and value our colleagues so that they are able to nurture and value children



2. Integrity

- a. Adapt to the needs of families respecting their race, disability, cultural and religious beliefs
- b. Speak for those who can't speak for themselves
- c. Be honest with children even if it is difficult



3. Creative

- a. Use the communication methods used by children
- b. Purposefully seek resources when children need them
- c. Show children the best sides of themselves so they can grow to recognise and develop them



4. Collaborative

- a. Being approachable so people can collaborate
- b. Give children time to build trusting relationships with their workers
- c. Show our colleagues the value we want them to show others



5. Focussed

- a. Be a role model
- b. Make learning exciting and an integrated part of working life
- c. Develop my understanding of cultures within Middlesbrough focusing on race, disability, cultural and religious beliefs they have

Introduction

Middlesbrough Council is committed to engaging and hearing directly from parents, carers and young people to ensure services develop to meet needs. The Council engages with their customers in a variety of different ways.

Example from Early Help (Stronger Families)


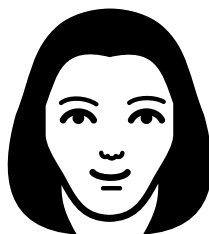
When a family has been supported by this team and their support is due to come to an end, someone who is independent, will contact the family to seek feedback on the support received and find out if there is anything we could do better.

The questions we ask were devised by young people, so that we can make sure we are seeking feedback from children and young people (and not just parent/carers) and it's called Phoebe's Pathway.

Families individual feedback is looked at by those who have supported the family and if they have told us something we could have done better, we will act on this and tell the family what we will do.

We use all the feedback from our families, to help us positively develop our services ensuring we meet their needs.

Some of the things our families have said

"The service was amazing.  was a huge moral Support. Always called when she said she would or as soon as possible. Always there to listen to. Helped my son into Middlesbrough foundation which he is loving and is so much better at home. Helped me to get onto a course I couldn't have done it without  help."

"The service has helped both Mum and G with difficulties getting G into school. This has been the biggest help for both of them".

Foreword

Middlesbrough Youth Council

'Young people want their voices to be heard. Middlesbrough Children Matter gives young people the opportunity to express their opinions freely without fear of judgement. Youth participation is essential to creating a brighter, better future. This strategy addresses the tactics and motivations for Participation in Middlesbrough. It's all you need to know about participation in Middlesbrough Council.'



Benefits of Engagement

Young People

"It gives us opportunities to help out in the community on behalf of young people."

"I love getting involved because not only does it help my community but also opens doors for me in the future."

"Educates me on the current issues and how I can do my part to help."

"It enables us to have a voice to be heard, something which is extremely valuable."

"Youth voice groups provides platforms for young people to effectively articulate their perspectives. Their voices are not only heard but creates positive changes."

Parents and Carers

"Your voice possesses incredible power, capable of effecting change, motivating others, and leaving a lasting impact on the world."

Benefits of Engagement

Benefits to Services

There are many services that impact on young people, families and communities. That is why it is so important they hear directly on what is working well, what people struggle with and what developments they would like to see made to have their needs met.

The benefits are:

- They will be fit for purpose
- They will be accessible
- They will be inclusive

Benefits to Communities

Working with young people, parents and carers to improve things in their area will:

- Increase a greater sense of belonging to their communities
- Enable those with lived experiences to have a voice and be heard
- Ensures voices from all communities are heard
- Projects our young people, parent and carers create will benefit the community
- Young people and families are more likely to stay in their hometown

Benefits to the National Agenda

We aim to make sure that our young people, parents and carers' voices and opinions are heard as widely as possible. We get involved in national projects to do just this! Some benefits of this are:

- By listening to young people/parents and carers around the country, government organisations are given the information they need to make informed decisions
- Our young people, parents and carers influencing national decisions

Participation Check List

When we work with our young people, parents and carers, we make sure that we have everything in place for meaningful participation.



People must "...understand that Participation is not a gift, but something that they have to do". Laura Lundy

We follow Lundy's Model Of Participation



We are huge fans of co-production between young people/families and senior leaders and will always encourage young people and families to work directly with those who have the power to influence service areas.

Governance

Our young people, parents and carers feed into...

Family Help Board



SEND & Inclusion Strategic Meeting

You Matter to Us (Corporate Parenting Board)



This strategy supports

1/ Young people across Middlesbrough

Key drivers:

Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Service and Activities to Improve Young People's Well-being, September 2023 states 'Local authorities must have regard to this guidance when exercising their statutory duty to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24'

The British Youth Council states ' Local youth councils are forums that represent the views of young people at a local level. Run by young people for young people, they give young people a voice and enable them to make their views heard in the decision-making process'

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1992 - 'the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm'.

Key achievements:

- The youth council meets on a fortnightly basis and is a group for young people across Middlesbrough aged between 13-19 years.
- They have all signed up to be Middlesbrough Volunteers.
- They design and deliver workshops at the annual Headstart Conference.
- They have been involved in the development of the Early Help strategy.
- They feed their findings from engagement events into the Children's Trust Board.



2/ Cared for young people

Key drivers:

- **The Children Act 1989** requires that *'before making any decision about a looked after child a local authority must give due consideration to the child's wishes and feelings, having regard to their age and understanding'*
- **Care Matters (DfESa, 2006a,2007)** *'expects all councils to have a Children in Care Council to ensure that there is a formal mechanism for children's views to be heard'*
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12** says *'every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously'*.

Key achievements:

- **'We Matter'** group (for young people who are looked after in foster care and residential care between the ages of 11-16 years) meets every fortnight. They come together, tell us what they would like to change to improve their experiences and have fun.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer team asked them how they could better support young people to be part of their meetings. Following this engagement Cared for young people are now routinely asked how they would want their meeting held and how they would like a greater role within the meeting.
- The Executive Director for Children's Services and Children's Director visited their group and heard what was important to them.
- During an engagement event with their Corporate Parents, young people said they wanted to be more prepared for independent living. An ASDAN accredited workbook is being developed to enable all secondary school aged cared for and care experienced young people to work through, to be better prepared to succeed independent living
- They have developed a 'You Matter' pack to be given to all young people who become looked after
- They hold their annual football event for all care experienced young people
- They design and deliver their annual Christmas and Halloween events

3/ Care Experienced Young People

Key drivers:

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces 'corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers'

- *to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people*
- *to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings*
- *to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people*
- *to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners*
- *to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people*
- *for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and*
- *to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

Key achievements:

- A monthly 'Voice, Influence and Change' group was created by care experienced young adults for their peers between the ages of 16-25 years, to come together have a voice, create events and influence positive changes to services.
- Members of this group are part of the Regional Children in Care Council and have attended the annual residential, Regional conference and other regional events
- Members of this group, other care experienced young people and 'We Matter' met their Corporate Parents and 15 Pledges were made. The Executive Children's Director's Pledge was to have young people deliver communication training for Managers, Social Workers, and Personal Advisors. The group developed and delivered the training and staff identified they had learnt more about young people's experiences and that they will change their support to meet young people's need.

3/ Care Experienced Young People - Continued

Key achievements:

- The Care Ambassadors volunteer with the participation team to support the wider engagement work
- Care experienced adults are involved in the training for potential foster carers, foster carer and social care staff recruitment and are part of the foster carer panel
- A Care Ambassador has worked with the Voice, Influence and Change group, 'We Matter' and the fostering support group to develop a 'My Journey to Independence' ASDAN accredited programme, for all cared for and care experienced young people

4/ Young people with Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Key drivers:

- **The Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014 and the Single Equalities Act 2010 together identify: *'All children and young people are encouraged to make decisions about their future, their support and to participate in designing services'***
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 26 - *'to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life'***
- **Middlesbrough SEND and Inclusion Board, one of the priorities is: *'To ensure greater involvement of children, young people and families to support coproduction and ensure that their voice is heard regarding the services and support they need'***

Key achievements:

- **Nine educational settings visited on a monthly basis to engage with their students. Over 80 students are actively engaged.**
- **Students co-produced and delivered the 2024 'My Voice Matters' Conference.**
- **Students from Discovery school said they wanted to have their own page on their school website. This was developed.**
- **Students from two settings were invited to a celebration event, to display their experiences of being part of the OFSTED inspection and participation engagement. Two students presented at the event.**
- **Representatives from each setting met with members of the SEND and Inclusion Strategic meeting, to tell them about their school, their engagement work and how to improve their post 16 Transition. The managers' reported positively about meeting the young people as they heard directly about their experiences. The students report that they feel listened to and feel empowered that they have met important people.**

5/ Family Hub Community Champions

Key drivers:

Middlesbrough Council received funding from the Department For Education to develop Family Hubs. One requirement was to establish Parent and Carer Panels, where expectant parents, parent and carers of children aged two years will come together and have shape the developments of services to improve their experiences together with local service commissioners to co-design and evaluate services.

Key achievements:

- Over 80 parents/carers have had a voice about the newly established Family hubs
- One parent attended the Regional Parent/Carer celebration event
- Parents/carers have been involved developing the new 'Community Conversation' project to engage with 20 parent/carers groups across Middlesbrough
- They attend the engagement workstream meeting and update services on what parents/carers are saying

Promoting Engagement

1. We recruit volunteers through a variety of methods

- Work with internal and external partners/organisations to promote the groups and volunteering opportunities
- Attend meetings to talk about the groups
- Share information on social media - Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Host events to encourage people to sign up to our groups
- Link with other youth providers in the area
- Link in with specialist services in the area

2. Keeping people involved:

- Setting them up as Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Giving young people opportunities to be Care Ambassadors
- Reimbursement of travel costs
- Having social events
- Giving vouchers for doing extra activities- Training, speaking at conferences, events and interviewing
- Refreshments/food at meetings
- Recognising all of the time and effort our volunteers put into the group and celebrating their achievements
- Training

3. Promoting and Celebrating:

- Supporting our volunteers to speak directly to decision makers and having them linked directly into the decision making Boards
- Share their work through regular reports into meetings
- Share positive stories about their achievements with the Middlesbrough Council Communications Team to put on their social networks
- Social media (Middlesbrough Children Matter Twitter, Instagram)
- Internal newsletters/bulletins
- Word of mouth from our volunteers
- Social events

Making a Difference

To know if we are making a difference, we measure the impact that our work is having. We do this through lots of different ways:

The Groups

- Create work plans together
- Check in with groups members for their feedback
- Reflection on the sessions
- Projects are co-produced with senior leaders and they can evidence the impact they are having
- Volunteers continue to come to our sessions and are enjoying themselves
- Service providers come to us and ask to work with young people
- Supporting the groups to monitor service areas progress

On a Strategic Level

- Every service provider to understand the importance of working with their customers to co develop and create services
- To ensure that all services respond to what their customers are saying we created a 'You Said, We Will, We Did' document. This tool is for everyone to record what their customers are saying, identify what they will do as a response and report on what they have done! The tool then requires services to report and provide evidence on the outcomes and impact their work has had.



Our plans for 2024-2027

Youth Council will:

- Continue to meet once a fortnight
- Have three annual campaigns running from September to July
- Make greater links with the Middlesbrough Youth Mutual
- Sign up all new members to become Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Increase youth voice by holding two engagement events each year
- Design and deliver a workshop at the annual HeadStart conference
- Have an annual 'Big Takeover'
- Engage with primary school students to capture their voice
- Increase their involvement with the Children's Trust Board and other Boards
- Increase their involvement being part of interview panels and advisory boards
- Work with the Commissioning service to create opportunities for young people to become Young Commissioners

'We Matter' will:

- Continue to meet once a fortnight
- Increase membership by working with with Children Looked After teams, Independent Reviewing service, Residential, Fostering and Pathways to increase membership
- Increase cared for voice by holding three engagement events every year for foster families to come together
- Explore with their older peers on using emails/WhatsApp's/Text to reach more cared for and care experienced young people
- Design and deliver an annual celebration event for all cared for young people
- Be part of the fostering service recruitment, skills to foster training and sit on fostering panels
- Engage with foster children, children who foster so their voice is captured within foster carer reviews and engage with foster carers birth children
- Ask all young people in residential care a 'tell us' question every month
- Increase the number of young people from residential care to attend the group
- Increase the number of Care Ambassadors to include younger care experienced young people
- Sign up new members of the group to become Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Hold an annual football event

Our plans for 2024-2027

Voice, Influence and Change will:

- Continue to meet every month
- Work with Children looked after teams, Independent Reviewing service, residential, fostering and Pathways to increase membership
- Create, launch and include this within their training, a positive list of words that all professionals should use when working with young people
- Develop and Deliver the 'My Journey to Independence' ASDAN accredited programme to cared for and care experienced young people.
- Co Design with Pathways three fun engagement events for older care experienced young adults
- Co design with Pathways several 'Open Day' events for young people about to be supported by Pathways, to hear from Social Workers and Personal Advisors about the support they will get
- Co produce with Pathways - Building positive relationships with family and Lifelong links
- Support Pathways to regularly communicate with their young people telling them about new opportunities and events
- Hold an annual Celebration event for older care experienced young adults
- Work with 'We Matter to have the 'You Matter' pack available for all young people who become looked after in place and monitor
- Work with the Virtual school to explore the impact of PROCLAIM on students to support further programme design
- Work with the Virtual school to analyse Student Voice in Personal Education Plans to support systematic change within education

Our plans for 2024-2027

'Voice, Influence and Change' will:

- Ensure young people interview panels are in place for more posts within Children's services
- Design and deliver six training sessions to their Corporate Parents
- Attend and report into the 'You Matter to us' (Corporate Parenting Board) and create more engagement opportunities with their Corporate Parents
- Have regular meetings with key decision makers to get updates on their 'You Said, We Will, We Did'
- Continue to be involved in the Regional Children in Care Council work and attend the annual residential
- Deliver a session at each Mandatory Children's Services Induction Event
- Promote their work at the Pathways 'Pop up' sessions
- Support the running of the Pathways 'Bright Futures' group
- Discuss with Pathways at every Voice, Influence and Change meeting what developments they are making in response to what young people want
- Meet with the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director of Children's Care every six weeks to get an update of developments
- Be involved in the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership conference
- Work with 'We Matter' and the residential homes to design and deliver a Children's Home Fortnight,' similar to the Foster Carer Fortnight
- Co design with Pathways a 'Skills' week looking at Training, Employment, University, Apprenticeships, Work experience and Volunteering opportunities

Our plans for 2024-2027

My Voice Matters - Young People (up to 25 Years) with Educational Needs and Disabilities will:

- Have accessible opportunities to be involved.
- Be engaged within their educational settings
- Co-produce and deliver the annual 'My Voice Matters' conference
- Ensure educational settings promote and attend the conference
- Tell key decision makers what key areas they want them to work on to improve their experiences
- Hear back from key decision makers on their 'You Said, We Will, We Did' progress
- Attend the SEND and Inclusion Strategic meeting twice a year
- Ensure young people and their families know about the 'Local Offer', making sure information is easily accessible and meets their needs
- Tell key decision makers what makes 'Good Transitions'

Family Hub Community Champions will:

- Meet on a regular basis
- Promote their role within their community and local Family Hub
- Increase further participation of parents and carers by offering different engagement methods
- Meet with service providers to report what parents/carers are saying
- Ensure key decision makers evidence impact regarding their 'You Said, We Will, We Did' actions
- Attend and report into the Family Help Board
- Be part of the regional Parent/Carer meetings and events

Updating the Strategy

- We will review and update this strategy with our volunteers, services and partners: March 2026 or earlier if required.

Our Appreciation

We would like to thank all of the young people and parents who have helped us with this strategy:

Young People - Ruby W, Ruby C, Cole, Phoebe, Oskar, Charlie, Pearl, Rosie, Adam, Harriett, Louisa, Caitlin, Chanice

Parents - Tim and Tiawo

Thank you all for your help in creating this strategy - we appreciate you all so much.

How to get involved!



Email us at:

Participation@Middlesbrough.gov.uk

Keep up with what we're doing on our socials!

Click the icons to be taken to our pages.



Our Website



Instagram



Twitter (X)



Middlesbrough's
Local Offer
for young
people/families
with SEND

Children's services Analysis Tool (ChAT)

Based on Ofsted's ILACS Annex A dataset / Inspection Report

Middlesbrough

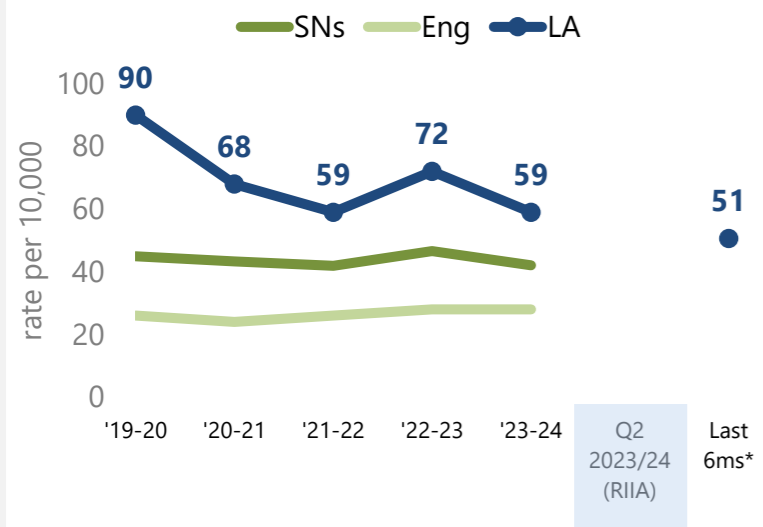
25 March 2025

Children Looked After (CLA) started and ceased in the last 6 months

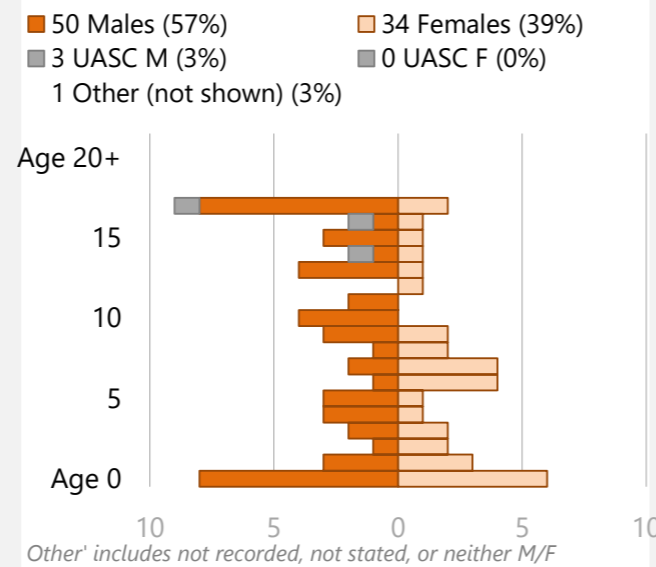
from 26/09/2024 to 25/03/2025

88 CLA started in the last 6 months

Rate of CLA started per 10,000 children

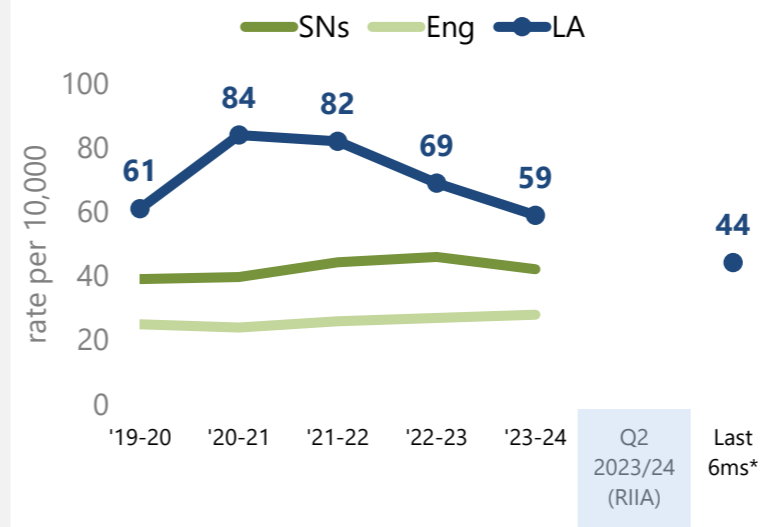


Age and sex

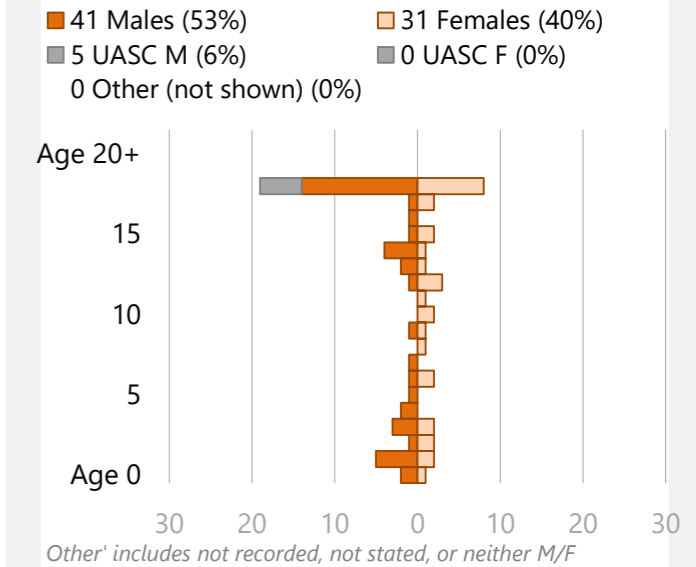


77 CLA ceased in the last 6 months

Rate of CLA ceased per 10,000 children



Age and sex



*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

*Annualised rate for comparison purposes

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3 of the 88 CLA starters were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

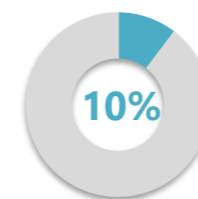
3%

4 of the 88 CLA starters have previously been looked after

5%

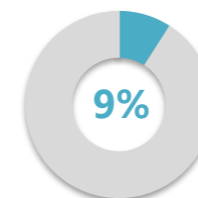
Reason episode of care ceased

Adopted



Last 6 months 10% | 2023-24 (published) LA 11%, SNs 14%, Eng 9%

Special Guardianship Order

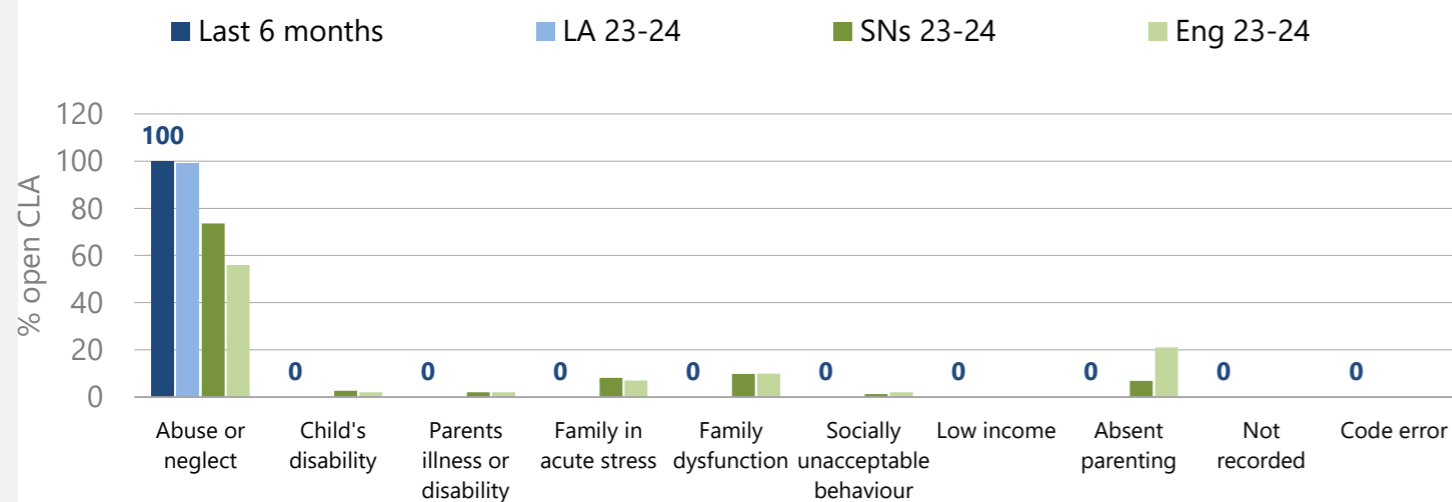


Last 6 months 9% | 2023-24 (published) LA 23%, SNs 18%, Eng 11%

Number of CLA ceased by reason in the period

Adopted	8
Died	0
Care taken by another LA	0
Returned home to live with parents/ relatives	4
Live with parents/relatives (not PR)	9
Residence order granted	7
Special Guardianship Orders	7
Moved into independent living	5
Transferred to residential care funded by ASS	0
Sentenced to custody	1
Accommodation on remand ended	0
Age assessment determined child was 18+	0
Child moved abroad	0
Any other reason	36
Not recorded / Error	0

Comparing the primary need of CLA starters

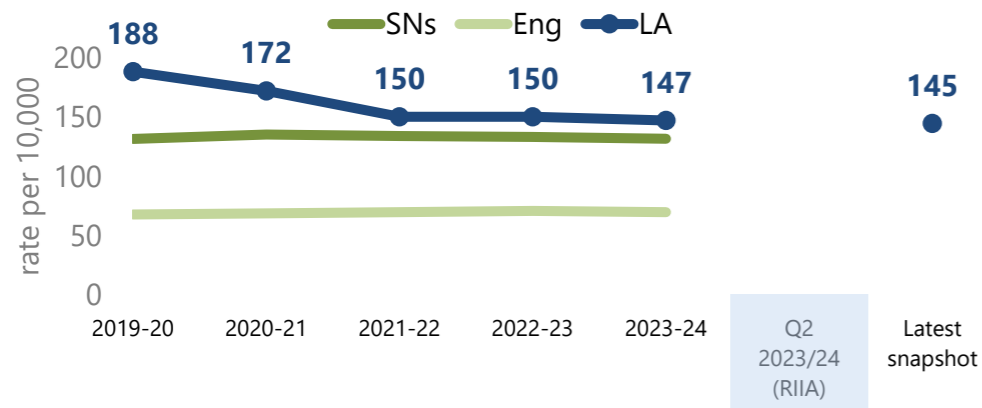


Children Looked After (CLA) with an open episode of care

Snapshot 25/03/2025

503 Children Looked After (CLA) with an open episode of care

Rate of CLA per 10,000 children (snapshot)



Ethnic background

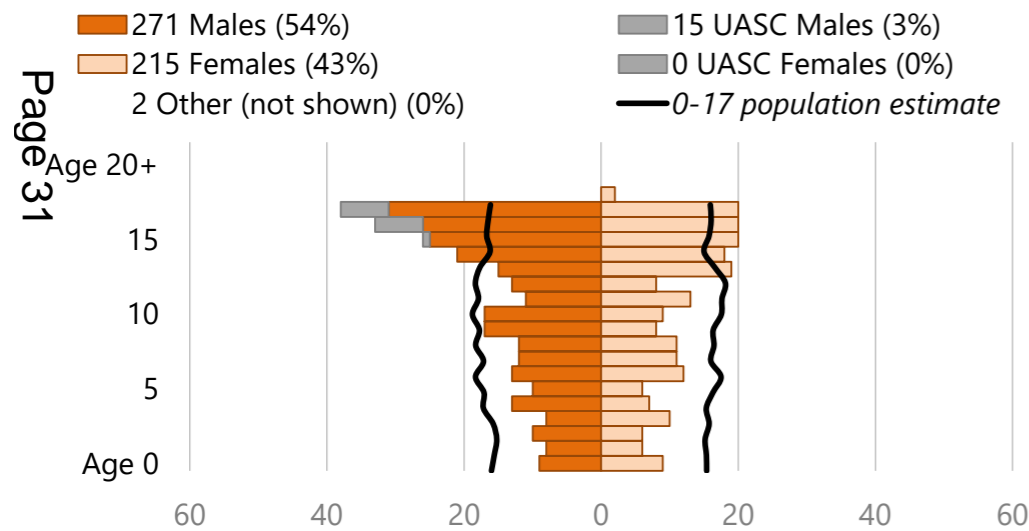
	All CLA	Not UASC	UASC
White	83%	85%	7%
Mixed	8%	8%	7%
Asian or Asian British	3%	2%	13%
Black or black British	3%	2%	20%
Other ethnic group	3%	2%	53%
Not stated	0%	0%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%	0%

45 children (9%) with a disability

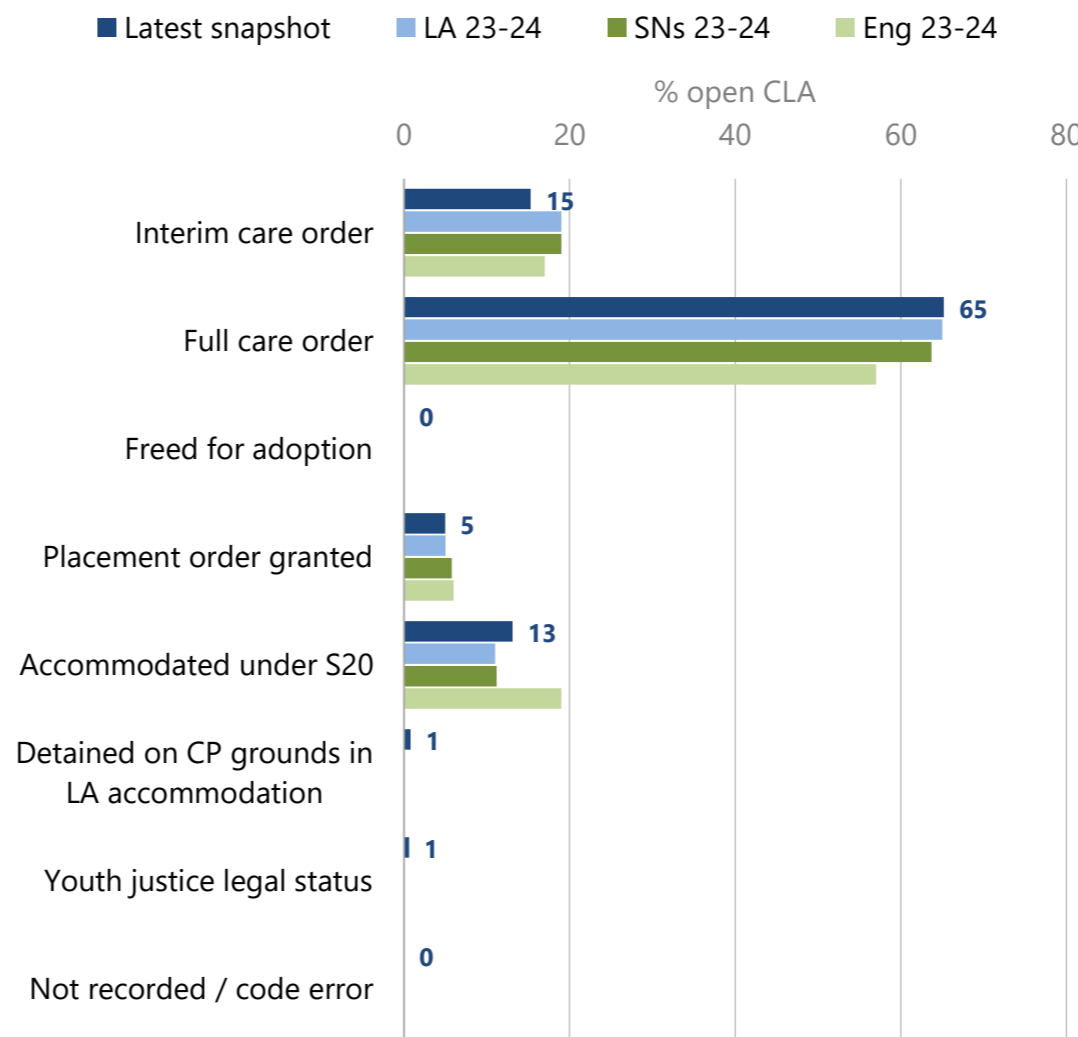
Permanence plan

	Number	%
Return to family	86	17%
Adoption	28	6%
SGO/CAO	37	7%
Supported living	30	6%
L/T residential	41	8%
L/T fostering	203	40%
Other	77	15%
Not recorded	1	0%

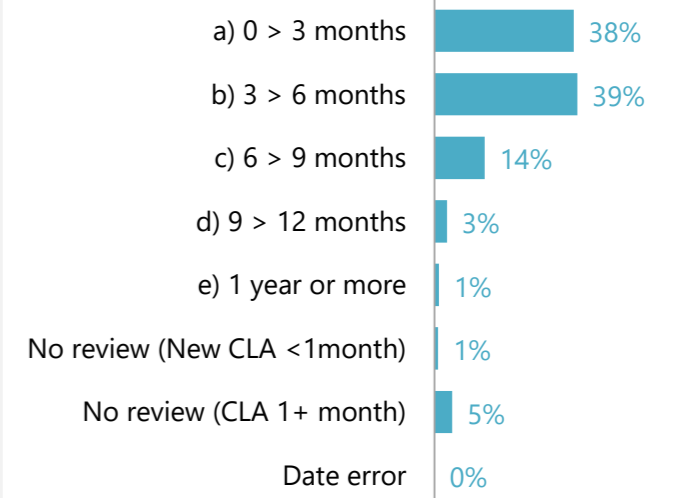
Age and sex



Comparing legal status of open CLA (snapshot)

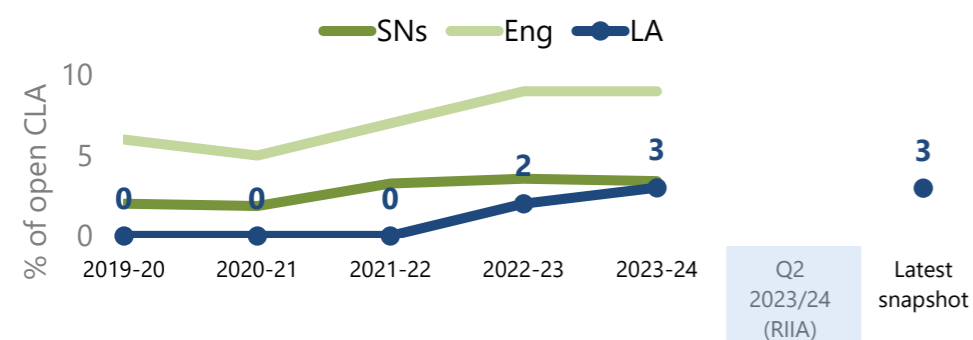


Time since latest review



15 open unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC)

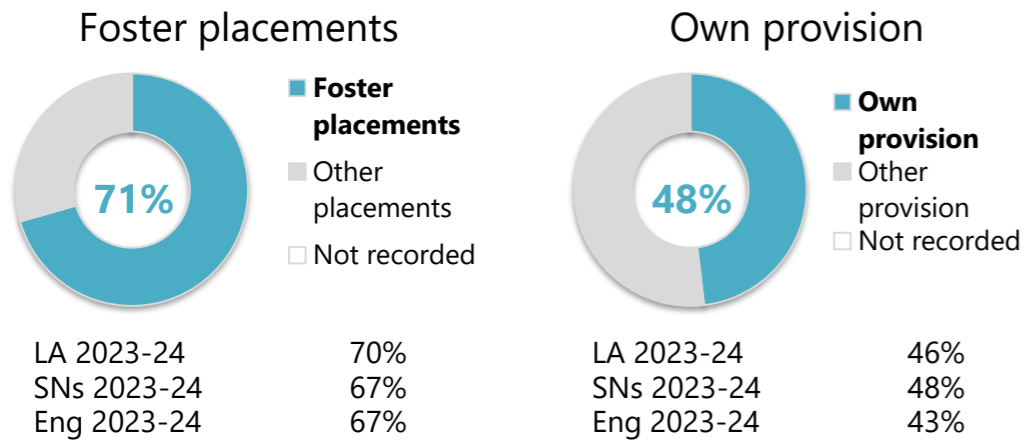
UASC as a percentage of CLA (snapshot)



Children Looked After (CLA) placements

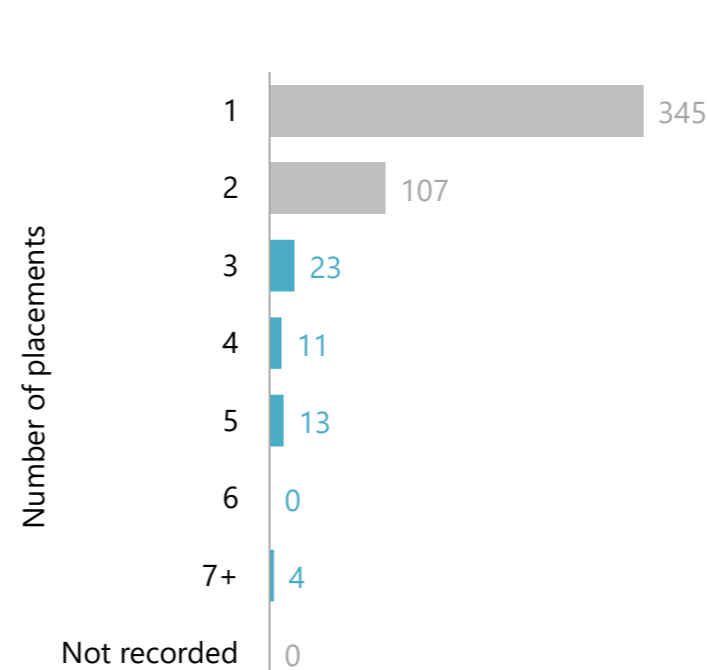
Snapshot 25/03/2025

CLA placements by type and provision

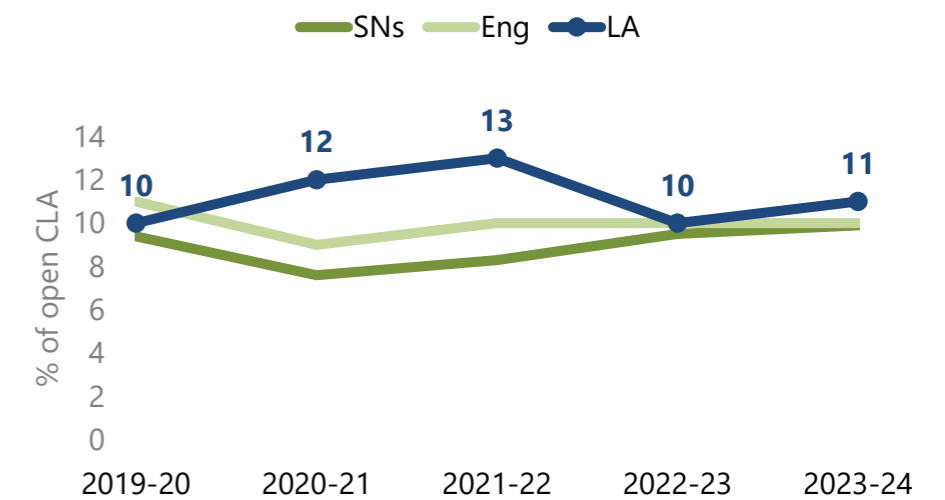


Placement type (open CLA)	Own LA	Private	Other	Total
Foster placement	218	100	37	355
Placed for adoption	0	0	8	8
Placed with parents	0	0	34	34
Independent living	0	0	0	0
Residential employment	0	0	0	0
Residential accommodation	1	16	0	17
Secure Children's Homes	0	0	1	1
Children's Homes	18	41	0	59
Residential Care Home	0	0	0	0
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	0	0
Family Centre	0	0	0	0
Young Offender Institution	0	0	4	4
Residential school	0	0	0	0
Other placements	5	19	1	25
Temporary placement	0	0	0	0
Total placements	242	176	85	503

Number of placements in the last 12 months



Comparing short term placement stability

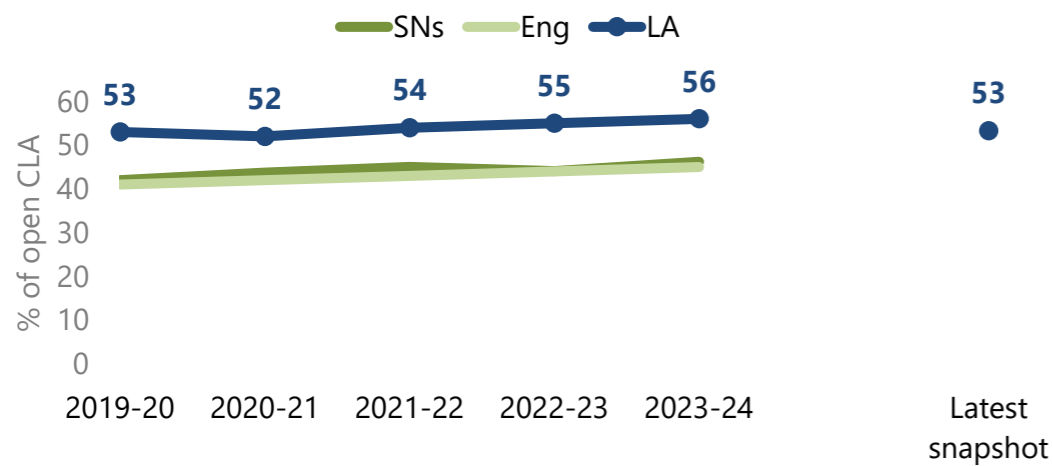


May include "status" changes as well as placements

Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present short-term stability alongside published statistics

Page 32

CLA placements out of borough



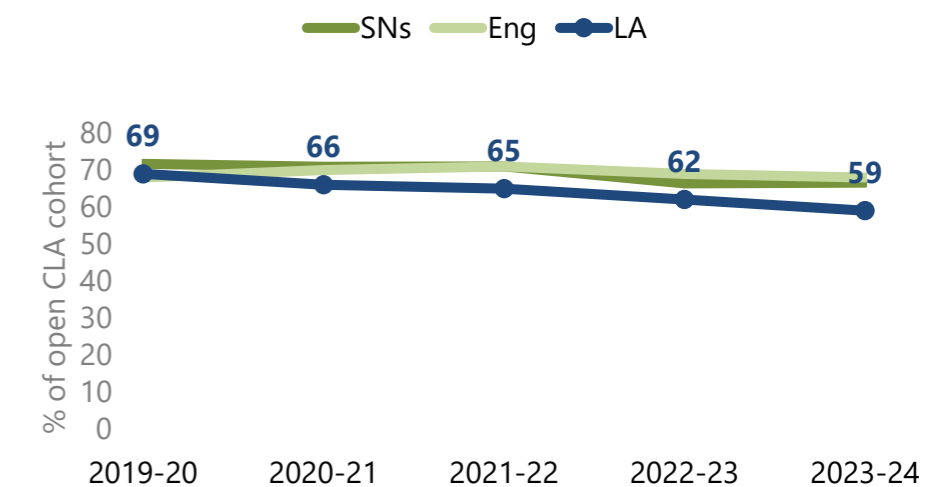
Duration of placements

Duration of latest placement for each current CLA aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2½ years or more



May include "status" changes as well as placements

Comparing long term placement stability



Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present long-term stability alongside published statistics

Children Looked After (CLA) health and missing/absent from placement

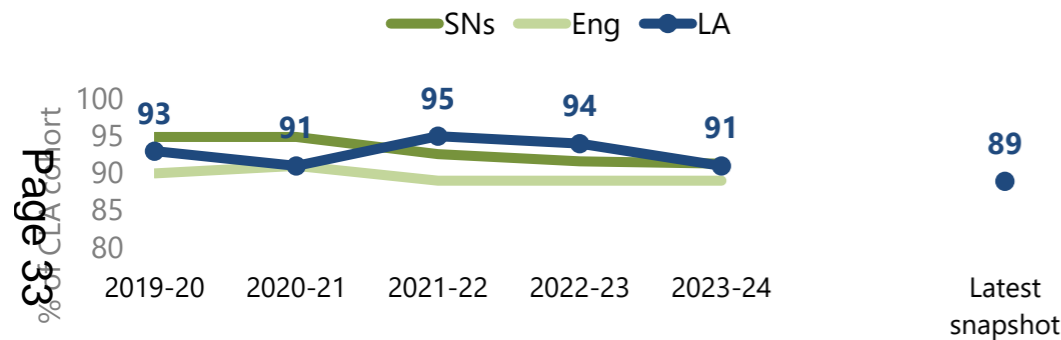
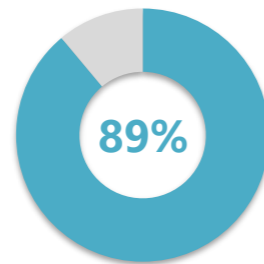
Snapshot 25/03/2025

Health

370 current open CLA looked after for at least 12 months

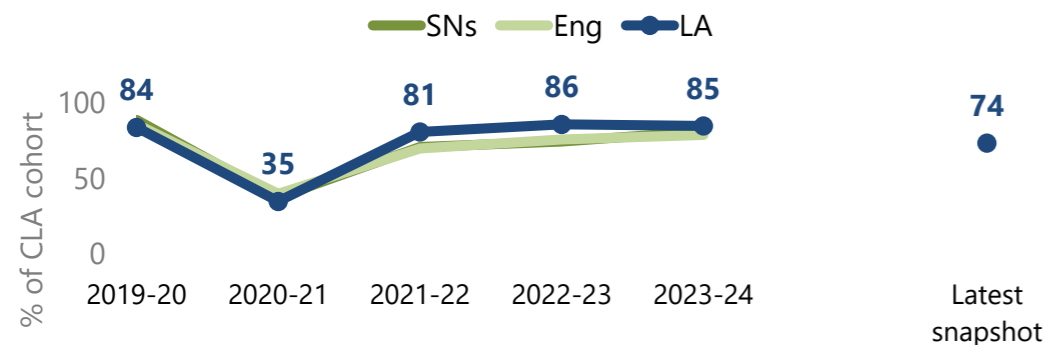
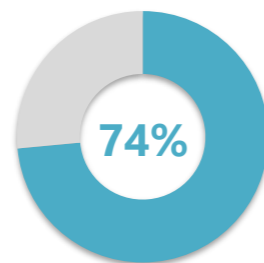
Health assessments

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months with an up to date health assessment (in the last 6 months for CLA aged under 5, and in the last 12 months for CLA aged 5-plus)



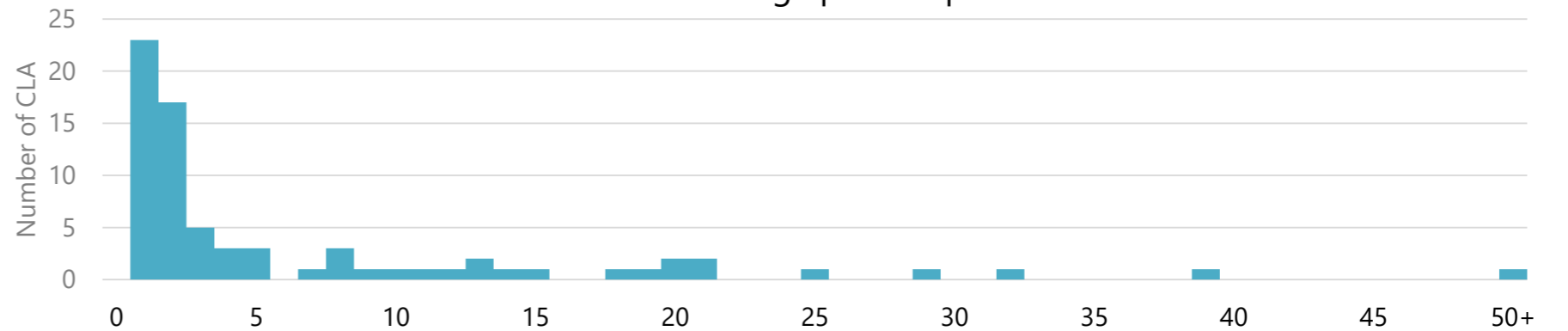
Dental checks

Current open CLA who have been looked after for at least 12 months who have had a dental check in the last 12 months.



Missing from placement

Number of missing episodes per CLA

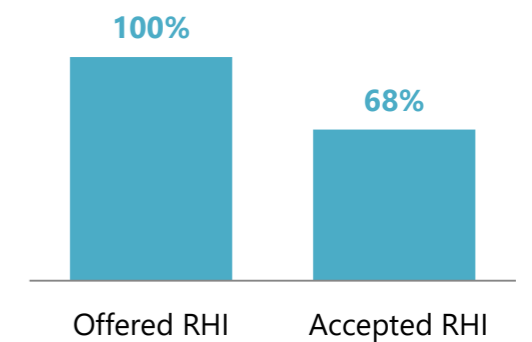


74 of 580 looked after children had a missing incident in the last 12 months

	Latest data	LA 23-24	SNs 23-24	Eng 23-24
Number of all CLA with a missing incident	74 of 580	83		
Percentage of all CLA with a missing incident	13%	12%	11%	11%
Total number of missing incidents for all CLA	544	431		
Average number of incidents per CLA who went missing	7.4	5.2	6.7	6.5

Missing incidents - return home interviews

	Latest data	
Missing children offered return interview	74 of 74	100%
Missing children not offered return interview	0 of 74	0%
Missing children return interview offer not recorded	0 of 74	0%
Missing children where return interview was n/a	0 of 74	0%



	Latest data	
Missing children accepted return interview	50 of 74	68%
Missing children not accepted return interview	20 of 74	27%
Missing children return interview acceptance not recorded	4 of 74	5%

Absent from placement

13 of 580 looked after children had an absent incident in the last 12 months

	Latest data	LA 23-24	SNs 23-24	Eng 23-24
Number of all CLA with an absent incident	13 of 580	c		
Percentage of all CLA with an absent incident	2%	c	2%	2%
Total number of absent incidents for all CLA	22	c		
Average number of incidents per CLA who were absent	1.7	c	0.8	4.0

Care leavers eligibility, PA allocation and pathway plans

Snapshot 25/03/2025

469 care leavers who have reached the threshold for receiving leaving care services

Care leavers by age and eligibility

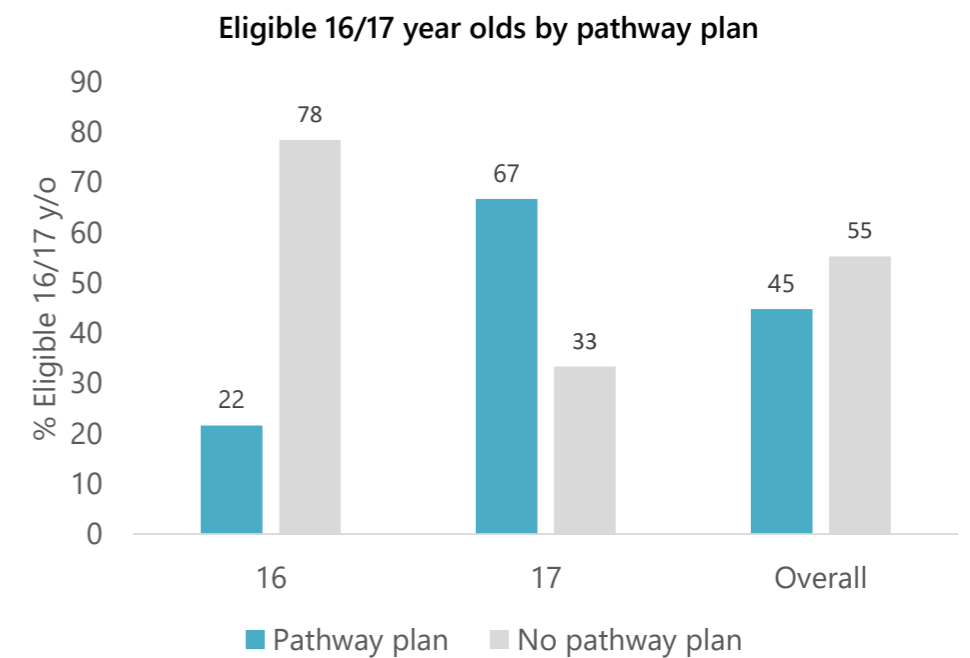
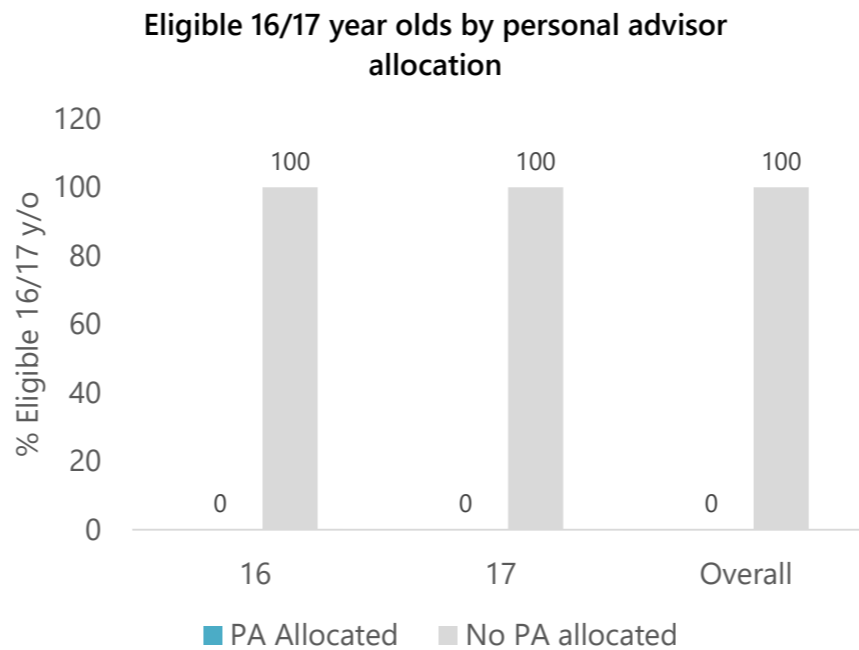
(where highlighted, please check eligibility/age criteria)

	Eligible	Relevant	Former Relevant	Qualifying	Other	Total
16	51	1	0	0	0	52
17	54	3	0	3	0	60
18	0	0	55	3	0	58
19	0	0	60	2	0	62
20	0	0	58	2	0	60
21	0	0	61	0	0	61
22	0	0	40	0	0	40
23	0	0	41	0	0	41
24	0	0	35	0	0	35
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	105	4	350	10	0	469

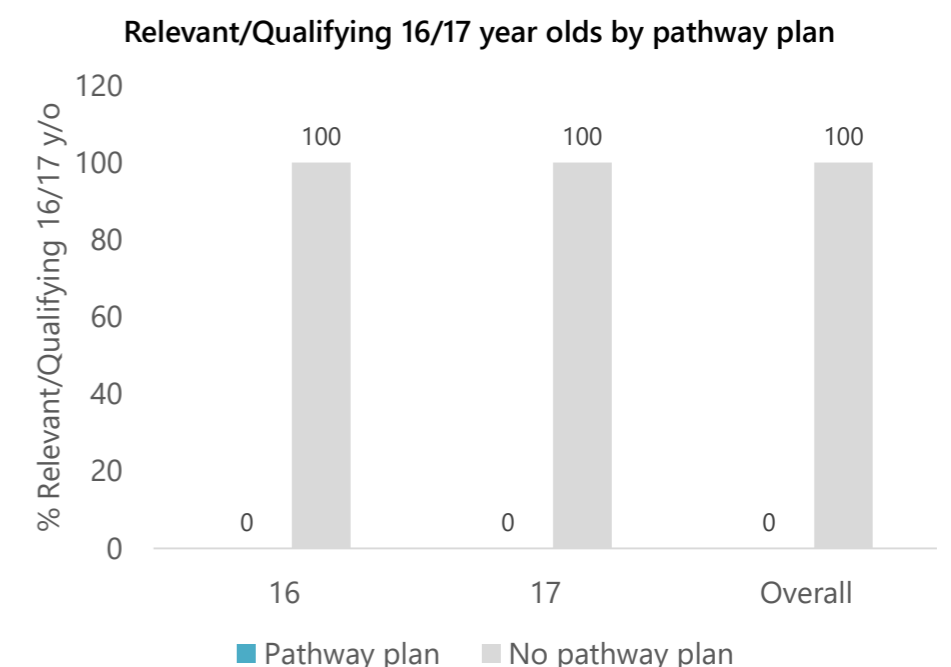
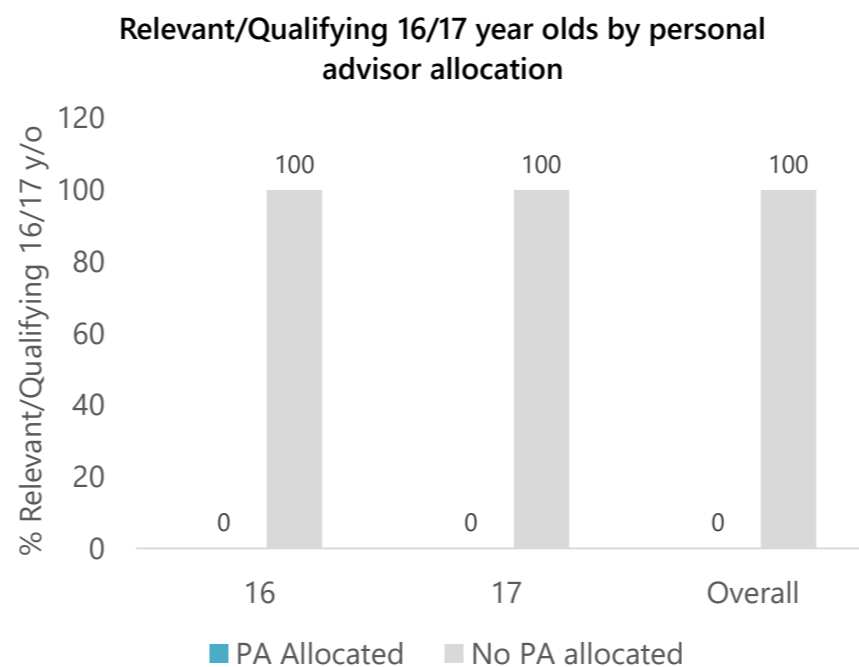
Care leaver eligibility summary (please refer to DfE guidance for full eligibility criteria)

Page 34 Eligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Age 16 or 17 ~ Has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since age 14 (can be multiple periods) ~ Currently looked after
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Age 16 or 17 ~ Has been looked after for at least 13 weeks since age 14 (can be multiple periods) ~ Looked after on or after their 16th birthday ~ No longer looked after
Former Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Aged between 18 and 25 ~ Previously an eligible or relevant child (see above definitions)
Qualifying (Annex A requires only those requesting and receiving a service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Aged between 16 and 21 (or 25 if in education) ~ Looked after on or after their 16th birthday ~ Not looked after for at least 13 weeks since age 14 or ~ privately fostered after the age of 16 but before the age of 18 or ~ were looked after prior to becoming subject to a SGO

Eligible Children (16/17 year olds) - comparing personal advisor allocation and pathway plans



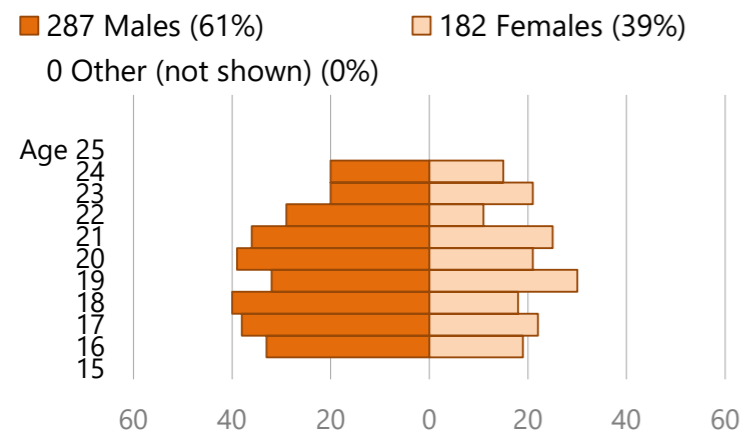
Relevant and Qualifying Children (16/17 year olds) - comparing personal advisor allocation and pathway plans



Care leavers demographics and UASC

Snapshot 25/03/2025

Age and sex



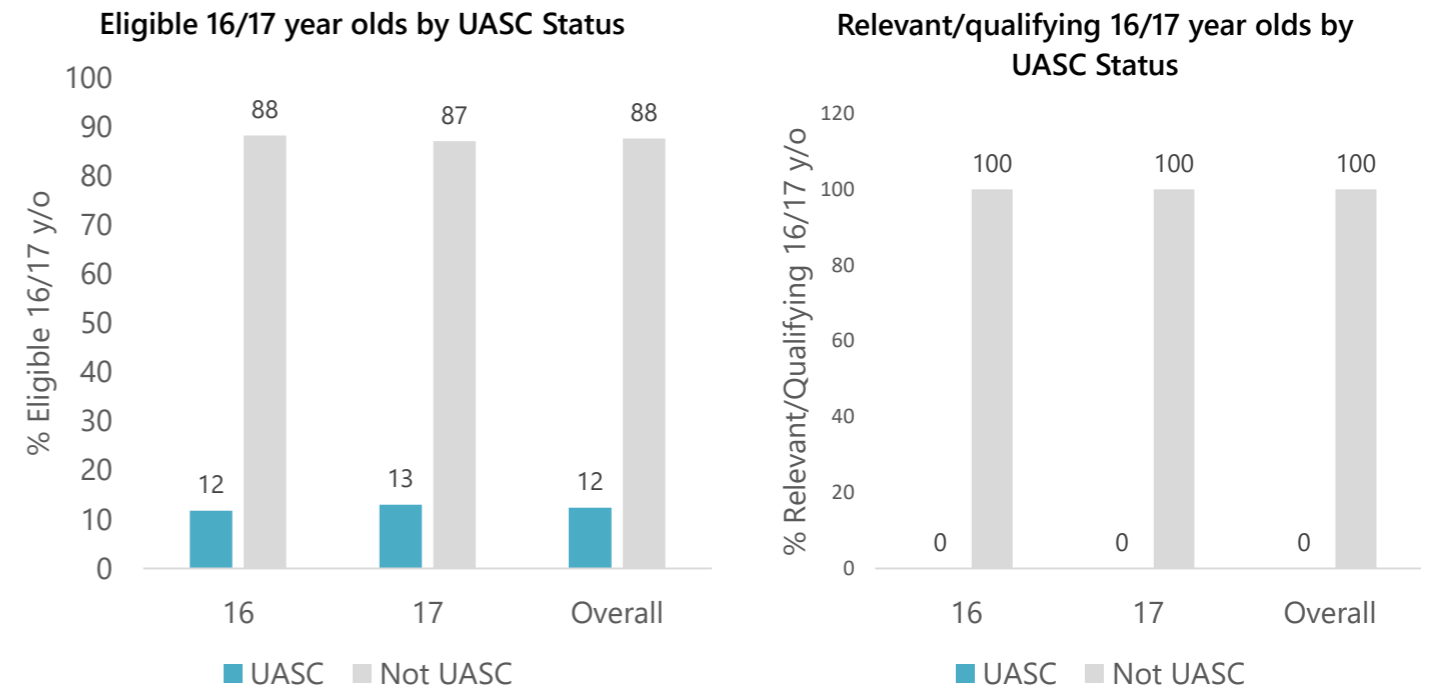
Ethnic background

White	75%
Mixed	7%
Asian or Asian British	5%
Black or black British	6%
Other ethnic group	6%
Not stated	0%
Not recorded	0%
#REF!	

44 (9%) care leavers with a disability

Other' includes not recorded, not stated, or neither M/F

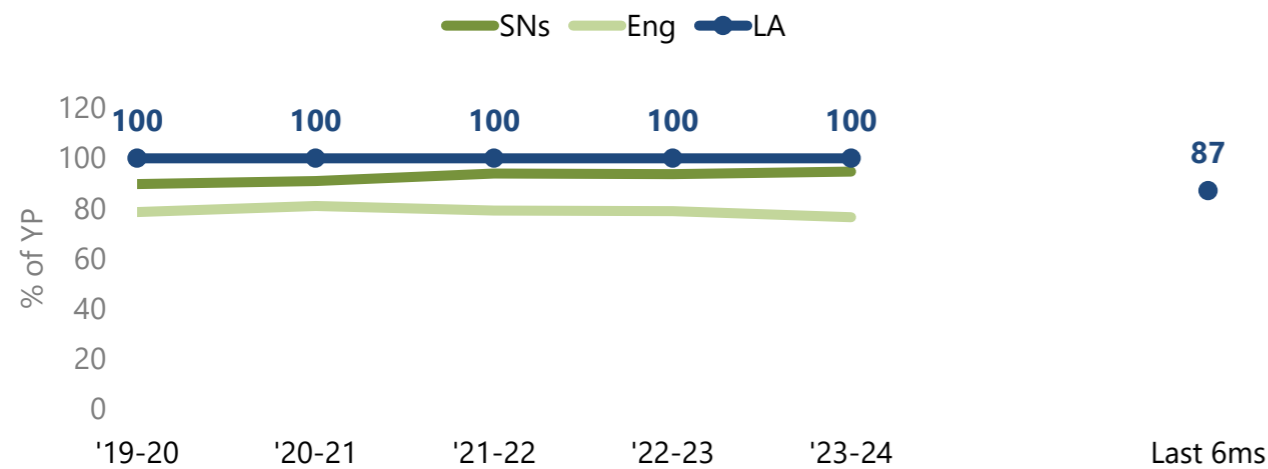
Care leavers - UASC/Former UASC (16/17 year olds)



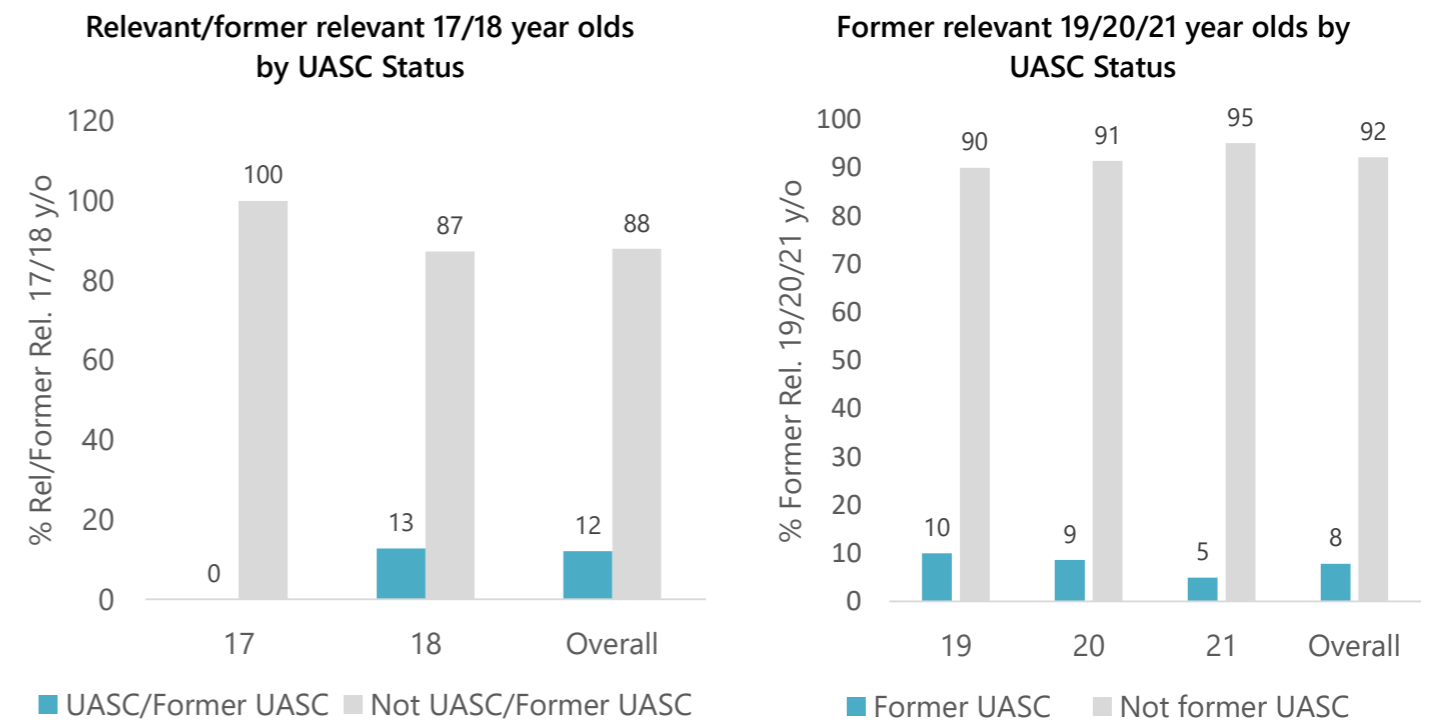
Remained in care until aged 18

YP who ceased to be looked after aged 16-plus who were looked after until their 18th birthday

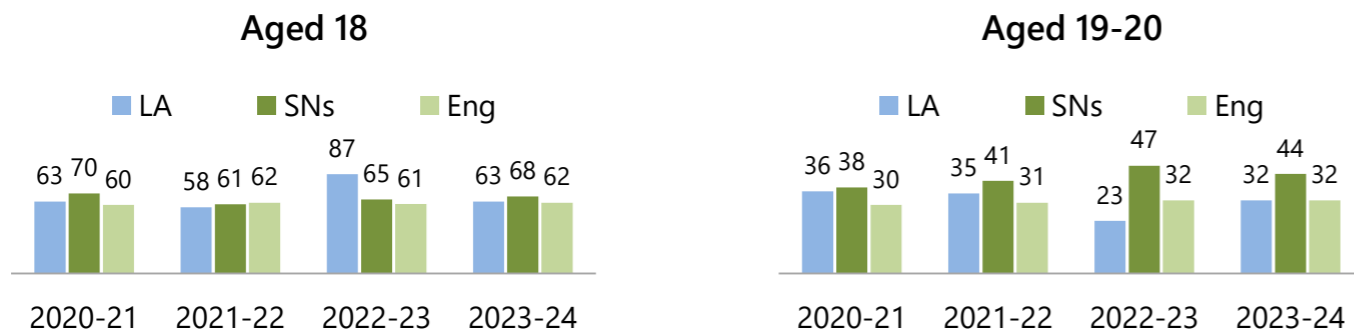
Page 35



Care leavers - UASC/Former UASC (17/18 & 19/20/21 year olds)



Remain with former foster carer

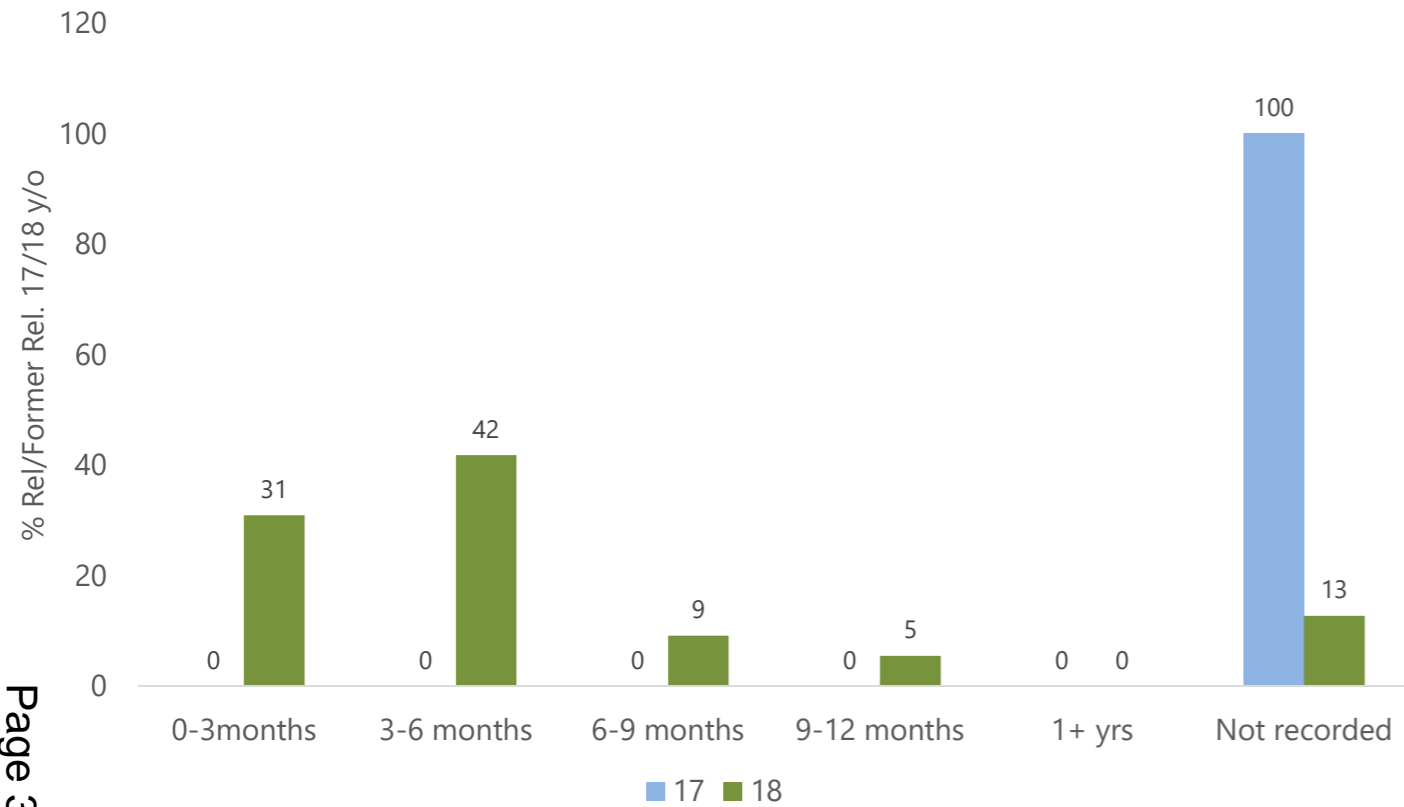


Care leavers pathway plan and contact timescales

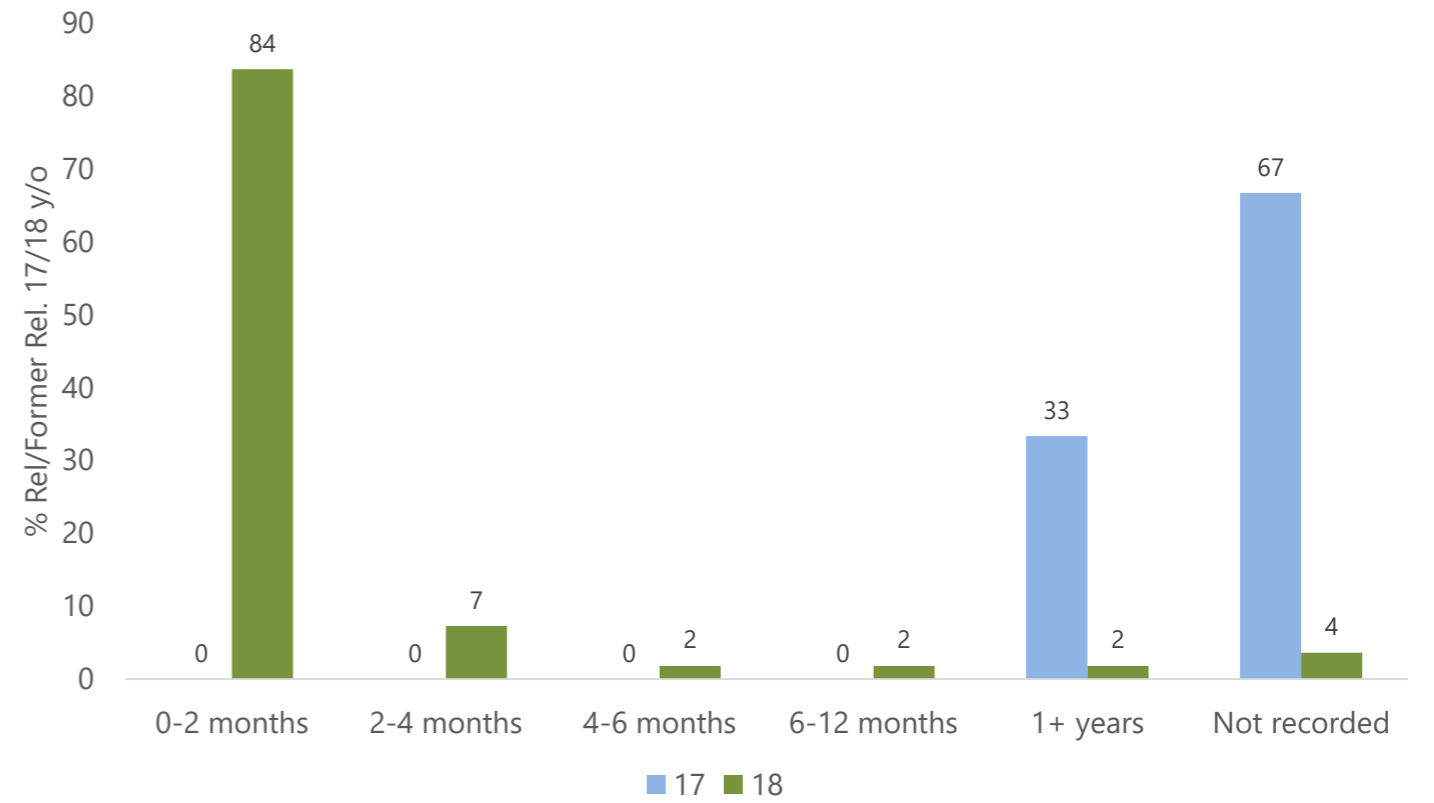
Snapshot 25/03/2025

Page 36

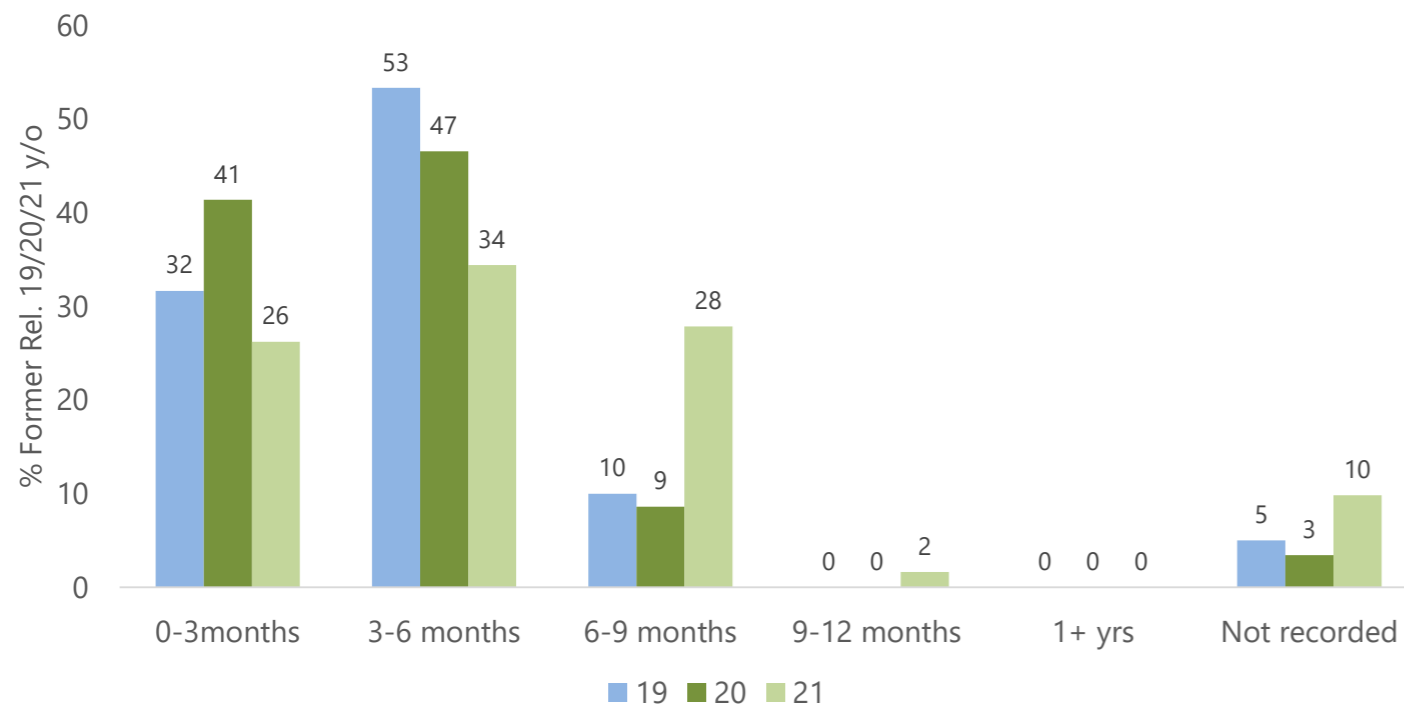
Pathway Plan last updated - 17/18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



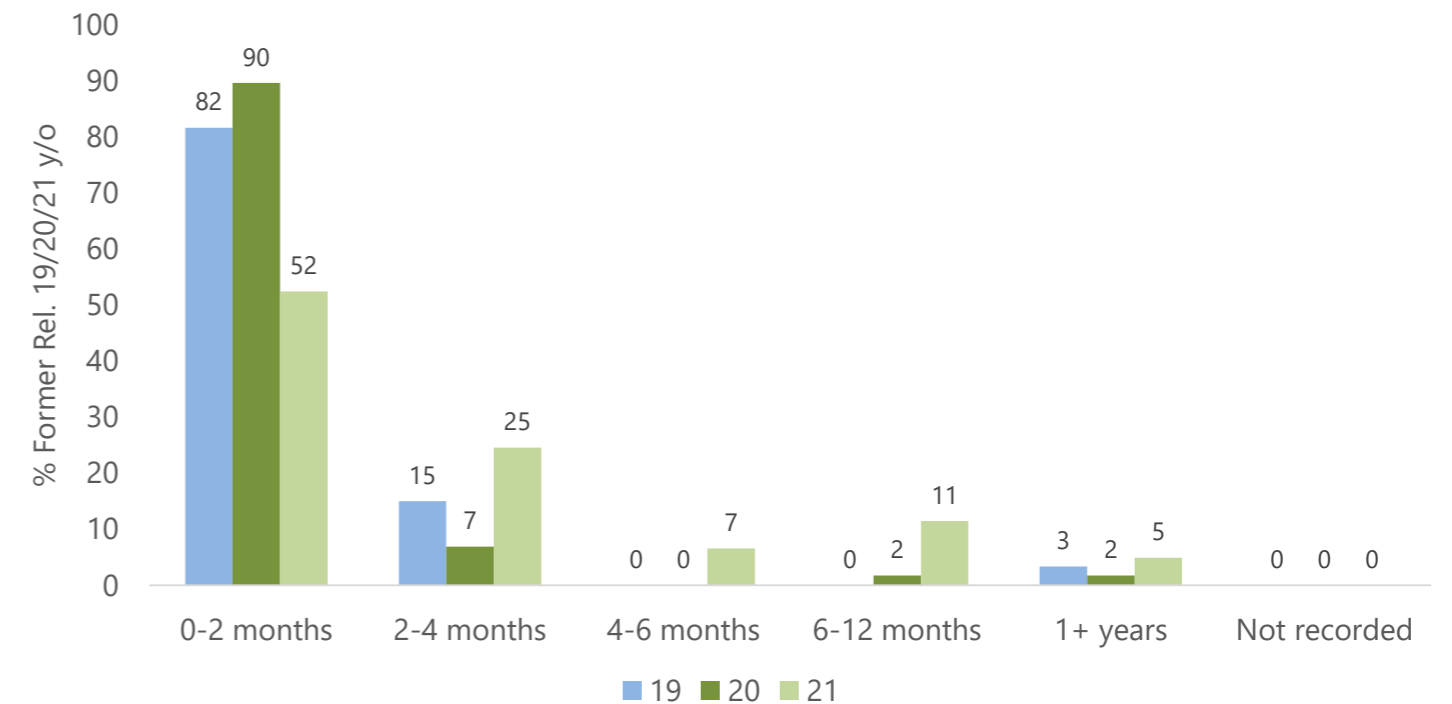
Time since last contact - 17/18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



Pathway Plan last updated 19/20/21 year olds (former relevant)

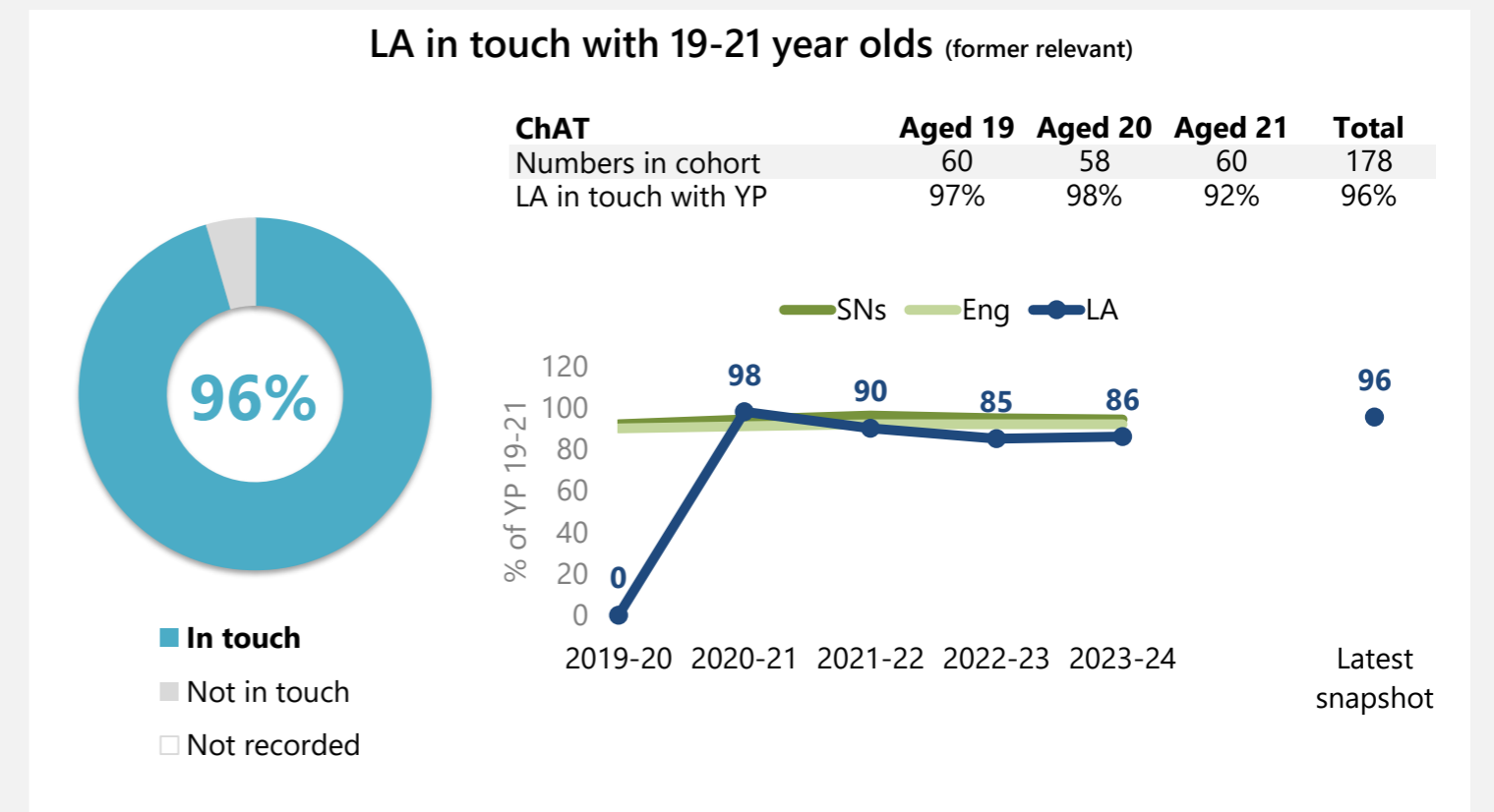
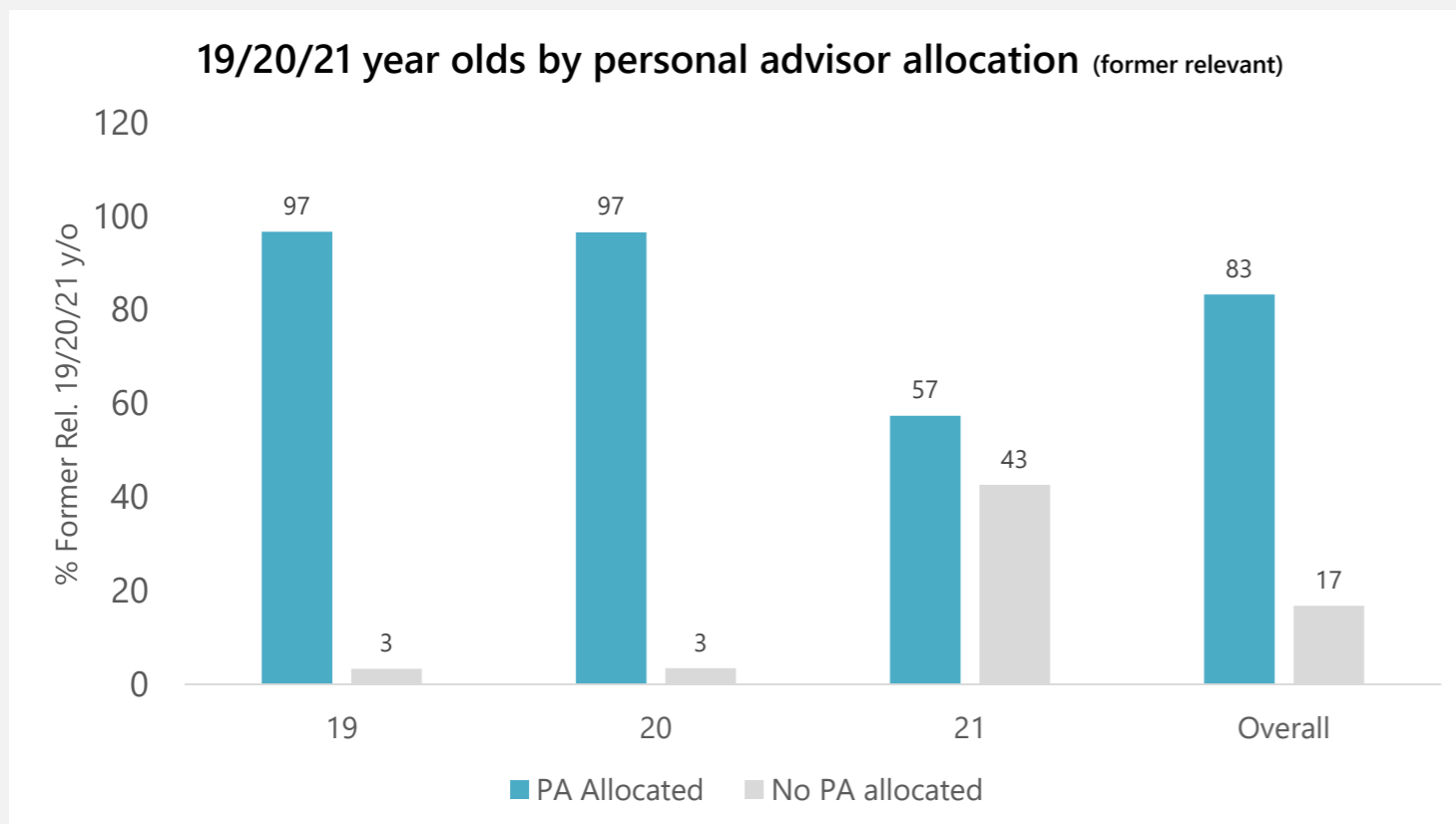
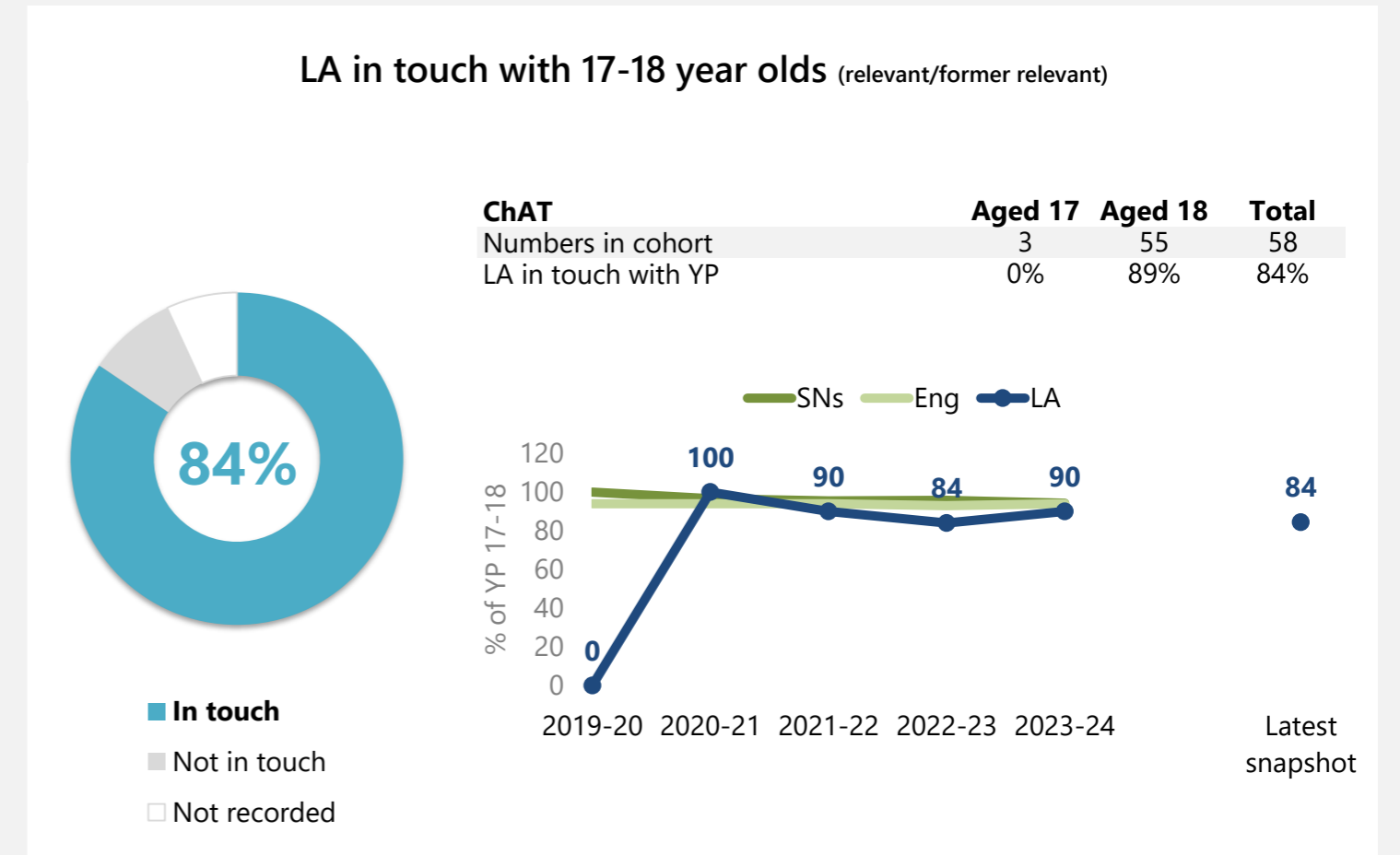
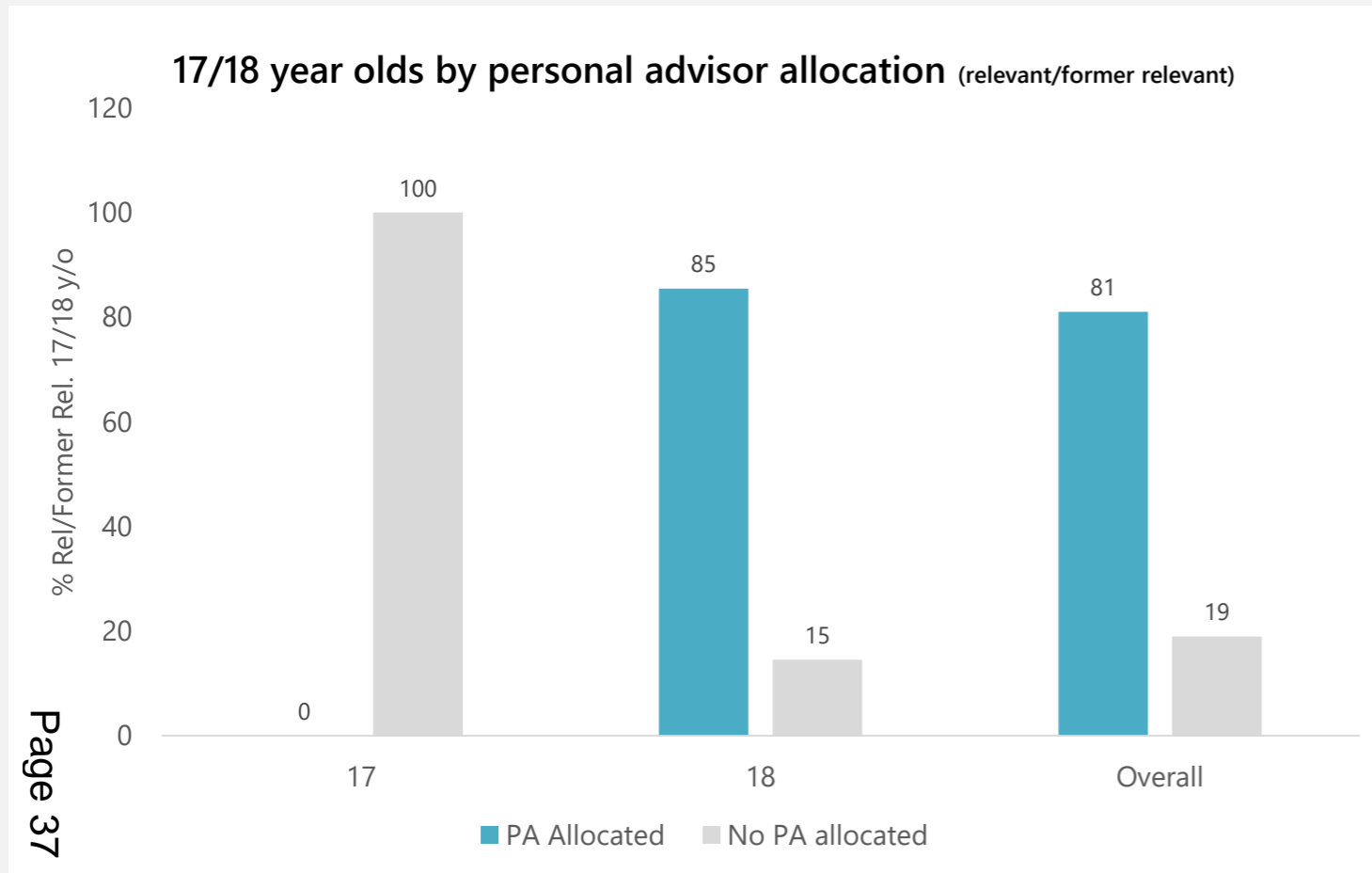


Time since last contact - 19/20/21 year olds (former relevant)



Care leavers PA allocation and in touch

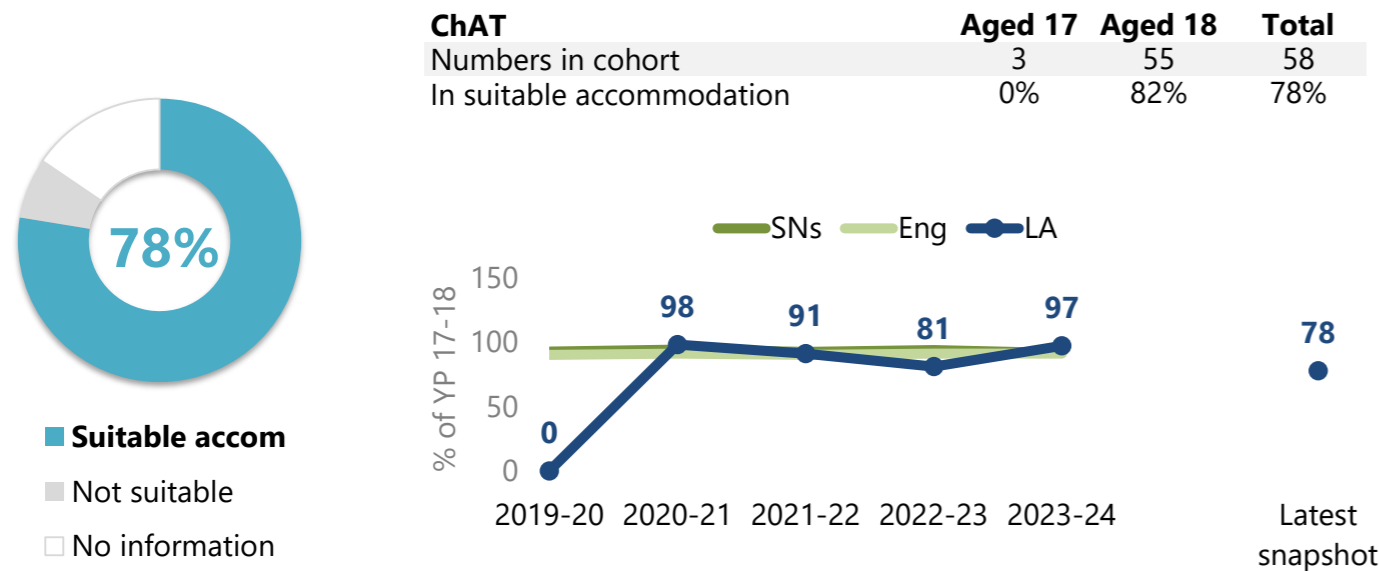
Snapshot 25/03/2025



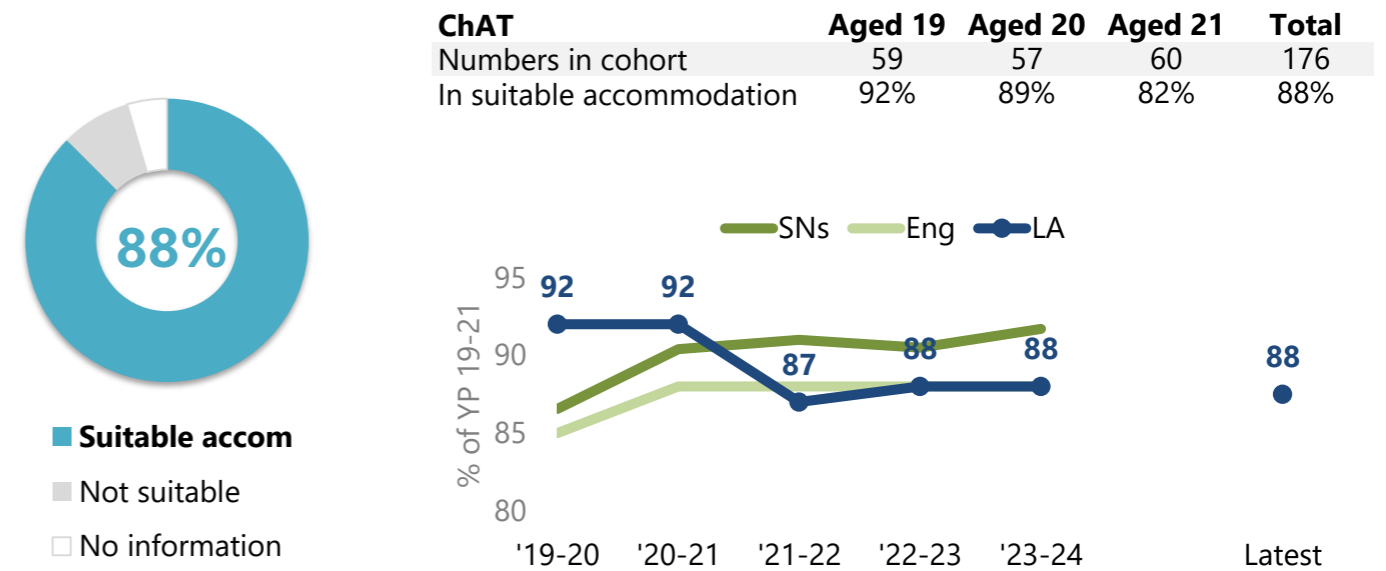
Care leavers accommodation suitability and type

Snapshot 25/03/2025

Accommodation suitability of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)

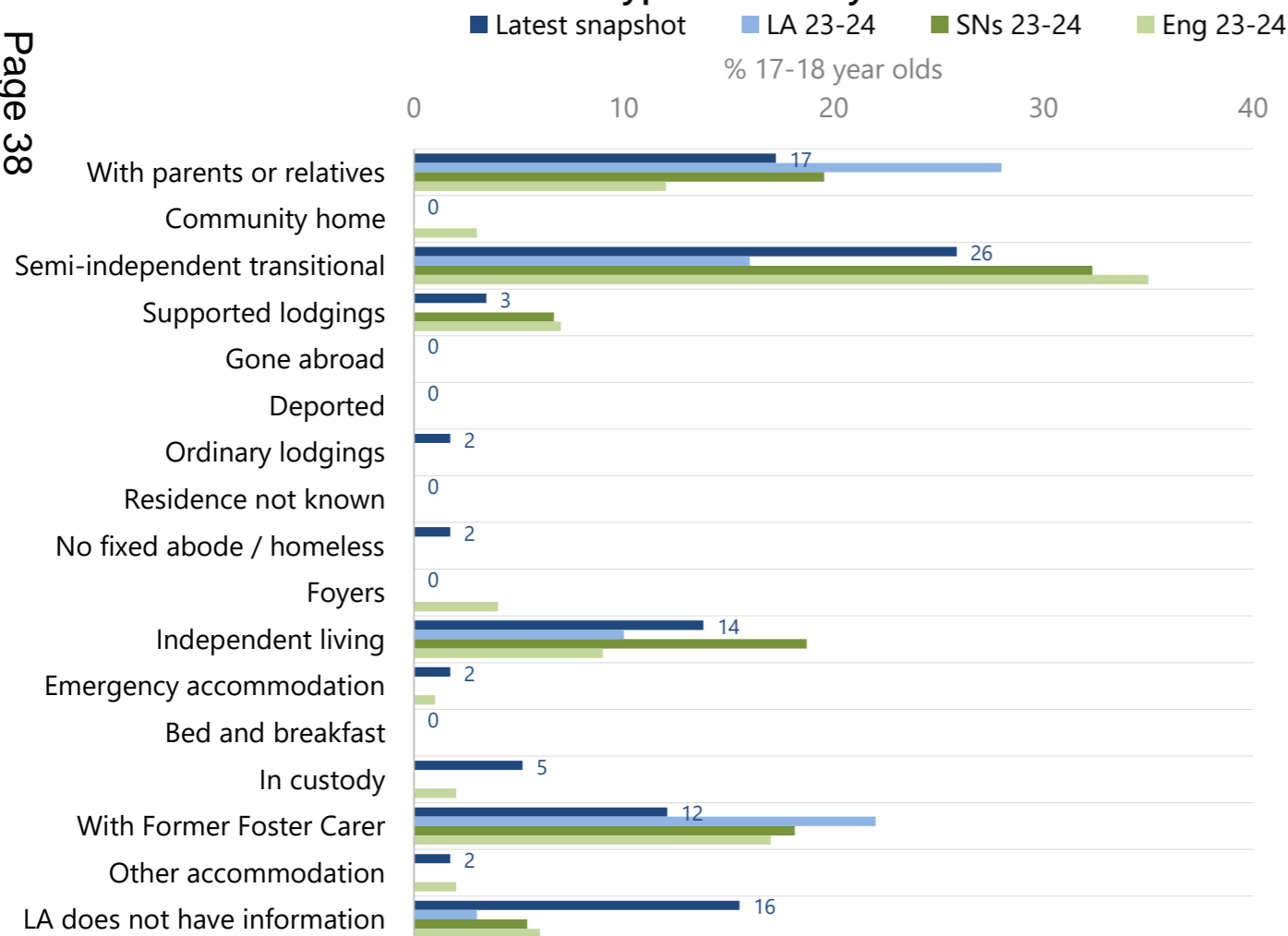


Accommodation suitability of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)

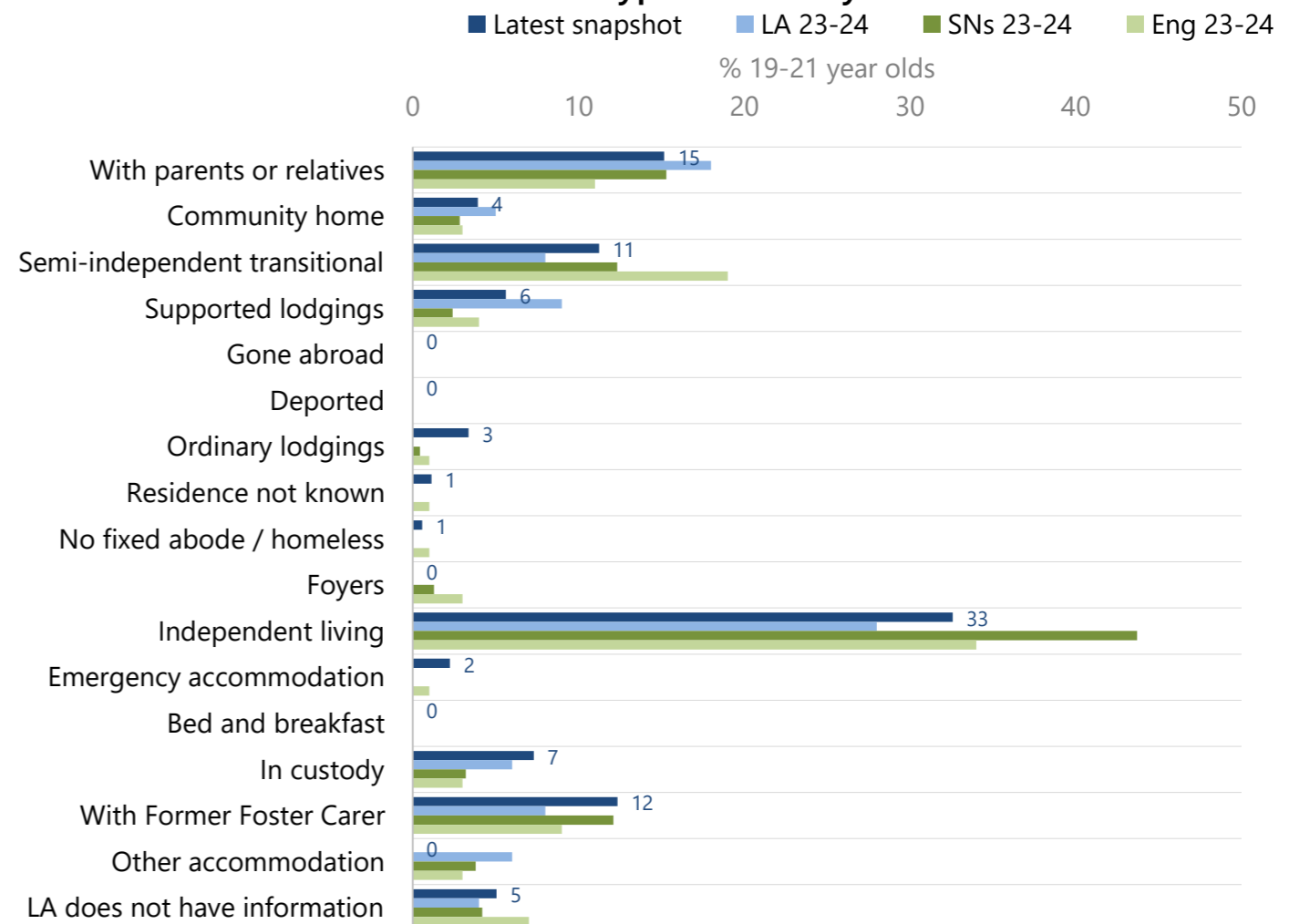


Accommodation types of 17-18 year olds

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Accommodation types of 19-21 year olds

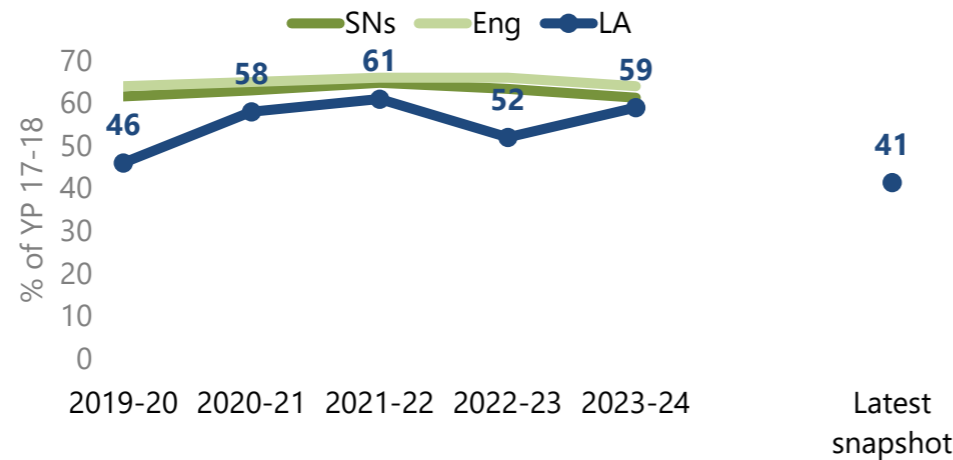
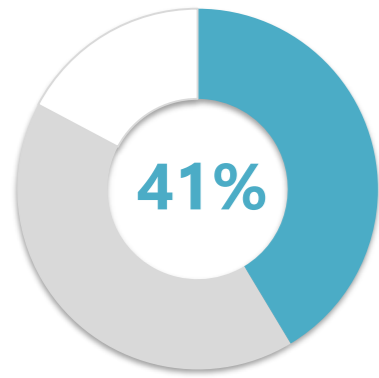


Care leavers activity (Education, Employment, or Training)

Snapshot 25/03/2025

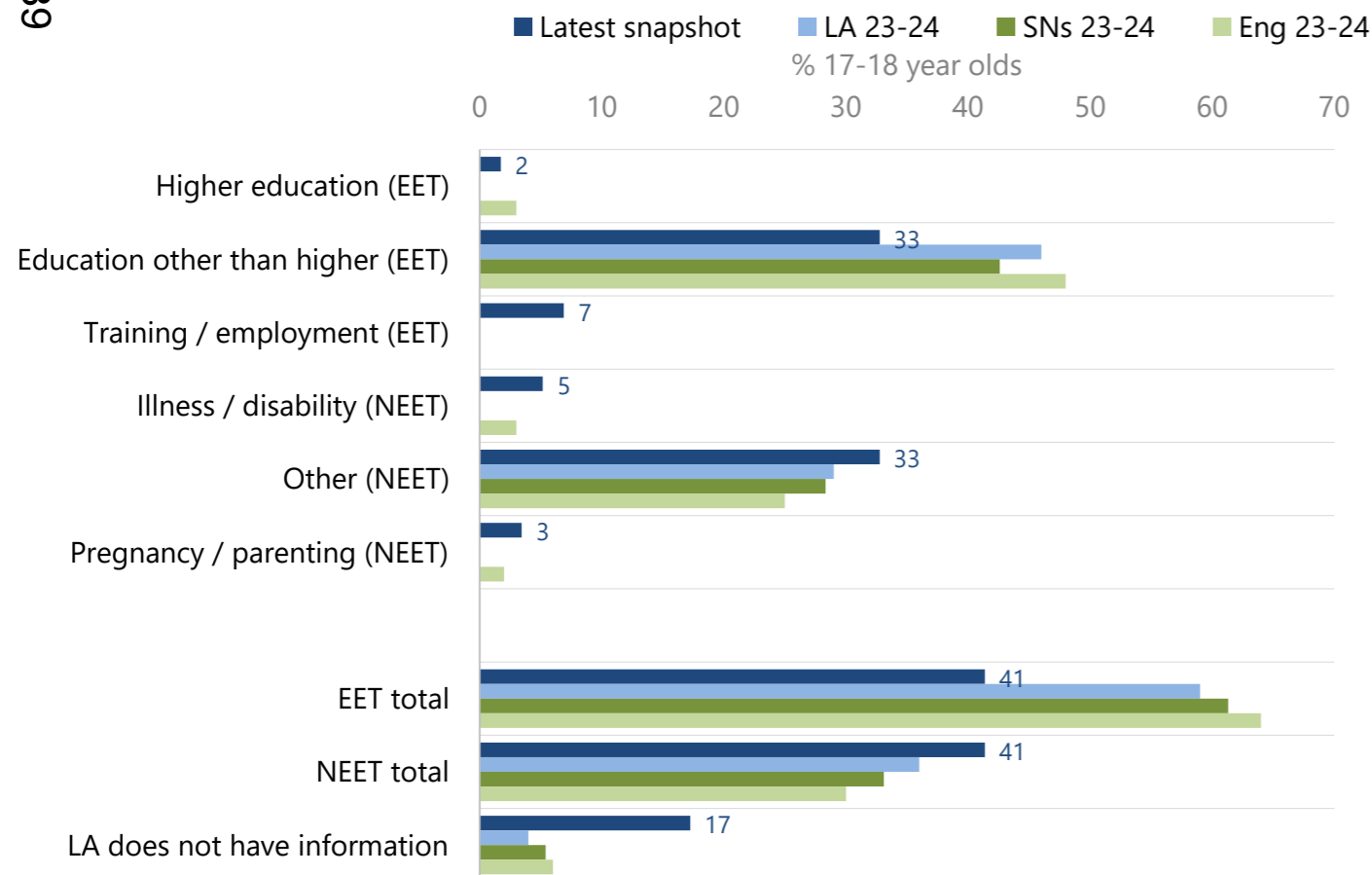
Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)

ChAT	Aged 17	Aged 18	Total
Numbers in cohort	3	55	58
In EET	0%	44%	41%



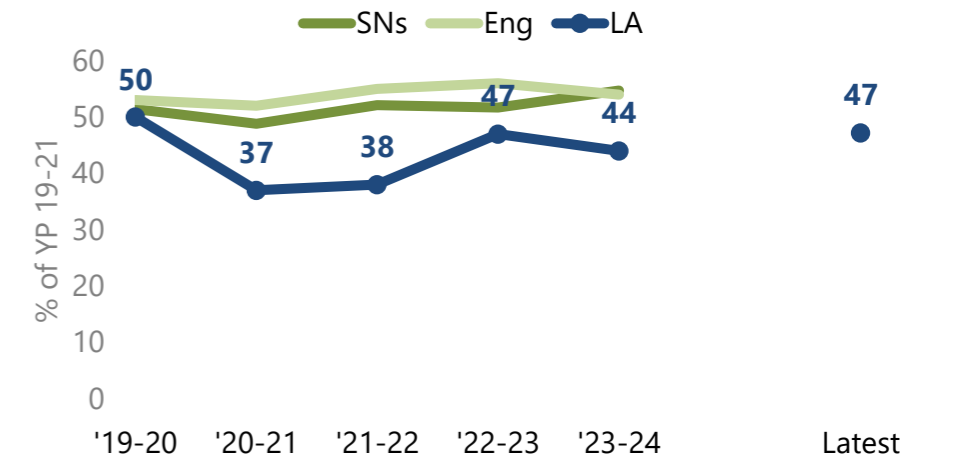
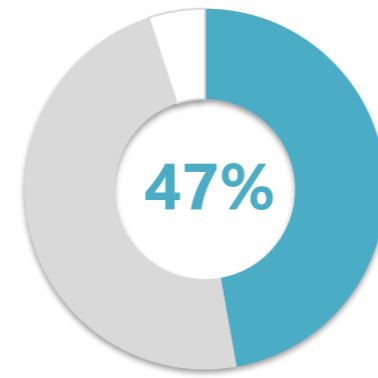
■ YP in EET ■ NEET
□ No info

Activity types of 17-18 year olds (relevant/former relevant)



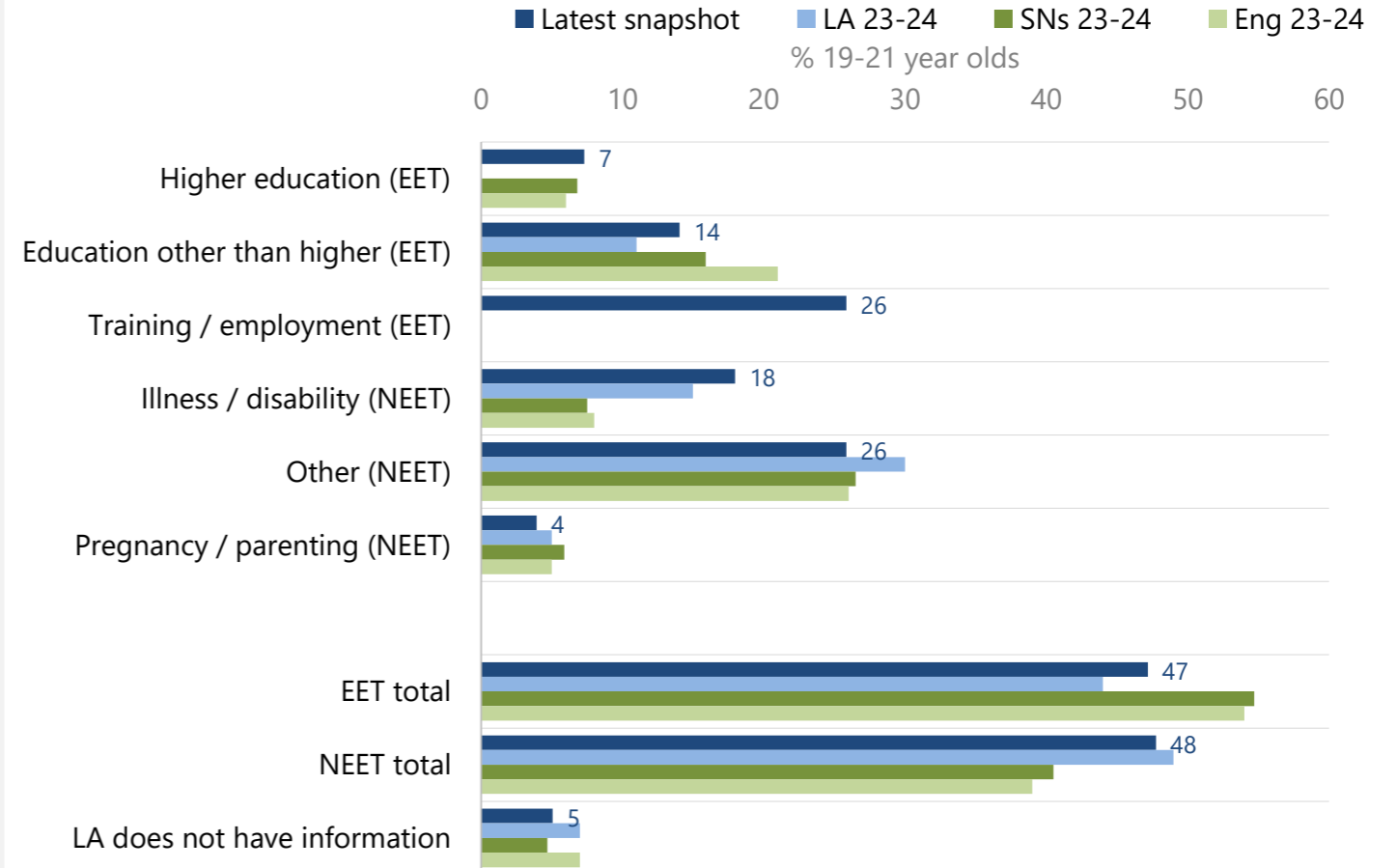
Education, Employment, or Training (EET) of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)

ChAT	Aged 19	Aged 20	Aged 21	Total
Numbers in cohort	60	58	60	178
In EET	60%	40%	42%	47%



■ YP in EET ■ NEET
□ No info

Activity types of 19-21 year olds (former relevant)



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Adoption Tees Valley
Bi-Annual report 1.4.24 2024- 30.9.24



1. Introduction

This report will provide performance information on adoption activity for the period of 1.4.24 -30.9.24. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) is the Regional Adoption Agency for the 5 Local Authorities of Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton.

The report will focus on an overview of adoption activity and performance for the first half year of 2024-25 (Q1 and Q2). The full year progress in all areas of the Adoption Agency was last reported in the Annual Report for 2023-24, and will be reported on again, in the full year Annual Report for this current year- 2024-25.

The performance data is that which has been reported to the ASGLB by all 5 Local Authorities, and by Adoption Tees Valley, and is now published information. Where a different time period is reported on, this will be noted.

2. Governance

The RAA is governed by a Board, which comprises the 5 Directors for Children's Services, or Assistant Directors of the 5 Local Authorities within the partnership. There is 1 non-Executive Director, who was recruited to the Board in 2023, and who is an adoptive parent who has adopted through ATV. There is a Virtual School Head who is now a member of the ATV Board. Plans are underway to recruit a strategic health partner representative on the Board.

The Service Manager for ATV attends all Board meetings and presents information to enable oversight of the performance of the RAA, strategic direction and operational practice. The Board has a role in being assured of the quality of adoption work in Adoption Tees Valley, and receives information on quality, outcomes, and proposed improvements.

Board meetings are held quarterly. Strategy, performance, finance, and overall delivery of the adoption service are considered at each Board meeting.

The Chair of the Board during this period was Sally Robinson Director of Children's Services, Hartlepool BC.

In each of the 5 LA's there is an Adoption Lead Officer who is responsible for ensuring that the RAA is delivering effective and high-quality adoption services for the children in its area. Adoption Leads meet with the Deputy Service Manager and Team Managers of ATV monthly.

Vision for ATV

In April 2024 the ATV Board came together for a leadership Day, considering key strategic ambitions for the Regional Adoption Agency, and its partner Local Authorities, regarding permanence planning for adoption.

The outcome of this full day was a new Vision for ATV, to take the agency through the next 3 years, embracing national and local priorities, and reflective of learning from children's adoptive placements which had ended.

The Vision is shared as part of the circulation of this Bi Annual Report.

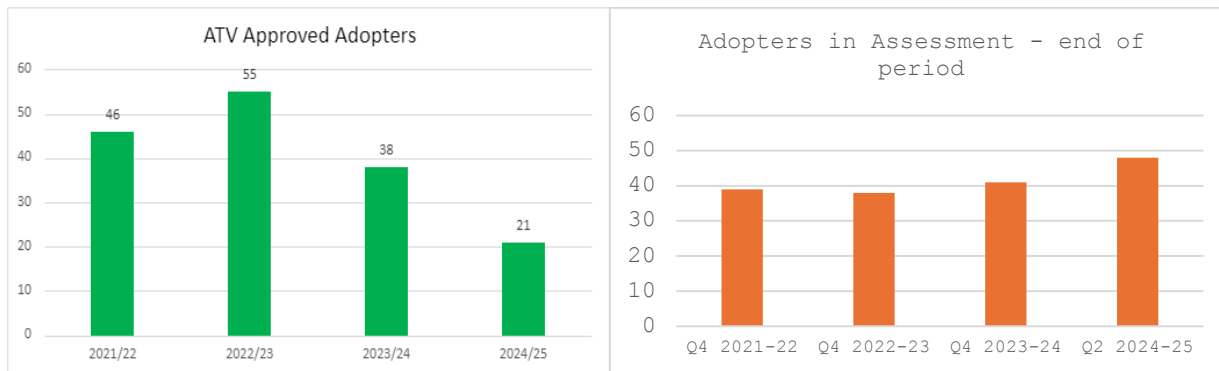
Adoption Activity and Performance

Adopter Approvals

Approvals have continued to remain stubbornly low for the first quarter of the year, however, are beginning to increase in the second quarter.

This low approval rate is reflective of wider national and regional decline in adopter approval numbers. In ATV there has been a review and restructure of the "front door" to provide a seamless response from initial enquiry to the conclusion of stage 1 checks for all applicants. Alongside this an improved marketing strategy has been implemented. Both measures have had the impact of increasing those people coming into the process and progressing through stage 1. At this stage it's unclear whether there is a national trend of more members of the public being in a state of readiness to consider adopting, or whether this is a localised impact.

At the end of the quarter there were 48 prospective adopters within the assessment process which is a record number for ATV, suggesting a change and upturn in the numbers, and a benefit of the new Enquiry team.

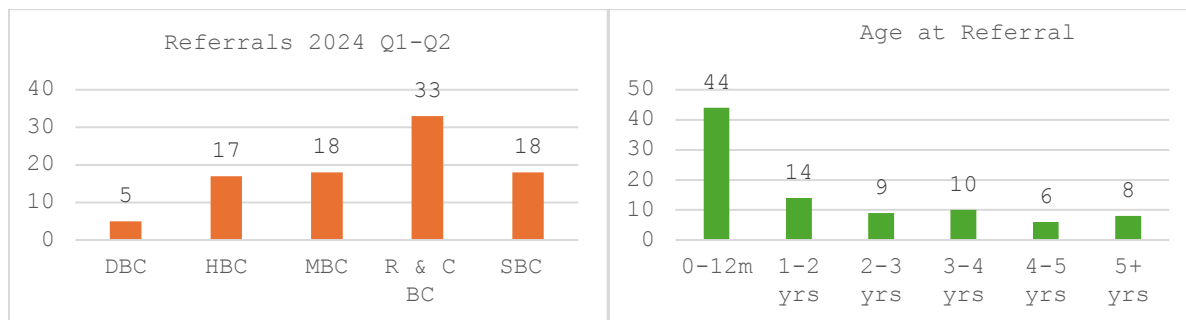


Referrals, matches and children placed for adoption

Each Local Authority will have a separate section for data later in this report.

The following is ATV overall data.

Referrals to ATV



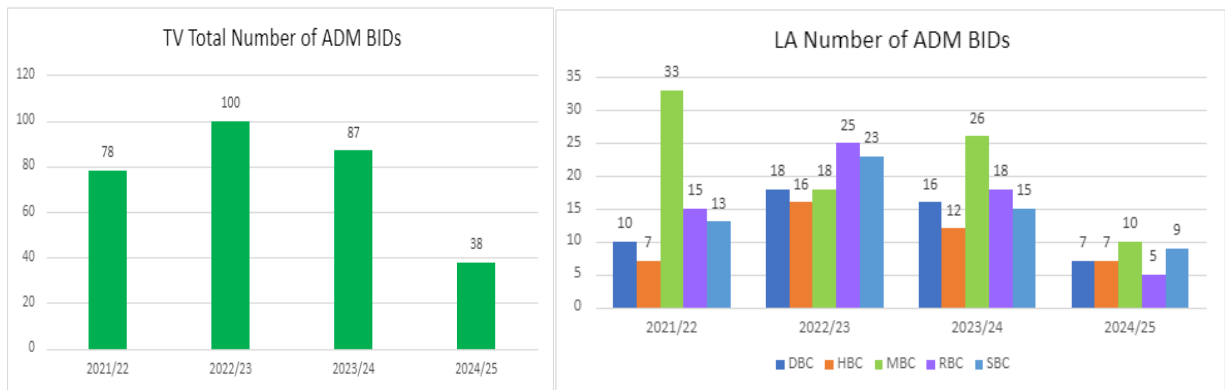
91 children were referred to ATV with a potential plan of adoption in Q1 and Q2, which is an increased rate of referral, with 138 being referred in total in 2023-24.

Of the children referred there were 10 sibling groups of 2, 1 sibling group of 3 and 1 sibling group of 4 referred.

At the time of writing 62 remain open to ATV with a potential adoption plan.

ADM Best Interests Decisions (ADM BID)

Over this period the rate of ADM best interests' decisions for children is lower than 2023-24 and is lower than in recent years. This means the Local Authorities are making fewer decisions that adoption is the permanence plan for the child.

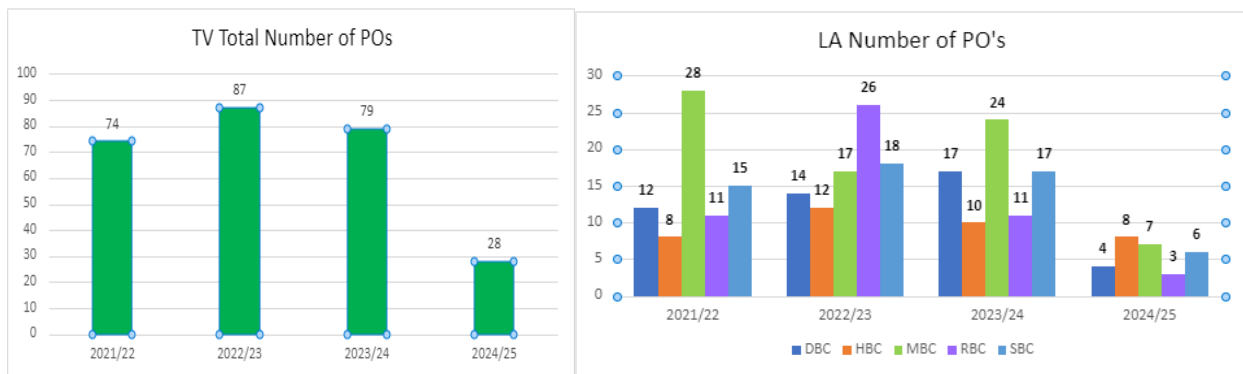


The charts show the numbers for previous full years and for the period Q1 and Q2 2024-25.

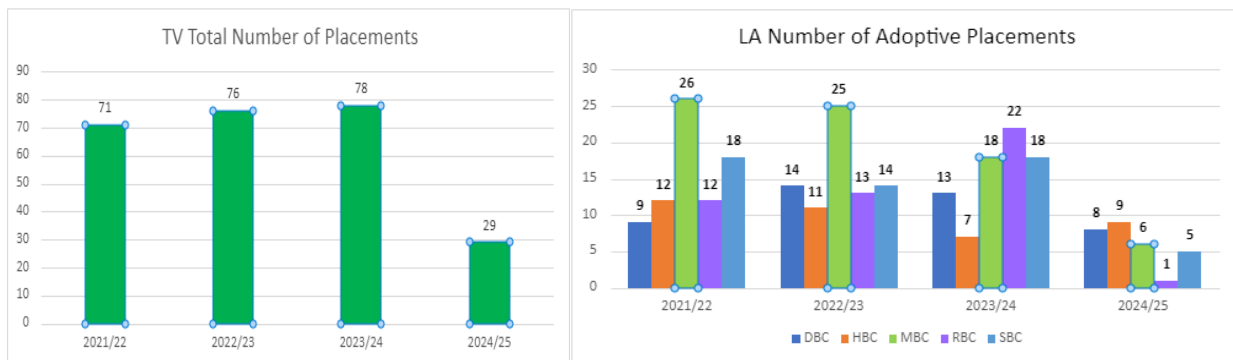
Darlington, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland show reduced numbers of ADM's compared with previous rates of ADM, in this period.

Placement Orders

The data shows an even greater drop in the numbers and rate of Placement Orders being granted. Hartlepool is the exception; however all of the 4 other Local Authorities are seeing a reduction in PO rates.



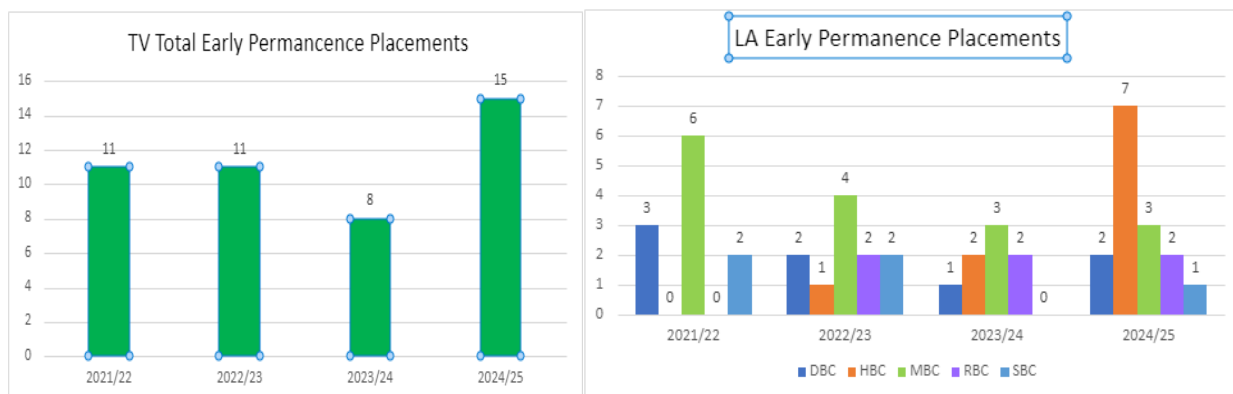
Placements of Children for Adoption



The numbers of children placed for adoption also shows a significant reduction, however, this is the number who are placed for adoption, under Adoption Agency Regulations (2005) which is a formal stage of the adoption plan for a child. Early permanence will be detailed below.

Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton show a significant drop in numbers of children placed for adoption in this period.

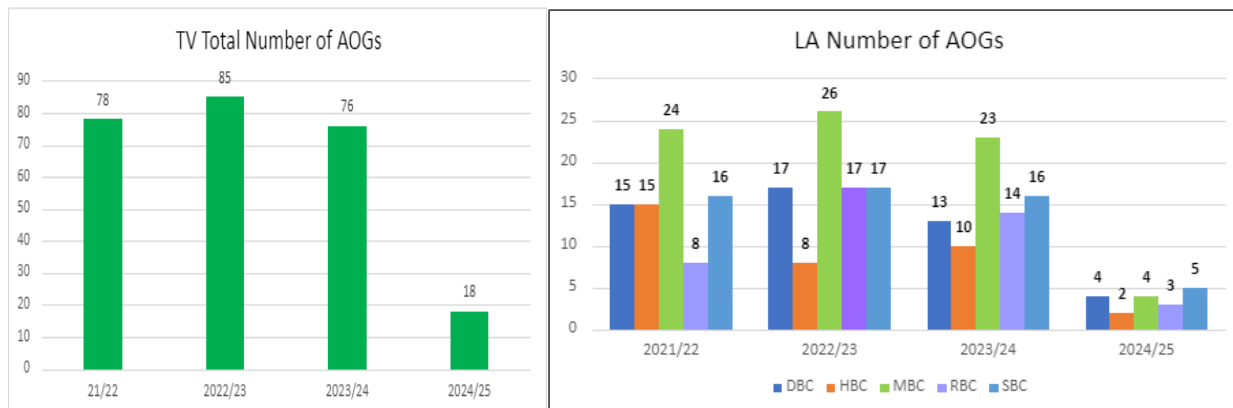
Early Permanence



ATV has had a focus on developing greater use of early permanence for children. The impact of the RAA and pan regional EP development work is now demonstrating a greater consideration of EP within this region. Hartlepool have significantly increased the numbers of children who are placed via early permanence, however all 5 Local Authorities have shown increased use of EP in care planning for children, which is very positive.

No children have been reunified with birth parents in this period.

Adoption Orders



The total number of children adopted in the period has reduced also within this period.

This is reflective of a reduction overall in numbers of children placed over the preceding years. Also, there were a high number of disrupted placements in 2023-24, and so not all children placed went on to have an adoption order.

Timeliness of Adoption

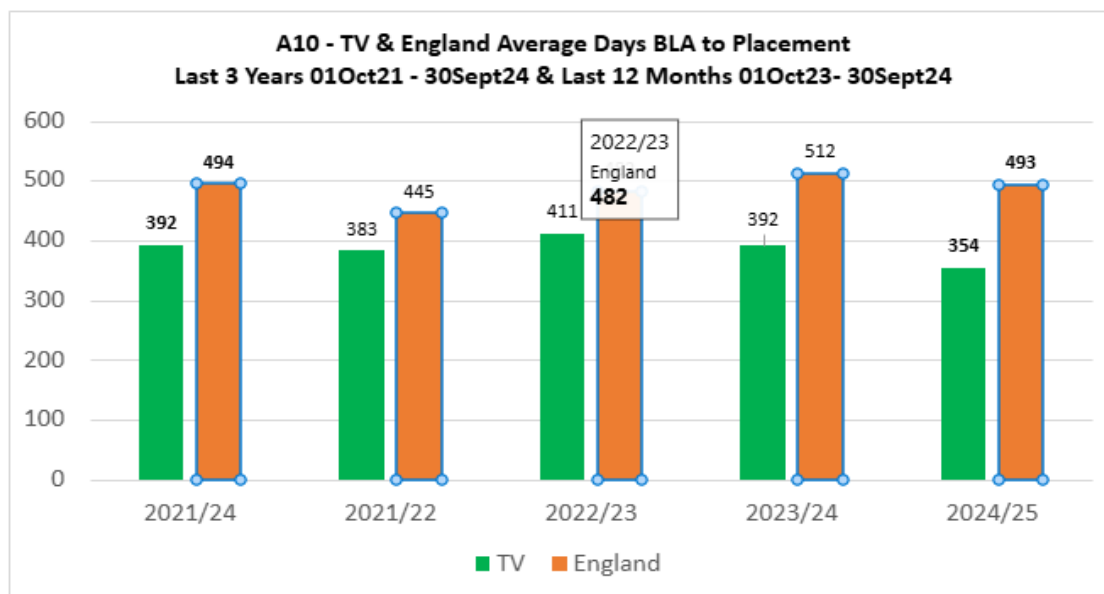
Timeliness is measured in 2 key ways- the date from which a child became a Child in Our care, to the date they moved in with their adoptive parents (A10) in days, and the time between the Court giving authority to place for adoption, the Placement Order (PO) to matching with adoptive parents (A2) in days.

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

A10

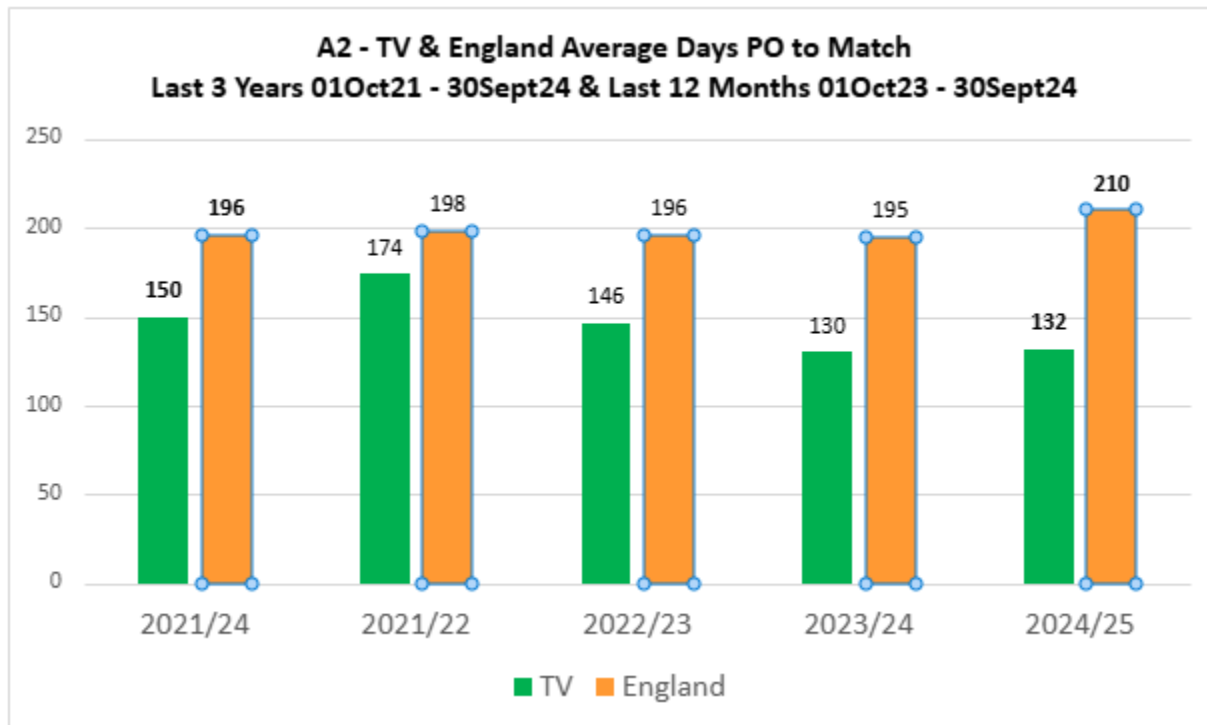


This graph shows the A10 timescales for Tees Valley as a whole over each of the past 3 years, and the 3-year average for 2021-24.

The graph gives the comparison with the England average timescales.

ATV is overall performing consistently well on timescales for children. The RAA is doing well compared with the Government expected timescales, and the England average. This indicates that overall, referrals to the RAA, care planning for adoption, timescales for PO, and family finding are effective.

A2



This graph shows that Tees valley overall is performing well against England average for Placement Order to match, and the overall figure has improved over recent years, with a slight upturn in this period.

The RAA has average figures slightly above the Government target timescale, however, is performing well compared with England average.

The sufficiency and availability of adoptive parents is a factor impacting on timescales in this region and nationally.

Individual local Authority data is provided in the following section.

Local Authority Performance

Darlington

	Q1- Q2 2024-25 (YTD)	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
AO's	4	13	6
Placements for Adoption	8	13	9
Early Permanence	2	1	0
PO	4	17	10
ADM	7	16	6
A10	419	458	365
A2	125	128	133
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%			15%
Disruptions	0	0	0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- Darlington has a strong reduction in numbers of children with a Placement Order within this period, compared with previous years.
- Darlington has increased its use of early permanence
- Darlington is showing good timeliness of placement for children.

Hartlepool

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
AO's	2	10	4
Placements for Adoption	9	7	4
Early Permanence	7	2	2
PO	8	10	4
ADM	7	12	4
A10	355	379	434
A2	76	110	171
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%			11%
Disruptions	0	0	0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- Adoption orders are comparatively low for this period, compared with previous years, however, reflect lower number of placements in 2023-24.
- Placements of children for adoption has increased significantly.
- Hartlepool has significantly increased its use of early permanence and care planning for early permanence for children. This is a positive practice development.
- The numbers of Placement Orders has increased.
- Timeliness for children is very good in Hartlepool, and well below the Government expected timescales.

Middlesbrough

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1-Q2 2023-24
AO's	4	23	14
Placements for Adoption	6	18	8
Early Permanence	3	3	0
PO	7	24	11
ADM	10	26	14
A10	281	352	420
A2	104	130	201
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%			9%
Disruptions	0		0

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- There is a significant drop in adoption activity for Middlesbrough in this period, compared with the previous year.
- ADM, PO and placement activity is reduced.
- Adoption orders are at a very low rate. The rate of placement had reduced in the previous year.
- Middlesbrough is making use of early permanence in care planning for children which is positive.
- Timeliness for children is very good and has improved.

Redcar and Cleveland

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1-Q2 2023-24
AO's	3	14	5
Placements for Adoption	1	22	15
Early Permanence	2	2	1
PO	3	11	7
ADM	5	18	9
A10	369	354	319
A2	145	128	140
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%			6%
Disruptions	0		6 + 2 interruptions

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- There has been a significant reduction in placements for adoption, with just one placement in the first 2 quarters of this year. This compared with 15 in the previous year.
- Placement orders and ADM decisions have also dropped significantly.
- Timeliness for children is good, however numbers are very low on which these figures are based. PO to match timescales are higher, however, again, the numbers are low, and therefore figures are less reliable.
- Redcar and Cleveland had an unusual and high numbers of placements which disrupted in the previous year. There have been no disruptions in this period.

Stockton

	Q1-Q2 2024-25	Full year 2023-24	Q1- Q2 2023-24
AO's	5	16	6
Placements for Adoption	5	18	9
Early Permanence	1	0	0
PO	6	17	9
ADM	9	15	6
A10	360	434	459
A2	175	148	540
Rate of Leaving Care by Adoption (Previous 12 months) England is 9%			9%
Disruptions	0	1	1

A10- The time from a child becoming a child in our care to moving in with adopters. Govt target is 426 days

A2- the time from the Placement order to being matched with adoptive parents. Govt target is 121 days

Both figures are based on children from the LA adopted within the previous 12 months.

- The numbers of children placed for adoption is at a lower rate, and PO are numbers are also at a lower rate. However, ADM decisions that adoption is the child's plan have increased on the previous year.
- Stockton continues to have a low use of early permanence, when care planning for children.
- Timeliness for children moving in to their adoptive placement has improved, which is positive. The timescales between the granting of a PO and matching a child with adopters is higher than government average.

Key Regional RAA Development in this period:

- The RAA has worked on a Vision, along with partners. See attached. The Vision reflects deep analysis of the previous year's disruptions, and also the modernizing adoption agenda, outlined through the Publication of the Public Law Working Group report into adoption (November 2024).
- Children's Voice is being heard in ATV and wider partners. The Young People's Voice and Influence Group have produced a film, called **Its My Voice**, which reflects their views about identity as adopted young people, and the wish to have control over their "story" within their school, community, and friendship groups. The group have been supported by ATV and by Blue cabin, a local Charity, to create the film. They have travelled to Leeds to share this within a network across Adoption England and are planning next steps for its wider sharing.
- The RAA has worked on developing and implementing a national data set for Adoption Support, which will be included in ILACS data sets moving forward. This has been considerable work, and we now have an embedded reporting mechanism in the CHARMS system. This means ATV can demonstrate the level of work with children and families to support them and will enable measuring and reporting on impact of that work in the future.
- The Adoption Support Workers are continuing to promote and develop their responsiveness to families where their child has an adoption plan. Direct support to help with Keeping In Touch correspondence is provided to many birth families, and the RAA is preparing for more direct Keep In Touch arrangements. The RAA is also planning towards safe digital exchange of correspondence without intervention, in line with national development.
- The RAA has implemented an Enquiry Team to manage all new contacts with people who may be interested in adoption. The "front door" is now managed by a small team of experienced social workers, who have capacity to dedicate follow up in shorter timescales, and are discussed the modernized approach to adoption, and early permanence from the outset. We believe that the evidence of increased enquiries, Registrations of interest and increased early permanence is reflective of significant work to embed this approach from the outset with all enquirers.

- The RAA is progressing an Adopter Pathway which will more clearly set out the supports, training and access to services which will be available for all adoptive parents.

Pan Regional Working

There has been a continued increase in pan regional working together in the North East and Cumbria, enabled through opportunity for additional funding to test out improvement projects in key areas of the development strategy, which is linked to the Adoption England Strategy 2024-27.

Adoption Tees Valley has benefited from pan regional working, which has strengthened practice, and brought positive impact to children and families.

The key development projects in place, or underway, at the end of this period are:

- ***Pan Regional early Permanence Project***

The project has been of 3 years duration and has been funded through £330,000 investment funding across the region to strengthen practice and increase the numbers of children who have access to an early permanence placement. The project as a whole has increased the numbers of children accessing EP by 44% across the region, with ATV seeing a significant rise within this year. The structure and process for early permanence is better understood across all stakeholders, and there is now one unified set of procedures, and processes. Additionally, preparation training across the region is harmonized and within the ATV region the fees for EP carers have also been harmonized as part of a national pilot. The project will conclude in March 2025, however, it is planned to continue the networking across the region, in order to sustain the improvements, and continue to address sufficiency of carers.

It is also planned to include a new Hope Box © pilot for children and birth parents as part of the next phase of working together. Early discussions have taken place with Adoption England and the University of Lancaster.

- ***Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service***

MDASS is now fully staffed and is a pan regional specialist adoption support service for adopted children and adoptive parents in the region. It is a 2-year

project, with funding extending into July 2025. Its unique strategic and operational delivery model incorporates a partnership between the 3 Regional Adoption Agencies, including ATV, and the Integrated Care Board (NHS). The funding achieved was £960,000 and the ambition is to enable the delivery of this specialist adoption support service, fully from within ASF funding as a long-term goal.

The service includes 2 dedicated clinical psychologists; speech and language therapist; occupational therapist; consultant social workers; service manager; business support.

The service has now started to deliver on specialist assessments, and therapeutic consultations and therapy, for children and families referred. The partnership with health is enabling more focus on how adopted children can access the adoption support assessments and services they need, within a shorter timescale, to help meet needs and support families. It is early days for the service, however, there is already planning to develop and secure more funding to enable a realistic timescale to get the service embedded and achieving its objectives.

- ***Commissioning Support Project***

Adoption England has invited RAA's to develop commissioning expertise and outcomes, through dedicated support to small commissioning projects.

ATV has partnered with Adopt Coast to Coast and Adopt North East to identify shared gaps and needs in relation to adoption support services. The identified gap is in peer support, and a small project is in process to develop a peer support model for adoptive families, which will be funded in the long term through the Adoption Support Fund, as it will meet criteria. The plan is to use learning from Adoption East Partnership to develop an Adopter Hub, which will have a central experienced "Support Adopter" to facilitate exchange of support through the peer to peer Hub.

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Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2023/24

Date: 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024

Author: Carrie McGarry, Gail Johnson & Gemma Maile,
Review & Development Management Team



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1. Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 This report is a statutory requirement under *Section 7, paragraph 11 of the IRO Handbook*, which sets out that the manager of the IRO Service must provide an annual report on the delivery of the IRO Service, which can then be scrutinised by members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It provides information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for Cared for children and young people, and young people leaving care.
- 1.2 In Middlesbrough, the IROs have a dual role and therefore this report includes consideration of those children and young people subject to Child Protection Planning as well as Cared for children and young people.

2. Reporting period

- 2.1 This report covers the period from the 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. It provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).
- 2.2 Due to no annual report being available for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 some data for the 22/23 period is included to allow for trend analysis and comparison.
- 2.3 It should be noted that some of the data sets may vary slightly from those published by Children's Social Care due to minor variations in the timeframe for data capture.

3. Legal Context and Statutory Function of the Independent Reviewing Officer

- 3.1 The appointment of an IRO is a statutory requirement of the Local Authority. The statutory duties of the IRO are set out in Section 25B (1) Children Act 1989 which are to: -
- 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 Care Planning Regulations.
- 3.2 There are two clear and separate aspects of the function of an IRO:
- Chairing the child's review; and
 - Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.
- 3.3 The IRO handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of Local Authorities in establishing an effective IRO service.
- 3.4 In summary the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including: -
- Promoting the voice of the child.
 - Ensuring that plans for Cared for children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs.

- Making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one.
- Offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for Cared for children and the delivery of services to them.
- Monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands.

Source: IRO Handbook paragraph 2.4

4. Local context

- 4.1 As a Corporate Parent, Middlesbrough Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people achieve their best possible outcomes whilst in our care. It is acknowledged that wherever possible children should be Cared for either within their own family or networks and that it is their own family and networks that are best placed to provide and sustain safety planning to mitigate risk. However, when it is felt that this is not a safe or suitable option for a child or young person they are helped to find a long-term permanent home.
- 4.2 All IROs within Middlesbrough are employed in a dual role. In addition to being Independent Reviewing Officers for Cared for children and young people, they also have responsibility for the role of Independent Chair at Child Protection Conferences.
- 4.3 The benefit of combining the two roles means that there is a greater level of consistency and oversight for those children and young people who transition from Child Protection and become Cared for children. These children and young people can then benefit from continued relationships with Independent Reviewing Officers who know them to support improved outcomes for them irrespective of a child's status.

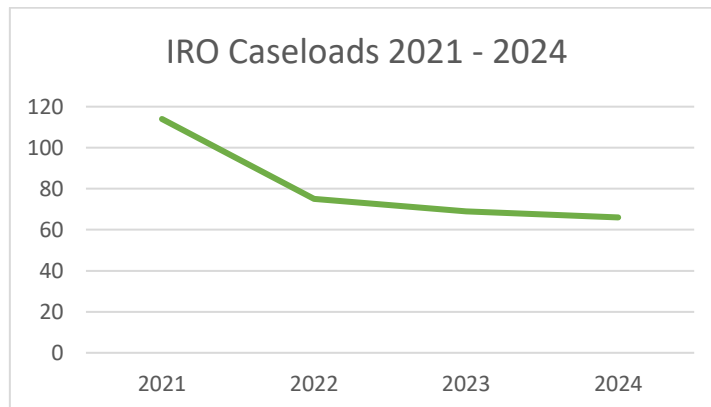
5. Independent Reviewing Officers

- 5.1 The IROs are co-located in the Review and Development Team (RAD Unit). The Team comprises of 14 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers, overseen by 2 Team Managers. The team has a wealth of skills and expertise from experience within Safeguarding and Care Planning, Cared for children, Early Help, substance misuse, exploitation, and Children with Disabilities. The range of skills within the team are complementary and foster a culture of learning and development. The team also has a dedicated IRO who undertakes Foster Care Reviews.
- 5.2 The team has remained stable, with most of the IROs having been in post for over 5 years. All IROs are permanent members of staff.
- 5.3 The position of the team in the Children's Directorate structure has remained the same throughout 2021/22 to currently.

- 5.4 The team has direct access to the Director of Children’s Social Care and are able to meet on a regular basis to share their insight into the challenges and improvements in practice and plans for our children and young people.
- 5.5 To provide assurance, the IRO team report progress to the Director of Children’s Social Care Monthly Performance meeting.
- 5.6 The team also contributes to a range of panels which provide senior management oversight of planning for our children and young people. These include: -
 - Legal Gateway Panel
 - Permanency Monitoring Group
 - Child Protection Review panel

6. IRO Caseloads

- 6.1 From 2019 to 2021, caseloads for the IROs increased from 70 to 114 children each. Statutory guidance recommends caseloads for Independent Reviewing Officers of approximately 70 children and young people. Over 2021/22, to promote good practice, additional resources were temporarily provided to the team through the recruitment of an additional 3 agency IROs. This resulted in IRO caseloads reducing over the year to an average of approximately 75 children per IRO.
- 6.2 In April 2023 the IRO caseloads were at an average of 69 reducing to an average of 66 in April 2024. This is a decrease overall of 42% between 2021 and 2024.



7. Key Messages about Cared for Children and Young People

Number of Cared for Children and Young People

- 7.1 As of the 31st of March 2024 there were 513 Cared for children and young people in Middlesbrough, this is the same as the reported figure at year end 2022/23. The calculated rate per 10,000 is 147.5 (based on 2023 population estimates), this is a decrease on the 2022-

23 figures (149.4). It remains higher, however, than all other external 2023/24 benchmarks. (National rate for 23/24 was 70)

- 7.2 The monthly rate for the number of children and young people in our care has fluctuated but by end of year is higher. The table below demonstrates the monthly number & rate of children and young people becoming cared for throughout the year 23/24.

	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24
Middlesbrough's No. of CLA	510	510	513	506	507	507	508	516	526	529	530	527	525
Middlesbrough's Rate of CLA	149.4	149.4	150.3	148.2	148.5	148.5	148.8	151.1	154.1	155	155.2	154.4	153.8

- 7.3 In 2024, the number of Cared for children and young people by local authorities in England was 83,630, similar to last year, following a steady rise since 2008. This is a rate of 70 Cared for children and young people per 10,000.

Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of children looked after	80,000	80,780	82,090	83,760	83,630
Annual change		+780	+1,310	+1,680	-130
Annual percentage change		+1%	+2%	+2%	< -0.5%

Source: SSDA903

- 7.5 Numbers and rates per 10,000 children and young people vary widely across local authorities, for example Stoke-on-Trent has the highest rate at 191 Cared for children and young people per 10,000 children and Richmond-upon-Thames has the lowest at 25 per 10,000 children and young people.
- 7.6 At the rate of 153.8 Middlesbrough's rate is much higher than the 70 average, however it is of note that Middlesbrough continues to work with children and young people within a context of significant deprivation and poverty. As part of its improvement journey work taking place, Middlesbrough is to explore reunification options alongside developing and improving practice that better supports children and young people to remain with their family networks.
- 7.7 In addition to this it is also of note that Middlesbrough has a higher resident population of children and young people aged 0 -15 years than both the England and Northeast rates.

Children and Young Peoples' Cared for Reviews

7.8 Performance in terms of Cared for children and young peoples’ reviews being held within timescales has decreased from an average of 93% in timescale in 2022/23 to 85% in 2023/24.

2022-23			2023-24		
	In Timescale	Out of Timescale		In Timescale	Out of Timescale
Apr-22	100%	0%	Apr-23	100%	0%
May-22	91%	9%	May-23	91%	9%
Jun-22	97%	3%	Jun-23	84%	16%
Jul-22	96%	4%	Jul-23	93%	7%
Aug-22	98%	2%	Aug-23	76%	24%
Sep-22	83%	17%	Sep-23	94%	6%
Oct-22	82%	18%	Oct-23	73%	27%
Nov-22	95%	5%	Nov-23	85%	15%
Dec-22	96%	4%	Dec-23	87%	13%
Jan-23	96%	4%	Jan-24	74%	26%
Feb-23	91%	9%	Feb-24	62%	38%
Mar-23	90%	10%	Mar-24	85%	15%
Average :	93%	7%	Average :	85%	15%

7.9 Our target for holding reviews in timescales is 95%. As a result, this is a high priority in the RAD units’ team plan.

7.10 One of the factors which has influenced the timeliness of reviews has been Middlesbrough’s workforce instability, which has included high numbers of agency staff. This has resulted in some children and young people experiencing changes in allocated social workers, which in turn has impacted on the timeliness and preparation of social work reports for reviews.

7.11 The RAD team has sought to mitigate this where possible, however this has not sufficiently improved overall timeliness for our children and young people. Moving forward the RAD team have set out clear timescales and expectations for reports to be available to IROs. Alongside this Cared for reviews are now timetabled a minimum of two weeks in advance of their due dates. This is to allow for any unforeseen circumstances that may prevent the review going ahead, such as staff sickness or unavailability of any key professional.

7.12 In addition to this the RAD unit Team Managers now provide a weekly schedule to the service, setting out the review dates scheduled for the week they are in, as well as the following week.

Children and Young People’s participation in Reviews

7.13 The most recent ILACS for Middlesbrough made an overall judgement of ‘Requires Improvement’ in March 2023. Within this, Ofsted judged that the experiences and progress of children in care was an area Requiring Improvement and reported that: -

“Most child in care reviews are well attended by key professionals involved in children’s lives. Children are involved in discussions prior to their reviews with social workers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) but meetings are not well attended by parents and very few children attend. This means that parents and children are not fully involved in discussions about their progress and plans for their future”.

7.14 There were 1252 Cared for reviews held in 2023/24, this is a decrease on 2022/23 when there were 1295 Cared for reviews held. 228 (18.2%) related to children under the age of 4 years old.

- 7.15 Our Cared for children and young people are more likely to share their views through another person or in writing (38.5%) than to attend their reviews in person (32%).

	Review participation	2022 -23 (count)	2023- 24 (count)	2022 -23 (percentage)	2023- 24 (percentage)
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	252	228	19.5%	18.2%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	319	395	24.6%	31.5%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	1	11	0.1%	0.9%
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbal)	1	2	0.1%	0.2%
PN4	Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her views symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her	10	4	0.8%	0.3%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	2	15	0.2%	1.2%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	584	482	45.1%	38.5%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed not the review	126	115	9.7%	9.2%
	TOTAL	1295	1252	100%	100%

- 7.16 We can see that in 2022/23 70.8% of children and young people’s views were gathered via methods PN1 to PN6 and 72.6% in 2023/24, demonstrating an increase of 2.6%.

- 7.17 As part of the RAD Unit’s improvement plan there is a focus on increasing this improvement further, to ensure that as many of our children and young people as possible have a voice in their Cared for reviews.

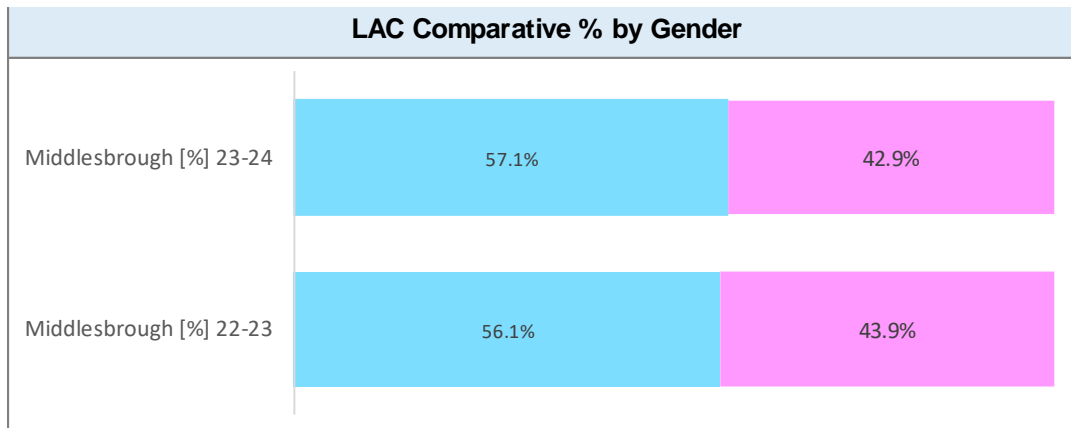
- 7.18 To achieve this, we are exploring a variety of feedback mechanisms, such as the Mind of My Own app, to diversify the way children and young people can contribute to their Cared for reviews, before, during and after the actual meetings themselves.

- 7.19 In addition to this the RAD Team Managers are working with our IROs, Quality Assurance Practice Lead Auditors (PLAs), our Participation co-ordinator, and our Care Ambassadors to explore and encourage opportunities for our children and young people to (where appropriate to do so) chair their own reviews.

- 7.20 Alongside this our PLAs are also working with our data and analytics team to create feedback forms which our children, young people, parents and carers will be able to access using a QR code.

Gender of Cared for Children and Young People

- 7.21 At the end of March 2024, 57% of our Cared for children and young people were male and 43% were female, compared to the 2022/23 figures which showed 56% male and 44% female. This reflects a 1% gender difference across the two periods, despite the same number of children and young people being in our care (513).



7.22 Nationally 57% of Cared for children are male and 43% are female, meaning that Middlesbrough's gender ratio is in line with the national trend.

Ethnicity of Cared for Children and Young People

7.23 Middlesbrough is the most ethnically diverse local authority area in the Tees Valley, with a British Minority Ethnic population of 17.6% identified at census 2021. This is an increase of 51% since 2011 and was projected to grow further.

7.24 82.36% of Middlesbrough's resident population was classified as White (with various sub-groups). This was lower than the Northeast rate of 90.04% but higher than the England rate of 81.05%.

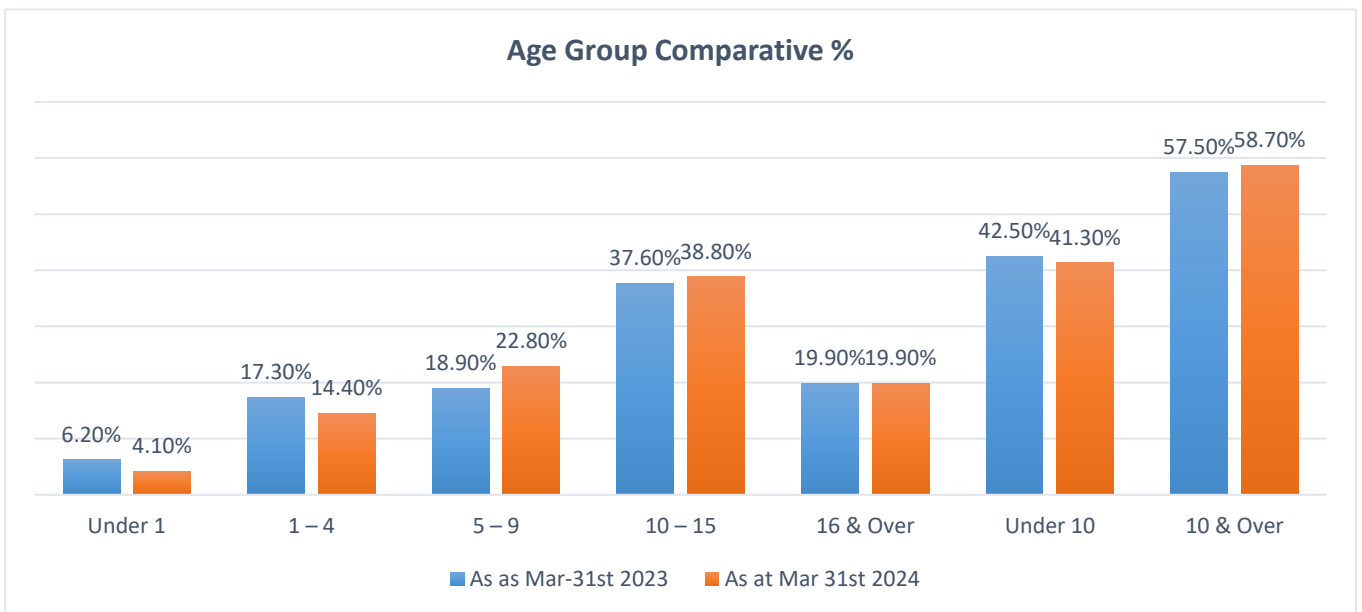
7.25 Middlesbrough is the second most ethnically diverse local authority in the Northeast, behind Newcastle upon Tyne (with 79.9% classed as white). Nationally 66% of the population is of White British ethnicity.

LAC Comparative % by Ethnicity				
Ethnicity	2022-23 [Count]	2023-24 [Count]	2022-23 [%]	2023-24 [%]
African	21	14	4.1%	2.7%
Any other Asian background	5	6	1.0%	1.2%
Any other Black background	2	3	0.4%	0.6%
Any other ethnic group	8	23	1.6%	4.5%
Any other Mixed background	13	13	2.6%	2.5%
Any other White background	18	18	3.5%	3.5%
Bangladeshi	2	2	0.4%	0.4%
Caribbean	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Gypsy/Roma	11	10	2.2%	1.9%
Indian	1	1	0.2%	0.2%
Information not yet obtained	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Pakistani	3	4	0.6%	0.8%
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
White and Asian	13	14	2.6%	2.7%
White and Black African	12	14	2.4%	2.7%
White and Black Caribbean	6	5	1.2%	1.0%
White British	392	382	77.0%	74.5%
White Irish	2	1	0.4%	0.2%
Chinese	0	3	0.0%	0.6%
TOTAL	509	513	100.0%	100.0%

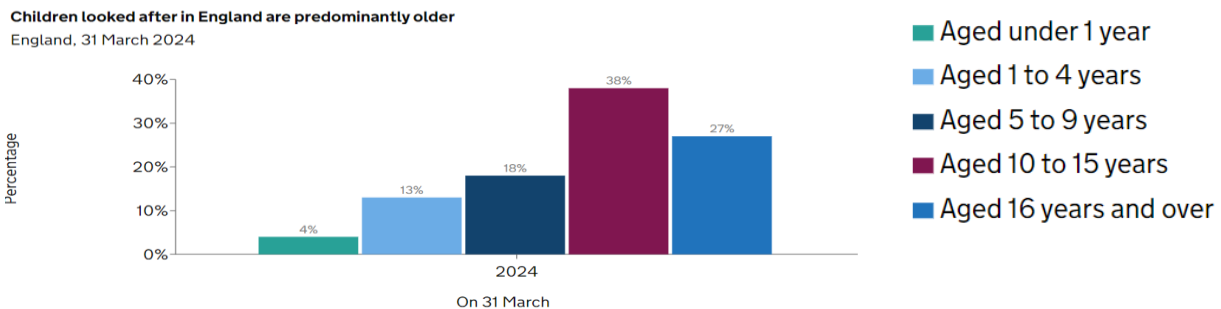
- 7.26 74.5% of Cared for children and young people on 31 March 2024 were White British, down from 77% in 2023. The next largest group of children and young people for 2024 pertains to 4.5% coming from ‘Any other ethnic group’ background.
- 7.27 Given the above the ethnicity of our Cared for children and young people, this is in line with our overall resident population.

Ages of Cared for Children and Young People

- 7.28 In 2023/24 the age distribution of Cared for children and young people has remained the same as in 2022/23 with under 1s representing the lowest percentage and 10- to 15-year-olds representing the highest percentage.



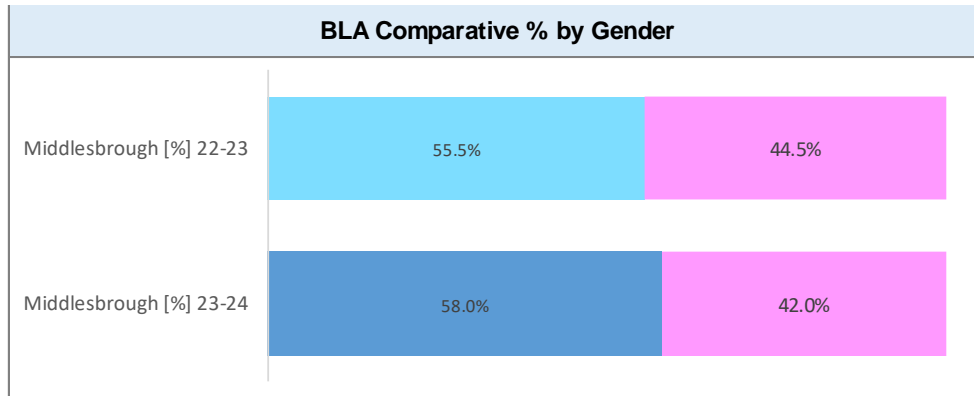
- 7.29 Middlesbrough has a younger population than both the national and regional averages. 20.8% of Middlesbrough’s resident population are children and young people aged 0 to 15 years. This is higher than the England rate of 18.6% and the Northeast rate of 17.7%.
- 7.30 This is aligned to the national figures for the age distribution of Cared for children and young people as illustrated below.



[Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

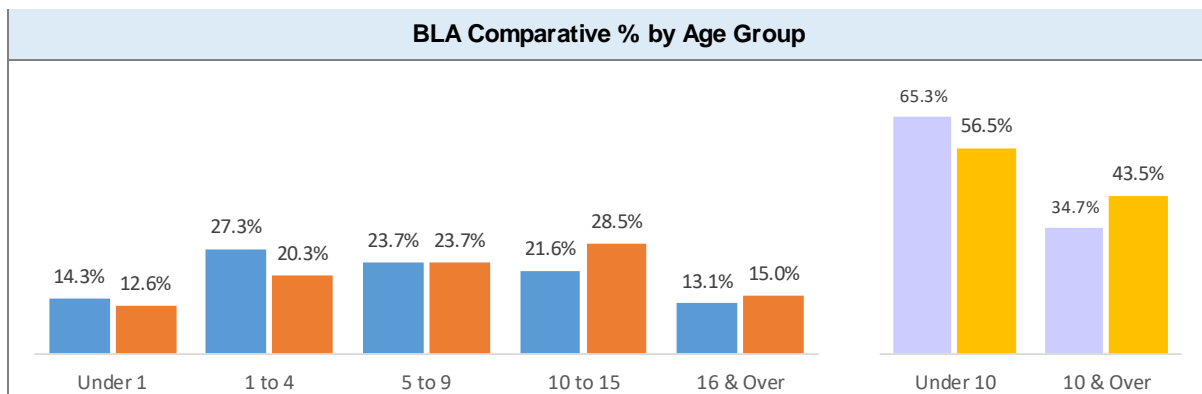
Children Becoming Cared for:

7.31 207 children became Cared for in 2023/24, a decrease on 2022/23 when the number was 245. 58% of children becoming Cared for in 2023/24 were male (120), an increase on 2022/23 when 55.5% were male. 42% becoming Cared for in 2023/24 were female (87), a decrease from the 2022/23 figure of 44.5% female.



7.32 Nationally for 2023/24 this figure sits at 61% male and 39% female, reflecting that whilst nationally more males than females become Cared for, the ratio gap in Middlesbrough is 12% smaller at 32% than the national gap of 44%. Middlesbrough demographics reflect that as a population Middlesbrough’s male population is 3% lower than its female population.

7.33 The most common age groups becoming Cared for in 2023/24 were:
 [A] Children aged 10-15 at 59 children (28.5%). Up from the 2022/23 figure of 53.
 [B] Children aged 5-9 at 49 children (23.7%). Down from the 2022/23 figure of 58.



7.34 Nationally the most common age group to become Cared for in 2023/24 is children and young people aged 16+ years (29%). Nationally the next highest age range is 10–15-year-olds (26%). however, as noted earlier, Middlesbrough has a higher resident population of children and young people aged 0 -15 years than both the England and Northeast rates.

7.35 The most common Category of Need recorded for 2023/24 was that of ‘Abuse or Neglect’, accounting for 98.6% of cases. This is a decrease from 98.8% in 2022/23.

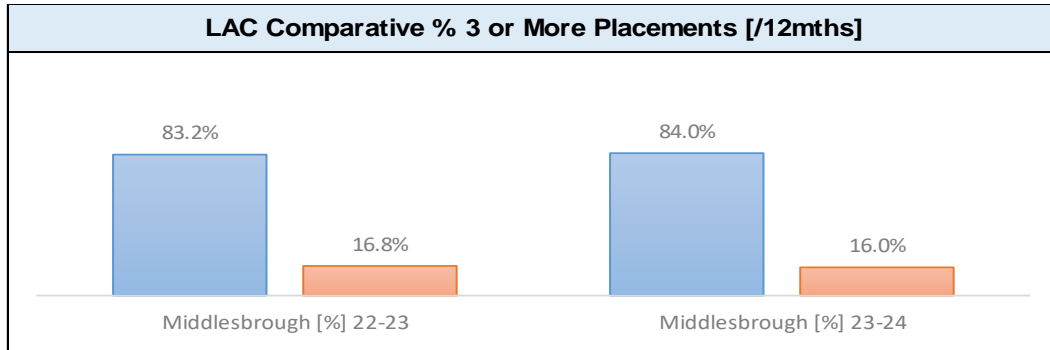
Category of Need	2022-23 [Count]	2023-24 [Count]	2022-23 [%]	2023-24 [%]
Absent parenting	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Abuse or neglect	242	204	98.8%	98.6%
Child’s disability	0	2	0.0%	1.0%
Family dysfunction	1	1	0.4%	0.5%
Family in acute stress	2	0	0.8%	0.0%
Parental illness or disability	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL	245	207	100.0%	100.0%

7.36 Whilst we can see this decrease of 0.2% in the category of need being recorded as ‘abuse or neglect’ from 2022/23 to 2023/24, this figure remains significantly higher than the national figure of 56% for 2023/24. Similarly, some of the other categories of need are higher within the national figures, highlighting a need for further exploration of Middlesbrough’s process for identifying and recording category of need.

8 Time Children and Young People spend in our care

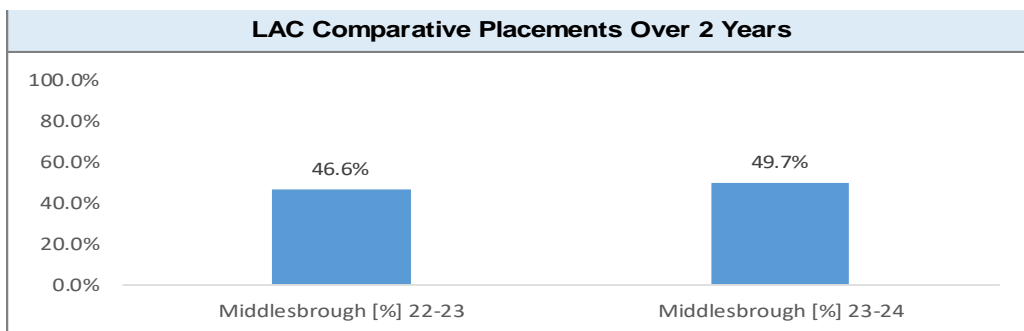
Placement stability

8.5 In terms of short-term placement instability (those Cared for as at 31st March with 3 or more placements within 12 months) performance at the end of March 2024 was 16.0%. This is a decrease from 2023 when the percentage was 16.8%.



8.6 This is a 0.8% decrease which would suggest some improvement in short-term placement stability, however, more needs to be done to reduce this figure further.

8.7 Long term placement stability (Under 16s looked after for 2.5 years and whose placement on 31st March was 2 years or more) was 49.7%. This is an increase on 46.6% for 2022/23.



- 8.8 This is an increase of 6.4%, demonstrating a move in the right direction for our children and young people, however we are ambitious and want this to improve further given the significant benefits stability has on improving overall outcomes for all children and young people.
- 8.9 Middlesbrough is working to increase its number of foster carers, reviewing its support and training offer to carers and commencing fostering modernisation as it moves into 2025.

Legal Framework for our Cared for Children and Young people

- 8.10 65% of Cared for children and young people in Middlesbrough are subject to a Full Care Order. This is an increase of 1% on 2023. The national percentage sits at 57%, however Middlesbrough is only 2% higher than the North East figure of 63%.
- 8.11 19% of Middlesbrough’s Cared for children and young people are subject to Interim Care Orders in 2024, which is a 3% increase on 2023. Within the Northeast this percentage remained at 16% in both 2023 and 2024, whilst nationally this figure was at 18% in 2023 and 17% in 2024. Supporting that overall Middlesbrough demonstrates little variance from the Northeast and national picture.

		Middlesbrough		Northeast		National	
		2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Total	Number	509	513	5970	6110	83760	83630
	Percentage	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Full Care Order	Number	318	334	3750	3830	48440	48080
	Percentage	62%	65%	63%	63%	58%	57%
Interim Care Order	Number	81	95	970	970	15000	14380
	Percentage	16%	19%	16%	16%	18%	17%
Placement Order Granted	Number	28	26	360	330	4530	4690
	Percentage	6%	5%	6%	5%	5%	6%
Voluntary agreements under S20 CA 1989	Number	81	57	890	960	15500	16240
	Percentage	16%	11%	15%	16%	19%	19%
Detained for Child Protection or Youth Justice legal statuses	Number	1	1	10	10	300	250
	Percentage	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

- 8.12 In 2023 16% of Cared for children and young people in Middlesbrough were subject to a S20 voluntary agreement, however this figure decreased by 5% in 2024, to 11%. The Northeast figure for 2024 is higher at 16% and the national figure is higher still at 19%. This evidences that children and young people in Middlesbrough are more likely to become subject to Care Orders than remain within S20 voluntary arrangements. Middlesbrough ensures that all children and young people who are subject to S20 arrangements are heard and reviewed as part of its Legal Gateway Panel process supporting timely permanence progression.

- 8.13 Placement Orders granted has remained consistently low at 5% and 6% Nationally as well as across Middlesbrough and the Northeast as a whole.

Placement location for our Cared for Children and Young people

- 8.14 Middlesbrough children living out of area as of 31st March 2024 is at 53%, this is a 2% decrease on the 2023 figure of 55% and is in line with the increase of children and young people residing in the area, which equally increased by 2% from 45% in 2023 to 47% in 2024.

- 8.15 Of those children and young people living out of area, 24% lived more than 20 miles away in 2023. This figure reduced to 23% in 2024. Middlesbrough remain committed to our Cared for children and young people residing within their own locality wherever it is possible and safe for them to do so.

	2023		2024	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
In area	230	45%	240	47%
Out of area	279	55%	273	53%
Out of area over 20 miles from home	66	24%	64	23%

	2023	2024
Proportion of Out of area children placed over 20 miles from home	24%	23%
Proportion of all cared for children placed over 20 miles from home	13%	12%

- 8.16 The most common Placement Type for 2024 is 'U6 Placement with other Foster Carer – long term fostering' at 24.4%, up from 23.4% in 2023.

Cared for comparative % by placement type					
Code	Placement type	2022-23 (count)	2023-24 (count)	2022-23 (%)	2023-24 (%)
A3	Placed for Adoption with consent with current foster carer	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
A4	Placed for Adoption with consent not with current foster carer	0	2	0.0%	0.4%
A5	Placed for Adoption with placement order with current foster carer	6	2	1.2%	0.4%
A6	Placed for Adoption with placement order not with current foster carer	14	3	2.7%	0.6%
H5	Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to Children's homes regulations	25	11	4.9%	2.1%
K1	Secure Children's Home	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
K2	Children's homes subject to Children's homes regulations	55	63	10.7%	12.3%
P1	Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	34	49	6.6%	9.6%
P2	Independent living like a flat, lodgings, bedsit, B & B or with friends, with or without formal support	6	0	1.2%	0.0%
R1	Residential care home	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
R2	NHS/Health Trust	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
R3	Family centre or mother and baby unit	1	1	0.2%	0.2%

R5	Young Offenders institute or Secure training centre	2	3	0.4%	0.6%
U1	Foster placement with relative or friend long-term fostering	38	43	7.4%	8.4%
U2	Foster placement with relative or friend who is also an approved adopter or FFA	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
U3	Foster Placement with relative or friend - not long term or FFA	80	69	15.6%	13.5%
U4	Placement with other foster carer long-term fostering	130	119	25.3%	23.2%
U5	Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter or FFA	1	1	0.2%	0.2%
U6	Placement with other foster carer - not long-term of FFA	120	125	23.4%	24.4%
Z1	Other placements	1	22	0.2%	4.3%
	Total	513	513	100.0%	100%

Children looked after at preferred placements as at 31st March 2024

- 8.17 Middlesbrough is equally committed to promoting arrangements that meet our children and young people's preferred residence. Sadly, this is not always possible due to preferences not always being appropriately safe or available. However, our IROs consistently ask our children and young people and seek to advocate where changes could be considered or made.

	2023		2024	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
At preferred placement	172	34%	171	33%
Not at preferred placement	337	66%	342	67%
Total	509	100%	513	100%

- 8.18 As part of this commitment Middlesbrough has been reviewing and continues to continually review its fostering offer as well as its own residential provision.

Children subject to DOLs

- 8.19 1 child was subject to a DOLs between 1st April 2023 and 31st March 2024, at that juncture the young person was 17 years of age, had been subject to a DOLS since 2019 and experienced significant learning needs. Sadly, due to those learning needs and the young person's understanding and coping mechanisms he required high levels of support to ensure both his own safety and that of those around him.

Use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders

- 8.20 A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's 'Special Guardian'. It is a private law order made under the Children's Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.

- 8.21 It is a more secure order than a Child Arrangement Order (CAO) because a parent cannot apply to discharge it, unless they have the permission of the court to do so, however it is less secure than an Adoption Order because it does not end the legal relationship between the

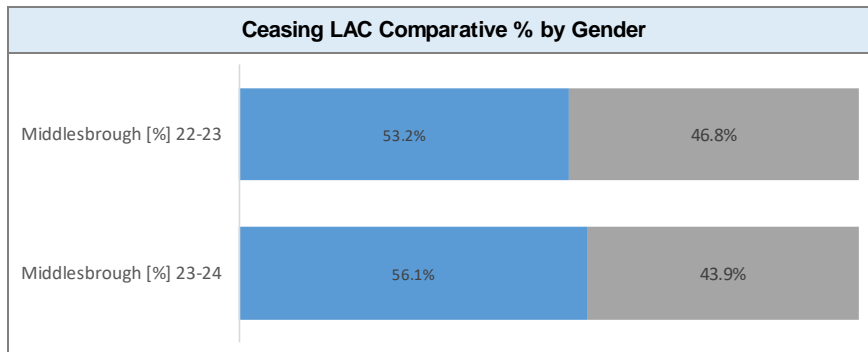
child and his/her birth parents. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced Special Guardianship Orders. Both an SGO and CAO are routes to permanence for Children Looked After.

CLA End Reason Description	CLA Cease
Child Arrangement Order	37
Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	22
Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	22
Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)	1
Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)	2
Total	84

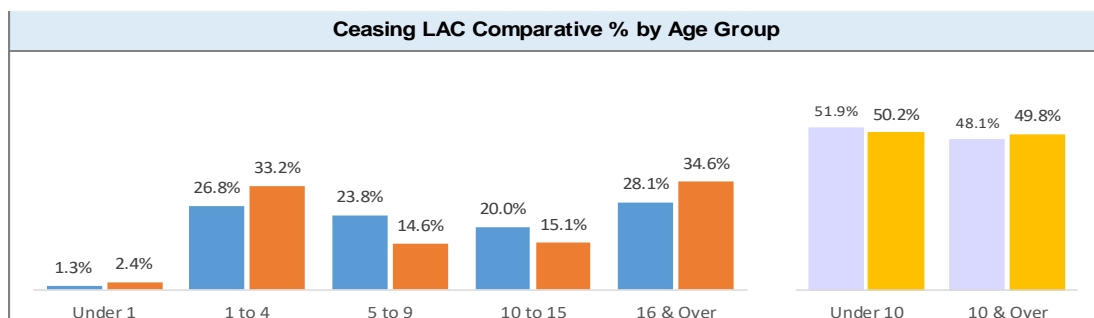
8.22 47 children and young people ceased being Cared for by Middlesbrough as a result of progression of Special Guardianship Orders securing their care, and a further 37 children and young people left our care as a result of a Child Arrangement order being secured.

9 Children and Young People leaving our Care

205 children ceased to be cared for between 1st April 2023 and March 31st 2024. This is a decrease on the 2022/23 figure which was 235. Of this number 115 (56.1%) were Male and 90 (43.9%) Female.



9.5 The most common age groups ceasing being looked after in 2023/24 were:
 [A] Children aged 16 and over at 34.6%. Up from the 2022/23 figure of 28.1%.
 [B] Children aged 1-4 at 33.2%. Up from the 2022/23 figure of 26.8%.
 [C] Children aged 10-15 at 15.1%. Down from the 2022/23 figure of 20.0%.



Children ceasing to be Cared for Reason [Statistical]:

- 9.6 Discounting the reason 'E8 Period of being looked after ceased for any other reason', 'E41 Residence order (or, from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order which sets out with whom the child is to live) granted' is the main reason for children ending their period of care.

Code	Period of care end reason	2022-23 (count)	2023-24 (count)	2022-23(%)	2023-24(%)
E2	Died	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E5	Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer Cared for: supportive accommodation providing formalised advice/support arrangements (such as most hostels, YMCA and care leavers projects)	0	2	0.0%	1.0%
E7	Transferred to residential care funded by Adult Social Services	1	0	0.4%	0.0%
E8	Period of being cared for ceased for any other reason	97	58	41.3%	28.3%
E9	Sentenced to custody	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E11	Adopted - application for an adoption order unopposed	19	14	8.1%	6.8%
E12	Adopted - consent dispensed with by court	6	8	2.6%	3.9%
E13	Left care to live with parents, relatives, or other person with no parental responsibility	9	3	3.8%	1.5%
E14	Accommodation on remand ended	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E17	Aged 18 (or over) and remained with current carers (inc under staying put arrangements)	2	20	0.9%	9.8%
E41	Residence order (or, from 22 April 2014, a child arrangements order which sets out with whom the child is to live) granted	34	37	14.5%	18.0%
E43	Special guardianship made to former foster carers	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E44	Special guardianship made to carers other than former foster carers	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E45	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s) who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	35	22	14.9%	10.7%
E46	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s) other than relative(s) or friend(s)	2	1	0.9%	0.5%
E47	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former carer(s), who was / are a relative(s) or friend(s)	6	22	2.6%	10.7%
E48	Special guardianship order made to carer(S), other than former foster carer(S), other relative(s) or friend(s)	3	2	1.3%	1.0%
E4A	Return home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or (from 22 April 2014) a child arrangements order)	20	12	8.5%	5.9%
E4B	Return home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility which was not part of the care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or (from 22 April 2014) a child arrangements order)	0	4	0.0%	2.0%
E3	Care taken over by another LA in the UK	1	0	0.4%	0.0%
E6	Independent living arrangement (no formalised support)	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E15	Age disputed, age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
E16	Moved abroad	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
	TOTAL	235	205	100%	100%

The use of Feedback and Consultation forms

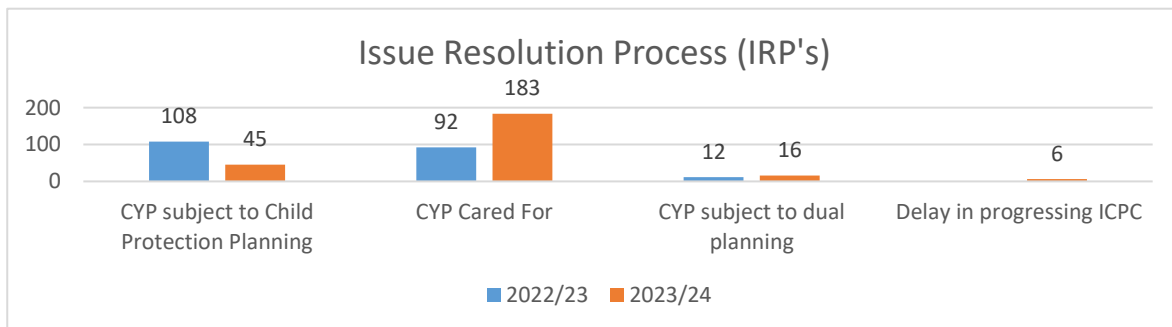
- 9.7 As we move into 2025 work is being completed to improve our ability to seek and respond to feedback from our children, young people and families. It is anticipated that by April 2025 we will have in place an automated system which allows us to provide a feedback QR code through which children, young people and their families will be able to share their views and experiences of working with us. This will be tailored to capture feedback from across service

areas, including both our children and young people subject to Child Protection planning, and our Cared for children and young people.

10 IRO service impact on Outcomes for Cared for Children and Young People

Dispute Resolutions, IRO Concerns and Escalations raised

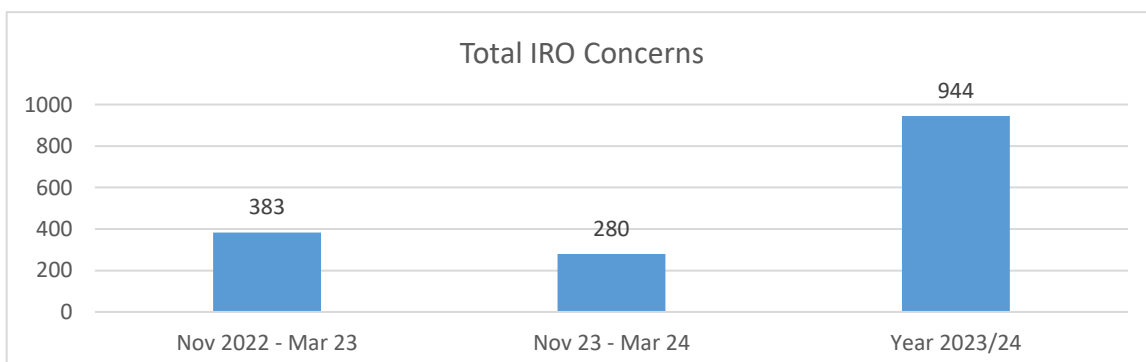
10.5 Our IRO’s challenge worries such as poor-quality plans or drift and delay through the IRP process. In 2022/23 IROs completed 108 IRPs (Issue Resolution Process) for children and young people subject to Child Protection planning, 92 for Cared for children and young people, and a further 12 for children subject to dual planning totalling 212 IRPs in 2022/23.



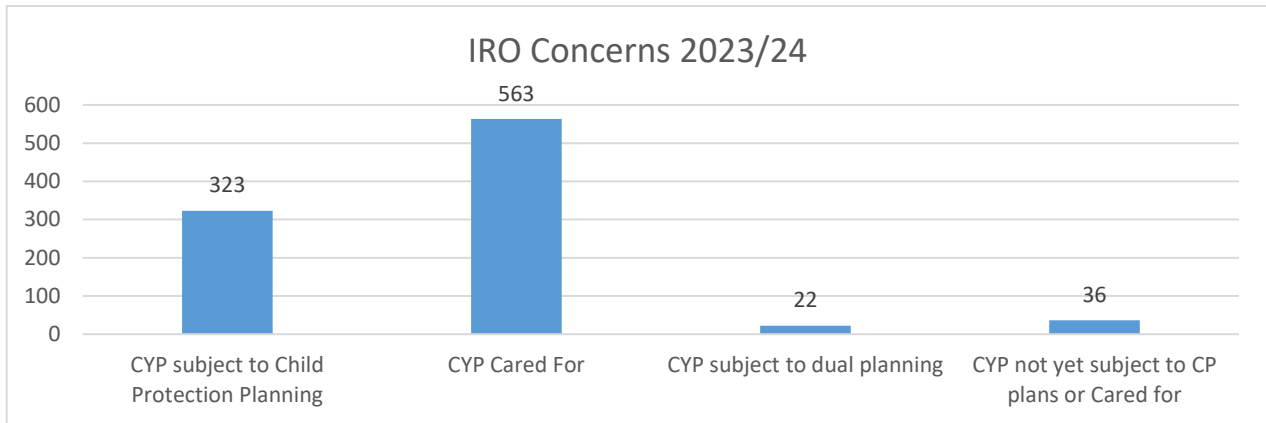
10.6 In 2023/24, 250 IRPs were raised, of which 183 related to Cared for children and young people, 45 related to children subject to Child Protection planning and 16 related to children subject to dual planning. A further 6 were not subject to either Child Protection or Cared for plans due to the IRP being raised regarding delay being able to progress an ICPC (sibling group of 6 children). This is an increase of 18% from the numbers above from 2022/23.

10.7 In 2022/23 IROs were also recording concerns, worries, and challenges that fell outside of the formal IRP process via case note recordings, however it was identified that this was difficult to report on as there was a variety of different case note headings which could be utilised. As a result, a specific case note heading of ‘IRO concern’ was created and as of November 2022 this information became reportable with greater accuracy.

10.8 Between 30th November 2022 and 31st March 2023 there were 383 IRO concerns recorded. For the equivalent period of 2023/24 (30/11/2023 to 31/03/2024) 280 IRO concerns were raised, with a further 664 subsequently being raised across the remainder of 2023/24 (Totalling 944 IRO concerns raised 2023/24).



10.9 Of those 944 IRO concerns raised in 2023/24, 563 related to Cared for children and young people, 323 related to children subject to Child Protection planning, 22 related to children subject to dual planning and a further 36 related to children who were not yet subject to Child Protection plans or Cared for.



10.10 Ofsted noted that:

“There is appropriate partner attendance and contribution to planning at child protection meetings. Not all core group meetings take place at the required frequency and partner agencies and child protection chairs are not challenging drift effectively. The lack of progress and improvements in some children’s situations means that they remain subject to child protection plans for too long without their outcomes improving”.

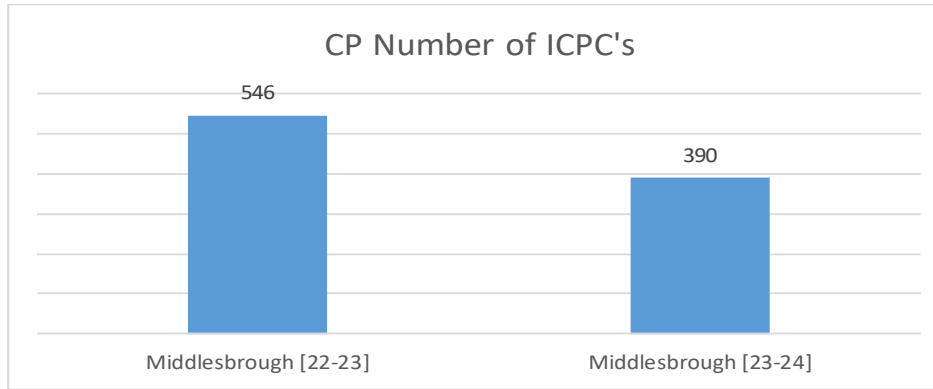
10.11 In May 2024 a panel is to be set up to review all children who have been subject to Child Protection planning for 15 months or more. The purpose of this panel is to explore the circumstances for each of these children and young people with a view to ensuring where appropriate, plans to exist Child Protection are agreed and progressed.

10.12 This panel will take place monthly, reviewing the actions agreed at the previous panel and ensuring exit planning progresses. Any children who subsequently hit the criteria of being subject to Child Protection planning for 15 months will be considered at this panel.

11 Key Messages about our Children and Young People with a Child Protection Plan

Initial Child Protection Conferences

11.1 The number of children and young people who were subject to an ICPC in the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 23 was 546. This figure decreased to 390 in 2023/24. A decrease of 28.5% which equates to 156 less children becoming subject to Initial Child Protection Plans.



11.2 This reflects an improvement in the identification and mitigation of risk for our children and young people. In June 2024 Middlesbrough’s Threshold criteria were updated. Running alongside this the MACH service delivered training internally and worked with partners and the STSCP to strengthen the wider professional understanding and application of the threshold criteria. It is anticipated that this will impact threshold application and in turn professional’s perspectives when contributing to S47 enquiries as well as when considering whether a Child Protection Plan is the appropriate support and / or safeguard required to positively impact and improve outcomes for specific children and young people.

Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences that did not lead to a plan

11.3 In 2023/24 40 (10%) ICPC’s did not lead to a Child Protection Plan, this is an increase from 31 (5.7%) in 2022/23.

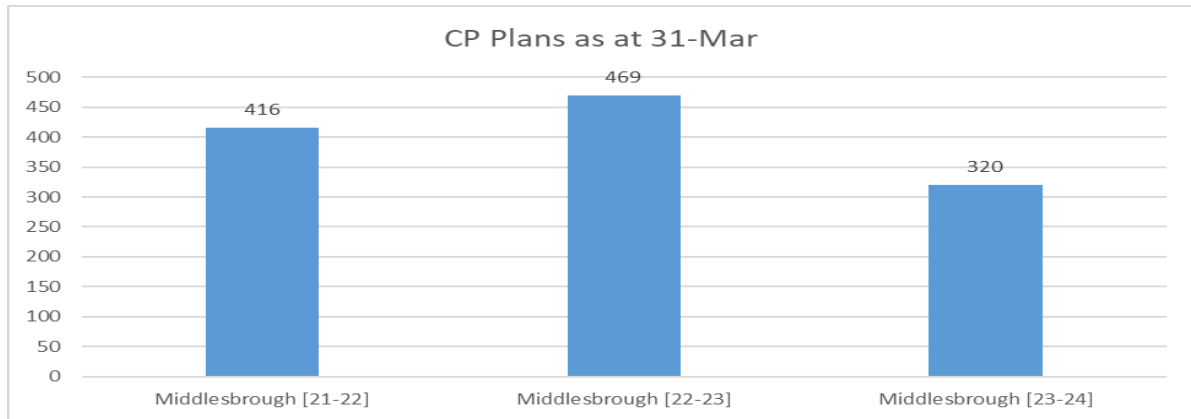
	Count	%
ICPC's leading to a Child Protection Plan	350	90%
ICPC's not leading to a Child Protection Plan	41	10.5%
Total number of ICPC's 2023-24	390	100%

11.4 Of those ICPCs held that did not lead to a Child Protection Plan in 2023/24, 31 (8%) children and young people were provided with services via Child In Need planning and 10 (2%) resulted in No Further Action.

11.5 This supports the hypothesis that an increased awareness of threshold application is positively influencing not only our own practice, but the perspectives of our partners given this is a total of 10% of ICPCs that lead to alternative outcomes for our children and young people, alongside the 28.5% decrease in children and young people’s circumstances’ being considered at an ICPC.

Number of Children and Young People subject to a Child Protection Plan

11.6 As at the 31st March 2024, there were 320 children and young people subject to an active Child Protection Plan in Middlesbrough. In the same period of 2023, this figure was significantly higher at 469, reflecting a 32% decrease. (In 2021/22 this figure was 416)

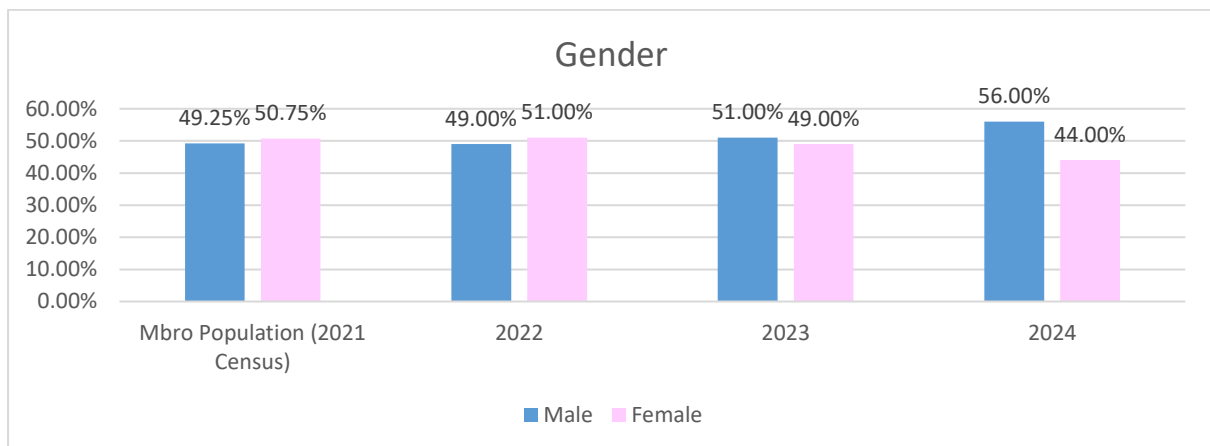


11.7 The rate of CPPs per 10,000 for March 31st 2024, was 92.0, for March 31st 2023 was 140.2 and for March 31st 2022 it was 125.6.

Gender of Children and Young people subject to a Child Protection Plan

11.8 20.8% of Middlesbrough’s resident population are children and young people aged 0-15years. This is higher than the England rate of 18.6%.

11.9 Out of the 320 children and young people who were subject to an active Child Protection Plan as of the 31st March 2024, 56% were male and 44% were female. In 2023, 51% were males and 49% were females reflecting that whilst there were more males than females subject to Child Protection Plans in both periods



11.10 According to the most recent CIN census, 50.75% of Middlesbrough’s population was estimated to be female and 49.25% were estimated to be male. In line with the England rates of 51.04% female and 48.96% male.

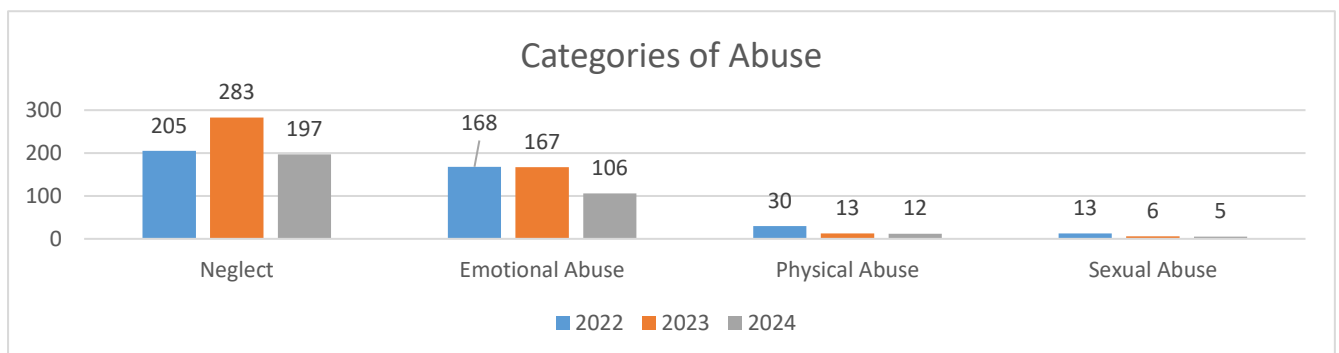
Ethnicity of Children and Young people subject to a Child Protection Plan

- 11.11 Children and young people in Middlesbrough who are subject to Child Protection Plans are more likely to be of White British ethnicity (84%), in line with the overall local demographic.
- 11.12 As illustrated below, whilst the individual percentages have varied the breakdown remains largely consistent across different ethnic backgrounds year on year, suggesting that the ethnicity of our children and young people who are subject to Child Protection planning mirrors that of our overall local population.

Ethnicity	Number 2024	Percentage 2024	Number 2023	Percentage 2023	Number 2022	Percentage 2022
a) WBRI	292	83.91%	401	77.12%	351	72.52%
b) WIRI	0	0.00%	1	0.19%	1	0.21%
d) WOTH	13	3.74%	31	5.96%	42	8.68%
f) MWBC	2	0.57%	5	0.96%	7	1.45%
g) MWBA	1	0.29%	3	0.58%	4	0.83%
h) MWAS	3	0.86%	11	2.12%	13	2.69%
i) MOTH	6	1.72%	15	2.88%	13	2.69%
j) AIND	1	0.29%	1	0.19%	2	0.41%
k) APKN	11	3.16%	17	3.27%	14	2.89%
m) AOTH	3	0.86%	8	1.54%	10	2.07%
o) BAFR	3	0.86%	7	1.35%	8	1.65%
p) BOTH	1	0.29%	1	0.19%	1	0.21%
r) OOTH	12	3.45%	19	3.65%	18	3.72%
Grand Total	348	100.00%	520	100.00%	484	100.00%

Reasons for Child Protection Plan

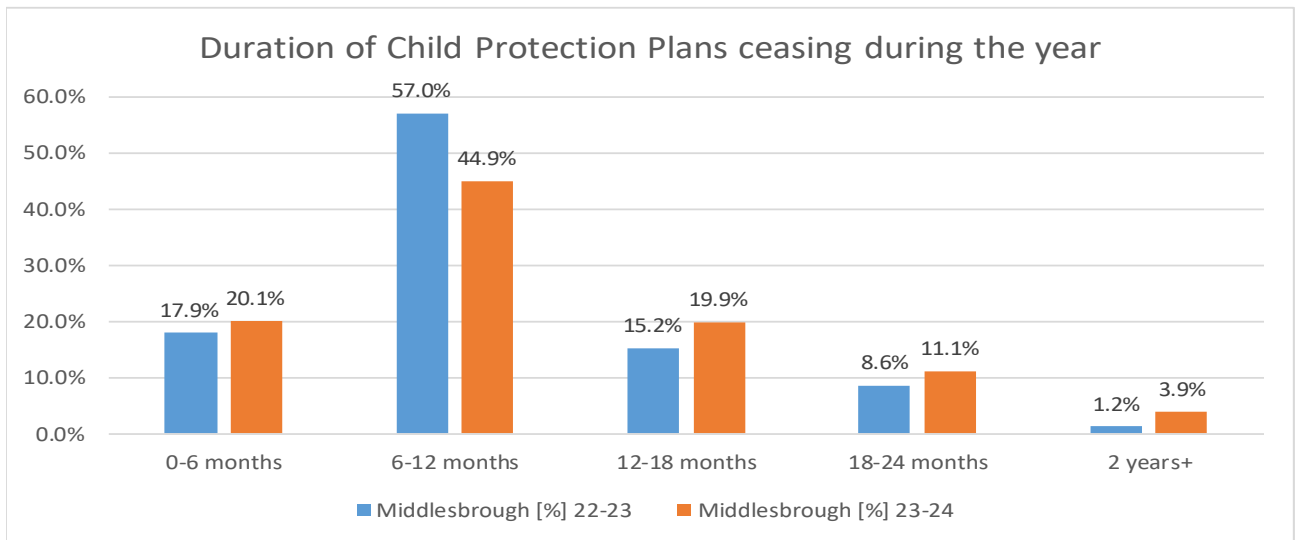
- 11.13 Children and young people in Middlesbrough who are subject to Child Protection Planning are more likely to be at risk of or suffering neglect (61%) or emotional abuse (33%) and less likely to be at risk of physical (4%) or sexual abuse (2%).



- 11.14 Whilst the most likely category of abuse has remained that of neglect across the last 3 years, 2023 and 2024 saw the percentage of neglect increase significantly compared to the other categories of abuse. This is likely to reflect the legacy of previous practice, whereby children and young people have experienced drift and delay in their plans progressing resulting in prolonged periods of Child Protection planning.

Duration of Child Protection Plans

11.15 The legacy of previous practice, whereby children and young people have experienced drift and delay in their plans progressing resulting in prolonged periods of Child Protection planning is equally illustrated when considering the duration of Child Protection Plans in Middlesbrough.



11.16 Within this we can see that most children and young people will be subject to Child Protection Planning for a period of between 6 and 12 months. However, some children and young people experience this for much longer, with the 2024 figures illustrating an increased number of children and young people who have been subject to Child Protection Planning across all periods in the range.

11.17 There are a number of possible reasons for this which relate to Middlesbrough’s improvement journey:

- Workforce instability
- Professional lack of confidence resultant from negative Ofsted rating in December 2019.
- Changes in senior leadership

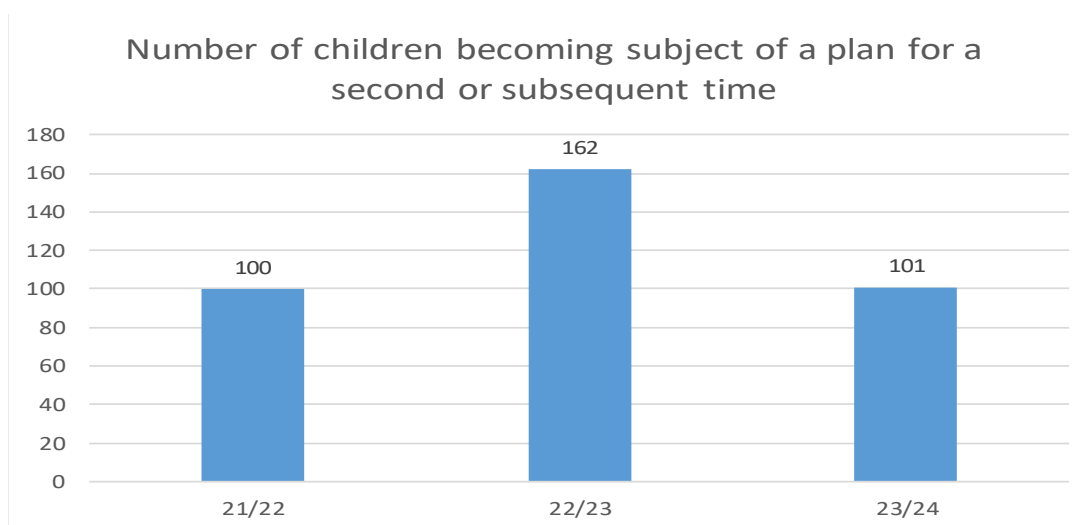
11.18 In addition to this it is feasible that the COVID pandemic negatively impacted on the reach of a variety of professional disciplines, meaning that services to support children, young people and their families was reduced at the same time as many children and young people ceased physically attending education.

11.19 Alongside this we also know that the pandemic meant that as services began to resume referrals increased for many local authorities as professionals were once again seeing children, young people and families, they had had reduced contact with.

- 11.20 Middlesbrough has not however simply accepted this. We have and continue to work hard to improve our workforce stability. We now have a permanent leadership team alongside increasing numbers of permanent frontline practitioners.
- 11.21 In addition to this, and in recognition of the trend towards a number of children and young people experiencing Child Protection Planning for prolonged periods, Middlesbrough introduced a Child Protection Review Panel in May 2024. During May and June, a number of review panels were held to discuss all 62 children who were at that juncture subject to Child Protection plans that had been in place for 16+ months. Step up and step-down plans were agreed and progressed for all of these children and young people. Some children and young people were stepped down prior to discussions but were discussed to understand themes and issues.
- 11.22 As at week beginning 24th June 2024 there were 53 children subject to Child Protection Plans that had been in place for 15+ months, out of which 17 children had been subject to a Child Protection Plan for 24+ months. All 17 children were reviewed and step up/ step down plans put in place.
- 11.23 The panel currently reviews all plans that have been in place for 15+ months on a monthly basis using the same panel methodology. This panel will remain in place to continue to provide senior management oversight and address any drift and delay for our children and young people.

Second or Subsequent Child Protection Plans

- 11.24 In 2022/2023 we saw 162 children become subject to a second or subsequent Child Protection Plan. In 23/2024 this has reduced with 101 children becoming subject to further Child Protection planning. This is a decrease of 37.6% from 2022 to 2023.

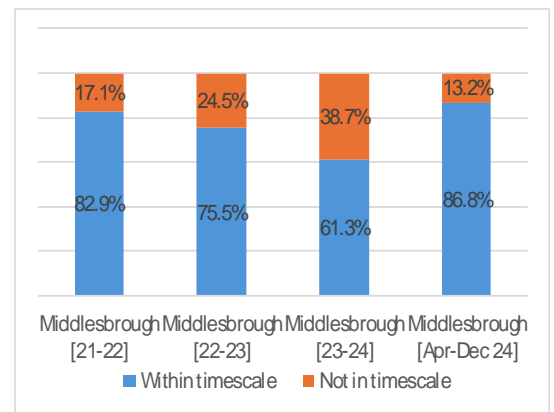
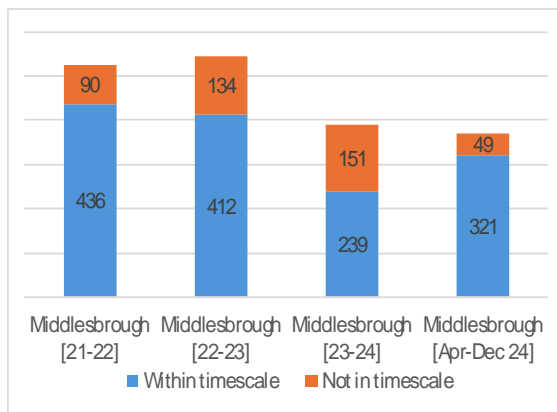


11.25 This would support that there has been an improvement in the effectiveness of work completed to support children and young people once Child Protection Plans have ceased. Equally this would support that the right services have been put in place during and/or after plans have ceased, to allow children, young people and their families to sustain positive changes and improvements.

Timeliness of Child Protection Plans

11.26 The decision as to whether a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, should take place within 15-days of the decision being made to investigate harm. This has significantly decreased over 2023/24 with only 61.3%% of Initial Child Protection conferences happening in timescales. This was 75.5% in 2022/23 and 82.9% in 2021/22.

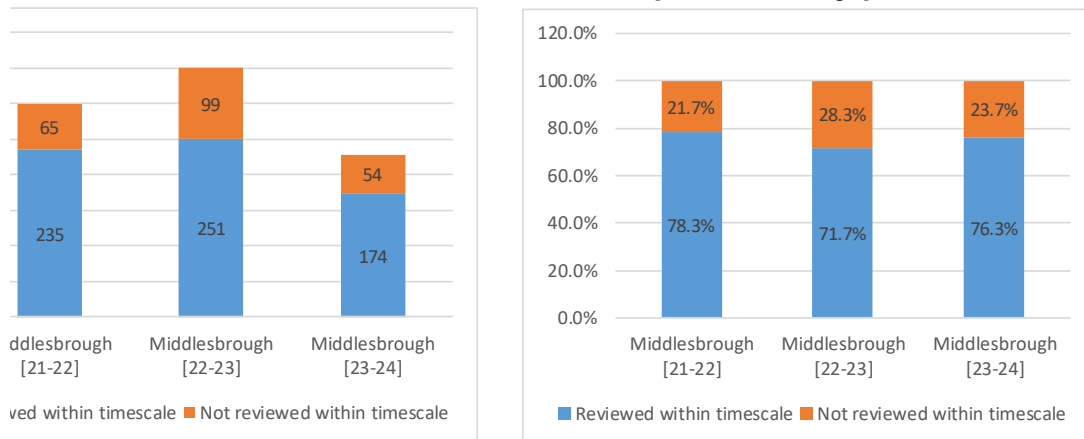
ICPC's within timescale [Numbers & Percentages]



11.27 However, when we consider the data between April and December 2024, we can see the impact of work completed by the IRO service and across the wider service areas, which has resulted in an increase to 86.8% of ICPCs being held in timescales, supporting that improvements are being made for our children and young people subject to Child Protection, but that earlier lower percentages have brought down the overall percentage for the reporting period.

11.28 The timeliness of Review Child Protection conferences has improved from 71.7% in 2022/23 to 76.3% in 2023/24, however this is still a decrease on figures for 2021/22 which were at 78.3%.

Child Protection conference reviews within timescale [Numbers & Percentages]



11.29 The IRO service is continuing to work alongside colleagues to improve performance in this area. As part of this work, IRO’s book in review conferences 2 weeks in advance of when they are due to provide additional flexibility should challenges such as staff sickness or parental unavailability require review dates to be re-scheduled.

12 How the IROs provide Quality Assurance

12.1 As part of an Independent Reviewing Officers’ quality assurance responsibility, IRO’s check that our Cared for children and young people have had a say in their care planning, making sure our children and young people receive the right support that meets their individual needs, and that there is an accurate record of everything that happens.

12.2 IRO’s do this by reviewing records and visiting and speaking to children and young people, and their parents or carers. They also speak to the child or young person’s Social Worker between reviews to make sure their plan is right for them (mid-way reviews). The cumulative evidence of IRO oversight including visits and midway reviews, on children and young people’s records has increased from 810 in 2022/23 to 1097 in 2023/24. This is an improvement of 35% since last year.

12.3 When there is a delay or the outcomes, we are hoping for are not being progressed for our children and young people, the IROs challenge this through the ‘Issues Resolution Process’. (see also section 10: IRO concerns).

12.4 In 2022/23 the IROs raised 212 IRPs on behalf of Cared for children. In 2023/24 this increased by 18%, with 250 IRPs being raised. Most of these were about drift and delay (47%). The IROs monitor the responses to their challenges to make sure it is resolved in a timely way.

12.5 Following recent changes in senior management and the implementation of the new Quality Assurance Framework, the RAD unit will also be completing audit activities, through which they will utilise their IRO skills to evaluate key areas of practice quality within the RAD unit.

13 What we want to Improve

- 13.1 A central function of the RAD unit and the IRO's therein is to ensure that our Cared for children and young people and those subject to Child Protection planning receive the best service possible, with clear plans which meet their needs both in the short and long term.
- 13.2 The IROs are in the unique position of being independent from the day-to-day case management responsibilities, affording them the ability to provide objectivity, insight and advocacy for our children and young people. With this comes the responsibility of providing professional challenge when needed.
- 13.3 It is evidenced that our IROs are already increasing their footprint via IRPs and IRO concern mechanisms, however, to achieve improvements for our children and young people the RAD unit needs to also recognise its own areas for practice improvement.
- 13.4 With this in mind, the RAD unit has a service plan which captures the below key areas for improvement:
- Increasing the voice of children and young people in their reviews.
 - To do this, IROs will be ensuring that all children 4 years and over are provided with an opportunity to share their views, either in person or via an advocate.
 - Exploration is also taking place around the use of modern technological mechanisms such as the Mind of My Own app
 - Improve the quality of Care Plans and Child Protection Plans, including contingency planning, so that children, young people and their families are clear what progress looks like and what will happen if progress is not made.
 - Attend relevant training.
 - Work with and support colleagues across the service to implement that learning.
 - Increase the timeliness of Cared for Reviews to consistently meet the service target of 95% held in timescales.
 - Increase the timeliness of ICPC and RCPCs
 - Working with the wider service to ensure notification and convening information is shared in sufficient time.
 - Working with the service to ensure that social work reports are completed and shared with families in line with Practice Standards.
 - Progress IRO quality assurance activities in line with the QA Framework

14 Conclusion

- 14.1 The Independent Reviewing Officers maintain their focus on the children and families of Middlesbrough and are committed to making a difference for them. As Middlesbrough's improvement journey has seen improvements in planning for children and young people, we have in turn seen IRO caseloads fall by 42% between 2021/22 and 2023/24.
- 14.2 The IRO service is stable and fully staffed with most IROs having been in service with Middlesbrough for 5 years or more. As a result, children subject to Child Protection planning,

who subsequently become Cared for, are increasingly likely to have the same IRO allocated to them, assisting with providing consistency and reducing the need for them to retell their story.

- 14.3 In 2023/24 we have also seen improvements in the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences; however, we are an ambitious service and want the best for our children and young people, meaning that we are committed to building on this improvement to reach our target goal of 95%, so that we can demonstrate consistency and timely intervention for our children and young people.
- 14.4 We have also seen a decrease (37.6%) in children becoming subject to a second or subject periods of Child Protection planning, suggesting that previous assessments and plans are increasingly effective in supporting sustainable improvements for our children and young people.
- 14.5 There is significantly increased evidence of IRO oversight of children's plans through midway reviews and IRO visits to children. IRO challenge has increased to improve arrangements for individual children and young people.
- 14.6 Children and young people in our care, are more likely to be male (57%), than female and more likely to be of White British ethnicity than any other ethnicity. They are also more likely to be cared for by foster carers and to have had less than 3 home moves (84%).
- 14.7 When children and young people leave our care, they are more likely to return to live with parents or to be cared for by extended family (23% Special Guardianship Order, 18% Child Arrangements Order, 9% home with parents or another person with/without PR). Increasing numbers of children, 11% were adopted over the year.

15 Next Steps

Goal	Actions to achieve	Timescales/Review Mechanism	Desired Outcome
Sustain optimum IRO caseloads	Monitor, review, and analyse Monthly IRO performance caseload data to inform staffing requirements	Monthly performance data	Children, young people, and their families continue to experience minimal changes in IRO allocation.
Increase the number of children and young people's views being gathered for their reviews	IROs to encourage children and young people to attend their reviews where appropriate.	Prior to all reviews	Children and young people's views will be evidenced and influence their care planning.
	Alternative feedback mechanisms to be secured and offered to children and young people who do not wish to attend in person.	April 2025	
Improve the quality of plans for our children and young people	IRO's will provide challenge where children and young people's plans require improvement	Training and workshops are to be delivered across the service in 2025. Attendance will be reviewed, and any IRO non-attendance addressed	Children and young people's plans will be evidenced as being of good quality, driving progress.
Increase understanding of the IRO role including the use of IRO concerns and IRPs, alongside the QA functions of the IRO.	RAD Unit Team Managers will deliver training across service areas	Training to be delivered in May 2025	Practitioners will have a clear understanding of the role of the IRO, their QA functions and how and when an IRO concern or an IRP will be completed
Increase the number of Cared for reviews held in timescale from 82% to 95%	RAD Unit Team Managers will work with IROs and the wider service to ensure all paperwork is prepared and available for Cared for reviews 3 full working days prior to the review meeting date	Monthly Performance data	Children and young people will have their Cared for reviews held in timescales.
Increase the number of Review Child Protection conferences held in timescales from 76.3% to 95%	RAD Unit Team Managers will work with IROs and the wider service to ensure all paperwork is prepared and available for Review Child Protection Conferences 3 full working days prior to the conference meeting date.	Monthly Performance data	Children and young people's review conferences will be held in timescales

<p>Increase the number of Initial Child protection Conferences held in timescales from 61.3% to 95%</p>	<p>RAD Unit Team Managers will work with IROs and the wider service to ensure all paperwork is prepared and available for Initial Child Protection Conferences 2 full working days prior to the conference meeting date.</p>	<p>Monthly Performance data</p>	<p>Children and young people's Initial conferences will be held in timescales</p>
<p>Reduce the number of children subject to Child Protection Planning for 15 months or more</p>	<p>All children and young people's plans that have been in place for 15 months or more will be reviewed at the monthly Child Protection Panel</p>	<p>Monthly Panels</p>	<p>Children and young people will not be subject to pro-longed periods of Child Protection Planning. Barriers to progressing children's plans will be identified and addressed.</p>



Children Missing from Home or Care

Presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board 3rd April 2025

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Kay Dargue
Head of Partnerships and South Tees Youth Justice Service
Tanya Evans
Risk and Resilience Manager

Agenda Item 8



What does 'Missing Child' mean?

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Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established and where the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another

What factors may lead to a child going Missing?

The Children's Society through its research has identified the following risk factors that can precede a missing incident:

Arguments and conflicts

Poor family relationships

Physical and emotional abuse

Page 93 Rules, Boundaries and Consequences

Peer pressure

Family contact

Placed out of area

Mental Health

Truancy

Exploitation

Missing From Home Team

- Team sits within Children's Services, within the Risk and Resilience team in the Education and Partnerships directorate.
- The team consists of 1 Missing from Home Coordinator and 2 Missing from home practitioners.
- The role of the team is to work with children who have had a missing from home or care episode.
- A Return Home Interview (RHI) is offered to all children who go missing from home or care within 72 hours of their return, this is a statutory requirement.
- Children can be signposted to partner agencies as part of engagement work, or partners can form part of a multi-agency plan to support the child.
- Practitioners are cognisant of potential reasons for children going missing and sometimes concerns can result in completion of the Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) screening tool being completed to identify any concerns surrounding exploitation and how to support the child.
- Teeswide changes to HOTH practice - currently in the implementation phase in Middlesbrough.

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What is a Home Return Home Interview (RHI) and who conducts it?

A RHI is offered to every child who goes missing from home or care. Practitioners in the 'Missing' team will conduct the interview and place this onto the child's record so that it is easily accessible to Social Workers/anyone working with the child. Issues identified at interview are addressed via the child's safety plan.

The purpose of the interview is:

- To better understand the reasons why the child went missing, capturing the child's views
- To explore the circumstances which led to the missing episode(s)
- To inform future prevention strategies
- To inform any future missing person investigation should the child go missing again
- To learn of the activities, persons of concern and/or locations of concern involved in the missing episode, and where possible to address issues with appropriate and proactive strategies.
- To identify and address any harm the child has suffered, including harm that may not have already been disclosed as part of the police welfare check.



Middlesbrough Missing in numbers

- From August 2024 to February 2025 Middlesbrough had 641 missing episodes for 295 children.
- In February 2025, 45 children went missing from home or care. Of those, 19 were Looked After Children.
- 100% of children were offered a RHI. 73% of children took up the offer and the reasons that 27% did not were due to children or their parents declining, the team being unable to contact the family despite repeated attempts, and 1 child had been placed into custody.
- 73% of interviews were completed within timescales. For those that were not this was due to child/parent availability or arranging to see a child at school (which was the child's preference).
- Of the 45 children who went missing 7 went missing on 3 or more occasions in the month. 6 of these children have been referred or were already known to Harm outside the Home arrangements and had significant professional involvement and robust plans put in place, the other child's missing episodes related to significant mental health issues and had support in place from CAMHS. All children who are repeatedly missing (3 or more occasions in 1 month) are subject to additional scrutiny by the team to ensure robust plans are in place and action taken.

Planned improvement activity

- In February 2025 the way in which missing is recorded has been amended with the aim of improving response.
- Previously data was only broken down by children not open to Social Care, and those who were Looked After Children, Child in Need or Child Protection.
- Recording practice has been amended to separate Looked After Children in the area and those out of the area, and also current open referrals to Social Care. This will enable better analysis in future, enabling the team to draw out themes, trends and issues to better inform safety planning for the child as part of a multi-agency response.
- Heads of Service and Directors are now provided with a daily update of children who have been missing, if they have returned, plans for the child. For those who have not returned the plan for the child is outlined.
- Directors also receive a weekly report of the overview of children who have been missing that week, and the plans for those who have not yet returned.
- There is on-going work taking place to the Case Management System to enable better reporting. This work will enable information to be drawn quickly where required and will also enable a dashboard to be built for monthly reporting of themes and trends relating to missing children.
- The aim of the data/reporting improvements is to enable better reporting and recording, and ultimately a better multi-agency response and safety plan for the child. It will also feed into various Harm outside of the Home meetings where relevant.

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