

# Scrutiny Report

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date	<b>7 DECEMBER 2023</b>
Topic	<b>CHILDREN IN CARE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23</b>
Report of:	<b>SERVICE MANAGER (ACTING) OF CHILDREN IN CARE</b>

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## **Purpose of this Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the achievements, progress and challenges of the services provided by the Isle of Wight Children's Services to children in the care of the Isle of Wight Council. This report will focus on the work of the statutory social work teams.

## **Recommendation(s)**

2. The priority areas for Children's Services, Children in Care are supported by the council. These are :
  - Strengthen the voice of the Looked After Child and impact on service delivery.
  - Promote the effectiveness and efficiency of the health assessment process and service so that it meets the physical and mental health needs of Looked After Children (including dental and immunisations).
  - Improve the educational outcomes of Looked After Children and effectiveness of the process and service.
  - Improve placement stability and increase placement choice for Looked After Children.
  - Looked After Children will be safeguarded from harm including, all aspects of exploitation.
  - Increase opportunities for Looked After Children to safely live outside of the care system through SGO assessments and reunification where appropriate.
  - Ensure the needs of all UASC are understood and met through new service delivery.
  - Improve the training for all SW's for Looked After Children resulting in measurable impact.

## **Executive Summary**

3. Children in the care of the Local Authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. It is vital that the care we provide to children in care is of the highest standard and that everyone involved in supporting and providing that care is aspirational for all our children.
4. This report aims to assure that the Isle of Wight's children in care are well supported, and the needs of our children are known, and plans are reflective of the need to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people.
5. The report will provide the characteristics of the Isle of Wight's children in care, the age and length of time in care, where children are currently living, the number of children in foster care, residential homes or other settings, the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and placement stability.
6. The report will also provide information about social worker caseloads to reassure that these are manageable and social workers are able to dedicate sufficient time to children, regardless of their needs.
7. The report will provide information on children who go missing to evidence how we are safeguarding them from harm and risk of exploitation. It will also provide information on the population of UASC who are being looked after by the Isle of Wight and how their needs are being met.
8. The report will detail how children and young people are able to express their views, wishes and feelings and how Children's Services know this. It also includes the work to improve how we are planning to strengthen and show the impact of the voice of the child on service delivery through the Corporate Parenting Board.
9. The report will outline the key areas of focus over the next twelve months.

## **Who are our "Children in Care"?**

10. Children in the care of the Local Authority is any child / young person between the age of 0 -18 years that have been in the care of the Local Authority for more than 24 hours. This generally means any child or young person that has been unable to remain living at home and there is a need to be looked after by foster carers, in residential homes or other relatives, this sometimes includes children living with their parents.
11. Children can become looked after because of a voluntary agreement by their parents, or because of a Care Order made by a Court.
12. Young people between the ages of 16-18 years old can provide their own consent to come into care and do not require the agreement from those with parental responsibility.
13. A continued significant priority for Children's Services to improve the quality of care that is provided, and crucially, that it is the right children, in care at the right time. This is reflective of the changing needs of children and their families and in recognition to the importance of family life and living at home being the right place for children and young people, if it is safe.

## Isle of Wight Demographic

14. Population 141,606
  15. 28% older than 65 (18% nationally)
  16. 14.6% under 15 (18.1% nationally)
  17. 97.3% White British
  18. 14,000 lone parent households
  19. 1 in 5 in children live in poverty
  20. Common pressures – council budgets, partner budgets, recruitment (SE profile)
  21. Partnership with HCC Children's Services ending on the 31 January 2024
  22. Coastal rural community with limited public transport and additional costs of Solent travel by ferry
  23. Low wage economy-seasonal
  24. Small Unitary Council – scales of economy
  25. Demographic profile-demand in adult social care
  26. Island Levy-impact on partner agencies
  27. Deprivation
28. All the above is relevant when we consider the care we provide our children in care and this has also reflected on the priority areas for children in care.

## The Virtual School

29. The Virtual School is responsible for improving educational outcomes for children who are looked after. The Virtual School was set up to monitor the progress and attainment of looked after children and provide support and challenge to the schools they attend.
30. The Virtual School team champions the educational needs of children in care on the Isle of Wight (and for children placed in other local authorities by the Isle of Wight Council). They work with other key services (admissions, education welfare and SEN) to prioritise the needs of looked after children to ensure there is minimal delay to appropriate education provision. The Virtual School Head oversees the pupil premium grant money and monitors how it is spent. The virtual school team will collaborate with schools to maximise the impact the pupil premium money has on improving educational outcomes.
31. The Virtual School support schools to identify needs and implement support to ensure children are safe, secure, and able to learn, allowing them to make good progress. Each looked after child should have a high-quality personal education plan in place that details their needs and how they will be supported to achieve the best outcomes possible.

## Data for Children in Care

32. As of March 2023, the Isle of Wight had 295 of its children in care, this being 1.2% of the Isle of Wight 0-17 population. The following table shows the gradual increase in numbers over the last 12-month period.

Date	CLA
30/04/2022	275
31/05/2022	280
30/06/2022	283
31/07/2022	279
31/08/2022	285
30/09/2022	288
31/10/2022	288
30/11/2022	293
31/12/2022	297
31/01/2023	295
28/02/2023	295
31/03/2023	295

33. The number of CLA has continued to increase over the last 12 months despite ongoing transformation programmes to keep more children safely at home and in the community, which has slowed the increase of children coming into care. As well as this, the work to reunify children home when safe and appropriate remains a constant focus to ensure that only the right children are in public care.
34. There has been a significant increase in UASC for the Isle of Wight from 12 in March 2021 to 23 in March 2023.
35. The age, gender, and time of placement for children in care:

Sum of Clients		Latest type of main placement													Grand Total
Gender	Age Group	Family centre	Foster (CSD)	Foster (IFA)	Foster (rel or friend)	Indep living	NHS / Health Trust	Placed for Adopn.	Res home (IOW) childn	Res home (NCP) childn	Res home other	Secure unit	With parents	YOI or prison	
Female	< 1	.	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	2
	1 - 4	2	1	2	4	.	.	2	.	.	.	.	6	.	17
	5 - 9	.	13	3	5	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	10	.	32
	10 - 15	.	14	13	16	.	.	.	.	7	.	.	6	1	56
	16 - 17	.	3	1	4	.	1	.	.	6	7	1	5	.	28
	18+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	1
<b>Female Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>136</b>
Male	< 1	2	1	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
	1 - 4	.	6	1	3	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	5	.	15
	5 - 9	.	8	8	8	.	.	1	2	4	.	.	7	.	38
	10 - 15	.	17	11	11	.	.	.	6	5	.	.	8	1	59
	16 - 17	.	5	15	5	2	.	.	0	7	6	.	3	.	43
	18+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	1	.	.	.	.	1
<b>Male Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>295</b>

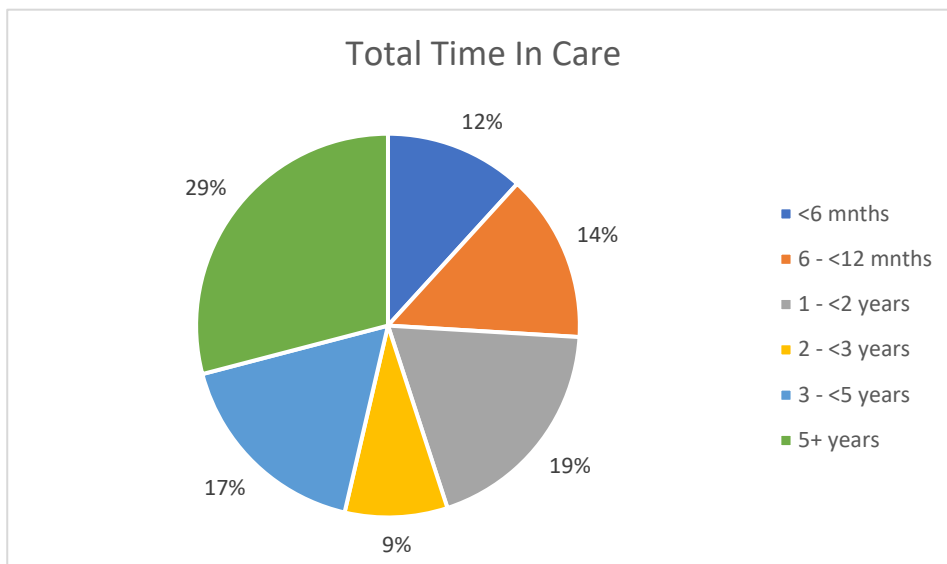
36. The above reflects where children and young people are currently placed and this shows our greatest proportion of children in care are between the ages of 10-15 years old, with significantly more males than females in care.
37. With regards to the main placement, it is positive to note that more children in care are placed with foster carers, and an increasing number being placed with Isle of

Wight carers, 69, which is reflective of the work to increase the number of in-house foster carers. There is also an increase in the number of children who are 16 and 17 years old over the last 2 years that live in supported accommodation, which is reflective of the work to promote their independence and transition to adulthood.

38. What is also significant to note, is the number of children placed with parents, the data reflects there were 51 children which means they are children subject to a Court Order but in their parents' care.
39. It is also of interest to note that there is an increasing number of children, (56) who are placed with family members or friends who have been approved as Connected Carers. All of these children are identified by Children's Services in our work to reduce this number of children in care but can continue to be supported under an alternative legal order such as a Special Guardianship Order.

### How Long Are Children In Care?

Time in care	Grand Total
<6 mnths	34
6 - <12 mnths	41
1 - <2 years	55
2 - <3 years	25
3 - <5 years	50
5+ years	84
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>289</b>

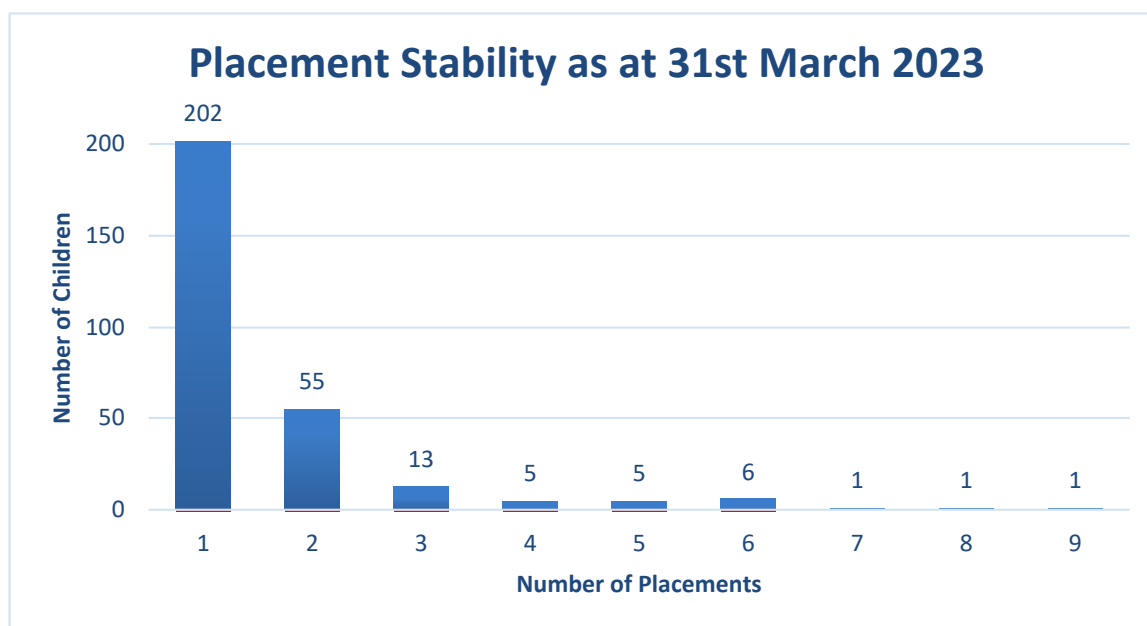


40. The data shows that most children are in care for over five years, with 29% of children being in this age bracket. The least number of children are in care are between 2-3 years at 9%.
41. This data cannot be taken in isolation, it serves to provide high level information and trends may change over time with the changes to practice meaning children are only in care for as long as needed. This is to be expected as matters placed before the Court should be concluded within 26 weeks, by which time a long-term plan will be

identified which could be for return home, to wider family under alternative orders, or a plan for adoption.

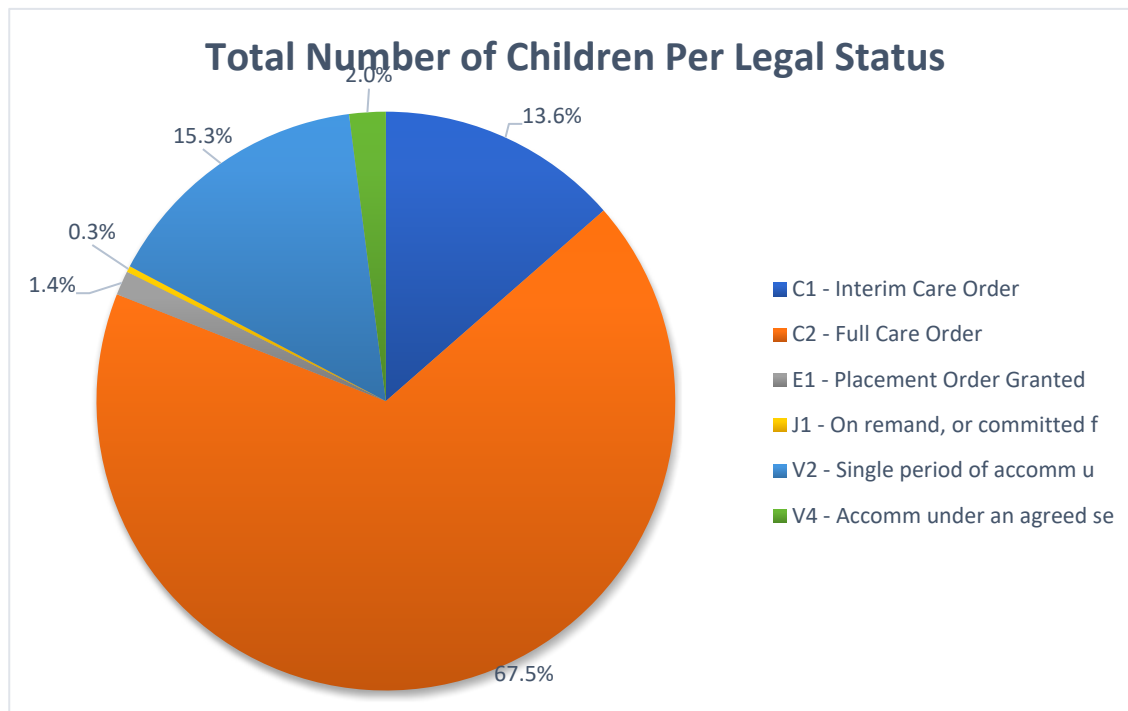
## Placement Stability

42. The below chart reflects the stability of children in care over the last 12 months. Positively most children remain in the same placement, 202 children, an additional 55 only having one move. A smaller number of children, 11 having had over 5+ placement moves over the year.
43. Placement moves can be for positive reasons, that children are returned to family, that children are able to transition from residential care to foster care. Equally it can mean that children's needs are not being best met in the current placement and there is a need to move. The important factor is that we know the reasons for the move.
44. An example of a child's journey where changes of placements are for a positive outcome could be a baby living in foster carer when the matter is placed before the Court and the conclusion of Care Proceedings is that the child's needs will be best met via adoption. The child then moves to the adoptive placement but initially remains a Child Looked After. Another example is a child initially being placed in a foster placement but after a period of two years being able to be reunified back to a parent. Both of these examples would mean that the child's care journey consisted of two placements.
45. Over the last twelve months the Isle of Wight fostering panel have approved:
- 11 connected carers bringing the total to 36 connected carers with a further 4 currently under assessment.
  - 10 new general foster carers bringing the total to 42 general carers
  - 1 supported lodgings carer
46. The Isle of Wight is involved in improving the fostering service under the Modernising Placements programme which will result in all enquiries being dealt within the consortium of local authorities, this should allow for a more centralised recruitment campaign and increase the number of foster carers on the Isle of Wight.



## Legal Status of Children in Care

47. The legal status of a child in care is important, it specifies who has legal parental responsibility for a child in care enabling decisions to be made. In respect of children who are in care under S20 of the Children Act 1989, the responsibility rests solely with the parent and when a Care Order exists, this responsibility is shared between parents and the Local Authority. All children who are in care, but living with a parent, will be subject to an Interim or Full Care Order.



48. The children who are looked after under a full or interim care order make up the greatest number, which is to be expected.

## Ethnicity of Children in Care – excluding UASC

49. This data has not altered significantly in the last 2 years with the majority of the Isle of Wight's children in care being White British, 93%.

Ethnicity	Total	Percentage
Black / Black British	1	0.4%
Any other Mixed Background	2	0.7%
Mixed White and Black	3	1.1%
White - Any Other	10	3.7%
White British	254	93.4%
White Irish	2	0.7%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## UASC – Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

50. The Isle of Wight currently have 23 UASC under the age of 18 years and currently in care. There has been a significant increase in UASC in IoW over the last few years, rising from 5 in 2020/1 to 10 in 2021/2 and as of 31 March 2023 now sits at 23. They

now make up 4.1% of IoW's looked after population. UASC are supported in specialist foster placements or in supported accommodation.

51. The majority of these continue to be 16 – 17 years old and from Afghanistan.

Age	Total	Percentage
14	2	8.7%
15	5	21.7%
16	13	56.5%
17	3	13.0%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

52. Count of UASC's Nationalities:

Nationality	Total	Percentage
Afghan	8	34.8%
Albanian	5	21.7%
Iranian	5	21.7%
Iraqi	1	4.3%
Kuwaiti	1	4.3%
Sudanese	1	4.3%
Syrian	1	4.3%
Egyptian	1	4.3%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

53. This figure is made up of children who have come through the National Transfer Scheme as well as children who have arrived spontaneously into the UK.
54. The number of UASCs has increased due to the mandatory quota moving from 0.07% to 0.1%. The Home Office is anticipating that there will be an increase the number of people arriving in the UK via small boats.
55. Hampshire has created a specialist Refugee team that supports children looked after by the Isle of Wight and Hampshire. Since the team went live at the beginning of March 2023, all UASCs that were open to the Children in Care Team on the Isle of Wight have been transferred.

### Disabled Children

56. On 31 March 2023 204 children were open to the Disabled Children's Team, of which 25 children were in care, 17 of these children were subject to Interim/Full Care Orders, 2 under single periods of accommodation with the remaining 6 are under Prog Breaks.
57. Of the 25 children, 7 children are in in-house foster care, 2 in family and friend arrangements, 1 is in a Secure Unit, 2 with Parents and 13 are in residential care.



Sum of Clients		Latest type of main placement							Grand Total
Gender	Age Group	Foster (CSD)	Foster (rel or friend)	Res home (IOW) childn	Res home (NCP) childn	Res home other	Secure unit	With parents	
Female	5 - 9	1	1	.	.	.	.	.	2
	10 - 15	1	1	.	1	.	.	.	3
	16 - 17	.	.	.	.	1	1	.	2
<b>Female Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>7</b>
Male	5 - 9	1	.	2	.	.	.	1	4
	10 - 15	3	.	6	.	.	.	1	10
	16 - 17	1	.	0	3	.	.	.	4
<b>Male Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>.</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>25</b>

## Children in Care Teams

58. The Isle of Wight has 1 Children in Care Team, comprising of a Team Manager, an Assistant Team Manager and on average 8 social workers (slight variation reflective of case numbers). The average caseload for a CIC social worker is 20 children per full time social worker.

## Placement Commissioning Team

59. The Children's Assessment and Support (CAST) teams, Children with Disabilities team and Children in Care team work closely with the Placement Commissioning team, with the purpose of ensuring that children are in the right provision for their needs. They ensure that the provider is accountable for targeted support to meet the young person's needs, that the focus is on promoting the needs of young people and encouraging their development.

60. Through the child's placement, outcome planning meetings are held with providers who are supported and monitored to remain on track with the Local Authority care plan, this enables children to move on at a time that is right for them.

61. The Placement Commissioning team also guide transitions which are required to enable children to move from residential placements back to family, connected carers or foster care. Linking closely with the fostering team and the independent fostering agencies.

## Reunification

62. The Isle of Wight introduced the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Approach as a method of social work intervention. This is a strengths-based approach focusing on building positive relationships with families, identifying strengths and using this to support change in other areas. For children in care, this has a significant impact around their plans, as children in care, are in care for as long as needed. Previously a permanence decision would be made for a child to be placed in care and it would be the plan until they reached the age of 18 years.

63. In recognition that family situations can change, there has been significant progress around working with children and their families to enable children to be safely reunified to the care of family over time. This is carefully considered and

uses the NSPCC Framework for Reunification to provide a robust assessment to progress plans.

64. The Isle of Wight have reunified 10 children to the care of their parents. All were previously in the care of the Local Authority.

### **Special Guardianship Orders**

65. It is recognised that children who remain placed within their family or with friends do better, they continue to remain within their family environment where their sense of belonging is maintained within the family.
66. On 31 March 2023 there were 84 children living with their Special Guardians on the Isle of Wight. In the period April 2022 to March 2023, 3 children who had been in care for 12 months or more, stopped being looked after as their carers became Special Guardians.
67. On 31 March 2023 there were 56 children living with their wider family or friends, but due to various reasons, the carers wish to continue to be Connected Carers and the children remain looked after. The Children in Care teams continue to review these regularly to see how we can support connected carers offering this vital support to become Special Guardians where appropriate. This would provide the carers with parental responsibility to enable them to make decisions for the child and give the child more security and prevent them from continuing to be a Looked After Child.

### **Children who go missing from care**

68. It is vital that we know the whereabouts of all children in care, this is closely tracked as it is known that children who go missing from care are at increased risk of child exploitation.
69. Exploitation includes:
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
  - Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
  - Modern Slavery
  - Trafficking
  - County Lines (drug running)
70. When a child is looked after and is missing, Children's Services will show the same concern as any good parent by taking the necessary steps to understand where children are going and why.
71. Over the past 12 months there have been 124 children reported missing. Some of these will be the same child, and we are aware which children frequently go missing and there is close monitoring of these. A risk assessment/safety plan will inform what support services and actions are required to prevent children and young people from going missing, and to judge when it is appropriate to report them missing to the police. For some high-risk young people, this would be immediately when out of visual sight of staff, for others this would be if they have failed to return home by the time agreed with their carer.

72. CLA missing children/episodes, any duration.

Event month	Children	Episodes
2022-04	10	16
2022-05	7	12
2022-06	11	14
2022-07	11	33
2022-08	8	36
2022-09	11	45
2022-10	11	40
2022-11	15	19
2022-12	10	20
2023-01	7	21
2023-02	10	36
2023-03	13	29
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>321</b>

73. There is a close working relationship with the police Missing, Exploited and Trafficked team who work with young people at risk of exploitation. CERAF's are completed for all children who go missing. CERAF's that indicate a child may be at a high risk of exploitation (scoring 11 or above) are reviewed by MASH and where relevant are referred for discussion at the monthly METRAC Meeting which is chaired by the police. There is a need for all agencies to work together around exploitation to ensure that there is an effective response.

74. For children who go missing from care they are offered a return from missing conversation and leaflets are provided to both children and their carers to provide further information which they read to increase their understanding of why we are worried when they are not where they are supposed to be.

75. There are different strategies in place to ensure that children in care have effective plans and support with issues around exploitation, below is an indication of just some of the work in place:

- Training – there is access for staff to attend training to increase their understanding around current issues regarding child exploitation.
- The Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS), Child Exploitation Toolkit is available to all of the children's workforce to support them to work with young people who are at risk of exploitation including children who go missing.
- The Early Help team monitor any child who has been reported missing on a daily basis and ensures the allocated teams are informed of who is missing. The service managers and Area Director is included in this communication to ensure everyone is cited over who is missing and how long they have been missing for.
- High Risk Strategy Meetings are convened as appropriate where all relevant people involved in a child are present in order to give multi agency oversight and an input into all decision making.

- All children who have been reported missing are offered a return conversation in order to gather information as to where they had been and who they were with and how further missing episodes could be prevented.
- Operation Salvus – is a Police pilot operation that looks to ensure that specific children who are at high risk of exploitation or are priority missing will be considered as 'High Risk Missing' as soon as they are reported. This means that the police are able to use resources to locate the young people who are most at risk.
- CAWNS are also utilised when an individual is identified as being a risk to children or young people.
- CERAF (risk assessment tool used by professional to determine a risk level) – upgraded to review and score risk around all forms of exploitation including Missing.
- UASC Collaboration – A multi-agency pan Hampshire review of UASC children including long-term missing and trafficked children.
- NRM – (National Referral Mechanism) – a framework to identify potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring that they receive the correct support.

### **Children's wishes and views:**

76. The Isle of Wight is committed ensuring the voice of children and young people is evident in all that we do. As part of the Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Approach all the recording in relation to children, all visits, assessments, plans are written to the child using strengths-based language that is appropriate to the understanding of the child. Practitioners integrate the voice of children and young people across all recording including supervision notes.
77. Strength based direct work tools ensures all voices are captured and inform the social worker analysis.
78. Children are involved in developing their My Life My Future plans, they do this directly with their social worker, their carer and some write it themselves. The child's perspective is embedded throughout the document and features age-appropriate scaling as both a direct work tool and also to demonstrate change over time. This has seen improved engagement from children around their care plan as they feel very much part of it.
79. Children are spoken to alone by their social worker on visits and their Independent Review Officer also ensures their wishes are understood in meeting with them alone and as part of their 6 monthly reviews.
80. Review participation performance for the Isle of Wight is 98% throughout the last 12 months. This evidences that a high percentage of young people have their opportunity to participate in their reviews and decisions being made about their future. IRO's have continued to seek children's views.

## Findings from 2022 Bright Spots Survey

81. Bright Spots is a national survey run by the charity Coram Voice which collates the voice of the child and their experience in care. This is a biannual survey, which was again completed in 2022.
82. Coram designate some findings as a Bright Spot. This is where children and young people are doing significantly better than children in care in other LAs or report the same or higher well-being than their peers in the general population.
83. All **four of the Bright Spots** awarded in the 2020 survey were awarded again in 2022. Having a pet, trusting carers, a trusted adult in your life and one social worker in the last 12 months.
84. An **additional 13 Bright Spots** were awarded for this survey:
  - Having fun and hobbies
  - Spending time outdoors
  - Access to the Internet
  - Feeling settled in placement
  - Feeling safe in placement
  - Liking bedrooms
  - Carers interested in children and young people's education
  - Carers noticing how children and young people are feeling
  - Regularly confiding in carers
  - Knowing who their social worker is
  - Knowing they can speak to the social worker alone
  - Having a good friend
  - Family time with siblings 'just right'
85. Areas of improvement identified included:
  - Children not liking school and feeling they were not getting help for bullying
  - They felt they were not included
  - Some shared that they did not trust their social worker
  - Some said they did not know the reasons why they were in care
  - Some reported that they were less likely to feel happy yesterday compared to other children.
86. These areas of improvement were turned into SMART actions and included in the participation action plan, the progress and impact of which on improvements in practice and service delivery is performance managed through the senior management team and Corporate Parenting Board (CPB).

## Participation

87. In recent years the responsibility for Participation has moved from a standalone role sat centrally, to every team within the service. The rationale for this shift is the recognition that participation is everyone's responsibility and that we should incorporate it in business-as-usual activity.
88. Local teams have continued to deliver a broad and varied range of participation events and activities throughout the year and a presentation on participation is presented at every CPB.

89. There are a significant number of examples of participation across our services This report aims to give a flavour of the breadth and impact of these events.

### **Care Leavers Events**

90. The Leaving Care team run events regular for care experienced young people to support them to feel less isolated and to be supported to take part in events held in their local communities.
91. HYPE is our participation group which meets monthly to enable young people to discuss the issues that are important to them, that are then raised with our Corporate Parents to provide resolution or explanations. Hearing the voices of our young people is fundamental in supporting the development of the what the team offers via the Local Offer and in enabling planning for the needs of care experienced young people.
92. Come Dine with Us is our monthly cooking group supporting young people to cook on a budget. The group provides support to learn new skills and to make friendships with other care experienced young people. Come Dine With Us takes place at the Isobel Centre and within the housing projects where our young people live and also supports the completion of the Independent Living Programme which is accredited by AQA Board.
93. Have Your Say week held twice a year supports care experienced young people to enjoy a variety of activities from bowling, swimming, barbeques, kayaking enabling them to come together for fun. The events also provide an opportunity to seek the views on the subjects care experienced young people have raised. The Bright Spots survey held this year provided areas of discussion resulting in an action plan to support changes.
94. This year the team launched Lunch Club for our care experienced parents funded by community grants. This project has proved very successful, and the group have enjoyed play dates, days out, throughout the year. The project provides a monthly meet up which has resulted in our parents now establishing friendships outside of the group.
95. Care experienced young people are also supported to attend food pantries funded by community grants for 12 weeks supporting them manage their income during the increased cost of living.

### **Children in Care team events**

#### Children in Care star Awards 2022

96. The star awards event is held annually. This year it was held at Northwood House in Cowes. This event is to celebrate and recognise children's and young people's achievements and progress.
97. All children and young people are nominated by their Social Worker and can also be nominated by their school or their carer/s. All children receive a certificate celebrating their success and some children who have made an exceptional achievement receive a prize as well. All looked after children are eligible to attend and invitations were sent to each team. This year we were pleased to have 49 children attend with their foster families.

### Have Your Say Events

98. Children's services hold a number of different events throughout the year in line with school holidays, these vary from Arts/Crafts to horse riding and trips to different events on the island. At the end of each event a questionnaire is completed to ascertain the views of the young people we are working with in order to listen to their views and act upon these as appropriate.

### Therapeutic story writing

99. This solution focused intervention uses story writing and metaphors. This programme runs for 10 weeks with a group of 6 children aged between 7-13 years. Groups can help children to process difficult feelings, develop social skills and improve children's engagement with writing.

### Story links

100. This intervention supports pupils with emotional difficulties. It uses therapeutic story writing to promote emotional well-being and reading skills. The intervention involves the child, parents/carers and the Teaching Assistant in co-creation of stories that address behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. This solution focused intervention runs over 10 weeks. It uses joint story writing and metaphors.

101. The Story Links project evaluation shows that the intervention:

- Supports children's emotional and social well-being
- Improves home/school relationships
- Improves involvement of parent/carer in their child's learning
- Improves child's behaviour and attitude to learning

### Junior Come Dine With Us Event

102. We hold a monthly cookery club for our young people to come along and join in with some staff in preparing and cooking a meal then afterwards they all sit down and eat together. These sessions allow for a more formal interaction between workers and the young people. Our looked after young people have a say as to what meals they want to cook at the next session. This event builds the confidence of our young people, and they can see that that they are not the only person who is the care of the Local Authority.

### Allotment project

103. The team have an allotment a well-established project based in Ventnor which offers young people, from across the service the opportunity to meet on a weekly basis to participate in the activities required to support the allotment and alongside this complete the AQA in horticulture.

### HYPE

104. Hearing Young People's Experiences, the purpose of the group is to gather young people's views. This can be as a result of particular questions put to them or to gather their views and opinions about things they would like changed. Young people can bring any concerns they want for discussion. This is then fed back through the Corporate Parenting Board.

### Youth Parliament

105. Meetings are held once per month and each meeting has a different topic for discussion. The meeting is attended by 8-10 young people. There is an elected youth

MP and deputy Youth MP and a chair of the meeting. The Youth MP attends the National youth events which is facilitated by the British Youth Council.

## **Conclusions**

106. This last 12 months has been extremely busy for Children in Care. It is a credit to all social workers that they have continued to fully engage children and young people in a way that they can participate in all visits and planning, to ensure that their voice is heard, they understand what is happening to them and a positive impact can be seen.
107. There is already work underway to improve the number of foster carers and this is being undertaken through the Modernising Placements Programme.
108. The department has continued to support children living with family and friends under alternative arrangements and without the need for them to be in care, where possible. For those children where care is necessary, This strengths-based way of working aims to improve outcomes for children by developing a continuum of care which can provide the right accommodation and support at the right time for our children in care, and to ensure that children in care have the same life chances as every other child; and they supported to achieve their goals.