

Independent Reviewing Officers

Safeguarding

Annual Report 2023-2024



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Executive Summary

The Lancashire Annual Safeguarding Report for 2023-2024 maintains the accessible and visually engaging format that was well-received in the previous year, outlines the progress and priorities for the IRO Service in our safeguarding work across Child Protection Conferences, Education settings, and with children at risk of exploitation.

The dual-role Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Lancashire, who also serve as Child Protection Chairs, have played a pivotal role in the oversight and quality assurance of safeguarding meetings and practice. We have built on our work in recent years to deliver and reflect the Family Safeguarding Model through our safeguarding support. Within this year we have incorporated learning and development drawn from lived experiences of safeguarding systems, as well as via the partnership JTAI inspection of Serious Youth Violence and exploitation in the later part of the year.

Our priorities and progress in the year include –

- **Trauma-Informed Development:** we have invested in continuous professional development for IROs, providing them with specialized training to better recognize and respond to the trauma experienced by children and parents who enter the child protection system.
- **Beyond Homes Initiative:** Recognizing the need to address risks that children face outside the home, Lancashire has introduced the Beyond Homes conference model, with a pilot program scheduled to commence in the East from July 2024.
- **School Safeguarding:** We have reinforced the safeguarding support for schools by increasing staffing levels and enhancing training programs. This approach has resulted in a high demand for safeguarding services and very positive feedback from educational institutions.
- **Participation of children and families:** The report highlights the improvements made in engaging children and parents in the safeguarding process, ensuring that their voices are heard and their feedback is integrated into protection conferences.



Progress on Priorities 2023-24

We Said

IROs are to be continually supported to develop best practice through trauma-informed development opportunities.

We need to consider how children at risk outside of the home, are being supported and Child Protection Conferences to be developed in line with the service delivery from the Contextual safeguarding team.

The IRO service gathers accurate data on timely, strength-based reports completed by social workers and multi-agency partners to ensure that relevant support, advice and training can be shared.

Professional feedback from conferences to be collated and used to inform service delivery and identify training, development, and support for multi-agency partners.

We Did

Regular IRO briefs, training events and learning opportunities have taken place to support understanding and awareness of how trauma informed effects individuals and communities.

We have supported in developing the Beyond Homes conference model to safeguard children who are at risk of significant harm from factors beyond the home. This is to be piloted and launched in the East in July 2024, and we will support the evaluation and wider rollout of this model.

The IRO service has gathered feedback from agencies and worked with multi agency partners throughout the year. One of the outcomes from this feedback was specific training need for schools on strength-based conferences and this has been delivered.

Professional feedback continues to be gathered, recently a new form and QR code has been developed in order to make this easier for professionals.

Progress on Priorities 2023-24 continued

We Said

We should monitor and analyse practice and trends in relation to the participation of children in Conferences so that we can highlight and promote best practice across the system.

We should develop flexible and accessible ways to gain feedback from children about their experience of Conferences to shape future service delivery.

We should make it easier for parents to provide feedback about Conferences so that we can use this for learning and practice improvement.

We Did

We have developed monitoring and reporting arrangements so that we understand the nature and quality of child participation in Conferences, and we use this to provide feedback and challenge.

We have developed a QR code based feedback form for children and we promote its use following Conferences.

We have developed a similar QR based feedback form for parents which feeds into our Performance & Quality arrangements.

The IRO Service

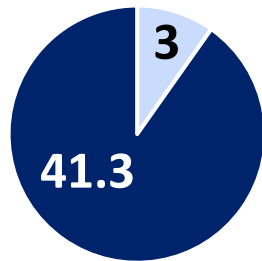
**Independent
Reviewing
Officers**

44.3

FTE

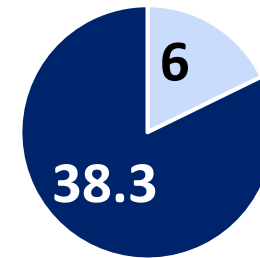
**IRO
Average
Caseload**

57.2



Gender

■ Male ■ Female



Ethnicity

■ All Other Ethnic Minorities ■ White British



School Safeguarding

The School Safeguarding Service has continued to move from strength to strength over the past 12 months providing support to schools across Lancashire in fulfilling their safeguarding duties. The Service remains popular and in high demand with approximately 620 education establishments signed up to the School Safeguarding standard SLA. It is a tribute to the service that there are almost no withdrawals when schools are converting to academies. During this year we expanded the capacity of the Service to strengthen the offer available to schools and are in the process of further expansion. This will support our delivery of core safeguarding support to schools, as well as broaden the offer of enhanced support to a greater number of schools than the current provision of 70 schools.

DSL Training Feedback - "Far more detail and relevance than when I completed my DSL training with a private company. All appropriate subject matter was thoroughly covered. Superb, thank you!"

In addition to planned work the Schools Safeguarding Service also provides ad-hoc commissioned support to schools. This comes from a variety of routes – the LCC School Improvement Service Monitoring and Intervention Team (MIT) commission targeted support for schools; usually via undertaking a Safeguarding Audit and support with follow up action planning. Schools also directly spot purchase training, audits and/or safeguarding support.

DSL Training Feedback - "Being able to talk over concerns with a colleague who understands safeguarding from a school's perspective is extremely helpful"

The Schools Safeguarding Service also supports schools in fulfilling their responsibilities in respect of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, including support in completion of education chronologies, attendance at Joint Agency Review Meetings (following a sudden child death) and other Safeguarding Practice Learning activity.

DSL Training Feedback - "Thanks for all your support on the course yesterday. I can safely say that I have been raving about it all day today!"

Safeguarding

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The first annual School Safeguarding Conference took place in October 2023 which provided an opportunity to support and upskill DSL's by raising awareness of other agencies that can support children and families through universal services and Early Help and encourage them to make relevant referrals to access support. Following the success of the conference a further conference is planned to take place again in October 2024.

The team have implemented a range of support and training options for DSLs. These include additional training around identified areas. The team have good, established links with other departments and agencies and have set up workshops for DSL's around the following topics in 23/24. DSL Multi-agency drop ins, Dealing with Physical Chastisement, What is MASH and how to make a referral, CP conferences, Online Safety for DSLs, SEND and Safeguarding and there is a workshop planned for June 24 around the Single Central Record, that is being attended by over 100 schools.

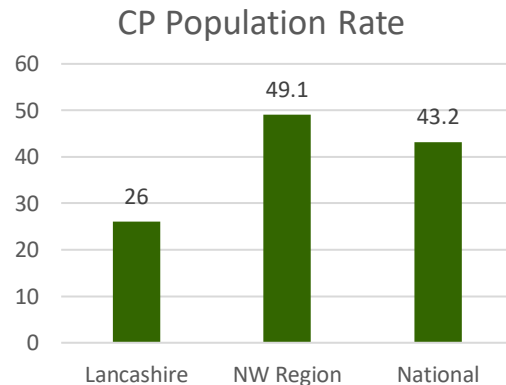
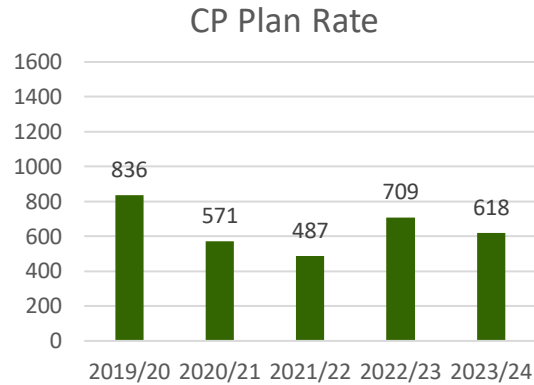
The team have significant plans for 2024 in view of a continuing with additional training on top of the core offer and expanding capacity with the fourth person to support safeguarding within our settings.

DSL Training Feedback " Reassurance that what we have in place in school is correct and also the updates and reminders of safeguarding procedures. Mechelle was great. Very approachable and supportive."

Safeguarding Performance

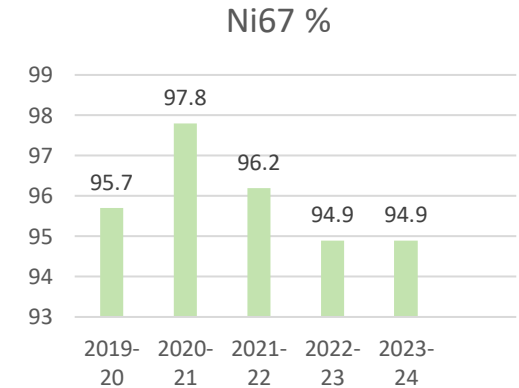
The number of children subject of a Child Protection (CP) Plan has reduced in 2024 with an overall decrease of 12.83% (709 plans March 2023 to 658 in March 2024). This follows a previous increase during 2022-23 of 45.6% (487 plans March 2022 to 709 plans March 2023).

The CP population rate reduced from 28 per 10k to 26 during the year.



Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs) held within timescale remains an area of consistently good practice. There has been no change since 2022/23, remaining at 94.9.

Review Conferences continue to be booked in advance to ensure timeliness; however, a small number are unable to go ahead due to insufficient attendance by family members or key professionals.



Safeguarding

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Performance on the duration of child protection plans over 2 years improved this year. This meant that at year end (March 2024) there were four children on an open CP Plan, down from a mid-year peak at 17.

This demonstrates that Manager and IRO oversight and challenge is effective in ensuring that timely support is provided with challenge and oversight from Managers and IRO's to address any drift or delay in CP Plans. From an IRO Service perspective all CP Plans over 12 months duration are reviewed within IRO Supervision, including oversight of the 12-month IRO-Manager review of the plan.

Year CP Plan Duration	2023						2024					
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
1. 0-3 Months	258	229	216	200	175	152	161	173	181	193	171	176
2. 3-6 Months	216	232	246	226	201	186	167	130	116	130	152	158
3. 6-12 Months	193	227	210	220	267	260	257	242	232	215	191	175
4. 1-2 Years	55	43	63	68	80	76	87	100	96	100	136	145
5. 2 Years+	7	12	12	13	13	17	11	10	5	5	5	4
Total	729	743	747	727	736	691	683	655	630	643	655	658

The IRO Service completed 18.5% of all Tier 2/Learning Space Audits completed within Children's Services during 2023/24. 69% of all audits completed during the year were graded as Good overall.

The IRO footprint is well evidenced and clearly documented on children's files, including mid-point reviews and via their attendance and participation in relevant meetings and reflective case discussions with managers. IROs know their children's strengths and needs well, and their input has assisted in promoting positive outcomes for the children. Challenge is appropriate via management alerts and support and guidance provided, such as prompts to put a trigger plan in place. Suggested actions are usually addressed in a timely manner. Very limited findings relating to what IROs could do better/differently. **Audit Service Report**

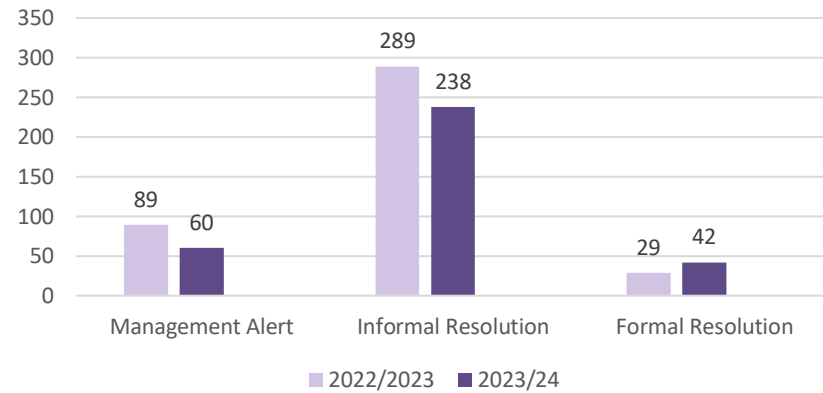


IRO Challenge

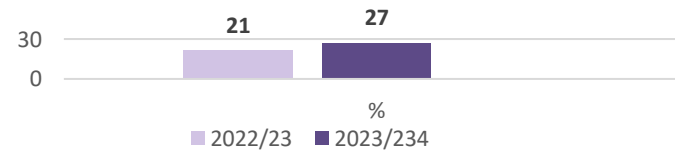
Throughout 2023/24 the IRO service has continued to focus on the quality of IRO challenge in respect of outcomes for children, ensuring challenge is evident, effective and outcome focussed. IROs use Management Alerts to challenge compliance issues and the Outcome Resolution process to track and escalate care planning deficits, practice issues etc.



Children subject of CPP accounted for 27% of IRO Outcome Resolutions 2022/23, which is an increase to the previous years.



An enhanced understanding of quality of practice, commitment to an ongoing journey of improvement, and consistent implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model has supported an overall reduction in challenge particularly at informal stages. There has, however, been an increase in the need for IRO's in their role as CP Conference chairs to escalate challenge formally when there has been concern regarding safeguarding; in the main this is in cases where it is deemed that the plan is not achieving sufficient and appropriate reduction in risk to the child and Senior Manager oversight and legal advice is sought.



Child Protection Plan Outcome Resolutions



Strengths Based Conferences

During 2023/24 the IRO service has continued to embed the Family Safeguarding Model, through strength-based and trauma-informed Child Protection Conferences. Learning from feedback via children, parents and professionals is central to this work.

➤ Police Reports – We have successfully rolled out the new style Police reports for child protection conferences Lancashire wide, which reflect our strength-based practice.

➤ Feedback – Electronic conference feedback from parents, carers, and partner agencies received via the QR code is used to reflect upon, inform and develop practice.

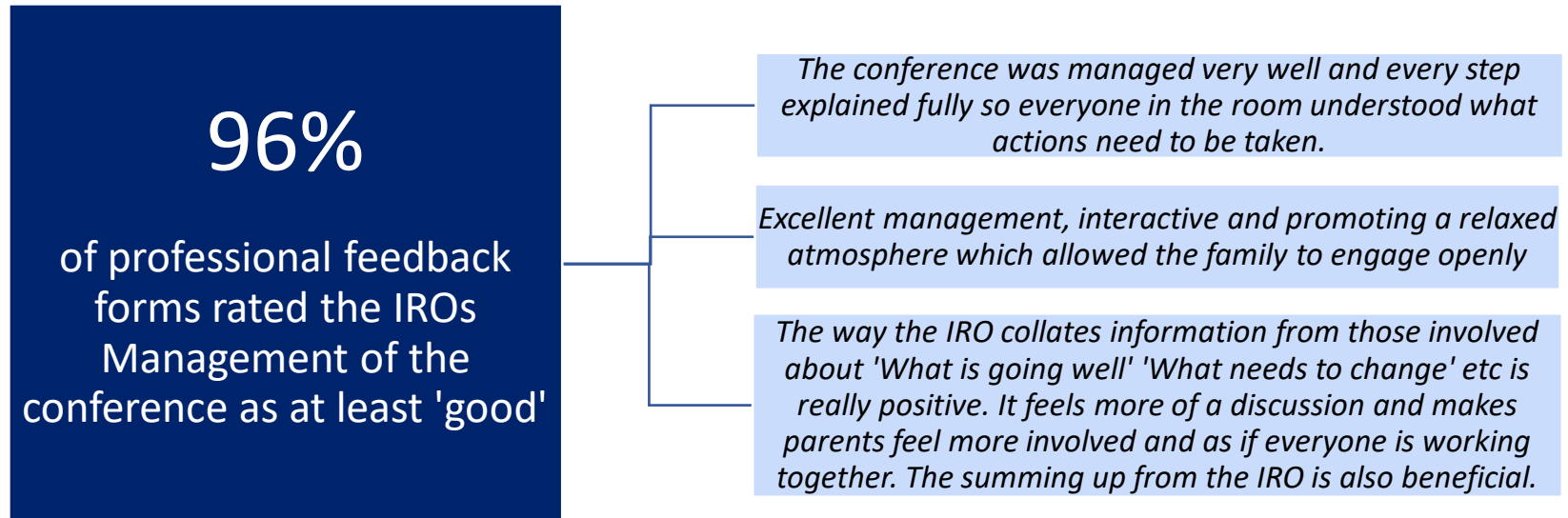
➤ Minutes – Child protection conference minutes have been developed and improved in-line with parent feedback and are now better aligned to strength-based practice.

➤ Workshops – Following feedback from schools we have facilitated workshops for our education partners to focussing on strength-based child protection conferences.

➤ Multiagency Working – We have continued to work with our multiagency partners in health and education, reinforcing the importance of sharing reports with parents/carers ahead of conferences.

2023-2024
Headlines

Strength Based Conference Feedback



There have been 182 feedback forms completed between April 2023 and March 2024 (55 from parent / carers and 127 from professionals) 93% of professionals felt they had felt able to express their views and ask questions in the conference and 82% of parents had met with the IRO to prepare for the Conference. This feedback has now progressed from an electronic form to being accessed via a QR code in the anticipation that this is easier and more accessible to parents and carers.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: I attended the ICPC meeting that you chaired & just want to feedback. It was the first child protection conference that I have attended & I felt that the way you conducted the conference excellent. Not only were you professional but you also had the ability to put everyone including the parents at full ease. I really appreciated this as I was quite apprehensive prior to the meeting & expected a completely different experience.

Beyond Homes

From July 2024 Beyond Homes Conferences are to be piloted in the East. Beyond Homes is a model that reflects harm which occurs to children in their wider social environments, beyond their immediate family or household. It recognises that the statutory child protection system, based around parental abuse or neglect is not well suited to meet the needs of families who experience such risks. By adopting a Contextual Safeguarding approach the multi-agency system can better understand and respond to the complex and dynamic risks faced by children in their wider social environments. It promotes a more holistic and comprehensive approach to safeguarding, ensuring that interventions address the multiple factors that contribute to a child's vulnerability to harm.

A beyond home plan has the same status as a child protection plan. The purpose of the beyond home plan is to facilitate and make explicit a coordinated approach led by the child, family and community knowledge to:

- Ensure the child is safe and prevent them from suffering further harm.
- Promote the child's health and development.

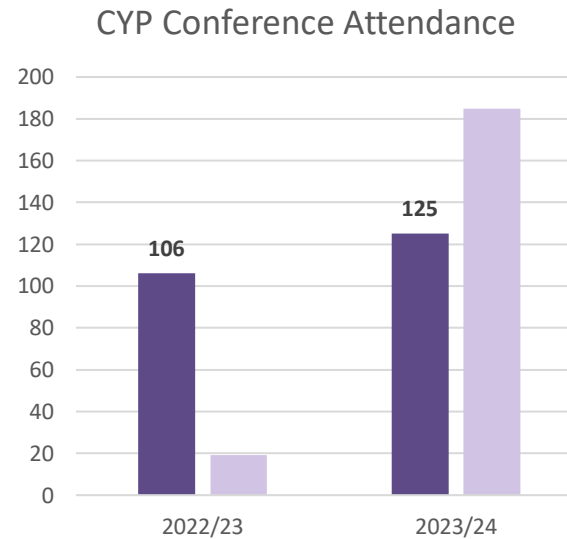
Support the family to safeguard and promote the welfare of their child. Following the pilot, beyond home conferences will be evaluated and rolled out across the county as appropriate.

In February 2024 the Lancashire safeguarding partnership received a JTAI inspection based on Serious Youth Violence and Criminal Exploitation. The good practice and learning highlighted from this work has been shared across the IRO Service and will inform our contribution to the development of the Beyond Homes model.



Participation

During 2023-24 we promoted the participation and voice of the child within CP Conferences. This saw a near ten fold increase in participation forms (185 completed) as well an 18% increase in children directly attending their Child Protection Conference (125 children)



IRO's continue to highlight the need to gain children's views and engagement whether through direct attendance, advocacy, Mind of my Own, or targeted direct work. This supports the development of a partnership based child protection system, as reflected in our Family Safeguarding Model, and wider national reforms.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE:

The IRO visited a family with the Social Worker prior to a Review, as the parent had not engaged in the conference process thus far. The visit provided reassurance to the parent about the delivery of Conferences and enabled the parent to share significant disclosures about their worries for the child. Since this the mother has attended and participated well in subsequent child protection conferences and is engaging well with the CP plan.

Safeguarding

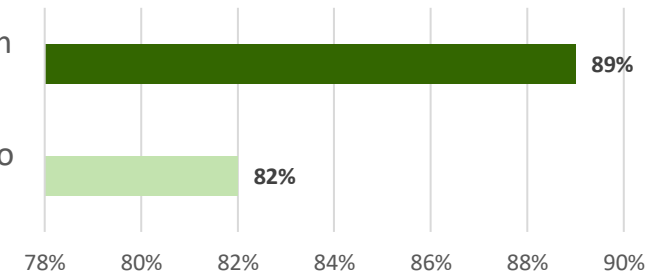
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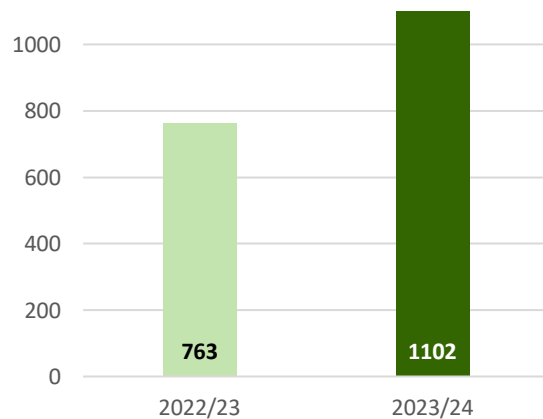
There were a total of 1313 conferences held during 2023/24. Our model of practice and ways of working promotes a high level of engagement both in preparation for Conferences, and at the Conference itself.

Parent Attended and Participated in the Conference

Parent Met with IRO Prior to Conference



Number of Statements



'Mind of My Own' is a web-based application that supports participation. During 2023-24 there were 1102 statements (up by 36%) created to share the views of children and young people. 195 were created by children from their own accounts and 907 were sent from workers accounts. 84 of statements were to prepare for a meeting, 21 were to sort a problem statement and 28 were to share good news. The IRO Service continues to work with the Participation Working Group to promote the use of Mind of My Own across Children's Services.

Conclusion

The Safeguarding Annual Report 2023-2024 for Lancashire presents a comprehensive overview of the progress made in enhancing safeguarding conference delivery through the principles of our Family Safeguarding Model.

The continuous professional development initiatives for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have significantly contributed to the improvement of trauma-informed practice, enabling them to offer more relational support to children and families. The School Safeguarding Service has responded to the demand for enhanced support by increasing staff and training, which has been well-received by the educational sector. The inaugural annual conference for School Safeguarding was a key event that brought together professionals to share and develop knowledge and good practice.

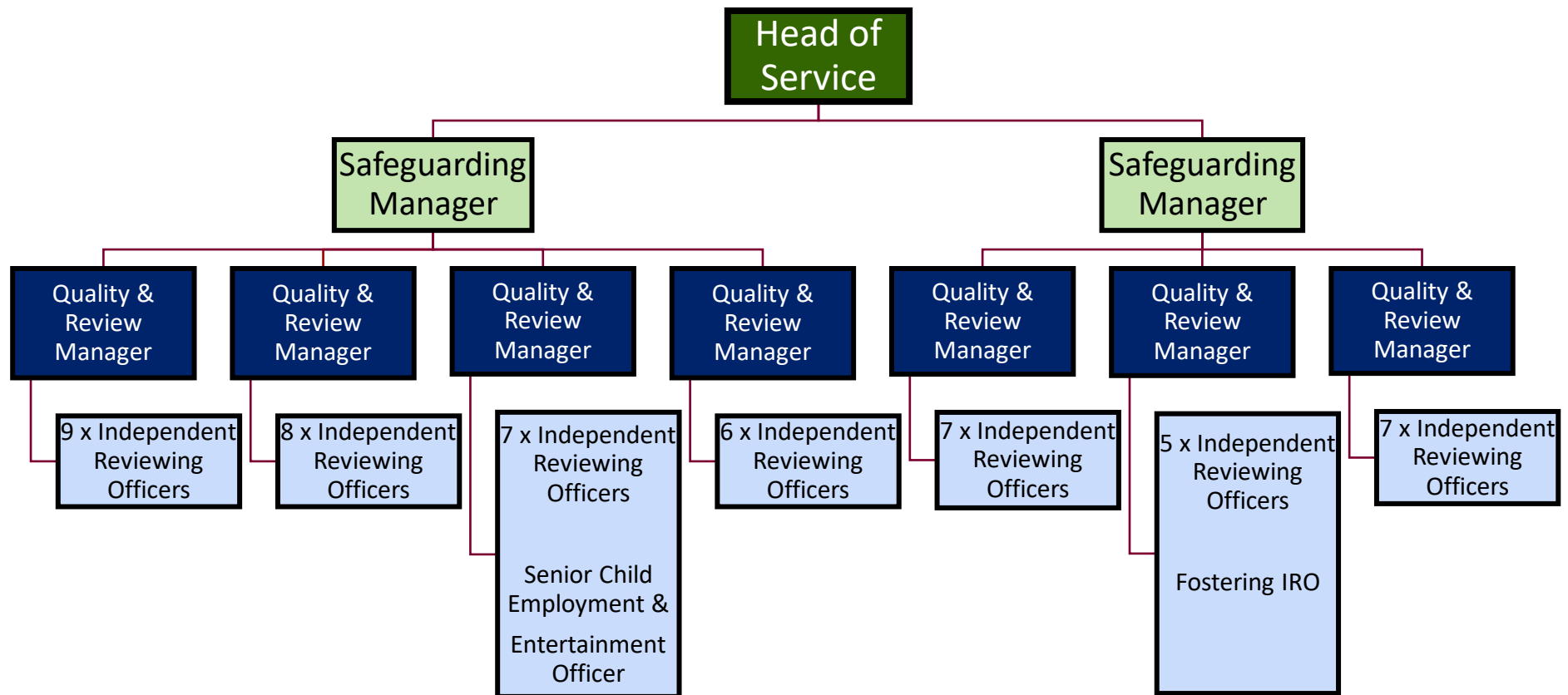
Furthermore, the report highlights the IRO service's ongoing commitment to embed strength-based and trauma-informed principles into child protection conferences, ensuring that the voices of parents, carers, children, and professionals are heard and respected. The support to external partners to develop reporting practice that aligns with strength-based practice represents a significant shift towards a more empathetic and supportive approach to child protection.

Finally, the report underlines the importance of effective communication and feedback mechanisms, as evidenced by the development of electronic feedback tools that have facilitated greater engagement and participation from children and parents. These initiatives reflect and promote practice that aligns with our Family Safeguarding Model.

Priorities for 2024/25

- We want to build on the progress made so that more children are supported to attend their Child Protection Conference or have the opportunity to express their views by a range of other means.
- To ensure that IRO monitoring of child protection plans in between Conferences is evident at over 95%, and impactful.
- To further promote child, parent and professional feedback to strengthen the learning available to how we deliver Conferences.
- To monitor and analyse the quality and timeliness of agency report sharing with families to provide challenge within the safeguarding system.
- To respond to strengthened statutory guidance through Working Together 2023 so that step-down from child protection planning is consistently supported by appropriate support and contingency arrangements.
- To support the delivery, evaluation, and rollout of the Beyond Homes model.





Safeguarding

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IRO Post Qualifying Experience

25+	9
20+	6
15+	16
10+	13
5+	2

Years as an IRO

20+	1
15+	2
10+	7
5+	23
0-5	13

Years as a Q&R Manager

10+	1
5+	3
0-5	3

Q&R Post Qualifying Experience

20+	2
15+	4
10+	1