

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013 - 14

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

13th MAY 2014

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

Agenda Item No: 3

**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING
OFFICER (IRO) REPORT**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Lead Member for children and young people and the Corporate Parenting Board, with information about the activity of the IRO Service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To note the contents of the attached report

3. BACKGROUND

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint IROs to conduct reviews for looked after children and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. Specific guidance is entitled "Independent Reviewing Officer Guidance Wales 2004.

IROs convene and chair reviews for all children looked after by the Council, be they subject to care orders, accommodated voluntarily, placed with foster carers, in residential or secure establishments, living with kinship carers or placed for adoption.

IROs have specific responsibility to raise concerns about looked after children, which cannot be resolved, to Chief Executive level within the Local Authority and subsequently to CAFCASS to consider legal action.

4. CURRENT SITUATION

Guidance requires the IRO service to be managed by an officer who does not have direct or line management responsibility, for individual children's cases or service provision. Therefore within RCT the service is managed by the Head of Safeguarding and Standards who has no Line Management responsibility for case work or care planning decisions affecting Looked after Children and who provides this report directly for the Group Director.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st October 2013 to 31st March 2014.

5. KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- Maintained good performance in relation to reviews being held within timescale.
- Continued developmental work undertaken by the Reviewing Team, which relates to personal education plans for looked after children and the 'When I'm Ready' arrangements .
- Outcomes from the approach developed for the resolution of problems or issues identified by the IRO in relation to care plans for individual children.
- Outcome focussed review reports.

MONITORING REPORT TO THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

May 2014

Adoption and Children Act 2002 and The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2004

Purpose of Report

To provide the lead Director for Children and Young People with information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for the period to 1st October 2013 to 31st March 2014.

Background

The provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, S118 require local Authorities to appoint IROs, "to participate in the review of children's cases, monitor the authority's function in respect of the review and refer the case to Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) if the failure to implement aspects of a care plan might be considered in breach of the child's human rights".

"Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004" sets out the requirements of the IROs and responsible authority in more detail. Key outcomes envisaged are:

- Focus on needs of children and ensuring they are addressed
- Minimising drift
- Consistency of care planning and decision making
- Involvement of appropriate persons in the process

The Guidance clearly requires an IRO to chair reviews of children who are: -

- In an Adoptive Placement prior to an adoption order being granted;
- Looked after subject to a statutory order or accommodated with the agreement of parents (including a series of short term breaks)
- Young people in Young Offender Institutions subject to a care order
- It is good practice to review those to be looked after s20 on release from custody and also Pathway plans for young people up to age 18 years.

This more recent guidance strengthens the existing requirements of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 and its accompanying Guidance made under the Children Act 1989.

Frequency of reports

Reports are provided twice a year and are also presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Reviewing Service

The reviewing service sits within the remit of the Head of Safeguarding and Standards in Children's Services thus fulfilling the regulation (2A (3) which states that "where the IRO is an employee of the responsible authority the IRO's post within that authority must not be under the direct management of:

- a) A person involved in the management of the case;
- b) A person with management responsibilities in relation to a person mentioned in paragraph (a); or
- c) A person with control over the resources allocated to the case"

The service now comprises 7.6 fte IRO posts plus a Team Manager. The investment and consequent increased capacity within the service has enabled a reduction in the caseload of the IROs. The team now works on the basis that each IRO (fte) is responsible for the reviews of an average 100 looked after children. It is not always possible to maintain this standard given the volume of children reviewed. The team is located, at Ty Pennant in Pontypridd, although the majority of the reviews are conducted within the community usually in the child or young person's placement setting.

Purpose of Reviews

Each child looked after should have an effective care plan which identifies outcomes for the child, sets objectives for work with the child, birth family and caregivers in relation to the child's developmental needs, which are: health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, self care skills.

The review meeting is a key component of the assessment, planning, intervention and review process of work with families. Its purpose is to consider the plan for the child, monitor progress and enable decisions to be made to amend that plan in the light of knowledge and circumstances.

The IRO has particular responsibilities set out in guidance, to monitor progress of the responsible LA in implementing the care plan, reconvening the review meeting in certain circumstances, raise concerns within the LA up to Chief Executive level and refer to CAFCASS unresolved concerns as appropriate.

Frequency of Reviews

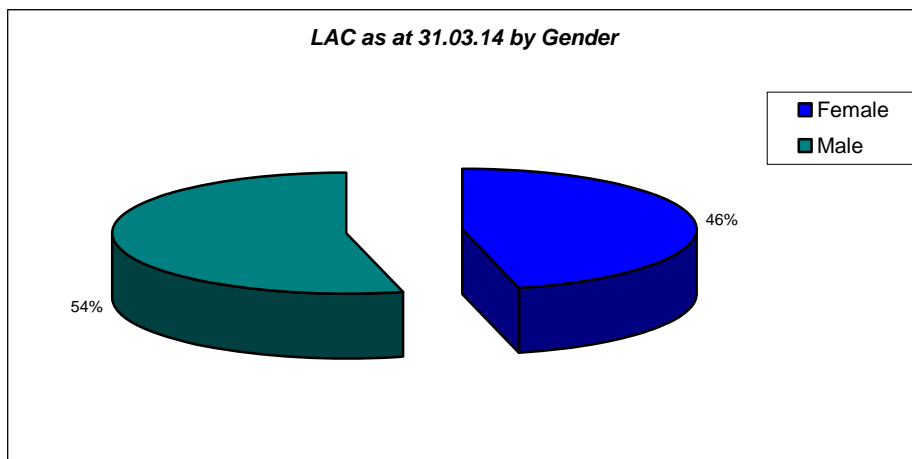
Looked after children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- Within 28 days of a child becoming looked after,
- Subsequently within 3 months,
- 6 monthly thereafter,
- Reviews should be convened earlier if there is a significant change in the child's care plan or failure to carry out an important aspect of that plan,

- The cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family;
- Children receiving a series of short breaks should be reviewed within 3 months of the start of the first period and thereafter 6 monthly.
- Reviews of family plans produced by the Integrated Family Support Team are held three times per year. The initial review is held 28 days after the start of the intensive phase, the second review 3 months later and the final review after 6 months.

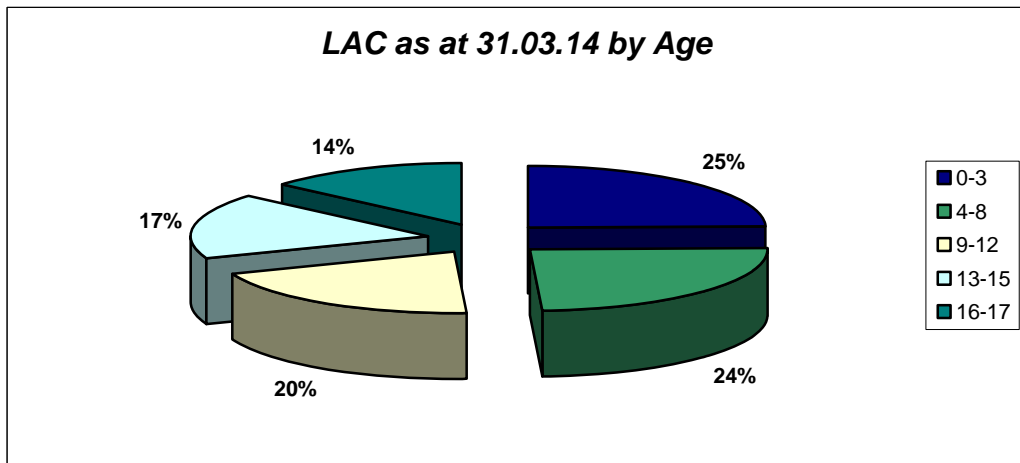
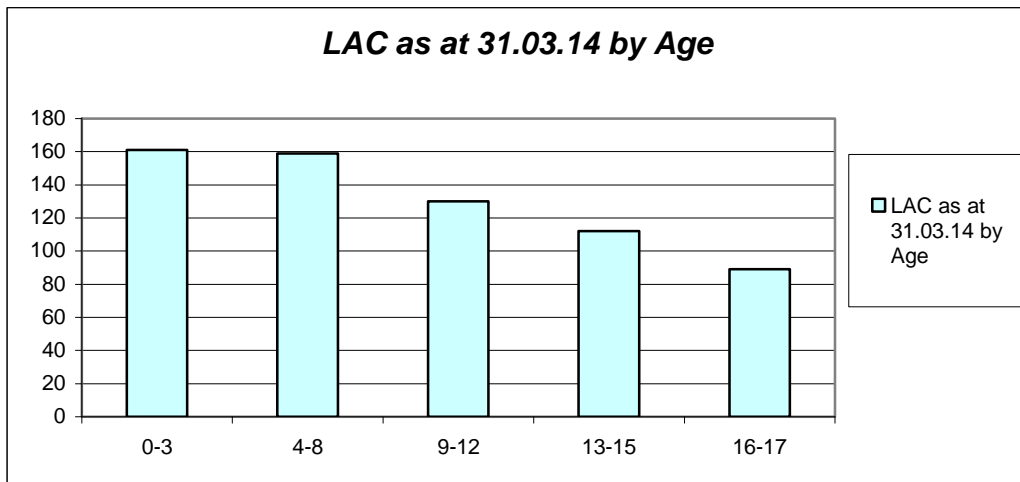
Looked After Population (30th September 2013)

1. Looked After Population by Gender



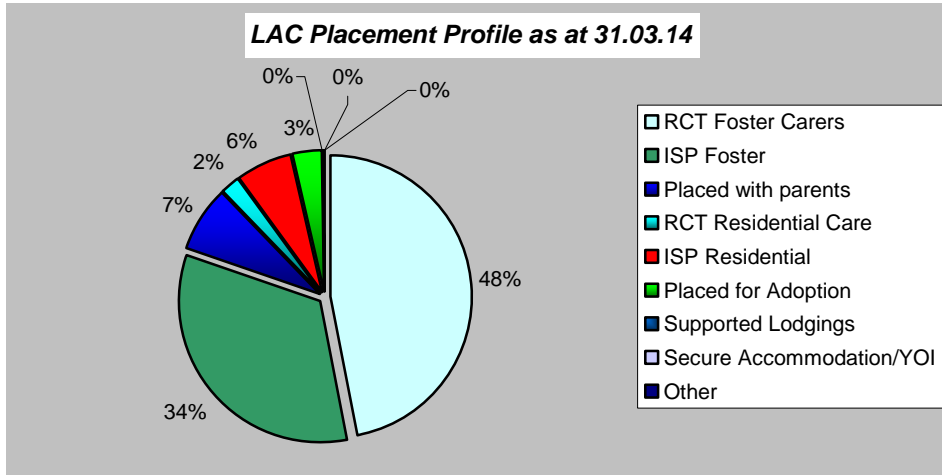
	LAC as at 31.03.12 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.12 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.13 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.13 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.14 by Gender
Female	258	257	352	284	310
Male	336	363	269	333	341
Total	594	620	621	617	651

2. Looked After Population by Age Group

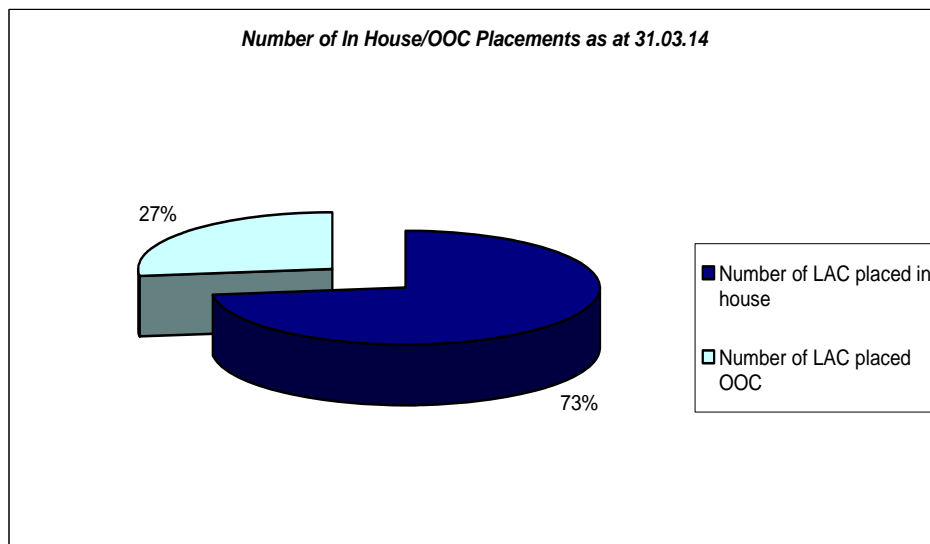


	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
LAC as at 31.03.12 by Age	137	154	111	109	83	594
LAC as at 30.09.12 by Age	146	161	119	109	85	620
LAC as at 31.03.13 by Age	149	158	124	97	93	621
LAC as at 30.09.13 by Age	146	154	118	109	90	617
LAC as at 31.03.14 by Age	161	159	130	112	89	651

3. Placement Details – including numbers in foster care, residential placements, placements within and external to RCT, those provided by Independent agencies etc.

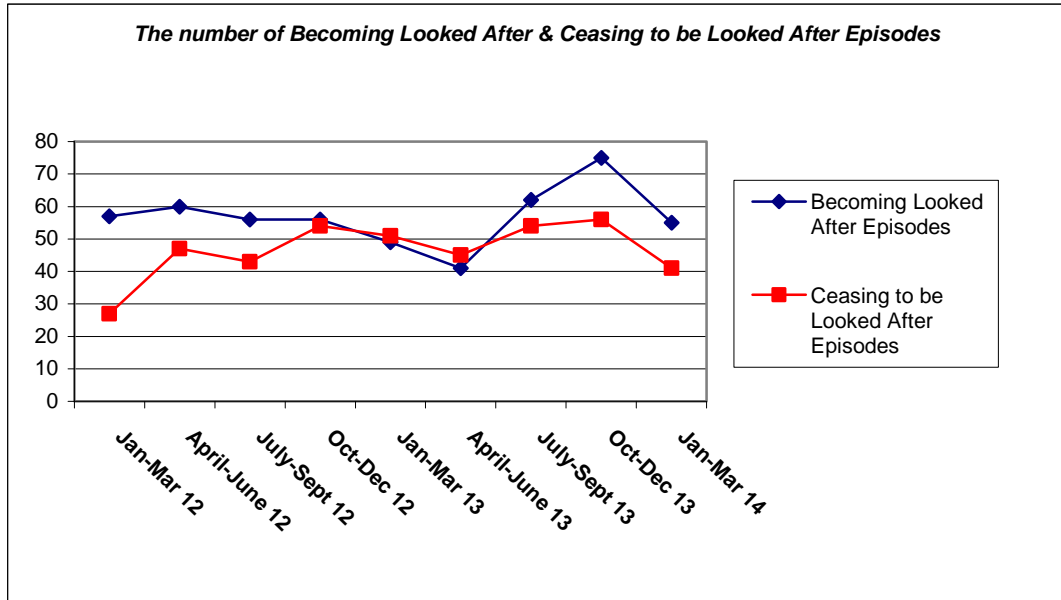


	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14
RCT Foster Carers	243	267	278	290	304
ISP Foster	212	200	209	206	210
Placed with parents	52	57	57	46	52
RCT Residential Care	12	12	12	13	10
ISP Residential	39	51	44	39	40
Placed for Adoption	31	28	18	21	27
Supported Lodgings	5	5	3	2	5
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	3
Total	594	620	621	617	651



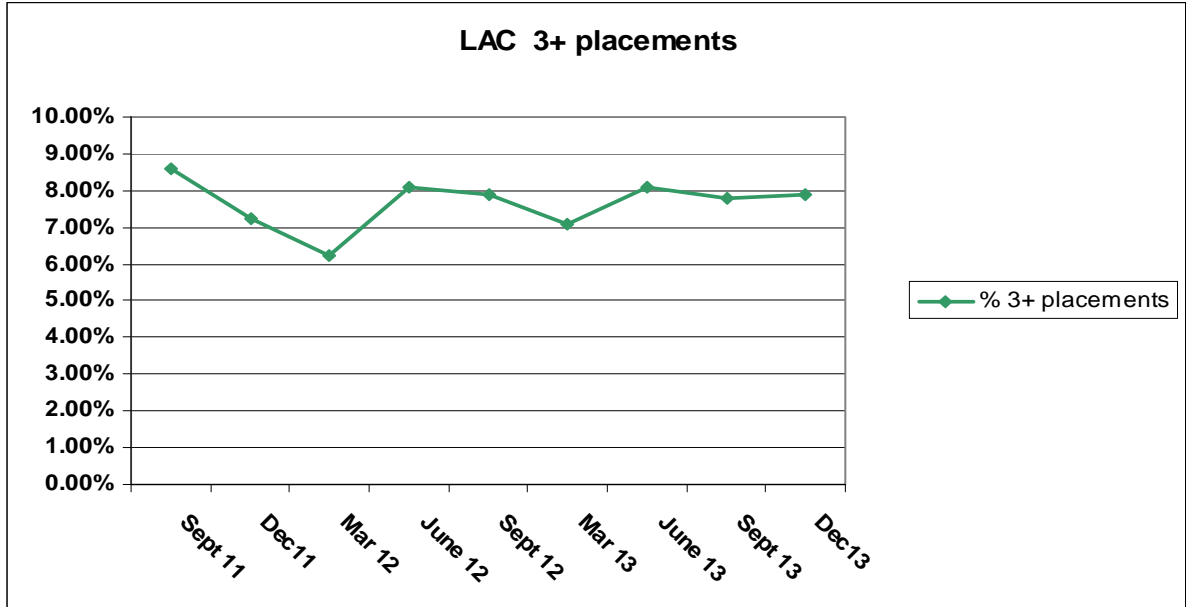
	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14
Number of LAC placed in house	417	444	436	434	476
Number of LAC placed OOC	177	176	185	183	175
Total LAC	594	620	621	617	651
% OOC	29.8%	28.4%	29.8%	29.7%	26.9%

4. Admissions and Discharge Information



	Jan-Mar 12	April-June 12	July-Sept 12	Oct-Dec 12	Jan-Mar 13	April-June 13	July-Sept 13	Oct-Dec 13	Jan-Mar 14
Becoming Looked After Episodes	57	60	56	56	49	41	62	75	55
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	27	47	43	54	51	45	54	56	41

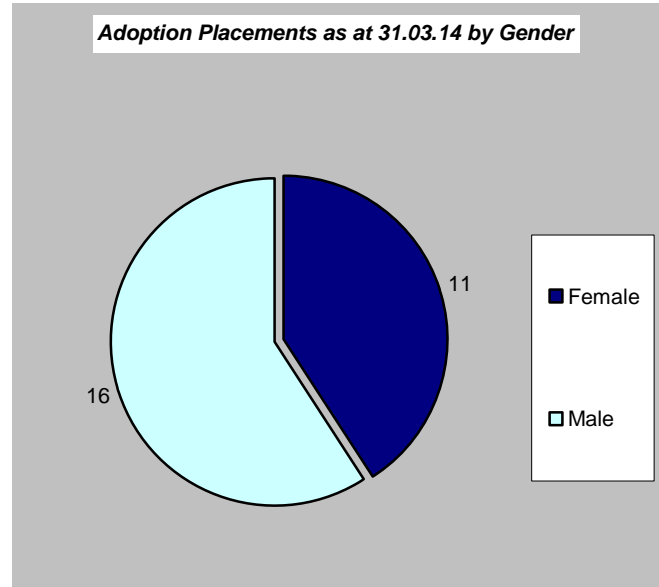
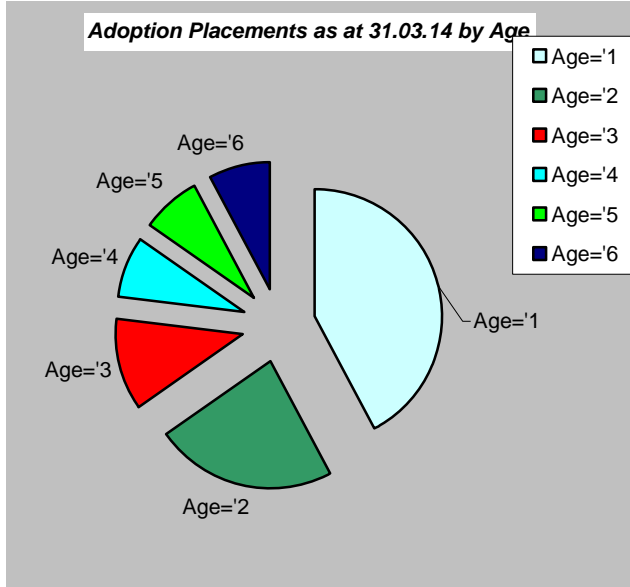
5. Placement Stability



	Sept 11	Dec 11	Mar 12	June 12	Sept 12	Mar 13	June 13	Sept 13	Dec 13
% 3+ placements	8.59%	7.26%	6.23%	8.10%	7.90%	7.09%	8.10%	7.80%	7.90%

6. Adoption Information

Total numbers of children placed for adoption or adopted, including age and gender breakdown



Adoption Placements as at 31.03.14 by Age	Total
Age=0	1
Age=1	11
Age=2	6
Age=3	3
Age=4	2
Age=5	2
Age=6	2
Age=7	0
Age=8	0
Total	27

Adoption Placements as at 31.03.14 by Gender	Total
Female	11
Male	16
Total	27

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.03.14	27
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.04.13-31.03.14	39
Number of Children adopted between 01.04.13-31.03.14	30

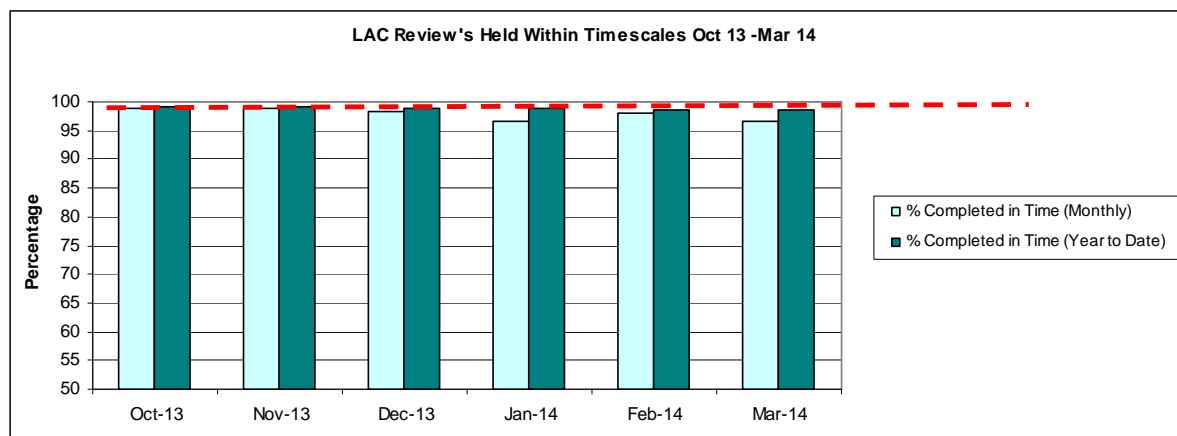
Review Activity 1st October 2013 to 31st March 2014.

There has been overall positive performance during the last 5 years in respect of reviews being held within timescale, performance for the period reported on has remained reasonably consistent.

The number of looked after children, plus the additional responsibilities of the IRO Team has meant that 937 reviews were due in this 6 month period, which once again for the third consecutive report is the largest number ever reported on. 20 of these reviews were held outside of the required timescale, overall performance is at 98.50% compliance. This continues to be excellent performance given the logistics of co-ordinating such a large volume of meetings with a considerable and varied range of participants.

The excellent business support arrangements and systems which contribute to the work of the reviewing team continue to be absolutely essential in enabling the team to perform at this current level. The practice of setting review dates with flexibility to reschedule within timescale if problems occur; remains firmly established, along with the commitment of both IROs and business support staff to performance improvement.

Month	Reviews Due	Number held within Timescale	Reviews outside of Timescale	Compliance
October	190	188	2	98.95%
November	165	163	2	98.79%
December	128	126	2	98.44%
January	179	173	6	96.65%
February	102	100	2	98.04%
March	173	167	6	97.87%
Total	937	917	20	98.50%



Month	Reviews held out of timescale	Reason
October	2 reviews	Both postponed as either IRO or social worker not available
November	2 reviews	1 postponed due to bereavement of foster carers, 1 late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system
December	2 reviews	1 postponed due to bereavement of family, 1 late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system
January	6 reviews, including 3 siblings	3 siblings postponed due to family bereavement, 1 late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system, 1 due to hospitalisation of family member, 1 due to unavailability of participants
February	2 reviews	1 postponed as late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system, 1 postponed due to bereavement of family
March	6 reviews (2 groups of 2 siblings)	3 postponed as late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system, 1 social worker in court, 2 to allow review to be held in foster placement

Comparators (last year)

October 2011 to March 2012

804 reviews held within timescale, 33 outside Total 837= 96%

April 2012 to September 2012

859 reviews held within timescale, 24 outside Total 883 = 97.30%

October 2012 to March 2013

862 reviews held within timescale, 22 outside Total 884 = 97.40%

April 2013 to September 2013

919 reviews held within timescale, 8 outside Total 927 = 99.14%

IRO Resolution of Problems

As outlined earlier the IRO has responsibility to monitor the LA performance in relation to individual children and to raise areas of good practice as well as problems and issues. IROs forward compliments and positive comments to staff and managers to ensure good practice is recognised.

The current guidance implemented in August 2011 introduced a face to face problem resolution meeting which is co-ordinated by the Reviewing team. If problems or issues are not resolved there continue to be arrangements in place to escalate them through the management structure to the Service Director, to the Group Director and to the Chief Executive as required by guidance if necessary.

The aim of the guidance is to:-

- Keep children and young people as its focus
- Streamline the process and make it more consistent, understandable and straightforward for all
- Improve communication between IROs, social workers and their managers and thereby achieve prompt resolution of issues raised
- Ensure records of the process are included on the child or young person's file
- Include a system for both reporting key issues and an overview of all problems and issues regularly to the Service Director now established on quarterly basis.
- Ensure IROs fulfil their responsibilities as set out statutory guidance.

Issues raised by IROs October 2013 to March 2014

There were 43 issues for resolution raised by the IROs this is an increase from the last 6 monthly report.

The issues raised this period are varied and include the following themes plus individual case examples:

Themes

- **Lack of planning for Looked After Children review meetings.**

It is clear that workload issues for social workers in the assessment care planning teams have an impact on the review outcomes and although social workers and team managers try to ensure that all reviews are prioritised they are not always able to ensure the relevant paperwork is completed and care planning recommendations implemented.

The issues raised by the IRO resolution process includes examples where;

- * Duty social worker covering the review with little knowledge of the care plan
- * Statutory visits out of time
- * Assessments delayed

Resolution: In all these examples the IRO raised the issue with the social workers and team managers to ensure that the problems were resolved and identified care planning issues addressed. This has to be set within a context of increasing demand and staffing deficits currently being experienced within Assessment and Care Planning Services.

- **Assessment and Progress Records**

Timescales for completing these documents are not always met.

Resolution: Performance is currently being monitored by the Assessment Care Planning Improvement Panel chaired by the Service Director.

- **Delay in Discharging Care Orders and Placement Orders**

The former are children who have returned home to the care of parents under specific regulations and for whom it has been subsequently recommended that it is appropriate to discharge their care order.

Resolution: The IRO has liaised with the relevant team manager and service manager to confirm that the arrangements for the preparation of court assessments and reports are in place.

The issue of revocation of Placement Orders has also been highlighted, these are situations where the care plan for the child was originally adoption but due to specific circumstances the care plan has been changed for example to long term fostering. However the Placement Order which enables the Council to place the child with adopters has not been revoked as required. Work is currently being undertaken by Children's Services to ensure that once these orders are no longer relevant they application is made to the courts to ensure they are revoked without delay.

Individual Cases

1. Relative Foster Placement

The IRO in this situation highlighted the issues raised in a review meeting that additional supports would be required if a young person was to remain placed with their relatives.

Resolution: A meeting was held of all concerned, including team managers; it was agreed social workers re-assess the future planning and update the assessments.

2. Residential Placements

During the review meeting a young person requested they move back to the South Wales area. The IRO and Social Worker and all concerned were able to put forward his views in the relevant panel meetings. ,

Resolution: An alternative residential placement has been identified but at a location that is more suitable for the young person with the staffing levels required and the educational facilities needed.

3. Pathway Planning

A concern regarding drift in the completion of a pathway plan that would have an impact on the overall planning was identified at the review . The young person also expressed their frustration that they had not been involved in preparing the pathway plan.

Resolution: The social worker ensured that the pathway plan was completed and the Aftercare team took over the responsibilities for implementing the plan.

4. Complex Care planning

The IRO raised the issue of a young person who was moved to a residential unit that did not meet her needs. The young person displayed risk taking behaviours and had specific needs and vulnerabilities. The IRO was concerned about the placement location and staff experience.

Resolution: A resolution meeting was held with the service manager present to discuss fully the risk management plans in place and the young person moved to a different location and placement.

5. Core Assessment and school support

This situation relates to a young person who after recently becoming looked after displayed challenging behaviour at school and in placement and where additional educational support would be required to prevent breakdown. The

IRO used the resolution process to highlight the need for completion of the core assessment to assist with care planning to ensure that the correct services to meet the young person's needs could be identified.

Resolution: The team manager also completed the necessary actions to ensure that the care plan being requested was the most appropriate for the young persons longer term needs.

6. Change of placement.

The IRO raised the issue of a young person in a long term placement who expressed her wish to move.

Resolution: A meeting was held aside from the review to discuss the request, the appropriate emotional support, life story work and support for the foster carer was provide by their agency. As a result of the efforts of everyone the young person felt able to remain in their long term placement.

7. Contact Issue

The contact for a younger sibling with his older siblings was discussed at several review meetings, however, the siblings were placed separately and had differing care plans and this contact proved difficult to organise and prioritise.

Resolution: The IRO raised the issue further with the team manager who ensured that telephone contact was put into place in the first instance as a building block to direct contact taking place in the future that would be safe for all concerned.

8. The voice of a young person

This issue relates to a young person in foster care who in wanting to make a formal complaint to a professional body needed additional support.

Resolution: The social worker and IRO worked closely to ensure that the young person's voice was heard during the reviewing process and made a referral to advocacy. The IRO has also sought the advice from legal services and CAFCASS and referred to the Quality Assurance group of Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board.

Current issues for the Reviewing Service

Capacity

There are 7.6 full time equivalent IRO posts and case loads are approximately just over 100 LAC per full time IRO. The average caseload figure has risen once again during again during the period reported. The number of children each IRO is responsible for does without doubt have a detrimental affect on the capacity of individual IROs to fulfil their quality assurance role and follow

up issues of concern. Performance on holding reviews within timescale as mentioned earlier in the report continues to be excellent; however the concern is about the capacity of the Reviewing Team to continue to provide a quality service. This is in the context of the good practice of the IRO following the child, wherever the placement which can mean a considerable amount of travelling and time taken to review individual children.

The figures above take into account the responsibilities for reviews of children receiving a series of short term breaks, young people up to 18 years subject of pathway plans and Children In Need who receive services from joint RCT and Merthyr IFST.

The council therefore continues to be compliant with statutory guidance, in relation to those children and young people entitled to an IRO. Although this may be difficult to sustain in the future.

This position reflects the additional resources which were made available to the Reviewing Team both through Children and Young People Act 2008, IFST grant monies and LAC action plan during 2011

Development work

- **Pathway Plans**

IROs are responsible for convening and chairing pathway plan reviews for all young people looked after and the young people from age 16 to 17 years who had previously been looked after.

There are new developments and draft guidance from Welsh Government which provides more choice for young people about when they have to leave the foster care system. RCT is a pilot for "When I am Ready" scheme which allows for young people to remain in foster care post 18. It has been agreed that in RCT the IRO will chair the first review meeting post 18 under this new arrangement. The team manager and an IRO will continue to attend the development groups taking forward the new guidance.

The team manager has also met with the Aftercare Team Manager and the Fostering Service Manager to look at ways of monitoring independent living skills for young people whilst in foster care and create a preparation for independence checklist. An example document has been shared with the relevant teams for consultation in the first instance.

- **Short term breaks**

The IROs took on responsibility for reviewing children with disabilities who receive a series of short term breaks formally from September 2011, as the reviews arise. At present 74 children have an allocated IRO.

Regular meetings continue to be held between the IROs, DCT and the residential units to further develop the review format used for the short break arrangements. This has included making amendments to the existing review form and looking more closely at the consultation booklets for children. The two teams have worked very well together to ensure that the review process is timely and meaningful.

Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) Family Plans

IROs have responsibility for reviewing family plans when IFST are involved in providing a service to children and their families in both RCT and Merthyr.

The lead IROs and team manager have met with the IFST on a regular basis to evaluate the arrangements in place. A new member of staff has now completed the 4 day training course and now up and running in chairing the meetings..

At the request of the team manager, the consultant social workers have provided a one day training event for all the IROs in RCT to gain a fuller awareness of the ISF aims and objectives and the innovative way of working with families.

The IRO team has produced a detailed report for the IFST board.

RAG system

The Reviewing team RAG system (**red, amber green**) has been implemented as a way of categorising at a glance children and young people reviewed by a specific IRO against set criteria.

Its aim is to identify individual children or young people whose circumstances are of concern and to focus activity and target resources as effectively and in as timely a way as possible. The Head of Service has made reports to the LAC Outcomes Board (LACOB) to ensure that the opportunity is maximised to identify any themes or problems which can be resolved on a strategic level. However there are plans in hand to review the LACOB, operational placement panel and the Multi Agency Placement Panel It will be important to ensure the RAG information is captured within any new arrangements.

The RAG system continues to be an effective tool for IROs and their manager to organise caseloads and focus attention and activity on children and young people whose circumstances cause most concern or require move on.

Consultation with children and young people

The Reviewing Team Manager is keen to ensure that young people, their parents and foster carers/key workers are able to contribute to the review process.

Two years ago a small group of looked after young people worked on producing a guide to access consultation documents on line. With the help of the WICID team a guide has now been placed on the website. It is clear that ongoing advertising and promotion is required as the young people are using this means of communication with the IROs less. The IROs will continue to encourage this link as a method for obtaining young peoples views

In light of the work outlined above the IRO team view is that a dedicated website for young people to access information about being looked after should be developed. This is something that in the future may be a subject for a graduate officer to take on as a project.

Outcomes based reviews

A development day was held, arranged by the team manager, to update and further develop the LAC review paperwork, particularly to make it more outcome focussed. The initial feedback is that this development makes the review more focused on the care plan and the needs of children whilst also highlighting the strengths and risks that are present. This work is still ongoing and some IROs have found it difficult to keep up with the developments with the amount of review administration they have to complete. However, once a whole service outcomes based framework is implemented within Children's Services the reviewing team will be well placed to adopt the chosen model.

Personal Education plans for LAC

The reviewing team has been part of a task group with colleagues from schools, Ymbarel and the Education directorate which has revised the personal education plan for LAC and its accompanying guidance. The aim is to make the guidance more straightforward to complete, focused on the achievements of and support for individual looked after children and young people

Implementation commenced in the autumn term and training has been provided for designated teachers within schools; the Reviewing Team Manager being a key Children's Services contributor. Further dates have been booked for 2014.

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Sheryn Edwards
Reviewing Team Manager
Liz Pearce,
Head of Safeguarding and Standards,
April 2014
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