

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015 - 16

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

27th JULY 2015

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES

Agenda Item No:

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 2014 to 31st March 2015.

5. KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- Maintained good performance in relation to reviews being held within timescale.
- Successful bid for a graduate officer to develop a LAC website in consultation with children and young people.
- Use of the resolution process, alongside caseload size and the IRO quality assurance role.
- Continuing work on outcome focussed LAC reviews

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

27th JULY 2015

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 2014 to 31st March 2015.

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 or on remand
- 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 team works on the basis that each IRO (fte) is responsible for the reviews of an average 88 looked after children, a rudimentary caseload weighting system has been developed . The team is now is located at Ty Catrin in Pontypridd, where facilities for reviews are much improved although the majority are still 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

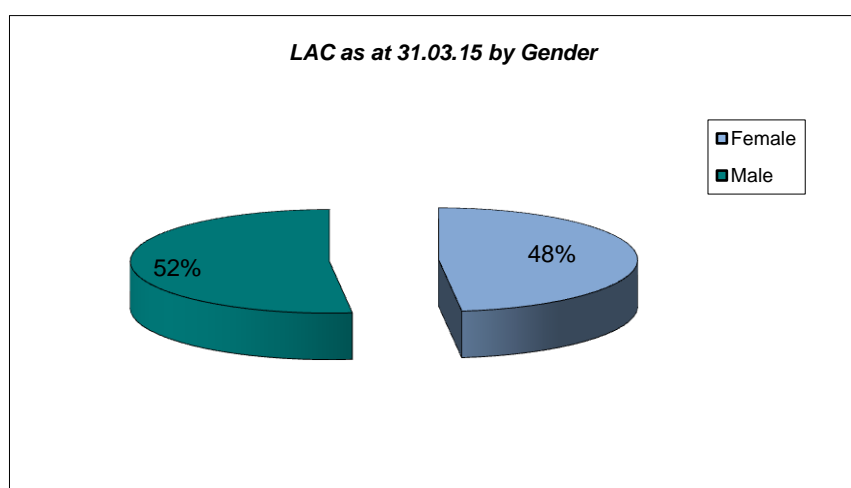
Looked after children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- 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.

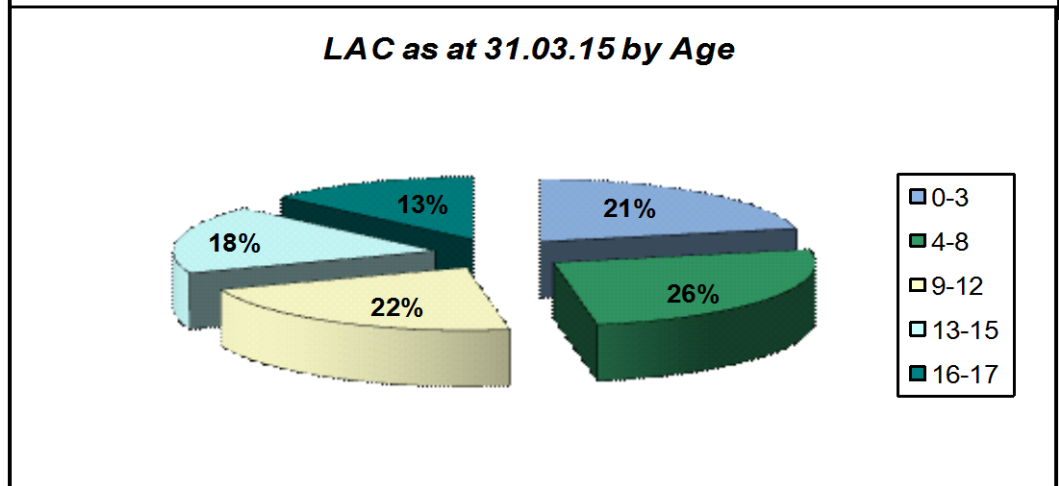
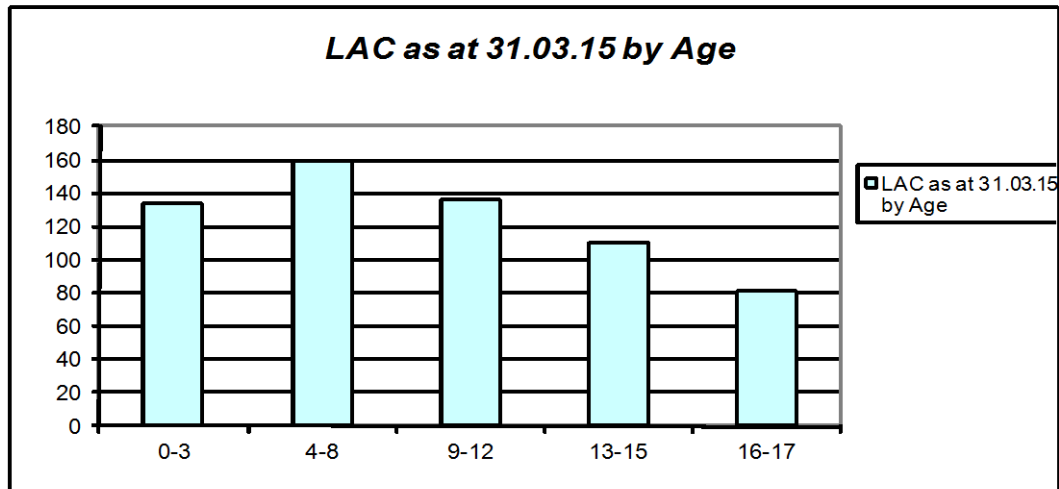
Looked After Population (31st March 2015)

1. Looked After Population by Gender



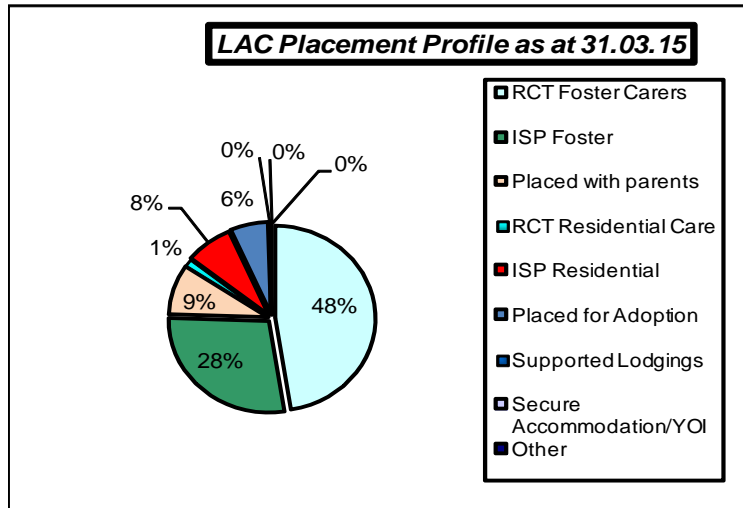
	LAC as at 31.03.13 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.13 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.14 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.14 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.15 by Gender
Female	352	284	310	316	299
Male	269	333	341	351	322
Total	621	617	651	667	621

2. Looked After Population by Age Group



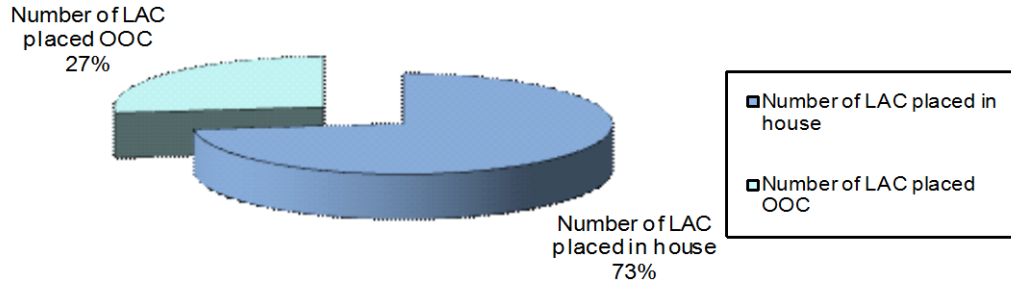
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
LAC as at 31.03.13 by Age	149	158	124	97	93	621
LAC as at 30.09.13 by Age	146	154	118	109	90	617
LAC as at 31.03.14 by Age	161	159	130	112	89	651
LAC as at 30.09.14 by Age	159	163	137	118	90	667
LAC as at 31.03.15 by Age	134	160	136	110	81	621

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



	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14	Mar-15
RCT Foster Carers	278	290	304	324	295
ISP Foster	209	206	210	199	174
Placed with parents	57	46	52	56	55
RCT Residential Care	12	13	10	13	8
ISP Residential	44	39	40	45	48
Placed for Adoption	18	21	27	26	38
Supported Lodgings	3	2	5	3	2
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	0	1	1
Other	0	0	3	0	0
Total	621	617	651	667	621

Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 31.03.15



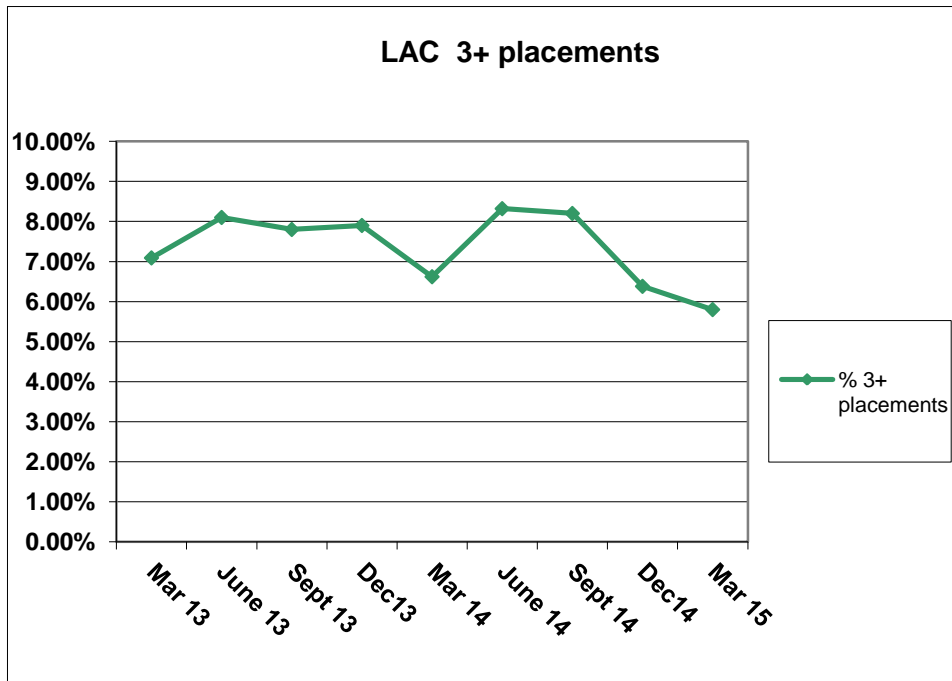
	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14	Mar-15
Number of LAC placed in house	436	434	476	485	449
Number of LAC placed OOC	185	183	175	182	172
Total LAC	621	617	651	667	621
% OOC	29.8%	29.7%	26.9%	27.3%	27.7%

4. Admissions and Discharge Information



	Jan-Mar 13	April-June 13	July-Sept 13	Oct-Dec 13	Jan-Mar 14	April-June 14	July-Sept 14	Oct-Dec 14	Jan-Mar 15
Becoming Looked After Episodes	49	41	62	75	55	58	72	56	42
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	51	45	54	56	41	57	59	65	79

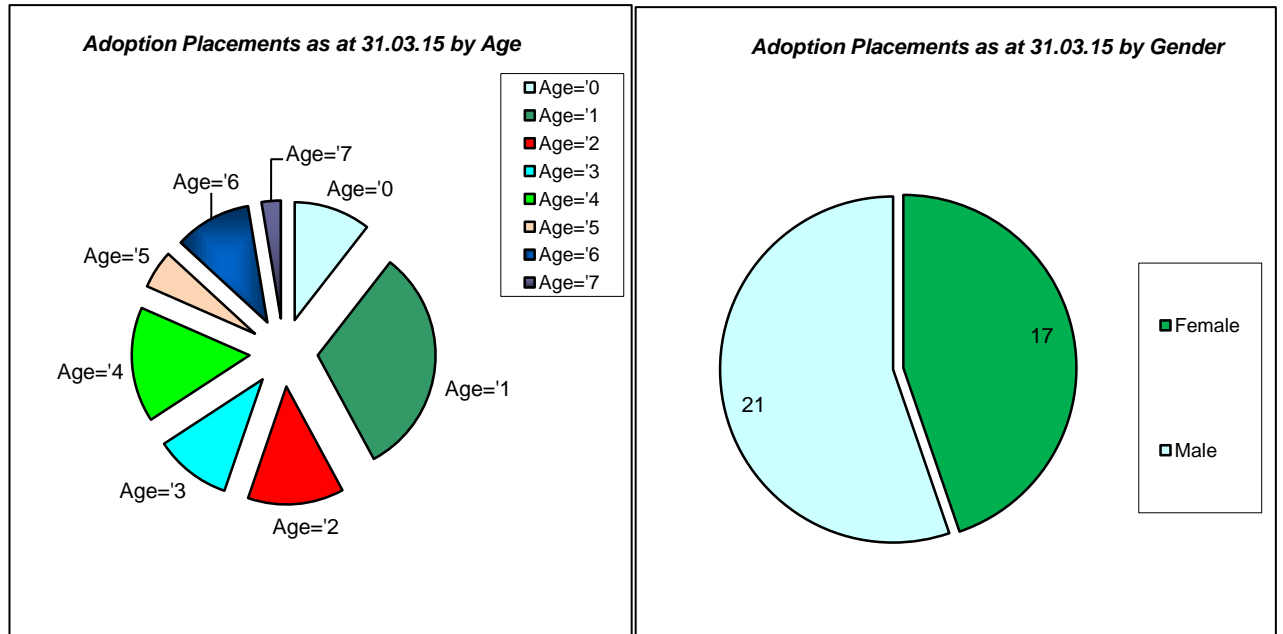
5. Placement Stability



	Mar 13	June 13	Sept 13	Dec 13	Mar 14	June 14	Sept 14	Dec 14	Mar 15
% 3+ placements	7.09%	8.10%	7.80%	7.90%	6.62%	8.32%	8.20%	6.38%	5.80%

6. Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 31.03.15 by Age	Total
Age='0	4
Age='1	12
Age='2	5
Age='3	4
Age='4	6
Age='5	2
Age='6	4
Age='7	1
Age='8	0
Total	38

Adoption Placements as at 31.03.15 by Gender	Total
Female	17
Male	21
Total	38

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.03.15	38
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.04.14-31.03.15	50
Number of Children adopted between 01.04.14-31.03.15	36

Review Activity 1st October 2014 to 31st March 2015.

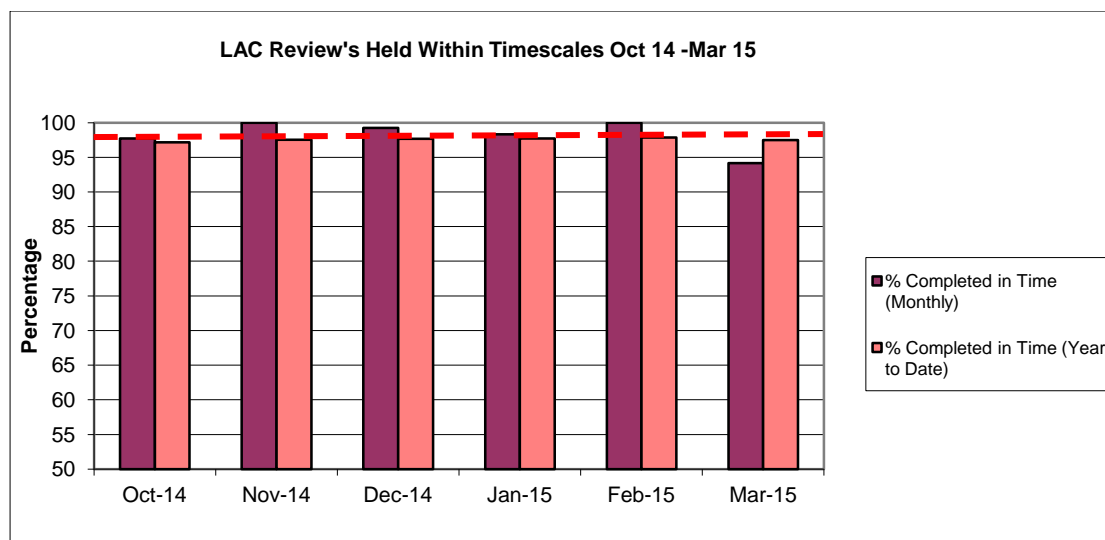
There has been overall positive performance during the last 5 years in respect of reviews being held within timescale, performance for the period reported on has improved very slightly.

This has meant that 902 reviews were due in this 6 month period, which is a reduction since the last reporting period reflecting the decrease in LAC numbers. 18 of these reviews were held outside of the required timescale, overall performance is at 98% compliance. This continues yet again to be excellent performance given the logistics of co-ordinating such a large volume of meetings with a considerable and varied range of participants.

This is a considerable achievement by the whole Reviewing Team given the absence of 3 IROs for differing periods of time during the reporting period and a part time vacancy.

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	175	171	4	97.71%
November	171	171	0	100%
December	131	130	1	99.24%
January	176	173	3	98.30%
February	78	78	0	100%
March	171	161	10	94.15%
Total	902	884	18	98%



Month	Reviews held out of timescale	Reason
October	4, 2x sibling groups of 2	Postponed due to bereavement and placement for adoption first review late
December	1 review	Carer ill
January	3 reviews, including sibling group of 2	2 postponed due to strategy meeting, 1 as SW unavailable
March	10 reviews, including sibling groups of 3 and 4	8 due to bereavement, 1 sw ill 1 first adoption review late.

Comparators (last year)

October 2013 to March 2014

917 reviews held within timescale, 20 outside Total 937 = 98.50%

April 2014 to September 2014

949 reviews held within timescale 29 outside Total 978= 97.03%

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 includes 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 2014 to March 2015

There were 29 issues for resolution raised using the IRO resolution process during this period. This is an increase from the last 6 monthly report where 15 issues were raised. .

The reviewing team have as mentioned above experienced staffing issues over the past year that have made it difficult to keep up with the demands of the reviewing processes. Along with increasing workload demand and staffing deficits, highlighted in the previous reports this may have contributed to the increase on number of issues requiring resolution at that time. Capacity issues experienced by the Assessment Care Planning teams has a direct impact on the review outcomes and although social workers and team managers try to ensure that reviews are prioritised they were not always able to ensure the allocation of looked after children and implement care planning recommendations.

This reporting period has demonstrated improved care planning for looked after children and more effective working relationships where IROs and social workers are resolving issues aside for the formal process.

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

Themes

- **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 IROs have liaised with the relevant team managers and service managers to confirm that the arrangements for the preparation of assessments for court 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 an application is made to the court to ensure revocation without delay.

The delays in these situations are now monitored in the LAC Quality Assurance Panel and meetings are planned with legal services to resolve the capacity issue.

Individual Cases

1. Changes

The IRO in this situation highlighted a large sibling group of children where there had been a number of changes of social worker at a crucial times in the care planning.

Resolution: The issue was raised with service managers recognising that further changes could impact on the care planning.

2. Educational Issues

The IRO raised concerns regarding two young people reviewed, who had been moved from their foster placements, on more than one occasion, and this has proved disruptive to their educational provision and planning.

Resolution :

IRO raised with team managers. It is clear that closer links school are required to ensure that key educational issues are addressed prior to placement moves.

3. Placement Moves

The IRO raised the issue of a young teenage girl in foster care where notice had been given to end the placement. An alternative foster placement had not been identified that allowed her to remain in the same school to complete GCSE's.

Resolution: Additional support was provided to the foster carers that assisted the child to remain in the original placement.

4. Care planning

The IRO was concerned about a young boy placed in a residential unit who would require additional support whilst a more appropriate placement that would meet his needs could become available.

Resolution: A robust care plan was put into place that with a detailed support plan met all the young person needs in the meantime.

This issue related to a teenager in a residential care who did not receive his belongings and savings from his previous foster carer.

Resolution: The IRO raised the issue formally with the team manager in order that it was highlighted and prioritised.

5. Drift and delay

This situation relates to a five month old baby who having been voluntarily accommodated for a number of months had no PLO meeting processes in place. This was due to changes in social worker and teams as a result the care planning was delayed.

Resolution: The IRO used the resolution process to highlight matters with the team manger and service manger, a PLO meeting was held and the threshold met and care proceedings are underway.

6. Contact issues.

The IRO raised the issue of contact arrangements for two siblings that required additional input as the current arrangements were not meeting the need of the children or family members.

Resolution: The social worker and team manager worked hard to resolve and as a result the contact sessions are reported as more settled.

IRO raised the issues of contact for three siblings that had been delayed and cancelled due to lack of capacity to facilitate within the team.

Resolution: Meetings were held to address the transport arrangements and also addressed the support foster carers could provide in order to resolve the problem.

Current issues for the Reviewing Service

Capacity

There are 7.6 full time equivalent IRO posts and case loads are approximately 88 LAC per full time IRO. The average caseload figure has decreased since the last reporting period; this is partly a reflection of the decrease in LAC numbers but also due to the changes in arrangements for reviewing children who receive a short term break. As referred to earlier the reviewing team now only review the LAC children whose short term break arrangement is provided under, Section 20, Children Act 1989.

The number of children each IRO is responsible for does without doubt have a affect on the capacity of individual IROs to fulfil their quality assurance role and follow up issues of concern. This has been exacerbated during this reporting period given the gaps within the IRO team and the need to put in place cover arrangements for IROs allocated to specific children. Performance on holding reviews within timescale as mentioned earlier in the report continues to be very good; however the concern in this time frame has been the ability of the Reviewing Team to provide a quality service due to IRO absence.

The council however continues to be compliant with statutory guidance, in relation to those children and young people entitled to an IRO.

The Manager has been looking at different means of maximising the effectiveness of the IRO resources within the team. An example of this has been the use of conference calls. This is not without its difficulties as looked after children and young people can be particularly vulnerable and as a Corporate Parent the Council need to ensure it discharges its obligations safely and effectively which includes visits to the individual in placement.

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.

The new developments and legal guidance from Welsh Government which provides more choice for young people about when they have to leave the foster care system are now in place. RCT has been a successful pilot for the "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 had 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. The Aftercare team manager is taking this forward.

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 arose.

Considerable development work has been undertaken over the past year led by the DCT Service Manager which has included the Reviewing Team Manager. As a consequence a new DCT Resource Panel came into operation in the New Year. The panel now allocates support to disabled children in a proportionate manner according to assessed need. In terms of short breaks they are now allocated as a CIN or LAC service. IROs are only provided for those children looked after. Consequently IROs resources now focus on a reviewing smaller number of children with complex additional needs.

Consultation with children and young people new group

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 online. With the help of the WICID team a guide was placed on the website. It was clear that ongoing advertising and promotion was required as the young people are using this means of communication with the IROs less.

Last year a different consultation group was organised by the reviewing team and an event held in the new office base, Ty Catrin. There was another very good turn out and along with the Participation Worker; the IROs helped facilitate the day. 14 young people attended and all gave their thoughts and views, which will be used to improve the quality of services in the reviewing team. The theme of the event was how young people could be central to their review meetings and their voice heard in the process. The group worked very

well together and were keen to attend future events which will be organised for these children and young people who are currently looked after.

In light of the work outlined above the team manager bid for a graduate officer to work on a web based project that would develop a dedicated website for young people to access information about being looked after and update the consultation documents. The team were very pleased when the graduate officer joined in January 2015

By using child focused and effective participatory techniques and facilitating a consultation session with a group of young people currently in foster care the graduate officer has been able to keep the children's views at the heart of the process.

The 6 month project is now nearing completion and the web based resource will be finalised over the next 4 months. This resource will allow children and young people to access their review consultation documents with a view to improve engagement and participatory opportunities for young people within the review process.

Outcomes based reviews

A further development day was held, arranged by the team manager, to ensure that the LAC review paperwork is 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.

IFST

The team manager and IROs who chair the Family meetings meet on a regular basis to ensure that the review process remains relevant and meets the need of the families and professionals taking part. The meetings have been useful in quality assuring the processes and ensuring the service is streamlined to fit in with the other reviewing processes that may be in place for the child .

Sheryn Edwards
Reviewing Team Manager
Liz Pearce,
Head of Safeguarding and Standards,
June 2015