

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016-17

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

23rd January 2017

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES

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 Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The Act was implemented on April 6th

IROs convene and chair reviews for all children looked after by the Council, be they subject to care orders, accommodated voluntarily under Section 76 of the Act, placed with foster carers, in residential or secure establishments, living with kinship carers or placed for adoption.

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

4. CURRENT SITUATION

Current 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 Service Manager for Safeguarding and Support who has no Line Management responsibility for case work or care planning decisions affecting Children Looked after and who provides this report directly for the Group Director.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st April - 30th September 2016.

5. KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- Maintained good performance in relation to reviews being held within timescale despite significant increase in numbers of CLA Reviews and consequent rise in IRO caseloads.
- Developments in organisation of Reviewing Service.
- The 2Sides website which was developed in consultation with children and young people and went live in April 2016.
- Increasing participation of children, young people and their families in the Reviewing process.
- Use of the resolution process and the IRO quality assurance role.
- Implications of the Social Service and Well-being Act 2014
- Strengthening links with Advocacy Providers and with CAFCASS

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

January 2017

Relevant Legislation

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Part 6 Code of Practice, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015

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 children looked after for the period to 1st April 2016 to 30th September 2016.

Background

The Social Services and Well-being Act (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The Act was implemented on April 6th 2016.

The CPPCR Regulations specify the circumstances in which the local authority **must** consult the IRO and when the IRO **must** consult with the child. The Regulations also specify the actions that the IRO **must** take if the local authority is failing to comply with the CPPCR Regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way. In RCT, this is addressed through the Resolutions process, which may include making a referral to CAFCASS in accordance with section 100(3) of the SSWB Act.

The Act Code of Practice (Part 6 CLA) sets out the requirements of the IRO and the responsible authority in more detail. The key functions of the IRO are to:

- monitor the local authority's performance in relation to the child's case
- review the child's Care and Support Plan in line with the Regulations
- ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are taken into consideration
- perform any other function prescribed in the Regulations.

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

- looked after subject to an Interim Care Order or a Care Order under Section 38/31 of the Children Act 1989. This includes children who are placed with a parent or a kinship carer as well as children placed in foster or residential care.
- accommodated with the agreement of parents (s76 SSWB Act) - this includes a series of short term breaks.
- in an Adoptive Placement prior to an Adoption Order being granted;
- detained in Young Offender Institutions and subject to a Care Order or remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation

- 18 and under and have a Pathway Plan

All Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) plans are also reviewed by an IRO.

Frequency of reports

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

The Reviewing Service

The Reviewing Service currently sits within the remit of the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Support.

The Act Part 6 Code of Practice (CLA) specifies the categories of persons that the local authority may **not** appoint to carry out the IRO function (regulation 54(3) of the CPPCR Regulations). These are:

- a person involved in preparing the child's care and support plan or the management of the child's case
- the child's social worker or personal adviser
- the representative of the local authority appointed to visit the child
- a person with management responsibilities for any of the above
- a person with control over the resources allocated to the case

At the beginning of March 2016, the Child Protection (CP) and CLA Reviewing Teams were amalgamated in line with good practice as defined in the SSWB Act and to develop more resilience within the service.

The remodelling of Childrens Services has meant that from November 2015, a Service Manager Safeguarding and Support has been in post who is leading on service development and SSWB Act implementation.

The current average workload for a full-time IRO focussed on chairing CLA Review meetings is approximately **93** children. The team is located at Ty Catrin in Pontypridd, which has good facilities for review meetings although best practice is that these should be held at the child's preferred venue (e.g. placement, school).

Purpose of Reviews

Each child who is Looked After must have a Care and Support plan (referred to as apart 6 care and support plan). This must be based on a current assessment of the child's needs and focus on the well-being outcomes for the child as specified in the SSWB Act. These are:

- protection from abuse and neglect
- promotion of physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- promotion of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development
- maintenance or development of family or other significant personal

- relationships
- involvement in education, training and recreation activities
- development and maintenance of social relationships and involvement in the local community
- social and economic well-being (including not living in poverty)
- living in suitable accommodation.

The Care and Support plan details what needs to happen to achieve the child's agreed outcomes and should be formulated in consultation with the child and their family, wherever possible.

The review of a Care and Support plan is a key component of the care planning process and is a continuous process. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the well-being of the child, monitor progress and make decisions to amend the plan or reconfirm previous decisions as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstance. This takes place in consultation with all those who have a key interest in the child's life, including the child.

Key issues to be addressed in the review process are:

- the child's participation and involvement, including providing the child with clear explanations of the reason for any changes
- the appropriate involvement of other agencies
- supervision and oversight by responsible managers
- the extent to which progress is being made towards achieving the identified outcomes.

As well as an overall review of the Care and Support Plan, the specific areas that must be covered in a Review meeting include:

- For all children who do not have a Permanency Plan, what is being done to enable them to return home
- Is the placement meeting the child's needs, and are any services being provided as additional to the basic cost of placement appropriate/still required
- Has the child been visited as required both by the CPPCR Regulations and by the needs of the child, and what is the child's perception of their relationship with their social worker
- Has an active offer of advocacy been made and the child's communication/preferred choice of language addressed

The planning and reviewing processes must promote the participation of the child and their family.

The IRO now has specified responsibilities, set out in the CPPCR Regulations and practice guidance, for monitoring the progress of the responsible LA in implementing a child/young person's Care and Support plan. IROs are now required to track the progress of the Care and Support plan between Review meetings, and to consult with the child at any time that there is a significant change to the Care and Support plan. Local authority staff are required to alert the IRO to any significant change to the child's Care and Support plan, or of any

failure to implement decisions arising from a Review. The IRO has the authority to determine when a Review meeting should be convened in the light of a change of circumstances. IROs are also required to raise concerns within the LA up to Chief Executive level and refer unresolved concerns to CAFCASS as appropriate. This is explained more fully under the section dealing with the IRO Resolution process

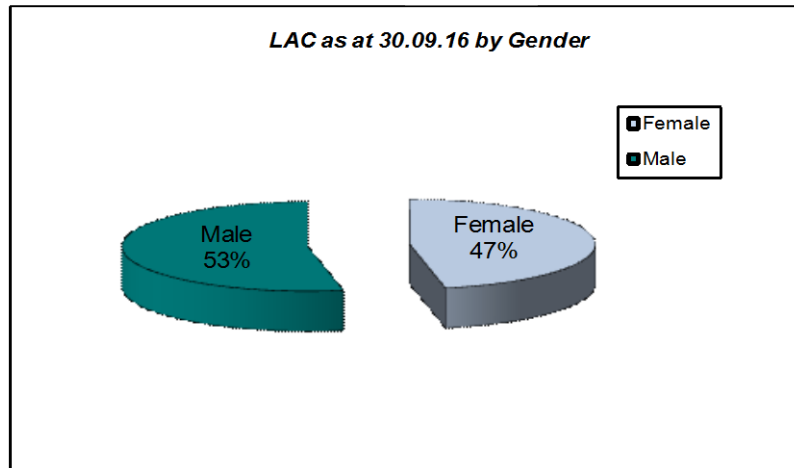
Frequency of Reviews

Looked After children review meetings must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- Within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After, or having an unplanned change of placement
- Subsequently within 3 months
- 6 monthly thereafter
- Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Care and Support plan, issues around the child's safety or a failure to carry out an important aspect of the 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.

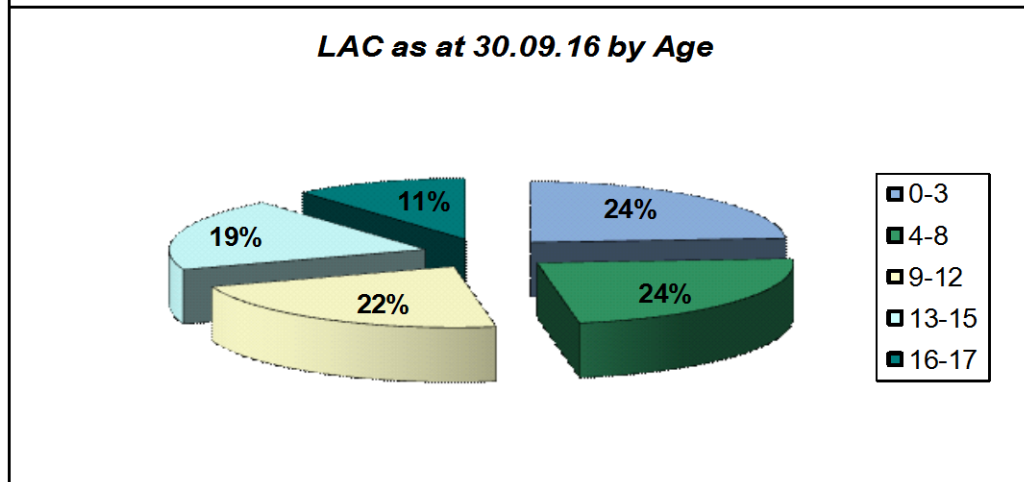
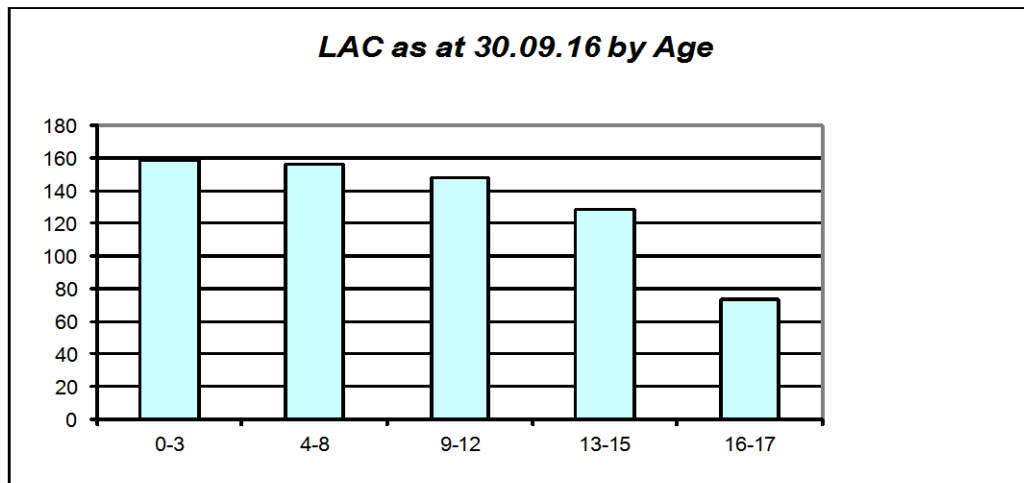
Looked After Population (30th September 2016)

1. Looked After Population by Gender



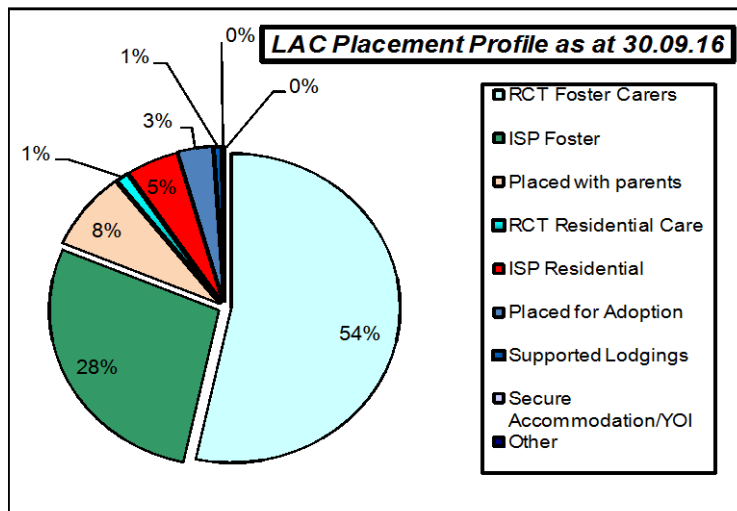
| | LAC as at 30.09.14 by Gender | LAC as at 31.03.15 by Gender | LAC as at 30.09.15 by Gender | LAC as at 31.03.16 by Gender | LAC as at 30.09.16 by Gender |
|--------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Female | 316 | 299 | 296 | 296 | 312 |
| Male | 351 | 322 | 314 | 327 | 353 |
| Total | 667 | 621 | 610 | 623 | 665 |

2. Looked After Population by Age Group



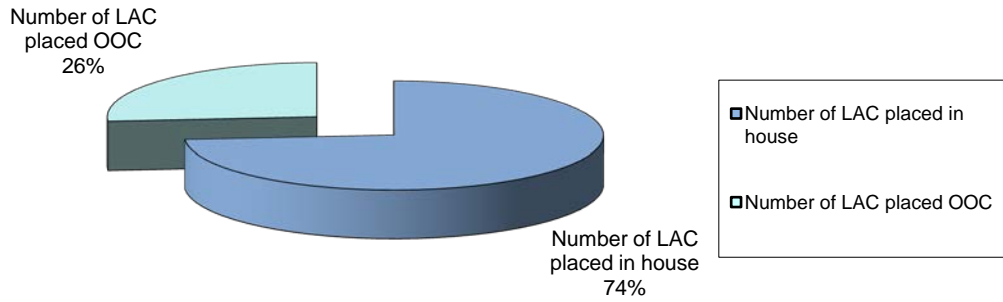
| | 0-3 | 4-8 | 9-12 | 13-15 | 16-17 | Total |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|
| LAC as at 30.09.14 by Age | 159 | 163 | 137 | 118 | 90 | 667 |
| LAC as at 31.03.15 by Age | 134 | 160 | 136 | 110 | 81 | 621 |
| LAC as at 30.09.15 by Age | 130 | 146 | 132 | 120 | 82 | 610 |
| LAC as at 31.03.16 by Age | 133 | 146 | 135 | 128 | 81 | 623 |
| LAC as at 30.09.16 by Age | 159 | 156 | 148 | 129 | 73 | 665 |

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



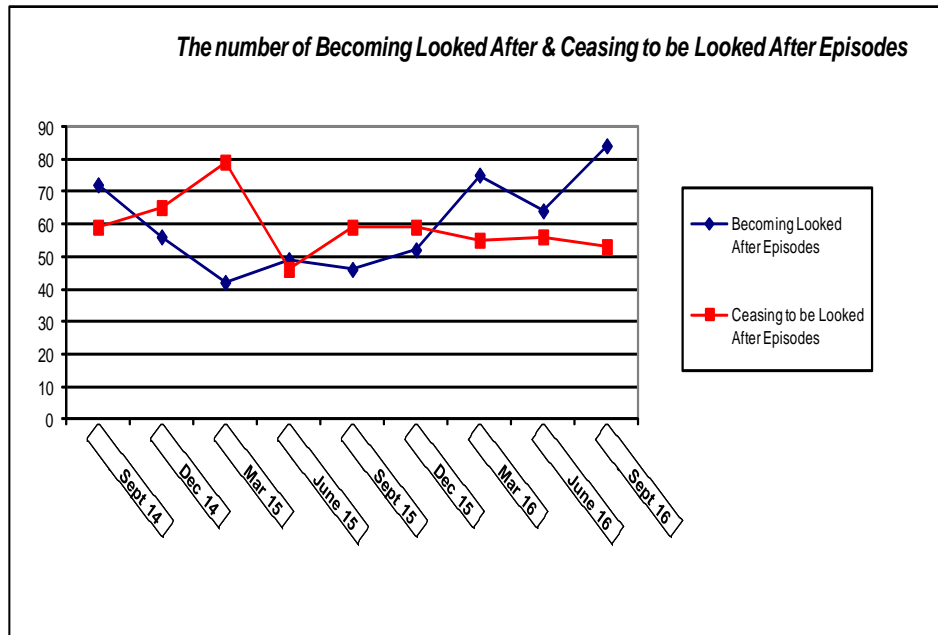
| | Sep-14 | Mar-15 | Sep-15 | Mar-16 | Sep-16 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| RCT Foster Carers | 324 | 295 | 289 | 321 | 355 |
| ISP Foster | 199 | 174 | 166 | 171 | 186 |
| Placed with parents | 56 | 55 | 59 | 49 | 54 |
| RCT Residential Care | 13 | 8 | 12 | 10 | 8 |
| ISP Residential | 45 | 48 | 44 | 43 | 33 |
| Placed for Adoption | 26 | 38 | 34 | 22 | 22 |
| Supported Lodgings | 3 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| Secure Accommodation/YOI | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 667 | 621 | 610 | 623 | 665 |

Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 30.09.16



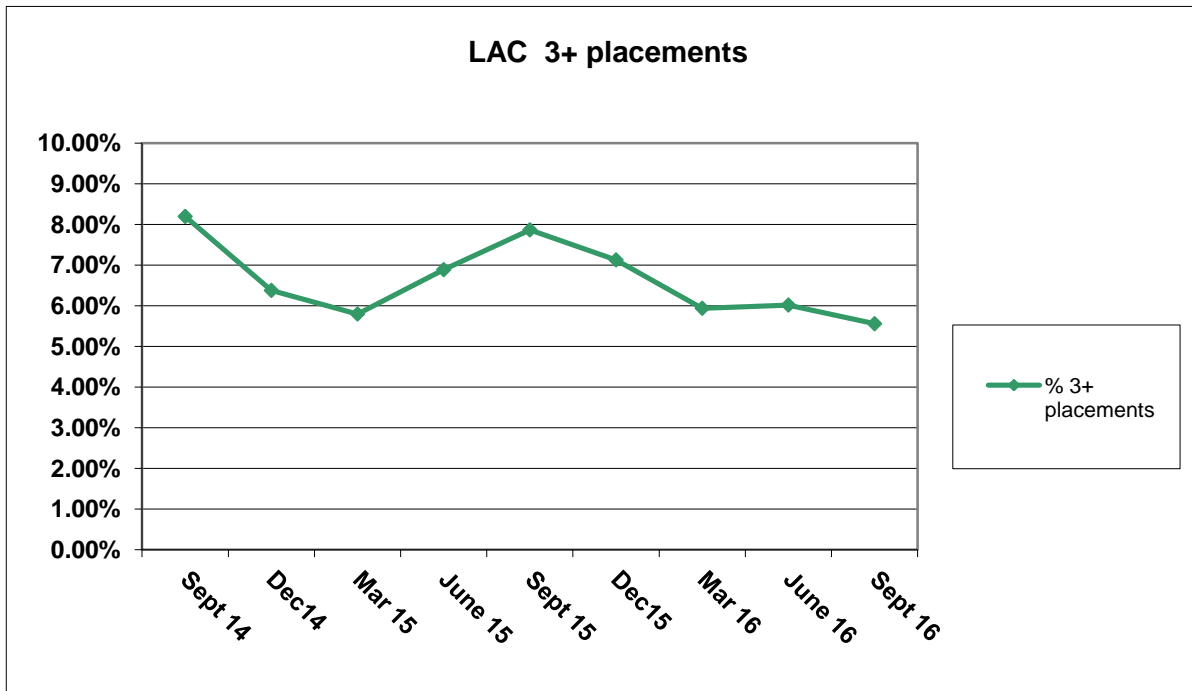
| | Sep-14 | Mar-15 | Sep-15 | Mar-16 | Sep-16 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Number of LAC placed in house | 485 | 449 | 446 | 451 | 490 |
| Number of LAC placed OOC | 182 | 172 | 164 | 172 | 175 |
| Total LAC | 667 | 621 | 610 | 623 | 665 |
| % OOC | 27.3% | 27.7% | 26.9% | 27.6% | 26.3% |

4. Admissions and Discharge Information



| | July-Sept 14 | Oct-Dec 14 | Jan-Mar 15 | April-June 15 | July-Sept 15 | Oct-Dec 15 | Jan-Mar 16 | April-June 16 | July-Sept 16 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| Becoming Looked After Episodes | 72 | 56 | 42 | 49 | 46 | 52 | 75 | 64 | 84 |
| Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes | 59 | 65 | 79 | 46 | 59 | 59 | 55 | 56 | 53 |

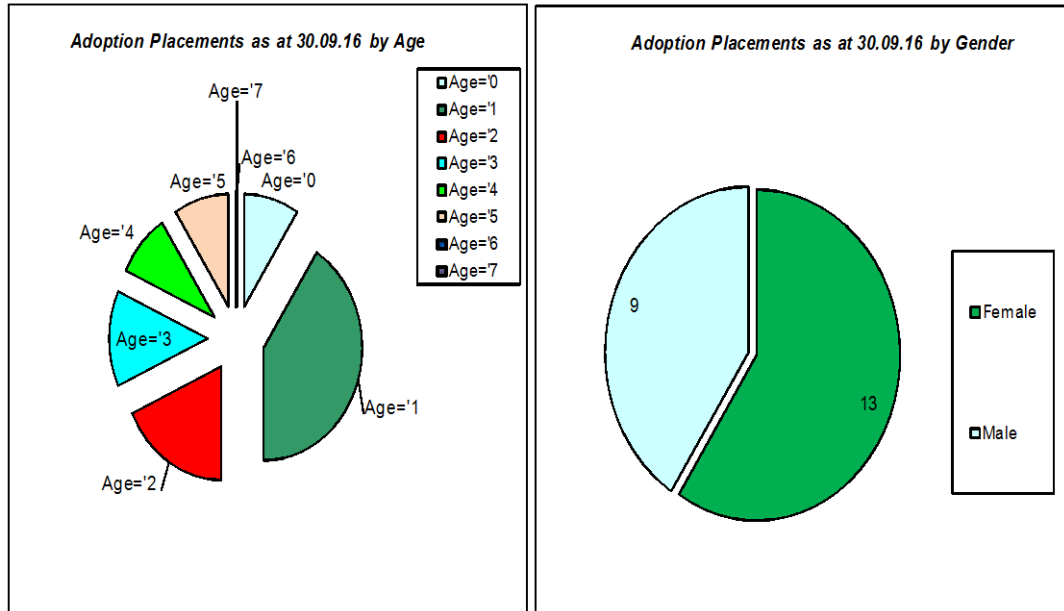
5. Placement Stability



| | Sept 14 | Dec 14 | Mar 15 | June 15 | Sept 15 | Dec 15 | Mar 16 | June 16 | Sept 16 |
|-----------------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|---------|---------|
| % 3+ placements | 8.20% | 6.38% | 5.80% | 6.89% | 7.87% | 7.13% | 5.94% | 6.02% | 5.56% |

6. Adoption Information

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



| Adoption Placements as at 30.09.16 by Age | Total |
|---|-------|
| Age=0 | 2 |
| Age=1 | 9 |
| Age=2 | 4 |
| Age=3 | 3 |
| Age=4 | 2 |
| Age=5 | 2 |
| Age=6 | 0 |
| Age=7 | 0 |
| Age=8 | 0 |
| Total | 22 |

| Adoption Placements as at 30.09.16 by Gender | Total |
|--|-------|
| Female | 13 |
| Male | 9 |
| Total | 22 |

| Adoption Information | Total |
|--|-------|
| Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.09.16 | 22 |
| Number of children placed for adoption between 01.10.15-30.09.16 | 20 |
| Number of Children adopted between 01.10.15-30.09.16 | 32 |

Review Activity 1st April - 30th September 2016

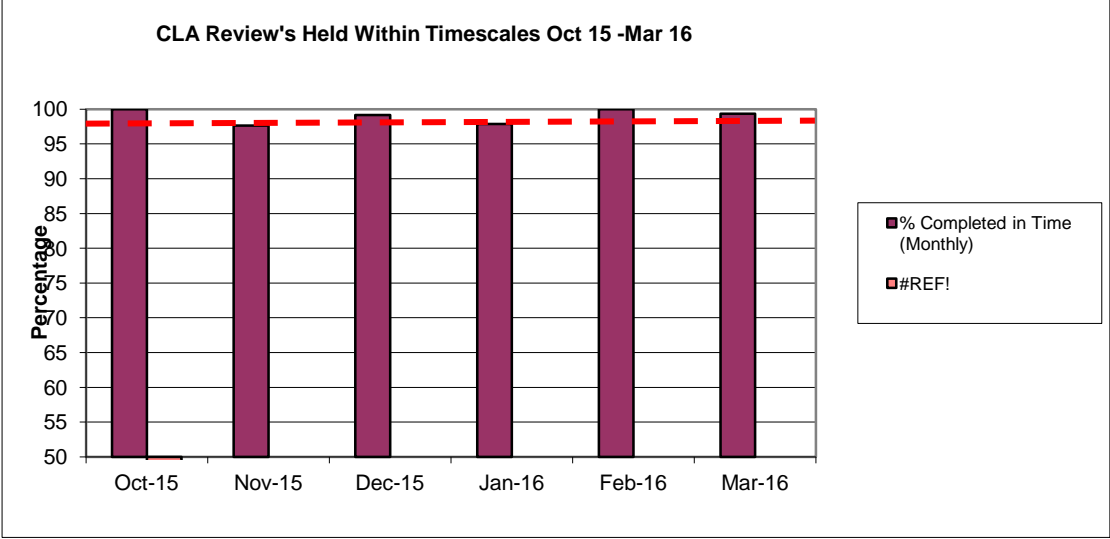
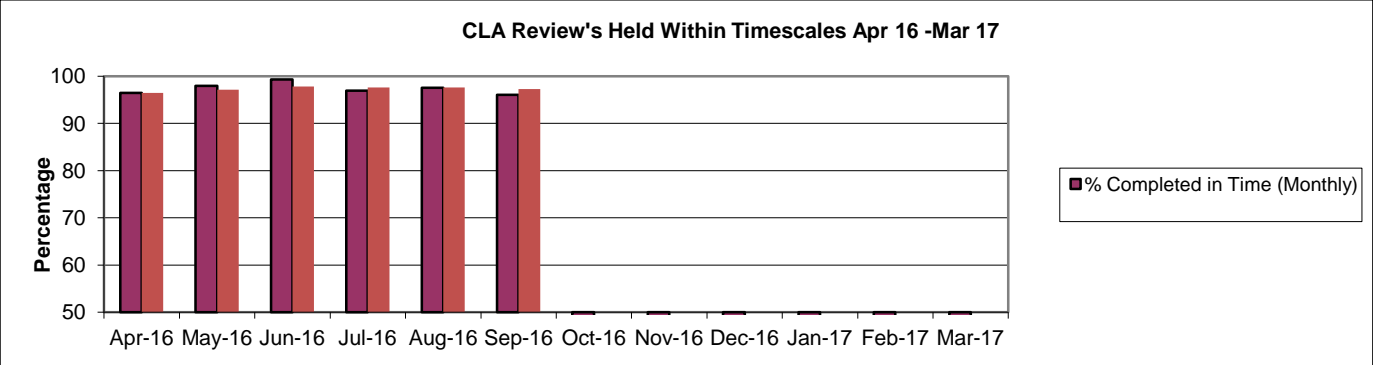
There has been overall positive performance during the last 5 years in respect of review meetings being held within timescale, performance for the period reported on has dropped slightly but this is attributable to a steep increase in the number of reviews held over this period.

920 review meetings were due in this 6 month period, which is an increase of 137 since the last reporting period. 25 of the review meetings were held outside the required timescale, overall performance is 97.28% compliance, which falls slightly short of our target of 98.5%. Despite this, performance is still considered excellent in terms of meeting PI's, given the number of review meetings required, without any increase in the size of the Reviewing Team.

During this period, 10 combined CLA Reviews/Review Child Protection Conferences were held under a new Protocol developed by the Service Manager in response to good practice under SSWB Part 6 Code of Practice. This led to the names of 9 of the children being removed from the Child Protection Register much earlier than would have previously happened, provided more consistency for the child and their family and avoided duplication of meetings.

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.

| CLA Reviews Held Within Timescales | | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Month | Reviews Due | Number held within Timescale | Reviews outside of Timescale | Compliance |
| April | 170 | 164 | 6 | 96.47% |
| May | 146 | 143 | 3 | 97.95% |
| June | 137 | 136 | 1 | 99.27% |
| July | 131 | 127 | 4 | 96.95% |
| August | 160 | 156 | 4 | 97.20% |
| September | 176 | 169 | 7 | 96.02% |
| Total | 920 | 895 | 25 | 97.28% |



Reviews held out of timescale

| Month | Number | Reason |
|--------------|---------------|---|
| April | 6 | <p>1 review was out of time because Reviewing Team not informed that child had become Looked After</p> <p>Reviews of sibling group of 4 were cancelled as social worker was unwell</p> <p>1 review cancelled as child and carers unwell - another date within time scales was offered by the IRO but professionals unable to attend</p> |
| May | 3 | <p>1 review cancelled as SW not available on agreed date</p> <p>1 review cancelled as older sibling had chicken pox</p> <p>1 review cancelled as child did not have an allocated social worker</p> |
| June | 1 | <p>review cancelled due to need to resolve child protection issues, rearranged 2 weeks later</p> |
| July | 4 | <p>Initial Adoption reviews for 2 siblings cancelled as adoptive father unavailable</p> <p>1 review was out of time because Reviewing Team not informed that child had become Looked After</p> <p>1 review cancelled as significant family member not available</p> |
| August | 4 | <p>Reviews of sibling group of 3 cancelled as carers served notice on the placement and no other professionals could attend</p> <p>Review cancelled as kinship carers unable to attend</p> |

| Month | Number | Reason |
|-----------|--------|--|
| September | 7 | <p>1 review was cancelled twice due to unavailability of school prior to summer holidays</p> <p>1 review cancelled as child moved to adoptive placement. Initial adoption review arranged for 22.09.16 out of timescale due to late notification to Reviewing Team</p> <p>Reviews for a sibling group of 5 were cancelled as Social Worker was on leave on dates offered and had no other availability within timescale, and requested permission to go out of timescale</p> |
| Total | 25 | |

Comparators (with last year)

April -September 2015

831 reviews held within timescale 11 outside Total 842 = 98.69%

October 2015 to March 2016

772 reviews held within timescales 8 outside Total 783 = 98.9%

The Resolutions process

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 is focussed on resolving matters at the earliest opportunity directly with those involved however it does include a face to face problem resolution meeting if necessary 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
- Ensure IROs fulfil their responsibilities as set out statutory guidance.

Current issues for the Reviewing Service

Capacity

There are currently 7.6 full-time equivalent CLA IRO posts. A review of the role of the IRO undertaken for Welsh Government in March 2016, noted that across Wales, IRO case loads ranged from 70 to 120. RCT is at the mid-point of this range with caseloads of approximately 93. This is an increase of 8 since the last reporting period.

The reviewing service is currently half a post down because of maternity leave.

One part-time post has recently been filled by an external candidate and interviews are planned for January 2017 as there will be a full time IRO vacancy from the end of the month.

A key challenge for the service when the number of children looked after is high and there are staff vacancies is to meet the expectation that every child looked after will be allocated their own IRO, who will chair all their meetings. Such consistency is key for the child or young person in developing a relationship with their IRO alongside the IRO's knowledge of the individual's circumstances, what outcomes are important to them, their plans and ability to monitor progress. This remains our priority but it has not been possible to ensure that this happens in all cases as on occasion external IROS have been utilised.

The increased case loads are impacting on the IROs' ability to produce and distribute written records of the meetings within the Reviewing Service's agreed timescale of 14 days. It should be noted that this is a good practice measure, not a statutory requirement as CPPCR Regulations do not stipulate a time limit for the distribution of the written record of the meeting. However, this is an area of concern for the Service

as it is important that what is decided in the review meeting is made available in a timely manner so that plans can be amended and implemented. Steps are being taken to reduce backlog by timetabling in days for IROs to focus on written work and providing extra Business Support assistance.

Case load numbers are also affecting the IRO's ability to monitor the implementation of the child or young person's Care and Support Plans as closely as good practice would require. However, **all concerns** are followed up through the Resolutions process; it is the capacity of the IRO to track progress between Review meetings that needs to improve in order to fully meet the requirement in the SSWB Act 2014 that the IRO must "monitor the performance of the local authority of its functions in relation to the child's case". The Service Manager is developing a programme of workshops for social work practitioners and IROs with the aim of improving communication between Review meetings.

The Service Manager is working with the Reviewing Team Manager to look at options around workload management that do not compromise our high

standards of practice in the chairing of Review meetings. The move in the Reviewing Service towards IROs chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences should also increase the overall capacity the service.

The team very occasionally use conference calling for some Review meetings but only when the IRO determines that this will not undermine the quality of the experience for the child or young person.

Issues raised by IROs April 2016 to September 2016

There were 17 issues for Resolution raised using the IRO Resolution protocol during this period. This is one less than was raised in the previous 6 months. This does not include the Resolutions that were resolved informally by discussion between the IRO and Social Worker/Team Manager and needed no further escalation. IRO's will always seek to reach a resolution in this way and the Resolutions protocol has been updated to include this as the first stage of the Resolutions process.

The issues raised during this reporting period continue to be varied and the themes are similar to those raised in previous periods which include the following themes plus individual case examples:

Theme: Care Planning

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care and support plan for a child looked after reflects their needs, and that the actions and outcomes set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

Case Example:

Two children have been known to Childrens Services for the whole of their lives due to concerns of neglect, parental substance misuse and domestic violence. In September 2015 they became Looked After because their mother's mental health had deteriorated in addition to escalating concerns in respect of both parents substance misuse. The children subsequently experienced one placement breakdown before being placed with their current carers in October 2015.

Care proceedings began in January and concluded in May with both children being made subject to Care Orders. The plan put before the court and endorsed by the Children's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) was that the children should remain in foster care with a view to the foster carers making an application for a special guardianship order in the very near future. However, the carers had indicated to their support worker that they were unlikely to apply for an SGO as they enjoy their role and benefit from the support they are provided with as foster carers.

It was the view of the IRO that the care plan did not provide permanence for the children and that a plan of long term foster care with a view to the foster carers applying for a special guardianship order in the distant future was not appropriate given their young ages (5 & 6). The social worker told the IRO that despite a “dry run” for prospective adopters indicating four possible matches the plan of adoption did not progress because of the special guardianship order plan.

Resolution:

Resolution meeting convened as a matter of urgency. The IRO was not satisfied with the outcome and escalated the matter to the Head of Service who chaired a further resolution meeting. The outcome of this second meeting was an independent assessment of the placement commissioned alongside work with the carers to address their concerns in respect of the SGO. Given that the assessment was positive and found that the children (who had already been told they wouldn't move again) had bonded with the carers it was agreed that the court care plan should continue. The carers have indicated that they are now considering an SGO sooner rather later to provide permanence for the children.

The Reviewing Team manager contacted CAFCASS to remind them that GALs were expected under the “Local Authority IRO Services in Wales and CAFCASS Cymru” protocol to consult with the IRO during care proceedings, and had this been the case the IRO's reservations could have been considered within the court arena.

Theme: Lawfulness of Placement

An increasing number of children are being placed by Children's Services with extended family members if they are unable to safely remain in their parents' care. This is considered best practice in line with current legislation as long as the children's needs for good enough care and stability are met. The IROs have identified a number of instances during IFST Reviews where what are being presented as informal family care arrangements are, in the IRO's view, kinship care arrangements as Children's Services are stipulating certain aspects of the care (e.g. around parental contact). Kinship care placements require a viability assessment to be completed within a fortnight of the child being placed which will consider whether the placement is likely to meet the child's identified physical and emotional needs. A placement may be deemed unlawful if this process is not followed or carers have failed a viability assessment and the child remains in their care.

Case Example:

As a response to an emergency situation, the Service Director for Children's Services had agreed to allow a teenage boy to reside with his extended family whilst alternative provisions were sought. The boy in question then didn't want to leave his extended family and Children's Services were proposing that he remain in their care. The IRO chaired a review a short time later and it was

apparent that although the placement had been agreed in the short term by the Service Director, it was unlawful because no assessments had since been completed. The IRO raised a resolution with the Service Director.

Resolution:

The Service Director confirmed that the arrangement was only intended as a short term arrangement and arranged for the Head of Service to address the issues raised. Given that the boy did not want to leave his family, legal advice was sought from Counsel, a specialist assessment was commissioned and a viability assessment was undertaken to legalise the placement

Theme: Drift and Delay

The IRO has an important role in ensuring that a local authority has a consistent approach towards the care of children for whom it is corporately responsible. The IRO should offer a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in the planning of the care for children who are looked after. The review meetings are outcome focussed and therefore tasks and timescales are agreed upon to avoid unnecessary and avoidable drift and delay. Outcome focussed tasks might range from making an emergency health appointment to completing a referral for a specialist service.

Case Example

Two girls were accommodated by the local authority because of concerns in respect of their mother's alcohol use and the impact of this on her parenting and ability to keep them safe.

At the second review meeting it was reported that although a legal threshold meeting had been held shortly after the girls were accommodated, the subsequent Public Law Outline (PLO) meeting with the family hadn't been held. Neither of the parents (who were separated) had sought legal advice. Parenting assessment of mother had only just started and was expected to be completed within six weeks but there was no projected timescale for the completion of father's assessment.

In the meantime the eldest of the girls had not been in education for 6 months because there has been considerable delay in identifying an appropriate educational provision for her. The secondary school in which she was still enrolled was sending work home. The girl told the IRO that she was worried that she had missed a lot of school and was going to find it difficult to catch up.

Resolution: The IRO raised a formal resolution with the team manager and a PLO Meeting was held with both parents within 3 weeks. Arrangements were made for the eldest girl to return to her secondary school on a phased return. Staff from the child's placement agreed to transport her.

Theme: Life Story Work.

Whilst Life Story work is often most associated with children placed for adoption it is in fact an integral part of the work that should be undertaken with any child who is unable to live with their birth family. Life story work may help a child understand why their birth parents could not care for them temporarily or permanently, give the child a sense of personal/family/cultural history, and build a sense of racial/ethnic/national identity. It may help the child understand the reason for placement moves as well as recording memories for the child of previous carers.

Case Example

The need for life story work had been identified not only in a young boy's review meetings but also during both his CAMHS assessment and educational psychologist's assessment. However, despite it being raised as a concern for two years it still hadn't been started.

Resolution: Despite the IRO having forwarded the resolution to the team manager, she didn't receive a prompt response and therefore requested a resolution meeting. The resolution meeting agreed that the delay wasn't acceptable and timescales were agreed upon. The life story work has since started.

Development work

The Reviewing Service

Increasingly, IRO's are chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences in line with the SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice (Consideration should be given to the IRO chairing the child protection conference where a looked after child remains subject to a child protection plan - para 58). This not only provides consistency for the child and reduces the need for multiple meetings, it is also enabling children's names to be removed from the Child Protection Register at the earliest opportunity. There are safety mechanisms built into the protocol underpinning Child Protection Conferences in these circumstances and it only applies to children who are subject to an Interim or Full Care Order. In addition, this development should allow the Reviewing Team to provide a more flexible and resilient response.

Short term breaks

Children who are having regular respite placements under the Short Breaks provision continue to be classed either as a child with Care and support needs or a child who is looked after. IROs chair the reviews for those children who are looked after. As a result the reviewing team continues to focus on a reviewing a smaller number of children with complex additional needs. This is compliant with the new SSWB Act 2014.

Consultation Documents.

The feedback from looked after children using the new consultation documents continues to be positive although the number of children completing their consultation isn't as high as was hoped. The reviewing team is continuing to explore ways of publicising the website.

It was hoped that the consultation document for carers would have been completed by the beginning of this reporting period but unfortunately this isn't the case. The visuals of the documents themselves have been updated to resemble those of the website. The consultation questions themselves are ready for the next print order.

The visuals of the parents' consultation document have also been updated although the service still needs to identify and consult with a focus group of parents.

2Sides Website

The website is primarily targeted towards looked after children and young people of secondary school age and is intended to be somewhere that they can access far more information about what it means to be looked after regardless of where they are placed, and complete an online review consultation document should they wish to do so.

The service manager and reviewing team manager have discussed the benefits of creating an editorial group of children looked after to review the content at pre determined intervals.

In the previous report it was stated that Merthyr CBC had asked whether it would be possible to extend the website across Cwm Taf. This was explored but didn't proceed in part because RCT was not prepared to compromise the work and identity created by our own young people and also because of the potential for data protection breaches were children to send a consultation document to the wrong local authority.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The reviewing service is keen to maintain a positive working relationship with Voices from Care and to encourage young people looked after by RCT to become active participants. The reviewing team manager is e-mailed regularly by Voices from Care and distributes the information to team managers and service managers.

Advocacy

The Reviewing Team regularly liaise with representatives of NYAS (advocacy service) and when appropriate, will refer children and young people to this service, with their agreement.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)

The “Local Authority IRO Services in Wales and CAFCASS Cymru” protocol issued in 2014 (this is currently being updated) promotes a positive working relationship between both the IRO and the Children’s Guardians throughout care proceedings, which might include constructive communication by telephone, email or face to face meetings.. The protocol refers to the need for timely discussion regarding a child’s care and support plan and whether or not there are any issues which need to be raised in court. At the conclusion of proceedings where a Care Order has been made and the child remains looked after, a final discussion between the IRO and the Children’s Guardian should raise any particular monitoring issues to be addressed through the CLA review process.

CAFCASS and the Reviewing Team Manager have recently established a clear process for exchanging information when a children's Guardian ad Litem is allocated a case.

Ceri Mann, Reviewing Team Manager

Judith Davis, Service Manager Safeguarding and Support

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