



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

20TH MARCH 2019

**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING
OFFICER (IRO) REPORT**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Author: Judith Davis, Service Manager for Safeguarding

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 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

- 2.1 To note the contents of the attached report

3. BACKGROUND

- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 16 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
- 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 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.
- The Reviewing Service currently comprises 11 IRO full-time posts, 3 of which are filled by 6 part time staff, and a Team Manager who is line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding.
- 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 SSWB 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, up to Chief Executive level within the Local Authority and subsequently to CAFCASS to consider legal action if necessary.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st April-31st December 2018.

4. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period includes performance information from the last 3 quarters (01.04.18-31.12.18).
- During this reporting period, the average number of children looked after by RCT was 682, which is 6 more than in the last reporting period. There was a continuing pattern of more boys than girls becoming Looked After, with the majority being under 12.
- As of 31.12.18, 79.8% of all children looked after were placed with foster carers, 71% of these with RCT foster carers, which is an increase from numbers as at 31.03.18. The percentage of children placed with Independent Service Providers in foster placements is 29.2%, with 5% in non-RCT residential placements. The number of Out of County placements has risen from 23.5% to 27.1% but it should be noted that this includes children placed with Relative Foster Carers.
- 1,298 CLA review meetings were due in this 9-month period, which is a decrease of 40 over the previous 9 months. In addition, IROs chaired 21 combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register; and 43 IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews.
- 68 Reviews were held outside the required timescale; which represents 5% of the total number due. This is an improvement over the last reporting period but still falls short of our target of 98.5%. However this target was set before the number of Looked After children rose significantly and there has not been an increase in the number of IRO posts.
- It is difficult to give a meaningful average in terms of numbers of children each IRO reviews, given that there are sibling groups that may be reviewed together, some children are subject to Child Protection and CLA Planning, and their parents may also have IFSS Plans. Factoring in the range from stable long-term placements where reviewing the child's plan is straightforward to highly complex Reviews where the placement is fragile or the child has complex needs, also

demonstrates that a quantitative measure does not give an accurate picture of work load. In terms of numbers of meetings chaired, the average will be 8 a week, which includes CLA Reviews, Child Protection Conferences, and IFSS Reviews.

KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- A continuing emphasis on the child being at the centre of the Reviewing process, meaning that the IRO prioritises seeking the child's views, and seeks to ensure that the child and family understand the Care and Support Plan. Review meetings are brought forward when the needs of the child require this
- All the full-time IRO's and 1 of the part-time IROs are now chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences in line with the good practice defined in the SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice. This not only provides consistency for the child and reduces the need for multiple meetings, it also ensures that children who are no longer at risk of significant harm do not remain on the Child Protection Register for longer than necessary.
- On-going development of the Two Sides website and links with Blueprint and Voices from Care.
- Increasing participation of children, young people and their families in the Reviewing process.
- Streamlining and strengthening of the Resolution process and the IRO quality assurance role.
- Strengthening links with Advocacy Providers and with CAFCASS.
- The challenges presented by the new Practice Care standards for Monitoring and Reviewing Part 6 Care and Support Plans.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

Authors: Judith Davis, Service Manager for Safeguarding
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is 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 (CLA) for the period **1st April – December 31st 2018**. The Report is also presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board note the information contained within this report.

3. RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 and 2016 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
- RCT staff guidance has been issued in respect of the SSWB Act Code of Practice part 6; the Role and Responsibilities of the IRO, and the IRO Resolution Protocol.
- RCT Guidance is being prepared in response to the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide recently issued by Welsh Government and AFA Cymru : Reviewing and Monitoring of a Child or Young Person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan.

The CPPCR Regulations specify:

- The general duty of the responsible local authority to review all Looked After children's cases.
- The responsible authority must not make any significant change to a child's care and support plan unless the proposed change has first been considered at a review of the child's case, unless this is not reasonably practicable.
- The circumstances in which the local authority must consult the IRO.
- When the IRO must consult with the child.
- 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 CAF/CASS in accordance with section 100(3) of the SSWB Act.

The SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice 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 Part 6 Care and Support Plan (CASP) 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.

Legislation and good practice 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 a Young Offender Institutions and subject to a Care Order or remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation.
- 18 years and under and have a Pathway Plan.
- All Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) plans are also reviewed by an IRO.

The most recent practice standards and guidance focus on strengthening the monitoring of care planning between CLA Review meetings, ensuring that the voice of the child is heard throughout the reviewing process, and that there is a transparent and robust process in place for addressing significant concerns raised by the IRO regarding a child/young person's care plan.

4. THE REVIEWING SERVICE

The Reviewing Service currently sits within the remit of the Head of Service for Safeguarding. It currently comprises 11 IRO full-time posts, 3 of which are filled by 6 part time staff, 2 Business Support staff who are responsible for taking notes in complex CLA Reviews, and a Team Manager who is line managed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding. It 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). There is a shortage of suitable venues for meetings within RCT and we have limited facilities for conference calls but are looking to expand this with support from the ICT Agile Working Team.

4.1 APPOINTMENT OF IRO'S

The CPCCR Regulations require the Local Authority to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers and specify 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 Part 6 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 Children Looked After (CLA) Reviewing Teams were amalgamated in order to meet the good practice standard of having the same IRO chair all meetings for a child wherever possible, and to develop more resilience within the service. All new appointments since then have carried responsibility for chairing Child Protection Conferences as well as CLA Reviews.

4.2 PURPOSE OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER REVIEWS

Each child who is Looked After must have a Care and Support Plan (referred to as a Part 6 Care and Support Plan). This must be based on a current assessment of the child's needs and be focussed 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 Part 6 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 the plan is a key component of care planning and is a continuous process as it includes monitoring the progress of the plan between Review meetings, and responding to any significant change in the child's circumstances. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider how the plan is meeting the well-being outcomes for the child, monitor progress and make decisions to amend the plan or reconfirm previous decisions as necessary in

light of changed knowledge and circumstances. 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 Part 6 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 at an additional to the basic cost of placement appropriate/still required.
- The views of all involved in the Reviewing process, including the child, parents and carers.
- Has the child been visited as required both by the CPPCR Regulations and by the needs of the child.
- 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 been addressed.

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

The IRO 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 Part 6 Care and Support Plan. IROs are now required to track the progress of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan between Review meetings, and to consult with the child at any time that there is a significant change to the Plan. Local authority staff are required to alert the IRO to any significant change to the child's Part 6 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 Resolutions process.

4.3 FREQUENCY OF REVIEWS

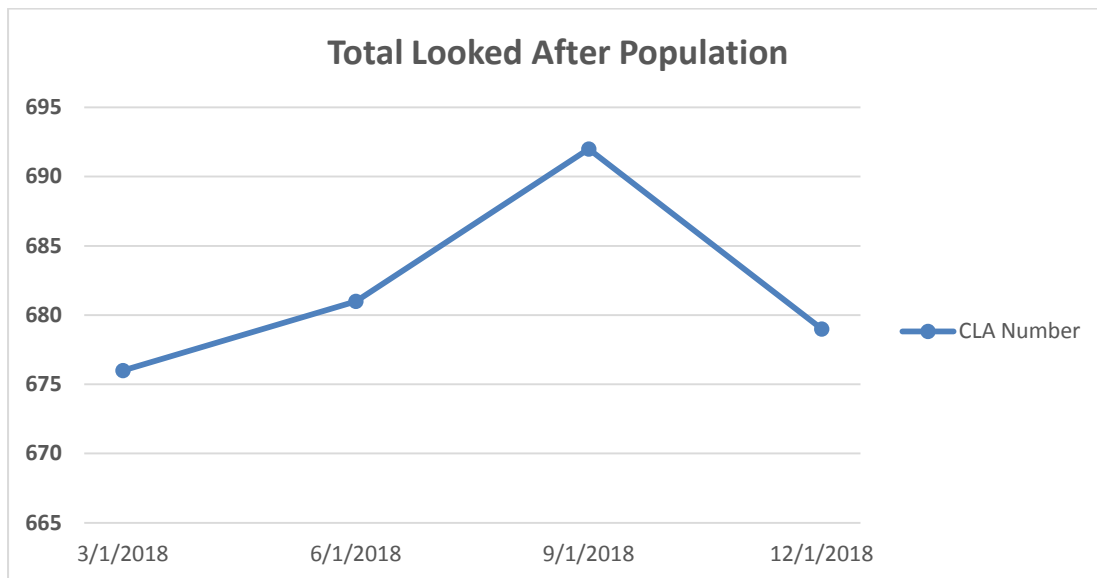
Children Looked After (CLA) review meetings must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- 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 Part 6 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 under S76 SSWB Act 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 Service 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.

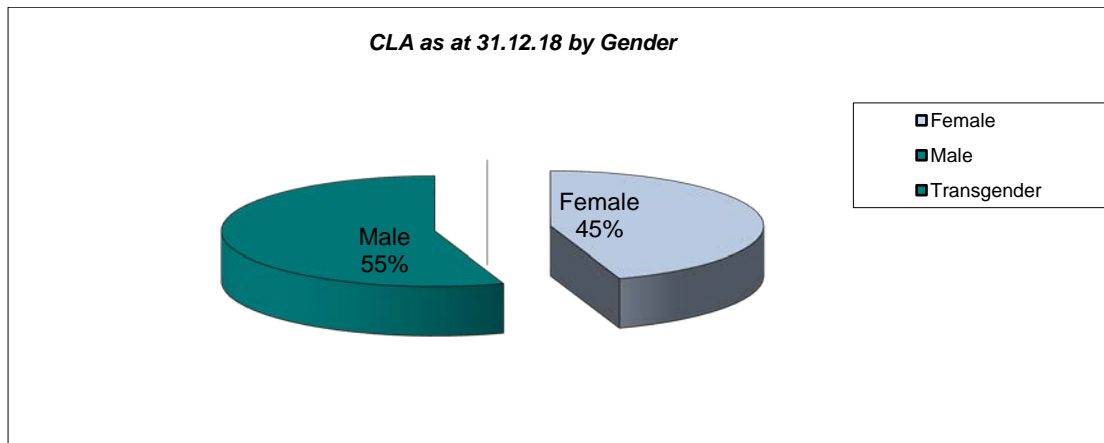
5. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (31st December 2018)

	31/03/18	30/06/18	30/09/18	31/12/18
CLA Number	676	681	692	679

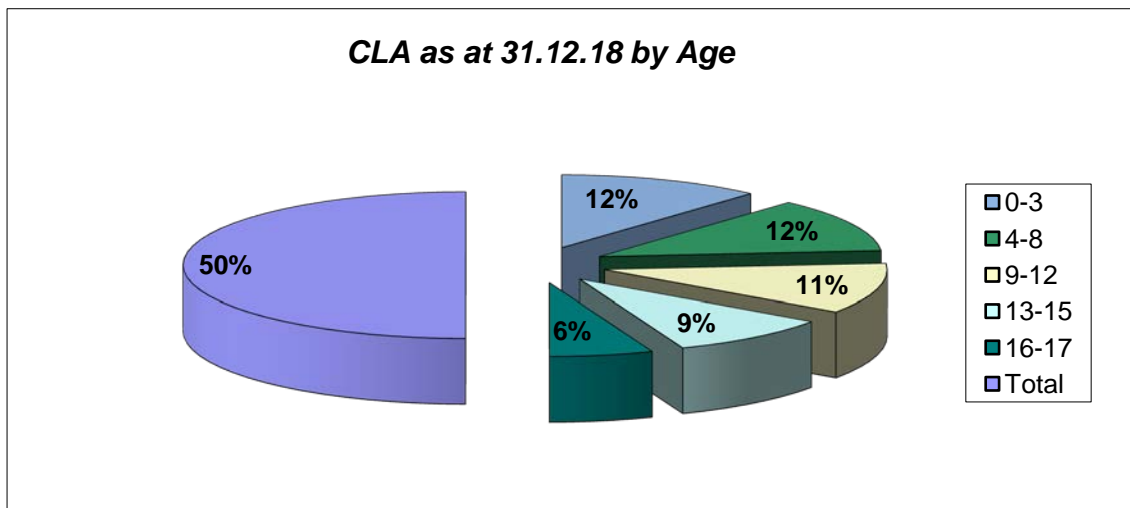
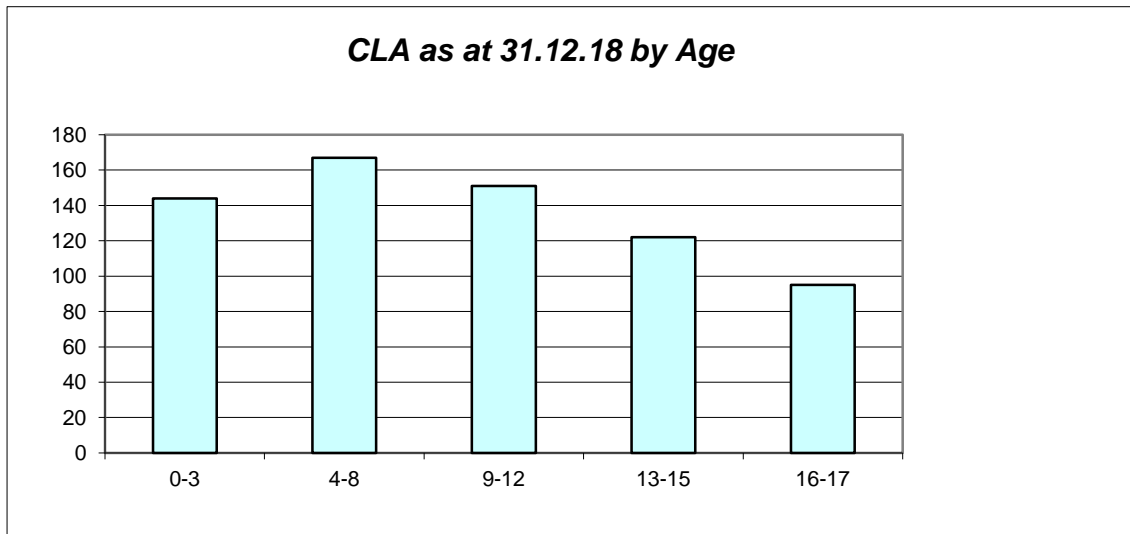


Looked After Population by Gender



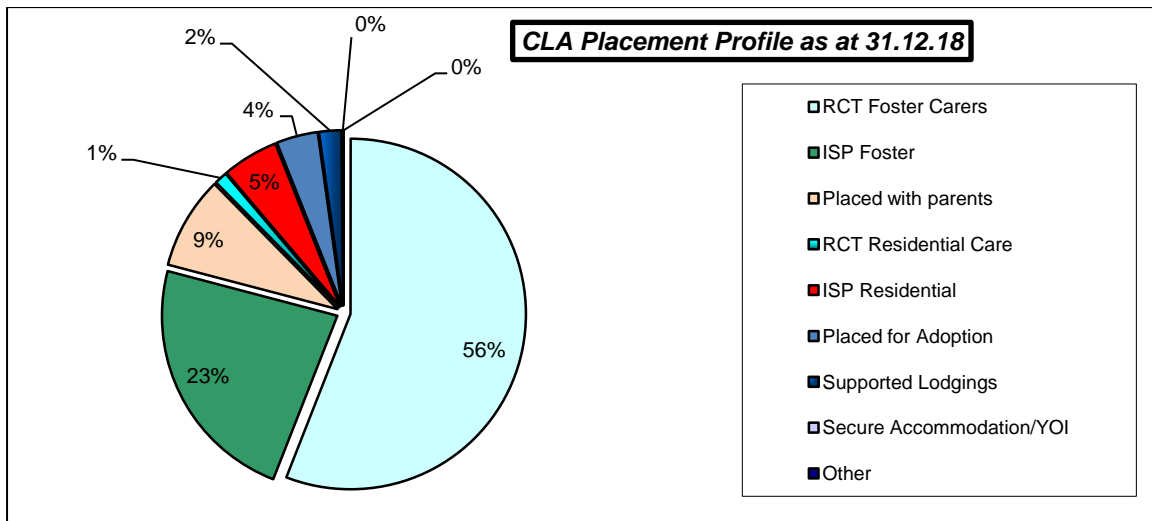
	CLA as at 31.03.18 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.18 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.18 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.18 by Gender
Female	300	302	306	304
Male	376	379	386	375
Transgender	0	0	0	0
Total	676	681	692	679

Looked After Population by Age Group

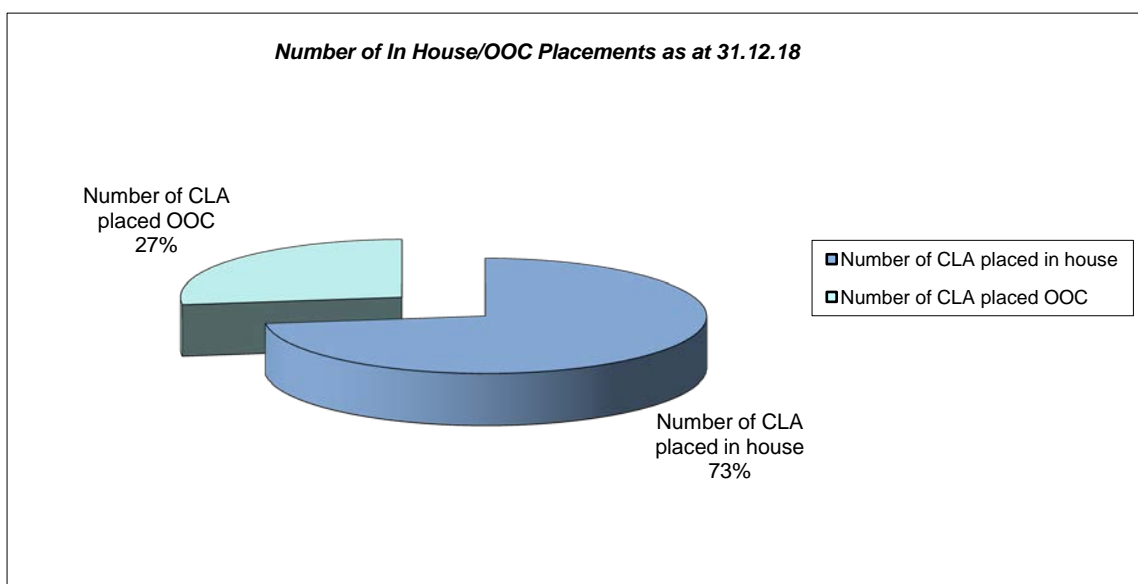


	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.03.18 by Age	158	162	150	126	80	676
CLA as at 30.06.18 by Age	159	167	144	126	85	681
CLA as at 30.09.18 by Age	152	174	147	131	88	692
CLA as at 31.12.18 by Age	144	167	151	122	95	679

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

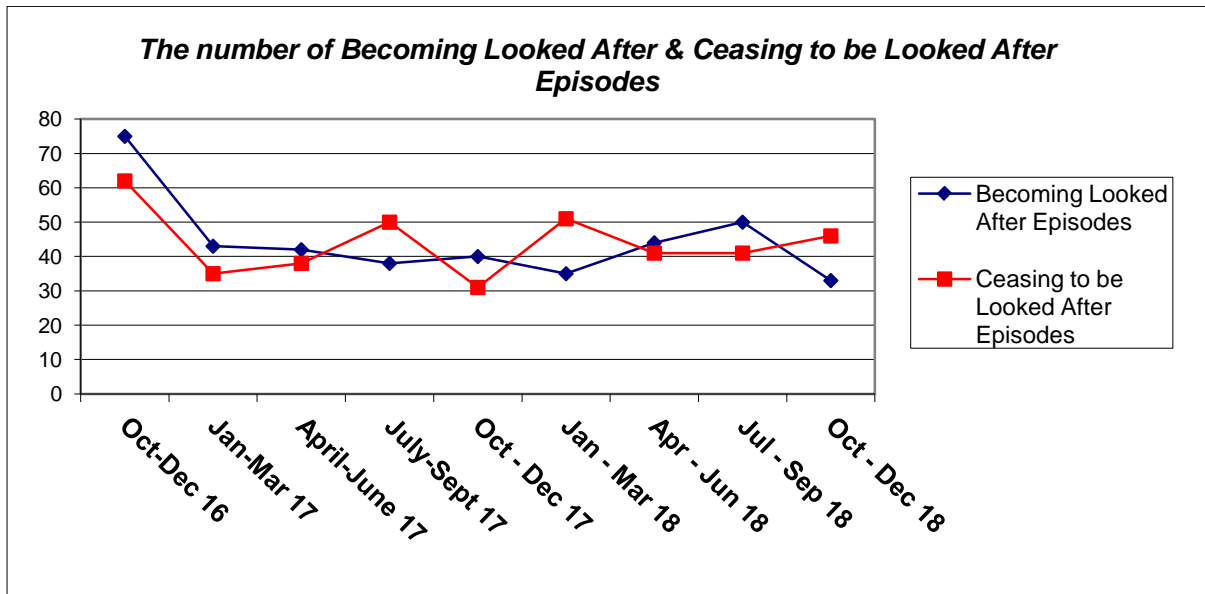


	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18
RCT Foster Carers	369	374	390	380
ISP Foster	174	169	164	157
Placed with parents	50	59	56	58
RCT Residential Care	9	7	10	8
ISP Residential	33	31	31	35
Placed for Adoption	33	29	24	26
Supported Lodgings	7	8	14	14
Secure Accommodation/YOI	1	3	1	1
Other	0	1	2	0
Total	676	681	692	679



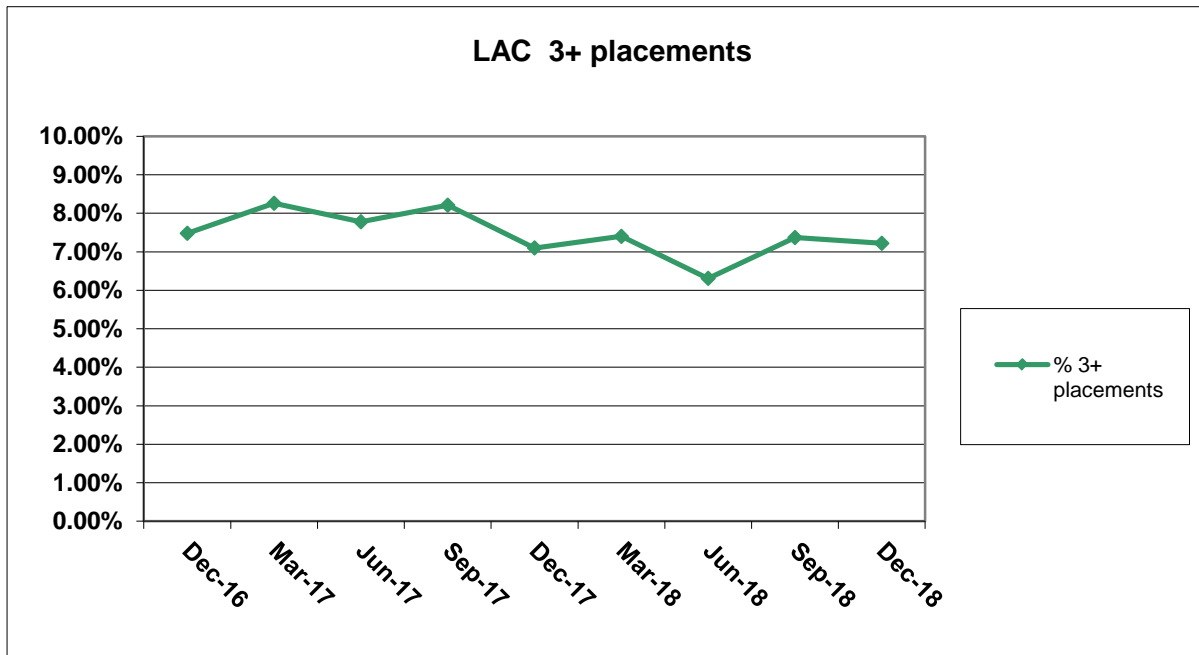
	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18
Number of CLA placed in house	517	500	513	495
Number of CLA placed OOC	159	181	179	184
Total CLA	676	681	692	679
% OOC	23.5%	26.6%	25.9%	27.1%

Admissions and Discharge Information



	Oct-Dec 16	Jan-Mar 17	April-June 17	July-Sept 17	Oct - Dec 17	Jan - Mar 18	Apr - Jun 18	Jul - Sep 18	Oct - Dec 18
Becoming Looked After Episodes	75	43	42	38	40	35	44	50	33
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	62	35	38	50	31	51	41	41	46

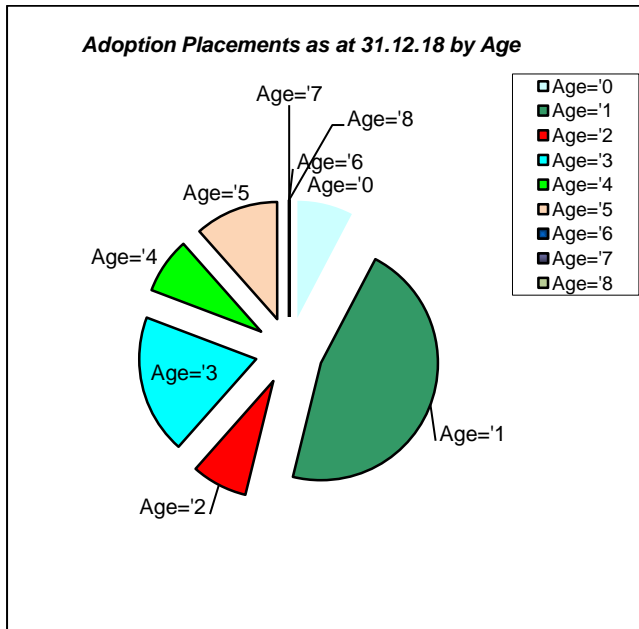
Placement Stability



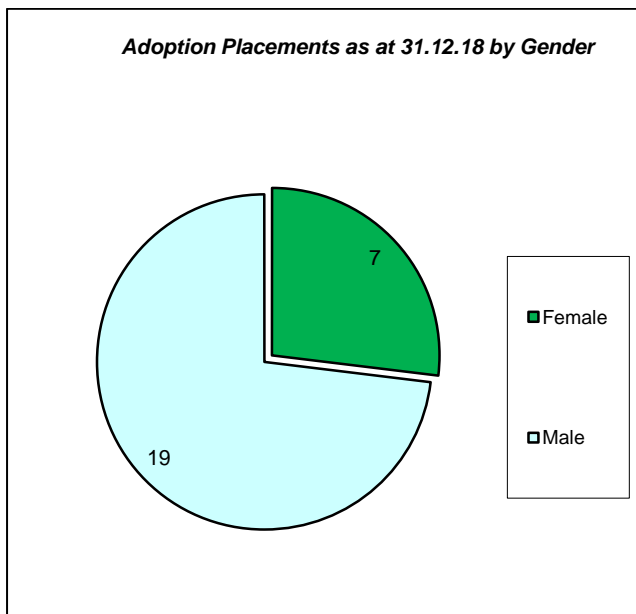
	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17	Sep-17	Dec-17	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18
% 3+ placements	7.48%	8.26%	7.78%	8.21%	7.10%	7.40%	6.31%	7.37%	7.22%

Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 31.12.18 by Age	Total
Age=0	2
Age=1	12
Age=2	2
Age=3	5
Age=4	2
Age=5	3
Age=6	0
Age=7	0
Age=8	0
Total	26



Adoption Placements as at 31.12.18 by Gender	Total
Female	7
Male	19
Total	26

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.12.18	26
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.01.18 - 31.12.18	44
Number of Children adopted between 01.01.18 - 31.12.18	42

6. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1ST APRIL – 31ST DECEMBER 2018

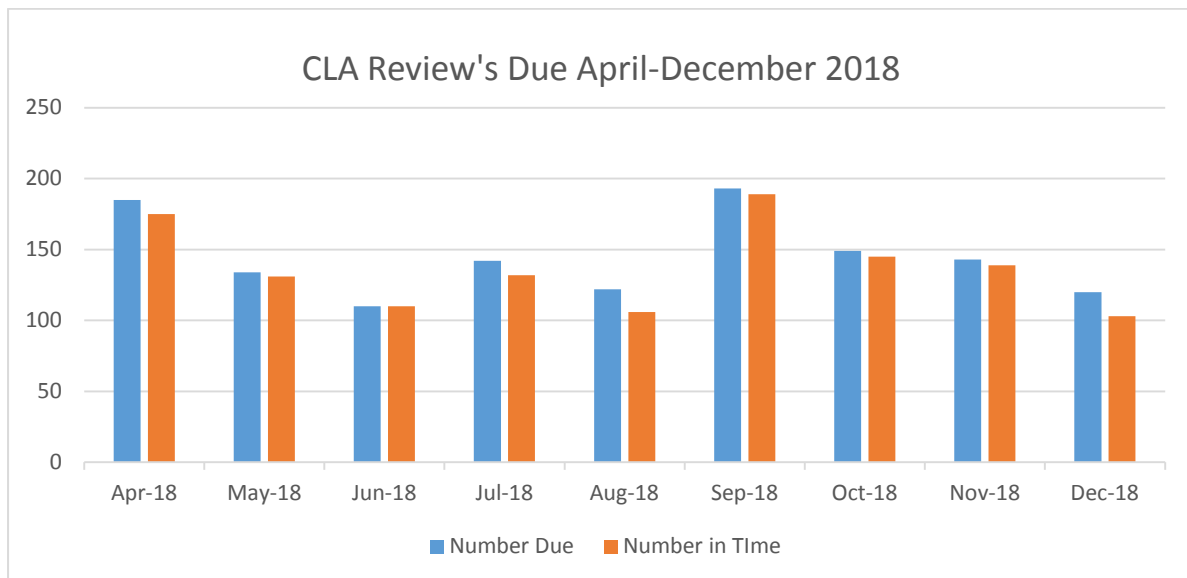
During this reporting period the total number of children looked after fluctuated between 675 and 701. 1,298 CLA review meetings were due in this 9-month period, which is a decrease of 40 over the previous 9 months. In addition, IROs chaired 21 combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register, and 43 IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews.

68 reviews were held outside the required timescale; overall our performance is 94.76% compliant, which is an improvement over the last reporting period but still falls short of our target of 98.5%. Measures have been put in place to reduce the number of cancelled reviews by requiring requests to rearrange to be agreed by Service Managers in advance.

It should also be noted that following the retirement of a long-standing member of the team who only chaired CP Conferences, a new IRO was appointed at the beginning of December and had to rearrange a number of CLA Reviews to fit in with the pre-existing Conference commitments.

2 additional full-time posts have been created in the Reviewing Service Business Support to provide a minute-taking service for CLA Review meetings, which is greatly assisting the IRO's. Currently one half-time post remains unfilled.

CLA Reviews



views Held Within Timescales				
Month	Reviews Due	Number held within Timescale	Reviews outside of Timescale	Compliance
April 18	185	175	10	94.59
May	134	131	3	97.76%
June	110	110	0	100%
July	142	132	10	92.96%
August	122	106	16	86.89%
September	193	189	4	97.93%
October	149	145	5	97.32%
November	143	139	4	97.20%
December	120	103	17	85.83%
Total	1298	1230	68	94.76%

6.1 REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

There were 68 children whose Reviews were cancelled and could not be rearranged within timescales during this reporting period. The reasons vary from decisions to delay to enable the CLA Review to consider key developments in Care Planning (e.g. an imminent Court Hearing) to unavailability of key people on the date originally set. It should be noted that over this period, 426 Reviews had to be rearranged in total; meaning that only 16% of the total were out of timescales. Reasons for requests to rearrange are generally due to unavailability of key participants on the original date.

Comparators (with last year)

April - June 2017

428 reviews held within timescales 16 outside Total 444 = 96.94%

July - September 2017

444 reviews held within timescales 40 outside Total 484 = 95.6%

October - December 2017

423 reviews held within timescales 38 outside Total 461 = 91.6%

January – March 2018

386 reviews held within timescales 27 outside Total 413 = 91.3%

April –June 2018

416 reviews held within timescales 13 outside Total 429 = 96.88%

July- September 2018

427 reviews held within timescales 30 outside Total 457 = 93.44%

October – December 2018

387 Reviews held within timescales 25 outside Total 412= 93.94%

7. CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE REVIEWING SERVICE

7.1 CAPACITY

Whilst there is capacity within the Reviewing Service to cover most CLA Reviews within time-scales, this is dependent on the continuing use of external staff to cover a small number of Reviews, although we only use people who have recently retired from RCT Childrens Services and are working on a self-employed basis. We consider it important that the plans for RCT's children are reviewed by people who understand the needs of our children and the systems operating within RCT.

The most challenging issues facing the Reviewing Service at present are the timely production of the required paperwork and the monitoring of the implementation of Care and Support Plans between Review meetings.

The number of Reviews that IROs are chairing leaves them little space to produce the required paperwork within time-scales but an action plan has been put in place to address this by streamlining the administrative process and working to agreed priorities (all 1st Reviews, cases going through Court, Placement with Parents, Adoptions and all instances where the placement is fragile or there are concerns about it meeting the child's needs).

Monitoring the progress of the Care and Support Plan between Review meetings is a critical part of the IROs role, and forms one of the Practice Standards on which the Local Authority will be inspected by Care Inspectorate Wales. A priority for the Service over the coming period will be to introduce a more rigorous process to ensure that this happens and is recorded. It requires us to ensure the IROs have adequate time to perform this function as it can often entail things to be chased up with the child's Social Worker and the child to be spoken to if there are any outstanding concerns.

A key challenge for the service when the number of children looked after is high is to meet the expectation that every Looked After child after will be allocated their own IRO, who will chair all their meetings but in the vast majority of cases we are able to provide this. Review meetings are brought forward if the needs of the child require this. We are also seeing cases where Placement with Parent meetings are having to be convened at very short notice because of decisions being made in Court that children should return home on Care Orders.

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. We have initiated discussions with IT about developing facilities to provide video conferencing, both in response to feedback from young people and to address the increasing shortage of suitable meeting venues.

8. THE RESOLUTIONS PROCESS

As outlined earlier, the IRO has responsibility to monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to care planning for individual children and to raise areas of good practice as well as problems and issues. IROs also forward compliments and positive comments to staff and managers to ensure good practice is recognised.

The IRO Resolution Protocol sets out the process for raising and resolving issues within set timescales that are intended to avoid unnecessary drift and delay in care planning. The protocol recognises the need to resolve issues as quickly as possible but allows for resolutions to be escalated where agreement cannot be reached or where there continues to be drift and delay.

There are currently 5 stages to the process:

- Stage 1: Resolution through discussion with the Team Manager.
- Stage 2: Resolution put in writing to the Team Manager.
- Stage 3: Resolution meeting with Service Manager
- Stage 4: Escalation to Head of Service.
- Stage 5: If the issue remains unresolved, referral to the Service Director, Group Director Community & Children's Services, Chief Executive and CAFCASS are additional steps to be taken by the IRO if required.

In practice, stages 1 and 2 are frequently having to be conflated to avoid unnecessary drift.

Some Resolutions involve concerns about the actions or lack of action by other agencies, and these will either be raised with the Children's Services Manager to address, or where necessary directly with the agency involved or via the CLA Quality Assurance Panel.

Raising Resolutions is one of the key responsibilities of the IRO, which has been reinforced by recent case law which has determined that the IRO can be held personally liable if there have been failures in the care planning or an abuse of the child's human rights, and the IRO has not raised this appropriately. It is critical that the IROs are supported by the Local Authority recognising that this aspect of their role is crucial both in terms of flagging up any concerns about the L.A's performance as a Corporate Parent and to ensure that no child's human rights are being violated as a result of failure in implementing their Care and Support Plan.

9. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IRO'S APRIL – DECEMBER 2018

In total 27 Resolutions were raised in this reporting period. It should be noted that this is a very low percentage in terms of the total number of Care and Support plans that are reviewed by the IROs, indicating that the majority of children are having their needs met or issues can be resolved without the need to formally raise a Resolution.

Theme: Safeguarding

Case Example:

2nd Review Child Protection Conference held in respect of 2 children who were accommodated S.76. Risk assessment from Probation outlined significant past offences on father's part that the social worker was not aware of, and highlighted father's behaviour as a high risk to adults and medium risk of severe harm to children from witnessing violence. This Information was likely to require further risk assessment requiring longer period of accommodation; but the IRO was mindful that father could choose to withdraw s.76 agreement. Children and father were asking for reunification at the earliest opportunity.

The team manager had told the IRO after the last review that legal advice had been taken by the Local Authority about their care planning under s.76 and had been advised they did not need to take any additional action. This was in response to father equivocating about whether or not to continue to give consent in April 2018. However current social worker had no awareness of formal legal advice having been taken.

Resolution:

The IRO was seeking confirmation that urgent legal advice would be sought about safeguarding the children alongside promotion of their human rights. The IRO closed the resolution when she was satisfied that legal advice had been sought appropriately.

Theme: No Pathway Plan

Case Example:

All looked after children should have a Care and Support Plan (Part 6) if they are 16 or younger and a Pathway Plan if they are 16 or older. These plans should be co-produced with children and their families / guardians in a timely manner. The transmission from a Care and Support Plan to a Pathway Plan requires an up to date assessment as it plans towards independence and adulthood.

Resolution:

The IRO raised a concern in respect of a girl who was 16 and a half years old and who still didn't have a Pathway Plan despite the IRO having significant concerns for the girl's wellbeing. The team manager agreed a realistic timescale with the IRO for the completion of the Pathway Plan which would allow consultation and for the final draft to be agreed with the young person.

Theme: Drift in Care Planning

Case Example:

In a CLA review the children's father raised an issue that he hadn't had contact for 2 months and no future contact was planned. The review heard that one of the children was upset by the lack of contact. Children's Services weren't in a position in the review meeting to confirm whether a formal risk assessment and assessment in respect of contact (father had been in custody earlier that year) had been completed. Furthermore a plan had previously been discussed for paternal grandmother to supervise father's contact when an application will be made in 2019 to replace the Care Orders with Special Guardianship Orders.

Resolution:

Initially the IRO requested a copy of the Court Care Plan and confirmed that the Local Authority had advised the court that they would be assessing the Children's father prior to his release from custody. Quality of contact and family dynamics between father and paternal grandmother would be assessed and subject to review.

The team manager agreed a realistic timescale for the completion of these delayed assessments with the IRO and made arrangements for contacts to take place in the meantime.

Resolution:

A further resolution that evidences the impact a significant delay in actioning plans has on children and their families. One of two grandparents two are kinship carers was diagnosed with cancer and required chemotherapy and radiotherapy after surgery. Parents enjoyed unsupervised contact with their children twice a week and therefore the review in May recommended that the children should be allowed to stay with their parents under Placement with Parents when the grandparents needed respite immediately before and after surgery.

Despite assurances by the Social Worker in the review that the matter would be passed on to the Agency Decision Maker by the middle of June this wasn't done because Police checks were slow coming back

The IRO made several further phone calls in June and July to the social worker but Placement with Parents had not been signed off by August. It was then that the IRO raised the resolution and was promptly given an assurance that PWP would be agreed in the circumstances.

On reflection a resolution should have been raised some time earlier and it is there dilemma's when IRO's are trying to work alongside social workers that create grey areas.

Theme: Failure to secure / apply for additional monies.

Case Example 1:

When children are placed for adoption or Special Guardianship Orders it is expected that any additional costs that are necessary to sustain a placement are agreed in advance. Whilst chairing a review meeting it became apparent

that the carer could not sustain the placement without additional nursery fees to allow the carer to continue working.

Resolution:

Such was the urgency in this matter that the Service Manager responded to the IRO and arranged a meeting to discuss the issue and plan its resolution within 10 days. The meeting acknowledged that the carer had been over optimistic in what hours she felt her employers would allow her to take and as a result she was facing significant hardship.

The meeting not only addressed the immediate issue but also factored in contingencies should there be any unexpected delay in the planning.

Theme: Life Journey Work

The largest single issue for which resolutions have been raised is in respect of Life Journey work not having been completed by the second adoption review meeting. This is one of the National Adoption Indicators. This sensitive piece of work is and holds some very emotional memories and information, and so every effort should be made to include them in its formation.

Resolution:

Where resolutions have been raised it is usual for timescales to be agreed. The IRO will keep the resolution open until the end of the agreed period so that it can be followed up. On one occasion the resolution was escalated to a resolution meeting because it had not been completed within the agreed timescales.

We have asked the IRO's to liaise closely with the adoption senior practitioner who is often approached by social workers for help with life story work. Laura therefore has insight into how close the Life Journey work is to being completed and therefore how realistic social workers prediction are in respect of completing it.

10. DEVELOPMENT WORK

The priorities identified in our current Service Delivery Plan are as follows:

1. An on-going commitment to ensuring that the voice of the child remains central throughout the Reviewing process and that work continues to promote consultation and participation by children and young people in in their Care planning. This will also involve improving the information provided to children and young people when they become Looked After.
2. Develop practice standards and implementation plan for both the Reviewing Service and Childrens Services in general in line with the AFA Cymru/Welsh Government "Good Practice Guidance for Reviewing and Monitoring Part 6 Care and Support Plans". This will involve integrating these standards into the wider Children's Services Quality Assurance Learning Framework.
3. Improve the effectiveness of the Resolutions process to make it more consistent and transparent.

4. Revise the RCT Reviewing Service – CAFCASS protocol to provide a robust mechanism for sharing information and consultation.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The Reviewing Service continues to promote the involvement of our Looked After young people in the Blueprint Forum. However the uptake with this has been disappointing and new initiatives are currently being made by Voices, which the Reviewing Team will be involved in.

The Reviewing Team Manager continues to ensure that information from Voices from Care is disseminated not only within the service but also to our colleagues in Children's Services, and has recently shared the email addresses of Children's Services Team Managers with Voices so that events can be forwarded to them directly.

2Sides Website

The Reviewing Team Manager presented an update to the Corporate Parenting Board at the end of last year in respect of the Service's vision and plans for the website. It is envisaged that the 2Sides website for our older children will be hosted on the Wicid.tv website whilst a version for younger children will be accessible directly or via the Corporate website.

It is hoped that both sites will be more user friendly and provide resources that will be of use not only to our Looked After children but also to stimulate discussion between children and social workers.

An event is planned for the Easter school holidays to bring a group of children and young people together to review not only the website content, but also how this resource can best meet the needs of our looked after population. It is proposed that the website might become a hub for age appropriate resources such as employment and training, physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Voices from Care will be involved, as well colleagues from Wicid tv, Design and Print, and Youth Arts Programme to create imaginative ways of sharing information such as easy speak and animations scripted by the group. It is envisaged that the website content will require 2 parts which are age appropriate – up to the age of 11, and 12+.

Bright Spots Survey

In 2018, Rhondda Cynon Taf participated in the Bright Spots programme which sought the views of Looked After children and young people and Care Leavers about all aspects of their care experience and well-being. This aimed to identify "Bright Spots": the policies and practices that have a positive influence on children and young people's well-being., and areas that needed improvement. The main themes that emerged are incorporated into CLA Review agendas:

- The child /young person knows why they are being looked after.
- The child/young person is able to say what they think in Reviews or other conversations with the IRO and the other people involved in their care, and that the adults listen to them and keep them informed.

- Carers take time to understand what the child/young person is feeling and why.
- The child/young person knows who to speak to and where to go, to feel safe in school.

11. ADVOCACY

The Reviewing Service has continued to liaise closely with both Jayne Thomas (Children's Services Complaints Manager) and representatives of NYAS (advocacy service) to look at the numbers of referrals and consider how any obstacles to referrals being made can be overcome.

It is now a legal requirement that all children over 5 who are Looked After are made an "Active Offer" for an independent advocate to represent their wishes and feelings throughout the care planning and reviewing process. The IRO is expected to monitor whether this has taken place in a timely manner and help to address any barriers preventing the child accessing advocacy.

CAFCSS

The CAFCASS Regional Manager regularly attends Reviewing Team Meetings. Efforts continue to be made to maximise the communication between the 2 agencies and meet the challenges arising from the current timescales for Care proceedings.

12. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

This is an information report therefore no Equality and Diversity Assessment is required.

13. CONSULTATION

This is an information report therefore no consultation is required.

14. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

None

15. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

This is covered above in section 3.

16. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ FUTURE GENERATIONS – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The statutory responsibilities and good practice standards of the Reviewing Service compliment the Council's Corporate Priorities to promote independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring:

- Rhondda Cynon Taf children and young people will receive a great start in life.

- Where children and young people are unable to live to live with their own parents, we put in place the care arrangements, including specialist accommodation, which will keep them safe and well. We will ensure that we listen to the voices of these children and young people by involving them in monitoring the action plan to address a child's journey through care from admission to exit.