



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18TH NOVEMBER 2019

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) REPORT

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER
COUNCILLOR C LEYSHON**

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

Author: Julie Clark, Head of Service for Safeguarding

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 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, and 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 CAF/CASS to consider legal action if necessary.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st January-30th June 2019.

4. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period includes performance information from the last 2 quarters (01.01.19 to the 30.06.19).
- During this reporting period, the average number of children looked after by RCT was 677, which is 11 less 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 30.06.19, 78.84% of all children looked after were placed with foster carers, 73.5% of these with RCT foster carers, which is an increase on the last reporting period. The percentage of children placed with Independent Service Providers in foster placements is down at 26.46%, with 5.40% in non-RCT residential placements (static). The number of Out of County placements is 26.5%, a slight drop on the last reporting period.
- 887 CLA review meetings were due in this 6 month period, which is an increase of 14 compared to the previous 6 months (July 2018-December 2018). In addition, IROs chaired 11 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.
- 61 Reviews were held outside the required timescale; which represents 6.87% of the total number due. This is a reduction on the last reporting period and 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 and we have also experienced ongoing sickness absence.
- 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, ensuring that the child and family understand the Care and Support Plan, and monitoring the progress of the Care and Support Plan in between review meetings. Review meetings are brought forward when the needs of the child require this or if requested by the child.
- There is an ongoing plan to address the backlog in respect of the circulation of review decisions.
- The shortage of suitable venues for meetings within RCT.
- All of the IRO's chair combined CLA reviews / Review Child Protection Case Conferences. This continues to provide consistency for the child and their family 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 where it sits if RCT chooses to commission either or both Mind of My Own and The Orb
- The work undertaken by the Life Story Working Group in response to the Bright Spots Survey that was undertaken in 2018.
- The challenges presented by the new Practice Care standards for Monitoring and Reviewing Part 6 Care and Support Plans.
- Streamlining and improving both the Review documentation in line with the new Practice Care Standards for Monitoring and Reviewing Part 6 Care and Support Plans, and the adoption documentation in line with the recommendations from the recent Child Practice Review.
- Strengthening links with the newly appointed Advocacy Providers and with CAFCASS.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE MONITORING REPORT

**Authors: Julie Clark, Head of Safeguarding
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for children looked after (CLA) for the period **1st January - 30th June 2019**. 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 has been prepared in response to the Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide 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 CAFCASS 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 continues to be a shortage of suitable venues for meetings within RCT and we have limited facilities for conference calls. This has been explored with the ICT Agile Working Team and further discussions are taking place to identify solutions.

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.
- 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

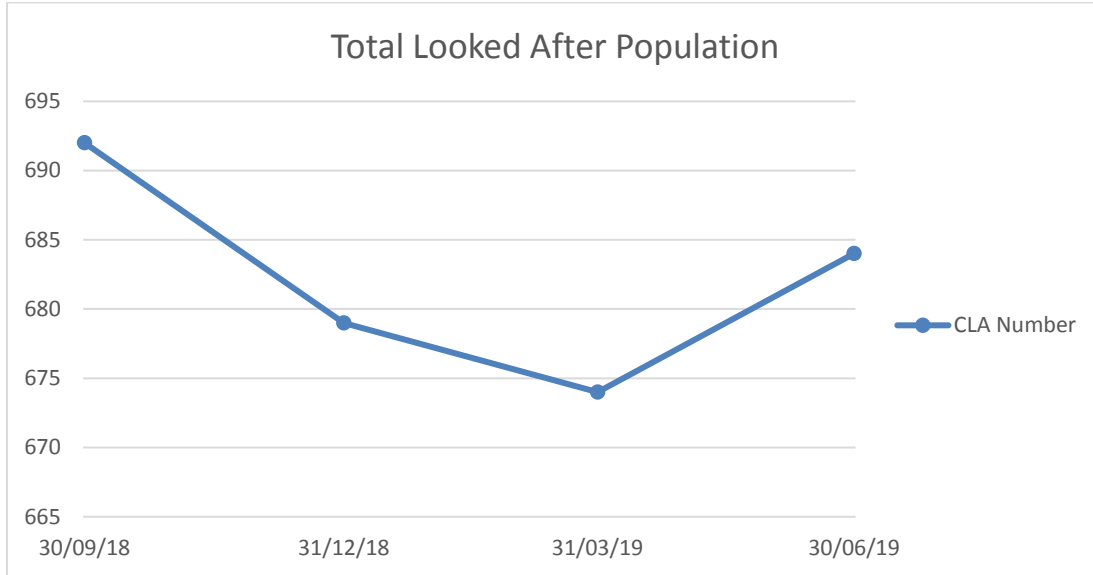
Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, there are issues around the child's safety or there has been a failure to carry out an important aspect of the plan.

The cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family.

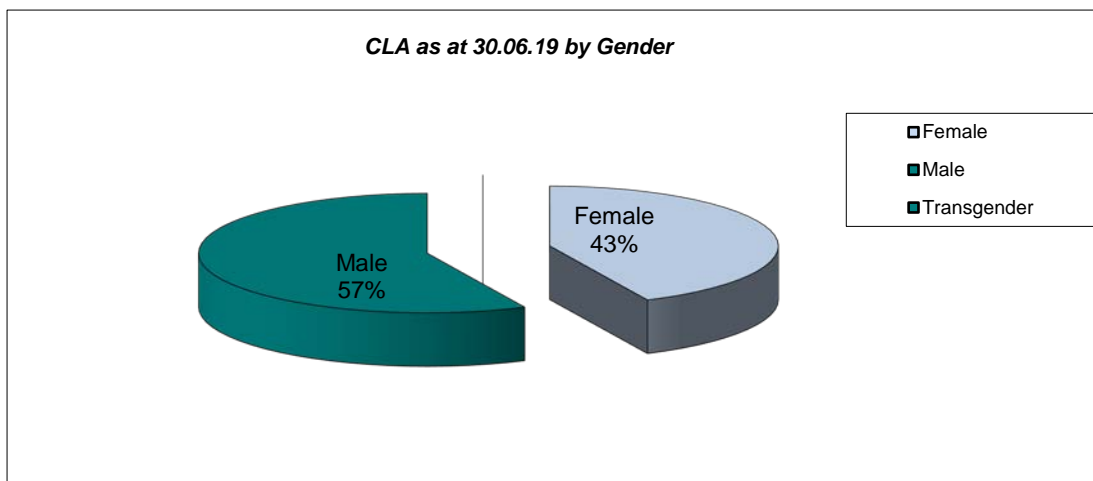
5. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (30th June 2019)

	30/09/18	31/12/18	31/03/19	30/06/19
CLA Number	692	679	674	684

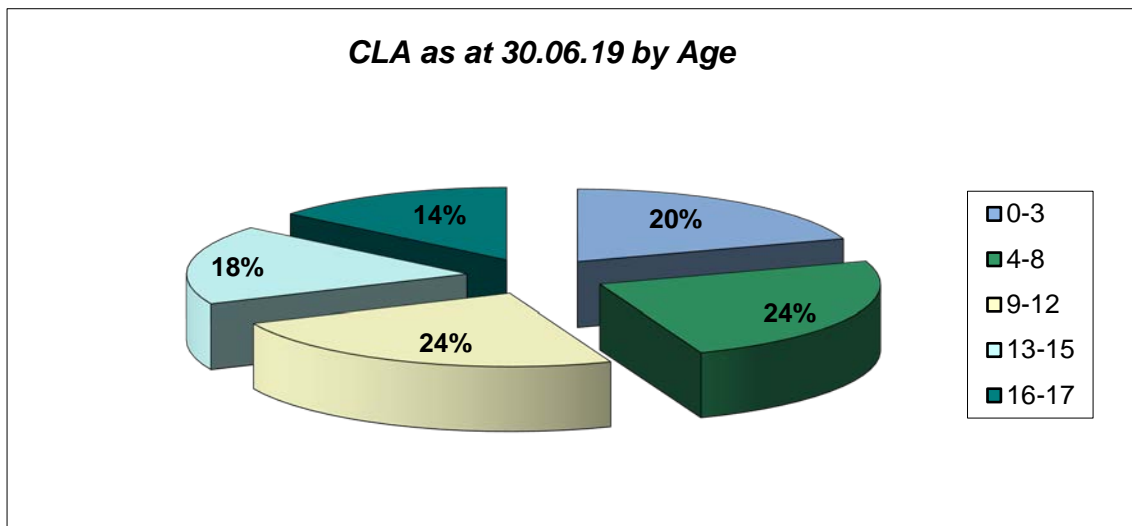
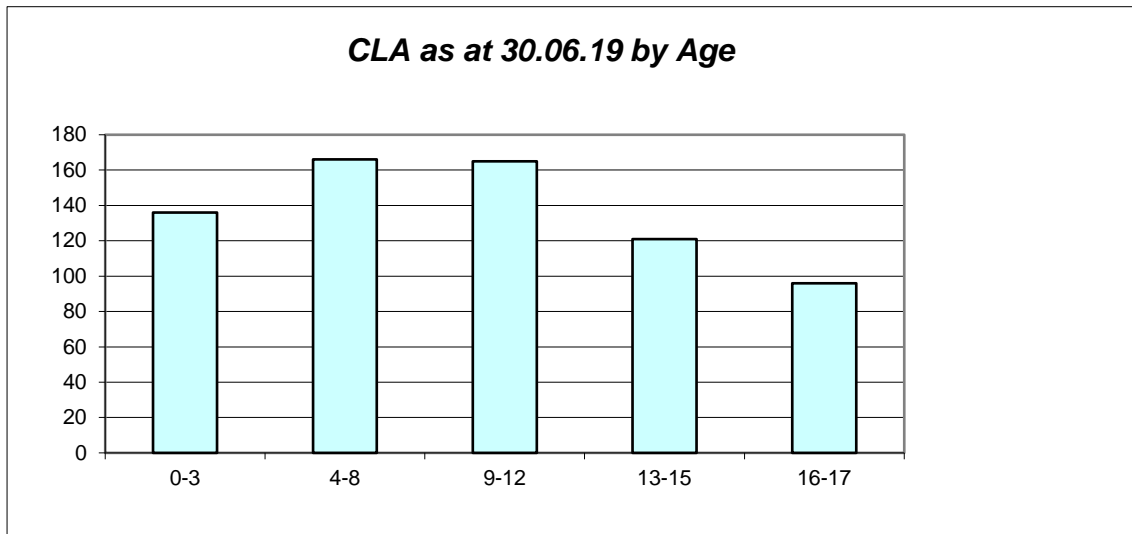


Looked After Population by Gender



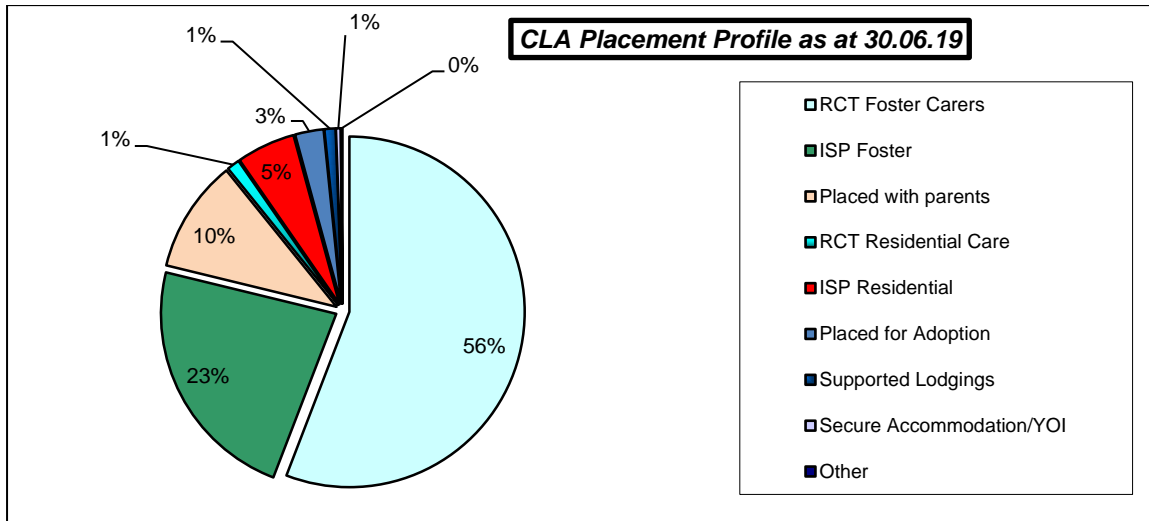
	CLA as at 30.09.18 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.18 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.19 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.19 by Gender
Female	306	304	297	294
Male	386	375	377	390
Transgender	0	0	0	0
Total	692	679	674	684

Looked After Population by Age Group



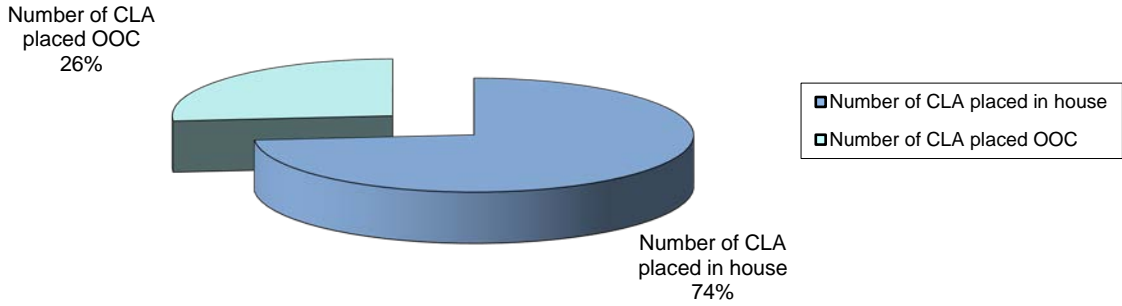
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 30.09.18 by Age	152	174	147	131	88	692
CLA as at 31.12.18 by Age	144	167	151	122	95	679
CLA as at 31.03.19 by Age	142	163	153	118	98	674
CLA as at 30.06.19 by Age	136	166	165	121	96	684

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



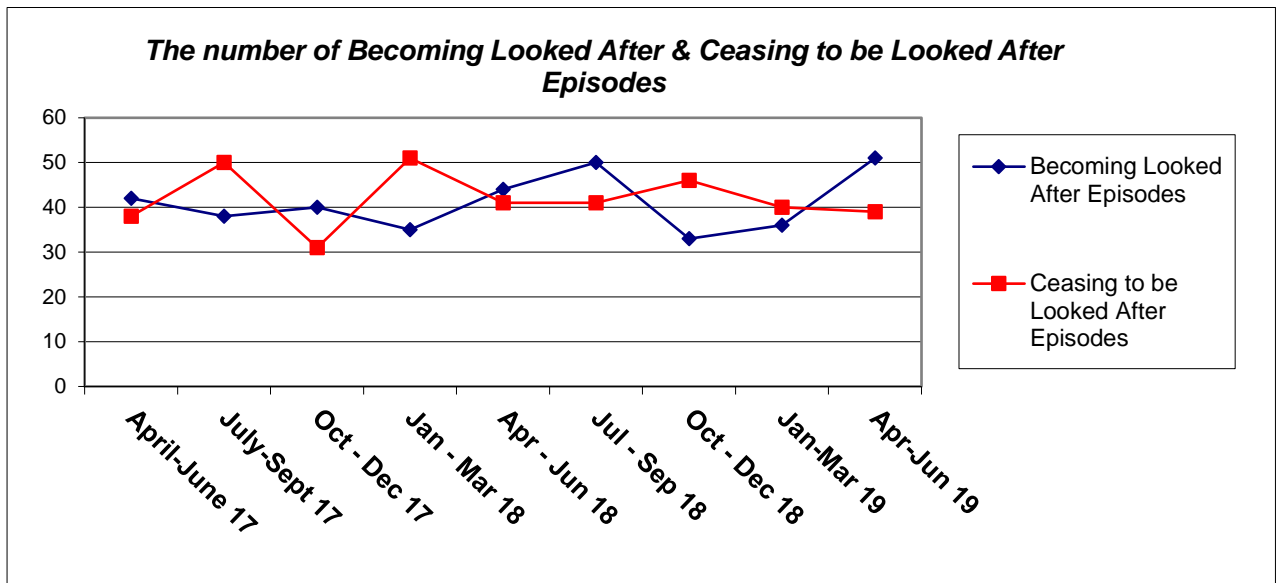
	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19
RCT Foster Carers	390	380	373	382
ISP Foster	164	157	160	157
Placed with parents	56	58	60	71
RCT Residential Care	10	8	7	8
ISP Residential	31	35	38	37
Placed for Adoption	24	26	24	18
Supported Lodgings	14	14	10	7
Secure Accommodation/YOI	1	1	1	3
Other	2	0	1	1
Total	692	679	674	684

Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 30.06.19



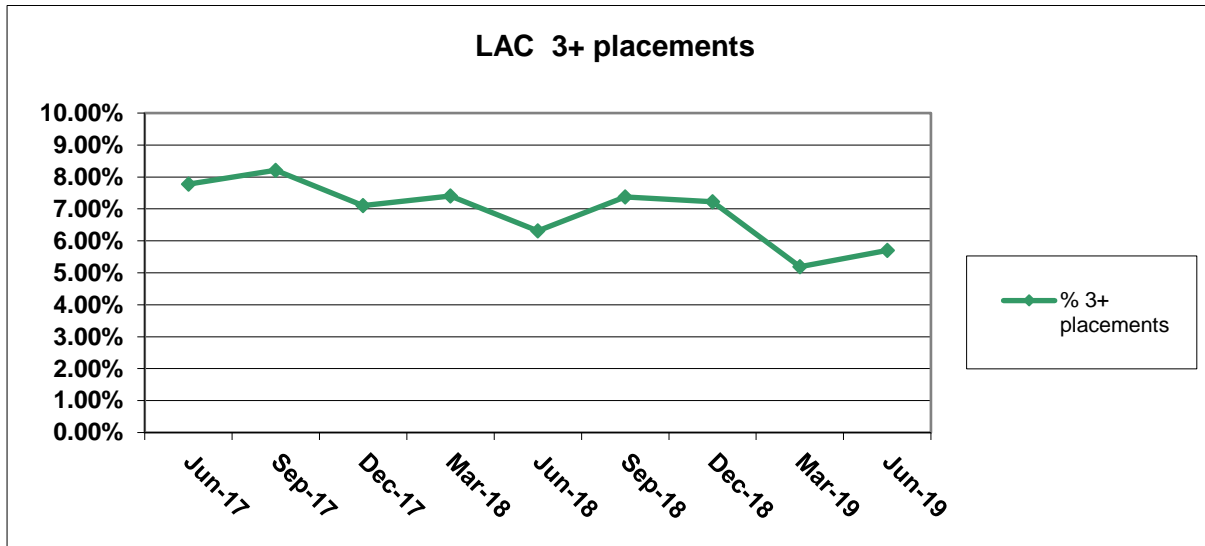
	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19
Number of CLA placed in house	513	495	489	503
Number of CLA placed OOC	179	184	185	181
Total CLA	692	679	674	684
% OOC	25.9%	27.1%	27.4%	26.5%

Admissions and Discharge Information



	April-June 17	July-Sept 17	Oct - Dec 17	Jan - Mar 18	Apr - Jun 18	Jul - Sep 18	Oct - Dec 18	Jan-Mar 19	Apr-Jun 19
Becoming Looked After Episodes	42	38	40	35	44	50	33	36	51
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	38	50	31	51	41	41	46	40	39

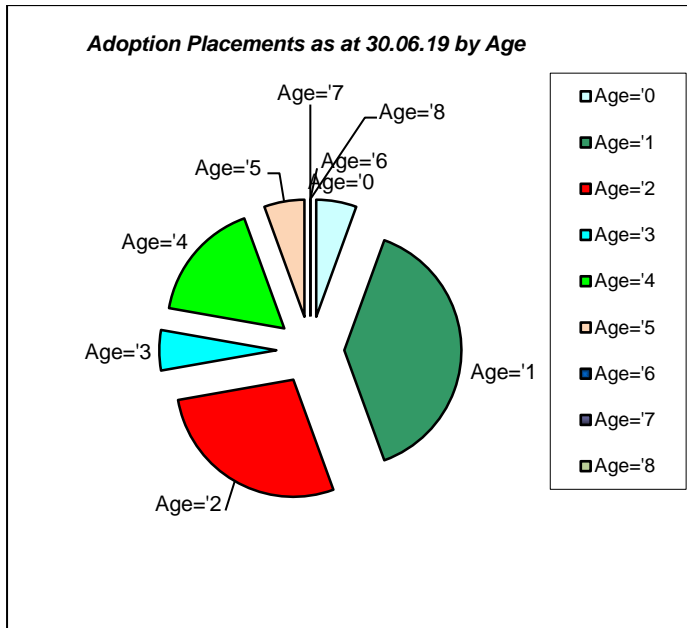
Placement Stability



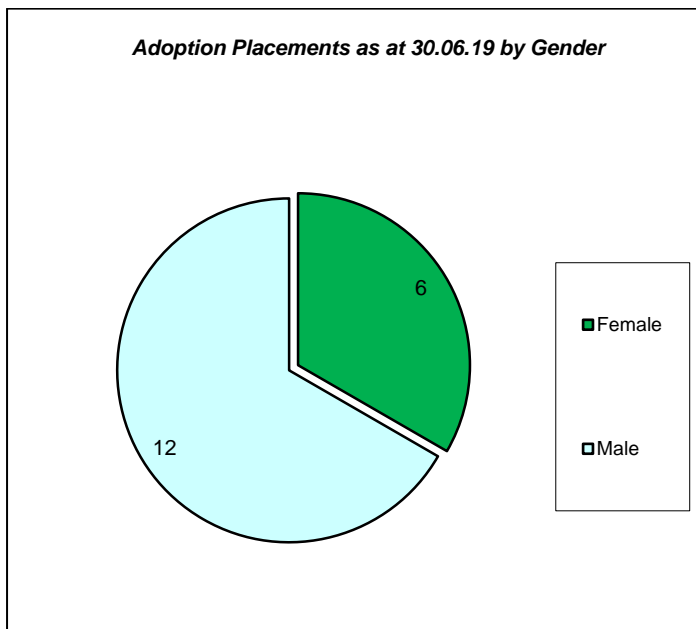
	Jun-17	Sep-17	Dec-17	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19
% 3+ placements	7.78%	8.21%	7.10%	7.40%	6.31%	7.37%	7.22%	5.19%	5.70%

Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 30.06.19 by Age	Total
Age=0	1
Age=1	7
Age=2	5
Age=3	1
Age=4	3
Age=5	1
Age=6	0
Age=7	0
Age=8	0
Total	18



Adoption Placements as at 30.06.19 by Gender	Total
Female	6
Male	12
Total	18

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.06.19	18
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.07.18 - 30.06.19	30
Number of Children adopted between 01.07.18 - 30.06.19	40

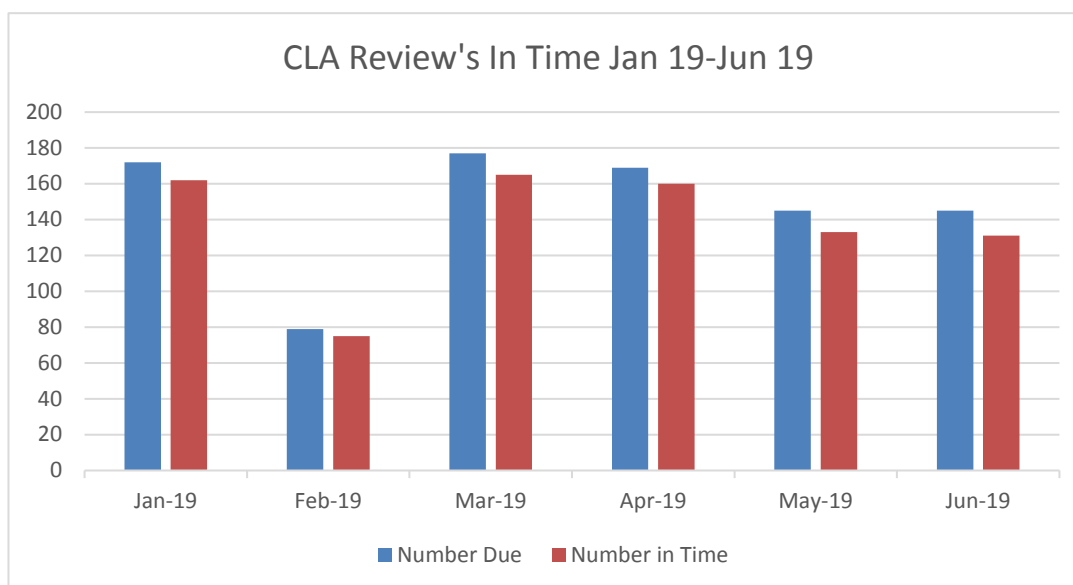
6. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1ST JANUARY– 30ST JUNE 2019

During this reporting period the total number of children looked after fluctuated between **669** and **685**. **887** CLA review meetings were due in this 6-month period, which is an increase of **14** compared to the previous 6 months (July 2018-December 2018). In addition, IROs chaired **11** combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register, and **56** *IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews*.

CLA Reviews

CLA Review's In Time Jan 19-Jun 19

	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19
Number Due	172	79	177	169	145	145
Number in Time	162	75	165	160	133	131



61 reviews were held outside the required timescale; overall our performance is 93.18% compliant, which is a reduction on the last reporting period and falls short of our target. 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.

CLA Reviews Held Within Timescales				
Month	Reviews Due	Number held within Timescale	Reviews outside of Timescale	Compliance
January 19	172	162	10	94.20%
February	79	75	4	94.93%
March	177	165	12	93.22%
April	169	160	9	94.67%
May	145	133	12	91.72%
June	145	131	14	90.34%
Total	887	826	61	

6.1 REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

There were **61** 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, **264** Reviews had to be rearranged in total; meaning that only **6.87%** 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)

January – March 2018

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

January – March 2019

402 reviews held within timescales 26 outside Total 428 = 98.52%

April – June 2018

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

April – June 2019

424 reviews held within timescales 35 outside Total 459 = 92.37%

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 timely production of required paperwork and the monitoring of the implementation of Care and Support Plans between Review meetings has been targeted in the action plan put in place to address the backlog identified. Whilst 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), has provided a useful structure for staff to focus on, ongoing sickness absence within the service has been an issue over the last six months, which has been compounded by annual leave. This has resulted in the remaining staff having to take on more work; which has impacted on their ability to produce the required paperwork within time-scales. The situation continues to be monitored.

Following the retirement of Service Manager Judith Davis, the Reviewing Team is currently without a Service Manager. Interviews are due to take place shortly and it is hoped that a suitable applicant will be appointed. A priority for the new appointee will be to introduce a rigorous process to ensure that monitoring of the progress of the Care and Support Plan between Review meetings is happening and recorded. As noted before this will require 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 and 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 or indeed the child request it. We continue to see 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.

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 Childrens 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 BETWEEN JANUARY - JUNE 2019

In total **9** 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: Transition Planning

Case Example:

Despite an adult transition referral being made in the summer of 2018 to Adult Services, the young man still did not have an allocated adult services worker by the summer of 2019. The young man's foster carers had asked to continue to care for him once he was 18 in 2020, but an adult services assessment is required to initiate a referral to Ategi to complete a shared lives assessment to support the placement in the long term. The lack of progress was understandably a cause of anxiety for the carers.

Resolution:

This was the first time that an IRO has raised a resolution with Adult Services and having explained the process and timescales to the Team Manager, confirmation was promptly received that a worker had been allocated and that the assessment could begin.

Since then, the Reviewing Team Manager and a number of IRO's have attended internal training facilitated by Adult Services - Transition, Preparing Young People to

Succeed in Adulthood, so that when issues have arisen in practice, the IRO's are able to confidently raise resolutions to Adult Services to ensure a timely response to concerns.

Theme: Drift in Care Planning

Case Example:

In the CLA review held in December 2018 it was agreed that a parenting assessment should be updated with a view to taking the matter back before the Court to discharge the Care Order. By June 2019 the assessment had not been updated. It was explained in the review meeting that the social worker had been on sick leave and that her team had not been in a position to re-allocate the work.

Resolution:

The IRO discussed the resolution with the Team Manager who confirmed that the case had now been reallocated, and together they agreed a realistic timescale not only for the completion of the assessment but for the paperwork to be filed with the court. The IRO followed this up to ensure that the timescales were adhered to before closing the resolution down.

It should be noted that as a part of this resolution the IRO brought to the attention of the Team Manager that statutory visits had not been undertaken as they should have, and as a result of the discussion the Team Manager immediately addressed the issue.

Theme: Failure to act on review decisions.

Case Example:

In particularly difficult circumstances where a parent's nationality and significant mental health issues posed obstacles and challenges in respect of engagement, the carers indicated that they were prepared to make an application for a Special Guardianship Order, but only once a passport had been obtained in the child's name. 12 months after the initial discussion the passport application had not progressed.

Resolution:

The IRO brought the matter to the attention of the Team Manager. The Team Manager and Social Worker were able to evidence the efforts that they had already made (including contacting Legal Services), but agreed timescales as to how the matter would be escalated if mother continued not to engage in the process so as to avoid any further delay. It is to the Social Worker's credit that she did in fact secure mother's agreement to consent to the passport application.

Theme: Placement with Parents procedures not completed.

Case Example:

Where there is a plan for a child subject to a Care Order to live with, or have overnight stays with a parent then there is a requirement that assessments are completed under Placement with Parents Regulations and approval given by the Head of Service. During a CLA review it was brought to the IRO's attention that a 16 year old boy was having overnight stays with his father without Placement with

Parents Procedures having been authorised by the HOS, and therefore the appropriate assessments had not been completed.

Resolution:

The IRO drew attention to the relevant section of the procedures that referred to children over the age of 16 years and agreed with the Social Worker and Team Manager realistic timescales for the completion of assessments, and for the matter to be put before the Head of Service for approval.

10. DEVELOPMENT WORK

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The Reviewing Service continues to promote the involvement of our Looked After young people in the Blueprint Forum, and where possible we have sought to involve them in our consultations with our looked after children. It was unfortunate that Voices from Care were not able to attend our consultation day in the summer holidays but they have expressed a wish to participate in any future events.

The Reviewing Team Manager continues to ensure that information from Voices from Care is disseminated not only to the IRO's but also to our colleagues in Children's Services.

2Sides Website

The reviewing team held a consultation event with a group of Looked After young people in July 2019 (outside of this reporting period) to share the changes that had already been made to some of the content of the website, and consider what information they would like to see included that wasn't already. The feedback was very positive, especially when compared to similar websites hosted by other authorities. The group recognised the value of the additional information Wicid offered to all children in their age group, in addition to the more detailed information for looked after children. Such was the success of this event that a number of the young people expressed an interest in attending events on behalf of Wicid and writing reviews.

Plans for Wicid.tv to host the 2 Sides Website have moved on, and some of the information has been re written into "easy read" and included on the Wicid website. Unfortunately the editor of Wicid who was working closely with the Reviewing Team manager has decided to move on and therefore the work has stopped for the time being. Once a full time replacement has been identified, this piece of work will gain momentum.

Mind of My Own / The Orb

RCT is currently exploring the viability of two digital tools that might compliment or enhance the work that has already taken place with 2Sides.

Mind of My Own is an app that allows children and young people to forward their thoughts, their wishes and their feelings to professionals when they feel the need to

do so. We have acknowledged in the past that the 2Sides online consultation document has not been used effectively by our looked after population, but the ease of access allowed by this app could lead to a more effective consultation process. It is understood that discussions are currently taking place on a regional level as to whether Mind of My Own will meet the needs of our looked after children.

The Orb provides a dashboard on a smartphone / tablet that is intended to allow users to access information easily. It appears that the dashboard could allow easy access to the content of 2Sides without having to navigate a website. It is envisaged that The Orb might also replicate the plan for 2 Sides to become a hub to information from other sources such as The Children's Commissioner or Children in Wales resources

Clearly any investment in either or both of these projects will have implications for 2Sides to ensure that they complement each other and that the information is consistent

Developing a new review document

Before retiring the Service Manager met with each of the childcare teams to discuss the development of a three part review document that in keeping with the "Good Practice Guidance for Reviewing and Monitoring Part 6 Care and Support Plans" will include the Social Workers report and the IRO's summary of the review discussion / decisions. The reviewing Team Manager is working closely with WCCIS support to create a working template for further consultation. Other local authorities have expressed an interest in seeing the final draft with a view to developing a similar document.

Developments in relation to the Regional Adoption paperwork

In response to the recommendations of a recent Child Practice Review the reviewing team has been part of a working group to develop a regional adoption review document. In addition to a more robust chronology and the record of the review, the document will include the written report of both the child's social worker and the adoption worker.

Lifestory Work

In light of the Bright Spots Survey in 2018 the reviewing service has been part of a working group to develop life story work for all children who become looked after. The group is developing guidance and process maps for discussions to begin at first review and to be monitored by the reviewing officers. It is also developing tools and IT resources to record the information digitally. It is envisaged that children, families, social workers and foster carers will all be able to contribute photographs / memories. This work will hopefully be piloted before the end of the year.

11. ADVOCACY

The Reviewing Service continues to liaise closely with both Jayne Thomas (Children's Services Complaints Manager) and representatives of Tros Gynnal (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's continue to monitor whether this has taken place in a timely manner and help to address any barriers preventing children accessing advocacy.

CAFCASS

Historically both the reviewing team and CAFCASS have met to develop working relationships and discuss themes and practice issues. Unfortunately unprecedented demands on CAFCASS and changes within their management structure have meant that these meetings have not taken place during this reporting period. The reviewing Team Manager will continue in his efforts to arrange meetings in the coming months.

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.