



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

30TH JULY 2020

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) REPORT

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

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 CAFCASS to consider legal action if necessary.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st July 2019 – 31st December 2019

4. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period includes performance information from the last 2 quarters (01.07.2019-31.12.2019).
- During this reporting period, the average number of children looked after by RCT was 692, which is 15 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 31.12.19 77% of all looked after children were placed with foster carers. 70.8% of these are with RCT foster carers, which is a decrease of 3% on the last reporting period. The percentage of children placed with Independent Service providers in foster placements is 29.2% which is an increase. The number of children in RCT residential care is 1.5% and the figure for ISP Residential is 6.4 % - an increase of 1% over this period. As of the 31.12.19 there were 77 children placed with parents which is an increase of 1% over the period. 27.1% of children are placed out of county which is a slight increase on the last period, all of which is not surprising given the increase in CLA numbers and the impact this has on internal and local capacity.
- 914 CLA review meetings were due in this 6 month period, which is an increase of 27 compared to the previous 6 months (January 2019 - June 2019). In addition, IROs chaired 22 combined CLA Reviews and Review Conferences to remove the names of children looked after under Care Orders from the Child Protection Register. This has doubled in comparison to the last period. 21 IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews.
- 60 Reviews were held outside the required timescale; which represents 6.56% of the total number due. This is a reduction on the last reporting period and falls 5% short of our internal target of 98.5%.
- 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:

- The increase in CLA numbers, had affected demand and capacity levels in the Reviewing Service as well as the rest of Children's Services. The increase had an impact on the number of external fostering and residential placements the Council has been forced to use in the absence of any alternative, more of which were OOC. This is indicative of the placement pressures across Wales.
- In view of the CLA numbers, alongside the fact that there has no increase in the number of IRO posts in response, that the service was carrying 2 IRO absences, ongoing sickness and that we had lost 2 external members of staff, our overall performance figures are good and illustrate the hard work and commitment of the staff group.
- Pressures aside, there was 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.
- This saw a doubling of the number of IRO's chairing 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.
- The reviewing team has drafted and will, once the staffing pressures within II reduce, pilot a new 3 part CLA review document which will include the social worker's report, the IRO's summary of the review discussion, and the Team Manager's response to the recommendations. Other areas have expressed an interest in the document.
- In total 16 resolutions were raised in this reporting period. This is a low figure 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, and that IRO's are seeking to resolve issues with fieldwork without the need to formally raise a Resolution.

- There is further work to be done on the relative merits of conference calling and Skype within the service, alongside developing the 2Sides website with the WICID Editor and any other digital development work underway.
- The IRO's will continue to support and monitor the use of the life journey work materials within CLA and Adoption Reviews, and provide feedback at the end of the pilot phase on the new Adoption Review paperwork; which RCT IRO's were heavily involved in developing.
- Strengthening links with the newly appointed Advocacy Providers and with CAFCASS.

Attached at Appendix 2 is the monitoring report for the period 1st January 2020 – March 31st 2020

5. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period includes performance information from the last quarter (01.01.2020-31.03.2020).
- During this reporting period, the number of children looked after by RCT was 717, which is a rise of 15 children. This is an increase when compared to our previous reporting period (Qtr 2 & 3) that saw 15 children become looked after over the 6-month period. There was a continuing pattern of more boys than girls becoming Looked After, with the majority being under 12.
- As of 31.03.2020 77% of all looked after children were placed with foster carers. 70.99% of these are with RCT foster carers. The percentage of children placed with Independent Service providers in foster placements is 29.01% which is an increase. There has been no significant changes to placement types since the last reporting period.
- The number of children in RCT residential care makes up 1.5% of the CLA population - this has remained the same as the last reporting period. The figure for ISP Residential is 7.25% - a slight increase over this period (just under 1%).
- As of the 31.03.20 there were 70 children placed with parents, which is a decrease of 9% since the last reporting period (Qtr 2 & Qtr 3).
- 29.8% of children are placed out of county which is a slight increase on the last period, all of which is not surprising given the increase in CLA numbers and the impact this has on internal and local capacity.
- 447 CLA review meetings were due in this 3 month period. 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. 12 IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews were held.

- 23 Reviews were held outside the required timescale; which represents 5.15% of the total number due. This is a reduction on the last reporting period and falls 5% short of our internal target of 98.5%.
- 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:

- The increase in CLA numbers, had affected demand and capacity levels in the Reviewing Service as well as the rest of Children's Services. The increase had an impact on the number of external fostering and residential placements the Council has been forced to use in the absence of any alternative, more of which were OOC. This is indicative of the placement pressures across Wales.
- In view of the CLA numbers, alongside the fact that there has been no increase in the number of IRO posts in response, that the service was carrying 2 IRO absences, ongoing sickness and that we had lost 2 external members of staff, our overall performance figures are good and illustrate the hard work and commitment of the staff group.
- Pressures aside, there was 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.
- Over this reporting period, we have continued to see IRO's chairing 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.

- The reviewing team has drafted and will, once the staffing pressures within II reduce, pilot a new 3 part CLA review document which will include the social worker's report, the IRO's summary of the review discussion, and the Team Manager's response to the recommendations. Other areas have expressed an interest in the document.
- In total 13 resolutions were raised in this reporting period. This is a low figure 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, and that IRO's are seeking to resolve issues with fieldwork without the need to formally raise a Resolution.
- Since the recent pandemic, the use of technology has become more prevalent and whilst we hope to return to meeting children, young people and their families face to face soon we are moving toward a 'hybrid' style meeting whereby Microsoft Teams will be used to facilitate CLA Reviews and communicate with participants in the future.
- In relation to the 2Sides Website, there is a newly appointed editor in place and the Reviewing Team Manager will contact them with a view to progressing this work. There has been a delay due to the pandemic, however it is hoped that this will be picked up and further developed in the near future alongside consideration of the use of the Orb.
- The IRO's will continue to support and monitor the use of the life journey work materials within CLA and Adoption Reviews, and provide feedback at the end of the pilot phase on the new Adoption Review paperwork; which RCT IRO's were heavily involved in developing.
- We are continuing to strengthen our working partnership with CAFCASS and Advocacy Service Trosgynnal to ensure collaborative working between agencies is in line with AFA Cymru Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide. We had met with CAFCASS managers in January 2020 however due to the pandemic we have not been able to meet further however, we are communicating with colleagues across these areas in order for us to further develop communication and participation in our service area.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

**Authors: Emma Walters, Interim Service Manager
Safeguarding
Ceri Mann, Reviewing Team Manager, RCT Childrens Services
Tel: 01443 484520**

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 July – 31st December 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. This is currently under review and will be taken to the policy review board for consideration imminently before disseminating to all staff.

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 care, residential care and secure establishments.
- 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 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 and support 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. We now have telephone technology in place to facilitate conference calling.

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, RCT CLA Schedule of Visiting Guidance 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.

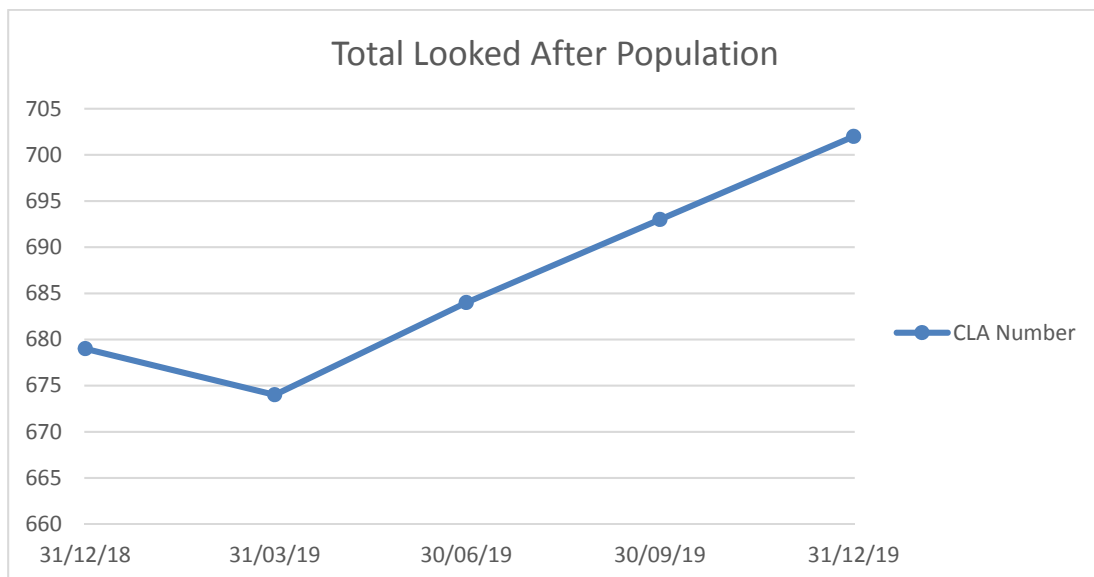
Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, there are issues around the child's safety or there has been a failure to carry out an important aspect of the plan.

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

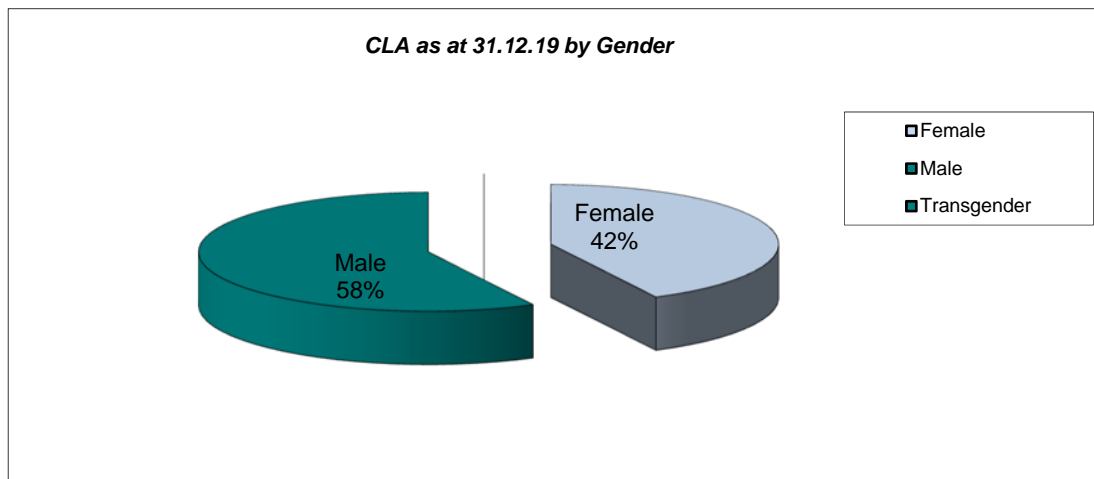
5. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (31st December 2019)

	31/12/2018	31/03/2019	30/06/2019	30/09/2019	31/12/2019
CLA Number	679	674	684	693	702

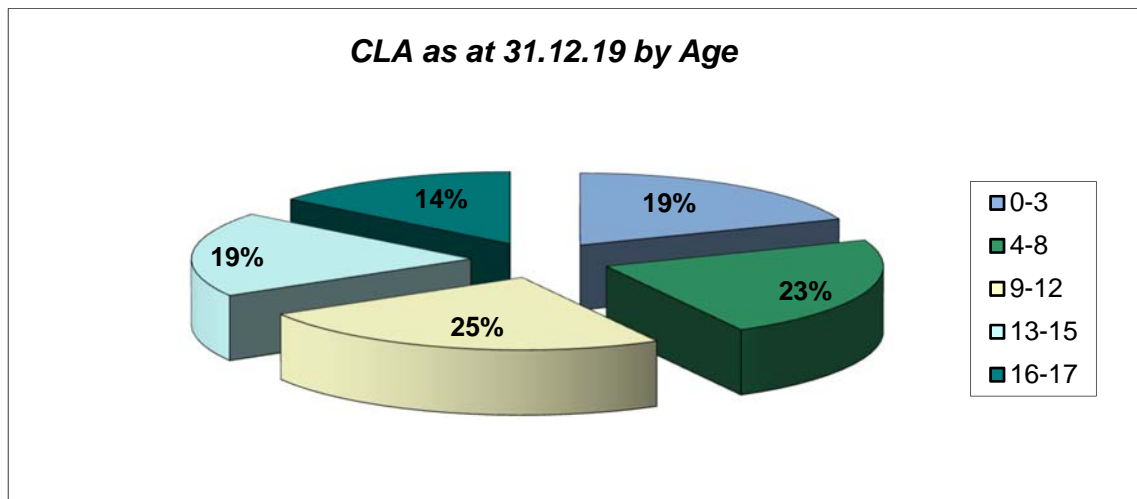
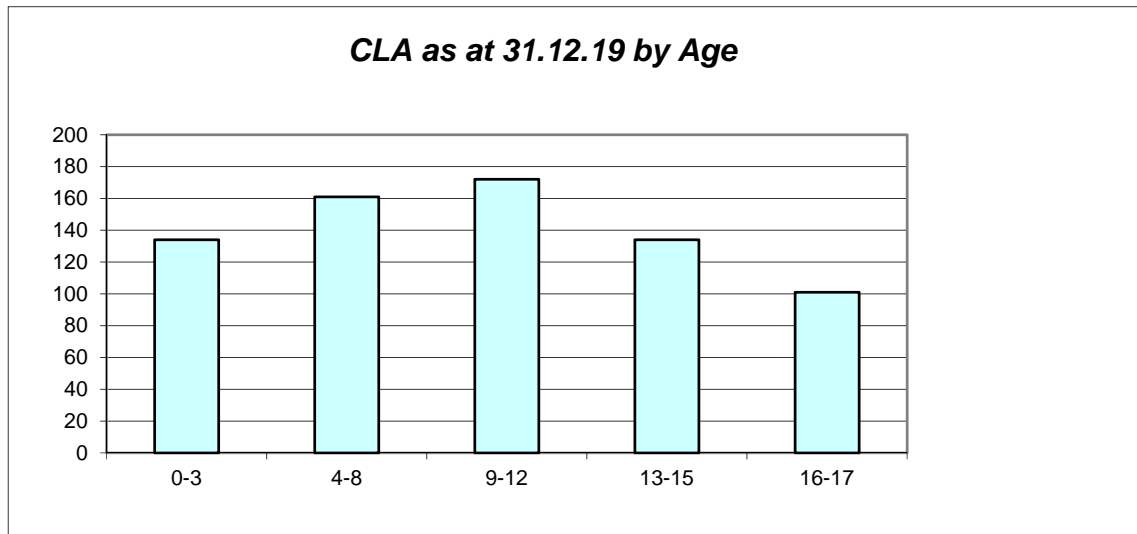


Looked After Population by Gender



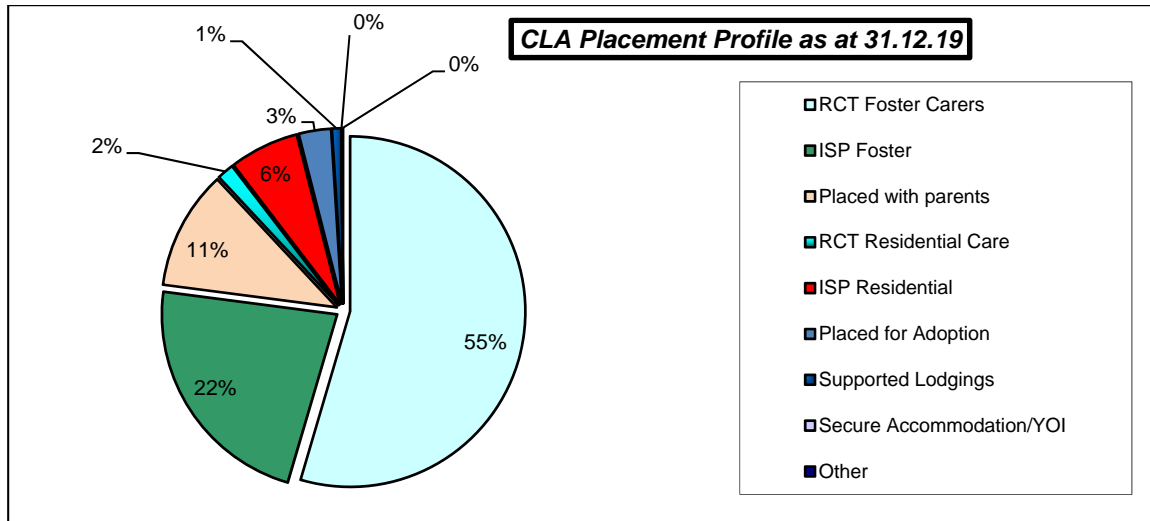
	CLA as at 31.12.18 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.19 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.19 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.19 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.19 by Gender
Female	304	297	294	294	298
Male	375	377	390	399	404
Transgender	0	0	0	0	0
Total	679	674	684	693	702

Looked After Population by Age Group



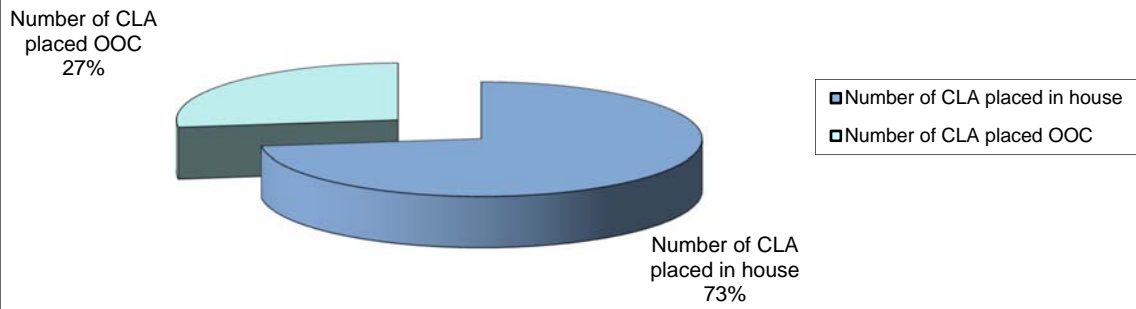
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.12.18 by Age	144	167	151	122	95	679
CLA as at 31.03.19 by Age	142	163	153	118	98	674
CLA as at 30.06.19 by Age	136	166	165	121	96	684
CLA as at 30.09.19 by Age	136	165	170	128	94	693
CLA as at 31.12.19 by Age	134	161	172	134	101	702

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



	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19
RCT Foster Carers	380	373	382	391	383
ISP Foster	157	160	157	154	158
Placed with parents	58	60	71	76	77
RCT Residential Care	8	7	8	9	11
ISP Residential	35	38	37	39	45
Placed for Adoption	26	24	18	16	21
Supported Lodgings	14	10	7	7	6
Secure Accommodation/YOI	1	1	3	0	0
Other	0	1	1	1	1
Total	679	674	684	693	702

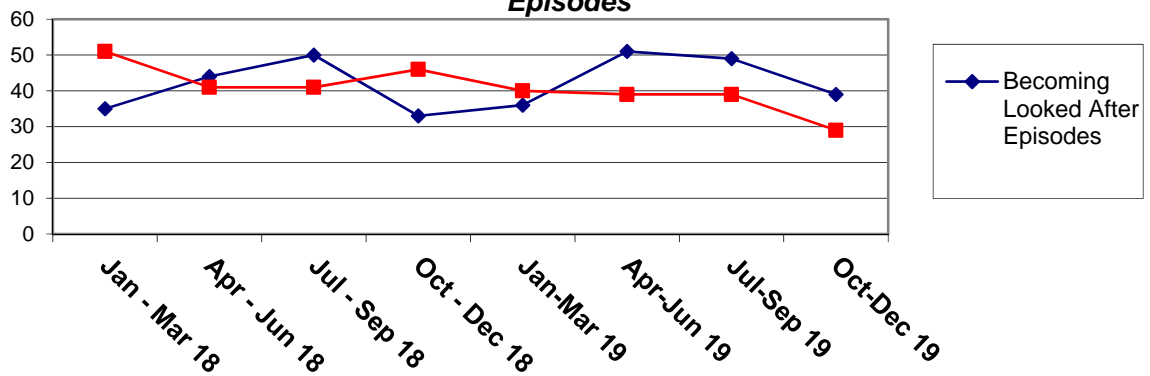
Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 31.12.19



	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19
Number of CLA placed in house	495	489	503	516	512
Number of CLA placed OOC	184	185	181	177	190
Total CLA	679	674	684	693	702
% OOC	27.1%	27.4%	26.5%	25.5%	27.1%

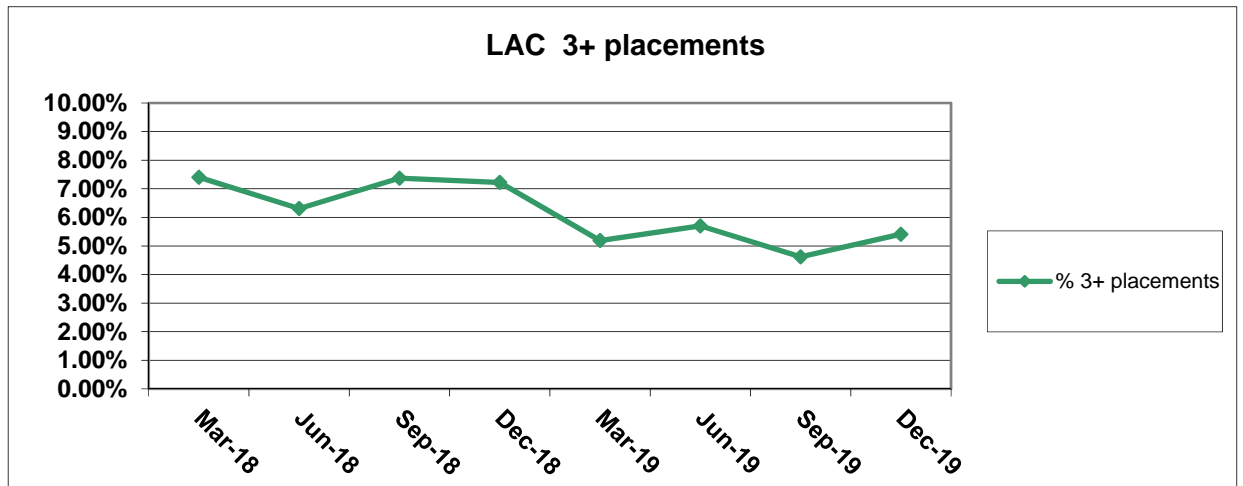
Admissions and Discharge Information

The number of Becoming Looked After & Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes



	Jan - Mar 18	Apr - Jun 18	Jul - Sep 18	Oct - Dec 18	Jan-Mar 19	Apr-Jun 19	Jul-Sep 19	Oct-Dec 19
Becoming Looked After Episodes	35	44	50	33	36	51	49	39
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	51	41	41	46	40	39	39	29

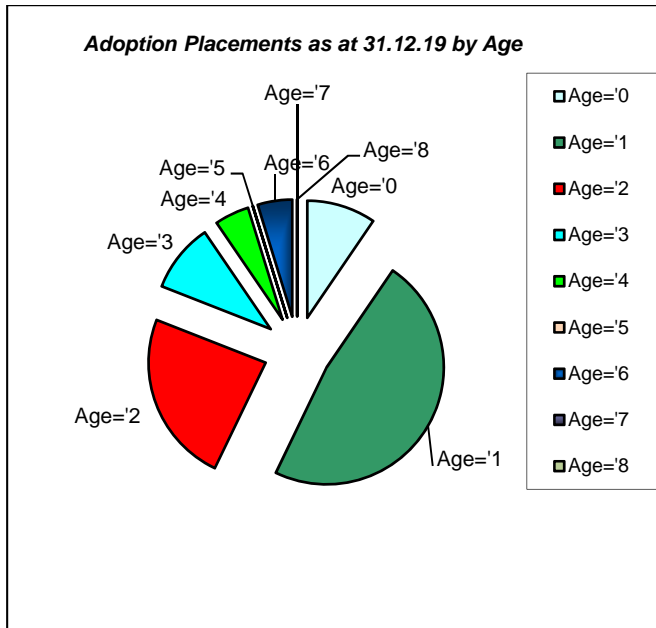
Placement Stability



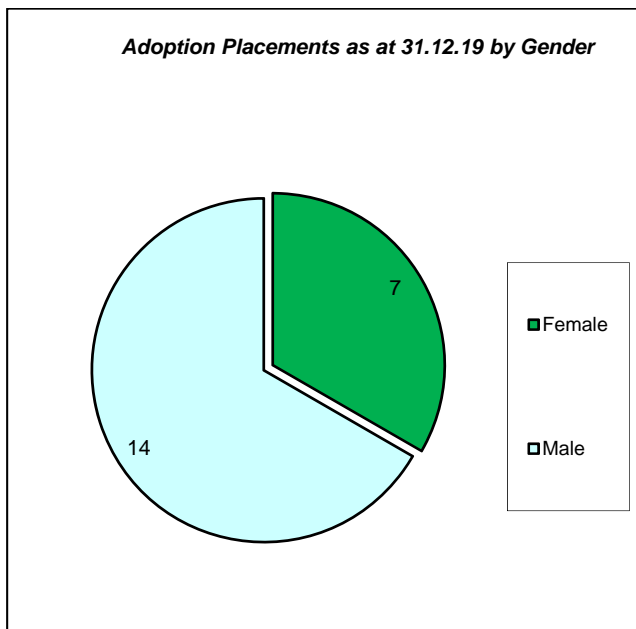
	Mar-18	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19
% 3+ placements	7.40%	6.31%	7.37%	7.22%	5.19%	5.70%	4.62%	5.41%

Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 31.12.19 by Age	Total
Age=0	2
Age=1	10
Age=2	5
Age=3	2
Age=4	1
Age=5	0
Age=6	1
Age=7	0
Age=8	0
Total	21



Adoption Placements as at 31.12.19 by Gender	Total
Female	7
Male	14
Total	21

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.12.19	21
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.01.19 - 31.12.19	27
Number of Children adopted between 01.01.19 - 31.12.19	32

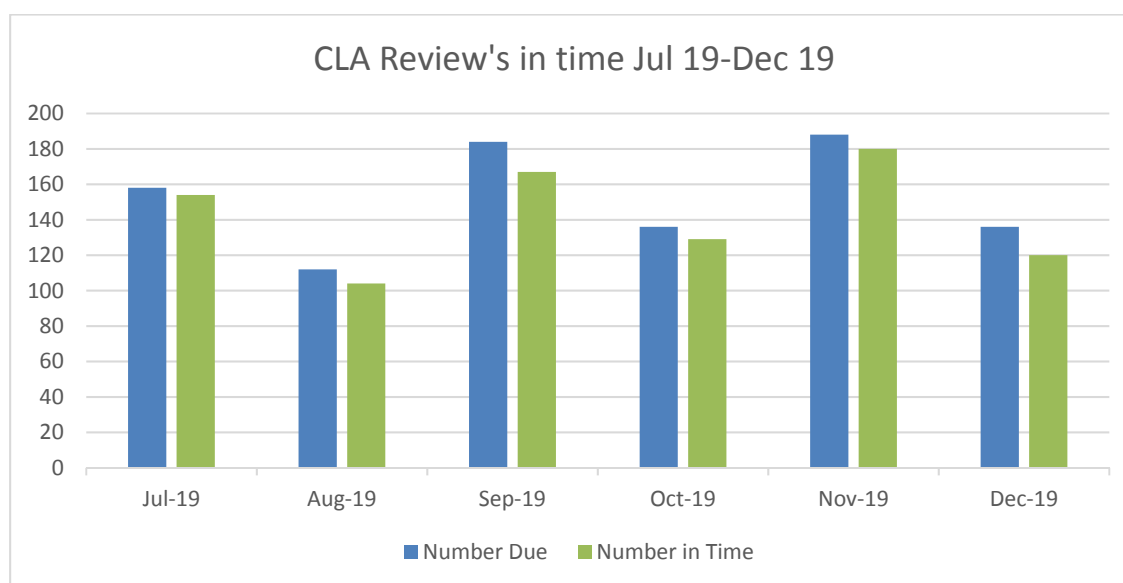
6. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1ST JULY– 31ST DECEMBER 2019

During this reporting period the total number of children looked after fluctuated between **683** and **702**. **914** CLA review meetings were due in this 6-month period, which is an increase of **27** compared to the previous 6 months (January 2019-June 2019). In addition, IROs chaired **22** 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 July 2019 to December 2019

	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Number Due	158	112	184	136	188	136
Number in Time	154	104	167	129	180	120



60 reviews were held outside the required timescale; overall our performance is **93.44%** compliant, which is consistent when compared to 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
July 19	158	154	4	97.47%
August 19	112	104	8	92.86%
September 19	184	167	17	90.76%
October 19	136	129	7	94.85%
November 19	188	180	8	95.74%
December 19	136	120	16	88.24%
Total	914	854	60	93.44%

6.1 REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

There were **60** 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, **191** Reviews had to be rearranged in total; meaning that only **6.56%** of the total were out of timescales. This has decreased marginally from the last report. Reasons for requests to rearrange are generally due to unavailability of key participants on the original date. However other examples were to enable the young person to attend and to facilitate combined CLA/CP Conference.

Comparators (with last year)

July – September 2018

429 reviews held within timescales 28 outside Total 457 = 93.87%

July – September 2019

425 reviews held within timescales 29 outside Total 454 = 93.61%

October – December 2018

402 reviews held within timescales 14 outside Total 416 = 96.63%

October – December 2019

429 reviews held within timescales 31 outside Total 460 = 93.26%

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, there have been occasions, where it has been necessary to use external chairs to cover a small number of reviews. We have previously used RCT managers who had retired from RCT Children Services, who were working on a self-employed basis. Since November both external staff have chosen not to apply for continued registration with Social Care Wales. Furthermore we have had two IRO's leave the service. One has retired and the other has moved onto a different role. This will clearly have an impact on our action plan to address paperwork backlogs alongside the developments in line with AFA Cymru best practice guidelines. We had recently appointed two new IRO's, one of whom will commence her role in April 2020. Unfortunately the second candidate has since withdrawn. There will remain to be a deficit of one IRO and this post is due to be re-advertised imminently.

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.

Since the retirement of the previous service manager (which the Council was unable to appoint to on a permanent basis), Emma Walters, Child Protection Coordinator has been seconded to the role for a 6 month period. Her existing role remains vacant. The new Service Manager has introduced processes 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 needing 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 ensure that every Looked After Child is allocated a named IRO, who will chair all of their meetings, and in the vast majority of cases we are able to do so. Demands on the service can increase unexpectedly, not only because of an increase in the number of children becoming looked after, but also when review meetings need to be brought forward at the child's request, or because a change in circumstances such as a placement breakdown necessitate it. It was reported previously to Corporate Parenting Board that we were seeing cases where Placement with Parent review 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, and this continues to be the case.

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 a failure in implementing their Care and Support Plan.

As part of the CLA action plan, there is currently work underway to revise the resolutions process to ensure they are compliant with the AFA Cymru best practice guidelines.

9. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IRO'S JULY – DECEMBER 2019

In total 16 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. Included below are examples of the resolutions that have been raised during this reporting period.

Theme: No Part 6 Care and Support Plan.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children) states “Most children who start to be looked after have been known to social services for some time. Where a child is to be accommodated it should therefore be possible to begin the care and support planning process in advance of the care episode. Where this is not possible, the Part 6 Care and Support Plan must be prepared within ten working days of the start of the first placement. Therefore the Part 6 Care and Support Plan should have been shared with the child and their family where it is appropriate to do so, and be available to the IRO in readiness for the first review meeting.

Resolution

A resolution was raised by the IRO following an initial CLA review as they had not received the relevant paperwork. None of the children had a Part 6 Care and Support Plan. The social worker told the IRO that the case was complex and the review was required to assist her with gathering the relevant information in order for the plans to be completed.

Outcome

The Team Manager response acknowledged that this was unacceptable and that in addition to ensuring that the Part 6 plans were completed within 10 working days, that she would address the matter with the social worker in supervision to ensure that this wasn't repeated in the future.

Theme: Recommendations Not Being Acted On

The role of the IRO carries with it personal responsibility for carrying out his or her functions. In a case in 2012, *A & S v Lancashire CC* [2012] EWHC 1689 (Fam) it was clarified that the IRO may be held personally responsible for:

- a) Identifying if a child or young person's human rights are being infringed;
- b) Ensuring that the local authority acts upon the recommendations of the CLA review;
- c) Referring to CAFCASS if the child/young person's human rights are infringed or significant recommendations of the review are not acted upon.

The 'decisions' made during a review are, in fact, 'recommendations' to the local authority, but there is an expectation that they will be acted on unless the Team Manager chooses not to and informs the IRO of this decision– thereby allowing the IRO to challenge the decision within the resolution process if they feel it is necessary

to do so.

Resolution

At the time a sibling group became looked after they had not received their childhood immunisations and parents refused to consent to this whilst the children remained in LA care. At the previous CLA review Children's Services had sought advice from the CLA Nurse and legal department in respect of possibly putting this matter before the court. It was recommended that a timely decision was needed to allow parents to challenge if necessary. This matter was still outstanding at the next review meeting despite the IRO following this up during a monitoring call between CLA reviews. The IRO's resolution drew attention not only to the recommendation not being actioned but queried whether the drift might be considered a breach of the Children's Human Rights if the matter were to go before the court and the decision made that the children should be immunised.

Outcome

Children's Services decided that there was no immediate risk to the children and therefore did not wish to challenge the parents decision unless it became mandatory to have these vaccinations in the future.

Theme: Timescales

Courts will, as part of care proceedings stipulate what reports and assessments they require, by whom and by when so that they are in a position to make informed decisions. Clearly if the appropriate documentation is not filed on time it will have repercussions for Children's Services and depending on the child's circumstances, it may undermine the Local Authority's position.

Resolution:

A review meeting was attended by a social worker who was not the case holder and who was therefore unfamiliar with the case. In the review meeting the IRO was told that the parenting assessment, sibling attachment assessment, final evidence and court care plan that were due to be filed in 12 days had not been started because the allocated worker was on sick leave.

Outcome:

As a result of the IRO's resolution the Team Manager spoke to the Local Authority Solicitor who submitted a request to the court for an extension to complete the assessments and file the documentation with the court. The resolution remained open until the IRO was satisfied that the documents had been filed.

Theme: Professional Visits

On occasion, IRO's raise resolutions to partner agencies directly involved with children looked after whereby it is not felt they have met the agreed requirements of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan.

Resolution

During a second adoption review meeting the IRO was told that the Life Journey Work had not been completed (a separate resolution was raised), but the prospective adopters also said that they hadn't had any contact from the Adoption Social Worker since the matching panel. This was the second adoption review meeting for this child where there was no worker or report from the adoption agency.

The IRO had spoken to the adoption worker after the first adoption review to provide feedback and inform them that it had been agreed in the review meeting that visits should be undertaken on a monthly basis by both the child's social worker and the Adoption social worker.

Whilst there were no concerns reported in the review itself the prospective adopters were keen to file their application for an Adoption Order and wanted practical support from the adoption team to do so.

Outcome

The IRO discussed the issue with the Adoption Agency Manager and forwarded the resolution to them. The manager offered an explanation as to why there had been failings, but confirmed that since the resolution had been received the worker had visited the family, completed both the court application form as well as the post adoption letter agreement, and agreed to visit at least once a month until the Order was granted.

Theme: Life Journey Work

There is an expectation that by the second adoption review meeting, that a child's life journey work will have been completed, and this is one of the National Adoption Indicators. Adoptive parents can file their application 10 weeks after a child is first placed with them, and an Adoption Order might, in certain circumstances be granted in a relatively short time.. This is clearly a sensitive piece of work that is intended to remain with the child into adulthood. As well as photographs of people who would have played an important part in a child's early life it will include some very emotional memories and information, and good practice is to complete this before the granting of the final order.

Resolution:

In a second adoption review meeting the social worker explained that they had not completed the life journey work. The IRO clarified in the review meeting what work was still outstanding and sought clarification on how long the social worker thought it

would take to complete it.

Outcome : The Team Manager agreed (as did the IRO) that the timescale proposed by the social worker was a realistic one and the resolution remained open until confirmation was received that the work had been completed as agreed.

10. DEVELOPMENT WORK

Conference Calling

It is rare that conference calling has been used in CLA reviews both because IRO's would want to be present when a child attends a review meeting, and because where possible IRO's would prefer to visit placements, especially those out of county. However, the installation of new telephone technology means that hosting conference calling is now available if required. It is felt that this may assist in the participation of other professionals also.

There have been very early discussions amongst the All Wales IRO Group (hosted by AFA Cymru) with regards to the challenges of using platforms such as Skype to chair review meetings, especially in light of the number of children placed some distance from their home county, but the initial response has been one of concern because of the inherent problems with relying on a camera feed to fully assess a situation and circumstance.

These same discussions have also touched on IRO's consulting with children and young people using platforms such as Skype, and once again there is concern as to how the IRO can be confident that the child's / young person's responses are not being influenced by other persons. We will continue to endeavour to communicate with children and young people in ways that ensures their voices are heard.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The Reviewing Service continues to promote the involvement of our looked after young people in any and all activities hosted by Voices from Care, and disseminates all emails relating to events to our colleagues in Children's Services.

It was unfortunate that Voices From Care were not able to assist in the consultation event that we held with a group of RCT's looked after children to consider what information should be included on the 2Sides Website / WICID Website, although they would be happy to participate in any future events.

2Sides Website

Some of the information on the 2 Sides Website has already been re written into an "easy read" format and when the reviewing team held a consultation event with a group of looked after children in July 2019 they were pleased not only with the changes that they were shown, but the feedback was very positive, especially when they compared WICID 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. The young people in attendance put forward that future developments might include videos of our residential homes, and of foster carers and their homes as well as a peer question and answer forum about dealing with some of the everyday experiences faced by looked after children.

Whilst the group liked the idea of the WICID pages providing links to information from the Children's Commissioner and Children in Wales literature, they did wonder whether they would really make use of it.

Unfortunately the work with WICID was delayed because the magazine's editor left. There is a newly appointed editor in place and the Reviewing Team Manager will contact them with a view to progressing this work.

Mind of My Own / The Orb

The previous report to the Corporate Parenting Board referred to the LA undertaking a viability of two digital tools that might compliment or enhance the work that had already taken place with 2Sides.

It was envisaged that the Mind of My Own app would have allowed children and young people to forward their thoughts, their wishes and their feelings to professionals when they felt the need to do so. Something that it was envisaged 2 Sides might have done but hasn't been able to up to now. It is understood that issues were raised in relation to the financial sustainability of the Mind of My Own developer, and no further work will be undertaken on this, but that work will now be taken forward on developing a digital platform for and with CLA, by a care experienced developer from West Wales.

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 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, as was noted in the previous report, any investment in the above will have implications for 2Sides to ensure that they complement each other and that the information is consistent.

CAFCASS

In the past the Reviewing Team has sought to develop a close, positive working relationship with the Children's Guardians with the intention of improving information sharing during and at the end of care proceedings. Unfortunately management restructuring changes within CAFCASS meant that these plans stalled until fairly recently. The Reviewing Team Manager met with CAFCASS in January 2020 to re-establish meetings between both services.

Adoption Review Documentation.

In light of the recommendations of a recent Child Practice Review, Children's Services and the Reviewing Team have been part of a task and finish group to produce an adoption review document that will be used by RCT, Merthyr, Cardiff and The Vale as well as VVC. In addition to a more robust chronology and record of the review, the document will include the written report of both the child's social worker and the adoption worker. This is now in a pilot phase and a review of the pilot will take place in May 2020.

Developing a new review document

The reviewing team have drafted a new 3 part CLA review document which will include the social worker's report, the IRO's summary of the review discussion, and the Team Manager's response to the recommendations. This document has been uploaded onto WCCIS (Case Management System), and is ready for use. Our Service Manager is in discussion with Children's Services to identify a group to pilot the paperwork and evaluate its effectiveness. Other local authorities continue to express an interest in its progress.

Life Journey Work

Following on from the Bright Spots Survey that was commissioned by the local authority in 2018 the reviewing service has been part of a working group to develop life journey work for all children who become looked after. It is intended to ensure that all children who become looked after understand why they are looked after, and that this will, wherever possible, be done with the support of parents so as to avoid as much confusion and misinformation as possible. Children, families, social workers and foster carers will all be able to contribute photographs / memories. It is hoped that the children will be able to take an active part in drafting their life journey work given that many social workers now have agile working laptops on which they may be able to do the work together.

This work is being piloted with a relatively small number of looked after children and initial feedback has been positive.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

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

12. CONSULTATION

This is an information report therefore no consultation is required.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

None

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

This is covered above in section 3.

15. 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.



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

March 2020

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

**Authors: Emma Walters, Interim Service Manager
Safeguarding
Ceri Mann, Reviewing Team Manager, RCT Childrens Services
Tel: 01443 484520**

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 January 2020- 31st March 2020**. 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. This is currently under review and will be taken to the policy review board for consideration imminently before disseminating to all staff.

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 care, residential care and secure establishments.

- 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 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 and support 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. We now have telephone technology in place to facilitate conference calling.

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, RCT CLA Schedule of Visiting Guidance 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 CAF/CASS 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.

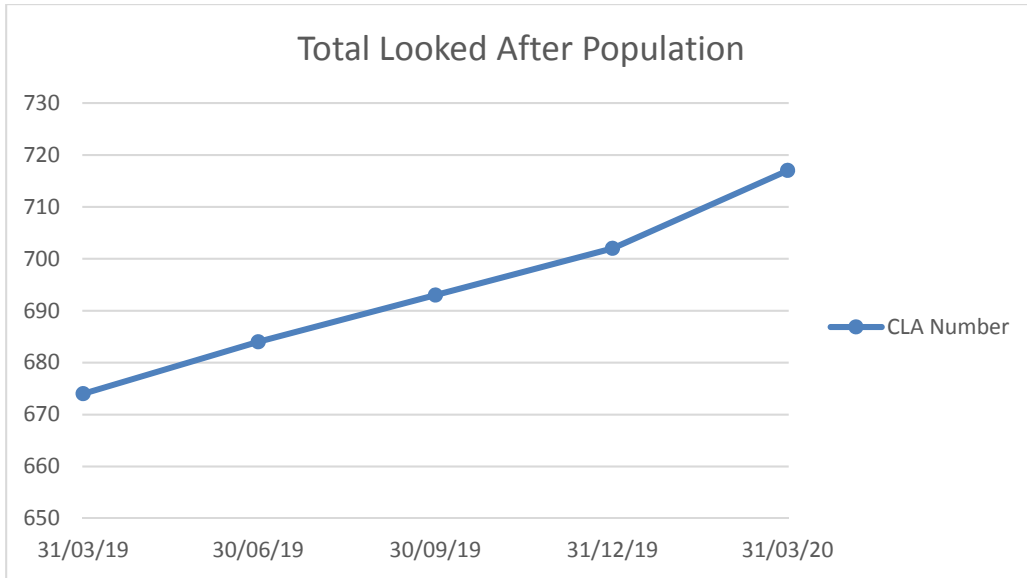
Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, there are issues around the child's safety or there has been a failure to carry out an important aspect of the plan.

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

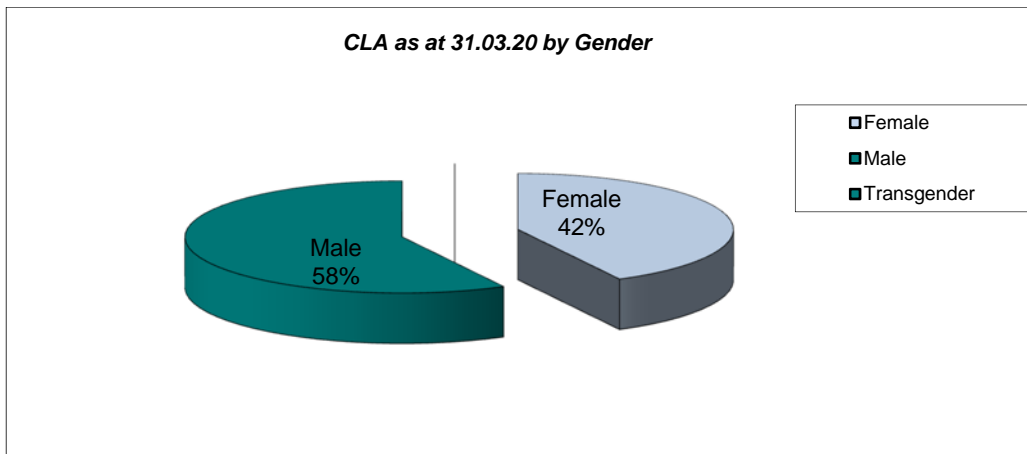
5. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (31st March 2020)

	31/03/2019	30/06/2019	30/09/2019	31/12/2019	31/03/2020
CLA Number	674	684	693	702	717

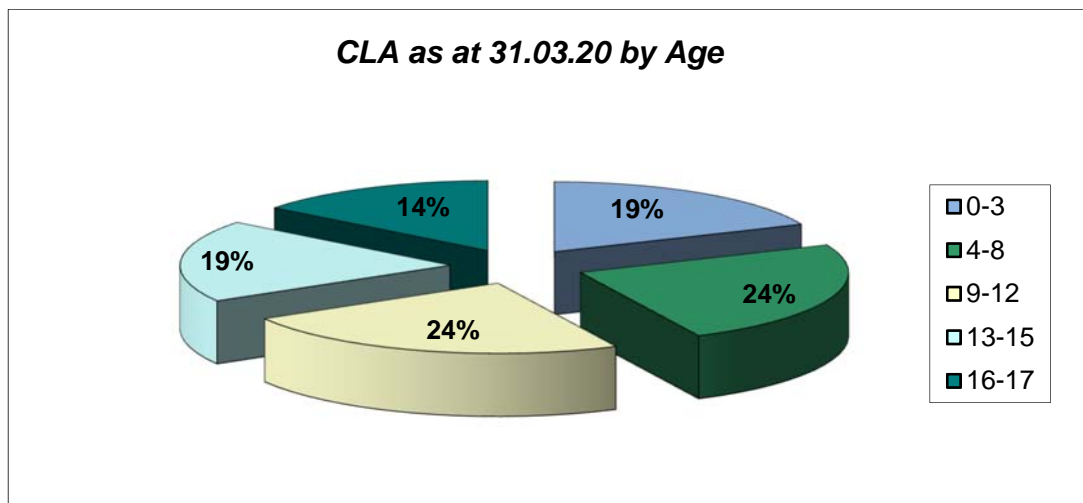
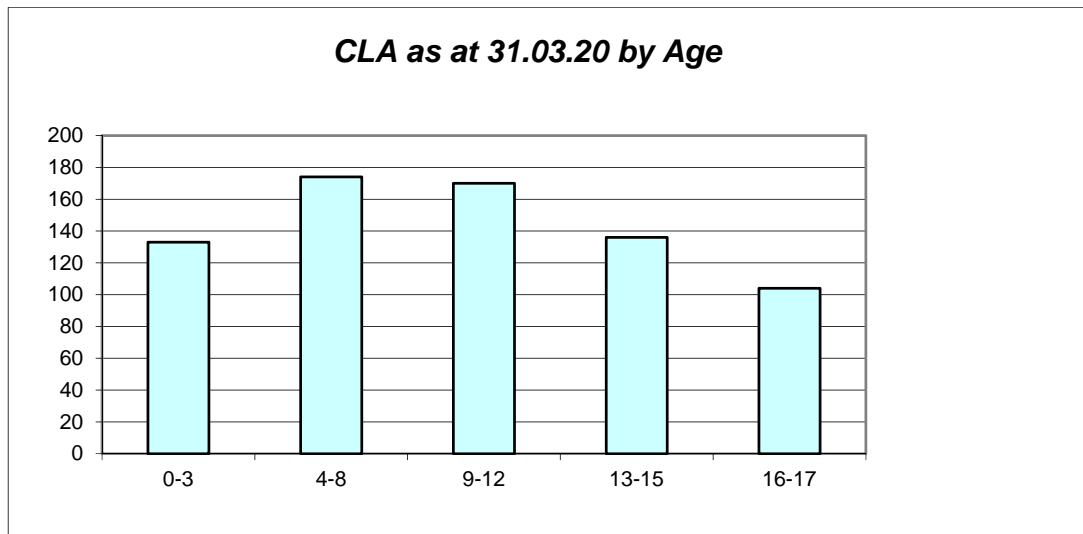


Looked After Population by Gender



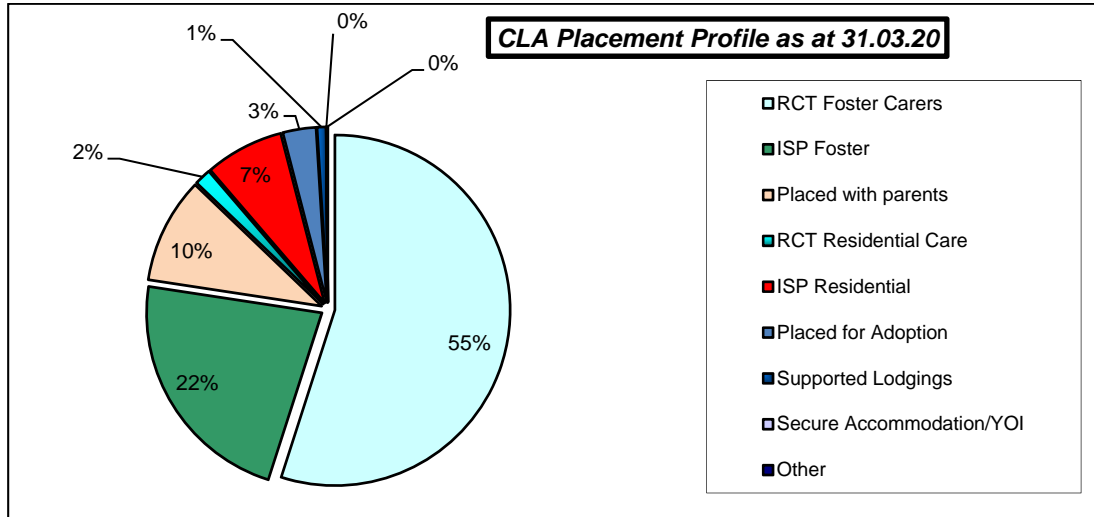
	CLA as at 31.12.18 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.19 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.19 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.19 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.19 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.20 by Gender
Female	304	297	294	294	298	303
Male	375	377	390	399	404	414
Transgender	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	679	674	684	693	702	717

Looked After Population by Age Group



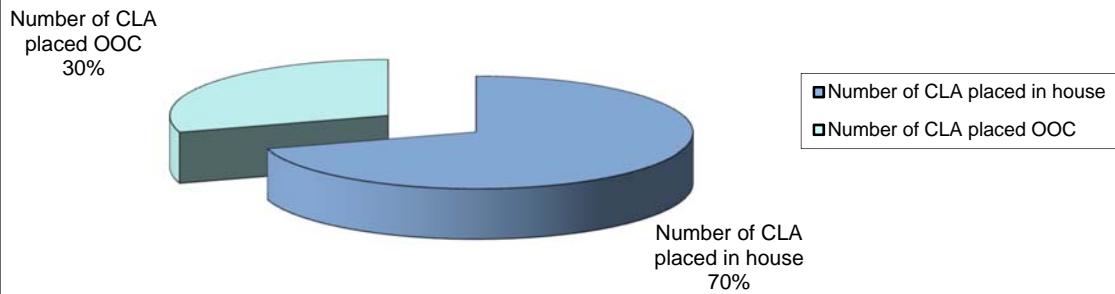
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.03.19 by Age	142	163	153	118	98	674
CLA as at 30.06.19 by Age	136	166	165	121	96	684
CLA as at 30.09.19 by Age	136	165	170	128	94	693
CLA as at 31.12.19 by Age	134	161	172	134	101	702
CLA as at 31.03.20 by Age	133	174	170	136	104	717

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



	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20
RCT Foster Carers	374	390	380	373	382	391	383	394
ISP Foster	169	164	157	160	157	154	158	161
Placed with parents	59	56	58	60	71	76	77	70
RCT Residential Care	7	10	8	7	8	9	11	11
ISP Residential	31	31	35	38	37	39	45	52
Placed for Adoption	29	24	26	24	18	16	21	22
Supported Lodgings	8	14	14	10	7	7	6	6
Secure Accommodation/YOI	3	1	1	1	3	0	0	0
Other	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	1
Total	681	692	679	674	684	693	702	717

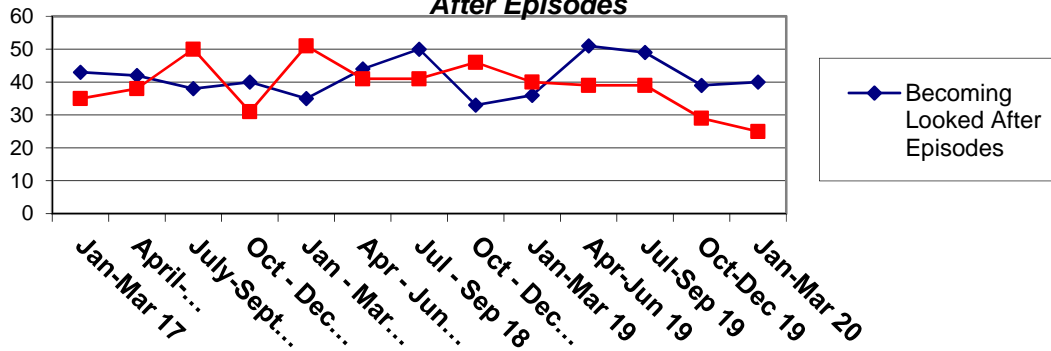
Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 31.03.20



	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20
Number of CLA placed in house	500	513	495	489	503	516	512	503
Number of CLA placed OOC	181	179	184	185	181	177	190	214
Total CLA	681	692	679	674	684	693	702	717
% OOC	26.6%	25.9%	27.1%	27.4%	26.5%	25.5%	27.1%	29.8%

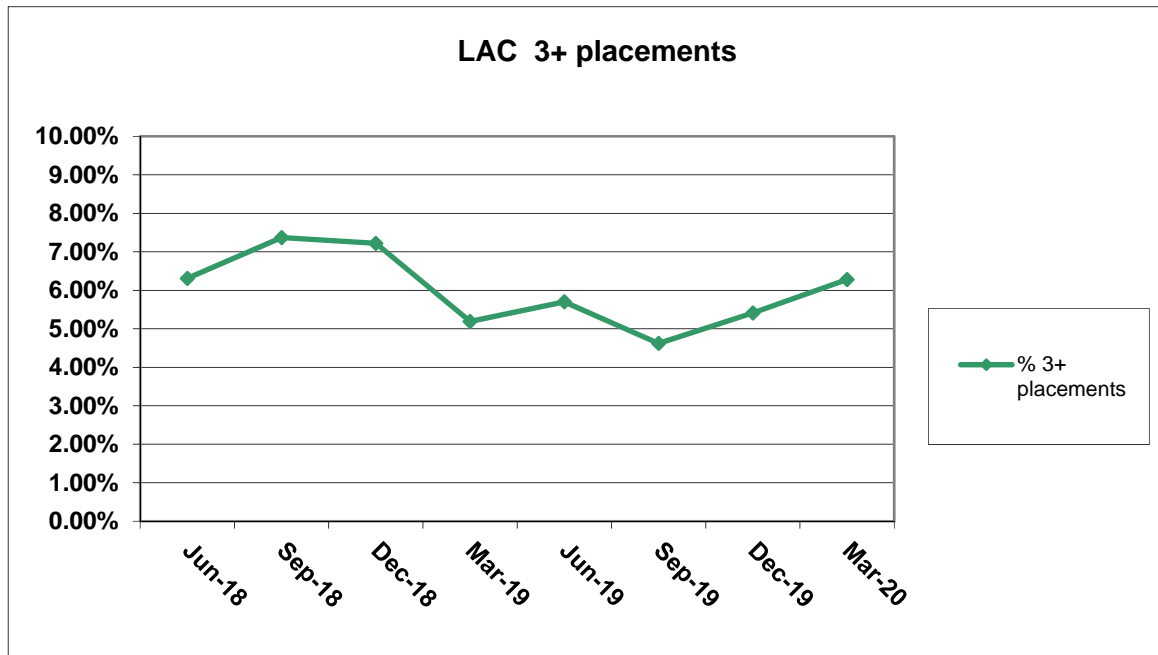
Admissions and Discharge Information

The number of Becoming Looked After & Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes



	Jan-Mar 17	Apr-Jun 17	Jul-Sept 17	Oct-Dec 17	Jan-Mar 18	Apr-Jun 18	Jul-Sept 18	Oct-Dec 18	Jan-Mar 19	Apr-Jun 19	Jul-Sept 19	Oct-Dec 19	Jan-Mar 20
Becoming Looked After Episodes	43	42	38	40	35	44	50	33	36	51	49	39	40
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	35	38	50	31	51	41	41	46	40	39	33	29	25

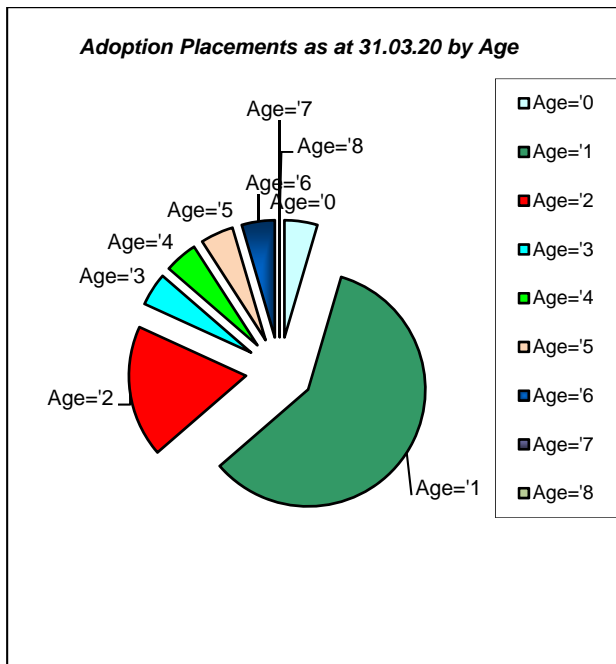
Placement Stability



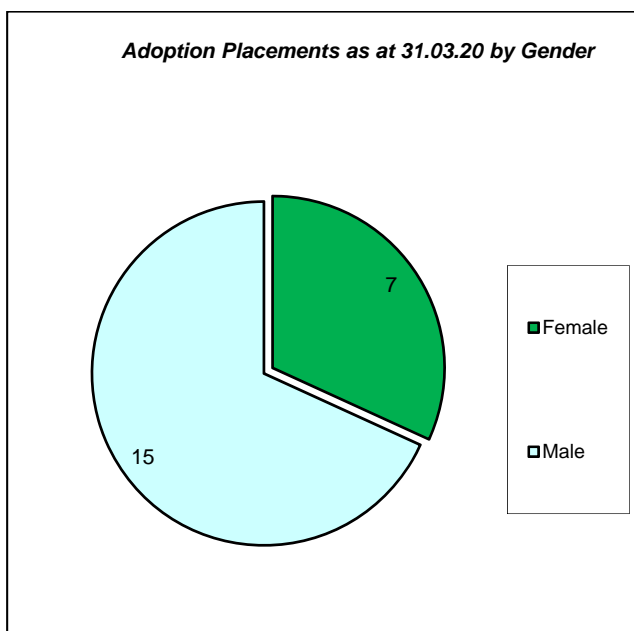
	Jun-18	Sep-18	Dec-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Sep-19	Dec-19	Mar-20
% 3+ placements	6.31%	7.37%	7.22%	5.19%	5.70%	4.62%	5.41%	6.28%

Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 31.03.20 by Age	Total
Age='0	1
Age='1	13
Age='2	4
Age='3	1
Age='4	1
Age='5	1
Age='6	1
Age='7	0
Age='8	0
Total	22



Adoption Placements as at 31.03.20 by Gender	Total
Female	7
Male	15
Total	22

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.03.20	21
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.04.19 - 31.03.20	25
Number of Children adopted between 01.04.19 - 31.03.20	27

6. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1st JANUARY 2020 – 31st MARCH 2020

During this reporting period the total number of children looked after fluctuated between **702** and **717**.

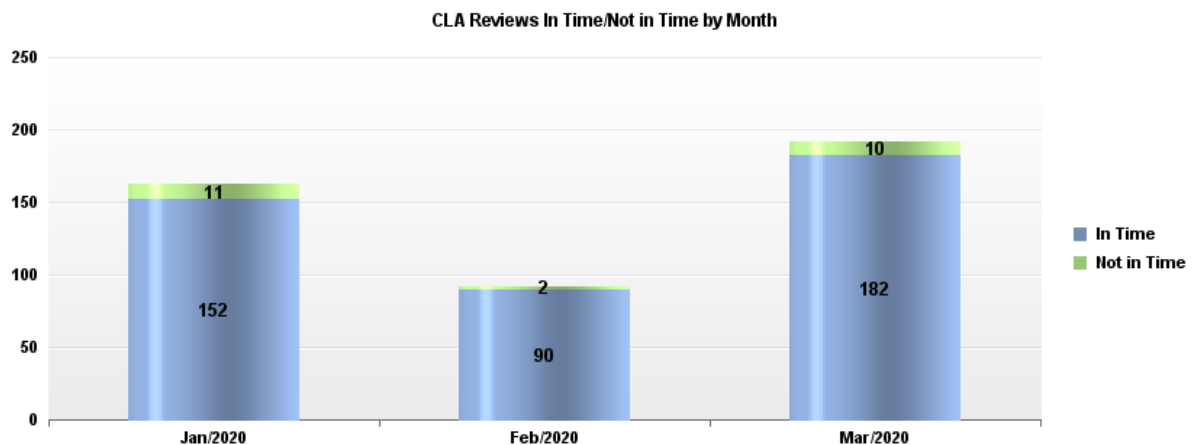
447 CLA review meetings were due in this 3-month period.

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 **12** IFSS (Integrated Family Support Service) Reviews.

CLA Reviews

CLA Review's in Time January 1st 2020 to March ~~31st 2020~~ 31st 2020

	Jan 20	Feb 20	Marc 20
Number Due	163	92	192
Number in Time	152	90	182



23 reviews were held outside the required timescale; overall our performance is **94.85%** compliant, which is a positive increase compared to the last reporting period, however remains 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 20	163	152	11	93.25%
February 20	92	90	2	97.83%
March 20	192	182	10	94.79%
Total	447	424	23	94.85%

6.1 REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

There were **23** 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. There were 3 meeting cancelled due to the pandemic in this reporting period.

144 Reviews had to be rearranged in total; meaning that only **15.97%** of the total were out of timescales. Whilst the number of rearranged meetings has increased slightly over this quarter the number that have gone out of timescale has remained static. Reasons for requests to rearrange are generally due to unavailability of key participants on the original date. However other examples were to enable the young person to attend and to facilitate combined CLA/CP Conference.

Comparators (with last year)

July – September 2018

429 reviews held within timescales 28 outside Total 457 = 93.87%

July – September 2019

425 reviews held within timescales 29 outside Total 454 = 93.61%

October – December 2018

402 reviews held within timescales 14 outside Total 416 = 96.63%

October – December 2019

429 reviews held within timescales 31 outside Total 460 = 93.26%

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, there have been occasions where it has been necessary to use external chairs to cover a small number of reviews. We have previously used RCT managers who had retired from RCT Children Services, who were working on a self-employed basis. Since November both external staff have chosen not to apply for continued registration with Social Care Wales. Furthermore we have had two IRO's leave the service. One has retired and the other has moved on to a different role. This will clearly have an impact on our action plan to address paperwork backlogs alongside the developments in line with AFA Cymru best practice guidelines. We had also recently appointed two new IRO's, one of whom was due to commence her role in April 2020, however due to the recent pandemic this has been delayed and she will now start in August 2020. Unfortunately the other appointed IRO withdrew and there remains a deficit of one full time IRO and this post is currently advertised.

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.

Since the retirement of the previous service manager (which the Council was unable to appoint to on a permanent basis), Emma Walters, Child Protection Coordinator has been seconded to the role for a 6 month period. Her existing role remains vacant. The new Service Manager has introduced processes 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 needing 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 ensure that every Looked After Child is allocated a named IRO, who will chair all of their meetings, and in the vast majority of cases we are able to do so. Demands on the service can increase unexpectedly, not only because of an increase in the number of children becoming looked after, but also when review meetings need to be brought forward at the child's request, or because a change in circumstances such as a placement breakdown necessitate it. It was reported previously to Corporate Parenting Board that we were seeing cases where Placement with Parent review 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, and this continues to be the case.

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 a failure in implementing their Care and Support Plan.

As part of the CLA action plan, there is currently work underway to revise the resolutions process to ensure they are compliant with the AFA Cymru best practice guidelines.

9. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IRO'S JANUARY 2020 - MARCH 2020

In total **13** 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. Included below are examples of the resolutions that have been raised during this reporting period.

Theme: Recommendations Not Being Acted On

The role of the IRO carries with it personal responsibility for carrying out his or her functions. In a case in 2012, *A & S v Lancashire CC* [2012] EWHC 1689 (Fam) it was clarified that the IRO may be held personally responsible for:

- a) Identifying if a child or young person's human rights are being infringed;
- b) Ensuring that the local authority acts upon the recommendations of the CLA review;
- c) Referring to CAFCASS if the child/young person's human rights are infringed or significant recommendations of the review are not acted upon.

The 'decisions' made during a review are, in fact, 'recommendations' to the local authority, but there is an expectation that they will be acted on unless the Team Manager chooses not to and informs the IRO of this decision – thereby allowing the IRO to challenge the decision within the resolution process if they feel it is necessary to do so.

Resolution:

In the previous CLA review held in August 2019 it had been agreed that Children's Services would explore contact moving into the community and allowing the foster carer to supervise.

Furthermore funding for crèche provision should be explored. In the meantime, and taking into account the recommendations of the Educational Psychologist, the foster carer had chosen to fund the crèche at a cost to herself of £200 per month.

Outcome:

It was agreed that the social worker and team manager would explore together the delay in actioning the recommendations of the CLA review, but immediate agreement was given to funding the crèche.

Whilst it was acknowledged that there had been an unacceptable delay in moving the contact into the community, the resolution was complicated in as much as a possible adoptive placement had been identified for the child, and so the IRO agreed that the plan for changes to contact should be put on hold whilst this placement was explored further

Theme: Life Journey Work

There is an expectation that by the second adoption review meeting, that a child's life journey work will have been completed, and this is one of the National Adoption Indicators. Adoptive parents can file their application 10 weeks after a child is first placed with them, and an Adoption Order might, in certain circumstances be granted in a relatively short time. This is clearly a sensitive piece of work that is intended to remain with the child into adulthood. As well as photographs of people who would have played an important part in a child's early life it will include some very emotional memories and information, and good practice is to complete this before the granting of the final order.

Resolution:

Life Story work has been agreed as an action with dates set when the work would be undertaken. The child had been asking for this and all parties agreed that the timing was right to explore his past with him, particularly as his extended family were giving contradictory explanations which was both confusing and upsetting him.

This work had not been completed by the following review meeting and the child was still waiting for this work and for a Later Life letter that would provide him the information he wanted and needed.

The IRO was therefore asking that the work be completed and shared with the child and his carers before the case transferred to a new worker.

Outcome:

Childrens Services agreed that the work needed to be prioritised and committed to doing so within 4 weeks so that the child had an opportunity to process the information during half term.

Although Children's Services did complete the work it wasn't possible to share it with him during half term because he had asked to visit his mother's resting place instead, but this was done, at the next available opportunity, and this process was discussed and agreed with the IRO.

Theme: Outstanding arrangements not made for a child placed out of county.

When a child is placed out of county, there is clearly an expectation that they will access school / education as a matter of urgency. Wherever possible it is expected that the initial planning will take place before the placement begins, but by the very nature of emergency placements, this is not always possible.

Where a child is placed with a family member, it is also expected that they will receive payment to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged whilst meeting the needs of the child.

Resolution:

At the initial meeting, it was established the child was placed out of county with relatives as part of a safeguarding plan and no plans had been made for an educational placement. His father opposed the child starting a new educational placement. Concerns were also raised by relative carers about the financial pressures placed upon them, however were clear they did not wish to see the child move.

Outcome:

Children's Services arranged for payments to be made within the week (which they were).

It was also agreed that Children's Services would meet with the child's father within a week in order to discuss his fears / objections and to provide him with reassurance that should the child return to RCT his educational provision would still be available.

As father could not participate in the meeting due to legal restrictions, it was also agreed that the social worker would remind father that he could contact the IRO should he wish to speak to him directly.

Father did not contact the IRO but agreed with the social worker that his son should be enrolled in a local school whilst he was living with relatives.

10. DEVELOPMENT WORK

Conference Calling

It is rare that conference calling has been used in CLA reviews because IRO's would want to be present when a child attends a review meeting, and because where possible IRO's would prefer to visit placements, especially those out of county. However, the installation of new telephone technology means that hosting conference calling is now available if required. It is felt that this may assist in the participation of other professionals also.

Since the recent pandemic, the use of technology has become more prevalent and whilst we hope to return to meeting children, young people and their families face to face soon, we are moving toward a 'hybrid' style meeting whereby Microsoft Teams will be used to facilitate CLA Reviews and communicate with participants in the future.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

As previously reported The Reviewing Service continually promotes the involvement of our looked after young people and publicises any events that Voices from Care and Blueprint have planned. Unfortunately, the pandemic has meant that events

have been put on hold for the foreseeable future, but virtual events are taking place which children in CLA in RCT can access.

2Sides Website

Unfortunately, the work with WICID was delayed because of recruitment issues with the WCCID editor. The pandemic has also stalled progress further and it is hoped that this will be picked up and further developed in the near future.

Mind of My Own / The Orb

The previous report to the Corporate Parenting Board referred to the LA undertaking a viability of two digital tools that might compliment or enhance the work that had already taken place with 2Sides.

Mind of My Own and The Orb were being considered, however a decision was made that Mind of My Own was not a feasible option. The prototype for The Orb has been developed by Swansea University and further consideration is being given to the utilising The Orb within Children Services.

CAFCASS

In the past the Reviewing Team has sought to develop a close, positive working relationship with the Children's Family Court Advisors, with the intention of improving information sharing during and at the end of care proceedings.

Unfortunately management restructuring changes within CAFCASS meant that these plans stalled until fairly recently. The Reviewing Team Manager met with CAFCASS in January 2020 to re-establish meetings between both services.

Adoption Review Documentation.

In light of the recommendations of a recent Child Practice Review, Children's Services and the Reviewing Team have been part of a task and finish group to produce an adoption review document that will be used by RCT, Merthyr, Cardiff and The Vale as well as VVC. In addition to a more robust chronology and record of the review, the document will include the written report of both the child's social worker and the adoption worker. This is now in a pilot phase and a review of the pilot will take place in May 2020, but this pilot phase will continue for longer than planned with the pressures of the pandemic placing pressures on all services.

Developing a new review document

The reviewing team have drafted a new 3 part CLA review document which will include the social worker's report, the IRO's summary of the review discussion, and the Team Manager's response to the recommendations.

The pilot will now commence when Children Services are in a position to take this forward.

Other local authorities continue to express an interest in its progress.

Life Journey Work

Following on from the Bright Spots Survey that was commissioned by the local authority in 2018 the reviewing service has been part of a working group to develop life journey work for all children who become looked after. It is intended to ensure that all children who become looked after understand why they are looked after, and that this will, wherever possible, be done with the support of parents so as to avoid as much confusion and misinformation as possible. Children, families, social workers and foster carers will all be able to contribute photographs / memories. It is hoped that the children will be able to take an active part in drafting their life journey work given that many social workers now have agile working laptops on which they may be able to do the work together.

This work is being piloted with a relatively small number of looked after children and initial feedback has been positive. The implementation plan to become operational is on hold due to the pandemic.

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

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

12. CONSULTATION

This is an information report therefore no consultation is required.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

None

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

This is covered above in section 3.

15. 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.