

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**  
**MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013 - 14**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2014**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF  
COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES**

**Agenda Item No: 2**

**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING  
OFFICER (IRO) REPORT**

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

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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide the Lead Member for children and young people and the Corporate Parenting Board, with information about the activity of the IRO Service.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

To note the contents of the attached report

**3. BACKGROUND**

The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority to appoint IROs to conduct reviews for looked after children and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. Specific guidance is entitled "Independent Reviewing Officer Guidance Wales 2004.

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

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

#### **4. CURRENT SITUATION**

Guidance requires the IRO service to be managed by an officer who does not have direct or line management responsibility, for individual children's cases or service provision. Therefore within RCT the service is managed by the Head of Safeguarding and Standards who has no Line Management responsibility for case work or care planning decisions affecting Looked after Children and who provides this report directly for the Group Director.

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

#### **5. KEY THEMES**

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- Maintained good performance in relation to reviews being held within timescale.
- Continued developmental work undertaken by the Reviewing Team, which relates to personal education plans for looked after children.
- Outcomes from the approach developed for the resolution of problems or issues identified by the IRO in relation to care plans for individual children.
- Outcome focussed review reports.

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

**December 2013**

### **Adoption and Children Act 2002 and The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2004**

#### **Purpose of Report**

To provide the lead Director for Children and Young People with information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for the period to 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

#### **Background**

The provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, S118 require local Authorities to appoint IROs, "to participate in the review of children's cases, monitor the authority's function in respect of the review and refer the case to Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) if the failure to implement aspects of a care plan might be considered in breach of the child's human rights".

"Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004" sets out the requirements of the IROs and responsible authority in more detail. Key outcomes envisaged are:

- Focus on needs of children and ensuring they are addressed
- Minimising drift
- Consistency of care planning and decision making
- Involvement of appropriate persons in the process

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

- In an Adoptive Placement prior to an adoption order being granted;
- Looked after subject to a statutory order or accommodated with the agreement of parents (including a series of short term breaks)
- Young people in Young Offender Institutions subject to a care order
- It is good practice to review those to be looked after s20 on release from custody and also Pathway plans for young people up to age 18 years.

This more recent guidance strengthens the existing requirements of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 and its accompanying Guidance made under the Children Act 1989.

#### **Frequency of reports**

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

## **The Reviewing Service**

The reviewing service sits within the remit of the Head of Safeguarding and Standards in Children's Services thus fulfilling the regulation (2A (3) which states that "where the IRO is an employee of the responsible authority the IRO's post within that authority must not be under the direct management of:

- a) A person involved in the management of the case;
- b) A person with management responsibilities in relation to a person mentioned in paragraph (a); or
- c) A person with control over the resources allocated to the case"

The service now comprises 7.6 fte IRO posts plus a Team Manager. The investment and consequent increased capacity within the service has enabled a reduction in the caseload of the IROs. The team now works on the basis that each IRO (fte) is responsible for the reviews of an average 100 looked after children. It is not always possible to maintain this standard given the volume of children reviewed. The team is located, at Ty Pennant in Pontypridd, although the majority of the reviews are conducted within the community usually in the child or young person's placement setting.

## **Purpose of Reviews**

Each child looked after should have an effective care plan which identifies outcomes for the child, sets objectives for work with the child, birth family and caregivers in relation to the child's developmental needs, which are: health, education, emotional and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, self care skills.

The review meeting is a key component of the assessment, planning, intervention and review process of work with families. Its purpose is to consider the plan for the child, monitor progress and enable decisions to be made to amend that plan in the light of knowledge and circumstances.

The IRO has particular responsibilities set out in guidance, to monitor progress of the responsible LA in implementing the care plan, reconvening the review meeting in certain circumstances, raise concerns within the LA up to Chief Executive level and refer to CAF/CASS unresolved concerns as appropriate.

## **Frequency of Reviews**

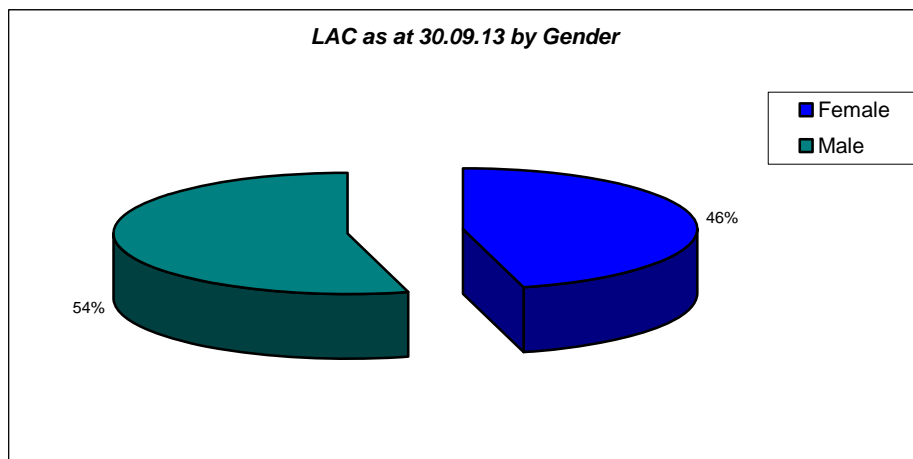
Looked after children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- Within 28 days of a child becoming looked after,
- Subsequently within 3 months,
- 6 monthly thereafter,
- Reviews should be convened earlier if there is a significant change in the child's care plan or failure to carry out an important aspect of that plan,

- The cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family;
- Children receiving a series of short breaks should be reviewed within 3 months of the start of the first period and thereafter 6 monthly.
- Reviews of family plans produced by the Integrated Family Support Team are held three times per year. The initial review is held 28 days after the start of the intensive phase, the second review 3 months later and the final review after 6 months.

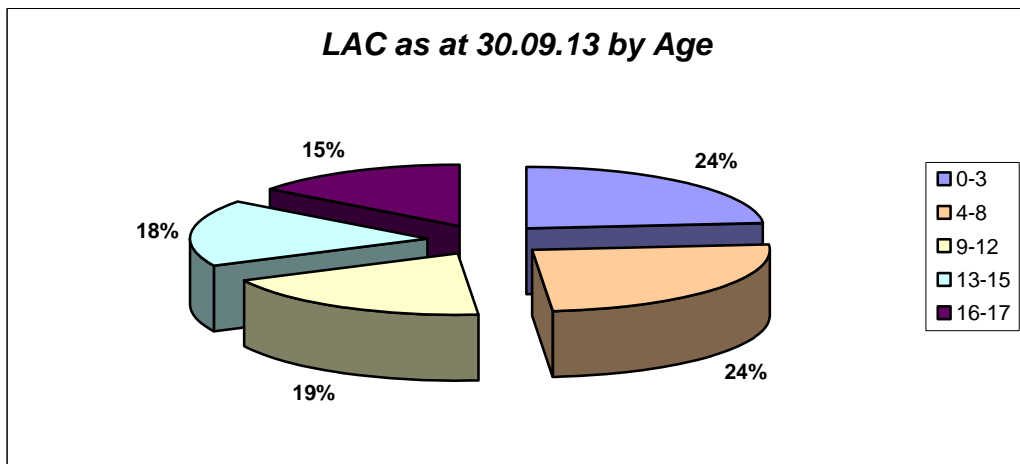
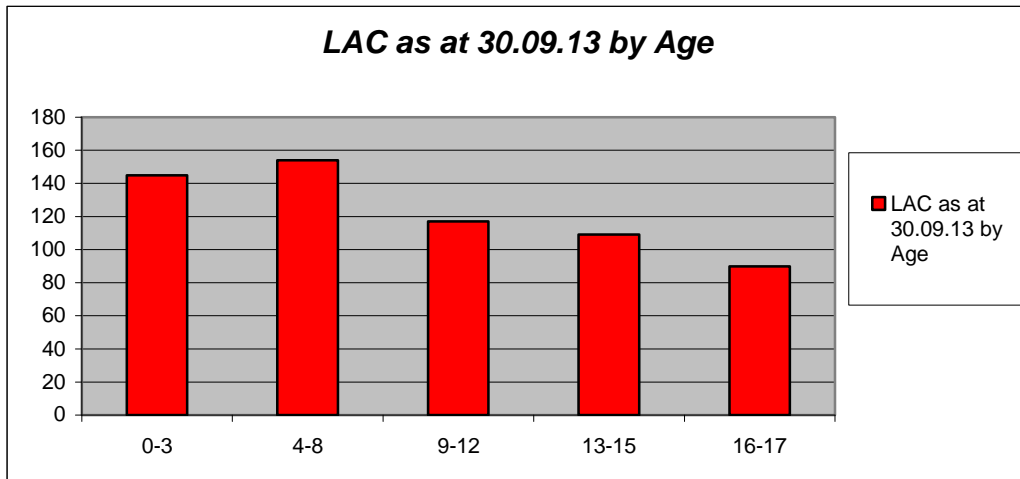
**Looked After Population (30<sup>th</sup> September 2013)**

**1. Looked After Population by Gender**



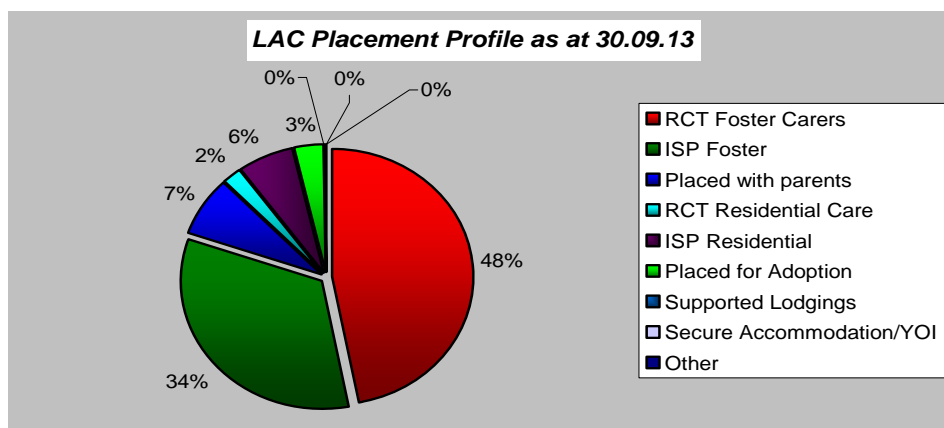
	LAC as at 30.09.11 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.12 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.12 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.13 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.13 by Gender
Female	238	258	257	352	282
Male	323	336	363	269	333
Total	561	594	620	621	615

## 2. Looked After Population by Age Group

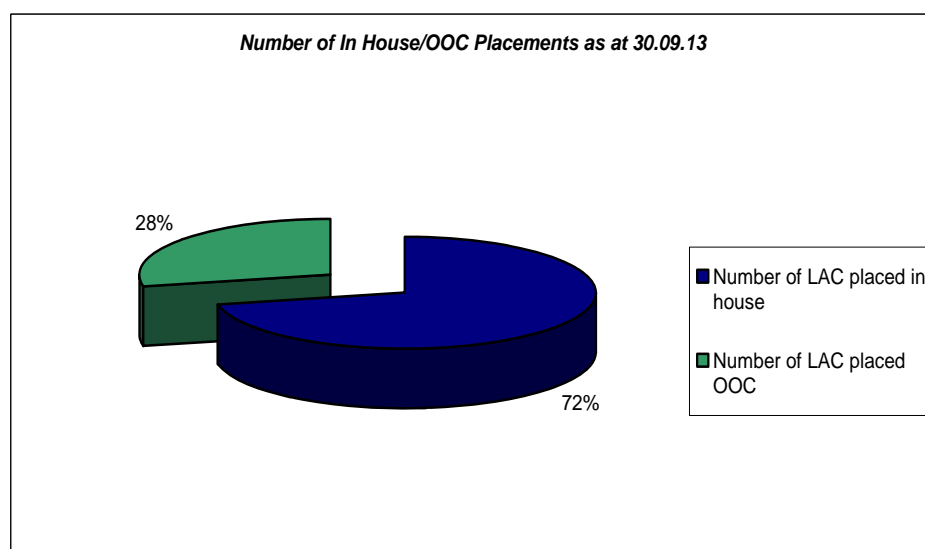


	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
LAC as at 30.09.11 by Age	126	139	109	114	73	561
LAC as at 31.03.12 by Age	137	154	111	109	83	594
LAC as at 30.09.12 by Age	146	161	119	109	85	620
LAC as at 31.03.13 by Age	149	158	124	97	93	621
LAC as at 30.09.13 by Age	145	154	117	109	90	615

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

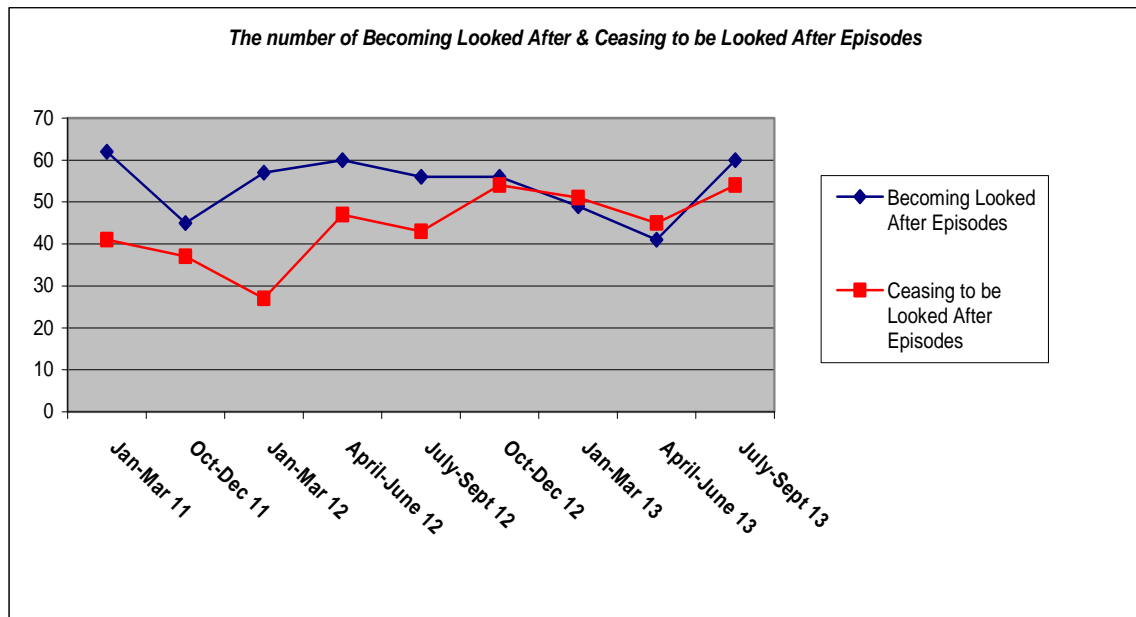


	Sep-11	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13
RCT Foster Carers	235	243	267	278	288
ISP Foster	195	212	200	209	206
Placed with parents	51	52	57	57	46
RCT Residential Care	14	12	12	12	13
ISP Residential	33	39	51	44	39
Placed for Adoption	25	31	28	18	21
Supported Lodgings	4	5	5	3	2
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	0	0	0
Other	4	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>615</b>



	Sep-11	Mar-12	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13
Number of LAC placed in house	381	417	444	436	432
Number of LAC placed OOC	180	177	176	185	183
<b>Total LAC</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>620</b>	<b>621</b>	<b>615</b>
% OOC	32.1%	29.8%	28.4%	29.8%	29.8%

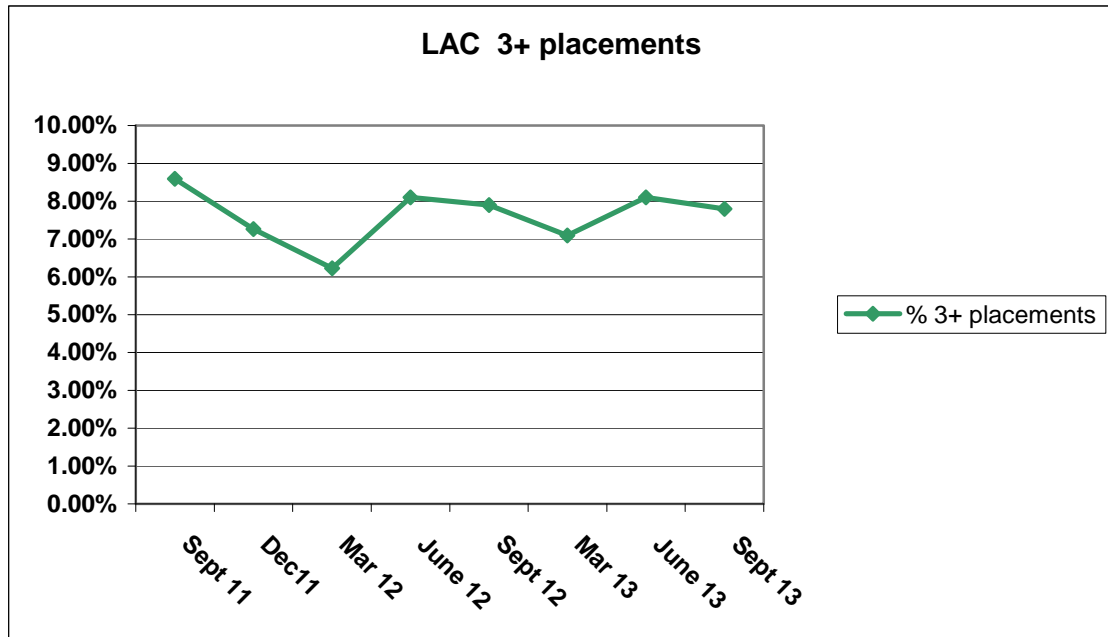
#### 4. Admissions and Discharge Information



	Jan-Mar 11	Oct-Dec 11	Jan-Mar 12	April-June 12	July-Sept 12	Oct-Dec 12	Jan-Mar 13	April-June 13	July-Sept 13
Becoming Looked After Episodes	62	45	57	60	56	56	49	41	60
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	41	37	27	47	43	54	51	45	54



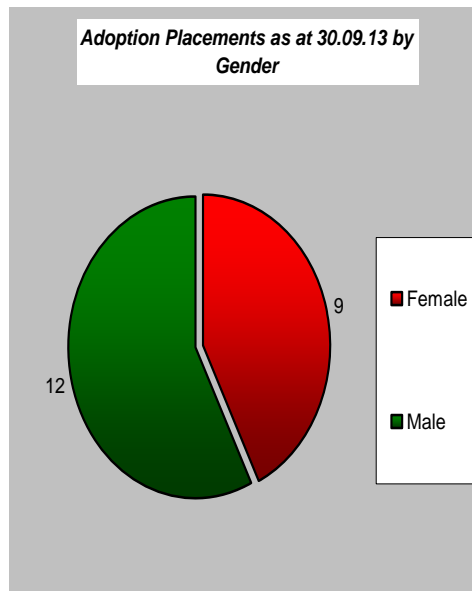
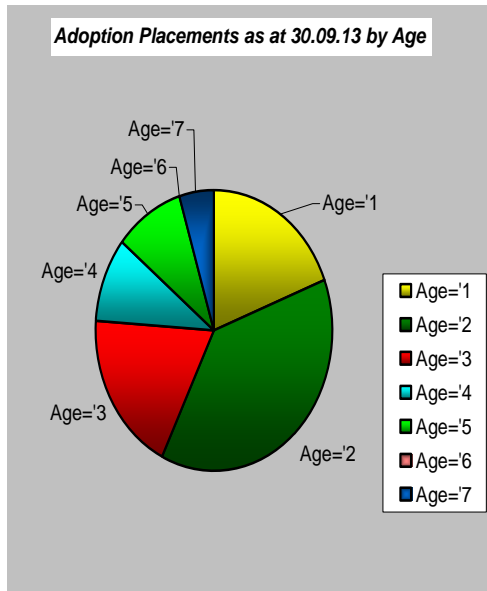
## 5. Placement Stability



	Sept 11	Dec 11	Mar 12	June 12	Sept 12	Mar 13	June 13	Sept 13
% 3+ placements	8.59%	7.26%	6.23%	8.10%	7.90%	7.09%	8.10%	7.80%

## 6. Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 30.09.13 by Age	
Age=0	0
Age=1	4
Age=2	8
Age=3	4
Age=4	2
Age=5	2
Age=6	0
Age=7	1
Age=8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

Adoption Placements as at 30.09.13 by Gender	
Female	9
Male	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>

Adoption Information	
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.09.13	21
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.10.12-30.09.13	36
Number of Children adopted between 01.10.12-30.09.13	39

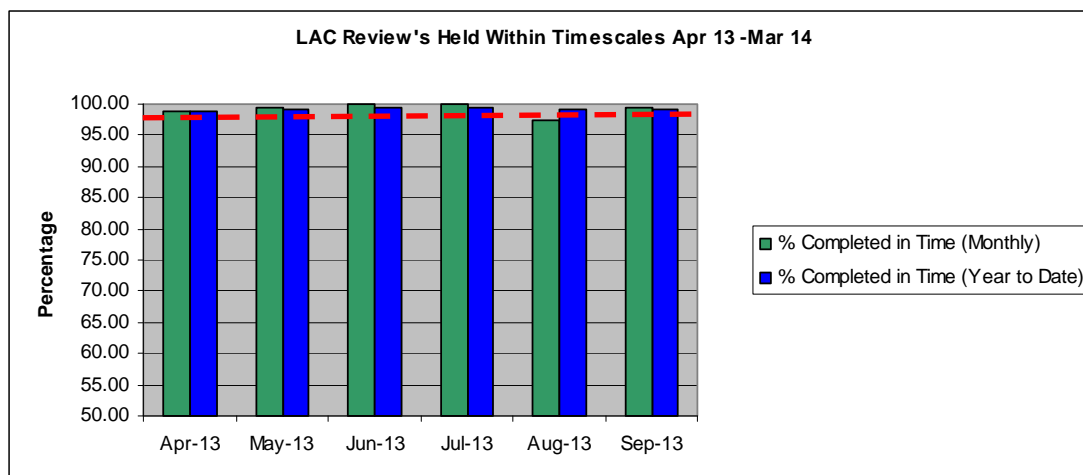
**Review Activity 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013.**

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

The number of looked after children, plus the additional responsibilities of the IRO Team has meant that 927 reviews were due in this 6 month period, which is the largest number ever reported on. Only 8 of these were held outside of the required timescale, overall performance is at 99.14% compliance. This is excellent performance given the logistics of co-ordinating such a large volume of meetings with a considerable and varied range of participants.

The excellent business support arrangements and systems which contribute to the work of the reviewing team continue to be absolutely essential in enabling the team to perform at this current level. The practice of setting review dates with flexibility to reschedule within timescale if problems occur; remains firmly established, along with the commitment of both IROs and business support staff to performance improvement.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Reviews Due</b>	<b>Number held within Timescale</b>	<b>Reviews outside of Timescale</b>	<b>Compliance</b>
April	175	173	2	98.86%
May	170	169	1	99.41%
June	135	135	0	100%
July	135	135	0	100%
August	149	145	4	97.32%
September	163	162	1	99.39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>927</b>	<b>919</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>99.14%</b>



Month	Reviews held out of timescale	Reason
April	2 reviews	1 cancelled due to problems in placement 1 as a parent was hospitalised
May	1 review	Cancelled due to placement breakdown child had to move
June	0	n/a
July	0	n/a
August	4 reviews including 2 siblings	2 cancelled as social worker unavailable ,1 as IRO unavailable and 1 late allocation as not entered in a timely manner on the IT system
September	1 review	Grandmother unwell

**Comparators (last year)**

**October 2011 to March 2012**

**804 reviews held within timescale, 33 outside Total 837= 96%**

**April 2012 to September 2012**

**859 reviews held within timescale, 24 outside Total 883 = 97.30%**

**October 2012 to March 2013**

**862 reviews held within timescale, 22 outside Total 884 = 97.40%**

## **IRO Resolution of Problems**

As outlined earlier the IRO has responsibility to monitor the LA performance in relation to individual children and to raise areas of good practice as well as problems and issues. IROs forward compliments and positive comments to staff and managers to ensure good practice is recognised.

The current guidance implemented in August 2011 introduced a face to face problem resolution meeting which is co-ordinated by the Reviewing team. If problems or issues are not resolved there continue to be arrangements in place to escalate them through the management structure to the Service Director, to the Group Director and to the Chief Executive as required by guidance if necessary.

The aim of the guidance is to:-

- Keep children and young people as its focus
- Streamline the process and make it more consistent, understandable and straightforward for all
- Improve communication between IROs, social workers and their managers and thereby achieve prompt resolution of issues raised
- Ensure records of the process are included on the child or young person's file
- Include a system for both reporting key issues and an overview of all problems and issues regularly to the Service Director now established on quarterly basis.
- Ensure IROs fulfil their responsibilities as set out statutory guidance.

## **Issues raised by IROs October 2012 to March 2013**

There were 34 issues for resolution raised by the IROs this is an increase from the last 6 monthly report that highlighted 27.

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

### **Themes**

#### **1. Lack of preparation for Looked After Children review meetings.**

It is clear that a lack of preparation for meetings has an impact on the future care planning arrangements for children and young people.

The issues raised by the IRO resolution process includes examples where;

- \* No LAC paperwork has been provided for the review meeting
- \* Duty social worker covering the review with little knowledge of the care plan
- \* Unclear care plans presented to parents during the meeting

- \* Statutory visits out of time
- \* No consultation completed for the young person.

The impact of this lack of preparation for individual children and young people has been for example:-

- contact arrangements could not be agreed because the social worker had no knowledge of the agreed plans,
- educational placement could not be identified
- a referral to CAHMS could not be made without the assessment from the social worker.
- care planning process hindered for 2 brothers placed together as Assessment and Progress records had not been completed and the boys' consultation documents had not been completed. Therefore the boys' individual needs could not be addressed and their voices were not heard within the review
- unsupervised contact could not be agreed as there were no firm risk assessments in place and the foster carer who required increased support voiced their concerns

**Resolution:** In all these examples the IRO raised the issue with the relevant team managers who each acted promptly to ensure that the problems were resolved and identified care planning issues addressed. This has to be set within a context of increasing demand and staffing problems currently being experienced within Assessment and Care Planning Services.

## **2. Assessment and Progress Records**

Timescales for completing these documents are not always met.

**Resolution:** Performance is currently being monitored by the Assessment Care Planning Improvement Panel chaired by the Service Director.

## **3. Delay in Discharging Care Orders and Placement Orders**

The former are children who have returned home to the care of parents under specific regulations and for whom it has been subsequently recommended that it is appropriate to discharge their care order. The IRO has liaised with the relevant team manager and service manager to confirm that the preparation of court assessments and reports are in place.

**Resolution:** Specific resolution meetings have been held which include team managers and service managers and problems addressed.

More recently the issue of revocation of Placement Orders has been highlighted, these are situations where the care plan for the child was originally adoption but due to specific circumstances the care plan has been changed for example to long term fostering. However the Placement Order which enables the Council to place the child with adopters has not been revoked as required. Work is currently being undertaken by Childrens Services to ensure that once these orders are no longer relevant they are presented to the courts and revoked without delay. The IRO team manager

has been involved in gathering the information required for the legal department.

## **Individual Cases**

### **1. Foster Placements**

The IRO in this situation highlighted the issues raised by a young person at the review meeting and as part of the consultation that they were not happy in their foster placement. This was discussed further aside from the meeting with the team managers from the social work team and fostering team and the advocacy and complaints service have now become involved.

Resolution: The young person has moved to an alternative foster placement.

### **2. Residential Placements**

The IRO and Social Worker, during a review meeting, became increasingly concerned about the suitability of the residential provider and their capacity to provide a suitable placement for the young person. Also issues relating to the risk assessments in place and long term care planning needed addressing as this teenage girl was placing herself at risk by absconding and sexual exploitation was an increasing concern.

Resolution: A resolution meeting was held with the service manager to address the areas of concern. Using the protocol for young people who display risky behaviours, 6 weekly meetings are being held to ensure the risks are managed as effectively as possible. This teenager girl has now moved to an alternative residential placement.

### **3. Contact issues**

An issue about the delay in arranging contact for a young sibling group who were in separate foster placements was highlighted by the IRO. The review participants expressed their concern that this contact plan had not been put into place and would have an impact on the wellbeing of the siblings.

**Resolution:** The team manager ensured that the contact plan was implemented.

### **4. Complex Care planning**

The IRO raised the issue within a complex case relating to a mother and baby where assessments and care planning arrangements were taking a time to conclude. Separating out of the different issues for mother and baby could consequently be delayed.

**Resolution:** A resolution meeting was held with the service manager present to discuss fully the timescales and when the legal issues would be presented to the courts to ensure appropriate care plans were in place for mother and baby.

## **5. Core Assessment**

This relates to a young person accommodated in an independent external foster placement with emerging complex needs. The IRO used the resolution process to highlight the lack of a core assessment and focused care planning which has meant the correct services to meet the young person's needs could not be identified.

**Resolution:** The team manager was made aware that the assessment needed completing to ensure that the care plan being requested was the most appropriate for the young persons long term needs. This has now been completed and the foster placement is now more settled.

## **Current issues for the Reviewing Service**

### **Capacity**

There are 7.6 full time equivalent IRO posts and case loads are approximately 100 LAC per full time IRO. This figure takes into account the responsibilities for reviews of children receiving a series of short term breaks, young people up to 18 years subject of pathway plans and Children In Need who receive services from joint RCT and Merthyr IFST.

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

This position reflects the additional resources which were made available to the Reviewing Team both through Children and Young People Act 2008, IFST grant monies and LAC action plan during 2011

It has to be said that the average caseload figure has risen again during the period reported. Performance on holding reviews within timescale as mentioned earlier in the report continues to be excellent; however the number of children each IRO is responsible for does have a detrimental affect on the capacity of individual IROs to fulfil their quality assurance role and follow up issues of concern.

### **Development work**

#### **• Pathway Plans**

IROs are responsible for convening and chairing pathway plan reviews for young people from age 16 to 17 years who had previously been looked after. A small group has met to develop a process for such reviews and written guidance has been produced.



There are new developments and draft guidance from Welsh Government which provides more choice for young people about when they have to leave the foster care system. RCT is a pilot for “When I am Ready” scheme which allows for young people to remain in foster care post 18. The role of the IRO has not been fully addressed yet but any future developments will be reported.

- **Short term breaks**

The IROs took on responsibility for reviewing children with disabilities who receive a series of short term breaks formally from September 2011, as the reviews arise. At present 77 children now have an allocated IRO.

The reviewing team manager established a working group with representatives from disabled children’s team, reviewing team, performance management and the fostering team to address the practice, performance and administrative arrangements for taking on these new responsibilities for reviewing short term breaks. This group has recently met to discuss the future planning of a process of consultation on short break arrangements.

The reviewing team are part of a “buddy” scheme and work with the Disabled Children Team and have good contacts to ensure that the reviews are working for both teams. This has meant that the review form has been updated and improved and further discussions are being held about consultation guide for children with disabilities.

Work is underway to produce written guidance so that the IRO responsibilities are clear for staff and families

### **Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) Family Plans**

IROs have responsibility for reviewing family plans when IFST are involved in providing a service to children and their families in both RCT and Merthyr.

The lead IROs and team manager have met with the IFST on a regular basis to evaluate the arrangements in place and produce written guidance for staff and families. The IRO team has produced a detailed report for the IFST board on the work in reviewing of IFST plans.

### **RAG system**

The Reviewing team RAG system (**red, amber green**) is a way of categorising at a glance children and young people reviewed by a specific IRO against set criteria.

Its aim is to identify individual children or young people whose circumstances are of concern and to focus activity and target resources as effectively and in as timely a way as possible. Initially it was agreed that the placement and resource panel had a key role to play and RAG information was beginning to be considered through the auspices of the Reviewing Team Manager.

However this responsibility now rests with the LAC Outcomes Board and reports are to be presented via the Head of Service. This will ensure that the opportunity is maximised to identify any themes or problems which can be resolved on a strategic level.

The RAG system is in addition proving an effective tool for IROs and their manager to organise caseloads and focus attention and activity on children and young people whose circumstances cause most concern or require move on.

### **Consultation with children and young people**

The Reviewing Team Manager is keen to ensure that young people, their parents and foster carers are able to contribute to the review process.

Last year a small group of looked after young people worked on producing a guide to access consultation documents on line. With the help of the WICID team a guide has now been placed on the website and during this reporting period the reviewing team has promoted the use of this as a method for obtaining young peoples views.

In light of the work outlined above the IRO team view is that a dedicated website for young people to access information about being looked after should be developed. This is something that in the future may be subject of a for a graduate officer to take on as a project.

### **Outcomes based reviews**

A development day has been held with the IRO team, arranged by the team manager, to update and further develop the LAC review paperwork, particularly to make it more outcome focussed. A new format was which will be trialled by the team. The initial feedback is that this development makes the review more focused on the care plan and the needs of children whilst also highlighting the strengths and risks that are present. This work is still in the early stages and once a whole service outcomes based framework is implemented within Children's Services the reviewing team will be well placed to adopt the chosen model.

### **Personal Education plans for LAC**

The reviewing team has been part of a task group with colleagues from schools, Ymbarel and the Education directorate which has revised the personal education plan for LAC and its accompanying guidance. The aim is to make the guidance more straightforward to complete, focused on the achievements of and support for individual looked after children and young people

Implementation commenced in the autumn term and training has been provided for designated teachers within schools; the Reviewing Team Manager being a key Childrens Services contributor.

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December 2013

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