

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2014 - 15

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

19th JANUARY 2015

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

Agenda Item No: 4
INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) REPORT

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

Authors: Sheryn Edwards Reviewing Team Manager
Sheryn.Edwards@rctcbc.gov.uk
Liz Pearce, Head of Safeguarding and Standards,
Liz.Pearce@rctcbc.gov.uk
Children's Services Ty Pennant 01443 490400

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 1st April to 30th September 2014.

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 consultation with children and young people.
- Positive internal audit report
- Use of the resolution process, alongside caseload size and the IRO quality assurance role.

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

December 2014

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 1st April to 30th September 2014.

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 or on remand
- 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 team works on the basis that each IRO (fte) is responsible for the reviews of an average 100 looked after children a rudimentary caseload weighting system has been developed . It is not always possible to maintain this standard given the volume of children reviewed. The team has moved during the reporting period and is now is located, at Ty Catrin in Pontypridd, where facilities for reviews are much improved although the majority are still 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 CAFCASS unresolved concerns as appropriate.

Frequency of Reviews

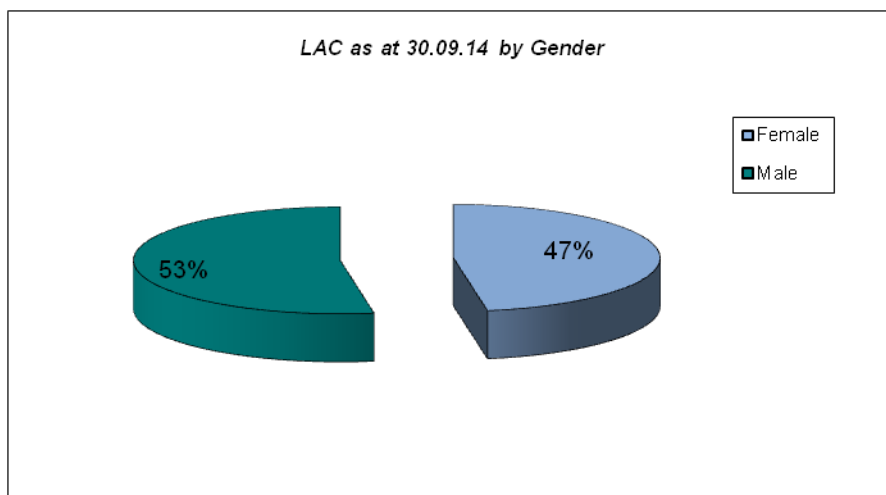
Looked after children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- 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.

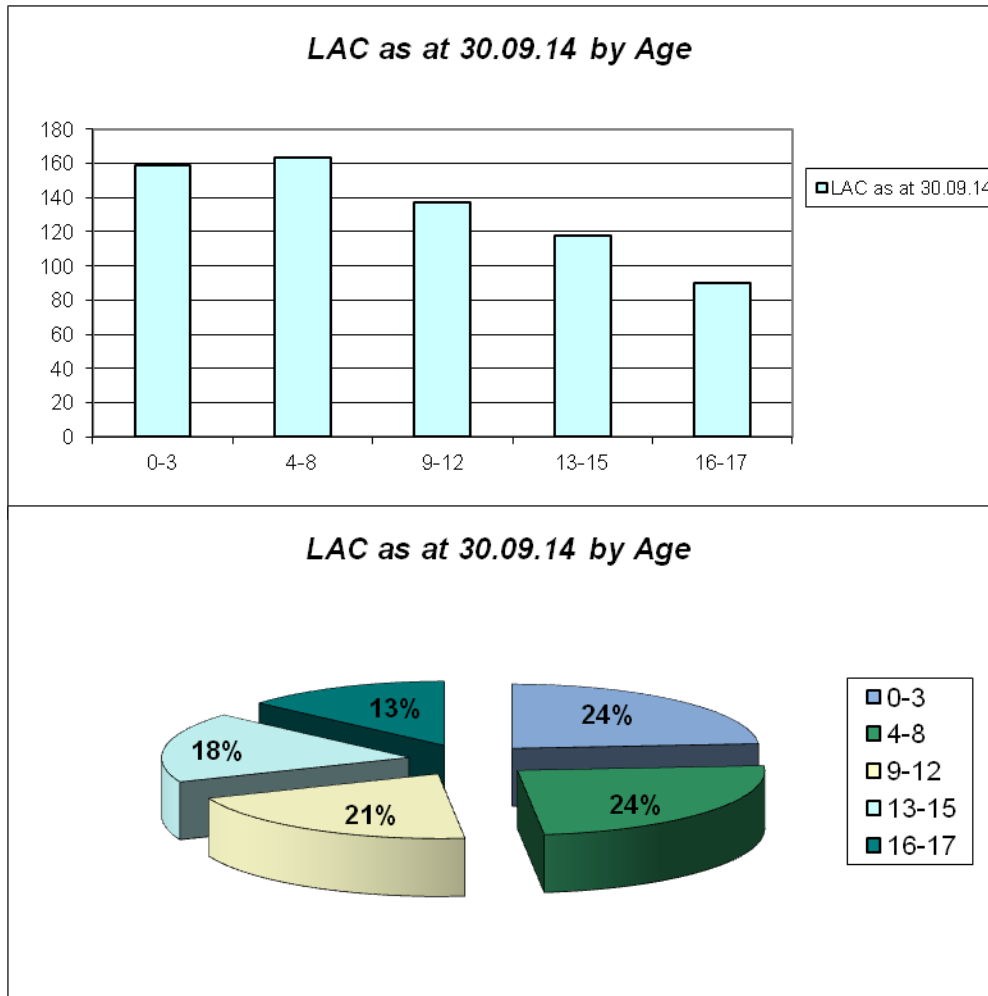
Looked After Population (30th September 2014)

1. Looked After Population by Gender



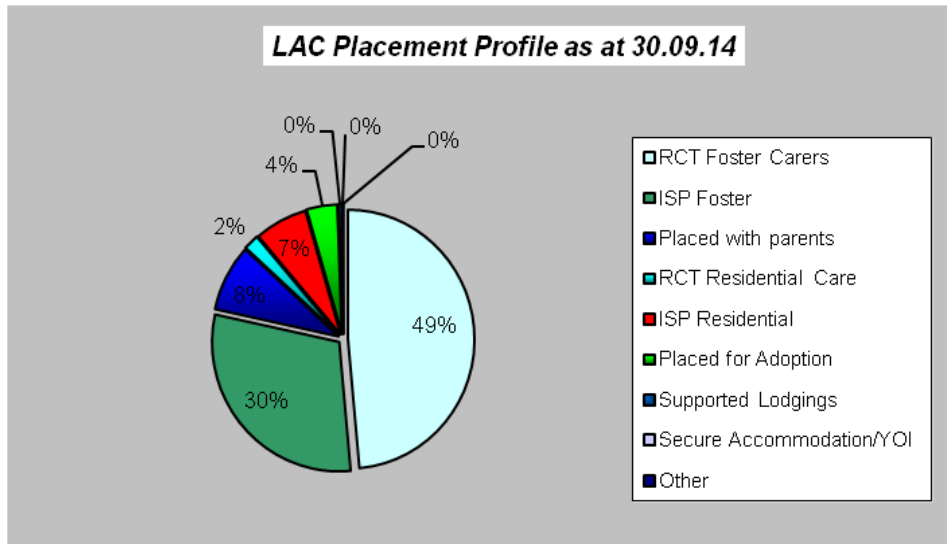
	LAC as at 30.09.12 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.13 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.13 by Gender	LAC as at 31.03.14 by Gender	LAC as at 30.09.14 by Gender
Female	257	352	284	310	316
Male	363	269	333	341	351
Total	620	621	617	651	667

2. Looked After Population by Age Group

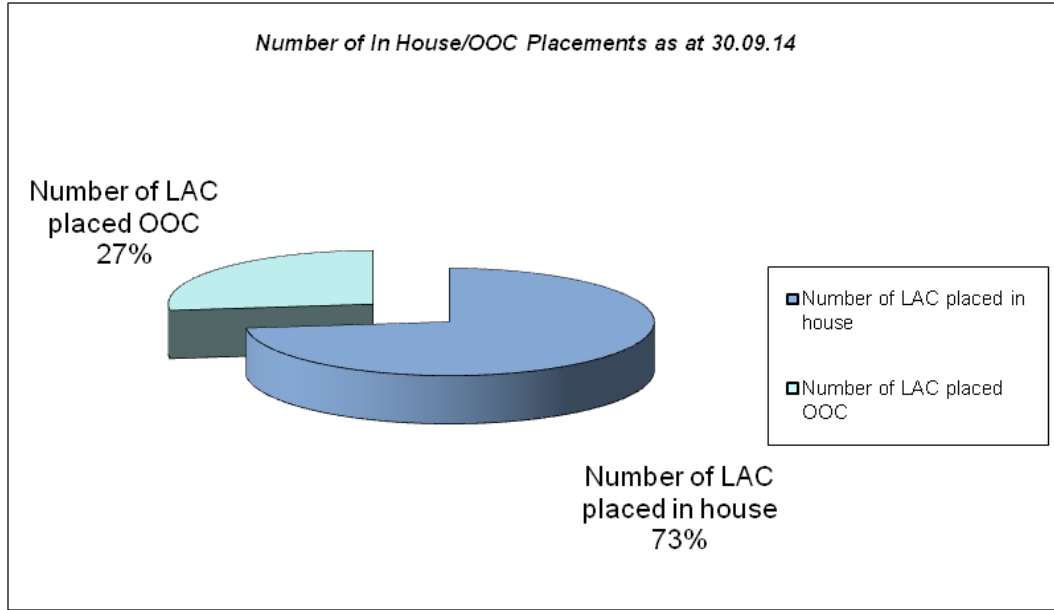


	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
LAC as at 30.09.12 by Age	146	161	119	109	85	620
LAC as at 31.03.13 by Age	149	158	124	97	93	621
LAC as at 30.09.13 by Age	146	154	118	109	90	617
LAC as at 31.03.14 by Age	161	159	130	112	89	651
LAC as at 30.09.14 by Age	159	163	137	118	90	667

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

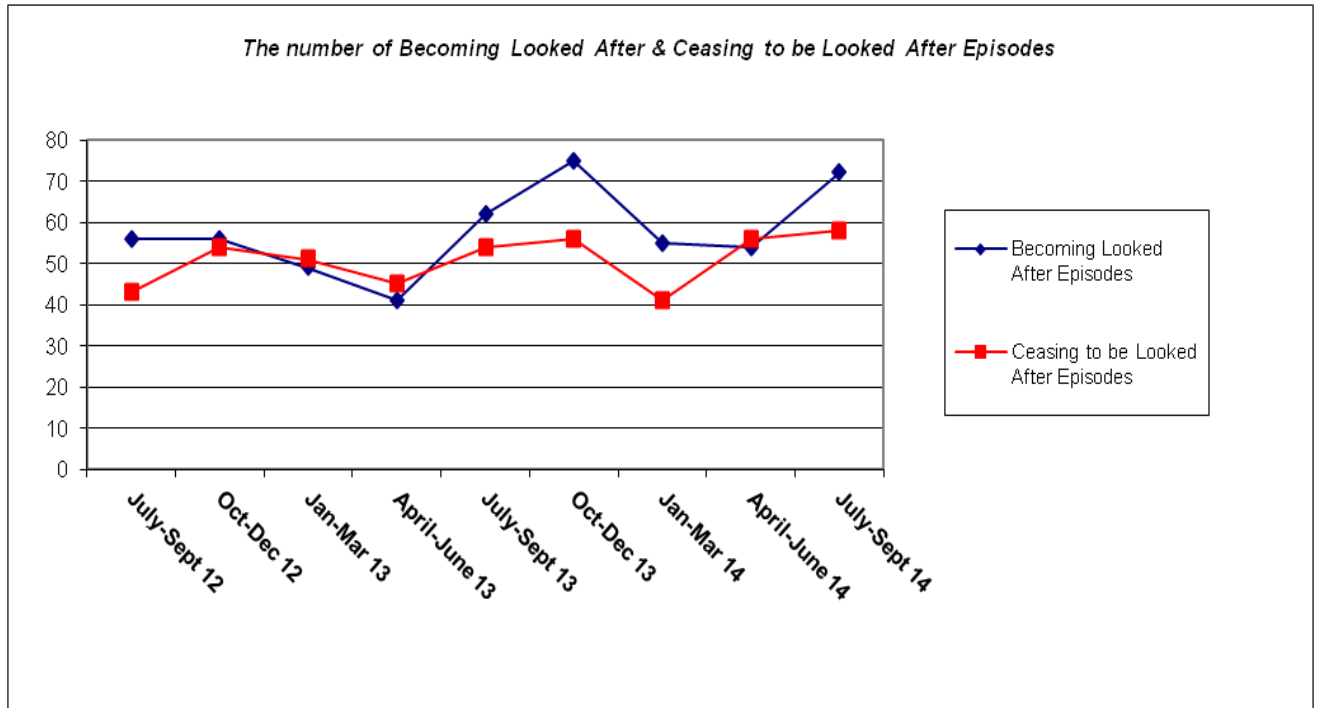


	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14
RCT Foster Carers	267	278	290	304	324
ISP Foster	200	209	206	210	199
Placed with parents	57	57	46	52	56
RCT Residential Care	12	12	13	10	13
ISP Residential	51	44	39	40	45
Placed for Adoption	28	18	21	27	26
Supported Lodgings	5	3	2	5	3
Secure Accommodation/YOI	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	0	3	0
Total	620	621	617	651	667



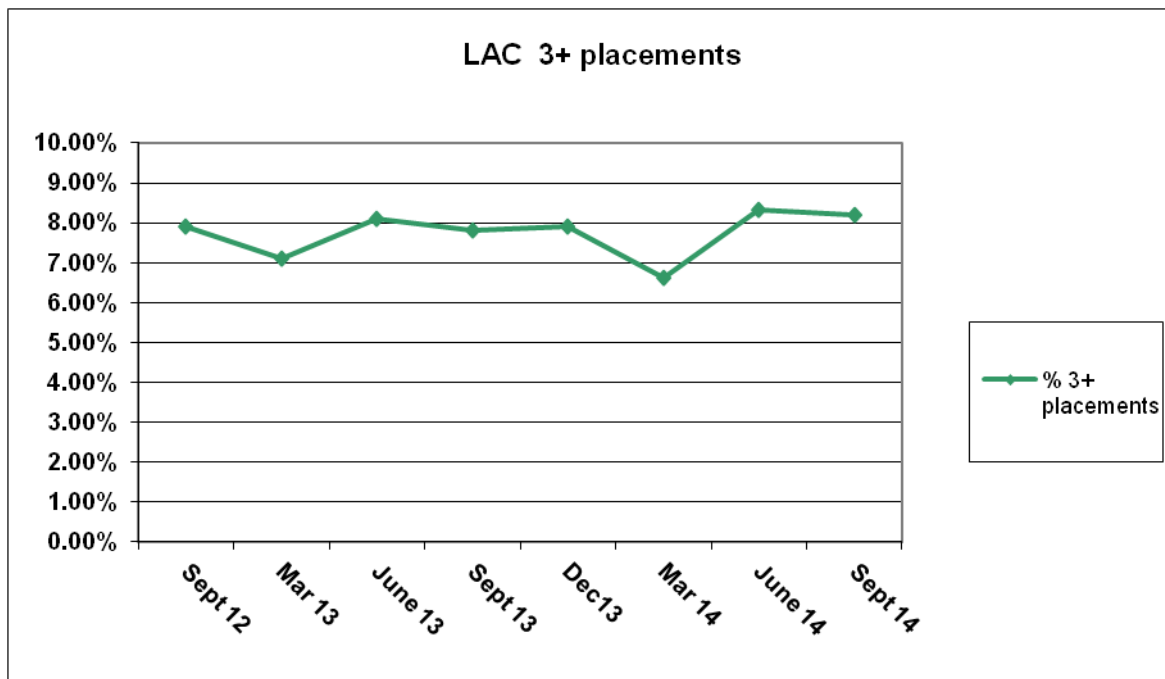
	Sep-12	Mar-13	Sep-13	Mar-14	Sep-14
Number of LAC placed in house	444	436	434	476	485
Number of LAC placed OOC	176	185	183	175	182
Total LAC	620	621	617	651	667
% OOC	28.4%	29.8%	29.7%	26.9%	27.3%

4. Admissions and Discharge Information



	July-Sept 12	Oct-Dec 12	Jan-Mar 13	April-June 13	July-Sept 13	Oct-Dec 13	Jan-Mar 14	April-June 14	July-Sept 14
Becoming Looked After Episodes	56	56	49	41	62	75	55	54	72
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	43	54	51	45	54	56	41	56	58

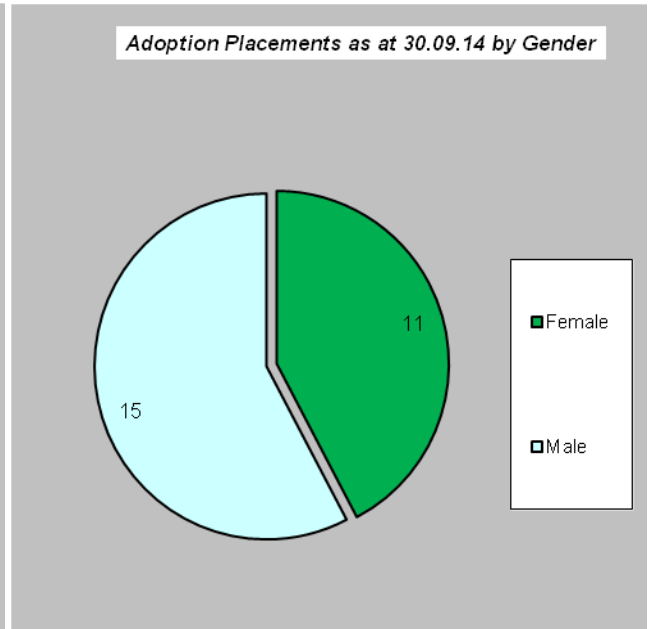
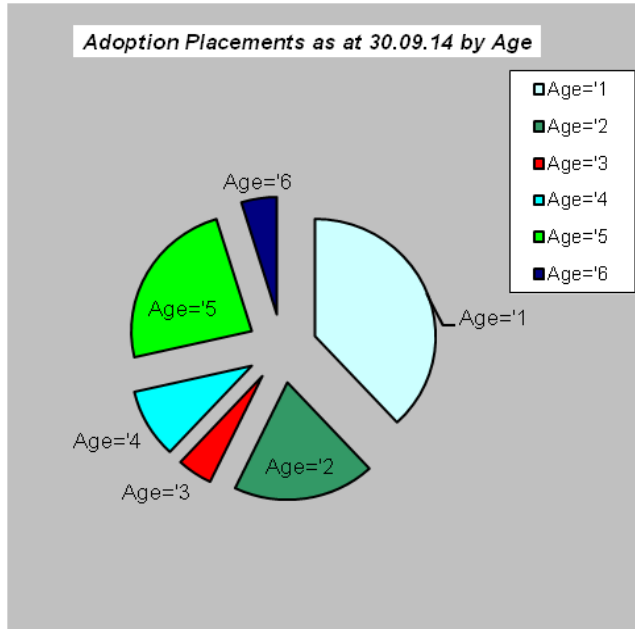
5. Placement Stability



	Sept 12	Mar 13	June 13	Sept 13	Dec13	Mar 14	June 14	Sept 14
% 3+ placements	7.90%	7.09%	8.10%	7.80%	7.90%	6.62%	8.32%	8.20%

6. Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 30.09.14 by Age	Total
Age=0	5
Age=1	8
Age=2	4
Age=3	1
Age=4	2
Age=5	5
Age=6	1
Age=7	0
Age=8	0
Total	26

Adoption Placements as at 30.09.14 by Gender	Total
Female	11
Male	15
Total	26

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.09.14	26
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.10.13-30.09.14	42
Number of Children adopted between 01.10.13-30.09.14	35

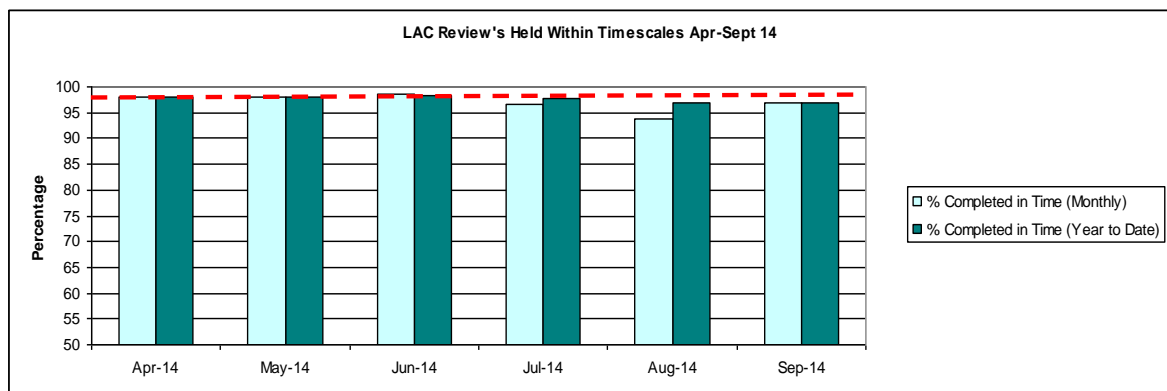
Review Activity 1st April to 30th September 2014.

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 fallen very slightly. The absence of an IRO for part of the period in an unexpected manner will have had an impact as will the increase in numbers of LAC.

This has meant that 978 reviews were due in this 6 month period, which once again for the fourth consecutive report is the largest number ever reported on. 29 of these reviews were held outside of the required timescale, overall performance is at 97.03% compliance. This continues yet again to be 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. Capacity is at its limits currently given the volume of work required. 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.

Month	Reviews Due	Number held within Timescale	Reviews outside of Timescale	Compliance
April	211	207	4	98.1%
May	154	151	3	98.05%
June	133	131	2	98.50%
July	174	168	6	96.55%
August	143	134	9	93.71%
September	163	158	5	96.93%
Total	978	949	29	97.03%



Month	Reviews held out of timescale	Reason
April	4, individual reviews	Parents or social worker unavailable for 2 of the reviews, 1 BLA date late being entered on system and 1 wrongly calculated
May	3 individual reviews	3 postponed due to un-availability of SW
June	2 individual reviews	1 postponed due to travel incident another as no convening form received
July	6, sibling group of 4 plus 2 individual reviews	Postponed as 4 late entered on system, 1 due to sports day and 1 no parent able; to attend
August	9 sibling group of 4, 2 sibling groups of 2 plus an individual review ,	4 postponed due to industrial action, 2 as late entered on system, 2 as court hearing on that day 1 carer on holiday
September	5 individual reviews	1 postponed due to bereavement 1 IRO ill, 1 mother unable to attend 1 placement unable to attend 1 problems with sibling in placement

Comparators (last year)

October 2012 to March 2013

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

April 2013 to September 2013

919 reviews held within timescale, 8 outside Total 827 = 99.14%

October 2013 to March 2014

917 reviews held within timescale, 20 outside Total 937 = 98.50%

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 includes 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 April to September 2014

There were 15 issues for resolution raised using the IRO resolution process during this period. This is a decrease from the last 6 monthly report where 43 issues were raised.

The increasing workload demand and staffing deficits, highlighted in the previous report may have contributed to the level of issues requiring resolution at that time. Capacity issues experienced by the Assessment Care Planning teams has a direct impact on the review outcomes and although social workers and team managers try to ensure that reviews are prioritised they were not always able to ensure the allocation of looked after children and implement care planning recommendations.

This reporting period has demonstrated improved care planning for looked after children and more effective working relationships where IROs and social workers are resolving issues aside for the formal process.

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

Themes

- **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.

- **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.

Resolution: The IROs have liaised with the relevant team managers and service managers to confirm that the arrangements for the preparation of assessments for court and reports are in place.

The issue of revocation of Placement Orders has also 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 Children's Services to ensure that once these orders are no longer relevant an application is made to the court to ensure revocation without delay.

Individual Cases

1. Out Of County Relative Foster Placement

The IRO in this situation highlighted the funding issue raised in a review meeting that was impacting on the implementation of the care plan. In order for the two children to remain with their extended family on a long term basis alterations were required to the property.

Resolution: The issue was raised with service managers in order for the care planning to be concluded. Funding has now been agreed and ratified by the Service Director. .

2. LAC paperwork not provided

The IRO raised the concern that the relatives caring for this young child had not been provided with any LAC paperwork or plan for the child with the information they required.

Resolution: After the review meeting the IRO informed the social worker and team manager using the resolution process in order that this was completed and information shared with the family.

3. LAC paperwork not signed

The IRO raised the issue of a young person accommodated with maternal grandmother where the necessary fostering assessments had not been completed or PLO process initiated.

Resolution: The IRO used the resolution process to arrange a meeting with the service manager. The plan for this child is now SGO and assessments are underway.

4. Complex Care planning

The IRO was concerned about a teenage girl where there were identified risks in her remaining in her foster placement but as a core assessment had not been completed a permanence plan was difficult to agree in the review meeting.

Resolution: The IRO raised the issue formally with the team manager in order that it was highlighted and prioritised. This young person has since moved from the placement on an unplanned basis and remains accommodated.

5. Drift and delay

This situation relates to a young person in foster care where the department were not fulfilling the requirements of the care plan. Play therapy was an outstanding issue along with specific training in techniques for the foster carer to manage complex behaviours. These issues had been discussed in a number of review meetings and no progress was being made.

Resolution: The IRO used the resolution process to highlight matters with the team manager and service manager in order for the funding to be made available if appropriate. This is now in place and the care planning for this child is more secure as her identified needs are being met.

6. Contact issues.

The IRO raised the issue of lack of contact arrangements for three siblings whose care plan detailed specific contact arrangements. The contact was not taking place as no worker was available to facilitate. This was discussed at length in meetings and the lack of contact was having a detrimental impact on the children and their future need for family links.

Resolution: The issue was raised by IRO via the resolution process with the outcome being that team manager agreed to look further at suitable arrangements.

Current issues for the Reviewing Service

Capacity

There are 7.6 full time equivalent IRO posts and case loads are approximately just over 100 LAC per full time IRO. The average caseload figure has risen once again during again during the period reported. The number of children each IRO is responsible for does without doubt have a detrimental affect on the capacity of individual IROs to fulfil their quality assurance role and follow up issues of concern. This has been highlighted in a recent inspection report. Performance on holding reviews within timescale as mentioned earlier in the report continues to be very good, however the concern is about the capacity of the Reviewing Team to continue to provide a quality service. This is in the context of the good practice of the IRO following the child, wherever the placement which can mean a considerable amount of travelling and time taken to review individual children.

The figures above take 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.

The Manager is currently looking at different means of maximising the effectiveness of the IRO resources within the team. Examples of this have been the emerging use of technology to assist in reviews e.g. conference calls and the next step is the potential to engage external IROs to review children placed at considerable distances from RCT. This is not without its difficulties as these children and young people may be particularly vulnerable as a Corporate Parent the Council need to ensure it discharges its obligation safely and effectively.

Development work

Pathway Plans

IROs are responsible for convening and chairing pathway plan reviews for all young people looked after and the young people from age 16 to 17 years who had previously been looked after.

There are new developments and guidance from Welsh Government which provides more choice for young people about when they have to leave the foster care system. RCT has been a successful pilot for the "When I am Ready" scheme which allows for young people to remain in foster care post 18. It has been agreed that in RCT the IRO will chair the first review meeting post 18 under this new arrangement. The team manager and an IRO will

continue to attend the development groups taking forward the new guidance produced and the reviewing process.

The team manager has met with the Aftercare Team Manager and the Fostering Service Manager to look at ways of monitoring independent living skills for young people whilst in foster care and create a preparation for independence checklist. An example document has been shared with the relevant teams for consultation in the first instance.

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 arose. At the time of the last report 74 children had an allocated IRO.

Considerable development work has been undertaken over the last 6 months which has included the Reviewing Team Manager led by the DCT Service Manager. As a consequence a new DCT Resource Panel will come into operation in the New Year. The panel will allocate support to disabled children in a proportionate manner according to assessed need. In terms of short breaks they will now be allocated as a CIN or LAC service. IROs will be provided for those children looked after. A rationalisation exercise has already taken place for children currently receiving short breaks to which each IRO contributed. Consequently IROs resources will now focus on reviewing children with complex additional needs rather than those well supported by families.

Consultation with children and young people new group

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

Two years ago a small group of looked after young people worked on producing a guide to access consultation documents online. With the help of the WICID team a guide was placed on the website. It was clear that ongoing advertising and promotion was required as the young people are using this means of communication with the IROs less. The IROs will continue to encourage this link as a method for obtaining young peoples views, aside from the consultation documents.

This year a different consultation group was organised by the reviewing team and an event held in the new office base, Ty Catrin. There was another very good turn out and along with the Participation Worker; the IROs helped facilitate the day. 14 young people attended and all gave their thoughts and views, which will be used to improve the quality of services in the reviewing team. The theme of the event was how young people could be central to their review meetings and their voice heard in the process. The group worked very

well together and were keen to attend future events which will be organised for these children and young people who are currently looked after.

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. The team are very pleased that a graduate officer will be working on this project in 2015.

Outcomes based reviews

A development day was held, arranged by the team manager, to update and further develop the LAC review paperwork, particularly to make it more outcome focussed so that the decisions and recommendations made a review meetings are relevant. 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 ongoing and some IROs have found it difficult to keep up with the developments with the amount of review administration they have to complete. However, 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.

Audit

The Reviewing team was subject of an internal audit during June 2014 the final report bring published in August. Audit opinion concluded:-

'The scheduling of Looked After Children (LAC) reviews by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) is considered to be effectively managed with opportunity for improvement.

There are robust databases that record all children that will require planned reviews, and all the children in the Internal Audit sample had a date planned for their next review. There was clear evidence that reviews had taken place as planned.....

Guidance in respect of Red Amber Green (RAG) categorisation has been developed and issued to IROs.

Sheryn Edwards
 Reviewing Team Manager
 Liz Pearce,
 Head of Safeguarding and Standards,
 December 2014

This page intentionally blank