

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

6TH NOVEMBER 2017

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) REPORT

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Corporate Parenting Board, with information about the activity of the IRO Service.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To note the contents of the attached report

3. BACKGROUND

- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (referred to as the SSB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The Act was implemented on April 6th
- 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 and Support 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.
- 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 Act, placed with foster carers, in residential or secure establishments, living with kinship carers or placed for adoption.

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

Attached at Appendix 1 is the monitoring report for the period 1st October 2016- June 30th 2017.

4. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period has been extended to include performance information from the last 3 quarters (01.10.16-30.06.17).
- During this reporting period, the average number of children Looked After by RCT was 688. There was a continuing pattern of slightly more boys than girls becoming Looked After, with the majority being under 8.
- Work is on-going in Childrens Services to reduce CLA numbers, part of which is an increased emphasis in the Reviewing process on monitoring progress towards a return home when the child does not have a Permanency Plan.
- As of 30.06.17, 71% of all children looked after were placed with foster carers, 54% of these with RCT carers. The percentage of children placed Out of County has remained at approximately 26% throughout this period.
- 1,358 review meetings were due in this 9 month period, which is an increase of 35 over the previous 9 months. 44 of the review meetings were held outside the required timescale; overall performance is 96.8% compliance, which falls slightly short of our target of 98.5%. Despite this, performance is still considered excellent in terms of meeting PI's, given the number of review meetings required, without any increase in the size of the Reviewing Team.

5. KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- Good performance has been maintained in relation to timeliness and quality of CLA Review meetings. Volume of work and team capacity continue to impact not only on the IROs' ability to produce full written records of the review meetings but also on their ability to monitor the implementation of the Part 6 Care and Support Plans as closely as they would wish.



- Continuing developments in the organisation of Reviewing Service to reduce duplication of meetings and work towards a child having the same Reviewing Officer for all their Child Protection Conferences, CLA Review meetings and IFST Reviews.
- On-going development of the Two Sides website and links with Blueprint and Voices from Care.
- Increasing participation of children, young people and their families in the Reviewing process.
- Streamlining and strengthening of the Resolution process and the IRO quality assurance role.
- Strengthening links with Advocacy Providers and with CAFCASS.

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

July 2017

Relevant Legislation and Guidance

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Part 6 Code of Practice, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015, RCT IRO Roles and Responsibilities, RCT IRO Resolution Protocol

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 children looked after (CLA) for the period to **1st October 2016- 30th June 2017**.

Background

The Social Services and Well-being Act (referred to as the SSWB Act) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015 (referred to as the CPPCR Regulations) replace previous legislation and guidance pertaining to the role and functions of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

The CPPCR Regulations specify the circumstances in which the local authority **must** consult the IRO and when the IRO **must** consult with the child. The Regulations also specify 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 SSB 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 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.

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

- looked after subject to an Interim Care Order or a Care Order under Section 38/31 of the Children Act 1989. This includes children who are placed with a parent or a kinship carer as well as children placed in foster or residential care.
- Accommodated with the agreement of parents (s76 SSWB Act) - this includes a series of short term breaks
- In an Adoptive Placement prior to an Adoption Order being granted;
- Detained in Young Offender Institutions and subject to a Care Order or remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation

- 18 and under and have a Pathway Plan

All Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) plans are also reviewed by an IRO.

Frequency of reports

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

The Reviewing Service

The Reviewing Service currently sits within the remit of the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Support.

The SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice specifies 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 CLA Reviewing Teams were amalgamated in line with good practice as defined in the SSWB Act and to develop more resilience within the service.

The current average workload for a full-time IRO focussed on chairing CLA Review meetings is approximately **94** children. IROs are also chairing Child Protection Conferences, combined Review CP Conferences and CLA Review meetings, Integrated Family Support Team (ISFT) Reviews and Short Break Reviews.

The team 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).

Purpose of 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 focus 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 a Part 6 Care and Support Plan is a key component of the care planning process and is a continuous process. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the well-being of the child, monitor progress and make decisions to amend the plan or reconfirm previous decisions as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstance. 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 as additional to the basic cost of placement appropriate/still required
- Has the child been visited as required both by the CPPCR Regulations and by the needs of the child, and what is 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 addressed

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

The IRO now 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 Resolution process

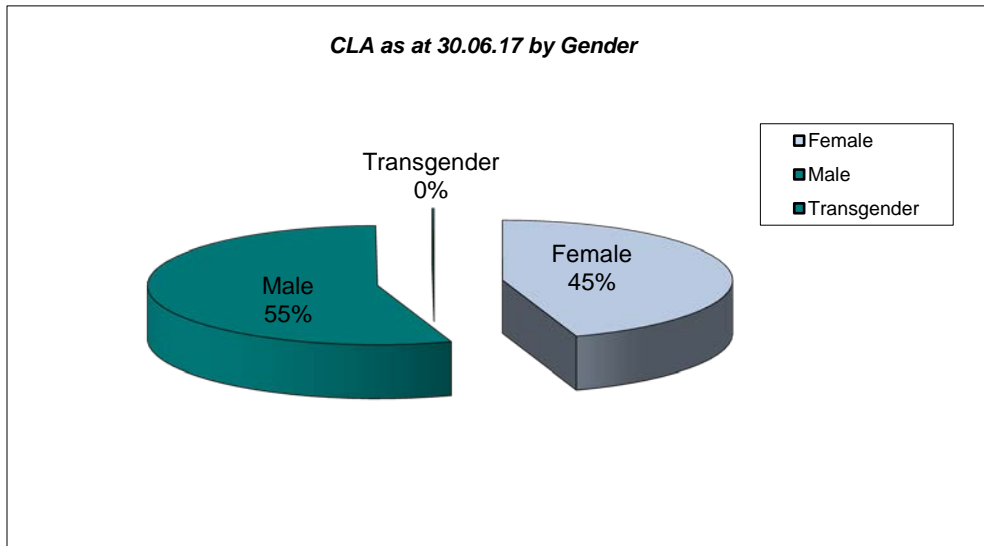
Frequency of Reviews

Looked After children review meetings must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- Within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After, or having an unplanned change of placement
- Subsequently within 3 months
- 6 monthly thereafter
- Review meetings should be brought forward if there is a significant change in the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, issues around the child's safety or a failure to carry out an important aspect of the plan
- The cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family
- Children receiving a series of short breaks 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.

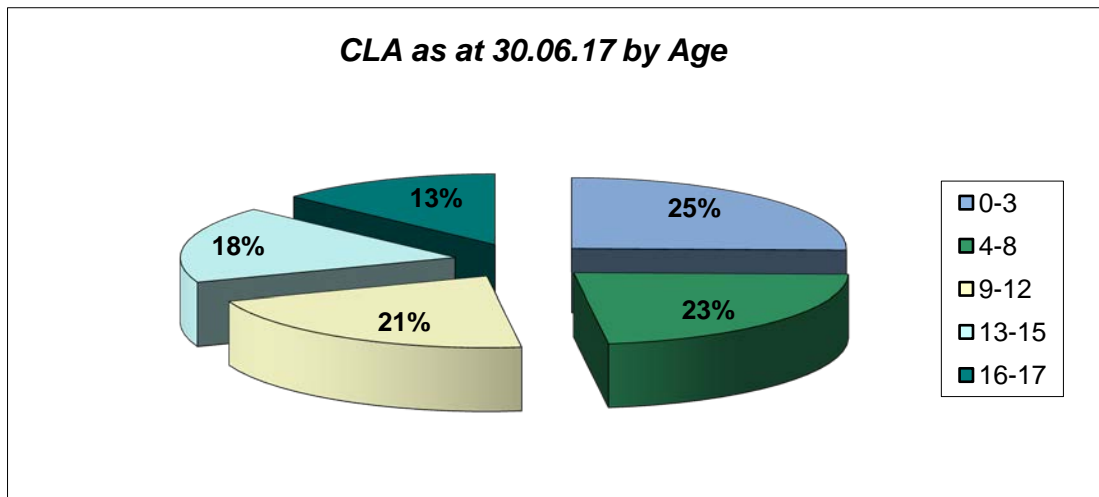
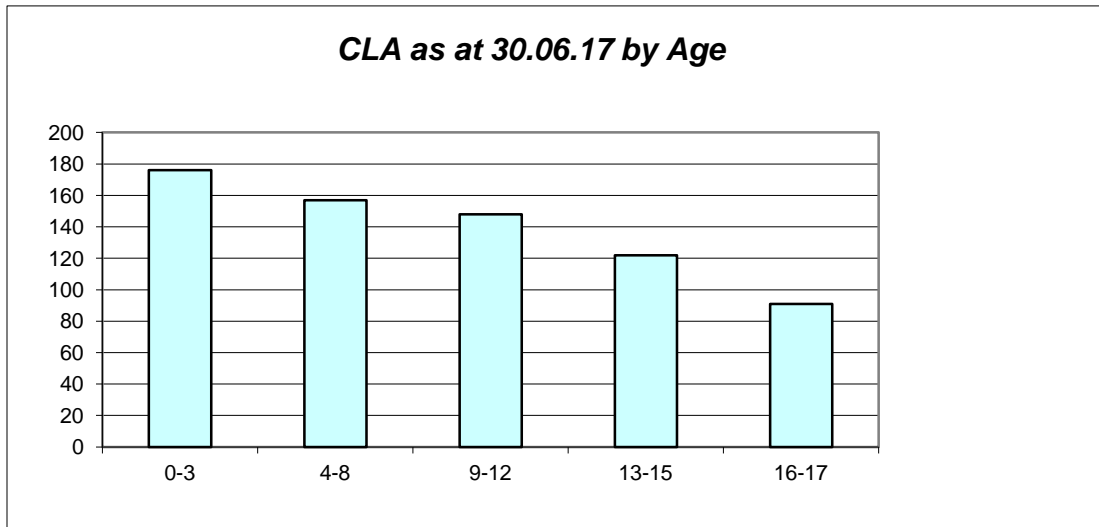
Looked After Population (30th June 2017)

1. Looked After Population by Gender



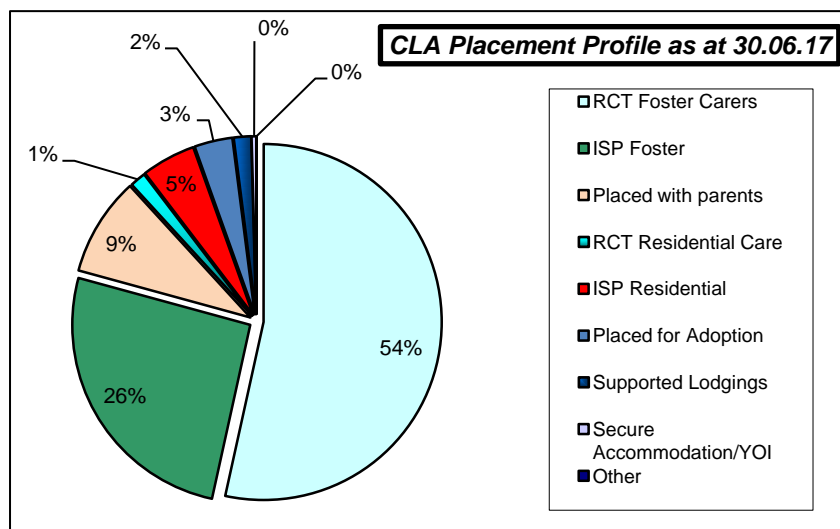
	CLA as at 31.03.16 by Gender	CLA as at 30.09.16 by Gender	CLA as at 31.12.16 by Gender	CLA as at 31.03.17 by Gender	CLA as at 30.06.17 by Gender
Female	296	312	319	316	311
Male	327	353	362	374	382
Transgender	0	0	0	0	1
Total	623	665	681	690	694

2. Looked After Population by Age Group



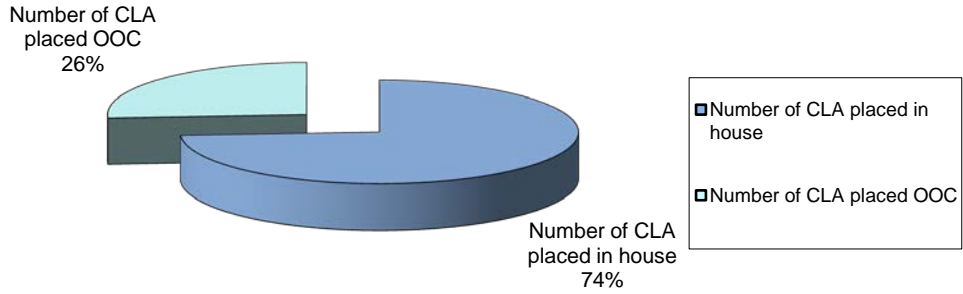
	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-15	16-17	Total
CLA as at 31.03.16 by Age	133	146	135	128	81	623
CLA as at 30.09.16 by Age	159	156	148	129	73	665
CLA as at 31.12.16 by Age	169	169	143	129	71	681
CLA as at 31.03.17 by Age	173	166	145	124	82	690
CLA as at 30.06.17 by Age	176	157	148	122	91	694

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



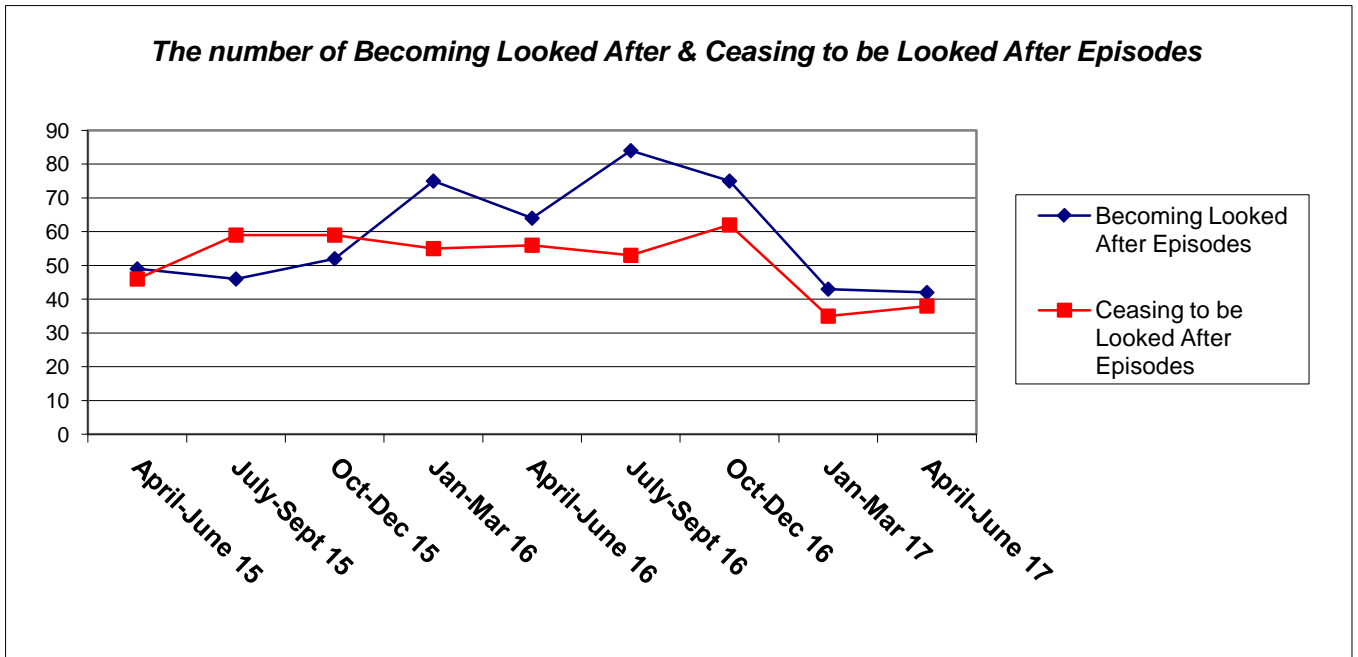
	Mar-16	Sep-16	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17
RCT Foster Carers	321	355	367	369	371
ISP Foster	171	186	189	187	179
Placed with parents	49	54	56	55	62
RCT Residential Care	10	8	7	8	10
ISP Residential	43	33	32	31	34
Placed for Adoption	22	22	25	23	24
Supported Lodgings	6	5	2	14	11
Secure Accommodation/YOI	1	2	3	3	3
Other	0	0	0	0	0
Total	623	665	681	690	694

Number of In House/OOC Placements as at 30.06.17



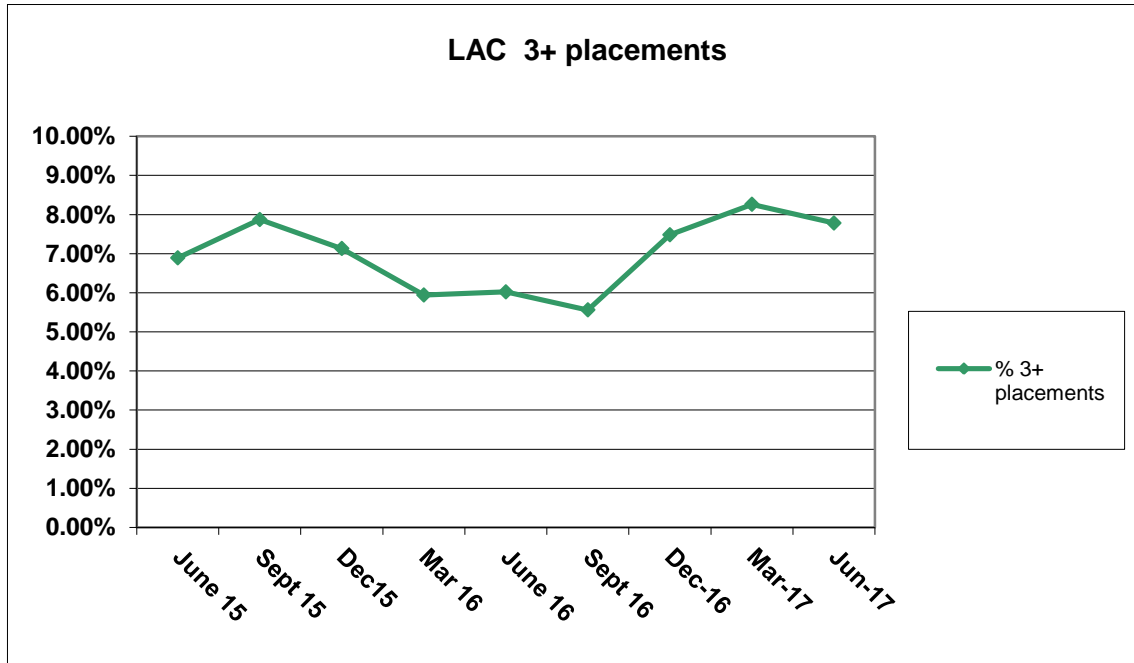
	Mar-16	Sep-16	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17
Number of CLA placed in house	451	490	501	506	513
Number of CLA placed OOC	172	175	180	184	181
Total CLA	623	665	681	690	694
% OOC	27.6%	26.3%	26.4%	26.7%	26.1%

4. Admissions and Discharge Information



	April-June 15	July-Sept 15	Oct-Dec 15	Jan-Mar 16	April-June 16	July-Sept 16	Oct-Dec 16	Jan-Mar 17	April-June 17
Becoming Looked After Episodes	49	46	52	75	64	84	75	43	42
Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes	46	59	59	55	56	53	62	35	38

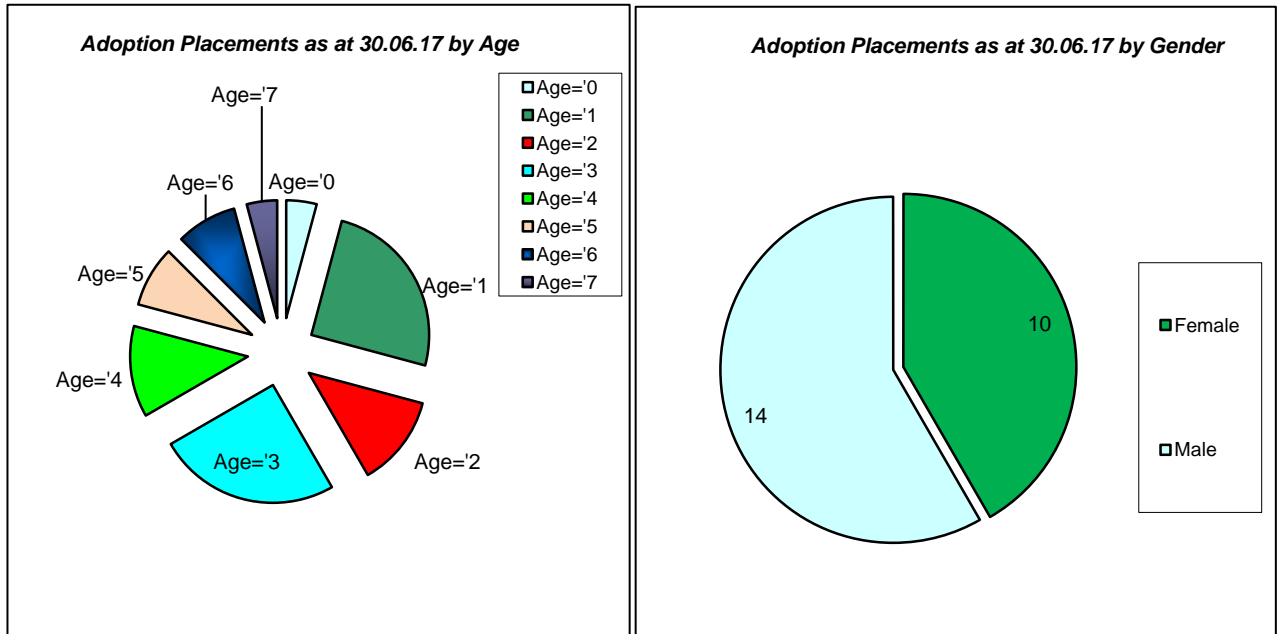
5. Placement Stability



	June 15	Sept 15	Dec15	Mar 16	June 16	Sept 16	Dec-16	Mar-17	Jun-17
% 3+ placements	6.89%	7.87%	7.13%	5.94%	6.02%	5.56%	7.48%	8.26%	7.78%

6. Adoption Information

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



Adoption Placements as at 30.06.17 by Age	Total
Age=0	1
Age=1	6
Age=2	3
Age=3	6
Age=4	3
Age=5	2
Age=6	2
Age=7	1
Age=8	0
Total	24

Adoption Placements as at 30.06.17 by Gender	Total
Female	10
Male	14
Total	24

Adoption Information	Total
Number of children placed for adoption as at 30.06.17	24
Number of children placed for adoption between 01.04.17-30.06.17	7
Number of Children adopted between 01.04.17-30.06.17	7

Review Activity 1st October 2016 - 30th June 2017

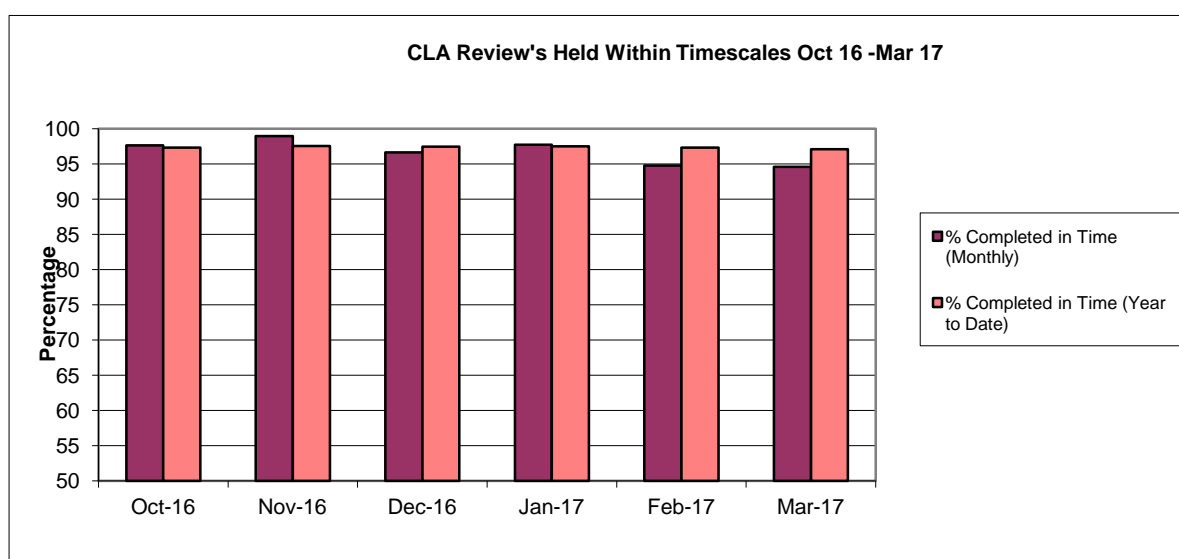
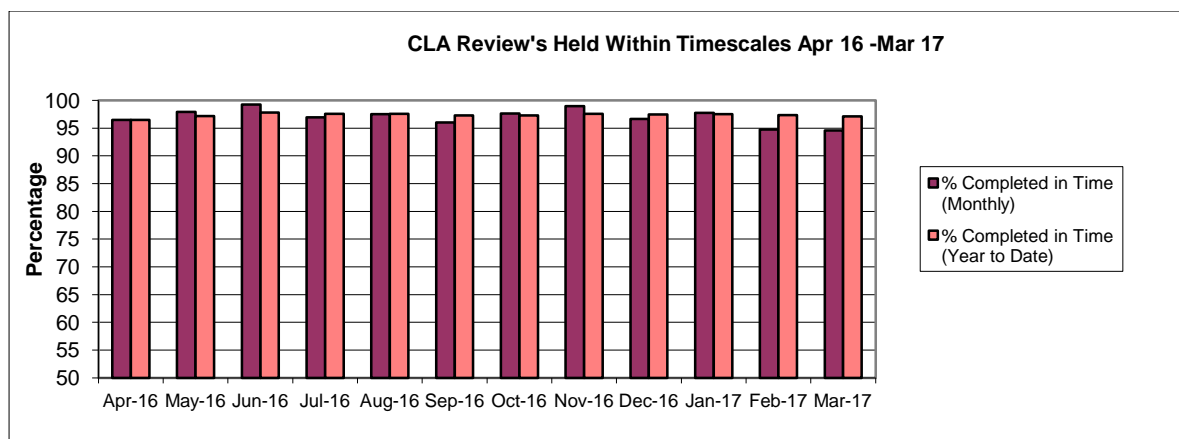
There has been overall positive performance during the last 5 years in respect of review meetings being held within timescale but this is becoming more difficult to achieve due to the high number of children looked after. Despite this, the Reviewing Service is committed to meeting our standards in terms of Review meetings being held whenever there are significant concerns about the care planning and conducted in the most child-friendly way possible.

Performance for the period reported on has dropped slightly in terms of Reviews being held within statutory timescales. 1,358 review meetings were due in this 9 month period, which is an increase of 35 over the previous 9 months. 44 of the review meetings were held outside the required timescale; overall performance is 96.8% compliance, which falls slightly short of our target of 98.5%. Despite this, performance is still considered excellent in terms of meeting PI's, given the number of review meetings required and the existing capacity of the Reviewing Team.

During this period, there were also 21 combined CLA Reviews /Review Child Protection Conferences and 57 IFST Reviews.

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. The high number of CLA Reviews has highlighted the need for more targeted Business Support for CLA, and this is something we are seeking to address.

CLA Reviews Held Within Timescales				
Month	Reviews Due	Number held within Timescale	Reviews outside of Timescale	Compliance
October 16	127	124	3	97.64%
November 16	196	194	2	98.98%
December 16	150	145	5	96.67%
January 17	178	174	4	97.75%
February 17	115	109	6	94.78%
March 17	148	140	8	94.59%
April	150	144	6	96%
May	167	166	1	99.4%
June	127	118	9	92.9%
Total	1,358	1,314	44	96.8%



There were 44 Reviews cancelled which could not be rearranged within timescales during this reporting period. Reasons for cancellation were as follows:

- 1 to enable a crisis in placement to be resolved
- 1 to take place once the outcome of a Court Hearing was known
- 1 to take place once the outcome of a Parenting assessment was known
- 4 due to non-availability of carers/placement
- 11 due to non-availability of parents/family carers
- 1 due to unplanned placement move (review needed to be brought forward)
- 6 due to child moving to adoption placement or Placement with Parent (review needed to be brought forward)
- 16 due to non-availability of professionals (including interpreters)
- 2 were out of time due to late notification that child had become Looked After
- 1 was wrongly recorded on ICS as not having been held

Comparators (with last year)

April -September 2016

895 reviews held within timescales 25 outside Total 920 = 97.28%

October 2016 to March 2017

886 reviews held within timescales 28 outside Total 914 = 96.94%

April - June 2017

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

Current issues for the Reviewing Service

Capacity

There are currently 7.6 full time equivalent CLA IRO posts and during this reporting period, case loads including CLA, IFST and Short Term Break reviews are approximately 94 children per full time IRO, which is the same as the last reporting period. One full time post has been filled by an internal candidate plus a part time IRO has also been appointed and is due to join the service in mid November.

The Reviewing Service is currently half a post down because of maternity leave.

Over the last 2 quarters (January-June 2017), the number of children becoming Looked After has reduced but so has the number of children ceasing to be Looked After. In addition, an added pressure on the Reviewing Service is the steady increase in the number of children placed under Placement with Parent arrangements which have to be reviewed at short notice due to Court timescales.

A key challenge for the service when the number of children looked after is high and there are staff vacancies is to meet the expectation that every child looked after will be allocated their own IRO, who will chair all their meetings. It has not been possible to ensure that this happens in all cases and the Reviewing Team has had to purchase the services of external IROs.

Due to the volume of work and team capacity, IROs now send out a shortened written record for all 2nd and subsequent CLA Review meetings. A full written record is provided for all Initial Review meetings, where the matter is in Court or there are complex issues with the Care Planning or if a full record is requested. With regard to the responsibility for IROs to track and monitor progress between CLA Review meetings, this is now having to be done on the basis of agreed priorities rather than as routine. The Service Manager and Reviewing Team Manager have, with the support of Business Support sought to use minute takers for reviews for large sibling groups and have used a typist to assist the IRO's with write up their notes of the meeting.

The team very occasionally use conference calling for some Review meetings but only when the IRO determines that this will not undermine the quality of the experience for the child or young person.

The Resolutions process

As outlined earlier, the IRO has responsibility to monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to 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.

In October 2016 the Reviewing Team updated its Resolution Protocol which 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. It was expected that the updated process would see a rise in the number of resolutions raised because IRO's now record resolutions that would once have been called "informal resolutions".

There are 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
- Stage 4: Escalate 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.

There were 47 Stage 1 IRO resolutions raised during this reporting period and 9 were escalated to Stage 2 resolutions. 5 Resolution meetings were convened in the previous 9 months.

Issues raised by IROs October 2016 to June 2017

The issues raised during this reporting period continue to be varied and the themes are similar to those raised in previous periods which include the following themes plus individual case examples:

Theme: Safeguarding Issues

When a review meeting is fully attended and the discussions are open and honest, information is sometimes shared that when considered within the wider context raises the levels of concern and necessitates an immediate discussion with the appropriate team manager or service manager to ensure that decisions to safeguard a child are immediate and proportionate.

Case Example:

Care proceedings had started in respect of a week old baby and the decision was made in court for a short period of assessment to start in a mother and baby placement with a plan for reunification home to mother's sole care. At the time of the review, Children's Services were in to the third week of a 6 week reunification plan and the mother had built up to having unlimited unsupervised contact with the baby in the community.

In the review meeting both the health visitor and foster carer raised concerns about the quality of mother's interaction with, and safe handling of, the child.

The IRO was concerned that the mother was not clear about who the safe people were with whom the baby could have contact. Despite having been told that the maternal grandmother was considered to be a risk at the time of the review meeting, the mother told the review that she and the baby were going to meet her later that day. The mother also went to leave the review with the father despite them both insisting in the review meeting that they weren't in contact.

Resolution:

The resolution in this instance was twofold. The IRO spoke to the team manager straight after the review meeting; the immediate safety of the baby was a priority and the mother was immediately told that she must not take the baby to see her mother as she had planned.

As part of the resolution it was also agreed that the team manager would contact legal advisors that same day and pause the reunification plan at least until a meeting could be held to discuss the concerns raised.

The team manager would also clarify what assessments had been undertaken of mother and whether there were issues with regards to her levels of functioning and understanding.

Theme: No Part 6 Care and Support Plan

Statutory regulation requires all children who are Looked After to have a Part 6 Care and Support plan. It is expected that the social worker will forward the Plan to the IRO along with the review paperwork 3 days before the review meeting, and will have shared it with the child and their parents.

Case Example:

IRO did not receive a Care and Support Plan or a review document in advance of a review meeting for a sibling group of 3.

Resolution:

IRO rang the Intensive Intervention team manager to ensure that they were aware that there was no evidence of a Part 6 Care and Support Plan having been completed. It was agreed that the team manager would discuss with the social worker and ensure that a completed and updated Part 6 Care and Support Plan was forwarded to the IRO within 10 days. This did not occur and so the matter

was escalated to a Resolution meeting. The necessary paperwork and the Plan were received by the IRO before a date for a resolution meeting was agreed.

Theme: Care Planning

When an application is made by Children's Services to the Court for a Care Order, a final Court Care Plan is submitted to the Court in readiness for the final hearing. The IRO will review this Care Plan in review meetings and ensure that it is being adhered to, and if changes do need to be made that are considered to be in the child's best interests, the reasons for these will need to be discussed and recorded in the review meeting and where possible agreement sought from all parties.

Case Example:

During a CLA review meeting the IRO was informed that Children's Services intended reducing a child's contact with his mother from 8 times a year to 4 solely because his siblings' contact (they attended contact alongside him although they were placed elsewhere) needed to be reduced. The IRO was of the view that the needs of the siblings should not impinge on their brother's contact.

Resolution:

The IRO raised a Stage 1 resolution with the team manager who agreed to discuss the proposal further with the social worker. The team manager contacted the IRO a short time later to assure her that the child in question would continue to have contact 8 times a year.

Theme: Statutory Visits

The SSWB Act sets out the frequency of statutory visits to children who are Looked After. The documentation completed by the social worker prior to the review meeting includes the dates a child is visited.

Case Example

In the absence of the allocated social worker for a child, the review documentation was completed by another member of her team. The documentation indicated that a child had not been visited over a 3 month period, nor was there a case record of visits having taken place.

Resolution:

The IRO contacted the team manager to raise a Stage 1 resolution. Arrangements were made for another worker to undertake statutory visits until the allocated worker had returned to work and they had an opportunity to discuss the Resolution.

Theme: Life Journey Work.

Whilst Life Journey work is often most associated with children placed for adoption it is in fact an integral part of the work that should be undertaken with any child who is unable to live with their birth family. Life Journey work may help a child understand why their birth parents could not care for them temporarily or

permanently, give the child a sense of personal/family/cultural history, and build a sense of racial/ethnic/national identity. It may help the child understand the reason for placement moves as well as recording memories for the child of previous carers.

It is expected that when a child is placed for adoption that the social worker will evidence at the first adoption review that the life Journey work has started, and by the second review meeting the life Journey work should have been completed and passed to the child / adopters

Case Example

At a first adoption review there was no evidence of Life Journey work having been started.

Resolution: The IRO raised a Stage 1 resolution with the team manager and it was agreed that the team manager would discuss the resolution with the social worker and agree realistic timescales to complete the work. The team manager then forwarded the timescales to the IRO who followed up the resolution at a later date and confirmed that it had in fact been completed.

Development work

The Reviewing Service

Increasingly, IRO's are chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences in line with the SSWB Act Part 6 Code of Practice. This not only provides consistency for the child and reduces the need for multiple meetings, it also ensures that children who are no longer at risk of significant harm do not remain on the Child Protection Register for longer than necessary. In addition, this development should allow the Reviewing Team to provide a more flexible and resilient response.

All new appointments are now made with the clear expectation that the Reviewing Officer will chair both CLA Review meetings and Child Protection Conferences.

Short term breaks

Children who are having regular respite placements under the Short Breaks provision continue to be classed either as a child with Care and support needs or a child who is looked after. IROs chair the reviews for those children who are looked after. As a result the Reviewing Team continues to focus on a reviewing a smaller number of children with complex additional needs. This is compliant with the SSWB Act.

IFST

To enable IRO's to chair IFST review meetings it was expected that they would have completed the 4 day IFST training. Unfortunately only 2 of RCT's current IRO's have completed this training. In order to increase the resilience within the team IFST are arranging condensed one day training for the Reviewing Team in September. Work is also ongoing to consider what changes, if any can be made to the IFST review documentation to ensure that it is both succinct and family focussed.

Consultation Documents.

The visuals of the parents' consultation document have been updated but unfortunately the service hasn't had an opportunity to identify a focus group of parents with whom we can consult over the questions and terminology used. It is hoped that over the next 6 months the service will have an opportunity to plan and carry out this piece of work in a sensitive way.

Two Sides Website

This website for all RCT children and young people who are Looked After continues to provide information about what it means to be Looked After and links to other sites and services.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The Reviewing Service, as always, is keen to maintain a positive working relationship with Voices from Care and to encourage young people looked after by RCT to become active participants. Where possible the team manager or IRO's have attended events. The Reviewing Team Manager continues to ensure that information from Voices from Care is disseminated not only within the service but also to our colleagues in Children Services, and has recently shared the email addresses of Children's Services Team Managers with Voices so that events can be forwarded to them directly.

Advocacy

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

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

Adoption

In April 2017, a Senior Practitioner was seconded to the Reviewing Service for 1 year to develop social work practice work around adoption. The focus has been on preparing written guidance around the referral and decision-making processes, mentoring social workers to improve standards of practice and improving links with the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Adoption Consortium (VVC). The benefits of this post are clear and it is hoped that the provision will be maintained once the secondment period has ended.

Ceri Mann, Reviewing Team Manager

Judith Davis, Service Manager Safeguarding and Support

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