



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18TH JULY 2018

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

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

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board, with information about the activity of the Independent Reviewing 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 SSB 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.
- 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, 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 2017- 31st March 2018.

4. SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

- The reporting period includes performance information from the last 3 quarters (01.07.17- 31.03.18).
- During this reporting period, the average number of children looked after by RCT was 688. There was a continuing pattern of more boys than girls becoming Looked After, with the majority being under 8.
- As of 31.03.18, 81% of all children looked after were placed with foster carers, 55% of these with RCT foster carers. The percentage of children placed with Independent Service Providers in foster placements is 26%, with 5% in non-RCT residential placements. The number of Out of County placements has reduced over the last year and is now 23.5%, down from 26.7% a year ago.
- 1,338 CLA review meetings were due in this 9-month period, which is a decrease of 30 over the previous 9 months. Reviews for 102 children (equating to 71 meetings) were held outside the required timescale; overall performance is 92.9% compliance, which falls short of our target of 98.5%. A variety of factors contributed to this drop, notably an increase in requests to rearrange review meetings because social workers were not available, other key people not being available for rearranged dates, staff sickness over the winter, and bad weather.
- The average caseload for a full-time IRO is **89** but once Child Protection Conferences, IFSS and Short Term Break reviews are added in, it rises to approximately **98** children per full-time IRO, which is an increase of 3 from the last reporting period.

KEY THEMES

The key themes highlighted within the report include:

- A continuing emphasis on the child being at the centre of the Reviewing process, meaning that the IRO prioritises seeking the child's views, and seeks to ensure that the child and family understand the Care and Support Plan. Review meetings are brought forward when the needs of the child require this.

- All but 1 of the IRO's are now chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences in line with the good practice defined in 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.
- 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.
- The positive impact of the creation of the Adoption Senior Practitioner post.



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Author: Judith Davis, Service Manager for Safeguarding, 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 2017- 31st March 2018**. The Report is also presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

To 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 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.

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.

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 a Young Offender Institutions and subject to a Care Order or remanded to local authority accommodation or youth detention accommodation.
- 18 years and under and have a Pathway Plan.
- All Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) plans are also reviewed by an IRO.

4. THE REVIEWING SERVICE

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

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.

The current average case load for a full-time IRO is **89** Looked After children. In practice, case loads are higher than this as in addition to CLA Review meetings, IROs are also chairing Child Protection Conferences, combined Review Child Protection Conferences and CLA Review meetings, Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) 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).

4.2 PURPOSE OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER REVIEWS

Each child who is Looked After must have a Care and Support Plan (referred to as a Part 6 Care and Support Plan). This must be based on a current assessment of the child's needs and be focussed on the well-being outcomes for the child as specified in the SSWB Act. These are:

- Protection from abuse and neglect.
- Promotion of physical and mental health and emotional well-being.
- Promotion of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development.
- Maintenance or development of family or other significant personal relationships.
- Involvement in education, training and recreation activities.
- Development and maintenance of social relationships and involvement in the local community.
- Social and economic well-being (including not living in poverty).
- Living in suitable accommodation.

The Part 6 Care and Support Plan details what needs to happen to achieve the child's agreed outcomes and should be formulated in consultation with the child and their family, wherever possible. The review of the plan is a key component of care planning and is a continuous process as it includes monitoring the progress of the plan between Review meetings, and responding to any significant change in the child's circumstances. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider how the plan is meeting the well-being outcomes for the child, monitor progress and make decisions to amend the plan or reconfirm

previous decisions as necessary in light of changed knowledge and circumstances. This takes place in consultation with all those who have a key interest in the child's life, including the child.

Key issues to be addressed in the review process are:

- The child's participation and involvement, including providing the child with clear explanations of the reason for any changes.
- The appropriate involvement of other agencies.
- Supervision and oversight by responsible managers.
- The extent to which progress is being made towards achieving the identified outcomes.

As well as an overall review of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan, the specific areas that must be covered in a Review meeting include:

- For all children who do not have a Permanency Plan, what is being done to enable them to return home.
- Is the placement meeting the child's needs, and are any services being provided at an additional to the basic cost of placement appropriate/still required.
- The views of all involved in the Reviewing process, including the child, parents and carers.
- Has the child been visited as required both by the CPPCR Regulations and by the needs of the child.
- The child's perception of their relationship with their social worker.
- Has an active offer of advocacy been made and the child's communication/preferred choice of language been addressed.

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

The IRO has specified responsibilities, set out in the CPPCR Regulations and practice guidance, for monitoring the progress of the responsible LA in implementing a child/young person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan. IROs are now required to track the progress of the Part 6 Care and Support Plan between Review meetings, and to consult with the child at any time that there is a significant change to the Plan. Local authority staff are required to alert the IRO to any significant change to the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, or of any failure to implement decisions arising from a Review.

The IRO has the authority to determine when a Review meeting should be convened in the light of a change of circumstances. IROs are also required to raise concerns within the LA up to Chief Executive level and refer unresolved concerns to CAFCASS as appropriate. This is explained more fully under the section dealing with the IRO Resolution process

4.3 FREQUENCY OF REVIEWS

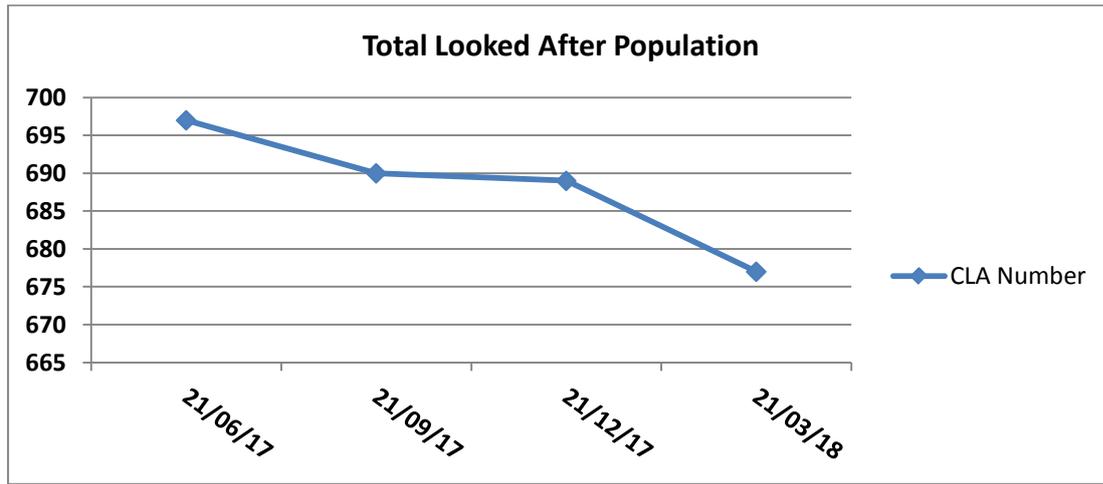
Children Looked After (CLA) review meetings must be conducted at the following frequency: -

- Within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After, or having an unplanned change of placement.
- Subsequently within 3 months.
- 6 monthly thereafter.
- 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 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.

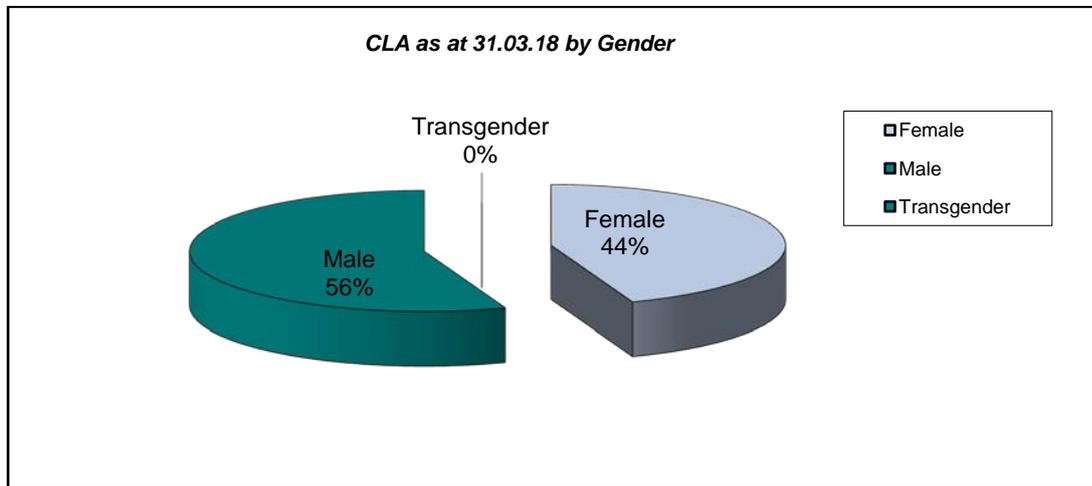
4. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

Total Looked After Population (31st March 2018)

| | 21/06/17 | 21/09/17 | 21/12/17 | 21/03/18 |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| CLA Number | 697 | 690 | 689 | 677 |

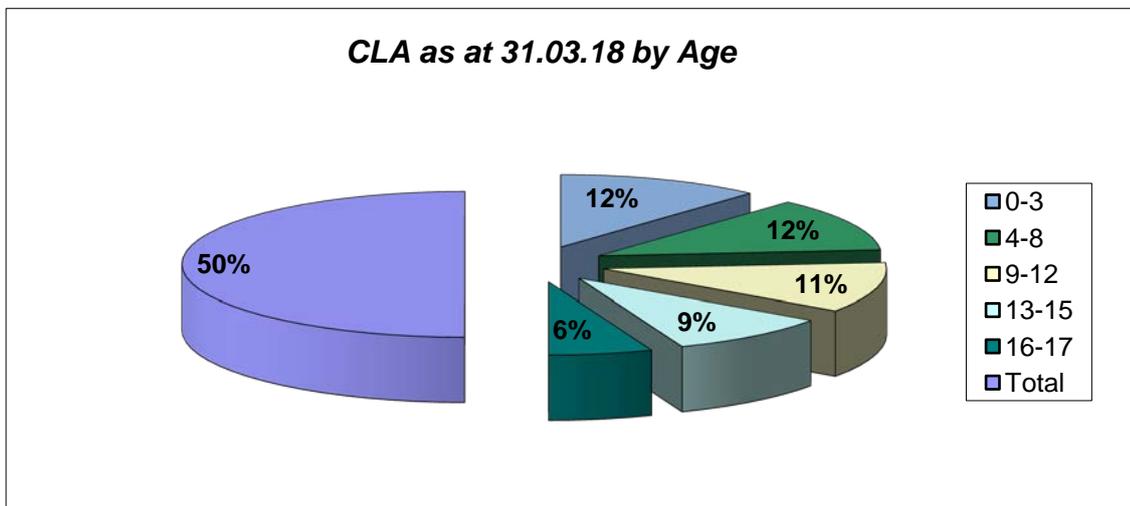
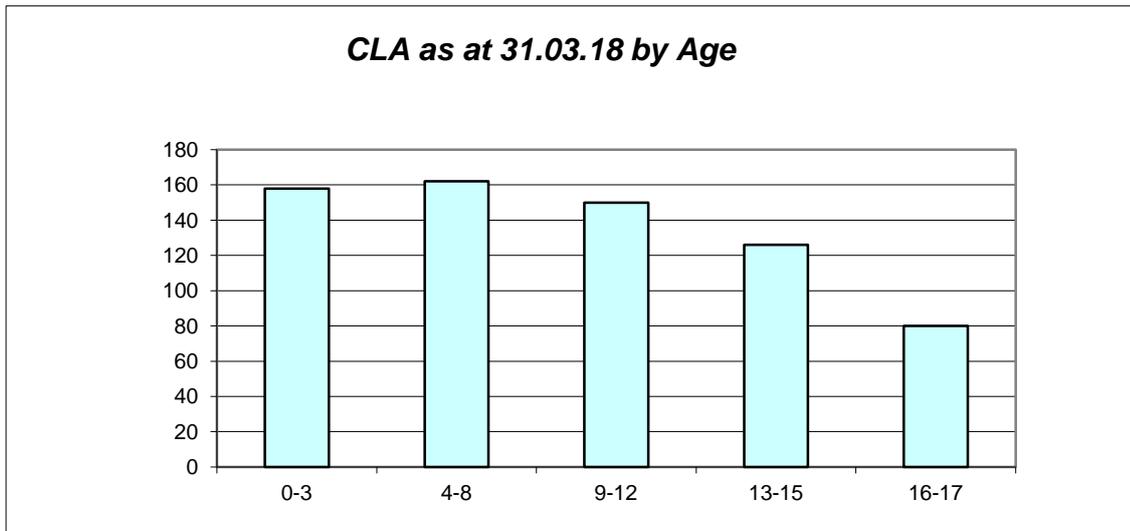


Looked After Population by Gender



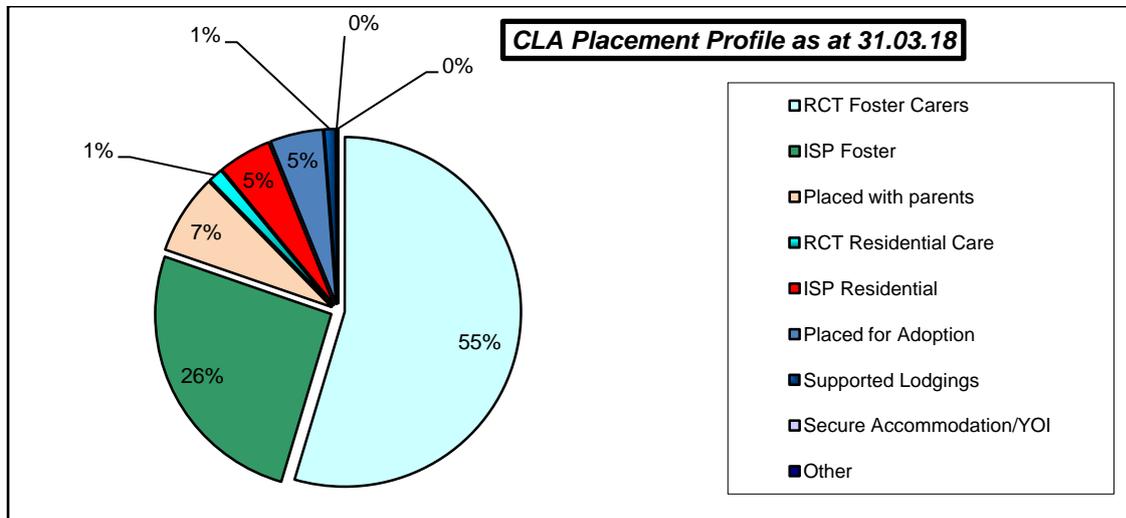
| | CLA as at 31.03.17 by Gender | CLA as at 30.06.17 by Gender | CLA as at 30.09.17 by Gender | CLA as at 31.12.17 by Gender | CLA as at 31.03.18 by Gender |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Female | 316 | 311 | 300 | 306 | 300 |
| Male | 374 | 382 | 381 | 384 | 376 |
| Transgender | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 690 | 694 | 682 | 690 | 676 |

Looked After Population by Age Group

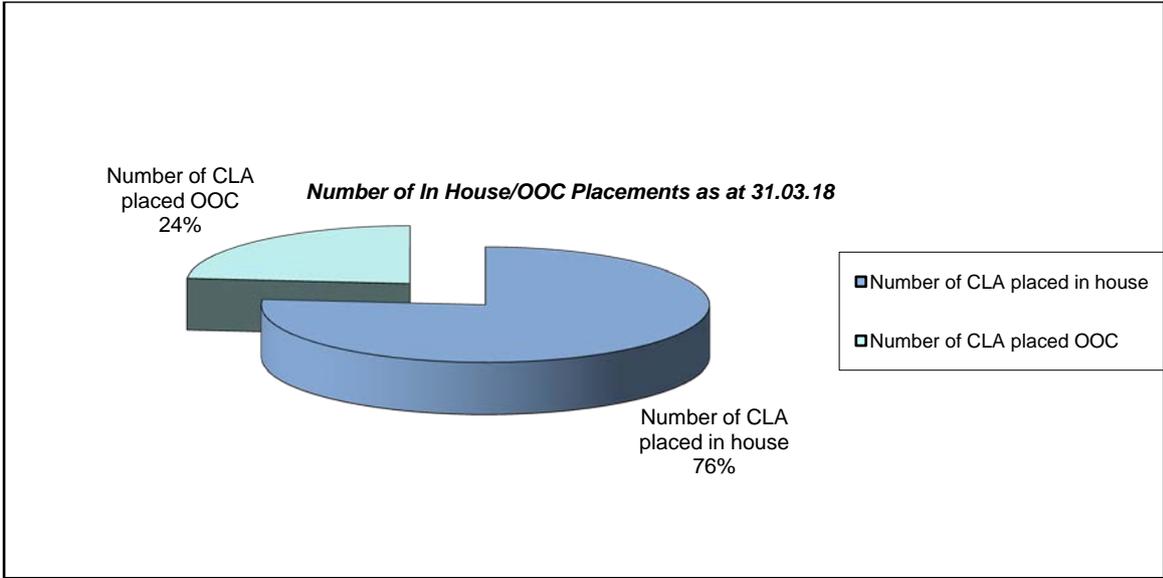


| | 0-3 | 4-8 | 9-12 | 13-15 | 16-17 | Total |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|
| CLA as at 31.03.17 by Age | 173 | 166 | 145 | 124 | 82 | 690 |
| CLA as at 30.06.17 by Age | 176 | 157 | 148 | 122 | 91 | 694 |
| CLA as at 30.09.17 by Age | 162 | 166 | 144 | 120 | 90 | 682 |
| CLA as at 31.12.17 by Age | 166 | 163 | 149 | 124 | 88 | 690 |
| CLA as at 31.03.18 by Age | 158 | 162 | 150 | 126 | 80 | 676 |

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

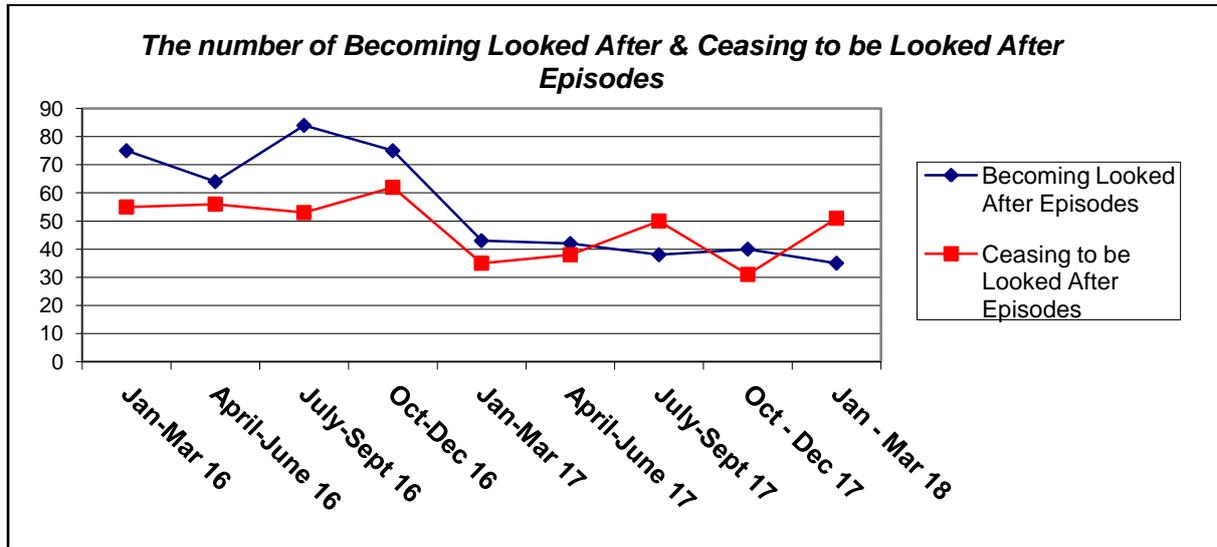


| | Mar-17 | Jun-17 | Sep-17 | Dec-17 | Mar-18 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| RCT Foster Carers | 369 | 371 | 361 | 369 | 369 |
| ISP Foster | 187 | 179 | 182 | 180 | 174 |
| Placed with parents | 55 | 62 | 59 | 59 | 50 |
| RCT Residential Care | 8 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| ISP Residential | 31 | 34 | 37 | 36 | 33 |
| Placed for Adoption | 23 | 24 | 24 | 24 | 33 |
| Supported Lodgings | 14 | 11 | 8 | 11 | 7 |
| Secure Accommodation/YOI | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 690 | 694 | 682 | 690 | 676 |



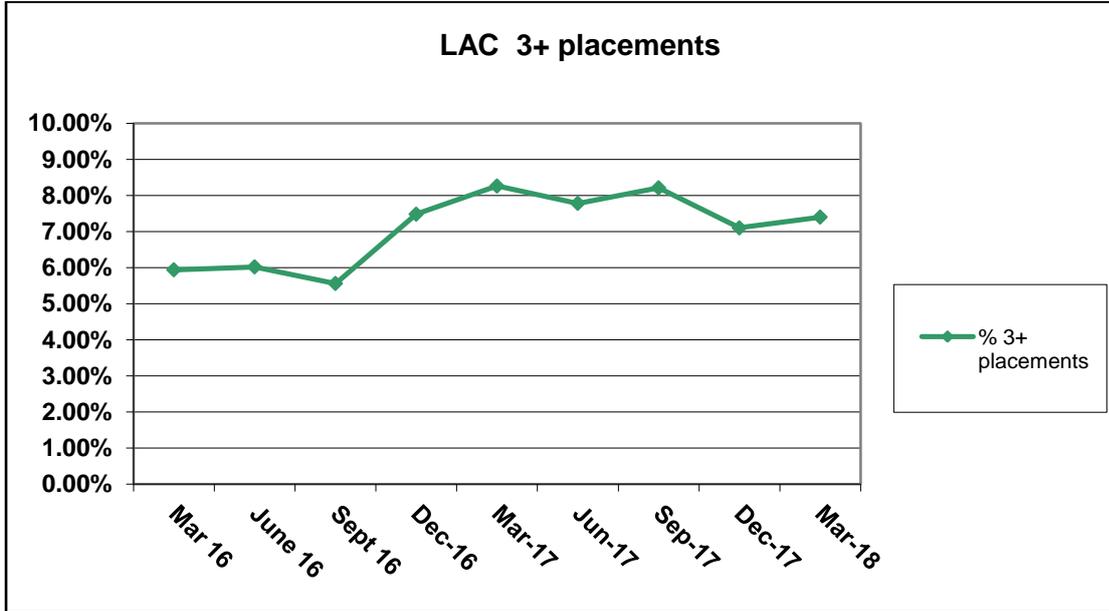
| | Mar-17 | Jun-17 | Sep-17 | Dec-17 | Mar-18 |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Number of CLA placed in house | 506 | 513 | 510 | 519 | 517 |
| Number of CLA placed OOC | 184 | 181 | 172 | 171 | 159 |
| Total CLA | 690 | 694 | 682 | 690 | 676 |
| % OOC | 26.7% | 26.1% | 25.2% | 24.8% | 23.5% |

Admissions and Discharge Information



| | Jan-Mar 16 | April-June 16 | July-Sept 16 | Oct-Dec 16 | Jan-Mar 17 | April-June 17 | July-Sept 17 | Oct - Dec 17 | Jan - Mar 18 |
|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------|--------------|------------|------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Becoming Looked After Episodes | 75 | 64 | 84 | 75 | 43 | 42 | 38 | 40 | 35 |
| Ceasing to be Looked After Episodes | 55 | 56 | 53 | 62 | 35 | 38 | 50 | 31 | 51 |

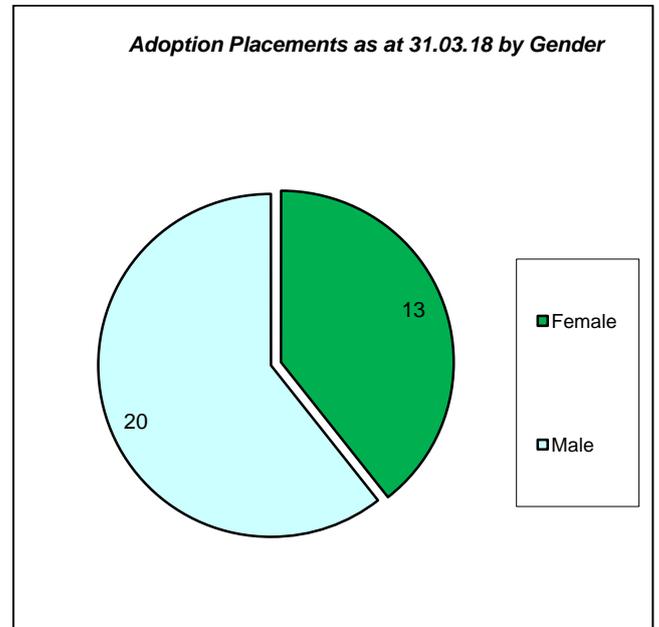
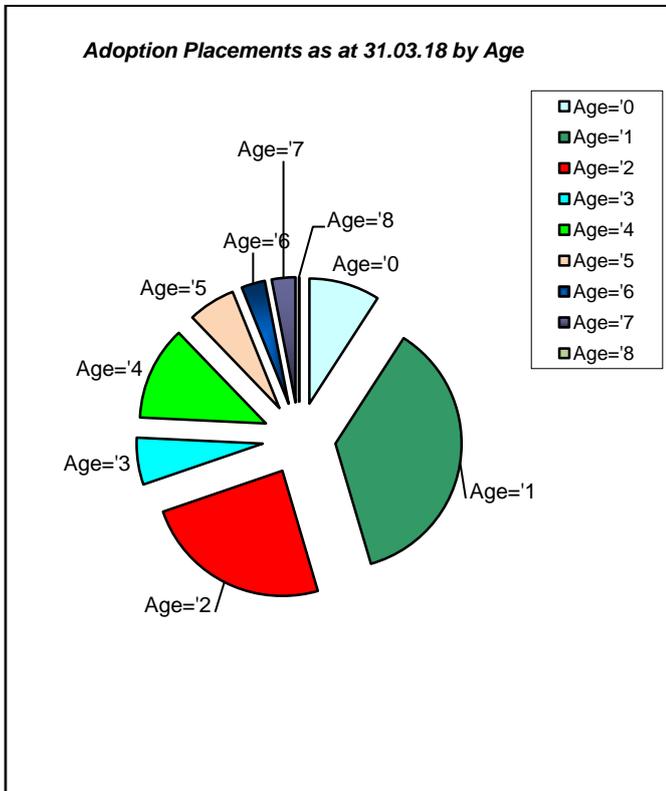
Placement Stability



| | Mar 16 | June 16 | Sept 16 | Dec-16 | Mar-17 | Jun-17 | Sep-17 | Dec-17 | Mar-18 |
|-----------------|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| % 3+ placements | 5.94% | 6.02% | 5.56% | 7.48% | 8.26% | 7.78% | 8.21% | 7.10% | 7.40% |

Adoption Information

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



| Adoption Placements as at 31.03.18 by Age | Total |
|---|-------|
| Age=0 | 3 |
| Age=1 | 12 |
| Age=2 | 8 |
| Age=3 | 2 |
| Age=4 | 4 |
| Age=5 | 2 |
| Age=6 | 1 |
| Age=7 | 1 |
| Age=8 | 0 |
| Total | 33 |

| Adoption Placements as at 31.10.18 by Gender | Total |
|--|-------|
| Female | 13 |
| Male | 20 |
| Total | 33 |

| Adoption Information | Total |
|--|-------|
| Number of children placed for adoption as at 31.03.18 | 33 |
| Number of children placed for adoption between 01.04.17-31.03.18 | 42 |
| Number of Children adopted between 01.04.17-31.03.18 | 31 |

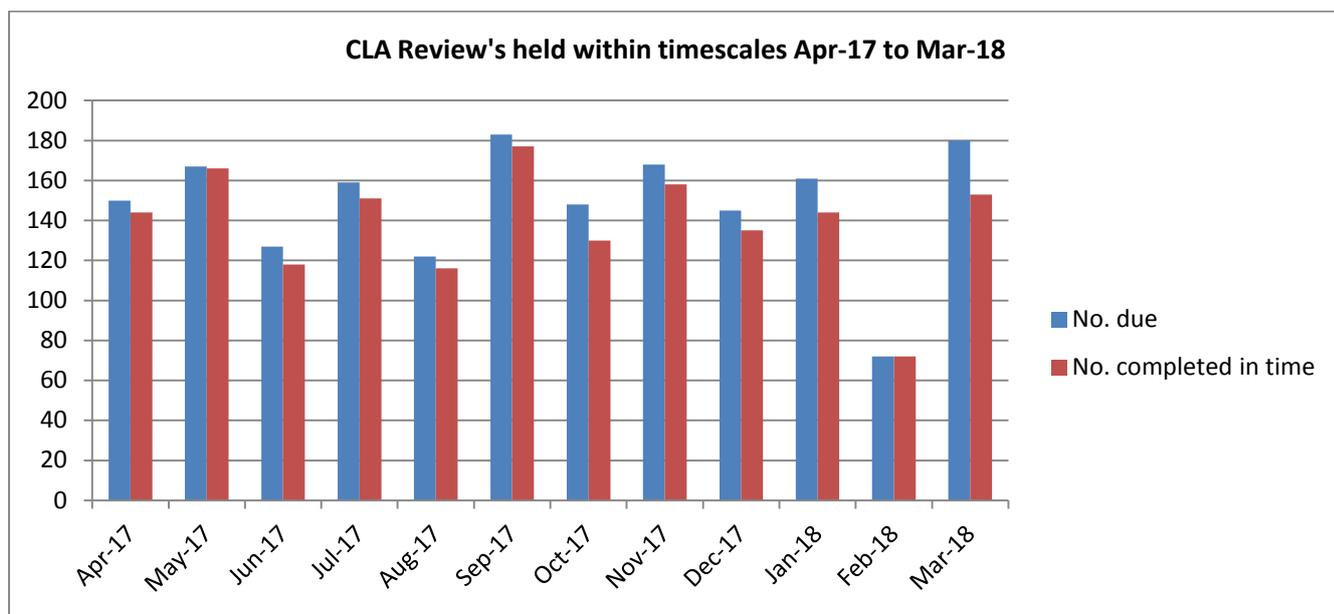
6. REVIEW ACTIVITY 1ST JULY 2017 – 31ST MARCH 2018

1,338 CLA review meetings were due in this 9-month period, which is a decrease of 30 over the previous 9 months. Reviews for 102 children (equating to 71 meetings) were held outside the required timescale; overall our performance is 92.9% compliant, which falls short of our target of 98.5%. The reasons for cancellations are detailed below but overall a worrying trend has been the increase in requests from social workers to rearrange Review meetings. Whilst it is recognised that this is largely due to other pressures on social workers, it does cause significant difficulties for the service, with some of the reviews being cancelled several times due to unavailability of key individuals to attend on the rearranged dates. 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.

It should also be noted that a part-time IRO was appointed at the end of 2017 who worked different days from the person she was replacing. This meant that review dates had to be changed and although this was a short-term problem, in the long run it has provided better cover within the service as a whole given the number of part-time staff working within the team.

During this period, there were also 31 combined CLA Reviews/Review Child Protection Conferences and 52 IFSS Reviews.

2 additional full-time posts have been created in the Reviewing Service Business Support to provide a minute-taking service for CLA Review meetings.



| CLA Reviews Held Within Timescales | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Month | Reviews Due | Number held within Timescale | Reviews outside of Timescale | Compliance |
| July 2017 | 159 | 151 | 8 | 95% |
| August 2017 | 122 | 116 | 6 | 95% |
| September 2017 | 183 | 177 | 6 | 97% |
| October 2017 | 148 | 130 | 18 | 88% |
| November 2017 | 168 | 158 | 10 | 94% |
| December 2017 | 145 | 135 | 10 | 93% |
| January 2018 | 161 | 144 | 17 | 89% |
| February 2018 | 72 | 72 | 0 | 100% |
| March 2018 | 180 | 153 | 27 | 85% |
| Total | 1338 | 1236 | 102 | 92.9% (average) |

6.1 REASONS FOR CANCELLATION

There were 102 children whose Reviews were cancelled and could not be rearranged within timescales during this reporting period. This translates as 71 meetings. 31 of these reviews were originally rearranged within timescales but could then not go ahead due to the unavailability of the child, carers or other key people on the rearranged date.

Reasons for cancellation were as follows:

- 20 due to unavailability of IRO (due to staff sickness and to new p/t IRO not working on days when Reviews had already been booked in).
- 10 due to unavailability of SW.
- Due to unavailability of child or family.
- 13 due to unavailability of carers/placement.
- Due to unavailability of professionals (including interpreters)
- 6 to take place once the outcome of a Court Hearing was known.
- 3 to allow for parents to be updated re change of Care Plan before Review.
- 3 to enable a crisis in placement to be resolved.
- 2 due to lack of venue (placement could not provide adequate room).
- 2 to take place once outcome of assessments known.
- 18 due to bad weather.
- 2 to allow the child to settle into new placement.

- 2 due to late notification that child had become looked after.
- 4 wrongly recorded as being out of time

Comparators (with last year)

April - June 2017

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

July - September 2017

444 reviews held within timescales 40 outside Total 484 = 95.6%

October - December 2017

423 reviews held within timescales 38 outside Total 461 = 91.6%

January – March 2018

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

7. CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE REVIEWING SERVICE

7.1 CAPACITY

There are currently 7.6 full time equivalent IRO posts which predominantly focus on CLA reviews, and during this reporting period, case loads including CLA, Child Protection Conferences, IFSS and Short Term Break reviews are approximately **98** children per full time IRO, which is an increase of 3 from the last reporting period. A long-standing IRO retired from her full-time post in March 2018 and was replaced by the redeployment of a very experienced practitioner, who will bring a depth of knowledge about the needs of children with disabilities to the Service.

Over the last 3 quarters (July 2017 – March 2018), the number of children becoming Looked After has reduced but the number of children on the Child Protection Register has increased over the last year (31/03/17: 418, 31/03/2018: 503), resulting in a significant increase in the demands on the Reviewing Service over all.

A key challenge for the service when the number of children looked after is high is to meet the expectation that every Looked After child after will be allocated their own IRO, who will chair all their meetings. For the majority of children, this is being achieved. Review meetings are also brought forward if the needs of the child require this. We are also seeing cases where Placement with Parent meetings are having to be convened at very short notice because of decisions being made in Court that children should return home on Care Orders.

IROs routinely track and monitor progress between CLA Review meetings. As well as being a statutory duty, this process has had to be tightened up because of the inconsistency in IRO's being informed of significant changes in the child's circumstances.

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. We have initiated discussions with IT about developing facilities to provide video conferencing, both in response to feedback from young people and to address the increasing shortage of suitable meeting venues.

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 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.

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.

9. RESOLUTIONS RAISED BY IRO'S JULY 2017 TO March 2018

Theme: statutory visits

Case Example:

Statutory visits had not been completed due to child's social worker being off work. This was raised in the CLA Review and addressed by the Team Manager by arranging for the visits to be undertaken by whichever workers were available. This caused the young person considerable distress.

Resolution:

A plan was agreed with the Team Manager to provide a consistent person to do the statutory visits and to minimise disruption around the forthcoming reallocation to the

16+ Team by arranging for one of her social workers to co-work with the worker from 16+ Team.

Theme: Drift in Care Planning

Case Example:

A 14 year-old was in a short-term placement while work was done with the family, and therapeutic trauma recovery work was done with the child. By the time of the 2nd CLA Review, no progress had been made towards a return home due to a dispute between the Health Board for the child's home area and the Health Board for the area where the child was placed about which CAMHS should provide a service. In addition there was no education provision in place or any timescale for achieving the aim of the child returning home as the child's relationship with her mother had broken down.

Resolution:

Resolution raised regarding the delay in child receiving therapeutic input and accessing education. There was no work being undertaken to address the relationship issues with her mother. Meeting arranged with Lead Nurse for CLA and CAMHS and Miskin referral made to undertake work with child and parent. Education Coordinator for CLA addressing education provision.

Theme: Safeguarding Issues

Case Example 1:

Concerns about the well-being of a young person on remand in a Young Offenders Institution arose from comments made to the IRO before the Review meeting and the IRO's observations of the young person's emotional state. This resulted in the IRO asking some key questions in the Review and establishing that the YOI needed to provide closer support and monitoring of the young person's state of mind, and other agencies needed to identify services to be provided upon the young person's release from custody.

Resolution:

The Resolution was raised to highlight the level of concern about the young person's well-being, and the lack of detail in the CASP about how the young person's well-being outcomes were to be met. The IRO monitored the progress of the implementation of the CASP between Review meetings and was satisfied that the agreed actions were implemented.

Case Example 2:

IRO was not consulted about the Court Care Plan for 2 young children to return to their father's care under Placement with Parent and did not agree with the plan due to the father's violent history, which did not appear to have been adequately shared in Court, where the care plan was endorsed. The Resolution was raised before the children's return home and led to a complaint being made to CAFCASS that the Guardian had not consulted with the IRO about the proposed Care Plan.

Resolution:

A Resolutions meeting was held with Legal, Childrens Services Managers and the Social Worker. Legal advice was that there was insufficient evidence to oppose the Court Care Plan. It was agreed in the meeting that the risk assessment of father had to be completed without delay, and that direct work should be undertaken with the children during the reunification plan to ensure that they could share any worries they had.

A second meeting was held after the children were placed with their father as the IRO and one of the services working with the family were of view that the father's engagement with Childrens Services and other agencies was disguised compliance. This view was not shared by Childrens Services but following further discussion in the meeting, it was agreed to have closer monitoring and to consider the need for child protection procedures to be implemented if there was on-going concern about father's engagement.

Theme: Change of Care Plan**Case Example:**

The Care Plan for 2 young children was changed by Children's Services from Adoption to long-term foster care as no adopters had been found after one year. IRO raised Resolution as she thought that the change of plan was not in the children's best interests, given how young they were. Childrens Services view was that, on legal advice, the children could not remain on Placement Orders any longer, which the IRO challenged.

Resolution:

A Resolutions meeting held, and it was agreed the search for adopters would be extended. The Adoption Senior Practitioner would also explore all possibilities for maximising the chances of adopters being found.

Theme: Life Journey Work

10 Resolutions were raised about life journey work not being completed with children either prior to their 1st Adoption Review or for children in long-term foster care to help them understand why they could not return home.

Resolution:

8 were resolved at Stage 2 with the Team Manager agreeing to help the social worker to prioritise this work. 2 Resolutions meetings were held at which plans with timescales were drawn up for the work to be completed. The Adoption Senior Practitioner provided significant help with this.

Theme: Contact issues**Case Example:**

Teenaged twin sisters were originally placed together with relative carers in the North of England. The placement for one of the girls broke down and she was moved to a foster placement that was close enough to her sister to enable the girls to have

regular contact. This was never established due to a conflict between the respective carers. A 1st and 2nd Stage Resolution was raised but it was apparent that no significant action was being taken to address the issues affecting the contact as there was a view from carers and professionals that in the near future the girls would be old enough to arrange their contact independently. However the IRO felt this would be difficult because the girls were being drawn into the conflict between the carers, and one of the girls was functioning well below her chronological age.

Resolution:

The IRO escalated the Resolution to Stage 3 and made direct contact with the supervising social workers for both sets of carers. This resulted in a compromise being agreed with the carers to enable contact to take place.

10. DEVELOPMENT WORK

The Reviewing Service

All but 1 of the IRO's are now chairing both CLA Reviews and Child Protection Conferences in line with the good practice defined in 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. All new appointments are now made with the clear expectation that the Reviewing Officer will chair both CLA Review meetings and Child Protection Conferences.

Intensive Family Support Service

IFSS are arranging a condensed one day training for the Reviewing Team to increase the number of IRO's who can chair IFSS Reviews as currently all the Reviews are being covered by 2 IROs.

Blueprint and Voices from Care

The Reviewing Service continues to promote the involvement of our Looked After young people in the Blueprint Forum. However the uptake with this has been disappointing and further discussion is needed to clarify what is causing this. 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's 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.

To 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. Work is on-going with Blueprint and Voices from Care to improve the site. It is planned for them to facilitate a session with members of the Reviewing Team with a group of Looked After children to review and develop the content of the website. An editorial group of children and young people is to be formed to contribute

to keeping the site up to date and ensuring it reflects the most common issues faced by children and young people. The Reviewing Team Manager will be discussing with Care to Work about the possibility of setting up an IT skills apprenticeship around the maintenance of the website. Better publicity of the site is also being looked at with RCT's Marketing Dept.

The Team Managers in the 16+ teams have also agreed to review the content on the website relating to employment and training.

A fuller report will be provided for the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2018.

Bright Spots Survey

Rhondda Cynon Taf is participating in the Bright Spots programme which is intended to improve the care experience and well-being of Looked After Children and care leavers by identifying "Bright Spots": the policies and practices that have a positive influence on children and young people's well-being. The dissemination of the "Your Life, Your Care" survey is intended to be undertaken by a child with a trusted adult who is neither their carer or their social worker, and this role was performed by the IRO's when doing Out Of County Reviews during the period of the survey.

Advocacy

The Reviewing Service has continued to liaise closely 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 to referrals being made can be overcome.

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

CAFCSS

The CAFCASS Regional Manager regularly attends Reviewing Team Meetings. Efforts continue to be made to maximise the communication between the 2 agencies and meet the challenges arising from the current timescales for Care proceedings.

Adoption

The Adoption Senior Practitioner seconded to the Reviewing Service remains in post and has done a lot of work with social workers around developing skills in completing life journey work in particular and adoption paperwork in general. She worked with VVC Adoption Consortium to put on a Practitioner Forum for social workers dealing with various aspects of the adoption process. The Forum was well attended and very well received.

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 hear 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.