



# **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
April 2017 – March 2018**

**The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers  
to Quality Assuring and Improving  
Services for Looked After Children**

# **Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service Annual Report 2017/18**

## **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND LEGAL CONTEXT**

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service  
1.2 activity during the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM IRO SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18, AND QUARTER 3 REPORT 2017**

- 2.1 The following recommendations were made in the IRO service annual report  
2016/17, and quarter 3 report 2017 in the context of key priorities:
- 2.2 **Consultation documents are to be collated at the end of statutory reviews by  
the IRO, in order for them to be viewed and feedback captured identifying any  
themes or trends we might want to investigate and see how these triangulate  
with IRO challenges and Voice of the Child in the live audits.**
- 2.3 The IRO service sent out all consultation documents to children / young people 10  
days prior to their statutory reviews. The IRO then collected completed documents at  
the conclusion of each statutory review. This process was introduced by the IRO  
service in quarter 2 (2017). The consultation documents were reviewed in both  
quarter 3 and 4 by the Child Participation Development Worker however there were  
insufficient numbers of completed and returned documents to evidence any particular  
themes. The feedback from the IROs is that children /young people who are in long  
term placements are often reluctant to complete as they feel it is repetitive. Other  
young people feel that their views are better represented by parents, carers IROs or  
themselves in person (*See child participation p4*)
- 2.4 The IROs and Child Participation Development Worker will however review the  
consultation documents for children / young people in order to identify if any  
appropriate changes can be made to further encourage their completion.  
We will also continue to quarterly analyse completed documents. Below is a  
summary of what the children and young people reported in the completed and  
collated forms:

- a. In the 6 month review booklets five out of nine young people said that they wanted changes to their contact arrangements with family and friends.

*"I would like to see T more"*

*"I want to see my dad more"*

- b. All except one young person were able to describe something they were pleased about doing over the previous 6 months. Examples include:

*"Starting my distance swimming".*

*"Being brave when I broke my knee cap. All back to normal now".*

*"Working for myself and going to college."*

- c. Life skills - All 9 young people reported they were learning life skills.

*"Managing my money, washing clothes, cleaning."*

*"I'm doing a mechanics course right now in college, I want to be a mechanic one day."*

*"Managing money, doing my laundry."*

- d. Seven out of nine young people were able to say what was going well at school for them.

*"English and maths."*

*"My grades are okay".*

*"Making a friend."*

- e. All but one of the young people said they knew how to get in touch with their Social Worker. One young person said they didn't.

*"No they keep leaving."*

- f. Seven of the young people chose the option of *"About right"*, to describe how often they were seeing their Social Worker. Two said they weren't seeing their Social Worker enough.

- g. Six young people said they did want to attend their review, however only three wanted to Chair their review.

- h. Only one young person requested an advocate via their booklet and only four young people knew how to complain if they needed to.

- 2.5** A small sample of children/young people reported engaging in positive activities outside and in school. They all knew how to contact their Social Workers (except one child), and in the main saw the Social Worker "enough". Three children raised the

issue of whether they could chair their own review, which is an area of work the conference and reviewing team will be developing in 2018/19.

- 2.6 Further training on SMART planning for IROs, in order to ensure reports are consistently SMART and provide clear, measureable outcomes.**
- 2.5** A briefing session facilitated by Conference and Reviewing manager in relation to SMART planning took place in quarter 2 (July 2017), and a further training morning took place in quarter 3 to solidify learning. The IRO service will be undertaking peer on peer sample reviews in Quarter 2 and 3 2018/19 to ensure consistency and quality.
- 2.6 Exploration of data regarding birth parent engagement with CLA reviewing processes to ascertain strategies to address/resolve as relevant.**
- 2.7** The IRO service reviewed the qualitative data regarding birth parent engagement within the CLA process, and found there was not one core theme for non-attendance. There were often multiple reasons for non-attendance/participation, such as: difficult relationship with CSC, did not agree with final care plan, current unresolved difficulties (i.e: mental health, alcohol misuse), did not feel they had alternatives to attendance/participation.
- 2.8** As a consequence of these findings it is felt that the current arrangement requiring IROs to contact parents prior to the review to encourage attendance or share wishes and feelings is appropriate.
- 2.9 Quality assurance systems to be further developed to support tracking of key performance data in relation to midway reviews, CLA reporting pathways and use of audit/peer reviews to inform continued learning.**
- 2.10** There are systems in place that specifically track consultation documents, midways and CLA reporting pathways. These systems are now embedded in MOSIAC or team centralised spreadsheets. In quarter 2 of 2018/19 there will be a series of peer reviews and observations of CLA reviews which will be triangulated with live child, parental and professional feedback in order to continue to inform learning.

- 2.11 Delivery of workshop / seminars to Social Workers and Managers to ensure the role of the IRO is clearly understood and new staff to have a detailed induction along with refresher briefings and research updates.**
- 2.12** Unfortunately briefing sessions provided by the IRO service were underutilised, with low attendance numbers from our CSC colleagues, so were not effective in promoting this area of work. As an alternative proposal for drop-ins, Q & A surgeries and attendance at team meetings has been proposed for 2018/19, in partnership with the Principal Social Worker (PSW). It is hoped that this will not only ensure the IRO role is clearly understood, but support good practice within the Children Looked After Process.

### **3. IRO PERFORMANCE DURING 2017/18**

#### **3.1 Quantitative Data and analysis**

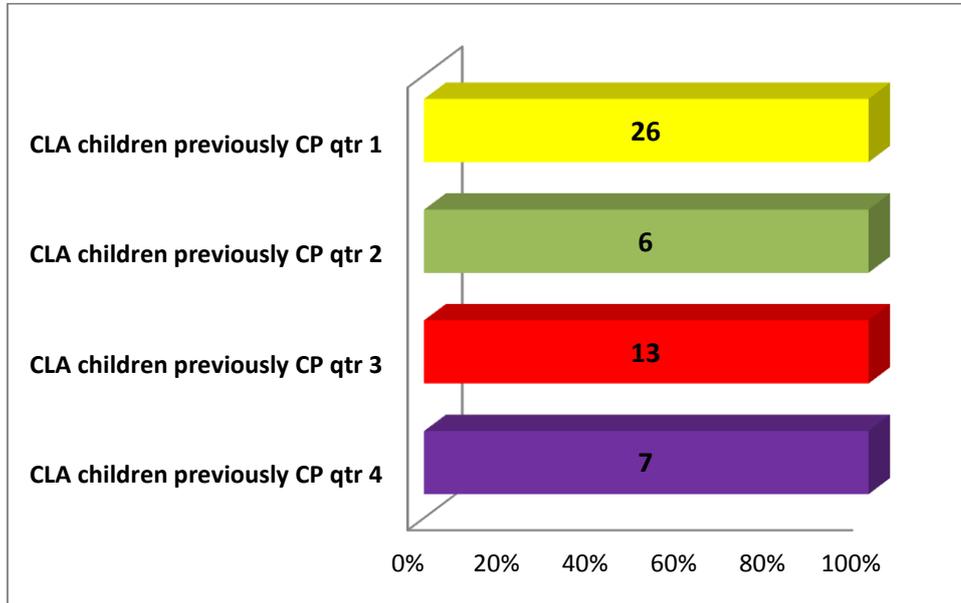
#### **3.2 Number of Looked After Children**

At the end of quarter 2 (2017/18) there were 142 Children Looked After by Bracknell Forest, a slight increase from quarter 1(136). At the end quarter 4 (31<sup>st</sup> March 2018), there were 138 Children Looked After in Bracknell Forest.

- 3.3** It was however identified by the IRO service that there had been a notable increase in the number of children / young people becoming Looked After who were at the time subject to child protection plans.

- 3.4** The IRO service subsequently looked at the conversion rate of children becoming Looked After who were the subject of Child Protection plans at the time. During quarter 1 and 2 a total of 32 children's' Child Protection plans were ended when they become Children Looked After. In addition to this there were also 5 children at the time who were subject to joint process (CP and CLA). At the time it was suspected that in quarter 3 the conversion rate would increase, and subsequently the number of Children Looked After may also increase, with Child protection numbers decreasing in the medium term.

**3.5** As predicted the number of children becoming Looked After rose and children subject to plans decreased in quarter 3 and 4, with the continued conversion from CP to CLA as illustrated in the figure below:



**3.6** This trajectory in terms of escalation in intervention is appropriate and what would be expected when addressing issues of significant harm and promoting good outcomes for children and young people.

#### **4. Looked After Demographic**

**4.1** When reviewing the table below, the increase in the demographic of Children Looked After crossed five different age groups, with by far the largest increase occurring in 10 to 15 year olds, followed by 1 to 4 year olds with relatively small increases in all other age ranges.

***The age profile of children and young people entering care during the period:***

	Mar-16	Mar-17	March -18
Unborn			
Under 1 – Female	3	4	4
Under 1 – Male	1	2	3
1 to 4 – Female	6	6	7
1 to 4 – Male	2	2	5
5 to 9 – Female	2	5	7
5 to 9 – Male	12	14	13
10 to 15 – Female	15	15	25
10 to 15 – Male	28	35	39
16 and over – Female	12	16	15
16 and over – Male	17	17	20
<b>Total number of looked after children</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Rate per 10,000 of population</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>41.1</b>	<b>48.9</b>

- 4.2** When these figures are viewed in relation to gender, males aged 10 – 15, 5 – 9 and females over 16 are the biggest cohort. This trend has continued throughout both 2016/17 and 2017/18 reporting periods. The reasons for these particular cohorts becoming Children Looked After remained the same as the previous reporting year (2016/17) such as significant CSE concerns, challenges with effective parental control, parental dysfunction, historical Child Protection concerns and/ or previous social care involvement. There may need to be more analysis and discussion in relation to service provision if current trend is repeated in 2018/19.

## 5. Number of Looked After Children by Ethnicity

5.1 In Bracknell Forest there are currently 81.2% of children looked after who are from a white background. This has remained relative consistence event taking into account the increase in Children Looked after population. As a result BME groups are underrepresented however this needs to be considered with representation of the local demographic.

This is outlined below:-

### Looked After Children by Ethnicity

	Mar-18
White British	110
White Irish	0
Any other White background	2
Traveller of Irish heritage	0
Gypsy/Roma	0
White and Black Caribbean	5
White and Black African	2
White and Asian	1
Any other Mixed background	3
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Any other Asian background	7
Caribbean	1
African	3
Any other Black background	1
Chinese	0
Any other ethnic group	3
Refused	0
Information not yet obtained	0
Total number of looked after children	138

It is however pertinent to note that audit activity continues to ensure it is an area of evolving learning for the IRO services, CSC and multi-agency partners.

## 6. Legal Status

- 6.1 At the end reporting period 2017/18 children subject to Interim and Full Care Orders outnumbered those subject to s20 (Children Act1989). This may be attributed to the large sibling groups where there are young children (5- 9 yrs. old) who have become looked after during this reporting period.

	Mar-18
Interim Care Orders (C1)	27
Full Care Orders (C2)	73
% of looked after children on care orders	72%
Placement Orders (E1)	9
% of looked after children on placement orders	7%
Section 20 (V2)	29
% of looked after children Section 20	21%
Other (inc L1 etc)	0
Total number of Looked After Children	138

## 7. Adoption Activity

- 7.1 Adoption Thames Valley has been in place since December 2017 and is shared service of 7 Local Authorities. During this review period **5** adoption orders were made.

## 8. Statutory meetings (*Timeliness of reviews*)

- 8.1 There were **366** statutory reviews completed in 2017/18 of which **98%** of Children Looked After Reviews took place within the statutory timescales. IROs completed some reviews in a series of meetings to ensure the relevant people were involved and the meeting remained child focused.

**8.2** IROs have reported in the main that statutory reviews take place within timescales, however there are occasions where they have had to be re-scheduled so care plans can be provided and shared with children/ parents and carers.

## **9. Child Participation**

**9.1** It is accepted that children and young people participate in a variety of ways in the reviewing process as illustrated below:

<b>PN Code</b>	<b>Nos</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>PN0 - child under 4 at time of review</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to conference</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>PN4 - child attends but does not speak for themselves/convey their views etc.</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>

Overall children and young people's participation rates in their LAC reviews are considered good, where **45%** attended and participated, slightly lower than **53%** in 2016/17. A further **28%**, whilst not attending, still conveyed their wishes and feelings. Only **1%** did not attend or give their wishes and feelings and in these cases the IROs continue to try to engage the young person via telephone, text or in person. The expectation is that children under 4's views will be represented by carers, parents, social worker or speak for themselves. IROs also undertake direct work where appropriate with children under 4 to gain a view of their wishes and feelings.

## 10. Advocacy

- 10.1 IROs routinely check whether children know about individual advocacy and how to make a complaint. They also check at reviews whether an independent visitor is needed, and any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support. Advocacy is a provision which is not sufficiently used by Children Looked After, however maybe a reflection of children's and young people confidence to use other means of representation. (*See child participation*)

Did the young person have an Independent Advocate at the meeting?	Nos	%
Yes	32	9%
No	334	91%

## 11. Escalation and Challenge

- 11.1 The IRO has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989, 25B (1) to ensure plans and arrangements Children Looked After are consistent with their individual needs and welfare and that the local authority is fulfilling their legal responsibilities towards the child. In accordance to the IRO's Handbook, escalations are vital to quality assure Care Plans and monitor the effectiveness of the service. Escalations can be issues, actions or questions that the IRO has raised within the review process but have not been addressed.

The IRO's have strengthened the use of challenge and escalation to address issues of care planning and placement arrangements. There were 53 challenges made by IRO's in period 2017/18, 45 were informal and resolved with social worker, 7 were formal and resolved with the involvement of the Team Manager and Head of Service, lastly 1 resolved with Chief Officer involvement. There has been an increase in challenges overall and the key themes were: provision of clothing/monies (in relation to 2 challenges), placement arrangements and care planning.

## **12. Complaints**

- 12.1** There have been total of 4 complaints made by Looked After young people through the complaints process. The complaints were related to placement arrangements and were responded to by the Social Care Team.

## **13. CONCLUSION**

- 13.1** The IRO service continues to have a vital role in helping to ensure that care planning for Children Looked After progresses in a timely manner, including hearing the voice of the child. The IRO's have utilised the challenge process through 2017/18 to draw attention to any difficulties with care planning, they have however had to do this less in quarter 4 2017/18, as there has been an improvement in the resolution of care planning issues. The reviews and performance is carefully tracked and will continue to inform practice and service developments.
- 13.2** Participation of children in their looked after reviews remains a key strength for the IRO service and whilst it has not been possible to encourage the completion of one medium of participation (consultation documents), we have been able to evidence that young people use various other means to participate in their Looked After process. IRO's in partnership with the Child Participation Development Worker will continue to proactively focus on developing further child centred communication tools.
- 13.3** Bracknell Forest Children Looked After have benefited from the permanency of the IRO team in providing more consistency and assisting with the process of challenge where it has been appropriate.
- 13.4** Key priorities for 2018/19 are set out below which will support further CLA system refinements to ensure a continued child-centred service focussed upon achieving the best outcomes for Children Looked After.

## **14. A SUMMARY OF KEY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES DURING 2018/19**

### **14.1 The IRO service will be focusing on specific activities during 2018/19 in order to continue to support good practice in relation to care planning, and child / parental participation. The key activities are as follows:**

- a. The Independent Reviewing Officers will be facilitating drops ins and surgeries providing the forums for colleagues to ask questions and gain answers about their role, Children Looked After process and Parental / Child participation.
- b. The Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to conduct pre CLA meetings, meeting the young person prior to reviews and have parental contact. These processes encourages parental and child participation, and appropriate case consultations.
- c. The Independent Reviewing Officers will be required to perform the additional role of Child Protection Chair, in order to manage care planning for children who are the subject of Child protection and CLA plans as it offers consistency and avoids delay for professionals, children and young people and parents.
- d. The Independent Reviewing Officers will work in partnership with the Child Participation Development Worker to continue to proactively focus on developing further child centred communication tools for use in the CLA reviewing process.
- e. The Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to participate in the auditing cycle, which provides them with the opportunity to extend their quality assurance role.

**Lisa Tingle – Conference & Review Team Manager**

**10.5.18**