



Independent Reviewing Officer

Annual Report

2018 / 2019

IRO ANNUAL REPORT (2018 – 2019)

DATE: NOVEMBER 2019

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report provides an overview of the IRO service activity during the reporting year, based on the data provided at the time of writing the report.

1.1 PROGRESS MADE IN RELATION TO RECOMMENDATIONS IN IRO ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18

- a. The Independent Reviewing Officers will be facilitating drop-ins and surgeries providing the forums for colleagues to ask questions and gain answers about their role, Children Looked After processes and Parental / Child participation.**

The IRO service continued to provide support to children's social care throughout the year. This took the form of CLA and CP surgeries during Q1 and Q2 (2018/19), and then in Q3 and Q4 these were further developed to become weekly drop-ins facilitated by the IROs and CP chairs. In this way we provided a forum for colleagues to ask questions and gain answers regarding a number of topics i.e.; the IRO role, Children Looked After processes and Parental / Child participation. The IRO service will use the joint management (CSC and C & R) meeting and CSMT as a forum for developing further strategies to increase attendance at drop-ins or alternative arrangements.

- 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 encourage parental and child participation, and appropriate case consultations.**

The IROs have continued to conduct pre CLA meetings with young people throughout the year. These meetings have been face to face in the majority of cases, though phone conversations have been used for some situations where this has been required. Arrangements are flexible and have taken account of the child's level of understanding and their individual needs. In addition the IRO service has agreed with the Conference and Reviewing manager that a formulated letter will be sent

specifically to parents who are reluctant to engage in the Looked After process to encourage them to attend or give their views on care planning for their child/ren.

- c. The Independent Reviewing Officers will be required to perform the joint 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.**

Two out of the three IROs have undertaken the joint role of CP chairing during the year. There has been specific co-working between CP chairs and IROs where there are cases where there are overlapping processes, in order to ensure a continuum of support.

- 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.**

The IROs and Conferencing and Reviewing manager worked together to discuss feedback given by children and young people regarding consultation documents. Following on from this the Independent Reviewing Officers and Conference and Reviewing manager met with Child Participation Development Worker to initiate work regarding developing further child centred communication tools for use in the CLA reviewing process. The amended consultation booklet will be available to children and young people in quarter 1 (2019/20).

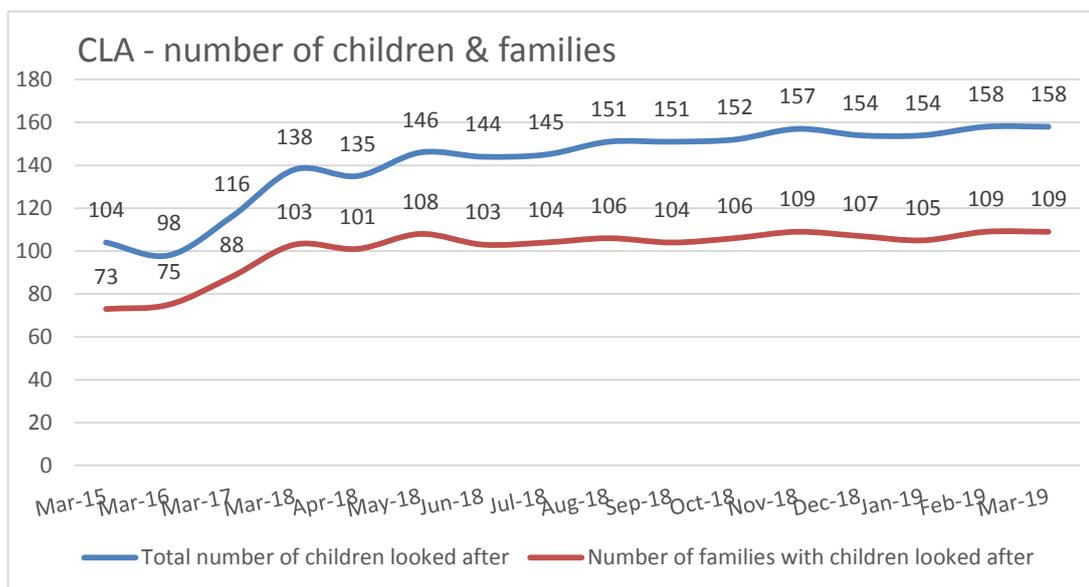
The Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to participate in the auditing cycle, which provides them with the opportunity to extend their quality assurance role.

2. IRO PERFORMANCE DURING 2018 / 2019

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis

2.1 Number of Looked After Children

At the end of 2017/18 reporting year there were **138** Children Looked After. This figure continued to increase throughout 2018/19 reporting period. At the end of the reporting year the number of Child Looked After was **158**.



The most notable increase occurred between quarter 1 and 2, as illustrated in the table below:

	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
Number CLA	144	151	154	158

Overall the CLA figures however did not significantly increase during Q3 and Q4.

2.2 Reasons for increase

2.2.1 There are a number of reasons for the increase in CLA numbers. The most prevalent of these is escalation from Child Protection Plan. In Q1 and **20** children (**40%**) who have become Looked After were subject to Child Protection plans at the time of coming into Local Authority Care. In Q3 and Q4 a further **42** children came into care, 45% of whom (19 children) of which were subject to CP Plans.

2.3 Children Looked After Demographic

The table below outlines the age and gender of Children Looked After for the last 3 reporting years. It is evident that the largest cohort of children becoming Looked After is the 10 to 15 age group:

	Mar-17	Mar-18	Mar-19
Unborn			

Under 1 - Female	4	4	3
Under 1 - Male	2	3	2
1 to 4 - Female	6	7	10
1 to 4 - Male	2	5	7
5 to 9 - Female	5	7	10
5 to 9 - Male	14	13	14
10 to 15 - Female	15	25	32
10 to 15 - Male	35	39	42
16 and over - Female	16	15	15
16 and over - Male	17	20	23
Total number of children looked after	116	138	158

During 18/19 the reasons for these cohorts becoming Children Looked After remained the same as the previous reporting year. These include significant challenges with effective parental control, parental dysfunction, educational disengagement and/or exclusion, CSE/CE concerns (in minority of cases), historical Child Protection concerns and/ or previous social care involvement. It is considered necessary to complete further analysis and discussion in relation to service provision if the current trends continue in 2019/20.

2.4 Legal Status

At the end of the reporting period 2018/19 children subject to Interim and Full Care Orders continued to outnumber those subject to s20 (Children Act 1989). This figure is reflective of Case Law and research: [2014] EWFC 775, SR (A child: Habitual Residence) [2015] EWHC 742 (Fam) regarding promoting permanency for children who become Looked After long-term with no care plan for rehabilitation medium to long term.

	Mar-17	Mar-18	Mar-19
Interim Care Orders (C1)	23	27	28
Full Care Orders (C2)	57	73	97
% of children looked after on care orders	69%	72%	79%
Placement Orders (E1)	8	9	7
% of children looked after on placement orders	7%	7%	4%
Section 20 (V2)	28	29	26
% of children looked after Section 20	24%	21%	16%
Other (inc L1 etc)	0	0	0
Total number of children looked after	116	138	158

3. Adoption Activity

During reporting period 7 adoption orders were made for Children Looked After.

4. Statutory meetings (Timeliness of reviews)

	Apr - Jun (Q1)	July – Sept (Q2)	Oct – Dec (Q3)	Jan – Mar (Q4)
Total no of reviews held	99	112	102	123
No of reviews held within timescales	100%	99%	92%	85%

The proportion of reviews held within timescales decrease during the year. This was in line with the increase in numbers of CLA, and therefore an increase in the number CLA reviews that need to take place within the first 4 weeks of placement. This increase created a challenge of ensuring that all involved in the care and support of the child had completed necessary tasks on time. These issues have been addressed with cooperation from our CSC colleagues and other identified professionals. The IRO service will continue to work proactively with the social work teams to ensure all CLA reviews during this reporting year (2019/20) are held within appropriate timescales.

5. Child Participation

	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3	Qtr 4
PN Code	%	%	%	%
PN1 - child attends and speaks for themselves	53%	41%	40%	38%
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the conference	31%	33%	36%	28%
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	2%	2%	2%	6%
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	13%	17%	16%	15%
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	0%	0%	0%	1%
PN2 - child attends and an advocate speaks for them	0%	4%	4%	10%
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to conference	0%	2%	2%	2%
PN4 - child attends but does not speak for themselves/convey their views etc.	0%	1%	0%	0%

In quarter 1, **99%** of children and young people participated in some form in their review meetings, and **100%** in quarter 2. In quarter 3 100% and quarter 4 100% children and young people participated. This is an area of strength for the IRO service. The IRO's service places specific significance on children and young people's participation in their LAC review and will continue to work with children / young people to encourage opportunities for them to participate in this process.

6. Use of advocacy

The advocacy service was used by the following numbers of young people in 0 in Q1, 2 in Q2, 3 in Q4 and 12 in Q4. IROs considered that approximately 20 additional young people could have benefited from an advocate however declined to have one.

The IRO service believes the increase in use of advocates may be a combination of child/young person's and professional's clarity and understanding of their role, as well as the IROs continued avocation for their use. Ideally the IRO service would like every young person who cannot use other means of representation in the review process, are represented by advocates. IRO will continue to discuss this issue with children and young people prior to reviews and represent their views as appropriate.

7. Parent Participation

In quarter 1, **46%** of birth mothers and **36%** of fathers were invited to CLA reviews but did not attend. **20%** of birth mothers and **16%** of fathers however communicated their views through telephone contact, written communication or interpreter.

In quarter 2, **44%** of birth mothers and **30%** of fathers were invited to CLA reviews, but did not attend. **16%** of birth mothers and **17%** of fathers however communicated their views through telephone contact, written communication or interpreter.

In quarter 3 **28%** of birth mother's and **28%** of father who were invited to CLA reviews still did not attend. T

he IRO service has recommended this continue to be focal point for work during 2019/20. There will be continued attempts to engage parents prior to CLA reviews.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Birth Mother Attended	26%	42%	55%	50%

Birth Mother Did Not Attend	46%	44%	28%	31%
Not Appropriate for Birth Mother to attend	27%	14%	17%	19%
Birth Father Attended	19%	32%	30%	36%
Birth Father Did Not Attend	36%	30%	28%	27%
Not Appropriate for Birth Father to attend	44%	38%	41%	37%

The Conference and Reviewing Team have once again reviewed a sample of parents' circumstances where they have not attended LAC reviews. The reasons for non-attendance remain widely varied i.e: did not want to engage in the process as child/ren removed from their care, distance of placement, current personal difficulties or difficult relationship with CSC professionals.

The IROs will continue to ensure that they make every attempt to contact parents prior to each statutory LAC review. This will give the IROs an opportunity to encourage parents who may not attend reviews to attend, or to verbally give the IRO their views on the care planning for their child. The parental documents will also continue to be sent out 10 days before every statutory review as another method for parents to represent their views. In addition to this the IRO service have agreed to send parents who specifically do not engage in the review process a letter inviting them to contribute to the process where appropriate.

8. Escalation and Challenge

8.1 The IRO has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989, 25B (1)

'to ensure plans and arrangements for 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 2010, (Statutory guidance relating to care planning and reviewing arrangements for looked-after children), escalations are vital to quality assure Care Plans and monitor the effectiveness of the service. Escalations can relate to issues, actions or questions that the IRO has raised within the review process but have not been addressed. The following is the current escalation Process.

Details of challenge submitted to SW

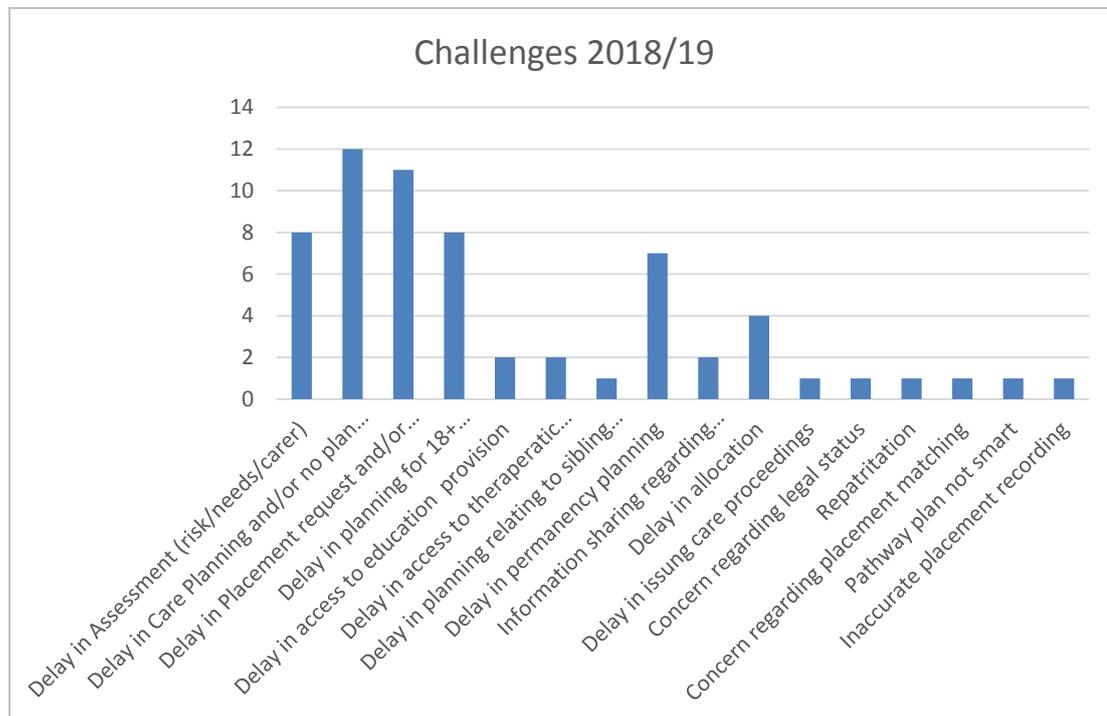
Informal challenge	This is desirable within agreed timescale with IRO to resolve the issue
Formal Stage 1	Forwarded to the Team Manager should an informal challenge not be agreed, or no response received within the agreed timescale TM is required to respond in 5 days
Formal stage 2	Forwarded to the Head of Service should stage 1 not be agreed, or no response received within the agreed timescale HOS is required to respond in 5 days
Formal stage 3	Forwarded to the Assistant Director should stage 2 not be agreed, or no response received within the agreed timescale AD is required to respond in 5 days
Formal stage 4	Forwarded to the Executive Director should stage 3 not be agreed, or no response received within the agreed timescale Executive Director is required to respond in 5 days
Ultimately the IRO can make a referral to CAFCASS to assist in resolving a situation if the above process is not deemed successful and is detrimental to the child/young person	

In the first half of the year there were 12 challenges raised in quarter 1, and 11 in quarter 2, all of which were resolved. In quarter 3 there were **19** and quarter 4 **21** challenges raised and resolved. In total therefore there were **63** for the reporting year. There has been an increase in the number of challenges raised in comparison to 2017/18, where there were **53**.

Care planning relating to placements, provision of education/therapy, sibling contact and provision of accommodation for 18+ care leavers were the main themes of these challenges during 2018/19. There is work being undertaken by our CSC colleagues

in cooperation with commissioning to implement systems which would address the provision of Education/therapy and provision of accommodation for 18+ care leavers.

The figure below further illustrates the specific details of the challenges, noting the increase specifically relating to delay in assessments, care planning and placement requests:



9. Complaints

There was one complaint made by a Looked After young person through the complaints process. The complaint was related to placement arrangements and was responded to by the Social Care Team and concluded at the first stage of the process.

CONCLUSION

The IRO service continues to have a key role in helping to ensure that care planning for Children Looked After progresses in a timely manner, including hearing the voice of the child.

Participation of children in their Looked After Reviews continues to be a focal point and strength for the IRO service. In partnership with the Child Participation Development Worker, IROs have reviewed the consultation documents and taken

young people's feedback into account, in adopting new forms in the hope it will encourage completion as child centred communication tools.

Bracknell Forest Children Looked After continuing to benefit from the permanency of the IRO team, which has provided consistent relationships with children / young people through periods of change.

The IROs have continued to use the escalation process to highlight specific difficulties with care planning. The service continues to attempt to resolve matters outside of the escalation framework where appropriate and beneficial to the child. In addition, the IRO service will work with children's social care to discuss themes and resolutions. Statutory reviews are carefully tracked and will continue to inform practice and service developments.

The IRO service is committed to continue to provide briefings and/or drops to offer support and assistance to our CSC colleagues

11. A SUMMARY OF KEY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES DURING 2019/20

Key priorities for 2019/20 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.

- The Independent Reviewing Officers to continue to promote and facilitate drop-ins providing the forums for colleagues to ask questions and gain answers about Child Protection, Children Looked After processes and Parental / Child participation
- IRO service to continue to provide representatives for IRO Service Meetings, in order to address themes that result from challenges, and progress any learning strategies / resolutions
- The IRO will continue to engage with children's social care and commissioning improvements to the support and accommodation for children leaving care
- IROs to continue to make attempts to engage birth parents and gain views, via pre review contact

- Conference and Reviewing Team undertake review learning and development day in Quarter 3, covering work activity for service

Report completed by: Lisa Tingle