



Derby City Council

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2014 – 2015

**Pervez Akhtar
Corporate Parenting Lead
July 2015**

Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Purpose of Service and Legal Context	2
3.	IRO Service	3
4.	The Children in Care Population	4
5.	The Age and Gender of Children in Care	5
6.	The Ethnicity of the Children in Care	6
7.	The Legal Status of Children in Care	6
8.	Entrants and Exits from Care	7
9.	Children in Care Placement Provision	9
10.	Reviews Completed	10
11.	Timeliness of Reviews	11
12.	Number of Children Participating in their Reviews	11
13.	Dispute Resolution Process – Quality Assurance Notification Forms	12
14.	Case Tracking	14
15.	Health Assessments	15
16.	Personal Education Plans	17
17.	Liaison with Social Care teams and other services	17
18.	Learning and Development	18
19.	Business Support Arrangements	18
20.	Children's Right's Service/ Children in Care Council	19
21.	Key Successes and Challenges in 2014/15	19
22.	IRO Service Action Plan 2015/16	21

1. Introduction

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their statutory functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children. As part of this statutory guidance there is a requirement for the manager of the IRO Service to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Purpose of Service and Legal Context

Every child who is looked after by Derby City Council must have a care plan which details the long term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made by Derby Childrens Young Peoples Services (CYP) to meet the child's day to day needs. All local authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review that care plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010)

The appointment of an IRO for every looked after child is a legal requirement under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The role of the IRO was strengthened in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

From December 2012 the Looked After Children (LAC) population was extended to include those children placed on remand in secure units or youth offending institutions under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) arrangements. This Act places a responsibility on Local Authorities to treat all children remanded to custody as looked after children up to the age of 18 years with each young person having a remand plan which is the equivalent of a care plan.

The IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and Independent Reviewing Officers on Reviewing Arrangements for Looked after Children specifies the following requirements:

Every child in care should have a named IRO to provide continuity in the oversight of the case and to enable the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child. The child's care plan must be prepared before the child is first placed by the local authority or if this is not practicable, within ten working days of the start of the first placement. The IRO must be appointed to the child's case with 5 days.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case
- participate in any review of the child's case
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority, and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations

The primary task of the IRO is ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authorities legal responsibilities towards the child.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- i. Chairing the child's review; and
- ii. Monitoring the child's case on an on-going basis

3. IRO Service

The IRO service in Derby has a total establishment of 5.8 fte IRO and a 0.5 fte specialist IRO for children receiving short breaks as at 31/3/2015. The IRO team headcount is 7 IROs, with 2 males and 5 females. It is an experienced and stable team; there has been little staff turnover with the last IRO joining the service in May 2014.

Up until February this year the team was managed by a senior IRO. The Corporate Parenting Lead took up his role in February 2015; the IRO service is now under his management.

The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the new IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 81, this is considerably higher than the guidance recommends¹. Children and Young People's Services (CYP) and the IRO service are working hard to ensure that we have the right children in care and that care plans for permanence are achieved in a timely manner.

It is hoped that over the longer term the numbers for children in care will reduce in line with the impact of early help services however there is no guarantee that this will happen. If the children looked after population reduces considerably this will enable the IRO service to be handbook compliant and thus affording more time to IRO's in the monitoring of cases and visiting of children in between reviews. However if the children in care population increases, as it has done in the last few months then serious consideration will need to be given to increasing the capacity of the IRO service. The IRO service is already not complying with IRO handbook guidance in relation to caseloads and any additional children in care will further exacerbate this issue.

The IRO team for the early part of the year was based at Middleton House and moved to the Council House in December 2014. There were some initial teething problems but the team have now settled and familiarised themselves with the working processes in the Council House. The Children in care teams are now also based at the Council House and this has helped in enabling direct communication and added visibility.

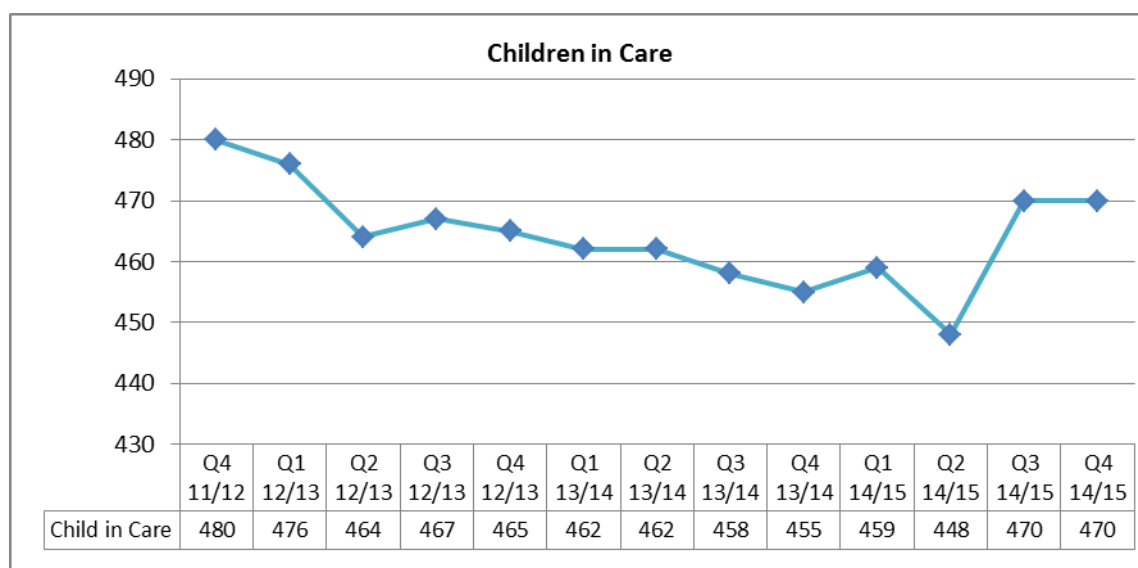
¹ At the time of writing the annual IRO report an additional IRO post has been agreed for the service. Based on current CLA population the additional post will make IRO caseloads handbook compliant.

There are future plans for the IRO team to be based together with the rest of the Quality Assurance Service (who are currently at Eastmead) at Kedleston Road offices. This will have many added benefits including the service being in one place as well as better communication with child protection managers and the rest of the quality assurance service staff and also access to shared business support services.

The status of IROs in Derby continues to be an issue for the service. Currently IROs are graded and as such paid at below team manager level. The IRO handbook is very clear in stating that an IRO should be at least team manager level. This is to ensure that IROs carry the appropriate seniority and status in order for them to undertake their role effectively. The IRO's are also awaiting the outcome of the hay pay and grading review, which will be published later in 2015/16.

4. The Children in Care Population

Over the last year the number of children in care in Derby has steadily increased. At the end of 2013/14 the number of children in care was 455, whilst at the end of this year the number has increased to 470. The table below demonstrates the quarterly changes in the number of children in care throughout the last three years. It is interesting to note that there was a peak of children in care in Q4 11/12 of 480. Following this peak the children in care population generally continued to decline resulting in the lowest number of 448 in Q2 of this year. For the last 6 months the number of children has gradually increased resulting in year end 2014/15 of 470 children in care. The graph shows a significant peak between Q2 and Q3 of this year when an additional 22 children came into care over the three month period and it has remained static from there on. There does not seem to be any obvious factors as to what has caused the increase between Q2 and Q3 although further investigation may be helpful in determining the cause if any.



5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 173 or 37% of the total. There are 21% or 98 children who are aged between 5 and 9 years old. There are 36 children or 8% who are under 1 years of age and a further 81 or 17% are between 1 and 4. It would be reasonable to expect the majority of the children that are under five to be either adopted or other permanence exit options to be secured for them including a return home. As children get older it becomes more difficult to secure permanence through adoption and hence it is very unlikely that children in banding of 10 and over will leave care through this exit route, this banding makes up of more than 50% of children in care. For these children it is important, where appropriate and safe to consider options for a return home or to extended family and friends via a Special Guardianship Order. Permanence can also be achieved through fostering. For children that are leaving care age it is important to provide support, advice and training to prepare for independent living. Derby Childrens and Young People Services have now also implemented the 'Staying Put' policy. This allows young people to stay in their foster placement beyond 18 as long as the foster carers agree and criteria are met. Whilst the young person is no longer in the care of the authority and the foster placement loses its status, the placement is funded through a combination of council funding as well as benefits. This provides continuity and stability for the young person to move to independence when they are ready.

Age Band	31/03/2015	31/03/2015
Under 1	36	8%
1 to 4	81	17%
5 to 9	98	21%
10 to 15	173	37%
16+	82	17%
Total	470	100%

The majority of children in care in Derby are male, 286 making 61% of the total with 184 females which equates to 39% of the total. Having looked at historical data dating back for the last three years, these figures in relation to gender of children in care seems to remain fairly consistent, with only a couple of percentage figure variations at most.

	31/03/2015	31/03/2015
Male	286	61%

Female	184	39%
Total	475	100%

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2015 out of the 470 children in care, the largest group of children, 328 were reported as being white, which was a total of 70% of all children in care. The next largest group were children of dual heritage who made up 13% of the population with 61 children in care followed by 6% who were reported as white other a total of 28, followed by 5% or 24 categorised as other. There were 16 children, 3% of the population categorised as Asian or Asian British and finally 13 children, 3% categorised as black or black British.

Ethnicity Recorded	Number	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	16	3%
Black or Black British	13	3%
Dual Heritage	61	13%
Other	24	5%
White British	328	70%
White Other	28	6%
Total	470	100%

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2015, 239 or 51% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 55 children or 12% that were on interim care order, this means that these cases were still in proceedings pending assessments or other work and a final outcome was yet to be determined through the courts. There were 79 children or 17% of the total population who had a placement order granted, this means that a care plan for adoption had been agreed through the courts for these children. 91 or 19% of the total population were voluntarily accommodated under s.20. This means that these children were accommodated at the request of and or in agreement with parent/s or those with parental responsibility. It is important to highlight that in Derby there are still two children who have been freed for adoption, the application for these orders ended in December 2005 and were replaced with placement orders. The plan for these two children was adoption at the time, this has obviously not materialised and plans have had to be changed. It is not appropriate or acceptable for these children to be still on freeing orders. For one of the cases application

has been made to court with a view to revoking the freeing order and for the other the application is in the process of being made to court.

Legal Status	31/03/2015	31/03/2015
C1 Interim Care order	55	12%
C2 Full Care order	239	51%
D1 Freed for Adoption	2	0.4%
E1 Placement Order Granted	79	17%
J1 In Local Authority on Remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence	3	0.6%
L1 Under Police Protection, in LA Accommodation	1	0.2%
L2 Subject to Emergency Protection Order	0	0.0%
J3 CYPA 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Required	0	0.0%
V2 Accommodated under Section 20	91	19.4%
Total	470	100%

8. Entrants and Exits from Care²

Analysing the number of children entering and exiting care provides useful information about the reasons why children and young people have come into care and also how we exit them from the care system.

When analysing the reasons for children starting care the most overwhelming reasons for each quarter throughout 2014/15 has been abuse or neglect. Out of 200 children and young people entering care in 2014/15 a total of 125 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 62.5% of all entrants. 21 children and young people came into care due to absent parenting, followed by 17 for socially unacceptable behaviour. Interestingly according to the records one child came into care because of low income. This has not been investigated further but it would be reasonable to assume that were other additional reasons for the child or young person coming into care and this may be a recording error.

² There is further work that is required to cleanse this data as at the present time the entrants and exits from care do not correlate with the total number of children in care at that given time. However it was deemed important to provide an overview of this area of work as it is very useful information. As the data is cleansed later in the year more accurate analysis can be made by CYPD

Children in Care - reasons for children starting care				
Reasons for children starting care	Quarter End - numbers starting care during the quarter			
	30/06/2014	30/09/2014	31/12/2014	31/03/2015
Abuse Or Neglect	39	21	29	36
Disability	0	5	2	0
Parental Illness/Disability	1	5	2	0
Family In Acute Stress	1	5	3	5
Family Dysfunction	3	0	4	0
Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	4	0	7	6
Low Income	0	0	1	0
Absent Parenting	9	5	3	4
Total	57	41	51	51

According to the data currently available in 2014/15, 153 children and young people exited care. This is considerably less than those that entered throughout the year. It is pleasing to note that 41 children were adopted, which is total of 27% of all exits, which incidentally is also the highest reason for exits. 40 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons with PR, this made 26% of the total. Quite a large number, 13 young people, exited care by being sentenced to custody, the large majority of these young people would have been classified as in care due in part to the LASPO Act 2012. There has also been quite considerable success in getting children and young people exited through the use of SGO's which totalled 10. There were 7 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, this may need further analysis.

Reason Ceased (grouped)	Quarter End - numbers			
	30/06/2014	30/09/2014	31/12/2014	31/03/2015
Adopted	9	14	7	11
Residence Order Granted	1	2	1	3
Special Guardianship Order granted	2	2	3	3
Returned home to live with parents, relatives or other person with PR	14	14	8	4
Independent Living	2	4	0	7
Transferred to care of adult social services	2	0	3	1
Care ceased for any other reason	0	4	2	1
Sentenced to custody	6	2	3	2
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	0	0	3	1
Left care to live with parents, relatives or other person with NO parental responsibility	1	2	0	5
Accommodation on Remand Ended	0	1	0	0

Child moved abroad	0	0	0	2
Age assessment determined 18 or over	0	0	0	1
Total	37	45	30	41

9. Children in Care Placement Provision

There were a total of 256 placements with Derby City Council or other provision, making a total of 54.5% of all placements. There were 214 placements with private agencies, making a total of 45.5% of all placements. From the total 167 or 35.5% of placements were with our in house foster carers and 180 or 38% with independent fostering agencies. If we just look at fostering placements this breaks down as 48% of all fostering placements are in house and 52% are with independent fostering agencies. The number of children placed with private fostering agencies is higher than what should be expected, at the moment there is a higher number of Derby children placed with independent fostering agencies than with its own in house fostering services. I am aware that Derby City Fostering service has embarked on a work programme to attract and increase its foster carer's pool

There are 37 children that are placed with parents. These will be children who are on care orders or interim care orders. The number of children placed with parents has considerably risen over 2014/15 as at the end of 2013/14 it was 16 and the year before that 2012/13 it was 18. 37 seems high and work is planned by the Corporate Parenting Lead in 2015 to look at these cases in more detail and identify the reasons as to why there are so many. Children and young people would usually be placed with parents as part of a process to return a young person back to care of the parents with a view to assessments to discharge the care order or as part of proceedings to decide what the plan should be for the child or young person.

The location of placements as at 31st March 2015 is that 217 placements are within the boundary of Derby City, a total of 46%, whilst the remaining 253 or 54% of placements are outside the city boundary. This may be due to a number of reasons but some of the reasons why this may be case is due to the size of Derby City and its capacity to provide all the placement needs of our children. Whilst the exact placement location and distance have not been broken down, many of the children will be placed in neighbouring counties including Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Leicestershire resulting in children not being placed too far from Derby. Of all the foster placements 129 are placed within the city and 218 are placed outside. Some of these foster carers will be Derby's own in house carers.

Derby City Council or Other

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2015
Foster Placement (Q1, Q2, U1 U3, U4 and U6)	167
Homes and Hostels (K2)	28

Independent Living (P2)	8
Placed for adoption (A3, A4, A5 and A6)	16
Placed with parents (P1)	37
Total	256

Private Agency including Independent Fostering Agencies

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2015
Foster Placement (Q1, Q2, U1 U3, U4 and U6)	180
Homes and Hostels (K2)	16
Independent Living (P2)	1
Residential School or Hospital (R1, R2, S1)	13
Secure Units, YOI or Prison (K1 and R5)	4
Total	214

10. Reviews Completed

The IRO team completed 1,235 statutory reviews in 2014/15 this is 37 more than in 2013/14 when 1,198 reviews were completed. The increase in reviews is mainly due to an increase of the number of children in care in the late part of 2014/15. At the end of 2013/14 there were 455 children in care whilst at the end of 2014/15 there were 470, a total increase of 15 at year end. The breakdown of reviews was as follows:

164 initial 28 day (20 working days) reviews, these would be usually for children and young people who come into care. 155 three month reviews (from initial review) and 916 six monthly statutory reviews.

The IRO service has 0.5fte IRO who undertakes short break reviews for disabled children. These are children or young people who live at home but receive respite residential care. The IRO for short breaks undertook an additional 94 reviews. In total the IRO service undertook 1,329 reviews.

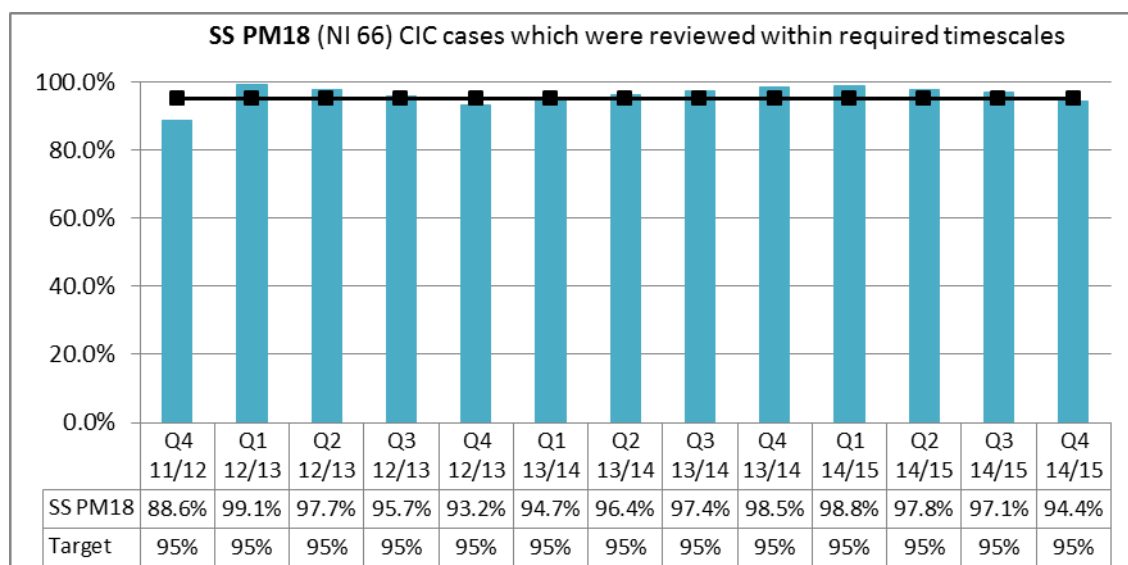
Type of Review	No
Ics - 4 Week Statutory Review	164

Ics - 3 Month Statutory Review	155
Ics 6 Month Statutory Review	916
Sum:	1235*

*additional 94 short break reviews making a total of 1,329 reviews for 2014/15

11. Timeliness of Reviews

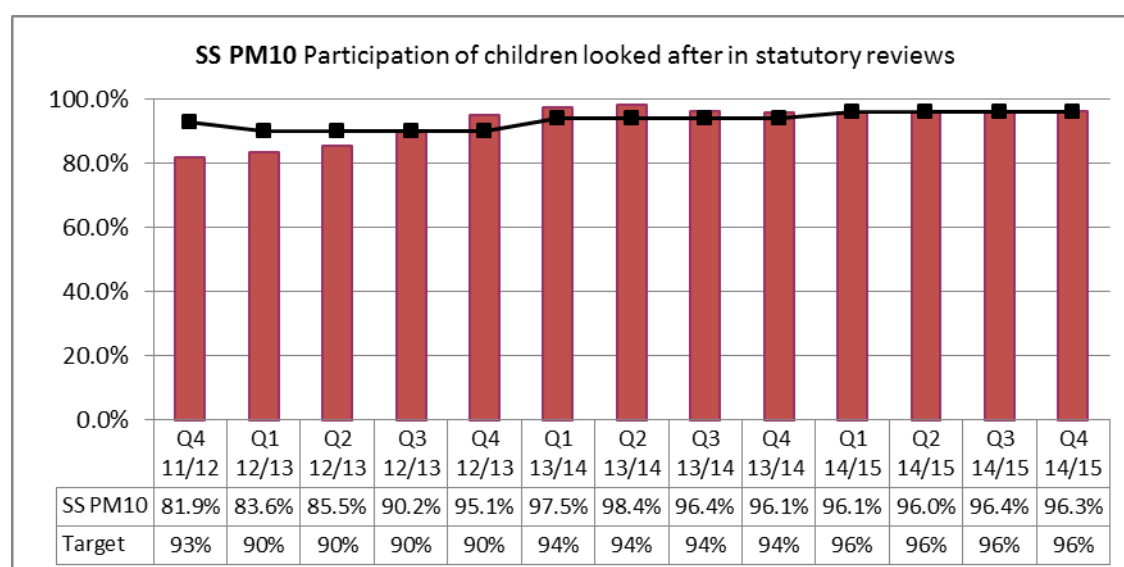
The number of reviews that have been within timescales has slightly dipped this year to 94.4% which is just under 0.6 of our target of 95%, this is obviously very disappointing. In total there were 25 children that did not have at least one review done on time. The 25 children equate to 5.6% because if one of the reviews is late for the child in the reporting year then all the reviews are classed as late. It is important to note that for the previous three quarters for 2014/15 the timeliness of reviews was 98.8%, 97.8% and 97.1%. The reasons for reviews being late range from the IRO or SW being ill, to industrial action forcing reviews to be cancelled as well as diary commitments making it difficult to hold the review in timescales, particularly for an initial review. The IRO service will continue to prioritise this area of work and work hard to ensure that all reviews are held within the statutory required timescales.



12. Number of Children Participating in their Reviews

The IRO service has continued to work very hard to ensure children and young people participate in their review. In 2014/15, 96.3% of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This is above our target of 96%.

The service continues to strive to improve on this, however even after discussion with their IRO and SW there are still some young people who do not want to participate in their reviews, in these cases this is recorded as non-participation and hence does effect the overall figures. In situations like this the IRO always tries to meet with the young person before the review to ascertain their wishes and feelings and ensures that these are reflected in the review. Furthermore children and young people are sent review consultation documentation which they are asked to complete before their review and send back to their IRO. We have separate documentation for children from 4 to 11 years of age and 12 to 17 years. The consultation documents are used to inform the discussion that the IRO has with the young person and also on the agreement of the young person to inform the discussion at the review.



13. Dispute Resolution Process – Quality Assurance Notification Forms

Where an IRO has significant concerns about practice or other issues affecting a child's care plan then the IRO can instigate the QA notification process:

The process has four internal stages, initially when the IRO has a serious concern about practice or issues affecting the care plan for the child the IRO instigates stage one of the process. This involves the IRO sending a QA notification to the social work team manager for a response to the issues raised, the manager has ten days to respond to the notification. If there is no response or the response is unsatisfactory then the issue will go to stage two of the process whereby the Corporate Parenting Lead will meet with the deputy head or head of service responsible to agree an action plan with a view to resolving the issue. If an agreement is not reached then the notification can be escalated to the third stage of the QA notification process. This involves a meeting between the head of service (QA) and head of service (Operational) and if required they can call a professionals meeting. Finally if there is still no satisfactory resolution then the head of service QA will discuss concerns with service director or strategic director as appropriate, to agree if any further action can be taken before a referral to CAFCASS is made for external scrutiny and resolution.

There is a list of criteria that IROs use when deciding whether to use the dispute resolution process. To make the process consistent and more transparent it has been agreed that IRO's must raise a QA notification when:

- LA has not complied with the agreed care plan
- There has been drift or delay in implementation of the care plan
- Failure to complete significant tasks agreed in reviews within the review period where this will have a detrimental impact on the child
- Failure by any agency to comply with statutory requirements e.g. visits, sharing of court documents, school provision etc.
- Poor practice which is repeated or has a significant impact on child
- Example of excellent practice which has achieved a good outcome for the child

In 2014/15 there have been a total of 53 stage one QA notifications; this is down from 63 in 2013/14. The notifications were made up as follows:

Reason	Number
Drift or Delay	10
Excellent Practice	5
Non completion of Significant Tasks	20
Persistent Poor Practice	2
Statutory Requirements Not Met	16
Total	53

The greatest numbers of QA notifications (20) were generated by non-completion of significant tasks, these included tasks such as contact not being agreed between siblings and/or parents or medical assessments/appointments not undertaken or completed in a timely manner. The second largest numbers of notifications were raised for statutory requirements not met; this would include cases where there are concerns that a child has not been visited as per the statutory requirements or statutory assessments not completed or completed in a timely. There were 10 QA notifications for drift or delay. These have included concerns regarding progressing permanence or revoking particular orders or discharging care orders. There were 5 notifications for good practice, whilst it is important for IRO to raise concerns about poor practice it is equally important to highlight where practice has been excellent and has had a good impact on the outcomes of a child, this is particularly important in generating a culture of continuous improvement. There were two

notifications for persistent poor practice, where there may be a number of actions that have not been completed over review period or beyond.

There were two cases which were escalated to stage two of the dispute resolution process; this included a case where there was significant drift to a plan for a child due to lack of progress by legal services in clarifying a way forward pertaining to particular type of assessment with the guardian. The second notification was concerning lack of progress to revoke an order which had been agreed some while ago.

There was one notification which went to stage three, this was relating to the issue regarding lack of progress by legal services to get clarification concerning an assessment. The concerns were resolved by operational services meeting with representatives to agree a way forward.

As well as the formal QA notification process IRO's continuously provide informal challenge to social workers and team managers. This is done by email, telephone calls or discussions. These are classified as informal challenges. It is particularly important to raise informal challenges as this provides an opportunity to discuss issues and or concerns with social workers and managers with a view to addressing them early before they escalate to formal QA notification. The informal challenges also develop a culture of working together between the IRO and social work practitioners and managers. Currently Derby IRO service does not have a process to accurately record the number of and reasons for informal challenge. It is very important to evidence the challenge and impact that IRO's are making on the care plan for a child. As an action for 2015/16 the Corporate Parenting Lead will work to develop a system whereby challenge can be recorded.

14. Case Tracking

In addition to monitoring the child's care and progress with the plan at statutory reviews, IROs have a responsibility to monitor between reviews. In order for this to be effective and transparent in Derby the IRO Service has introduced a tracking system.

Cases are identified as High, Medium and Low priority. The level is agreed and recorded at the review

High: where the IRO has concerns that time-critical elements of the care plan are becoming subject to drift or delay, and this is likely to have a significant impact on outcomes for the child, the IRO may set an early date for review, require an up-date from the social worker at regular intervals, and/or monitor activity on the child's file. They may also complete a QA notification and where the concern includes the manager's oversight of the case, they will alert the (D)HoS.

Examples include delay in issuing proceedings, delays in homefinding, critical assessments not completed impacting on permanence planning.

Medium: where the child or the situation would be vulnerable to any drift or delay, though none identified at present, or where less critical elements of the care plan are not being progressed, the IRO may require an interim up-date from the relevant member of staff, and/or check the child's file between reviews.

Examples include children with plans for adoption who may be hard to place or a placement has not been found by the second review post PO, criminal injuries claims, delays in arranging therapy or a school place, PEP not completed revocations of orders in PWP.

Low: where the child is in a stable permanent placement and/or the plan is progressing well, and the IRO is confident with the worker and management oversight.

Examples include the majority of children in long-term care and children subject to care proceedings

The case tracking process has now been implemented since April 2014. The IRO service is of the view that this has helped to identify cases that need closer monitoring and action. It is further felt that the tracking system has reduced the need for more formal Quality Assurance Notifications. Depending on the priority level, especially when it is high, IRO's are feeding back that they are having increased communication, monitoring and discussion with the case social workers. In many cases due to the IRO following up on actions with the social workers this is ensuring that decisions from reviews are being actioned and hence reducing the need for QA notifications at the subsequent statutory review.

15. Health Issues for Children in Care

The IRO team continue to have a good working relationship with the children in care nurses, health visitors and lead nurse.

The Corporate Parenting Lead continues to attend the Children in Care and Adoption (CICA) steering group on a quarterly basis. This is a meeting which includes the lead doctor, LAC nurse and other key professionals to discuss and improve health issues and processes for children in care.

The 2014/15 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows;

- 88.5% had their annual health assessments. This is the highest performance over the past 5 years. Nationally in 2013-14 the figure was 88.4% so Derby are more in line with national compared to last year's final figure of 74.9%.
- 77.4% had their health development checks. This is the highest performance seen over the past 5 years. Derby is significantly higher than they were at the end of last year – 58.3%. However this is still below the 2013-14 national (86.8%) and comparator averages (86.8%). Health development checks are undertaken for children who are aged up to 5 years of age and done on a 6 monthly basis.
- 97.8% had up to date immunisations – Derby have been performing at over 95% for the past three years and remain well above the 2013-14 national average (87.1%) and comparator average (91.3%)

- 92.5% had their dental checks completed. This is the highest performance seen since 2012-13. Nationally in 2013-14 the figure was 84.4% and the comparator average was 80.3% so Derby is performing well above the comparator averages in 2014-15.
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ's), Derby is showing a 67.6% completion rate and an average score of 16.1 for 2014-15. This is the highest completion rate seen over the past four years. It's a slight improvement on last year's final figure of 66.0%. Nationally in 2013-14 the completion rate was 68% and the comparator average was 67.8%. The DfE requirement is that the SDQ is done for all children who have been in continuously in care for one year and are aged between 4 and 16 years. The SDQ measures the emotional and behavioural health of the child or young person. Work is planned to increase the completion rate for SDQ's in 2015/16. The SDQ should be done with the main carer, in Derby it is usually completed by the foster carer with the child or young person.
- The average score for SDQ's in 2014-15 was 16.1 which is Derby's lowest average score for the past four years. It's dropped from 16.9 in 2012, 16.8 in 2013 and then 16.3 in 2014. The national average for 2013-14 was much lower at 13.9 and the comparator average was 14.4. The score represents the emotional and behavioural health needs of the child or young person, the higher the score the more the needs. The aim of the process is not necessarily to get the score in line with national or regional averages but to ensure that they are being done consistently with people who know the child and young person and hence fairly reflect their needs.

It is encouraging to see that progress is being made in all areas, although further work needs to be done to increase health development checks in line with comparator authorities and the national average. It is pleasing to note that 97.8% of children in care in Derby have up to date immunisations and this has been consistently high over the past few years.

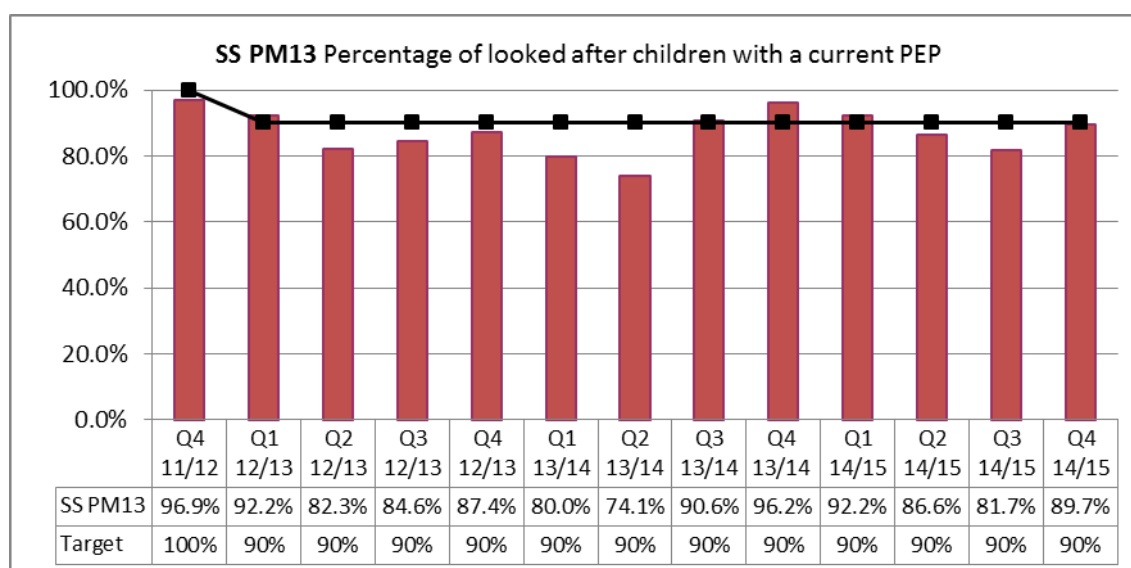
There has been on-going work to ensure that health assessments are recorded accurately. All health assessments for children placed in or very near to Derby (apart from the initial assessment which is done at the Royal Hospital) are done at Sinfin Health Centre. The initial health assessment has to be done within 20 working days of the child coming into care and then depending on the age of the child if they are under five they have six monthly development checks and if they are over five they have annual health assessment. Whilst children and young people are encouraged to have a health assessment if they decide to then can decline.

One of the issues that may have contributed to not getting an even higher percentage of health development checks/assessments on time is relating to children who are placed out of Derby. For these children the assessment has to be usually done by their local health nurse or doctor. Due to logistical issues in arranging these, there is an increased chance of these assessments being late. The Corporate Parenting Lead is working closely with health colleagues to explore how we can improve this area of work.

16. Personal Education Plans

All children and young people that come into care and are of school age have to have a personal education plan (PEP) completed for them. This is usually done by the school in conjunction with the social worker. The PEP outlines the educational needs of the child or young person and what will be done to ensure that the child or young person is supported to achieve best outcomes. Connected with the PEP is the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), this is specific funding of £1900 for each academic year for a child in care to support his/her educational attainment. The Virtual School Head Service leads on ensuring that PEPs are completed and are of a good standard and the funding is also disseminated by the service. The IRO has a key role in chairing the statutory review to go through the educational needs of the child or young person and review the PEP as well as ensure that the PPG is appropriately used.

The Virtual School Head Service has done some work in 2014/15 to increase the quality of PEPs and ensure that they reflect the needs of children and young people. Furthermore they have invested in an electronic PEP system which will allow schools to complete PEPs electronically. It is envisaged that this new system will come into place in September 2015 and should make a difference in the number and quality of ePEPs completed.



17. Liaison with Social Care teams and other services

Each IRO is linked to a Locality/ CiC team or service, including Youth Offending Service and The Lighthouse (Children's Disability Service). An IRO also attends the Residential Managers meetings. They attend management team meetings on a quarterly basis.

Managers of the Fostering and Adoption Teams attend IRO team meetings on a six monthly basis.

The Corporate Parenting Lead meets regularly with the Professional Adviser to Adoption Panel, Adoption Team Manager, and Deputy Heads of Service to oversee the process of moving children on to adoption and identify any issues that may cause delay or drift.

Work continues to strengthen the working relationship between IROs and Children's Guardians team. An annual joint team meeting takes place and this has helped.

The Corporate Parenting Lead meets quarterly with the Service Manager CAFCASS and the IRO manager of Derbyshire County Council to discuss issues and improve partnership working as well as plan the annual workshop for IROs and Children's Guardians.

The Corporate Parenting Lead meets regularly with the IRO Manager from Derbyshire County Council and a joint Derby City/ Derbyshire IRO team meeting took place in August 2014 to share good practice and look at new initiatives/ legislation.

18. Learning and Development

There is a quarterly regional IRO managers meeting which the Corporate Parenting Lead attends. As well as this there are regular events organised by the regional managers which the IRO team attend.

There have been a number of learning and development opportunities for IROs in 2014/15 these have included:

- An IRO doing refresher Practice Educator Training
- Many of the team attending the national NAIRO conference in London
- Two IRO's attending the Prevent training
- A service development day for the QA service
- Training on Roma communities and the legal implications for all the team facilitated by CAFCASS
- IRO attending training on Honour based violence and forced marriage
- IRO attending training on CSE

Many of the team are members of National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) with one of the team being the national chair.

19. Business Support Arrangements

There is currently 2.3 fte business support staff available to the service.

Quite a significant backlog of work has built up over the last few months, particularly around the dissemination of review reports to children and young people, parents and external agencies. It is an expectation that review reports are distributed in 20 working days from the review. Due to capacity issues with business support Derby IRO service has not been able to achieve this for a significant number of reviews. This has been highlighted with business support on a regular basis; there is currently a plan in place with business support to get the review reports disseminated as a matter of priority.

Due to the recent business support reorganisation, it is anticipated that there will be further business support changes for the IRO service in 2015/16. This will need to be managed very carefully as not to impact negatively on the quality of the service.

20. Children's Right's Service/ Children in Care Council

Services for children's rights have been commissioned to Volunteering Matters formerly CSV. They provide services which include:

Independent Visitors, Independent Advocacy Service, Child Protection Conference (support and ascertain views of children for initial conference) and facilitate the Children in Care Council which is made up children who are in care or recently left care and the meetings are held on a monthly basis.

A full detailed annual report will be provided by Volunteering matters which will outline the activity undertaken and impact in each of the areas identified.

The project manager of the children's right's service attends IRO team meetings on a quarterly basis. IROs will refer a case for a child to have an advocate from this service if the child wishes to make a complaint or have representation at a review meeting. Independent Visitors are appointed where a need is identified and they are invited to attend a review if the child agrees to this.

The Corporate Parenting Lead regularly attends the children in care council meetings, this provides an opportunity for children in care to raise issues directly with the Corporate Parenting Lead as well as an opportunity for the Lead to discuss possible developments and get the views of young people.

21. Key Successes and Challenges in 2014/15

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. Maintaining and strengthening the team of experienced, motivated and committed IRO's. There has only been one IRO change in the last year, with a new IRO joining the service in May.
2. New consultation forms created with young people. The new consultation forms for young people between 12 -17 are completed in advance of the review by the young person. The forms are much simpler and shorter and allow young people to express their views. The consultation paperwork is used to inform discussions with young people by the IRO before reviews and also at the review where appropriate. There is separate consultation document for children between 4-11 years of age.
3. Arrangements have now been put in place for IRO's to access independent legal advice. A reciprocal advice arrangement has been agreed with Derbyshire County Council legal services.
4. The status of IROs in Derby continues to be an issue for the service. Currently IROs are graded and such paid below team manager level. The IRO handbook is very

clear in stating that an IRO should be at least team manager level. This is to ensure that IROs carry the appropriate seniority and status in order for them to undertake their role effectively.

5. There has been a dip in the timeliness of reviews in particular for last quarter of 2014/15 compared to 2013/14. This has been particularly disappointing. The Corporate Parenting Lead to work with IRO's to ensure that reviews are done in a timely manner.
6. The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the new IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 81, this is considerably higher than the guidance recommends.
7. There have been ongoing issues regarding business processes and capacity in 2014/15. This has severely impacted on the timely circulation of review reports. This is being addressed with business support and an action plan has been put in place to clear the backlog.
8. Appointment of Corporate Parenting Lead who started in post in February 2015 to manage the IRO service.
9. Transition to Council House by IRO's and business support in January 2015. After an initially difficult start, particularly due to the new working arrangements, with an open plan office and paperless approach to work the IRO's have now settled into the council house.
10. A regular partnership meeting with CAFCASS and Derbyshire IRO's to improve partnership working. This includes planning and facilitating an annual workshop for IRO's in Derbyshire and Derby with CAFCASS officers to improve working together, practice and learning.
11. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council. Corporate Parenting Lead attends the Children in Care Council meetings on a regular basis to discuss care issues with young people and progress any matters.
12. Regular attendance of Children in Care Council representative to the Corporate Parenting Board. The Young person is supported by a project officer from Volunteering Matters.

22. IRO Service Action Plan 2015/16

Objectives	Action	Lead	Timeframe
Children in care achieve an appropriate plan for permanence, through safe family arrangements, adoption or other means, as soon as possible, and receive high quality services whilst in care to promote good outcomes, including education and health.	Ensure all children in care have an appropriate permanence plan, including opportunities for children to safely return to their families are kept under continual review and challenge.	Corporate CP Lead	July onwards
	Work with CYP and partners to improve the completion & recording of Health Assessments for children in care.		June onwards
	Work with schools & Virtual School head to monitor and improve completion, quality and effectiveness of PEPs.		July onwards
	Ensure all children have appropriate legal status, specifically: Placement Orders are discharged when the plan changes from a plan of adoption; Care Orders are discharged appropriately when children return home (within a year); Proceedings are issued promptly when young children are removed.		October
Quality assurance of individual casework is robust, with both recognition of outstanding practice and challenge of poor practice or decision-making across the partnership, escalated as	Maintain IRO QA notification system; benchmark regularly to ensure robustness & consistency; analyse and report	IRO, CP Lead	Ongoing April, October
	Create a system to monitor and report on informal challenges by IROs	CP Lead	July

necessary, and challenging management for evidence of action and learning.	Extend use of notifications to partner agencies where appropriate	IRO	July
	Collate and report on evidence of action and learning from QAs	CP Lead	April, October
Participation by children, young people and parents is expected, through input into their individual plans, and into wider partnership quality assurance, to improve practice and services	Develop and implement ways of obtaining views of service users about QA meetings; analyse and use to inform improvements in practice	CP Lead	September
Quality Assurance staff and Business support staff work effectively together to ensure internal processes are compliant, consistent, high quality and efficient.	Implement internal QA processes to ensure meetings and processes are sensitive, robust and effective, e.g. peer observations, group supervision and user feedback.	CP Lead	Various
	Ensure every child in care is seen either at their review or prior to/ after their review - sample audit to be completed.		September
	Work with Business Support to implement Liquid Logic and maximise any opportunity to make processes more efficient.		May and ongoing
	Work with business support to meet timescales for circulation of minutes. Ensure minutes are to an acceptable standard consistently		June ongoing

	Take part in joint training events with CAFCASS/ Derbyshire IROs/ LFJB / regional CPMs & LADO and attend regional events to promote and share good practice.	IRO, CP Lead	As available
	Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO contacts on child's file.	CP Lead	July