

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2016 – 2017

Pervez Akhtar
Deputy Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance
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Derby City Council

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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 at year end 2016/17 had a total establishment of 6.6 fte IRO's and a 0.5 fte specialist IRO for children receiving short breaks. The IRO team headcount is 8 IRO's, with 1 male and 7 females. It is an experienced team; it has generally been a stable team however there has been considerable staff change over the last year with 3 IRO's leaving the service, 2 in September, one went on to lecturing at the University of Derby and the other went to train as teacher and 1 in December 2016. The IRO that left in December 2016 went to take up a one year secondment post as a children's team manager for Derby City Council. The service undertook a recruitment process and was able to recruit to all three posts. For the secondment post a compromise had to be made to a 0.8 rather than a full time post due to the availability of the staff member appointed. When the service is fully staffed it will have total number of 7.3 IRO's including a 0.5 IRO for short breaks. The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the 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 70; this is at the top end of the guidance. However over the year the number of children in care has been variable at periods being considerably lower and in more recent months it has steadily risen. The average case load in 2015/16 was 73. 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.

The IRO service was based in the Council House up until December 2016. As part of plans to bring the whole Childrens Quality Assurance Service together the IRO service moved to new offices at the Gatehouse on Kedleston Road. The whole of the Quality Assurance Service is now based at the Gatehouse; this has improved communication and better working within the service. The IRO's are located in the same office as the child protection managers; this has particularly helped with discussion regarding children who may be on child protection plans coming into care.

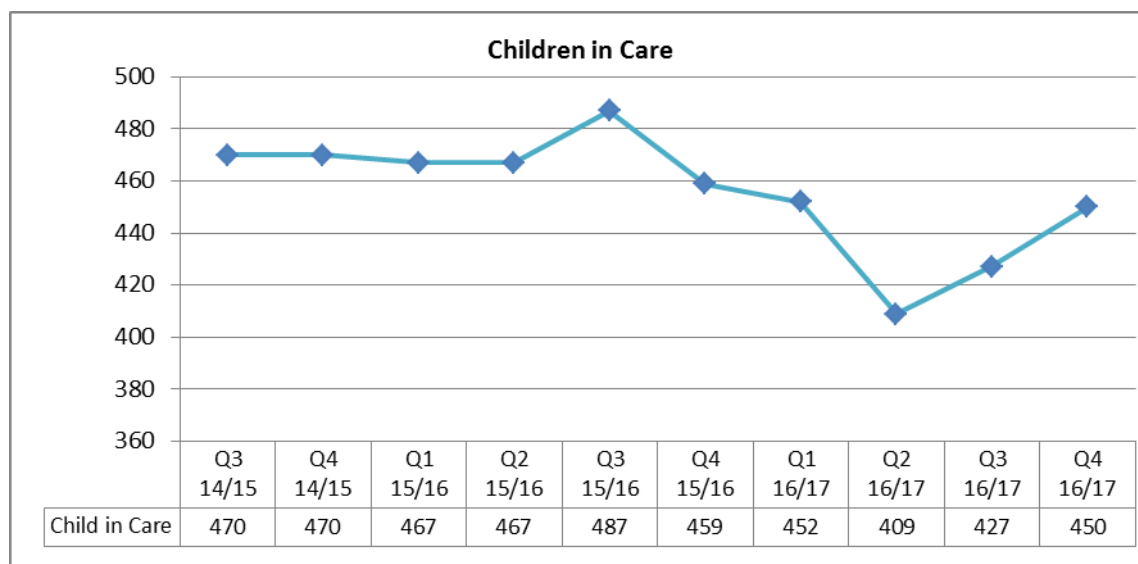
4. The Children in Care Population

The table below illustrates 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 Q3 2015/16 of 487. Following this peak the children in care population generally continued to decline resulting in the lowest number of 409 in Q2 of this year. From Q3 of 2015/16 to Q2 of 2016/17 there was total reduction of 78 children in care. There has been no clear rationale for this significant decrease, however some of the things that may have contributed to this include the increased number of children that have been adopted as well as the increased number of children that reached 18 years old and hence no longer classed as in care.



It is interesting to note that since the dip in numbers in Q2 to 409 there has been a considerable increase in each subsequent quarter, to 427 at the end of Q3 and the year ending on 449.

Children in Care over the last three years



5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2016/17 are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 169 or 38% of the total. There are 22% or 97 children who are aged between 5 and 9 years old. There are 23 children or 5% who are under 1 years of age and a further 70 or 16% 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 a '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 | 31/03/2017 | 31/03/2017 |
|----------|------------|------------|
| Under 1 | 23 | 5% |



| | | |
|--------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 to 4 | 70 | 16% |
| 5 to 9 | 97 | 22% |
| 10 to 15 | 169 | 38% |
| 16+ | 90 | 20% |
| Total | 449 | 100% |

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2016/17 were male, 258 making 57.5% of the total with 191 females which equates to 42.5% 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.

| | 31/03/2017 | 31/03/2017 |
|---------------|------------|-------------|
| Male | 258 | 57.5% |
| Female | 191 | 42.5% |
| Total | 449 | 100% |

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2017 out of the 449 children in care, the largest group of children, 294 were reported as being White British, which was a total of 65% of all children in care. The next largest group were children of dual heritage who made up 12% of the population with 56 children in care, followed by 33 Children or 7% classed as white other.

4% or 19 categorised as Asian or Asian British. There were 16 children, 4% of the population categorised as Gypsy/Roma/Traveller. There were 20 children or 4% categorised as black or black British. This number has doubled from 2015/16 when there were only 10 Black or Black British Children in care

| Ethnicity Recorded | Number | Percentage |
|------------------------|--------|------------|
| Asian or Asian British | 19 | 4% |
| Black or Black British | 20 | 4% |
| Dual Heritage | 56 | 12% |
| Gypsy/Roma/Traveller | 16 | 4% |
| Not Known/Recorded | 1 | 0% |



| | | |
|--------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Other | 10 | 2% |
| White British | 294 | 65% |
| White Other ¹ | 33 | 7% |
| Total | 449 | 100% |

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2017, 260 or 58% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 61 children or 14% 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 36 children or 8% 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. 92 or 20% 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.

| Legal Status | 31/03/2017 | 31/03/2017 |
|---|------------|-------------|
| C1 Interim Care order | 61 | 14% |
| C2 Full Care order | 260 | 58% |
| D1 Freed for Adoption | 0 | 0% |
| E1 Placement Order Granted | 36 | 8% |
| J1 In Local Authority on Remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence | 0 | 0% |
| L1 Under Police Protection, in LA Accommodation | 0 | 0% |
| L2 Subject to Emergency Protection Order | 0 | 0% |
| J3 CYPA 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Required | 0 | 0% |
| V2 Accommodated under Section 20 | 92 | 20% |
| Total | 449 | 100% |

8. Entrants and Exits from Care

¹ White - Other includes: White - European, White - Non-European, White - Other European, White - Irish

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 2016/17 has been abuse or neglect, this was also the case in 2014/15 and 2015/16. There were 212 children entering care in 2016/17 compared to 154 children and young people entering care in 2015/16 and in 2014/15 there were 200. Out of this, a total of 150 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 71% of all entrants. 19 children came into care due to parental illness/disability, with 10 coming in alone in the last quarter. 7 children and young people came into care due to disability and a further 11 for absent parenting. According to the records 3 children came into care because of low income. There were 8 children that came into care for socially unacceptable behaviour. In the latter end of 2016/17 in particular there have been a number of large sibling groups that have come into care; these may have impacted on the figures for particular categories e.g. parental illness/disability. There were also significantly higher numbers of children coming into care in the last 2 quarters for 2016/17

| Children in Care - reasons for children starting care | | | | |
|--|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Reasons for children starting care | Quarter End - numbers starting care during the quarter | | | |
| | 30/06/2016 | 30/09/2016 | 31/12/2016 | 31/03/2017 |
| Abuse Or Neglect | 29 | 21 | 47 | 53 |
| Disability | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Parental Illness/Disability | 3 | 3 | 3 | 10 |
| Family In Acute Stress | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Family Dysfunction | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Socially Unacceptable Behaviour | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Low Income | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Absent Parenting | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| Total | 43 | 34 | 62 | 73 |

According to the data currently available in 2016/17, 212 children and young people exited care. There was a significant rise in the number of children adopted a total of 47 when compared to 2015/16, when there were a total of 26, in 2014/15 there were 41 children that were adopted.



72 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons with PR, this made 34% of the total. This was highest reason for exits from care

Quite a large number, 32 young people, exited care by moving into independence, this made 15% of the total number. There was a slight drop in the number of children and young people exited through the use of SGO's which totalled 15, compared to 21 SGO's in 2015/16. There were 12 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, this may need further investigation regarding accurate recording with a further 13 exiting through being sentenced to custody

| Reason Ceased (grouped) | Quarter End - numbers | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | 30/06/2016 | 30/09/2016 | 31/12/2016 | 31/03/2017 |
| Adopted | 16 | 19 | 8 | 4 |
| Care taken over by other LA | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Residence/Child Arrangement Order | 2 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| SGO | 4 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Returned Home | 19 | 19 | 21 | 15 |
| Independent Living | 10 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| To Adult Social Care | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Any other reason | 3 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| Sentenced to custody | 2 | 3 | 2 | 6 |
| Total | 59 | 59 | 46 | 48 |

9. Children in Care Placement Provision

There were a total of 184 placements with Derby City Council or other provision, making a total of 41% of all placements. There were 265 placements with private agencies, making a total of 59% of all placements. From the total 130 or 29% of placements were with our in house foster carers and 212 or 47% with independent fostering agencies. If we just look at fostering placements this breaks down as 41% of all fostering placements are in house and 59% are with independent fostering agencies. There has been a significant decrease in in-house fostering placements as at the end of 2015/16 in-house fostering placements made up 51.5% of all foster placements.

The number of children placed with private fostering agencies is higher than what is desired, at the moment there is a continuing increasing number of Derby children placed with independent fostering agencies then with its own in house fostering services furthermore this has increased from last year by 10.5%. However it must be recognised that there is a changing economy in relation to foster care provision and the market has significantly



increased with private providers over recent years, this has made it increasingly difficult for the local authority to compete and increase its market share of foster carers. Derby City Council Fostering Service has a marketing strategy in place and is working to increase in house foster carers.

There are 21 children that are placed with parents. These will be children who are on care orders or interim care orders. This is an area that has had significant attention over the last year. Two audits with recommendations were completed. The number of children PWP at the end of 2015/16 was 33 so there has been a positive reduction of 12 so far.

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.

Derby City Council or Other

| Placement Groups - provision of placement | 31/03/2017 |
|---|------------|
| Foster (U1-U6) | 130 |
| Homes and Hostels (K2) | 27 |
| Independent Living (P2) | 2 |
| Placed for Adoption (A3-A6) | 4 |
| Placed with Parents (P1) | 21 |
| Total | 184 |

Private Agency including Independent Fostering Agencies

| Placement Groups - provision of placement | 31/03/2017 |
|---|------------|
| Foster (U1-U6) | 212 |
| Homes and Hostels (K2) | 22 |
| Independent Living (P2) | 11 |
| Placed for Adoption (A3-A6) | 11 |
| Residential School/Hospital (R1/R2/S1) | 6 |
| Secure Units, YOI or Prison (K1 and R5) | 3 |
| Total | 265 |

10. Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews

The IRO team completed is 1,034 reviews in 2016/17 this 140 less than in 2015/16 when 1,174 statutory reviews were completed. The decrease in reviews is mainly due to the reduction in the number of children in care in the middle part of 2016/17, at one stage there were just over 400 children in care which is considerably lower compared to the year-end figure of 449, since which the numbers have continued to increase. At the end of 2016/17 there were 449 children and young people in care, whilst at the end of 2015/16 there were 448, a total increase of 1 at year end.

The number of reviews that have been completed within timescales has largely stayed the same with 90.4% for 2015/16 to 90.1% for 2016/17 this just over our target of 90% for the year. The IRO service will continue to work hard to ensure that we improve on this for 2017/18.

In exploring the reasons for the delays, a number were delayed due to sickness either of the IRO or social worker, as well as late notifications to the IRO service and a couple of miscalculations of dates.

Because of recording purposes for DfE if one of the reviews is late for the child in the reporting year then all the reviews are classed as late. 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.

11. 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 2016/17, 89.8 % of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This is under our target for 2016/17 of 95%.

The service continues to strive to improve on this, however sometimes even after discussion with their IRO and SW there is still some young people who do not wish to participate in their reviews, in these cases this is recorded as non-participation and hence does affect 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.

12. 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:

In the first instance if appropriate the IRO will raise an Informal QA Notification, this will be in the form of an Informal Notification Case Note on LCS. The Case Note will generate a notification for the SW. The SW and TM are expected to respond in 72 hours.

The informal notification can be completed anytime and may cover

- Poor practice - this can include the SW not following up a decision from a statutory review, not keeping the IRO informed about changes, lack of preparation for the review, poor quality reports or failure to complete required tasks or lack of progress
- Non-attendance - SW not attending statutory review
- No reports – reports not generated through LCS on time for the review
- Child not supported to participate in the review process

If any of the above criteria for Informal Notification is repeated or where there are significant concerns a Formal QA Notification is instigated. The formal process has four internal stages, initially when the IRO has a serious concern about practice or issues affecting the care plan for the child (or the informal process has not been successful) the IRO instigates stage one of the process. This involves the IRO generating an electronic QA notification on LCS this generates a notification to the social worker. The IRO follows this up with an email to the 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:

- 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 2016/17 there were 84 Formal QA notifications, this is a drop of 23 notifications from 2015/16 when there were 107. In 2014/15 there were a total of 53 QA notifications. In the first six months of 2016/17 there were a total of 46 stage one QA notifications; this is 14 more than 2015/16 when there were 32. The issue of QA notifications has stayed steady over 2016-17 with an additional 38 in the second part of 2016/17, whilst in the 2015/16 there was a surge in QA notifications with an additional 75.

Whilst there has been an overall drop in formal QA notifications, it is evident that there has been an improvement and consistency in the activity of the IRO's in relation to their role. They have an improved footprint on the system and an increase in the communications with case social workers. The improved communications may have contributed to the decrease in QA notifications, through discussions and early informal challenge may have resulted in the need for less formal QA notifications.

Work has been undertaken with the children in care teams by the Deputy Head of Service (Children in Care) over the last year to establish stability of the workforce and reduce caseloads. The impact of this positive work may also have contributed to steady flow of QA notifications and not the spike as seen in the latter part of 2015/16. In the 2015/16 report it was commented that the instability in the social work workforce may have contributed to the significant increase in QA notifications in the latter part of that year.

The notifications were made up as follows:

| Reason | Number |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Drift or Delay | 11 |
| Excellent Practice | 21 |
| Non completion of Significant Tasks | 19 |
| Persistent Poor Practice | 7 |
| Statutory Requirements Not Met | 26 |
| Total | 84 |

The greatest numbers of QA notifications 26, were raised for statutory requirements not met; these 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 way.

The second largest number on QA notifications were for were for excellent practice with a total of 21, this is a significant increase from last year when there were a total of 10 for the whole year. Whilst it is important for IRO's 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 19 QA notifications generated for 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.

There were 11 QA notifications raised for delay and drift. These have included concerns regarding progressing of permanence or revoking particular orders or discharging care orders.

There were 7 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 five cases which were escalated to stage two of the dispute resolution process (reduction of one from last year's report); four of these QA notifications had to be escalated due to lack of response from the team manager, even after reminders from IRO's. All four related to failure to complete tasks. The fifth notification was concerning failure to meet statutory requirements, this centred on a contact order being in place for contact between siblings and contact not being arranged by the social worker. All of the stage two disputes were addressed satisfactorily following a meeting between the Deputy Head of Service (QA) and relevant Head/Deputy of Service.

13. Case Tracking

In addition to monitoring the child's care and progress within 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 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 DHoS.

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. 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.

As part of the case tracking the IRO service has been working on evidencing the effective work that they do. With this in mind the service has worked on ensuring that there is a clear footprint of the IRO involvement within the child's or young person's LCS record. Whilst the IRO service strives to improve on this, there has been considerable improvement in this area over the last year.

14. Feedback from Young People and Parents

As well as using consultation forms for young people and parents, the Derby IRO service has introduced forms to gather feedback after the review. The feedback forms were launched in October 2015. For 2016/17 there were a total of 46 feedback forms received from young people and 37 from parents.

On reviewing the feedback forms from young people, they have been almost unanimous in stating;

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.
- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Some of the comments include:

I really appreciate the time and effort put into this meeting to help and support me

I felt I got my point across and felt listened to and the help and support needed is there

No thank you, she is brill

You guys do a good job

There were a number of comments from young people stating that they would like biscuits or pop at the meetings.

On reviewing the feedback forms from parents they have for the majority been positive.in parents stating:

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.



- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Comments from parents included:

Thank you for hearing and listening to myself as I was very worried with this being my first LAC

Everything was covered fully. All support is in place and available.

I feel everything was ok and I was listened to

However one parent stated:

I felt I couldn't express my opinion and was made to feel like my opinion was inadequate

The IRO followed this issue up with the parent.

This is an area of work that that IRO service needs to continue to further imbed and develop. We plan to continue to improve on this in 2017/18.

15. Health Assessments

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

The Deputy Head of Service 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 2016/17 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows;

- 92.6 % had their annual health assessments. This is a significant improvement from last year when nationally in 2015-16 the figure was 90% and comparator authority figures were 91.6%.
- 81.6% had their health development checks. Nationally in 2015/16 it was 83.2% and comparator authorities it was 89.4% . Health development checks are undertaken for children who are aged up to 5 years of age and done on a 6 monthly basis.
- 97.7% had up to date immunisations, – Derby have been performing at over 95% for the past three years and remain well above the 2015-16 national average (87.2%) and comparator average (93%)



- 84.1% had their dental checks completed. Nationally in 2015-16 the figure was 84.1% and the comparator average was 89.4%. Derby has worked hard to improve this and work will continue to increase completion rates.
- 79.1% of children completed their SDQ. This is much improved from last year which was 70% our highest completion rate ever. The average score for SDQ's in 2016-17 was 16.2, there was slight decrease from last year when it was 16.4. It has dropped from 16.9 in 2012, 16.8 in 2013 and 16.3 in 2014. The national average for 2015-16 was lower at 14 and the comparator average was 14.9. 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. A high percentage of children in care in Derby continue to have up to date immunisations and this has been consistently high over the past few years.

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 Sinfon 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 they can decline.

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 the 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.

17. Liaison with Social Care Teams and Learning and Development

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



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 Deputy Head of Service meets quarterly with the Service Manager at 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 Childrens Guardians.

The annual IRO/Cafcass workshop took place in October 2016, with attendance from Anthony Douglas, strategic Director of Cafcass attending, issues discussed included closer working together, IRO/Cafcass national protocol and adoption.

The Deputy Head of Service meets regularly with the IRO Manager from Derbyshire County Council.

There is a quarterly regional IRO managers meeting which the Deputy Head of Service 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 2016/17 these have included:

- Four regional workshops which many of the team members have attended. Topics for these have included:
 - Immigration and pathway planning
 - Learning from serious case reviews and permanency planning
 - Family assessments, residential placements and working with YOS
 - Placements with parents and working with Cafcass
- Many of the team attending the national NAIRO conference in London
- An IRO attended the prevent training
- An IRO attended pathway planning training
- An IRO attended UASC training
- An IRO attended pause training
- A number of newly appointed IRO's attended the NAIRO training for new IROs
- An IRO also delivered identity training to one of the localities

Many of the team are members of National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO).

18. Business Support Arrangements

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance stating the local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective review process, enabling review meetings to take place in accordance with the Regulations and good practice. Invitations to reviews and consultation documents should be sent out to all those participating in the review at least ten working days before the meeting and the record of the review should be distributed within the required timescales.



There is currently 1.8 fte and 1 term time only, part time business support staff available to the service.

There have been some issues with the capacity of business support available to the IRO service in 2016/17. This has resulted in delays in review reports being sent out in a timely way. This was particularly the case over December 2016 and January 2017, however subsequently additional support was identified and the backlog of circulation reports was cleared.

An action plan has been developed going forward for 2017/18 in order to ensure that there is sufficient business support capacity and no repeat in the delay of review meeting reports being circulated.

19. Children's Right's Service

For 2016/17 the services for children's rights was commissioned to Volunteering Matters. They provided 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 of children who are in care or recently left care. The children in care council meetings are held on a monthly basis.

A full detailed annual report is available which outlines the activity undertaken and impact in each of the areas identified.

The Childrens Rights Service facilitates/provides:

- Independent advocacy for all children in care
- Independent advocacy for all initial CPC conferences where agreed
- Independent visitor service, priority given to children placed out of authority and at a distance
- Children in Care Council

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

During 2016/17 a review of the children rights was undertaken, this was required as the current contract was coming to an end in March 2017. It was agreed that the children in care council element of the service would be brought in house; this has resulted in the appointment of a part time participation officer who started post in March 2017. The remainder of the contract has been awarded to SOVA who started provision on 1 April 2017

20. Quality Assurance Activity

The Deputy Head of Service and IRO Team repeated an audit in 2016/17 about children and young people placed at home with parents whilst on a care order (PWP). The audit identified

that there had been a significant improvement in this area of work from the 2015/16 audit. The number of children and young people placed with parents had reduced from 30 to 22. The audit found that the number of children and young people who had been placed with parents for over a year had reduced. Recommendations were made to address the issues identified in audit. It was agreed that the IRO service would continue to robustly challenge and scrutinize the appropriateness of these placements as well ensure that there is no drift in revoking care orders where there has been appropriate progress or bringing children back into care where they may be at risk. A separate detailed report of the findings and recommendations is available for further information.

Ofsted undertook the single inspection of Derby Children's Services in March 2017. As part of this inspection the work of the IRO service was inspected, This included tracking and assessing the effectiveness of the IRO service as well as individual and group interviews with IRO's and Deputy Head of Service.

Ofsted found that the IRO service was sufficiently resourced and is robust in challenging the quality of social work practice and planning.

In March 2017 the IRO service introduced a peer auditing process. 15 cases are peer audited each month, the purpose of the audit is to ensure the work undertaken by IRO's is of a consistently high standard and good practice is shared across the team. Where there are gaps these are picked up. It is early days but so far the peer auditing process is working well.

21. Key Successes and Challenges in 2016/17

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. Strengthened the team of experienced, motivated and committed IRO's. There have been a number of IRO changes in the last year. These changes have built on the experience and strength of the IRO service.
2. There has been positive feedback from young people and parents about their experience of the review process.
3. The service has maintained the timeliness of reviews for 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. The Deputy Head of Service and the IRO's will continue to work hard to ensure that reviews are done in a timely manner.
4. 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 70, this is lower than year-end for 2015/16 when it was 73 and in 2014/15 when it was 81. The service is now handbook compliant, but at the upper end. This inevitably fluctuates depending on the number of the children in care. .
5. 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. Working between individual IROs and Cafcass Officers has improved in 2016/17



6. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council. Deputy Head Of Service as well as IRO's regularly attend the Children in Care Council meetings to discuss care issues with young people and progress any matters.
7. The Deputy Head of Service has a schedule of quarterly meetings with the designated family court judge. This is building on the positive relationship that the IRO service has with the courts.
8. The IRO service has worked hard to challenge and appropriately evidence the work they do by ensuring there is a footprint of their work on LCS. There has been some very good progress on this area of work. This was commented on positively by Ofsted.
9. Successful implementation of the peer auditing process in the IRO service. Each month 15 cases are peer audited by IRO's
10. Positive feedback gained from young people and parents as part of post review feedback process
11. In the recent SiF inspection Ofsted reflected positively on the Independent Reviewing Service being robust and effective. *"The use of informal and formal escalation procedures when concerns about children's care plans are identified are fully embedded and sufficiently challenged. The majority of children spoken to during the inspection knew their IRO and saw them as a constant and supportive presence in their lives"*. (p.17 Derby City Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, Ofsted 13 June 2017)

22. IRO Service Action Plan 2017/18

| Objectives | Action | Lead | Timeframe |
|--|---|------------------------------|-----------|
| Children in care achieve an appropriate plan for permanence, | Ensure all children in care have an appropriate permanence plan; including opportunities for children to safely return to their | Deputy Head of Service/IRO's | Ongoing |



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| 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. | families are kept under continual review and challenge. | | |
| | Work with CYP and partners to improve the completion & recording of Health Assessments for children in care. Work to develop an electronic module on LCS so that health information can be recorded directly | | To be completed by September 2017 |
| | 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. | Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) DHoS | Ongoing |
| 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 necessary, and challenging management for evidence of action and learning. | Maintain IRO QA notification system; benchmark regularly to ensure robustness & consistency; analyse and report | IRO, DHoS Lead | Ongoing June and December |
| | Continue to build on the use of notifications to partner agencies where appropriate | IRO | On going |
| | Collate and report on evidence of action and learning from QAs | DHoS | December 2017 |
| | Meet with DHoS CiC on a bi monthly basis to discuss QA notification issues and themes as well as practice issues | DHoS | Bi Monthly |
| | Meet with Cafcass on a quarterly basis to discuss and | DHoS | Quarterly |



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|--|--|-------------|----------------------------|
| | improve working together between IRO and Cafcass officers | | |
| 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 | Continue to improve on obtaining views of service users about review meetings; analyse and use to inform improvements in practice. | IRO DHoS | Ongoing/ September 2017 |
| | Update/review the consultation paperwork that is sent to young people 4-11 before the review | IRO DHoS | October 2017 |
| Quality Assurance staff and Business support staff work effectively together to ensure internal processes are compliant, consistent, high quality and efficient. | Continue with the implementation of the peer auditing process to build on the strengths of the IRO service. Continue with group supervision, peer observations and user feedback | DHoS IRO | Various |
| | Ensure every child in care is seen either at their review or prior to/ after their review. | | Ongoing |
| | Review of business support to ensure adequate level of support is available to meet the needs of the IRO service | | October 2017 |
| | Take part in joint training events with CAFCASS/ Derbyshire IROs/ CPMs and attend regional events to promote and share good practice. | IRO, DHoS | As available |
| | Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO | DHoS | Ongoing |



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| | contacts on child's file. | | |
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