

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2018 – 2019



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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 the care plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2015)

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 within 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 to 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 2018/19 had a total establishment of 6.8 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 been a stable team over the last year.

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 83. This is 13 more than the top end of the handbook guidance.

The average case load in 2017/18 was 72, 2016/17 was 70 and in 2015/16 it was 73. There has been a significant increase of children in care numbers over 2018/19 with a total of 562 in care at the end of the year whereas in 2017/18 there were 491. The IRO service is based at the Gatehouse with the rest of the Quality Assurance Service, including Child Protection Managers and Children in Need Reviewing Officers. This service has a strong identity and works very well across the Quality Assurance Service.

In 2018/19 IRO have been provided with Mi Fi devices. These devices allow them to work whilst travelling, making them more efficient as well as reducing the need to carry confidential papers/reports around with them. The Mi Fi devices have significantly improved IRO efficiency and well-being.

4.0 Children in Care over the last three years

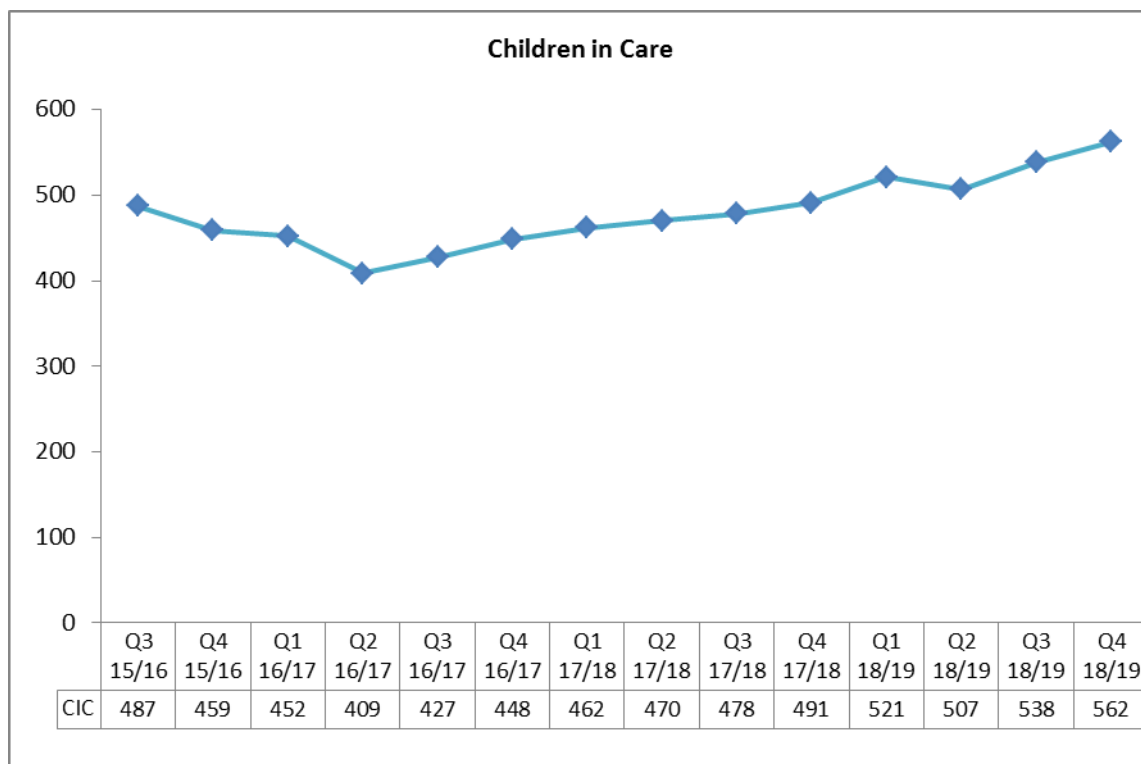
The table below illustrates the quarterly changes in the number of children in care throughout the last three years.

There has been a continuing increase in the numbers of children in care over the last three years. At the end of 2016/17 there were 448 children in care rising to 491 at the end of 2017/18 and 562 at the end of 2018/19. This is a total increase 114 children in care since the beginning of April 2017.

2018/19 started off with 521 children in care at the end of quarter one, this figure dropped by 14 at the end of quarter two to 507 and then from then on has continued to increase consistently with 538 at the end of quarter three and 562 at year end.

Derby City has a higher children in care rate per 10,000 population compared to its comparator authorities and nationally. At the end of 2017/18 Derby was at 82.0, comparator average was at 78.7 and nationally it was 64. At the end of 2018/19 this figure has increased to 94.2. The national and comparator rate has not been released yet so comparisons are not possible at this stage.





5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2018/19 are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 225 or 40% of the total. There has been a 3% increase in the number of 16 plus children in care from 18% to 21% this year, an increase of 28 children over the last year. There has been a decrease of 5-9 yr olds of 3% from 111 to 110. The other age group percentages have stayed relatively stable over the past year.

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 61%% 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 or Child Arrangement 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	31/03/2019	31/03/2019
Under 1	39	7%
1 to 4	72	13%
5 to 9	110	20%
10 to 15	225	40%
16+	116	21%
Total	562	100%

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2018/19 were male, 322 making 57.3% of the total with 240 females which equates to 42.7% 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, almost identical to last year 2017/18 and with only a very small percentage figure variations at most in other years.

	31/03/2017	31/03/2017
Male	322	57.3%
Female	240	42.7%
Total	562	100%

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2019 out of the 562 children in care, the largest group of children, 330 were reported as being White British, which was a total of 58.7% of all children in care, this an actual drop of just over three percent over the last year . The next largest group were children of dual heritage who made up 12.3% of the population with 69 children in care, followed by 44 Children or 7.8% classed as Asian or Asian British other.

On analysing the data in more detail the percentage of white British children in care has consistently reduced in last three years from 65.4% (293) at the end of 2016/17 to 62.1% (305) at the end of 2017/18 and 58.7% (330) at the end of 2018/19. Whereas Asian or Asian British children have increased year on year from 4.2% (19) from the end of 2016/17 to 7.5% (37) at the end of 2017/18 and 7.8% (44) in 2018/19.



There has been a big increase in the number of black or black British children in care over 2018/19. It was 3.3% at the end of 2017/18 (16) and this rose to 6.8% (38) at the end of 2018/19. The total number more than doubled. Part of the explanation to this could be the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children who come from the African subcontinent, via Laverstoke Court

There were 31 children, 5.5% of the population categorised as Gypsy/Roma/Traveller. There too has been a steady increase in the number of Gypsy/Roma/Traveller children in care from 23 at the end of 2017/18 to 31 at the end of 2018/19

Ethnicity Recorded	Number	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	44	7.8%
Black or Black British	38	6.8%
Dual Heritage	69	12.3%
Gypsy/Roma/Traveller	31	5.5%
Not Known/Recorded	1	0.2%
Other	15	2.7%
White British	330	58.7%
White Other ¹	34	6%
Total	562	100%

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2019, 309 or 55% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 104 children or 18.5% 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 38 children or 6.8% 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. 106 or 18.9% of the total population were voluntarily accommodated under s.20. This is an increase of 28 (2.9%) from 2017/18. Again the explanation for this maybe the increased number of unaccompanied asylum seeker children. This means that these children were accommodated at the request of and or in agreement with parent/s or those with parental responsibility or were over 16 and had requested to be accommodated under the homelessness policy

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

Legal Status	31/03/2018	31/03/2018
C1 Interim Care order	104	18.5%
C2 Full Care order	309	55%
E1 Placement Order Granted	38	6.8%
J1 In Local Authority on Remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence	5	0.9%
L1 Under Police Protection, in LA Accommodation	0	0%
V2 Accommodated under Section 20	106	18.9%
Total	562	100%

8. Entrants and Exits from Care

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 2018/19 has been abuse or neglect, this was also the case in 2017/18 and 2016/17,

There were 292 children entering care in 2018/19 compared to 270 children and young people entering care in 2017/8. Out of this, a total of 182 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 62% of all entrants. This is 8% less than last year 2017/18 when it was 70%. 20 children came into care due to parental illness/disability, with 14 coming in alone in the last two quarters, when this has been broken down this has included parents abusing alcohol and drugs, parental disability, parents with problems and parents with learning disability . 5 children and young people came into care due to disability and a further 46 for absent parenting; this is a big increase from last year when it was a total of 9 young people. The increase can be attributed to the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeker children in care. According to the records 6 children came into care because of low income. When this has been explored further this is usually because young people have signed themselves into care due to being homeless. There were 7 children that came into care for socially unacceptable behaviour, last year this was only 2. There have been a steadily increasing number of children entering care throughout 2018/19 starting with 66 in the first quarter and 84 in the final quarter.



Children in Care - reasons for children starting care				
Reasons for children starting care	Quarter End - numbers starting care during the quarter			
	30/06/2018	30/09/2018	31/12/2018	31/03/2019
Abuse Or Neglect	42	36	49	55
Disability	1	0	1	3
Parental Illness/Disability	3	3	5	9
Family In Acute Stress	6	5	4	3
Family Dysfunction	3	3	1	1
Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	2	2	0	3
Low Income	1	3	2	0
Absent Parenting	8	8	20	10
Total	66	60	82	84

According to the data currently available in 2018/19, 221 children and young people exited care. There was an increase in the number of children adopted a total of 30 when compared to 2017/18. 63 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons with PR, this made 28% of the total.

Quite a large number, 49 young people, exited care by moving into independence, this made 22% of the total number. The number of children and young people exited through the use of SGO's has remained consistent with 9. There was a decrease in the number of child arrangement orders from 38 in 2017/18 to 25 in 2018/19.

There were 7 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, this may need further investigation regarding accurate recording with a further 10 exiting through being sentenced to custody, and this is significant increase from last when there were only 2. There have been 6 exits through the age assessment process whereby the person was assessed to be over 18 years old. Sadly one child who was severely disabled passed away whilst in care during 2018/19.

Reason Ceased (grouped)	Quarter End - numbers			
	30/06/2018	30/09/2018	31/12/2018	31/03/2019
Adopted	11	6	4	9
Child Arrangement Order	7	9	3	6
SGO	1	1	5	2
Returned Home with PR	13	14	18	18
Returned Home with no PR	4	8	5	11
Independent Living	7	14	11	17
To Adult Social Care	0	3	2	2
Any other reason	0	7	0	2
Sentenced to custody	1	3	4	2
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	2	0	0	0
Age assessment determined 18 or over	0	3	2	1
child moved abroad	0	1	0	0
Accommodation on remand ended	0	0	1	0
Died	0	0	1	0
Total	44	69	48	60

9. Children in Care Placement Provision

There were a total of 159 placements with Derby City Council or other provision, making a total of 28.2% of all placements. There were 403 placements with private agencies, making a total of 71.8% of all placements. There has been a significant increase in the use of private agencies over recent years.

From the total 104 or 18.5% of placements were with our in house foster carers and 289 or 51.4% with independent fostering agencies. If we just look at fostering placements this breaks down as 26% of all fostering placements are in house and 74% are with independent fostering agencies. There has been a decrease in the percentage of in-house fostering over the last few years, although this seems to have stabilised somewhat over the last year with

only a 4% decrease in the use of in house foster carers. However it must be noted that 74% of foster placements are in the independent sector.

The number of children placed with private fostering agencies continues to be a very significant amount. 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 recently set up an improvement board and started related activity to increase its stock of foster carers.

There are 29 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 few years. The number of children PWP at the end of 2017/18 was 22 so there has been an increase of 7. 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	31/03/2019
Foster (U1-U6)	104
Homes and Hostels (K2)	22
Independent Living (P2)	0
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	4
Placed with Parents (P1)	29
Total	159

Private Agency including Independent Fostering Agencies

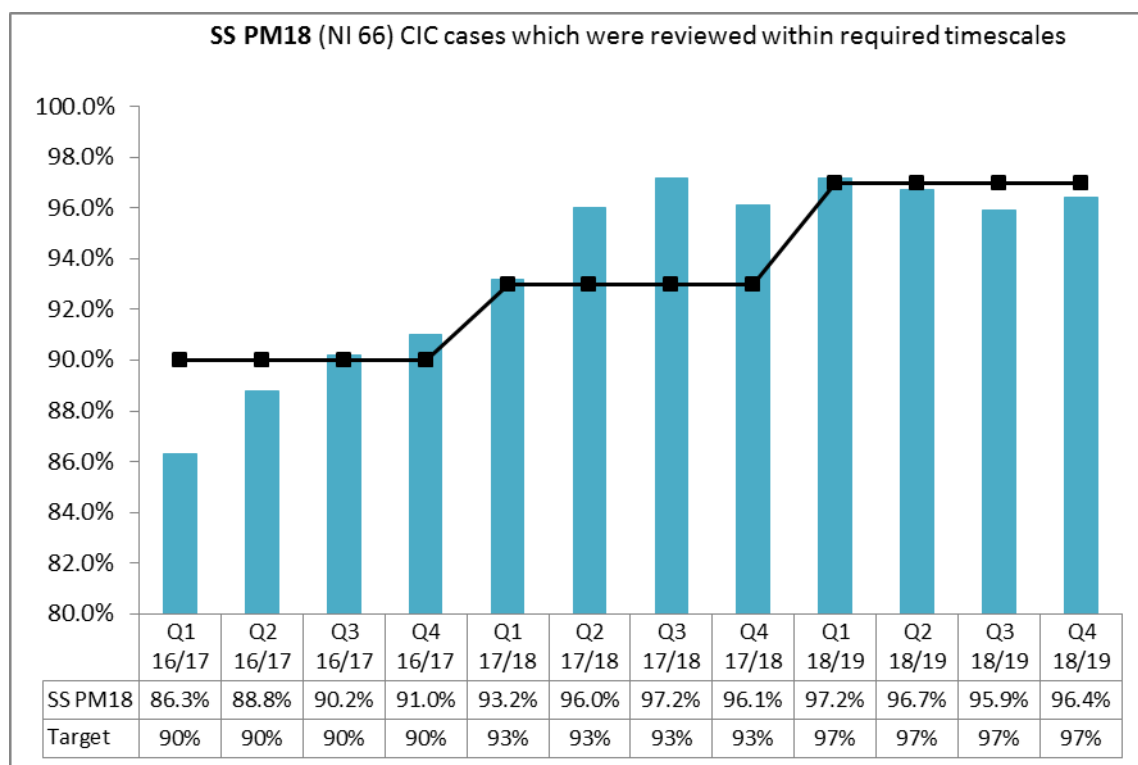
Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2019
Foster (U1-U6)	289
Homes and Hostels (K2)	77
Independent Living (P2)	0
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	5
Residential School/Hospital (R1/R2/S1)	1

Secure Units, YOI or Prison (K1 and R5)	7
Other placements	24
Total	403

10. Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews

The IRO team completed 1,230 reviews in 2018/19. The number of reviews that have been completed within timescales has remained the same as in 2018/19 at 96%; it was 96% for 2017/18 and 91% for 2016/17. The 96.4% is just below our target of 97% for the year. The achievement of 96% has been remarkable given that the IRO service had a member of staff that was off sick for two months. IRO's in the team have had to cover all that IRO's reviews as well as their own. On top of this there has been a significant increase in the number of children in care and thus reviews. The IRO service has continued to receive a number of very late notifications; some these have been so late that the date for the initial review had passed, thus affecting the IRO service statistics. The number of children in care continues to increase and it is big challenge to make sure reviews take place on time, however the IRO service will continue to work hard to ensure that we maintain this for 2019/20.

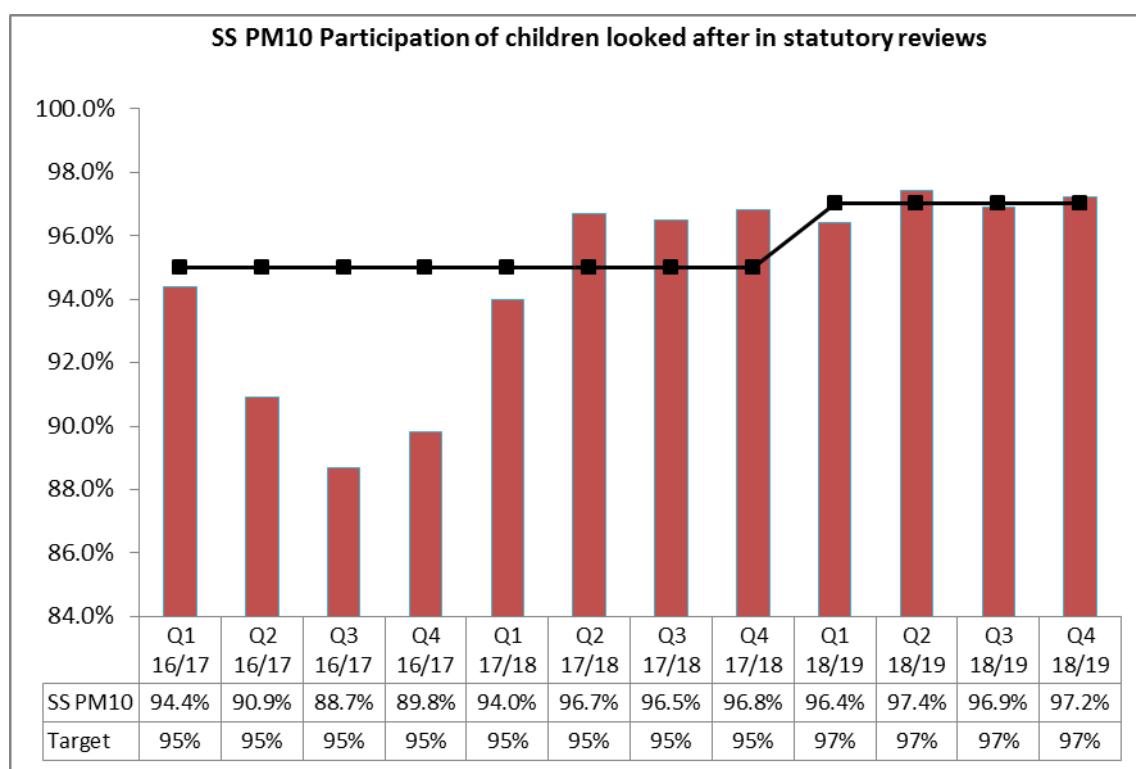
Because of recording purposes for DfE if one of the reviews is late for the child in the reporting year then all the reviews are classed as late. The IRO service will continue to prioritise this area of work and work hard to ensure that all reviews are held within the statutory required timescales.



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 2018/19, 97.2%% of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This exceeds our target for of 97%.

The service has worked very hard over the year to improve on last year's figures, 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 Deputy Head of Service 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 2018/19 there were 91 Formal QA notifications this is two less than in 2017/18 when there were 93 Formal QA notifications, whilst in 2016/17 there were 84, in 2015/16 there were 107 and 2014/15 there were a total of 53 QA notifications.

The numbers of formal QA notifications have been generally consistent over the last three years; there has been a continued improvement and consistency in the activity of the IRO's in relation to their role. They have continued to ensure they have a good footprint on the system and have regular communications with case social workers. The good communication has continued to keep the formal QA's at a consistent level, by having thorough discussions and early informal challenge this will have resulted in the need for less formal QA notifications.

The notifications were made up as follows:

Reason	Number
Drift or Delay	6
Excellent Practice	11
Non completion of Significant Tasks	11
Persistent Poor Practice	4
Statutory Requirements Not Met	59
Total	91

The greatest numbers of QA notifications 59 an increase of 22 from 2017/18 when there were 37, 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 of QA notifications, 11 was generated for non-completion of significant tasks, this is 7 less than in 2017/18 when there were 18, 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 number of QA notifications for excellent practice was a total of 11, this is a decrease from last year when there were a total of 14 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 4 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 6 QA notifications raised for delay and drift. These have included concerns regarding progressing of permanence or revoking particular orders or discharging care orders.



There was 1 case which was escalated to stage two of the dispute resolution process (reduction of 3 from last year's report); The case had to be escalated to stage 2 due to unsatisfactory response at stage 1, Viability assessments had not been completed on family members and this was causing unnecessary drift and delay. Following a discussion between the Deputy Head of Service (QA) and relevant Head/Deputy of Service this issue was progressed satisfactorily.

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 home finding, 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. In 2018/19 we received 29 feedback forms from young people and 2 feedback forms from parents, in 2017/18 it was 48 from young people and 54 from parents. It is disappointing that there has been a decrease in the amount of feedback forms received from the previous year.

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:

Felt comfortable with how the meeting was. Felt I was heard by the chair and gave me chance to speak

For me to speak without people answering for me

YP felt the SW didn't let her answer things by herself. IRO took upon herself to speak to the SW and share young person's feedback

I was given the chance to speak very much so!

I am Happy with the service the way it is

I would change nothing, had great support

Meeting was very helpful

Thank you, to finally have someone who will listen to what I have to say

On reviewing the feedback forms from parents they have 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



15. Health Assessments

The IRO team continue to have a good working relationship with the children in care nurses, health visitors, lead nurse and designated 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. As well as this the Deputy Head of Service meets with the designated LAC nurse on a quarterly basis.

The 2018/19 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows;

- 96.1 % had their annual health assessments. This is a very good percentage and a big increase from last year. This is the highest in seven years with a figure of 96.1% compared to a year-end target of 89%
- 91.9% had their health development checks. This is big improvement from last year when 87.5% children had their health and development checks completed. . Health development checks are undertaken for children who are aged up to 5 years of age and done on a 6 monthly basis. The performance for Health Development Checks is the highest seen in seven years with a figure of 91.9% compared to a year-end target of 80%
- 92.8% had up to date immunisations, –this is slight dip from 2017/18 when it was 93.9%,
- 90.6% had their dental checks completed. This is an improvement from 2017/18 when it was 87.6%. Dental checks have increased year on year over the past four years and is now above 90% for the first time since 2014-15. Derby has worked hard to improve this and work will continue to increase completion rates.
- 92.9% of children completed their SDQ. This is in line with last year which was 93.6%. The average SDQ score has dropped further from 15.6 to 14.7 which is the lowest average score we've ever seen in Derby. This compares to a previous year end figure of 15.9. We are now more in line with the comparator average (14.7) and national average (14.2).

It is encouraging to see that progress is being made in all areas, 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 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 they can decline.

16. Personal Education Plans

All children and young people that come into care and who 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.

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. 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 2018/19 these have included:

- Regional workshops which many of the team members have attended. Topics for these have included:
 - Safeguarding of Young Children from Pre-birth
 - Peer on Peer Sexual Abuse
 - Quality Assurance and the role of Chairs
 - Voice of the Child and Meaningful Participation
- Several IRO's also involved in training including the Journey of the Child and fostering Training
- IRO service providing regular induction training to other social care staff as well external agencies.



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 1fte and 1 term time only business support staff available to the service.

The business support arrangements continue to be tight with IRO's continuing to reduce their reliance on business support other than the essential functions. Business support have continued to focus their efforts on ensuring that review reports are circulated in a timely manner as well arranging initial reviews and facilitating the written consultations from young people in care and their parents.

19. Children's Right's Service

The services for children's rights is commissioned to CGL (Care, Grow and Live) this excludes the role of the Participation Officer who provides support for the children in care council. The commissioned services to CGL cover:

- 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
- Independent advocacy for children that are privately fostered

20. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children

Over 2018/19 there has been a significant increase in the number of young people that have had to be accommodated as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children. This is due to the opening of the Immigration Disbursement Centre, Laverstoke Court in Derby. The Centre opened in February 2018. The purpose of the Centre is to house families who are seeking refuge in the country for a number of weeks before they are moved onto a more permanent arrangement around the country. However there are a number of lone individuals that are being placed at Laverstoke Court. On placement they are stating that they are children, thus requiring the local authority to initiate an age assessment and accommodate whilst the assessment is being carried out. Many of these young people have been assessed as under 18 and hence have had to be accommodated by Derby City Council. These individuals should have been age assessed at their port of entry and if they were determined as



under 18 they should have been accommodated, however this does not seem to be happening robustly.

Laverstoke Court has had a significant impact and increase in the numbers of young people in people in care. This has not only increased the work of the IRO service but also across children's services.

21. Key Successes and Challenges in 2018/19

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. The IRO team remains a stable and experienced service with no staffing changes during 2018/19
2. The service continues to collect feedback forms completed by young people and parents. The feedback remains positive and complimentary about their experience of the review process.
3. The service has maintained the timeliness of reviews for 2018/19 at 96.4%. This is just shy of our target of 97%.
4. The service has also maintained improvement in the participation of young people in their reviews. In 2018/19 97.2 % children have participated in their reviews. This has exceeded the target of 97%.
5. 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 83; this is higher than year-end for 2017/18 when it was 72. The caseloads currently are much higher than where they should ideally be.
6. 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. On the whole IRO's and cafcass Officers have a good working relationship.
7. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council. Deputy Head of Service as well as IRO's regularly attending the Children in Care Council meetings to discuss care issues with young people and progress any matters.
8. 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.



22. IRO Service Action Plan 2019/20

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.	Deputy Head of Service/IRO's	2019/20
	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	2019/20
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	Maintain IRO QA notification system; benchmark regularly to ensure robustness & consistency; analyse and report	IRO, DHoS Lead	2019/20 June and December
	Continue to build on the use of notifications to partner agencies where appropriate	IRO	2019/20
	Meet with DHoS CiC on a bi monthly basis to discuss QA notification issues and themes	DHoS	Bi Monthly



challenging management for evidence of action and learning.	as well as practice issues		
	Meet with Cafcass on a quarterly basis to discuss and improve working together between IRO and Cafcass officers	DHoS	Quarterly
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	2019/20
	Update/review the consultation paperwork that is sent to young people 4-11 before the review	IRO DHoS	October 2019
Quality Assurance staff and Business support staff work effectively together to ensure internal processes are compliant, consistent, high quality and efficient.	Ensure every child in care is seen either at their review or prior to/ after their review.	IRO DHoS	2019/20
	Monitor business support to ensure adequate level of support is available to meet the needs of the IRO service		2019/20
	Take part in joint training events with CAF/CASS/ Derbyshire IROs/ CPMs and attend regional events to promote and share good practice.		As available
	Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO contacts on child's file.	DHoS	2019/20
	IRO's to continue to be involved in audit activity	IRO	Twice yearly

