

The Six Month Monitoring Report November 2016

Adoption and Children Act 2002 and The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2004

Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004 sets out the requirements of the IRO's and Responsible Authority in more detail. The key outcomes envisaged are:

- Focus on needs of children and ensuring they are addressed.
- Minimising drift.
- Consistency of care planning and decision-making.
- Involvement of appropriate persons in the process. The Reviewing Officers Guidance 2004 clearly requires an IRO to chair reviews of children who are:
 - In an adoptive placement prior to an adoption order being granted;
 - Looked after subject to a statutory order or accommodated with the agreement of parents.
- Young people in Young Offender Institutions subject to a Care Order or on remand as required under Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offender's Act 2012 (LASPO 2012)

Frequency of reports

The Independent Reviewing Service provides a report to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee twice a year and will also provide twice yearly reports to the LSCB.

The Reviewing Service

The Service comprises of 13 IROs in post made up of full and part time positions. Due to staff sickness there are three agency workers who are covering vacant positions and sickness. The service offers IROs who have substantial experience with relatively new staff member's joining the service within the last 12 months. There is a buddying system in place to support new staff. 3 IRO's are currently being trained to undertake reviews for the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST). These reviews are also monitored and tracked by the IRO's.

All IRO and Child Protection (CP) chairs in the service are able to carry dual functions chairing Looked After Children reviews and/or child protection conferences. This has improved the effectiveness of the IRO function and quality assuring the support available for Looked After Children.

Immediate line management responsibility for the IROs is undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service Manager.

There is also an Adult Safeguarding Service Manager in post who is responsible for the management of the Adult Protection Team and Safeguarding Education Service. A member of the Adult Protection Team, known as Designated Lead Managers (DLMs), are also positioned within the newly formed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This role is undertaken on a rota basis amongst the DLMs

The work of the Corporate Safeguarding Board continues to work through the recommendations made by the Welsh Audit Office (October 2014). As mentioned in the previous reports The Corporate Safeguarding Board will:

- i. Ensure the compliance of all Council Directorates with key safeguarding requirements in relation to children and vulnerable adults
- ii. Support the Statutory Director of Social Services in the discharge of his/her wider safeguarding duties.
- iii. Support HR in the delivery of key vetting and barring requirements and workforce development.
- iv. Provide an Annual Corporate Safeguarding Report, setting out the performance of all Directorates, in relation to vetting and barring, staff safeguarding training, and the operation of front-line services in terms of their effectiveness in identifying and referring safeguarding concerns.
- v. Review and develop relevant corporate safeguarding standards and policy.
- vi. Review and develop appropriate corporate safeguarding performance measures.
- vii. Advise the Head of the Paid Service and recommend relevant action in relation to corporate safeguarding standards and policy.
- viii. Promote effective cross Directorate safeguarding practice particularly in terms of information sharing and data collection, front-line operational awareness, staff training and wider partnership engagement.

The corporate safeguarding board meets quarterly to review and update an agreed work plan arising from the recommendations made by the Welsh Audit Office.

Independent Reviewing Officer workload

The team works on the basis that each IRO (FTE) is responsible for the reviews of up to 65 Looked After Children. Caseloads presently are running between 60 and 95 children. There are a number of reasons why caseloads are variable ranging from part time staff hold a smaller case load, to mixed caseloads from some IRO's undertake Child Protection conferences and Looked after children reviews.

The team is located at County Hall, although majority of the reviews are conducted within the community, usually in the child or young person's placement setting. There are travelling requirements involved in these reviews where children have been placed in North of Scotland, London, Manchester and Devon and Cornwall. We currently have 222 looked after children placed outside of the authority.

All IROs and Safeguarding officers have completed the Signs of Safety Training The Signs of Safety framework is part of the wider change programme within the service that is designed to significantly improve our ability to achieve better outcomes for the

children and families we work with. Signs of Safety It requires a fundamental change to our overall approach when working with children and families. The purpose in implementing Signs of Safety is to:

- Promote the need for children and families to remain together where it is safe for them to do so.
- Develop its workforce in order to make sure children are as safe as possible.
- Create a culture which empowers staff to proactively manage risk and engage with children, young people and their families.
- Ensure that there is clear and supportive leadership and open communication across the service.
- Focus on the practice that will provide the necessary interventions for the needs of children and their families.

The Service Manager of the Safeguarding Service has been identified as one of the practice leads for the support and implementation of Signs of Safety model and is currently facilitating peer support groups and will assist the identified lead manager for SOS implementation

Purpose of reviews

The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the child, monitor progress and enable decisions to be made. It is a statutory requirement for each looked after child to have an effective care plan that meets their day to day long term needs and which identifies the outcomes for the child. The plan achieves this by settings objectives for work with the child, birth family and caregivers in relation to the child's developmental needs. These needs include health, education, emotional wellbeing and behavioural development, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, and self-care skills.

Frequency of Reviews

Looked After Children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency:

- Within 28 days of a child becoming looked after.
- Subsequently within 3 months
- 6 monthly thereafter,

Reviews should be convened earlier if there is a significant change in the child's care plan or failure to carry out an important aspect of that plan. The cycle begins again from the date the child is placed with an adoptive family.

Quality Assurance role

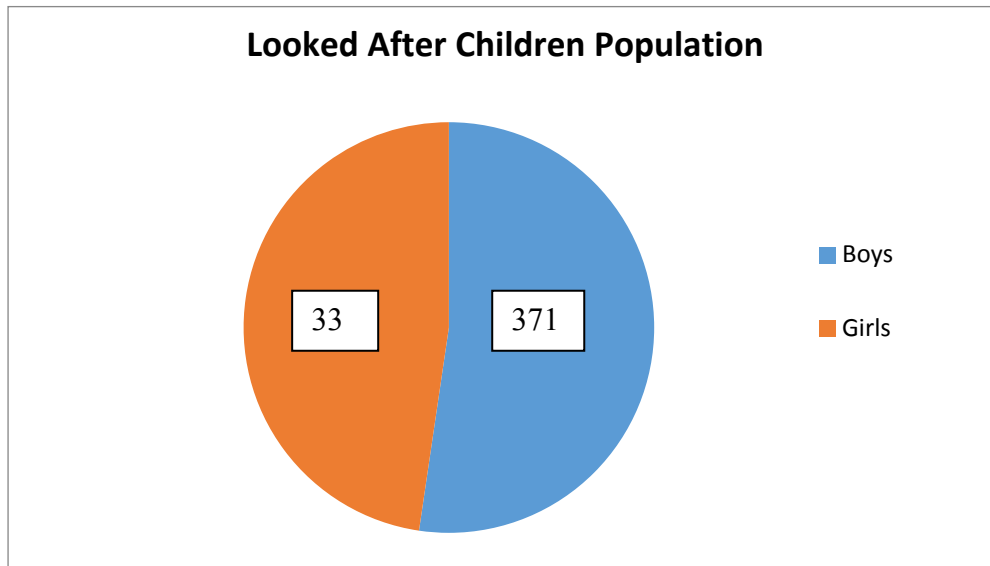
The IRO's provide a quality assurance role through regular review of cases. This provides appropriate challenge to social work practice and care plans for looked after children. As part of their input to the new Quality assurance frame work, IRO's

will be required to audit one case file each month and provide feedback of their findings to the Quality Assurance Officer. The Quality Assurance Framework provides a systemic monitoring and evaluation of practice, policies and procedures. This will be achieved through monthly case file auditing. The findings from the monthly audits will drive service improvement, identify areas of practice that are good or in need of further development through training.

Social Services & Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014

All team members have completed mandatory training in relation to the introduction of the Social Services & Well-Being Act (SSWBA) which came into effect April 2016. Part 6 of this Act relates to Looked After Children and the role of the IRO. All Looked After Children are required to have a Care & Support Plan that meets the requirements of this act and demonstrates the multi-agency plans to meet child's needs. These new care and support plans will provide the basis of all Looked After Children Reviews. A significant change of note is that section 20 of the Children Act 1989 'voluntary accommodation' is replaced with Section 76 of the 2014 SSWBA.

Looked After Children Performance Information

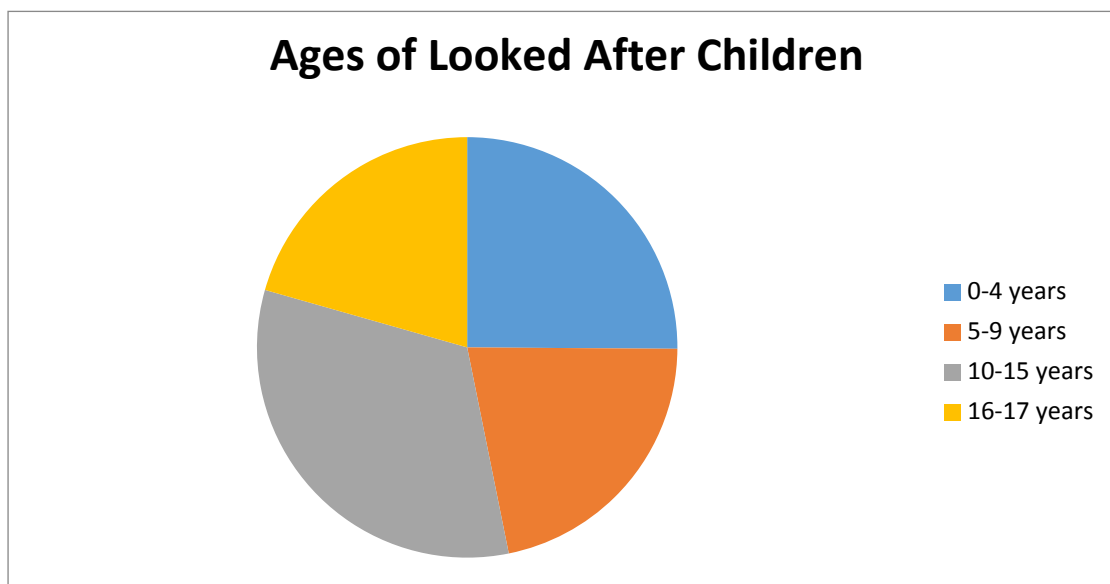


Gender (at 31/10/2016)

Male	371	52.3%
Female	338	47.7%

Total **709**

The Looked After Children Population as of the end of October 2016 was 709. We have seen a significant increase in the number of looked after children since the last reported figures of 640 in February 2016. This is an increase of 69 children, at present we are unable to provide specific details as to this increase although audit and case management reviews are taking place to look at any trends or issues that may have attributed to this significant increase. As detailed in the figures above neither males or females appear to be over represented within the Looked After population.



Ages (at 31/10/2016)

0-4	178	25.1%
5-9	154	21.7%
10-15	231	32.6%
16-17	146	20.6%

Total	709	
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Despite the increase of Looked After Children there has been a decrease in the numbers between the age ranges of 10-17 with the overall figure representing 53.2%. These age ranges previously represented 57% in February 2016, within the last 12 months this figure has continued to decrease. This is significant to note as in previous years this age range have previously represented in excess of 60% of the population. This would suggest we are more robust in the protection of children who are younger and more vulnerable as they lack the ability to care for themselves.

Start and End Becoming Looked After

	Starts	Ends
Feb-16	21	14
Mar-16	29	27
Apr-16	38	15
May-16	32	30
Jun-16	33	24
Jul-16	30	16
Aug-16	32	22
Sep-16	30	26
Oct-16	29	24
Total	274	198

The numbers of children ending their period of being looked after has increased within the last six months with 198 episodes ending within this period compared to 174 episodes ending in the previous six months. However, the overall number of children becoming looked after during this period was 274, which is an increase of 152 compared to the numbers between July 2015 and January 2016. This is a significant increase during this period and has an overall impact on all service areas, and the overall caseloads of the IROs.

Number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children in Care Feb 16 – Oct 16

We have had 25 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) come into care during the last six months. The Local Authority recently worked closely with the Home Office and Welsh Government in offering Care & Support to 17 UASC who were being dispersed to the UK following the closure of the 'Jungle' camp in Calais. The majority of these have since been reunited with their families in various parts of the UK. For those not reunited with family the Local Authority will continue to support them as Looked After Children.

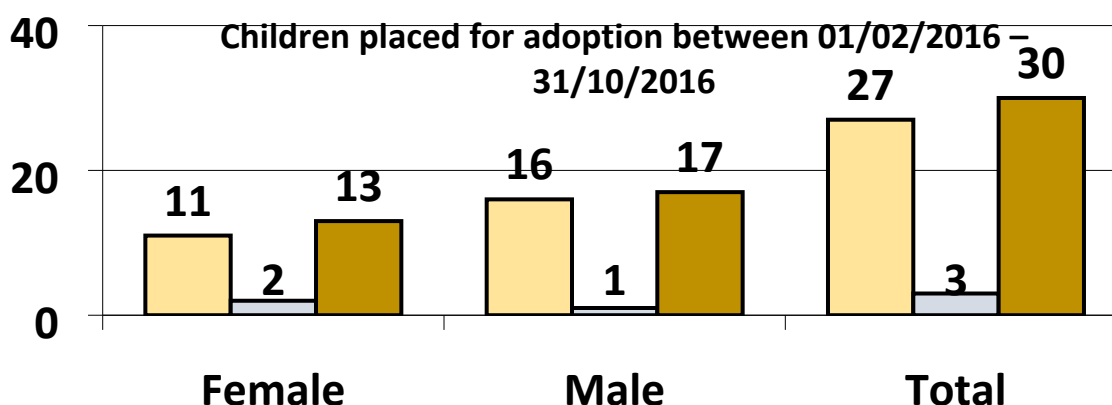
Number of children who have had 3 or more moves

2014/15	68/650	10.46%
2015/16	64/644	9.90%

Information relating to placement moves was unavailable for previous report in February 2016. As the figures show there been a slight decrease in children who have experienced three or more placement moves in 2015/16. This figure includes a percentage of children who have moved from out of county placements. The Reviewing Service continues to support children and social workers to ensure that placements offer stability and are meeting their individual needs.

Children placed for adoption between 01/02/2016 – 31/10/2016

Age	Female	Male	Total
0-4	11	16	27
5-9	2	1	3
Total	13	17	30

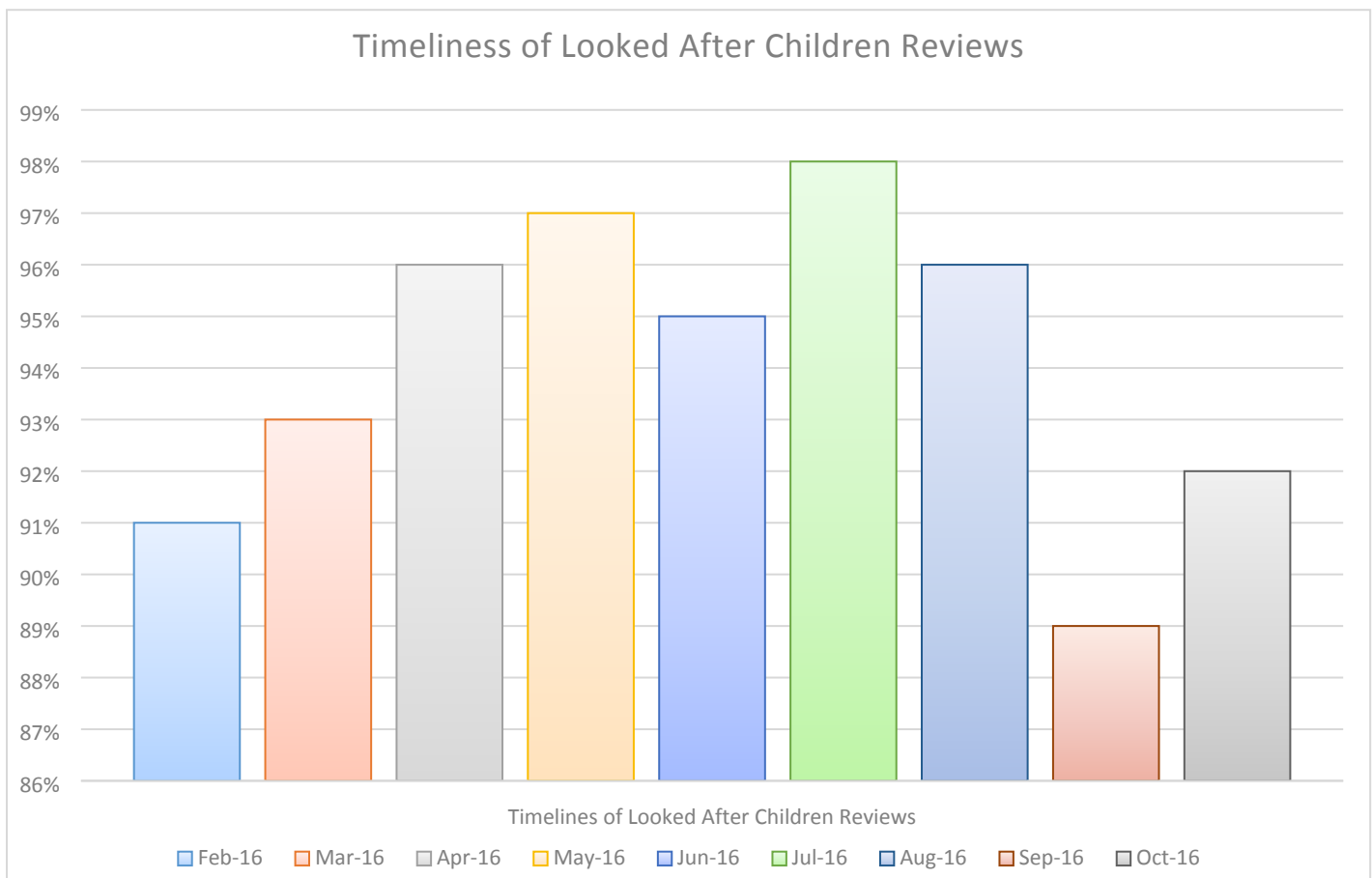


A total of 30 children were placed for adoption between February and October 2016. This is particularly worthy to note as the figures for the 12-month period January to December 2015 was 25 in total. This is in excess of 100% increase in the number of children being placed for adoption. The increase in these numbers can be attributable to the significant numbers of care proceedings that have taken place within the preceding months and concluding within this six-month period.

There remains disparity between the numbers of children placed for adoption within the 5-9 age range, this emphasizes the need to develop best practice to increase the chances of older children being considered and eventually adopted.

Timelines of Looked After Children Reviews

	Late	On Time	Total	%
Feb-16	10	105	115	91%
Mar-16	13	161	174	93%
Apr-16	7	163	170	96%
May-16	5	183	188	97%
Jun-16	8	146	154	95%
Jul-16	4	157	161	98%
Aug-16	7	155	162	96%
Sep-16	22	187	209	89%
Oct-16	13	158	171	92%
Total	84	1415	1504	94%



There was a dip in the month of September regarding timeliness of reviews; however, July highlights the high rate of reviews which took place within timescales. Cardiff is performing slightly below the Welsh average of 95.9% for reviews taking

place within timescale with our current average of 95.8%. When looking at factors impacting on timeliness it was identified that issues relating to sickness; availability of workers and late notification of start of being looked after impacted on achieving 100% compliance with this timescale.

In an effort to address the timeliness of reviews the Service Manager for the Reviewing service is now informed by the performance team on a weekly basis of all children that become looked after. This provides consistency and timeliness of allocation to an IRO, which in turn has resulted in less reviews being held out of timescales. There has also been changes to the internal notification system of start being looked after children which is now incorporated into our Carefirst System.

Timeliness of Looked After children reviews is essential to ensure no child or young person has their welfare compromised due to the delay or cancellation of a review. The system in place ensures operational managers must approve a review being cancelled or postponed.

Placement with Parents (as at 31/10/16)

There are currently 101 Placement with Parent (PWP) arrangements that are subject to review by the IROs. Placement with Parent arrangements has increased considerably with the last 18 months and discussions have taken place between Childrens Service Senior Managers, CAF/CASS and Judiciary in relation to this increase and the appropriateness of this arrangements in some cases.

Out of Area Placements

DOH Type Description	OOO	
	OOO	Grand Total
Children's home outside LA boundary	45	45
Foster placement with relative / friend outside LA	7	7
Independent living	2	2
Placed with foster carer provided by LA outside LA	8	8
Placed with parents / person with parental resp.	14	14
Placement with agency foster carer outside LA	140	140
Resid accom not subject to Children's Home regs	1	1
Residential School	2	2
YOI or Prison	3	3
Grand Total	222	222

The above details the number and breakdown of children currently in out of area placements. As detailed above, there is a significant number of children with agency carers outside of the Local Authority. Work continues to look at the appropriateness of all placements outside of area and an Out of Area Placements Panel takes place on a monthly basis to consider all requests for out of area placements. This is represented by Childrens Services senior management and representatives from Education and Cardiff & Vale Health Board.

IRO Resolution of Problems

IRO's are in a unique position within a local authority they carry out a critical monitoring and challenging role. They can highlight both positive and negative issues that affect children, ensuring that children's views are heard. They should be able to evidence how their role has made a positive difference to the child and helped to improve life chances of children they are involved with.

If an IRO believes that the practice or policy of the Local Authority is detrimental to the child's welfare, they have a duty to assertively challenge the Local Authority. A key feature of the IRO role is that they should provide an independent perspective uninfluenced by managerial or resource pressures of the local authority.

The Local Authority have recently adopted a new Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP). This enables issues to be addressed via a formalised document that is retained and responded to within the Carefirst system.

There have been several IRO DRPs that have been escalated to assistant director level in the last six months, in line with the protocol.

An example of a DRP that was escalated through the protocol relates to a female baby who had come into Local Authority care shortly after birth. At the first looked after review the child was still subject to S.76 (SSBWA) and the IRO felt that the care plan for permanency was not being prioritised and raised their concerns. At the subsequent three month review the IRO was of the view that the Local Authority should formalise the child's legal position to ensure that her long term care plan could be determined at the earliest opportunity. This issue was escalated to Assistant Director as per the DRP and a resolution meeting took place. This meeting involved the Social Worker, OM Targeted Services, OM Safeguarding, IRO and chaired by Assistant Director. Issues were discussed and the outcome being that the LA would issue care proceedings within a specified timescale. The IRO would continue to review the care plan and ensure timescales were adhered to. Care proceedings were initiated with a twin tracking plan. This is an example of how the LA responds to the concerns raised by the IRO and the mechanisms in place to ensure that concerns/issues are escalated appropriately.

Elements of the role of the IRO include:

- To ensure that the welfare of the child in care is safeguarded.
- To provide consultation and advice for the child, social work teams, professionals, carers.
- To make effective challenges through the dispute resolution process when plans are not serving a child needs appropriately.

An IRO can raise any issues of practice with the social worker and team manager. If the issues are not addressed within an acceptable timescale the matter is escalated to the Operational Manager, in the relevant service area.

The IRO service provides robust challenge to social work team regarding case that have gone into drift or where the quality of care plan is not good enough.

Occasionally, this challenge has met with some resistance from some social workers or managers. Where matters have not been resolved satisfactory they have been escalated to the Assistant Director for resolution. In an effort to raise awareness and a better understanding of the IRO. The IRO service will be attending team meetings to discuss the role of the IRO and develop better working relationships. The escalation protocol has also been updated to reflect what will constitute the trigger for a case alert and/or escalation and will be distributed to all social work staff. Regular IRO's and Manager forums will take place to discuss cases and general practice to ensure better partnership working.

The range of powers available to the IRO include seeking of legal advice if they are not happy with the Local Authority's decisions regarding the long term plans for a child or young person. The Lancashire Judgement – 2012, a case brought by two teenage brothers, against Lancashire County Council and an Independent Reviewing Officer, found the Local Authority and the IRO had breached the boys' human rights by not challenging the care plan.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was found personally responsible, alongside the Local Authority, because he did not hold the Local Authority to account for failing to implement its care plan and review decisions. In response to the Judgement, we have ensured that all IRO's have direct access to independent legal advice, which will aid challenge or should they need to attend court to give evidence. This will be spot purchased as and when required.

The monitoring forms are now embedded as part of the quality assurance framework.

It is a statutory requirement for IRO views to be included within all care plans submitted to court. This practice has not been widely adopted across Wales, however, Cardiff has embedded this practice, with the IRO being provided all care plans and relevant assessments prior to being filed and their views being recorded in all court care plans.

Pathway Plans

IRO's also chair pathway plan reviews for Young People from age 16 to 17 years who had previously been Looked After. Work is currently underway to develop reviews for Young Adults 18+ years in response to "When I'm Ready" for Young Adults who want to remain in their foster placement or continue in full time education or training. Consideration needs to be given to how these young people would like their reviews to take place in the future.

Consultation with children and young people

The IRO ensures during the reviewing process that wishes and feelings of the child/young person are sought and they are encouraged to participate in their review. Parents and foster carers are able to contribute to the review process, and also ensure that younger children also have an opportunity to discuss their feelings about the reviewing process and their experiences in foster care.

The Independent Reviewing and Safeguarding Service are reviewing the way they engage children and young people in the reviewing process and will be undertaking a review of how they can encourage children and young people to chair their own reviews. IRO's also visit children and young people in between reviews to ensure they are happy in the placement and they have the opportunity to share their views independently, this also take place if there are issues of concerns. The service is keen to strengthen even further children's participation in reviews. The IROs are currently communicating with other Local Authorities and gathering examples of good practice in this area to contribute to effective communication and engagement with Looked After Children. Some examples provided have used apps using phones and other devices which has been very successful in other authorities and improved engagement and communication.

It is intended that the Service Manager for the Reviewing Service will work with the Quality Assurance Officer to undertake quality assurance visits to young people to inform other areas in which we can develop good practice in engaging children and young people in the reviewing process.

Examples of Good Practice

'C' is a 14 year old girl who has experienced poor parenting and chaotic lifestyle associated with parental substance use. She became Looked After in 2014 and the initial plan was reunification with parents, following a period of intervention and parenting work. Unfortunately, this was not successful and the local authority were granted a care order in 2015. 'C' demonstrated challenging behaviour to all those who worked with her and in her school setting. However, following the determination of her long term care being long term foster care, 'C' began to settle and improvements with her engagement with school and carers improved. 'C' had developed a good relationship with her IRO and they have been meeting in between reviews to look at 'C' wishes and feelings. 'C' was offered the opportunity to chair her own review which she was in agreement with and this has taken place with 'C' reportedly finding this really helpful and made her feel that she has a direct impact on her care plan and decisions being made.

'D' is a five year old male child with is subject to Placement with Parent arrangement. He lives with his father and plans are in place to discharge the care order. His mother has had numerous periods of being in custody and posed issues to the family due to her lifestyle and substance misuse. Contact with 'D' was ceased via court order due to her aggressive and volatile behaviour, however, the IRO was able meet with mother to discuss her feelings around 'D' care and ensure her views are included and are shared with others

Adoption

The IRO team and the adoption team have worked closely together to improve adoption reviews. Timescales remain the same, but by the nature of adoption it is usually the case that these placements are out of county and this has an impact on capacity for IRO's and can affect caseloads. IRO's ensure they remain the chair for children until adoption is fully completed.

CAFCASS

IROs have attended two lunch and learn sessions with the CAFCASS team. This has been designed to develop good communication between Childrens Guardians and the IRO. The sessions focus around areas of concern; good practice and learning lessons for the future. This has had a positive impact on the relationships and communication between IROs and Children Guardians.

Next Steps:

- Ongoing recruitment to permanent posts
- Embed Signs of Safety across all areas of work
- Contribute to overall Safeguarding Service Plan and identify key areas for development
- Prioritise the participation and engagement of children & young people within their Looked After Reviews
- Explore use of software/apps to replace outdated modes of communication with young people and their families