

City Of Cardiff Council
Corporate Parenting Board February 2015
Municipal Year 2014-2015
March 2015

Report for	The Statutory Director of Social Services
Subject	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Report
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No of Pages	9

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide the Statutory Director of Social Services with information about the role function and activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service.

RECOMMENDATION

2. To note the contents of the attached report.

BACKGROUND

3. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 requires the Local Authority (LA) to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to conduct reviews for looked after children and monitor the Local Authority's performance in relation to implementing the care plans for individual children. Specific guidance is entitled "*Independent Reviewing Officer Guidance Wales 2004*".
4. IROs convene and chair reviews for all children looked after by the Council; be they subject to care orders, accommodated voluntarily, placed with foster carers, in residential or secure establishments, living with kinship carers or placed for adoption.
5. IROs have specific responsibility to escalate concerns about looked after children (LAC), which cannot be resolved, to the statutory Director of Social Services or the Chief Executive within the Local Authority and subsequently to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service Cymru (CAF/CASSC) to consider legal action if necessary. This escalation steps should only be taken when earlier stages in the escalation protocol have been exhausted in turn.

CURRENT SITUATION

6. Regulatory guidance requires the IRO service to be managed by an officer who does not have direct or line management responsibility, for individual children's cases or service provision. Therefore within the City of Cardiff the service is managed by the

Operational Manager (OM) for Safeguarding for Safeguarding and Independent Review who has no line management responsibility for case work or care planning decisions affecting Looked After Children and who provides this report directly to the Director of Social Services.

7. Attached at Appendix1 is the monitoring report for the period up until 31st March 2015.

KEY THEMES

8. It is anticipated that key thematic issues will become more evident as subsequent reports build on the evidence base which this first report initiates. Meanwhile some emergent thematic issues include:

- 8.1. Continued developmental work undertaken by the Reviewing Officers, which relates to IFST family plans.
- 8.2. Consultation with children and young people.
- 8.3. Adoption.

APPENDIX 1 - MONITORING REPORT: Adoption and Children Act 2002 and The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2004

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the lead Director for Children and Young People with information about the discharge of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) functions for the period up until 31st March 2015.

Background

2. The provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, S118 require local Authorities to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) *"to participate in the review of children's cases, and monitor the authority's function in respect of the review, and if necessary refer the case to the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service"* (CAFCASS Cymru). This referral to CAFCASS Cymru will be made following an escalation process to the Director of Social Services if the IRO identifies a failure to implement aspects of a care plan that might be considered in breach of the child's human rights".
3. "Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales 2004" sets out the requirements of the IROs 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.
 - It is also good practice to review those to be looked after s20 on release from custody and also pathway plans for young people up to age 18 years. This more recent guidance (2004) strengthens the existing requirements of the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 and its accompanying guidance made under the Children Act 1989.

Frequency of Reports

4. Reports are to be provided twice a year and will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee. These reports will contribute significantly to the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services,

The Independent Reviewing Service

5. The Independent Reviewing Service sits within the remit of the Operational Manager for Safeguarding and Independent Review in Children's Services, thus fulfilling the regulation 2A (3) of the Reviewing of Children's Cases (Wales) Regulations 2007 which states that;

6. *“Where the independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is an employee of the responsible authority the IRO’s post within that authority must not be under the direct management of:
 - a) A person involved in the management of the case;
 - b) A person with management responsibilities in relation to a person mentioned in paragraph (a); or
 - c) A person with control over the resources allocated to the case.”*
7. The service now comprises 9 fte IRO posts with one specialist post established to undertake reviews of Family Plans managed by the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST). Immediate line manager responsibility for the Independent Reviewing Officers is undertaken by the grade 10 (acting) Lead Manager, who reports to the Operational Manager for Safeguarding and Independent Reviewing.
8. The Safeguarding Unit has recently been realigned, merging three disciplines; the Safeguarding Children and Independent Reviewing Service; the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) service and incorporating safeguarding in education (Education safeguarding officers). The amalgamation of these resources has prompted a review of all posts, and it is proposed capacity of the Independent Reviewing Officer will increase, by merging their role with the role of Child Protection Case Conference Chairs. This in turn will potentially improve capacity of the service.
9. The principal reason for merging these functions is to enhance capacity and consistency in the delivery of key safeguarding responsibilities but more importantly in the context of this report, to improve the effectiveness of the IRO function in terms of quality assuring support for Looked After Children.

Independent Reviewing Officer Workload

10. The team now works on the basis that each IRO (fte) is responsible for the reviews of an average of 100 looked after children. Caseloads are presently are running at between 95 and 103
11. The team is located at County Hall, Cardiff - although the 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 across the UK, for example, in Scotland, London, Manchester, Devon and Cornwall. The Safeguarding Manager has recently commissioned a service via Cardiff works to undertake the reviews in Scotland, which has reduced the costs of flight travelling and time.

Purpose of Reviews

12. It is a statutory requirement for each looked after child to have an effective Care Plan which identifies the outcomes for the child and sets 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. There is detailed statutory guidance about how each of these domains should be treated.
13. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the child, monitor progress and enable decisions to be made to amend that plan in the light of knowledge and circumstances.

14. The IRO has particular responsibilities to monitor progress of the responsible LA in implementing the care plan, to reconvene the review meeting in certain special circumstances, The IRO is empowered to escalate concerns where these are not satisfactorily addressed. Escalation can include the Director of Social Services, the Chief Executive or CAFCASSC.

Frequency of Reviews

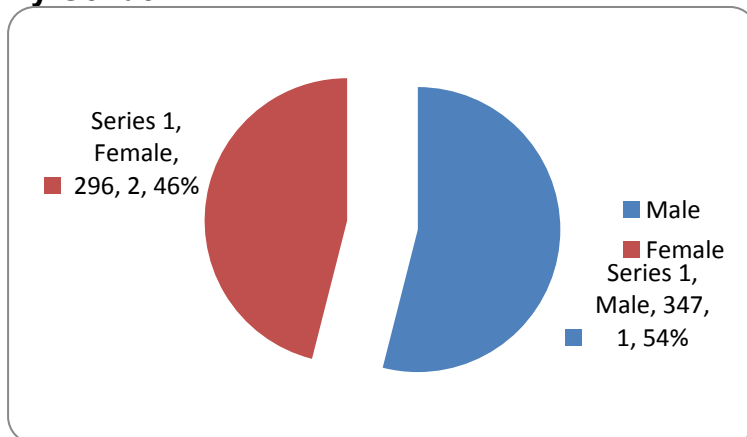
15. Looked after children reviews must be conducted at the following frequency:-

- 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.
- If the child is placed with an adoptive family, the cycle begins again from the date of the adoptive placement
- When the IFST post is filled, reviews of family plans produced by the IFST will be held three times per year. The initial review is held 28 days after the start of the intensive phase of intervention, the second review 3 months later, and the final review after 6 months.

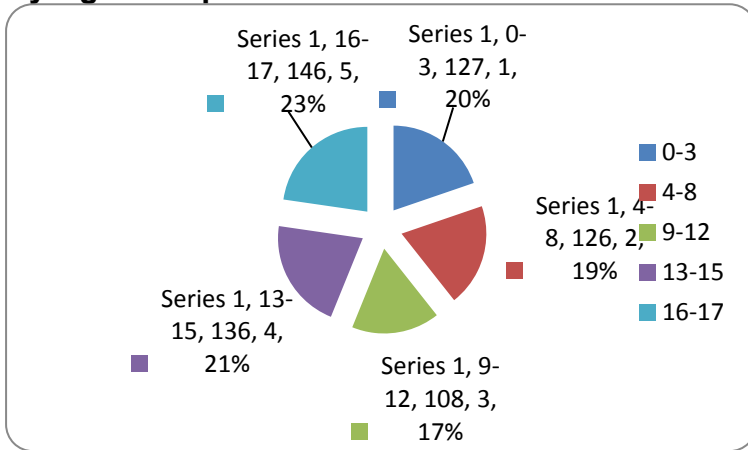
Looked After Children Population

Cardiff LAC Population

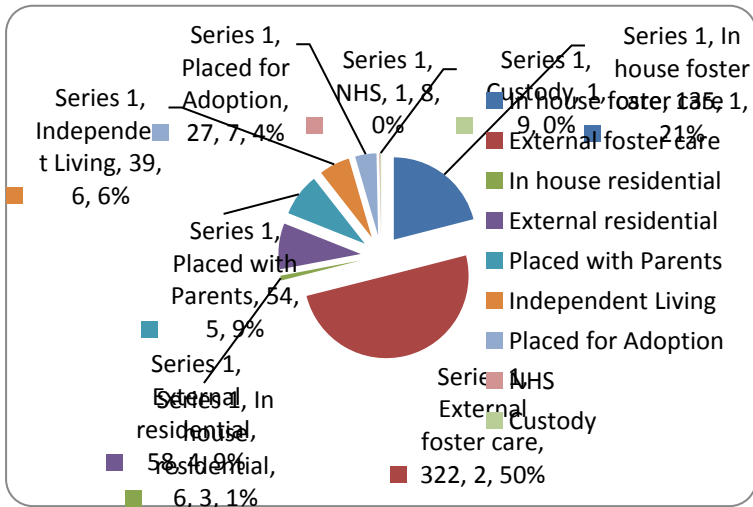
By Gender



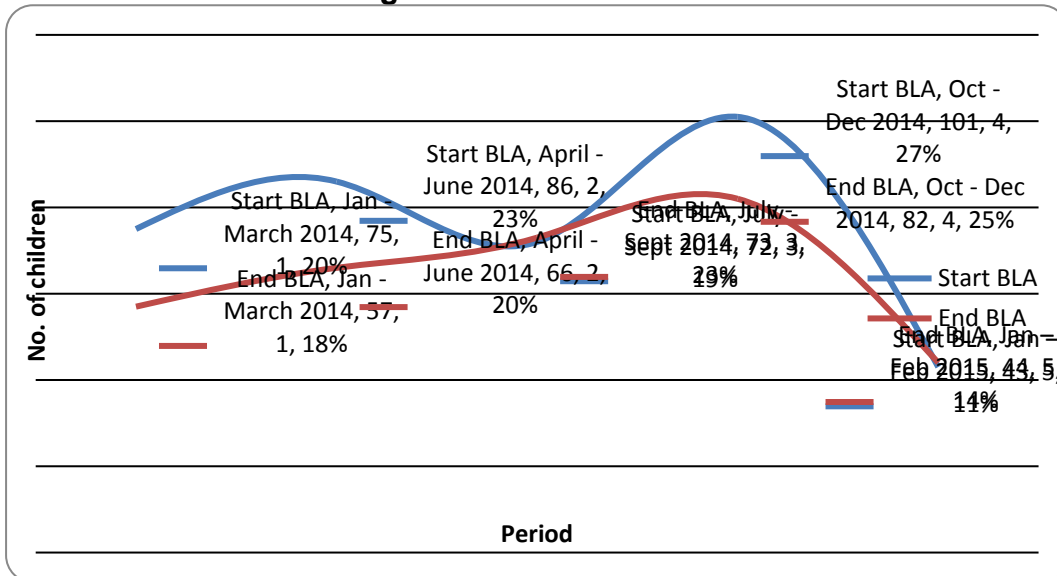
By Age Group



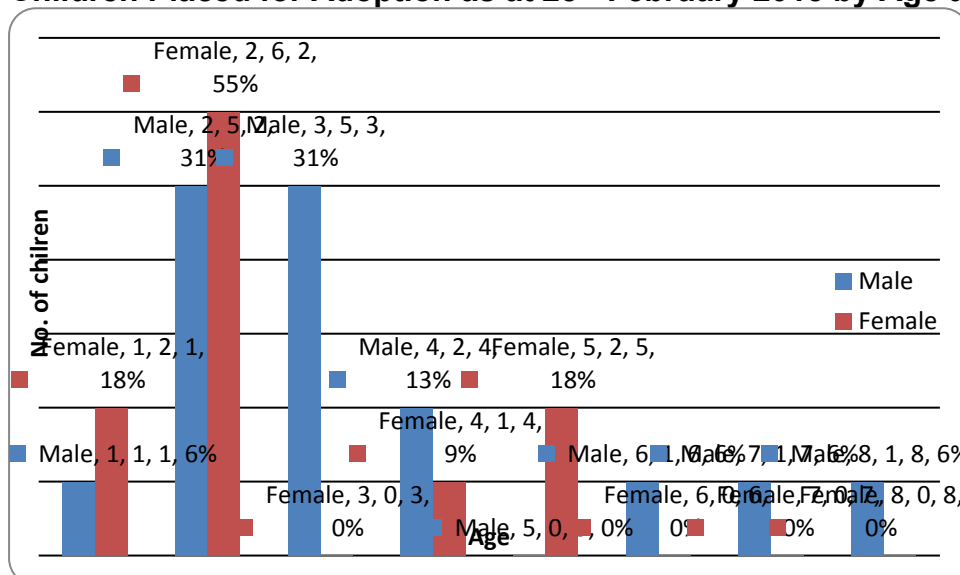
Placement Details



Admissions and Discharge Information

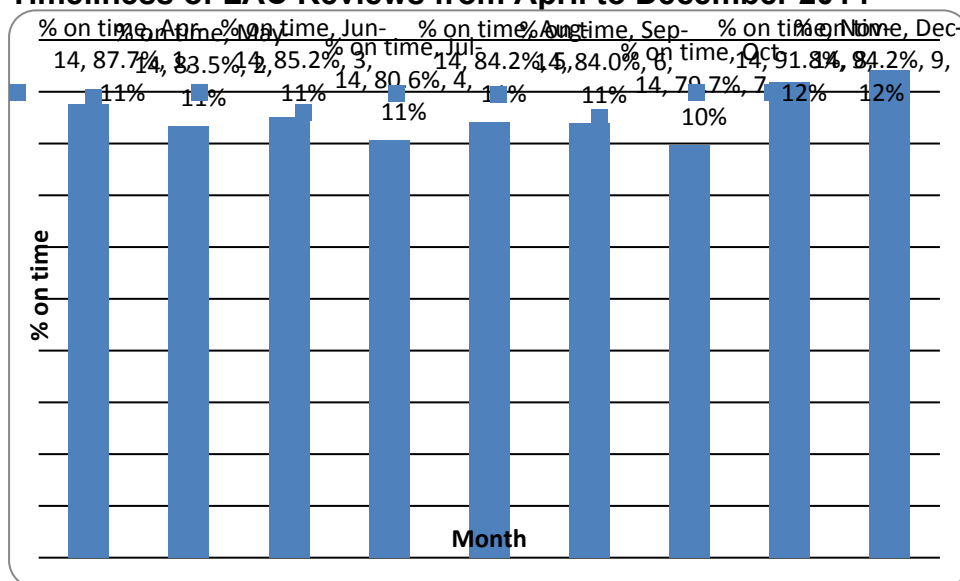


Children Placed for Adoption as at 28th February 2015 by Age and Gender



No. of children placed for adoption between 01/04/13 - 31/03/14 = 28
 No. of children adopted between 01/04/13 - 31/03/14 = 22

Timeliness of LAC Reviews from April to December 2014



Overall timeliness of LAC reviews from April to December 2014 = 85.5% (1,106 / 1,293). Compared with 92.3% (1,104 / 1,196) in April to December 2013. This compares with the All Wales average of 95.9% in 2013-2014.

The % of Looked after Children who had three or more placements in 2013-14 = 8.3% (51 / 611). This is on-par with the All Wales average – also 8.3%.

Review Activity October 2014 to February 2015

16. There has been variable performance during the last 9 months, since the Safeguarding Unit has been in existence. However, there have been some significant staff changes, long term sickness and a 6.3% increase in looked after children, a number of whom

reside out of county. In respect of reviews being held within timescale, performance for the period reported on has fluctuated slightly and this can be explained by the increase in workload and out of county placements.

17. In terms of timeliness, it is critical to note that the OM investigated those reviews that were cancelled and was able to ascertain that no child or young person was placed in jeopardy because of the delay or cancellation of a review. It is also important to note that a system is in place, which means that the Operational Manager has to approve a review being cancelled or postponed.
18. The Safeguarding Manager has established the practice of setting review dates with flexibility to reschedule within timescale if problems occur. This alongside the commitment of both IROs and business support staff is aimed at ensuring performance improvement by identifying when difficulties arise, and why.
19. Team Managers and Social Workers have been briefed concerning the process that the Social Worker must follow if a LAC review needs to be cancelled, which renders it out of time. There is now clarity that any postponement or cancellation of a LAC must be requested in writing and agreed by the Safeguarding Manager, who will advise the Statutory Director of Social Services of any implications

THEMATIC ISSUES

20. The following emergent themes have been identified over the last 6 months in relation to individual children's reviews:-

Addressing Any Delay in Discharging a Care Order

21. These are children who have returned home to the care of parents under specific regulations and it has been subsequently recommended that it is appropriate to discharge the care order. The IRO has liaised with the relevant Team Manager to confirm that the preparation of court assessments and reports are in place in 3 cases.

Placement Disruption

22. Following the review meeting, the IRO highlighted the issue of a 16 year old girl whose placement was fragile.
23. Resolution: The placement was discussed with the Social Worker / Team Manager who were in agreement and this was then referred to the OM for LAC, who agreed to a plan being put in place to search for an alternative foster placement.

Contact Issues

24. The review meeting highlighted the lack of contact for a child with his siblings this issue had been raised with the Team Manager and Operational Manager. The IRO then discussed the issue directly with the Safeguarding Manager who considered invoking the IRO protocol.
25. Resolution: The Team Manager organised for an updated assessment to be undertaken to take into account the emerging more positive situation. The long-term care plan now reflects increasing contact for the siblings.

Development Work

Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) Family Plans

26. IROs have responsibility for reviewing family plans when IFST are involved in providing a service to children and their families in both Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. Interviews were held for IRO which would incorporate IFST reviews in their role in December 2014, unfortunately there were no successful candidates and this post is now being advertised.

Consultation with Children and Young People

27. The Safeguarding and Reviewing Team is keen to ensure that young people, their 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.

28. The Safeguarding Manager and IROs are reviewing how they capture the child's wishes and feelings at child protection case conferences and LAC reviews

Adoption

29. The IRO team and the Adoption Team have worked closely together to improve adoption reviews. The new National Adoption Service (NAS) has been established and there will be strong links between the NAS and the reviewing service, which will establish that the allocated adoption social worker and the IRO will ensure appropriate planning, is in place for children in a timely manner. 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. We will evaluate the position once the NAS has been functional for one year, to ascertain if there are any tweaks in the reviewing position in relation to adoption required.

Ali Davies

Operational Manager for Safeguarding

17th April 2015