

The Independent Reviewing Officers Monitoring Report January 2020

Independent Reviewing Role:

The role and function of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and the Local Authority in relation to care planning for Looked After Children are set out in the following –

- *The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* sets out the main functions of the Care Planning Process and IRO
- *The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales) Regulations 2015* - sets out the detail of the IRO's role
- *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code of Practice*- elaborates on the regulations and explain the role and function of the IRO in further detail.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a statutory function within each Local Authority. Each authority must appoint a person (IRO) in respect of all Looked After Children known to the authority. The IRO role is key to improving outcomes for children in care, it is a legal requirement and an important process in determining decisions affecting a child's future and, increasingly, IRO's are being called to account for the robustness of these decisions. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 challenges Local Authorities to do things differently and to improve consistency and quality of practice, ensuring that children and young people are seen, heard and play a meaningful part in the decisions that are made about them and in determining their own wellbeing and outcomes.

Recent Practice Standards produced by the Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru and the Welsh Government for reviewing Looked After Children carefully considered the 2014 Act and provides guidance for IRO's and Local Authorities. It summarises a number of issues relating to the role of the IRO that are useful to include here:

- *The IRO's role is to monitor, that is keep an overview of the child's case, not just at formal review meetings, but between review meetings as well.*
- *During the reviewing process the IRO has a duty to look at how the child has been looked after and how the care plan is progressing*
- *As the IRO does not have the power to overrule the Local Authority decision making process, there has to be some way of showing that they are concerned about the progress of a child or young person's case or a decision made in relation to a care and support plan. The local authority should have a dispute resolution process by which IRO's can make senior managers in the local authority aware of their concerns, with a view to resolving them. If that internal process does not work, then the IRO may refer to CAFCASS Cymru.*
- *The role of the IRO carries with it personal responsibility for carrying out his or her functions. In a case in 2012, **A & S v Lancashire CC [2012]***

EWHC 1689 (Fam) it was clarified that the IRO may be held personally responsible for:

- a) *Identifying if a child or young person's human rights are being infringed;*
- b) *Ensuring that the local authority acts upon the recommendations of the LAC Review;*
- c) *Referring to CAF/CASS if the child/young persons' human rights are infringed or significant recommendations of the review are not acted upon.*

Personal responsibility carries with it the possibility of being personally liable for damages (compensation) to be paid to the child if the IRO is held to be in breach of his/her statutory duties.

Purpose of reviews

The IROs role is to monitor, both at formal Looked After Review meetings and in between as well. The purpose of the review meeting is to consider the plan for the child, monitor progress and enable decisions to be made. Part 6 of the Social Services & Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014 relates to Looked After Children and the role of the IRO. Under this part of the Act it is a statutory requirement for each Looked After Child to have an effective Care and Support plan that meets their day to day long term needs and which identifies the outcomes for the child, and also demonstrates the multi-agency plans to meet the child's needs. The plan achieves this by setting 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.

Since the implementation of the SSWBA 2014 children who are 'voluntarily accommodated' are done so under Section 76 (formally section 20 of the Children Act 1989). This is usually on a short term basis due to a difficulty at home or where the young person is over the age of 16 and under some circumstances presents as homeless. The Child and Family Courts have recently offered guidance that effectively enables Local Authorities to make greater use of S.76 without needing to make an application to Court for an Order. There are presently 101 children voluntarily accommodated (increase from 81 in December 2018). Children who are voluntarily accommodated still need to be reviewed carefully and the IRO's look to ensure that this is on a short term basis only or, if rehabilitation is not possible, that the Local Authority seeks legal advice in a timely way to secure a legal order for the child.

Frequency of Reviews

Looked After Reviews are held within 28 days of a child becoming Looked After. The first review then needs to take place within 3 months and the subsequent reviews take

place at least every 6 months for the duration of the child remaining looked after. Where there has been a placement disruption or a significant other change (for instance moving from a foster placement to a residential placement) the review will be brought forward. In the case of children being placed for adoption, the same timescales are adhered to.

As outlined above within the updated legislation, guidance and case law, there is now a duty for the IRO to continually monitor the child's plan and particularly where there are issues of concern or drift. Where there are issues or concerns there is a need to robustly challenge the plan. In practice, this means that there is significant work that the IRO needs to do on a frequent basis to ensure that they remain in contact with the child's social worker, reviewing the child's records and monitoring the progress of the plan.

The Reviewing Service

The Safeguarding and Reviewing Service is responsible for coordinating and chairing Child Protection Conferences as well as independently chairing and reviewing children who are Looked After. The staffing establishment includes 15.5 members of staff employed as Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) with an additional IRO post that exclusively reviews families open to the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS). All IRO and Child Protection (CP) chairs in the service are able to undertake dual functions chairing Looked After Children reviews and/or Child Protection Conferences.

The Independent Reviewing Officers are mostly all experienced social workers, however there have been some new additions to the team. A combination of experienced staff and new recruits has meant that the team has remained knowledgeable and innovative. One of the main challenges however, has been ongoing sickness in the team. At one point in 2019, there were five members of staff on long-term sickness leave. We have worked closely with HR People Services and Occupational Health to support staff back into work; however, it placed additional pressure on the other team members. Agency workers were brought in to help cover some of the staff absence. There are currently two members of staff on long-term sick leave, with one due to return in February 2020. One experienced member of staff is shortly about to go on maternity leave and another will be retiring in April 2020. Therefore supporting staff will remain a focus in the near future.

The team is mostly all agile as meetings and reviews take place in the community (such as Hubs), children's homes or public buildings local to the placement. Whilst the reviewing service is based at County Hall, the IRO's rarely attend there except for specific meetings and supervision. As such, the work can be quite isolating, given the nature of the role. The team have recently explored and put into place alternative ways of coming together to share knowledge and support one another, which whilst relatively early on appears to be working well to promote staff wellbeing.

There has been an increase in the number of children Looked After in the last year from 882 children to the current number of 972 (nearly 10% increase in 12 months). There has also been an increase in the number of children on the Child Protection

register from 199 in December 2018 to the current figure of 250 (20% increase). The increase in the number of children on the Child Protection Register is not a concern in itself as 199 was considered to be very low for a City the size of Cardiff and compared with other authorities of a similar size. The rising number of children we are working with in the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service has placed additional pressure on staff workloads.

We currently have 324 children placed outside of the authority; this has increased from 303 in December 2018 and 249 in December 2017. This means that 33% of our Looked After Children are placed outside of the Cardiff area. Whilst this can be for planned reasons, for instance children placed for adoption or with a family member, it is also linked to a shortage of foster and residential placements in the area. With so many children currently placed out of area, there are significant time commitments involved in undertaking out of area reviews. Some children are placed a considerable distance from Cardiff, such as the North of England, West Wales and London. This is a recognised national issue, however the senior management team consider that there are opportunities to further develop in house provisions in Cardiff. The Commissioning Team in Children’s Services has been expanded and an accommodation strategy is being advanced within Children’s Services to develop foster and residential placements in Cardiff.

There has been a lot of change in the Directorate over the last 12 months linked to the current restructure. This has involved the Children’s Services teams, Targeted Services and Specialist Services, moving to localities in the East, West and South of the City. There has also been a restructure of senior management, with the addition of more Operational Manager capacity. There is no longer an Operational manager in the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service, and instead the Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Officers and Conference Chairs now reports directly to the Assistant Director. The move back into locality teams has been welcomed by most staff, including IRO’s, as it enables workers to link closely with communities and local services. Social Workers were initially concerned that Looked After Children would not be prioritised in generic locality teams. Reassurance has been given that there will remain Looked After teams in each locality, however there will be more flexible arrangements so that children can remain allocated to the right social worker.

Any significant change or restructure can be disruptive. There have been considerable social work vacancies over the last year, most notably in the Looked After teams. The Senior Management Team are acutely aware of the staffing difficulties and have met intensively, with a focus on developing strategies to support the workforce. In the immediate term, this has involved employing agency social workers and commissioning a managed team. They have also met regularly with social workers and managers to provide information, updates and listen to feedback whilst the restructure proceeds. In the medium and longer term, the Senior Management Team is working on the ‘offer’ Cardiff Council provides to new recruits and retaining existing staff through the support it gives.

The following table includes figures on the changes of social worker children have had over the last year:

Changes of social worker in last year

%	Narrative
---	-----------

27.88%	Stayed with same worker
29.15%	Had 1 change of worker
23.71%	Had 2 changes of worker
11.89%	Had 3 changes of worker
5.38%	Had 4 changes of worker
1.41%	Had 5 changes of worker
0.31%	Had 6 changes of worker
0.28%	Had 7 changes of worker

These figures include all children open to Children's Services. Children who are Looked After are more likely to have had changes in social worker, because of the vacancies and new staff that have been brought in to help. We are working on a dataset to be able to monitor this specifically for Looked After Children. The situation should improve over the next 12 months as the teams settle into their new localities and with the ongoing recruitment and retention work. As outlined above, the Independent Reviewing Officers role is vital in these circumstances in minimising drift. They are often the person that has had the longest relationship with the child, young person or their family. Coordinating reviews in timescale has also been much more challenging and required more work for the IRO, as the new social worker often has other commitments organised and needs briefing on the child's plan.

There are two Service Managers in the Children's Services Safeguarding and Reviewing Service. Matt Osborne is responsible for the management of the Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs. Lynda Gallagher manages the Education Safeguarding Service, Professional Concerns Allegations and has involvement in Corporate Safeguarding in the Council. In previous years there had been concern raised regarding the number of changes of Service Manager for the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service, however the Service Manager arrangements have remained stable over the last year. This has helped provide stability to the team.

Cardiff Children's Services remains committed to utilising and imbedding the Signs of Safety approach. 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. All IROs and Safeguarding officers have completed the relevant Signs of Safety Training. Work has been undertaken with IT and the Signs of Safety QA Practice Lead Officer to develop a suite of forms and correspondence which embeds the Signs of Safety strengths based approach across all parts of the IRO and Conference Chair Service. Reviews place a great emphasis on strength based practice and planning. Including the voice of the child is critical and the new forms and system better enable reviewing officers to capture this.

Regional Safeguarding Children Board

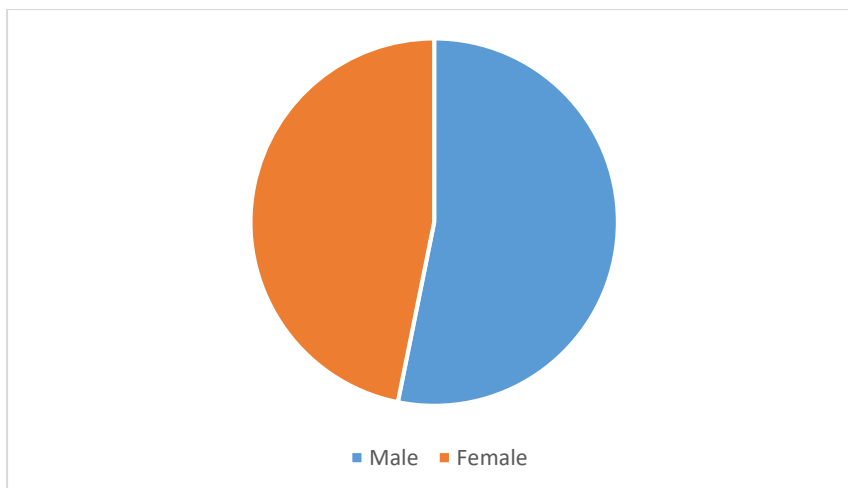
The IRO and Conference Service is expected to report to the Cardiff and Vale Regional Safeguarding Children Board on a regular basis to ensure that any issues within the

service which may impact negatively on children and their families are addressed regionally. The Board is a forum responsible for the following:

- Multi-agency strategic partnership arrangements in the region
- Has a statutory duty to hold all agencies to account for their safeguarding responsibilities in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Lead, co-ordinate and ensure the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding practice in the region
- Challenging relevant agencies in an area so that there are effective measures in place to protect children and adults who are experiencing harm or who may be at risk as the result of abuse, neglect or other kinds of harm; and there is effective inter-agency co-operation in planning and delivering protection services and in sharing information.

As part of the Board's functions, they undertake a scrutiny role in the child protection process and must be informed of any concerns as regards children who are in the child protection or looked after children process. As part of this work, the Board is currently developing a suite of data across the region which will monitor any delay or drift, or any professional dispute resolution necessary in all looked after children cases. The Children's Audit Sub-Group of the Board are also developing audit tools to assess the effectiveness of the IRO service. The Services Managers for the Independent Reviewing Officers in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan both sit on this sub-group and are part of the discussions.

Looked After Children Performance Information



Gender

Male	500	51.44%
Female	472	48.56%

The Looked After Children Population at the end of December 2019 was 972. This is a significant growth from 882 in December 2018. This is an increase of 90 children, or approximately 9.25%, and has placed additional demands on all teams. Several trends have been identified through case audits and population analysis that explain these increases. These include:

- There has been a general population rise in Cardiff, which is set to continue.
- Increased complexity, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who require Age Assessments.
- Better recognition and coordination of referrals and concerns by partner agencies, such as Schools, Police, Education and Health.
- The Court making greater use of a legal process to place children at home with a parent under Placement with Parent Regulations [PWP], which is referred to further below. These children and families often require intensive work and it can be difficult to evidence satisfactory progress to the Court that there has been sufficient change that would warrant discharging the order. Whilst the order remains in place the Local Authority has the same statutory duties as any other Looked After Child.
- The increased level of staff turnover has inevitably led to drift, despite the new social workers and managers doing what they can to minimise delay.
- There has been a trend in younger children becoming Looked After, which has meant that unless rehabilitation or permanence by other means can be achieved (for instance a Special Guardianship Order), then children will remain Looked After for longer.
- Reduced number of children on the Child Protection Register. In recent years, there has been a trend that the number of children on the register has decreased against a corresponding pattern that children Looked After has increased. The number of children on the Child Protection Register has increased steadily over the last year to the current figure of 250, which is considered a positive development.

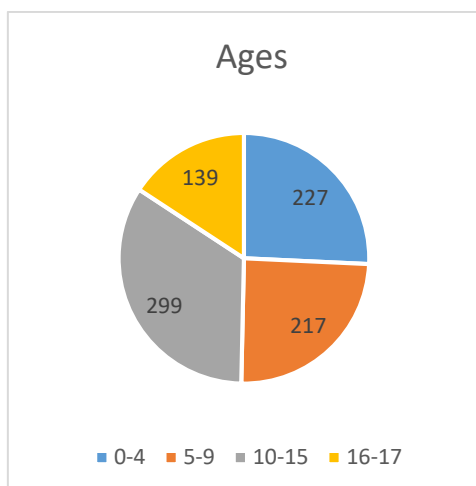
Cardiff Council has developed focused panels, all chaired by an Operational Manager with a renewed examination and scrutiny on the planning for children and families. These include:

- Public Law Outline- looking at legal planning and intervention
- Resource- coordinating support for children and families
- Admissions Panel- scrutinising the plan for children who need to become or have recently become looked after on an emergency basis
- Brighter Futures- Reviewing all children placed out of area, including high cost placements.
- Residential Panel – Reviewing effectiveness of children in residential placements
- High Risk Panel- Reviewing those children considered to have very complex needs or at being placed at high risk.

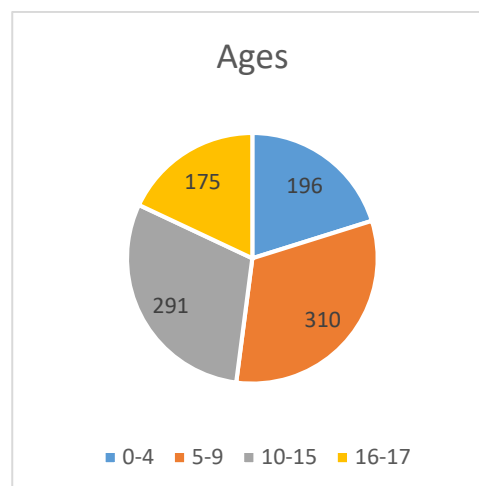
In addition, Cardiff Council has invested in Early Help Services to provide support to children and families without the need for formal Children's Services intervention. A

coordinated effort is also being made to refer all children into wider edge of care arrangements such as the Rapid Response and the Adolescent Resource Centre (ARC) as a means of preventing the child from ending up in the formal care process. There are currently 48 children in Cardiff receiving support from the ARC, which is an increase from 36 children at the same time as last year.

Ages of Looked After Children 2018



2019



Age	2017	Percentage	2018	Percentage	2019	Percentage
0-4	219	27.5%	227	25.74%	196	20.16%
5-9	188	23.6%	217	24.60%	310	31.89%
10-15	250	31.4%	299	33.90%	291	29.94%
16-17	139	17.5%	139	15.76%	175	18.00%
Total	796		882		972	

Whilst there has been an overall increase in the number of children Looked After, there has been small decrease in the number of children aged 0-4 and 10-15. The children aged 5-9 will need to be a particular focus for Cardiff Council over the next year, as they could remain looked after for many years. The reviewing service and the case management teams will need to closely scrutinise the care plan for these children to try to ensure that they remain the most effective.

Start and End Becoming Looked After

YEAR	Starts	Ends	Difference
2017	335	217	118
2018	280	189	91
2019	289	193	96

The table above shows that there were 96 more children who started to be Looked After than ceased to be. The figures remain broadly the same as the previous year; however both sets are quite a lot lower than in 2017.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

We have had 17 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) come into care during the last six months, which is broadly the same as in the same period last year (16 children). The Local Authority has previously worked closely with the Home Office and Welsh Government in offering Care and Support to UASC. There are currently 26 UASC children open to the Local Authority. A number of these children have required age assessments as their age has been disputed by the Home Office. These are complex assessments, which the Local Authority is completing using strict guidance.

Number of children who have had 3 or more moves

2015/16	64/644	9.90%
2016/17	79/725	10.90%
2017/18	77/830	9.28%
2018/19	86/900	9.56%

As the figures show there has been a small increase, both in numbers and percentages of children who have experienced three or more placement moves in 2018/19. This is against a context of more children becoming looked after. This figure includes a percentage of children who have moved from out of county placements back into the authority area. The Reviewing Service continues to support children and social workers to ensure that placements offer stability and are meeting their individual needs. These children will be monitored continuously to ensure that all children have a greater degree of permanency and stability.

Children placed for adoption between 01/01/19 - 31/12/19

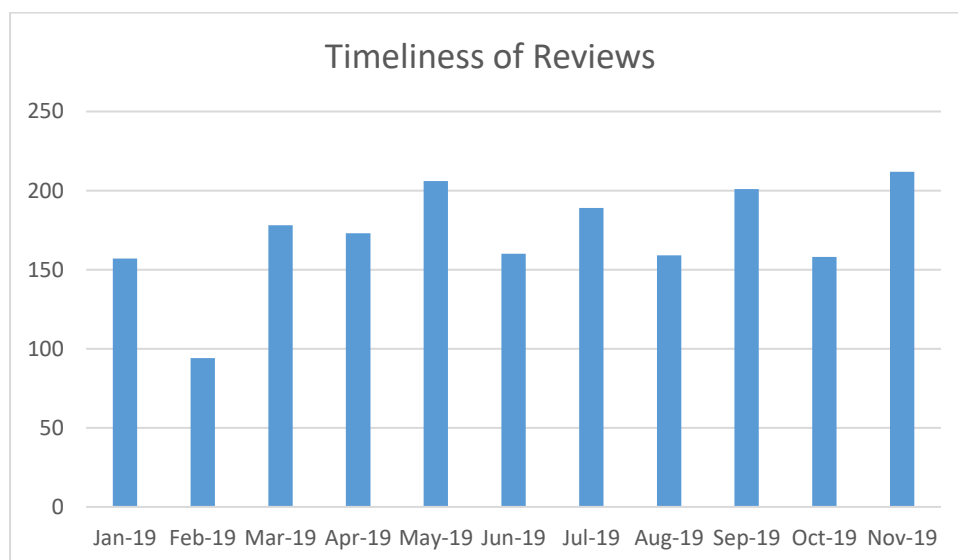
Age	Female	Male	Total 2019	Total 2018	Total for 2017
0-4	27	14	41	30	35
5-9	4	1	5	3	2
Total	31	15	46	33	38

A total of 49 children were placed for adoption between January 2019 and December 2019. This is an increase from the previous year, which is a positive development. There remains disparity between the numbers of children placed for adoption within the 5-9 age range, which is part of a national trend and emphasises the need to focus our best practice to increase the chances of older children being considered and eventually adopted.

Timelines of Looked After Children Reviews

Timeliness of LAC Reviews

	Late	On Time	Total	%
Jan-19	52	157	209	75.12%
Feb-19	16	94	110	85.45%
Mar-19	20	178	198	89.90%
Apr-19	16	173	189	91.53%
May-19	25	206	231	89.18%
Jun-19	18	160	178	89.89%
Jul-19	29	189	218	86.70%
Aug-19	22	159	181	87.85%
Sep-19	41	201	242	83.06%
Oct-19	47	158	205	77.07%
Nov-19	15	212	227	93.39%
Dec-19	Not available			
TOTAL	301	1887	2188	86.3%



The number of reviews taking place on time over the last year (86%) has decreased slightly since 2018 (91%). The main factors impacting on timeliness include; the rise in the number of Looked After Children; social work vacancies or change of social worker; IRO sickness; and late notification that a child has become Looked After.

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. A Service or Operational Manager must approve a review going outside of timescale. Where reviews do not take place within timescale, they usually fall within a few days or at the latest within the month. In these circumstances the IRO will continually

monitor the child by remaining in touch with the social worker, child (where appropriate) and other professionals.

The IRO team and the adoption team have worked closely together to improve adoption reviews. Timescales remain the same, but in many cases these placements are usually out of county arrangements, 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.

Placement with Parents

There are currently 168 children subject to a Care Order and living with their parents under Placement with Parent (PWP) Regulations. All of these children must be reviewed by an IRO in the same way as any other Looked After Child. There has been a rise of 38 (23%) PWP cases compared to the previous year (130).

Cardiff is in a unique position with a higher than national average number of children subject to Placement with Parent Regulations. Whilst other Local Authorities have reported increases, Cardiff has the highest number in Wales by quite some distance. Usually these arrangements are ordered by the Court. There is a significant amount of additional work in reviewing children placed at home with their parents, as by virtue of the Court Order, there are often considerable support needs. There is also an expectation that the Independent Reviewing Officer should review these children more closely. As outlined elsewhere in this report, the PLO Panel is reviewing these children periodically to consider whether there is a need for a Care Order to remain in place.

Out of Area Placements

Placement Type	Total for 2017	Total for 2018	Total for 2019
Children's home outside LA boundary	45	49	61
Foster placement with relative / friend outside LA	7	28	30
Placed with foster carer provided by LA outside LA	8	15	10
Placed with parents / person with parental resp.	14	15	22
Placement with agency foster carer outside LA	140	188	189
Residential School	1	4	6
Secure unit outside LA boundary (within Wales)	2	3	1
Youth Offending Institution or Prison	3	1	4
Independent Living	0	0	1
Grand Total	222	303	324

The above table provides a breakdown of children currently residing in out of area placements at the end of December. Whilst there is still a significant number of children placed with agency carers outside of the Local Authority, the increase is relatively small. The largest increase is in the number of children placed in a residential placement (12 additional children). This reinforces the work being done in the Accommodation Strategy to develop more in Cardiff options. The Brighter Futures

Panel continues to look at the appropriateness of all placements outside of the Cardiff area. This is represented by Childrens Services senior management and representatives from Education and Cardiff & Vale Health Board.

IRO Resolution of Problems and Auditing

The Independent Reviewing Officer has an important duty in monitoring individual cases and checking children's plans. 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 IRO service provides robust challenge to social work teams regarding cases that have gone into drift or where the quality of care planning is not good enough. The IRO's are employees of the council and there is a delicate balance required of all Local Authorities to ensure that the IRO's remain impartial.

If an IRO believes that the practice of the Local Authority is detrimental to the child's welfare, they have a duty to challenge the Local Authority. 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 help improve life chances of the children they are involved with.

The Local Authority has an active Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP) in place. This enables issues to be addressed via a formalised document that is retained and responded to within the Carefirst system. These comments on good practice and concerns are looked at and used to evaluate practice, policies and procedures. Following a Looked After review the IRO completes documentation that outlines whether a child's care plan is effective in meeting their needs. This information is then reported and collated centrally. Where there are general low level issues of concern, this gets reported and the social worker/team manager are asked to respond and address these issues. Where there are more serious issues, the Protocol is raised as described above.

Occasionally, this challenge has met with some resistance from social workers or managers. Where matters have not been resolved satisfactorily they will then be escalated to an Operational Manager and then Assistant Director for consideration and resolution. Ultimately a referral can be made directly to CAFCASS if the IRO cannot seek resolution, however this is rare. In an effort to raise awareness and a better understanding of the IRO role and duties, the IRO service will be attending social work team meetings to discuss the role of the IRO and enhance working relationships.

There have been 107 IRO DRPs that have been raised over the last 12 months. 76 of these were at the Social Worker and Team Manager Level, 21 were escalated to an Operational Manager and 4 to the Assistant Director. These have resulted in agreements to progress the cases discussed effectively. In the same period 188 reports were raised reporting good practice.

The two main causes for the IRO raising a concern relate to Care and Support Plans not being updated within timescale and delay in seeking or discharging a legal order. Greater scrutiny is being given to the use of legal orders through the PLO Panel and

the IRO is able to make recommendations that the child/family is referred directly to this panel. More reliable data about the effectiveness of Care and Support Plans has been developed, which now allows Case Management Teams to more closely monitor completion of Care and Support Plans without the IRO needing to raise a concern.

It is a statutory requirement for IRO views to be included within all care plans submitted to Court. Whilst this practice has not been widely adopted across Wales, Cardiff has embedded this into operational practice. The IRO is given a copy of the Court Care Plans and relevant assessments concerning a child prior to being the documentation being filed to the court and their views are 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. Reviews now also take place regularly 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. Many young people do not wish to have a review when they are over the age of 18. Where this is the case the IRO must satisfy themselves that the young person has made an informed choice and offers the young person advice about how to get in touch with the IRO in the future if they wish to change their mind.

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.

At a Looked After Review and especially when a child or young person is present, IRO's always end the review with a celebration of what has gone well and what has been achieved. It is encouraging that the most recent Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide developed by the Association for Fostering and Adoption (AFA) Cymru and the Welsh Government for reviewing Looked After Children remarked on this.

IRO's are encouraged to meet with a child or young person before each review and where appropriate between reviews for an 'IRO visit'. The purpose of this is to ensure; they are happy in the placement; have the opportunity to share their views independently; and to consider if there are any issues of concern. The service is keen to strengthen children's participation further in reviews. Work is being completed to develop a good practice recording template, so that we can measure the frequency of these IRO visits. A number of reviews have been 'chaired' by the child themselves with support from the IRO.

Children and Young people are currently sent consultation forms prior to each Looked After Review. Not all young people want to fill in these consultation forms and there have been a number of comments such as, "it feels like homework". In keeping with

the Councils priority to utilise '21st Century Technology', Cardiff Children's Services are commissioning a purpose designed 'App' that helps young people communicate their views about how they are feeling, what support they need, and tell social workers and IRO's what is important to them. They can do this either with support or on their own at any time and using any device (tablet, phone or computer). Once operational, the views of children and young people will feed directly into Looked After Reviews.

In last year's IRO report, it was recommended that the Service Manager for the Reviewing Service will work with the Service Quality Assurance Officer post, which was vacant at the time, to undertake quality assurance visits to young people. Regular meetings have been diarised to review performance.

Next Steps:

- Prioritise the participation and engagement of children and young people within their Looked After Reviews
- Develop a good practice recording template to encourage IRO visits
- Implement and imbed the Mind of My Own app to replace outdated modes of communication with young people and their families
- Closely review the plans for children placed at home under PWP to consider support or ensure that the need for a legal order remains
- Review timeliness and quality of Care and Support Plans
- Work with the Senior Management and Case Management Teams to support the restructure
- Develop a legal process so that IRO's can seek independent legal advice (as recommended in the IRO Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide)
- Work with Human Resources to address the long term sickness issues
- Review the Mobile and Agile Working arrangements of IRO's including the efficacy of an alternative base to support a whole team approach