

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

IRO ANNUAL REPORT April 2018 to March 2019

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Executive Summary

This Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Cambridgeshire as required by statutory guidance. This report covers the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Key highlights of this report are:

- The number of children in care rose by 83 this year (from 697 at the end of March 2018 to 780 at the end of March 2019).
- A total of 2022 Child in Care Reviews were held this year.
- Timeliness of Reviews continues to be very good.
- Children's participation in their Reviews continues to be good but there is room for improvement with this.
- The IROs Escalation Protocol was revised in November 2018 and is gradually becoming embedded.

The report concludes with an evaluation of the IRO Service Action Plan of 2017-18 and outlines the new IRO Service Action Plan for 2018-19.

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1.0 Purpose of the IRO Service

- 1.1 The appointment of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Amendments to statutory guidance in 2010 embedded the IRO role further within 'Care Planning Placement and Case Review' and 'The IRO Handbook'.
- 1.2 The IRO Handbook states: 'The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting panel. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed.' (IRO Handbook 2010, page 48, paragraph 7.11.)
- 1.3 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that every child who is "looked after" (in this report referred to as "in care") must have a Care Plan. The Care Plan must detail the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made to meet the child's day-to-day needs.
- 1.4 It is a core responsibility of the IRO to ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child within care planning. The IRO has a responsibility to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case. Statutory guidance and regulation clearly defines circumstances when the local authority should consult with the IRO; for example, proposed change of placement, change of education plan, or serious incident. The actions that the IRO must take if it is felt that the local authority is failing to comply with the regulations, statutory guidance and/or is breaching their duty to the child are also clear.
- 1.5 Every local authority is required to have a dispute resolution procedure that reflects the process for effectively resolving areas of disagreement raised by the IRO in respect of care planning. This includes access to independent legal advice for the IRO and referral to the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS).
- 1.6 The core mechanism for reviewing the child's care plan and ascertaining the child's wishes and feelings, is the child's 'Child in Care' (CIC) Review, which are held at statutory intervals; initially within 20 days of the child coming into care, then within three months later, and then at least once every six months.

2.0 Profile of the population of children in care

- 2.1 As at the end of March 2019 there were 780 Cambridgeshire children in care. This compares to 697 at the end of March 2018 and represents an increase of 11% over the past year. Between March 2016 and March 2017 the increase was 3%. Therefore the proportionate increase in the last year has been significant. There has been a steady increase over the last five years of the numbers of children in care. See Appendix I for statistical detail.
- 2.2 There is significant fluctuation through the year of the number of children entering and exiting care. The higher proportion of children entering care over July and August is, in part, a reflection of the increase in numbers of asylum seekers entering the UK during the summer months.
- 2.3 Table 3 in Appendix I illustrates that, relative to the whole number of children looked after, there are fewer children accommodated under Section 20 this year than there were in 2017-18, which is a continuation of the trend since 2016-17.

3.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 3.1 In Cambridgeshire the IRO Service sits within Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (SQA) and is accountable to the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. SQA broadly exists to act as a 'critical friend' to the organisation. The wider functions of SQA include:
- The Child Protection Service: chairing conferences and quality assuring CP Plans;
 - The LADO Service: managing allegations against staff and volunteers working with children;
 - Customer Care: addressing customer feedback including complaints, from across People and Communities Directorate;
 - The Quality Assurance team who carry out audits and deliver workshops to support practice improvement as outlined in the QA framework;
 - Principal Social Worker to champion best social work practice.

Staff Team

- 3.2 The permanent staffing establishment for the team is 10.4 IROs (full-time equivalent). 1.4 posts are fixed term to March 2020 and the remaining nine

are permanent. Since December 2018 there has also been additional Agency IRO cover in place to cover vacancies and help to manage the growing volume of work for the team.

- 3.3 Once again, membership of the IRO team has been relatively stable this year. There was one permanent IRO who left the team in January 2019, who has since been replaced.
- 3.4 In terms of diversity, there is only one male member of staff and the rest of the IRO Team are female. The majority of the staff team identify as White British. Overall the team do not reflect the gender balance and ethnic mix of the population of children in care that we work with. There are however a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented within the social work teams.
- 3.5 Attached to the IRO Service is a dedicated Business Support Team of one Business Support Officer and 2.5 FTE Business Support Assistants.
- 3.6 There is a permanent Service Manager in post, and since February 2019 a second Service Manager (shared with Peterborough) has begun to share the line management of the IROs.

Staff Development and Support

- 3.7 Each IRO has monthly 1:1 supervision with the Service Manager to reflect on performance, practice, development and support, as well as access to informal supervision when needed.
- 3.8 Monthly IRO Team Meetings take place in Huntingdon. Attendance is mandatory for all IROs. Standard agenda items include staff wellbeing, updates in procedures, and discussion themes in social work practice with children in care. Often visitors from other parts of the organisation are invited, which helps to maintain good working relationships and communication between the IROs and the wider professional network around Cambridgeshire's children in care. Some of the visitors over the past year have included managers and practitioners from the Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Team, the Virtual School, the Participation Team and Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption.
- 3.9 This year has seen the continuation of systemic peer discussion once every two months. A Clinician joins the team for one hour every other month to facilitate a session about a topic or challenge of the team's choice. This

provides a space for practice reflection, encouraging curiosity into alternative perspectives when understanding the experiences of children.

- 3.10 The Eastern Region IRO Managers group and IRO practitioners groups are established within the region. Cambridgeshire's IRO Service Manager and two IROs are active members of the Eastern Region group. The quarterly regional meetings offer a space for rich discussion about dilemmas and challenges of the role, national trends, significant case law developments and learning from one another.

Workload demand

- 3.11 The IRO Handbook recommends a caseload for each full-time equivalent IRO is between 50 and 70 children. This volume of cases should allow the IRO to fulfil all their statutory functions to the best of their ability. This will include the conduct of CIC Reviews within timeframe, consulting children prior to their review and a continuous overview of the welfare of the child and their permanence plan. In 2018-19 the caseloads for Cambridgeshire have been at the higher end of the recommended range, which has been a continuous challenge as the numbers of children in care has progressively risen over the year. Caseload numbers peaked at an average of 74 per full-time equivalent IRO in December 2018. The introduction of additional Agency staff assisted to ease the pressure, and as at the end of March 2019 the average full-time equivalent caseload was 69.
- 3.12 Effective business support staff use established systems to support the IROs, this does not include the typing of minutes, which the IROs complete themselves. All IROs ensure that they distribute the decisions from CIC Review meetings to the responsible Team Manager within five working days of the review; this is in accordance with the IRO Handbook.
- 3.13 The high caseloads have had a significant impact on the staff capacity to undertake their full responsibilities to the highest standard. The areas of practice that have been particularly effected have been the timeliness of the CIC Review Reports being completed by IROs, and the limitations of the IROs to escalate issues every time a concern regarding the care plan emerges. Gradually these areas of performance have improved throughout the year, correlating with the reduction in caseloads.

4.0 Performance of the IRO Service

- 4.1 This year it was decided to adapt the general terminology used around Reviews, to refer to 'Child in Care' Reviews as opposed to 'Looked After Child' or 'LAC' Reviews. This was refreshed when the new Corporate Parenting Service was launched in November 2018, and also aligns with the language used by Peterborough County Council.
- 4.2 A total of 2022 Reviews were held in the year 2018-19. This is a significant rise from the 1974 Reviews that were held in 2017-18, and the 1718 Reviews 2016-17. The increase is proportion to the increase in numbers of children in care.
- 4.3 In 2018-19 93% of CIC Reviews were held within statutory timescale. This is a decline from last year, which was 97%. The reasons for late Reviews were as follows:
- Late notification of child coming into care
 - Adverse weather conditions preventing travel: Beast from the East
 - Social worker unavailable due to an emergency
 - IRO illness
 - Delayed so that the young person able to attend in person
 - Foster carer unwell so Review venue needed to be found
 - IRO compassionate leave
 - Late notification of child moving to adoptive placement
 - IRO left and new IRO unavailable to adhere pre-arranged date
- 4.4 IROs chair Reviews at the child's preferred venue. This is often at the child's foster home or residential setting. 52% of children are placed out of county, which means that a significant proportion of IROs working time is spent travelling. On average a full-time IRO will travel around 1250 miles per month, and will spend 5-6 full days out of county each month.
- 4.5 It is a statutory responsibility of the IRO Service to distribute the record of the CIC Review within 20 working days. It has been a challenge this year to consistently maintain compliance with these timescales due to the heavy workload of the IROs. There are indicators that the timeliness of records was improving towards the end of the year, as caseloads started to reduce.
- 4.6 It is important that IROs maintain a level of continuous oversight into the progress of the care planning for children that they work with. IROs are therefore required to record evidence of their monitoring through a record of their 'footprint' on the child's case. Twice yearly 'Footprint Audits' illustrated

that there was room for improvement in this area at the beginning of the year. Following reinforcement of the expectations and some guidance around this there is growing evidence of more regular recordings of IRO involvement on the child's case file, and this continues to improve.

- 4.7 Monthly IRO Peer and Manager Audits of CIC Review Reports and annual direct observations of chairs continue this year. Feedback to IROs helps to focus on the strengths of their work and ensures there is a consistent and high standard of written and direct work the whole team.

5.0 Voice of the child in care planning

- 5.1 There is an expectation nationally that children's views are sought in an age appropriate manner for their CIC Reviews. This year in Cambridgeshire 54% of children over the age of 4 attended their CIC Reviews in person. Not all children and young people wish to attend their Reviews; 41% conveyed their views via another person, through Mind of My Own or through a consultation document.
- 5.2 47% of children were visited by their IROs in between Reviews so that IROs could keep in touch and monitor how their wishes and feelings are impacting on ongoing care planning.
- 5.3 When a child first comes into care the newly allocated IRO tries to arrange to visit them within four weeks; i.e. before their first Review. Sometimes this is not possible due to IROs' existing diary commitments. It is still, however, very important that the child has an understanding of who their IRO is and what to expect at a Child in Care Review. This year we began routinely sending out introductory letters and Service Leaflets to children from IROs, which gives a child-friendly explanation of who they are and what they do (see Appendix II).
- 5.4 NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) provides advocates where they are requested by Cambridgeshire looked after children. Advocates are there to support the child to put their views across, or to represent the child's views on their behalf, at any meeting relevant to that child. NYAS do not work with children who are subjects of care proceedings as these children are allocated a CAFCASS Guardian to advocate for them and reflect their views in court. This year, 6% of children were supported by a NYAS advocate at their Reviews, and 20% of Reviews were for children who had allocated CAFCASS Guardians.

6.0 Observations of the organisation's practice and performance with children in care

Permanence tracking

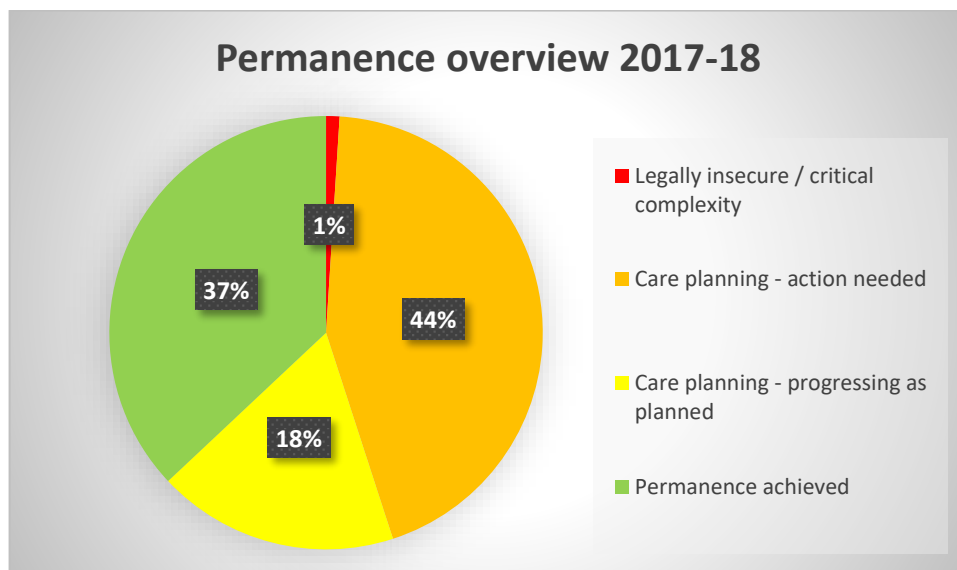
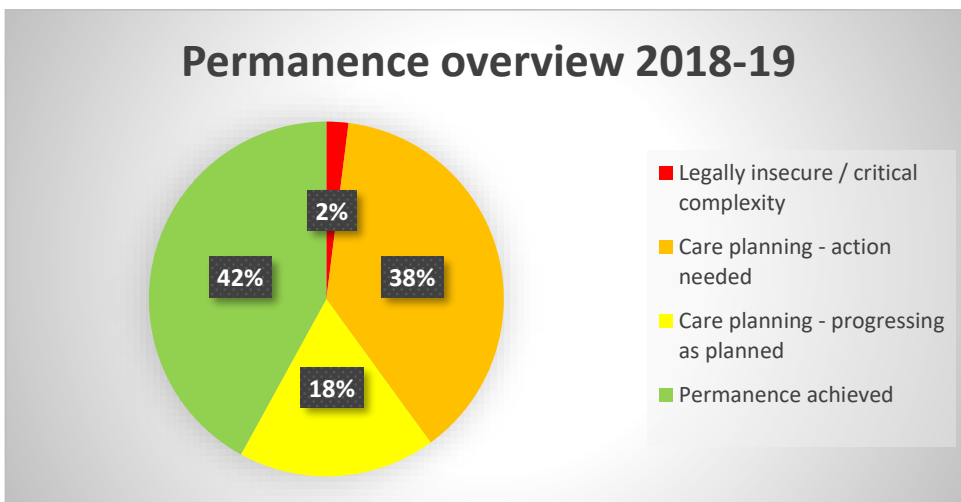
- 6.1 The IRO Service is instrumental in the monitoring and tracking of permanence for children in care. The IRO Service manages a Central Permanence Tracker (CPT) which is updated regularly from the outcomes of Reviews and escalations. The CPT can then be used to track any

patterns across the service of obstacles to permanence for children, and areas where there have been improvements.

6.2 The children who have critical complications or delays to their care plans, such as children who are in secure accommodation or who are missing from care, feature on a weekly 'Red List' which is circulated across Heads of Service and Service Managers. In addition, these children have CIC Reviews at a minimum of once every three months to ensure that they maintain a sufficiently high level of scrutiny and attention across the organisation.

6.3 As well as those children highlighted 'Red' all other children are also colour coded on the Central Permanence Tracker. Monthly feedback on the service's progress in achieving permanence for children is given through visual reports.

6.4



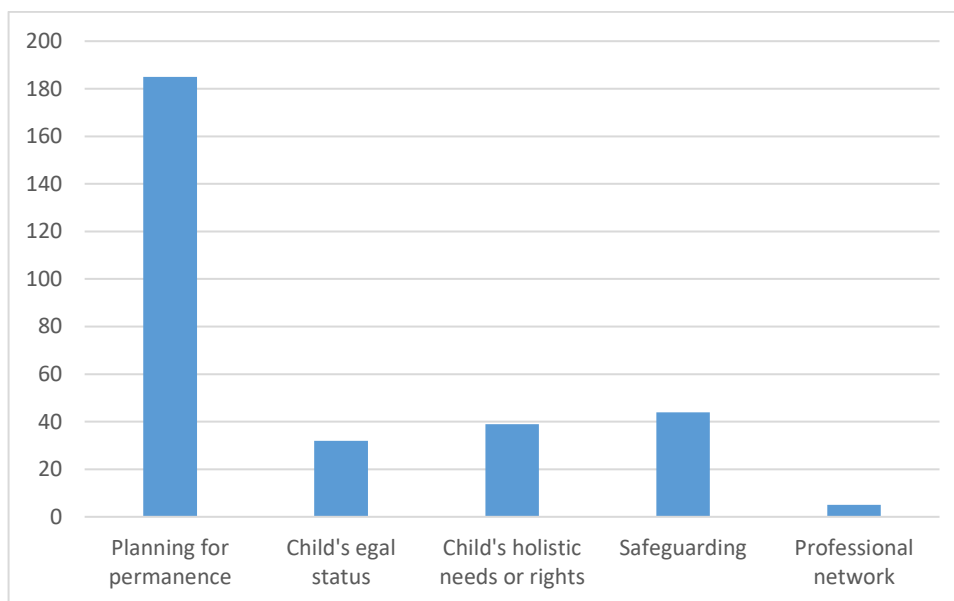
- 6.5 The two tables above illustrate that, as at the end of March 2019, 42% of all Cambridgeshire looked after children had achieved 'permanence'; (that is settled and stable care arrangements where they could remain until independence). This does not include adoption, as adopted children are no longer 'looked after' and therefore are not part of the children in care cohort. 42% is an improvement on the previous year, but there are clearly areas identified where more attention is needed in order to ensure all children in care achieve permanence.
- 6.6 In terms of the progress of plans for adoption, 45 adoption orders were made, and 43 placement orders were made. This is higher than in 2017-18, when 37 adoption orders were made and 43 placement orders were made. This year a total of 30 Special Guardianship Orders were made compared to 67 in 2017-18.

IRO Escalations

- 6.7 A core function of the IRO role is to resolve problems that arise within care planning. It is a statutory responsibility of the IRO Service to have a formal process in place to raise concerns and to ensure that this process is respected and prioritised by managers. In Cambridgeshire this is referred to as the Escalation Protocol.
- 6.8 The Escalation Protocol was revised in November 2018, which had a positive impact in simplifying the process for IROs and achieving a more consistent standard for raising escalations across the whole IRO team.
- 6.9 Over the 12 months between April 2018 and March 2019 the IROs raised 305 escalations to social care managers to prompt them to address the specific issues of drift or delay raised. This is more than double the number of escalations raised the previous year.
- 6.10 The reasons for this increase lie largely in the enhanced understanding and appreciation across both the IRO service and the operational social care service of how effective the Escalation mechanism can be for identifying and progressing issues of drift and delay for children.
- 6.11 The types of issues raised by IROs fell loosely into five categories:
- Planning for permanence
 - Child's legal status
 - Child's holistic needs or rights
 - Safeguarding

- Professional network

The graph below illustrates which issues were raised most often by IROs.



6.12 Within each of these broad categories some issues were identified and escalated more often than others. Over the year, the five specific tasks that were identified as causing most drift or delay were:

1. The child's care plan or pathway plan was incomplete or out of date = 97 escalations.
2. Drift in family finding for a child with a care plan of adoption or long term fostering = 58 escalations.
3. A Risk Assessment and Safety Plan were needed in order to ensure the child was safeguarded = 29 escalations.
4. The child's legal status was unsuitable = 16 escalations.
5. Delay in assessments to progress permanence planning (e.g. sibling assessment, parenting assessment, viability assessment etc) = 11 escalations.

Resourcing issues impacting on social work services for children in care

6.13 November 2018 saw the re-introduction in Cambridgeshire of dedicated social care teams for children in care. IROs strongly welcomed this change to the service structure and it is clear that these teams are able to focus their

attention on the specific needs and issues that affect children who are in care.

- 6.14 The adjustment to the service structure has however come with the drawback of changes in social worker for a large proportion of children. Of a dip sample of 15 children in care 100% had had at least one change of allocated social worker over the year, and one child had had five changes of social worker. This child told her IRO:

"I just want a social worker who sticks around and builds a relationship with me"

7.0 Feedback on the IRO Service

- 7.1 This year feedback has been elicited on an ad-hoc basis. There are plans next year to establish a more efficient mechanism of obtaining feedback for IROs, particularly from young people.

"My IRO talks to me on my own and asks me what are the most important things to talk about in the Review meeting. She listens to me."

"I really like my IRO. He's easy to talk to. I know if things aren't done that are supposed to be he will make sure they get done."

"The IRO chairing the Review was very good. She explained what the meeting was about and asked questions from the parents, the social worker and from me (the baby's foster carer). At the first meeting it was only mum there, who got upset but the IRO although being empathetic kept the meeting on track."

"I would like to say the layout of the Review Report is really child focused, which I know RP will appreciate."

“The IRO engages well with the young people, she has a good relationship with them and in relation to KC this is evidenced by the fact that he accepts challenge and straight talk from the IRO as well as being able to engage in ‘banter’ with her.”

“I am writing to pass on my appreciation of how well the IRO has been chairing the last two of CG’s Reviews who we have living with one of our foster carers. The IRO is great at ensuring everyone’s point of view is shared and manages to get beyond the administrative task. I welcome her ideas about ensuring progress within the placement, such as helping achieve stability and adjust to the changes given his carer’s death. She gives me confidence that the corporate parenting responsibilities of the council will be taken care of - even in a complex and sensitive case such as CG’s.”

PL has an excellent IRO. The IRO manages meetings really well and the young people really like her. She doesn’t do meetings for meetings sake. She comes in, well prepared, and explores the bits that she still needs to know in order to review properly. The meetings are kept to an hour which is best for everyone.

8.0 Impact of the IRO Service

Impact for children

- 8.1 Regular Reviews by IROs ensure that care plans are progressing for children, and that there is always a meaningful purpose for the child to remain ‘in care’.
- 8.2 The escalations raised by IROs, where there are issues causing drift or delay, guarantee immediate management oversight. Almost all of the escalations raised this year were addressed within the deadline set by the IRO (based on the child’s timeframe) by the relevant social work Team

Manager or the District Safeguarding Manager. This shows that, in the instances where social work practice has fallen below standard the IRO has been instrumental in ensuring plans get back on track quickly.

8.3 Of the 305 escalations raised over the past year, six had to be escalated by the IRO to the Assistant Director using the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP):

- Three of these DRP escalations were for a sibling group where the care plan had changed from one of adoption to one of long-term foster care after a long and unsuccessful search for a suitable adoptive family. However the Placement Orders for these children were still in place and therefore meant that the court had not been updated on the change of plan, and the children had inappropriate legal statuses. On raising this to the Assistant Director the legal paperwork was completed within two weeks and the Placement Orders were subsequently revoked.
- One DRP escalation was on behalf of a three year-old boy with chronic health complications who had been in foster care since birth, and had a plan for adoption. His carer wished to adopt him but there was significant delay in decisions being made around the Adoption Support that the local authority would commit to. His IRO strongly supported the plan for him to be adopted and this delay was an obstacle to this being progressed. Within two weeks of this being escalated by the IRO to the Assistant Director the issue was resolved and the little boy was subsequently adopted by his foster carer.
- The last DRP escalations were for a brother and sister in an adoptive placement. The children had significant emotional and behavioural difficulties, and the local authority had previously agreed to share the commitment to funding therapy for these children, alongside the Adoption Support Fund. The IRO found, however, that there were bills outstanding for the local authority contribution, which was putting a strain on the placement and causing a delay in the adoption plans being concluded for the children. Within one month of the DRP escalation by the IRO the financial issues were resolved and the children were successfully adopted.

Impact for the organisation

8.4 There is an established system for the IRO Service to feedback to the operational social work services the broad findings of their work.

- 8.5 The IRO Service constructs and circulates the Positive Practice and Escalation Report each month which summarises the themes of escalations and raises awareness of ongoing areas of practice concern. The report also includes observations of positive practice that have been appreciated by the IRO Service (and Child Protection Chairs) on behalf of children in care each month; thereby offering the wider organisation regular balanced feedback.
- 8.6 Each month the emerging themes with respect to permanence are discussed in Improving Performance Meetings (formerly 'Permanence Tracking Meetings') across the service. This enables dialogue around the broader context for any challenges, and highlights areas for learning and support.
- 8.7 In early 2019 the Corporate Parenting Service began to review its procedures for formally matching foster placements for children with plans for long term foster care. This was encouraged by the IRO Service's feedback regarding the high number of children still waiting to be matched to long-term carers.
- 8.8 The IRO Service has been able to contribute knowledge and support for care planning across the wider organisation during this period of structural change to endeavour to ensure that the ongoing needs of children in care are not overlooked. This has included:
- Delivering workshops for social workers and team managers with respect to care planning and the purpose of CIC Reviews.
 - Speaking at different team events to broaden awareness of the role of the IRO in care planning, including Foster Carer Support Meetings, Social Work Team Meetings and District Away Days.
 - Responding to requests from the Access to Resources Team about quality of placements

9.0 Review of the IRO Service Action Plan 2018-19

9.1 Objective 1

To further raise awareness and understanding of the IRO Service to children and young people, and to elicit their feedback, the following actions will be undertaken:

- An IRO Service Leaflet will be developed for young people;
- A representative from the IRO Service will meet with a group of young people at least once in the year (potentially through the Just Us groups or Voices Matter) to gain feedback on their views of the service and how CIC Reviews are run;
- IROs will continue to promote the use of Mind of My Own with young people as a method of eliciting their views.

Outcome

The IRO Service Leaflet for young people has been created and is in use (see Appendix II). The IRO representation with young people's groups has not been established yet. This has been due to a change in the management of the Participation Service, and new groups have been in their own rapport-building stages. IROs have continued to promote Mind of My Own, though the take-up of this by young people has been quite low.

9.2 Objective 2

To enhance learning and discussion on the up-to-date research findings, case law and national debates regarding the IRO role the following actions will be taken:

- The IRO Service Manager and all of the IROs within the team will participate in an IRO Conference for the whole of the Eastern Region;
- IROs will participate in a bespoke training day specifically focussed on the challenges and rewards of the IRO role, to be facilitated by Research in Practice.

Outcome

All the IROs and the Service Manager attended the first Annual Eastern Region IRO Conference in November 2018, which provided an excellent opportunity for rich discussion and learning from other authorities as well as recent research presented by Keynote speakers. In January 2019 Cambridgeshire hosted a bespoke training day for IROs delivered by Research in Practice which allowed for the IROs to reflect on their own practice and consider solutions to some of the challenges of the role.

9.3 Objective 3

To further improve permanence outcomes for looked after children the following actions will be undertaken:

- Peer supervision will be introduced to help IROs learn from and challenge one another in their practice, particularly focussing on their knowledge and skill in identifying drift and making and tracking decisions accordingly.

Outcome

Group supervision has begun to be embedded within the IRO Team.

9.4 Objective 4

To assist the IROs in exercising their professional authority and quality assurance role, the following actions will be undertaken:

- The existing arrangements for PQAM to quality assure care plans for long term fostering will be adapted so that the IRO will take the lead role in scrutinising the assessments and care plan that the local authority intends to propose to court.

Outcome

Group supervision has begun to be embedded within the IRO Team.

9.5 Objective 5

To enable IROs to fulfil the entirety of their roles to their best ability the following actions will be undertaken:

- Monthly Peer / Manager audits will continue and the feedback and learning discussed in supervision;
- Caseloads will be kept to a maximum of 70 per IRO where at all possible;
- IROs will be assisted to record an overview of the LAC Review in the most concise style, including only relevant details, through the introduction of a standardised template.

Outcome

Peer / Manager Audits have continued this year and has helped all IROs to try to maintain a succinct and balanced style of recording. Caseloads have been able to reduce over the year, and are now consistently under 70 per IRO.

9.6 Objective 6

To support the local authority to improve the timeliness of children achieving permanence and stability without delay the following actions will be undertaken:

- The Independent Reviewing Service Manager will deliver further training programmes on the topics of 'the Looked After Child' and 'Life Story Work' to social workers and other staff working with looked after children;
- The Independent Reviewing Service Manager will support the Fostering Service to review and refresh their processes for family finding for children with long-term plans of foster care;
- The IRO Service will have membership on strategic workstreams in relation to practice in respect of:
 - o Assessments and plans for reunification;
 - o Special Guardianship as a permanence option;
 - o Staying Put protocol review.

Outcome

Training programmes on the Looked After Child' and 'Life Story Work' continued to the end of 2018 when responsibility for workforce development in these areas returned to the Corporate Parenting Service and the Learning and Development Team. The work alongside Fostering in reviewing the processes for family finding and matching continues. Unfortunately the anticipated workstreams on different care planning options has not progressed as planned this year.

10.0 IRO Service Action Plan 2019-20

10.1 Objective 1

IROs to support children in care to have greater opportunities to influence standards of professional practice and decision making by:

- Improving working relationships and partnership work with Voices Matter (Cambridgeshire's Children in Care Council);
- IROs to audit one care plan per month, in conjunction with the young person, with feedback to be shared with the relevant social work team;
- Children and young people to be offered feedback forms with respect to their IRO and their management of the CIC Review.

10.2 Objective 2

IRO Service to improve opportunities for feedback from birth parents, carers and other professionals with respect to the CIC Reviews and IRO practice:

- Introducing standard feedback forms which will be offered to all attendees at CIC Reviews, with a range of methods available to them to return the feedback to the service.

10.3 Objective 3

IROs to record information about compliance with respect to completion of required documentation and arrangements of Reviews. This will provide qualitative feedback to Social Work Team Managers in respect of focussed care planning, to be shared in the supervision with social workers. Themes of strong practice across the organisation and areas where knowledge and practice need to be improved will enhance SQA's existing Positive Practice and Escalation Reports.

10.4 Objective 4

To support the local authority to develop pro-active models of working to enhance placement stability for children and reduce instances of placement breakdown and multiple moves for children, by:

- Conducting a service-wide review of recent Placement Breakdowns;
- IRO Service taking responsibility for holding Placement Breakdown Meetings;
- IRO to support Corporate Parenting to review matching procedures for assessing long-term 'matches'.

10.5 Objective 5

Introduction of specialist roles and duties for IROs, to broaden their influence across the service and promote the voice of the child, e.g.:

- IRO input to Social Work Team Manager meetings every other month;
- Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS;
- IRO representative to link regularly with Voices Matter;
- IRO Links to be established with the Fostering Team, the Adoption Team, the Participation Team, the Virtual School, the Youth Offending

Service, the LAC Health Team, the Reunification and Placement Stability Service.

10.6 Objective 6

IRO Service to support the organisation to improve standards and consistency in returning children to the care of their parents where appropriate. The IRO Service will do this by:

- The IRO Service Manager, (or a representing IRO) to join senior managers to oversee the consistency in standard and quality of reunification assessments and plans for return home at regular Reunification Monitoring Meetings;
- IROs to support the development of a Return Home Policy;
- IRO Service Manager (or a representing IRO) to contribute to Reunification training across the service, to reinforce expectations with respect to quality of Assessments and Plans.

10.7 Objective 7

To ensure the child's voice is strongly heard through the care planning and Review process, so that children can have a leading influence on their care plans by:

- Increasing the proportion of children who are consulted by the IRO prior to their Review.

10.8 Objective 8

To ensure children's needs regarding dental and health assessments, and risk assessments around Child Criminal Exploitation or going missing are undertaken as appropriate by responsible social work teams. IROs will do this by:

- Increasing oversight of records of assessments, both as part of regular CIC Reviews and interim monitoring.

11.0 Appendices

Appendix I: Statistical detail of the profile of children in care population

Table 1: Number of Looked After Children

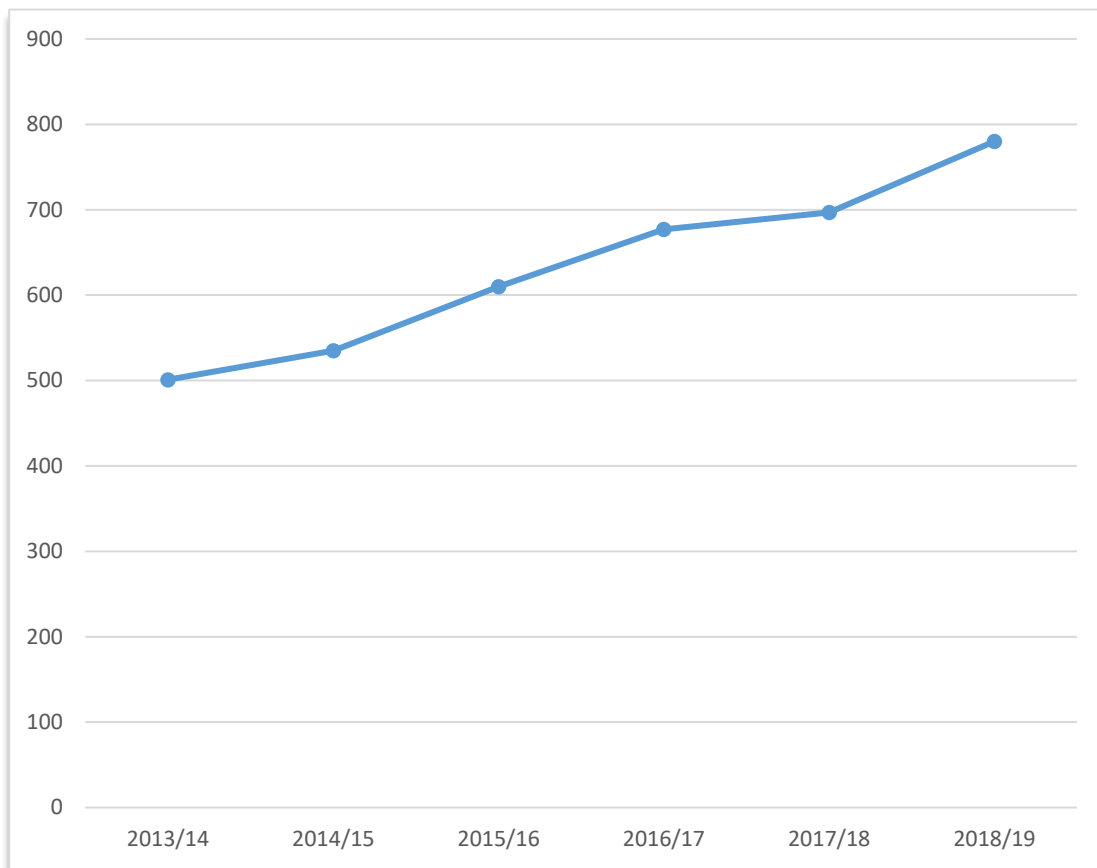


Table 2: Cambridgeshire Children entering and exiting care

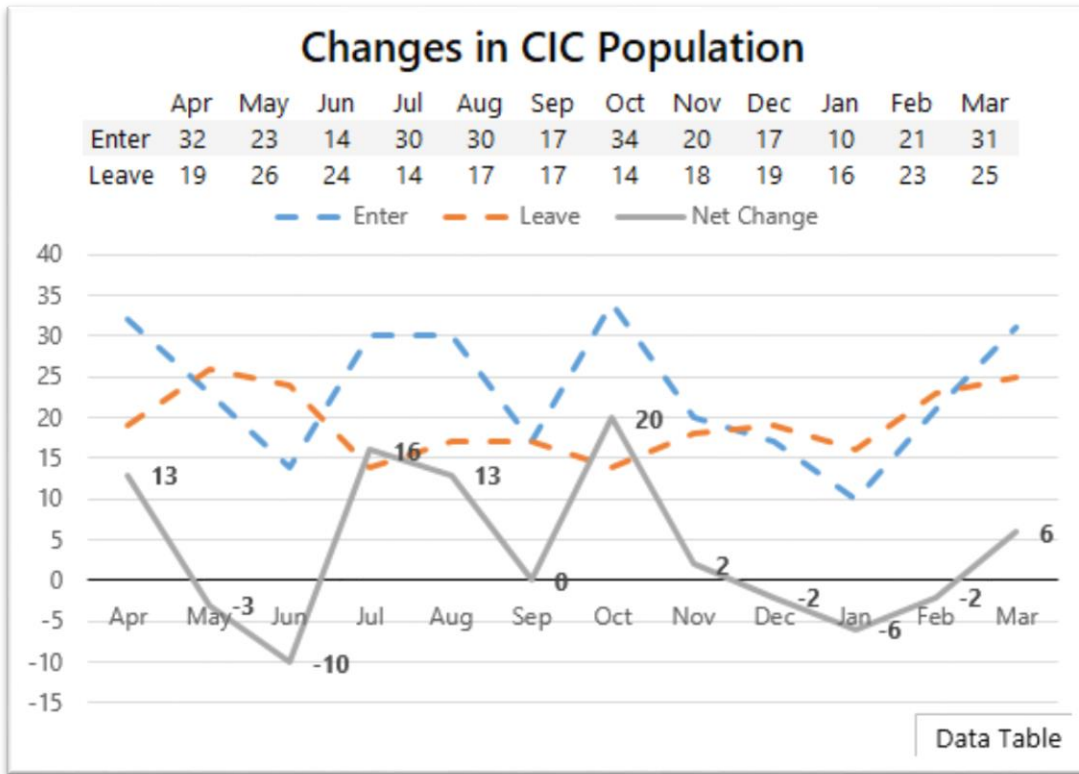
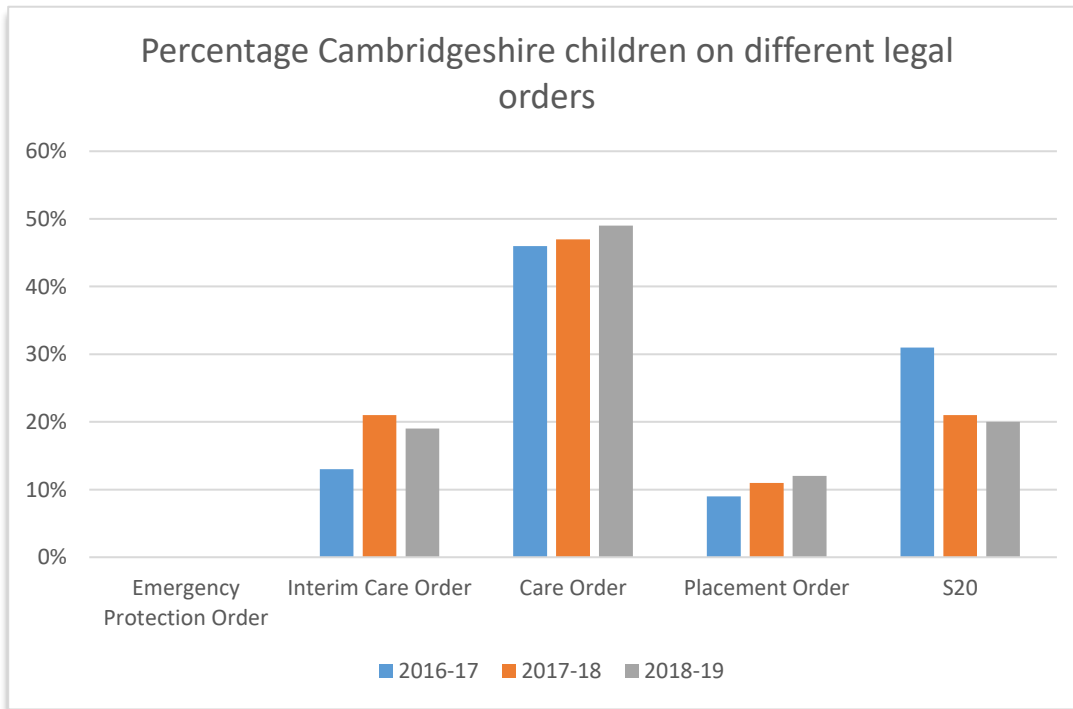


Table 3: Looked after children – legal status



Appendix II: Introductions to children

Example of IRO letter



IRO Service Brief for children and young people 2019



Independent Reviewing Officers: Information for Young People





All children in care have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

What will my IRO do?

Your IRO reviews your care plan by having a meeting, and talking with you and the people who are important to you. These meetings and discussions are called a **review**.

Your IRO will chair or help you chair your review. They are there to make sure your voice is heard, and that the people involved are doing what they are meant to.

Reviews are for you, not about you. It is important to share how you feel and what you would like to accomplish, so that your IRO can help you achieve all that you can be.

Your IRO will always:

- Promote your voice.
- Help you to understand your care plan.
- Check that you are getting the services you need.



When will I have my reviews?

Your IRO will organise your first review **within 20 days** of becoming Looked After, then **3 months later**, and then at least **every 6 months**.





How is my IRO 'independent'?

Being 'independent' means that your IRO does not work in the same team as your Social Worker or the other people involved in your life.

In fact, the law says that an IRO cannot be a person who is already involved in your care - this means that an IRO will always have a fresh perspective and can make sure your Social Worker is doing the best thing for you.

Your IRO will contact you to introduce themselves before your first review, and they will make sure you know how to contact them if you want to talk.

What will happen at my review?

Your review is a chance to see:

- The things that are going well,
- The things that could be going better, and
- The things that need to happen in the future.

How can I get involved?

Your review should take place where you want it to, include the people you want to invite, and talk about the things you want to discuss.

You can share your thoughts and feelings with your IRO online by using Mind of My Own (<http://mindofmyown.org.uk>). Your Social Worker will be happy to help you create an account.



You can also invite a NYAS Advocate to attend your reviews. NYAS are there to help you share your views. You can ask your social worker to help you with this or you can make contact with NYAS yourself on www.nyas.net





Our IRO's promises to you

Cambridgeshire County Council's IROs are committed to helping you reach your full potential. We believe that reviewing your care plan is an important part of this, and our IROs promise to always:

- Focus on your future, not your past.
- Help you to see the important people in your life.
- Support you to achieve your goals at school, and in your hobbies and interests.
- Support you to live a healthy lifestyle both physically and mentally.
- Work to keep you living somewhere you are happy.
- Make sure you understand why you're in care and to support you throughout your journey.
- Ask you about, and keep you updated with any changes to your care plan.
- Listen to you, and communicate openly and honestly.

