

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 15 July 2020

From: Olly Grant
Independent Reviewing Service Manager

Electoral division(s): All

Outcome: The 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 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to note the report.

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Summary:

This Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report covers the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Key highlights of this report are:

- The number of children in care fell by 62 this year (from 780 at the end of March 2019 to 718 at the end of March 2020).
- A total of 2275 Child in Care Reviews were held this year.
- Timeliness of Reviews continues to be excellent.
- The IROs Escalation Protocol has been fully embedded across the service. The work of IROs has proved to be significant for children and has contributed to an overall improvement in children being settled and stable in care.

The full report is attached at Appendix I. This report finishes with an evaluation of the IRO Service Action Plan of 2019-20 and outlines the new IRO Service Action Plan for 2020-21

1. BACKGROUND

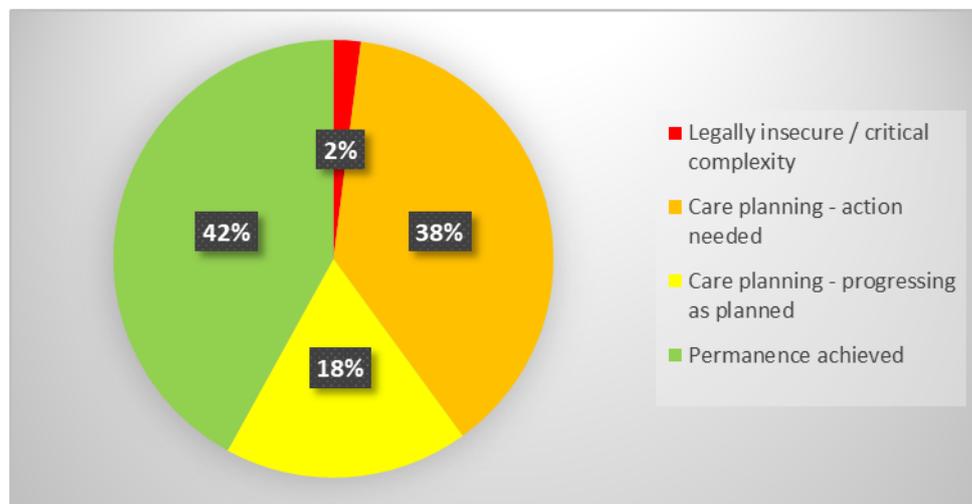
- 1 The appointment of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Amendments to statutory guidance in 2010 embedded the IRO role further within 'Care Planning Placement and Case Review' and 'The IRO Handbook'.
- 1.2 The IRO 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.)

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 Purpose of the IRO Service: It is a key responsibility of the IRO to ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to the views expressed by the child within care planning. 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. The IRO has a responsibility to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case. If the IRO has concerns with respect to drift or delay within the child's care planning they will escalate the issue through the Case Alert and Dispute Resolution Protocol.

- 2.2 Profile of the population of children in care: There were 718 children in care at the end of March 2020.
- 2.3 Professional profile of the IRO Service: The IRO team is comprised of a Service Manager, 10.4 full-time equivalent staff, an Agency IRO and a dedicated Business Support team. Staffing is generally very stable and there was minimal change in the composition of the team this year.
- 2.4 Performance of the IRO Service: Each IRO works with approximately 60 children and young people; this caseload is considered to be moderate. 99% of CIC Reviews were held within statutory timescales; an improvement on last year.
- 2.5 Voice of the child in care planning: This year 55% of children over the age of 4 attended their CIC Reviews in person. Not all children and young people wish to attend their Reviews. 36% conveyed their views via another person, through Mind of My Own or through a consultation document.
- 2.6 Observations of the operational practice and performance with children and young people in care:

Permanence overview 2019-20:



Over the 12 months between April 2019 and March 2020 the IROs raised 738 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. The types of issues raised by IROs fell loosely into seven categories (in order of highest number of escalations):

- Planning for permanence
- Safeguarding
- Child's holistic needs or rights
- Preparation for leaving care
- Accountability and record keeping
- Professional network

- Child's legal status

2.7 Feedback on the IRO Service: A new evaluation form for service-users was introduced towards the end of 2019. Overall, feedback from children, parents, foster carers and other professionals has been positive. The majority of young people 'always' felt that their IRO listens to them, 'always' feels their IRO is open and honest and 'always' feels supported during their Reviews.

2.8 Impact of the IRO Service: There is evidence that decisions made by IROs Reviews, and where necessary subsequent escalations, have positively impacted children. The IROs independence allows them to have an objective oversight of the care plan, which can sometimes highlight questions about how the plan meets the child's short and long term needs, or how it aligns with the wishes of the child, which social workers may have overlooked. Therefore the independent scrutiny also supports the social work teams to reflect on their planning and keep the child's experience at the centre of what they do.

2.9 Review of the IRO Service Action Plan 2019-20: Please see full report at Appendix I for details.

2.10 IRO Service Action Plan 2020-21:

Objective 1: To further strengthen the relationship between the IRO Service and Voices Matter (Cambridgeshire's Children in Care Council).

Objective 2: To evaluate the new ways of working that have been established in response to covid-19 restrictions, and preserve the elements that have proven to be effective for children.

Objective 3: To further improve the feedback loop with respect to the comments received from children and young people after their Reviews.

Objective 4: To establish a routine for IROs to regularly meet with young people to co-audit their care plans and pathway plans.

Objective 5: To collate and analyse information gathered from Placement Breakdown Meetings for children in foster care.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

Report authors should evaluate the proposal(s) in light of their alignment with the following three Corporate Priorities.

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children
The report above sets out the implications for this priority in **paragraphs 2.1 and 2.6.**

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050
There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications
n/a

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
n/a

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
n/a

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
n/a

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
n/a

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
n/a

4.7 Public Health Implications
n/a

Source Documents	Location
None	