

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 20 November 2019

From: Olly Grant
Independent Reviewing Service Manager

Electoral division(s): All

Purpose: 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 2018 to 31 March 2019.

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

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Summary:

Key highlights of this report are:

- The number of children in care rose by 83 during the period covered by the report (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 in this period.
- 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 full report is attached at Appendix 1 and ends with an evaluation of the IRO Service Action Plan of 2017-18 and outlines the new IRO Service Action Plan for 2018-19.

1. BACKGROUND

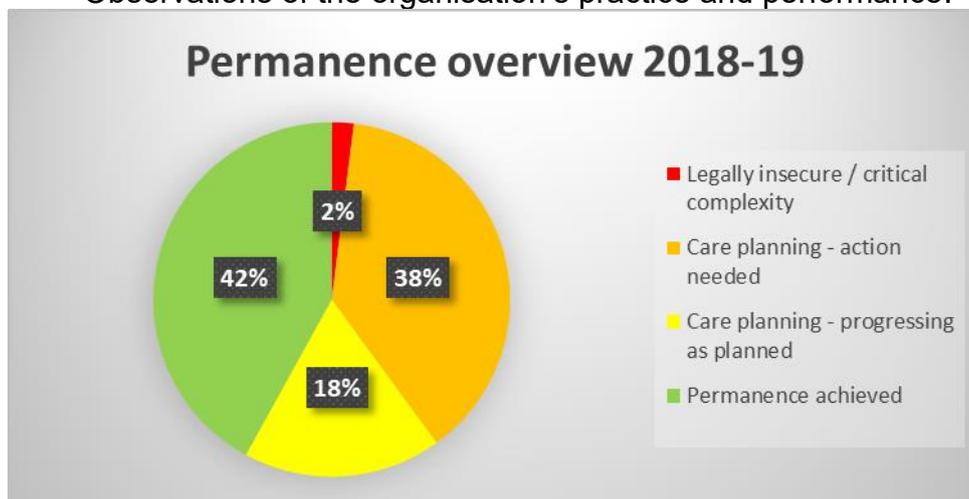
- 1.1 The appointment of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002). Amendments to statutory guidance in 2010 embedded the IRO role further within 'Care Planning Placement and Case Review' and 'The IRO Handbook'.
- 1.2 The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

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 780 children in care at the end of March 2019.
- 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.
- 2.4 Performance of the IRO Service: 93% of CiC Reviews were held within statutory timescales.
- 2.5 Voice of the child in care planning: 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.

2.6 Observations of the organisation’s practice and performance:



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. 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

- 2.7 Feedback on the IRO Service: It has not been easy to achieve feedback other than on an ad-hoc basis this year and work is being done to ensure that service-users and colleagues have clear methods by which to feedback their experiences of the IRO Service. Those who have shared their views this year have mostly been positive, particularly referencing the continuity of the allocated IRO through change within the social work force as being of

significant benefit to children in care.

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 2018-19: Please see full report at Appendix 1 for details.

2.10 IRO Service Action Plan 2019-20:

IRO Service to:

Objective 1 – Support children in care to have greater opportunities to influence standards of professional practice and decision making.

Objective 2 – Improve opportunities for feedback from birth parents, carers and other professionals with respect to the CIC Reviews and IRO practice.

Objective 3 – Improve recording of information about the social workers compliance with respect to completion of required documentation and arrangements of Reviews.

Objective 4 – 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.

Objective 5 – Introduce specialist roles and duties for IROs, to broaden their influence across the service and promote the voice of the child.

Objective 6 – Support the organisation to improve standards and consistency in returning children to the care of their parents where appropriate.

Objective 7 – 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.

Objective 8 – Ensure children's needs regarding dental and health assessments are being met, and risk assessments around Child Criminal Exploitation or going missing are undertaken as appropriate by responsible social work teams.

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 2.2.**

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 n/a

Source Documents	Location
None	