

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service 2017 – 2018



Pervez Akhtar
Deputy Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance
June 2018

Contents

1.	Introduction	2
2.	Purpose of Service and Legal Context	2
3.	IRO Service	3
4.	The Children in Care Population	3
5.	The Age and Gender of Children in Care	4
6.	The Ethnicity of the Children in Care	5
7.	The Legal Status of Children in Care	6
8.	Entrants and Exits from Care	7
9.	Children in Care Placement Provision	9
10.	Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews	10
11.	Number of Children Participating in their Reviews	11
12.	Dispute Resolution Process	12
13.	Case Tracking	15
14.	Feedback from Young People and Parents	15
15.	Health Assessments	17
16.	Personal Education Plans	18
17.	Liaison with Social Care Teams and Learning and Development	18
18.	Business Support Arrangements	18
19.	Childrens Rights Service	19
20.	Key Successes and Challenges in 2017/18	20
21.	IRO Service Action Plan 2018/19	21

1. Introduction

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their statutory functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children. As part of this statutory guidance there is a requirement for the manager of the IRO Service to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Purpose of Service and Legal Context

Every child who is looked after by Derby City Council must have a care plan which details the long term plan for the child's upbringing and the arrangements made by Derby Childrens & Young Peoples Services (CYP) to meet the child's day to day needs. All local authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review the care plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2015)

The appointment of an IRO for every looked after child is a legal requirement under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The role of the IRO was strengthened in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

From December 2012 the Looked After Children (LAC) population was extended to include those children placed on remand in secure units or youth offending institutions under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) arrangements. This Act places a responsibility on Local Authorities to treat all children remanded to custody as looked after children up to the age of 18 years with each young person having a remand plan which is the equivalent of a care plan.

The IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities and Independent Reviewing Officers on Reviewing Arrangements for Looked after Children specifies the following requirements:

Every child in care should have a named IRO to provide continuity in the oversight of the case and to enable the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child. The child's care plan must be prepared before the child is first placed by the local authority or if this is not practicable, within ten working days of the start of the first placement. The IRO must be appointed to the child's case within 5 days.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case
- participate in any review of the child's case
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority, and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authorities legal responsibilities towards the child.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:



- i. Chairing the child's review; and
- ii. Monitoring the child's case on an on-going basis

3. IRO Service

The IRO service in Derby at year end 2017/18 had a total establishment of 6.8 fte IRO's and a 0.5 fte specialist IRO for children receiving short breaks. The IRO team headcount is 8 IRO's, with 1 male and 7 females. It is an experienced team; it has generally been a stable team over the last year.

In September a seconded IRO returned to service having been a team manager in another part of children services. She had been covered by a staff member who was doing 4 days per week. Other than this there have been no changes in staff over 2017/18.

The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 72; this is just above the top end of the guidance. The average case load in 2016/17 was 70 and in 2015/16 it was 73. Children and Young People's Services (CYP) and the IRO service are working hard to ensure that we have the right children in care and that care plans for permanence are achieved in a timely manner.

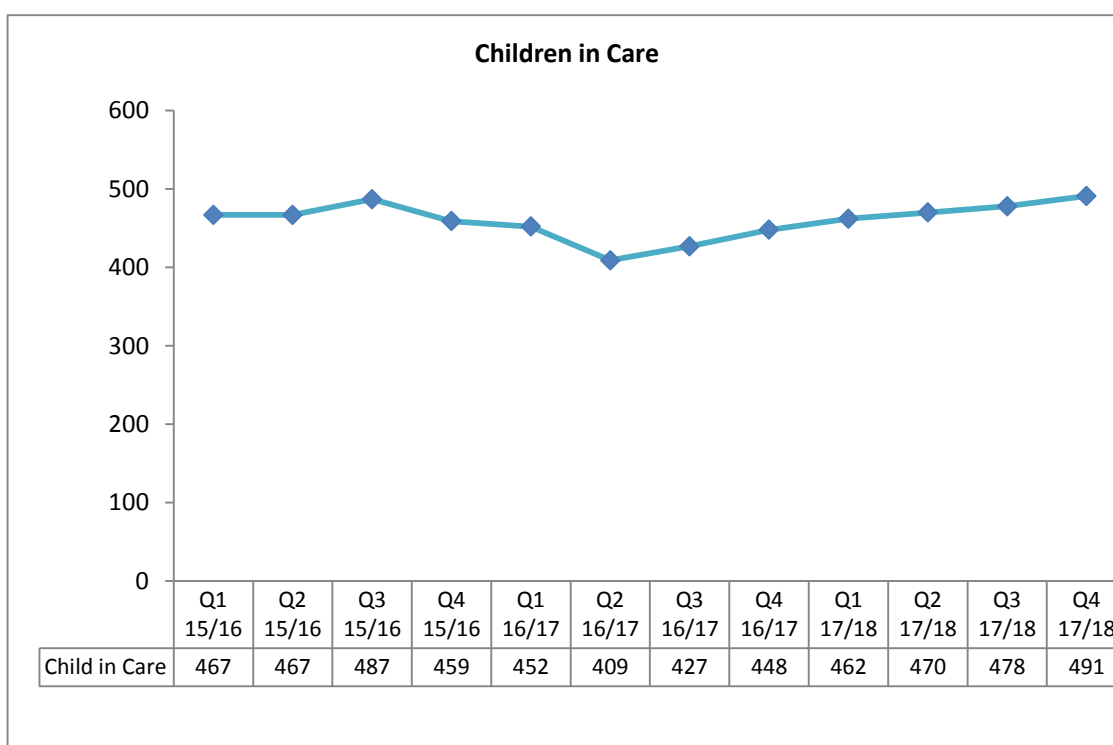
The IRO service since December 2016 has been based at the gatehouse with the rest of the Quality Assurance Service, including Child Protection Managers and Children in Need Reviewing Officers. This has considerably helped with service identity and improved working together and communication across the Quality Assurance Service.

4.0 Children in Care over the last three years

The table below illustrates the quarterly changes in the number of children in care throughout the last three years. It is interesting to note that there was a peak of children in care in Q3 2015/16 of 487. Following this peak the children in care population generally continued to decline resulting in the lowest number of 409 in Q2 of 2016/17.

From the dip in numbers in 2016/17, Q2 from 409 there has been a considerable increase in each subsequent quarter, to an all-time high at the end of Q4 of 2017/18 of 491. There is a combination of large sibling groups, unaccompanied asylum seeker children and young homeless children that have contributed to the increase in numbers. Derby is not alone in seeing children in care numbers rise there has been a national increase.





5. The Age and Gender of Children in Care

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2017/18 are aged between 10 to 15 years old, 197 or 40% of the total. There are 23% or 111 children who are aged between 5 and 9 years old. There are 29 children or 6% who are under 1 years of age and a further 66 or 13% are between 1 and 4.

It would be reasonable to expect the majority of the children that are under five to be either adopted or other permanence exit options to be secured for them including a return home. As children get older it becomes more difficult to secure permanence through adoption and hence it is very unlikely that children in banding of 10 and over will leave care through this exit route, this banding makes up of more than 50% of children in care. For these children it is important, where appropriate and safe to consider options for a return home or to extended family and friends via a Special Guardianship Order. Permanence can also be achieved through fostering. For children that are leaving care age it is important to provide support, advice and training to prepare for independent living. Derby Childrens and Young People Services have a 'Staying Put' policy. This allows young people to stay in their foster placement beyond 18 as long as the foster carers agree and criteria are met. Whilst the young person is no longer in the care of the authority and the foster placement loses its status, the placement is funded through a combination of council funding as well as benefits. This provides continuity and stability for the young person to move to independence when they are ready.



Age Band	31/03/2018	31/03/2018
Under 1	29	6%
1 to 4	66	13%
5 to 9	111	23%
10 to 15	197	40%
16+	88	18%
Total	491	100%

The majority of children in care in Derby at year end 2017/18 were male, 283 making 57.6% of the total with 208 females which equates to 42.4% of the total. Having looked at historical data dating back for the last three years, these figures in relation to gender of children in care seems to remain fairly consistent, almost identical to last year 2016/17 and with only a couple of percentage figure variations at most in other years..

	31/03/2017	31/03/2017
Male	283	57.6%
Female	208	42.4%
Total	491	100%

6. The Ethnicity of the Children in Care

As at the end of March 2018 out of the 491 children in care, the largest group of children, 305 were reported as being White British, which was a total of 62% of all children in care. The next largest group were children of dual heritage who made up 14% of the population with 68 children in care, followed by 37 Children or 7.5% classed as Asian or Asian British other.

On analysing the data in more detail the percentage of white British children in care has consistently reduced in last three years from 69% (310) at the end of 2016 to 62% (305) at the end of 2017/18. Whereas Asian or Asian British children have increased year on year from 3.5% (16) from the end of 2015/16 to 7.5% (37) at the end of 2017/18

There were 23 children, 5% of the population categorised as Gypsy/Roma/Traveller. There too has been a steady increase in the number of Gypsy/Roma/Traveller children in care from 2.4% (11) at the end of 2015/16 to 5.3% (23) at the end of 2017/18

Ethnicity Recorded	Number	Percentage
Asian or Asian British	37	7.5%



Black or Black British	16	3.3%
Dual Heritage	68	13.8%
Gypsy/Roma/Traveller	23	5.3%
Not Known/Recorded	2	0.4%
Other	10	2%
White British	305	62.1%
White Other ¹	27	5.5%
Total	491	100%

7. The Legal Status of Children in Care

As at end of March 2018, 279 or 57% of children in Derby were looked after under a full care order. There were 89 children or 18% that were on interim care order, this means that these cases were still in proceedings pending assessments or other work and a final outcome was yet to be determined through the courts.

There were 44 children or 8% of the total population who had a placement order granted, this means that a care plan for adoption had been agreed through the courts for these children.

78 or 16% of the total population were voluntarily accommodated under s.20. This means that these children were accommodated at the request of and or in agreement with parent/s or those with parental responsibility or were over 16 and had requested to be accommodated under the homelessness policy

Legal Status	31/03/2018	31/03/2018
C1 Interim Care order	89	18%
C2 Full Care order	279	57%
D1 Freed for Adoption	0	0%
E1 Placement Order Granted	44	9%
J1 In Local Authority on Remand, or Committed for Trial or Sentence	1	0.2%
L1 Under Police Protection, in LA Accommodation	0	0%

¹ White - Other includes: White - European, White - Non-European, White - Other European, White - Irish

V2 Accommodated under Section 20	78	16%
Total	491	100%

8. Entrants and Exits from Care

Analysing the number of children entering and exiting care provides useful information about the reasons why children and young people have come into care and also how we exit them from the care system.

When analysing the reasons for children starting care the most overwhelming reasons for each quarter throughout 2017/18 has been abuse or neglect, this was also the case in 2016/17, 2015/16 and 2014/15.

There were 268 children entering care in 2017/18 compared to 212 children and young people entering care in 2016/7 and in 2015/16 there were 154. Out of this, a total of 187 were due to abuse and neglect, this totals 70% of all entrants. This is the same percentage as in 2016/17. 23 children came into care due to parental illness/disability, with 12 coming in alone in the last quarter, when this has been broken down this has included parents abusing alcohol and drugs, parental disability, parents with problems and parents with learning disability . 5 children and young people came into care due to disability and a further 9 for absent parenting. According to the records 10 children came into care because of low income. When this has been explored further this is usually because young people have signed themselves into care due to being homeless. There were only 2 children that came into care for socially unacceptable behaviour, last year this was 8. There have been a steady number of children entering care throughout 2017/18 at approximately 70 with the exception being in quarter three when there were only 55.

Children in Care - reasons for children starting care				
Reasons for children starting care	Quarter End - numbers starting care during the quarter			
	30/06/2017	30/09/2017	31/12/2017	31/03/2018
Abuse Or Neglect	51	53	39	44
Disability	0	0	3	2
Parental Illness/Disability	7	2	2	12
Family In Acute Stress	7	7	5	1
Family Dysfunction	1	6	1	4
Socially Unacceptable Behaviour	1	0	0	1



Low Income	3	1	3	3
Absent Parenting	0	4	2	3
Total	70	73	55	70

According to the data currently available in 2017/18, 227 children and young people exited care. There was a significant drop in the number of children adopted a total of 24 when compared to 2016/17, there were a total of 47, in 2015/16 there were 26 children that were adopted.

92 children returned to live at home with parents or relatives or other persons with PR, this made 40% of the total. This was highest reason for exits from care

Quite a large number, 40 young people, exited care by moving into independence, this made 18% of the total number. There was a big drop in the number of children and young people exited through the use of SGO's which totalled 7, compared to 15 SGO's in 2016/17. There was a big increase in the number of child arrangement orders from 13 in 2016/17 to 38 in 2017/18.

There were 8 children and young people who ceased care for any other reason, this may need further investigation regarding accurate recording with a further 2 exiting through being sentenced to custody

Reason Ceased (grouped)	Quarter End - numbers			
	30/06/2017	30/09/2017	31/12/2017	31/03/2018
Adopted	2	8	8	6
Residence/Child Arrangement Order	6	12	9	11
SGO	1	0	1	5
Returned Home with PR	28	25	17	22
Returned Home with no PR	1	2	0	2
Independent Living	10	13	9	8
To Adult Social Care	2	2	4	1
Any other reason	1	4	1	2
Sentenced to custody	1	1	0	0
Care taken over by another LA in the UK	2	0	0	0
Total	54	67	49	57



9. Children in Care Placement Provision

There were a total of 159 placements with Derby City Council or other provision, making a total of 32.4% of all placements. There were 332 placements with private agencies, making a total of 67.6% of all placements. There has been a significant increase in the use of private agencies from 2016/17 when the ratio was 84 (41%) with Derby City Council and 265 (59%) placements with private agencies.

From the total 107 or 22% of placements were with our in house foster carers and 253 or 52% with independent fostering agencies. If we just look at fostering placements this breaks down as 30% of all fostering placements are in house and 70% are with independent fostering agencies. There has been a significant decrease in the percentage of in-house fostering over the last few years at the end of 2015/16 in house fostering made up for 48% of all fostering placements, this has gradually declined year on year.

The number of children placed with private fostering agencies continues to rise. At the end of 2016/17 there were 130 children placed in in-house fostering, this has decreased in 2017/18 to 107 whereas in 2016/17 the number of children placed in IFA's was 212 and this has increased in 2017/18 to 253. It must be recognised that there is a changing economy in relation to foster care provision and the market has significantly increased with private providers over recent years, this has made it increasingly difficult for the local authority to compete and increase its market share of foster carers. Derby City Council Fostering Service is currently exploring a number of options to increase its stock of foster carers.

There are 22 children that are placed with parents. These will be children who are on care orders or interim care orders. This is an area that has had significant attention over the last two years. The number of children PWP at the end of 2015/16 was 33. Children and young people would usually be placed with parents as part of a process to return a young person back to care of the parents with a view to assessments to discharge the care order or as part of proceedings to decide what the plan should be for the child or young person.

Derby City Council or Other

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2018
Foster (U1-U6)	107
Homes and Hostels (K2)	24
Independent Living (P2)	0
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	6
Placed with Parents (P1)	22
Total	159



Private Agency including Independent Fostering Agencies

Placement Groups - provision of placement	31/03/2018
Foster (U1-U6)	253
Homes and Hostels (K2)	43
Independent Living (P2)	12
Placed for Adoption (A3-A6)	11
Residential School/Hospital (R1/R2/S1)	2
Secure Units, YOI or Prison (K1 and R5)	3
Other placements	8
Total	332

10. Reviews Completed and Timeliness of Reviews

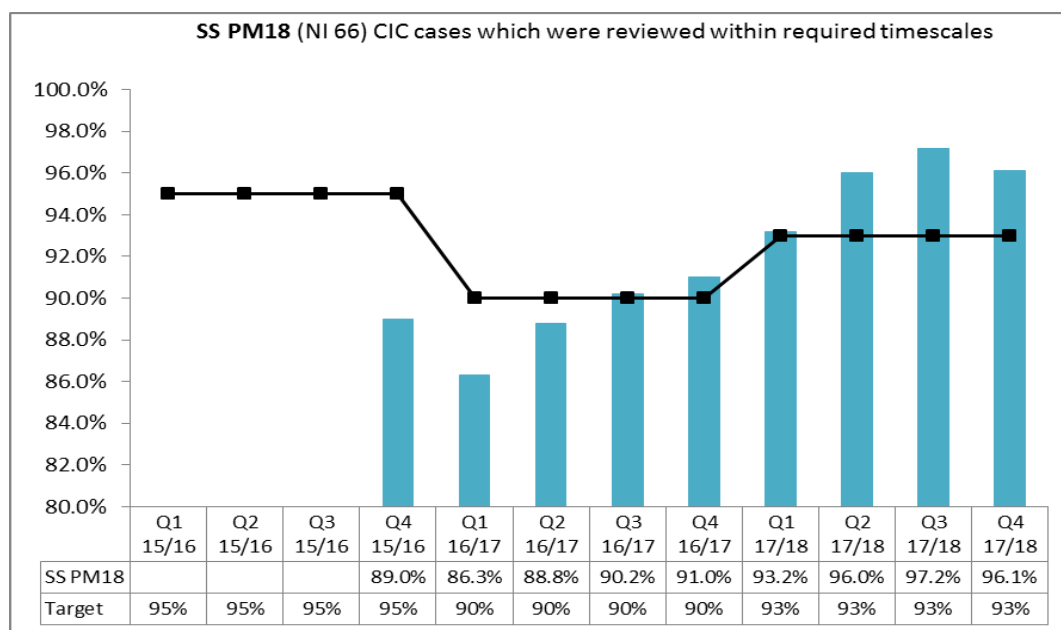
The IRO team completed 1,341 reviews in 2017/19 this is 304 more reviews than 2016/17 when 1,034 reviews were undertaken. The significant increase in reviews is mainly due to the increase in the number of children in care during 2017/18, as well as an increase in reviews due to change of care plans. The year-end figure for 2016/17 was 449, since which the numbers have continued to increase. At the end of 2017/18 there were 491 children and young people in care, a total increase of 42 at year end.

The number of reviews that have been completed within timescales has increased in 2017/18 to 96%; it was 91% for 2016/17 and 89% for 2015/16. The 96% is above our target of 95% for the year. The IRO service will continue to work hard to ensure that we maintain this for 2018/19.

In exploring the reasons for the delays, it is interesting to note that more than half of reviews that were late were the initial reviews, over 2017/18 there have been on going issues with late notifications to the IRO service about children coming into care. The IRO service has only 20 working days to undertake the initial review. In some situations the IRO service has been informed 10 or 15 days late leaving the IRO with an almost impossible task of getting the review done in timescales. In another case the IRO service was not notified for over 6 weeks, by the time the notification came through the initial review was already overdue. A formal QA notification was raised regarding this. The Deputy Head of the IRO Service has raised this with Heads of Service however there still continue to be issues with timely notifications.

Because of recording purposes for DfE if one of the reviews is late for the child in the reporting year then all the reviews are classed as late. The IRO service will continue to

prioritise this area of work and work hard to ensure that all reviews are held within the statutory required timescales.

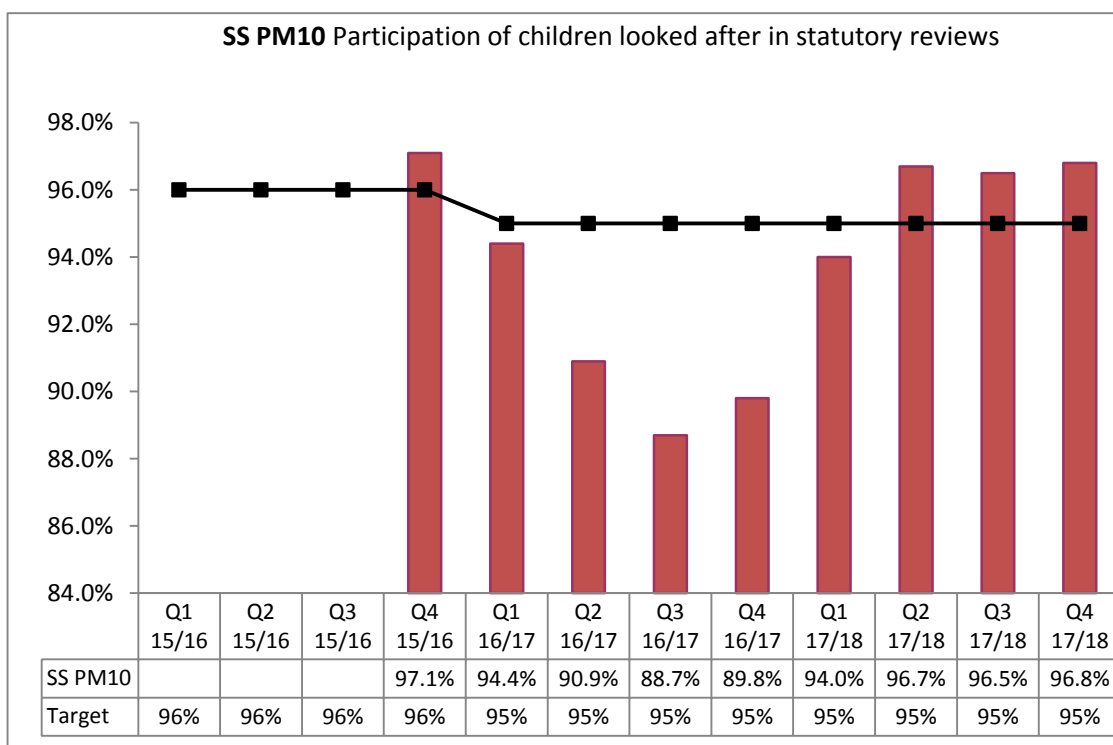


11. Number of Children Participating in their Reviews

The IRO service has continued to work very hard to ensure children and young people participate in their review. In 2017/18, 97%% of all reviews had children and young people participating in them. This exceeds our target for of 95%.

The service has worked very hard over the year to improve on last year's figures, however sometimes even after discussion with their IRO and SW there is still some young people who do not wish to participate in their reviews, in these cases this is recorded as non-participation and hence does affect the overall figures. In situations like this the IRO always tries to meet with the young person before the review to ascertain their wishes and feelings and ensures that these are reflected in the review. Furthermore children and young people are sent review consultation documentation which they are asked to complete before their review and send back to their IRO. We have separate documentation for children from 4 to 11 years of age and 12 to 17 years. The consultation documents are used to inform the discussion that the IRO has with the young person and also on the agreement of the young person to inform the discussion at the review.





12. Dispute Resolution Process – Quality Assurance Notification Forms

Where an IRO has significant concerns about practice or other issues affecting a child's care plan then the IRO can instigate the QA notification process:

In the first instance if appropriate the IRO will raise an Informal QA Notification, this will be in the form of an Informal Notification Case Note on LCS. The Case Note will generate a notification for the SW. The SW and TM are expected to respond in 72 hours.

The informal notification can be completed anytime and may cover

- Poor practice - this can include the SW not following up a decision from a statutory review, not keeping the IRO informed about changes, lack of preparation for the review, poor quality reports or failure to complete required tasks or lack of progress
- Non-attendance - SW not attending statutory review
- No reports – reports not generated through LCS on time for the review
- Child not supported to participate in the review process

If any of the above criteria for Informal Notification is repeated or where there are significant concerns a Formal QA Notification is instigated. The formal process has four internal stages, initially when the IRO has a serious concern about practice or issues affecting the care plan for the child (or the informal process has not been successful) the IRO instigates stage one of the process. This involves the IRO generating an electronic QA notification on LCS this generates a notification to the social worker. The IRO follows this up with an email to the team manager for a response to the issues raised; the manager has ten days to respond to the notification. If there is no response or the response is unsatisfactory then the issue will



go to stage two of the process whereby the Deputy Head of Service will meet with the deputy head or head of service responsible to agree an action plan with a view to resolving the issue. If an agreement is not reached then the notification can be escalated to the third stage of the QA notification process. This involves a meeting between the head of service (QA) and head of service (Operational) and if required they can call a professionals meeting. Finally if there is still no satisfactory resolution then the head of service QA will discuss concerns with service director or strategic director as appropriate, to agree if any further action can be taken before a referral to CAFCASS is made for external scrutiny and resolution.

There is a list of criteria that IROs use when deciding whether to use the dispute resolution process. To make the process consistent and more transparent it has been agreed that IRO's must raise a QA notification when:

- There has been drift or delay in implementation of the care plan
- Failure to complete significant tasks agreed in reviews within the review period where this will have a detrimental impact on the child
- Failure by any agency to comply with statutory requirements e.g. visits, sharing of court documents, school provision etc.
- Poor practice which is repeated or has a significant impact on child
- Example of excellent practice which has achieved a good outcome for the child

In 2017/18 there were 93 Formal QA notifications, this is a rise of 9 notifications from 2016/17 when there were 84. In 2015/16 there were 107 and 2014/15 there were a total of 53 QA notifications.

In the first six months of 2017/18 there were a total of 42 stage one QA notifications; this is 4 less than 2016/17 when there were 46. The issue of QA notifications has stayed steady over 2016-17 and 2017/18 with an additional 51 in the second part of 2017/18,

The numbers of formal QA notifications have been generally consistent over the last two years; it is also evident that there has been an improvement and consistency in the activity of the IRO's in relation to their role. They have an improved footprint on the system and an increase in the communications with case social workers. The good communication has continued to keep the formal QA's at a consistent level, by having thorough discussions and early informal challenge this will have resulted in the need for less formal QA notifications.

The first part of 2017/18 was generally stable in numbers of children in care however in the last quarter on 2017/18 this gradually began to rise. It is positive to note that on the whole stability of workforce has been maintained in the children in care service, Whilst no doubt there has been some movement, the service has not had to use the service of interim staff over the year and worked very hard to replace social workers that left. This has continued to ensure young people received a consistent and stable service and will have ensured that formal QA notifications remain fairly stable. The notifications were made up as follows:



Reason	Number
Drift or Delay	10
Excellent Practice	14
Non completion of Significant Tasks	18
Persistent Poor Practice	14
Statutory Requirements Not Met	37
Total	93

The greatest numbers of QA notifications 37, were raised for statutory requirements not met; these would include cases where there are concerns that a child has not been visited as per the statutory requirements or statutory assessments not completed or completed in a timely way.

The second largest number of QA notifications, 18 was generated for non-completion of significant tasks, these included tasks such as contact not being agreed between siblings and/or parents or medical assessments/appointments not undertaken or completed in a timely manner.

The number of QA notifications for excellent practice was a total of 14, this is a decrease from last year when there were a total of 21 for the whole year, however for 2016/17 there were only 10. Whilst it is important for IRO's to raise concerns about poor practice it is equally important to highlight where practice has been excellent and has had a good impact on the outcomes of a child, this is particularly important in generating a culture of continuous improvement.

There were 14 notifications for persistent poor practice, where there may be a number of actions that have not been completed over review period or beyond.

There were 10 QA notifications raised for delay and drift. These have included concerns regarding progressing of permanence or revoking particular orders or discharging care orders.

There were four cases which were escalated to stage two of the dispute resolution process (reduction of one from last year's report and same number as in 2015/16); three of these QA notifications had to be escalated due to lack of response from the team manager, even after reminders from IRO's. Two related to failure to complete tasks. And two related to drift and delay, all of the stage two disputes were addressed satisfactorily following a meeting/discussion between the Deputy Head of Service (QA) and relevant Head/Deputy of Service.

13. Case Tracking

In addition to monitoring the child's care and progress within the plan at statutory reviews, IROs have a responsibility to monitor between reviews. In order for this to be effective and transparent in Derby the IRO Service has a tracking system.

Cases are identified as High, Medium and Low priority. The level is agreed and recorded at the review

High: where the IRO has concerns that time-critical elements of the care plan are becoming subject to drift or delay, and this is likely to have a significant impact on outcomes for the child, the IRO may set an early date for review, require an up-date from the social worker at regular intervals, and/or monitor activity on the child's file. They may also complete a QA notification and where the concern includes the manager's oversight of the case, they will alert the DHoS. Examples include delay in issuing proceedings, delays in homefinding, critical assessments not completed impacting on permanence planning.

Medium: where the child or the situation would be vulnerable to any drift or delay, though none identified at present, or where less critical elements of the care plan are not being progressed, the IRO may require an interim up-date from the relevant member of staff, and/or check the child's file between reviews.

Examples include children with plans for adoption who may be hard to place or a placement has not been found by the second review post PO, criminal injuries claims, delays in arranging therapy or a school place, PEP not completed revocations of orders in PWP.

Low: where the child is in a stable permanent placement and/or the plan is progressing well, and the IRO is confident with the worker and management oversight.

Examples include the majority of children in long-term care and children subject to care proceedings

The case tracking process has now been implemented since April 2014. The IRO service is of the view that this has helped to identify cases that need closer monitoring and action. Depending on the priority level, especially when it is high, IRO's are feeding back that they are having increased communication, monitoring and discussion with the case social workers. In many cases due to the IRO following up on actions with the social workers this is ensuring that decisions from reviews are being actioned and hence reducing the need for QA notifications at the subsequent statutory review.

As part of the case tracking the IRO service has been working on evidencing the effective work that they do. With this in mind the service has worked on ensuring that there is a clear footprint of the IRO involvement within the child's or young person's LCS record. Whilst the IRO service strives to improve on this, there has been considerable improvement in this area over the last year.

14. Feedback from Young People and Parents

As well as using consultation forms for young people and parents, the Derby IRO service has introduced forms to gather feedback after the review. The feedback forms were launched in

October 2015. In 2017/18 we received 48 feedback forms from children and 54 from parents as well as one form from a social worker a total of 103 feedback forms. This is a good increase from 2016/17 when there were 46 feedback forms received from young people and 37 from parents a total of 83

On reviewing the feedback forms from young people, they have been almost unanimous in stating;

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.
- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Some of the comments include:

I would change nothing; I felt the meeting went really well

I like it when my IRO comes to visit me

I like it when my IRO comes to visit me; she talks to me and listens to what I have to say

It's good to have someone who's nice and actually listens to what's best for me and what I want and sticks around longer than a couple of weeks, Thank you.

On reviewing the feedback forms from parents they have for the majority been positive. in parents stating:

- They understand the purpose of the meeting.
- They felt that they had been listened to
- They were given a chance to speak and say what they wanted to

Comments from parents included:

The meeting was really helpful

The meeting went really well the IRO explained everything

Thanks for chairing the meeting, I felt listened to by the IRO. Really put things a lot clearer

Don't need to change anything I was happy with the way it went

Furthermore a Social Worker stated:

The meeting was really clear; the chair had all the knowledge

15. Health Assessments

The IRO team continue to have a good working relationship with the children in care nurses, health visitors, lead nurse and designated nurse.

The Deputy Head of Service continues to attend the Children in Care and Adoption (CICA) steering group on a quarterly basis. This is a meeting which includes the lead doctor, LAC nurse and other key professionals to discuss and improve health issues and processes for children in care. As well as this the Deputy Head of Service meets with the designated LAC nurse on a quarterly basis.

The 2017/18 data for children receiving their health assessments, dental checks and immunisations is as follows;

- 92.7 % had their annual health assessments. This is good percentage and consistent with last year. The comparator authority figures in 2016/17 were 91.7%
- 87.5% had their health development checks. This is big improvement from last year when 81.6% children had their health and development checks completed. . Health development checks are undertaken for children who are aged up to 5 years of age and done on a 6 monthly basis.
- 93.9% had up to date immunisations, –this is slight dip from 2016/17 when it was 97.7%,
- 87.6% had their dental checks completed. This is an improvement from 2016/17 when it was 84.1% Derby has worked hard to improve this and work will continue to increase completion rates.
- 93.6% of children completed their SDQ. This is much improved from last year which was 79.1% our highest completion rate ever. The average score for SDQ's in 2017/18 was 15.8, there was an improvement from last year when it was 16.2. The score represents the emotional and behavioural health needs of the child or young person, the higher the score the more the needs. The aim of the process is not necessarily to get the score in line with national or regional averages but to ensure that they are being done consistently with people who know the child and young person and hence fairly reflect their needs.

It is encouraging to see that progress is being made in all areas, a high percentage of children in care in Derby continue to have up to date immunisations and this has been consistently high over the past few years.

All health assessments for children placed in or very near to Derby (apart from the initial assessment which is done at the Royal Hospital) are done at Sinfin Health Centre. The initial health assessment has to be done within 20 working days of the child coming into care and then depending on the age of the child if they are under five they have six monthly development checks and if they are over five they have annual health assessment. Whilst children and young people are encouraged to have a health assessment if they decide to then they can decline.



16. Personal Education Plans

All children and young people that come into care and who are of school age have to have a personal education plan (PEP) completed for them. This is usually done by the school in conjunction with the social worker. The PEP outlines the educational needs of the child or young person and what will be done to ensure that the child or young person is supported to achieve best outcomes. Connected with the PEP is the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), this is specific funding of £1900 for each academic year for a child in care to support his/her educational attainment. The Virtual School Head Service leads on ensuring that PEPs are completed and are of a good standard and the funding is also disseminated by the service. The IRO has a key role in chairing the statutory review to go through the educational needs of the child or young person and review the PEP as well as ensure that the PPG is appropriately used.

17. Liaison with Social Care Teams and Learning and Development

Each IRO is linked to a Locality/ CiC team or service, including Youth Offending Service, Leaving Care Service and The Lighthouse (Children's Disability Service). An IRO also attends the Residential Managers meetings.

Work continues to strengthen the working relationship between IROs and Children's Guardians team. There has been evidence of improved communication in 2017/18.

The Deputy Head of Service meets quarterly with the Service Manager at CAFCASS and the IRO manager of Derbyshire County Council to discuss issues and improve partnership working. There is a quarterly regional IRO managers meeting which the Deputy Head of Service attends. As well as this there are regular events organised by the regional managers which the IRO team attend.

There have been a number of learning and development opportunities for IROs in 2017/18 these have included:

- Regional workshops which many of the team members have attended. Topics for these have included:
 - Dilemma's in Adoption
 - The Hidden Responsibilities of an IRO
- An IRO attended the Attachment Awareness Training
- An IRO attended Sanguine Training
- Several IRO's also involved in training including the journey of the Child and fostering Training
- IRO service providing regular induction training to other social care staff as well external agencies.

18. Business Support Arrangements

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides the statutory guidance stating the local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective

review process, enabling review meetings to take place in accordance with the Regulations and good practice. Invitations to reviews and consultation documents should be sent out to all those participating in the review at least ten working days before the meeting and the record of the review should be distributed within the required timescales.

There is currently 1fte and 1 term time only business support staff available to the service.

There continue to be some issues with the capacity of business support available to the IRO service in 2017/18. As an action from 2016/17 a plan has been put in place over the last year to review on a monthly basis that review reports are disseminated in a timely way. This has worked well and ensured that reports are circulated in a timely way. Overall administrative support remains tight however the service functions have not been affected by this over the last year. The administrative team and IRO have a positive working relationship and this continues to improve.

19. Children's Right's Service

For 2017/18 most of the services for children's rights were commissioned out excluding the support for the children in care council. This funding was used to recruit a part time participation officer, who would lead on this work. Previous to this all children services were commissioned out to Volunteering Matters. For 2017/18 the services commissioned out to SOVA including the Independent Visitors Service, The Independent Advocacy Service, Child Protection Conference Advocacy (support and ascertain views of children for initial conference) And in the latter part of 2017/18 we also extended the advocacy services to be made to children placed in private fostering arrangements. A full detailed annual report from SOVA for 2017/18 is available which outlines the activity undertaken and impact in each of the areas identified.

The commissioned services to SOVA cover:

- Independent advocacy for all children in care
- Independent advocacy for all initial CPC conferences where agreed
- Independent visitor service, priority given to children placed out of authority and at a distance
- Independent advocacy for children that are privately fostered (from January 2018)

The children in care council element of the children's rights service has been brought in house with the appointment of a part time participation officer. The participation officer has worked very hard to ensure that the council continues to meet on a monthly basis, as well as improve the membership of young people attending.

During 2017/18 work has continued to strengthen the voice of children in care, particularly as part of the corporate parenting committee. Updates from the children in care council and care leavers' forum are standing items at the beginning of every corporate parenting meeting.

Committee reports are sent in advance to members of the children in care council so they can then scrutinize and raise any questions and challenges. During 2017/18 there has



been consistent and meaningful representation of the children in care council at the corporate parenting committee meetings.

20. Key Successes and Challenges in 2017/18

Our key successes and challenges have been:

1. Only one change in staffing over 2017/18, with a seconded IRO coming back into the service in September 2017. The IRO team remains a stable and experienced service.
2. There has been an increase in the number of feedback forms completed by young people and parents. The feedback remains positive and complimentary about their experience of the review process.
3. The service has been a significant improvement the timeliness of reviews for 2017/18 to 96% compared to 2016/17 when it was 91%. It exceeds it's the target of 95%.
4. There has been a significant improvement in the participation of young people in their reviews. In 2017/18 97% children have participated in their reviews, this is significantly higher then 2016/17 when 89% children participated.
5. The IRO Handbook 2010 (statutory guidance), states that in order to carry out the new IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should ideally have between 50 – 70 cases. Caseloads at year end for each IRO were approximately 72; this is higher than year-end for 2016/17 when it was 70, whilst in 2015/16 it was 73 and in 2014/15 when it was 81. The caseloads currently are slightly higher then where they should ideally be.
6. A regular partnership meeting with CAFCASS and Derbyshire IRO's to improve partnership working. This includes planning and facilitating an annual workshop for IRO's in Derbyshire and Derby with CAFCASS officers to improve working together, practice and learning. Working between individual IROs and Cafcass Officers has continued to improve in 2017/18
7. Regular input from and liaison with the Children in Care Council. Deputy Head of Service as well as IRO's regularly attending the Children in Care Council meetings to discuss care issues with young people and progress any matters.
8. The Deputy Head of Service has a schedule of quarterly meetings with the designated family court judge. This is building on the positive relationship that the IRO service has with the courts.
9. The IRO service continues to evidence its good effectiveness in the recent Mockstead Inspection 2018 as well as monthly inspections audits.



21. IRO Service Action Plan 2018/19

Objectives	Action	Lead	Timeframe
Children in care achieve an appropriate plan for permanence, through safe family arrangements, adoption or other means, as soon as possible, and receive high quality services whilst in care to promote good outcomes, including education and health.	Ensure all children in care have an appropriate permanence plan; including opportunities for children to safely return to their families are kept under continual review and challenge.	Deputy Head of Service/IRO's	2018/19
	Ensure all children have appropriate legal status, specifically: Placement Orders are discharged when the plan changes from a plan of adoption; Care Orders are discharged appropriately when children return home (within a year); Proceedings are issued promptly when young children are removed.	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) DHoS	2018/19
Quality assurance of individual casework is robust, with both recognition of outstanding practice and challenge of poor practice or decision-making across the partnership, escalated as necessary, and challenging management for evidence of action	Maintain IRO QA notification system; benchmark regularly to ensure robustness & consistency; analyse and report	IRO, DHoS Lead	2018/19 June and December
	Continue to build on the use of notifications to partner agencies where appropriate	IRO	2018/19
	Collate and report on evidence of action and learning from QAs	DHoS	December 2018
	Meet with DHoS CiC on a bi monthly basis to discuss QA notification issues and themes	DHoS	Bi Monthly



and learning.	as well as practice issues		
	Meet with Cafcass on a quarterly basis to discuss and improve working together between IRO and Cafcass officers	DHoS	Quarterly
Participation by children, young people and parents is expected, through input into their individual plans, and into wider partnership quality assurance, to improve practice and services	Continue to improve on obtaining views of service users about review meetings; analyse and use to inform improvements in practice.	IRO DHoS	2018/19
	Update/review the consultation paperwork that is sent to young people 4-11 before the review	IRO DHoS	October 2018
Quality Assurance staff and Business support staff work effectively together to ensure internal processes are compliant, consistent, high quality and efficient.	Ensure every child in care is seen either at their review or prior to/ after their review.	IRO DHoS	2018/19
	Monitor business support to ensure adequate level of support is available to meet the needs of the IRO service		2018/19
	Take part in joint training events with CAF/CASS/ Derbyshire IROs/ CPMs and attend regional events to promote and share good practice.		As available
	Audit tracking activity between reviews and recording of IRO contacts on child's file.	DHoS	2018/19
	IRO's to continue to be involved in audit activity	IRO	Twice yearly

