

# **Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

**The contribution of  
Independent Reviewing  
Officers to quality assuring  
and improving the experiences  
of the cared for children and  
care leavers**



The report covers the period of April 2017 to March 2018 and provides information about the practice of the IROs (cared for children) in relation to monitoring and reviewing of care planning and quality of services provided to children cared for or care leavers for Cheshire East Council. It meets the statutory requirement to produce the annual report and, whilst it follows the national guidelines regarding such reports, it also incorporates the framework for our local delivery model, Signs of Safety.

The legislative framework regulating services of Independent Reviewing Officers (Children and Adoption Act 2002, Children and Young People Act 2008, IRO Handbook 2010 and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010) imposes a specific set of statutory duties which all IROs are expected to execute in order to improve outcomes for the children in public care, in particular it specifies that IROs should:

- be social work professionals with at least 5 years post qualifying front line practice and supervisory/ managerial experience,
- ensure that children's views are heard, they are aware of their rights and entitlements and receive relevant services and support,
- consult children before reviews to keep their views and input central to the whole review process (particularly during the review meeting),
- maintain overall objective sound consultation with parents, carers and others with significant involvement with the child and ensure they are involved and their views have been taken into account in relation to the care planning and review,
- monitor the local authority's management of the child's case at any time,
- attend any significant meeting or other type of review for the child,
- identify and challenge drift, delay and underperformance and make attempts to resolve them in a timely manner.

***'The IRO must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.'***

## CHILDS STORY

The most important measure of success is where we can demonstrate that our intervention and the way we have worked has meant that a child's needs are understood, these have shaped the plan for them, they are permanent home, are given opportunity to achieve their potential and have a clear understanding of why we. These are just two examples where practice has been outstanding and why:

safe and secure in a  
are involved in their lives.

**Family A:**

Two young children became cared following ongoing concerns for their care due to neglect and were placed within their extended family. The social worker was quick to form good relationships with the children and all the family members. Care proceedings were issued in a timely way. The social worker co-ordinated a thorough care plan involving several agencies, and was praised within the proceedings by the Judge.

Throughout the proceedings excellent child centred work was led and co-ordinated by the social worker including using words and pictures to explain to the children what had happened, what was going to happen but also obtained their wishes and feelings. This was an ongoing process throughout the proceedings which helped the children, and assisted all caring and supporting them to understand their needs and work together.

The children have remained with family members who they know throughout proceedings, and they continued to have positive contact with other family members. The children were able to remain in their schools and continue their friendships and the stability this offered them.

The children now reside permanently within their extended family. This is what the children wanted and there is a good support plan going forward for both carers and the children, including managing contact and relationships with wider family members.

**Child A:**

The outcome for this 17 year old has been positive for them and the practice that supported their journey is inspiring. He became cared for four years ago as part of a large sibling group. The match with his foster carers was informed and considered and has been effectively supported through challenges and as a result has been a good experience for him. The impact of this has been that he now has a really positive male role model in his life who has supported him to develop his self esteem, confidence and academic ability.

Reviews are occasions where achievements are celebrated, such as GCSEs, driving, relationships and a Saturday job as well as being able to tackle worries and difficulties, such as the arrival of a new sibling and working through some negative feelings and emotions at a particularly difficult time for him.

This young person has a dynamic, personable and efficient social worker, who has developed a trusting working relationship with the young person. The worker is a skilled communicator and follows up things that need doing. For example this has resulted in a successful Criminal Injuries Compensation claim, considered introduction to his Personal Advisor where there was resistance to accept the need, and effective planning for Staying Put arrangements.

The outcome for this young person is that despite their difficult earlier experiences, they are achieving their potential, have gained in confidence and self-belief and have built networks and resilience to cope positively with future challenges.

### **WHAT'S GONE WELL – MAIN THEMES**

- We chaired 942 cared for and 271 Pathway Plan reviews (total of 1,213 reviews),
- From this figure, approx.18% (200) were initial reviews and approx. 12% (112) of all reviews required 2 or more meetings to conclude the 'review series',
- 99% of children participated in their reviews and 62% care leavers attended their Pathway Plan reviews,
- 69% of children were seen by their IRO before reviews either as a separate visit to their placement or separate meeting on the day of the review and this evidences a clear commitment by the IROs to building and maintaining trusting relationships with children and consulting them before/ in between their reviews.
- Our shared commitment to ensuring good practice standards and chairing good quality reviews producing relevant, comprehensive and good quality recommendations over the past three years has contributed to the decrease in number of reviews that required standing down when child/ parent or care plan were not ready for review from 63 in the preceding year to 54 this year
- The commitment of the IRO's meant that we managed a significant spike in demand without impact of delay in reviews for children and young people.

## KEY STATISTICS

**1, 213 cared for and Pathway Plan reviews – 53 more than last year**

**3746 consultation/ feedback forms sent - 787 received**

**92% cared for reviews in timescales**

**99% children 4+ year old participated in their reviews**

**69% children consulted by IRO before review**

**54 good practice notifications – highest in 5 years**

**147 practice alerts raised – 117 (80%) resolved informally**

**7 disruption meetings chaired by IROs**

- We became a fully permanent team (Sep'17) with 9 full time IROs reviewing nearly 700 children and young people,

- We ensured new IROs are always recruited based on interviews conducted jointly with a children and young people's panel,

- How we promote children's rights and involvement was independently evaluated by children and young people and in October'17 we were awarded 'Investing in Children' membership

- We developed a procedure and One Minute Guide for annual review meetings and adapted the template of the review minutes within the child's record,

- The 'How am I getting on' tool, to assess the emotional wellbeing of 16+ care leavers, developed in 2016-17, was

integrated into Pathway Plans for care leavers and is now one of the key areas for care leavers' assessments,

- We further strengthened our working relationship with CAFCASS and attended or hosted relevant joint meetings,
- In May we co-organised and attended the North-West IRO conference in Manchester; in October we attended specialist training on the impact of Adult Attachment and held 2 Team Development days in September'17 and March'18,
- We led on the development of the collation of a baseline dataset on IRO activity within the North-West IRO managers forum to help compare performance of various IRO services in our region and obtain a relevant benchmarking tool,
- Individual IROs have now developed areas of specialism including: child and young person participation, children going missing and at risk of exploitation, children with disabilities and in transition to Adult services, care leavers, UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking young people), links with fostering as well as with Adoption Counts (Regional Adoption Agency), Virtual School and children's educational attainment and resilience, children's health and links with designated nurses or SGO and early permanence oversight ,
- We co-delivered 2 Care Planning and Permanence masterclasses and undertook two joint and thematic audits with the Permanence service – one for children on care orders at home (North West audit) and another on quality of care planning meetings and reviews,

- We developed a system for caseload weighting to make workload comparison and case allocations a fairer process,
- We undertook a number of themed reviews and started implementing Signs of Safety model in children's reviews,
- Issues relevant to assessment and service provision for 16-17 years old young people who present as homeless led to an audit and subsequent report to senior managers with recommendations for improvement within this area of service which were all accepted,
- We celebrated when children received a good service – nearly 50% of all IRO notifications raised were about good practice – we also listened to social workers and developed a separate record to notify about good practice,
- We produced reports on the themes arising from practice alerts and good practice notifications twice last year and learning from practice alerts will also be discussed during monthly joint performance meetings (where fieldwork managers attend alongside IROs) with a brief update to senior managers on a quarterly basis to promote learning in a more timely way. An example of the impact of this was that this feedback on practice, contributed to formulation of a new Working Agreements procedure and planned Reg.24 policy update,
- We have worked with the fieldwork teams on ensuring that children's court care plans are endorsed (or challenged) in a timely way by IROs before they reach court and we are now ahead of some other local authorities, both regionally and nationally, with this arrangement fully embedded,
- Improvement was also achieved with IROs authorising recording of their specific views in the social workers' statements for court,
- IROs robustly scrutinised children's plans and, where they disagreed with either the plan or accompanying support plan, discussion and, where appropriate, escalation took place which enabled sharing of differing perspectives and benefitted the final plan, on one occasion, the IRO's position statement was required and submitted to the courts in relation to the IRO's disagreement with the proposed final care plans for the children,
- The liaison and co-operation between IROs and team managers in the Permanence service has been particularly good and this was supported by a joint session for all above and their respective managers during a development day in September 2017,
- Audit of permanence plans at the point of the second review took place in February and March 2018 and supported agreement as to what constituted and should be expected of the 'permanence plan' options at that stage (also within the context of pending care proceedings),

- IROs provided feedback to the Fostering reviewing officer for the foster carers' annual reviews, consulted on the Local Authority Sufficiency Statement, and shared their observations and concerns when appropriate with Placements and Commissioning teams.
- IROs recognised and celebrated good quality practice of partners through compliments to relevant carers/ agencies as well as supporting the work undertaken by the 16+ designated nurse and leaving care services on improving service provision for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, pregnant care leavers as well as care leavers who became parents.

## **AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT – MAIN THEMES**

- There were still occasions when the IRO availability/ capacity to endorse final care plans, was compromised by the limited time to acknowledge information from completed assessments or other pieces of evidence responsible for the shaping of the proposed final care plans, on occasion the delay is caused by late availability of the view of expert assessors.
- Some of the escalations and discussions took place late in the process; to resolve this, a discussion was held with legal department, CAFCASS and the judiciary within Cheshire and Merseyside courts to propose inclusion of the review date to endorse the final care plan within the court timetable at the beginning of the proceedings,
- A number of reviews were stood down due to the care plan not being ready for the review with the inevitable impact for children, carers and resources. It is acknowledged that care planning is complex and the view of external experts can impact on this, however, it has been rare for this to result in a need to stand a review down.
- The Cared for Children Service identified in September that there were some challenges in the interface between themselves and health providers. An audit in February 2018 by the IRO service identified improvements were needed in child involvement in their medicals (Inc. adoption medicals) with more information to be gathered from families, the child themselves when possible, rather than being completed through a review of the child's medical files and information from the foster carer. Improvements have been evidenced and reported on in Q1 and 2 this year.
- There have been occasions where there was inconsistency in case management, with allocations of sibling groups to two or more social workers and, at times, two different team managers whilst there is one allocated IRO (unless there is a clear conflict of interest between siblings), this was raised, based on information collated in Q1 and shared with operational senior managers:

Q1 check - number of children in sibling group with number of SWs, TMs and IROs involved		
2 siblings (1 of them a care leaver) – 2 SWs and 2 TMs – 1 IRO	3 different groups of 2 siblings with 2 SWs and 2 TMs and 1 IRO each	
3 siblings – 2 SWs and 1 TM – 1 IRO	3 siblings – initially 2 SWs + 2TMs – then 1 SW + 1TM – 1 IRO	
2 groups of 4 siblings with 2 SWs and 1 TM and 1 IRO each	1 group of 4 siblings with 2 SWs and 2 TMs – 1 IRO	4 siblings – 3 SWs and 2 TMs – 1 IRO
5 siblings – 2 SWs and 1 TM - 1 IRO	5 siblings – 2 SWs and 2TMs – 1 IRO	5 siblings (2 care leavers) – 2 SWs and 2 TMs + 2 PAs and 1 TM – 1 IRO
6 siblings – 2 SWs and 1 TM – 1 IRO	6 siblings – 2 SWs and 2 TMs - 1 IRO	Some care leavers who are siblings have different PAs each – 1 IRO

It was explained that such allocations occurred for children with significantly different care plans or where the older child in the sibling group got their 16+ worker (who had a different line manager) but also due to workload pressures and staffing changes; positively, it is anticipated that this area will remain under close scrutiny of managers to minimise potential risk of inconsistencies and uncoordinated plans for children; it is also reassuring that the new transfer policy reflects the need for an ongoing relationship between the allocated social worker and children once the care proceedings have ended when such an arrangement would benefit the implementation of their care plan.

- The liaison meetings between IROs and team managers have continued to be led by the IROs. These has not always occurred as frequently as planned which has challenged the aim to ensure ongoing dialogue and building mutual understanding based learning from escalations and good practice notifications. Positively, there has been some improvement noted recently,
- The need for consistency of financial support to connected carers assessed under Regulation 24 to become the child's kinship (family and friends) foster carers, assumed to be provided on a 'no prejudice' basis reflecting existing fostering allowances, until the carers' later approval at fostering panel is made (or declined); it is reassuring that the policy on Regulation 24 is being currently updated, and it is anticipated that the above issue will be resolved shortly,



- Some delays in notification when a child enters care, slows down the process of allocation of the child's IRO and starting the consultation and preparation process for the 20 days/ initial cared for review; relevant data on late notifications has been collated and shared with operational managers to improve the situation,
- There is a challenge in relation to placement sufficiency, especially for those young people whose care plan included a need for a foster placement but where the lack of relevant placements meeting their needs led on occasion, to a residential placement.
- The detailed minutes from Resource and Accommodation Panel which agrees new placements, provide agreed actions but the limited narrative from the discussions during the panel could give more clarity about the role of care planning meetings following RAP which would be useful,
- The outcomes of stability and disruption meetings will support future joint learning to enhance planning and better outcomes for children and young people.

#### REVIEW OF PROGRESS AGAINST PRIORITIES FROM LAST YEAR AND OUR NEW TARGETS:

The IRO service was able to achieve most of the targets we set ourselves at the beginning of the year. Some of them will remain central to our focus and monitoring in the current year (2018-19) and have been recorded in red colour below:

<b>Priority</b>	<b><i>What was achieved and what still needs to be done</i></b>
<b>Strategy</b> achieve and sustain stable, permanent staffing across the whole team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>9 full time posts with permanent appointments from July 2017:</b> In July'17 we increased the capacity from 8 to 9 full-time posts and successfully appointed 4 IROs to achieve a fully permanent team since Sep'17.</li> <li>• <b>Support IRO capacity by use of Echo pens and audio transcription into narrative by Dragon software and use of Dictaphones:</b> We piloted both technologies and did not find the use of Echo pens useful; use of Dragon software was found supportive although we continued with the testing via other devices which would enable direct recording within the child's file. <b>New targets: Finalise testing Dragon directly in LL, supply headsets and software where still needed and test mobile audio recording and IT security for transcribed narratives (by September 2018). Improve the timescales for completion of outcomes and decisions from reviews</b></li> <li>• <b>Complete caseload weighting process by July 2017:</b> Staffing changes and summer leave meant that this was achieved in September 2017. Since then, we have updated caseload scoring, in line with the ongoing changes, one more time in December 2017 and this enabled a more methodological and fair case allocation process.</li> <li>• Support the development of the IRO service with specialist training and development – the IRO's have had 2 team development days with</li> </ul>

	thematic focus, and have had specialist training on adult attachment and child trauma to enhance their understanding and decision making
<b>Practice and performance:</b> improve outcomes around primary indicators while enabling more confident and consistent practice across the team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Achieve review timeliness at 99%</b> This year 92% of reviews were kept in timescales; the 8% outside of time was due to staffing changes, sickness and two periods of adverse weather preventing travel. Other reasons included the need to align the reviews for two siblings within the same family, crucial document/ evidence for care proceedings not made available, reviews being stood down or carried out as 'series of meetings' and occasionally IROs incorrectly calculating or recording the date of the last/ next review. Although out of statutory timescales the impact for children and young people was minimised in the prevailing majority of cases as the review went ahead within a few days of the due date.</li> <li>• <b>Complete 100% review outcomes in 5 working days:</b> IROs worked very hard to improve timeliness of outcomes from 76% last year and achieved 90% this year. Staffing, capacity and recording issues with IROs unable to create Outcomes for 'series of meetings' (where outcomes could only be created 5 days of the last meeting within the series). <b>New target: ensure 100% reviews occur in timescales and 95% review outcomes are completed in 5 days</b></li> <li>• <b>Ensure child participation in cared for and Pathway Plan reviews is at 99% and 90%, respectively:</b> We achieved <b>99%</b> of children participating in reviews and <b>62%</b> care leavers in Pathway Plan reviews. Additionally, 69% children were visited and consulted by IROs before review (in their placement, sometimes at significant distance from CEC), marking 3% decrease from 72% last year. Children who declined an IRO visit often attended reviews, some had a phone conversation with IROs or had views represented by their social worker, parent, carer or advocate; <b>New target: 85% of children will be consulted by their IRO before review and 75% Care Leavers participating in their Pathway Plan reviews</b></li> <li>• <b>Maintain 95% of issues resolved informally or via DRP level 1:</b> This target was not met as there were 117 informal and 30 formal alerts, 12 of which were escalated and resolved via DRP beyond Level 1. <b>New target: maintain 95% or issue resolved informally or via formal DRP level 1</b></li> </ul>
<b>Promote child's voice through Anti-oppressive practice:</b> promote children's rights and ways in which	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>finalise a work stream, agree reference for use and produce RAG rating tool by Q2:</b> This tool was superseded by the implementation of SoS practice model and corresponding approach to evaluating quality of assessments and plans. However, examples of good assessments and plans were shared with managers in some liaison meetings. In March 2018, a joint audit was undertaken to evaluate quality of care planning meetings and following reviews. This supported insight into 'what works well' and 'what's not working' in this area.</li> <li>• <b>achieve 50% return rate for child and parent consultation forms and 75% for health and education</b> The aspirational targets were not achieved but there was some improvement on last year (see section on consultation below for more details). <b>New target: achieve 30% return rate for child and parent consultation forms whilst gradually increasing the rate of children and parents attending the reviews and 50% from health and education</b></li> <li>• <b>review implementation of the new Missing children workspace on LL child's record and ensure a BO report is available by Q2</b> This was achieved and BO report on children missing was created, <b>New Target: drive the need for risks to children and young people from going missing and exploitation to be identified and strategies to reduce those risks to identified in their Care plan - audit</b></li> </ul>

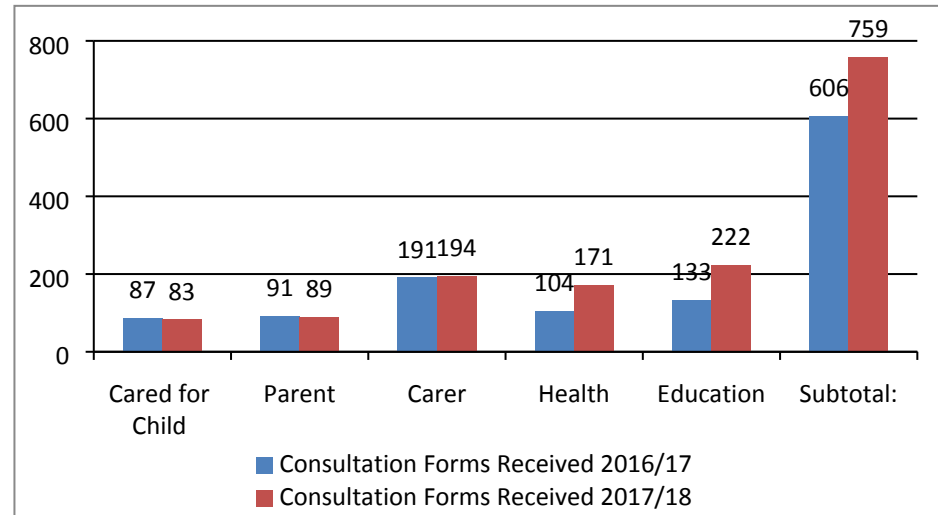
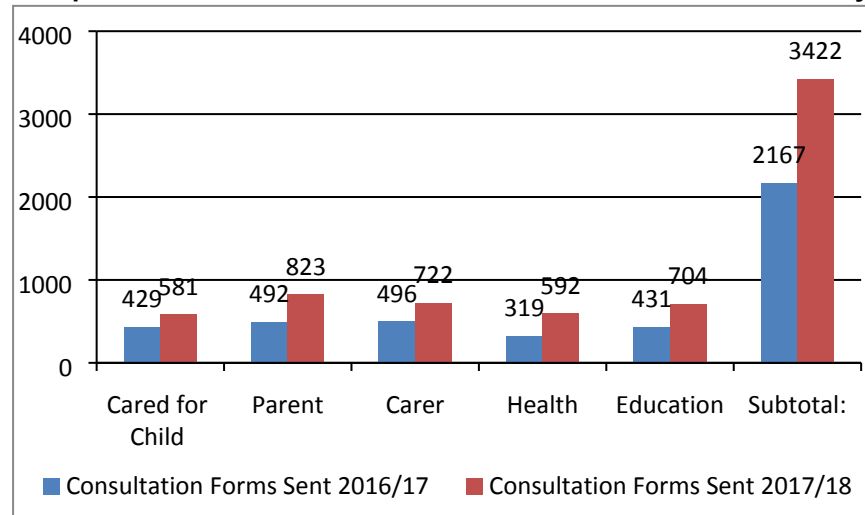
<p>children, parents and carers are engaged</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>achieve the Investing in Children award in Q2</b></li> </ul> <p>This was achieved in October 2018 when the Investing in Children inspection was undertaken. The cared for IROs were involved in the submission process, particularly two IROs for whom children's rights and participation is the leading specialism as well as another IRO who facilitated the young people's presence and attendance on the day. <b>New target: prepare and submit application for renewal of the award (due October 2019)</b></p> <p><b>The service will have a focus on achieving greater stability for Cared for Children for 2018/20, and improved outcomes will be agreed at joint performance meetings</b></p>
<p><b>Communication and collaboration:</b> optimise and achieve consistency and coherence when practice standards are applied in practice across all teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Re-activate the lead IRO role in fostering matters and undertake joint audits with fostering service to produce an overview of disruption meetings in 2017</b></li> </ul> <p>An IRO has a specialist role for this. They have established good links with the Fostering team and managers as well as the Fostering Reviewing Officer and this supported improved communication between the services. However, the joint audits of disruption meetings were completed by the IRO manager rather than jointly with the Fostering service due to changes within the management.. <b>New target: disruptions audit to be agreed in Q2 and completed in Q3 to share findings at Practice/ Performance workshop in December '18. Focus on preventing placement instability to be focus of joint performance meetings with a view to reducing the number of moves children experience and we know what works to sustain placements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>IROs to work with Designated nurses and Family support, Virtual School and fieldwork teams to review the use of SDQs and promote triangulation of the questionnaires with carers, young people and school completing them</b></li> </ul> <p>Mostly achieved. Audit undertaken by IROs and subsequent drive to improve inclusion of SDQ under 'emotional health' in each statutory health assessment and ensure child is present at their health assessment (esp. adoptive one) seem to have a clear impact and follow up audit will confirm whether progress has been significant. Triangulation of SDQ was popularised with Virtual School who started raising awareness and arranged a specialist training for Designated teachers in summer 2018. <b>New target: designated teachers and virtual school head to work together on wider use of SDQs and follow up audit of health assessments by IRO service jointly with designated nurse's team to confirm what improvement has been made – complete by November'18.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Further co-operation by IROs with Virtual School on timeliness and quality of PEPs and EHCPs and support to underachieving cared for children, esp. in alternative educational settings.</b></li> </ul> <p>The above areas were raised and discussed during individual liaison meetings between the link IROs with the Virtual School Head, managers at Children with Disability team and the rest of the team during team development day. The focus on all above aspects remains an ongoing team target.</p>

## CONSULTATION PROCESS

The invite and consultation process remained one of the focal aspects of improving the overall review effectiveness. This was not without a level of ongoing reinforcement and reminding about the importance and impact of this process for the planned review outcomes but also future reference if the young person wishes to seek access to their records. There were **992** invites sent out by Business Support officers and **295** invites were sent/ arranged differently. **514** review dates were changed – they were either cancelled, when the child was no longer cared for, rearranged, due to availability, or stood down, in line with the IRO's statutory powers to prevent the review from being unproductive due to care plan or the child/ family not being prepared/ ready for the review. The following numbers of consultation and feedback documents were sent and received:

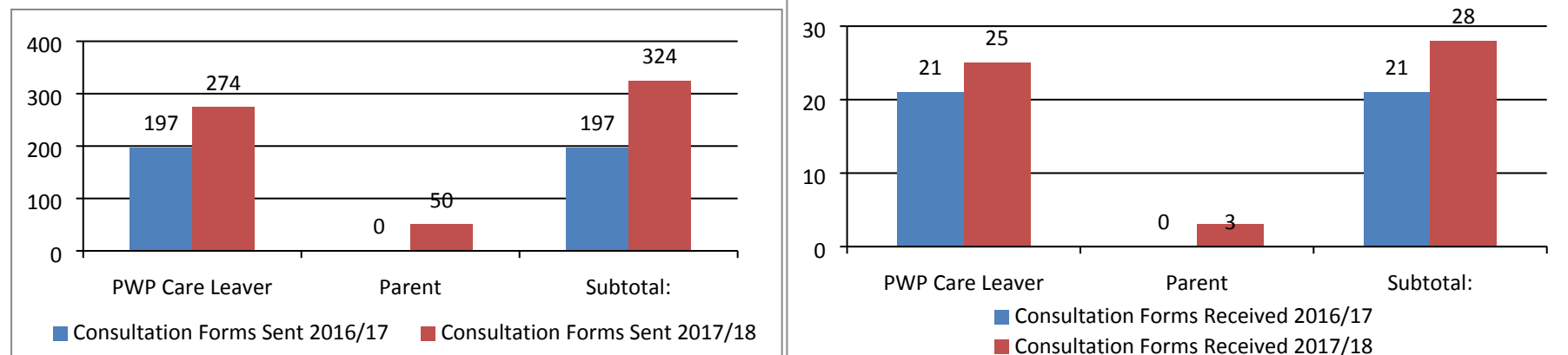
- Consultation form for children/young people (**581 sent and 83 returned - 14%**)
- Consultation form for parents (**823 sent and 89 returned - 11%**)
- Consultation form for foster carers/residential care (**722 sent and 194 received - 29%**)
- Consultation form for health (**592 sent and 171 received - 29%**)
- Consultation form for education (**704 sent and 222 received - 32%**)
- Email consultation with other professionals, esp. Children's Guardian/ CAFCASS (**694 sent and 54 received - 8%**)
- Feedback forms for care leavers (one for young people who attended and another for those who did not) after Pathway Plan reviews
- Feedback form for parents of care leavers for Pathway Plan reviews.

**Comparison – consultations sent and received in 2016/17 and last year**



The number of consultation forms distributed increased by 64% in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17. This included 229 more forms for children than last year and 381 more forms for parents being sent, with 108 children and 92 parents responding although this did not allow for the aspirational target of 50% returns to be achieved. Improvement is being sought in relation to return rate by carers although views are provided at the review if a written report has not been provided.

#### Comparison feedback forms sent and received 2016/17 and last year – PP reviews



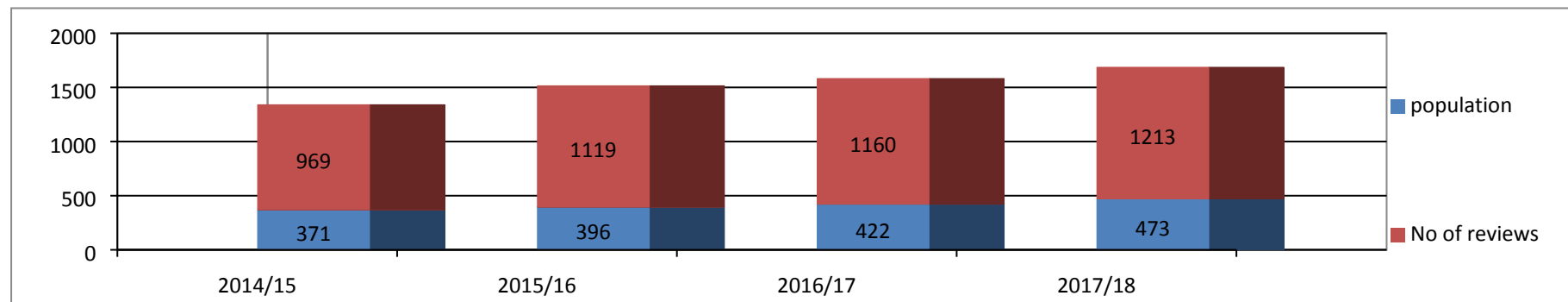
Consultations with health and education (with the target of 75% return rate) saw 9% increase on last year, with 273 more consultations sent out to health and education with 67 and 89, respectively, more replies received from them. This meant an increase of consultation forms received from professionals of 9%. Details have been collated by the IRO Admin Team, who have also devised a relevant tracking system to produce the required data, which supports the ongoing monitoring of the quality of review preparation. Good attempts have been made to consult/obtain feedback from care leavers who did not attend their reviews and 274 forms were sent with 25 replies; a feedback form created for parents of care leavers also started being sent to parents (if involved) and there were 3 replies from 50 parents contacted for feedback. The return rate remains our objective and further targeting of both not only child but also care leaver consultation and feedback has been undertaken through joint work with 'My Voice' group as well as all IROs during ongoing consultations and reviews. This targeted approach further encompasses dialogue with relevant agencies, including the designated nurses' team as well as Virtual School. It is expected that as SoS becomes embedded the family networks for cared for children will be much more embedded in the child's daily lived experience.

## REVIEW ACTIVITY

2017/18 has seen a continuing growth in our cared for population, there has also been some placement instability, although a reduction in the number of children who experience 3+ placement moves. Children and young people in our care have continued to have episodes of going missing which impacts on IRO activity chairing trigger meetings. The team have experienced some staff sickness this year, requiring covers and adverse weather conditions also impacted seeing children and young people, all of which have challenged the services flexibility and capacity to accommodate all reviews in timescales.

Given the above, the increase in children participating in their reviews is a significant success and this is undoubtedly the result of the focus and priority given to this by the IROs, assisted by all posts becoming permanently filled through the year. These factors have enabled more meaningful and consistent relationships with the young people. There were 1213 cared for and Pathway Plan reviews. Also, although counted as one review, a number of reviews (on average 10% last year) required two or more meetings under the option of 'series of meetings' to enable effective and full participation.

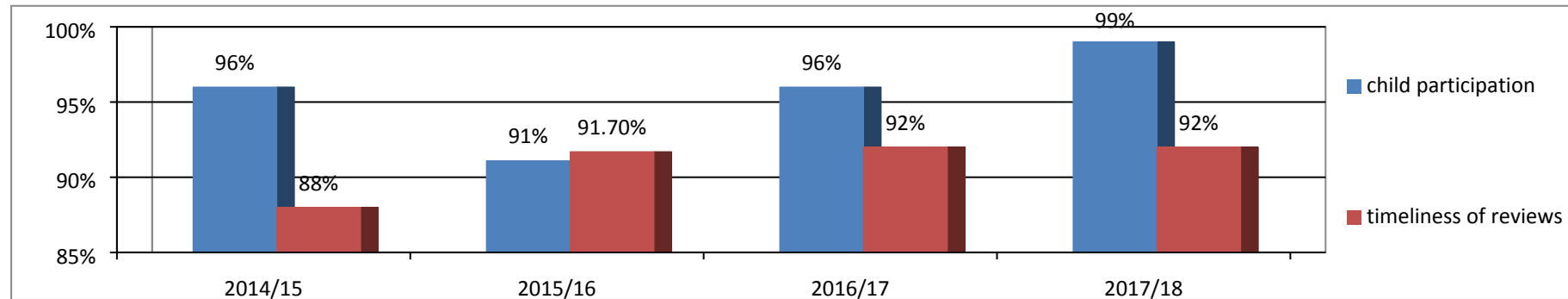
### Increase in population and number of reviews – 4 year comparison



Increase in numbers of cared for reviews and Pathway Plan reviews reflected the increase in numbers of cared for children, the majority entering care with a court order. This reflects the national trend, and the pattern shared by many local authorities in the North-West region, with an increase in children remaining with parents on Care Orders at home. With 942 cared for and 271 Pathway plan reviews throughout the year, circa 92% cared for and 92% of Pathway Plan reviews were kept in timescales. The majority of delays did not exceed a few days, so the impact of delay for children and young people was minimal. It needs to be emphasised that a high proportion of children received 3 or more reviews in

the year due to their case being in proceedings and plans requiring endorsement at various stages alongside plans for children on Placement Orders/ awaiting adoption which are reviewed every 3 months.

#### Timeliness of reviews and child participation in reviews – 4 year comparison



It is particularly reassuring that 99% of children aged 4 and above participated in their reviews, which is the highest result over the last 4 years. Also, 62% of care leavers participated in their reviews – which indicates some improvement and needs to be seen in context of many reviews being re-arranged to suit the care leaver's changing needs and own arrangements, at times still not leading to the young person being present at their review.

The majority of children (**69%**) were also visited in their placements or consulted before their review by the IROs to ensure how they lived and what they thought about their care plans and services they received. Many were also contacted by phone or text messages and communicated with their IRO in-between reviews. A number of children and care leavers have developed or maintained good, trusting relationships and a few were supported by their IROs whilst their complaints were being heard and resolved. Furthermore, over the last year, work has begun to adopt aspects of Child-centred reviews and focusing on making reviews more visual and informal by utilising things such as colouring pens, post-its and large flip chart paper. Feedback from young people was that this way of reviewing worked well and it helped to reengage young people that had previously not been interested in their reviews, disliked their reviews and/or found their reviews boring. Since this work started there has been the introduction of the Signs of Safety (SoS) model and work was started within the IRO service to implement the key aspects and ethos of this with the implementation plan aiming at fully aligning review meetings with the SoS model by the end of the year.

Initial feedback regarding the development of reviews utilising a Child-centred review model and SoS and maintaining the visual element of reviews has been positive. Although relatively new, feedback from young people on this new concept of chairing reviews has managed to



alleviate stress and anxiety for young people when they have a review upcoming, allow for young people to have a better understanding about their care plan and the review process and, more importantly, allow for young people to become more involved and participate meaningfully in their reviews. Over the last year IROs have also utilised a range of themes to encourage young people to attend their reviews stemming from a football themed review and a pug, French and a 'bake off' themed review. It is intended that these themes will continue to help merge the formal requirement of a statutory meeting with what is a purely relational experience for the child or young person, making reviews more laid back and more of a fun experience for children and young people inviting different format for discussions about risks and difficulties, alongside a focus on positivity, children's strengths and their skills, enhancing resilience and encouraging children to choose positive alternative behaviours and activities.

## PARTICIPATION

The IROs continued to focus on encouraging the participation of children and young people in their cared for reviews.

The focus on IROs seeing children in their placements clearly impacted positively on the rates for children participating and present at their meetings. This contributed to more comprehensive understanding of children's experiences through their views, wishes and feelings and development of lasting and trusting working relationships between the IROs and the children they are allocated to. Achieving team stability with all IROs permanent in their posts since September 2017 certainly supported this. IROs using a variety of tools and approaches to reviews further enhanced child participation. Simultaneously, overall participation of care leavers also improved although the rates for their presence in reviews were changing over the year with a couple of months when the presence was lower than in other months (August and February).

IROs have used various ways of contacting young people like: letter, text or phone call to feed back/ reflect with the young person or a more child friendly/ edited version of the review report although this was not sent to all young people.

**Children's rights:** The team has a designated IRO with a strong Children's Rights background. A participation group was developed by him, with support from another IRO colleague, and entailed a small group of children/ care leavers who reflected on their experience of the care and review process, shared their views about some of the tools and processes. Young people's panel was also an integral part during the

*'I like my meeting'*

*'I got an explanation why I'm not with S. (old carer)'*

*'I know what the SGO is now'*

*'My IRO was descriptive'*

**Children's feedback on reviews and their IRO**



recruitment process for the last 4 appointed IROs from April to September 2017. One of the two designated IROs has also supported links with other leads in participation across other services and attended Participation Network meetings.

In October 2017, the IRO team obtained the 'Investing in Children' award for involving children in decision making and being based on the evaluation by the children. This preceded celebrating children's achievements during the Local Authority annual Star Awards ceremony, where a designated IRO was part of the Steering Group, as well as November Hands Up for Children's rights which was recognised and celebrated, with all IROs making their pledges with regards to further improve child participation within their scope of duties, particularly within the review meetings.

The team remained committed to supporting children in need anywhere in the world and established a link with the managing Foundation of Good Hope Primary school in Uganda and supported by voluntary contributions the school's new travel arrangements, after the children and the school old bus were involved in a serious accident after which the bus was no longer roadworthy. Later in the year, celebrating children's achievement at their annual exams was supported by donations from distribution of Christmas cards with festive wishes which had been hand-made by the children.

**Participation Group:** The idea of maintaining co-operation and keeping communication between the IRO team and a small group of children and young people materialised with a couple of meetings taking place in addition to the group supporting our IRO recruitment process as the Young People's recruitment panel. Gradually, it turned out that arranging meetings with children and young people and specialist IROs was becoming complicated, in large proportion due to the young people's own circumstances and pressures within their own respective lives to attend these meetings. It was decided towards the later stages of 2017 that the young people involved with the IRO service so far could retain their specialist experience and knowledge and continue as links with the IRO service within the wider participation group 'My Voice' which was being re-launched.

It was identified by the IROs as well as based on the feedback from young people that the consultation forms sent to young people as part of the review process required an update. In collaboration with 'My Voice', draft versions of consultation forms have been completed with the aim to make the forms more child friendly and quicker to complete. Two versions have been completed and work is currently being undertaken on the presentation and design of the consultation forms. It is estimated that by July 2018 the draft versions will be completed and forms can be trialled. There are further plans in place to also address the format and content of the information young people receive post review to capture the pertinent points and actions of the young people's reviews.

**IROs and 'My Voice Group' (formerly Children in Care Council):** Since the start of 2018, the IRO service worked a lot more closely with 'My Voice' group. Over the last few months there has been an IRO attending the 'My Voice' Group on a 4-6 weekly basis. It is hoped that having a

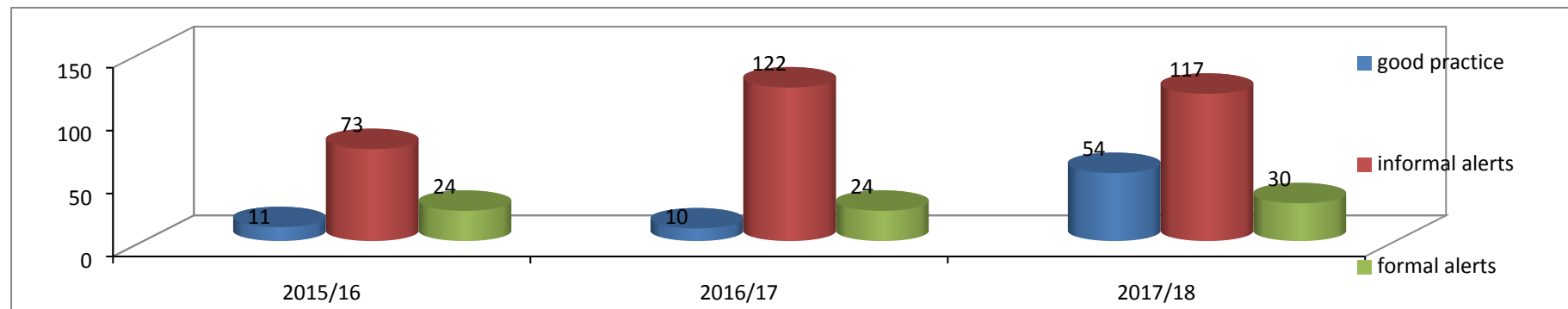
consistent presence will allow for better working relationship with children who represent cared for and care leavers' population. Although a new arrangement, this working partnership has allowed more children to have a better understanding of the role of an IRO and how IROs and the review process impacts upon their lives. The IRO attended 'My Voice' group development day recently where the working relationship was cemented; the long term goal to continue co-operation with 'My Voice' group further assumes liaison with a specific young person who would become the lead among cared for children to work a lot more closely with the IRO leads for participation.

### **ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT VISITORS:**

Over the last year a more effective working relationship between the Council's independent advocacy service and the IRO service has been better established. The IRO service also maintained a contribution to quarterly contract monitoring meetings when discussing issues pertinent to advocacy and IVs. IROs also offered specific feedback about advocates enabling children to have their issues resolved and the role of the advocates in this process, especially when challenges were escalated by advocates. Further work was identified for the current year with the advocacy service and this includes plans for their representation of children's voices in Stability and Disruption meetings, complaints and placement freeze process, should a child disagree with a plan to change their placement. It is anticipated that during the current year the above aims are achieved and the role of advocates will be clearly outlined in policy guidance.

### **IRO ESCALATION**

#### **Alerts summary - three year annual comparison**



Analysis of data from 201 practice alerts and good practice notifications raised by IROs to all services across the department in 2017/18 provides good evidence of greater balance and improved practice which is best seen when comparing corresponding data from the last 3 years.

#### **What's gone well - IRO alerts and good practice notifications in the reporting year:**

- significant increase in good practice notifications (54 notifications last year) with a 1:2 ratio to informal alerts (117 alerts last year),
- fewer practice alerts regarding issues with care plans,
- well embedded IROs endorsement of the court care plans, contributing to better permanence and support plans for children.

#### **What we've been worried about:**

- still too many reviews stood down due to care/ pathway plans not being ready for reviews – impacting on children/ parents/ carers and their availability,
- gaps in consistent partnership working with service users IROs not being updated in a timely way when changes occur,
- issues not resolved informally by IROs and Team Managers and escalated formally (30 DRPs) to managers at more senior level, including resolution of issues about the final court care plans occurring at a very late stage (in some cases the day of the filing),
- some lack of consistent practice when using accommodation under sec.20 with children.

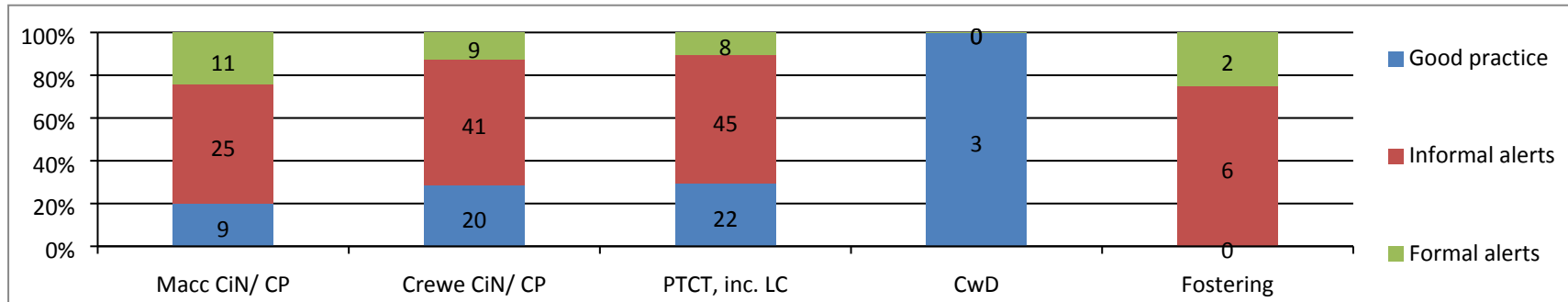
*'Time could have been discussed – had to change things to be able to attend'* Carer on review being stood

#### **What needs to change:**

- issues need to be resolved promptly and with confidence between IROs and TMs,
- views of the child, parent and carer need to underpin the development of plans and these need to be shared with service users in a timely manner,
- similarly, final court care plans need to be shared more consistently with IROs in a timely manner,
- learning from thematic data on alerts needs to become well embedded.

The data on IRO alerts is proportional to the population of cared for children and their cases per any given service (hence Permanence team has more IRO alerts/ good practice notification than other services). The oversight of the fostering service performance is not a routine requirement for IRO and where alerts were raised for this service, this was in relation to instances of delay or deficiencies in matching or placing children linked to practice issues by the fostering service and not linked to the child's social worker or their team.

Good practice within Children with a Disability service has been recognised with no practice alerts raised last year (there were 3 in 2016/17) and overall 3 good practice notifications. The most balanced and improved practice was seen in Permanence (including Leaving Care service) with 22 good practice notifications and reduction from 68 to 45 practice alerts last year. Both CiN/ CP Crewe and CiN/ CP Macclesfield services were close behind, with Crewe service with 20 good practice notifications closely following the Permanence service. This is also a reflection of the action within the IRO service to proactively recognise good practice more systematically than we have in previous years. With the overall increase in formal alerts, the consistently high ratio of formal alerts in the first and second half of the year in CiN/CP Macclesfield service may require further reflection, although the reduction in alerts for reviews stood down in second half of the year, in this service clearly evidences improvement in this area.



#### Alerts distribution across the department annual summary

Good working relationships with the child make for the highest number of good practice notifications across the department (31) with Permanence taking the lead, followed by (at nearly identical level in both halves of the year), CiN/ CP Macclesfield then CiN/ CP Crewe and CwD service. The process of raising good practice notifications include clear commentary to the involved social worker's manager about how the good practice impacted/ improved the child's experience. Team manager respond to these alerts promptly and appreciate IROs' feedback.

GOOD PRACTICE NOTIFICATION THEMES	No of times evidenced	CiN/ CP Macc	CiN/ CP Crewe	Perm inc. L/ Care	CwD
Consistently good practice	25	6	3	16	
Exemplary practice in advocating for or supporting the child	25	4	11	9	2
Lived experience well evidenced	6	3	1	2	

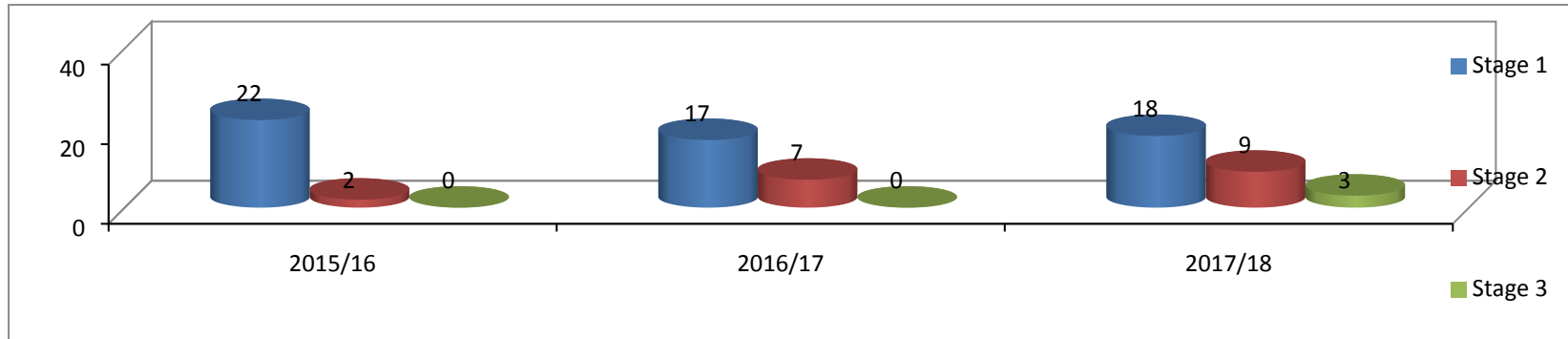
<b>Good quality assessment or plan</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Good working relationship with the child</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Good relationship with others - supportive/ empathetic relationship with carers at critical time</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>	

Good practice in advocating for the child and supporting the child led to 'consistently good practice' notifications (25). Good quality assessment/ plan were identified mainly in the Permanence service followed by CiN/CP Crewe. Particularly reassuring are notifications regarding consistently good practice for children (shared 25 times)

The number of alerts in relation to reviews stood down due to the lack of an updated care plan ready for review has been a significant issue and a resource implication which only improved significantly for CiN/CP Macclesfield during the year, whilst both CiN/ CP Crewe and Permanence service had an increase in numbers of reviews stood down. This seems to reflect the impact of staffing changes, including team managers affecting their availability for consistent oversight in the second half of the year. Not sharing of either care plans or other documents with the child and/or their parents or carers was another issue where concern diminished during the second half of the year, possibly due to the decrease in the care proceedings.

There were 9 alerts which required resolution at Stage 2 with HoS and 3 alerts (one sibling group) at Stage 3 with ADCS. The DRPs (Dispute Resolution Process) evidences IROs' diligence in striving to reach the outcome and resolution for alerts they were not able to resolve informally at first and/ or needed to resolve them in a timely manner. Complying with statutory requirements, through the interface of IROs with more senior managers, the DRPs provide a learning opportunity for both parties to gain more experience and confidence in its use, which supports the culture of positive challenge. The subject matters raised in DRPs provide an excellent source of support for reflecting on practice and learning as well as further practice improvement, too.

### **Three year comparison – Dispute Resolution Process stages 1-3**



PRACTICE ALERTS - THEMES	No of times raised	CiN/ Macc	CP	CiN/ Crewe	CP	PTCT inc. L/ Care	Fostering
No Plan/ plan not updated: review stood down	43	9		7		27	
Statutory visits out of timescales or not recorded	20	5		13		2	
Required documents not produced or shared with IRO (e.g. CPR, SGO, parenting assessment, support plan)	18	7		10		1	
Documents not shared and/ or poor consultation with child and/or parent and/ or carers and/ or professionals	32	7		13		12	
No permanence plan by 2 <sup>nd</sup> review	7	4		3			
Drift/ legal issues, e.g. applying for or discharging an order, confirming care leaver status	32	4		15		10	3
Deficiencies in care planning (e.g. no care planning mtgs, contact plan, contingency plan)	45	15		21		9	
Placement issues (e.g. no care/ placement planning mtg, frequent moves, no timely confirmation for Staying Put arrangements)	12	4		1		4	3
Poor or no communication and/ or direct work with child	5			3		2	
Child's wishes/ feelings or lived experience not captured; issues with arranging advocacy for the child	11			11			
Decisions from reviews not implemented – drift	16	2		5		9	

<b>Safeguarding issues, inc. lack or out of date risk assessment, lack/ quality of analysis and decision making</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	
<b>Funding/ resource related issues</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>	

There were alerts raised due to legal issues like:

- cases not progressed to court in a timely manner,
- differences in views as to when private arrangements for child's placement were made as opposed to the child being accommodated under sec.20,
- issues relating to confirmation of support post final hearing or drift in progressing the SGO and/ or care leaver status for late care entrants with a significant level of need.

Some of the alerts in this group were escalated to formal DRP and it is certainly an area requiring specific focus and learning as some of the most recent examples indicate some inconsistency between actions taken by the allocated social workers or how these have been perceived by service users when it comes to placing children away from home. However, it is positive that reflecting on some of the care proceedings, a management decision was already made and applied across both CiN/ CP services to consider progressing to court promptly where likelihood of the child's rehabilitation back home appeared to be diminishing and that a new policy on management of connected persons (Reg.24) placements is going to be produced.

In the last year a decrease in alerts when there has not been a plan for permanence at the second review may be due to a decrease in care entrants, also it may be a result of IRO practice resorting to either a series of meetings or completing the meeting and holding a separate discussion due to outstanding reports prior to ADM or Final evidence being filed. The focus for 2018/9 is on permanency and the IRO service will work with the social work teams by raising alerts whenever there is no permanency plan (or concurrent permanent options outlined) at the second review. This may result in an initial increase.

Other areas resulting in IRO escalation included delay in implementing review decisions, leading to drift, and not informing the IRO about significant changes to the child's care plan (including instances of child changing placements or being returned home).

### **REFLECTION ON IMPACT OF IRO SPECIALIST AREAS:**

#### **Children missing from home/ care**

A Multi-agency Missing Children Focus Group was established and led by the IRO service and achieved the following:

- good communication about what impacts and promotes good practice resulting in more consistent oversight and service provision to the children who go missing,
- improvement in service provision leading to greater participation and partnership work, with more parents and, on occasion, children attending their Trigger Missing meetings to create better plans and prevent reoccurrence of going missing again,
- evaluation of the awareness and use of tools for consultation with children, young people as well as their parents and carers when managing risk plans at trigger Level 1 and Level 2 missing from home and care meetings, and use of the dedicated workflow to record all missing incidence, actions and reporting.
- update to Pan Cheshire Missing Risk Assessment, the template is now held on the LSCB website, and when used, placed within the relevant available records (Forms) on the child's file, resulting in more accurate assessment.
- One Minute Guide completion by Catch 22 for Pan Cheshire Protocol,
- identified training needs across EDT (out of hours team) in relation to Missing categories lead to addressing them accordingly,
- identified and addressed the difficulty in the recording of return interviews and 'N/A' box being completed at point of recording,
- identified and agreed with service managers the need for photographs of any child who goes missing to be regularly uploaded onto child's record,
- altered the process for endorsement of Trigger Level 2 minutes to ensure both the IRO and the team manager sign it off so there is good over-sight and shared focus,
- circulated information to IROs to ensure Missing episodes and plans are clearly referenced in minutes of reviews in terms of understanding and planning for the risks,
- supported team managers in reminding their teams to update care plans following Trigger meetings to ensure all relevant actions are incorporated in children's care/ placement plans, so risk informs assessment and planning for the child.

### **Children with disabilities and transitions to Adult Services**

The link IRO in this area met with both Children with Disabilities as well as Adults with Learning Disability teams and managers. Meeting with Adults with Learning Disabilities Team meeting enabled evaluation of the overlap in presence of services from Adults and Children's Leaving Care Team as well as IRO service. This supported development of more positive relationship and encouraged Adult Services' social workers attendance at Pathway Plan reviews. The Adult service workers later reported that they had often found such attendances useful and this ensures smoother transition for the child. IRO service was also represented and contributed to the 'WS3 Preparing for Adulthood and Transitions' work stream which is developing Transition Pathways to Adult Services. There is a range of areas for further development ahead of the transitional worker and Adult service but the co-operation of the above three services certainly paved the way forward and needs to be maintained.



### **Care Leavers - Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

The lead IRO in this area continued involvement with the working group monitoring processes linked to 'How am I getting on' tool that supports assessing emotional wellbeing of care leavers. Last year the group started looking to broaden its scope beyond the assessment of need to find ways to ensure that the identified needs are met. The specialist IRO attended a 'Thoughtfulness' workshop to experience the service offered to care leavers and to meet with the service provider and also met with the 'Pure Insight' service to discuss the new role they were developing with a mental health worker to offer direct counselling services to care leavers as well as to develop mentoring services and a range of 'self-care tool kits' to aid wellbeing. It is recognised that assessment and the quality of Pathway Plans has improved, and that consideration of relevant support to care leavers starts early and plays an important part in service provision. Links with accommodation/ care and other service providers are established (Ignition panel plays a significant role) and where there were concerns about quality of services and care leavers' experiences, these were promptly shared by the IROs with the Commissioning team and were responded to with relevant action improving the experience of Care Leavers.

### **Unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.**

The IRO service supported the work of the 16+ Designated nurse and Leaving Care service to develop more robust and evidence informed practice on behalf of social care, medical and housing professionals when understanding and meeting the needs of this group of young people, including former 'UASC' when they reach 18 years of age.

The IRO service supported the need for further awareness raising across many professionals and agencies, including GPs, dentists and housing officers. There is clear merit in gaining a better understanding of what expected service provision and standards there are across the various agencies these young people may come in contact with, including the Faith and third sector organisations, access to advocacy and legal support for ARE or 'age-disputed' young people whose application for asylum was rejected or their age disputed, use of culturally and ethnically appropriate interpreters, relevant ESOL providers or specialist local medical professionals and services like NHS funded therapy for young people who were subjected to torture and modern slavery.

### **IRO links with Virtual School:**

The specialist IRO and Virtual School Head as well as both respective teams have collaborated over the last year. The overriding theme has been raising educational outcomes for cared for children with a specific focus on emotional health and outcomes achieved by cared for children in alternative provisions. Evidence gathered by IROs through reviewing children attending one of the local authority's specialist schools



identified specific concerns about the emotional wellbeing and educational attainment of the cared for children in this provision. Agencies worked together to improve the attainment of children and reviewed the progress so that long term decisions were made in the best interests of each child.

Improving the emotional wellbeing of cared for children in schools was promoted by the IRO service with the Virtual Head who has committed to rolling out relevant training for Designated Teachers in Cheshire East Schools over the summer term 2018. There is also a drive to ensure schools complete SDQ (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire) for cared for children with an aim to further triangulate the scores from the SDQ for each cared for child with the scores from the same questionnaire completed by their carers and the child/ young person themselves to allow for more holistic overview of the emotional health needs and therefore an appropriately individualised response for each young person. Further work on this will take place over 2017/8, and future liaison with the designated nurses' service is needed to take advice on how the completed SDQs will be reflected in each child's review health assessment.

An issue identified by the IROs when reviewing children under 2 years of age was the lack of a consistent approach to assessing the education/ developmental needs of this group of children (pre 2 PEP). This was raised with the Virtual School Head. It was agreed more consistent practice in this area would be discussed by the Virtual School Head with the senior manager (Head of Service) for cared for children so that an agreed process would be communicated to all social workers.

Another significant concern identified by IROs was linked to EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans) for cared for children placed out of borough. To enable a quicker response to each cared for child's educational needs, the Virtual Head secured agreement with the SEN team that they would retain responsibility for EHCPs where children were in an out of area residential provision. The Virtual School Head will also be able to urgently provide resources for bespoke education packages where required. A greater involvement of the Virtual School in all SEN aspects relevant for the cared for children and the inclusion of IRO oversight of EHCPs within statutory cared for reviews and alignment of the reviews remains an area for continued progress.

Apprenticeships – retention rates for young people who have taken on apprenticeships within Cheshire East Council was queried with the Virtual School Head in the context of the outcomes for these young people at the end of the apprenticeship period. This is an area for continued focus that will enable a better understanding of what makes our young people successful and what hinders this process in relation to securing employment post apprenticeship period.

#### **Liaison with CAFCASS and North West IRO Managers regional group:**

Regular liaison meetings took place with both the CAFCASS service manager and IRO manager in attendance. The IRO service was regularly represented and made contributions to the meetings of Liverpool Family Courts, CAFCASS for Merseyside and Cheshire and IRO services

within this area as well as bi annual meetings with Judge de Haas and IRO services. The IRO manager regularly attended bimonthly meetings of the North West IRO managers group and led on collation of baseline database regarding IRO statutory activity to enable regional comparison and support individual annual IRO report production by each local authority IRO manager.

### **Other specialist areas and liaison with services**

Specialist areas for liaison to develop better joint working and communication involved fostering service (see below section), new adoption agency (Adoption Counts), SGO and designated nurses team. A new specialism includes an IRO acting as a practice lead for implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model.

## **IRO FEEDBACK ON QUALITY OF SERVICES INVOLVED IN CHILDREN'S PERMANENCE PLANNING AND PLACEMENTS**

### **WHAT'S WORKED WELL?**

- co-operation was good and feedback from IROs for the Fostering reviewing officer prior to carers' annual reviews was regular,
- improved communication regarding learning and sharing of concerns for children whose placements broke down was influenced by the IROs who chaired placement disruption meetings working with the Fostering reviewing officer who chairs the carers' reviews – helping to align the process, i.e. share the learning points from disruptions before the carers' reviews (this will continue to be a work in progress),
- appointment of a dedicated senior manager to oversee issues pertinent to children's permanence and offer consultation and support to the operational teams/ team managers,
- greater clarity about the organisation and processes within the regional adoption agency (Adoption Counts) and its links with internal teams,
- undertaking of a review of therapeutic provision to address children's emotional and mental health needs and progression towards offering outreach type of work alongside additional out of hours designated support to foster carers,
- the main learning points from disruption meetings (for long-term placements which broke down after 12 months or more from the child entering the placement) were analysed and shared with relevant services, especially the Placements and Fostering team to inform their matching and resource planning as well as training and support to the carers,

- identifying appropriate provider of accommodation and support to care leavers was enabled by regular Ignition panel meetings.
- the percentage of children cared for with 3 or more placements during the year as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, is 10.7% (51 children). This is an improvement on the previous year (13.6%) and in line with regional statistical neighbours. We recognise there is still more we can do to ensure placement stability and learn from breakdowns, but this years figures show a positive move in the right direction

#### WHAT'S NOT WORKING WELL/ WHAT WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT?

- Increase in demand and lack of in house or agency foster placements meant that children were placed in residential agency placements, where this was not the preferred choice for them. The new residential admissions receive particular scrutiny and challenge, as do the residential placements where issues about their suitability/ sustainability have already been raised or are a reason for concern.
- although significantly improved, greater consistency in the clear recording and monitoring of children in unregulated placements would continue this trend, e.g. when a Reg.24 carer is not approved at fostering panel or a young person does not wish to live with a relative/ parent before an assessment and formal arrangement has been made,
- records from placement stability meetings had varied in their content and quality, initially due to there being no established format, however this changed towards the end of the year with two specific managers delegated to chair all of these meetings and this has improved. This will help us learn from disruptions and improve placement stability even further
- consistent practice for chairing of stability meetings to support 'fragile'/ at risk of breakdown placements has developed during the year, it would be important to consider how to further embed this practice across the teams and empower the front line managers to confidently take increasing levels of control for robust monitoring and support to social workers where management to prevent placement breakdown is an issue, joint performance meeting will also provide a shared focus.
- clarity about support where Adoption Fund can be accessed/ is being utilised, inc. post adoption support,
- gradual decrease in number of Staying Put arrangements for 18+ care leavers - we need to better understand this and ensure all children are appropriately offered the opportunity where this meets their needs and is what they want.
- some improvement in attendance of supervising social workers at reviews or in the consultation prior to reviews has been seen, this would still be a target area to ensure that children's care plans are progressing well with the carers are supported in line with the changing needs of the children, particularly when proceedings are ongoing.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

- consistent consultation before the matching of a new child needs to include carers, their supervising social worker and social workers for each respective child already in the placement,
- assessment and long term matching of children with foster carers needs to include consideration of the carers' willingness to offer Staying Put arrangements,
- there needs to be dedicated workspace/ workflow within the child's record to offer a consistent manner for recording (and monitoring/ auditing) of placement instability/ disruption issues, inc. minutes from disruption meetings (chaired by IROs),
- learning from unplanned disruptions before the child has been 12 months in the placement needs to be enabled/captured and analysed,
- consultation document for supervising social workers before a child's review needs to be developed.
- there have been some good examples of close working between IROs and the fostering service, particularly in relation to the co-ordinated working to support children moving on, family finding and exchanging information when a new social worker is allocated and supporting placements at fragile times. The link IRO and fostering managers will continue to develop ways of communicating concerns about fostering practice and bringing about change and to improve knowledge of each team's role by team meeting attendance and joint workshop,

## PRIORITIES FOR 2018/19:

What do we want to achieve?	How will we get there?	When will we know we have succeeded?	Impact on the child
Improved engagement of children and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we will maintain liaison with 'My Voice' and promote engagement through effective invite and consultation process and regular</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• six monthly feedback evidences improved service</li> <li>• Investors in Children award is renewed and STAR AWARD event is co-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children have better relationships with their IROs and understand well how to communicate their views and how IROs can support them</li> </ul>

<b>young people, their parents, carers and significant others</b>	<p>feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we will continue to improve the consultation process and scrutinise quality of advocacy</li> <li>• we will monitor partnership working with service users to develop plans</li> </ul>	<p>prepared</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice of UASCs and CwD is clear, understood and impacts on service development</li> <li>• Increase in children and young people who attend and lead their reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and parents trust that independent review process regularly consults and asks them about quality of services and their voices improve the service</li> <li>• Children/ YP trust they are heard when developing plans</li> </ul>
<b>Co-operation with frontline services to improve stability in placements and achieving permanence at the earliest point</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we will contribute to placement stability by knowing the child and carer through regular visits and consultation, oversight and timely reviews</li> <li>• IRO's will ensure that the child is understood within their family and community context and that important links for the child are maintained</li> <li>• we will retain focus on children's educational attainment and emotional wellbeing through EHCP/ PEP scrutiny and triangulation of SDQ scores and use of 'How am I getting on' tool</li> <li>• our feedback and escalations will support foster carers' training and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All children will have permanency plans by the second review</li> <li>• joint challenge sessions improve quality of care planning through IRO visits. timely reviews and learning from IRO alerts</li> <li>• the child's review and plan reflects how services are sustaining meaningful links with their family and community</li> <li>• IRO/ TM liaison meetings are regular</li> <li>• Repeat joint audits on placement disruptions and care planning/ review will evidence where there is good practice and areas for continued improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process of assessing capacity within the family and outside of it, if need be, when placing a child has been recognised early to decrease risk of breakdowns and children moving</li> <li>• Plans for children clearly set out their family and community links and ensures they are sustained so they remain meaningful for the child</li> <li>• Children's anxiety about their future is responded to and their views play crucial role when formulating plans and reviewing them to give children answers about their future lives</li> <li>• Children understand that their views matter whether during care</li> </ul>

	<p>improvement in quality and stability of placements and support to carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we will support development of specific joint working approach to supporting and scrutinising Care orders at home whilst preventing drift</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Placement breakdowns are reduced and prevented and Virtual school's role is well evidenced</li> <li>IROs, Fostering service and Fostering Reviewing Officer developed and embedded a pattern of consistent feedback post child's reviews and prior to carers' annual reviews</li> </ul>	<p>planning, review, stability meeting or disruption meeting and that their experiences are taken seriously to improve their and other children's experiences</p>
<p><b>Successfully implemented SoS approach leading to the development of own review model</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we will consistently encourage and scrutinise use of support networks in formulating care plans during care proceedings and afterwards</li> <li>we will use appreciative enquiry and group supervision for learning and support and empower children and young people to co/chair their meet</li> <li>we will develop tools and methods which are SoS compliant and enable undertaking cared for and Pathway Plans reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>kinship placements are explored early when needed to offer permanence and arrangements tested out and supported where they are in the child's interest</li> <li>updated consultation and evaluation tool, co-produced with children and young people and SoS compliant, replaced old tools and are in use by December 2018</li> <li>IROs are proficient in using SoS approach and have conducted peer observations to help them develop SoS review model by December 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children will benefit from more appropriate tools which are going to be used consistently by social workers during visits or meetings as well as IROs during consultations and reviews</li> <li>Children and their parents will feel more involved and thus empowered to share their views about the strengths as well as risks to help co-produce the eventual plans</li> </ul>

- children's voices will remain a central priority for IROs and all other professionals involved, with advocates being used to actively support children when making their decisions about issues significant for them, especially when these relate to contact arrangements or placements,
- wider use of advocacy should be considered for meetings such as care planning meetings, Stability or Disruption meetings,
- ensuring that focus on partnership working with the parents in decision making about their children is maintained and further developed through implementation of the Signs of Safety model,
- wider services, including the legal department, need to work together to ensure the date for a review gives sufficient time for the IRO to familiarise themselves with all final evidence prior to final hearing is agreed at early stages of proceedings,
- further work will happen on co-ordinating EHCP review within PEP process and the statutory cared for review process to evidence robust monitoring,
- further joint work by the IRO team will contribute to cross departmental work on optimising arrangements for the young people with disabilities and high level vulnerabilities who require transitional arrangements and involvement from Adult services,
- recommendations made by the IRO service to address the needs of 16-17 year olds presenting as homeless needs implementing,
- achieve consistent approach to assessing and addressing educational/ developmental needs of children under 2 years of age (replacing the pre 2 PEP),
- further work to build on specialist knowledge and skills in recognising the needs and supporting UASC (unaccompanied asylum seeking children), as initiated by the Designated 16+ nurse and Leaving Care service, would be very beneficial, particularly in relation to supporting the emotional and identity needs of this group of young people; further work on linking the interpreter with the young person's ethnic and religious background, established links with medical professionals with specialist knowledge, established pattern of accessing NHS led therapeutic support for the young people who were tortured or forced into labour/ modern slavery,
- a reduction in stood down reviews – better use of weekly email and active role of team managers in communicating with IROs when there are legitimate issues delaying care planning and production of updated care plan in readiness for reviews,



