



Cheshire East

# **TOGETHER** for Children and Young People

*Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young*

## Independent Reviewing Officers (Cared for Children) Annual Report

April 2020 – March 2021



# Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	2
Statutory role and the legal context	2
The Team	3
Executive Summary	5
Review activity	6
Cared for reviews	6
Pathway plan reviews	8
Annual reviews	8
Participation in reviews	8
Consultation	9
Dispute Resolution and Practice Alerts	10
Feedback about the service and our impact	13
Progress on plans from last year's report	15
Future planning	19



## Introduction

This report is a reflective overview of activity and performance in Cheshire East in respect of our cared for children and young people. It covers the period of April 2020-March 2021 and provides information about the performance and practice of the Independent Reviewing Officer Team in relation to the monitoring and review of care planning in Cheshire East. Additionally, it reports on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in relation to quality assurance through the Practice Alert and Dispute Resolution Policy.

## Statutory role and legal context

The appointment by local authorities of an Independent Reviewing Officer is a statutory requirement. Their purpose is to ensure that the care plan for a cared for child fully reflects the child's needs, and that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration, and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's statutory responsibilities towards them.

The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, followed by revised care planning regulations and guidance which came into force in April 2011, strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer. The statutory duties of the IRO are to [section 25B (1) -1989 Act]:

- 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.

As corporate parents each local authority, through their officers and councillors, should act for the children they care for as a responsible and conscientious parent would act. There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of an Independent Reviewing Officer:

- chairing the child's review; and
- monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Team in Cheshire East sits within the Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The service is managed independently of children's operational social work and is therefore offering a level of independence that enables the service to effectively challenge plans, arrangements, and the practice of the local authority. The strategic lead for the service reports directly to the Director of Children's Social Care. Independent Reviewing Officers and their managers are not involved in preparing a child's care plan, management of the case, operational decision making and/or allocation of resources to cared for children.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of local authorities in establishing an *effective* Independent Reviewing Officer service.

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 to improve outcomes for the children in public care, it specifies that IROs should:

- be social work professionals with at least five 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 overview and promote meaningful consultation with parents, carers and others with significant involvement with the child and ensure they are involved, and their views have been considered 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 Team

The team of Cared for IROs in Cheshire East increased in 2019 to reflect the increase in children cared for and consists of 10 IROs covering 9.5 posts and the Fostering IRO (FIRO) overseen by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Cared for Manager. There are six female IROs and three males, two IROs are from the BAME community, two IROs are of mixed heritage and the remaining are White British.

In relation to the children in care we serve, this provides a diverse team; at the time of writing there are 518 cared for children, approximately 80% are white British with the other 20% from a variety of other ethnic or mixed backgrounds. At the time of this report, there are more boys than girls in our care with boys representing approximately 54% of the cared for population.

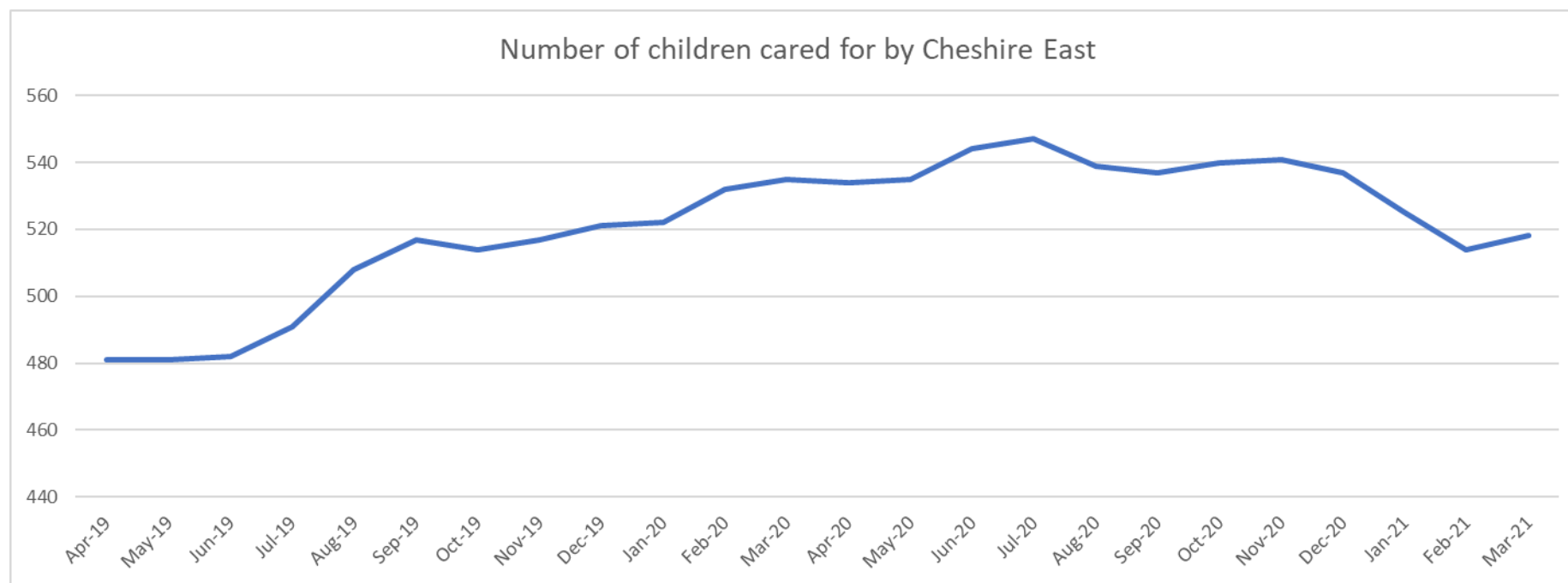
The team are settled and made up of eight permanent members of staff including one member of the team who has been employed for over eight years, four employed for

over four years with two members of the team who have been with us for two years. At the time of this report, we have an agency IRO who has been with us for 18 months due to high caseloads, and to cover a period where we end our involvement with the majority of over 19-year-olds as planned and discussed in the previous report.

Caseloads at the end of the business year were around 67-75 but the team have experienced some instability this year due to the long-term absences of two IROs, which has brought additional pressure as cases had to be covered by the remaining team. Caseloads over the year have fluctuated in line with the number of children in our care but

have remained broadly slightly above where we would like to be in relation to recommended levels, as outlined in the IRO Handbook.

The graph below depicts the number of children in our care at the end of each month over the past 2 years. The graph demonstrates a gradual climb and then recent reduction in cared for children over the past two years.



# Executive Summary

## What has gone well?

We have chaired 1415 cared for reviews and 353 pathway plan reviews this year. This is an increase of 45 reviews over the year reflecting the increase into care during the year, despite the reduction of over 18's pathway plan reviews being covered by our service as more over 19's are reviewed by the care leavers service.

- Child and young people participation in their review - rates remain high at 98%
- On average 68% of children attended their cared for reviews and 53% of over 18's attended their Pathway Plan reviews
- 96% of all reviews were held in statutory timescales - a 5% increase on last year
- We continued to hold all reviews despite COVID-19 restrictions moving them online to virtual meetings where possible or completing them as series of discussions via phone calls using technology to ensure these were conference calls if Microsoft Teams was not available
- We held a focus group with some of our cared for children in January 2021 who gave feedback about our service and their experiences
- We continue to write a letter to each child following their review as a record of their meeting, these have been well received with positive feedback from children and young people

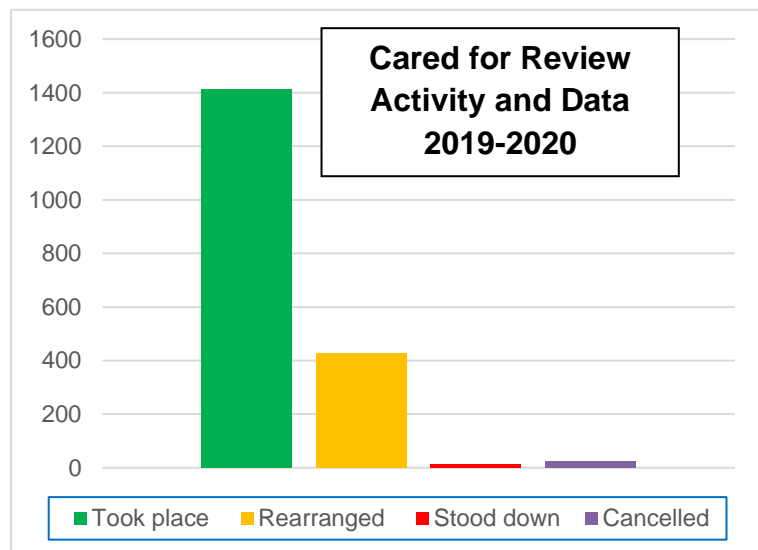
- IROs began visiting children again in the Autumn of 2020 making essential visits to meet children new to their caseload or where the child had requested the visit. Since January 2021 visits have increased to see children across their caseloads.

## What are we worried about?

- Whilst child participation in their review remains at a high level of 98%, and actual attendance at their review has increased to an average of 68%, we remain keen to improve attendance figures and respond to the feedback received
- The Cared for Children Survey indicated that of the 77 children who responded to the survey 23% were uncertain about the purpose of their cared for review, social workers and IROs need to ensure when we visit or consult with children, we help them understand this is their meeting and support them to attend or even chair the meeting if possible
- Staff sickness has meant some reviews had to be covered by IROs who were not known to the children
- Sufficiency of placements is a continuing cause of concern regarding achieving stability and permanency
- Timeliness of adoption plans impacted by COVID
- COVID-19 restrictions placed some difficulty in enabling IRO visits to take place during lockdown and restricted working arrangements as the visits are not deemed essential – consultations therefore had to be via Teams or telephone

- Whilst the use of technology established some better communication with our older children in care, we are concerned it did not always allow full participation of those younger children in care who we would normally meet
- Less placements were visited during the past year due to COVID-19. Whilst IRO visits are not statutory this did impact on their ability to understand what the placement was like for the child
- Continuing to build strong relationships with children social care staff, social workers and managers ensuring complimentary support, whilst maintaining scrutineer and challenge role

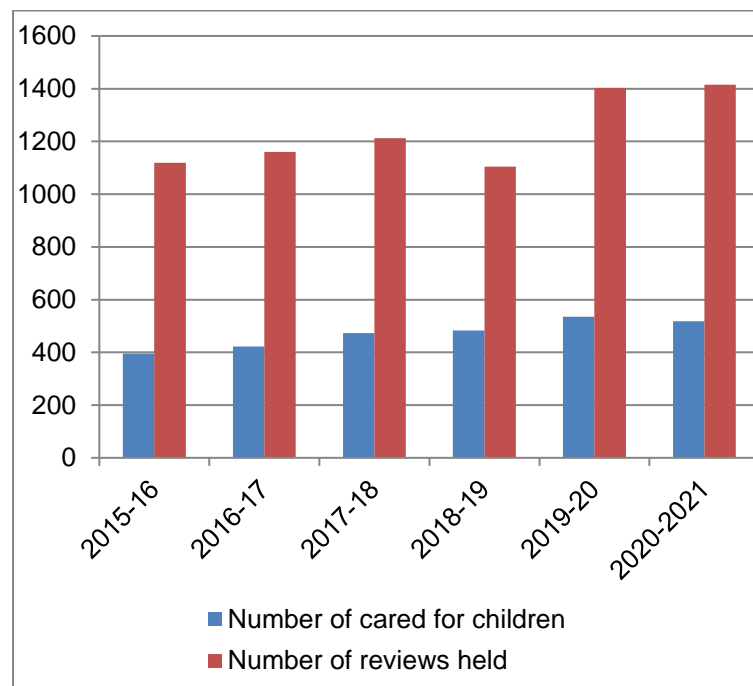
## Review Activity



## Cared for Reviews 2020-2021

- Of the total 1415 cared for review meetings planned to take place in this business year, 30% were rearranged to new dates from the originally agreed date. There can be multiple reasons for rearrangement, including request by child or carer due other commitments, request by social worker due to needing to be in court on another case or a request by the IRO themselves due to sickness or due to the case being re-timetabled in court proceedings. The percentage of rearranged reviews has reduced by 5% but remains higher than would be appropriate for a statutory meeting of importance to the child. This is a good reflection of independent reviewing officer's engagement with allocated social workers and strong performance.
- Less than 1% of cared for reviews were stood down this year however many rearrangements have been found to allow time for new social workers to complete the care plan rather than standing down the review.
- Cancellations remain very low and are related to change in legal status when a child leaves care and a review is cancelled.

### Cared for Review Activity comparison for the last 6 years



### Review activity 2020-2021 – Cared for Children (under 18)

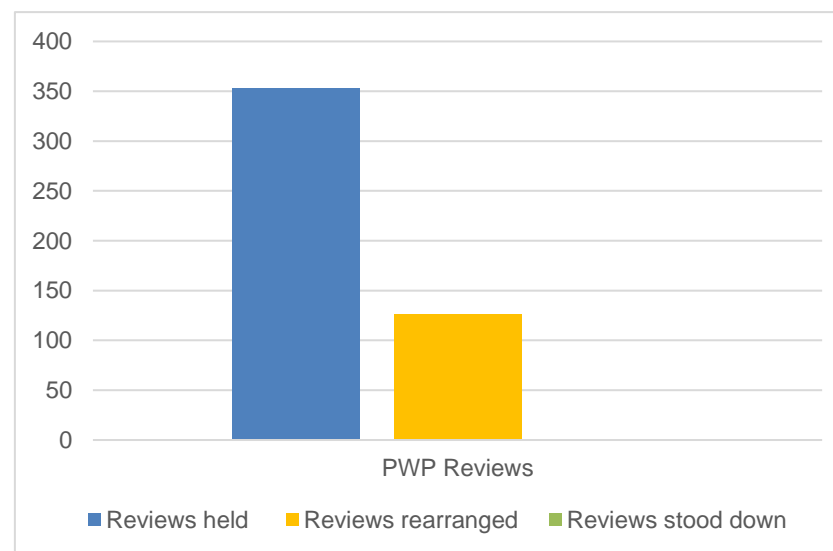
The performance this year of number of reviews compared to number of children remains very similar to the previous year. Generally, most cared for children will have an average of three reviews a year particularly if they are in care proceedings, once settled they have two reviews a year in line with statutory timescales and this will only

increase should a child have a lot of placements moves when a review is needed each time they move.

### Reviews held in timescale

In the past business year 96% of reviews have been held in timescales which is a great improvement on the 88% of the previous year and reflects the hard work and commitment of the Independent Reviewing Officers in a difficult year where some added pressures of working from home and home- schooling of their own children might have brought a different outcome. However, with less travelling time and more flexibility in terms of how the review were completed using technology performance has improved.

### Pathway Plan Review Activity for over 18's





## Pathway Plan Reviews

### Pathway Plan Reviews 2019-2020

There were 353 Pathway Plan meetings planned for this year and of those 82 were rearranged; this is a percentage of 23% which is an improvement on last year when 35% of Pathway reviews had to be rearranged. This may be an improved picture due to lockdown and the availability of both young people and personal advisors to complete the review remotely

No Pathway Plan reviews were stood down this year.

## Annual Reviews

A very small number of children in Cheshire East have annual reviews, where it has already been ascertained that Special Guardianship Order (SGO) is not appropriate or possible. They are children who are all in very settled placements who have requested less visits and intervention. Regular risk assessments are carried every six months to indicate whether an annual review remains appropriate, and should there be any concerns, any significant event, or if the child enters transition planning with a Pathway Plan, then reviews revert to six-monthly. Last year no children had annual reviews and all children had at least two reviews carried out virtually due to the pandemic.

## Participation in Reviews

We continue to have a high rate of participation from children and young peoples in their reviews consistently achieving between 98% this year as an average which is an improvement again on last year.

Participation can be through completion of consultation documents, providing views via an advocate or their carers, or attendance at the review meeting.

We remain concerned at the figure we are achieving for actual attendance at the review and have sought feedback from a small group of young people to understand what that is about. These young people indicated that they do not like attending any meeting and do not see their review meetings as different, they wish to be normal and their friends do not attend review meetings, they like meetings if they do attend to be informal and not to involve too many people. They also fed back that they enjoy the use of Teams, WhatsApp and other technology to gain their views.

Most will meet via Teams or the telephone to have a consultation with their IRO - it is sometimes just the actual meeting they wish to avoid. They have also advised by meeting with their IRO they feel they have been to their review and so we are looking at how we capture that involvement in our data to fully represent what they see as attendance and what we might call consultation.

## Consultation

As part of the review process IROs are required to consult with the child or young person, their parents, their carers, as well as education and health or any significant agency involved in their care plan. Figures for return of consultation documents remain low and do not necessarily represent the true picture. For example, whilst foster carers may not always complete the consultation form, they attend the review and will report verbally instead.

Despite changes to the consultation forms following consultation with our health and education colleagues response rates have actually reduced in the past business year. This may in part be due to the way reviews are being held and arranged virtually as this sometimes means the consultations are sent by email separately and we then do not always receive a response. It has also removed the ability to hand a written document over at a review as sometimes happened.

The quality of the consultation is generally good and assists and supports the IRO to ensure views of others are fully noted in the review. It also supports a more holistic overview of how the child's care plan is meeting their needs.

This will be an area for work for the service this year to see how we may achieve better consultation results and ensure colleagues who contribute to the review, as well as parents

and family are not placed at any disadvantaged in the way we are working.

Recorded Invites/Consultation Forms sent out					Black 18/19 Green 19/20 Blue 20/21
Young people	Health	Education	Parents	Foster/Home	Other
680 655	536 492	641 589	695 652	679 530	447 356
259	365	435	340	221	218
Recorded Consultation Forms received					
Young people	Health	Education	Parents	Foster/Home	Other
85 (13%) 70 (10.6%)	164 (31%) 153 (31%)	249 (38.8%) 160 (27%)	87 (12.5%) 61 (9.3%)	197 (29%) 145 (27%)	29 (6.4%) 29 (8.1%)
17 (6.5%)	103 (28%)	153 (35%)	38 (11%)	48 (21)	39 (7.8%)

## Dispute Resolution and Practice Alerts

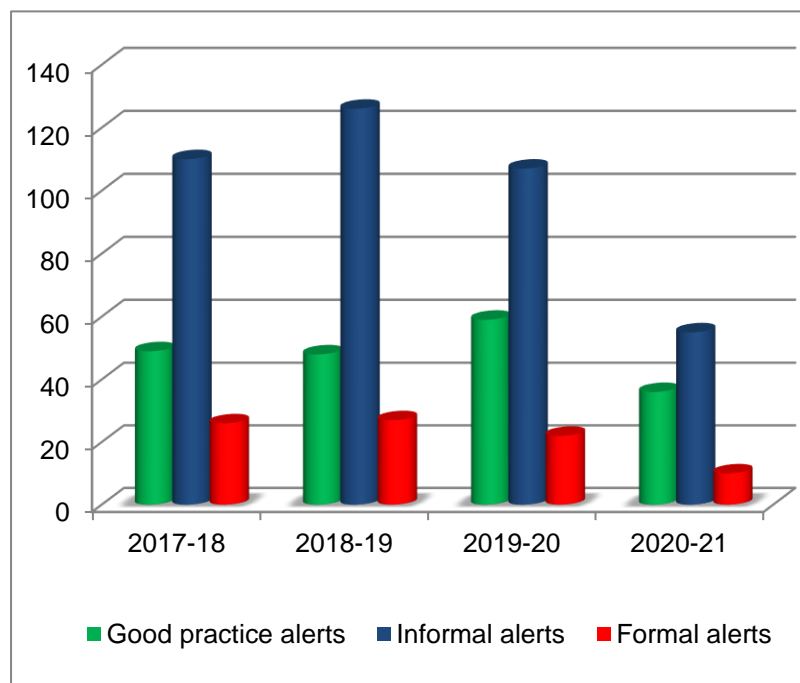
One of the key functions of the statutory role of the IRO is to seek resolution to any problem or disagreement arising out the care planning process. It is a core part of their role to scrutinise practice and challenge the Local Authority to ensure good and timely outcomes for children. To do this, IROs must establish good working relationships with social workers and their managers to be able to affect a good dispute resolution process and with good support of this process by senior managers. Alongside this responsibility, IROs in Cheshire East also have a role in identifying good practice so learning from what works well for children and young people can also be understood and replicated.

The IRO Handbook, legislation, and guidance around the planning for cared for children requires local authorities to ensure they have a good formal dispute resolution system in place. Whilst this may look different in each local authority all systems must have a 20-day maximum time limit to resolve any disagreement from the beginning of the process to its conclusion. In Cheshire East this commences with an informal practice alert being raised by the IRO with resolution at this level within 5 working days with the team manager. If this is not achieved, then the IRO will escalate to a formal practice alert allowing a further 10 days to reach resolution with a senior manager. If there is still no agreement after 15 days, then the IRO may escalate the concern to Cafcass.

What is going well?	What are we worried about?	Future focus
<p>Good practice alerts represented 35.6% of all practice alerts raised - this is an 4% increase on last year. Most good practice alerts related to good working relationships with the child and their family.</p> <p>There has been a slight decrease in disputes raised at the formal level compared to last year. This year formal alerts represent 9.9% of all alerts raised compared to 12% last year</p>	<p>One third of formal alerts raised at the informal alert stage did not reach a satisfactory outcome within the agreed timescales.</p> <p>16% of informal alerts this year relate to no care plan updated or the plan not being ready for the child's review.</p> <p>32% of informal alerts have related to there being no updated assessment to inform plans.</p>	<p>The importance of a child's care plan needs to be recognised by all involved with a child in care from day one of their care story. It is the basis of our intervention and the most important document relating to the child. The plan needs to be informed by an updated assessment and we need social workers to better understand the link between these documents.</p>

<p>Following introduction of the new protocol we have seen a reduction in practice alerts for compliance issues this year.</p> <p>Many IROs indicate relationship-based practice allows for discussion and resolution at an early stage which is captured in case notes.</p>	<p>This year has not been a clear representation of activity due to agreements put in place initially due to COVID where it was agreed in March and April disputes would be resolved via discussion and no alerts would be raised as social workers were mainly working from home with less support available to them.</p> <p>In a number of cases reviews have been rearranged rather than stood down with a practice alert being issued. Whilst this may reflect flexibility being used to support social workers it is not necessarily in the best interests of the child/ young person as this leads to a delay in the review taking place from the original date agreed.</p>	<p>We need to find ways across the services to highlight this issue and encourage social workers to understand the care plan is an evolving and continuously moving document which should reflect the updated assessment and planning for the child at each review.</p> <p>Informal alerts need to be resolved to prevent escalation to formal level; formal disputes should mainly be about disputes in the final care plan or a significant safeguarding concern, others matters should be resolvable at a lower level.</p> <p>IROs need to consistently raise practice alerts for reviews that cannot take place due to lack of preparation to recognise delay caused for the child – a peer audit will take place to improve consistency.</p> <p>Many issues are resolved via discussion and we need to seek a way to measure this using the practice alert case note if this has been the case.</p> <p>Consideration of themes to aid practice improvement once protocol is reviewed at end of June.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## Practice Alerts received between 2017-2021



## Themes

### Good Practice Alerts

This year most good practice alerts relate to good working relationships either with the child or the family, often the alerts are raised where it is a newly allocated social worker who has made considerable efforts to build relationships quickly in order to progress the child's plan. In at least two cases good working relationships have been established

with parents who had difficult relationships with a previous worker. There is one example where exemplary practice has been recognised both by the IRO and the Guardian within court proceedings. Another example relates to an example of a good Child and Family assessment as part of an exercise to identify good examples for the principle social worker.

### Informal Alerts

The figures for informal alerts in the first half of the year are reduced due to the service level agreement not to raise alerts in the first three months of the March 2020 lockdown but to resolve concerns via discussion; this was to reduce pressure for social workers already working in more difficult circumstances. Alerts overall are fewer following the introduction of the new protocol in December which focused on areas of practice where there was a direct impact for the child rather than issue of compliance.

During a difficult year of practice with COVID there have been challenges with changes of social workers in some teams. This has led to IROs being reluctant to raise practice alerts and instead have continued to resolve difficulties via discussion instead. Whilst this reflects good relationship-based practice it minimises the ability to show effective challenge by the IRO Team.

## Formal Alerts

There were 10 formal alerts raised in total throughout this year; three related to matters that could not be resolved at informal level and were escalated to the service manager before they were resolved as they related to resources and therapeutic input.

One formal alert related to concern for partnership working in relation to a child with disabilities who had experienced considerable delay in respect of his living conditions at home, this was escalated as resolution could not be found at team manager level and it was necessary for heads of service to become involved to raise concerns with partner agencies.

Another formal alert was raised for a family who had entered care where family dynamics were such that the children were not adequately placed with relatives leading to flux and drift in their care plans under Section 20. In this instance following discussion at service manager level it was agreed it was in the children's best interests to enter public proceedings for the local authority to hold parental responsibility as parental alienation prevented Section 20 from being effective.

All formal alerts raised are good examples of resolution reached which was in the best interests of the child and where it was clear there were obstacles leading to lack of response of delays in planning which needed the oversight of senior managers.

## The impact of the role of the IRO in Cheshire East – Feedback from children and young people to ensure quality in our practice

Following a year of working in a different way we sought feedback from a small group of our cared for children and young people. The children were consulted by two IROs in January 2021. The consultation found that our children are individuals and like to communicate their views in different ways. Some children like attending their reviews, others like communicating over video call or the telephone and some like to fill in consultation booklets. This confirmed that it's important that IROs know the children they review well including how they like to communicate so that they are given the support to participate as much as possible in their review and care planning.

We received further feedback from the Children in Care Survey carried out by the Participation Team. The following findings from that survey have been shared and discussed to inform and improve our practice.

The survey found that of the 77 children who responded to the survey about their cared for review, 72% were very clear about the purpose of their review, however 23% did not really know the purpose review.

79 children responded to the question about attendance at their care reviews:

- 30% always attended
- 44% sometimes attended their review
- 26% never attended.

Among the reasons given for not attending were that they:

- did not know about the meeting
- did not like meetings
- preferred one to one discussions.

Some children believed their review took place when they were at school possibly being confused with their Personal Education Planning meetings.

The children were asked what they wanted their IRO to do in terms of their review their answers included:

- Make the social worker listen to my views
- Make it more about me
- Keep it the same
- He does really well - don't change
- Make sure things get sorted
- My IRO is fantastic don't change
- Keep the meetings online
- Keep the meetings in person

The survey has led to planning to widen our offer to children and young people as to how they wish to complete their review, to ensure we recognise individual wishes and

needs and meet these as much as possible despite ongoing restrictions on our working practices.

We also recognise there is still much to do in making sure children fully understand the meetings and process around them when they are cared for and what we as IROs can do to ensure that the meetings we hold are meaningful for the children we support and review. We have found it beneficial to ensure children and young people have the choice of making their own two outcomes or recommendations from each review.

We continue to have a role in ensuring a child can challenge their care plan or indicate if they are unhappy with aspects of their plan. In Cheshire East the IRO can direct a referral to the independent advocacy service (The Children's Society) to support the child or young person to challenge their plan and if required support them via the advocacy service to seek their own independent legal advice.

## Progress on plans from last year's report

Priority team objective	Impact statement (when you achieve this what will the impact be for children, young people and their families)	Measures of success	Actions needed to achieve priority objective	Update on plan
<p>Relevant Children's Social Care Objective:  <i>We will reflect, learn, and continuously improve our practice to provide an excellent service for children and young people</i></p>				
<p>We will improve on our offer of how we consult with children offering them a variety of means to engage in reviews including the annual foster care reviews</p>	<p>Children's views will be evident in recording of reviews</p> <p>Two outcomes from each review will be provided by the child and will be followed up to ensure they are met at the subsequent review</p> <p>Peer reviews will take place to ensure consistency across the team using child participation as a theme</p>	<p>The child's voice will be evident in the review process in the outcomes from the review</p> <p>Letters to children will be personal and reflect the relationship built between IRO and child or young person</p> <p>Fostering reviews will not need to be stood down as children's views will be prioritised</p>	<p>Provision of options to the child ahead of the review</p> <p>Face to face meetings</p> <p>Microsoft Teams consultation</p> <p>WhatsApp consultation</p> <p>Fostering Portal implementation for ease of access</p> <p>Revision of consultation templates for children wishing to provide views in writing</p> <p>Access to advocacy</p> <p>The Fostering IRO will work with fostering improvement</p>	<p>This objective has been achieved in most reviews children do opt to make their own recommendations some children have declined this option</p> <p>We are not yet at the point of exchanging information via the fostering portal for our reviews</p> <p>We have seen an increase in children's view obtained for the foster carers review</p>



			to ensure cared for children's views are obtained early for fostering reviews	
<b>Relevant Children's Social Care Objective:</b> <i>We will safely and appropriately reduce the number of cared for children</i>				
<p>We will review plans for children including consideration of those who could safely return to live with their families</p> <p>We will track those children awaiting discharge of care orders and raise formal disputes for those where resources are delaying their plan</p>	<p>We will see an increase in children being able to return safely to their families where care is no longer required</p> <p>Children will not remain in care and will achieve better outcomes by living in their families if safe to do so</p> <p>There will be a reduction in missing from home for those children who seek out their family and where it is assessed they can safely live with that family member if necessary, with support provided</p>	<p>Care numbers will reduce, and caseloads will reduce leading to better oversight by the IRO team</p>	<p>Good IRO oversight of children's plans</p> <p>Scrutiny of those children coming into care in regular audits to ensure it was the best decision</p> <p>Clear Children and Family assessments available to ensure the IRO is fully informed of the family situation</p> <p>Clearly identified support plans to ensure any return home is sustainable and will provide permanency</p>	<p>The impact of COVID-19 on the business of the family court has caused some delays. Courts have not been able to prioritise these cases. Whilst some children have successfully returned, we remain focused on ensuring no drift for this cohort.</p>
<b>Relevant Children's Social Care Objective:</b> <i>We will achieve a permanent, safe home for children, young people and care leavers as early as possible.</i>				
<p>Focus on achieving permanency at the 4-month review and evaluation of children's plan to</p>	<p>Children will achieve early permanency with fewer placement moves</p> <p>All options will be considered early in planning including</p>	<p>More plans of permanency will be achieved by the four-month review</p> <p>IROs will identify any gaps in the Children and Family</p>	<p>IROs to ensure a mid-point review between the initial review and the 4-month review to ensure outcomes have been addressed</p>	<p>Data for achieving permanency at 4-months remains low and fluctuating. The average at the year-end was around 25% achieving permanency at the 4-month</p>

<p>ensure the plan is SMART</p> <p>Fostering Annual Reviews will be held on time and will be more robust following review of the process and update of the forms.</p> <p>To ensure children are living safely in good fostering homes that meet their needs by carers who are skilled and trained and meet regulations</p>	<p>the option of Special Guardianship to a connected person where possible</p> <p>Outcomes for children will be good with early identification of where they should safely live in order to have stability</p> <p>Children will feel safe and secure in their fostering settings</p> <p>There will be fewer placement breakdowns as reviews will highlight support needs or concerns</p>	<p>Assessment at the first review</p> <p>IROs will identify family members to be considered at the first review</p> <p>Foster carers will feel supported and well trained and will be resilient providing safe stable placements</p>	<p>The quality assurance checklist completed on each new case will give opportunity to highlight any missing information such as a genogram to enable good preparation for the review</p> <p>IROs to raise practice alerts should a permanency plan not be achieved at the 4-month review due to practice below agreed standards</p> <p>Fostering IRO to feed into fostering review</p> <p>Fostering IRO supporting policy updates in fostering</p> <p>Fostering IRO supporting implementation of new LiquidLogic workflow and forms</p> <p>Fostering IRO supporting improvement in participation of children in the fostering annual reviews</p>	<p>review. This is likely to reflect in some cases drift and delay in the court process as issues such as drug testing and alcohol testing to rule parties in or out have been delayed</p> <p>Performance around fostering reviews (annual review of foster carers) has improved significantly a quarterly report is now produced to track all reviews and ADM decisions</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Relevant Social Care Objective:**  
*We will reflect, learn, and continuously improve our practice to provide an excellent service for children and young people*

<p>Strengthen the quality assurance role of IROs and Fostering IRO to challenge social workers' and supervising social workers' practice that impacts on outcomes for children through use of quality assurance forms, practice alerts and dispute resolution as well as audit activity</p>	<p>Practice will improve across the service and there will be less delay in achieving children's plans</p> <p>Placement stability will increase</p>	<p>Children will have more timely outcomes and plans will be achieved without drift or delay</p> <p>Practice will improve and be consistent</p> <p>Foster reviews will be holistic involving all contributors including children and will support stable placements</p>	<p>Discussion with social work service team managers to agree practice standards going forward for practice alerts and some shared goals</p> <p>Consistent use of all practice alerts by IROs and Fostering IRO</p> <p>Ensure use of dispute resolution when in disagreement with the plan to evidence IRO scrutiny and footprint</p> <p>Regular peer audit activity to improve consistency across the team</p> <p>Regular team audits to highlight themes and improve practice</p> <p>Monthly performance data</p> <p>Annual practice alert report</p>	<p>The practice alert protocol was introduced during the year to focus on ensuring all disputes raised focused on the impact on the child. Whilst less practice alerts were raised there were clearer themes identified as indicated earlier in this report.</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

## Future planning

Priority team objective	Impact statement (when you achieve this what will the impact be for children, young people and their families)	Measures of success	Actions needed to achieve priority objective
Provide children with a variety of methods to participate in their review	More children will attend their review meetings and take part in the actual review	Children and young people will feedback that they enjoyed their review and felt it was their meeting	For IROs to have the time to explore with each child how they would like to attend their review and what they would like to change to be able to attend their review
Ensure all children understand the role of the IRO and what the cared for review meeting is about	Children will know their IRO and have a relationship with them to ensure they take part in the review	When asked children will be able to name their IRO and what they do and what can be achieved from their cared for review	For IROs to visit all children and to keep in touch with them on a regular basis
Increase quality assurance activity to improve practice standards	Practice standards will improve and the impact of the IRO in relation to the experience they will bring to auditing activity will bring about shared goals and understanding of what good looks like. Networks and supportive relationships will be developed	Practice improvement will be clear from audit activity more audits will be good	IROs to take part in regular audit activity with team managers across the service
Support workforce development and practice	The experience of the IRO team will support practice improvement around specific themes	Practice will improve and timeliness will be evident in planning for reviews	IROs to provide support to masterclasses around the review process and other identified areas where they have valuable experience

Improve the progress in children and young people's plans	Ensure recommendations from reviews are SMART and tracked by the IRO with clear escalation when not achieved as agreed	Delay and drift in plans will be reduced and outcomes for children and young people will improve	IROs to ensure midpoint reviews take place and recommendations are tracked effectively
-----------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------