

# Corporate Parenting Committee

## Agenda

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**Date:** Tuesday, 19th September, 2017  
**Time:** 4.00 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Suite 2/3 - Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ

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The agenda is divided into 2 parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and in the report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making and Overview and Scrutiny meetings are audio recorded and the recordings will be uploaded to the Council's website.

### **PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT**

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in any item on the agenda.

3. **Minutes of Previous meeting** (Pages 3 - 6)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2017 as a correct record

4. **Update on Health of Cared for Children and Care Leavers**

To receive a presentation updating the Committee on the health of cared for children and care leavers.

5. **Input from Children and Young People**

To receive an oral update on the health of cared for children and care leavers

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**Contact:** Gaynor Hawthornthwaite  
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6. **Corporate Parenting Update** (Pages 7 - 14)

To consider an update on Corporate Parenting

7. **Corporate Parenting Scorecard (Quarter 1)** (Pages 15 - 18)

To consider the Corporate Parenting Scorecard Quarter 1

8. **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report** (Pages 19 - 42)

To consider the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

9. **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

The reports relating to the remaining items on the agenda have been withheld from public circulation and deposit pursuant to Section 100(B)(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the matters may be determined with the press and public excluded.

The Committee may decide that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

**PART 2 - MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITHOUT THE PRESS AND PUBLIC PRESENT**

10. **Fostering Panel Report** (Pages 43 - 58)

To consider the Fostering Panel report

11. **Adoption Panel Report** (Pages 59 - 76)

To consider the Adoption Panel report

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 4th July, 2017 in R1 & R2 - Westfields, Middlewich Road,  
Sandbach, CW11 1HZ

**PRESENT**

Councillor G Merry (Chairman)  
Councillor D Flude (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors P Butterill, M Deakin, B Dooley, A Kolker, J Saunders, L Smetham  
and M Warren

**Councillors in attendance:**

Councillors G Hayes and S Edgar

**Officers in attendance:**

Gill Betton – Head of Children's Development and Partnerships  
Nigel Moorhouse – Director of Children's Social Care and Deputy DCS  
Anji Reynolds – Service Manager, Permanence and Through Care Team  
Kate Rose – Head of Children's Safeguarding  
Cherry Foreman – Democratic Services Officer

**The Children's Society**

Amanda Greenwood  
Sue Preston

**1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN****RESOLVED**

That Councillor Gill Merry be appointed Chairman of the Committee.

**2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN****RESOLVED**

That Councillor Dorothy Flude be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

**3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Durham, M Grant  
and O Hunter.

**4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2017 be approved as a correct record.

**6 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Consideration was given to the Terms of Reference for the Committee and whether any amendments were required. It was agreed that the establishment of the Shadow Board of Young People and the Committees interaction with it should be added.

**RESOLVED**

That the involvement of the Shadow Board of Young People be added to the Terms of Reference of the Committee, and they be considered further at the next meeting of the Committee.

**7 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

Members considered this report on cared for children and young people's participation covering their right to be heard in all decision making processes including court hearings. At present the Children's Society is commissioned by the Council to provide a Children's Rights and Participation Service and they work closely with the Council and its partner agencies to provide advocacy and independent visitor services, and on participation with children and young people.

Representatives from the Children's Society, and from the Permanence and Through Care Team, attended the meeting to introduce the Advocacy and Independent Visitor Annual Report 2016 and to answer Members questions. Members were particularly interested in work associated with early pregnancies, preparations to assist in the transition to independent living, the arrangements to involve children in care outside the area and how to keep track of children who no longer wished to engage with the services provided once they were over 18 years of age.

In addition the report included overall service priorities around participation for the current year, and details of the range of ways in which children and young people are engaged in decisions which affect them.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted.

**8 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE**

Consideration was given to an update on national and local developments in relation to cared for children and young people, and care leavers as follows:

**National Developments**

Children and Social Work Act

**Local Developments**

Regional Adoption Agency

Fostering Collaboration

Fostering Care Fortnight

New Head of Service for Cared for Children

It was agreed that a further report on the Children and Social Work Act be considered when it was enacted.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted and a further report on the Children and Social Work Act be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

**9 CORPORATE PARENTING OPERATIONAL GROUP SCORECARD**

The Committee considered the scorecard showing results for the last quarter of 2016/17 in comparison with the rest of that year. An explanation was given of reasons for statistical differences across the year.

The success of young people around education, employment and training was accredited in part to appointment of a Job Coach who has been helping care leavers with such things as CV writing, applications and interview techniques.

In response to a question concerning the stability of placements, and differences in certain cohorts, it was agreed that this be the subject of a deep dive in the future.

**RESOLVED**

That the report be noted and that the influence of cohorts be the subject of a future deep dive by the Committee, linked with placement sufficiency.

**10 CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE FORWARD PLAN 2017-18**

**RESOLVED**

That approval be given to the Forward Plan for the coming year with the addition of the following items agreed earlier in the meeting:

1. Terms of Reference and the involvement of the Shadow Board of Young People
2. The Children and Social Work Act
3. Placement stability and cohort analysis in a future deep dive around placement sufficiency

### **11 FEEDBACK FROM MEETING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Committee received an update following the last meeting of the Shadow Board for Young People. As part of a round table session the representatives had put forward various requests for what they most wanted; these would now be assessed in accordance with the Council's duties of care and safeguarding, and in the light of what would be appropriate for various age groups and circumstances taking into account legal and court restrictions which might be in place.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the update be noted and that following more detailed assessment of the requests by Officers there be further discussion with the Shadow Board of what was possible taking into account what was age appropriate and also acceptable in the light of any individual and/or court restrictions which might be in place.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.35 pm

Councillor G Merry (Chairman)

## Cheshire East Council

### Corporate Parenting Committee

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**Date of Meeting:** 19<sup>th</sup> September 2017

**Report of:** Nigel Moorhouse, Director of Children's Social Care

**Subject/Title:** Corporate Parenting Update

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr George Hayes

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#### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on national and local developments in relation to cared for children and young people and care leavers.

#### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
- 2.1.1 Note the contents of the report.

#### 3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is as advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Committee need to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

#### 4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

#### 5. Background

##### National Developments

##### Outstanding inspection reports from other local authority areas

- 5.1. Ofsted are continuing to inspect local authority arrangements under the single inspection framework. Inspection reports are a good way of learning from good practice in other areas. Two recently published reports have received praise the corporate parent arrangements and members are encouraged to read these reports as follows:

[Stockport](#) – judged good for for children looked after and achieving permanence (adoption – outstanding)

[Bracknell Forest](#) – judged outstanding for children looked after and achieving permanence

[Islington](#) - judged good for children looked after and achieving permanence

### **Local Developments**

#### **Rising demand in Children's Social Care**

- 5.2. The rise in demand for children's social care services over recent years has put increasing demand on the service both in terms of staffing and placements. The biggest impact from a budgetary perspective is the rise in the number of individuals being cared for by the local authority.
- 5.3. As at March 2014, Cheshire East supported 333 individuals. As at March 2017, this had risen to 428 individuals – a rise of 95 (29%). This continues to rise and as at July 2017 was 459.
- 5.4. An internal foster care placement including friends and family placements cost approximately £20,000 per annum and an external foster care placement approximately £40,000 per annum. In addition a residential placement/ NHS placement costs somewhere between £150,000 and £200,000 per annum on average. By way of example in March 2016 we had 89 individuals in an external foster care placement but due to an increase in individuals entering care by July 2017 we have 102. This alone equates to annual increase of at least £520,000 if each individual stays in care for 12 months. Throughout this we are maintaining over 80% occupancy rate in our internal foster care provision and recruiting new carers. Likewise in March 2016 we had 36 individuals in either an internal or external residential placement, by July 2017 this has increased to 45 (including residential schools) so adds a minimum of £1,650,000 to costs of care.
- 5.5. The other escalating costs being seen in supporting our vulnerable children who are looked after by relatives and friends instead of being in care, is the increase in special guardianship order allowances the carers receive.. Whilst there are individual scales of weekly payment depending on the age of an individual being supported, this equates to an average of about £189 per week per individual. In 2013-14 we paid allowances for 117 individuals, by 2016-17 we were paying 166 allowances. This is an increase of over £500,000 in the two years.
- 5.6. In order to mitigate as far as possible the impact of rising numbers and costs, the following action is being taken, ie, we are:
  - Working hard to increase the numbers of children leaving care through adoption and in 2016/17 we had an increase of 44% compared to the previous year (regional adoption agency)



- Working as part of a shared fostering service with Cheshire West & Chester, Warrington and Halton Councils to improve the recruitment of internal foster carers
- Commissioning 5 new childrens homes to reduce the costs of requiring external placements and ensuring individuals can remain closer to their established networks of support
- Investing in project Macclesfield and Crewe to prevent the escalation of need
- Continuing to improve social work practice (Signs of safety)
- Working with the LSCB to improve the early help offer

### Star Awards and November Children's Rights Month

- 5.7. Work is underway to plan for the annual Star Awards as part of November Children's Rights Month (NCRM). NCRM is where everyone working with children and young people in Cheshire East can celebrate and raise awareness of children's rights in a variety of different ways. One of the main celebrations for cared for children and care leavers in November is the 'Star Awards'. This is a celebration event and awards ceremony for cared for children and young people and care leavers in Cheshire East, with every young person receiving an invite in the post to attend. The event is co-organised by young people and nominations have been requested by 22<sup>nd</sup> September. This year the event will take place on Sunday 19 November 2017 in Crewe.

### National Adoption Week 2017

- 5.8. National Adoption Week is 16th – 22nd October and work is underway to celebrate this in Cheshire East, along with other areas as part of the Adoption Counts. This includes a range of activity including a media campaign (billboards, posters, bus rears, digital screens and digital media adverts. There will also be press adverts during adoption week in a range of newspapers, including the Macclesfield. Adoption will also be promoted through social media, including facebook and twitter using using hashtags #nationaladoptionweek and #supportadoption.

### National Care Leavers Week 2017

- 5.9. National Care Leavers' Week is 25th October - 3rd November. The week is about highlighting the needs of care leavers, and encouraging the agencies responsible for looking after them to work in a coordinated and effective way. Cheshire East's Care Leavers Service is currently working with our care leavers to look at a range of ideas on how best to celebrate in the Borough. Current ideas include a 'Hollywood Bowl' in Crewe and a poetry competition. The service is also in discussion with the Sexual Health Nurse and Everybody Leisure to plan a FIFA tournament with the young people, with access to a sexual health advice (C-Card & chlamydia testing) and information on physical health advice and access to gym passes.

## Overview of Education Results

- 5.10. Improving outcomes for cared for children remains a priority for all staff but most especially for the Virtual School. All children have been allocated a named Advisor and additional support and tuition has been made available.
- 5.11. There has been an improvement in the number of children who reach the expectations at the end of reception. This is now at 50%, 10% above the 2016 level and the highest result for Cheshire East.
- 5.12. Due to the number of children leaving care there were only four children who completed the Year 2 tests after 1 year in care. Of these, two were not entered for the tests, one reached the expected levels in maths and English and one did not.
- 5.13. This is the second year of the new curriculum and assessment and so comparisons can only be made with 2016. Although there was an increase in the percentage gaining the expected standard in three of the four areas, the number reaching this in reading, writing and maths (RWM) has fallen, which is disappointing for the pupils and their teachers as well as for those in the Virtual School who have been supporting them. Despite this, there are some children who have made excellent progress and should be congratulated on their efforts.
- 5.14. All the children were offered additional tuition from January and this was put into place for 13 children. This included all the children who gained the expected levels in RWM and increased the confidence of children even when they did not quite reach the standard score in particular subjects. A Kindle Club was set up to promote reading in children who were identified as needing support in this subject. All the children who took up this offer gained the expected level in reading, although one boy did not wish to participate and he gained the expected level in all subjects except reading.
- 5.15. Strategies are already in place to improve outcomes in 2018, which include replacing agency tutors with and an in-house teacher who will focus specifically on Year 6. These include the purchase of tablets with pre-loaded Key Stage 2 (KS2) learning and revision materials which allow usage and progress to be tracked and additional sessions for carers on how to raise aspirations and support children to prepare for and complete the tests.
- 5.16. One young person who has ended KS2 has written an autobiography and has agreed to take part in a video recording to be used to help schools understand and support cared for children. In this she describes how school offered her safety and support and has equipped her for the future.
- 5.17. Under the new scoring and reporting system for GCSEs for cared for children, 19% of children have gained Level 2 in maths and English. This is a provisional figure but is an increase of 7% from 2016 and is above the reported national figure for 2016, which was 17.5%.

- 5.18. The number of 16-18 year old care leavers who are in education, employment or training remains high, with 37 completing college courses this year. With intensive support, all but 2 completed their courses and have plans in place to move on to further education, training or employment. The post-16 tutor employed through the innovation fund has worked with 8 young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and has succeeded in helping 5 move from NEET into re-engagement programmes including maths/English tuition. Support plans are still in place for the remaining young people and others who require additional support. The Cygnet programme, which aims to develop employability and work skills has moved to the Virtual School. A tender was drawn up and Total People were awarded the contract to start in April. Twelve young people have been referred to the programme, with 11 requesting the initial interview. Some have decided that they do not wish to continue or work with Total People and 5 have continued to the next step. Because of this feedback from young people, the specification has been revised to allow more flexibility and this will operate from October.

### Official Schools Adjudicator Report

- 5.19. Section 88P of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires Local Authorities to make an annual report to the Schools Adjudicator. The information required by the schools adjudicator report, submitted in June, included how well admission arrangements serve cared for and previously cared for children. For Cheshire East this was reported as 'well' because most primary schools are willing to accommodate these children showing necessary adjustments and flexibility. It was not reported as 'very well' because secondary school places can sometimes be hard to secure, which means children are without a school place, particularly those with SEN or challenging behaviour who require the routine of a school quickly. Where delays occur, schools are challenged robustly and made aware that the LA will follow measures such as appeals, direction and reporting to Secretary of State in order to secure an appropriate school place.

### Independent Visitor Standards

- 5.20. The Independent Visitor Service in Cheshire East is currently delivered by The Children's Society (TCS). TCS adhere to the new National Independent Visitor Standards, which have been developed alongside other voluntary organisations. There are 14 Standards in all and, more recently, these 14 standards have been made more child and young person friendly by children and young people involved in an Independent Visitor Service. This is expected to enable more children and young people to understand their right to an Independent Visitor.

### South Cheshire College Awards - Cared for Winners

- 5.21. Two Cheshire East care leavers were recently commended at an awards ceremony at South and West Cheshire College. Despite setbacks in their education, and through the support of our Virtual School, both of these young

people have exceeded in their field. One of these young people won Health and Social Care student of the year for her hard work and determination and is now moving onto University to study mental health nursing. The other young person won the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) student of the year, having arrived in Cheshire East in December 2016 as an unaccompanied asylum seeker through the dispersal programme.

### **6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members**

- 6.1. Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

### **7. Implications of Recommendation**

#### **7.1. Policy Implications**

- 7.1.1. There are a number of policy implications as a result of local and national developments and these will be reported, as appropriate to the relevant Committee.

#### **7.2. Legal Implications**

- 7.2.1. The national and local developments described in this report are wide ranging and will in many particulars have legal implications. Legal advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues.

#### **7.3. Financial Implications**

- 7.3.1 The rising demand for Children's Social Care services are impacting on the Council's budget position.

#### **7.4. Human Resources Implications**

- 7.4.1. The rising demand for Children's Social Care services has human resource implications for the Council as more staff are needed to deal with this rising demand.

#### **7.5. Equality Implications**

- 7.5.1. There are no equality implications as a result of this paper.

#### **7.6. Rural Community Implications**

- 7.6.1. None.

#### **7.7. Public Health Implications**

7.7.1. None identified at this stage.

## **8. Risk Management**

- 8.1. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors – poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood.

## **9. Contact Information**

Contact details for this report are as follows:-

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Corporate Parenting Operational Group Scorecard

Ref	Measure	Polarity	Stat Neigh Av	National Av	Target	Yr. end 16-17	Qu 1 17-18	Qu 2 17-18	Q3 17-18	Q4 17-18	RAG	Quarterly dir of travel	Comments	C&YP Plan Priority	Corporate Priority
General															
G1	Number of cared for children				380-430	422	438					↑	We are continuing to see a rise in the number of children entering care and a detailed report has been prepared highlighting implications. This rise is reflected locally and nationally; statistical neighbours CWAC and Warrington are reporting rates per 10,000 of 73 and 85 respectively for quarter 4.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
G2	Rate per 10,000 cared for children		56	60	50.7-57.3	56	58					↑	We are continuing to see a rise in the number of children entering care and a detailed report has been prepared highlighting implications. This rise is reflected locally and nationally; statistical neighbours CWAC and Warrington are reporting rates per 10,000 of 73 and 85 respectively for quarter 4.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
G3	Number of care leavers					199	202						This represents all eligible, relevant and former relevant care leavers who are supported with access to a Personal Advisor (PA) to offer help and guidance as they move to independence together with financial support as appropriate to individual needs.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
Involve Me															
P1.1	Number of eligible children and young people accessing advocacy services	High is Good				127	27						There were 122 advocacy cases open in Quarter 1, of which 29 were issued based cases (17 in care, 5 care leavers, 5 disability and 2 private fostering) The main issues were representation at meetings, contact, placement and education. There were also 93 cases open to children who were on a child protection plan.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P1.2	% cared for children reviews in timescales	High is Good				98%	95%					→	Of the 238 individuals subject to a review in quarter 1 225 reviews were held in timescales. Those out of timescale are scrutinised at challenge sessions to ensure that the reasons for delay did not adversely affect the young person, and that systems support timely reviews. There are always instances where a delay may occur due to young person or carer wishes/needs.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 6
P1.3	% of children and young people chairing their own reviews	High is Good				2.75%							<i>Data not available at quarter 1 as sharepoint is incomplete - a report is being developed to address this for quarter 2.</i>	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 7
Provide Me With a Good Safe Home															
P2.1	Number of cared for children in internal foster care (including friends and family placements)	High is Good			215	209	210					↑	This is an improving figure quarter to quarter. When we exclude CE foster carers who have been approved for respite provision only, the current CE foster care bed occupancy rate is 82% which is consistent with last quarter.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.2	Number of cared for children in external foster care	Low is Good			85	95	102					↑	Due to the increase in numbers of individuals entering care we have needed to utilise external foster carers to a greater degree. Internal foster care occupancy remains high at 82% (excluding respite placements).	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.3	% cared for children placed over 20 miles from home address (Cheshire East and out of borough)	Low is Good				22%	24%					↑	Whilst we would want more of our cared for children living locally a number are living in long term placements due to increased	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.4	% of children and young people in residential care	Low is Good			10%	9%	11%					→	Whilst this is a low percentage there has been an increase in our cared for population residing in residential care and an increase of younger children living in residential care. This reflects the reduction in foster carer capacity locally and the increase in complexity of	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.5	Number of Cheshire East foster carers	High is Good			165	150	152					→	Several foster carers have converted to special guardianship orders providing permanence for children and therefore have resigned as foster carers.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.6	Long term placement stability - % cared for children in care for 2.5 years who have been in the same placement for 2 years (under 16 years old)	High is Good		68%	75%	69%							This indicator is very difficult to predict in year as the cohort of individuals relevant fluctuates. In quarter 1 however there were 10 individuals aged 16 or under that moved placement who had previously been in care for 2.5 years and in the same place for 2 years.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.7	Number of cared for children that went missing 5 times or more (quarterly figure is 5 or more times in any month in that quarter)	Low is Good			5	5	13					↑	Year end position is the number of cared for children that went missing more than 5 times in the reporting year 2016-17. The Quarterly figures has been amended to reflect the number of individuals that went missing 5 or more times in the quarter. This includes CE children who are placed in CE and those placed in other local authorities. This is monitored closely on a monthly basis and scrutinised for emerging patterns together with ensuring plans are revised to reflect needs and the reasons for missing episodes fully understood and addressed.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.8	% of children and young people placed with providers with good/outstanding Ofsted judgements	High is Good				90%	91%					→	Of the 113 placements with an Ofsted inspection 103 are good/ outstanding. In addition there are 17 inspected under other inspectorates 8 of which have improved/ sustained effectiveness.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.9	% of children ceased to be looked after due to granting of special guardianship order (SGO) - year to date figure	High is Good			12%	17%	20%					↑	A cumulative figure of 9 out of 45 children in 2017-18 ceased to be cared for due to granting of SGO.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.10	% of children ceased to be looked after due to adoption - year to date figure	High is Good			20%	18%	18%					→	A cumulative figure of 8 out of 45 children in 2017-18 ceased to be cared for due to granting of adoption order.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.11	Number of children adopted in period (YTD)	High is Good			30 annually	26	8					↑	The total number of children adopted by the Q1 of 2017-18 was 8. In addition, there are 27 individuals with an adoption plan, 9 of which are living with their adoptive family/ foster to adopt placement.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5

Ref	Measure	Polarity	Stat Neigh Av	National Av	Target	Yr. end 16-17	Qu 1 17-18	Qu 2 17-18	Q3 17-18	Q4 17-18	RAG	Quarterly dir of travel	Comments	C&YP Plan Priority	Corporate Priority
P2.12	% children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (This has changed to 14 months from 16 months)	High is Good			58%	84%	74%					↑	Please note that this indicator has reduced to being monitored at 14 month rather than 16 months in previous scorecards. There has been a substantial improvement in the first quarter of 2017-18. The target is based on the England average that was provided by DfE on the unpublished Adoption scorecards.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.13	Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family (A1 national indicator)	Low is Good			426	541	383					↓	Cheshire East performance has improved steadily year on year since this became monitored through the Adoption data set, from an initial position of over 700 days down to 383 in the latest quarter.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.14	Average number of days between placement order and match with adoptive family (A2 national indicator)	Low is Good			121	66	62					↓	We continue to outperform the England average of 226 days and the national target of 121 days.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P2.15	Average number of days between entering care and moving in with adoptive family/ foster carer who becomes adoptive family	Low is Good			426	284	373					↑	Whilst the number of days between a placement order and match with an adoptive family has increased, it still remains well within the national target of 426.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
Keep Me Healthy															
P3.1	% of initial health assessments requested within 48 hours of coming into care	High is Good			70%	64%	78%					↑	In quarter 1 a total of 59 IHA were requested. Of these 46 were within 48 hours and 13 were outside of timescales. Of these 1 subsequently left care before 20 days were completed so the assessment was no longer required.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.2	% of initial health assessments completed by paediatricians within 20 working days	High is Good			100%	58%	41%					↓	In quarter 1 a total of 58 assessments were required to be completed within 20 ways. Currently a total of 40 of these have been completed 24 within timescales, 16 out of timescales and 18	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.3	% of children in care over 12 months up to date with statutory health assessments (6 monthly for under fives, annual thereafter)	High is Good	84%	90%	100%	91%	87%					↓	Of the 300 individuals who have been in care for longer than 12 months as at 30/6/17 there are 39 individuals whose last health check recorded is over 12 months old. However 17 of these are only just over 12 months old and if you look at the number over 14 mths old it drops to only 17 individuals and 14 of these are aged	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.4	% of children and young people with immunisations up to date.	High is Good		87%	95%	93%	90%					↓	Of the 300 individuals recorded as being in care for over 12 months as at the end of June 2017, 271 individuals had their immunisations recorded as up to date. Of the 29 recorded as not up to date 10 are aged 16/17 so it is possible we do not have historical data available. Priority should be given to addressing the 8 individual aged 1-5.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.5	% of children and young people in care over 12 months who have had an annual teeth check up by a dentist	High is Good		84%	95%	80%	66%					↓	Of the 300 individuals recorded as being in care for over 12 months as at the end of June 2017, 102 had either no dental check date loaded or a dental check dated over 12mths in the field where the information is extracted from. At year end all cases with gaps were manually checked and the data submitted was improved as information was often contained within case notes or as part of plans/ minutes of meetings.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.6	% of young people who have had a developmental assessment.	High is Good		90%	95%	100%							Of the 28 individuals aged 5 or under only 5 currently have a date of developmental assessment loaded. As such it would be inaccurate to report on this currently. The year end figure was a manual	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.7	Number of pregnant care leavers (eligible, relevant and former relevant) 16+	Low is Good				7	8						This is a new figure which is being collated due to perceived high numbers of pregnancies.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
P3.8	% of young people with a SDQ score of 20 or above	Low is Good				23%	22%						As before, when anecdotal evidence suggests that the complexity of the challenges presented by cared for children is increasing, it is encouraging that SDQ scores in this regard are stable. Most of the high returns are actually only just above the threshold score of 20 with only three young people scoring higher than 30.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 5
Help Me Achieve															
P4.1	% of children taking up their early years entitlement – 2, 3, 4 year old offer - all cared for children	High is Good			90%	95%	89%					↓	Of those eligible, 4 children were not in nursery. One of these was new into care and a place is being sought. One is placed with adopters and the nursery will be agreed when settled. Two are age 2 but not yet eligible for nursery places- will start in September.	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.3	% personal education plans (PEPs) for children of statutory school age completed since start of term	High is Good			90%	83%	93% (July fig)					↑	Quarter 1 end is mid term when 66% were completed. As at July term end the position was 93%. There will be a similar issue at Sept	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.4	% attendance at school of children in care (quarterly figure is all cared for children at month end rather than those in care for 12mths which are published figs)	High is Good	95.50%	96.10%	95%	94%	94%					→	Latest percentage attendance is 96% for primary schools and 92% for secondary schools which includes Year 11 not in school after completion of exams	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.5	% school age persistent absence of children in care (quarterly figure is all cared for at month end rather than those in care for 12mths which are published figs)	Low is Good			10%	12% Prim 17% Sec	9% Prim 21% Sec					→	Secondary data includes attendance of Year 11 during exam period. Pupils marked on roll until end of June but are usually not required to attend after their final exam which may be early June so 2-3 weeks absence can cause them to fall into the persistent absence	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.6	Number of permanent exclusions starting in month - All Children	Low is Good				0	0					→	No permanent exclusions in this period or last year.	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.9	Number of cared for children/care leavers academic age 16-18 in apprenticeships.	High is Good			5	7	2					↓	1 moved into work, 1 became ill and was admitted to hospital, planning to resume college when well enough	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.10	% of cared for children in good or outstanding schools	High is Good			85%	82%	83%					→	Transfer of pupils to schools with higher rating.	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.11	% not in education, employment or training (NEET) academic age aged 16, 17 and 18	Low is Good			30%	20%	In care 15% Care leavers 28%					↓	Data is now reported for 2 categories separately	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3



Ref	Measure	Polarity	Stat Neigh Av	National Av	Target	Yr. end 16-17	Qu 1 17-18	Qu 2 17-18	Q3 17-18	Q4 17-18	RAG	Quarterly dir of travel	Comments	C&YP Plan Priority	Corporate Priority
P4.12	% not In education, employment or training (NEET) aged 19, 20 and 21	Low is Good		39%	38%	43%	41%					→	NB THIS WILL DIFFER FROM THE RETURNED FIGURE. ALSO PLEASE NOTE THAT WE MUST EXCLUDE POSITIVE ACTIVITIES THAT DON'T MEET THE CRITERIA FOR THE REPORTED FIGURE. This figure relates to the 19th, 20th and 21st birthday cohort only and details their latest status. When taking into account all individuals engaged in positive activities leading towards entering into education, employment and training then this percentage reduces to 29%. Each individual will have a designated PA and work continues to engage individuals where possible.	5 Best Skills & Quals	Outcome 3
P4.13	% not In education, employment or training (NEET) AND not engaged in any positive activities leading towards EET aged 19, 20 and 21						29%						NB THIS WILL DIFFER FROM THE RETURNED FIGURE. This figure relates to the 19th, 20th and 21st birthday cohort only and details their latest status. When taking into account all individuals engaged in positive activities leading towards entering into education, employment and training then this percentage reduces to 29%. Each individual will have a designated PA and work continues to engage individuals where possible.	5 Best Skills & Quals	
Support me to move into adult life															
P5.1	Number of care leavers accessing Higher Education (University)	High is Good				10	10						A total of 10 care leavers aged 18-21 are currently accessing higher education on a full or part time basis	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 1
P5.2	Number of Cheshire East care leavers in apprenticeships (18+)	High is Good				9	4						As per the latest position for the current care leaver cohort aged 18+ in terms of EET status there are 4 with an external apprenticeship loaded and a further 2 in traineeship schemes	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 1
P5.3	The number of young people with a CSE plan - All Individuals					10	6						NB this is all individuals - not just those in care (that would be a supressed figure)	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P5.4	Number of individual offences committed by cared for children	Low is Good					18						This figure shows the total number of offences from those listed in measure P5.6 below.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 1
P5.5	% of care leavers in suitable accommodation	High is Good			96%	94%	96%					↑	There are 5 individuals considered to be in unsuitable accommodation - 3 are in custody, one we are unable to contact and whereabouts are unknown and one has no fixed abode.	2 Feel & Be Safe	Outcome 5
P5.6	Number of cared for children offending	Low is Good					4						This will be all young people starting on Youth Justice Service or Divert Intervention during the quarter where they are flagged as a child in care on Childview.	4 Being Healthy and Making Positive Choices	Outcome 1

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# **Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17**



**IROs' contribution to quality assuring and improving  
Services for cared for children and care leavers**

## INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for cared for children and care leavers during the reporting year April 2016 to March 2017. This contribution is measured by how well IROs know the needs, wishes and feelings of the children and young people and scrutinise whether these needs are met by the care planning and services provided to children by their local authority and partner agencies acting as the 'corporate parent'. Information contained in the report refers to both cared for children and care leavers due to the IROs in Cheshire East reviewing the plans for both. The report is in line with the statutory requirements. It was completed by the Safeguarding Manager (IRO manager) and based on comprehensive input from all IROs and business support.

***This Annual IRO report provides information on how the IROs discharged their statutory duties in improving outcomes for children and young people and how the services to these children have operated. It will to be shared with and scrutinised by Corporate Parenting Board and the LSCB.***

## THE STATUTORY FUNCTIONS OF THE IRO

Previous annual IRO reports have already set out in detail information about who can be appointed as an IRO, what their statutory duties are and the purpose of an IRO annual report. They also explored what had been published about the IROs' effectiveness in relation to Cared for

Children by Ofsted, National Children's Bureaux and East Anglia University through the research they conducted.

To summarise, the main standards, responsibilities and powers of the IRO service relate to:

- IRO caseloads not exceeding 50-70 children,
- IROs having access to independent legal advice,
- Child's Social worker having a duty to keep the IRO informed about significant issues and changes in the child's life and care plan (Reg.45),
- IROs standing a review down if the child is not prepared or their care plan has not been formulated for the review,
- IROs having a duty to monitor the local authority's performance in relation to the child's case and raising and resolving issues, wherever possible, informally when drift and shortfalls in care planning are identified but, where they remain unresolved or the IRO believes the resolution requires senior manager review, initiating a formal Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) and concluding it within 20 working days,
- IROs having the power to escalate issues to CAFCASS if issues are not resolved, especially where there are concerns that the child's rights may be being breached.

For further information contained in the previous IRO annual reports, particularly for 2014/15 and 2015/16 reporting year, please follow the link below:

<http://cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell/care-and-support-for-children/are-you-concerned-about-a-child/cheshire-east-consultation-service-cheecs/independent-reviewing-officers-contact-information.aspx>

## IMPACT OF THE IROs ON THE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND SERVICE PROVISION in 2016/17:

This year (2016/7) has presented the IRO service with some challenges both in staffing and an increase in demand. The process of ongoing improvement has continued and there have been some significant achievements over the year. Despite the pressures, relatively few reviews fell out of timescales, and, where this happened, the reviews were held within days of the statutory requirement so the impact of any delay for the child was minimised. There is now a well-developed process for notifications to the service when a child becomes Cared for, and for the majority of children, this has worked very efficiently.

IROs have demonstrated effectiveness at a service level; they identified and responded to some themes during the year, particularly the increase in repeat missing incidences for some of our most vulnerable children. Similarly, the increase we have experienced in placement disruptions. In order to ensure effective planning for the child, IROs have seen their children, and their views obtained when changing placements, whether care or educational ones. This included visits to children where there was a plan for the change of the residential provider e.g. due to re-commissioning of the service, where the impact on the child and arrangements for them was anticipated.

Robust monitoring by IROs has remained in place, supported by some new processes, particularly the improved tracking process for children in court proceedings. This has been an example of efficient communication with the Local Authority Legal support officer. This was complimented by a clear focus via the Permanence Tracking panel. Other similar processes eg, the Adoption Decision Making, Complex Needs panel and a new Children of Concern meeting, and long-term

fostering matching panel, promoted good dialogue and a shared focus between frontline staff and the IRO's to promote the best and timely outcomes for children.

A theme for the IROs affecting their capacity to be effective in their oversight of care plans for children, has been the challenge of having sufficient time from when the final care plan is presented, to be endorsed through the relevant review to inform the care proceedings. To address this issue, a work stream on improving the PLO and court processes, ensured that good practice guidance and protocol in relation to timetabling care proceedings, which included sufficient time for IRO acknowledgement of any supporting assessments or statements as well as the final care plan. As a result, practice has improved over the year, albeit the continuous focus on the IRO's views being represented in the final statement needs to remain.

IROs have collaborated with fieldwork professionals and managers on embedding the process of meaningful preparation for reviews, ensuring that invites and consultation forms have been sent and this has led to an increase in the forms received. More can still be done to optimise what information is being gathered before the reviews, in order that no child, carer or parent is missed when considering who should be invited or consulted for the review. Focus on this aspect embodies compliance with statutory requirements and IROs are working hard to ensure that the information, views and perspectives on the care plan are being reflected during the review and within the recommendations.

The IRO escalation process has been further embedded. The quarterly IRO escalation reports are shared with managers and senior leadership team, including any emerging themes. The process is becoming more timely and effective although it does require specific ongoing commitment to ensure that trends and patterns identified by IROs are

analysed and translate into learning as well as actions. The IRO escalation provides qualitative information pertinent and consistent with the plans for optimising services, training for professionals and managers as well as improving specific processes or aspects of the services for our children.

There are specific examples where IROs made an impact on achieving better outcomes for individual children throughout the reporting year. The key themes are represented in the case examples below:

- IROs promoted the child's rights to advocacy and Independent Visitor service as well as their level of understanding about their legal rights and/ or entitlements as care leavers, including a young person who eventually returned to school after 10 months of refusing to go.
- IROs raised good practice notifications to reflect on the good quality of direct work, advocating for the child and/ or establishing partnerships with children and parents during assessment stage or formulating their plans,
- IRO challenged an initial negative assessment of foster carers which considered that they would not meet the long-term needs of a sibling group. An evidenced base challenge based on observation of visible secure attachments and children's as well as carers' clear wishes, led to a successful and happy long-term placement being matched,
- IRO worked closely with the allocated social worker and carers to analyse and review a complex case of a young person with serious CSE issues and missing incidence which then led to greater stability, safety and educational attainment of the young person,
- DRP enabled learning from a case where a child accommodated under sec.20 returned to the parent's care with financial assistance provided to the parent to enable overnight stay after which the child entered care again which captured

implications of such decisions regarding impact on the child and recognition of the subsequent changes to the child's legal status

- Sufficiency of evidence was challenged when 16 year old young person consented to being accommodated under sec.20, at the time when the parent withdrew the same consent, and the IRO identified the young person's limitations when telling the difference about the choices and consequences in relation to specific legal status,
- IRO ensured that unregulated placement issues were explored when children remained in the placement after the viability assessment was concluded as negative and the role of contingency planning at early stages of viability assessments with kinship carer (Reg.24) was explored
- IROs raised issues regarding placement planning meeting and shortfalls with placement plans preventing early information sharing and clarity about delegated authority agreement with child's new foster carers.

## PROFILE AND STAFFING

### Location and independence of the service:

The IRO team is part of Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit and the team's office is located at Macclesfield Town Hall. The line management is provided by a Safeguarding Manager (C4C IRO manager) who reports to the Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding. The senior management oversight of the service is provided by the Director of Children Social Care accountable for the operational services for children. During the reporting year there were no formal IRO escalations at level 3 and 4 of the formal Dispute Resolution Process to the Director. IROs and the IRO manager work closely with colleagues from frontline teams and, over the reporting



year, were involved in a range of joint working groups and training events.

The IROs have access to independent legal advice via a contractual agreement with an independent legal firm. There were two instances during the reporting year when obtaining such advice was considered but eventually was not needed. The first issue was resolved when the local authority's social worker and manager consulted the internal legal team for advice which was consistent with the IRO's suggestions and in the second instance the IRO held a reflective discussion with the IRO manager which enabled resolution of the matter. In both cases this was a positive outcome for the child.

### **Structure and characteristics:**

In 2016/17, there were 8 FTE posts across the service although towards the end of the year an additional post with 2 year funding was granted as a response to the business case against the increase in the numbers of our cared for children. The service faced significant challenges with having to respond to an increase in demand whilst undergoing an internal improvement process, both of which saw staff turnover and significant churn for the service. The improvement process included recruitment of permanent staff to reduce interim agency appointments and thus provide continuity and stability for our children. This has been highly successful with 4 new permanent members joining the team this year with a range of experiences from other Local Authorities. By June 2017, there were 9 FTE posts with 7 permanent IROs and 2 agency staff and a recruitment campaign underway to reach the target of fully permanent team. All appointed IROs met the criteria for the appointment of an IRO as set out in IRO 2010 Handbook (NB. IRO Handbook constitutes 'a statutory guidance

for IROs and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children').

During any changes in staffing, efforts were made to minimise re-allocation rates to children who then saw a new IRO although this was unavoidable for some children. IROs prioritised communicating with children and young people to keep them informed at reviews and via letters about the change and how to contact the new IRO. Alongside impact on the children and the team's stability, the staffing changes challenged implementation of a small number of 2015/16 team priorities

Team sickness rates were not an issue over the reporting year, or indeed the year before. Covers for reviews were required at times and these were planned with as much advanced notice as possible and executed with professionalism and flexibility by other colleagues. In light of changes set out, arriving at good overall outcomes and performance results for the year, particularly in consultation with children, child participation, timeliness of reviews and consistent IRO issue resolution is a significant positive achievement of the whole team.

Furthermore, quality and timeliness of IRO scrutiny and issue resolution and improvement of children's experiences of their reviews remained the central strategic aims alongside development of individual IRO specialisms and strengthening of the departmental and inter-agency relationships.

The IRO team continued to be supported by 3 Business Support workers (2.8 FTE posts). The Business Support team undertook all relevant administrative tasks in relation to the invite and consultation as

well as distribution processes for cared for children and care leavers' reviews as well as relevant review data collection and processing.

Overall, the ethnicity of the team reflected the ethnicity of majority of the cared for children population and correlated with some of the main other ethnic origin groups across the cared for population. Disability rates within the cared for children and care leavers population were not proportionally reflected by the diversity of the IRO team but gender disproportion was less apparent with 3 male and 5 female staff to compare with cared for population.

### Specialist skills:

In 2016/17 care plans for children with special needs or disabilities, various legal or immigration status and offending profile, were reviewed by all IROs and two areas of more specialist focus in allocations, namely children under 5 (1.5 FTE posts and 2 IROs) and reviewing Pathway Plans for care leavers (1.7 FTE and 2 IROs).

The review of 'permanence for under 5s' specialism evidenced increasing and overpowering rate of demand due to numbers of children in care proceedings where scrutiny of their permanence plans required a lot of more intensity and presence of the IRO which became untenable after one of the two IRO leads in this area resigned. Sustaining isolation of this specialism was also met with some criticism from other IROs who felt they were becoming detached from ongoing involvement with care proceedings for under 5s and adoption cases, particularly in context of regionalisation of adoption services. Decision was then made to retain thematic lead on permanence and monitor care planning for all children in proceedings but remove the system for allocation of 'under 5s' to any one IRO post holder.

Anticipating the retirement of one of the 2 IROs involved in Pathway Plan reviews, another decision was made about the whole team undertaking these reviews with internal thematic briefing process started in March 2017.

Overall, the following specialisms were developed by individual IROs whose contributions and feedback about the specialist work they undertook has been included in relevant sections of the report:

- participation,
- permanence, esp. for children under 5,
- professional discussion forum on cared for children and care leavers' matters,
- CSE and MHC (Missing from Care) issues,
- transition to adulthood and disability.

### Caseloads and additional duties:

The individual IRO caseloads fluctuated throughout the year from 60 – 81 cases with an average caseload of 71. Whilst the average caseload is numerically slightly above the recommended caseload of 50-70, the additional pressure of travel due to the geographical location of the local authority and placements of the children added significantly to the overall workload per each IRO. Additional IRO workload comprised:

- chairing of missing from care Level 2 meetings, some of the CSE conferences for cared for children and disruption meetings for children whose placements broke down after 12+ months,
- regular liaison meetings with Team Managers from CiN/ /CP and PTCT services and sporadic attendance at their team meetings,
- contribution to multi-agency and joint audits,
- supporting scrutiny of ASYEs portfolios,



- participation in regional CAFCASS liaison meetings
- contribution to training/ briefings arranged for other social care and health colleagues.

### CPD, learning opportunities and contributing to the learning of others:

Supervision meetings with all IROs occurred in accordance with the local authority requirements. Newly appointed IROs benefitted from both induction and more intense supervision programme. Two of the new permanent IROs completed 'Advance IRO practice' modules at Edge Hill University. The IRO manager complied with the requirement for undertaking individual practice observations of all IROs.

Reflective feedback contributed to setting objectives within respective performance and development plans (PDP) and further learning and consolidation of practice was executed during monthly team meetings and performance challenge sessions.

Individual IROs attended a number of specialist training courses and conference events, including NAIRO (National Association of IROs) conference in October 2016. IROs attended Practice Champions and quarterly Practice and Performance workshops. Specialist team training on NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) was arranged with an external facilitator. IROs have also been ready for introductory training to support testing of new IT technologies (Echo pens and Dictaphones linked to Dragon software). This was in response to IROs' limited capacity and the demands on them producing timely records and reports.

IROs shared specialist competence and experiences with other colleagues representing various services involved with cared for children and care leavers through:

- supporting 3 training courses for school nurses and health visitors
- reading and providing feedback on ASYEs portfolios,
- facilitation of a professional discussion forum 'Time to Share' (T2S).

T2S has been a theme-led forum for any practitioner and agency involvement with Cared for Children and Care Leavers. The bi-monthly meetings were attended by social workers (with many ASYEs among them), personal advisors, residential workers and managers, IROs, YOS workers, Children's Society, Virtual School, Family therapy, @CT, Designated Nurses team, Housing and Transitional team's representatives. The theme discussions during the meetings reflected the changing nature of legislation, policy and procedure but primarily focused on pertinent practice issues. The forum identified and contributed to the improvement or creation of a variety of practice tools or approaches and hence impacted on the outcomes for children. Among those tools and learning from the experience and good practice of others there were:

- a checklist for ASYEs/ newly appointed SWs on initial and subsequent care planning and review core tasks and deadlines,
- a map of the geographical spread of care leavers as well as sharing successes and challenges in achieving good outcomes despite the location
- a significant focus on issues of trauma and resilience in practice, including the health phone application,
- reflection on own/professional resilience and what underpins motivation followed by an open to multi-agency completion to capture views,

- identifying gaps and existing solutions for further priority work with Corporate Parenting Strategy on meeting the needs of UASC and non-EEA cared for children and care leavers resulting in further consultations with housing on the impact of the 'Reducing Migration Funds' policy,
- placement stability/sufficiency for young people.

T2S started in April 2015 and ran for two years until April 2017 when a recommendation was made by senior leadership team to amalgamate T2S into the wider Masterclasses (series of briefings/ training opportunity) agenda. Without consultation preceding this recommendation and the last T2S session taking place only in April 2017, further work is needed to progress with the merging of the two.



## IROs' OVERSIGHT OF CARED FOR CHILDREN'S CARE PLANS

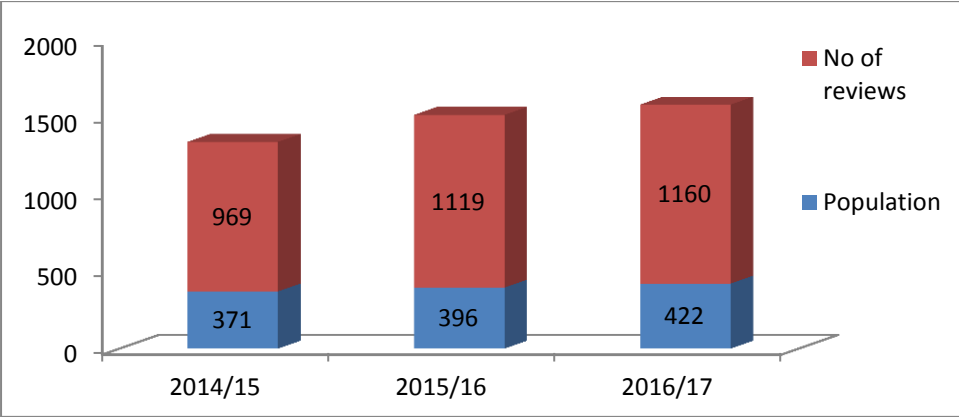
### KEY STATISTICS

**1, 160 statutory case reviews – 41 more than last year**  
**2167 consultations sent and 606 received**  
**91% cared for reviews in timescales**  
**95.4% children 4 and above participated in their reviews**  
**37 children chaired or co-chaired their review**  
**146 practice alerts raised – 122 resolved informally**  
**IROs chaired Disruption meetings for 8 children**

It was a challenging year for the IROs in relation to meeting their statutory duties towards children and ensuring their oversight was consistent. The growing cared for population, increase in placement instability and missing incidence for some of the cared for children challenged team's capacity and flexibility, particularly in context of IROs having to accommodate numerous staffing changes throughout the year.

The increase in our cared for population, reflecting national trends, inevitably resulted in an increase in review numbers. There were over

40 more reviews than last year. Although counted as one review, a number of reviews entailed two or more meetings under the option of ‘series of meetings’. This is chosen if gathering everybody’s contributions and endorsing the plan was not possible in one meeting, for example if the young person requests that the parent does not attend their review or there is a restraining order for either parent in place and they thus cannot be in the same meeting. It is anticipated that specific ‘series of meetings’ data report will be available shortly.

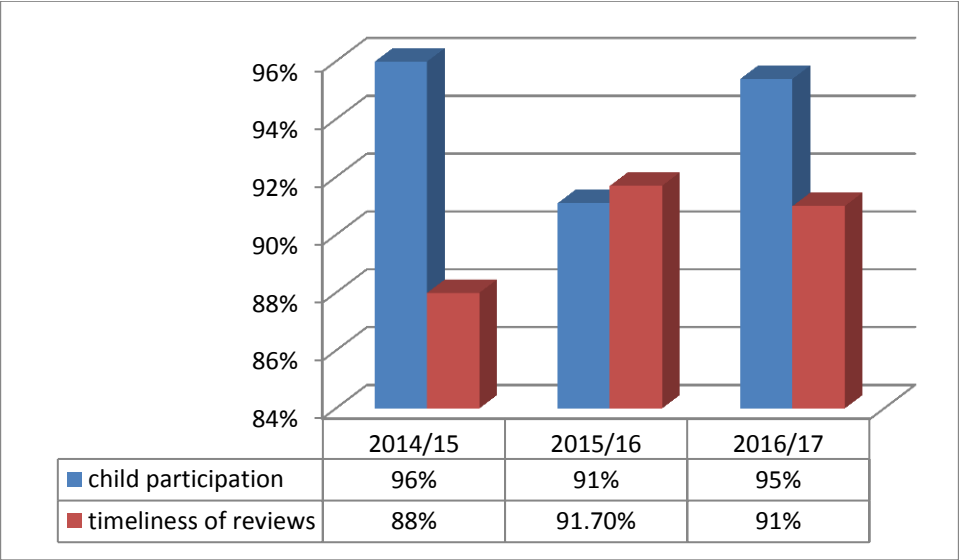


Increase in population and number of reviews - 3 year comparison

Despite increase in demand and staffing challenges, the IROs worked hard to ensure reviews occurred within timescales and children and young people participated in them as fully as possible.

91% of reviews were kept in timescales, which against the significant challenges throughout the year, has been one of the major achievements of the team last year.  
95.4 % of children aged 4 and above participated in their reviews, which is 4.4% more children than the year before and similar rate to 2014/15, but with a 20% increase in reviews. The majority of children

were visited in their placements by the IROs before their reviews to ensure their lived daily experiences alongside their views, wishes and feelings about their care plans and quality of received care and other services were understood and reflected in the review.



Timeliness and child participation in reviews – 3 year comparison

The area where a higher anticipated target was not achieved was in relation to the number of children who chaired or co-chaired their reviews with 64 children last year and 37 this reporting year. This is not surprising given the changes of staff and the limitations in establishing working relationships with children by their new (or interim agency) IROs, as well as diminished capacity of the whole team. All other indicators show improvement on last year which, given the context, is a significant achievement of the IRO team and exemplification of the

IROs' professionalism and commitment to the children and young people they work with against any encountered difficulties.



### IROs and their role in improving child participation and advocacy:

Over the last year the IROs took an active role in promoting child participation. It was identified that information and correspondence templates sent out to children and young people would benefit from updating, and to aligning to the specific needs of the child. Work has begun, to develop new information leaflets for young people and parents before reviews outlining not only the purpose of the review and

reviewing process but also giving a brief outline of the role of the IRO. The IRO lead on child participation worked with a number of children and young people to create a group keen to meet up and give their feedback to the Safeguarding Unit about key issues and themes pertinent to their care plans, IRO involvement and daily experiences. Another future area of interest for the group will be consultancy in revising the literature sent prior and post reviews to children and young people. It is hoped that the group will not only improve the participation of children and young people but invite a continued focus on the needs and wishes of the child.

Type of service	No of referrals in 2016
Independent Visitor	24 11 for children with disabilities
Advocate	74 C4C - 40% 109 (for 222 children) referrals for CP conferences – 60%

### Comparison of advocate and Independent Visitor allocations in 2016

Dialogue with the young people has been integral to the improvement of the functioning of the IRO service. Young people contributed to the appointments of new IROs as the Young People's panel, with its distinctive aim of focusing on the key issues and themes important to them in relation to their IROs.

The independent advocacy provision commissioned by the Local Authority, responded to 74 referrals it received in respect of cared for

children, i.e. 40% of the overall advocacy referrals. As with all workers, the IROs have a clear duty to understand and promote the needs and rights of the child. The IRO lead for participation started to build positive working relationships with the independent advocacy service (The Children's Society), to ensure there was a good level of communication and any identified themes, issues, barriers or delays were addressed promptly. In the past year, IROs and Children's Society worked together in ensuring that young people are being offered an advocate to not only represent their views but also to robustly challenge on the young person's behalf, further ensuring that their wishes and feelings were incorporated within the work that IROs and social workers undertake.

The IRO service participated in the review of Independent Visitors and Advocacy service. It also supported the process of incorporating a new consultation tool for children and young people, including those with disabilities, called MoMo - an interactive, web-based tool which has been agreed to be implemented during the 2017/8 reporting year.

The contribution of children and young people to the work of the Corporate Parenting Board was well evidenced at the beginning of the reporting year with young people attending the Board's meetings together with the managers representing services across the department as well as designated elected members. This year there has been a change of the Board to a Committee and establishment of a new Corporate Parenting Operational Group. Over the next year the reconfiguration of the arrangements for the interface between the new Committee and the young people will develop. The new proposal has been to establish a Shadow Committee composed of children and young people involved in Children and Care Council, although this is

yet to be tested it is expected that this will ensure that our cared for children have a strong voice and can offer effective challenge.

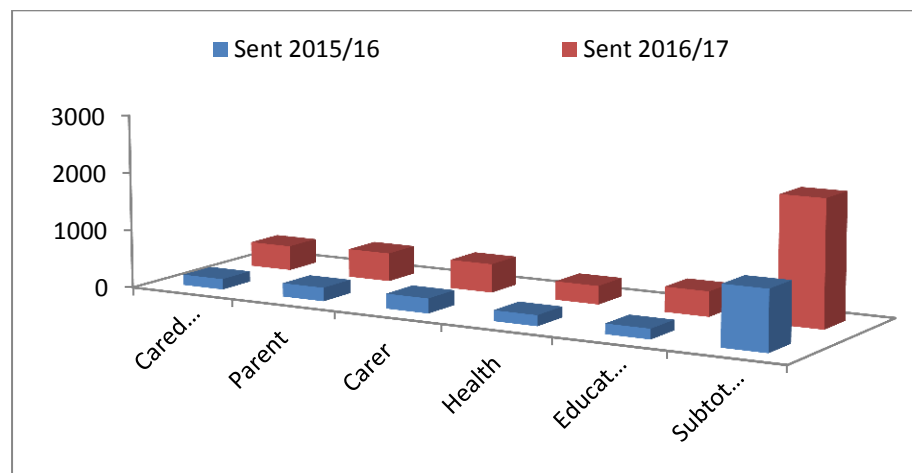
### Consultation – Cared for Children and Care Leavers' case reviews

Consultation Form for:	Sent 2015/16	Received 2015/16	Sent 2016/17	Received 2016/17
Cared for Child	182	24	429	87
Parent	233	15	492	91
Carer	256	90	496	191
Health	185	54	319	104
Education	177	67	431	133
<b>Subtotal:</b>	1033	250	2167	606

The invite and consultation process remained one of the focal aspects for improving the overall review effectiveness of the IRO role. As a statutory requirement, this has now been fully integrated across the department although, as a new process, reminders reinforcing the impact of its absence on the quality of preparation for the review have assisted. The main messages are very clear: the best outcomes happen when SWs reply quickly enabling IROs to endorse the invite and consultation lists for these to be sent out in good time before the reviews. This will remain an area of joint activity to ensure that children are placed first and we can get the best outcomes for them from their comprehensive reviews.

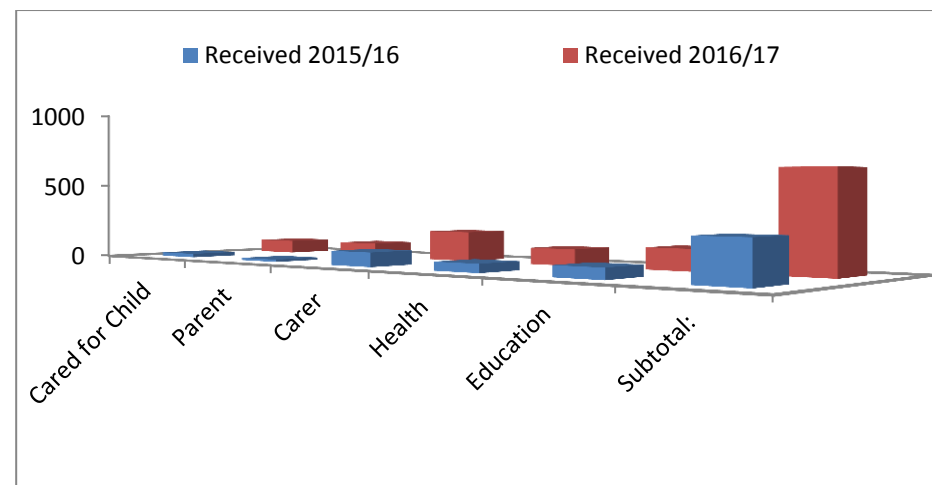
Positively, there was an improvement in consultations received from carers as well as from children and their parents which evidences better inclusion of their views. As for the range of received consultations,

there is still work to be done to improve the response rate from health and education professionals.



The overall performance has seen a marked improvement in forms sent and received compared to 2015/16. Overall, 2167 consultations were sent and 606 received. 7% more children and young people and 14% more carers than last year sent back their consultations before reviews.

The improvement to date is encouraging and a further rise in paper consultations is anticipated. Preparation is also underway for a new consultation method where children share their views via an interactive web based consultation system called MoMo, which is planned to be implemented in 2017/18.

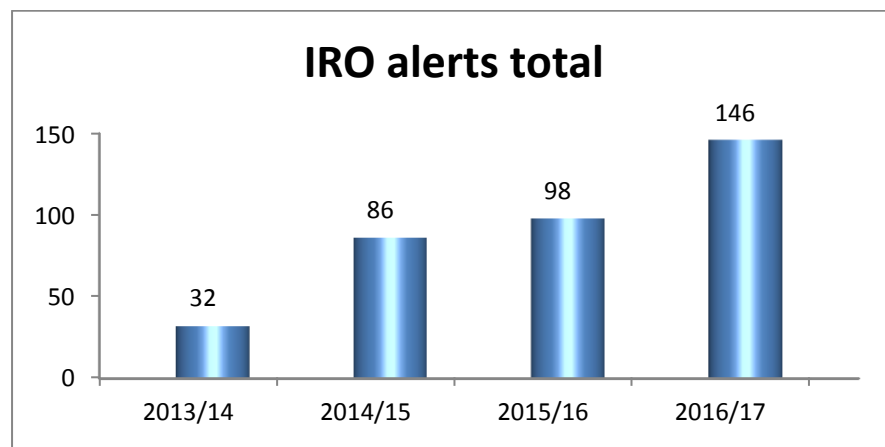


At the same time, similar improvement was also seen with in relation to invites and consultations for Pathway Plan reviews:

Consultation Form for:	Sent 2015/16	Received 2015/16	Sent 2016/17	Received 2016/17
PWP Care Leaver	106	12	197	21
Parent	5	0	0	0
<b>Subtotal:</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>21</b>



## IRO issue resolution process:



As anticipated, there has been a further increase in issues raised by IROs during 2016/17 in comparison with the preceding 3 years. A critical role and one tested by Ofsted relates to the quality assurance of children's plans and the effectiveness of challenge from the IROs. Increase in numbers may be linked to the increase in our cared for population and number of reviews during the year but it primarily evidences that IROs were scrutinising children's care plans with consistency and rigour. Commitment of the IROs to identify and take action leading to resolution of issues needs to be appreciated in the particular context of the churn the services has experienced last year.

Simultaneously, implementation of the IRO escalation process, as an integral part of child's record system in April 2016 and monitoring of this activity, certainly supported the process of timely communication and issue resolution between IROs and fieldwork professionals.

Type of alert	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Good practice notification			11	10
Informal resolved	30	53	73	122
DRP level 1	2	29	22	17
DRP level 2	0	4	2	7
Total number of alerts raised	32	86	109	156

## Practice Alerts and Formal Escalation 4 year comparison

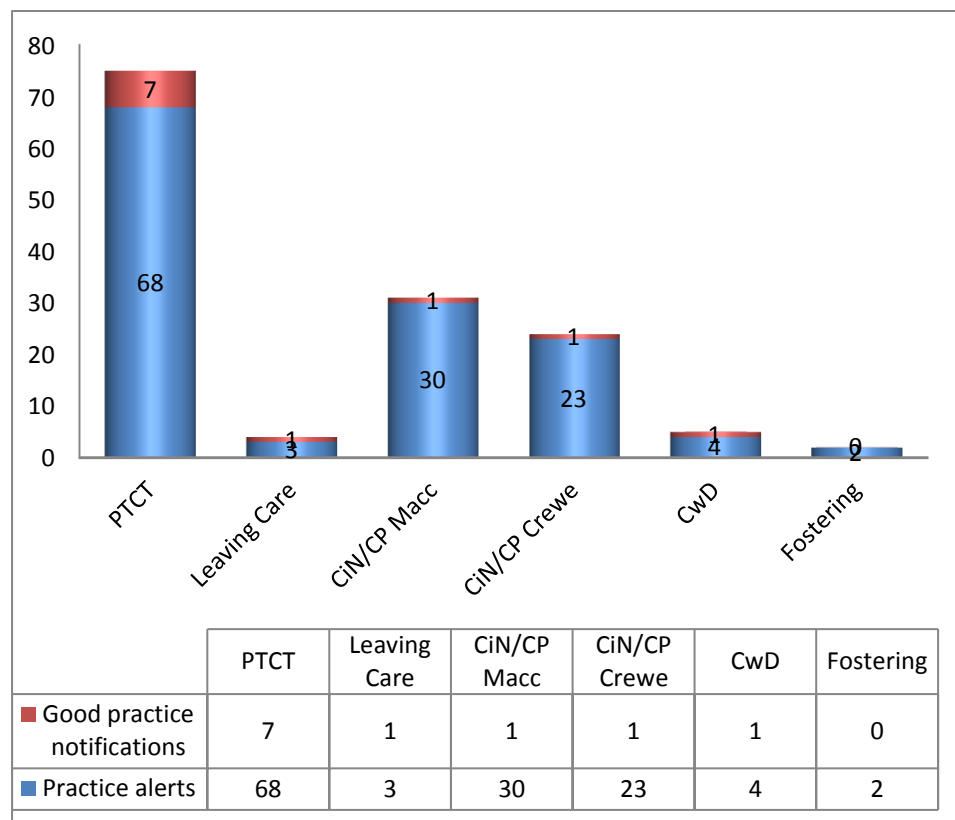
***'The role of the IRO is a specialist one which stands alone in the local authority. It is a role that may involve challenging senior managers and may require the IRO to seek legal remedies if the local authority fails in its duties.'***

*Statutory guidance for IROs and LAs on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children, 2010.*

## Distribution of alerts and good practice notifications across relevant services:

The main disproportion of alerts issued per individual services should be linked to the number of cared for children and the care leaver population managed by these services. This explains why the majority of alerts and good practice notifications were issued to the P&TCT as

the main cared for children's service. The ratio of alerts per number of cared for children's cases managed by each of the two CiN/ /CP services is also a subject of further analysis.



There are far fewer children whose care plans are managed by CiN/ CP services although there are specific challenges practitioners on these teams face, mainly due to the often intense and complex nature of the initial stages of care and placement planning, alongside progressing cases to care proceedings.

Overall, the practice of robust IRO escalation of issues to improve outcomes for children is being embedded as an integral part of the care planning and case review process. There have been many good examples where IROs and Team managers, as well as senior managers, have discussed their differing perspectives or the details of the identified improvements, and a more consistent and timely approach to issue resolution has been seen. This improvement developed best where there was stability of staff, both on the IRO team as well as SWs and Team managers. The following aspects were evidenced and found to represent 'what works' when improving the efficacy of achieving issue resolution:

- retaining a clear focus on how the issue impacts on the child,
- IROs and managers holding discussions and meeting up, to share information and their respective views aiming to resolve the issue promptly for the benefit of the child,
- IROs clearly specifying what outcomes they would anticipate in relation to all issues they raised, esp. relevant for multiple-issue alerts.
- Managers responding promptly,
- IROs ensuring they are consistent with raising issues impacting on the child or their care plan which cannot be resolved with the social worker,
- Managers identifying systemic and/ or capacity issues affecting social workers and acting to prevent further drift in care planning/ implementation,
- Managers using themes from issues raised to identify any learning needs for the team.

The improvement in execution and resolution of IRO escalations reflects the commitment from IROs as well as SWs and their managers to get things right for the Cared for Children and ensure that identical approach is promoted for the children who move on to adulthood as Care Leavers.



### Thematic data:

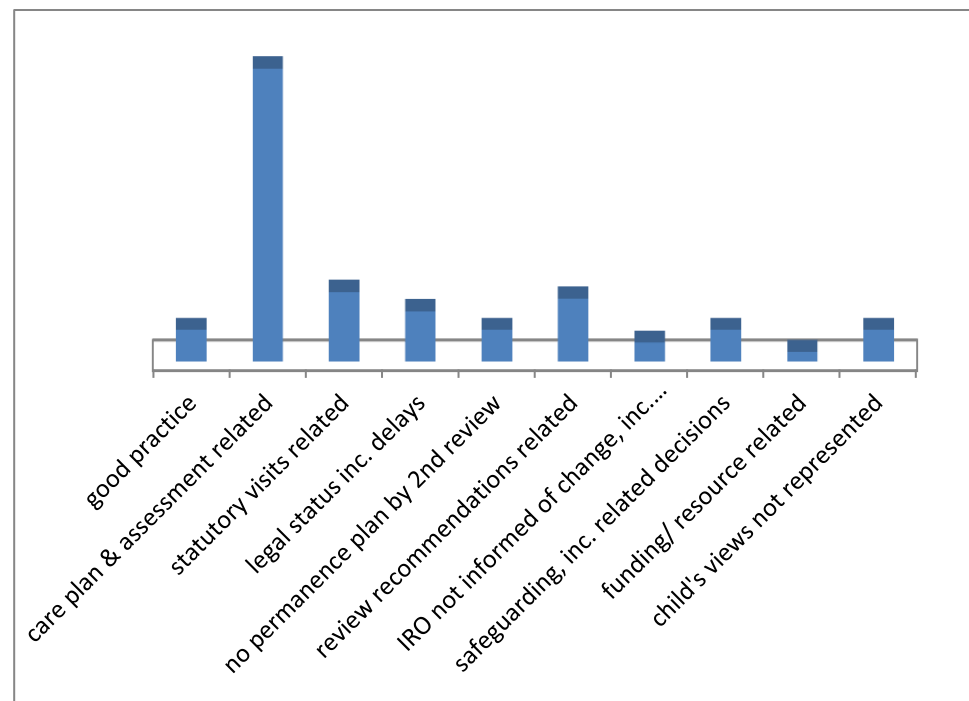
Common patterns from IRO alerts evidence fewer, than last year, issues in relation to statutory visits and overall more attention to the messages from children themselves. Alongside a few instances of lack of clear children's views and wishes in the assessments or care plans, there has been an emergence of good practice notifications identifying children's views being promoted and remaining paramount to the care planning process. Other common themes include:

- care plans not formulated or updated for the statutory reviews,
- drift or delay in relation to progressing care plans, e.g. when clarifying the legal status and securing permanence (inc. revocations of care orders)
- clarity about accommodating young people under sec.20 when prompt homelessness assessments are required to determine best ways to support them when they are the most vulnerable.

Alerts regarding quality of assessments, placement planning and more effective direct work to progress the care plans varied in numbers. The latter included issues regarding Life story work or ensuring there was a good partnership working with children, parents and carers to progress the plans.

Similarly to previous years, IROs evidenced scrutiny of the quality of safeguarding and legal arrangements, which was reflected in alerts regarding management of various risks, e.g. timely completion of Reg.24 assessment, timeliness of placement plan adapted to the negative outcome of the viability assessment or impact of experienced difficulties within parental capacity to protect the child when supporting the plan for the child's rehabilitation with the parent. Among the positive trends, there were no instances identified in Q4 where IROs were not contacted and informed about a significant event which would mean a change to the child's care plan.

Among the positive trends, IROs were gradually better informed about changes and significant events in children's lives meaning potential change of their care plans, with no such instances highlighted in Q4.



**Themes within alert summary 2016-17**

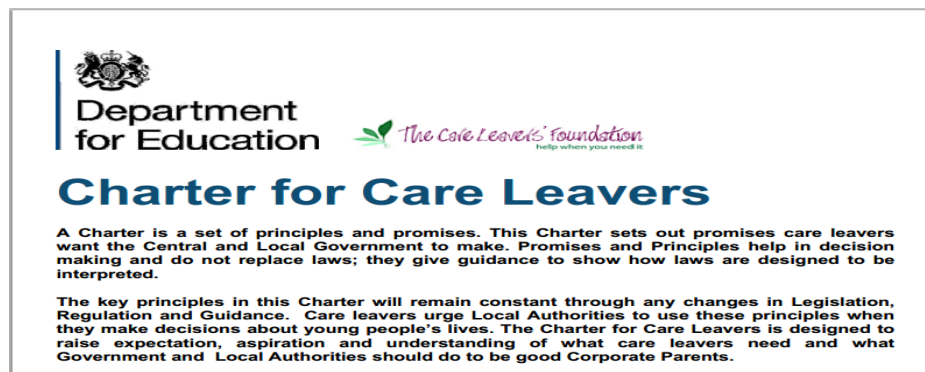
Overall, there were 10 good practice notifications highlighting good and exemplary practice by practitioners in relation to:

- good level of engagement with service users (child/ young person or/ and parent or carer),
- good quality assessment and understanding of the child's lived experience,
- good understanding of children's needs and their lived experience as well as advocating for them or on their behalf.

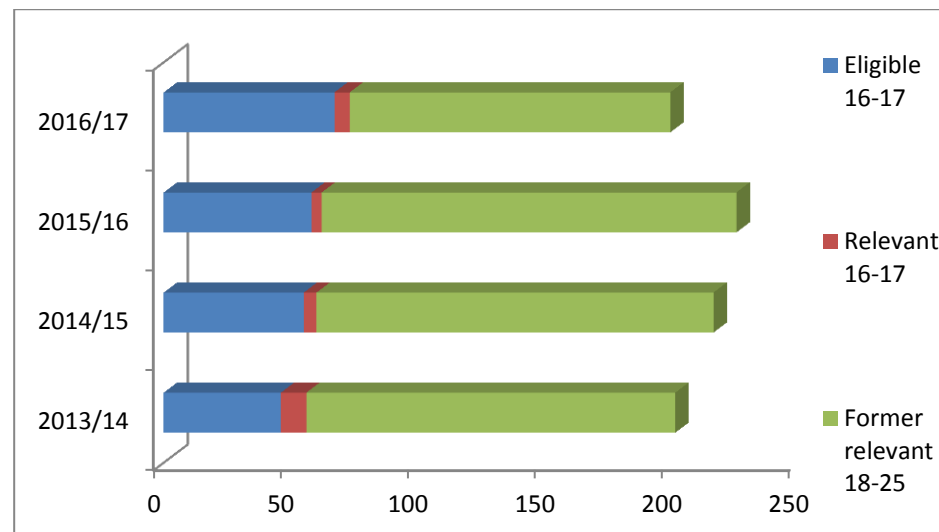
## IRO OVERSIGHT OF CARE LEAVERS' MATTERS

Although not an IRO statutory duty, it is recognised as good practice by young people and Ofsted to retain the IROs' involvement when reviewing the care leavers' Pathway Plans. The main benefit is the trust and continuity of relationships between care leavers and their IROs, often established over many years, alongside the independent scrutiny of the Pathway Plans by IROs. A testimony of how much these relationships mean to some of the care leavers is best represented by what one of them wrote to her IRO on hearing she was leaving to retire:

*'Apart from the biscuits you bring, you also correct the mistake in the meeting when people call me ... instead of... and you ask the questions I forget or get too nervous to ask. Before I wouldn't expect to get a copy of my pathway meeting unless I asked for it but you always send it to me in the post before my meeting so we can correct it or reflect on things. I know I can be a pain in the backside and my mood is up and down like a rollercoaster especially when a pathway meeting is coming up, you managed to stick with me without a moan or bad word ;) Thankyou for being my Safeguarding officer, I hope you enjoy retirement :).'*



Numbers of cared for children preparing to leave care (eligible care leavers) and all care leavers in receipt of services



Reviews of Pathway Plans were led by two IROs in particular although gradually other IROs have been gradually retaining their involvement for the cared for children, they were allocated to, who were becoming former relevant care leavers.

In 2016-17 there were 199 care leavers, aged 16-25, the majority of whom (126) were former relevant aged 18-25, with 7 of these aged 21+ (in education or training), 67 were eligible young people aged 16-17 preparing to leave care and 6 relevant young people were aged 16-17 who were no longer cared for.

#### a. Care leavers living out of area:

With fewer former relevant care leavers in 2016/17 than a year ago but more relevant and eligible care leavers, there were more care leavers living out of area. The increase in numbers related in large proportion to more teenage placements due to 'absent parenting' (asylum seeking and refugee young people) and 'family dysfunction' and 'family in acute stress' all those reasons consistent with the same trends reported nationally.

The 5% increase in care leavers living out of the area on last year is due to relocating closer/ live with their birth families or partner or to study. The IROs undertook these Pathway Plan reviews in places as distant as Isle of Man, London, Chichester or locations in Wales, Midlands, Yorkshire or Cumbria. In some instances there were additional challenges associated with long distance reviews, mainly around the availability of the care leavers who did not turn up or otherwise were not available for the review.

#### b. Number of pathway plan reviews and young people participation

No of Pathway Plan Reviews	309	No of YP expressing their views	243
No of Pathway Plan Reviews held within timescales	284	% young people expressing their views	79%
% Pathway Plan Reviews held within timescales	92%	No of young people attending	192
		% young people attending	62%

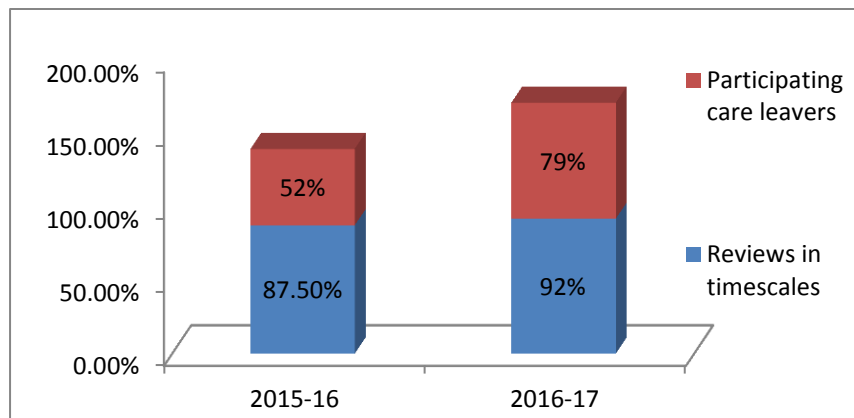
The IROs conducted 309 Pathway Plan reviews, 92% of them being in timescales. Ensuring care leavers' are present at their reviews is crucial but it often means that reviews have to be re-

arranged due to the changes in the young people's college, training or work schedules, at times, leading to reviews falling out of timescales. Despite the above and staffing challenges throughout the year, there has been a 4.5% increase in the timeliness of reviews since last year's 87.5% which embodies a good effort by the IROs to further improve care leavers' outcomes.

Similarly there has been an improvement in care leavers attending and participating in their reviews - from 52% participating in reviews last

Year	FR care leavers living out of area
2013/14	50%
2015/16	34%
2016/17	48 (39%)

year to 79% this year, which reflects the long-term aspiration to engage 100% of care leavers and exceeded the working target of 75% by 4%.



### c. Quality of Pathway Plans

IROs have worked effectively with the frontline Leaving Care service to improve the quality of pathway plans. There has been strong leadership within the permanence and through care team to drive this, and the quality of work undertaken with care leavers and the quality of Pathway Plans has improved significantly. The dedication and professionalism of the Team Manager, with the support and leadership of his Service Manager, led to a restructure of the service as a separate team and an increase in permanent Personal Advisors (PAs) supported and supervised by Senior Personal Advisors. This also allowed for specific areas of focus to be driven by individuals within the service, for example: apprenticeships/ career options etc.

Evidence of achieving outcomes quicker through joint working with other professionals and agencies was more evident during reviews.

Improved co-operation with Housing, other regulated and unregulated (under Care Standards Acts) providers, together with Commissioning, through a new Ignition panel helped to achieve this. The issue of care leavers being classed as 'intentionally homeless' by Housing has been explored by relevant agencies and it is believed that work is ongoing to ensure these young people's needs and impact of earlier abuse, neglect and trauma are taken into consideration when assessing and allocating them with relevant accommodation.

The significant improvement would not be possible without the inclusion of the Transitional worker and her team within the work with vulnerable young people who are then requiring support as vulnerable young adults. The new Designated 16+ nurse, providing outreach work to care leavers, alongside ongoing involvement of the Teenage Partnership nurse, have made their clear impact on the overall improved outcomes.

Personal Advisors were evidencing promoting the safeguarding duty towards the care leavers' own children, where there were concerns about quality of care and parenting and safety, was evident. This is a difficult area of balancing the needs of the parent – the care leaver whom the PA is allocated to – with the safeguarding needs of the care leaver's child, which requires good co-operation between the allocated child's Social worker and the PA and ensuring that both are supported. As preventative or supportive measure, further focus and communication to care leavers via the health app or health passports about the IDVA service and relaying information about the support to victims of domestic abuse, could benefit care leavers further.

A small number of reviews had to be stood down or re-arranged due to the Pathway Plan not being updated on time for its review. However, Pathway Plans were more frequently written with the young person and

agreed with them, which is of the utmost importance. There is still a need for improvement in ensuring that the documents are signed by the young people although this is often due to the technicalities of PAs having to input the information onto the system after working with the young people and then taking the Plan to them to sign at the review.

ETHNIC ORIGIN	NUMBERS	%
Any other mixed	1	1%
Any other Asian	0	
African	0	
Any other	10	8%
Any other white	2	2%
White and Black Caribbean	4	3%
White British	102	86%

d. **Ethnicity:**

The ethnicity of our care leavers' population remained primarily white British although there was an increase in asylum seeking young people from various countries as well as emergence of EU nationals aged 18+. There was no marked difference in the ethnicity of the cared for children and care leavers and the ethnicity of care leavers was matched by the IROs' ethnicity, with majority of them being of white British, 1 of Asian and 1 of African origin within the reporting year.

e. **Gender – former relevant 18-20**

Male	61	(51%)
Female	58	(49%)

2 IROs - one male and one female reviewed the majority of Pathway Plans. The female IRO's caseload was dedicated to 18+ care leavers and this specialism made best use of her long-standing expertise, well established relationships with care leavers and established relationships with other professionals, benefitting stability and continuity of professional involvement for the care leavers. The end of the reporting year saw this IRO preparing to retire which led to a decision that all IROs would retain their involvement with 18+ care leavers. This will help to re-balance the gender balance ratio, with 2 further male IROs (3 in total) working with care leavers, alongside 6 of their female counterparts.

f. **Disability:**

For this year, 9 care leavers (8%) were identified as having a physical or learning disability preventing them from work or training (NEET category). The integration and smooth transition into Adult services, when children with special needs move into adulthood, is still variable in terms of best outcomes for children. Ongoing work is focusing on increasing the awareness in Adult Services about the IRO role. There will be a further focus on the optimising the Pathway Plan review process when the Adult services 2017/18.

IROs reviewing their Pathway Plans retained or established their links with Transitional team, Virtual School, Housing and Probation, alongside some professionals from Adult Services. Transitional arrangements remained a specialism of one of the IROs who reported the following:

*'As a lead on working with Cared For young people with complex needs who are coming up to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and therefore are making the transition from Children's to Adult Services, I have been involved in a working party that developed a Transition Policy for young people in need of continuing support from Adult Services as they move into adulthood.*

*I remain involved with a work stream developing a policy on 'Preparation for Adulthood' which is a programme funded by the DfE as part of the 'Delivering Better Outcomes Together' consortium. This is linked to the council's 'Local Offer' for people with Special Educational Needs and Disability. I am the link person with the Children with Disability team alongside a counterpart in Adult Services and attend team meetings to form relationships and facilitate effective communication.'*

g. **Education, employment and training:**

- 16 (13%) of care leavers were NEET - not engaged in work, training or education ((this does not include those who are unable to work or who are pregnant or a parent) - this figure is not stable but fluctuates throughout the year, **improved by 2% from 34 care leavers (15%) last year,**
- 10 young people were in Higher Education (3.5%) – **again improvement due to 2 more young people in**

**HE than last year** with sustained rate of young people in Further Education,

- 16 (13%) were in full time work or training, and **increase of 4% over preceding year.**

h. **Unaccompanied asylum seekers: 19**

There were concerted efforts to make sure that the needs of the unaccompanied asylum seekers/ refugee young people in CEC care (esp. from the dispersal programmed) were recognised and supported well.

Feedback regarding the timeliness and quality of educational/ training support to asylum seeking and refugee young people varied. Some care leavers and professionals confirmed care leavers enjoyed their ESOL course, with their PAs stating that their English improved vastly and their tutor attended some of the reviews for. One of the care leavers attended an extra adult language learning course at South Cheshire College. Discussions about these issues took place as part of the Pathway Plan reviews for these young people, with the report providing overall feedback on the arrangements for this provision.

i. **Accommodation for care leavers:**

As stated above Ignition panel and co-operation with Housing as well as providers seemed to have made a positive impact. Through the reporting year, there were only 3 care leavers judged to be in unsuitable accommodation as per government definition. This was either due to their being held in custody or in Emergency

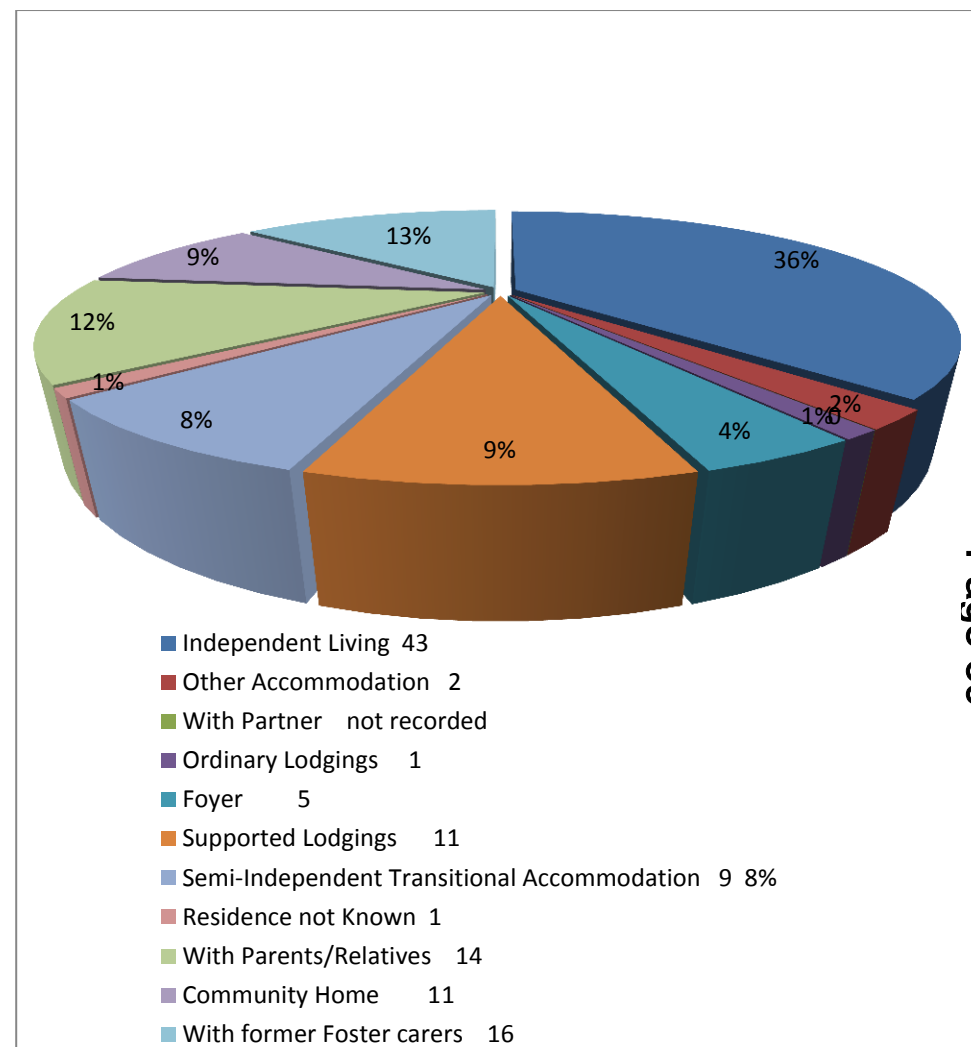


Accommodation. Six care leavers were noted as homeless since April 2016 for short periods of time but none were homeless at the time of writing this report.

Independent Living	43	36%
With former Foster carers	16	13%
Other Accommodation	2	2%
Ordinary Lodgings	1	1%
Foyer	5	4%
Supported Lodgings	11	9%
Semi-Independent Transitional Accommodation	9	8%
Residence not Known	1	1%
With Parents/Relatives	14	12%
Community Home	11	9%

**Types of accommodation with numbers of care leavers in them**

It was identified that there was an opportunity to improve the access to suitable accommodation for our young people at the point of potential entry into care. This led to the IRO service having a clear focus on this area, particularly in relation to the consistent and timely use of the joint protocol between Housing and Social Care. Instances where 16-17 year old young people were initially supported under sec.17, and after a further period of time became cared for under sec.20, constitute a learning opportunity.



This issue is of particular importance given the potential future instances where needs of the young people should be recognised and their awareness of support and entitlements ensured in a timely

manner. It will support prevention of young people, who present themselves at 16-17 as homeless, from sofa surfing or putting themselves at risk as well as provide clear evidence for their eligibility for the care leaver's status and thus relevant post 18 support. It will also evidence consistent commitment by all agencies to implement, research compliant, good practice when older 16-17 years old young people are not treated with any more degree of confidence as less vulnerable and more self-reliant only by the virtue of their age than younger children and young people whose entry into care may be easier.

j. **Parenting:**

Similarly to last year, a small number of care leavers were either expecting a baby or have been a parent already. Relevant assessments and steps were undertaken to ensure that the needs of the care leavers who are parents were met whilst the needs of their children, particularly where there were safeguarding concerns, were addressed accordingly. The IROs ensured good co-operation with involved professionals to achieve the right balance between the need of the parent as well as their child.

## **THE YEAR AHEAD – IRO TEAM TARGETS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2017/18**

This report informs the priorities for the service for next year. The range of the new tasks has been presented in full within the report and this will continue to be built on. The IROs will continue with executing their statutory duties towards children whilst retaining their commitment to

working together with operational services and other agencies to optimise service provision and ensure that individual needs are fully recognised and met and outcomes for cared for children and care leavers in the care of the local authority continue to improve.

The following aspects of service development have been planned to further improve outcomes for our children in 2017/18 year:

- A focus on promoting placement stability by: understanding, promoting and addressing and reducing the placement disruptions for our Cared for Children, with a strong focus on the prevention and management of placement instability and work with the fostering team on keeping children central to the care planning and review process and achieving better outcomes for children who are disrupted from placement; it is anticipated that this will encompass:
  - a) Work with fostering service to link information from disrupted placements with analysis of the carers' approval range issues not changing over time but rather their strengths and weaknesses being reflected by accompanying matching considerations,
  - b) Achieving clarity about consistency of support, including financial, within the policy for Reg.24 kinship carers,
  - c) Work with Family Therapy, fostering service, designated nurses and Virtual school on optimising the use of SDQ,
  - d) Joint working with all teams regarding the learning about impact of trauma on children and the methods for undertaking Life story work
  - e) Helping to promote a culture where the impact of any move for our children is fully understood and informs any decisions about them, ensuring the right support to help them achieve stability is in place at the earliest point.



- Working with the Virtual School on understanding trends and patterns and methods of addressing the needs of underachieving cared for children and young people,
- Closer co-operation with the teams involved with the SEND agenda, in relation to embedding consistent processes for the child between their EHCP reviews and statutory case reviews, in line with the relevant national practice guidance,
- Exploration of impact of implementation of the joint homelessness protocol in cases of cared for young people age 16-17 who ask for support from local authority,
- Development of relevant guide regarding DLA management for foster carers.



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