

Independent Reviewing Service
ANNUAL REPORT 2016/2017

Introduction

An annual report of the Independent Reviewing Service for looked after children is required in accordance with the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and this report provides a summary of work completed by the IRO service in Kent for the period between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017.

The development of the IRO Service

All local authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review the care plan of children in their care within the legislative timescales as set out in the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations (2010). The appointment of an IRO for every looked after child is a legal requirement under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act (2002) and the subsequent Review of Children's Cases Regulations (2004). The role of the IRO was strengthened in the Children and Young Person's Act (2008) and Care Planning, Placement Regulations and Case Review (2010).

Since April 2011, the IRO role has been strengthened and its role and function clarified and set down in the IRO Handbook. Essentially the responsibility of the IRO changed from the management of the LAC review process to a wider overview of the child's case, including monitoring of the care plan in between reviews. This a key role within the Council in relation to the improvement of care planning for Children in Care and for challenging drift and delay in the implementation of care plans and permanency planning for our children and young people.

In June 2013 Ofsted published a report; "Independent Reviewing Officers: taking up the challenge?" Inspectors found that senior leaders valued the quality assurance role of the IRO, with most saying that they would welcome more consistent, and stronger, challenge from IROs. There is a continued need to ensure that IROs are sufficiently supported and challenged by leaders in driving effective improvement in services for children in care.

In November 2014 findings from a research study by The Centre for Research on the Child and Family (CRCF) at the University of East Anglia were published. The project focussed on care planning and the role of the IRO and found the IRO role had 'bedded down', has a higher profile and greater acceptance within Local Authorities. The research found that IROs have become more active and interventionist and social workers and team managers usually valued the input of the IROs even when they found it challenging. Social workers welcomed advice and monitoring and most IROs enjoyed this collaborative working to improve practice. The IRO service needs to develop a stronger collective voice within their organisation which in turn needs to harness the learning and share the messages from individual cases.

Executive Summary

The last year remained challenging for the whole of Children's Services, with the large numbers of young people who had presented as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) during 2015 continuing to have an impact during 2016. For the Independent Reviewing Service there was a need to operate a "business as usual" service for our existing young people whilst responding to the particular needs of these vulnerable young people who had become Looked After. This required the Independent Reviewing Service to assimilate as many UASC young people into the caseloads of existing staff as possible and recruit an additional seven locum IROs simply to deal with the basic needs of the 1000+ UASC young people who were accommodated during 2015.

The National Transfer Scheme started in July 2016. By March 2017, 233 UASC dispersals had taken place from Kent to other Local Authorities.

The service to citizen children in care has been maintained and enhanced during 2016. The IRO Service has focused its resources to carry out the "added value" activities of increased contact with young people between reviews, to consistently set caseloads at 70 per FTE and to identify specialist work streams for individual IROs to develop.

The ethnic component of the CIC population remains largely White at 1310 with 196 young people classified as Black and a further sizeable group of 252 young people classified as "other".

This latter group falls within the UASC cohort who have moved to England from Eritrea, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan and Albania.

The IRO Service has during 2016 continued to work with partners in Health and Education as well as with the UASC Social Work Teams, to provide a comprehensive initial review for UASC young people.

The total number of reviews chaired by IROs in the year April 2016 to March 2017 was **6081**, including initial and additional reviews following a placement change.

There is clear evidence of IRO challenge to poor care planning and standards through the use of both informal and formal Dispute Resolutions. This is an area where reflection on the value of challenge as a positive indicator of an active corporate scrutiny function has benefitted the organisation.

Social work services to young people in care are generally good, but they are still not achieving the higher performance profile within quality assurance processes that would suggest that the Council is delivering optimum results for all the young people in its care.

Of particular concern however is the significant number of children who experience three or more placement moves after they become Looked After. Currently this stands at a total of 236 (12% of the Looked After population of Kent). A total of 190 young people who experienced three or more placement moves fall between the age of 12 and 17.

CYP who experienced 3 or more placement moves Apr 16 to Mar 17

Age	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	15	Total
0	3									3
1	4									4
2	2									2
3	1									1
4	1	1								2
5	2	1								3
6			1							1
7	4	1								5
8	2	1		1						4
9	3	1								4
10	8		1	1						10
11	5			1			1			7
12	4	2	1	2	1	1				11
13	13	3	2		1					19
14	4	6	4	1	2					17
15	18	2	3	2	1	1		1	1	29
16	26	8	3	2		1		1		41
17	40	17	9	4	2		1			73
Total	140	43	24	14	7	3	2	2	1	236

The IRO Service has a crucial role to play in scrutinizing whether children and young people are being appropriately matched to carers, and whether carers are being appropriately supported to provide consistent, reparative and committed care to young people who have complex care needs. Achieving placement stability for Looked After children, demands that collaborative efforts are made and sustained by social workers, foster carers, supervising fostering social workers, IROs and our partners in education and health to support placements. The IRO service will therefore be working closely with the Fostering Service and Children in Care social work teams to reflect on factors which put the risk of placement stability at risk and consider how support to foster carers to strengthen placements is to be delivered by supervising fostering social workers.

During 2016/2017 there has been a strong drive within the county for young people to have consistent and coordinated support as they make the transition to independent living. Collaborative working arrangements between social work and the leaving care service are now in place and it is been helpful and reassuring to young people to have their allocated Personal Assistants meet them before their 18th birthday and for a member of the leaving care service attend their review meeting prior to their 18th birthday.

The Role and Responsibility of IROs

Kent as the Corporate Parent and its partners in delivering services, make a positive difference for children and young people in our care by investing in them, holding those

responsible for looking after young people on many different levels accountable for the care and support provided, and ensuring that service planning takes account of their identified needs. As with any concerned parent, Kent wants the children and young people in our care to achieve the best outcomes they can, to be happy and safe with the people they live with and who care for them, and to have a positive sense of themselves as young citizens in communities that value them.

Part of the Council's commitment to overseeing good outcomes for children and young people in our care is the continued investment in a strong Independent Reviewing Service. By doing so the Council continues to make sure that there is proper scrutiny of care plans so that they reflect each child and young person's needs, that the actions required to achieve the plan are identified and implemented effectively in a timely way, and that the young person's support network provides a cohesive response to their needs.

The IRO function and how it undertakes tasks is set out in the Department for Education's IRO Handbook, which forms part of the regulations and statutory guidance; Volume 2 of the "Children Act 1989 – Care Planning, Placement and Case Review".

The statutory duties of the IRO as set out in Section 25B [1] of the Children Act 1989 are:

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case
- Participate (usually as chair) in any reviews of the child's case
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority. IROs are expected to arrange to have contact with children in care before the day of their review meetings

In addition IROs have the power to:

- Adjourn reviews under Regulation 36(2) if they are satisfied that the local authority has not complied adequately with all the requirements relating to the review (such as consulting the child/young person, parents etc.)
- Freeze decisions until a child in care's review has been held that involve any unplanned change to the child's accommodation that would impact on their education (especially at key stage 4), changes of placement where the child has been settled and established for some time, and changing their legal status before the age of 18 years.
- Raise concerns through the local authority's formal dispute resolution process, which should have a timescale of no more than 20 days.
- Refer cases to the Children and Families Court Advisory Service (CAFCASS) under Regulation 45, which may include the use of a concurrent referral at the same time that they instigate a formal dispute resolution.

The IRO role is an independent one by its very nature and the IRO service has a key role to play in ensuring that care planning is robust, does not result in drift; and through the Review process identifies pathways for rehabilitation to family care or other supports that enables a young person to cease to become looked after wherever possible. The IRO is expected to

provide robust challenge where children's outcomes are being hampered across the spectrum of service delivery by the Council and its partner agencies.

Kent County Council's IRO service

The IRO service is part of Specialist Children's Services and sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. The day to day running of the IRO Service is undertaken by two Quality Assurance Managers under the management of the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Service Manager who answers to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

There are 2 IRO teams which are coterminous with two operational areas apiece: North West and South East.

Within Kent, the IRO function is separate from the Independent Child Protection Chairs Service, although there is the possibility of a CP Chair undertaking the IRO role in certain circumstances.

IROs were regraded to KR12 Team Manager level as a way of recognising their role and authority within the Council's Corporate Parenting function. While recruitment of permanent staff has proved difficult, especially in the North West because of the general shortage of IROs nationally and the particular pull from outer London, the IRO Service has been able to recruit more permanent IROs this year. The South East is more stable with an almost completely permanent establishment.

For the 2016/17 the settled establishment was planned to be 29 full time or equivalent IROs with an average caseload of 70. During the year the dispersal of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children combined with more recently a significant number of these young people turning eighteen has enabled the reduction of additional locum UASC focussed IROs.

The Service has adapted well to the challenges posed by the dispersal scheme ensuring reviews take place within timescales where dispersal is delayed.

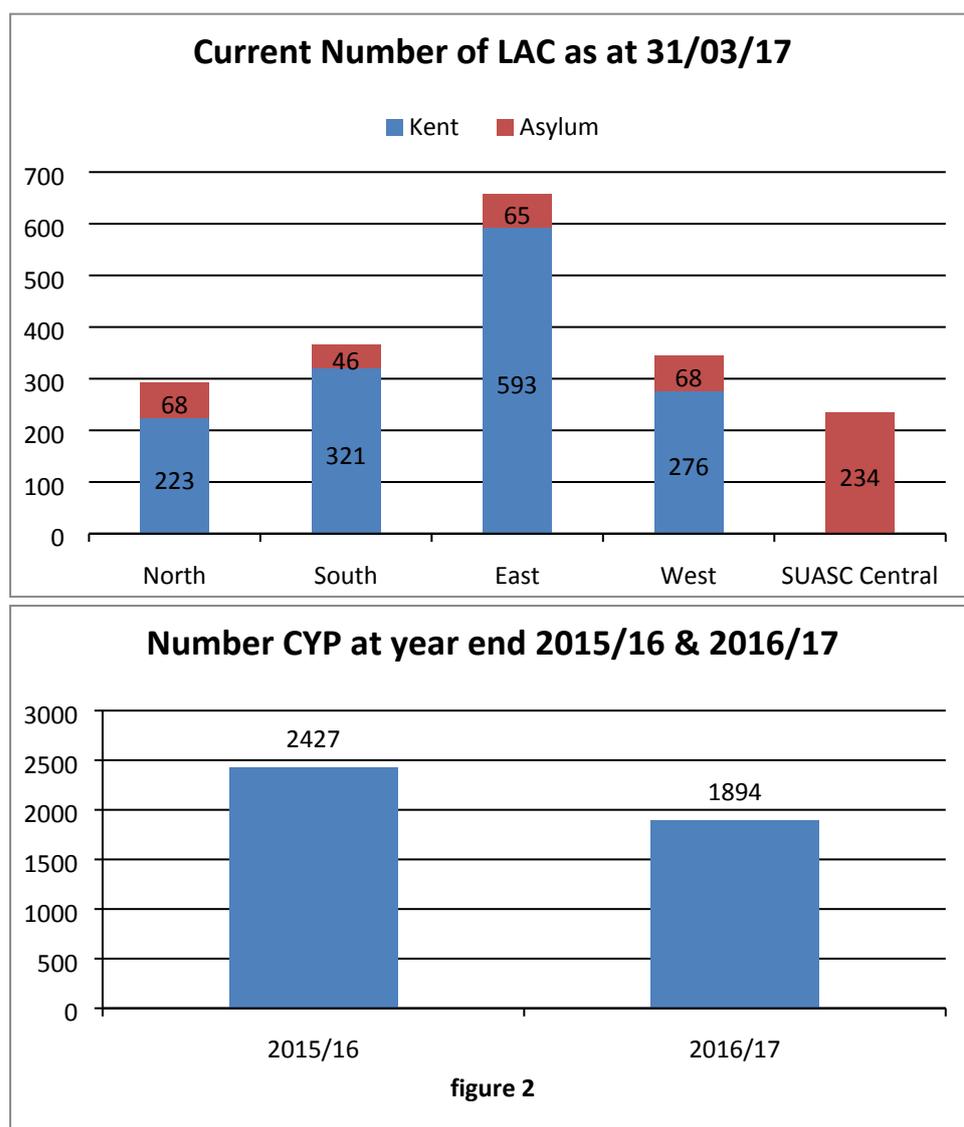
Ongoing Development of IROs

All IROs receive regular supervision from the IRO Quality Assurance manager through individual and group supervision, the latter providing a peer mentoring element to the process where IROs can discuss and identify good practice or highlight areas of difficulty. There is a monthly meeting schedule split into bi-monthly Team meetings alternating with bi-monthly IRO Group supervision, and there are quarterly countywide Practice meetings. These are well attended and provide a forum for practice development and maintain a county-wide cohesion in the IRO group. County staff meetings are held every 6 months and currently an annual "away day" enables the service to reflect on progress and to look at key areas of development for further practice improvements and service delivery. The most recent away day took place in October 2016 and focused on:

- Key changes in procedures and role of the IRO in Quality Assurance

- Communication tools and encouraging participation at reviews for disabled children
- s20 and planning for children and young people
- Throughout the year IROs have accessed individual and more specialised training through the KSCB training programme. Permanent IROs have been trained in Signs of Safety with recent recruits booked on to the training. The Quality Assurance Managers are designated Practice Leads in Signs of Safety. There has also been training delivered by Research In Practice on the role of the IRO completed in May 2016, and county IRO practice/team meetings have included updates on FGC; Mental Capacity Act; and, Pathway Planning.
- As part of service self-evaluation the IRO Quality Assurance Managers undertake case file audit of each IRO within supervision and observation of a review meeting. The findings from these case file audits and observations are used to provide feedback during supervision. This approach reflects good practice highlighted by Ofsted in their June 2013 report evaluating IRO services in England.
- The IRO Quality Assurance Managers attend the area based Child in Care Panels; Local multi agency Adolescent Risk Management Panels; County Child in Care Service meetings; Adoption Operational Group Meetings; area based/district meetings; Independent Visitor Service meetings.
- Over the last year the IRO Service has undertaken bespoke reviews on children Placed with Parents; children known to the Youth Justice System; and contributed to updates on procedures for looked after children.
- IROs have “lead” roles which are designed to work with the service areas on promoting practice. Lead roles include Family Group Conferencing; participation; Unaccompanied asylum seeking children; fostering; adoption; child sexual exploitation; permanence; care leavers; education; youth justice.
- The IRO Service has contributed to the planning and delivery of the Transition Workshop in November 2016 on care leavers for foster carers and other professionals.
- Co-developed a film on encouraging participation for children and young people at reviews.
- Co-developed an e-learning training course on care planning, placement and review.
- Contributed to the development of a Signs of Safety compliant foster carer feedback form.
- The NW IRO Quality Assurance Manager has been appointed as the co-chair for the South East IRO Managers Group which feeds into the national IRO group.

Service Demographics:



The number of children and young people in care at year end was 1894. 1413 are Citizen Children and 481 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). 234 UASC are held within the SUASC Central Teams. The reduction in this group is accounted for by the number of young people who turned 18 in January 2017 and the current voluntary dispersal scheme in operation, which has young people move to the care of other authorities. This has enabled the IRO Service to begin to look at reducing the number of locum IROs employed and begin to plan for a further reduction in coming months as other young people potentially move away from Kent under the proposed national dispersal scheme.

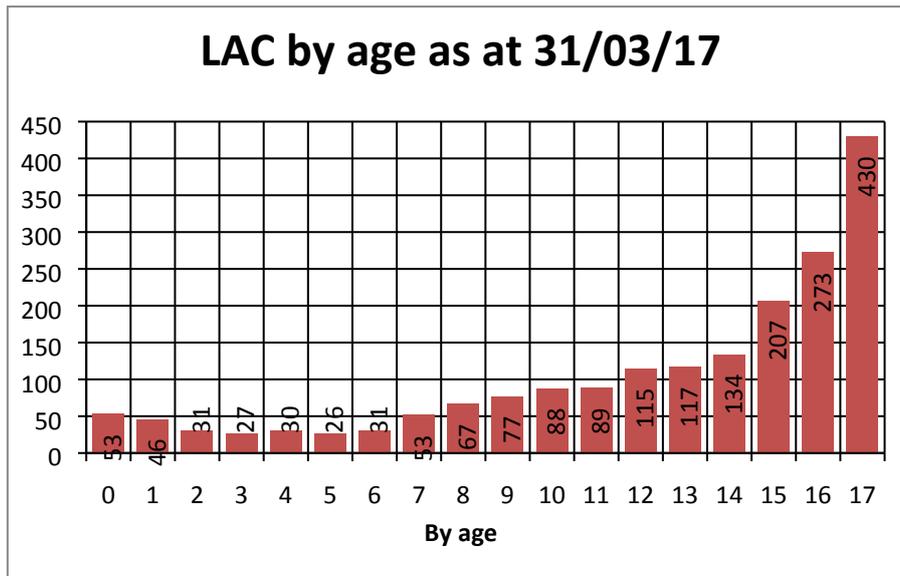
Children in Care by Gender/Ethnicity /Age

By Gender

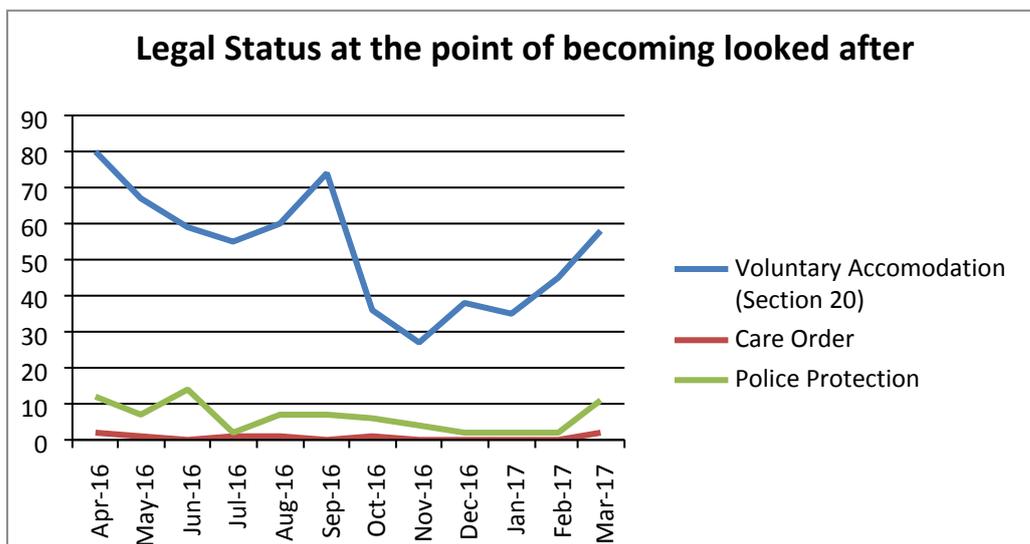
Case holding Teams	Girls	Boys
Kent	645	1,249

By Ethnicity

White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
1,310	87	49	196	252



The largest age group of LAC in 2016/2017 were those at 16 and 17 at 703. Those young people who presented as UASC in 2015 has influenced this total. There is a clear increase in accommodations when young people reach age 12 years and includes those children who transfer into specialist residential/educational provision related to disability, and who then become classed as Looked After Children under Section 20 (4) Children Act 1989. Figures demonstrate the increased accommodation of children post birth and in their first year of infancy. This suggests an increase in pre-birth assessments being undertaken on parents assessed as 'high risk' and the early identification of the need for care proceedings to be initiated. IROs continue to actively consider the ongoing use of Section 20 and the permanence needs of this cohort of very young children within this crucial window.



Section 20 Cases:

The impact of the changed legal view with regard to the appropriate use of Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, led to a review of all relevant non-UASC Section 20 cases. This has required a renewed focus from IROs to be mindful of the need to reflect on and challenge the ongoing suitability of accommodation under Section 20 for non-UASC children in care.

Staying Put:

The introduction of the “Staying Put” policy offers support to young people leaving care and an opportunity to remain living in their foster placement for a period of time after their 18th birthday. The IRO Service has played a role in exploring this option with young people and their foster carers prior to transition to the 18+ Service so that all the parameters that may affect ongoing stability are assessed in a timely way and both parties are clear about the support available and the expectations of the placement and the young person. Staying Put as an option is becoming more prevalent within Kent with 68 Staying Put arrangements in place in the 2016/17, compared with 49 in 2015/16 and 14 in 2014/15.

Children leaving care:

A total of 1339 children/young people left the care system during 2016/2017.

An analysis of children who ceased to be Looked After during 2016/17 indicated.

- 324 of 1339 leavers = 24.2%: children returned to the care of their parents.
- 54 of 1339 leavers = 4.0% : Special Guardianship Orders made
- 79 of 1339 leavers = 5.9%: were adopted
- 121 of 1339 leavers = 9.0% : 18+ - moving on to independent living
- 699 of 1339 leavers = 52.2% SUASC becoming 18 years of age/ dispersal scheme.

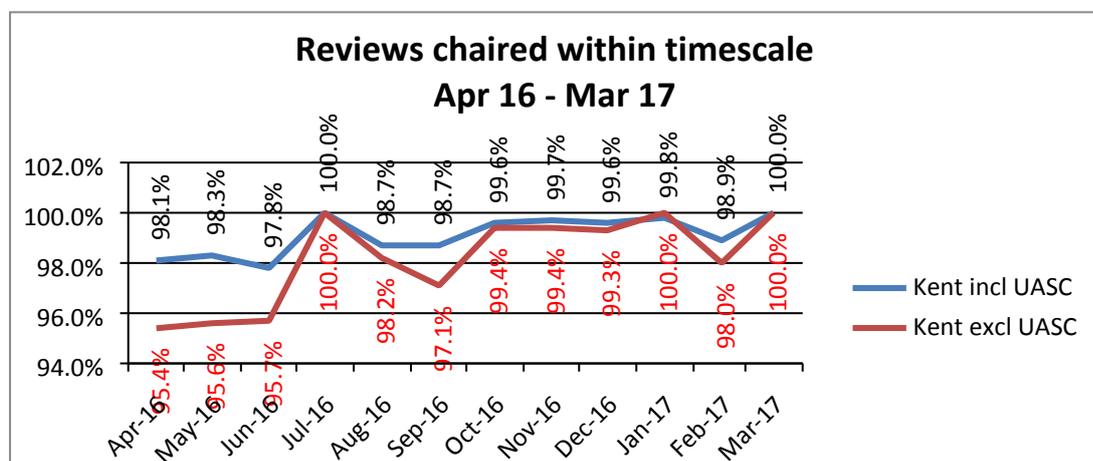
IRO Caseloads

The average IRO caseload at the year-end was **64.1**, although there will be IROs with more young people in their caseload. This figure includes the spread of cases across the whole IRO Service including those who hold UASC caseloads. It represents a decrease in caseload reflected by children exiting the service at 18.

IRO visits to children between their reviews is most visible In the South and East with 61.9%, 61.6%, 66.5% and 65.1% across Quarters 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

The total number of reviews chaired by IROs in the year April 2016 to March 2017 was **6081** including initial and additional reviews following a placement change.

IRO practice and performance, including findings from feedback surveys



consultation/participation process. The IRO Service and children's social work teams have during the course of the past year been trialling new media platforms such as the MOMO (Mind Of My Own) app to achieve greater engagement and participation by young people in their Review preparation, enable young people to have their voice heard within the care planning process and empower children and young people to take control of their lives.

Achieving Permanence:

Close, collaborative work between the IROs, adoption and social work teams has been maintained to achieve early permanency for young children. IROs have established links with Childrens' Guardians to consider obstacles in the way of achieving early permanency for children who become Looked After. The need for early permanency planning meetings, robust Family Group Conferencing to consider all care options available to children is now firmly embedded in social work practice when considering all care options available to children before care proceedings are initiated and children become Looked After.

Life Story Books and work:

The need for children who are Looked After to have access to life story books has been recognised and the IROs have tracked progress made with the completion of life story books at and between review meetings as progress is made with securing adoption orders and permanency of care for children. The provision of Life story work with children placed in long term foster care continues to be encouraged by IROs

Access to Independent Visitors:

The County's commitment to providing an independent visiting service to Children who are Looked After has continued and during 2016/2017 a total of 66 children have been linked in with an independent visitor attached to the Young Lives Foundation. In recognition of the added value this service holds for children who have not been able to maintain strong links with their birth families or are placed out of county, the IRO service meets with Young Lives Foundation throughout the year to review the impact of befriending and visiting on the lives of the children they support.

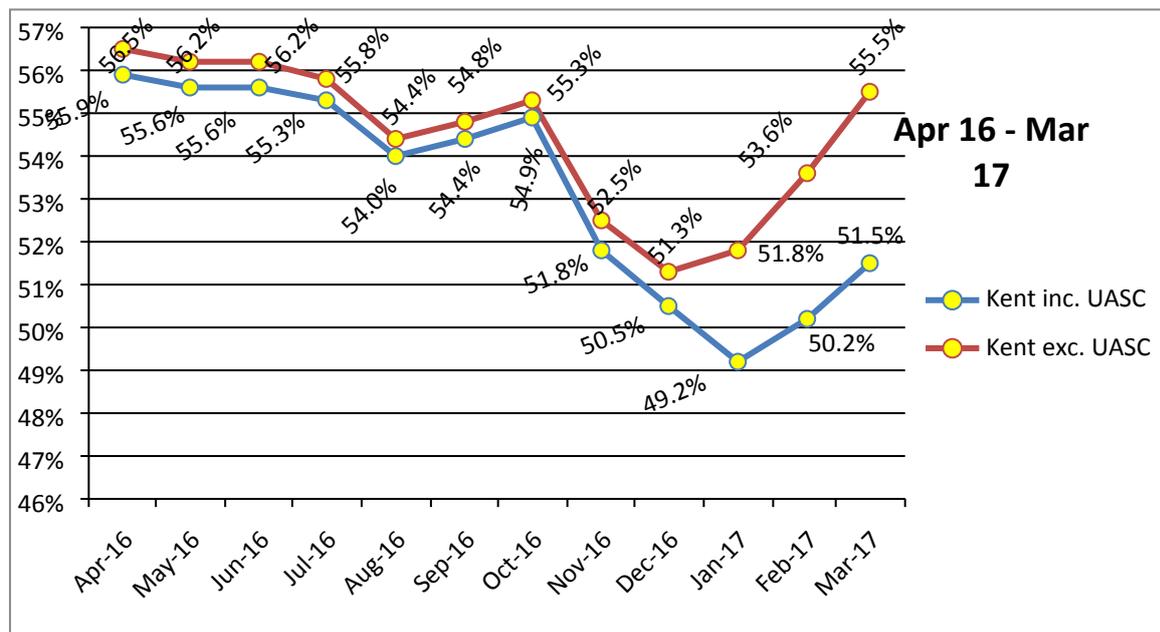
DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESSES 2016/17

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Total
C&F / Core / Needs Ass DR	1.6%	0.5%				2.1%
Care Plan/PWP DR	21.7%	8.2%	2.7%			32.6%
permanence DR	1.0%	0.8%				1.8%
stable placement DR	3.4%	0.3%	0.8%			4.5%
safety DR	0.5%	0.3%				0.8%
health DR	1.0%	0.3%	0.3%			1.6%
education DR	4.4%	1.0%				5.4%
promotion of interests DR	0.6%	0.6%				1.2%
participation in care planning DR	0	0				0.0%
contact DR	1.4%	0.3%				1.7%
visits DR	1.9%	0.3%				2.2%
direct work DR	0	0.3%				0.3%
Life Story Work	1.6%	1.6%				3.2%
Later Life Letter	0.3%	0				0.3%
contingency DR	0.5%	0.8%				1.3%
Pre-meeting Report DR Not there	7.1%	2.2%	1.0%			10.3%
Pre-meeting Report DR Quality	11.4%	4.9%	1.4%			17.7%
Pledge DR	0.3%	0				0.3%
Other Issues DR	7.9%	3.8%	1.0%			12.7%
Total %	66.6	26.2	7.2			100

There were 532 DR's in 2016/17, with the majority being resolved at level at Level 1 and 2.

A small number were escalated to Level 3 but none were so intractable that the dispute progressed higher. The majority of DR's were rooted in a lack of completing Pre-Meeting Reports within the required timeframe. Further areas for resolution were the Care Plan/Pathway Plan processes, usually around the timeliness of their preparation but also in some cases about the quality of the content.

Social work performance and practice



CIC for at least 18 months who've had the same Social Worker for 12 months (Inc. UASC)

Impact of staff turnover:

The turnover of social workers has decreased since January 2017. Repeated changes of social worker impacts on the willingness of the young person to engage with successive social workers. We acknowledge the efforts made to recruit and retain staff and recognise the difficulties. Nevertheless it is the IRO Service's role to promote an optimum service to all of our young people in line with national requirements.

Late Notifications of care entry:

A late notification is defined as 2 or more working days after the child has come in to care. A delay in the IRO service being notified promptly, delays an IRO being appointed and makes it harder to ensure that the initial review takes place on time. In 2016/17 there were 75 late notifications, a significant improvement on the 120 of the previous year.

Performance:

IROs Quality Assurance Grading of CIC Care Plans:

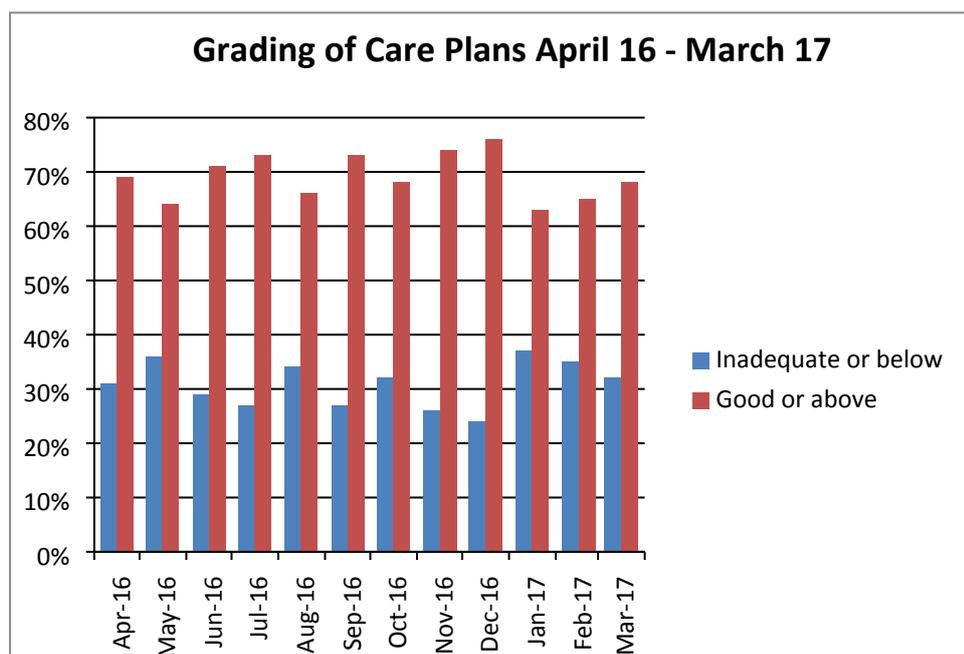
Good or Better – 69.3% - 3760 out of 5426. This is an increase of 7.5% for the 2015/16 period.

Requiring Improvement to Good- 25.3% - 1373 out of 5426. This is a decrease of 1.3% for the 2015/16 period.

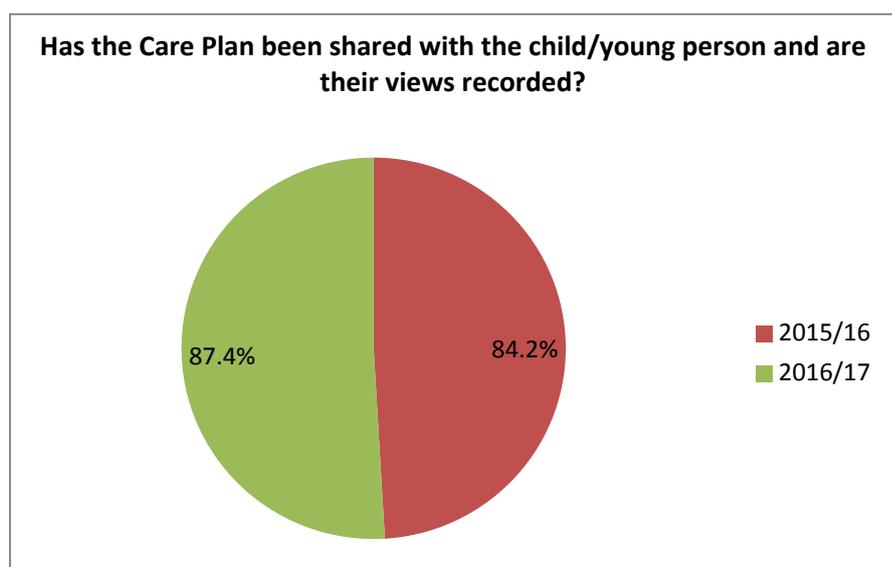
Inadequate- 5.4% - 293 out of 5426. This is a decrease of 6.2% for the 2015/16 period.

Care Plans:

The IRO Review QA process and Monthly Quality Assurance audits demonstrate that the quality of planning for Children in Care has improved in the last year in the Good category, but there is a need for IROs to drill down into these figures to assess whether there are issues around the administration of the LAC process which is preventing a better performance profile or whether there is a lack of real engagement with and aspiration for young people within care planning. Care planning rated as inadequate has decreased.

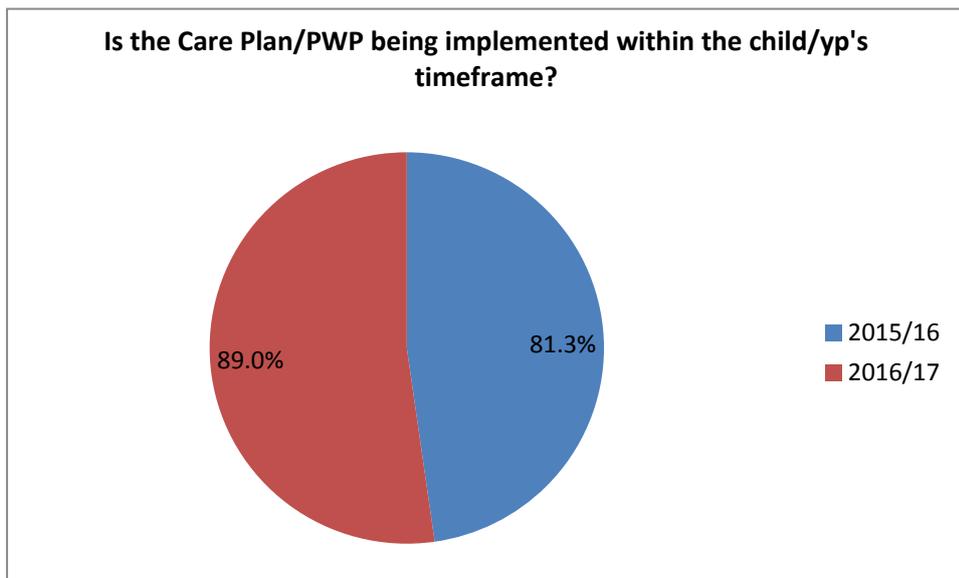


Care Plan been shared with the child/young person and are their views recorded:



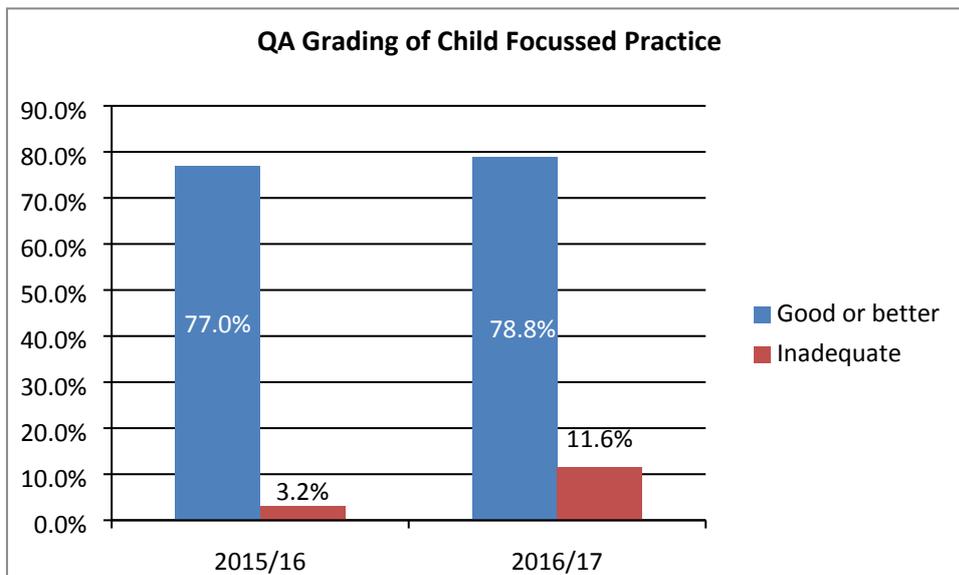
2016/17 saw an increase of 3.2% of Care Plans which were shared with the child/young person and their views recorded when compared to 2015/16.

Care Plan / PWP implemented within child/young person's timeframe:



2016/17 saw an increase of 7.7% of Care Plan/PWP being implemented within the child/young person's timeframe when compared to 2015/16.

Child Focused Practice:



2016/7 saw a slight increase of 1.8% of Child Focussed Practice being graded as Good or Better when compared to 2015/6 and also saw an increase (8.4%) of inadequate grading.

Change of Review dates

This process requires the agreement of the area Assistant Director and the AD for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance to ensure that reviews do not change without good reason and that reviews are held within the required time scale.

Practice considered to be 'good':

There is an overall reduction in delay and drift including the review of children subject to Section: 20 care arrangements

Good communication and liaison between district teams and IROs including timely alerting of the IRO to significant changes in most districts has been achieved and sustained.

Clearer efforts are being made to family find for children with a plan for adoption including Foster to Adopt and early identification for babies, often matching at approval or with existing sibling adopters.

Timeliness in reviewing whether adoption continues to be a feasible plan or needs to be changed to long term fostering

Evidence of the Signs of Safety approach being used in casework including direct work tools with children and IROs using this framework when considering progress being made by children/young people who are Looked After.

Areas which require sustained improvement:

Life story work for children in permanent placements needs to be undertaken consistently.

Life story books need to be well progressed before children are presented to adoption matching panel.

Sibling assessments need to be completed and inform care planning for sibling groups who come in to the care system.

Pre Meeting Reports are not regularly being provided 3 working days before the review meeting takes place and some do not provide a comprehensive update and analysis.

The distribution of review minutes are not consistently circulated in a timely way to participants.

The availability and use of interpreters needs to be consistent.

Timeliness of age assessments continues to be a challenge.

Timely access to legal advice and linking this to permanency planning meetings needs to be imbedded.

Limited access to education particularly for older UASC young people, and health assessments remains a concern and efforts made by VSK to support the education of young people who are not in mainstream education will need to continue..

Stability Core Group meetings and Adolescent Risk Management meetings are being used, however Disruption meetings need to take place more consistently.

Recent improvements achieved in supporting the smooth transition of young people as they move towards independent living needs to be sustained.

What children and young people told us during the past year:

The Child in Care Survey and Participation Report has given insight into what young people feel about their care experience. Taking findings from Quarters 1/2/3 & 4 this is what children and young people said.

"I know what my care plan is and it's been very helpful."

"Always supported me through tough times and nice times."

"They helped me when I needed support."

"Great help and support throughout my time in care."

"They did their jobs beyond the book they followed."

"She listened to what I had to say."

"My IRO has helped my case to move on."

- 41% of young people in care felt happy most of the time, but a significant proportion of young people who responded in Consultations also said they were Sad/Worried/Angry/Confused. The IRO explores with young people whether they have concerns which need to be addressed within their review meeting.
- 78% of young people who responded felt that they see their social worker at the right frequency but around 15% of young people do not feel that they see enough of their social workers.
- 83% of young people were aware of the Complaints process. 61% were aware of "Our Young People's Council" and 56% were aware of the Kent Pledge.
- Children and young people will continue to be encouraged and supported by IROs and social workers to take an active part in their reviews, including the number of children who chair all or part of their Review.

- Children and young people consultation booklets are now available in 5 different languages to cater for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children we work with.

Conclusion:

The IRO Service has had a busy year, particularly in light of monitoring the care plans for the UASC cohort. Excluding UASC, the number of children who have entered or left the care system has remained relatively stable and the Council has continued to invest in the Service through the regrade of IROs and through improved admin support. Caseloads have been maintained at around 70 per Full Time IRO .

IROs are monitoring the care plans of children and young people who have complex care needs. IROs have focussed on meeting with children whose placements are unstable between review meetings and maintained a high level of input with the professional network around vulnerable children who are experiencing placement instability. IRO oversight of care plans has increased with midway reviews/IRO oversight now formally recorded and monitored. The Service remains aspirational in this respect, seeing it as a crucial aspect of the IRO role, and one that can provide real added value to the relationship with children and young people and a consistent adult for them.

Achieving placement stability for children and young people in care will need to remain a priority for the IRO service. It is therefore pleasing to note that the practice of holding permanency planning meetings at the outset of children entering the care system and reviewing progress made towards securing permanency is now embedded in social work practice. IROs have and will continue to contribute to permanency planning meetings and will be challenging the fostering service and professional networks around young people to strengthen placement stability for children and young people who have complex care needs.

The IRO service has strengthened the challenge function of the role over the last year through the Dispute Resolution Process to address delay and drift for children in care. Constructive challenge is an expectation identified in the IRO Handbook and an element of the service which Ofsted will expect to see evidence of during their Inspections. We recognise that Dispute Resolution will continue to be a challenge in how it is received and acted upon by operational colleagues and the IRO Service will retain objectivity in order to be part of the solution.

IROs are mindful that young people need to be carefully supported when they make the transition to adulthood. This process starts long before the young persons' 18th birthday. IROs therefore monitor carefully progress made towards achieving goals set out in the young person's pathway plan and encourage social workers to liaise with the leaving care service so as to plan for a smooth transition. IROs also ensure that young people understand their entitlements and care leaver's status.

The Service must focus on setting the consistent standards expected across the County and holding areas accountable for them if it is to continue to be taken seriously. The IRO service in 2016/17 will need to continue raising its profile as the link between the child, their parents and carers and the local authority, and promote the continuity that improves placement stability and the provision of the most relevant support

Knowing the wishes and feelings of our children and young people and helping them to participate fully in their review has to remain a priority. Going forward the IRO with the social worker needs to encourage many more young people to actively chair their reviews. The Service needs to gather the views of foster carers, other providers of care to our young people and the views of parents in particular on how well the Council is fulfilling its responsibilities, but also to act as the co-ordinator of the support network that will assist young people to achieve their goals and aspirations into the future.

There are likely to be many challenges in the coming year which will require the IRO Service to continue to focus on the quality of provision to children and young people, improvements, both within the offer to children in care but also on how it fulfils its roles and to continue to ensure the child remains at the centre of all of our processes.

As a service we are mindful of our safeguarding responsibilities for children in care who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, substance misuse, missing episodes and disengaging from education and training. We will continue to monitor Return Interviews, Adolescent Risk Management Meetings and Care Plans closely and to include actions which build safety and stability for children and young people. There is growing need to be vigilant to the emotional needs of young people, particularly in respect of vulnerable adolescents but also our UASC young people who we know little about or how they may have been affected by possible trauma in their past.

The use of the signs of safety model as a framework to review how well children and young people are doing in care and identify areas of concern which need to be addressed is now embedded in Child in Care process with children and young people fully included in discussions around how concern can and may be addressed and resolved.

The IRO Service notes the ongoing hard work and commitment of social workers and other professionals, particularly the Virtual School Kent in supporting young people who are looked after. Despite some inevitable tensions the quality of the relationship with Children's Social Care in particular remains a strength.

Targets for 2017/2018

IROs to continue:

Working collaboratively with social work teams, fostering service and partners in education and health to strengthen placements so as to ensure that placement stability is achieved for all children and young people who enter the care system.

Highlighting, sharing and promoting aspirational, good social work practice in care planning ensuring good outcomes for children/young people

Supporting efforts made by social work teams and the Leaving Care service to support the successful transition of young people as they move towards living independently.

Highlighting need for life story books to be completed for and life story work to be undertaken with children placed with adoptive families or remaining placed in long term foster care.

Sustaining consistent oversight and monitoring of care plans, challenging drift of delay in achieving permanence for children and young people.

Actively promoting and supporting improved methods of consulting with children and young people in between reviews and particularly ensuring they understand the purpose of care planning and their involvement in the process. The Implementation of the MOMO app for interactive use by children and young people in care will therefore be supported and encouraged by IROs.

Encouraging young people to be supported by their social workers and carers to chair their own reviews.

Reviewing and promoting the Participation and Consultation process with parents and carers.