



Independent Reviewing Service
ANNUAL REPORT 2017/2018

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 2017 and 31st March 2018.

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 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 focused 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.

The Ofsted Inspection Report on Kent Children's Services, March 2017 highlighted that *"the very large majority of children participate in their own timely reviews, with their wishes and feelings carefully considered by independent reviewing officers (IROs) who know them well. Caseloads for IROs are manageable. IROs meet children before their reviews and monitor the progress of plans between reviews. A culture of challenge is in place across the service, and appropriate dispute resolutions are progressed."*

Executive Summary

In 2017/18 the Independent Reviewing Service completed 5055 looked after child review meetings including initial and additional reviews following a placement change. The IRO Service has ensured timely reviews have taken place with 99.6% of reviews in timescale. IRO caseloads have averaged 63.2 during this period.

2017/18 saw an overall reduction in the number of looked after children with a significant number of young people who had presented as Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children (UASC) turning 18 and requiring Care Leavers Services. The IRO Service has 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. Where there has been delay in transfer as part of the National Transfer Scheme the IRO Service has continued to monitor and oversee the care planning for these young people.

The service to citizen children in care has been maintained and the IRO Service has focused its resources to carry out “added value” activities to support children and young people’s understanding and involvement in the care planning process. This has included IROs visiting young people between review meetings, IRO oversight between review meetings and we have begun the scheduling of midway review meetings to ensure care planning is in place. A formal midway review template is being devised to ensure consistency in practice.

IROs have been given “lead” roles to enable them to focus on and champion a key area of work with looked after children. Lead roles include participation; child sexual exploitation permanence; CAFCASS; family group conferencing/life-long links; fostering; adoption; disabled children and leaving care. This has enabled the establishment of closer district links to champion good practice.

There is a gender disparity with approximately 38% of the looked after population made up of girls/young women and around 62% made up of boys/young men. Much of this is related to the UASC component where the majority are male. The ethnic component of the looked after population remains largely “white” at 1308 with 93 young people classified as “black” and a further sizeable group of 125 young people classified as “other”.

There is evidence of IRO challenge to poor care planning and standards through the use of both informal and formal escalations and 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. IROs have used their experience and knowledge to scrutinise and challenge care plans and highlighted any concerns through their quality assurance role.

While the number of children who experience three or more placement moves has reduced since the previous year there remain a significant number of children who experience three or more placement moves after they become looked after. Currently this stands at a total of 188 (11.3% of the Looked After population of Kent). A total of 153 young people who experienced three or more placement moves are between the age of 12 and 17 years and factors include their later entry into the care system. A number of younger children have also had a number of placement moves primarily as a result of a move following a parent and child placement and move into foster care and then an adoptive/family placement.

CYP who experienced 3 or more placement moves as at 31/03/2018

Age	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
0	6									6
1	4	1								5
2	3									3
3	1									1
4	1									1
5	2									2
6	1									1
7	1									1
8	2	2				1				5
9	1									1
10	3									3
11	3	2	1							6
12	4	2	3							9
13	9	4	3	2			1		1	20
14	4	3	3	1		3				14
15	9	5	2	1	2	2	1			22
16	14	9	3	5	2	3	1	2		39
17	29	10	7		1			2		49
Total	97	38	22	9	5	9	3	4	1	188

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC list as at 31/03/18

The IRO Service has a significant role to play in highlighting the availability and matching of children and young people with appropriately skilled carers and who are able to provide consistent and reparative care to young people who have complex care needs. The IRO Service will continue working closely with the Fostering Service and Children in Care social work teams to reflect on factors which put placement stability at risk, including educational stability, and consider how to support foster carers to strengthen placements and children's sense of belonging.

During 2017/2018 there has been a strong drive within the county for young people to have consistent and coordinated support as they make the transition as care leavers. Collaborative working arrangements between social work teams and the leaving care service are now in place and it is been helpful and reassuring to young people when a member of the leaving care service attend their review meeting prior to their 18th birthday so they know who their allocated Personal Advisor is before turning eighteen.

Some children and young people have complex needs and the early assessment and identification of these needs is key to ensuring early permanence. 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 as part of the role as corporate parents.

The Role and Responsibility of IROs

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 and that the young person's support network provides a cohesive response to their needs.

The IRO function and how it undertakes its role 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 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. The importance of the role of the Corporate Parent is reinforced in the recent statutory guidance for local authorities: "Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers," DfE February 2018. Kent as the Corporate Parent and its partners make a positive

difference for children and young people in care by investing in them and holding those responsible for looking after young people accountable for the care and support provided. They also ensure that service planning takes account of their identified needs. As with any concerned parent, Kent wants the children and young people in 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.

Kent County Council IRO Service

The IRO Service is part of Children's Social Work 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 reports to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

There are two 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. IROs may, in certain circumstance chair CP conferences where the child has become looked after under the IRO/CP chair agreed protocol.

In 2017/18 the settled establishment was planned to be 29 full time or equivalent IROs with an average caseload of up to 63.2. With a number of young people turning eighteen and with others being part of the National Transfer Scheme, the IRO Service has been able to reduce its unaccompanied asylum-seeking agency IRO staff over the year. During this time the service has continued to respond to the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children placed within Kent ensuring reviews take place within timescales, and, where dispersal is delayed, the completion of a further looked after review meeting where required. IROs have worked alongside interpreters to ensure the voice of the child and participation encouraged.

226 children and young people are placed out of county and IROs have continued to review and provide oversight of these children.

Ongoing Development of IROs

All IROs receive regular individual supervision including ad hoc supervision from the IRO Quality Assurance Managers. IROs also participate in group supervision which provides a peer mentoring element to the process where IROs can discuss and identify good practice or highlight areas of difficulty using a Signs of Safety based approach. There is a monthly meeting schedule split into bi-monthly team meetings alternating with bi-monthly IRO group supervision and there are quarterly countywide IRO practice meetings. These are well attended and provide a forum for practice development and maintain a county-wide cohesion in the IRO group. IRO county meetings are held every 6 months.

An annual IRO “away day” took place in October 2017 and enabled the service to reflect on progress, look at key areas of development and focus on practice improvements and service delivery. The most recent away day focused on:

- Sharing good practice experiences – examples of what good practice looks like and what we do to make a difference to children in care.
- Listening to lived experiences of children in care which included a presentation by VSK apprentices.
- Achieving a planned and smooth transition for care leavers including an update on legislation, research and guidance.

Throughout the year IROs have been trained in Signs of Safety and the Quality Assurance Managers are designated Practice Leads. IROs have also completed mandatory training on data protection/information governance, child sexual exploitation and Prevent. County IRO practice/team meetings have included updates on transitions for disabled children; liaison with Cafcass; Life Long Links; role of the LADO and evaluation meetings; Mind of My Own (MOMO); vulnerable adult protocol and the mental capacity act and transitions for disabled children.

As part of service self-evaluation, the IRO Quality Assurance Managers undertake regular supervision with each IRO including case file discussion within supervision and observation of a review meeting. The findings from these case file audits and observations are used to provide feedback during supervision.

The IRO Quality Assurance Managers attend area 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 contributed to a number of thematic audits including looked after children known to the Youth Justice System, KSCB follow up Early Help audit; Central Referral Unit audit; Care Order application audit; and the fostering thematic audit. The IRO Service has also contributed to updates on local procedures for looked after children and produce an IRO Newsletter highlighting key themes for good care planning.

A quarterly IRO Newsletter was launched last year and provides the opportunity to share key themes and good practice in care planning. The newsletter has included a focus on transitions for looked after children and care leavers; life story work and later life letters; consultation forms for review meetings and notifying IROs of significant events.

IROs have “lead” roles which are designed to work with the service areas on promoting practice. Lead roles include family group conferencing/life-long links; participation; unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; fostering; adoption; child sexual exploitation; CAFCASS; prevent; permanence; care leavers; education; health; youth justice. There are also IRO links with district teams to promote and share good practice and areas for development as demonstrated in an IRO workshop on Identity at the second Kent Beyond the Margins equality and diversity conference.

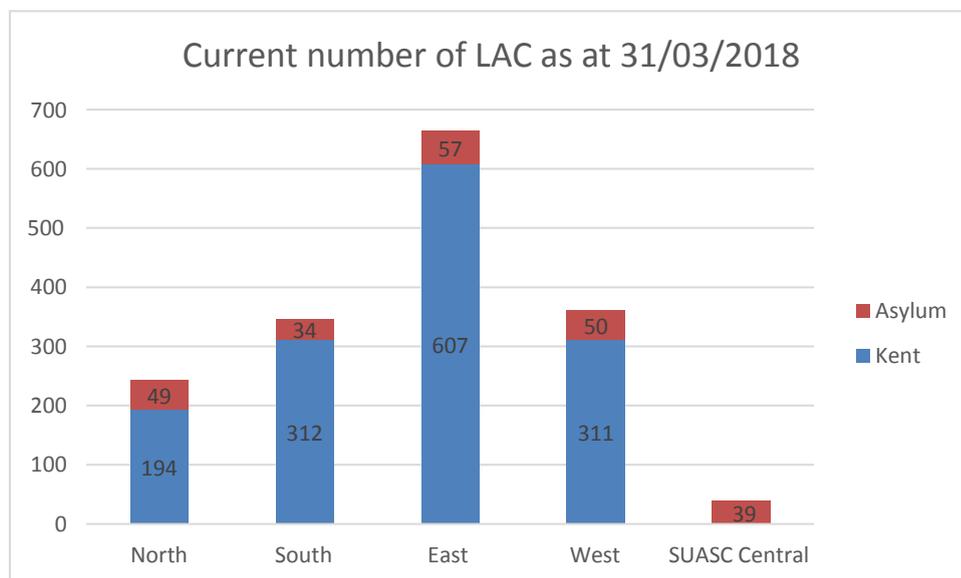
The IRO Service has worked closely with Virtual School Kent (VSK) to support participation and activities for looked after children and young people including their attendance at looked after children council meetings. Young people are also involved in the recruitment of IROs and we have worked with VSK apprentices on the re-design of the Kent Cares Town website.

The IRO Service contributed to the planning and delivery of the Transition Workshop in September 2017 on the preparation for independence of care leavers aimed at foster carers and other professionals. The service completed a survey on the attendance and preparation of reviews by fostering social workers and foster carers. The IRO Manager's also presented at the Fostering Appreciation Awards in October 2017 and the Safe Care Seminar in December 2017 aimed at external providers.

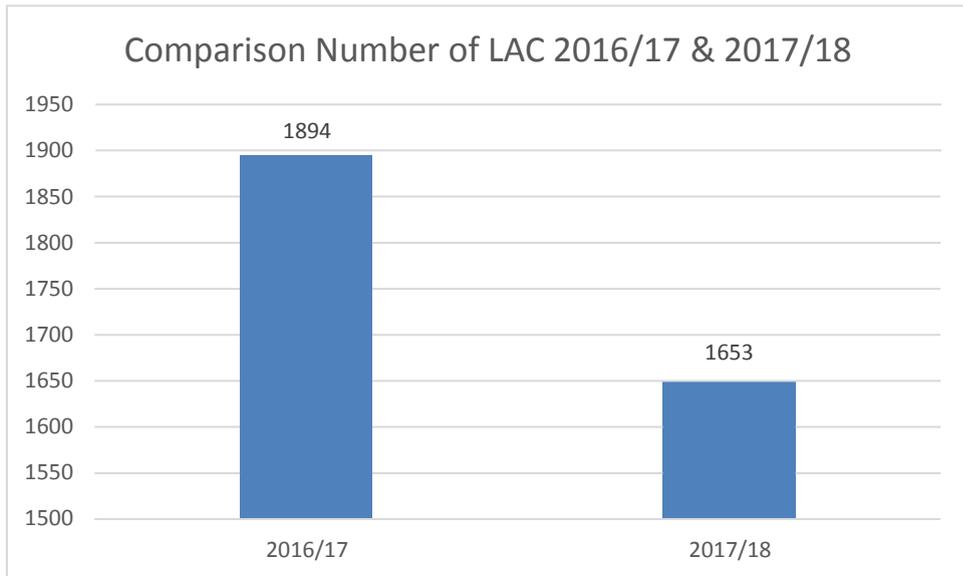
Over the year the IRO Service has further reviewed the IRO minutes template and are working on a revised IRO QA form for implementation in 2018 and an expected go-live date of 1st November 2018. Work has also begun on the invitation letters to review meetings for children and young people to ensure these are child centred and encourage participation in their review meetings alongside the invitation letters to parents, foster carers and adopters. This has been done in co-production with VSK apprentices and young people.

The NW IRO Quality Assurance Manager has continued as the co-chair for the South East IRO Managers Group (SEIRO) which feeds into the National IRO Managers group (NAIRO) and meet quarterly. The two IRO QA managers attend the SEIRO managers meeting.

Service Demographics



Source: SCS Performance Management/Scheduled reports/Current LAC List _0080



Source: SCS Performance Management/Scheduled reports/Current LAC List _0080

The number of children and young people in care at year end was 1653. 1424 are Citizen Children and 229 are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). 39 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 2018 and the current voluntary dispersal scheme in operation which has young people move to the care of other authorities.

Children in Care by Gender/Ethnicity /Age

By Gender

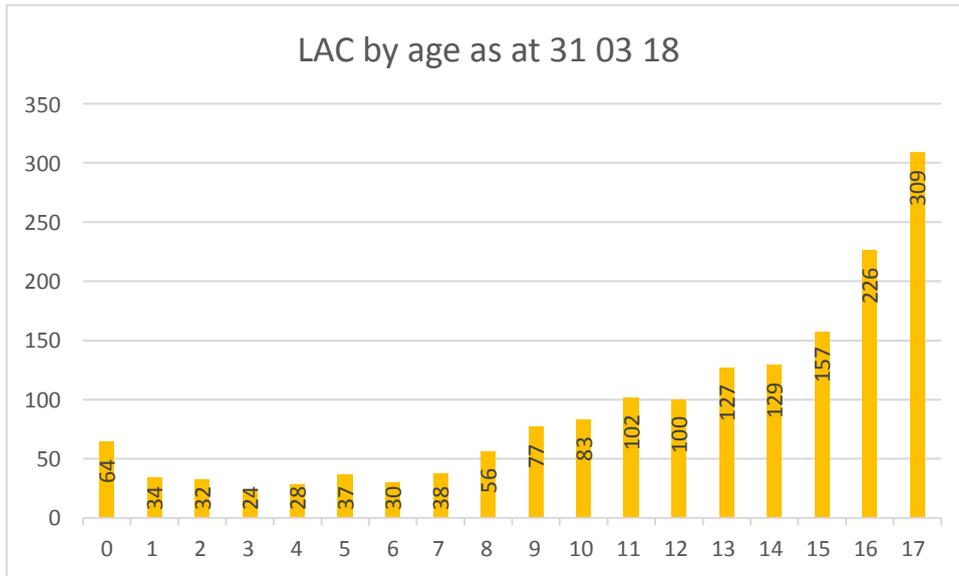
Case holding Teams	Girls	Boys
Kent	636	1,017

By Ethnicity

White	Mixed	Asian	Black	Other
1,308	85	42	93	125

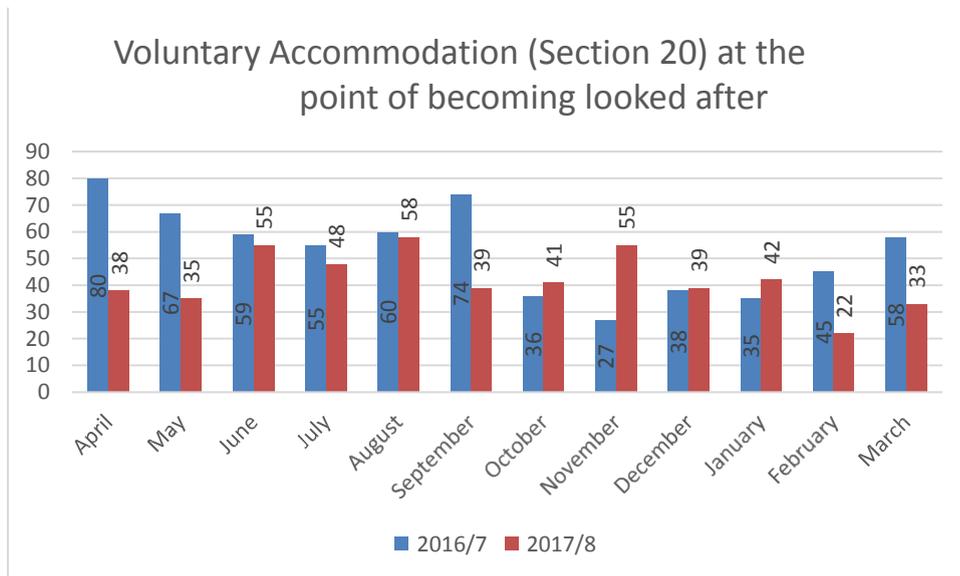
Source: SCS Performance Management/Scheduled reports/Current LAC List _0080

There is a gender disparity with 38% of the CIC population made up of girls/young women and 62% made up of boys/young men.

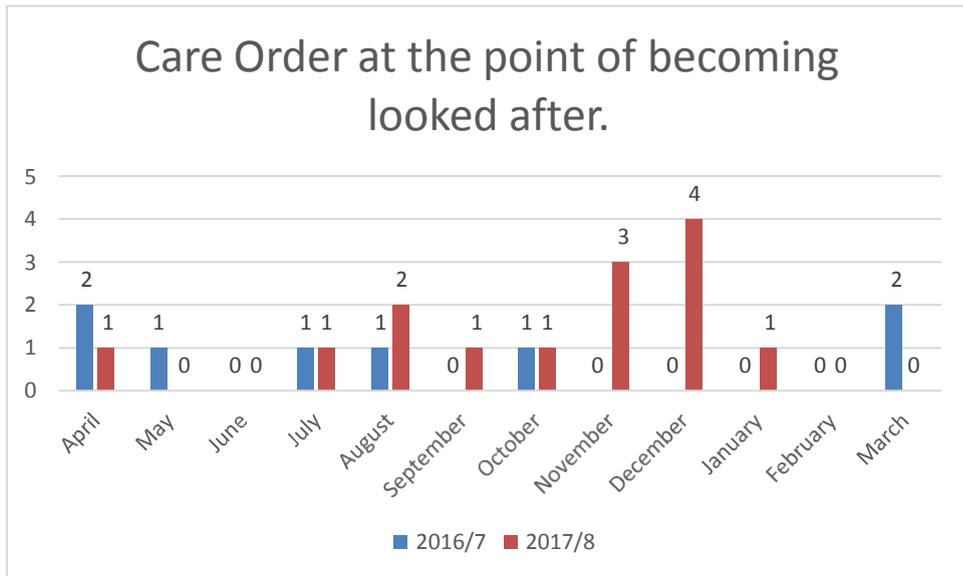


Source: SCS Performance Management/Scheduled reports/Current LAC List _0080

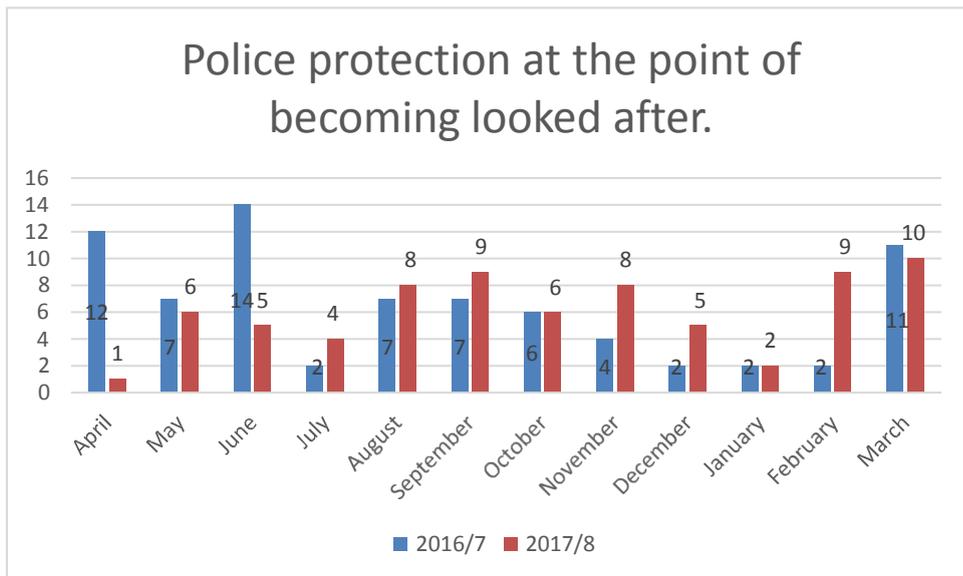
There is a clear increase in accommodations when young people reach age 9 years and includes those children who transfer into specialist residential/educational provision related to disability, and who then become classed as Looked After Children under Section 20 (4) Children Act 1989.



Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC starts in the last 12 months



Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC starts in the last 12 months



Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC starts in the last 12 months

Section 20 (Voluntary accommodation at the point of becoming looked after)

IROs have continued to scrutinise Section 20 arrangements and the plans for permanency for children in care to prevent drift and consider alternative options for the young person's care.

Staying Put

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 supported the planning for Staying Put as an option for young people and their foster carers prior to transition to the 18+ Service and Staying Put as an option is becoming

more prevalent within Kent with 69 Staying Put arrangements in place in 2017/18, compared with 68 in 2016/17 and 49 in 2015/16.

It is important that early discussions are held as part of the Pathway Planning process including the plans by the foster carer, their continued commitment to the young person and understanding of the financial implications and change in role. Eligibility criteria for the continued funding of fostering placements has been raised for young people who are more vocational.

Children Leaving Care

A total of 1057 children/young people left the care system during 2017/2018 compared to 1339 who left the care system during 2016/17. An analysis of children who ceased to be Looked After during 2017/18 indicated:

25.9% (274) returned to the care of their parents compared to 24.2% in 2016/17

3.9% (41) Special Guardianship orders compared to 4% in 2016/17.

9.3% (98) were adopted compared to 5.9% in 2016/17.

29% (307) 18 plus moving on to independent living compared to 31.9% in 2016/17.

25.4% (268) SUAC becoming 18 years of age/dispersal scheme compared with 30.7% in 2016/17.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC ends in the last 12 months

There are a number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were placed in London and now reaching eighteen. Some do not wish to return to Kent having established local networks. The options for suitable local accommodation have been raised with the local authority.

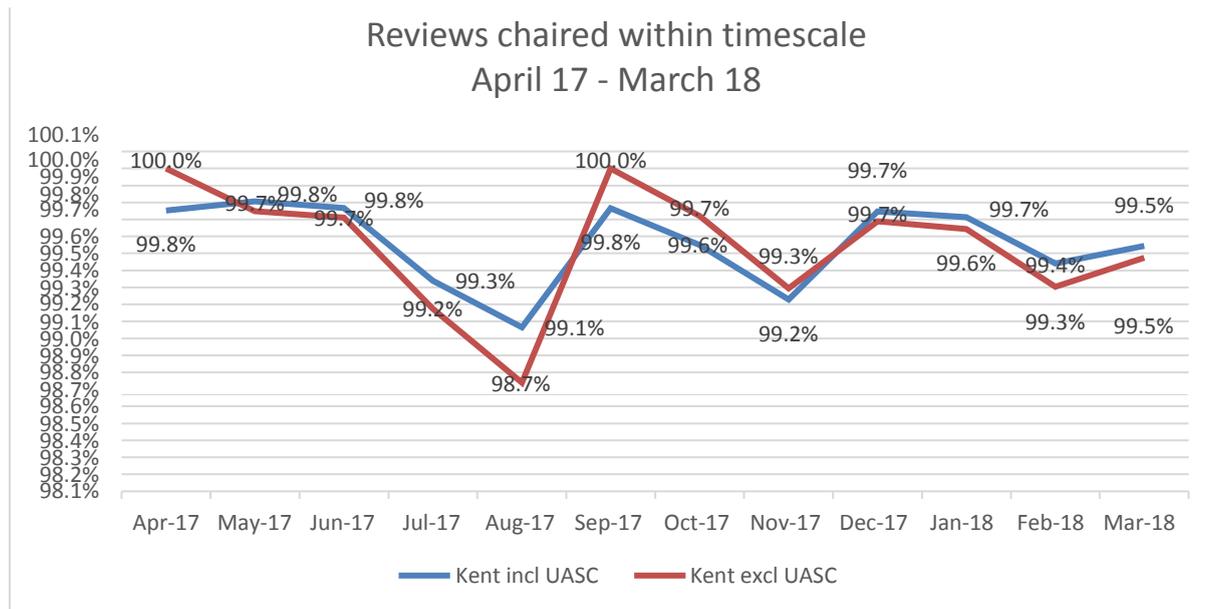
IRO Caseloads

The average IRO caseload over 2017/18 was 63.2 includes the spread of cases across the whole IRO Service including those who hold UASC caseloads. Caseloads have reduced in the latter part of the year primarily due to the number of young people leaving care including through adoption.

IRO visits to children between their reviews increased to 1118 in the 2017/18 year from 1072 in the previous year. These visits provide an opportunity for children and young people to share their views about their review meeting, whether they know their care plan and understand what it means. The children and young people are also given the opportunity to raise any matters of concern about the progress of their care plan with their IRO.

The total number of reviews chaired by IROs in the year April 2017 to March 2018 was 5055 including initial and additional reviews following a placement change.

IRO practice and performance, including findings from feedback surveys

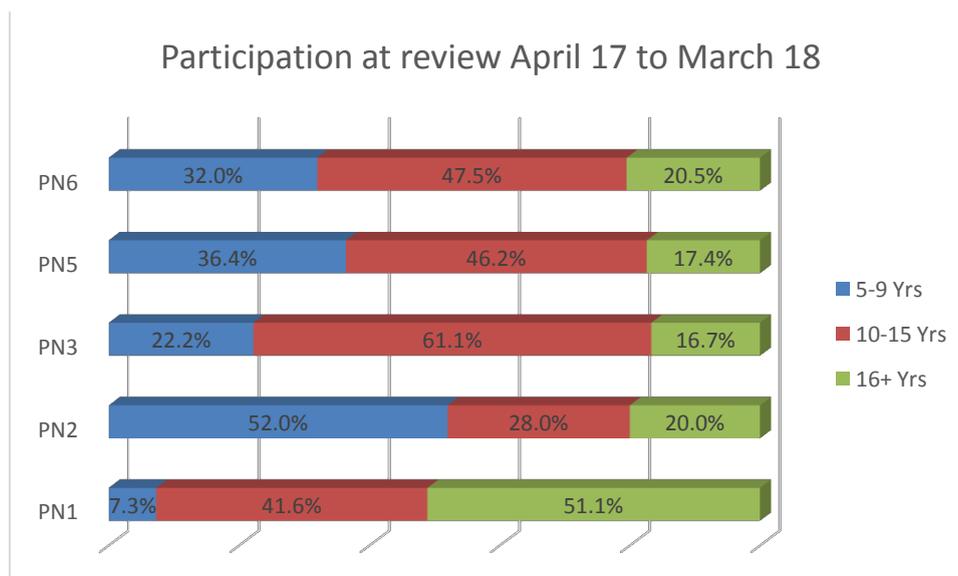


Between April 2017 and March 2018 the IRO Service chaired 99.6% reviews within timescale. The IRO Service has remained committed to ensure timely completion of all review meetings, reflected in table above.

Between April 2017 and March 2018 91.4% of minutes and 84.3% of outcomes were completed within timescale.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC reviews held in the last 12 months

Participation and Consultation:



Key: PN1 Child attended & spoke for self. PN2 Child attended – advocate spoke. PN3 Child attended – gave views non-verbally. PN5 Child not attended advocate briefed with views. PN6 Child not attended views sent.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC reviews held in the last 12 months

people to take control of their lives.

Achieving Permanence

Close collaborative work between the IROs, adoption, fostering and social work teams has been maintained to achieve early permanency for young children and an increase in adoptive placements noted over the year. IROs have established closer links with children's guardians through the IRO lead role including practice discussion meetings to consider obstacles in the way of achieving early permanency for children who become looked after. IROs have actively promoted early permanency planning for children including family group conferencing to consider all care options available to children before children become looked after. For children who are unable to return home IROs are promoting life-long links in liaison with family group conference service.

Life Story Books and Later Life Letters

The need for children who are looked after to have access to life story books and later life letters has been actively promoted by IROs. IROs are continuing to track progress of the completion of life story books and later life letters at and in between review meetings. 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 2017/2018 a total of 62 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.

IRO Dispute Resolution/Escalations

DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESSES 2017/18

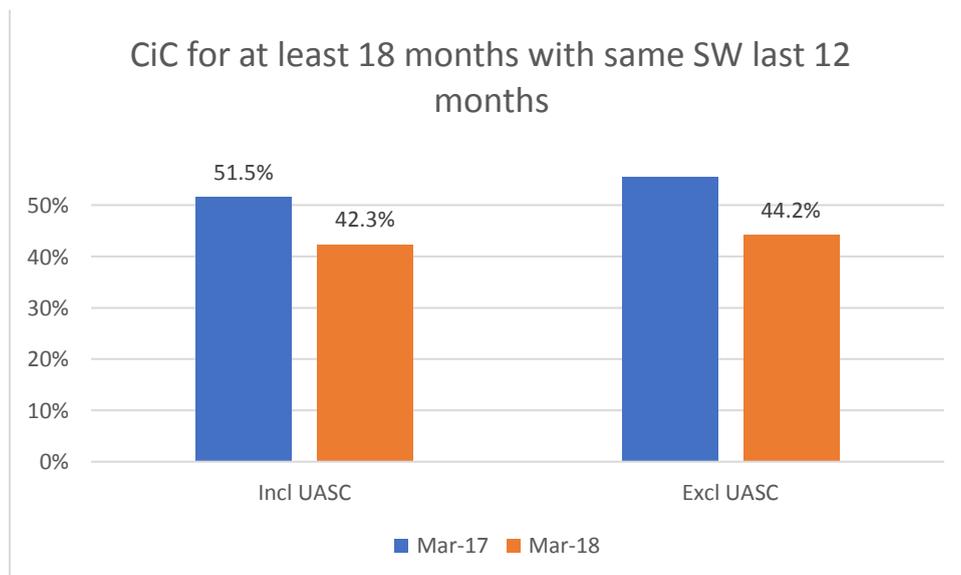
DR Category	DR 1	DR 2	DR 3	Total
Care Plan/Pathway Plan	7.5%	1.3%	1.3%	10.1%
Chronology	1.9%	0.6%	0.6%	3.1%
Communication	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Contact	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Drift	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Education	3.1%	0.6%	0.0%	3.8%
Health	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Life Story Work	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%
No Permanency Planning Meeting	3.1%	1.3%	0.0%	4.4%
Other	15.1%	1.9%	0.6%	17.6%
Permanence	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%
Placement Plan	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Pre-Meeting Report not there	40.3%	3.8%	0.6%	44.7%
Promotion of Interests	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Placement with Parents	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.6%
Safety	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Stable Placement	6.9%	0.6%	0.6%	8.2%
Total	85.5%	10.7%	3.8%	100.0%

There were 159 formal dispute resolutions (DR's) issued in 2017/18, with the majority being resolved 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.

Source: K:\CFE LAC Independent Reviewing Service/Dean/Data for reports/2018/IRO-Reviews-QAs-DR April 17 to Mar 18

Social work performance and practice



Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/ Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/LAC list as at 31/03/18

Impact of Staff Turnover

There has been an increase in the number of children with the same social worker in the last 12 months who have been looked after for over 18 months. Repeated changes of social worker make it difficult for children and young people to establish relationships with someone they feel they can trust and can impact on care planning. Generally, IROs have remained consistent professionals in the children and young peoples' lives who are looked after and especially important when there have also been placement moves.

Late Notifications of Care Entry

A late notification is defined as 3 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 2017/18 there were 145 late notifications, an increase of 70 of the previous year. Notification details have been reinforced with the district teams and their managers and included in the IRO Newsletter.

Source: K:\CFE LAC Independent Reviewing Service/Admin/NW/Initials North West 2018 & K:\CFE LAC Independent Reviewing Service/Admin/SE/Initials South East (NEW) – 2017_2018

Performance

IROs Quality Assurance Grading of CIC Care Plans:

Good or Better – 72.4% - 3096 out of 4279. This is an increase of 2.9% on the 2016/17 period.

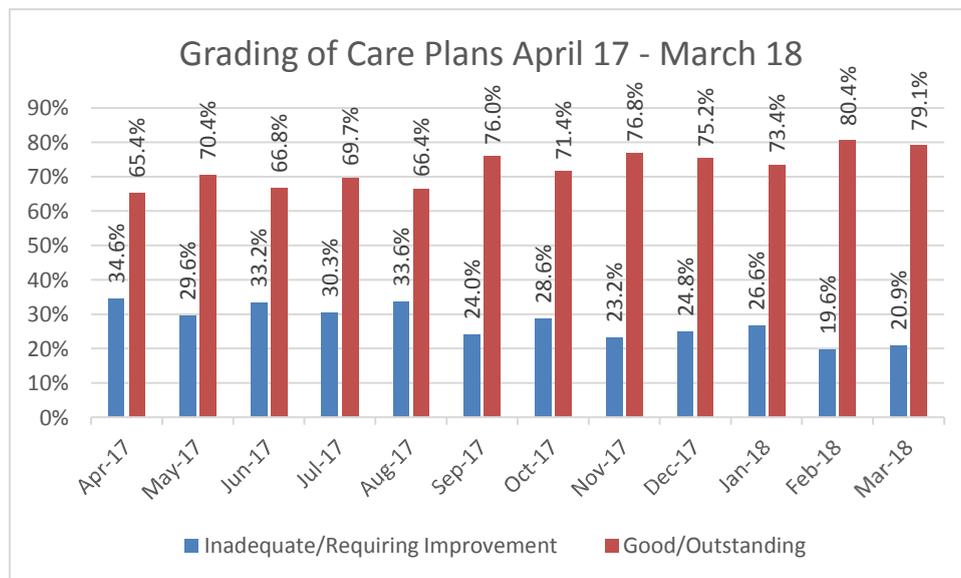
Requiring Improvement to Good- 23.6% - 1008 out of 4279. This is a decrease of 1.7% for the 2016/17 period.

Inadequate- 4.1% - 175 out of 4279. This is a decrease of 1.3% for the 2016/17 period.

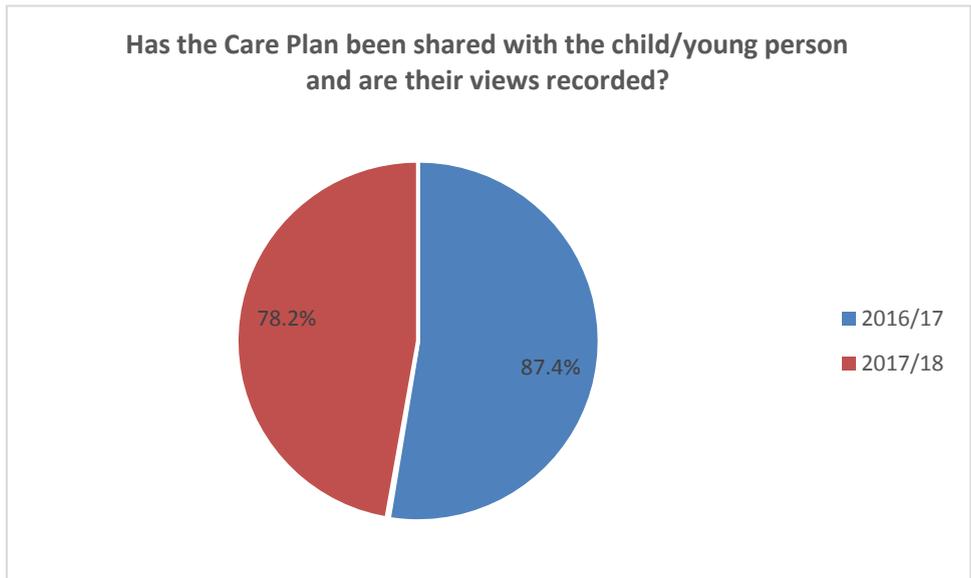
Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data

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 or Better category. Care planning rated as inadequate has decreased. IROs will continue to work closely with social workers to ensure performance in this area continues to increase.



Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data



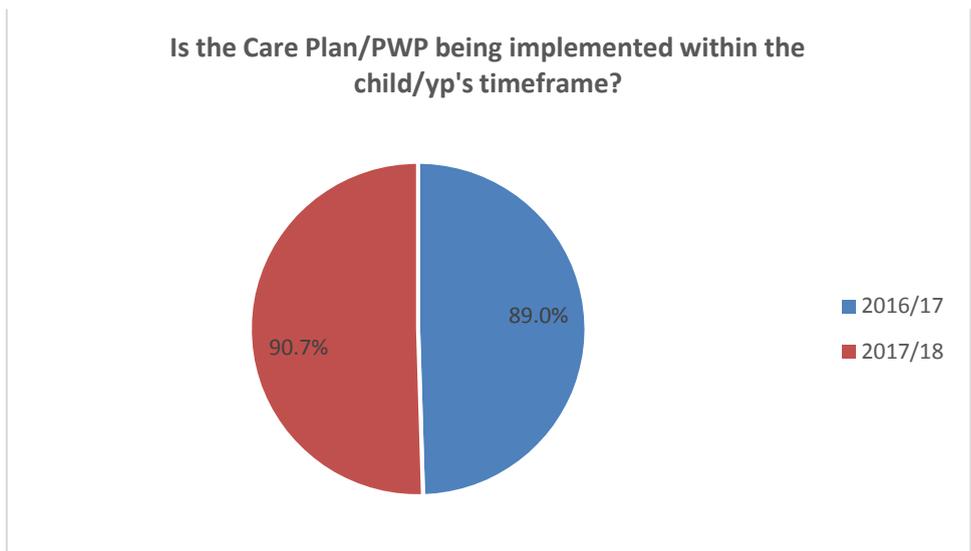
Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data

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

2017/18 saw a decrease of 9.2% of Care Plans which were shared with the child/young person and their views recorded when compared to 2016/17. Social worker performance in this area of practice needs to improve ensuring the voice of the child is heard and recorded, they know what their care plan is and understand what it means for them.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data

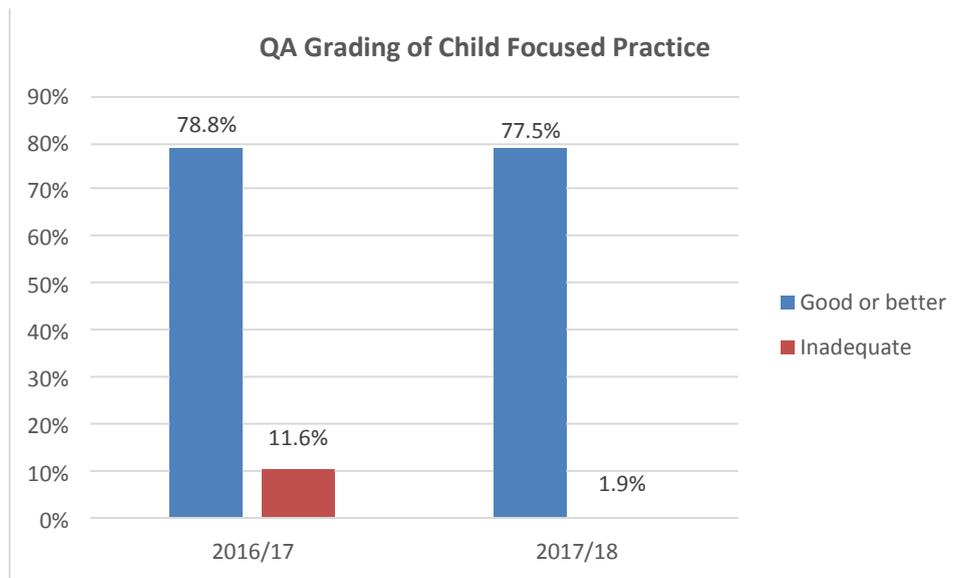
Care Plan / PWP implemented within child/young person's timeframe:



2017/18 saw an increase of 1.7% of Care Plan/PWP being implemented within the child/young person's timeframe when compared to 2016/17.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data

Child Focused Practice:



2017/8 saw a slight decrease of 1.3% of Child Focused Practice being graded as Good or better when compared to 2016/7. However, there was a decrease of inadequate gradings.

Source: SCS Performance Management/Performance reports/Monthly Scorecard/View Child Level Data/IRO QA child level data

Change of Review Dates

Looked after meeting review dates agreed at the previous review are maintained wherever possible. Any change of date requires the views of the child/young person and the agreement of the local area Assistant Director and the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance to ensure that reviews do not change without good reason and held within the required timescales.

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.

***“They put the right things in place
i.e. somewhere to live.”***

***“They made me understand
situations, gave me advice and helped me.”***

“They gave me their time.”

***“Great help and support
throughout my time in care.”***

***“Very supportive with everything
including education and contact.”***

***“They all worked together as a team
to help me. They are people that have
known me for a long time.”***

***“Always supported me through
tough times and nice times.”***

49% 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.

76% of young people who responded felt that they see their social worker at the right frequency but around 11% of young people do not feel that they see enough of their social workers.

86% of young people were aware of the Complaints process. 56% were aware of “Our Children & Young People’s Council” and 49% were aware of the Kent Pledge.

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

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.

Source: K:\CFE LAC Independent Reviewing Service/Dean/Quarterly Reports/2017 Q1 Apr to June/CYP-Consultation-b-2017-2018-Q1 & 2017 Q2 Jul to Sep/ CYP-Consultation-b-2017-2018-Q2 & 2017 Q3 Oct to Dec/ CYP-Consultation-b-2017-2018-Q3 & 2017 Q4 Jan to Mar/ CYP-Consultation-b-2017-2018-Q4

Conclusion:

Over the course of the year, the IRO Service have recruited permanent IROs reducing the number of agency staff. IROs have continued to monitor and scrutinise the care plans for looked after children to ensure the care plans are meeting the identified needs of children and young people. IRO caseloads have reduced over the year which will provide more opportunity for IRO case oversight and scrutiny including the completion of midway review meetings to challenge any delay or drift in the care plan

Some children continue to have complex needs which may require specialist support from health and education services. The IRO Service will continue to use a formal dispute resolution process to highlight any areas of challenge to improve outcomes for children.

Achieving placement stability for children and young people in care will need to remain a priority for the IRO Service. The IRO QA form is being reviewed focusing on key areas of the child's placement and plan for permanence.

Participation of children and young people within their review meetings will remain a key area for the service ensuring their voices heard and that they understand their care plan. Parental involvement at child in care reviews will be promoted where appropriate.

The service will remain aspirational for children in care and ensure they have the best experience whilst being looked after.

Appendix 1

What's working well?

- The total number of reviews chaired by IROs in the year April 2017 to March 2018 was 5055 including initial and additional reviews following a placement change.
- There is evidence of IRO challenge to poor care planning and standards.
- During 2017/2018, there has been a continued 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 improving. It is 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.
- IROs are monitoring the care plans of children and young people who have complex care needs.
- IRO oversight of care plans has increased with midway reviews/IRO oversight now formally recorded and monitored.
- The IRO Service has continued to review and monitor UASC including those who are part of the National Dispersal Scheme.
- Between April 2017 and March 2018, the IRO Service chaired 99.6% reviews within timescale. The IRO Service has remained committed to ensure timely completion of all review meetings.
- 95.3% of children and young people participated in their review meetings.
- Children and young people are consistently encouraged to chair or part -chair their reviews.
- IROs have lead roles in key service areas including participation, exploitation, permanence and lifelong links.

What needs to change?

- Foster carers need to consistently complete and submit foster carer consultation forms 5 days before the review meeting and quality assured by their fostering social worker.
- Encourage parents' participation at the review meeting and completion of consultation forms.
- Pre-meeting reports need to be completed in a timely manner (3 working days before the review) showing the progress of the children based on an assessment of their needs.
- The pre-meeting report needs to reflect the signs of safety model and this approach used consistently by social workers and IROs.
- IROs' minutes should be child centred, shorter and reflect the progress of the child and what needs to happen and by when
- IRO outcomes and minutes should be completed within timescales and distributed in a timely way.
- IROs need to be informed consistently of significant events in the child/family's life by their allocated social worker.
- Early and good communication between the social worker and IRO before the review meeting.
- Working collaboratively with social work teams, fostering service and partners in education and health to strengthen placements and achieve permanence.
- Ensure suitable and timely accommodation for young people leaving care.

- Sustaining consistent oversight and monitoring of care plans, challenging drift of delay in achieving permanence for children and young people.
- Reviewing invitation letters to children and young people, foster carers and parents to encourage attendance to reviews and participation.
- IROs 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.
- Learning from disruption meetings needs to be shared within the district and countywide by the child in care service.
- The service must focus on setting the consistent standards expected across the County and holding areas accountable.
- Knowing the wishes and feelings of our children and young people and helping them to participate fully in their review must remain a priority. The IRO, with the Social Worker, needs to encourage many more young people to actively chair their reviews.
- IRO escalation and challenge needs to be recorded consistently and highlight progress through the stages of escalation until resolved and recorded on Liberi.
- Midway reviews need to be consistently scheduled, recorded on Liberi and reported on by management information.
- Distribution of review minutes need to be consistently circulated in a timely way to participants.
- Placement Plans need to be consistently completed before or within 5 days of placement and updated when children change placement or experience a change of circumstances.
- Individualised safe care plans need to be completed for children and shared with them.
- Early permanency planning meeting need to take place prior to a child becoming looked after.