

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2014 – March 2015

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children (LAC)

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Annual Report must be presented to: Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

1. Purpose of service and legal context

- 1.1 The IRO service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for LAC and for challenging drift and delay. One of the key tasks for IROs is to build relationships with children, young people and the professional and family network to enhance effective planning for positive outcomes.
- 1.2 The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

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

1.3 The NCB research outlines a number of important recommendations and a number of key issues identified as most pertinent to the service in East Sussex in last year's annual report are referenced within this report. The Director of Children's Services, Stuart Gallimore, was exhorted to promote a culture demonstrating his support for these. Alongside the whole service staff management meetings he attended an IRO team meeting and listened to the issues raised by IROs as well as communicating some of the proposals and challenges for Children's Services over the coming years. The most significant challenge is the reduction in funding and the potential impact this will have on the quality and efficacy of intervention in the lives of children and families. The Assistant Director has also attended a team meeting and is concerned to ensure that quality and safety continue to be promoted and maintained during this time of financial pressure, which can be seen in the context of the target to reduce numbers of child protection plans and LAC.

Key messages

Improvement activities for 2014/15 have included:

- Working group to develop and improve outcome focussed plans for LAC
- Improve involvement and participation of children and young people at reviews
- Improve Pathway Plans for Care Leavers so they are effective and understood by young people
- Undertake an analysis of the roles and responsibilities of IROs and plan staffing numbers required to provide the standard of service recommended in the IRO Handbook
- Improve the quality assurance of assessment and plans presented to LAC
- Improve the outcome records for Reviews to include quantitative and qualitative information
- Exploring children's understanding of IROs role and responsibilities
- Develop a caseload weighting system to inform workload management
- Ensure continued awareness of the diversity of the East Sussex population
- Increased communication and visiting to children between reviews
- Increased observation of IROs for learning and reflection

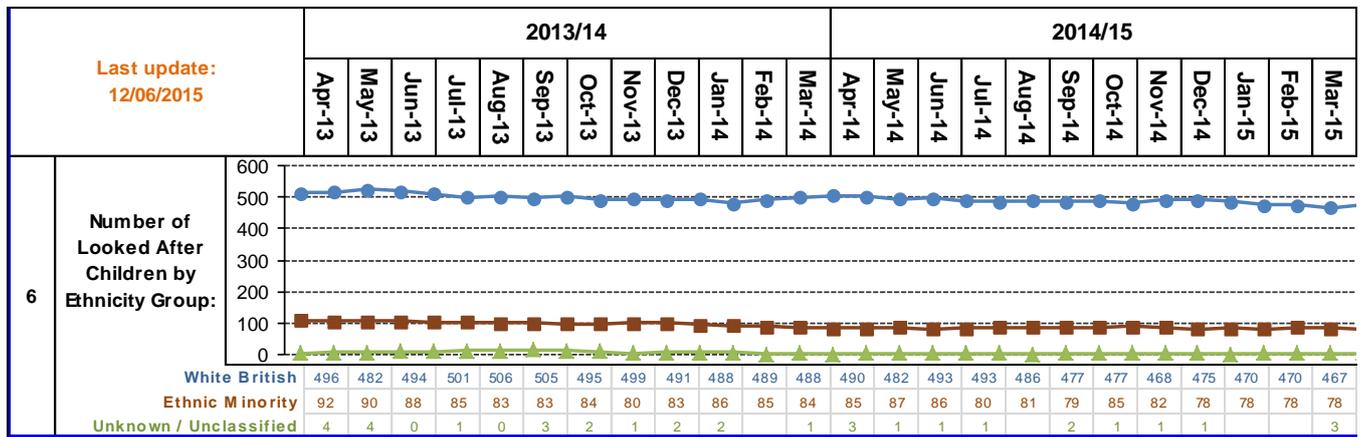
These are explored in greater depth within the report.

Professional Profile of the IRO Service

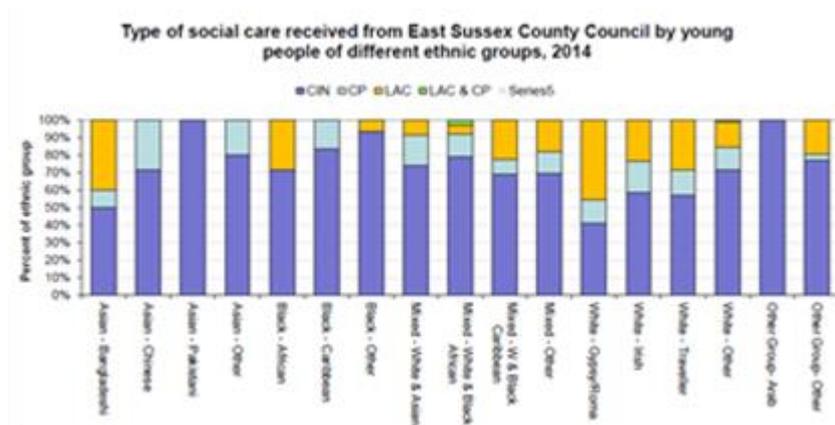
- 1.4 The IRO service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services and is managed by the Head of Safeguarding, Douglas Sinclair, and two operations managers, Sue McGlynn and Alex Sutton who have the leads for the IRO and Child Protection Adviser (CPA) role in Child Protection and LAC respectively. When the unit was created chairing Child Protection Conferences (CPC) and LAC reviews were separate specialisms. These two roles are further separated by the different legislation and regulatory protocols underpinning them. Although in the main the roles are no longer separated the names have stuck and chairs will be referred to within this report as IRO/CPA.
- 1.5 Following the analysis of IRO/CPAs workloads there was agreement to increase the capacity of the unit and two full time IRO/CPAs were recruited in February, 2015. This meant that when the Thrive funding ended in March, 2015 we were able to retain a staff complement of 9.8.
- 1.6 The IRO/CPA team is currently made up of 9.8 fte staff at Practice Manager level (LMG2). This equates to 10 IRO/CPAs, 9 working full time and 1 part time. In order to manage the day to day demands of the service across the year the Unit has at times required the services of two full time agency workers and two part time self-employed workers. At year end the Safeguarding Unit requires the services of one near full time self-employed worker. This arrangement will remain in place until the end of June 2015. This meant that at the end of the year the unit had a staff complement of 10.6, although one IRO was on long term sick leave.
- 1.7 During the year one IRO/CPA returned from maternity leave in February, two IRO/CPAs and the Operations Manager for CP experienced periods of long term sick leave, and a longstanding member of the unit retired in November, having worked for this authority for almost 36 years and as an IRO since 2000. In addition, LAC Reviews and CP Conferences are occasionally chaired by the Safeguarding Operations Managers. IRO/CPAs continue to quality assure all referrals for a CP Conference on a Duty rota basis.
- 1.8 A steady increase in the number of children subject to Child Protection Plans, which had begun in January 2014, continued through Quarter 1 and 2 and presented challenges for the Safeguarding Unit in respect of its chairing and administrative functions. An independent audit undertaken in 2013/14 had already highlighted the high IRO/CPA caseloads, compared with other authorities.
- 1.9 Numbers of child protection plans in East Sussex were significantly higher when compared with other authorities. Following targeted scrutiny during quarter 3 and 4, the numbers of child protection plans began to decrease significantly and the Thrive target was achieved and exceeded. The numbers of Looked After Children have also been steadily decreasing and the Thrive target remains in place for the coming year.

As at 31st March 2015	Thrive target	Actual figures
CP	502	469
LAC	522	548
31st March 2016	Target	
CP	469	
LAC	522	

- 1.10 This reduction in numbers for children subject to Child Protection plans has had a significant impact on IRO/CPA's caseloads since the beginning of the year.
- 1.11 Prompted by the pressures on the service and need to achieve equality in caseloads, a workload management tool was developed and piloted in February 2015. This is due to run for 9 months. Due to the differing nature of LAC Reviewing and CP Conferencing work, it had been difficult to effectively compare the time demands of the two roles. We made some calculations and now have a simple formula in place that promotes parity in workloads.
- 1.12 This tool coupled with the reducing numbers of child protection plans and LAC, has meant that caseloads for IRO/CPAs have reduced to a much more manageable average of 90, compared to between 110 and 120 in the previous year. Although this is still above the recommendations of the IRO Handbook of between 50 and 70, it is more in line with average caseloads nationally of between 50 and 95 (Dec 2013).
- 1.13 We have a mix of male and female IRO/CPAs but not at the same level as the LAC population which is approximately 41% female and 59% male. The ethnicity of the LAC cohort is predominantly white British and around 15% are from ethnic minorities and around 6% have a disability.
- 1.14 As with society at large our LAC have a wide range of needs across a broad spectrum and there is a diverse mix of people within the unit including disability, sexuality and ethnicity. The IRO/CPAs sensitively consider and promote the differing needs of children from ethnic minorities, religious faiths, children with disabilities and children's sexuality and gender identities to ensure that their care plan addresses their specific ethnicity and diversity needs. One of the IROs specialises in working with children with disabilities and continues to undertake specific training to enhance her skills in this area and to share her experience and expertise with the unit as a whole.

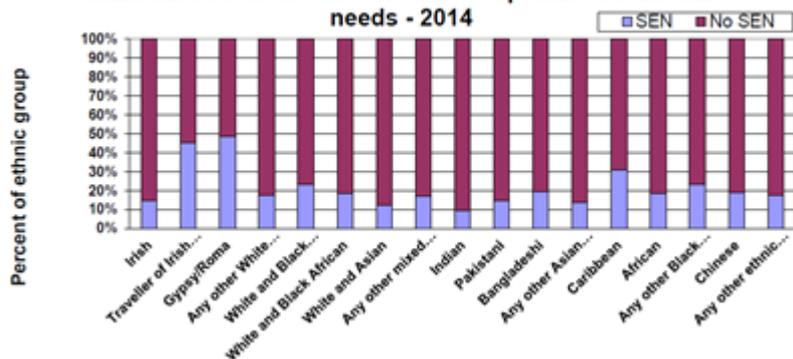


1.15 The graph above shows the numbers of BME children who are Looked After and the trends over the last few years. The following graph provides more detailed information and shows that the Gypsy/Roma and White traveller ethnic groups when put together are the most represented in the Looked after children population in East Sussex. The fact that there is also a larger population of Gypsy/Roma pupils in East Sussex than the national average would suggest a potential link with their representation in the LAC population.



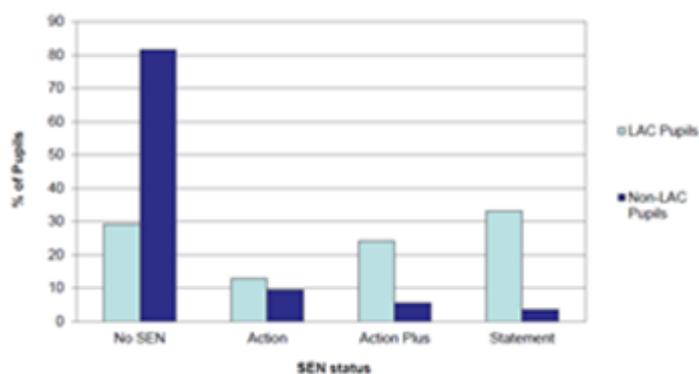
1.16 There are a number of challenges facing services involved with this group of children who are significantly under achieving in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 (KS2) in comparison with other minority ethnic groups in East Sussex. The graph below illustrates that they are identified as having higher levels of special educational needs and figures also show they are more likely to be persistently absent which suggests a potential link with their KS2 achievement.

Pupils from different ethnic groups in East Sussex maintained schools with or without special educational needs - 2014



1.17 These figures above should however also be considered in the context of the graph below that indicates the high level of all LAC receiving SEN provision in comparison with non LAC.

SEN provision of LAC and non LAC pupils in ESCC Schools and Academies 2014



1.18 The percentage of children classed as White in East Sussex is 86.7 compared to 70.2 nationally. Consequently BME LAC are over represented in this area. Ensuring the needs of these children are met and understanding the pressures, difficulties and potential discrimination they face is a priority and a challenge to all those involved especially in the context of a predominantly white culture.

What are we doing about it?

IRO/CPAs continue to engage in specific training to increase their awareness of the diversity of the East Sussex population.

1.19 We have:

- 7.8 IRO/CPAs who chair CP Conferences as well as LAC reviews
- 3 IROs who chair LAC reviews
- IRO/CPAs also see and quality assure all referrals for a conference on a duty basis
- 1 IRO with specialist disability experience and short breaks
- 1 IRO contributes to the Child Sexual Exploitation working group

- 2 IRO/CPAs lead LSCB training

1.20 IRO/CPAs average between 20 - 25 statutory reviews of LAC in any given month, a mix of first and subsequent reviews. First Reviews are all booked by the administrator who has particular responsibility for co-ordinating the LAC process in the service. This system helps to ensure compliance with timescales and continuity.

1.21 The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is also part of the unit and has responsibility for managing allegations against people who work or volunteer with children.

Advocacy Service

Responsibility for the Contract Management of the Advocacy Contract for children is managed by the Participation Officer and is funded by the service. This service is currently provided by NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

Regional and National links

1.22 IROs have continued to meet up with their colleagues in West Sussex and Brighton and Hove as part of a consortium. Training topics included a presentation from NCB about their research and in June, 2015 there is a presentation by Julie Selwyn of her research into the breakdown of adoption placements.

1.23 There is also a regional meeting that is co-chaired by the Operations Manager, Alex Sutton, where representatives from the southeast region, involving 9 different authorities, meet to discuss relevant topics three times a year. It is hoped with increased capacity due to the reduction in numbers of child protection plans and LAC that IRO/CPAs will also be able to attend some of these this year.

1.24 Alex Sutton is also now part of the National group of IRO managers who meet with the Department of Education (DfE) and consider changes to policy and practice, gather relevant statistical information for government and work toward consistent practice across the country. This report, for example, is adapted from a national template. A national website is also being developed for all IROs to access.

2. Quantitative information about the IRO/CPA service

A total of 1232 LAC review meetings for 1518 children were held in the year

(Compared with 1688 in 12/13 and 1530 in 13/14)

A total of 1198 CP Conferences were also held in the year

- 2.1 Between July and November numbers of LAC reduced from the 570s to around 550 where they hovered for the last 5 months of the year ending on the 31.3.15 on 548.
- 2.2 The profile of the children as at the 31.3.15 is as follows:
- 41% female
 - 59% male
 - 15% from ethnic minorities
 - 6% have a disability

Unaccompanied Minors

- 2.3 8 unaccompanied asylum seeking minors became LAC during 2014 - 2015. 6 were detained following channel crossings and 2 were discovered working in/associated with ethnic restaurants. 5 of the young people remained LAC, making up 1% of the LAC cohort. However, not untypically of this group, two young people did not remain in placement and were reported as missing.

Admissions and Discharges

2.4 The trend of higher numbers of children leaving care compared to those entering continues.

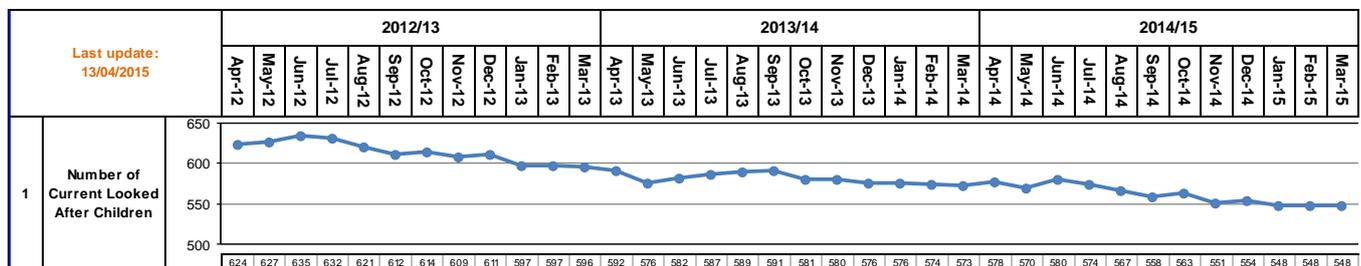
	Nos LAC	discharged	Average per month	New	Average per month
12/13	596	210	17.5	178	14.8
13/14	573	212	17.6	190	15.8
14/15	548	185	15.4	159	13.3

LAC admissions

	2010-11 Pre-Thrive	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
0-12 years	190	181	148	158	125
13+	31	28	24	32	34
Total	221	209	172	190	159

LAC discharges

	2010-11 Pre-Thrive	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
0-12 years	113	111	123	132	121
13+	68	60	74	80	64
Total	181	171	197	212	185



2.5 Annual LAC admissions for 12 and under have reduced by 66% since the beginning of the THRIVE programme (from 190 in 2010-2011 to 125 in 2014-15). The number of care proceedings initiated continues to reduce from 77 in 2013/14 to 67 in 2014/15. Overall LAC admissions in 2014/15 have significantly reduced when compared with 2013/14, a reduction of 16% from 190 in 2013/14 to 159 in 2014/15.

2.6 The number of LAC is 548 (52.2 per 10,000 of the 0-17 population) against a year-end target of 522. Whilst the rate per 10,000 is higher than the THRIVE target it is below the IDACI expected rate (a measure in terms of population profiles and deprivation levels) of 57.4 and the 2014 England average of 60.

Children's Participation

2.7 Encouraging children and young people to take part in their reviews begins at an early age in recognition of the importance of this to his or her self-esteem and self-efficacy and the consequent impact on good outcomes. Ways of engaging children are many, varied and highly individual and we try to measure this in a number of ways.

- 2.8 Some national standard measures for children are reported quarterly to the Department of Education. Our target figure for children’s participation in their review for the year is 95%. This is consistently exceeded and this year was particularly high at 98.2%, compared with 95.4% in 13/14 and 96.9% in 12/13.
- 2.9 Almost half of these children, approximately 49.1% attended their own reviews and spoke for themselves which is an encouraging result. Approximately 40% presented their views via another medium, this includes the consultation booklets. In order to understand more about this cohort we have broken these figures down into teams and age bands. Unsurprisingly almost half the reviews of children with disabilities present their views in this way and almost 60% of all children were aged between 4 -7.

Breakdown by age

N.B. based on 1340 reviews due to new reporting system

Age	Number of PN6s	Number of reviews	Percentage of reviews
4 – 7 years	104	175	59.4%
8 – 11 years	160	321	49.8%
12 – 16 years	125	340	36.8%
16 – 18 years	35	259	13.5%

- 2.10 We want to have a greater understanding of this cohort to explore the different ways the children and young people are communicating their views and whether these can or should be improved. We will begin to analyse this information at the end of every quarter in order to build up a picture over the year.
- 2.11 16 children did not participate at all in their reviews. Nearly half of these were young people who typically were expected to attend but didn’t and were uncontactable. Some have been consistent in avoiding their reviews. One was a child with a disability who chose not to attend as a different IRO/CPA was chairing the review due to the IROs sickness absence. Some are due to the hectic period immediately after a child is accommodated and the social worker did not have time to explore this with the children.
- 2.12 We also seek increased understanding of what children are saying and to what degree this impacts on his or her care plan. Since June 2014 we record the views of children over 4 years who have expressed their wish for changes to their care plans. The most common themes over the last year were Contact at 55% and Placement Issues at 30%.
- 2.13 Some examples of children’s wishes for changes to contact include for example, a young person who was placed separately from her siblings and contact had not happened for many years. When her permanent placement broke down and she became accommodated again contact with her siblings was very important to her to re-establish and this was possible and positive with two but not all so this continues to be something she wants.

- 2.14 A young boy of 8 years was also placed separately to all his siblings including two who were placed at home with his parents. The contact schedule was very high and he struggled emotionally with it, so he did some work with his social worker to come up with a pattern of contact that he could manage involving different combinations of his family at any one time. This meant his contact with individual members of his family was reduced. His parents agreed to this and since this time contact has been more enjoyable for him and continues to be kept under review.
- 2.15 A young girl of 12 years asked for her contact to be stopped with her mother after a distressing incident that frightened her. This was agreed but continues to be kept under review.
- 2.16 IROs also now report on children's knowledge of the advocacy service and approximately 11% of children did not know about advocates in June last year but this dropped to 2% by March 2015. IROs carry information and ensure that children are made aware of the role of the advocate and how to get in touch with them. Children and young people who used advocates averaged approximately 5.5% during this period. Those who expressed a wish to have an advocate averaged approximately 1.3% and those who did not wish to have an advocate averaged 48%. The Independent visitor service is also being built up service for children who don't have meaningful contact with their birth family, with two matches established last year and a further two matched for this year, one of whom is in a residential home.
- 2.17 The work identified in the last report that has been ongoing through last year concluded with the compilation of a pack of resources for staff members to use when working directly with children. This is varied, detailed and full of ideas for engaging children and young people and is hoped to maximise their ability to express their views.

IRO visits

- 2.18 One of the targets this year was to increase the level of visiting and communication with children between reviews and this is the first year that it has been directly recorded. There were 313 independent contacts with 169 children (31% of the LAC cohort) undertaken by IRO/CPAs during the period. This was a mixture of communication methods including text, visits and letters. All IRO/CPAs report positively about how valuable this is and that they would like to do more of this.
- 2.19 The development of the use of digital technology is also being explored to promote participation of children and young people and to increase contact with the IRO/CPA between reviews.

What are we doing about it?

IRO/CPAs will continue to increase their level of communication with children and young people between reviews

3. Qualitative information about the IRO service

Late reviews

3.1 Services for LAC are highly regulated with specific timescales for reviews. The unit work hard to achieve this so that children’s plans can be considered in a timely way. Over the last year the number of late reviews increased from 4 to 6. Although this is a very slight increase it is still a significant decrease since 12/13 and positively reflects the effectiveness of the systems that are in place when co-ordinating these meetings within the rigid timescales.

	No. children reviewed	No. late	% late
12/13	1688	19	1.5%
13/14	1530	4	0.3%
14/15	1518	6	0.4%

The reasons for these were:

- Three were due to oversights within in the unit following multiple changes of arrangements and resulted in miscalculation of dates by a combination of IRO, administrator and social worker.
- One was due to staffing issues in the care leavers team.
- Two were due to the unit not being notified when a young person became looked after.

3.2 All of these incidents have been followed up and are more complex than the figures indicate. For example, one of the young people was 16 and experienced a breakdown of her permanent placement where she was subject to a Special Guardianship Order. She was confused and ambivalent about whether she wanted to be looked after. This led to a delay in establishing her status as a Looked After Child.

What are we doing about it?

Feedback is given to all the teams via the link IRO/CPA system and managers are informed of the issues arising.

3.3 IRO/CPAs, social workers and the LAC administrator work together to avoid these situations and IRO/CPAs undertake a number of 2 part reviews to start the process off within timescales and then complete within 20 days as a series of meetings combining as the review.

3.4 Distribution of completed review outcomes and reports continues to fall out of the required timescale of 5 working days for decisions and 20 for decisions and discussion record. This was a target that we did not meet last year and will be repeated for the coming year.

What are we doing about it?

A monitoring system will accurately assess the level of compliance with timescales over four months to inform strategies to improve performance

New information systems being introduced in December 2015 will assist considerably with this

4. Achievements and impact of IRO service

Problem resolution and escalation

- 4.1 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO/CPA is to raise issues affecting a child's care with the local authority where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's progress. IROs will always discuss issues with the social worker or their manager but if there is no resolution there is a formal process known as a Dispute Resolution Process whereby the issue can be escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the chief executive for resolution.
- 4.2 Over the last year there have been 4 formal challenges, about LAC, to the authority using the Dispute Resolution Procedures.
- 4.3 Two were due to delay in identifying and moving a child/young person to an appropriate placement – these were eventually resolved but one was not resolved in a timely way and both involved escalation to senior managers.
- 4.4 For another young person there was a change in their care plan that was not supported by the IRO and there had not been appropriate consultation. Furthermore a review had not been held to consider these changes. This is very significant in terms of children and young people's rights and entitlements as there should be no change to a child or young person's care plan without a review to consider this and his or her views obtained.
- 4.5 There were practice, assessment and planning issues for a young person who was returned to their mother's care – this was resolved quickly as the identified issues were acknowledged and plans formulated to address them.
- 4.6 Usually these issues are raised formally only after exhaustive attempts have been made to avoid formal procedures and there are many more issues that are resolved this way.

What are we doing about it?

Operations managers for IRO/CPAs and LAC service to discuss the value of establishing a more structured system to monitor these issues before they reach the need for a dispute.

Children's Views about their IRO/CPA and review process

A young person leaving care gave the IRO some flowers and then texted to say "thank you for always being there me for it has meant a lot over the years". He had been in the same placement throughout his time as LAC. He is achieving well at college and the IRO was able to give advice about London schools of music for extra tuition for him and the Virtual School helped with the application- he was accepted by Royal College of Music for Saturday classes at the end of his audition. This is very unusual as there are few places and national and international competition. He had emailed to ask the IRO to visit when his social worker left and he didn't feel heard. The IRO was able to follow up with Practice Manager.

An IRO for a group of 4 siblings placed independently of each other with complex needs and care plans became aware their contact with each other was not being taken forward in line with their court care plan, their wishes and those of their carers. The IRO met with the different carers and the SW's for the children and looked at the strengths and potential areas of risk and a plan was formulated. The siblings had their first direct contact in June which was a success and more direct contact is planned for the future. The IRO's independence and overview of all the children and their competing needs played a pivotal role in achieving this.

- 4.7 During the LAC summer activities in August 2014, representatives from the Children in Care Council (CICC) undertook a survey with LAC attending the activities to find out their experiences of IRO//CPAs. 68 LAC were due to attend the activities and surveys were completed with 45 young people, giving a response rate of 66%.

Key findings:

- Over half didn't know who their IRO/CPA was.
- Of those who knew their IRO/CPA nearly 90% said they hadn't ever contacted their IRO for anything. Over half say they aren't able to contact their IRO/CPA when they need to and over 70% said they didn't have their IRO/CPAs mobile number or email address.
- The most common response in relation to how their IRO/CPA has helped them was that they had listened to them and their wishes.
- Over 60% weren't sure or didn't know the difference between their social worker, IRO/CPA or advocate.
- Over half said they were happy with their IRO/CPA.
- Over 60% said their IRO/CPA had treated them with respect.

4.8 Looking at the equality monitoring, boys were more likely to say they weren't able to contact their IRO/CPA when they needed to, and are less likely to say their IRO/CPA treats them with respect. There were small numbers of disabled children and children from different ethnic groups completing the survey so it is difficult to draw conclusions from this. However, children from minority ethnicities respondents were more likely to say they didn't know who their IRO/CPA was, whereas children with disabilities were more likely to say they did know. But, children with disabilities were more likely to say they weren't able to contact them when they needed to as compared to non-disabled children.

4.9 Feedback from the CICC was that it was the term IRO that was an issue as when the role was explained children and young people remembered their IRO/CPA by name. Acting on this feedback two of us met with a young person on TakeOver day (when LAC who are involved with the CICC shadow and complete work within the service) to formulate an introductions card for all new LAC. This has been completed in draft form and we are currently exploring whether there is someone in the Care Leavers team who is doing a graphics course or who has a special interest in graphics and wants to design this as a project.

4.10 In the meantime IRO/CPAs continue to promote knowledge and understanding of their role and ensuring children and young people have their contact details.

What are we doing about it?

We are creating an introductions card

The survey will be repeated again this summer

Permanence Outcomes

- 4.11 A central function of the IRO role is to ensure timely planning for outcomes for permanence for children and to challenge any drift. IROs liaise closely with Children's Guardians when there are care proceedings and contribute their views to the final care plan.
- 4.12 IRO/CPAs also chair Disruption meetings when adoption placements break down. Sadly this happened to a young child in December last year, having been placed with her prospective adopters 5 months previously. The meeting process examines all aspects of the placement, including the matching process and introductions in order to inform future planning and to identify any learning. It is hoped that a further adoptive placement will be found for this young girl. This process is ongoing so the outcome is not yet known.
- 4.13 A permanence plan should be discussed and agreed at the second review. Of the 131 children in this cohort 64% had an agreed permanence plan in place compared with 58% in 2013/2014. On closer examination some differences were noted in how this was being interpreted by IRO/CPAs. Approximately 2 thirds of the 36% who were identified as not having a permanence plan can be explained by this. Of those remaining there has been ongoing discussion between the IRO/CPA and the managers involved.
- 4.14 New legislation was passed in March regarding the permanence of LAC. This introduces a range of changes and is also an attempt to reduce the regulation of children in permanent foster placements. This includes the ability to reduce visiting by the social worker and the number of meetings for reviews by the IRO. Relevant managers are meeting to discuss the impact of this legislation and develop the policies and procedures.

What are we doing about it?

IRO/CPAs to agree definitions for of permanence plans at 2nd review to achieve consistency in reporting

Children who put themselves at risk

- 4.15 As part of monitoring services for children who are at risk from, for example, child sexual exploitation, IRO/CPAs record whether a child is identified as at risk and whether agencies are working together effectively to reduce that risk. 147 children/young people (26.8% of the cohort) were identified as engaging in high risk behaviours. In 94% of those cases the IRO felt that agencies were working together to address the behaviours. 20 of the cases were from the Children's Disability or Transitions teams. IRO/CPAs follow this up on an individual basis with the relevant teams.

What are we doing about it?

IRO/CPAs are now recording their intervention in between reviews onto the careFirst recording system.

Children and Young People's Care plans

- 4.16 There are a number of strands to the further development and improvement of care plans.

SCIS

- 4.17 A new information system is being introduced in December and has a number of functions that support the ability to print off a simple care plan for children to keep and is a single, outcome focussed plan (as recommended by Ofsted and SEND reforms) that follows children throughout their journey within children's services.

Quality Assurance

- 4.18 IRO/CPAs use the Ofsted performance measures to comment on the quality of Health plans, Personal education plans, review reports/care plans and pathway plans and this information is passed on to the relevant part of the service. This information is valued by the professionals involved and work is being undertaken to improve the quality of reporting so that the criteria used is consistent. These criteria have been agreed with health, education and the Operational manager for the LAC service.

Outcome focussed plans

- 4.19 A small working group has researched and agreed the plan and the wording. As stated earlier this is a single plan that is strengths based and focusses on identifying and agreeing goals and aims and planning how to achieve them. The plan is formulated under the following headings:

What's Working Well? <i>(Strengths)</i>	What are we worried about? <i>(Risks/Needs)</i>	What will it look like if things improve <i>(Goal)</i>	Who does what, by when?
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- 4.20 Specific detail will be added under each heading regarding health, education, placement issues and contact for example. With the advent of the new information system this plan also reduces some of the time consuming administrative tasks performed by the IRO/CPA.

Children's Rights and Entitlements

- 4.21 The All Parliamentary Group for LAC and Care leavers undertook an Inquiry into their rights and entitlements and followed this up one year later. Their research highlighted the need to ensure that children and young people are aware that, for example, they are entitled to have a care plan that says what their needs are now, what will be done to meet those needs and what their plans are for the future.

Monitoring and tracking of Care Plans between LAC Reviews

- 4.22 The National Children's Bureau research (2014), Ofsted thematic review in 2013 and the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection in East Sussex (2014) highlighted the need for IRO/CPAs to be more targeted in their decisions at the reviews, with expectations

about specific timescales for actions. IRO/CPAs should also regularly check the progress of the decisions between reviews. This is an area for improvement in the service and is closely linked with capacity issues. IRO/CPAs frequently see the social workers for the children they review and discuss issues with them and as Ofsted reported ensure progression of the plan but this has not hitherto been recorded on the system consistently outside of the review process.

What are we doing about it?

IRO/CPAs are now recording their intervention in between reviews onto the CareFirst recording system.

A new care plan format will be used with the introduction of the new information system in December.

5. Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

Auditing and observations

- 5.1 An audit tool was developed to evaluate the efficacy of the role of the chair in both LAC Reviews and CP Conferences. During the year there has been one audit of LAC and a thematic audit of children on Child Protection plans who were either coming up to their 3rd review or been on plans for over 18months.
- 5.2 There has also been a programme of observations by the Assistant Director, Head of Safeguarding and Operation Managers of both LAC reviews and CP Conferences.
- 5.3 Individual feedback was given to IRO/CPAs and it would be valuable to have a collective analysis of the information to identify themes of good practice and areas for development

What are we doing about it?

The Operation Managers and Head of Service will undertake audits on a quarterly basis and will also observe at least one meeting chaired by an IRO over the course of the year, this will be either a Looked After Child's review or Child Protection Case Conference.

Consideration to be given to the development of a generic feedback form to inform analysis

Supervision and training

- 5.4 IRO/CPAs receive regular monthly supervision and have enjoyed attending the Action Learning Sets for Practice Managers that are facilitated by two experienced external trainers. Unfortunately these will no longer run in the coming year. There has also been

a considerable number of briefing training for managers on relationship based practice skills. However the issue of specialised training for IROs is on the national agenda and is being explored further as it is recognised as a unique role.

- 5.5 IRO/CPAs work to specific timescales and after each review a further meeting is planned. The longest timescale between reviews is 6 months and this therefore means that an IRO/CPA's diary can be full up to 6 months in advance. Most training is offered with up to three months notice and this makes it very difficult for IRO/CPAs to juggle their diaries to attend training.

What are we doing about it?

Where possible trainers are asked to attend team meetings to give their presentations and there is the opportunity for discussion.

Nationally there is exploration of tailored training for the IRO role.

Key Messages

New research, policies and legislation affecting IROs during 14/15 includes:

Children and Families Act 2014

Looked After Children and Youth Justice - April 2014

Beyond the Adoption Order: challenges, intervention and adoption disruptions - April 2014

Revision to care planning regulations for care leavers - May 2014

Unaccompanied and trafficked Children - July 2014

Promoting the educational achievement of Looked After Children - July 2014

SEND code of practice - July 2014

Out of Authority placement of Looked After Children - July 2014

UEA research outcomes: Care Planning and the Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer October 2014

Updating guidance for planning transitions to adulthood for care leavers – October 2014

National Audit office report on Children in Care – November 2014

The Entitlements Enquiry “one year on” – December 2014

Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children – updating statutory guidance – March 2015

New Care Planning regulations re permanency – March 2015

Research

- 5.6 The University of East Anglia (UEA) research, commissioned by the DfE, was carried out over two years and examined care planning and the role of the IRO. The research findings included:

- IRO's effectiveness was enhanced by being located within the local authority
- Social workers and team managers usually valued the views of IROs, even when they found them challenging. Workers welcomed informal and supportive advice and

monitoring, rather than confrontational approaches. Most IROs thought that they were effective at working in these collaborative ways.

- Local authorities, and ultimately the children and young people in their care, will benefit if there are better systems for well-supported IROs to feed in collective concerns and influence policy development.

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6. Overview and Summary

Key messages

Achievements for 14/15 included:

- Increased communication with children and young people between and before reviews
- Promotion of children's advocacy
- Increased understanding of children's wishes and feelings
- Increased quality assurance feedback activity for locality and LAC teams
- Almost 100% reviews take place on time
- 98.2% participation of children and young people in their reviews
- Caseloads have reduced to approx. 90
- Continued challenge to the operational teams regarding care plans

- 6.1 Looking back over the past year it is very positive to note that IRO/CPAs continue to develop their relationships with children and young people and to promote their views, understanding and engagement with plans that are made for and with them. With the advent of greater accessibility to digital technology, the ways in which IRO/CPAs communicate with children can continue to increase and become more varied. IRO/CPAs continue to talk to children and young people about advocacy, awareness of their rights and entitlements and encourage his or her influence over their care plans. This is further enhanced by the new resources for direct working with children and young people so that their views, wishes and feelings can be shared and explored in a variety of ways that aim to maximise their meaningful engagement. The new introductory card should also enhance this and facilitate greater understanding of all the people involved in their lives.
- 6.2 IRO/CPAs have struggled this year to report on all the quality assurance issues they are asked to consider, partly as a result of the form and partly the additional requirements of the role. The new information system and care plans format should make this easier and consequently result in more consistent statistical information being shared with operational services.
- 6.3 An inescapable pressure over the past year and for the years ahead is the impact of the financial savings that need to be made by the council. Promoting stability for children and young people whose lives have been characterised by instability and abuse so that they can be safe, flourish and realise their potential is a complex challenge to the skills and resources of the service as a whole. During this time of financial pressure, delivering any changes safely for children and young people will draw on the need for teamwork between children, social workers, IRO/CPAs and colleagues in health and

education. The effectiveness of this will rely on good communication and IRO/CPAs raising issues, where necessary, in a timely way.

Key messages

Improvement activities for the year ahead:

- The delivery of outcome focussed care plans
- Enhancing children and young people's understanding of IRO/CPAs roles and responsibilities
- Effective communication with operational teams
- Increased quality assurance feedback activity for locality and LAC teams
- Continued challenge to the operational teams regarding care plans
- Considering implementation of new legislation for permanence