

Report title	Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2018-2019	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services	
Originating service	Safeguarding	
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Report has been considered by	Children in Care Council Children and Young People Management Team	21 August 2019 22 August 2019

Recommendation for decision:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2018–2019.

1.0 Purpose

1.1 Wolverhampton Safeguarding Service has statutory responsibility for overseeing and ratifying the care plans for Children and Young People in Care via the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers. As a result, the service is duty bound to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an annual report that outlines the activity of the service, the impact for children and recommendations for service improvement that will enhance young people's experiences.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 reinforced and strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), enabling more effective independent oversight and scrutiny of the child's case. It has ensured that the child is able to meaningfully participate in planning for their own care and that the care plan that the local authority prepares for them is based on a thorough assessment of the individual child's needs.

2.2 In March 2010 the Government issued statutory guidance, The IRO Handbook, for Local Authorities and IROs on care planning and reviewing arrangements. The IRO Handbook states that the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- monitor the Local Authority's performance of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case;
- ensure any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

2.3 All children and young people in care, including children who are in an adoptive placement prior to an Adoption Order, are covered by the legislation. This applies to all children who are the subject of a care order (under section 31 of the Children Act 1989), or who are voluntarily accommodated for a period of more than 24 hours (section 20 of the Children Act 1989), including those described in this report as in Short Break Care, or who are placed for adoption under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It also covers those who are compulsorily looked after, such as those remanded by the court to local authority accommodation. Since the publication of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in December 2012, it has been the responsibility of the Local Authority to look after all young people who are remanded into custody. These young people require an allocated IRO and reviews in their place of custody.

3.0 Progress

3.1 The annual report provides an outline of activity covering the period 2018-2019 and determines actions to be progressed in 2019-2020.

- 3.2 The IRO service has remained stable, with an experienced and capable staff team. The Ofsted Inspection of 2017 found that 'Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are effective in driving improvements in practice and performance, leading to better outcomes for children looked after. A stable and experienced team of IROs has been given additional resources, to ensure that IROs are able to continue to deliver a high-quality service'.
- 3.3 Caseloads for IROs have been manageable, which has enabled the team to be more effective in driving improvements and to spend more time seeing children.
- 3.4 The report shows that, overall, the service has been effective in terms of the timeliness of reviews and the participation of children in reviews, but there is still room for improvement. This is reflected in the plans for 2019-2020.
- 3.5 There has been improvement in how the team demonstrates effectiveness in parental participation and in escalating concerns when this is needed.
- 3.6 The team has piloted a more child friendly approach to reviews which has helped improve the quality of participation. This is to be rolled out in the coming year.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 The approved budget for 2019-2020 for IROs is £933,000 and is held within the Safeguarding Service.
- 4.2 Any costs associated with the IROs Service will be funded from within the above allocation.
[NM/16092019/M]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The relevant legislation is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.
[TC/11092019/C]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 The Annual report recognises issues of equality for Children who access the safeguarding service and how equality is represented within the service.

7.0 Climate Change and Environmental implications

- 7.1 None arising directly from this report.

8.0 Human resources implications

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9.0 Corporate Landlord implications

9.1 None arising directly from this report.

10.0 Schedule of background papers

10.1 The annual report for 2018 - 2019 is attached. The Corporate Parenting Board has received Annual reports in preceding years.

**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL**

**Independent Reviewing Officer Service
Annual report**

2018 - 2019

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The IRO Handbook (2010) is the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of children and young people in care. It states that the IRO Manager (known as the Safeguarding Manager – Children, in Wolverhampton) should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It should also be available to the public on the Council website.
- 1.2 This report covers the period from April 2018 – March 2019. This is the ninth annual report.
- 1.3 The Safeguarding Service is based at the Priory Green Building in Pendeford, Wolverhampton.
- 1.4 Dawn Williams is the Head of Safeguarding (HOS) and has overall responsibility for the IRO functions and ensures independence from the line management of cases and the allocation of resources within Children and Families Services. Mandy Lee is the Safeguarding Manager-Children. The management of the IRO team involves the provision of supervision to the IROs and responsibility for the team including ensuring that reviews are held on time and that they are correctly administered. The Safeguarding Manager also manages an IRO who undertakes foster home reviews.
- 1.5 As prescribed by the National IRO Managers Group, this report will endeavour to ‘highlight areas of good practice and areas which require improvement, identify emerging themes and trends, describe areas of work which the service has prioritised during the year, and will prioritise in the coming year.’
- 1.7 The IROs have a key role in assuring the quality of the case planning for those children and young people in care in Wolverhampton. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the work undertaken by the IROs in 2018 – 19 and to outline the priorities for the next year.

2.0 Purpose of service and legal context

- 2.1 The arrangements for the statutory reviews of children and young people in care in Wolverhampton, were amended and updated by Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Legislation for the reviewing of cases is supported by detailed guidance which has been taken into account in making arrangements in Wolverhampton. The guidance includes Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the IRO Handbook.
- 2.2 The IRO Handbook states that the statutory duties of the IRO are to:
 - monitor the Local Authority’s performance of their functions in relation to the child’s case;
 - participate in any review of the child’s case;
 - ensure any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;

- 2.3 The IRO service has an important quality assurance role as outlined in the IRO Handbook: 'As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern emerging not just around individual children but also more generally in relation to the collective experience of its looked after children of the services they receive. Where IROs identify more general concerns around the quality of the authority's services to its looked after children, the IRO should immediately alert senior managers about these. Equally important, the IRO should recognise and report on good practice'
- 2.4 All children and young people in care(CAYPIC), including children who are in an adoptive placement prior to an adoption order, are covered by the legislation. This applies to all children who are the subject of a Care Order (under section 31 of the Children Act 1989), or who are voluntarily accommodated for a period of more than 24 hours (section 20 of the Children Act 1989), including those described in this report as in Short Break Care, or who are placed for adoption under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It also covers those who are compulsorily looked after such as those remanded by the court to local authority accommodation. Since the publication of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in December 2012, it has been the responsibility of the Local Authority to look after all young people who are remanded into custody. These young people now require an allocated IRO and reviews in their place of custody.

3.0 Quantitative information about the service

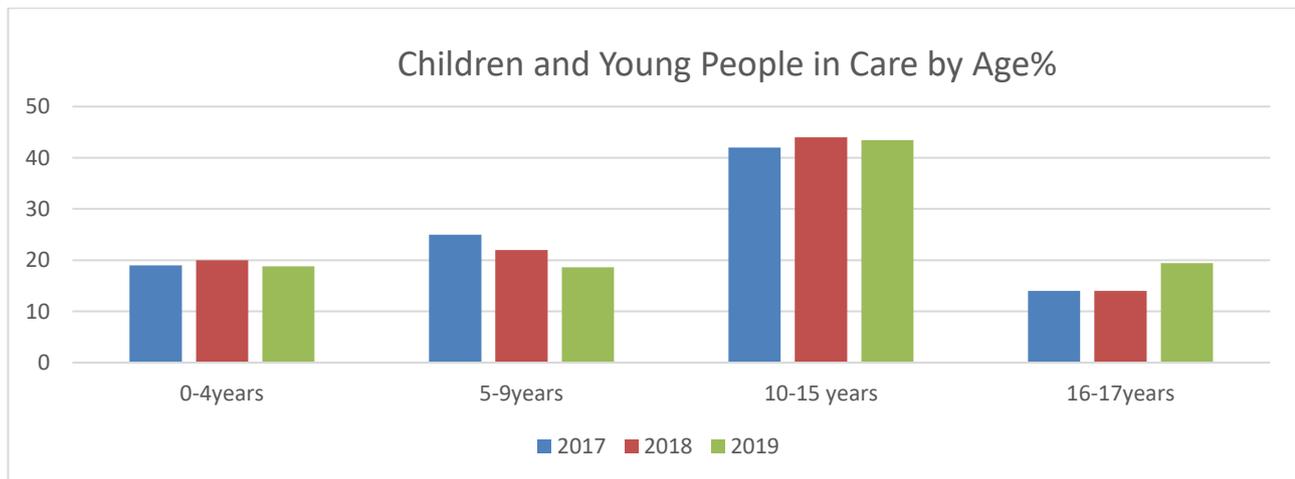
- 3.1 The Service has an establishment of 11 FTE IRO's. The team has been fully staffed since January 2018. The team has no temporary or agency workers. The Safeguarding Manager-Children is supported by a 0.5 Principal IRO.
- 3.2 The team has remained stable and the Team is increasingly experienced; some of whom have worked for Wolverhampton for many years, meaning some IROs have been consistently involved with the same young people for 10 years or more. The majority of the team have a mixed caseload of CAYPIC and Child Protection. Three of the permanent IROs only hold CAYPIC cases. The makeup of caseloads is regularly reviewed.
- 3.3 The IRO Handbook recommends IRO caseloads of 50 – 70 children per IRO. The average caseload including children and young people in care, children on a CP plan, and those receiving care through short breaks (S20) on 31 March 2019 was 87 children. This compares to 92 at March 2018. Caseloads have slightly reduced, in line with the general reduction in the numbers of children and young people in care.
- 3.4 The team is made up of 3 men and 10 women. The team is made up of IROs from different ethnic backgrounds. (3 black/Asian, 1 black Afro/Caribbean/mixed heritage and 9 white British.) This adequately reflects the children we are serving. The looked after children of Wolverhampton were from the following backgrounds on 31.3.19: 59.5% white British, 4.6%

Asian, 9.9% black/British/African/Caribbean, 11.6% mixed white/blackAfrican/Caribbean, 2.2% mixed white/Asian, 9.9% other.

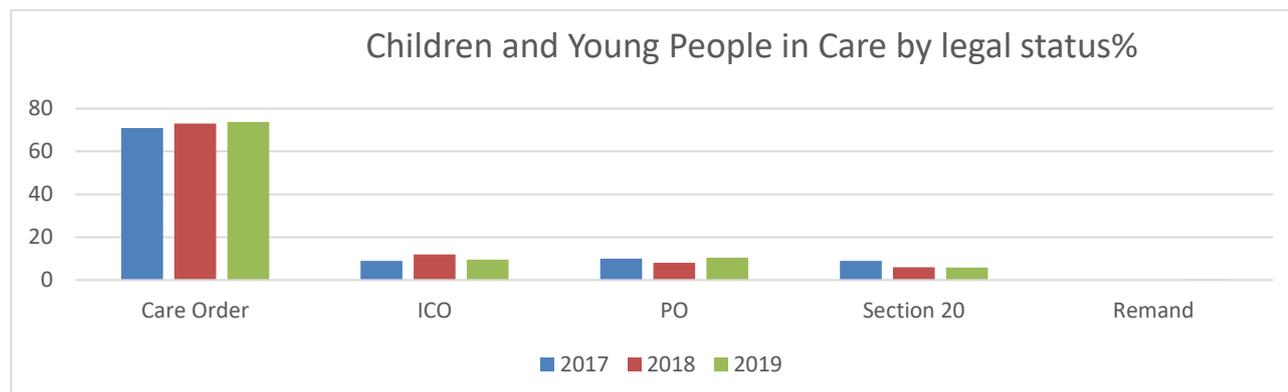
- 3.5 The service also has 1 Independent Foster Home Reviewing Officer who is responsible for chairing Foster Home reviews.

4.0 Quantative information regarding the Children and Young People in Care population.

- 4.1 There were 624 children and young people in care at 31.3.19, compared to 648 in 2018. Of these 276/44.2% were female (287/44% in 2018) and 348/55.8% were male (361/56% in 2018). The charts below show the percentage of children in care by age and legal status. The data shows a slight decrease in the numbers of young children in care, whilst the proportion of older children has increased. This may be the result of effective plans to move young children on to permanence, whilst there is remaining legacy of older young people who will not leave care until adulthood.



- 4.2 In relation to legal status, the chart below shows the percentage of all children remaining subject to Care Orders has increased slightly. The proportion currently subject to care proceedings, subject to Interim Care Orders has slightly decreased, which reflects the reduction in overall children in Care and the percentage subject to section 20 has fallen slightly. This is in line with case law which has provided greater clarity about the appropriate use of section 20. The number subject to Placement Orders has increased slightly, suggesting more children are achieving permanence through adoption. The figures for remand Reviews are low, and accounts for a small percentage (0.3%) the Children in Care population.



5.0 Qualitative information about the IRO service

5.1 Under the provisions of the *Review of Children's Cases Regulations (1991)*³ local authorities are required to review the case of any child or young person who is in care or provided with accommodation as follows:

- First review must take place within 28 days of the date upon which the child begins to be looked after or provided with accommodation;
- Second review must be carried out no later than 3 months after the first review; and
- Subsequent reviews shall be carried out not more than 6 months after the date of the previous review.

5.2 The date of the next review should be brought forward:

- If there is an unplanned change of placement or other substantial changes to the care plan.
- If the IRO has specific concerns about a child and directs that the review be brought forward.
- Any request from the child or parent(s) for a review to be brought forward should be given serious consideration.

5.3 90% of all children and young people in care in 2018/19 were reviewed in line with statutory timescales (92% in 2017/18). This shows a slight decrease of performance from the previous year however continues to represent good performance.

5.4 An IRO is allocated to all children and young people in care within 24 hours of the Safeguarding Service being informed of that child's entry into care. Written information about the IRO and the reviewing service is shared with the child prior to their first review, in the form of child friendly postcard type information booklets. Further work is being undertaken to provide children with more choices about how they communicate with their IRO, including consideration of an electronic system similar to the Mind of My Own website. New consultation leaflets are being designed, with versions for younger and older children, following consultation with the Children in Care Council. Plans are also underway to develop consultation tools that would be more suitable for children with disabilities. Children can make direct contact with their IRO by calling, by text or by email.

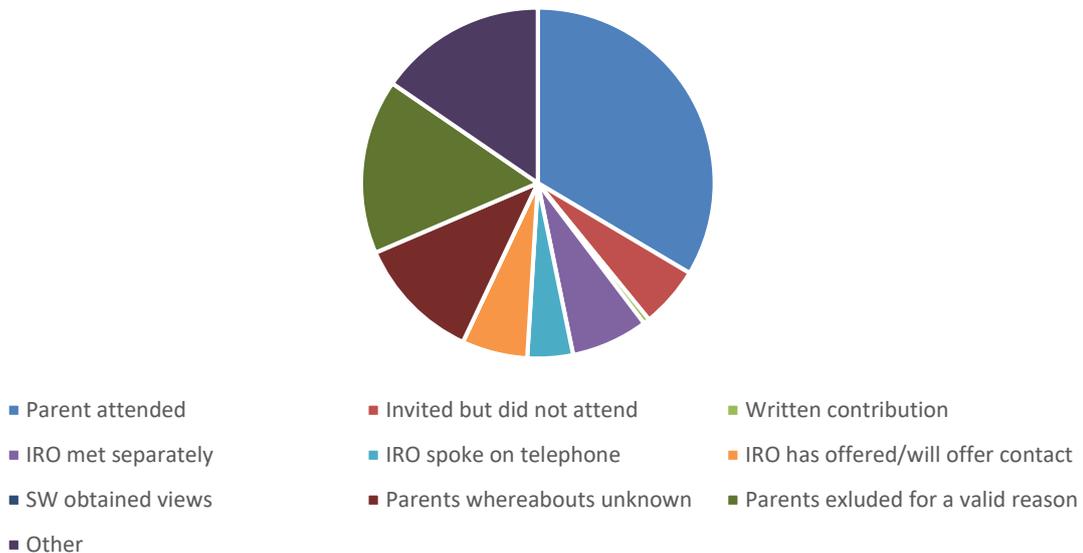
- 5.5 The majority of sibling groups, whether placed together or not, are allocated to the same IRO. This ensures consistency of information exchange, oversight of care planning and decision-making, including sibling contact, and is particularly of benefit when children have different social workers.
- 5.6 The involvement of children in their own reviews is regarded as an essential part of the process. *'A key task for the IRO will be to ensure that the review processes, and particularly review meetings, remain child and family centred'* (IRO Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002.) The IRO has an important role in ensuring that the child:
- can make a meaningful contribution to their review;
 - speaks for themselves if they are able and willing to do so; and where this is not possible that their views are conveyed by someone else on their behalf or by an appropriate medium; and
 - has been given the opportunity to make a written contribution to the meeting, particularly if they have chosen not to attend or are unable to attend for some other reason.
- 5.7 The recorded achievement in this area of activity is also a measure of local authority performance, although no longer a national performance indicator. At 31 March 2019, 94% of children participated in their reviews. This is a slight decrease from 2018 (95%). There will always be a proportion of children who do not want to participate or for a variety of reasons, do not make themselves available to the IRO and do not take up other forms of consultation. IROs make efforts to offer children a number of ways of participating, which has been a focus over the last year in line with the Review Project which was piloted during November 2018.
- 5.8 Children aged 7 and over receive a written invitation to their review meeting along with the consultation document inviting their contribution to the review. The IRO is required to speak with the child alone prior to the first review and before every subsequent review (regulation 36). The requirement for direct contact with the child extends to observation of babies and younger children.
- 5.9 The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002, states that *'The IRO has an important role in ensuring that all parties to the review are able to make an effective contribution.'* In order to assist in this aim, age appropriate consultation papers continue to be sent to the child/young person, and carers, prior to a review. The child's consultation paper provides the IRO with an overview of the child's feelings about the various aspects of their care and the services he/she is receiving, and assists the IRO in ensuring the child's voice is heard. Work has been undertaken to introduce giving children choices about how to prepare and participate in their Reviews and this approach has been piloted with a selected number of children. The feedback from this pilot was encouraging; when children chose to lead their Review or use an activity to enhance their participation, this was successful.

Case example, Children's Participation:

The following child's Review was chosen as part of the Pilot for a Review Project to increase meaningful participation of children and ensure they are given choices about how their meeting will work. Child M is aged 9 and has a Care Plan of Long-term Fostering. Child M's Review was selected and the Social Worker visited the child to discuss options for how the Review should be undertaken. Child M chose to use a consultation tool, a type of Review board game, to shape the Review discussion. Child M also chose who should attend, where the Review was held (at her home) and prepared in advance what she wanted to discuss using the Consultation Booklet. The Social Worker and IRO discussed Child M's choices in advance and the Review was arranged according to her wishes. The IRO reported that Child M participated well, using the game as a way of getting her views across. The IRO felt that Child M seemed more confident and empowered to ask about the things that were important to her, in this Review asking if she could have a pet to look after at home. The Social Worker also fed back that the Review was more child focused and had a celebratory feel, drawing attention to the child's achievements. The child also took ownership of her own Review; being in control of who attended and welcomed them by making cupcakes for the Review (with the help of her Foster Carer). The outcome was that the child's views were given due consideration, she felt listened to and knows that her opinions are taken seriously.

- 5.10 IROs continue to work hard to involve parents in their children's Reviews, albeit that sometimes this means consultations take place by telephone discussion or separate meetings. The table below shows a break down of how parents have participated in their children's Reviews. In the majority of cases, the parent attended the Review, but participation by some means has been achieved in 72% of all reviews, although in some instances parents have chosen not to take up the offer of attending, speaking or meeting with the IRO. There appears to be low usage of parents contributing by writing and this may be an area of work; to re-introduce the parental consultation leaflet and to ensure Social Workers and IROs are providing this option of participation to parents.

Participation of Parents in Reviews - between April 2018-March 2019



Case example, Parental Participation:

Child P has been the subject of a Care Order since February 2015 and her mother attended her Review for the first time this year. There had been a number of barriers to Child P's mother engaging in the Review process; having felt unfairly treated during the Care Proceedings she had not wished to remain in contact with the Local Authority and will not even disclose her address. The mother's mistrust of the system was further amplified following an unsuccessful application to have the Care Order discharged and the children returned to her care. It is also likely that the parent has undiagnosed Mental Health difficulties which affects her ability to communicate effectively with professionals.

At the previous Review last autumn, Child P asked if her mother could come to the next one, so the IRO found a way of inviting her, and it was held at the Office. The parent met with the IRO before the meeting started and she participated really well in the Review. Child P was really pleased to have her mother there. The parent got a hug off Child P's Foster Carer, and also a previous social worker who happened to be in the building. It was great for Child P to see that all the adults in her life were on cordial terms. The parent had the confidence to call the IRO a couple of weeks later to talk about a minor concern she had following a contact session. Child P's mother seems to have finally accepted that her girls are all doing well in Care, and she can enjoy their successes and her participation in Reviews is a good way of her staying informed about their progress.

- 5.11 One child was reviewed by an IRO under the Short Break Statutory Guidance (Section 20(4) of the Children Act 1989) in 2018/19 (1 in 2017-2018).
- 5.12 10% of the Reviews during 2018/2019 were for children who are subject to Placement Orders and awaiting Adoption. Some of those children are still residing with Foster Carers where an adoptive family has not yet been identified. Others will already be placed with their Prospective Adopters, awaiting further proceedings to obtain an Adoption Order and complete the Adoption process, where the child will cease to be In Care. Post-placement Adoption Reviews have a different feel, but there are clear statutory duties for the IRO to monitor the transition for the child and ensuring the Local Authority's support to the child is in place. A priority for the service was to improve the consultation documents for Prospective Adopters and children, where they are of an age to express their views, although generally children placed for adoption are much younger. A new consultation form is now in place to support Prospective Adopters to prepare for the Review, although often consultation is achieved by discussion with the IRO ahead of the Review.

Case Example, Adoption Review:

The IRO had been involved with Child H, aged 1 and Child J, aged 5 for some considerable time, having also been the IRO for their older siblings. As a plan of adoption was agreed for the children, the IRO played a significant role in sharing information between necessary parties and ensuring the identity needs of the children were met. The IRO had an established relationship with the children's mother and was able to speak to her and ask about the reasons behind choosing the children's names and was also instrumental in ensuring the Adopters and Birth Parent had the opportunity to meet each other, which will be of great importance to the children as they get older. The IRO attended a meeting with the Prospective Adopters and shared information about the children's care journey and history when they lived at home. The IRO met with Child J before she moved to her adoptive family and the Child shared a photo of some of her siblings and discussed this. The IRO noticed that she had not mentioned her eldest sister, who she had not met. The IRO was able to make sure the children had the opportunity to meet their eldest sister before they were adopted and directed that ongoing post adoption contact by letter is arranged and that information is recorded in her Life Story Book about all of their siblings. When the IRO met with Child J to consult with her for the first Review after she had been placed for adoption, the child voluntarily shared information about who was in her family, and mentioned her oldest sister – proving that she now had accurate information about her birth family and these memories could be kept for her future.

- 5.13 The IRO service have received 18 compliments between April 2018-March 2019 from a variety of sources including children, Social Workers, Foster Carers and other professionals. Children have made comments that acknowledge the value of the longevity in the IRO relationship and appreciation for IROs sorting out problems they may have. One child who

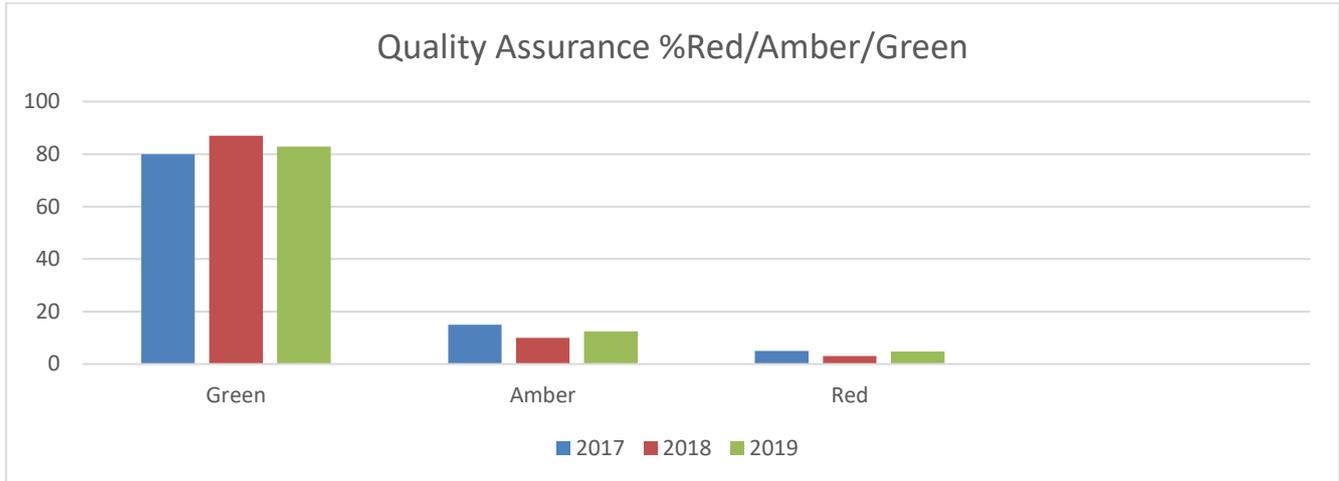
was turing 18 said; "I am going to miss my IRO. He used to fix everything for me and did lots for me". Another child wrote to their IRO; "Thank you. I know I can always rely on you, you are a great IRO and you don't mess about which is a good skill to have and that's why I like you, because you always try and help me". Another child wrote to their IRO after returning home; "Thank you for helping me return to my Mom and Dad. I really really appreciate everything you have done for me and my family. It means the world to me that I am back where I belong and I will never forget how you helped me get there". Comments from other professionals and Foster Carers highlight the skill of the IROs in balancing being child focused in Chairing Reviews but also challenging delay in Care Planning in an authoritative manner. One Social Worker commented that; "the IRO was able to pace the Review around the needs of the child and the child felt comfortable to discuss all areas of her life" and a Foster Carer noted that "The IRO is really good in the way she communicates with the children, appears caring, is not intimidating, and does as she promises". One Foster Carer made a general comment that; "The IROs are brilliant, everyone I have worked with have been calm and in control of the Review. They've explained everything really well to the parents and everybody involved. They all have the children's best interests at the forefront during the meetings." There was one complaint about the service and this related to the conduct of a Child Protection Conference.

6.0 Conduct of the organisation in relation to the review

- 6.1 The IROs quality assure each child's case at every review which include the following:
- Quality of preparation for review by social worker, including report preparation, preparation of the child/young person and sign off by manager,
 - Quality of care planning, including how up to date the care plan is,
 - Quality of contribution by the child/ young person and other attendees, to review,

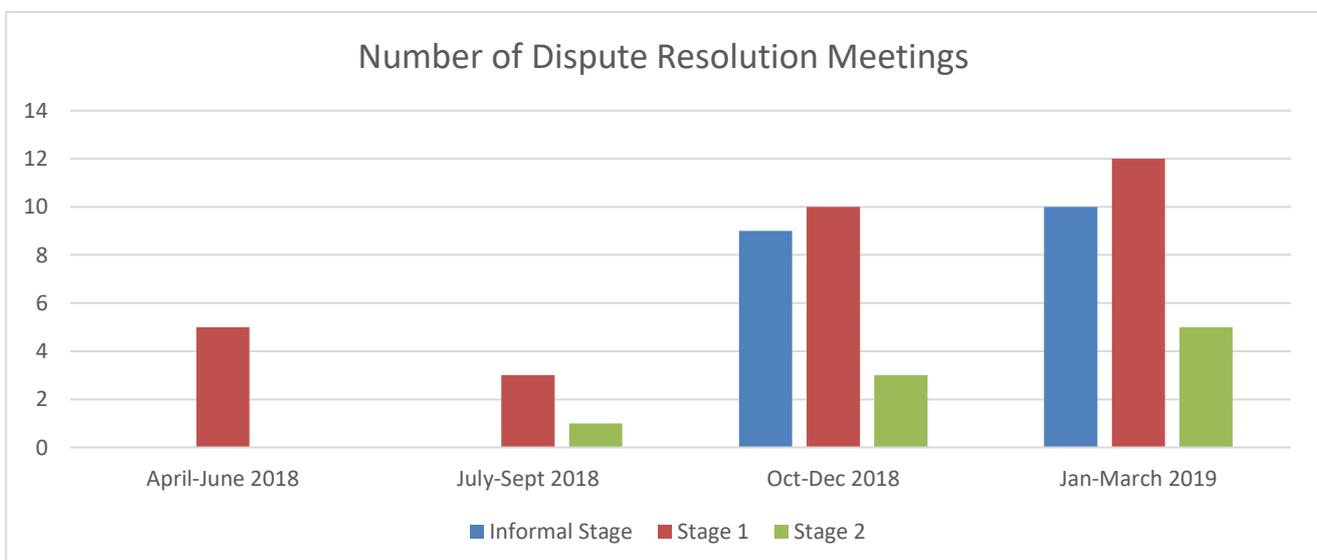
Detailed reports are now available on the findings of this quality assurance work, which means the service is now able to identify trends and patterns of practice and bring them to the attention of Children's Social Care. The Safeguarding Manager-Children provides a report to the Children and Young People's Management Team quarterly, highlighting areas of good practice and areas for concern and action.

- 6.2 The RAG(Red/Amber/Green) quality rating system, in respect of Reviews, including the progress of plans, preparation for the meeting and the quality of reports has been used consistently in Wolverhampton since August 2014. In 2018-19, RAG ratings were issued in relation to 1618 Reviews (1580 in 2017-18). The chart below compares ratings over the last 3 years. This shows an increase in Amber and Red RAGs being issued, suggesting more concerns around drift in work with children and an increase in serious concerns around Care Planning.



6.3 A notification is automatically sent to the responsible Social Workers and Team Manager, and ensures they are alerted to the status (red, amber or green) of the child’s plan. It identifies any concerns the IRO has about a child or their care plan, and should be a clear and valuable part of the quality assurance of the Local Authority’s work which is provided by the IRO. There is an expectation that the responsible Children’s Team Manager responds to the IRO in all red and amber cases. Where the IRO feels their concern is not being addressed, they would commence the agreed dispute resolution process.

6.4 During 2018-19 a number of formal dispute resolution protocols were implemented in Wolverhampton. This protocol commences when the IRO identifies serious concerns about drift or delay in a child’s case and is unable to resolve the difficulty with the social worker or their manager. Improved data analysis has allowed the ability to capture numbers of informal stage Dispute Resolutions since October 2018, which explains the vast increase in the last 2 quarters. The table below shows the breakdown of the use of dispute resolution and demonstrates that IROs are exerting effective challenge of the Local Authority regarding care planning for children where there is serious concern or delay and that escalation continues to the next stage where matters are not resolved.



Case example, Formal Stage 1 Dispute Resolution:

Child K is aged 17 and had entered Care when he was aged 15. He had not settled in Foster Care or Residential Settings and eventually refused to stay in the placement identified for him and started staying with his Grandmother. This was not agreed as a placement by the Local Authority and was unsuitable for him as a long-term arrangement because of his Grandmother's housing situation and poor health. The IRO became concerned that there had not been a swift response by the Local Authority to assess the situation and find alternative accommodation for Child K and that he was at risk because his parents continued to spend time at the Grandmother's address. The IRO had a number of discussions with the Social Worker and Team Manager but there was still delay in resolving the issue. A Stage 1 Formal Dispute Resolution meeting was held with the Team Manager and Service Manager and actions were agreed; including increasing the visits to Child K to build a relationship so he would trust his Social Worker, and also to assess what accommodation needs would best suit him. There was also a change of allocated Social Worker who managed to engage better with Child K by helping him sort out practical matters such as getting new clothes and a bus pass. The assessment concluded that Child K was ready to live in supported accommodation; his wishes to find accommodation near to his Grandmother were respected. Child K is now settled in his own flat. The IRO was pleased to see that he has taken great pride in furnishing his own flat and is doing very well. Child K continues to live near his family who can offer some support, but he is feeling more settled than he had been when in care placements.

- 6.5 The IROs complete a Recognition of Excellent or Good Practice notification when there is evidence of high quality practice. 35 notifications were awarded in 2018-19 (a slight decrease from 40 in 2017-18). The IROs have recognised the positive impact that recognition of good work has on teams, and therefore actively seeks to improve recognition.
- 6.6 The IRO service promotes good practice across Children's Service and has implemented a training programme available to all Social Work staff. Sessions are delivered regarding best practice for Social Workers in relation to Child Protection Conferences and Child and Young Person in Care Reviews. These sessions are offered on a quarterly basis and delivered jointly with Advanced Practitioners; the training has been well received particularly by newly qualified Social Workers. Training is also now being offered by the Team to partner agencies in relation to their contribution to Child Protection Conferences.
- 6.7 Each IRO is linked to a Social Work Team; this works as a mechanism for disseminating messages around expectations of practice and encouraging good practice in line with the service priorities and quality assurance standards; most recently around participation of children and parents in Reviews. It is expected that IROs occasionally attend their link Team Meetings and regularly hold discussions with the Team Managers to increase communication between the two services.

6.8 Wolverhampton IRO service has been hosting regional IRO Practice Share meetings on a quarterly basis with attendance from a number of West Midlands Local Authorities. These meetings have been welcomed and has provided good opportunities for IROs to network and share ideas for practice improvement.

8.0 Consultation with Young People- Feedback from the Children in Care Council

8.1 The Children in Care Council were presented with the IRO Annual Report on 21 August 2019. They reported that they understood the role of the IRO and the purpose of their Reviews. Although not all could remember the name of their IRO, most knew that their IRO had been a consistent person in their life for some time. The children discussed appreciating having the opportunity to meet with their IRO outside of the Review and one child shared how their views had been respected by their IRO who invited a family member to the Review, according to the child's wish. The group spoke about how it would be helpful to receive a letter to remind them when their Review is scheduled and having some information, perhaps a 'fact file' card to remind them who their IRO is. The group were shown the new Consultation Booklets and liked that there were different versions for different age groups. They liked that there was more space to freely write their views and not as many questions. The group gave some feedback about the colour scheme and icons and these alterations will be made

9.0 Review of last year's priority areas for improvement and action

9.1 To further develop means by which children can participate in reviews, including MOMO and implement new model for reviews which is more child friendly

Work has been ongoing to develop creative ways to encourage children's participation in their Reviews and offering choices about how their Reviews are arranged. A Project has been piloted to refresh how children are consulted and prepared to take part in Reviews; the feedback obtained from children, Foster Carers, Social Workers and IROs is encouraging and the next steps for further implementation are being considered.

9.2 To improve participation and consultation arrangements for children and carers where children are placed for adoption.

A revised consultation form has been used for Prospective Adopters to assist them in preparing for their Reviews. It is unclear as to the effectiveness, as very often Prospective Adopters are supported by their own Social Worker in planning for their Reviews. By nature of the adoption process, many children who are placed for Adoption are too young to verbally express a view or provide written consultation. Where children are older, IROs will make efforts to see or observe the child so they can participate in their Review.

9.3 To demonstrate improved parental participation in Reviews
Data shows that the vast majority of parents are participating in Reviews, or being offered the chance to participate. Where there is no participation this tends to be because their whereabouts are not known or they are excluded for a valid reason, because of potential risk

to the child or if it is the child's wish that they are not part of their Review. IROs continue to make efforts to encourage parents to participate, even when they have been absent from the Review process for some time.

10.0 Priorities for 2019 - 2020

- 10.1 To continue to build on increasing participation and creative approaches to children's Reviews.
- 10.2 Capture data to evidence the different ways IROs consult with children, including the amount of face-to-face pre Review consultations.
- 10.3 Design/development of consultation leaflets and tools to increase the participation of children with disabilities.
- 10.4 Annual observations of IROs Chairing a Review and feedback to be obtained directly from the child and parent where appropriate, which can be included in the next Annual Report.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 This report has highlighted the work of the IROs in Wolverhampton from April 2018 to March 2019 and is an update on the last annual report.
- 11.2 The service needs to continue working to improve child participation and consultation, for children with a range of needs and circumstances.
- 11.3 The next report will cover the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.