

Independent Reviewing Service

Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officers Service

April 2016 – March 2017

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Summary of the year	4
2.1 What is working well?	4
2.2 What are we worried about?	5
3. Statutory requirements	7
3.1 Purpose of service and legal context	7
3.2 Staffing	8
4. Key looked after children data	10
4.1 Number of children in care	10
4.2 Timeliness of reviews	10
4.3 Participation in review meetings	10
4.4 Health and education for looked after children	11
5. 2016-17 Areas of focus – What we said we’d do and what we achieved?	12
5.1 What we said we’d do	12
5.2 What we achieved	12
6. What else have we done?	18

6.1 Health Check – identifying areas for improvement	18
6.2 Adoption audit – IROs improving permanency policy...	18
6.3 Review of consultation forms and development of review leaflets	18

7. What difference have we made – impact and effectiveness of IRO Service

7.1 Recognising good practice and raising care planning and practice concerns	19
7.2 Care planning alert/escalations	20
7.3 Examples of areas of challenge	21
7.4 Case examples of IRO impact/challenge to local authority following IRO advocating on behalf of the child	23

8. What do we need to do next?

8.1 Safer Surrey – making practice consistently child focus	25
8.2 Improving timeliness of reviews and monitoring of timely implementation of care plans	25
8.3 Improving participation and engagement	25
8.4 Strengthening partnership working / working better together for children	26

1. Introduction

This is the eighth annual report of Surrey County Council's Independent Reviewing Service (IR Service). Within the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) [Handbook](#), the manager of the IR service is required '*to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting board. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed*'¹. For more detailed information about the statutory responsibilities and functions of an IRO, please see [Statutory responsibilities](#).

The IR Service is committed to delivering a high quality professional service. As IROs we are passionate about our independent role and have our children and young people at the heart of everything we do. We work together with colleagues across social work teams and partner agencies to achieve the best possible outcomes, without any undue delay or drift; ensuring their care plans meet their needs; that they have a voice and feel their wishes and feelings are heard, is what motivates us and we strive to deliver on every day.

Surrey continues to implement and embed the 'Safer Surrey' approach in delivering services to children and their families. 'Safer Surrey' is defining the way we work; the approach places the child at the centre of everything we do, in a non-punitive and supportive environment, and supports our practices and processes. It is about working in partnership with families to achieve better outcomes for children and positive answers to these questions.

It has been another busy year for the service and the county. This report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service as defined in statutory guidance for the period April 2016-March 2017. The report contains:

- What's worked well this year?
- What we're worried about?
- What we said we'd do during this year and what we achieved?
- What difference have we made – impact and effectiveness of IRO Service?
- What else have we done?
- What we need to do next?

¹ The statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children

2. Summary of the year

Below are some key areas of 'What's working well?' and 'What we are worried about?' as identified by the Independent Reviewing (IR) Service with regards to practice and service delivery for looked after children in Surrey during 2016-17. This is based on performance data, quality assurance, scrutiny of service delivery and insight and feedback gathered through the experience of the IROs in undertaking their statutory role and responsibilities.

2.1 What is working well?

2.1.1 Improvements in the looked after children review process

- Safer Surrey (strength based framework) is starting to be embedded in Children's Services and the IR Service, which is having a positive impact on the review process. This includes IROs having access to Signs of Safety training as a key part of the workforce that is contributing to strengths based practice both within the IR Service and the looked after review process.
- Children and young people, if they would like to, are starting to co-chair and lead on their review meetings more often resulting in improved participation and engagement in their review meetings and making the meetings more child focussed.
- More review meetings are being held in the child or young person's placement and where the request is to hold it at school by the child, careful consideration is being given to the timing of the meeting, to ensure the child does not miss out on lesson time.
- Where appropriate a review is also being held as a series of meetings to reduce the number of professionals at a child's meeting and to accommodate who the child wishes to have at their meeting.

2.1.2 Increased capacity and independence of IR Service and access to training

- On average an IRO (full time equivalent) will have 64 children to review. A reduction in IROs caseload during the second half of 21016-17 has enabled IROs to have some further capacity to undertake more monitoring of a child's journey between review meetings.
- In recognition of the need for increased independence of the IR Service, in September 2016 the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Prevention took over managerial responsibility for the IR Service. This is enabling the IR Service role to support, monitor and scrutinise service delivery by Children's Services.
- The IR Service also has access to independent legal advice, which the service can access as/when required further enabling the independent role.

2.1.3 Improved engagement with children and young people in review meetings

- As a result of using a strength based framework within looked after review meetings; IROs, social workers and other professionals have feedback that there has been greater engagement with some children and young people who previously found it difficult or chose not to engage in their review meetings.

Example of impact of IRO in young person's life: A young person made an amazing picture for his IRO to thank him for everything he has done for him since he has been in care and his IRO. This particular young man has complex needs and difficulty with concentration at times, but sat for hours according to him and his carers to complete the picture, as a show of appreciation to his IRO.

2.1.4 Dedicated workforce and striving to achieve best outcomes for children

- Generally IROs see that social workers know their children well and are dedicated to delivering the best possible service to children who are looked after by the local authority.
- IROs have been very consistent in the lives of children in care in Surrey, with some children having the same IRO for more than 8 years at least.
- Where life-story work is completed with a child, to explain their journey in care, this is of good quality and benefits the child to have a greater understanding of why they came into care and their journey in care and beyond.

2.1.5 Improved working relationships between IR Service and key groups

- The IR Service has good working relationships with the Care Council, the Children's Participation and Children's Rights Services and Quality and Development Service, working closely to improve service delivery by IR Service and engagement with children within their review process.
- The Safeguarding Coordinator for the IR Service attends key meetings such as: monthly Looked After Service Managers Meeting, Placement Stability Group, Corporate Parenting Operational Group, Quarterly Adoption Forum, Local Family Justice Board, Practice Improvement Group. This contributes to open dialogue between the different services.

Example of impact of IRO in young person's life: A young person completed her consultation form for her last review and again, thanked the IRO for all his support during her time in care. He had been her IRO for over 8 years and was one of the few consistent adults in her life, alongside her social worker who had been with her for a similar duration.

2.2 What are we worried about?

2.2.1 Timeliness of preparation of children for review meetings

- Throughout the year a low percentage of pre-meeting social work reports were completed and authorised within 5 working days before a review meeting. This coincided with a low percentage of pre-meeting social work reports or content of the report shared with the child or their parent before their review meeting. This meant that in many cases the child was not fully prepared for their review. However for a higher percentage of cases the content of the report was shared with their carers. For more information see [Key data](#).

2.2.2 Children and young people's participation at review meetings

- There was a drop in participation of children and young people at review meetings over 2016-17. For more information see '[What we've achieved](#)'.

2.2.3 High caseloads impact on timeliness of reviews and IRO footprint

- At the start of the year IROs had very high caseloads (and workload considering high percentage of children placed out of county), around 80 children per IRO. This negatively impacted on their ability to monitor their oversight of a case in between review meetings. This was then compounded for an approximately six-month period (June-November 2016) when the IR Service was under a great deal of pressure with the loss of two IROs and an unprecedented increase in children coming into care and requiring looked after review meetings. The team's capacity was only fully increased by November 2016. For more information see [Key data](#)

2.2.4 Impact of resources on service delivery

- Over 40% of children in care were placed out of county during the last year. This has had an impact of IROs capacity and workload and social workers' workload as well as contributing to a lack of local placement choice for children and young people.
- During the year there was a high turnover of social workers, causing some children to have multiple social workers during their time in care, which impacted on the timely implementation of their care plan. This is between teams and within teams. This also in cases led to drift and delay in life story work being completed.
- In some cases there was a long delay in revoking of placement orders when care plan has changed i.e. from adoption to long-term fostering.
- Due to unprecedented increase in number of care leavers, the Care Leavers Service has not had the capacity to allocate Personal Advisors (PAs) when a child in care turns 16 years old. The local authority created a policy to address this challenge; however the IR Service did not agree with the policy, taking the view that it was unlawful and not meeting statutory requirements. For more detail see [Care planning alert/escalation](#).

3. Statutory requirements

3.1 Purpose of service and legal context

The Independent Reviewing Service (IRS) has been a statutory requirement since 2004. In 2010 the government published the '[Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook](#)' Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Local Authorities. This was implemented in April 2011 and was linked to the revised [Care Planning Regulations and Guidance](#), which were introduced at the same time.

The responsibilities of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) has been broadened to include not only the management of the review process, but a wider overview of the case, including regular monitoring and follow up between reviews.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to [\[section 25B \(1\), 1989 Act\]](#):

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review 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; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.²

The core tasks of the IRO are defined as:

- The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.
- 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.³

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- chairing the child's review; and

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/section/25B>

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337568/iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf

- monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.⁴

In practice, the IRO reviews a number of key outcome areas in respect of each child or young person. These include:

- the plan for permanency and legal status;
- the quality of the child or young person's placement;
- the health and education needs of the child or young person;
- safeguarding issues in response of the child or young person;
- the activities that the child or young person participates in; and
- transitional arrangements to adulthood.

3.2 Staffing

This has been a very challenging year for the service. There were a number of staffing changes which coincided with an unprecedented increase in children becoming looked after and requiring allocation of an IRO. A new Safeguarding Coordinator came into post in August 2016 following an interim arrangement between December 2015 and August 2016 when the Consultant IRO acted up in this role. At the end of June and July 2017 respectively the service lost 2 IROs due to one IRO taking a year sabbatical and the other early retirement.

The challenge for the service was recognised by the local authority and interim arrangements were put in place (Locum IRO) to address the capacity challenges faced by the service. The Service also successfully recruited to one new FTE post, a 0.9FTE and 0.6FTE sabbatical cover. Unfortunately there was a delay in these IROs starting and the service was only fully staffed by November 2017.

High caseloads were immediately identified by the new Safeguarding Coordinator as an area affecting effectiveness of service delivery and a business case was put forward to extend the contract of the locum position whilst the number of children in care remained very high. Funding was agreed to extend this position until the end of March 2017. An additional business case was presented to the senior management team for a Fixed Term Contract to replace the locum position, to be extended till March 2018. Despite the ongoing high volume of children coming into care the IROs have stated the impact of reduced caseloads of on average 64 children per FTE IRO has become noticeable since January 2017 in them having for the first time, in what has felt like a very long time, the capacity and time to start monitoring of progress on cases in between review meetings.

By the end of March 2017 the service was staffed by 13.33 full time equivalent IROs in post. This is made up of full time staff, part time staff, bank staff and a locum IRO.

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337568/iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf



The team consists of 5 men and 14 women, all white apart from one female black IRO and one male black IRO (locum). Within the team there is a range of specialist knowledge and expertise such as children with disability; unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC); Care Leavers; and Social Pedagogy & person centred reviews and Signs of Safety.

An IRO's workload can vary dependent on the complexity of cases, distance to travel (out of county placements), siblings groups, whether the child has English as their first language or not and if not, meeting should be done through an interpreter; whether the child wishes their parents and other professionals to be part of their meetings or not. If the child does not want professionals or parents to attend, then the IRO will complete the review process as a series of meetings, which increases their workload. In addition from July 2017 all IROs will be undertaking mid-way progress updates on all cases. Distance of placement has played a key role in increasing the workload of IROs, as at 31st March 2017 over 40% of placement were out of county. This has been a similar percentage throughout the year.

4. Key looked after children data

4.1 Number of children in care

1270 children were looked after in Surrey between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017. At 31st March 2017 there were 871 children looked after. During the year 402 children came into care, whilst 413 left care. Although the number of children in care is virtually the same as 2015-16, when 872 children were looked after at 31st March 2016, the number of reviews during 2016-17 were 2,452 compared to 2,366 during 2015-16. The increase in number of reviews can be attributed to the number of placement changes and unplanned endings (breakdowns), which according to Surrey practice necessitates a review meeting to be brought forward to 20 working days within the new placement. This has added an additional strain on the service, coupled with the high number of children being looked after during the year.

4.2 Timeliness of reviews

During April 2016-March 2017 the IROs arranged 2572 reviews, but only chaired in total 2452 review meetings due to some children ceasing to be looked after during the year before the meeting was due. This has been an increase of 86 review meetings (2452 vs 2366) compared to last year and on average 184 reviews per FTE IRO during the year. This has been an unprecedented increase in workload and this culminated with a decrease in the team's capacity over a 6 month period (June –November 2016). Subsequently there had been a significant drop in the timeliness of looked after reviews during the year, dropping from 94.2% to 85.9% (based on data provided for 710/827 children of those children looked after at 31st March 2017). Timeliness of review meetings are now monitored weekly by the Safeguarding Coordinator, in order to ensure that a review only goes out of timescale if it's in the best interest of the child to ensure their participation and those they wish to have part of their review process. It is envisaged that, unless there is a similar increase of children looked after and capacity challenges within the service, that next year we will return to our aim of 95% of review held within timescale.

4.3 Participation in review meetings

At 31st March 2017 90.38% (based on 686/759) who are over aged 4 children had participated in their review meetings through range of ways. This has dropped by another 2.42% from last year. Some of this drop could be contributed to an increase in the number of children who became looked after, but soon after they were taken into care they have been missing, but we continue to be reviews held within the required timescales. It is a worry and an engagement group has been set up and our consultation forms are being revised, to explore and attempt to improve engagement and participation. We on the other hand have also had young people participate in their review following the introduction of our new strength-based methodology within review meeting, where previously they have chosen not to participate.

We are committed to ensure all children who are looked after have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate and engage in their review process. The local authority has invested in a range of tools that can be used by social workers and IROs to seek engagements and participation and enabling children to share their wishes and feelings. We must ensure that we encourage and facilitate their engagement and participation

in their review meetings as much as they wish to take part in and keep the focus of the meeting on them and their needs. As previously stated we use a range of methods to seek their views:

- Mind Of My Own (MOMO),
- Three Houses /fairies (Signs of Safety tools).
- UR8US booklet'
- "Your Review Your Say"
- Text
- Phone
- Face to face

4.4 Health and education for looked after children

4.4.1 Health

We also review the health needs of a child to ensure that the care plan addresses the child's health needs sufficiently and to monitor that all children have access to their health history. Data provided to the IRO Service indicated that there was an improvement of 5.3% (84.9%) for children who had their health assessments within timescale during the year. However according to data submitted only 85.9% of those children who have been looked after for more than 12months have had dental checks within timescale. This is a significant drop of 8.5% in completion of dental checks within timescale. The IROs will continue to monitor these key performance areas to support ongoing improvement in order to improve health outcomes for children in care. This will be supported through the change of the consultation form that carers and reports that social workers will be completing for review meetings from September 2017.

For children looked after for 12+ months, and eligible for a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (327/576), 56.77% had an SDQ completed. Data on the number of children who had abnormal scores and referred on to 3Cs (CAMHS provision for children in care) was not available to the IR Service at the time of writing this report.

4.4.2 Education

In 2014-15 the target of 80% for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to be completed in timescale was set. In 2015-16 only one quadrant achieved this. During 2016-17 all four quadrants have improved and achieved above 82%, with two quadrants achieving above 93% of PEPs all completed in timescale by End of Term figures for Summer Term 2017. This has been a vast improvement across all four quadrants, with an average of 91.6% for statutory school aged (SSA) children and 89.9% for SSA and Early Years PEPs. 97% of unaccompanied asylum seeking children and 80.4% of care leavers and post 16+ (Years 12&13) had PEPs completed in timescale.

5. 2016-17 Areas of focus – What we said we'd do and what we achieved?

At the end of 2015-16 the IR Service set out a number of key areas of focus for the Independent Reviewing Service for 2016-17. Below is a summary of what we said we would do during 2016-17 and key highlights of what we achieved or where we continue to work towards achieving the target set.

5.1 What we said we'd do	5.2 What we achieved	RAG rating
Incorporate Safer Surrey approach which is a strength-based approach in children looked after reviews.	❖ We reviewed and amended our review record (minutes) template and have started to chair looked after review meetings being more strength based, focussing on what's worked well since the last review meeting, what we are worried about and what we are going to do to address the worries for the child. Review minutes reflect Safer Surrey principles of <i>What's working well? What are we worried about? What needs to happen next?</i>	Green
Increase the number of reviews held within timescale.	❖ We have tried very hard to improve on our timeliness of review meetings, however due to staffing challenges and a surge in children in care during June 2016 – January 2017, we were unable to achieve our target to improve on our timeliness of reviews. The local authority however recognised the capacity issues within the service following the arrival of a new Safeguarding Coordinator and subsequently increased the capacity of the team. This has led to a reduction from about 80 children allocated to each full time equivalent (FTE) IRO to a more manageable caseload of 64 children on average per FTE IRO. Although this remains high, is it within national guidelines of 50 to 70 children per FTE IRO.	Red

Improve the participation and engagement of children and young people in the review meetings to ensure the meetings are child-led and child focussed and that there is an active response to what children and young people are saying to us in their feedback forms.

- ❖ The IR Service has listened to what children and young people are saying and have started to change the reviewing process to be much more child and young person focussed. Safe Surrey is shaping how we do reviews. Children's review meetings are more strength based, focussing first on what's working well, as well as what we are worried about, setting clear outcomes to be achieved in a timely manner. The child should be and is more in control of who attends their meeting, what they want to be discussed, having their wishes and feelings listened to and professionals responding accordingly. This is starting to happen as evidenced by comments from young people who previously chose not to participate in their review meetings and now attend and participate, taking the lead in deciding who should attend their meetings, etc.
- ❖ However data would indicate that there was only 90.38 % recorded participation of children in their review meetings, which is a 2.42% drop from last year and is disappointing and is not the perceived perception and views shared by review attendees. It is unclear what the reason for the drop in % for participation is, which will be explored further through the Engagement Group that has been established to look at participation and engagement with children across Children Schools & Families. We will aim to improve and work towards achieving 95% of participation of children (over the age of 4) in their review process.
- ❖ There was a relatively large cohort of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who came into care in July 2016, but went missing within 24-48hrs of being in the looked after children and therefore have not been able to participate in their meetings. This could be contributing to the drop in participation rate from 92.8% at 31st March 2016 to only 90.38% at 31st March 2017. This has been a consecutive drop in participation which is a concern and work has been started to review how we engage with children and young people and seek their participation in meetings. Increasing participation will continue to be an area of focus for 2017-18.
- ❖ Children and young people are starting to take more lead in deciding where they want to have their review meetings. When we consulted with children through the Care Council, the majority stated that they wish to have their review meetings in their

<p>Increase the number of reviews held within placement and reducing number of reviews taking place at schools.</p>	<p>placements. Alongside the change in practice in seeking the child's view of who they want to attend their meeting, the IROs took an active position in seeking clarification from social worker as to whether they have consulted with children as to where they wish to have their review meetings and encouraged these to take place in placement. If it was the child's choice to have it at school, the IRO would then make sure that the meeting did not take the child away from any lesson time. This is a performance area that will now be tracked and improvement will be able to be monitored in future, although anecdotal information already confirms that there has been a steady increase in the number of review meetings taking place in placement which is positive.</p>	
<p>Improve the recording of informal challenge and escalation done by the IRO within LCS to demonstrate IRO oversight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ There has always been ongoing dialogue between IROs and social workers and managers, but it has been recognised that IROs must improve their recording of such dialogue and challenge within the child's case file. With the increase in the team's capacity, IROs caseloads are being reduced to be more manageable, which will also aid them to have more time to record their informal challenge to the local authority within the child's case record. ❖ The process of strengthening how IROs challenge and raise care planning concerns with the local authority, as well as the recording of this process, has commenced. In future it will be referred to as the 'Care Planning Alert Process'. The policy is also being reviewed. This aims to given greater clarity to IROs and the local authority of expectations or raising care planning alerts and to improve the recording by IROs re. their challenge to the local authority where they consider drift and delay occurs and the care plan is failing to meet the child's needs. 	
<p>Explore different ways to increase the monitoring of care plans between reviews to reduce drift and ensure follow through of review actions in a more structured way such as midway meetings between looked after child review meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Various options were explored and it was agreed that from July 2017 IROs will start to complete a mid-way progress update in between each review. This will entail the IRO reviewing the case file and either meeting face or face or having a case discussion over the phone with the social worker to monitor progress of decisions 	

	agreed at the last review, scrutinising the delivery of the care plan and if required, address any care planning concerns.	
Enhance the escalation process by including a feedback process between the IRO and social work team following response to an escalation. Ensure that the escalation process includes escalations to all partner agencies that provide services to children in care, such as Social Care, Health, CAMHS, Education, etc.	❖ IROs will now directly respond back to the social work team once they've received a response to the concerns raised and this should be recorded on the system. If the IRO is not satisfied with the response, consideration will be given to trigger the next stage within the care planning alert process. It has been agreed that the revised process for raising care planning alerts by the IRO will include multiagency partners, such as education, CAMHS and health. Ratification of this multi-agency policy has taken place by Surrey Safeguarding Children Board's Policy & Procedures Sub-group and introduced early in 2017-18 financial year.	
Increase representation of Independent Reviewing Service at key strategic and operations meetings and panels such as Adoption and Fostering Panel, Permanency Panel, etc.	❖ The Independent Reviewing Service is represented on key meetings such County and Area Corporate Parenting Operational Groups (CPOG), Area Managers Meetings, Placement Stability Group, Practice Improvement Group, Adoption Panel, Quarterly Adoption Forum, etc. However at times our attendance at such operational and strategic meetings can be restricted due to competing demands created by the increase in number of review meetings and requiring IROs to be available to chair a review rather than attend an operational or strategic meeting. ❖ The IR Service was a key stakeholder in developing the new Permanency Policy, which was ratified in March 2017.	
Participate in the development and delivery of training to new and existing staff to ensure all staff have a clear understanding of the purpose of a looked after review, the role and responsibilities of an Independent Reviewing Officer, to	❖ Following a review of induction and other courses relating to looked after children it was recognised that there was a gap in county wide training for social workers focussing on looked after children, the review process and other key issues and processes relating to looked after children. The Safeguarding Coordinator worked closely with Learning and Development Service to create a template for a new training course which will include all key areas of Corporate Parenting responsibility. The aim is to increase consistency in practice through the delivery of a county wide training programme. This is envisaged that the new training programme will commence in October 2017.	

<p>ensure a greater understanding of the oversight and scrutiny role of an IRO of the county's delivery its corporate parenting responsibility to all looked after children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ The Safeguarding Coordinator also worked closely together with one of the Service Managers of a Looked After Child Team on 'how to change and improve Looked After Review meetings' project group, which will focus on making reviews more child focussed and led. Two very successful days were held with multi-agency partners to look at 'what a good review looks like' and how you achieve this. As a result of this and with a further session with children and young people in care, this project aims to finish by August 2017, and will lead on revising the current Looked After Review Policy which will be launched in September 2017. This will coincide with the implementation of the new looked after child's care plan and social work pre-meeting report, which has been developed based on Safer Surrey principles. 	
<p>Revise the quality assurance form used by the service post each review to improve the data available to monitor quality of practice from an IRO's perspective. Share the data with social work teams to ensure high quality of service to our children and young people and address areas of improvement as identified by the Independent Reviewing Service.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Following every review an IRO will complete a quality assurance (QA) form, commenting of both qualitative and quantitative information about the review, information presented to the IRO for the review, engagement and sharing of information with the child, their parents, carers and other relevant professionals by the social worker and other key areas of risk such as 'missing', child sexual exploitation (CSE), etc. Due to technical difficulties with the form and capacity challenges within the service up to November, the service did not complete the forms. The QA questionnaire was reviewed and updated and all IROs started completing it again from November 2017. The initial analysis of the IRO QA data, as well as other data gathered from the local authority's systems, was shared with the Practice Improvement Group in February 2017. The report highlighted areas of strengthen within the services, but also areas of concern from the IRO's perspective. Work streams were set up as a result of this, with a focus on how to improve the completion of social work pre-meeting report within required timescale and the use of the new care plan and pre-meeting report. This work will continue to be taken forward into the new financial year. The IRO QA form is also being revised, to ensure it captures all the required and desired areas of scrutiny. Once the form is finalised, then the revised report will be shared with social work teams on at least a quarterly basis. This will commence during the next financial year. 	

Re-establish the links with CAFCASS and the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB).	❖ These are now established. The Safeguarding Coordinator for the IR Service attends LFJB regularly and a good working relationship has been established with the new CAFCASS lead for Surrey.	
Develop a system of gathering and collating more systematically the feedback received from children and young people either in preparation for or after their review meetings, so that their views of the service can be better reflected in our annual reports in future.	❖ The IRO Service has been liaising with Care Council on the best ways to engage with children and young people, to ensure they feel empowered and able to feed back to the service they receive from both social workers and IROs, with the focus on the review process. The consultation form for children and young people for their review is being revised. This is an ongoing piece of work.	

6. What else have we done?

6.1 Health Check – identifying areas for improvement

In addition to the above activity, the IRS Service also undertook a health check which was done both by the Safeguarding Coordinator and an independent consultant. It identified a number of strengths and areas of development which included the requirement to increase capacity – and the impact of this as a result of action taken. It recognised the high caseloads were limiting IROs effectiveness and impact of the service, as they were not able to monitor and record their oversight on a child's file as they wish to do. It recommended that the increase in capacity should be sustained long-term to enable the service to stabilise and improve its effectiveness and scrutiny role, as required within statutory guidance.

6.2 Adoption audit – IROs improving permanency policy

During the last year the Safeguarding Coordinator has worked with colleagues across Children, Schools and Family in reviewing processes and procedures that impact on children who are looked after by the local authority. The Quarterly Adoption Forum (QAF) agreed that it would be helpful to investigate Surrey's practice in cases which did not result in placement orders being made. 24 such cases were subsequently identified – representing all children aged 7 and under whose care proceedings concluded between April – December 2016.

A further 16 cases were identified where placement orders were made in the same period. Cases were reviewed from the LCS case record by a small group from the adoption and IRO service and area head with lead responsibility for proceedings. Following on from this audit, the Permanency Policy was reviewed and signed off in March 2017. The IRO's role in monitoring the securing of permanence plan for a child, from the second review, has been reinforced.

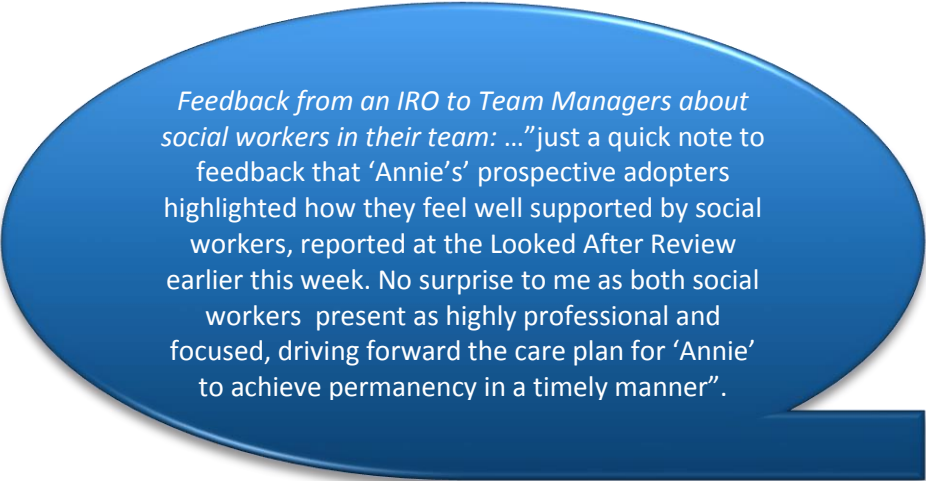
6.3 Review of consultation forms and development of review leaflets

We have started the process to review all out consultation forms, consulting with carers, adopters, children and families where possible. This is to create more user-friendly consultation forms that also link with our new strength-based way of working within review meetings. Following a meeting with adopters they suggested having a brief leaflet to explain what a review is, who an IRO is, etc. as this would have helped them as first time adopters. We subsequently began to look to develop new leaflets that explain what a looked after review, who is responsible for what, who attends, etc. We have also reviewed our templates for recording the review, again in line with Safer Surrey, which is already being used by IROs in writing up their records of a review (minutes). The new leaflets and consultation forms should be available by October 2017.


7. What difference have we made – impact and effectiveness of IRO Service

7.1 Recognising good practice and raising care planning and practice concerns

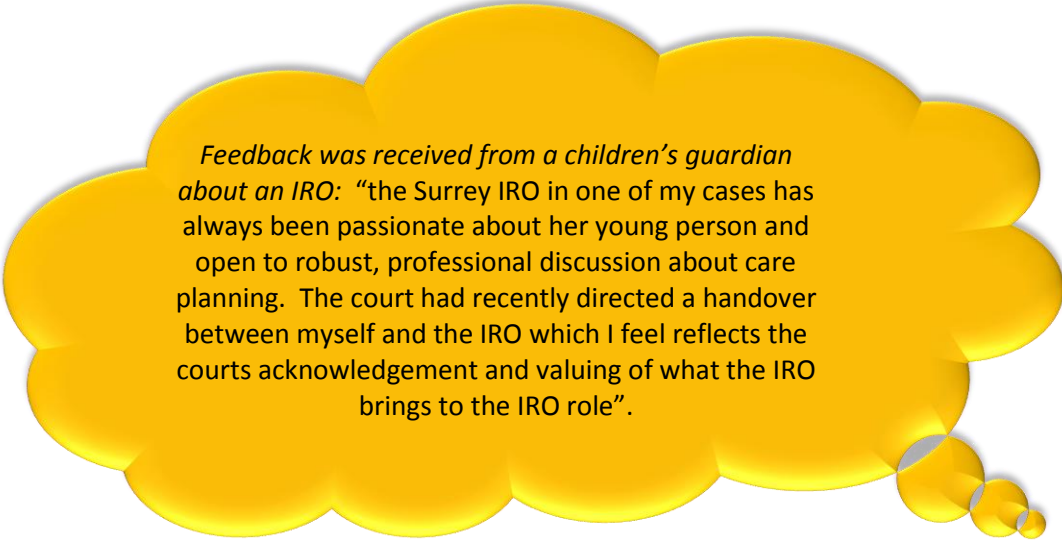
There is some excellent practice within Surrey, with very dedicated social workers working extremely hard to support the children they're working with to achieve the best possible outcomes. This could be to return safely home to their parents, where this has been assessed as to be safe and in the child's best interest; or to achieve permanency through either adoption, Special Guardianship Order or long-term fostering. IROs will recognise this and acknowledge the worker's efforts and good practice with their senior managers.



Feedback from an IRO to Team Managers about social workers in their team: ..."just a quick note to feedback that 'Annie's' prospective adopters highlighted how they feel well supported by social workers, reported at the Looked After Review earlier this week. No surprise to me as both social workers present as highly professional and focused, driving forward the care plan for 'Annie' to achieve permanency in a timely manner".



Feedback from an IRO to a social worker: "Thank you so much for your informative and quality review report; it made for a focused and speedily review meeting. I will recommend that this goes in our good review report section so we can share with other workers if you and your manager are in agreement."



Feedback was received from a children's guardian about an IRO: "the Surrey IRO in one of my cases has always been passionate about her young person and open to robust, professional discussion about care planning. The court had recently directed a handover between myself and the IRO which I feel reflects the courts acknowledgement and valuing of what the IRO brings to the IRO role".

7.2 Care planning alert/escalations

As IROs we are committed to raise any care planning concerns with the social worker and team manager at the earliest opportunity to seek a resolution and without the need to address this through initiating the 'Escalation Process'. In most cases this means that such a discussion

will resolve the matter. However when this has not been possible, the IRO will trigger the escalation process and a written escalation will be raised. There are different stages within the process: Stage 1 = Team Manager, Stage 2 = Service Manager, Stage 3 = Areas Head, Stage 4 = Assistant Director, Stage 5 = Director, Stage 6 = CAFCASS. During April 2016-March 2017 the escalation process was triggered 53 times.

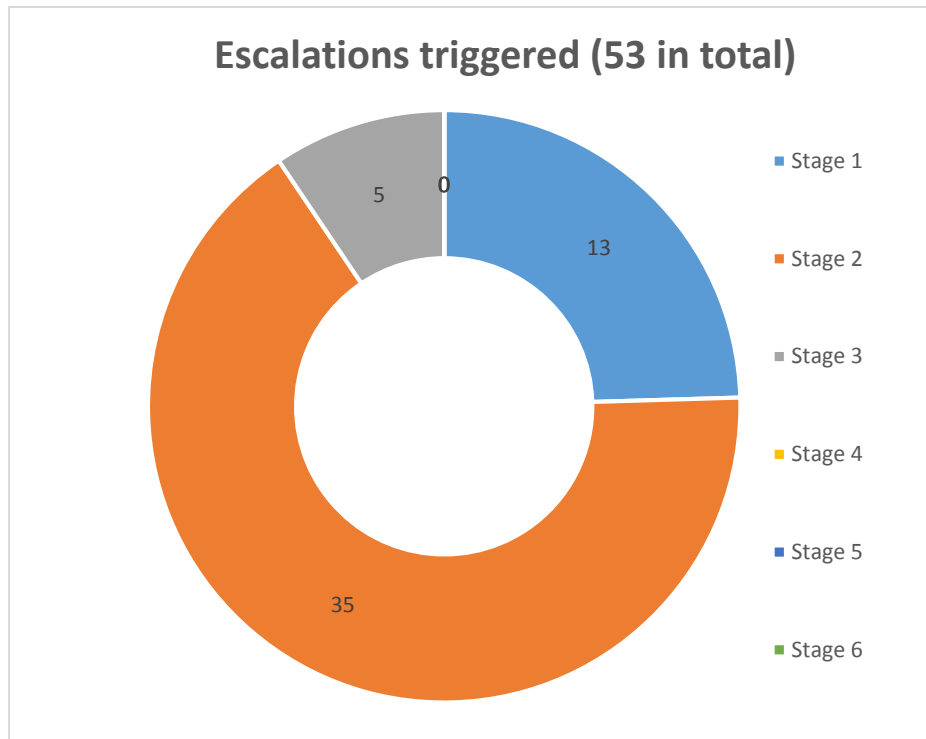


Figure 1: Numbers of escalations triggered by IROs at each stage of process

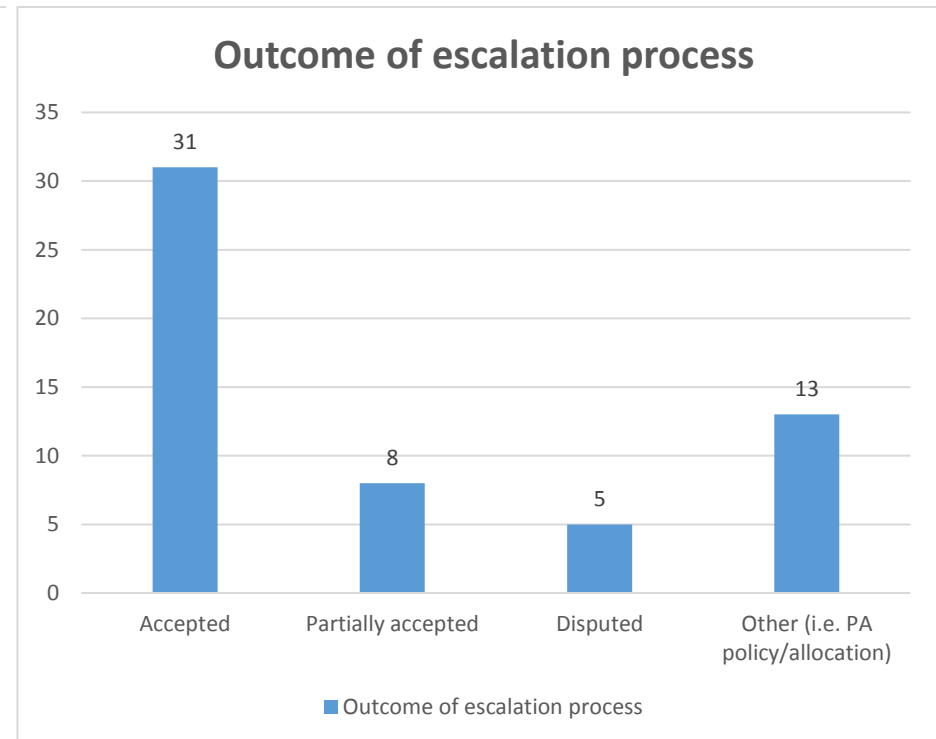


Figure 2: Outcome of escalation process



Figure 3: Reasons for escalation being raised

7.3 Examples of areas of challenge

7.3.1 Placement choice

In Surrey, as in many other parts of the country, there is a great challenge with regards to the availability of suitable local placements. During the last year the number of children in care has risen month on month, culminating at one point to just over 900 children being looked after by the local authority. Surrey also has one of largest number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children populations in the country. This, along with the increased complexity of needs that many of the

older children who came into care during the year, the increased awareness of CSE, have led to challenges in finding suitable placements. As a result, this has led to an increase in the number of children are being placed beyond 20 miles from their family home and being placed outside of the county boundaries, far away from friends and family. The local authority is taking steps to try to address this and reduce the number of out of county placements, but similarly, there have been cases where it's been recognised that it is in the child's best interest and in order to meet their needs most effectively, that they need to be placed out of county. IROs are mindful of the difficulty faced by the local authority, however they have challenged the local authority

on placement choice, where it's been deemed that the offer being considered is not in the child's best interest.

7.3.2 Allocation of Personal Advisors

The Care Leavers Service (CLS) has seen an unprecedented increase in the number of young people eligible for support from the service. The Care Leavers Service put a business case forward to increase its service capacity and in light of this, the IR Service acknowledged an interim proposal by the CLS in November 2016 to manage the demand for allocation of Personal Advisors (PA). In January 2017 the IRO Service were informed that the interim measure was in fact agreed as policy as the CLS was unsuccessful in securing additional funding to increase capacity and therefore could not meet the demand to allocate a PA at aged 16 for all looked after children. The IR Service was not in agreement with this policy and position that the local authority took. The IR Service sought independent legal advice, and CLS was also advised by the IR Service to seek their own legal advice, as it was felt this policy was unlawful and did not meet statutory requirement in relation to allocation of PA. Legal advice confirmed the IROs views that the policy was unlawful and the local authority has since taken steps to enable CLS to expand their service, in order to increase capacity that will enable them to allocate a PA to all 16 year old looked after children.

7.3.3 Use of Section 20 (S20)

As across the country, Surrey reviewed the use of S20 accommodation of children and young people. The IROs reviewed a child's legal status within the review process and in a number of cases recommended that

the local authority should seek legal advice to consider the appropriateness of its use of S20 accommodation. This was mostly for older children and children with disabilities. The local authority responded appropriately and in cases where there was drift and delay in securing legal permanency, action was taken. However where the action was deemed too slow, the IRO would challenge this through discussion with the team manager and if not was not resolved, through triggering the escalation policy.

7.3.4 Timeliness of authorisation and sharing of social work pre-meeting reports for looked after review meetings

Concerns were raised with the local authority within the quality assurance report presented to the Practice Improvement Group in February 2017 with regards the timeliness of social work pre-meeting reports, which are not consistently completed and authorised 5 working days before a review meeting. The content of the report is also not shared prior to the review with the child and their parents as would be expected. Commitment was given by senior management that this matter will be addressed and the Service Managers for Looked After Children and Head of Countywide Services were tasked to address compliance. As a result of this meeting there was a 5% increase in compliance with regards to social work pre-meeting reports and an increase of 4.5% sharing of the content of report with the child. Although it is a positive trend, compliance still has to greatly improve and will continue to be monitored by IROs.

7.4 Case examples of IRO impact/challenge to local authority following IRO advocating on behalf of the child

Example of IRO challenge to delay in progressing care plan: A young boy in a residential unit was making good progress and was very keen to move back into a family home so in his view 'to be normal and have friends over'. He was very keen also to remain in the same area (outside of Surrey) and not move back to Surrey, as he had settled at school, had formed friendships and did not want to lose these relationships. The IRO challenged a proposed care plan to delay the search a foster placement for a young boy resulting in the social work team reviewing the care plan and subsequently explored foster placements. A local carer was identified and plans have been put in motion for him to move to a foster placement local to his school.

Example of IRO challenge to securing permanency: A 15 year old young man wished to remain in care and for the local authority to share parental responsibility with his adoptive parents. He sadly returned to local authority care following the breakdown of his adoption placement. Although initially his adoptive parents were supportive of S20 accommodation, they started to withdraw their engagement with the local authority. They were adamant they did not wish for the young person to return to their care, but were blocking him from engaging in activities within his current placement, such as going on foreign holidays, etc. It was recommended that the local authority should seek legal advice and subsequently to initiate care proceedings. Following a delay in such action being taken in a timely manner, the IRO challenged the local authority and they have subsequently applied for a full care order. This was the young person's wishes, which he expressed at his review meetings, which he co-chairs with his IRO.

Example of IRO challenge in drift and securing permanency: An IRO challenged the local authority with regards to delay in parenting and cognitive assessments and agreeing legal status for a young girl who wished to remain in care. Her parents are in agreement for this too. Following PLO process it has been agreed, with the support of the IRO that the young girl will remain in care under S20 and that this is the appropriate legal status for her.

Example of IRO advocating on behalf of child to secure permanency: A young boy was placed with his aunt and uncle in a Reg 24 placement, but due to difficulties with contact with his father and other challenges faced by his carer, the Local Authority decided to place the child with alternative Local Authority foster carers. The young boy was very unhappy with this decision, as he wanted to remain in his family's care and indicated he wanted to speak to anyone to enable him to remain in placement. The IRO did not view this to be in his best interest for the young boy or that sufficient work had been done with his carers to address the concerns. The IRO referred to the Children's Rights Service asking for an advocate. The IRO discussed it with the Children's Rights Service and it was agreed that his IRO would represent the young boy's views at the Fostering Panel. Following the IRO advocating on his behalf, the Fostering Panel agreed to re-approve his aunt and uncle as his carers and he continues to live with them and their family.

Example of IRO challenge placement choice and securing permanency: A young man has been looked after in Surrey, but the majority of his extended family network are living on the North-east coast of England. He has limited connections in Surrey. He has sadly had several placement moves due to his complex needs which foster families found difficulty to manage and he struggled living in a 'family environment'. The IRO advocated that a specialist placement should be sought for him closer to his family network who could offer him ongoing support once he turns 18, as he would be very isolated if he were to be placed in Surrey. The social work team agreed to explore the IRO's recommendation and found a suitable placement for him closer to his family network, where he will now live and receive support from his extended birth family in the immediate, but also long term.

Example of IRO challenge in care planning and securing permanency: Following this the young child had a period of being settled in her foster placement and it was the expressed view of the young girl that she wished to remain in her foster placement, her carers are 100% committed to her and could not imagine her not being part of her family. The IRO questioned the local authority's ongoing care plan of adoption still being in the child's best interest and suggested a review of the care plan, to consider revoking the placement order and recommending long-term fostering for the child. The local authority after further assessment has agreed to apply for revocation of the placement order and proceeding with matching for long-term fostering for the child and her current carers.

8. What do we need to do next?

During 2017-18 the Service will work to ensure that IRO practice continues to be child centred and consistently good across the county, ensuring it drives improvement in practice and reduces drift and delay for children. We will work with our colleagues in Children Schools & Families to develop a culture of challenge and support between IROs and social workers that drives good practice that leads to good outcomes for looked after children.

We will aim to measure how successful we are in achieving this by:

- Looked After Children Review meetings are held within timescale (not including exceptions);
- IRO recommendations, unless challenged, are implemented in a timely manner;
- Any disputed recommendations are swiftly challenged and appropriately resolved;
- Children and young people are able to feedback their satisfaction levels with their reviews; and
- IRO evaluation of care plans is documented (IRO QA forms are completed following every review, data analysed and incorporated in the overall QA process)

In addition, we will continue to implement our development plan to address a number of key issues to improve our service delivery, which is summarised in the below:

8.1 Safer Surrey – making practice consistently child focus

- Embedding the Safer Surrey approach into children looked after reviews. We have already contributed to the review and development of the new care plan, pathway plan and social work

report templates for looked after reviews. The Pathway Plan pilot has been completed. It is important the children looked after reviews reflect this strength-based approach and follows the same pathway for a child throughout their journey coming into care until they leave.

8.2 Improving timeliness of reviews and monitoring of timely implementation of care plans

- Increase the number of reviews held within timescale.
- Increase the number of reviews held within placement and reducing number of reviews taking place at schools unless this is the child's choice. (Timing of review should not allow the child to lose lesson time).
- Implement mid-way progress updates between the IRO and social worker to monitor implementation of care plans between reviews to reduce drift and ensure follow through of review outcomes between looked after child review meetings.

8.3 Improving participation and engagement

- Continue to improve the participation and engagement of children and young people in the review meetings to ensure the meetings are child-led and child focused and that there is an active response to what children and young people are saying to us in their feedback forms. New consultation form is being developed by the Care Council and alternative ways of young people participating are being explored with the Care Council. The apprentice who leads on Care Council will also attend IRO team meetings bi-monthly.
- Implement the revised consultation forms for children and young people, parents, foster carers, residential staff or other carers and adopters by October 2017.

8.4 Strengthening partnership working / working better together for children

- Implement new 'care planning alert' process, which will improving the recording of challenge and escalation done by the IRO within LCS to demonstrate IRO oversight.
- Monitor the implementation of a feedback process between the IRO and all partner agencies that provide services to children in care, such as Social Care, Health, Police, CAMHS, Education and any other relevant agency, following response to a care planning alert.

Linde Webber
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Independent Reviewing Service