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Independent Reviewing Officer

Annual Report 2017/18

Policy/Report **Summary**

This report provides an overview of the Independent Reviewing Service for year ending 31 March, 2018. The aim of the report is to give an account of the roles and responsibilities of the IRO during the year and identify areas for improvement, both within the Reviewing Service and across the Trust in relation to children in care.

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Summary of key areas of progress during 2017/18

Recruit permanent staff within the IRO service.

Outcome – The IRO service has a full compliment of permanent staff and as of August 2017 a permanent Review Service Manager has been in post.

Further development of more accessible options for children and young people to communicate with their IRO between reviews.

Outcome – The Participation Officer has developed the online tool My Reviews My View for children aged 8-15, with a new separate on line form for those young people aged 16 & 17. Children aged 4 – 7 have been provided with a paper version in which they can express their views and feelings through more creative mean.

We need to make further improvements in the way that we ensure our children and young people are made aware of these resources. While these options would provide an additional form of communication we also recognise and value the importance of face to face contact with children and young people.

Review the systems and forms for recording the outcome of the CIC (Children in Care) review to ensure they are more child focused.

Outcome – The Record of Discussion form is child centred, the format is written to the child/young person about their review. In the coming months the review service will endeavour to improve the quality of those documents further and this will be monitored via regular thematic audits.

Deliver workshop / seminars to Social Workers and Managers to ensure the role of IRO is clearly understood and new staff have good induction.

Outcome – This did not progress as anticipated in 2016/17; however, members of the IRO service are committed to providing induction sessions for new staff, and refresher sessions for all staff, to enable an improved understanding of the IRO role and of the requirements of social workers in contributing to the review process. This will be available on a quarterly basis.

Increase the profile of the IRO Service and provide effective challenge when necessary.

Outcome – A formal escalation policy was agreed and there has been an increase in the IRO challenge being made in relation to children's care, the process has been formalised with a clear protocol in place to ensure accountability and outcomes are clear and understood by all.

Continue to contribute to the South East Regional IRO group.

Outcome – There is now regular attendance at the South East Regional Group by at least one member of the IRO service, this enables some wider networking and developing an understanding of best practice across the region.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Independent Reviewing Service for the period of 1st April, 2017 to 31st March, 2018. The report will provide an account of the roles and responsibilities of the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) during the year and identify areas for improvement, both within the Reviewing Service and across the Trust in relation to children in care (CiC).
- 1.2. The Reviewing Service encompasses the IROs who provide an independent function for the review and oversight of children in care, and the Child Protection Chairs who chair Child Protection Conferences. This report relates specifically to the IRO roles and responsibilities and does not cover the roles and responsibilities of the Independent Child Protection Chairs.
- 1.3. Ofsted carried out a full inspection of Children's Services in Slough in November 2015 and found services for children to be inadequate, within the report there was a specific recommendation for the Reviewing Service to strengthen and monitor the effectiveness of the role of IROs in challenging and escalating concerns about children's plans.
- 1.4. The Reviewing Service is committed to delivering a high quality professional service. As Reviewing Officers we are passionate about our independent role, we keep our children and young people at the heart of everything we do. We work together with colleagues across social work hubs and partner agencies to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children and young people; we aim to do this without any undue delay or drift; ensuring their care plans meet their needs; that they have a voice and feel that their wishes and feelings are heard.

2. Purpose of service and legal context

- 2.1. The Independent Reviewing Service 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. 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.
- 2.2. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Children in Care(CiC) and for challenging drift and delay. 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.

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



A hands-on approach to help children in Slough be

..... Safe, Secure and Successful

- 2.3. The Reviewing Service is committed to delivering a high quality service and continues to work towards ensuring that IROs:
- Have the right skills: particularly the ability to communicate with children and young people, and to know how and when to challenge
 - Have access to expert advice and resources, including independent legal advice and opportunities for reflective practice
 - Have dispute resolution protocols that work, from informal conversations to the escalation of formal disputes to senior management level
 - Are 'child-centered' and demonstrate their commitment to each child and work out the best way to seek their views
 - Have a focus on outcomes, and holding agencies to account for their contribution towards these.
- 2.4. The legislation and regulations specify:
- The duty to appoint an IRO
 - The circumstances in which the local authority (Trust) must consult with the IRO
 - The functions of the IRO both in relation to the reviewing and monitoring of each case
 - The actions the IRO must take if the local authority (Trust) is failing to comply with the regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way, including making a referral to CAFCASS.
- 2.5. 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 (Trusts) legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents each local authority or Trust should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.
- 2.6. 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. Profile of the reviewing service

- 3.1 The Reviewing Service has a responsibility for the independent chairing of Children in Care reviews and for independent chairing of Child Protection Conferences.

- 3.2 In order to provide independence from the line management of cases and allocation of resources within Children's Social Care the Reviewing Service sits within the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Team and the Head of this Service reports directly to the Director of Finance.
- 3.3 The Independent Reviewing Officers are managed by the Reviewing Service Manager who reports to the Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. During 2017/18 the Reviewing Service Manager completed training in systemic supervision.
- 3.4 The staffing complement for the IROs is as follows:
- Reviewing Service Manager (37 hours per week), in post since August 2017;
 - One full time IRO (37 hours per week);
 - Two part time IROs (30 hours per week);
 - One part time IRO (22.5 hours per week);
 - Administrative support is provided by a small team supporting both the IRO process and Child Protection Conferencing.
- 3.5 Every child who comes into care is allocated an IRO within 5 days and it is best practice to for the same IRO will chair the reviews and monitor the care plan throughout the period the child is looked after to ensure consistency.
- 3.6 The role of the IRO is to monitor and maintain an overview of the Care Plan (including Court Care Plans) and the Pathway Plan of each child in care at the review meeting and between reviews. In order to do this effectively the IRO needs to have pre meetings with social workers, speak to carers and parents, read the child's file and speak to the child between review meetings.
- 3.7 The social worker in turn, should update the IRO on significant events and provide an updated Care Plan and a report for the review. All the requirements and timescales for reviews are set out in the IRO handbook.
- 3.8 All children in care, including children who are in an adoptive placement prior to an adoption order, have a review. 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 having 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.
- 3.9 The IRO Handbook recommends that a caseload for a full time IRO should be between 50-70 children. The total number of children who were in care at the end of March 2018 was 206 therefore the overall caseloads for the IROs have not exceeded the caseload recommendations. Notwithstanding this, there have been times over the last year where the number of children in care has risen, which has at times resulted in the IRO's reaching full capacity.

4. Profile of children in care in Slough

- 4.1 On 31 March, 2018 there were 206 children in care in Slough, this was a slight increase on the previous year where there were 197 children in care as at 31 March 2017 (in 2016 the figure was 188). Of these 206 children 12% were children with disabilities.
- 4.2 The number of children in care can vary from month to month as children move in and out of the system. During the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 133 children became looked after and 109 ceased to be looked after; there is a slight increase of children entering care this year when compared with the previous year (2016/17) where 126 children came into care (117 children ceased to be in care). The previous year (2015/16) the numbers were significantly higher (153 children came into care and 162 children ceased to be in care).
- 4.3 It is important to note the impact of this in terms of creating stability in care for children and the most notable change in terms of permanency outcomes in 2017/18 is an increase in children who have returned home to live with parents which was 39.4% (42 children) this year compared to 37.6% in 2016/17 and 29.6% in 2015/16.
- 4.4 The number of children who have left care as the result of a Special Guardianship Order has increased on the previous two years, however, the figures remain low; it is noted elsewhere that fewer children have had Adoption Orders granted this year. These are two key options for permanence and the Reviewing Service will continue to ensure these options are considered when permanency is discussed in the child's review. These options will also be considered at Permanency Planning Meetings (PPM's), which are now being facilitated more consistently and more regularly and to which the IRO is often invited/able to attend.

Outcome	% 2017/18	%2016/17	%2015/16
Returned home to live with parents	39.4%	37.6%	29.6%
Independent arrangement with formalised support	20.2%	0%	0%
Independent arrangement no formalised support	1.8%	0.9%	0.6%
Transferred to adult services	0.0%	0%	1.2%
Ceased for any other reason	11%	31.6%	30.9%
Sentenced to custody	4.6%	0%	6.2%
Adopted – application unopposed	8.3%	9.4%	9.9%
Adopted – consent dispensed with	0%	0%	0%
Returned home – residence order	0.9%	7.7%	5.6%
Special Guardianship Order to former foster carers	0%	4.3%	6.8%
SGO made to carers other than former foster carers	12.8%	8.5%	9.3%

Table 1: Permanency outcomes table

- 4.5 Of those children and young people looked after on 31 March 2018; 109 were male and 97 were female, on 31 March 2017, 112 (56.9%) were male and 85 (43.1%) were female. This is similar to the figures reflected at the end of March 2016 (56.4% male and 43.6% female).

	31 March 2018	31 March, 2017
Male	53.1%	56.9%
Female	46.9%	43.1%

Table 2: Gender of children in care

- 4.6 Of those children and young people in care on 31 March, 2018 there is a decrease in the % of children under one year old, and an increase in children aged one to nine years. The number of children aged ten to fifteen has seen a decrease, and those aged sixteen plus very slightly increasing.

There are a number of reasons for the changes which include an improved focus and action on safeguarding in particular on babies under one. In the older age groups this % is in line with national figures and reflects some of the issues associated with contextual safeguarding such as gang association, CSE risks and issues with parental control, as examples of reasons for coming into care.

	31 March 2018	31 March, 2017
Under one year	5.8%	8.6%
One to four years	12.6%	8.6%
Five to nine years	19.4%	13.2%
Ten to fifteen years	35.4%	43.7%
16 +	26.6%	25.9%

Table 3: Age of children in care

- 4.7 Over 200 children were looked after in Slough on 31st March 2018, this is up slightly (8.42%) from 31st March 2017, of those almost a quarter had been looked after for 2.5 years and over 70% were in stable placements which is positive.

No of children Looked After at end of year:	31 st March 2018	31 st March 2017
	206	190
Number of full time CLA in care less than 1 month	13	3
Number of full time CLA in care 1-6 months	26	28
Number of full time CLA in care 7-12 months	44	45
Number of full time CLA in care 1-2 years	40	35
Number of full time CLA in care 2-5 years	40	39
Number of full time CLA in care 5 -10 years	39	38
Number of full time CLA in care over 10 years	4	2
Number of full time CLA who are UASC	8	14
Proportion in stable placements (2 years +)	41.6%	67.4%
Proportion placed inside Slough or within 20 miles	75.1%	68.1%

Table 4: Length of time in care and placement stability

4.8 There has been an increase in the proportion of children placed inside Slough or within 20 miles of Slough, this is positive and linked to the successful recruitment of foster carers in Slough. It remains a concern that a quarter of our looked after children are placed 20 or more miles from Slough, however, this is a challenge faced by many social care departments. At the end of March 2018 there were 19 children placed 20-50 miles from Slough, 21 children placed 50-100 miles from Slough and 9 children placed 100 or more miles from Slough. It is interesting to note that this is reflective of the figures for looked after children across England at 31st March 2017 when 74% of placements were within 20 miles of home.

4.9 There is a number of explanations for our children being accommodated outside of Slough, some of whom at a considerable distance; some children who have been accommodated and are at risk of CSE may be placed further afield in order to reduce the risk and access specialist care provision.

4.10 Of the children and young people in care as at 31 March, 2018 children who are white British was 38.4% (up 4%) on last year.

There has been an increase in children from white / other background in care, and also an increase in Asian Pakistani and Black British Caribbean and Black British African children in care.

It would be beneficial to complete further analysis of the ethnicity of children in care to ensure it reflects the local demographic and ensure services are meeting the needs of local communities and that there is not an over or under representation of any particular ethnic groups.

It is important to ensure that ethnicity and cultural needs are being clearly identified and supported for our children in care and IROs ensure there is an overview of this within the review process and discussions are recorded in the minutes accordingly.

No of children Looked After at end of year:	31 st March 2018	31 st March 2017
White British	38.4%	34.5%
White Irish	0.0%	0.5%
White – any other background	16.1%	9.1%
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0.0%	0.0%
Gypsy / Roma	1.8%	2.0%
White and Black Caribbean	5.4%	6.6%
White and Black African	2.7%	1.5%
White and Asian	1.3%	2.5%
Any other mixed background	8.5%	7.6%
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3.6%	4.1%
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	6.3%	9.1%
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0.0%	0.5%
Asian – any other Asian background	2.2%	4.6%
Asian or Asian British - Sikh	2.7%	2.0%
Black or Black British Caribbean	1.8%	3.6%
Black or Black British - African	4.9%	5.1%
Black any other background	1.3%	2.0%
Chinese	0.0%	1.5%
Any other ethnic group	2.7%	2.5%
Proportion of full time CLA who are BME	41.7%	52.1%

Table 5: Ethnicity of children in care

4.11 The legal status of children in care on 31 March, 2018 is shown in the table below, alongside figures for the 31 March, 2017. The % of children in care on an order (ICO of Care Order) has decreased over the year and those children placed on S20 (voluntary care) has reduced; this is good practice in line with national guidance on the use of S20; An increase in Placement Orders is positive and is in line with the Trust's focus on permanency.

	31 March 2018	31 March, 2017
Interim Care Order (S 38 CA 1989)	18.3%	19.3%
Care Order (S 31 CA 1989)	46.9%	53.3%
Placement Order Granted	8.9%	4.6%
In local authority or remand or committed for trial or sentence	0.9%	0.0%
Police Protection in local authority accommodation.	0.0%	0.0%
Single period of accommodation (S20 CA 1989)	15.6%	17.3%
S 20 Short Breaks (Respite)	3.1%	3.6%

Table 6: Legal status of children in care

4.12 During 2017/18; 13 Adoption Orders were made, this is a small increase from 2016/17 when 11 Adoption Orders were made.

There has been a decline in the timeliness of Orders being made following the Agency Decision Makers decision, however it is noted that none have exceeded 18 months in this year.

An IRO has been identified as a link IRO to the Adoption Team and they will meet on a quarterly basis in order to continue to focus on the challenges and issues where children are placed for adoption. The IRO service has also met with Coram and attended Coram events in order to strengthen knowledge and practice pertaining to permanence.

	31 March 2018	31 March, 2017
Order made within 12 months of ADM decision	15.4%	6 (54.5%)
Order made within 12 – 18 months of ADM decision	84.6%	5 (45.5%)

Table 7: Adoption activity

5 Timeliness of statutory reviews

- 5.1 Under provisions set out in the IRO Handbook (2010) there is a requirement to review the case of any child who is in care or provided with accommodation within the following timescales:
- The first review must take place within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after or is provided with accommodation
 - The second review must be carried out no later than 3 months after the first review and subsequent reviews must be carried out not more than 6 months after the date of the previous review meeting
 - Each IRO has a designated case load and is responsible for ensuring that each child's review takes place within timescales. The IRO also ensures that care planning is robust and that young people, parents, carers and relevant professionals have the opportunity to participate fully in the review process
 - It may be necessary to bring forward a child's review meeting if:
 - There is a change of placement or other substantial change to the care plan
 - The IRO has specific concerns about the child and directs that the review be brought forward
 - There is a request from the child or parent for a review to be brought forward.
- 5.2 Number of looked after children reviews completed:
- Of the 523 reviews held in 2017/18, 97.5% (510) were completed within timescales and 2.5% (13) were completed outside of timescales. This remains good performance and exceeds the figures for the previous year when 535 reviews were held, 95.1% were held in timescale and 4.9% were not. The IROs remain committed to ensuring reviews take place in a timely manner that meets the needs of each child / young person's circumstances.
 - The number of reviews completed above the statutory requirements for a small minority of children in the year remains high, this is due to a number of complicating factors including changes to the child's care plan, and planned / unplanned placement moves. Whilst this does not increase the overall case load for the IRO, it does increase the workload associated with additional reviews taking place. It is good practice to hold more frequent reviews where there are concerns about a child and this was noted by Ofsted in a monitoring visit this year. Placement stability at the end of March 2018 was 13.1% (27 children) who had experienced three or more placement moves; this is almost identical to 31st March 2017 where 13.1% (25 children) experienced three or more placement moves.
- 5.3 Timeliness of review meetings are monitored by the Safeguarding Service in order to ensure that a review only goes out of timescale if it is in the best interest of the child.

6 Participation of Children at CLA Review meeting and representing their Views

6.1 We are working hard to ensure that the voice of the child is clearly represented at CLA Review meetings. We want to enable the effective participation of children and young people in the care planning process; we want to do this an age appropriate and child focussed way. There are a range of tools that can be used by social workers and IROs to enable children to share their wishes and feelings.

- 'My Reviews...My Views' is an on line tool offered to all children aged 8 to 15 that that helps children and young people express how they feel about their home life, education, emotional and physical health and their social worker. A brand new form for young people aged 16 and 17 has been created which asks questions that are more relevant and appropriate for young people of this age. Children aged 4-7 receive a paper version as this age group often find it easier to express their views, thoughts and feelings through drawings.



www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/myreviewmyviews



www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/myreviewmyviews16-17

- Some children and young people prefer to speak to their IRO by text message;
- Some children and Young People like to speak to their IRO by phone;
- Some children and young people like to speak to their IRO by Email;
- Lots of our children and young people prefer to see their IRO Face to face.

6.2 Children and young people who attend their review should be well prepared by their Social Worker and supported at the meeting. Children and young people who do attend bring great value to the meeting and it is really useful to hear their views and thoughts. Children and young people should be consulted in respect of their review, how they want it facilitated and who they want to be there. It is imperative that we gain their views through the pre-meeting consultation and we need to increase our efforts in this regard.

6.3 We need to encourage more children and young people to use the 'My Reviews...My Views' on line tool; from October to December 2017 a total of 8 children completed the form. (Breakdown of 8 = 4 x 11 year olds / 1 x 14 year old / 2 x 16 year olds and 1 x 17 year old). This number is slightly less than the two previous quarters. We have taken steps to improve the distribution of the on line tool for children and anticipate an increase going forward in the number of children who use it.

- 6.4 Some children and young people have their views represented at their review by an advocate. The benefit of this is that the advocate is independent and purely presents what the child or young person has said to them. It is good practice to offer advocacy services to children and young people and is a service that we need to promote with increased rigor so that we can ensure that we have done enough to encourage the participation of children at their review.
- 6.5 As of the beginning of March 2018 the IRO Service has incorporated a set of questions into the Reviewing Officers Quality Assurance form which specifically asks about the child's voice. It is predicted that the new template will enable us to gather quantitative and qualitative data. We are not yet in a position to report on this but it is envisaged that we will sufficient data to report on in the next quarterly report.
- 6.6 In the year 2017/18; 97% of children in care have been recorded as having participated in their review, this is a significant increase in the % of children who were recorded as having participated in their review in the year 2016/17 which was 88.7%. The IRO's have been creative in how they encourage children and young people to participate, this has included the child making name plates and helping plan seating arrangements to providing a young person with an agenda which he rigorously implemented.
- 6.7 During the year 2017 /18 the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) was commissioned to provide advocacy, return home interviews for children out of area and Independent Visitors. NYAS received 56 referrals for advocacy during the year with a proportion of these for children seeking support for their reviews, (see case study).
- 6.8 The IROs note that a survey called Bright Spots was completed with children in care by Coram, which provided information on a wide range of issues for children in care, this survey lead to additional questions being added to the on line consultation form My Review My views for children in care and IROs will ensure these are carried through for discussion in reviews where relevant.

Research with foster children shows they want to be heard and have their views taken into account. This includes their views on:

- contact with their birth family
- the kind of foster family they want
- the way decisions are taken in their day-to-day lives
- their long-term future.

(Sinclair, 2005)

- 6.9 The participation of children in their review has been a significant focus for the IROs in 2017/18. The Participation Officer came into the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service at the end of March 2017 and the IROs have worked closely with the Officer to increase participation; they will continue to do this.

Parental participation in CLA reviews

6.10 The IRO has a responsibility to gain the views of parents within the review process, this is important as it helps the IRO to understand the way in which the child is viewed by parents and to gain an idea of the life experiences of the child.

There are many ways a parent can be involved including:

- Attending the formal meeting.
- Completing and returning consultation documents.
- A separate meeting can be arranged with the allocated IRO.
- Telephone / email communication with the allocated IRO.
- Via a Social worker / Advocate.

One exception is that birth parents do not attend CLA review meetings when a child is on a placement order and about to be placed for adoption. Their views are sought and communicated to the meeting but they do not attend.

The IRO's aim to engage parents in the review process wherever possible, this activity has not been measured in 2017/18 and will be an area for development for the service in the coming year.

Participation and contribution of partner agencies

6.11 Participation from partner agencies is important in ensuring there is a clear multi-agency input into the ongoing care plan. The review meeting covers all areas of need and requires input from health, education and other specialist services that may be involved. The IROs note in particular within the Hub model the role of the Clinician and the positive impact that this has had in addressing some more complex cases.

6.12 The IRO's also liaise with the nurse for children in care, and will ensure that they refer to the health assessment in the review meeting.

6.13 Children in care who are school age have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting within 20 days of coming into care. The IRO recognises the importance of education in improving outcomes for children and one IRO has been linked with the Virtual School to ensure clear links and communication. The IRO will review the PEP and any other key documents prior to the review. The Reviewing Service acknowledges the significant developments and improvements in the Virtual School and the positive impact on education support and opportunities for children in care.

6.14 An IRO has been identified to be a link person to the YOT to ensure clear liaison when children under 18 are placed on remand.

6.15 Members of the IRO service have attended the Berkshire CAFCASS liaison meetings. These meetings offer the IRO an opportunity to meet with Guardians and discuss the interface between Guardians and IROs. IROs also have contact with the Guardian on individual cases during court proceedings. Further development and commitment from all parties is required to build on this relationship to support the views of the child being heard in the court process.

7. Health and education for looked after children

- 7.1 All CLA children and young people should have their health needs reviewed in order to ensure that their care plan addresses their health needs sufficiently; and to ensure that all children have access to their health history.

No of CLA in care 12+ months at end of month:	31 st March 2018	31 st March 2017
	130 CLA	120 CLA
Who had a dental check in the last 12 months	100 (76.9%)	90 (75%)
Who had a health assessment in the last 12 months	117 (90%)	107 (89%)
Combined % of CLA who are up to date with health and dental checks.	83.5%	82.1%

Table 8: Health check activity

- 7.2 The figures in the table above indicate a slight improvement in health and dental checks overall. The IRO Service notes that there is work ongoing to focus on improving this figure further and there is good liaison with the health of CLA Nursing Service and the identification of a single point of contact in the Trust to coordinate the health notification process.
- 7.3 The IROs will continue to monitor these key performance areas in order to support ongoing improvement and to improve health outcomes for children in care. This will be supported through the consultation form that carers complete and via the reports that social workers complete in preparation for review meetings. Health needs are discussed at every CLA review and actions are identified where appropriate.
- 7.4 All CLA children and young people should have their education needs monitored, according to figures provided by the Virtual School the figures for the number of completed PEPs for those children who attending education are impressive, the quality of PEP's varies and continues to be monitored:
- **Numbers of PEPs**
 - 100% completion of PEPs in autumn term
 - 95%+ completed (snow days lost) but not all had been signed off by the Virtual Head at the time of reporting.
 - First PEPs within 20 days 90%+ none more than 3 school weeks from notification. Courtesy calls made before PEPs
 - **Quality of PEPs**
 - According to audit the average PEP is now good.
- 7.5 The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a brief emotional and behavioural screening questionnaire for children and young people. SDQ Activity needs to improve in terms of being carried out and adequately recorded; however, table 9 indicates that there has been a dramatic improvement over the last year in completing SDQ's.

	31 st March 2018	31 st March 2017
No of CLA at end of month who have been in care for at least 12 months and are aged 4 and above:	123	190
Proportion of CLA where an SDQ has been completed in the last 12 months	77.6%	23.7%
Proportion of CLA where an SDQ has been completed more than 12 months ago	4.8%	4.7%
Proportion of CLA where an SDQ has never been completed	17.6%	71.6%

Table 9: SDQ activity

7.6 The Social worker ensures that the SDQ is completed by the carer for all children and young people in care between the ages of 4-17. For those between the ages of 11-17, the young person and school are asked to complete SDQ's as well. If any SDQ score is above 14, the Clinician completes an analysis and ensures that the results are discussed in hub meetings and at the CLA review meeting. The results and analysis will be reflected in the Care plan developed in the CLA review. SDQ's should be completed every 6 months, so ensuring these are completed before CLA reviews will help to ensure the appropriate frequency.

8. Quality assurance

- 8.1 All the IROs within the service contribute to the audit programme that takes place across the Trust. This enables them to have a clear understanding of the level of practice across the Trust and to identify areas for development within the service and more broadly. Where an area for development is identified through audit this is shared with the IRO and action is taken to address the issues raised.
- 8.2 There has been some observation of IROs in practice which has been limited in this year; this is an area for further development in the year 2018/19.
- 8.3 During 2017/18 the main source of reporting performance to the Trust and partners has been through the Trust Performance Board which has focused on performance data, and the audit programme which has focused on thematic issues and learning. This is an area for further development during 2018/19 where it is intended that the Reviewing Service will continue to produce regular performance and quality assurance information.
- 8.4 The IROs have completed some quality assurance recording activity although this has not been consistent. It is positive to note from recording that IROs meeting with the child has improved and that permanency planning being initiated at the second review has improved. The mechanism for quality assurance and collating of evidence will remain an area of focus in 2018/19.
- 8.5 Between 1st January 2018 and 19th March 2018, 164 Due Diligence Audits were completed on CLA cases; we did not audit any case that had already been audited within the last 6 months. The Trust had not completed Due Diligence Audits previously and so an audit template was designed in order to aid the collection of data. A report and action plan was completed to address issues identified. The exercise will be repeated in the 2018/19 period.

- 8.6 The Reviewing Service Manager, the CLA Head of Service and a CLA Consultant Social Worker liaised with IT to reconfigure the CLA Review Report format; the purpose of this was to ensure that the content of the report is more meaningful. The new format encourages the social worker to provide a proposed care plan which can then be ratified at the CLA Review meeting; this means that there should be no CLA child or young person with an out of date care plan. There has been some delay in this form being available on the system, but this is being actively pursued to ensure it is implemented.

Management oversight and monitoring

- 8.9 The role of the IRO manager is set out in the handbook. A key aspect of the IRO Service is in supporting ongoing quality assurance activity as part of the Quality Assurance Strategy.
- 8.10 The IROs meet on a regular basis led by the Reviewing Service Manager and periodically attended by the Head of Service. This enables the IROs to review performance, consider areas for development and consider best practice.
- 8.11 The IROs have delivered training for Social Workers on the roles and responsibilities of the review. This is intended to continue and additionally new workers are offered one to one meetings with IROs.
- 8.12 IROs attend a variety of meetings to provide input and challenge as appropriate, this includes Permanency Planning meetings, and IROs where necessary meet with Social Workers to discuss individual cases.
- 8.13 The IROs contribute to foster carers' reviews by completing consultation forms. This allows the IRO to comment on good practice and also identify areas of concern.
- 8.14 The IROs receive regular supervision from the Reviewing Service Manager; going forward a note will be added to the child's file when their case has been discussed in IRO supervision, the purpose of this is to evidence effective and consistent management oversight.
- 8.15 The IROs have begun to link with different areas of the Trust to build awareness of the role and input as a 'specialist.' This enables the IRO to learn from the various areas of the Trust as well as input to ongoing developments.
- 8.16 The Reviewing Service Manager and the Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance have begun to complete thematic audits in order to identify and address areas of poor practice and performance, as well as to acknowledge good practice and performance.

Training and peer support

- 8.17 All members of the team have undertaken training appropriate to their needs. The IROs have the opportunity to attend a legal briefing (as part of a Pan Berkshire arrangement) on a quarterly basis, in addition to a quarterly meeting with CAF/CASS.
- 8.18 Individually members of the team have all completed half day training on Systemic Practice, two days training on Signs of Safety and a further full day of looking at the Signs of Safety framework; and have attended various other training courses such as Coercive Control, CSE and Gang Awareness.

- 8.19 Members of the IRO Service have attended the IRO South East regional meetings and the Berkshire IRO legal surgeries. Common themes IROs are monitoring are legal status and the use of S20, being aware that young people know their entitlements.
- 8.20 Members of the IRO Service are able to access various internet based forum's such as NAIRO (National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers <http://www.nairo.org.uk>) and NIROMP (National IRO Managers Partnership <https://niromp.org>); these websites provide access to common themes, legislation, research and training.
- 8.21 The Reviewing Service Manager has successfully completed the Systemic Supervision training facilitated by the Tri-Borough; it is envisaged that she will complete a 2nd year of systemic training. The Review Service Manager is committed to imparting her knowledge and learning through her practice and supervision of IRO's.
- 8.22 All members of the team are involved in the planning and delivery of training pertaining to CLA processes and procedures; this will be delivered on a quarterly basis. The Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Service would appreciate the support of operational heads of service to ensure attendance.

9. Challenge and dispute resolution

- 9.1 The IRO service has been working to resolve issues informally where possible and has primarily held face to face and email discussions where possible to raise and resolve issues. The IRO footprint on children's case records has increased and IROs are challenging care plans and practice, this has been commented on in the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Report:

“ Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are now having an impact in challenging and guiding children's plans. The use of formal escalation is increasing. IROs meet regularly with children and social workers, both in and outside of reviews. The timeliness of children looked after reviews and the level of participation by children in their reviews are much improved. The minutes of review meetings are child-centred and written directly to the child in plain language; they ensure children know why they are in care, and who is responsible for making sure that they remain safe. Professional relationships between social workers, team managers, and independent reviewing officers (IROs) are increasingly constructive, and are contributing to strengthening quality assurance processes.”

- 9.2 The Review Service implemented a revised process for raising escalations which has been in use since October 2017. There is now a clear and transparent escalation process in place and its use has enabled the successful resolution of a number of escalations. We have developed an escalation tracker which will enable us to collect data regarding the use of the escalation process and the progress or resolution of the escalations raised. The escalation process is beginning to gather momentum, however, requires time, continuity and consistency of use in order to successfully embed it in practice. The service is confident that we will be in a position to begin reporting on this in the next quarter.

- 9.3 The challenges made by IROs vary and include as examples:
- Delay in care planning
 - Regulatory CLA visits not taking place within timescales
 - Drift in follow up actions in the agreed care plan
 - Social Work reports not always being provided for CLA reviews
 - Level of contact and other contact issues.
- 9.4 The service has a revised escalation protocol and tracker in place. The tracker has not been used to its full potential and as such this is an area that needs addressing in the reviewing service QA process. 45 escalations have been recorded in 2018, of those escalations it is positive to note that the majority have been successfully resolved at an informal level, where the IRO has spoken to the social worker and any issues raised and actions agreed have been clearly recorded in the case notes as an informal challenge, or, where the issue or concern has not been resolved through informal challenge the IRO has sent a formal stage 1 challenge to the Consultant Social Worker with a response provided within five working days.
- 9.5 There is one example where the IRO has raised a challenge that has not been resolved satisfactorily and the IRO has sought advice from CAF/CASS; this advice is an option that is available where the IRO wishes to seek independent advice and guidance.
- 9.6 Where the IROs have made more formal challenges examples include:
- Delay in achieving legal permanency for a child
 - Delay in progressing legal proceedings
 - IRO in disagreement with the Care Plan.
- 9.7 There is some very good practice demonstrated within Slough Children's Services Trust, with some very dedicated professionals working hard to support the children and young people they are working with to achieve the best possible outcomes. This might be to safely return to the care of their parents where it has been assessed as safe to do so; or to achieve permanency either through adoption, Special Guardianship Order of permanent fostering. The IRO members are of the view that good practice should be recognised and will acknowledge the worker's efforts with their Consultant Social Worker.

Feedback from IRO to CSW:

"I chaired the CLA review for J and M this morning which is one of E's cases. I wanted to let you know that when speaking to J alone she told me that she really liked her social worker because she always listened to her and she knew that if she ever needed her, the social worker would drop everything and come and see her".

Feedback from IRO to CSW:

During a LAC review today the foster carer stated that she has received a very good service from R social workers. The carer has particularly appreciated that the SW's have regularly kept her updated in regards to the care proceedings in respect of R and have been straight and direct with her about what is possible and unlikely to be possible in respect to R's future care plan.

10. Issues impacting on the service for children in care

- 10.1 In the first 18 months of the Trust forming and developing there was a significant change programme underway which saw practice moving from a traditional team model to a Hub model. This initially resulted in significant changes in structure, and personnel. It was important for the IROs to maintain a clear overview of children during that period to ensure that there was consistency in planning alongside the change that took place.
- 10.2 The Trust has continued on its improvement journey and has welcomed the DfE Peer Review and the Ofsted monitoring visits which have enabled us to focus on specific areas of practice and development. The Trust has also welcomed the support of Essex County Council, who continue to work with us to drive up standards.
- 10.3 Staff turnover, particularly social workers, can have an impact on the timeliness of decisions, continuity and care planning; as of 31st March 2018 24.6% of children looked after (for 12 months or more) had two or more changes in social worker in the last 12 months. The importance of permanent IROs during such periods is in keeping a clear overview of the plan ensuring drift and delay is kept to a minimum. Staff turnover remains a concern and is a concern that our children have raised with us. It is positive to note that over the last year the ratio of permanent staff to agency staff has increased and this has increased stability across the social work hubs.
- 10.4 The demographic for Slough is particularly complex with a rich variety of cultural needs, alongside some complex issues such as gang associations, Child Sexual Exploitation, children who frequently go missing, children who are unaccompanied asylum seekers. This has meant that in some cases there have been learning needs identified to ensure that the IROs have the relevant skills and knowledge in these issues in order to address them within the review meeting. IRO's have access to and have attended a range of training including CSE training – Reach every generation and Gang Awareness training.
- 10.5 Whilst the case loads for the IROs are within the requirements of the IRO Handbook, the workload remains significant for the IRO Service. It is important to note that the Trust as a whole continues on its improvement journey and the IRO service is part of that, with clear recognition of the areas for improvement needed to further improve and embed the IRO challenge and quality assurance function.

- 10.5 There has been an increase in children in PLO and care proceedings and therefore an increase in court work. IROs are required to have oversight of these cases, raise issues where there is drift and delay and IROs have been asked to write a statement for court.
- 10.6 Where children are placed out of the area this has an impact on the IRO and other professionals in terms of time travelling, ensuring contact with the child between reviews and monitoring and ensuring their needs are being met to a good standard.
- 10.7 A small minority of children have experienced a high number of placement moves which has resulted in additional reviews taking place.

11. Summary

11.1 What is working well?

- The IRO service has a full compliment of staff;
- There is an improved escalation process in place;
- The vast majority of CLA Review meetings are held within timescales;
- Children and young people are encouraged to participate in their review;
- The review meeting minutes are child focused and are written to the child or young person; this has been positively commented on by Ofsted.
- Dedicated workforce and striving to achieve best outcomes for children.
- IROs are aware that the majority of 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;
- IRO's have linked with other service areas to monitor and improve practice.

11.2 What are we worried about?

- CLA Reports not being available in good time prior to the CLA Review taking place, on occasion not being available on the day of the CLA Review and at times, not available until some time after the CLA Review has been held;
- CLA Reports not being shared with families/child/young people prior to the review;
- % of children who have not had their health needs assessed in the last 12 months;
- IRO's working to maximum capacity at times and having less capacity to complete tasks such as midway monitoring;
- CLA invitations and consultation documents not being sent out in a timely manner.

Action plan 2017/18

No	Action	Responsibility	By
1	Collect and share data pertaining to timeliness and quality of social work reports.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	1 st Quarter
2	Collect and share data pertaining to escalations. Improve the recording of informal challenge and escalation to demonstrate IRO oversight.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	1st Quarter
3	Update Due Diligence template and develop tracker.	Review Service Manager and CLA Head of Service	1 st Quarter
4	Midway Monitoring to be completed on all CLA cases with use of standardised template.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	On going
5	Complete regular thematic audits, record outcomes and actions and ensure outcomes are followed up.	Review Service Manager, Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.	On going
6	Increase representation of Independent Reviewing Service at key strategic and operations meetings and panels such as Adoption and Fostering Panel, Permanency Panel, etc.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	2nd Quarter
7	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 consultation documents.	Independent Reviewing Officer, IRO Admin and Review Service Manager.	2nd Quarter
8	Improve the participation and engagement of parents in review meetings and other areas of our work with them.	Independent Reviewing Officer, Review Service Manager, Social Worker and Consultant Social Worker.	On going

9	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 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.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	2nd Quarter
10	There is some excellent practice within Slough, with very dedicated workers working extremely hard to support the children they're working with to achieve the best possible outcomes. We need to ensure that we are recording and reporting on this.	Independent Reviewing Officer and Review Service Manager.	2 nd Quarter