

**Independent Reviewing Officer  
Looked After Children Annual Report  
1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 This report covers the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017. The report will be presented to Children's Services Senior Management Team, the Together for Children Board, the Corporate Parenting Board, Children's Scrutiny Committee and the Sunderland Safeguarding Board.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to provide information on the progress made within the Independent Reviewing (IRO) service and the impact that this has had upon children/young people. The report provides an overview of the improvements made, emerging themes and trends in performance, examples of good practice and IRO service priorities for the next 12 months. The report focuses on performance in relation to Looked after Children (LAC). A separate report is provided in relation to the Conference Chair role undertaken by the Service.

## **2 Legal context - The role of the IRO**

- 2.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child/young person looked after by a Local Authority became a legal requirement under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which gave responsibility to IRO's for reviewing plans and placements for children in any form of placement. This requirement was replaced by the Care Planning and Placement Regulations Act 2010.
- 2.2 The IRO handbook outlines the statutory framework for the IRO to discharge their duties including; ensuring that children/young people's care plans meet their needs and that their wishes and feelings are taken into consideration. The IRO also ensures that children/young people in care have their review completed within statutory timescales.
- 2.3 The IRO has a duty to monitor the performance of the Local Authority as a corporate parent, identify practice deficits and alert managers about these in a timely manner and also to seek to achieve positive outcomes for children/young people.

## **3 IRO Services in Sunderland – Overview of staffing structure and training**

- 3.1 In September 2016 the management of the IRO service transferred to the Quality and Performance Directorate. A new structure followed in November 2016 which permanently increased the number of IROs from 10.6 to 13.5 and IRO Management from 1 to 2. The aim of the new structure is to improve managerial oversight and to ensure that caseloads can be continually maintained, within statutory requirements.
- 3.2 In April 2017, Together for Children - Sunderland was launched and the IRO Service transferred to the Company. The IRO Service also took over the direct line management of a dedicated administration team from this date.
- 3.3 Since the last annual report, only one part time permanent staff member has left the IRO service due to retirement. As the overall capacity has increased, there has been

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a strong emphasis on recruitment to a permanent team. The recruitment drive has been very successful and by June 2017, all newly appointed IROs will have taken up their position and all team members will be permanent. The service is also working on ensuring that the administration team have a more permanent workforce.

- 3.4 Due to the success of the IRO recruitment, some reallocation of cases has been necessary. In January 2017 every looked after child/young person received a letter from the team confirming the name of their IRO. Subsequent to this, departing IRO's were asked to contact the children/ young people they were working with to wish them well and advise them of the name of the new IRO.
- 3.5 All IRO's in Sunderland are qualified Social Workers and are registered with the Health Care Professional Council. They undertake a dual role of IRO and Conference Chairing. The IRO's have a broad range of appropriate knowledge and experience including:-
- Frontline Child Protection Social Work
  - Team Management
  - Adoption and Fostering
  - Next Steps (Leaving Care)
  - Children with Disabilities
  - Therapeutic Work
  - Residential Work
  - Cafcass Work
  - Direct Work with Looked after Children
- 3.6 All IROs have access to independent legal advice if required, through a commissioned arrangement with an independent solicitor.

#### **4 IRO - Caseloads**

- 4.1 As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, there were 534 looked after children in Sunderland compared to 546 at the end of March 2016. (See Table 1)
- 4.2 The IRO Handbook states that the looked after children case load for each IRO should be between 50 and 70 whilst taking into consideration additional duties. The average IRO looked after case load (as at the end of March 2017) is 39.5 per IRO which is a reduction from March 2016. The IRO's also hold a child protection caseload averaging 31.5 child protection cases which corresponds to an approximate overall average case load of 71 cases per FTE. (See table 1).
- 4.3 During the period 1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017, the IROs undertook 1660 looked after children reviews, which is a increase from March 2016 of 101 reviews.

*Table 1 – IRO caseload – LAC*

March 16	March 17
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Cases and Caseload		
Number of Looked After Children	546	534
Number of looked after children reviews	1511	1660
Average number of LAC cases allocated cases to IRO's within team	51.5	39.5

## 5 IRO – Performance and Outcomes for Looked After Children

- 5.1 Since the Ofsted inspection in 2015, the IRO service has been working hard with Children's Services to improve outcomes for children in care. In the Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2017, Ofsted noted that *"the IRO service is more visible, and performance is improved"* (Ofsted monitoring visit 2&3<sup>rd</sup> February 2017). Whilst progress has been pleasing, the IRO service acknowledge that further work is required to improve outcomes for children/young people who are looked after and the Service will continue to ensure that the child/young person's journey is promoted and strengthened.
- 5.2 To assess the performance of the IRO Service, the Service has developed a performance scorecard which shows performance against a number of key Performance indicators (KPIs) as follows. 6 of the 7 KPIs have demonstrated improved performance from the 15/16 outturn.

Table 2 – Key Performance Indicators

	May-15	15/16 outturn	16/17 outturn
<b>LAC</b>			
% of CLA at end of period where reviews were held in timescales	92%	90%	95%
% of CLA at end of period where young people participated in their most recent review	94%	96%	97%
% CLA at end of period with an up to date Care Plan	98%	85%	93%
% CLA at end of period with an up to date PEP	71%	86%	81%
% of CLA at end of period accommodated under section 20	52%	38%	24%
No of Pre IRO visits completed	n/ava	n/ava	2477
<b>Leaving Care</b>			
% CLA at end of period with an up to date Pathway Plan (within 6 months)	27% (Aug 15)	81%	94%

### 5.2.1 Timeliness of Looked After Reviews (LAR)

Within 20 working days of a child/young person becoming looked after, a LAR is required. A second review has to be convened within 3 months (91 days) of the first review if not sooner, then every 6 months (183 days) after this. Reviews can be held early and in cases whereby there is an unplanned change to the child/young person's care plan, then a review should be convened with the set review date being brought forward. 95% of reviews were held within timescale.

There are a number of reasons why a Looked After Review is held out of timescale. In September 2016, the IROs changed the system for capturing the reasons why reviews were out of timescale to ensure more consistency in the data collated. Data has therefore only been captured in relation to Quarter 3 and Quarter 4. Table 3 below shows that the majority of reviews were out of timescale due to a calculation error, which increased in Quarter 4. This is predominantly due to the number of new IROs starting within the service as the current IT Management system does not project the date of the next review which leaves reviews vulnerable to calculation errors. All IROs have been requested to plan looked after reviews 20 working days prior to them going out of timescale. In addition to this, checks are also being built into the new IT system, Liquid logic, to reduce the risk of any calculation errors going forward.

*Table 3 – Reason for Looked after Reviews been out of timescale*

Reason	Qtr. 3 (Oct – Dec 2016)	Qtr. 4 (Jan – Mar 2017)
Late notification	1	0
Calculation Error	6	14
Missing Report	0	0
Non Attendance by a significant person	3	4
Non Attendance by Social Worker	0	0
Series of meeting (looked after review commenced a further meeting required)	3	1
Total number of children	13	19

The IROs have also sought to improve performance of LARs in timescale by:

- The IRO manager checking the date of the review at the point of allocation, to ensure that LAR's are kept in timescale.
- Addressing the reasons for any out of timescales with individuals during supervision sessions.
- Delivering training on the reviewing process to all new IROs.
- The Introduction of a daily allocation meeting in December 2016.

### 5.2.2 Participation with children and young people

Engagement with children/young people continues to be a central part of the IRO role to ensure that children/young people have a voice within their looked after review process.

The percentage of young people who participated in their review was 97% as at March 2017. This is a 1% increase on the outturn in March 2016.

The IRO service utilise a number of tools to support engagement within children and young people including Viewpoint, which is a computer assisted interviewing tool which children either complete this by themselves or via the support of the Viewpoint Officer. In this year, 175 viewpoint documents have been completed and to advise the IRO of children and young people's views. In all age groups the areas requiring development / of least satisfaction were:

- A lack of life story work
- Not having a bank account
- Not understanding the role of the IRO or who they are
- Not having friends to visit where they are living. This area seemed to have most impact on the child. Several felt they would be happier where they lived if their friends could visit.

In light of the feedback that has been provided by children/ young people with regards to the IRO Service, the Service has taken action to remedy this situation. In January all looked after children/young people were written to, advising them of their IRO and how to contact them. Practice standards were introduced in March 2017 to ensure that IROs visit children at least 5 working days prior to their review. The IRO Service has reengaged with the change council and has set a priority for 2017/18 to develop information/ web page with regards to the IRO role and the current team of IROs in Sunderland.

MOMO (Mind of my own) has in 2016 through to 2017 grown in its use. A total of 139 MOMO statements have been provided and used to support the child's voice.

IRO staff attend Change Council meetings on a quarterly basis. The purpose of this is to gather and encourage the sharing of children/young people's views, to improve relationships between the IRO service and our children/young people and to seek advice and information from them which will then be used to inform future developments within the IRO service, such as changes to the paperwork/documentation which the IRO team use.

The IRO service has remained committed to support young people outside of primary role of chairing LAR's by supporting the children's participation officer in key events such as the Christmas party event organised by Change Council, forwarding nominations for the annual star award and the young achievers award.

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### *5.2.3 LAC with an up to date Care Plan*

The IRO service has targeted the area of care plans to ensure that every child/young person has an updated care plan. Performance in this area has improved. At the end of March 2016, 85 % of the looked after population had a care plan that had been updated within the last 6 months. As of the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, this is 93% which marks an 8% increase in the number of children with updated care plans. Work remains ongoing in relation to the standards of care plans and the need to ensure that care plans are written clearly with SMART outcomes.

### *5.2.4 LAC with an up to date Personal Education Plan*

Targeted work was undertaken in January 2017 to ensure that IRO's, during the course of the LAR's, had a good understanding of a young person's Personal Education Plan (PEP) and to ensure that a completed document with SMART recommendations was seen. Work in this area continues to be required to ensure that PEP's are SMART, as whilst the number of children with PEP increased in February 2017 to 93%, a decrease is noted in March 2017 to 81%. This will remain a targeted area in 2017-18, as will oversight in terms of improving the varying quality of these documents.

### *5.2.5 LAC accommodated under section 20*

In 2015 Ofsted raised concerns around the inappropriate use of Section 20. On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016, 38% of children were looked after under Section 20, on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 it was 24% marking a reduction of 14%. This is an important indicator that children/ young people's care plans are progressing.

### *5.2.6 IRO Visits*

In 2016/2017 focussed work was undertaken to ensure that children/young people were offered an IRO visit prior to their looked after review.

Performance reporting in the area has been strengthened; IRO's have been reminded of the need to record all contact with children/young people 2477 'contacts' have taken place. Between January 2017 and March 2017 there are 283 IRO Pre looked after visits.

### *5.2.7 LAC Pathway Plans*

Performance has improved with regards to updated pathway plans. There has been coordinated work undertaken both by social workers in the Next Steps team and by IRO's who seek to ensure that a Leaving Care Assessment is commenced at the age of 15 ½ years and an updated pathway plan is presented during the course of the young person's review from the age 16 years and 3 months. At the end of March 2016 there were only 81% of young people with an updated pathway plan, whereas at the



end of March 2017, 94% had an up to date pathway plan which represents a 13% marked increase.

In 2016, the IRO service assumed responsibility for reviewing the initial pathway plan for post 18 years of age. This ensures independent scrutiny of the pathway plan. This change was in recognition of the pivotal nature of this significant transition for our young people who were moving into adulthood.

#### *5.2.8 LAC with Health Assessments*

In relation to health, the IRO service has been targeting looked after health assessments to ensure that children and young people have an in date Health Assessment. Performance in this area has continued to be monitored to ensure improvements are achieved for looked after children/young people.

### **6 Secure Accommodation Review Panels**

- 6.1 With regard to children/young people who have been placed in secure accommodation under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989, (Welfare Secure) a secure review panel must be arranged. As part of the IRO role it is expected that all IRO's are able to chair a Secure Review Panel and subsequent reviews. Sunderland continues to have a reciprocal regional arrangement in place with South Tyneside and Gateshead; this arrangement supports the need for an independent panel member in secure accommodation reviews. For a Sunderland child/young person the secure panel requires the involvement of two IRO's from Sunderland, plus an independent IRO from the Inter- Authority Consortium arrangement.
- 6.2 From the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31st March 2017 there have been a total of 5 Sunderland children/young people who have required a secure accommodation review to be completed, all of which have taken place within the statutory timescales.

### **7 Dispute Resolution Process (DRP)**

- 7.1 The Government wants IRO's to challenge poor practice. The IRO Handbook states that Local Authorities must have a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) in place, where the Local Authority must work with the IRO to try and resolve any differences in relation to a child/young person's plan. The idea is that the issues can be resolved quickly without the need to escalate to senior managers or for the need for legal intervention. The timescale for the DRP process is 20 working days for a formal resolution to arising issues.
- 7.2 In Sunderland, the DRP is a 5 stage process. During 2016/17, there were 81 LAC disputes within this process. The vast majority were dealt with at the informal stage 1 of the procedure, indicating the commitment by all parties to the swift resolution of concerns raised by the IRO. There was only 1 dispute dealt with at stage 4 and none at stage 5 of the procedure.



Table 4 – Case Escalations

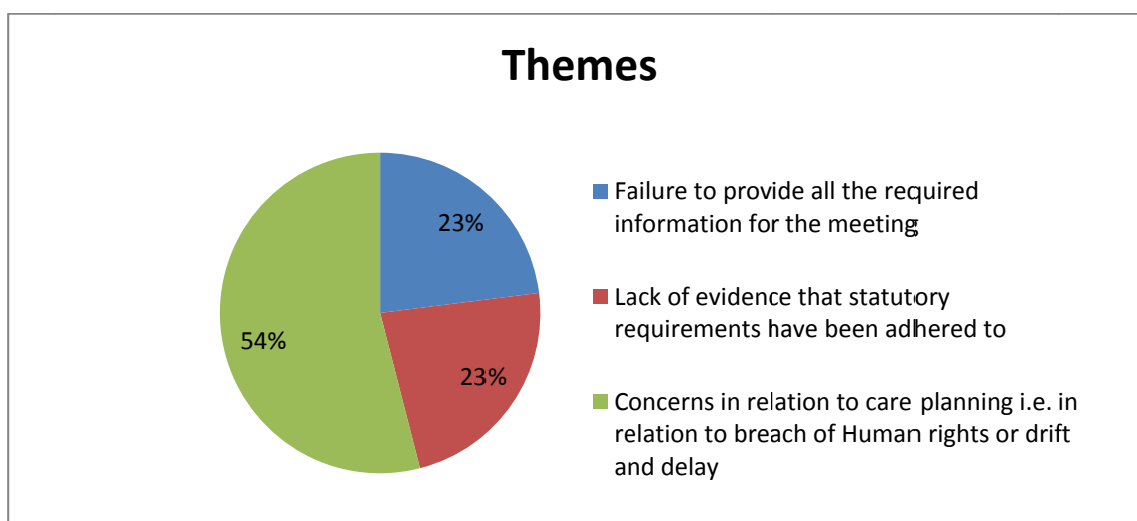
	May-15	15/16 outturn	16/17 outturn
<b>Case Escalations</b>			
No. of case escalations relating to looked after children in the period	12 (Jun 15)	n/ava	81

The main reasons for raising issues in relation to looked after children in 2016/17 are shown in the chart, however by way of example;

Case example:

A DRP was issued in respect of a sibling group age ranging 6-12years whereby the Care Plan of adoption had not been achieved and repeated requests were made by the IRO during the LAR/ Placement Order review process for Children's Services to seek a change of legal status and Care Plan. The DRP led to an agreed child focus timetable to progress the necessary changes and resulted in re-engagement of birth parents with their children.

*Overview of DRP by theme*



7.3 This information in relation to DRPs, is shared on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis with the Children's Services Management Team to ensure that issues are progressed and resolved in a timely manner for the child/young people.

7.4 Within the IRO service there is an expectation that appropriate challenge will take place, and that the service be seen as a 'critical friend and guardian to the Care Plan'. This leads to challenge as reflected within our figures. For example the challenge reflects differing practise standards within presented documents and the timeliness of care planning processes. The chart above depicts the categories; it is the expectation of the IRO when raising such matters that there will be a positive outcome and positive

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change for the child/young person. In the past year the impact of DRPs has resulted in improved Care Plans for children, changes in contact arrangements and more timely decisions being progressed.

- 7.5 Targeted work has been undertaken by the IRO team to ensure that the focus of the second looked after review is on ensuring that there is a long term plan for the child/young person and that the child's legal status meets their needs. Where this is not the case, the IRO ensures that they track the case on the child/young person's behalf to reduce the risk of delay and issue a DRP when appropriate. Performance data with regards to this is now also collated and is informing IRO management oversight. Performance against this will be reported in the 2018 annual report.

## **8.0 Partnership working**

- 8.1 The IRO service has continued to work with a wide range of organisations to achieve best practice for looked after children. In 2016/17 a number of agencies have attended the IRO team meetings to deliver updates to the service. For example, the Chief Social Worker delivered learning lessons from Serious Case reviews, the Looked after Health Nurse and Doctor attended to offer updates with regards to looked after children's health assessments and health passports and the Domestic Violence Co-Ordinator gave a briefing. The Virtual School Head provided updates with regard to PEP's and work has been undertaken in relation to Family Group Conference's with the FGC Co-coordinator.
- 8.2 IRO's have individual team links with all social worker teams. This offers a means of sharing information and raises topics for learning in IRO group supervision which ultimately improves practice.

## **9 Corporate Parenting**

- 9.1 One of the central roles of the IRO service is to support the Local Authority by scrutinising the performance of Children's Services in relation to their planning for looked after children. An IRO Manager has attended the Corporate Parenting Board and the Scrutiny Committee to update the Lead Portfolio holders in relation to the work and findings from the service.

## **10.0 What has the service achieved in 2015/16?**

- 10.1 At the beginning of 2015/16 the IRO service identified a number of key priorities. A summary of progress against these priorities is detailed below and there is further information in Appendix 1.
- *Improving the quality of recommendations* - the IRO service provide SMART recommendations to social workers and team managers in keeping with IRO standards. The SMART recommendations provide a clear timetable for the completion of work which is evident within the LAR minutes for the child/young

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person and others to see, understand and question, thus raising accountability for all involved.

- *Improving Performance Data* - The availability of performance data in the area of looked after children/young people has been strengthened by the introduction of the IRO scorecard, which is being used to improve overall performance and promote practice improvements. It has provided strength and evidence around themes and issues which impact upon children/young people and which we can address. The service has also worked to improve which data is collected e.g. pre lac visits (PLV) being undertaken and recorded within CCM. Due to the increase in PLV we have seen increased participation figures for children/young people attending their LAR's which gives increased opportunity for the voice of the child/young person to be heard.
- *Mid way reviews* - It is the expectation that midway reviews are completed with the allocated Social Worker to ensure that recommendations are being progressed. IRO's are being actively encouraged to ensure that details from these discussions are recorded on CCM and that the IRO 'footprint' is evidenced not only following the mid-way review but also following any case discussion. This means that drift and delay is being identified sooner, which can then be challenged.
- *Drift and Delay* - Children's care plans are now more rigorously monitored by the IRO. Where there are issues with drift and delay these issues are being raised within the DRP process. The DRP process was reviewed in December 2016, further streamlining is to take place in April 2017. This streamlining will lead to one single process for the child protection conference chairs and IROs to follow when raising an issue on behalf of the child.
- *Permanency planning* - The IRO service in 2016/2017 has continued to focus upon the need for a permanency plan at the second review, due to the importance of this it will remain a priority area throughout 2017/2018.
- *Voice of child* - The working relationship with the Change Council has been strengthened and will be key within the IRO service development, this positive link will ensure that the voice of young people is heard and will guide the IRO service in its future developments.

## **11.0 What do we need to do? Priorities for 2017/18**

- 11.1 The IRO service has achieved a number of the objectives identified in the last year's annual report. However, there is further work to be done, particularly with the recent recruitment of new IROs to drive quality and consistency across the service and to improve the scrutiny of care plans which will promote effective change for the individual child.

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11.2 The IRO service continues to remain committed to the Ofsted improvement plan and our key priorities for 2017/2018 are detailed below (please refer to appendix 2 for further information).

- Recruitment and Training – ensuring that all IRO posts are in place by June 2017 and business posts are also fully recruited to. This also involves ensuring that staff are fully trained to carry out their roles.
- Further increase the ‘footprint’ of the IRO on the child’s case file in progressing plans and evidencing informal challenge.
- Continue to strengthen the child’s voice/ participation in looked after reviews and child protection conferences.
- Integrate business support unit into IRO Service
- Continue to build and improve relationships
- Continue to challenge the quality of practice and planning seeking to improve care plans, PEP’s and assessment analysis.
- Strengthen the IRO Service Profile in Sunderland with professionals and young people

## Appendix 1 IRO Service priorities for 2016/17

Action	Lead	Deadline	Annual Update 31.03.2017
<b>Enhance the stability of the workforce as part of future developments</b>			
<b>Recruit permanent staff to:</b> IRO managers IRO LADO Foster Carer Reviewing Officer	IRO Manager	December 2016	All posts within the IRO Service as of 10.02.2017 have been successfully recruited to. The IRO Service is currently in transition from agency workers to permanent members of staff. It is anticipated that this will be achieved by June 2017 as all newly recruited staff will be in post.
<b>Enhanced Team development and cohesion</b>			
<b>Team Development day to be arranged.</b>	IRO Manager – IRO's	January 2017	Whilst the IRO Service has not been able to hold a full development day in this annual year 4 dates are fixed for 2017-2018. The first of these dates was the 03.05.17. Training events however have continued to be undertaken with the IRO Service with the most recent of these being delivered on 15.03.17 covering the Dispute Resolution Process and the IRO Looked after review process.
<b>Remove barriers affecting performance in relation to CCM V29</b>			
<b>IRO Managers will continue to collaborate with their colleagues in Children's Services, CCM project team to achieve positive change for Service users in Sunderland</b>	IRO Managers	July 2016	IRO Service has had regular meetings with the senior management group in 2016 with regards to quality assurance data and CCM. The IRO Service has been represented on liquid logic development sessions in October and November 2016 and January and March 2017. The IRO Service continues to provide monthly performance data to the senior management team.
<b>Achieve a more effective case escalation process for practice alerts</b>			
<b>DRP and QPR processes to be reviewed and updated to include an informal stage of resolution.</b>  <b>IRO's, IRO Management and</b>	IRO Managers , Business Manager Children's services	September 2016	A review of the DRP process took place in December 2016. There is currently a weekly tracker on all open DRPs which is shared between Children's Social Care management team and the IRO Service. Training with regards to the DRP process was delivered on the 15.03.2017. Going forward the IRO Service is seeking to streamline how they raise

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<b>business support to further develop tracking of DRPs and QPR.</b>			challenge by using a sole process for both child protection and looked after.
<b>Achieve a more systematic data collation and reporting mechanism in respect of Children looked after</b>			
<b>Ensure a single practice/SMART pro forma for recording review decisions and review minutes.</b>	IRO Managers Business Manager, ICT	Review three monthly	A new recommendation pro forma was introduced by the IRO Service in March 2016. This was further amended in October 2016 to enable it to be compatible with version 29.
<b>Reduce the choice of CCM tabs to record IRO pre-review and mid-term visits from three to two to avoid potential for mistake.</b>	IRO Managers Business Manager, ICT	Review three monthly	Work has been undertaken and CCM tabs are in the process of being updated to achieve consistent reporting from the IRO Service. The IRO pre lac visit tab and midway review case note has been introduced and performance data for Quarter 4 is available. This has meant that performance data is now available on the number of children who are being visited by the IRO.
<b>Strengthen the admin function in relation to this.</b>	IRO Managers Business Manager, ICT	Review three monthly	A new reporting mechanism was implemented in December 2016 to enable the service to be able to report on performance in relation to timeliness of CP minutes being completed and available.
<b>To engage in the development of any new IT system for Children Services</b>	IRO Managers	Review three monthly	Over the last 6 month the IRO service has had representation on all relevant liquid logic events. The IRO Service has prioritised its engagement in the development of liquid logic as a means to ensure the system supports the role of the IRO
<b>Establish a reporting mechanism for the timeliness of distribution of child protection conference plans and minutes</b>			
<b>IRO Service will work with the specialist minute taking team to ensure that the practice standards and reporting mechanisms are fit for purpose.</b>	IRO Managers, Specialist Minute Taking Team Managers	November 2016	As above this area remains a high priority going forward into 2017/18 as ongoing strengthening is required to ensure that the administration team is able to meet the needs of the business.
<b>Increase participation of children and parents in their meetings</b>			
<b>Collaborate with</b>	IRO	February	In July 2016 all IROs were provided with smart

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participation and engagement colleagues and the change council to increase the use of advocacy, MOMO, other mechanisms.	Service, IRO's, Service Users, Change Council	2017	phones to enable the use of MOMO whilst in the community. IROs have undergone further MOMO training in January 2017. The IRO service has attended 2 Change Council meetings to seek the views of young people in relation to the IRO team. Letters were sent to all young people in January 2017 to ensure they were advised of who their IRO was and how to contact the service if needed.
<b>Increase the level of pre-review and mid-review visits of IRO's to children</b>			
<p><b>IRO managers to ensure that IRO caseloads are sustained within the recommendations of the IRO handbook. (50 -70 cases). To enable IROs to undertake mid-way reviews and pre LA review visits for children and young people.</b></p> <p><b>IRO's will continue to manage their diaries effectively.</b></p> <p><b>With expectation that midway review and pre CL review visit will be timetabled in advanced of the main review.</b></p>	IRO Managers , IRO's	December 2016	The IRO staffing team has been strengthened since 2016 report and the permanent structure has been implemented and recruited to. This has enabled caseloads to remain on average within 10% of the recommendation from the IRO handbook.
<b>Achieve effective customer feedback and reporting mechanisms</b>			
<p><b>IRO Service will establish feedback mechanisms for:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• children and young people</li> <li>• families</li> <li>• professionals</li> </ul>	IRO Managers, IRO's, Change council, Participation and engagement team, QA directorate	February 2017	<p>The IROs continue to manage their diaries effectively to ensure that they are able to fulfill their IRO duties. This has seen an increase in the number of pre lac review visits being completed and an increase in the number of mid-way reviews. The IRO Service has also developed mechanisms to enable performance data to be reported on within this area of practice.</p> <p>In total 2 Change Council meetings have been attended since the last annual report and arrangements are in place to ensure the IRO Service has an effective link to children and young people in care therefore the IRO services attends Change Council, at the request of young people, on a quarterly basis. Feedback from parents has been strengthened</p>



			via the introduction in December 2016 of a feedback questionnaire. Information to date from this questionnaire has highlighted strengths in relation to the services chairing of child protection conferences. The IRO Service has continued to attend multi agency forums and where necessary has reviewed and adapted its practice on the feedback that it has received from peers.
<b>Evaluate the increased incident of the category of emotional abuse in the child protection arena</b>			
<b>Track and analysis children who have protection plans under the category emotional abuse.</b>	IRO Managers , QA Audit functions, IRO's Business Support Staff	February 2017	<b>Ongoing</b> Overview on the use of emotional abuse is that as there has been a decrease in the use of neglect as the category of registration there has been an increase in the use of emotional. This is due to greater level of understanding by professionals with regards to issues of domestic violence.
<b>IRO Service will utilise up to date research and development to improve the quality of practice in the service</b>			
<b>IRO Managers will liaise with Chief Social Worker and local Universities to promote bespoke learning</b>	IRO Service, Chief Social Worker, local Universities, Research and development forum, QA Directorate	March 2017	In December 2016 the IRO Manager met with the chief social worker and developed a training matrix for the IRO team. Ongoing training opportunities have been undertaken whilst IROs have attended regional and national training events. IRO to consolidate work with the Chief SW to involve local Universities
<b>Whilst at the same time via staff appraisal consideration to be given individual learning needs.</b>	IRO management IRO's		Staff appraisal remains an area that requires ongoing work
<b>IRO Service will continue to improve timeliness of meetings</b>			

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<b>IRO manager to continue to address the issue of timeliness with other Children Service Managers and ensure that IROs maintain timescales.</b>	IRO Managers , MASH Managers , Business Managers	July 2016	Issues have presented themselves that have impacted the timeliness of meetings within the IRO Service. In recognition of the impact that this was having for children at the time of request for an ICPC there has been process changes which were agreed in December 2016 as an attempt to improve performance. The IRO Service continues to provide performance data for the improvement board and senior management group.
<b>Child protection conference will be held in appropriate child and family centered venues</b>			
<b>Due to capacity issues and the shortage of suitable venues in which to hold conferences, the IRO Service will collaborate with commissioners to achieve more suitable venues, which meet the needs of our service users.</b>	Head of Service - Commissioning Service, Children's Services	March 2017	There remains an ongoing pressure with regards to accommodation. The IRO Service uses a wide range of buildings to ensure that it is able to meet the needs of the business. In 2017/18 ongoing reviewing of the services accommodation will need to be in place
<b>All quality assurance mechanisms to be further strengthened</b>			
<b>IRO service is to move into Quality Assurance Directorate which will strengthen QA role of IROs.</b>	Head of Service, QA Directorate, IRO Team	October 2016	The IRO Service moved into the Quality and Performance Directorate as of 01.09.16.
<b>Elevate the sharing of good practice</b>			
<b>This will be achieved via:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision</li> <li>• Appraisal.</li> <li>• Peer audits</li> <li>• Peer observation</li> <li>• Group supervision.</li> </ul>	IRO Service	November 2016	Since September 2016 there has been a team programme of peer observation, group supervision and individual supervisions with staff. In December 2016 the IRO Service reviewed and strengthened its supervision to support outcomes and actions being SMART. In addition to this the auditing team has undertaken audits on 6 of the permanent IRO staff members. In March 2017 an IRO auditing programme started with the IRO management team to ensure the service has the appropriate level of managerial scrutiny.
<b>The provision of legal advice to IRO's</b>			

<b>IRO service to seek confirmation of legal arrangements for access to independent legal advice.</b>	Head of Service	July 2016	<b>Achieved July 2016</b> Arrangements were put in place with an independent solicitor to ensure that the IRO Service has access to legal advice.
<b>Business Support to the IRO Service to be further strengthened</b>			
<b>IRO Managers will continue to liaise with Business Managers in order to streamline the allocation process and develop appropriate systems to ensure effective services.</b>	IRO Managers , Business Managers , Business Staff	September 2016	<b>Achieved</b> In December 2016 administration process was implemented whereby the IRO Service had 1 sole system for arranging ICPCs, RCPCs and CLAs. In addition to this a daily allocation meeting was implemented to take place at a set time.

# Independent Reviewing IRO Priority Plan 2017-18

## Priority 1: Recruitment, Retention and staff development

**Outcome:** All positions within the IRO Services to have a permanent appointment.

To maintain high staff retention rates within the IRO Service.

IRO workforce to be skilled and competent in order to undertake roles effectively.

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
To seek to appoint to IRO business manager	Business Manager in post	IRO Managers	July 2017			
Fully support fully in their development through effective induction, supervision and training	% of staff who feel supported Monthly supervision records Attendance at training courses	IRO Managers	Ongoing			
All members of staff to have an annual appraisal	% of staff who have received an appraisal every 12 months	IRO Managers	December 2017			

## Priority 2: Improve the IRO footprint and challenge on the child's behalf

**Outcome:** Further increase the 'footprint' of the IRO on the child's case file in progressing plans and evidencing challenge

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
Every looked after child has a mid-way review and all IRO contact is recorded on CCM.	% mid-way reviews within timescale  IRO contact and footprint to be evidenced through case file audits	IRO/ IRO Managers and performance team	To be reviewed in the quarterly reports			
Pre CLA visits to be completed 5 working days prior to the planned review in order to effectively capture the voice of the child.	% of CLA visits completed within timescale  To be evidenced through case file audits	IRO/ IRO Managers and performance team	Monthly performance data and findings from monthly audits			

## Priority 3: The voice of the child

**Outcome:** The child's voice/ participation in looked after reviews and child protection conference informs the decisions made on their behalf

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
Increase use of MOMO/ Viewpoint within looked after reviews and child protection conferences	Number of MOMO statements/viewpoint completed as part of LAC review process	IROs	Monthly via the IRO score card			
Work effectively with Change Council members to promote the IRO presence and utilise the	IRO service web page for young people  IRO attendance at Change Council  Voice of Change	IRO management Change Council Young People's Officer	February 2018			

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Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
advice offered by Change Council to inform our service development	Council taken into consideration for service development					

#### Priority 4: Integrate business support into the IRO team

**Outcome:** To have admin service that is fit for purpose in the supporting the IRO business

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
IRO admin service to support the IRO service to meet their statutory requirements	% of minutes circulated in timescale % of invites issued in timescales	IRO Business manager	30 <sup>th</sup> July 2017			
Business manager to support the IRO service with the development of performance data	Performance information is available each week/month for IRO managers to allow timely challenge to IRO teams.	Business manager/IRO manager s	Monthly			

#### Priority 5: Strengthen working relationship with Social Work teams

**Outcome:** To ensure that the IRO service has an effective working relationship with children social worker

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
IRO service to maintain and develop on going team links with Social Worker team	Open discussion between IRO services and Social worker teams. Sharing of knowledge between the services	IROs with IRO management oversight	Quarterly			
Reintroduction of IRO and Team Manager quarterly meeting	Improved working relationships and sharing of information	Service Manger Children's Social Care	Start date Summer 2017			

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Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
IRO managers to continue to meet with Service Managers to progress discussion around case themes and issues	Improved working relationships	IRO managers	July 2017			

#### Priority 6: Further develop IRO training matrix and improve training opportunities for IRO's

**Outcome:** to ensure that the IRO service has a training programme to meet staff needs

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
All IRO to be registered on the Sunderland learning Hub	Increase in IRO engagement in the training. All IRO to attend the minimum of two training events in a reporting year	IRO Managers	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2017			
Every IRO to undertake appropriate training to support their personal learning	Every IRO will complete a minimum of one day's professional training	IRO's	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2018			
IRO team to under taken a quarterly learning event on IRO practice standards	Consistent practice by the IRO team to be evidenced through case file audits	IRO Manager s	Quarterly			

#### Priority 7: Strengthen IRO services quality assurance and safeguarding oversight

**Outcome:** Ensure that emerging themes are fed into the QA framework and training programme

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
To utilise the information	Improvements in IRO service performance	IRO Manager	Quarterly			

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Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
provided by the IRO scorecard; to identify themes and performance issues within areas of looked after children and child protection						
Undertake audits to assess quality of IRO work and carry out audit actions	Number of audits completed  Audit gradings	IRO Manager	Monthly			
Peer observation to continue to be undertaken on quarterly cycles to support peer learning	Number of peer audits completed	IRO's	Bi monthly			

**Priority 7:** To strengthen the IRO Service profile within Sunderland with both professionals and children and young people.

**Outcome:** IRO Service to become a respected and utilised resource to support better outcomes for children/young people within the City

Action	Success measure(s)	Lead	Time	RAG Previous	RAG Current	Progress Update
All IRO's to identify a lead in key areas of work within Together for Children and with partner agencies.	Increased membership of appropriate steering groups	IRO's IRO Managers	February 2018			
To develop a web page to inform children and young people about the role of the IRO and the current IRO Team.	Number of young people who know how to contact their IRO.  Web analytics to track number of people viewing website	IRO Managers	December 2017			

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