

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE

IRO ANNUAL REPORT 2015 / 2016

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1. Introduction

This report covers the period July 2015 to June 2016. It is to be presented to Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board, Children's Services Senior Management team, Change Council and the Corporate Parenting Board.

The annual report informs board members about progress made over the year and illustrates where targeted work has had a positive impact upon the outcome for children. The report also identifies areas for improvement, emerging themes, examples of good practice and outlines the service priorities for the next 12 months.

The report will be made available as a public document and copies in other formats will be made available in large text and Braille as required.

2. Legal context – The role of the IRO

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person looked after by a local authority became a legal requirement under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which gave responsibility for reviewing placements and plans for children in any form of placement to IRO's. This was replaced when the Care Planning and Placement Regulations Act 2010 became legislation and the IRO Handbook outlined the statutory framework within which an Independent Reviewing Officer discharges their duties.

The IRO handbook also significantly broadened the role of the IRO to not only undertake a review of a child's case but also to effectively monitor the care planning of the local authority and to track the implementation of the child or young person's care plan. Integral to this, the IRO must ensure the child's voice is heard and their views are acted upon whilst making plans for their future.

The IRO has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority as a corporate parent, identify any practice deficits and alert managers about these in a timely manner.

3. The IRO service in Sunderland

3.1 In July 2015 Ofsted delivered a critical report following the inspection of Children's Services. The inspection concluded that services for children in need, child protection, looked after, care leavers and adoption were inadequate. As a result, central government appointed a Children's Commissioner, Nick Whitfield to oversee plans for improvement.

The Ofsted report in relation to the IRO service stated:-

“Challenge by IRO’s does not lead to sustainable improved outcomes for children looked after, IRO’s are not given sufficient profile and status as additional guardians of the child’s plan. Where IRO’s identify drift and delay they escalate this to senior managers but this has little or no impact. . . excessive caseloads of more than 100 mean IRO’s cannot fulfil their statutory duties and are not able to track progress on children’s plans between reviews“.

The high caseloads of the IRO’s led to them not being able to fully quality assure cases where escalations had been required. The impact of the lack of progress by managers also caused further drift and delay. Due to this the perception of the IRO service was not positive within Sunderland. Challenges to cases have continued to be escalated when necessary to senior managers in children’s services by the IRO’s, however responses have sometimes taken lengthy periods of time to achieve and some IRO’s have not ensured a timely resolution. This reflects back to the Ofsted report about evidencing sustainable improved outcomes for children and is a high priority in the team and for the coming year.

This culture has shifted somewhat and remains part of evolving work with collaboration between IRO’s, managers and social workers. IRO links to social work teams will be reinforced to raise awareness of the role, offer advice and remove barriers to effective care planning faster to avoid case drift.

IRO’s are in daily contact with children, young people, families, social workers and professionals discussing care planning for children. In the past the excessive caseloads meant that there were fewer opportunities to do this. Current caseloads are within the IRO handbook guidelines. The average caseload in June 2016 now stands at 60 with the highest at 77 for a full time equivalent member of staff and the lowest at 53. The IRO Handbook recommends a caseload of between 50 and 70 for full time staff. As at the year-end there were 1017 cases held by team members comprising of:-

- 537 children looked after
- 458 children subject to child protection plans

As part of a management strategy to reduce caseloads, raise morale, address drift and improve IRO overall effectiveness, additional locum staff were appointed. In addition to this managers reviewed caseloads and further empowered IRO’s to drive permanence in a timelier manner. IROs began to undertake targeting work before a child’s second looked after review; this allowed for the IRO’s to endorse a permanent plan for the child or young person.

Running parallel, IROs focussed on scrutinising the reasons behind children still subject to child protection plans and began rigorous discussions at initial and review child protection conferences. Ofsted noted that there was an overuse of the category of ‘neglect’ within child protection and managers highlighted this for urgent attention. The application of the threshold criteria for child protection was discussed at length

to ensure that all parties to the conference understood, were in agreement and were not reliant on the social worker's conclusion before agreeing to a category of abuse.

3.2 Team Profile

- The IRO team was formally under the People's Directorate under the Head of Commissioning. The plan from September 2016 is that the IRO service will sit within Children's Services under the Director of Performance and Quality.
- All team members are qualified social workers and are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.
- There are 10.6 full time equivalent permanent posts as at April 2016.
- Some IROs have additional skill set that include law, psychotherapy, and family group conferencing.
- Overall sickness levels for the year have been relatively low, with the exception of two long term absences. To date there are no sickness absences.
- Due to an expanding team the current premises were overcrowded and as a result additional accommodation was sourced. This meant that the IRO service had two team offices and some team members relocated to the new premises in February 2016 and the working environment for all is much improved.
- Additional ICT equipment and mobile phones were also purchased so all staff can now hot desk and work remotely when required.
- Alongside monitoring the local authority's performance in care planning for looked after children and chairing reviews of care plans, the majority of IRO's also fulfil the function of conference chairs for Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences fulfilling the local authority's statutory duties.

3.3 Secure Accommodation Review Panels

- There is a reciprocal regional arrangement in place with our nearest neighbours South Tyneside and Gateshead for the chairing of secure accommodation reviews. These panels involve two IRO's, plus an independent IRO from the Inter- Authority Consortium. The service collaborated with regional colleagues and updated procedures. We await confirmation that these can become policy.
- There is currently one young person in secure accommodation reviewed by the team.
- Over the past twelve months only one young person was detained under the Mental Health Act.

3.4 Foster Carer Reviews

- The IRO Service has responsibility for the review of foster carers.
- In the summer of 2015 there was a backlog of 90+ pieces of work. Rigorous management and additional resourcing has resulted in the backlog being cleared. From March 2016 all reviews for the forthcoming year have been diarised.
- Between July 2015 and the year end, 181 foster care reviews have been completed, 97 of these have been after the statutory review date.

3.5 LADO Function

- Since the last annual report, the LADO service has continued to be based within the IRO service. There has been a strengthening of the LADO service in the city of Sunderland since September 2015 when the provision increased from 29 hours to 55.5 hours.
- During April 2015 – March 2016 the LADO service has managed a total of 185 referrals and 51 advice and consultation contacts.
- In September 2015 an appointment of a Deputy IRO Manager was made with lead responsibility for the day to day management of the LADO service. Designated business support was also co-located within the LADO service in October 2015 which has strengthened the overall function of the LADO provision in Sunderland. A new referral form was introduced in November 2015 alongside briefing sessions being completed to 130+ staff from across the multi-agency network. In 2016 – 2017 the LADO service continues to strengthen inter agency partnerships to effectively manage allegations against adults who work with children.

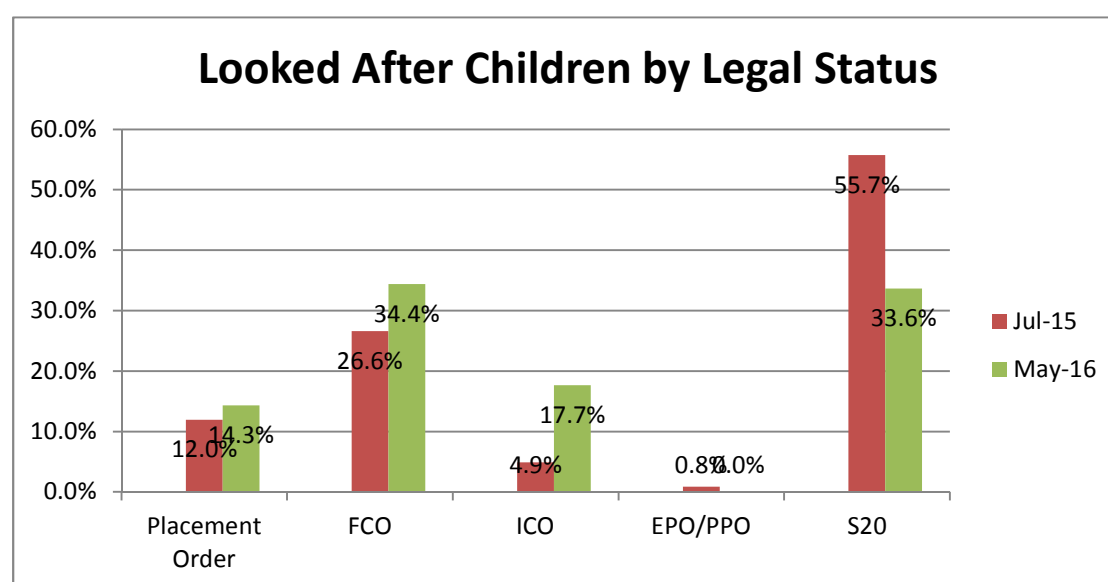
Feedback from a Deputy Head Teacher from an infant school about the service received from LADO staff (April 2016)

“I feel it’s only right with the circumstances at Sunderland City council and Safeguarding are facing at present to bring to your attention the level of care and support I have received from members of the LADO team --- was both supportive and well informed giving me advice and guidance promptly. I feel --- was very professional and friendly and provided me with the necessary advice I needed to make the right decisions for our pupils and our staff. It’s a pleasure to deal with such courteous and professional people in Sunderland LADO. “

4. Performance in relation to children looked after in Sunderland

Looked after children by legal status

Looked After Children activity by legal status	Jul-15	May-16
Placement Order	12.0%	14.3%
CO	26.6%	34.4%
ICO	4.9%	17.7%
EPO/PPO	0.8%	0.0%
S20	55.7%	33.6%

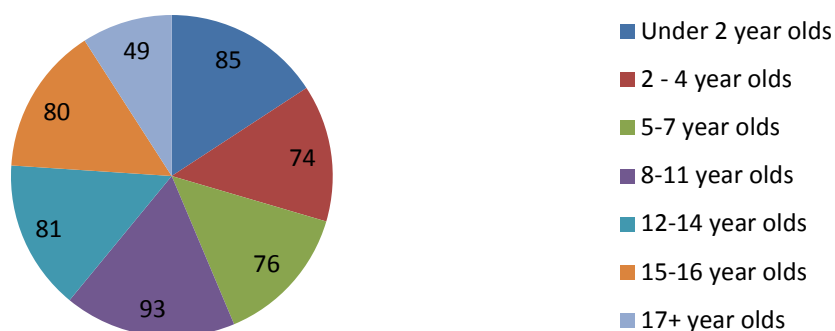


In June 2016 there were 538 children looked after in Sunderland. There has been a large reduction in s20 cases since July 2015 to May 2016. However Family Arrangement Orders and Interim Care Order have increased.

Looked after children by Age

Looked After Children	May-16
Under 2 year olds	85
2 - 4 year olds	74
5-7 year olds	76
8-11 year olds	93
12-14 year olds	81
15-16 year olds	80
17+ year olds	49

Looked After Children - Age May 2016

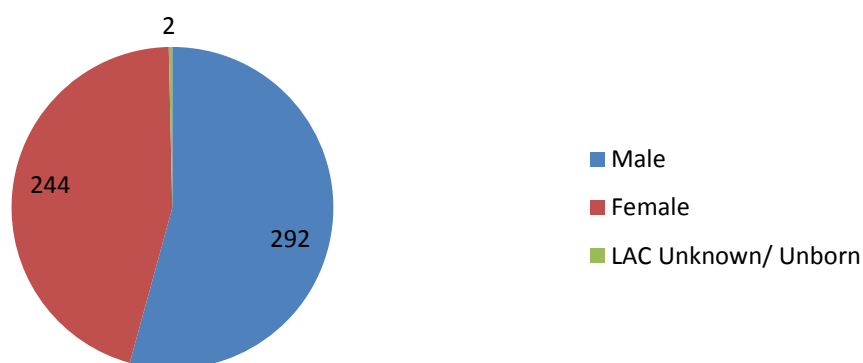


The chart above demonstrates that the largest percentages of children looked after are in the younger age ranges. The highest age range is 8-11 year olds with 93.

Looked after children by Gender

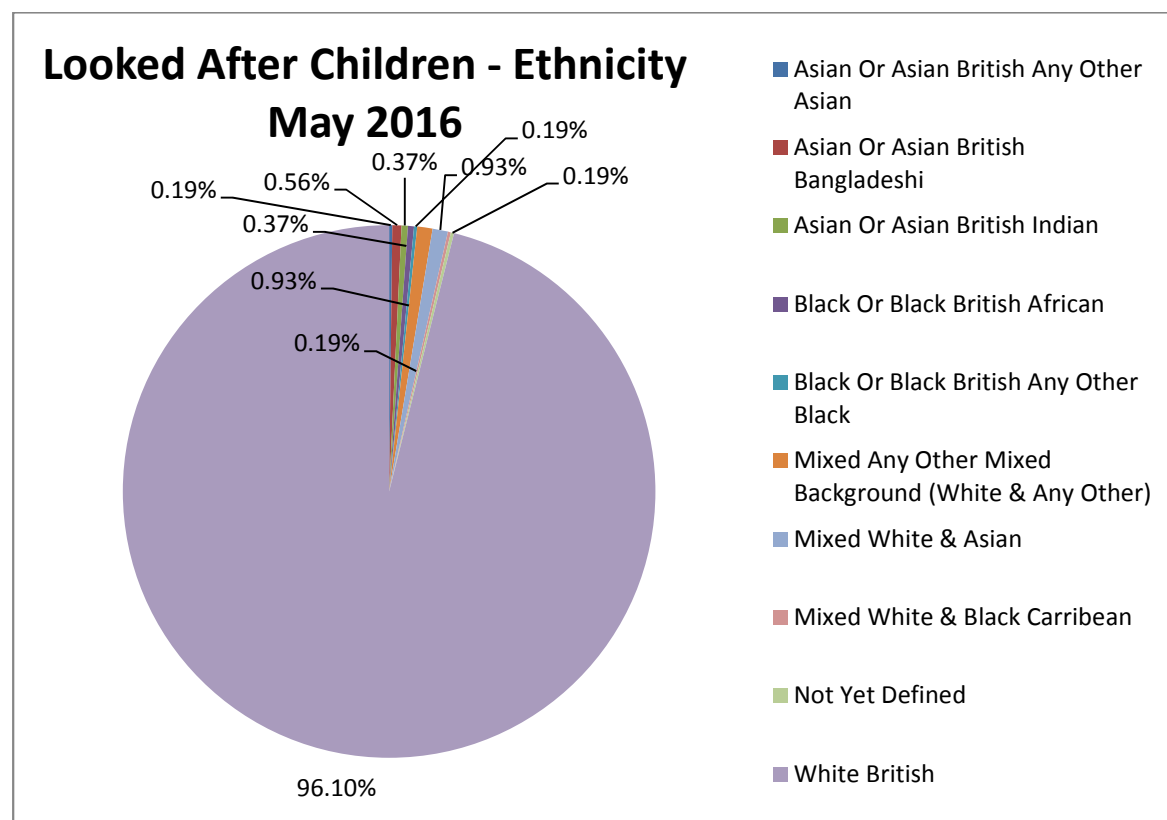
Looked After Children	May-16
Male	292
Female	244
LAC Unknown/ Unborn	2

Looked After Children - Gender May 2016



Looked after children by Ethnicity

Ethnic Origin(LAC)	May-16
Asian Or Asian British Any Other Asian	0.19%
Asian Or Asian British Bangladeshi	0.56%
Asian Or Asian British Indian	0.37%
Black Or Black British African	0.37%
Black Or Black British Any Other Black	0.19%
Mixed Any Other Mixed Background (White & Any Other)	0.93%
Mixed White & Asian	0.93%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	0.19%
Not Yet Defined	0.19%
White British	96.10%



- On 31 March 2015 there were 570 children looked after in Sunderland which represented an increase of 79 children over the previous year.
- In June 2016 there were 538 children and young people looked after and reviewed by IRO's, a reduction of 32.

During the period of July 2015 to May 2016 a number of children left care by the achievement of their long term legal status:

- 37 children were adopted during the year.
- 38 children left care through the granting of Child Arrangement Orders.
- 23 became the subject of Special Guardianship Orders

4.1 Timeliness of Looked after reviews

Between July 2015 and end of May 2016, 880 reviews were chaired by IRO's with 94% held on time. This builds on performance of the previous year at 91%.

4.2 Children and young people with an up to date care plan

In January 2016 this was 88%. More recently performance has dipped slightly to 85%.

4.3 Personal Education Plans for children and young people.

An example of some targeted work with partners leading to improved outcomes for children is in relation to PEP's. The Ofsted report in July 2016 commented upon the poor quality and poor compliance of PEPs. Following an agreed strategy involving IRO's, Virtual Head Teacher, social worker's and schools, PEP's were targeted for improvement over the past 9 months. This has improved PEP performance from 69% to 92%.

4.4 Percentage of children looked after s20 Children Act 1989

The IRO service has been working hard to achieve more timely permanence before and at the second looked after reviews to avoid case drift and address the duration of S20. At a strategic level IRO service managers have collaborated with children's services and legal representatives to receive regular updates on the outcomes of PLO panel meetings. There has also been attendance at Permanence Monitoring Group and communication between IRO's and Cafcass. This has resulted in the percentage of children looked after under s20 reducing from 56% to 36%, achieving the target level of 40%.

Feedback following a looked after review (June 2016).

“I would like to pass on how happy C is with the decisions of yesterday’s review. I can honestly say that was the best review I have attended in 15 years. C has real trust issues but trusts the IRO. C has been a different young person today. I am thanking you all on C’s behalf as you know C would just say “cush!”

5. Young People’s Participation

5.1 Viewpoint

Viewpoint software has been used in Sunderland for a number of years. Viewpoint is a computer assisted interviewing tool. Some looked after children complete their questionnaires independently online but the majority are visited and supported 1:1 by an Engagement Officer.

After a Viewpoint visit, the reports generated are sent by post to the child and by email to the IRO and social worker. Additional comments and observations are included in the emails. Anything of concern is brought immediately to the attention of the IRO and social worker. The child’s views and the information gathered are then considered at the looked after review.

In 2015 - 2016 90 individual children gave their view. Some children gave their views twice in the period.

- 51 were fostered within the local authority area.
- 27 were fostered outside the local authority area.
- 9 were in kinship care.
- 3 were in residential care outside the local authority.

Viewpoint will soon be used with foster carers as part of their annual review. Foster carers previously completed a paper questionnaire in preparation for their annual reviews. The advantage of completing the questionnaire online is that detailed statistical reports can be produced to inform the carer’s review and the fostering service as a whole. Foster carer’s will receive their printed report. At the same time foster carers are doing their annual review, young people will also be asked to complete a Viewpoint with regards to placement.

The Viewpoint officer is also working alongside the commissioning team to ensure we hear the voice of young people who are placed out of area with regards to their placement. It is acknowledged that ongoing strengthening by the IRO Service is needed to further strengthen the voice of the child.

5.2 MOMO

Sunderland launched MOMO (Mind of My Own) in December 2015 and purchased the use of the app for 3 years.

In Sunderland there are now over 35 people trained in MOMO including IRO's, social workers, residential staff, virtual school and foster carers. MOMO is a simple tool to use and was reviewed by the Change Council before Sunderland commissioned the service.

The use of MOMO has enabled young people to create a structured statement of their views in relation to situations they encounter while in care or receiving support from social care services. This includes looked after reviews, PEP meetings, child protection conferences or other meetings requesting a change to care and raising a problem, complaint or making a disclosure.

To ensure that all young people know about MOMO a letter will be sent along with postcards and fact sheets to children and young people eligible to use MOMO.

From 20/11/2015 – 31/06/2016 in Sunderland the use of MOMO has been as follows:

- 65 statements have been created and sent
- 8 problems
- 27 preparing for meeting, typically Looked After Reviews
- 6 change statements
- 3 Pathway Plan statements
- 18 conference statements
- 3 new worker visits

In phase one of the implementation of MOMO, young people could only choose to send their statement to their IRO or social worker. As Sunderland moves into the next phase the audience will be extended to include the complaints manager and the Virtual School.

Some of the statements that young people have made directly to the IRO's with regards to the Service are as follows:-

“my IRO was like my left leg, when I needed them they were there for anything and everything”

“my IRO is the only one still around after several changes of worker and knows my history and therefore I can talk more easily to them than another new worker”

“the conference that led to me becoming LAC was the first time I really felt heard and knew I had options. I felt it changed my life and I am very happy to be LAC”

Over the course of the next reporting year the IRO service needs to strengthen the views and opinions of young people with regards to the service that they receive.

5.3 Independent Advocacy for Children and Young People

In total 23 young people accessed advocacy services during the year, with females using this service more than males.

Out of this number one young person used the advocacy service at their child protection conference, one at their looked after review and one whilst in secure accommodation.

6. Performance in relation to children subject of child Protection Plans

6.1 CP Conference Timescales: –

From July 2015 to May 2016 staff chaired a total of 1013 meetings, 349 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) and 664 Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC).

Figures for timeliness of ICPC's have improved markedly from 12% in July 2015 to 96% currently, well above the national average of 75%.

In autumn 2015 the management team took responsibility for the allocation of child protection work from a centrally based business support team. This has enabled more rigorous management of caseloads and workflow oversight, paying particular attention to improving conference timeliness and addressing case drift.

In January 2016 the IRO service established a “pre-conference alert” tracking system from the point of a request for conference in order to remove barriers and reduce delay of the child's journey.

The data tells us that some delays still occur due to the late notification for conferences, data entry omissions for example strategy meeting data incomplete on CCM and incomplete invitation documents.

In February 2016 dedicated conference days were established with each conference chair having a day each week to chair conferences.

6.2 Targeted work by IRO service in the child protection arena:-

In July 2015, when Ofsted's report was published there were 371 children on child protection plans, 80% were under the category of neglect.

IRO managers and staff further explored the use of neglect and dialogue within the team. Through awareness raising, collaboration with children's services via the senior management team (SMT) meetings, individual supervisions and the application of a distinct management strategy the figures reduced from 80% in July 15 to 55%.

Whilst seeing a reduction in neglect, there has been an increase in the use of emotional abuse rising from 11% in July 15 to 37%. The team are monitoring this and managers have raised this at SMT. Future work is planned by the IRO service – see 2016/17 service priorities.

6.3 Timeliness of Review child protection conferences

Timeliness has been improved as a result of an increase in IRO establishment, management oversight, and effective diary management by IRO's. Performance in May 2016 was at 100% however this has reduced. Further work is still needed with children's services regarding practice standards particularly in relation to social work reports being submitted on time prior to conference, the current performance rate is 40%.

7 Quality Assurance

7.1 One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of the child. The very nature of the role requires staff to ensure that high quality needs led planning for children is taking place in order to achieve the best outcomes. Since the last annual report staff have continued to track progress on plans through dialogue with social workers, managers and children's guardians, they have also visited children and young people prior to their reviews to receive and act upon their views and enhance their participation addressing case drift and ensuring quality of care planning have been team priorities.

7.2 Case escalations

The IRO handbook requires each local authority to have a formal Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) in place whilst acknowledging and giving primacy to informal resolutions where possible.

In the looked after arena the DRP provides evidence of the practice challenges raised by IRO's and this has been utilised throughout the year when informal routes have failed.

From July 2015 – June 2016 a total of 97 DRP's have been raised involving looked after children. The three main themes are absence of a care plan, delays in assessment work to enable progression of planning and previous decisions not progressed.

In the child protection arena quality performance records are used (QPR's).

From July 2015 – June 2016 140 QPR's were raised. The three main themes are absence of reports, plans, and delay impacting upon planning when back at review conference. QPR's remain an area of rigorous work for the service.

Other QA mechanisms utilised by the IRO service during the year are:-

- Pre-conference alert system - identifying and removing barriers to timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences.
- Child protection audit form – This captures information on the timeliness of receipt of reports from all agencies, when they were shared with children and family, how long the meeting lasted, if the child attended for example.
- A quality assurance form is also completed for looked after reviews showing key data.
- IRO managers randomly sample child protection minutes and looked after review records to ensure SMART recording.
- A diarised observational and corporate quality assurance function will link into wider quality assurance directorate timetable in the very near future.
- In March 2016 in order to further strengthen service delivery and quality assurance in the IRO service an independent review was commissioned by the Chief Operating Officer. The review was conducted over a 2 day period by Ms Caroline Mark, Service Manager Achieving for Children London.

- Ms Mark undertook three observational audits, attending two child protection conferences, one looked after review, Ms Mark also undertook one paper audit of a current LADO case. In summary the outcome of both child protection conferences was 'good'. The outcome of the child looked after review was 'requires improvement'. The outcome of LADO was 'requires improvement'.
- The IRO service welcomed the independent audit and has embraced the learning. Immediate corrective actions were taken regarding children looked after and LADO feedback and improvements have been made.

7.3 Involvement in key groups and developments

IRO managers contribute to the work of:-

- Children's services senior management team
- Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board Quality Assurance Sub Committee
- SSCB Missing, sexually exploited and trafficked children and young people
- SSCB on line training on procedural update and domestic abuse
- Regional IRO manager's forum
- Regional Cafcass interface and training
- Permanence Monitoring Group
- Delivered training on behalf of SSCB to Social Workers and other partners
- LADO briefing sessions have been provided to 130+ professionals
- Social Worker career progression panels
- An attachment to area social work teams has been refreshed and will commence July 2016
- IRO's are represented on a number of multi-agency forums for looked after children:- MALAP, PMG and External Placement Panel
- IRO's attended Ofsted Getting to Good seminar
- Whole Family Solutions
- Staying Put and the transition to adulthood
- Independent legal advice for IRO's
- IRO opinion and submission to the Courts

Conclusion

The IRO service has achieved some of the objectives set and demonstrated in the report some progress made towards the city wide improvement plan.

Within Appendix 1 the priorities are set out with comments regarding the progress of the improvement plan in relation to the annual report activities.

Appendix 2 outlines the IRO Service completions and priorities for 2016/2017.

APPENDIX 1: PROGRESS ON PREVIOUS ANNUAL REPORT ACTIVITIES

PRIORITY	COMMENT
1. Increase management capacity	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Interim Service Manager Jo Robinson appointed July 2015.</p> <p>Interim Deputy Manager Gavin Taylor appointed September 2015.</p>
2. Increase permanent IRO establishment	<p>Partially Achieved</p> <p>Current establishment 10.6 FTE, comprising of 6 FTE and 4 part time IROs.</p> <p>The establishment has been temporarily increased by the appointment of agency staff members. This interim arrangement until such time that the Children Independent Reviewing Team has an agreed permanent structure.</p>
3. Dedicated admin support to IRO's and managers	<p>Partially achieved</p> <p>Due to the rationalisation of administration resources, within the council, support from the administration service has changed and has impacted significantly on the IRO service with regards to service efficiency.</p>
4. Increase capacity for Foster Carer	Achieved

<p>Reviewing Officer, LADO and View Point functions.</p>	<p>The previous backlog of foster carer reviews was cleared by February 2016 and all reviews are now planned for the forthcoming year.</p> <p>A full time agency Foster Carer Reviewing Officer was appointed in October 2015.</p> <p>The overall LADO provision increased from 29 hours to 1.5 posts in November 2015. A locum LADO is currently in post on a full time contract and it is hoped that a permanent LADO will be appointed by December 2016.</p> <p>In October 2015 a dedicated administration support worker was appointed and co-located with LADO.</p> <p>The Viewpoint officer post was transferred to the management of Participation Officer in January 2016. Viewpoint continues to be used with some children to promote their participation within their looked after reviews.</p> <p>An additional opportunity for children to present their views has been promoted through introduction of MOMO (Mind of My Own) as Sunderland commissioned this resource.</p>
<p>5. IRO service will work with the Performance Team to introduce an IRO scorecard by Oct 2015 to track team performance.</p>	<p>Achieved.</p> <p>The gathering of baseline performance information was established and a report mechanism was put in place in October 2015.</p> <p>Monthly reporting takes place across the services with information been fed into SMT, HOS Improvement Plan and SSCB.</p> <p>Themes and trends are now being identified by the IRO Service and corrective action taken by the management team.</p> <p>A part time business manager is now attached to the IRO service and assists in this process along with Scale 5 business support post.</p>
<p>6. IRO Service will improve pre-review visits to looked after children (Target 75% 15-16)</p>	<p>Partially achieved.</p> <p>The IRO Service has experienced some staff changes, reducing IRO availability for pre review visits this tied in with late notification to the IRO</p>

	<p>service of children initially becoming looked after and data entry errors has impacted on pre review being achieved.</p> <p>Corrective action has been taken with all IROs being encouraged to plan all pre- review visits in advance.</p>
7. Looked after reviews to take place within statutory timescales (95% target 2015 – 2016)	<p>Not achieved</p> <p>91% July 2015 94% April 2016</p> <p>Corrective action has been taken by management.</p>
8. Child Protection Conferences to take place within timescales (95% target 2015 – 2016)	<p>Achieved</p> <p>ICPC's – 96% June 2016 (12% July 2015) RCPC's – 100% April 2016 (99% July 2015)</p> <p>IRO Service has systematically targeted conference timeliness in the past 12 months with a particular focus on ICPC's via pre conference alert system.</p>
9. Increase the participation of Children' and young people aged 4+ in their reviews. (Target is 99% 2015 – 2016)	<p>Partially achieved</p> <p>July 2015 – 92% Jan 2016 – 100% April 2016 – 85%</p> <p>This deterioration in the figures is due to in part to changes in data input and in the decision by some children choosing not to participate.</p>
10. Further develop and improve the quality of the escalation log	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The escalation log has been refined to include more detail which has aided the data reporting mechanisms.</p> <p>IRO Managers will meet with Children's Services staff to manage arising issues.</p> <p>Business staff will amend this log and include an informal stage of resolution. (September 2016)</p> <p>IRO staff area now encouraged to celebrate and share good practice.</p>
	Achieved

<p>11. Work with Permanence and leaving care team to further improve the quality and timeliness of Pathway Plans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2015 – NIL (Figures not available) • Aug 2015 – 27% • April 2016 – 93% • IRO's linked to teams • Training on Staying Put and Transition to Adulthood • IRO Team driving permanence, exit routes and placement stability.
<p>12. IRO Service will review the high number of children subject to CP Plans under neglect.</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July 2015 – 85% • April 2016 – 55% <p>A management strategy was put in place August 2015 to support the consistent application of child protection thresholds for the categories of CP plans.</p> <p>IRO's were asked within CP reviews to ensure they reviewed the appropriateness of use of the category 'neglect'.</p> <p>This message was reinforced in supervision, team meetings and performance feedback to the team.</p>
<p>13. The team will contribute to the back to basics workforce development programme to further embed practice standards.</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>IRO's attended planned sessions</p>
<p>14. An audit tool to collate children's views on the role and function of their IRO.</p>	<p>Not achieved</p> <p>A reporting mechanism has been established.</p> <p>Discussion is taking place with Participation and Engagement colleagues. Change council will need to be consulted on their views re the design of this tool and a working group established.</p>
<p>15. An area for further development within the IRO Service will be in relation to monitoring the use of advocacy, independent visitors and interpreting services. To review the documentation to request a conference to ensure the above services have been identified and used effectively.</p>	<p>Achieved and ongoing</p> <p>Documentation for conference request was reviewed and includes this, data is then reported on.</p> <p>This work will continue to be progressed in 16/17.</p>

<p>16. Undertake thematic audits</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>In October 2015 IRO team undertook a thematic audit of Section 20 cases, 60+.</p>
<p>17. IRO's need access to the corporate training plan. Explore opportunities for a regional training plan. Good practice sharing to become a standard agenda item.</p>	<p>Achieved and ongoing</p> <p>Good practice is shared with individuals and with the team.</p> <p>IRO's have access to the corporate training and bespoke training opportunities. IRO's have attended regional and local training. E.g. Cafcass, Ofsted, Whole Family solutions.</p>
<p>18. Refresh and revisit work and ownership of current standards of practice for Children In need of Protection and Children Looked After.</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>Work remains on going due to updates within this area.</p>
<p>19. Review environmental arrangements which present barriers to the effective work of the IRO Service</p>	<p>Achieved</p> <p>The IRO team working environment has been improved by the acquisition of additional premises which has reduced staff overcrowding.</p> <p>An IT equipment review has taken place which lead to purchase of new Laptops.</p> <p>The challenge over suitable venues in which to hold conferences remains, accommodation is on the agenda.</p>

Appendix 2 IRO Service priorities for 2016/17

Action	Lead	Deadline	Update
Enhance the stability of the workforce as part of future developments			
Recruit permanent staff to:- IRO managers IRO LADO Foster Carer Reviewing Officer	Head of Service – IRO Management	December 2016	
Enhanced Team development and cohesion			
Team Development day to be arranged.	IRO Management – IRO's	January 2017	
Remove barriers affecting performance in relation to CCM V29			
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	IRO Managers	July 2016	
Achieve a more effective case escalation process for practice alerts			
DRP and QPR processes to be reviewed and updated to include an informal stage of resolution. IRO's, IRO Management and business support to further develop tracking of DRPs and QPR.	IRO Managers, Business Manager Children's services	September 2016	
Achieve a more systematic data collation and reporting mechanism in respect of Children looked after			
Ensure a single practice/SMART pro forma for recording review decisions and review minutes. Reduce the choice of CCM tabs to record	IRO Managers, Business Manager, ICT	Review three monthly	

Action	Lead	Deadline	Update
<p>IRO pre-review and mid-term visits from three to two to avoid potential for mistake.</p> <p>Strengthen the admin function in relation to this.</p> <p>To engage in the development of any new IT system for Children Services</p>			
Establish a reporting mechanism for the timeliness of distribution of child protection conference plans and minutes			
IRO Service will work with the specialist minute taking team to ensure that the practice standard and reporting mechanisms are fit for purpose.	IRO Managers, Specialist Minute Taking Team Managers – performance section	November 2016	
Increase participation of children and parents in their meetings			
Collaborate with participation and engagement colleagues and the change council to increase the use of advocacy, MOMO, other mechanisms.	IRO Service, IRO's, Service Users, Change Council	February 2017	
Increase the level of pre-review and mid-review visits of IRO's to children			
<p>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.</p> <p>IRO's will continue to</p>	IRO Managers, IRO's	December 2016	

Action	Lead	Deadline	Update
<p>manage their diaries effectively.</p> <p>With expectation that midway review and pre CL review visit will be timetabled in advanced of the main review.</p>			
Achieve effective customer feedback and reporting mechanisms			
<p>IRO Service will establish feedback mechanisms for:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children and young people • families • professionals 	<p>IRO Managers, IRO's, Change council, Participation and engagement team, QA directorate</p>	<p>February 2017</p>	
Evaluate the increased incident of the category of emotional abuse in the child protection arena			
<p>Track and analysis children who have protection plans under the category emotional abuse.</p>	<p>IRO Managers, QA Audit functions, IRO's Business Support Staff</p>	<p>February 2017</p>	
IRO Service will utilise up to date research and development to improve the quality of practice in the service			
<p>IRO Managers will liaise with Chief Social Worker and local Universities to promote bespoke learning</p> <p>Whilst at the same time via staff appraisal consideration to be given individual learning needs.</p>	<p>IRO Service, Chief Social Worker, Local Universities, Research and development forum, QA Directorate</p>	<p>March 2017</p>	
IRO Service will continue to improve timeliness of meetings			
<p>IRO manager to continue to address the issue of timeliness with other Children Service Managers and ensure that IROs maintain timescales.</p>	<p>IRO Managers, MASH Managers, Business Managers</p>	<p>July 2016</p>	

Action	Lead	Deadline	Update
Child protection conference will be held in appropriate child and family centered venues			
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.	Head of Service - Commissioning Service, Children's Services	March 2017	
All quality assurance mechanisms to be further strengthened			
IRO service is to move into Quality Assurance Directorate which will strengthen QA role of IROs.	Head of Service, QA Directorate, IRO Team	October 2016	
Elevate the sharing of good practice			
This will be achieved via :- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision • Appraisal. • Peer audits • Peer observation • Group supervision. 	IRO Service	November 2016	
The provision of legal advice to IRO's			
IRO service to seek confirmation of legal arrangements for access to independent legal advice.	Head of Service	July 2016	
Business Support to the IRO Service to be further strengthened			
IRO Managers will continue to liaise with Business Managers in order to streamline the allocation process and develop appropriate systems to ensure effective	IRO Managers, Business Managers, Business Staff	September 2016	

Action	Lead	Deadline	Update
services.			