

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
21 MARCH 2018	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Executive Director People and Communities Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Councils	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Sam Smith, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services.	
Contact Officer(s):	Marie Saunders – Deputy Safeguarding Lead	Tel. 07730 616958

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Alison Bennett Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	Deadline date: N/A
It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the content of the report; and 2. Raise any queries they have with the lead officer. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Committee by The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Department PCC in line with annual requirements.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide statutory review and analysis of the Independent Reviewing Service.

2.2 This report is for The Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference 3.4.3.2 To receive statutory reports in relation to the adoption, fostering, commissioning, looked after children services and children’s homes with a view to recommending any changes.

2.3 This links to all areas of the Children in Care Pledge and Care Leavers Charter.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1. This Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Peterborough as required by statutory guidance. This report covers the period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

4.1.2 The appointment of an Independent Review Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section

118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. In March 2010, the government issued the 'Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Statutory Guidance.' They also published the: 'IRO Handbook, Statutory guidance for IROs and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children.'

4.1.3 In respect of this report, the IRO Handbook states: 'The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting panel. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed.' (IRO Handbook 2010, page 48, paragraph 7.11).

4.2 Legal Context

4.2.1 The appointment of an IRO for every looked after child is a statutory requirement of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 2004, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Care Planning and Placement Regulations 2010.

4.2.2 The IRO Service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit with its core functions consisting of reviewing plans for children in care and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities. Independent Chairs in Peterborough operate a dual role and undertake both CP and Looked after Children responsibilities.

4.2.3 Every child who is looked after by Peterborough City Council must have a Care Plan, which details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing, and the arrangements made to meet the child's day-to-day needs. All local authorities have a statutory duty to regularly review that Care Plan within legislative timescales (Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010).

4.2.4 It is the responsibility of Local Authorities to develop Care Plans and provide care that gives children in care positive life experiences and the best short and long-term life opportunities. The Children Act 1989 [amended 2004] and the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, set out the duty of the local authority to appoint an IRO when a child first becomes looked after.

4.2.5 The IRO should ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child and the IRO has a responsibility to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case. Statutory guidance and regulation clearly defines circumstances when the local authority should consult with the IRO; for example, proposed change of placement, change of education plan, or serious incident. The actions that the IRO must take if it is felt that the local authority is failing to comply with the regulations, statutory guidance and/or is breaching their duty to the child are also clear.

4.2.6 Every local authority is required to have a dispute resolution procedure that reflects the process for effectively resolving areas of disagreement raised by the IRO in respect of care planning. This includes access to independent legal advice for the IRO and referral to the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass).

4.3 Structures and Management of the Team

4.3.1 The team sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit, and is accountable to the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. There are two Deputy Safeguarding Leads within the service who are responsible for a team of nine Independent Chairs of whom eight are full time permanent staff and one is part time permanent staff.. The Deputy Safeguarding Leads line manage the Independent Chairs and will be referred to as Managers throughout this report.

4.3.2 All current IROs are qualified social work practitioners with significant experience of working with looked after children.

4.4 Supervision and Quality Assurance

4.4.1 IROs receive monthly supervision and have access to informal supervision as and when needed. Managers remain committed to ensuring the level of supervision and support to Independent Reviewing Officers is effective, supportive and of a high standard.

4.4.2 The IROs attend team meetings which alternate between Practice and Business issues and occur every month. Focus within business meetings is placed upon emerging issues or legislative/ organisational changes and implementing processes impacts on the service; current themes and expectations and organisational agenda. The practice meetings give the Independent Reviewing Officers opportunities to identify, analyse and discuss practice issues, present research and professional information, give feedback from individual meetings with partners and social workers, identify areas of learning and development and define and support the implementation of good practice.

4.5 Workload Demand

4.5.1 The IRO handbook recommends that a caseload of 50-70 children in care for a full time equivalent IRO is appropriate. This means the IRO is able to fulfil all of their statutory functions to the best of their ability; thus providing a high quality service for all children in care. During 2016-2017 the average caseload per FTE IRO was consistently between 63 and 68 cases.

4.5.2 Effective business support staff use established systems to support the IROs, this does not include the typing of minutes, which the IROs complete themselves. All IROs ensure that they distribute the recommendations from CIC review meetings to the responsible Team Manager within five working days of the review; this is in accordance with the IRO Handbook and enables the responsible manager to identify any areas of disagreement, which they then share with the IRO.

4.5.3 The IROs monitor the performance of the local authority's functions in relation to the child's case between reviews. This will include oversight of initial health assessments and other general health check-ups. If the child's care plan continues to meet the needs of the child there may be no need for any communication between the IRO and the social worker.

4.5.4 The IRO will also aim to complete a young person's care plan audit once a month. This is completed in conjunction with the young person and the findings sent to the QA Team looking at themes and areas for improvement.

4.6 Quantitative Data up to 31 March 2017

4.6.1 The table below details the *total* number of children in care per 10,000 in the last three years for PCC against the statistical neighbour (SN) average result (Bolton, Derby, Medway, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Rotherham, Sheffield, Southampton, Telford & Wrekin and Walsall) and the national average result for England where available.

Year	PCC Result	SN Result	ENG Result
2014-15	74.0	79.4	60.0
2015-16	75.0	79.5	60.0
2016-17	73.0	81.7	62.0

4.6.2 Peterborough City Council's rate per 10,000 children in care for 2016-17 was 73.0; lower than the statistical neighbour average of 81.7 and higher than the national average of 62.0. The 2016-17 out turn is slightly lower in comparison with the last two years.

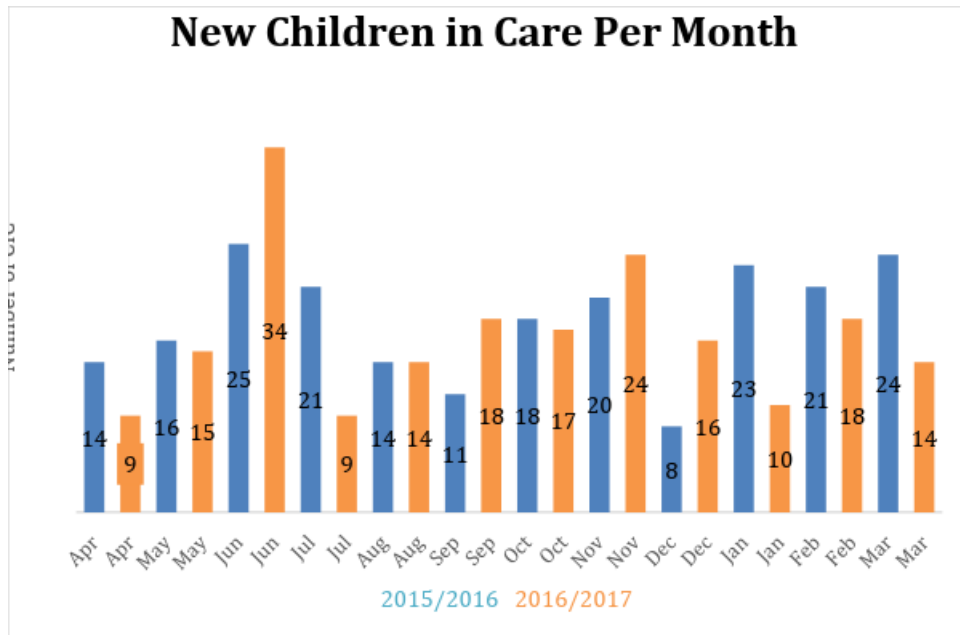
4.6.3 The table below details the number of *new* children in care in the last three years for PCC against the statistical neighbour average result and the national average result for England where available:

Year	PCC Result	SN Result	ENG Result
2014-15	30.0	34.2	26.8
2015-16	41.9	31.1	27.4
2016-17	37.0	33.1	28.4

4.6.4 Peterborough City Council's rate of *new* children in care for 2016-17 was 37.0 per 10,000 children; slightly higher than the statistical neighbour average of 33.1 and significantly higher than the national average of 28.4.

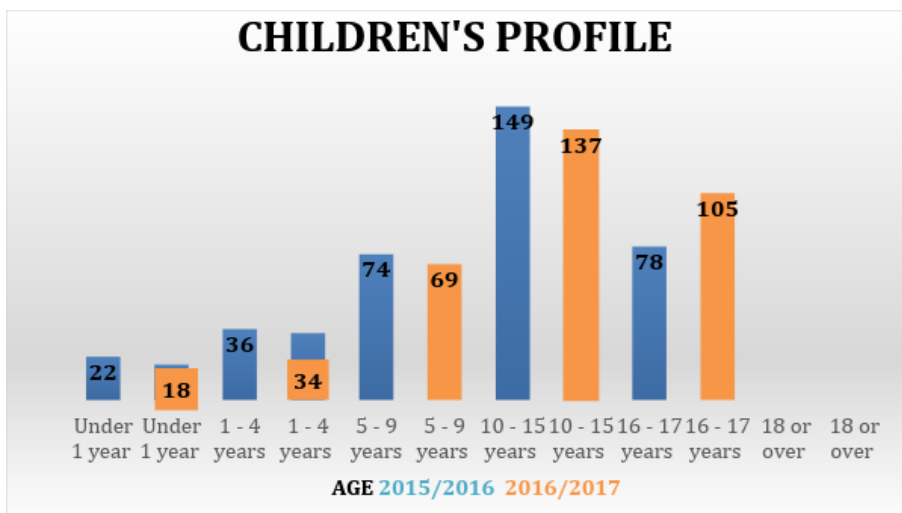
4.6.5 The rate of new children in care has increased over the last twelve months. The overall number of children coming into care remains above the target.

4.6.6 The graph below shows the number of new children in care per month:



4.7 Children's Profiles

4.7.1 The graph below shows the age of children in care covering 2016-17 in comparison to 2015-16. There was a total of 356 children in care in 2016-17 of which 197 were male and 159 female compared to 360 in 2015-16 where 204 were male and 156 were female.



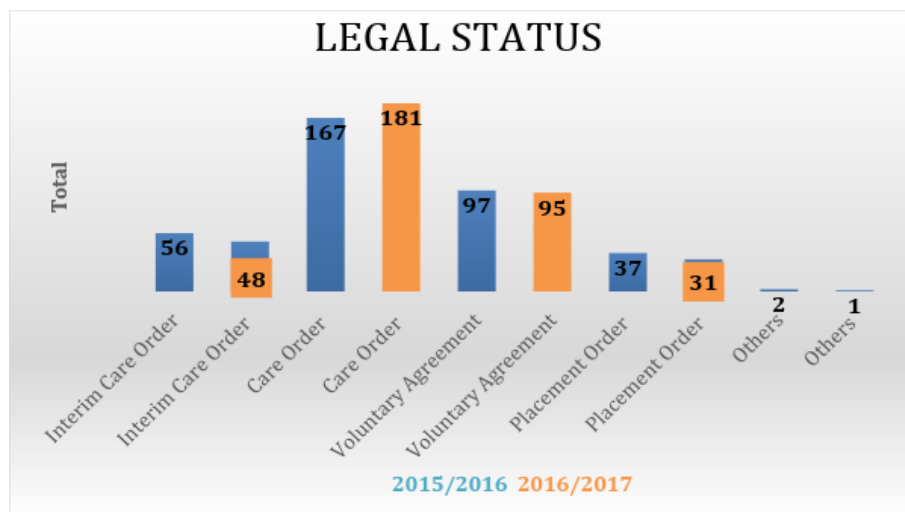
4.7.2 Generally the number of children of each age group has reduced since 2015-16. However, the total number of 16-17 year olds is greater than the number of that age group in 2015-16. Upon further analysis, this would appear to be as a result of the inflated numbers of children aged 10-15 years who were in care during 2015-16, a proportionate number of which remain in care and reflect in the older children figures the following year. The total figures for both periods are fairly consistent at 359 for 2015-16 and 356 for 2016-17.

Age at 31 March 2017	Boys	Girls	Total
Under 1 year old	10	8	18
1 – 4 years old	15	12	27
5 – 9 years old	37	31	68
10 – 15 years old	79	58	137
16 – 17 years old	56	50	106
18 years and over	0	0	0
Total	197	159	356

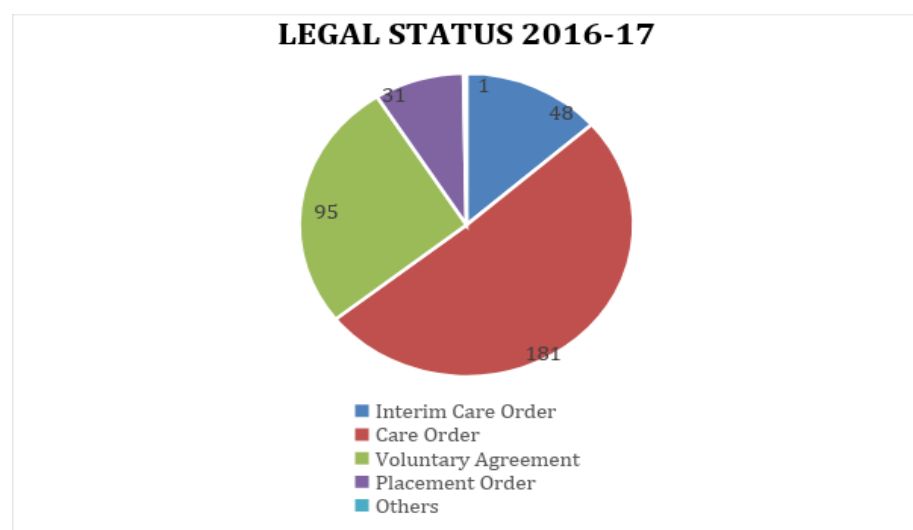
4.7.3 There continues to be a larger population of boys looked after in Peterborough which reflects similar consistencies within other Local Authorities. There were 27 unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC) looked after during 2016-17.

4.8 Legal Status

4.8.1



4.8.2

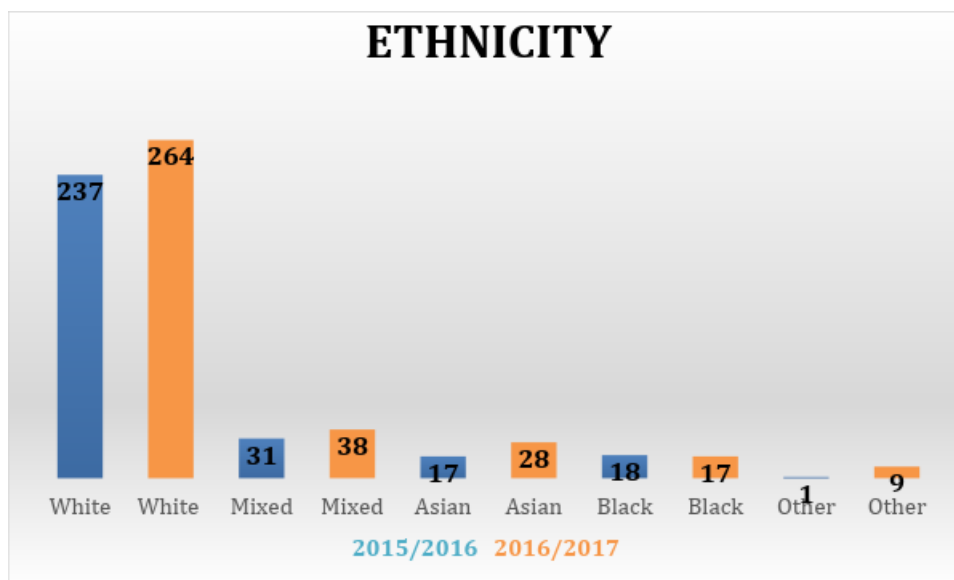


4.8.3 More Care Orders were obtained for children in 2016-17 compared to the previous year. There were small decreases in the number of interim care orders 48, voluntary agreements 95,

placement orders 31 and other 1. Care orders accounted for over half of all orders granted in 2016-17.

4.9 Ethnicity

4.9.1



4.9.2 The graph above indicates an increase in the numbers of white children in care in 2016-17 compared to 2015-16 and a reduction in others. The slight change in figures could be as a result of a transient and diverse cultural and ethnic population in Peterborough and shows that the figures are relatively consistent.

4.10 Children Subject to Placement Orders

4.10.1 At year end March 2017, 7 children were subject to Placement Orders where adoption was no longer the plan with the Placement Order needing to be revoked. The figure has remained the same since it was last reported. There have been a number of cases where the Placement Order has been revoked however, during the year further cases have been identified. There is a clear plan in place to address the remaining revocation cases.

4.11 Children in Care Reviews

4.11.1 Between April 2016 and March 2017, 99.6% of reviews took place within statutory timescales. This is roughly the same percentage as at the time of the last reporting period and means that three reviews took place outside of timescale. The reason for this was attributed to vital attendees not being available on agreed dates.

CLA Reviews held within timescales	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	99.7%	99.7%	99.6%

4.11.2 The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit has systems in place, which enable CIC reviews to be held within timescales. These are as follows:

- At the beginning of each calendar month, business support staff send out the statutory date due date for all children in care reviews. This means that, responsible operational team managers, the manager of the conference and review service and IROs can monitor and ensure reviews do not go out of timescale.
- Only the managers can authorise a change in a CIC review date. This endeavours to ensure that if a change of date is unavoidable, the new date is scheduled within statutory timescales. It is important that the review is child centred and only involves the necessary number of professionals. Where this is not appropriate the IRO will have a series of meetings to involve all the relevant people.

- 4.11.3 IROs focus on the steps taken to progress adoption and permanency planning at CIC reviews. They address delays by raising their concerns with social workers, responsible team managers and heads of service.
- 4.11.4 IROs complete and update a spreadsheet record of remedial actions and the conference and review service manager monitors this for timely completion. Where remedial actions are not completed in timely manner, IROs commence the dispute resolution process where appropriate.
- 4.11.5 In addition, IROs will arrange for CIC reviews to take place more frequently 'where permanence planning is not being progressed in a timely manner'. These reviews include a high level of scrutiny and monitoring of decision-making and actions. This ensures they are in the best interests of the child and that there is minimal delay.
- 4.11.6 There is an ongoing arrangement between the local authority children's legal services and IROs. This ensures that IROs receive copies of all documents including statements and reports that are filed with the court as part of care proceedings relating to CIC.
- 4.11.7 All IROs continue to deliver culturally competent practice and the child's individual needs, wishes and feelings are central to all reviews. IROs closely monitor the integration of a child's identity including culture, religion, ethnicity and birth family values to care planning.
- 4.11.8 IROs continue to fulfil their responsibility to children remanded into youth detention accommodation (YDA). The key to this role is to ensure that all of these children have active individual care plans that meet their needs. In developing the care plan for children who become looked after solely as a result of being remanded, the IRO will be aware that some children will only be looked after for the period they are remanded. In many cases this period will be relatively short. However, consideration will be given to what longer term support or accommodation the child will need following the remand episode should the young person continue to be looked after at the end of the remand period. The conference and review service manager monitors the numbers of children remanded.
- 4.12 **Children in care Reviews - Participation**
- 4.12.1 It is the role of the IRO to encourage and promote the participation of children aged four years and over on the review process. IROs record the method at the end of each Child Care Review and these are coded in line with national guidance.
- 4.12.2 At year end 2016-2017, 99% of looked after children had participated in their review. This has improved from last year, where the outturn was 98.5%. The locally set target is 95%. Each child and young person who is looked after receives a consultation booklet prior to his or her review meeting. In 293 cases in 2016-17 these were completed; the booklets aid children's preparation for and contribution to their review meeting. Some children are supported by their carers to complete their booklet, some complete them themselves and some choose not to complete them. An average of 63% of the booklets were not returned during 2016-2017. MOMO has recently been introduced and as at 31 March 2017, 30 young people were signed up to MOMO with active accounts and Peterborough had 17 members of staff with accounts and supporting children to use the system.
- 4.12.3 The feedback from the consultation forms provide valuable information about the experience of looked after children. In the main, the information suggests that most feel safe, listened to and well cared for. The consultation document is discussed with the child and with their consent, the IRO shares it with review participants.
- 4.12.4 IROs will always aim to spend time individually with children prior to a review to determine their wishes and feelings to identify if they have any concerns; and find out how they would like to participate in the meeting. This includes the time, venue and attendance at their meeting though it should be noted this remains primarily the social worker's responsibility. It is noteworthy that

many young people do not want their reviews to disrupt their school day or leisure activities for example. Each child is given the opportunity to engage with an advocate, particularly if this maximises the young person's contribution to their reviews. In 2016-17, 371 IRO visits to children prior to their review took place.

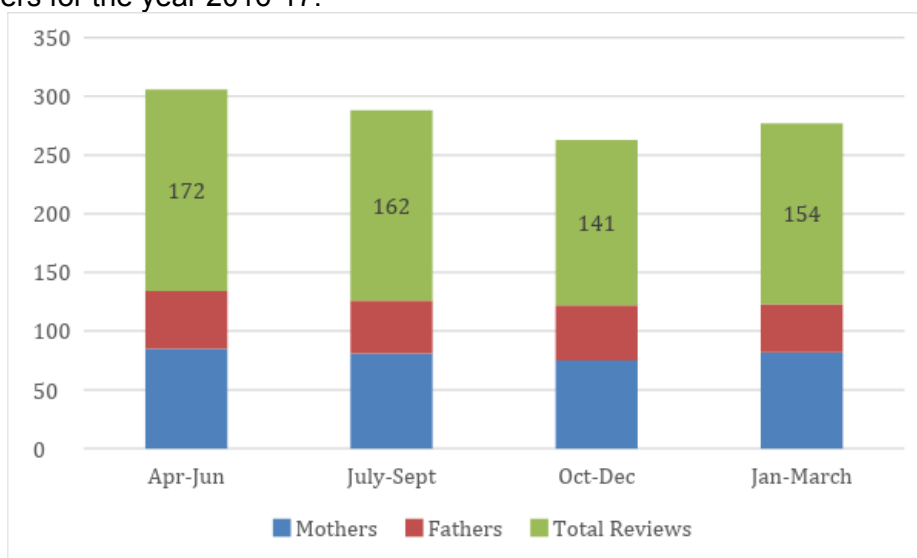
4.12.5 IROs document their consultations with children on Liquid logic to form a permanent record of the consultation. Consultation takes various forms, which includes face-to-face meetings, texting, telephone calls and emails. Children who have English as a second language always have an interpreter available and children with additional needs always have the support of their carers, specialist worker or an advocate. IROs have occasionally helped children to co-chair their reviews, this is particularly effective as children reach their teens and wish to have greater control over their meetings.

4.12.6 The Children in Care Participation Officer Co-ordinates and facilitates the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and liaises with the Corporate Parenting Panel and Cabinet Members to facilitate dialogue between all parties. Peterborough City Councils Looked after Children's Strategy reflects the council's priority for CLA. This strategy lists priorities for the children and young people ensuring that good outcomes are pivotal to processes. CLA in Peterborough benefit from the continued robust commitment of elected members of the council.

4.13 Parental Participation

4.13.1 Parental participation is noted within the minutes of the review and monitored by the IRO manager. The level of attendance by parents was 49% in the year 2016-17. In accordance with the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010, IROs offer to meet with parents outside of the main review meeting. This is particularly evident where a parent is prevented from attending or in any instances where the arrangements for the main review meeting cannot be adjusted to accommodate the parent attendance

4.13.2 The graph below shows the level of participation of parents and differentiates between mothers and fathers for the year 2016-17.



4.14 Audit of Children in care Arrangements

4.14.1 The effectiveness of the IRO service and the difference they make to children's experiences of being CLA in Peterborough is monitored through the activity of the Quality Assurance Team including the ongoing thematic audit programmes. In addition, team and senior managers undertake a programme of case file audits and use Ofsted judgements to grade cases. All cases where remedial actions are identified and monitored by the QA Team to ensure that appropriate action is taken in a timely manner. Audit themes and areas for development inform service improvement plans for each service.

- 4.14.2 Established organisational systems contribute to good practice. IROs routinely receive minutes of the Peterborough Access to Services Panel (PASP) and can challenge decision making with the PASP chairperson following discussion with their manager and the Head of Service.
- 4.14.3 All IROs complete a monitoring form after each meeting. This is sent to the social worker and responsible team manager. If the IRO identifies an immediate cause for concern they will raise a case alert. They will always discuss this with their manager and ensure that timescales are clear. This will then be followed up with a telephone call / email to the responsible manager and Head of Service. This ensures that immediate action is taken to safeguard and protect the child.
- 4.14.4 As part of the Quality Assurance and Learning Framework, young people's audits were introduced in 2016 in order to identify and evidence the effectiveness of the whole system surrounding the child and to obtain their views about the service they receive. The IROs are required to complete a minimum of one of these every 4 – 6 weeks and they are collated and reported on by the Quality Assurance Team. 3 audits were received prior to the end of the year which did report positive experiences for children. 2017-18 audits will continue to identify practices and experiences across the service.

4.15 **Dispute Resolution**

- 4.15.1 The IRO handbook clearly describes the role of the IRO where there are areas of disagreement: 'One of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. It is expected that IROs establish positive working relationships with the social workers of the children for whom they are responsible. Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, for example in relation to care planning, the implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to it, resources or poor practice, the IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The IRO should place a note of this initial informal resolution process on the child's file. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action.'
- 4.15.2 In Peterborough, the IROs and their managers track cases between reviews and bring any concerns to the attention of the social worker and responsible team managers. This can result in differences of opinion. To mitigate this, there is regular dialogue between the IRO service and operational managers about how each other's roles conjoin to ensure that short and longer term outcomes for children are the best they can be.
- 4.15.3 If the IRO identifies any concerns during the review or preparation process for the review, they routinely have contact with the team manager and attempt to resolve the issues. If the issues are not resolved, a case alert is raised and monitored. If the agreed timescale is not met, the IRO will instigate the dispute resolution process to ensure there is no drift or delay in achieving permanence and stability for children.
- 4.15.4 Peterborough City Council underpins practice with a culture informed by challenge and continuous learning. The challenge of the IRO regarding practice is strong within Peterborough and a case alert being raised is recorded on the child's file. However the recording is an area that continues to require improvement to ensure challenge and impact on outcomes for children is accurately reflected.
- 4.15.5 During 2016/17, the IROS raised 128 case alerts. Seven cases went to formal dispute. Two went to stage 2 and one case is ongoing. The following themes were noted with regard to the case alerts raised:
- Practice issues, which include assessments and other paperwork not being, completed (89)
 - Drift in care planning (27)
 - Statutory visits (11)
 - Placement issues (5).

4.15.6 The cases that entered the dispute process related to drift in care planning once the disputes were raised action was taken within the required timescales. However, two cases went to stage 2 and were concluded at that stage.

4.15.7 Relationships between Cafcass and the IRO service continue to be positive with a named guardian and IRO providing a link between the two services. Cafcass attend the IRO team meeting twice yearly and the named IRO reciprocates this arrangement. This ensures joined up working and the sharing of information continues to be a priority between the professionals who maintain albeit differing degrees of independence from the operational social work teams. The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance meets with the Service Manager at Cafcass on a quarterly basis to identify and discuss any areas requiring improvement.

4.16 **Summary**

4.16.1 The IRO Service has continued to provide effective provision for reviewing and monitoring the Care Plans for CLA (Children Looked After). It contributes to improved outcomes for CLA through increasing participation of children and young people in the decision making about their care, as well as making independent representations to operational teams and management on planning and practice issues. The independent scrutiny provided by the team is valued by social workers and management.

4.16.2 **Independent Reviewing Officer Achievements in 2016-17**

- Service Plan – A robust service plan is in place to continue to drive improvements across the service and maximise positive outcomes for children.
- Caseloads – Independent Reviewing Officers' caseloads have remained within the recommended guidelines of between 50 and 70. This has enabled the IRO's to meet expectations for a high quality service whereby all aspects of their role are undertaken.
- Oversight and Quality Assurance – IROs have actively addressed concerns, poor practice and non compliance in a systematic and professional manner to promote the improvement of standards amongst social work teams and partner agencies. Challenging as denoted within the IRO handbook and ensuring that timescales are adhered to.
- IRO footprint – There has been clear evidence obtained throughout case audits, supervisions and dataset analysis, of the consistent presence and oversight of the IRO and clear demonstrations of the IRO footprint on their caseloads.
- Children's voices – consistent approach by IRO's to maximise the engagement of children and the evidence within reports demonstrates an awareness and objective to ensure that the voice of the child is heard.
- Themed audits – the Quality Assurance team continues to undertake a significant number of thematic audits across Children's' Social Care and a number of audits across the IRO service have evidenced robust systems and competent and effective practice and established performance.
- Agile working – whilst Peterborough is preparing to embrace agile working during 2017-18, most staff are already furnished with mobile devices including phones and Chromebooks, resulting in maximising effective time management and enabling IROs to effectively and pro actively manage their time in a resourceful way. This enables them to connect remotely in order to access documents, records and record information at the time and assists in enabling them to make better use of their time in terms of location and time limits.
- Learning and development – The IRO service continues to promote good practice and to develop and embed learning and supportive relationships within the wider sector. IROs take responsibility in organising and managing meetings with operational team managers to identify impacts and issues in the service and to recognise areas of good practice. They work together in maintaining a respectful, transparent and learning abled forum within which to identify and design models of ideal working. The IROs also take turns to represent Peterborough City Council at the Eastern Regional IRO network.

4.17 **Areas of Development for 2017/18**

- 4.17.1 IRO will continue to proactively contribute to improving outcomes for looked after children through rigorous monitoring and challenge of care planning and promoting timely permanency planning.
- 4.17.2 Further development of the escalation process to ensure improvement on commitment from partner agencies and to challenge areas of poor practice, non-engagement and lack of progress.
- 4.17.3 To evidence the promotion of the welfare for children in care. To ensure robust oversight of health assessments, SDQ's and dental checks and address areas of concern.
- 4.17.4 To evidence the support to the local authority in raising practice standards.
- 4.17.5 IROs will continue to raise awareness amongst social workers of the need to keep the IRO informed of significant events between review meetings and to consult the IRO before important decisions are taken in respect of changes to the child's care plan.
- 4.17.6 To focus on supporting young people to chair their own reviews and to maximise the voice of the child.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Parents, carers and children were consulted as part of the review process.
- 5.2 Further consultation with Health colleagues in order to agree a plan to move forward in terms of maximising outcomes for children.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 To ensure there is a more robust approach to supporting the experiences of children and young people in order to improve their lives.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 Statutory requirement

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 None

9. IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial Implications

None

9.2 Legal Implications

None

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 None

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