

**Safeguarding &
Quality Assurance Unit**

**Independent Reviewing Officer
Annual Report**

2017/18

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1. Introduction

- 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 2017 to 31 March 2018.
- 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.'
- 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).

2. Legal Context

- 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 Person's Act 2008 and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- 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 the role of the Independent Chair Person for child protection conferences (CPC) and Looked after Children responsibilities. For the purpose of this report we will refer to the Independent Chair as the IRO.
- 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).

- 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.
- 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.
- 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).

3. Structures and Management of the Team

- 3.1 The team sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit, and is accountable to the Assistant Director of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. There are two Deputy Safeguarding Leads within the service who are responsible for the team of Independent Chairs who are all permanent staff. The Deputy Safeguarding Leads line manage the Independent Chairs and will be referred to as Managers throughout this report.
- 3.2 All IROs are qualified social workers with the required knowledge and experience to fulfil the requirements of the role

4. Supervision and Quality Assurance

- 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 IRO is effective, supportive and of a high standard.
- 4.2 The IROs attend team meetings twice a month. The meetings alternate between Practice Meetings and Business Meetings. Focus within business meetings is placed upon emerging legislative/ organisational changes and

issues, and implementing processes which impact 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.

5. Workload Demand

- 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 2017-2018 the average caseload per FTE IRO was consistently between 60 and 67 cases.
- 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 decisions 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, and use the provision for challenging the decisions of the meeting in accordance with the IRO handbook.
- 5.3 The IROs monitor the performance of the local authority, the progress of the plan and any decisions made at the Review between Reviews. This will include oversight of initial health assessments and other general health check-ups; missing episodes and other key issues, so as to mitigate risk of drift and promote timely and optimum outcomes for children.
- 5.4 The IRO will also aim to complete a young person's care plan audit bi-monthly. This is completed in conjunction with the young person and the findings sent to the Quality Assurance Team looking at themes and areas for improvement.

6 Quantitative Data up to 31 March 2018

- 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
2015-16	75.0	79.5	60.0
2016-17	73.0	81.7	62.0
2017-18	74.0	87	64.0

6.2 Peterborough City Council's rate per 10,000 children in care for 2017-18 was 74.0; lower than the statistical neighbour average of 87 and higher than the national average of 64.0. The 2017-18 out turn is slightly higher in comparison with the last two years.

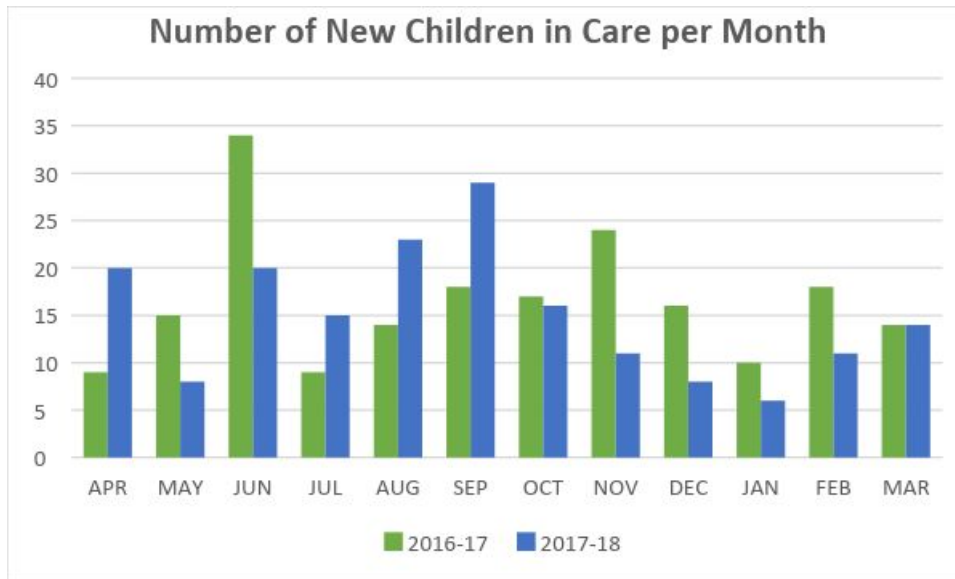
6.3 The table below details the number of *new* children in care in the last three years for PCC against the statistical neighbour average result and the national average result for England where available:

Year	PCC Result	SN Result	ENG Result
2015-16	41.9	31.1	27.4
2016-17	37.0	33.1	28.4
2017-18	35.0	37.0	27.0

6.4 Peterborough City Council's rate of *new* children in care for 2017-18 was 36.0 per 10,000 children; slightly lower than the statistical neighbour average of 37.0 and significantly higher than the national average of 27.0

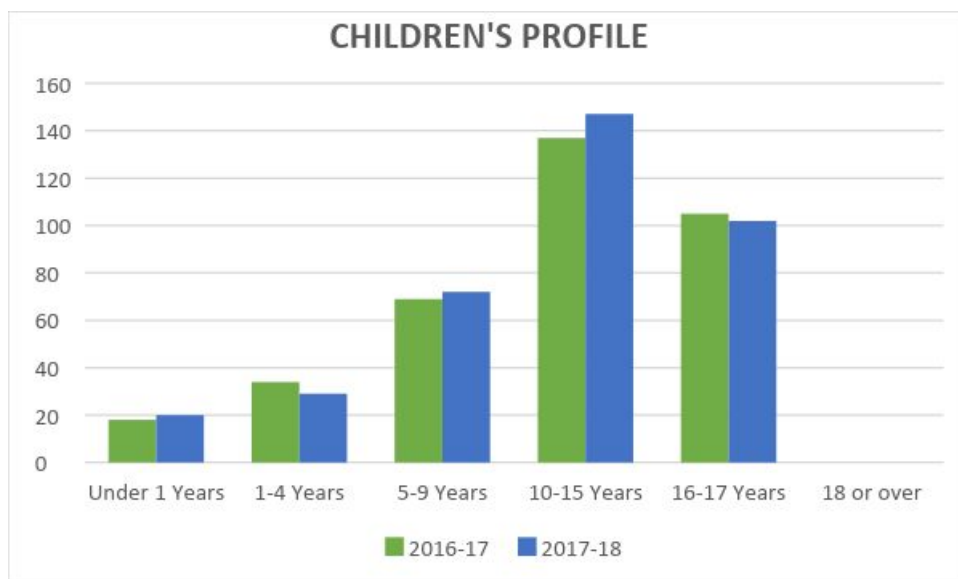
6.5 The rate of new children in care has increased over the last twelve months. The overall number of children coming into care remains above the target. Family Safeguarding Teams were introduced in 2018 to ensure more effective and collaborative working with Children and their Families in order to target increasing numbers of children being brought into care.

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



7. Children’s Profiles

7.1 The graph below shows the age of children in care covering 2017-18 in comparison to 2016-17. There was a total of 370 children in care in 2017-18 of which 212 were male and 158 female compared to 365 in 2016-17 where 197 were male and 159 were female.



7.2 Generally the number of children of each age group has increased slightly reduced since 2016-17 except children aged 1-4 which has a small reduction compared to last year.

Age at 31 March 2018	Boys	Girls	Total
Under 1 year old	10	10	20
1 – 4 years old	19	10	29
5 – 9 years old	42	30	72
10 – 15 years old	80	67	147
16 – 17 years old	61	41	102
18 years and over	0	0	0
Total	212	158	370

There continues to be a larger population of boys looked after in Peterborough which reflects similar consistencies within other Local Authorities.

There were 9 unaccompanied children seeking asylum (UASC) looked after during 2017-18 which is a significant reduction from 21 in 2016-17.

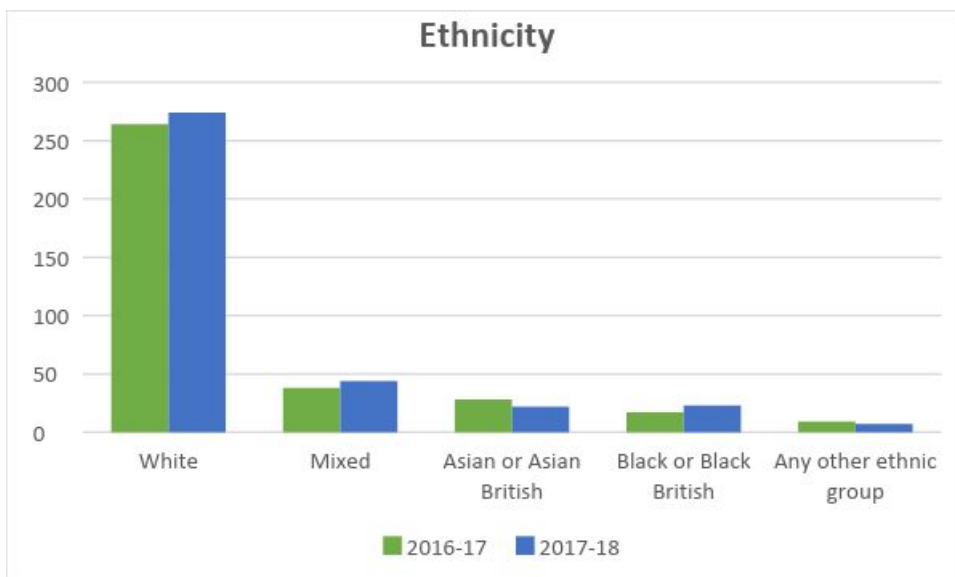
7.3 Legal Status





The number of Care Orders obtained for children has increased over the last 2 years with a significant increase in 2017-18 compared to 2016-17. Interim Care Orders increased slightly in the same year whilst Voluntary Agreements and Placement Orders have decreased. Care orders accounted for over half of all orders granted in 2017-18.

7.4 Ethnicity



The graph above indicates an increase in the numbers of White, Mixed ethnicity

and Black children in care in 2017-18 compared to 2016-17 and a reduction in Asian and other ethnic groups. The slight change in figures could be as a result of a consistently transient and diverse cultural and ethnic population in Peterborough.

7.5 At year end March 2018, 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. Effective tracking is in place to monitor these cases.

8. Children in care Reviews

8.1 Between April 2017 and March 2018, 98.9% 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 four reviews took place outside of timescale. The reason for this was attributed to vital attendees not being available on agreed dates. The reason for this is attributed to four Reviews being recorded as taking place out of time scales. In fact in each of these instances the Review commenced on the planned date and within time scale, and was adjourned or completed within a series of meetings within 20 days as required, but the date of the final meeting was recorded in error, thus creating the erroneous data that the Review was out of time scale. The systems requirement for correcting these errors was deemed to be disproportionate and as such could not be corrected. However All Reviews were in fact held within timescales using the ability to hold more than one meeting and where appropriate adjourn.

CLA Reviews held within timescales	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
	99.7%	99.6%	98.9%

8.2 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. Where necessary and appropriate meetings are adjourned or the Review held over more than one meeting to ensure the review is child centred and involves the all of the necessary professionals.

8.3 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 using the well-established case alert process and where appropriate the Dispute Resolution Process – see also section 12.

- 8.4 IROs complete and update a spreadsheet record of remedial actions and the Deputy Safeguarding Leads monitor this for timely completion. Where remedial actions are not completed in timely manner, IROs commence the dispute resolution process where appropriate.
- 8.5 IROs will arrange for CIC reviews to take place more frequently in certain circumstances such as for children who live at a significant distance from Peterborough; and ‘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.
- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 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.
- 8.8 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.

9. Children in care Reviews - Participation

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 At year end 2017-2018, 99% of looked after children had participated in their review. This has remained the same from last year. The locally set target is 95%.

MOMO has recently been introduced and as at 31 March 2018, 81 young people were signed up to MOMO with active accounts which is a significant increase on last years' figure of 30. The year 2017-18 also recorded that 91 members of staff had accounts and were supporting children to use the system. Again a considerable increase on the 17 workers recorded last year. This is as a result of increased awareness and training.

- 9.3 The feedback from the consultation forms provide valuable information about the experience of Children in Care. 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.
- 9.4 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 2017-18, 951 IRO visits to children prior to their review took place. This is exemplary.
- 9.5 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 actively encourage children to chair /co-chair their Reviews, and over this year there has been an increase in number of children to co-chair their reviews, this is particularly effective as children reach their teens and wish to have greater control over their meetings.
- 9.6 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 Council's Looked after Children's Strategy reflects the council's priority for Children in Care. This strategy lists priorities for the children and young people ensuring that good outcomes are pivotal to processes. Children in Care in Peterborough benefit from the continued robust commitment of elected members of the council.

10. Parental Participation

- 10.1 Parental participation is noted within the minutes of the review and monitored by the IRO manager. There were a total of 1045 Child Care Reviews completed in 2017-18. The level of participation by parents was approximately 42% in the year 2017-18. 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. Parents are also given a consultation form to complete their views, wishes and feelings to inform the Review.

Parental and Child Feedback forms were introduced in March 2018 which aim to maximum the voice of the parent or child and also to seek to evaluate and improve practice within the service by identifying with the experiences of the Child Care Review process.

11. Quality assurance and audit of Children in care Arrangements

- 11.1 The effectiveness of the IRO service and the difference they make to children's experiences of being in Care 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.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 All IROs complete a monitoring form after each statutory 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 their concern with the case responsible manager / senior manager and agree a course of actions with timescales. This will then be followed up with a email to the responsible manager and Head of Service and any other managers as appropriate. This ensures that immediate action is taken to safeguard and protect the child.
- 11.4 As part of the Quality Assurance and Learning Framework, young people's audits of their care plan 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 asked to complete these with children during the visits where the child is age appropriate and agrees and they are collated and reported on by the Quality Assurance Team. Audits received this year did report positive experiences for children. 2018-19 audits will continue to identify practices and experiences across the service.

12. Dispute Resolution

- 12.1 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.'
- 12.2 During 2017/18, the IROS raised 145 case alerts. One case went to formal DRP. During the year, our Case Alert process was updated to reflect the additional managerial tier within Children's Social Care. The method of recording was also updated to enable better scrutiny of themes and issues raised which will further tie into the new Manager and Group Manager meetings planned for 2018-19. The following themes were noted with regard to the case alerts raised:
- Practice issues, which include assessments and other paper work not being completed
 - Drift in care planning
 - Statutory visits
 - Placement issues
- 12.3 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.

13. Summary

The IRO Service has continued to provide effective provision for reviewing and monitoring the Care Plans for Children in Care. It contributes to improved outcomes for Children in Care 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.

14. Independent Reviewing Officer Achievements in 2017-18

In March 2018 we implemented professional feedback forms for (CCR) meetings and in May 2018 we are implementing feedback forms for children and parents.

Analysis of the 85 returns in March 2018 evidences that other professionals consider “*The IRO took the views of the child into account*” 100% of the time; and “*the voice of the child was discussed and made clear*” in 81 (95%) responses with two (2%) stating ‘no’. One young person chose to provide his own feedback and stated “*x is an excellent IRO. x always respects my opinions. x never judges my opinions.*”

- 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 – There has been a 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.
- 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 as well as areas for improvement. 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.
- PCC is part of the Eastern Region IRO Managers Network and they are currently planning an Annual IRO Conference which will be held in November 2018 and are expecting over 90 IRO’s to attend.

- The IRO's have contributed to the increase in dental checks and health assessments for children in care due to increased monitoring. They have also been instrumental in the increased oversight of children at risk of CSE or Missing episodes.

15. Areas of Development for 2018/19

- IRO's 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.
- To contribute to the early identification of Children/young people who may be able to return home safely to their families.
- To have increased oversight of the Local Authority's plans for Children and are identifying all options to secure permanence.
- 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
- To evidence the support to the Local Authority in raising practice standards. One aspect will be to combine meetings with all Team Managers and Independent Chairs to collaboratively identify and address practice and process issues. Another area will be to ensure regular meetings between IRO Managers and Group Managers in CSC to further develop a joined up approach to improving practice.
- 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.
- To improve and support the local authority with the quality assurance of care plans for children.
- To support in establishing good working relationships with Cambridgeshire County Council and to continue to improve processes and services across the two Local Authorities.

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