



Independent Reviewing Officer

Looked After Children Annual Report Summary 2018/19

What do IROs do?

The law states that all children and young people that become looked after must be appointed an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO Handbook (2010) sets out the requirements of the IROs in supporting children and young people who are in the care of the local authority. An IRO has an important role in making sure that children and young people's care plans meet their needs. IROs are there to make sure that reviews are run properly, that children and young people's views are listened to and their best interests are protected, and to ensure that children are only looked after as long as necessary.

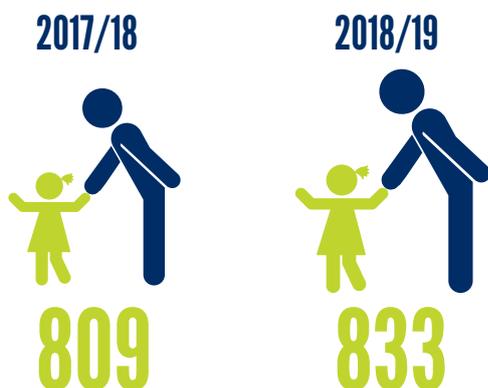


IROs also make sure that they talk to the local authority when they are worried about whether plans are progressing for children or young people. IROs will challenge the local authority if they disagree with the local authority's plan for a child or young person. IROs will also tell the local authority about things that they are doing particularly well.

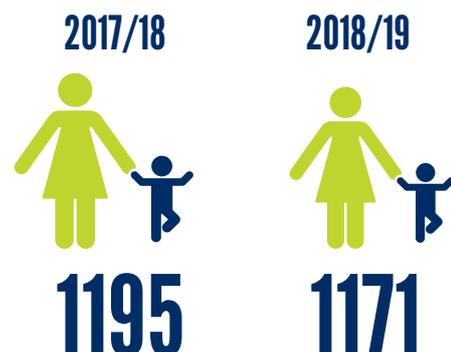
IROs in County Durham also chair child protection conferences and work within Durham's Safeguarding Children's Board (DSCB) Child Protection Procedures.

Number of Looked after Children in County Durham.*

*As of March 31st



Total number of Looked after Children during the year.



Looked After Children's Reviews held within the timescale

We now monitor LAC reviews as part of our new monthly performance management framework, this has been consistently above 90% for those reviews held which were due in the month.

Children and young people in the care of County Durham

The IROs chair Looked After Reviews (LARs) for all children, including those placed for adoption, those in short break respite care, young people who are remanded into the care of the local authority and those children on Care Orders who are placed with their families. The child's journey through the looked after process is set out at the end of this report.

Timeliness of Looked After Reviews

It is important that children's looked after reviews take place within specific timescales. This ensures that children and young people have the right plan and things are happening that should be. IROs work hard to make sure there are no delays in reviews taking place. Some of the reasons reviews cannot take place are outside of anyone's control.

The regulation states that children and young people should know their long-term plan within 4 months of becoming looked after (their 2nd review). In 2018/19 there has been an increase of children who's plans were ratified at the 4 month review. In the last 6 months this has increased to 56%. This is an area of development for the IRO service and the social work team for 2019/20.



“The meeting and information the IRO spoken about was like a breath of fresh air.”

Family Carer

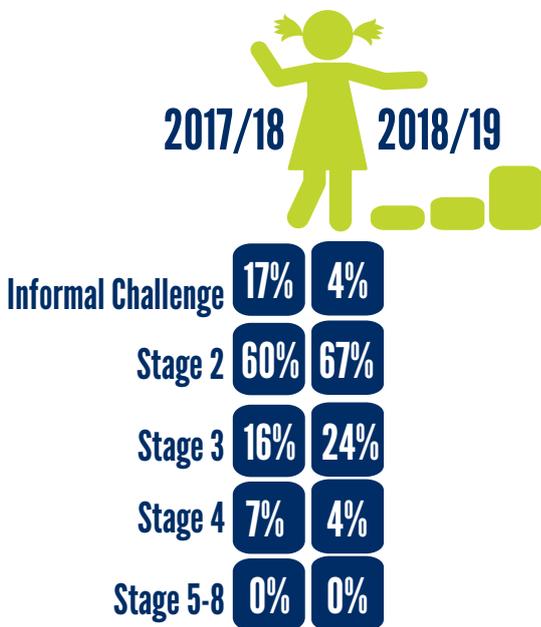
When IROs have worries

The IRO handbook states that all local authorities must have a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). This is where the social worker must work with the IRO to try to resolve any differences they may have in relation to a child's or young person's plan. The idea is that issues can be resolved quickly without the need to escalate to senior managers or for the need to go to court.

Number of children where a Dispute (DRP) was raised.



Disputes raised were resolved via:



Reasons for submitting a dispute:



“ best support I could have asked for. She supported me and my family. My IRO is a fun, friendly and caring person. ”
Young person

How are we doing?

Engagement with children and young people

All children who become looked after over the age of 4 years receive a letter telling them the name of their IRO and how they can get in contact with them. All children who have a review are offered the opportunity to speak to their IRO prior to and between their reviews. Children and young people can contact their IROs at any point between reviews if they are not happy with any aspect of their plan.

The IRO's attend the Children In Care Council to support with events and feedback for changes needed in the service.

We attend the young people experience group to look at young peoples participation.



“ The IRO service has appointed the last 2 IRO's based on the balanced feedback from a young people panel as part of the interview process. ”
Young person

The following are case examples of the impact of the IRO role:

- A 17 year old young person contacted their IRO to challenge a decision made at a Looked After Meeting. This was surrounding a young person 's family time arrangements. The IRO has booked in a consultation with the young person to support a challenge.
- IRO's have submitted statements to court to support and challenge care planning for children and young people.

“ The new letters from the IRO rather than notes from looked after meetings is more personal and much better to receive. ”
Young person

“ I can tell my IRO and he will sort it out for me. ”
Young person

“ I set my IRO challenges before the next meet. He does these and it shows he takes an interest in what I think. ”
Parent/carer

IROs ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to participate within their review, that their voice is heard, and they feel they can contribute to decision making. Children and young people are also supported to:

- Chair their own reviews.
- Compile their individual agendas, which assists them in preparation for chairing and sharing views at their reviews.
- Children will receive a letter rather than notes of the meeting. This will be more personal to the child or young person.

“ I set my IRO tasks and make a game of this to make my review fun. ”
Young person

“ My IRO Cares. ”
Young person

“ We have a chat rather than a meeting as I like this better. ”
Young person

“ My IRO is the best and I have had them he 8 years I have been looked after. ”
Young person

Working with others

The IRO Service work with a lot of different agencies and groups.

Including:

- Other IRO Services across the region and nationally.
- National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).
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- Children & Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) is well embedded into practice.

IRO work with social work teams with the focus being on improving practice and outcomes for children and young people. They have produced monthly and quarterly performance reports to senior managers to support improvement work and identify any training needs which may be required.

What needs to be done next?

The IRO Service action plan sets out what needs to be done during 2019/20.

Including:

- a) Increase the numbers of Looked After Children who are actively involved in their review.
- b) Continue to ensure that plans for children and young people are robust and that they progress without delay.
- c) IROs will continue to work alongside social workers and other professionals to promote better outcomes for children and young people.
- d) Ensure that all looked after children understand their plan and are part of the process when making these plans.

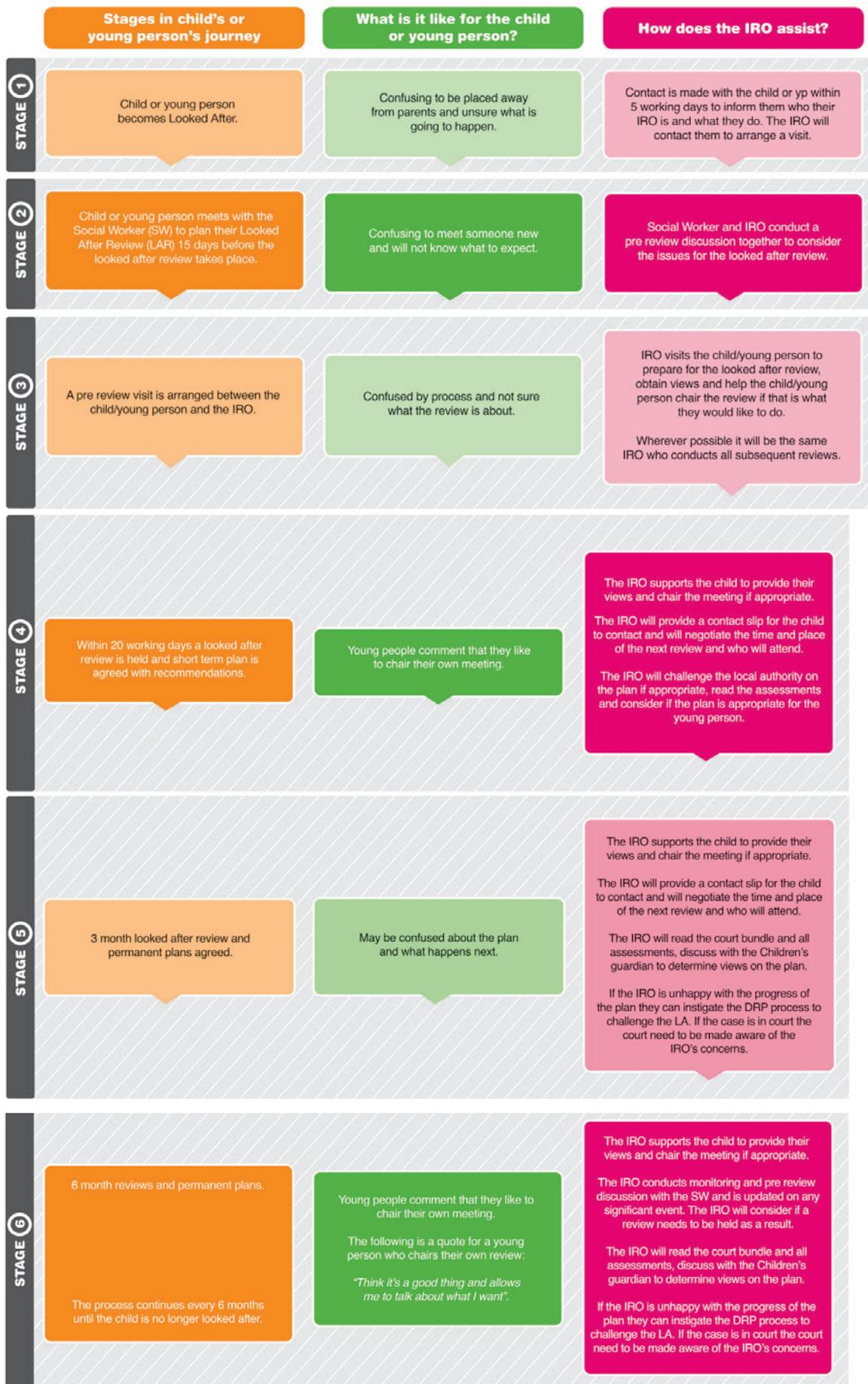
For further information or to discuss anything in this report please contact

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The Child's Journey

The information below contains the key stages in the child's journey through the Looked After Child process and how the IRO assists the child or young person in this process.



Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.



Braille



Audio

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Large print

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