



# Corporate Parenting Board

Dorset Council – Children’s Services

IRO Annual Report 2018/19

Date of Meeting: 19 November 2019

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education and Early Help

Director: Sarah Parker, Executive Director of People - Children

**Executive Summary:**

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in the Dorset Council area as required by statutory guidance.

**Equalities Impact Assessment:**

N/A

**Budget:**

None Identified

**Risk Assessment:**

N/A

**Climate implications:**

N/A

**Other Implications:**

None

**Recommendation:**

Members to actively consider and comment upon the adequacy of the Annual Work Programme in section 18

**Reason for Recommendation:**

To be assured that the Annual Work Program identifies gaps and areas for development and will drive learning and service improvement to strengthen outcomes for children.

<b>Appendices:</b>
<b>Background Papers:</b> None
<b>Officer Contact:</b> Name: Kevin Stenlake Tel: Email:

## **1. The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care**

- 1.1 This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in the Dorset Council area as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Annual Report must be presented to: Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## **2. Purpose of service and legal context**

- 2.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children Looked After and for challenging drift and delay.

- 2.2 The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

"The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing."

- 2.3 The NCB research highlights

Where IROs identify barriers to their ability to fulfil their role, or systemic failures in the service to looked after children, they must raise this formally

with senior managers. These challenges and the response should be included in the Annual Report.

### 3. Key messages – learning and improvement

3.1 This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO service in the Dorset Council area, as required by statutory guidance.

#### 3.2 Improvement activities 2018/19

- Provided challenge and supported the improvement in Care Plan completion which has improved from well below 50% to 89%. The IRO Service uses a measure of Care Plans completed within the last 7 months.
- Assisted with driving up the quality of Care Plans. In June 2018 55% were deemed inadequate and 10% Requiring improvement. At the end of March 2019 87.5% Good, 7.5% Requiring Improvement and 4.17% Inadequate.
- Enhanced Monitoring Meetings commenced in August 2018 reviewing the following cohorts of children jointly with the Social Care Service  
  
Children subject to section 20 arrangements under the age of 16  
Children Placed with Parents - subject to Care Orders (including Interim)  
Children who have been subject of a placement order for 12 months and are not placed for adoption
- Introduction of a MOSAIC IRO Monitoring Form for each LAC Review, enabling a range of factors to be reported – quality of the care plan – social work relationship – permanency.
- Working with “Participation People” children/YP in care in terms of responding to the young people’s IRO Report Card and recommendations. The Service has supported the introduction of Care Space Packs designed by young people.
- Produced an Aide Memoire for Statutory Visits to Looked After Children supplied to all social workers to help improve the quality of visits/recording.
- Produced a ‘Quality of the Care Plan’ Management Instruction Note (MIN)

#### 3.3 Number of Looked After Reviews

A total of 1241 LAC Reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2019

#### 3.3 Number of children attending reviews

Children attended 584 of the 1241 LAC, 169 the child was under 4.

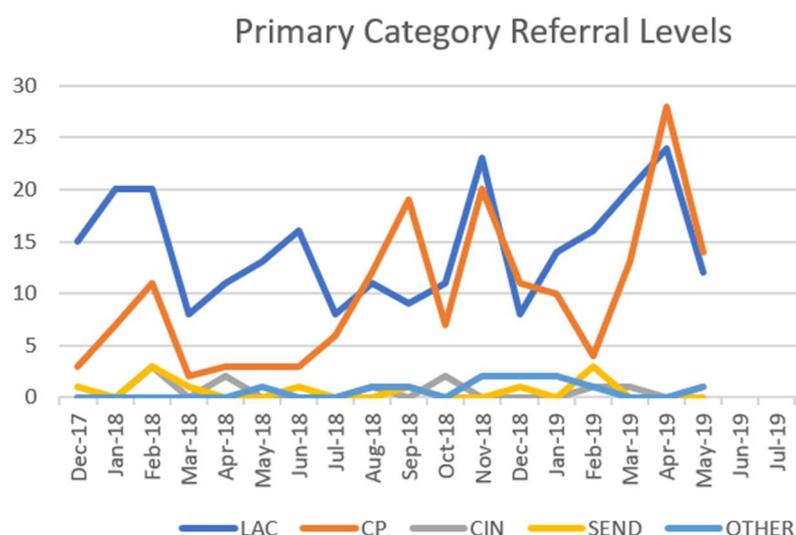
### 3.4 Number of advocates

In terms of Looked After Reviews, Advocate attendance, participation codes PN2 and PN5, equates to 131. The IRO Monitoring report captures at child level whether the child/young person chooses to advocate for themselves, has drawn on an Action for Children advocate or has chosen someone else. 48 children advocate for themselves at their review.

The Advocacy service is commissioned by Dorset Council with Action for Children.

- Children are fully aware of the advocacy services available to them and can easily access the services should they wish to
- Children/Young People are able to raise a complaint against the Local Authority and are supported to do so if they wish

Advocacy referrals to Action for Children 2018-19



- 3.5 There has been a drive to help children and young people to be more actively involved in their looked after reviews through strengthening the use of advocacy. A new system was put in place in February 2019 with the expectation of new LAC 8y+ using an advocate unless they decide to “opt-out”. At present the opt out approach is only being applied to new LAC but has led to an increase in referrals in Q1 by 15%.

### 3 Young people feedback survey: Advocacy

“They are a great group of people and I would recommend them to anybody who needs help”

“It was good 5 stars”

“They are very good”

“She is the best advocate ever”

“I think the Advocacy helps me get my feelings across”.

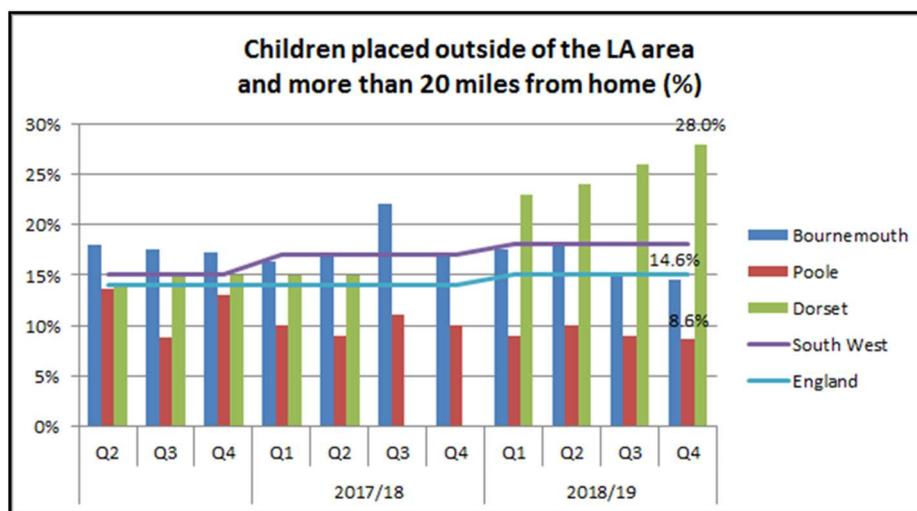
“This has been very helpful and brilliant thank you”

“I really really like having someone to speak for me”

### 5. Timeliness of Reviews

5.1 Performance improved significantly in 2017-18 with the establishment of a separate IRO and CP team. Three IROs being off work for a significant period in the September/December 2018 period impacted on review performance. This coincided with staffing issues with the central admin team which lead to an extended challenging period. There are also some challenges with timely responses from some social workers as to confirming review times and invites.

5.2 The other factor which has increase travel and IRO time has been the increased use of placements outside of the LA Area, approximately 140 children. Over the last year this has shown a marked rise and Dorset is now an outlier against comparators both national and regional.



Timeliness of Lac Reviews	Percentage %
2016-17	76%
2017-18	96.1%
2018-19	83.6%

### 5.3 Recovery plan

- Improved MOSAIC reporting and tracking
- Introduction of MOSAIC requests for Reviews – introduce 3<sup>rd</sup> June
- Escalation process in place regarding LAC Review dates/invites being confirmed
- Regular meetings between IRO Manager and Service Manager for Looked After
- Agency IRO agreed to cover IRO vacancy
- Admin vacancies filled

## 6. Number of Looked After Reviews occurring outside of area.

32.3% in Private Provision

### Children Looked After - By Placement Provider - Fully Looked After

Data is extracted from MOSAIC as at the last day of the month

Placement Provider	2018 - 2019												
	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	
PR0: Parent(s) or other person(s) with parental responsibility												26	22
PR1: Own LA provision inc. a regional adoption agency where the child's responsible LA is the host LA	205	197	189	196	188	185	187	194	188	195	196	195	
PR2: Other LA provision inc. a regional adoption agency where another LA is the host LA													
PR3: Other public provision (for example, a primary care trust)							1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PR4: Private provision	99	103	110	110	119	147	147	135	135	143	144	146	
PR5: Voluntary/third sector provision													
Not known	158	156	158	151	150	122	110	117	126	115	88	88	
<b>Total</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>447</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>452</b>	
% Private Provision	21.4%	22.6%	24.1%	24.1%	26.0%	32.4%	33.0%	30.2%	30.0%	31.5%	31.6%	32.3%	

41.4% placed outside of area

### Children Looked After - Home to Placement distance

LAC Home to Placement distance	2018 - 2019												
	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	
Distances calculated	433	432	431	436	435	430	425	425	429	402	392	394	
LAC home to placement over 20 miles	174	170	168	169	173	173	165	165	171	172	165	173	
LAC home to placement under 20 miles	259	262	263	267	262	257	260	259	258	230	227	221	
% of LAC home to placement distance over 20 miles	40.2%	39.4%	39.0%	38.8%	39.8%	40.2%	38.8%	38.8%	39.9%	42.8%	42.1%	43.9%	
LAC placed outside of area	164	164	164	163	162	161	158	158	168	162	163	163	
% of LAC placed outside of area	37.9%	38.0%	38.1%	37.4%	37.2%	37.4%	37.2%	37.2%	39.2%	40.3%	41.6%	41.4%	

## 7. Audits and Service Improvements

### 7.1 Ingson Audits July 2018

In regards to LAC Review recommendations: -

- Set outcomes or 'finish lines'.
- These must flow from the child's assessed needs
- Outcomes are where we want to get to when we can say 'job done'?
- Use of language must always be **understandable, precise and descriptive**

- For each outcome, set clear, specific and meaningful tasks which are allocated to individuals and which have a specific date for completion (or at least a date for review)
- Challenge words associated with drift and inactivity, e.g. support, monitor.

7.2 Training was provided to the IRO Service and the above principles adopted. Performance is measured through the Internal Monthly audits.

Partners in Practice Audit in February 2019

a) This led to joint work with Participation People regarding developing a revised model of "Dorset LAC Reviews". Principles proposed and subsequently adopted by the Assistant Director

- reclaim the 'Looked After Reviews' for the child/young person
- reduce the number of professionals attending the review
- have an emphasis on pre- work with the young person before the Review – addressing key areas – ensuring the young person can share their views and what they wish to discuss at the review

b) Introduction of Case Summaries for all allocated cases on MOSAIC. This proposal was put forward by the IRO Service and has been formally adopted. Once fully embedded this will enable a more efficient reviewing of key outcomes and plans for Looked After children.

c) Improvements in the Enhanced Monitoring meeting with regards to achieving Permanence for looked after children. Improved data, increased level of challenge regarding drift.

7.3 Social Care Monthly Audits

- a) A continued focus on improving the quality of children's Care Plans – ensuring they are outcome focussed – in plain English – clearly capture the child's voice – child's needs.
- b) LAC statutory visiting – need to continue to drive performance – Target 95%

7.4 IRO Service Internal Audits

a) Need to develop a Mid-way Check-in policy for the IRO Service. A proposal to undertake a Mid-Way check in with approximately a 1/3 of the LAC population. This will assist in helping to avoid drift within the plan for the child and drive towards permanence.

## 8. Professional Profile of the IRO Service

8.1 The IRO Service sits within the Safeguarding and Standards section of Children's Services with its core functions consisting of reviewing Care plans for children in care and monitoring the Local Authority in respect of its corporate parenting and safeguarding responsibilities.

8.2 The IROs are independent but managed within the Children's Services. They are qualified social workers with significant social care experience. The majority of the team work full-time. There is a good split gender wise.

8.3 IRO Service 2018/2019 Structure consists of 1 FTE Manager and 7.61 IROs.

IROs	Hours per week
SJ	37
JAF	37
KK	37
DS	37
Vacancy	37
DW	30
RC	25
SW	23
GG	18.5
TOTAL	7.61 FTE

## 9. Quantitative information - Looked After population

9.1 The Looked After population has been relatively settled around 445 range in the April 18 to March 19 period.

IRO caseloads have been maintained in the 60 – 70 per FTE range. This is within the recommended case load of 50-70 set out in the IRO Handbook. A total of 1241 LAC Reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2019, 78.87% within timescale.

Most children and young people who started to be Looked After were in the 10-15y group.

Children who are disabled form 9% of the looked after population. Increased time is required to elicit the wishes and feelings of a child with additional needs.

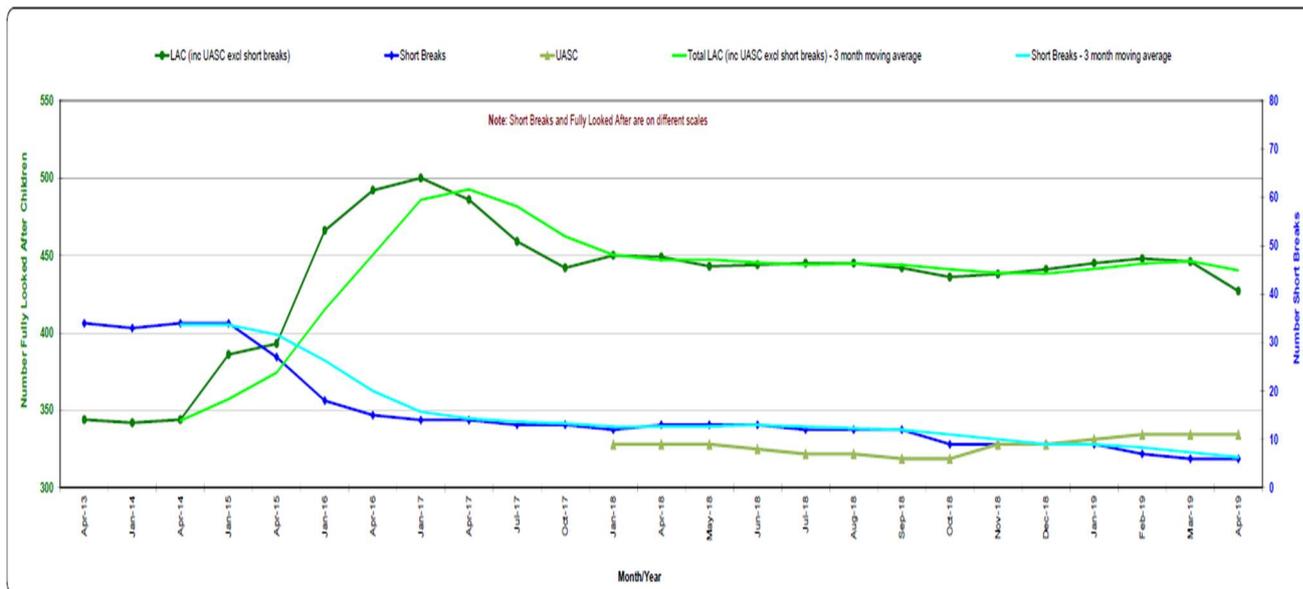
Permanence has remained a focus for the IRO team. Permanence refers to the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children. It ensures a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

At the end of March 2018, 21 children were recorded as being in confirmed long term foster placements. Following work predominately in the 0-12 team this has increased to 48 recorded as being in long term foster placements. Further work is planned within the 13-25 Team to ensure that MOSAIC is accurately recording all those children placed long term with relatives/friends foster carers or with foster carers.

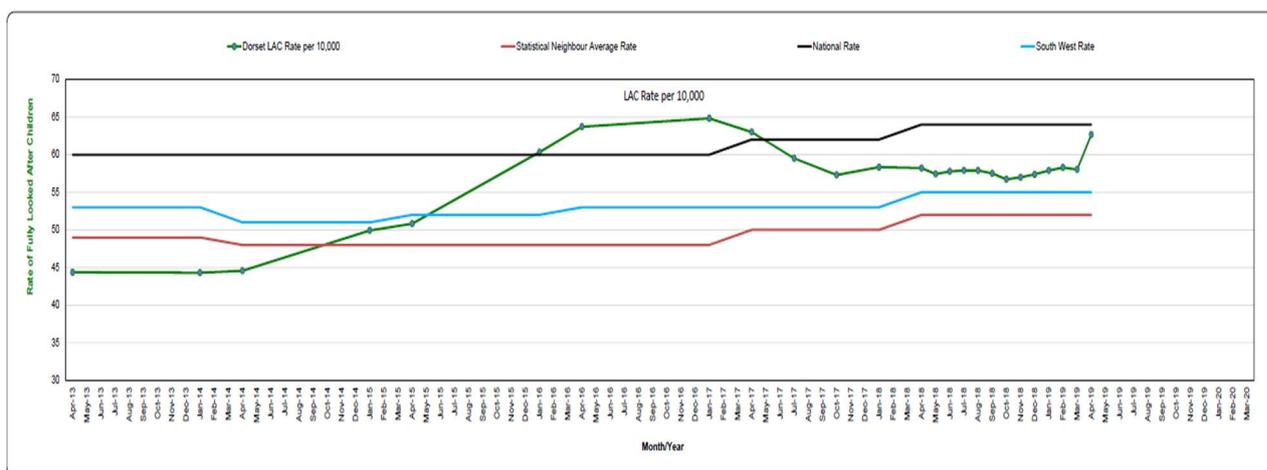
Confirmation of "Long Term Designated Foster Placements" has enabled increasing use of lighter touch Looked After Reviews in recognition of those permanency arrangements.

## 9.2 Looked After population during 2013 to 2019

Data is extracted from MOSAIC as at the last day of the month



9.3 The Looked After numbers have remained consistent around 445 since January 2018 until the end of March 2019. The reduction in numbers in April 2019 relates to the transfer of 33 children/young people to the new Council in Bournemouth Poole and Christchurch as part of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).



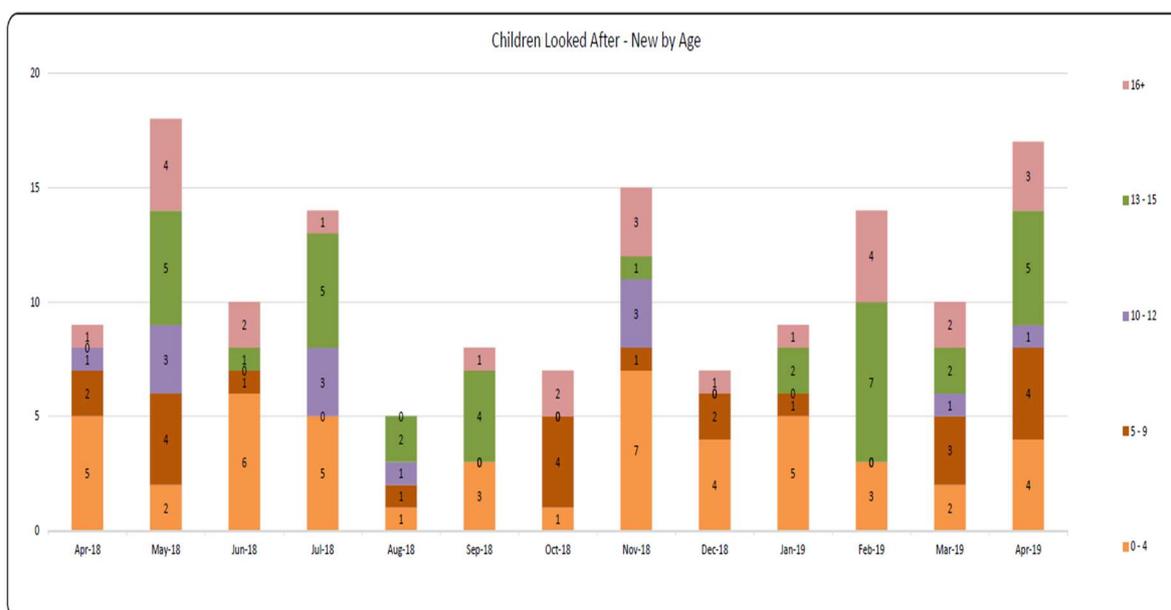
9.4 The numbers of 'Looked After Children' of per 10,000 had reduced to below the National average of 64 since May 17 but remained above Statistical Neighbours and the South West. Following the LGR changes in population in the new Dorset Council, coupled with an increased number of new LAC in April/May, the rate of 62.7 per 10,000 is significantly higher than statistical neighbours at 52.

The previous Dorset County Council children population was 76,861, the new Dorset Council population is 68,138.

## 9.5 Legal Status

Legal Status	2018 - 2019											
	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
C1 Interim Care Order	61	54	47	47	45	44	42	43	45	44	44	44
C2 Full Care Order	233	234	235	234	240	243	244	244	247	255	255	259
D1:Free For Adoption:- Freeing order granted							1	1	1			
E1 Placement Order Granted	43	44	44	50	56	58	58	50	54	49	45	39
V2 Single Period of Accommodation Under Section 20	110	109	114	111	102	96	91	98	94	95	104	101
L1 Under Police Protection				1						2		3
L2 Emergency Protection Order	2	2	3	2	2	1		2				
J1 on remand or committed for trial or sentence												
J3 sentenced to Youth Rehabilitation Order												
<b>Total</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>436</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>445</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>446</b>
<i>% V2 Single period of accommodation Section 20</i>	24.5%	24.6%	25.7%	24.9%	22.9%	21.7%	20.9%	22.4%	21.3%	21.3%	23.2%	22.6%

## 9.6 Looked After – New by age



## 9.10 Children who are disabled

2018 - 2019											
Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
46	46	47	45	47	48	48	47	46	46	44	43

The % of children who are disabled has remained consistent around 9%.

## 10. Entitlements and Advocacy

10.1 The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked-After Children and Care Leavers Inquiry (2013) asked children and young people what the most important entitlements for looked-after children and care leavers were. The All-Party Parliamentary Group selected the five that the children and young people said were most important for looked-after children and for care leavers.

10.2 % of children have a care plan that says what their needs are now, what will be done to meet those needs and the plans for their future.

This area of practice has been a challenge in Dorset and received a major focus during 2018. At the end of March 90.78% of children/young people had a Care Plan completed within the last 7 months which represents a significant improvement from below 50%.

10.3 % of children have a care plan that sets out their views.

The majority fall into good quality and contain the views of children/young people.

<b>Standard of Care Plan Rating</b>	<b>Percentage % March 2019</b>
1. Outstanding	0.83
2. Good	87.50
3. Requiring Improvement	7.5
4. Inadequate	4.17

10.4 % of children had information about their entitlements, including information about decision making processes and professionals' responsibilities to hold a review before any significant decision is made in relation to their care plan.

Dorset/Participation People launched a new Care pack of information for all children/young people looked after in August 2018. This includes information regarding decision making, LAC Reviews, IROs, the Dorset Promise and complaints.

The information is also available on a new Dorset webpage.

10.5 % of looked after young people aged 16-19 who received a £1,200 bursary to support them to stay in full-time education.

No formal IRO disputes were raised as a result of the authority's failure to meet this Entitlement. This is recorded on an individual young person basis and not yet available within MOSIAC reports.

10.6 When a social worker visits you, they must speak to you alone unless you refuse, it is not appropriate at that time or the social worker is unable to.

The LAC Statutory visiting performance has improved from 76% to 80.11% over the last year. The target remains 95%, so still some distance to travel. The performance is tracked weekly by the Service and subject to Service Improvement Board scrutiny.

## 11. IROs findings on the five entitlements for care leavers

- 11.1 % of children had information about their entitlements, including their entitlement to a £2,000 setting up home allowance.

The Dorset 13-25 team work on a case by case basis rather than a set £2000 setting up home allowance. The related page on Dorset for you has been recently updated to make clearer the 'Care Leaver offer'  
<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/children-in-care/care-leavers-entitlements>

- 11.2 % of young people had information about their entitlements, including information about what the local authority must provide to the young person in relation to help with costs of being in education or training up until the age of 21 (or 25 if the young person is still in education).

See above as to improvements to the information regarding the 'Care Leaver Offer'

- 11.3 % of young people had information about their entitlements, including information about what help the local authority must provide in relation to the costs of getting and keeping a job (up until the age of 21 if the young person is in education, employment or training).

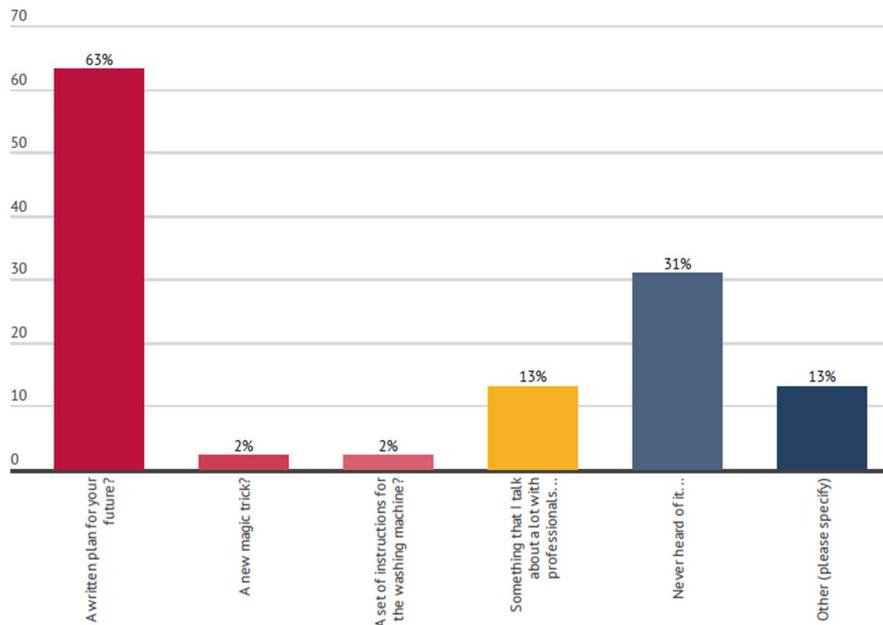
This report is not yet available on MOSAIC

- 11.4 % of young people were given a copy their Needs Assessment and Pathway Plan. In a random survey of number young people, number % were satisfied that they had been given a full explanation of their Pathway Plan.

This report is not yet available on MOSAIC. Current figures indicate 76.9% of young people 16+ have Pathway Plans completed within the last 7 months.

Feedback from the young people survey March 2019 appears to match Dorset Council data.

## Perceptions and knowledge



### 12. Number and percentage of young people are in higher education and provided with vacation accommodation (or money towards it).

12.1 Dorset has 25 Care leavers in higher education in the age range 18-25

8 have vacation support identified to meet their needs, the majority being in staying put placements.

10 have independent tenancies/private renting so their tenancies continue during the Summer.

6 prefer to make own arrangements to stay with family members/friends/partners

1 had a Unite scholarship for 3 free years of accommodation

### 13. Qualitative information - Achievements and impact of IRO service

13.1 Quality of Care Planning

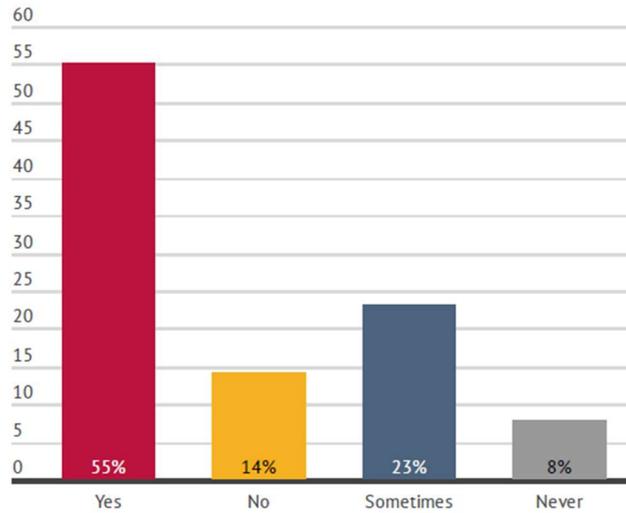
The Quality Care plans has improved during the last year. There is a significant decrease in 'inadequate' ratings which primarily related to non-completion. Further joint work is planned between the Social Care Teams and IRO Service looking at "What is a good Care Plan?"

Standard of Care Plan Rating	Percentage % Sept 18	Percentage % Mar. 19
1. Outstanding	3.41	0.83
2. Good	70.45	87.50
3. Requiring Improvement	6.82	7.5
4. Inadequate	19.32	4.17

### 13.2 Children's Views/Feedback to IROs – Satisfaction Survey

The 'Looked After Children' Satisfaction Survey 2019 undertaken by Participation People provides useful feedback to the IRO Service and an indication of areas to focus on and improve in the coming year.

### 13.3 Looked After Reviews Participation

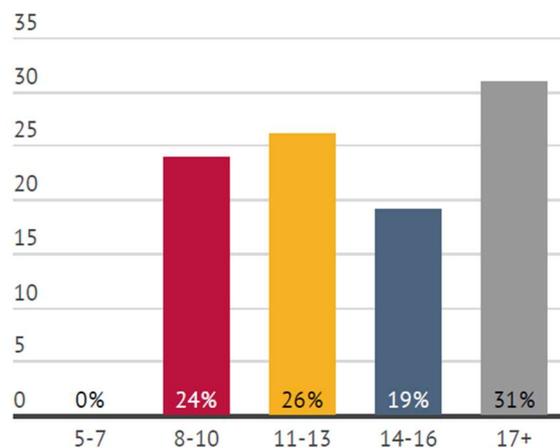


Graph showing % participants answering the question, "do you go to your Looked After Child Review?"

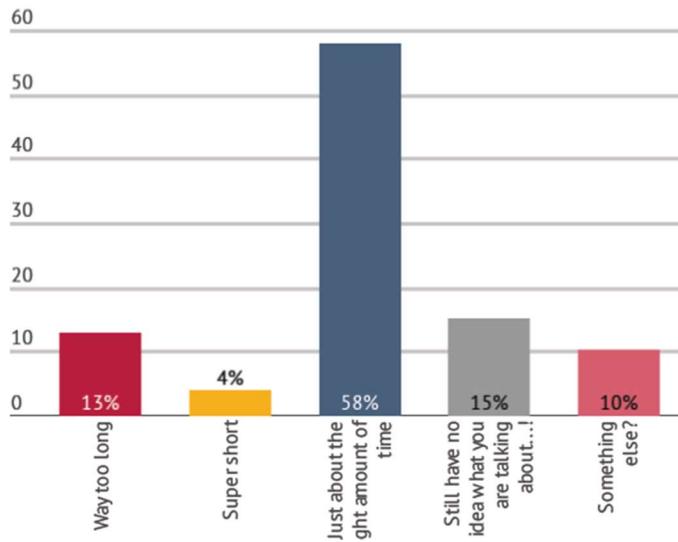
### 13.4 IRO Service response

LAC reviews that took place in period for children aged 4 and over who participated is 92.17%. The young people's survey was responded to by children/young people over 8y.

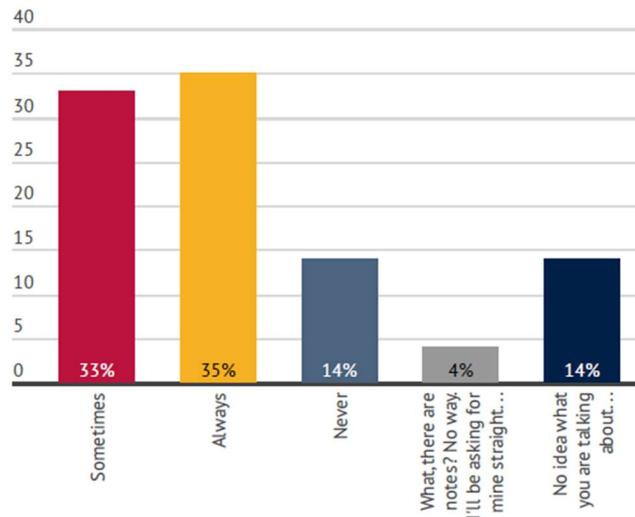
Graph showing age of response to survey



### 13.5 Length of LAC Reviews



### 13.6 Written record of LAC Reviews received by children/young people



## 14. To improve the delivery and timeliness of LAC review meeting notes to CYP's.

14.1 There was a change to a 'letter format' to the child/young person last year as opposed to review Notes. This is more personalised, and child focussed. Feedback has been generally positive. As indicated above timeliness needs to improve.

There is a proposal to develop the LAC Review 'letters' further into an 'Easy Read/Plain English approach. This would fit with young people's feedback.

The Children in Care Council have also offered to help design a template for Review notes which can use tools like Pinterest, Snap Chat and Instagram. This needs to be considered as part of the review of the Dorset model of LAC Review.

## 15. Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation

15.1 In total IROs have formally recognised **21** instances of good practice during 2018-19

All formal recognitions demonstrated a range of professional capabilities with the following reported most for

- child centred approaches
- good working relationship with the child
- achieving a good outcome for the child

## 16. IRO Escalation TriX Policy

16.1 IROs have challenged practitioners and managers formally on 38 occasions down from 66 last year. These situations been escalated informally first but not been resolved. Challenges relate to a mix of issues with the following reported most:

1. Care Plan not completed or updated
2. LAC Statutory visiting not undertaken
3. Drift in the plans being implemented
4. Use of unregulated placements

Level	Responsible Officer	Number of escalations
Level 1:	Team Manager / Operational Manager	38
Level 2:	Service Manager	15
Level 3:	Assistant Director Children's Services	4
Level 4:	Director of Children's Services	1
Level 5:	Referral to CAFCASS	0

## 17. Supervision and training

17.1 IROs have scheduled monthly formal supervision and informal supervision as required. All IROs have an annual Personal Development Review (PDR) and are expected to attend regular training. Any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service

The IRO role is not to identify the resources needed to meet a young person's needs but to ensure that the needs of the young person are appropriately identified and met.

- 17.2 Issues are evident regarding a lack of in-house foster carers leading to a lack of choice of placement. This causes issues with matching. As highlighted, there is an increased use of out of area LA placements – 140 Private Provider placements.
- 17.4 A significant number of looked after children have had multiple changes of social worker – 3 plus within a 6-month period. This prevents working relationship building and good quality life story work. This issue is also raised in the Children in Care survey.
- 17.5 The most significant IRO escalation relates to the use of unregistered placements for under 16s due to lack of placements. As highlighted by Ofsted, “Providers who accommodate young people under the age of 16 are operating an **unregistered** setting and therefore operating illegally”
- 17.6 Initial Health Assessment (IHA) performance has fluctuated and been a concern throughout the year. This has at times been related to high caseloads and use of staff with little looked after knowledge.

## **18. Annual work programme for next year April 2019 – March 2020**

- 18.1 Establish a ‘Dorset Model of LAC Reviews’ together with young people/Participation People
  - reclaim the ‘Looked After Reviews’ for the child/young person
  - reduce the number of professionals attending the review
  - have an emphasis on pre- work with the young person before the Review – addressing key areas – ensuring the young person can share their views and what they wish to discuss at the review
- 18.2 To review the LAC meeting notes format and improve timeliness of completion. Work to be undertaken between Participation People and the IRO Service to consider the format of the meeting notes, looking at “strength based” approaches and learning from other LAs.
- 18.3 To have a clear joint focus on permanency with Social Care, an improved “Enhanced Monitoring Meeting” with shared data with regards to children identified as being in “designated long-term foster placements”. Improvements in data with regards to Permanence Plans, the tracking of permanence plans.
- 18.4 Improvements in performance data drawing on the information captured by IROs at each LAC Review. The IRO Monitoring Form and data report to be prioritised by MOSAIC governance board.
- 18.5 Introduction of a Mid-way check in policy with a target of undertaking check-ins on a 1/3 of the LAC population. This is aimed at tackling potential drift.

## **19. Blueprint for change – IRO Service workshop regarding structure/service improvements 12<sup>th</sup> November**

- Exploration of employing an IRO who lives/is based in the midlands. This would go some way to addressing the provision of an IRO service to children at a distance and operating more efficiently. Travel time is a significant issue with children placed in N Wales, Birmingham, Newcastle etc.
- Reducing the need for Looked After status. With the proposed introduction of a dedicated Edge of Care Service there is an improved opportunity to drive the care planning, looking at early rehab for children recently admitted to care.
- Equally there is a need to drive practice with regards to the potential of rehab home and exploring placement with parent (PWP) for those whose situation has improved following longer periods in care.
- A reduction in overall LAC Numbers to around 400 would achieve a significant saving to the local authority in terms of placement costs, social work time, IRO time. The average cost of an internal placement is £375 a week £780,000 a year and an external placement £800 a week, 1.6M a year. A reduction in 40 looked after would also enable a reduction of 25h of IRO time.
- Improved Permanence tracking by IRO Service/Social Care- Tackling drift – pursuing permanence e.g. Adoption/SGO.