

Bridgend County Borough Council

Independent Reviewing Service

Annual Report 2014-15

Report To Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee

April 2015

**Report To The Corporate Director Social Services & Wellbeing
Directorate**

Children Safeguarding

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Introduction

It is a requirement of the manager of the IRO service to produce an Annual Report for the scrutiny of Members of the Corporate Parenting Board in line with the regulations under the Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance Wales (2004). The IRO service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved. The guidance states this report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

This Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report focuses upon the work of the IRO service from April 2014 to March 2015. As part of the Quality Assurance role, the report will contain performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are looked after by Bridgend County Borough Council, and children subject to Child Protection Case Conferences. The report will consider an analysis of the quantitative data with information drawn from internal reports. The qualitative data is drawn from IRO monitoring forms, supervision and Team Meetings.

The report also includes information that relate to regulatory requirements in respect of: resolving case disputes; IRO caseloads; participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period, in addition to service priorities for 2015-16.

Legal Context

The appointment of IRO's by Local Authorities is a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by the legal regulatory framework outlined below:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 detailed the requirements on Local Authorities in respect of the appointment of IRO's.
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004

Core Functions

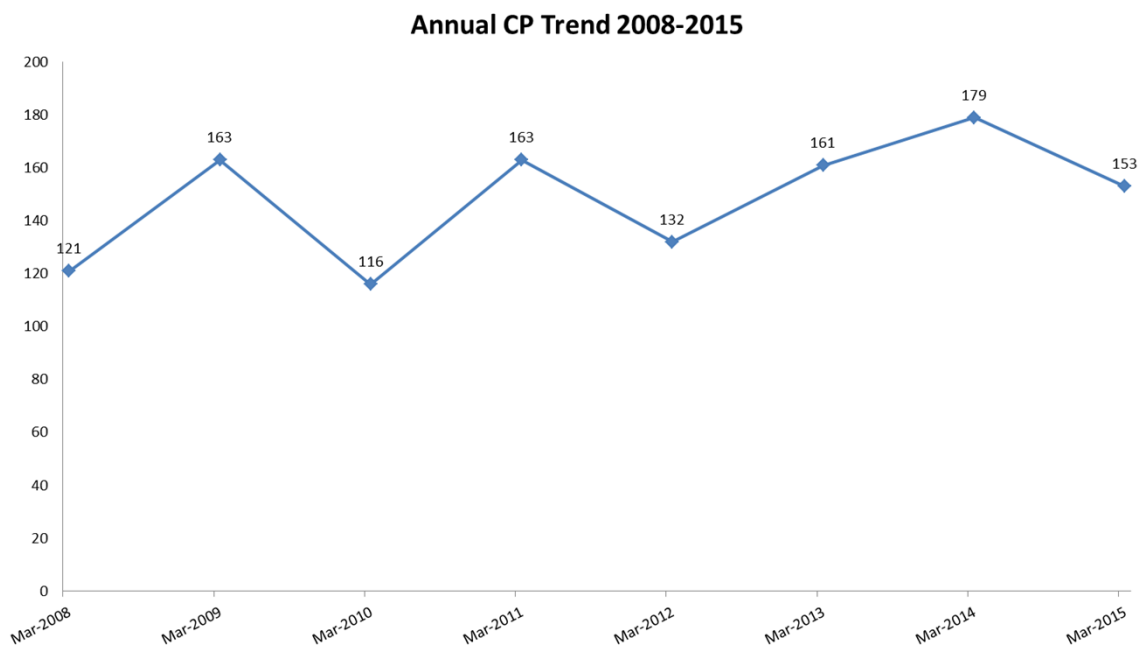
The Independent Reviewing Service has an important Quality Assurance function and works towards ensuring all children within the care of Bridgend County Borough Council has a robust effective care plan. This plan is aimed towards improving outcomes for children and young people in providing a stable and secure childhood where their health, education and emotional wellbeing is promoted through effective care planning . It is the function of the Independent Reviewing Service to ensure the care plan is appropriate and progressing in Safeguarding children and Young People whilst ensuring all their identified needs are being met.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) are required to independently review the Care Plans of all Looked After children and those children with a Child Protection Plan and subject the Child Protection Register (CPR). The Review will include consultation with and attendance of relevant agencies (health, education and Police etc) and will usually include the child/young person, their Social Worker, carers and family

members. Time scales for Reviews are set out in the Children Act 1989, with the first Review taking place within 28 days, next Review is held within three months following the initial and then subsequent Reviews are held six months from the second Review. Subsequent Reviews are held every six months unless there has been an unplanned change of placement where a Review will need to be held within 28 days.

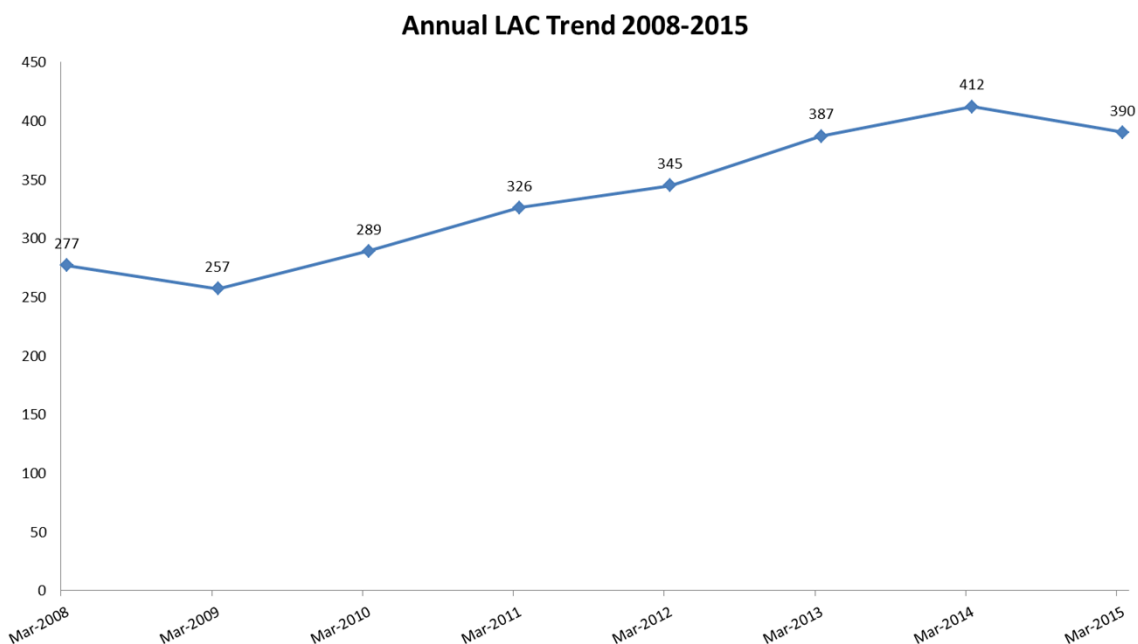
Within Bridgend County Borough Council, the IRO Service has the following roles and responsibilities;

- To Review and oversee the effectiveness and the appropriateness of Care Plans for those Children and Young People the Council has responsibility for who are subject to a Child Protection Plan and those children and young people Looked After.
- The IRO service are responsible for Chairing all Child Protection Conferences within Bridgend County Borough Council area on behalf of Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board; to Chair multi-agency Looked After Children Reviews, including those children placed for Adoption and young people subject to Pathway Plans (young people moving towards independent living and for those living Independently up to age of 21 years old or 25 if in full-time education).
- The Independent Reviewing Service are responsible for ensuring all LAC Reviews and Children Protection Conferences take place within compliance as outlined in regulation.



- To provide a report on each Review held which includes recommendations to any changes to the Care Plan and to monitor the progress of the Care Plan by tracking cases between Reviews.

- To ensure the child/young person's rights are protected and enhanced.
- To ensure the voice of the child is heard throughout the care planning process and to monitor the child's wishes and feelings have been recorded and documented throughout the Care Planning process.
- To support and advise through a mentoring and coaching role to social work staff in relation to effective care planning.
- To raise IRO concerns where they have been identified through the agreed Resolution Protocol and to escalate unresolved concerns regarding care planning to the appropriate level of the Local Authority's management structure.
- To consider the need to seek independent legal advice and possible referral of a case to Cafcass.
- The Quality Assurance function of the IRO service aims to highlight concerns around specific cases and also any trends relating to care planning practice. It also has a duty to highlight good practice.
- All Looked After Children are subject to Health Plans to promote their health and development. The IRO's have responsibility to ensure the Health Plans are monitored and meeting the children's needs within the Looked After Children Reviewing process.
- All LAC children are subject to a Personal Education Plan (PEP). The IRO is responsible for ensuring this is in place and are regularly reviewed to ensure all educational needs are being met.



Composition of the IRO Service

There has been some change in the composition of the Team since the last Annual Report dated April 2014.

There are currently 6 full-time posts and one ½ time post. However, from 1st April 2015, one full-time staff has reduced his hours from five to four days and the half time post increased their hours to three days from 2 ½. Over the year one full-time IRO has left to work as an IRO for Newport CBC (his home area); one part-time IRO left due to retirement and one part-time IRO left to work for a Social Work Agency. We have recruited three full-time posts and one ½ time post. Following the recruitment success we were able to bring the IRO service up to full capacity and as a consequence, the agency worker left in September 2014. The IRO Service is now settling after a period of change. They have recently been informed they have been successful with their Job Evaluation Appeal. It was acknowledged the post is unique and should be placed outside of the Job Families.

The current IRO cohort have a wealth of experience and all have been qualified Social Workers for a substantial period of time. The IRO Manager has been in her current post since June 2013 and also assisted the Safeguarding and Case Management service from June to January 2015 due to challenging staffing capacity in the group manager officer cohort.

IRO Caseloads

In line with Local Authorities across Wales, Bridgend County Borough Council has seen an increase in the number of Looked After Children and the number of children subject to a child protection plan over recent years. However, over the last year we in Bridgend County Borough Council are beginning to see a reduction in both our LAC population and the number of children on the Child Protection Register. Consequently, the IRO caseloads are beginning to slightly reduce. Full-time caseloads are currently around 100. However, it is important to note that caseloads remain significantly high and the recommended caseload figure is advised to be between 50-80 per full-time IRO. Colleagues in Newport, Neath Port Talbot, Vale of Glamorgan and Carmarthenshire have reported much lower caseloads.

TOTAL NUMBER CASES WITHIN THE IRO SERVICE (AT TIME OF WRITING MAY 2015)

Child Protection	Looked After Children	Looked After Children and those subject to a Pathway Plan (16-18 year olds)	Pathway Plan 18+ - 21years	Total
129	328	61	103	621

Business Support

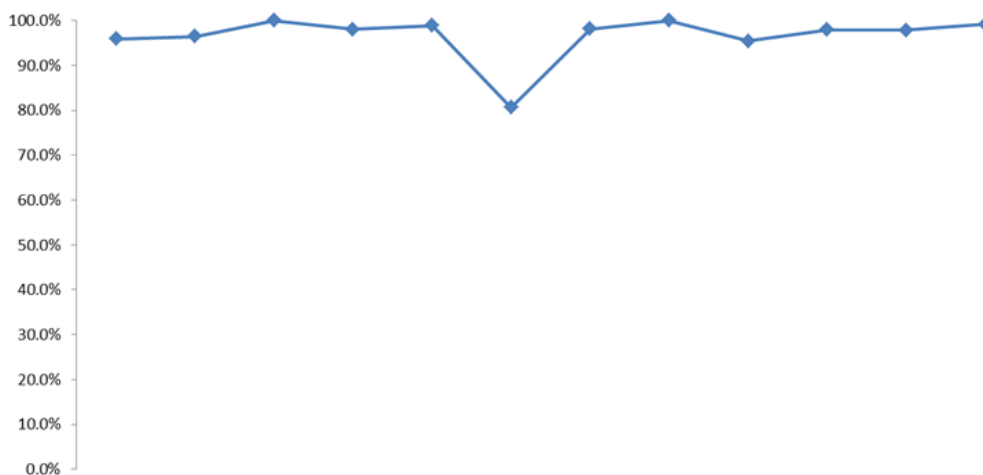
Under regulation, the Local Authority is “required to provide sufficient administration support to facilitate the delivery of efficient and effective review process”. Business Support within the Independent Reviewing Service performs a number of functions and these include liaising with Social Workers and IRO’s to arrange dates and venues for Initial LAC Reviews; forward planning and organising LAC invite letters/consultation papers for Reviews; creating ICS documents on Draig, co-ordinating cancellations/re-arrangements, collating monitoring/feedback forms, dealing with telephone queries. Distributing minutes as well as validating LAC data for performance indicators. Following the recent restructure, the Independent Reviewing Service has seen a reduction in Business Support.

Child Protection Conferences are supported by 4 clerks who collate information and reports for conference; verify attendance, take minutes and distribute minutes; maintain the Child Protection Register, Pre Birth and Temporary Register. They will arrange venues for Review conferences and coordinate invite letters, log and process GP invoice for GP reports, chase up professional reports.

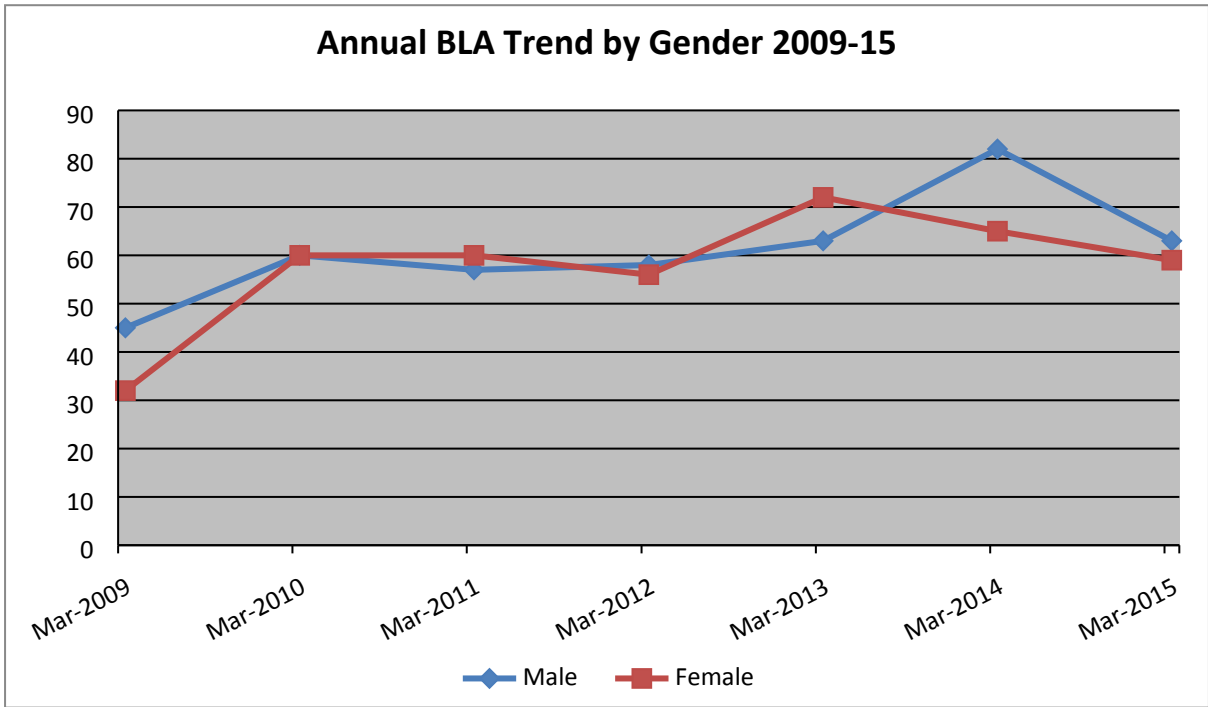
Reviewing Activities

Between April 2014 and March 2015, the IRO Service carried out 1187 Reviews on Looked After Children and 1139 of these were within compliance.

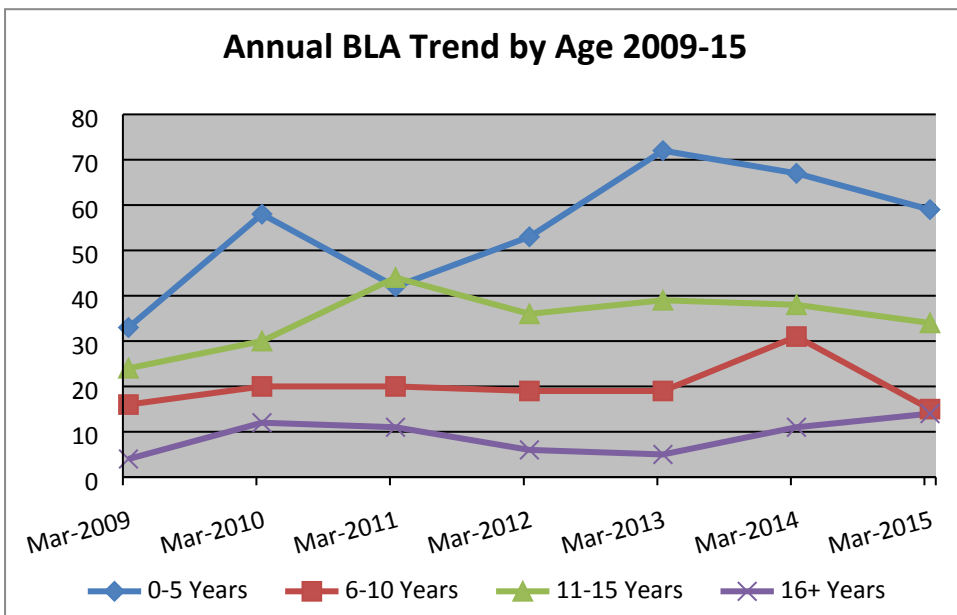
LAC Review Compliance April 2014 to March 2015



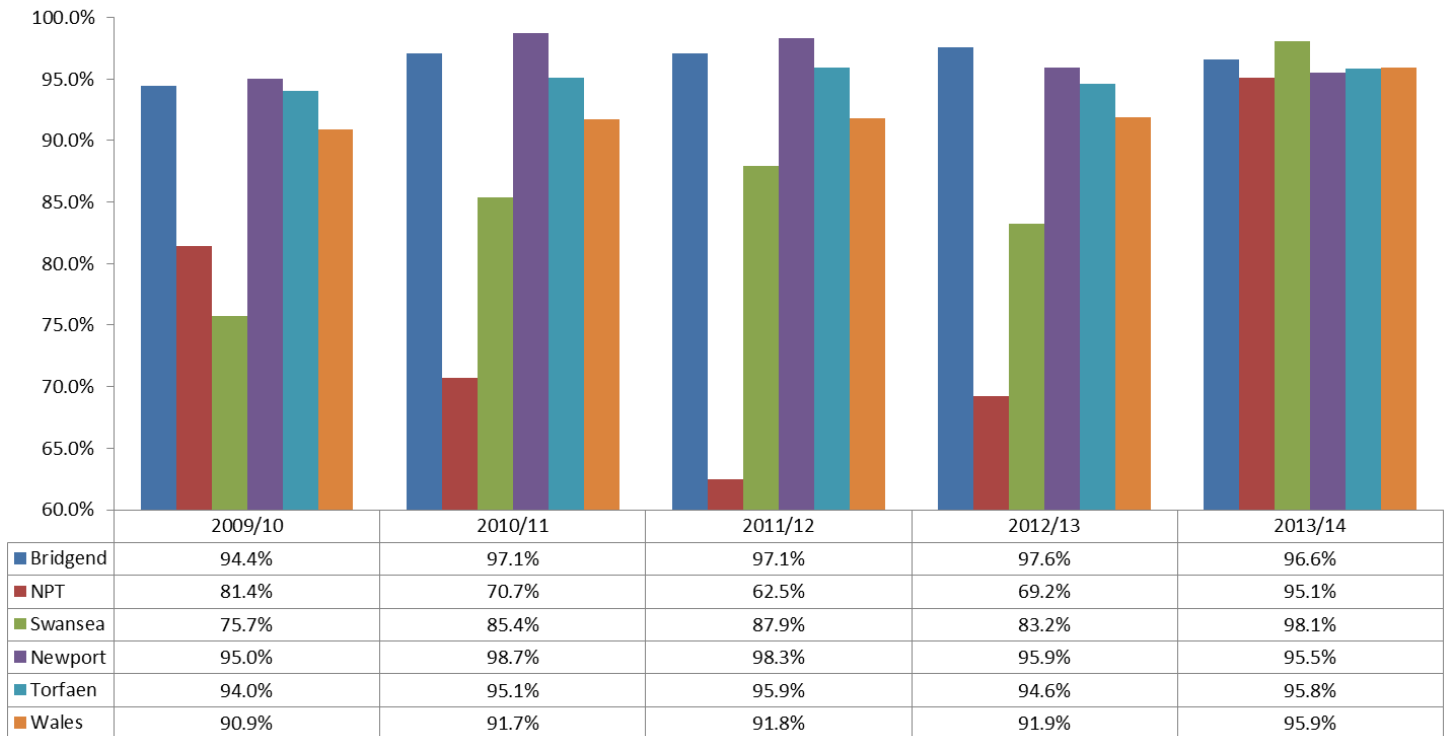
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	2014/15 year end figure
LAC Rev. in Compliance	139	82	82	97	88	104	104	86	104	96	45	112	1139
LAC Rev. Due	145	85	82	99	89	129	106	86	109	98	46	113	1187
% Complaint	95.9%	96.5%	100.0%	98.0%	98.9%	80.6%	98.1%	100.0%	95.4%	98.0%	97.8%	99.1%	96.0%



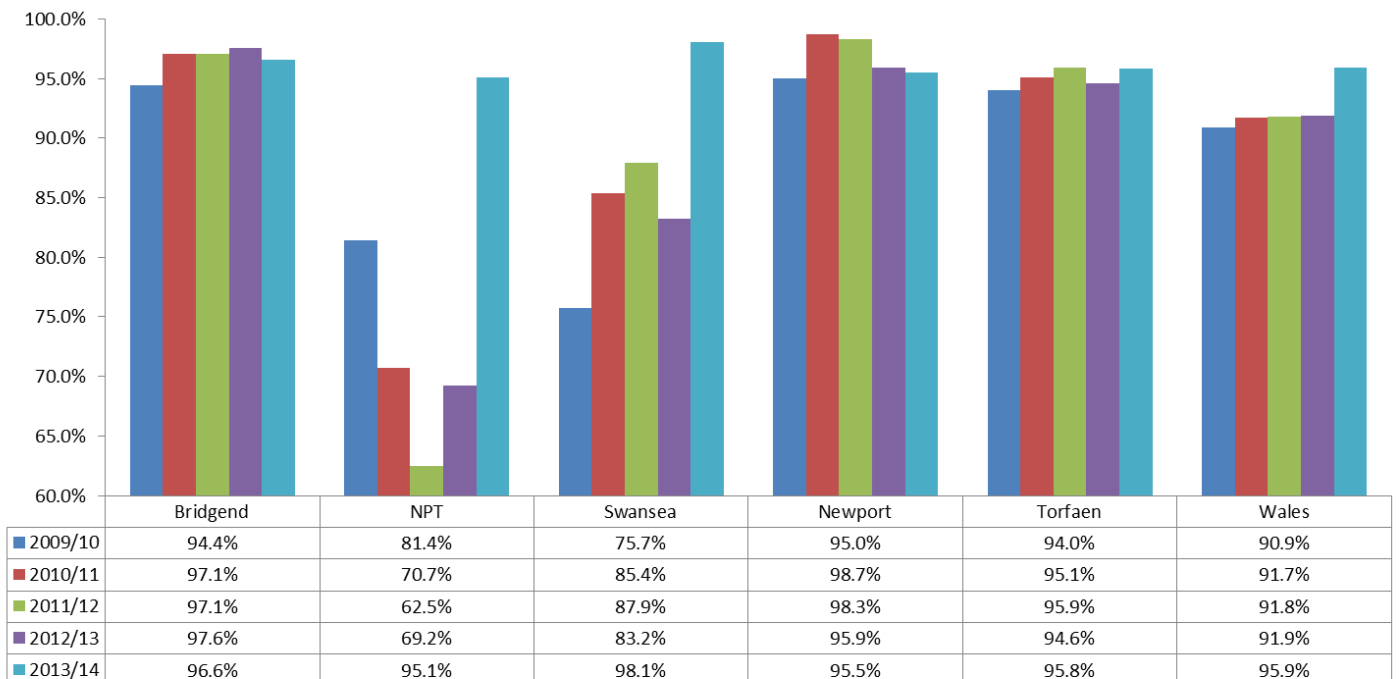
	Male	Female
Mar-2009	45	32
Mar-2010	60	60
Mar-2011	57	60
Mar-2012	58	56
Mar-2013	63	72
Mar-2014	82	65
Mar-2015	63	59



LAC Review Compliance (5 year trend) comparison to similar authorities in Wales

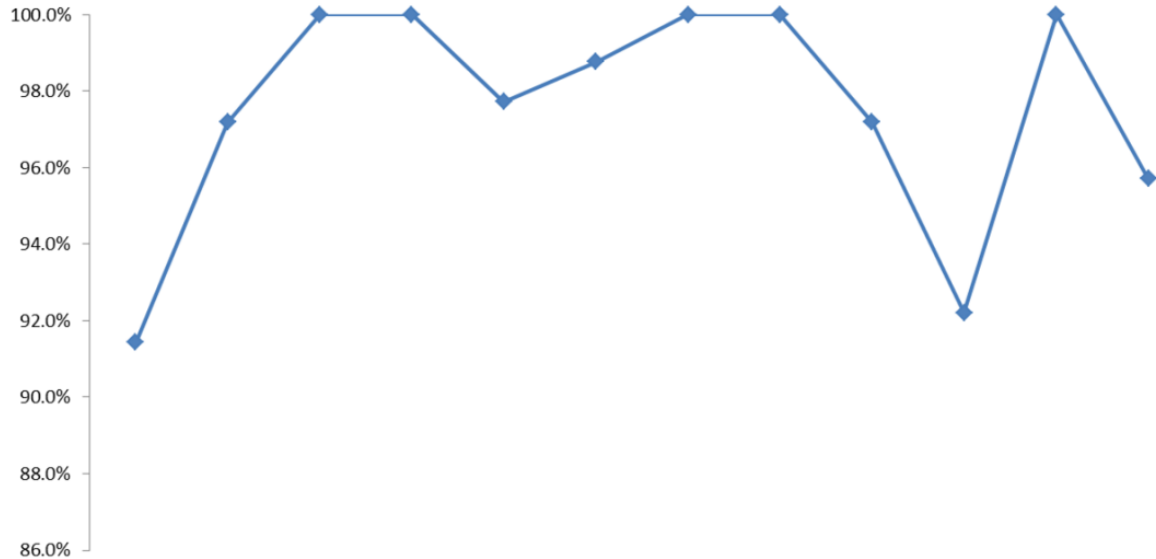


LAC Review Compliance (5 year trend) comparison to similar authorities in Wales



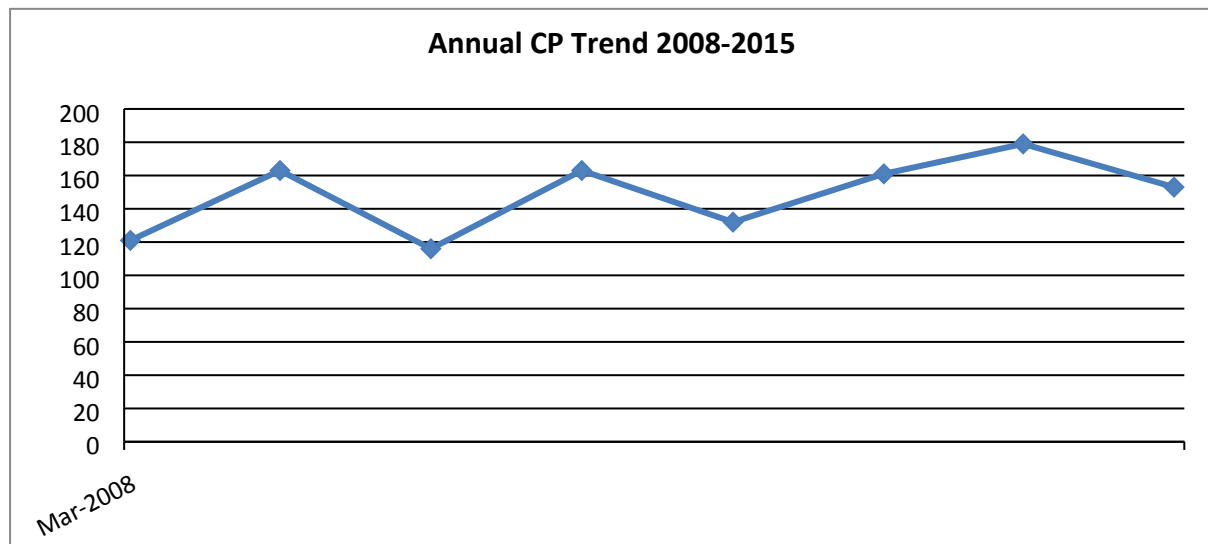
Between April 14 and March 15, there were 801 Child Protection conferences held and 780 of these were held within compliance.

CP Conference Compliance April 2014 to March 2015



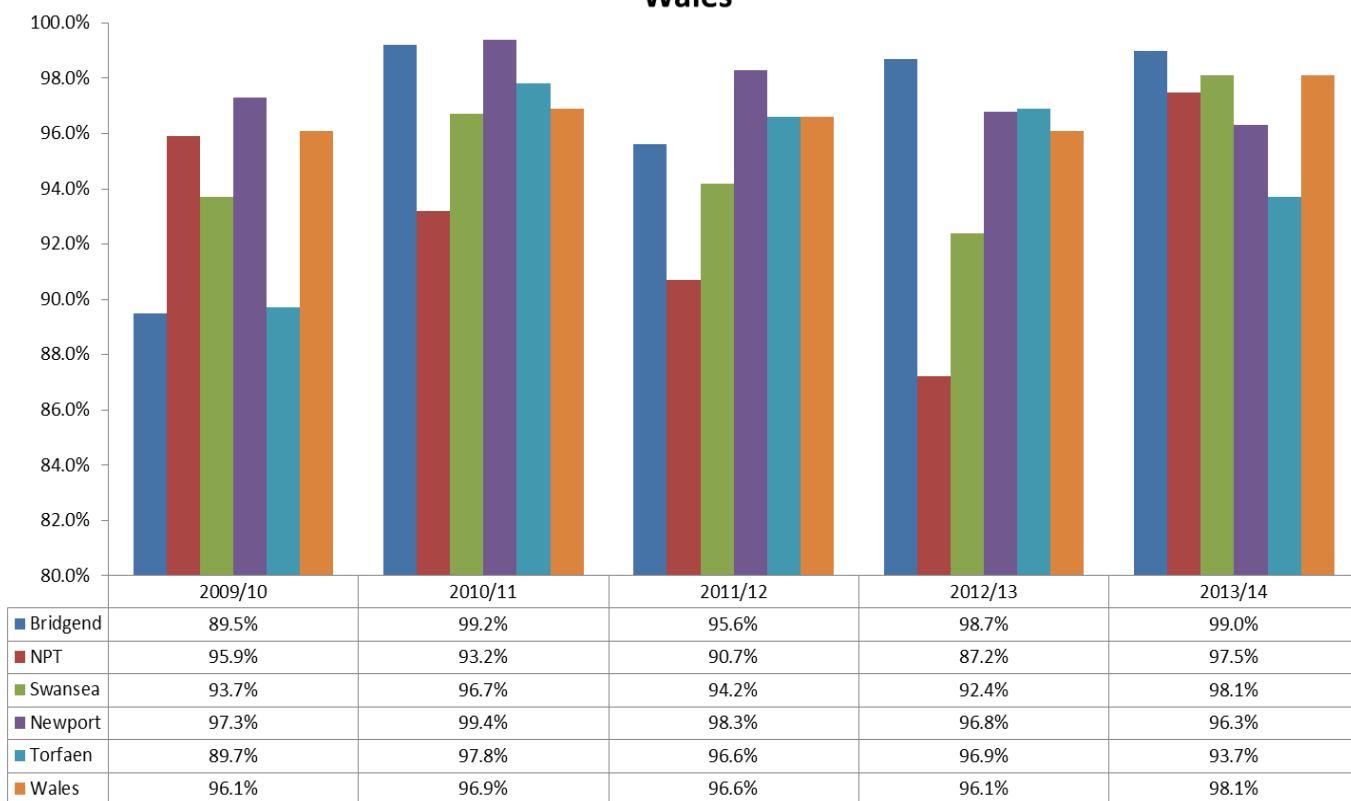
	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	2014/15 year end figure
CP Conf. in Compliance	64	69	92	72	43	80	52	57	69	71	44	67	780
CP Conf. Due	70	71	92	72	44	81	52	57	71	77	44	70	801
% Complaint	91.4%	97.2%	100.0%	100.0%	97.7%	98.8%	100.0%	100.0%	97.2%	92.2%	100.0%	95.7%	97.4%

Annual CP Trend 2008-2015



Year ending	Mar 08	Mar 09	Mar 10	Mar 11	Mar 12	Mar 13	Mar 14	Mar 15
No. CP	<u>121</u>	<u>163</u>	<u>116</u>	<u>163</u>	<u>132</u>	<u>161</u>	<u>179</u>	<u>153</u>

CP Review Compliance (5 year trend) comparison to similar authorities in Wales



Qualitative Information

The IRO service continue to work to improve standards and ensure robust Care Planning is taking place for children, young people and families within Bridgend County Borough Council. Information received from IRO's during Team Meetings, Supervision and the analysis of the IRO monitoring form have highlighted some general themes below and the concerns raised by the IRO's are recorded below. However, it is important to note the information received is only a snapshot sample of the number of cases we have Reviewed this year. The capturing of the qualitative data will be improved during 2015/16 with the introduction of the IRO Audit/Monitoring Tool along with the introduction of the Electronic Consultation Document.

General themes reported through Supervision, Team meetings, Case discussions and IRO monitoring Form.

- Out of 257 Lac Reviews + 55 Pathway Reviews held between January and March 2015, 135 monitoring forms were received 92 LAC Reviews & 43 Pathway Reviews: 62 where Social Workers provided reports for the meeting; 68 children and young people attended their Review & 46 consulted with the IRO prior to the Review. **Comments made by the IRO were** "Care Plan out of date", "PEP out of date", "Stat Visits out of compliance", "Reports not being received in readiness of the Reviews".

- Between January to March 2015, 191 Child Protection Conferences were held. 27 monitoring forms were received. Only 12 reports were received 3 days prior to the conference date. Six were without a Care plan on coming to Conference. **Comments made by IRO's were** "poor quality report" "parents not provided with the opportunity to read report prior to conference" and "Strategy meetings & Section 47 paperwork was not signed off by Team Managers".
- Standard of Social Work reports for case conferences are reported to be inconsistent. Some are reported to be of a very good standard and include good analysis while others are of poor standard with no analysis and no care plan attached. Some Social Work reports are not signed off by Team Manager. IRO's are not receiving reports 3 working days prior to the Review/Case Conference. Reports are often received late and are usually received on the day of the Child Protection conference itself and some reports having not been signed off by the Team Manager.
- Reports such as Section 47, statutory visits and core group minutes are often not written up and signed off by the Team Manager in time for the conference.
- Not all agencies are submitting reports to case conference. GP reports for conference are generally received but are often of poor quality.
- IRO's have raised concern when no reports have been received for the LAC Review meetings and duty workers are in attendance.
- During Supervision and Team Meetings IRO's have reported Pathway Plans are generally of a good standard which is an improvement from last year's annual report. However, reports are often not received prior to the pathway Review and there has been some delay in cases being transferred from Safeguarding Teams to Just Ask+.

There are a number of cases which are making good progress with robust and effective care planning to establish improved outcomes for Looked After Children. The numbers of Looked After Children are reducing with 24 children in receipt of Adoption Orders; 22 Special Guardianship Orders and 3 Child Arrangement Orders.

- The number of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Plan has reduced over the last year to 129. The reasons for this decrease are unknown but are likely to be attributed to a number of factors;
 - A number of large sibling groups being removed from the CPR
 - Children and young people are remaining less time on the CPR due to the impact of PLO.
 - IRO's have focussed on the threshold criteria.

- Ensuring the voice of the child and young person throughout the Care Planning process is a priority for the IRO service. The Consultation and participation of children and young people in their Reviews was an area the IRO service had identified to improve during the last Annual Report. It is noted that without accurate data to substantiate the level of activity, it is very difficult to judge what progress has been made. However, during January to March 2015, out of 257 LAC Reviews + Pathway reviews, 68 children and young people attended their Review and 46 consulted with the IRO prior to the Review. Service users have reported they have not received the consultation document in time for the review and others merely fail to complete the document. This is recognised as an area to be improved and the IRO service have been working with the Communications Team to develop an interactive Electronic Consultation Document for Children Young People, their families and carers. It is expected the document will become live during May/June 2015.

Case Dispute Resolution and Complaints

There have been 8 cases taken through the formal stage of the IRO Resolution Protocol between April 2014 and March 2015. Of these cases, 5 were resolved at the first stage and 3 were resolved at stage two. An example of the concern had been where a child had been placed for adoption and the care plan was not progressing and was not proceeding to Court with an application for an Adoption Order. Delay was caused by the Adoption Service failing to make the funding arrangements for therapeutic support. There were also concerns that BCBC had not conducted the statutory visits for a period of time. The matter has now been resolved and the case is progressing.

IRO Concern was raised on 22 cases at the informal stage of the Resolution Protocol and all issues were resolved within five working days before reaching the formal stage. IRO's have raised concerns where cases have not been allocated or where there is drift in the care planning process or that Care Planning arrangements are inappropriate.

The IRO Service has received 2 complaints between April 2014 and March 2015. The first complaint was received from a family member around the Chairing of a Child Protection Conference. The second complaint was received from a family concerned about the Child Protection Conference process. Both matters were resolved at the initial stage and required no further input.

Challenges 2014-15

The IRO Service faced a number of challenges over the last year;

- The increase in LAC & CP population had initially led to high caseloads which inevitably led to increased pressure on the service ensuring Reviews and Conferences are held within compliance.
- The changes in staffing and recruitment at a time when the IRO Manager was also acting as Interim Group Manager had put increased pressure on the management and support for the IRO service.

- The lack of conference facilities when Sunnyside closed whilst waiting for the venues to become available within Civic Offices. This has now been addressed by the use of temporary venues at the Safeguarding Hubs, along with schools and health venues.
- The lack of Social Work reports provided for LAC Reviews continues to be of concern for the IRO Service.
- Internal systems and processes not being followed by Social Work staff impacts upon the IRO service performance Indicators and compliance. Notification is often received late due to a failure to follow the defined process.
- The pressures and demands experienced within the Safeguarding Teams have impacted upon the IRO service in terms of re-arranging LAC Reviews and Case Conferences, reports not being provided etc. Whilst efforts are always made to avoid any cancellation and re-arrangement of Reviews for Children and young people, we are often in a position where there is no choice, e.g. such as when the Social Worker is needed to attend Court.
- The IRO service has recently moved from Sunnyside to Level 2 at Civic Offices.
- The IRO's have raised concern with some cases being unallocated and duty workers attending the Review meetings with little or no information to share. This hinders the ability to effectively progress quality Care Planning.
- Despite a slight reduction, IRO caseloads continue to remain at an unacceptable high level. High caseloads have impacted upon the IRO's capacity to meet and consult with children and young people prior to their Review. It also impacts upon their capacity to effectively track cases.
- Minutes of LAC Reviews have been a particular challenge due to the high caseloads. Some IRO's have had a number of outstanding LAC Review minutes but this continues to be monitored on a monthly basis and individual action plans are put in place to address the delay.
- There are delays in reports for Child Protection initial and review conferences; they are often received on the day of the conference itself. Consequently, these reports are not always being shared with families the day before Conference which places pressure on the Conference Chair to ensure families are provided with the opportunity to read the report and address any discrepancies before proceeding with conference. In some cases, this has caused delay and even led to the cancellation of conference due to some families wanting to share the content of the report with their legal advisors prior to conference. The IRO service considers this to be unacceptable practice and have attended Safeguarding Team Meetings and Team Manager Meetings to address this issue, as well as raising the concern with the Senior Management Team. The IRO service have spoken with the training

department and are in the process of arranging training mornings for Social Work staff to be facilitated by the IRO service on the standards and expectation of preparation and attendance at Child Protection Conference.

Service Development & Achievement

- The IRO service has regular monthly Team Meetings where other professionals are invited to attend to discuss information on their service development. This is a means of ensuring the IRO service is kept fully informed of service provision and changes within Social Services & Well Being Directorate.
- The IRO Service attends quarterly All Wales IRO meetings. This enables the service to keep up to date with developments across Wales. The Service will be attending the All Wales IRO Annual Conference in September 2015 which is centred on Child Sexual Exploitation of children and young people.
- Children and Young People continue to be a priority of the IRO service. Work has commenced to develop ways in which improved consultation can take place with children, young people and families. An interactive electronic Consultation Document is currently being developed and it is hoped this will be introduced during May/June 2015.
- The IRO service have adapted the monitoring form and developed an Audit tool to ensure the IRO service increases the level of Auditing of cases within the Safeguarding service on a more frequent basis. It is expected to be introduced during May/June 2015.
- The previous Job Evaluation decision had caused some unsettlement within the IRO Service and had resulted in some long standing professionals deciding to leave and take up other positions outside of the Local Authority. The morale was low in June 2013 when the new IRO Manager took up post. However, the IRO's had appealed against the outcome of the Job Evaluation decision and won their appeal in March 2015, with the recommendation their professional position was unique within Children Services and should remain outside of the current job family.
- The IRO Service Manager and the Group Manager for Safeguarding are now responsible for Chairing all the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy meetings and attend the Child Sexual Exploitation Task Force.
- The IRO Service has attended Safeguarding Team Meetings to work to raise standards at Looked After Children Reviews and Child Protection Case Conferences. This work is to continue and arrangements are being to hold a number of mentoring sessions for Social Work staff over the next few months.

- The IRO Service has continued to participate/facilitate within the Western Bay Multi-Agency Child Protection Training.
- Changes to the LAC Review document. Adaptations to the separation of the Social Work Report and the IRO Report have made improvements.
- Head of Service met with the IRO's in April 2015, and it is planned these meetings will take place on a bimonthly basis. The purpose of these meeting is for the IRO to share concerns and themes picked up by the IRO service.

Service Priorities

- To continue to work to improve performance of the IRO service.
- To continue to work to improve care planning for children and young people.
- Improved monitoring/auditing of children's cases through the Quality Assurance role of the IRO service.
- Improved emphasis upon Pathway Planning for young people Looked After by the Local Authority.
- To improve Consultation and participation of children and young people in the care planning process by continuing to develop ways to capture the voice of the child.
- To continue to work to improve standards of Looked After Children Reviews, Child Protection Conferences and Pathway Reviews.

Jaci Morgan
Independent Reviewing Service Manager
May 2015.