

Croydon Early Help & Children Social Care

Practice Week Overview Report

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Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

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1. Introduction

This document provides a summary of key findings from the Practice Week audits completed during the week of the 10th of September 2018.

The audits were selected from the case cohort which is the focus for the October Ofsted Monitoring Visit. This is permanency planning, and includes children aged twelve years and under in care for more than twelve months, and children who have come into the care of the local authority during the last three months ((June to August 2018).

2. Methodology

Practice Week is a twice yearly activity as outlined in the Quality Assurance Framework (January 2018). Audits are undertaken by Service Managers, Consultant Practitioners, Heads of Service, Director of Early Help and Children’s Social Care and Director of Children, Families and Education. All auditors are independent of the line management of the case. The audit process includes a discussion with the allocated case worker, and if appropriate their Team Manager. There is also an expectation that Practice Week will include observation of relevant case meetings, including case conferences, review or core groups, a discussion with the child if appropriate and any family members or carers.

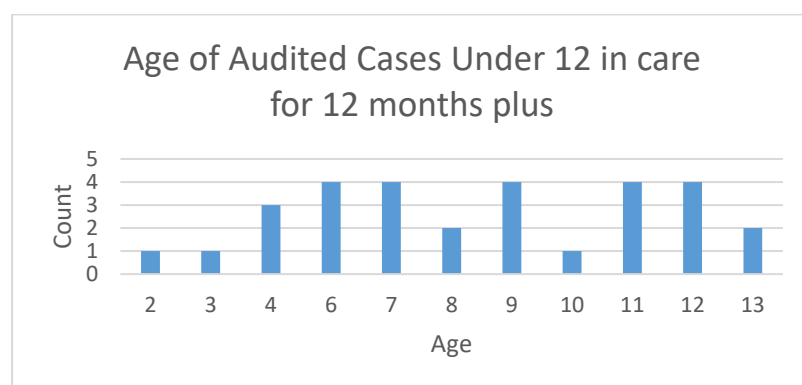
Auditors were asked to review the previous 12 months of case history, but to take into account historical practice which continues to impact on the child.

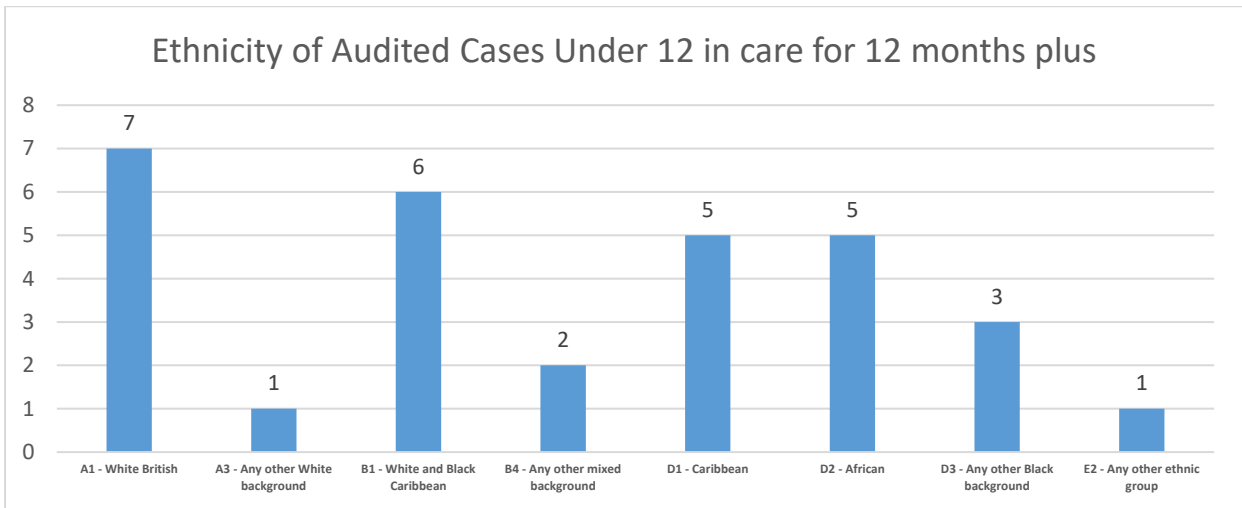
There was no moderation panel held for this Practice Week but as part of our Improvement work with Camden, the Head of Quality Assurance from Camden had copies of all the audits and reviewed this report.

3. The cohort of cases

A total of forty two cases were selected for Practice Week.

Thirty cases were selected from the cohort of children aged 12 years and under who have been in care for more than twelve months. 25% of this cohort (6 children) have a disability.

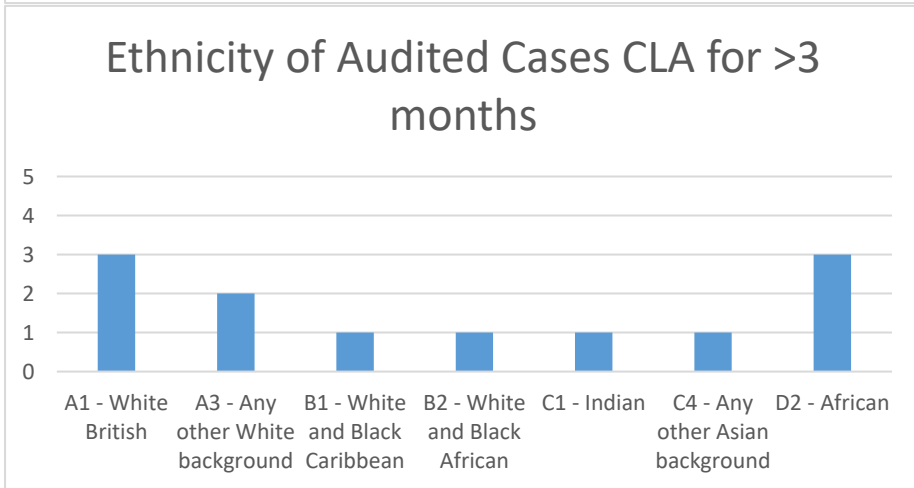
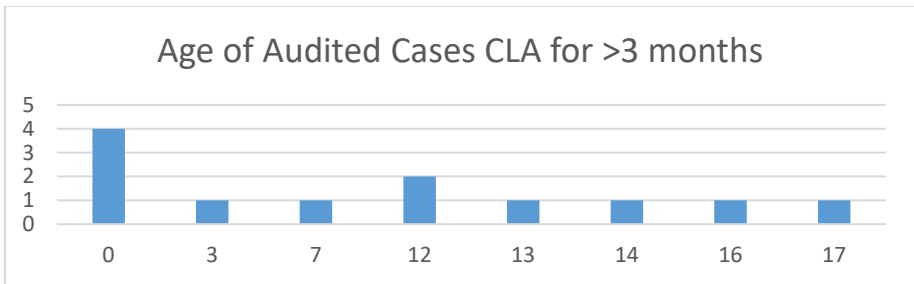




Twelve cases were selected from the cohort of children and young people came into the care of the local authority between June and August 2018.

The age distribution is reflective of new admissions to care over the last twelve months with a peak of under a year old.

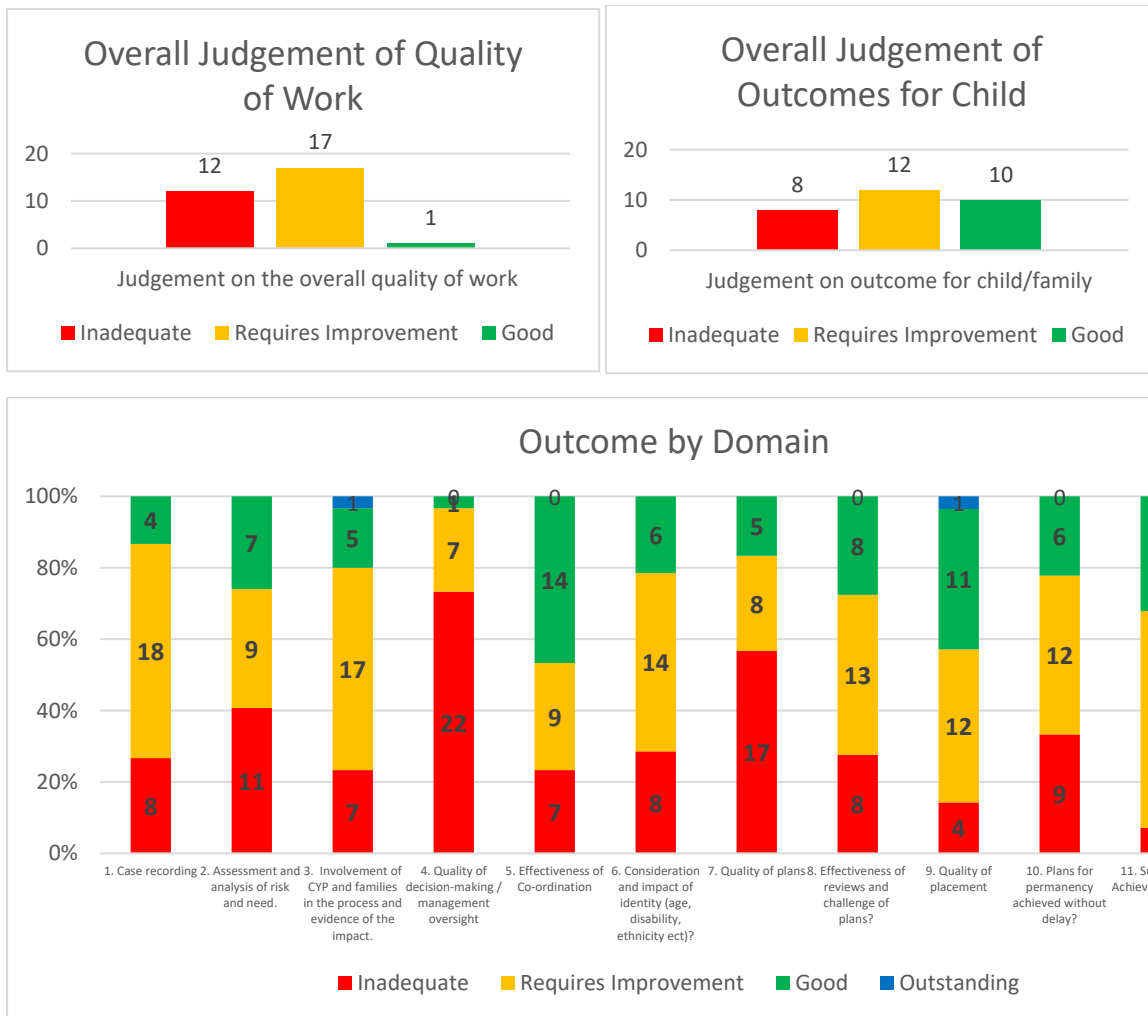
Two children in this cohort have a disability.



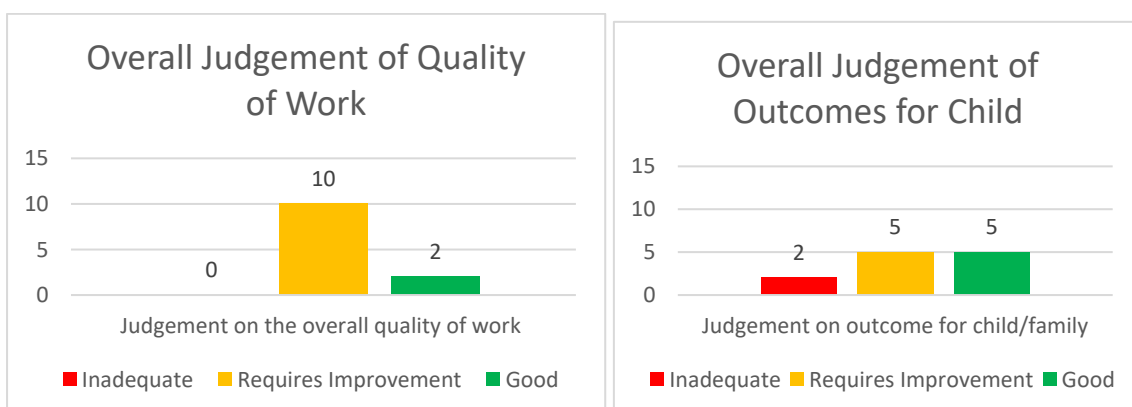
4. Audit Grades

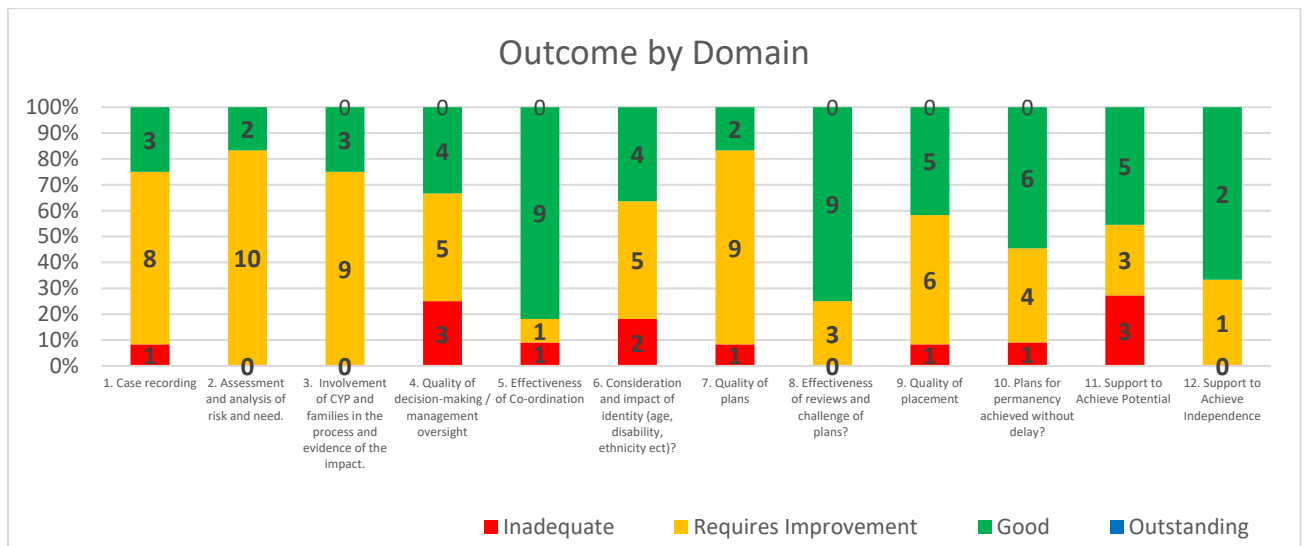
4.1 Overall grades (NB the audits are graded both by quality of intervention, and outcome for the child.

Children aged under 12 years in care for 12 months and more



Children in care for 3 months or less (June to August 2018)





Although a smaller sample of cases, it is positive that the quality of work in relation to new admissions to care shows improvement with no case graded inadequate on quality of work, and significant difference in grading by domain. Whilst there is still inconsistency, particularly encouraging are the signs of improvement in some of the key practice areas for children in care and for the service as a whole, including:

- Assessment and Analysis of risk
- Involvement of children and young people
- Quality of decision making
- Effectiveness of review and challenge
- Plans for permanency achieved

Good outcomes have been recorded in over 30% of both audit samples, reflecting auditors' positive comments about the stability and quality of placements.

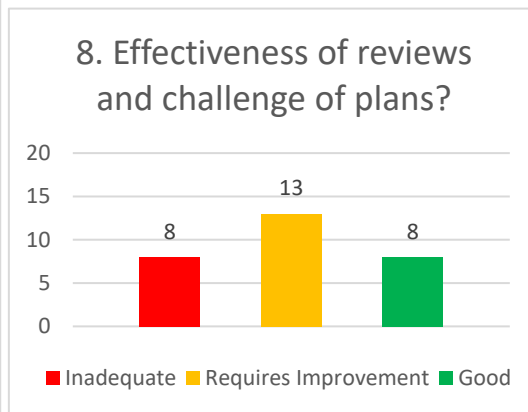
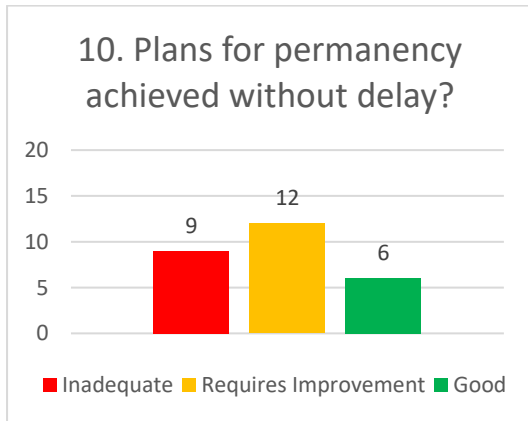
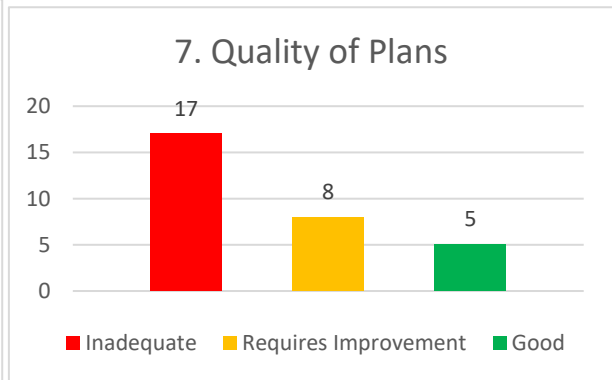
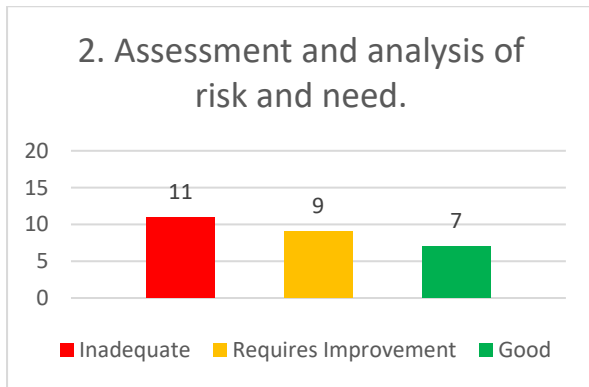
The detail of the findings in relation to domains is outlined below.

5. Summary of findings by domain

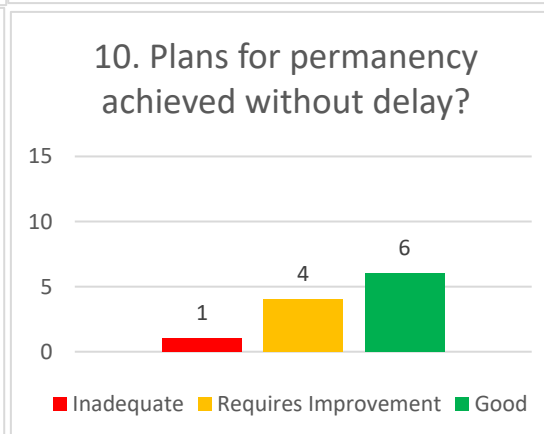
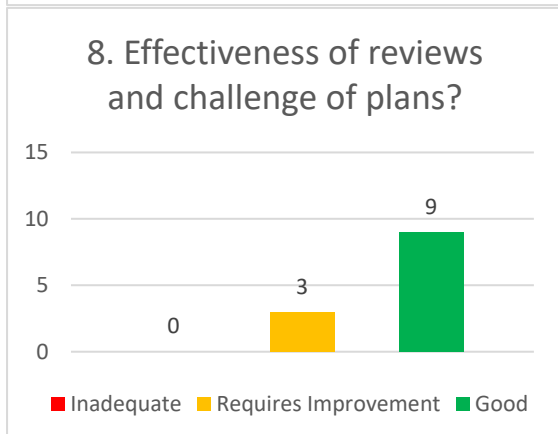
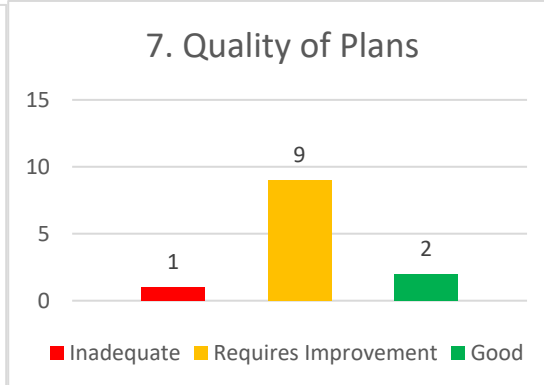
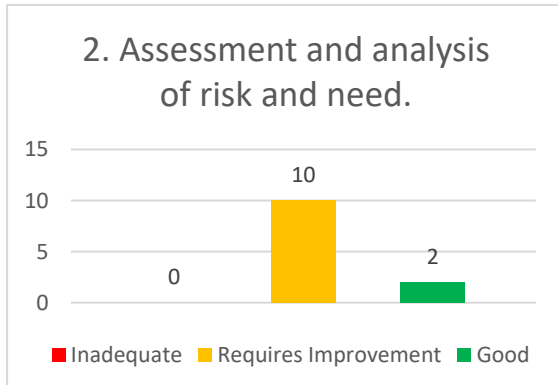
The following summarises the key learning from each area of focus for the audits.

5.1 Assessment, permanency planning and review

Children aged under 12 years in care for 12 months and more



Children in care for 3 months or less (June to August 2018)



There is evidence of improved assessment processes and more urgency in permanency planning evident in recent case records, with focus on contingency and parallel planning, and using PLO processes to progress plans for children.

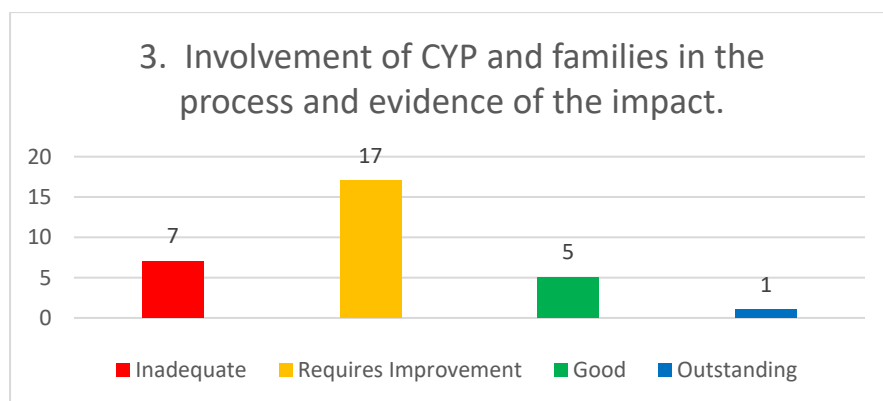
There is still inconsistency in quality of care plans and although the majority of children in care for more than 12 months are in permanent and stable placements, and legal processes are in place to support this, there are some delays in formalising these through panel and matching processes which will give both child and carer the reassurance that the child will remain in their current home until they reach adulthood. These factors are the main features of the plans graded inadequate in this cohort, and this delay was not always identified or challenged by either the IRO, or the supervising social worker.

The new Strengthening Families format for Care Plans has improved the focus on the child and supported the recording of clear actions with timescales, but there continues to be some care plans which are not SMART and some which are general to all children in a family rather than identify the particular needs of each child.

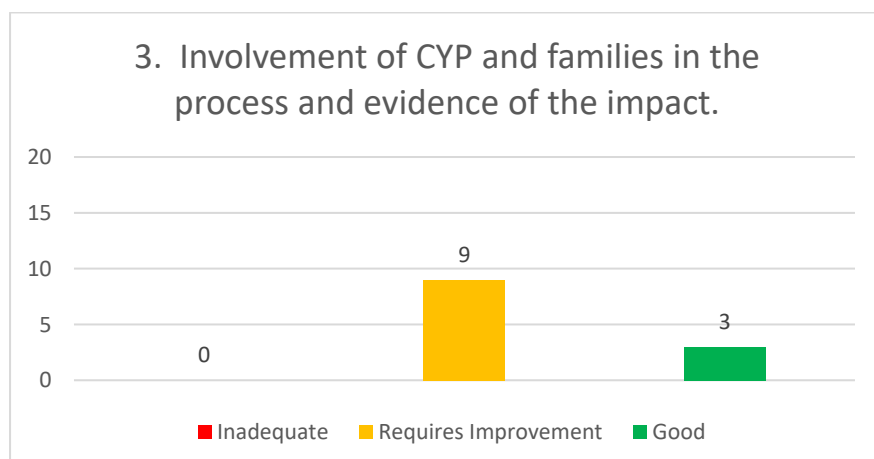
Effectiveness of the review process is showing better impact on outcomes for children, with more evidence of IRO challenge both through formal and informal processes.

5.2 Involvement of and direct work with children

Children aged under 12 years in care for 12 months and more



Children in care for 3 months or less (June to August 2018)



Recording of direct work with children is improving with evidence of uploaded documents, use of tools and engagement of children in their plans and reviews. Some examples of imaginative and productive life story work were seen in audits.

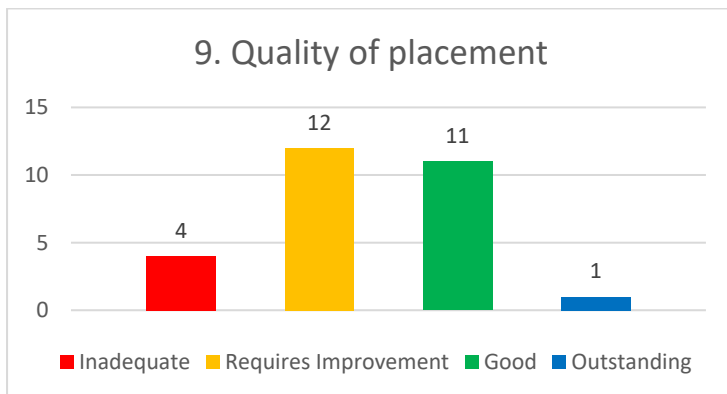
However there are still gaps and deficits in practice in relation to work with children to understand their life story, particularly when they are in a permanent placement away from their birth parents. Where children are placed with family members there is some evidence that social workers rely on family members to help children understand their situation, rather than undertake life story and identity work with them.

Social workers are able to demonstrate in case discussion that they know their children well, and have built a positive relationship with them but this is not always reflected in the child’s record.

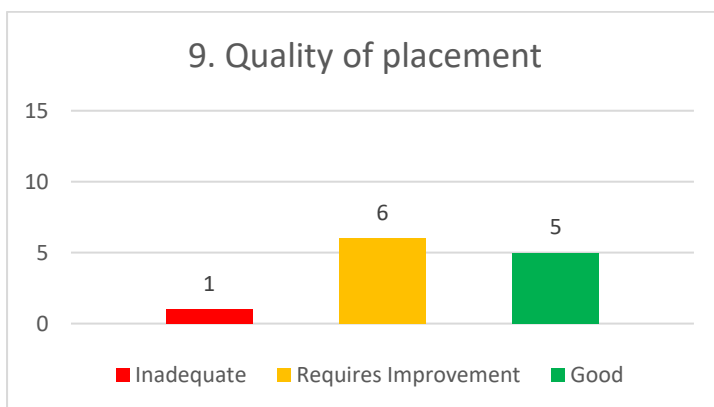
Where visits to children have been observed as part of the audit process (11 home visits observed), there was evidence that children had good relationships with their caseworkers, could engage in constructive discussion about their plan and their placement and that their views and wishes were important and taken into consideration in any planning decisions.

5.3 Quality of placements

Children aged under 12 years in care for 12 months and more



Children in care for 3 months or less (June to August 2018)



The majority of children in care for twelve months or more are in settled placements, where their needs are met by foster carers or adoptive parents. The cases where the placement was graded

Inadequate have been reviewed and the factors influencing the grade in three of the cases were in relation to gaps in processes which should have supported the placement, including introductory visits, LAC visit within 3 days, placement planning meetings in timescales. In all these cases the children are thriving in placement.

In one case the child has a disability and requires an additional support package for what is a positive match with committed carers. In one case, there is a programme of work underway with foster carers before the match returns to Fostering Panel and this is not fully recorded on the child's record.

The formal processes to match and record these as permanent placements are not always followed in a timely way. There were examples of delays in convening permanence planning meetings and in taking cases to panel for formal matching even though children are well settled and thriving.

There are a number of children in the audit cohort already placed for adoption, but processes to track and ensure applications are made to the court in an appropriate timescale for the child are insufficiently robust.

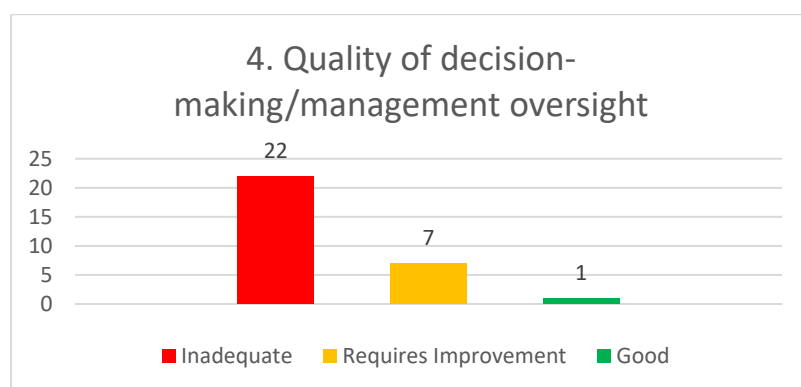
Where contact with family is part of the plan, there is evidence that this is recorded and managed. Children are in school and there is evidence of positive relationships with schools and other partners. However there are gaps in timeliness of health assessments and recording of Personal Education Plans (PEPs), and not all children have had their emotional wellbeing assessed using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

There is evidence of good partnership working between the permanence, fostering and adoption services in most cases, with carers well supported, and examples of positive family finding.

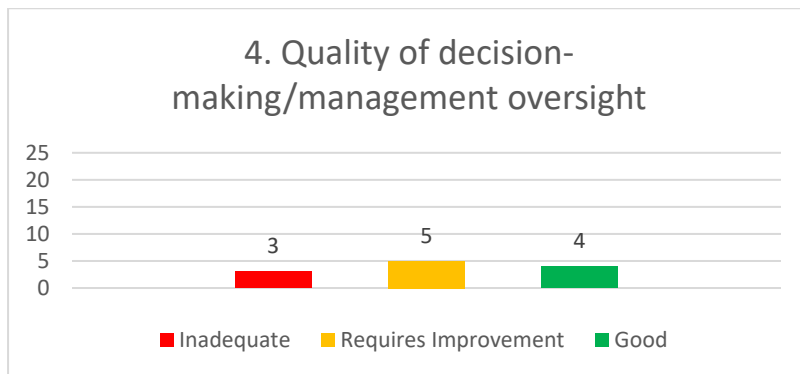
There are however gaps in knowledge of placement and adoption processes on the part of some social workers regarding the importance of Later Life letters, Child Permanence Reports and life story work, evidenced in the discussion with social workers during the audit process.

5.4 Management oversight and supervision

Children aged under 12 years in care for 12 months and more



Children in care for 3 months or less (June to August 2018)



There is evidence that recording of supervision and frequency of supervision is improving although not yet consistent across all teams and services, and is not having the desired impact of progressing plans and supporting workers to reflect on their practice in all cases.

Management oversight is more evident in case records through the case note function and on this small sample there is evidence this is improving in more recent work.

The quality of supervision however remains variable, and although Strengthening Families templates are now in use, supervision records continue to demonstrate a task focused approach with less evidence of reflective discussions.

When case related tasks are agreed, there is not consistent evidence that completion is followed up by managers.

Group supervision with Consultant Practitioners is recorded and evidences that reflective discussion does take place in this forum.

The inconsistent practice in tracking and progressing permanence processes in some cases is further evidence that management oversight requires improvement.

6. Summary of Learning Points

6.1 Features of practice graded good or outstanding

- Stable placements meeting the individual needs of children, offering permanent family homes
- Evidence of direct work with children, focusing on life story work and support for their permanent placement
- More urgency in permanency planning evident in recent admissions to care
- Improvement in timeliness and quality of assessment and analysis of risk, case recording, updated case summaries and purposeful visits to child
- Good partnership working, particularly with schools
- Improved frequency of recorded supervision and management oversight
- Statutory reviews of plans within timescales, focusing on progressing actions, and involving children, young people and carers, although these continue to be recorded in case notes in some cases rather than on the review template.
- Social workers know the children allocated to them and speak confidently about their work and their interventions
- Practice observations noted purposeful visits and positive relationships between social worker, child and carers
- Evidence of challenge from the IRO service leading to improved planning

6.2 Features of practice graded Requires Improvement and Inadequate

- Decision making not timely or well recorded. Supervision not reflective or supportive of proactive interventions; lack of focus on compliance with agreed actions Poor quality of written care plans, which are not SMART or child focused (Strengthening Families format is achieving some improvement)
- Delays in implementing permanency plans – permanency planning meetings and matching processes not carried through in a timely way, even though children were settled in their placements. These delays are not always consistently challenged by the IRO.
- Pre-meeting reports not completed before the LAC review, leading to delays in review outcomes and minutes being recorded
- Gaps in life story work and limited direct work – some as a result of changes of social workers.
- Poor visibility of children in some records – absence of their ‘lived experiences’.
- Delays in health assessments, PEPs and use of SDQs
- No systematic use of genograms or chronologies
- Inconsistent use of contingency planning
- IRO challenge not always present, or when challenge has been made, not consistently actioned

7. Conclusion

In considering two cohorts of children looked after, it has been possible to recognise and evidence some emerging signs of improving practice in more recent work, particularly in relation to assessment and more timely planning.

Management oversight and compliance with standards for supervision has also shown some signs of improvement; improving the quality must continue to be a priority area, with more rigorous management guidance to practitioners, to ensure both quality of intervention and compliance with practice standards.

The role of the IRO is essential for supporting review and challenge of any plan where there is drift and delay, particularly in cases where there has been historic poor practice; this role can be seen to provide additional oversight and challenge in some of the audited cases but must be used more consistently.

Placement stability is a positive feature of the cases subject to audit and a priority must be to continue to recruit and support foster and adoptive carers who can meet the diverse needs of Croydon’s looked after children.

Practitioners have demonstrated that they know their children and are passionate about achieving the best outcomes for them, but they continue to need development opportunities to improve their direct work and ensure they have the necessary knowledge to achieve permanency for the children they work with.

There is some evidence that performance reporting on a team level is beginning to impact on practice, and rigour in accuracy of data and a system which supports practitioners, must continue to be a priority for improvement

However management oversight and supervision is still an area of concern and must continue to be a priority for improvement to support practitioners to drive plans, follow processes to achieve

permanence in a timescale appropriate for the child, and ensure learning and development is targeted to workers and teams to build skills, knowledge and capabilities.

September 2018

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Action	Timescale	Lead	Impact
Continue to develop and roll out ongoing management development programme for all team managers which addresses supervision, challenge, performance and capability management	Programme development underway; delivery of first module 12 th October 2018	Nicky Shaw Learning and Development Manager	Improved managers' skills and knowledge leading to improved interventions and outcomes for children
Target essential skills training in relation to life story work, direct work with children and adoption planning and processes on social workers in permanence service	Training courses already in calendar from September 2018.	Nicky Shaw Learning and Development Manager	Improved practitioners' skills and knowledge leading to improved interventions and outcomes for children helping them to understand their heritage and reasons for being in a permanent placement
Develop a set of expectations for life story work with children moving into placement and explore the feasibility of including a workflow on CRS	December 2018	Moira Keen HOS and Simon Townend Children's Systems Strategic Lead	Improved life story work meaning that children are supported to understand their heritage, reasons for being in care and have a sense of their identity as they move into adulthood.
Review impact of launch of new LAC review process in relation to the role of the IRO through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CERP report to CSMT quarterly; • Service spotlight session reviews quarterly; • Reports to CSMT on midway reviews of IROs quarterly 	QA report to CSMT December 2018 Spotlight sessions October 2018 and January 2019	Shaun Hanks, QA HOS Heads of Service	Improved challenge, compliance and quality of care plans, leading to more timely permanency plans and improved outcomes for children
Review and streamline the workflow on CRS for making placements and achieving permanency	December 2018	Wendy Tomlinson HOS and Simon Townend	Reduction in drift and delay in progressing permanency plans
Fully embed the permanency tracker and review at performance meetings	Review of tracker in place from November 2018	James Allen and Simon Townend Review by HOS	Reduction in drift and delay in progressing permanency plans
Develop targeted performance reporting on critical areas, including care plans, visit and reviews	October 2018	James Allen Performance, Intelligence and Data Quality Manager	Improved compliance with Practice Standards, improved planning and more timely permanency arrangements for children
Introduce weekly data quality checks to close gaps in recording and data accuracy on targeted areas including visits, care plans and reviews	October 2018	James Allen	Improved compliance with Practice Standards, improved planning and more timely permanency arrangements for children