

**North Yorkshire County Council
Children and Young People's Service**

Children's Social Care

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE

Annual Report

1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report covers the reporting period of the 1st April 2014 – 31st March 2015 and is submitted to North Yorkshire County Council under the requirements of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) Handbook 2010.
- 1.2 The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook 2010 is statutory guidance and it is a requirement of the Handbook that the IRO Service produces an annual report for the scrutiny of members of the Corporate Parenting Board and that the report should be made available as a public document.

2 The IRO Service

- 2.1 The IRO Service is delivered by a county wide team based in three geographical locations. The team comprises of one Senior Manager Band SM2, who combines responsibility for the IRO Service with other management responsibilities. The IRO Service has two full time dedicated IRO Managers (Band 16) who have complementary responsibilities. One has a portfolio lead for Safeguarding and the other has the portfolio lead for Looked After Children. There are 13 FTE IRO posts (Band 15) and two dedicated full time IRO (CPQA) Child Placement Quality Assurance Posts who are responsible for carrying out the foster carer reviews. The IRO service is supported by the children's safeguarding support team who play a vital role in the delivery of the service.
- 2.2 Following the 1st April following the CYPS restructure the IRO Service is now located within the Safeguarding Unit in the Directors Unit. This relocation of the service does give the potential to further strengthen its independence. It also gives the opportunity to develop stronger links with partner agencies to report and improve on the multi-agency work with both looked after children and the children and families who experience the child protection conference process.
- 2.3 The IRO manager (Looked After Children) attends the Yorkshire and Humberside regional IRO Managers meetings and is the regional representative at the National IRO-DFE (Department for Education) partnership meetings.
- 2.4 The IRO Service in relation to the Looked After Reviews and child protection conferences has been fully staffed throughout the reporting year which has ensured that children have had continuity of service from their IRO. The only staff changes have been in relation to the IRO (CPQA) posts that are responsible for chairing the foster carer reviews.

- 2.5 The gender breakdown of the team is 2 males and 13 females. Fourteen members of the team are white British and one member of the team is African Caribbean/White UK.
- 2.6 IRO caseloads have remained largely consistent throughout the reporting year, averaging 70 children per FTE (full time equivalent) IRO. Within this there is some variance across the geographical areas with caseloads in the East being consistently higher than in Central and West. The IRO Handbook, 7.15 states “It is estimated that a caseload of 50-70 looked after children for a FTE IRO would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service, including the full range of functions set out in this Handbook”. Whilst the caseloads are within the recommended levels in the Handbook, in a rural authority the size of North Yorkshire, with the associated travel requirements, a caseload of 70 remains challenging.
- 2.7 The IRO Service accesses training courses provided for all CSC (Children Social Care) staff through workforce development and training provided by the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children’s Board (NYSCB). Training provided specifically for IROs in the last reporting year included a joint half day training session with the disabled children’s social work teams “Increasing Disabled Children Involvement in the Looked After Review process”; a joint IRO/ Legal/CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) workshop was held to review at a local level how the national protocol between IRO Service and CAFCASS is working; The Leaving Care team also provided four excellent half day training sessions which was targeted at the IROs “Helping looked After Children make the transition into adulthood”. The IROs have all received training in the Signs of Safety model and several of the IROs accessed the NYSCB conference on child sexual exploitation.
- 2.8 The IRO managers use performance data provided by the performance and outcomes team and data collated within the IRO service to monitor the performance of the IROs. IRO managers quality assure the work of the IROs through the use of audits of IRO records and observations of practice.
- 2.9 The IRO service is seeking to build in feedback on children’s experience of the service and has requested a piece of work to be undertaken by the Participation Quality and Standards Officer and young advisors to conduct a survey of children’s experiences of their first review. Whilst it had been hoped this could have been undertaken in the last quarter of this reporting year it has been delayed pending the young advisors taking up their posts and will be undertaken in 2015-16.
- 2.10 In this reporting year there has been a review of the IRO Service undertaken by the Business and Change team which completed its work in March 2015.

The review has put forward a number of recommendations for the Service to consider and take forward in 2015-16.

3 Key Responsibilities of the IRO Service in North Yorkshire

The IRO Service is responsible for:

- Carrying out the statutory child care reviews for North Yorkshire's Looked After Children, including reviewing the plans for those children who are placed outside the County.
- Monitoring Looked After Children's cases on an on-going basis.
- Monitoring the Local Authority's performance as a corporate parent and bringing any areas of poor practice to the attention of senior managers.
- Chairing the Initial Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Review Conferences (whilst it is not a statutory requirement for IROs to chair Child Protection Conferences it is a key responsibility in North Yorkshire).
- Chairing foster carer's reviews.
- Chairing Disruption Reviews

4 Looked After Children Population in North Yorkshire

4.1 On the 31st March 2015 there were 446 children who were Looked After compared to 461 on the 31st March 2014

In addition to the 446 children, there are 51 children who receive regular short breaks and are reviewed by an IRO under Section 20 Regulation 48 of the Care Planning Placement and Review (England) Regulations 2010.

4.2 The number of children who had an allocated IRO 31st March 2014

Number of children who have an allocated IRO	31st March 2015	31st March 2014
Looked After Children	446	461
Short Breaks (section 20 Reg 48)	51	44
Total	497	505

4.3 The breakdown of the gender of Looked After Children 31st March 2015:

Number of Looked After Children	31st March 2015	31 st March 2014
Male	260	269
Female	186	192
Total	446	461

4.4 A breakdown of the ethnicity of the Looked After Children 31st March 2015 is shown:

Ethnic Origin	Number of Children 31st March 2015	Number of Children 31st March 2014
A1 - White - British (WBRI)	415	425
A2 - White - Irish (WIRI)	2	1
A3 - Any Other White Background (WOTH)	6	6
B1 - Mixed - White And Black Caribbean (MWBC)	2	2
B2 - Mixed - White And Black African (MWBA)	2	6
B3 - Mixed - White And Asian (MWAS)	12	12
B4 - Mixed - Any Other Mixed Background (MOTH)	4	6
C1-Asian/Asian British-Indian	0	0
C2 - Asian/Asian British - Pakistani (APKN)	1	1
C3 - Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi (ABAN)	0	0
C4 - Asian/Asian British - Any Other Asian Background (AOTH)	0	0
D2 - Black/Black British - African (BAFR)	1	0
D3 - Black/Black British - Any Other Black Background (BOTH)	1	1
E2 - Any Other Ethnic Group (OOTH)	0	1
Total	446	461

4.5 The age of the Looked After Children Population and the type of living arrangement they had as of 31st March 2015.

Child Numbers

Year	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014
Age	0-4	0-4	5-10	5-10	11-15	11-15	16+	16+	Total	Total
In-house Fostering	56	43	51	47	65	71	40	28	212	189
Family & Friends	16	21	28	27	26	25	9	5	79	78
Specialist	0	0	3	5	15	18	7	5	25	28
TFCP (Treatment Fostering)	1	2	2	3	1	1	1	0	5	6
IFA (Independent Fostering Agency)	0	0	2	5	10	11	6	7	18	23
EBD (Emot. And Behav Difficulties)	0	0	1	1	8	9	6	5	15	15
Secure	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

DCS (Disabled Children's Services Ext)	0	0	0	0	1	5	8	6	9	11
OLA (Other Local Authority)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Supported Lodgings	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	11	10	11
Residential	0	0	0	0	2	6	9	5	11	11
Placed for Adoption	15	23	1	11	0	0	0	0	16	34
Placed with Parents	11	11	4	4	10	11	5	1	30	27
V4 to V2 (Looked After by virtue of short breaks)	0	0	3	4	9	10	14	14	16	28

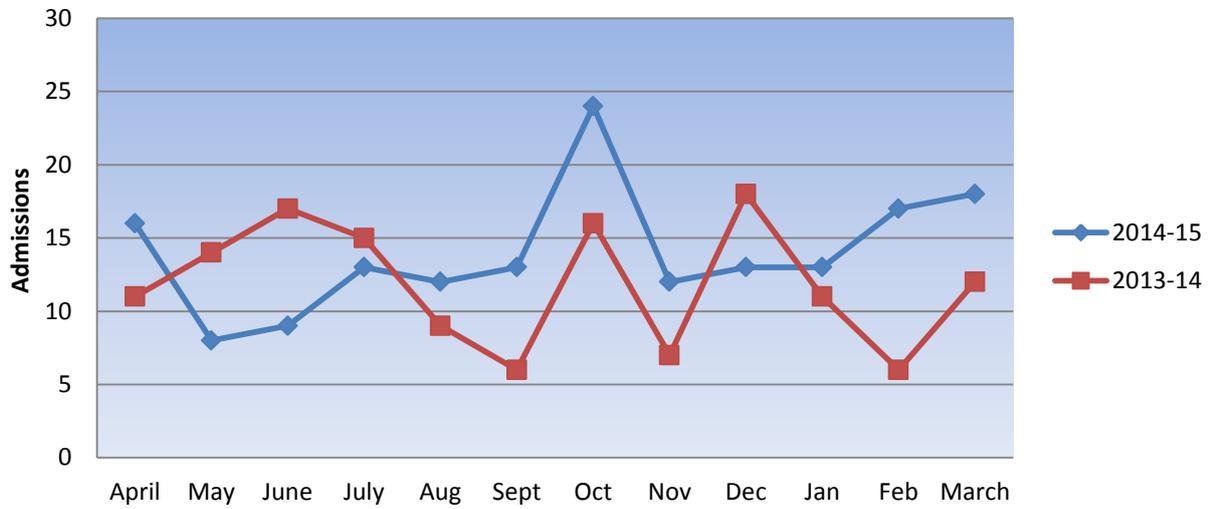
4.6 The Legal Status of the Looked After Children Population – 31st March 2015:

Legal Status of Looked After Children	Number of children 31 st March 2015	Number of Children 31 st March 2014
Interim Care Order	56	34
Care orders	254	260
Section 20 Accommodation (Voluntary care)	95	170
Police Protection Order	0	0
Emergency Protection Order	0	0
Subject of Placement Order placed with adopters but not yet adopted	39	60
Young People on Remand	2	0

4.7 It is interesting to note that in March 2015 there are significantly less children accommodated by the Local Authority under sect 20 voluntary care compared to the 31st March 2014

4.8 Numbers of children coming into the care system in 2014-15 compared with 2013-14

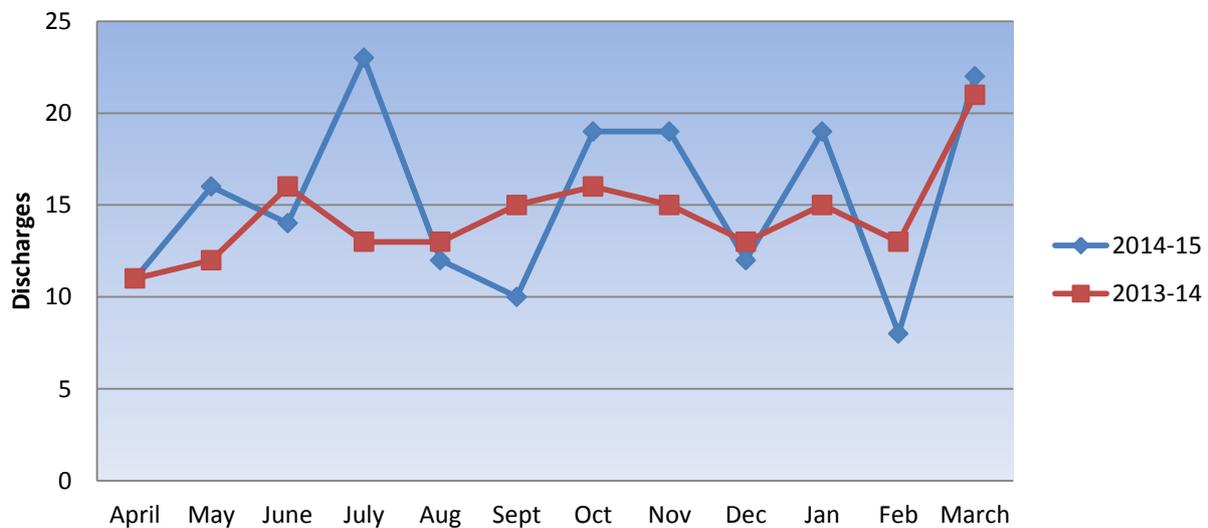
Comparison of admissions to care month on month 2014-15



Month	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	total
2014-15	16	8	9	13	12	13	24	12	13	13	17	18	168
2013-14	11	14	17	15	9	6	16	7	18	11	6	12	142

4.9 Numbers of children being discharged from the care system in 2014-15 compared with 2013-14

Comparison of discharges to care month on month 2014-15



Month	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Total
2014-15	11	16	14	23	12	10	19	19	12	19	8	22	185
2013-14	11	12	16	13	13	15	16	15	13	15	13	21	173

4.10 In terms of Looked After Children activity within this reporting year there were 26 more children admitted into care than in 2013-14, and 12 more children discharged from care this year than in 2013-14.

5 IRO Activity

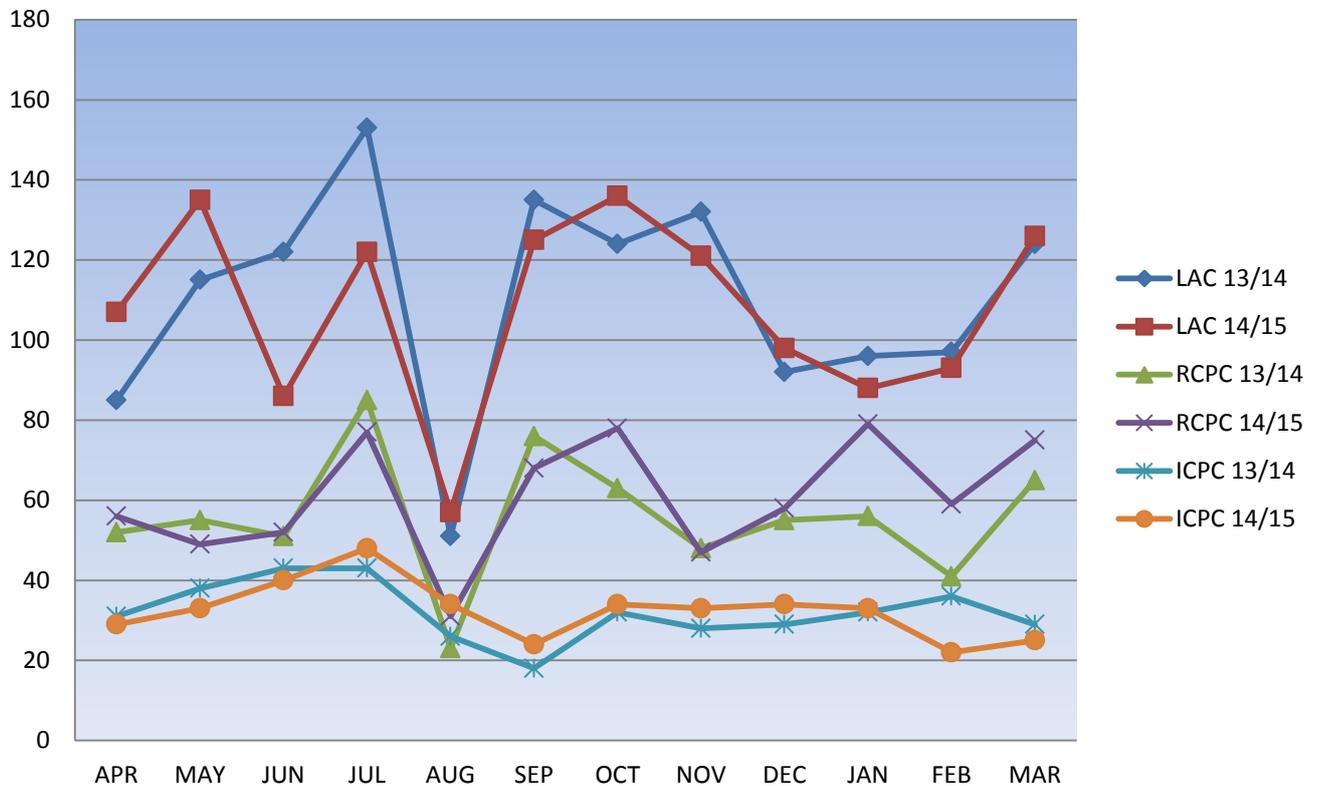
5.1 There were 906 children that had an allocated IRO on the 31st March 2015 which is marginally more than on than on the 31st March 2014, when there were 882 children who had an allocated IRO.

Breakdown of Children open to IRO Service	31 st March 2015	31 st March 2014
Looked After Children	446	461
Short Breaks (section 20 Reg 48)	51	44
Child Protection Plans	409	377

5.2 The IROs chaired 2,412 meetings in the 2014-15 reporting year which is just slightly higher than the number of meetings chaired in 2013-14. A looked after review is counted as one meeting but an increasing number of reviews are being conducted in two parts to facilitate the child's attendance and participation.

Number of Meetings	2014-15	2013-14
LARs	1,294	1,326
Conferences	1,118	1,055
Total	2,412	2,381

Meetings Chaired by IRO's 13/14 - 14/15 comparison



5.3 In addition to this the IROs retain responsibility for a small number of young people who have just left care. The IRO will undertake the review of the first pathway plan following a young person leaving care if the young person wishes before handing over to the Leaving Care Team to conduct future pathway plan reviews.

6 IRO Service Performance

6.1 The IRO team is directly responsible for two key performance indicators in relation to Looked After Children:

- Timeliness of Reviews
- Children's views

6.2 It is important to note that these can only be achieved in partnership with the operational teams within Children's Social Care.

6.3 Timeliness of Reviews:

Under the Care Planning Regulations, the child's first review must be held within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after, the second review within no more than three months after the first and the third and subsequent reviews no more than six months after the previous one.

A total of 1,294 Looked After reviews were held in the reporting year 2014 -15. The percentage of children who had a review on time was 99% and maintains the performance of 2013-14.

A total of 1,118 child protection conferences were held in the reporting year 2014-15. 98% were held within the statutory timescales, marking a minor slip from the 100% in 2013-14.

6.4 Children's views:

The Local Authority reports to Government the percentage of Looked After children who communicated their views specifically for each of their statutory reviews.

Out of the 1,294 reviews conducted, there were only **seven** reviews that took place where the child/young persons' view was not known. The performance in relation to the number of children who communicated their view in this reporting period is 98%.

7 The IROs links to children

7.1 The IROs visited 351 children in this reporting year, 128 children were seen prior to their first review and an additional 213 children were seen prior to or in between subsequent review meetings to follow up how their plan was progressing. In all 70% of all looked after children had a visit from their IRO which is a very high performance rate given the rurality of the county and it is a direct result of having a stable and fully staffed team and the IROs having a more manageable caseload. In addition to the visits some IROs have had contact with children via emails, text, phone calls and letters.

7.2 Every IRO has an introductory information sheet which contains information about themselves, the IRO service, advocacy, the young people's council and information about what to do if the young person is unhappy. The IROs are routinely ensuring that all children and carers have a copy of their introductory sheet which also contains their contact details so that a child or their carer can make contact with the IRO at any time if they wish to do so.

7.3 The IRO service has been working jointly with CSC and the Participation and Quality Standards Officer James Parkes and the YPC to develop a child and

young person friendly care plan. The IRO report in 2013-14 highlighted that the care plan template on LCS is not child and young person friendly and yet every legally every child should have an up to date copy of their care plan. The work on this is on-going and is being incorporated into the LCS 7 year review. However given the timescales for implementing changes to LCS the IRO service feels that CSC need to introduce the child friendly care plan template in advance of the changes being made to the LCS system.

- 7.4 Viewpoint is an IT interactive programme for children and young people to give their views prior to their looked after review and is now being used across the county. The IRO service has worked closely with CSC to support the introduction of the system and IROs have actively encouraged children and young people to use it. Take up of the system has been slow but has steadily grown and in the last quarter there were 139 LAC viewpoint questionnaires available, of which 89 were completed by young people representing a 64% take up. IROs report that some children really like to use the system whilst for others they don't like the graphics and have experienced problems accessing the system or that it has crashed part way through. The IROs have found that where children are using the system the information they gain from the child in relation to their views and experiences is excellent. The IROs have found that it has been helpful in flagging up positive changes with young people e.g. being able to respond to requests that they may have made. IROs find that able to refer directly to some of their questions or response in the review meetings gives them reassurance that they are being listened to and their voice is being heard.
- 7.5 The use of Viewpoint has been extended into the foster carer review process so that looked after children are now only asked to complete one consultation process where as previously they have been sent a separate paper consultation when it comes to their foster carers review. Children have asked if they can have one consultation process so from the 1st April 2015 the child's viewpoint consultation for their looked after review is being used in the foster carers review.
- 7.6 CSC will be reviewing the licence for Viewpoint in 2015-16 and the IRO service will be keen to see that children and young people continue to have an electronic system of communicating their views whilst recognising that this does not necessarily need to be provided by Viewpoint.
- 7.7 The post card system for children to feedback on their experience of the review has been in operation throughout this reporting year. 50 children and young people responded and returned the postcard which is less than the previous year when 77 children and young people responded. Of the responses received 46% thought that their review was "excellent" and 48% thought that it was "good". 2 young people felt their meeting was "poor". There was also high satisfaction with the individual arrangements made for these meetings 94% felt it was held at a venue they had wanted: 82% felt the review date was when they wanted it; 83% felt it was at a time they wanted; 68% said they had been asked about who should attend their review.

7.8 The postcard feedback system has been in place for a number of years now and children and young people are feeding back to IROs that they are not interested in completing a postcard. As part of the IRO Service review completed by the Business and Change Team there are now a number of recommendations that they have put forward to suggest ways of improving communication and links to children/carers and families e.g. the use of skype, developing an electronic feedback system to replace the post card system which could be extended beyond children and used by parents and carers to feedback on the service. The IROs service is very keen to take forward these recommendations in 2015-16.

8 Performance Monitoring of LA Key Performance Indicators

8.1 Core Assessments

Every child should have a completed core assessment before they became Looked After as the core assessment will identify the child's needs and how these are best met. The assessment should inform the decision as to whether a child needs to be looked after and what the areas of work are in order to return the child to family care.

8.2 Number of Core Assessments seen at 20 Day Looked After Reviews

	1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015	1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014
No. of 20 Day Reviews held	148	166
No. of Core Assessments seen	129	131

8.3 The performance of completed core assessments by the 20 day review in this calendar year was 87% and is a significant improvement on the 2013-14 reporting year when performance was 79%. CSC do appear to be exercising much greater rigour for ensuring that the core assessment has been completed prior to agreeing that a child will be looked after and it is noted that in the last quarter of the reporting year 93% of children had a core assessment completed prior to their 20 day review. It is important to note that the statutory timescale for completing a core assessment is 35 working days. There will be occasions where the Local Authority will need to accommodate a child in order to safeguard them and they may have had no prior involvement with the child. In these circumstances a core assessment will be commenced at the point of involvement so may not have been completed prior to the 20 day review.

8.4 Care Plans - Under the Care Planning Regulations 2010, the Local Authority is required to have a care plan in place prior to the child coming into care, or if this is not practically possible, within 10 working days of the child being in care. Children, parents and carers should be provided with a copy of the care plan. The IRO has a key quality assurance role to play in ensuring that every child has an appropriate care plan that meets the needs of the child and that it

is being implemented in a timely manner. The IROs check that a care plan is in place at the 20 day Looked After Review.

8.5 Number of Care Plans seen at 20 Day Looked After Reviews

	1 st April 2014 to 31 st March 2015	1 st April 2013 to 31 st March 2014
No. of 20 Day Reviews held	148	166
No. of Care Plans seen	123	129

8.6 The performance in relation to Care Plans seen at the 20 day review in this reporting year was 83% which represents an improvement in performance from the 2013-14 reporting year of 78%. The performance in the last quarter was 93% and reflects the improvement in practice and rigour that is being exercised by CSC in ensuring that this happens.

9 The Effectiveness of the IRO role

9.1 The IROs on a daily basis work hard outside of the review to influence and shape the planning for children and to ensure that plans are being implemented in a timely and effective manner. A great deal of the IRO work is done collaboratively with the social worker, their manager and with fostering and adoption colleagues. The IROs work is not done in isolation; they are very much part of a system and process intended to improve outcomes for children.

9.2 Whilst the IROs work very closely with the CSC social work teams it is anticipated that the move to the Safeguarding Unit will provide the opportunity for stronger links with partner agencies to ensure that all agencies are fulfilling their corporate parenting duties in relation to looked after children.

9.3 The effectiveness of the IRO role is often measured in terms of the challenges, informal and formal that they bring to the Local Authority it is difficult to quantify the impact they have in participating in discussions about for example, assessments that are being undertaken, contact issues, family finding etc. IROs will frequently engage in conversations about how a child's placement is progressing and in the course of this may well be used by the worker or manager as a sounding board and in an informal way be consulted about their view on some matter in relation to the child's plan. This sharing of experience and expertise is an important part of what the IRO contributes to the effective planning for children. These informal conversations are often not captured in records and are difficult to quantify but none the less form a significant and often unrecognised role that IROs play. Similarly the IROs often oil the wheels of ensuring that due processes are being followed, nudging things along to ensure that a child's plan is not tripped up further down by the line for example by highlighting the need for a panel date to be booked or that a viability assessment is needed.

- 9.4 The UEA (University of East Anglia) research “Making care plans work well for children: messages from UEA research into care planning and the role of the IRO” 2014 recognises that IROs make positive change happen and often this is done in very subtle ways. The research recognises that “not everything that IROs do is visible in the record and that not everything can be, including some of the most effective, subtle ways of helping to achieve positive change”. The UEA research recognises the role that the IRO has in working collaboratively and bringing about change often done by actions and tones.
- 9.5 IROs through working collaboratively with the social workers and their managers can prevent problems arising or they can resolve things before they become a problem. There are sometimes very difficult and complex decisions to make about children and their lives where there may be a difference of view about how best to resolve something or what is the best plan for the child. For example IROs have contributed to meetings where there have been very difficult decisions about whether or not to split siblings in searching for the right permanence placement or attended meetings where there are difficult decisions to be made about whether the current placement is the right one for a child or whether a move should be considered. There are often very difficult decisions to be made in a complex and uncertain world for the child.
- 9.6 One of the key functions of the IRO role is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. It is expected that IROs should establish positive working relationships with the social workers for the children for whom they are the IRO. Where problems are identified in relation to implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to it or about resources the IRO is expected in the first instance to seek to resolve the issues informally with the worker or their manager and record this on the child’s file. (IRO Handbook 6.1).
- 9.7 Examples of IRO practice of resolving problems informally through their day to day work include: addressing changes to legal status, sometimes a child has been accommodated under sect 20 and a voluntary arrangement is not the most appropriate order, the IRO has discussed this with the team and encouraged the move to seek shared parental responsibility by applying for a Care Order. IROs have pushed forward plans for young people to return home when on occasions there has been some reticence on the part of CSC to the plan. The IRO has been of the view that the care is “good enough” and the child/young person wishes to return to their family and that a return can be safely supported and managed. IROs have been proactive in ensuring that appropriate education and training plans have been in place for young people with complex needs. In one particular case, this was about seeking a specialist school place post 16 as this was more appropriate than a college place for a particular young person- the IRO worked to help people understand why this was the case.
- 9.8 The IRO service has not had to invoke the formal dispute resolution process in this reporting year, which is in part a measure of the effectiveness of IROs being able to resolve things through the informal resolution process and the

willingness of senior managers to act on concerns or issues raised by the IRO service.

9.9 The IROs play an effective part in the court process both in agreeing the local authority care plan prior to the final care hearing and in ensuring the court is aware of their view in respect of the child's care plan. There is an established relationship with legal services and the courts for ensuring that the IRO's view is known to the Court at the final care hearing. The IRO service is benefiting from the work that was done in 2013-14 with the legal service /Court and Cafcass. Routinely IROs receive copies of the legal bundles and the court receives a copy of the IRO review record which agrees or may disagree with the local authority's care plan. The IRO also submits a separate form to court which clearly sets out their view in relation to the proposed care plan. The importance of this system is that it allows a formal channel of communication between the IRO service and the court which is particularly important where the IRO may not be in agreement with the local authority's proposed care plan or some aspect of the plan. The sorts of situations that have arisen where the IRO has held a different view has sometimes been about the separation of siblings, or the type of legal order e.g. a care order or supervision order or with regards to a contact plan.

9.10 There are good working relationships and systems in place between the IRO service and CAFCASS which is important both for the liaison to take place between the two service when proceedings are in progress and also for ensuring there is a proper handover of the final care plan from the Guardian to the IRO at the conclusion of the care proceedings.

10 Challenge and Dispute Resolution

10.1 In accordance with the IRO Handbook the local authority has a system in place for informal and formal resolution of disputes. The IRO service has an established process with CSC of issuing a quality issues alert as part of the informal dispute resolution process. The quality alert will specify what the problem is and the IRO will say who they expect a response from and the timescale for resolution. Senior managers are copied in to all quality alerts and a quarterly report is provided to the senior management team which gives a summary of the alerts that have been raised. Quality alerts are usually issued by an IRO when something is missing in relation to what a looked after child should have and it needs to be put right or it may be to raise a concern about a practice issue. Quality alerts are also used to highlight exceptional practice.

10.2 In this reporting year there have been 110 quality alerts raised by the IRO service in relation to looked after children, 10 of these were quality alerts were issued to recognise the exceptional practice of staff. The five most common reasons for a quality alert being issued was as follows:

Decisions of review not acted on – 35

Other – 23

Pre meeting report not available -15

Assessment and progress records not up to date- 14

Life story work not being progressed – 13

- 10.3 As stated earlier in the report all issues raised by the IRO service have been resolved through the informal resolution process and the IRO Service has not had to invoke the formal dispute procedure.
- 10.4 The IRO manager (Safeguarding) has worked with the NYSCB to draw up a policy and procedure for recognising exceptional practice and raising a quality issue alerts where there are concerns in relation to partner agencies fulfilling their duties to a Looked After Child. The multi-agency quality alert system is to be piloted in 2015-16 and is a timely introduction given the IRO Service move to the Safeguarding Unit and the opportunity to focus on all partner agencies responsibilities to deliver timely interventions and good services to looked after children
- 10.5 The IRO manager has collaborated with one of the Leeds IRO Managers to produce a set of national standards on IRO challenge and dispute resolution for the national IRO Manager-DFE partnership group. The standards are awaiting sign off before being made available to all IRO services. One of the recommendations of the NCB (National Children’s Bureau) research “The role of Independent Reviewing Officers’ (IROs) in England 2014” asks each Director of Children’s Services to undertake a review of how their dispute processes are working, including the formal stage and the involvement of other agencies” The standards have been produced to provide a framework for CSC and IRO Service to utilise in undertaking this review .The IRO service will seek in 2015-16 to undertake a review of how the dispute process is working using these standards as a framework.
- 10.6 The IRO service does use North Yorkshire’s legal services for advice and has consulted the CAF/CASS Legal duty helpline on a few occasions in the course of the year to seek guidance. There has not been a reciprocal legal arrangement in place for independent legal advice with neighbouring authorities in this reporting year, as there was in 2013-14 due to problems with the insurance available to the legal departments. Work is being undertaken to try and establish a reciprocal agreement in 2015-16. It is noted that IRO handbook 6.13 states that each local authority should have a system in place that provides its IROs with access to independent legal advice.

11 Disruptions:

The IRO service has conducted three disruption reviews processes and chaired a meeting of professionals about a disruption. These disruption reviews were undertaken as all three children have been placed with carers as a long term permanent placement that had ended in an unplanned way. The disruption review process sets out to establish what can be learnt from the disruption to help inform the child's future plan and also looks to identify whether there is any learning for practice and for the organisation. The action plans following these reviews are in the process of being drawn up and from this any emerging themes will be shared with CSC senior managers.

12 Entitlements:

The all-parliamentary group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers conducted the Entitlements Enquiry in 2013 and then did a follow up enquiry "The Entitlements – one year on" report Dec 2014. Following the publication of this report, the Children's Minister has asked IRO Services through the national IRO managers/DFE partnership group to revisit children and young people's awareness of their entitlements in their local authority and to comment in the IRO annual reports about how well the LA is meeting their responsibilities in providing children with information and knowledge about their entitlements and whether all children and young people are receiving them. I have attached a list of the 10 entitlements to the appendix. In the main the LA is ensuring that children are aware of their entitlements and that they are receiving them but I think there is more to do around the care plan entitlement and I think it would be prudent for a piece of work to be undertaken collaboratively between CSC/IRO/YPC (Young People's Council) service in 2015-16 to review and report back on how North Yorkshire is doing in relation to ensuring the children have information about their entitlements and whether they are in receipt of them.

13 CSC Action Plan and IRO Service Action Plan

The action plans drawn up to incorporate the recommendations from the previous IRO Report (1st April 2013 -31st March 2014 have been updated and are in appendixes two and three).

14 Areas of Development for the IRO Service

- 14.1 The IRO Service is seeking to incorporate the Signs of Safety model into the looked after reviews. The model works on identifying strengths and is used by the IROs in the chairing of conferences so it will be a natural extension to develop the model into the Looked After Review work.
- 14.2 The IRO service is working to strengthen the links between the IRO (CPQA) Child Placement Quality Assurance that undertakes the foster carer reviews and the children's IRO who undertake the child's review and has oversight of

the progression of the child's case. There are missed opportunities for sharing information about children's experience of their foster placements by the under development of this link.

- 14.3 The IRO Service is considering the recently completed IRO service review that was undertaken by the Business and Change team and agreeing which recommendations will be implemented. The IRO Service is keen to take forward those recommendations which will enhance the opportunities to have stronger links with children/families and carers and will create more flexible ways of both keeping in touch and receiving feedback on the service provided.
- 14.4 The IRO manager will ensure that the action plans arising from the disruptions are completed and emerging themes are shared with senior managers
- 14.5 The IRO service will liaise with the Participation and Quality Standards Officer to facilitate the piece of work to be undertaken by the young advisors in relation to gaining feedback from children and carers on the 20 day review process.
- 14.6 The IRO Service wishes to see in place an electronic system of tracking decisions and quality alerts which will assist them in their tracking and monitoring role. It is the intention to explore this with CSC in the 7 year LCS review.
- 14.7 The IRO service will be working with Legal Services to assist them in re-establishing the reciprocal access to independent legal advice.
- 14.8 The IRO service will undertake to work jointly with CSC/Leaving Care and the YPC to undertake a review of young people's awareness of their entitlements.
- 14.9 The IRO Service will seek to develop its multi-agency links as part of the move to the Safeguarding Unit in order to enhance the multi-agency working and reporting functions of the service in relation to both looked after children and the conferencing process. One aspect of this will be to pilot the multi-agency quality issues alert system.
- 14.10 The IRO service will seek to extend the annual IRO report in 2016 to incorporate and report on both the work with looked after children and the child protection conference work.
- 14.11 The IRO manager will undertake a review of the challenge and dispute process in line with the recommendation of the NCB research 2014. And will report back to the Director.

15 Recommendations for CSC

- 15.1 The few remaining outstanding actions from the 2014-15 report should be carried forward.
- 15.2 CSC, the YPC and IRO Service have worked positively together to develop a more child and young person friendly care plan. This collaboration should continue in order to seek to implement the new version ahead of the changes to LCS which will come about in the LCS 7 year review.
- 15.3 It would be helpful In undertaking the LCS 7 year review if CSC could take the opportunity to revisit the Assessment and Progress records which IROs often find promote a tick box response and a notable lack of analysis which limits the value and purpose of the information.
- 15.4 There has been a lot of work undertaken in North Yorkshire already about ensuring children and young people are aware of their entitlements. CSC/Leaving Care/YPC/ IRO service should work together to undertake a review of young people's awareness of their entitlements in order to be assured of what the current picture is in relation to children and young people's knowledge and identify any gaps in knowledge and awareness that need to be addressed.
- 15.5 CSC have put effective measures in place which have led to a substantial improvement in the number of children having a core assessment and care plan in place at the point of placement. It will be important for CSC to continue to maintain these measures to ensure that this this improvement in performance is embedded in practice.
- 15.6 CSC have worked hard to introduce Viewpoint and to encourage workers to promote its use with children. It is important that this work continues and is developed further whether the product used is Viewpoint or an alternative product is used.

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Date: 1st June 2015

APPENDIX 1

Entitlements

(Extracted from The Entitlements Enquiry – Summary Report with recommendations Nov 2013)

Five entitlements in relation to Looked After Children:

1. You must have a care plan that says what your needs are now, what will be done to meet those needs and what your plans are for the future.
2. The care plan must include your views, and when deciding what to do people must take those views into consideration.
3. No important decisions about you, for example a placement move, should be taken without a review meeting being held unless it is an emergency.
4. Looked after young people aged 16 to 19 should get a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education.
5. 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.

Five entitlements in relation to Care Leavers

1. You can ask your authority for £2,000 for the setting up home allowance. This was the amount that young people agreed, at the regional meetings for Chairs of Children in Care Councils, to ask their local authorities for.
2. Your local authority must provide you with help with the costs of being in education or training up until you are 21 (or 25 if you're still in education).
3. Your local authority must provide you with help with the costs of getting and keeping a job (up until the age of 21 if you are in education, employment or training).
4. You must be given a copy, and full explanation, of your assessment and pathway plan.
5. If you're in higher education, your local authority must provide you with vacation accommodation (or money towards it).

APPENDIX 2

**Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 1.4.13 -31.3.14 – Action Plan for the IRO Service
Updated 12.5.15**

RECOMMENDATION	ACTION	HOW	WHO	TIME SCALE	RAG RATING	COMMENTS
14.1	IRO Service to undertake a whole service review	This action is contained within the CSC action plan	IRO Managers and Technology and Change Service	March 2015		Review completed March 2015 and recommendations to be taken forward in 2015-16
14.2	IRO Service to develop and embed further the QA system	Promote consistent practice across the team and develop a more effective system for tracking the resolution of the QA	IRO Managers and IROs	March 2015		Work has been undertaken with the team and a more effective tracking tool is in place.
14.3	IRO Service to implement the extension of the QA system to include partner agencies	The work on the procedures for multi-agency implementation to be completed and then implemented.	IRO Managers	March 2015		Development work is continuing on this project with a small scale pilot proposed to take place later in 2015/16. Delay to the original timescale due to the large number of agencies and staff involved.
14.4	IRO Service to develop an	In collaboration with the Business	Head of Effective Practice	Dec 2014		This is currently being explored

	electronic system of case tracking on the progress of review decisions	Intelligence analysts				alongside the potential to use LCS more effectively to track progress.
14.5	All looked after children to receive a copy of the IRO introductory sheet	IROs to all have an introductory sheet and to ensure this is given out to all looked after children.	IRO Managers and IROs	Dec 2014		IROs all have an introductory sheet which are given out to all children and young people
14.6	IRO service to ensure that all newly looked after child/young people are visited by the IRO prior to their first review and to increase the number of children seen by the IROs prior to subsequent reviews.	IROs service to prioritise visits to children and to work with the Performance and Outcomes teams to ensure that there is accurate reporting in place on this activity.	IRO Managers and IROs	March 2015		Since May 2015 IROs are routinely undertaking visits to children prior to their first review and have undertaken additional visits where time has permitted.
14.7	IRO service to seek feedback from children and young people on the initial visits done by the IROs	IRO service to request assistance with this from CSC Participation and Quality Standards Officers	IRO Managers	March 2015		This work is in progress but has not been completed and the action will carry forward into 2015-16
14.8	IRO service to	IROs to positively	IRO Managers	March		IROs are actively

	support the introduction of Viewpoint	encourage children and young people to use viewpoint and to ensure that the review records reflects the efforts to support the young person and the views that have been given via Viewpoint.	and IROs	2015		encouraging and supporting the use of Viewpoint in all meetings. There is an IRO Viewpoint champion in each of the three IRO office bases.
14.9	To seek a new feedback mechanism for children and young people following their review	IRO service to continue the work with Technology and Change Services to achieve this.	IRO Managers	March 2014		The IRO service review completed in March 2015 has made a number of recommendations in relation to this and the work will be undertaken in 2015 -16
14.10	To quality assure the work of the IROs	Through audit of IRO records and observations of preparation/chairing of meetings. Audits to feed into quarterly reports to the Team and SMT	IRO Managers	March 2015		IRO managers have undertaken audits and observations of the IROs in their looked after children work but did not achieve the full quota of monthly observations and audits.
14.11	To strengthen the relationships	Reviewing the operation of the new	IRO Managers	March 2015		A joint legal/Cafcass/IRO

	between the IRO service/Legal Services/CAFCASS/Courts	systems and to seek a further joint development session between the services				workshop was undertaken in June 2014 to review the systems and to further strengthen working relationships.
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APPENDIX 3

****Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 1.4.13 -31.3.14 – CSC Service Action Plan updated May 2015**

(This action plan contained the actions arising from the recommendations made in the 2013-14 IRO Fostering report to the Director and Executive Members “Trends in Foster Carer Reviews Identified by the IRO Service reporting period 1st April 2013– 31st March 2014 and have been taken out for the purpose of this report).

RECOMMENDATION	ACTION	HOW	WHO	TIME SCALE	RAG RATING	COMMENTS
15.1	To review and improve the IRO service to ensure that it has capacity to deliver the IRO Handbook	To conduct a review using the Ofsted thematic report and NCB 2014 report on the Role of the IRO to review and improve their services in line with their recommendations.	Colin Wilson Corporate Development Officer	Sept 2014		A review of the IRO service has been completed by the Business Change Team in March and a number of recommendations have been made.
15.2	Ensure that core assessments are completed prior to children coming into care unless there are exceptional circumstances	To continue to implement robust mechanisms for checking that the core assessment is in place prior to decision making	Vicky Metherringham Head of Safeguarding	Dec 2014		More assessments are now completed, however in order to get to a green rag rating vm will establish a clear system to collate this info
15.3	Ensure that children have a Care Plan prior to coming into care	Review and implement more effective mechanisms for ensuring the Care Plan is in place.	Danielle Johnson Group Manager – Long term	March 2014		All teams now have systems in place to ensure this happens and

	or within 10 working days of being in care					that the plan is shared with the carer.
15.4	Develop a child and family friendly Care Plan template	CSC to work collaboratively with the YPC / IRO Service /Liquid Logic to develop a more user friendly template	Alan Tucker Performance Standards and Commissioning Officer	Sept 2015		<p>Currently live with Version 10 (V10) of LCS. All the 'Change Requests' for V11 had to be submitted before Christmas 2014 and unfortunately, due to staff sickness and other tasks that had to be given priority, the Care Plan work was not done in time for V11.</p> <p>This piece of work currently remains in the Work Plan for LCS Improvement for V12. Unfortunately, just before</p>

						Christmas LiquidLogic then put the timetable back by four months. This means that 'Change Requests' for V12 must now be submitted by the end of October 2015 (instead of the end of June 2015). The Software Upgrade will not come from LiquidLogic until April 2016 (instead of January 2016) and not be in our live system for at least a couple of months after that
15.5	Ensure that there are procedures in place to support the implementation of the permanence strategy.	Review and amend current procedures if required.	Alan Tucker Performance Standards and Commissioning Officer	March 2015		Tri-X contract was signed at the end of January 2015. Implementation will now take place between March and June 2015
15.8	To update the	CSC staff to review and	Alan Tucker	March		Tri-X contract was

	care planning procedures to comply with the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations (England) 2010 and the very recent changes in legislation under the Children and Families Act 2014	update the care planning procedures.	Performance Standards and Commissioning Officer	2015		signed at the end of January 2015. Implementation will now take place between March and June 2015
15.10	To ensure that life story work is being undertaken in a timely manner.	Review and address any problems in resourcing the demand for life story work	Danielle Johnson Group Manager-Long Term	March 2014		There are now 2 FSW's across the County who focus on life history work. Work is being undertaken to further develop these roles.
15.12	To review the request from the Leaving Care Service to have pathway plans reviewed independently until young people are 18.	CSC to consider in conjunction with the Leaving Care service and the IRO service whether the level at which independent reviewing of pathway plans is at the right level.	Julie Firth Head of Effective Practice	Dec 2014		This request has been considered in light of current IRO capacity and is not feasible at this time. However, if there is a reduction in CP and LAC caseloads this decision will be reviewed.