Services for Children and Young People

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT
FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

April 2015 - March 2016

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<th>Status</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Approved</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
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<td>Last Updated</td>
<td>May 2016</td>
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<td>Review Date</td>
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Government published new regulations and statutory guidance to improve the quality and consistency of care planning, placement and case review for looked after children in March 2010. The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Handbook 2010 was one of a suite of these new regulations and statutory guidance, which was implemented on 1st April 2011. This suite revised the statutory guidance accompanying the Children Act 1989.

The IRO Handbook 2010 provided guidance to IROs about how they should discharge their distinct responsibilities to looked after children. It also outlined guidance to local authorities on their strategic and managerial responsibilities in establishing an effective IRO service. The aim was to give all looked after children the support and services that each one requires to enable them to reach their potential and to achieve improved outcomes for children.

The IRO Handbook states that the IRO manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting board. It specifies the areas that an annual report should make reference to which are outlined in this report as follows:-

- Development of the IRO service including information on caseloads, continuity of employment and the make-up of the team and how it reflects the identity of the children it is serving;
- Number of reviews that are held on time, the number that are held out of time and the reasons for the ones that are out of time;
- Extent of participation of children and their parents;
- Outcomes of quality assurance audits in relation to the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews;
- Procedures for resolving concerns, including the local dispute resolution process and it should include an analysis of the issues raised in dispute and the outcomes;
- Whether any resource issues are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service to all looked after children, in addition to;
- Good practice, and
- Update on issues outlined for further development in 2015/16 and further development identified for 2016/17.

The IRO Handbook also states that the annual report should be available as a public document and that it would be good practice to publish this on the local authority’s website so that looked after children can easily access their corporate parent’s assessment of the quality of its parenting.
2 SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

This section of the report will give an overview of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRS) in line with the 2010 requirements focusing on the key outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by North Lincolnshire Council.

2.1 Development of the IRO service including information on caseloads, continuity of employment and the make-up of the team and how it reflects the identity of the children it is serving

North Lincolnshire has maintained a low number of children in care and remains lower than the latest national and statistical neighbor comparators. This reflects investment in a robust family support service.

Over the past year there has been an increase in the children in care population. There were 202 children and young people in full-time care as at the end of March 2016 which equated to 57.4% per 10,000 children compared to 165 at March 2015 or 50.1% per 10,000.

In addition there was 1 child in short-break care under section 20 and 4 young people aged 16 and 17 “relevant” care leavers whose pathway plans were independently reviewed during the year.

The average IRO caseload was 69 cases at the year end. The IRO Handbook states that an estimated caseload of between 50 to 70 children for a full time IRO would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service.

The IRO team within North Lincolnshire is part of the wider IRS which incorporates child protection conferencing, independent foster carer reviewing and the Local Authority Designated Officer function for managing allegations against people who work with children.

Since April 2015 there have been no changes in IRO’s. A new Practice Supervisor was appointed during the year and the Service Manager has remained the same throughout.

In accordance with regulation 46 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) Regulations 2010, the position of the IRO’s within the local authority meets the levels of independence prescribed in that they operate distinct from case management. Likewise in accordance with this regulation all IRO’s, the Service Manager and the other staff are qualified, registered social workers, with at least five years post qualifying experience. The staff group therefore has substantial experience of communicating and working with children and young people. They have extensive knowledge about what makes for good quality practice in safeguarding and promoting
the welfare of children with an understanding of the relevant legal frameworks and processes in addition to experience of providing social work supervision. In respect of the team’s collective knowledge of diversity and children’s identity, the staff team has backgrounds in working with children who have suffered significant harm from abuse and neglect and children with attachment difficulties. This is in the context of working with both looked after children and children subject to child protection and child in need plans, including working with disabled children, children from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, care leavers and young people who have offended.

The IROs and their manager are of White British ethnicity, where the majority of the population is White British. In the last 2011 census more than 92% of North Lincolnshire’s population belonged to the White British ethnic group and 7.2% was identified as belonging to minority ethnic communities. These minority ethnic communities included people from established Asian/Asian British communities, ‘new communities’ (migrant workers) to the area including Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, Portuguese and Somali communities. The team continues to further enhance their knowledge in respect of minority ethnic communities and have access to translators and expert advice when needed to ensure children, young people and families’ needs in terms of language, diversity and equality are fully considered during reviewing. It is difficult to get accurate figures on disability as many people with impairments do not consider themselves to be disabled. In the last census 19 percent of residents identified as having day to day activities being limited either a little or lot (due to impairment or health condition.) From local government statistics approximately 6% of residents are blue badge holders. The IRO team does not incorporate a disabled worker and utilises expert advice in relation to reviewing disabled children’s cases.

2.2 Number of reviews that are held on time, the number that are held out of time and the reasons for the ones that are out of time

Table 1 below indicates looked after children reviews held within timescale for 2015/16 was 100% for children in full-time care. This reflects an effective system where high importance is given to the timely reviewing of care plans. There were 531 reviews for children/young people in full-time care during the year, compared to 491 last year. This 8.1% increase reflects the increase in the number of looked after children.

For children and young people in section 20 short-break care 100% of reviews were held within timescale. This year there were a total of 4 reviews compared to 6 in 2014/15.

Reviews held within timescale for “relevant” young people with pathway plans were 100% with a total of 9 reviews compared with 9 held also in 2014/15.
Overall, this demonstrates an effective IRO service including the necessary administration which underpins and supports the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of quality reviewing practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review type</th>
<th>31/03/14</th>
<th>31/03/15</th>
<th>31/03/16</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Full-time care reviews</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Short break section 20 reviews</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Pathway Plan reviews (‘relevant’ children)</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>100%</td>
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**Table 1 Percentage of Looked After Children that had Statutory Reviews within timescale**

2.3 **Extent of participation of children and their parents**

The IRO has key statutory duties to:

- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations, for example to ensure that children have been informed of their rights, including how to make a complaint.

There was 100% participation of children in their reviews during 2015/16 which included direct attendance, using advocacy and creative methods such as the Three Houses/Islands and Fairy/Wizard tools, My IRO and Me tool, devising the review agenda on cue cards, using flipcharts, memory boxes, games, books, drawings, pictures and words to establish their views, wishes and feelings. Some children and young people took on the responsibility of chairing their reviews or part of them with support from their IRO.

There were 72% of children who had attended their reviews with 68% speaking for themselves whilst 4% had an advocate speak on their behalf. There were 18% of reviews where children had not attended yet an advocate spoke on their behalf. There were 10% of children under 4 years old. In all of these cases the IRO had consulted with the children and offered a pre-review visit/discussion or completed an observation for younger children.
The IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and how to access one. This could be a formal advocate or someone already in the child’s network.

The Children and Young Person’s Advocate had received 30 referrals for children in care and subsequently advocated and supported these children and young people. In addition 35 children who recently came into care had been visited during year. This development was in response to feedback from children and young people about how they realised the benefit from advocacy once they had agreed to meet the Children and Young Person’s Advocate. It is aimed at directly introducing them to the advocacy service and provides an early opportunity for any questions or issues of concern to be addressed.

There were 9 complaints made by children in care this year and none of these related to safeguarding issues. Young people’s complaints were mainly about communication issues and uncertainty about future plans. These complaints were all resolved at the first stage with young people being provided with the information they needed. Keeping in touch had been highlighted to those involved and the children’s pre review consultation form had been revised to incorporate a question on this.

Children and young people had been offered exit interviews by the Children and Young Person’s Advocate following a placement move or when they had left care to give them the opportunity to share their views about their care experience. Information from these interviews had been reported back to the IRO service, fostering team, residential home or the children in care external placement team as appropriate. This information helped to shape practice by reinforcing good practice and indicating where there was a need for further development. An impact was that the foster carer training programme had been enhanced around de-escalation techniques and teenage development in the light of what children had said.

Parents had been routinely consulted before reviews and invited to them. In circumstances where it had not been appropriate for them to attend all or part of the review, a separate review meeting/discussion had been offered and held with them regarding their child/young person’s care plan where appropriate. IRO’s had exercised professional judgement in terms of consulting with or holding discussions with parents whose children were subject to Placement Orders or where there were contact restrictions in place.

2.4 Outcomes of quality assurance audits in relation to the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews
There had been robust management oversight into the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews. This had incorporated oversight of cases, systems and the use of frameworks including:

- IRO case allocation
- Administrative system including invitations, consultations and distribution of review records
- Monthly IRS outcomes meetings to monitor and evaluate performance and activity data including the conduct of reviews (reviews in timescale, pre-review visits, participation of children) and effectiveness (IRO case tracking, dispute resolution).
- Case file audits to quality assure practice and recording of reviews and care planning, including of needs/risk analysis, decision-making and outcome based review decisions and care plans. This included reporting through the Case Audit Meeting to the Director of People.
- Views and feedback from children, young people, their parents and carers.

Cases had been allocated to IRO’s daily and certainly within 5 working days of children entering care meeting the IRO Handbook requirement.

The audit of the administrative arrangements of reviews had operated weekly and monthly to ensure that for example, written consultations and invitations were sent out to children, young people, parents, carers and other significant adults/professionals within 10 working days before reviews. There had been routine written consultation prior to reviews for children, young people, their parents/carers, school/pre-school, Specialist Nurse for looked after children and any other relevant adults. In most cases these consultation documents have been sent out 10 working days before the review and earlier around school holidays to capture any additional school views supplementary to Personal Education Plans. In the event that a significant change had been proposed to a child’s care plan, a review had been held at short notice and consultation with the child, their parents and relevant others had been upheld where possible.

In almost all cases the review decisions had been sent to team leaders for approval within 5 working days of reviews for commensurate approval by 10 working days. The 15 day completion of full review records and 20 day distribution were closely overseen to ensure as timely completion as possible.

The monthly IRS outcomes meetings have continued to be underpinned by detailed informative up to date performance reports compiled by the Performance and
Information Team. These meetings had ensured that reviews were scheduled and held on time in 100% of cases. As at the end March 2016 all children in care had an up to date pre-review visit/discussion or observation recorded on the case file. IRO’s had offered children and young people a meeting/discussion in private prior to their review, subject to age and understanding or observed them in placement. In some cases, a formal pre-review meeting had not been necessary and a telephone discussion had been held, for example where the IRO and child/young person had already established a relationship and the young person chose not to meet their IRO prior, their placement remained stable and there were no significant changes planned for the foreseeable future. For babies and younger children, it was not always necessary or appropriate to see the child alone. In these cases the IRO had observed the child in placement and used observation or methods of play, picture cards, drawings and stories to establish their wishes, feelings and understanding.

The service has embedded IRO case recording standards introduced in 2014. These included IRO pre discussion with Social Workers within 15 days prior to the review, pre-review visits to children, case tracking and dispute resolution recorded on the child’s case file. These areas were incorporated as a focus within case audits by the IRS and other Children’s Services managers with evidence showing that the case standards were embedded. The introduction of an electronic whiteboard during the year had strengthened the monitoring of case recording standards.

Cohorts of cases have been tracked at outcomes meetings, for example children in care under section 20 for less than 1 year to ensure that their legal status remained appropriate. Children’s cases with twin-track care plans featuring adoption and those children subject of Placement Orders had been closely tracked at the Adoption outcomes meetings to ensure timely permanence.

Case file audits were completed during the year by the IRS and across Children’s Services underpinning monthly Case Audit Meetings with the Director of People for organisational learning, including service and strategic improvement and challenge.

As part of the Learning and Development Framework the Local Safeguarding Children Board held an audit session on children in care in March 2016. This highlighted some excellent examples of permanency planning including early permanency, a strong theme was the voice of the child and agencies were contributing to good outcomes for children through being aspirational in supporting educational achievements, providing positive activities and stability and the management of risks with examples of strengths based approaches. The learning points have been delivered to the Board for future developments to be agreed.

The IRS has a longstanding history of collating, analysing, taking action and making improvements from the views of children, young people and their parents/carers. Last year’s views are shown below for 2015/16. This regular feedback under the Child and
Family Feedback Framework from the perspective of children, young people and parents/carers had been overseen at a number of levels. The IRO’s had made responses at the individual child’s care planning/reviewing level. The Service Manager had overseen the analysis of this feedback on a monthly basis submitted to the Case Audit Meeting and completed an annual evaluation. The key messages had been turned into service planning to ensure a responsive and effective service, taking account of these influences from children, young people and their parents/carers views.

The agreed set of questions within the framework included:

1. Do you understand the reason we are involved?
2. Are you given the chance to have your say?
3. Is what we are doing making you (your child/child you are looking after) feel safer?
4. Do you understand your (your child’s/child you are looking after) plan?
5. How can we improve what we do?

These same questions had been used at other key stages of the child’s journey through assessment, planning and intervention across Children’s Services. A range of methods are used by staff to ensure that the views of children, young people and their families are captured in ways which are meaningful for them.

The views of children, parents and foster carers collated by the IRS are shown below for 2015/16.

**Children’s Views**

There were 226 children’s views given during 2015/16 for children aged 4 and above. The overall feedback rate by children who attended reviews (aged 4 and above) held in the year was 53%.

**100% of children understood the reason for involvement, said that they had their say and understood their plan. 97% said that they felt safer.**

The responses provided in the very few cases where six children said that they did not feel safer highlighted two key themes. This was that these children wished to return to live with their parents and hence they found it difficult to accept and acknowledge the risk factors present within their family. Where this had been identified as an issue for a child further direct work around acceptance of why they were in care was included in care planning. Secondly where a child had been placed in secure accommodation on
welfare grounds they strongly disagreed that this was making them feel safer compared to local authority care. The care plan reflected an enduring approach including direct work with the young person by a small consistent group of professionals to support them in understanding and identifying their vulnerabilities and the risks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive comments made by children and young people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you understand the reason we are involved?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I understand why I am in foster care and the plan for my future”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I have done life story work and I know why I am in foster care”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I know why I do not live with my Mum and that I am staying here”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Are you given the chance to have your say?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I said what my views were (in my review) and I knew my consultation had been read”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I have lots of opportunity to say what my views are”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“People listen to me”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Is what we are doing making you feel safer?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am happy and settled here”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am safe in this home”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I do not want to be seen as in care. This is my family”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Do you understand your plan?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am staying in foster care until my Mum is getting better”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I agree with staying with my foster carers and my life here in (local area)”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I will be staying with my foster carer until I am grown up”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Positive comments made by IROs

Child A understands that my role is around ensuring that he is 'Ok and safe' and that he knows what his future goals are.

Child B stated that she understood my role was about ensuring she knew 'what the plan was and who was doing what'.

At times child C needed time to reflect and did so with support from the Independent Sexual Violence Advocate.

Child D feels safe and happy in his long standing placement.

Child E is aware that she is to obtain support to enable her to reach independence and that support will continue beyond this point via Adult Social Care Services.

Child F said he knows his plans for his care and is in agreement. He said that they have been discussed with him and he had discussions with his Social Worker regularly.

A key strength from children’s feedback is that they understand the reason for involvement, have their say in care planning and reviewing, understand their care plans and feel safer.

Through evaluating their feedback coupled with case auditing there were examples of excellent enduring practice with children to help them to understand their experiences and through aspiration support achieve positive outcomes.

Parents Views

During 2015/16 the feedback from 180 parents showed an overall feedback rate from reviews held in the year of 34%. This demonstrated IROs commitment to parental feedback yet it has to be acknowledged that there will be varying levels of parental participation at reviews given a changing care population whereby it may not be in the best interests for parents to continue to be involved in the actual review meeting.

99% of parents said that they understood the reason for involvement, 97% said that they had their say and 93% thought that their child was safer. 100% understood their child’s care plan.

There was one parent who said that he did not understand the reason for involvement and did not agree with health intervention that had been deemed necessary for his child. There were explanations given during care planning, reviewing and within the court process. The parent did say that they understood the care plan.
There were three parents who said that they did not have their say. Upon closer discussion with one parent they had attended the pre-proceedings meeting and been given an opportunity to give their views about their children. During the review they were encouraged to continue to do this and were aware of their children’s care plans.

One parent did not think that they were being listened to and wished their child to be cared for by them. Their views had been included within the review meeting and court statements and reasoning for the care plan had been explained.

One parent did not think that he had been given the chance to have their say because they wished to attend the review meeting that had been held with their child. Due the child not being in agreement with this a separate review meeting had been offered to the parent who had declined.

The very small minority of parents which equated to twelve parents who reported that they did not feel their child was safer stated that they did not believe that their child was ever unsafe in their care. Continued explanations about the reasons for children being removed were given to these parents by the IRO’s at review points and by Social Workers during care planning and court proceedings. The reasons given by the very few parents who said that their children were not safer in local authority care were fully evaluated and feedback was given to the parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive comments made by parents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand the reason we are involved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We are fully involved in the plans for our child”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I understand the care plan is for my child to stay in foster care. I would not cope with caring for my child”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We reached crisis point as a family and requested support”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you given the chance to have your say?</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I felt confident to give my views with my mother helping me”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We shared all of our views and thoughts”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I have worked well with the Social Worker and I can’t believe my child is coming home”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is what we are doing making you (your children) feel safer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am happy and agree with the care plan”</td>
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</table>
“The foster carers are keeping my child safe and well cared for”

Do you understand the plan?

“We are aware of the care plan and in agreement with it”

“I am clear about the plan and agree with it”

Positive comments made by IROs

*The parents* are aware the care plan is for the children to remain within foster care. They understand my role is to independently consider how the children's are being met.

*The parent* wants the children to be returned to her care after she has completed her alcohol detox. She understands my role is to ensure that the care plan is progressing, to listen to the children's views and ensure support is in place.

*The mother* is aware that my role is around ensuring that she is part of planning and that *her child’s* needs are being met whilst he is within care.

*Grandparents* understand that the plan is for the children to remain within their care long term.

The feedback obtained throughout the year demonstrated that parents and wider family members of children in care continue to be actively engaged, involved in the care planning for their child and understand the care planning and reviewing processes. Parents continue to be assisted to come to terms with difficult situations.

There were no themes for improvement from parents’ feedback. The IRS have evaluated that the service provides parents with appropriate opportunity for them to provide improvement ideas.

Foster Carers Views

During the year there were 184 foster carers views.

100% of foster carers understood the reason for involvement with the child they were caring for, thought that the child was safer and understood the child’s plan. 99% said that they had their say.

For the one carer who did not think that they had their say there was reassurance given that the care plan was right for the child to be restored to wider family.

Positive comments made foster carers

Do you understand the reason we are involved?
“I am aware of the reasons why the child in my care was taken into care”

“I understand the care circumstances of the child in my care and the reasons for the mother and baby placement I provide”

Are you given the chance to have your say?

“I was able to say my views in the meeting”

“I discussed my views with child in my care’s Social Worker”

Is what we are doing making you (your children) feel safer?

“I keep child in my care safe, he has a lot of anxiety around the community. I empower child in my care to keep safe and tackle these one at a time. The child in my care trusts me more now around keeping him safe”

“We have being working with child in my care around ensuring their safety and independence skills”

Do you understand the plan?

“We understand the plan is for the children to remain with us until independence and want this to occur”

“We agree to the long term plan”

Positive comments made by IROs

The foster carers understand the mother has mental health difficulties also that my role is to ensure that care planning is being pursued and the best interests of child in their care are being pursued.

The foster carer understands that the parenting assessment has been completed with concerns around the children returning to parents care, family members are being actively pursued and court proceedings have been initiated. She is happy that there will be ongoing direct work with the children around understanding their care plans and she will work alongside this to support the children.

The foster carer stated that she understands the care planning and is in agreement with caring for the child in their care until his father is able to care for the child in their care safely and would be willing to engage with the parent around the transition of child in their care to go back to live with their father.
Foster carers have a good knowledge of children’s previous experiences and needs, are actively involved in care planning and reviewing and understand the children’s plans and how these contribute to making the children safer.

2.5 Procedures for resolving concerns, including the local dispute resolution process and an analysis of the issues raised in dispute and the outcomes

The Care Planning Dispute Resolution Policy within North Lincolnshire outlines that a key function of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.

Within North Lincolnshire IROs had established collaborative, reflective and challenging working relationships with social workers and their managers. The IROs work with the local authority Complaints Officer and Children’s Advocate where necessary.

There had been 10 issues raised through the care planning dispute resolution policy. In these very few cases the IROs had agreed remedial timescales and monitored actions for resolution. There were three themes which were around the timeliness of a very small number of assessments/plans or sharing the assessment with the child and family prior to the review, placement moves and life story work. The Resolution of 6 of the issues had been reached informally at stage one by the IRO/social worker and their manager with 4 resolved formally at stage two by service managers.

Solutions had been expedited in all cases with no cases being taken up to the level of senior management. There had been no referral to the Children and Families Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass).

2.6 Any resource issues putting at risk the delivery of a quality service to all looked after children

There were no resource issues having such an affect.

2.7 Good practice

Services for children in care are a North Lincolnshire Council priority. The Council has demonstrated an enduring and strong commitment to children, young people and families, front line service delivery and the continuing finance to support this within the 2016/17 forward budget supporting Staying Put and other permanence options. North Lincolnshire Council has invested in family based care, supported accommodation, permanence through adoption and a range of support services which has included the development of Pathways, Horizons, Accommodation, Support and Education (PHASE) a support service for care leavers and a Children’s Campus transforming provision for children in care.
All looked after children had been reviewed in accordance with the timescales set out in the 2010 regulations and the statutory guidance. During monitoring of children’s cases additional reviews had been held where the IRO had determined this necessary due to a change/event in the child’s life which was significant such as a care plan change following court directions, major change to contact, a child frequently missing or in circumstances where a review must be held, for example where a placement change may affect an educational change. This timely and effective reviewing of children and young people’s care plans had underpinned the work and commitment of Social Workers to ensure that care planning had remained on track to meet the planned outcomes and permanency for children and young people. Effective practice had been demonstrated by Social Workers, care plans had been revised which included the risk analysis framework.

There were a range of excellent examples of pieces of creative direct work with children by IROs during pre-review visits and in reviews also by Social Workers and the Children and Young People’s Advocate in presenting children’s views at reviews. Creative methods such as the Three Houses/Islands and Fairy/Wizard tools, My IRO and Me tool, devising the review agenda on cue cards, using flipcharts, memory boxes, games, books, drawings, pictures and words. The impact of this was that the children’s understanding of their care plan, wishes, feelings and views were more clearly established and considered therefore enhancing their voice and influence in care plans and review decisions.

There was high quality engagement, participation and collaboration with children in care at the individual, service and strategic levels which continued to be a strong feature. The views and voices of looked after children and young people, their parents and carers had actively and consistently been sought across Children’s Services through assessment, intervention, planning and review via the Child and Family Feedback Framework. There was excellent feedback from children and young people. Widespread children knew the reason for involvement, had their say, felt safer and understood their care plans. The specific feedback established by the IRO service is outlined in section 2.4 above. This evidence based the highly effective practice by those involved with looked after children and throughout children’s journeys within the Children’s Services system.

There had been continued presentation of children on care case audits at the Case Audit Meeting. An impact had been the further development of the Personal Education Plan
as an aspirational e-PEP tool with strengthened PEP quality assurance which had been achieved through a multi-agency Education Visioning day. This has led to further improvement of the quality and focus of the PEP.

Advocacy continued to be a strong feature for children in care. There was a continued commitment to informing children and young people of their rights to advocacy and access to this provision by the IRS and others. During 2015/16, the Children and Young People’s Advocate had been involved with 64 children in care. In addition, the Advocate had continued to make quarterly visits to children and young people placed in out of area placements during the year as an important element to monitoring of these placements in addition to statutory practices and to inform service commissioning. The children had reported that they were positive about their placements and were evaluated as being safeguarded. An impact had been that the Advocate was an additional contact point for children placed out of area.

All looked after children aged 10 to 18 years had completed Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) preventative and self-protection work through workshops or individual work. This had primarily been delivered by the targeted CSE Families are Safe supported Transformed (FaSST) service.

There had been oversight given to children in care who had gone missing at the individual case level and at a strategic level to identify and act upon any patterns, themes and trends. All children who went missing during the year had been offered an independent return interview by the Missing Children’s Advocate and the annual take up rate was 95%.

Systems for the monitoring and oversight of children in care who are placed outside of the local authority were thorough and robust. This included the External Placement and Complex Care Panel which oversaw children’s cases when an external placement was being considered, pre placement checks and contract monitoring and oversight.

There had been continued collaborative working between the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service Children’s (Cafcass) and IRO services. A third joint Humber area Cafcass/IRO annual event was hosted in North Lincolnshire in 2015 with a local Judge as guest speaker which focussed on how to make a difference in tackling any delay around section 20 accommodation and permanency. The impact of this was that the IRS had worked collaboratively with Social Work Services to make sure that care planning and reviewing focussed on maximising permanency.

The North Lincolnshire Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP) 2013 – 16 sets out the partnership commitment, strategic priorities and ambitions to improving the safety, health and wellbeing of children and young people with the vision of safe children, supported families and transformed lives. Children, young people and families are a key priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board and the CYPP was set within the context of
the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The CYPP communicates strong commitment to integrate services through integrated ways of working with children, young people and families as central. The transformation ethos of right service, right time, right place and right management is a key component which is also embedded in the Early Help Safeguarding Strategy due to its integral part of the wider CYPP. Children in care are a priority group within the three identified ambitions – integrated approach to services with a priority focus on – 9 months to 2 years and young people 13 to 19 years; raising attainment and aspiration and improving family prosperity in addition to safeguarding children and young people and the strategic priorities of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). Underpinning plans within a delivery framework were outlined.

The Children and Young People’s Partnership as a stakeholder/reference group is responsible for bringing together the key priorities and ambitions under the auspices of the CYPP with a range of strategic partnerships and boards with responsibilities for delivering the areas of primary focus outlined within the CYPP. Key boards relating to children in care included the Health and Wellbeing Board and Corporate Parenting Board with the Children in Care Council as a stakeholder reference group. The CYPP, Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy and LSCB Business Plan priorities were distinctively communicated to staff during Director led communication events and newsletters and through other activities such as the market place event where services layout information about their roles/responsibilities and showcase their work.

The Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Plan 2015-2017 set out what success would like in terms of the outcomes to be achieved and priority actions for children in care and care leavers. There was a children and young people friendly version of the plan which had been devised by the Children in Care Council.

The Multi-Agency Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership group chaired by the Director of People and comprising of senior and responsible officers had monitored the plan taking a lead on performance and reporting on its progress to the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and attended by Elected Members, the Director of People, Senior Leadership Team and partners had a significant impact in raising the profile of children in care in the council and with partners and continued to build a strong council and cross agency commitment to children in care. It demonstrated a clear focus on leadership and innovation in the corporate parenting role and ensured service pledges were implemented.

The Board’s impact can be seen in the development of Aspirations Days through a series of visits, employability sessions and events. This has included visits to the Territorial Army, Police, Fire Service, Café Indie, Normanby Hall and a local construction site. Consolidation work has been undertaken with the young people on qualifications and aspirations building on their enthusiasm following the visits/sessions. Further events are
planned into 2016 with Leisure services, the Police and Fire Service. There had been the creation of two new apprenticeship placements at Scunthorpe General Hospital specifically for children in care/care leavers with a young person in one of these apprenticeships.

The Children in Care Council remained integral to the involvement and voice of children in care and care leavers affecting service developments through representatives attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board and meeting regularly with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Director of People, IROs, Children and Young Persons and Missing Children Advocates, Social Workers, Fostering service, Training officers and senior officers from across the council and its partners. Recent examples of influence and involvement had been in producing a film for training school staff, recruitment of foster carers and staff, design and development of procedures, forms, guides, posters and leaflets also a presentation at a World Social Work day event.

Partnership and collaboration activities undertaken throughout the year involved regular Children in Care Council meetings and activities (BIZZ and the GPK - TEENS and EPIC sub groups) the Children’s Campus group meetings, targeted events such as the Awesome Xmas Factor, a Space of My Own Art Show and contribution to the Shaping the Future Foster Carer events. The Children in Care Council continued links with the Youth Council and their strands around ‘Be Unique’ and LGBT. The IROs continued links with the Children in Care Council through consulting, supporting activities and disseminating publicity material for new members and events.

The fourth annual North Lincolnshire Adoption Round Table event was held in 2016 with national speakers. The event aimed at sharing and further developing good practice and covered updates on the Family Justice System led by a Judge, Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders legal update and implications for practice given by a Barrister, Attachment and Impact of Self given by a national consultant trainer and Regionalisation outlined by the regional Adoption Consortium Manager.

Social Workers in North Lincolnshire benefited from an excellent North Lincolnshire Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy 2013/16 which complemented the aspirations in the CYPP to ensure a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce who can effectively fulfil their duties working in partnership with children, young people and families.

There were excellent Children’s Services and LSCB training programmes in place including attachment, life story work, court skills, preparing reports for the adoption panel, pre-birth assessments, neglect, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, Prevent, and domestic abuse to continually develop the contemporary knowledge, skills and expertise in working with children in care.
A summary of the impact and outcomes for children in care and care leavers over the past year is:

- The very large majority of children in care live in stable family placements which are helping them to achieve positive outcomes. Long term placement stability was at 83.8% this year and higher than last also higher than the latest national average of 67%. The % of children with 3 or placement moves in the last year continued to be lower than the national average and statistical neighbour comparators.
- The percentage of children in care placed out of the area at 26.7% was a decrease on the previous year and remained lower than national and statistical neighbour comparators.
- There had been increased numbers of foster carers and prospective adopters also Pasture (supported flats) and PHASE (mixture of accommodation for care leavers) had built on placement choice for children and young people in care and local accommodation provision for care leavers.
- Care proceedings average timescales had substantially decreased from 51 weeks in 2011/12 to 21.6 weeks this year instilling timely permanence.
- All children had an up to date Health Plan. There was a quality assurance process in place and children's views were incorporated into plans.
- All children in care over 5 years old who had been in care for over a year had an annual Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completed by their foster carer. Children assessed as having a high level of need had been prioritised by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- Children in care missed very few days of education through school absence which was 2.7% of children and well below both the national and statistical neighbour averages.
- The very large majority of children in care made two or more levels of progress in reading and writing at Key Stage 2. The majority of children in care attained level 4 at Key Stage 2 or above in Maths and the very large majority made two or more levels of progress.
- There were 20% of children in care who achieved the gold standard of 5+ A*-C including English and Maths at Key Stage 4. This was significantly above the national and statistical neighbour averages.
- All school age children had an up to date PEP. There had been the development of the ePEP during the year which had also been introduced into colleges. This had impacted by further improving the quality of the plan.
- Very few children in care in North Lincolnshire commit offences at 4.4% and this continued to be lower than the national average.
• There were 75% of children leaving care over the age of 16 who had remained looked after until their 18th birthday. This reflected the focus on ensuring young people are able to 'stay put' in their placement and are supported to stay there as long as is needed. Where young people had left care prior to reaching 18 as part of their plan, it has been due to being supported to return to their family.

• Care Leavers in Employment, Education and Training was at 67.3% of care leavers aged 19 – 21 compared with the most recent national comparison of 48% and statistical neighbours at 49%.

2.8 Update on developments in 2014/15 and future developments for 2015/16

In the previous annual report the developments for 2015/16 were as follows with an update outlined:

• Evaluate the formal IRS written pre-review consultation forms for children and young people to modernize them working with children and young people to do this.
  The written pre-review consultation forms for children and young people had been revised taking into account children and young people’s comments to IROs. Available electronic systems that could replace written consultation forms had been explored and evaluated for usage by the IRS. Following a full evaluation it was decided that the currently available electronic systems would incur the usage of another database in addition to the one currently used and incur additional administrative processes. The potential for further development of the Child and Family Feedback Framework outweighed introducing a new recording system that would be out of syncronisation with the wider Children’s Services.

• Further develop cohesion of the creative tools used by IROs during reviewing practice to concentrate on how IROs evidence base effective practice with children and young people.
  Creative methods had been used by IROs such as the Three Houses/Islands and Fairy/Wizard tools, My IRO and Me tool, devising the review agenda on cue cards, using flipcharts, memory boxes, games, books, drawings, pictures and words to evidence base their effective practice. The impact of this had been that children understood their care plans, also their wishes, feelings and views were more clearly established and considered therefore enhancing their voice and influence in care planning and reviewing practice.

• Provide updates for foster carers about reviewing practice developments linking into current communication channels including the foster carers bi-monthly information meetings.
The IRS attended the Shaping for the Future Foster Carer events held during the year. This facilitated cross council working for further improvement for example to payments. Subsequently the IRS attended a bi-monthly foster carers meeting to facilitate updates and enhance two way communications. This has enhanced communication channels and collaborative working.

The future developments for 2016/17 are:

- Integrate strengths based approaches into IRO practice.

- Explore how to develop efficient recording practice and capture the creative methods used with children and young people by IROs more effectively and linking these into the child’s case file through utilising agile and innovative IT and digital approaches.