

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

Meeting to be held on 17 September 2019

### **Report of the Head of Service – Safeguarding, Inspection and Audit**

Electoral Division affected: All
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The Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2018-19  
(Appendix 'A' refers)

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#### **Executive Summary**

The Independent Reviewing Service is made up of 45 (full time equivalent) Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) working across Lancashire. They are responsible for chairing Looked After Child Reviews and Child Protection Conferences. Their work in respect of Looked After Children is carried out under statutory guidance – 'The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook'. This sets out the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer in quality assuring the care planning and review process for children and young people in care, and to ensure that their wishes and feelings are given due consideration. In Lancashire the Independent Reviewing Officer role is undertaken jointly alongside the Child Protection Conference Chair function. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service produces an Annual Report which sets out service performance and developments within the year as well as future objectives. Since January 2019 Children's Services have been working to address the findings of the August 2018 Ofsted inspection via our 'Getting to Good' Plan. The 2018/19 Annual Report sets out the progress made to date and further work planned.

#### **Recommendation**

The Board is asked to review and consider the Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report and the objectives set by the Service, and to provide such feedback as appropriate.

#### **Background and Advice**

The Independent Reviewing Officer Annual report highlights that although the number of children and young people looked after or subject to a Child Protection Plan increased during 2018/19 a very high proportion of these receive a timely review within statutory timescales. Almost all children and young people participate in their review, either directly or indirectly.

The 2018 Ofsted inspection highlighted the need to strengthen critical challenge amongst first line managers and Independent Reviewing Officers to achieve and maintain consistent delivery of good support services. This finding is reflected within the 'Getting to Good' improvement plan and has included joint development work between first line managers and Independent Reviewing Officers to identify and agree good practice standards in the assessment, planning and review of support to children and young people. The Independent Reviewing Officer report identifies that the service has significantly increased the number of challenges made by Independent Reviewing Officers this year compared to last, although further work is proposed to ensure this is consistently applied across the service.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service has strengthened its work in respect of monitoring the welfare and progression of plans for children and young people outside of the formal (6 monthly) statutory review. During 2018/19 mid-point monitoring was undertaken in respect of 85% of looked after children and young people (as some reviews take place on short timescales it would not be possible or appropriate to undertake mid-point monitoring within 100% of review periods). The Service has also strengthened the internal audit process by which the line managers of Independent Reviewing Officers review the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer role within a case file, with an emphasis on the impact for the child/young person.

The Improvement Plan also directs improvements in respect of the health and education planning/provision for looked after children and young people. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service has provided updated guidance to Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that all health and education planning needs are considered within each review. A multi-agency working group has been established to direct improvements in respect of the Health Assessment process for looked after children and young people. This is beginning to show improvements with 85% of looked after children and young people receiving a Health Assessment. Further work is planned to address the timeliness of these Health Assessments and ensure the identified needs are fully understood within the review. The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has also been updated to ensure that looked after children and young people receive well-planned support for their education.

Achieving permanence for looked after children and young people is a key objective within the improvement plan and for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service. Permanence is defined in respect of legal permanence, placement permanence and emotional permanence (stability/security). This will include long term fostering, Special Guardianship as well as children/ young people being reunited with their families and statutory orders being discharged where it is judged safe and appropriate to do so. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service has undertaken work through the year to ensure that a consistent threshold of what represents good planning towards permanence is understood and applied. Permanence performance is now monitored closely through a 'Permanence Tracker' and business reports and the findings used to identify areas for further work. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service has changed the way that children looked after reviews are recorded to ensure that the delivery of permanence is closely monitored through the review process. Helping children and young people to develop a clear sense of their life story and identity is a key component of achieving permanence and to this end the

Independent Reviewing Officer Service is contributing to work to ensure that all children and young people with a plan of permanence receive a Life Story Book. To further support this work guidance has been established to direct how placements at risk of breaking down should be supported, or lessons learned if they do break down, via Stability and Disruption Meetings.

With regard to future objectives it is recognised that there is more to be done to ensure that first line managers and Independent Reviewing Officers challenge and direct practice to achieve consistently good service and we will continue to address this through joint training and development this year. Children's Services is committed to developing a Family Safeguarding Model and this will change how the Independent Reviewing Officer Service delivers looked after child and child protection reviews, with an emphasis on working *with* (as opposed to *doing to*) families to co-produce planned support. A focus on achieving permanence and supporting this through Life Story Books for looked after children will be a priority.