



Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2018-2019

Looked After Children and Safeguarding

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1. Executive Summary

This is the Annual Report of the Lancashire Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service for the period from the 1st April 2018 to the 31st March 2019.

The statutory requirement for this report is found in the Children and Young Person's Act, 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010, (The IRO Handbook). The report will be presented to the senior leadership team, Corporate Parenting Board and the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) and will be available as a public document.

In 2018/19 the IRO Service operated with 45 full-time equivalent (FTE) IROs. IRO caseloads have increased by 3.6% since 2017/18 with the average caseload for 2018/19 being 77.9. Quality and Review (Q&R) managers have consistently monitored caseloads throughout the year and have worked hard to ensure that caseloads have been equitable across the county. This average caseload is a significant achievement and has greatly increased IRO capacity to fulfil their role in line with the IRO Handbook. Three posts are currently covered by agency workers due to maternity leave.

The number of Children Looked After (CLA) in Lancashire increased by 7.5% during 2018/2019. Performance for reviews held in timescale has decreased from 97.3% to 96.8%. Positively the participation of children and young people in their CLA review has increased from 99.1% in 2017/18 to 99.8% in 2018/19. Out of the cohort of 2,025 CLA, 12 children did not participate or contribute to their review. This cohort includes those children under the age of 4 who may be too young to participate in their review.

In the CLA population, performance for reviews held in timescale is 96.8%. Out of the cohort of 2,025 children who had a review during the period, 40 reviews were held outside of the required timescale. The participation of children and young people in their CLA review is 99.8%. Out of the cohort of 2,025 children who had a review during the period, 12 children did not participate in their review.

The number of children subject to child protection plans (CPPs) has increased by 10% from 1,243 in March 2018 to 1,368 in March 2019. The rate in Lancashire is now at 50.1 per 10,000 child population, which is lower than the regional average (March 2018: 53.7), and is just above our statistical neighbours (March 2018: 48.6) and the national average (March 2018: 45.3).

There has been a slight improvement in performance in respect of review child protection conferences (RCPCs) held within timescale from 94% in 2017/18 to 95.7% 2018/19. This performance remains good and is above the national (2017/2018, 90.2%), North West average (2017/2018, 90.8%) and our statistical neighbours (2017/2018, 94.6%). There are a number of reasons for conferences being outside of timescale, these are detailed in the main body of the report but it is important to note that Lancashire continue to implement a zero tolerance to conferences going ahead if the report has not been completed and shared with parents prior to the conference.

For CP cases, there has been a consistent rate of initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) being convened each month in the last year. In March 2018, there were 144 ICPCs and in March 2019 173 ICPCs held in the month, in December 2018 there was a dip to 98 ICPC's being started, this could be explained by the holiday period.

The proportion of CP plans over two years duration has increased to 4.0%, with 71 children on a CP plan for over 2 years. This is higher than our statistical neighbours (2017/2018 3.6%) and the national average (2017/2018: 3.4%).

Alongside this performance, the proportion of children made subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time increased slightly from 20.9% in 2017/2018 to 21.3% in 2018/2019. A

more meaningful indicator is the number of children subject to a plan for a second or subsequent time in the last twelve months. This has also increased from 6.5% to 7.5%, the possible reasons for this are discussed within the main body of the report.

Along with other IRO meetings, the Minute Taking Service (MTS) completed an average of 16.31 meetings per month during 2018/2019, this has increased from 11.16 in 2017/18. This does not include the CLA reviews and other meetings held by the IRO Service where a minute taker is not present.

During 2018/2019 the IRO Service reviewed the way that IROs use the Problem Resolution process (PR) introduced in 2017/2018. This change introduced two distinct processes, firstly the PR process which focuses on care planning challenge from the IRO and secondly Management Alert (MA) challenge which focuses on compliance issues on a case. In 2018/2019 there was a total of 1705 IRO challenges, 421 PR'S and 1284 MA's. This is a significant increase of 222% in comparison to a total of 767 IRO challenges recorded in 2017/2018. Weekly data reports are produced which highlight all PR and MA initiated that week and all outstanding challenges which are tracked to ensure they are completed. This has significantly reduced the numbers of outstanding PR's and MA's over 4 weeks. It is recognised and accepted that the service needs to evidence the impact of these challenges on improving outcomes for children and young people which needs to be the focus for 2019/2020.

To strengthen the IRO role and improve learning the service is participating in learning circles, for both IROs and Q&R Managers, the latter being held jointly with front-line managers from Children's Social Care (CSC). These are facilitated by the Advanced Practitioners, with a focus on understanding and delivering effective challenge, good practice in relation to assessment and planning and how to support an effective review process. This work is scheduled to continue to provide a forum for joint learning and development between front-line managers and IROs based on themes identified from a range of sources, for example, performance data, audit activity and live observations of practice. Lancashire has also supported IROs in attending the Advanced IRO qualification at Edge Hill University, with 6 IROs having completed this, with a further 4 currently on the course.

Due to feedback back from CP/RCP conference being very low during 2017/2018 a pilot took place during March 2019. During the 4 week period a total of 248 ICPC's and RCPC's took place and from these meetings a total of 148 questionnaires were completed. This equates to a 62% return, this is a large increase when compared to 2017/18 when the return over the full year equated to 2.1%. The method applied during the 4 week pilot has therefore been successful in terms of increasing the number of feedback forms completed. From the 148 questionnaires returned 58 related to initial conferences and 90 related to review conferences.

During 2018/2019 there was a significant reduction (60%) in the number of appeals against CP/RCP conference decisions from 10 during both 2017-18 and 2016-17. Of these only 1 was upheld, again a reduction from 2 in 2017-18 and 7 in 2016-17. This evidences that both procedures are being followed and CP decisions being accepted during conferences which supports good practice.

2. Recommendations from the IRO Annual Report 2018/19

- **Improve S47 audits**

Work with CSC to ensure that all required S47 enquiries are sent to the IRO service to ensure that audits are completed. Work with LCS to determine whether the IRO audit can be incorporated into the Section 47 document on LCS.

Update: Throughout the year regular reminders have been sent via the Weekly Brief to remind CSC of the process for Section 47 audits. Targeted discussions have been held with specific teams and areas where the process has consistently not been followed.

Overall the amount of Section 47 audits sent has increased, however this is still not to an acceptable level.

Discussions have taken place and it has been agreed that the Section 47 audit will be incorporated onto the Section 47 document on LCS, however the timescale for this is not currently known.

- **Embed the use of consultation documents to improve participation in child protection conferences and children looked after reviews**

IROs to continue to promote the use of consultation documents for all CLA and children subject to a child protection plan to ensure that children's voices are heard and they are able to contribute to the plans in place for them. The IRO service will work with CSC to ensure that the importance of children and young people being fully involved in conference and review processes is fully embedded. This will be achieved by Q&R Manager's attending CSC team development sessions, through liaison meetings and through information provided on briefings to ensure the consistent use of tools to support children's participation, particularly in child protection conferences.

Update: During the last 12 months, more 'All About Me' consultation documents have been produced and sent to the localities. At all cluster meetings, Q&R managers are reminding CSC of the importance of social workers using consultation documents with children and young people prior to all reviews and conferences. A crib sheet has also been created that will be attached to all ICPC requests, reminding social workers of what is required prior to conference; including participation and preparation. Q&R managers have also been working with Gavin Redhead to identify Participation Champions for the IRO service.

- **Improve child protection plans and ensure they are SMART**

The IRO service to oversee child protection plans to ensure they are SMART, reflecting risks and strengths/protective factors.

Update: The IRO's have continued to have oversight of CP plans after the first core group. The service has found this difficult to embed in practice for the reasons outlined further in the report, however it continues to be an expected standard and is part of the IRO supervision audits. Further training has been offered to all new IRO's and managers across Lancashire to embed this practice and SMART plans continue to be a theme of the purposeful practice workshops co-ordinated and delivered by the Advanced Practitioner service. There is currently further training being developed to commence in summer 2019 to support the use of a strength based approach.

- **Ensure consistent and high standard of practice from the IRO service**

The IRO service have devised an audit template to be used within IRO supervision. This is consistent with Lancashire's audit framework and the Ofsted grading judgements. This will ensure consistency of IRO oversight of practice and IRO learning and development needs.

Update: The audit tool has been embedded for over a year and is used for all IRO supervisions. The completed audits are returned to the audit team who complete an audit analysis. There has been delay in receiving the audit analysis however there is a plan to receive a quarterly report that evidences the findings of the audits and will inform our training and learning needs and areas for development. The Q&R managers have found this a very useful tool within supervision as it has evidenced the learning needs of the individual IRO's and areas of good practice to be shared in reflective supervisions.

- **Improve outcomes for children through the problem resolution and management alert system**

Ensure that the learning from problem resolution and management alerts, including themes and trends on a district/locality footprint, is used to further drive practice improvement.

Update: The IRO Service have continued to challenge concerns in relation to compliance, practice and decisions relating to the care plan. Formal challenge from the IRO Service has increased over 200% this year. IRO's during 2019/2020 need to ensure that their challenge is consistent and effective in improving outcomes for children and young people.

- **Improve the feedback process for parents / carers**

Develop an effective feedback process for parents / carers who attend child protection conferences and CLA reviews that is more user friendly, more accessible and improves impact on service delivery.

Update: Following poor returns of parent / carer feedback forms in 2017/18 the IRO service decided to take a different approach in 2018/19, in an attempt to increase the rate of returns and quality of feedback provided. A 4 week pilot has been undertaken where the views of every parent / carer, at every child protection conference (where appropriate), were sought directly from the parent/carer immediately following the conference. This has generated 148 responses, providing a significant amount of feedback. Due to the success of this pilot the service will now use this method to seek feedback bi-annually. It is hoped that by analysing the feedback the service will be able to make improvements to the quality of service provided to families and improve outcomes for children and young people.

- **Improve the performance in respect of health assessments, PEPs and educational achievement for CLA**

Promote IRO oversight of health assessments, up to date PEP's and educational achievement during CLA reviews to improve performance.

Update: In relation to oversight of health assessments, PEPs and educational achievement for CLA – a template for CLA reviews with guidance has been produced for IRO's and implemented in October 2018. The guidance is clear about what is expected in terms of oversight for these areas by IRO's for Children Looked After. Furthermore, due to the concerns about performance regarding health assessments a project group was established in October 2018 to improve performance and health outcomes for children looked after in general. The project involved consultation with health leads, medical practitioners, CSC, IRO Service and business support. The project has identified areas of improvement and the redesign is ongoing in terms of implementing the actions identified.

- **Improve early permanence**

The IRO service will promote early permanence and challenge when there is delay in permanence planning.

Update: Planning for permanence has continued to be a key area of development for the IRO service, with the aim of ensuring looked after children have a plan for permanence by their second CLA review and if not, there are clear actions and timescales to achieve this. This is being achieved and progressed in conjunction with the 'Permanence Action Plan' and 'Getting to Good Plan'. The first step was to clarify the definition of permanence so as a Local Authority we were clear about the definition and the difference between

children having plans for permanence and plans of permanence. A template for CLA reviews for IRO's to complete has been developed with guidance around permanence and what needs to be included in the review and decisions around achieving permanence. A permanence tracker has been developed so that we have a clear understanding of current performance and which children do not have a plan of permanence. This will enable IRO's and managers to track the progress and to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay. Work is ongoing around further improvements to the outcomes form to enable us to capture further data around permanence as currently some data has to be manually obtained. Permanence workshops have been provided to IRO's and CSC staff to ensure everyone has a clear and shared understanding of permanence and expectations.

3. The IRO Service

Lancashire's IRO service was established in 1999. IROs are responsible for chairing CLA reviews, CP/RCP conferences and a range of specialist strategy meetings, including suspected cases of fabricated/induced illness, stage 2 missing from home intervention meetings, Placement disruption meetings, CLA who display sexually harmful behaviours towards other children and cases of serious self-harm of children who are looked after.

The IRO service also undertakes Regulation 44 visits for LCC residential children's homes, monthly cross service case file audits as part of their quality assurance role and Section 47 audits in those cases where concerns have been substantiated but the child is judged to be no longer at risk of significant harm.

3.1 Service Structure

The IRO service sits within the Safeguarding, Inspection & Audit Service (SIA) within the Start-Well arm of the Operations and Delivery Services of the County Council's Children's Services. It is independent of the line management structure of the locality social work teams, therefore maintaining the independence of the IROs.

The IRO service is made up of a Head of Service, Safeguarding Manager, 6.5 FTE Quality Review Managers and 45 FTE IRO posts; 44 FTE posts chair reviews for CLA and CP/RCP conferences and 1 FTE post is dedicated to the review of Lancashire's approved foster carers. Five of the posts are held by male staff and eight team members identify themselves as from a BME background.

The service mirrors the locality footprint of CSC. There are two IRO teams in the Central Locality, three teams in the East Locality and one team in the North Locality. This helps to strengthen local relationships whilst also improving consistency of practice and challenge. The IROs participate in monthly team meetings / workshops bi-annual development days and have begun to attend monthly learning circles and development events with CSC colleagues. The IRO team structure chart is found at Appendix 1.

3.2 Post Qualifying Experience

All IROs in Lancashire are required to have a minimum of five years post qualifying experience. They have all worked in statutory childcare settings and several have previous management experience. A detailed table of the level of post qualifying experience and length of service of IROs and Q&R managers in Lancashire can be found in Appendix 2.

3.3 Staff Recruitment and Retention

During 2018/19, the service has been fully staffed, any long term sickness absence has been covered by agency staff where possible.

In April 2018, the service was made up of 97.73% permanent staff and 2.27% agency staff. In March 2019, there are now three agency workers within the team who are covering maternity leave for a twelve month period (6.66%).

During 2018/19, three permanent IROs left the service: one secured internal promotion and two workers left to pursue other opportunities.

3.4 Caseloads

The current average IRO caseload is 81 with a yearly average of 77.9, which has risen by 3.6% since March 2018, when the average was 74.3.

The number of CLA has increased by 7.5% from 1,968 in March 2018 to 2,128 in March 2019. Lancashire's rate of CLA per 10,000 population is now 79.2 (March 2018). This is lower than the regional rate (March 2018: 91) but is higher than our statistical neighbours (March 2018: 67.1) and the national average (March 2017: 64).

The number of children subject to CP Plans has increased by 9.1% from 1,243 in March 2018 to 1,368 in March 2019. The rate in Lancashire is 50.1 per 10,000 child population (March 2018), which is lower than the regional average (March 2018: 53.7), but higher than our statistical neighbours (March 2018: 48.6) and the national average (March 2018: 453.3).

3.5 Fostering IRO

Foster carers are reviewed by a dedicated fostering IRO within the IRO Service. During 2018/2019, there has been a continued focus on encouraging the attendance of foster carers at their reviews, including connected carers and this has continued to remain at a good level. It has also continued to be standard practice that a representative from the Fostering Service, who has knowledge of the foster carers attends the review.

The countywide calendar continues to ensure that no more than six foster carer reviews are booked on any one day, and there are no more than 12 reviews in a week.

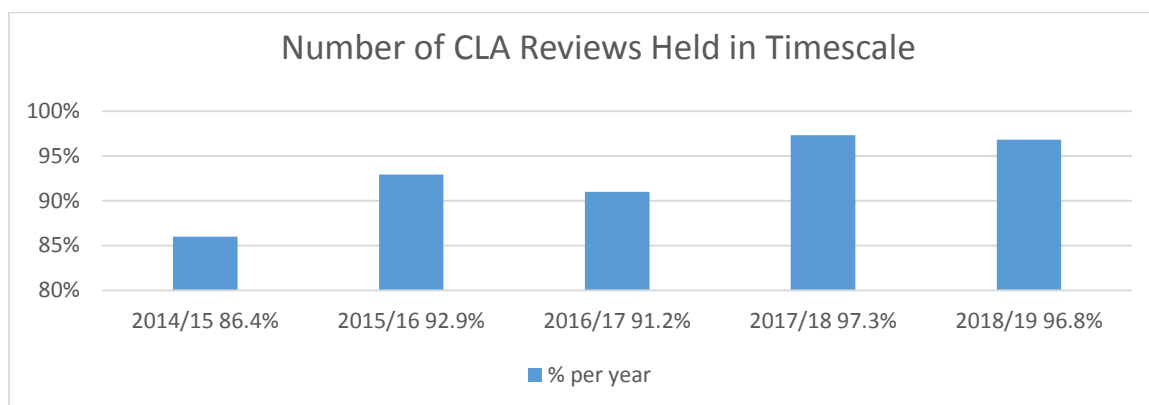
In addition to this, in the last 12 months it has been agreed to introduce an additional day of reviews once per month solely for reviews required following allegations regarding the foster carers. This has been established to ensure that the reviews can be held in a timely manner and also to clearly separate out the different reviews.

Within the last 12 months further prompts have been added to the agenda template to ensure that the paramount issues are captured for every review. A significant development within the last 12 months is that all of the reviews are now minuted by Business Support. This allows the fostering IRO to focus more on interacting in the review rather than recording notes. This has also had a positive impact in ensuring that there is no backlog in completing the write up and distribution of the reviews. Work is still being undertaken to analyse the data in relation to the foster carer reviews to ensure that these are all being completed within timescale, and provide some narrative where this has not been possible.

4. Performance

4.1 Looked After Children

4.1.1 CLA Reviews in Timescale (Ni66)



Performance has decreased slightly in respect of the proportion of reviews completed within the requisite timescale. (2017/18: 97.3% compared to 2018/19: 96.8%). Out of the cohort of 2,128 children who had a review during the period, 40 reviews were held outside of the required timescale. This was due to a number of factors as follows:

- IRO human error
- Late notification of looked after status by CSC
- IRO sickness absence
- Lack of Social Worker availability
- Changes in Social Worker
- Changes in IRO

When taken as a proportion of the total number of reviews held (4,727) performance rises to 98.1%.

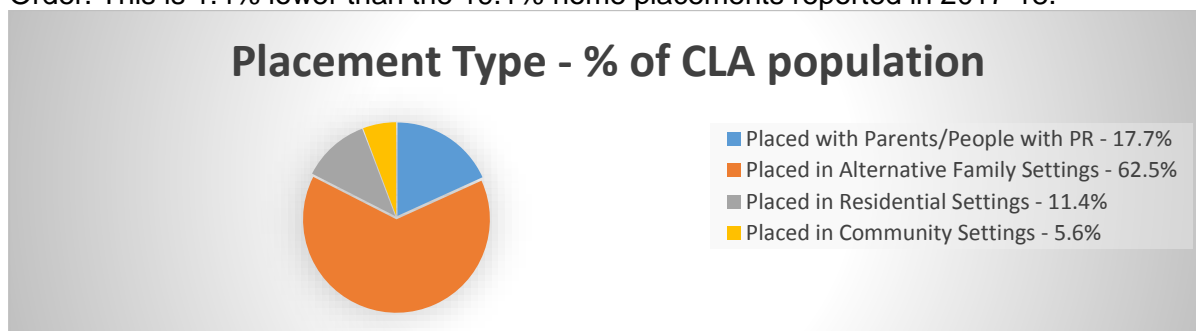
Note: this data is subject to confirmation once the CIN census has been finalised.

4.1.2 Children Looked After Placed outside of Lancashire

There are a total of 473 children placed outside of the local authority area. This figure represents 22.2% of the CLA population, which is almost a 1% increase from the previous year. (March 2018: 21.4%).

4.1.3 Placements of Children Looked After

Of the 2,128 CLA after by Lancashire County Council: 62.5% are placed within an alternate family setting (1,332 with foster carers, 52 with prospective adopters), which is a 1.5% decrease from the previous year (March 2018: 64%). 11.4% (243 children) are placed within residential settings, (including Lancashire's residential children's homes, external residential settings, residential schools, secure units, hospitals and prisons). 5.6% (121 children) are placed in other community settings such as supported accommodation projects, supported tenancies and supported lodgings. 17.7% (378 children) are placed with their own parent (or someone who has parental responsibility for them) either via a Care Order or Interim Care Order. This is 1.4% lower than the 19.1% home placements reported in 2017-18.

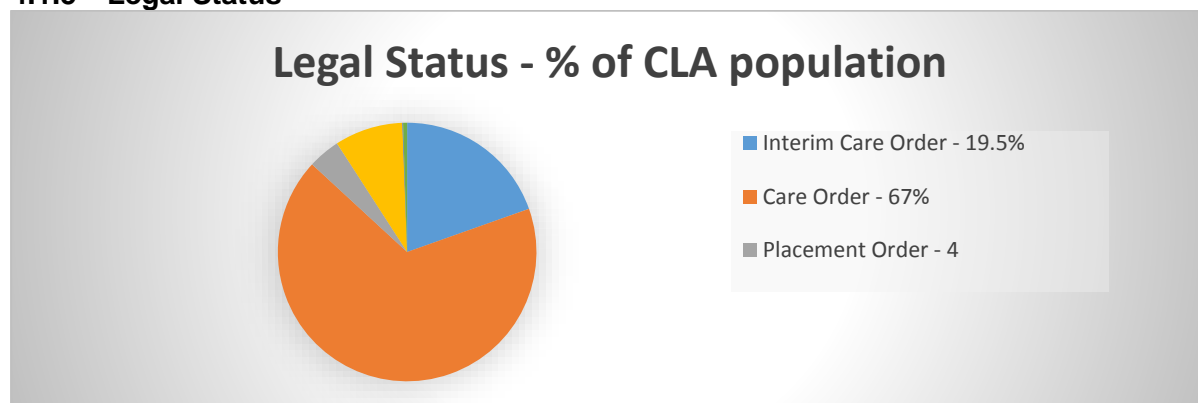


4.1.4 Placement Stability

The percentage of children having three or more placements within 2018/19 was 8.8% compared with 7.9% in 2017-18. Performance is more effective than the regional (March 2018: 10%), national (March 2018: 10%) and statistical neighbours averages (March 2018: 9.8%).

The percentage of children living in the same placement for at least two years was 69.3% in 2018–19 compared to 73.7% in 2017–18. Performance is slightly lower than the regional average (March 2018: 71%) and statistical neighbours (March 2018: 71.4%) and the national average (March 2018: 70).

4.1.5 Legal Status



During 2018/19, the proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders has risen slightly, however, the proportion of children subject to Care Orders has remained the same and the proportion of children subject to Placement Orders and Section 20 Accommodation has decreased slightly compared to 2017/18.

4.1.6 Achieving Permanence

Planning for permanence has continued to be a key area of development for the IRO service, with the aim of ensuring CLA have a plan for permanence by their second CLA review and if not, there are clear actions and timescales to achieve this. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review. Permanence is the framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence – which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

This is being achieved and progressed in conjunction with the 'Permanence Action Plan' and 'Getting to Good Plan'. The first step was to clarify the definition of permanence so as a Local Authority we were clear about the definition and the difference between children having plans for permanence and plans of permanence. A template for CLA reviews for IRO's has been developed with guidance around permanence and what needs to be included in the review and decisions around achieving permanence. A permanence tracker has been developed so that we have a clear understanding of current performance and which children do not have a plan of permanence. This will enable IRO's and managers to track the progress and to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay. Work is ongoing around further improvements to the CLA review outcomes form to enable us to capture further data around permanence as currently some data has to be manually obtained. Permanence workshops have been provided to IRO's and CSC staff to ensure everyone has a clear and shared understanding of permanence and expectations.

In terms of current performance:

During 2018/2019 385 children and young people became looked after and had their 2nd review. Of these children and young people 277 had a permanence plan agreed at this 2nd review (72%). At this time, 360 (93.5%) have now got an agreed plan for permanence.

There are a few reasons for the figure for permanence being agreed at the 2nd review including some cases assessments were still being undertaken to determine the primary permanence plan. A large number of these were due to the outcomes form for children looked after reviews, asking the question around plans of permanence at the second review rather than a plan for permanence. This form is currently in the process of being amended so this can be recorded correctly, in addition Lancashire have produced a permanence policy which clearly defines what permanence is for children looked after.

There are a few reasons for this including some cases were and are still undergoing assessments to determine the primary permanence plan. A large number of these were due to the outcomes form for children looked after reviews, asking the question around plans of permanence at the second review rather than a plan for permanence. This form is currently in the process of being amended so this can be recorded correctly, in addition Lancashire have produced a permanence policy which clearly defines what permanence is for children looked after.

4.1.7 Participation

The majority of CLA either attend their review meeting or participate in the review process. Performance in relation to participation has risen from 99.1% during 2017-18 to 99.8% in 2018-19. Out of the Ni66 cohort of 2,025 CLA, (including children Under 4 who may be too young to participate in their review), 12 children did not participate in or contribute to their review.

The IRO service plays a key role in promoting the child's voice within their review processes. One of the tools used in Lancashire is the Mind of My Own application. During 2018/19 302 Mind of My Own statements were sent by children looked after or children in need of protection to share their views, make complaints, share good news or ask for support.

4.1.8 Health Assessments

The IRO service continue to review the health needs of CLA and whether they have had a health assessment. There has been an improvement in respect of performance in respect of the proportion of CLA with an up to date health assessment. Currently as of 31 March 2019 83.6% of CLA have an up to date health assessment (March 2017: 93%, March 2018: 77%). It should be noted that this figure does include 58 initial health assessments that haven't been completed yet but are within the statutory timescale.

Due to the concerns about performance in this area in 2018 and the need for this to continue to improve and be sustained, a health assessment redesign project was set up to address the issue. The project was established to improve health outcomes for children looked after and ensure that outcomes from health assessments, SDQs and special educational needs and disability are factors taken into account in multi-agency care planning. The work involved consultation with health leads, medical practitioners, children's social care, the IRO Service and business support.

The project started on 4th October 2018 and finished stage one with a findings report published in February 2019. A redesign workshop with colleagues from health and social care was held in March 2019 and the action plan is currently being implemented. Some interim improvements have already been agreed and put in place.

The IRO service will continue to monitor and review the health needs of children through the statutory reviews and case monitoring. It is essential that the IRO service challenges robustly regarding any delays in health assessments being completed and that the health needs of looked after children are reflecting in the care plan. The project has also examined the escalation process and this is being established so that services including IRO's can escalate any significant issues in a timely manner. Sent to Q&R managers re PR's for challenge

4.1.9 Personal Education Plans

The proportion of children with an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) in 2018-19 has been stable in comparison with 2017-18 figures (March 2019: 77%, March 2018: 76.4%), however this is still too low. To improve the quality of PEPs the PEP template has been reviewed by all key stakeholders to ensure it is a more effective tool, with increased focus on pupil voice, health needs and aspirational targets.

IROs are required to track PEPs at each CLA review and to make review decisions regarding PEPs being completed where they are not up to date. This is part of the CLA Review template and guidance used by all IROs. IROs also consider PEPs within their case monitoring between reviews and are able to complete management alerts where they identify deficits. IROs review and monitor CLA attainment and progress within reviews to ensure that their educational needs are being met and they are making progress at expected levels. Where this is not happening IROs can make review decisions regarding additional support being considered, including the use of Personal Education Plan Support Allowance (PEPSA) funding. In cases where there are serious issues or deficits IROs can instigate Problem Resolution to ensure the issue is addressed in a timely manner. Q&R Managers also consider PEPs within monthly case sample audits to identify themes and trends in practice.

4.2. Safeguarding

4.2.1 Child Protection Plans Reviewed in Timescale (NI67) Sue

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Lancashire	94.3%	95.8%	97.8%	96.4%	94.0%	95.7 %
SN's	96.8%	96.3%	96.6 %	96.7 %	94.6 %	N/A
North West	96.1%	94.00%	94.5 %	93.0 %	90.8 %	N/A
England	94.6%	94.00%	93.7 %	92.2 %	90.5 %	N/A

There has been a slight improvement in performance in respect of review child protection conferences (RCPCs) held within timescale from 94% in 2017/18 to 95.7% 2018/19. This performance is better than statistical neighbours, North West and England for 2017/18.

This percentage equates to 40 children whose review conference was held outside statutory timescale from a total of 890 children's conferences (some conferences involve multiple children).

The 40 children's meetings that were late equates to 20 conferences over the year. The reasons for conferences being held outside of the statutory timescale include:

- Social worker availability (40%)

- Family availability (15%)
- The RCPC was not quorate (15%)
- IRO availability (15%)
- The social work report had not been completed (10%)
- Human Error, mis-calculation of dates (5%).

Locality Data:

North: 12 of the 20 meeting that were late were in the North of the County, this equates to **60%** of the meetings.

East: 7 of the 20 meetings that were late were in the East of the County, this equates to **35%** of the meetings

Central: 1 of the 20 meetings that was late was in the Central of the County, this equates to **5%** of the meetings.

4.2.2 Percentage of children ceasing to be the subject of a child protection plan during the 12 month period who had been subject of a child protection plan for 2 years or more (NI64)

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Lancashire	3.7%	3.0%	3.6%	2.9 %	2.3%	4.0%
SN's	4.5%	4.9%	4.9 %	3.6%	3.6 %	N/A
England	4.5%	3.7%	3.8 %	3.4%	3.4 %	N/A
NW	4.5 %	3.7 %	3.7 %	3.1 %	3.8 %	N/A

The table illustrates a decrease in performance of children who are subject to child protection plans for more than 2 years that have now ceased. To break the figure down further 71 children were subject to a child protection plan for more than 2 years that were ceased during 2018/19. The information highlights that the majority of these cases were due to emotional abuse (46%) and neglect (39%), with physical abuse (6%), sexual abuse (3%) and multiple categories (6%).

Locality Data:

East: 42% of the plans were from the East.

Central: 39% of the plans were from Central.

North: 18% of the plans were from the North.

Exploitation: 1% of the plans were from the Exploitation Team.

In order to maintain and improve performance in this area the Quality and Review Managers will continue to provide targeted training to newly appointed IROs to ensure they understand their role in monitoring children subject to child protection plans and all child protection plans over 12months duration will continue to be reviewed individually within IRO supervision to ensure appropriate progression of the plan and reducing drift and delay. Child protection plans over a twelve month duration are also subject to review by the IRO and Team Manager.

4.2.3 Percentage of children who become subject of a child protection plan at any time during the year who had previously been subject of a child protection plan regardless of how long ago (NI65) Sue

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Lancashire	12.6%	13.9%	17.9%	17.9 %	20.9 %	21.3 %

During 2018/19, 327 children on a CP plan had previously (at any time) been subject to a child protection plan. A number of factors may attribute to the rate of repeat plans: a change in the family's circumstances, meaning that a child became subject to a repeat child protection plan due to an unrelated safeguarding concern, children moving across local authority boundaries and the child protection plan perhaps being ceased prematurely with insufficient evidence of sustained change.

4.2.4 Percentage of children who become subject of a child protection plan at any time during the year who had previously been subject of a child protection plan within the last 12 months Sue

Perhaps a more meaningful indication of how effectively risk is being managed is to consider the proportion of children made subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time within twelve months of the previous plan being ceased. There has been a slight increase in performance against this indicator, from 6.2% in 2017/18 to 6% in 2018/19, this performance remains good.

5. Quality Assurance

The IRO service remains committed to improving the quality of practice and services to children and young people. It undertakes a range of quality assurance work to achieve best outcomes for the children and families they work with. This enables IROs to identify interventions that are effective and highlight good practice, as well as areas where practice does not meet the required standard.

The IRO service undertakes a variety of quality assurance activities for CLA and children in need of protection, including case file audits, Tier 2 audits, practice observations and the quality assurance of S47 enquiries where a child has suffered significant harm but is not judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm and a decision is therefore made not to hold an initial child protection conference.

Quality assurance is also undertaken through the Q&R Managers, Safeguarding Manager and Head of Service regularly shadowing IROs chairing child protection conferences and CLA reviews to observe their practice and to ensure consistency and quality across the service and highlighting areas for development.

Lancashire was re-inspected in June 2018 and there has been a continued focus on improving both quality and consistency across the service and for IRO's to challenge more effectively on SMART outcomes in line with OFSTED's recommendations. Lancashire's Getting to Good plan was launched in January 2019 which identified a number of key priorities for the service as highlighted below.

The service is focused and commitment to improving practice and completing timely case monitoring checks in between both CLA and CP review meetings is one part of the IRO role

that helps e support the monitoring of review decisions and plans ensuring that plans are implemented effectively and preventing drift and delay.

The service has developed more in depth management audits on cases and complete 35 per month as a service. This is to ensure that the IROs are effectively undertaking their role that their footprint is evident and challenge is used as required effectively evidencing improved outcomes for children and young people. The audit tool has been updated to ensure that the impact on outcomes for the child is clear and are graded in line with Ofsted judgement grading's. The service have only recently began receiving the analysis for these audits, therefore in 2019/2020 this will be used to inform ongoing improvement of practice, highlighting strengths and areas of development for the service.

5.1 IRO Feedback in Relation to the Quality of Practice

IROs are provided with a wide range of opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of social work practice. This involves regular reflective supervision, team meetings, service development days and CSC/IRO cluster meetings. IRO's reported that the last annual report 2017/2018 was very informative and helpful for IRO's.

The IRO service remains fully staffed with permanent IROs who are able to develop meaningful relationships with the children they are working with. IROs feel they are able to visit children outside of the review process and get to know them as individuals and ensure their needs are being met effectively.

When areas of concern are raised IROs feel confident in challenging the Local Authority to ensure the outcomes for children are improved and their voice is strong and acknowledged. IROs feedback regarding the response to challenge is variable across the County with some areas welcoming the IRO challenge to assist in developing practice and ensuring timely resolution. This is not however consistent across the County with IROs in some areas expressing frustration regarding the lack of CSC response to advice and challenge. The IROs are also proactive in identifying good practice and raising this with the identified managers to positively support social workers in developing child centered practice.

The IROs report that the implementation of the risk sensible model is working to improve practice and provides a common language to analyse and understand risk to children. Again this is not consistent and further work is required to ensure this model is used appropriately and consistently across County. IRO's report specifically there is little progress with regards to IRO's being alerted when a child protection plan is created at the first core group. Further work is required to embed this into practice. A more strengths based approach focusing on the positive aspects of parenting and protective factors is currently being considered and developed.

It is the general feedback that areas of practice are improving however further work is required to ensure the quality of assessments, plans and chronologies and that the child's voice and lived experience is consistently captured and responded to. The IRO role in achieving this a priority for the service. It is acknowledged that there is also a need for improving analysis within assessments. This is replicated in audit findings and is being addressed as part of the actions within Lancashire's getting to good plan, joint CSC / IRO training sessions have commenced to assist in achieving this.

IRO's have reported the benefits of being assigned as working in one specific area of the county advising that they feel this supports them building relationships and communication with Children Social Care, other professionals and knowledge of local services which supports towards achieving better outcomes for the children and young people.

IRO's report that permanence and life story work need to be prioritised and have advised that despite Permanence Panels being in place there continue to be delays in presenting children to panel. The IRO induction pack was updated in January 2019 and changes were made to the CLA review template and template guidance to ensure that IRO's consider the need for life story work at a child's initial and subsequent CLA reviews. The implementation of the permanence tracker which is reviewed by Q&R managers and IROs during monthly supervisions will support in preventing any drift or delay regarding permanence.

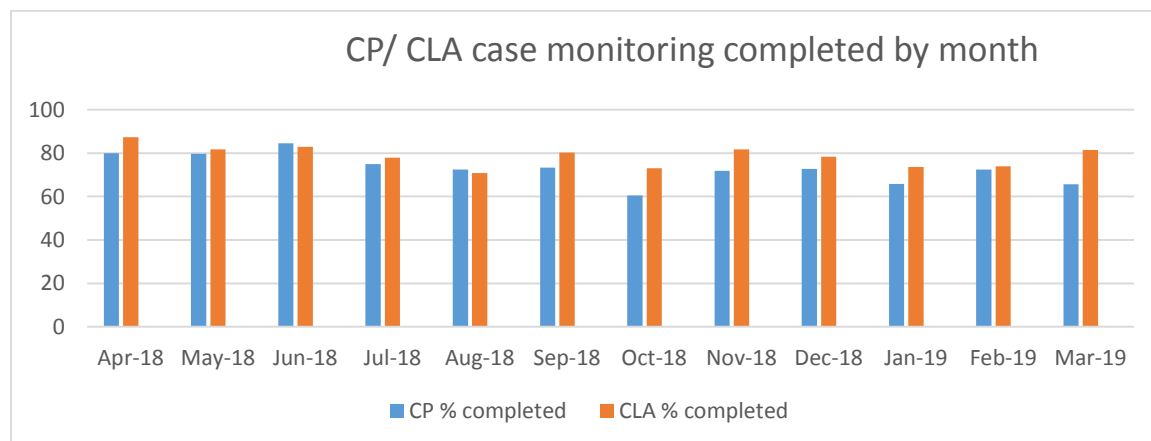
IRO's have reported inconsistencies across county in relation to the quality and completion of CLA Reviews reports and Care Plans. Unfortunately consultation documents are still not being used consistently with children and young people prior to reviews and conferences. This issue has been highlighted at cluster meetings across the county between IRO's, Q&R managers and CSC managers and the CLA invite process has been updated in March 2019 to ensure that consultation documents are being distributed.

IRO's have report in East Lancashire increased joint working / consultation between IROs and CSC Managers particularly in complex cases, long standing CP and CLA in care proceedings. The problem resolution figures reflect this and there are less formal challenges in areas where IROs report good communication and responses between CSC and the IRO Service and timely resolution when concerns are escalated.

It is reported in some areas that a more stable workforce in CSC and Management is assisting in improving practice and consistency for young people and communication with the service. This, again however is variable across the County and in some areas concerns continue to be expressed regarding the high levels of changes in allocated social workers for children resulting in delay and inconsistency for children and their families.

IRO's have reported that they feel the Q&R management team are both approachable and supportive.

5.2 IRO Footprint and Case Monitoring



Over the last 12 months the IRO service has consistently developed the case monitoring between reviews and embedded this in practice. The purpose of this is to ensure that IROs have oversight of the progression of the child's care plan / child protection plan between reviews to prevent drift and delay.

The above chart demonstrates the percentage of case monitoring completed in-between reviews, for both CP and CLA, There is a consistently high standard of case monitoring completed, with the highest months being June 2018 for CP, 84.6% cases had a case monitoring completed and for CLA April 2018 was the highest month with 87.3% of cases having a case monitoring completed.

There are many reasons why there will not be 100% of case monitoring completed in between reviews. This can be due to the IRO evidencing their oversight in other ways, such as visits to CLA children, attendance and involvement in case management meetings or short review periods.

The case monitoring between reviews is also an area within the IRO supervision audits. This ensures that there is some consistency to how these are completed across the county. There is now a focus on developing the quality of case monitoring to ensure these do ensure the progression of the plan in place and effective in reducing drift and delay.

5.3 Case File Audits

In the last year 420 Tier 2 audits have been completed with cases selected from each of the three locality footprints. Of these 38% (159) were allocated to IROs and Q&R Managers.

Cases with IRO involvement include CP & CLA, this equates to 63% of the total number of audits. These Tier 2 audits ask specific questions that offer a qualitative insight into the oversight and challenge of IROs.

The section of the audit relating to the quality of IRO oversight found that 92% (259 responses) rated IRO practice as requires improvement or good.

Good	Req. Improvement	Inadequate
167	92	21

NB: This is not a direct judgement of IRO footprint

When asked about the quality of IRO challenge, 93% (211 responses) found that IRO practice fell between requires improvement and good.

Good	Req. Improvement	Inadequate
119	92	14

Q&R Managers also complete case sample audits in relation to IRO practice. In 2018/19 277 case sample audits were completed. Out of these audits 97% (268) were graded as good or requires improvement.

Good	Req. Improvement	Inadequate
129	139	9

5.4 IRO Quality Assurance of Section 47 (S47) Enquiries

IROs undertake the quality assurance of S47 enquiries where a child has suffered significant harm and the decision has been made not to hold an ICPC. The aim of this check is to ensure that risk is being appropriately managed and child protection conferences are held to consider the risk to children when required. If there is disagreement about the decision not to proceed to conference, this is escalated via the problem resolution process.

The IRO service continue to embed this requirement in practice and have reinforced this through CSC weekly briefs and through discussion at the IRO/locality quarterly liaison

meetings. The monthly performance report completed in relation to the quality assurance of Section 47 enquiries continues to be shared with the Heads of Service.

The feasibility of incorporating this the timescale for implementation. This is a welcomed update to the process as it will ensure that all required audits are completed as the Section 47 document will not be able to conclude without the audit being completed.

5.5 Themes arising from Practice Observations

Q and R managers, Safeguarding Manager and Head of Service continue to undertake practice observations of CLA reviews and Child Protection conferences to ensure consistency and quality of practice across the service. The following findings are from practice observations undertaken:

5.5.1 Strengths

- IROs have a good understanding of the child's case and the child's journey.
- IROs build positive relationships with children through completing pre-meeting visits, and children and young people are confident in sharing their views with their IRO.
- There is an improved consistency in the management of child protection conferences by IRO's.
- There has been an increased focus on consideration for Family Group Conference at ICPC's and as part of the Child Protection plan.
- IROs have a wealth of knowledge and experience in relation to both safeguarding and children looked after.
- IROs meet with parents prior to child protection conferences and support and encourage their participation in the meeting and this is evidenced within the conference minutes.
- IROs adjourn conferences and CLA reviews appropriately and when required.
- There is increased focus in relation to reviewing the child protection plan and progress made in review child protection conferences.
- IROs are clear in reflecting the voice of the child and the child's wishes and feelings in CLA reviews and ensuring review decisions reflect these.
- There is increased evidence of IRO's gaining reasoning for professional's decision making during conferences.
- There is evidence of the Risk Sensible Model being embedded in conferences.
- There is evidence of IRO challenge in ensuring the child protection plan is progressed.
- There is evidence of thorough preparation by the IRO's prior to conferences and CLA reviews and IRO's ensure that parents and young people are fully prepared for the conference / review and participate appropriately.
- There has been improved understanding of permanence and improved challenge by IROs at CLA reviews where the plan for permanence is not clear or being progressed.

5.5.2 Areas for Development

- Improving the quality of child protection plans and ensure that they are SMART and consider contingency planning within child protection conferences.
- Improve the quality and review of Children Looked After care plans.
- Ensuring the child's voice and lived experience is evident in and reflected on in child protection conferences.
- Improve the consistency and timeliness of IRO challenge in the review and conference process, focusing on improving outcomes for the child.
- IROs to ensure the pre meeting social worker report for CLA reviews is of a good quality.
- Improve IRO oversight of the Child Protection plan following the first core group and ensure these plans are developed in line with the risk sensible model and are SMART, including strengths and outcome focussed and challenge occurs when required.

- Encourage, where appropriate the attendance of children at child protection conferences and promote their participation.
- Ensure consultation documents and participation tools are used effectively to ensure views are clear within meetings in respect of child protection conferences and CLA reviews.

All managers within the service from Q&R manager to Head of Service will be completing a minimum of one live observation of a Child Protection conference or CLA review each month. Direct feedback from the observations will be given to IRO and will incorporate strengths as well as areas for development. The findings from the observations will be collated and analysed by Q&R managers to support with the improvement of quality and consistency of practice across the service.

5.6 Audit of Multi-Agency Attendance at Child Protection Conferences

On average 234 child protection conferences are held each month, this is a slight increase from last year (226). Monthly reports are used to monitor attendance of agencies, parents and children/young people at ICPC/RCPCs.

Key Themes

After CSC, education (schools and early years) are the most consistent attenders at both ICPCs/RCPCs, with health visitors and school nurses also being consistent attenders. Attendance by non-statutory agencies continues to be inconsistent.

Over the last 12 months a further audit was completed in relation to agency participation at conferences to determine when agencies were invited and the numbers of these who did not attend or send a report. Overall findings in relation to this are detailed below:

During the period April 2018 – March 2019 the following professionals were invited as it was felt that their attendance was necessary at the conference, however did not attend or send a report:

- 66 GPs.
- 44 health visitors / school nurses / midwives.
- 17 school representatives.
- 6 mental health practitioners.
- 8 nursery workers.
- 1 MASH / PPU workers.
- 4 probation workers.
- 4 social worker
- 8 family support worker

Appropriate multi-agency attendance at conferences is required when making decisions around threshold as vital information could be missing from key agencies involved with the family which could impact upon decision making. Continued work needs to be undertaken, particularly with health professionals and schools regarding this and LSCB training can be accessed regarding participation at CP conferences.

In addition to multi-agency attendance at conferences, it is essential that young people and their families fully participate within the conference process and that the voice and views of the child are clearly evident within the conference.

During the 2018/2019 there were 2811 conferences compared to (2488 2017/2018).

From these conferences:

- 86 consultation forms were completed with young people prior to conference (81 last year).
- 184 children/young people physically attended and participated in the conference (209 last year).
- 779 young people did not attend, but their views were expressed (846 last year).
- 130 young people did not attend and their views were not available (79 last year).

Although it is positive that some children/young people are choosing to attend the conference and many are expressing their views this has decreased slightly over the last 12 months. Further work is still required in relation to the completion of consultation forms and ensuring that the views of all children are available to the conference and that IROs ensure that this information is shared in conference. It is anticipated that this should significantly improve once Participation Champions are identified and a Participation Steering Group is established.

5.7 Feedback from Parent/Carer Questionnaires

During previous years parents and carers who attend conferences have been encouraged to complete a feedback questionnaire following the conference. The purpose of the questionnaire is to give parents/carers the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of the child protection process and for this information to be used to improve and develop service delivery. In 2017/18 there was a reduction in the number of feedback reports being completed and returned. Due to the low returns, the process was reviewed regarding how increased returns and improved feedback could be obtained.

It was agreed that the following actions would be taken:

1. To explore how we could improve the method of obtaining feedback, by using technology / SMS feedback system – Unfortunately the required technology is not currently available to seek feedback by an SMS system and alternative electronic solutions are continuing to be considered to enhance the feedback process for families.
2. A targeted pilot over a four week period, using a different method to obtain feedback. Parents would be requested to fill in the questionnaire directly following the conference, rather than taking the questionnaire home to complete and return in a prepaid envelope (it must be noted this option was available if felt appropriate or requested).

The pilot as detailed in point 2 above, took place for 4 weeks from 4 - 29 March 2019. During the 4 week period a total of 248 ICPC's and RCPC's took place and from these meetings a total of 148 questionnaires were completed. This equates to a 62% return, this is a large increase from last year 2017/18 when the return over the year equated to 2.1%. The method applied during the 4 week pilot has therefore been successful in terms of increasing the number of feedback forms completed. From the 148 questionnaires returned 58 related to initial conferences and 90 related to review conferences.

5.7.1 Parent/Carer Feedback from Initial Child Protection Conferences

Of the 58 questionnaires returned that related to ICPC's, 49 (84%) indicated they had seen the social workers report 48 hours before the conference. This is an increase from the previous year (72%) which is a positive improvement. From those that didn't receive the reports 48 hours before the conference, 6 reported receiving them the day before conference, one reported receiving it the evening before the conference. In terms of professionals reports, out of the 58 questionnaires returned 33 (43%) reported that they had received these reports prior to conference, this again is an improvement on last year's figures which was 5.5%.

The majority of participant feedback was positive in terms of how they felt they were prepared for the conference and that they felt they could express their views and ask questions in the conference. Furthermore, 57 (98%) of parents/carers reported that they met with the IRO prior to conference and all 58 (100%) of the parents/carers reported that they were able to express their views and ask questions at the conference. Furthermore 100% of parent/carers reported that they understood why professionals were concerned, which is an increase from last year when the figure of 83.3%.

5.7.2 Parent/Carer Feedback from Review Child Protection Conferences

There were 90 questionnaires returned for RCPC's, of these 64 (71%) participants reported they had seen the social workers report at least 48 hours prior to the review conference. Two participants said they had only received the report prior to the conference and one reported it was the evening before the conference. This is an improvement from 2017/18 when 55% of participants reported they had received the social workers report 24 hours prior to conference. 41 (46%) of the participants indicated they had seen the reports of other professionals prior to the review conference, again this has improved since 2017/18 when the figure was 35%.

A high proportion of participants, 82 (91%), reported that they were invited to attend core group meetings. 80 (88.8%) reported that they had been given a copy of the child protection plan and understood what was expected within the child protection plan. One parent reported that they were unsure about whether they understood the child protection plan, the same parent/carer also reported not receiving the conference report until the morning of the conference, this could support the view that parents/carer who receives the report in a timely manner and have time to understand the issues and are fully prepared for the conference are more likely to understand what the expectations are within the child protection plan. This highlights the importance of ensuring parents/carers are prepared for conferences.

As with the ICPC's a high proportion of participants reported that the review was well managed and that they had the opportunity to express their views and ask questions within the conference. Only 2 out of the 90 participants reported that they never had the opportunity to express their views or ask questions, however those two parents did say they understood why professionals were concerned. A high proportion (84%) reported that they understood why professionals were concerned, which is positive, as parents/carers that understand the concerns are more likely to engage with the plan which will hopefully lead to improved outcomes for children.

Parents/carers were asked to comment and provide feedback on things that went well and things that could be done better. Responses included:

- 'I felt supported throughout the meeting as I attended on my own. I'd like to thank the staff for that.'
- 'Happy with conference and decision'
- 'It was an emotional meeting'
- 'You've all been brilliant all the way through'
- Mother – 'doesn't want a six month review period and feels this could be managed on a Child in Need Plan'
- Mother – 'we are not just a case number and are a family and this has destroyed us'
- One parent expressed concerns about professionals not doing their job due to an issue which had led to a parent not being invited to core groups.
- 'I feel it is a waste of time as there are others that need the help more.'
- 'I think what went well is IRO enforcing what support is needed and stressing around consistency of contact with dad and what is needed around this. Glad that the IRO went through this.'
- 'Happy how things have gone'

5.7.3 Analysis of Feedback

It is a positive that there has been improvements in the majority of areas covered in the feedback questionnaire. It highlights that where parents/carers have reports shared with them in a timely manner and have the opportunity to be prepared for conference and time to absorb the information, they will be far more likely to be able to share their views and ask questions within the conference. It is also positive that IRO's have met with parents prior to all conferences, except in a few cases, where the parents were given the opportunity but didn't feel it was needed. Again this will assist in parents understanding the process, ensuring they feel prepared and provides them with the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the conference that may cause them concern or worry. If parents/carers are fully prepared they are more likely to be able to fully participate in the conference and ultimately more likely to understand the concerns and why a child protection plan may be required. This will lead to a plan that parents understand and have ownership of which will ultimately impact on improving outcomes for children and young people. The feedback is positive as last year feedback from parents/carers was that they wanted to be better prepared for conferences and this year's feedback confirms that in general this has occurred.

These improvements have been supported by;

- Continuing to raise the issues at cluster meetings, which is a joint liaison meeting between social care and the IRO service
- Increasing observations of conferences
- IRO's preparation for conferences and ensuring that social workers understand the need to share reports in a timely manner
- A stable workforce within the IRO
- IRO guidance when completing CP conferences

There are still areas for improvements and it is not acceptable for parents/carers not receive conference reports in a timely manner so they are fully prepared for the conference and have the opportunity to ask questions. In many of these cases the IRO adjourns the conference. As one parent said it can be a very emotional meeting and we need to ensure all parent/carer/young people are fully prepared. The other area that requires further improvement is the sharing of agency reports – this will continue to be raised with the relevant agencies.

We will continue to progress the review of how we obtain parent/carer feedback, in terms of the possible options for utilizing technology. Given the success of the pilot in obtaining more feedback we will complete this bi-annually as the evidence has shown this method has been more effective.

5.7.4 Appeals

The Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedure for appeals against decisions of a child protection conference identifies that there are three circumstances in which an appeal can be made:

- I. That the child protection conference has not been run properly and in accordance with the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Procedures.
- II. That the wrong decision has been made in relation to making your child subject to a Child Protection Plan.

- III. That the plans made at a Child Protection Conference are not in the best interests of the child/children.

During 2018/2019, there were 4 appeals a reduction from 10 in both 2017-18 and 2016-17, of these only 1 was upheld, again a reduction from 2 in 2017-18 and 7 in 2016-17. This again evidences improved compliance with procedures as previously significant number of appeals were upheld due to procedures not being followed. During 2018/2019 there have been no appeals upheld due to procedures not being followed. The one appeal that was upheld was due to key professionals not being present at ICPC therefore significant information missing.

6. Good Practice & Problem Resolution

6.1 Good Practice

There have been many examples during this year of the positive impact the IRO role is having in improving outcomes for children/young people.

Example 1

Young person was initially accommodated in July 2017 due to parent's being unable to manage her challenging and volatile behaviours, she had also been assessed as a high risk of CSE, had a history of cannabis misuse, poor mental health and had not accessed any form of education for a significant time. The young person had become physically and verbally abusive during one of her previous CLA reviews and didn't want to engage. During a subsequent IRO visit, the young person advised her IRO that she becomes agitated during her CLA reviews because she feels that people are judging her; that agencies are making decisions about her without taking into account her wishes and feelings and this makes her feel that she is not being listened to and that her views are not important. The IRO asked the young person if she would like to chair her own review, this would enable her to ask agencies questions that were important to her. The IRO agreed with the young person to visit her prior to her review to devise an agenda together. This visit was led by the young person with the IRO offering suggestions and offering reassurance that she would be supported during the review when needed. At the CLA review the young person had written up the agenda in more detail and the IRO praised her on how well she had worked on this. The young person asked questions about care proceedings; her care plan; contact with her parents and asked her social worker when her pathway plan would be updated – requesting that the pathway plan was updated with her in attendance. The young person's engagement during the review was exemplary and the action of the IRO ensured that the young person felt fully part of the decision making, which she appreciated.

Example 2

Young person became looked after as a result of his parents not being able to meet his needs due to their drug use and father's transient and criminal lifestyle. The young person has a range of complex health needs which have recently been diagnosed as life limiting, which the family are coming to terms with. Following his CLA Review a nurse from Royal Preston Hospital approached the IRO to compliment and thank her for chairing the meeting in an effective and child focused manner. She particularly complimented the IRO on how she brought the young person's wishes and feelings and emotional needs into the review. For the young person this was particularly crucial as he is an unwell child, whose communication and understanding of his status and health is limited.

Example 3

Email sent from a young person to her IRO

'Hi. We haven't spoken in a while and I'm doing well and I have finally found my dad after all the years looking. I'm just emailing you because when I was in secure as you know a lot of my property went missing and I was told I was able to put in a compensation claim I think me and you spoke about it. I was wondering if you could email my chronology and contact details of the solicitor.

I also wanted to thank you for everything you have done for me you was there for me before other professionals and have gotten me through a lot. The children in your case are very lucky to have an IRO like you. You truly were amazing. And also thanks for sticking by me when I was a nightmare unlike other social workers.'

6.2 Problem Resolution Processes

6.2.1 Use of the Problem Resolution Process for Children Looked After and Children Subject to Child Protection Plans

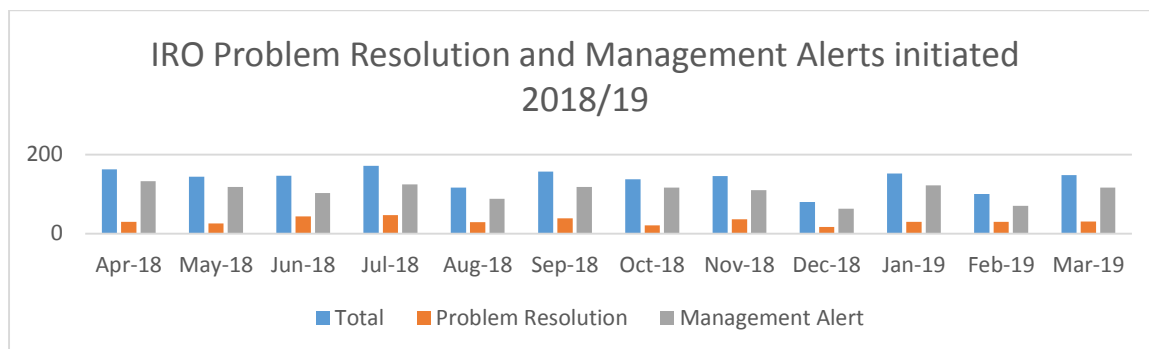
In November 2017 the Problem Resolution (PR) and Management Alert (ma) processes were integrated into LCS and during 2018-19 this process has been fully embedded into IRO practice. This has allowed for increased tracking and reporting of data allowing improved data analysis and increased evidence on the child's file, of the effect and impact of IRO challenge in improving outcomes for children and young people. IROs continue to have a high level of liaison with social workers and CSC managers in an attempt to resolve any issues informally. This is now evidenced on the newly created IRO challenge case note. If this is unsuccessful, or the IRO feels that the matter is serious enough, then a PR or MA will be initiated and reassigned to the level of management in CSC the IRO feels appropriate.

IRO MA's are initiated by IROs to alert CSC management of recording deficits on a child's file. These are recorded under 4 categories; 1: CLA review not recorded, 2: Statutory visits not recorded, 3: Pathway Plan not recorded or 4: Multiple / other recorded deficit. It is the responsibility of CSC management to ensure that these highlighted actions are completed. Weekly reports are produced for SMT to highlight the numbers of MA's initiated, reasons and districts and numbers of outstanding MA's.

IRO PR's are initiated by IROs to challenge any area of concern in respect of the implementation of the child's care plan / child protection plan or concerns regarding practice on the case. Problem Resolutions are initiated under the following categories; 1: Compliance, 2: Practice Issues; 3: Implementation of the child's care plan / child protection plan, 4: Resource issues. These are tracked on a weekly basis and a weekly update is provided to SMT on those PRs which are outstanding for over 4 weeks.

In total 421 PR's and 1284 MA's have been initiated by IROs in 2018/19, in total 1705 IRO challenges. This is a significant increase of 222% in comparison to a total of 767 IRO challenges recorded in 2017/2018. Weekly data reports are produced which highlight all PR's and MA's initiated that week and all outstanding challenges. In addition more recently a weekly report analysing this data, regarding themes, districts, and highlighting details of all outstanding PR's and MA's over 4 weeks is produced and shared with management within CSC and SIA. This has significantly reduced the numbers of outstanding PR's and MA's over 4 weeks. Evidencing the effectiveness of IRO in improving outcomes for children and young people is a significant part of Lancashire's Getting to Good Plan and Permanence Action plan discussed in more detail below.

The below chart illustrates the numbers of problem resolutions and management alerts initiated during 2018/19.



It can be seen that the numbers of PRs and MA's initiated throughout the year has been relatively constant, there is a dip in holiday periods ie, August and Christmas which can be expected.

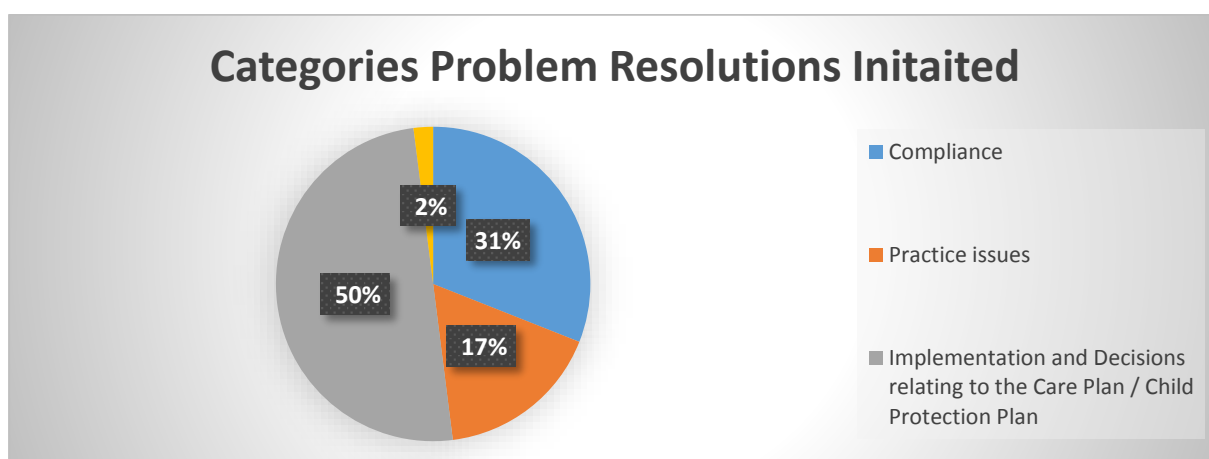
In respect of CLA and CP cases there has been 299 PR's in respect of CLA in comparison to 122 in respect of children subject to a CP plan and in respect of MA's there were 828 initiated in respect of CLA and 456 initiated in respect of children subject to a CP plan. In total IRO challenges have been initiated in 66% cases in respect of CLA and 34% in respect of children subject to a CP plan. This breakdown is similar to that of 2017/18 and are reflective of the greater numbers of CLA in Lancashire than children subject to a CP plan and also in respect of the IROs responsibilities in respect of CLA highlighted in the IRO Handbook.

6.2.2 Aims of the Problem Resolution Protocol

The aims of the problem resolution remain unchanged to assist in improving outcomes for children and young people who are looked after and subject to a child protection plan and to challenge concerns regarding poor practice. The challenge from the IRO Service is evidencing the impact that this has in improving outcomes for children and young people which is the focus during 2019/20.

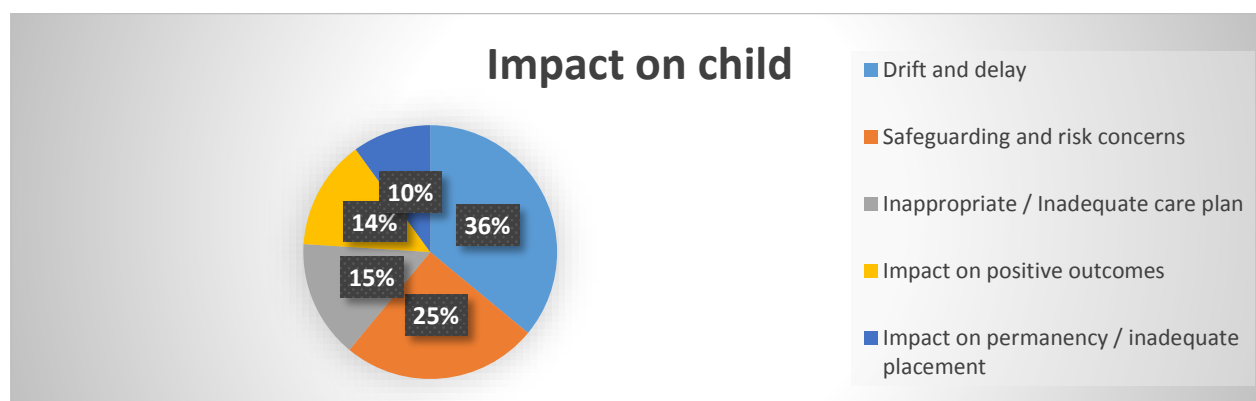
- Ensure the IRO service undertakes regular consistent oversight of practice and care planning in children's cases.
- Evidence the impact and difference IRO involvement has made to children's lives and in improving outcomes for children and young people.
- To highlight practice themes and support effective ways of organisational learning from this.
- To ensure that children receive a good quality service and that their needs are met.

The IRO service is committed to improving outcomes for CLA and children subject to a CP plan in Lancashire.



There has been an increase in PR's initiated in respect of the implementation and decisions relating to the care plan / child protection plan which account for 50% of the PR's initiated, this is in comparison to 21% of PR's initiated in respect of the same area in 2017/2018. There remains 31% of PRs initiated due to compliance issues which is of concern as these are generally initiated following a MA not being resolved. These figures however do reflect the success of the PR/MA process and splitting these processes so IRO's can focus more on issues pertaining to children's care plans.

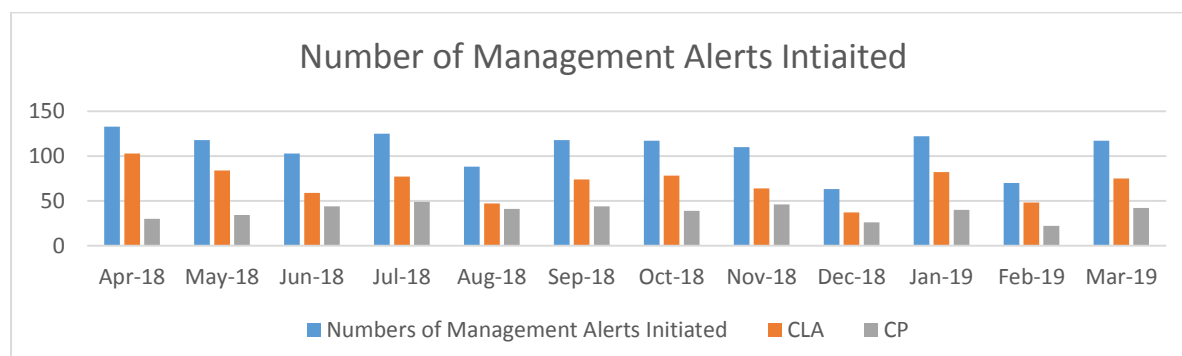
Problem resolutions initiated highlight the IRO's concern regarding the impact on the child should the issue not be resolved. These are classified under the following categories; delay and drift, risk and safeguarding concerns, inappropriate or inadequate care plan, inappropriate placement or impact on permanency and detrimental impact on achieving positive outcomes for the child.



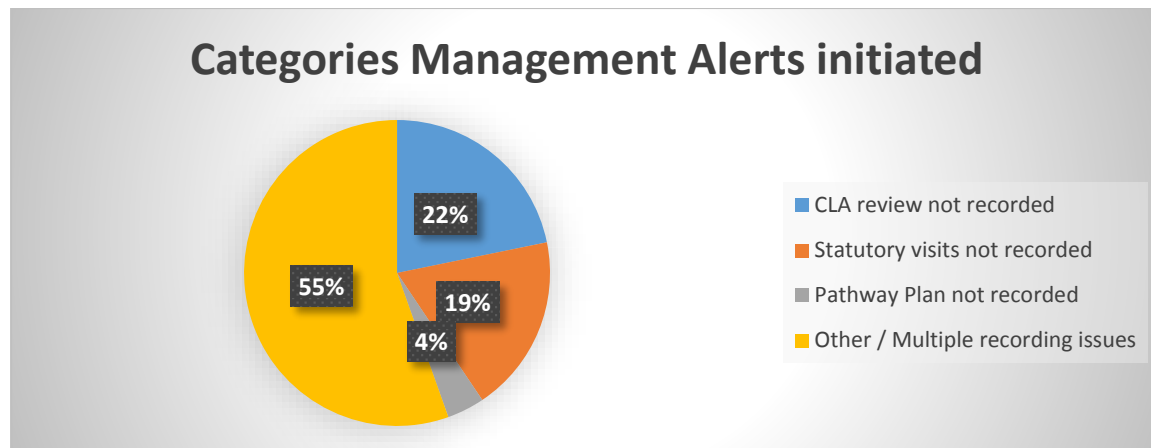
It can be seen from above chart that the IROs have raised significant concerns regarding drift and delay for some children which accounts for 36% of the PR's initiated, although high this is a reduction from 59% the previous year. These primarily relate to where there is delay in the implementation of the child's care plan or child protection plan and delay in initiating care proceedings or in initiating discharge of care orders.

Another large area of IRO challenge relates to concern about the risk/safeguarding concerns. These have primarily been initiated when the IRO has been concerned that the child's care plan/child protection plan is not being effective in adequately reducing the risk to the child or plans are not being implemented effectively and the risk is not being managed appropriately.

Management alerts are initiated by IROs to alert CSC management to recording deficits on a child's file on LCS. It is the responsibility of the CSC to ensure these are completed. As above identifies some of these have had to be escalated to PR's when not completed. These are categorised under the following classifications: CLA review report not recorded, statutory visits not recorded, Pathway Plan not recorded and other / multiple LCS recording issues. Other recording issues include PEP / core groups and care planning minutes.



It can be seen that the numbers of MA's initiated by the IRO service has remained relatively consistent throughout the year. The high number of MA's being initiated is a concern to the IRO service and highlights the significant role of IROs in Lancashire in achieving statutory compliance. In this respect the IRO service continue to evidence challenge when statutory responsibilities are not being fulfilled by CSC which is essential in achieving good practice and therefore more positive outcomes for the child.



Statutory compliance remains a significant concern particularly in relation to the completion of CLA review reports and recording of statutory visits. It can be seen that the largest area relates to multiple / other recording issues. It is fed back from the IRO service that compliance / recording issues are rarely seen in isolation on a child's file and if there are compliance concerns this relates to several areas. Data in respect of outstanding MA's is received by management on a weekly basis and a weekly reports highlights those areas where there are management alerts outstanding over 4 weeks.

Weekly data regarding outstanding PR's has allowed for increased management oversight and escalation if required to ensure the matter is concluded in a timely manner. At the time of writing there is currently no PR's outstanding over 4 weeks, evidencing that the PR's being resolved in a timely manner. .

The IRO will initiate and escalate PR's to the level of management within social care as felt appropriate. This year in respect of the level at which PR's were resolved; Practice Manager – 69%, Team Manager – 21%, Senior Manager – 9% and Head of Service – 1%. This demonstrates that IROs resolve the majority of PR's at Practice Manager and Team manager level however IROs escalate when felt required to Senior Managers and Head of Service.

6.2.3 Analysis of Findings

These are some of the themes arising from Problem Resolutions initiated by IROs:

- Delay in initiating care proceedings – cases in which the IRO is concerned that the CP plan is not being effective and the child is at risk of significant harm, or challenging delay when it has been agreed that care proceedings are to be initiated but delay in producing initiating statement.
- Delay in applying for discharge of Care Orders – IROs have had significant oversight of all home placement agreements over this year and are reviewed monthly in supervision to ensure that they remain appropriate and for challenge to be initiated if it is felt that there is delay in initiating discharge proceedings.
- Failure to implement aspects of a child's care plan – examples of this have been therapeutic input, appropriate education provision, life story work, appropriate contact arrangements, care plan not meeting child's needs.

- Failure to implement an aspect of the child protection plan – examples of this include; direct work with child or family members, agreed home visit scheduled, delay in assessments, concerns regarding risk not being managed appropriately.
- Delay in achieving permanence for the child – delay in presentation at permanence panel, delay in assessment, delay in finding long term placement for a child.
- Concerns regarding lack of pathway planning and transition planning for young people or inappropriate pathway plan.
- Placement concerns – delay in addressing issues in placement / placement not meeting the child's needs.
- Concerns regarding contact arrangements – inappropriate contact arrangements / lack of contact planning / failure to adhere to Final Order in respect of contact / child's voice not being given consideration in respect of contact arrangements.
- Inappropriate / lack of educational provision for child

This evidences the range of issues and concerns that the IRO Service continue to challenge in order to improve outcomes for children and young people and to ensure that their care plan is appropriate.

The PR and MA process is fully embedded within the IRO service. Weekly and monthly data is provided which allows for increased tracking and timely completion of PR's to assist in preventing any further drift and delay for the child. The responsibility for ensuring PR's are progressed in a timely manner lies with the IRO and their manager. Problem resolution is a standing agenda item in IRO supervision, providing an opportunity for IROs to discuss any issues, look at all outstanding PR's and MA's and where appropriate for the manager to escalate if required. A weekly report is produced for SMT which identifies the PR's initiated that week and reasons for them and update on any PR's currently over 4 weeks.

The following case examples illustrate how the IRO has used the PR process to improve outcomes for children and young people during 2018/19:

Example 1

Two siblings age 6 and 8 years old. Foster carers gave notice in respect of the older sibling. Sibling assessment occurred and CSC plan was to find an alternative placement for the older child and for the younger sibling to remain in current placement. The IRO challenged the sibling assessment and the decision to separate the siblings. The IRO did not feel that this was in the children's best interests, taking into account that the children's mother was deceased, their birth father had significant illness and they have no other birth family contact. CSC decision was made as the assessment expressed concern that the younger sibling was frightened of her older sibling. The IRO's focus was on improving this relationship and felt that the behaviours of the child were a reflection of the lack of skills of the carers to manage the behaviours. The IRO requested a case management meeting which she attended and was chaired by a CSC senior manager. The conclusion of the meeting was that the siblings should remain together and a long term placement was subsequently found for the siblings. Successful bridging occurred and the children remain settled in this placement which is currently some 8 months later.

Example 2

Young person aged 13 and previously been subject to Placement Order. The IRO was concerned regarding drift and delay in respect of life story work for the young person, including informing him of siblings that he was not aware of, and progression of direct contact with parents which had not occurred. There were differing views of professionals and carers in regards of progressing this situation and the IRO appropriately remained focussed on the needs and rights of the young person and escalated challenge on the case to the senior

manager. A plan of completing life story work and progressing direct contact with parents was agreed and currently being implemented. The young person has now had life story work completed and this has been positive for the young person and plans are in place for the progression of contact and IRO oversight continues to be evident on the child's file to ensure implementation of the agreed plan.

6.2.4 Future Developments

OFSTED have inspected Lancashire during 2018/2019 and although no longer inadequate the report raised specific areas of development for the IRO Service. These have been incorporated into Lancashire's Getting to Good Plan in January 2019 and is the current focus of the service.

The main focus is to:

- IRO challenge needs to evidence improved outcomes
- Ensure IRO challenge prevents drift and delay of care plans
- IRO's to ensure a plan for Permanence at the 2nd review which is then monitored and progressed during subsequent reviews.

There is a plan in place to achieve this:

- A new case note has been created 'IRO Challenge' to improve evidence of informal IRO challenge on an informal basis prior to the Problem Resolution process being entered into, data will be provided monthly to monitor numbers and evidence challenge
- A new case note has been created 'IRO Problem Resolution Tracking / Escalation to evidence of tracking and escalation of PR's
- Monthly PR report will continue to be produced – this will include data regarding PR's, MA's and data from IRO Challenge case note. Monthly report will provide analysis of themes from that month, information regarding themes and trends by locality. To be shared with SMT.
- Weekly PR report will continue to be produced – this will detail reasons for initiation of PRs that week
- Continue to highlight on weekly and monthly reports regarding PR and MA'S over 4 weeks- again analyse themes regarding localities and districts regarding this. Detailed progress on these cases and at what level of management this is currently at, shared with SMT to assist in reducing drift and delay
- Requested amendments have been made to the existing PR form to improve data collection
- IRO's will quality assure CLA Care Plan and implementation of the plan at CLA review and case monitoring – PR process to be used – under inadequate / inappropriate care plan to escalate concerns regarding care plans and address deficits
- Joint CSC Management / IRO training sessions are taking place in all districts, as highlighted in this plan, to improve the quality of assessment / plans / reviews / challenge and working relationships with the aim of improving practice and improving outcomes for children and young people.
- PR is a standing item on all IRO team meetings and supervision to ensure that the processes are being used appropriately and consistently and allowing reflection and discussion regarding these processes
- Permanence and care planning learning circles are taking place with managers and IROs to improve quality of practice in these areas

7. Priorities for 2019/20

The priorities of the IRO Service this year is to focus on actions prescribed in Lancashire's current Getting to Good Plan, January 2019.

- Joint training sessions to be delivered across all the localities with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and front-line managers to:
 - a) Gain a shared understanding of the requirements of a good assessment;
 - b) Clearly articulate what best practice looks like in accordance with the Ofsted grade descriptors;
 - c) Enable positive critical challenge and professional respect.

As a result we will see evidence of critical challenge by managers and IROs, resulting in robust assessments, plans and reviews. This will address drift and delay for children and families.

- To continue to embed guidance for IROs on chairing CLA reviews to ensure quality and consistency across the service and focus IRO challenge more effectively on SMART outcomes
- To continue to embed guidance for IROs on chairing CP Conferences to ensure quality and consistency across the service and focus IRO challenge more effectively on SMART outcomes
- To improve the quality and consistency of IRO oversight in respect of CP plans to improve the quality of plans to ensure CP plans are SMART and outcome focused, embedding the risk sensible model, which needs to be strengths based and that CP plans are multi-agency led from the initial core group
- Improve the quality of IRO challenge in respect of the quality of care plans and drift and delay with a focus on improving outcomes for the child. Ensuring that challenge is evident and effective
- Improve the quality and focus on permanence for all children in CLA reviews. Ensure that permanence is considered at all CLA reviews
- Ensuring that the IRO footprint is evident on all case files and evidences impact and outcomes for the child linked to the implementation of the care plan
- IRO learning circles to be established and embedded, to include a focus on permanence
- IROs to review all cases audited as inadequate in respect of CP Plans and CLA Care Plans and support the SW in updating the plan to ensure it is SMART and outcome focussed / includes the voice of the child and includes a clear contingency plan

8. Conclusion

Over the last 12 months the service has continued to have a stable workforce who are committed to the IRO role and service. Despite increased demand in both CLA and CP cases, performance remains good with reviews held in timescale being 96.8%, participation of children and young people in their CLA review being 99.8%, RCPC's in timescale 95.7%.

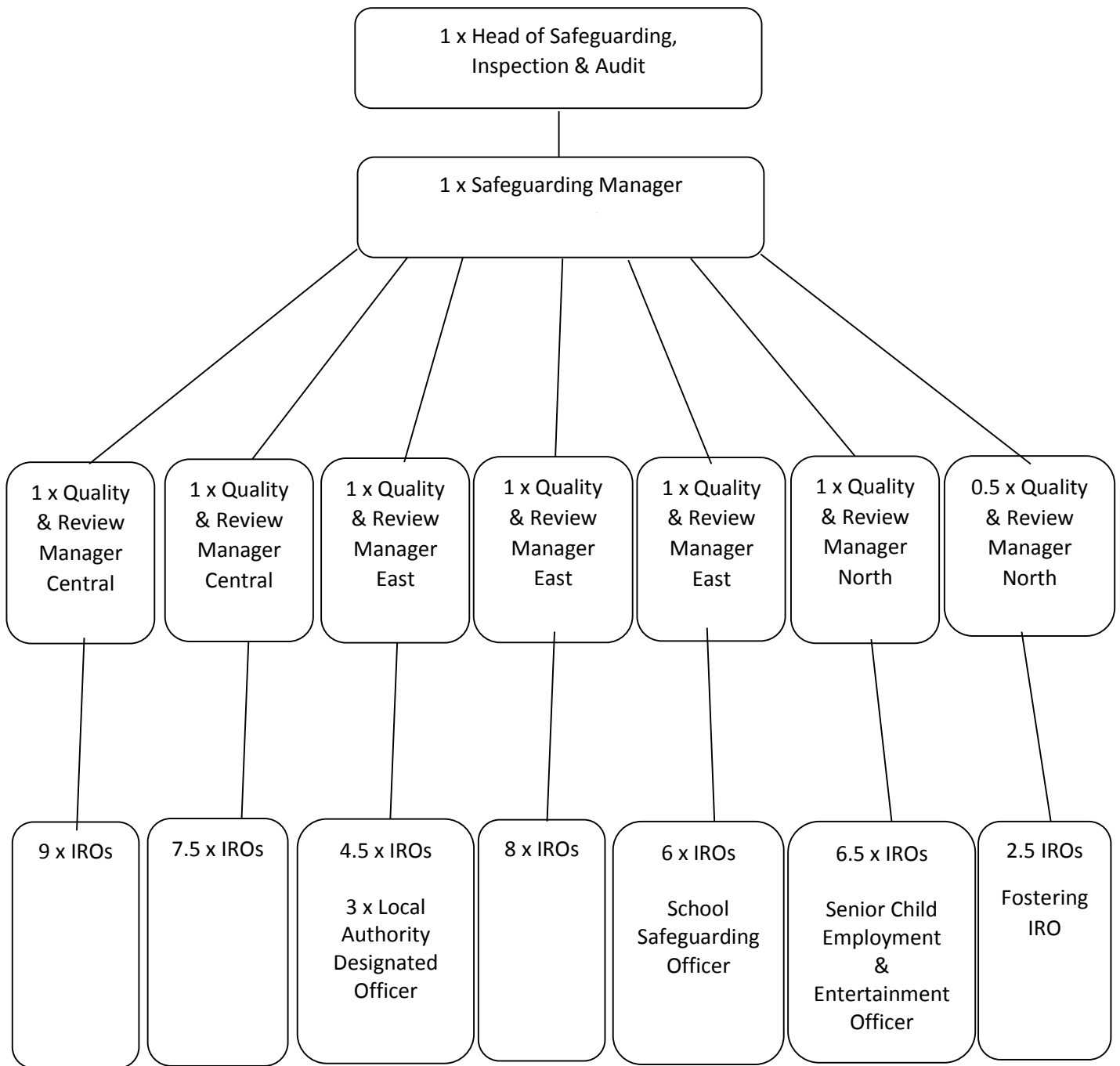
During 2018/2019 there have been a number of different learning opportunities and monitoring within the service to help improve practice, these have included IRO learning circles, joint development days between front-line managers and IROs, improved data, audit activity, observations of practice and IRO's completing the advanced IRO qualification. Whilst it is not a sole indicator of improvements in practice Tier 2 audits have reported that the quality of IRO oversight found that 92% (259 responses) rated IRO practice as requires improvement or good, 167 reported as good. When asked about the quality of IRO challenge, 93% (211 responses) found that IRO practice fell between requires improvement and 119 good.

The introduction of a revised Problem Resolution and Management Alert process has resulted in a total of 1705 IRO challenges, 421 PR'S and 1284 MA's. This is a significant increase of 222% in comparison to a total of 767 IRO challenges recorded in 2017/2018. However, the impact of this increased IRO challenge and evidence of this challenge improving outcomes for children is inconsistent and requires improvement during 2019/2020. IRO's also need to improve the quality and consistency of IRO oversight in respect of CP plans to improve the quality of plans to ensure CP plans are SMART and outcome focused.

Report written by:

Laura Gardner	Quality & Review Manager
Susan Harrison	Quality & Review Manager
Charlotte Kay	Quality & Review Manager
Joanne O'Neill	Quality & Review Manager
Carl Spedding	Quality & Review Manager
Lesley Warbrick	Quality & Review Manager
Danielle Winkley	Quality & Review Manager
Paul McIntyre	Safeguarding Manager

Appendix 1: IRO Service Structure



Appendix 2: IRO Post-Qualifying Experience

The tables below detail the level of post qualifying experience and length of service of IRO managers and IROs in Lancashire:

Quality & Review Managers

Name	Year of Qualification	Years as an IRO	Years as an IRO Manager
Laura Gardner	2008	N/A	2016 – 2019
Susan Harrison	2001	N/A	2016 – 2019
Charlotte Kay	2004	2012 – 2016	2016 – 2019
Joanne O'Neill	1995	N/A	2015 – 2019
Carl Spedding	2011	N/A	2018 – 2019
Lesley Warbrick	2004	2010 – 2013	2013 – 2019
Danielle Winkley	2006	N/A	2016 – 2019

Appendix 3: Independent Reviewing Officers

Position	Year of qualification	Year began as an IRO
IRO 1	1995	2001
IRO 2	1995	2004
IRO 3	2000	2007
IRO 4	1993	2009
IRO 5	2005	2010
IRO 6	1982	2011
IRO 7	1989	2011
IRO 8	2000	2011
IRO 9	2007	2012
IRO 10	2007	2012
IRO 11	2001	2013
IRO 12	1997	2013
IRO 13	1998	2013
IRO 14	2004	2014
IRO 15	2006	2014
IRO 16	1997	2014
IRO 17	2008	2015
IRO 18	2008	2015
IRO 19	2006	2015
IRO 20	1994	2016
IRO 21	2008	2016
IRO 22	2011	2016
IRO 23	2001	2016
IRO 24	2009	2016
IRO 25	2011	2016
IRO 26	2008	2016
IRO 27	2009	2016
IRO 28	2007	2016
IRO 29	2007	2016
IRO 30	2010	2016
IRO 31	1988	2016
IRO 32	2011	2017
IRO 33	2002	2017
IRO 34	2009	2017
IRO 35	2011	2017
IRO 36	2006	2017
IRO 37	1995	2017
IRO 38	2002	2017
IRO 39	2002	2017
IRO 40	2010	2017
IRO 41	2005	2018
IRO 42	2005	2018
IRO 43	1992	2018
IRO 44	1998	2018
IRO 45	2007	2018
IRO 46	2011	2018
IRO 47	1999	2019