



Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015 - 2016

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 2015 to the 31st March 2016.

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 2014/15 the IRO Service operated with 30 full-time equivalent (FTE) IROs. Despite some additional investment in the service IRO caseloads remained high with an average caseload of 109, which was significantly higher than the number recommended in the IRO handbook (50-70). In September 2015, Lancashire's services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers were inspected by Ofsted. The report published on the 27 November 2015 judged children's services to be "inadequate". It was highlighted that IRO caseloads were high and a recommendation was made that the IRO Service undertakes consistent, regular oversight of practice and care planning. As part of the Improvement Plan there has been further significant investment in the IRO Service, including 15 additional permanent IROs and 3.5 additional permanent Quality & Review Managers. Agency staff have been appointed pending permanent recruitment to these posts. This has had a positive impact in reducing IRO caseloads to an average of 92 at the end of March 2016 followed by a further reduction to 82 in April 2016. Once fully staffed it is anticipated that the average caseload will be below 75. This is a significant achievement and will greatly increase IRO capacity. Prior to the recruitment of additional IROs high caseloads presented many challenges for the service and impacted upon the IROs ability to fulfil many aspects of their role. This has included the completion of mid-point checks, seeing all children separately and in addition to their statutory review meetings and tracking of problem resolution issues.

Performance in relation to child protection conferences held within the requisite timescale improved in 2015/16 despite a significant increase in the number of children subject to child protection plans. At the end of March 2015, 956 children were subject

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to a child protection plan. However, in March 2016 this had increased by 55% to 1,443. Performance in relation to children looked after reviews being held in timescale has dipped slightly from 95.3% in 2014/15 to 93.9% in 2015/16. When considered in the context of the additional workload of the team this still represents good performance.

The reduction in caseloads since the recruitment of additional IROs to the service has led to a significant increase in the completion of mid-point checks. (March 2016: 899 mid-point checks were completed with only 95% of staff being in post). This is strengthening IRO oversight of practice and care planning in line with the Improvement Plan.

There have been elements of success with formal and informal problem resolution. A review of the informal and formal resolution system has taken place and a new protocol was implemented on the 01/04/16. This has simplified the process and joins both informal and formal resolution within the same process. IRO challenge can now be evidenced and tracked using both forms of resolution. Data available covering informal resolution indicates that IROs have provided 432 challenges during 2015/2016. It is acknowledged that the factors that enable IROs to adopt a position of positive independent challenge are complex; it has been accepted by the IRO Service that the level of challenge needs to be stronger.

IROs have worked to develop strong positive relationships with children's services and quarterly liaison meetings take place in the 3 locality areas to look at themes, good practice and deficits. IROs have highlighted areas of learning and development in relation to chronologies, child and family assessments, quality assurance audits of S.47 enquiries and case recordings. IROs have worked alongside CSC to improve the completion of social work pre-meeting reports for looked after children review meetings and where necessary have used an escalation process to identify when the report has not been available prior to the review. This has led to considerable improvements in this area.

IROs have also supported improvements in the completion of quality assurance audits of S.47 enquiries.

2. Recommendations from the IRO Annual Report 2015/16

- Managers of the IRO Service must continue to monitor IRO caseloads and the impact on delivery of the IRO responsibilities as detailed in the IRO handbook.

Update: Quality and Review managers have monitored IRO caseloads on a monthly basis. The Ofsted inspection identified that caseloads were too high. This has been addressed in the Improvement Plan with Management Team approval of an additional 15 IROs and 3.5 Quality & Review Managers. The average IRO caseload in April 2016 was 82 compared with 109 at the end of March 2015.

- To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the IRO Service, from the 1st June 2015, a locality management model will be introduced. This will replace the current cross county structure and will align IROs in three teams which mirror the locality footprints for Children's Social Care (CSC). To support the new arrangements changes will also be made to the arrangements for IRO team meetings and development days.

Update: The locality model has been implemented which involves IRO locality meetings being held on a monthly basis and full service development days taking place quarterly. This is proving to be effective in supporting IRO involvement, participation and contribution to service development.

- Managers of the IRO Service will continue to monitor performance in respect of the proportion of looked after children reviews and child protection conferences held within the required timescales to further improve performance against these indicators.

Update: Quality & Review Managers have continued to monitor performance in respect of looked after children reviews and child protection conferences through IRO supervision. Whilst good performance has been maintained in child protection conferences reviewed within timescale, it is acknowledged that there has been a slight dip in performance in respect of looked after children reviews. This will be a priority for improvement in the coming year.

- IROs to undertake robust quality assurance of practice to ensure that statutory requirements are met, including children having an up-to-date child & family assessment, personal education plan, health assessment and that visits to children are undertaken within required timescales. IROs need to make a review recommendation where this is not evidenced and escalate if necessary to ensure timely completion.

Update: There is some evidence of IRO quality assurance of practice within informal and formal resolution. However, the service recognises this is still an area of improvement. Alongside a revised Audit Framework, a new IRO quality assurance checklist is being introduced which will be embedded in practice in the forthcoming months. A supervision audit tool has also been introduced in 2015/2016.

- Additional training is to be provided to the IROs in relation to the problem resolution process, thresholds and appropriate timescales for resolution to ensure greater consistency of practice across the service.

Update: Additional training was provided to IROs during a service development day and this will continue to be included in future training to support thresholds and appropriate timescales for resolution to ensure greater consistency. This is also a standard agenda item for IRO supervision, locality meetings and quarterly liaison meetings.

- Evidence of informal resolution of issues by the IRO needs to be captured more effectively.

Update: There is evidence of informal resolution by IROs and changes to the children's electronic recording system (LCS) have been introduced to capture this data. There is evidence that some children's cases have been escalated from informal to formal resolution. Issues have been identified and addressed in a timely manner, capturing the impact of IRO involvement. This has been supported by the implementation of a new problem resolution protocol bringing together both informal and formal resolution.

- Quality and Review Managers should work more closely with the newly centralised case support services for looked after children and safeguarding to

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ensure the timely distribution of documentation in respect of looked after children reviews and child protection conferences.

Update: The Centralised administration teams provide a monthly report in relation to their performance and deficits in performance are reviewed by senior managers on a regular basis. Due to capacity issues within the Minute Taking Service compounded by the significant increase in the number of child protection conferences held, there are delays in minutes being transcribed. This will continue to be monitored and a review will be undertaken of the way in which meetings are minuted to improve efficiency.

- Where an agency that has been identified as part of the core group does not attend / submit a report for a child protection conference the IRO should escalate this to the appropriate safeguarding lead for that agency.

Update: The IRO Service has implemented a standard letter of escalation in relation to non-attendance/where a report is not submitted for child protection conferences. The Quality & Review Managers will analyse this information as part of their audit activity in 2016/17.

- When the core group is being agreed at a child protection conference the IRO should ensure that explicit consideration is given to any areas of need that are not adequately addressed (particularly parental mental health, substance misuse or domestic abuse) within the proposed core group and the child protection plan should include actions to address such areas.

Update: This is addressed by IROs within the conference to ensure appropriate membership of core group meetings. IROs also continue to reinforce the requirement of agencies to contribute to a final core group report rather than providing individual agency reports to review child protection conferences.

- The Principal Social Worker should consider the development and support needs of Social Workers attending child protection conferences and take this forward.

Update: Up-skilling training for practice managers has been provided to ensure social workers are equipped and understand their role around decisions to proceed to an initial child protection conference. Back to basics social work training has also commenced and will be undertaken throughout 2016/2017. Child centred and SMART plans training is currently underway across children's services. A 'risk sensible' model will also be launched in July 2016 which will improve the quality of child protection plans, ensuring a clear focus on the high risk indicators and the changes required to reduce the risk to the child.

Foreword

The IRO Annual Report provides a review of the work and findings of the IRO Service during the period from the 1 April 2015 to the 31 March 2016. The report will consider the findings and recommendations made by Ofsted in respect of the IRO Service during their inspection of children's services in September 2015.

A key recommendation for the IRO Service was to "ensure the Independent Reviewing Service undertakes consistent regular oversight of practice and care planning in children's cases in line with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, 2010."

Ofsted found that IROs do not consistently monitor children's cases to ensure they are receiving the services they need and that their plans are progressing as agreed. The authority's performance in achieving permanence for children looked after was found to be variable. It was also highlighted that the IRO Service did not collect information on how well permanence was being promoted at children's review meetings or through wider monitoring by IROs. The report acknowledged that IRO caseloads were too high with some IROs holding 130 cases compared with the recommended level of between 50 - 70.

At the time of the inspection the service operated with 30 FTE IROs and there were three vacant IRO posts due to recruitment difficulties. Ofsted concluded that "Overall performance in this service has improved, but is still not meeting the authority's own targets and improvements are further hampered by the lack of timely information available to IRO managers."

This report will address how the service has responded to the findings of Ofsted and

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015 - 2016 will highlight areas of good practice, areas of innovation and improvement and sets out key elements needed for continuous development.

The report will be presented to the Senior Leadership Team, Start-Well Senior Management Team, Corporate Parenting Board and the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

4. The IRO Service

Lancashire has had an IRO service since 1999. IROs are responsible for chairing children looked after reviews, child protection conferences and a range of specialist strategy meetings, including allegations against adults working in regulated activity with children, suspected cases of fabricated/induced illness, child sexual exploitation, children missing from care, children looked after who display sexually harmful behaviour towards other children and cases of serious self-harm to children who are looked after.

Since January 2016 the IRO Service has undertaken Regulation 44 visits for Lancashire's residential establishments for children and young people ensuring greater independence within this process.

4.1 Service Structure

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

During 2015/2016 the service has increased its IROs by 50% from 30 to 45 FTE posts. Forty-four of these posts have responsibility for chairing children looked after reviews, child protection conferences and specialist strategy meetings, whilst the remaining post reviews the local authority's approved foster carers. The IRO posts are held by 47 members of staff and the team have recently appointed to the last two vacancies. Eleven of the posts are held by male staff and eight members identify themselves as from a BME background.

The service mirrors the locality footprint of Children's Social Care. There are two IRO teams in the Central locality, 3 teams in the East and 1.5 teams in the North. This

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015 - 2016 helps to strengthen local relationships whilst also improving consistency of practice and challenge. The IROs participate in monthly team meetings and quarterly full service development days. The IRO team structure chart is found at Appendix 1.

4.2 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 child care settings and several have previous management experience. A detailed table of the level of post qualifying experience and length of service as IRO managers and IROs in Lancashire can be found in Appendix 2.

4.3 Staff Recruitment and Retention

Following the agreement to increase the number of IRO posts from 30 to 45 and Quality and Review Managers from 3 to 6.5 recruitment has been extremely challenging. Agency staff have been appointed pending permanent recruitment. During 2015/16 four permanent IROs left the service: one retired, one left to take up an IRO post in another local authority and two secured internal promotion to managerial positions.

Lancashire has struggled to attract a good pool of suitably experienced candidates when recruiting for Independent Reviewing Officers within the regional 'market workforce'. Lancashire's recruitment difficulties are compounded by higher pay rates for IROs regionally and in neighboring local authorities. Currently from the structure of 45 IROs 48% are agency staff. This has been recognised and senior managers within the service are looking at a resolution to address this, making Lancashire more competitive within the regional market place.

4.4 Caseloads

The investment of additional IROs has had a significant impact in reducing caseloads which have gone down from an average of 109 in March 2015 to 82 in April 2016. Once fully staffed it is anticipated that the average will be under 75 which is close to the recommended caseload in the IRO Handbook (50 – 70 children for a full-time

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015 - 2016 equivalent IRO). However, the continued rise in initial child protection conferences and the number of children subject to child protection plans has placed additional demands on the IRO Service. (Child protection plans: March 2015 – 948, compared to March 2016: 1,469. This represents a 55% increase). The rate in Lancashire is now at 59 per 10,000 child population, above the average trends for the region (49.9) and our statistical neighbours (48.2) and far above the national average of (42.9).

The number of children looked after has increased by 3% from 1,626 in March 2015 to 1,674 in March 2016. Lancashire's rate of children looked after per 10,000 population (March 2016: 69.1) is lower than the regional rate (March 2014: 81) but is higher than our statistical neighbours (March 2014: 61.2) and the national average (March 2014: 60).

Whilst IRO capacity remains a significant challenge the reduction of caseloads is a priority for the service and now that IROs (currently agency staff) have been appointed to posts there will be a focus over the coming weeks to reduce caseloads below an average of 75 to enable IROs to improve the quality of all aspects of their role.

4.5 Fostering IRO

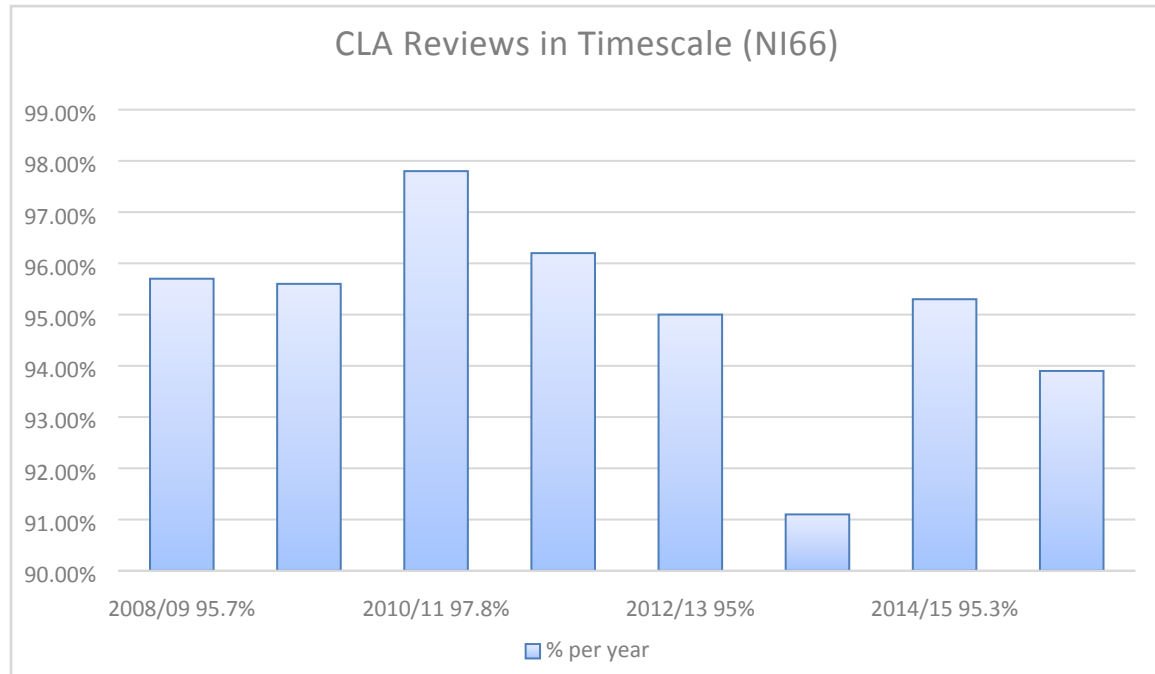
Foster carers are reviewed by a dedicated Fostering IRO within the IRO Service. Whilst the Ofsted inspection found that foster carers are reviewed regularly, some of the reviews seen by inspectors lacked detail and rigour. This has been addressed in conjunction with the Fostering Service. Attendance at foster carer review meetings now includes the foster carer, Social Worker for the carer, Practice Manager and Fostering IRO. Reviews are also undertaken in more venues across the county to enable foster carers to attend. The review follows a clear and consistent agenda, giving consideration to the placements a foster carer has had over the previous year, looking at what has been successful but also where there has been areas of difficulty or where the foster carer has required additional support. The actions from the foster carer's professional development portfolio are also reviewed and the recommendations are based on the needs of the foster carer and what is required to develop their skills/confidence in fostering. A process is in place to seek the views of all children who have been in placement during the review period and views of the child's Social Worker for any child in placement and those of birth parents. The process

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and agreed timescales ensure that the reviews are completed and shared in a timely
manner.

5. Performance

5.1 Looked After Children

5.1.1 Reviews in Timescale (NI66)



Performance has decreased from 95.3% in 2014–15 to 93.9% in 2015 -16. Out of the cohort of 1,608 children who had a review during the period, 98 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 Children's Social Care
- IRO sickness absence
- Changes in Social Worker
- Transfer of cases to new IROs

When taken as a proportion of the total number of reviews held (3449) performance rises to 97.1%.

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

5.1.2 Children Looked After Placed outside of Lancashire

There are a total of 331 children placed outside of the local authority area. This figure

Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015 - 2016 represents 19.8% of the looked after children population.

Of this population there are 100 (6%) "truly" distant placements, an increase from March 2015 (4.4%). Truly distant placements are defined as placements "outside of the local authority area or one of its neighbouring authorities" (Out of Authority Placement of Looked After Children: supplement to The Children Act 1989 Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (England) Regulations 2014).

5.1.3 Placements of Children Looked After

Of the 1674 children looked after by Lancashire County Council:

66.9% are placed within an alternate family setting (1068 with foster carers, 52 with prospective adopters). This rate has decreased slightly from 70% in 2014-15.

14.7% (247 children) are placed within residential settings (including Lancashire's residential settings, external residential settings, residential schools, secure units, hospitals and prisons).

2.6% (43 children) are placed in other community settings such as supported accommodation projects, supported tenancies and supported lodgings.

15.7% (264 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 an increase from 217 home placements in 2014-15.

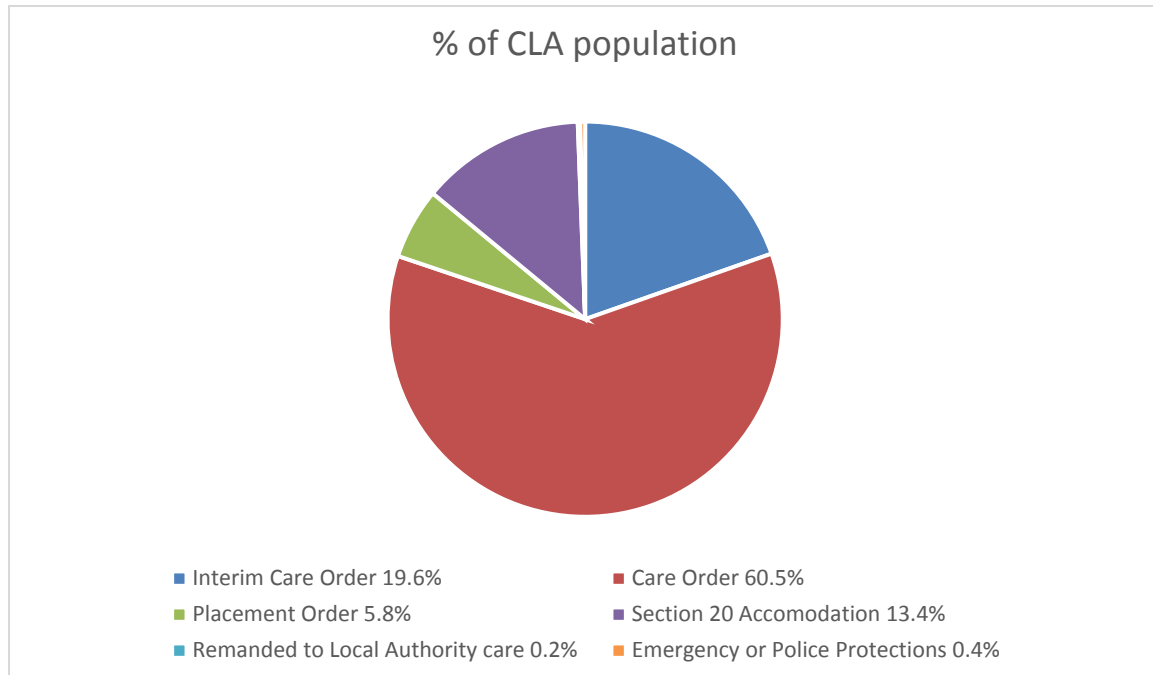
5.1.4 Placement Stability

The percentage of children having three or more placements within 2015/16 was 6.7% which is comparable with 6.8% in 2014-15. Performance compares favourably with both national (11%) and statistical neighbour (10.5%) averages (March 2014).

The percentage of children living in the same placement for at least two years was 66.1% in 2015–16 compared to 69.4% in 2014-15. However, performance remains in line with our statistical neighbours (65.6%) and the national average (67%) (March 2014).

5.1.5 Achieving Permanence

The legal status of looked after children by Lancashire is as follows:



The proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders, Care Orders, Section 20 Accommodation, Remanded to the Care of the Local Authority and subject to Emergency or Police Protection has increased. However, there has been a decrease in the proportion of children subject to Placement Orders compared to 2014/15.

The IRO Service plays a key role in reviewing care plans for children subject of a Placement Order and in ensuring that timely action is taken to secure permanence for this group of children. Performance in this area can be summarised as below:

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of Placement Orders	219	222	97
Placed with adopters	64	92	52
Not yet placed with adopters	155	130	45

The figures demonstrate that fewer children have become subject of Placement Orders in 2015/16. This could be attributed to the increase in the use of alternative family placements under other orders such as Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders.

5.1.6 Participation

Performance in relation to participation has increased over the last 12 months; the majority of looked after children in Lancashire either attend or contribute to their review. In 2014/15 the participation of children looked after was 92.5%. This has increased to 95.9% during 2015-16. Out of the cohort of 1608 children only 66 did not participate or contribute to their review. When considered as a proportion of the total reviews held (3449) performance rises to 98%.

The IRO Service continues to have excellent links with the Corporate Parenting Board and has a named IRO representative at every meeting. The IRO is able to follow up any issues raised by the Board or the young people in attendance and provides feedback to the service on relevant issues.

Linx (Lancashire's Children in Care Council) is invited to attend IRO team development days annually to promote a better understanding from a young person's perspective of how IROs can more effectively engage with children looked after.

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

5.1.7 Health Assessments

There has been a significant improvement in the proportion of children looked after with an up-to-date health assessment which has risen from 86.5% in March 2015 to 94.4% in March 2016. This can be attributed to the collaborative work undertaken by CSC and Health colleagues. Performance is favourable compared with statistical neighbours (87%), national (88.3%) and regional (90.8%) rates (March 2014).

5.1.8 Personal Education Plans

Significant progress has been made in relation to the proportion of children looked after with a Personal Education Plan (PEP). In March 2016 this was 99.8%.

5.2. Performance related to Safeguarding

5.2.1 Child Protection Plans Reviewed in Timescale (NI67)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Lancashire	100%	98.90%	96.5%	94.3%	95.8%	98.9%

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SN's	96.4	98%	97.4%	96.8%	96.3%	N/A
North West	95.2%	95.7%	91.7%	96.1%	94.00%	N/A
England	97.1%	96.7%	96.2%	94.6%	94.00%	N/A

There has been an increase in performance in respect of review child protection conferences held within timescale from 95.8% in 2014–15 to 98.9% in 2015–16. Performance is 4.9% above the national average of 94% for 2013/14 and is also above that of regional and statistical neighbours (2013/14 data). In respect of individual children and young people, this performance means that 11 children did not have a review child protection conference within the required timescale. This equates to 8 meetings as 3 of the conferences considered siblings within the same meeting.

The reasons for conferences being held outside of the statutory timescale include: changes in dates to accommodate family attendance, capacity issues of the IRO/Social Worker when rearranging an adjourned meeting and staff sickness. The increase in performance can be attributed mainly to: the increased capacity within the service but also that the Quality and Review Managers have been closely monitoring timescales and continually improving performance through IRO supervision and locality meetings. It is anticipated that, with a reduction in IRO caseloads and an increase in management capacity, the service will continue to achieve good performance in this area and so contribute to safeguarding children appropriately.

5.2.2 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)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Lancashire	4.8%	4.4%	2.6%	3.7%	3.0%	3.7%
SN's	7.5%	6.0%	5.2%	4.5%	4.9%	N/A
England National Average	6.0%	5.6%	4.3%	4.5%	3.7%	N/A

The table illustrates a slight drop in performance in relation to the duration of child protection plans. (2014/15: 3.0% compared to 2015/16: 3.7%). This equates to 44 children. Performance is in line with the national average in 2014/15 and continues to

be above that of our Statistical Neighbour averages of 4.9%. This illustrates that there is effective monitoring of child protection plans by IROs and managers within Children's Social Care, ensuring appropriate outcomes for children, either through a step-down with continuing support as a child in need or escalation to care proceedings. Strengthening IRO oversight of practice will ensure tighter monitoring of children's cases and prevention of drift. The implementation of the risk sensible model will also ensure tighter and more focused child protection plans which set out clear expectations for parents in relation to the changes required.

In order to improve performance the Quality and Review Managers will 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 two year's duration will continue to be reviewed individually within IRO supervision. Child protection plans over twelve month's duration are also subject to review by the IRO and Team Manager and are monitored within IRO supervision.

5.2.3 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)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Lancashire	13.7%	10.8%	12.3%	12.6%	13.9%	17.9%
SN's	12.5%	15.6%	15.2%	16.1%	18.1%	N/A
England National Average	13.3%	13.8%	14.9%	15.8%	16.6%	N/A

During 2015/16, 303 children subject to a child protection plan had previously (at any time) been subject to a child protection plan. This represents a 29% increase compared to 2014/15 but is slightly below that of our statistical neighbours, but is higher than the national average performance of 16.6% in 2014/15. The increase in the number of repeat child protection plans may be attributable to a number of factors:

- An increase in the number of children entering the child protection system. This is reflected in a rise in the number of S47 enquiries undertaken which has increased from a rate of 13.5 per 10,000 population (March 2015) to 17.9 per 10,000 population (March 2016). There has been a corresponding rise in the

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number of children subject to a child protection plan which increased from 956 or a rate of 39.2 per 10,000 population (March 2015) to 1443 or a rate of 59.0 per 10,000 population (March 2016). This increase is particularly notable since the Ofsted inspection in September 2015 when the number of children subject to a child protection plan was 1064 (rate per 10,000 population: 43.5). This may be due to a heightened awareness of agency safeguarding responsibilities and the identification of children at risk of significant harm. This may include children previously subject to a child protection plan.

- The audit and reassessment of child in need cases following the Ofsted inspection in September 2015. In some cases this resulted in an escalation to child protection.
- Children subject to a child protection plan moving across local authority boundaries. A child moving back into Lancashire whilst still subject to a child protection plan will be classed as a repeat child protection plan.
- The child protection plan being ceased prematurely or 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.

As identified above a number of factors may impact on performance against this indicator. A sample audit will be undertaken to support a further analysis of practice. Quality and Review Managers will provide more robust quality assurance of decision making where the child protection plan has been ceased at the first review child protection conference. IROs will also be trained in the risk sensible model ensuring consistency of practice in respect of the identification of high risk indicators and the role of the conference in reviewing the child protection plan.

5.2.4 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

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. Although there has been a slight drop in performance against this indicator from 5.1% in 2014/15

6. Quality Assurance

The IRO Service is committed to improving the quality of services and 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 children looked after and children in need of protection, including case file audits and the quality assurance of S47 enquiries where a child has suffered significant harm but a decision is made not to hold an initial child protection conference.

Since the inspection by Ofsted there has been a strong focus on the requirement for IROs to undertake mid-point checks in between review meetings to ensure more robust monitoring of the child's care plan. This has been effective in evidencing the IRO foot-print and challenge by IROs in relation to care planning issues. Positively this was recognised by Ofsted during a recent monitoring visit.

Quality assurance is also undertaken of the performance of the IRO Service by managers undertaking shadowing of IROs to observe their practice, supervision and audits.

6.1 IRO Feedback in Relation to Quality of Practice

The issues highlighted by IROs and Quality & Review Managers in supervision and locality meetings are as follows:

- The sharing of child protection conference Social Work reports with parents in a timely manner prior to conference. This has been highlighted as a concern with CSC in the Locality/IRO liaison meetings and has been included in the CSC weekly brief to promote best practice.
- The lack of chronologies at initial child protection conferences and how this impacts on the quality and outcome of the decision making and the implications for safeguarding children. Given the increased capacity within the service IROs are

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undertaking more robust preparation prior to the conference with a focus on ensuring chronologies are included within the report.

- Social work reports are not always completed and shared prior to looked after children review meetings which results in the longer duration of meetings. The child where age appropriate should have sight of the report to support their participation in the meeting and the service has a clear escalation process by IROs prior to the review. This has been one of the main areas for IROs entering into in-formal resolution during 2014-2015 and has resulted in an improvement over recent months.
- The standard of child protection conference requests. The number of conference requests that are being challenged by IROs and Quality and Review Managers has increased in recent months. The evidence to demonstrate how threshold has been met to move into the child protection arena at times is unclear. This requires greater oversight by Quality & Review Managers to ensure that requests for a conference are appropriate.
- In April 2015 Children's Social Care (CSC) changed its model of working to generic social work and this appears to have impacted on the quality of practice, in some cases causing drift and delay in the progression of care plans and child protection plans. Staff turnover and a high number of inexperienced staff within CSC have also been highlighted as contributory factors affecting the quality of practice. Re-modelling of services within CSC has taken place with a move to specialist teams for safeguarding and assessment, children in our care, children in need hubs and professional personal advisor teams. This will improve practice and achieve better outcomes for children and young people. IROs are aware of the need to ensure timely progression of care plans through the use of mid-point checks and problem resolution.
- Concerns in respect of the quality of Pathway Plans and practitioners not fully understanding the local authority's responsibilities towards young people preparing for and leaving local authority care. This is a priority within the Improvement Plan and training has been commissioned for Social Workers and managers on support for care leavers and their entitlements. The creation of specialist teams including the development of professional personal advisor hubs will also support

improvements in practice.

- Requests for initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) are not always being received in a timely manner resulting in a number of ICPC's not being held within the statutory timescale. A contributing factor to this is likely to be the 55% increase in ICPCs held. (March 2015: 956 compared to 1,443 in March 2016). This has been addressed via the CSC weekly brief and has been discussed with Team Managers in the quarterly IRO/Locality liaison meetings. IROs have also delivered briefings as part of CSC development days to ensure there is a clear understanding of the process and importance of ICPC's being held within statutory timescales.
- In a small number of children's cases there has been inconsistency in the application of thresholds, such as where children are living in the same household and one child is the subject of a Care Order and a sibling is the subject of a child in need plan where safeguarding concerns have been identified. This learning from this has been shared at an IRO development day and with Children's Social Care to promote consistency of practice.
- The quality of child protection plans and care plans for children looked after has been highlighted as an error of concern. This includes timescales, who is responsible for actions and contingency planning. Training is being provided to Social Worker's and has already been delivered to IROs. IROs will also be trained in the risk sensible model and they will have a key role in quality assuring child protection plans to ensure they are SMART and address the high risk indicators identified in the assessment. The quality of plans will be monitored via case file audits and the Audit Framework has recently been revised and relaunched.
- IROs have acknowledged the enthusiasm and commitment within CSC and their passion to improve services for children and families.
- IROs have seen evidence of positive outcomes for children and timely progression to secure permanence through the use of contingency fostering placements which have been effective in avoiding the need for changes of placement.
- There is good evidence of Social Worker's gaining and recording children and young people's views, wishes and feelings and children feeling listened to as a result.

6.2 Case File Audits

The completion of case file audits by IROs continues to be an integral part of their quality assurance role. The IRO Service completed 88% of all case file audits allocated during April 2015–October 2015, despite very high caseloads. From October 2015 Quality & Review Managers were involved in the auditing of child in need cases and Section 47 enquiries that hadn't progressed to an initial child protection conference when the concerns were substantiated.

Following feedback from the Ofsted Inspection in September 2015 the Audit Framework has been updated and relaunched. The audit tool has now been revised and training is being delivered. This will be implemented from the 1 June 2016. All managers within the service will be required to complete 1 case file audit per month whilst 10 audits per month will be undertaken by IROs. The audit will consider compliance issues but will have a greater emphasis on qualitative analysis.

6.3 IRO Quality Assurance of S.47 Enquiries

IROs undertake the quality assurance of S.47 enquiries where a child has suffered significant harm and the decision has been made not to hold an initial child protection conference. The aim of this audit is to ensure that all children who may be at continuing risk of significant harm are considered at a child protection conference. If there is disagreement about the decision made not to proceed with a child protection conference, the problem resolution process is used.

Historically a limited number of S.47 enquiries have been shared with IROs for them to quality assure. In recent months this has increased but there is still a short-fall in the number of requests received. In March 2016 there were 76 S.47 enquiries which were substantiated but did not progress to a conference. However, the IRO Service only received 37 of these to quality assure.

This is recognised as an area for improvement. The importance of S.47 enquiry audits has been highlighted in IRO team briefs, the CSC weekly brief and through discussion at the IRO/Locality quarterly liaison meetings. In order to monitor this more closely, new systems are being considered, such as S. 47 enquiries requiring review being sent to the Quality and Review Managers' duty box prior to distribution to IROs. In this

way any differences between the total numbers received requiring an audit and the actual number completed by IROs can be monitored and addressed.

6.4 Themes arising from Practice Observations

The following findings are from practice observations undertaken by Quality & Review Managers within the Safeguarding, Inspection & Audit Service in relation to looked after children reviews and child protection conferences:

6.4.1 Strengths:

- IROs have a good understanding of the child's case.
- IROs have a wealth of knowledge and experience in relation to safeguarding and children looked after.
- Meetings are well managed, in terms of securing good participation and managing conflict.
- IROs meet with parents prior to child protection conferences and support their participation in the meeting.
- There is a clear focus on the child and the progress being made in both child protection conferences and children looked after reviews.
- IROs recognise the importance of children participating in their review and endeavour to achieve this through good preparation. More recently this has included checks to ensure that the child has been prepared for the review and that the IRO has seen the child prior to the meeting and they were clear as to their wishes and feelings and participation preference.
- Previous review recommendations were checked and the care plan reviewed.
- Good engagement of parents by the IRO.
- IROs are challenging non-attendance by individual agencies at child protection conferences by contacting them and reminding them of their responsibilities for safeguarding children under "Working Together".
- Since the relaunch of the Problem Resolution Protocol in March 2016 there is good evidence of the effective use of informal and formal resolution.

6.4.2 Areas for Development:

- Develop IRO confidence and ability to appropriately and consistently challenge

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and evidence the IRO footprint within the child's case record.

- IROs to ensure that chronologies are available for all child protection conferences
- Ensure mid-point checks are completed on all children's cases.
- IROs to ensure all children have an up to date Child & Family Assessment that provides an analysis of risk and informs outcomes and decision making.
- Plans for children to be specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic and to have clear timescales.
- Ensure that thresholds are in line with the revised Continuum of Need and risk sensible model and that both are embedded within the IRO Service.
- Embed the File Audit Framework within the service and ensure that audits completed are of a good standard and that actions arising from audits are completed in a timely manner.
- Ensure robust challenge by IROs at the child's second looked after children review where there isn't a clear plan for permanence.

6.5 Audit of Multi-Agency Attendance at Child Protection Conferences

On average 230 child protection conferences are held each month. The IRO and Minute Taking Service captures data in respect of attendance by agencies, parents and children and young people at initial and review child protection conferences.

6.5.1 Key Themes:

After Children's Social Care, Education (schools and early years) are the most consistent attenders at both initial and review conferences (90%), with Health Visitors and School Nurses also being consistent attenders (88%).

Attendance by non-statutory agencies continues to be low with only 32% of conferences having staff from this sector. The low attendance of non-statutory agencies highlights a risk that all relevant information regarding the welfare of children may not be available for the conference.

To strengthen practice in relation to the participation of children and young people it is important that their voice is heard in the process of decisions being made about their lives. From April 2015 – March 2016, 5167 children were the subject of either an Initial or review child protection conference. Out of this number 677 children (13%) attended

the conference and gave their views either themselves or through an advocate. Furthermore, 1653 (32%) children who did not attend the conference, did express their views through facilitative means, for example via a Social Worker/Support Worker or parent. Improving the participation of children in child protection conferences remains a priority. The strengthening family's model may assist in this process.

There was very limited attendance at conference from substance misuse services (17%) and Probation/YOT (29%) of all conferences. The attendance of adult and child mental health services was also extremely low with only 86 professionals attending a possible 2762 meetings.

A more detailed audit will be undertaken of multi-agency attendance at child protection conferences across Lancashire over a two week period to gain a better understanding of multi-agency attendance and participation in child protection conferences.

6.6 Themes arising from Parent/Carer Questionnaires

Parents and carers of children subject to a child protection conference are encouraged to complete a questionnaire following the meeting to gain a better understanding of their experience of Lancashire's child protection processes.

During 2015/2016 there was sixty-nine questionnaires received which is extremely low and represents a 30% decrease when compared to 2014/2015 when 99 questionnaires were completed. This equates to 5.3% of questionnaires returned from the total number of initial or review child protection conferences.

From the returns 30 related to initial child protection conferences (ICPCs) and 36 related to review child protection conferences (RCPCs) with only 3 questionnaires relating to looked after children reviews. A review of this process will be undertaken and consideration given to other mechanisms by which the views of parents/carers can be sought.

6.6.1 Parent/Carer Feedback from Initial Child Protection Conferences

Of the questionnaires returned from the ICPCs, 18 (60%) indicated they had seen the Social Worker's report 24 hrs before the conference. Two participants chose to make an additional comment that they had seen the report either the evening before or the morning of the conference, but were content with this.

Generally, participant feedback was positive. On 17 of the 18 questionnaires (94%), the participants reported that, having had sight of the Social Worker's report in advance, they were well prepared for the conference, the IRO had provided help and support and had chaired the meeting appropriately.

In 16 of the 18 (88%) questionnaires returned, participants also noted that they had met with the IRO prior to the meeting and had found this to be helpful.

94% of participants reported that they had come away from the conference with a good understanding of the local authority's concerns about their child(ren) and the Child Protection Plan.

In many cases, individual participants had made reflective and thoughtful comments about their experience of the conference, for example:

"Yes, I fully understand the concerns....I welcome the support"

"It was fully explained and I agree with what was said things don't always go well, but only because of my pride"

"I understand the plan and what will happen next"

"We are going to work very hard as we want the best for our child so we will do what it takes"

As previously noted, there were 12 questionnaires (40%) returned from ICPC where the participant had not received the Social Worker's report until the morning of the meeting. They found this unacceptable and went on to report further dissatisfaction with the conference as a whole.

For this group, it would seem that from the outset, they felt disadvantaged by the lack of preparation afforded them and were not able to regain sufficient confidence to be positive or accepting of the issues under scrutiny. As a result, their experience of the conference was 'negative' and they came away without a clear understanding of the plan to safeguard their child.

Some examples of this are as follows:

"Was not prepared and only received what allegations have been made on the

day of the meeting".

"No help or support, was not aware of anything in the meeting, wasn't even aware there would be other professionals there".

"Given report 5 minutes before conference"

"I felt victimised as I wasn't given an opportunity to have my opinions heard. It was all very one sided"

"I had been kept in the dark"...Didn't expect it to be as brutal as it was"

6.6.2 Parent/Carer Feedback from Review Child Protection Conferences

There were 36 questionnaires returned for RCPCs; of these, 20 (55%) of participants reported that they had seen the Social Worker's report at least 24 hours before the review. 17 (47%) of the participants indicated that they had seen the reports of other professionals prior to the review. This represents a small increase from the 2014/2015 figures.

A very high proportion 97% (all but one of the participants) reported that they were invited to core group meetings. Indeed, this is an increase on the previous year and continues to indicate that once a Child Protection Plan has commenced, a large proportion of participants are invited to core groups.

With regards to the conduct of the meeting itself, 27 (75%) of the participants reported that the review conference was well conducted and chaired by the IRO. Of these, most participants made additional comments that they felt comfortable and that they understood the issues and the process.

In terms of the Child Protection Plan and an understanding of the concerns of the local authority, 30 of the 36 participants (86 %) reported that they came away with a good understanding of the issues of concern and the Child Protection Plan.

6.6.3 Analysis of Feedback

Despite this low return, the responses would seem to indicate the following:

- All conference participants would like to have sight of the Social Workers report

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and the other professionals' reports **at least** prior to the start of the conference
and preferably, the day before.

- Those participants who did see the Social Worker's report prior to the meeting stated that they felt better prepared for the conference and their experience of it was generally more positive.
- Those participants who did not see any reports felt disadvantaged and found their experience of the conference to be negative.
- Although the number of Social Worker's reports seen before the conference stands at 60%, there is still much room for improvement.
- Overall, the majority of participants who returned the questionnaire reported that the conference had been well managed by the IRO.
- In turn, this appears to have helped the participants to come away from the conference with a good understanding of the issues and the Child Protection Plan itself.

7. Good Practice & Problem Resolution

The following are examples of the positive impact that IROs have had in improving situations for children and young people who are looked after by the local authority.

Example 1

A young person wrote a letter to an IRO who was leaving the service expressing her appreciation for the support she had been given. She said:

"When I found out you were leaving I had to hold back my tears. I just can't imagine my meetings without you in them. You have done so much for me and for that I am forever grateful."

Another IRO was able to support a young person's participation in their review by personalising her review agenda through the inclusion of photographs of her before the agenda items.

Example 2

During the IROs discussion with the parents prior to the child protection conference

they became aware that they were not prepared for the meeting. The mother lacked understanding of what was happening or the severity of the situation and the family had not received support identified as necessary in the pre-birth assessment. The IRO adjourned the conference to allow this work to be undertaken.

At the reconvened conference the family had legal representation to support them and had a better understanding of the issues and the process. The IRO was open with both parents about their learning needs and their possible impact. The IRO made sure that the language used in conference was conducive to their understanding and that they were fully involved.

The outcome of conference was a child protection plan, but parents were able to see this as supportive and articulated their willingness to work with it. They were positively engaged with the process.

Example 3

There were a number of concerns raised about a family, that constituted neglect, but the legal department had indicated that the threshold for proceedings was not met.

The child had a diagnosis of diabetes and the parents were not managing this condition. Health professionals regarded this as potentially life threatening due to the child's young age. Home conditions were poor and parental control of the older child was limited. Mother had been diagnosed with depression and father was aggressive.

Following further consultation with the legal department by the social worker, with the support of the IRO, an Interim Care Order was applied for and granted.

7.1 Problem Resolution Processes

7.1.1 Use of the Problem Resolution Process for Looked After Children

In 2015/16 51 starred recommendations were made compared to 50 in the preceding year. The breakdown by locality is as follows: East Locality: 28, North Locality: 17 and Central Locality: 3. Over the last twelve months the largest increase has been seen in the North (2014/15: 6). There has been a reduction in Central Locality. (2014/15: 17) and the East Locality has remained at a similar level (2014/15: 27).

The majority of starred recommendations were resolved at Stage Two in all three localities. In the East four were escalated to stage three and two of these escalated to Stage 4 prior to resolution. The need for escalation was mainly due to delays in response from relevant managers. No starred recommendations escalated to Stage 5 over this review period.

Starred recommendations have frequently focused on compliance issues. A common theme in the East and North relates to case recording not being up to date on the LCS electronic children's social care recording system and there being considerable delay in the completion of the social work pre-meeting report. This issue does not seem to have arisen in the Central Locality which may account for the low number of starred recommendations made in that area.

7.1.2 Themes from Starred Recommendations:

- Delay in the application to revoke the Care Order.
- Delay in application for an Interim Care Order.
- Statutory visits not taking place within required timescales.
- IRO requesting a placement freeze due to concerns about a proposed placement move or the IRO requesting additional information to consider a proposed placement move or change of care plan.
- Direct work not completed with a child.
- Delay in following up actions to progress the care plan for the child.
- Child sporadically receiving education and requiring a school placement.
- Child needing placement nearer to family members.
- Delay in identifying a school placement.
- Provision of Personal Education Plan Support Allowance (PEPSA) funding for equipment to support a young person complete their homework.
- Funding for a school trip and to participate in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.
- No pathway plan.
- No missing from home meeting held - stage three meeting requested.
- CLA review recommendations not completed.
- CLA paperwork not completed on LCS.

7.1.3 Use of the Problem Resolution Process for Children Subject to Child Protection Plans

Very few starred recommendations have been made in relation to children subject to child protection plans: Central Locality: 2, East Locality: 1 and in the North Locality no starred recommendations have been made.

The East case related to concerns that the children were not safeguarded within the child protection plan; further actions were identified and timescales met. The Central starred recommendations related to concerns about a delay in multi-agency information sharing and lack of risk assessment undertaken. In the second case there was no social work report and a lack of police information to fully review and consider the existing child protection plan. All three recommendations have been addressed and are closed.

7.1.4 Analysis of Findings

In all cases the issues raised by the IRO were accepted by managers. In most cases prompt resolution followed, with improvements over this review period being seen in required actions being completed within agreed timescales. This is reflected in the small number of cases that were escalated to stage three and four compared with the previous year and none have thus far been escalated to stage five for resolution. A few have remained open for a longer time period to enable the IRO to track the completion of missing CLA reports to ensure the system is fully updated. The starred recommendations issued have successfully addressed outstanding pre-meeting social work reports ensuring that the case record (LCS) was brought up to date.

The responsibility for ensuring starred recommendations are progressed in a timely manner sits with the IRO and their manager. There is evidence of the IRO Managers tracking and having involvement in moving forward starred recommendations. It is important to ensure the escalation process is instigated at an early stage to avoid drift.

There are variations across the localities in the number of starred recommendations made. A possible explanation for this is differences in IRO practice and lack of consistency in their application of the problem resolution protocol. There are members of the team that have not issued any starred recommendations with some IROs issuing several. There is a need to consider the informal resolution process, research supports

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that IROs prefer to try and resolve issues informally in the first instance. Data supports that the East and Central are comparable regarding the use of informal resolution, with the North being less. However, there are fewer IROs in the North which may account for this.

Informal resolution is recorded by the IRO using LCS case notes. During the period from the 1/04/15 to the 31/03/16, 432 case notes were recorded on children's records regarding informal resolution by the IRO. In some cases children have multiple case notes recording informal resolution. Further analysis is required to consider practice themes and to evidence the impact of informal resolution in achieving better outcomes for the child.

The following case examples illustrate how starred recommendations have achieved positive outcomes for children and young people.

Case Example 1:

The IRO, when completing a mid-way check had identified delay in a recommendation that the long term care plan was presented to the Permanence Panel. A timescale of two months had been agreed for preparation and planning. The impact on the young person of this drift was highlighted and it was recognised that this had prevented her benefitting from the security and re-assurance that ratification of her care plan would have provided.

Case Example 2:

The IRO identified, within a CLA Review that a child was to leave their placement. The IRO requested a "freeze" on this proposed move due to the lack of a full risk assessment. The young person wished to remain in the placement and to be able to finish their schooling there. The outcome was that it was considered to be in the young person's best interests to remain in the same placement.

Case Example 3:

The IRO adjourned a review child protection conference due to the social work report not being completed. Neither the allocated Social Worker nor their manager were available to attend and another Social Worker attended the conference. No update was available from the police regarding their investigation. The outcome was the

Police Officer was invited to attend the review conference where an update was provided regarding the police investigation. The social Work report and core group meetings were completed and the report shared with family members.

7.1.5 Review of Informal and Formal Resolution Protocol

A review of the informal and formal resolution protocol took place in February 2016 so that timescales could be standardised and accurate information about the challenges made by IROs could be collated. This brought together formal and informal resolution processes. Criteria for the use of informal/formal resolution processes has also been developed to ensure greater consistency of practice within the IRO Service. The revised protocol was implemented on the 1 April 2016.

The new criteria list and forms have been well received by CSC managers. The protocol will be reviewed after three months. This will include consideration of themes, whether all IROs are fulfilling their responsibilities in the use of the protocol and evaluating the impact of the IRO role in achieving better outcomes for children and young people.

7.1.6 Aims of the New Protocol:

- 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 outcomes.
- To highlight practice themes – support effective ways of organisational learning from individual cases.
- To ensure that children receive a good quality service and that their needs are met.

8. Challenges

8.1 Workforce Development

Positively, there has been significant investment in the IRO Service since November 2015, with an additional 15 IROs and 3.5 Quality & Review Managers. However, as detailed in Section 4.3 of this report, there have been difficulties recruiting to IRO posts

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on a permanent basis resulting in the use of agency staff. The challenge going forward is two-fold: to recruit permanent staff to posts and to ensure that the service provides a consistent, effective and quality service. To improve staff recruitment and retention, the service is looking at ways in which to make Lancashire's IRO Service more competitive in the regional 'market workforce'. Lancashire Children's Services are also hosting a recruitment event on the 15 June 2016 which includes vacancies within the IRO Service.

8.2 Implementation of Revised Problem Resolution Protocol

The Problem Resolution Protocol has been updated and became operational on the 1st April 2016. Its successful implementation will be crucial in evidencing that IROs are undertaking consistent, regular oversight of practice. A review is planned after three months and there will be oversight by Quality & Review Managers in tracking and monitoring cases through IRO supervision and at IRO/Locality Meetings to support all team members' involvement and commitment.

8.3 Quality Assurance of Practice

IROs play an important role in the quality assurance of practice as highlighted by Ofsted in their recent inspection of children's services. Considerable work has been undertaken within the service to strengthen this function and to ensure the IRO footprint is visible within children's case records. Feedback from Ofsted in a recent monitoring visit confirmed that there was regular IRO input on the cases audited which was having a positive impact in checking progress of care plans to prevent drift. In terms of next steps there needs to be a greater focus by IROs on the quality of practice.

Lancashire's Audit Framework has been updated and was launched on the 13 May 2016. Quality & Review Managers will be expected to complete one audit each per month and the IROs as a group 10 per month. A programme of monthly and quarterly reporting will provide feedback on the quality of practice using the Ofsted grading judgements. Quality and Review Managers will also attend the three monthly Locality Practice Improvement Meetings where performance is reviewed to provide feedback from the IRO Service on performance and the quality of practice.

A challenge for the IRO Service is to ensure that audits are of a consistent high quality and clearly identify strengths as well as areas where practice needs to improve.

Training is being delivered to all staff undertaking audits.

8.4 Improving the Quality of Plans

Feedback from Ofsted and our own audits has highlighted the need to improve the quality of child protection plans, care plans and pathway plans. In particular plans need to be outcome focused and include clear timescales. As the person reviewing the plan the IRO needs to undertake robust quality assurance to ensure the plan addresses the child/young person's needs, is SMART and is progressed in a timely manner. IROs will be trained in the risk sensible model and will play a key role in its implementation.

9. Priorities for 2016-17

The following priorities have been identified for the IRO Service in 2016/17:

- Recruit appropriately skilled and experienced staff on a permanent basis to all IRO and Quality & Review Manager vacancies.
- Deliver targeted training to newly appointed staff to ensure they understand their quality assurance and challenge role related to both safeguarding and looked after children. Ensure there is evidence of the IRO foot print in the child's case record and that the impact of the IRO in improving outcomes for the child is clearly visible.
- Quality & Review Managers to ensure caseloads are equitable across the IRO Service.
- IROs to undertake robust quality assurance of practice to ensure there is a chronology, up to date child & family assessment that provides an analysis of risk and that plans are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and have clear timescales.
- IRO footprint to be visible on all children's case records including evidence of challenge and impact of IRO involvement. This will include mid-point checks in relation to case progression on all cases, the IRO seeing children in between their review meetings to ascertain their wishes and feelings and the use of informal/formal resolution processes.

- Enhancement to be made to LCS to improve the quality of recording of mid-point checks and to ensure a consistent approach.
- Embed the revised Problem Resolution Protocol in practice. Quality and Review Managers must be proactive in tracking the resolution of informal and formal resolution in a timely manner. Analysis to be undertaken of practice themes to support effective organisational learning through IRO/Locality Meetings.
- Develop IRO practice standards to ensure consistency within the service.
- Quality & Review Managers to monitor the performance of the IRO Service, including reviews held within the required timescale, permanence achieved at the second CLA review, the completion of mid-point checks, IRO quality assurance of S.47 enquiries and the use of informal/formal resolution processes to further improve performance in these areas.
- Embed the Audit Framework within the IRO Service and ensure audits are of a consistently high standard to promote learning.
- Quality & Review Managers to audit cases where the child protection plan has been ceased at the first review child protection conference. Sample audit to be undertaken of repeat child protection plans to quality assure decision making.
- Review the system for the quality assurance of S.47 enquiries by IROs to ensure performance in this area is consistent and monitored more closely.
- IROs to gather evidence of permanence achieved for children looked after at their second (four month) review and ensure this is recorded within the IRO outcome report.
- Quality & Review Managers to review and plan audit activity for the service in the forthcoming year. This will include attendance at core group meetings, multi-agency attendance and participation at child protection conferences and child protection plans ceased at the first review conference.
- Quality & Review Managers to review the mechanisms used for seeking feedback in relation to the views of children, families and professionals in

- Quality & Review Managers to ensure a consistent approach across the IRO Service in the completion of Regulation 44 visits of Lancashire's in-house residential children's homes.

10. Conclusion

This report covers a period of significant change for the IRO Service where it has been recognised that improvement is required to ensure that IROs are effective in achieving better outcomes for children and young people. Whilst the challenges ahead appear substantial there is a commitment and determination from senior managers within the service to ensure that IROs can fulfil their responsibilities as identified within the IRO handbook. There has already been a significant reduction in caseloads as a result of increased capacity and there is increasing evidence of the positive impact of this in strengthening IRO oversight of practice. However, further work is required to ensure the service works to consistent standards and there is a stronger focus on the quality of practice rather than compliance. Priorities for the coming year are clear and will take the IRO Service forward in line with the Improvement Plan.

Eileen Brown Interim Quality & Review Manager

Margaret Challenor Interim Quality & Review Manager

Pam Cope Quality & Review Manager

Susan Morley Interim Quality & Review Manager (PT)

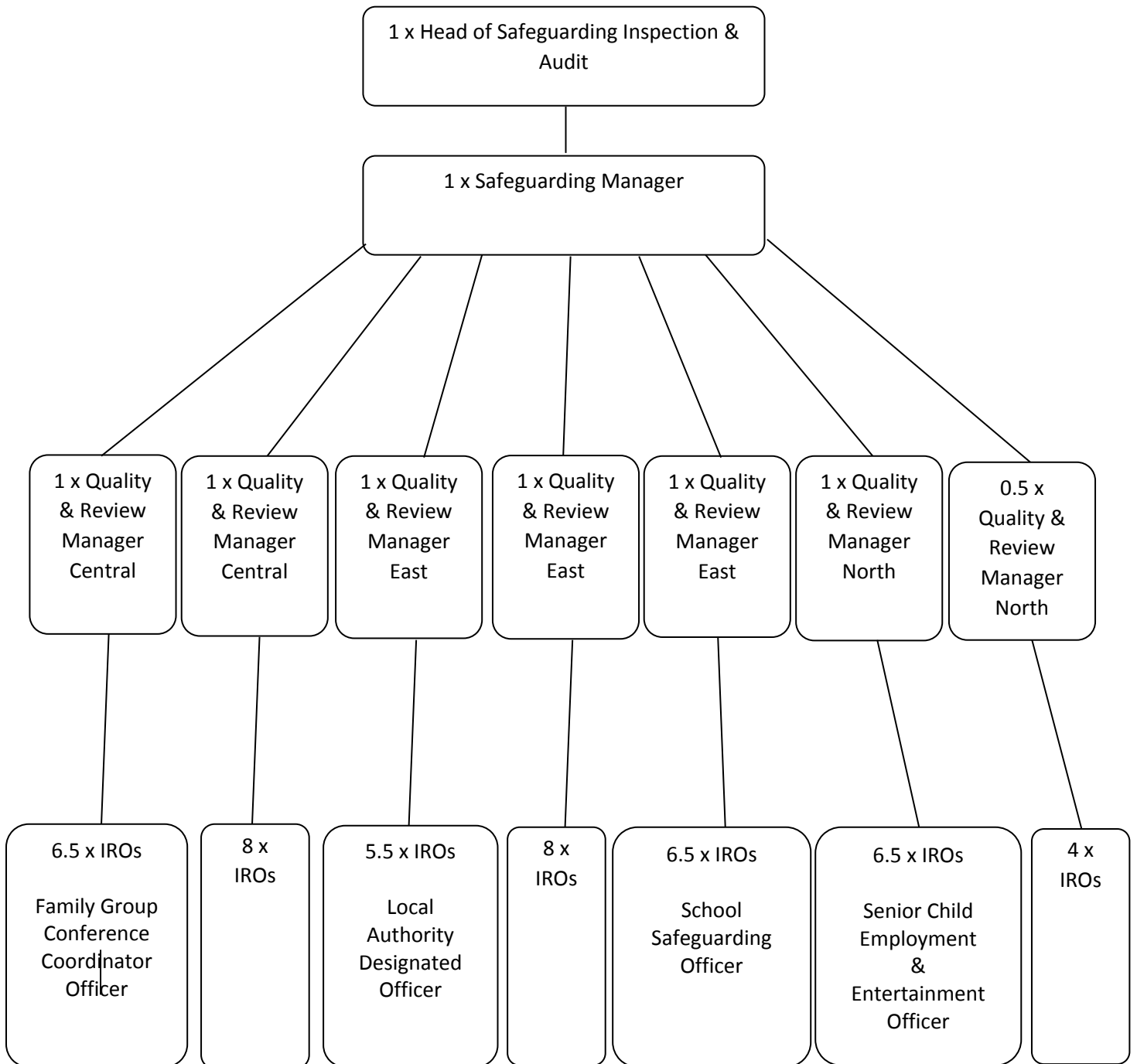
Joanne O'Neill Quality & Review Manager

Lesley Sheridan Quality & Review Manager

Frances Widdop Interim Quality & Review Manager

Andy Smith Interim 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
Eileen Brown	1996	2010 - 2016	2016
Margaret Challenor	1991	2010 - 2016	2016
Pam Cope	1996	2011 - 2016	2016
Susan Morley	1979	N/A	2016
Joanne O'Neill	1995	N/A	2015 - 2016
Lesley Sheridan	2004	2010 - 2013	2013 – 2016
Frances Widdop	1995	2001 - 2015	2015 – 2016

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Name	Year began as IRO	Year of qualification
IRO 1	2004	1995
IRO 2	2007	2000
IRO 3	2009	2003
IRO 4	2009	1993
IRO 5	2010	2005
IRO 6	2011	1982
IRO 7	2011	2000
IRO 8	2011	1989
IRO 9	2011	2000
IRO 10	2012	1987
IRO 11	2012	2007
IRO 12	2012	2004
IRO 13	2012	2007
IRO 14	2013	2006
IRO 15	2013	2001
IRO 16	2013	1979
IRO 17	2013	1998
IRO 18	2014	2001
IRO 19	2014	2004
IRO 20	2014	2006
IRO 21	2015	1970
IRO 22	2015	2008
IRO 23	2015	2002
IRO 24	2015	2006
IRO 25	2015	2008
IRO 26	2015	2006
IRO 27	2015	1981
IRO 28	2015	1994
IRO 29	2015	2010
IRO 30	2015	1987
IRO 31	2015	1996
IRO 32	2015	2009
IRO 33	2016	1995
IRO 34	2016	2005
IRO 35	2016	2010
IRO 36	2016	1997
IRO 37	2016	2009
IRO 38	2016	2001
IRO 39	2016	1997
IRO 40	2016	1992
IRO 41	2016	1988
IRO 42	2016	2006
IRO 43	2016	1999
IRO 44	2016	2009
IRO 45	2016	2010
IRO 46	2016	2011
IRO 47	Vacant	