



Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2019-2020

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 2019 to the 31st March 2020.

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 will be available as a public document.

In 2019/20 the IRO Service operated with 45 full-time equivalent (FTE) IROs. IRO caseloads have decreased by 2.1% since 2018/19 with the average caseload for 2019/20 being 76.3. The IRO Service continues to benefit from a stable and experienced staff team with very low rates of vacancy or use of temporary staff.

Looked after children and young people continue to take part in regular reviews of their Care Plan in line with statutory requirements, with just 3.7% of reviews outside the required timescale. Almost all children and young people participate in their review by some means but we can do more to strengthen the participation of young people and especially direct attendance.

The number of Child Protection Plans in Lancashire has declined significantly during 2019-20 with an overall reduction of 39% and fewer plans in every District. Child Protection Plans continue to be reviewed regularly, with 95.6% of reviews held in time. This remains good performance against our comparators. Fewer children are now subject to a Child Protection Plan for over two years, or become subject of a Child Protection Plan within 12 months of a previous plan ending which indicates that predominantly the right interventions are being made when children are at risk of significant harm. However an increasing percentage of children who become subject of a Child Protection Plan have a previous plan at some stage in their life and this requires further analysis.

Work is currently underway to develop a digital feedback method for parents and carers to provide their comments and views following child protection conferences and children looked after reviews. This is a complex process as the feedback form needs to be able to work in conjunction with the Liquid Logic system and provide performance data so that the feedback can be analysed effectively. However, once it is complete it will enhance the service we provide to families as we can be more responsive to their needs.

In respect of IRO challenge the service have continued to focus on the quality of IRO challenge in respect of improving outcomes for the child, ensuring that the challenge is evident, effective and outcome focussed. In respect of numbers, there has been a total of 403 Problem Resolutions, 1285 Management Alerts and 1533 IRO Challenge case notes completed. The numbers in comparison to last year are very similar and are relatively consistent throughout the year, however there is increased evidence of informal IRO challenge, recorded via IRO Challenge case note and increased focus on aspects relating to care planning rather than

on compliance. In 2020/21 we want to strengthen the focus on the impact and outcome for young people when an IRO raises an issue by moving away from a deficit based 'problem' approach towards a focus on getting it right for this child / young person.

To strengthen the IRO role we are committed to ensuring that there is a learning and development programme. At the time of writing we have a number of events planned including 1 annual service development day, 2x locality development days and the commitment to send 6 IRO's to the Edge Hill University to complete the advanced IRO programme. IRO's are also undertaking Motivational Interviewing training linked to the introduction of the Family Safeguarding model. This training is due to commence in June 2020 (this was due to be completed face to face but will now be done online due to COVID19). Additionally due to COVID 19 we may need to consider how we can deliver the training plan but we are committed to exploring how the plan can be delivered online if required.

Appeals against Conference decisions during 2019/20 remained at the low level seen in 2018/2019 with a low level of upheld appeals. This supports confidence that multi-agency safeguarding decision making is robust,

2. Recommendations from the IRO Annual Report 2018/19

- 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.

Update: Joint training sessions have been held in locality functions. These focused on 3 areas; assessment, plans and reviews and critical challenge and the presentation was shared between heads of service and principal social worker.

These joint training sessions have set a shared understanding of best practice and some of the challenges faced by frontline practitioners and IRO's. These sessions have also ensured that positive working relationships have been established.

- 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.

Update: The guidance for IROs chairing CLA Reviews has been reviewed and updated, including revised adjournment and series of meetings protocols. IRO challenge has been embedded in practice throughout

the service to ensure that challenge occurs at the earliest opportunity. A variety of methods for IRO challenge are utilised including; informal discussions, case note recordings, management alerts and problem resolution.

- To continue to embed guidance for IROs on chairing Child Protection Conferences to ensure quality and consistency across the service and focus IRO challenge more effectively on SMART outcomes

Update: The guidance for chairing Child Protection conferences continues to be used throughout the service and there is a template for the minute taking service. IRO challenge has been embedded in practice throughout the service and IRO's will use this at Child protection conferences to escalate issues quickly and effectively.

- To improve the quality and consistency of IRO oversight in respect of child protection plans to improve the quality of plans to ensure child protection plans are SMART and outcome focused, embedding the risk sensible model, which needs to be strengths based and that child protection plans are multi-agency led from the initial core group.

Update: IRO's have continued to offer oversight of child protections plans following Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC). This is quality assured through the IRO supervision audits. Lancashire is changing its working model to the family safeguarding model and therefore Quality and Review (Q&R) managers are working closely with the project team to see what changes will be required for child protection conferences.

- 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

Update: IRO Challenge this year has had more focus on improving the quality of children's care plans and on drift and delay rather than on compliance which has been seen in previous years. There has been a focus on evidencing and recording informal challenge on the child's file.

- Improve the quality and focus on permanence for all children in Children Looked After (CLA) reviews. Ensure that permanence is considered at all CLA reviews

Update: Quality and Review managers have held IRO learning circles during 2019 that focused on permanence to ensure a clear and consistent approach county wide to understanding and achieving permanence. The LCS outcome form for children looked after reviews was updated to include asking a mandatory question around plans FOR permanence at the second review and an additional mandatory question asking whether there is a plan OF permanence. This enables Quality and Review Managers to access the data from the permanence tracker, to establish whether children have plans for permanence

at their second CLA review and distinguish at which time a plan OF permanence has been achieved. All IROs are aware of the expectation that plans FOR permanence are agreed at the 2nd CLAR and if not, there are clear actions and timescales to achieve this. Utilising data, Quality and Review Managers and IROs are able to track specific cases during supervision to ensure support in preventing delay and achieving permanence in a timely manner. The CLA review template guidance and template also directs IRO's to ensure that permanence is covered as part of every CLA review.

- 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

Update: Over the last twelve months there has been a continued move to ensure that IRO case monitoring focuses on progress of plan and drift and delay, rather than on compliance. This has been aided by changes made to the case monitoring template. Q&R managers have continued to monitor the IRO footprint through the monthly information on how many case monitoring, visits and contacts have been recorded, as well as completing monthly supervision audits which consider the quality of IRO oversight on cases. In addition to this there has been a continued focus on IROs initiating and recording management alerts, IRO challenge and Problem Resolution.

- IRO learning circles to be established and embedded, to include a focus on permanence

Update: Learning circles have been held in each locality covering a wide range of topics from problem resolution to permanence. The author of the permanence policy attended the focused permanence session to ensure a robust understanding of the new policy.

- 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

Update: The Audit Team continue to send Q&R managers all Tier 2 audits where the plan was graded as inadequate. In addition to this, Q&R managers complete a number of supervision audits each month where there is a focus on the quality of plans. Q&R managers then discuss these in supervision with the IRO's involved in order for them to support the social worker in making the required improvements to ensure that there is a SMART and outcome focused plan.

3. The IRO Service

Lancashire's IRO service was established in 1999. IROs are responsible for chairing CLA reviews, CP Conferences and a range of complex strategy meetings, including suspected cases of fabricated/induced illness, stage 2 missing from home intervention meetings, placement disruption meetings, CLA who display

sexually harmful behaviors towards other children, cases of serious self-harm of children who are looked after and complex exploitation cases involving multiple children or organised crime. The IRO service also undertakes Regulation 44 visits for LCC residential children's homes and monthly cross service case file audits, as part of their quality assurance role.

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 conferences and 1 FTE post is dedicated to the review of Lancashire's approved foster carers. 5 of the posts are held by male staff and 6 team members identify themselves as from a BAME background.

The service mirrors the locality footprint of Children's Social Care (CSC). There are two IRO teams in the Central Locality, three teams in the East Locality and one team in the North Locality. During 2019/20 the IROs have participated in monthly team meetings / workshops, quarterly development days, 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 many 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 2019/20 the service had been fully staffed until February 2020 when we have had a vacancy pending recruitment. 1 staff member left the service at the end on January 2020 to pursue other opportunities.

In April 2019, the service was made up of 98.7% permanent staff and 1.3% agency staff. In March 2020, there is now one agency worker within the team who is covering maternity leave for a six month period. During 2019/20, 1 permanent IRO left the service to pursue other opportunities.

3.4 Caseloads

The current average IRO caseload is 67.1 with a yearly average of 76.3, which has decreased by 2.1% since March 2019, when the average was 77.9.

The number of looked after children has decreased from 2128 in March 2019 to 2098 in March 2020 (1.5% reduction). Lancashire's looked after rate per 10,000 population is now 83.9 (March 2020). This is lower than the regional rate (March 2019: 91) but is higher than our statistical neighbours (March 2019: 67.1) and the national average (March 2019: 64).

The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans has decreased by 39% from 1,368 in March 2019 to 836 in March 2020. The rate in Lancashire is 33.5 per 10,000 child population (March 2020), which is lower than the regional average (March 2019: 56.5), our statistical neighbours (March 2019: 48.3) and the national average (March 2019: 43.7).

3.5 Fostering IRO

Foster carers are reviewed by a dedicated Fostering IRO within the Service. During 2019/2020, 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.

Reviews are arranged on a booking calendar basis to ensure that the reviews can be held in a timely manner and also to clearly separate out the different reviews. This allows for the paperwork to be submitted in a timely manner and therefore gives the fostering IRO opportunity to prepare for this review in line with the severity of the review.

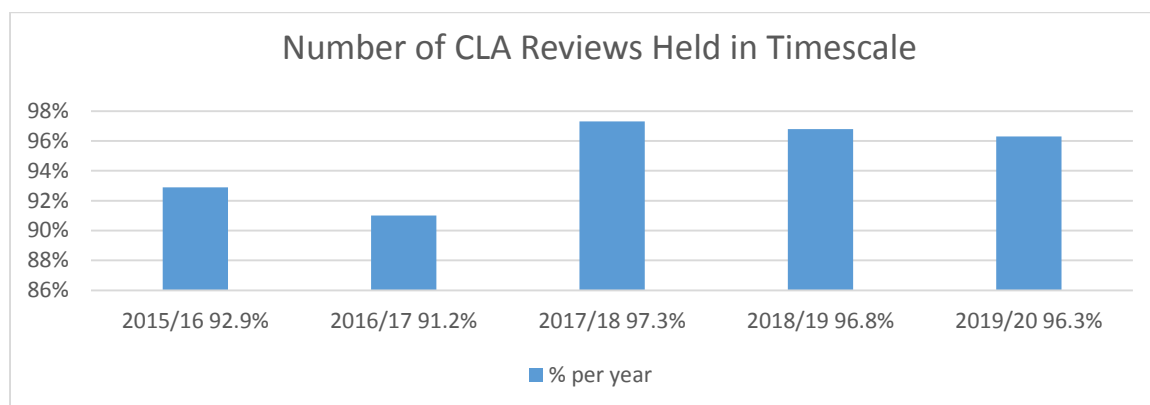
The reviews continue to be supported by the business support team, therefore the Fostering IRO can focus on the review rather than writing and keeping notes. This ensures that the reports are completed and distributed in a timely manner. There is also some work being undertaken with business intelligence team to receive detailed reports about the timings of foster carer reviews.

At the time of writing foster carer reviews are being held by SKYPE, due to Covid19 government guidance to work from home. There is some limited feedback that this is going well, often allowing both carers to contribute as they are at home and allowing for those who would usually not attend due to distance the opportunity to participate fully. Over coming month's further feedback will be sought dependent on restrictions in place.

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. (2019/20: 96.3% compared to 2018/19: 96.8%) Out of the cohort of 2024 children who had a review during the period, 75 children were reported to have had a review that was held outside of the required timescale. After further exploration only 33 children (98.4%) actually had a late review, the remaining 42 children's reviews were held in timescale but due to system errors show as late and cannot be corrected due to the impact this would have on the child's electronic record. Reasons for the small number of late reviews include human error, late notification of CLA status or availability of the SW or IRO.

When taken as a proportion of the total number of reviews held (4720) performance rises to 98.4%.

4.1.2 Participation

The majority of looked after children either attend their review meeting or participate in the review process. Performance in relation to participation has increased from 99.1% during 2018-19 to 99.6% in 2019-20. Out of the cohort of 2024 children, (including 19.6% of children who are under 4 and too young to participate in their review), just 8 children did not participate in or contribute to their review. 34.8% of children attended their review meeting or have a separate meeting with their IRO as part of the review process. 45.6% of children do not participate directly in their review, however, they are visited or contacted by their IRO prior to their review, in line with their wishes, to ensure that their views are able to be represented within the review. We would like to see more children physically attending their reviews, and ensure that for those who do not their indirect participation is meaningful. We will reflect this in our priorities for the coming year.

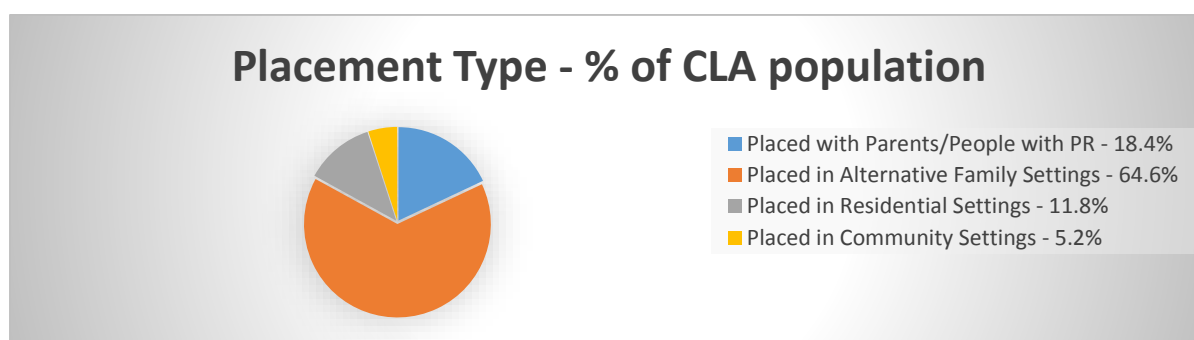
'Mind of My Own' is a web based application that is used to support the participation of children and young people. During 2019-20 there have been 352 statements created to share the views of children and young people. 208 children have their own accounts and 190 workers have an account. We can make wider and better use of Mind of my Own to strengthen children's participation. The use of the Mind of My Own tool is promoted at the Social Work Academy with all newly qualified social workers and by Advanced Practitioners within all social work teams to ensure that maximum advantage is taken of this excellent tool to support the engagement and participation of children and young people. This will be enhanced further when Children's

Social Care move to a functionality model within the Family Safeguarding process and there will be a dedicated function solely focused on children who are looked after.

4.1.3 Placements of Children Looked After

The majority of children who are looked after (81.6%), reside in placements provided by Lancashire County Council or partner agencies commissioned to provide care services. A dedicated team is responsible for the sourcing and commissioning of placements with external providers. For the majority of children we are able to identify a suitable placement close to their home, to support family time with birth families and access to children's social care services. Only 9% of children live in placements outside Lancashire. This is better than the National 15%, North West 11% and Statistical Neighbor 12.5% performance figures (March 2019).

Of the 2098 children looked after by Lancashire County Council: 64.6% are placed within an alternate family setting (1309 with foster carers, 46 with prospective adopters), which is a 2.1% increase from the previous year (March 2019: 62.5%). 11.8% (247 children) are placed within residential settings, (including Lancashire's residential children's homes, external residential settings, residential schools, secure units, hospitals and prisons). 5.2% (109 children) are placed in other community settings such as supported accommodation projects, supported tenancies and supported lodgings. 18.4% (387 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 0.7% more than the 17.7% home placements reported in 2018-19.



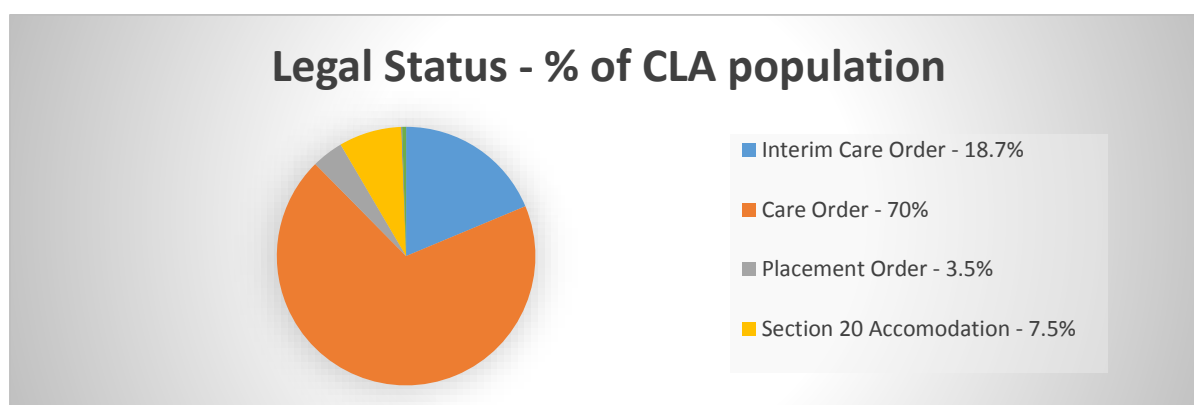
During 2019/20 the placement of looked after children in semi-independent / supported living placements has been the focus of regional and national attention. For some young people this can mean they do not receive the right level of support, or are receiving care in a setting that is not registered to do so. Lancashire has adopted a regional protocol for how such placements are commissioned and quality assured, with monitoring arrangements in place to track the appropriateness of such placements. IROs in Lancashire have been briefed on this protocol and are formally contributing to the oversight of such placements.

The use of secure placements on welfare grounds has declined during 2019/20 and at year-end this mean just one young person was placed in secure accommodation on this basis.

4.1.4 Placement Stability

Fewer children in Lancashire experience changes of placement that mean they have three or more placements (7.6% in 2019/20 from 8.8% in 2018/19). This represents good performance compared to regional, national and statistical neighbour comparisons. However the proportion of looked after children living in the same place for over two years declined slightly to 68.6% in 2019/20 (from 69.3% last year) and this is slightly lower than comparator authorities, suggesting the need for a further focus on achieving permanence and stability.

4.1.5 Legal Status



During 2019/20, the proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders has decreased, the proportion of children subject to Care Orders has increased and the proportion of children subject to Placement Orders and Section 20 Accommodation has decreased compared to 2018/19.

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. 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 introduction of Lancashire's Permanence Policy, IRO learning circles and permanence workshops to ensure there is clarity and consistency in respect of permanence. Regular permanence panels are now being held in each district to ensure early permanence for all children looked after. A template for CLA reviews for IRO's is used for all reviews and ensures that permanence is considered and discussed in every review and appropriate review decisions made in respect of achieving this. The permanence tracker has been developed so that we have a clear understanding of current performance in respect of permanence and which children do not have a plan of permanence. This

enable's IRO's and managers to track the progress and to ensure that there is no unnecessary delay. Since the last IRO annual report work has been completed to improve the CLA review outcomes form in October 2019 to enable us to capture further data around permanence.

During 2018-2019 66% of cases were recorded as "yes" in respect of plans for permanence being agreed at the child's 2nd review, in 2019-20 this has increased to 87.6% which is positive and evidences the increased focus on early permanence for children looked after.

In December 2019 the permanence tracker was utilised to identify children/young people with a 2nd review held between January 2019 and July 2019 to ensure that these children had plans OF permanence. For these children 95.6% had progressed to a plan OF permanence. The findings from the report evidenced that performance is good in this area and the delays in achieving a plan OF permanence appeared to be influenced by the duration of Care Proceedings and ratification of a plan of permanence.

As part of progressing plans of permanence the IRO Service reviews plans for the discharge of care orders, in favour of reunification to birth families or Special Guardianship Orders. This is a vital part of securing legal permanence for children while using the least intervention necessary. IROs review whether the discharge of the Care Order is appropriate at every children looked after review. Where appropriate the IRO endorses the plan and makes a review decision, including setting a timescale, for the application for discharge to be progressed. Where a plan of discharge is not supported by the IRO a challenge will be issued to Children's Social Care. As a service we monitor children with a plan of discharge via the permanence tracker and produce regular internal reports to support IRO oversight of permanence via discharge of Care Order.

Disruption meeting 2019 – 2020 –Permanent placements

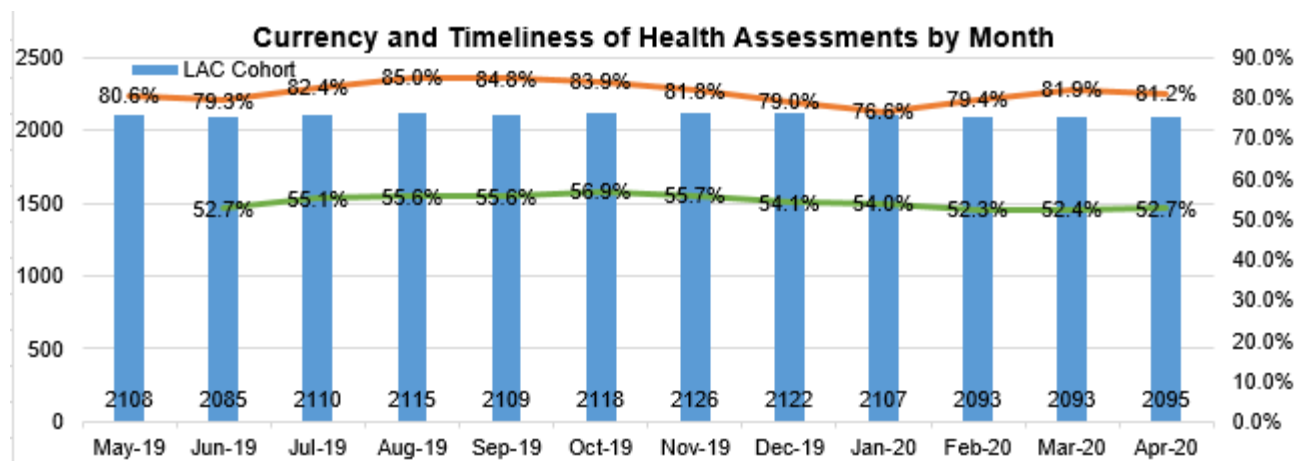
There were 12 requests for placement disruption meetings for permanent placements that disrupted between 01.04.2019 and 30.03.2020. 5 of the disruptions were long term in-house fostering placement, 6 of the disruptions were agency fostering placements and 1 was a long term residential placement. The learning and findings is disseminated to IRO's through team meetings and shared with Childrens Social Care managers at district cluster meetings and through the management structure to senior management. Each case will be presented and reviewed at their respective locality permanence panels quarterly following the disruption meeting.

The learning from the cases highlighted the following:

- The need for regular multi agency care planning meetings.
- A stable workforce to reduce changes in social workers and social worker managers.
- In a few cases there were concerns reported regarding delay in the children becoming CLA.
- The need to reduce delays in children, young people and carers accessing therapeutic input and identified direct work.
- The need to ensure that full information is shared with carers at the point of matching.

4.1.7 Health Assessments

The IRO service continue to review the health needs of CLA and whether they have had an initial and review health assessment. Currently as of 2 April 2020; 81.2% of CLA have an up to date health assessment (March 2017: 93%, March 2018: 77%, March 2019 83.6%). The table below shows the performance for the period of May 2019 and April 2020 for all looked after children:



As at the end of 2019/20 performance was 81.2% (including 2.6% awaiting paperwork [55] and 2.1% [44] Initial Health Assessments (IHA) that were still in progress but not overdue). The green line above tracks timeliness of the Initial Health Assessment.

However by 1 May 2020 performance had improved again to 86.1% (including 1.8% [37] awaiting paperwork and 1.7% [35] IHAs that were still in progress but within timescales)

Performance did see a decline for several months over the year 2019/2020, due to a backlog of Review Health Assessment (RHA) however performance now appears to be recovering.

The Health Assessment Redesign Steering Group has continued to operate during the last 12 months. This has led to the refresh of the process for requesting and recording Health Assessments for Looked After Children and includes an updated monitoring process for IRO's to quality assure the completion of the Health Assessment and Health Care Plan within the Review process. The Steering Group has undertaken periodic deep dive audit work of Health Assessment performance to identify delays and inform future practice, see details of one aspect below. Agreement is also now in place that consent for the Initial Health Assessment is provided via the Local Authority to care for the child as a corporate parent and this has reduced delay at the request stage.

Targeted analysis of the children new into care has been completed in the months Sep-19, Nov-19 and Dec-19. The initial health assessments were measured at each step of the process against the redesigned process map to ensure timescales are being met. Generally performance appears to be improving and requests for Health Assessments are made promptly when children become looked after.

Working days were used in the redesign process and therefore the following is in working days - For the September cohort the average time for the IHA being returned was day 51 (target is day 20) with the

appointment being completed on day 34 (target by day 15), by the December cohort this had reduced to day 33 for return and appointment completed on day 22. Whilst this is still outside the targets from the redefined process there has been a reduction in time take to complete and return these IHAs.

As at the end of 1 May 2020 72.6% of the 164 children accommodated in Jan-March had had an IHA appointment, this was higher for the Jan LAC (77.6%) and lower for the March (65.3%). The average days for these 116 IHAs to have the appointment completed was 15.9. – 57.9% of the total new LAC had an IHA appointment within the 28 days/20 working days timescales

Out of all the children accommodated we have received 66.5% of the IHAs back, as with the completed appointment this is higher for the Jan cases (73.5%) but lower for the March ones (59.2%). For the 109 whose IHA we had received back average work days was 21.6. 33.5% of the total new LAC had their IHA completed and paperwork returned to LCC within the 28 days/20 working days.

From this 6 month analysis we can see there has been a clear improvement in terms of IHAs being done and returned to LCC within timescales

The IRO service will continue to monitor and review the health needs of children through the statutory reviews and case monitoring. IROs use an agreed 'Single Point of Contact' within each looked after child health area to escalate cases of delayed Health Assessments.

4.1.8 Personal Education Plans

The proportion of children with an up to date Personal Education Plan (PEP) in 2019-20 is 77.5% this has been stable in comparison with 2018-19 figures of 77%, however this continues to be too low. In order to address this the following has been actioned:

A revised Lancashire PEP template has been designed in response to recommendations from Ofsted following the Inspection in 2018.

A multi-partner task group which included LA services, schools and colleges and with input from young people reviewed the existing PEP system, with the aim of developing a more effective tool to support educational progress and attainment. There will be age appropriate versions for Early Years, primary, secondary, post 16 and special school pupils. The new template increases the focus on the child's voice and additional needs including emotional and mental health, language and communication and learning needs. There is also a greater focus on aspirational aims.

In addition to content, the system to complete and submit the PEP has been revised. Currently schools have to complete PEP on word documents as they are unable to access the LCS version. The new system allows schools access to the Professional Portal so PEPs will be completed and recorded in one place by Social Worker and education professional. It is hoped this will improve security but also more timely completion. This was due to be implemented in April 2020 but has been postponed due to COVID19.

IROs continue 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 to be considered. In cases where there are serious issues or deficits IROs can instigate Problem Resolution to ensure the issue is addressed in a timely manner.

4.2. Safeguarding

Number of children and young people subject of a Child Protection (CP) Plan

As highlighted above the number of children subject of a CP Plan in Lancashire has decreased significantly during 2019-20, with an overall reduction of 40% (1382 plans April 2019 to 831 plans April 2020). Historically the number of CP Plans in Lancashire rose significantly in 2015-16 and remained broadly at this level through to 2019. This trend saw Lancashire go from a lower rate of CP Plans compared to our statistical neighbours (2013-2015) to a significantly higher rate of CP plans (2016-19). In per 10,000 children terms this decline saw plans reduce from 56 per 10,000 up to August 2019 to 33 in April 2020 (with our statistical neighbours typically around the high 40's). All districts saw a reduction in plans with Burnley (14%) the smallest reduction and Chorley / South Ribble (74%) the largest. A large part of this reduction is driven by a lower rate of Initial Child Protection Conferences being held – an average of 141 per month in the first four months of 2019-20 compared to an average of 90 per month in the last four months.

This trend has been highlighted and analysed via District performance meetings, with input from the IRO Service and the following factors identified –

- The aftermath of the 2015 inspection judgement and a focus on identifying risk saw CP plans increase and remain high
- Managers' report an increased focus on the assessment of risk / capacity to change within threshold decisions, as opposed to responses driven by the presenting risk in the referral
- The reduction is most evident from summer 2019 onwards and is likely to reflect the shift towards a Family Safeguarding Model and a focus on strengths and 'significant harm'. Evidence from Hertfordshire suggests that the most significant reduction in CP plans was experienced in the 12 month preparation for Family Safeguarding and not from the point of adoption
- Some evidence of greater use of Child in Need plans in the districts with the most significant reductions
- Evidence pointing to more effective demand management through MASH and fewer referrals to CSC (average 916 per month Apr-July 2019 to 749 per month Jan-Apr 2020)

Whilst a reduction in CP Plans can be supported as a necessary and appropriate development it will be important that local cluster and performance meetings maintain a focus on trends, threshold application and reflective analysis of live cases to ensure that the right support and protection is provided at the right time.

Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC)

Performance data within Annex A indicated poor performance on ICPC being held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting and therefore delay in formal and multi-agency safeguarding plans being developed. In April 2019 the 6 month rolling performance stood at 57% (where good performance is over 90%). This meant that of 185 ICPC held in March 2019 96 were held in time, whilst 89 were not. A working group of Social Care and IRO Managers was established to identify contributory factors and an Action Plan agreed. This has been taken forward through district performance meetings. In March 2020 of the 109 ICPC that were held, 99 were held in time and just 10 were late. The 6 month rolling rate for ICPC in time is now 83% (April 2020), from 57% 12 months ago.

4.2.1 Child Protection Plans Reviewed in Timescale (NI67)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Lancashire	95.8%	97.8%	96.4%	94.0%	95.7 %	95.6%
SN's	96.3%	96.6 %	96.7 %	94.6 %	94.7%	N/A
North West	94.00%	94.5 %	93.0 %	90.8 %	89.2%	N/A
England	94.00%	93.7 %	92.2 %	90.5 %	91.8%	N/A

Looking at the table above it illustrates that the performance in respect of review child protection conferences (RCPCs) held within timescale has remained consistent, in 2018/19 is 95.7%, in 2019/20 this is 95.6%. This performance is better than the North West and England for 2018/19 and just below our statistical neighbours.

This percentage equates to 27 children whose review conference was held outside statutory timescale from a total of 581 children's conferences (some conferences involve multiple children). The number of RCPC meetings out of timescale was 16.

The reasons for conferences being held outside of the statutory timescale include:

- Social worker availability (34%)
- The RCPC was not quorate (20%)
- IRO availability (6%)
- The social work report had not been completed (6%)

- Human Error, mis-calculation of dates (34%).

On a locality basis 8 of the 16 meeting that were late were in the North of the County; 4 each of the 16 meetings that were late were in the East and Central locality.

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)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Lancashire	3.0%	3.6%	2.9 %	2.3%	4.0%	3.4%
SN's	4.9%	4.9 %	3.6%	3.6 %	N/A	N/A
England	3.7%	3.8 %	3.4%	3.4 %	N/A	N/A
NW	3.7 %	3.7 %	3.1 %	3.8 %	N/A	N/A

The table illustrates an in-year increase 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 59 children were subject to a child protection plan for more than 2 years that were ceased during 2019/20, this has reduced from 71 children in 2018/19. The information highlights that the majority of these cases were due to emotional abuse (63%) and neglect (24%), with physical abuse (0%), sexual abuse (11%) and multiple categories (1%).

The number of open Child Protection Plans of over two years duration remains low and slightly reduced from last year – in March 2019 67 open CP plans were over two years duration. In March 2020 62 open CP plans were of two years duration. This indicates that challenge and oversight of CP plans to prevent drift is effective. Open plans over two years as a percentage of all children subject of a plan within the year has reduced and now sits within 'good performance'. On a locality basis - 32% of the plans were from the East; 27% of the plans were from Central; 41% of the plans were from the North.

In order to maintain and improve performance in this area the Quality and Review Managers will continue to provide targeted training to newly appointed IRO's to ensure they understand their role in monitoring children subject to child protection plans and all child protection plans over 12 months 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)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Lancashire	13.9%	17.9%	17.9 %	20.9 %	21.3 %	24.3%

During 2019/20, 312 children on a child protection plan had previously (at any time) been subject of 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 of 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.

Repeat CP plans (ever) has gone up to 28% and has now moved into the inadequate quartile (any rate above 24.4%). Our statistical neighbour performance is 23%. Whilst some level of repeat plans is inevitable to respond to adverse changes in circumstances a high level of repeat plans indicates that for some children the Child Protection intervention does not achieve the required changes in the child / family circumstances. This requires further analysis of cases that return to CP plans to identify contributory factors and practice learning.

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

Perhaps a more meaningful indication of how effectively risk is being managed is to consider the proportion of children made subject of 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 7.5% in 2018/19 (137 children) to 7.4%, that equates to 88 children. However although the percentage has slightly decreased the actually number children subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time has greatly decreased in line with all the total number of children subject of plans.

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.

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. 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 IRO's feel confident in challenging the Local Authority to ensure the outcomes for children are improved and their voice is strong and acknowledged. IRO's feedback regarding the response to challenge has improved in some areas of the county with IRO's reporting that Children's Social Care managers are responding more timely to Problem Resolutions which is required to avoid drift and delay. This however is not yet consistent across the County with IRO's in some areas expressing frustration regarding the lack of CSC response to advice and challenge. Last year following the Ofsted focus visit and the Peer Review IRO managers were keen to evidence and improve IRO footprint on children's case files. IRO learning circles were held to discuss IRO challenge, Problem Resolution (PR) and IRO footprint. This highlighted that there was a lot of IRO challenge and involvement however it wasn't always evidenced in recording. Following this additional case notes were created on LCS and a guide devised for IRO's to ensure these were used to evidence oversight, footprint and IRO involvement and challenge. Discussions also took place with Children's social care managers as the feedback was social workers and managers can respond negatively or defensively when IRO's are recording these discussions on case files. The IRO's have reported that find these useful to record their oversight and challenge alongside formal PR if required. 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. IRO's have attended CSC team meetings alongside Quality and Review managers to deliver presentations as part of learning and development to improve practice and working relationships.

IRO's have reported an improvement in permanence being achieved for children and that generally plans towards permanence are presented at the child's second Children Looked After review meeting. The implementation of the permanence tracker which is reviewed by Q&R managers and IROs during monthly supervisions supports in preventing any drift or delay regarding permanence.

IRO's have reported an improvement in the quality of Child Protection Plans and report there appears to be much better consistency in social workers sharing their ICPC report and RCPC final core group meeting report with parents prior to the Child protection conferences, however this still is not consistent in all cases as evidenced in the parent carer feedback (see below). IRO's being alerted when the initial CP plan has been created is still not consistent as per agreed process.

There have been some improvements with social workers completing the necessary reports prior to CLA review meeting, however there are still issues with the report being shared with the appropriate

persons/young person prior to the meeting. IRO's generally report the quality of the pre meeting report as needing to be improved and have also reported that the quality of CLA care plans needs to be improved.

IRO's have reported that children's emotional needs and response to a Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) score are often overlooked in respect of their care plan. IRO's have reported the completion of SDQs remain a concern and often have to be continually followed up to ensure they are completed. IRO's are following this up in the CLA reviews and via IRO CLA Case Monitoring. IRO managers from January 2020 are supporting with driving performance in this area by monitoring data for children who have high scores to ensure the IRO is satisfied that the appropriate support is in place and identifying children with missing SDQ's so this can be escalated.

IRO's are reporting continued concerns regarding Life Story work and that this remains the same since the last IRO annual report and is yet to become consistent practice across Lancashire. Positively, permanence panels are now being held by each district regularly and the IRO's are able to share their views as part of the panels. During 2019-20 updated guidance has been developed in respect of Life Story Work and Life Story Books; this is being taken forward into practice by the Principal Social Worker and Advanced Practitioner Service and is expected to deliver greater consistency and quality of support to children understanding their journey and identity.

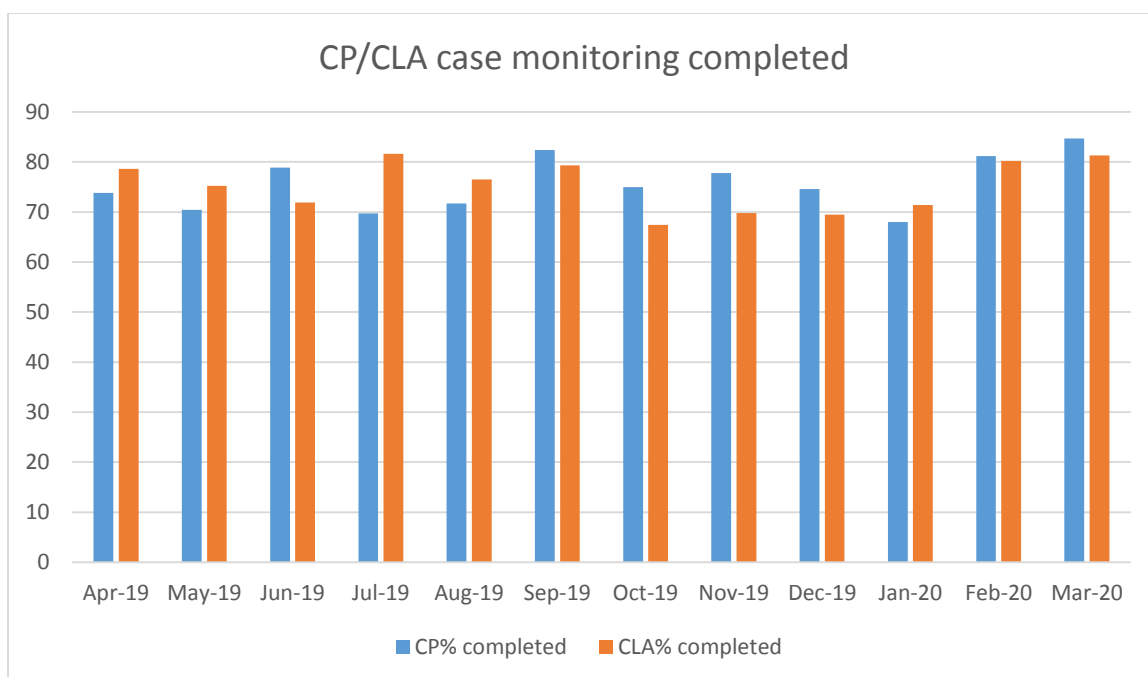
IRO's have shared there has been improvement in respect of evidencing the child's voice and some IRO's report children's views are readily available during CLA review meetings and CPC's and when this is not available or ascertained, this is being followed up by the IRO in relation to how this will be addressed. Other IRO's have reported that they feel we still have a long way to go in ensuring children's views are sought in respect of child protection conferences and relayed that they do not find devised tools such as the "All About Me" is being utilised. IRO's have raised that the number of young people who attend ICPC's and RCPC's remains low. This has been discussed in Cluster Meetings to raise this issue and ensure that social workers are aware of the importance of inviting children and young people and sharing their views, wishes and feelings.

It is reported in some areas that a more stable workforce in CSC and Management is assisting in improving practice and consistency for children and young people and communication with the service. This however continues to be variable across the County and IRO's have reported there is still some children that experience too many changes in allocated social worker. Positively an IRO advised that they are finding an awareness by new social workers of this and they are positively consulting with children about how often they want to see them and are accommodating individual need. In one child's case recently, the new social worker sent her profile to the child prior to visiting for the first time.

IRO's in the East have reported joint working in parts of East Lancashire remain good with IRO's regularly being invited to meetings and their views listened to. This is also getting better in other areas but again remains inconsistent. The development of a 'functionality' structure from 2020 will change the structure of this interface and creates the opportunity for focused improvement on the experiences of looked after children and those in need of help and protection.

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

5.2 IRO Case Monitoring



Over the last 12 months the IRO service has continued to focus on the case monitoring of cases between reviews and continue to embed 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 good standard of case monitoring completed; 75.6% for CP and 75.2% for CLA. This does not differ significantly from last year; 72.8% for CP (slight increase) and 78.6% for CLA (slight decrease). These figures are calculated using every review held when a mid-point check would not be completed prior to a first review or in between a short review period and therefore the service target is that case monitoring is completed for 80% of all reviews.

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

5.3 Case File Audits

In the last year IRO's and Q&R managers have continued to complete Tier 2 audits for a range cases selected from each of the three localities and have supported social workers with the identified actions and learning from these cases.

Tier 2 audits have also been another tool to quality assure the role of the IRO on cases as there continues to be specific questions relating to IRO's. In any audits where the role of the IRO has been identified as inadequate, the Q&R manager has been notified and this has allowed them to address the concerns with the IRO and to identify any areas of development.

In February 2020, a revised audit tool was implemented. The intention is to be less focussed on the LCS record and compliance yet place a greater emphasis on quality of social work practice and the outcomes achieved as a result of the intervention. It is also simplified the process for auditors by being more concise and less time consuming while combining the two different audit tools.

5.4 Practice Observations

Q&R managers, Safeguarding Manager and Head of Service continue to undertake practice observations of CLA reviews and Child Protection conferences when issues have been identify with IRO's to help and support their professional development.

5.5 Audit of Multi-Agency Attendance at Child Protection Conferences

On average 207 child protection conferences were held each month, this is a significant decrease from last year (234). 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

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. When key agencies and professionals are not in attendance, IRO's are checking that they have been invited to the conference and requesting that social workers liaise with them or IRO's liaise directly to ensure that they understand the importance of their attendance at future meetings. More recently attendance at Child Protection Conferences has improved as these have moved to remote meetings and this shows the potential for more creative multi-agency working in future.

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 period from April 2019 to March 2020 there were 2489 conferences compared to 2811 in the year 2018/2019.

From these conferences:

- 61 consultation forms were completed with young people prior to conference (86 last year).
- 147 children/young people physically attended and participated in the conference (184 last year).
- 664 young people did not attend, but their views were expressed (779 last year).
- 118 young people did not attend and their views were not available (130 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 over the last 12 months, although the overall reduction in the amount of conferences held, also needs to be considered with this. Work to strengthen child participation in Child protection processes is being taken forward as part of the Family Safeguarding Model, which has a specific focus on parent and child participation.

Over the last year we have encouraged our multi-agency partners to share their reports with parents before an ICPC. To support this we have asked partners to ensure reports are shared prior to the ICPC and have asked if this has happened at the start of each ICPC. This supports parents to understand the concerns that will be discussed at the conference and allows them to prepare for the meeting. The service no longer shares multi agency reports with parents as the agency needs to take responsibility for this. This also supports GDPR as it allows partner agencies to be responsible for the information they are sharing and to whom.

Within COVID-19 working practices we have still encouraged partner agencies to share their reports prior to the ICPC, this could either be over the phone or through email dependant on the nature of the information.

When a RCPC is held the multi-agency information is usually contained within the Social workers final core group report. However if an agency dissents from the core group decision about the plan they would provide an additional report. Again we encourage that this report is shared with parents prior to the RCPC.

5.6 Feedback from Parent / Carer Questionnaires

Feedback questionnaires give parent/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. The feedback is shared with IRO's and colleagues in children's social care to look how issues raised can be addressed and services developed. Due to the increased feedback returns in 2018/2019, by completing the feedback forms at the end of the conferences, it was agreed we would repeat this again in 2019/2020 for two months of the year these being: October 2019 and March 2020. However, due to COVID19 we actually only managed to get returns completed for the month of October 2020. In the meantime work is currently underway to develop a digital feedback method for parents and carers to provide their comments and views following child protection conferences and children looked after reviews.

For the month of October 2019 there were 53 initial Child Protection Conferences and 139 Review Child Protections Conferences, parent/carers were given the opportunity at the end of the conference to provide their feedback or take the form away and return it. Out of the 192 meetings we received 85 completed feedback forms, feedback as follows:

5.6.1 Parent/Carer Feedback from Initial Child Protection Conferences

Of the 23 questionnaires returned that related to ICPC's, 15 (65%) indicated they had seen the social workers report 48 hours before the conference. This is a reduction from the previous year which was 84%. From those that didn't receive the reports 48 hours before the conference, 4 reported receiving them the day before conference and 4 reported receiving them on the day of conference. In terms of professionals reports, out of the 23 questionnaires returned 8 (35%) reported that they had received these reports prior to conference, this again is a reduction on last year's figures which was 43%.

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, 22 (96%) of parents/carers reported that they met with the IRO prior to conference and 22 (96%) of the parents/carers reported that they were able to express their views and ask questions at the conference. Furthermore 96% of parent/carers reported that they understood why professionals were concerned

5.6.2 Parent/Carer Feedback from Review Child Protection Conferences

There were 62 questionnaires returned for RCPC's, of these 44 (71%) participants reported they had seen the social workers report at least 48 hours prior to the review conference. This performance is the same for 2018/19 when 71% of participants reported they had received the social workers report 24 hours prior to conference.

A high proportion of participants, 61 (98%), reported that they were invited to attend core group meetings. 59 (95%) reported that they understood what the concerns were and what was expected within the child protection plan.

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 1 out of the 62 participants reported that they never had the opportunity to express their views or ask questions, however they did say they understood why professionals were concerned. A high proportion (95%) 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 make any additional comments and provide feedback on things that went well and things that could be done better. Responses included:

- Parents were happy with the support given and came off the CP Plan. They wanted some support still but they are going to receive this on a CiN level.
- Unhappy with number of different SWs. Happy with the current allocated worker and picked everything up in short space of time.
- Happy with the outcome, felt comfortable too.
- Chairperson kind, understanding, fair.
- I understand why a CPP has been put in place and look forward to working with all professionals involved. The meeting was well managed and guided through the process. The meeting went as well as could be expected.
- Everyone used their facts to make the best decision in regards to CPP.
- Social workers used their personal opinions and were unprofessional.
- The meeting went really well and is positive in Child's interest. I don't think there is anything else one can do.

5.6.3 Analysis of Feedback of Parent/Carer Feedback Forms

It is positive that a very high proportion of parents/carers that have completed the feedback questionnaire felt that they understood why professionals were concerned and that they understood what was expected of them in relation to the child protection plan. Equally it is positive that parents had the opportunity to meet with the IRO who chaired the meeting prior to the conference, this can help parents understand the process of the meeting and what the purpose of the meeting is. This then can lead to parents/carers feeling able to participate in the conference, certainly the feedback reflected this as by the majority of the feedback stated that parent/carers felt able to give their views in the conference. However, it is a concern that there has been a reduction in the overall percentage of social worker and professionals reports that have been shared with parents at least 48 hours prior to conference. This is not acceptable as this will impact on how well prepared parent/carers are for the meeting and being able to understand and digest the concerns the Local Authority and professionals may have. 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.

It is acknowledged that the development of the Family Safeguarding Model raises specific challenges in delivering inclusive and collaborative safeguarding interventions with families and children and this will be a key priority as this work is rolled out.

5.7 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 2019/20 there were five appeals against a Child Protection Conference decision received. This maintains the level seen last year (four) and is reduced from the two previous years (ten each year). Four of the five appeals received derived from North Lancashire, with three of these being submitted by a parent. Three of the five appeals were upheld (two agency and one parent appeal). Parents and agencies are advised of the appeals procedures at all Child Protection Conferences and the low rate of appeals indicates that multi-agency decision making within Conferences is robust and compliant.

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

Here is the feedback an IRO received of from an 11 year old child earlier this year.

"Earlier in the year I had the chance to chair my own Children Looked After review. Since I wasn't really aware of what normally goes on at a Children Looked After review I had some help from my social worker and my IRO, so that I knew what type of things I would be talking about. Because I am a child we decided to make the meeting a little bit more fun by doing some fun games and activities in the meeting. A little while before the meeting me and my IRO went to set up some things for the meeting. First we drew a big flower with lots of petals on it and each person at the meeting had to write something about me in one of the petals. This made me feel really good about myself because everyone wrote nice things in the petals. We also set up a really fun quiz to see who knew me best. Me and my IRO wrote down some questions about me on a

white board and everybody had to answer and the person who got the most questions right got a prize at the end. In the meeting I also got to talk about any concerns I had or anything that I wanted to make better. I talked about my contact with my parents and also about my school and my home. Before the meeting I was actually really nervous to do it but after a while I realised that it was nothing like I imagined. I loved chairing the meeting and I would really love to do it again. I got to choose who was allowed to be at the meeting and I got to do loads of other stuff too. I think everybody should try chairing their own meeting because it gives us a chance to speak for ourselves and share our thoughts and opinions but we don't have to share everything either. We get to choose what we want to share and what we don't. It was nice to have a chance to give ideas and opinions. In conclusion I quite liked chairing the meeting and I would definitely do it again."

There are several photographs of the child and the meeting which were submitted alongside this good practice example that have been shared with all IRO's, senior managers and the IRO has received excellent feedback for her child centred approach.

Example 2

Children's Social Care have been involved with the family throughout the Children's lives under CIN and CP due to concerns regarding parental drugs and alcohol misuse, domestic violence and neglectful parenting. The Children were made subject of Interim Care Orders in 2019 and placed into a Local Authority Foster Placement together.

Since the onset of care proceedings there has been a period of relative stability for the children despite them experiencing a placement move. They have remained in the care of the Local Authority where they have been kept safe from harm and had their needs met on a daily basis. This has had a positive impact on the children who have managed a turbulent time in their life with little further negative impact on their emotional wellbeing, behaviours or presentation. They have increased their level of educational attainment and have increased their sociability and access to stimulation.

The IRO has been a key factor in driving permanence and Full Care Orders were recently made and a plan of Long Term Fostering agreed for the children. The children are already placed in their Permanent placement where they will continue to have the opportunity to reside within a safe home environment and have their care needs met whilst maintaining a relationship with their parents.

The Judge commented on the positive example of early permanence being achieved for the children at the final hearing.

Example 3

Child was a relinquished baby, this was not straightforward due to both parents being of a foreign Nationality and baby not automatically receiving British Citizenship by birth. Neither parent held British Citizenship or "settled status" meaning the baby was not registered as a British Citizen.

The IRO researched the above and read previous case law available that highlighted potential problems that could arise. Such as a family member coming forward to ask to care for the baby. It was agreed that the L.A. would write to the foreign Embassy/Ministry of justice to inform them of the position and ascertain whether they had any intentions to intervene in her care. In the case law the IRO had read a family member had come forward late in care proceedings with the Judge making a decision that they should be assessed as a potential carer for the child in that case.

A response was received from the Embassy stating this had been passed to the Countries State Child Rights Protection and Adoption Services. The IRO had read the original letter and was concerned this had left the matter open, no timescale had been given for a response in the original letter to this department and there was concern about the L.A. stating what their intentions were for the child if no response was received. The Guardian shared the concerns of the IRO.

Due to a lack of progress in addressing the concerns, problem resolution was entered into as this could not be resolved so this was promptly escalated within a day to the senior management for their consideration.

Within a day the issue was resolved with agreement reached that a further letter would be sent by the L.A. to the above department that would be explicit in detailing a timescale for response and what the L.A.'s intentions were if none was received.

This supported thorough planning from the start for the child, once the date had passed for a response from the department in the foreign country, the child was placed in a concurrent placement with their prospective adopters at the earliest opportunity. This meant the child did not have to spend longer than necessary in a foster care placement and this supported their attachments and bonding to their prospective adopters. The child was provided with stability and security as early as possible in their permanent placement.

Importantly this avoided potential delay and drift for the child from any challenge or issues arising relating to her permanence care plan.

No response was received from the above department, in effect meaning the additional letter providing a timescale with stated intentions for the child made the notification more robust.

The Child was placed with concurrent carers, this became their adoptive placement.

The child is very happy, settled and thriving, receiving a high standard of care.

Application to adopt has been lodged with the court.

Example 4

An ICPC where the mother suffers from extreme anxiety and did not want to attend the meeting – she was worried that the negative historical concerns would dominate the meeting and was worried her unborn baby was going to be removed. The IRO met with mother before meeting and offered her water and tissues – she offered her reassurance and agreed she would introduce everyone at the meeting and make a statement at

the beginning about mother's anxiety and asking for professionals to be sensitive to this. The IRO offered mother opportunities to have regular breaks during the conference if she needed these and made sure she sat beside her so she didn't feel on her own. During the meeting the IRO asked professionals to comment not only on the risks – but the many positive factors that had been reported. The IRO regularly checked how mother was feeling during the meeting and encouraged her to drink water and to do some deep breathing.

Mother stayed for the whole meeting and agreed with the decision that her unborn child should be on a plan due to the history – but left the meeting feeling like she was going to be offered support and encouragement. She said ' it was not as scary as I thought it was going to be'.

The professionals at the meeting were all pleased with how the meeting had gone and agreed it had allowed mother to participate – when they had expected her anxiety to overwhelm her (as had she).

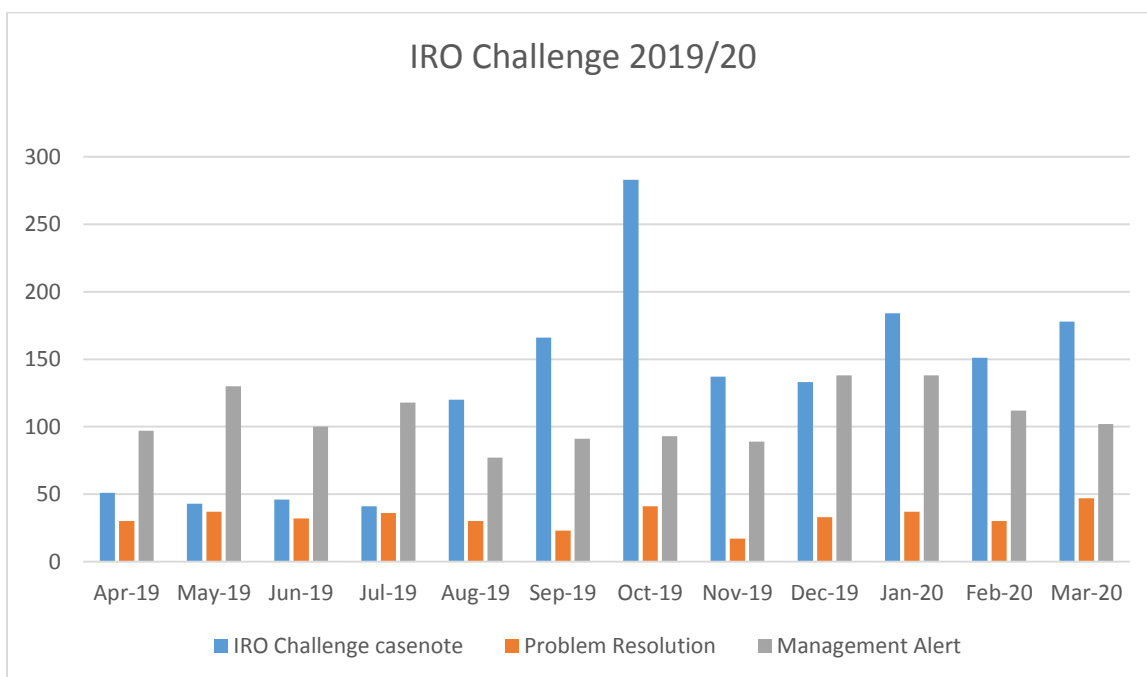
Example 5

During a Regulation 44 visit to a children's home, a young person fed back that:

"My IRO is really nice and she visits me and has taken me out and I know how to contact her if I need anything'. This young person has been able to and in confident in contacting her IRO to discuss changes in her care plan and potential placement moves".

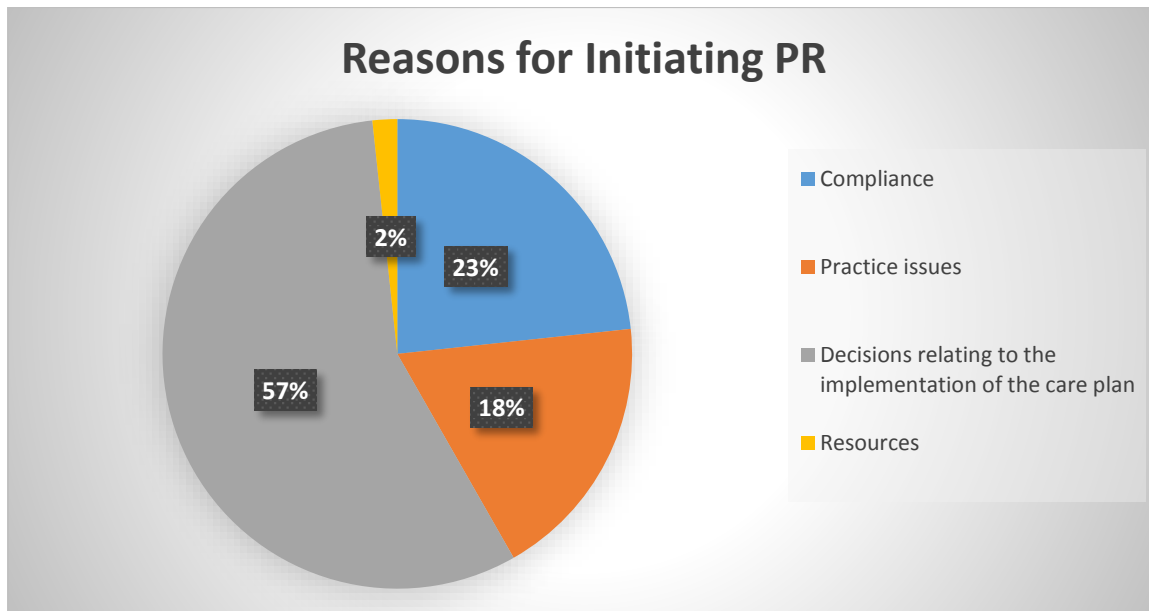
6.2 Problem Resolution Processes

In 2019/20 the IRO Service have continued to focus to improve the quality of IRO challenge in respect of improving outcomes for the child, ensuring that the challenge is evident, effective and outcome focussed.

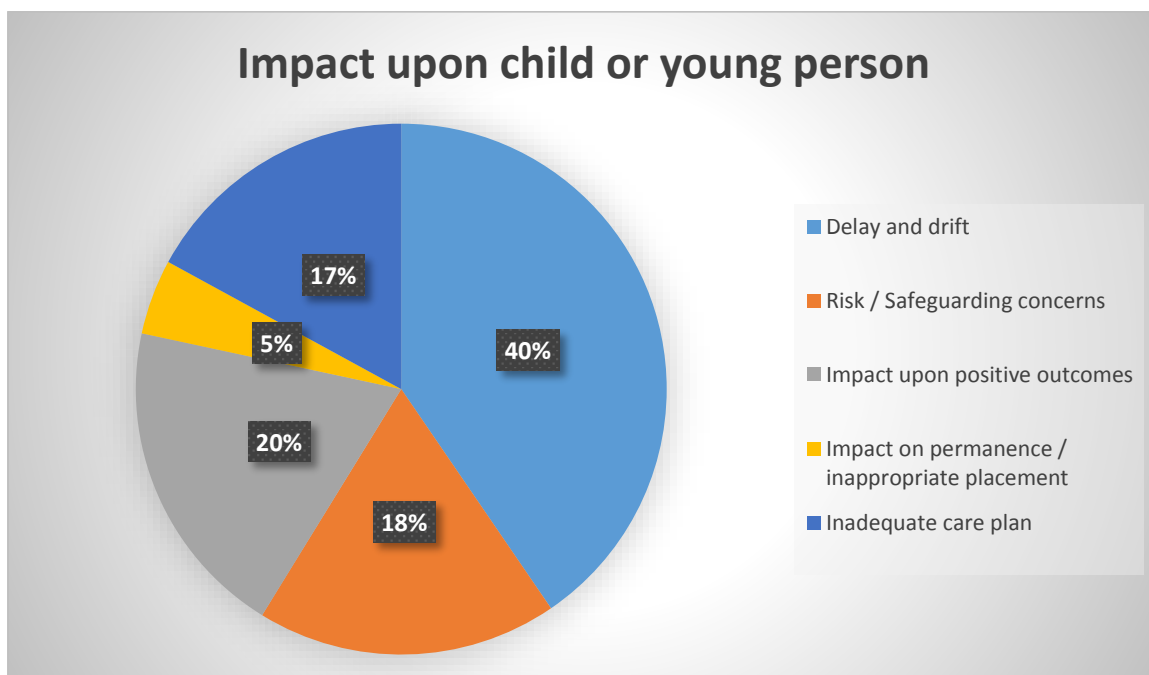


In respect of numbers, there has been a total of 403 Problem Resolutions, 1285 Management Alerts and 1533 IRO Challenge case notes. The numbers in comparison to last year in respect of problem resolutions

and managements alerts are very similar and are relatively consistent throughout the year however there is increased evidence of informal IRO challenge, recorded via IRO Challenge Case note and increased focussed on aspects relating to care planning rather than on compliance. It is felt that this has always been occurring however not always recorded and there has been increased focus this year on ensuring IRO oversight and challenge is evident on a child's file responding to feedback from OFSTED inspections and Peer Review.



The above chart shows the reasons why IROs have initiated problem resolutions this year. It is positive for the service that 77% of PRs have been focussed on practice issues and issues relating to implementation of the care plan.



The above chart shows the concerns of IROs regarding the impact upon a child or young person. It can be seen that drift and delay has been the largest concern of IROs when initiating problem resolutions. Instability

in CSC has had an impact upon this for example changes of social worker for children and young people leading to drift and delay in implementing a child's care plan.

A number of themes have been identified throughout the year regarding the focus of IRO challenge and where IROs have had significant impact upon improving outcomes for children and young people. These are:

- Challenges regarding delay in the progression of plans and achieving permanence for children and young people – these have included challenge regarding delay in seeking legal advice, delay in initiating care proceedings, inappropriate use of Section 20, drift in respect of the implementation of CP plans, delay in completion of SGO assessments and agreement regarding support and financial packages, delay in progressing rehabilitation plans, delay in presentation at permanence panel. These challenges have been resolved in a timely manner ensuring appropriate progression of plans for children assisting in ensuring that children have appropriate permanent plans in a timely manner.
- Challenges regarding the implementation and quality of plans for children. These include challenge regarding lack of multi-agency planning for children, concerns regarding care plans not being reflective of the children's needs or in line with the voice of the child, failure to respond to the voice of the child, for example, regarding progressing family time arrangements and challenge regarding inappropriate education provision for children – again, challenges are resolved in a timely manner and have been successful in ensuring progression in the implementation and improvement in quality of care plans.
- Challenges regarding pathway planning and progressing transition arrangements for young people. IROs have raised significant concerns regarding the lack of pathway planning and the negative impact that this has had upon young people. This has resulted in improved and earlier pathway planning in liaison with the young person, improved quality of pathway plans and young people feeling more secure and clear about the options for their future and inputting meaningfully to this process.

IRO challenge, both informal and formal, 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. This year the IRO service will focus on ensuring that all IRO challenge is outcome focused for the child or young person.

7. Priorities for 2020/21

- To work with the Family Safeguarding Project Team to ensure that Child Protection Conferences in Lancashire are delivered in a way that reflects and supports the principles of strengths based practice. This involves – 1) All IRO Chairs trained in Motivational Interviewing and applying these techniques in practice, 2) a focus on parent and child engagement and participation in Conferences 3) shifting

the balance of Conferences away from detailed agency information sharing towards the identification of significant harm and collaborative strengths based plans to address that harm.

- Continue to improve the quality of IRO challenge with a particular focus on improving outcomes for children and young people. Review the language used in the Problem Resolution form to ensure this is child and outcome focussed and quality assurance from QR managers to ensure that problem resolutions are child centred and outcome focussed.
- Work within a new Looked After Child framework to strengthen the quality of child participation within looked after child reviews – specifically to focus on improving the rate of direct attendance and 2) to ensure that indirect participation is meaningful and evidence based.
- To ensure that the need for Life Story work is formally highlighted at the outset of a child's looked after period and attention is directed to that any child with a ratified plan of permanence who does not have a Life Story Book.
- To ensure that children with a plan of permanence via a Discharge of Care Order are progressed in a timely manner.

8. Conclusion

The IRO Service in Lancashire continues to represent a stable and skilled workforce who are committed to getting it right for children. A culture of maintaining good performance is well embedded within the Service and this can be seen in performance data.

The Service has strengthened the IRO footprint and this focus on evidencing oversight and the impact / outcome for the child is reflected in audit evidence. There is an increasing focus within looked after child reviews on achieving permanence for children. The IRO Service undertakes the quality assurance of in-house Children's Homes (Reg 44) and the quality of this work is recognized as a strength by Ofsted.

The development of the Family Safeguarding Model and the creation of a Looked after Children function supports the further development of the IRO Service in driving quality interventions and support towards positive outcomes.

Evidence of IRO challenge increased significantly in the period following the 2015 Ofsted inspection and evidence of informal challenge has increased in the current year. It is recognized that the language of 'problems' and 'challenge' can be deficit based and didactic in approach and the use of outcome and solutions based language will support an emphasis on impact and quality over compliance alone.

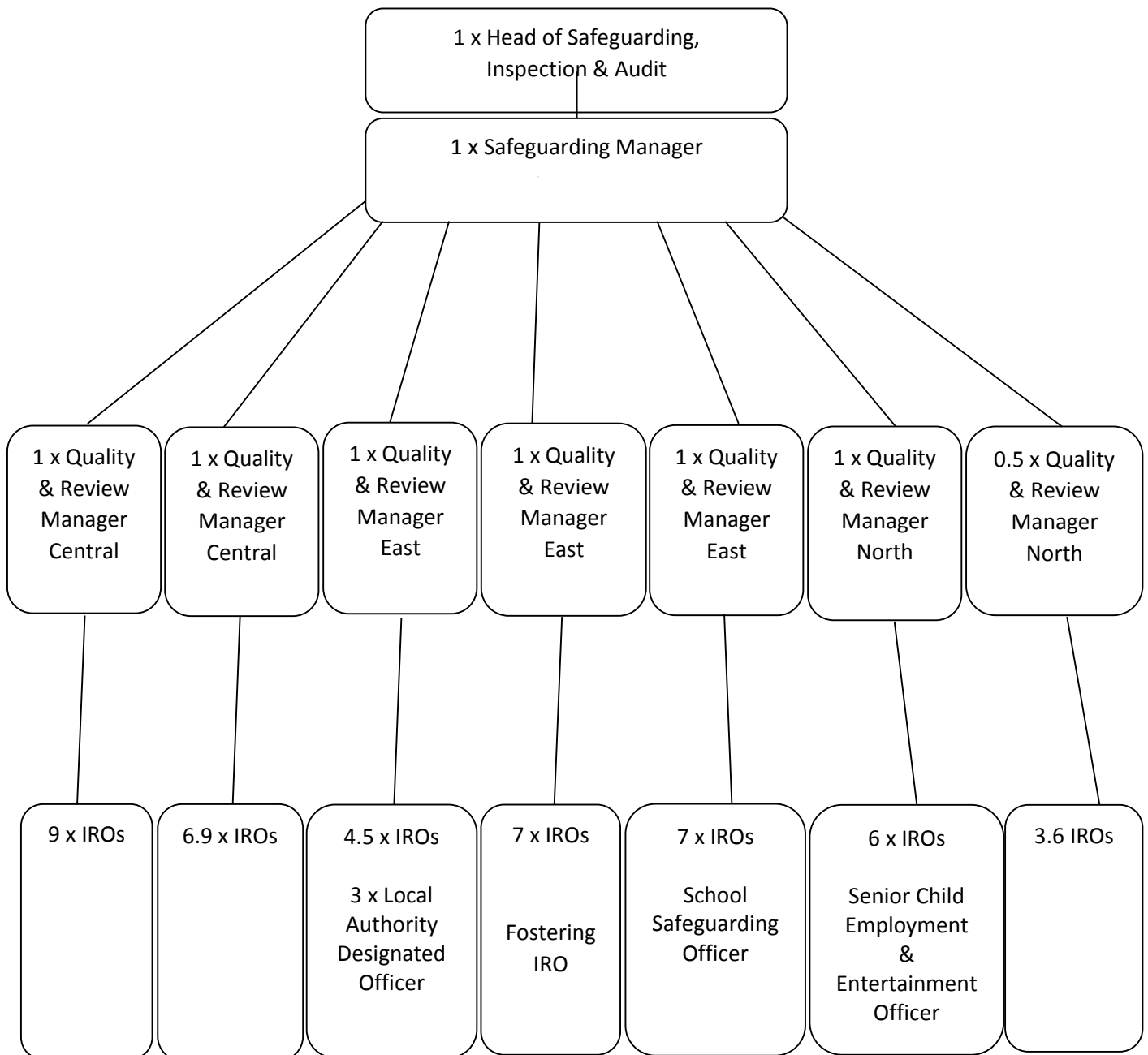
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Appendix 1: IRO Service Structure



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:

Managers

Name	Year of Qualification	Years as an IRO	Years as an IRO Manager
Laura Gardner	2008	N/A	2016 – 2020
Susan Harrison	2001	N/A	2016 – 2020
Charlotte Kay	2004	2012 – 2016	2016 – 2020
Joanne O'Neill	1995	N/A	2015 – 2020
Carl Spedding	2011	N/A	2018 – 2020
Lesley Warbrick	2004	2010 – 2013	2013 – 2020
Danielle Winkley	2006	N/A	2016 – 2020
Paul McIntyre	1999	2005 - 2008	2012–15 & 2019-2020

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	1998	2013
IRO 13	1997	2013
IRO 14	2004	2014
IRO 15	2006	2014
IRO 16	1997	2014
IRO 17	2008	2015
IRO 18	2006	2015
IRO 19	2008	2015
IRO 20	2009	2016
IRO 21	2007	2016
IRO 22	2007	2016
IRO 23	2008	2016
IRO 24	2011	2016
IRO 25	1994	2016
IRO 26	2010	2016
IRO 27	2009	2016
IRO 28	2001	2016
IRO 29	2009	2016
IRO 30	2011	2016
IRO 31	1988	2016
IRO 32	2008	2016
IRO 33	2009	2016
IRO 34	1995	2017
IRO 35	2009	2017
IRO 36	2011	2017
IRO 37	2002	2017
IRO 38	2002	2017
IRO 39	2002	2017
IRO 40	2006	2017
IRO 41	2011	2017
IRO 42	2005	2018
IRO 43	2011	2018
IRO 44	2007	2018
IRO 45	1998	2018
IRO 46	1992	2018
IRO 47	2008	2020
IRO 48	Vacant	Vacant