

**Lincolnshire County Council – Children’s Services  
Independent Reviewing Service 6-month Report  
1st April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

This is the six-month updating report in relation to the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to quality assuring and improving services for children in care in Lincolnshire.

The Independent Chairs have a dual role as Independent Reviewing Officers and Independent Child Protection Conference Chairs. This report focuses on the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to children in care. Activity relating to their Child Protection Chair role is detailed in a separate report which is presented to the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

This IRO report provides evidence relating to the IRO Service in Lincolnshire which must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board as required by statutory guidance.

### **Purpose of service and legal context**

The IRO Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook 2010 which provides statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children in care.

The guidance is issued as part of a suite of statutory guidance which sets out how local authorities should carry out the full range of responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and review for looked after children. The aim is to provide looked after children with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes.

Throughout this report the term child/ children refers to all those under the age of 18. However, it must be acknowledged that some young people in the upper age bracket like to be referred to as Young People.

### **Update on priorities 2021-2023 – Taken from the Quality & Standards Team Action Plan 2021-2023**

- **Analysis and development of procedures and IT support required for post covid Child in Care hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings being those attended by invitees in person and via electronic means.**

### **Action: Ongoing**

There is still some way to go before all conference facilities around the County have hybrid working equipment available. This is an ongoing project within the context of smarter working development across the wider Council.

- **Challenge and focus by the Independent Reviewing Officer on ensuring active participation and engagement with any "absent" parent within Child in Care Reviews, with particular emphasis on Fathers.**

**Action: Ongoing within LSCP. Now business as usual for the IRO's**

The strategic work driven by the LSCP is ongoing. Practitioner surveys in respect of the success of working with absent fathers along with some of the challenges concluded in September 2023. This together with the outcome of the parental surveys is being brought together to identify themes of already good practice together with organizational learning.

A Separated Parents Policy & Procedure has been finalised and this is in the process of being added to the LSCP policy manual to guide all partner agencies in this area.

The recommendations from the Children's Services audits are being taken forward and now that the themes and learning from the LSCP work has concluded, the working group will take these forward.

The Practice Advisors have delivered the PL sessions around engaging absent fathers and all IRO's have attended this to inform and shape their practice. Engaging absent fathers has moved to business as usual within the IRO team.

There is a clear focus within the team to ensure that absent fathers and paternal networks are included as standard wherever possible. Given the wider focus on the reunification of children and young people back to their families, wherever it is safe and, in a child, best interest to do, the inclusion of the paternal network is of high importance.

- **The development of the Valuing Care Toolkit and how these impact on the information that is provided to reviews and how care plans are constructed is an ongoing workstream and IRO service needs to be actively engaged in the implementation and review of Valuing Care Toolkit.**

**Action: Ongoing**

The Valuing Care Toolkit continues to develop. It has become a mandatory addition to the care planning step and is included in each child's care review from the second review onwards, sometimes sooner. There is an expectation that IRO's will use this information to consider an individual child's needs and to support the development of their care plans. Valuing Care is business as usual within the IRO team.

A Team Manager from the Quality & Standards Service continues to sit on the Valuing Care Governance Board to ensure that the service is always at the heart of any developments and how this impacts on the children and young people that the service oversees.

- **Development of regular joint working with CAFCASS**

**Action: Now business as usual**

The Team Managers have worked with the Service Manager of CAFCASS to develop a joint working program. IRO's have strong links with Childrens Guardians on a day-to-day basis and it's crucial that they understand each other's roles.

The first joint development day took place on 4.10.23. The day involved IRO's, CAFCASS Officers and some Social Workers from Locality FAST, CIC and CWD Teams who are all involved in care proceedings. The day which included a presentation on Deprivation of Liberty (DOLS) by Talents solicitors and group exercises looking at child case studies was met with great success. Those attending took opportunities to further understand each other's roles and develop future learning. A further planning meeting is arranged for February 2024 to start planning the next seminar which will be an annual event.

- **The Development and embedding of the IRO's MOSAIC Monitoring tools.**

**Action: Ongoing**

The new Chairs monitoring forms are now fully embedded within the MOSAIC workflows. This further expands opportunities for the Quality & Standards Service to explore how the service and Locality teams are performing against key measures such as working with and preparing children and parents / carers for meetings, the quality of reports and participation of child / parents, including absent parents, engagement of children and advocacy, the use of the Valuing Care tool and the overall impact of how the Local Authority performs.

The monitoring forms are currently being mapped by the performance team to enable a quarterly locality / county wide accessible monitoring report to be developed that Chairs can share with teams to highlight positive performance and to guide future development. These reports will also be shared with each locality Head of Service. The outcomes will feed onto the overall Childrens Services Quality Assurance functions.

- **Embedding in a new framework for linking with locality teams**

**Action: Ongoing**

Each locality team now has a dedicated Chair link worker. Regular meetings have commenced and are allowing opportunities for the IRO's to further build relationships and focus on developing practice and relationships.

At each team meeting the Chairs give feedback from these meetings and gain feedback from their colleagues to take to their link meetings.

The overall view is that these links are having an impact, and this is likely to be further increased once the formal performance monitoring reports are available as outlined in the action above.

- **The Development of IRO Good Practice Guidance**

**Action: Ongoing**

The service continues to develop a range of good practice guidance. These are freely available and promoted to the IRO's. This is having a positive impact as it highlights what good practice looks like when it has a positive impact on children and their families. This guidance will bring consistency of practice across the team and ensure that all new starters have further access to materials that will support and enhance their development pathway.

- **Further develop practice around those Children Placed with their Parents under the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations (2010)**

**Action: Now business as usual**

The Audit report completed was accepted by DLT and the Team Manager with the lead for Children in Care is taking forward the recommendations and is the lead in completing an annual audit and report in this area.

Guidance has been completed and published for the IRO's to support better practice and understanding in this area.

- **Development of a bespoke IRO Induction package**

**Action: Now business as usual**

This is now completed and all new IRO's joining the service benefit from a comprehensive induction period that includes the allocation of a workplace mentor, a period of work shadowing and learning, access to learning and development materials linked to the role and ongoing support.

New starters have commented positively on how this organised approach has supported them in their new, provided them with the time and space to learn and familiarise themselves in the role and brought them confidence in approaching it.

- **Launch of Children in Care Consultation and engagement materials**

**Action: Ongoing**

This work is ongoing. The range of engagement materials has been brought together and the Team Manager with the lead for Children in Care with two IRO's are attending the Voices 4 Choices meeting on 25.10.23 to meet with young people to consult with them

around the proposed changes but most importantly to listen to their views to support the service development. There are also plans to engage with the Foster Carer network to seek their engagement in relation to the carers consultation documents.

### **Professional Profile of the IRO Service**

The Independent Reviewing Service continues to be embedded within the Quality and Standards Service Area of Lincolnshire County Council.

The Independent Chairs Team is made up primarily of two distinct roles: Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Child Protection Chairs. In some Local Authorities these roles are separate roles, often located in separate teams, however this is not the case in Lincolnshire. The service continues to secure further funding for an additional IRO post in relation to the rising UASC numbers.

The team also has responsibility for reviewing Children with Disabilities Short Term Breaks. This additional role is also a statutory requirement.

Sickness absence continues to be a challenge over the last six months; however, this appears to have lessened. Within the last 6 months successful recruitment has meant that the team now has a full establishment of permanent workers. Agency workers have been utilized to support the transition arrangements and it is anticipated by the end of the financial year the team should not need any agency workers.

### **Staffing**

#### **Management Team**

There remain four Team Managers within the Service. The Chairs are predominantly managed by Debbie Johnson and Richard Stone. Debbie Johnson has the service lead for Child Protection and Richard Stone has the service lead for Children in Care. Paul Fisher has responsibility for the LADO's and Reg 44 Officers and Philippa Gallop has responsibility for Quality Assurance, Learning and Development, Participation and Liaise. Paul Fisher has recently secured the secondment position of Corporate Parenting Manager and leaves the service in November 2023. Kim Murray, who is currently employed as a LADO was successful in her application to backfill Paul's post and she starts as a Team Manager on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

#### **Independent Chairs**

Within the past 6 months the 4 new recruits as outlined in the last report have all started, completed their inductions and are positive additions to the team.

3 further vacancies have arisen due to one member of staff leaving the Local Authority, one securing a Practice Supervisor post within a locality FAST team and one securing the Team Manager secondment as outlined above. It is positive that despite these changes, 2 out of the 3 have stayed within the organisation.

All 3 positions have been recruited too. The team is preparing to welcome 2 new external candidates in December/ January 2023 /24 and one new starter who has been redeployed into the team is already in the post and going through an induction period.

The team now only has 2 agency workers who will leave the service when the 2 new starters commence their employment.

### **Short Term Breaks (STB's)**

Short breaks are part of a continuum of services which support children in need and their families. A large number of short breaks occur that do not require oversight by the IRO due to not meeting the statutory requirements. Where children and young people receive a higher number of STB's an IRO is allocated to oversee their care plans.

The role of the IRO for children looked after in a series of short breaks is more limited than for longer term Children in Care. It is important that IROs are sensitive to the close and active involvement of parents. Given this sensitivity, parents as well as children and young people can highly value their contribution and independent perspective, especially in helping to resolve any difficulties with the placement. IROs have a responsibility to alert the local authority if the placement is not meeting the child's needs.

### **Number of Short-Term Break meetings held**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
April	8	5	4	4	4	5
May	12	3	4	6	10	4
June	8	11	6	7	4	5
July	8	5	7	6	7	3
August	1	0	2	1	0	1
September	7	8	4	7	3	6
October	4	6	4	4	8	
November	9	6	9	9	6	
December	8	4	2	6	4	
January	6	6	4	3	7	
February	4	4	3	5	0	
March	5	4	5	4	7	
Totals	80	62	54	62	60	24

### **Children in Care population and the IRO service**

Despite the inclining trend during the past 12 months the figures for young people in care appear to be overall more stable yet still slowly rising. As of 30th September 2023, there were 749 children in care, compared to 730 on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

In the 6 months from 1st April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 the IROs have conducted 891 reviews. In the same period 1st April 2022– 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022 there were 862 reviews. The workload has been increasing year on year.

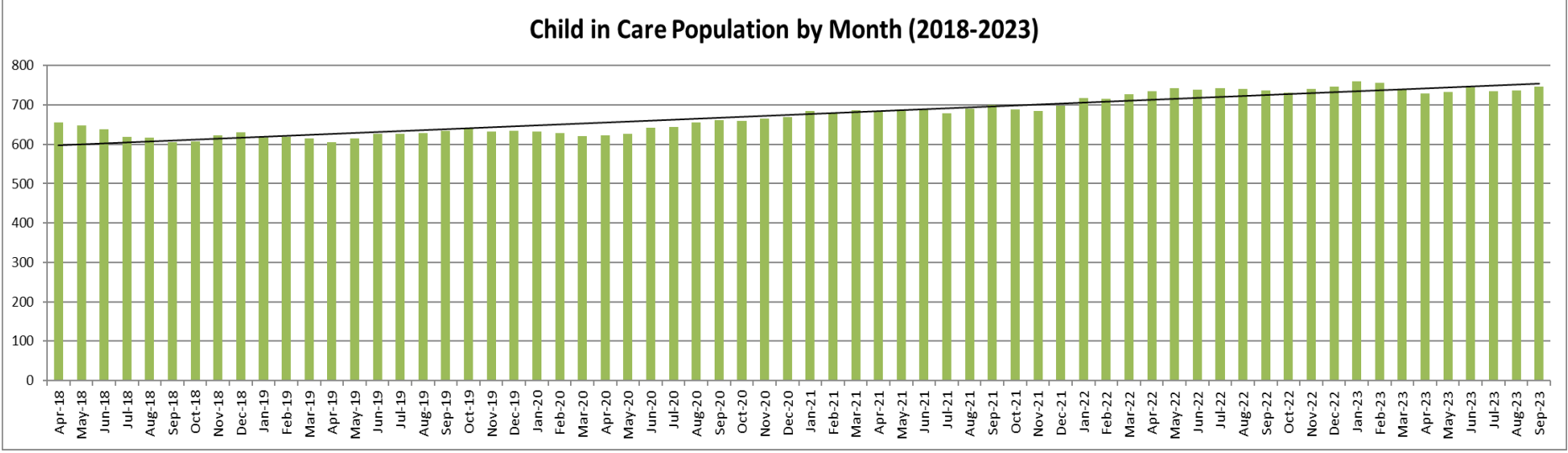
Due to the court system still being in the pre pandemic recovery period , the Judiciary and the Local Authority are jointly focused on returning to completing proceedings within the 26-week track to reduce delays for children. This together with impact of a number of foster care changes for some children has meant that reviews are sometimes rescheduled to accommodate this. As an example, between April 1st, 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, 451 reviews were re arranged which has had a further impact on workload. This is an increase on the previous year's figures which were 433 from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Overall, the Children in Care population has seen an upward trend resulting in the highest Children in Care population in the last 3 years.

In the 6 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023, 2 children have been subject to Secure Accommodation under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989. Any Secure Criteria Reviews are chaired by the Independent Chairs Team Managers.

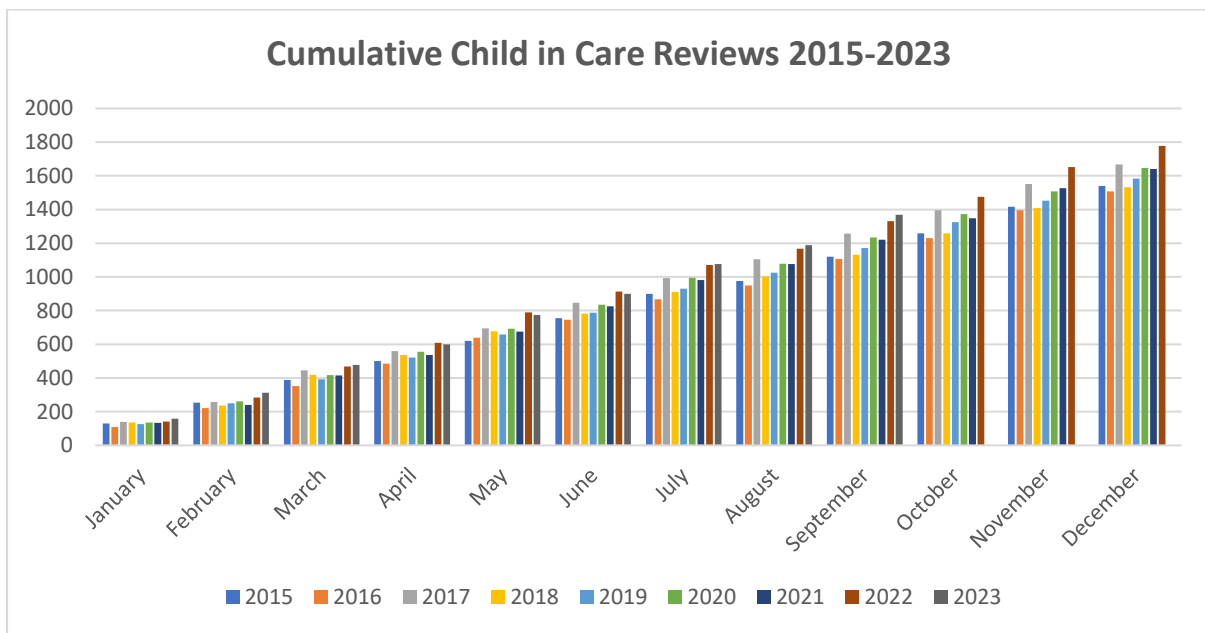
In the 6 months from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 there have been 27 Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children (UASC) placed in the care of Lincolnshire Children's Services under the National Transfer Scheme. Whilst these children are the responsibility of Lincolnshire, their placements are mainly located in Peterborough, Derby and Nottingham areas with 5 children also being placed in London. Given the frequent referrals for UASC's there are predominantly 3 IRO's who oversee these. This allows them some constancy while the geographical locations of their placements mean that multiple reviews can often be held in one day by one IRO. It also allows the IRO's to focus mainly on these children and build their specialism in this area with this vulnerable group of children. The number of UASC's under 16 years old appears to be increasing.

**Child in Care Population**

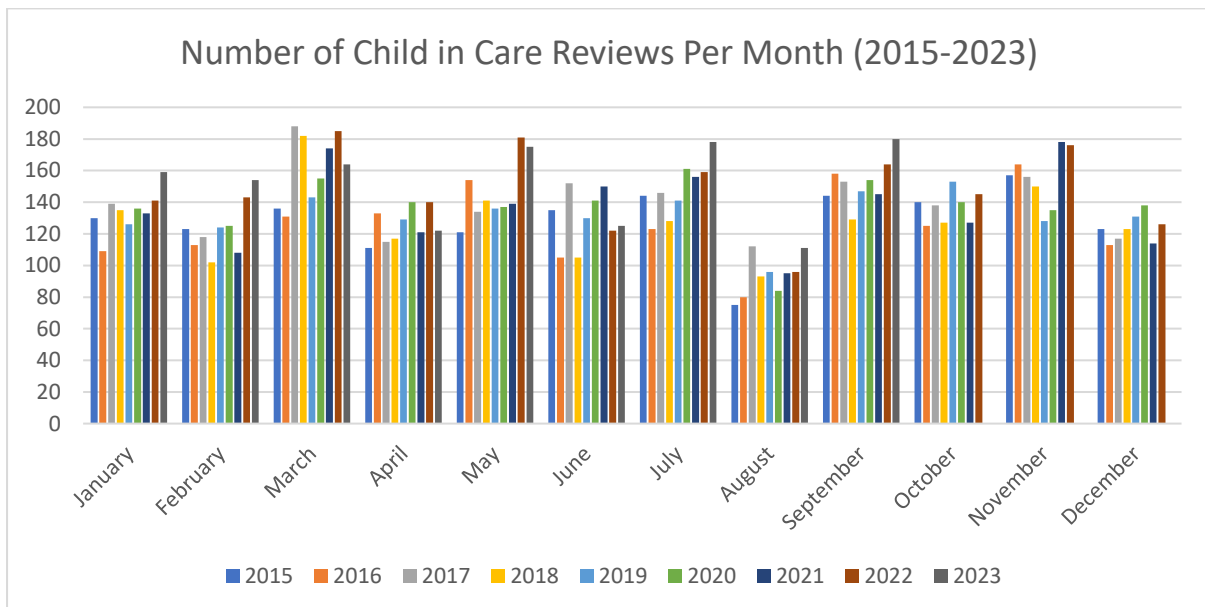




Cumulative Child in Care Reviews 2015- 2023									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	130	109	139	135	126	136	133	141	159
February	253	222	257	237	250	261	241	284	313
March	389	353	445	419	393	416	415	469	477
April	500	486	560	536	522	556	536	609	599
May	621	640	694	677	658	693	675	790	774
June	756	745	846	782	788	834	825	912	899
July	900	868	992	910	929	995	981	1071	1077
August	975	948	1104	1003	1025	1079	1076	1167	1188
September	1119	1106	1257	1132	1172	1233	1221	1331	1368
October	1259	1231	1395	1259	1325	1373	1348	1476	
November	1416	1395	1551	1409	1453	1508	1526	1652	
December	1539	1508	1668	1532	1584	1646	1640	1778	



Number of Child in Care Reviews Per Month (2015-2023)									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	130	109	139	135	126	136	133	141	159
February	123	113	118	102	124	125	108	143	154
March	136	131	188	182	143	155	174	185	164
April	111	133	115	117	129	140	121	140	122
May	121	154	134	141	136	137	139	181	175
June	135	105	152	105	130	141	150	122	125
July	144	123	146	128	141	161	156	159	178
August	75	80	112	93	96	84	95	96	111
September	144	158	153	129	147	154	145	164	180
October	140	125	138	127	153	140	127	145	
November	157	164	156	150	128	135	178	176	
December	123	113	117	123	131	138	114	126	



## Re-arranged CIC Reviews

Number Re-arranged Child In Care Reviews Per Month (2015-2023)									
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
January	50	46	59	64	65	64	52	79	80
February	30	63	71	58	41	62	66	78	80
March	39	61	74	80	42	52	70	80	79
April	51	57	52	60	44	64	46	49	70
May	53	43	68	55	54	51	58	73	62
June	47	26	52	53	65	53	74	95	104
July	40	47	62	48	64	46	58	69	90
August	29	59	51	30	58	45	46	62	58
September	40	52	50	39	77	74	63	85	67
October	51	64	53	46	75	90	77	73	
November	37	64	58	58	60	64	65	90	
December	48	47	37	42	42	58	51	54	
Yearly Total	515	629	687	633	687	723	726	887	690

## Advocacy/Independent Visitor

Advocacy/Independent Visitor provision in Lincolnshire continues to be provided by Voiceability as part of a commissioned service.

IRO's routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a real say in decisions affecting their lives. Children in Care are opted in to Voiceability who are invited to Children in Care Reviews for children aged 8 and over after the child's Social Worker has referred them. The Local Authority has a duty to appoint a person to be an Independent Visitor when it appears to be in the child's interests to do so. The appointment of an Independent Visitor should be considered as part of developing the Care Plan for the child and at the Child in Care Review. Any decision not to appoint an Independent Visitor should be kept under review. The child's wishes and feelings should be obtained, and they must agree to the appointment of the Independent Visitor.

There continues to be some challenges around provision, with some young people not being able to secure an advocate if required in a timely manner. Ongoing work is being completed to evaluate the actual provision against the service level agreements to identify any complicated factors that may be affecting the availability of provision.

## Timeliness of reviews

Between 1st April 2023 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 a total of 891 individual review meetings were held. It should be noted that sometimes children within the same family or same placement may have their reviews held together. This means that the number of children who had their care plans reviews is likely to be noticeably higher than 891.

Within the same time period a total of 1 child had their review held out of timescales which

means 99.9% were held in timescales.

The 1 review that was held out of timescales was a human error. A former IRO had commenced a Series of Short meetings to hold the review meeting in parts to meet the child needs. The date for the next review was calculated from the final meeting date, rather than from when the series of meetings commenced. This led to the review being held 10 calendar days late. The child in question has lived in the same kinship foster home for almost 8 years with a family member, is settled and there was no impact on the child's care plan progressing.

Any recording errors are identified and resolved on a weekly basis to ensure that the performance reports are an accurate representation of "actual" performance.

### Children and young people's preparation and involvement in reviews

When we consider how young people participate in their reviews, we look at their attendance at their meetings, how they contribute towards the agenda and how 'their review' is run. Our bottom line as a service is that however they choose to contribute, their voice should be at the forefront.

All children and young people are sent a consultation form with their invite. Some have phone calls, emails, and separate visits from their IROs in between reviews or in anticipation of a forthcoming review depending on their age and development. This is to enable the IRO to build a relationship with the child, ensure that they can discuss any issues / talk about the positives in their lives and to determine how they want the next review to be conducted. Attending a review is the child or young person's decision and not mandatory. Although IRO's always encourage them to engage and offer to adapt the meeting format to their needs.

IRO's routinely visit their children and young people in person prior to and in between their reviews. However, given that the landscape has changed, many young people are now requesting that they speak with their IRO over the phone, through video calls or text messages. Whilst in-person experience would be the preferred model, IRO's are clearly listening to their children and young people and really taking their preferences into account when communicating with them.

IRO's are always mindful that not all children are old enough to verbally express their views, for some children English is not their first language and for other disabilities or additional needs means they communicate in a different way. Some children simply do not wish to talk or do not feel ready. IRO's are creative with how they approach participation, trying to understand what a child's world looks and feels like, how they interact with those around them and what their behaviors may be telling us. IRO's also ensure those adults around the child are able help them share their views and feelings too. By taking this approach, as a service we try to ensure that any plans made are in the best interest of the child.

Participation performance was 99.8% up to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023. The figures to 30<sup>th</sup> September are not yet available at the time of completing this report.

## Plans for Children in Care

The Chairs continue to focus on ensuring the availability of high-quality plans for every child in care. The Chairs raise professional escalations if care plans are not completed or are not of sufficient quality.

The Valuing Care assessment and analysis tool is now fully embedded into the child's journey and IRO's oversee this at review meetings, ensuring that there is a clear understanding and analysis of the child's needs to support the development of the care plan.

IRO's write plans 'to the child', making sure that they use child friendly language.

There continues to be some fluctuations around the quality of initial care plans presented for IRO's to review. This is in part due to the ongoing pressures that the locality teams have experienced, particularly in relation to turn over of social workers. IRO's have been sympathetic to this where they can and restorative in their challenges to support the current pressures but always with any potential impact on a child and their family in their focus. This situation appears to be settling and IRO's report that there is much more stability within some teams leading to better quality care planning.

## Progress-chasing Activities between Looked After Reviews

All IROs have a duty to monitor the progress of their allocated children between reviews. This is to ensure that the care plan is progressing and allows them to intervene and escalate issues where matters are drifting. All young people are provided with the IROs name and contact details at the initial meeting and routinely at reviews so that they know how to contact them.

## Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation

IRO's regularly identify and share good practice with colleagues but also raise concerns with locality teams via positive challenge and formal escalation.

Most concerns are still raised by the IROs through a positive challenge, focusing on a restorative approach with social work colleagues without the need for a formal escalation. These are recorded on MOSAIC.

The team continues to focus on improving consistency in terms of escalations made and to ensure better monitoring and reducing drift and delay. Systems are in place to support managerial oversight as well as helping the IRO's in their duty of tracking escalations to improve care planning and outcomes for young people.

There continues to be a significant drop in the number of formal escalations. As a result of this, the number of positive challenges has increased as IRO's seek to resolve challenges in care planning in a restorative way in the first instance.

All Independent Reviewing Officers are required by the regulations to have access to legal advice. Clearly, given the independent nature of the Service, it would not be appropriate for

any such advice to be provided by the Children's Services Legal Department. No Legal advice has been sought within the past 6 months.

**Number of formal escalations per month**

	2016 /17	2017 /18	2018 /19	2019 /20	2020 /21	2021 /22	2022 /23	2023 /24
April	9	2	4	8	3	2	0	1
May	4	5	4	3	0	4	0	0
June	0	7	4	1	3	0	1	2
July	3	5	5	0	4	8	0	5
August	1	1	2	0	5	1	2	0
September	3	9	4	8	5	1	1	1
October	4	4	1	1	0	4	6	
November	3	5	1	2	3	1	3	
December	6	5	0	0	3	3	1	
January	2	8	3	2	5	7	1	
February	5	4	2	7	1	1	2	
March	8	7	2	1	1	1	0	
Totals	48	62	32	33	33	33	17	9

Themes of Child in Care Formal Escalations (for the period April 2023 - September 2023)

Theme	Number of escalations raised
Plan/Reports – Quality	4
Safeguarding Concerns	3
Practice Issues (Multiple Concerns)	1
Provision of Service	1
Total	9

**Management oversight**

The Guidance states that operational social work Team Managers must consider the IRO's decisions and recommendations from the Review before the plan and record of meeting is authorised. This is due in part to the need to ensure that any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions and recommendations are completed by the IRO, the Locality Team Manager has 5 days to raise any queries or objections. Managers rarely ask for any amendments to be made and this process appears to work well.

**Leaving Care – Director's Decision**

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
April	1	0	0	0	0	0
May	3	1	0	1	1	0
June	2	0	0	0	1	2
July	1	1	0	0	0	1
August	2	2	0	0	0	0

September	0	0	0	0	1	0
October	1	0	0	1	0	
November	1	0	0	0	1	
December	0	2	1	0	0	
January	0	0	0	0	0	
February	0	0	0	0	0	
March	0	0	0	0	0	
Totals	11	6	1	2	4	3

The procedure with regards to Sec. 20 Accommodated young people leaving care before their 18th birthday is understood by Chairs and is discussed within reviews as part of the Care Planning process and Recommendations. Any young person who has been accommodated for more than 20 days and is aged 16 or 17 and wants to leave care must have this decision considered by the Assistant Director with a lead for safeguarding.

### **Quality Assurance of the IRO Service**

#### Auditing and observations undertaken by the IRO Team Managers

The service has just revised the way in which Team Managers quality assure the work of the IRO's. Regular supervisions and appraisals take place to ensure that all Team Managers are fully familiar with their staff, have ample opportunities to engage in reflective discussions with them, problem solve around complex issues and support their learning and development. Spot sampling of work for quality often takes place.

The new Quality Audit schedule is actively being followed and during the last 6 months all IRO's have observed a colleague and have completed a case Quality Audit. Team Managers have all observed each member of their staff and conducted a quality audit in the same way.

The management team along with the Head of Service are meeting quarterly to review the outcomes of this ongoing work and to use the findings to reflect on practice and identify developmental themes. The results will be used to further shape the service and develop the Quality & Standards Team Action Plan.

#### Supervision and training

IRO's have scheduled monthly supervision (pro rata) and informal supervision as and when required. All IRO's have a Personal Development Plan (PDP) and are encouraged to attend training through Lincolnshire Children's Learning and Development Team, Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and the Regional IRO Workshops. Each IRO undertakes annual mandatory training and follows the 5-year Children's Services development training plan.

All IRO's are social workers and registered with Social Work England. As part of their continued registration, workers are required to evidence their continuing professional development.

Team Meetings are held monthly and include guest speakers and workshops. Team Meetings take place over one full day per month, and these are always held in person to promote staff being together and to enhance practice discussions.

Any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service

The Independent Reviewing Officers continue to work at full capacity. Due to the court system still being in the pre pandemic recovery period, the Judiciary and the Local Authority are jointly focused on returning to completing proceedings within the 26-week track to reduce delays for children. This has an ongoing impact as timetabling is very often tight leading to IRO's frequently having to rearrange meetings in order ratify plans prior to QAAG and filing dates, sometimes with limited time to prepare. This continues to impact on time and capacity. As identified above in this report, in the past 6 months there have been 451 reviews rearranged, many due to court timetabling but capacity within locality Social Work teams also impacts. It must also be noted that the IRO's also chair Child Protection meetings where there are similar challenges and tensions around readiness for conferences. This also has an impact on their capacity and ability to work.

The chairs are under increasing pressure due to the additional admin tasks involved in new ways of working and also taking into account the increased travel time to in-person meetings. Additional capacity has been created through the recruitment of agency members of staff to fill vacancies in the team as outlined within this report. However, it is also noteworthy, as outlined within this report, that agency staff support will be reduced significantly over the coming weeks due to recent positive recruitment. It should be noted that the Chairs are at the upper limit in terms of children allocated as set out in the IRO Handbook, which provides guidance around case capacity in order to carry out their duties effectively. As the Child in Care and Child Protection population continues to grow the established numbers of Chairs will need to be constantly reviewed to ensure that this key area of Quality Assurance is sufficiently staffed.

Supplementary to this the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children is increasing which is having a further impact on the IRO's capacity. The Local Authority commission specialist provisions which are predominantly situated in the Peterborough and Nottinghamshire area which due to the demographics means their cultural needs are better met.

**Carolyn Knight**  
**(Head of Service Quality and Standards and PSW)**

**Richard Stone, Debbie Johnson & Paul Fisher**  
**(Team Managers Quality and Standards)**