

**Lincolnshire County Council – Children’s Services
Independent Reviewing Service yearly report
1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022**

Due to the ongoing Coronavirus and the recurring and changing measures imposed by the UK government the Quality and Standards Service has had to redesign the delivery of child protection conferencing, Children in Care (Formally known as Looked After Children) reviews and reg 44 visits under the governments Coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for children's social care services. During this unprecedented period, the service has continued to hold CP conferences and Children in Care reviews within timescales and ensured the continued participation of children and families who face additional challenges.

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care

This IRO report provides evidence relating to the IRO Services in Lincolnshire as required by statutory guidance. Due to the core business of the team also including child protection, short-term breaks and Reg 44 visits, where appropriate this report contains information relating to those areas.

The IRO report must be presented to: Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Purpose of service and legal context

The IRO Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook which provides the statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children looked after.

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.

The CP Chairs role is described within Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 which is a guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Following section 47 enquiries, an initial child protection conference (ICPC) brings together family members (and the child where appropriate), with the supporters, advocates, and practitioners most involved with the child and family.

The purpose of the Child Protection Conference is to analyse all relevant information and plan how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child with the family and their network taking the lead. It is the responsibility of the conference to make recommendations on how organisations and agencies work together to safeguard the child going forward.

Priorities 2021-22

- **The service will be undertaking a review of Conference and CiC physical participation by families and professionals with a road map for attendance.**

The plan going forward from January 2022 is that all initial CP meetings are held in a "hybrid" format, the core group and family attending physically and other professionals attending virtually.

The new Omnicom strain postponed the return to physical meetings in January until March. Since this time, there has been an expectation that all initial Child Protection Conferences will be offered as physical / hybrid meeting, attended by a minimum of the

Chair, Social Worker, family members and core group (professionals who work closely with the family).

CP Chairs are noting that some parents are stating that they feel less comfortable attending physical meetings, opting to attend virtually. Where this is safe to do so, and the parents are engaging to assist with the creation of the CP plan, this has been utilised. However, conferences involving those parents/ carers who are vulnerable such as domestic abuse cases, additional needs such as learning or communication, have been facilitated in person to remove barriers and maximise participation and safety planning.

- **Analysis and development of procedures and IT support required for post covid CP and CiC hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings being those attended by invitees both in person and via electronic media.**

In the interim, equipment has been purchased by the service to enable hybrid meetings to take place at conference rooms around the County. This is also being used to facilitate CiC reviews where appropriate. Each of the Chairs has their own set of portable equipment. Whilst this enables full audio participation in meetings and improves the visibility of physical attendees for those attending online, there is an ongoing piece of work to ensure that all conference rooms have dedicated hybrid equipment which will enable full visual engagement (everybody attending will be able to see and hear each other).

- **Integration of current feedback from CP and CiC utilising "Engagement HQ" (centralised feedback development and recording system) when this comes online.**

We are still awaiting Engagement HQ to come online; however, we continue to collate feedback from children, families, and professionals in order to continue developing the service.

- **Initial trial and review of progress of the new Pre-Birth Protocol, implementation of any subsequent amendments from the review.**

As per the previous report, the Pre-Birth protocol was implemented in December 2020. In June 2021, following 6 months of the IRO service chairing Pre-birth protocol strategy meetings, a review between children's health, midwifery and children's social care took place. The protocol was evaluated as having a positive impact on key outcomes for these most vulnerable of children. Those children that need to come into the care of the local authority once born are identified early and the coordinated multi-agency collaboration was delivering high quality assessments to Court. Where early intervention was welcomed by families and they engaged with services offered, children had been able to remain in the care of their parents with robust child in need plans in place.

A number of updates to the protocol were recommended to the LSCP in July and implemented in August.

- amended timescales, avoiding two CPCs before birth
- addition of requirement that **ALL Strategy discussions** about an unborn baby are to be held as **chaired meetings** (as opposed to series of discussions) by a PS/IRO/TM (we have said in procedure this must be a senior social worker G11 or above)
- Safeguarding and Review are coordinating all pre-birth Strategy meetings and for minutes to be taken.

The benefits are:

- improved coordination of invites and agency information sharing,
- centralised monitoring of the number of ICPC for UBB vs UBB in pre-proceedings;
- take pressure off FAST team PS in terms of meeting organisation;
- centralised diary for partners so it is easy to see when Midwifery and police are already in a meeting with another locality.

The amended pre-birth protocol is in place and responsibility for embedding and reviewing has been passed over to the front-line Social Work Teams.

- **Promotion of the role of the Independent Chair service through the LSCP and individual partners to ensure clarity and accountability.**

Team Managers now sit on the LSCP Operational Delivery Group to ensure that the role is promoted and challenge to partners is effective and timely. We continue to escalate any concerns to partners directly through the use of the monitoring form and LSCP escalation process.

- **Exploration and assessment of the categories of harm by the Independent Chairs within conference, ensuring that sexual harm is captured effectively.**

Children's Services continues to work with LSCP and the What Works Well Centre for Child Sexual Abuse to launch a child sexual abuse pathway. The work to develop the pathway exceeds the exploration of the level of sexual harm referred to Children's Services, it delivers excellent resources and training to all partners. This addresses the needs of victims, the assessment of risk, the progress of the criminal justice process, support to families and upskilling of professionals across the LSCP. The plan is for the pathway to be finalised and training to commence from September 22.

- **Challenge and focus by the Independent Chair on ensuring active participation and engagement with any "absent" parent within the child protection framework. With particular emphasis on Fathers.**

The chairs "Activity Record" has been updated to better capture chairs contact with family members. This is also identified on the monitoring form. During the next 6 months we will be undertaking a review of participation and challenge by the chairs where there hasn't been parental involvement. This is coupled with a Team Manager currently taking the lead in a Children's Social Care Fathers task and finish group with the purpose being to evaluate procedures, processes and ways of working to maximise engagement and

participation with fathers. Part of this process is involving fathers so that we understand the impact of our intervention with them and to adapt practices accordingly.

- **A review, analysis and any appropriate change to the 12 Month Conference Review process.**

An audit and report were compiled reviewing the 12-month conference review. The findings and recommendations from this report was submitted to OMG. As a result, the 12-month reviews have changed to 18 months. Further work is being undertaken within the next 6 months in relation to the agenda and guidance relating to these meetings to make them more effective.

Other work completed:

A whole service review including full consultation with staff has taken place. This has led to a reshaping of the management structure, with an addition of one Team Manager. There has also been the addition of one full time Independent Chair.

There is an ongoing workstream involving IRO's, Team Managers, CIC service and MOSAIC to develop how Valuing Care is integrated into the care planning and review workflows.

Team Managers are continuing to work within the Valuing Care Governance Group to support the rollout and integration of this way of working.

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 a number of Local Authorities these roles are separate roles, often located in separate teams, however this is not the case in Lincolnshire. As a result of the consultation there are now 18.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Independent Chair posts within the team that cover the County as a whole. Currently, there are 2 vacant posts which are covered by agency staff until recruitment is able to be undertaken.

The team also has responsibility for reviewing Children With Disabilities Short Term Breaks and Regulation 44 Inspections. Both of these roles are also statutory requirements.

In addition, there are 4 FTE Local Authority Designated Officers within the wider team who are line managed by a Team Manager. These roles are filled by qualified Social Workers at the same grade as the IRO's and Chairs, and are able to assist with covering work on occasion. The restructure has resulted in all the Chairs and LADO's being on the same job description, which means there is more resilience across the service.

COVID, sickness absence, secondment and recruitment have proven challenging over the course of the year; this has necessitated the use of some agency staff to ensure that service capacity is not impacted upon, and standards are maintained.

Short Term Breaks (STB's)

Short breaks are part of a continuum of services which support children in need and their families. They include the provision of day, evening, overnight and weekend activities for the child or young person, and can take place in the child's own home, the home of an approved carer, or in a residential or community setting. In Lincolnshire the users of short breaks are disabled children and their families. The breaks usually have two aims: to enable the child to participate in fun, interesting and safe activities; and to provide a break from caring for the parents.

The role of the IRO for children looked after in a series of short breaks is more limited than for children looked after longer term. 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. A large number of short breaks occur that do not require oversight by the IRO due to not meeting the statutory requirements. A referral form has been developed with CWD to ensure that information and rationale for IRO involvement is captured effectively.

Number of Short-Term Break meetings held

Apr 18	8	Apr 19	5	Apr 20	4	Apr 21	4
May 18	12	May 19	3	May 20	4	May 21	6
Jun 18	8	Jun 19	11	Jun 20	6	Jun 21	7
Jul 18	8	Jul 19	5	Jul 20	7	Jul 21	6
Aug 18	1	Aug 19	0	Aug 20	2	Aug 21	1
Sep 18	7	Sep 19	8	Sep 20	4	Sep 21	7
Oct 18	4	Oct 19	6	Oct 20	4	Oct 21	4
Nov 18	9	Nov 19	6	Nov 20	9	Nov 21	9
Dec 18	8	Dec 19	4	Dec 20	2	Dec 21	6
Jan 19	6	Jan 20	6	Jan 21	4	Jan 22	3
Feb 19	4	Feb 20	4	Feb 21	3	Feb 22	5
Mar 19	5	Mar 20	4	Mar 21	5	Mar 22	4

Regulation 44

(For details in terms of the service please see the individual report provided for the corporate parenting board)

The Regulation 44 Officers continue to be based within the wider team. The role is a statutory one to act as an independent person, visit and report on the children's homes. Lincolnshire has 7 residential homes with a wide range of specialism – one Secure unit, two homes accommodating children with disabilities for short breaks, one long term home for children with disabilities and 3 children's homes that offer long term placements for children in care. There are 2 supported living schemes, one in Grantham and the other in Gainsborough providing accommodation for young people aged 16-18 for a period of up to six months. This accommodation is to be inspected under the Regulation 44 process, however this is 'a light touch' exercise every 4 months.

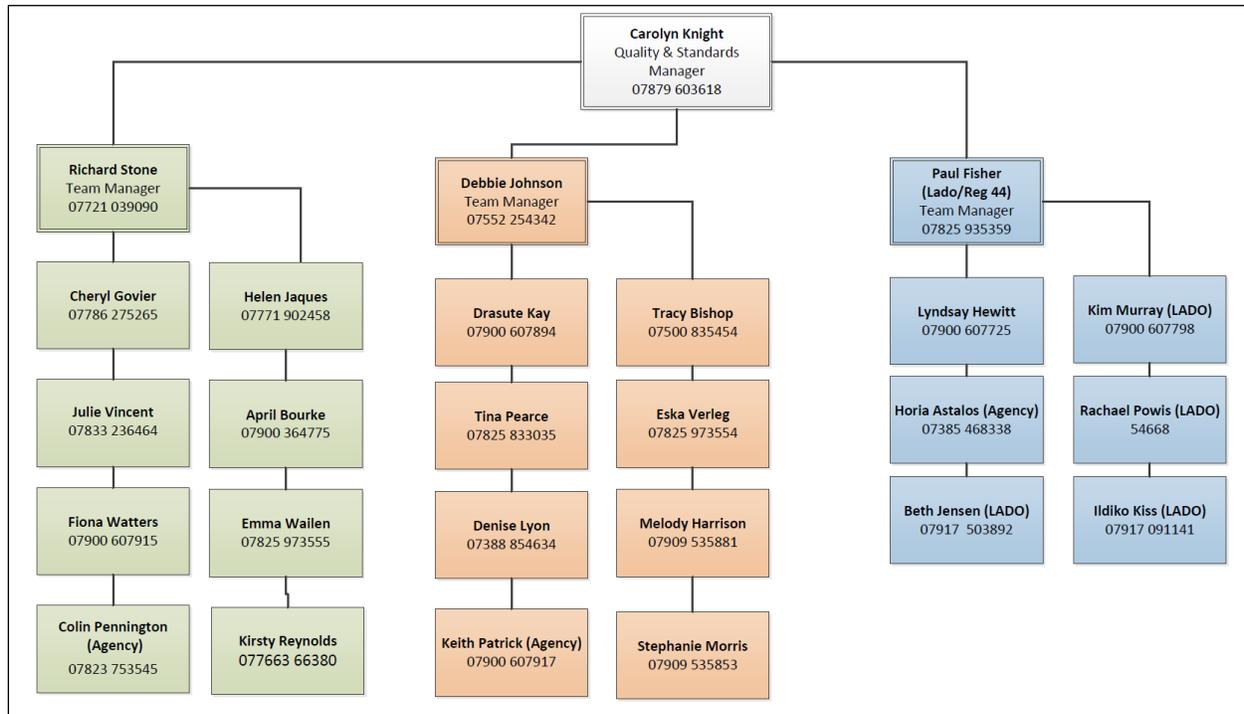
Staffing

Management Team

There are four Team Managers in the Service. The Chairs are predominantly managed by Debbie Johnson and Richard Stone. 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.

Independent Chairs

The team has experienced a number of changes over the last 12 months. Two members of staff have retired. A member of staff has been seconded to Lincoln FAST for the whole year to support front line practice pressures as a supportive measure. There have also been 4 members of staff on long term sick. Two of whom are back at work and the other two due back soon and have return to work plans in place. We have recruited 3 new members of staff from within Children's Services. As of 31st March 2022, we currently have 3 agency staff in post to cover staffing shortfall.



Children in Care population and the IRO service

There continues to be an upward trend in the number of young people being in care, 682 (April 1st 2021) as opposed to 731 (31st March 22).

In the year 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 the IROs have conducted 1954 reviews. In the same period in 2020-2021 there were 1645 reviews. Workload has been increasing year on year.

Due to the current drift and delay within the court and the impact of a number of foster care changes for some children, reviews are often rescheduled to accommodate this. As an example, between January 1st and March 31st, 225 reviews were re arranged which has had a further impact on workload.

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

6 young people have been subject to Secure Accommodation under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989. The reviews are chaired by the Independent Chairs Team Managers.

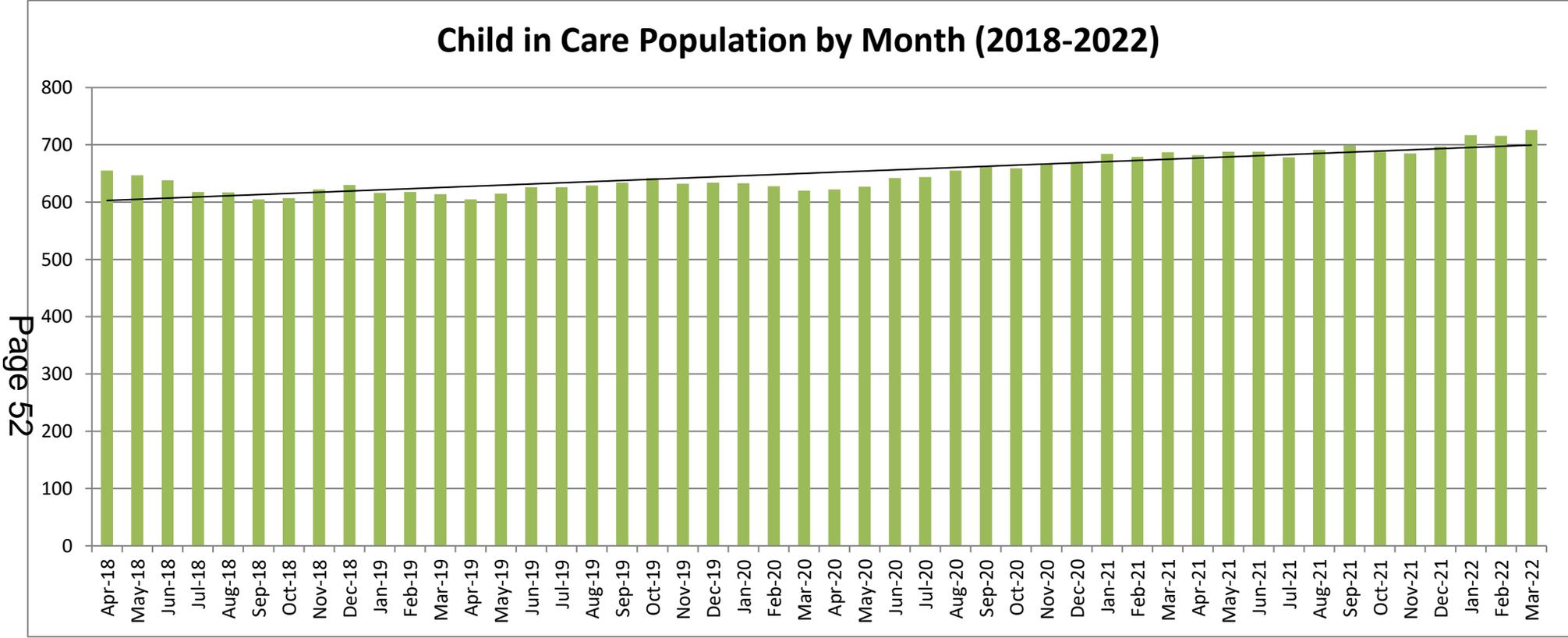
Of the 6 young people subject to secure accommodation, 5 of these are young women with complex trauma histories who require specialist psychological input and therapeutic environments for move on placements, and these have not been available nationally despite extensive searches.

Despite being a small percentage of the CIC population, they represent a significant challenge both in terms of professional time, intervention, and budget.

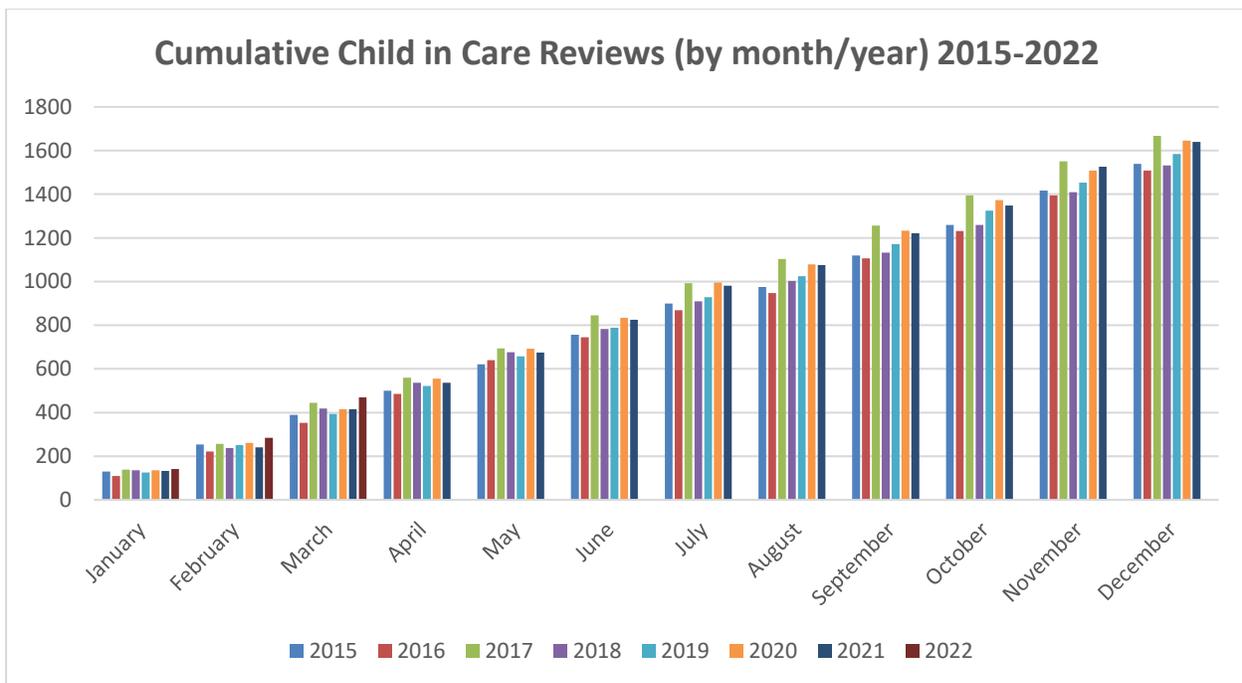
Within the September report we underlined this cohort of young people as requiring additional scrutiny so that we could better understand their journeys and exit planning. This is an ongoing piece of work that will be completed by September 2022.

Child in Care Population

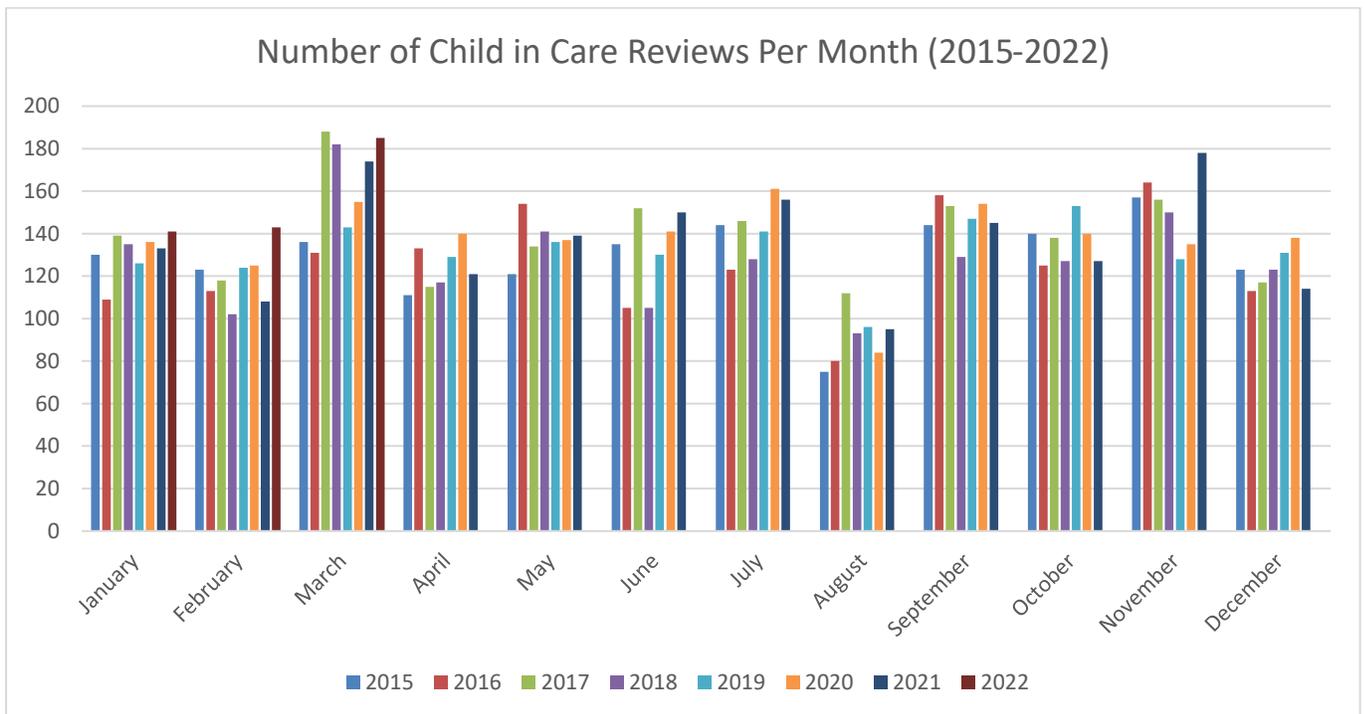
Child in Care Population by Month (2018-2022)



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



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



Advocacy

Advocacy provision in Lincolnshire is currently 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 children are opted in to Voiceability who are also automatically invited to Children in Care Reviews for children aged 8 and over.

Timeliness of reviews

Between April 1st 2021 and 31st March 2022 a total of 1694 individual review meetings were held. Out of these 4 were out of timescales, making compliance at 99.77%

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

Of the 4 meetings that were out of timescales; One was a result of a technical issue with a Police Protection Order overlapping a Section 20 agreement by one day, two were the result of Interim care Orders being made, whereby the understanding was Interim Supervision Orders were made (later highlighted by the legal team) and one was genuinely out of timescales.

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, and also how they contribute towards the agenda and how 'their review' is run. Our bottom line 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.

Since the start of Covid-19 children have been contacted either via the telephone or virtual technology. As restrictions have eased, the IRO's have started to physically visit young people in person where they have requested this.

As identified previously we are looking at the impact of this way of working on participation to ascertain whether this encourages young people to attend or proves to be a barrier.

Signs of Safety, Restorative Practice, Social Pedagogy and Valuing Care are being utilised by staff in partnership with Social Work colleagues in their planning for reviews and engagement with children and young people. This remains an important strand of work to ensure we can reach out to young people who do not attend to gain feedback and improve participation.

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. Work with the MOSAIC team is ongoing to ensure that recording of escalations is robust and can be reported on effectively.

There is an ongoing workstream involving IRO's, Team Managers, CIC service and MOSAIC to develop how Valuing Care is integrated into the care planning and review workflows.

Team Managers are continuing to work within the Valuing Care Governance Group to support the rollout and integration of this way of working.

Additional work is ongoing with the Children in Care Teams, IRO's and MOSAIC to support better working between SW's and IRO's to continually improve quality of care planning records.

Progress-chasing Activities between Looked After Reviews

All IROs have a duty to monitor the progress of their allocated children and young people 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.

Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation

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

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

The team continue to focus on improving consistency in terms of escalations made and to ensure better monitoring, 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. The IROs are sent weekly reminder emails of open formal escalations so that they can follow these up with the respective teams. The drive is to make the escalations more robust and to increase the use of positive challenge, whenever this is warranted to approve care planning and outcomes for young people. We have made amendments to the Chairs Activity record to enable more accurate recording.

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. To date legal advice has been sought twice. An ongoing area of development is clearer guidance and processes regarding access to independent legal advice.

Number of formal escalations per month

Apr 16	9	Apr 17	2	Apr 18	4	Apr 19	8	Apr 20	3	Apr 21	2
May 16	4	May 17	5	May 18	4	May 19	3	May 20	0	May 21	4
Jun 16	0	Jun 17	7	Jun 18	4	Jun 19	1	Jun 20	3	Jun 21	0
Jul 16	3	Jul 17	5	Jul 18	5	Jul 19	0	Jul 20	4	Jul 21	8
Aug 16	1	Aug 17	1	Aug 18	2	Aug 19	0	Aug 20	5	Aug 21	1
Sep 16	3	Sep 17	9	Sep 18	4	Sep 19	8	Sep 20	5	Sep 21	1
Oct 16	4	Oct 17	4	Oct 18	1	Oct 19	1	Oct 20	0	Oct 21	4
Nov 16	3	Nov 17	5	Nov 18	1	Nov 19	2	Nov 20	3	Nov 21	1
Dec 16	6	Dec 17	5	Dec 18	0	Dec 19	0	Dec 20	3	Dec 21	3
Jan 17	2	Jan 18	8	Jan 19	3	Jan 20	2	Jan 21	5	Jan 22	7
Feb 17	5	Feb 18	4	Feb 19	2	Feb 20	7	Feb 21	1	Feb 22	1
Mar 17	8	Mar 18	7	Mar 19	2	Mar 20	1	Mar 21	1	Mar 22	1
Total	48	Total	62	Total	32	Total	33	Total	33	Total	33

Themes of Child in Care Formal Escalations (for the period April 2021 to March 2022)

Theme	Number of Escalations Raised
Safeguarding concerns	8
Practice Issues (Multiple Issues)	7
Placement/ Accommodation concerns	5
Plans (Disagreement)	5
Drift and Delay	3
Blank (No Reason recorded in MOSAIC)	2
Legal concerns	1
Family Time Concerns	1
Provision of Service	1
Total Escalations Raised	33

Management oversight

The Guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the decisions from the Review before they are finalised. This is due in part for the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are completed, the 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

Apr 18	1	Apr 19	0	Apr 20	0	Apr 21	0
May 18	3	May 19	1	May 20	0	May 21	1
Jun 18	2	Jun 19	0	Jun 20	0	Jun 21	0
Jul 18	1	Jul 19	1	Jul 20	0	Jul 21	0
Aug 18	2	Aug 19	2	Aug 20	0	Aug 21	0
Sep 18	0	Sep 19	0	Sep 20	0	Sep 21	0
Oct 18	1	Oct 19	0	Oct 20	0	Oct 21	1
Nov 18	1	Nov 19	0	Nov 20	0	Nov 21	0
Dec 18	0	Dec 19	2	Dec 20	1	Dec 21	0
Jan 19	0	Jan 20	0	Jan 21	0	Jan 22	0
Feb 19	0	Feb 20	0	Feb 21	0	Feb 22	0
Mar 19	0	Mar 20	0	Mar 21	0	Mar 22	0

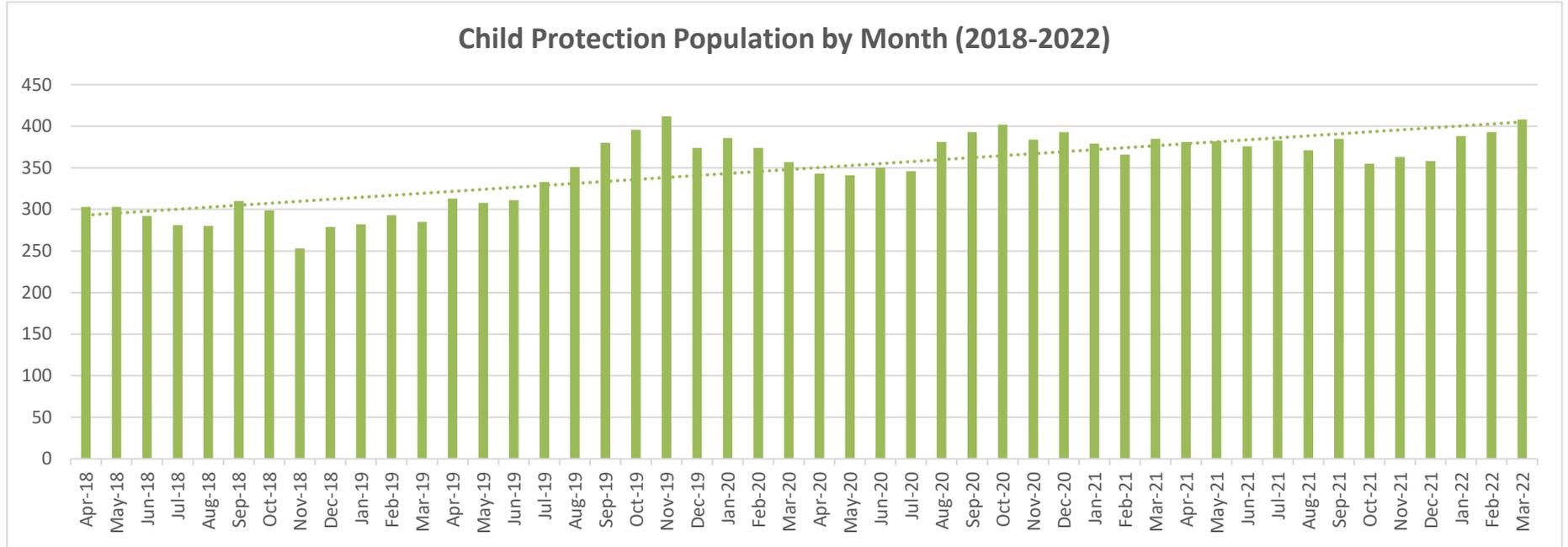
The procedure with regards to Sec. 20 Accommodated young people leaving care before their 18th birthday is understood by Chairs and is discussed within reviews as part of the Care Planning process and Recommendations. Any young person who has been accommodated for more than 20 days and is aged 16 or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

Child Protection

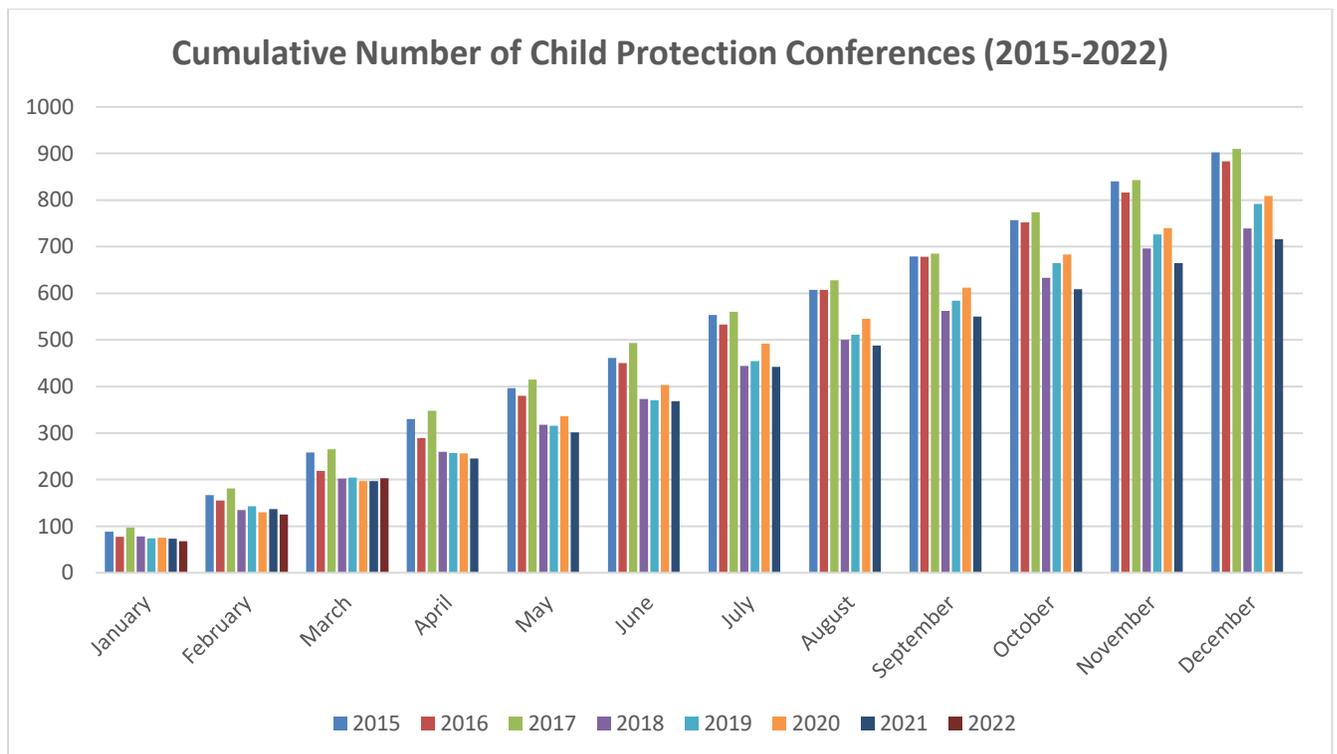
As of 1st April 2021 the number of children subject to a CP Plan on April 1st 2021 was 381. As of 31st March 2022 there are currently 376 children subject to a CP plan. The number of conferences has increased by 5 during this period.

However, it should be noted that the number of unborn babies subject to Pre-Proceedings under the new protocol has increased which has had an impact on the CP plan figures. In the year 2020-2021, 113 Initial CP Conferences were held for unborn babies and by comparison in the year 2021-2022, 47 Initial CP conferences were held.

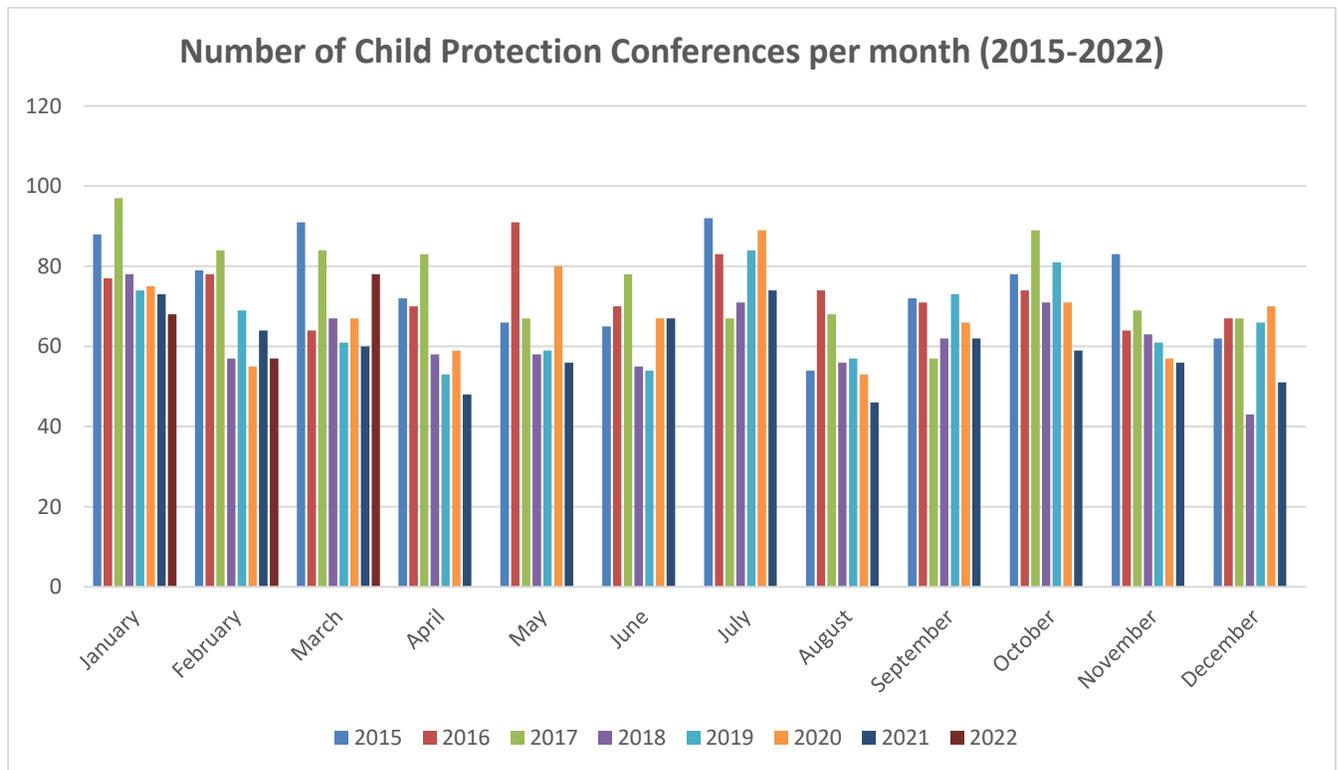
Child Protection Population



Cumulative Number of CP Conferences 2015-2022								
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
January	88	77	97	78	74	75	73	68
February	167	155	181	135	143	130	137	125
March	258	219	265	202	204	197	197	203
April	330	289	348	260	257	256	245	
May	396	380	415	318	316	336	301	
June	461	450	493	373	370	403	368	
July	553	533	560	444	454	492	442	
August	607	607	628	500	511	545	488	
September	679	678	685	562	584	612	550	
October	757	752	774	633	665	683	609	
November	840	816	843	696	726	740	665	
December	902	883	910	739	792	809	716	



Number of CP Conferences per month (2015-2022)								
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
January	88	77	97	78	74	75	73	68
February	79	78	84	57	69	55	64	57
March	91	64	84	67	61	67	60	78
April	72	70	83	58	53	59	48	
May	66	91	67	58	59	80	56	
June	65	70	78	55	54	67	67	
July	92	83	67	71	84	89	74	
August	54	74	68	56	57	53	46	
September	72	71	57	62	73	66	62	
October	78	74	89	71	81	71	59	
November	83	64	69	63	61	57	56	
December	62	67	67	43	66	70	51	



Timeliness of reviews

Between April 1st 2021 and March 31st 2022 the data shows that four conferences took place out of timescale out of 722. These are accounted for and were agreed by a Quality and Standards Team Manager. This equates to 99.45% compliance with 718 taking place within timescales.

From September 2021 the Team Managers are collating the specific reasons for any cancellations or late meetings, for example:

- One conference was delayed due to the mother giving birth early just prior to the conference with the baby requiring specialist hospital care.
- One conference was delayed due to the chair having technical difficulties. The initial meeting took place just prior to the due date but a failure of IT service meant the meeting had to be re-convened.
- One conference was delayed due to the family not receiving the reports prior to the conference
- One conference was delayed due to a significant lack of professionals attending

Children and young people's preparation and involvement in conferences

A limited number of young people attend conferences and are supported by advocates if they choose to be, advocates also attend meetings on behalf of children.

The service has recently updated leaflets for young people and their families to include information around attending conferences / reviews.

Activities between Child Protection Reviews

Chairs undertake a monitoring check at the midway point between Conferences and a check when preparing for reviews. This is to ensure that statutory tasks have been undertaken (such as regular Core Group meetings and child protection visits) and that the plan is progressing and having a positive impact for the child and family. Where there are concerns the Chair will alert the relevant member of the team such as the Social Worker, Practice Supervisor or Team Manager.

Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation

Since September 2019, a quarterly email is now sent to the Senior Liaison Officer's to make them aware of any escalations raised for staff or areas that they cover.

Child Protection Conference Escalations raised in the period April 2021 to March 2022

Organisation	Number of Escalations
GP's	52
Social Workers / Practice Supervisors	16
Education (Nurseries, Schools etc)	11
Early Help Worker	7
Other / Misc Workers	6
Other Health-Related Professionals	5
Health Visitor	4
Probation	3
PPU	1
Barnardo's Advocate	1
Housing Officer	1
Total escalations raised in this period	107

Number of Child Protection Conference Escalations raised each month

Apr 18	15	Apr 19	23	Apr 20	7	Apr 21	1
May 18	33	May 19	24	May 20	8	May 21	9
Jun 18	27	Jun 19	14	Jun 20	16	Jun 21	17
Jul 18	27	Jul 19	33	Jul 20	22	Jul 21	11
Aug 18	20	Aug 19	15	Aug 20	10	Aug 21	10
Sep 18	26	Sep 19	46	Sep 20	19	Sep 21	10
Oct 18	18	Oct 19	35	Oct 20	13	Oct 21	18
Nov 18	26	Nov 19	30	Nov 20	7	Nov 21	3
Dec 18	12	Dec 19	14	Dec 20	20	Dec 21	8
Jan 19	26	Jan 20	32	Jan 21	17	Jan 22	8
Feb 19	22	Feb 20	30	Feb 21	12	Feb 22	3
Mar 19	30	Mar 20	27	Mar 21	8	Mar 22	9
Total	282	Total	323	Total	159	Total	107

The overwhelming reason for escalation was no report being prepared for the conference and no apologies provided for non-attendance. The preparation of this report has highlighted the increased number of escalations in relation to GP's. Liaison with the designated Doctor for Safeguarding for children, children in care and adults will be a service priority within the next 3 months.

As previously explained, currently this data reflects only the formal escalations made.

Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

Auditing and observations undertaken by the IRO Manager

Conferences are observed by a number of different professionals, both internal and external staff who want to familiarise themselves with the conference process and learning – this has included colleagues from LCC, LSCP Trainers and SOS Practice Advisers.

Supervision and training

Chairs have scheduled monthly supervision (pro rata) and informal supervision as and when required. All Chairs 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 Workshops. Each Chair undertakes annual mandatory training and follows the 6-year Children's Services development training plan.

All Independent Reviewing Officers are social workers and registered with the 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, currently these are virtual.

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

The chairs continue at full capacity under the new ways of working. Despite some meetings being held virtually which has impacted positively on decreased travel time between venues, Chairs are under increasing pressure due to the additional admin tasks involved in new ways of working and the large number of re arranged meetings due to changes of placements and delays with the Courts. Additional capacity has been created through the recruitment of two agency members of staff to cover vacancies in the team and we are currently over established by one agency worker to manage the additional pressures in numbers. 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. We are currently reviewing the best way to increase long term capacity in the service.

Service Priorities 2022-2023

The service priorities outlined below consist of those ongoing priorities from 2021-2022 and newly identified priorities 2022-2023.

Priorities 2021-22

Ongoing Priorities

New and creative technology

The service will be continuing to pursue new ways of working to engage with children, young people, and their parents through the use of technology to facilitate in person, hybrid and virtual meetings.

Technology in locality conference facilities

Ongoing analysis and development of procedures and IT support required for post covid CP and CiC hybrid meetings. This will include the ongoing work to ensure that all locality conference facilities are fully equipped for hybrid meetings.

Engagement HQ

Integration of current feedback from CP and CiC utilising "Engagement HQ" (centralised feedback development and recording system) when this comes online.

Sexual Harm Pathway

Exploration and assessment of the categories of harm by the Independent Chairs within conference, ensuring that sexual harm is captured effectively. The plan is for the pathway to be finalised and training to commence from September 2022.

Newly Identified Priorities

Develop Practice Champions

The service aims to support the Chairs with their continuing professional development and assist with implementation of the various practice stream updates such as Valuing

Care, Graded Care -Neglect; CSA; Family Finding; Restorative Practice; Signs of Safety and UASC. Individual Chairs will be taking the lead in one of these specialist areas.

Continuous Dip Sample auditing

Managers and Chairs will complete dip sample audits on children files with a focus on children's participation in their care plans and reviews.

Absent Fathers

A Team Manager is currently taking the lead in a Children's Social Care Fathers task and finish group with the purpose being to evaluate procedures, processes, and ways of working to maximise engagement and participation with fathers. Part of this process is involving fathers so that we understand the impact of our intervention with them, and to positively adapt practices accordingly.

Team Manager and Peer Observations

Now the Local Authority is operating within the post Covid period, the service intends to return to peer audits. Team Managers and Chairs will regularly observe CP Conferences and CiC meetings to feedback on peer performance to aid professional development and practice reflection.

Carolyn Knight
(Quality and Standards Manager)

Debbie Johnson, Paul Fisher & Richard Stone
(Independent Chairs Team Managers)

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