

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND CULTURE
CABINET MEMBER**

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a summary update to the Cabinet Member on the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officers 2018-2019.
- 1.2 To seek permission to publish the annual report as per statutory guidance.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The work of the Independent Reviewing officers is a statutory function as detailed in the Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook 2010. The Independent Reviewing Service deliver the following functions to all Children in Care within North Lincolnshire:
 - To undertake an initial Child in Care review within 20 working days of a child entering care
 - To undertake further Child in Care reviews within 3 months and thereafter 6 monthly
 - To determine if a review is required following any significant change in a Child in Care's circumstances
 - To undertake visits to Children in Care to ascertain their understanding of their care plan and to gather their views, wishes and feelings
 - To ratify care plans and offer independent advice and recommendations
 - To fulfil records and decisions distribution requirements
- 2.2 The Annual Report 2018/19 follows a standard format and sets out a range of information about the service, including the extent to which it complies with regulation and best practice, and what the service helps us learn about the broader provision for children in care. Key points are as follows:
 - a) Children in Care in North Lincolnshire benefit from a timely, good quality review of their care plan by an experienced, skilled, and well trained IRO. They are encouraged and supported to chair their own meeting, to attend, and to contribute their views.

- b) Robust systems of management oversight, quality assurance, dispute resolution, case allocation, and performance management help ensure that the service is effective and responsive.
- c) Operating within a child-focused organisational culture with outstanding services to children in care means that IROs are able to prioritise children's participation and engagement, and provide challenge and support to multi-agency teams to promote best outcomes.
- d) The IRO service in North Lincolnshire is statutorily compliant and adds value to a robust child in care system.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member is asked to approve publication of the IRO Annual Report, in compliance with statutory guidance.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Annual Report is a positive and balanced appraisal of the strengths of the service and the broader system around children in care. The report therefore reflects other information in the public domain, for example published data and Ofsted inspection reports.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

- 5.1 None.

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

- 6.1 Publishing the report demonstrates transparency and accountability, which connects with the broader public engagement framework. The report provides evidence of strong practice and outcomes in terms of service delivery and impact on children in care, reflecting the council plan commitment to excellence.

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

- 7.1 Not undertaken

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

- 8.1 None undertaken

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Note the key points in the Annual Report and agree website publication

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report – IRO Handbook



**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS SERVICE
ANNUAL REPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**
April 2018 – March 2019

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INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This annual report has been produced under the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Independent Reviewing Service has a key role in assuring the quality of a Local Authority's care planning for looked after children and improving the overall quality of services offered.
- 1.2 This report is prepared for those with executive responsibility for children's services and corporate parenting, to enable consideration of the services on offer, and to consider whether the local authority is achieving optimum outcomes for our looked after children.
- 1.3 This report provides an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement, to identify emerging themes and trends, to report on work undertaken to date and outline the service development priorities for the coming twelve months.

PROFILE OF NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE IRO SERVICE

- 2.1 The Independent Reviewing service operates within the framework of the IRO Handbook. This is statutory guidance issued to local authorities in 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement and quality assurance of the Care Planning for Looked after Children and for challenging any drift and delay.
- 2.2 IRO's have a responsibility to ensure that plans are timely, effective and achieve good outcomes for children and young people. They have a responsibility to promote best practice and high professional standards across the Children's Social Work Service.
- 2.3 IROs make an important contribution to the consistency of practice from all those who have a corporate responsibility for looked after children and care leavers. They have a duty to prevent drift and delay in care planning and ensure that the local authority's efforts are focused on meeting the needs of children and achieving the best possible outcomes. IROs monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent, in ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to meet the child's assessed needs, and that the Local Authority is operating in line with care planning regulations. They have a responsibility to identify patterns of concern that emerge in respect of individual children and collectively, and to make senior leaders aware.
- 2.4 The Independent Reviewing Officers sit within the Independent Review Service alongside Child Protection Conference Chairs and The Local Authority Designated Officer. The IRO service is supported by five administrative staff who support all functions of the Independent Reviewing Service

2.5 The IRO service in North Lincolnshire consists of:



2.6 In accordance with regulation 46 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) Regulations 2010, the position of the IROs within the local authority meets the levels of independence prescribed in that they operate distinct from case management. Likewise in accordance with this regulation all IROs, the service manager and the other staff are qualified, registered Social Workers, with at least five years post qualifying experience. The IRO team have substantial experience of communicating and working with children and young people. They have extensive knowledge about what makes for good quality practice in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children with an understanding of the relevant legal frameworks and processes in addition to experience of providing Social Work supervision. In respect of the team’s collective knowledge of diversity and children’s identity, the staff team has backgrounds in working with children who have suffered significant harm from abuse and neglect and children with attachment difficulties. This is in the context of working with both looked after children, children subject to child protection and child in need plans, including working with disabled children, children from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, care leavers and young people who have offended.

2.7 The Independent Reviewing Officers and their manager are all female and of White British ethnicity, this parallels the local population where the majority of the community is White British. In the most recent 2011 census more than 92% of North Lincolnshire’s population belonged to the White British ethnic group and 7.2% was identified as belonging to minority ethnic communities. These minority ethnic communities included people from established Asian/Asian British communities, and included ‘new communities’ (migrant workers) to the area including Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, Portuguese and Somali communities. The team continues to further enhance their knowledge in respect of minority ethnic communities and have access to translators, translation services and expert advice when needed to ensure children, young people and families’ needs in terms of language, diversity and equality are fully considered during reviewing. It is difficult to get accurate figures on disability as many people with impairments do not consider themselves

to be disabled. In the last census 19 percent of residents identified as having day to day activities being limited either a little or lot (due to impairment or health condition.) From local government statistics approximately 6% of residents are blue badge holders. The IRO team does not incorporate a disabled worker; however an IRO works specifically alongside the Disability Service to ensure all services relating to Children in Care with a disability are met.

- 2.8 Independent Reviewing Officers are integral to a number of Panels and forums and planning groups, in which the IRO perspective is valued as part of the decision making process alongside that of children's social work service. These include the MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation), "You say who", Missing, Holding on, MAAG, and Mars Line Of Sight meetings.
- 2.9 The North Lincolnshire IRO service is represented at the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Practitioners and Regional IRO Managers forums.

QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IRO SERVICE

- 3.1 During 2018-2019:
 - A total of 695 Looked after and Adoption Reviews have been chaired during the year.
 - 99.9 % of all reviews were held on time.
- 3.2 North Lincolnshire has maintained a low number of children in care and remains lower than the latest national and statistical neighbourhood comparators. However there has been an increase in the number of children entering care in North Lincolnshire, 90 Children entered care in 2017/18, compared to 129 Children entering care during 2018/19.
- 3.3 Over the past year the numbers of children in care has increased, from 227 at the end of March 2018, to 251 at the end of March 2019. This places North Lincolnshire below the England latest published rate.
- 3.4 The number of children leaving care has increased from 95 in 2017/18 to 105 in 2018/19.
- 3.5 The % of children in care who are classified as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has increased from 7% at 31/03/18 to 11.6 % at 31/03/19.

- 3.6 The following detail shows the gender and age splits of children in care at the end of March 2019:
- 59% of children in care are boys, in-line with 60% at 31/03/18.
 - 5.2% of children in care are aged under 1, an increase from 3.5% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 6%.
 - 10.8% of children in care are aged 1-4 years, a decrease from 13.7% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 13%.
 - 19.1% of children in care are aged 5-9 years, an increase from 18.1% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 19%.
 - 42.2% of children in care are aged 10-15 years, a decrease from 45.4% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 39%.
 - 22.7% of children in care are aged 16-17 years, an increase from 19.4% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 23%.
 - 71.3% of children in care are subject to interim/full care orders, a decrease from 76.2% at 31/03/18. This compares to the England 31/03/18 figure of 74%.
 - 5.6% of children in care are subject to a placement order, a decrease from 6.6% at 31/03/18, compared to the England 31/03/18 figure of 7%.
 - 22.7% of children in care are accommodated under s20, an increase from 16.7% at 31/03/18, compared to the England 31/03/18 figure of 19%.
 - The % of children in care who are BME is 16.5%, an increase from 13.7% at 31/03/18, compared to 25% across England at 31/03/18.
 - The % of children who are in care due to abuse or neglect has reduced from 54.2% to 50.6%, compared to 61% in England at 31/03/18.
- 3.7 With a full complement of staffing the average IRO caseload was 70 Cases at the year end. The IRO Handbook states that an estimated caseload of between 50 to 70 children for a full time IRO would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service.

NUMBER OF REVIEWS THAT ARE HELD ON TIME, THE NUMBER HELD OUT OF TIME AND THE REASON FOR THE ONES THAT ARE OUT OF TIME

- 3.8 Table 1 below informs that during 2018/19, 99.9% of child in care reviews were held within timescales and 1% was completed within 7 days of the required timeframe. This shows improvement from 2017/18. Overall, this reflects an effective IRO role which promotes the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of quality reviewing service.

	2017 /18	2018 /19
Reviews held	595	695
Review over timescales	4	1
% reviews held on time	99%	99.9%

Reviews out of timescale:

Review	Reason
1	Review due to start when issue in Foster Carer home halted the review

EXTENT OF PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

- 4.1 The IRO has key statutory duties to:
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
 - Perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations, for example to ensure that children have been informed of their rights, including how to make a complaint.
- 4.2 There was 100% participation of children in their reviews during 2018/19 which included direct attendance at their Child in Care Reviews, using an advocate, and creative methods such as the direct work tool 'Chatter Bags' or the 'My IRO and Me tool'. Other ways children participated included devising the review agenda on cue cards, using flipcharts, memory boxes, games, books, drawings, pictures and words to establish and communicate their views, wishes and feelings. Some children and young people took on the responsibility of chairing their reviews or part of them with support from their IRO.
- 4.3 The table at 4.4 indicates that there has been a change in how children participate within their reviews this year. There has been an increase in 2018/19 of 35% of children using an advocate to speak on their behalf and attend alongside them to convey their views compared to 2017/18 of 28%. However there is a decrease in children physically attending their Child in Care Review meetings. 44% of children attended, actively participated and shared their views for themselves compared to last year's figure of 51%. 19% of all the children were aged under 4 years old.
- 4.4 The IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how a Children's Advocate could help and how to access one. This could be a formal Advocate or someone already in the child's network. In all of these cases the IRO had consulted with the children prior to their review and offered a pre-review visit/ discussion or completed an observation for younger children.

Method of Participation at Review	2017/18 %	2018/19 %
PN0: Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	20%	19%
PN1: Child physically attends and speaks for themselves	51%	44%
PN2: Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on their behalf	4%	7%
PN3: Child attends and conveys their view symbolically	0%	0.3%
PN4: Attendance without contribution	0%	0%
PN5: Child does not attend but briefs an advocate to speak for them	24%	28%
PN6: Child does not attend but conveys feelings by a facilitative medium	2%	1%

- 4.5 Parent consultation and invitation pre review is firmly embedded. In circumstances where it had not been appropriate for them to attend all or part of the review, a separate review meeting/discussion was offered and held with them regarding their child/young person's care plan where appropriate. IRO's exercised professional judgement in terms of consulting with or holding discussions with parents whose children were subject to Placement Orders or where there were contact restrictions in place.
- 4.6 The Children's Advocate works with Children in Care to ensure that they are supported to express their views, ensure that their views are understood and that they are able to fully participate in decisions being made about their lives. While we recognise that everyone who works with children has a role in advocating for them and in representing their view we recognise that there are some children where the additional support of someone independent is beneficial. The advocate therefore offers support at particular points in the child's life: offering regular visits to children who are in agency placement; meeting with children who are new into care to introduce the advocacy service; seeing children and young people who have moved placement or who have left care to give them the opportunity to discuss their placement or to share their views about their wider care experience. In addition the advocate receives individual referrals for children who need support around specific issues.
- 4.7 In the year 2018-19 the Children's Advocate has seen 61 children the majority of which were new into care which has meant that these children understand the Advocacy Service at an early point and benefit from any issues of concern being identified promptly. This figure

includes contact with separated and unaccompanied children by way of drop in sessions and meetings. In total 217 referrals have been received this year to the Advocacy team, the most common reasons for referral were in relation to seeking a child's views, wishes and feelings, new into care/introduction to advocacy and issues around placements .The Children's Advocate has carried out 84 interviews with children and young people who have moved placement or left care and has made 92 visits to children in external placements

- 4.8 Complaints about Children in Care services have shown a decrease of 53% with 8 complaints received for the full year compared to 17 in 2017/18. The Children in Care Team received 22% of the statutory complaints. The complaints range from children who are unsettled within their placement, contact with other family members and social worker communication.

OUTCOMES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AUDITS IN RELATION TO THE ORGANISATION, CONDUCT AND RECORDING OF REVIEWS

- 5.1 North Lincolnshire has robust management oversight into the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews. This had incorporated oversight of cases, systems and the use of frameworks including:
- IRO case allocation - Case allocation was strengthened in 2017/18 with new processes that ensured timely allocation. There has been no delay in allocation in 2018/19.
 - Embedded business support processes including invitations, consultations and distribution of review records
- 5.2 Business Support processes have been reviewed this year to strengthen performance and timescales for setting up reviews, invitations, consultations and distribution. The introduction of an identified business support officer for each IRO supports best practice.
- 5.3 Case file audits and quality assurance processes are undertaken on a regular basis and feed into established Management Oversight meetings including a monthly Case Audit Meeting (CAM) and Multi-Agency Resilience Arrangements (Mars) Line Of Sight Meetings, thematic audits etc. More recently CAM reporting has focused on specific themes including Missing and transitional arrangements for Care Leavers. The Independent Reviewing Service has recently introduced a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Meeting to dip sample the smartness of plans, recording, direct work and engagement.
- 5.4 Furthermore a Case Tracking tool is embedded in practice and recorded on the Children's database

- 5.5 Embedded the revised Dispute Resolution procedure. Bite size workshops have continued to take place throughout the year to support practitioners and first line managers in the resolution process and procedure.
- 5.6 Embedded a Disruption Meeting Procedure. A revised disruption policy and procedure has been reviewed and launched within the last year. Learning from disruption meetings will be reported on a quarterly basis.
- 5.7 North Lincolnshire continues to deliver a high quality Independent Reviewing Service that meets statutory requirements as outlined within the Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook 2010.
- 5.8 The service delivers clear policy, procedures and practice standards that are robustly embedded and play a key role in ensuring that children's care plans are quality assured to the highest standard and children are safeguarded. The service ensures that the child is placed at the heart of practice.

PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING CONCERNS, INCLUDING THE LOCAL AUTHORITY RESOLUTION PROCESS AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES RAISED IN DISPUTE AND THE OUTCOMES

- 6.1 The Resolution Policy within North Lincolnshire outlines that a key function of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.
- 6.2 Within North Lincolnshire IROs have established collaborative, reflective and challenging working relationships with Social Workers and their managers.
- 6.3 There have been 14 issues raised through the care planning dispute resolution policy in 2018/19.
 - Of the 14 cases 7 were resolved at stage 1 (50%)
 - 5 were resolved at stage 2 and were in respect of Placement moves and the need for Permanent placements.
 - 2 were resolved at stage 3. These 2 were a sibling group of 2 and the dispute was in relation to a house extension approval for foster carers.

- 6.4 The learning was in respect of the need for more timely decision making to prevent drift and placement matching issues to prevent placement breakdown.
- 6.5 In all cases the IROs had agreed remedial timescales and monitored actions for resolution.

Stage 1	7 cases	2 individual children and 2 sibling groups: 1 with 2 children 1 with 3 children
Stage 2	4 cases	All individual children
Stage 3	3 cases	All individual children

- 6.6 In the majority of cases the issues were resolved at Stage 1. Issues that required resolution related to matters such as delays in report writing, sign off, permanence planning and adaptations
- 6.7 Solutions had been expedited in all cases; there had been no referrals to the Children and Families Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass).

ANY RESOURCE ISSUES PUTTING AT RISK THE DELIVERY OF A QUALITY SERVICE TO ALL LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 7.1 There were no resource issues having such an affect.

GOOD PRACTICE

- 8.1 Excellent services for Children in Care are a priority for North Lincolnshire Council. The Council has demonstrated an enduring and strong commitment to children, young people and families, front line service delivery and the continuing finance to support this within the 2018/19 forward budget supporting Staying Put and other permanence options. North Lincolnshire Council has invested in family based care, supported accommodation, permanence through adoption and a range of support services which has included the development of Pathways, New Horizons, Accommodation, Support and Education (PHASE) a support service for care leavers and a Children’s Campus transforming provision for children in care.
- 8.2 99.9% of Children in Care had been reviewed in accordance with the timescales set out in the 2010 regulations and the statutory guidance. During monitoring of children’s cases additional reviews had been held

where the IRO had determined this necessary due to a change/event in the child's life which was significant such as a care plan change following court directions, reviews and changes to family time, a child frequently missing or in circumstances where a review must be held, for example where a placement change may affect an educational change. This timely and effective reviewing of children and young people's care plans has underpinned the work and commitment of Social Workers to ensure that care planning has remained on track to meet the planned outcomes and permanency for children and young people. Effective practice has been demonstrated by Social Workers, care plans have been revised which included the risk analysis framework.

- 8.3 There are a range of excellent examples of creative direct work with children by IROs during pre-review visits and in reviews. This is equally demonstrated by Social Workers and the Children and Young People's Advocate in presenting children's views at reviews. In a small number of reviews the young person chairs their own meeting. Creative methods such as the use of chatter bags, the 'My IRO and Me' tool, devising the review agenda on cue cards, using flipcharts, memory boxes, games, books, drawings, pictures and words. The impact of this was that the children's understanding of their care plan, wishes, feelings and views were more clearly established and considered therefore enhancing their voice and influence in care plans and review decisions.
- 8.4 There has been high quality engagement, participation and collaboration with children in care at individual, service and strategic levels throughout the year. The views and voices of looked after children and young people, their parents and carers had actively and consistently been sought across Children's Services through assessment, intervention, planning and review via the Child and Family Feedback Framework and consultation prior to each Child in Care Review.
- 8.5 There has been quality feedback from children and young people. Children inform they know the reason for involvement, were given the opportunity to have their say, felt safer and understood their care plans.
- 8.6 There has been enhanced oversight by the Independent Reviewing Officers for Children in Care who had gone missing and are at risk of child exploitation on an individual case level and at a multi-agency level to identify and act upon any patterns, themes and trends. The Independent Reviewing Service has prioritised attendance at the monthly missing and Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings
- 8.7 There has been an IRO lead for Separated/Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children who has linked with other parts of the service to develop group and drop in facilities.

- 8.8 All children who went missing during the year had been offered an independent return interview by the Missing Children's Advocate.
- 8.9 Systems for the monitoring and oversight of Children in Care who are placed outside of the Local Authority were thorough and robust. This included the External Placement and Complex Care Panel which oversaw children's cases when an external placement was being considered, pre-placement checks and contract monitoring and oversight.
- 8.10 The Independent Review Service works in partnership with CAFCASS, and professional relationships between IROs and Children's Guardians ensures that timely discussions are held within the timeframe of care proceedings. The Independent Review Service has not required the need to refer to CAFCASS
- 8.11 North Lincolnshire Council and partners Children's Strategy 2020 are committed to working together to safeguard, promote and improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Good health and wellbeing for children and young people means good:

- Physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Protection from harm and neglect
- Education, training and recreation
- Opportunities for contributing and being involved
- Economic wellbeing

- 8.12 As a partnership, by understanding what outcomes are being achieved for children and young people, as well as what they and our needs assessment tell us, we can work together to ensure we have safe children, supported families and transformed lives.
- 8.13 The Corporate Parenting Board drives and oversees the Local Authority's commitment and responsibility as Corporate Parents to all Children in Care, within a multi-agency context. Corporate Parents refers to the Local Authority and partners responsibilities to ensure the best possible outcomes, care and protection is achieved for Children in Care. The Local Authority is committed to ensure that services are provided to Children in Care to the level that any good parent would provide to his or her own children. Within each Child in Care Review meeting it is the responsibility of the IRO to ensure that all Corporate Parent duties are upheld in enabling Children in Care to reach their potential.
- 8.14 The Children in Care Council has remained integral to the involvement and voice of children in care and care leavers affecting service developments through representatives attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board and meeting regularly with the Cabinet Member for

Children's Services, Director of Children and Community Resilience, IROs, Children Advocates, Social Workers, Fostering Service, Training Officers and Senior Officers from across the Council and its partners.

A SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS OVER THE PAST YEAR:

- 8.1 Short-term stability: 28 children in care at 31/03/19 had 3+ placements in 2018/19 (11.2%). This is an improvement on the 31 children (13.7%) at 31/03/18.
- 9.2 Long-term stability: 62.2% of children aged under 16 and in care for over 2.5 years had been in their placement for over 2 years. This was 51 children from a cohort of 82. This is an improvement from 52.6% at 31/03/18, a cohort of 40 out of 76.
- 9.3 49 children (19.5%) are placed out of the NL boundary, of which 3 are adoption placements. This is an improvement from 22.9% at 31/03/18. 23 of these children (9.2% of those in care) are placed over 20 miles from the home address they entered care (adoption placements excluded).
- 9.4 At 78%, the proportion of children in care that are in foster care is lower than the 81% at 31/03/18. This compares to 73% for England at 31/03/18.
- 9.5 The % of those in foster care that are in a long-term placement is 69%, a decrease from 74% at 31/03/18.
- 9.6 Across all placement types:
- 85.7% are placed in our own provision (this includes Phase). This compares to 53% across England at 31/03/18.
 - 6.4% are placed in private provision, this is a reduction from 8.8% at 31/03/18 and compares to 34% across England at 31/03/18
 - 25 children have this year seen their short-term foster placement change status to long-term fostering, staying with the same carer.
 - 1.2% of children in care are placed for adoption, a decrease from 3.1% at 31/03/18.
 - 5.9% of children in care are placed in children's homes, a decrease from 6.2% at 31/03/18.
- 9.7 With regards to the reason placements have ended, the carer requested the change due to the child's behaviour on 20 occasions, a reduction from 30 in 2018/19. In 2018/19 this was 9.8% of all placements changing, compared to 12% in England in 2017/18.

OUTCOMES

- 10.1 Below are the figures for the 'outcomes', compared with previous years. This data is for children in care for one year plus. The completion of health assessments, dental checks and immunisations remain at a high rate.
- 100% of children in care for 1 year or more had a health assessment in the year, compared with 88% in England at 31/03/18.
 - 92% of children in care for 1 year or more had a dental check in the year, a decrease from 95% at 31/03/18 but higher than the England comparator of 84% at 31/03/18.
 - 92% of children in care for 1 year or more had up-to-date immunisations, a decrease from 98% at 31/03/18 but higher than the England comparator of 85% at 31/03/18.
 - 100% of SDQs have again been completed, at a slightly increased average score of 16.0. The 31/03/18 England comparator was 78% for the completion rate but 14.2 for the average score. A fuller analysis of the SDQ cohort, with comparisons to previous years and progress for children will be circulated at a later date.

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN 2018/19 AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FOR 2018/19

- 11.1 Last year's report recommended:

- The Independent Reviewing Service continue to develop the quality and depth of IRO direct work with children and young people, including those with special needs, in order to provide an opportunity to every child in care, to evaluate their current placement and express their views, through the best medium for them.

Update:

IRO have use of the chatterbox toolkit and recognise that children and young people are key in selecting whom they would wish to advocate for them, and how they want their reviews to be undertaken such as chairing themselves, agree an agenda together, adopt a safe word if finding difficult, use of flip chart and flashcards to help in expressing or leading the conversation. They have opportunity for child's advocate to support them in sharing their views.

IROs continue to strengthen a relational and creative approach in ensuring the child is placed at the heart of their work. The number of additional visits

and meetings has increased this year demonstrating a child centred approach in understanding the child's world.

- Through digital transformation provide a modernised approach to assist Children in Care to contribute and participate.

Update:

Independent Reviewing Officers have been provided in the last year with updated IT equipment to enable creative direct work with children within their homes using modern technology. There remains further work to enhance consultation via use of social apps.

The agreed way of communication is agreed between IRO and child as to ensure there increased participation and feeling comfortable in this.

- Develop the role of the IRO in relation to adoption, by attending celebration events for children placed for adoption, and contribute to the child's life journey through a letter for later life.

Update:

Independent Reviewing Officers are now invited and attend a celebration event prior to the child being placed with prospective adopters that involves all relevant professionals speaking with the prospective adopters and sharing experience of the case and answering any questions they may have.

- Ensure that every child over the age of 6 will be provided with a personal age appropriate communication from their IRO, outlining their contribution and issues discussed at their review.

Update:

There are child friendly version of CIC reviews as to what was discussed and recommendations, with it agreed with the young person as to how they would like there information such as through child friendly report written, or want this verbal, it is very much up to what the child's preference is and what is agreed between them and IRO, to ensure all young people have a copy of the meeting however do not feel overwhelmed by the whole IRO chairs report.

All children will be provided on a consistent basis with a personal birthday card from their IRO.

- IROs to support and contribute to wider practice developments and initiatives such as 'Holding On' and 'You Say Who' that seek to

strengthen relationships and support for families, helping children to remain with and return to family care where possible.

Update:

Independent Reviewing Officers have fully embraced the “You Say Who” approach.

You say who is embedded within the CIC reviews, as to whom the child wishes to be connected with, and whom remains part of their lives. Preliminary assessments are being undertaken, with any that have been positive are shared with the IRO with information, and agreement reached within review for this to be pursued and analysis of this. IROs have been involved in meetings around what the support package for return would be, what steps need to occur for reunification to be possible, and reviewed at stages of the reunification to ensure that timely progress is being made as well as correct support in place

ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2019/20

Action 1: Inclusion and Involvement at Child in Care Reviews

- Review and modernise the Consultation forms that are sent to every child pre-review
- Increase the proportion of children attending their reviews
- Increase and capture the data in respect of the number of children leading their own reviews.
- Continue the work of the “You Say Who” approach ensuring family/friend networks and family time are integral to the child’s care plan and the CIC review process.

Action 2: Improve the quality of Care Planning

- Where social work reports, care plans and pathway plans are not completed prior to reviews, not signed by a manager, are of poor quality, or are not outcomes-focused, use the formal and informal processes to improve quality and timeliness.
- To review procedures in relation to unregulated placements to ensure an IRO enhanced challenge role.

Action 3: Children safely remain in the care or return to the care of their birth families where possible

- IROs to work with Social Workers to consider the possibility of reunification with family (including wider family) is regularly explored and promoted where safe to do so using the Reunification toolkit.

Action 4: Quality Assurance

- Embed the disruption meeting procedure and reporting structure to provide quarterly learning for management oversight in relation to placement stability
- Review the Case Tracking forms completed post Child in Care review to enhance statistical data particularly in relation to attendance and contribution at reviews.
- Embed the bi monthly Independent Reviewing Service Quality Assurance Meeting to include Scrutiny of IRO Children in Care Chairs report.
- Ensure each IRO has a yearly observation of a Child In Care review

Action 5: Develop the provision of Independent Visitors

- To work with the independent Visitor Service in recruiting, training and allocation of Independent Visitors to children and young people who do not have contact with their birth family.

