



1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the IRO Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board, established by the *IRO Handbook* (2010).
- 1.2 The specific purposes, content and format of this report will follow those set out in preceding Annual Reports.
- 1.3 Following presentation to the City of York Council Corporate Parenting Board and the City of York Safeguarding Childrens' Board, this report, and a Children and Young People's version, will be placed on the City of York Council website as publically accessible documents.
- 1.4 Where possible, this Report refers to Children and Young People in Care (CYPIC) in preference to Children Looked After (CLA) or Looked After Children (LAC). Such use reflects the views and wishes of children and young people in York about their own identity and the way in which they prefer to be referred to by professionals.

2. Reporting Period

- 2.1 This report covers the period from 01 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. Some of the data sets expressly omit Q4 data due to the impact upon reporting of the transition of processes to the new Case Management System within the quarter.

3. The Legal, Statutory and National Context of the IRO Role

- 3.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 3.2 In March 2010 the *IRO Handbook* was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IRO's should discharge their duties. Significantly, the *Handbook* stated:

The IRO has a new role conferred upon them to monitor the child's case as opposed to monitoring the review, effectively monitoring the implementation of the Care Plan between reviews (at para. 3.74)

The *Handbook* goes on to state that the primary role of an IRO is:

To ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child (at para. 2.10)

3.3 In discharging this role, the *Handbook* notes (at para. 2.14) that the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

- *promoting the voice of the child;*
- *ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;*
- *making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;*
- *offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them; and*
- *and monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands*

4. Local Context - The City of York Council as Corporate Parent

4.1 The City of York Council IRO Service operates within the context of City of York Council as 'Corporate Parent' for all of the children and young people in its care. As Corporate Parent, the Council's ambition is not merely limited to ensure that children and young people in care are safe and their welfare promoted but that, as parent, the Council strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for its children and young people.

4.2 Within the reporting period, the City of York Council has implemented a new Strategy for Children and Young People in Care. The strategy introduces 6 strategic themes and a Strategic Partnership for Children and Young People in Care. The six strategic themes are ambitious, challenging and well-placed to support the development of corporate parenting arrangements and the IRO Service in York.

The Six Strategic Themes for Children and Young People in Care:

- **Ambition:** *'good enough is not good enough'.*
- **Personalisation:** *'every child and every family is different'.*
- **Normality:** *'every child and young person is entitled to a normal, stable, caring family life'.*
- **Trust:** *'as professionals we need to trust each other better, and young people even more'.*
- **Accountability:** *'we need to be clear who is responsible for what'.*
- **Efficiency:** *'we have to live within our means'.*

4.3 To support the implementation of the new strategy, the City of York Corporate Parenting Board has reviewed its role and function, highlighting the following priorities to:

- Refresh the purpose and role of the Board, promoting closer direct engagement with children, young people and professionals working with children in care;
- Champion the rights, aspirations and achievement of children and young people in care, monitoring progress and outcomes;
- Raise awareness of the corporate parenting role, responsibilities and opportunities in order to extend the principles of corporate parenting to a wider group of officers and elected members;
- Actively engage with young people through existing forums, such as Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM), in order to stay connected to the experiences of young people and ensuring a sustained focus on the voice of the child, outcomes and progress.

5. The City of York Council IRO Service

- 5.1 During the reporting period, the IRO Unit has been subject to some changes in personnel. The Unit continues to comprise of three full-time, permanent Independent Reviewing Officers, all of whom are experienced and authoritative Social Work practitioners with management experience. Additionally, the Unit continues to benefit from a temporary full-time Agency IRO. On 31 July 2015, the 0.5 FTE IRO who had been temporarily appointed through secondment from another service area left the Council to take up work elsewhere. She was not replaced, resulting in a small reduction in capacity. The Unit has also, during the reporting period, relied upon limited additional sessional hours (0.2 FTE) from a part-time Independent Reviewing Officer.
- 5.2 All five IRO's working for the Unit are qualified Social Workers registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring

Service enhanced checks. All have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience including Children's Social Care safeguarding management, youth offending management, fostering and adoption work, work in therapeutic and third sector services, residential services management and performance management and quality assurance work. All have substantial experience of effective direct work with children and young people.

- 5.3 Four of the five IRO's are White British females, the other a White British male. The Unit takes issue of gender, culture and diversity fully into account in its provision of services.
- 5.4 All five of the IRO's are independent of City of York Children's Social Care and are not involved in preparation of children's care plans or the management of cases or have any control over resources allocated to a case.
- 5.5 All IRO's have access to independent legal advice upon request.
- 5.6 All IRO's are encouraged to participate in the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Practitioners Group for peer-support and sector-led improvement opportunities.
- 5.7 All IRO's access training opportunities. In May 2015 for example, all five attended a one-day Regional IRO Practitioners Conference, hosted by Sheffield City Council. The conference programme included:
- From the PLO Forwards: a legal briefing for IROs
 - Making care plans work well for children: messages from University of East Anglia research into care planning and the role of the IRO
 - Child Centred Approach to Child Care Reviews (Sheffield Children's Involvement Team)
- 5.8 During the reporting period, management of the IRO's has continued on an interim basis and has been subject to some change. On 01 May 2015, management transferred from the Principal Advisor to the Principal Social Worker and in November 2015 to the Senior Manager – Peer Support and Challenge. All three managers within the reporting period have been qualified Social Workers registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and subject to regular Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks. All three are experienced Children's Social Care safeguarding managers. Interim management arrangements have ensured that there has been oversight, professional advice and management support to each IRO, including monthly Supervision and Team Meetings and work to ensure the IRO's access training appropriate to need.
- 5.9 Although all of the Interim Managers have been part of the Children's Social Care Management Group, their substantive roles have not involved operational

management, the preparation of children’s care plans, the management of individual cases or resource allocation. Accordingly, there has been no conflict of interest. Should there be any potential conflict, provision has been made for the Principal Advisor to ‘step-out’ of their Children’s Social Care line-management arrangement.

- 5.10 All of the Interim Managers have represented York and been active members of the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Managers Group. The Group meet on a quarterly basis to share information, report on common and emerging themes and priorities and provide peer support and sector-led improvement opportunities. The Group provides two Members to the National IRO Managers Group which has representation from the Department for Education.
- 5.11 During the reporting period, the administrative support for the IRO’s has continued to be provided through a pooled resource arrangement with a wide range of responsibilities.
- 5.12 During the reporting period a review of the Unit’s overall structure, level of resourcing, management arrangements and reporting arrangements within the wider Authority was undertaken by the Senior Manager – Peer Support and Challenge. Quantitative and qualitative Information gathered during the course of the review are referred to, as appropriate, below.

6. IRO Caseloads and Unit Performance

Caseloads

- 6.1 In common with half of its regional peers, City of York Council IRO’s have a dual function. As well as the independent review of children and young people in care, the IRO’s provide independent Chairing of Child Protection Conferences, a separate statutory function under *Working Together 2015* for which they are accountable to the Director of Children’s Services. The most significant benefit of integrating CYPIC Reviews with the Chairing of Child Protection Conferences is the opportunity to provide a greater level of consistency and oversight for children and young people. The benefit of continued and sustained relationships, and the potential for relationships to improve outcomes for children, irrespective of a child’s status, is considered to be a key and important strength. The argument in favour of separating the functions is the ability to prioritise children and young people in care cases all of the time. It is acknowledged that the integrated model in use in York places a very substantial additional task upon Unit.

Table 1: Total Unit Caseload and IRO Average Caseload at Year End

					2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Oct-Dec	Quarter 4 Jan-Mar				
CYPIC	199	203	188	191	191	197	222	243
CP	124	133	144	146	146	124	125	128
Total	323	336	332	337	337	321	371	345
Average					75	68	74	98

6.2 Table 1 shows case load by quarter for the reporting period and historical comparisons. The data confirms a marginal increase in the 2015/16 return in the total caseload over the 2014/15 figures. It is noted that the marginal decrease in Children and Young People in Care has been offset by an increase in the Child Protection population. As a consequence the Year End Average Caseload evidences a small but significant increase.

6.3 To contextualise the caseloads, partial regional data has been made available through the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Managers Group in November 2014. It is noted however that comparison with regional peers should be regarded as illustrative only, due to the very different structures, roles and responsibilities across the region's Local Authorities and the partial return of data.

Table 2: Yorkshire and Humberside IRO Services allocated caseloads (November 2014)

Local Authority	Average Caseload
Bradford	85
Hull City Council	89
Kirklees	65
Leeds City Council	63
North Yorkshire County Council	68
Rotherham	78
Wakefield Metropolitan District	76
Regional Average	76

6.4 Table 2 evidences that there is significant caseload variation within the Region. However, for the purposes of this Report it is noted that York, at an average caseload of 75, continues to return below the indicative regional average of 76.

6.5 Managers within the Regional IRO Management Group would note however that indicative caseloads do not represent the challenges in responding to unpredictable

demand and retaining enough flexibility to respond to peaks in demand and associated workload, whilst maintaining a focus on quality and oversight.

Number of Reviews

Table 3: Total Unit Activity – Reviews and Child Protection Conferences undertaken

Total Unit Activity				
		Historical		
	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	1012/13
CYPIC	548	619	660	861
CP	273	235	240	312
Total	821	854	900	1173

6.6 Within the reporting period the Unit have chaired a total of 548 CYPIC Reviews (compared with 619 in 2014/15 and 660 in 2013/14) and a total of 273 Child Protection Conferences (compared with 235 in 2014/15 and 240 in 2013/14). As a consequence, the overall reduction in the numbers of children and young people in the care of the City of York Council has been almost totally offset by an increase in the number of children and young people subject to Child Protection Plans within York, resulting in a very marginal reduction in workload.

Timeliness of Reviews

6.7 Table 4 reports the percentage of looked after children who had **all** their reviews on time within the reporting period. The 2014/15 Annual Report adopted a target of 90%. This ambitious target was met in Q1, however the overall performance within the reporting period (Q1-Q3) of 81% fell short of the target and reflects a decrease in Unit performance from the preceding year. In part this may be attributed to a reduction in the establishment of the Unit of 0.5 FTE and marginally higher caseloads as a consequence. It may also reflect changes in the Business Support staff group and decreasing familiarity with the Review process.

Table 4: Percentage of CYPIC Reviews held within timescales

Reviews within timescales by Quarter 2015/16					Historical Performance			
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Oct-Dec	Quarter 4 Jan-Mar	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Reviews	90%	85%	81%	No Data	81%	88%	86%	75%

Participation in Reviews

Table 5: Method and Percentage CYPIC Participating in their Review taken from the Quality Assessment Framework (Question

		Historical		
		2016/16	2014/15	2013/14
Code	Method	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
PN0	Child under 4 at time of Review	18%	13%	15%
PN1	Attends or speaks for him/herself	38%	41%	40%
PN2	Attends, views rep. by Advocate	1%	0.5%	2%
PN3	Attends, views conveyed non-verbally	0.3%	2.5%	0%
PN4	Attends but does not convey views	0.7%	1%	0.5%
PN5	Does not attend but briefs an advocate	15%	11.5%	7%
PN6	Does not attend but conveys in wri. etc	23%	24.5%	32.5%
PN7	Does not attend nor views conveyed	4%	6%	3%
Total		100%	100%	100%

6.8 Within the reporting period 78% of children and young people in care contributed to the review of their care, with only 4% not contributing by choice and 18% by virtue of age. The return is consistent with the 2014/15 return, with a marginal increase in the use of advocacy. Only 40% of children and young people in care attended their Review. This level of participation through attendance continues to be an area of concern to the Unit.

6.9 Of those children and young people who attended, it has been a Unit priority to facilitate, where appropriate, a child or young person to Chair or Co-Chaired their own Review. Whilst there will only ever be a small minority of children or young people who wish to Chair or Co-Chair their review, the Unit will continue to encourage all children and young people to consider Chairing or Co-Chairing their review and ensure that they are supported to do so. The return within the reporting period showed a welcome and substantial increase over the previous year. This complies with the aspiration within the Handbook that:

It is hoped that for many older children and young people, especially as they begin to plan for independence, the IRO will hand over at least part of the chairing role to them so that they can take an increased ownership of the meeting (at para.3.37)

Table 6: Number of Children and Young People Chairing or Co-Chairing their own Review:

Number of Reviews Chaired and Co-Chaired by Young people			
	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14

Reviews	41	24	11
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Consultation Prior to Reviews

6.10 There is a statutory expectation that children and young people are visited by the Independent Reviewing Officer and consulted with *prior* to their review. The *Handbook* does however acknowledge that there are circumstances where the IRO will exercise their discretion and determine whether this is necessary, for example; where there is a strong relationship between the young person and the IRO, where there are no significant changes to the care plans or where the child is very young. In previous periods this statutory requirement has proved extremely challenging due to higher than desirable caseloads held by the Unit. The return for the calendar year of 2013 for example recorded that in only 11% of reviews was the child or young person seen prior to their review and in 22% of reviews there was no record at all.

Table 7: Percentage of children and young people seen and spoken to by the IRO prior to the Review (Data from QAF Question 3)

Percentage of Children seen and spoken to prior to Review		
	2015/16	2014/15
Seen	35%	45%
Not Seen	30%	25%
Not appropriate	26%	22%
Not necessary	9%	7%

6.11 The Unit has been committed to improving its performance. In the Annual Report for 2014/15 a target of 50% was set building upon the 45% achieved within the preceding 12 months. The 2015/16 return indicates an unacceptable decrease in performance by the Unit. Whilst the staff group did reduce by 0.5FTE from 31 July 2015, nearly a third of children and young people whom it was appropriate and necessary to see were recorded by the QAF as not having been seen. This is a priority performance deficit for the Unit.

7. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in York

Number of Children and Young People in Care

Table 8: Number of Children and Young People in Care (excluding Short Breaks)

Number of CYPIC		
	Historical Performance	Comparators

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	Regional	National
Number CYPIC	199	203	188	191	191	197	222	243	491	457
No. per 10k	55	56	52	53	53	54	61	68	65	60

7.1 Within the reporting period, the number of children and young people in the care of the City of York Council has steadily decreased. At the end of Q4 (31 March 2016), the figure was 191. The numbers of looked after children in York are lower than both the national and regional averages. The decrease is consistent with Children’s Social Care’s determination to provide robust edge of care services to ensure that only those children and young people who absolutely need looking after become children in care. The figures also reflect the shorter duration of public law care proceedings and the focus on ensuring that permanency by way of adoption, or within kinship placements out of care secured in a timely way. It is anticipated that over the next reporting period, the numbers of Children will stabilise around the current level and not significantly decrease any further.

Gender of Children and Young People in Care

Table 9: Number of Children in Care by Gender

	Number of CYPIC					Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Number	199	203	188	191	191	193	222	243
Male	120	111	109	98	98	101	121	132
Female	103	106	100	93	93	92	100	111

7.2 Within the reporting period, the numbers of male and female children and young people in the care of the City of York are broadly representative of the demography of York, with no notable over-representation.

Ethnicity of Children and Young People in Care

Table 10: Percentage of Children in Care by Ethnicity at Year End

Ethnicity		2015/16		2014/15	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
ABAN	Bangladeshi (Asian or Asian British)	0	0%	1	0.5%
AOTH	Any other Asian or Asian British Bckgnd	1	0.5%	1	0.5%
BCRB	Black or Black British - Caribbean	0	0%	1	0.5%
MOTH	Any other mixed background	1	0.5%	1	0.5%
MAWS	White and Asian	4	2%	4	2%
MWBC	White and Black Caribbean	1	0.5%	1	0.5%
OOTH	Any other ethnic group	0	0%	1	0.5%
WBRI	White British	183	96%	187	95%
WIRI	White Irish	1	0.5%	0	0%
WOTH	Any other White background	0	0%	0	0%
		191	100%	197	100%

- 7.3 Within the reporting period, the ethnicity of the children and young people looked after by the City of York is broadly representative of the demography of York with no notable over-representation.

Age of Children and Young People in Care

Table 11: Number of Children by Age at Period End

Children by Age						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Under 1 yr	10	9	9	13	13	8	6	5
1-4 years	23	21	17	19	19	23	30	38
5-9 years	39	39	36	37	37	36	45	46
10-15 years	86	90	79	78	78	90	92	102
Over 16 yrs	41	44	47	44	44	36	49	52

- 7.4 Within the reporting period, there have been a number of changes in the age profile of children and young people in care. There continues to be an increase in the number of babies in care which it is believed reflects improvements in assessment practice, earlier intervention and improved decision making. The next two age groups have shown a steady decline in numbers. This may reflect changed timescales for care proceedings down to a maximum of 26 weeks brought in with the revised PLO (CYC being a top performing Authority with average timescales of less than 20 weeks) and improved timescales and outcomes for permanence planning out of care for younger children. The number of young people in the 10-15 years age group has also decreased substantially. This reduction may reflect a greater Edge of Care focus by the Child in Need Service within the reporting period.

Time in Care of Children and Young People

Table 12: Number of Children by Period of Care at Period End

Number of CYPIC by Care length						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Less than 6mths	28	34	24	25	25	25	27	20
6-12mths	25	21	13	18	18	22	11	17
1-2 years	18	25	32	31	31	19	24	57
2-4 years	39	33	30	33	33	41	61	65
More than 4 yrs	89	90	89	84	84	86	99	84

- 7.5 Within the reporting period, there has continued to be a decrease in the length of time in care for significant numbers of children and young people cared for by the City

of York. However, the increase in the 1-2 year cohort may reflect the challenges in securing permanency by way of Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order or Discharge of Care Orders following care proceedings.

Legal Status of Children and Young People in Care

Table 13: Legal Status of Children and Young People in Care as Percentage of whole

	2015/16	Historical			Comparitors	
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	Regional	National
Interim Care Orders	10%	11%	6%	12%	23%	20%
Full Care orders	55%	54%	57%	49%	44%	40%
Freed for Adoption	4%	6%	12%	16%	14%	11%
Accomm. S.20	31%	29%	25%	22%	18%	29%
YOT legal Statuses	0%	0%	0%	0.4%	0%	0%
Detain CP in LA Acc.	0%	0%	0.5%	1.0%	0%	0%

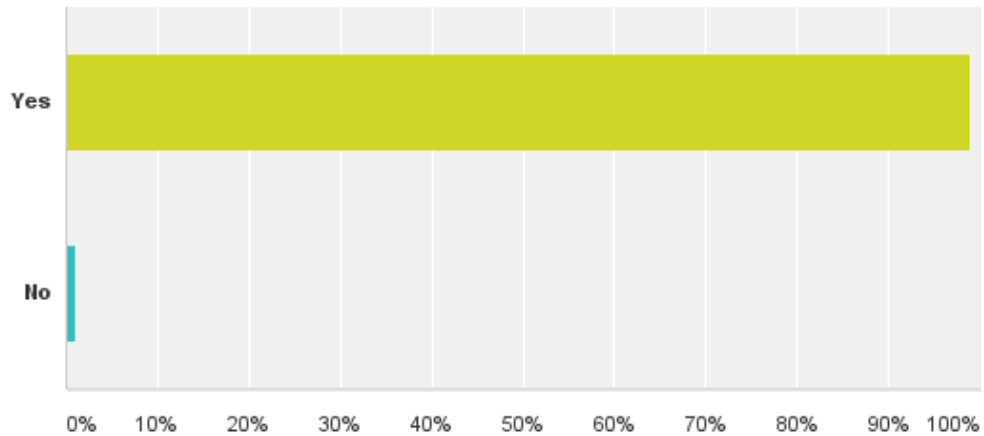
- 7.6 Within the reporting period, there has been a continued reduction in the numbers of children subject to Placement Orders (Freed for Adoption). This trend reflects the national picture. As there is no matched increase in use of full care order it is likely that this reduction is due to use of other permanence options such as Special Guardianship Order.
- 7.7 It is also noticeable that within the reporting period, there has been a further marginal increase in the use of s.20 Children Act 1989. The use of Section 20 has been subject to judicial and national scrutiny (N (Children) (Adoption: Jurisdiction) [2015] EWCA Civ 1112; ADCS *Practice Guidance for the Use of Section 20*). The ADCS Practice Guidance noted:

We share judicial concern about those s20 cases which have drifted without decent care plans for children, where individual children looked after have suffered demonstrable harm or detriment as a direct result. This type of practice can never be excused or condoned. All local authorities should take steps to ensure they do not have a single s20 arrangement of this sort. This assurance can only be achieved by ensuring that every s20 case open to a local authority has been actively reviewed and that s20 status remains the appropriate current legal option and framework for the child.

The Unit takes this challenge very seriously and works proactively to ensure the right permanence plan, including legal status, is in place for every child and young person in care. This is reflected in the Quality Assurance Framework used by the Unit. Table 14 demonstrate that, in the IRO's opinion, in 99% of cases the current or proposed legal status of the child is appropriate and meeting the child's needs. In the small minority

of cases where the IRO disagrees with the Legal Status, 1% of cases, the IRO will dispute the matter under the Local Dispute Resolution Process.

Table 14: QAF Data from Question 20: Is the current or proposed legal status for the child appropriate?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	98.96%	478
No	1.04%	5
Total		483

Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care

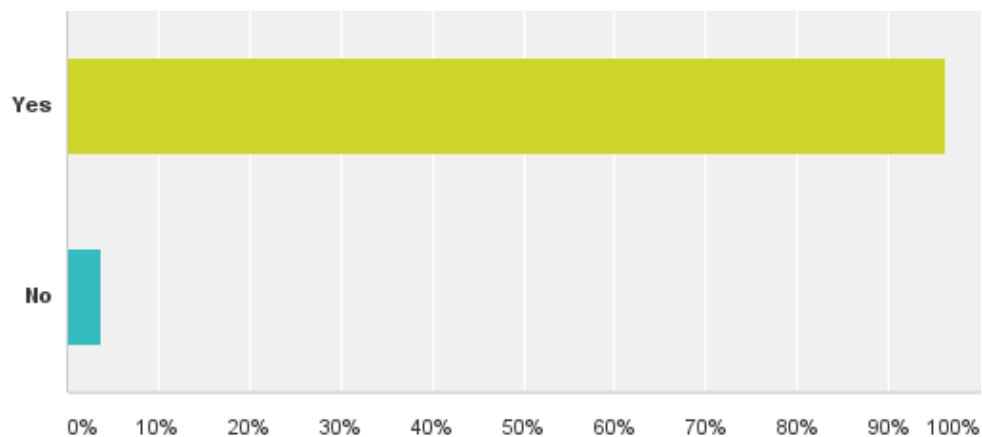
Table 15: Percentage of CYPIC having 3 or more placement moves

	2015/16	Historical Performance		
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
3+ Moves	8.9%	11.9%	9.5%	14%

7.8 Accordingly, placement stability has increased since 2014/15. The Unit is aware of the contribution that it can make to the stability of care for children and young people and will subject care plans proposing changes in placement to detailed scrutiny under its Quality Assurance Framework to ensure that any placement change is in the best interests of a child or young person and any disruption, particularly to education, is minimised. The Unit takes this challenge very seriously and works proactively to ensure the right placement for every child and young person in care. This is reflected in the Quality Assurance Framework used by the Unit. The table demonstrates that, in the IRO’s opinion, in 96%

of cases the current or proposed placement for the child is appropriate and meeting the child’s needs. In the small minority of cases where the IRO disagrees with the placement decision, 4% of cases, the IRO will dispute the matter under the Local Dispute Resolution Process.

Table 16: QAF Data from Question 21: Is the current or proposed placement meeting the needs of the child?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	96.29%	467
No	3.71%	18
Total		485

Placement Location of Children and Young People in Care

Table 17: Number of Placements by Location of new CYPIC

	2015/16	Historical		
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
New Placements in LA	47	35	46	38
New Placements outside LA	22	29	16	16
New Placements +20miles	4	11	10	14

7.9 Within the reporting period, there has been a significant decrease in the number of children who have been cared for in placements placed outside of the authority. This may reflect in part, the reduced numbers of children and young people in care and successful recruitment of Foster Carers within the City under the Making York Home project. The Unit is aware of the contribution that it can make in ensuring placements are appropriate and that every effort is made by Children’s Social Care to place as close to the child’s home and community as possible so far as is consistent with their need to be safeguarded.

Health and Education of Children and Young People in Care

Table 18: Health Assessments and Dental Checks, Under 5's Developmental Checks, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire Scores and Personal Education Plans

	2015/16	Historical		
		2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Health and Dental Checks	74.5%	66%	92.9%	82%
Under 5s Dev Checks	100%	92.9%	82.1%	87%
Average SDQ Score	13.0	13.1	15.9	14.8
Up-to-date PEP in place	Not Available	70.1%	83.7%	53%

7.10 Health and education are two key dimensions within the developmental needs of children and young people in the care of the City of York. The Unit is aware of the contribution that it can make by monitoring multi-agency activities such as the Initial and Review Health Assessments and PEP meetings to ensure that children and young people in care are getting the help and support they need. Table 18 demonstrates that there has been progress in the reporting period but that more can be achieved.

8. IRO impact on the outcomes for children and young people

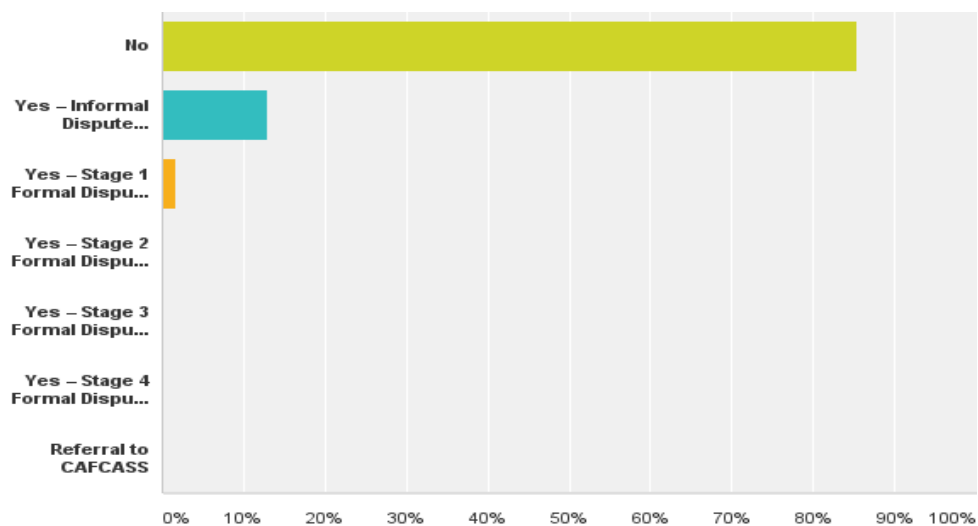
Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 8.1 One of the key functions of an IRO is to oversee the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority. This responsibility is outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and *IRO Handbook 2010*. Every child in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care. An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person, for example in relation to planning for the care of the child, or the implementation of the plan or decisions relating to it, resource issues or poor practice by the Social Worker. When this happens the IRO is required to seek a resolution.
- 8.2 It is acknowledged that the resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. Nevertheless, the child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance

with the *IRO Handbook 2010* there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process whilst acknowledging and giving primacy to informal resolution where possible.

8.3 York IROs manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively and on an informal basis. More often than not, discussion with social workers and their managers is effective in achieving the progress required. That said, achieving a culture of effective challenge is difficult and success is ultimately rooted in confident and respectful professional relationships. At its best, challenge is perceived as helpful and supports professional learning and development which social workers and managers take forward in other cases and elements of their practice. A Dispute Resolution Process is only effective if IROs, social workers and managers all perceive it to be effective and this remains an area which requires further and continued focus following the review of the Unit.

Table 18: Number of Disputes (taken from QAF Data Question 30: Following the Review, in the judgment of the IRO will any issue identified in the care or care planning for the child be taken into informal or formal resolution processes?)



Answer Choices	Responses	Count
No	85.42%	416
Yes – Informal Dispute Resolution	12.94%	63
Yes – Stage 1 Formal Dispute Resolution	1.64%	8
Yes – Stage 2 Formal Dispute Resolution	0.00%	0
Yes – Stage 3 Formal Dispute Resolution	0.00%	0
Yes – Stage 4 Formal Dispute Resolution	0.00%	0
Referral to CAFCASS	0.00%	0
Total		487

8.4 Accordingly, the IRO Unit initiated 63 disputes with Children’s Social Care on an informal basis and 8 at Stage 1. In terms of reasons for the Dispute – these are captured within the QAF to aid the Unit’s challenge to the Authority as Corporate Parent.

Table 19: QAF Data for Question 31: Issues taken into Dispute

Answer Choices	Responses	
Not applicable	84.18%	399
Resources - inappropriate placement	0.21%	1
Resources – contact arrangements unsuitable/inadequate	1.05%	5
Resources – inadequate health provision	0.21%	1
Resources – inadequate education provision	0.42%	2
Resources – inadequate emotional wellbeing provision	0.00%	0
Care Planning – inadequate risk management of CSE	0.21%	1
Care Planning – inadequate risk management of missing/absence	0.00%	0
Care Planning – Family Finding (Adoption)	0.00%	0
Care Planning – Achieving Legal Status change	0.63%	3
Care Planning – Planning for Permanence	1.69%	8
Care Planning – Securing a permanent placement	0.84%	4
Practice - LACR Decisions not implemented/complied with	1.27%	6
Practice - Insufficient evidence of child's voice	0.63%	3
Practice – No/delay in allocating Social Worker	0.00%	0
Practice - Statutory Visits not within timescales	3.80%	18
Practice - No/poor quality assessment of need	1.48%	7
Practice – No/poor quality Placement Plan	3.16%	15
Practice – No/poor quality Care Plan	6.12%	29
Practice – No/poor quality Pathway Plan	2.32%	11
Practice – No/poor quality Health Assessment	1.48%	7
Practice – No/poor quality PEP	2.53%	12
Practice – No/poor quality Life Story Work	0.42%	2
Practice – Inadequate preparation for LACR	0.63%	3
Other (please specify)	6.33%	30
Total Respondents: 474		

8.5 Accordingly, from the QAF Survey Data, the Unit is able to assert that the three key issues brought into Dispute were:

1. Practice – No/Poor quality Care Plan
2. Practice – Statutory Visits not in timescales
3. Practice – No/Poor quality Placement Plans

In this way, the Unit was able to feed back to Children’s Social Care to improve practice by practitioners for children and young people in care.

Quality Assurance of Corporate Parenting

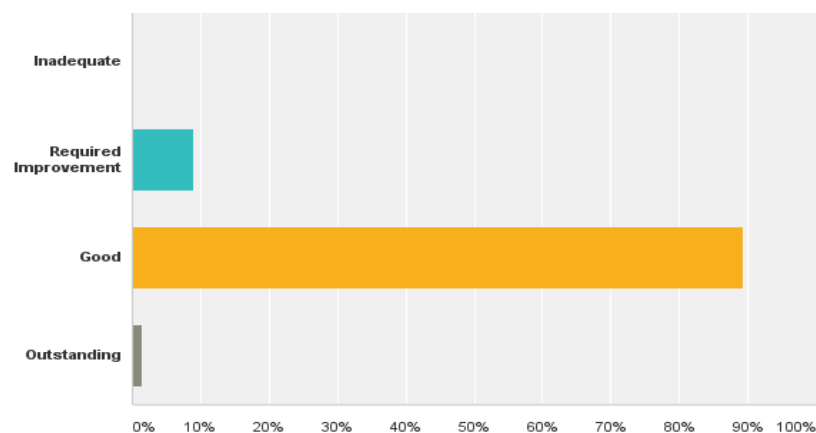
8.6 As well as Chairing Looked After Reviews and monitoring individual cases on an ongoing basis, the *Handbook* notes that:

the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority’s function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern emerging not just around individual children but also more generally in relation to the collective experience of it’s looked after children of the services they receive (at para. 2.13)

Accordingly, the Unit has systematised the collation of data obtained at each Review by way of the Quality Assurance Framework which is recorded on Survey Monkey, enabling aggregation into the ‘collective experience’ of children and young people Looked After by City of York Council as Corporate Parent.

8.7 The QAF Survey explicitly asks the IRO at the end of the Review to comment upon the quality of the Corporate Parenting that the child or young person in care has received. This QAF dataset is perhaps the best indicator of the quality of Corporate Parenting being provided.

Table 20: QAF Data for Question 29: In the judgment of the IRO, what is the overall quality of corporate parenting of this child?

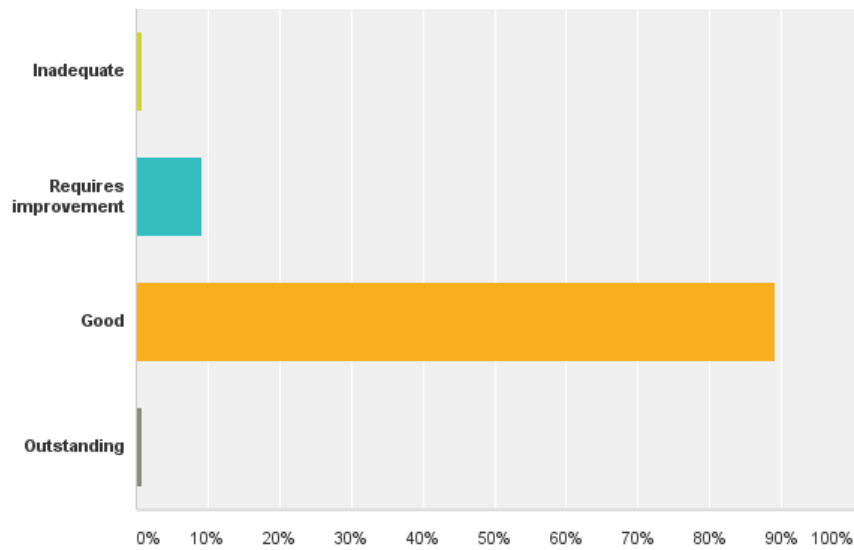


Answer Choices	Responses
Inadequate	0.20% 1
Required Improvement	9.00% 44
Good	89.37% 437
Outstanding	1.43% 7
Total	489

8.8 Accordingly, the Corporate Parenting was judged to be inadequate in only a single case, whereas in 89% of cases, the Corporate Parenting was judged as either good or outstanding.

8.9 Following the introduction of the QAF, historical comparisons can begin to be made. In 2013 65% of Care Plans were recorded as being judged as being of 'good quality'. In the first QAF return, 85% were deemed 'good' (with 2% of outstanding quality) and in 2015/16 89% of Care Plans were judged 'Good' (with 0.8% outstanding).

Table 21: QAF Data for Question 23: In the judgment of the IRO, what is the overall quality of the Care Plan?



Answer Choices	Responses
Inadequate	0.81% 4
Requires improvement	9.15% 45
Good	89.23% 439
Outstanding	0.81% 4
Total	492

8.10 In summary, the Quality Assurance processes introduced by the Unit within the reporting period are a significant improvement and enable the Unit to identify areas of concern and development and areas of strength which can then be alerted to Senior Managers within Children’s Social Care.

Referrals for Advocacy

8.11 The IRO Unit continues to have an established and close working relationship with the Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service. The Service offers advocacy to children and young people in care and, if necessary, will support them through the City of York Corporate Complaints procedure.

8.12 The Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service advise that the main themes of referrals to it by the Unit and others in relation to the concerns and views of children and young people in care in 2015/16 were as follows:

Theme	2015/16	2014/15
Contact issues	3%	13%
Unhappiness about their Social Worker	17%	11%
Placement issues	11%	13%
Disagreement with Care Plan	5%	11%
accessing support / services	8%	5%
Support to express wishes and feelings	50%	45%
Other	6%	2%

8.13 The Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service regularly attends Unit Team Meetings to update IRO’s on emerging themes of concern raised by children and young people. Every IRO understands that it is their responsibility to make sure that a child or young person understands that advocacy is a right and an option for them and will explain how the advocate could help, providing age appropriate information to each looked after child about the City of York Advocacy Service.

8.14 The Unit greatly values the contribution of the Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service to outcomes for children and young people. Two examples of the Unit and advocacy working closely to achieve improved outcomes for children and young people are described below:

A referral was made for an advocate by the IRO for 2 siblings subject to Care Orders, living with parents, outside of York. The referral recognised the complexity of the placement and focused on ascertaining the children’s wishes and feelings and insights into life at home. Frequent visits were undertaken outside of the home environment, during which time both children were able to talk about

how they felt about living at home. Both children were supported to attend their review meetings. They requested to leave the home and come into Foster Care and although the decision for them was still difficult, they were supported through this process. The case was closed to advocacy in February 2016, they both now attend IM2 and have independent visitors and are very happy in their placement.

A referral was made for a young man age 14 due to him saying that he was unhappy living out of area in a residential unit. S was supported to express his views about wanting to live with a family friend and his reasons for this. With the support of an advocate S was able to share his views and wishes and a planned move was agreed. S is settled and remains in the placement he requested.

9. Update on the Seven Service Priorities 2015-16

9.1 In the Annual Report 2014/15, seven Service Priorities were identified for the Unit Work Plan 2015/16 period. These seven priorities were:

- 1. Deliver the 'enhanced' IRO role for children and young people;**
- 2. Change business processes to better support the IRO Role;**
- 3. Increase the participation of children and young people in their Reviews;**
- 4. Ensure appropriate independent challenge to the City of York as Corporate Parent to improve outcomes for children and young people;**
- 5. See more children and young people.**
- 6. Conclude the Review of the Unit**
- 7. Prepare the Unit for transition onto the Mosaic case Management System**

This Section provides a detailed overview of progress made by the Service on the seven identified priorities during the whole of the reporting period from 01 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

One: Deliver the 'enhanced' IRO role for children and young people

9.2 Monthly supervision sessions with IROs have consistently reviewed IRO caseloads and the balance of work with regard to children subject to Child Protection Plans and Children in Care. At most points during the reporting period, most IROs have been within the target of holding no more than 80 cases.

- 9.3 During this reporting period, the IROs have commenced completion of monthly Peer Audits of colleagues' case files. The IROs have consistently prioritised this work and describe the value in terms of learning from colleagues and the peer feedback they receive. The IRO peer audits are collated and included in a routine service 'Score Card' which is used by managers to identify practice strengths and themes across Children's Social Care. This contributes to improvement in the Corporate Parenting of the Council.
- 9.4 Additionally, as well as their case work, York IROs have become increasingly involved in wider service and partnership work, bringing their quality assurance experience to a range of activities. During this reporting period, York IROs have prioritised the following:
- One IRO represented the Unit in a Project (Making York Home) aimed at strengthening local placement options for children with complex needs. The project was intensive in terms of time and included representation from a number of key agencies.
 - Two IROs acted as 'Mosaic Champions' and assisted colleagues in the transition to a new work flow based Case Management System.
 - York IROs and the interim IRO Manager have consistently prioritised attendance at regular regional IRO meetings and training. The meetings have been invaluable in terms of peer support and learning, including focused work around evidenced based approaches to child centred reviews.
 - IROs have prioritised team meetings to develop communication and relationships with key colleagues, including; Named Nurse for Children in Care, Children's Rights and Advocacy Team, Health colleagues regarding the introduction of the Health Passports.
 - IROs have attended a foster carer consultation session and Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM) Group and plans are in place to progress this work further.
 - IROs and IRO Manager attend and contribute to a number of LSCB sub groups, including one which focuses on multi agency case audits and a case review group.

Two: Change business processes to better support the IRO role

- 9.5 During the reporting period, IROs have prioritised work around improving consistency around systems and processes. This work has included a number of joint sessions with business support colleagues and detailed discussion and planning around roles and practice, including the implementation of Mosaic. The Unit has worked hard to

support changes to colleagues and responsibilities within business support. This work remains ongoing.

Three: Increase participation of children and young people in their reviews

9.6 During the reporting period, the Unit has nearly doubled the number of children and young people who have Chaired or Co-Chaired part of their review, evidencing a move toward more child-centred reviews facilitated, in part, by a challenging and stimulating presentation by the Sheffield Children's Involvement Team to the Unit in May 2015. However, overall participation through attendance did not increase within the period and this must remain a service priority in the next twelve months. Nevertheless, the Unit can report on some excellent examples of child-centred practice:

- One IRO uses a set of 6 coloured A5 prompt cards, labelled : 'Family', 'Friends', 'Home', 'School' 'Health' and 'Wild Card'. The IRO sometimes uses the cards with children and young people to help them identify their own priorities for discussion at a Review Meeting. If the child or young person decides to chair their meeting, they have the option of using the cards to structure the discussion. Some young people have chosen to circulate the cards during the meeting, appointing different people to lead different parts of the discussion.
- One IRO always writes an individual letter to children and young people following Review Meetings. The letter includes a photograph of the IRO and 'speech bubbles' to ensure that the child or young person knows that the IRO has written the letter.
- IROs have used video link, when young people have said that they don't want to attend a Review Meeting but still want to be involved in the process.
- One IRO routinely asks young people if they would like her to bake cakes for their Review Meeting! In some cases, this has prompted young people to also bake and bring cakes and biscuits.

Four: Ensure appropriate independent challenge to the city of York as a corporate parent to improve outcomes for children and young people

- 9.7 The Unit has been active in challenging the Council. The IROs initiated 63 disputes with Children's Social Care on an informal basis and 8 at Stage 1. Whilst the issues raised were many, key themes emerged, focusing on practice. These were communicated to Senior Managers within Children's Social Care and in every case, resolution was achieved.
- 9.8 The introduction of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) Survey using the functionality of Survey Monkey has significantly increased the ability of the Unit to aggregate data and thereby identify areas of strength and areas of development with which to challenge the Council as Corporate Parent. In this way the Unit has been better able to contribute to the ambitions of the Council to achieve the best possible outcomes for its children and young people.

Five: See more children and young people

- 9.9 Seeing more children and young people in care has been a Unit priority since 2013 when just 11% of children in care were seen prior to their Review. All IROs have been committed to improving their performance. In the Annual Report for 2014/15 an ambitious target of 50% was set for the year, building upon the 45% achieved within the preceding 12 months. Regrettably, the 2015/16 return of 35% indicates a decrease in performance by the Unit. Whilst the staff group did reduce by 0.5FTE from 31 July 2015, nearly a third of children and young people whom it was appropriate and necessary to see were recorded by the QAF as not having been seen. This is a priority performance deficit for the Unit.

Six: Conclude the Review of the Unit

- 9.10 The IRO Unit has been subject to review for several months and interim staffing and management arrangements have been in place. It is acknowledged within this Report that the interim arrangements presented, at times, high levels of uncertainty for Unit staff. The review by the Senior Manager – Peer Challenge and Support is now complete and her recommendations will be implemented during September 2016.
- 9.11 The review of the Unit started from a position of understanding existing strengths, challenges and dependencies. The process considered different perspectives and in particular focused on the wider system in which the Unit is expected to operate. This approach resulted, importantly, in the review's conclusions being coherent and consistent with the overall direction and vision of Children's Services and partnerships. The review process included the following research and engagement;

- Engagement sessions with the IRO Unit and business support colleagues

- Engagement session other related Service Managers
- Questionnaire to agencies attending case conferences
- Manager observations of 4 case conferences
- Feedback and insights from Regional IRO Manager Meetings and work around child centred reviews

9.12 The review established the following baseline strengths;

- *A well performing team with good oversight of children and their plans. IROs are experienced and tailor their approach to individual circumstances.*
- *Fluctuating levels of demand can create challenges around the allocation of work (IROs and business support). The unit recognise that, in part, this situation can be helped by further streamlining systems and processes.*
- *The vast majority of Child Protection Conferences are well attended with good agency participation. The Conference process has developed well in recent years and a current priority is achieving an earlier focus, in the meeting, on risk analysis and the multi agency development of the outline plan.*
- *The insights and analysis which IROs develop could be routinely collated and better communicated to the workforce and wider partnership, promoting learning through practice and child and family feedback.*

9.13 The Review also included feedback from Foster Carers about the Unit and highlighted a number of themes and priorities;

- *Foster Carers have different levels of understanding about the IRO role and statutory responsibilities.*
- *Foster carers value contact (visit or telephone discussion) from IROs prior to review meetings.*
- *Foster Carers support an approach to child and young person centred reviews. Some carers noted that they had observed recent improvements and others felt that meetings were still too focused on professionals and parents.*
- *Foster carers would like to see more young people consulted in advance of Review Meetings. Some carers identified the importance of practical things such as venue and invites to meetings. Foster carers were pleased to hear that IROs wanted to promote 'normality' and this theme can help structure subsequent discussions.*

- *Foster carers noted an improvement in the distribution of review records. The consensus, however, was that distribution still takes too long.*
- *All agreed that it would be important for IROs to routinely contribute to foster carer basic training so that new carers are well informed about the role. Equally, it would be helpful for IROs to produce a leaflet for foster carer explaining the role and sharing contact details.*

9.14 The Review also included feedback from the Service Manager for Fostering who noted:

“York IROs are child focused and conscientious colleagues who are always keen to be flexible in their role, ensuring that their skills and unique oversight of a child’s story are maximised. At times, this has included IROs visiting children to inform them about important decisions and on such occasions (although limited), IROs have recognised that their relationship with the child means that they are best placed to have the discussion and/or share the information”

9.15 Finally, the Review included feedback from a Service Manager responsible for one of Social Work teams who noted:

“York IROs present as having a holistic understanding of our individual young people and their individual strengths and needs, particularly those who are in care. This frequently comes across to me through my discussion with IROs and also via their written documentation”

9.16 The review of the Unit concluded there was a strong baseline from which to further improve the IRO service in York. It was noted that:

“the strengths of the unit are important strengths; an existing emphasis on the voice of the child, a skilled and experienced staff team which prioritises learning and already identifies the potential that the role can offer at a practice and strategic level”

9.17 As a result of the review, with its areas for development and positive feedback of areas of strength, the review proposed significant changes focused upon increasing the resilience and capacity of the Unit, establishing additional management capacity and improved coordination and alignment with other performance and quality

assurance related functions. The most significant changes for the purpose of this report include:

- The Unit will be structurally located within a new Quality Assurance Group alongside other quality assurance and performance management activities. The Unit will therefore be accountable to a newly established Group Manager providing strategic overview of related activities and linking in with the Head of Children’s Social Work Practice and other operational Group Managers;
- The Unit will include a new Service Manager post which will, for the first time, provide the unit with a full time dedicated manager providing oversight, challenge and support. This role will be critical in driving forward the Units’ performance and practice development work;
- The IRO unit will benefit from additional staffing, moving from three permanent full time equivalent posts to six full time permanent posts. This additional resource will provide greater resilience to what was previously a relatively small team with vulnerabilities to sickness absence, leave and spikes in demand. The additional staffing will however absorb the transfer of Child in Need cases and introduce independent review of them, promoting greater consistency for children along the whole safeguarding continuum;
- The Unit will for the first time accommodate and deliver the statutory review of Foster Carers and also undertake quality assurance of commissioned residential placements include an additional IRO post which will focus on

Seven: Prepare the Unit for transition onto the Mosaic case Management System

9.18 The Unit fully engaged and participated in the preparation and transition onto the Mosaic Case Management System. Two IRO ‘Champions’ supported the development of workflow, templates and processes to enable the Reviews for children and young people in care to be undertaken on the new system. The work was of high quality and the launch – on 21 March 2016 – was achieved successfully as a consequence of months of preparation.

10. Service Work Plan for 2016/17

10.1 The Service Work Plan for 2015/16 identifies a number of Actions for the next reporting period, categorised under three Strategic Aims:

- Achieving Structural Change

- Strengthening Professional Relationships
- Prioritising Quality Practice

The Work Plan is tabulated as follows:

Strategic Aims	Actions
Achieving Structural Change	1. Establish and embed the new management structure with Group Manager and Service Manager appointments
	2. Progress to successful conclusion the transition of IROs and assimilation of current CIN Planning and Reviewing Officers to the new Unit; including induction and whole-team development work
	3. Review key processes to establish how systematic and independent reviews of children and young people’s plans across the safeguarding continuum will be delivered, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Frequency of Reviews; b. The resolution of disputes process c. The Quality Assurance Framework
Strengthening Professional Relationships	1. Establish an improved balance between home, independent working and team working for IROs
	2. Establish a link worker IRO role for teams and services and use this role to strengthen professional relationships
	3. Develop a forward plan identifying IRO unit participation and engagement with key services and stakeholders, including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Carers • Show Me That I Matter • Regional Groups • Virtual Head Teacher for Children in Care • Health
	4. Implement a process for providing routine feedback to services and agencies, regarding the quality of service and agency practice, more specifically; feedback around how practice impacts on outcomes for children

	5. Introduce routine peer observation of practice by Service colleagues
Prioritising Quality Practice	1. Extend the practice of mid-point reviews to all cases involving children in care
	2. Prioritise developing systems and processes to improve the timely distribution of records following review meetings
	3. Develop a way of analysing cases that move up and down the continuum from Child in Need to Child Protection or Children in Care to establish practice learning around the application of thresholds
	4. Develop the Child Protection Conference model, researching evidenced based approaches consistent with relational practice. Consult on and implement and recommendations from this work.
	5. Review the IRO role and oversight for young people reaching 18 years, ensuring that Transition to Adulthood is well planned and supported for all cases, particularly for children with disabilities or complex needs
	6. Take forward the priorities identified through the Making York Home Project, identifying and promoting placements which offer opportunities for delegated authority to foster carers and other child-centred planning
	7. Review quality assurance arrangements, introducing peer observation and reviewing current arrangements for collating and using family feedback

11. Summary

11.1 At the time of writing, the Unit is on the cusp of significant change. Looking backwards, it made significant progress over the reporting period in delivering high quality, systematic and independent reviews of the care and care planning for children and young people in the care of the City of York Council. Looking forward, changes to the Unit offer the opportunity to meaningfully improve the experiences and outcomes

for looked after children within the City. The Unit can look forward with confidence to the next twelve months.

12. Recommendations to the Corporate Parenting Board

12.1 It is recommended that the City of York Council Corporate Parenting Panel consider the following:

1. Note the areas of positive performance referred to within the Annual Report, particularly evidence that the Unit has directly contributed to improving outcomes for children and young people in care;
2. Note and support the Unit's commitment to better deliver its statutory responsibilities to children and young people in care and their parents or carers, in particular increased consultation, participation and challenge;
3. Use the annual reporting requirement of the Unit to inform the ongoing work of the Corporate Parenting Panel in raising outcomes for the children and young people in the care of the City of York Council.

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