



## 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 the IRO Annual Report for 2013. The details of the underpinning statutory guidance and recommendations from the OFSTED Thematic Report *Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the challenge?* (2013) inform the structure and content of this report and are set out in the Annual IRO Report 2013. They will not be repeated here.
- 1.3 Finally, it is noted that 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.

## 2. Reporting Period

- 2.1 The previous full Annual IRO Report covered the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013. That report was followed by an addendum report covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. This brought the annual reporting cycle for the IRO report into line with the national reporting cycle for looked after children.
- 2.2 This report therefore covers the standard reporting period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015.

## 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 looked after by 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)*

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*

3.3 Furthermore, the *Handbook* commented upon how Local Authorities should facilitate IRO's to fulfil their statutory responsibilities by observing:

*The local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective review process (at para. 7.3)*

*The manager should ensure that the size of the caseloads enables each IRO to comply with primary legislation, the Regulations and relevant guidance in order to achieve the outcomes for every looked after child that a conscientious and caring parent would seek for their own children (at para. 7.9)*

*It is estimated that a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service, including the full range of functions set out in this handbook (at para. 7.15)*

3.4 The 2013 Annual IRO Report highlighted the 2012 case of *A and S v Lancs CC* [2012] EWHC 1689 (Fam) which raised fundamental questions about the IRO role and purpose. Whilst the court found a local authority's failings were primary failings in front line social work, of relevance the Judgment noted that a contributory factor was the inadequacy of the IRO system, which did not pick up on and remedy the primary problem. Significantly, the IRO was found to have independently breached the boys' rights under Articles 8.

3.5 In a more recent case in 2015 *Re X (Discharge of care order (1)) Re 2014 EWFC B217* the Court found that there was a failure by a Local Authority to implement a plan for the permanent placement for a child with autism. This appears to have been, at least in part, due to resource constraints. There was also a failure to provide therapeutic support once CAMHS

had assessed that the child did not meet their threshold criteria. The IRO in this case was explicitly criticised for "... failing to robustly manage the Local Authority's implementation of the Care Plan". The judgement made clear that it was the expectation of the Court that an IRO should appropriately escalate concerns and set remedial timescales even when a Local Authority's ability to implement its care plan was affected by matters outside its direct control. The judgment noted the *IRO Handbook* (2010) which clearly states:

*There will be times when the IRO may be advised that obstacles in the way of resolving the issue are outside or beyond the control of the local authority, for example in relation to staffing, interagency or resources issues. However, if these are impacting on the ability of the department to meet the needs of a child as identified in the child's care plan, the IRO should continue to escalate the issue. (at para. 6.5)*

3.6 Finally, in the Annual Report 2013, it was noted that Ofsted had published a thematic report in relation to an evaluation of the effectiveness of IRO's entitled *Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the challenge?* (2013). The recommendations of that Report (at pps. 6-7) are worth restating:

*Local authorities should:*

- *Take urgent action to implement in full the revised IRO guidance and ensure that:*
  - *IROs have the required skills, training, knowledge and time to undertake all elements of their role effectively, including ensuring that children's wishes and feelings properly influence the plans for their future*
  - *management oversight of IROs is sufficiently robust, which must include formal and rigorous challenge where there is delay in making permanent plans for their future; senior managers must assure themselves of the quality of the IRO service and manage its performance effectively; line managers must take prompt action to rectify poor IRO performance*
  - *an annual report is produced by the IRO service in line with statutory guidance, setting out the quality of corporate parenting and care for looked after children; it should be publicly accessible and include information on IRO caseloads*
- *seek regular feedback from children, young people, families, carers and professionals about the difference the IRO has made to the lives of the children with whom they work. This evidence should be collated by the local authority and used to drive improvement*
- *prioritise and implement strategies that enable the most vulnerable looked after children, such as children with additional communication needs and children living away from their home local authority, to participate as fully as possible in the planning and reviews of their care.*

## 4. The City of York Council IRO Service

- 4.1 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, from 01 June 2014, the Unit benefitted from a 1.5 FTE temporary uplift in capacity with a full-time Agency IRO being appointed and a part-time IRO appointed through the secondment of a Senior Practitioner from another service area. The Unit has also, during the reporting period, relied upon limited additional sessional hours (0.2 FTE) from a part-time Independent Reviewing Officer.
- 4.2 All six 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.
- 4.3 Five of the six 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.
- 4.4 All six 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.
- 4.5 All IRO's have access to independent legal advice upon request.
- 4.6 All IRO's are encouraged to participate in the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Practitioners Group for peer-support and sector-led improvement opportunities.
- 4.7 All IRO's access training opportunities. In May 2015 (just outside the reporting period) all six 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)
- 4.8 During the reporting period, management of the IRO's has continued on an interim basis to be provided by the Principal Advisor, a substantive post within Children's Social Care. The Principal Advisor is a qualified Social Worker registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council, is subject to regular Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks and is an experienced Children's Social Care safeguarding manager. The Principal Advisor provides oversight, professional advice and management support to each IRO, including monthly Supervision and Team Meetings and works to ensure the IRO's access training appropriate to need.

- 4.9 Whilst the Principal Advisor is part of the Children’s Social Care Management Group, this is a performance management and quality assurance role and does not involve operational management, the preparation of children’s care plans, the management of individual cases or resource allocation. Should there be any potential conflict in the Principal Advisor supporting an IRO in dispute with Children’s Social Care, provision is made for the Principal Advisor to ‘step-out’ of their Children’s Social Care line-management arrangement.
- 4.10 The Principal Advisor is an active member 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.
- 4.11 During the reporting period, the administrative support for the IRO’s has been subject to review and in common with other service areas, administrative staff are a pooled resource with a wide range of responsibilities.
- 4.12 During the reporting period, a new online Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for ‘Looked After Children’ was introduced. This was introduced from 01 June 2014 and replaced the previous ‘Monitoring Form’ which had been in use in the Authority for a number of years. The new QAF is completed by the IRO following the completion of a Review. The QAF provides data pertinent to the performance of the IRO Unit as well as wider performance of the Local Authority as Corporate Parent.
- 4.13 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 Interim Manager. His findings led, in November 2015, to the instigation of a Senior Manager review of the service This review is ongoing and it is anticipated will be completed in march 2016.

## 5. IRO Caseloads and Unit Performance

### Caseloads

- 5.1 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 looked after children, 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. This arrangement supports an aligned single planning and review process when a child is looked after and subject to a Child Protection Plan. The arrangement also supports the maintenance of safeguarding competences by the IRO’s. However, Chairing responsibilities are a very substantial additional task for the Unit.

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

	2014/15				2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Oct-Dec	Quarter 4 Jan-Mar			

LAC	223	217	209	197	222	243	256
CP	114	120	118	124	125	128	162
Total	337	337	327	321	371	345	418
Average	-	-	--	68	74	98	-

5.2 Table 1 shows case load by quarter for the reporting period and historical comparisons. The data confirms a reducing total Unit Caseload based upon decreasing numbers of looked after children. This is marginally offset by a slight increase in the Child Protection population. The Year End Average Caseload evidences a significant reduction, commensurate with the increase in the staffing of the Unit from 01 June 2014.

5.3 To contextualise the caseloads in Table 2, partial regional data has been made available through the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Managers Group. 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
<b>York</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Regional Average</b>	<b>76</b>

5.4 Table 3 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 Case Load of 68, returned below the indicative regional average of 76.

5.5 The Directorate Management Team is aware that the current caseloads are based upon the temporary uplift of 1.5FTE and that the long-term staffing of the Unit needs to be resolved.

## Number of Reviews

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

Total Unit Activity 2014/15 by Quarter					Historical			
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Oct-Dec	Quarter 4 Jan-Mar	2014/15	2013/14	2011/12	2010/11
LAC	154	146	174	145	<b>619</b>	660	861	783
CP	61	57	57	60	<b>235</b>	240	312	199
Total	215	203	231	205	<b>854</b>	900	1173	982

5.6 Within the reporting period, 2014-15 the Unit have chaired a total of 619 Looked After Reviews (compared with 660 in 2013-14) and a total of 235 Child Protection Conferences (compared with 240 in 2013-14). This relatively small reduction in Unit activity is commensurate with the overall reduction in the numbers of children and young people Looked After by City of York Council and the number of children and young people subject to Child Protection Plans within York.

### Timeliness of Reviews

5.7 Table 4 reports the percentage of looked after children who had **all** their reviews on time within the reporting period. The 2013 Annual report established for the Unit a 2014/15 target of 90%. This was achieved in the final quarter (Q4), however the overall performance within the reporting period of 88% fell just short of the target. Nevertheless, within the return period the Unit has recorded its highest performance for a number of years.

**Table 4:** Percentage of LAC Reviews held within timescales

Reviews within timescales by Quarter 2014/15					Historical Performance			
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Oct-Dec	Quarter 4 Jan-Mar	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
Reviews	88%	85%	88%	90%	<b>88%</b>	86%	75%	85%

### Participation in Reviews

**Table 5:** Method and Percentage Looked After Children Participating in their Review. Taken from the Quality Assessment Framework (Data for Q2, Q3 and Q4 only)

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

5.8 Within the reporting period 81% of children and young people in care contributed to the review of their care, with only 6% not contributing. The return is consistent with the 2013/14 return. Of those children and young people over the age of 4, just over half attended their Review and were facilitated to represent their own views and wishes. This level of

participation through attendance continues to be an area of concern to the Unit. As a consequence, in May 2015, the IRO staff group attended a Regional training event in which one of the key topics was the involvement of children in their own reviews. A presentation by the Sheffield Children’s Involvement Team of a model using a strengths-based approach, similar to the Strengthening Families Child Protection Conference Model provided some useful tools and ideas for the Unit to take forward as it strives to deliver greater levels of involvement and participation by children and young people in their reviews.

- 5.9 Of those children and young people who attended, there were very few who were facilitated to Chair or Co-Chaired their own Review. Whilst the *Handbook* does not expressly require Chairing or Co-Chairing by young people of their own Review, it does promote Chairing and Co-Chairing noting:

*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 5:** Number of Looked After Children Chairing or Co-Chairing their own Review:

<b>Number of Reviews Chaired and Co-Chaired by Young people</b>		
	2013/14	2014/15
Reviews	11	<b>24</b>

- 5.10 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 shows a welcome increase over the previous year.

### **Consultation Prior to Reviews**

- 5.11 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 6:** Percentage of children and young people seen and spoken to by the IRO prior to the Review

Percentage of Children seen and spoken to prior to Review		
	2013	2014/15
Seen	11%	45%
Not Seen	65%	25%
Not appropriate	2%	22%
Not necessary	-	7%
Not recorded	22%	0%

- 5.12 The Unit has been committed to improving its performance. In the Annual Report for 2013 an ambitious target of 50% was set. The return indicates that whilst significant improvement was made – commensurate with reduced caseloads – the Unit fell just short of its target. Accordingly, whilst there has been a marked improvement, the Unit is not complacent and recognises that further significant improvement in this area is needed.
- 5.13 Finally, it is worth acknowledging that the Annual Report 2013 made reference to the Unit actively considering the introduction of 'Viewpoint', a national web-based, child-focused interactive consultation tool which children and young people from the age of 4 to 18 can use to contribute to their Review. Pilot Funding was agreed. However, concurrent to the Unit's consideration of a 'stand alone tool', Children's Social Care embarked on commissioning a replacement of its entire case management system with a new system which included portal applications for direct consultation with service users. Accordingly, Viewpoint was not progressed and launched and the Unit awaits the implementation of the Mosaic Case Management System.

### Distribution of Review Records

- 5.14 The *Handbook* unambiguously requires that the record of the Review of a Looked After Child is distributed **within 20 working days of the completion of the Review**. This facilitates and enables all those involved in the care of the child or young person to be informed of the decisions made at Review in writing, with timescales and responsibilities clearly communicated. Accordingly, the Annual Report 2013 set a challenging target of 50% of records distributed in timescales. Regrettably, within the reporting period, this target has proved to be extremely challenging. Nonetheless, it is of note that there has been a significant improvement over the previous reporting period from only 9% within timescales to 26%. Indeed, in Q4 the figure returned was 39% of reviews. However, the performance of the Unit continues to be below that expected and represents an ongoing challenge.

**Table 7:** Percentage of Records distributed within 20 working days of Review

Percentage of Records Distributed within 20 Working Days					2014/15	2013/14
	Quarter 1 Apr-Jun	Quarter 2 Jul-Sep	Quarter 3 Jan-Mar	Quarter 4 Oct-Dec		
Within 20 Days	16%	32%	16%	39%	26%	9%
More than 20 days	84%	68%	84%	61%	74%	91%

## 6. Profile of Looked After Children in York

### Number of Looked After Children

**Table 8:** Number of Children Looked After (excluding Short Breaks)

Number of Looked After Children						Historical Performance			Comparators	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	Regional	National
Number LAC	223	217	209	197	<b>197</b>	222	243	256	491	452
No. per 10k	61	60	58	54	<b>54</b>	61	68	73	65	60

6.1 Within the reporting period, the number of children and young people looked after by the City of York Council has steadily decreased. At the end of Q4 (31 March 2015), the figure was 197. The numbers of looked after children in York are now lower than 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 are looked after. 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 is secured in a timely way. It is anticipated that over the next reporting period, the numbers of Looked After Children will stabilise around the current level.

### Gender of Looked After Children

**Table 9:** Number of Children Looked After by Gender

Number of Looked After Children						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
Number LAC	223	217	209	197	<b>197</b>	222	243	256
Male	120	111	109	101	<b>101</b>	121	132	147
Female	103	106	100	92	<b>92</b>	100	111	109

6.2 Within the reporting period, the numbers of male and female children and young people looked after by the City of York are broadly representative of the demography of York, with no notable over-representation.

### Ethnicity of Looked After Children

**Table 10:** Percentage of Looked After Children by Ethnicity (as at Year End (31.03.2015))

		2014/15	
Ethnicity		Number	Percentage
ABAN	Bangladeshi (Asian or Asian British)	1	0.5%
AOTH	Any other Asian or Asian British Bckgrnd	1	0.5%
BCRB	Black or Black British - Caribbean	1	0.5%

MOTH	Any other mixed background	1	0.5%
MAWS	White and Asian	4	2%
MWBC	White and Black Caribbean	1	0.5%
OOTH	Any other ethnic group	1	0.5%
WBRI	White British	187	95%
WIRI	White Irish	0	0%
WOTH	Any other White background	0	0%
		<b>197</b>	<b>100%</b>

6.3 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 Looked After Children

**Table 11:** Number of Children by Age at Period End

Looked After Children by Age						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
Under 1 yr	4	10	10	8	<b>8</b>	6	5	9
1-4 years	29	25	23	23	<b>23</b>	30	38	51
5-9 years	41	39	40	36	<b>36</b>	45	46	54
10-15 years	94	92	93	90	<b>90</b>	92	102	101
Over 16 yrs	55	51	43	36	<b>36</b>	49	52	41

6.4 Within the reporting period, there have been a number of changes in the age profile of looked after children. There was an increase in the number of babies in care during Q2 and Q3 of the period. It may be thought that this increase reflects improvements in assessment practice, earlier intervention and improved decision making for the most vulnerable group of children in the city. 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 looked after young people in the 10-15 years age group has remained stable. This is an age group where permanence options out of care are less likely. The reduction in those over 16 has been due to a number of factors including, young people returning home, care orders being discharged and a significant group of young people reaching 18 (at adulthood, their Looked After status lapses).

### Time in Care of Looked After Children

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

Number of LAC by Care length						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
Less than 6mths	24	26	34	25	<b>25</b>	27	20	40
6-12mths	16	20	15	22	<b>22</b>	11	17	38
1-2 years	15	18	22	19	<b>19</b>	24	57	42

2-4 years	65	60	51	41	<b>41</b>	61	65	70
More than 4 yrs	103	93	87	86	<b>86</b>	99	84	66

6.5 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 looked after by the City of York. This is likely to be a result greater focus on securing permanency by way of adoption, the reduction in the length of time for public law care proceedings and securing permanency by way of Special Guardianship under the Public Law Outline. There has been an increase in those in care for between 6-12 months.

## Legal Status of Looked After Children

**Table 13:** Legal Status of Looked After Children as Percentage of whole

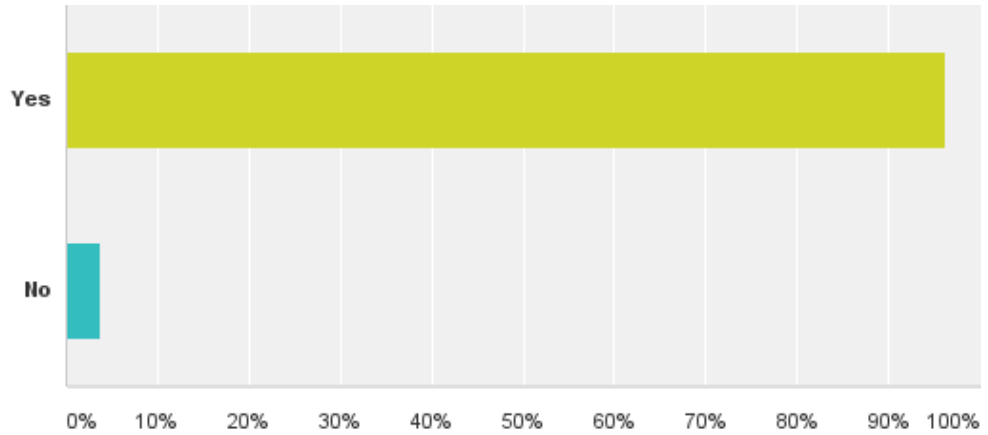
Percentage of LAC by Legal Status						Historical		Comparators	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	Region	National
Interim Care Orders	3%	5%	8%	11%	<b>11%</b>	6%	12%	23%	20%
Full Care orders	58%	56%	54%	54%	<b>54%</b>	57%	49%	44%	40%
Freed for Adoption	10%	11%	9%	6%	<b>6%</b>	12%	16%	14%	11%
Accomm. S.20	29%	28%	28%	29%	<b>29%</b>	25%	22%	18%	29%
YOT legal Statuses	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>	0%	0.4%	0%	0%
Detain CP in LA Acc.	0%	0.5%	1%	0%	<b>0%</b>	0.5%	1.0%	0%	0%

6.6 Within the reporting period, the number of children subject to full care orders has stabilised, having increased in the previous year. The increase in Full Care Orders is likely to have been as a result in the national drive by Family Courts to decrease the length of public law care proceedings, resulting in more Care Orders being granted when work to assess other permanent outcomes remains ongoing. The fact that this figure has stabilised rather than continued to increase may indicate that the work to achieve permanent outcomes out of care has progressed after care proceedings have concluded. Where this is the case, IRO's fulfil an important role in ensuring that the care planning progresses without delay and that the outcome secured is the most appropriate for the child.

6.7 There has been a reduction in the numbers of children subject to Placement Orders (Freed for Adoption) in the second half of the reporting period. This trend is likely to continue and 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. It is too soon to know if this is a long term trend.

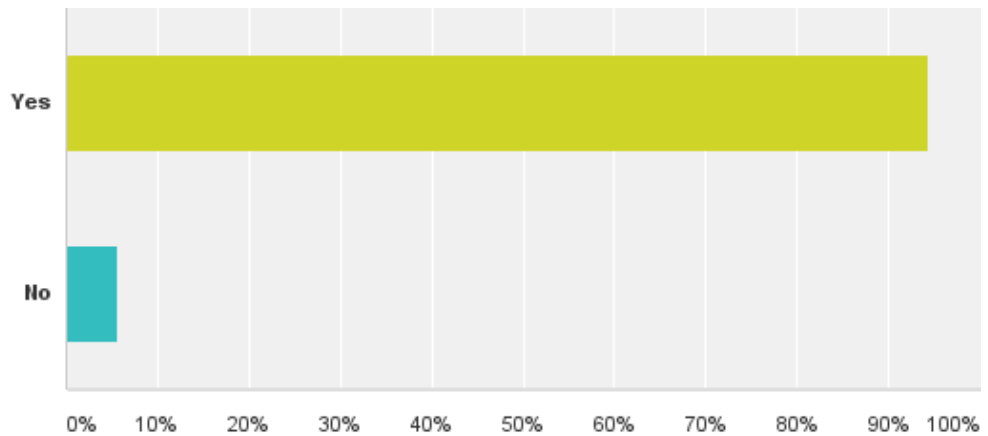
6.8 The IRO is responsible for ensuring the right permanence plan is in place for the child. This is reflected in the Quality Assurance Framework used by the Unit. Tables 14 and Table 15 below demonstrate that, in the IRO's opinion, in 97% of cases the current or proposed legal status of the child is appropriate and in 95% of cases the current or proposed placement for the child is meeting the child's needs. In the small minority of cases where the IRO disagrees with the Legal Status or Placement of a child, 4% and 6% respectively, the IRO will dispute the matter under the Local Dispute Resolution Process.

**Table 14:** Is the current or proposed legal status for the child appropriate?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	96.18%	378
No	3.82%	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>393</b>

**Table 15:** Is the current or proposed placement meeting the needs of the child?



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	94.39%	370
No	5.61%	22
<b>Total</b>		<b>392</b>

## Placement Stability of Looked After Children

**Table 16:** Percentage of LAC having 3 or more placement moves

Percentage of LAC with 3 or more Placement moves						Historical Performance		
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12
3+ Moves	2.2%	4.1%	9.1%	11.9%	<b>11.9%</b>	9.5%	14%	16%

- 6.9 It is noted that Table 16 is a cumulative return (Q4 represented the Year End aggregate). Accordingly, placement stability has decreased slightly since 2013/14, however is lower than the preceding years. 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.

## Placement Location of Looked After Children

**Table 17:** Number of Placements by Location of new Looked After Children

Placement Location of new LAC by Quarter						Historical	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
New Placements in LA	10	12	7	6	<b>35</b>	46	38
New Placements outside LA	6	7	14	2	<b>29</b>	16	16
New Placements +20miles	4	2	4	1	<b>11</b>	10	14

- 6.10 Within the reporting period, a much higher proportion of children who have started to be looked after have been placed outside of the authority than has previously been the case. This may reflect in part, the great success in York of the "Staying Put" initiative, whereby young people can remain with their carers beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, putting additional pressure on the need to recruit new carers within the City. 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. Within the context of reducing availability of placements in York, the stable number of placements made more than 20 miles away from York is in part a measure of the effectiveness of the unit in this regard.

## Health and Education of Looked After Children

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

Health and Education Activity by LAC by Quarter						Historical	
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13
Health and Dental Checks	60.7%	63.7%	56.8%	66%	<b>66%</b>	92.9%	82%
Under 5s Dev Checks	90.9%	85.7%	15.8%	92.9%	<b>92.9%</b>	82.1%	87%
Average SDQ Score	15.9	16.2	13	13.1	<b>13.1</b>	15.9	14.8
Up-to-date PEP in place	84.1%	80.3%	73.9%	70.1%	<b>70.1%</b>	83.7%	53%

- 6.11 Health and education are two key dimensions within the developmental needs of children and young people looked after by 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 Looked After Children are getting the help and support they need. Table 18 demonstrates that there continue to be significant challenges in this area.

## 7. IRO impact on the outcomes for children and young people

### Dispute Resolution and Escalation

- 7.1 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 looked after 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 looked after child. 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 looked after child, 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.
- 7.2 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 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.

### 7.3 Six examples of the Unit making a real difference to the lives and outcomes of looked after Children and young people in 2014/15

#### Case Example 1:

*J is a young woman, aged 17 years, with significant and complex mental health needs. Her mental health needs included a history of self harm and an emerging pattern of foster placements breaking down. J had also experienced a number of hospital admissions relating to her mental health. The IRO worked very closely with J and her social worker to identify the type of placement J needed. J was fully involved in planning and this included a number of meetings and visits to potential placements. J describes being happy in her placement and risk taking behaviour has significantly reduced.*

#### Case Example 2:

*IRO achieved the reinstatement of direct contact between mother and her daughter following a divergence of professional opinion as to whether this was appropriate. IRO facilitated a number of mediatory meetings that established regular indirect contact as a building block to reinstatement of direct contact with the support of all parties*

#### Case Example 3:

*K is a young man, aged 14 years, who struggled to settle and form attachments within a foster placement. The IRO facilitated discussion and planning which explored residential options for K. K previously described a residential placement as a 'sign of failure'. The move to a residential placement proved to be very successful for K and he now recognises that he copes better with the balance between what the placement and staff team can offer and his relationship with his family. The IRO for K spent time with him discussing placement options to ensure that his voice was central to the planning and review process.*

#### Case Example 4:

*The IRO identified that there was no allocated Social Worker and this impacted G because there was a lack of progress in implementing Decisions from the Review, particularly around CAMHS input. The IRO raised this with the Service Manager and a Worker was allocated and clear actions were agreed, including the need to secure timely CAMHS involvement.*

#### Case Example 5:

*When a new Social Worker and new Service Manager increased the level of contact for S with their father and began to consider promoting staying contact, the IRO intervened. The IRO provided continuity of knowledge of the original assessments and Care Plan and through collaborative discussions clarified more appropriate and proportionate contact arrangements.*

#### Case Example 6:

*Following representations by Police that a young person who was placed in their area 'needed to move', Children's Social Care planned a move without a full consideration of the significant progress made by the young person in her placement in engaging with education in her Year 11 studies. The IRO, through informal resolution processes, stayed the move and triggered a more comprehensive needs-led consideration of the necessity of a move. The young person was also signposted by the IRO to advocacy enabling the young person's voice in care planning for her to be clearly heard and considered.*



## Quality Assurance of Corporate Parenting

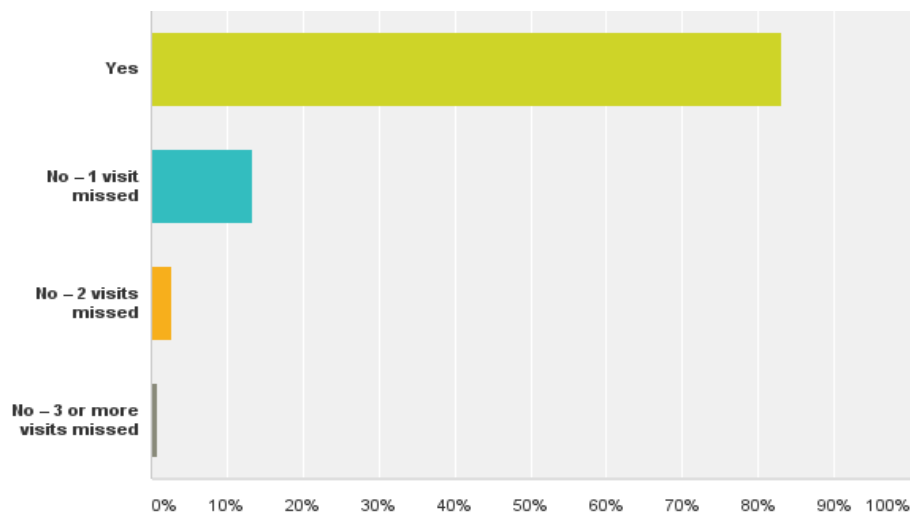
- 7.4 As well as Chairing Looked After Reviews and monitoring individual cases on an ongoing basis, the *Handbook* notes that:

*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.

- 7.5 For example, the Council has statutory responsibilities to visit children and young people within specific timescales, depending upon the type and duration of placement. The Quality Assurance Framework prompts the IRO to record an answer to the following question: Has the Social Worker visited the child in placement within statutory timescales? The results can then be aggregated as follows.

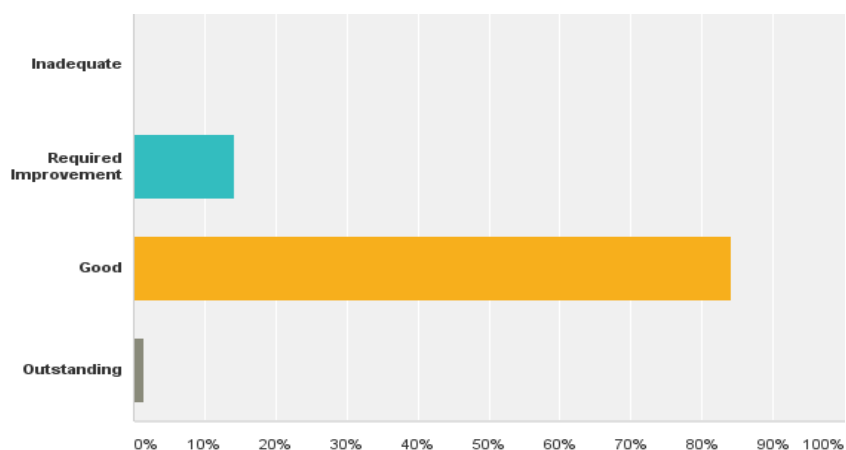
**Table 19:** QAF Data for Question 25: Has the Social Worker visited the child in placement within statutory timescales?



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	83.12% 330
No – 1 visit missed	13.35% 53
No – 2 visits missed	2.77% 11
No – 3 or more visits missed	0.76% 3
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>

- 7.6 Accordingly, , the QAF Survey is a useful tool to enable aggregate performance data to be produced which is then used by the Unit to challenge Children’s Social Care about any deficits in the quality of corporate parenting and care planning.
- 7.7 Additionally, the QAF Survey also 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?

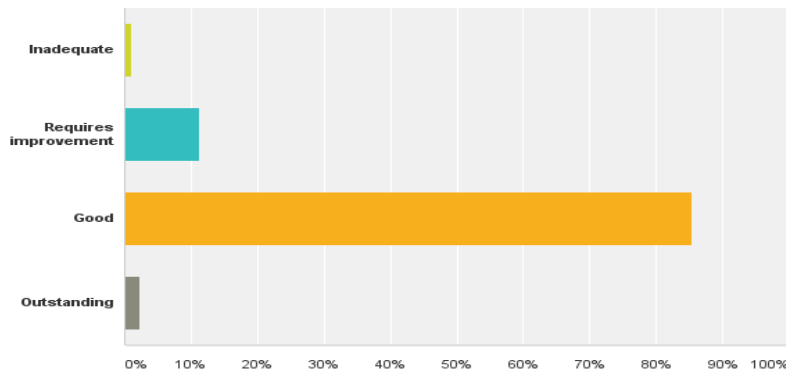


Answer Choices	Responses
Inadequate	0.25% 1
Required Improvement	14.11% 56
Good	84.13% 334
Outstanding	1.51% 6
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>

- 7.8 Accordingly, the Corporate Parenting was judged to be inadequate in only a single case, whereas in 86% of cases, the Corporate Parenting was judged as either good or outstanding.
- 7.9 Given the introduction of the QAF, historical comparisons are difficult – the preceding ‘Monitoring Form’ had a more limited question set. However, it is noted that in 2013, 65% of

Care Plans were recorded as being judged as being of ‘good quality’. The aggregate QAF data suggests that some significant improvement in the quality of Care Planning has taken place.

**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	1.01% 4
Requires improvement	11.36% 45
Good	85.35% 338
Outstanding	2.27% 9
<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>

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

## Referrals for Advocacy

7.11 The IRO Unit has an established and close working relationship with the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service. The Service offers advocacy to children and young people looked after and, if necessary, will support them through the City of York Corporate Complaints procedure.

7.12 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 City of York Looked After Children in 2014/15 were as follows:

- 13% related to contact issues
- 11% related to unhappiness about their Social Worker
- 13% related to placement issues
- 11% related to disagreement about their overall Care Plan
- 9% related to accessing support / services
- 45% related to support to express wishes and feeling in decision making process
- 2% related to advocacy for other issues

- 7.13 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.
- 7.14 The Unit greatly values the contribution of the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service to outcomes for children and young people. An example of achieving improved outcomes for children and young people is described below:

*B is aged 8 years and lived with foster carers. A referral was made for advocacy by the IRO following a Looked After Child Review and as a result of some concerns regarding how well B had settled into her foster placement. An initial visit was made by the Advocate at the foster placement and subsequent visits at school, at B's request. Over a few weeks, B began to talk about her wishes and feelings, and stated that she wanted to move to a different placement and see her mother and sister. Advocacy helped B explore her wishes and feelings. B also spoke about her foster placement and agreed for the feedback to be shared with her social worker. Through advocacy, B was able to communicate clearly what she wanted from a placement and a planned move to an alternative placement progressed. The child's advocate, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer worked closely to ensure that planning and preparation were prioritised for B and all are confident that the new placement is better suited to meet B's long term needs. Contact with B's mother commenced again.*

## **8. Update on the Five Service Priorities established for 2014-15**

- 8.1 In the Annual Report 2013, five Service Priorities were identified for the 2014/15 period. These five priorities related to identified deficits in service delivery by the Unit at the time. The five 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.**

In November 2014 an Addendum to the Annual Report 2013 provided a 'mid-way update' on progress made in the six months since the Service Improvement Plan had commenced. This Section provides an overview of progress made by the Service on the five identified priorities during the whole of the reporting period from 01 April 2014 to 31 March 2015.

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

8.2 From 01 June 2014, the Unit increased its capacity from 4.0 FTE (3 full-time Independent Reviewing Officers and 1 FTE provision through sessional staff) to 4.8 FTE (an additional part-time (0.5 FTE) seconded Advanced Social Work Practitioner IRO, a full-time temporary Agency IRO and some limited sessional hours from an additional IRO). The increase in establishment had a significant positive impact upon caseloads during the remainder of the reporting period.

**Table 22:** Average Allocated Caseloads on 31 March 2014 and 31 March 2015

	31/03/14	31/03/15
Average Caseload	93	68

The reduction in caseloads was identified as foundational to the Unit contributing to improved outcomes for children and young people. The Service Improvement Plan asserted that evidence of the positive impact of reduced caseloads would be found in improvements in a range of performance indicators used by the Unit. Evidence of improvement is shown by:

- **More LAC reviews held in timescale**
- **More children Chaired their own or part of their Review**
- **More children consulted prior to a Review**
- **More children and young people attended their Review**
- **More reports distributed in time**
- **More local disputes instigated and resolved**
- **More referrals of children and young people for Advocacy**

8.3 However, perhaps the biggest contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people was the introduction by the Unit within the reporting period of a Quality Assurance Framework for children and young people looked after. This Framework gave effect to the 'enhanced role' of the IRO by requiring them to systematically review the care and care planning of a child or young person by reference to 20 'quality indicators' derived from the statutory guidance within the IRO Handbook . The indicators are as follows:

Planning for the Review

1. The child was consulted by the Social Worker about who s/he wished to attend the meeting, about the time and date and venue of the meeting and about the agenda

Consultation Prior to the Review

2. The child was seen and spoken to by the IRO in private prior to the Review
3. The child was made aware of their right to an Advocate by the IRO
4. All relevant parties were consulted prior to the Review

Information considered at the Review

5. A report from the Social Worker was available for consideration 3 days before the Review
6. An up-to-date PEP was available for consideration at the Review
7. An up-to-date Health Assessment was available for consideration at the Review

Timing of the Review

8. The Review was held within timescales

#### Participation in the Review

9. The child participated in the Review and may be Chaired or Co-Chaired part of their Review
10. The views of all relevant people were considered at the Review

#### The Care Plan

11. The child has a current and up-to-date Care Plan
12. From the second Review, there is a plan for permanence for the child
13. The current or proposed legal status for the child is appropriate
14. The current or proposed placement meets the needs of the child
15. The Care Plan demonstrates that the child's views and wishes have been taken into account

#### Monitoring the Case on an Ongoing basis

16. The Social Worker informed the IRO of all significant changes or events in the child's life since the last Review
17. The Social Worker visited the child in placement within statutory timescales
18. All the Decisions that were agreed at the last Review (if still relevant) were implemented within the timescales set for them
19. There is no drift and/or delay in the care planning for the child
20. There is no drift and/or delay in achieving permanency for the child

- 8.4 This 'QA Framework' enables the Unit to provide consistent challenge by the Unit where there is an identified deficit in the care and care planning for a child or young person. Additionally, as the IRO completes a 'QA Survey' on every case using Survey Monkey, as well as case-specific challenge, a service-wide picture of the quality of corporate parenting and care planning can be established.

### **Two: Change business processes to better support the IRO Role**

- 8.5 Within the reporting period, business processes in use by the Unit have been reviewed and where necessary improved. New documentation such as the Social Work Report to Review, IRO Record of Review and the Decisions Record of Review have been introduced.
- 8.6 Within the reporting period, the Unit has also actively contributed to the Case Management System Replacement Project by attending workshops to map processes and ensure that the new system – Mosaic – will support effective practice by the Unit.
- 8.7 Within the reporting period there has been no resolution of the somewhat cumbersome administrative arrangements for the Unit. The future of the arrangements will be incorporated within a review of the Unit by a Senior Manager building on a review undertaken by the Interim Unit manager.

### **Three: Increase the participation of children and young people in their Reviews**

- 8.8 The third service priority was in relation to increasing the participation of children and young people in their Reviews. An ambitious target of increasing the attendance at Review

by 10% from a 2013/14 figure of 42.5% was established. This target has not been met. The data for participation in 2014/15 is as follows:

		<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
<b>Code</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
PN1	Attends or speaks for him/herself	40%	41%
PN2	Attends, views rep. by Advocate	2%	0.5%
PN3	Attends, views conveyed non-verbally	0%	2.5%
PN4	Attends but does not convey views	0.5%	1%
		<b>42.5%</b>	<b>45%</b>

- 8.9 There is clearly more work to be done. Work to make reviews more child-centred, adopting and developing elements of the ‘Sheffield Child Centred Approach to Child Care Reviews’ will need to progress.

#### **Four: Ensure appropriate independent challenge to the City of York as Corporate Parent to improve outcomes for children and young people**

- 8.10 This fourth service priority has benefitted from the introduction of the Quality Assurance Framework for Children Looked After. Using Survey Monkey it is now possible to report on whether, in the independent judgment of the IRO, care and care planning are appropriate to the needs of children and young people looked after. The Quality Assurance Framework is linked to a structured decision making tool about when an IRO should and should not use the Local Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) to seek a resolution of a concern. This has led to a greater consistency and use of the DRP and more timely resolution to concerns about the care and care planning for children and young people.

- 8.11 An amendment to the Survey Monkey question set now aggregates when the Dispute Resolution is used and in relation to what areas of concern. This data is not available within the reporting period. However, by way of indication of the future dataset, the following concerns will be reported upon:

- Resources – inappropriate placement
- Resources – contact arrangements unsuitable/inadequate
- Resources – inadequate health provision
- Resources – inadequate education provision
- Resources – inadequate emotional wellbeing provision
- Care Planning – inadequate risk management of CSE
- Care Planning – inadequate risk management of missing/absence
- Care Planning – Family Finding (Adoption)
- Care Planning – Achieving Legal Status change
- Care Planning – Planning for Permanence

- Care Planning – Securing a permanent placement
- Practice - LACR Decisions not implemented/complied with
- Practice - Insufficient evidence of child’s voice
- Practice – No/delay in allocating Social Worker
- Practice - Statutory Visits not within timescales
- Practice - No/poor quality assessment of need
- Practice – No/poor quality Placement Plan
- Practice – No/poor quality Care Plan
- Practice – No/poor quality Pathway Plan
- Practice – No/poor quality Health Assessment
- Practice – No/poor quality PEP
- Practice – No/poor quality Life Story Work
- Practice – Inadequate preparation for LACR

### **Five: See more children and young people**

8.13 The Annual Report of 2013 asserted the primacy of the Service Priority to see more children prior to their Review. The Unit set itself an ambitious target of seeing 50% of children and young people where it was deemed necessary and appropriate to see and consult with them prior to a Review. The Unit fell just short of this target but returns a significant improvement.

<b>Percentage of Children seen and spoken to prior to Review</b>		
	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Seen	11%	<b>45%</b>
Not Seen	65%	<b>25%</b>
Not appropriate	2%	<b>22%</b>
Not necessary	-	<b>7%</b>
Not recorded	22%	<b>0%</b>

8.14 The Unit remains aware that a significant number of Looked After Children are still not seen when they should be. Meaningful face-to-face consultation can make a direct contribution to attendance and participation at the Review itself and of course direct work is foundational to safeguarding practice. More can clearly be done and more needs to be done.

## **9. Unit Work Plan for 2015/16**

9.1 The Unit Work Plan for 2015/16 adopts the five priorities for 2014/15. These are as follows:

- (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**



The adoption of the five previous priorities is not in anyway an acknowledgement that the Unit failed to deliver within 2014/15, merely that it remains committed to delivering further on the ambitious Work Plan first established in 2013.

9.2 Additionally, the Unit Work Plan for 2015/16 includes the following additional priorities:

**(6) Conclude the Review of the Unit**

In November 2015, the Senior Manager – Peer Challenge and Support commenced a review of the IRO Unit’s overall structure, level of resourcing, management arrangements and reporting arrangements within the wider Authority building on the work undertaken by the Interim Manager. This review is ongoing and it is anticipated will be completed in March 2016.

**(7) Prepare the Unit for transition onto the Mosaic case Management System**

In March 2016, the Unit along with a number of statutory safeguarding services for children will transition from the current case management system onto Mosaic. The Unit must be prepared to deliver services in new and innovative ways whilst ensuring there is no disruption to the timely review of care and care planning for children and young people in care.

## **10. Summary**

10.1 The Unit has 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 Looked After by City of York Council. Increased capacity has contributed to more children and young people being seen, more timely reports and better scrutiny of the quality of care and care planning. The Unit continues to work with some of the most vulnerable children and young people in York and does so within a very regulated and prescribed statutory framework. The Unit has readopted the five Service Priorities for the year ahead as these remain ambitious priorities which, if delivered, will enable the Unit to significantly contribute to improving the experiences and outcomes for looked after children within the City.

## **11. Recommendations to the Corporate Parenting Board**

11.1 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 through the early resolution of issues with Children's Social Care;

2. Note and support the Unit's commitment to better deliver its statutory responsibilities to children and young people 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 Looked After by the City of York Council.

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