

**Independent Reviewing Service****Summary of the Key issues identified in 2017-18 IRO Annual Report**

1. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) have a statutory responsibility to report to senior managers and the Corporate Parenting Board regarding the performance of the local authority with regards their statutory requirements as corporate parent to the Children and Young People in Care (CYPIC) of the local authority.
2. IROs in York have a unique role in that in addition to overseeing the care planning and reviews for Children and Young People in Care, they also chair Children in Need reviews and Child Protection Conferences , so benefit from a holistic oversight of interventions before and after most care episodes. This means IROs in York are particularly well placed to identify examples of best practice, areas for development and to assist with helping to ensure that care episodes are avoided, or ended as soon as possible, wherever this is agreed to be appropriate.
3. The overall number and profile of Children and Young People in Care in York has remained fairly static over the last 5 years, (198 on 31 March 2018) in contrast with upward National / Regional trends. This is attributed to the impact of improved early help offer delivered via the Local Area Teams and Immediate Response Team and early promotion of Family Group Conference. *(The trend remains fairly static with just a slight rise to 207 CYPIC by 31 Dec 2018)*
4. A higher percentage of CYPIC are subject to statutory court order than in previous years (86% on 31 March 2018) evidencing that care is being effectively avoided for all but the most vulnerable children, for whom there was clear evidence of abuse or neglect. *(This has slightly risen again such that 89% CYPIC were subject to court order on 31 Dec 2018)*

5. Whilst the overall number of children in care has remained relatively constant, the number of children subject to protection plans in York and the complexity and vulnerability of children receiving preventative supports coordinated through Child in Need plans has increased requiring more frequent oversight and review, which has impacted on social work and IRO work loads.
6. In 2017-18 IROs continued to highlight issues in some cases regarding overdue visits and late completion of statutory assessments, plans and reports. A new quality alert and revised resolution process have been implemented to improve the tracking, escalation and quick resolution of any such issues. It is too soon yet to say what impact this has had on practice, but IROs continue to raise very few issues for formal resolution as generally senior managers are already proactively aware of and addressing any significant practice or resource issues that are identified.
7. IRO's have a duty to ensure that any care planning decisions are based on a current and robust assessment of the child's needs and that the child's wishes and feelings are properly heard and considered. The number of children and young people being directly consulted by IROs (34% in 2017-18) and directly participating in their review meeting (33% in 2017-18) remain key areas for improvement. The IRO team has been involved in developing a range of participation tools to help promote and facilitate improved participation, but opportunity to significantly raise participation levels and progress other service development initiatives has been affected by competing workload demands.
8. IROs continue to report that children in care generally have the right plan, placement, legal status and a good quality of corporate parenting.

In 2017-18 IROs reported that in the IRO's opinion

- 98% CYPIC were subject to appropriate legal status
- 98% were in placements that met their assessed needs
- 83% quality of care plan was good or outstanding
- 83% quality of corporate parenting was good or outstanding

*Performance to date in 2018-19 shows a further improvement to 99%, 99%, 89% and 90% on 31 Dec 2018 respectively.*

9. Changes of care placements arise for a number of reasons, but generally need to be avoided as all children benefit from stability. In 2017-18 there

was an increase in the number of placement disruptions, with 12% CYPIC experiencing 3 or more changes of placement, and a reduction to 59% of the children who had been in care for over 2 ½ years being in the same placement for at least 2 years. The need to reduce the number of short term placements and unplanned moves remains a key area for development that is being addressed by the Placement Service Review (*performance was 12% and 58% respectively on 31 Dec 2018*)

10. There was a slight reduction in the number of CYC fostering households during 2017-18 and a rise in the use of none CYC carers /residential provision with 41% CYPIC being placed outside of the city boundary. The need to increase the number and availability of local care placements is being addressed by the ongoing Placements Service Review.
11. IROs in York continue to be ambitious about the need to improve the level and impact of children's direct participation in their care planning and are promoting use of increased range of materials to assist with this, IROs are also currently piloting use of an integrated care planning / assessment report to help improve the quality of planning and piloting the use of new Quality Alert Monitors and revised Resolution Process to better track and evidence resolution of any practice issues that are raised.

## **Recommendations**

12. The report is for information only.
13. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board consider the following:
  - Note the areas of positive performance referred to within the Annual Report and identified areas for improvement;
  - 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;
  - Use the annual reporting requirement of the Unit to inform the ongoing work of the Corporate Parenting Board in raising outcomes for the children and young people in the care of the City of York Council. 2018-19 report will be available from July 2019

Reason: To keep the Board updated on the IRO Service

## **Council Plan**

14. The work of the IRO service is in line with the Council Plan as follows:

- a prosperous city for all – striving to ensure that children in care have the best opportunities for future prosperity as citizens
- a focus on frontline services – ensuring that children in care have access to good services, provision and support
- a council that listens to residents – engaging with the voice of children in care.

## **Implications**

15. The implications are:

- **Financial** - none
- **Human Resources (HR)** - none
- **Equalities** - none
- **Legal** - none
- **Crime and Disorder** - none
- **Information Technology (IT)** - none
- **Property** - none
- **Risk Management** – none

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Director of Children Education and Communities

**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 07.03.19

**Wards Affected:**

**All**



**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## Annexes

Annex A – IRO Annual Report 2017-18

## Abbreviations

CYPIC - Children and Young People in Care

CYC – City of York Council

IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer