

Executive Summary

This report is prepared in accordance with Statutory Requirements to inform the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Leaders about the council's performance in respect of children in the care of the local authority.

Since 2016 IROs in York have uniquely overseen the planning and review for children subject to protection plans and child in need plans as well as children in care. Service wide review of these arrangements undertaken during Quarter 4 concluded that this extended remit was not serving children well as IROs capacity to robustly achieve their full statutory responsibility to children in care was compromised by the competing demands of children subject to safeguarding concerns. Whilst IROs were working hard to maintain the timeliness and effectiveness of meetings their availability to consult very young or resistant children and young people and to effectively oversee implementation of plans between review meetings was compromised. During this period there were ongoing issues regarding staff retention across children's services which meant that some children were experiencing multiple changes of social worker and / or front line manager and a consequent loss of momentum in intervention. IROs were undertaking a high volume of informal resolutions to address the impact of this , however the Independent Reviewing Service was not effective in escalating concerns about this amid a changing senior management team. A new senior management team is now in place and has effectively established a multi agency improvement board to oversee implementation of a robust service wide improvement plan. As part of this, responsibility for oversight of children in need arrangements transferred on 1st June 2019 to newly configured social work teams to reduce IRO caseloads and enable IROs to better focus on children in care and subject to safeguarding arrangements

During the reporting period there has been a small rise in the number of children in care in York , which is less than the national and the regional trend – ongoing robust service review and independent scrutiny and audit is being undertaken to better understand the extent to which this is a positive indicator of effective early intervention or consequence of drift in care planning for some children. Of the children that are in care over half are living in stable placements that are consistent with their permanence plan. 94% of the children in care who participated in the 2019 Tell Us Survey reported that they felt safe and happy where they were living.

Sufficiency of placements in York continues to be a significant issue resulting in some children needing to be placed away from York and / or in short term bridging placements, until the right permanence placement can be secured for them. Plans have been confirmed to increase the recruitment of new foster carers and to commission additional regulated residential provision within York to help address this gap.

Priorities for the coming year

1. Reassign oversight of the children subject to Child in Need plans to enable IROs to focus on their statutory responsibilities to Children in Care and subject to protection plans.
2. Embed adherence to clear practice standards across children's services with an accountable quality assurance framework to quickly identify and address any potential drift in planning and achieve expedient and optimal outcomes for children
3. Re-launch and embed the IRO resolution process and reporting arrangements to increase the impact of IRO intervention in quickly identifying, escalating and addressing any emergent issues of concern.
4. Raise placement stability by increasing sufficiency of local placement provision and reduce use of

out of area and independent care provision.

5. Build in social work sufficiency to reduce reliance on agency workers
6. Embed a proactive process of customer led feedback and evaluation of services

Introduction and Legal Context

1.1 The roles and responsibilities of the IRO are defined by:

- The Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (ref section 7)
- The Children Act 1989
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Children Act 2004
- The Children and Young People's Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- IRO Handbook 2010 (implemented 1 April 2011)

This includes legal requirement for the IRO Manager to produce an Annual Report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board to provide information about the structure and performance of the IRO Service, information about the delivery of services and outcomes achieved for children in care in York and recommendations regarding identified areas for development.

1.2 The IRO's statutory responsibilities are to;

- monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent and alert senior manager's to any issues of concern / report on good practice
- ensure that children's care plans are based on a current and informed assessment, and provide an effective response to the child's individual needs and aspirations ;
- identify and address any gaps in the assessment process or provision of service;
- provide a safeguard to prevent 'drift' in care planning and the delivery of services;
- ensure that the child's voice, wishes and feelings are reflected in the plan and that the child fully understands the implications of any changes to their care plan
- ensure that the child understands how an advocate could assist them and their entitlement to one

1.3 To help achieve this

- All Looked after Children have a named IRO who, as far as possible, remains a consistent figure during the child's journey through care.
- The IRO chairs a meeting to review the child's care plan within 28 days, then within 3 months and then at least every 6 months
- As part of each review the IRO consults with the child, making sure that the child understands what is happening to them, can make a genuine contribution to plans, fully understands the implications of any changes and understands his / her legal entitlement to legal advice or independent advocate and how these could help them .
- The IRO provides challenge and support to social workers, their managers and partner agencies to ensure the best life chances for the child in care
- The IRO service oversees the formulation and implementation of care plans, tracking progress against desired outcomes, identifying any potential for drift and effective means for helping to challenge and address such issues, including, a Formal Resolution Process, the ability to convey concerns to CAF/CASS and access to independent legal advice

2 Profile of the IRO Service

2.1 The Independent Reviewing Service is sited within the Quality Assurance Group in Children's Social Care, based at West Offices alongside the CSC management team, the social work teams and Children's

Rights and Advocacy Service. This co location of services has significantly assisted with improved working together across the teams.

2.3 The IRO service consists of:

- 1 FTE Service Manager who reports to the Quality Assurance Group Manager – independent of CSC service delivery
- 6 FTE IROs undertaking the CYPIC, CIN and CP reviews, (made up of 5 full time workers and 2 part time workers)
- 1 FTE IRO (Placements) undertaking the foster carer's annual reviews, inspection of CYC's registered provision (The Glen) and quality assurance of externally commissioned residential care provision (two part time workers job share this post)

2.4 Within the Independent Reviewing Service there are 10 long serving and experienced workers covering the 8 FTE posts, all of whom are employed on permanent contracts. The longest serving member of the unit joined the council in 1992 and the most recent appointment was January 2018. Most children have had the same IRO for at least two years with a significant number retaining the same IRO for over 3 years. Maintaining this consistent relationship is recognised as very important by children, carers and IROs alike. 68% of the children and young people who participated in York's 2019 U Matter* survey of care experienced young people stated that they know who their IRO is – our aspiration is to increase this to 100%, and to this end the service has been working with the Speak Up Service to develop a review toolkit that includes a revised IRO profile, pledge and welcome pack.

2.5 Of the 10 workers within the IRO Service Unit 8 are female and two are males. 9 of the Service members are White British and one is White/ Swedish.

2.6 All IROs have at least 5 years post-qualifying experience as a social worker and are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council. 5 members of the unit have previously held manager roles in social work services, including looked after children and leaving care services, safeguarding, quality assurance, fostering and residential services. The other IROs have extensive experience working in referral and assessment, adoption and fostering services.

2.7 IROs and their manager access a diverse range of training appropriate to their development needs and the specific areas of knowledge required by the needs of the young people on their caseloads and the IROs and their manager also participate in the regional IRO practitioner's group and the regional IRO manager's group. Additional focused training is being commissioned for the IROs as part of the service review and improvement plan.

2.8 All members of the team have monthly supervision and contribute to monthly team meeting and peer audits. IROs have also contributed to thematic service wide audits. Learning arising from these audits is reviewed in individual supervision and the collective data arising from the audits is shared and discussed with the team as part of team meetings.

2.9 The Independent Reviewing Service has contributed to practice improvement activity across children's services in a number of ways including delivery of multi agency child protection training delivered on behalf of CYSCB, induction sessions for students and newly appointed social workers, participation in the Speak Up task group, Fostering Gateway meeting and active promotion of Family Group Conference, Advocacy Service and use of graded care profile and practice educator role for a social work student.

2.10 The IRO perspective is represented by the manager in a number of forums including Legal Gateway and permanence tracking Meetings, Permanence Panel, Children in Care partnership meetings, and guest attendance at York Association of Foster Carer's support group. The IRO manager has also provided interim

line management cover for the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) dealing with allegations against professionals.

3. IRO Caseloads and outputs

3.1 During the reporting period work with Children and Young People in Care constituted a third of the overall work undertaken by York’s Independent Reviewing Service, as uniquely since 2016 IROs in York have also overseen the planning and reviews for children subject to Child Protection Plans and Child in Need plans. IROs in York have thus been well placed to oversee implementation of early intervention support to help avoid the need for children to come into care, and to also oversee the implementation of support services to help support children when their care episode ends, however this broad remit has also meant that the IRO’s capacity to deliver a high quality service to children in care has been compromised by rising caseload and competing workload demands .

Table 1 : IRO caseload

Snap shot at period end	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	Q1 2018-19	Q2 2018-19	Q3 2018-19	Q4 2018-19
Children subject to CPP	171	167	161	179	182	193	161
Children and YP in Care	205	197	208	207	206	207	208
CIN allocated to IRO	220	199	211	190	186	195	211
Average caseload size	91*	94	97	96	96	99	97

*In Sept 2016 the number of IROs reduced from 7.5 to 6 FTE as part of the CSC restructure

3.2 The IRO Handbook 2010 (Statutory Guidance) states that in order to carry out the IRO responsibilities as laid out in the Care Planning Regulations 2010 a full time IRO should have a caseload of between 50 and 70 looked after children. In York IROs have an average of 30 Children in Care each with no single IRO overseeing more than 50 Children in Care, however the total number of allocated children has varied between 80 and 100 children (FTE) as IROs were also allocated children subject to Child Protection and Child in Need plans. The IRO task is less time intensive for children subject to child protection and child in need plans as review of these plans are usually undertaken as whole family meetings rather than the individualised format of most CYPIC reviews and IROs do not have statutory requirements to undertake the same level of pre-meeting consultation / and post review oversight, however the high caseloads and competing casework tasks have impacted on IROs’ capacity to undertake their statutory functions for children in care, as there has been a real challenge between the need to prioritise scrutiny of safeguarding arrangements versus the requirement to further develop the level and effectiveness of IRO engagement with children and young people in care, with an inherent risk that neither are done as effectively as they need to be.

3.3 Concern about the potential impact of this on outcomes for all children was such that during Quarter 4 the new senior management team commissioned a whole service review that specifically considered whether current IRO caseloads, remit and status were consistent with statutory requirements and best delivery of services for all children. This review concluded that IROs require equitable status with frontline managers to help exert appropriate gravitas and influence and that the broad remit was detracting from IRO’s statutory duty to children in care, as there was insufficient opportunity for IRO’s to undertake qualitative consultation with the very young or hard to reach children or availability to maintain effective oversight of care planning between reviews. The outcome of this review has been the decision that from May 2019 IROs in York will cease to oversee interventions for children subject to

Child in Need Plans to focus attention on children in care and subject to safeguarding arrangements. This development is very welcomed by the unit.

4. CYPIC Profile and trends

4.1 The number of children in care in York has remained fairly static across the year, whilst the number of children subject to protection plans has been more variable, peaking in quarter 3 at a time when there was a high level of staff turnover in the social work teams and across all tiers of the CSC front line and senior management group.

Table 2. Children in Care / subject to Protection Plans April 2017 to March 2019

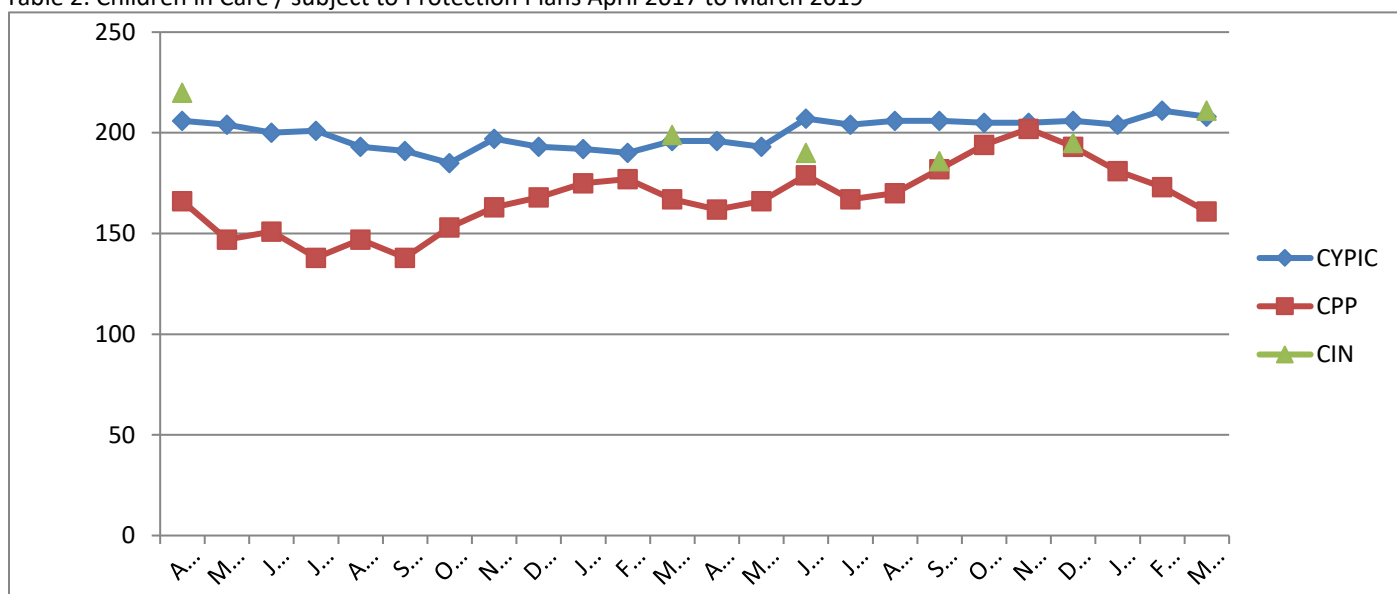


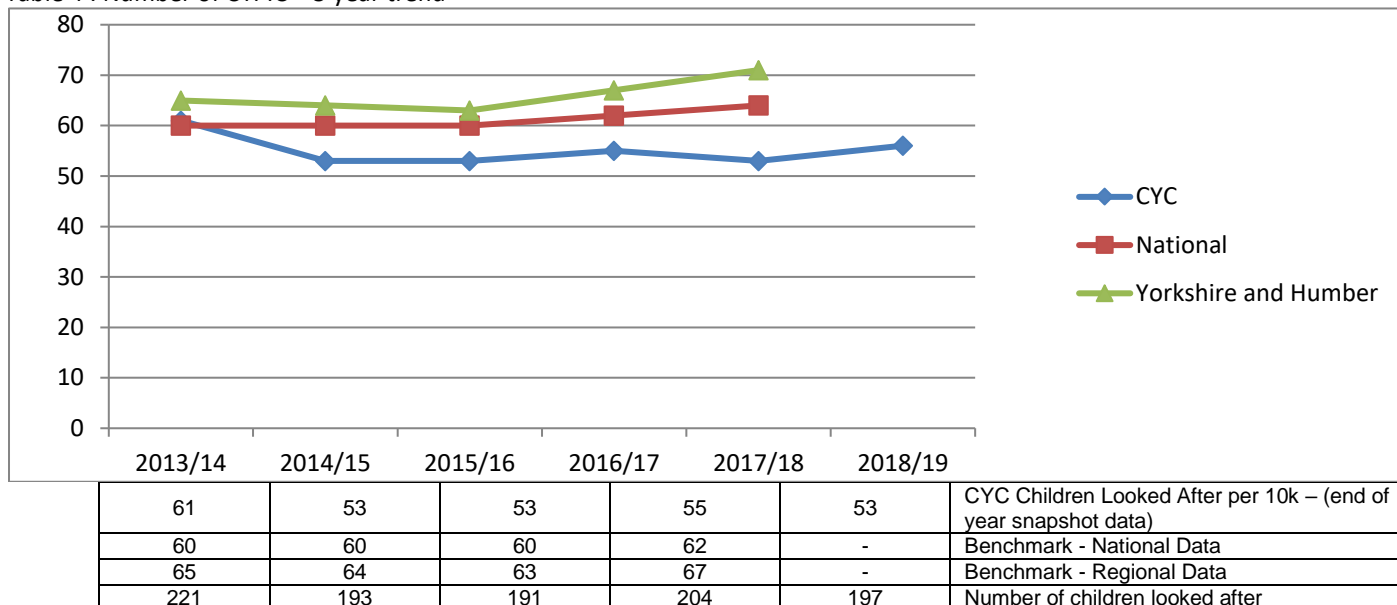
Table 3 CP and CYPIC numbers by month

	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M
LAC	206	204	200	201	193	191	185	197	193	192	190	196	196	194	207	204	206	206	205	205	206	204	211	208
CPP	166	147	151	138	147	138	153	163	168	175	177	167	162	166	179	167	170	182	194	202	193	181	173	161

4.2 Difficulty recruiting to staff vacancies during this period resulted in an unprecedented level of temporary agency cover in the social work teams (many of whom who left after short periods). This meant that some children experienced a succession of different workers and consequent loss of momentum in their planning and intervention. The need to prioritise scrutiny of the safeguarding arrangements inevitably compromised IROs availability to maintain robust oversight of the implementation of care plans between reviews and their capacity to undertake qualitative consultation and planning, particularly with any younger, resistant or ‘harder to reach’ children and young people in care.

4.3 Throughout this period the static number of looked after children in York remained below Regional and National comparators – previously this had been regarded as an indicator of the positive impact of effective early intervention and support services achieved via the Immediate Response Team, Family Group Conferencing and Local Area Teams. Whilst this was still a positive factor for some children it is also recognised that there was some delay for some children in care planning decisions being robustly progressed. This has now been addressed by the introduction of very clear practice expectations, weekly scrutiny of alternate legal gateway and legal tracking meetings and much more robust permanency case tracking, escalation processes and external scrutiny of partner agencies and executive members.

Table 4 : Number of CYPIC – 5 year trend



61	53	53	55	53	CYC Children Looked After per 10k – (end of year snapshot data)
60	60	60	62	-	Benchmark - National Data
65	64	63	67	-	Benchmark - Regional Data
221	193	191	204	197	Number of children looked after

4.4 The IRO service is working hard with Children’s Services to help identify and expedite the planning for any children for whom there are concerns about potential drift, delay or poor planning and the IROs are contributing to the permanence, legal tracking and gateway meetings to help ensure that the right children are in care at the right time and that care plans for permanence are achieved without avoidable drift.

4.5 54 of the 70 children who came into care during the year (77%) did so as a consequence of concerns about them being at risk of abuse or neglect. The planned reconfiguration of the social work and children in need teams is set to further improve the focus on quick step up and step down between support services and safeguarding interventions to ensure that early help and edge of care support services are targeted at the right children to help divert the need for children to come into care.

Table 5 Reason for care episode starting

Reason for care episode starting	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Total - (YTD)	64	73	84	64	70
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Abuse or neglect - (YTD)	42	51	42	28	54 ↑
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Child's disability - (YTD)	3	1	1	1	0
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Parents illness or disability - (YTD)	5	3	10	12	1
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Family in acute stress - (YTD)	8	8	13	3	4
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Family dysfunction - (YTD)	1	4	4	11	5
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Socially unacceptable behaviour - (YTD)	2	2	7	0	0
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Low income - (YTD)	0	0	0	0	0
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Absent parenting - (YTD)	3	0	6	6	5
CLA Starters, excluding Short Term Breaks - Cases other than CIN - (YTD)	0	4	1	1	0

Profile of all children in care (5 year trend)

4.6 The overall profile of children and young people in care in York has been broadly consistent across the last 5 years with little variation in the gender and just a small increase in those who are not White / British. This reflects the changing demographics in the wider population of York and a small number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (currently 4). This change is not matched by the ethnic profile of the substantive staff or foster carers within CYC, who currently continue to be almost exclusively White British, however increased use of agency social workers and managers has increased ethnic diversity amongst the work force.

Table 6: Number of CYPIC by Ethnicity

ETHNICITY	White British	Other white	Asian	Black African	Black and white	Other mixed	Other ethnic
snapshot on 31.3.19	90%	0.4%	2%	0.5%	0.5%	5%	1.4%

Table 7: Number of CYPIC by Gender

CYPIC by GENDER excluding Short Term Breaks	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
% of Children Looked After (CLA), - Male - (Snapshot)	52.30%	51.30%	52.90%	54.30%	54.33%
% of Children Looked After (CLA), - Female - (Snapshot)	47.70%	48.70%	47.10%	45.70%	45.67%

4.7 There has been a rise in the number of infants under the age of 1 coming into care, which has been in part caused by an unusually high number of babies being relinquished for adoption via York's student population. It is recommended that consideration is given to whether more preventative work needs to be undertaken with local universities and colleges to help increase the availability of free / emergency contraception to help reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies.

Table 8: Number of CYPIC by age

CYPIC by AGE , excluding Short Term Breaks	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Number of Children Looked After (CLA) - Under 1 - (Snapshot)	8	13	11	10	19
Number of Children Looked After (CLA), - 1-4 years - (Snapshot)	23	19	24	27	30
Number of Children Looked After (CLA), - 5-9 years - (Snapshot)	36	37	35	33	40
Number of Children Looked After (CLA), - 10-15 years - (Snapshot)	90	78	82	85	76
Number of Children Looked After (CLA), - 16+ years - (Snapshot)	36	44	52	42	43

4.7 The number of children in care subject to either full or interim care orders has marginally increased in the last year whilst the number of children in care due to S20 voluntary agreement has reduced, this reflects the national trend following judicial and national scrutiny about use of S20. The number of children subject to Placement Orders (Freed for Adoption) has risen fairly significantly this year partly as a

result of an increase in relinquished babies, but also indicating effective early intervention by which permanence plans are secured for children at an earlier age.

CYPIC by LEGAL STATUS	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Children in care under legal code - Interim care order - (Snapshot)	22	30	20	30	28
Children in care under legal code - Full care order - (Snapshot)	105	106	126	132	144
Children in care under legal code - Freed for Adoption or Placement Order - (Snapshot)	11	9	5	5	13
Children in care under legal code - Accommodated under S20 - (Snapshot)	55	44	52	29	22
Children in care under legal code - Youth Justice legal statuses - (Snapshot)	0	0	1	1	0
Children in care under legal code - Detained on CP grounds in LA accommodation - (Snapshot)	2	2	0	0	0

4.8 The IROs work proactively with the social work teams to ensure the right permanence plan, and legal status is in place for every child and young person in care. The Quality Assurance Monitor completed by IROs following every child care review confirms that IROs continue to be satisfied that almost all children have an appropriate legal status / placement. Where concerns have been identified they have generally reflected the increased focus on converting some voluntary S20 arrangements for children for whom a return to their family's care is not in the C/YP best interests.

Table 9: QAF Data: Is the current or proposed legal status / placement appropriate for the child ?

Appropriateness of legal status	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18
In the IRO's view is the current / proposed legal status is NOT appropriate	1.04%	2.8%	2.24%	1.2%
In the IRO's view the current / proposed placement does NOT fully meet child's assessed needs	3.7%	2.3%	2.07%	2.2%

4.9 IROs confirm that in their view all but 2% of York's children in care are in placements that meet their needs, however there is a small cohort of young men who are placed in unsuitable semi supported accommodation outside of York. The lack of a sufficient range of available local placements is being addressed by the current residential service review and in the interim IROs are maintaining a high level of additional scrutiny regarding these arrangements and reporting weekly to the director on their wellbeing and progress.

4.10 Of the 210 children who were looked after on 31st March 117 (56%) were living in what is intended to be their long term placement consistent with their permanence plan - ie placed with parents, prospective adoptive parents, Kinship foster carers, confirmed long term foster carers or living semi independently. Of the 93 not yet living in a confirmed permanence placement (residential provision, secure, YOI, hospital and short term placement with kinship carers or foster carers), 26 (28%) were subject to ongoing proceedings (interim care order or placement order) 16 (17%) were subject to s20 accommodation and 54 (59%) were subject to care orders, and so should ideally be placed in a confirmed long term placement - a significant number of these are placed with connected carers or other foster carers in placements that could potentially convert to permanent placements if return to parents is fully ruled out. (eg. Some parents are part way through substance rehabilitation and need to demonstrate sustained or unsuccessful abstinence before the child's final permanence plan can be confirmed). Work is required in respect of some children to better

understand what the barriers are to these children and carers committing to a confirmed long term placement. A common theme is often carers' reluctance to surrender their status and recompense as foster carers to become special guardians. A more robust Special Guardianship support package would potentially help reduce some of this resistance.

4.11 Of the 20 children placed with parents 10 had been living back home for over 12 months – It is recognised that this ongoing care status is costly and potentially intrusive as it impacts on right to private family life and self determinance, and as such IRO's drive ongoing and pro-active consideration about whether the time is yet right to seek revocation of the care order for these children.

Table 10. Placement type – snapshot of all placements on 31.3.19

Children in permanence placements			Children not yet in permanence placement		
Placed for adoption	5	2.3%	Secure unit	1	0.4%
Placed with parents	20	9.5%	YOI	1	0.4%
Kinship carers – long term	25	11.9%	NHS hospital trust	1	0.4%
Foster carers- long term	62	29.5%	Reg. children's home	11	5.2%
Living semi independently	7	3.3%	Unregulated residential	4	1.9%
			Short term kinship care	23	10.9%
			Short term foster care	50	25.8%

4.12 A significant number of children continue to experience multiple changes of placement. Some of these moves are very positive, either undertaken at the young person's request or because they are moving to a permanent home in accordance with their permanence plan, however a number of placements also arise because they have had to have a series of short term / emergency placements before a longer term or more suitable bridging placement can be secured. Current sufficiency issues are such that an increasing number of children have had to be placed a distance away from York. This separation from family, friends and local networks can sometimes be part of a positive protection plan, but where it isn't the distance from local connections and professional supports can increase the likelihood of further placement disruption. Senior Managers and the executive recognise the need for local placement sufficiency to be increased and have invested money in raising local provision, in accordance with the recommendations of a recent placement review.

Table 11 ; Placement stability

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017-18	2018 -19
% of CYPIC having 3 or more moves of placement	11.9%	8.9%	7.4%	11.7%	12.2%
% of the CYPIC looked after for at least 2.5 years who've lived in the same placement at least 2 years, or whose adoptive and previous placement lasted at least 2 years	58.3 %	63.6%	66.83%	58.8%	56.5%

4.13 To help support these children the permanence team and fostering service have developed an effective RAG rating system to help identify and address any emergent placement difficulties, whereby there is a clear protocol and expectation about the Supervising Social Worker consulting the IRO at first sign of any emergent placement difficulties so that consideration can be given to convening an early review to consider additional support arrangements and / or need for a positively planned and supported move. As part of this development IROs are to take on the chairing of a more robust regime of placement disruption meetings to help identify and learn the lessons about how best to support these placements and avoid disruptions.

4.14 Feedback from children in care continues to confirm that the majority of children consider themselves to be in the right place for them. In the 2019 U Matter survey for York's children in care and care leavers 94% (49) of young people reported to feel safe and happy where they were living, 76% (44) of young

people said if they had ever been unhappy about a placement, they were able to talk to their social worker or carers about this. 93% (52) of the young people in care felt that they have received the help and support they need to keep in touch with their family and 87% (47) stated that they had the support that they needed to keep in touch with their friends, however the IRO service and or children's advocacy service have also assisted some young people in raising complaint / issue regarding their experiences in some care homes – and their wish to be permitted to return to York (bail conditions prohibit this for some) .

Profile of children leaving care

4.15 The majority of care episodes in York continue to end positively as part of a successful permanence plan, with the biggest cohort being children and / young people being supported to return / move to the care of parents or relatives, (18), children being adopted (16) or being made subject to Special Guardianship Order (3). Sadly one child with severe disabilities died as a consequence of complex health issues.

Table 12 : Reason care episode ended

REASON CARE ENDED	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
CLA Ceased, - Total - (YTD)	89	65	74	73	57
CLA Ceased, - Adopted (All) - (YTD)	16	3	9	10	8
CLA Ceased - Adopted (Application unopposed) - (YTD)	9	3	7	7	6
CLA Ceased, s - Adopted (consent dispensed with by court) - (YTD)	7	0	2	3	2
CLA Ceased, - Left care to live with parents, relatives, or other person with no parental responsibility - (YTD)	5	9	3	4	3
CLA Ceased Accommodation on remand ended - (YTD)	1	0	4	1	0
CLA Ceased, s - Age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over and support not required - (YTD)	0	1	2	0	1
CLA Ceased, - Died - (YTD)	0	0	0	0	1
CLA Ceased, - Care taken over by another LA in the UK - (YTD)	0	0	2	0	0
CLA Ceased, - Returned home with parents/relatives etc - (YTD)	3	1	-	-	-
CLA Ceased, - Returned home with parents/relatives etc as part of their agreed care plan - (YTD)	9	16	15	8	11
CLA Ceased, - returned home with parents/relatives etc other than part of their agreed care plan (and not SGO, RO or CAO) - (YTD)	4	2	7	6	4
CLA Ceased, - Residence order or child arrangement order granted - (YTD)	6	1	0	3	3
CLA Ceased, - SGO made to former foster carers - (YTD)	9	1	6	7	-
CLA Ceased, - SGO made to former foster carer who was a relative or friend - (YTD) (New for 2018/19)	-	-	-	-	3

CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - SGO made to other carers - (YTD)	3	5	1	5	-
CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - Moved into independent living (supportive) - (YTD)	14	2	5	9	19
CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - Moved into independent living (non supportive) - (YTD)	2	0	1	3	0
CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - Sentenced to custody - (YTD)	1	0	3	1	0
CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - Ceased for any other reason - (YTD)	13	20	13	12	4
CLA Ceased, excluding Short Term Breaks - Transferred to Adult Services residential care - (YTD)	3	1	1	4	0

4.16 94% of care leavers aged between 17 and 21 were deemed to be in suitable accommodation and 75% were in employment or training, both considerably higher rates than national and regional comparators.

Table 13: Suitability of accommodation for care leavers

	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
% of care leavers in suitable accommodation aged 17-21 (19-21 until 2016/2017) - (Snapshot)	95.00%	92.00%	97.44%	91.00%	94.25%
Benchmark - National Data	81.00%	83.00%	84.00%	-	-
Benchmark - Regional Data	86.00%	85.00%	86.00%	-	-
Benchmark - Comparator Data	83.20%	84.80%	84.75%	-	-

Table 14 : Number of Care Leavers aged 17+ tears in employment or training

	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
% of care leavers in employment, education or training aged 17-21 (19-21 until 2016/2017) - (Snapshot)	57.50%	68.00%	75.64%	71.00%	73.56%
Benchmark - National Data	48.00%	49.00%	50.00%	-	-
Benchmark - Regional Data	53.00%	52.00%	50.00%	-	-
Benchmark - Comparator Data	49.20%	49.50%	52.00%	-	-

5. The review process.

5.1 Despite the pressures that the IROs have experienced during the year performance in relation to timeliness of meetings has significantly improved since the dip that was associated with the 2016 restructure .

Table 15 : Timeliness of Reviews

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
% of children looked after cases which were reviewed within required timescales - (Rolling 12 Months)	90%	85%	67%	95%	94.1%

% of children looked after cases which were reviewed within required timescales - (Rolling 12 Months)	2018-19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	94.15%	90.76%	93.40%	94.97%	94.15%

Table 16. Number of meetings chaired

	2016-17 total	2017-18 total	2018-19 total	April-June 2018	July-Sept 2018	Oct-Dec 2018	Jan-March 2019
CYPIC Reviews	553	580	572	148	139	166	119
CP Conf	321	314	360	89	89	103	79
CIN reviews	474*	271	417	103	96	103	115
Total	1,348	1165	1349	341	328	377	333

5.2 A key responsibility for IROs is to ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are known and are influential in formulating the care plan. IROs must also establish whether the child knows their own rights and entitlements in law, for example that they can make a complaint, have an advocate or apply to court under S8 of the Children Act .

5.3 It has been a key priority for the service to increase the level and effectiveness of IRO engagement with children and young people, however despite the teams' enthusiasm and commitment to better engaging with and promoting direct participation of children and young people in their care planning, no tangible improvement has been made to the number of young people being effectively consulted by IROs, or directly participating in their care planning.

Table 17 : IRO consultations

Percentage of Children separately visited and consulted prior to Review	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	45%	35%	34.5%	34%	33%	32%	35%	27%	38%

5.4 IROs report that only 1% children and young people don't have their views represented in the meeting at all, however currently only 32% are choosing to actually attend and directly contribute with 39% either having their views represented by a third party or via written report / consultation record.

Table 18 : CYPIC participation in their reviews

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Child under 4 at time of Review	15%	13%	18%	17.4%	19.4%	25.5%
Attends or speaks for him/herself	40%	41%	38%	39.5%	36.7%	32.6%
Attends, views rep. by Advocate	2%	0.5%	1%	1.3%	.8%	0.1%
Attends, views given non-verbally	0%	2.5%	0.3%	0.6%	1.0%	0.52%
Doesn't attend but briefs advocate	7%	11.5%	15%	10%	10.6%	10.6%
Does not attend but conveys views	32.5%	24.5%	23%	21.3%	24.6%	28.8%
Does not attend or convey views	3%	6%	4%	9.5%	6.3%	1.04%

5.4 The IRO Service is very determined that this must change, and this has been one of the primary drivers in the decision for IROs to cease overseeing Child in Need plans. The reduced caseloads will significantly

increase IRO’s ability to spend time meaningfully consulting children and helping to promote their voice and influence in the plans that are being made with and for them. It is our intention to try to get 80% of those aged over 4 years to attend their meeting.

5.5 Building on the work that has been undertaken by the IROs with the Speak Up Youth group to develop a new participation toolkit for child care reviews, the IROs have been instrumental in initiating a new Children’s Champion task force, working with representatives from every team across the directorate to further review, update and embed an improved range of consultation and evaluation tools, processes and forum including safeguarding processes.

5.5 A key IRO function is to identify issues and trends in services provided to CYPIC, and report these to senior managers and elected members. IROs do this by routinely completing monitoring data after every review, and reporting on the issues that are being raised by IROs and addressed through informal & formal disputes. This data is readily available to managers as a live report and as part of the improved quality assurance framework a weekly bulletin monthly scorecard and quarterly analysis of this data will be shared with the management group and quarterly service report will be produced for strategic partnership.

5.6 IRO’s evidence their monitoring of the progress of plans between reviews by conducting a brief “mid-way check” between reviews, an evidenced dialogue between IRO and social worker to ensure that care planning is on track. IROs also demonstrate their “footprint” on a case by making a record of their intervention and oversight on the children’s records. By actively monitoring progress in this way IROs are able to identify and address potential drift and it becomes less likely the IRO is faced with any unexpected developments on cases.

5.7 In York IROs continue to report that the placement, legal status, care plan and quality of corporate parenting are good for the vast majority of children , with the expectation that formal resolution activity is promptly initiated to address any shortfalls. Ongoing training is being provided to IRO’s to ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of what good looks like and quick identification and escalation of any deviation from this. New practice expectations have been produced for the full directorate to help embed these expectations.

Table 19 : Quality of care plan and corporate parenting

Quality of care plan in IROs view	IRO rating	2015/16 total	2016/17 total	2017/18 total	2018.19	Q1 2018	Q2 2018	Q3 2018	Q4 2019
	Outstanding		1.4%	1.8%	1.2%	1%	1%	1%	-
Good		89%	80%	81.6%	88%	84%	88%	93%	86%
Req Improv		9%	18%	12.6%	30%	14%	9%	4%	3%
Not recorded		0.2%	0%	5.5%	1%	-	1%	1%	2%

Table 20 : IRO Resolution Activity

See annex A for details of the issues raised

5.8 Where IROs raise concerns they generally tend to be practice issues, relating to poor quality or out dated Education Plans, Care Plans, Health Assessments and Placement Plans . The most common issues arising from child care reviews tend to be concerns about the quality of the social workers report / updated assessment, and concerns about the quality of the child’s written care plan, placement plan or delegation of parental responsibility . Of concern there has also been persistent concern across the year about the timeliness and recording of some statutory visits to children in care– such issues have continued to be particularly prevalent where there has been a high turn over in allocated social worker - particularly in the safeguarding social work teams.

5.9 Competing workload demands within the social work teams is such that there is sometimes some delay in identified issues being completed even after the social work team have acknowledged and agreed to address the shortfall. Improved reporting tools and cycles are being developed to help promote improved tracking and responsiveness to issues raised at an informal level, to help disseminate learning and avoid issues needing to be escalated through the formal resolution process

5.10. An action arising from the recent all service review is the decision to launch revised practice expectations across the directorate to help drive consistently good practice, compliant with best practice models and statutory requirements – the IROs will be pivotal in helping to embed and promote adherence to these.

5.11 IROs have good professional relationships with children’s social work teams. Where issues or differences of opinion exist, IROs will always seek to resolve the matter informally with the social worker or the social worker’s manager. Co location of the IROs with the social work teams facilitates prompt identification and resolution of most issues. This approach supports York’s relationship based approach in which the IROs employ a solution–focussed, collaborative approach to prevent issues escalating into a formal dispute, and most key performance indicators evidence practice improvements since the preceding year.

5.12 The IRO Unit are co located and maintain 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. Advocates continue to support CYPIC with issues similar to those identified by the IROs. IRO’s were responsible for 4% of the referrals made to the advocacy service this year, and have helped to promote many of the referrals made to the service by social workers and foster carers.

Table 20 ; Issues that the advocacy service has supported CYPIC with.

Support to have voice heard in decision making	16 (23%)
Placement issues	23 (32%)
Contact issues	11 (15%)
Other	9 (13%)
Unhappiness with social work service	7 (10%)
Education	3 (4%)
Access to support/services	2 (3%)
Total	71 (100%)

In Summary

Based on the data arising from IRO consultations with young people, Quality Assurance Monitoring and referrals to the advocacy service key issues to be addressed in the coming year include:

1. The need to maintain manageable IRO caseloads to enable statutory compliance and expedient and robust service development
2. Sufficiency of local placement provision is currently impacting on placement stability and social work workload. In addition to the plans to commission new placement provision within York it also continues to be a priority to recruit, train and appropriately support a larger and more diverse pool of local authority foster carers to reduce the use of costly out of area and independent care provision.

3. Some children continue to experience multiple changes of social workers and interim cover by different agency and duty social workers as a consequence of increased social work sickness and recruitment issues. Significant investment is being made within children's social care to improve recruitment, training, support and retention via use of a range of live learning and consultant agencies, Frontline Program and development of a social work academy in partnership with York University to embed a well resourced and supported post graduate employment scheme for newly qualified social workers.
4. Staff retention and competing workload demands are impacting on quality and timeliness of completion of some social work assessments, reports and key statutory processes. There is a need to ensure that all workers are aware of and adhere to required practice standards at all times, and that IROs have effective and expedient mechanisms to quickly and effectively escalate any non compliance and contribute to further development of best practice models. The escalation process is to be relaunched, supported by improved reporting tools and cycle.
5. Competing caseload demands are similarly impacting on the time that workers are spending with children and young people to properly consult and engage them in planning for their own futures. Priority focus needs to be shifted back to this direct work being seen and understood as the most critical and important aspect of both the social work and the IRO task.

Sarah Olorenshaw
Service Manager Independent Reviewing Service
Report dated August 2019

Appendix
Annex 1 - IRO QA data arising from Child in Care Reviews
Annex 2 - IRO service plan 2019-20