

SAFE WELL PROSPEROUS CONNECTED

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS ANNUAL REPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN April 2021 – March 2022

Status	Date	By Whom
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Last Updated		
Review Date		

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INTRODUCTION

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

PROFILE OF NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE CHILDREN'S INDEPENDENT REVIEW

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

2.4 The Independent Reviewing Officers sit within North Lincolnshire Children’s Independent Review alongside Child Protection Conference Chairs and the Local Authority Designated Officer. The IRO team is supported by six administrative staff who support all functions of North Lincolnshire Children’s Independent Review.

2.5 The IRO offer in North Lincolnshire consists of



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

2.7 The Independent Reviewing Officers and their manager are all female and of White British ethnicity. In the most recently reported 2011 census more than 92% of North Lincolnshire’s population belonged to the White British ethnic group and 7.2% was identified as belonging to minority ethnic communities. These minority ethnic communities included people from established Asian/Asian British communities and included ‘new communities’ (migrant workers) to the area including

Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, Portuguese and Somali communities. The team continues to further enhance their knowledge in respect of minority ethnic communities and have access to translators, translation services and expert advice when needed to ensure children, young people and families’ needs in terms of language, diversity and equality are fully considered during reviewing. It is difficult to get accurate figures on disability as many people with impairments do not consider themselves to be disabled. In the last census 19 percent of residents identified as having day to day activities being limited either a little or lot (due to impairment or health condition.) From local government statistics approximately 6% of residents are blue badge holders. The IRO team does not incorporate a disabled worker; however, an IRO works specifically alongside Children’s Disability to ensure the needs of Children in Care with a disability are met.

The results of the 2021 Census are not yet published to understand the changing population within North Lincolnshire.

- 2.8 The IRO management team are integral to a number of panels, forums and planning groups, in which the IRO perspective is valued as part of the oversight process alongside that of children’s social work. These include the Preventing Exclusion from Education group, MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation), Missing Children Meeting, Holding On panel, UASC Forum, Harmful Sexual Behaviour panel and MARS Line Of Sight meetings, Pathway Plan Oversight Meeting, Multi Agency Looked after Partnership, Independent Visitors Liaison Meetings, You Say Who & Reunification and the Emotional Wellbeing Meeting.
- 2.9 The North Lincolnshire IRO provision is represented at the Yorkshire and Humberside Regional IRO Managers forums and Fostering IRO forum.

QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN AND THE IRO OFFER

3.1 During 2021-2022:

- 520 Looked after and Adoption Reviews have been chaired during the year.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Reviews held	634	617	520
Review over timescales	1	0	0
% reviews held on time	99.8%	100%	100%

- 100 % of all reviews were held within timescales, reflecting long-term strong performance in this area.
- 3.2 Over the past two years the numbers of children in care has decreased, from 231 at the end of March 2020, to 207 at the end of March 2021 to 192 at the end of March 2022. The children in care population is at its lowest level since before the end of 2015/16, which reflects North Lincolnshire's One Family Approach ambition for children to be in their schools and in their communities. North Lincolnshire have reduced the number of children in external foster care and residential provision enabling them to remain connected to their local support networks and community.
- 3.3 During 2021/22, the children entering care figures have reduced with 63 episodes (62 children) entering care, this is a small decrease on last year's performance where there were 64 episodes of children entering care.
- 17 (27.4%) children entered care on an Interim Care Order; this is the same as last year and lower than the 37% in England and 47% for Statistical Neighbours during 2020/21.
 - 29 (46.8%) entered care subject to section 20, a decrease from 38 (61%) in 2020/21 and in-line with the 48% in England and 43% in Statistical Neighbours during 2020/21.
 - 1 child entered care with police powers of protection in 2020/21 but this increased to 13 children in 2021/22. Of the 13, 6 have since left care and the remaining 7 are now subject to Interim Care Orders.
 - 4 of these children had previously been in care with North Lincolnshire Council and had returned to care within a year, 2 within 1-5 years and 3 were over 5 years since their last entry to care.
- 3.4 The percentage of children in care who are unaccompanied/ separated children has reduced to 3.1%, from 4.3% at 31/03/21. This compares to 5% in England at 31/03/21.
- 3.5 The following detail shows the gender, age splits, legal status and ethnicity of children in care at the end of March 2022 compared to previous years:
- 59.4% of children in care are boys, higher than the 57% at 31/03/21 and the 56% in England at 31/03/21.
 - 77.6% of children in care are subject to interim/full care orders, in-line with 77% at 31/03/21. This compares to the England 31/03/21 figure of 79%.
 - 5.7% of children in care are subject to a placement order, a decrease from 10% at 31/03/21, compared to the England 31/03/21 figure of 6%.

- 15.6% of children in care are accommodated under s20, an increase from 13% at 31/03/21, compared to the England 31/03/21 figure of 15%.
- The percentage of children in care who are from a black and ethnic minority heritage is 8.8%, a decrease from 9.2% at 31/03/21, compared to 25% across England at 31/03/21. The latest local population figure is 7.7%.
- At 31/03/22 20% of children had been in care for under 6 months, higher than the previous year which was 12%. At 31/03/22 67% of children had been in care for over 2 years, a decrease from 73% at 31/03/22.

Children Looked After at 31 March	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 % of all CIC
All children	251	231	207	192	
Boys					
Under 1:	9	7	7	8	4.2%
1 - 4:	17	17	17	12	6.3%
5 - 9:	26	24	24	22	11.5%
10 - 15:	54	54	54	37	19.3%
16 - 17:	43	31	31	35	18.2%
Total boys:	149	133	133	114	59.4%
Girls					
Under 1:	4	1	1	3	1.6%
1 - 4:	10	15	15	2	1%
5 - 9:	22	20	20	13	6.8%
10 - 15:	52	49	49	38	19.8%
16 - 17:	14	13	13	22	11.5%
Total girls:	102	98	98	78	40.6%

Legal Status at 31 March		2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 %
Care Orders:	<i>Interim</i>	23	17	21	26	13.5%
	<i>Full</i>	156	155	138	123	64.1%
S20 (single period of accommodation)		57	34	27	30	15.6%
Placement Order		14	24	21	11	5.7%
On remand, committed for trial, or detained		1	1	0	0	0%
Emergency orders or police protection		0	0	0	2	1%
Total:		251	231	207	192	

Ethnic Origin at 31 March	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 %
White	210	206	188	175	91.1%
Mixed	6	4	6	6	3.1%
Asian or Asian British	3	1	2	1	0.5%

Black or Black British	8	4	1	3	1.6%
Other ethnic groups	24	16	10	7	3.6%
Total:	251	231	207	192	

- 3.6 The team has remained stable throughout the year 2021/22 with no leavers or long-term sickness. The impact for children and their families is that they have a meaningful and trusting relationship with their reviewing officer who has often been their IRO for many years.

IRO caseloads have remained within best practice guidance of 50 to 70.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

- 4.1 The IRO has key statutory duties to:
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
 - Perform any other function which is set out in regulations, for example to ensure that children have been informed of their rights, including how to make a complaint.
- 4.2 The year 2021/22 has been one of creativity and readjustment following the pandemic in relation to participation of children in their reviews. This has included IROs undertaking more regular personalised/ activity-based visits to children pre/post and at mid-point of reviews. The team have also embedded other aspects of learning from the pandemic such as the use of video calling, message apps, and voice notes which provide a useful range of options for promoting effective communication with children and families - however, IROs have ensured they see children face to face on a regular basis.
- 4.3 All children contributed in a meaningful way to their review during 2021/22. There has been an increase in the number of children briefing an advocate to speak for them from 41% to 46% with the number of children physically attending their review dipping slightly to 39% from 43%.

Method of Participation at Review	2020/21 %	2021/22 %	2021/22 No
PN0: Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	16%	14%	70
PN1: Child physically attends and speaks for themselves	43%	39%	204
PN2: Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on their behalf	1%	2%	8
PN3: Child attends and conveys their view symbolically	0%	0%	1

PN4: Attendance without contribution	0%	<1%	0
PN5: Child does not attend but briefs an advocate to speak for them	41%	46%	237
PN6: Child does not attend but conveys feelings by a facilitative medium	0%	0%	0
PN7: No attendance or contribution	<1%	0%	0

- 4.4 The IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how a Children's Advocate could help and how to access one. This could be a formal Advocate or someone already in the child's network. In all of the reviews where the child briefed an advocate, the IRO had consulted with them prior to their review and offered a pre-review visit or completed an observation for younger children.
- 4.5 Child In Care review meetings that are part of a series has reduced for the year to 9.4% (49/520). This is an improvement on the 2020/21 figure, which was 10%. In circumstances where it had not been appropriate for parents to attend all or part of the review, a separate review meeting/discussion was offered and held with them regarding their child/young person's care plan wherever possible. IRO's exercised professional judgement in terms of consulting with or holding discussions with parents whose children were subject to Placement Orders or where there were family time restrictions in place.
- 4.6 In North Lincolnshire we are committed to providing high quality representation, information, support and advocacy for our children and young people. Our children's advocacy offer plays a key role in ensuring that the voice and experience of the child is understood, their rights are maintained and that their views, wishes and needs are represented and taken into account.

North Lincolnshire's team of four independent children's advocates are managed separately from case-holding teams, ensuring their independence from direct provision and decision making. The team was enhanced in 2020/21, providing a more flexible advocacy offer delivered by experienced and child led workers. Together they provide effective and high-quality representation, information, support and advocacy for children in need, children with disabilities, children subject to a child protection plan, children in care and care leavers. The team are accredited as independent advocates via the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and bring with them a wealth of knowledge, skills and creative practice.

The children's advocates work with children and young people to ensure that they are supported to express their views, ensure that their views are understood and that they can fully participate in decisions being made about their lives. While we recognise that everyone who works with children has a role in advocating for them and in representing their views, we recognise that there are some children

where the additional support of someone independent is beneficial. The advocate therefore offers support at points in the child's life for example:

- Offering regular visits to children and young people who are in agency placements
- Meeting with children and young people who are new into care or new onto a child protection plan to introduce the advocacy offer
- Seeing children and young people who have moved placement or who have left care to give them the opportunity to discuss their placement or to share their views about their wider care experience.

The advocates provide support for children and young people in relation to their reviews of child protection meetings; this could be supporting the child to prepare, attending with the child or representing the child if requested. In addition the advocate receives individual referrals from professionals and children themselves for support around specific issues.

The voices of children in care are heard clearly and listened to, supported through our dedicated children's advocacy offer. In the year 2021/22 the children's advocates carried out 412 contacts with 242 children, an increase on the previous year. Of the 412 contacts:

1. Referrals, representations and follow ups
 - 225 referrals were made and 202 contacts taken up by 150 children and young people
 - The large majority of contacts taken up with in relation to children in care and care leavers
 - 60 contacts were in relation to supporting a child or young person's voice
 - 63 contacts were in relation to support with a child or young person's child in care review – the large majority of which related to supporting a child to prepare for their review
 - 24 contacts were in relation to support with a child protection meeting – the very large majority related to supporting a child to prepare for their meeting
 - 51 contacts were 'other', primarily proactive approaches to children in relation to the advocacy offer
 - 4 children were supported with complaints
 - 34 contacts with children were follow up meetings to previous contacts

2. Core offer
 - 22 new into care and 24 new onto child protection plan discussions took place

- 37 visits were completed with the very small number of children and young people living in external foster care and children's homes – the offer is open to all children living in external provision and child also self-refer for advocacy support when they choose to
- 45 change of placement and 48 leaving care discussions took place

Advocacy contacts are in many forms including face-to-face visits and virtual meetings (video call and telephone) and outward facing contacts such as texts, letters and cards sent to children. This enables a range of communication opportunities to be provided in line with a child's preferences, throughout 2021/22 contacts have seen a progressive increase in face-to-face visits.

The most frequently identified discussion points raised by children with the children advocates were in relation to support from professionals, wishes and feelings, their education and where they live (placement) in line with the previous year.

Independent Reviewing Officers meet with the Children's Advocates on a monthly basis to discuss pending advocacy visits and share any relevant information that will support Advocacy officer's engagement with children and young people.

4.7 Complaints from Children in Care have decreased overall in 2021/22.

The Children in Care Team received 4 statutory stage 1 complaints compared to 13 in the previous year. Of the 4 complaints 2 were made to the advocate via the child with the remaining complaints made by parents. The complaints were actioned and resolved in a timely manner in accordance with North Lincolnshire Customer Complaints Policy 2022.

Of the 4 stage 1 complaints 2 were made directly by the children with none upheld. The complaints were all very individual to the child's circumstances but were primarily in relation to communication issues. Of the 4 stage 1 complaints 1 was escalated to stage 2 for independent investigation and was not upheld.

2 complaints were not considered at stage 1 and were escalated to stage 2 due to their complexity.

1 of these complaints came via the Children's advocate, which was partly upheld due to communication issues in relation to certain aspects of their care provision.

The remaining complaint was not upheld.

There were 3 stage 3 complaints received in 2021/2022 compared to none received at this level in the previous year.

1 stage 3 complaint was upheld in part and 2 stage 3 complaints were not upheld. 1 upheld in part stage 3 complaint related to whether communication with connected carers about their roles and responsibilities could be clearer, contact arrangement issues, and a delay in setting the stage 3 panel hearing.

The learning from the complaints forms part of the Learning Improvement Framework and is reported into the QSEF (Quarterly Self Evaluation Framework meeting and will also be reported to the newly formed voice and engagement group

The Children and families Participation and Consultation Group is being reconfigured to become the Children and Families Voice and Engagement Group to bring together managers across Children and Families to provide a strategic overview of voice and engagement activity. A Children, Families Voice, and Engagement Operational Group, will bring together managers to plan and coordinate voice and engagement activity and consider emerging themes and areas for action.

4.8 Independent Visitors

A strong focus on the Independent Visitor provision has continued within the year with North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review chairing a monthly meeting with the Children in care team and the North Lincolnshire Voluntary and Community Sector Team, who recruit, train and supervise Independent Visitors. The referral and allocation of Independent Visitors has been added as a monthly practice standard reviewed in the Case Audit Meeting which has strengthened the management oversight of this area of our offer to children in care.

The recruitment of Independent Visitors has continued to be a priority for the Corporate Parenting Board agenda and recruitment campaigns have successfully brought some new volunteers.

4.9 As of 31st March 2022, there were 14 Independent Visitors, 10 of them matched with a child. 1 young person has remained funded to be matched with an Independent Visitor in an out of area placement. 3 further children were in the process of matching and introductions at the end of the year.

Consideration of children's eligibility and wish to have an independent visitor are formally embedded within practice within the child's care plan and at review.

- 4.10 During 2021/22, 24 children in care have been missing for a total of 93 occasions. This is an improvement on 2020/21 performance of 26 children with 147 missing episodes. A reviewing officer attends and contributes to the monthly missing group to feedback themes.

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

- 5.1 North Lincolnshire Council has a robust assurance and management oversight framework which includes the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews. This had incorporated oversight of cases, systems and the use of frameworks including:
- IRO case allocation – There continues to be no delay in allocation of children and families in the reporting period 2021/2022.
 - The business support arrangements including invitations, consultations and distribution of review records includes a robust monitoring system of the whole process. Following a Director of Children and Families assurance event on the experience of children in care a monthly practice standard has recently been added to report on timescales for the IRO chairs report being completed (15 working days) and distributed (20 working days). IROs continue to work hard to achieve those targets with the majority within timescale. There continues to be an identified business support officer for each IRO that supports best practice.
- 5.2 Case file audits and quality assurance processes are undertaken on a regular basis and feed into established management oversight meetings including a monthly Case Audit Meeting (CAM), thematic audits etc. Monthly Case Audit Meeting reporting has focused on specific themes within the year including:
- The quality of individualised child in care reports for sibling groups
 - The quality and impact of interventions offered to children and families
 - Dual planning when a child is subject to a Child Protection plan and a Care Plan
 - Children who are vulnerable to or involved in Child Exploitation
 - Children living outside of North Lincolnshire
 - Children’s educational attainment and attendance
- 5.3 North Lincolnshire Children’s Independent Review have continued to follow the Local Authority Dispute Resolution procedure where there are IRO concerns regarding care planning.

- 5.4 North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review continue to chair disruption meetings to offer independent oversight and reflection in circumstances whereby children have moved unexpectedly. This has included children living with short-term foster families and in residential care.
- 5.5 North Lincolnshire continues to deliver high quality Independent Review that meets statutory requirements as outlined within the Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook 2010.
- 5.6 North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review delivers clear policy, procedures and practice standards that are embedded and play a key role in ensuring that children's care plans are quality assured to the highest standard and children are safeguarded. It ensures that the child is placed at the heart of practice.

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

- 6.1 The Resolution Policy within North Lincolnshire outlines that a key function of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.
- 6.2 Within North Lincolnshire reviewing officers have positive, collaborative, reflective relationships with social workers and their managers that offer high challenge. They have taken the initiative by holding meetings with partners at the earliest opportunity to prevent escalation through the formal dispute resolution procedure.
- 6.3 There have been 7 issues raised through the formal care planning dispute resolution policy in 2021/22. All 7 disputes were resolved at or before Stage 2, this compares to 11 disputes in 2021/22. There were 3 disputes in relation to 1 child that were in respect of placement suitability and sufficiency. Other issues have related to accessibility issues and resources for a wheelchair user, education provision and suitability of placement.
- 6.4 In all cases the IROs and the service manager actively advocated on behalf of the child pulling together key professionals to resolve issues promptly and ensure actions were completed in a timely manner.
- 6.5 With all 7 disputes being resolved by stage 2 there were no referrals to the Children and Families Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass).

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

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

GOOD PRACTICE

- 8.1 Corporate parenting continues to be robust in North Lincolnshire with an effective and well-supported Corporate Parenting Board chaired by the Lead member for Children, strong political support and further engagement across the Council and partners.

Identified Corporate Parenting Champions across all partners are responsible for the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Promise to children in care, care leavers, and report on their specific roles and actions to achieve the promise. Champions are supported with this through the Corporate Parenting Champions Group.

Children in care and care leavers achievements are celebrated, in a range of ways. Corporate Parents across the partnership all play an important role in ensuring these achievements are known about and celebrated on an individual and group basis. An example of this includes the annual Corporate Parenting Week, which took place in October 2021 and was supported across the Council, including political support, and the wider partnership. A range of activities were held for children in care and care leavers. It also included a formal signing of the Corporate Parenting Promise by Lead Members and Senior Leaders across the Council and partners, a round table professional's event, a number of activities and events for children and young people including the Awesome Autumn Factor Awards and talent show.

Reviewing Officers contributed to the development and facilitation of Corporate Parenting training. This was delivered to a range of partner agencies within North Lincolnshire.

Reviewing Officers have been integral to the delivery of Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting week.

- 8.2 We have embraced our One Family Approach, which is based upon the fewest best interventions with our children, young people and families to build upon their strengths and resilience to find or be enabled to find solutions. Through workforce development and our ongoing commitment to working towards our ambition for children to be in their families, in their schools and in their communities, the One Family Approach, underpinned by the One Family Approach Practice Model is permeating through systems, process, behaviour and practice.

- 8.3 100% of Children in Care had been reviewed in accordance with the timescales set out in the 2010 regulations and the statutory guidance. When undertaking audits it was evident that additional reviews had been held where the IRO had determined this necessary due to a change/event in the child's life which was significant such as a care plan change following court directions, reviews and changes to family time, a child frequently missing or in circumstances where a review must be held, for example where a placement change may affect an educational change. This timely and effective reviewing of children and young people's care plans has underpinned the work and commitment of Social Workers to ensure that care planning has remained on track to meet the planned outcomes and permanency for children and young people. Effective practice has been demonstrated by Social Workers, care plans have been revised which included the risk analysis framework.
- 8.4 With a stable workforce IROs have remained a consistent figure in children's lives and have been able to offer additional oversight and support on an individual needs basis for example: formulation meetings, supporting children with independence skills, undertaking life narrative work, oversight within family support meetings, and oversight within child in need meetings whereby the child has returned to the care of parents or upon the granting of a Special Guardianship Order.
- 8.5 There has been high quality engagement, participation and collaboration with children in care at individual, team and strategic levels throughout the year. The views and voices of looked after children and young people, their parents and carers have actively and consistently been sought across Children and families through assessment, intervention, planning and review via the Child and Family Feedback Framework and consultation prior to each Child in Care Review.
- 8.6 Children in care consistently say that they feel listened to and are able to articulate any issues or concerns. Evidence of this includes:
- The Child and Family Feedback Framework demonstrates that children in care understand their plans, feel that they are listened to and understand the reasons they are in care.
 - Children in care say that they have a trusted adult with whom they can discuss any worries or concerns
 - Oversight of return from missing interviews demonstrate that the voices of children in care are heard and considered within analysis and decision making.
- 8.7 North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review continue to offer independent oversight and support on the quality of young people's pathway plans post leaving care. This is undertaken through the Pathway Plan Oversight Meeting held on a 6-weekly basis.

- 8.8 There has been active IRO involvement in linking with Separated / Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children.
- 8.9 All children who went missing during the year had been offered an independent return interview by the Missing Children's Advocate.
- 8.10 IROs have reduced the number of reviews held as a series of meetings, rather than a single meeting. During 2021/22, 9.4% of reviews were held as part of a series compared to 10% the previous year.
- 8.11 North Lincolnshire has robust and thorough monitoring and oversight systems for Children in Care who are placed outside of the Local Authority. This includes the External Placement and Complex Care Panel, which oversees children's cases when an external placement is being considered, pre-placement checks, contract monitoring and oversight. This is an embedded process whereby each IRO offers their written view in relation to every child discussed at the panel.

Reviewing Officers over the last year have accompanied the commissioning officers on external provision monitoring visits to provide additional oversight and social work practice wisdom.

- 8.12 North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review works in partnership with CAFCASS, and professional relationships between IROs and Children's Guardians ensures that timely discussions are held within the timeframe of care proceedings. North Lincolnshire Children's Independent Review has not required the need to refer to CAFCASS in 2020/21
- 8.13 Good health and wellbeing for children and young people is achieved within a multi-agency context. Corporate Parents refers to the Local Authority and partners responsibilities to ensure the best possible outcomes, care and protection is achieved for Children in Care. The Local Authority is committed to ensure that help and support is provided to Children in Care to the level that any good parent would provide to his or her own children. Within each Child in Care Review meeting, it is the responsibility of the IRO to ensure that all Corporate Parent duties are upheld in enabling Children in Care to reach their potential.
- 8.14 Corporate parenting is well-developed, effective and is taken seriously across partnerships, making a difference to children and young people in care and care leavers. As corporate parents, children in care in North Lincolnshire are our children, and it is deeply rooted in the culture of the council and its partner organisations to care about them in this way. North Lincolnshire are collectively ambitious for children in care and we expect their outcomes to be every bit as good as their peers, and better.

- 8.15 The Corporate Parenting Board, is a well-established, well represented partnership which remains committed to providing high challenge and high support in order to improve outcomes for children and care and care leavers.
- 8.16 The Children in Care Council is long-standing and well-established, providing an opportunity for children in care and care leavers across a wide age range to contribute to strategic and operational planning and prioritisation.

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

- 9.1 The stability of children in care improved during 2021/22 and continues to improve with 8% of children experiencing 3 placements and 74% of children who have been in care for 2.5 years+ living in the same home for the last 2 years.
- 9.2 24 children (13%) are placed out of the NL boundary, of which 2 are adoption placements. This is a decrease on last year when it was 30 (14%). 12 of these children (6.3% of those in care) are placed over 20 miles from the home address they entered care from, again an improvement from last year when it was 16 (7.7%).
- 9.3 At 81.3%, the proportion of children in care that are in foster care has remained in-line with 31/03/21. This compares to 71% for England at 31/03/21.
- 9.4 Across all placement types, 91.7% are placed in our own provision. This compares to 48% across England at 31/03/21. 6 children (3.1%) are placed in private/voluntary provision, a decrease from the 11 (5.3%) at 31/03/21 and compares to 43% across England at 31/03/21.
- 9.5 8 children have this year seen their short-term foster placement change status to long-term fostering, staying with the same carer. At 81.6%, the proportion of children in care that are in foster care has increased since the 77% at 31/03/20. This compares to 72% for England at 31/03/20.
- 9.6 The NLC post-16 semi-independent living provision is categorised as 'Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to the children's homes regulations' recognising the support around the provision. At 31/03/22 this is 6.8%, an increase from 4.8% last year.
- 9.7 2.1% of children in care are placed for adoption, a decrease from 5.3% last year.

- 9.8 4.7% of children in care are placed in children's homes, an increase of 1 child compared to 31/03/21.
- 9.9 With regards to the reason placements have ended, the carer requested the change due to the child's behaviour on 15 occasions; this was 13 occasions in 2020/21.
- 9.10 Those moving placement due to an allegation decreased to 2 in 2021/22.
- 9.11 We have no placement changes recorded as 'Other', compared to 22% across England in 2020/21. The majority of placements, 59%, changed in accordance with the care plan, which is higher than the 2020/21 figure for England of 35%. Following a local review of the DfE guidance, the North Lincolnshire Council post-16 semi-independent living provision has been re-categorised from independent living to 'Semi-independent living accommodation not subject to the children's homes regulations' recognising the support around the provision. At 31/03/21 this is 4.8%.

Placement at 31 March		2020	2021	2022	2022%
Foster placement with relative or friend:	<i>Inside local authority</i>	22	25	17	8.9%
	<i>Outside local authority</i>	10	5	5	2.6%
Placement with other foster carer:	<i>Inside local authority</i>	128	121	119	62%
	<i>Outside local authority</i>	19	18	15	7.8%
Secure unit		0	0	0	0%
Homes and hostels		12	8	9	4.7%
Hostels and other supportive residential placements (includes supported lodgings & NLC semi-ind. accom. from 01/04/20)		2	10	13	6.8%
Residential schools		0	0	0	0%
Other residential settings (includes YOIs)		1	0	0	0%
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)		12	11	4	2.1%
Placed with own parents		13	9	10	5.2%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently (reduction due to re-categorisation)		12	0	0	0%
Total:		231	207	192	

OUTCOMES

- 10.1 The completion of health assessments & immunisations remain at a high rate, with dental checks now increasing following the decrease during the COVID-19 period.
- 10.2 79.2% of children in care for 1 year or more had a dental check in the year, an increase from 65% at 31/03/21, compared with 40% in England at 31/03/21. 10.3 99% of children in care for 1 year or more had a health assessment in the year, compared with 90% in England at 31/03/20.
- 10.4 92.4% of children in care for 1 year or more had up-to-date immunisations, in-line with 93% over the previous 2 years but higher than the England comparator of 86% at 31/03/21.
- 10.5 100% of SDQs were again completed, at a reduced average score of 13.6. The 31/03/21 England comparator was 80% for the completion rate and 14 for the average score.
- 10.6 The % of SDQs that were banded 'high' has reduced from 41% in 2020/21 to 37.5% in 2021/22, in-line with the 2020/21 England average of 37%.
- 10.7 The % of SDQs that were banded 'borderline' has decreased from 14% in 2020/21 to 9.6% in 2021/22, lower than the 2020/21 England average of 12%.
- 10.8 The % of SDQs that were banded 'normal' has increased from 45% in 2020/21 to 52.9% in 2021/22, slightly higher than the 2020/21 England average of 51%.
- 10.9 3 children were identified as having substance misuse difficulties and received an intervention. This was an increase from the 1 child identified in 2020/21. An increase from 0.6% to 2% of children in care for over a year.
- 10.10 3 children had an offending outcome in 2021/22, the same as in the previous 2 years. Below are the figures for the 'outcomes', compared with previous years. This data is for children in care for 1 year plus.

Outcome Indicator	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Children in Care for 1 year+	195	173	144
Number of SDQs applicable	151	140	104
% of children requiring an SDQ, who had one	100%	100%	100%
Average SDQ score	14.9	14.8	13.6
Under 5s with up-to-date health surveillance checks	23 (100%)	17 (100%)	10 (100%)
Children with an up-to-date health assessment	195 (100%)	172 (99%)	144 (100%)

Children with an up-to-date dental check	168 (87%)	112 (65%)	114 (79.2%)
Children who's immunisations were up-to-date	182 (93%)	161 (93%)	133 (92.4%)
Aged 10 or over who had were convicted/youth cautioned for an offence	3/131 (2.3%)	3/118 (2.5%)	3/107 (2.8%)
Children identified as having a substance misuse problem	3	1	3
Children receiving intervention for a substance misuse problem	1	1	3
Children offered intervention for a substance misuse problem but refused it	2	0	0

10.11 North Lincolnshire have continued to support children remaining at / or returning home with their parents / family with a sustained focus on early help and support packages in place. The values and vision enshrined in our One Family Approach are at the heart of our practice for children in care.

We have remained committed to ensuring that all children entering care have bespoke care plans capturing their holistic needs and that care planning is swiftly explored, with timely decisions made for permanence.

We strongly believe that children need to remain connected to their local community and the You Say Who model is well embedded into daily practice and children's connections and relationships are paramount in this. By using the You Say Who model children have made reconnections with family members and people that are important to them.

During the summer months of 2021, we have seen children have positive holidays with extended family, because of You Say Who. We have developed working toolkits to use with children and young people to explain this model and are continuing to develop the range of direct work. Our value base is entrenched in our continued work with parents, and the use of assessment tools such as the NSPCC reunification toolkit is considered for all children in care on a minimum of a yearly basis. Our positive regard for parents is captured in the assessments with a strength-based model of practice whilst assessing the parental changes and signposting for support where needed.

Our ability to offer stability of care placements is a key focus. We have continued with a monthly oversight of children in care placements to ensure any issues are worked through using a family solutions model with carers. Children are supported to remain connected with people that matter to them and are supported to feel valued, loved and supported.

We hold on to our parents and continue to offer support and intervention to equip them in their abilities, ideally restoring children

home to their care or helping them work through individual issues to be able to parent subsequent children.

Since the 1st April 2021, following successful interventions and outcomes, 33 children have returned home to their parents/ or family members care, with 30 children continuing to have the opportunity to live with their parents/ or family members.

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN 2021/22 AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS FOR 2022/23

11.1 Last year’s report recommended:

What we Said	What we Did
<p>Action 1: Prevention of exclusions of Children in Care in Education The senior IRO has led a task and finish multi-agency group to consider prevention and reduction in respect of children in care being excluded from education. From this there will be an agreed protocol with partners including Education inclusion, the virtual school head teacher that will be monitored and overseen throughout the next year.</p>	<p>Protocol developed and agreed.</p> <p>Meetings have been held within 48 hours of exclusion.</p> <p>Meeting records have been shared and agreed with partner agencies and termly quality assurance meetings are now in place to review themes and actions.</p>
<p>Action 2 Independent Visitors North Lincolnshire Children’s Independent Review will continue to work with the voluntary and community sector team and social work to oversee the provision, recruitment and matching of Independent Visitors with children who request a befriender and have no contact with family. A monthly meeting will continue to oversee those children who are entitled to have an Independent Visitor are offered the opportunity to have one, to ensure the children are matched appropriately and benefit from having a befriender in undertaking social and leisure activities.</p>	<p>Monthly meetings with the voluntary and community sector team, child in care team and North Lincolnshire Children’s Independent Review are well established to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who are eligible • Children who would like an Independent Visitor • Referrals • Matching • Training

<p>Action 3 Review and Development of the IRO role in “You Say Who” and Reunification IROs will continue to contribute to the You Say Who and Reunification meetings and review procedures to refresh practice and ensure children are enjoying quality time with people who are important in their lives and where circumstances have changed are afforded the opportunity to reunite with their family.</p>	<p>Reviewing Officer attend the You Say Who and reunification monthly meetings</p> <p>We consider the position of parents within all reviews and the outcomes of preliminary reunification assessments.</p>
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ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23

Action 1:

Consultation exercise with children and young people to consider how best to further increase engagement within the reviewing process, including how to co-produce children’s care reviews with children in care.

This work be incorporated and overseen by the Voice and Engagement Group.

Action 2:

Undertake a review of the Independent Visitor scheme in North Lincolnshire, to consider opportunities for development in order to maximise impact for children in care and care leavers.