



Independent Reviewing Officer

# Looked After Children Annual Report Summary 2017/18

# What do IROs do?

The law states that all children and young people that become looked after must be appointed an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO Handbook (2010) sets out the requirements of the IROs in supporting children and young people who are in the care of the local authority. An IRO has an important role in making sure that children and young people's care plans meet their needs. IROs are there to make sure that reviews are run properly, that children and young people's views are listened to and their best interests are protected, and to ensure that children are only looked after as long as necessary.

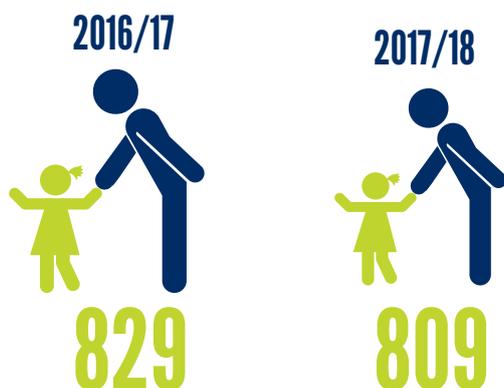


IROs also make sure that they talk to the local authority when they are worried about whether plans are progressing for children or young people. IROs will challenge the local authority if they disagree with the local authority's plan for a child or young person. IROs will also tell the local authority about things that they are doing particularly well.

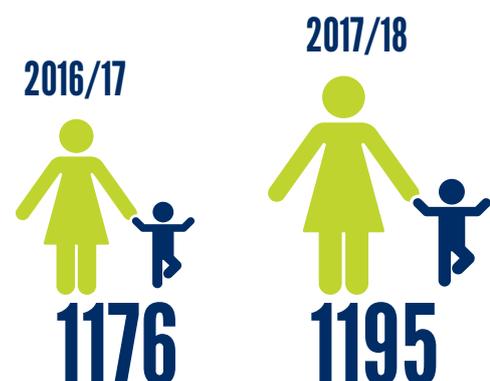
IROs in County Durham also chair child protection conferences and work within Durham's Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Child Protection Procedures.

## Number of Looked after Children in County Durham.\*

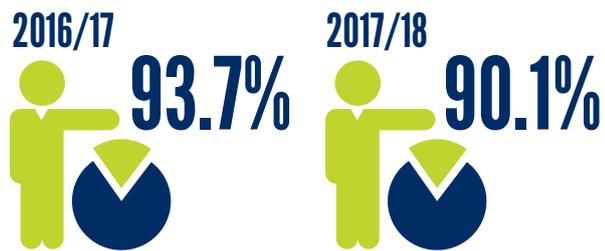
\*As of March 31st



## Total number of Looked after Children during the year.



## Looked After Children's Reviews held within the timescale.



## Children and young people in the care of County Durham

The IROs chair Looked After Reviews (LARs) for all children, including those placed for adoption, those in short break respite care, young people who are remanded into the care of the local authority and those children on Care Orders who are placed with their families. The child's journey through the looked after process is set out at the end of this report.

## Timeliness of Looked After Reviews

It is important that children's looked after reviews take place within specific timescales. This ensures that children and young people have the right plan and things are happening that should be. IROs work hard to make sure there are no delays in reviews taking place. Some of the reasons reviews cannot take place are outside of anyone's control.

The regulation states that children and young people should know their long-term plan within 4 months of becoming looked after (their 2nd review). Over half of the children who came into care during 2017/18 did not have a clear plan at 4 months. This is an area of development for the IRO service and the social work team.



“ I felt that the IRO ran the meeting with confidence and clearly knew the child's circumstances. Outcomes and timescales were very clear. ”

Professional

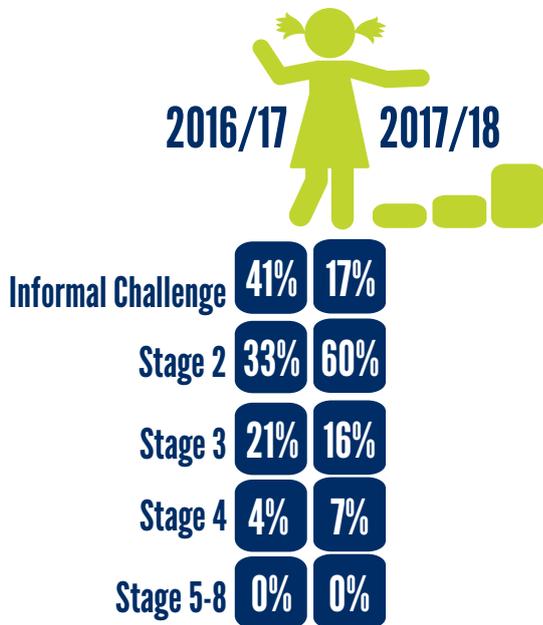
## When IROs have worries

The Government wants IROs to challenge poor practice. The IRO handbook states that all local authorities must have a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP). This is where the social worker must work with the IRO to try to resolve any differences they may have in relation to a child's or young person's plan. The idea is that issues can be resolved quickly without the need to escalate to senior managers or for the need to go to court.

## Number of children where a Dispute (DRP) was raised.



## Disputes raised were resolved via:



## Reasons for submitting a dispute:



“The IRO was professional and ran the review in a relaxed way. The IRO was fine with the young person coming in and out of the review meeting, contributing when they wanted to.”

Professional

# How are we doing?

## Engagement with children and young people

All children who become looked after over the age of 4 years receive a letter telling them the name of their IRO and how they can get in contact with them. All children who have a review are offered the opportunity to speak to their IRO prior to and between their reviews. Children and young people can contact their IROs at any point between reviews if they are not happy with any aspect of their plan.

The IRO service were delighted to celebrate 'Care Day'. This was an opportunity for the IROs to show all of the wonderful ways children and young people contribute to their reviews.



“ I've had one IRO and they are the best. ”  
Young person

“ Best support I could ever ask for. They supported me and my family. They are a friendly and caring person. ”  
Young person

## impact of the IRO role:

- A 16 year old young person raised their dissatisfaction to the IRO around the social worker's decision not to progress contact with their father. The young person was of the view they wanted to progress contact 'whilst they were still in foster care rather than manage the relationship when they turn 18.' The IRO raised this within the looked after review. It was agreed conversations would start to be established with the young person's father, in line with the young person's wishes
- The IRO raised a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) due to concerns around the delay in the completion of life story work. The matter was resolved and work commenced with the young person over the following review period.

“ The IRO supported both myself and my husband through a very difficult meeting. ”  
Parent/carer

“ The IRO does a great job supporting our foster child who has special needs. ”  
Parent/carer

IROs ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to participate within their review, that their voice is heard, and they feel they can contribute to decision making.

Children and young people are also supported to:

- Chair their own reviews.
- Compile their individual agendas, which assists them in preparation for chairing and sharing views at their reviews.

“ If you want anything done they (IRO) always try their best to make it happen. ”

Young person

“ They always ask if I want to chair my review. ”

Young person

“ We get invited to all our meetings and decide who we want there. ”

Young person

“ My IRO comes out before my review to talk to me. They tell my social worker to get things done. ”

Young person

## Working with others

**The IRO Service work with a lot of different agencies and groups.**

### Including:

- Other IRO Services across the region and nationally.
- National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).
- Children & Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) is well embedded into practice.

IRO work with social work teams with the focus being on improving practice and outcomes for children and young people. They produce monthly and quarterly performance reports to senior managers to support improvement work.

## What needs to be done next?

**The IRO Service action plan sets out what needs to be done during 2018/19.**

### Including:

- a) Increase the numbers of Looked After Children who are actively involved in their review.
- b) Continue to ensure that plans for children and young people are robust and that they progress without delay.
- c) IROs will continue to work alongside social workers and other professionals to promote better outcomes for children and young people at risk of harm.
- d) Ensure that all looked after children understand their plan.

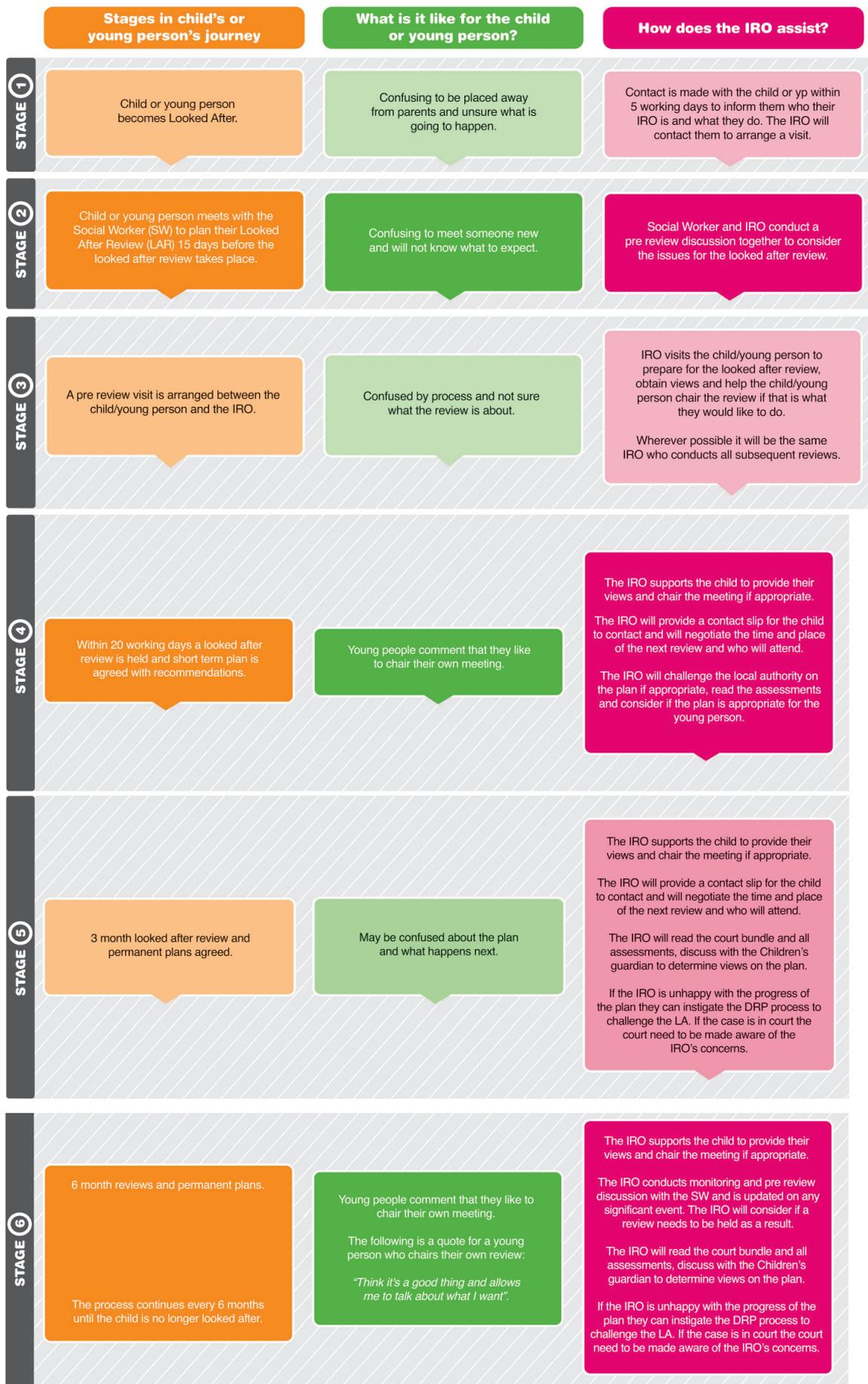
**For further information or to discuss anything in this report please contact**

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# The Child's Journey

The information below contains the key stages in the child's journey through the Looked After Child process and how the IRO assists the child or young person in this process.



Please ask us if you would like this document summarised in another language or format.



Braille



Audio

AAA

Large print

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