

**INDEPENDENT REVIEW SERVICE FOR LOOKED
AFTER CHILDREN
ANNUAL REPORT 2013- 2014**



Rutland
County Council

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1. STATUS OF THE REPORT

The Annual Report for the Independent Review Service is a requirement under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The Independent Review Service Handbook (statutory guidance) states that Managers of the Independent Review Service should provide an Annual Report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board.

This report is structured in accordance with the headings prescribed in the guidance issued as part of the Independent Review Officers Handbook. The Independent Review Officers Handbook provides supplementary guidance for use by Independent Review Services in relation to the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

The report highlights areas of good practice in addition to areas that need further improvement to ensure the needs of Looked After Children are met both in the short term day to day care and long term aspirations to prepare children for success in adulthood.

It is also a review of the trends and emerging themes from the reviews of Looked After Children providing information that may contribute to the strategic plans of the Local Authority in fulfilling its corporate parenting duties.

2. PURPOSE OF SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2001. The 2004 Regulations require all Local Authorities to appoint an IRO to participate in statutory meetings to review the Care Plan of each Looked After Child. The IRO is also responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority's functions in respect of each review. If appropriate and if there is an unmet need for a Looked After Child, the IRO can refer the child to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) who may consider legal actions on behalf of the child against the Local Authority.

3. RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN THE ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

3.1 Operational service

- 3.1.1** Social work reports should be available to the IRO 3 days before an initial review and 5 days before reviews thereafter.

Response: This remains an area for improvement.

- 3.1.2** More foster placements are secured locally for teenagers requiring placements.

Response: The Local Authority has continued to secure more placements, and has recruited one additional carer this year. In addition, the new Youth Housing Project should also increase opportunities for teenagers.

- 3.1.3** Further consideration is given to ensure that there is provision to accommodate sibling groups.

Response: The Local Authority continues to make this a recruitment priority.

- 3.1.4** Developing contact arrangements to ensure consistency of supervision and suitable venue.

Response: Contact arrangements have improved with a greater number of staff available to supervise contact. Venues for contact are limited but there have not been any complaints made to IROs about this by young people or their parents.

- 3.1.5** Coming into Care books are provided by the operational team when children come into care for the first time.

Response: Coming into Care Books are issued and are made available to all children coming into care.

- 3.1.6** Timely and child friendly information is made available to children and young people about their placements as requested by SUSO (Speak up Speak Out) Child in Care Council.

Response: The fostering service has developed child-friendly information about foster families for children to have before they meet their new families when coming into care.

3.2 IRO Service

- 3.2.1** Use the ideas provided by the young people in the Children in Care Council to create new consultation books.

Response: Consultation books using ideas provided by the young people in the Children in Care Council to help children and young people to participate in their review meetings have been completed subject to the SUSO (Speak Up Speak Out) Child in Care Council approval. 102 review meetings were held this year and children and young people were involved in all but 4 of them.

Feedback from carers/agencies and children and young people about the IRO and review meetings is positive.

- 3.2.2** Agree the design and process for issuing the quality assurance forms to the social worker and team manager and Head of Service.

Response: The new Quality Assurance arrangements for Looked After Children have only recently been implemented and need to be fully embedded.

- 3.2.3** Complete the production of the protocol between LLR and CAFCASS and the Local Authority's legal department.

Response: A protocol has been agreed and signed with CAFCASS (Children and Family Court and Advisory and Support Service). There is good liaison between the Independent Review Service and Guardians appointed by the court to represent children in care proceedings.

3.3 Recommendations for the IRO Service 2014- 2015:

- 3.3.1** Embed the quality assurance process with the social worker, team manager and Head of Service in accordance with the agreed Quality Assurance Framework 2014 - 2015.
- 3.3.2** Develop further good relationships with CAFCASS by reviewing working practice in accordance with the national protocol.
- 3.3.3** Ensure that the IRO service makes things happen for Looked After Children by continuing to monitor the progress of decisions about children and young people's plans in between review meetings.

3.4 Recommendations for the Organisation 2014-2015:

- 3.4.1** The timescale for the availability of social work reports still needs to be improved.
- 3.4.2** More foster placements are secured locally for teenagers requiring placements.
- 3.4.3** Further consideration is given to ensure there is provision to accommodate sibling groups.
- 3.4.4** Children who no longer need to be subject to a placement order should have those orders revoked as agreed in their care plans and review meetings.
- 3.4.5** Strategic discussions are held with CAMHS to ensure that CAMHS services meet the needs of Rutland children. In particular,
 - (i) Further developments are made to ensure there is a menu of specialist services available to help children in a more timely way when they don't meet the criteria for CAMHS.
 - (ii) Strategic discussions are held with CAMHS to ensure that CAMHS services meet the needs of Rutland children.
 - (iii) Consideration is given to help children make successful transitions between CAMHS services or newly needing CAMHS services when placed out of county.
 - (iv) Health Assessment outcomes are referred to in social workers' reports for reviews and any suggested changes to meet children's needs are given attention and care plans updated accordingly.

4. QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IRO SERVICE

4.1 At the end of March 2014 there were 34 Looked after Children compared to 29 at the end of March 2013. The demand for the service is largely planned as a consequence of children requiring accommodation as a result of meeting the threshold for a Child Protection Plan and then continuing to have additional needs that require them to be Looked After. Emergency placements have been provided for 5 asylum seeking children. Two more children also required accommodating long term following Police Protection Orders.

4.2 Staffing

4.2.1 The Authority employs one full time member of staff who provides the Case Conference and Looked after Review independent chairing service and a quality assurance function. In addition, there is a full time safeguarding administrator who looks after the convening and organisational aspects of the service.

4.2.2 In order to provide a contingency and flexible response the service also uses some independent workers who support service delivery through a contract known as the Rutland Register. This year the same independent worker has continued as the IRO for those children who have needed further safeguarding as their child protection plan has not been sufficient. The full time employee and independent workers are of white British origin and female. This ethnicity generally reflects that of the population of Looked After Children in Rutland.

4.2.3 26 Looked After Children are supported by the full time employee and the remaining 8 children are supported by the independent employee.

4.3 Newly Accommodated Children

4.3.1 13 Children have been newly accommodated since April 2013. This compares to 7 in 2012-2013. Of the 13 newly accommodated children, 5 are unaccompanied asylum seekers. In addition, of those 13 children, 6 have subsequently ceased to be accommodated because they have either

been made subject of a Special Guardianship Order (2 children), left the service to return home (1 child), or left care as older young people to become care leavers (3 children). Of the remaining 7 children, 4 are asylum seekers; 1 child was made subject to a Care Order and placed with family and friends who will later consider an Special Guardianship Order (SGO) application; the other 2 children are still in care proceedings and continue to remain in Local Authority care.

4.4 Children Previously in Care

- 4.4.1** Of the wider cohort of Looked After Children not newly accommodated in the year (21 children), 8 also left care. 5 were young people leaving care. 3 left care to live independently, and are all at college or in work. The fourth young person stayed with carers under Staying Put agreements and is also at college. The fifth young person remains in residential college and has plans to move back to the local area within the next year. There are significant strengths in the Local Authority's arrangements to assess and plan early for young people leaving care and this is further evidenced in the outcomes that they have achieved this year.
- 4.4.2** The remaining 3 children no longer Looked After achieved the following outcomes: 1 young person left care to return home and 2 children stayed with their family and friend's carers after care proceedings were concluded and they were made subject of Special Guardianship Orders.

4.5 Applications for Care Proceedings

- 4.5.1** There have been 11 applications made to safeguard children through care proceedings this year, compared to 2 last year. 5 applications relate to 2 sibling groups the rest were for individual children. 2 children whose applications were made later in the year have yet to have their plans resolved in Court. The other 9 applications have been resolved by the granting of Special Guardianship Orders for 2 children; care orders for 2 children; and care orders with placement orders for 5 children.

4.6 Adoption Proceedings

- 4.6.1** There is a continued trend to ensure speedier resolution in proceedings so that children receive the long term stability they need. All proceedings have concluded within 26 weeks even when in 2 instances they were dealt with in High Court. This evidences the accurate and careful planning taking place by agencies with the Local Authority to ensure there is evidence in place to help the Courts make timely decisions for children. The new Public Law Outline (PLO) requirements have been well

implemented in Rutland. There is a good relationship between CAFCASS and the Independent Review Service. Liaison takes place around reviews and key decision points to ensure that the IRO and CAFCASS officers hand important care planning matters over prior to and once proceedings are concluded. Guardians have attended the majority of children’s review meetings this year. There were 4 children waiting for an adoptive family at the end of the year. Active planning has taken place during proceedings to ensure these children will have the best chance to find their new families. There are timescales in place to review the progress of planning for adoption post care and placement orders being achieved so that there is no delay in securing the children securely with new families.

4.6.2 There are three children for whom the Local Authority has long since amended care plans following inconclusive searches for adoptive placements and who should have these orders revoked at Court. This is an action for improvement identified for the Local Authority in the next year’s action plan.

4.7 Performance

4.7.1 Table one illustrates the performance of the service since 1st April 2013. 102 (compared to 75 in 2012/13) reviews have been convened. 100% of these have been within timescales.

Table 1: LAC Reviews April 2013 – March 2014

Number of reviews				102
Boys		Girls		
41	40%	61	60%	

4.7.2 Review meetings happen 20 days after a child has come into care and then every 3 and 6 months. Some children therefore have more than one review in a year.

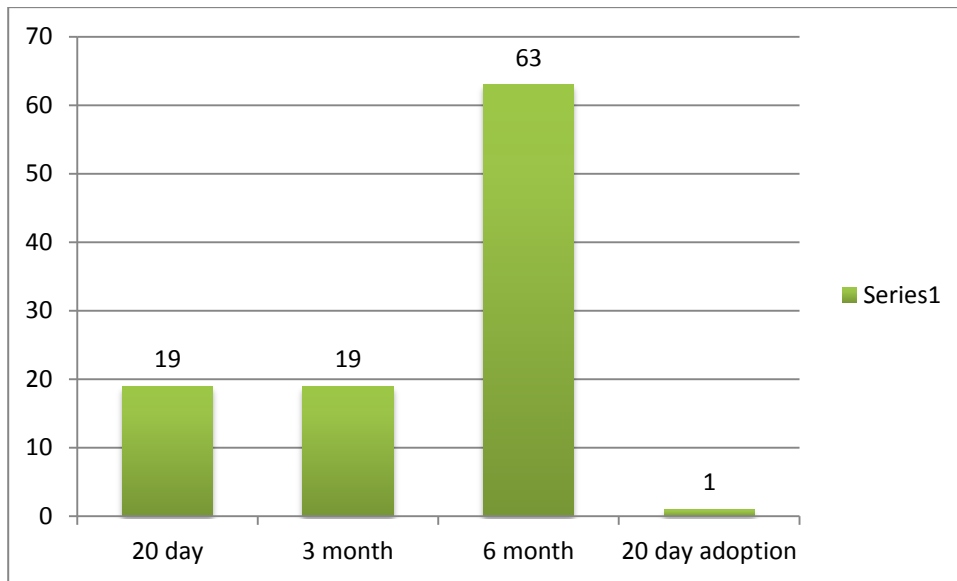


Figure 1: LAC Reviews by Type

5. QUALITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IRO SERVICE

5.1 Involving Agencies and Carers in Review Meetings

5.1.1 Feedback has been sought from a range of agencies and Local Authority staff as well as foster parents in relation to how well they feel prepared and involved in review meetings and how speedily the decisions and reports are returned to them following the meetings.

5.1.2 The majority of carers and other professionals told us that:

- i.** They attended meetings
- ii.** The purpose of the meeting was clearly explained
- iii.** They had received a copy of the IRO's last report
- iv.** They had received an invitation to the review meeting in a timely way
- v.** They had received and completed the carer's consultation booklet (or in the case of others found the meeting familiar and thus were able to make a contribution without the prompt booklet.
- vi.** They were able to give their views in review meetings
- vii.** They were listened to
- viii.** They were treated with respect
- ix.** They were able to ask questions
- x.** They understood the decisions made at reviews.

5.1.3 There are regulatory requirements that ensure that review invitations, decisions of reviews and the chairs report are distributed in good time. Figures 2-4 illustrate the extent to which these requirements have been met.

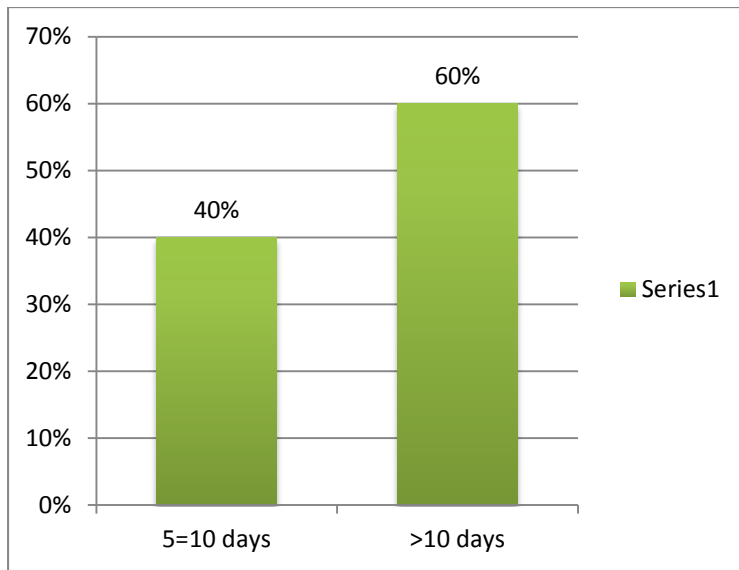


Figure 2: Distribution of Invitations

Target (working days)

Local: 10

Regulatory: 10

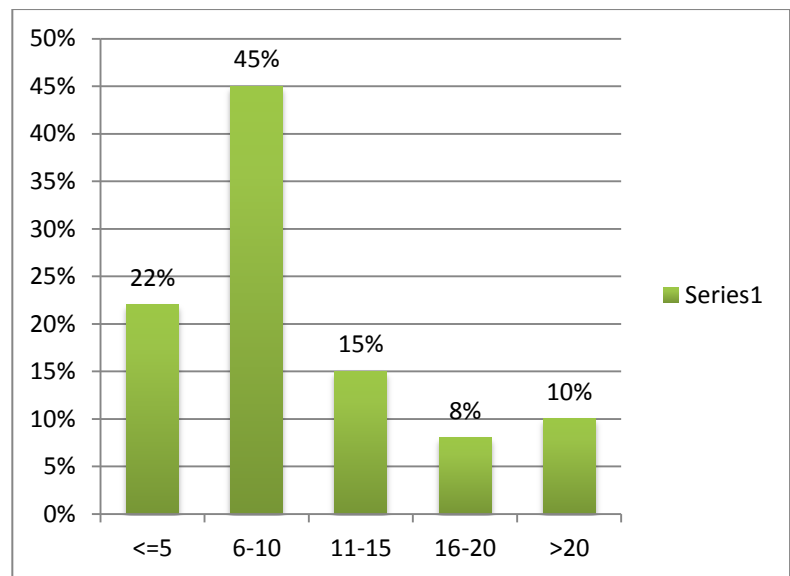
Figure 3:

Distribution of Chair's Report

Target (working days)

Local: 7

Regulatory: 20



5.2 Children's Participation in Reviews

5.2.1 The ages of the children currently looked after at the end of March 2014:

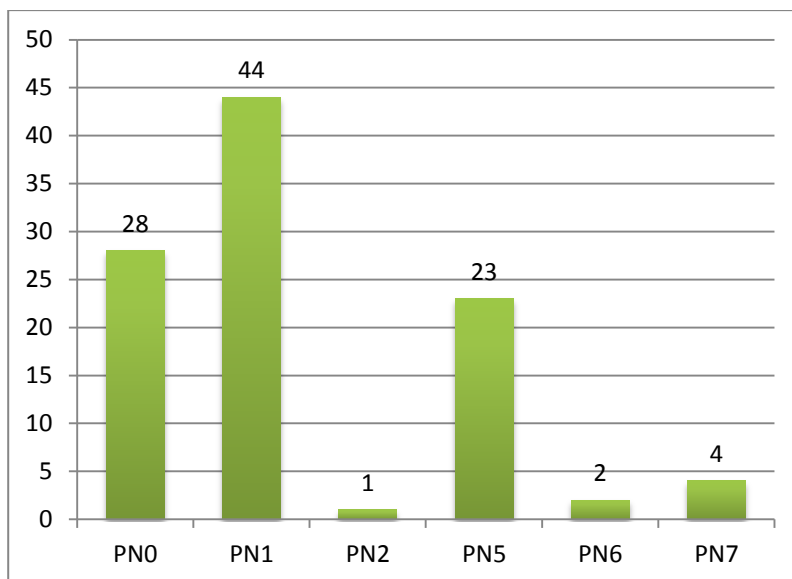
Children under 5	10
Children under 8	4
Children under 11	5
Children under 16	5
Young people under 18	9

5.2.2 Of these, 27 are white British and 6 are other ethnic backgrounds, 5 of whom use English as a second language and have had interpreters in attendance in their meetings. None of the children are disabled.

5.2.3 Every newly accommodated young person has been allocated an IRO. The service sends a personal/photographic letter to any child over the age of 8 naming their IRO and the safeguarding administrator.

5.2.4 The IRO writes or sends a copy of the review to all children under the age of 16 with details about the review discussion as a reminder of the decisions agreed. In some instances the IRO has also written to young people over the age of 16 if it is felt that the report may be more difficult to understand. Table 2 illustrates how children and young people have been involved in their meetings.

Table 2: Participation of Children and Young People



PN0	Child aged under 4 at time of the review	28
PN1	Physically attends and speaks for his or her self	44
PN2	Physically attends and an advocate speak on his or her behalf	1
PN5	Child does not attend but briefs an advocate to speak for his or her self	23
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his/her feelings by a facilitative medium	2
PN7	Child does not attend, nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	4
		102

- 5.2.5** Children and young people nearly always come to their review meetings or we hold a series of meetings to accommodate their ideas about how they would like to be involved. One young person has used an advocate this year in order to feel their wishes and views were given a good hearing in relation to a key issue for them in relation to wanting to leave care.
- 5.2.6** Again, through an appointment system with the IRO and the social worker responsible, agreement is reached in consultation with the child or young person in relation to who they would like to invite and how and where they would like their review meetings to happen. In the case of children under the age 5 the IRO arranged home/school visits to observe the children in familiar environments or in the case of babies they have attended their review meetings with their carer. Children between the age of 5 and 9 have also been seen in their placement so they have the opportunity to become familiar with the IRO and eventually feel more confident to get involved in their review meetings in the future.
- 5.2.7** Most children and young people complete the consultation booklets designed to help them have their say in review meetings. The children and young people who have helped to look at a redesign this year said that they didn't mind filling them in; some seem to enjoy filling them in. The service often meets with representatives of the child in care council and has worked this year to redesign the consultation booklets which children and young people complete for reviews.
- 5.2.8** A 'Coming into Care' folder is now provided to all children who have been looked after regardless of length of time. Again, the Children in Care Council liked the look and design of it and thought it would be helpful for Looked After Children (especially older children), to have this prior to placement. They have also asked that more thought could be given to the information about their new foster families so that they can read this in private which they feel helps them after the initial anxiety about coming into care. This work has been achieved and all foster carers have provided

some smaller booklets about their families which have been used to help children prepare for placement with new families this year.

- 5.2.9** The service also works with the social work team through an appointment system to ensure there is adequate planning to include parents. Some reviews are run as a series of meetings so that the IRO meets with parents separately should they not feel able to attend a meeting. The only reviews in which there has been no parental involvement have been the asylum seeking children who are estranged and alone in the country and children placed with adopters.
- 5.2.10** The IRO ensures that Guardians are invited to reviews. The IRO makes introductions to the Guardian appointed to the proceedings to represent the child and maintains contact until the end of the process. Review records are sent to the Guardian throughout. The revised National protocol in relation to ensuring the two services work effectively together to help Looked After Children has been signed and regular meetings have been scheduled for the next financial year to review working relationships within the protocol.
- 5.2.11** OFSTED published a report called 'Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the Challenge' (Ofsted June 2013). Of the findings contained in the report of the 10 Local Authorities who had been subject to this focused inspection into their IRO service, one of the challenge areas identified was the requirement of the IRO to monitor the child's plan in between review meetings. This was identified as an area for practice improvement and as a consequence, in order to ensure the IRO service in Rutland works to ensure things get done for Looked After Children, IROs now write to social workers in between review meetings and ask about the progress of some of the more salient decisions made at reviews. This is proving effective and instils a further focus to ensure tasks agreed in reviews and care plans work for children and young people.

6. CONDUCT OF THE ORGANISATION IN RELATION TO THE REVIEW

- 6.1** The social work team has continued to be relatively stable this year with established workers who provide continuity for the child and carers. This means that children, young people and their families are able to develop a good working relationship based on a level of trust and common understanding of their needs.
- 6.2** There has been a good response from the Authority in relation to working with the service proactively to ensure positive and timely reviews for children, young people and their families. 100% of reviews are held within timescale. An area for improvement lies in ensuring that social work reports are available 3 days before initial reviews and 5 days before review meetings. Review reports are mostly provided on the day before the meeting.
- 6.3** Care plans are always available and have been revised in between review meetings so they are used openly in review meetings to revise plans according to the child's needs.
- 6.4** Pathway plans have been available in all but one case for the review after the child's 16th birthday and within three months of them reaching their 16th birthday. The case that has experienced some delay is currently working to timescales agreed to rectify this. The young person is not seeking to make any significant changes to their placement arrangements so this practice is acceptable. The leaving care adviser is introduced to young people once the Pathway plan has been completed and takes a pro-active role at the right stage if the young person is planning to leave care.
- 6.5** Carers always attend and often host review meetings for children. Agency attendance is good. Reviews about children under the age of 5 always include a health visitor who has often known the child since birth, will have supported the child protection plan and is familiar with the needs of the child and family. The reviews of pre-school children will include the nursery officers, the inclusion team if needed as and the health visitor. School staff are always involved in reviews of school age children and for older children who feel that they do not wish to have a meeting with a school representative present the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is used to help to track progress and support required.

7. CONDUCT OF THE ORGANISATION IN RELATION TO THE CASE

- 7.1** Notwithstanding the above, the IRO service has raised some alerts in relation to concerns about practice in relation to the service provided to Looked After Children this year. The dispute resolution policy is used for cases where there is on-going concern about an issue which needs to be escalated. The dispute resolution process is an agreed procedure where cases are raised firstly with Team Managers and then if not satisfactorily resolved to the Head of Service and then the Assistant Director. Responses are required within 5 working days to prevent any further delay. At any stage during the dispute resolution process the IRO has the authority to refer cases to CAFCASS if the IRO considers it appropriate to do so.
- 7.2** During the year there have been 4 recorded escalations. These were all resolved at team manager stage and related to delay in filing care applications following review decisions.
- 7.3** There have been no cases referred to CAFCASS.
- 7.4** The long term team manager responds expediently to the decisions made at review meetings and responds within given timescales to review reports provided by the IRO.
- 7.5** Care planning placement and review regulations require that a child should have a plan to achieve a permanent resolution to their needs; this plan should be available for their second review meeting four months after they come into care. There are now good organisational systems in place to ensure this good practice is maintained. The IRO is included in the minutes of the Authority's resource panel decisions in relation to permanency decisions. There is openness to challenge should the IRO be concerned about the suitability of decisions in relation to individual children.
- 7.6** There has been some excellent practice to achieve placements when children require these pending further assessments as to the best option for them in the future. However the placement of teenagers continues to present challenges. The Authority is in the process of opening a supported living project but this may not be suitable for all young people who would choose family life. Foster placements able to accommodate a sibling group are also short in supply. Continued planning to recruit foster carers for sibling groups is in progress. Prior to admission and shortly after,

there are family group conference meetings convened to try and identify extended family or friends who can meet the child's need in order to avoid accommodation.

7.7 Out of County placements

20 of the 34 Looked After Children are placed out of county. Further analysis identifies the children are placed as follows:

- i. 4 young people (all teenagers) living with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers. One of these would like to move into Rutland and one other was placed due to lack of available choice but subsequently expressed a wish to stay, which has been approved. The other two young people are in their preferred choice due to cultural need and safety issues.
- ii. 4 other young people living in supported accommodation are suitably placed to meet their cultural needs.
- iii. 6 other children and young people live with a RCC approved carer who lives just outside of the county boundaries, under 10 miles away. Rutland is a small authority.
- iv. The remaining 6 children live with family or friends who live outside of the authority but are in preferred placements.

7.8 One Looked After Child was reported missing this year and was also reviewed as at risk of sexual exploitation. She was not made subject to a Child Sexual Exploitation plan as it was agreed that her existing care plan was able to meet her needs. One other child has been identified for additional support as a child who has been exploited. Neither was subject to plans at the end of March 2014.

7.9 The adoption team is involved early and near to the review decision to support adoption as the preferred plan for the child. Good assistance and planning is then jointly undertaken by the adoption and social worker for the child to help prepare a child for adoption. There are 4 children waiting for adoptive families at present. Timescales have been identified to implement contingency plans should the preferred plan be unachievable.

7.10 All Looked After Children in Rutland have a school placement and educational progress is seen as paramount to ensuring good outcomes for the looked after population. Personal Education Planning meetings are held with 'needs led'

frequency to ensure the right focus is maintained on the progress of the child. Looked After Children have made good educational progress this year. Some children still benefit from the provision of additional tutors to help them gain confidence and make progress where needed. There are high aspirations for Looked After Children and plans are designed to ensure education and extra-curricular activities are not overlooked in order to promote self-esteem and confidence amongst the looked after community of children.

7.11 Education Training and Employment

7.11.1 The Social Inclusion Development Officer coordinates regular PEP meetings and the Virtual Head Teacher provides an invaluable service in terms of oversight and scrutiny to ensure that all schools in or out of the county give Rutland's Looked After Children priority. In considering the cohort of children currently in the group there is no reason to suspect they will not continue to make good progress at school or college. Those young people expecting to leave school this year have all got plans for their futures as well as having attained some good exam results. Children preparing for secondary are also well placed to make a positive transition.

7.11.2 The young people who left care this year are all in further education, training or work.

7.12 Health

7.12.1 Health needs of Looked After Children, including the child's emotional health, are also an area given specific attention. The dedicated LAC nurse retired at the end of the previous financial year. The Authority was kept informed as to progress in relation to a replacement and arrangements have since summer 2013 been put in place to ensure continuity of service. However, there were a number of delayed health assessments at December 2013. The number of initial health assessments being available for the first review has not improved this year but appointments are always in hand ready for discussion at that review. This issue was raised and the long term team manager and designated nurse manager have reviewed processes to ensure this practice is improved.

7.12.2 Some Looked After Children have required support to recover from significant emotional trauma. The response of the Local Authority has been to provide services to the child to prevent further emotional and possible mental health needs escalating. Where the child has not met the criteria of the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) the Local Authority has funded private interventions - play therapy (one case) and in one other case sought referral to a more specialised facility who concludes that CAMHS ought to have provided a response. This service was eventually provided by the in house intensive family support service. This case has been raised with CAMHS to improve future services.

7.12.3 It has also been difficult to transfer children to CAMHS services when children are placed out of county and move before their needs are met. However, CAMHS are providing consultation clinics to foster carers who are helping children and young people recover.

7.12.4 Promoting the emotional well-being of Looked After Children placed with family and friends and located out of county has also provided challenges as social workers have attempted to negotiate through unfamiliar service thresholds. For families who might consider Special Guardianship Orders this has been an inhibiting issue.

7.13 Advocacy

7.13.1 The Targeted Youth service continues to provide the Authority's response to ensure that all Looked After Children have access to an advocate, if required.

7.13.2 There are 3 members of RCC staff who are National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) accredited level 3 advocates. This year the Targeted Youth Service has received 7 requests for advocacy from Looked After Children (compared to 4 last year). Following initial contact, two young people decided that they did not wish to proceed with the service. The remaining cases involved helping young people to have their voices heard about school related matters which are now resolved (2 cases) and helping to resolve disagreements about contact with their siblings and own

children (3 cases). These have been resolved by reported improvements and legal representation being established more securely for one young person.

7.14 Complaints

7.14.1 One Looked After Child has complained twice about a previous placement. One complaint is resolved the other is under investigation.

Janet Marriott

Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager

April 2014