

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **11 July 2014**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2013/14**

Purpose of report: **To update Corporate Parenting Panel on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children**

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**RECOMMENDATION: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report**

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**1. Financial appraisal**

1.1 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

**2. Supporting information**

2.1 The report is attached as appendix 1

**3. Recommendation**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of the report.

STUART GALLIMORE  
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Alex Sutton

Local Members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: none





## IRO Annual Report April 2013 – March 2014

### *The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children*

#### 1. Purpose of service and legal context

- 1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Looked After Children (LAC) and for challenging drift and delay. One of the key tasks for IROs is to build relationships with children, young people and the professional and family network to enhance effective planning for positive outcomes.
- 1.2 The recently published National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings in regards to the efficacy of IRO services and outlines a number of important recommendations. At the Local Authority level the following are most pertinent to the service currently in East Sussex and each Director of Children's Services is exhorted to promote a culture demonstrating their support for these by:

*Setting out the expectations of the role and disseminating this information to all those involved in services for looked after children and young people, including children and young people themselves*

*Creating systems to give IROs a voice*

*Specifying the process for producing an IRO Annual Report, including who will be involved in contributing to the report, how it will be responded to, and how it will be used to contribute to improved outcomes for looked after children and young people.*

*Reviewing and strengthening quality assurance processes in accordance with the IRO Handbook, including feedback from social workers and children and young people, direct observation of IRO practice and opportunities for reflection.*

*Assessing the training and development needs of IROs and IRO managers and commissioning role specific training and support*  
*Undertaking an analysis of the time required by IROs to undertake their duties, so as to then plan the number of IROs they require in order to provide the standard of service recommended in the IRO Handbook*

1.3 In the foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson he makes the following comment

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

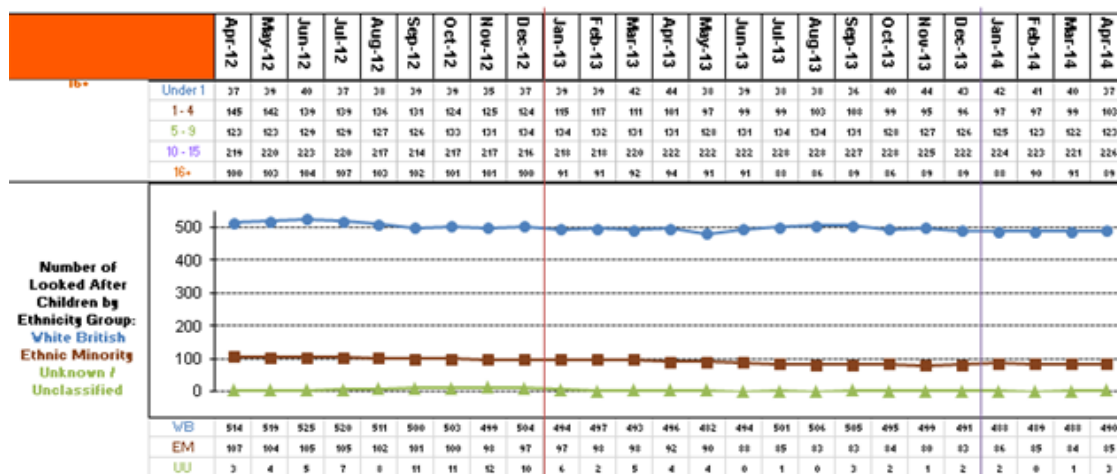
### **What are we doing about it?**

On a national level it was recommended that all Local Authorities use the same template for formulating their reports. This report is written using the template that is being piloted this year.

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex local authority as required by statutory guidance.

## Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 1.4 The IRO service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services and is managed by the Head of Safeguarding and two operational managers. The unit experienced considerable change during the year as a number of longstanding members of staff left the department. These included the Safeguarding Manager of the unit who left in April, the office manager and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO); all 3 had worked for East Sussex for a significant number of years.
- 1.5 As part of a wider agenda within the unit in 2012 to increase the effectiveness of the unit and further develop the quality assurance role a second temporary managerial post was created to increase management capacity and drive forward changes in child protection both within the unit and locality services. This post was made permanent in June 2013 and the commitment to two managers continued with the creation of a further temporary post in May 2013 until March 2015. This post has the lead role in developing the IRO role with Looked After Children and contributing to the service as a whole. Furthermore in response to the high numbers of children subject to Child Protection plans and children who were Looked After the THRIVE project was initiated and this funded two extra posts in the service in 2012 continuing to March 2015 giving the unit a complement of 10.1 fte (full time equivalent) reducing to 8.1 fte in April 2015 when this funding ends.
- 1.6 The IRO team is currently made up of 8.5 fte staff at Practice Manager level (LMG2). This equates to 9 IROs, 7 working full time and 2 part time, one of whom went on maternity leave in February 2014. In order to manage the day to day demands of the service there are currently two full time agency workers and two part time self employed workers.
- 1.7 The Team has experienced considerable change during the year and alongside the changes in management two longstanding IROs left the unit to take up new posts. In addition there have been significant periods of sickness involving several members of staff.
- 1.8 In January 2014 we were happy to welcome a new IRO to the unit but unfortunately two further recruitment campaigns have been unsuccessful to date and the unit has been reliant on agency and self employed workers.
- 1.9 This has led inevitably to some degree of discontinuity in relationships with Looked After Children. The permanent staff group have been long standing members of the unit and have worked hard to minimise the effect of the changes in the unit on the children and their families. However all the IROs are under significant pressure in the context of high caseloads in comparison to other authorities and to those recommended by Department of Education, the pressures of sickness absence, a decreasing permanent staff pool and an increase in responsibilities and expectations within the department and from the Government.
- 1.10 We have a mix of male and female IROs but not at the same level as the LAC population which is approximately 43% female and 58% male. The ethnicity of the Looked After Children cohort is predominantly white British and around 15% are from ethnic minorities and around 7% have a disability.



1.11 These numbers are relatively small in percentage terms and the staff group are white British or white other and thus reflect the majority culture. Consequently ensuring that the needs of these children are met and understanding the pressures, difficulties and potential discrimination that they face in a predominantly white culture is a priority and challenge to IROs and children's services.

1.12 As with society at large our Looked After children have a wide range of needs across a broad spectrum and although there is no ethnic minority representation in the staff group of the unit there is a diverse mix including disability and sexuality. The IROs sensitively consider and promote the different needs of children including from ethnic minorities, religious faiths, children with disabilities, children's sexuality and gender identities to ensure that their care plan addresses their specific ethnicity and diversity needs. One of the IROs specialises in working with children with disabilities and continues to undertake specific training to enhance her skills in this area and to share her experience and expertise with the unit as a whole.

## What are we doing about it?

IROs are engaging in specific training to increase their awareness of the diversity of the East Sussex population.

1.13 We have:

- 4 IROs who chair Child Protection Conferences as well as Looked After Children's reviews
- 3.2 fte temporary staff chair Child Protection Conferences only
- Child Protection conference chairs also see and quality assure all referrals to the unit on a duty basis for a conference
- 1 IRO with specialist disability experience and short breaks
- 1 IRO who undertakes regulation 33 inspections of East Sussex residential units. (These have to be completed monthly and are statutory inspections of residential units submitted to Ofsted and undertaken to a clear set of criteria to ensure children's safety and well being is being promoted.)
- 2 IROs contribute to the Child Sexual Exploitation working group
- 2 IROs lead LSCB training

## **Regional and National links**

- 1.14 IROs also meet up with their colleagues in West Sussex and Brighton and Hove as part of a consortium and attend three training afternoons a year led in turn by each authority.
- 1.15 There is also a regional meeting where representatives from the southeast region, involving 9 different authorities, meet to discuss relevant topics three times a year. Unfortunately only the Operations Manager has been able to attend this year due to capacity issues in the unit.
- 1.16 The Operations Manager is also now part of the National group who meet with the Department of Education (DfE) and consider changes to policy and practice, gather relevant statistical information for government and work toward consistent practice across the country.

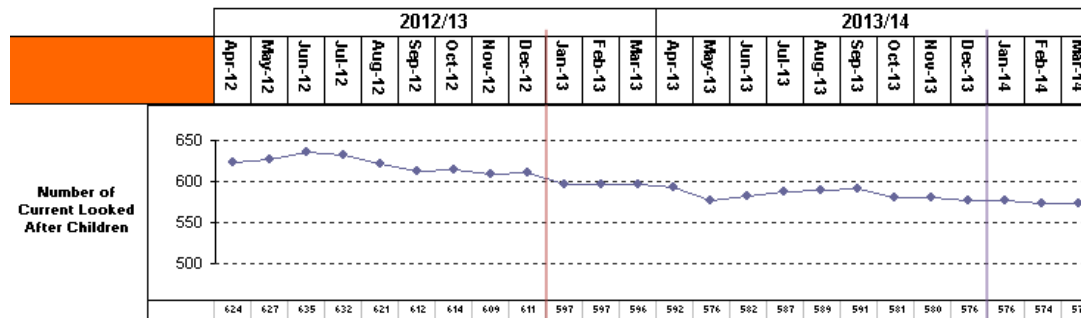
## 2 Quantitative information about the IRO service

*A total of 1,530 LAC reviews were held in the year*

*A total of 1,191 Child Protection Case Conferences were also held in the year*

2.1 Numbers of Looked After Children reduced quite quickly at the beginning of the year from 592 but since then they have hovered around the 570s ending the year on 573.

	Nos LAC	discharged	Average per month	New	Average per month
12/13	596	210	17.5	178	14.8
13/14	573	212	17.6	190	15.8



2.2 There is a consistent trend over the last two years as the table shows of higher numbers of children leaving care compared to those entering.

### LAC ADMISSIONS

	2010-11 PRE THRIVE	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
0-12 YEARS	190	181	148	158
13+	31	28	24	32
TOTAL	221	209	172	190

### LAC DISCHARGES

	2010-11 PRE THRIVE	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14



<b>0-12 YEARS</b>	113	111	123	132
<b>13+</b>	68	60	74	80
<b>TOTAL</b>	181	171	197	212

- 2.3 Annual LAC admissions for 12 and under have reduced by 16.8% since the beginning of the THRIVE programme (from 190 in 2010-2011 to 158 in 2013-14). The small rise in admissions during 2013-14 is attributable to a small number of very complex cases with large sibling groups within care proceedings (e.g Kx8; Px5 Bx4 ).
- 2.4 There has also been a small increase in 13+ admissions. This rise is primarily attributable to the unusual number of 16+ year old admissions ( 12 compared with 7 in previous year). Teenage admissions include 3 UASC; 5 YOI/remand; 4 within sibling groups in care proceedings; 2 teenage parents previously LAC.
- 2.5 LAC discharges are also increasing across all age groups. It is positive to note the increase in under 12 discharges. This is reflective of improved timeliness of permanence planning with more care proceedings concluding than in previous years with children moving quickly to their adoptive families and SGO Family and Friends arrangements.
- 2.6 The way the team is currently configured means that staff able to undertake LAC reviews currently equates to 5.4 fte and Staff able to undertake CP conferences including the current temporary staff is 5.1 fte which is .4 over the staff complement of 10.1.
- 2.7 The following table illustrates the average caseloads of IROs chairing meetings during January to March this year. The figures are calculated to include staff absence.

	LAC reviews	CP conferences and LAC	If all staff did both
Jan – March 2014 (avg.staff 10)	110	125	116

- 2.8 The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. Nationally, the average caseload for IROs ranges between 50 and 95 identified in a recent (December 2013) national benchmarking survey. The size of caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO; the number of other responsibilities added to the role including visiting children between reviews, the number of Out of County placements, large family groups, disability, remand placements and quality assurance work doubles the time commitment.
- 2.9 As mentioned above the staffing levels of the unit are currently augmented from the Thrive initiative and are due to reduce at the end of March, 2015 when this programme ends. However these are based on Thrive targets being met.

As at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2014	Thrive target	Actual figures
CP	520	613
Lac	560	573
31 <sup>st</sup> March 2015		
CP	502	
LAC	522	

- 2.1 These figures demonstrate that the current number of CP plans is significantly higher than the target. If the target is not achieved by March 2015 consideration will need to be given to how we sustain the additional resources (posts) in the Safeguarding Unit.
- 2.2 Furthermore if the Thrive targets are reached at the end of March, 2015, the average caseload for IROs based on the staff complement of 8.1 will be 126 for those undertaking conferences and 127 for those chairing reviews and 126 if the whole staff group did both. These figures indicate that even with the targets reached caseloads will in fact increase at the end of March 2015 and continue to be higher than those recommended or those in other authorities.
- 2.3 An independent audit within Children's Services was completed during the year and this also highlighted the high case load numbers in comparison with other authorities.

### What are we doing about it?

In the summer a Benchmarking report is being considered by senior managers alongside an in depth analysis of the responsibilities of the role, the configuration of the service and the current Thrive targets.

The reasons for the rise in Child Protection plans is being explored and examined as a matter of urgency.

- who has particular responsibility for co-ordinating the LRO process in the service. This system helps to ensure compliance with timescales and continuity.
- 2.5 IROs also represent the service on a number of strategy groups including Child Sexual Exploitation, outcome focussed care plans, practice development group and are linked to specific teams to maximise communication.
- 2.6 Regulation 33 inspections are currently undertaken on a monthly basis by a part time IRO who will be retiring at the end of this year. During 2013/14 new legislation was introduced regarding Regulation 33 inspections and these are currently being considered with regard to whether the IRO service continues to undertake this work.
- 2.7 The Local Authority Designated Officer is also part of the unit and has responsibility for managing allegations against people who work or volunteer with children.

### Advocacy Service

Responsibility for the Contract Management of the Advocacy Contract for children is managed by the Participation Officer and is funded by the service. This service is currently provided by NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service).

### 3 Qualitative information about the IRO service

- 3.1 Looked After Children's reviews must be held within specific timescales and the unit work hard to achieve this so that children's plans can be considered in a timely way.

	No. reviews	No. late	% late
12/13	1688	19	1.5%
13/14	1530	4	0.3%

- 3.2 Out of the 1,530 meetings this year, four were late and did not adhere to timescales. The reasons for this were:

- Staffing issues in the care leavers team
- Incorrect recording of the date a child became Looked After (this was a young person who was on remand)
- A child was made subject to an order and thus became looked after but they remained in the same placement (with relative) pending moving to a permanent placement a few week's later. This is an unusual situation and the social worker did not let the unit know of the change of status and the review therefore went out of timescales. However in practice there was no delay or impact on the child and their review took place within timescales after they moved as appropriate.
- The last one was due to a diary error by the IRO who went to the wrong venue in the first place and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> review was not arranged formally. The impact on the child was minimised as the IRO discussed the situation in full with the Social worker, reviewed the care plan and agreed ongoing decisions. It did not result in delay, however the young person was having a difficult time and would have benefitted from a more responsive review process.

#### What are we doing about it?

Feedback is given to all the teams via the link IRO system and managers are informed of the issues arising. A new system will also be introduced to monitor any changes in information recorded on careFirst (social care recording system) regarding status of young people and children.

- 3.3 IROs, social workers and the LAC administration co-ordinator work together to avoid these situations and IROs undertake a number of 2 part reviews to start the process off within timescale and then complete within 20 days as a series of meetings combining as the review.
- 3.4 Ensuring the centrality of the child and their voice in their care plans and their participation in meetings affecting them is a primary objective of the unit. Children participated in 95.4% of their reviews in the year 2013/14. This is slightly lower than 2012/13 where 96.9% was achieved but still above the target of 95%. The majority of

children who do not participate are 17/18 year olds with complex issues, who are difficult to engage and build relationships with but who are also engaging often in high risk behaviours or are unmotivated with little interest in attending a meeting or giving their views. These figures are considered quarterly to monitor the trend. However these figures do not tell the whole story and having achieved this level of consistency in high participation rates the unit now wants to build on this to gather more qualitative information about what children are actually saying and how this is influencing their care plans.

- 3.5 Coupled with this process has been a review of the way in which children's wishes and views are gathered and recorded. Currently prior to each review the child and social worker complete together an age appropriate booklet that was developed in conjunction with the Children in Care Council. There has been some research and analysis of these forms that highlighted their inconsistent use and raised challenging questions about the relevance to the child of some of the questions being asked and the way these were presented. This has led to work currently being undertaken to develop a greater variety of tools for engaging with children and young people maximising the potential for their wishes and feelings to be meaningfully explored and shared. One young person has developed their own booklet and shared this with the department.

### **What are we doing about it?**

A working group is looking at the different ways that can be used to engage children in direct work and conversation about the things that are important to them, including tools for children with disabilities.

Training will be offered to social work teams during the year

The booklets will be re-launched to promote consistent use

Booklets will also be re-designed where appropriate based on consultation with and feedback from children and young people

A system for more interactive internet based programme will be explored as part of the new data base being introduced to Children's Services.

IROs complete a questionnaire following reviews that will enable more detailed and qualitative information to be garnered about the impact and influence of children's participation

- 3.6 The IRO Handbook makes it an expectation that the IRO will meet with the child prior to the Review meeting or as part of the process. The expectation is that this contact takes place on a separate occasion before the meeting. Due to capacity issues this has been very difficult to achieve and children are being seen just before their reviews quite often. Currently IROs prioritise visits to children where they do not attend their reviews. However despite the difficulties in seeing children due to the IROs caseload, during the recent Ofsted inspection it was found that there was substantial evidence that the IROs knew the children they review and that the young people also know them. This was also a finding in the management audit that took place. (see below for further detail)

#### **What are we doing about it?**

A new form has been developed and IROs use this to record on in the recording system when they have met and/or spoken to the young person

IROs also complete a quality assurance questionnaire following all reviews and are asked to confirm when they have met and/or spoken to the young person

- 3.7 Distribution of completed review Outcomes and reports does not always meet the required timescale of 5 working days for decisions and 20 for decisions and discussion record.

#### **What are we doing about it?**

A monitoring system is being put in place to accurately assess the level of compliance with timescales

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## 4 Achievements and impact of IRO service

- 4.1 There was an inspection of the service by Ofsted in January 2014 where the efficacy of the IRO service was scrutinised. The following excerpts are taken from the Ofsted report:

*Looked after children's reviews and care plans are consistently reviewed within statutory timescales. The Independent Reviewing Officers provide consistency and a continuity of oversight of the progress children make. Children know their reviewing officers well. The service provides effective challenge to some care planning arrangements, for example, through challenging the quality of provision in an agency children's home or through delaying a young person's move to a new home until their exams had finished.*

*Social workers and the independent reviewing service are active in moving forward decisions where permanence is considered to secure stability for children.*

*Children who live some distance away from East Sussex are well supported and receive the same level of services as those children who live within the county. Social workers visit them regularly and their looked after reviews are held within statutory timescales. In one particular case, a young person visited by an inspector said she had the same Independent Reviewing Officer over a number of years and as a consequence she was confident in the decisions being made about her.*

- 4.2 Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers March 2014
- 4.3 Ofsted gave the overall judgement as good with gradings of good for children needing help and protection; good for looked after children and permanence sub-grades of outstanding for adoption and requires improvement for care leavers; and good for leadership, management and governance.
- 4.4 During the inspection one young person told inspectors that her IRO was a 'legend' and there was substantial evidence that the IROs knew the children they review and that the young people also know them.

### Children's Views

- 4.5 Unfortunately due to the number of surveys our young people contributed to and the Ofsted inspection the planned feedback exercise was postponed and is part of the work plan for the coming year.

#### Case study 1

An IRO identified a number of young people she reviews who had been waiting for some time for permanent placements with foster carers. These were children who did not have any special needs or difficulties. The IRO advocated on their behalf and in one case opened a dispute to challenge senior managers about placements as the



timeliness of the move needed was acute so that the young person could start senior school in a planned way. This dispute was escalated to the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive. This was resolved and he and his brother were placed permanently with foster carers and have maintained a high level of continuity. The other young people have also been placed.

### Case Study 2

J was born in May 2011 with a number of complex health needs – and was placed with his current carers at 3 weeks. An assessment of his parent's ability to care for him was undertaken, however neither parent engaged with the assessment process and made the decision that they wished to relinquish the care for J and for him to be placed for adoption. Attempts were made to encourage parents to provide details of family members who may be in a position to care for J, however neither parent provided these details to the Social Worker.

The Local Authority's chosen permanence plan for J was Adoption and was considered by the permanence and adoption panel in September 2011 and it was agreed that pursuing potential adopters for J would be put on hold pending a clear diagnosis of J's health needs and if possible J under going his first operation. Between this decision being made and February 2013 the Social Worker followed up a number of potential adopters all of whom were not willing to pursue adoption of J. The carers had considered J remaining with them permanently but did not wish to go through adoption process, but wanted to consider long term fostering. This was due to his health needs. In July 2013 a decision was made that there should be a twin track approach for three months and if no adopters could be found the care plan should be that J be placed with his current foster family.

This was considered to be in J best interests as he is clearly very loved by the family and attached to all family members and the match was considered at the Adoption and Permanence panel in December 2013 and the care plan for him to remain with his carers permanently was recommended and subsequently agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. J's carers will consider an application for Special Guardianship order after his next surgery when he is five. The IRO advocated for this care plan for J on the basis of his attachment needs and attempts made to find adopters for him.

## Children and young people chairing their own reviews

- 4.6 This continues to take place where appropriate, however there is currently no system in place to record how many. From this year IROs are being asked to report on this.

## Monitoring and tracking of Care Plans between LAC Reviews

- 4.7 The recent National Children's Bureau research, Ofsted thematic review in 2013 and the findings of the recent Ofsted inspection highlighted the need for IROs to be more targeted in their decisions at the reviews, with expectations about specific timescales for actions. IROs should also regularly check the progress of the decisions between reviews. This is an area for improvement in the service and is closely linked with capacity issues. IROs frequently see the social workers for the children they review and discuss issues with



them and as Ofsted reported ensure progression of the plan but this has not hitherto been recorded consistently outside of the review process.

### **What are we doing about it?**

IROs are now recording their intervention in between reviews onto the careFirst recording system.

## Quality of Care Plan

- 4.8 IROs play a significant role in monitoring permanence planning at an early stage and considering all options for young people by their 2<sup>nd</sup> review. The practice in Children's Services is to recognise that planning for long term stability and permanence for a child begins with the first intervention. IROs also continue to monitor the timeliness of family finding and preparation of children for adoption and permanent placements and raise any issues appropriately. Plans for adoption and permanence, the timeliness of family finding, completion of reports for panel and planning for introductions are scrutinised during reviews.
- 4.9 IROs also have a significant role in reviewing plans for court to ensure that they meet children's needs. This also means monitoring and having regular oversight of care plans to ensure that there is no drift or unnecessary delay in permanence planning both during and particularly after proceedings have completed. IROs are consulted and kept up to date at each stage of decision making and reviews are held in a timely manner to agree any changes or challenge issues arising.
- 4.10 However an area that Ofsted found required improvement is care planning for children leaving care and becoming independent. They found that pathway planning for young people was not sufficiently robust. This was an issue that the service had already recognised and had already agreed additional management capacity and resource for that team. This is an age group coming under significant scrutiny nationally as well with the staying put duty becoming law in the Children and Families Act and the duty to have an allocated personal adviser in recognition that young people struggle to manage independence to varying degrees and need ongoing support.

### **What are we doing about it?**

The Operations Manager is leading a working group to develop outcome focussed care and pathway plans for LAC that are accessible to children and young people. This will include consideration of the single plan recommended by Ofsted and the SEND reforms.

IROs are specifically reporting on the quality of care and pathway plans using the Ofsted criteria

IROs are ensuring that young people know their entitlements

IROs are specifically reporting on timeliness of family finding and permanence planning

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## 5 Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

### Auditing and observations

- 5.1 An audit tool was developed to evaluate the efficacy of the role of the chair in both Looked After Children Reviews and Child Protection Conferences and an audit was undertaken during Quarter 3 of the reporting year as part of the Management Audit programme. These audits involved senior managers including the Chief Executive and interviews with IROs.
- 5.2 11 LAC children's cases were audited and children were judged to be safe. There was evidence of:
- timely lac reviews
  - good level of contact and effective multi agency work
  - longstanding positive relationships with children
  - many cases young people actively involved in reviews; in all cases young people's views have been taken into account in planning and review. Young people who were involved in their reviews seemed to be appreciative of their voices being heard
  - effective and purposeful planning and robust consideration of the care plan and safeguarding issues
  - effective monitoring of permanence plans and challenge of potential drift
  - monitoring, positive feedback and challenge of practice with social workers and managers (issues addressed were drift in planning; standards of care; late production of work)
- 5.3 Areas for improvement:
- Documents not being completed and shared with IROs within timescales
  - More outcome focussed reviews with explicit timescales for actions
  - Need to monitor child's care plan between reviews
  - More explicit evidence in records of whether placement meets the child's needs
  - More personalised records of reviews taking account of each child's needs and point of view
  - Breadth of work undertaken by IROs not recorded on ICS
- 5.4 Due to the changes in the team and the pressure of workload it has not been possible to begin a programme of observations but this will now be put in place for 2014/15 with the Head of Safeguarding and the Operations Managers observing practice.
- 5.5 There has also been an audit of children who are waiting for permanence and subject to Placement Orders to ensure that the care plan is still appropriate for that child.

## What are we doing about it?

The Operation Managers and Head of Service will undertake audits on a quarterly basis and will also observe at least one meeting chaired by an IRO over the course of the year, this will be either a Looked After Child's review or Child Protection Case Conference.

Recommendations from the audit have been included in the work plan for the year ahead.

## Problem resolution and escalation

- 5.6 One of the pivotal roles of the IRO is to raise issues affecting a child's care with the local authority where, for example, performance issues, care planning and resources are affecting the child or young person's progress. IROs will always discuss issues with the social worker or their manager but if there is no resolution there is a formal process known as a Dispute Resolution Process whereby the issue can be escalated to the attention of senior managers and ultimately the chief executive for resolution.
- 5.7 Over the last year there have been 11 formal challenges to the authority using the Dispute Resolution Procedures. The issues included:
- 5.8 Delay in finding permanent placements (x4)
- 5.9 Lack of evidence of senior manager agreement for care plan
- 5.10 Number of changes of social worker
- 5.11 Legal status of placement
- 5.12 All these matters have now been resolved and one was escalated to the Director and Chief Executive. All were resolved with good outcomes for the children. There is also a substantial amount of discussion and resolution of issues before they go into formal challenges.

## Supervision and training

- 5.13 IROs receive regular monthly supervision and have enjoyed attending the Action Learning Sets for Practice Managers that are facilitated by two experienced external trainers. There has also been a considerable number of briefing training for managers on relationship based practice skills. However the issue of specialised training for IROs is on the national agenda and is being explored further as it is recognised as a unique role.
- 5.14 IROs work to specific timescales and after each review a further meeting is planned. The longest timescale between reviews is 6 months and this therefore means that an IRO's diary can be full up to 6 months in advance. Most training is offered with up to three months notice and this makes it very difficult for IROs to juggle their diaries to attend training.

## **What are we doing about it?**

Where possible trainers are asked to attend team meetings to give their presentations and there is the opportunity for discussion.

Nationally there is exploration of tailored training for IROs.

## Any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service

5.15 The IRO role is not to identify the Resources needed to meet a young persons needs but to ensure that those resources utilised match the needs of the young person and are of a high quality. IROs will challenge when the placement fails to address needs.

## Achievements for this last year

5.16 IROs are visiting more children

5.17 IROs carry Complaints and Advocacy information to give out when required.

5.18 IROs ensure children know about the Pledge

5.19 IROs ensure good communication with Children's Guardians

5.20 IROs have achieved almost 100% of reviews taking place on time

5.21 IROs have continued to manage high caseloads and develop relationships with young people despite the significant changes in the team

5.22 A new questionnaire for quality assurance and reporting has been formulated

5.23 Auditing processes have been established

5.24 IROs are formally challenging issues where appropriate and recording all discussions regarding the child.

## 6 Annual work programme for next year April 2014 – March 2015

Strategic objective	Actions	
Quality Assurance and Performance management activity provides challenge to operational services and identifies priorities for service development	<p>QAF Annual Report</p> <p>Safeguarding Unit dashboards developed for both CP and LAC and quarter reporting to CSCMT (to include quantitative and qualitative information and highlight any key themes and suggested actions)</p> <p>CPC and LACR outcome records to be improved to demonstrate effectiveness and impact of care plan</p> <p>Improve reporting of dispute resolution for both LAC and CP</p> <p>Ensure policy, procedure and OICS are up to date and respond to changes in national guidance</p> <p>Workload management tool to be developed and review of capacity of IRO/CPA</p> <p>Ensure IRO annual report is presented to CPP &amp; LSCB to enable senior managers and elected members to properly consider how this service effectively challenges children's care planning arrangements</p> <p>Reduce data security incidents</p>	<p>Quarterly management report to CSCMT</p> <p>To populate SU dashboards</p> <p>Appraisal target for IRO/CPA and to populate SU dashboard CSCMT to agree priorities</p> <p>Administration process to be reviewed alongside ICT development</p>
Children and young people receive timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk	<p>Improve the quality assurance of assessment and plans presented to CPCs and LACRs</p> <p>Ensure effective outcome focussed</p>	<p>Quarterly reporting to CSCMT</p>

Strategic objective	Actions	
based assessment and planning	<p>child in need plan when a CP plan ends</p> <p>Improve the outcome records for both CPCs and LACRs to include quantitative and qualitative information</p>	Reduction in repeat CP plans
Children and young people in need receive effective multi-agency help that is proportionate to the level of risk, does not drift and is regularly reviewed to secure change	<p>Convene multi-agency short-life working group through the LSCB to review and develop core group activity</p> <p>Further develop relationship based practice within CPCs</p> <p>Improve involvement and participation of children and young people at reviews</p>	<p>Revised agenda and format for CPCs</p> <p>Audit and practice observation</p>
Looked after children have a plan that is outcome focused and they are supported to participate in the development and review of their plan	<p>LAC MCI to be completed</p> <p>Working group to develop and improve outcome focussed LAC plans</p> <p>Improve involvement and participation of children and young people at reviews</p> <p>Improve Pathway Plans for Care Leavers so they are effective and understood by young people</p>	<p>Quarterly reporting to CSCMT</p> <p>Audit demonstrates meaningful participation</p>
Develop an understanding of the diversity of the local population and how the service reflects these diverse needs	<p>Quality Assurance of assessments and plans to ensure diversity issues addressed</p> <p>Diversity information to be presented at unit meetings</p>	Quarterly reporting to CSCMT
Provide opportunities for care leavers in your service	<p>Identify possible opportunities for work experience, mentoring etc.</p> <p>Include care leavers in service development</p>	
Service User Feedback (check target with AG)		
Review of Terms and Conditions		

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## 7 Overview and Summary

- 7.1 This has been a challenging and busy year with significant changes in personnel in the safeguarding unit. Expectations of the work of the IRO have increased alongside developing priorities for the unit, specifically the quality assurance role. Keeping up with additional responsibilities has continued to be a challenge but the IROs are committed to providing a high quality service and meeting those challenges and these were recognised both by Ofsted and the management audit.
- 7.2 Capacity and staffing continues to be a significant issue that potentially compromises the good practice of the unit but IROs continue to monitor the care plans of our looked after children and young people, challenge cases highlighted as at risk of drift and use the escalation protocol effectively, managing the greater number of escalations at the Practice Manager/Operations Manager level, which leads to a quicker resolution of the issue.
- 7.3 As stated in the body of the report the scrutiny by Ofsted and the management audit found that IROs know the children they review very well and are trusted to advocate on their behalf.

Alex Sutton 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2014  
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