

---

**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 2 July 2012  
**Subject:** Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2011-2012  
**Report of:** Yolanda Corden, Interim Assistant Director Children's Services Operations  
**Summary:** The report outlines the activity of the Conference and Review Service in relation to the reviews of Looked After Children during 2011/2012.

---

**Contact Officer:** Isabel Wilks, Team Manager Conference and Review  
**Public/Exempt:** Public  
**Wards Affected:** All  
**Function of:** Council

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

Medium Term Plan for Central Bedfordshire - The key priorities which relate to the report are:

- Promoting health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable
- Improved educational attainment.

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011.2014

- Priority 1: Helping children and young people achieve more
- Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe

Provision of an independent reviewing service to scrutinise care planning for Looked after Children is a statutory responsibility of the Council.

### **Financial:**

1. Conference and Review is part of the wider Quality Assurance Service within Children's Services Operations. The Conference and Review function of the service is responsible for the co-ordination and chairing the reviews of Looked after Children and child protection conferences. The service has an annual budget of £849,000.
2. The financial implications noted in this report relate to the need to keep under review the staffing complement in order to ensure compliance with the recommended caseloads specified in the IRO Handbook.

**Legal:**

3. Regulation and associated statutory guidance outline the requirement to report on the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service in relation to the reviews of Looked after Children.

**Risk Management:**

4. Regulatory and reputational risks by virtue of non production of an Annual Report in line with guidance.

**Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

5. Not Applicable.

**Equalities/Human Rights:**

6. Adherence to Human Rights and Equality issues are maintained.

**Community Safety:**

7. Not Applicable.

**Sustainability:**

8. Not Applicable.

**Procurement:**

9. Not applicable.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes and comments on the content of the Report.**

**Background**

10. The IRO Handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked after Children states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an Annual Report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
11. This report provides an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and areas which require improvement, describe areas of work which the service has undertaken and areas of work which will be prioritised in the coming year.
12. 2011.2012 is the first year that the service has been required to produce an Annual Report. Hence this will provide the basis for comparative data and learning in relation to the service in future years.
13. Independent Reviewing Officers are part of the wider Quality Assurance Service within Children's Services Operations. In addition to chairing the reviews of all Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children, they chair all child protection conferences.

## **Qualitative Information about the Service**

14. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
15. There were 590 reviews held in respect of 266 children during the year from April 2011 to March 2012. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they became looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and any changes of circumstances requiring an additional review.

## **Qualitative Information about the IRO Service**

16. The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews. 97.5% of reviews were held on time during 2011.12 and of the cohort of children for whom participation in the review process is measured 91.7% participated in some way.

## **Conduct of the Service**

17. The recent Ofsted Inspection February 2012 stated that case planning and reviews overall were effective although further improvement is required to aspects of work, such as the quality of some assessments, pathway plans, personal educational plans and case recording. They also found that monitoring by independent review officers enabled practice on individual cases to be improved. Inspectors commented that permanency planning is evident in all care planning, with good scrutiny and challenge from independent reviewing officers.

## **Conclusion and Next Steps**

18. Further improvements in the quality of care planning for Looked after Children will be driven by the Ofsted Improvement Plan. Independent Reviewing Officers will contribute to this process by ensuring that good practice is identified and shared. Where there is a need for improvements in service provision and delivery IRO's will deliver appropriate challenge in an effort to secure the best outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After Children.

## **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2011-12

**Background Papers:** (open to public inspection): None