

**Meeting:** Corporate Parenting Panel  
**Date:** 03 June 2013  
**Subject:** Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2012-13  
**Report of:** Gerard Jones, 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 2012/13.

Advising Officer: Isabel Wilks, Team Manager Conference and Review

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations.

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. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) are employed to review care planning arrangements for individual children such that the best outcomes are achieved for those children.

### **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 coordination and chairing of reviews of Looked After Children and child protection conferences. The Quality Assurance service has an annual budget of £840,000.

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 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) handbook.

**Legal:**

3. Regulation and statutory guidance set out 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 accept the content of the report.**

**Background**

10. The IRO handbook – Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers 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 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. Independent Review 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**

13. The report sets out data in relation to the Looked After Children population in Central Bedfordshire.
14. There were 669 reviews held in respect of 307 children during the year from April 2012 to March 2013. The number of reviews held in respect of any individual child or young person is determined by when they become looked after, in accordance with statutory timescales and changes of circumstances requiring an additional review.

### **Qualitative Information about the IRO service**

15. The report sets out data in relation to the timeliness of reviews and participation of children and young people in their reviews. 98.3% of reviews were held on time during 2012/13 and of the cohort of children for whom participation in the review process is measured, 97% participated in some degree at their review.

### **Conduct of the Service**

16. The Service has focussed on ensuring good quality of care planning following the outcome of the Ofsted inspection in February 2012. The recent Peer Review confirmed that effective quality assurance processes were in place evidencing scrutiny and challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers.

### **Conclusions and Next Steps**

17. The Conference and Review Service will continue to focus on delivering good outcomes for Central Bedfordshire's Looked After children and young people in accordance with the Quality Assurance Strategy for Children's Services, which includes responding to the themes emerging from internal quality assurance processes and audit findings, taking into account feedback from service users and responding to the outcomes of external review processes such as Peer Reviews and inspection.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2012/13

### **Background Papers:**

None