

Central Bedfordshire Council
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Quality Assurance
Children Services Operations



Appendix A

Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2014 – March 2015

The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality
Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care



1.0 Purpose of Service

- 1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) role is set out in statutory guidance "2011 The IRO Handbook". The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. The responsibility of the IRO has widened from just the review process to an overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews, challenging drift and delay.
- 1.2 In the National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014), the foreword written by Mr. Justice Peter Jackson 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.'

This Annual IRO Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Central Bedfordshire.

1.3 Summary of Key Points

- A total of 818 reviews were held this year an increase from 777 last year
- Timeliness and participation have both improved and are good
- A stable staff group has provided good continuity to our children, caseloads are within guidance
- The QA process has improved with use of RAG ratings and revision of the dispute resolution process
- Impact of the IRO service is illustrated through case examples
- IROs have responded to the views of young people, captured in the work with the Child In Care Council
- The review process has been streamlined and distribution target met

2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers' function is undertaken by Review Managers in Conference and Review (CRS) within Professional Standards. Review Managers undertake two main areas of work: Chairing of Child Protection Conferences and Looked after Children's Reviews. In addition a small number of short break reviews when provided under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 are chaired by an IRO. Two workers undertake the Local Authority Designated Officer role, in combination with the review manager role.
- 2.2 In April 2014 the Service had an establishment of 7.8 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) posts, including the LADO function. Having successfully recruited three new permanent members of staff, the last of whom started in May 2014 we have had good staff stability over the past year. We have recruited internally to one further permanent post; the Service now has seven permanent and two long term agency workers. This has provided a good continuity to our children.
- 2.3 In terms of diversity the team has a good gender balance reflecting the looked after children population. Workers come from a range of backgrounds, but do not fully reflect

the ethnic mix of the population. Ideally the workforce would reflect the diversity of the Looked After Children population it is serving, but within a small group a wide representation has not been achievable. Within the social work teams there is a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented.

2.4 All Review Managers have, as required, a considerable number of years' experience. IROs' previous roles include front line social work with Children with Disabilities, Looked after Children and Child Protection, supervisory and managerial experience, residential experience, fostering experience and previous work as Children's Guardians. Two of the workers joining us last year came from other local authorities bringing different ideas and experience. Several of the team live locally, others in neighboring authorities. There is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.

2.5 All of the Review Managers undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO Service or as part of their wider role. These include:

- Monthly Quality Assurance Liaison meetings with social work teams as part of the QA strategy
- Attendance at Multi Agency Public Protection meetings as the Children's Services representative
- Supervision of the Parent Partnership Service which sits within CRS as an off-line management role
- Regular liaison with National Youth Advocacy Service including review of the service level agreement for provision of Advocacy and Independent visiting
- Contribution to LSCB training
- Participation in rolling monthly audit programme
- Attendance at Frameworki/Mosaic practitioner group
- Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS
- Supervision of the Review Officer Foster Care
- Linking with the Children in Care Council (CICC)

3.0 Arrangement for Reviews

3.1 The Social Worker and IRO share responsibility for the review.

3.2 The IRO Handbook sets the expectation that children and young people are included in an age appropriate way in deciding on the arrangement for the review which is **their** review.

3.3 Deciding who needs to attend, where the review should be held, arranging invitations and consultations, providing reports, recording the discussion and ensuring timely distribution of the review record, involve co-ordination between social worker, IRO and administrative staff. Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of Frameworki, the children's case management and recording system.

3.4 The IRO and Corporate Parenting Services have worked together to simplify and streamline the process, improve the timeliness, and focus on the quality of the recording ensuring IROs and Social Workers each take responsibility for their part of the process. This has led to a marked improvement in timeliness of social work reports for reviews and in review recording and distribution.

3.5 The IRO Service has additionally worked with the Participation Officer and the CICC to consult with young people on making the reviews more child friendly. This work is continuing.

4.0 Qualitative Information about the IRO Service

4.1 The Timeliness of Reviews

This figure relates to the rolling year with definition from 903 returns. "Of those children who had been looked after for at least 20 working days, the percentage whose Reviews had all been on time over the past year". This indicator excludes children placed for adoption.

Our target for timeliness was 100%. This has been missed by two reviews being late.

Both reviews that went out of timescales were subsequent reviews that had been booked well inside the 6 month due date, but were cancelled at the request of the social work team who asked for a change of date, due to changing circumstances in the case.

Case 1 The Social Worker suggested a new date that was exactly 6 calendar months but just out of the 183 day timescales (by 4 days) this was agreed and booked by CRS without checking. The IRO and CRS Business Support should have checked.

Case 2 The IRO and social worker decided to wait until the child moved, but this was delayed and they didn't track closely enough so went out of timescales. There was a very high level of communication between the IRO and social worker and close monitoring of the child's circumstances; the review was due in February, held in March.

The admin system has been revised so that due dates have to be recorded in the diary when the review is booked. It should be noted that whilst regrettable that these reviews were late there was no adverse impact for the children and the date changes were made appropriately in response to changes in the children's circumstances, but should of course still have been in timescale. In both cases the children attended and participated.

4.2 The timing of reviews is specified in regulation. The first review has to be held within 20 working days of the child/young person becoming looked after, the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews at intervals of no more than 6 months. Reviews will in addition be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or of the Care Plan.

5.0 Children's Participation

5.1 The IRO Handbook states that it is expected that the child if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding will be present for the whole of the Review, but this will depend on the circumstances of each individual case. The IRO may decide, in consultation with the Social Worker that attendance of the child is not in the child's best interests. If the child does not attend, other arrangements should be made for their involvement. It is one of the specific responsibilities of the IRO to promote the voice of the child and to ensure their wishes and feelings are represented. It may be appropriate for a younger child to be observed or for the IRO to interact with that child through play or reading in a placement setting. If the child's first language is not English, as for example with the unaccompanied

asylum seeking children an interpreter will be provided. A child with disabilities may perhaps be observed in school or placement and their needs and feelings discussed with their carers if a direct conversation is not possible.

- 5.2 The Review Record will include information on how the child participates and how their wishes and feelings were included. Participation is monitored by recording a participation code. Children aged under 4 are excluded. For all other children it is expected that they should attend, or that their views should be represented.
- 5.3 Participation is considered an important performance indicator. The March figure was 97.9% participating in their most recent review. Annual performance data is not yet available; data quality checking is still in progress at the time of writing.
- 5.4 Based on preliminary checking IROs have confirmed only 4 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, an explanation is given below:
- **S** aged 14, living in a residential setting was expected to attend his review but declined to get up. He refused to speak to his IRO when asked by staff and refused to attend the meeting. He was informed when his mother arrived but still refused to leave his bedroom.
 - **B** aged 16, was missing from care for the period including his review date. He was not answering his phone and his whereabouts were unknown. His review was held without his participation. He participated fully in his next review.
 - **N** aged 16, arrived late as his review was ending; his IRO felt this was his intended contribution. He stated he did not intend to participate in his next review but actually did join in intermittently.
 - **D** aged 17, was unaccompanied asylum seeker who went missing when her age assessment was about to be queried. She remained missing and has now ceased to be looked after, being 18, or perhaps older.

5.5 **Work with the Child in Care Council**

In 2014 during Easter school holidays and summer half term IROs attended activity days arranged by the CICC. IROs enjoyed meeting the young people and spending time with them in this more informal and relaxed setting and joined in activities such as football and 'The Mummy Game'. Young people participated in several activity sessions, one session on each day being arranged by review managers. Young people were asked by IROs for their views about LAC reviews and how IROs carried out their roles. Young people commented for example about the length of LAC reviews (often too long), and the venue for reviews (often too formal, with one suggestion that a roller coaster would be a good venue).

IROs used this feedback to inform their thinking about future reviews at their own IRO Practice Development Day in November 2014, facilitated by an external organization.

Following the enjoyment and success of these events the IROs decided to organize their own event this year with the help of the Participation Officer.

This was a fun, interactive day which started with ice breakers and games to get the creative juices flowing and put young people and IROs at ease. Twelve young people aged 9 and 21 years took part along with four of the IROs. The two key questions the IROs wanted to know from the young people was "What makes a good IRO?" and "What makes a good Looked After Review?"

The key learning point which emerged from consultation was that every child's review is different for them and needs to be tailored for that individual young person.

Some Common themes:

- The young people would generally like the meetings to be shorter.
- They would like IROs to try and add humour to the meetings so they are not so serious – even bad jokes are better than none!
- That just because the last review was arranged in a certain way and worked things might have changed and the review might need to be managed differently at each review.
- The IRO - young person consultation is key to making the review meeting work – it should happen at least a week before the review and if possible be activity based so more fun.

The IROs attending fed back to their colleagues in team meeting and the team have agreed:

- IRO consultations about the review arrangements will take place in sufficient time to allow the review to be organised taking into account the child's views.
- IROs will make consultation meetings more activity based – evidence of IRO playing football, Lego, Chess, going out for a coffee for example.
- IROs do recognise the young people's wish for the reviews to be shorter, and will seek to achieve this through increased gathering of information and consultation with professionals in advance. This will assist in allowing the meeting to focus on the key issues for the young person whilst ensuring that the IRO has fulfilled their statutory requirements and considered all the information required.
- IROs will continue to hold regular consultation activity events with the looked after children, which we hope will continue to be fun and help inform improvement to the service.
- The Participation Officer who has recently moved to Professional Standards will be invited to attend IRO team meetings twice a year and will, we hope, support us in planning our events.

6.0 Parental Participation

6.1 The IRO Handbook advises that the IRO should seek the views of birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility and other significant persons in the child's life, for example extended family members.

Parent's active participation is achieved through attendance, completion of a consultation booklet, representation via an advocate or social worker, in writing or consultation by phone or in person with the IRO separately from the review meeting. Consultation booklets are sent out by CRS to all parents whose whereabouts are known unless the IRO advises there are inappropriate circumstances.

Overall 79% of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending (38%) or contributing to the review process.

There is a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 73% of reviews, fathers for 23%.

For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage (4%) of cases a parent has died. There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown (5% of mothers, 20% of fathers). In some cases parents are invited but do not attend (15% mothers, 16% fathers). If they do not choose to attend or to complete the consultation leaflet they can still contribute their views if they wish to do so but a proportion do not choose to take up the opportunity.

7.0 Service User Feedback

- 7.1 IROs will respond promptly and informally to questions and queries arising from young people their parents and carers, often through a telephone conversation. On most occasions discussion and explanation resolve the matter.

When complaints do arise, they are often part of a wider complaint about Children's Services actions in which case Conference and Review have contributed to the response. Conference and Review have responded to one formal complaint from a young person. The young person had been helped to write her complaint by her carer. She had a number of concerns about what her Care Plan and Review Record said about her history. It was noted that some of the points were similar to those made by her parents who disputed the findings of fact in court. The IRO met with the young person and her carer and went through the points in detail. Meeting with the young person and carer together meant the carer was better informed and able to support the young person. A change to the wording was agreed that the young person was happy with and the matter was successfully resolved.

The understandable sensitivity of young people about the way their history is recorded as illustrated by this example led to a Practice Workshop with Corporate Parenting Team Managers, and a proposal to review the format of records will be progressed now that the case recording system has been upgraded.

Another area of complaint from parents has been in respect to the timeliness of the distribution of review records. This has been a challenge as the process involves prompt recording by the IRO, timely sign-off by the team manager, accuracy of addresses and then the admin process leading to the documents being sent out.

This was at a low point at the start of this period with pressures throughout the complex process and in particular in CRS Business Support after the office move from Bedford to Dunstable which led to a backlog of work.

CRS have worked with the Corporate Parenting Managers to simplify and streamline the process and have set up a tracking and chasing mechanism to monitor and improve timeliness. A RAG rating system has been used recording and distribution as part of monthly team performance data. The IRO Handbook target of distribution within 20 working days was not being met due to a backlog. A target of 70 % was set and there has been steady improvement with the target being reached for the last two months.

Positive feedback is often verbal and hard to capture. Two examples come from Children Leaving Care: one a child with disabilities whose parent wanted to pass on her thanks to the IRO for all the support she has provided over the years as her son turned 18, another from an adoptive family who sent the IRO a copy of the life story book they had done for

their child one year on showing his year with them and thanking the IRO and Social Worker for their part in making their new family possible.

8.0 The Conduct of the Organisation in Relation to the Review

- 8.1 Conference and Review (CRS) sit within Professional Standards and the quality assurance role is central to the IROs' responsibilities. The IRO is responsible for monitoring the performance of the Local Authority, including effective challenge of poor practice, and has a crucial role in ensuring that the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent for all the children it looks after.
- 8.2 The IRO completes two monitoring forms after each LAC Review. One of these sits within the Frameworki review episode and records information about the arrangements, who has been consulted, participation by parents and children, completion of required documentation, Health Assessment, Personal Education Plan and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. In addition a word form gives qualitative feedback in respect of care planning, children's participation, and appropriate involvement with family and partnership working with other agencies.
- 8.3 The Line Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice will include good practice as well as any areas of concern. The qualitative feedback is RAG rated focusing on the care the child has received and challenging any concerns in respect of the social work practice or wider service provision. The Line Manager will share with the social worker in supervision and if any identified actions are needed, ensure these are completed.
- 8.4 Conference and Review hold monthly Quality Assurance Meetings with each of the fieldwork teams. A Fostering Manager also attends which helps to pick up any concerns within placement. A Summary Report is provided by Conference and Review which is also circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual worker and manager and an overview is given to heads of service.
- 8.5 Examples of good practice are highlighted in the Quality Assurance Liaison Meetings and recorded in the Minutes. A sample of these are also included in the Professional Standards Newsletter which highlights good practice.

9.0 Conduct of the Organization in Relation to the Case

Procedures for Resolution of Concerns

- 9.1 The Central Bedfordshire Conference and Review Service focuses on immediate problem solving with social workers and team managers whenever possible and will always begin to address issues in a constructive co-operative manner. Central Bedfordshire already has in place a Quality Assurance Process described above through which most concerns will continue to be raised and resolved.
- 9.2 However the IRO Handbook strengthens the role of the IRO and requires the Authority to have a formal Disputes Resolution Policy.

- 9.3 In the Guidance, the IRO has a duty to monitor the Local Authority's performance overall, not just in respect of the review of the child/young person's case. So, the IRO should identify poor practice, and must negotiate with the Local Authority's managers up to the highest level. Referral to CAFCASS will usually occur when a dispute raised through this process has not been resolved in a timely way.
- 9.4 If an IRO considers that a matter involves a breach of a child's human rights the matter should immediately be raised as a formal dispute.
- 9.5 Most other concerns will be raised with the Team Manager through the existing Quality Assurance Process. A 'RAG system' is now in place ensuring that more urgent or serious matters are highlighted. Cases rated amber or red are tracked through the Liaison Meetings until resolved or escalated into formal dispute, if appropriate, again until resolved.
- 9.6 A failure to respond or a failure to resolve a concern through the Quality Assurance Process will lead to a formal dispute being raised, in accordance with the Dispute Resolution Procedure.
- 9.7 Most concerns continue to be raised and resolved through our quality assurance process. Areas of concern that have been identified have included the following issues:
- Late/poor quality case recording
 - Timescales/responses on Frameworki
 - Concerns re contact
 - Concerns re pathway plans/care plans
 - Failure to consult with IROs
 - Concerns about the services offered to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
 - Concerns about timely progression of life-story work

Case examples of the impact of the IRO are given at the end of the report.

The follow-up and feedback mechanism within the Quality Assurance Process has been revised and is working well. The decision to escalate into formal dispute is made by the IRO. An e-mail is sent headed 'Formal Dispute' identifying the issues. There is a Flow Chart for resolution of Formal Dispute, timescales are set out, but may be varied by agreement according to the issues and actions needed.

- A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service
- The Assistant Director and CAFCASS have been consulted on two occasions
- Independent Legal Advice has not been sought, but it's availability was confirmed in the case where CAFCASS were consulted

On both these occasions there were differences of opinion between professionals within Children's Services and, in one case, other agencies. The Head of Corporate Parenting chaired complex case discussions enabling a thorough exploration of the concerns and options and contributing positively to an agreed resolution.

10.0 Any Resource Issues that are putting at risk the Delivery of a Quality Service for Looked after Children

- 10.1 CRS are appropriately resourced to deliver an effective IRO Service. There have been some minor pressure points due to sickness, but overall there has been good stability in workload and capacity.
- 10.2 Staff turnover and the use of Agency Staff, within the Looked After Children's Teams was identified last year as an issue impacting on the quality of service to children and young people. This has vastly improved over the last year.
- 10.3 Placement choice in particular availability within CBC for young people in semi-independent accommodation has been limited. The Corporate Parenting Service Action Plan includes the delivery of the sufficiency strategy and expects IROs to identify and escalate any concerns.

11.0 Annual Work Programme Achievements this year

- 11.1 The IRO Service has been reviewed and as part of service development. IROs have been re-graded and are now the same grade as Team Managers, in line with the IRO Handbook recommendation. The revised job description emphasizes the context of the role within Professional Standards and the expectations of IROs in the continued improvement in services and outcomes for children and young people. The Head of Service and Practice Manager jointly led a half-day workshop in September focused on Professional Leadership. Following on from the Management Re-modelling the Admin Review has led to positive changes in Business Support. Following staff changes earlier in the year we now have a strong team with one agency post to which we hope to be able to recruit soon.
- 11.2 Improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the commissioning team. The monitoring form has been revised to include feedback on Commissioned Services, including placements, The Children's society, CAMHS provision and other specialist services. Both the Commissioning Manager and the Quality Assurance Manager from Commissioning have attended CRS Team Meetings to discuss how we can work jointly together to improve services and outcomes for children. There has been direct discussion with IRO's about placement quality for all our children placed at distance in residential accommodation. IROs now automatically send commissioning a copy of the monitoring form, including comment on the services provided.
- 11.3 IRO training opportunities had been nationally recognized to be limited which has led to the identification and provision of tailored or specific input in CBC. Through the IRO/CAFCASS Quarterly Managers' Meetings across the four local authorities working with local courts, the need for input on Sibling Assessment and Post Order Contact was identified and training was delivered by BAAF to IROs along with social workers and Children's Guardians. Following the success of this further training has recently been planned and delivered across the same group on Special Guardianship Orders. Learning and Development as well as supporting these training opportunities funded a bespoke IRO one day programme delivered in November by an external organisation, which provided the opportunity to the team to consider the recent research on the IRO Role and identify areas for further development within our IRO Service. This has been followed up in Team Meetings and in a Practice Workshop. A gap in Post Qualifying opportunities for

IROs was identified locally and through the IRO Managers Eastern Region Meeting and L&D Regional Meetings, it has been agreed that the University of Birmingham will run a Post Qualifying course for this region. The course is accredited and carries 20 MA credits. CBC will be sending 2/3 IROs, which will be of benefit to them as individuals and also to the team in shared learning.

- 11.4 The IRO Service have maintained, strengthened and developed partnership working with colleagues in CBC and in partner organizations. Managers in other service areas have been invited to our team meetings to inform and develop practice and improvements. We work closely with the Virtual School and IROs ensure oversight of Personal Education Plans and the use of the Pupil Premium, and escalate any concerns.
- 11.5 The IRO Service has embedded the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice Protocol for Public Law Work. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about matters of critical importance to the child's safety wellbeing and permanency needs. IROs comments of final care plans introduced last year have now become embedded good practice. IROs have contributed to timely care planning and case progression by appropriate challenge to any identified delay. CRS attend the monthly legal issues meeting.
- 11.6 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of Placement Stability. A process was introduced for holding Disruption Meetings when long term foster placements break down, chaired by another IRO. Learning from these meetings was shared at Placement Stability Workshop run by the Corporate Parenting Team and the process has been further developed. The IRO Service also attends Monthly Placement Stability Panel as part of the strategy to prevent placement breakdown.
- 11.7 Conference and Review have been developing our own learning about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and ensuring within the reviewing process that CSE risks are being appropriately considered, identified and responded to. The CSE panel representative led a workshop session within a team meeting. IROs also undertook an Audit of the Risk Assessments done for Looked After Children placed out of area. The findings were collated and shared with managers in Corporate Parenting and actions were followed up as necessary for some individual young people.
- 11.8 The IRO Service has developed practice in respect of monitoring and tracking between reviews. This is needs based rather than timetabled so the level of oversight and progress chasing will be dependent on the child's circumstances. All IRO activity in respect of the child is now recorded on the child's record; this has been supported by a change in the recording system which now allows e-mails to be saved to the record.

12.0 Annual Work Programme for Next Year – action plan in appendix

- Responding to recent and emerging National Guidance – as detailed in action plan
- Contributing to Development of Practice in respect of CSE
- Contributing to the work on placement stability
- Developing closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements
- Continued Development of the Work with the CICC , working with the Participation Officer who has recently moved to Professional Standards
- Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs

- IROs to contribute to implementation of Corporate Parenting Team Action Plan

IRO IMPACT- case examples

These case examples illustrate the impact of the IRO Service, representing the voice of the child and challenging the Local Authority when the care it is delivering is not as good as it could be. In some cases the matter was resolved through the formal Dispute Resolution Process, in others the IRO was able to influence a positive outcome working collaboratively with colleagues. The names are not used in these examples.

Case 1 – Supporting a Young Person’s Contact with her Birth Family

L came to UK from her country of origin at age 10 following the death of her father and her mother remarrying. Over time L’s relationship with her mother deteriorated and her own mental health suffered. The family gained residence in the UK but L's older sister did not want this so returned to her country of origin. L subsequently spent time in a psychiatric residential unit moving to foster placement under S20. At the 2nd Review Meeting with IRO L was asked about her long term plans and whether she considered returning to her country of origin when her statutory education was completed. She seemed surprised that this could be possible and/or funded.

At the following Review she confirmed she wanted to do a degree and that her best option was to continue to study in UK. At a further Review she advised that she wanted to go to her country of origin for a holiday, and confirmed she had mentioned this to her Social Worker. The IRO agreed this would be a good experience and built this into her plan. As L would only be 17, and bearing in mind her mental health needs, the IRO considered a Family Safety Plan would be essential. Consultation with Family Group Meeting Service then took place, and after some delays the Family Group Meeting took place and a plan was confirmed. There were some delays in then putting this into place, and the IRO was instrumental in supporting L and chasing the team to confirm arrangements. The plane tickets have recently been booked and L is now excitedly looking forward to her holiday and the contact with members of her extended family with whom she will be staying.

Case 2 Challenging Placement Move, Advocating for the Young People’s Wishes (edited)

Three children between 11 and 15 had been known to Children’s Services since 2004, were accommodated in September 2013 and placed with independent foster family the Browns. The children thrived in their care. During care proceedings In November 2014 as part of the consideration of options for permanence the Corporate Parenting Service identified an in-house foster placement they felt could equally well meet the children’s needs at better value to the Council. The IRO Service was appropriately consulted and challenged the proposal as the IRO had concerns about detrimental impact on the children as they have been settled in the Brown’s care for 14 months and considered this their home. Corporate Parenting recognized that the children should be consulted and that a Review would need to be held. The IRO was asked to seek the children’s views, and evidence what impact the proposed move would have. The children told their IRO that they were all very upset with the prospect of being moved, they said very clearly they do not wish to move.

K “I do not want to go it is like my home, I am so angry, upset, made me sad, but I like R and S (other children in placement) and J and R (foster carers). I do not know what to do”.

C “I told the social worker I don’t want to move....I am part of a very fun, funny family and good family.... I feel angry, I will not move. I am settled this is my home, I like the things we do. I love J and R I love R and S, I am very happy here”.

A “I am not going to move because I like it where I am, I am settled where I am. I like the house, J, R, S, R, the dogs, the food, the holidays, the bedroom, I LIKE EVERYTHING... I can talk to J and R when I feel sad”

The IRO supported the children getting an advocate to support them in expressing their views. The IRO consulted with other professionals including the children’s guardian and education. The LAC Review did not agree with the change of care plan to move the children and the IRO proposed to the service that the children should remain in their current placement, instigating the Formal Dispute Resolution Process. The challenge was successful with the response: “There had been many discussions amongst ourselves, which took time. After considering again the views of the children and that of the professionals involved, I agreed the children should remain with their current foster carers. Thank you for your inputs in this matter”

The children were informed they were staying with Browns prior to Christmas and this enabled them to have a good festive period. They have advised their IRO that they are happy now and all said “I like everything here”.

Case 3 - Supporting the Young Person’s View of his Own Identity

Young person aged 17, seeking Asylum asked his IRO for support in regard to his date of birth. This had been recorded as either 01.05.97 or 05.01.97 in different documentation. The discrepancy was picked up by his Social Worker when he wished him happy birthday in January. **N** expressed surprise which the Social Worker perceived to be natural/genuine. On discussion it was felt quite likely the misunderstanding has been caused by the juxtaposition of day and month. The management view was that age assessments are often queried and that the decision made to use the January date would not be changed. However, when the IRO discussed with the young person he was clear in his expressed view that his birthday was in May. **N** did not have anything to gain by a four month difference. He had been granted refugee status until 2019.

The IRO was concerned however about the impact on his sense of identity and emotional well-being, and felt that having his official documentation ‘wrong’ may have life long implications. The IRO’s view was that the young person’s explanation and account were credible and that it mattered to him because he knew it to be true. The initial management decision was discussed with the young person by the IRO.

N still wished her to support his wish for his date of birth to be recognized as May. The management decision was challenged through the Dispute Process and the decision was made to recognize the correct date of birth the young person.

Case 4 - Addressing Diversity

Two African young people requested support to enable them to attend their Orthodox Church, the nearest being in London. This need was identified at a LAC review in August, and was agreed in principal. However it had not been progressed and was raised again by the IRO in October at which point there had been significant delay and the matter was escalated to a formal dispute. The IRO challenged that rather than seeking to support this request and make it

happen, the team had identified problems and not sought resolution. Further to the escalation this was resolved, transport costs were agreed, and after an initial supported visit regular attendance has been established. This is a positive response to these young people's religious and cultural needs.

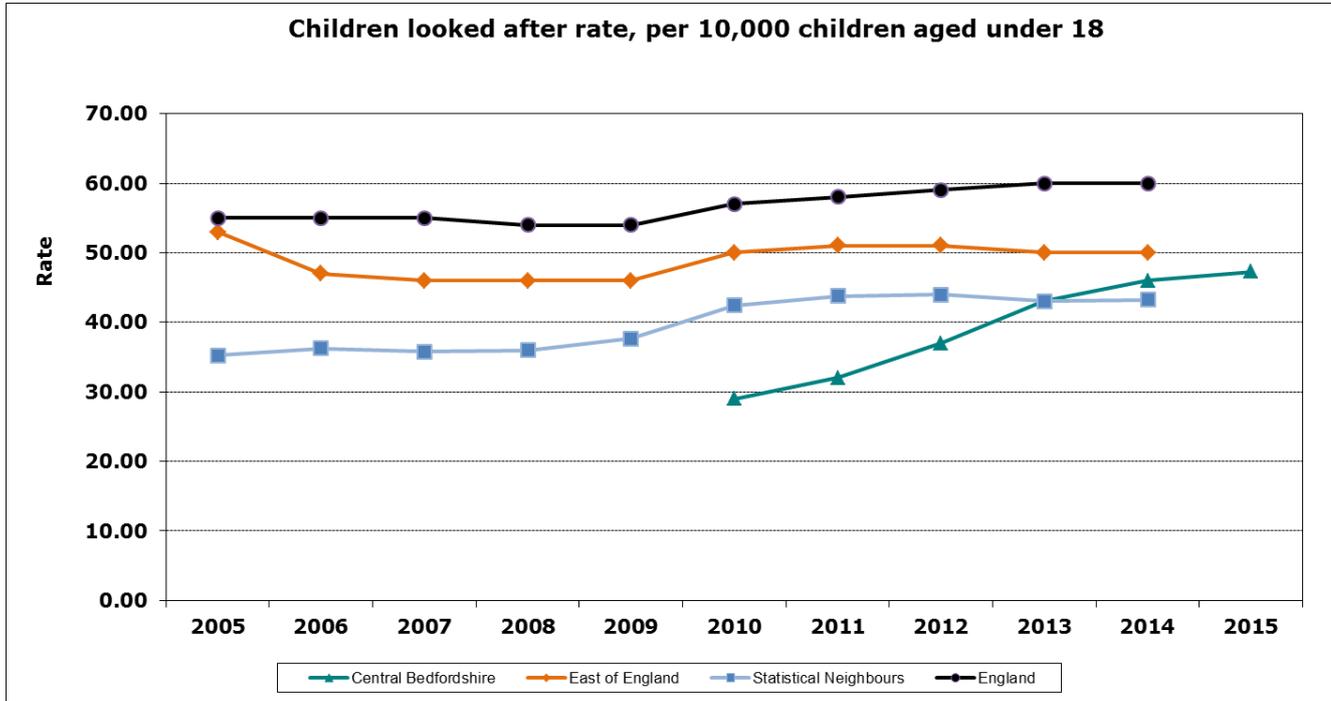
Report prepared by
Isabel Wilks
Practice Manager
Conference and Review Service

Appendix A

Quantitative Information about the IRO Service DRAFT DATA - yet to be validated

A total of 363 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2015.

A total of 818 reviews were held in the year, an increase from 777 held last year.



Notes

- (i) The Looked After Children population for the past six years is shown above. This is shown as a “Rate per 10,000” to enable comparison with other areas. The year end figure for Central Bedfordshire is currently reported as 274, up from 268 in March 2014. National, regional and statistical neighbour rates are also shown above.
- (ii) The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. In CBC the review managers undertake both the IRO and conference chair roles. Calculated on per child basis caseloads at 31/03/15 average 60. This figure has varied over the year and there are variations between workers. The size of caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO. The number of other responsibilities, the number of out of county placements, large family groups and complex case needs will also impact on the work load. A review of caseloads and workloads was undertaken in October 2014 and at that point capacity was assessed as appropriate. Staffing and CP/LAC numbers have remained reasonably stable over the past six months which would suggest this remains the case. However management re-modelling has led to a wider range of additional tasks being undertaken by the review managers as detailed in 2.5. This is of positive benefit but the on-going monitoring of the case and the timeliness of case recording and administrative tasks can be compromised by the demands of additional workload responsibilities.

Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as of: 31/03/15)

Total 274

Ethnicity

	White	Mixed	Asian	Black	other
CBC Local School Population	89%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
CBC Children Looked After 31/03/15	79%	10%	2%	6%	2%
National Children Looked After 31/03/14	78%	9%	4%	7%	2%

Age

Age at 31 March 2015					
	BOYS	GIRLS	Total CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Under 1	7	11	18	7%	6%
1-4	25	21	46	17%	17%
5-9	39	28	67	24%	20%
10-15	53	42	95	35%	37%
16-17	32	15	47	17%	21%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	1	0	1		
TOTAL	157	117	274	100%	100%
CBC %	57%	43%			
31/03/14 National %	55%	45%			

Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2015			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Care Orders Interim	31	11.3%	12%
Care Orders Full	127	46.4%	46%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	76	27.7%	28%
Placement Order	39	14.2%	13%
Sentenced to CYPA 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	0	0.0%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	0	0.0%	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	1	0.4%	-
TOTAL	274	100%	100%

Placement

Placement at 31 March 2015			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	39	14.2%	75%
Placement with other Foster Carer	157	57.3%	
Secure Unit	1	8.0%	9%
Homes and Hostels	21		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	2	0.7%	1%
Other Residential Settings	0	0.0%	2%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	20	7.3%	5%
Placed with Own Parents	7	2.6%	5%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	27	9.9%	3%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0.0%	-
Other Placement	0	0.0%	-
TOTAL	274	100%	100%

Action Plan 2015-2016 DRAFT

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
<p>Responding to recent and any emerging National Guidance</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Permanence long term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child 2. Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children 3. Working Together 2015 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities. 2. Develop practice guidance with corporate parenting 	<p>June</p> <p>September</p>	<p>Implementation of statutory guidance. CRS Practice Manager IROs Head of Professional Standards Managers from permanence and 16+ teams within corporate parenting</p>
<p>Contributing to Development of Practice in respect of CSE</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IROs to ensure CSE is considered and that where appropriate a risk assessment and safety plan are in place. 2. IROs to review return interview records and ensure any necessary actions have been identified. IRO's to record a case note to this effect. 3. IROs to ensure QA challenge is made to social work teams and to other agencies as needed. 4. Ensure Sex and Relationships Education is in place/ has been provided, if gap identified raise with team and virtual schools and ensure addressed. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>June</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>CSE is always considered, risks are identified, up to date safety plans are in place. IROs to consider CSE at each LAC review and recommend any actions identified.</p>
<p>Contributing to the work on placement stability</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Embed placement stability panel and ensure IROs are identifying placements at risk and contributing to panel as appropriate. 2. Develop the use of disruption meetings and evaluate and disseminate the learning from these. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>6-monthly report on learning</p>	<p>Improved Placement Stability IROS CRS Practice Manager</p>

<p>Developing closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitoring forms to be routinely copied to Foster Care review officer. IROs to give qualitative feedback and offer challenge where appropriate. 2. IROs to complete contribution form for all annual reviews where they have been the IRO for a child in placement during that period. 3. Foster Care Reviewing Officer to Attend CRS team Meeting Quarterly 	<p>In place Ongoing</p>	<p>IROs contribute to improved placement quality</p> <p>IRO Foster Care Review Officer Practice Manager</p>
<p>Continued Development of the Work with the CICC</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Meet with the CICC to feedback the IROs response to the recent consultation exercise. 2. Timetable twice yearly consultation events 3. Identify IRO and if possible Young person to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group. 	<p>Sept Twice Yearly June</p>	<p>IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.</p> <p>Stephen Lagan to lead on this area.</p>
<p>Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop practice guidance for IROs setting clear expectations so that case overview is proportionate according to need and risk. 2. For Identified high risk cases , for example CSE IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the young person. 3. Brief social work teams on expectations and on their responsibility to ensure IROs are advised of any significant changes for a child. 	<p>Sept Ongoing Sept</p>	<p>IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.</p> <p>Practice Managers IROs</p>
<p>IROs to contribute to implementation of Corporate Parenting Team Action Plan</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IROs to be briefed on Corporate Parenting Team Action Plan 	<p>June</p>	<p>IROs effective contribution to delivery of Corporate parenting plan.</p> <p>Practice Manager IROs</p>