



Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2015 – March 2016

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 805 reviews were held this year a slight decrease from 818 last year
- Timeliness and participation continues to be good
- A 100% permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children.
- IRO caseloads are within statutory guidance.
- The quality assurance system, including the dispute resolution process is fully embedded and evidences an improvement in the provision of services to children and young people.
- 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

2.0 Professional Profile of the IRO Service

- 2.1 In Central Bedfordshire the Independent Reviewing Officers' function is undertaken by IROs in Conference and Review (CRS) within the Professional Standards function of Children's Services. IROs 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 (LADO) role, in combination with the review manager role.
- 2.2 In April 2015 the Service had an establishment of 7.8 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) posts, including the LADO function. Having successfully recruited four new permanent members of staff, the last of whom started in February 2016, we have achieved staff stability over the past year and a 100% permanent workforce. 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 which 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 IROs have, as required in statutory guidance, 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 IROs have recently joined as experienced IROs from other local authorities bringing different ideas and experience to CBC. The majority of the team live locally or in neighbouring authorities, and there is a good knowledge of the local area within the team.
- 2.5 All of the IROs undertake additional roles and duties, either as representatives of the IRO Service or as part of their wider role. These include:
- Monthly Quality Assurance (QA) 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
 - Participation in rolling monthly audit programme
 - Attendance at Mosaic practitioner group
 - Attendance at quarterly liaison meetings with CAFCASS
 - Supervision of the foster care Review Officer
 - 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 The CRS is responsible for the following elements of the LAC Review:
- Deciding who needs to attend the LAC review,
 - where the review should be held,
 - arranging the invitations and consultations,
 - providing reports,
 - recording the discussion,
 - ensuring timely distribution of the review record,
 - involve co-ordination between social worker, and administrative staff.

Business processes are set within the work-flow and formatting of Mosaic, the children's case management and recording system.

- 3.4 The IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic support team are currently trialing further developments 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 will further enhance the achievements already completed in the 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 Department for Education, Children looked after return, *'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.

99.8% of LAC reviews were completed on time which is 804 reviews out of a total of 805.

On this one occasion there was a change of the young persons allocated IRO and a delay in setting a review in time. The possibility of this reoccurring for any young person has been addressed as the administration system records the due dates in the electronic diary when the review is booked.

- 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. Although, children aged under 4 are exempt from this count IRO's ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways such as direct observation and the obtaining the views of professionals who know the child. 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. This year 98.8% young people participated in their most recent review.
- 5.4 A total of 7 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, 6 of which were missing at the time of the review and one young person did not attend his review as he did not feel well enough but gave his views to the IRO prior to the meeting.

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

Following the success of IROs attending activity days arranged by the CICC, IROs decided to organize their own event in 2015 with the help of the Participation Officer as it was recognised that young people enjoyed meeting the IROs and spending time with them in this more informal and relaxed setting and joined in activities.

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 were identified which resulted in the development, implementation and achievement of an action plan:

- IRO now ensure that consultations about the review arrangements take place in sufficient time to allow the review to be organised taking into account the child's views.
- Consultation meetings more activity based and focus on child related activities such as IROs playing football, Lego, Chess, or going out for a coffee.
- IROs recognised the young people's wish for the reviews to be shorter, and have sought to achieve this by gathering information and consultation with professionals in advance. This has enabled 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.
- The Participation Officer is now a member of the Professional Standards which underpins the importance of the participation of young people and the relationship with CRS and supports the opportunities to regularly share information. The Participation Officer also attends the IRO team meetings twice a year.
- Young people and IROs felt that consultation activity events were successful and a fun way to form and build positive relationships and inform improvement to the service. The next event has been planned with the Participation Officer and will take place in Summer 2016.

IROs used this feedback to inform their thinking about future reviews at their own IRO Practice Development Day in January 2016, facilitated by an external organization.

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 72% (582/805) of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending 33% (266/805) or contributing to the review process. There is a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 67% (541/805) of reviews, fathers for 41% (334/805). For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage 4% (10/223) of cases a parent has died.

There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 8% (66/805) of mothers, 18% (162/905) of fathers. In some cases parents are invited but do not attend 15% (121/805) mothers, 13% fathers (107/805). 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. This process of engagement resulted in every concern raised being resolved through an informal discussion and exploration of the matter and consequently no complaints were received.

Positive feedback is often verbal and hard to capture. One example comes directly from a young person placed in a potential adoptive placement. Sadly after a great deal of thought and consideration amongst professionals and lead by the IRO it was agreed that the young person would need to leave this adoptive placement and move into a foster placement. This move occurred and the IRO who had been a consistent figure in this young persons life went to visit him. On meeting the young person in this new placement he smiled, a smile that the IRO had not seen for a long period of time and confirmed to the IRO that although this was a very challenging and difficult decision to take it had clearly been the right one for this child who now displayed in the first time in a very long time that he was happy.

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 Mosaic 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 Professional Standards Newsletter contained a sample to highlight good practice to social workers and managers, however until recently the Head of Professional was a vacant post and it is envisaged that publication of this newsletter will resume as it has not been published for some time.

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 and child-centered 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. The IRO Service has implemented 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. An IRO comment on final care plans is now fully embedded and IROs have contributed to timely care planning and case progression by appropriate challenge to any identified delay.
- 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 The number of concerns has decreased this last year reflecting the improvements in the quality of work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Team. Most concerns identified continue to be raised and resolved through our quality assurance process. Areas of concern that have been identified have included the following issues:
- Late or poor quality recording of case notes
 - Delay in achieving timescale of managers responses to child's review
 - Concerns re contact
 - Concerns re pathway plans/care plans
 - 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 is working well. A formal Dispute Resolution procedure is in place with agreed timescales and escalation process when issues have been identified by an IRO and action is required.

- A small number of disputes have been escalated to Head of Service
- The Assistant Director has been consulted on one occasion
- Independent Legal Advice or a referral to CAFCASS has not been required.

These escalations have arisen due to differences of opinion between professionals within Children's Services and been resolved as 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 pressure points recently due to the rise in the numbers of children and young people who have become looked after and subsequently the numbers of reviews required, however this is being closely monitored.
- 10.2 The Corporate Parenting Service is now fully staffed with permanent employees which assists to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.
- 10.3 Placement choice for young people in semi-independent accommodation was identified as an area of development. The Corporate Parenting Service Action Plan includes the delivery of the sufficiency strategy and expects IROs to identify and escalate any concerns. During this last year the range of choice in semi independent accommodation has varied and a tendering exercise is currently taking place to review this provision.

11.0 Progress of Action Plan 2015-2016

- 11.1 In partnership with Research in Practice a tailored support workshop was held in February 2016, 'The role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs): What does the research tell us?' which was attended by all IRO's. Following the success of this workshop we are pursuing a further opportunity focusing on 'the role of Quality Assurance for Independent Reviewing Officers', to review our knowledge and strengthen our impact on the performance and outcomes of the local authority.
- 11.2 Following the identification of a national gap in Post Qualifying opportunities for IROs a bespoke Post Qualifying course has been developed by the University of Birmingham. This is an accredited course which carries 20 MA credits. Two IRO's from Central Bedfordshire Council have been supported to attend and their learning will benefit both them as individuals and their team, who will share learning in the learning.
- 11.3 The IRO Service have maintained, strengthened and developed partnership working with colleagues in CBC and in partner organisations. 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. A representative from CRS attends the monthly legal issues meeting.
- 11.4 A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has recently been appointed and is managed within CRS. The Review Officer will regularly attend CRS team meetings and it is envisaged that this new arrangement will support a closer working relationship with all IRO's and the joint views regarding quality of placement. Regular meetings are also planned with the Fostering Service to correlate the information with the supervising social workers.
- 11.5 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of Placement Stability. As part of the Corporate Parenting Team Action the CRS have contributed too a comprehensive audit of young people plans who had more than 3

placement moves in one year. This has been concluded and as a result a Placement Stability Action Plan has been drawn up to address the identified learning. CRS have extended the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO for occasions when long term placements break down to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more. An annual evaluation is also completed by CRS in line with good practice identified within the adoption process. The IRO Service also attends a Monthly Permanency Tracking meeting as part of the strategy to prevent placement breakdown and ensure permanence is secured for young people in a timely manner by effective care planning and case progression using appropriate challenge to any identified delay.

- 11.6 Ongoing 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 continue to attend CRS Team Meetings ensure ongoing communication to improve services and outcomes for children. IROs provide commissioning a copy of the monitoring form, including comment on the services provided and the Quality Assurance Officer provides a quality assurance report to the IRO for each placement caring for a young person.
- 11.7 CRS have continued to develop their own learning and knowledge about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and ensuring within the reviewing process that CSE risks are being appropriately considered, identified and responded to. The CSE coordinator has attended CRS team meetings to ensure that the local knowledge and any learning is disseminated to IRO's and as a result the risk of CSE is considered at every young persons reviews. In preparation for the recent Ofsted inspection all of the identified cases, many of whom had an allocated IRO, were subject to a comprehensive multi agency audit. The audit and findings were shared to ensure ongoing learning and any actions were followed up as necessary for some individual young people. The CRS team participated in a national webinar focusing on CSE.
- 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 and following a successful trial of the use of mobile technology within CRS this is currently being rolled out for all IRO's. The use of mobile technology will provide a more accessible, alternative form of communication for young people with the use of Skype and facetime and provide a different medium to obtain their wishes and views via the different applications that are available.
- 11.9 The Participation Officer has recently moved to Professional Standards and has attended IRO team meetings to ensure that we continually review the knowledge and experiences of young people within care. An IRO is now a member of the Corporate Parenting Board to offer an independent overview of the needs of young people whom are looked after.

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

- Respond to recent and emerging National Guidance

- Contribute to development of practice and implementation of multi agency development following recent inspection focusing on CSE/Missing
- Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way
- Contribute to the work on placement stability, findings of recent audit and subsequent action plan when published.
- Develop closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements
- Continue Development of the Work with the CICC
- Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs

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 - Advocating for the young people's wishes

One young person J had been known to Children's Services since 2008, and was accommodated in March 2012 and placed with her grandmother who became a foster carer. J was eleven years of age and due to transfer to school in September 2016. J was an incredibly bright young person, exceeding all of her targets and some of her achievements had been published. She was a member of the school council and enjoyed extra curricular activities that supported her future aspirations that were funded via the Pupil Premium.

J and her grandmother had identified the school that she wished to transfer to, however this was not agreed due to the schools Ofsted rating and the guidance that all Looked After Children should attend a school with a high Ofsted rating. This was discussed within the PEP meeting and LAC Review. J had visited the school and spoke positively about this experience. She described it as a very friendly and welcoming school. She thought that it was good and that the school was improving, which she had also read in the local newspaper. J felt that she would achieve at this school and her friends were also transferring there.

The IRO was concerned that J would lose her motivation and passion for learning if her wishes and feelings were not prioritized and she was made to attend a school she did not want to attend. The IRO consulted with J's grandmother and other professionals including representatives from education. As a result it was agreed that the wishes and feelings of the young person should be prioritised and professionals would support J to attend the school of her choice.

J was informed of this decision and subsequently secured a place in the school of her choice. J was delighted that her voice was listened too and she was given to the same opportunity as other young people and her peers.

Case 2 – Supporting a young person’s contact with birth family

D and G, aged 17 and 15, were accommodated in 2002 and placed with foster carers. The siblings were made subject to Care Orders in 2004 and they have remained with the same foster carers since 2003 who are committed to both of the children. The plan is for the children to remain in this placement until at least they have finished their education which is likely to be by 19 years of age when the Local Authority will support funding the placement under the Staying Put policy.

Sadly in 2008 and 2014 the children’s birth parents died, however they have contact with their maternal grandparents twice a year in the summer and near to Christmas. They also see their paternal grandmother and wider paternal family including cousins and uncles as and when they wish.

As the IRO at a LAC Review, the issue of contact was raised not just for those members of the family that they currently had contact with but also their young brother who was adopted. D and G told the IRO that they wished to see him as they previously had contact with when he was young but this has faded out over the last few years.

As a result the IRO requested the social worker to pursue the possibility of contact with the adoptive parents of their brother. The social worker contacted the adoptive parents who spoke to the child and it was agreed that contact could be arranged. This is currently being pursued and is soon to be arranged as an initial date was postponed to enable their adoptive brother to accept the news regarding the death of his birth mother.

Case 3 – Challenging delay in providing for a young person’s needs

N had been known since to Children’s Services since 2006 and was accommodated in 2013. N and his sibling were placed in foster care and made subject of Care Orders by the court due to the ongoing concerns regarding the care that they received from their parents. It was agreed that they will remain in long term foster care and they have been in the same foster placement for eighteen months and the foster carers wish to care for these children on a long term basis, which is being progressed. N is 10 years of age and is diagnosed with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, challenging behaviour and a medical condition that required an operation.

At a LAC Review the IRO discussed in the young person’s transition plan the need for additional support whilst his Educational Health Care Plan Assessment (EHCP) was being completed. It was important that additional support was in place and implemented transition was a success.

The IRO identified a delay in providing this extra support at school and challenged this and escalated the concerns via Virtual School. A meeting was held and as a result extra hours were provided by Virtual School of 15 hours one to one support for 6 weeks.

This is currently still in place whilst his Education, Health and Care Plan Assessment is being completed.

Case 4 – Engaging with family members

Y was an unaccompanied child asylum seeker aged 14 years of age. He was accommodated and placed in foster care. Within the first LAC review the IRO raised the point that we had yet to make contact with the young person's parents and their views were not known about their son being accommodated by the local authority. The IRO recommended that he and the social worker and IRO would call the parents using an interpreting service.

Y's parents were delighted to hear from the professionals providing care to their son and most importantly they gave verbal consent for the local authority to care for him. The parents were able to seek answers and reassurance about their son and how he would be cared for and were able to provide essential information about his physical, social and emotional needs.

It was agreed that in addition to the contact between Y and his parents', the local authority and Y's parents would regularly communicate to ensure that they were kept up to date with his progress and his legal status.

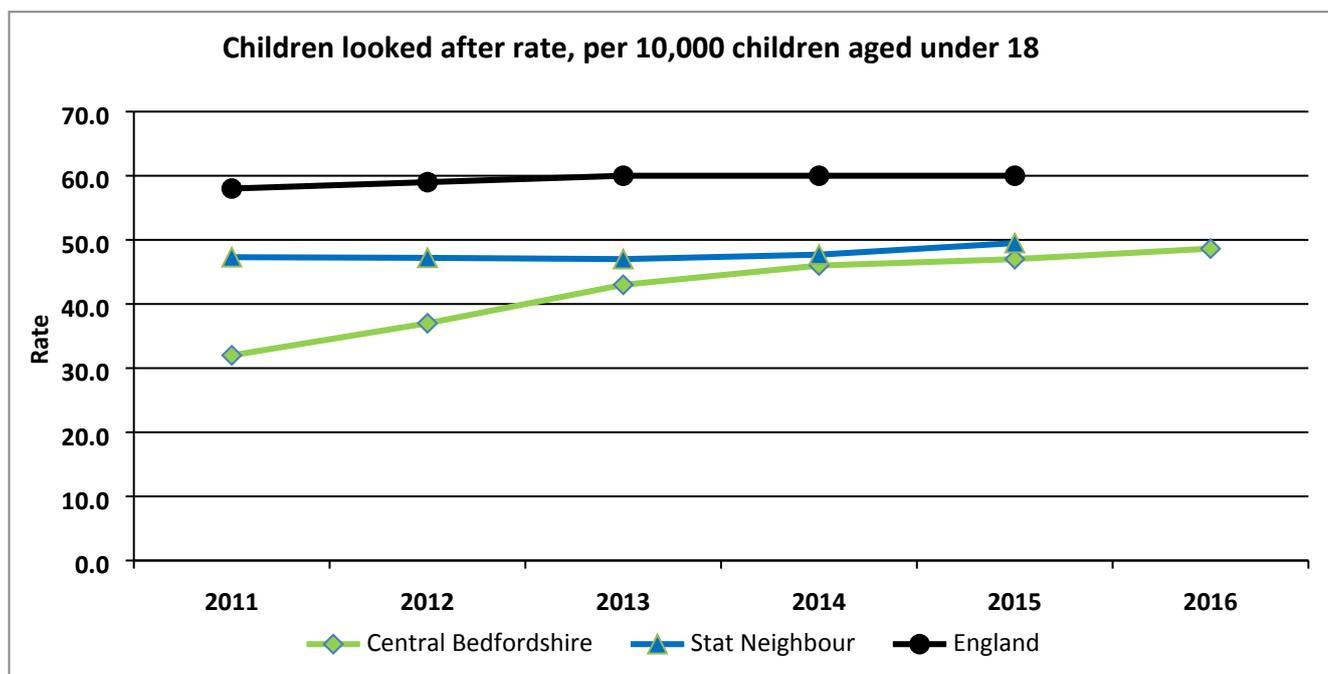
Sharon Keenan
Practice Manager
Conference and Review Service

Appendix A

Quantitative Information about the IRO Service

A total of 349 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2016.

A total of 805 reviews were held in the 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 285, up from 274 in March 2015. National, regional and statistical neighbour rates are also shown above. Of this total 11.9%, that is 34 of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this compares to our statistical neighbours at 4.0% and national figure of 2.9% (2014-2015).
- (ii) The IRO Handbook recommends that case loads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70. In CBC the IROs undertake both the IRO and conference chair roles. Calculated on per child basis caseloads at 28/03/16 average 68, a rise of 8 since last year. 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. Staffing and CP/ LAC numbers have remained reasonably stable over the past year, which would suggest that staffing level are appropriate at present, although nearing the recommended capacity. However management re-modelling has led to a wider range of additional tasks being undertaken by the IROs 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: 31/03/16)

Total 285

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 31/03/16	76%	9%	3%	5%	7%
National Children Looked After 31/03/15	79%	10%	2%	6%	2%

Age

Age at 31 March 2016

	BOYS	GIRLS	Total CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/15
Under 1	6	11	17	6%	5%
1-4	18	24	42	15%	15%
5-9	40	28	68	24%	21%
10-15	50	44	94	33%	38%
16-17	47	17	64	22%	22%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	0	0	0		
TOTAL	161	124	285	100%	100%
CBC %	56%	44%			
31/03/15 National %	55%	45%			

Legal Status

Legal Status at 31 March 2016

	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Care Orders Interim	29	10%	11%
Care Orders Full	149	52%	49%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	70	25%	29%
Placement Order	37	13%	11%
Sentenced to CYP A 1969 Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	0	0%	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	0	0%	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	0	0%	-
TOTAL	285	100%	100%

Placement

Placement at 31 March 2016			
	CBC	% CBC	National 31/03/14
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	31	11%	75%
Placement with other Foster Carer	167	59%	
Secure Unit	1	9%	9%
Homes and Hostels	25		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	0	0%	1%
Other Residential Settings	0	0%	2%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	17	6%	5%
Placed with Own Parents	9	3%	5%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	29	10%	3%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0%	-
Other Placement	2	1%	-
	4	1%	
TOTAL	285	100%	100%

Action Plan 2016-2017

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve permanence long term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities. Develop practice guidance with corporate parenting 	<p>June 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	Implementation of statutory guidance.
Contribute to development of practice and implementation of action plan following recent inspection focusing on CSE/Missing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> IROs to ensure CSE/missing episodes are considered and that where appropriate a risk assessment and safety plan are in place. IROs to review return interview records and ensure any necessary actions have been identified. IRO's to record a case note to this effect. IROs to ensure QA challenge is made to social work teams and to other agencies as needed. 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 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	CSE/Missing is always considered, risks are identified, up to date safety plans are in place.
Review the LAC Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engaging with young people in a meaningful way	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Review the current LAC review format and explore alternative practice. If changes are identified regarding the format of the LAC reviews - create and implement an action plan Explore alternative options available, including computer technology to ensure 	<p>November 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p>	The LAC review is child centred and the voice and participation underpins the review.

	that the voice of the child is central to the review process, for example Skype, language line.		
Contribute to the work on placement stability, findings of recent audit and subsequent action plan when published.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ensure effective IRO representative at placement stability panel and ensure IROs are identifying placements at risk and contributing to panel as appropriate. 5. Enhance the use of disruption meetings for foster care placements and evaluate and disseminate the learning from these. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>6-monthly report on learning</p>	Improved Placement Stability
Develop closer working with the Foster Care Reviewing Officer on the Quality of Placements	<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</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>April/July/ October/January</p>	IROs contribute to improved placement quality
Continue Development of the Work with the CICC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Timetable annual consultation events 2. Identified IRO to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person. 	<p>September 2016</p> <p>Twice Yearly</p>	IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.
Ensure appropriate and proportionate case overview by IROs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop practice standards 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. Develop the use of multi agency care planning meetings when children/young 	<p>September 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2016</p>	IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.

	<p>people going through a significant transition</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Embed the use of the Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes. 5. Brief social work teams on expectations and on their responsibility to ensure IROs are advised of any significant changes for a child. 6. Quality Assurance systems are enhanced to incorporate all information obtained from professional standards to triangulate information from Audit manager, Consultant Social workers and reported at Performance SMT bi-monthly. 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>September 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	
<p>Review the Mosaic workflow system</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. IRO, Corporate Parenting Services and Mosaic support team to ensure that the LAC process, support the workflow to improve timeliness, and focus on the quality of the recording, and the tasks is correctly allocated 2. Training to be provided to IROs and social workers to ensure care plans are SMART. 	<p>June 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p>	<p>Ensure care plans appropriately reflect the child's needs and are available to robust challenge by the IRO.</p> <p>Review minutes and decisions agreed and distributed in a timely manner.</p>