



# **Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report April 2016 – March 2017**

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 872 reviews were held this year a slight decrease from 899 last year.
- Timeliness and participation continues to be good.
- An almost 100% permanent IRO and administrative staff group will ensure excellent continuity to our children (0.5 IRO post was covered by an agency worker for 6 months).
- 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 the Conference and Review Service (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. One worker undertakes the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role in combination with the review manager role. The Fostering Review Officer is a member of this Service and has responsibility to conduct annual and additional reviews of Central Bedfordshire Council foster carers, as required in accordance with statutory requirements.
- 2.2 In April 2016, the permanent appointment to the post of Head of Professionals Standards started. This strategic leadership and oversight has provided an opportunity for the Service to promote and support continuous scrutiny, implementation and monitoring of quality standards at all levels within the organisation.

In March 2016 the Service had an establishment of 7.2 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) permanent, excluding the LADO function. In August, one member was successfully recruited to join a national inspection team and this subsequent vacancy was filled by an agency worker who had previous experience of working in this team. It is anticipated that at the time of publication this post will be permanently recruited too. This level of stability, knowledge and experience over the past year 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 IROs have, as required in statutory guidance, a considerable number of year's experience. IRO's 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. 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:
- Bi-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.
  - 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
- Involving 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 have successfully implemented new processes to simplify and streamline the procedure, 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 further enhanced 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 ongoing.

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

##### **4.1 The Timeliness of Reviews**

- 4.2 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.

99.5% of LAC reviews were completed on time which is 868 reviews out of a total of 872.

- 4.3 Of these four, three were overdue by one day and it was considered acceptable for continuity of service provision to the child and family as the IRO was off sick. The one other occasion was due to an administrative oversight and booking the review late and remedial action has been taken to ensure that the system flags this at the point of booking reduce the risk of this happening again.
- 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 and the second within 3 months of the first. Subsequent reviews are at intervals of no more than 6 months. In addition, reviews will be held if there is a significant change of circumstances or change of 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 exempt from this count but IRO's ensure that they seek their views in a variety of ways, such as direct observation and obtaining views from professionals that work with the children. 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, 96.6% of young people participated in their most recent review. Children and young people are also actively supported and encouraged to 'chair' their reviews.

*C is 13 and has been looked after for four years along with his brother and sister. He was subject to a Child Protection Plan and then became looked after under section 20 before a full care order was granted and is now placed with his sister with a carer locally. He has faced a number of challenges and is supported by his Foster Carer, Social Worker and specialist support to which he has responded very well.*

*He continues to achieve in his education and is supported to attend after school activities and recently attended the University of Bedfordshire Access Partnership to raise aspirations of Looked After Children.*

*He has worked with his Social Worker to complete his life story and enjoyed this activity and produced a book that he is very proud of. He has also developed a very positive working relationship with his IRO who joined him at the summer activities and consultation events arranged by the CiCC. At his most recent LAC review he was supported by the IRO and co-chaired this meeting and made sure that everyone contributed to his meeting.*

- 5.4 A total of 10 young people chose not to participate in their reviews, 7 of which were missing at the time of the review. One young person was in custody, however gave his views to the IRO prior to the meeting. One was sectioned because of mental health difficulties and one did not attend as she is young for her age so it was decided that it is best she didn't attend as the meeting would be too much for her.

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

- 5.6 IROs value and promote the work of the CiCC and send referrals of young people who would like to be part of the CiCC. Following the success of IROs attending activity days with children and young people, their feedback was that they enjoyed meeting the IRO and spending time with them in an informal and relaxed setting. This has become an annual event. This year was as successful and the IROs attended these days arranged by the CiCC, including 'Gulliver's Land', 'Bounce' and horse riding.

5.7 Consultation booklets are sent out to all young people before their Looked After Children's Review. The booklets were designed by our CiCC and encourage young people to give their views before the meeting about their life and being in care which is then discussed in the meeting. Some young people use the spaces to draw pictures to give their views. This feedback was evaluated and key themes were identified.

- The majority of children and young people (94%) said that they were happy with the current arrangements and where they lived. The changes that they identified included the placement being closer to home, small changes in the house or a change of the routine.
- They said that they liked school especially meeting friends, the teachers and the subjects and if they could change anything a small number said the subjects, the rules and some of the pupils.
- They all felt that they were healthy and the majority said that they has attended their health appointment and would know who to contact if they were unwell.
- 78% of children and young people said that they were happy with how often they saw their Social Worker and some of these said that they saw them too often.
- The children and young people said that in their spare time they liked at to see their friend, do activities of watch TV of play computer games.
- The most significant area of concern identified is that 73% children and young people said that they were not happy with the contact arrangements with their family. When asked they said that were not happy with the venue, would like more contact with those they currently saw, or different people.
- When asked about if they would like an advocate or independent visitor 30% said yes.



5.8 This key themes identified have been reviewed on individually and as an organisation. In April 2017, the Advocacy Service became part of Central Bedfordshire and is offered by professionals who are independent of the organisation to provide a service that 'reaches out' to all children and young people and ensure that they are appointed an advocate is identified as and when they need.

5.9 One of our CiCC Ambassadors was invited to a meeting with the IROs to discuss the use of a new way to organise the Looked After Children's Reviews. She gave her view on what reviews were like for her and how she thinks that they have improved and gave feedback on the information presented. This pioneering work is to be developed as part of our action plan.

5.10 To improve the range of options available to children and young people to support and encourage them to share their views the MOMO app (Mind of My Own) has been purchased. The MOMO app gives children and young people an instant and convenient way to express their views, wishes and feelings, and Social Workers a smart way to record them. This app will be used for all children and young people, including those who are Looked After and will be an alternative consultation form for Looked After Reviews.

### 5.11 Feedback from Young People

5.12 During the recent consultation events and the Peer Review, members of the CiCC spoke about their IROs and the support they have received from them.

5.13 Young people said they have a good relationship with their IRO and that their IRO know them well and made comments like:

*I really liked seeing my IRO at Gulliver's, I was having some difficulties and was able to speak to her about it and she reassured me.*

*My IRO has really helped with sorting things out for me. I have their phone number and can contact them myself.*

*It used be that an IRO would attend a meeting and I would only see them twice a year. Now I feel that it has changed and my meetings are quite different.*

*I feel happier to talk to my IRO and say what I really thing about things, he came on an ice skating trip and we were able to see him outside of a meeting which helped us to get to know him.*

5.14 Our CiCC Ambassadors report that they think the service is very different from when they were looked after and had review meetings. They see that IROs attend activities and make time to meet with their young people and are really interested in what the young people are doing and what they are achieving. Ambassadors stated that although they don't have meetings anymore *'they sound a lot more young person focused and encourage the young people during activities to work with their IRO and make sure that their voice is heard'*.

## 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.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Overall 74% (647/872) of reviews record parental participation, reflecting one or both parents either attending 30% (264/872) or contributing to the review process. There is a far greater participation by mothers than fathers. Mothers' views were obtained for 70% (617/872) of reviews, fathers for 45% (395/872). For those cases where parental views are not obtained the reason is recorded. In a small percentage 9% (25/265) of cases both parents have died.
- 6.4 There are some parents whose whereabouts are unknown 11% (102/872) of mothers and 22% (199/872) of fathers. In some cases parents are invited but do not attend 13% (118/872) mothers, 12% fathers (110/872). 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, however this is an example:

A young girl of 11, AB, who had suffered a traumatic childhood and consequently has been Looked After for 3 years. She bravely told her Social Worker and IRO that she didn't want contact with her mummy as this made her feel anxious. Her mother is described as very unpredictable and overbearing, so this was a very brave and insightful conversation from an 11 year old. The IRO suggested the her mummy could be video messaged to tell her she was Okay. It was thought that this was far less threatening and manageable. This would enable AB to be in control and redo the video message or change her mind at any point. They had a little practice and then she was able to say a '*hi, I'm fine*'. Afterwards AB stated '*I feel as if a weight has lifted off my shoulders, thank you \*\*\*\**'.

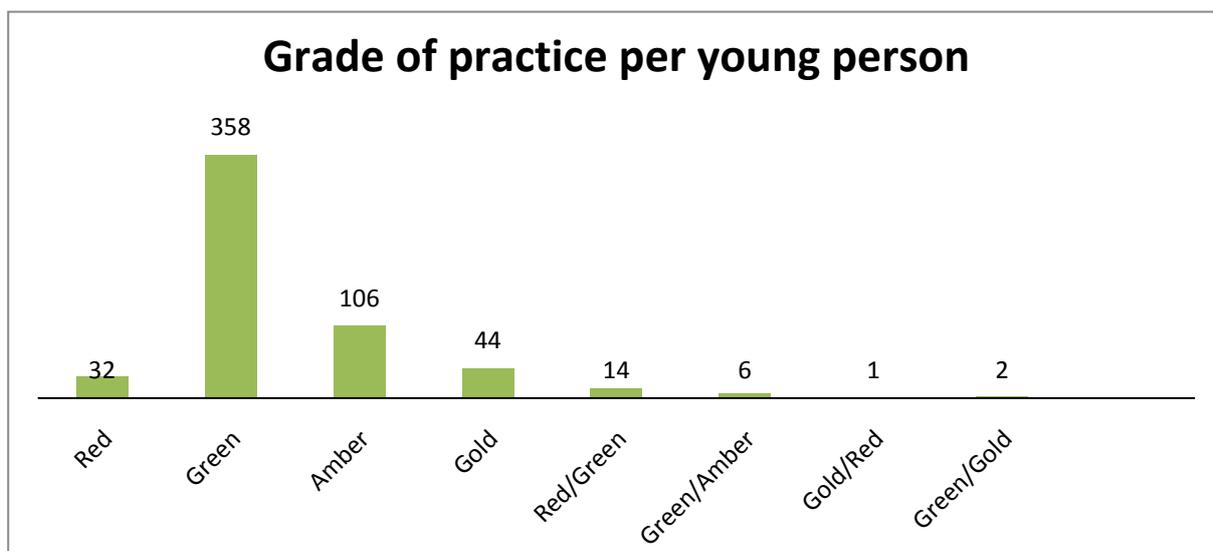
Mother was delighted to see her child and was reassured that this was her daughter's decision and not some ulterior motive from Social Care.

## 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 relevant Team Manager receives both feedback forms. Feedback on practice includes good practice as well as any areas of concern. The qualitative feedback is 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 Team 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 bi-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 CRS which is also circulated to the relevant Heads of Service. This process ensures that feedback on practice is shared with the individual Social Worker and Team 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.
- 8.6 For the period of 2016, a total of 27 meetings took place in the key areas of Children’s Services whom Looked After Children are allocated to and a total of 584 children were discussed. Of these 571 children, the rating awarded in relation to the quality of social work practice, wider service provision and the outcomes for the young person was:



- 8.7 The grading of practice is consistently high as shown above. Of the 584 children's Looked After Reviews, 44 have been graded as gold, that is outstanding practice, 358 children as green, that is good practice 106 as amber and 32 as red. There are 23 young people whose grading has been separated to reflect the quality of the social work practice and the assessed outcome for the young person.
- 8.8 The identified themes in relation to areas of improvement have been addressed in a variety of ways, including lunch and learn sessions, focusing on 'direct work with children', 'how to write SMART care plans', the quality of assessments regarding 'pre-birth assessments' and 'engaging with fathers'. The implementation and impact on practice relating to these identified themes will be subject to further audit to measure the impact of this learning and the outcomes to children and young people.

## **9.0 Conduct of the Organisation 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. The rating system in place ensures 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 via the Dispute Resolution process have included the following issues:

- the contact arrangements for a young person,
- the plan, quality or timeliness of the young persons care plan,
- delayed implementation of additional services.

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

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

9.8 Most escalations have 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. Throughout the year there have been occasional pressure points when the numbers of children and young people who are looked after has risen and subsequently the numbers of reviews required. This is closely monitored and the IRO's caseloads are in line with national guidance.

10.2 The Corporate Parenting Service continues to be fully staffed with permanent employees which assists to ensure continuity of care for children and young people.

10.3 A key focus of issues that affect young people is placement choice and placement stability. During this last year the targets set within the Corporate Parenting Team have been met and exceeded.

## **11.0 Additional updates regarding the progress of Action Plan 2015-2016**

11.1 The IRO Service has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Teams in respect of permanence of children and young people in long term foster placements. Various strategies have been implemented to address this.

- The IRO Service is represented at a weekly multi-agency meeting that reviews all children and young people requiring additional services and resources. This meeting provides senior management oversight in relation to practice, decision making and consistency that resources are evenly and fairly provided. The IRO representation provides independent input and robust challenge.
- The IRO Service attends a bi 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.

- A pathway and relevant policy has been implemented to formally agree children and young people the placements for children and young people in long term foster placements who are over the age of 13 and 'friends and family placements'. This promotes a child friendly approach, as the children are encouraged to attend the meetings were these decisions are endorsed and thus minimise any future delay or anxiety about where they are living.
- 11.4 CRS have extended the use of disruption meetings chaired by an IRO, for occasions when long term placements breakdown to now include young people whom are in a placement for 12 months or more.
- 11.5 The CRS leads a bi-monthly Quality Assurance Meeting with the Corporate Parenting Team. The practice, progress and outcomes of individual and all children and young people is reviewed and identified areas of development, learning and improvement are identified for the organisation and actioned as required. It has recently been agreed that this will form part of a quarterly report to be presented to Senior Managers

**Identifying placement's that are not supporting children and supporting their move**

*NK was placed on an interim Care Order in a placement that did not meet her needs. This was a 12 years old child who had suffered chronic neglect; sadly the placement was not to the standard of cleanliness and repair as the IRO wished or expected, and a view echoed by the Social Worker. The IRO contacted the Team Manager and fostering service to support the move to an appropriate placement where the young person has flourished.*

- 11.2 IRO's continue to undertake additional learning and development. Following the identification of a national gap of post qualifying training two IRO's successfully completed a bespoke Post Qualifying course hosted by the University of Birmingham and were awarded 20 MA (Master of Arts) credits. Two other members of the team are currently completing Post Qualifying courses at the University of Bedfordshire.
- 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. CRS works 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.

The Head of Service for Virtual School & Vulnerable Learners, complimented the IRO's and their focus on all aspects of a child's needs. It is recognised that when a Looked After Child moves from their current placement this may affect the young persons education and their ability to remain at the same school or resource. *'The IROs are very supportive and try to either maintain the current provision, or address these challenges and ensure that continuity of their education placement is highlighted and action is taken to resolve any issues that would affect this important part of the child's life'*.

- 11.4 A permanent Foster Care Review Officer has been in post since early 2016 and this has proved to be an asset within the organisation. The Review Officer periodically attends CRS team meetings and this has provided a closer working relationship with all IRO's and the joint views regarding quality of placement. IROs routinely provide the Review Officer a copy of the monitoring form, which includes their views on the quality of care provided by the CBC foster carer for the child and young person reviewed.
- 11.6 The improvements have been made to the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance Feedback loop with the commissioning team have continued. The revised monitoring form includes 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 to 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 'Missing' children, ensuring that within the reviewing process, the risks and links in relation to these concerns are appropriately considered, identified and responded to. Both the CSE lead and coordinator of team that complete 'Return Home Interviews' have 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 review. A copy of the Return Home Interview is routinely shared with the allocated IRO.
- 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 recorded on the child's record and following a successful trial of the use of mobile technology within CRS is available to all IRO's. The use of mobile technology provides 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 any emerging National Guidance.
- Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process.
- Review the Looked After Child Review format and implement changes to ensure that they are child focused and engage with young people in a meaningful way.
- Continue to develop 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. Engaging children with disabilities with their families**

KC has a diagnosis of autism and significant, complex learning needs; she is none verbal but mobile. KC has been Looked After for 8 years; her parents are very committed to her and see her weekly. KC has torn up and eaten the photographs displayed in her bedroom but loves to see photographs of her parents. The IRO suggested the family got a photograph of themselves printed onto a pillow for KC's room. This has been a huge hit, as KC loves it and her parents were delighted that KC was able to 'see them' every day.

#### **Case 2. Trying to engage children with challenges**

The IRO tried to engage a child who was Looked After and had significant mental health issues but refused to speak to the IRO. To try and resolve this and support the young person and gain her views, the IRO made a short video of herself on her iPad, introducing herself and briefly explaining the role of the IRO. The young person told her nurse that she was *'impressed by the IRO trying to communicate with her'* and subsequently spoke to the IRO about herself and her wishes and feelings.

#### **Case 3. Challenging delay in providing for a young persons needs**

JJ aged 14 was placed with out of authority foster carers in June 2016 and at the subsequent LAC review, steps were agreed to access a local school placement. Despite the work of her Social Worker and the Head of the Virtual School it was apparent that the host Local Authority had not identified a school placement. The IRO, young person, her mother and the review members becomingly increasingly concerned about the delay and that a school place was not identified in a timely way.

The IRO escalated this concern and delay of a school place being made available as required. Ultimately, this escalation resulted in a case discussion with the Director,

Assistant Director and Head of the Virtual School. At this meeting the Director agreed that the time delay (of the host authority) was unacceptable and agreed funding to secure an alternative school placement. The IRO conveyed this to the young person and foster carers and the young person started school and has settled in extremely well, is very happy and enjoying attending school.

#### **Case 4. Engaging with family members**

LG aged 15 was placed in a residential placement outside of CBC. Prior to his LAC Review he asked the IRO for his level of contact with his family in CBC to be increased. At the LAC review the IRO recommended a change to the contact plan and subsequently met with Social Worker, Team Manager and the Head of Service soon after and the proposed level of contact was agreed. The IRO ensured that this was promptly conveyed to the young person and agreed change of arrangements commenced within a week. The young person was very happy with this outcome.

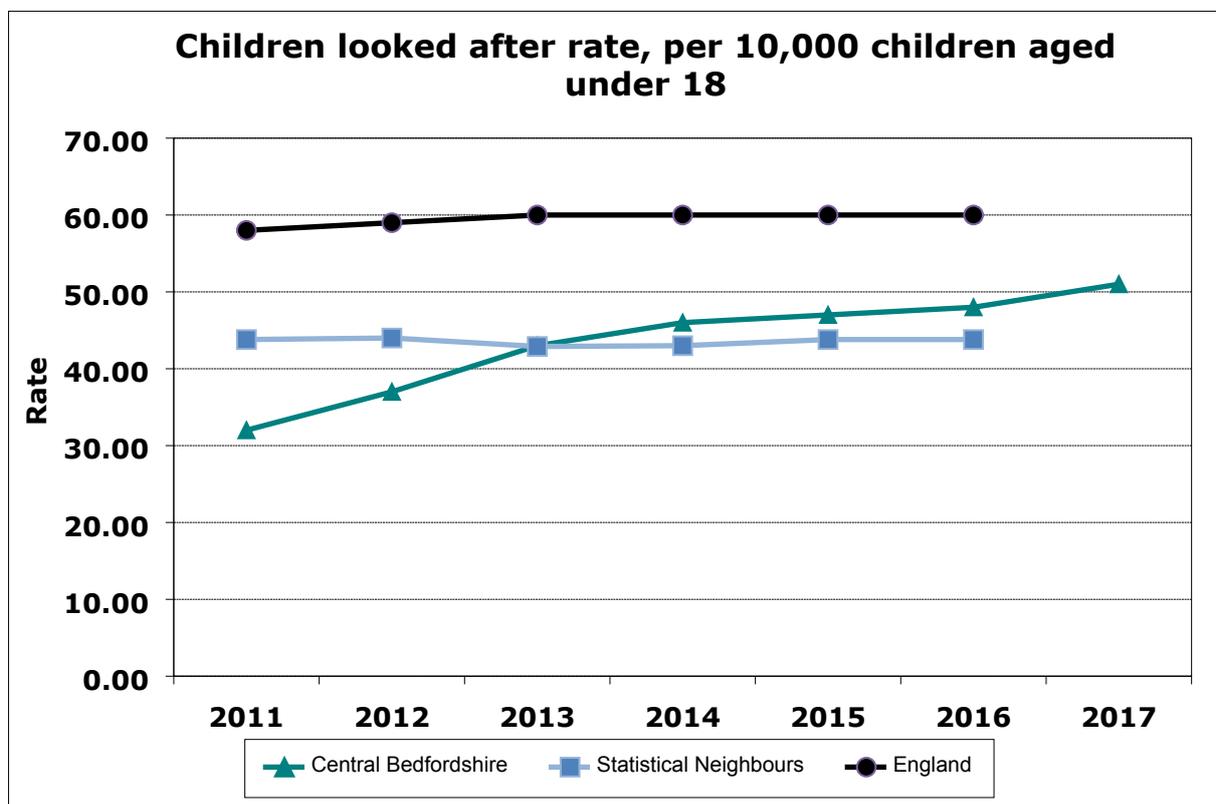
Sharon Keenan  
Practice Manager  
Conference and Review Service

## Appendix A

### Quantitative Information about the IRO Service

A total of 414 children have been through the review system in the 12 months ending 31/03/2017.

A total of 872 reviews were held in the year.



### Notes

- (i) The Looked After Children population for the past seven 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 303, up from 285 in March 2016. National, regional and statistical neighbour rates are also shown above. Of this total 15.2%, that is 46 of these young people are unaccompanied asylum seeking children, this compares to our statistical neighbours at 6.1% and national figure of 6.0% (2015-2016).
- (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 65, a decrease 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.

**Composition of the Looked After Children Population (as of: 31/03/17)**

Total 303

**Ethnicity**

	<b>White</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Other</b>
CBC Local School Population	88%	5%	2%	2%	1%
National Funded School Population 31/01/12	78%	4%	9%	5%	2%
<b>CBC Children Looked After 31/03/17</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>10%</b>
National Children Looked After 31/03/16	75%	9%	4%	7%	3%

**Age**

<b>Age at 31 March 2016</b>					
	<b>BOYS</b>	<b>GIRLS</b>	<b>Total CBC</b>	<b>% CBC</b>	<b>National 31/03/15</b>
Under 1	7	3	10	3%	5%
1-4	16	20	36	12%	13%
5-9	42	32	74	24%	20%
10-15	50	49	99	33%	39%
16-17	63	21	84	28%	23%
18 & over and placed in a Community Home	0	0	0		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	100%
CBC %	59%	41%			
31/03/16 National %	56%	44%			

**Legal Status**

<b>Legal Status at 31 March 2016</b>			
	<b>CBC</b>	<b>% CBC</b>	<b>National 31/03/14</b>
Care Orders Interim	<b>29</b>	<b>10%</b>	13%
Care Orders Full	<b>180</b>	<b>59%</b>	52%
Voluntary Agreements under S20 (Single Period of Accommodation)	<b>75</b>	<b>25%</b>	27%
Placement Order	<b>14</b>	<b>5%</b>	8%
Sentenced to <i>CYPA 1969</i> Supervision Order with Residence Requirement	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	-
On remand, committed for trial, or detained	<b>5</b>	<b>2%</b>	-
Emergency Orders or Police Protection	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	100%

**Placement**

<b>Placement at 31 March 2016</b>			
	<b>CBC</b>	<b>% CBC</b>	<b>National 31/03/14</b>
Foster Placement with Relative or Friend	29	10%	74%
Placement with other Foster Carer	182	60%	
Secure Unit	1	8%	11%
Homes and Hostels	22		
Hostels and Other Supportive Residential Placements	0		
Residential Schools	1	0%	1%
Other Residential Settings	0	0%	1%
Placed for Adoption (Including placed with Former Foster Carer)	6	2%	4%
Placed with Own Parents	13	4%	5%
In Lodgings, Residential Employment or Living Independently	40	13%	4%
Absent from Agreed Placement	0	0%	-
Other Placement	9	3%	-
	0	0%	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Action Plan 2016-2017

Priority	Actions	Timescale	Outcomes
Respond to recent and any emerging National Guidance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Brief IROs through circulation, discussion at team meeting highlighting of key changes and IRO responsibilities.</li> </ol>	<p>June 2016</p> <p>September 2016</p>	Implementation of statutory guidance.
Strengthen the Voice of the Child within the Looked After Children process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attend the MOMO training session.</li> <li>2. Ensure that all Looked After Children's views are represented in the LAC review in the most appropriate way for the individual young person, for example on their own, using the consultation document such as MOMO.</li> <li>3. Identified IRO to lead on this and share progress and actions into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<p>July 2016</p> <p>July 2016</p> <p>Quarterly</p>	The Voice of the Child is evidenced in all meetings and contributes to the recommendations regarding future care planning. IROs listen and respond to the voice of children and young people.
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"> <li>1. Review the current LAC review format and explore alternative practice.</li> <li>2. Create and implement an action plan to introduce a new format of the LAC reviews.</li> </ol>	<p>July 2016</p> <p>November 2016</p>	The LAC review is child centered and the voice and participation underpins the review.
Continue the development work with the CICC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Timetable annual consultation events</li> <li>2. Identified IRO to lead on this and feed into LSCB sub group, in partnership with an appointed young person.</li> </ol>	<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"> <li>1. For identified high risk cases, for example CSE IROs to have an increased level of overview and more regular contact with the Social Worker and young person.</li> <li>2. IRO's to attend multi agency care planning meetings when children/young</li> </ol>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	IROs offer a proportionate level of scrutiny and support dependent on the individual child's circumstances.

	<p><b>people going through a significant transition</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>3. Embed the use of the Dispute Resolution Framework including, threshold, timescales, flow chart and recording processes.</b></li><li><b>4. A quarterly report reporting quality of practice and identifying themes from Quality Assurance Meeting to be presented to Senior Management Team.</b></li></ul>	<p><b>September 2017</b></p> <p><b>July 2016</b></p>	
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