



**Haringey** Council

<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee</b>	<b>Item Number:</b>	
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<b>Title:</b>	<b>Independent Reviewing Officer - Annual Report 2012/2013</b>
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<b>Report Authorised by:</b>	<b>Marion Wheeler - Assistant Director, Children and Families</b>
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<b>Lead Officer:</b>	<b>Perminder Chahal – Reviewing Manager</b>
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<b>Ward(s) affected: All</b>	<b>Report for Non Key Decisions:</b>
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## **1. Introduction:**

- 1.1.** In accordance with the guidance arising from The Adoption and Children’s Act 2002 an annual report of the work undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) is to be presented to the Director of Children’s Services and Lead Member for Children’s Services.
- 1.2.** This report provides an overview of practice in relation to children looked after, highlighting the progress made during 2012/13 in strengthening the IRO role in Haringey’s Children and Young People’s Service whilst acknowledging the challenges faced by the Service and recognising areas for development. The report also seeks to celebrate achievements and successes in improving outcomes for children and young people and serves as another voice for Haringey’s Looked After Children.



**1.3** The IRO has a duty to fulfil their corporate parent role on behalf of individual children. This involves negotiating best outcomes and at times challenging decision making, timeliness as well as working in partnership with parents. The work of the IRO has been recognised by both young people and carers and there is national debates about how best to ensure IROs are able to fulfil their role to the fullest capacity, ensuring they monitor progress in between reviews and report poor and good practice.

## **2 Legal Context:**

**2.1** The Children and Young People's Act 2008 came into force in April 2011 significantly strengthening the role of the IRO giving them the responsibility of monitoring the function and performance of the local authority in relation to outcomes for children looked after. The intention of these changes was to give IROs the power to provide effective independent challenge and scrutiny of children's cases and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

**2.2** The 1989 Children's Act, The IRO handbook and the more recent Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010 brought together a single set of regulations with duties which are at the heart of effective corporate parenting to improve the outcomes of looked after children, namely:

- Placing the child at the centre of the work.
- Effective care planning.
- Ensuring that a child or young person is provided with accommodation which meets his/her needs.
- To appoint an IRO.
- Ensuring that an effective review is conducted of the child's case within the specified timescales.
- The circumstances in which the local authority must consult with the IRO.
- The functions of the IRO both in relation to the reviewing and monitoring of each child's case.
- The actions that the IRO must take if the local authority is failing to comply with the regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child in any material way, including making a referral to CAFCASS.

**2.3** In November 2011 the Family Justice Review reported on the role of the IRO, their findings were as follows:



- The role of the IRO is an important one and they would very likely recreate it were it removed from them. The priority should be to improve the quality of the function and ensure the effectiveness and visibility.
- It was recommended that local authorities review the operation of the IRO Service to ensure that it is effective. In particular they should ensure that they are adhering to guidance regarding case loads.
- It was recommended that the Directors of Children's/Directors for Social Services and Lead Members for children receive regular reports from the IRO on the work undertaken and its outcomes. Local Safeguarding Children's Boards should also consider such reports.
- Courts would benefit from this information too alongside outcomes of care cases. The pilot recommended earlier (for courts to receive information about the outcomes for children and families on which they have adjudicated on) should include information from the IRO.
- The courts and IROs need to develop more effective links; guardians and IROs should strengthen their working relationship.

**2.4** The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishing of Offenders Act (LASPOA) introduced a new framework for youth remand which commenced in December 2012 and stated that all young people who are remanded into either local authority or youth detention accommodation (YDA) are now looked after children.

**2.5** This has had some impact on the Reviewing Service due to the rising numbers of Children placed in YDA which are usually some distance away. The IRO has no control in regard to the decision to remand the child, the child's LAC status or the child's placement. There is a potential for risks associated with the capacity of the IRO Service to meet all its statutory responsibilities in the light of the potential for continued increase in numbers of remanded Looked After Children. The IRO Manager has the lead responsibility for monitoring this and taking any action needed to ensure the authority meets its statutory obligations.

### **3 The Independent Reviewing Service in Haringey.**

**3.1** The Haringey IRO Service is situated within the Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Practice Development Service.

**3.2** In addition to the core function of monitoring children's' care plans, the IRO Service is also involved in:



- Meetings on individual cases.
- Wider consultations on issues relating to Looked After Children.
- Planning forums where policy and procedures are developed e.g. Health, Education, Participation and Quality Assurance Framework groups.
- Contributing to auditing work as part of the Quality Assurance Framework.
- Training and liaison with teams.
- Assisting with addressing complaints and investigations.
- Working with the commissioning team to monitor the quality of placements.

The IRO has a duty to fulfil their corporate parent role on behalf of individual children this involves negotiating best outcomes and at times challenging decision making, timeliness and working in partnership with parents. The work of the IRO has been recognised by both young people and carers and there is national debates about how best to ensure IRO's are able to fulfil their role to the fullest capacity ensuring they monitor in between reviews and report poor and good practice.

### 3.3 Over the last year the IROs have:

- Assisted with the development of policies and procedures including the Staying Put policy.
- Supported the induction of Newly Qualified Social Workers around the review process and planning for Looked After Children.
- Attended LAC service meetings Health, Education, Participation and Adoption/Permanency groups.
- Highlighted good practice by workers as well as feeding back evidence of poor practice, concerns about placements or safeguarding issues.
- Worked jointly with Child Protection Advisors on cases where children are both subject to a CP Plan and Looked After to achieve clarity of status.
- Contributed to the development of the revised review documentation and workflow system.
- Continued to have an input into the permanency and tracking meeting which meets monthly, with the aim of highlighting how children's cases are progressing and any issues preventing the case from confirming permanency. The group have recently looked at all children under placement orders and the timescales associated with this to ensure that decisions are made in a



timely way for each child and placement orders are revoked if this is no longer the plan.

- Contributed to the Quality Assurance programme of audits.
- Contributed to improving the quality of services through discussions with social workers about the quality of Care Plans, preparation for children prior to their review and monitoring contributions at reviews.

## **4 Staffing**

**4.1** The establishment for the IRO team includes 7 full-time posts. Over the past 2 years the team has moved from being very stable and established to having 4 vacancies. The vacant positions are currently covered by experienced and well trained agency staff who have worked as IROs in other Local Authorities and have a great deal to contribute to the development of the Service. This has provided stability during this period as they have remained with us throughout this time.

**4.2** IROs are mainly experienced former practitioners with good knowledge of working within Children and Families. They offer consultation and advice on cases. We currently have a culturally mixed team made up of Asian, Caribbean, Spanish and White UK.

**4.3** The IRO team has one reviewing officer who chairs all annual reviews for foster carers. This compliments the work of the IROs through regular discussion and follow-up.

**4.4** The most recent recruitment campaign for the IRO posts has been unsuccessful in securing suitable appointments and a further round of recruitment is underway with interviews pending. There are reported national recruitment difficulties in this field and neighbouring Local Authorities have similar experiences. We are looking at a range of other strategies to fill these posts including encouraging home grown talent to think about these positions.

## **5 Performance**



- 5.1** At the point of entry into care the reviewing manager allocates an IRO; this has provided our Looked after Children with continuity and consistency.
- 5.2** The IROs have an average caseload of 65 to 70 as recommended by the IRO handbook. In previous years, this has fluctuated and had meant some IROs were carrying high caseloads of between 70 and 90.
- 5.3** The IRO's primary task is to ensure:
- That a plan of care is presented for each child to be reviewed.
  - That reviews are arranged for each of our children within timescales with the correct representation of family and professionals.
  - That the reviews are held at the child's/young person's placement address.
  - That the child and young person is given space and time before the review to raise issues and agree on the logistics of seating, speaking and advocacy where needed.
  - That a record of the meeting is completed with clear decisions for actions to be implemented and that this is uploaded onto the child's file and distributed to attendees.
- 5.4** IROs chaired 1423 reviews last year. On average 118 reviews took place per month.
- 5.5** There has been a year on year improvement in the number of reviews held within timescale. The reviews that did go out of timescale were due to staff sickness and miscommunication between professionals over dates and arrangements. The table below details the improvements and current position:

<b>Years</b>	<b>Percentage held within time scale</b>
<b>2011-12</b>	66%
<b>2012-13</b>	82%
<b>2013-14</b>	95% performance to date

- 5.6** The actions we have taken to improve performance:
- embedding good practice through team meetings, supervision and individual target setting as part of performance appraisals;
  - establishing a duty rota to cover reviews when sickness occurs;



- increasing communication with the placement service and social work teams when children and young people are placed in an emergency kinship placement.

**5.7** The IRO Service makes an important contribution to good performance against key performance indicators in the National Indicator Set: C63 (Participation at Reviews) and N166 (timeliness of Reviews). They also contribute to other Performance Indicators through quality assurance and collection of data or raising issues on cases at appropriate levels to minimise poor outcome e.g. drift in care planning, placement stability, educational achievements, health appointments etc.

**5.8** IROs will, from this April, carry out themed audits and report on the new audit framework which will focus on agreed areas for practice improvement and provides an overview of quality of practice.

## **6 Participation**

**6.1** The following table sets out the pattern for children and young people participating in their reviews. Just over 10% do not have their views recorded and 27% did not attend reviews, but conveyed their views to the meeting via a third party.

<b>LAC Participation Code/Definition</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% of the Total</b>
PN0- Child under 4 at time of review	225	16.1
PN1- Attends and speaks for him or herself	691	49.5
PN2-Attends,views represented by advocate	83	5.9
PN3-Attends,views conveyed non verbally	1	0.1
PN4-Attends but does not convey his or her views	9	0.6
PN5-Does not attend but briefs an advocate to speak for them	181	13.0
PN6-Does not attend but conveys feelings in writing/visually/recording etc	63	4.5
PN7-Does not attend nor are child's views conveyed to the	51	3.7



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review

Unknown

91

6.5

**Total**

1395

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- 6.2** There were 784 children and young people who attended their review with 84 choosing others to represent their views. Further work has been identified to ensure as full participation as possible for all young people at their reviews and to ensure that children and young people are well prepared to take part and express their views and feelings, including when they choose to use an advocate.
- 6.3** IROs will always aim to spend time individually with children and young people prior to a review to determine their wishes and feelings, to identify if they have any concerns and to find out how they would like to participate in the meeting. If necessary, or requested, the IRO will ensure an advocate is provided to support the child or young person.
- 6.4** When children or young people decide not to attend their review meeting the IRO will arrange to meet with them at another time or speak to them on the phone to ascertain their views and feelings. Children or young people who have English as a second language will have an interpreter available. Children with disabilities or with communication difficulties will be supported to express their views with help of their carers or a specialist worker or an advocate.
- 6.5** In January 2013 an IRO evaluation form was sent out to 80 children in order to gain their views about their IRO and the processes of their reviews. 25% of children and young people responded and comments received included:
- “My IRO included me”.
  - “I want to stay in my foster placement until I am 18”.
  - “To have the same IRO as he is nice and I will not feel shy”.
  - “I choose not to attend meetings”.
  - “The review meeting talked about my care, school and home life”.
  - “The IRO spoke to me separately and was nice and friendly”.
  - “Nothing needs to change”.
  - “I was listened to and she made it interesting”.
  - “Every Friday can I go to my mum’s house and come back Sunday?”.
- 6.6** This feedback has been discussed at team meetings as to how comments are followed up and actioned and how IROs can further improve the





participation of children and young people in planning and reviewing their services.

- 6.7** The evaluation of the IROs including direct observation and case file audits indicates that alternative ways of gaining our children's views need to be found. A working group, Hearing Children's Voices, comprising young people in care, Deputy Heads of Service for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Practice Development, Fostering, Children in Care, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Missing from Care and representatives from ASPIRE has been established. The remit of the group is to agree common aims, identify further areas for involvement of the young peoples' views and to develop a wide range of approaches to enable young people to participate at all levels in decision making. In addition, the aim of the group is to ensure that these approaches are embedded in service planning and delivery and is part of induction and training programmes.
- 6.8** Participation will be increased through the use of information leaflets, feedback using electronic and hard copy consultation forms and focus groups. This work will also include supporting children and young people with disabilities to use a range of communication aids to express their wishes and feelings.
- 6.9** The group has identified the need to have one point of entry for all areas of work that relates to children in care, including the use of a logo which could be publicised through a web page or App. The group has a wide representation and they will report their findings and recommendations to the Extended DMG so that the practice is embedded within each team. The implementation will be tracked and monitored through the recently established Quality Assurance Steering Group to ensure that there is evidence in case file audits of increased participation of young people and increased awareness of the processes involved.
- 6.10** IROs currently use Viewpoint which is an electronic questionnaire for children to complete prior to their statutory review. It is a tool to engage young people and help them to share their wishes and feelings about their lives. Take up rate by children in care is still low and action is required to understand how we can improve and change this. Other Local Authorities report similar low returns and have mixed views about using this tool. Between January 2012 and March 2013, 70 Haringey young people gave their views through Viewpoint. This data is under analysis and a report will be produced by the



middle of June 2013. In response to a national consultation with young people Viewpoint is now available on iPads, tablets and smart phones etc as a plain screen version of Viewpoint, but this is leading to the development of Viewpoint as an 'app' that will work online or offline, this at the final testing stages at the moment.

**6.11** In addition IROs offer children and young people several ways to participate in the decisions being made about their lives.

These include:

- meeting with their IRO prior to their review;
- attending all or part of their review;
- completing other consultation forms or drafting a letter for the attention of the review;
- symbols;
- through an advocate.

**6.12** Another example of the use of their role is where an IRO has been enabling two young people to Chair part of their review meetings. This is an area of work that needs further exploration and needs to be encouraged across the team. We will agree a protocol so that all IROs can discuss this option with their young people and work will begin in July 2013 firstly with IRO's and then the social work teams.

## **7 Representations and Escalations**

**7.1** IROs seek to ensure good outcomes for children. They do this through their quality assurance role in LAC reviews, for example by checking diets are healthy and culturally appropriate, that medicals take place, that foster carers attend parent evenings or read bedtime stories, checking that contact with siblings take place.

**7.2** IROs often pick up on matters which make a difference to a child if they get overlooked, for example ensuring sleepovers or school trips take place; that passports are obtained so holidays are not missed; ensuring cultural and faith needs are met such as a prayer mats for young people of the Muslim faith. They will normally do this through suggestions at reviews and by encouraging carers and workers rather than via formal escalation processes and so this cannot always be visibly evident or easily quantified.

**7.3** Where there are concerns relating to implementation of the Care Plan, resources or poor practice, IROs will initially liaise with the team and seek to



resolve things informally – often by bringing reviews forward or participating in professionals meetings. A record of this should be on the child's record.

**7.4** When a concern cannot be resolved informally each Local Authority must now have a formal 'dispute resolution' process through which an IRO can escalate their concern to the appropriate management level. In Haringey this is the Head of Service responsible for the social work service to the child, if no resolution is achieved at this level it is escalated to the Assistant Director.

**7.5** During 2012-13 the IRO Service has raised an average of two escalations each month. In addition to quality of care issues, which required individual responses, a number of recurring themes were identified and addressed during the year. Key issues during the period were:

- The criteria for agreeing funding for British citizenship applications. This has heightened departmental understanding of immigration legislation and our responsibilities as corporate parents. It has also generated an in-depth review of all young people to ensure that those without British citizenship have secured Indefinite Leave to Remain and where this has not happened, appropriate applications have been made. The review identified that 8% of children and young people looked after need their citizenship/immigration status addressed. It is essential that immigration applications are made prior the age of 17 and half and before they reach the age of 18 years old.
- Confirming permanency through "long term fostering" – an agreed process is now in placement, which is in line with the recently launched Permanency Policy and is designed to reduce delay in decisions making.
- For young people wishing to remain with foster carers after reaching 18 years old a consultation has been undertaken with young people and other stakeholders and a "Staying Put" policy has been prepared and will shortly be presented for consideration.
- The poor standard of semi-independent 16 plus accommodation – the level of concern regarding standards of property and furnishing has reduced since the retendering of the service provision and the introduction of new providers. The Placement Officers actively work with providers to continually raise standards in respect of both support and the quality of the accommodation.

**7.6** In all cases, following the escalation, the managers concerned worked closely with the IROs to take action to remedy the issues noted.



- 7.7** None of the above cases needed to be escalated to CAFCASS as they were resolved within the local management structure. However, the common element in cases requiring escalation was the need for timeliness of assessment, decision making and actions to reduce the drift and delay at various stages of the child's journey in care. In the future all escalations to senior managers will be systematically collated; outcomes recorded with times taken to achieve resolution monitored against the 20 day target given in the IRO Handbook – please see action plan below.
- 7.8** When there are concerns, the IROs contact the Social Worker and a timeframe to resolve the issue is agreed. The IRO follows up to ensure that the actions have been completed and plans are back on track. Where actions remain outstanding, or there is a professional disagreement on the way forward, then these cases are escalated to Heads of Service. Every effort is made to resolve issues as quickly as possible so that the impact on children's outcomes is minimised.
- 7.9** As specified within the regulations, IROs have a duty to monitor children's cases in between reviews to ensure progress is being made and to prevent drift. This is currently completed in an informal manner although all correspondence regarding a case is on the child's case file. However it has been agreed to formalise this through creating a midway report. The midway intervention is part of the monitoring of the child's case and is set out in the 1989 Act. This form will be completed by the IRO in between reviews after reading the child's file and speaking to the allocated social worker; it will formulate the IRO's footprint on FWi. It will also be used as part of supervision with social workers.

## **8 Education of Children Looked After**

- 8.1** The educational attainment of Looked after children is priority for the IRO service. Many of the informal and formal representations from IROs concern the provision of appropriate education for Looked After Children, including attendance and punctuality, special educational needs, attainment, examination arrangements, extracurricular activities and the use of Pupil Premium Grant.
- 8.2** As part of the Looked After Review the IRO will always review the personal education plan for the child or young person and ensure it is up to date and contains appropriate targets for the child and young person's individual needs.



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## **9 IRO Service Training**

**9.1** IROs have attended a variety of training over the past year in line with current changes these are as follows:

- An ongoing quarterly meeting with Waltham Forest IROs and CPAs to reflect and discuss current trends, new legislation, critical thinking and ways of working. As well as improved analysis of case problem solving.
- Joint training with CAFCASS officers to consider the practice implications of the Family Justice and other associated reforms; as a result the IROs and guardians work more productively together to agree and negotiate care plans or difficulties and the best way forward in the best interest of the child.
- Adoption process workshops look at the changes to the decision making process where adoption is the care plan for LAC.
- Better outcomes for children; this workshop looked at how we can impact on this area of work.
- Annual IRO conference; this keeps IROs in touch and abreast of national and political issues and trends.

## **10 Key Priorities for the IRO Service for 2013 -14**

The action plan below (Appendix one) sets out planned service improvement for the next year, this builds this year achievements and addresses the areas identified for development.

## **11 Summary**

The IRO Service has continued to provide effective provision for reviewing and monitoring the Care Plans for Looked After Children. It contributes to improved outcomes for Looked After Children through increasing participation of children and young people in the decision making about their care, as well as making independent representations to operational teams and management on planning and practice issues. The independent scrutiny provided by the team is valued by social workers and management.



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**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ACTION PLAN - 2013 / 2014**

**Appendix 1**

No	Action	Responsibility	By
1.	Confirm data set for IRO activity – which will be reported on a quarterly basis as part of the QA Framework.	Head of Service Safeguarding QA & PD	July 2013
2.	Quarterly report format to be finalised and agreed.	Reviewing Manager / Business and Quality Assurance Manager	July 2013
3.	Escalations to senior managers are systematically collated, outcomes recorded with times taken to resolve, analysis forms part of the quarterly reports.	Review Manager	System in place April, reporting beginning July, Oct, Jan 14.
4.	Active involvement with ASPIRE & Hearing Children’s Voices – young people’s contributions use to inform service development	Review Manager	October 2013
5.	Undertake a stakeholder evaluation (including children and young people) of the IRO service based on the Ofsted thematic inspection framework and the London AD groups priority areas for IRO involvement.	Operational Systems Support and Head of Service Safeguarding QA & PD	July – September 2013
6.	Regular participation in London IRO and IRO Managers Network - identification of “best practice” models to inform development of the IRO service and improve the effectiveness of care planning	IRO’s and Review Manager	October 2013



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7.	Based on findings of 4, 5 & 6 above produce recommendations for practice development and future delivery model.	Operational Systems Support and Head of Service Safeguarding QA & PD	November 2013
8.	To put in place strategies for ensuring Reviews are held within timescale.	Review Manager	April 2013
9.	Development of protocol for Young People chairing their own reviews.	Review Manager	October 2013