

**LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES**  
**Safeguarding & Improvement Unit**

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Children in Care Annual Report**  
**2015-16**

**Contents**

- 1 Executive Summary
  - 2 Introduction
  - 3 Purpose of IRO Service and Context
  - 4 IRO service
  - 5 Quantitative Information
  - 6 Qualitative Information (See Appendix 1)
  - 7 Conduct of the organisation
  - 8 Recommended areas for improvement by the Operational Service 2014-15
  - 9 Annual Work Programme 2016-17 (See Appendix 2)
- Appendix 1** IRO Service 2015-16 Annual Work Programme Performance and Outcomes
- Appendix 2** IRO Service 2016 – 17 Annual Work Programme
- Appendix 3** Tables of figures

## Executive Summary

- 1.1 The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) has a statutory role to ensure effective and improved care planning for children and young people, securing better outcomes, with their wishes and feelings being central and given full and due consideration. (IRO Handbook March 2010).
- 1.2 IROs independently oversee care planning for children and have opportunity to challenge poor decisions and better protect a child's interests.
- 1.3 This report evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to the children in its care for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016; including its corporate parenting function.
- 1.4 There are strengths, challenges and areas for improvement as set out below. The report includes priorities for 2016-17 in its appendices.
- 1.5 For the purpose of this report, the term LAC (Looked After Child) will be used for statutory related references to children looked after by the local authority e.g. LAC Reviews and all other references will refer to children in care.
- 1.6 Overall, the IRO Service in Leicestershire is really pleased with what it has achieved over the last year and is confident that it has operated to a high standard. The vision moving forward remains one of excellence and the improvements identified in this report will help build on what has been achieved and is working well to enhance the service even further.
- 1.7 **Strengths – What is working well?**
  - 98.1% of the 1398 Reviews were carried out within the prescribed timescale. This indicates a good level of performance when looking at the previous three years. (99.1%, 98.8% and 98% respectively).
  - A consistent level in the number of children participating in their Reviews again this year, at 90.2% which compares well to previous years (88.5% in 2012-13, 91% in 2013-14, and 92.5% in 2014 - 15).
  - Strong and meaningful relationships continue to be maintained by the IRO in contact with and visits to children and recording of this including children placed at a distance, whilst working in a challenging environment in regards capacity.
  - Wealth of experience, expertise and knowledge across the IRO Service with ability to offer consultation in a number of lead areas including Children Using Sexually Abusive Behaviour, Mental Health, Youth Offending/Remand/Secure Accommodation.

- All IROs have been trained in Signs of Safety and have championed this approach in their dual role, and continue to receive development days to deepen practice.
- IRO Service Regional and National links and training and development opportunities.
- IRO Service links with Cafcass and representation on Family Justice Board and Performance sub-group and opportunity for influence in care proceedings. This includes a joint working session with further sessions planned in 2016 - 17
- Strengthened working relationships and effective, collaborative working and peer challenge between IRO Service and Service Managers in Children's Social Care.
- IRO Challenge activity including challenge meetings between the IRO Service managers and Assistant Director. IROs have a clear and direct route to the Director in those situations where resolution with the Assistant Director is not achieved.
- IRO Service attendance and involvement at Joint Solutions and Permanency Forum, Education of Children in Care meetings and with the Specialist LAC health team and Early Years partners.

#### 1.8 Challenges – What are we worried about?

- How current capacity within the IRO Service impacts on IROs being able to consistently comply with the regulatory requirements of the IRO handbook:

A challenge in meeting the responsibilities of the role whilst carrying staff vacancies for prolonged periods.

IRO caseloads (combining LAC & CP) remain consistently high within a range of 85 - 90 per FTE

IROs aspire to increase further the practice of ensuring that they speak with/visit children privately and individually prior to each review especially those placed at a distance. Whilst ensuring effective care planning oversight.

- More consistently meeting good standards of practice around processes for children coming into care and their first Review to build on the achievements made in this respect over 2016-17. This had been highlighted in the previous Annual report (2015 – 16).

#### 1.9 Areas for Improvement – What needs to happen?

- Development of an evaluation tool to gain feedback about the quality and experience for young people of their Review and the IRO Service.

- Further work between locality social work services and the IRO Service, to build on the good progress that has been made over 2015-16, to more fully achieve consistent standards of practice around quality and timeliness of preparation for Review, including timeliness of notifications to the IRO Service of children coming into care.
- Improved placement sufficiency and suitability to support more stability and permanency options for children and young people.
- To embed the SoS care planning and review documentation that supports a commissioning approach.
- Further strengthening of the IRO notification and escalation process so the independent voice of the IRO continues to challenge and evidence impact on improved outcomes for children and young people in care.
- To improve data collection around IRO activity on child's case in capturing contact and visits.

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 This Annual Report is a requirement of 'The IRO Handbook - Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children' (March 2010). The content and format follows the prescription set out in the guidance; the report will comply with the expectation that it will be available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as accessible as a public document and most importantly, communicated to Leicestershire's children in care in a child and young person friendly version.
- 2.2 The report outlines the contribution made by the IRO Service in Leicestershire, to the quality assurance and improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2015 to March 2016. It evaluates how effectively the service and the Local Authority have fulfilled their responsibilities to Leicestershire's children in care over this period, including performance in relation to the Local Authority's corporate parenting function in seeking to achieve best outcomes.
- 2.3 The report is an opportunity to pinpoint areas of good practice and those in need of development and improvement, providing information that can contribute to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. It highlights emerging themes and trends, and details areas of work which the service has prioritised during the year, including progress on the areas of development that were identified from the 2015-16 IRO Service Annual Work Programme, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.4 Priorities for the current year 2016-17 are set out in Appendix 2.

## **3.0 Purpose of IRO Service and Context**

- 3.1 The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.
- 3.2 The effectiveness of the role has rightly been subject to scrutiny since its inception and the legal framework and statutory guidance was

revised in 2010 to support a strengthened position. This is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.

- 3.3 The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is essential to the quality assurance and effectiveness of the looked after experience of children and young people, not just on an individual basis but collectively too, with IROs having a key part to play in monitoring the performance of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent; drawing out themes for improvement and development and helping to drive forward change.
- 3.4 The regulations clearly specify circumstances when the local authority should consult with the IRO; when there are proposed significant changes to the care plan including changes of placement, change of education plan or serious incident. IROs are a key part of decision making processes for children and young people's care and permanence planning.
- 3.5 Should IROs have concerns about the conduct of the local authority in relation to its provision for a child in care, they have the power to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (section 26 of the 1989 Children Act as amended by the 2002 Act) who could consider bringing proceedings for breaches of the child's human rights, judicial review and other proceedings.
- 3.6 To support IROs in their challenge role, the statutory framework recognises the need for access to independent legal advice and supports that this should be in place.
- 3.7 Expectations of the quality and effectiveness of the IRO Service have continued to grow over the period covered by this report and this has been the case locally and nationally, as evidenced in a number of Ofsted inspections of other local authorities.

#### **4.0 IRO Service**

- 4.1 Although IROs are appointed by the local authority, the regulations are very clear that they must be independent from the immediate line management of the case – this is significant in terms of the challenge and scrutiny role.
- 4.2 The IRO Service in Leicestershire is hosted within the Safeguarding & Improvement Unit (SIU), part of Children's Social Care (CSC), which sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS). Whilst part of CSC, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams.

- 4.3 There has been much national debate regarding how truly effective IROs can be when they are employed directly by the local authority and the question asked as to whether they should be employed outside of local authorities. (Children and Young Persons Act 2008 – Sunset Clause) This has not come to fruition and commitments continue in order to make the role work within the current arrangements – recognising that the true test of independence is IROs ability to challenge and operate in an environment that allows for this.
- 4.4 In this context, the effective independence of the IRO Service in Leicestershire continues to be monitored and considered across the IRO management team and the position remains that overall, independence is not felt to be compromised, supported by evidence of challenge and support for this at senior levels within the authority.
- 4.5 The siting of IROs within CSC is one that is viewed by the service as beneficial overall as it enables IROs: to have a good understanding of the local authority and the context in which they operate; to have direct access to case records and therefore full information relating to a child’s case; to build constructive working relationships with social work teams which aids good information sharing and partnerships and to have oversight of the strengths and needs of the department that in turn enables contributions to improvement activity for the benefit of children in care.
- 4.6 The structure of the SIU has seen a number of changes since its inception in 1997 with the most recent change – the creation of the Multi Agency Child Sexual Exploitation and Missing Team as a separate team out of the SIU – concluding at the beginning of 2015-16.
- 4.7 Prior to this being finalised, as reflected in the 2014-15 annual report, there were implications for capacity in the IRO Service overall, as a result of staff being seconded into the new team and there was a need to employ agency IROs for most of 2015-16 in order to ensure statutory business could be met. The arrangements that were planned to address this at the time have since been put into place and it is really positive that permanent staff have been recruited into posts that were being previously supported by agency resources.
- 4.8 Over 2015-16, the IRO Service operated with two Team Managers to manage the team of IROs and the SIU Service Manager, who has lead responsibility for the IRO Service overall. One permanent member of staff left the service over 2015-16 and 4 new staff joined between September and February following a recruitment process that had to run twice in order to secure the quality of staff required. As recruitment progressed the number of agency staff reduced. At the end of March 2016 the service had 9.46 FTE represented by 11 individual IROs.
- 4.9 In addition, the service has been carrying 1 FTE permanent IRO vacancy and 1 FTE temp IRO vacancy arising from the substantive

post holder acting up into a Team Manager position. Further recruitment has been very difficult which means the service has been stretched and challenged to consistently deliver high standards and fulfil statutory requirements.

4.10 Collectively, the IRO service has many years of social work and management experience, professional expertise and knowledge across a number of areas which brings great benefit in their role working with children and families as well as an ability to offer consultation to the wider department. This includes but is not confined to:

- *CUSAB (Children Using Sexually Abusive Behaviour)*
- *Domestic Abuse Champion*
- *Neglect*
- *Children with disabilities and complex care needs*
- *Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and Deprivation of Liberty (DoLs)*
- *Youth Offending*
- *Therapeutic social work*
- *Fostering, Adoption and Permanency*
- *Mental Health*
- *PREVENT & MAPPA*
- *Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)*

4.11 All IROs have had bespoke training in Signs of Safety, relevant to their role – this has included in depth residential training and several development days throughout the year that are continuing into 2016-17. Some are practice leads and all these opportunities have meant a deepening of skill and the IRO Service really taking a lead and championing Signs of Safety developments across the department.

4.12 In addition, there are links with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Participation Officer for Children in Care and Care Leavers as well as the Corporate Parenting Board.

4.13 IROs have worked with the CiCC over the reporting period to produce new and improved consultation documents with the aim of supporting more effective participation of children and young people in their Care Planning and Reviews - crucial in relation to their voice being listened to, heard and influential.

4.14 Continuing challenges with capacity in the IRO service has meant a need to guard carefully against IROs undertaking too many additional duties and extended responsibilities that are not specified in the statutory guidance for the role, yet create a balance that allows for an enhanced skill set that can contribute to quality and improvement developments.



- 4.15 The current configuration of the IRO Service as a whole means that IRO's continue to have responsibility for both child protection and children in care functions through their role in child protection conferences and Looked After Reviews and care planning. This is an established arrangement of many years in Leicestershire and is the case in other authorities also. It brings a benefit in relation to the continuity it provides to children and young people on their journey through the child protection process and into the care system, allows flexibility within the team and provides more effective oversight across children's' situations.
- 4.16 However, there are a number of authorities that have chosen to separate out these functions and as referenced in last year's annual report, some informal consideration and discussion has taken place at various points across 2015-16 as to the best way to deliver these functions and make best use of available resources. Specialist Signs of Safety developments in the child protection conference processes alongside growing demands on IROs to make a difference for outcomes for children in care make a strong argument to think seriously about a different configuration that would more readily support what needs to be delivered. Formal consideration of this via a business case is one of the actions for the 2016-17 work plan (Appendix 4)
- 4.17 Caseloads for IROs (FTE) over 2015-16 have averaged 50 for children in care responsibilities but their child protection conference chair role on top of this needs to be taken into account and this takes caseloads more into the region of an average of 85-90 per FTE IRO, which is over the recommended guidelines as per the IRO Handbook (50-70)
- 4.18 The issue of sufficiency within the IRO Service (a regional and national test, not just experienced in Leicestershire) remains a challenge and continues to be on the agenda to address.
- 4.19 The expectations on IROs are significant and the IRO Service in Leicestershire remains committed to delivering a high quality service for children in care. In order for them to continue to encompass their full responsibilities and contribute to improved outcomes on an individual as well as collective basis, the resources to deliver this need to be in place.

## **5.0 Quantitative Information**

- 5.1 The children in care population in Leicestershire has remained stable overall over 2015-16 with the number at year end being 470 compared to 474 at the year end March 31<sup>st</sup> 2015.
- 5.2 The activity generated from this is reflected in the number of review meetings held for children between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 and end March 2016 which totalled 1398, an increase of 106 compared to 1292 for 1<sup>st</sup> April

2014 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015. **See Table 1 in Appendix 3.** The figures in the table do not show the adoption reviews for previous years (adoption work has only been inputted into Fwi in the latter part of 2014-15 so is now able to be included in electronic reports run).

- 5.3 On time LAC Reviews support focused and timely care planning for children, help secure permanency - avoiding unnecessary delay and assist in the completion of actions aimed at delivering best outcomes. Of the LAC Reviews held over 2015-16, 98.1% were held within the prescribed timescales compared to 99.1% in 2014-15. This remains good performance and is down to clarity of expectation and a robust system that supports this within the SIU, across IROs, managers and administrative support. A continued flexible approach, treating the review as a process rather than a meeting is another way that the IRO Service works with locality teams to ensure reviews take place within timescale.
- 5.4 There were 12 LAC reviews that did not take place on time over 2015-16.
- 4 are showing as out of date as a result of discrepancy in the dates recorded in the social work teams for LAC episodes/placements which affected timescale calculations.
  - The remaining 8 breaks down into x7 28 day (initial) LAC Reviews and x1 which was a subsequent (6 month) LAC Review.
  - The reason for all of the out of date 28 day LAC reviews was that the IRO Service (SIU) were not notified by the SW team that the child/young person had come into care until it was too late to hold the review in timescale. The SIU should be notified within 2 working days and performance needs to improve in this respect as it sits at 46.7% for 2015/16. This is a KPI in the SIU 2016/17 Delivery Plan – Q1 is showing improvement 2016/17 at 63% and it is the plan to do further improvement work through performance reporting over 2016/17.
  - SIU admin have a system in place that runs weekly reports to identify new LAC from data entered by social workers on Fwi and manage to pick up a number of new into care this way so we are able to arrange timely LAC Reviews. Where this doesn't work (and this accounts for some of the late cases) is where the system is not updated by the SW and then this will not be picked up on the weekly report so timely data entry is key also.
  - The x1 late 6 month LAC Review was as a result of miscalculation at the IRO/SIU end following the previous review for the young person concerned taking place in x2 parts and the date of the subsequent review calculated from part 2 rather than part 1. A reminder has been sent to admin and IROs.

## 5.5 Participation

- 5.5.1 Children's voice should be at the centre of their care planning and engaging their participation in their Looked After Review process is crucial in ensuring the influence this has when making plans for their future.
- 5.5.2 The participation figures for this period represents the percentage of children and young people aged 4 and over who communicated their views in some way, for their review. **See Table 2 in Appendix 3 and Table 2a for comparison with 2014-15.**

Participation is defined across 7 different indicators:

- PN1 Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves;  
 PN2 Those who attend but communicate via an advocate;  
 PN3 Those who attend and convey their views non verbally;  
 PN4 Those who attend but don't contribute;  
 PN5 Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf;  
 PN6 Do not attend but communicate their views by another method;  
 PN7 Those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way.  
 PN0 Represents children under the age of 4

The participation figures for 2015-16 at 90.2% have seen a slight decrease compared to 2014-2015 at 92.5% but still in a similar range for the last 3 years (91% in 2013-14) and good overall at 90%+.

- 5.5.3 In 2014-15, a system was put into place of monthly reporting and monitoring by IRO managers and admin support of those children who were recorded as not having participated in their review and follow up actions contributed to improvement. However, it is recognised that there is still room for further improvement and will be taken forward over 2016-17. It is anticipated that commencing use of newly developed consultation and participation documentation designed in conjunction with children and young people will assist.
- 5.5.4 IROs have built some strong and meaningful relationships with children and young people and continue to work hard at visiting and keeping in contact with them in between and prior to their reviews, recognising that these relationships are at the heart of good practice and achieving best outcomes. Capacity in the service continues to challenge IROs in this area of their responsibility, especially where children are placed at a distance but despite this there are some very good practice examples of IROs travelling some distances to engage children and young people and seek their views around their care plans; views that have certainly influenced the way meetings have been planned and conducted as well as impact on care planning.

- 5.5.5 IROs have the facility to record their contact with and visits to children and young people on Fwi but there are still a number of null returns for this data field which requires some further analysis over 2016-17 to establish what proportion is down to the need for improved recording activity by IROs and what proportion is because IROs are struggling to see children and young people outside of their LAC Review process. This is being picked up as part of the continuous improvement work across CFS.
- 5.5.6 One of the areas of work identified in the 2015-16 Work Plan was to develop an evaluation tool to gain feedback about the quality and experience for young people of their Review and the IRO Service; to better understand the impact of young people's participation and their voice and the difference it makes for their outcomes. This action was part of a wider piece of work to improve the range of consultation tools available for children and young people and whereas some of this has been achieved (See **Appendix 1; Point 6**) there are still elements that have been delayed that are being taken forward into 2016-17.

## **6.0 Qualitative Information**

- 6.1 The 2014-15 IRO Annual Report, identified priority areas for improvement and action by the IRO Service for 2015-16 in the Annual Work Programme. **Appendix 1** illustrates performance against that.

## **7.0 Conduct of the organisation in relation to the review and the case, including any resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service for Children in Care.**

- 7.1 Timeliness of notifications to the IRO Service of children coming into care to support strong practices and performance around care planning and LAC Review processes has been a continuing challenge, as indicated in section 5.4 above. There is progress to be made and this will be taken forward into 2016-17.
- 7.2 The statutory Review meeting is the forum where care and permanency planning for children is carefully considered and overseen by the IRO and in order for this to be most effective, evidence of the assessment and thinking on which the plan is formulated, along with the plan itself, needs to be made available in advance to the IRO along with all relevant reports.
- 7.3 Performance in this respect which was 51.5% averaged over 2015-16 has featured as a recommended area for improvement by the operational service in the last 3 annual reports and it remains an issue of concern that is being picked up as a priority as part of the CFS Continuous Improvement Plan 2016-17.

- 7.4 There has been a continued close working over 2015-16 across the IRO Service and Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to improve understanding across locality social work teams of the quality assurance responsibilities these roles have for children in care and how this fits with achieving permanency for children avoiding unnecessary delay. This work has further helped to raise the profile of the IRO and the importance of good working relationships and communication with social workers for children in care and their plans. There are still some instances of IROs not being notified of significant changes or event in a child's life including changes to their care plan but there are in contrast numerous examples of good practice whereby IROs have worked very closely and consistently with practitioners to address issues and achieve good outcomes for children and young people. The role of the IRO is much better understood than previously and more integrated into the thinking of workers and managers at all levels.
- 7.5 Over 2015-16 there has been a continued focus on achieving permanency and ensuring robust and timely processes for children and young people are followed as well ensuring appropriate use of S20 accommodation for children and young people. The establishment of the new Permanence Panel within the department has supported this and the Service Manager for the IRO Service is a panel member so is well placed to feed in a perspective from the oversight role of IROs as well as lead further improvements across the IRO Service in order to influence best outcomes for children in care.
- 7.6 IROs have continued to endeavour to exercise their challenge and influence role to the fullest over the last year and despite the demands on the service that have been highlighted already in the report, they have been active in this part of their role on a formal basis as well as informal.
- 7.7 There have been eleven challenge meetings between the IRO Service and Assistant Director over 2015-16. Some issues have been resolved swiftly whilst others have been more complex and have taken longer to progress to a satisfactory conclusion. A number are included in priorities and workplans across the department that will be taken forward over 2016-17.
- 7.8 Overall, the issues of concern requiring challenge & discussion over this period have included:
- Several high risk/high profile situations
  - Lack of provision around mental health and emotional wellbeing that has required challenge to partner agencies
  - Provision of support to carers as a result of capacity issues in fostering social work team.

- Unnecessary delays in numerous aspects of care and permanency planning.
- Disagreements around proposed care and permanency plans
- Disagreements around type of placement and concerns about availability and suitability of placements especially in regard to complex need and 16+ provision
- Concern about matching practices when identifying placements for children and young people.
- Change of plans without IRO involvement
- Lack of response to IRO challenge
- Delays incurred as a result of agreements around financial packages
- Need for a strengthened and consistent approach around admissions to care

- 7.9 One of the challenge cases resulted in formal referral to Cafcass, two in referral to Official Solicitor and one a formal challenge into the care proceedings as IRO was not in agreement with final care plans for sibling group. Others have been subject of discussions with Cafcass and Independent legal advisors in a bid to progress the situation for children concerned. IROs have effective access to Independent Legal Advice and have used this to support their challenges for children and young people over the year.
- 7.10 The case that resulted in formal representation by IRO into the care proceedings highlighted a lack of understanding of the role of the IRO by some solicitors within the LA legal department and work has been undertaken with team leader in legal to address this and ensure there is suitably close and proper working together under the Cafcass & IRO Protocol, that is signed up to be LCC CFS and Legal Dept.
- 7.11 There is a continuing, positive working relationship between the IRO Service and Cafcass, under the umbrella of the Cafcass Protocol and a successful joint session was held during the year to look at what is working well and what needs to improve. Further reviews and joint forums are planned over 2016-17.
- 7.12 The IRO Service has continued to benefit from strong links with partners in health and education for the benefit of children in care and IRO Service representation at both education and health strategic groups continues.
- 7.13 Regional and National IRO Service and IRO Manager relationships have developed positively over 2015 – 16 and the IRO Service in Leicestershire has taken full advantage of regional, tailored training and networking opportunities. This has been invaluable as regards furthering knowledge to support the role as well as sharing good practice across regional and national peers and keeping abreast of developments and government thinking around the role of the IRO and how this can be used to best effect.

## **8.0 Recommended areas for improvement by the operational service**

- Improved the timeliness to IRO Service from locality social work teams (within 2 working days) of notifications of children new into care – performance issues where relevant will be shared with Service Managers to address with teams.
- Further work between the IRO Service and the locality social work teams to improve quality and timeliness of preparation for LAC reviews. This includes availability of relevant documentation for IROs. **(See Appendix 2; point 4 for IRO Service actions required).**
- Continued efforts to ensure effective and consistent communication with IROs as regards all aspects of care and permanency planning for children and young people. In particular when changes in the care plan are being considered.
- Consistent use of revised Care Plan documentation needed by localities.
- Improved placement sufficiency and suitability to support stability and permanency.

## **9.0 Annual work programme of the IRO service i.e. priority areas for improvement and action in the IRO service in the coming year 2016-17.**

See Appendix 2 attached

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*Service Manager*  
**Safeguarding & Improvement Unit**  
*July 2016*



## Appendix 1

### **IRO Service 2015-16 Annual Work Programme Performance and Outcomes**

|    | <b>ACTION</b>   | <b>WHO</b>                   | <b>WHEN</b>               | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|----|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|------------|--|
| 1) | Achieve sufficient capacity in the IRO Service so that caseloads are within the IRO Handbook recommendations (50-70)                                | IRO Service Manager with DMT | By end of Q2 2015-16      | A          | As highlighted in the body of the report this remains an issue that will be picked up over 2016-17.  |
| 2) | Systematic and methodical peer and manager review system to be adopted to support consistency of approach and continuous improvement in IRO Service | IRO Managers and IROs        | To commence in Q3 2015-16 | A          | <p>Some peer and manager review has been undertaken over 2015-16 and this, alongside audit outcomes and actions for follow up have contributed to consistency and improvement and development in the IRO Service over this period.</p> <p>Capacity within the service has had an impact on this being developed further but this will be taken forward into 2016-17 with a view to a more systematic approach being in place to support quarterly reporting.</p> |

|    | <b>ACTION</b>                                  | <b>WHO</b>            | <b>WHEN</b>    | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>   |
|----|--|-----------------------|----------------|------------|---|
| 3) | Implement outstanding elements of IRO Handbook | IRO Managers and IROs | Across 2015-16 | A          | <p>New consultation documents and letters from IROs are ready for use to be taken forward into 2016-17 work plan.</p> <p>IROs are liaising and consulting with social workers, children and families and carers in order to make best plans for LAC reviews but this is not always achievable within the timescales advised and will continue to be a challenge until capacity issues are resolved. The IRO Service will of course strive to do its best in this respect in the interim.</p> <p>As regards timely distribution of decisions from LAC reviews by IROs, this remains an area for improvement and the service continues to employ a range of workload management and business support strategies including frequent and regular monitoring, review and management oversight in a bid to try and address.</p> |

|    | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>   | <b>WHEN</b>          | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|----|--|--|----------------------|------------|--|
| 4) | Achieve a Signs of Safety LAC Review service   | IRO Managers with SoS Project Team and IROs                | March 2016           | G          | SoS Methodology is now being used for LAC Reviews and paperwork has been changed accordingly to support this. The next steps will be to continue to hone skill and embed further over 2016-17. |
| 5) | Build on Care Planning and Review developments achieved over 2014-15 including completion of suite of flowcharts for social workers to support practice in relation to permanency options for children and young people other than adoption.             | IRO Service with CSC, key partners & Comms.                | By end of Q2 2015-16 | G          | Achieving permanency flowcharts and guidance are complete and in use as part of new Permanence Panel arrangements.   |
| 6) | Further reduce null returns as regards recording on Fwi by IROs of their visits and contact with children. Work with business intelligence and performance team so that the data reflects an accurate story of the work undertaken around participation. | IRO Service and Business Intelligence and Performance Team | By Q3 2015-16        | A          | There is further work to be undertaken as outlined in the report at 5.5.5.   |

|     | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>  | <b>WHEN</b>                    | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|-----|--|---|--------------------------------|------------|--|
| 7)  | Develop an evaluation tool and begin to gain feedback about the quality and experience for young people of their Review and the IRO Service. | IRO Service   | In place by end of Q2 2015-16  | R          | This has been delayed as outlined in section 5.5.6. Will be taken forward into 2016-17.  |
| 8)  | Effective use of Beacon website including as a platform for consultation, participation & evaluation.  | IRO & EH Service Managers with The Jitty and Beacon Development Team rep. | March 2016                     | R          | More work needs to be done as regards making full and effective use of the Beacon – to take forward into 2016-17.  |
| 9)  | Establish IRO specialist role for Care Leavers and SYPAC link if capacity in IRO Service is able to accommodate.                             | IRO   | Ideally, with immediate effect | A          | IRO was identified but has since left the department and capacity has not been able to accommodate this to date however appointment of temp Corporate Parenting Team Manager in June 2016 will allow this to be explored further over 2016-17. |
| 10) | Raise profile of IRO and ensure voice of IRO is heard in court in care proceedings   | IRO Manager with Cafcass Manager and HHJ Bellamy                          | By end of Q2 2015-16           | G          | Good links across IRO Service and Cafcass and template devised and in use for IRO View into court as agreed with HHJ Bellamy.  |

|     | <b>ACTION</b>   | <b>WHO</b>  | <b>WHEN</b>                     | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>   |
|-----|---|---|---------------------------------|------------|---|
| 11) | Review case note type nomenclature on Fwi for IRO Challenge recording   | IRO Manager with Fwi link   | By end of June 2015.            | A          | Partly complete but connected to IRO quality assurance alert development that is anticipated to be in use in Sept 2016.   |
| 12) | New Care Plan documentation to support a commissioning approach and embrace Signs of Safety methodology.  | Across IRO Service, Commissioning Development lead and Principal Social Worker. | Established by March 2016.      | A          | Some of this work has been completed, led by Principal Social Worker but further developments needed that are being taken forward as part of continuous improvement activity across CFS |
| 13) | Ensure compliance with new guidance and regulations – Working Together 2015 & The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 | IRO Managers  | From 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2015 | G          | Completed as part of continuous improvement work.   |
| 14) | Review Escalation Process and how challenge is more systematically captured and evidenced.  | IRO Managers  | In Q2 2015-16                   | A          | Review has taken place and quality assurance template has been devised – final stage is development of tracking and reporting system and aim is to have this in place Sept              |

|     | <b>ACTION</b>   | <b>WHO</b>                    | <b>WHEN</b>                  | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>   |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---|
|     |   |                               |                              |            | 2016 so can commence use.   |
| 15) | IROs to be more consistently robust and less lenient as regards their challenge role. | IROs with IRO manager support | Embed further across 2015-16 | G          | The IRO Service has worked hard to be consistently challenging and robust over 2015-16 and the development of the QA alert for IROs as at 14) above will enable this to be more easily and readily evidenced. |

## Appendix 2

### IRO Service 2016-2017 Annual Work Programme

|   | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>            | <b>WHEN</b>          | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|---|--|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|--|
| 1 | Devise business case for increased capacity in IRO Service and distinct child protection/children in care IRO Service functions, so that caseloads are within the IRO Handbook recommendations (50-70) | SIU Service Manager   | September 2016       | A          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper to DMT</li> </ul>   |
| 2 | Disseminate the relevant learning identified in this report across CFS and partners.   | IRO Service Managers  | By September 2016    | A          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate action plan</li> </ul>  |
| 3 | Systematic and methodical peer and manager review system to be adopted to support consistency of approach and continuous improvement in IRO Service  | IRO Managers and IROs | By end of Q2 2016-17 | A          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop and implement a systematic approach to support quarterly reporting.</li> </ul> |

|   | <b>ACTION</b>                                  | <b>WHO</b>            | <b>WHEN</b>     | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------|------------|--|
| 4 | Implement outstanding elements of IRO Handbook | IRO Managers and IROs | Across 2016- 17 | A          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New consultation documents and letters for children &amp; young people from IROs are ready for use and to be taken forward into 2016-17 work plan.</li> <li>• IROs are liaising and consulting with social workers, children and families and carers in order to make best plans for LAC reviews but this is not always achievable within the timescales advised and will continue to be a challenge until capacity issues are resolved. The IRO Service will of course strive to do its best in this respect in the interim.</li> <li>• Timely distribution of decisions from LAC reviews by IROs, this remains an area for improvement and the service continues to employ a range of workload</li> </ul> |



|   | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>   | <b>WHEN</b>                   | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|---|--|--|-------------------------------|------------|--|
|   |  |  |                               |            | management and business support strategies including frequent and regular monitoring, review and management oversight in a bid to try and address. This will continue to be a challenge until sufficiency is attained in staffing levels |
| 5 | Further reduce null returns as regards recording on Fwi by IROs of their visits and contact with children. Work with business intelligence and performance team so that the data reflects an accurate story of the work undertaken around participation. | IRO Service and Business Intelligence and Performance Team | By Q3 2015-16                 | A          | There is further work to be undertaken as outlined in the report at 5.5.5.   |
| 6 | Develop an evaluation tool and begin to gain feedback about the quality and experience for young people of their Review and the IRO Service.   | IRO Service  | In place by end of Q2 2016-17 | R          | This has been delayed as outlined in section 5.5.6. Will be taken forward into 2016-17.  |

|    | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>  | <b>WHEN</b>                | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>   |
|----|--|---|----------------------------|------------|---|
| 7  | Effective use of Beacon website including as a platform for consultation, participation & evaluation.            | IRO & EH Service Managers with The Jitty and Beacon Development Team rep. | March 2017                 | R          | More work needs to be done as regards making full and effective use of the Beacon – to take forward into 2016-17.   |
| 8  | Establish IRO specialist role for Care Leavers and SYPAC link if capacity in IRO Service is able to accommodate. | IRO   | Q3 2016 -17                | A          | IRO was previously identified but left the department and capacity has not been able to accommodate this to date however appointment of temp Corporate Parenting Team Manager in June 2016 will allow this to be explored further over 2016-17. |
| 9  | Review case note type nomenclature on Fwi for IRO Challenge recording  | IRO Manager with Fwi link   | By end of September, 2016. | A          | Partly complete but connected to IRO quality assurance alert development that is anticipated to be in use in Sept 2016.   |
| 10 | Review Notification & Escalation Process and how challenge is more systematically captured and evidenced.        | IRO Managers  | In Q2 2016-17              | A          | Review has taken place and quality assurance template has been devised – final stage is development of tracking and reporting system and aim is to have this in place Sept  |

|    | <b>ACTION</b>  | <b>WHO</b>  | <b>WHEN</b>  | <b>RAG</b> | <b>COMMENTARY</b>  |
|----|--|-------------|--------------|------------|--|
|    |  |             |              |            | 2016 so can commence use.  |
| 11 | To further establish a framework for practice discussions and process with ADM & Cafcass that will assist learning and improve outcomes for children | IRO Service | Q2 2016 - 17 | A          | Some of this work has begun and will be further refined over 2016 -17. |



### Appendix 3 – Tables of figures

Table 1

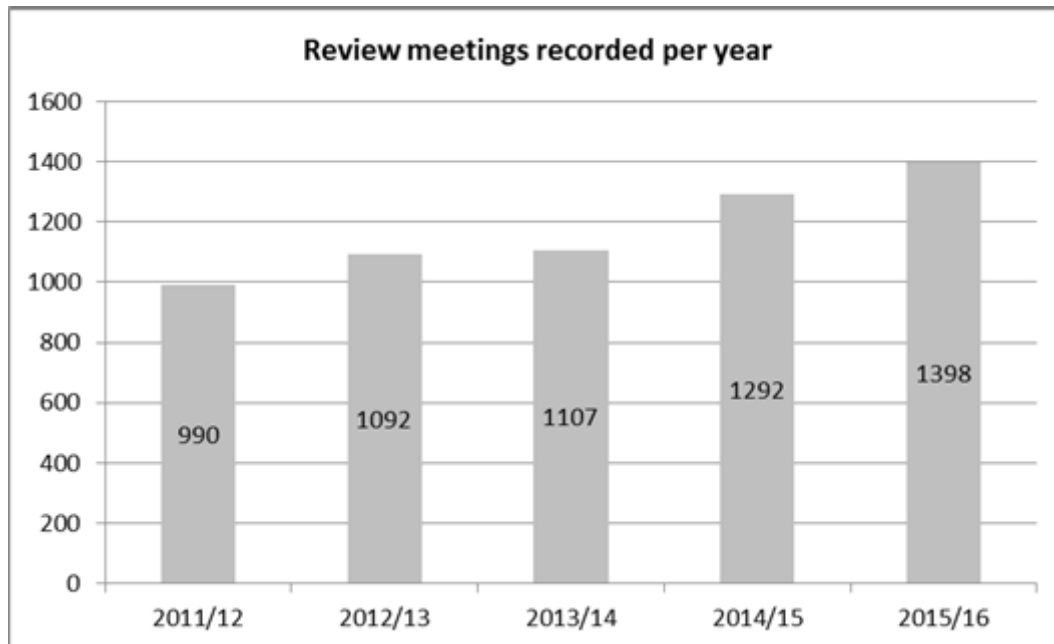


Table 2

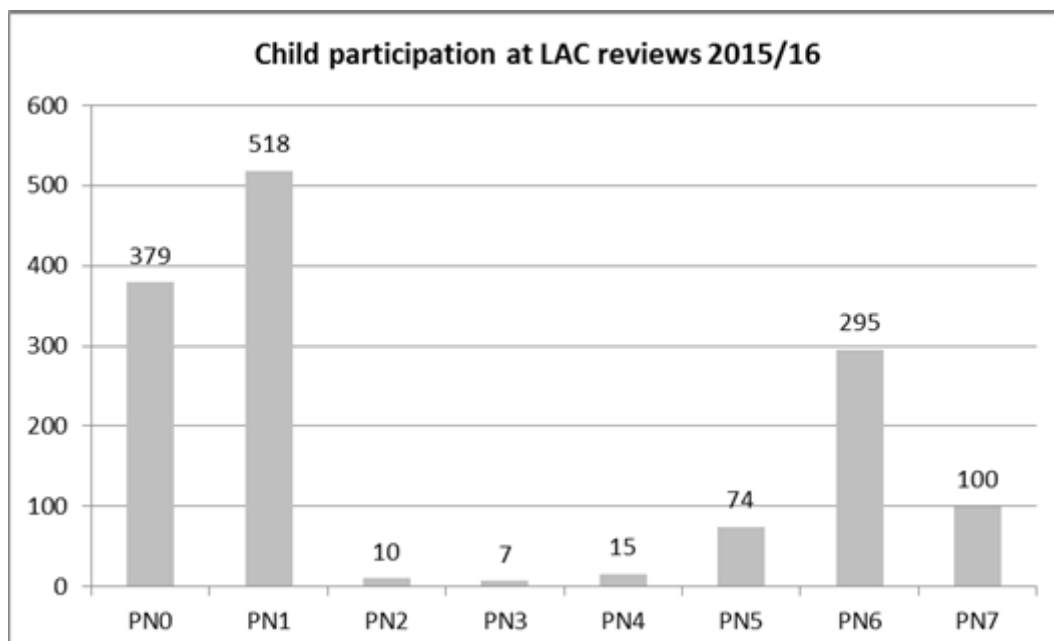


Table 2a

