

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES
Safeguarding & Improvement Unit

IRO Children in Care Annual Report 2013-14

Content

- 1 Executive Summary
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Purpose of IRO Service and Legal 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 2014-15 (See Appendix 2)

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Appendix 3 (IRO Handbook Implementation Plan update)

Appendix 4 (IROs - Taking up the Challenge update)

Appendix 5 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, between 1st April 2013–31st March 2014 including its corporate parenting function.
- 1.4 There are strengths, challenges and areas for improvement as set out below. The report includes priorities for 2014-15 in its appendices, which respond to local and national drivers.
- 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 Strengths
 - Defined IRO lead areas on Children Using Sexually Abusive Behaviour, Child Sexual Exploitation, Signs of Safety, complex care needs, national/regional developments and soon to be added care leavers.
 - Dual role of IROs provides continuity to the child's journey through the child protection process and into the care system.
 - 98.8% of the 1283 Reviews were carried out within the prescribed timescale an improvement on the previous two years, (97.9% and 98% respectively).
 - Increased numbers of children participating in their Reviews from 88.5% in 2012-13 to 91% in 2013-14.
 - IRO Service attendance and involvement at Joint Solutions and Permanency Forum, Education of Children in Care meetings and with the Specialist LAC health team.
 - Challenge meetings between the IRO Service managers and Assistant Director.
- 1.7 Challenges
 - Maintaining manageable caseloads within current capacity as the numbers of children in care have continued to increase.

- Ensuring that the process for children coming into care and their first Review is fully understood and carried out by social work staff.
- Ensuring that the data input to Frameworki is accurate and on time.
- Establishing an effective approach to ensure that children with communication needs and disabilities can participate in their Reviews.

1.8 Areas for Improvement

- Improved quality and timeliness of preparation for Reviews.
- Consistency regarding assessment, care planning and notification of/consultation with IROs regarding changes in a child's case.
- Clear understanding of the IRO statutory role across the children's workforce.
- Improved placement sufficiency and suitability to support stability and permanency.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 This paper reports on the contribution of 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 2013 to March 2014. 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.
- 2.2 The content and format of this report follows the expectations set out in 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); it will make recommendations with due regard to this guidance and comply with the expectation that such reports should be available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as accessible as a public document and most importantly, accessible to Leicestershire's children in care.
- 2.3 In addressing the above, this report will draw on the key findings from the Ofsted publication, '*Independent reviewing officers: taking up the challenge?*' - produced on June 7th 2013 following an evaluation of the effectiveness of independent reviewing officers across a sample of 10 local authority areas between November 2012 and February 2013.
- 2.4 This report will identify areas of good practice and areas in need of development and improvement. It provides an opportunity to pinpoint 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 2013-14 IRO Service Annual Work Programme, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.5 Priorities for the current year 2014-15 are set out in Appendix 2.

3.0 Purpose of IRO Service and Legal Context

- 3.1 A House of Lord's judgement in 2002 concluded that a local authority that failed in its duties to a looked after child could be challenged under the Human Rights Act 1998, most likely under article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to family life. The judgement recognised that some children with no adult to act on their behalf may not have any effective means to initiate such a challenge.
- 3.2 In response, the Government made it a statutory requirement that local authorities appoint IROs (*Adoption and Children Act 2002, section 118*).

- 3.3 The IRO role is 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*).
- 3.4 IROs should do this not only on a singular case basis but collectively, in order to monitor the performance of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent, drawing out themes for improvement and development and helping to drive forward change.
- 3.5 Historically there has been some concern regarding the effectiveness of IROs in contributing to improved outcomes for children in care (*Care Matters 2006/07*) with insufficient challenge to the local authority when needed.
- 3.6 The Children & Young Persons Act 2008, as well as the revised Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010 regulations augmented the role of the IRO, so that they were not just concerned with the performance of the local authority in respect of the child's looked after review but of the child's case per se; the intention being that this would provide a strengthened, independent oversight of the care planning for children and therefore more opportunity to challenge poor decisions and better protect a child's interests.
- 3.7 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.
- 3.8 The legal framework, associated regulations and statutory guidance sets out very clearly the expectations on local authorities and on IROs for the benefit of children in care. An effective IRO Service should enable the Local Authority to meet these expectations.

4.0 IRO Service

- 4.1 The IRO Service in Leicestershire is sited 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; significant in terms of the challenge and scrutiny role.
- 4.2 The effective independence of the IRO Service in Leicestershire, in the context of them being sited within the department that they challenge, continues to be monitored and considered across the IRO

management team. Our position is very firmly that independence is not compromised, and is supported by evidence of strengthened and increased challenge by the IRO Service.

- 4.3 The siting of IROs within CSC is one that is viewed by the service as beneficial overall as they have direct oversight of the performance of the department and direct access to case records and therefore full information relating to a child's case – invaluable in considering how well the Local Authority is discharging its responsibilities.
- 4.4 The restructure of the SIU, finalised at the end of the 2011-12, facilitated a strengthened and enhanced IRO function as referenced in the 2012-13 annual report. The role has continued to evolve and gain strength and responsibilities over 2013-2014 as the importance has been recognised and further supported both locally and nationally.
- 4.5 The service has 3 Team Managers with lead responsibilities for children in care, quality assurance and child protection, including child sexual exploitation and trafficking, children missing and runaways. The Team Managers manage the team of IROs; the SIU Service Manager has lead responsibility for the IRO Service.
- 4.6 The IRO Service provides a fairly diverse mix of staff in comparison with the make-up of the children in care population, with good representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity. Opportunities to reflect the make up more effectively have continued to be presented and taken, through recruitment.
- 4.7 The Team Managers drive forward the development of their lead areas of expertise in order to support progress in practice and improvement activity. This approach has been mirrored across the IRO team with individual IROs having lead areas of expertise as follows:
- CUSAB (Children Using Sexually Abusive Behaviour)
 - Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
 - Children with complex care needs
 - Signs of Safety (Growing Safety)
 - Regional and national IRO developments.
- 4.8 Additionally, 2 IROs have been involved with the Children in Care Council, working closely with the Participation Officer for Children in Care and Care Leavers as well as the Corporate Parenting Team and Team Manager. Links have been forged with the Corporate Parenting Board where influence is exerted, as regards the overall progress and experiences of children and young people in care and care leavers. One of the IROs left the IRO Service in April 2014 but the other remains and will continue their involvement.
- 4.9 At the time of writing, the Children in Care Council are working with the IRO Service in relation to developments to improve consultation and

therefore participation of children and young people in their Care Planning and Reviews. This is crucial in relation to their views being listened to, heard and acted upon in the most effective way.

- 4.10 There are plans over 2014-15 to further develop the specialisms within the service and have an IRO taking the lead on Care Leavers; linking with the newly developed Care Leavers focus group SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care). Leicestershire officially signed its commitment to the Care Leavers Charter at a launch event at the end of April 2014 and it will be vital that there is accountability for the pledge it has made to care leavers – the IRO specialism will assist in this.
- 4.11 The Growing Safety practice methodology has continued to gather momentum across CYPS and contribute to improving outcomes for children and their families. The IRO Growing Safety champion has had a key role in helping to strengthen the skills of the workforce, working with Learning and Development to deliver introductory training sessions for staff. It is a role that complements the improvement work of the IRO Service.
- 4.12 The IRO specialisms inevitably means extended responsibilities against a working environment of already high demand and a careful balance has to be struck in terms of their capacity to deliver their statutory obligations to children in care to the required standard. However, the service continues to assert that this strategy enhances the skill set of the team which in turn supports the capacity for quality and improvement which is fundamental to the IRO role.
- 4.13 Within Leicestershire, as in a number of other local authorities, IROs have a dual role whereby they undertake their statutory role as outlined in the IRO Handbook, as well as the chairing of all Child Protection Conferences (CPCs) convened in the authority. This is an established model of some 14 years in Leicestershire, in contrast to other models where the roles are kept separate.
- 4.14 The approach taken in Leicestershire is key 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. Such an approach maintains the flexibility of the team and provides more effective oversight across children's' situations. The service provided from the IRO team to Child Protection as well as Children in Care continues to be given equal priority and status. At present there are no plans to make any changes to the configuration of the team by splitting the team into two functional areas.
- 4.15 One of the continuing challenges for the service over the reporting period and beyond is the issue of sufficient capacity. This is a regional and national picture, not just pertinent to Leicestershire. It is highlighted in *Independent Reviewing Officers: taking up the challenge?* (June

2013), as well as recently published Ofsted Inspection outcomes in other authorities along with the findings from the NCB Research Summary 11 in March 2014 'The Role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England'.

- 4.16 The IRO Service has been fairly stable in terms of the make-up of the team over the 2013-14 period although there have been some changes as a result of maternity leave, one member of staff leaving and new staff commencing to replace. In terms of capacity, the service has operated with an average of 9.8 FTE IROs meaning caseloads continue to be over the recommended guidelines as per the IRO Handbook.
- 4.17 A further increase in the numbers of children in care in Leicestershire alongside a continuing improvement approach regarding the challenge and scrutiny responsibilities, has meant continued increased demands on IROs, exacerbating further the pressures they faced over 2012-13 to the degree that again, towards the end of the reporting period it was necessary for further support to be sought from agency staff, to bolster the service.
- 4.18 Within this, careful consideration has continued to be given to the type of work allocated to temporary staff within the team in order to continue to support sufficient priority being given to consistent professional relationships with children, young people, their families and their carers.
- 4.19 The challenge for the IRO service in the context of the above has been the ability to continue to meet and maintain required standards and not fall short. A key area of focus in this respect has been timely distribution of Review decisions, an area of concern highlighted in last year's annual report. Despite continuing pressures, the team has successfully addressed this and management oversight and newly developed systems and paperwork formats have achieved objectives set and will ensure this does not revert.
- 4.20 The expectations on IROs are significant and the strive for quality from the IRO Service in Leicestershire remains high accordingly. In order for IROs to continue to encompass their full responsibilities and improve outcomes for children in care on an individual as well as collective basis, the resources to deliver need to be in place.
- 4.21 At the time of writing, a risk assessment to consider sufficiency is being undertaken within the SIU, led by Service Manager.

5.0 Quantitative Information

- 5.1 The year-end figures below, highlight how the children in care population in Leicestershire has seen further growth over the 2013-14

period in comparison to the previous two years. It has been as high as 500 during this year. **See Table 1 in Appendix 5**

- 5.2 Caseload numbers per FTE IRO (pro rata, taking into account the dual role for LAC as well as Child Protection that IROs have in Leicestershire) have remained high at 100 – continuing to sit well above the parameters recommended within the IRO Handbook which is 50-70.
- 5.3 Between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014, a total of 1283 reviews for children were held. The figures in the table **See Table 2 in Appendix 5** do not reflect those that have not have been captured on Fwi (Frameworki) or those where children are in pre-adoptive placements, which accounts for the difference between 1107 and 1283. SIU has manual records of these as a result of their own monitoring which enables a more accurate representation.
- 5.4 On time LAC Reviews are important, to ensure focused and timely care planning for children, avoiding delay and assisting in the completion of actions aimed at delivering best outcomes. Of the 1283 LAC Reviews held over 2013-14 98.8% were held within the prescribed timescales. This is a good achievement and a further improvement compared to 97.9% and 98% in the prior two periods.
- 5.5 The good performance in relation to timely LAC Reviews is very much attributed to a robust and finely tuned system operated within the SIU across IROs, managers and excellent 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.
- 5.6 Of the 1283 reviews 36 were completed in 2 parts to allow more flexibility both with timescales as well as attendance and participation of young people and their family, carers and professionals. This also allows for a more pragmatic approach where for example there are key court hearings that ideally need to have taken place before the review meeting in order to inform further planning or there is a need to have different people in different meetings to allow for the young person to be more comfortable with their Review. Flexibility in holding a review in several parts means that key information and decisions can be made in the right order rather than having a situation whereby there is information missing and having to have yet another meeting for the sake of a short period of time.
- 5.7 There were 16 out of 1283 LAC reviews that did not take place on time over 2013-14 (1.2%). This represents improved performance compared to (2.1%) 2012-2013 and (4%) in 2011-12, achieved as a result of actions being implemented in line with the 2013-14 work plan including clear communications from the IRO Service to locality social workers and managers around expectations and standards.

- 5.8 Despite the improved performance, the main reasons for those out of date are again, the same as the main reasons in the two previous reporting periods. (i) Lack of understanding of the process needing to be followed by social workers when children come into care and need their first review; (ii) untimely or no notification to the SIU (iii); and issues with the accuracy and timeliness of data input to Frameworki.
- 5.9 The Work Plan for 2014-2015 has as a priority the need to take forward joint work across the IRO Service and Locality Social Work Teams that was not fully achieved over 2013-2014. This needs to focus on enabling all workers and managers responsible for meeting the needs of children in care to have a more consistent and clear understanding of the whole care planning and review process - in order to achieve the standards and requirements within this that underpin securing best outcomes for our children in care and care leavers. A locality lead has been identified to take this forward with the IRO Service – a joint approach is crucial for this to be effective.

5.10 Participation

5.10.1 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.

5.10.2 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 and do not convey their views in any other way.
- PN0 represents children under the age of 4

5.10.3 The figures in the table **See Table 3 in Appendix 5** do not account for work not captured on Frameworki, including pre-adoptive reviews, but again the SIU has a separate monitoring system that gives a fuller picture. The participation figures for 2013-2014 have seen an increase to 91% from 88.5% in the previous period.

5.10.4 This improvement albeit small is heading in the right direction but this will need to increase further over the 2014-2015 period so there is minimal non participation.

5.10.5 Analysis of key reasons for non-participation has been undertaken and some of this was about inaccurate recording by IROs to reflect

participation that had taken place. Work is being progressed across the IRO team and a monitoring system introduced to support further improvement. This needs to be extended to the social work teams also, so there is a joined up and more collaborative and creative approach to supporting children and young people to take part in their reviews, particularly for children who's communication needs and disabilities present more of a challenge. This is work that is currently progressing as part of the 2014-2015 work plan.

5.10.6 The IROs endeavor to support the meaningful participation of all children and young people in their review process and build good relationships with them; they accept and support it as a requirement that is best practice. IROs are aware of the IRO Handbook stipulations around contact with children and young people outside of their formal Review meeting and the service has strived to make improvements over the reporting period with some success, building on what has been achieved in the previous reporting period.

5.10.7 The IRO Service has received positive comments previously about their good practice in encouraging participation and fostering good relationships (*Ofsted Fostering Inspection in November 2012*). There is evidence of this continuing from positive comments received from young people, carers and other professionals. The examples relate to 3 separate IROs:

"...best LAC review L has ever had ... she is brilliant, she just has a great way with kids...L has always really struggled with attending his reviews, he is such a private, and at times self-conscious young man.... a big thank you for enabling this shift in L."

"IRO was very good in ensuring/checking with L that she understood jargon, processes and working at her pace/in a style that fitted L's needs... L's views were central to the discussion and the IRO proactively sought her views."

"Recently LL's review...the IRO made a lot of effort to include L, visiting beforehand and asking him where he wanted to have his review, the purpose of the review etc. In the end we had the review in the park. This worked well for L and the carers so I wanted to pass on my view that this work prior to the review allowed L to make the most out of the process."

5.10.8 There is a facility for IROs to record their contact and visits with children and young people on Frameworki so a clearer picture as to how effectively this is happening can be gained, to support the anecdotal perspective. Work is in progress to ensure more consistent recording by IROs as well as fine tuning the questions asked in relation to data reporting, so an accurate picture can be achieved.

- 5.10.9 At the time of writing, work is underway within the IRO Service to revamp and develop a wider range of participation and consultation approaches and platforms, as the current system is outdated and not effective enough. Within this, a decision has been made that responsibility for coordinating and driving consultation with children and young people for their care planning and review process will return to the SIU from locality social work teams. It is the intention to make best use of the Beacon website to support this development. Young people are contributing their views to this work.
- 5.10.10 There are clear systems in place to report on participation of children and young people in their reviews, but not for impact of this and feedback about the quality and experience of the IRO Service and the difference it makes in relation to outcomes.

6.0 Qualitative Information

- 6.1 The 2012-13 IRO Annual Report, identified priority areas for improvement and action by the IRO Service for 2013-14 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 The statutory Review meeting is the forum where care 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.
- 7.2 Performance in this respect was a recommended area for improvement by the operational service from last year's annual report as this was only achieved in 43% of LAC Reviews over the 2012-13 period. As the table shows **See Table 4 Appendix 5**, performance has improved which would indicate that the measures put into place (work to improve the quality of assessments under the umbrella of the QAIF; clarity of expectation and challenge from the IRO Service) have had some positive effects, but this needs to improve further, along with the quality of information within the reports.
- 7.3 It is the view of the IRO Service that the joint work around care planning and review developments, featuring in the 2014-2015 work plan is crucial and likely to bring further good results. This will be supported further by embedding Signs of Safety methodology, building on progress already made with this approach.
- 7.4 Additionally, the IRO Service still has the facility to adopt a more stringent approach where there is a lack of effective planning and preparation on the operational side for LAC reviews and can adjourn

where there is concern about this. The service has considered this very carefully over the reporting period as one method to assist making improvements but has not progressed to adopting this as a possible solution at this stage. There is evidence that this has worked well in other authorities yet will have a cost in terms of affecting timeliness of reviews as well as personal impact on others involved in reviews, especially young people. Further consideration will be given to use of this as a means of bringing improved performance over 2014-15.

- 7.5 Notification to IROs of any significant change or event in a child's life including any proposed change to the care plan has seen improvement over 2013-14, compared to the previous year and there have been more examples of good practice in this respect to support that the role of the IRO is better understood than previously and more integrated into the thinking of workers and managers at all levels.
- 7.6 The role of the IRO Service in the Joint Solutions and Permanency Forum has been influential in this, having a positive impact for best outcomes for children at an individual case level as well as opportunity to influence service planning and development for children in care.
- 7.7 Additionally work undertaken between the IRO Service and Legal Services around the role of IROs in legal planning meetings for children has further aided notification to IROs of care planning direction and thinking from the operational teams enabling proper process to be followed in terms of decision making and oversight.
- 7.8 However despite improvement, on the whole consistency is still an issue, and agreements about how this will be achieved on a more whole service basis needs to be addressed.
- 7.9 IRO challenge has been a key progressive focus for IROs over the reporting period. Despite the demands on the service and capacity issues already highlighted, it has strived to conduct its role to the fullest, in order to achieve best outcomes for children in care, holding those representing the Local Authority to account where needed. Challenge has taken place on a formal basis using the escalation procedure, as well as on an informal basis which takes the form of concerns being flagged by IROs but not necessarily needing to progress through the formal process. Close work with the Children's Rights Officer for children in care has continued.
- 7.10 The issues of concern requiring challenge have as in the previous reporting period, centred mainly on drift and delay in permanency planning and associated decision making along with placement sufficiency, suitability and stability. None of the cases that used the escalation procedure required referral to Cafcass in relation to Judicial Review as the challenge was resolved prior to that becoming necessary. However advice and consultation has been sought from Cafcass legal advisors in 3 cases this period compared to one

previously and one case has required an element of independent legal advice.

- 7.11 The IRO Service has identified the need to review its systems to ensure all challenge work is captured and evidenced to best effect and there is clear information regarding outcomes and impact for children and young people. This will form part of the 2014-15 work programme (see Appendix 2). Quarterly thematic reporting is now in place that will support the collective rather than the individual scrutiny - the action that follows from this reporting needs to be developed more systematically at senior manager level with the IRO Service in order to realise the contribution of the IRO Service to strategic service development and better provision and outcomes for LAC.
- 7.12 The latter part of the reporting period has seen the development of monthly challenge meetings between the IRO Service managers and Assistant Director that are diarised ahead over the forthcoming year. Clear terms of reference have been identified along with clear lines of accountability in terms of the role the Local Authority has as a Corporate Parent to the children in its care. It is the intention to use these meetings as opportunity to further the way in which the IRO Service can influence not just the individual case of the child but developments for improvement on a strategic and service level also.
- 7.13 IRO Service links with partners in health and education for the benefit of children in care services have been consolidated over the reporting period with both the EDCiC Service and Specialist Nursing LAC health team. There is representation at both education and health strategic groups and arrangements in place for regular attendance at IRO meetings of both services.
- 7.14 Over the 2013-14 period, the IRO Service has worked with EDCiC in relation to developments in personal education plans for early years as well as 16 + and has recently commenced consultation with health around leaving care health summaries. Close working relationships will continue.

8.0 Recommended areas for improvement by the operational service

- Improved quality and timeliness of preparation for LAC reviews alongside consistency and quality of assessment and care planning.
- Whole service consistency as regards notification to and consultation with IRO of changes and progress or otherwise in a child's case.
- Clearer and fuller understanding of the statutory role of the IRO across all workers and managers responsible for and working with children in care.

- Clearer and fuller understanding of the processes and procedures to be followed for LAC to achieve best practice and best outcomes.
- 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.

See Appendix 2 attached

Judith Jones

Team Manager (Children in Care and Corporate Parenting)

Safeguarding & Improvement Unit

June 2014

Appendix 1

Performance of IRO Service against 2013-2014 Annual Work Programme

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|--|---|--|------------|--|
| Address delays in the distribution of records of the decisions and recommendations from LAC reviews. | SIU Managers including Admin Managers with IROs | End of 2013 and monitor through monthly reporting system | G | Achieved at the end of April 2014. Improved reporting and monitoring now in place to ensure this is maintained, although this remains vulnerable to demand as well as the magnitude of the IRO role. |
| Identify resource gaps | SIU Managers | Review at monthly SIU Manager meeting | G | Additional IRO recruited during 2013-14 to increase the IRO establishment. Risk assessment being completed June 2014 led by SIU Service Manager. |
| Achieve consistency through workload allocations systems | SIU Managers and Admin Team | End of 2013, monitor at monthly joint meeting | G | Weekly workload management meetings in place with SIU Team |

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|--|---------------------------------|-----|--|
| | | with Admin Managers | | Managers working closely with Administrative Team and Admin Managers for improved consistency. |
| Achieve consistency through quality assurance systems in place (Observation tool, peer observations, and audit) | SIU Team Managers with Safeguarding Development Officer and IROs | End of 2013 | A | This work remains in the early stages, capacity across the IROs and Team Managers has been a factor. Will need to be taken forward into 2014-2015 Work Plan. |
| Develop and execute IRO Handbook implementation Plan | SIU Team Managers for Children in Care and Quality Assurance | See Appendix 3 for more detail. | G | This is almost complete. Detail can be seen at Appendix 3 |
| Plan and run IRO Service follow up development day. Focus on permanency planning and effective | SIU Team Managers with Learning and Development | November 2013 | G | Achieved although work will be undertaken over 2014-2015 to embed Growing Safety methodology and |

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|--|----------------------|------------|---|
| LAC review recommendations. | | | | approach into LAC Reviews |
| Launch Care Planning developments | SIU Team Managers for Children in Care and Quality Assurance with Locality Social Work Teams | July 2014 | A | Locality lead identified and planning is underway. Carried forward to the 2014-2015 work plan. |
| Further review of IRO recording on Fwi and consistent use by IROs | SIU Team Managers & IROs | End of November 2013 | G | Further review achieved. There has been improved use - highlighted need for more consistent and increased use. Work plan for 2014-2015 will include more systematic manager oversight of usage along with periodic reviews and audit. |
| Develop further systems to capture evidence regarding quality and impact of IRO Service | SIU Team Managers | End of 2013 | A | Quarterly reporting developments are in place. Some system refinement required. Further work needed for user feedback |

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|-------------------------|-------------|-----|---|
| | | | | to be developed in the work programme 2014 - 15. |
| Use the Beacon to improve and develop a wider range of participation and consultation strategies | Beacon Development Team | March 2014 | A | Wider use of the Beacon is needed; action for 2014 - 2015 Work Plan. Consultation developments including use of the Beacon as a platform currently in place; 2014 – 2015 Work Plan. |
| IRO compliance with relevant Adoption Minimum Standards and requirements of the Adoption Act 2002 | SIU Team Managers | End of 2013 | G | Adoption Action Plan tasks for SIU achieved. |

Appendix 2

IRO Service 2014-2015 Annual Work Programme

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|---|
| Risk assessment to consider sufficiency of capacity in IRO Service | SIU Service Manager | June 2014 | G | SMT Agenda June 20 th 2014 |
| Achieve consistency of approach across IRO Team using observation tool, peer review and audit | SIU Team Managers and IROs | Dec 2014 | G | Approach being used that replicates what has been undertaken across Child Protection Conferencing Service. |
| Realise IRO Handbook full implementation | IRO Service Team Manager leads | See detail in Appendix 3 | G | Almost complete – Appendix 3 has more detail |
| Embed Growing Safety methodology and approach into LAC Reviews | SIU Team Managers with L&D and IROs | March 2015 | A | Growing Safety IRO Champion to have key role building on progress and skill set developed through introduction in CP conferences. |

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|--|---------------------------------|------------|--|
| Complete Care Planning & Review developments | SIU Team Managers for Children in Care and Quality Assurance with Locality Social Work Teams | July 2014 | A | Locality lead identified and planning is underway |
| More consistent and increased use of recording on Fwi by IROs to evidence their role and challenge. | SIU Team Managers & IROs | Through quarterly reporting | G | Team managers applying more systematic oversight of usage – need to review nomenclature of case note type on Fwi and set review and audit pattern. |
| Refine systems for capturing evidence of quality and impact of IRO Service including user feedback | SIU Team Managers | September 2014 | G | Time specific and focused piece of work currently underway |
| Wider use of Beacon website as a platform for consultation and participation | Beacon Development Team with IRO temp manager | Initial phase by September 2014 | G | Work commenced June 2014 |
| Establish IRO specialist role for Care Leavers and SYPAC link. | IRO | July 2014 | G | IRO identified |

| ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|--|--|------------|-----|---|
| Further improve participation performance | IRO Service lead with locality social work teams | March 2015 | A | SIU team manager /admin monitoring system in place and planned work in relation to care planning and review developments with localities will assist. |
| Establish IRO Service link with Family Justice Board and VOICE of young people in care | IRO Managers and young people | July 2014 | G | Recently set up – opportunity to influence further Public Law Outline developments to secure better experience and outcomes for children. |
| Increase challenge - need to improve influence at service and strategic level not just individual case | IRO Service with Assistant Director | Monthly | G | Commenced end of 2013-2014 period |

Appendix 3

IRO Handbook Implementation Plan – Progress Update June 2014

| REQUIREMENT | ACTION | WHO | WHEN | RAG | COMMENTARY |
|---|--|----------------------------|------------------|-----|---|
| IRO Service to be notified of child becoming Looked After within 2 working days. | To ensure notification procedure in place to alert SIU. This involves procedures to be in place with Locality Team | Locality Social Work Teams | October 2013 | A | Good progress made between Oct 2013 and April 2014 but this is not being consistently maintained and further work with localities needed. |
| IRO to be appointed to child within 5 working days of child becoming Looked After. Child to be given information including contact details. If child only informed verbally this date to be recorded on case records. | Relies on notification process as above. Need to develop notification process to inform young person (age appropriately) of the IRO's details. | SIU | September 2014 | A | IROs are allocated as soon as SIU receives notification so if notification is on time then allocation is too. Information to child re IRO is part of work recently commenced in IRO service around consultation and preparation for LAC reviews including use of the Beacon. |
| IRO name and contact details must be recorded on case record | Name of IRO is shown on child's front sheet on Frameworki | N/A | Already in place | G | Completed |

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| Consistency of IRO including across sibling groups. | Administrative system ensures that SW is asked about the relationship of child to any other siblings that may be in care or subject to CP plans. | N/A | This practice already in place. | G | Completed |
| IRO to receive all appropriate reports in advance of the LAC review | Aide Memoir for SW/TM to define minimum set of documents. | N/A | July '12 | G | Completed |
| | Need to make clear the expectations and timescales that Locality Social Work Teams need to achieve. | SIU Team Managers to Locality Social Work Teams | September 2014 | A | Improvement in performance from last year as highlighted in the body of this report but still not a good standard and IRO Service will be taking firm stance moving forward. |
| IRO to speak with the SW 15 days prior to review (to include agreeing arrangements for the meeting). | IRO to forward task date for consultation and planning and preparation from point of allocation | SIU/ IROs | Sept 2014 | A | Not happening consistently, capacity is an issue – needs to be part of the care planning and review developments that need to be taken forward |
| Consult with the child about the review 10 working days prior to the review. | IRO/SW to liaise, agree plan and forward task date for consultation. | IROs & Locality SW | Sept 2014 | A | Part of care planning and review developments. |

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| IRO to provide child with information about advocacy, Children's Rights, how to make a complaint, including information re discharge of care order. | Suitable written format to be developed and system to evidence. | IROs/CRO | October 2014 | A | Information already present on Beacon website. Plans for small working group to develop with CiCC in place. |
| IRO to meet with / communicate with child before review. | Facility to record this activity on Fwi in place, now need to monitor performance. | SIU Team Managers | In place | G | Team Managers are monitoring performance, working with Performance and Business Intelligence colleagues. |
| To agree role of child/Young person in the review (including arrangement for young person to chair some/all of the meeting). | To embed practice further into care planning and review developments. | IRO Service with Locality Teams | End of 2013 | G | To continue to implement as part of the process of organising review |
| IRO to observe child <4 yrs in placement | Completed | IROs | In place | G | Completed |
| Written consultation to child, parent, carers and other significant person 10 working days prior to review | Update consultation process and methods | SIU Team Manager, IROs and Young People | September 2014 | G | In progress |

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| Review timescales to be in place and monitored. Including adjourned reviews. | Completed | SIU Team and Admin Managers | Completed | G | In place. |
| To establish clear procedure where child is subject to more than one process (e.g. CP, CSE, CUSAB) | To develop procedure that clarifies how this will be managed | SIU Managers with Admin | September 2014 | A | There is a procedure and oversight in place that is understood and actioned within the SIU but not currently captured in writing |
| To record outcome of permanency plan (3 month review) | Completed | IROs | Completed | G | Encompassed in new LAC minutes format and process in place for communicating with ADM. |
| Review timescale for Adoption placement disruption (4 – 6 weeks following removal of child) | Included in procedures. | N/A | In place | G | In place |
| To distribute decisions and minutes within timescale | Covered in Appendix 1 | SIU Managers with admin and IROs | Achieved | G | As per Appendix 1 |
| SW to update care plan within 10 working days of review. | Locality social work teams to address | Locality social work teams | Phased approach from July 2014 | | Part of care planning and review joint work needed. |

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| Dispute resolution and Escalation procedure | Completed | N/A | N/A | G | In place |
| Provision of independent legal advice for IROs that is easily accessible. | Completed | N/A | N/A | G | In place |
| Changes to the care plan to be reviewed and recorded | Notifications to IROs need to happen more consistently in order to achieve this fully. | Locality social work teams and managers | Immediately | A | Criteria of when this is required has been set out and communicated to social work teams. Improvement evident but still needs to happen more consistently. |
| To ensure systems are in place to meet the care planning needs of more specialist groups with more specialist requirements including LAC Reviews for children receiving Short Breaks; young people in the Criminal Justice System; children and young people in secure accommodation (s25 Children Act 1989); for Children admitted to Hospital and | To ensure Frameworki episode is in place. Access to specialist communication services and advocacy. Update IRO and social worker Aide Memoir with specialist information and where to access further detail Produce procedure that outlines and clarifies requirements in each of the specialist circumstances and integration of the LAC review | SIU Team Managers with relevant professionals for each of the specialist requirements. | September 2014 | A | Some of this work is complete and in place e.g. young people in the Criminal Justice System and Secure Accommodation and the remainder needs completion. |

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| Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. | & IRO into other relevant procedures e.g. the Secure Accommodation Panel, Care Programme Approach, UASC related processes. | | | | |
| Transition Planning | <p>To ensure protocol is in place to set out expectations for Pathway Planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEN/PEP process • Pathway Planning • Co-chairing meetings • Move to unregulated placement <p>Process to ensure Pathway Planning is complete – receipt 20 days prior to 18th birthday.</p> <p>To consider the role of IRO oversight of Pathway Plan post 18.</p> <p>To review protocol with Adult Health & Social Care.</p> | SIU Team Managers with Transitions Teams, CiC Teams and Adult Services | October 2014 | A | Some areas have been developed the remainder require further work. |

Appendix 4

Key Findings - Independent Reviewing Officers: taking up the challenge? Leicestershire IRO Service position against findings –progress update June 2014.

| FINDING | ACTION & COMMENTARY | WHO | WHEN | RAG |
|--|---|----------------------------|--|------------|
| Pace of progress in taking on all of the enhanced responsibilities too slow | IRO Service has almost achieved IRO handbook implementation plan-see Appendix 3 for detail. | SIU Managers & IRO Service | Risk assessment re. sufficiency to DMT June 2014 Appendix 3 has detail. | G |
| The effectiveness of IRO oversight of care plans not consistently good enough | IRO Service has further increased its oversight and challenge over the reporting period – IRO Service input into JSF has supported this and plans in place to further improve and increase recording and evidence on Fwi. | IRO Service | Quarterly reports | G |
| Workloads impacting on ability of IRO's to carry out role effectively and influence of child's VOICE in planning | Despite challenging workloads body of this report highlights achievements and progress alongside further improvements to be made. Risk assessment has been undertaken in recognition of the impact of workloads and work is in progress as identified in Appendix 2 to further through consultation and participation the influence of the child's VOICE. | SIU Managers & IRO Service | As per Appendix 2 | G |

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|--|---|---|----------------|---|
| Review recommendations and monitoring not consistently rigorous resulting in poor planning and delay | New format for recommendations in place supports more rigorous and consistent approach to planning and securing permanency. | IRO Service | In place | G |
| Insufficient consultation with young people about venue for their reviews and attendance. | Part of care planning and review developments - to embed further as part of the process of organising the review | SIU Managers and Admin Managers alongside Locality Managers | September 2014 | A |
| Social Worker and IRO consultation occurs regularly but purpose and impact not always evident | Key discussions and outcomes recorded on Fwi by IROs with analytical approach. Team manager oversight in place to ensure more consistent and increased use. | IROs and SIU Team Managers | In place | G |
| Quality of IRO Annual report not consistently good enough and not accessible to children and young people, carers and families and wider public. | Agreed format as per IRO Handbook being followed. | SIU team manager | In place | G |
| | Reports tabled for Corporate Parenting, LSCB and Scrutiny | “ | Achieved | G |
| | 2013-2014 report to be made available on LCC website and Beacon website including version for children and young people. | “ | September 2014 | G |

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|--|---|--|----------|---|
| IRO's not forging links with Corporate Parenting Board or CinC Council. | Effective integration already in place but need to develop influence at strategic and service level. Use of monthly challenge meetings with Assistant Director to further this. | SIU Managers with IRO Service and AD | In place | G |
| Formal dispute resolution processes in place but not always well understood or used when required | Effective challenge mechanisms in place and demonstrated through a number of cases. Dispute process used effectively. Work underway to improve systems for capture and evidence as per Appendix 2 | IRO Service | In place | G |
| The involvement of IRO's in cases where care proceedings underdeveloped, though improving liaison with Cafcass evidenced | National protocol with Cafcass near completion at local level – initial phases in place already which is supporting more focused and consistent liaison. | SIU Managers with Cafcass and Leicester City | In place | G |
| Oversight of IRO work by line managers not sufficiently rigorous. | SIU Team Managers continue to oversee individual IRO work through formal and informal supervision, apply supervision and capability processes and policies. Workload management and oversight system in place. Quarterly reporting in place provides more collective oversight | SIU Managers | In place | G |

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|--|--|-------------------------------|----------|---|
| Independent challenge that can be provided by IRO's was encouraged and welcomed as a lever for improvement | Active challenge in place with reporting mechanism to Senior Management. | IRO Service with SIU Managers | In place | G |
|--|--|-------------------------------|----------|---|

Appendix 5 – Tables of figures

Table 1

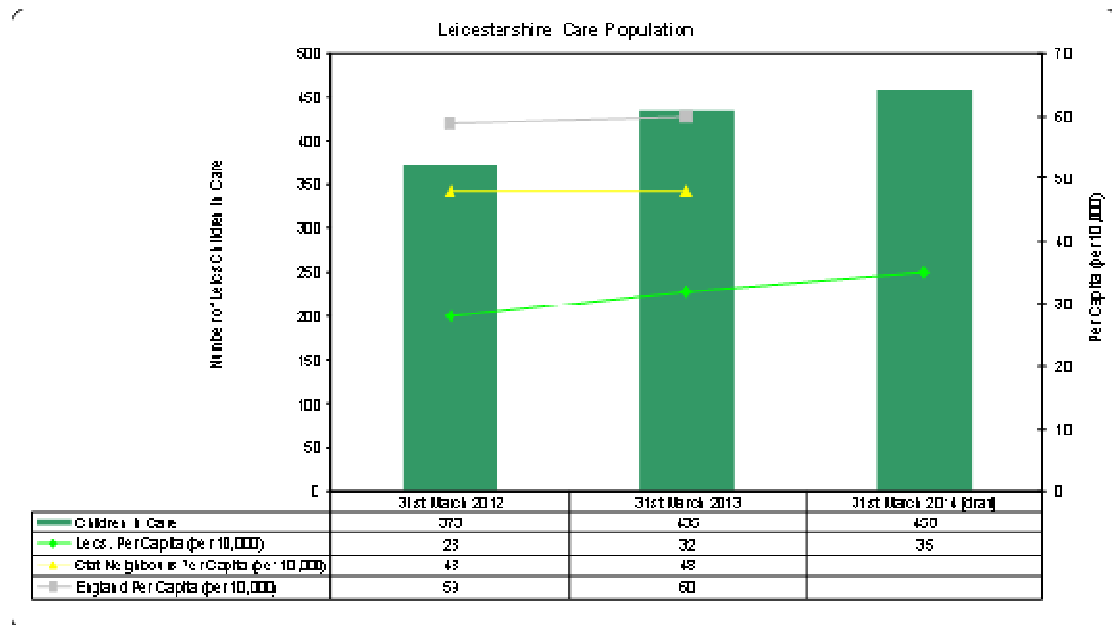


Table 2

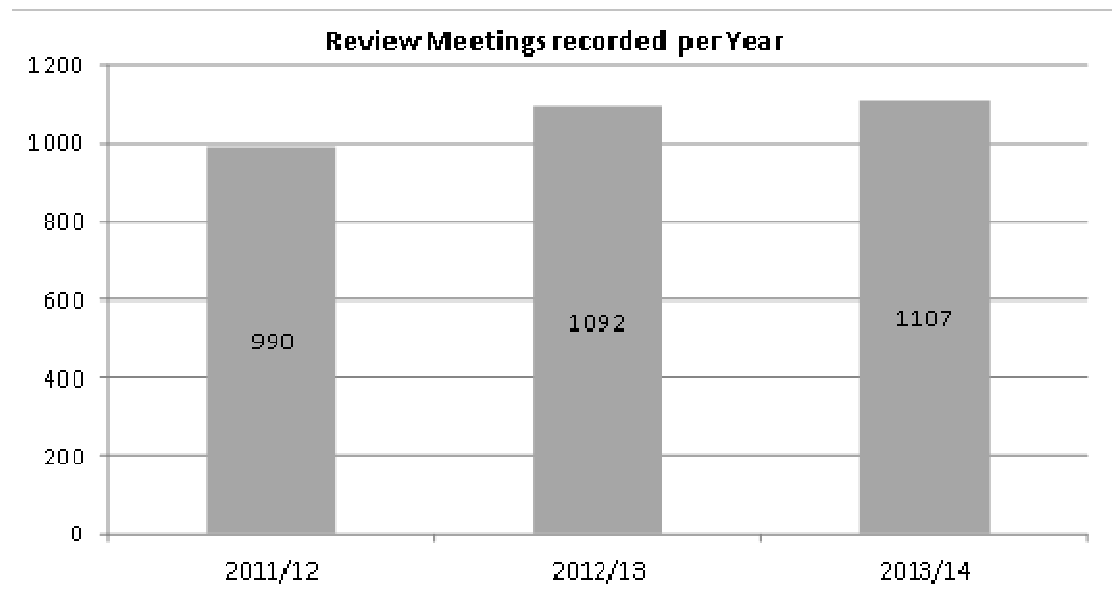


Table 3

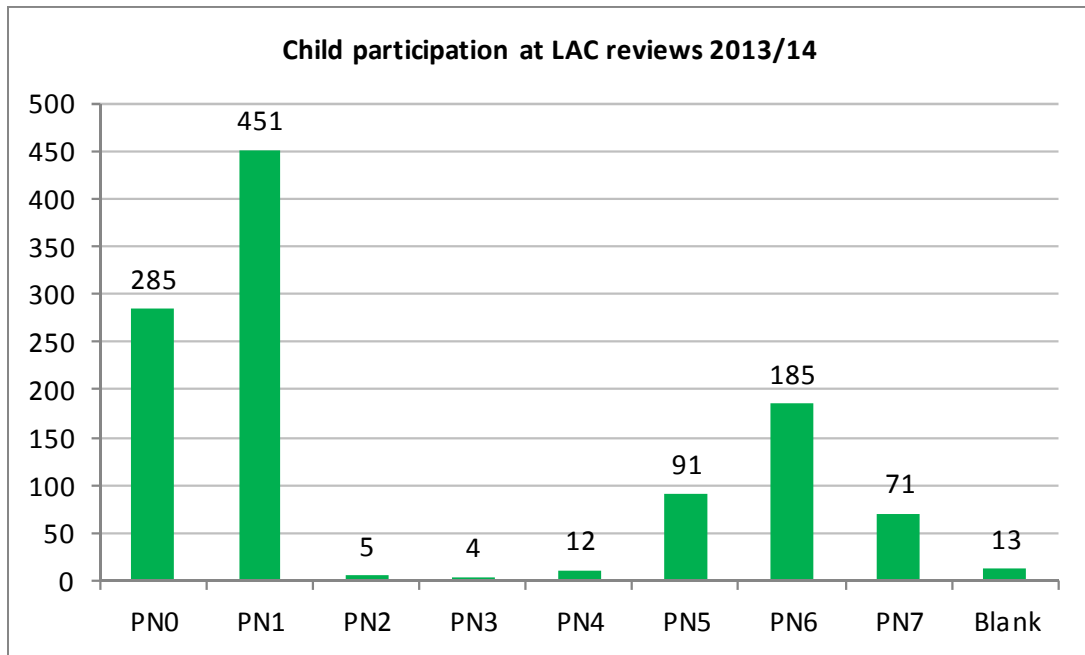


Table 4

