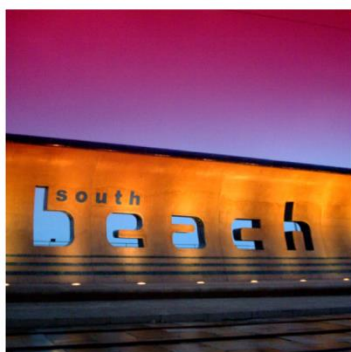


Safeguarding, Quality and Review

Independent Reviewing Officers

Annual Report 2013 - 2014

Blackpool Council



Safeguarding Quality and Review

Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2013 - 2014

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Section1: Forward

This is the first annual report in recent years. This report considers the work of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Blackpool and their role in ensuring there is robust scrutiny of plans and arrangements for Looked After Children ensuring their individual needs are met and the voice of children and young people is heard.

Within this report the author has reflected on current practice and has highlighted future service objectives and targets that are aimed at driving a cycle of continuous development and improvement.

Linda Evans
Principal Social Worker

Section 2: Purpose of the Report

2.1 This report gives an overview of the work of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Blackpool Council. IROs have independent oversight of 'Looked After' children¹ (LAC) and play a key role in care planning, ensuring that the needs of these children are met. The IRO discharges a monitoring and strategic duty to develop environments in which they thrive and are well prepared for adulthood.



2.2 In March 2010 the then Department of Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education - DfE) published 'The IRO Handbook', statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities on their functions in case management and review for looked after children. This guidance predicates a responsibility for IRO services to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board. Initially a national template was suggested; however individual authorities now have a template agreed by their corporate parenting boards which they must follow. A template has been agreed for some of the data within the report to be collated at a Regional and National level to share with DfE and the Minister for Children in Care how the IRO legislation is working in practice, and any themes which are emerging each year. A template for IRO National Data Collection appears in Appendix 1.

2.3 A frequently asked question across key IRO stakeholders is 'how do IROs know what difference they make for children?'. IROs are intrinsic to the independent review process and, as such, are finding that their own practice is increasingly open to scrutiny. In Blackpool over the last 12 months performance indicators have been developed to this end – see the later section, Performance Information. OFSTED's thematic inspection - Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the Challenge –was published in June 2013. This acknowledged the role of the IRO as being crucial in driving improvement for children and highlighted OFSTED's improvement offer. For more information see: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/independent-reviewing-officers-taking-challenge>.

¹Please note that for this report, children covers children and young people 0-18 years.

2.4 Increased scrutiny brings opportunities and a regular annual report provides a welcome opportunity to both reflect on practice while shaping future objectives and targets to drive forward improvements. The Annual Report, both locally and nationally, is an evolving means of documentation, with OFSTED noting in their report that IRO annual reports, where they were existed, were generally in need of further development. That is a process that begins here in Blackpool with the composition of this first publication.

Section 3: Profile of Looked After Children in Blackpool

Blackpool Profile

- 3.1 Blackpool is synonymous with fun and enjoyment as England's largest and most popular seaside resorts . It is also the principal retail and public administration, cultural and service provide for the wider Fylde coast. After a period of economic decline, Blackpool remains a town in transition with significant development and innovations in its current landscape. However, the town faces salient challenges with the social and economic problems that impinge on the lives of children and their families. The 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation indicates that Blackpool is the 6th most deprived local authority district in England and the most deprived local authority.
- 3.2 The 2011 census shows that Blackpool supports a resident population of 142,065 (50.9% female, 49.1% male) and is the most densely populated borough in North West England. 32,354 children (0-19) reside within the authority, accounting for 22.8% of the resident population. Birth rates are below regional and national rates and are outnumbered by the death rate. There is a relatively low proportion of minority ethnic groups (6.0%) but above the regional average of over 65 year olds (19.2%). 75.4% of the working population is economically active which is broadly in accord with regional and national averages but unemployment and median weekly pay rates levels compare less favorably. Blackpool has a poor life expectancy without below national averages for both males and females. Blackpool has the highest drug use across the region and is within the top 10 nationally. The numbers of children admitted to hospital for mental health conditions is significantly above the national average and numbers admitted to hospital for self-harm is triple the national average. While the teenage pregnancy level has fallen, it remains above the national average. Dental health at 5 and 12 years is poorer than the national average.
- 3.3 28.8% of primary school pupils and 24.3% of secondary school pupils are entitled to free school meals. Blackpool has higher than average referral rates, regionally and nationally, into early intervention and acute services relative to other authorities proliferating demand across all resulting work areas – LAC, Children in Need, Disabled and Child Protection). LAC children have significantly poorer outcomes than other children in Blackpool with Health data indicating a higher need for mental health support and Education assessments showing an attainment below the national average, especially around English and Mathematics.

Numbers of LAC Children in Blackpool(also see Appendix 2)

- 3.4 Blackpool has a significantly higher number of Looked After children when compared to statistical neighbours' and local authorities nationally remain relatively flat. The number of LAC Children per 10,000 populations reduced between March 2013 and March 2014 from

169.2 to 152.8 but remains well above the statistical and national average for 2012, i.e. 77.1 and 60.0 respectively.

Similarly, the number of children who became Looked After per 10,000 has decreased over the last year from March 2013 to March 2014 from 71.1 to 54.4 which compares with 50.6 at March 2012, 46.2 at March 2011 and 56.5 at March 2010. Nonetheless, this is still appreciably over the statistical and national average, i.e. 33.2 and 25.5 respectively.

3.5 The numbers of children who ceased to be LAC does compare favourably with statistical and national trends. This increased from 56.0 in April 2013 to 70.2 in March 2014 with figures for March 2010 at 39.3, March 2011 at 39.3 and March 2012 at 40.0. The averages for statistical neighbours and nationally were 30.6 and 24.8 respectively.

3.6 The number of LAC Children at 31 March 2014 was 443; a figure that reduced 8%, from 481 on 31 March 2013 but was higher than for the corresponding stages for 2012 (434), 2011 (396), 2010 (375) and 2009 (324). Below is a summary of the salient points of a further delineation of this profile with a full breakdown located in Appendix 2.

Placement Type of LAC Children in Blackpool

3.6 In line with the above the demand on Foster Care placements, as the primary option for Looked After children, has increased from 119 in March 2009 to 288 in March 2014, when it accounted for 65% of all LAC placements. The numbers placed for adoption increased from 5.9% to 9.7 % during the period. Generally, other categories of placement do not show significant % fluctuations when measured against the numbers of LAC.

Legal Status of LAC Children in Blackpool

3.7 Over the 2009-14 period the use of Section 20 LAC (parental consent) has reduced from 86 (26.5%) to 54 (12.2%). Case sampling indicates that the Local Authority responsibility to provide accommodation is applied consistently and cases are reviewed in timescales in accordance with LAC Review schedules, currently circa 95%. Options to return home at the earliest opportunity are evident in a number of cases where it is apparent from the outset that a short stay LAC is appropriate to facilitate a return home. There remain some queries over the use of S.20 as an extension of a Police Protection Order (PPO), e.g. following a Child Protection (CP) Plan, to secure LAC status. This may be to accommodate the deferral of court proceedings, possibly by way of meeting the 26 week court timetable, which means a permanency decision is delayed. What is not so apparent is how robust Social Work Teams and the LAC review processes are in addressing options with longer term rehabilitation or permanence and avoiding drift together with applying due cognisance over parental consent and rights. IROs are now giving this area extra attention through LAC reviews.

3.8 The number of children on Interim Care Orders has reduced significantly from March 2013, following a steady 4 year rise when it was at a 5 year high of 122 while by March 2014 this had reduced by nearly half to 62. This is possibly consistent with the improved Public Law Outline provisos and 26 week timescales for care proceedings. The number of Placement Orders had risen steadily during the 2009-14 period from 36 to 112 correlate with an increase in Full Care Orders from 125 to 209. The greater drive recently, both nationally and locally, towards

permanency planning for LAC children is reflected in the figures with adoptions broadly flat-lining from 2009 – 2013, 19 to 22 but nearly doubling by March 2014 to 41. Similarly, Special Guardianship Orders numbered only 3 in March 2009 increasing to 24 by March 2013 and then to 42 by March 2014.

Age, Gender and Ethnicity of LAC Children in Blackpool

- 3.9 The age profiles of children generally relate reciprocally with the increase in LAC numbers over the period 2009 - 2014. Some upsurge with the under 4 population in 2010 and 2011 is evident together with under 12 months cases in 2013. Gender profiles consistently show that male numbers are slightly higher than females, approximately 55% to 45% over the 2009 – 14 periods. Ethnicity of LAC Children generally reflects the local Blackpool profile with no Minority Ethnic group seemingly over represented in the LAC population.

LAC Children placed out of area

- 3.10 The number of Children who were placed out of area, i.e. in the catchment area of another Local Authority outside of Blackpool, at the end of March 2014 was 211 out of 443 LAC (47.6%), these children primarily resident in external fostering and residential placements. From 2014 the definition for LAC children placed out of area will be those more than 20 miles away from Blackpool.

3.11 LAC Children Missing from Home (MfH)

There are two measures for this currently, with a weekly report produced by the Children's Services' Management Information Team that reports all of those children who have had at least 5 and 9 MfH episodes recorded against their record on Frameworki in the 90 days prior to the weekly reporting date. This is then used across Children's Services to assess if a strategy meeting, as per the pan Lancashire MfH Strategy, is required. A First Stage Intervention Meeting should be held once a child has been missing 5 times during this 90 day period and is usually chaired by the Team Manager of the relevant Social Work Team. A Stage 2 meeting is held once a child has been missing 9 times during this 90 day period and is usually chaired by the IRO if the child is LAC.

- 3.12 The other means for collecting MfH information is via the Monitoring Form completed by the IRO after each LAC Review – for more information on this see the Section Performance and Quality Assurance Framework. Those individual LAC children on 31/03/2014 were flagged at their latest review as being involved in Absconding or Going Missing from Home is 25/443 (5.6%).

Section 4: Looked After Children Strategy for Blackpool

LAC Strategy for Blackpool Council 2013-15

- 4.1 Blackpool Council is committed to promoting the education and health of all LAC children, ensuring that this remains at the heart of all care planning. The Strategy summarises the means by which the Council will seek to provide the range and quality of placements required to meet the current and anticipated needs of the LAC population, including the activities needed to bolster these services. The Strategy is concurrent with the Council Plan, the Children and Young People's Plan, the Getting It Right Strategy, the Sufficiency Strategy and the Permanence Strategy. The most up to date position of LAC Services is available through the Purple Book which is the Children's Services Monthly Performance Statistics containing specific IRO performance indicators - see later sections.
- 4.2 The premise for good placements for LAC children, when they enter the system, is to place them within their family or friends' network, provided this is consistent with their welfare. If this is an arrangement made by the Local Authority, the carer will be assessed and supported as a Foster Carer. When this is not available an in-house fostering placement will be sought, preferably, and if safe to do so, to maintain close links to the child's community so they can remain at the same school and maintain links with their networks. Usually children will be placed with their siblings where this is practicable and unless assessed as not appropriate. Where an in-house placement is not available, a placement from an independent fostering agency will be sought, again closest to the child's community unless incongruent with their safety or welfare.
- 4.3 When the needs of a child cannot be met in a family environment, a residential placement will be considered, initially within Blackpool Council's own provisions. Children aged under 12 will not usually be placed within residential homes unless it is clearly demonstrated that this is consistent with their welfare and provides the best way of meeting their needs. All external placements must be approved through the External Placements Panel that is chaired by the Head of Children's Care and which contains within its membership the Service Manager (LAC) for Safeguarding, Quality and Review. The role of the Service Manager is to inform the meeting of the IRO stance with the care plan for the child and how this impinges on the decision to continue with the external placement while also providing dates of the LAC Review schedule and recommendations from the IRO as they contribute to the care plan.
- 4.4 Where children are not able to return to those with parental responsibility, planning will take place in a timely way to enable them to move to permanent families who can offer them legal and emotional security. For younger children the placement of choice is likely to be adoption. For older children, who retain significant ties to their birth family, longer term foster care may be appropriate if a Special Guardianship Order is not tenable.

Blackpool Children and Young People's Plan

- 4.5 This plan contains 3 priorities, as underpinned by the priorities and values within Blackpool Council's vision to tackle child poverty; safeguard protect the most vulnerable; improve health

and well-being especially for the most vulnerable; and create safer communities. These priorities are:

- i. Keeping children safe, preventing them entering the care and custody system wherever possible and ensuring there are safe and effective exit routes;
- ii. Maintaining the Blackpool culture of high expectations and aspirations where attendance, participation and achievement are all improved;
- iii. Improving the health, self-confidence and resilience of children;

Section 5: Legal Framework

- 5.1 The IRO has statutory duties under Children Act 1989, Section 25B (1) to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are congruent with the local authorities' legal responsibilities towards the child. The role of the IRO is set out in the HM Government guidance The IRO Handbook, a statutory guidance for IROs and local authorities on their functions in case management and review for looked after children. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273995/iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf
- 5.2 The Corporate IRO has statutory duties to review Foster Carers and make suitability recommendations upon whether the Foster Carers can continue to foster children, that their household remains appropriate and that their terms of approval are still fit for purpose –this as predicated in Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. The Corporate IRO role in Blackpool has also undertaken Regulation 33 visits under Children's Homes Regulations 2001 (amended 2011), this to inspect Local Authority children's homes on a monthly basis. This function ceased on 31 March 2014, as compatible with contemporaneous central government regulations, and has now passed to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS).
- 5.3 Following the 2013 OFSTED Thematic Report, the OFSTED Single inspection framework was introduced to Children's Services. Recent inspections have demonstrated a sharper focus on the effectiveness and impact of IROs emphasising how they bring rigour and challenge to care planning, escalate contentious issues, drive plans for permanence and monitor the performance of the local authority as a corporate parent. From the initial inspections undertaken nationally some good practice is evident across IRO services but generally IRO caseloads are too high, challenge of drift/delay in care planning is not always strong enough, the level of engagement with children varies and the role in monitoring and driving overall improvement is not fully embedded.
- 5.4 Since 2002 IROs can discharge authority to refer the case of any LAC child to CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) under Children Act 1989, Section 118, if they are of the view that the child's human rights have been breached and all attempts to resolve the matter have been exhausted from within their own organisation, normally the Local Authority. Through the development of a national protocol between CAFCASS and IRO Services (also see later section), the scope of such referrals is now extended and the IRO now has the authority to refer a case to CAFCASS 'if the IRO considers it appropriate to do so.

Section 6: Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer including the Corporate IRO

The LAC Review Team in Blackpool

- 6.1 IROs in Blackpool Council are based in the Safeguarding, Quality and Review (SQR) within Children's Services as an independent unit from mainstream children's social work services and headed up by the Principal Social Worker, Linda Evans. In addition to the IRO service, this includes a team of 3.6 Safeguarding Chairs and Local Safeguarding Board Business Managers, as headed by a separate Service Manager, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and a team of administration staff.
- 6.2 The Blackpool team currently comprises of 7.7 IRO posts at 31st March 2014 and this includes a 0.8 Corporate IRO post, responsible for reviewing Foster Carers. Up until April 2014, that post was responsible for all Regulation 33 visits.

The LAC IRO Team comprises of the following at 31 March 2014:

Steve Cook – Service Manager
Philip Bannister – IRO
Chris D'Arcy - IRO
Peter Dixon – IRO
Clodagh Flanagan – IRO (Agency)
Bobbie Kenny – IRO
Louise Mayland – IRO (current maternity leave)
Anna Stowell – IRO
Mary Sveinsson - IRO
Harpal Thandi – Corporate IRO
Deborah Ward - IRO
Amanda Bartoszek – Adminstrator
Debbie Coleman –Admin Officer (to March 2014)

- 6.3 1362 LAC Reviews were undertaken between 01/04/2013 and 31/03/2014 with the workload, in terms of number of LAC children per IRO, broadly in line with the national average of up to 80 cases as based on a national survey conducted by the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) during 2013. The average caseload for the four IROs, who worked throughout the 2013/14 period, was 77 children. The OFSTED guideline for IRO caseloads, to accommodate their range of responsibilities in the IRO Handbook, is between 50 and 70 cases. Assuming a full complement of IROs, Blackpool will aim to ensure that caseloads are within this guideline during 2014/15. The core tasks for IROs revolve around the LAC Review process. No IROs now undertake a specific IRO / Safeguarding Chair role but IROs cover Child Protection

conferences on a shadow duty basis which means they can have on their caseload a small number of children on Child Protection Plans and chair strategy meetings for LAC child on child allegations. Also, they chair Stage 2 MfH strategy meetings as mentioned previously.

IRO Responsibilities

- 6.4 The IRO's primary role is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. (1.21 IRO Handbook). The Blackpool LAC Review procedures, as consonant with the IRO Handbook, were revised in 2013 focusing on ensuring appropriate plans are in place to safeguard and promote the overall welfare of the LAC children in the most effective way. The IRO has a key role in achieving permanence for children within a timescale that meets their needs. This means managing the care planning, often through court proceedings, by monitoring the case plans so they are progressed effectively, while making required decisions to amend those plans to reflect any change in knowledge and/or circumstances. Advocacy and key attention to the child's legal rights should be primary considerations.
- 6.5 The format that should be considered for each LAC Review is included in Appendix 3. Participation by the child should, wherever age appropriate, be promoted by the IRO from the outset with involvement at all stages of the review process. The child should attend their review unless they specifically indicate a wish not to or it is not age appropriate (usually pre-school). Disability must not be a bar to the child's attendance
- 6.6 Attendees at the review normally include the child's parents, Social Worker, carers (e.g. Foster Carers and Key Workers if the child is in residential care) and any significant people or specialists involved in the child's case. This incorporates extended family members, Fostering Social Worker, Adoption Social Worker (if the child is subject to Placement Order). Also featured are representatives from the child's school including the Designated LAC Teacher, Personal Advisor (Leaving Care) if the child is over 16 and Health Professionals if they are actively involved with the child (namely Health Visitor, Midwife, School Nurse, CAMHS, Psychologist). If actively working with the child, an Independent Visitor or Advocate may attend and represent the child's views. Ahead of the Review, consultation forms are sent out to the child, parents and carers.
- 6.7 Convening LAC Reviews within 20 working days of a child becoming LAC, or a new placement commencing, is mandatory. For new placements a Review should then take place every 3 months and, thereafter, 6 monthly. Thus, all LAC children must have at least 2 LAC reviews per year. Other instances where a LAC Review should take place is before a significant change is made to the Care Plan (e.g. placement change or submission of final care plan arrangements), and before a decision is taken to cease looking after a child. Similarly, reviews should be instituted for children who are LAC as a result of Youth Court proceedings including a secure court ordered remand, and encompassing all 17 year olds – see Appendix 4. Also reviews should occur before an Eligible Child - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 - moves into semi-independent accommodation.

- 6.8 IROs organise and manage LAC review meetings and usually chair them. Children are encouraged to chair their own review and this is an area to further develop across the Team. IROs will usually convene a main LAC Review meeting, with the participants as highlighted in 5.6, and other salient inputs should include a meeting with the child ahead of the review, and the IRO liaising with Social Worker and Carers to facilitate the child's participation in their Review including choice of those attending, venue and date / time of the review.
- 6.9 Following the Review a report is sent to all parties, including the child as age appropriate, and this should be within 20 working days of the main review meeting date or at the conclusion of a series of meetings. Clear recommendations should be made including starred recommendations where urgent actions are required. An Issues Resolution process is available to escalate concerns where actions are not progressed - see Section 9.
- 6.10 The child's Social Worker has a key role in supporting the IRO in discussing and organising the review with the child, parents and carer and in encouraging and supporting CYP and parent(s) to prepare for the review. Also, they should keep the IRO informed of any significant changes in the child's circumstances, particularly as it affects the care plan, and the outcomes of any other key meetings / court proceedings and updates on recommendations. The Social Worker should keep the child's records and plans up to date, including records of the statutory placement visits and the last date when the child's sleeping accommodation was seen. Prior to a Review the Social Worker needs to either prepare and update, or ensure are available, the Social Worker Report, Care Plan or Pathway Plan, Health Plan, Personal Education Plan (PEP) and any other relevant reports by professionals.

The Corporate IRO

- 6.11 From 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 121 Reviews on Foster Carers were undertaken. The Regulation 33 visits were monthly to each of the 3 Children's Homes- Argosy Avenue, 331 Bispham Road and Hornby Road so 36 visits were completed for that period with the attendant reports as sent to OFSTED. Regulation 33 visits have been undertaken by the Corporate IRO in collaboration with Elected Members.
- 6.12 The Corporate IRO carries out formal reviews of Foster Carers on at least an annual basis. Newly approved Foster Carers should have an initial review 6 months after their first placement. Dates and the venue for review meetings, invariably held at the foster home, are agreed by the Corporate IRO in consultation with the supervising (Fostering) Social Worker and the Foster Carer. The first annual review meeting is reported to the Fostering Panel within 12 months of the original approval. Reviews take place more frequently, and may be initiated by the Fostering Social Worker or Foster Carers, this in the event of a significant change in circumstances of a Foster Carer affecting their ability or capacity to foster. This may include a change in the composition of the household, a significant health issue, and/or concerns about the standards of care provided by the Foster Carer, a complaint or allegation made about the Foster Carer or related family / household member. This may have initiated a Child Protection (Section 47) enquiry or investigation and concerns as a result of information from updated Disclosure and Barring Service checks or a recommendation for a change of approval.

6.13 The Review should be informed by written consultation documentation by Foster Carers, Supervising Social Worker for the Foster Carers, children placed with the Foster Carers, Social Worker(s) and IROs for all children placed in the placement. The review of Foster Carers will consider all the available information and views and assess whether the Foster Carers continues to be suitable to foster children and if the terms of approval continue to be suitable. Other recommendations include the support needs of the carer has and how these will be met and steps required to address difficulties or concerns since the last review to improve the quality of the placement, e.g. health and safety compliance. The training and development needs of the Foster Carers should be appraised and how these needs will be met and who will be responsible. The recommendations will also incorporate the date for presentation to the Fostering Panel, if relevant. As per children's IROs, an Issues Resolution process is available where the Corporate IRO has concerns with how recommendations are being progressed.

Developments in the IRO Role

6.14 As mentioned previously, the IRO role is currently under scrutiny nationally. In addition to the 2013 OFSTED Thematic review, a recently published National Children's Bureau (NCB) report on the role of the IRO service considers how the role is understood and implemented locally. Particular attention is given to monitoring and analysing care plans that contribute to improving outcomes for LAC children. The NCB Report indicates that most IROs are employed by Local Authorities and half had been in post for more than 5 years, this consistent with the Blackpool staffing profile. In 2 case studies, IROs were paid less than recommended grade of Team Manager for Children's Social Work Teams (in Blackpool IROs retain parity with Team Managers). 85% of Local Authorities expect IROs to take on other tasks – particularly Safeguarding Chair) but also Foster Carer reviews, complaints, LADO and Regulation 33 visits which can affect the IROs independence and ability to challenge.

6.15 Children's feedback for this report also provides helpful insights into the role – also see next section: Voice of the Child. This included comments such as.. 'many were things (of the IRO role) that should be happening anyway....meet the child before the review, introduce people, don't keep postponing...building a trusting relationship...listen without judging, do what you've said you will do...maintain child-friendly records – and care plans. They also questioned the 'independence' of IROs in the current system with comments that IROs.. 'shouldn't work for the Local Authority and should not be former Social Workers. The independence of IROs is another moot area although the OFSTED thematic did conclude that the effectiveness of IROs would not be easily improved by removing them from the employment of local authorities as there is much scope for improvement under the current arrangements.

6.16 The NCB Report recommendations include:

- i. setting out the expectations of the IRO role with dissemination to all the key stakeholders particularly the child;
- ii. creating systems to give IROs a voice;

- iii. specifying how the IRO Annual report will be used to make a difference;
- iv. reviewing the dispute resolution process;
- v. improving quality assurance- feedback from social workers and children, direct observation and opportunities for reflection;
- vi. commissioning role specific training/ support for IRO services;
- vii. analysing how many IROs are needed to do the job properly;
- viii. challenging any obstacles to a good IRO service or other ways that the authority is failing looked after children in their authority;
- ix. clarifying how cases will be monitored between reviews and how this activity will be recorded;
- x. reviewing additional tasks to establish whether they compromise IRO independence – or capacity – and act on the findings;

[http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1124381/ncb the role of independent reviewing officers in england - final2.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/1124381/ncb_the_role_of_independent_reviewing_officers_in_england_-_final2.pdf)

6.17 IRO services seek to progress their practice by taking full account of legislation and practice developments. This includes Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013. Academic research is consistent in underlining the damage to children from delaying intervention. The actions taken by professionals to meet the needs of these children as early as possible can be critical to their future.

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/w/working%20together.pdf>

6.18 The Children and Families Act 2014 will, inter alia, have implications for extending the IRO role post 18 years, i.e. after Younger People cease to be LAC to better develop continuity and planning of services into independence and adulthood.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-children-and-families-act-2014-gains-royal-assent>

Section 7: The Voice of the Child

What do children tell us about the IRO Service?

- 7.1 Nationally, as well locally, this area has received appreciable prominence for IROs and is a welcome development that is driving forward local practice.
- 7.2 The work of a number of groups – e.g. Family Justice Young People’s Board - has highlighted the need for children to be made fully aware of the IRO role with feedback from LAC Children highlighting a number of germane points about their LAC Reviews – see Appendix 5. This has included being asked about wishes and feelings at their review and to feel more included, with the professionals the child wants present at their reviews, and to have some control over their confidentiality. Children wish to meet with their IRO at a time and location convenient for them and assurance that their views and feelings matter and are not tokenistic. On a local Blackpool level, children say that they generally don’t like LAC reviews - “I don’t like sitting there why everyone talks about me” and they consider they are not always consulted on where, when and how their reviews happen. They would like a review that is personalised and is tailor made to their individual wishes and tell us they wish to have the same opportunities and support with their education as their peers and be able go to on to university or further education. Thus, the challenge is to deliver personalised, individual reviews that children feel part of, want to attend so their views are valued, listened to, acted on and they are fully included in any decisions made about their lives. Reviews should be a positive experience.



Voice of the Child at Reviews

- 7.3 We are making headway in Blackpool while recognising that we still have some way to go. During the last 12 months a Children and Young Persons’ Engagement Officer, Kirsty Fisher, has been appointed by Children’s Services which is raising the profile of the child’s voice and informing practice and service development. This is evident in developing the local voice for LAC children that has included the redesign of leaflets for children and generally scrutinising our existing LAC review documentation for child friendliness and compliance while making the attendant improvements. An action plan has been developed across Children’s Services - Engagement Work with Looked After Children and Young People – that includes specific actions for IROs, e.g. children are to have their IROs contact details. LAC children’s views have been incorporated into this report and a specially edited version will be produced for them.

7.4 Invitations are now sent out to children and young people 6 weeks prior to a LAC review. A review menu booklet has been created called 'My Review, My Choice' so children can have their say in what happens at their review. This should be sent out to them 6 weeks prior to their meeting and has a prepaid element so they can return it straight back to their IRO. Invitations are then sent out on their behalf with an invitation card also developed so a child can send out their own invitations if they choose. A child friendly feedback form has been created that serves as a template to allow their IRO to personalise minutes following their review. New Consultation Documents are now close to completion the new booklets are called 'My Life, My Review and My Voice'. They have been designed in consultation with the Just UzCiCC (Children in Care Council).

Just UZ CiCC (Children in Care Council)

7.5 Blackpool Just UZ CiCC is now an established group and has 28 members who have signed up under the auspices of the LAC Engagement Officer. They meet up monthly, have named themselves Just UZ and are in the process of designing their own logo. New members are still being encouraged to join. The group membership is representative of children who live with Foster Carers, residential children's homes and children who are also placed with external Foster Carers out of the area. Just UZ Juniors has recently been established. They meet every 8 weeks and the session is always activity based. The group is for children age 5 to 10. IROs and the Service Manager have attended this Group during the year and have valued the contributions to date on progressing improvements to the LAC Review process.

7.6 The calendar of social events is agreed each year to include an annual Celebration of Achievements Awards. This took place on 7th March 2014 with Blackpool Council staging an event to celebrate the achievements of all Looked After Children and Care Leavers, this to become an annual event. Feedback on the evening was very positive.

7.7 Children wish for the opportunity to speak to the people that make key decisions and to this end Just UZ CiCC representatives attend and participate in national events that promote the involvement of CiCC's and look at ways of improving outcomes for all looked after children. Two members of Just UZ attend the National Children's Bureau conference for children in care councils in Dec 2013 with Cllr Ryan, a member of corporate parenting panel, attending with them. Five members of Just UZ attended a conference held by Lancashire to listen to a keynote speech by the Children's Commissioner for England in February 2014.

7.8 JustUZ CiCC is keen to ensure that Blackpool Council employs the right people to work with them and for them. A pool of LAC children have been recruited to have an active role in the recruitment of new Social Workers, IROs and Managers for Children's Services - "The You're Hired Crew" - and have contributed to IRO recruitment during the last year. Children are to be involved in developing and delivering training to Children's Services' staff, Foster Carers/ and Corporate parent panel members. This will include sharing their experiences of being looked after and what matters to them.

Advocacy and Independent Visiting Services

- 7.9 In recent years case law practice has highlighted potential issues for IROs, Family Court Advisors (CAFCASS) and Safeguarding Chairs in relation to human rights for children. The case of *A and S v Lancs CC* [2012] EWHC 1689 (Fam) is an application, made by two brothers freed for adoption by Lancashire County Council in 2001, for a declaration that the Council had breached the boys' rights under Arts 8, 6 and 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. As party to the proceedings, the IRO was also implicated in the breached of their rights under Arts 8 and 6. The judgment here indicated a pressing need for an independent reviewing system to work more effectively than it did for these two boys.
- 7.10 Thus, independent advocacy has an integral role to play to facilitate children having a voice so they can be heard by local authorities, their families, cares and their communities. In Blackpool Council this service is provided by NYAS who observe the precept of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, i.e. the right of each child to be consulted on all matters affecting them. This is particularly for those children in administrative or judicial proceedings with NYAS providing a specialist legal team and issues and rights based advocacy, e.g. within mental health settings and where children are disabled.
- 7.11 NYAS also provide Independent Visitor services for children who have little or no contact with their family and who would like an adult friend who is outside the care system. Visiting is normally monthly either at the weekend or during the evening and could involve an activity outside of the child's placement.
- 7.12 IROs, through the LAC Review process, should consider the need for advocacy and independent visiting for a child.

For further information visit the NYAS website at www.nyas.net or via e-mail at help@nyas.net Telephone 0300 330 3131.

Section 8: Performance Information and Quality Assurance Framework

8.1 This is an area that has developed apace during 2013/14 with the development of 'The Blue Book' for the Safeguarding, Quality and Review Team that features monthly performance statistics, a range of local and national measures for both safeguarding information, as based on child protection / safeguarding data, together with LAC information and the specific input of IROs. Information is collated from the IRO Monitoring Forms, as redesigned in 2013 to better capture new information requirements. These are completed by IROs following each LAC Review. From these IROs now have their own individual data as set against key performance indicators. The key sections are outlined as follows.

Percentage of looked after children with reviews in timescales

8.2 This is a national indicator (NI66). From April 2013 to March 2014 the Team has performed strongly in this area ranging from 99.3% in April to 94.1% in March with 2013/14 performance (94.3%) above both Blackpool's statistical neighbour average (93%) and the national average (90.5 %).

The Team target for 2014/15 is 96%.

% of children with a LAC review who were consulted by the IRO prior to the review

8.3 This is a local indicator with a specific measure that has commenced from April 2013. During this period team performance has improved from 40.9% in April 2013 to a team overall figures of 74.4% for 2013/14. There has been an appreciable focus on expanding consultation with children and IROs are now expected to visit all children in placement before their primary review meeting with all children consulted in some form before their review, this including attempts by the IRO to engage them in the process. Over 2013/14 changing team culture to prioritise this practice has been required together with providing more clarity around recording by IROs with clearer guidelines now in place.

The Team target for 2014/15 is 95%.

% of children with a LAC review who participated in their review

8.4 A national indicator, performance in this area has been reduced to the range of 85% - 92% during the period with an annual figure of 88.2%. IROs should be ensuring some level of participation for all children over 4 years.

The Team target for 2014/15 is 95%.

% of children with a LAC review where the Social Worker attended the review

- 8.5 Social Workers are expected to attend the LAC Reviews for children on their caseload. Measured locally, monthly performance in this area has been at a mean yearly average of 94.5%. If the Social Worker does not attend the review then a Team Manager or Duty Social Worker should be present in their place.

The target for 2014 / 15 is 98%.

% of children with a 2nd LAC Review (4 month review) where the Permanence Plan was agreed

- 8.6 While a local measure, this is a significant indicator in promoting the Child's Journey to Permanence (CJP), i.e. to achieve a permanence plan by the child's 2nd LAC Review, 4months of them becoming LAC. Monthly fluctuations have been apparent here with the range between 33.3% and 87.5%. Specific targets have not been set yet for this area that is not within the specific gift of IROs. Information is shared by the Service Manager in the CJP monthly meetings within Children's Services.

A consideration for 2014 / 15 will be to ensure that an Issues Resolution is raised where permanence has not been achieved by the 2nd Review.

% of children with a LAC Review where the child has an up to date Care Plan; PEP (Personal Education Plan), Health Assessment Plan; Pathway Plan (if 16+)

- 8.7 The overall figure for 2013/14 is 61.9% for Care Plans; 37.1% for PEPs; 75.3% for Health Assessment plans and 38.3% for Pathway Plans. These are unacceptable levels but not directly within the control of IROs as completion lies with Social Workers and Schools. Recording systems need to be developed to measure how completion has been scrutinised by IROs and what action has been taken if not completed, i.e. use of Issues Resolution processes.

% of children with a LAC Review where the IRO has ratified the current plan for the Child

- 8.8 The monthly range for this during 2013/4 was from 96.6% to 69.5% with a mean yearly average of 79.9%. No targets have been set for this area but, theoretically, this should be 100% at the end of the process as any change of Care Plan should be agreed through a LAC Review. Further work is required with IROs to assess how this data is being recorded on the IRO Monitoring form and so to consolidate this indicator and set an achievable target.

% of children with a LAC Review where the birth mother attended the review

- 8.9 This is a new indicator for the Team and this needs further refinement and possible target setting, particularly with a view to improving parental participation. Currently this shows an

overall average of 37.2 for the year with a range between 29% and 43.6%. Adoption reviews have now been removed from the cohort for 2014/15, as birth parents do not attend these.

% of children with a LAC Review where the birth father attended the review

- 8.10 Another new indicator with the same comments as per the previous section, namely better parental participation, further refinement, target setting and adoption reviews. Currently this shows an overall average of 17.3% for the year with a range between 8% and 27.3%.

% of children with a LAC Review where the IRO is satisfied the placement is giving the child opportunities to have their leisure needs met

- 8.11 This shows a high level of IRO assessed satisfaction with a range between 100% and 90.4% over 2013/14 with a mean average of 95.8%.

% of children with a LAC Review where the child has a substance misuse problem

- 8.12 This shows an overall average for 2013/14 of 5.8% and needs further benchmarking against the non LAC population with a further analysis of the efficacy of interventions.

% of children with a LAC Review where the child is at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) or experiencing CSE

- 8.13 This shows an overall average for 2013/14 of 4.9% and needs further benchmarking against the non LAC population with a further analysis of the efficacy of interventions.

% of children with a LAC Review where the child has a mental health issue

- 8.14 This shows an overall average for 2013/14 of 9.1% and needs further benchmarking against the non LAC population with a further analysis of the efficacy of interventions.

% of children with a LAC Review where the child is involved in absconding / going missing from home

- 8.15 This shows an overall average for 2013/14 of 8.5% and to better combine with the weekly information provided to track patterns and developments and contribute to pan Lancashire's strategy initiatives.

Quality Assurance

- 8.16 LAC Reviews are recorded as part of the workflow on the Integrated Children's System (Frameworki) which means they are open to scrutiny to those that have access in Children's Services and this includes audit activity. Fostering reviews are initially recorded on a separate

system but uploaded on to the Foster Carer section of Frameworki. The Team has a dedicated drive on the Children's Services list of electronic internal folders with information on the role and practice developments contained therein.

8.17 IROs are supervised monthly by the Service Manager with recorded notes of these sessions. Key areas covered include: focus on the IRO well-being and workload; case supervision for cases / reviews as highlighted by Service Manager and IRO with an opportunity to reflect on case practices; review of individual IRO performance / KPI activity and training / development needs. An annual appraisal system, as per the Blackpool Council Individual Performance Appraisal (IPA) system, is in place with a development plan and targets set for each IRO. Team meetings (group supervision) sessions take place monthly and feature outside speakers both internally and externally for relevant areas of IRO practice. Other core features include policy and procedural development, discussion of the Blue Book data and a focus on administrative issues. There have been two team audits days during 2013/14 that have involved the Team with the Principal Social Worker to develop the wider strategic direction for the Service.

8.19 As yet there is no bespoke auditing process for LAC and Fostering Reviews, as discrete from Children's Services systems, but a more robust programme of auditing will be developed over 2014/15. IROs can access training and development opportunities across Blackpool Council / Children's Services but the Team would benefit from a clearer staff development strategy. Similarly, the team has started to build a repository of research and practice reports and case law indices that will also be expanded over 2014/15. Also, see Priorities section.

8.18 The procedure for complaints is incorporated into the Blackpool Council / Children's Services arrangements as per Customer First. Over 2013/14 there has been 6 complaints investigated by the Service Manager, where an IRO has been implicated in some capacity, with some element of finding in each which has produced an action plan to improve practice.

Section 9: Issues Resolution

9.1 ..'Every IRO should feel confident in his/her role and personal authority and understand his/her responsibilities to monitor and review the child's case and, where necessary, challenge poor practice..' (1.22 *IRO Handbook*)

'... the idea of the IRO as a critical friend of the local authority seems to me to be a dangerous misconception. The IRO should not be a friend of the local authority, critical or otherwise.... but the IRO should be a monitor or inspector who cannot be ignored. S/he must constantly hold in mind that every concession to working relationships with adult colleagues may make life easier for the adults but harder for the children...' (Mr Justice Jackson – *NAIRO conference 2013*)

9.2 Demonstrating vigorous and successful challenge is possibly the most important test facing IROs, both locally and nationally, in evidencing the efficacy of their role. OFSTED, through their Thematic Inspection, highlighted the need for IROs to have regular contact with LAC children so that they know and understand their wishes and feelings and can then robustly challenge all agencies involved to ensure that children's needs are met. The OFSTED Report highlighted that the IRO role, in challenging overall performance as corporate parents, was under-developed. The NCB Report on the IRO Role concluded, as based on its sample finding, that most attempts to influence/challenge were informal and invisible. NCB highlighted that dispute resolution protocols do not always work, and may not hold other agencies to account, while IROs nationally have inconsistent access to independent legal advice with few referrals to CAFCASS in resolving disputes and confusion about what it can deliver. Clearly there is a future expectation that IROs challenge more consistently, with one corollary that IROs could specifically become party to care proceedings in contentious care planning cases.

9.3 During 2013 the Safeguarding, Quality and Review Team reappraised their protocol that outlines the process for IROs- including the Corporate IRO and Safeguarding Chairs – to follow when they want to offer challenge or escalate issues. This focuses on concerns about action being taken, and/or the plans that are in place, and adherence to agreed practice standards. Challenge, or escalation of issues and concerns, will usually occur following a review or conference but can be initiated at any point in the process. In circumstances when the above actions have been exhausted, or if the matter is of sufficient urgency the IRO can refer the case to CAFCASS. The expectation is that the IRO and relevant Service Managers will have discussed this prior to the Head of Children's Social Care, and Principal Social Worker for Safeguarding, Quality and Review, being notified that a referral to CAFCASS is being considered. The IRO in making this decision has access to management advice and support and in addition to independent legal advice, as provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council Legal Team, where necessary. Blackpool IROs can access this service at any stage of the child's review process.

9.4 The protocol for Blackpool does predicate areas the IRO may challenge that includes:

- i. Change of Care Plan not agreed through the LAC Review process;
- ii. Social Worker visits not undertaken within timescales;
- iii. Social Worker reports not completed for the LAC Review meeting;

- iv. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) not completed in timescales, i.e. for the LAC Reviews;
- v. LAC medicals/ health assessments not completed in timescales;
- vi. Pathway Plan / allocation of Personal Advisor (Leaving Care) not undertaken at the appropriate age juncture; and Permanence plan is not defined by the Second Review.

Further recent local guidance has added unresolved contact issues to this list.

- 9.5 For the Corporate IRO the internal procedure features informal and formal resolution through a professionals' meeting to include the Service Managers of both the Fostering and Social Worker's team and the IRO. If no resolution is reached at this stage a referral should be made by the Principal Social Worker to the Head of Children's Social Care Services and, if there is still no resolution, a referral should be made by the Principal Social Worker to the Assistant Chief Executive/Director Children's Services. Examples of when the Corporate IRO may challenge, via Foster Carers' reviews and Regulation 33 visits, include: Fostering Social Worker visits not undertaken; Review documentation not completed by Foster Carers, Social Workers for the child; Health and Safety recommendations and Safeguarding procedures not completed.
- 9.6 The total number of formal Dispute Resolutions in relation to LAC Children within the year April 2012 - March 2013 was 14 instances with the number recorded for the corresponding period for 2013 - 2014 indicating that this has more than doubled with an increase apparent during 2014. The IRO monitoring from data was only collated since August 2013 so this does not show a full years' data. No children have been referred to CAFCASS and information is not formally recorded as to the number of children discussed with CAFCASS.
- 9.7 Team recording and monitoring of issues resolution is still in its embryonic stage and the development of this is a priority for 2014/15. As yet, a system of recording has not been fully formulated, as linked to the integrated case management system, and the team introduced a manual recording system for IROs to input on an excel spreadsheet. Revisions need to be made to the IRO Monitoring form to provide more data and improve its veracity. This will then enable the Team to devise a baseline for activity in this area. Audits of Reviews for both LAC and Fostering Reviews provide a more qualitative account of IRO performance in this area.

Section 10: Links with CAFCASS and other professionals and organisations

Blackpool Children's Services

10.1 The current IRO Team is part of Children's Services in Blackpool Council and includes team representation of a number of internal and external forums. This comprises, for the Service Manager, membership of the Children Services' Management Group, External Placements Panel, Child's Journey to Permanence / Permanency Strategy Group and Children Causing Concern Group for those LAC children presenting educational challenges as highlighted by the Virtual (LAC) School. In addition, IROs are involved in a countywide Missing from Home Coordinators' Group and Blackpool Council Shadow Improvement Board, established following an OFSTED inspection of children's safeguarding in Blackpool in 2012, and other arbitrary internal groups, e.g. Frameworki Working Group. The Service Manager has represented Children's Services on the county (Lancashire) Missing from Home Strategy Group, Blackpool's Integrated Children and Young People's Emotional Health and Well-Being Group and Channel, a key element of the Prevent strategy as a multi-agency approach to protect people at risk from radicalisation.

CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)

10.2 Family Justice Reviews, e.g. around Public Law Outline, have highlighted the need for working relationships between IROs and CAFCASS Children's Guardians (or Family Court Advisors). A national protocol exists between CAFCASS and IROs. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) supports the protocol and considers it to be a good practice model.

10.3 A key element of the protocol is, at the point of case allocation, for CAFCASS Business Support to inform the IRO Manager of the named Children's Guardian, including direct contact details using the agreed template. The Children's Guardian will establish contact with the IRO prior to the CMH. The level of any on-going consultation will be at the discretion of the Children's Guardian or the IRO in order to promote the best possible care planning process for each child. At the point of case allocation the IRO or IRO Manager will inform CAFCASS of the named IRO and contact details. The IRO will ensure that the Children's Guardian is advised of Children Looked After Review (CLA) arrangements and sent a copy of the record of the review. This is an on-going arrangement during the proceedings. The IRO should maintain a comprehensive record of all discussions with the Children's Guardian on the child's file

10.4 During proceedings, within five working days of receiving them the legal department of the local authority, will ensure that the IRO is sent copies of all relevant court documents including interim and final court care plans; court timetable/directions; expert reports; Children's

Guardians interim and final report; facts and reasons, or judgments (if any). When the Children's Guardian has a concern about the Local Authority's management of the child's case they may consult with the named IRO. The Children's Guardian will consult when appropriate with the IRO prior to the CLA review as CAFCASS attendance is generally not required. The Children's Guardian will send apologies in advance when not attending the meeting. The IRO will alert the Children's Guardian to any significant issues that arise in planning and review meetings. Prior to Looked After Reviews the IRO may contact the Children's Guardian. The local authority Solicitor will inform the court of any matters subject to local dispute resolution.

10.5 No later than 10 working days after the end of proceedings the Children's Guardian will ensure the final court care plan is provided to the IRO, and discuss it with them and provide written handover on the agreed template. At the end of the proceedings the IRO will record discussions with the Children's Guardian and the written handover information on the child's case file and identify any outstanding issues. Following the withdrawal of the Children's Guardian the IRO remains the only independent scrutiniser of the local authority's actions in relation to the care plan for the child. The Children's Guardian will send a letter to the child, giving details of the end of his/her involvement and confirming the IRO as the person who will oversee their care plan.

10.6 As mentioned in the previous section, Issues Resolution, Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 amending section 26 of the Children Act 1989, states that the IRO should refer the case of any looked after child to CAFCASS where the IRO considers it appropriate to do so and it has not been possible to resolve the issues through local resolution. Referrals should be sent direct to CAFCASS Legal.

10.7 Links have developed with CAFCASS informally by IROs building on the initial notification by CAFCASS of the Guardian which occurs routinely. Areas of contact between the IRO and CAFCASS Family Court Advisors need to be formally recorded and the system of CAFCASS contact at the conclusion of the Family Court Advisor involvement needs to be further developed. The Service Manager meets quarterly with the CAFCASS Service Manager and planning is in place for a Blackpool event along with other Service Managers in Children's Service. A twice yearly event will take place with those involved in the LAC Child's Journey this will involve Family Court Advisors, IROs, Social Workers and Team Managers. The initial session that had been scheduled for March 2014 has now been postponed until later in the year. The purpose is to promote communications between the Social Work professionals involved in the LAC Child's journey and develop working practices across the professional disciplines focusing on children and young people's participation and issues resolution.

North West (NW) Regional IRO and Safeguarding Managers Group

10.8 This group exists to develop practice in accordance with the Handbook and comprises of 23 Local Authorities, along with CAFCASS representation, and meets on a quarterly basis with all IRO Managers across child protection and looked after children services with a view to improve learning and practice to ensure sector led improvement. The Group also includes CAFCASS

representation. A regional business plan has been devised, based on key priorities set by the NW Regional Heads of Safeguards Group, namely commissioning, improvement, early help and personalisation. A NW IRO, Safeguarding Chairs and Family Court Advisors Conference are planned for May 2014 with the Blackpool Service Manager for Safeguarding, Quality and Review (LAC) actively involved in the planning group for this. The proposed event is a cornerstone of the business plan to ensure IROs and Safeguarding Chairs and Family Court Advisors around the region are able to meet the requirements of the role and legislative requirements.

10.9 There are links with the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) with the Service Manager attending the Annual Conference and IROs attending a regional event in 2013.

Section 11: Priorities for 2014/15

11.1 This Report has provided a good opportunity to reflect on a year in which practice and performance has clearly developed within a context of a service seeking to reposition and refocus its remit and focusing on the priority areas of children participation, issues resolution and developing its quality assurance framework. Priority areas manifest through the report from which an action plan will be developed and reported on in the Annual Plan for 2014/15. These are as follows.

11.2 Priority 1: Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

What do we need to do?

- i. Maintain IRO caseloads within the 50-70 range, i.e. number of individual children
- ii. Analyse how many IROs are needed to do the job properly
- iii. Review additional tasks to establish whether they compromise IRO independence – or capacity – and act on the findings
- iv. Specify how the IRO Annual report will be used to enhance practice including the participation of the Just UZ CiCC (Children in Care Council)
- v. Introduce a staff development strategy

How will we know we have made a difference?

- i. Role and functions of the IRO are clear to all stakeholders
- ii. Full range of IRO task successfully discharged as per the IRO Handbook, particularly
 - Children are visited before reviews
 - Quality reports produced following reviews
 - Issues Resolution raised appropriately

11.3 Priority 2: The Voice of the Child

What do we need to do?

- i. Explain the role to each child and agree how they will maintain contact with the IRO
- ii. Clarify how cases will be monitored between reviews and how this activity will be recorded
- iii. Ensure invitations and consultation documents are sent out in a timely way
- iv. Develop child friendly feedback forms for the Review (LAC and Fostering)
- v. Child friendly information to be developed and shared to include:-
 - The review process
 - Why LAC reviews need to happen

- The role of the IRO.
- Information to be accessed via website/ leaflet in information pack.
- A “Review Menu” to be created
- To offer choice of where, when, who and how to every child/ young person.

How will we know we have made a difference?

- i. Children own their LAC Review and feel fully engaged in the process to include Fostering Reviews
- ii. More children chair their own LAC Review

11.4 Priority 3: Performance Information and Quality Assurance Framework

What do we need to do?

- i. Develop team audit tools in line with regional developments to inform team monitoring practices and ensure compliance with the Children’s Services Quality Assurance Framework
- ii. Create quality assurance systems to include regular team audits and service feedback from all key stakeholders including children, parents, social workers while ensuring compliance with the Children’s Services Quality Assurance Framework
- iii. Review current monitoring practices, particularly the IRO Monitoring Form to ensure that all information collected is relevant and all pertinent areas of practice are covered
- iv. Integrate the review practices of the Corporate IRO on to the Framework case management system
- v. Provide opportunities for all staff for direct observation and reflection of practice
- vi. Improve on key performance indicators as highlighted in Performance Section
- vii. Expand the team repository for research and case law

How will we know we have made a difference?

- i. Robust self-appraisal systems in place to cultivate data and information for a learning organisation approach across the team
- ii. Facilitation of data and information collected by the team to input positively to the wider Children’s Service’s agenda, this to include the IRO Annual Report
- iii. Effective use of data, research and auditing to better inform IRO practice

11.5 Priority 4: Issues Resolution

What do we need to do?

- i. Improve effective case management recording systems to capture team performance
- ii. Develop team auditing practices to incorporate appraisal of issues resolution activity

- iii. Commission role specific training/ support for IROs to build upon their practice in this area

How will we know we have made a difference?

- i. Effective challenge to any obstacles to a good IRO service
- ii. IROs can clearly evidence effective challenge in the following key areas
 - No up to date PEP
 - No Care Plan (up to date) and agreed
 - No Permanency Plan by 2nd review
 - No Health Assessment
 - Unresolved contact issues
 - Lack of Social work reports for LAC reviews/CP Conferences

11.6 Priority 5: Links with CAFCASS and oither professional networks

What do we need to do?

- i. Reappraise the existing CAFCASS Protocol and assess how the current arrangements are working
- ii. IROs to strengthen links with Family Court Advisors
- iii. Promote joint training events
- iv. To create recording systems for IRO involvement with Family Court Advisors

How will we know we have made a difference?

- i. Joined up care planning to enhance the child's journey to permanence or through the care system

Appendix 1: IRO Annual Reports National Data Collection

Name of Local Authority:

Purpose: The IRO Handbook requires each authority to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of their corporate parenting board. Initially a national template was suggested; however individual authorities have a template agreed by their corporate parenting boards which they must follow.

Therefore it has been agreed that some of the data collected within the report would be useful to bring together at a Regional and National level to share with DfE and the Minister for Children in Care in relation to who the IRO legislation is working in practice, and any themes which are emerging each year.

Data to be collected should be as at 31st March (insert year).

No. of Looked After Children (includes children reviewed under Adopt Regs)

No. of IRO single role fte

No. of Joint IRO/CP Chairperson role fte

No. of Looked After Children

No. of Children on CP Plan

Average Workload Looked After Children

Average Workload Looked After Children/CP children

Total number of **Formal** Dispute Resolutions in relation to Looked After Children only within the year April 12 – March 13

Total number of **Informal** Dispute Resolutions where measured within the year April 12 – March 13

Total numbers of children referred to CAFCASS

Total number of children discussed with CAFCASS

Three Key Themes emerging from Annual Report

Appendix 2: Blackpool LAC Children Profiles

Placement Type for LAC Children

		03/2009	03/2010	03/2011	03/2012	03/2013	03/2014
No	Foster placement with relative or friend	32	34	48	51	52	33
	Placement with other Foster Carer	199	257	258	278	298	288
	Homes and Hostels	40	45	43	46	52	35
	Residential accommodation not subject to 'Children's homes regulations'	0	0	0	0	0	2
	Residential care home	1	3	2	4	1	2
	All Residential schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home	3	1	1	0	0	0
	NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care	0	0	1	0	0	0
	Young Offender Institution or prison	1	3	1	1	3	2
	Secure Unit	2	0	2	0	0	3
	Placed for adoption with placement order	19	10	14	14	34	43
	Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	20	20	20	25	27	20
	Independent living	7	2	6	15	14	15
	Total	324	375	396	434	481	443

%	Foster placement with relative or friend	9.9%	9.1%	12.1%	11.8%	10.8%	7.4%
	Placement with other Foster Carer	61.4%	68.5%	65.2%	64.1%	62.0%	65.0%
	Homes and Hostels	12.3%	12.0%	10.9%	10.6%	10.8%	7.9%
	Residential accommodation not subject to 'Children's homes regulations'	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
	Residential care home	0.3%	0.8%	0.5%	0.9%	0.2%	0.5%
	All Residential schools, except where dual-registered as a school and children's home	0.9%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	NHS/Health Trust or other establishment providing medical or nursing care	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Young Offender Institution or prison	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	0.2%	0.6%	0.5%
	Secure Unit	0.6%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
	Placed for adoption with placement order	5.9%	2.7%	3.5%	3.2%	7.1%	9.7%
	Placed with own parents or other person with parental responsibility	6.2%	5.3%	5.1%	5.8%	5.6%	4.5%
	Independent living	2.2%	0.5%	1.5%	3.5%	2.9%	3.4%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0%

Legal Status for LAC Children

Number		03/2009	03/2010	03/2011	03/2012	03/2013	03/2014
	Section 20	86	87	82	81	69	54
	Interim Care Order	73	116	106	113	122	62
	Full Care Order	125	133	160	162	189	209
	Placement Order Granted	36	34	46	77	96	112
	Freeing Order Granted	1	1	1	1	1	1
	On remand, or committed for trial or sentence, and accommodated by LA	3	4	1	0	4	5
	Under police protection and in local authority accommodation	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sentenced to CYPA 1969 supervision order with residence requirement	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	324	375	396	434	481	443

%		26.5%	23.2%	20.7%	18.7%	14.3%	12.2%
	Section 20	26.5%	23.2%	20.7%	18.7%	14.3%	12.2%
	Interim Care Order	22.5%	30.9%	26.8%	26.0%	25.4%	14.0%
	Full Care Order	38.6%	35.5%	40.4%	37.3%	39.3%	47.2%
	Placement Order Granted	11.1%	9.1%	11.6%	17.7%	20.0%	25.3%
	Freeing Order Granted	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
	On remand, or committed for trial or sentence, and accommodated by LA	0.9%	1.1%	0.3%	0.0%	0.8%	1.1%
	Under police protection and in local authority accommodation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Sentenced to CYPA 1969 supervision order with residence requirement	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Adoption	19	19	18	17	22	41
Special Guardianship Order	3	5	16	10	24	42
Total	22	24	34	27	46	83

*2013/14 figures cover 6 months from 01/04/2013 to 30/09/2013

Gender for LAC Children

		03/2009	03/2010	03/2011	03/2012	03/2013	03/2014
Number	Male	178	206	225	246	272	253
	Female	146	169	171	188	209	190
	Total	324	375	396	434	481	443

Percentage	Male	54.9%	54.9%	56.8%	56.7%	56.5%	57.1%
	Female	45.1%	45.1%	43.2%	43.3%	43.5%	42.9%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Age for LAC Children

		03/2009	03/2010	03/2011	03/2012	03/2013	03/2014
Number	Under 1	21	39	22	34	48	33
	1-4 Years	67	82	114	109	115	109
	5-10 Years	67	74	72	88	105	100
	11-15 Years	127	136	141	144	142	139
	16 and Over	42	44	47	59	71	62
	Total	324	375	396	434	481	443

%	Under 1	6.5%	10.4%	5.6%	7.8%	10.0%	7.4%
	1-4 Years	20.7%	21.9%	28.8%	25.1%	23.9%	24.6%
	5-10 Years	20.7%	19.7%	18.2%	20.3%	21.8%	22.6%
	11-15 Years	39.2%	36.3%	35.6%	33.2%	29.5%	31.4%
	16 and Over	13.0%	11.7%	11.9%	13.6%	14.8%	14.0%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Ethnicity for LAC Children

		03/2009	03/2010	03/2011	03/2012	03/2013	03/2014
Number	White British	308	353	379	415	444	408
	White Irish	0	0	0	0	0	3
	White Other	0	2	2	4	7	4
	Asian or Asian British	4	4	3	2	1	1
	Black or Black British	3	2	1	1	1	1
	Chinese	1	1	2	1	1	1
	Mixed (White and Asian)	0	1	0	2	9	9
	Mixed (White and Black African)	0	0	4	4	7	7
	Mixed (White and Black Caribbean)	1	4	1	1	2	1
	Mixed Other	7	8	4	3	6	6
	Not Stated	0	0	0	1	3	2
	Total	324	375	396	434	481	443

%	White	95.1%	94.1%	95.7%	95.6%	92.3%	92.1%
	Asian or Asian British	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
	Black or Black British	1.2%	1.1%	0.8%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%
	Black or Black British	0.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
	Black or Black British	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
	Black or Black British	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.5%	1.9%	2.0%
	Black or Black British	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.9%	1.5%	1.6%
	Mixed	0.3%	1.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	0.2%
	Other Ethnic Groups	2.2%	2.1%	1.0%	0.7%	1.2%	1.4%
	Not Stated	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.6%	0.5%
	Total	100.0%	99.5%	99.5%	99.1%	98.5%	99.1%

Appendix 3: IRO Format for LAC Reviews

LAC REVIEW DATE: CHILD / YOUNG PERSON:

ATTENDEES:

APOLOGIES:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

CARE PLANNING (CONTINGENCY/TRANSITIONAL)–TO INCLUDE CURRENT *SOCIAL WORKER ICS PLAN AND LAC REPORT*:

PLACEMENT:

LEISURE:

HEALTH (PHYSICAL/EMOTIONAL):

EDUCATION – *UPDATED PEP*:

CONTACT:

IDENTITY:

SAFEGUARDING ISSUES:

CHILD’S VIEW: (*COMPLIMENT*)

CHILD’S LEGAL RIGHTS:

PARENT’S VIEWS & SIGNIFICANT OTHERS:

OTHER ISSUES (ADVOCACY – INDEPENDENT VISITORS):

DISAGREEMENTS:

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS REVIEW (NAME PERSON RESPONSIBLE & TIMESCALE):

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS REVIEW (NAME PERSON RESPONSIBLE & TIMESCALE):

NEXT REVIEW:

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL – FOSTER CARER REVIEW
(To be completed by Reviewing Officer)

Name of Carer/s:

Address:

Accreditation Level:

Approved for:

Name of Supervising Worker:

Name of Independent Reviewing Officer:

Date of review:

Dates of Unannounced Visits since Last Review:

The purpose of the Foster Carer review is to make recommendations upon whether the foster carer continues to be suitable to foster children, that their household remains suitable and that their terms of approval are still suitable (Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011)

Present:

- 1. Description of any changes and developments in the foster carers' circumstances under each of the following headings:**
 - a) Family** (includes all members of the household and whether those over the age of 18 years have current CRB checks – please also include any babysitters etc.) Comment upon whether any statutory checks have been completed since the last review i.e. health/references etc.
 - b) Employment**
 - c) Accommodation** (comment upon whether the accommodation is suitable to meet the needs of the children)
- 2. Have the carers identified any additional support in any aspect of their role as foster carers? (Comment upon the support that carers currently receive)**
- 3. Have the carers made any specific complaints about any aspect of their role as foster carers? (comment upon how these have been dealt with/resolved)**
b) Note if any compliments received
- 4. Have there been any allegations made against the foster carer since the last review. –**
Comment upon the nature of the allegation, whether the LADO has been informed and if the allegation is still being investigated.
- 5. Have the foster carers been made aware of comments made by Social Workers and Children and had the opportunity to respond? (comment upon the care offered by**

the foster carer to each child currently in placement and those who have been in placement since the last review)

6. **Have the foster carers been made aware of the comments made by their own children and had the opportunity to respond** (please comment on any consultation forms/comments made by foster carers birth children)
7. **Are the carers satisfied with the comments on health, safety and hygiene? (Please refer to standards checklist).** (Comment upon any outstanding health and safety issues and any recommendations)

Pet Questionnaires completed?

8. **Are the Foster Carers aware of their responsibility to support the education of children and how do they facilitate this?** (Comment upon how the foster carers meet the educational needs of each child in placement. If children are not in formal education comment upon the availability of age appropriate toys/attendance at toddler groups etc.)
9. **How do young people receive their pocket money (i.e. direct/bank account/activities, etc?)** (Comment upon what children spend their pocket money on - for young children provide evidence of how pocket money is used for the child)

If eligible for **DLA**, what is the money being spent on?

10. **How do young people receive their clothing allowance (i.e. weekly/monthly/when needed/bank account)?** (Comment upon the quality of clothing/amount of clothing each child has in placement, whether older children are encouraged to choose/purchase their own clothing)

11. Contact

Is there any ongoing contact with previously cared for children?

- a) **Can the carers transport for contact?** – Comment upon whether they are currently transporting for contact and how many hours a week.
 - b) **Can the carers supervise contact? Comment upon whether they are currently supervising any contact**
 - c) **Are there any barriers to facilitating contact?**
12. **Are children allowed to/encouraged to bring friends home to the Foster Carers home?** (Comment upon which children in placement bring children home). If children are not encouraged to bring friends home, comment upon why not and what has been done to facilitate this.

13. **Do the carers feel confident that they can continue to meet the requirements of the children's foster placement in relation to each child's care plan?** Comment upon how the foster carer meets the health needs of the children in placement; promotes the identity of children in placement; works with the Local Authority.

Including health appointments

13. **Safer Caring/Keep Safe Policy for each child – Has policy been updated?**
14. **Training needs identified by carers:** comment upon the training undertaken by the foster carer since the last review and training identified for the next 12 months review period.

PDP completed

15. Proposed Status

Accreditation:

Age Range:

Number of children:

Is the Qualifying Determination letter required: Yes ☐ No ☐

Is an Exemption Certificate in place: Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

16. Recommendations:

Signature:

Name:

(Independent Reviewing Officer)

Date:

Signature:

Name:

(Team Manager)

Date:

Appendix 4: Blackpool Youth Offending Team & Children's Social Care: Safeguarding Young People in Criminal Justice System

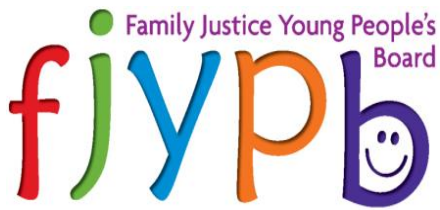
The [Children] Act [1989] applies to children in Prison Service establishments (including Young Offender Institutions), subject to the necessary requirements of imprisonment. Accordingly, the functions, powers, duties, responsibilities and obligations conferred or imposed on local authorities by the Act (and, in particular, by sections 17 and 47 of the Act) do not cease to arise merely because a child is in a Young Offender Institution or other prison establishment; however such functions, powers, duties, responsibilities and obligations take effect and operate subject to the necessary requirements of imprisonment - the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offender (LASPO) Act 2012.

Where a child is not released on bail, the LASPO Act 2012 requires the Court to remand the child to local authority accommodation unless specific sets of conditions set out in sections 98 to 101 are met, in which case the Court may instead remand the child to youth detention accommodation. If the child has looked after status, the designated local authority must be the local authority that is currently looking after the child.

Under section 104(1) a child remanded to youth detention accommodation will be treated as Looked After Children under the Children Act 1989. Where the child is not previously looked after, the designated local authority may be the one in whose area the child habitually resides or where the offence or one of the offences was committed. The designated local authority must receive the child and provide or arrange for the provision of accommodation. A 10-11 year old may only be remanded on bail or to local authority accommodation. A 10 - 17 year old remanded to local authority accommodation may be placed in secure local authority accommodation if the designated local authority obtains a Court order permitting this under section 25 of the Children Act (as modified by the Secure Accommodation Regulations).

All children placed in Local Authority accommodation, including secure, and youth detention accommodation must receive a review, as conducted by an IRO, in accordance with LAC procedures and the IRO Handbook. Good practice requires IROs to coalesce LAC reviews with sentence planning whilst ensuring that the distinct facets of each are maintained.

Appendix 5: Family Justice Young People's Board



National Charter

1. Children and young people should be at the centre of all proceedings.
2. Children and young people should be kept safe. They should feel safe and be safe.
3. Every child should be respected and treated as an individual.
4. Children and young people should be informed of their rights.
5. Children and young people should be given the opportunity to meet and communicate with the professionals involved with their case including Cafcass workers, social workers, judiciary and legal representatives.
6. Children and young people should be kept informed about the court proceedings in an age appropriate manner.
7. Every child and young person should have the opportunity of giving feedback through email, text, telephone or written form.
8. Children and young people should be involved in all developments in family justice.



Independent Reviewing Officers

TEN important things to know about Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

- 1 If you are in care (or "looked after") **the local authority must appoint an IRO for you.** This is the person whose job it is to make sure that the local authority does what is best for you whilst you are in care.
- 2 **Your IRO chairs your case reviews** – although new guidance says that they can also arrange for you to chair your own review if you want to.
- 3 If you have brothers and/or sisters in care **they too will have the same IRO as you.**
- 4 **You should know who your IRO is** and how to make contact with them.
- 5 **You should be able to keep the same IRO** for the whole time that you are in care.
- 6 **If you are a parent** yourself of a child who is also in care, you should both have a different IRO.
- 7 **You should be given written information** explaining the role of the IRO, and telling you what you can do if things decided at your review aren't carried out, or if you strongly disagree with what is being decided.
- 8 If your IRO leaves (perhaps to go to another job or retire) **they must introduce you to your new IRO.**
- 9 Apart from your very first week in care, **you should never be without an IRO.**
- 10 **Your IRO should meet with you in person** before your first review.



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