

# **Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report**

## **April 2014 – March 2015**

**To be read in conjunction with the Chairs of Child Protection Conference Annual Report April 2014 – March 2015**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report specifically focuses upon the work of the IROs from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. It is a requirement of the IRO service to produce an annual report for the scrutiny of Members of the Corporate Parenting Board in line with the 'IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for IROs and Local Authorities on Their Functions in Relation to Case Management and Review for Looked After Children.' The IRO Handbook was published by the Department for Children, School and Families in 2010.

The IROs are based in the Review and Inspection Unit within the Children and Families division of the People Services Directorate.

This report should be read in conjunction with the annual Chairs of Child Protection Conference report from April 2014 to March 2015, which details the work of the IRO in relation to Child Protection Conferences.

Please refer to section 2 for an explanation of the IRO role.

## **2. PURPOSE OF SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT**

Within Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council the IRO has 3 main roles:

- To chair Child Protection Conferences on behalf of the Redcar and Cleveland Safeguarding Children Board (RCSCB).
- To oversee the effectiveness and appropriateness of care plans for those Looked After Children (LAC) who the Council has responsibility for which includes the chairing of LAC reviews.
- To undertake foster-care reviews on behalf of the Fostering Service and present them to Fostering Panel for consideration as required.

In addition to these 3 main areas, the IROs also undertake the following duties:

- Attend strategy meetings as required.
- To act as the Investigating Officer for those complaints which have reached stage 2.
- To undertake single agency reviews as required.

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- To undertake case file audits.
- To provide a link between the social work teams and IRO unit
- Representation on the following groups:
  - Children in Care Council
  - Safeguarding Liaison
  - Corporate Parenting Board
  - Virtual School Group
  - Also facilitate training such as the safeguarding module on both the nominated teachers training and adoption preparation training.

It is the role that the IRO plays in the LAC review process that will be the focus of this report.

The main legislation and regulations that govern and support professionals to safeguard children and hence surround the work of the IRO follows:

- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Children and Young Person's Act 1933
- The Protection of Children Act 1999
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- The Criminal Justice Act 1998
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- Protection From Harassment Act 1997
- Education Reform Act 1988
- Education Act 2002
- UN Convention of the Rights of the Child 1989
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 as amended in 2015.

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- Children and Families Act 2014
- Section 7 Local Authority Social Service Act 1970, which requires the local authority to act in accordance with the Secretary of State.

### 3. QUANTITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IRO SERVICE

#### Composition of the IRO team

There are 4.5 permanent full-time equivalent IROs in the Review and Inspection Unit. These individuals were made up of 5 females although 1 retired in February 2015 and her replacement is a male. The age range of the IROs spans from mid-30s to 50s and 3 of them have lived locally for the majority of their lives. All the IROs are White British. The Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) communities form 1.1% of the total population within Redcar and Cleveland therefore, 98.9% are classed as white British. This means that the composition of the IROs does predominantly reflect the identity and ethnicity of the children and families they are working with. However, the IROs are very experienced in working with children and families who do have a different ethnicity, religion and identity to their own and this has not posed any difficulties to date.

Apart from the newest member of the team most of the IROs in the unit have been in post for a substantial period of time so continuity of staffing remains stable. The IROs have a wealth of experience between them and all have been qualified as Social Workers for a substantial period of time with all having worked directly with children and families before moving along in their career. The team have a wealth of experience and complement one another in areas such as CAFCASS, Child and Adolescent Mental Health and front line operational social work and a manager of a social work team. During this reporting period, 1 IRO returned from maternity leave in October and left for a second maternity leave during March 2015. To ensure the quality of the service could be maintained an experienced female Social Work Team Manager who had been seconded to the Review and Inspection Unit in late December 2013 remained in post.

The IROs are managed by the Review and Inspection Service Manager who is white British and female, and who has also lived in the area for the majority of her life. This Service Manager left her post to take up a role in another Local Authority during February 2015 and her replacement took over the post in May 2015. The current Service Manager is also white British and was born on

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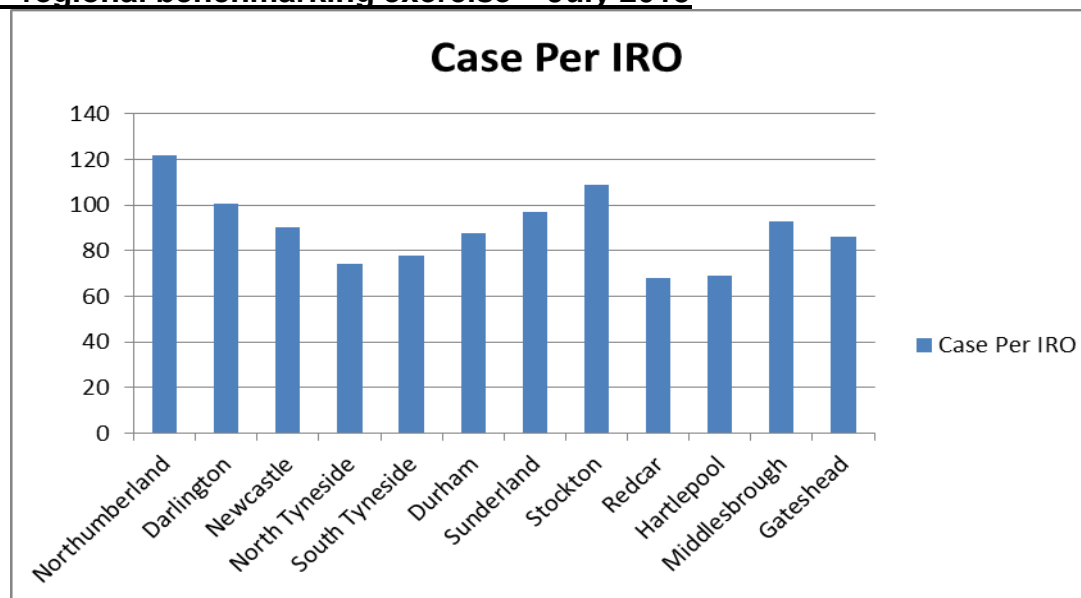


Teesside and has remained in the area all her life. She is an experienced Service Manager with substantial experience of front line safeguarding. She has a particular interest in raising social work standards and undertakes Peers Reviews for the Local Government Association.

### Caseload

A monthly IRO workload is produced that includes the number of Looked After Children (LAC) and the number of foster-carers that the IRO is responsible for reviewing, and also the actual number of children that are subject to a Child Protection Plan per IRO. As at the 31 March 2015, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 120, there were 183 LAC and 104 foster carers across 55 fostering households. The IRO case load within Redcar and Cleveland compare favourably with our regional colleagues and is in line with the recommendations made by the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officer (NAIRO). Usually each full-time IRO holds around the same caseload, and the part-time IRO's caseload reflects her reduced hours.

### IRO average caseloads – regional benchmarking exercise – July 2015



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The managers responsible for the IROs from across the North-East of England meet on a quarterly basis. One of the tasks that are set by the group is to provide data to enable the production of a benchmarking table of the IRO workloads in each Council. This data was not collected at the end of March 2015 for this reporting period, but instead June 2015. However, it remains valid to include this benchmarking data even though it post-dates this reporting period. The data provided only relates to the total of the number of children on a Child Protection Plan per IRO and the number of LAC per IRO. It must be acknowledged that for Redcar and Cleveland there are also foster-carers that are reviewed annually by the IROs, as not all IROs across the region undertake foster-care reviews or other tasks such as attendance at groups, stage 2 complaints, and case file audits.

The IRO team had some changes due to retirement and maternity leave during this time which meant some had higher caseloads and cases have been transferred. Inevitably this has also resulted in some change for the children and young people and in these instances a review of the case at the point of transfer has taken place to ensure, where possible, the vast array of experience we have in the service is matched with the needs of the child.

### Data collection:

#### LAC by age band and gender at 31 March 2015

	Female	%	Male	%	Total	%
<b>Under 1</b>	3	1.6%	5	2.7%	8	4.4%
<b>1 – 4</b>	15	8.2%	15	8.2%	30	16.4%
<b>5 – 9</b>	17	9.3%	21	11.5%	38	20.8%
<b>10 – 15</b>	40	21.9%	40	21.9%	80	43.7%
<b>16+</b>	13	7.1%	14	7.7%	27	14.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>48.1%</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>51.9%</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

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### LAC by legal status at 31 March 2015

Legal status	Total	%
Interim Care Order	19	10.4%
Full Care Order	107	58.5%
Placement Order granted	12	6.6%
Section 20 (voluntarily accommodated)	45	24.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

### LAC by ethnicity at 31 March 2015

Ethnicity	Total	%
White British	178	97.3%
White Irish	1	0.5%
White other	1	0.5%
Mixed White and other	1	0.5%
Asian other	1	0.5%
Any other ethnic group	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

### LAC by Category of Need at 31.03.15

Category of need	Total	%
Abuse and Neglect	70	38.3%
Child's disability	4	2.2%
Parental illness/disability	4	2.2%
Family in acute stress	65	35.5%



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<b>Family dysfunction</b>	39	21.3%
<b>Absent parenting</b>	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

### LAC by duration as at 31 March 2015

<b>Duration</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>0 – 3 months</b>	14	7.7%
<b>3 – 6 months</b>	24	13.1%
<b>6 months – 1 year</b>	18	9.8%
<b>1 – 2 years</b>	30	16.4%
<b>2 – 3 years</b>	20	10.9%
<b>3 – 4 years</b>	18	9.8%
<b>4 – 5 years</b>	23	12.6%
<b>5 – 6 years</b>	16	8.7%
<b>6 – 7 years</b>	4	2.2%
<b>7 – 8 years</b>	3	1.6%
<b>8 – 9 years</b>	6	3.3%
<b>9- 10 years</b>	4	2.2%
<b>Over 10 years</b>	3	1.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

### LAC by postcode at admission at 31 March 2015

<b>Postcode area</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>East</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>21.2%</b>
<b>Central</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>31.8%</b>

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<b>West</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>38.5%</b>
<b>Out of area</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8.4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **LAC by duration and age band at 31 March 2015**

	<b>Under 1</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>1 – 4</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>5 – 9</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>10 – 15</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>16+</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0 – 3 months</b>	5	2.7%	5	2.7%	2	1.1%	2	1.1%	0	0%	14
<b>3 – 6 months</b>	1	0.5%	8	4.4%	5	2.7%	9	4.9%	1	0.5%	24
<b>6 mths – 1 year</b>	2	1.1%	4	2.2%	5	2.7%	7	3.8%	0	0%	18
<b>1 – 2 years</b>	0	0%	9	4.9%	6	3.3%	11	6.0%	4	2.2%	30
<b>2 – 3 years</b>	0	0%	3	1.6%	7	3.8%	8	4.4%	2	1.1%	20
<b>3 – 4 years</b>	0	0%	1	0.5%	6	3.3%	3	1.6%	8	4.4%	18
<b>4 – 5 years</b>	0	0%	0	0%	5	2.7%	16	8.7%	2	1.1%	23
<b>5 – 6 years</b>	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.5%	11	6.0%	4	2.2%	16
<b>6 – 7 years</b>	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.5%	2	1.1%	1	0.5%	4
<b>7 – 8 years</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.6%	0	0%	3
<b>8 – 9 years</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	2.2%	2	1.1%	6
<b>9- 10</b>	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	2.2%	0	0%	4

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years											
Over 10 years	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.6%	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>		<b>30</b>		<b>38</b>		<b>80</b>		<b>27</b>		<b>183</b>

### LAC by disability at 31 March 2015

Disability	Total	%
Asthma	7	18.9%
Autism	1	2.7%
Cerebral Palsy	1	2.7%
Communication problems	2	5.4%
Cystic Fibrosis	1	2.7%
Incontinence	2	5.4%
Learning disability	5	13.5%
Other non specific	6	16.2%
Other syndromes	5	13.5%
Physical disability or mobility problems	2	5.4%
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1	2.7%
Visual impairment	4	10.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total children with a disability</b>	<b>27</b>	

Note: Children may have more than one disability recorded hence the discrepancy in figures.

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## **LAC by placement location at 31 March 2015**

Placement location	Total	%
Inside LA boundary	89	48.6%
Outside LA boundary	94	51.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **LAC by placement at 31 March 2015**

Placement Type	Total	0%
Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster-carer	8	4.4%
Placed with own parents	12	6.6%
Homes and hostels	19	10.4%
Independent living	1	0.5%
Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	19	10.4%
Placement with other foster-carer- long term fostering	88	48.1%
Placement with other foster carer- not long term or FFA	36	19.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Number of LAC reviews held by month between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015**

### **Month Total %**

Month	Total	%
April 2014	38	7.5
May 2014	43	8.4
June 2014	42	8.3

July 2014	54	10.6
August 2014	15	2.9
September 2014	64	12.6
October 2014	34	6.7
November 2014	47	9.2
December 2014	55	10.8
January 2015	35	6.9
February 2015	36	7.1
March 2015	46	9.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### **4. QUALITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE IRO SERVICE— LAC REVIEWS**

##### **Timeliness of LAC reviews**

The performance indicator for LAC (NI66) remained at 100% at the end of March 2014 as all LAC reviews had been held within timescales between 1 April 2014 and March 2015.

##### **LAC reviews by participation of the child/young person between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015**

<b>Participation</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Not recorded	0	0.0%
Child aged under 4 at time of meeting	120	23.7%
Child attended and spoke for self	221	43.7%
Child attended – advocate spoke	7	1.4%
Child attended – gave views non verbally	5	1.0%

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<b>Child attended without contributing</b>	2	0.4%
<b>Child not attended, advocate briefed with views</b>	38	7.5%
<b>Child not attended – views sent</b>	104	20.6%
<b>Child not attended &amp; did not send views</b>	9	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	506	100%

The Safeguarding & Inspection Unit continues to gain the views of Looked After Children using the Viewpoint programme. Viewpoint is a computer assisted interviewing process. It allows the child, if they wish to present their views both positive and negative, in respect of their full time or respite care arrangements. The Viewpoint programme is undertaken with all looked after children. Please refer to the annual Viewpoint report 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2015 for information and statistics relating to the use of the web package whereby Looked After Children can provide their views in readiness for their LAC review. All individual Viewpoint reports completed by Looked After Child are sent to the child's IRO.

### Number of LAC reviews attended by parents and relatives between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015

<b>Relative</b>	<b>Attended</b>	<b>Invited but not attended</b>	<b>Not recorded</b>
Mother	164	78	79
Father	96	45	46
Aunt	13	5	4
Brother	2	0	2
Sister	2	0	0
Friend of child	2	0	0
Grandfather	12	2	4
Grandmother	41	11	13
Great Aunt	2	1	3

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Great Grandmother	6	1	0
Great Grandfather	1	0	0
Uncle	4	1	1
Great Uncle	0	0	2
Step Father	6	6	5
Step Grandfather	5	0	1
Step Grandmother	0	0	0
Step Mother	0	0	0
Other relationship	4	1	0
Other relative	9	7	6

### Feedback regarding LAC reviews

Under the Quality Assurance strategy a random sample of reviews are observed and feedback is collated from attending professionals and parents/ carers. Closed case questionnaires are also sent out to families although the responses received is minimal and this process has been reviewed and changed from August 2015.

During this 12 month period 3 observations took place but parents/ carers only responded to feedback requests in 1 case.

There were 10 responses received from professionals attending LAC reviews between the 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, including 3 Social Workers:

- In all responses, the Social Workers stated that the IRO had been well prepared for the LAC review, that the meeting had moved along appropriately and that the IRO related well to the people attending the LAC review.
- The responses from social workers stated that the views of the child/young person and family members had been appropriately sought. "the Chair ensured the meeting remained child focussed", "the IRO ensured the views of the family were incorporated into the meeting", "support and guidance has been offered by the IRO to ensure the emotional impact on

the child was reduced”, “ the IRO spoke to all attendees appropriately and with an equal measure of respect, even when challenging”.

- One Social Worker commented “the IRO has been involved with these children from the time the children became subject to Protection Plans and has followed through the whole process to their becoming subject to Care Orders and placed with family members. This has had a beneficial effect for outcomes for children in so far as the IRO has been part of the process throughout.
- A Health Visitor commented that “ it was a difficult meeting and handled well”.
- There was one response from Carers “we definitely felt listened too and able to comment. Completely happy with how the IRO conducted the review”.

### **Foster-Care Reviews**

The Review and Inspection Service Manager and the Practice and Inspection Officer observed 3 foster-care reviews as part of the quality assurance process during this reporting period. The feedback was very good as it was evident that the Reviewing Officers had prepared very well for each review meeting and ensured that all views were included in the meeting.

Feedback from the Supervising Social Workers at each of the foster-care reviews concluded that.

- The Chair was great with the foster carers and circulated the minutes in good time.
- She was through in the review
- She was very efficient and prepared. She had done all the necessary background reading.



The feedback from foster-carers at these reviews echoed that of the social worker as they felt the Reviewing Officer was prepared for the meeting, encouraged participation and progressed the review in a timely manner. Additionally they felt that nothing could have been done differently to improve the review meeting.

## **5. CONDUCT OF THE ORGANISATION IN RELATION TO THE LAC REVIEW**

The IROs relationship with social workers and team managers across the safeguarding social work teams and the LAC social work team remains a positive one. A good level of communication between the 2 parties is experienced alongside healthy challenge. The amendments to the Care Planning in 2015 increased the levels of responsibility for IRO's in terms of planning, assessment and scrutiny. In particular there is the expectation that the oversight of arrangements in respect of children ceasing to be looked after are far more rigorous. IRO's are mindful to discharge their duties and balance the need to do so through helpful conversations that are both robust and respectful. Recently we have implemented a team link system in which an IRO are assigned to social work teams to support better communication.

In April 2014 the Review and Inspection Unit introduced a RAG rating form for LAC reviews (red/amber/green). These forms are completed by each IRO following every LAC review and will state whether review documents were made available for the review, and whether the care plan is being progressed effectively. There has been a mixed reaction to this process from the social work teams and IRO and to date there is no evidence that they have positively influenced practice in terms of care plans being progressed effectively but they seem to be a 'check list' of whether social work task have been complete. A review of the RAG forms is to be undertaken and will involve consultation with the social work teams.

In 'IRO consultation' and 'IRO contact case note tabs are well embedded and this provides the IRO with a consistent mechanism to evidence their involvement in the case by writing case notes on to the child's electronic file. The data analyst runs weekly reports on the use of these case notes which is overseen by the Review and Inspection Service Manager and available to the IRO. This list is routinely analysed by the Service Manager and the IROs. The use of these case note tabs also ensure that the Service Manager is aware of the level of contact that IROs are having with those looked after children they are responsible for reviewing, and also the level of contact they have with social workers and provides assurance of IRO challenge .

There has been an embedding of practice in relation to the timely completion of LAC outcomes, as these should be completed within 5 working days following the LAC review. The completion of LAC outcomes within timescales has vastly improved and all IROs are aware of the need to have these completed as a priority.

The timely completion of LAC minutes remains a challenge but nevertheless good progress has been made and this has been maintained over a sustained period of time. LAC minutes should be written within 20 working days of the LAC review being held. In some cases the electronic database hampers the timely completion of these minutes because it is a work flow system and if a task is blocked it will not release the LAC minute task to the IRO meaning they are unable to progress to completion. Over the past year the IROs have been able to use the administration team more effectively and supporting mechanisms have been introduced such as the introduction of LAC outcome and LAC minute templates, which can be hand-written and passed to the administration team for them to type onto PROtocol which can be time consuming. The IRO will then quality assure the work and approve it. This is proving very effective for the IROs but it should be remembered that the administration team also have competing demands on their time and cannot devote all their energy to supporting the IROs in this way.

The IROs will raise their concerns directly with social workers and team managers if the quality of the LAC review report is not of sufficient quality and this is generally received positively.

## **6. CONDUCT OF THE ORGANISATION IN RELATION TO THE CASE**

### **Formal Dispute Resolution**

It is the task of each local authority to put in place a formal process for the IRO to raise concerns about a child's care plan and to ensure that this process is respected and prioritised by managers. This process is referred to as the formal dispute resolution process. This process involves escalating the matter in dispute through a number of levels of seniority within the department with identified timescales for a response at each stage. The IRO may bypass any stage and progress the dispute to the level considered most appropriate.

Within this reporting period, 1 formal dispute resolution process was initiated specifically in relation to a young person who has complex needs and global developmental delay and requires twenty four hour support to meet her needs and keep her safe. The

young person had been in her foster placement for nine years and was approaching her eighteenth birthday. Transition to adult services had been regularly raised as a concern by the IRO. The carers were paid additional fees because of the young person's complex needs and as a result one of the carers was able to give up their job and provide full time care for the young person.

The initial plan was that post eighteen the care package for the young person would be transfer to adult services in the area where she lived resulting in a considerable reduction in the financial allowances payable. Understandably this was not acceptable to the foster carers and under these circumstances the young person would not be able to continue to remain in her placement and the potential disruption was causing a great deal of distress for all concerned.

The IRO initiated a Formal Dispute Resolution and sought independent legal advice. The Local Authority were asked to reconsider the position and served with seven days' notice to resolve the issues or the IRO would refer the matter to CAFCASS. The matter was resolved with an agreement that an appropriate support package would be put in place until the young person reaches 21. This was deemed by the IRO has a good outcome for the young person.

### **Informal IRO Challenges**

As previously discussed the core purpose of the independent reviewing officer role is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's needs and to ensure that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration. The additional duties under the care planning regulations 2015 has resulted in IRO's more robustly 'taking up the challenge'. It is difficult to quantify the number of informal challenges given their nature. Most will involve verbal discussions between the IRO and social workers, team managers and in some cases the service managers, while some involve an evidence trail via a formal e-mail. However, it is clear during monthly supervision sessions between the IROs and the Review and Inspection Service Manager that informal challenges are frequent and routine and are effective.

The case note tabs entitled 'IRO dispute resolution' and 'IRO informal challenge' has improved the way in which IRO challenge is captured. IROs are aware they need to be mindful and sensitive when adding case notes that this is the child's file, and therefore, great care needs to be taken when writing case notes of this nature.

The following are a small number of examples of informal challenges:

- The father of two looked after children made a requested for an updated assessment for the rehabilitation of the children to his care. This was agreed but unfortunately a period of six months elapsed and the assessments did not commence. The IRO raised an informal challenge with the social work manager due to the drift in the care planning. Following this a meeting was arranged and the assessment commenced within two weeks
- An informal challenge was initiated by the IRO following circumstances where a young person was placed in her grandmother's care where all her needs being met. However the Local Authority assessment of Grandmother under family and friends procedure was not positive after historical concerns linked to the grandmother's previous relationship came to light. There were concerns that the LA may move the child from Grandmother and this was opposed by the Grandmother and young person. The IRO raised her concerns to the local authority setting out their power to refer to Cafcass and seek independent legal advice or apply for an injunction so the young person could not be moved. The outcome was positive as the child remained with her Grandmother and the local authority supported a Special Guardianship Order which was granted in June 2015.
- The IRO raised an informal challenge following plans to move a young person from his placement without any discussions with the IRO. The young person was very happy in the placement and the placement was meeting his need. The IRO used the young person's Viewpoint record to evidence the young person's view that they were happy in placement and the placement was stable. If the young person had moved it would have been his 6 placement move and would mean he would have more access to his father who was a negative influence. The young person remained in the placement.

**7. ANY RESOURCE ISSUES THAT ARE PUTTING AT RISK THE DELIVERY OF A QUALITY SERVICE FOR LAC**

The Fostering Service continues with their drive to recruit foster-carers and during the reporting period have increased net foster placements by 15, which is against the backdrop of a number of foster-carers retiring or resigning from their fostering career for a variety of reasons. In addition there are continuous recruitment campaigns but the higher number of LAC that the Local Authority has been experiencing over recent years is inevitably placing pressure on the ability to place children with in-house foster-carers. The IROs view the placement of children with the most appropriate foster-carers as their priority rather than the need for them to be placed with in-house foster-carers. It is recognised that the number of IFA placements remains high and inevitably this might be with a carer outside the Redcar and Cleveland boundary but the IROs are also aware that there are a number of children and

## Directorate of People Services Children and Families Division



young people who have been successfully placed for the long-term with carers from IFAs. This situation is being experienced nationally and is not specific to Redcar and Cleveland.

Within Redcar and Cleveland we currently do not have any children waiting for Adoptive Placements and the IRO's are no longer highlighting the delay of the identification of adoption placements as an issue. The judgement of Re – BS and BR has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of Placement Order granted by the court. This is set against a backdrop of the Adoption Grant being used to support a recruitment drive to identify adoption carers. There are regular meetings with the Permanency Team Manager, social workers and IRO's where family finding efforts are discussed.

The Leaving Care Service continues to function well, and the IROs do not experience any significant issues regarding the service afforded to the LAC who are linked with it. There are good relationships between the Leaving Care Team and the IROs.

The majority of looked after children have a social worker within the LAC social work team. This process is working well as the dedicated team have a good working relationship with the IROs. As the social workers will inevitably have more than 1 looked after child with each IRO, they will often discuss a number of children and young people with the individual IRO at regular intervals. The social workers are aware that the IROs need to be informed of significant issues and the electronic PROtocol database also supports this, as social workers can copy IROs into case notes that they have uploaded. Equally, the IRO can maintain oversight by looking at the database and reading case notes, supervision notes and other relevant documents without having to access a paper file. The LAC social work team have good access to the LAC Nurse and the LAC Education Manager. More recently there has been a steady increase in the numbers of looked after children remaining with the social work team and the IROs need to work harder at ensuring they are aware of developments with the looked after children they review as they will be spread across a number of different social work teams. However, the same database is used so information is easily accessed. The LAC cases that fall into this category will not be transferred over to the LAC social work team until care proceedings have been concluded. The IRO Handbook makes it an expectation that the IRO will meet with the child prior to the Review meeting or as part of the process. IROs are to record on ICS where they have met and spoken to the child.

**8. ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME OF THE IRO SERVICE - PRIORITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND ACTION IN THE IRO SERVICE IN THE COMING YEAR**

The Review and Inspection Unit has identified a number of priority areas for improvement. At the time of writing this report some progress had been review made on these areas.

**The IRO development plan**

The Review and Inspection Unit has both a service plan and an IRO development plan. Specific actions in relation to the IRO role with LAC follow:

<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>
The effectiveness of the RAG forms that were introduced in 2014 to be evaluated.	RAG forms have been in place and consultation with IRO and social workers regarding the impact is underway.
To develop a system whereby feedback can be gained from children and young people who have left care.	It has been determined that NYAS are able to undertake the 'exit' interviews as part of their contract. Now in the process of developing 'exit' questionnaires and a process for their completion.
Improve the quality of review for looked after children	IRO's are regularly observed chairing a LAC review by the Review and Inspection Service Manager as part of the quality assurance process and feedback is provided in supervision.
Improve the recording of IRO challenge.	The IRO case note tabs specifically records IRO informal challenge and formal dispute resolution process and this is evidence in weekly performance reports.
Improvement in timeliness of completion of LAC review minutes.	The administrative team are being utilised to enable them to offer additional support to the IROs, for example the uploading of hand

	<p>written minutes using templates onto PROtocol speeds up the process for the IRO.</p> <p>Performance data is now more robustly used by the IRO and used to inform diary management.</p>
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**Wendy Rudd**  
**Review and Inspection Service Manager**  
**September 2015**