

Report of the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care Improvement) to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 11th March 2019

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Subject:

THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN THEIR REVIEW MEETINGS

Summary statement:

Young people at the Corporate Parenting Panel asked for assurance about whether when children did not attend their reviews their voice was accurately reflected and the review was done with someone who had knowledge of their care plan. This report addresses the questions raised and provides assurance.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:
Children's Social Care

1. SUMMARY

Following the presentation of the 2017-2018 IRO Annual Report at the Bradford Corporate Parenting panel on 10/09/2018 a recommendation was made for the IRO Manager to submit a further report on the most recorded participation code (PN6), which relates to where children did not attend the meeting but their views were sent via a key professional. The report requested information on how the IRO communicates with this cohort of children.

The representative from the Children in Care Council asked the questions

1. How could the IRO be satisfied that the views presented were indeed accurate and the view of the child.
2. If the child is physically not at the review meeting then how are the outcomes and essentially the care plan communicated to the child.

2. BACKGROUND

Context:

The IRO Manager presented the 2017-2018 IRO Annual Report at the Bradford Corporate Parenting panel on 10/09/18. Within the report the following table on children's participation within their reviews over the year was presented to evidence improved and consistent performance.

Participation & Voice of the Child in Reviews (LAC age 4+) 2017 – 2018

Participation code	Total
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	882
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	6
PN3 Child attended - gave views non verbally	5
PN4 Child attended without contributing	3
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	129
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	943
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	18
Grand Total	1986

Participation Rate (PN1 to PN6)	99.0%
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Particular interest was given to the most popular code PN6 where children had not attended their review meeting but forwarded their views via a 3rd party. It was agreed that the IRO Manager would undertake an audit, looking at a sample of cases where PN 6 participation code was recorded with a view to addressing the questions raised at the corporate parenting panel in September 2018.

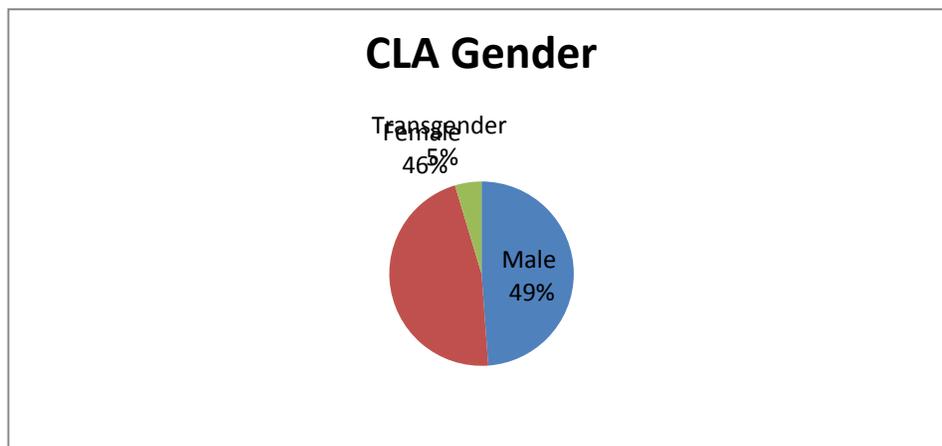
Methodology

Each of Bradford's Independent Reviewing Offices provided some key information on recent children who had participated by not attending their meeting but sending their views by a key professional. This information included:

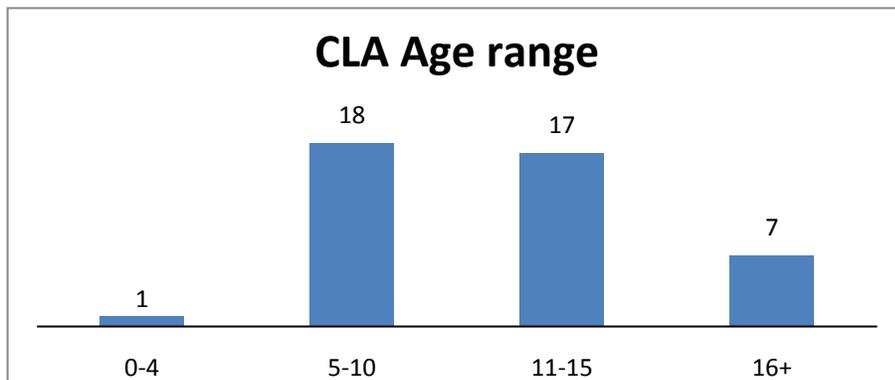
1. The demographics of the child.
2. The legal status and placement type.
3. Length of time in care and time the IRO had been involved.
4. Who had presented the views on behalf of the child.
5. Whether the IRO had advocated and pursued an outcome following a specific request from the child.
6. When was the last time the IRO saw the child.
7. How the outcomes were communicated to the child.

Findings

1. Demographics of the sample



Bradford's IRO's reviewed a sample of 43 children out of which 21 were male, 20 were female and 2 children identified with being transgender.



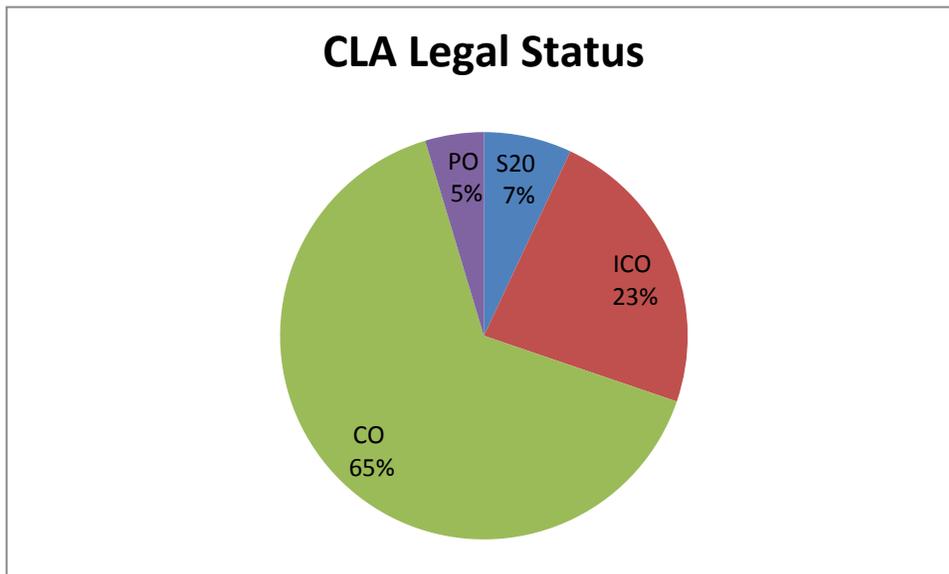
It can be seen from the table above that 81% of the cohort of children looked at were between the 5 to 15 years of age, range. In last year's IRO annual report 10-15 was the most dominant age range making up 37% of the total CLA population.

Time in care

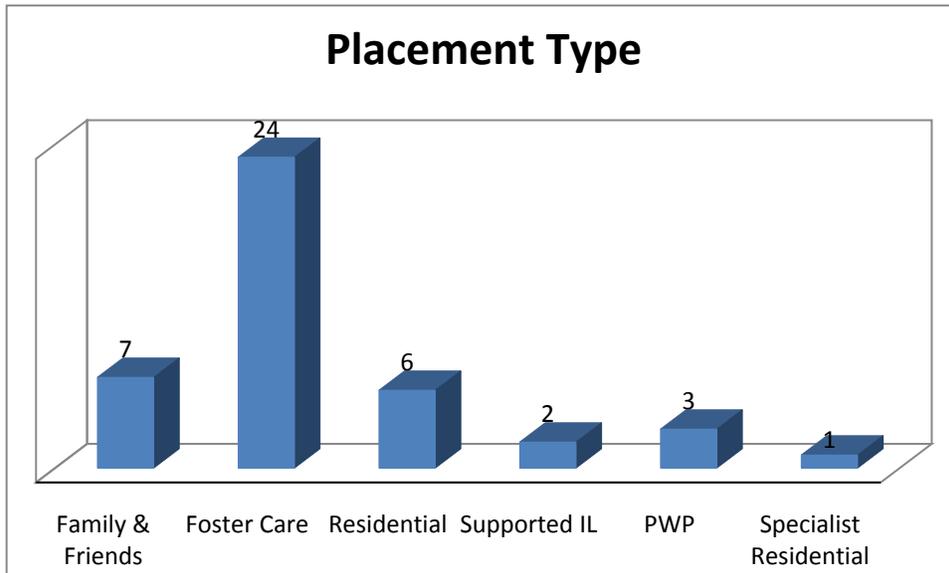
Under 12 months	1-3 years	4-7 years	8+ years
11	12	12	8

The above table illustrates that there was no specific trend between how long these children had been in care and how they had participated within the review. There is an even spread from those who have recently become looked after and the children who had been looked after for more than 8 years. The audit did find relative consistency for the involvement of the IRO for the duration of the care episode. For the children who experienced longer time in care the chance of a change in IRO did increase. Over the last 3 years the team has also recruited 6 new IRO's to replace retiring colleagues and to meet the increase in demand.

2. The CLA Legal Status & Placement Type for the sample?

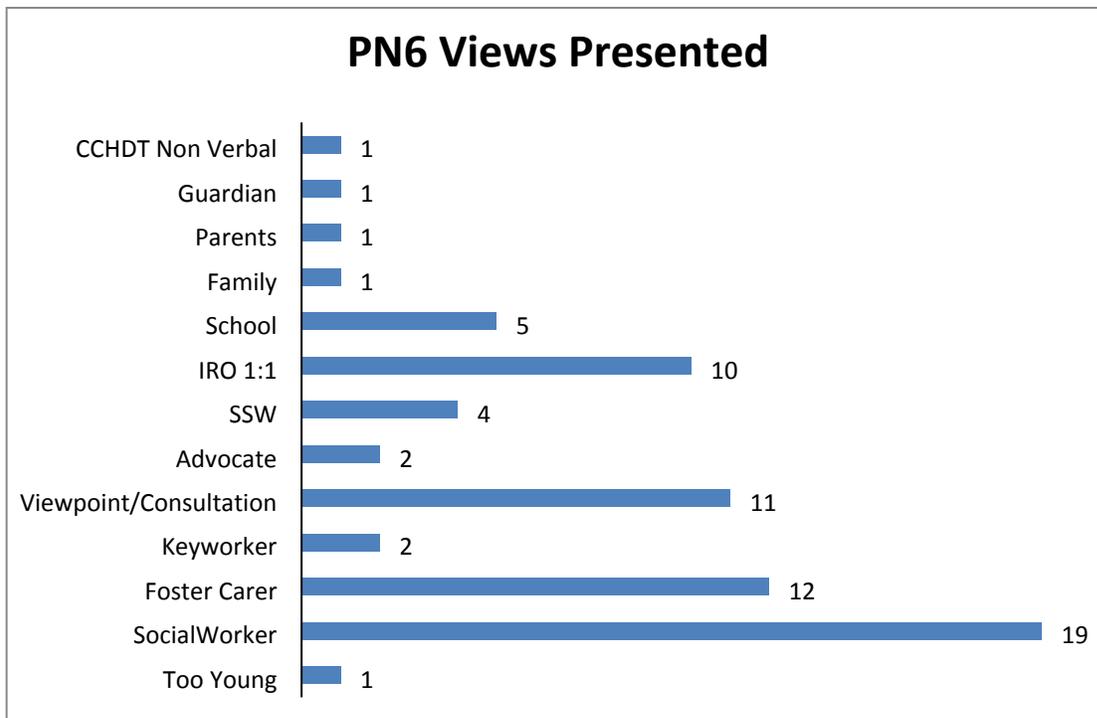


Almost 2/3 of the children looked at were subject to full care orders. 3 children were accommodated under section 20 agreement and 2 children were subject to a placement order a permanency plan of adoption.



55% of the children live with foster carers followed by 16% living within a connected person's placement and a similar number living in a children's home.

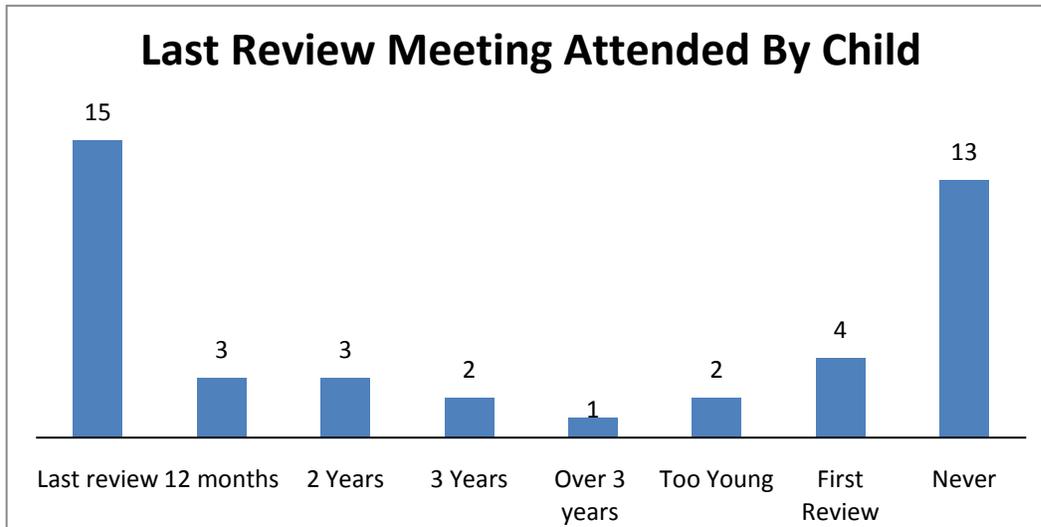
3. Who presented and spoke on behalf of the child



It was no surprise and encouraging seeing that the lead professional who spoke on behalf of the child was the social worker. This accounted for 44% of the group. After the social worker the next most popular person was the foster carer and it was also encouraging to see that 11 of the children completed the viewpoint questionnaire or had some form of written consultation to the IRO. It is also encouraging to see that the IRO's had direct communication for 10 of these children before the meeting and so was able to present first-hand views and feelings. This does to some extent address the question raised back in September on how IRO's can be satisfied that

what is being presented is accurate and a true reflection of how the child feels. We can see from the above table the wide range of professionals who presented the children's views and it was encouraging to see that non-verbal communication was also used for a child with complex health and disability.

4. Review Attendance



It is positive to see that 15 out of the 43 children attended their last review meeting in person. 50% of the children had attended a review within the last 2 years. This once again shows that there is direct communication between the IRO and children who don't always attend their meetings.

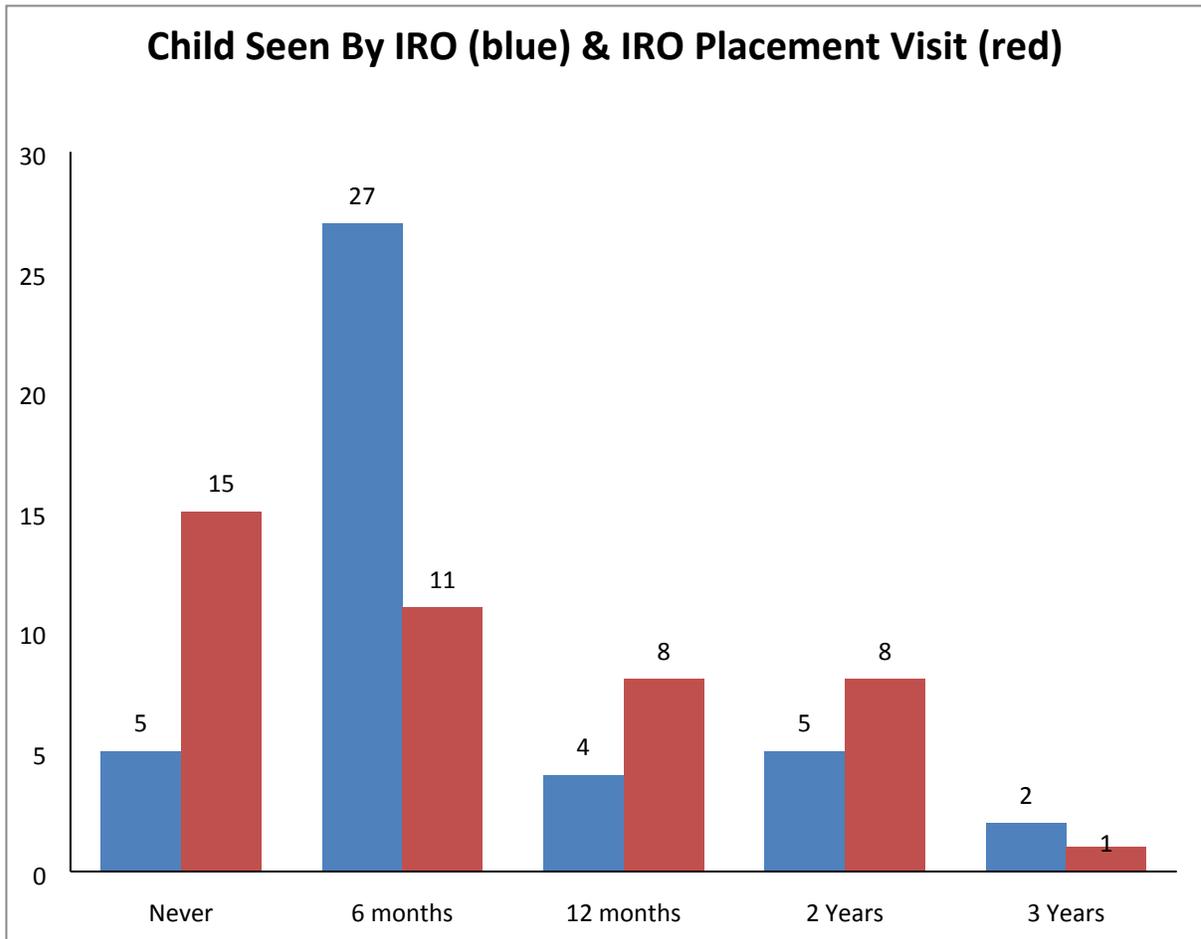
13 children were found to never attend their review meetings. Some of the reasons for this were as follows:

- It was agreed by professionals and members of the family that a 7-year-old with complex health and disability needs would find the meeting distressing and not have the capacity to understand the process.
- Two siblings aged 10 and 7 told the IRO when he visited before the review that they did not want to attend their meeting.
- A girl aged 13 who has been in care since 2007 said she does not wish to attend the meeting even though efforts are regularly undertaken to encourage her to attend. This included 3 placement visits offered in 2018 but she did not want the IRO to visit her at home and preferred to send her views in writing. Given it was a long-term stable placement and the age of the child the IRO did not feel it necessary to pressure the child into doing something she clearly was not comfortable with at this stage. Social workers also advised that visits from professionals can make the young person feel anxious. The young person has the introductory profile, "I am your IRO," letter and the IRO also provides child friendly amended review minutes with her contact details included.
- A boy does not attend his meetings due to challenging behaviour and limited understanding to his circumstances. He is currently on a shared care arrangement

between home and a specialist residential respite unit.

- A boy aged 15 does not engage with the social worker or the IRO. He has made it clear that he does not want to attend. The IRO had recently planned to visit him again but due to sensitivity around a recent family bereavement this has been postponed .

5. When has the IRO seen the child



We are pleased to report that the IRO had seen 90% of these children, 27 of them within the last 6 months. It is also encouraging that IRO's had undertaken placement visits separate to reviews for 28 of these children.

There are 5 occasions where the IRO has not met the child. For two siblings aged 8 and 6, the IRO had recently been allocated the case and has already arranged to go and meet them at home. One was a baby aged 1. Also a 16-year-old boy who has recently become looked after under a shared care arrangement with parents at home and a specialist residential unit due to his aggressive behaviour and family circumstances. Finally it was an initial review for a girl aged 15 and the IRO plans to visit her before her next review to encourage and promote her attendance.

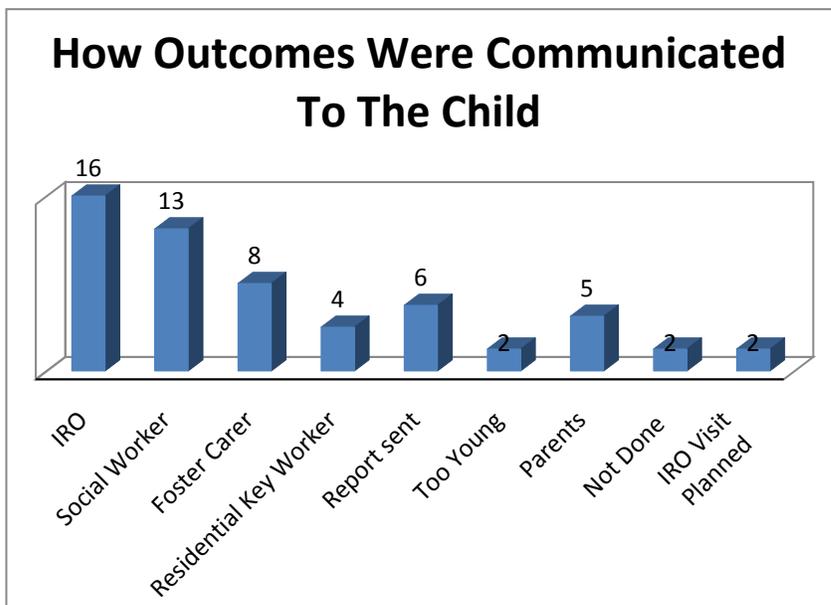
6. IRO acting on behalf of the child

In the sample on 21 occasions Bradford's IRO's advocated or undertook specific action

at the request the child. This included:

- Securing funding so that a young girl could attend gym classes with her foster family during school holidays.
- Securing funding so that the child could continue to have DDP therapy.
- Requesting a community resource worker to be allocated in supporting a 17-year-old with the demands and transition to independent living.
- Advocating for a young boy to go on holiday with his respite carers.
- Progress in contact arrangements following a request from a young person to see his mother and siblings.
- Supporting a young person to be placed out of the area.
- Separate consultation outside of the meeting was offered to parents as the child was not comfortable attending while they were also present.
- Child friendly reports being provided at the request of the child.
- Following a home visit the IRO took immediate action to pursue a change of placement due to the poor physical state of the house and neglect concerns for the child.
- The IRO supported a child's request to be reunified with his mother. Recommendation was made in the review for the social worker to update the assessment looking at whether or not it was safe and appropriate for the 14-year-old boy to return home.
- The IRO assisted in getting a young person moved to an area closer to his previous foster placement which was a key source of support for the child. The IRO also advocated for the child to pursue training in a field of their interest as oppose to one being suggested by professionals.
- The IRO pursued contact expenses for mother at the request of the child.
- The IRO vocalised the need for extra support in school for maths and English.

7. Communicating the outcomes / Care Plan



For 16 of the children the IRO met with them after the meeting and updated them with the outcomes and any changes to the care plan. We can also see from the above table that both the social worker and foster carer are significant people in

communicating outcomes to children after reviews. There were 2 occasions where outcomes had not been communicated but the IRO has planned to visit those children. Similar to how views are presented by the child we can see that with some cases outcomes are communicated by more than one person.

Conclusions

1. Children participate in their reviews by a variety of different methods. Children choose different methods and people to express and communicate their wishes and feelings.
2. If a child chooses not to attend a meeting and present their wishes and feelings via an advocate or professional this does not mean that they never attend their review meeting- the sample shows that most children do attend some meetings
3. IRO's are proactive in seeking out communication and visiting children who do not attend their review meetings to ensure that they kept informed of any changes to their care plan.
4. Key professionals such as social workers and foster carers are also instrumental in achieving the voice of the child and supporting IRO's to communicate outcomes from review meetings.
5. Reasonable explanations have been provided in situations where there has been no communication between the child and the IRO.
6. This audit exercise has evidenced that IRO's do not just accept how children feel or their opinions via third-party but face-to-face meeting and communication is common practice to ensure that the views presented are indeed the views of the child.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

No other considerations.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

N/A

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

There are no significant risks arising out of the implementation of the proposed recommendations, but only on advice of the Assistant Director Finance and Procurement and the City Solicitor.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

There are no legal issues arising, but only on advice from the City Solicitor.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

N/A

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

N/A.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

N/A

7.6 TRADE UNION

N/A

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

N/A

**7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A

7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

The purpose was to inform the Corporate Parenting Panel of how communication is presented and captured for children who do not attend their review meetings. Whether this was a regular practice for all reviews and how does the IRO communicate outcomes to these children.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/A

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

N/A

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

To endorse the findings in this report and to be satisfied that Bradford IRO's are committed and ensuring action to maximise child participation within reviews.

That the findings evidence that the children's views presented via PN6 code are accurate and checked.

11. APPENDICES

N/A

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

N/A