

# **Report of the Assistant Director (Children's specialist Services) to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on Wednesday March 9<sup>th</sup> 2016.**



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**Subject:**

**Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service April – Dec 2014**

**Summary statement:**

This report examines the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who review the care plans for all Looked After Children in Bradford. The report presents performance data and demonstrates the robust oversight of care planning in Bradford MDC.

The production of an IRO annual report is required under the regulations contained in the IRO Handbook. The report should provide evidence as to the effectiveness of the reviewing service, examine the quality of the reviews offered to young people and set targets for the development of the service.

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**Portfolio:**

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**Overview & Scrutiny Area :**

**Children's Services**



## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1** This report examines the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) who review the care plans for all Looked after Children in Bradford. The report presents performance data and demonstrates the robust oversight of care planning in Bradford Metropolitan District Council.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** Following the case of *Re S* in 2002 the House of Lords raised concerns that children 'getting lost' in the care system could be a breach of the childrens' and parents' rights under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act. The Government responded with Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which amended the Children Act 1989 and established the role of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)
- 2.2** This role was further strengthened by the IRO Handbook, regulations and statutory guidance for IROs that came into force in 2011, to improve care planning and strengthen the role of the IRO. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the individual child's care including regular monitoring and follow-up between looked after child reviews. This has increased the importance of mid review checks and processes. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Children Looked After and for challenging drift.

## **3. REPORT ISSUES**

None.

## **4. OPTIONS**

None.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 That the Corporate Parenting Panel notes:**

- (i) The work undertaken by the IRO service and its ongoing role in providing robust and challenging reviews of all Care Plans.
- (ii) The improvements over the past 9 months in children's participation, the continued improvement in timeliness and the successful introduction of a quality assurance process for the service.
- (iii) That the panel endorses the work plan for year 2016/17
- (iv) That the panel consider adjusting the timing of this regular report so that they are considering this material in May when full year figures are available.

**7. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.

**8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None.

**9. APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1** – Report of the Independent Reviewing Team 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 - 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2015

## APPENDIX 1

### Report for Corporate Parenting Panel regarding the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) April 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 to February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016.

#### **1. Purpose and Legal Context**

- 1.1** Following the case of *Re S* in 2002 the House of Lords raised concerns that children were 'getting lost' in the care system after the court had made final orders and that this could be a breach of the children's and parents' rights under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act.

The Government responded with Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which amended the Children Act 1989 and established the role of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

- 1.2** This role was further strengthened by the IRO Handbook, regulations and statutory guidance for IROs that came into force in 2011, to improve care planning and strengthen the role of the IRO. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the individual child's care including regular monitoring and follow-up between looked after child reviews. This has increased the importance of mid review checks and processes. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Children Looked After and for challenging drift and delay.

- 1.3** There have been several research studies focusing on the effectiveness of the IRO role. The University of East Anglia published a study in October 2015, *Care Planning and the Role of the IRO*, which involved an in depth study of 122 case files in addition to interviews and focus groups held with Looked After Children, parents, social workers, social work managers, and Cafcass representatives. Amongst a range of key findings the research noted:-

- It is important to recognise the value of the collaborative and supportive work that IROs do, for social workers, parents and children, not just the formal challenge. It is also important to appreciate that there will be many negotiated settlements, and the negotiations may be particularly difficult in some circumstances. A full picture of the IRO service should take account of this 'hidden' work.
- IRO's have generally become more active and interventionist.
- Social workers and team managers usually valued the input of IRO's, even when they found it challenging.
- Social workers generally welcomed informal advice and monitoring; most IRO's thought that they were effective at working in these collaborative ways, to improve practice
- Local authorities, and ultimately the children and young people in their care, will benefit if well-supported IRO's have effective channels to feed in collective concerns and influence policy development.

## **2. Profile of the IRO Service in Bradford**

- 2.1** Currently Bradford employs 13 IRO's, 9 full time and 4 part time (11.2 FTE). The teams are all experienced practitioners with 5 years post qualification experience as required by the IRO Handbook.
- 2.2** Traditionally the IRO team has been a relatively stable entity undergoing fewer personnel changes than the social work teams however over the past 9 months the team has coped with staff reducing their hours and the loss of an experienced worker and former practice manager who retired following ill health. Another experienced IRO will retire in March this year. At the point of writing the service is undertaking recruitment and will hopefully be able to find suitable replacements. It should be noted that IROs have to have 5 years post qualification experience which makes finding suitable candidates more challenging.
- 2.3** The IRO Manager has now been in post since August 2014 and has had a positive impact on the service ensuring effective supervision of staff and that IROs are positively supported in their role.
- 2.4.** Changes to the legal framework as part of the Family Justice Review have meant an enhanced role for IROs requiring them to:-
  - Monitor the child's case rather than simply monitoring progress in relation to reviews
  - Oversee effective liaison with SW teams and other key professionals, including CAFCASS
  - Ensure they have all relevant information in order to effectively review a child's case
  - Speak to the child or young person, where appropriate, and obtain their views
  - LAC care plan must include a plan for permanence from the second review onwards
- 2.5** IRO's in Bradford are solely focused on reviewing plans for Looked after Children; they do not undertake additional tasks for example chairing child protection conferences or foster care reviews as they do in other authorities. This is a policy decision to ensure the team develops a shared expertise in reviewing and means that there are no unnecessary diversions from this task.

### 3. Statistical information regarding Looked after Children (LAC) and the IRO Service

#### 3.1 Looked After Children in Bradford

N.B. Figures have been presented giving the year end totals for financial year 2014 -2015 and then figures for April to December 2015 for comparison. Full year data for 2015 -16 will not be available until May of this year.

<b>CARE STARTED / CEASED 1 APRIL 2014 - 31 MARCH 2015</b>	
Total Number of Children who have Started to be Looked After	294
Total Number of Children who have Ceased Care	301

<b>CARE STARTED / CEASED 1 APRIL 2015 - 31st DECEMBER 2015</b>	
Total Number of Children who have Started to be Looked After	256
Total Number of Children who have Ceased Care	271

Over the 9 month period we have had 256 new children became looked after (BLA). Over the 12 month period 01.04.2014 – 31.03.2015 the number was 294. If we break that down by month the number of new BLA over 9 months, 2014-15 would have been 220 children. Therefore if the current trend continues we can expect an increase of approximately 40 new BLA over this financial year.

If we calculate the monthly average for children that have ceased care for the period 01.04.2014 – 31.03.2015 it comes to 225 for 9 months. This shows that over the last 9 months there has been a significant increase of 46 children no longer being looked after, from 225 to 271.

If the current trend continues then even though we may have approximately 40 more children BLA by year end 31.03.2016, children who have ceased will also be approximately 60 more, and therefore the LAC population at year end should show a modest reduction.

### 3.2 Age and Gender 31.03.2015

<b>AGE AT 31 MARCH 2015</b>			
<b>BOYS</b>		<b>GIRLS</b>	
Under 1:	23	Under 1:	22
1 - 4:	81	1 - 4:	70
5 - 9:	108	5 - 9:	91
10 - 15:	170	10 - 15:	170
16 - 17:	78	16 - 17:	65
18 & over and placed in a community home:	0	18 & over and placed in a community home:	0
<b>TOTAL BOYS:</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>TOTAL GIRLS:</b>	<b>418</b>
<b>TOTAL ALL CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AT 31 MARCH 2015:</b>	<b>878</b>		

### Age and Gender 31.12.2015

<b>Age band</b>	<b>Gender</b>		<b>Grand Total</b>
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
0 - less than 1	19	28	47
01 - 04	66	66	132
05 - 09	91	95	186
10 - 15	179	187	366
16 - 17	67	72	139
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>870</b>

We can see that the total LAC population has remained relatively stable, with a reduction of only 8 children over the past 9 months from 878 to 870 LAC. The number of boys has reduced from 460 to 448 and the number of girls has increased by 4 from 418 to 422. The most popular age range is still 10-15 with an increase of 9 for girls and 17 for boys. Whilst boys still predominate the gap has narrowed significantly over the past 9 months.

### 3.3 Legal Status

<b>LEGAL STATUS AT 31 MARCH 2015</b>		
Care Orders:	Interim	124
	Full	529
Voluntary agreements under S.20 (single period of accommodation)		127
Freed for adoption		1
Placement Order		92
On remand, committed for trial, or detained		5
Emergency orders or police protection		0
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>878</b>

<b>LEGAL STATUS AT 31 DECEMBER 2015</b>		
Care Orders:	Interim	128
	Full	561
Voluntary agreements under S.20 (single period of accommodation)		109
Freed for adoption		1
Placement Order		66
On remand, committed for trial, or detained		5
Emergency orders or police protection		0
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>870</b>

Over the 9 month period we can see a slight increase of ICO's from 124 to 128 and an increase of 32 Full Care Orders from 529 to 561. There has been some decrease in S20 and Placement Orders. S20 children have gone down from 127 to 109. Recently concern has been expressed regarding the inappropriate use of Sec 20 by local authorities. The IRO service has been involved in a recent challenge panel looking at Bradford's performance in this respect and will be reviewing all children with this legal status to ensure that it is appropriate. Children on placement orders with plans for adoption have decreased from 92 to 66. The majority of these children have been adopted.



### 3.4 Placement Type

<b>PLACEMENT AT 31 MARCH 2015</b>		
Foster placement with relative or friend:	Inside local authority	170
	Outside local authority	48
Placement with other foster carer:	Inside local authority	308
	Outside local authority	67
Secure unit		3
Homes and hostels		101
Hostels and other supportive residential placements		1
Residential schools		9
Other residential settings		5
Placed for adoption (including placed with former foster carer)		58
Placed with own parents		76
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently		32
Other placement		0
<b>TOTAL :</b>		<b>878</b>

<b>Placement Type 31.12.2015</b>	<b>Total</b>
Family and Friends	200
Foster care In-house	370
Foster care Purchased	32
Other	33
Placed for Adoption	29
Placed with Parents	102
Residential In-house	58
Residential Purchased	46
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>870</b>

In house and purchased foster family placements are still the most popular placements increasing from 375 to 402 over the 9 months. Second behind foster families are connected persons placements with Friends and Families which have gone down from 218 to 200.

Children placed for adoption has gone down from 58 to 29 which show that 29 adoptions have been granted over the 9 months. PWP placements have gone up from 76 to 102 children.

### 3.5 Category of Need

CATEGORY OF NEED FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AT 31 MARCH 2015	
Abuse or neglect	747
Disability	18
Parental illness or disability	7
Family in acute stress	37
Family dysfunction	52
Socially unacceptable behaviour	5
Low income	0
Absent parenting	12
<b>TOTAL :</b>	<b>878</b>

Category of Need 31.12.2015	Total
Abuse or neglect	746
Disability	18
Parental illness or disability	7
Family in acute stress	37
Family dysfunction	44
Socially unacceptable behaviour	5
Low income	2
Absent parenting	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>870</b>

Abuse and Neglect is still the main category of need and has remained constant over the 9 months with only a reduction of 1 child from 747 to 746. Family dysfunction has decreased by 8 children.

### 3.6 Care Started / Ceased

#### Looked After Children Totals by Month

As At Date	LAC Total
April 15	885
May 15	889
June 15	877
July 15	866
August 15	874
September 15	864
October 15	863
November 15	867
December 15	870

If we compare the same 9 month period over the past 2 years we once again see a relatively similar pattern. From April 2014 – Dec 2014 the LAC Total was 881 – 874 (reduction of 7) and last year April 2015 – Dec 2015 the number of children was 885 – 870 (reduction of 15).

This once again shows that we have a constant number of new BLA and children leaving care. It also evidence consistency in our thresholds and care planning.

## 4. Participation

**4.1** The IRO service strives to ensure that the voice of the child is heard within reviews and that Care Plans reflect their wishes and feelings. These are reported nationally under the following codes.

Participation Code	Total
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	752
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	11
PN3 Child attended - gave views non verbally	4
PN4 Child attended without contributing	12
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	329
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	499
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	112
<b>Grand Total 31.12.2015</b>	<b>1719</b>
<b>Participation Rate (PN1 to PN6)</b>	<b>93%</b>

- 4.2** We are very pleased to report an increase in the aggregate participation performance for our LAC population, from 89.6 % in 2014 -15 to 93 %.
- 4.3** There has been a significant decrease in PN7 code from 147 (calculated at 9 months for period April 2014 – Dec 2014) to 112. We have addressed this area and work was undertaken at the IRO development day in Oct 2015 specifically looking at our PN codes. There was agreement between IRO's and a clear aim to continue to drive high levels of child participation and that any further PN7 entries need to be flagged up so lessons can be learnt for subsequent reviews. Not all children wish to attend their meetings but their views should be communicated to the reviews and taken into consideration.
- 4.4** PN1 child attended and spoke for themselves is still the leading category. If we again use a monthly calculation for 2014 from the annual figure of 866 we get 649 for a 9 month period. We have had an increase of 103 from 649 to 752 over a 9 month period. This is very encouraging.

## **5. Timeliness of LAC Reviews**

### **Performance at 31.12.2015 98%**

- 5.1** The IRO service is proud to report improved performance of **98% of LAC Review meetings** being held within statutory timescales between April to December 2015 compared to an overall 97% in 2014-15.
- 5.2** The timeliness of LAC reviews is a key measure for the effectiveness of the IRO service and is an indicator that is scrutinised in any Ofsted inspection. IROs have worked hard to ensure that meetings are not delayed and have raised appropriate challenge where this is threatened.

## **6. Viewpoint LAC**

From April 2015 – 31st December 2015 we have had 361 completed viewpoint questionnaires in comparison to 366 for the same period in 2014. This shows a constant and similar performance for viewpoint over the same period.

## 7. IRO Quality Assurance

- 7.1 We are pleased to report that our (in house developed) IRO Quality Assurance process went live on our LCS Liquid Logic database on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015. We now have a QA system implemented into our LCS database where IRO's can address and report on Challenge, Good social work practice and undertake a Quality Assurance Audit overview in relation to the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews.
- 7.2 Over the period 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 our IROs issued 46 separate challenges, 19 recognitions of Good SW practice and 142 QA case file audits.
- 7.3 87% of the challenges were resolved without the need to escalate any further. Two challenges did escalate to Formal Dispute Resolution Process involving a meeting with the service manager for one and a formal meeting with the Assistant Director for the other.
- 7.4 Each of the 146 QA audits looked at the following 5 category areas in the review process; Pre Meeting Report, Education, Care plan, Participation and Health. IROs report that 85% of the time we received good pre meeting reports for our reviews. 83 of the 95 personal education plans completed were audited as being up to date and of a good standard. That 82% of the care plans audited were of good quality. Only 3 audits out of the 146 undertaken did not evidence the voice of the child in the assessment, plan and review process (less than 2%). On 87% of the cases audited, health assessments were undertaken on time.
- 7.5 The feedback from team managers and service area managers so far has been very positive. They have found the QA audits very useful, in not just raising areas for improvement but also identifying good individual social work which then can be used to drive better practice across the rest of the team. Team managers have welcomed IROs to be even more subjective in their scrutiny and auditing.
- 7.6 Following consultation with the Assistant Director we began to grade all the audits with an outcome rating.

From 23.11.2015, 60 QA audits were graded as follows;

Excellent	23
Adequate	29
Needs Improvement	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>60</b>

From mid January 2016 the Outcomes Grading has been changed to;

- *Outstanding*
- *Good*
- *Needs Improvement*
- *Challenge*

This is in line with National Ofsted Grading and 2 Needs Improvement outcomes in a row will trigger a mandatory challenge.

## **8. Missing from Care**

- 8.1** Children going missing from both home and care are a matter of both local and national concern. Bradford recently contributed to the All Party Parliamentary Group researching children going missing and absent.
- 8.2** Colleagues from West Yorkshire Police raised issue in September of last year about an increase in missing children across the region. This prompted a reconsideration of Bradford's response to missing children particularly those who are looked after.
- 8.3** There is now daily monitoring of Looked After Children going missing and the service to provide return interviews which are conducted to try to understand why a child goes missing and prevent future occurrences has been additionally resourced.
- 8.4** Funding has been found to recruit a Missing Children's Coordinator to ensure that Bradford's services to missing children meet all of the statutory requirements and that this service links closely with the Child Sexual Exploitation Hub to ensure that children missing from care receive the highest quality service.

## **9. The Bradford Young People's App**

- 9.1** The Bradford Young People's smart phone App was launched jointly with the Bradford Pledge for Children In Care on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2015. The App was developed with input from our Children in Care Council who not only held a competition for the name but also played a vital role in the development and review stages.
- 9.2** The App has been developed in partnership with IT, I.R.O's, Health, LAC, Leaving Care, Participation (Bradford's Children in Care Council) and other Children/Young people. The Children in Care Council have had oversight of the App from inception to launch.
- 9.3** Children and Young People can use the App to find a place of safety in the city centre if they feel threatened, uneasy, afraid or worried.

#### **9.4 Future development of the app will include:-**

- Health; there will be a facility for storing health information (an electronic health passport)
- Participation; Direct links including the Children In Care Council's new Face book, Twitter, Webpage, contact details, events and meeting times.
- A personal space to store important personal information.

#### **10. IRO Service Work plan 2016-17**

1. The IRO service will support the review of all Sec 20 children as prompted by the Family Court to ensure that all Looked After children have the appropriate legal status.
2. The whole service will re-locate to Margaret McMillan Tower and will report to the newly appointed Assistant Director for Performance, Standards and Commissioning.
3. IRO Service will conduct further workshops across children's services to promote the understanding of the QA process as a tool for raising standards.
4. Signs of Safety will be introduced as the social work model across Children's Services. IROs will participate fully in the training in the new discipline and will introduce innovations in how they deliver Looked after Child reviews.
5. The IRO service will continue to provide oversight and challenge around children's care plans providing additional vigilance where there are issues of children going missing.
6. The IRO Manager will continue to be involved with the further development of the Bradford Young People's App to ensure that this innovative development can provide accessible, up to date information for Bradford's looked after young people.

**Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit  
24-02-2016**