

10 January 2017		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015-16 – clarification regarding children’s voices being heard		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: None Key	
Report of: Neale Laurie - Service Manager Safeguarding and Child Protection		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter – Head of Children’s Social Care		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson – Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary:

This report is at the request of the previous Corporate Parenting Committee (Oct 2016) clarifying and giving some examples of the activity undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) ensuring children’s voices are heard within the Looked After Children process.

1. Recommendation

1.1 For the Corporate Parenting Committee to satisfy itself that children are included and are encouraged to engage in the care planning process/Looked After Reviews.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The participation of children and young people in their reviews is good and continues to be an area of growth ensuring the voice of the child is heard. Advocacy services are also used to ensure their voices are included. The Team in conjunction with the Children in Care Council have developed an alert card, to be used at times when a young person is worried about their safety and is unable to raise this with their carer. Please see table below.

Participation	Number of Reviews
Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	178
Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	344
Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	13
Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself,	6

does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her	
Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	49
Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	149
Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	81
Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her	5
Grand Total	825

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

In reference to young children under 5 years old, there are 5 ways we try to engage young children in their reviews and for them to have a voice.

- 3.1 When a child is too young to be consulted with regards to the review process and to voice how they feel about the situation they are now in. A child's wishes and how they feel are obtained through normal interaction, activities and observation of carers, social workers, professionals, parents and family members who are involved in the child's care plan, which is discussed within the review.
- 3.2 The IRO visits the child at their placement and according to their age and understanding; the IRO will spend time with the child to observe their behaviours and interaction with those they are living with. Our observation and what the child says helps to determine if the placement is the right placement for the child, is it meeting the child's needs, if an attachment is made or not, how much they are missing their parent/s or not and when parents are mentioned the response of the child.
- 3.3 Consultation booklets "A book about My life" (Thurrock Council) - are sent to children prior to reviews. Crayons are also provided for them to complete with their carers.
- 3.4 Contact - We want to know what the baby/child is like before, during and after contact with their biological family. We will gain from contact if there were any attachment issues, what the interaction is like between child, parents, siblings and family and what the child said; all helps to gain an understanding as to what the child may or may not want; especially through their behaviours if they are not able to voice it.
- 3.5 Reviews - babies and toddlers are invited to attend, which is another way for the IRO to gain a child's feelings. Through our observation we will see the baby/toddlers attachment to parent/s, their behaviour, interaction when in the company of their parent/s, what a child says to their parent's and if the child is upset who they go to for comfort and how the parents react and deal with an upset baby/child and in turn the reaction of the baby/child when being

comforted by a parent. It gives the IRO the opportunity to observe parents interaction, their emotions, engagement and communication with their baby/child. Observation of a child's interaction with professionals helps to see how the child reacts and interact with strangers

3.6 Areas for development

The IRO service to continue to ensure children and young people actively participate in their reviews and care planning.

4. Reason for recommendation

The involvement of young people in the care planning process is vital to ensure the success of placements, but also provides a clear safeguarding function too.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Consultation with Performance Team and CICC (children in care council).

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community

6.1 The report highlights the importance of the IRO role in ensuring that the legal duties are fulfilled by the local authority. The recommendations enhance and support corporate policies and priorities.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager

There are no financial implications.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor, Children's Safeguarding

Section 118 Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced the concept Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extends the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to child's review to monitoring the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to a child's case as set out in sections 25A - 25C of the Children Act 1989. The intention is that IROs should have an effective independent oversight of the child's case and ensure that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

The IRO Handbook provides clear guidance on the IROs' role in and processes around the case review.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
**Community Development and Equalities
Manager**

The IRO's within the care plan explore issues of diversity and ensure they are addressed appropriately where necessary.

Culturally sensitive and gender appropriate placements are identified where necessary and appropriate. This is particularly relevant to the increase of unaccompanied asylum seekers. Interpreters are routinely used to identify and meet their needs both within the care planning and review process. The Department provides a dedicated Team for young people with a disability and reviews are conducted in a manner that is sensitive to their communication methods, to enable participation where at all possible, for example, signing or picture/computer input.

Recognition of young people's ethnicity is also recognised for example the inclusion of Travellers Welfare Service for some young people.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. **Appendices to the report**

None

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