

Safeguarding and Review Service

Independent Reviewing Officer Practice Standards

August 2020

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Scope

This document describes the good practice standards required of Independent Reviewing Officers regarding quality assurance, care planning and review; and outlines how the Safeguarding and Review Service will work *with* Children's Teams to enable children, young people and their families/carers to reach their full potential.

Introduction

The Safeguarding and Review Service is set within the framework of the [Independent Reviewing Officer \(IRO\) Handbook \(Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010\)](#), and is linked to [Care Planning Regulations and Guidance \(2015\)](#) and [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2018\)](#) statutory guidance. The responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) includes regular monitoring and follow-up between formal reviews.

The Safeguarding and Review Service is committed to ensuring all children are protected from harm and have plans that ensure their needs are met, and that their developmental outcomes are promoted. The Service has a strong focus on outcomes, and holding agencies to account for their contribution towards these outcomes.

All children and young people, and their families and carers, have the same protection regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation. The Service aims to identify any additional needs of children from minority ethnic groups and children with disabilities, and seek to reduce the barriers they may face, especially around communication, in their day to day lives and in reviewing their care and protection plans.

The Principles underpinning our work:

- The child's welfare must be paramount and this overrides all other considerations.
- Children have the right to be heard, to be listened to and to be taken seriously. Taking account of their age and understanding, they should be consulted and involved in all matters and decisions which may affect their lives.
- Parents/carers have a right to respect and should be consulted and involved in matters which concern their families.
- All agencies concerned with the protection of children must work together on an inter-agency basis in the best interests of children and their families.
- Each agency must have an understanding of each other's professional values and accept their respective roles, powers and responsibilities.

The Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that there are policies in place to ensure the quality of service delivery. This should include regular and routine feedback from children, parents, social workers and partner agencies, as well as auditing of the records, supervision, and direct observation of each IRO.

Restorative Practice within the Safeguarding and Review Service

The features of a Restorative Conference

Since 1st October 2018, the following changes and restorative practices have been implemented in Initial and Review Child Protection Case Conferences:

- Tables removed.
- The family have their opportunity to talk first.
- The chair uses a prompt sheet to help them prepare for conference restoratively.
- The 3 point Significant Harm Checklist is used to determine criteria for a child protection plan.

Each phase starts with the family, and each family member is asked a range of questions in turn before professionals. Professionals may have less to say if the family have been very open and honest in their perspective and the incident/concerns/harm has been outlined. Not all questions must be asked of each participant; the facilitator should be confident each person's perspective, particularly family members, has been obtained and sufficient information shared to reach a decision.

Dual Child Protection Conference Chair and Children Looked After IRO role

In line with a new service model, the roles of the Child Protection Conference Chair and Children Looked After IRO are a combined role. This re-design ensures regulatory compliance and will allow continuity for children. For example, when children have been subject to a Child Protection Plan and then become a child in care, they do not have to have a change of IRO unnecessarily. This key change fits with the Restorative service delivery model, as this places children's relationships with consistent professionals at the heart of practice.

Working with the Local Authority to improve children's outcomes

The Safeguarding and Review Service works with Children's Social Work Teams to enable children, young people, and their families/carers, to reach their full potential. This is achieved by challenging and supporting social workers, their managers, their teams, and wider Children's Services departments to promote good practice. Furthermore, the IRO service should 'identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed' (DCSF, 2010). Thus the IRO's focus is both individual children's care planning and the promotion of good practice across the organisation.

The IRO Handbook (DCSF, 2010) highlights the unique position of IROs to be able to identify systemic weaknesses and to make suggestions to the Local Authority for improvement, thus

have a massive amount to contribute to system-wide learning (Clements & Street, 2016). To ensure this capacity is fully utilised there needs to be established mechanisms in place for IROs to contribute and share learning across Children's Services to both front line staff and senior managers.

As a Service, we are committed to developing more effective ways of organisational learning from individual cases. The IRO Service carries out the following learning and support mechanisms:

- IRO representation at various Sub Groups and Panels across the Local Authority.
- IROs model good practice and SMART planning principles in outline plans and recommendations and decision documents.
- Identify good practice and feedback to the Children's Social Work Teams.
- Complete Progress Reviews for every child between statutory reviews.
- Complete effective informal and formal challenge as per the local Dispute Resolution Process. "In the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The IRO should place a record of this initial informal resolution process on the child's file. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action" (DCSF, 2010).
- Auditing case files.
- Annual report identifies system-wide learning.

Independent Reviewing Officer Practice Standards

The Safeguarding and Review Service is committed to embracing Dudley's Practice Standards practice standards have been set to give everyone working in Children's Services a set of consistent values and core standards by which we will be able to measure the quality of services provided, and ultimately the impact they have on children and families in Dudley.

These are the specific standards relevant to the IRO's role in working directly with children and families, and in overseeing the child's care or protection plan:

Participation

- The child's lived experience is at the centre of our work;
- There is evidence of direct work with the child and all practitioners will use creative methods to involve the child or young person in seeking their voice and involving them in their care plans.
- We will make sure all children will be invited to attend their meeting or be helped to take part in another way. The child and their family have participated in their Child Protection Conferences and/or Reviews.
- The use of advocates, independent visitors, Dudley Pledge, and the Children In Care Council will be promoted.
- Where possible we will invite parents and significant adults to attend their child's meeting or help them to contribute in another way.
- Where a Children's Guardian is appointed for the child/young person, the IRO will liaise with them in accordance with the local protocol.

Planning

- The views of children and families are always evident within the plan;
- The views of partner agencies have been considered in the planning process;
- Every plan should have clear contingency arrangements;
- Plans have been reviewed and updated within required timescales;
- CLA reviews are initially held within 20 days of a child coming into care;
- Subsequent CLA reviews are at 3 months from the Initial Meeting, then 6 monthly thereafter;
- All children in care should have a Personal Education Plan which should be completed within 20 working days of a child becoming looked after, and every term thereafter;
- Plans are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely).

Permanence

- Plans for permanence are in the best interests of children and young people.
- The care plan sets out what help and services will be provided to a looked after child and their family.
- Permanency planning is progressed in a timely way within the wider context of assessment, care planning and review.
- Care leavers are effectively prepared for independence and supported through their transition to adulthood.
- The accommodation is suitable and meets the child's needs.
- Every placement is approved by the Local Authority.
- There is evidence that the placement arrangements have been considered through the reviewing process.

Documentation

- A child's meeting can only take place if there is an up to date assessment/report, Care Plan or Pathway Plan (as appropriate).
- Ensuring the Social Worker provides information to IROs in a timely manner helps IROs to fulfil their responsibilities (RIP, 2016). This includes reports prior to meetings and alerting IROs to important changes in circumstances for the child.
- The meeting report/plan must have the manager's comments and signature.
- When there is no Social Worker report this will be challenged through the dispute resolution process.
- We will ensure that review decisions and recommendations are completed and circulated in the required timescale.
- If the IRO finds inaccuracies about demographic details on the child's electronic file, they will advise the Social Worker and Team Manager.
- Minutes of any Reviews/Child Protection Conferences are clear and on file.

Timeliness

- Minutes of any Reviews/Child Protection Conferences are clear and on file.
- Any Reviews/Child Protection Conferences have been held within timescales.
- Record whether timescale standards are met and, if not, record the reasons.
- Ensure that the date of the next review is agreed at the meeting and is within statutory timescales.

Monitoring

- We will ensure that all our outline plans and/or decisions and recommendations are SMART and monitor the implementation of the plan between meetings.
- We will raise any issues both individually and collectively with the appropriate persons/service when the Local Authority is failing to fulfil its responsibilities.
- Every child will have a Progress Review to monitor progress and prevent drift and delay.

Dispute Resolution

- Where possible we will resolve disputes about a child's care plan informally and in a timely way. This will be evidence on the child's electronic file.
- If unresolved, or where concerns are sufficient to enter straight into the Dispute Resolution Protocol, we will initiate the formal [dispute resolution process](#).
- The dispute resolution will be recorded on the child's file using the appropriate case note.
- We will only utilise the CAFCASS protocol when proportionate and necessary.
- The Service have devised a "Dispute Resolution Consistency" document which reflects a piece of work undertaken with IROs to ensure the reasons for and level of challenge offered to the Local Authority is proportionate and consistent within and across Services. The resulting document will be shared with wider Children's Services Teams so that everyone is aware of and responds effectively to all informal or formal dispute resolutions.
- Positive working relationships are at the heart of this process.

Child Looked After Review

- Ensuring children and young people have a genuine opportunity to be involved in the review of their care (DCSF, 2010). This includes evidence that each child has been consulted about chairing their own review. The review will take place in the child / young person's preferred venue where possible and appropriate.
- We will ensure that each child knows who their IRO is and how to contact them between reviews, and this will be clearly recorded on the child's file. Young people involved in a joint Children in Care Council and IRO Service event in February 2020 said they would welcome IROs' work mobile numbers and this is something IROs are keen to provide.
- Visits and contact between IROs and children and young people will be undertaken between Reviews.

- The IRO must be informed of any significant change or event that affects the care plan. In specific circumstances (DCFS, 2010) the review must be reconvened.
- In the event of a change to the care plan, the IRO will scrutinise the plan and ensure the Local Authority can evidence the proposed changes.
- The IRO will ensure every child has a permanence plan ratified at their second review (DfE, 2015).

Child Protection Conference

- A child's attendance at Conference should be planned and discussed with the IRO in advance and take into account issues of confidentiality, information-sharing and the effect on the child. If it is agreed that a child will attend the Conference, s/he must be adequately prepared by the Social Worker.
- We will meet with family members, immediately prior to the Conference to explain the process and discuss their contribution. We will invite family members to highlight any factual inaccuracies in any of the reports.
- The reason for any period of exclusion of family members in the Conference will be noted on the child's file by the IRO.
- We will seek a consensus regarding the need for a Child Protection Plan and any descending views will be recorded in the report.
- If a significant change of circumstances occurs, the Social Worker will contact the Chair to request that the Review Conference be brought forward.

Good Practice for Progress Reviews

The IRO Handbook outlines the duty upon IROs “to review the child’s care plan and progress between formal reviews”. In regards to child protection, “the chair should also quality assure progress to secure improved outcomes for the child in between case conferences. This will include a follow up on the plan’s progress within the first month of any child protection plan” (WM procedures, 2019). Thus a Progress Review is an opportunity to ensure that IROs monitor progress to avoid unnecessary drift and delay for children.

An audit of IRO Progress Reviews was undertaken in January 2019. The audit evidenced that the most effective IRO challenge included highlighting to the Social Worker and Team Manager that “recommendations remain outstanding or not evidenced on CCM”, and also included consideration that, “recommendations may need evidence or there is still time for these to be done by the next Review”. There is a presumption by the IRO that tasks are being progressed and could be undertaken within previously agreed timescales, and positive reinforcement and expectation that this will be achieved. This promotes positive working relationships between IROs and the child’s Social Work teams.

Minimum standards for Progress Reviews

- Take place at the mid-point.
- Include dialogue with the SW as well as evidence tasks were recorded on the child’s electronic file.
- Evidence how the recommendations and decisions of the last Review were being progressed within timescales.
- Areas of concern and/or lack of progress will be raised informally or formally with the Social Worker and or Team Manager.
- Be recorded on CCM using the Progress Review case note.

Quality Assurance of the Safeguarding and Review Service

In order to achieve better outcomes for all vulnerable children in Dudley and drive forward practice development and improvement, there are a number of monitoring, evaluating and quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure that the Safeguarding and Review Service is effective. Jelcic et al (2014) recommends quality assurance activity includes case file audits, observations of practice, and obtaining feedback from children and their families. Therefore as a service we commit to the following quality assurance measures:

Governance Arrangements

The Annual Report is considered by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services each year and is subject to Cabinet Scrutiny.

Stakeholder Engagement

Children, families and multi-agency professionals who attend Conferences and Reviews are invited to comment on the service they have received. Service Managers also chair quarterly Partnership Meetings to build relationships and develop practice across partnership agencies.

Staff recruitment, supervision, appraisal and continuous development

All staff are recruited through fair, transparent and equal opportunities process in accordance with safe recruiting practices. All staff have regular monthly supervision provided within the framework of a supervision agreement. All staff receive an annual appraisal where development and training needs are identified in addition to the service Workforce Development Plan and specifically tailored IRO Development Days throughout the year.

Observations of practice

Each IRO will have their practice chairing a meeting observed by their line manager once in a 24 month period. This will enable Chairs to continue to develop and maintain their practice skills and ensure the highest quality of service is provided to children and their families.

Case file auditing

All Children's Service managers are expected to undertake audit activity each month as part of the Council's Quality Assurance and Learning Framework. IROs and Service Managers contribute to the audit cycle.

Measuring against National Performance Indicators

We review our performance against the government set targets on a regular basis. Efforts are made to maintain targets and reduce unnecessary delay for children without compromising the quality and stability and permanency.

Complaints and representation

All complaints are monitored by the Children's Complaints manager to ensure that remedial actions can be taken and service improvements delivered.

References

Clements, K., and Street, C. (2016) **Independent Reviewing Officers; Strategic Briefing**. Darlington: Research in Practice.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) **IRO Handbook; Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their Functions in Relation to Case Management and Review for Looked After Children**. Nottingham: DCSF Publications.

Department for Education (2015) **The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review**. Department for Education.

Jelicic H, La Valle I, Hart D and Holmes L (2014) **The Role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England**. London: National Children's Bureau.

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018); **A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children**. Her Majesties Government.

Appendix 1: Initial Child Protection Conference Timeline

DAY	ACTION
Day 1	Strategy Discussion Decision to request Initial Child Protection Conference Social Worker / Team Manager
By Day 3	ICPC Convening Form completed and sent to safeguarding.child@dudley.gscx.gov.uk
By Day 4	Date of ICPC and Chair confirmed Safeguarding and Review Service (S&RS)
By Day 5	Invitation letters/email sent to all invitees S&RS
4 Days Prior to ICPC	Responses to invites checked to determine quoracy If inquorate, invitees/ Managers contacted to confirm attendance S&RS/Social Worker (SW)
3 Days Prior to ICPC	Responses to invites checked to determine quoracy Reports from invitees checked S&RS/SW Reports from invitees checked Social Work Report to Conference including Outline Plan and Team Manager (TM) Comments forwarded to Chair Initial Child Protection (ICP) Chair/S&RS
	If ICPC remains inquorate discussion to take place with Service Manager (SM)/Head of Service (HOS) to determine whether ICPC will go ahead ICP Chair/SM/HOS
Within 1 Day Prior to ICPC	Chair and SW/TM informed regarding decision to proceed with ICPC SM/HOS Alternative date obtained to ensure quoracy ICP Chair/S&RS/SW
	Family notified of the outcome of decision for ICPC to be cancelled in the event the meeting is not quorate and notification of new date SW
Initial Child Protection Conference	
4 Days following ICPC	Report submitted stating exceptional circumstances if an inquorate ICPC took place ICP Chair

Appendix 2: Child Protection Review Conference Timeline

DAY	ACTION
20 Days Prior to RCPC	Contact SW for Invite List/updating information S&RS
15 Days Prior to ICPC	Follow up if invite list/confirmation not received
13 Days Prior to RCPC	Invitations sent out
4 Days Prior to ICPC	Responses to invites checked to ensure quoracy If inquorate follow up contact made with invitees to confirm attendance SW/Care Management Team (CMT)
3 Days Prior to RCPC	If still inquorate, follow up contact with invitees Reports with comments regarding view as to whether threshold is met
	Reports from invitees checked
2 Days Prior to RCPC	If still not quorate discussion with SM/HOS as to whether Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) is to go ahead
1 Day Prior to RCPC	Chair and SW/TM informed regarding decision to proceed with ICPC SM/HOS Alternative date obtained to ensure quoracy ICP Chair/S&RS/SW
	Family and invitees notified of the outcome of decision for ICPC to be cancelled in the event the meeting is not quorate and notification of new date SW/R&CS
Review Child Protection Conference	
4 Days Following Conference	Report submitted stating exceptional reasons if RCPC inquorate/exceptional but took place

Appendix 3: Child Looked After First Review Process chart

Standard/Process	Timescale	Action by	SUBSEQUENT REVIEW
Notification of CLA recorded on CCM.	2 working days	Social worker Admin	N/A
IRO manager allocates the named IRO and records on CCM. Sibling groups will be allocated to the same IRO unless inappropriate and the reason documented on CCM. Where parent and child both children looked after, the child has a separate IRO.	3 working days from notification	IRO manager Admin – to inform Social Worker of allocation	N/A
IRO will make contact with the child before the review to discuss what issues they want raised in their review, and in principle if they wish to chair it.	10 days before the review	Named IRO	Child/young person will be spoken to in private in advance of every subsequent review. In exceptional circs this may not be appropriate and IRO will use professional judgement (<i>IRO Handbook section 3.33 to 3.34</i>). Visit to be recorded on CCM.
Letter to be sent to the child with the IRO details.	On allocation	Admin	N/A

<p>Consultation between IRO, Social Worker and child about who will be invited to the review, and where it will be held.</p> <p>Interpreters should be offered to the family if English is not their first language, or family members have issues arising from disability.</p> <p>IRO and Social Worker will establish whether the child/young person or their parent requires the support of an advocate.</p>	<p>15 working days before review allowing sufficient time for the arrangements to be made.</p>	<p>IRO</p> <p>Social worker</p>	<p>15 working days before review.</p>
<p>First review will be held within 20 working days of CLA.</p> <p>Invitations and consultation documents to review will be sent from the Safeguarding Service to all attendees.</p>	<p>At least 10 working days of CLA</p>	<p>Safeguarding admin</p>	<p>Discussion between IRO and Social Worker 15 days before subsequent review to confirm attendees and venue.</p> <p>Invites and consultation docs to be sent via safeguarding admin.</p> <p>If child becomes unallocated or there is a change of Social Worker,</p>

			IRO to be notified by TM immediately
<p>Review report and Care Plan/Pathway Plan must be on CCM.</p> <p>Team Manager comments must be included.</p> <p>Copies of these documents to be brought to review for review participants by the SW.</p>	<p>3 working days before review.</p> <p>3 working days</p> <p>At review</p>	<p>Social worker</p> <p>Team Manager</p> <p>Social worker</p>	5 working days
<p>Consultation documents, Person Education Plan and Health Plan to be available to the IRO.</p>	<p>Before the review and on CCM</p>	<p>Social worker</p>	<p>Before the review and on CCM</p>
<p>It is the IRO's decision whether to adjourn the review (refer to IRO Handbook) based on preparation, consultation, required documentation. The decision to postpone or rearrange a first or subsequent review rests with the IRO.</p>	<p>Adjourn for max of 20 working days</p>	<p>IRO</p>	<p>If review is adjourned, or there are any changes, IRO notifies admin who will notify all parties.</p>
<p>It is expected that the parent and child will be present for the review. In consultation between social worker and IRO a parent or</p>	<p>Before review</p>	<p>IRO</p> <p>Social worker</p>	<p>Before review</p>

child may be excluded. A record of reasons for exclusion must be recorded on CCM and review document, and alternative consultation process established.			
Where possible first review meetings will be recorded by dedicated minute takers.	At the Review	Safeguarding admin	

Appendix 4: Child Looked After Subsequent Review Process chart

Recs and decs of review recorded on CCM. They will be outcome focussed, state required task, timescale and by whom it will be completed.	Within 5 days of meeting	IRO	same
Send to TM for comment. They will become decision if no response	Within 5 working days receipt	TM and IRO	
In event of disagreement TM notify IRO. Try to resolve informally and record outcome on CCM	Within 5 working days	TM and IRO	
Any dissent/disagreement from any party will be recorded and addressed informally			

by IRO or social worker/TM. Ultimate recourse via complaints procedure or legal action.			
Record of review summary will be recorded on CCM and distributed.	Within 20 working days of meeting	IRO Safeguarding admin	
CLA review care plan to be updated after completion of review, and decisions agreed by TM.	Within 10 working days from TM agreement	Social Worker	
Complete review monitoring form Details of next review to be recorded on CCM	Within 5 working days	IRO Safeguarding admin	