**Introduction**

Learning from respectful challenge supports continuous improvements for children and is necessary to sustain and drive excellent practice. The responsibilities for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to challenge and raise alerts to achieve the best outcomes for the children we are working with are set out in the IRO Handbook ([IRO statutory guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337568/iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf)).

In line with the Outstanding Practice Framework, the alert process privileges finding resolutions through respectful communication, and positive collaborative working relationships that support outcomes for children.

Alongside this, patterns and themes from alerts are tracked by the Service Managers for IROs and CP/LADO. This information is included in Quarterly and Annual reports to influence practice and outcomes for children.

This guidance sets out the reasons why alerts might be raised and how we will undertake this together.

1. **Guidance on alerts process**

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| **Step 1:** | Where the IRO or CPC identifies an issue with a child achieving best outcomes in a timescale that reflect the child’s needs and prevents drift, the IRO or CPC will:   * invite a face-to-face or Teams/telephone conversation with the Social Worker and Team Manager, and any other professional relevant to achieving specific outcomes. * If indicated this meeting can be facilitated by Service Manager or Head of Service. It should be held quickly to find solutions together. Consultation or input from a Family Therapist may also be considered to assist resolution.   Where the issue has been quickly and effectively resolved for the child **within 72 hours,** the IRO/CPC will:   * record the agreed solution by email so all involved are clear about actions and timescale. * This email will be uploaded into case notes by the IRO/CPC using *“IRO or CPC Oversight”.* |
| **Step 2:** | Where the conversation **has not resolved** the issues for the child **within 72 hours**, the IRO/CPC will:   * raise an **Informal Alert** via email and via Mosaic case note alert to the Team Manager which will be uploaded into case notes by the IRO/CPC using *“Informal Safeguarding Alert”*.   This is to be resolved in an **additional 48 hours** from initial conversation. This brings the Informal Resolution stage to 5 working days. |
| **Step 3:** | Where the Initial discussion and Informal Alert has not been resolved in the 5 working days from the start of the process, and where there is insufficient explanation for why more time is required, the IRO will:   * raise a **Formal Alert** will be raised using the Mosaic Episode *“*[*Dispute Resolution (Safeguarding) Alert*](https://ssamosaic.ssa.root.lan/mosprod/controller/personsummary/1357890)*”*   **The Formal Alert is to be resolved within 5 working days.** |

1. **Reasons for raising alerts on behalf of children subject to CP and CLA plans**

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| **Reason** | **Children subject to CP plans** | **Children child in our care** |
| There are concerns about the safety of a child and planning that does not address needs and safety of the child sufficiently. This includes the absence of Strategy Discussions and S47 enquiries. | **x** | **x** |
| The child is not being seen within timescales and is not being seen alone regularly. | **x** | **x** |
| Updated Assessment is not available prior to review to provide narrative of child’s needs and to support decision making for children and their families. | **x** | **x** |
| IRO/CPC has not being advised / consulted on key changes in child’s circumstances which influences their CP/care plan e.g., strategy discussions, placement changes, missing from home or care. | **x** | **x** |
| Support and services identified and agreed at review for the child, i.e., educational support needs, CAMHS support etc, have not been provided or are delayed without a clear explanation. | **x** | **x** |
| Contextual vulnerability e.g., exploitation, county lines, radicalisation, gangs, missing from home have not been addressed and resolved satisfactorily, and are adversely impacting on the child’s/YPs welfare. | **x** | **x** |
| A Review is late or cancelled (without agreement from IRO/CPC) or not correctly organised. | **x** | **x** |
| The Core Group is not meeting regularly and there is drift to supporting outcomes identified in the CP plan. | **x** |  |
| Parents and young people have not read or had sufficient time to contribute and comment on the assessment prior to the conference. | **x** |  |
| Children and Young persons on Child Protection Plans have not been consulted or invited to their Child Protection Review and, where appropriate, have not been offered support or advocacy to attend. | **x** |  |
| There is no visibly recorded Care Plan including absence of the Permanence Plan (at 2nd CLA review), and sufficient Parallel/Contingency plans. |  | **x** |
| Key meetings for the child have not been held and are contributing to Drift and delay in planning.  e.g., LPM, Placement Planning and Permanency Planning Meetings, Family Meetings, Stability Meetings are not taking place or recorded |  | **x** |
| Insufficient or late Pathway/Transitions to adulthood arrangements that impact upon the Young Person and their outcomes. |  | **x** |
| Life story work, direct work, preparation for permanency and moving is not progressed appropriately or evidenced on the file. |  | **x** |

1. **Other action by the IRO**

The IRO has the discretion to escalate concerns directly to Head of Service and Deputy Director at any point, but these should be considered in the most serious of circumstances. The operational TM and SM should be aware this is taking place and why.

Since 2002, IROs have had the authority to refer the case of any looked after child to Cafcass [under s118, 2002 Act] if they are of the view that the child’s human rights have been breached and all attempts to resolve the matter have been exhausted. The scope for such referrals is now extended.

The IRO now has the authority to refer a case to Cafcass ‘if the IRO considers it appropriate to do so’ [under s25B (3), 1989 Act]. The IRO will encounter a wide range of situations in which there are concerns about the plan for the child/young person or the service that is being provided. In most cases it will be possible to address these through: dialogue with the local authority, including access to the dispute resolution procedure; use of the complaints procedure, either by the child directly or by an adult who is authorised to act on the child’s behalf; and/or application to the court for an order under the 1989 Act, either by the child or by an appropriate adult who is able and willing to act.

When considering whether to make a referral to Cafcass, the IRO should consider the impact that a referral would have for the child. In some cases, there will be time available first to pursue the full dispute resolution procedure within the local authority.

In other situations, the matter will be of sufficient urgency that the dispute resolution process needs to be curtailed. It is the responsibility of the IRO to make the decision about whether and when a CAFACSS referral is necessary, based on the timetable for the child. As part of any dispute resolution procedure and prior to making a referral, the IRO should notify the Head of Service and the Deputy Director that a referral to Cafcass is being considered.

When considering whether to make a referral, the IRO should have access to management advice and support in addition to independent legal advice where necessary. If IROs at the London Borough of Wandsworth need independent legal advice, they can access this from the legal service provided via Merton and Sutton. This information is available to IROs on request from the Head of Service and IRO Service Manager.

The IRO and senior managers will make every effort to resolve the matter by finding solutions that are in the child’s best interest *before* a referral to CAFCASS is considered.

Cafcass Legal operates a duty helpline which is available to IROs for the discussion of possible referrals. The lawyers at Cafcass Legal cannot give IROs legal advice but will discuss with the IRO whether any other steps can be taken before a referral is made. The IRO can make a referral to Cafcass by contacting Cafcass Legal initially by telephone, but the referral should always be confirmed in writing to the duty lawyer who will provide contact details to the IRO. The Cafcass Legal duty helpline telephone number is available from the Cafcass National Office, the contact details for which can be found on www.cafcass.gov.uk The IRO has the discretion to refer matters subject to IRO Alerts to CAFCASS at any time.