

IRO Annual Report 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020

Safeguarding and Review Service

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Terry Cranston, Service Manager Safeguarding and Review

Jazmine Walker, Service Manager Safeguarding and Review

Introduction

This report will cover the period from the 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

The role and function of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook 2010, and linked to Care Planning Regulations and Guidance, which were introduced in April 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Children in Care and for challenging any drift and delay. The IRO handbook states that an IRO must be a registered Social Worker with at least the equivalent status to an experienced Team Manager.

The IRO Handbook (Section 7.11) states the IRO Service Manager “should be responsible for producing an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting board.

This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed. It should make reference to the:

- procedures for resolving concerns, including the local dispute resolution process and it should include an analysis of the issues raised in dispute and the outcomes;
- development of the IRO service including information on caseloads, continuity of employment and the makeup of the team and how it reflects the identity of the children it is serving;
- extent of participation of children and their parents;
- number of reviews that are held on time, the number that are held out of time and the reasons for the ones that are out of time;
- outcomes of quality assurance audits in relation to the organisation, conduct and recording of reviews; and
- whether any resource issues are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service to all looked after children”.

Whilst the IRO Handbook sets out expectations of the Local Authority’s provision of the IRO Service to review Children in Care, Dudley’s service model means IROs for Children in Care also review children subject to Child Protection planning. Therefore, the report will cover both Child in Care and Child Protection activity within the service. IROs reviewing children subject to Child Protection planning do so within the framework of Working Together to Safeguard Children and Families (2018).

SUMMARY OF KEY AREAS OF PROGRESS DURING 2019/20

	Need	Action	Update
1	Voice of the Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service to continue with ensuring that the voice of the child/young person informs service delivery. More children to be supported to chair / co-chair their own reviews. Target of 30% YP for 2019/20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 2020 CIC Survey: 30% of young people have been asked if they would like to co-chair their meeting.
2	Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Chair's to ensure that family and professionals are fully included in the restorative process. To monitor the participation and gather feedback from Parents of their experience of Restorative Process. This is to commence from October 2019 Challenging the Local Authority and partner agencies to submit reports prior to conference dates. Update on report timeliness to be presented to Head of Service Safeguarding and Review each month from September 2019. Service to ensure monitoring and scrutiny take place for all children via consistent approach to midterm review 100% children open in Safeguarding and review service to have an IRO case note added to child's file between each review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IROs have continued to promote Restorative Practice. A Restorative Practice Evaluation took place in February 2019 which recommended development to IRO practice and to the wider Children's Service workforce. These recommendations were not taken forwards by the LA as there was a reconsideration of the LA's practice model. Therefore, there was no further evaluation in October 2019. Challenging the Local Authority and partner agencies to submit reports prior to conference dates started in April 2020. There has been a continued expectation that IROs undertake Progress Review (the new phrase for mid-term reviews). As of June 2020, there is a case note for this

			activity that can now be reported upon.
3	Practice Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out a one-day evaluation and development of restorative conferencing. Training to continue to be rolled out across Local Authority and partner agencies. To be carried out by November 2019. • The IRO team and managers need to agree the overall approach to restorative conferencing. This to include language used, Report sharing and family involvement in developing the plan. To be in place by November 2019. • Set up a one day or series of half day workshops to develop restorative approaches within children looked after Reviews. To be planned by December 2019. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As outlined above the LA has reconsideration the LA's practice model. Therefore, there was no further developmental work to strengthen Restorative Practice.
4.	Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology to be introduced that enables IROs to sit with the restorative circle and input live information into large screen TV monitors by November 2019. • Contribute to the development of the Successor programme to ensure system supports the safeguarding and review function and generates accurate and timely reports and alerts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As outlined above the LA has reconsideration the LA's practice model. Additionally, Child Protection Conference were moved into the community venues over the Summer 2019. Therefore, plans to introduce technology were put on hold. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IRO Service have continued to play an active role in the development of the Successor Programme
5	Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRO to ensure consistent and appropriate recording of escalations to improve outcomes for children. Monthly report to Head of Service Safeguarding regarding the number and progress of escalations from September 2019. • To ensure follow up and closing the loop of escalations by specific reference in minutes of conferences and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Quarterly Dispute Resolution Protocol Report is now in place. The first report reports on Quarter 4 (from 1/1/20-31/3/20) as outlined in the main body of this report. The Quarterly report is now produced each quarter and is shared with Extended DLT.

		reviews. Dip Sample Audit of IRO minutes in January 2020.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dip sample did not take place in January 2020. However, the Quarter report is now in place and includes data on timeliness and follow up.
6	Emerging themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The service to develop a greater understanding of contextualised safeguarding and how it impacts upon their practice. IRO team training to be delivered by Centre for Professional Practice by November 2019. • The service to participate in the new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements by attendance at subgroups and work streams from April 2019. • IRO service to be included in Dip Sample audit from August 2020. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LA are still developing their response to contextualised safeguarding and the IRO Service will participate in the new arrangements once they are in place. • The IRO Service was audited in December 2019 and the learning and development was incorporated into the Service Plan. There was a further audit in May 2020, and another planned for September 2020.

Section 1: Development of the IRO Service

- 1.1 The IRO service in Dudley is located within the Safeguarding and Review Service. The service is managed within Children’s Services.
- 1.2 The Safeguarding and Independent Reviewing Service has two main responsibilities to ensure:
 - the right children are subject to the right level of intervention at the right time to ensure they are safeguarded from harm and;
 - the Local Authority comply with primary legislation, the Regulations and relevant guidance in order to achieve the outcomes for every looked after child that a conscientious and caring parent would seek for their own children.
- 1.3 The Service is made up of several distinct roles:
 - Two Service Managers
 - Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO’s) who undertake a dual role for reviewing children who are looked after by the Local Authority as well as children and young people who require a Child Protection Conference to decide if they are in need of a Child Protection Plan
 - Fostering IROs who undertake annual appraisals of Dudley’s internal foster carers
 - Local Authority Designated Officer

- 1.4 Additional roles and responsibilities within the team include:
- Link worker role with the social work teams
 - The Fostering Reviewing Officers has the responsibility of reviewing Dudley's foster carers.
 - All IROs are trained in allegation management and cover the LADO role when LADO not available.
 - Member of Access Resources Panel
 - Member of Legal Gateway Meeting
 - Member of Channel Panel
 - Member of Achieving Early Permanence Panel
 - Member of Adolescent Risk Management Panel
 - Member of Unborn Baby Network Meeting
 - Quality Assurance – auditing and moderating
 - 2 IRO Restorative Champions
- 1.5 The Staffing Compliment of the IRO Service:
- Head of Service permanent – FT
 - 2 x Service Manager – FT
 - 3 x IRO - PT – 2 permanent, 1 agency
 - 13 x - IRO FT- 11 permanent, 2 agency
 - 2 x Foster Carer IRO - 2 permanent
 - 1 x LADO – permanent (secondment)
- 1.6 In terms of diversity, the team consists of 15 female (68%) and 7 male (32%) members of staff in the service. Of those children and young people looked after on the 31st March 2020, 293 (47%) were female and 329 (53%) were male. Therefore, there are significantly more female IROs than there are male IROs whereas there is an even split between male and female looked after children. The Service can consider the need for more male IROs during future recruitment campaigns. However, it is noted that the social worker professional is represented by a predominately female workforce.
- 1.7 The team consists of 10 members of staff from BME backgrounds (45%). As at the 31st March 2020, 77% of the children looked after are described as White and 23% are from minority ethnic groups. The level of diversity in the team is positive and ensures children from BME backgrounds and their variety of needs are more likely to be understood by a diverse IRO staff group.
- 1.8 The IRO Handbook recommends that CIC caseloads for IROs need to be between 50 and 70 for CIC. That said the size of caseload alone does not indicate the total workload for each IRO. Currently IROs have an average caseload of 70 Children in Care and Child Protection Chairs (CPC) have a caseload of approximately 100 children.
- 1.9 On the 31st March 2020 there were 622 children and young people who were looked after. The number of Children and Young People Looked After at the same point last year was 659 and therefore the number of children looked after has reduced slightly. Every child who becomes a child in care is allocated an IRO within 48 hours of becoming looked after. The Service Manager oversees the allocation of the IRO's.

- 1.10 As at the 31st March 2020 there were 366 children subject to a Child protection Plan. As can be seen above there has been a slight decrease from 413 children in March 2019.
- 1.11 As can be seen, in Table 1, although the numbers of children open to the service have slightly fluctuated the combined numbers of children within the service area have remained similar at the start of the reporting year to the end.

Table 1: number of children allocated within the service

As at month end	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Total CP	377	332	325	300	326	306	303	326	327	346	348	366
Total CIC	647	644	635	637	632	625	614	613	616	617	620	622
Total	1024	976	960	937	958	931	917	939	943	963	968	988

Section 2: Participation of children and families

Children and young people's involvement in Service Development

- 2.1 A postal Survey was sent to all Children in Care (age 11-17) along with Children in Care Newsletter in December 2019. The survey was completed by 57 children and young people. The Survey asked children about their relationship with their IRO and how they were supported to prepare for and participate with their Review.
- 2.2 The IRO Handbook states IROs should *speak with* all children before their Review. 35% of young people said they are "always" and 28% "sometimes" offered the chance to *meet with* their IRO before their Review. This is supported by 38% of young people who reported they prepare for their Review by meeting their IRO. 68% of young people are asked who they would like to attend their meeting of which 30% of young people have been asked if they would like to chair or co-chair their meeting. This gives us baseline data about how children and young people are prepared and supported to participate in their Reviews. Children were also asked if they felt their Review "makes a difference to my life" and the average response was 6 out of 10 which means the majority of children feel the meeting is purposeful for them.
- 2.3 In addition to the postal Survey, a joint event between the Children in Care Council (CICC) and the Safeguarding & Review Service was held on 19th February 2020. The purpose of the day was to obtain more qualitative feedback about the relationships between children and their IROs and their views about how their Review meetings work as well as offering support and training to children and young people who wanted to chair or Co-chair their meeting. The day was attended by 12 young people and 4 IROs facilitated. Positive feedback obtained about the quality and nature of relationships with IROs. IROs were seen as an "authority" figure who had some power and control over their

“case” and who made things happen e.g. “permanency” and ensured “safety”. IROs were also seen as adults who were involved for a long time and who knew their “story”.

- 2.4 Both the Survey and Joint Event were successful in building relationships with the CICC and giving children and young people opportunities to contribute to service development and will be repeated in the new proposed Service Evaluation process (see recommendations).

Child Participation in Looked After Reviews

- 2.5 It is essential for the IRO to ensure that the voice of the child is central to their review process. Participation can take place in a variety of ways, through attendance, children chairing or co-chairing their own review, talking to adults who can convey their wishes and feelings or a written submission. In addition to this if a child or young person has a specific issue/complaint they are actively encouraged to use an advocate.
- 2.6 To promote participation IROs are required to:
- Speak with every child before their Review.
 - Discuss and offer support to young people in chairing their own reviews. This is raised at their review and when the IRO visits a young person.
 - Encourage young people to choose what order they want things to be discussed at in their review.
 - Record on CCM when they have met or spoken with a child/young person. If a young person chooses not to meet or speak to the IRO then the IRO ensures that the child is aware that they can change their mind.

Parental participation in Looked After Reviews

- 2.7 The IRO has a responsibility to gain the views of parents within the review process, this is important as it helps the IRO to understand the way in which the child is viewed by parents and to gain an idea of the life experiences of the child. If birth parents do not attend looked after review meetings, for example when a child is on a placement order and about to be placed for adoption, their views are sought and communicated to the meeting.
- 2.8 There are many ways a parent can be involved including:
- Attending the formal meeting.
 - Completing and returning consultation documents.
 - A separate meeting can be arranged with the allocated IRO.
 - Telephone or email communication with the allocated IRO.
 - Via a Social Worker and or Advocate

Children and Parents participation in Child Protection Conferences

- 2.9 There has been no service data collected or feedback obtained from children or their parents during this reporting period. However, children subject to Child Protection planning do have access to advocacy (see below advocacy information). This is a significant disadvantage to service development and is addressed within the analysis and recommendations section of this report.

Advocacy and Independent Visiting Service

- 2.10 It is the right of every child open to the service to have access to an advocate. The Advocacy Service Contract sits within the Safeguarding and Review Service and is provided by Black Country Advocacy. The service worked with 57 Dudley young people on 68 separate issues in the reporting year. This is 12 less children and 14 more issues than last year (see table 2). Referrals are received from a variety of sources with the child young person's consent (see Table 3).

Table 2: Dudley Advocacy reported issues

Advocacy issues	18/19	%	19/20	%
Care Placement	26	28%	28	41%
Education	7	8%	7	10%
Health	1	1%	1	1%
Housing	1	1%	0	0%
Legal	9	10%	5	7%
Personal Relationships	14	15%	6	9%
Professional Support	4	4%	8	12%
Social Care	30	33%	13	19%
Other	0	0%	0	0%
Total	92	100%	68	100%

Table 3: Breakdown of the referrals received in 2018/19 and 2019/20

Referrals received for Dudley	18/19	%	19/20	%
Child or Young Person	8	12%	4	7%
Education	1	1%	1	2%
Health Professional	1	1%	1	2%
Independent Reviewing Officer	2	3%	2	4%
Other (please specify)	7	10%	3	5%

Parent or Carer	15	22%	18	32%
Social Worker	35	51%	28	49%
Grand Total	69	100%	57	100%

2.11 The Independent Visitor contract also sits within the Safeguarding and Review service and is now provided by Change Grow Live (CGL) as a joint contract with the Black Country authorities. CGL has a target of 18 young people (at any one time) as an active match for Dudley. In March 2020 Dudley had 6 current matches with 8 waiting to be matched totalling 14. There was a total of 14 matches in 2018-19 period also.

Section 3: Timeliness of Reviews

Children in Care

3.1 Under provisions set out in the IRO Handbook local authorities are required to review the case of any child who is looked after or provided with accommodation within the following timescales:

- The first review must take place within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after or is provided with accommodation.
- The second review must be carried out no later than 3 months after the first review
- The third and subsequent reviews must be carried out not more than 6 months after the date of the previous review meeting.

3.2 The percentage of CIC reviews electronically recorded as being held within timescale is outlined in Table 4. Performance regarding timeliness of Reviews has improved in the last quarter of the year. The manual count required due to data error and recording practices in CCM evidences CIC reviews are held within timescales 98% of the time. To reflect this the current performance target has been increased to 100% in order further improve. The reasons that Reviews were held out of timeframe include:

- Lack of Social Work report
- Delay in notification to Safeguarding and Review Service
- Lack of attendees

Table 4: % of CIC Review completed in time

Month	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Value	92.5%	81.5%	93.9%	97.9%	94.3%	94.4%	93.8%	96.8%	96.7%
Target	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	100.0%

Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
93.4%	95.7%	98.6%
100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

3.3 Child Protection

The percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences electronically recorded as being held within timescale is outlined in Table 5. Performance regarding timeliness of Reviews improved during the last quarter of the year. However, remains below target of 90%. The reasons for delay include:

- Delayed notification is Social work teams informing the service of the need for an ICPC
- IRO and/or minute taker availability

Table 5: % of ICPC held within 15 days of the Strategy Discussion

Month	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Value	44.4%	59.7%	67.4%	72.5%	73.1%	74.9%	74.5%	77.8%	79.1%
Target	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	80.0%	90.0%

Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
81.8%	82.0%	81.19%
90.0%	90.0%	90.0%

3.4 The percentage of Review Child Protection Conferences electronically recorded as being held within timescale is outlined in Table 6. Performance regarding timeliness of Reviews improved during the last quarter of the year. However, remains below target of 94.3%. The reasons for delay include:

- Lack of Social Work report
- IRO and/or minute taker availability

Table 6: % of Review Child Protection Conferences held in time

Month	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Value	79.4%	86.9%	98.7%	91.8%	100.0%	97.2%	90.8%	91.2%	90.9%
Target	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%	100.0%

Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
82.6%	90.6%	89.5%
100.0%	100.0%	94.3%

3.5 Progress Reviews

The IRO handbook outlines the duty upon IROs “to review the child’s care plan and progress between formal reviews”. In regard 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). In Dudley, there is a standardised approach to undertaking Progress Reviews to ensure progress takes place for all children and young people allocated within the Safeguarding & Review Service. This approach is outlined in IRO Practice Standards.

3.6 Minimum standards for Progress Reviews:

- Whilst every child’s circumstances are different, Progress Reviews should take place no longer than 1 month before fist review and 2 months for subsequent reviews.

- Include dialogue with the SW as well as evidence tasks were recorded on the child's electronic file.
 - IRO considered how the recommendations and decisions of the last Review were being actioned within timescales. This included reference to evidence the recommendations are/are not being progress.
 - Initially any areas of concern will be raised informally with the Social Worker and or Team Manager. If concerns about the progress persist a formal escalation should be completed.
- 3.7 The child's electronic file should evidence the Progress Reviews took place and what action if any was taken to follow up outstanding matters that required progressing.
- 3.8 During the reporting cycle there was no way to measure whether a Progress Review has taken place.

Section 4: Feedback to the Local Authority

Dispute Resolution Protocol

- 4.1 The aim of this dispute resolution process is to improve opportunities for our Children in Care and our Children subject to Child Protection plans. Demonstrating communication, good practice and challenge in a child focused way. Dudley has a formal process in place for the IRO to raise concerns and to ensure this is brought to the attention of the most appropriate manager.
- 4.2 The IRO handbook states (chapter 6) that "one of the key functions for the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process." Furthermore, the IRO Handbook states: 'the individual IRO is personally responsible for activating the dispute resolution process, even if this step may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings, but may, in the IRO's view, be in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his/her human rights' (Section 6.4 IRO Handbook).
- 4.3 The individual IRO is personally responsible for activating the dispute resolution process, even if this step may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings. The IRO's view may be that instigating the process is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child.
- 4.4 IROs continue to use the Dispute Resolution Protocol, ensuring that the service maintains a tracker and that there is evidence of challenges and resolution to challenges on CCM. IROs ensure that disputes are escalated within timeframes if the initial response is not satisfactory or has not been received. IRO's continually raise the aspirations for children and challenge continuous improvement in practice.
- 4.5 The Dispute Resolution process is embedded across the service. This year has seen a continued increase in challenges made from the IROs. At the end of the reporting year there had been 153 informal escalations and 78 formal escalations raised. The higher number of informal escalations is a strong indication that issues raised are addressed and resolved before having to initiate the formal process (see Table 7).

Table 7: Total number of DRPs each year

Financial Year	Informal DRP	Formal DRP	Total for Service
2019/20	153	78	231
2018/19	156	53	209
2017/18	85	27	112

- 4.6 4.6 The service collates the reasons for informal and formal DRP (see Tables 8 and 9). This information is shared with the Local Authority to help to support learning and development plans. During this reporting reason the main reasons for informal DRP were care or pathway plans not being completed or updated within statutory timescales, outstanding actions and child protection plans not being progressed. The main reasons for formal DRP were child protection plans not being progressed and outstanding actions.

Table 8: Reasons for informal DRP

Care / pathway plan not completed/updated	82
Outstanding actions	25
CP Plan not progressed	11
Unregulated placement / Progress with post 18 provision / placement move	7
Delay in allocation / Unallocated case	7
No final review before discharge	7
No supervision / outstanding actions (fostering team)	5
Adoption medical not updated / delay in adoption application	4
Review cancelled / no SW report	3
No CYPA	1
No LSW	1

Table 9: Reasons for formal DRP

CP Plan not progressed	27
Actions outstanding	25
No care plan / pathway plan	11
Delay in allocation	8
No CYPA	3
Care plan concerns	1
Delayed reports	1
Unregulated placement	1

Examples of Good Practice

- 4.7 The IRO service observes many areas of good practice on a day to day basis by a range of professionals and ensures that it is shared with the Social Worker and Managers. On the day the report was written the latest examples raised by an IRO were as follows.
- 4.8 A Social Worker in the CIC Service, Wendy Edwards produced a case summary for a child at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown that was written in the first person as if the child were sharing their life circumstances with someone who didn't know them. The case summary was written in clear, child focused and age appropriate language and gave

a very detailed and relatable summary of the child's likes, dislikes and circumstances. The summary would have been helpful to anyone reading the case file prior to having contact with the child and his carers.

- 4.9 A Team Manager in the CIC Service, Samuel Mehaffy responded to the IRO's decisions and recommendations following a CIC Review for a child. The response was clear, time focused and in line with statutory responsibilities and local procedures. Samuel's proactive approach is extremely positive to building working relationships between Team Managers and IROs at the same time as ensuring children's plans are progressed.
- 4.10 A Social Worker from the Duty & Assessment Team, Jess Davies has been the social worker for a looked after child longer than would usually be expected for a social worker in the D&A Team due to the child imminently turning 18 years old and not wanting the young person to have to get to know another professional. Despite having limited experience of working with looked after children Jess has been proactive in achieving the recommendations; an advocate for the young person by ensuring the young person was prepared prior to her review meeting. In addition, Jess has been proactive in networking with other professionals, finding out information she does not know about the needs of looked after children/care leavers, and balanced against the demands of working in a busy assessment team, Jess has remained focused on achieving good outcomes for the young person. This included weekly visits to hand deliver a weekly allowance, she secured a grant, laptop, sorted college course, applied for charities, furniture, Health passport, later in life letter, and NI number. This is testament to Jess' hard work and dedication and reflects the lengths our social workers can, and do go to, to support looked after children.

Section 5: Quality Assurance including resources

- 5.1 The IRO Handbook states "the local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective review process, enabling review meetings to take place in accordance with the Regulations and good practice. Invitations to reviews and consultation documents should be sent out to all those participating in the review at least ten working days before the meeting and the record of the review should be distributed within the required timescales. The manager of the IRO service should inform the local authority of any shortfalls in the provision of this aspect of the service".
- 5.2 The Business Support in Dudley provided to facilitate the delivery of efficient Review process includes:
- Sending out Convening Checklists for all our CLA reviews on a monthly basis to the Social Workers, when these are returned will then issue invitations along with consultation documents for the children and parents.
 - Managing an email inbox which involves processing emails from IRO's regarding new, changed and CLA reviews, this involves putting the CLA Review into the team diary and generating the CLA Review banner on CCM (child's electronic record)
 - New IRO allocations which involves updating the allocation spreadsheet, ending the CP plan if necessary and adding the new IRO involvement once allocated by Service Managers
 - Manages change of circumstances and updates the allocated IRO of such changes

- 5.3 All the above tasks are undertaken by one full time member of Business Support staff. Child Protection Conferences are minuted by Business Support Minute takers. However, IROs are expected to minute Children in Care reviews. The majority of the time this is achievable. However, there are times where a Review is for a large sibling group or the child's needs or circumstances are complex and the IRO would benefit from a minute taker while the IRO focuses on chairing the meeting. Business Support have agreed to trail minuting complex CLA Review meetings.
- 5.4 The minutes of Reviews are currently distributed by the child's social worker due to their being concerns regarding the parent's address being correct on the child's electronic case file and due to a lack of Business Support to facilitate the task. This task has recently moved to the role of the Business Support Unit. This will also ensure the tracking and monitoring of children and parents consultation documents bring sent out as well as copies of their meeting minutes. This will facilitate the effective management of children's Reviews.
- 5.5 The IRO Handbook states the IRO manager in each local authority should ensure that there are policies in place to ensure the quality of service delivery. This should include regular and routine feedback from parents, children and social workers and an audit of the records and direct observation of the IRO.
- 5.6 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. These include:
- 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.
 - 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 the service Workforce Development Plan and specifically tailored IRO Development Days throughout the year.
 - 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 Manager's contribute to the audit cycle.
 - On a regular basis we review our performance against the government set targets. Efforts are made to maintain targets and reduce unnecessary delay for children without compromising the quality and stability and permanency.
 - All complaints are monitored by the Children's Complaints manager to ensure that remedial actions can be taken, and service improvements delivered.
- 5.7 A number of audits were undertaken in December 2019 that provided feedback regarding the IRO service. The themes for development from the audits were:
- Example of good practice where an IRO telephoned parent to ensure they received a consultation document before the CIC Review.
 - Progress Reviews are routinely undertaken by IROs.
 - IROs visiting children before LAC Reviews.

- IROs are not evidencing challenge (undertaking and recording use of informal DRP) when SW reports received on the day of the Review/Conference.
- Plans/Recs and Decs evidence tasks being repeated and not justified (e.g. if not significant impact for child and was not completed take it off the plan; if significant and needs to remain the fact it was not completed this needs to be challenged). Many cases have plans that do not change from review to review even though actions are said to be complete.
- Families are leaving Child Protection Conferences with a summary plan of what has been agreed.
- The role and involvement of fathers is variable.
- There appears to be drift and lack of focussed direct work with this 16/17-year olds.

Section 6: Analysis and Recommendations

- 6.1 The IRO team are a highly skilled and knowledgeable, long standing predominately permanent staff team as you would expect from a group of staff who are experienced team managers prior to undertaking the IRO role. The Annual Report demonstrates significant progress in regard children who are looked after participation. The completion of the CIC survey and the joint event with Children in Care Council are strengths of the service activity this year and demonstrates a strong commitment to working in partnership with and ensuring children have a voice in service development. The service seeks to capitalise and build on this work and plans to develop several working groups to further strengthen participation across the service with a range of stakeholders.
- 6.2 The service's use of Progress Reviews is another strength of the service. This model of practice is unique to Dudley and is evidenced by audits to play a role in effective oversight by the IRO in children's lives to ensure their plans are being progressed. This year has also seen an increase in IRO challenge as evidenced by the increase in the number of dispute resolutions raised.
- 6.3 The Annual Report highlights a number of areas of practice where the Service needs to develop. This includes strengthening the voice of children who are subject to Initial Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection planning. There has been no service data collected or feedback obtained from children or their parents involved in Child Protection planning during this reporting period and this is a significant disadvantage to understanding children and their family's experiences during a time of crisis and is required to inform service development. The numbers of children accessing advocacy services and independent visiting is also poor and requires significant investment from social workers and IROs to improve children's access to these services and the voice and opportunities this gives children.
- 6.4 The performance data also highlights the is Service are not meeting its targets for the timescales in which key meetings across the Service (ICPCs, RCPC or CIC Reviews). This is in part due to ambitious target setting. However, there are key areas where action can be taken to improve timeliness. This includes challenging individual social work teams where there has been late notification of a change in the child's circumstances and where the social work report has not been submitted within the required timescales.
- 6.5 The IRO Service has undertaken a limited role to drive learning and development across Social Work Teams this financial year. A Review of the IROs involvement with panels and

groups across Children's Service and the link role with SW teams is required to further understand and remove any blockages to learning and development within the service and across Children's Services. This will ensure requests for IROs to undertake additional tasks, which are not a part of the IRO role, do not hinder the IROs ability to advocate and achieve the best possible outcomes for children as set out in the IRO Handbook (Section 7.9) as well as ensuring IRO's skills and expertise are effectively utilise to develop the wider workforce.

- 6.6 This annual report serves to provide a holistic evaluation of the service at this time that will enable IRO's and S&R Service Managers to identify and prioritise areas for development and capitalise on the strengths of the service and individual IROs. The ability to strengthen the IRO's independence, effective challenge, and contribution to wider Children's Service improvement journey will depend on the support of Senior Managers and the day to day commitment and working relationships with Social Work Teams.

Service Objectives 2020/2021

	Need	Action
1	An annual Service Evaluation process including all stakeholders	<p>Annual process of stakeholder feedback spread across the year (one form of feedback activity taking place every other month):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback forms from partner agencies after Conference. - Feedback forms from parents after Conference. - Feedback forms from parents after CLA Review. - CIC annual survey. - One-month C&YP views after/involved in Conferences. Develop a feedback process for post Child Protection Conference. Interviews or focused groups with children (age 11 and above) who are subject to a child protection plan to understand how they are involved in their meetings and how they could be involved
2	Strengthened monitoring of administration processes to ensure effective meetings	<p>Business support to monitor, track and report on the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The completion of the conveying checklist (completed by the social worker to ensure the right people are invited to the review) - That consultation documents are sent to children, parents and carers prior to the CIC Review - The completion of the social work report for both CIC Reviews and Conferences - The distribution of CIC Review minutes (this is already in place for Conference minutes) <p>Service managers to use this data to improve practice and challenge poor practice where appropriate through</p>

		service managers meeting with social work teams and collective dispute resolution.
3	Build upon children and parents Participation across the service	<p>“You said, we did” poster following January 2020 survey to be completed and ensure “Ingredients of a good review” are shared with relevant practitioners across Children’s Services as an outcome of the joint event with CICC in February 2020.</p> <p>A number of working groups to be set up by August 2020:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children’s participation in Child Protection Conferences - Consultation Documents for children and parents/carer to be updated - Writing child-friendly meeting minutes - Parents participation across the system (Child Protection and CIC services)
4	There needs to be an increase in the use of Advocacy (for subject to Child Protection Plans and Children Looked After) and Independent Visiting Services for Children Looked After	<p>Service Managers to ensure IROs have a consistent understanding of advocacy offer across the service and discuss this in IROs annual appraisal, supervision and team meetings.</p> <p>Use of advocacy (across CP AND CIC) and IV to increase.</p>
5	Further strengthen the IRO footprint, follow up and effective challenge	<p>Progress Review and DRP case notes to be devised within CCM.</p> <p>Performance indicators to be devised from the CCM case note data. Dispute Resolutions to be tracked for resolution/closure. To ensure follow up and closing the loop of escalations.</p> <p>The performance target for Progress reviews is 100%. IROs to follow guidance and expectations of a Progress review as outlined in the IRO Practice Standards.</p> <p>IROs to challenge where the social work report is not completed 3 days prior to the child’s meeting taking place.</p> <p>A consistency document to be agreed to ensure IROs are raising the same level of challenge for key issues in case planning on behalf of children.</p>
6	IROs to play a more significant role in the learning and development within the service and across Children’s Services.	Review of the IROs involvement with panels and groups across Children’s Service and the link role with SW teams is required to further understand and remove any blockages to learning and development.
7	Ensure IROs receive a learning and development	4 Development Days are held each year, including bespoke training from Centre for Professional Practice

<p>offer that strengthens their ability to carry out their key roles and functions</p>	<p>or external provider, to ensure IROs receive the right training and support to undertake their roles to the best of their ability.</p> <p>Service managers to complete observations of IROs practice - each IRO will have their practice chairing a meeting observed by their line manager once in a 24-month period.</p>
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