



Independent Reviewing Service, Annual Report, 2015 - 2016

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS TO QUALITY ASSURING AND IMPROVING SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE.

Purpose of Service and Legal Context.

The service is based in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Section of Nottingham City Children's Integrated Services Directorate. The Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service operates within the framework of the updated version of the IRO handbook, national guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and the national guidance for Fostering.

Children in Care

The primary focus of the IRO is to critically examine and quality assure the Care Planning and interventions of the Local Authority in respect of each child or young person in care. Central to this is ensuring that the child's wishes and feelings are given full consideration in planning.

The primary focus therefore is to ensure;

1. There is robust challenge regarding decisions, where there is underlying poor professional practice and when decisions are not being taken in the children's interests
2. To challenge the quality of analysis being undertaken, to ensure it identifies the children's needs
3. That views of children, parents, carers and other professionals are given sufficient weight in care planning

Child Protection

Within the child protection system, IROs manage Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences to ensure that there is effective multi-agency planning and activity to improve outcomes for children and young people subject to a protection plan. These requirements reflect the responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989, Working Together to Safeguard Children (2015) and the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board procedures.

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) also operates from the IRO service and is managed by the Principal Manager (CP)

Fostering

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (fostering) is to ensure that Nottingham City Council foster carers provide suitable care for children in care. The IRO is responsible for reviewing all foster carers in line with the Fostering Regulations 2011 and departmental policy.

Action taken to address key issues of 2015 - 16

The IRO Annual Report 2014 – 15 identified the following areas for development during the course of 2015/16

1. Achieving compliance with the IRO handbook.

There has been some progress in this regard, although the impact of increased demand in the Child Protection area of our work has restricted this. A further issue has been the challenge in recruiting and maintaining a permanent workforce. We have introduced more effective monitoring systems to allow us to maintain oversight of key aspects of service delivery such as visits to children and young people in care by their IRO. The other key development which will impact on performance in this regard is re-grading IROs to Team Manager Grade. This work was finalised in the early part of 2016/17 and work is planned to permanently recruit to posts.

2. Greater participation of children and young people in decision making and planning

96% of children and young people contributed to their Looked After Review. We also have plan in place to improve young people's participation in child protection meetings, particularly meetings where there are concerns about sexual exploitation.

3. Improve performance evaluation and oversight to contribute to service improvement

We have produced quarterly performance reports, which highlight both good practice and areas for improvement. These reports are presented in Children and Adults Leadership Team and the directorate Heads of Service meeting.

4. Ensure outcome focussed planning leading to timely interventions from children and young people.

We have introduced measures to highlight any case where there is no permanence plan in place by the time a child or young person has been in care for 4 months. We have also extended the Cause for Concern (escalation) process to include staff from all agencies. IROs use the cause for concern process to highlight when there are practice issues which impact on outcomes for children and young people.

We have also supported the development of

- Improved planning processes for children who may become subject to a Special Guardianship Order. To support this work one of the IRO team has been supporting work to review all cases of young people who are subject to a SGO.
- A Permanency Panel, which considers permanence plans for young people to ensure the right options are promoted to give young people a permanent home where adoption is not considered to be the best option
- The weekly placement panel which considers plans for children placed in externally commissioned placements

- A re-ablement programme which seeks to identify alternative plans for children and young people who may need bespoke packages of support to achieve better outcomes.

Professional Profile of the IRO Service

The increase in capacity in the service reported in the 2014/15 Annual report has been maintained and the staffing establishment is

- Principle Manager – 2 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)
- IRO – 14 FTE
- IRO Fostering – 0.5 FTE
- LADO – 1 FTE

Of the above posts one of the Principal Manager posts and 9.5 of the IRO posts are permanently funded, although work is planned for 2016/17 to permanently fund all posts. The LADO post is funded by the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board.

Although the service works with both children in care and those subject to a protection plan we have increasingly sought to specialise within these areas of work to improve the levels of expertise. Effectively we have two teams, one specialising in child protection, the other in work with children in care.

Extra capacity was also created in 2014/16 in Business Support Service as a result of reviewing the service performance over the last year. The additional investment relates to the recruitment of additional Minute Takers and the additional Diary Manager position. This has also been maintained. Again although this is currently temporary work is planned in 2016/17 to finalise these arrangements.

Quantitative Information

This section reports upon the activity that the IRO Service has been involved in over the past year. It does not include the role of the LADO which will be subject to a separate Annual Report specifically analyzing activity, themes and context separately. The figures below relate to specific circumstances (strategy meetings) meetings that are held to consider issues such as Sexual Exploitation and Historical Abuse. It should be noted however that there has been significant increase in demand for such meetings which has impacted on IRO capacity.

Meetings held

	Looked After Reviews	Child Protection Conferences	Total
2014/15	2,050	1,273	3,323
2015/16	1,879	1,874	3,753

Child Protection

On 31st March 2016 there were 564 children and young people subject to a protection plan. This represents a rate per 10,000 of the population of 87. The figure for 31st March 2015 was 548.

The rate in our statutory neighbors per 10,000 was 59.

Breakdown

Category of plan		
	2016	2015
Physical abuse	11%	9%
Sexual abuse	4%	3%
Emotional abuse	49%	47%
Neglect	36%	36%
Multiple categories	0%	5%

As will be seen from the information in Appendix 1 there were slightly more boys than girls in care, with children from a White British background forming the largest cohort. On 31st March 2015 there were slightly more girls than boys subject to a protection plan but the difference, particularly when taking into account the numbers of unborn children subject to a protection plan, is not felt to be significant.

Of the cohort of children and young people subject to a Child Protection Plan 3.7% had been subject to a plan for 2 years or more. The most recent available figures for performance in this area by statutory neighbors was 4.3%. 8% of children were subject of a plan for a second or subsequent time. The most recent available figures for performance in this area by statutory neighbors was 14.6%.

The service has achieved 99% of cases being held in timescale. The most recent available figures for performance in this area by statutory neighbors was 70.4%.

Children Looked After

On 31st March 2016 there were 589 children and young people in care. This represents a rate per 10,000 of the population of 90.5. The figure for 31st March 2015 was 575.

The rate in our statutory neighbors per 10,000 was 96.5.

Just over 80% of children in care were placed within 20 miles of Nottingham.

As will be seen from the information in Appendix 1 there were slightly more boys than girls in care, with children from a White British background forming the largest cohort. This is similar to the position reported in the IRO annual report for 2014/15.

Fostering Reviewing Officer.

On 31st March 2016 there were 129 Nottingham City foster carers, which represented a slight reduction from the figure at the same point in 2015 (135)

Qualitative Information

Causes for concern

One of the key functions of the Independent Reviewing Officer service is to quality assure work undertaken with children and families to promote good outcomes. One element of this work is to escalate a case where there are issues which need to be addressed in order to achieve this. This process is referred to as the cause for concern process.

From April – December 2015 156 causes for concern processes were initiated, across the three elements of the service. Proportionally the majority of causes for concern were raised in relation to work with children in care. This is unsurprising as the requirement to have an escalation process in relation work with children in care has been in place for some time. It is important to see this figure in context as the IRO will initiate a process after a meeting and, as will be seen from the figures above this indicates that such processes are only initiated in a small minority of cases.,

Key themes from this process are

Child Protection

- Work not being completed in a timely way
- Core groups not being held in agreed timescales
- Reports not being available in advance of meetings

Children in care

- Insufficient engagement with the child and their family
- Failing to progress contact arrangements
- Work not being progressed/completed in a timely way
- Care plans not being submitted in advance of meetings

Causes for concern relating to short breaks for a child with a disability are small in number and do not lend themselves to any thematic analysis. Examples of the types of issues raised are similar to those highlighted above

Fostering

The numbers of causes for concern relating to fostering are very small and as such it is difficult to provide a thematic analysis.

Complements

The IRO service highlights examples of good practice where these are identified as it felt these provide an excellent opportunity for wider learning. This process is not as well embedded as the Cause for concern process so numbers are comparatively low (28 from April – December 2015). There are examples of excellent work in managing risk in complex situations, supporting children in care, including preparation for adoption, and supporting foster carers highlighted through this.

Efficacy framework

The efficacy framework tool was designed to provide an overview in performance in support of the individual audits undertaken through quality assurance framework. After every review of a child/young person in care the IRO reviews the Care Plan and grades the position the child or young person is at, on a scale across seven domains.

Safety – In respect of safeguarding the picture is positive. 72% of young people were seen as being in a stable and suitably protected environment. Of the other 28% many are new cases relating to young people with behavioral challenges which create risks in their lives

Contact – Contact evaluations take into account how well established the arrangements are and the impact contact has on a young person. The distribution of evaluations in this area is more even, indicating that contact arrangements are more variable. There are various factors which contribute to this, some of which are linked to court processes and some relating to the need for arrangements to change as permanence plans for children and young people are developed.

Permanence – the picture with regard to permanence is again generally positive, with the overwhelming majority of arrangements graded as 7 or better. Where there are lower scores this usually relates to cases where the child/young person has come into care more recently and the plan for permanence is still in development.

Home Environment – The arc for this domain is very positive with 80% of children and young people deemed to be in supportive and positive placements. There are however a small number of young people whose placements needs are not easily met despite work both internally, regionally and, in some cases, nationally to identify appropriate placements for them. Such young people receive considerable management attention through the Placement Panel and other processes.

Meeting identified need – performance in this area is again generally positive with 70% percent of placements/support plans found to be meeting the children’s needs. Again there are a small number of children whose circumstances are more challenging which impacts on the overall performance picture.

Educational need - The arc for educational achievement also demonstrates a more even distribution of children and young people across the range of scoring. Performance throughout the year did however suggest an improving picture.

Emotional wellbeing – Again figures continue to show children and young people are at various levels in relation to their emotional wellbeing but

Moving Forward

Priorities for 2016/17

1. Finalise the Team establishment in order to recruit to permanent posts. IROs who work with children in care will be the priority to promote good working relationships for children in care with their IRO.
2. Maximise the opportunities for children and young people to contribute to plans and meetings about them
3. Support the implementation of new case recording system and ensure that this meets the needs of the wider service area, including the LADO
4. Work with the Child Sexual Exploitation Coordinator to provide information and intelligence to further strengthen the local response to sexual exploitation
5. Refine and further develop the Causes for Concern process and the Efficacy Framework.

Appendix 1 Statistical Information

Children in Care on 31 st March 2016			
Age	Number	Male	Female
Under 1	36	16	20
1	26	15	11
2	22	12	10
3	12	6	6
4	19	7	12
5	16	10	6
6	22	13	9
7	26	15	11
8	25	12	13
9	30	16	14
10	44	21	23
11	31	17	14
12	27	15	12
13	37	21	16
14	47	31	16
15	57	23	34
16	60	38	22
17	52	28	24
Total	589	316	273

Ethnicity of Children in Care	
Any other ethnic group	19
Arab	1
Asian / Asian British / Bangladeshi	1
Asian / Asian British / Pakistani	8
Asian / Asian British / Indian	1
Asian / Asian British / Any other Asian background	11
Black / Black British / African	22
Black / Black British / Caribbean	18
Black / Black British / Any other Black background	5

Chinese	1
Gypsy / Roma	3
Mixed White & Black African	9
Mixed White & Asian	5
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	73
Mixed any other mixed background	28
Unknown	6
White British	346
White Irish	6
White any other White background	23
Total	586

Children subject to a protection plan as at 31st March 2016

Age	Female	Male	Unborn	Grand Total
0	31	29	20	80
1	23	22		45
2	17	17		34
3	18	17		35
4	18	22		40
5	12	22		34
6	11	20		31
7	15	22		37
8	13	15		28
9	18	21		39
10	13	15		28
11	9	13		22
12	12	14		26
13	11	7		18
14	16	7		23
15	13	8		21
16	10	7		17
17	5			5
Grand Total	265	277	20	564

Ethnicity of children subject to a Protection Plan as at 31 st March 2016	
White British	328
Mixed - White & Black Caribbean	66
White - Any other White background	20
Asian / Asian Brit - Pakistani	20
Black / Black Brit - African	19
Unknown	18
Mixed - any other mixed background	18
Black / Black Brit - Caribbean	14
Mixed - White & Asian	12
Asian / Asian Brit -Any other Asian background	9
Any other ethnic group	8
Mixed - White & Black African	8
#N/A	7
Asian / Asian Brit - Indian	7
Asian / Asian Brit - Bangladeshi	2
Black / Black Brit - any other black background	2
Gypsy / Roma	2
Client refused to specify	1
White Irish	1
Arab	1
Traveller of Irish Heritage	1
Grand Total	564