



Additional / To Follow Agenda Items

This is a supplement to the original agenda and includes reports that are additional to the original agenda or which were marked 'to follow'.

Nottingham City Council Corporate Parenting Board

Date: Monday, 16 January 2023

Time: 2.00 pm

Place: Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG

Governance Officer: Phil Wye **Direct Dial:**

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Nottingham City Council

Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service

IRO Service

Children in Care

Annual Report

2021 – 2022



Safe, clean, ambitious
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Nottingham
City Council

This report sets out the contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officers to quality assuring and improving services for children whom Nottingham City Council are responsible for.

This Annual Report provides evidence relating to the services in Nottingham City as required by statutory guidance.

The core business of the team includes the chairing of Children in Care reviews and monitoring the activity of the Local Authority as outlined in the IRO Handbook 2010.

The IRO Annual Report will be presented to The Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership (LCSP).

Purpose of Service and Legal Context.

The service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service of Nottingham City Councils Children's Integrated Services Directorate. The Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance, which were introduced in 2015.

The Responsibility of the IRO (Children in Children).

- The responsibility of the IRO changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case. This includes regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews.

The IRO

- Plays a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children in care.
- Ensures a process for challenging drift and delay.
- Ensures that the views of the children, parents and carers are given sufficient weight in Care planning.

Professional Profile of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO).

The IRO Service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service offering independence to the role. There are two Service Managers with distinctive roles one responsible for Children in Care and the other Child Protection. Both sides of the service sit together to maintain some team cohesiveness.

To offer clarity of the roles and enable the development of specialisms each side of the Service is responsible for different elements of the service. To further promote clarity Independent Reviewing Officers undertaking Children in Care Reviews are known as IRO's.

All IRO's are qualified Social Workers, sufficiently experienced with a wide range of Social Care experiences which brings a positive level of depth and knowledge to the service.

Independent Reviewing Officers.

Every child who is '*looked after*' (Nottingham City use the term children in care) by Nottingham City Council must have a care plan. This document details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing, and the arrangements made by Nottingham City Children's Integrated Services to meet the child's day-to-day needs. All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to review the Care Plan regularly, within legislative timescales, as stipulated in the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations.

It is a legal requirement for every child who is in care to have an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to them under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook (2010) outlines the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children in care. The handbook specifies that the Independent Reviewing Officer should provide continuity in the oversight of matters relating to a child being in care and that they should strive to establish a consistent relationship with the child. The statutory duties of the Independent Reviewing Officer include the following:

- Monitor the performance of the Local Authority and their function in relation to the child's case.
- Participate in any review of the child's case.
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
- Perform any other function, which is prescribed by the regulations.

From December 2012, the children in care population was extended to include those children placed on remand in a secure unit or youth offending institution under the terms of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. This legislation placed a responsibility on all Local Authorities to treat the child as a child in care, up to the age of 18 years, who is remanded into custody. Each of these children is required to have a Remand Plan, which is equivalent to the Care Plan.

Independent Reviewing Officers role in Short Breaks.

The Statutory Guidance on how to safeguard and promote the welfare of disabled children using short breaks 2010 focuses in particular on the decision as to whether overnight short breaks should be provided under section 17 or section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and the consequences in relation to '*looked after*' status if section 20 provision is made.

The guidance states (para 3.19) that reviews for children who are receiving short breaks under S20 arrangements but who are not looked after should take place at least every six months. Reviews for looked after children must take place in accordance with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and be undertaken by an IRO.

Within Nottingham City Council Short Breaks Services Policy is that IRO's are responsible for chairing all reviews where children are accessing Short Breaks for 36 nights or above.

Management Team and Staffing.

The Head of Service remains as John Matravers, we continue to have a permanent staff team of both full and part time workers. This now includes the Fostering IRO and this year it was increased from one full time post to 1.5 posts supporting the amount of fostering reviews needing to be undertaken.

As a service we continue to have a culturally diverse team, which reflects the diverse population of Nottingham City.

Our flexible approach involving working online, which was necessitated by the Covid Pandemic, has remained for this year. However, for 2022/23 we will transition back to in person meetings whilst retaining a clear emphasis on the child and young persons wishes. The team report that our teenagers are predominantly requesting virtual reviews as this assists their attendance and more professionals can attend due to the reduction in their travel. However, there are now face to face reviews being held and the number of home visits from the IRO's to see children they review is a key improvement required.

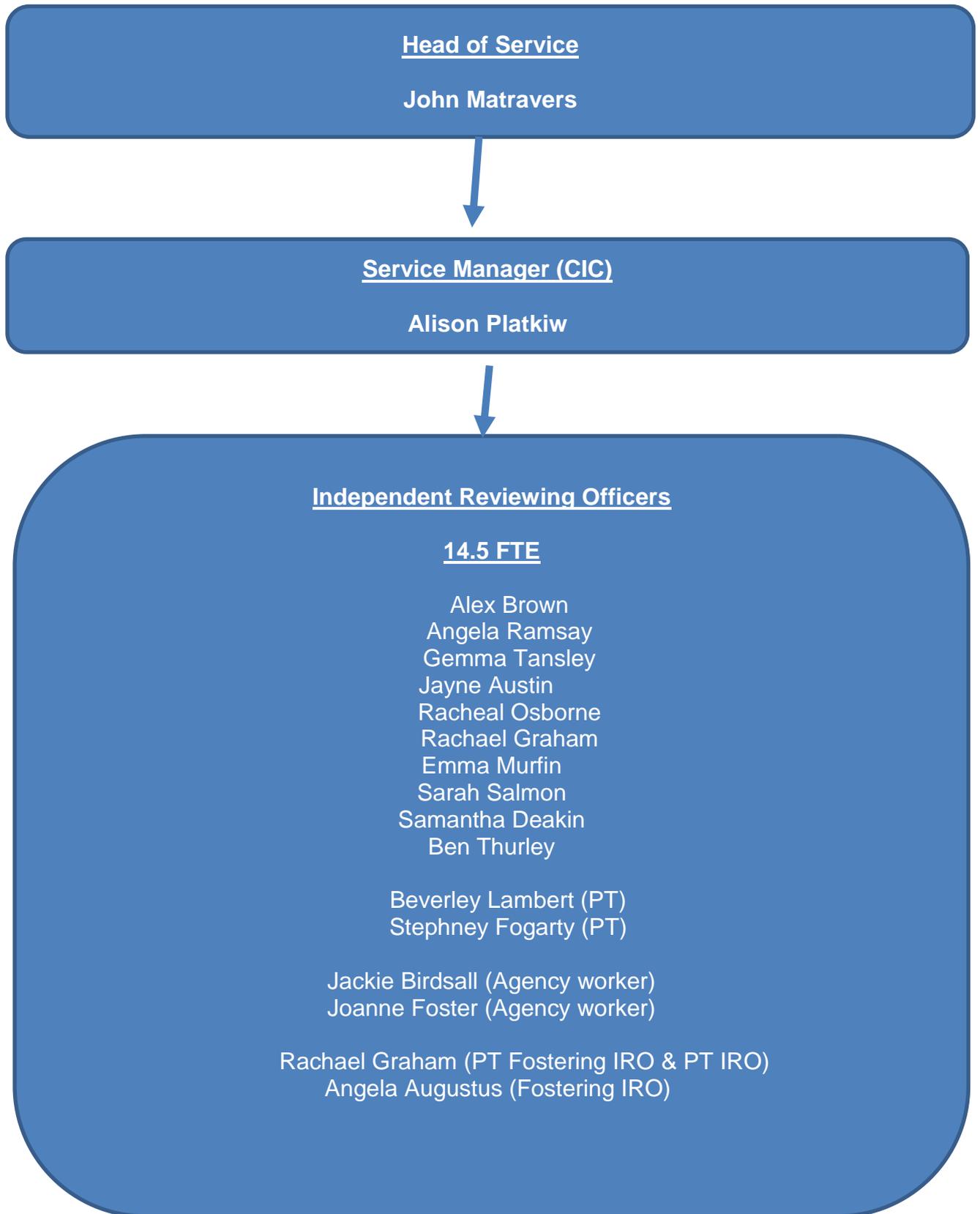
Supervision and Training.

IRO's have monthly supervision and informal supervision when required. All IRO's have a yearly performance appraisal and are encouraged to attend training in line with the requirements of Social Work England. All IRO's are required to evidence their training and development each year as part of the Social Work England Practice Standards for continued practice on the new online site. The team has the opportunity to attend regional workshops for IRO's, which are held four times a year and include the East Midlands regional partners IRO Services.

Team members can access the training provided by the NCC learning and development team as well as the LCSP training opportunities. Partner agencies also offer a variety of training courses, which can be accessed. Additionally, we continue have quarterly team development days in which we have undertaken work around improvements to the IRO Service or undertaken focused training. We also hold monthly team meeting to share management and team matters and invite other Services to share how the IRO can look to support children accessing these services.

Furthermore, since the Covid restrictions have been removed we have been able to undertake one session this year with Cafcass. Within these seminars, we look at themes agreed by the Managers from Cafcass and the IRO Service. This has increased communication and understanding of respective roles and continues to be fully attended by all parties.

IRO Service structure chart:



Updates on priorities set in 2020-2021.

1. To work with the Fostering Manager to develop a foster carers and Supervising Social Workers review report. Due to staffing difficulties in the Fostering Service this hasn't been finalised but there is now a model for this in place which will enable the service to report on in the next annual report.
2. To ensure the dispute resolution process is embedded in practice and on liquid logic so that the IRO voice is visible in the child's file around escalations and we are able to report on performance in this area. The consultation and development work on this has now finished. The process is now called the Practice Resolution Protocol as this better reflects the nature of the issues raised. The template is complete and it will be available on LiquidLogic before the end of 2022/23.
3. To continue to implement and review the IRO Service Ofsted Improvement Plan. This continues to take place and has since been amended to reflect the findings of the July 2022 full Ofsted inspection.

Children in Care Data 2020 - 21

Children in Care Population and the IRO Service Data.

The Children in Care population for 2021 - 2022 within Nottingham City Council is currently 724 excluding 55 short breaks however this number is fluid and it can fluctuate on a daily basis. Caseloads are specified in the IRO handbook, which denotes a caseload of 50-70 per IRO as being manageable. At present 13 full time IRO's two of these are agency workers hold caseloads of 60-70. Part time workers hold no more than 30 cases. This shows considerable progress compared to previous years and will enable the service to improve in its function.

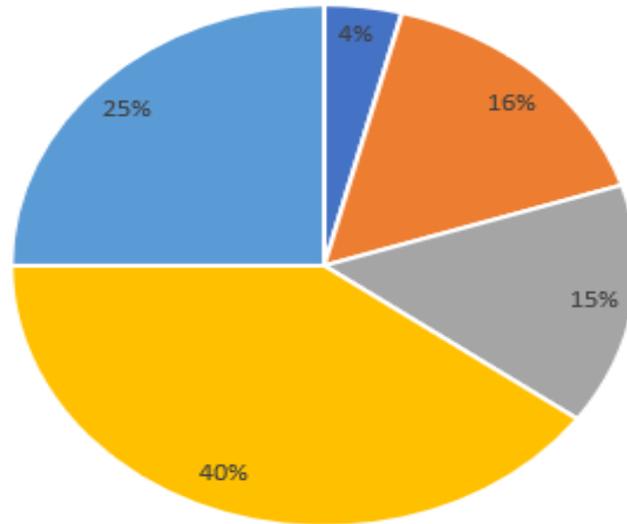
In terms of outcomes during 2021-22, there were 28 Adoption Orders granted, 28 Special Guardianship Orders granted (SGO) and 18 Child Arrangement Orders issued.

Furthermore 71.6% of the child we care for have remained in the same placement for at least 2 years or more.

We can look at the data for children in care in age groups, ethnicity and gender as highlighted below:

Age	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Under 1	6.7%	5.3%	6.4%	6%	23.2%	4%
1 - 4	9.7%	12.3%	10.2%	12%	17.9%	16%
5 - 9	18.5%	16.7%	14.9%	16%	12.5%	15%
10 - 15	41.2%	41.6%	42.1%	42%	25.4%	40%
Over 16	23.9%	24.1%	26.4%	24%	21%	25%

Age of Children in Care

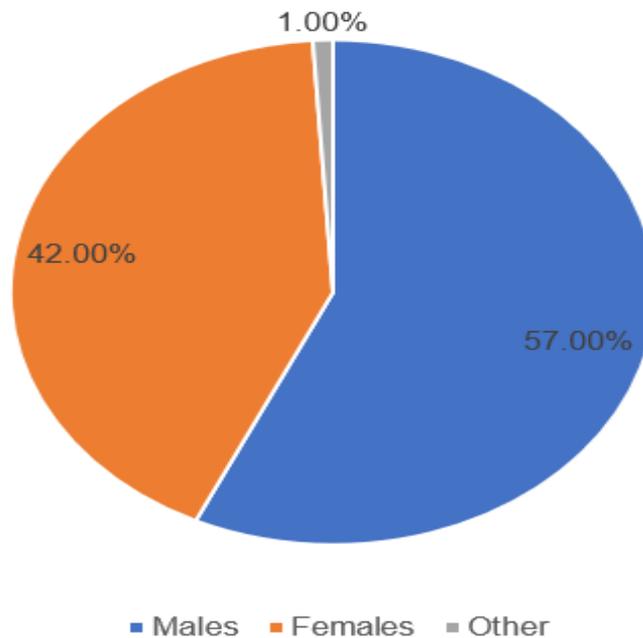


■ Under 1
 ■ 1 to 4
 ■ 5 to 9
 ■ 10 to 15
 ■ Over 16

Ethnicity of Children in Care	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Arab	3	24	0	4	0	11
Asian / Asian British / Bangladeshi	1	1	3	3	5	3
Asian / Asian British / Pakistani	13	13	11	11	10	11
Asian / Asian British / Indian	3	3	3	0	1	1
Asian / Asian British / Any other Asian background	17	18	26	19	19	18
Black / Black British / African	29	23	35	31	25	30
Black / Black British / Caribbean	20	23	20	25	32	25
Black / Black British / Any other Black background	6	5	8	6	11	7
Gypsy / Roma	3	3	8	7	8	5
Mixed White & Black African	8	8	9	7	7	16
Mixed White & Asian	6	5	5	14	25	26
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	71	78	68	88	86	87
Mixed any other mixed background	26	31	27	26	23	23
Other ethnic group	16	0	20	19	29	20
Unknown	5	1	2	3	1	2
White British	362	356	348	361	361	398
White Irish	7	7	4	3	4	2

White any other White background	24	19	32	35	38	39
Total	620	618	629	662	685	724

Gender of Children in Care



Advocacy.

The commissioning of advocacy services has remained with the Children’s Society during this year. However, this service for 2022/23 has moved to CGL. The Childrens Society attend IRO team meetings to promote their service. Additionally, the Children’s Society leaflet is included in the coming into care pack. IRO’s this year have actively accessed this service on behalf of children or have encouraged them to access this service.

Timeliness of Children in Care Reviews.

92.3% of Children in Care Reviews took place within the statutory timescales which has been a slight decline from the previous year. There are a number of factors for this including IRO sickness and changes of social workers. This performance is still strong, however our drive will remain on keeping children at the heart of their review and improving the quality of their lived experience in our care.

Children’s and Young People’s Involvement in Reviews.

94.5% of children in care participated in their review process through a number of forums either by attending the meeting, completing the contribution paper or for some having contact either by phone, email or a virtual visit with the IRO before their review is held. This is an increase of 2.5% for last year reflecting on this the new ways of working since Covid has assisted more child engagement.

IRO’s continue to support and encourage young people to chair their own meetings or set their own agenda’s where appropriate.

Contact with young people between reviews are now undertaken in several ways after consultation with the child to how they would like to speak with their IRO. Since Covid it has supported the team to think about other avenues for speaking to their children through face to face visits, virtual calls, emails or via text messages.

IRO's continue to make a conscious effort to further increase the participation of children by undertaking child friendly reviews, which are individualised to each child's needs and abilities. Furthermore, children are reassured in between reviews or before the review starts to give them, the confidence needed to participate fully in their own review in many different formats ensuring they feel comfortable with how they participate.

Progress and Activity between Children in Care Reviews.

This is an area of challenge for the service the IRO's have not been consistently undertaking mid-way reviews to monitor the progress of their allocated children. Therefore, they have not consistently been able to monitor the progress of the Care Plan and intervene to escalate issues should there be a need. This is another area of priority action for the service

All children at their initial meeting are given the contact details of their allocated IRO and every effort is made to ensure the IRO chairs any subsequent meeting, offering a level of consistency moving forward. Given the stable staff team this is working well for children as they now have strong relationships built with their IRO.

Management Oversight.

Statutory Guidance states that operational Social Work Managers must consider the decisions from the Review before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are completed, the Manager has 5 days to raise any queries or objections. Managers rarely ask for any amendments to be made so at present this process appears to work well.

IROs have continued to monitor the quality of care plans, adoption plans and pathway plans and social worker reports. Where any issues were identified, the IRO's have attempted initially to deal with the matter informally to address these and on a few occasions have formally escalated concerns. However, going forward, we will use the Practice Resolution Protocol to ensure service improvement can be identified, themes recognised and addressed.

Dispute Resolution Data 2021- 22

Dispute Resolution Policy

Throughout the majority of the year formal escalations have been responded to, but the timeliness of these responses can vary. Some of the barriers to having these timely responses is staffing issues and responses not being received in line with the protocol. We as a service have not consistently used the protocol and this is why it has been reviewed and changed along with our implementation of it.

Also, part of the improvement plan was to get the dispute process put into Liquid Logic so that it is clear when concerns have been raised by the IRO through being

visible in the child's electronic file. This process is still being resolved as it is a complicated formula to get this working in the live system. However, it is hoped that within the next annual report these issues will be resolved, and disputes are in a child's file directly showing what and when IRO's are raising concerns are care planning.

The IRO's within the dispute policy in 2021/22 can send informal disputes before they progress to formal ones. However, this isn't possible to capture as it is mostly done through emails and we don't have a way of reporting this information currently. However, once the practice resolution process is live on Liquid Logic this will allow us to monitor this.

Looking back over the last reporting year the service as a whole has raised 41 formal concerns. Auditing and dip sampling tells us that this number should be higher and we can expect to see this in the next annual report. None of these have gone beyond the level of a Head of Service. From the data currently analysed there are themes developing around disputes the IRO's are raising these are:

The main contributing factors to the disputes are:

- Issues around placement suitability.
- Number of Social Workers or Team managers allocated to a child's case.
- Issues with statutory visits not being in timescale.
- Drift and delay in progressing the care plan.
- Reports not written and shared with parents, carers and child 3 days before the review is held.

Compliments from the IRO Service.

The policy also incorporates a system for IRO's to raise good practice in the course of their work. The IRO completes a compliments form and sends to all Senior Managers in order to share the positives that are seen out in practice. This reporting year 30 compliments have been sent to Senior Managers about Social Workers whom IRO's have felt their work has been exceptional they wanted it to be formally acknowledged.

Some examples are below:

- I would like to thank E for all the support she has offered since she became our Permanency social worker, she fought for us to be matched with our "Mum" and "Dad" and I know matching can be very tricky but I am so very happy now.
- She also ensured that "Mum" and "Dad" have felt supported for the last seven months which "Mum" told R too, and now something called Lodging and an Annex A is to be completed so that we can become a real family.
- Thank You so much without you spending all the extra time and supporting us we may not have had such a lovely outcome and future.

- I have just completed the review and I wanted to pass on some wonderful comments.

L – the head teacher wanted to specifically comment on your work S. She said that you have worked tirelessly on this case, you respond to emails extremely timely and are obviously a very caring professional. She is very impressed with all your hard work on a very complex case.

J the foster carer also stated that she was impressed with how you have been thinking out of the box to enable a smooth transition of care for both girls. Well done!

- I have just completed a review for M and S and just wanted to say what a pleasure it was!
- K obviously has an absolutely amazing relationship with these 2 girls and their grandparents, which shines through at the reviews. I know previously we looked at some wonderful life story books that K had made for the children.
- I just wanted to highlight this great work by both K and Ke – they both know this case inside out!
- J has played a significant role in improving MA's life chances. Much is written about social workers needing to "make a positive difference" in children's lives. MA is one example of where J has done exactly that.

Annual Work Programme and Key Themes for April 2022- March 2023.

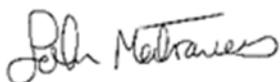
1. Ensure every child has a mid-point review undertaken by the IRO and evidenced on child's record.
2. Rewrite the previous Dispute Resolution Policy and rebrand as Practice Resolution Protocol and this to be on Liquid Logic.
3. Performance Framework dashboard to be developed and implemented through an IRO specific analysis and insight report to monitor outcomes.
4. To ensure the IRO's footprint is clearly evidenced in the child's records. Minimum standards are agreed following consultation and communicated with the service area.
5. That all children we care for are seen in line with their needs by the IRO service.
6. Improved collaboration with all parts of Childrens Services so that the IRO may offer high support and high challenge in meeting expectations for our children.
7. To meet with the social worker 15 days before the next review.

8. IRO's shall undertake the 20-day and 3-month review face to face for all new cases.
9. Consultation documents to be reviewed, refreshed and then shared with children and carers 30 days before the next review.

The IRO service has many strengths however we are now at the point of driving service improvement at pace so that we can improve outcomes for children in our care by discharging our distinct responsibilities. We aim to give all children in our care the support and services that each one requires to enable them to reach their potential.



Alison Platkiw
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Children in Care



John Matravers
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