

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS
CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date:	21st October, 2014
Title:	Rotherham Independent Reviewing Officer Service - Annual Report for the Year April 2013 - March 2014
Directorate:	Safeguarding, Children and Families Children and Young People's Service

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of practice in relation to children looked after by Rotherham Local Authority. It will highlight the progress made during 2013-14 within the IRO Service in Children and Young People's Service, whilst also providing some examination of the challenges posed, and recognising and planning around the areas for development. The report will look at achievements and successes in respect of the outcomes for our children and young people. It is hoped this report also serves as a voice for Rotherham's looked after children and young people.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), along with other Officers has a duty to fulfil their corporate parent role in respect of individual children. The role involves regular thorough review of the child's Care Plan, it means negotiating for best outcomes, at times challenging practice and decision making, operating in a timely way, working in partnership and solidly encouraging the participation of children and young people and those with legal parental responsibility for the child, as appropriate.

Over the past few years there has been discussion and national debate about how it is best to ensure IRO's are able to fulfil their role.

2. Purpose of the Service and the Legal Context

IRO's work within the wide statutory framework of the legislation which governs children's social care. Their specific role in regard to looked after children however, is governed by a suite of statutory guidance namely the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010, which came into force from 1st April 2011.

The Guidance places statutory duties on the IRO:-

- To monitor the local authority's performance in respect of their functions in relation to the child's case (not just the Review).

- To participate in any review of the child's case.
- To ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
- To perform any other function which is prescribed in the regulations

In undertaking these duties, the IRO has specific responsibilities:-

- To promote the voice of the child (child at the centre of the work).
- To ensure that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a response to each child's needs.
- To identify any gaps in the assessment process or provision of service.
- To make sure the child understands how an advocate could help, and also understands their entitlement to one.
- To offer a safeguard to any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them.
- To monitor the activity of the responsible authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands the implications of any changes made to their care plan

Through 2013 and early 2014 the changes to the role of the IRO have been the subject of an Ofsted thematic review in (March 2013) closely followed by the NCB publishing research in 2013 and 2014 around the efficacy of IRO services (March 2014). The NCB and Ofsted reports look closely at the ability of the IRO to be the voice of the child in Care planning and challenge LA's where appropriate, in terms of their corporate parenting role and decision making. The foreword to the NCB research was written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson and within this he makes a comment highlighting what an effective IRO and IRO service needs to be:

'The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.'

3. Profile of the IRO Service

The Rotherham IRO Service is situated within the Safeguarding Unit and has grown to cover the Foster Care IRO. Other teams and services within the Unit include Child Protection Conference Chairs, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Rights 2 Rights Service (Children's Rights Service), including Independent Visitors.

In addition to the core function of the role; monitoring and reviewing Children's Care Plans, the IRO Service is also involved in:

- Meetings on individual cases such as strategy meetings, planning meetings, meetings under LADO procedures, network meetings.
- Wider consultation on issues relating to looked after children.
- Auditing work as part of the Quality Assurance Framework (across the range of casework, not solely LAC).
- Training and development, including inputting to the training of Independent Visitors and Volunteers, and delivering a presentation to the Family Courts Forum.
- Assisting with addressing of complaints and investigations.
- Supporting staff induction and awareness raising across the service.
- Providing opportunities for shadowing by other staff and students, to assist learning and development of the wider workforce.
- Highlighting good practice (by workers/partner agencies/carers), as well as feeding back evidence of poor practice, concerns about placements or safeguarding issues (through Dispute Resolution process; see later in report, or for example, through liaison with LADO in cases of safeguarding issues and professionals/foster carers/residential staff).
- Working jointly with Child Protection Conference Chairs on cases where children are subject to a CP Plan and become Looked After, to gain clarity of status. As part of this work a streamlined process was developed to manage such instances. The process is in line with both the IRO Handbook and the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children.

Staffing - Developing a Stable and Permanent Team

There has been considerable change and development within the Rotherham IRO team since 2010. In 2011 The implementation of the Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations, and the IRO Handbook has had national impact on the role of the IRO setting out clear additional duties in relation to visiting / communication with children before reviews, 'monitoring' the case between reviews, being kept up to date on key changes in the child's or

families circumstances and creating a clear process for IRO's to raise and address challenge. This led to the recommendation from Government that the appropriate IRO caseload is between 50-70 children

By September 2011 the IRO team was operating with 5.6 IRO's plus a full-time Manager (Assistant Safeguarding Manager/IRO Manager). At this period caseloads of the full-time IRO's were around 65-70, in line with the IRO Handbook.

Through 2012 there were changes within the team management structure and an agreed reduction in a full time IRO post, this created an increase in IRO workload and agreement was achieved for a further 0.5 post within the IRO team. Through 2013 there has been a period of some limited agency cover and recruitment to the Senior Safeguarding Officer Role (manager for the IRO's) and to a vacant IRO post in October and current staffing stands at 5.1 IRO's (4 full time posts, 1 x 0.6 post, 1 x full-time 'split' post which provides around 0.5 capacity to the IRO team). In March 2014 the average IRO Case load stood at 78 per IRO with the number of LAC standing at 394.

As mentioned in the last IRO annual report, there was development of and recruitment to a full-time IRO post to cover Foster Carer Annual Reviews in July 2013. This post now sits within the IRO team.

The recruitment drives described above have resulted in successful recruitment of staff in compliance with the Care Planning Regulations. Across the team there is a wealth of relevant experience and knowledge. The team is also now more representative of the children and young people in care in terms of gender; however, the ethnic mix of the permanent team does not reflect that of children in care in Rotherham.

Caseloads

The Care Planning Regulations 2010 are clear in suggesting an average caseload of between 50-70 cases per full-time IRO. This was largely achieved in Rotherham late 2011 through to mid-2012. With the staffing changes described above, caseloads rose in 2012 to 70-80+ per full-time IRO and while they were at times lower through 2013; they have been above the recommended 70 per IRO throughout 2013 and into 2014. This impacts on the IRO's capacity to undertake all the required tasks and responsibilities of the role to a consistently high standard, and at times affects the capacity to fulfil all requirements. The key area where this can be seen is in that a number of notes from meetings are not written up within the 20 working days timescale. It has also impacted on the team's ability to be involved in development and other work across the wider children's service.

A key part of the IRO's role is the work in between each LAC Review that takes place for a child – tracking cases and issues in order to improve the quality of casework and to ensure drift and delays for children are avoided, and to increase the level and quality of participation of children and young people in the process of their Review. At times this can be less at the forefront than would be desired, due to caseload pressures:

Average caseload per full-time IRO

April 13	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 14	Feb	Mar
79	78	79	79	78	78	76	75	74	76	77	78

Numbers of children in care

April 13	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan 14	Feb	Mar
396	393	396	394	390	390	382	376	369	384	388	394

Training and Development

All IRO's have attended training days and opportunities for development, in line with their HCPC registration, as a minimum. Changes in staff, including at times use of temporary agency IRO's means that there have been periods of revisiting core IRO skills and working towards achieving a consistency of practice across the IRO team. The appointment to the role of Senior Safeguarding Officer in July 2013, has allowed for some consolidation work around key areas of practice within team meetings and an away day has meant that there is a clearer and sharper focus on the DRP process. There have been developments in terms of gathering and following up on informal and DRP concerns and this remains an ongoing key area of practice that the whole IRO team work on developing themselves but also supporting all professionals around understanding and working through the process to promote better outcomes for our LAC children.

The IRO team have regular weekly 'Keep in Touch' meetings where allocation of any new cases is undertaken. Additionally, there are once monthly (2.5 hour) team meetings where practice and performance issues are discussed, and opportunity is taken to distribute and discuss any relevant information such as changes in legislation, new initiatives, and share practice and training experience. This time is often used to form and maintain appropriate professional links with partner agencies, and other professionals within children's services.

In terms of specific training, in the period 2013 - 2014, IROs have attended training sessions on:-

- Child Sexual Exploitation (awareness raising).
- SDQ/Attachment training.
- BAAF Adoption Activity Day workshop
- Delegated Responsibilities (foster carers).
- Personal Education Plans.

- Conference on Improving Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children.
- Work of the Looked After and Adopted Children Support Team (LAACST).
- Attended the Regional IRO conference/event, which included a legal expert and opportunities to share good practice and developments.

4. Performance

Consistency of practice delivery

At the point a child becomes looked after, the IRO manager oversees the allocation of an IRO, which takes place within one week maximum, generally much sooner. Weekly allocation meetings ensure this happens in a timely way. In line with the IRO Handbook and good practice, changes of IRO are avoided wherever possible, and **there is consistency of IRO allocation across sibling groups. We provide continuity** of IRO if children leave care and then become looked after at a later time, ensuring the same IRO is re-allocated wherever possible.

LAC Reviews

From April 2013 to March 2014 the IRO's managed **1065** LAC Reviews, with **1062** recorded as taking place within the required timescale.

Date Review Completed	Review in Timescale	Total No. of Reviews
April 2013	86	86
May	97	97
June	60	60
July	138	138
August	47	47
September	80	80
October	107	109
November	90	91
December	81	81
January 2014	100	100
February	74	74
March	102	102
TOTAL	1062	1065

In respect of the Reviews which are recorded as having taken place outside of statutory timescale, upon further analysis it was identified:

- That one review was out of timescale following the IRO having leave - the review being planned to take place on the latest date possible (due date). The SW was then absent on sick leave (10 days out of timescale).
- A second review went out of timescale due to multiple meetings happening where the case was discussed and the IRO completing one siblings review, but not another's (3 weeks out of timescale)
- The third and final review was due to an earlier review being completed as a series of meetings and then the planned review being rearranged out of timescale, when it had to again be cancelled due to SW sick leave (3 days out of timescale)

A number of Reviews were completed as a series of meetings to support gathering the views of all parties and seeing children in their placements. Over the next year I expect to collate clearer data to explore some of the trends behind this.

Participation of Children and Young People

At the time of writing this report there is further information required in relation to the participation codes / data of Looked after children and their Reviews. This seems to be linked to a systems issue, following the change over from Swift to CCM in the July / August period. This data is expected shortly and will be offered in an addendum report as soon as this is received.

The voice of the child

As part of the working group developing the RMBC strategy for looked after children in Rotherham, one of the key themes is the voice of the looked after child and how this is heard and acted upon within their reviews and care planning. Whilst all feedback and input from children and young people is managed on an individual basis within each LAC Review, it is also important to consider this information from a more strategic viewpoint. It was agreed that because each child (over 4 years) is sent a consultation booklet prior to their LAC Review, these could offer some direct insight into if our looked after children are happy with the support and services they are being offered and if their views are being heard and responded to. There are 2 separate types of booklet, one for primary school age children and one for young people of 11+ years. Those returned are included within the Review record and placed on the child's file.

It was agreed that a snapshot would be taken of the year, and the reviews taking place in the month of March 2014 were chosen. The feedback was analysed and provided some important feedback. In respect of the reviews held in March 2014, **41 children and young people** returned their forms

From this feedback it was found:-

- 90% of Looked after children and 77% of young people are happy where they are living
- 90% of Looked after children and 80% of Young People feel they can talk to their social worker
- 89% of Looked after children and 100% of Young People understand what contact means
- 60% of Looked After children and 57% of Young People are happy with their contact arrangements
- 100% of Looked after children and 84% of Young People are not worried about their Health
- 20% of Looked After children are unsure and 40% of Young People sometimes having problems with bullying
- 89% of Looked After Children and 87% of Young People understand why they are looked after

This information allows us as an IRO service and our colleagues within the LAC service as well as other who are corporate parents, to know where we need to focus our support and services. It also allows us to reflect on what is working positively for some of your young people. It is important to reflect the 41 children who provided the feedback do represent 10 % of our current LAC population.

Further work is to take place following the next reviews of these young people, to see if they have the same positives to share or same worries, and to see if appropriate actions have been taken to support them. We also hope to develop regular collation and analysis of the young people's views, so this can be monitored on a quarterly basis to consider any ongoing or emerging themes.

Advocacy for children and young people and Independent Visitors

Advocacy for looked after children and young people is provided within Rotherham through the Rights to Rights Service, which is based within the Safeguarding Unit. The (volunteer) Independent Visitor service is also based within Safeguarding. Both services are managed by the Children's Rights Manager, who in turn is managed by the Safeguarding Unit Manager.

Independent Reviewing Officers play a vital role in liaising where necessary, with the Children's Rights Service, to ensure children and young people are in receipt of a service from an Advocate, or an Independent Visitor, as appropriate.

In regard to the provision of Independent Visitors, the IRO has a particular role, and responsibilities. The appropriateness of the continuing appointment of the particular Independent visitor and indeed of any Independent Visitor for an individual child or young person is considered at each statutory review:

- The IRO must be satisfied that the appointment is in the child/young person's continuing interest.
- The IRO must also ensure that effective liaison and communication arrangements are in place between the Independent Visitor and others involved in the child and young person's care.

- In such circumstances, the IRO plays a vital role, within their communication with the child/young person in establishing the child's views

Within Rotherham, we have 17 young people who are receiving a Volunteer Independent Visitor service and 2 further matches have also been made.

Participation of Parents/those with Parental Responsibility

Alongside facilitating and ensuring children's participation in the Review of their Care Planning, IRO's also work hard at supporting parental participation in the process. This includes occasions where there is a conflict of interest and perhaps the young person's attendance at a meeting is prioritised; in such circumstances the IRO will arrange a separate meeting/discussion with the parent. IRO's will also meet separately with parents on the occasions when a decision has been made to exclude one parent, for example, due to conflict or domestic abuse between parents. Information is input to the records/database in respect of parental involvement in LAC Reviews, detailing invitations sent, exclusions and attendance. There has been liaison with the performance/data team in respect of achieving reporting of this area, however, for the purpose of this report it has not been possible to gain any detailed data/analysis. This will be an area for continued consideration with Performance Section/Analyst colleagues, and it is anticipated will be part of future Annual and Interim reports.

Complaints

During the year 2013-14, there has been 1 complaint received, relating to the LAC Independent Reviewing Service. The complaint was made by a father, unhappy with the IRO that Chaired his child's review. This was explored by the Senior Safeguarding Officer and the YP did not wish to progress this issues and the father then did not wish to progress with this complaint.

There has also been one complaint with regard to the Foster carer IRO. This related to the conduct of the foster Care annual review. This was explored by the Senior Safeguarding Officer and not upheld, however learning points around bringing up issues of concerns in a timely way was taken from this complaint for future service development.

5. Conduct of the Local Authority in relation to children's cases

IRO Monitoring and Challenge

The IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations, 2010, clearly place responsibility upon the IRO to 'monitor the child's case' on an ongoing basis. There is the expectation that the IRO will challenge management where necessary and 'champion' positive care planning which is timely and relevant in respect of individual children. As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice. IRO's seek to ensure good outcomes for children. They do this on an individual basis through the quality assurance role they impose within the LAC Review

process. Some examples are; in reviewing a child's care plan they will ensure diets are healthy and culturally appropriate, statutory health assessments are taking place, that the child is receiving appropriate support within school/education, and that plans and arrangement for their contact with relevant people is appropriate.

Much work is generally undertaken within individual review processes, in prompting and encouraging carers and workers on such issues, rather than such resulting in formal escalation/dispute processes. This level of scrutiny, monitoring and challenge is part of the QA role undertaken by the IRO, and routinely applied within the casework of the IRO.

In the event of issues such as concern relating to resources, poor practice, or the implementation of a care plan, IRO's will undertake liaison with the team to seek resolution, often participating in professionals meetings, or bringing Reviews forward, to an earlier date.

Dispute Resolution Process

A key function of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.

The IRO Handbook and Care Planning Regulations outlines the requirement of each Local Authority to have in place a local 'Dispute Resolution Process' This is a formal process through which an IRO can escalate their concern to the appropriate management level. Rotherham's Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) was formulated and implemented from January 2011, prior to the statutory requirement for such from April 2011. **(DRP policy, guidance and relevant forms are Appendix to this report).**

As outlined above, the IRO's undertake considerable work in seeking to resolve informally, and at the lowest possible level, any issues of concern in respect of planning for children. Such 'informal concerns' are communicated in writing to the Social Workers, Team Managers and on occasion if appropriate the Service Manager, on the same document as the Review decisions and recommendations (Key Actions), within 5 working days of the Review meeting taking place. This record is placed on the child's file.

If matters are placed in the Dispute Resolution Process in order for the IRO to escalate their concern to the appropriate management level, in Rotherham this means to Team Manager at Stage One, Service Manager at Stage Two and to Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families if Stage Three.

The dispute resolution process details timescales of 20 working days maximum to resolve 'disputes'/problems with care planning.

The IRO has the power within Care Planning Regulations to refer a matter to CAFCASS at any point in the dispute resolution process if they feel such is appropriate.

IRO Activity from April 2013 to March 2014 in respect of resolving ‘Informal Concerns’, and matters which are progressed through the Dispute Resolution Process

	Informal Concerns	Stage 1 DRP	Stage 2 DRP	Stage 3 DRP
April 2013	11	-	-	-
May	14	1	-	-
June	9	-	3	-
July	22	2	-	-
August	9	1	1	-
Sept	17	3	1	-
October	10	4	-	-
November	18	4	3	-
December	9	1	-	-
January	10	-	-	-
February	14	5	-	-
March 2014	16	14	12	-

As noted in the above table, the majority of the concerns raised by IRO’s in respect of care planning for children were dealt with at the ‘Informal stage’. However following an IRO Team away day in February 2014 and a refocus on using the DRP process consistently across the team there has been an increase in the use of the DRP stage 1 in February and then DRP stage 2 in March (a number of which were escalations from stage 1)

Analysis of the work undertaken in resolving Informal Concerns and matters which have been progressed through the formal Dispute process reveals the following themes:

Issues and themes dealt with under ‘informal concerns’:

- Absence of LAC statutory visits – 97
- Deficits in recording/key documents – 4
- SW report for LAC Review and/or Care Plan not on file – 36
- Placement with Parent’s assessment not on file/not authorised – 1
- PEP’s not up to date, or not on file – 14
- Lack of up to date Health Assessment – 11
- Concerns around care planning, including around contact issues – 13
- Concern around decision-making around safeguarding issues and risk being managed in placement - 6
- Instability of placement – 6
- Suitability of placement – 7
- Lack of Risk assessment / assessment due to specific changes in circumstances of placement - 4

- Lack of clarity around legal status – 3
- Delay in commencing legal proceedings regarding revocation of Placement Order / Care Order - 11 / 1
- Delay in progressing permanency, eg through long term links in foster placements – 2
- Delay in service provision, eg CAMHs and education - 1
- Delay in resources/planning, eg for building extensions – 1
- Delay in child or carer/parent receiving explanations/information regarding decisions, eg life story work/letterbox arrangements – 2
- Concern about provision of specific specialised support to young person / placement – 3
- Concerns around how a YP's identity needs were not being met in placement and required additional support -3
- Concerns around the provision of placement post 18 (young people wanting to remain in their foster placements) – 2
- Delay in progressing the LT match of YP with current carers – 4
- Suitability of placement – 1
- Care planning issues from Jan 2014 - 24

Since the end of December there has been a change in the way that DRP's are recorded on the central spreadsheet and this has impacted on some of the data and means that issues around care planning are recorded more generally and the 24 reflects a number of issues around the quality of care plans, if there is a care plan/ LAC review report on file or prepared for the report. Consideration needs to be given to how this data is recorded in the future to ensure the themes are reflected more accurately.

Issues raised under Stage One of the Formal Dispute Process:

- Lack of Statutory Visits (more than one visit) - 18
- Concern over care planning – regarding a child being returned home without a clear assessment or plan
- Concern around decision-making; safeguarding issues and risk being managed in placement.
- Delay in health assessment taking place – 2
- Delay in an updated PEP - 2
- Delay in application to revoke Placement Order - 3
- Delay /lack of progress in care planning
- Delay in permanence planning in respect of SGO
- Lack of updated Care Plan (escalated from informal concerns)
- Delay in progressing long term match with foster carers -4
- Concerns around the provision of placement post 18 (young person felt to be at significant vulnerability due to not meeting adults criteria)

Issues raised under Stage Two of the Formal Dispute Process:

- Concern around decision-making; safeguarding issues and risk being managed in placement.(escalated from stage 1)
- Delay in permanence planning in respect of SGO (escalated from stage 1)
- Concerns around the provision of placement post 18 (impact emotionally and on education).

- More than one statutory visit missing from the file and raised through DRP1 but then escalated due to LAC of response – 8
- Placement suitability and effective long term planning for a YP before and after a placement breakdown.
- Delay in therapeutic provision for a YP and the impact on his LT placement stability
- Contact concerns not being assessed following expressed wishes of the children.
- Delay in revocation of placement Order – 5
- Concerns around delay of revocation of Placement Order on Long term Match - 4

Comparison to the figures from last year and identifying themes:

- There have been a significant number of informal concerns raised around statutory visits: 54 by the end of November 2013 with a further 43 in the final quarter of the year. In the previous year this had been 56 for the whole year. Please note if a matter is raised via informal concerns this should reflect that only 1 statutory visit has been missed or that it has taken place but not been recorded.
- There has also been a significant increase with regard to cases where more than one statutory visit is missing for some children, and from February 2014 this has been rigorously addressed via DRP stage 1. This accounts for some of the increase in the use of DRP stage 1's in February and March 2014
- There have been 60 concerns around care plans either not being on file available for the review of the quality of care planning; this was at 36 for the full year previously.
- This year there were 159 informal concerns raised (143 last year). There were 35 issues raised via DRP stage 1 (22 last year). There have been 20 issues raised via DRP stage 2 (5 last year). As highlighted and visible from the above chart a large number of the DRP Stage 1's and Stage 2's have been since February 2014, highlighting a significant period of intense work around issues.
- There has been a sustained increase in concern around Placement Orders not being revoked within an appropriate timescale and these have been escalated through the process and are currently at DRP 2 being addressed via Service Managers.
- The issues around PEPs and Health assessments continue to be around the same level from the year previously however due to a delay in them being addressed there has been increase in increase in this issue at the DRP stage 1.
- There has been an increase in concerns around care planning and statutory visits that has escalated at times due to a lack of feedback from team managers at all points of the process.

- On a positive note there were no concerns raised for the 12 month period around delays in children being placed for adoption; the transfer of cases between workers or criminal injuries compensation.
- New issues for this year are around addressing issues around identity, therapeutic provision, timely assessment around contact and a rise in concern around the stability of placements.

Feedback in respect of positive practice

Alongside the challenge when faced with areas of concern in respect of practice and care planning for children, IRO's also provide positive feedback when appropriate.

During the period April 2013-March 2014, there have been occasions when IRO's have sent written information to Social Workers and Managers complementing and in recognition of particularly good quality practice.

6. Foster Care IRO

The Foster Care IRO is a newly established permanent post dedicated to Reviews of foster carers, and based in the Safeguarding Team. This full-time role has no responsibility for children's reviews. The line management of the Foster Care IRO allows this role to sit alongside children's IRO's, and to enable better communication and linking up of issues for Looked after children, who are fostered by Rotherham carers, and to support independence from the fostering service.

Achievements since July 2013:

- Dedicated admin support has increased the efficiency of foster care reviews and supported a better level of written consultation for Foster Care reviews. Child's consultation booklets are also being associated to the child's file
- The Foster Care IRO is invited to all strategy/LADO meetings relating to Rotherham foster carers, to support a robust service in terms of following through on safeguarding issues and revisiting these within the carers Annual review.
- Reviews are taking place in time scale from April 2013 to March 2014 – 2 foster care reviews are outside of the required of timescale.
- There is an emphasis on good quality Reviews, including preparation. Some Review have been being stood down when reports not received in advance, and the quality of reports is being challenged where appropriate
- The foster care IRO is an established member of regional Fostering IRO forum with RMBC hosting the last forum.

7. Summary

During 2013-14, there have been further changes in the IRO team and management structure, which is viewed as positive. Such has supported the IRO team and service to continue to provide an effective review and monitoring of Care Planning for Rotherham's looked after Children. The team has also worked positively to raise the profile of children where there are issues and concerns at times, due to wider issues within the authority. The

more robust and visible mechanism that is now in place around informal concerns and DRP's allows the IRO 's to highlight their knowledge and insight into what is important for the looked after young people in Rotherham, and to highlight what is working well and what needs to be addressed. By collation, this information in one place, such also supports senior management to consider and see if there are any wider patterns around service provision or practice that may need to be addressed on a more strategic level.

The service has contributed to improved outcomes for Looked after Children through supporting the participation of children and young people, their parents and carers and other relevant people in the decision making about the children's care. The IRO team has continued to work positively with wider agencies and with the changes in the legal climate and the implications for when young people become LAC and when decisions around their future need to be made, the IRO's continue to work closely with Guardians.

Strengths

- Reviews indicate a good level of child participation and evidence of the voice of the child, including through links with the Advocacy service (children's rights service) and links with Independent Visitors.
- IRO's are providing challenge in respect of a range of practice, resource and care planning issues. In working to raise the profile and consistency of this challenge across the borough, the IRO service is able to highlight gaps in provision and areas of need for individual children, whilst also highlight more widespread 'themes and patterns'
- The number of statutory LAC Reviews held on time has increased. However, this needs to improve further, and with increased management capacity, weekly monitoring will assist this. The issues around miscalculation need to be eradicated.
- The IRO team now consists of permanent and experienced staff and with recent management capacity changes the areas for development are receiving the necessary attention.
- The Foster Care IRO role within the Safeguarding unit is already proving to be very positive in terms of managing complex issues and safeguarding issues around carers. There is also a positive commitment from the Fostering Team to work together with the Foster Care IRO to further improve the quality and timeliness of Foster Care Reviews.

Areas for Consideration/Action Plan – Next Steps

1. Development of a QA framework around the IRO activity, including qualitative audit of the IRO activity, direct observations and peer evaluation. This work has commenced under a 'pilot' through May and will be in place from **October 2014**.
2. Ongoing robust individual and team evaluation of the Dispute Resolution Activity. There is agreement in place that this will be shared

with SMT and with Team manager's on a monthly basis from **June 2014**, to support an understanding of the areas where there are concerns around provision or practice across Rotherham, and also within locality Teams.

3. The Foster Care IRO to work with the Senior Safeguarding Officer and Fostering to develop a bespoke DRP for Foster care Reviews by **October 2014**
4. To put in place strategies for ensuring Reviews are held within timescale (**this is monitored on a weekly basis and discussed across the team monthly**).
5. For the Senior Safeguarding Officer/Manager to work with IRO's around the timeliness of reports produced from the review meeting, and the timely distribution of such reports. This involves reviewing the current length of the IRO report and working with the IRO team to develop a report style that is focused and succinct, and remains fit for purpose. Work on the Review Agenda's and IRO audits will support work around this over the next 3 months (**by October 2014**).
6. Consideration needs to be given to capacity and IRO caseloads; since July 2012 they have been over the upper limit determined within the IRO Handbook/Care Planning Regulations – this is a risk factor and continues to impact on service delivery.
7. The IRO team will work with social work teams to develop a joint understanding around the monitoring role of the IRO. The IRO team will work to develop a more formal agreement around a 'monitoring meeting / discussion' on cases, wherever the IRO has concerns around key actions / informal concerns being progressed, or potential issues around drift and delay. (**Post July 2014**) This cannot currently be in place on all cases due to high IRO caseloads.
8. To work with Performance Section colleagues to improve team/Review data collection and analysis processes. To provide a clearer picture regarding outcomes of IRO activity. To confirm the data set and ensure that the manner in which data is collated and input leads to effective data/reporting which can be analysed.
9. To follow up on the feedback offered from children and young people in March 2014, and to expand on this work and build in feedback from younger people, carers/parents and other agencies about the Review experience, and for such to be evaluated and reported upon. (Next cohort to be reviewed is Reviews in **July 2014**). To also explore the collation of the Foster Carer IRO consultation's and how these can be used to further evidence the voice of the child and improve the service.
10. To further explore the development of a protocol for Young People chairing their own reviews. This will be supported by the development of the review agenda document (**September 2014**)

11. IRO Manager/Safeguarding Manager's involvement in the Rotherham LAC Strategy Group, to focus on progressing a range of issues which will impact and support lives of looked after children. (**Ongoing**)

12. Regular attendance of designated IRO at the regional IRO practitioners group. Regular attendance of the IRO Manager/Safeguarding Manager at regional IRO Managers meetings. (**Ongoing**)

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