



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	10 November 2022
Subject:	Independent Reviewing Service Yearly Report (1st April 2022 – 30th September 2022)

Summary:

This report introduces the Annual Report on the Independent Chair's Service. This is a statutory requirement and serves to update the Corporate Parenting Panel on the services to Looked After Children in Lincolnshire.

Recommendation(s):

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to consider the Annual Report on the Independent Chair's Service and endorse the ongoing priorities for 2022 - 2023.

1. Background

The government's range of Covid 19 restrictions that had previously posed some challenges on how the Quality & Standards Service has continued to deliver crucial services over the past 2.5 years are no longer in place. Meetings and visits have now fully resumed as the Local Authority embraces new ways of working which are outlined within the body of this report.

This report sets out the updates in relation to the Local Authority's Children in Care. Given the Independent Chairs have a dual role and also chair Child Protection conferences, a separate Appendix A is attached to this report as supplementary reading.

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care

This IRO report provides evidence relating to the IRO Services in Lincolnshire as required by statutory guidance. Due to the core business of the team also including child

protection, short-term breaks, and Reg. 44 visits, where appropriate, this report contains information relating to those areas.

The IRO report must be presented to: Corporate Parenting Board and the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Purpose of service and legal context

The IRO Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook which provides the statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children looked after (known as Child in Care).

The guidance is issued as part of a suite of statutory guidance which sets out how local authorities should carry out the full range of responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and review for looked after children. The aim is to provide looked after children with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes.

2. Conclusion

The main service priorities for 2022 - 2023 are outlined below together with a full explanation and update on progress.

Priorities 2022-2023 – Taken from the Quality & Standards Team Action Plan 2021-2023

- **Recording of escalations on Mosaic is amended to enable the recording of the narrative where there is genuine resolution dialogue to avoid taking to the next level.**

This is a piece of ongoing work. At the current time positive challenges are fully recorded within the Chair/ IRO activity step which evidences the way in which issues are narrowed down, often avoiding formal escalations. The formal escalation step needs to be revised to allow the dialogue between individuals to be fully recorded to demonstrate how escalations are managed prior to progressing to the next management level if they remain unresolved.

- **The service will be undertaking a review of Conference and CiC physical participation by families and professionals with a road map for attendance.**

All Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) are now held in person with the minimum of the Social Worker, Chair, parents/ carers, Health and Early Help colleagues and other key individuals that work closely with the family. This is intended to form those initial supportive relationships around building a safe and robust plan for the child/ren and to engage with parents / children. Once this has taken place, the platform for subsequent meetings is agreed, taking into account the family's level of engagement, learning needs and other variables such issues of

domestic abuse where it benefits victims, to be able to express their views away from a perpetrator in a safe setting.

Children in Care meetings follow a similar pathway, however, for those children and young people old enough and who are able to express their views independently, the platform for the meeting always takes into account their preferences. The service very much holds a 'it's my CiC meeting, it's my choice' ethos, ensuring that children and young people are always listened to.

- **Analysis and development of procedures and IT support required for post covid Child Protection and CiC hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings being those attended by invitees in person and via electronic means.**

There is still some way to go before all conference facilities around the County have hybrid working equipment available, similar to those already installed and working such as County Offices. All chairs now have individual Logitech conference cam units. These are portable and allow hybrid meetings to take place more effectively, where there is enhanced quality of sound and vision to support more effective meetings. This was procured after a successful business case was presented and is already having a positive impact. This model is particularly benefiting CiC as the equipment can be used in a range of locations such as schools and foster carers homes which again allows more of our children and young people to have choices in relation to their meetings, who attends in person and who attends remotely.

- **Integration of current feedback from CP and CiC utilising "Engagement HQ" (centralised feedback development and recording system) when this comes online.**

The Local Authority are just moving onto the generic feedback platform through the Let's Talk system. This generic platform allows all feedback to be gathered in a central location in order for it to be evaluated. However, given the specific nature of the role, some evaluation is currently being undertaken to understand whether the new platform would provide the right level of feedback required to continue to fully understand the needs and views of our children and parents/ carers or whether this needs to be service specific.

- **Based on Engagement HQ, review of feedback forms and analysis of lessons learnt to effect service delivery.**

As above this is currently ongoing, however whichever platform the services elect to use, we continue to monitor the impact of the services we deliver and how these can continuously be improved to meet the needs of those we seek to support.

- **Initial trial and review of progress of the new Pre-Birth Protocol, implementation of any subsequent amendments from the review.**

This piece of work is now completed and fully embedded into practice. Since its initial stages the Pre-Birth Protocol has evolved into a confirmed model of practice and there is clear guidance around this. On occasions, Child Protection (CP) Chairs still chair some of these meetings, but it has become more embedded into front line social work practice and Practice Supervisors often chair their own Pre-Birth Strategy Meetings. The Safeguarding & Review team still coordinate the administration for this important piece of work. This has resulted in many more unborn babies avoiding CP plans with an alternative Child in Need / Pre Proceedings pathway being implemented which has resulted in a less oppressive and stressful experience for the expectant mother and father. There are of course those unborn babies, where despite this positive way of supporting families, the risks elevate. In these cases, further consideration of an ICPC and potential CP plan is always considered to manage any risks.

- **Promotion of the role of the Independent Chair service through the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) and individual partners to ensure clarity and accountability.**

This is an ongoing piece of work. One of the Team Managers who takes a lead for CP is in regular attendance at LSCP meetings and events, and promotion of the role together with gathering important feedback is always present to enhance and promote the role.

- **Exploration and assessment of the categories of harm by the Independent Chairs within conference, ensuring that sexual harm is captured effectively.**

This is a piece of ongoing work. The introduction of the Sexual Harm Pathway which has been a significant piece of work together with the current delivery of updated Sexual Abuse training delivered by the Practice Advisors is enhancing understanding, knowledge, and practice in this area to ensure that for those children experiencing sexual harm, this is fully acknowledged as a key category.

- **Challenge and focus by the Independent Chair on ensuring active participation and engagement with any "absent" parent within the child protection framework. With particular emphasis on Fathers.**

This is an ongoing piece of work within the service. Managers frequently consider this in case supervision to ensure the issues remains live. Chairs are now fully back completing peer audits and there is an expectation that this area is fully considered and reflected upon. Chairs, where necessary are discussing absent parents with locality social work teams to ensure that where there is an absent parent, every attempt is made to include them. Further to this a Team Manager in the Quality & Standards Team is involved in a discrete piece of work between the LSCP and Children Services to look at the current ways of working, practice development and training to ensure that this very important group of individuals is always fully considered.

- **A review, analysis, and any appropriate change to the 12 Month Conference Review process.**

The 12-month meeting has now been changed to an 18-month meeting. Family Assessment and Safeguarding Team (FAST) Team Managers are expected to attend all CP conferences at the 9-month point, and as such have a broader understanding of any issues relating to CP plans not progressing. The 18-month point felt more appropriate to review those children still subject to CP plans. This is now fully embedded with a revised agenda that seeks to review progress and any challenges within the S.O.S framework. A CP chair, independent of the child's CP chair, facilitates the meeting to ensure independence and objective oversight and seeks to support colleagues to analyse a child's circumstances and their plan to highlight any changes required to move plans forward.

- **Working collaboratively with FAST Teams to improve preparation for Initial Child Protection Conferences in a re-design of ICPC requests**

This is an ongoing piece of work. There are some significant challenges within some of the FAST teams at the current time in terms of staffing movement which continues to impact on the quality of preparation in some instances. Chairs are using a restorative approach to support colleagues to navigate these issues to minimise impact on children and their families.

- **Develop Practice Champions within the Chairs Service to support continuing professional development and assist with implementation of the various practice stream updates. Valuing Care, Graded Care -Neglect; Child Sexual Abuse (CSA); Family Finding; Restorative Practice; Signs of Safety; Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC).**

This is an ongoing piece of work. Individual chairs are involved in these pieces of work which are used as a platform to enhance practice within the team and the wider social care teams and partners. Practice Champions are expected to share good practice examples, guide and coach staff in these areas and act as a mentor for those less experienced. As an example, the team has 2 IRO's who predominantly deal with UASC children, who are experienced in this area and often coach and support colleagues to enhance practice.

- **Implementing recommendations from the IRO dip Sample Audit in relation to the upholding of children's participation in their care plans and reviews**

This is a piece of ongoing work. There is a service expectation that IRO's fully engage with their children and families prior to review. To further quality assure this, IRO's are now completing peer audits to provide independent overview of practice, and this also remains a live subject in regular case supervision.

- **The development of the Valuing Care Toolkit and how this impacts on the information that is provided to reviews and how care plans are constructed is an ongoing workstream and IRO service needs to be actively engaged in the implementation and review of Valuing Care Toolkit.**

The Valuing Care Toolkit (VCT) continues to develop. This has recently had further developments in its use and the guidance provided for all staff. It has become a frequent addition to the CiC care planning steps and is included in each child’s care review. There is an expectation that IRO’s use this information to consider an individual child’s needs and use it to promote conversations within and outside of reviews to ensure that children’s plans always reflect their needs as these change over time. A Team Manager from the Quality & Standards Service sits on the Valuing Care Governance Board to ensure that the service is always at the heart of any developments and how these impact on the children and young people that the service oversees.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Independent Reviewing Service yearly report 1st April 2022 – 30th September 2022
Appendix B	Child Protection Report 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022

5. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Carolyn Knight Quality and Standards Manager, who can be contacted on 01522 553732 or Carolyn.knight@lincolnshire.gov.uk.