



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

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	12 May 2022
Subject:	Independent Reviewing Service Yearly Report 1st April 2021 – 31st March 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.

Actions Required:

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

1. Background

Due to ongoing Coronavirus and the range of measures imposed by the UK government, the Quality and Standards Service continues to redesign the delivery of child protection conferencing and Children in Care (Formally known as Looked After Children) reviews. During this unprecedented period, the service has continued to hold CP conferences and Children in Care reviews within timescales and ensured the continued participation of children and families who face additional challenges.

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to Quality Assure and Improve Services for Children in Care.

The attached Independent Reviewing Service Yearly report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 sets out an overview of the services provided to Children subjected to Child Protection Plans, Children in Care and those who receive Short Term Breaks.

The report outlines a range of key priorities for the service together with projected priorities for 2022-2023 and includes the ways in which children and young people are encouraged to be involved in their care planning and how the service advocates for children and young people to ensure that their plans are progressive and tailored to meet their individual needs.

Within the report, key data outlines the current Child Protection and Children in Care population and provides fiscal comparisons to assist the reader to understand how this has changed over time and may impact upon future service delivery.

Management oversight, staff development and quality assurance of the service is also outlined within the context of developing a professional, reflective, and learning service that continues to meet the needs of these groups of children.

Legal and Resource information:

Every child who is 'looked after' by Lincolnshire County Council must have a Care Plan. This document details the long-term plan for the child's upbringing, and the arrangements made by Lincolnshire Children's 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 2010.

It is a legal requirement for every child who is looked after 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) specifies that the Independent Reviewing Officer should provide continuity in the oversight of matters relating to a child being looked after, 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

The chairs continue to work at full capacity under the new ways of working. Despite some meetings being held virtually which has impacted positively on decreased travel time between venues, Chairs are under increasing pressure due to the additional admin tasks involved in new ways of working and the large number of re arranged meetings due to changes of placements and delays with the Courts. Additional capacity has been created through the recruitment of two agency members of staff to cover vacancies in the team and we are currently over established by one agency worker to manage the additional pressures in numbers. It should be noted that the Chairs are at the upper limit in terms of children allocated as set out in the IRO Handbook, which provides guidance around case capacity in order to carry out their duties effectively and best meet the needs of children and young people. We are currently reviewing the best way to increase long term capacity in the service.

2. Conclusion

The main service priorities for 2022 - 2023 are outlined below. A full explanation and update on progress for the year 2021 - 2022, together with any ongoing priorities and

newly identified priorities for the year 2022 – 2023 can be accessed in the full report attached to this overview sheet.

Updated Priorities 2022 - 2023

Ongoing Priorities

New and creative technology

The service will be continuing to pursue new ways of working to engage with children, young people, and their parents through the use of technology to facilitate in person, hybrid, and virtual meetings.

Technology in locality conference facilities

Ongoing analysis and development of procedures and IT support required for post covid CP and CiC hybrid meetings. This will include the ongoing work to ensure that all locality conference facilities are fully equipped for hybrid meetings.

Engagement HQ

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

Sexual Harm Pathway

Exploration and assessment of the categories of harm by the Independent Chairs within conference, ensuring that sexual harm is captured effectively. The plan is for the pathway to be finalised and training to commence from September 2022.

Newly Identified Priorities

Develop Practice Champions

The service aims to support the Chairs with their continuing professional development and assist with implementation of the various practice stream updates such as Valuing Care, Graded Care -Neglect; CSA; Family Finding; Restorative Practice; Signs of Safety and UASC. Individual Chairs will be taking the lead in one of these specialist areas.

Continuous Dip Sample auditing

Managers and Chairs will complete dip sample audits on children's files with a focus on children's participation in their care plans and reviews.

Absent Fathers

A Team Manager is currently taking the lead in a Children's Social Care Fathers task and finish group with the purpose being to evaluate procedures, processes, and ways of working to maximise engagement and participation with fathers. Part of this process is involving fathers so that we understand the impact of our intervention with them, and to positively adapt practices accordingly.

Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to consider the full Annual Report on the Independent Chair's Service and endorse the priorities for 2022 – 2023 outlined within the document.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

NA

4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Independent Reviewing Service Yearly Report

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, who can be contacted on 07879603618 or Carolyn.knight@lincolnshire.gov.uk