

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Annual Report May 2008

Work of the Independent Reviewing Officers

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Introduction

1 Legislative Background

1.1 **The Adoption and Children Act 2002 Section 118** amended Section 26 of The Children Act 1989 by introducing a new statutory role of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with the responsibility of reviewing Children in Care (referred to as Looked after Children – LAC – in Southwark) cases. The **Regulations and Guidance** (*Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance : Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) Regulations 2004*) came into effect on September 1st 2004 issued under **Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970**.

1.2 Prior to this it was acceptable for social work Team Managers to chair LAC reviews though many Local Authorities (including Southwark) had started to move to independent chairing, as had happened much earlier with independent chairing of child protection conferences .

1.3 The responsibilities of the IRO are as set out in the Guidance

- To participate in the review of children's cases and chair any meetings that are part of a Review
- Monitor the Local Authorities functions in respect of reviews
- Refer a case to CAFCASS (The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, an independent non departmental body reporting to the Secretary of State for Children , Schools and Families with the role of safeguarding and promoting best interests of children in family court proceedings) where a child's rights have been breached due to actions or inactions of the Local Authority
- Ensure the children's views are given appropriate weight in decision making
- Ensure persons responsible for implementing any decisions of a review are identified and the timescale within which a decision should be completed
- Bring to the attention of persons at an appropriate level of Seniority within the authority any failure to review within timescales or make arrangements for implementation of decisions
- Ensure the child has an appropriate adult to provide assistance to bring proceedings on their behalf on their own account under the Act or assist in obtaining legal advice for this.

1.4 As a minimum the IRO will

- Be independent of line management of a case and the decision making process for allocation of financial resources
- Have sufficient relevant experience to undertake the functions defined.

1.5 **The Children and Young Persons Bill 2007** is currently going through Parliament. The key themes in the Bill for Children Looked After (CLA) are:

- High ambitions
- Good parenting from everyone in the system
- Stability in every aspect of the children's experience
- Centrality of the voice of the child

1.6 The Legislation will aim to achieve this by strengthening the care planning duties of local authorities through

- Introducing one set of regulations and guidance for all requirements for care planning
- New arrangements for scheduling reviews
- Completing the full implementation of the Integrated Children's System (ICS) in every local authority.

1.7 As part of this it will also require Local Authorities to appoint a named IRO for each child enhancing personal accountability and individual responsibilities of each IRO. Named IROs have been allocated to all CLA cases in Southwark since 2004. The Bill will reinforce the role of the IRO by

- New Regulations which prescribe the manner in which the IRO functions are to be performed
- A new power to issue statutory guidance to IROs and their Managers
- A new duty on the local authority to cooperate with the IRO and take all reasonable steps to enable the IRO to perform his/her functions
- Requiring the IRO to ensure the local authority give due consideration to any views expressed by the child
- Requiring the IRO to monitor the local authority performance of functions in relation to the child's case not just in respect of the review
- New Powers to the Secretary of State to make provision for IRO services to be delivered by an independent national body if thought necessary (Clause 12) ; and
- Enabling the IRO to go to CAFCASS at any stage in parallel to escalating an area of concern within the Local Authority

1.8 The reinforcement of the IRO role has arisen out of widespread concern that the IRO role is not as effective as had been hoped for when originally introduced. IROs were thought not to be challenging enough or able to challenge the local authority decision makers sufficiently robustly to make a difference to CLA lives and care planning when appropriate. This is as a result of not one case being escalated to CAFCASS. Nationally IROs have consulted with CAFCASS but have not escalated a case to them, needing to exhaust the internal escalation process before this could happen. The hoped for healthy scrutiny of the local authorities care planning and corporate parenting for CLA had become more of a 'rubber stamping' exercise in many Local Authorities.

1.9 The Guidance states the '*manager for the IRO service should provide an annual report to the Lead Member with executive responsibility for Children's Services and for Corporate Parenting. This report must identify good practice but also highlight issues for further development, including those where urgent action is needed. It will be important for the Local authority to make effective use of reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve optimum outcomes for the children concerned.*' There has been no consensus on what the detailed content of the Annual Report should be. This is the first report completed in Southwark under the Guidance and will therefore address the work and developments from 2004. The Children and Young Persons Bill will provide guidance on the expected content of Annual Reports.

2 Southwark context

2.1 The Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) was set up in Southwark in Feb 2002 with a Manager and 3 Chairs of Child Protection Conferences and 3 Chairs for LAC reviews. In Southwark IROs are called Looked After Children's Co-ordinators (LAC Co-ordinators) to reflect the additional duties they carry which include consultation, liaison, training and auditing. Children and young people, as well as many professionals, however tend to still use the term IRO and this is the more recognised term nationally. It is recommended that Southwark Children's Services considers returning to the term IRO to reduce confusion. The QAU Business Unit Manager reports directly to the Assistant Director for Children's Services (AD) making IROs independent of children's cases operational management structure where allocation of resources rests. Responsibility for both Operational and Quality Assurance services come together with the AD.

2.2 At this time in 2002 only Reviews for children under the age of 5 and initial and second reviews were undertaken by the 3 IROs as there were insufficient resources to provide a full service for the approximate 670 LAC at the time. Since 2002 the team has grown to include a Deputy Manager of QAU for LAC , 5.5 permanent IROs and the equivalent of 3.5 IROs made up by using freelance IRO(11 persons with variable caseloads from 5-60) on a sessional basis. The advantage of using freelance IROs as well as permanent is the flexibility of staffing requirements as LAC numbers increase or decrease, cover for sickness or other absences with known IROs , but most importantly this group of workers is chiefly made up of very experienced ex Senior Social Workers/ Managers and bring a wealth of knowledge and skills. Southwark have built up a substantial stable bank of such workers, several being the most Southwark consistent worker in some LAC's lives.

2.3 The team is now responsible for all reviews including children placed for adoption under Adoption Regulations but excluding children subject to short breaks (respite care). Responsibility for Reviews for these children has rested with the Children's with Disabilities Team due to the workload of IROs. However as there has been a drop in LAC population over the last 2 years to 570, this responsibility is now transferring to the IRO team as of April 2008. Although there has been a drop of approximately 100 LAC, review numbers have not dropped by the same percentage as there continues to be a high level of referrals and new LAC who require first and second reviews before rehabilitation home takes place.

2.4 Given the remit of IRO's, their job was re-evaluated and regraded in 2007 to that of a Team Manager .This reflected the experience and skills the job required especially as an IRO is expected to challenge if necessary Team Managers' decision making. Rates of pay

for sessional workers were also increased to be in line with that received by chairs of child protection conferences.

2.5 The role of the IRO and the authority assigned to it in legislation has required a shift in the culture of operational services throughout Local Authorities to accepting outside scrutiny, and in affording it status. Inevitably when the role was first introduced there was some resistance to change. However IRO's are pleased with the progress Southwark have made to date with shifting culture. This is reflected by the increase in reviews taking place within timescales (96%) and with participation from LAC afforded prominence now achieving (95%). Other examples of a shift in culture include the regrading of IROS in recognition of the authority of their role, a formal escalation format for IROs being introduced and a Care Plan document becoming mandatory.

2.6 IROs' enquiries and issues raised receive a varied response from Teams across the Services. There are many examples of IROs and Teams working very well together in the best interests of the child and the majority of cases raising little difference in professional opinions. Nevertheless there remain some areas of concern among IROs for example review reports and decisions are often not distributed to children and families and professionals or actively used in Supervision for case action planning by social workers and managers. Therefore it is felt that the role and authority of the IRO continues to need prioritising and leadership from Senior Management as has been recognised by central government through the introduction of The Children and Young Persons Bill.

2.7 The Children and Young Persons Bill through Clause 12 has raised discussion as to whether the IRO service needs to be situated outside Local Authorities if to be seen as truly independent. There have been cases in Southwark where the IRO has felt compromised in their role by being a Local Authority employee as their professional views were opposing to Southwarks and seen to be undermining the Local Authority (LA) care planning. Areas of conflict have been rare and can now be addressed by the escalation process. It is the view of the Team that the IRO service can be more effective and influential from within the Local Authority structure enhancing the role of the LA as Corporate Parent. The change in structure of Children's Services with most LAC coming under one Business Unit has made considerable improvement in the working relationship and status of IROs with operational teams and with the Children and Young Persons Bill this can only continue to develop.

2.8 There is debate but no consensus within the Team however as to whether the IRO service would be more effective if their accountability and management is placed within the Chief Executive's Office rather than remain part of the Children's Service Structure. This is also a debate London wide and across the country.

2.9 The change in structure of Children's Services in Southwark has necessitated a change in physical placement and accommodation of Teams with a proposal for the LAC Service moving to one building (possibly Spa Road) in 2009. As part of this plan it is Senior Managements recommendation that the IRO Service and the Children's Rights and Participation Service should also be physically based in the same building. The benefits of this are obvious – potential for closer working together by being able to communicate personally on a day to day basis, perhaps having a more direct input to LAC meetings and training etc influencing policy and procedures and understanding of the role.

2.10 Nonetheless the overwhelming majority in the Team are concerned that this co-location will detract from the independence of the IRO and Children's Rights and Participation Role by this very deepening of relationships with teams through frequent contact. This could make challenging workers more difficult because of familiarity. It may be argued that as experienced professionals IROs should be able to maintain their independence wherever located. However perhaps more importantly IROs are concerned that the perception to LAC and families of their true independence may be questioned if we all are seen to go in through the same doors to work, regularly mixing and working together. Some anecdotal feedback through Speaker Box (Southwark Looked After Children and Young Peoples representative group) has been that they do not want to have IROs and Children's Rights and Participation permanently placed with the LAC service. They need to know they can approach this service without literally 'bumping into' the very teams they may wish to discuss or feeling that their issues are being shared 'in the kitchen' and both these roles could lose credibility as being independent. The issue of physical locality is also an ongoing debate London and nationwide.

2.11 With the introduction of Modern Ways of Working there is also a move to more homeworking for IROs with 2 permanent workers now established as home workers , other permanent workers about to start remote homeworking and sessional workers all being home based. The time therefore actually spent office based will be greatly reduced and the issue of co-location may become less of a concern.

2.12 It is recommended that more considered exploration of the best location – physical and managerially - for the QAU LAC Team is undertaken by Senior Management in consultation with the IROs, Children's Rights & Participation Worker and Speakerbox. The IRO would also like to request formal annual meetings with the Corporate Parenting Committee / Lead Member and Assistant Director given that they frequently are referred to as 'the eyes and ears' for the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Role .

3 **Composition of the IRO service** as at April 2008 is

		IRO's	full time equivalent
3.1 Gender	Female	14	7.8
	Male	3	1.2
Ethnicity	White British	15	6
	Caribbean	1	1
	Dual Heritage	1	1
	Irish	1	1
	Disability	1	1

3.2 The gender and ethnicity imbalance in the IRO service is of concern and requires a strategy to address in future recruitment.

3.3 The majority of IROs have previously been Managers in Social Services or the voluntary and private sector from Practice Manager through to Senior Managers. The team has been a

very stable team for the last 4 years with few changes to either permanent or sessional workers. Thus retention of IROs has been good and most importantly LAC have had a continuity of IRO, often being the only worker that has remained with the child through changes of teams and social workers, carrying valuable information and history for the child and care planning. Unfortunately this year 2008 there will be some upheaval with a number of workers planning to leave.

3.5 IRO's workloads have varied considerably throughout the country and London with a very few Local Authorities having caseloads of over 100. Reviews in these Local Authorities however have been noted to be more a 'tick boxing' exercise with little time to ensure the voice of the child is truly heard or a healthy scrutiny of care planning and the rights of the child followed through. Caseloads of this size do not allow for detailed reports or follow through of review decisions between reviews. In recognition of this The Children and Young Persons Bill will be introducing guidance on caseloads expected to be in the range of 60 -80 per fulltime IRO in London. In Southwark we presently work to an average caseload of 70. The IRO role is also expanding from being responsible for monitoring through reviews to monitoring case planning which will increase time required for each case. It is therefore likely that the IRO staffing requirements will have to be maintained in the near future even if numbers of LAC continue to decrease.

3.7 The Southwark JAR inspection April 2008 commented on good participation of Children at their reviews and 'reviews being robust and challenging'.

Progress for Period 2005-2008

4 Reviews

4.1 A review is held at one month (28 days) after a child or young person has become looked after, then 3 months and every 6 months minimum thereafter. Children and young people, their parents and their carers along with social workers are invited to reviews. Venues are usually their placement if appropriate. Information from other involved agencies is obtained via additional meetings or reports e.g. a LAC will have an annual health assessment and six monthly Personal Education Planning meetings and the reports are available for review; other agencies such as Children's and Adolescents Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Youth Offending Team (YOT) may be involved, feeding their views in through reports, discussions with IROs or sometimes attending. The number of adults at meeting with the LAC is kept to a minimum to enable a more child friendly and less intimidating environment. Reviews are normally one meeting but can take the form of a series of meetings if this is required.

4.2 The agenda for a review covers Permanency Planning, placement issues, health, emotional and behavioural issues, education, leisure, contact, identity, independent living preparation and legal issues. A summary of discussion is written up afterwards with a Decision Sheet detailing actions /tasks necessary to fulfil the Care Plan. This is signed off by the Team Manager following any negotiations with the IRO if differences of opinion exist. The final report is then distributed to the LAC, parents, carers and any others identified. This process should take 14 days post review date.

4.3 The Corporate Parenting Committee will be aware of the numerous initiatives, old and new, with many introduced since the formation of the LAC Business Unit and with Corporate

Parenting Committee input, to support and improve the lives and planning for LAC e.g. Carelink, Personal Education Tutors, free Southwark Leisure cards, Group work with 16+, various Health support services, intensive & early adoption monitoring . Southwark also has relative to many other inner London Boroughs a stable staff group and management group with low use of agency workers. Together these are improving outcomes for LAC as reflected in such data as education attainment , numbers of completed health assessments, adoptions etc. These are commended and have put Southwark LA in the forefront of services for Looked after children in London, achieving excellence in many areas inspected by the recent JAR. Information on these initiatives and data is available from the CLA Business Unit and will not be repeated here.

5 Performance Indicators

5.1 Performance Indicators (PI's) which are directly under the responsibility of the IRO service are those for Participation of children and young people in their reviews and the timeliness of reviews.

5.2 Participation at reviews was 95% for the period 2007-2008, an increase from 76% in 2003-2004 when first recorded. IROs offer to see all young people over age 4 separately where appropriate before the start of a review. They will visit a young person or phone at a different time if they are not able or do not want to attend their review. Views are also obtained via consultation forms or through an advocate of the YP choice. The formal government consultation forms have been replaced by the Team by more child friendly forms and further work with Speakerbox is planned to update these. For very young people or some children with disabilities observation of behaviour and emotions and feedback from carers are used to help inform reviews of the views of the child .The Participation at Review Protocol describes the variety of methods used to engage young people and facilitate their participation.

5.3 Participation and consultation with parents and families has also improved but has not been recorded. Further work and monitoring is required in this area and a protocol for Participation of Parents at Reviews is required.

5.4 Timeliness of reviews as per statutory requirements has improved significantly from 88% in 2005-2006 to 96% for 2007-2008. Again there is a Postponement of Reviews protocol which makes operational managers and IRO consent for postponement of reviews essential and provides for an executive review (social worker and IRO only) in exceptional circumstances to keep within timescales followed by a full review in 4 weeks. Executives were 10% of all reviews in 2006-2007 but have reduced to 2% in 2007-2008. The Children and Young Persons Bill will introduce more flexible arrangements for scheduling reviews enabling IROs to postpone the timing for reviews as per each case's need rather than adhering to such strict timescales.

5.5 There is not a Performance Indicator for distribution of reviews. However statutory guidance states good practice is to get review decisions out to children and others within 14 days after review. IROs targets are to complete their reports and recommendations within 7 days to send to Team Managers to ratify decisions and distribute by the 14 day limit. IROs are achieving this 7 day target in approx 50% of reviews and a further 20% within 20 days.

This target is an area for improvement in 2008-2009. However of more concern is the distribution of signed off reviews by Team Managers. This is low with approx 50% of reviews in the last 6 months of 2007-2008 not signed off or distributed according to Carefirst. Teams state some reviews are distributed without being signed though feedback from subsequent reviews is that participants often have not received review reports by next review date. IROs have started to monitor at each review if children and participants have received copies of the last review. A system in LAC Teams is also being established to monitor distribution. If this continues to be a problem area reconsideration of the need for Team Managers to sign off reviews prior to distribution may be necessary and /or a review of admin.

5.6 Administrative support for invitations to child care reviews and distribution of review reports is placed within the operational services and not with the QAU service as happens for child protection conferences. A review of these arrangements is recommended.

6 IT & Integrated Children's System ICS

6.1 Review reports are now (since 2005) a standardised format as previously each IRO had their own format and style. This format has been translated into an ICS document (May 2007) and those IRO's with access to ICS (permanent staff) complete their reports on CareAssess. This, as for all other workers, has caused additional work and time to complete reports reducing the capacity of IROs (and other workers) to maintain timescales and recording responsibilities. Sessional IROs will have remote access to the ICS in 2008-2009. At present they complete a word document format of review report which is uploaded into Care store. Provision of IT equipment e.g. laptops and Blackberries for IROs who are continually on the road to enable effective use of their time and reduce time taken to write up reports is recommended.

6.2 ICS does have the potential to provide greater access and sharing of information for professionals and where this has been available and up to date IROs have found the system very useful. The system has however introduced a new set of forms and formats necessary for IT compatibility but as a consequence these are very child unfriendly. The challenge is to either find an ICS format that is child friendly or for separate formats to be completed for children and young persons.

7 Decision Making

7.1 IROs have through individual cases and in meetings with Management raised the legal requirement to consult and plan with LAC any change in placement or Care Plan prior to decision making. This is as a result of the review being the only forum under law in which a Child Care Plan can be changed outside of the courtroom.

7.2 Regulation 8a of the Review of Children's Regulations 2004 makes it mandatory to notify the IRO of failure to implement decisions and a duty to inform the IRO of any significant change of circumstances affecting care plans and decisions that occur between reviews. The Children and Young Person's Bill will reinforce these requirements making any

significant changes to a child's care plan only permissible at a properly constituted statutory review.

7.3 Definitions of significant changes have now been detailed in Southwark and accepted by operational services though compliance of keeping IROs informed is variable. The IROs do not feel the Operational Service fully recognise this critical requirement in the regulations and that consequently the Local Authority can be put at risk of breaching the human rights of children and families by denying them a right to a hearing.

7.4 Some children have successfully used advocates from Voice to achieve a halt or postponement of changes to review decisions such as move from placement by the Local Authority, as not to do so may have resulted in a lengthy and expensive Judicial Review of the case.

7.5 There is a need for Management to ensure review decisions are implemented through monitoring in Supervision and any significant changes to review decisions are brought to the attention of IROs and LAC. Review decision sheets should also be completed with the outcome to tasks detailed, signed by Management. This ensures Management are accountable for their staff undertaking the work or explaining why this has not happened where applicable. Otherwise social workers are frequently left in reviews having to explain to LAC and others why they were unable to carry out decisions when the responsibility often lies elsewhere. Social workers can feel undermined and scapegoated by this. This could also be assisted by minutes of Placement panels, Legal Planning meetings, Guardians reports, Court directions, final Care Plans and Legal judgements being available to IROs if not immediately placed on Carestore.

7.6 An escalation policy for Children's Services is in place and the IRO service have recently introduced an IRO escalation format to use in those situations where significant concerns or repeated failure to carry out decisions and statutory requirements. It is hoped that this procedure will improve compliance with carrying out Review decisions within timescales, highlighting any areas of concern to Management. This process will be monitored and information collated fed back to Management.

8 Advocacy

8.1 IRO's actively promote the availability of independent advocacy for LAC or care leavers in any issue to do with their care. Independent advocacy in Southwark is provided by Voice commissioned through the QAU service and annual reports and reviews are available. This has been a very successful service and continues to need promotion. Advocacy for Children with Disabilities where 'best interest' advocacy rather than 'instructed advocacy' is required is an area for development and the QAU Manager in conjunction with Voice and commissioning has started this process. Also quality assurance of Voice's work and feedback from their users and professionals will be expanded this year.

9 Independent Visitors

9.1 IROS also actively promote the use of Independent Visitors provided through CSV (Community Service Volunteers) at reviews for LAC. Again this is a very successful service provided by the Local Authority, managed by the Adoption and Fostering service. Annual reports and review minutes are available.

10 Adoption and Permanency

10.1 IROS welcome the new monitoring processes for Adoption planning which have improved the numbers and timescales of successful adoptions and Special Guardianship Orders SGOs. The CLA Service and IRO service have initiated working together to define permanency planning options as part of a clear and transparent policy and procedure for permanency for all children. This will be continued in 2008 in line with the forthcoming new Regulations and accompanying statutory guidance for Care Planning in The Children and Young Person's Bill and the Public Law Outline.

10.2 It is essential for each case that a Care Plan exists on record which can be shared with LAC and families and reviewed by IROs at each review. This could help LAC and families understand why care has been necessary and how care will be provided as well as being a legal document which must be adhered to. Southwark practice for a long time has been to use the social work report and review report to fulfil the requirements of a Care Plan when Court Care Plans did not exist, preferring this to completing the DCFS formats or devising a Southwark version of this. Thus very few reviews if cases not in court have actually a separate Care Plan document available or the Court Care Plan document is rarely updated following conclusion of proceedings. This is now being revised and LAC standards are working on a Care Plan document which will meet statutory requirements, be compatible with ICS and user friendly for staff and LAC and families.

11 Fostering

11.1 Southwark has a very good in house fostering service which provides a high standard of care for many LAC. Details of the service will not be repeated here and can be found in the many inspection reports carried out over recent years.

11.2 However there has previously been discussion between Fostering Service and the QAU service about undertaking the Foster Carers Review process to provide a degree of independence to the annual review of foster carers. There is feedback from operational services and IROs and supervising social workers for foster carers that in cases where concerns re care in foster placements are raised, it can be difficult to get an objective overview where both the rights and needs of the child and the foster carer are fairly addressed. The transfer of this responsibility to the IRO service would involve some reallocation of budgets and this detail was not previously resolved. It is recommended that Senior Management consider placing the review of foster carers within the QAU service supported by the necessary reallocation of budgets to provide a degree of independent scrutiny of foster care provision.

12 Transitions

12.1 Transitions to adulthood and independent living must be clearly planned and detailed in Pathway Plans. This has been an ongoing area of development in the Adolescent and Aftercare service with training for social workers being led by A&A managers and an IRO. The coming year will see the introduction of another ICS Pathway Plan exemplar, integrating the Care Plan and Pathway Plan, and further training will be required to consolidate this area of planning. The Adolescent and Aftercare service provide a very good group work support to 16+LAC to assist with independent living skills e.g. cooking, budget skills.

12.2 A new Transition policy for children with special needs at age 18 has recently been introduced and is very welcome. There have been several cases of LAC reaching age 18 without the abilities to live independently who did not meet Adult Services criteria for a service and were being left in very vulnerable situations. Having a recognised procedure to negotiate support needed with adult services should improve this.

12.2 Transitions of LAC from Assessment & Safeguarding Service to the LAC Services and from Team to Team within services or social worker to social worker e.g. following a social worker leaving remains an area of concern. The crucial period of the first 6 weeks to 6 months of care when research shows that the possibility and success of rehabilitation home is greatest is often a lost opportunity for the necessary work due to pressures of workloads within services we are informed. This can result in a delay in the care planning and may even result in work such as the Core Assessment needing to be redone or in tasks not being undertaken. Review dates and other important dates can be missed in transitions and more importantly history and knowledge of the child can be lost.

12.3 LAC frequently recite this as a cause of stress not regularly experienced by children outside the care system, by repeatedly being asked to retell their life story to new workers, make new attachments with an expectation to trust yet another person to listen to them and carry out 'promises' i.e. decisions made.

12.4 LAC Standards Group is a forum where the impact of transitions can be discussed with a view to improving the system and reducing the impact and confusion this can cause.

13 Stability

13.1 Stability for LAC is probably the most essential factor in achieving the five Every Child Matters outcomes. These are Be Healthy; Stay safe; Enjoy and achieve; Make a positive contribution; and Achieve economic wellbeing. Stability includes stability of relationships - carers, family, friends, social workers (see transitions above), teachers, counsellors; stability of placements; stability of schools and educational input; stability in health provision; stability in community and identity links.

13.2 It is monitored by a Performance Indicator which tracks the number of placement changes in a year. A placement change should not take place without careful assessment and planning and consultation with the LAC. This requires the involvement of the IRO either through the review process or when occurring outside of this through consultation with them. The Children and Young Persons Bill will make it a statutory requirement to hold a review before any planned change in placement.

13.3 Changes in placement when not due to a planned move as a part of the Care Plan e.g. move from foster carer to Adoption, are as a result of breakdowns often due to behaviour issues of LAC or their family contacts, less frequently due to carers personal circumstances. Disruption meetings where the factors contributing to breakdown are analysed in an effort to minimise future placement breakdowns for that LAC or that carer, can be a useful forum to learn lessons. Disruption meetings have not taken place in Southwark for a number of years. Consideration to the reintroduction of such meetings in a systematic and focused way that would produce valuable information for future placement matching and planning is recommended.

13.4 Placement breakdowns also includes unsuccessful rehabilitation home plans following which the LAC will be returned to care , usually a different placement. LAC Standards Group have already started a process to look at those cases where rehabilitation home has not worked to understand the reasons for this and improve outcomes for future rehabilitations. This workgroup could also include the remit of devising procedures for disruption meetings.

14 Independent Legal Support & Training for IROs

14.1 IROs are expected to have access to independent legal support and this needs to be independent of the Local Authorities Legal Service. IROs have on occasions wished to consult legal support but have had to rely on either in house service or voluntary organisations. Exploration of commissioning an independent legal service has started and it is hoped legal support will be in place if required in 2008-2009. This also is a recommendation of the C&YP Bill to be fulfilled.

14.2 IROs have accessed different generic training courses which will assist their role. However there is very little targeted training specific for the IRO role available and this is an area of need identified through the consultation process nationally for the Children's and Young Persons Bill. London wide IRO services have initiated their own training schedules through a number of conferences. Southwark IROs have participated in these.

15 Learning Lessons – Quality assuring the IROs

15.1 IROs quality assure operational services work with LAC. But who quality assures the IROs? Audits of reports and collation of data re performance indicators has provided a degree of scrutiny of IRO work. This needs developing further to gain the views of LAC, parents, carers and social workers on the value of reviews and to determine the impact of the IRO service on outcomes for LAC.

15.2 Feedback systems for review participants will be developed along with observation of reviews and audits of reports. Feedback forms have already been used for young people since Dec 07 but take up is not sufficient as yet to provide detailed information.

15.3 To complement the ongoing auditing and quality assuring it is recommended that a more detailed review process to learn lessons from cases of LAC where outcomes have been negative is introduced. This would assist in improving the outcomes for Southwark looked after children and young persons. Criteria for selecting cases, identifying independent persons to undertake work and provide the remit for the review is required. It is recommended that CLA standards group considers implementing this process for learning.

Specific Groups of LAC

16 YOT

16.1 Working in partnership with the Youth Offending Services has seen an improvement since the YOT came into Children's Services structure. Many LAC cases will have YOT involvement especially where a young person has been remanded into Local Authority care or where an already looked after young person receives a custodial sentence. A joint protocol for working together has been developed in 07-08 and with time implementation of this will further improve working relationships between YOT and social workers, clarifying

roles. Southwark Adolescent and Aftercare Service already have a commendable practice of continuing to work with young people in custody even if their voluntary looked after status has stopped due to sentencing. As part of this a review will be held prior to their release to ensure planning for their return to the community has taken place. Identified staff from YOT and IRO's responsible for liaison for LAC on remands/ in custody have left and reallocation of this work is necessary to maintain the progress already made.

16.2 An increase in the number of remands and remands for serious crimes that may involve guns, knives, gang violence and young people seeking accommodation for protection from gangs poses challenges for the Looked After Services in terms of planning for the safety of LAC and staff and carers. These may require placements out of Borough away from 'gang' areas. This has mostly been achieved on a case by case basis but it is recommended that a more strategic approach to care planning for these young people is required.

17 Children with Disabilities (CWD)

17.1 Three IROs with expertise in working with children with disabilities (2 former managers in CWD teams, 1 former NSPCC Manager) chair most of the CWD LAC reviews. They also liaise with the CWD team and are involved in training with the CWD and IRO teams. They will be overseeing the transfer from April 2008 of all reviews for children in receipt of short breaks to the IRO service and will re-evaluate the process for conducting these reviews. Best interest advocacy and participation of CWD is an area for further development in 2008 as stated above.

18 Unaccompanied Minors UAM

18.1 In 2004 it became clear to all IRO's through reviews of UAM's that they were not receiving the same service as LAC who had British immigration status. They received lower allowances and were expected to leave foster care on their 16th birthday moving into hostels/semi independent accommodation. The IRO's made representation to the AD and challenged the legality of this. As a consequence UAM's now have the same rights to continue in their foster placement post 16 and for UAM LAC in semi independence they have improved though not equitable allowances as other LAC. It is recommended that the Senior Management review the allowances of UAM in semi independence and decide whether Southwark will provide a fully equitable service for all looked after children regardless of immigration status or continue with the two tier service.

19 Equalities and Diversity

19.1 The need to address the individual LAC's issues of identity (race, religion, culture, special needs, and sexual identity) is a priority at Reviews. For example; this may include ensuring that interpreters are accessible, same race placements are made, appropriate food and diet is provided and practice of faith is continued, discrimination or bullying at school is addressed, and special needs services are available.

19.2 The demographics of the LAC population in Southwark is detailed and analysis is provided within the Children's Services Divisions Equalities Impact reports and will not be repeated here. However it must be stated that there is always need for further analysis and the scope of this work is, due to carrying out core business to expected standards, often too vast for Services to undertake comprehensively or keep up with as demographics change.

The ICS system has and continues to enable this analysis to take place more easily and will contribute greatly to future understanding of the different needs of the diverse LAC population.

19.3 To date areas where there has been consistent anecdotal feedback from across the services with some data evidence to indicate need include

- Large Numbers of initial referrals from Black African communities
- Significant numbers of LAC from mixed heritage where dual identity needs may bring more complex care and emotional requirements to be addressed
- Increasing number of LAC with special needs on the Autistic Spectrum (including dyspraxia, ADHD Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder, Aspergers, Autism). They can present particularly challenging needs for their care requiring high resources and many will continue to need post care support. However most do not meet CWD or Adult Services criteria for a service.
- Young LAC parents – support and training in parenting , support through Care Proceedings for baby/CP procedures where these become necessary

19.4 These areas have/are being raised by and within Services and Management groups. They would benefit from more research to evidence any targeted input required. The IRO service will participate in any strategic research and planning for these groups e.g. the teenage pregnancy screening already in place.

19.5 Equal Opportunities issues for IRO recruitment, the UAM group and Children with Disabilities have been addressed above.

20 Finances

20.1 The IRO service has been delivered consistently within budget. The statutory duties of the IRO are about to be expanded and the extra time and resources this may require will need to be assessed after details of the CYP Bill are known.

20.2 IROs are mostly 'on the road' to complete their core business of Reviews frequently at children's placements. Provision of IT tools such as Blackberries and laptops would enable a more efficient service, helping to reach this year's target of getting reviews and Care Plans to LAC and parents within timescales and improving communication with IROs especially for arrangements of reviews. If these are provided consideration should also be given to providing them on a loan basis to the 2-3 freelance IROs who carry a significant caseload. The pilot project for use of IT 'Signify Tokens' to enable all workers to access Southwark IT systems from home computers via the internet may, if successful, reduce the need for laptops .

Recommendations for future/ IRO Service Business Plan

Service Management

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
1 Prepare an Annual Report for the Executive Member and Corporate Parenting Committee annually	QAU Service Manager in collaboration with IROs	April annually	An improved transparency and independence of information flow about children and young people looked after in Southwark to Corporate Parenting Board
2 Agree the content of future Annual Reports	Lead Member/ IRO Service Manager/ as defined in CYP Bill	Jan 2009	
3 Consideration is given to IRO service meeting with Corporate Parenting Committee/AD on a formal basis annually.	Lead Member / AD Specialist Children's Services & Safeguarding (SCS&S)/QAU	Annual meetings	As above ,
4 Review of location of the IRO service, both physically and managerially within Southwark and the renaming of LAC Co-ordinators to IROs.	Corporate Parenting Committee / AD SCS&S /QAU	Jan 2009	Maintaining and improving independence of the IRO service , reducing confusion of roles for LAC
5 Undertake audits and quality assuring of IRO Service (including feedback from sws , foster carers , other professionals as well as LAC and parents) .	QAU/ Independent source	Annually/ongoing	To assess the effectiveness of the IRO service
6 Consider undertaking minimum 2 case reviews annually for LAC cases with poor outcomes/ drift in planning/breaches in child's rights to 'learn lessons'. Agree process for this.	LAC Standards/QAU	Jan 09	To identify strengths and weaknesses of care experiences of LAC and inform future provision

7 Devise recruitment strategy which allows for maximum opportunity to employ IROs reflective of diverse needs of LAC population	HR /QAU	2008 recruitment	To ensure IRO workforce reflects the LAC population bringing life experiences as well as knowledge and skills to the role
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Be Healthy

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
8 Monitor and promote health needs of LAC through reviews , referring to health initiatives& services as necessary and upwardly reporting where concerns exist and auditing outcomes	IROS	As required	Improved health for LAC
9 Participating in Health audits and Health planning groups	IROs IRO Manager	2x annually 3x annually	To assist in health planning for LAC

Stay Safe

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
10 Transfer the responsibility for independent reviewing of Children with disabilities receiving respite care from the CWD Team to the IRO service	IRO Manager/ CWD Manager	Complete transfer by Sept 08	Improved quality assurance of respite care
11 Collate & Analyse data for repeated Care episodes for children and families , ensuring rehabilitation plans are safe and adequately supported , devising practice guidance for rehabilitation	LAC Standards Group	By Jan 09	Improvement in successful rehabilitation to family reducing need for further care
12 Consider reintroduction of 'disruption meetings' to minimise placement breakdowns and provide data for future planning and devise protocol if agreed	LAC Standards	Jan 09	Improve stability of placements for LAC

13 Permanence Planning definitions and Care Plan format to be agreed. System to monitor compliance with completion and distribution of Care Plans agreed	LAC Standards/QAU/LAC Management	Sept 08	Improve timescales for achieving permanency for LAC , transparency of Care Plans for LAC and parents
14 Independent legal advice resource identified for IROS	QAU	Sept 08	To ensure Southwark as Corporate Parent fulfils role within legal boundaries
15 Complete strategic Review of safeguarding of LAC remanded into Southwark care or custody or LAC involved with serious crime and ensuring care planning for their return to the community is jointly undertaken.	QAU/YOT/LAC Service	March 09	Ensure improved care planning for young people returning to the community. To reduce crime and improve outcomes for LAC rehabilitation
16 Consideration given to transferring the responsibility for Reviewing foster carers from the Adoption & Foster Care Service to the QA Service with the necessary budgetary adjustments	AD/LAC & QAU Management	Decision by Oct 08, transfer by Jan 09 if agreed	To bring independent scrutiny to the care provided by in house foster carers

Enjoy and Achieve

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
17 Monitor and promote leisure activities in reviews	IROS	Ongoing	Improved resilience and self esteem for LAC , promotion of positive activities with reduction in negative activities such as crime / drugs
18 Promote the identity of LAC through monitoring of life story work, contact , diversity needs	IROS	Ongoing	Improved resilience and self esteem , emotional health, maintaining links to

			families and communities
19 Monitor and promote the educational needs of LAC through reviews , referring to services as required and escalating areas of concern & audit outcomes	IROs	Ongoing	Improve the educational outcomes for LAC
20 Participating in Education Audits and Education Planning Groups	IROs IRO Manager	2x annually 3x annually	To assist in educational planning for LAC

Make a Positive Contribution

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
21 Review of admin support structure for distribution of LAC Review reports	CLA /QAU Business Managers	Jan 09	Improvement in arrangements for reviews and distribution of reports to improve participation
22 Review need for 'best interests' advocacy for CWD/ special needs LAC , improve participation of CWD and commission resource provision	QAU Manager /Children's Rights worker / CWD Team /Commissioning	Sept 08	To improve the participation of children with disabilities in decision making for their lives
23 Monitor distribution of Review reports , improving rate to 75% distributed within 20 days , 50% within 14 days	QAU/LAC service	By March 09	Increase LAC participation in reviews, improve the effectiveness ,transparency and timeliness of Care planning
24 Promote the use of Review Decision Sheets by Practice Managers in supervision of social workers. Completed Decision sheets to be signed off by Practice Managers and distributed with social work review reports. This process to be owned and enforced	Senior Management	Ongoing Quarterly	To make LAC participation active and Children's Services accountable for decisions made , keeping LAC & Parents informed of outcomes

by Senior Management. 25 Collation and feedback of data on this to teams to take place	IROs		
26 Explore different ways of engaging 'hard to reach' LAC. 27 LAC did not contribute to a review in 2007-2008. Undertake themed audit of LAC who do not participate at all in reviews. New consultation forms for 16+ to be devised with Speakerbox	IROs/ Speakerbox	Dec 08	Improve LAC in the decision making for their lives
27 Monitor participation of parents in Reviews , complete a Participation at Reviews Protocol	IROs	Ongoing Dec 08	Improve information re parents involvement and devise strategy to improve their participation/ working in partnership
28 Devise strategy for obtaining feedback from reviews from LAC , parents , carers and social workers and implement	IROs/ Speakerbox	March 09	To improve effectiveness of reviews and assure quality
29 Further explore introducing LAC friendly report formats and language	IROs /Speakerbox	Nov 08	To improve LAC understanding of their Care Plans and thereby increase their involvement in decision making . Similarly for parents.

Achieve economic well being

Action/Task	By Whom	By When	Expected outcome
30 Review the allowances for UAM	LAC Management	Nov 08	To remove inequitable care and resources from sections of LAC population
31 Monitor the preparation for independent living and transition arrangements for Care Leavers	IROS / LAC Service	Ongoing	To improve life chances post care

through Pathway Planning and in line with new Transition Protocol, referring to services as necessary and escalating concerns. New Pathway Plans/Care Plans to be adopted when introduced and training provided			
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Equalities & Diversity

Action/Task	By whom	By When	Expected Outcome
See no's 10,22,&30 above			
32 Devise recruitment strategy which allows for maximum opportunity to employ IRO's reflective of diverse needs of LAC population	HR /QAU	2008 recruitment	To ensure IRO workforce reflects the LAC population bringing life experiences as well as knowledge and skills to the role
33 Consideration given to more strategic research & Planning for the following groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial Referrals from Black African communities • LAC from mixed heritage backgrounds • LAC with special needs on the autistic spectrum • LAC who are parents 	LAC standards Group	Jan 09	To understand the additional care needs for these groups of LAC and assist planning appropriate provision
34 Review the Equalities Impact Assessment for the IRO service	QAU Manager with Team	Dec 08	To ensure issues of equality and diversity are considered and addressed in all areas of planning and to monitor outcomes

Appendices

References

Legislation & Guidance

Children & Young Persons Bill 2007

Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance, Adoption & Children's Act 2002

Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2004

Review of Children's Cases Regulations 2004

Children (Short term Placements) Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1995

Southwark Policies and Procedures

Southwark Handbook

LAC Business Unit Reports & Plans

Participation at Reviews Protocol

Postponement of Reviews Protocol

Escalation Policy and Format

YOT Protocol

Transitions Protocol

Permanency Definitions

Significant Events definitions

Southwark Management Information & PAF & Statistics report 2008

Statistics

Brief summary of LAC Statistics from 2004 -2008

Looked After Children (LAC)	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	
No of LAC in Southwark Care	669	661	641	623	576	
No of Unaccompanied minors	86	72	71	86	59	
No of LAC in Children with Disabilities Team					24	
% of LAC who are white		34.9%	37.9%	36.9%	34.7%	
% of LAC who are of mixed ethnic origin		18.6%	16.1%	15.1%	15.8%	
% of LAC who are Asian or Asian British		3.4%	3.7%	3.5%	5.7%	
% of LAC who are black or black British		38.2%	38.1%	39.2%	39.4%	
% LAC who communicated their views to a review	76.3%	89.9%	80.1%	90.8%	94.7%	
% of reviews within timescales	N/a	N/a	88.7%	94.3%	95.7%	
% of LAC in foster placements	72	72.8	72.2	67.3	75	
% of LAC in residential placement	12.5	12.3	14.7	15.1	15.0	
%of LAC fostered by family/friends	9	8.3	7.6	6.7	7.2	
% of LAC living with parents						
% of LAC adopted	N/a	5.8	4.7	6.8	10.1	
% of LAC placements out of borough	50.8	53.1	51.5	48.8	52.4	
% of LAC with 3 or more placements	11.4	10.7	10.8	12.7	12.7	
% of LAC leaving care at 16+ with at least 1 GCSE/equivalent	42.7	47.6	44.3	47.3	57.1	

Looked After Children					2007-2008	
No of male LAC					313	
No of female LAC					263	
No of LAC under age 1					29	
No of LAC age 1-4 years					65	
No of LAC age 5-9					82	
No of LAC age 10-15					226	
No of LAC age 16-18					174	
No of LAC in voluntary care Section 20					188	
No of LAC with Legal Order					368	
No of LAC with Placement Order (for adoption /special guardianship)					13	
No of LAC remanded into LA Care					14	

Roisin MC Manus

Acting Manager QAU LAC May 2008

The QAU LAC Team as detailed below have participated in the preparation of this report and approve the contents.

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