

Item No. 11.	Classification: Open	Date: 1 March 2017	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Escalations Breakdown - Update	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director, Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That this report be noted by the corporate parenting committee.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. In November 2016 the corporate parenting committee considered the independent reviewing officer (IRO) annual report. It noted the escalations described in the report and asked for a separate report setting out more detail about the children escalated by IRO's in 2015-16 including setting out how and why the cases were escalated particularly around 'drift' or delay in care planning.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

2015-16 representations / escalations

3. During 2015-16 there were 184 recorded representations and escalations to managers from IRO's concerning 178 children. The majority of the escalations were followed up within 24 hours and resolved quickly but in 9 cases the matter had to be escalated to a head of service or an assistant director to resolve.
4. The main themes of the representations made were as follows (note that some escalations were about more than one issue):

Escalations	Number	%
<p>Care plans/pathway plans not completed on the system in good time</p> <p>A new data system, Mosaic, was introduced in July 2015. A feature of this system is that reporting is ordered into work flows which follow good practice guidance. This means that a LAC review cannot be written up until a Care Plan or Pathway Plan is completed. Also a Care Plan cannot be drawn up until previous documents have been completed and signed off. This has caused severe delay to IRO's and 54% of all escalations and representations during the year (99) have been linked to this problem.</p> <p>There was intensive work over the Summer 2016 to resolve the issues that have impacted upon LAC reviews and new, more user friendly, Mosaic forms came on line in Autumn 2016. Extra training is also being provided to social workers in all areas.</p>	99	54%

Escalations	Number	%
Drift in care planning (details in sections below)	18	9.5%
Concerns re young person's safety Missing episodes 6 CSE/sexually harmful behaviour 5 Criminality/gang links 6 (NB sometimes more than one feature per child)	15	9%
Infrequent social work visits (often linked to recent transfer of case or sickness)	9	5%
Issues around contact with family members Most of these representations were about the need to plan sibling or parent contact. One was concern at the high level of parental contact for a baby	9	5%
No allocated worker/sickness Impact of social work sickness 3 SW has left and case to be reallocated 5	8	4.5%
Health issues Included – emotional health and well-being (3) learning difficulties, management of complex health conditions such as epilepsy and diabetes. In one case a full paediatric assessment was requested.	7	4%
Concerns about the placement These included variously: concern about the physical environment of the placement; carer unable to manage child's behaviour; child needs to move to a more stable or resilient placement	7	4%
Review decisions outstanding In the LAC review – it was noted that previous decisions were outstanding or delayed.	4	2.5%
Staying put arrangements These were reminders to the social workers concerned about staying put arrangements for young people approaching 18 that needed to be confirmed or finalised.	3	2%

Escalations	Number	%
Life story work	1	0.5%
Request for social worker to carry out life story work for a child in care.		

Comments and issues in relation to the escalations

5. IRO's have a key role in scrutinising and improving care planning and challenging drift and delay. Out of 184 representations and escalations to managers in 2015-16, 18 (10%) were directly related to IRO concern about drift or delay in care planning.
6. The 18 children escalated for drift in care planning included two large families accounting for 12 children – all the children in these two families were subject of care proceedings. All 12 children are now in permanent placements.
7. The IRO escalations were all responded to extremely quickly and positively by the operational managers (within 2 days in all cases)
8. There are many different reasons for drift and delay in care planning. In the cases looked at these included:
 - Assessments of different parents and extended family members separately
 - Parent having inadequate housing which delayed rehabilitation
 - Difficulties in identifying appropriate carers
 - Police investigations taking a long time (often awaiting Crown Prosecution Service decisions)
 - The need to make difficult and painful decisions – such as splitting sibling groups up or decide which parent or family member should care for a child.
9. The IRO's were effective in flagging up delays in care planning to senior managers and significantly moving on the care plans for all of the children and young people in the cases looked at.
10. Brief anonymised case descriptions:
 - (i) May 2015 the IRO contacted the head of service in relation to two young children under 5 who were awaiting adoption. IRO was concerned about possible delay in the case – the head of service responded quickly and the children were adopted by August 2015.
 - (ii) September 15 the IRO contacted the Practice Group Lead (PGL) in relation to a young man in care. The care plan was rehabilitation to parent and the IRO felt that things could be moving more quickly. This case was speedily picked up by the PGL and rehabilitation plans were made for the child to return home to his parents.
 - (iii) October 2015 the IRO contacted the PGL about a young man in a residential unit where there were plans for him to return home to his parents. The IRO felt that the plans were not moving forward quickly enough. The PGL responded quickly and following the IRO intervention

the case went into court proceedings. The young man finally returned to the care of his father in 2016.

- (iv) October 2015 the IRO contacted the advanced practitioner (AP) regarding two young asylum seeking women in their teens. The IRO wanted faster progress with their care planning. The AP responded to the escalation – in a very short period health assessments were carried out, education placements were sorted out and home office interviews were arranged.
- (v) January 2016 the IRO contacted the PGL in connection with a large family of which all children were in pre-proceedings. The IRO was concerned that the delay in a police investigation had impacted on the planning for the children. The PGL responded to the IRO – full proceedings were started shortly afterwards and the children are now all in permanent placements.
 - i) January 2016 - IRO contacted the PGL in connection with a large family in pre-proceedings. The IRO was concerned about the delay in initiating proceedings. Following this the social work team started proceedings very quickly and all children are now placed in foster care.

Finance / legal issues

- 11. There are no financial or legal implications arising from this report.

Community impact statement

- 12. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or a very small impact on local people and communities.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
None		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children and Families	
Report Author	Jackie Cook, Head Of Social Work Improvement and Quality Assurance, Children's and Adults' Services	
Version	Final	
Dated	20 February 2017	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Officer	20 February 2017	