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**Looked After Review Standards**

**Introduction**

The core task of the independent Review Officer is to review and monitor the cases of looked after children. In particular they chair reviews for children in a way which should:

1. Hold the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration.
2. Ensure the voice of the child is heard clearly in the process.
3. Subject the Local Authority care plan to critical scrutiny and challenge the Local Authority in relation to the care plan if necessary.

**Standards**

* The social worker is to notify the Independent Review Unit that a child has become looked after within 24 hours.
* In all cases a Looked After Care Plan must be completed and this needs to be informed by an up to date social work assessment, that clearly identifies the child’s/young person’s needs. This must ensure that all care plans are based on a full assessment of the child/young person’s needs.
* The social worker is to ensure that a consultation is had with the allocated IRO 15 days before all LAC Reviews.
* The social worker must inform the IRO of any significant events/changes involving the young person or their family between LAC review. *(Examples of this include: missing episodes, teenage pregnancy, allegations/disclosures of harm, changes to immigration status, episodes of self harm and criminal activity.)*
* The Care Plan & LAC Review report is to be completed by the social worker and sent to the IRO 3 working days prior to the LAC review, having been shared with the child/young person/carers and parents.
* The IRO will ensure that the decisions of the LAC review inform the care plan whilst making decisions SMART, (ie Specific, Measurable, Accountable, Responsible and Timely), in order to safeguard against drift and unnecessary delays.
* The IRO will review the child’s file prior to the LAC review, to ensure that the statutory visits, core groups and relevant LAC paperwork has been completed.
* The social worker is to complete the LAC consultation forms with the young person, carers and parents prior to the LAC review taking place.
* The social worker is to ensure that all relevant persons attend the LAC review in consultation with the young people and the IRO.
* The IRO to consult with young person prior to the LAC Review, this should be in private and separate to the LAC review meeting and this will be recorded in the observations section
* The IRO should also consult with parents, including fathers and other relevant agencies and professionals. A separate meeting will be considered with parents if not appropriate for them to attend the review
* The IRO will ensure that the child/young person’s voice is heard and their views listened to, whilst protecting the best interests of that child/young person. The IRO will make sure that children understand the changes to their care plan where necessary.
* The IRO must ensure the review considered the child’s needs and that the Local Authority is meeting these needs and consider changes to the care plan if appropriate
* The IRO will make available the decisions from the review within 5 working days and the full report within 20 working days
* Where a case is in family proceedings the IRO will make early contact with the children’s Guardian. This will be maintained throughout the proceedings.
* Where a child/young person is the subject of care proceedings the social worker must ensure that the final care plan is sent to the IRO before being filed with the courts for the IRO to endorse and discuss with the child’s guardian.
* If the IRO believes that the care plan, or any other element of policy or practice of the local authority in relation to the child, is detrimental to the best interests of the child, he/she will raise the matter swiftly and assertively. In the event of concerns relating to poor practice, the IRO will initiate the dispute resolution process and will if issues are not resolved, seek independent legal advice where it is deemed to be in the best interests of the child/young person. Where deemed relevant then referring the matter to CAFCASS at an early stage.
* The IRO will promote the role of corporate parenting across all partner agencies as part of the LAC review process
* The IRO will act as a safeguard against children and young people staying in the care system or not being able to access relevant supports or services that they need.
* All children and young people will be encouraged to attend and participate in their review meeting or for part of the meeting
* There will be evidence of the IRO footprint in between reviews, recorded in observations.
* The IRO service will undertake exit interviews when a child leaves care linked to their experiences and feedback
* The IRO service will report regularly to the corporate parenting panel as part of the wider quality assurance role of the IRO service.
* Feedback will be gained from children and young people, parents and professionals to contribute to service delivery

**Final Version – November 2016**