

## **Practice Standards for the IRO function of the QARO role.**

### **Practice Standard 1 – Voice of the child. Children need to be listened to and heard**

*The QARO will ensure children and young people know and understand what arrangements are in place to review and support their journey-according to the individuals child's age and ability. They will help them to feel confident to contribute and challenge decisions and make sure their rights and wellbeing are protected and they feel safe.*

- Every child/young person who comes into the care of Dorset will be allocated a person called a QARO within 5 days.
- The QARO is independent and responsible for making sure the care plan is right for each individual child/young person.
- The QARO will spend time with the child/young person, getting to know them and ensuring that they understand the things that are going well for them, the worries they have and the things they want to happen/change.
- The QARO will send out their one-page profile to new children/young people and any other person they feel is appropriate.
- The QARO will spend time understanding the child/young person's beliefs, values, religion, family history and culture and what these means to them personally.
- Seeing the child/young person means being present in the moment with them, considering the child as an individual and considering the best way to engage with them given their situation.
- The QARO will have an open line of communication through text/email and WhatsApp or through a person the child trusts, agreed with the child/young person.
- The QARO will visit or speak to the child/young person before each review to plan the meeting with them.
- The QARO will check the following with children and young people
  - When and where a visit should take place.
  - Make sure the child/young person's understands the purpose of the visit.
  - Consider a child's developmental abilities, understanding and language needs to ensure their participation in the review. (e.g. Makaton/sign language/specialist technology or images).
  - The QARO will talk to children/young people about an advocate and Independent person (for those age 8+) and make sure there is someone who is able to speak on their behalf at the reviews if they choose not to attend.

## **Practice Standard 1 – Children should be in the most suitable placement for them**

*Every child has a loving, stable, and safe home that can meet their needs, keep them safe and most importantly enable them to experience happiness and a sense of belonging*

- We expect that all of our children and young people will be placed with a family unless there are clear reasons why residential care, or an alternative type of placement is the better option.
- We expect that siblings will be together unless there are clear reasons why this should not happen.
- The QARO will expect to see plans in place for children to have time with their siblings (if they are not placed together) unless there are clear reasons and decisions for this not to happen.
- Children and young people will live in approved foster/residential homes that are suitable to meet their needs.
- We expect our children/young people to be supported by the right people to help them to heal from childhood traumas, develop resilience and reach their full potential.
- We will do what we can to prevent children and young people needing to move.
- The QARO will challenge the Local Authority through the escalation process if they do not feel the placement is meeting the child or young person's needs.

## **Practice Standard 3 – Children need an understanding of their own story**

*QARO's will ensure that all aspects of a child/young person's needs are fully considered within the review process & that children/young people are helped to understand their story and the reasons they are in care.*

- Within 20 (working) days of a child/young person coming into care we will hold the first child in care review.
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> review will be held no more than 3 months later and the 3<sup>rd</sup> (and any future) reviews will be held no later than 6 months after the last one.
- The review is the child's meeting; they are the most important person at the meeting and hearing what they have to say is central to the review.
- We will not hold reviews at times that mean a child will miss school, essential appointments, or activities they value.
- All reports, minutes and decisions will be written in a way that the child/young person can understand.
- All those attending the review will receive a written record of the meeting and the decisions.
- The QARO will talk with the child/young person about how they would like their review to be held (where, when and who will attend).
- Where possible the QARO will encourage and support the child/young person to chair their own meeting.

- Each review will celebrate any achievements and success as well as discussing the child/young person's current health (physical and emotional), education, relationships, interests & hobbies.
- The QARO will ensure that any actions agreed involving the child are understood by them.
- The review will also include the views of the child/young person's carers, parents, or anyone else who is significant to them.
- Every child/young person will have a care plan which will show the details of how Dorset will respond to the full range of the child's needs, considering their wishes and feelings.
- The QARO will make sure the child/young person understands their care plan and identify any specific work around this if required.
- The QARO will expect children in care, and those who are placed with prospective adopters to have a life story book and later life letter. This will be from the social worker at the point of permanency.

## **Practice Standard 4 – Permanence**

*Children and young people are provided with permanent living arrangements that are nurturing, loving and stable whether from parents, foster carers, special guardians, or adopters.*

- A permanence plan will be developed for every child/young person by the second child in care review (no later than 3 months after the last review).
- The QARO will make sure that permanency planning meetings are being held regularly and will escalate if this is not happening.
- The child/young person should understand their permanency plan (according to their age and ability) and it will be considered at every review.
- The plan must support children/young people to spend time with their family, unless there are clear reasons why this cannot happen.
- The QARO will check that there are clear plans and timescales for achieving permanency for all children and young people in care. They will challenge drift and delay through the escalation process.
- The option to return home will be considered until a clear alternative long-term plan is in place. When there are plans to return a child or young person home, a family group conference may take place to enable the family network to develop a safety plan.

## **Practice Standard 5 – Transitions**

*QARO's will ensure the right support is in place for young people to transition to adulthood.*

- From the age of 14 years old (at the latest) child in care reviews will start to explore with the young person and their carer ways to develop age appropriate independence.
- For children who are in care after their 16th birthday, the QARO will make sure there is a pathway plan in place and that arrangements are made with clear plans to support the young person through adolescence and into adulthood.

- The pathway plan will need to include the young person's aspirations and hopes for the future and clearly identify what support the young person will need to reach these goals.
- The pathway plan will be discussed at all reviews and will be updated and amended to meet the changing needs of the young person.
- The pathway plan will need to include how Dorset will support the young person developing budgeting skills, accessing on-going education, training or employment, building and developing relationships with family members (if safe to do so), accessing community resources and developing personal skills such as cooking, keeping clean, safe and reducing areas of potential vulnerability.
- The QARO will make sure that every young person over 16 has a personal advisor who is able to support them with the transition from 16 and beyond. The QARO will escalate their concerns if this is not in place.
- For those young people who are likely to need the ongoing support of adult services, the QARO will expect referrals to be made to the relevant services at a time appropriate to the needs of the young person.
- The QARO will make sure (through the review process) that by the age of 17, the young person has a national insurance number, passport, bank account and a copy of their birth certificate.

## **Practice Standard 6 – Protection**

*The QARO will make sure that all children and young people feel, and are safe, and will take necessary action to prioritise the safety and needs of Dorset children and young people.*

- Safeguarding is at the heart of everything we do.
- QAROs will continue to help young people make the right choices.
- We will never give up on someone and will continue to try and engage and support them in the participation of their review and care planning.
- When young people are reluctant to accept QARO help and support, we will keep persisting, trying different ways to build a relationship with them and offer support.
- When there are critical worries about young people in relation to mental health, substance misuse or domestic violence, the QARO will work hard to support the young adult/young person and their naturally connected network to develop a safety plan.
- The QARO will raise or escalate as appropriate, concerns regarding the child/young person's safety to the social work service.
- The Quality Assurance & Partnerships Service are able to provide an independent chair (QA manager) for contextual safeguarding meetings, to enable the development of community safety plans.

## **Practice Standard 7 – Independence**

*The QARO is independent and holds the corporate parent to account.*

- If the QARO is worried that things are not happening or shouldn't be happening, then they will escalate their concern using the dispute resolution and escalation process as appropriate.

- The QARO service will provide senior managers and the corporate parenting board with information regarding service activity on an annual basis through the statutory report.
- The QARO managers will meet regularly with senior managers to share data performance and exceptions. This will include impact on our children and young people in care.
- The QARO will regularly reassure themselves that the practice standards are being met. This will be evidenced through formal supervision.
- The QARO will continue to prioritise the child/young person's needs, and support those working with the child/young person to ensure that Dorset children and young people thrive.

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