**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Communication**

**Communication with Children (including the Use of Technology)**

* It is accepted that communication between adults and children is subject to an inevitable power imbalance which can impact on how information is shared and received. This is further accentuated by differences in gender, authority and physical presence, all of which can be interpreted subjectively by children.
* The majority of communication between staff and children will be face to face interactions. However, on occasions where children leave the home, the use of mobile telephones and related technology to maintain contact is a helpful and positive way to promote communication.
* Communication between children and adults, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries. This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, social media, websites and blogs.
* Adults should not share any personal information about themselves with a child or young person. They should not offer any personal information to the child other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role.
* Adults should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.
* Adults should also be circumspect in their communications with children so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as grooming.
* Staff must not give their personal contact details to children (or family members of the child) including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers. Any communication between an adult and a child outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet based web sites and social media.
* Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the organisation’s policy.
* Staff should only use equipment e.g. mobile phones, provided by the organisation to communicate with children, making sure that parents have given permission for this form of communication to be used.
* Staff should only make contact with children for professional reasons and in accordance with any organisation policy.
* Staff recognise that text messaging can be an appropriate response to some young people in a crisis situation or at risk of harm. It can be used as an essential and effective tool to maintain contact in a non-intrusive way while also recognising the inherent risks of not establishing direct contact.
* Staff must not use personal internet or web-based communication channels to send messages to a young person or any message/contact via social media even after the child has left Local Authority care, until they reach the age of 18.

**Care Leavers**

* Any communication with young people who have left the care of a WSCC children’s home should be approved in advance by the Registered Manager of the home, and the allocated worker for the young person.
* The principles outlined above should be observed and staff must ensure they do not share personal contact numbers and use only their work contact details.
* Staff must keep clear records and accounts of any contact with young people who have left the care of the home.
* Where there may be concerns about their safety or wellbeing, these should be shared in line with Safeguarding policies and procedures.

**Links to related documents:**

WSCC Guidance on Propriety and official conduct for officers

Code of Conduct for Residential Staff