

Six monthly update on some of the key issues for the Independent Review Service

1. Profile of LAC of Nottinghamshire

As at the end of September 2015, there were 875 children and young people looked after, this figure has remained relatively stable throughout the year and is in line with the figure noted for 2014/15.

2. Raising concerns/Dispute Resolution Process

During the last 6 months, 43 alerts were initiated within social care, in comparison to last year this is much lower with the total for the whole year being 137 alerts. Service Managers continue to explore with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) in supervision and meetings about addressing matters of concern and given the reduction in the amount being initiated when quality assuring alerts sent we are assured those being sent are appropriate.

The themes that emerge from alerts so far relate to issues with Personal Education Plans not being completed; contact dates and who will be supervising these; home visits being out of timescale and assessments not being completed in a timely manner to progress the care plan.

3. Areas for Development 2015-16 as identified in the Annual Report 2014-15

Explore further how the service can obtain the views of children aged 5-9 years.

3.1 Two of the IROs are involved in participation meetings with Pav Yayoub, Youth Service, in order to explore how the wishes and feelings of LAC can be better captured as part of the LAC review process. Earlier this year foster carers were asked about how best the views can be sought from children aged 5-9 years. Feedback from the initial work undertaken was that the questionnaires needed to be simpler and more in line with the Listen to Me booklets. It has been suggested by foster carers rather than redesign the questionnaire for 5-9 years the IROs gather the information needed from the LTM booklet instead.

IROs to explore different means of communicating with children and young people between reviews or as part of the review by promoting child-centred planning.

3.2 In September 2015 IROs took part in an East Midlands regional workshop which was delivered by Clare Holdsworth, Sheffield City Council and focused on child-centre planning. The presentation outlined an innovative and new way to explore aspects of the child's life, celebrating the positives and facilitating all professionals more direct discussion with the young person about what the critical areas for planning are, with an open dialogue with the child in developing and prioritising future plans. This workshop had the highest number of IROs attending across the region and created much discussion about this approach and

challenged how they currently work with children and young people when engaging them in the review process.

3.3 IROs within the region continue to reflect on new ways of working with looked after children. Within our service the IROs are having a session as a group in January to explore how they can integrate some of the elements of the person centred approach delivered by Clare Holdsworth. The group intend to participate in role playing an actual review whilst using some of the techniques for person centred planning. Regional Managers are also planning a group session regionally in order to share elements of good practice and tools used to engage children and young people within their review.

CAFCASS and Regional workshops over the year

There have been three workshops arranged since April that has involved as many IROs as possible within the East Midlands Region.

They have taken place on the following dates:

9th June - Care Planning and Effective Management - Focusing on the challenges around care planning

8th September - Child Participation and exclusion - focus as detailed in child centred planning

8th December - Evidencing outcomes with Matthew Brazier, Ofsted.

CAFCASS

11th June - Working with Child Sexual Exploitation and the role of Guardians/IROs in pre-proceedings

23rd October - Together or Apart training.

The IROs felt that the joint session with the Guardians was really helpful and informative on the current research on siblings being placed together or apart. IROs found it really valuable to understand the importance of sibling assessments being undertaken and the timing of this, as well as the sharing of research on siblings with older children and longer term impacts for adoption.

4. Ensure that any relevant issues for partner organisations are effectively raised and recorded

Throughout this period the dispute resolution process for raising internal alerts has been amended, the form has been simplified so that the themes generated by the alerts sent by the IROs can be collated better. Where concerns relate to practice external to children's social care the IRO will discuss the matter with their Service Manager in the first instance and the practice concern will be raised by way of a letter which has to be endorsed by the manager. To date there has only been one external issue of concern letter sent to an agency and this was centred on their non-attendance at the review when their input was crucial. As managers we continue to address whether there are relevant issues with partner organisations being effectively raised as part of individual supervision and as an IRO group.