

REPORT TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 JANUARY 2007

The Role of Independent Reviewing Officers

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Members with information in respect of Independent Reviewing Officers as requested.

2.0 Policy and Guidance

- 2.1 The requirement for a Local Authority to establish Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) is found in the Adoption and Children Act 2002 which amended the Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991.
- 2.2 The DfES published a guidance document in 2004 detailing the role, management structure and tasks relating to IROs.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 At the time the guidance was received North Yorkshire had been managing its reviews of Looked After Children from within the Children and Families Service since the reorganisation of 1996. It employed 8.5 Reviewing Officers whose grading was below that of local Service Managers and their responsibilities included that of chairing Child Protection Conferences as well as reviews of Looked After Children.
- 3.2 A decision was taken that the line management arrangements for the unit met the criteria of the guidance in respect of independence but that the following issues needed to be addressed:
- status of the role within the organisation
 - qualification and experience of IROs
 - additional responsibilities for IROs
 - improvement of the review process – particularly the greater involvement of children and young people in their Review meetings.
- 3.3 The outcome was that a significant budget bid (£180K) was successfully made, the Reviewing Officer posts and their managers' posts were disestablished, and eleven IRO posts were established along with two more senior manager posts. (One manager holds a portfolio for the work with Looked After Children and one for Child

Protection issues.) The IRO posts were graded as equivalent to experienced managers – as specifically required by the guidance.

3.4 The IROs and their managers came into post in August and September 2006. The appointment process included a young person's panel whose views were acted upon. The staff report to the Strategy and Performance Manager for Children's Social Care. They will report twice yearly to the Corporate Director – Children and Young People's Service.

3.5 The enhanced role of the IRO brings some significant benefits to Looked After Children. In addition to chairing the Looked After Review Meetings they have a responsibility to:

- Ensure the participation of the child/young person, their family and their carers in the review process.
- Ensure that the child/young person's views are heard and taken into account.
- Track the planning for children and young people between Review meetings to prevent drift.
- Bring to the attention of Senior Managers (up to Chief Executive if appropriate) any concerns that the child's human rights are being breached. To refer the case to the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) if concerns continue.
- Ensure Review Meetings are held within the statutory timescales.
- Assist a Looked After Child to take legal advice where there is no appropriate adult to do so on their behalf.

3.6 Work is now ongoing through an Implementation Group to align all the operational practices and procedures in respect of Looked After Children to be congruent with the IRO guidance. Once these changes have been made the IROs will be able to progress their full range of responsibilities.

4.0 Performance Indicators

4.1 The work of the IROs impacts on a number of performance indicators. They have direct responsibility for:

- The participation of Looked After Young People in their reviews
- The timing of Child Protection Reviews.

Their work has a significant impact on:

- The Child Protection Register numbers, Registrations, De-Registrations and Re-Registrations
- Timescales for children being adopted
- Stability of placement indicators.

5.0 Partnerships

- 5.1 Within their Child Protection work the IROs chair Protection Conferences on behalf of the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board. Thus there is a significant multi agency partnership role for them.

- 5.2 The work in respect of Looked After Children demands proactive high quality partnership working at the individual level. The relevant manager is involved at a strategic level in multi agency groups considering specific needs (eg Health, Education) of the Looked After Group. She is also a member of the Corporate Parenting Group.

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