



STAY · SAFE
WORCESTERSHIRE
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP



Briefing for Partners on Multi-Agency Meetings for Looked after Children

This briefing paper will outline the legal framework/context, the statutory duties of the IRO the CLA meetings and partners roles preparing for and attending meetings.

Legal Framework/context:

Children can not be looked after without consent or a legal Court Order

There are five main groups of Children Looked After.

1. Children who are accommodated under section 20 by Children's Services when the parent(s) is unable to care for a child. This must be with the consent of the parent(s) or, if over 16, with the young person's own consent (section 20, Children Act 1989).
2. Children who are the subject of a Care Order (section 31, Children Act 1989) or interim (temporary) Care Order (section 38, Children act 1989).
3. Children who are the subject of emergency orders for their protection (section 44 and 46, Children Act 1989).
4. Children who are compulsorily accommodated through the criminal courts, usually the youth court. This includes children remanded to Children's Services or subject to a criminal justice supervision order with a residence requirement. (Section 21 – Children and Young Persons Act 1969).
5. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) are children under the age of 18 who arrive in the country without a parent or a guardian. Many of these children will enter the care of Children's Services as children in care. This will be on a voluntary basis under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

The role of the IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer):

Statutory duties of the IRO are to;

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case;
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.

There are now two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- Chairing the child's review
- monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis

As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice.

Review Meetings:

The local authority is required to carry out review meetings in line with timings specified in the regulations:

- The **first** review of a child's case within 20 working days of the date on which the child becomes looked after;
- the **second** review no more than three months after the first;
- the **third** and subsequent reviews no more than six months after the previous one;

The review meeting should take place in a venue where the child is most likely to feel relaxed and comfortable.

First consideration should be given to the review taking place in the child's placement. It may not be appropriate for professionals to be present throughout the meeting and consideration should be given in advance to when they should make their contribution. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate for the IRO to meet separately with members of the professional network and/or with the parents so the review may be held as a series of meetings.

- All meetings should be child centred throughout and the IRO should speak with the child before each meeting where appropriate to do so.
- Each professional will be spoken to and invited to contribute to the review meeting, even if held as a series of meetings.
- The social worker for the child should have prepared a review report in advance of the meeting, so this can be shared within adequate time and will offer an update on recommendations/progress since the last meeting.
- The Social worker will include in the report specific reference to care planning for the child particularly re permanence planning for the child and assessment reports that have been completed and legal status and other statutory elements such as health, education, family time, legal status and care plan as well as leisure and hobbies, how the placement is meeting the child's day to day needs and how their cultural identity needs are being met.

The IRO must consider the views of;

- The child's wishes and feelings should be evident throughout the meeting whether the child attends full or part of the meeting.
- birth parents and any other adults with parental responsibility.
- other significant adults in the child life, for example extended family members.
- those caring for the child, such as foster carers; and other relevant professionals whether or not they actually attend the meeting.

Partners preparation for Reviews:

The IRO may contact you prior to the review meeting to seek your contributions.

As partners you should contribute to the looked after review meeting using a signs of Safety, strengths base approach highlighting verbally to the meeting or in your report or pre meeting discussion with the IRO what is working well, what you are worried about and what needs to happen within your own discipline i.e. health, education etc related to the child's progress and development.

The IRO should offer ample opportunity for partners to contribute to the meeting.

Following the Review Meeting

- As a partner if there is a specific recommendation for you, it is important that the identified task is completed within the specified timescales.
- At the end of the meeting a date will be set for the next meeting however please note this could change depending on the circumstances.
- Following the review meeting the IRO will write the minutes of the meeting, which will be addressed to the child but will cover all the discussions that have taken place during the review process, this will be distributed within 20 working days of the review meeting.
- On receipt of the minutes please check for accuracy regarding your contribution, any query please go direct to the IRO.
- We all have a duty as corporate parents to promote the child's welfare at all times if you have any concerns in relation to a child who is looked after please contact the Social worker, Team Manager or IRO.

If you have any concerns or queries in relation to the IRO service please contact Sally Branchflower ,Practice Manager, IRO service on 01905 845996 or sbranchflower@worcschildrenfirst.org.uk.

