

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) REPORT

Reasons for the Report

1. The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee's terms of reference require the Committee to regularly review performance data and ensure performance monitoring systems are in place to achieve sustained improvements. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with information about the role, function and activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service.

Background

2. The purpose of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is to ensure that the care plan for a Looked After Child clearly sets out the help, care and support that they need and takes full account of their wishes and feelings. Local authorities are required by law to appoint an IRO for each Looked After Child.
3. Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, makes provision for Looked After and accommodated children that currently exist in Part 3 of and schedule 2 of the Children Act 1989. IRO's convene and chair reviews for all children looked after by the Council; be they subject to care orders, accommodated voluntarily, placed with foster carers, in residential or secure establishments, living with kinship carers or placed for adoption.
4. Changes to Care Planning, Placement and Case Reviews (Wales) Regulations 2015 have strengthened the IRO role. IROs are now not only responsible for chairing statutory reviews but also for monitoring children's care plans on an on-going basis. IROs should also monitor the local authority's overall performance as a 'corporate parent' for Looked After Children. As a "Corporate Parent" all those who have responsibility for Looked After Children should act as a responsible and conscientious parent would act for their own children
5. Independent Reviewing Officers have specific responsibility to escalate concerns about Looked After Children, through a dispute resolution process, if it cannot be resolved within the line management structure, the process allows escalation through to the Chief Executive level within the Local Authority and ultimately to CAF/CASS Cymru to consider legal action if necessary. This escalation step will only be taken if all other avenues of resolution have been exhausted in turn. In

the last six months, there have been no escalations to CAFCASS Cymru for consideration of legal proceedings.

Issues

6. The Independent Safeguarding and Reviewing unit came into being in October 2014. During this time there have been a number of changes to the management structure. The most recent changes in the senior management structure has seen the appointments of a permanent Operational Manager and two Service Managers all of whom joined the service in November and December 2015.
7. Regulatory guidance requires the IRO service to be managed by an officer who does not have line management responsibility for individual children's cases or service provision. The Independent Reviewing Officers are managed by a Service Manager who has no line management responsibility for case work, or care planning decisions affecting Looked after Children.
8. Attached at Appendix 1 is the first annual six month monitoring report for 2016/17.

Financial Implications

9. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

10. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to:

- I. note the information contained in the report; and
- II. make any observations or comments on the six-month monitoring report.

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16 November 2016