



Worcestershire Children First

OUR VISION
Worcestershire to be a wonderful place for all children and young people to grow up.

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST

OUR MISSION
Supporting children and young people to be happy, healthy and safe.

OUR VALUES



Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2021 / 2022

Introduction:

This report captures the performance, feedback, and next steps of the IRO Service in Worcestershire for the year 2021/2022. The report provides an evidence base for what's working well, what we need to improve on, the impact our service is having on children and young people and where our priorities are focused for the year ahead.

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Executive Summary:

This executive summary highlights what we know about ourselves in the IRO Service

What is Working Well...	Areas for Focus...
<p>The IRO Annual Report has evidenced sustained & continuous improvement in timely CLA Reviews for Children with an average of 96% in time and a high of 98%.</p> <p>Although a continuous priority, we have seen strengths in children attending & participating in their reviews</p> <p>We have heard from 132 children & young people – the majority telling us that they are having opportunities to attend and/or participate in their reviews</p> <p>We have consolidated our Quality Assurance programme in respect of the IRO Service and this has evidenced areas of good practice; this was through audits of children's experiences from mid-way and targeted audits</p> <p style="text-align: center;">We have a stable and experienced IRO Workforce</p>	<p>From our Audit Learning we are focusing on ensuring all our recommendations from CLA Reviews are SMART – with clear timescales and measures</p> <p>We want to ensure that the IRO consistently reviews and has oversight when children go missing</p> <p>Although improving year-on-year, from our feedback we want to ensure all children participate in their meetings in the best way for them</p>

1. Context of the IRO Service

The responsibility of Local Authorities is to provide Looked after Children and Care Leavers the best possible experiences in life and support their hopes, wishes and aspirations as any good parent should, this is our privileged role as corporate parents.

The Children Act 1989 [amended 2004] and the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 specify the duties of the Local Authority to appoint an IRO when a child first becomes looked after. The IRO should ensure that the Local Authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by the child and the IRO has a responsibility to monitor the Local Authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case.

The regulations clearly specify circumstances when the Local Authority should consult with the IRO, for example, proposed change of placement, change of education plan, or serious incident. They also specify the actions that the IRO must take if it is felt that the Local Authority is failing to comply with the Regulations or is in breach of its duties to the child. The statutory duties of the IRO are to (section 25b (1), 1989 Act

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's care journey.
- Participate in any review of the child
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration
- 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 those actions in the care plan are consistent with the LA legal responsibilities towards the child. There are now two clear and separate aspects of the function of the IRO.

- Chairing the child's review meeting and monitoring the child's care journey on an ongoing basis.
- The monitoring function should include identifying any areas of poor practice or drift and delay in care planning that impacts directly on the child and should be appropriately escalated. Equally the IRO should also recognise and celebrate good practice that has positively impacted on the child's care experience.

2. Workforce & Management

The IRO service is situated with in the Safeguarding Quality Assurance Service alongside the Independent Chairs for Child Protection Conferences and the LADO Service; the service is supported by a Business Support Team; each Team has a dedicated Practice Manager. The Service is under overall direct management of the Head of Service for Quality Assurance, Daniel Gray.

We have a diverse team of IROs in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age and all bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the team. All have been Team Managers and/or Service Managers – this enables us to have a robust service embedded in practice wealth.

The IRO Service is almost at full establishment presently having had a member of staff recently retire and our new starter joins the team on the 1st of July 2022. We have achieved and maintained a fully staffed and permanent workforce; this has been a strength of the Team which brings consistency and stability for children who are looked after.

Supervision & Performance/Wellbeing Reviews:

All IROs have bi-monthly supervision with the Practice Manager as well as other support & development opportunities – in year 2021/2022 we achieved 100% compliance of achieving supervision for all staff.

All IROs complete, a recently revised individual diagnostic tool, that they send to the Practice Manager before supervision. This reflects the work the IRO has completed since last supervision and captures information such as caseload, case closures, participation and attendance of children, formal and informal DRPs, audit activity, learning and reflection on what has gone well any worries they have and what needs to happen; this promotes accountability for each IRO and is used in supervision with all IROs.

Each year we undertake an end of year Wellbeing & Performance Review for each member of staff – this is to reflect on achievements, areas for focus, training and personal wellbeing; in 21/22 we achieved 100% compliance for the IRO Service.

Management:

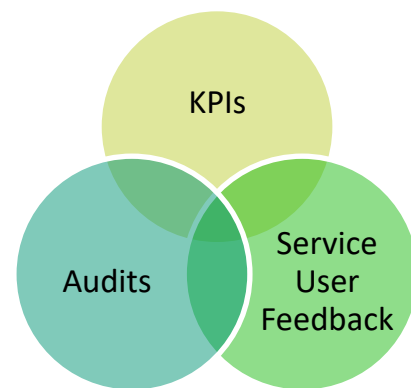
In addition to receiving one to one supervision the service has several mechanisms to ensure that we are sharing information and promoting practice development these are:

- **Monthly Meetings:** Monthly team meetings where information is shared from across the service, ideas are brought to the table, and we invite speakers in and track agreed team actions.
- **SQA Service Meetings:** these meetings are held twice a year for the whole of the SQA service – we celebrate our achievements and look to focus on areas of improvement.
- **End to End Leadership Meeting:** End to End Leadership Meetings are bi-monthly meetings for all Senior Managers, Front Line Managers, Advanced Practitioners, and IROs/CP Chairs from across the service. This is a forum to share and celebrate good practice, disseminate key information/learning, and build relationships with wider staff.
- **Ask and Tell:** The whole service have an opportunity to meet with the Group Manager Daniel Gray and ask any questions they may have, this is a monthly opportunity for staff to join the ask and tell session, which staff have found very helpful and informative.
- **Regional Practice Meetings:** All IROs are invited to the Regional practice meetings with other IROs to share practice.

We know from our staff health check that our staff feel valued, that they feel supported and guided by managers and they feel engaged and central to the vision and purpose of the service. 100% of staff report good visibility, accessibility to responsive management support and all staff reporting they receive feedback from quality assurance activity.

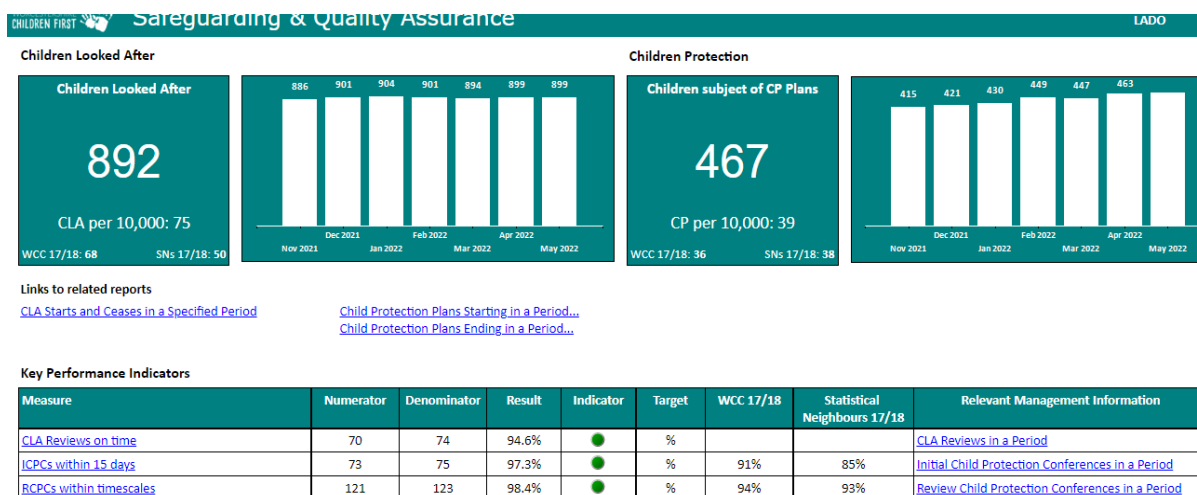
3. IRO Quality Assurance

In SQA we have systems to Quality Assure our work, this is through Key Performance Information, Service User Feedback and Audits.



3.1 KPIs

Key Performance Indicators help us understand how much we are doing and the timeliness of our work, this is the first measure of knowing ourselves well. We measure IRO Performance through the SQA Dashboard which is a live system to help us track & monitor team & individual performance.



CLA Reviews

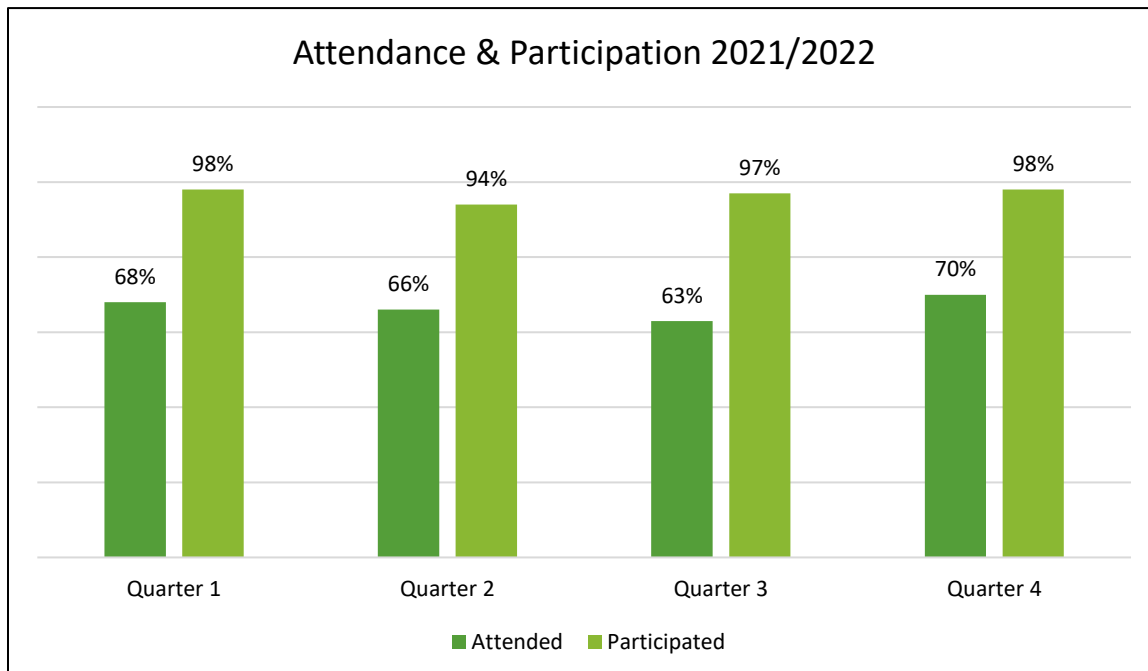
Timely looked after reviews are essential to effective and timely care planning for children and young people who are looked after. A key priority of SQA was to improve the timeliness of review meetings held in Worcestershire for our children. The below graphs demonstrates a consistent improvement of review meeting timeliness, the year 2021/2022 saw a total of 2,122 Reviews held which is an increase of 145 from 20/21 figures – the average of meetings held in time for 21/22 is 96% with a high of 98%. There has been pretty much consistent improved performance across most months apart from a slight dip of 3% in November 21 and a dip of 10% in February this year in reviews being completed in timescales, the audit undertaken regarding the dip in performance in Feb 22 relates to miscalculation of timing of reviews from some IROs and some late notifications or requests to move meetings. There is also a 1% dip in March compared to last year but overall, a very positive picture

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
20/21	96%	95%	96%	95%	96%	96%	97%	97%	96%	87%	98%	98%
20/22	98%	95%	98%	97%	96%	96%	98%	94%	96%	91%	88%	97%

This remains an on-going service priority to promote achieve and sustain timely review meetings for our looked after children. As a team we use an individual IRO Diagnostic Tool which provides better qualitative information and individual accountability, and greater IRO independence this is submitted to the Practice Manager every 8 weeks in line with supervision and is used as a tool for discussion/reflection. This is only one part of performance management of the service.

Children's Participation and Attendance

Promoting children’s participation and attendance within Looked after Reviews is essential to ensure their voice is captured, listened to and that our outcomes are based on their wishes and feelings. This requires creativity in our approach as we work with a wide range of children with differing needs.



In the year 2020/2021 we had an average of 64% of children attending and 93% participating; we can see from the above graph that overall; we have seen improvements in children attending & participating in their meetings – this remains a relentless focus to ensure children’s voices are heard and they are part of these important meetings and decisions about them.

IRO Direct Contact:

These are specific case notes to capture IRO Visits and phone calls to children and young people between Review meetings, to strengthen their footprint, evidence their work and to capture children and young people’s views. In the year 2020/2021 IROs completed 1032 direct contact summary episodes. In the year 2021/2022 IROs completed 1341 that is an increase in the last year of 309 additional contact summaries.

3.2 Audit Activity

Audit activity is the second strand of our Quality Assurance Framework, over 2021/2022 we have worked hard to embed an approach of how we audit our own work in the IRO Service, this comes through part of the mid-way audits, but also Targeted Audit activity on key areas of practice, below is a summary of this learning. Learning is shared with the IRO Service through individual feedback, reports, team presentations and most recently in an SQA Service Event that was held virtually.

3.2.1 Mid-Way Audits:

In 2021/2022 we completed 125 mid-way audits in the IRO Service this is a slight increase of 6 since the previous year and also we had a couple of IROs who were off due to prolonged ill health who did not complete audits every month.

- Across the year we have identified strengths through our IRO Footprint and Engagement, and this has been a consistent theme of the mid-way IRO Audits.
- The volume of audits and feedback completed by the IRO Service remains a strength.

3.2.1 Targeted Audits:

Across the year 228 children's experiences of the IRO Service have been undertaken across 5 Targeted Audits; the key learning and reports are:

Targeted Audit Theme	Number of Children	Snapshot Summary/learning	Document
SMART Planning Children Looked After	10	Ten review records were considered as part of the audit, overall, the responsible person for actions was clear in the plan and actions supported care planning; language was child centred and easily understood. Timescales for actions were not always clear in plans and therefore the ability to track and measure progress will be hindered. The actions need to be always clear and specific and have a clear timescale provided so it can be tracked from review into review and within the workers supervisions.	Appendix A
CLA Reviews Audit	37	<u>Review timescales</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing delay with pre meeting reports not being completed by the SW in time for the child's review meeting, Minutes are completed by the IRO on word but causes delay in workflow being completed • Some CLA Reviews have been postponed due to no PM reports or at the request of others. 	Appendix B

		<p><u>Attendance of children at their meetings.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some children and young people choose not to attend their meeting in addition there has been some confusion over the use of PN codes 	
CLA Review Recommendations Audit	8	<p><u>What is going well:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Records are well written and directly to the children, in all Reviews considered the review record was on the child's record. • Most actions written are specific and relevant for the child and their care plan. • Most cases the manager has reviewed the recommendations of the CLA Review. <p><u>Areas of Focus & Improvement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the recommendations were not SMART and timescales were not clear or ambitious and language such as "ongoing" "ASAP" were used 	Appendix C
IRO Footprint and Minute Audit	162	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having audited the 132 sets of minutes it is encouraging to see the minutes are in the main comprehensive and the quality is good there is evidence of improved consistency in the style of writing, but all have a SOS approach recognising strengths, worries and what needs to happen. • All the 94 audits re IRO footprint and the further snapshot audit of another 30 evidenced a significant improvement in IRO footprint on Childrens files over the last 12 months, again some inconsistencies in style of writing, but overall evident on Childrens files. <p><u>Areas of continued development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All reviews should be written to the child, proof reading before ending the episode would ensure a more consistent approach. • Headings should be in bold. • IROs should provide narrative re Legal status and care plan not just a "yes" • IROs to be mindful re language used so it is easy to read and clear with minimal jargon in it. • Actions should have clear timescales and person responsible for each task 	Individual learning is recorded within IRO personal supervision

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of next meeting should be in the record (if there is going to be another meeting) • IROs to evidence greater depth re identity section and an introduction to the IRO role • IROs should continue to evidence that a discussion has taken place re emotional health and wellbeing of YP 	
Missing Audit	11	<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small number of the 11 audited had IRO footprint on the file re action taken once they had received it and where recorded the quality was good and actions were appropriate <p><u>Areas of continued development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All IROs on receipt of a missing notification will evidence in a monitoring IRO case note that they have read the notifications and record action/t taken • Concerns around missing and the risks should be evidenced in plans and recommendations 	Appendix D

3.3 Service User Feedback

Service user feedback is the third strand of our Quality Assurance Framework, this helps us understand how children & families experience our services. In 2021/2022 we heard from 132 children, and 44 foster carers.

Foster Carers

Across October 2021 we undertook a targeted survey with WCFF Foster Carers, the survey was completed electronically via Microsoft Forms to hear the views of Foster Carers. In total 44 Foster Carers gave their views, they told us:

	Question	Feedback
1.	Did you have an opportunity to speak with the IRO before/after the CLA Review or in-between reviews?	77% said yes
2.	Did they help you understand the role of the IRO and how the Review was going to work?	84% said yes
3.	Do you understand the recommendations from the review and what everyone will do next?	93% said yes
4.	Was it recognised what was going well in respect of the child/placement during the review?	93% said yes
5.	CLA Reviews are currently being held in a blended approach, with a mix of face to face and virtual meetings, were you supported to attend and contribute to the meeting?	86% said yes
6.	Did the meeting hear the views of the child/young person and take them into consideration?	80% said yes
7.	Were you given the opportunity to share your views and opinions?	93% said yes
8.	Do the notes of the meeting give an accurate reflection of what was said and agreed in the meeting?	93% said yes

Foster Carers said...

"The knowledge of the child's history to date"

"We have nothing but praise for our IRO"

"Communication is excellent"

"Our IRO is extremely supportive, and he always puts the kids needs at the centre as should everyone"

"She shows interest in the children, had a good understanding of their past and grasped very quickly how they want to be listened to"

"Cherry always goes out of her way to make sure the child is heard, and her wishes taken into consideration"

"I liked how the children needs are met and I like that on home visit the IRO has been very positive"

"Fred Whiston very supportive of S's needs and wishes, with regards to home-schooling in the January 21 lockdown"

Children & Young People

The IRO Service undertook a targeted survey across November 2021 to January 2022, IROs contacted children & young people to hear their views on the IRO Service, in total 132 young people gave us their feedback on their experiences. Their feedback was:

Did you have the opportunity to speak with your IRO before your looked after review? **85% said yes**, of the group of children & young people who said they did not speak with their IRO – 95% said they did not want to speak with their IRO prior to their review and this was their choice.

Did the IRO help you understand their role? **85% of young people said that they did.**

Did the IRO help explain how the review was going to work? **73% of young people** said that the IRO did explain the review meeting.

Do you understand the plan from the review and what everyone will do next? **76% said that they did.**

Did the meeting recognise what was going well for you? **97% of young people said that the review did recognise strengths** and what was going well for them.

CLA Reviews are being undertaken in a blended approach, between face-to-face and virtual meetings. Were you supported to attend and contribute to the meeting? **85% said they were supported to attend and contribute to their meeting.**

If you attended, how did you attend?

- 25% said they attended in person
- 36% said they attended virtually
- 11% said they had a separate meeting with their IRO
- 9% said they didn't attend their review
- 19% said they didn't attend their review, but this was their choice

Were you given the opportunity to share your views and opinions? **98% said that they were supported** and given these opportunities.

Did the review hear your views and consider them? **96% said yes**, the review and those attending did.

There is a range of feedback from children & young people, the majority are telling us that they are having opportunities to attend and/or participate in their reviews and this is how they want to do this as part of their review. There is a small number of children telling us that they didn't have the opportunity to speak with their IRO before the review but wanted to (5%) and some children didn't attend their review but indicated within the survey they would have wanted to (9%), although these are small % it is a key focus to ensure all children have the opportunities to attend and participate in their meeting in the way they want to.





What did children tell us...?

"Pretty good and she was dancing and singing with at the last one – she was here for 3 hours, which was fine"

"She did a good job and supporting us and left us a card with her phone number so we can call her"

"She did the meeting very well and seems to know what she's doing"

"I think Teams Meetings work well for me, I know how to get in touch with my IRO if I need to speak to them or I want things to be different"

"My new IRO seems nice, she called me to introduce herself and review was all good"

"MY IRO always had a little chat with me after every discussion to ensure i understood things"

"I always feel listened to 'every time"

"My IRO brought me and my siblings a letter that told me about her role so that I understood. I have kept my letter. My IRO is funny and kind"

"She listened to me really well and understood what i wanted and helped me get what I want"

"For my IRO to come and see me more often"

"I would like to attend my review, not just the end of it, I can't remember some things about my reviews"

"My new IRO met me and respected that I did not want to attend my meeting, but she listened to my views, and she made sure people knew the reasons why I did not want to stay in my supported living placement"



4. DRPs & Practice Acknowledgements:

A crucial role of the IRO is to quality assure the work of the Local Authority; if a concern arises then the Dispute Resolution Process is initiated, this is a process where the IRO can raise a concern for a child or young person and the Social Work Manager will respond.

We have a clear DRP Framework, and this is available to all staff on Practice Standards – Social Care.

The IRO Service also looks to identify and celebrate good practice; this is achieved through a Practice Acknowledgement. This is a specific Liquid Logic Form where the IRO can formally record and recognise practice of Social Work Teams.

Our DRP Summary for 2021/2022:

- A higher number of Informal DRPs being issued – supporting to resolve matters at an early stage.
- Audit findings of Informal DRPs evidenced appropriate application of DRP, there was learning to ensure Informal DRPs were clearly recorded and tracked, to improve this we have moved Informal DRPs from Case-Note recording into the DRP form to improve this area of work.
- The volume of formal DRPs is 24% less than Informal, this evidences that IROs and Conference Chair's appropriately identify concerns at an early stage and look to progress at the appropriate level. The majority of our Formal DRPs are resolved at Stage 1 (total 80%), again evidencing those concerns are resolved early, a small volume move to Stage 2 and none through the year went to Stage 3 or 4 – evidencing appropriate resolution of concerns. Audits again evidenced the appropriate use of DRP to identify and resolve practice issues. 82% of DRPs are responded to within the required timescales, this remains an area of focus for SQA tracking.
- We have seen a range of Practice Acknowledgements across the service with an equal split across engagement with families, quality of assessments and voice of the child.
- The development of our DRP Dashboard to now support our weekly, monthly & quarterly analysis and tracking of DRPs

5. Signatures



Daniel Gray
Head of Service



Sally Branchflower
Practice Manager IRO Service 12/05/2022