



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Corporate Parenting Service

Joint working between social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers practice guidance

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

1. Introduction

This document sets out the local practice and procedures for social workers and managers when working jointly with Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on CLA cases and should be read together with the *Appointment and role of IROs* policy.

[Appointment and Role of Independent Reviewing Officers](#)

2. Camden's IRO service

- The service is made up of 5 IROs and a service manager who provides supervision, advice and guidance to IROs and managerial oversight of the service.
- To ensure its independent status, the service is based in the Quality Assurance Service. No member of the IRO service is in any way connected with the management or case decision making for any individual case or with the provision of resources for looked after children's cases.
- All children will have an IRO allocated within 5 working days of becoming looked after. The IRO will remain allocated for the duration of the child's care episode and will only be changed if the IRO leaves Camden or in *exceptional circumstances*.
- If a child returns to Camden's care, every effort will be made to allocate their original IRO.
- Sibling groups will be allocated the same IRO even if they are placed separately unless there is a clear conflict of interest between siblings or the sibling group is too large.
- Cases of larger siblings groups may be split and shared between IROs to ensure CLA reviews take place within statutory timescale and all the children's needs are fully addressed in reviews. The IROs will liaise and joint work cases to ensure care planning is progressed.
- Where a child who is subject to a care order to Camden receives a custodial sentence, they will remain looked after and their IRO will remain allocated. If a child who is accommodated under section 20 receives a custodial sentence but is expected to be re-accommodated on release, their IRO should remain allocated as long as the case remains open.

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- When a young person transfers to the care experienced service at 18, the IRO will remain in touch with them for a period of time after the transfer to make sure of a smooth transition and in particular cases may attend further meetings to offer the young person support.

3 IRO manager role

The IRO manager will:

- provide supervision for IROs that covers professional support and guidance
- oversee case allocation and ensure caseloads enable IROs to have the capacity to carry out their functions
- ensure there is a suitable provision for training for IROs
- liaise with the CLA service manager and other senior managers in order to promote efficient service delivery and good outcomes for CLA
- provide senior management with an annual report detailing good practice and emerging issues.

4 Deciding on early reviews

- In general, significant changes to a child's care plan can only be agreed at the statutory CLA review, and where there are any major unplanned changes in response to events, the review may need to be held earlier to discuss the change and amend the care plan.
- However, not all changes to the child's circumstances, including changes of placement, will warrant an early review, and may be better discussed at a multi-agency meeting instead.
- It is important that any changes are discussed between the social worker and IRO and a decision taken as to whether the impact of the change on the child's safety and wellbeing is such that a review needs to be held.
- The following changes will generally require the review to be brought forward:
 - breakdown to any adoptive or permanent placement (with a disruption meeting being held prior to the review)
 - breakdown of placement with parents
 - emergency or unplanned move to residential or semi-independent accommodation following breakdown of a foster placement

- any change of placement that may disrupt the child's education if in year 10/11 or seriously curtail contact arrangements
- placement in secure accommodation under section 25 of the Children Act 1989
- remand into local authority accommodation, youth detention accommodation or custodial sentence or shortly before release from custody where the child will return to Camden's care
- any planned or unplanned return home
- any discharge from care where the young person will not be returning home.

4.4 Recording consultations

IROs are responsible for recording any discussion or consultation on cases with social workers on the consultation case note on MOSAIC. There must be a record of any notified change and any agreed action taken in response; in particular, there must be a record of discussion around any changes of placement and a record made of whether or not the review will be brought forward with reasons.

5 Mid-review meeting

- Where reviews are being held at a frequency of 6 months, a formal mid-review feedback meeting should take place between the social worker and the child's IRO to monitor the implementation of decisions and recommendations made at the previous review meeting. The team manager should attend only when needed to make decisions on the outcome of the meeting.
- At the CLA review, the IRO will select a date mid-way between reviews where the social worker will meet with the IRO to look at progress and any issues that may have arisen.
- The issues to be raised at this meeting should be discussed and agreed by the social worker and their supervisor in supervision. The meeting agenda should cover the following:
 - key changes since the review
 - a record of what has been done so far to implement the review decisions
 - any issues or difficulties around implementation.

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- Although it is an expectation that the meeting is held for all cases, there may be some cases where there are no issues around implementation and the care plan and placement are stable. In these cases, the IRO may decide that a meeting is not necessary.
- The midway review should be recorded in the *IRO contact form* with fuller details of any meeting recorded in the *Midway Review* case note.
- The IRO may trigger an alert under section 6 of this policy if serious concerns arise from the mid-review meeting.

6 Care proceedings

Where the child is subject to care proceedings, social workers and IROs must ensure the following:

- The IRO must ensure they liaise closely with the court appointed guardian. Social workers must ensure Legal Services have the name and contact details of the IRO to pass on to the guardian and that the guardian is able to contact the IRO.
- When preparing court care plans, social workers must ensure that the IRO's comments on the plan are recorded on the court document before it is sent to the service manager for authorisation.
- The social worker should keep the IRO fully informed of the outcome of proceedings and ensure they have copies of all court documents.
- The IRO should ensure that the child's guardian is informed of review meetings and invited where appropriate and that they receive a copy of review minutes.
- The social worker must notify the court of any formal dispute resolution that is on-going regarding the case prior to the Issues Resolution Hearing.
- The IRO must keep in close contact with the guardian to discuss the case, including a final discussion once a care order has been granted to identify any outstanding issues. A record of these discussions should be placed on the child's case record.

7 Issues resolution

- As part of their oversight function, IROs have a duty to raise issues stemming from care planning processes in individual cases as well as raising concerns about poor practice in general.
- It is expected that the majority of concerns will be resolved informally following discussion between the IRO and the social worker and their manager but unresolved matters or serious concerns will need to be referred on within the management hierarchy via Camden's formal issue resolution system.
- The purpose of the system is to:
 - resolve problems as quickly and as informally as possible so that they do not impact on the child's safety and welfare
 - ensure Camden continues to discharge their legal duties towards the looked after child
 - support good practice and enable managers to pick up on trends and issues as they arise so they can be addressed in a timely manner.
- Details of the system are set out in the table below; the general principles of the system are:
 - Where possible, issues will be dealt with between the IRO, social worker and team manager in the first instance without referral to the formal resolution system; only serious concerns or unresolved matters will be referred on to senior managers.
 - Escalation of concerns to the next level of management will be discussed with the IRO manager and notified to all parties.
 - All concerns, decisions and agreed actions relating to issue resolution procedures will be clearly recorded in the child's MOSAIC record by the IRO.
 - Responses to notification of concerns will be given within the timescale requested by the IRO manager.
- IROs will keep the child's guardian informed of any actions being taken through the formal issue resolution procedures.

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- Where the IRO service remains unhappy about responses from senior managers after following the issue resolution procedures, consideration can be given to referring the matter to CAFCASS to issue judicial review proceedings on behalf of the child.
- Applications can only be made where it can be demonstrated that the child's human rights are likely to be breached following any action or omission by the local authority and that all efforts to resolve issues within the local authority have failed.
- To help IROs decide, Camden has an arrangement with the Legal Services Department at the London Borough of Islington whereby IROs can obtain free legal advice on matters prior to making any application to CAFCASS. IROs can also contact the CAFCASS legal team for general guidance making an application.
- IROs should refer to the CAFCASS practice note available at the link below:
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/c/cafcass%20and%20the%20work%20of%20independent%20reviewing%20officers.pdf>

Appendix 1: Issue resolution system

Stage	Notification to:	Type of concern	Actions required	Timescales
Informal stage	Social worker and team manager	Minor concerns around compliance with CLA processes or implementation of the care plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRO raises issues with the social worker and team manager via email or through meetings and discussion takes place to try to resolve the issues. • IRO makes a record of any discussion and resolution, including agreed actions, in the consultation section of the MOSAIC record. 	10 working days before IRO notifies social worker and manager of possible notification to service manager then a further 10 working days to resolve
Stage 1	Service manager and IRO manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serious concerns about social work practice • Non-compliance with statutory regulations: no care plan in place, statutory visits and reviews not carried out in timescales • Serious disputes between IRO and CLA team regarding the child's care plan • Where the child has or will make 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRO discusses issues with IRO manager and a decision is made on using formal procedures. • IRO sends out a formal Notice of Concern (see appendix) to the service manager and IRO manager. • The service discusses the issues raised with the parties 	5 working days unless a shorter timescale is specified by the IRO manager

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		a formal complaint <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor concerns that have not been resolved informally in a reasonable timescale. 	and the IRO manager. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service manager formally replies to the IRO stating whether the issues raised have been accepted and what action will be taken to resolve matters. 	
Stage 2	Head of Service	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above with the IRO discussing next steps with the IRO manager before sending the Notice of Concerns. The Director to formally reply to the IRO stating their decision on the matter.	5 working days unless a shorter timescale is specified by the IRO manager
Stage 3	CSFH Director	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above	As above
Stage 3	Executive Director – Children and Learning	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above.	As above
Stage 4	Chief Executive	Serious concerns listed above that cannot be resolved in an appropriate timescale at the previous level.	As above.	As above

