

Reviewing Care Plans – Additional guidance for social workers

Purpose

As part of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations 2010, Local Authorities are required to have a policy focussing on the review of Looked After Children care plans. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to outline Central Bedfordshire Council's policy and procedures on this matter. It will serve as a guide to all staff who are involved in the planning and provision of care for Looked After Children.

The role of the Independent Review Officers and reviews

An Independent Review Officer is appointed to each of Central Bedfordshire Council's Looked After Children. The Independent Review Officers are responsible for monitoring the performance and functions in relation to the child's care plan and to ensure that the child or young person's wishes and feelings have been given due consideration by Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Services. The role of the Independent Review Officer is in accordance with Section 25A of the Children Act 1989.

The focus of the first review meeting is to examine and confirm the initial care plan. Subsequent reviews will be occasions for monitoring the progress being made within the care plan and making decisions to amend the plan as is deemed necessary.

Preparation for a Looked After Child Review

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that children and young people understand the importance of Looked After Children reviews**

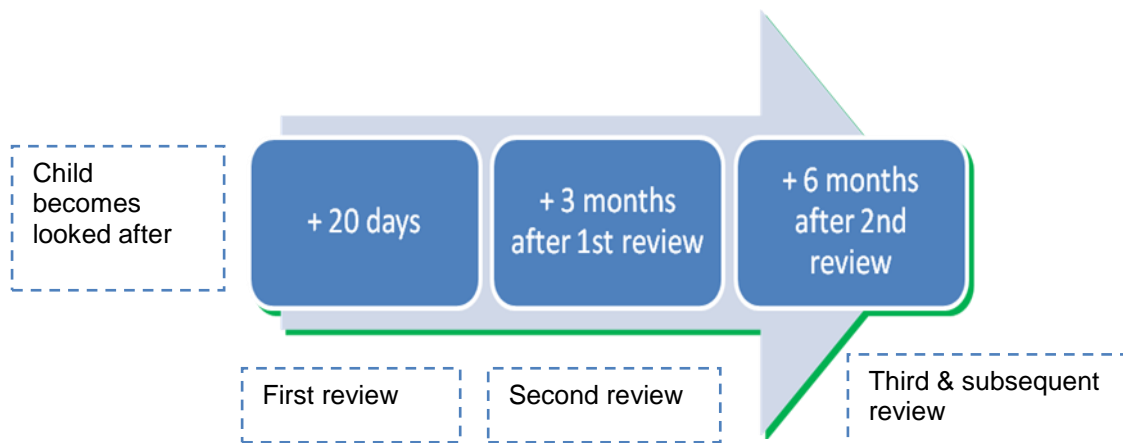
As part of Central Bedfordshire Council's pledge to children and young people in care social workers should ensure that children and young people are involved in the plans and decisions that are made about them. Therefore, it is important that Children and young people understand the importance of reviews and their purpose. This information will be given by means of section 6 of the 'Looked After Children Information Pack,' which has been completed by Central Bedfordshire's Children in Care Council.

It is also recommended that social workers advise children and young people that they can access further detailed information about the role of Independent Review Officers on the 'rights4me' website, at the following link:

<https://www.rights4me.org/~media/Library%20Documents/Guides/GUIDE%20IRO%20Handbook.pdf>

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that reviews are completed to timescales.**

As part of ensuring an effective care planning system it is important that Looked After Children reviews take place within the specified timescales. The timescales for Looked After Children Reviews are outlined below:



** Please note that the chart above indicates the maximum intervals between Looked After Child reviews. It is essential for the child or young person's social worker to keep the Independent Review Officer updated on significant events in between Looked After Children reviews. These ongoing discussions that take place between Looked After Children reviews may lead to early Looked After Child reviews. This would be in instances where it was felt there is a need for a change in the care plan or if the social worker or Independent Review Officer has significant concerns.

Prior to the Looked After Children review

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that reviews are planned in advance**

Arranging a date in advance

In order to guarantee that reviews take place in a timely fashion the process of organising a Looked After Children review must be planned in advance. At each Looked After Children review a date should always be set for the subsequent review. Booking a date in advance is supportive to attendees. It enables them to have ample notice to arrange such things as childcare, time off from work etc.

Invitations

To support reviews taking place in a timely fashion approximately 3 weeks prior to the scheduled Looked After Child review an administrator from Central Bedfordshire Council's Conference and Review service will email the child or young person's social worker. The email will request the social worker to advise them of who is to be invited and where the meeting will be taking place. The Conference and Review Service then send out invitations to all invitees. This serves as a reminder to all attendees about the upcoming meeting.

Booking in advance also ensures that timescales are met. Central Bedfordshire's Independent Review Officers will tend to book reviews which fall before the maximum interval so that there is room to renegotiate the date if required at a later date.

At a minimum it is expected that the following people be in attendance at the review:

- The child or young person- taking into consideration age and understanding
- The child's birth parents [where this is consistent with the welfare of the child]
- Others with Parental Responsibility
- The child or young person's foster carer/ keyworker
- The foster carer's supporting social worker
- The child's social worker

Request to adjourn a LAC review

Adjournment that falls within timescales

If a request is made for a Looked After Child review to be adjourned, but still to take place within timescales, then the social worker should discuss with the Independent Review Officer. If both parties are in agreement and a rescheduled date is convenient to all involved parties then the review can be rescheduled. However, there needs to be a clear, child centred reason for the adjournment of a Looked After Children's review.

Adjournment that falls outside of timescales

In cases where an adjournment would cause the Looked After Children review to fall out of timescales then a request would need to go to the team manager for the Conference and Review Service. ** This would only be granted in very exceptional circumstances.

Power to adjourn by an Independent Review Officer

Under the new 2010 regulations, Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review the Independent Reviewing Officer has the power to adjourn a review if s/he is not satisfied that the social worker has complied with all requirements relating to the review [the completion of paperwork, preparation of the child etc.] If an adjournment takes place the rescheduled review meeting should be within 20 days of the original scheduled date.

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that children and young people are consulted**

Discuss the care plan

It is important that the social worker meets with the child or young person in the weeks leading up to the Looked After Children review. This gives an opportunity for the social worker and the child or young person to discuss progress made since the last review, gather their wishes and feelings about the care plan and any changes they would like to see.

The social worker should ensure that they discuss any changes to the care plan with the child or young person. In instances where the child finds it difficult to make their wishes and feelings known consideration should be given to securing an advocate for the child or young person.

Discuss who is to be invited

It also enables the child to advise who they would like to attend their review. In some instances a child or young person may be reluctant to have a particular professional/person at the Looked After Children review and there may need to be some negotiation by the social worker as to whether they can attend just part of the review or contribute with a written report.

Consultation document

As part of the consultation process Central Bedfordshire Council's Conference and Review Service will send the child or young person a consultation document for them to complete. This document is read by the Independent Reviewing Officer at the meeting.

Venue and time of meeting

The time and venue of the Looked After Children's review should always be a time that meets the needs of the child or young person. The child or young person should not be required to miss school or other appointments to attend a review.

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that documentation is prepared in advance of the LAC review.**

Social workers must ensure that they have completed the Review of Arrangements document at least 3 days prior to the review meeting. This should be sent to the Independent Review Officer along with an up to date and signed care plan. The Review of Arrangements and the care plan will be required at each LAC review. However, at the initial LAC review the following documents will also be required to be with the Independent Review Officer 3 days prior to the review meeting:

- Health assessment
- PEP
- Keeping safe PLAN
- Placement information Record

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that the Looked After Childrens reviews involve relevant people.**

It is important that as part of the process of updating the child or young persons care plan and review of arrangement document social workers have ensured that discussions have also taken place with the child's carer, birth parents and professionals.

Carers, birth parents and professionals bring with them knowledge and expertise which can all inform the care plan and ensure that the child or young person and their family gets the best support possible.

It is also good practice to consult with relevant people prior to the review meeting in case there may be contentious issues which can be brought to the attention of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Conference and Review Service will send out consultation documents to the child or young person, their birth parents and their foster carer/key worker.

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that the Looked After Childrens reviews are inclusive**

Expectation of attendance

Under the 2010 Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review regulations there is an expectation that the child or young person (if s/he is of sufficient age and understanding) and their birth parents will be present at the entire Looked After Children review. However, it is also acknowledged that this will very much depend on the circumstances of each individual case.

Exclusion from attendance

In exceptional circumstances, the child or young person's social worker may not deem it appropriate for the child or parent [if detrimental to the child's wellbeing] to be at part or all of the meeting. In such cases, the social worker should discuss this with the Independent Review Officer. If a parent, child or young person is excluded from the Looked After Children review then it is important that consultation documents are sent out to them so that they are still able to be involved in the review process.

These consultation documents are sent out by the Conference and Review Service and the expectation is that they are returned to the Conference and Review Service. If these consultation documents are completed and returned then the Independent Review Officer should ensure that they are included with the review record unless the IRO was of the view that to do so would cause unnecessary distress to the child or young person.

Following the Looked After Children review the Independent Review Officer should ensure that the completed consultation documents are returned to the social worker so that they can be stored on file.

In cases of exclusion from a Looked After Children review, the Independent Review Officer should also contact the birth parents or child/ young person and offer to meet with them or have a more detailed discussion on the telephone. The Independent Review Officer will need to exercise professional judgement and some discretion in these circumstances. The details of these efforts should be placed on the child's case record. It should also be noted that if a parent or child is excluded from part or the entire Looked After Children review, a written explanation of the reasons should be given to them and recorded as part of the Looked After Children review.

** It is important to note that the anxieties of professionals should not be the reason for excluding a child or his/her parent from a review. Decisions about exclusion from a Looked After Children review should be child centered.

At the Looked After Children review

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that there are opportunities for the child/ young person to be seen alone**

Speaking to the child or young person alone

At the meeting the Independent Reviewing Officer has a duty to speak to the child or young person in advance of the meeting about the care plan and matters to be considered. However, Independent Reviewing Officer's will need to consider issues of age and understanding. The child or young person may also refuse to meet with the Independent Reviewing Officer and on these occasions, this should be recorded within the minutes of the meeting.

The child or young person may prefer for the Independent Reviewing Officer to ascertain their wishes and feelings through the consultation document.

- Central Bedfordshire will ensure that a review meeting complies with Schedule 7 requirements.

Under the 2010 Regulations there is a checklist of matters that have to be considered at a Looked After Children's review and are as follows:

- 1 the effect of any change in the child's circumstances since the last review
- 2 whether decisions taken at the last review have been successfully implemented, and if not the reasons for that
- 3 whether the responsible authority should seek any change in the child's legal status, for example an application to discharge the current order or for a new order by the responsible authority or the application by a carer for a residence order or special guardianship order
- 4 whether there is a plan for permanence
- 5 the current arrangements for contact and whether there is a need to change these arrangements to promote contact between the child and his/her family or other relevant people
- 6 whether the placement continues to be appropriate and is meeting the needs of the child
- 7 the child's educational needs, including consideration of:
 - the child's most recent assessment of progress and development;
 - whether the arrangements that are in place are meeting the child's educational needs
 - whether any changes are, or are likely to become, necessary or desirable before the child's next review
 - whether the child has a PEP and also whether its content provides a clear framework for promoting the child's educational achievement
- 8 the child's leisure interests and activities and whether the current arrangements are meeting the child's needs
 - the child's health, including consideration of:
 - the child's most recent health assessment (to include physical and emotional health needs)
 - whether the arrangements that are in place are meeting the child's health

needs

- whether any changes are, or are likely to become, necessary or desirable before the child's next review
- whether the content of the health plan provides a clear framework for promoting the child's health.

9 whether the identity needs of the child are being met and whether any changes are needed, having regard to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural background

10 whether the child understands any arrangements made to provide advice, support and assistance and whether these arrangements continue to meet his/her needs

11 the child's wishes and feelings about the care plan including in relation to any changes or proposed changes to the care plan (having regard to his/her age and understanding)

12 the views of the child's IRO about any aspect of the case and the care plan.

13 whether the plan fulfils the responsible authority's duty to safeguard and promote the child's welfare

14 whether it would be in the child's interests for an independent visitor to be appointed

- Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that there is a clear record of decisions made at each review.

At the LAC review it is important that there is a clear record of the discussions that have taken place and the decisions made.

Sharing views

The Independent Reviewing Officer must ensure that the meeting enables everybody present to be given a fair opportunity to share their views and to ensure that everybody, particularly the child or young person, understands what is being said.

Disagreements

Agreement is unlikely to be reached on every issue raised at the review. Disagreements will be recorded in the review minutes to ensure that attendees wishes and feelings are accurately recorded. However, disagreements should not allow the prevention of the formulation of a care plan.

Summary of discussions

Before the conclusion of the meeting the Independent Reviewing Officer should summarise the issues discussed, the decisions about what has been agreed, who is responsible and timescale for actions.

If the child or young person was not at the review but is available for a discussion the child's social worker and the Independent Reviewing Officer should meet with the child or young person to discuss what has happened and the decisions made.

The written record

A written record of the review is the responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer. It is an important process as it gives the practitioner confirmation of how it has been agreed to update the care plan for a child or young person. It is important that the minutes assess whether the care plan is meeting the needs of the child or young person, changes that are required and the decisions made.

Who the minutes should be sent to and how

At the LAC review the Independent Reviewing Officer will also ensure that there is a clear record of who the minutes should be distributed to and whether any copies need to be anonymised. If copies are to be anonymised reasons for this should be recorded.

After the review

- **Central Bedfordshire Council will ensure that reviews are completed in a timely fashion**

Timescales for completion of minutes

There is an expectation that the minutes from the meeting are typed within 10 working days of the Looked After Children's review.

Timescales for social worker and manager to agree the minutes

Then, within 5 working days of receiving the minutes the team manager and social worker from looked After Children and Leaving and After Care are required to sign to confirm the decisions that have been made at the review meeting.

Distribution of minutes

The Conference and Review service are then responsible for ensuring that those on the agreed list to receive minutes receive them. The social worker must ensure that their copy of the minutes is placed on the child or young persons file.

Issues arising from the minutes

In cases where the review identifies an issue and/or recommendation which may require an operational team manager agreement such as the allocation of resources the Independent Reviewing Officer should contact the Looked After Children and Leaving and After Care team manager within 5 days of the review to discuss the review recommendations and agree the decisions that arose in a subsequent 5 days. If agreement cannot be reached recourse to Central Bedfordshire Council's Dispute Resolution policy may be necessary