

EQUALITY ANALYSIS (EA)

POLICY/PROPOSAL:	A combined contract for an Independent Reviewing Officer Service for Looked After Children and a Fostering Review Service
DEPARTMENT:	Children and Young People
TEAM:	Commissioning Team, Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships Service
LEAD OFFICER:	Shirley Parks
DATE:	23 rd March 2020

NB: Please ensure you have read the accompanying EA guidance and instructions in full.

SECTION A – INITIAL SCREENING

1. Please provide a description of the policy, proposal, change or initiative, and a summary its objectives and the intended results.

This impact assessment relates to the procurement of a new combined contract for an Independent Reviewing Officer Service for Looked After Children and a Fostering Review Service as the current contract is expiring on September 30 2020.

Under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and Care Planning Regulations and Guidance April 2011, Local Authorities are required to provide an Independent Review Officer for each Looked After Child (LAC). The National Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Handbook sets out the expectations of the role, which includes a regular review process and regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the quality of care planning for Looked After Children and for challenging any drift or delay in associated processes.

Brent's IRO provision currently is a mixture of both in-house and commissioned services. The IRO provision currently consists of two in-house IROs and nine IROs provided by Aidhour, a not-for-profit organisation. Aidhour is currently contracted by Brent Council to source and provide local independent IROs to enable the local authority to fulfill its statutory duty in reviewing care plans of children who are looked after by Brent Council. The plan is to continue with a model that includes some internal IROs and a contracted service. Current IROs are of diverse ethnicity, although two-thirds have a white background.

Approximately 900 LAC reviews are carried out each year. In 2018/19 863 reviews were carried out and 870 have been undertaken in 2019/20. The number of Looked After Children as at 31 March in each of the last three years was 318 2017/18, 299 in 2018/19 and 294 in 2019/20. The number of LAC can change at any point in the year, but it is relatively consistent and it is anticipated that the number will remain broadly the same for the future. The actual number of reviews each year will, however, fluctuate based on the number of LAC, changes in Care Plans and the amount of placement changes. Full time IROs carry a case load of 60 to 65 children at any given time to be in line with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 outline how fostering service providers must review the approval of each foster parent annually. The local authority, as the fostering

service provider, must ensure these reviews of approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster. At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and whether the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate.

The IRO service seeks to assist in improving outcomes and life chances of Looked After Children, by building practitioner skills and tracking care plans in order to expedite permanency for Brent's looked after population. The service also works with parents and other stakeholders who have a contribution to make to ensure that each looked after child receives consistent support.

The combined Independent Reviewing Officer Service and Fostering Review Service will provide a service that:

- Listens and advocates for LAC and ensures that their voice is heard and shapes their care plan.
- Improves outcomes for children and young people through robust care planning alongside challenging and supporting practice and escalating of concerns through appropriate channels when required.
- Contributes to the monitoring of the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent.
- Delivers a consistent, experienced and stable work force of social work professionals carrying out the task of independent reviews.
- Ensure children and young people are included in the decision making process about their care plan
- Ensures that foster carers reviews provide a thorough analysis of carers ongoing suitability to foster
- Ensures that foster carer reviews identify any areas where additional support is required and that these are addressed in a timely manner.

It is an expectation that the service provider ensures staff are appropriately skilled and qualified to address the needs and wellbeing of Looked After Children and address any aspects that arise from discrimination, harassment and victimisation. The service specification states that the service provider must meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and that the Provider shall deploy staff who are appropriately qualified, competent, trained, skilled and experienced.

2. Who may be affected by this policy or proposal?

Looked After Children
Foster carers, and in particular Brent foster carers
Practitioners working with children and young people

3. Is there relevance to equality and the council's public sector equality duty? If your answer is no, you must provide an explanation.

Yes

4. Please indicate with an “X” the potential impact of the policy or proposal on groups with each protected characteristic. Carefully consider if the proposal will impact on people in different ways as a result of their characteristics.

Characteristic	IMPACT		
	Positive	Neutral/None	Negative
Age		X	
Sex		X	
Race		X	
Disability		X	
Sexual orientation		X	
Gender reassignment		X	
Religion or belief		X	
Pregnancy or maternity		X	
Marriage		X	

5. Please complete **each row** of the checklist with an “X”.

SCREENING CHECKLIST		
	YES	NO
Have you established that the policy or proposal <i>is</i> relevant to the council’s public sector equality duty?	X	
Does the policy or proposal relate to an area with known inequalities?		X
Would the policy or proposal change or remove services used by vulnerable groups of people?		X
Has the potential for negative or positive equality impacts been identified with this policy or proposal?	X	
If you have answered YES to ANY of the above, then proceed to section B. If you have answered NO to ALL of the above, then proceed straight to section D.		

SECTION B – IMPACTS ANALYSIS

1. Outline what information and evidence have you gathered and considered for this analysis. If there is little, then explain your judgements in detail and your plans to validate them with evidence. If you have monitoring information available, include it here.

Looked After Children are some of the most vulnerable in society and as such, they are vulnerable to discrimination. In Brent the looked after population is diverse, reflecting the local population.

IRO and Fostering Review Services aim to support and protect Looked After Children. The IRO services play an important part in ensuring the quality of care planning for Looked After Children and for identifying any areas of concern or challenging any drift or delay in associated processes. This is a highly personalised service that is tailored to the needs of individual LAC. IROs also carry a quality assurance role, and work with social workers and other multiagency practitioners giving advice, guidance and consultation to support meeting the health, educational and wellbeing needs of individual LAC.

IROs play an important role in preventing issues from escalating or drift in planning for a child's life. The earlier a care plan for a child is finalized the greater the likelihood of securing permanency and positive outcome for looked after children and this can include returning home to their family.

The LAC review process that IROs support takes into account children's age, disability, and ethnicity and, where appropriate, the sex, sexual orientation and faith of the child or young person is taken into consideration to determine what a child's long term plan should be. The IRO plays a key role in ensuring that the voice of the child is at the centre of all decision making process that affect their lives at all times.

The Fostering Review Service is aimed at ensuring that foster carers effectively support children and young people working with practitioners.

2. For each "protected characteristic" provide details of all the potential or known impacts identified, both positive and negative, and explain how you have reached these conclusions based on the information and evidence listed above. Where appropriate state "not applicable".

AGE	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support children in all age groups.
DISABILITY	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.

RACE	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
SEX	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
PREGANCY AND MATERNITY	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
RELIGION OR BELIEF	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
GENDER REASSIGNMENT	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable. The new IRO Service and Fostering Review Service will support all children.
MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP	
Details of impacts identified	Not applicable.

3. Could any of the impacts you have identified be unlawful under the Equality Act 2010?

No

4. Were the participants in any engagement initiatives representative of the people who will be affected by your proposal and is further engagement required?

Feedback from service users has been incorporated into the development of the service and specification. This includes feedback through the annual Bright Spots Survey and through LAC reviews. If possible, two representatives from Care in Action will be involved in the procurement exercise.

5. Please detail any areas identified as requiring further data or detailed analysis.

N/A

6. If, following your action plan, negative impacts will or may remain, please explain how these can be justified?

This is not anticipated. If any negative impacts did arise, these would be addressed through contract monitoring.

7. Outline how you will monitor the actual, ongoing impact of the policy or proposal?

Robust contract monitoring processes will be put in place to monitor outcomes and impacts and to inform future delivery. This includes regular feedback from service users, monitoring complaints and compliments received, service data analysis and contract monitoring meetings.

SECTION C - CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis above, please detail your overall conclusions. State if any mitigating actions are required to alleviate negative impacts, what these are and what the desired outcomes will be. If positive equality impacts have been identified, consider what actions you can take to enhance them. If you have decided to justify and continue with the policy despite negative equality impacts, provide your justification. If you are to stop the policy, explain why.

Procurement of a new IRO Service and a Fostering Review Service is not expected to negatively impact on Looked After Children as the core purpose of the service is to support and advocate for them. The quality of tenders will be evaluated against a specification that sets out clear expectations in terms of the IRO and Fostering Review elements of the service.

Any new provider will be required to maintain diversity monitoring information which will be reviewed as part of quarterly contract monitoring processes. This will, alongside feedback from service users, inform any changes to service requirements.

SECTION D – RESULT

<i>Please select one of the following options. Mark with an "X".</i>		
A	CONTINUE WITH THE POLICY/PROPOSAL UNCHANGED	X
B	JUSTIFY AND CONTINUE THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	
C	CHANGE / ADJUST THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	
D	STOP OR ABANDON THE POLICY/PROPOSAL	

SECTION E - ACTION PLAN

This will help you monitor the steps you have identified to reduce the negative impacts (or increase the positive); monitor actual or ongoing impacts; plan reviews and any further engagement or analysis required.

Action	Expected outcome	Officer	Completion Date
Establish a clear implementation plan and contract review plan, working with stakeholders	To ensure successful mobilisation of the new service	Tanuja Saujani	September 2020

SECTION F – SIGN OFF

Please ensure this section is signed and dated.

OFFICER:	Tanuja Saujani
REVIEWING OFFICER:	
HEAD OF SERVICE:	Shirley Parks