**Independent Reviewing Service Covid 19 Response (March 18 2020)**

This short paper aims to outline the risks to the CIC Review system and IRO functions and to outline how the service will complete its job of review and oversight of the Trust functions to children and young people in care while safeguarding all review participants from increased spread of the virus. These arrangements will also increase the resource to support broader Trust responsibilities as the pandemic develops.

**Risk to and associated with CIC Reviews**

(Based on estimates that 60 – 80% people in the population will become infected, over a potential period of 12 to 14 weeks).

1. CIC reviews are face to face meetings involving children, adults of varying ages, both carers, parents and various professionals. As such, there will be a number of people in the room, who have arrived from various settings and therefore the risk of transmission of COVID19 could be increased. Current Government Guidance recommends reducing social contact to support reducing risk of transmission.

2. CIC reviews take place at various venues including homes, foster placements, residential placements, schools, and children’s trust offices and we are finding that venues where children live are increasing wishing to limit visitors to the settings to prevent the transmission of Covid 19, so suitable venues for meetings are currently not appropriate

3. CIC reviews are attended by professionals whose services will also come under increased pressure e.g. social work practitioners and schools as well as third sector agencies. Therefore, it is likely that there will be decreased resource to attend and participate in review meetings

4. The IRO team has a broad area of responsibility across the Trust and so the service is vulnerable should team members become infected/ self-isolating. We already have staff either self-isolating or becoming increasingly concerned about travel and meetings.

5. The area social work service will come under increasing pressure and it is likely that workers’ time will be directed at the most vital tasks such as seeing children, within the Trust’s priority areas of children at risk of safeguarding concerns in the community or completing assessments rather than having capacity to focus on reviewing of children in care

6. Overall the capacity to enable reviews to take place as face to face meetings, with availability of key individuals with increased health risks for all involved will clearly impact the need for reviews to not take place as face to face meetings in the venues where usually they happen, compounded by potentially less availability of both carers, children and young

people and social work and other professionals to be available due to absence, and expected self-isolation, and reducing risk of exposure to Covid 19 for all participants in the traditional way reviews have taken place.

**Temporary Arrangements**

The purpose of the IRO function and CIC Reviews is to ensure that each child in care has a care and permanence plan that meets their needs, and the review enables scrutiny of the plan and forms the basis of how the IRO for each child undertakes their function to provide independent oversight of the child’s care plan, as well as ensure that the child’s views have been suitably considered in the making and outcomes of their care plan

The CIC review is a forum to enable all involved to openly discuss the care plan and arrangements, ensuring the care plan meets the child’s needs. This is a very important service, but it should not be the vehicle for the establishing of the care plan for the child – that is done by the area social work service.

The temporary changes we will institute will enable IROs to review the arrangements for individual children and undertake due functions of the IRO to monitor the Trusts functions to the children in care.
The IRO service will continue to strive to maintain oversight of children in care situations and progress of plans without the specific need to hold face to face review meetings with all their inherent risks of cross infection. This will, together with area social work services, identifying those children who are at risk and require greater input to support their wellbeing at this time.

**Child in Care Reviews**

CIC Reviews will be managed by IROs making arrangements to have an overview of the child’s situation in communication with the area team manager and social worker, carers, parents as applicable, children and young people and, where possible, involved professionals.The general assumption that in this period the review will not likely involve a physical meeting for all the reasons set out above. I propose that these arrangements start from Monday 23rd March 2020 and run until the urgent phase of the pandemic is over. This arrangement will be reviewed regularly with senior managers from the Trust and partner agency as necessary
There is below clear guidance on how this is to be achieved in a coherent, consistent and clearly recorded way. The IRO for each child will determine whether, considering the changing situation regarding COVID19, the care plan for the child is suitable and indeed possible.

Although there will not likely to be a formal face to face meeting, all IROs have access to the use of Skype, Email, Microsoft team and mobile telephone to communicate with key individuals

* The IRO will determine in the preparation for the review with the child’s social worker and child and young person how the above communication tools will be used, or if a face to face meeting can be possible
* The review will be conducted as required but through remote communication methods agreed including
* read all relevant documents
* Undertake due functions of the review including, reviewing permanence plan, legal status, child’s placement, health development and identity, emotional wellbeing, education and learning, family relationships, and pathway plan as applicable, through communication with participants
* Ensure across the review process the IRO has spoken with all key participants
* IRO will produce a review record – this will include clearly stated method of how review was conducted.

**Informing People of the Changed Arrangements.**

The information on immediate arrangements for CIC Reviews have been agreed at senior management level and communicated to: -
IROs,
BCT Senior Management Team
Area Heads of Service (and Fostering and Adoption) for distribution to all social work staff

**Conclusion.**

The IRO service is an important but not urgent service for BCT’s children in care. For the reasons outlined above there will be considerable short-term disruption to the review meetings themselves but the arrangements cover the essential tasks of the service to provide independent oversight of care planning for children in care.

At this time of unprecedented stress on public services and increased anxiety and vigilance among the population, it is necessary that all resources are directed to the most vulnerable families in the most effective manner. The IROs will be available to provide support as required to the Trust in meeting the needs of our children and young people

If anyone is unclear or concerned about the arrangements, the IRO Management Team can be contact via Central IRO Service email centraliroservice@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk .

Paul Nash IRO Head of Service -18/03/2020

**ENDS**