

Child centred reviews for looked after children and young people

Evaluation report

November 2013



**Children's
INVOLVEMENT**
TEAM ■ SHEFFIELD

Introduction

The Children's Involvement Team (CIT), Sheffield City Council, has worked for almost 13 years delivering a range of projects to support all children in the city to have a say on issues that affect them. Our ethos is based on the belief that all children have something to say and a way of communicating their wishes, views and feelings and through this we ensure that everything we do is inclusive and accessible. We work hard to promote the voice of all children and ensure that everyone, including children with the most complex communication impairments, can access opportunities to be heard.

The CIT works across the 0-19 age range and our work is flexible and appropriate for each age group. Over the years we have developed a wide range of inclusive, fun and engaging resources and toolkits, for which we have been nationally recognised and have sold nationally and internationally, to get disabled and non-disabled children actively involved in influencing decisions and services that affect them. We deliver practical training packages to professionals to increase their skills and confidence in listening and communicating effectively with children. The training aims to make sure that services and professionals alike embed consultation and participation of children within their everyday practice.

We facilitate an award winning Young Inspector's Project to support disabled and non-disabled children to have their say on how accessible and inclusive the city's leisure venues and activities are, and offer recommendations for improvements. We also support and facilitate special educational needs (SEN) reviews for disabled children, using a child centred approach originally developed by Helen Sanderson Associates.

During 2013, 21 Looked After Children (LAC) aged between 8 and 16 years from across the city agreed to trial a child centred review process based on the above SEN model and evaluate its success. This report highlights the reason for the need for a change in the LAC review process, the steps we went through to develop the pilot in Sheffield, a summary of the pilot, presentation of the findings and some recommendations for taking the work forward.

Review of the current situation

The Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) Handbook¹ states that:

“in order to ensure that the meeting remains the child's meeting as far as is possible, the IRO should always begin from the perspective of the child, listen to his/her views and make sure that s/he is involved as much as possible in the review process” (p19).

In Sheffield this is reflected in the Looked After and Adopted Children's (LAAC) Strategy, which states that:

“Children's views must be at the centre of the review process in ways that are suitable to their personal circumstances and abilities” (p11).

There is however a concern at a national level that the existing process for LAC reviews is at risk of not meeting the child's rights in their reviews. In 2013, Ofsted published a report² evaluating the effectiveness of IROs in discharging their responsibilities towards LAC in ten local authorities drawing on evidence from the views of children, carers, and professionals. The report highlights the negative experiences of some children and concludes that not all reviews were found to be conducive to children's effective participation in reviews and that often, “the views of children were not always taken into full account” (p34). Other criticisms of the review process focussed on the consultation booklets, with one child quoted as saying:

“the consultation booklets are pathetic... the wording is just like from 1934... they put graffiti writing into the booklets, it's just like they want to get down with the kids” (p22).

Many children interviewed as part of the Ofsted report said they want choice in their reviews, for example of venue and who is and isn't invited. Almost all of the ten local authorities involved in the Ofsted evaluation identified engaging children with communication difficulties and learning difficulties as an area requiring improvement.

After reading these criticisms of the current system for LAC reviews and based on our experiences of successfully facilitating child centred SEN reviews where children's voices were meaningfully included in decisions, the CIT approached the Service Manager of the Independent Review Service (IRS) in Sheffield to discuss a willingness to explore a new child centred approach to LAC review meetings.

¹ DCSF [IRO Handbook: Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children](#) 2010.

² Ofsted [Independent reviewing officers: taking up the challenge?](#) 2013.

How the project began

In September 2011, as part of a regular contribution to Early Professional Development (EPD) programme in Sheffield, the CIT delivered a training session to demonstrate some techniques that Social Workers and Support Workers could use to make meetings with children more child centred. During this session we demonstrated the model we use in SEN reviews and discussed with participants how the process could be adapted for LAC reviews. Following this training session, we met a number of times with a representative group of senior staff from IRS and Sheffield City Council's Permanence and Through Care Service to discuss if and how we could take these concepts forward within LAC review processes. These discussions stalled at this point due to the then IRS Service Manager leaving his post.

In September 2012, in an attempt to revive the idea, we delivered the same demonstration review session to a group of IROs and staff from the Permanence and Through Care Service. The new Service Manager for IRS was very positive in his evaluation of the process and asked us to work with IRS to look at taking the work forward.

We established a steering group whose membership consisted of the IRS Service Manager, an IRO, a Social Work Consultant from the Permanence and Through Care service and other Social Workers and Support Workers from the team. The steering group considered the process in relation to how it might meet the statutory requirements of a LAC review and made some initial amendments to the process. The concept was then presented by CIT and the IRS Service Manager at the Priority 1³ subgroup of the LAAC strategy⁴ and the Corporate Parenting Board which gave approval to take the project forward.

During the period January to April 2013, CIT worked with the IROs, through a combination of consultation workshops and training, which culminated in them shaping the new review process to meet the statutory requirements of a LAC review. During this period, CIT developed a full process and a range of printed materials to support the process and the IROs in implementing it. The printed materials were all stylised to ensure continuity and were all designed and written in a child friendly way. One of the major challenges in this was ensuring that, for ease of use, there was one set of materials for all ages and genders of children.

The written materials included:

- A detailed printed process timetable
- A summary checklist timetable
- A consultation booklet for children
- A consultation booklet for families and carers
- A child's information leaflet
- A set of invitations for the child to select from

³ Priority 1: Engagement and Influence of Looked After Children and Young People.

⁴ Looked After and Adopted Children and Young People Strategy, 2010-2013, Sheffield First Partnership.

- A suite of 'One Page Profile' templates for completion with the child by the IRO or whoever the child and IRO identified as being most appropriate.
- A step by step process guide for IROs
- A pocket guide to the process for IROs
- A top tips sheet for IROs
- An introductory letter from the IRO to the child confirming the date and time of their consultation meeting
- An information sheet for parents
- A template letter for children clarifying the decisions made at their review
- An information sheet for professionals
- Headings cards for the review meeting
- Ground rules for display in the meeting
- A 'thank you' postcard with '5 day changes' reminder

In May 2013 the IRS Service Manager and a member of CIT met with members of the ACE Council (Sheffield's Children in Care Council) to hear their thoughts on both the process and the materials. They were unanimously in favour of both and several of the young people asked for their own forthcoming LAC reviews to be part of the pilot process.

During Easter 2013, CIT delivered three days of training for all the IROs. The training included:

- Practical tools for the IROs pre-review meeting with the child, including one page profiles, Communi-crate resources and communication charts
- Discussion and ideas for communicating with disabled children who don't use speech and language or don't have a formal system of communication
- A demonstration of a review
- Opportunities for each IRO to play three different roles in three reviews:
 - Review facilitator
 - Subject of the review
 - Observer to give feedback to the facilitator
- Reflection and discussion about the review process in relation to difficult scenarios
- Discussion about taking the project forward.

The pilot project

The pilot took place between June and September 2013. Each IRO identified two children who were due to have a review during this period and who were willing to have their LAC review facilitated in the new child centred approach. A total of 21 child centred reviews were carried with disabled and non-disabled children and young people by the 10 IROs.

The reviews were booked as usual and each review was allocated a member of CIT to shadow and support the IRO and observe the process to provide feedback on the facilitation of the process. This was discussed with the IRO at the end of the session and a copy of the feedback emailed to them.

What a child centred review looks like

A child centred review ensures that everyone, including the child, has the opportunity to have their say. It puts the child at the centre of the meeting, giving the child ownership over the decisions that are made about their life.

Before the meeting:

During a meeting with the child, the IRO will complete some preparatory work with the child. This will involve:

- Using the consultation booklet to gather their wishes and feelings, including what is working and not working, what's important to them now and in the future and any questions they have to pose at their review
- Who they would like to attend their review meeting
- Confirmation of a venue that is both suitable for a review of this nature and is acceptable to the child
- What music they would like played during sections of the meeting and what snacks and drink they would like.

At the meeting:

The IRO will facilitate the meeting around the following headings that are displayed on flip chart paper around the room:

- What everyone likes and admires about [child]
- What's important to [child] now
- What's important to [child] in the future
- What's working and not working for [child]
- What support [child] needs to stay healthy and safe
- Questions to ask or issues to be resolved
- Decisions.

Everyone attending the review, including the child who uses their consultation booklet to help them, has the opportunity to write up their own thoughts and feelings about the child on flip chart under each heading.

Once everyone has finished writing under the headings, everyone including the child will be given stickers to vote on the priorities for discussion. The remainder of the meeting is spent creating decisions to take forward, starting with the priorities voted on by the child. The meeting will continually come back to the child, putting them at the heart of every decision. At the end of the review, there will be a clear set of decisions with an assigned date and person responsible for taking it forward.

The evaluation

Following each review, the CIT member allocated to each review spoke, where possible, to each individual who attended the review to gather their views on the process. Each review's evaluation, where relevant and appropriate, consisted of:

- A visit to the child to facilitate an age appropriate activity or discussion
- An interview (face to face or over the phone) with parents, carers and Foster Carers
- A feedback form sent electronically to the IRO
- An interview (most commonly via a telephone conversation) with professionals who attended the review

The interviews followed a set format and questions varied slightly depending on the role of the professional.

Each IRO was tasked with facilitating a review with two children, however one IRO only facilitated one review and two IROs facilitated three reviews. A total of 21 reviews were completed during the pilot period. Of these 21, two reviews will be disregarded for the purposes of the evaluation. The first, because the child centred review process was not followed and it was decided that a meaningful evaluation with attendees couldn't be carried out as they would not have seen the child centred process they were being asked to evaluate. The second, because only the child and their foster carer attended the review and neither were able to be contacted for the purposes of the evaluation. Therefore the evaluation report will be based on 19 child centred reviews. One young person was unable to attend their review due to illness.

A total of 81 parents, carers and professionals attended the 19 reviews; this figure does not include the child, the IRO or the supporting member of CIT. For the evaluation, 89% of these were contacted and interviewed. Of the 11% who could not be contacted, this included six school staff, two Social Workers, and one key worker.

Of the 19 reviews to be evaluated, one child did not attend due to illness. This review was still evaluated and the views of all the other adults who attended were captured. 16 children who attended their review contributed to the evaluation, three could not be contacted for their views.

Presentation of findings

The model has been broken down and the findings for each section are presented below. Under each section we have summarised the views of each participant under the following headings:

- Child
- Birth parents, family and friends
- Foster Carers
- Social Workers
- IROs

Under each heading, each attendee's views were summarised as positive, neutral or negative and this quantitative feedback score was summarised in a graph. Feedback from birth parents, family and friends was not included in the graph as, with only 5 people in this category attending across all the reviews, it was thought that this figure was not statistically significant to be included. This group included three birth mothers, one birth parent and one boyfriend of a young person.

Following the quantitative data, qualitative feedback from each person is presented, including some words from birth parents, family and friends.

In this report each review will remain anonymised and attendees will be referred to by their job role, for example IRO or Social Worker. Where a person's words have been quoted in this report, this is because what they wrote was a good example or a clear summary of what others had said.

We have used the term 'child' throughout the report to mean any child or young person aged 0 to 16 years. Where the term 'young person' is used specifically, it is because it relates to a specific teenager and a particular situation, for example a review taking place in a young person's own home as they are of an age where they can live independently.

Preparation for the review meeting

The invitation

All but one of the **children** said they enjoyed choosing the invitations and liked having some control of who was invited.

“It’s a good idea. It’s good to choose who can come”.

The one negative comment related to a request for more designs for older teenagers.

Birth parents, family and friends were positive about the invitations when they received them though one birth parent said he didn’t receive it as it was sent to his ex-partner.

Only half the **Foster Carers** said they received an invitation but for those who didn’t, they stated that they were happy with just a phone call from the IRO.

Over two-thirds of **Social Workers** said they received an invitation and the feedback was generally positive:

“It was good that it had come from the kids themselves as this hasn’t happened before. I felt important”.

Other professionals were very positive about the invitation:

“A lovely touch, lovely for it to come from the young person themselves”.

Some questioned the timescales of it being sent out, with an emphasis on needing “plenty of notice” for the review.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- More designs, particularly for older teenagers (child); ensure that the timescales for the review allow time for professionals to be available
- Importance of review invitations being sent out with adequate notice.

The consultation booklet

All the **children** said they liked the consultation booklet with different children choosing different pages as their favourites. Many mentioned that it was an improvement on the previous booklet:

“I couldn’t stand the other booklet, it was boring and didn’t stand out”

“It’s easy to use in the review and helps you think about what you want to talk about. In the old reviews you might not have thought of things like this but now it’s all there. It’s much better than just talking about it on the day”.

Many of the children said they would like to have a copy of their booklet to keep and others said it would have been more useful if they had had access to it in the review meeting to refer to. Two of the older children said they would like to be able to complete their booklet online rather than on paper and suggested that some of the text in the booklet was “said too childishly”.

Foster Carers were very positive about the booklet and commented on how useful it was for preparing the children for their review.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Have a version available to be completed online
- Keep the booklet on the child’s file for the next review
- Make sure the child has access to the booklet in the review meeting
- Ensure that the text is child-friendly but not childish.

The one page profile

The majority of **children** liked the one page profile, which was viewed as a “fun” task to complete with the IRO and a “positive experience”.

“I think it’s a good way for new people to get to know me...It was a positive experience, especially the like and admire bit and reading what people thought about you”.

Some children, however, questioned the value of this tool, particularly for those for who it wasn’t their first review:

“I didn’t mind doing it but it seemed a bit pointless as everyone knows me already. It would be good for people coming into care for the first time”.

For two children who expressed a negative view of this task, it was clear that the process wasn’t followed correctly by the IRO who had chosen the profile design for the child:

“[The IRO] chose one for me. I had Barbie but I’m not keen on Barbie. I like the Gruffalo one or I’d choose Tracey Beaker”.

The majority of **Foster Carers** liked the one page profile and the positive affect it had had on the child:

“It was great to build him up as he’s so let down in the past”

“[Child] saved hers and put it in her special box”.

However, some questioned whether it was really necessary when the child is well known to the attendees:

“It was nice but it’s probably extra work for the IRO when we knew all the information already”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Only do a one page profile for a child when it is their first review or when it was thought it would be useful for new professionals attending to see it.

IROs’ views on the preparation process

IROs were generally positive about the new consultation booklet and the one page profile:

“This worked really well with [child]. I was a bit surprised but she clearly finds it easier to write than to talk about what is important to her. She engaged really well”

“I already have a positive relationship with [child] but I think this process improved that. He engaged very well with the whole process”.

The IROs also fed back that the consultation booklet and one page profile were also useful for children with additional support needs:

“The [preparation] meeting went well. [Child] has learning difficulties and her Foster Carer stayed with her as I went through the consultation booklet to help her with the answers. She was able to complete the whole booklet and gave some good answers”

“Due to [child]’s special needs, she found some of the preparation material much easier to use than previous materials. She was able to concentrate on some of the work and enjoyed making lists of things she likes to do and who she wanted to invite”.

There were, however, some concerns about using the one page profile for every child in terms of how much it was actually used during the review:

“I’m not sure how the one page profile fits in. I think it’s really good and we put two copies up on the wall but I’m not sure that anyone at the review saw them and they were never referred to”

“I found the one page profile a really good tool to use with younger children that I was meeting for the first time. I wonder whether it will have the same impact at subsequent reviews”.

There was also a concern raised by a number of IROs in relation to the amount of time the preparation took:

“Preparations with children, the Foster Carer and professionals all took a lot of time. It’s too much to do the booklet and the one page profile in one meeting”

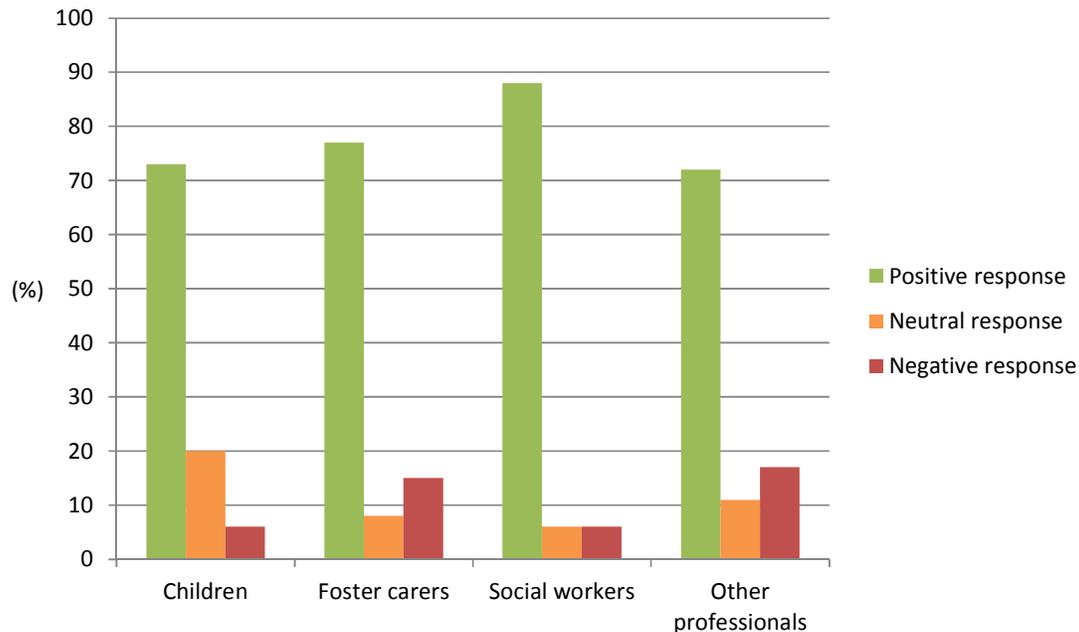
“Meeting with [child], there were a lot of things to get through; I almost felt I needed an agenda. This made it a long visit with not very much general catch up time, but focussed on completing documents and making arrangements for the review”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Consider the benefits of completing the one page profile with every child and make a judgement call as to whether or not it is needed
- Have a one page profile for children for their first review and include it as part of the meeting so everyone uses it to get to know the child.

The venue

The reviews took place in a range of venues, including Foster Carers' homes, residential homes, the young people's own homes, schools and City Council office meeting rooms.



The **children** were generally happy about the venue for their meeting. Some concerns raised included privacy issues in residential homes, space issues both at Foster Carers' homes and independent meeting rooms:

"It was here at the residential home. It's noisy and people walk in and out, it's not private. I've had one at the Town Hall before and that was better as it was private"

"It was good having it at Norfolk Park because I could play outside after but the room was too small and hot".

Birth parents, family and friends had mixed views about the venue, and comments were generally linked to space:

"We had lots of room in school".

The majority of **Foster Carers** were positive about the choice of venue.

"I liked it and I like going over there [Centre in the Park, Norfolk Park]. He could have a break and run around outside and go and play in the park"

"[Child] chose to have it here [home] as he felt more comfortable. He doesn't like having them at school as it makes him stand out and be different. Being in his own home helped as he felt safe and participated better than at school. When it was at school we just talked about school things, this way was better as we talked about other things".

Negative issues raised were related to when the review had taken place in the Foster Carer's home:

"It's fine here [in my home] cos I'm easy going and don't mind things on the walls. It was hard though with my other kids coming home from school and needing my attention".

Social Workers had mixed views on the different venues. Positive feedback included:

"Norfolk Park is a good neutral venue; it's not school or home"

"Norfolk Park was good because there was more space for paper"

"Star House was suitable as it's central and had plenty of room".

Negative comments related to space and issues with the review being at the foster carers' homes:

"The room could have been better, school didn't really give us the space we needed"

"A lot of Foster Carers wouldn't want writing to go on their walls"

"If they're at the Foster Carer's home it can make the children feel more uneasy, it's easier for the children to get distracted"

"Some [Foster Carers] wouldn't want paper up on their walls".

Again, **other professionals** had positive comments to feed back about the various venues used which was linked more to the suitability for and the needs of the child rather than the actual venue itself:

"Great idea having it in his flat"

"It did the job overall, much better than having it in school" [review was held in Star House].

As with previous feedback, negative comments were linked to space issues:

"The room wasn't big enough to accommodate all who attended comfortably" [reviews held at residential home]

“There wasn’t much wall space” [review held at residential home].

IROs were positive about some of the reviews and, again, this feedback was influenced by each individual child and situation rather than the venue. The main issues raised by IROs in relation to the venue included space and time needed to set the room up for the review:

“[Child] wanted the review to be at the carer’s home and there was not enough space for all the sheets. The venue was where he felt most comfortable but would not have been suitable for a larger number of people”

“A lot of wall space is required. Most rooms we use do not have that much accessible wall space and certainly not in foster homes”

“I am not sure this review is easily transferable into every venue”.

A point was made by a couple of the IROs that some consideration needs to be given to any support the child may need after the review, particularly if the review is with a young person in their own home thus leaving them alone after the review:

“I needed to stay and offer him some support as he was upset that his mother left quickly”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Consult with the child about where they would feel most comfortable to hold the review
- Negotiate with the child, foster carers and professionals about the most suitable location for the review
- Consider other venues in addition to the traditional locations of home and school
- Ensure there is sufficient space at the venue for attendees and for the paper on the walls.

Setting up the room

There were some difficulties with this aspect of the review, in relation to the time that children arrived for the meeting with parents which didn't always allow enough time for the child to be involved in the set up, or if the IRO allowed this to happen the review meeting over ran.

Children were generally happy with being involved in setting up the room though almost half of the children didn't view it as an essential part of the process.

IROs said they found setting up the room a difficult part of the process:

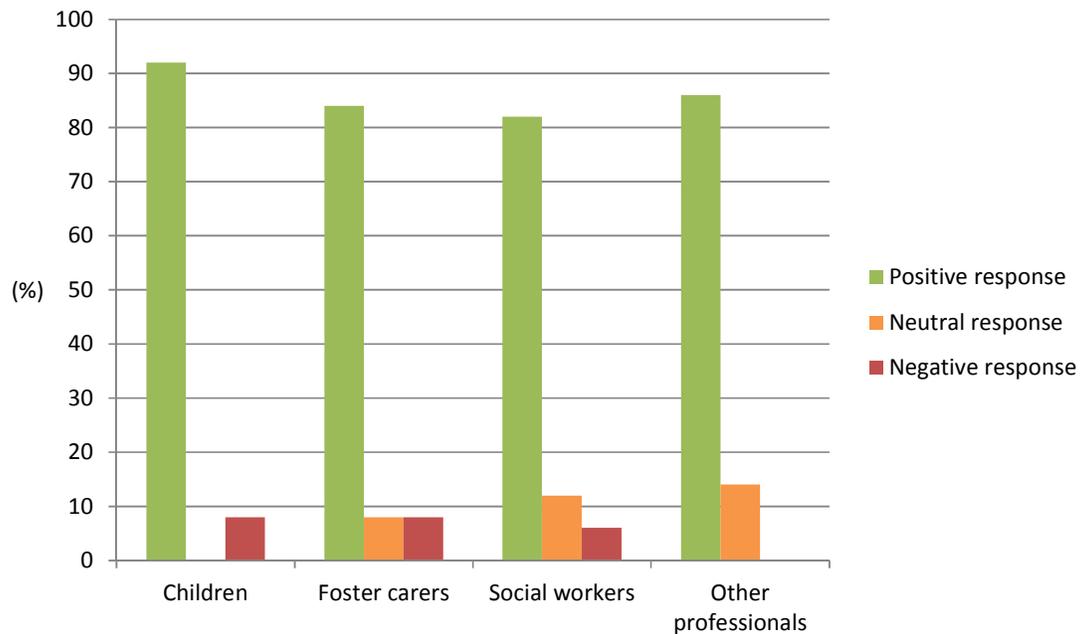
“Getting the room organised how I wanted was a bit time consuming and shifting the furniture a challenge. I thought it would be great to have a dedicated room we could book that is already set up with flip charts and headings already on the walls”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Consult with the child about their desired involvement in setting up the room and arrange with foster carers, where appropriate, to arrive in time to enable this to happen
- Investigate the possibility of a suitable space which could be booked for reviews.

The review meeting

Like and admire



The **children** all gave positive responses to this section of their review which evidently had a positive impact on many of the children:

“It put a big smile on my face. About time I heard something good”

“I didn’t think anyone would have anything nice to say but there were lots”.

One older child commented:

“I did like it but it was a bit weird”

“Bad. Embarrassing. Normally I hear the bad things first, it was nice though”.

Birth parents, family and friends were very positive in their feedback on this section, commenting that this was “a really good idea”.

Foster Carers were also very positive about this section:

“It was nice, it couldn’t not be. We talked about it for a few days after”

“Brilliant idea. He got to find out what everyone likes about him, it was great to boost him up”.

Even the neutral and negative comments had a positive element to them in relation to the effect on the child. One Foster Carer said:

“Some of it I found OK and some a bit much but it was good on [child’s] front to see nice things”

“It wasted time but knowing [child] it was probably a good thing for her to see it in writing in front of her so she could take it in properly”.

The dominant message from **Social Workers** was that the ‘like and admire’ section was a positive activity for children. Described as “empowering”, one Social Worker said:

“We should absolutely start all reviews this way”.

The one negative response reflected on the fact that some children may find it difficult to cope with such a positive approach in front of a group of adults and suggested that some consideration should be given to the effect this section may have on an individual child.

Other professionals highlighted the positive impact of this section, not only on the child but also the impact on their contribution to the whole review meeting:

“From my experience at reviews and visits it is easy to be drawn into negatives first which leads to creating a tense atmosphere and by the time we get around to highlighting the positives it usually ends up with people not able to recollect any and the young person going into close down and cutting off as a self-protective act for fear of hearing anything else negative about them”.

Some also welcomed the opportunity to be able to give positive feedback to the child:

“We rarely get an opportunity to give positive feedback to the young person so this was good as it was in both written and verbal form”.

IROs were very positive in their feedback on this section, and highlighted the positive effect this had on the child and the subsequent review meeting:

“Excellent. [Child] has had a negative self-image, of getting into trouble, especially at school. At the review the teacher and carer were particularly positive as to how well he is now doing. This enabled the review to start really well”

“I really liked this part. We can focus too much on negatives and not enough on the qualities of the child. It was affirming for [child]”.

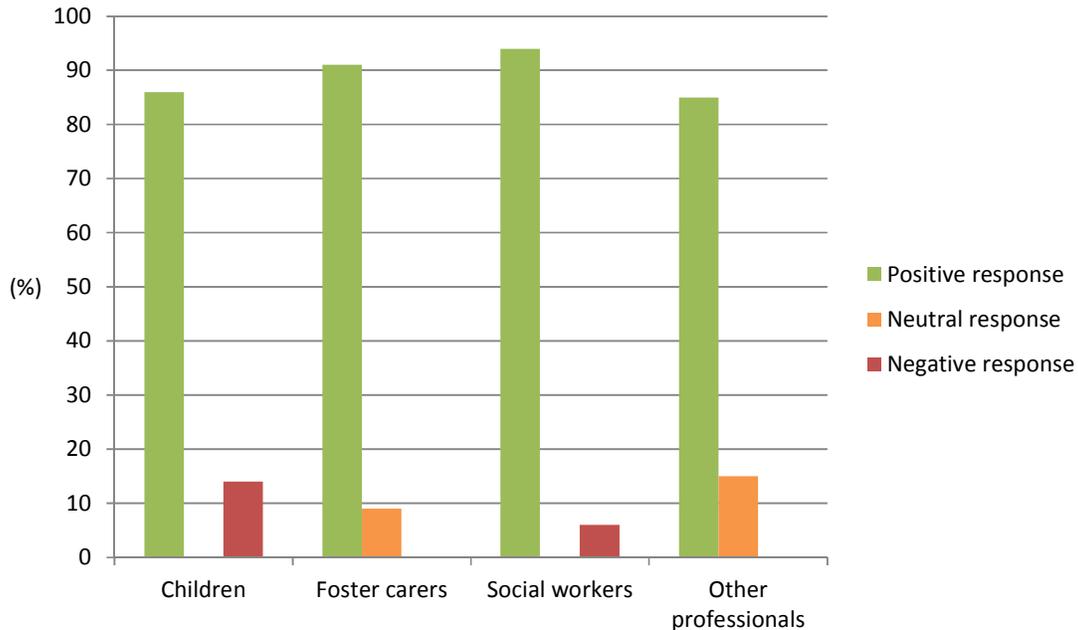
The IROs highlighted a negative related to managing this process with other professionals:

“A nice positive way to start. Sadly, participants seemed to find this direct question difficult. At least a couple qualified the positive things by saying ‘some of the time’ or ‘can be’ which I felt somewhat negated the positive start”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Consider the suitability of this exercise for the child
- Ask the child whether they are happy with this section and prepare them for what to expect
- Ensure clear communication with Foster Carers and professionals about the ‘like and admire’ section and be clear about the ‘rules’ for this section of the meeting to ensure everyone is prepared and able to say something positive about the child.

Ground rules



The **children** who gave a positive evaluation of the ground rules thought that it was useful to keep “chatting” to a minimum and to make sure mobile phones didn’t interrupt the meeting. However, there was some confusion over some of the terms used in the ground rules such as “jargon” and “confidentiality”.

Birth parents, family and friends also stated their appreciation of mobile phones not ringing throughout the meeting. They also commented positively about the rules making them feel more at ease in the meeting:

“They helped us feel we could make spelling mistakes and it wouldn’t matter”.

This was echoed by **Foster Carers**:

“It was great, it made us feel that we could write and not be put down”.

Foster Carers also highlighted the usefulness in the review of the rule that only one person should speak at a time:

“Often in reviews everyone is talking at once. It’s really important that everyone is given the chance to speak”.

One Foster Carer questioned whether they were needed as they are “common sense”.

Social workers thought that having the ground rules would make the meeting accessible for the child attending:

“Perfect. It was good that there was no jargon from professionals. If the child doesn’t know what we’re talking about then what’s the point?”.

The one negative thought from a Social Worker was:

“Pointless really, we would have done these anyway”.

Other professionals stated that they thought the rules were helpful, highlighting the rules ‘spelling mistakes are OK’ and ‘listen without interruption’ as the most useful. There was some concern about the confidentiality rule as some professionals said they need to share information about the meeting with colleagues, for example in the residential homes or at college. Also, some professionals suggested that the term ‘agreement’ might be more appropriate than calling them ‘rules’.

Feedback from **IROs** echoed that from other professionals. Many found them useful or could see how they might be useful on other occasions:

“Ground rules were useful for mum and dad – dad in particular has been very angry in the past in reviews, and this and the previous section helped to set a positive tone, and the concept that the review is for [child], not for ongoing issues about the legal proceedings or arguments with the Social Worker”

“I didn’t need them but they do set the tone of the meeting and there will be times when they will be helpful”.

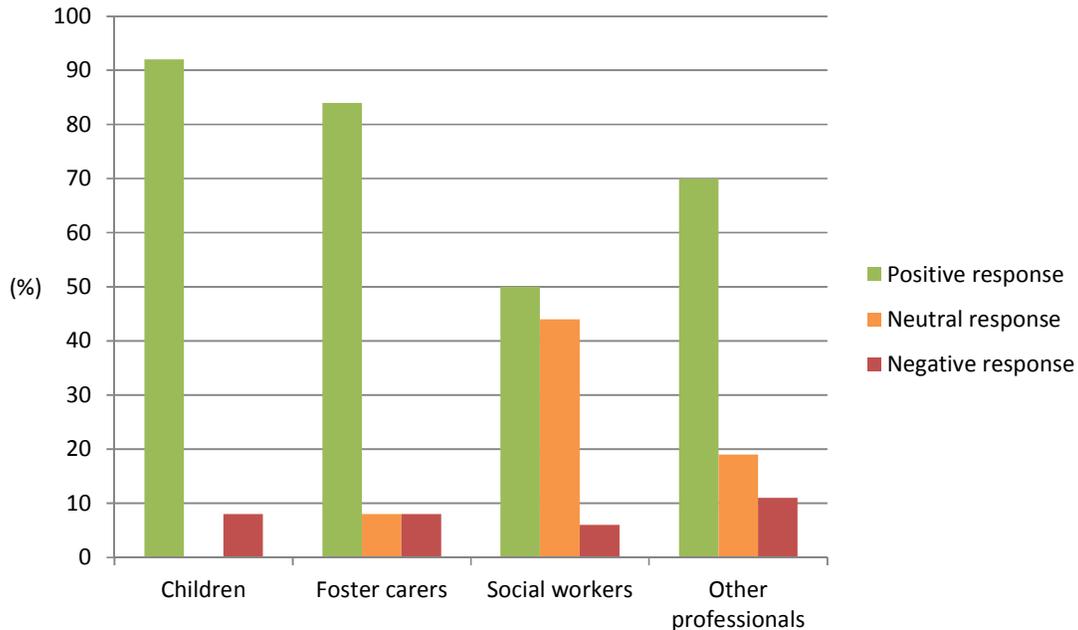
Some of the IROs highlighted that some of the rules were confusing or misleading, including the term ‘smelling mistake’ which was described as “confusing” and the 5 minute rule:

“Implementation of the 5 minute rule was difficult. Almost all the issues voted for were actually related to one issue and although this issue could have been dealt with outside the review it was clearly the most pressing issue so I did not want to defer this discussion to another meeting”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Make sure the ground rules are written in plain, child friendly language
- Reflect on the confidentiality rule – agree how it will be explained to enable professionals to share information with colleagues
- Change the wording to clarify some rules, including ‘smelling mistake’ and the five minute rule which needs some clarification to relate to one *person* not talking for more than five minutes, rather than one *issue* being discussed for more than five minutes
- Review the title ‘ground rules’ to be more child friendly.

Writing on paper



The majority of the **children** were positive in their evaluation of this section, suggesting that it made the meeting more open and therefore made them feel more included in what others were thinking.

“I liked having everyone up writing everything on the paper and seeing what everyone was writing and thinking”

“It helped me open up and talk about some issues I don’t think I’d have talked about otherwise”.

Some children also said it made them feel more comfortable and relaxed as there was time when everyone was up and writing with music on that people could chat and joke with each other in a less formal section:

“I liked that people got up, it made them talk to each other and made me feel less nervous”.

Some children also said they appreciated someone to write for them; during the pilot this was often the IRO.

One child expressed her concern at having lots of important, private information up on the wall:

“Everyone was writing too big, anyone could have walked in and seen it”.

Others said that, where the review meeting involved a lot of people, it was difficult to get to the wall to write. One child’s solution to these problems was to have post-it

notes for everyone to write on and then stick on the wall. This would mean the writing would be smaller and more difficult to read if someone came through the door who wasn't in the meeting and it would be easier to be able to stick them on the wall. This was also perhaps related to venue as the child who expressed these views had their review meeting in their residential home.

Birth parents, family and friends were also particularly positive about this section of the meeting. All said that in the previous meeting format they felt excluded:

"I think it's an absolutely outstanding idea, it gets our input into things"

"I felt a part of it. Normally we just have to sit and listen and this way we got to put something down and get involved".

One parent was supported by the Social Worker to write things up on the wall which was appreciated.

Many **Foster Carers** said that initially they were nervous of writing in front of other people but this feeling soon disappeared.

"I was a bit nervous about this as I'm dyslexic. I was worried that I'd have to get up and write in front of everyone but it wasn't like that and once I was up there I felt OK".

They did acknowledge that, even if they didn't feel like this, others may and suggested that someone to help people write if they needed it would be a good idea.

Foster Carers also highlighted the relaxed feeling that this section gave to the meeting and stressed the positive affect this had on the child and their engagement in the meeting:

"It's more relaxing and made the whole meeting feel more relaxed which helped [child] to open up a bit more".

Most Foster Carers said they found it useful to be able to see everyone's thoughts up on the wall:

"It was lovely. Stepping back and seeing what was written on the walls gave you a wider view of what was going on".

Social Workers had very mixed views on this section of the process. The majority of Social Workers weren't concerned about the actual writing process and thought that having the information up on the walls would be positive for the child:

"It was spontaneous. I would think it's definitely less intimidating as a child and much more conducive to not being vulnerable".

Negative thoughts expressed related to repetition of information presented, the need for fewer headings and the thought that some things written up needed some clarity

about what they meant. Some Social Workers said they didn't write everything they wanted to due to concerns about the child being present:

"We were delicate about how we wrote that up so we didn't cause any problems for her. Some things that were written up were quite cryptic. It's a negative that there were certain items that should have been on the agenda but they couldn't with [child] being there".

Other professionals had lots of different reasons for why they thought this section was a positive experience both for themselves and for the child. These included it enabling a more relaxed, informal feeling to the meeting, keeping up the energy in the meeting, being able to see others' thoughts and reflect on them in the context of your own thoughts. Benefits to the child of this approach were highlighted as very important:

"I really liked it. It made you focus on the child as an individual and gave them the right image that nothing is underhand and the agenda hadn't been agreed before the meeting. It's good that the child gets to play such a big part".

Concerns raised by other professionals reflected previous negative comments, including nervousness related to writing in front of others and people getting in each other's way. Some other professionals also thought it might be useful to have the headings in advance of the meeting so they could think more about what they wanted to write in each section.

IRO feedback showed that this section generally worked quite well:

"Everyone was really happy to do this and I think this was because they were all prepared. The preparation booklet was really helpful for [child]".

One issue raised by IROs focussed on support needs of the child during this part of the meeting and the potential benefit of the child having a supporter or advocate to help them during this section of the meeting:

"People needed encouragement and I think [child] found this hard so I concentrated on supporting him the most"

"As [child]'s helper couldn't attend and I had no notice of this I was lucky to have [CIT observer] there to help. This would have been more tricky if she had not been there".

Other negative feedback about this section focused on difficulties juggling the dual role of the IRO as facilitator and contributor:

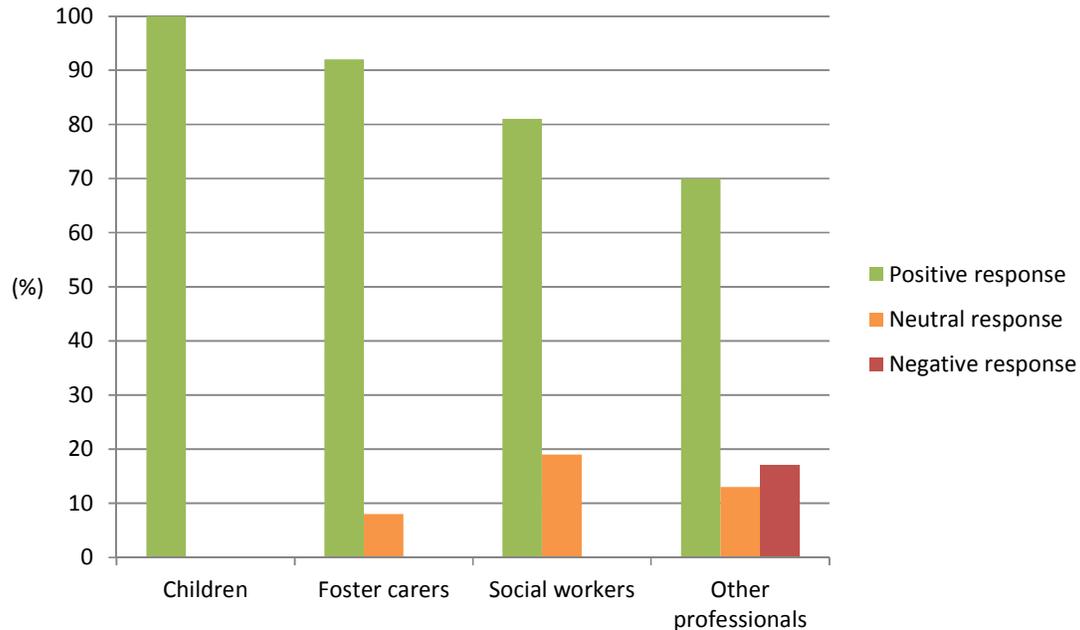
"I had chosen not to write my comments up on the sheets before the review as I did not want to influence everyone else but then I found that I

had too many things to do during this time and wrote very little of my own views”

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Someone identified to help people, both children and adults, during the writing on the wall section if they feel they need it
- Writing on post-it notes instead of directly onto the wall
- Condense the headings
- Ensure that the process to go through the information at the end of the writing section is followed to clarify any information that isn't understood
- Provide a list of headings and explanation of the process to accompany the invitations
- During the preparation visit with the child and/or Foster Carer, consider the use of a supporter or advocate to support the child during the writing up section and identify who the best person would be to fulfil this role from the child's perspective.

Voting



The views expressed by the **children** about the voting section were very positive:

“Top of the list! Went to the point instead of drifting off”

“It was a good thing that my votes were discussed first...the most important stuff could get talked about first”.

Improvements suggested included time in the preparation meeting and space in the booklet to discuss and record the child’s thoughts on this.

Birth parents, family and friends said they were in favour of this section and said that it made the process clear to them.

Foster Carers were also positive about this section of the meeting:

“It was good to think about the three main things, it made you think about what the problems were and it stops you going on forever. It gave us a chance to say what we thought was important. That can sometimes get lost in the other meetings”.

The shadow CIT members for two reviews noted that some of the issues that had been voted on weren’t discussed, and this was reflected in the neutral responses from two Foster Carers.

Social Workers were on the whole positive about the voting section. Some were encouraged by how well this enabled the child to engage in the process:

“I was really surprised that [child] did it as they had said ‘no way’ initially but they participated well”.

Others said they liked how it focussed the meeting on the most important issues that needed to be discussed.

The neutral feedback was related to misunderstandings or lack of clarity about the reason for doing this activity:

“At the time I wasn’t keen, I found it a bit confusing. But we had some training the other day [EPD session delivered by CIT] and I understand it more clearly now”.

Other professionals raised both positive and negative thoughts about this section of the process. Positive feedback was often related to the “empowering” impact of this activity on the child:

“Excellent that the young person could put up stickers and prioritise things for him. This process helped with that and I’m not sure the other would have”

And the way that it was an important learning point for older children to understand more about how professionals work together to come to a consensus about a particular issue:

“It was a good way of showing [child] what professionals agree or disagree with in a positive manner. He could also see that people put the same things down and there was a sense of working together”.

Negative comments raised were related, as with the social workers’ comments, to slight confusion about the process and where to put votes if issues were repeated across a number of sheets and concerns that not all issues that were voted on were discussed.

IROs were generally positive about the voting section:

“This was a new and novel approach and participants engaged with it”.

During the pilot reviews, some IROs found it difficult to group the votes into themes due to the repetition of issues to discuss and a spread of votes across these:

“This was really hard, trying to make sure everything was covered and everyone contributed. This was a small review, it would have been harder in a large review”.

However, most of the IROs successfully developed different methods to make this part of the process work for them and for the other participants:

“We had a break for refreshments which worked better than in the previous [pilot] review where we did not”

“I was able to group subjects together so that we could cover everything. I took a bit of time to prioritise the areas to discuss while people got another drink”

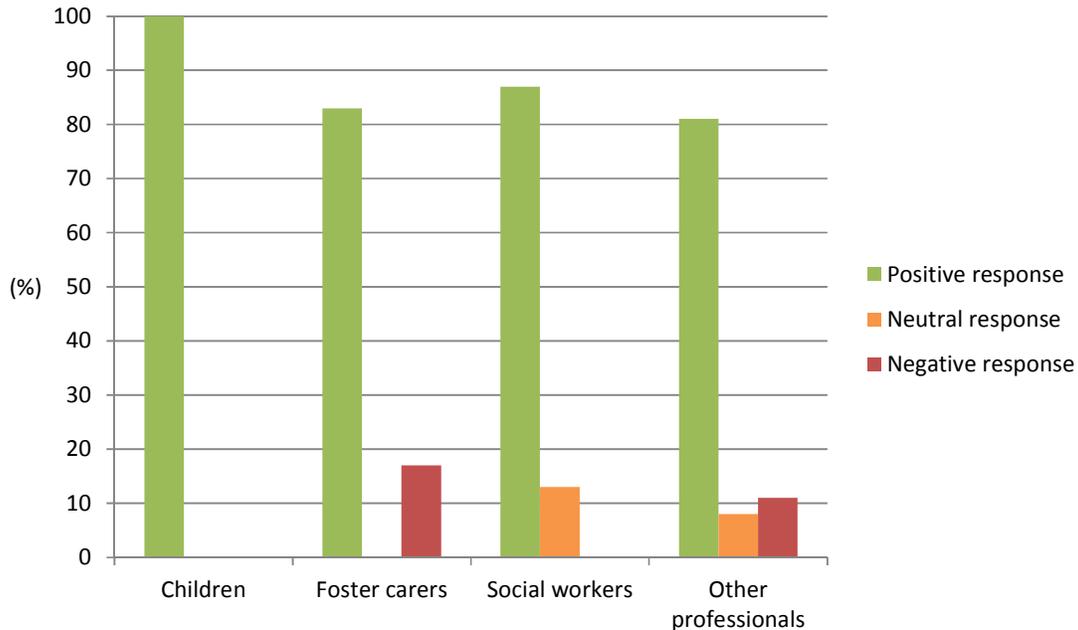
“There were only a small number of votes so it was quite easy to cover all that needed to be discussed. Some of the items were grouped for discussion as they were the same thing”.

There were some concerns raised by IROs about the child’s understanding and ability to prioritise what they wanted to discuss and about whether everyone left satisfied that their issues had been sufficiently addressed.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Include a section in the consultation booklet to record what the child wants to vote on
- Ensure a clear explanation of the reason for doing this section in terms of setting the agenda for the meeting
- Ensure that all topics voted on are discussed at the meeting
- The IRO should ensure that any issue that is important to be raised but has been forgotten or avoided so is missing from the information gathered be added to the ‘agenda’
- Add a section in the consultation booklet to help the child consider which issues they would like discussed at the review meeting.

Decisions:



All the **children** were positive about the decision making part of the process:

“It was good, more clear. Hopefully stuff will get done and hopefully things might happen now”

“I liked it because I got to choose what we talked about too, it was the best bit”.

One child spoke about decisions being made in the meeting that weren’t necessarily what she thought, highlighting the need for children to receive the decisions following the review giving them opportunities to change their minds.

All **birth parents, family and friends** also gave positive feedback and stated their satisfaction that the main issues raised were discussed and decisions made.

Most **Foster Carers** were happy with the decision making section and acknowledged the positive impact on the child both to be involved in making the decisions and to see them written up in front of them in a clear, visual format:

“It was good for [child] to see it up and hear who will do what and when they’ll do it. It was very clear and helped him understand everything better”

“I think [child] found it more beneficial than before as they were more involved and got what they wanted to say over better. I was clear what would happen next”.

There was some concern that not all the areas voted on had been discussed:

“There was stuff I wanted to discuss that wasn’t discussed even though I had voted on it. I didn’t raise these things that I wanted to say but I wouldn’t have done in the old style either”

The negative views were related to the fear of making decisions about some subject areas with the child present:

“It felt that some things were skirted over that we’d voted on. How can you put bad things up in front of her, how can they deal with seeing the bad things in front of them...she don’t need negative things”.

Social Workers were positive about the decisions section both for themselves and for the child:

“It was good and specific about what actions would be taken and who would take them. I’m a visual learner so seeing it up there was really good for me”

“This was more interactive and involved the young person more”

Two Social Workers thought it would have been better if more time had been allowed for the decisions section. The CIT observer in these cases noted that the IRO spent too much time talking through the issues rather than simply summarising and clarifying them and therefore didn’t leave enough time for all the issues voted on to be discussed and decisions made.

Other professionals were, on the whole, positive about this section:

“Interesting and productive with clear projected outcome and realistic timescales”

“I think it gave a more democratic process to decision making, with more input and contribution from the young person. It was more centred around what they wanted”

“I think the standard review decision making process would have seen [child] walking out and not coming back”.

Reservations echoed those previously stated, including requiring “more time to reflect on decisions we were making and more time to stop and think about them” and the concern about discussing some issues with the child present in the room.

IROs gave much positive feedback about the decision making section of the review. Comments included:

“I very much liked that the action plan is immediately visible for the child and the group was really engaged and worked with me to think of actions and decisions”

“There was agreement about the priorities. We came up with clear decisions and timescales for action”.

The two main criticisms of this section reflected others’ feedback. The ‘5 minute rule’ caused some confusion though from feedback received it is clear that this wasn’t understood by IROs and subsequently others at the review.

“I could have been stricter and used the five minute rule but actually felt it was important that I heard what everyone said rather than making a decision based on half the information”

“One of the purposes of a LAC review is to have discussions about issues. There is no ‘5 minute rule’ in conventional reviews”.

The ‘5 minute rule’ appears to have been understood as no issue can be discussed for longer than five minutes; it should be understood as no single person should be allowed to talk for longer than five minutes to prevent one person dominating the discussion.

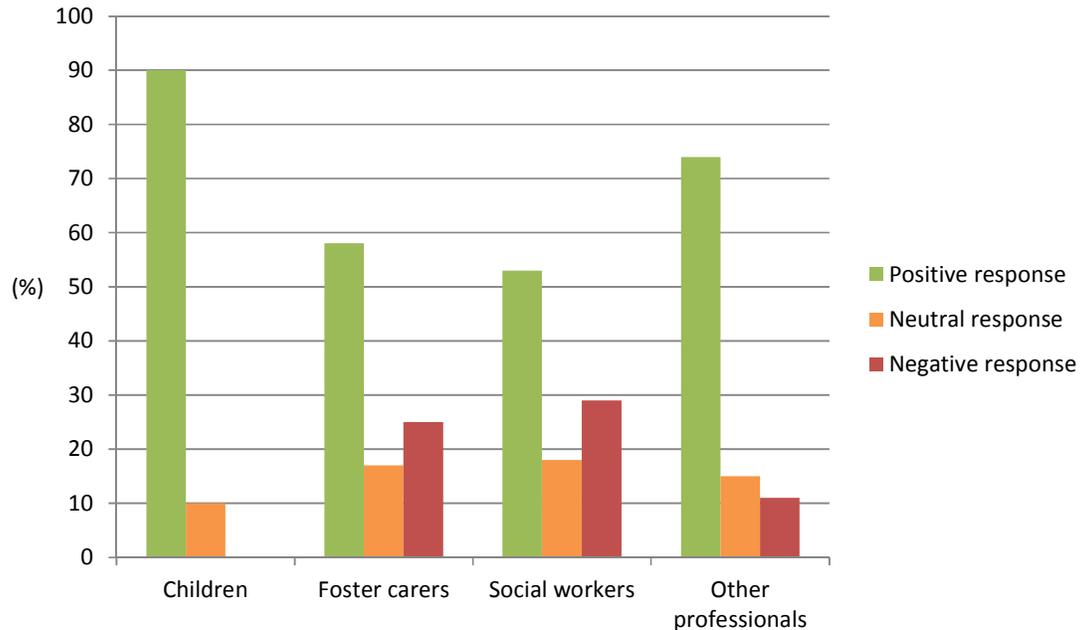
The concern about issues being discussed with the child present was raised by IROs:

“This was OK but a bit superficial as issues which really concerned everyone were not discussed in depth as it wasn’t felt OK to do so in front of [child]”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Make sure all children are left with a postcard at the end of the review meeting with a contact number to enable them to change their minds about the decisions made in the meeting within the 5 day timescale
- Make sure all children are sent a letter from the IRO to confirm what decisions were made at the review meeting, who is responsible for taking them forward and a timescale in which this will happen
- IRO to ensure that everything that is voted on has a decision against it and to double check with everyone at the end to make sure everyone has raised everything for discussion and decisions that they wanted
- IRO to manage the time allocated to each section of the review to ensure that enough time is left (minimum 45 minutes) for the discussion and decisions section of the review
- CIT need to clarify with IROs the meaning of the ‘5 minute rule’ and how it would work in practice.

Length of meeting



The **children** who were involved were, on the whole, positive about the length of time the review took:

“I normally can’t sit down for long but I was getting up and doing stuff so it didn’t feel like 90 minutes”

“It was good, they’re normally longer than this when they’re at my house”

“It was too short – only an hour – I’d like it to go on for longer”

For three siblings, the IRO held their reviews one after the other. The children’s response to this in relation to the length of the review was:

“Having all three reviews together was too long”

Birth parents, family and friends said they thought the review went on longer than the previous style meeting but did not see this as a negative point:

“It went on longer because of [child] but it doesn’t matter. It’s my daughter; it’s her life and future. It takes as long as it takes”.

This was reiterated by the **Foster Carers** for these children who said:

“I think the younger two got involved more but it was too long to have them all together”

There was a mixed response generally from Foster Carers with some thinking it was fine at 90 minutes and some finding it longer than the previous style.

Social Workers also gave mixed responses to the length of time the review took. Several Social Workers said that it took longer than the previous style which some thought was fine:

“The format lends itself to a longer review but on balance this was positive”

Whereas some thought it that the length was not a positive:

“The process needs to be condensed. It was longer than normal reviews and this does impact on workload”.

Other professionals were generally positive about the length of time the meeting took:

“It didn’t feel like it was any longer because it was relaxed. These things can’t be rushed”

“It was a bit longer than normal as [child] got distracted and wanted to talk about different things but it didn’t affect anything during the meeting”.

There was some confusion from other professionals about how long the review actually lasted. From the observations carried out by the CIT, three out of the nineteen reviews went on for longer than 90 minutes, with the longest lasting for 105 minutes (15 minutes longer than the allowed time). However, the majority of the negative comments from other professionals were linked to the time the review took:

“It went on for a long time, 2 hours is too long and it makes it difficult for me in my role [class teacher] to attend for the whole meeting”.

Some, however, did not have concerns about the meeting running over but suggested it would be helpful to be clear about this with attendees:

“It needs to be totally transparent, to start bang on time and also if it’s running over be clear and check with everyone there, ‘is it ok if we talk for 5 more minutes?’”.

Most **IROs** said they thought that the length of the review was acceptable:

“It was just a little longer than a normal review but it really involved [child] in the decisions”.

However, there were some concerns raised about other implications from the additional time the whole process might require:

“30 minutes for setting up the room, 90 minutes for the review, then 30 minutes to clear up”

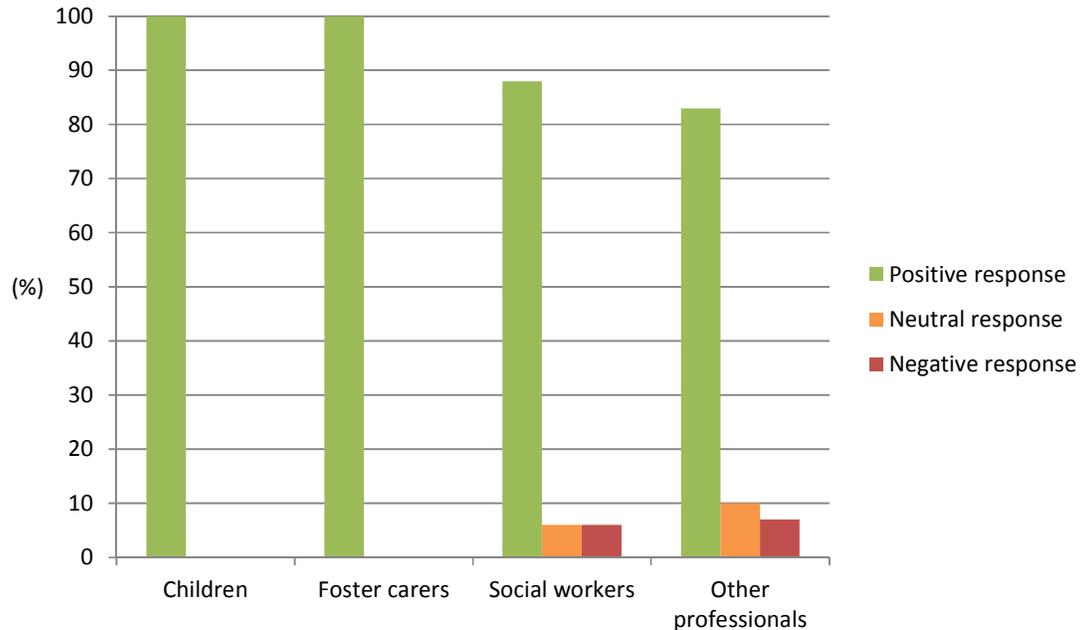
“The review took about 90 minutes which is longer than a conventional review and that did not include the 45 minute pre-meeting”

The whole process is very time consuming and to do this with all reviews would have a major implication for our time”

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- Ensure clarity from the outset about how long the review will last so everyone has sufficient time booked in to their schedules
- IRO to monitor the time during the meeting to ensure, as much as possible, it doesn't run over the allocated 90 minutes
- Some consideration of the additional time, perceived or real, required for the review process in relation to staff resources.

The child's involvement



The **children** were very positive about their involvement in the meeting and process. The most common feedback response was:

“I felt listened to”.

Most of the children commented on how the process made it easier for them to voice their views:

“I felt like it was much more in-depth than before because I talked about more difficult stuff than before instead of just nodding”

“When you’re writing up on the walls with your booklet you say what you want to say and it’s just so much better”

“This way you can say what you want to say because you could write it up. Sometimes in the old meetings you’d want to say things but you wouldn’t know how”

“They were bad as everyone was talking and interrupting each other. They would add things to what you were saying and it would be like Chinese whispers and they would get the wrong idea”.

Many of the children commented on how their involvement in the whole meeting made them feel more involved and made it a more positive experience for them:

“In the old style when I was younger I used to have to leave at the end and they’d talk about me. I hated that, I didn’t feel listened to. This style would have helped me a lot”.

Birth parents, family and friends said they thought it was important that the child was in their review and were positive about their child’s involvement in the process:

“It’s her review; it’s about what she wants. She was chatterboxing saying things and she doesn’t normally get involved. This time she was involved and she was laughing and joking and was putting input into it”.

Foster Carers were also unanimously positive about the child’s involvement in their review:

“I thought it was really, really good. They all got up and looked at each other’s and gave their views. I was amazed at how much they all opened up, it felt like a door had opened”

“I think he found it much more beneficial. He was much more involved and got his things across. I think he really enjoyed it”.

Many **Social Workers** were positive about the child’s involvement in this style of review:

“I think it was really positive to get [child] more involved in the process and this type of review allows it to happen in a child-friendly way”

“I thought it was brilliant. [Child] has been to reviews before but she participated more than ever in this one. She was laughing along which was really nice, it was a nice relaxed way of doing things. If it wasn’t like that she wouldn’t have managed and certainly wouldn’t have been as involved”

“[Child] did really well to contribute; he was really involved and central to discussions. I felt he was very empowered by the whole process”.

The few reservations related to concerns that the attendance and involvement of the child being tokenistic and unnecessary:

“I’m not sure any child is getting anything out of being there. It’s a tick box exercise when the environment isn’t really geared up for the young person’s attendance”

“[Child]’s information was the same as what we had offered, we all know what’s important to her. It’s a bad idea to have the child in the review throughout as we would have felt uncomfortable saying any issues in front of her. [Child] normally just comes in for 10 minutes at the end and this works as we can fill her in on the details”.

Most **other professionals** were also very positive about the child's involvement:

"[Child] managed the review very well and was always at the centre of discussions and decisions. He embraced it and felt listened to and it made him feel very positive about himself"

"It's much better than people talking for her as she could put her own views forward".

Neutral views from other professionals acknowledged the importance of the child's involvement but questioned whether this was any more in this style than in previous reviews:

"She's usually involved. It was nice that she was able to put her views down but no more than usual just done in a more positive, slightly different, more visual way. It gave her more control and was maybe more positive for her overall".

Two negative comments related to the perceived inability to be able to talk about "difficult things", assuming that if more difficult, challenging topics had been addressed the child's involvement wouldn't have been as positive.

IROs were very positive about the child's involvement in the meeting. It was raised that the child was often more involved and engaged than in previous reviews and IROs acknowledged the positive impact this had on both the child and the meeting itself:

"[Child] was engaged in the whole process. The key worker said she had never seen him so engaged in a review"

"[Child] was more engaged and he really enjoyed the process, particularly the 'like and admire' section and having food and drink at the review, and he felt satisfied with the decisions"

"This was [child]'s last review. She was able to take part in the planning and was well supported within the review setting which enabled her to stay for the whole meeting. This is the first time [child] had played any significant role in her review process and in many ways it is sad that it came right at the end of her time as a looked after young person".

It was clear that some initial reservations about the children's ability to engage in the review did not come to fruition:

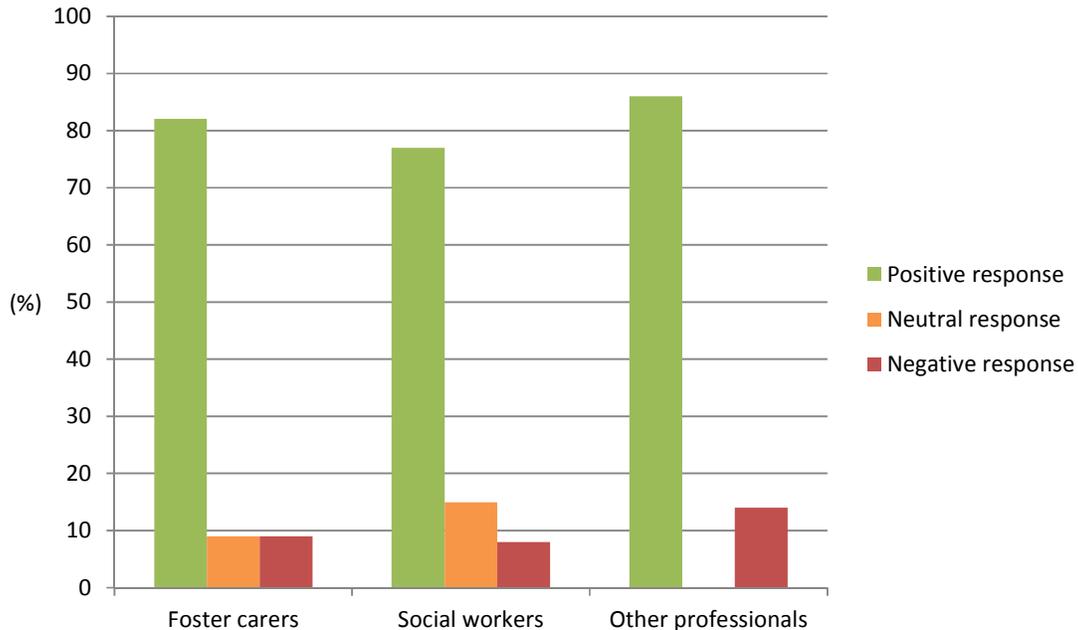
"[Child] was brilliant. I was worried that he would lose concentration or interest but he was really engaged. He spoke about really deep issues – his separation from his brother and why he couldn't live with his former carer. In the break he said 'thank you for my meeting [IRO]'"

“I was worried that he thought we were having a party, not a review. In a sense we achieved both and his suggestion of playing musical statues made a fine ending. Some professionals who attend reviews would have struggled with this”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- The benefits to children being present in a child centred review meeting is widely acknowledged
- Some briefings or awareness raising, highlighting the benefits of the child's involvement, are required for other professionals.

Adults' involvement



The majority of **Foster Carers** said they felt that they had been listened to:

“I felt very involved. I had a couple of issues I wanted to discuss and got the chance to bring them up and talk about them”.

One Foster Carer also felt frustrated that although she had voted on an issue it didn't get discussed. Again there was some concern that not everything that adults felt they wanted to discuss could be discussed with the children present.

Birth parents, friends and family were positive about their involvement:

“It was good for me as I don't often get the chance to be involved. It made a difference that I could get involved. I often get left out and this made a difference. We normally just sit and listen and everything's been decided in advance. This time I really felt listened to”.

Social Workers were generally satisfied with their involvement but also raised the issue of not feeling like they could discuss everything they wanted or needed to with the child present:

“I feel all the issues were raised but in a very basic and child-friendly way so it did not allow professionals to put more detail into plans for working with [child]”.

One Social Worker suggested that anything that was too difficult to raise with the child present could be discussed at another time:

“There was an issue about contact between [child] and his siblings and whilst we wanted to maintain that contact and that was discussed we couldn’t discuss it fully because he doesn’t need to hear about the issues between the two Foster Carers. Maybe that could be done at another meeting after the review”.

Other professionals were positive about their own involvement:

“I felt involved, valued and relaxed. I was there and delighted to be”

“I was concerned that I wouldn’t get much of a voice about important health issues I needed to discuss but this didn’t happen. I felt very involved and got the answers I needed to the issues I raised, much more than in previous reviews”.

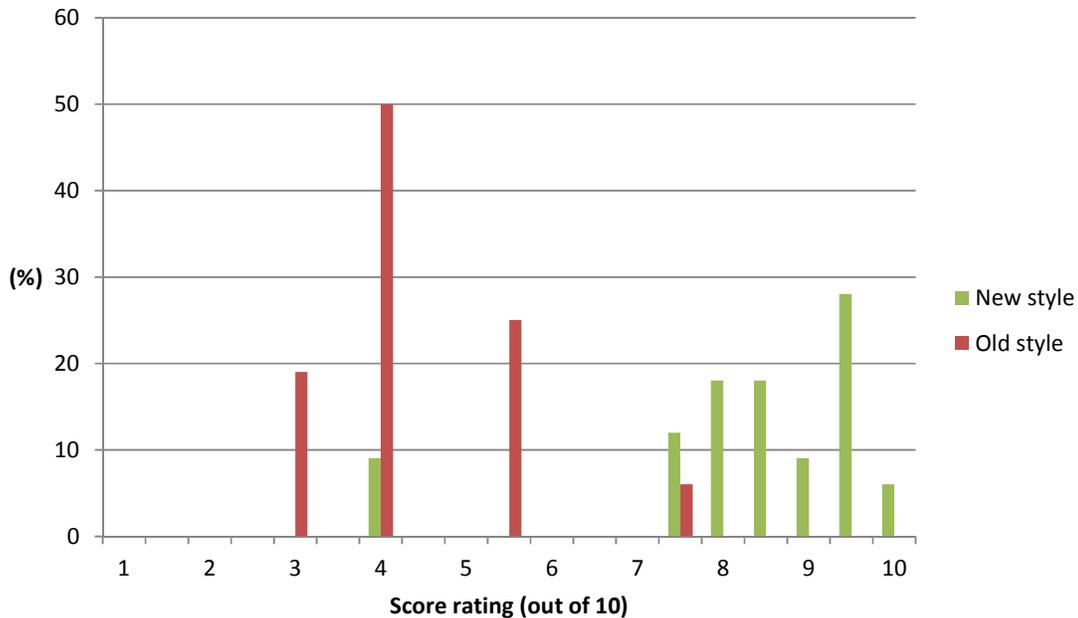
Negative feedback from other professionals focussed again on not feeling like they got all the answers they needed due to difficulties raising everything they needed to due to the child’s presence in the meeting.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- IRO needs to make sure that everything that is voted on is discussed
- To be totally transparent with the child, consider adding a decision to discuss any difficult issue, that genuinely cannot be raised in front of the child, at a subsequent meeting
- Arrange and deliver briefings and or information sharing sessions for other professionals to clarify the purpose of a review and confirm that the review is the child’s meeting.

Old versus new style

The **children** were asked to score the old style review and the new style and state which style they preferred. The graph below shows their responses:



Every child, except for one, said they would like their next review to be carried out using the new child centred style.

The children were asked to give a score out of 10 for each review. They gave scores of 7.5 and above for the new style, except for one child who gave a score of 4 for both styles, based on the fact that he dislikes any type of review. The old style scored between 3 and 5.5 with one child giving a score of 7.5. Comments about the new style included:

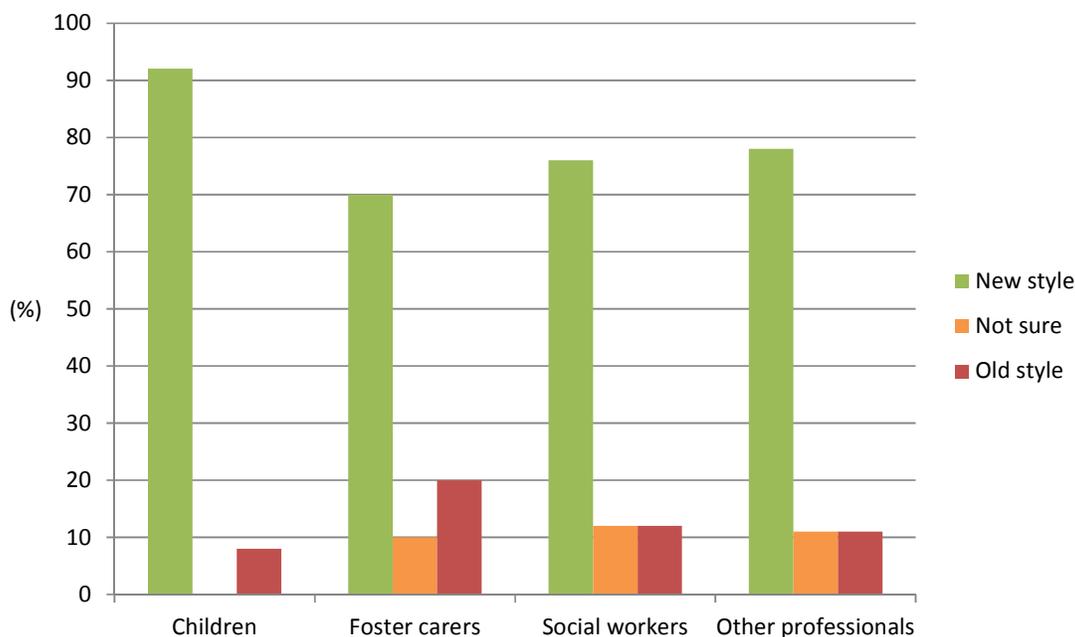
“Excellent, everything was really good”

“What would make this new style a 10 is if there was less paper”

“Would like it in this style but in a bigger room and not have three together”

“Both the same for me. It’s good when you feel comfortable. When it is here at the house [old style] I can wander in and out which is good, and lie on the sofa. They are boring but I have to have them”.

The participants were then asked whether they would prefer the old style of review or the new style. The results are presented in the graph below:



All the **children**, except one, said they would like to have the child centred style of review at their next review:

“It was so much more helpful. In our old reviews it felt like nothing was changing and you’d go from one to the next. With these you know where you are and you know what’s changing”

“This way you can say what you want to say because you could write it up. You could see what others were saying. Sometimes in the old meetings you’d want to say things but you wouldn’t know how”.

The one respondent who did not choose the new style gave the following reason:

“I felt we could communicate better in the old one, sitting round a table – it was more sociable and you could hear what everyone was saying”.

Birth parents, family and friends were very positive about the new child centred style of review:

“It’s more relaxed than a normal review. It’s much better than before, we felt more involved. Normally we go in and everything’s decided and we get talked to. I never want to go to one of the old style again”.

Most **Foster Carers** said they preferred the new style of review:

“It was easier this way. The old style is daunting, you are staring at each other. In this way we weren’t directing things at each other it was just going up on the wall to be talked about. There’s a better atmosphere”.

Positive comments from Foster Carers also recognised the impact of this style on the children involved:

“The old style is easier for Foster Carers I think but the new style is more effective. It’s got to be about what’s easiest for the kids and what’s easiest for them is the new style”.

There was some disagreement with the feedback from Foster Carers in who the approach would be most suitable for: some thought it would depend on the individual child, whereas others thought that “it would work with all children”.

Two Foster Carers said they preferred the old style, stating that they found it “more organised” and raised concerns about the child being in a meeting where difficult issues are discussed.

Social Workers also favoured the new style, and their feedback also focussed on the positive experience for the children present:

“The old one is more statutory and makes the child feel like they’re going into some kind of examination. It feels like they’re singled out from mainstream children. If we changed them [reviews] to this way then more children would come”.

Some Social Workers also acknowledged the fact that the review could be appropriate for all children:

“I prefer this one definitely. I think it’s a really good method as long as it can be adapted to work really well with our kids. It would be great for all our kids even if they couldn’t participate very much it’s important that they are in the room, just being in the room is important”.

Although some preferred an individual approach:

“This was a good format for this young person at this time. It may be appropriate to allow the IRO in discussion with professionals and the child to decide what format suits other children at particular times”.

Other professionals were also positive about the impact of the child centred review on children:

“This style of review was very effective for all people involved, especially the young person. Just the overall relaxed, less formal manner. It encouraged a less threatening environment I felt, in comparison to the old style where even I on occasions felt as if I was being cross examined”

“An excellent way forward, children at the heart of things. Enjoyable and positive for the child. I hope they don’t ever go back to the old way”.

Again, other professionals noted that the child may appreciate the choice of style and that the system needs to be flexible to accommodate this. Other professionals also raised concerns over important discussions being missed:

“There could be different headings so there is less cross-over and repetition and a way of ensuring important things aren’t missed. Missing things would be my biggest concern with this style”.

Learning points / suggestions for change:

- IRO to consult with child and other professionals to agree format of review
- Reduce the number of headings
- IROs to ensure that anything that isn’t voted on but requires a discussion is included on the ‘agenda’ under an ‘any other business’ type heading.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are taken from suggestions for change collated through the evaluation in the above report and themed:

Preparation information and documentation

- More invitation templates, including more designs suitable for older teenagers
- Investigate the possibility of making the consultation booklet available to be completed online
- Save the consultation booklets and investigate scanning into the child's file on Wisdom
- Make sure the booklet is available for the child in the review meeting
- One page profiles should always be completed for a child when it is their first review meeting. The IRO should make a judgement call about whether or not to do a one page profile with a child if it not their first review, taking into consideration the number of new professionals at the meeting and the usefulness of this at the review. If a one page profile is used, build some time in to the review for attendees to read it
- Consult with the child about where they would feel most comfortable to have the review, considering privacy of personal information, and use this information in negotiations with foster carers and other relevant professionals
- Investigate different options for suitable venues and consider their use to ensure there is adequate space for all the attendees and to put paper on the walls
- Consider whether a suitable venue for reviews can be accommodated within plans for the Safeguarding Service and IRS moving into new accommodation
- Consult with the child about whether they want to be involved in setting up the room and arrange with Foster Carers, where appropriate, to arrive in time to enable this to happen
- Identify someone to support or advocate for the child in the meeting if, through consultation with the child, this is an identified need
- Ensure clear communication with Foster Carers and professionals about the 'like and admire' section and be clear about the 'rules' for this section of the meeting to ensure everyone is prepared and able to say something positive about the child

- In any pre-meeting correspondence (eg. sent out with the invitations) include a list of the headings and explain the process

During the review meeting

- In consultation with the child, consider the suitability of the 'like and admire' exercise for each individual child and prepare them for what to expect
- Have alternative methods available for recording thoughts to put on the flipchart, such as post-it notes
- After the information has been written up on to the sheets on the wall, the IRO must ensure they briefly summarise the information and clarify anything that is not understood
- The IRO must ensure that they explain that the voting activity is to set the agenda
- The IRO must ensure that all issues voted on are discussed at the meeting and check at the end of the meeting if anyone has anything else that they would like to raise that hasn't been discussed (under an 'AOB' type slot)
- The IRO must manage their time carefully to ensure there is at least 45 minutes for the discussion and decisions section and that the review doesn't run over 90 minutes
- If an issue arises for discussion that is thought to be too difficult for the child to be involved in, the IRO should make a decision for the issue to be discussed at a subsequent meeting. The child should be included in the decision as to what is too difficult for them to discuss
- Consider whether this format is suitable for all reviews for each child or all children and, if not, detail which parts are essential within any reviews and at what frequency a review, as detailed, should take place.

Following the meeting

- The IRO must ensure that they send the letter with the decisions to the child as soon as the review has been written up to enable them to have a copy of the decisions and know who's agreed to do what and when. The child can hold onto this for their next review.

Process changes

- Consider renaming the 'ground rules' and consider the wording, particularly of 'confidentiality', 'smelling mistakes' and the '5 minute rule'. Ensure all IROs are clear as to the meaning of each rule and that they convey this to children and professionals in the meeting

- Reduce the number of headings, and therefore flipchart sheets
- In the consultation booklet, include a section to record what the child wants to vote on
- Consideration needs to be given to time requirements for a child centred review in relation to IRO workloads.

Next steps

The CIT will present the findings included in this report to the Independent Reviewing Service at a half day workshop with them in December 2013. At this meeting, a way forward will be discussed and agreed which will then be presented to the Sheffield Children in Care Council, Social Care Managers, LAAC Strategy Group and Corporate Parenting Board to gain their agreement with a plan as to what training and information sharing is necessary prior to an agreed start date.

For more information on the child centred processes in LAC reviews please contact the Children's Involvement Team (childrens.involvement@sheffield.gov.uk) or Paul Massey, Service Manager for Independent Review Service (paul.massey@sheffield.gov.uk).