

ALL ABOUT ME REVIEWS

A guide to Sutton's new approach to
Looked After Reviews for Independent
Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, carers
and other professionals



INTRODUCTION

Sutton has introduced a new approach to Looked After Reviews. Our All About Me reviews will capture children's views and experiences in a process that is more engaging and enjoyable, and that they wish to take part in. The aim of this guide is for everyone involved in the review process to understand the new approach and how they will contribute to it.



WHY CHANGE THINGS?

Usually we hold a meeting that covers a broad, sometimes lengthy agenda and invite the child or young person to join in discussions about them in this meeting. This can work for some young people but the process tends to be adult-focused and children can find it difficult to take part. We want our children to be involved in making decisions that affect them and to break down some of the barriers that stop them from participating in a meaningful way during Looked After Reviews.

There's a lot of talking and I'm not sure about everything that was said.

It's too long!!!

I don't like the meetings.

Don't like people talking about me.

I don't like meetings with everyone there. It's easier when it's me and one person.

Comments from young people taken from LAC Survey Report 2019

We know meetings can seem long and boring for children. Research into the Role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England (2014) by the National Children's Bureau quotes an advocate as stating:

...often the meetings feel like professional meetings and I think, "no actually this is the child's meeting" – so I still think there's a long way to go to make it a meeting where the young people feel it's for them. Because they say it is for them at the beginning and then the professionals end up having their discussions.

In Sutton we carried out a survey in 2019 of children's views of their Looked After Reviews, and this highlighted a need for them to be better prepared for their reviews and making the paperwork more accessible for them.

We want to celebrate the successes of our Looked After Children and to use their reviews to do this. Even though there are sometimes difficulties that need to be addressed, this can be done in a way that builds on the child's strengths and focuses on solutions. In doing this we can empower our children and young people.



We believe Looked After Reviews can be a process rather than an event. Creative approaches can be used to ensure that children and young people are at the centre of this process and their wishes, feelings and experiences are the main focus.

To meet statutory requirements, the Looked After Review still needs to monitor progress of the Care Plan, ensure the child's needs are being met and their welfare is being safeguarded. The wishes and feelings of the child about their care plan still need to be considered alongside the views of parents, carers and other key professionals.

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

For All About Me Reviews to be strengths-based and truly celebrate the achievements and successes of each child we need to rethink our approach. Where there are concerns or worries, these can be explored with the child or young person so they can be part of finding the solution.

We would also like the information shared during the Looked After Review process to contribute to children and young people's life story work.

To achieve this, we need to consider 3 key components of the review process:

1 - PREPARATION

2 - THE REVIEW

3 - PAPERWORK



1 - PREPARATION

This part is really important. All About Me Reviews are better when everyone is well prepared and there is a plan about what the review might look like. The child's social worker, carers, key workers and IROs play a key part in this preparation to ensure everyone is ready for the review and children and their parents are able to participate.

THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER:

Preparing the child

The child's Social Worker should visit the child about 2-3 weeks before the review to explore:

- Who they would like to be at their review
- Where they would like it to take place
- What they would like to be discussed

Sutton have produced a 'Menu of Choices' to give children and social workers some ideas of how they could prepare for their review (see page 10).

The social worker should talk to the child about how they would like the review to run or any activities they may like to do. For example, a creative activity, the child interviewing the participants or mapping out future goals and plans. They should also ask if the child would like to chair their own review.

All of this should be recorded in the social worker's report All About Me Review and Care Plan and shared with the IRO a week before the review so that they can prepare.

Preparing the child's family

Where it is in the child's best interest and in line with the child's views, parents and family members should be supported to attend their child's review. The child's social worker will be responsible for explaining the new approach to All About Me Reviews and help family members to understand how they can contribute.

Preparing the foster carer or key worker

Foster carers and key workers often know more about children's current interests, what they are good at and enjoy. Before the review, the child's Social Worker should talk to the foster carer or key worker about ideas they have about what the child might like to do in their review.

THE ROLE OF THE FOSTER CARER OR KEYWORKER:

Foster carers and key workers have a key role in helping children to prepare for their review. Carers should also think through with the child whether they might like to do an activity, have a discussion-based review or have any other ideas and let the social worker and IRO know. The carer may also have their own ideas about what would work well for the child so they get the most out of the review.

Carers need to be well prepared for reviews, thinking about what has gone well for the child and what achievements should be celebrated. In advance of the review, they should also think about how challenges can be addressed together. The All About Me Reviews should be child focused, but this doesn't mean difficult discussions can't take place. If required, carers can speak separately to the IRO before or after the review to share their experiences and explore how best to resolve any issues.



Alongside preparing and contributing to All About Me Reviews, we are asking foster carers and key workers to write a letter to the child twice a year. This may align with the time of reviews. This letter should capture the experiences of the child or young person within the foster family or placement setting over the past 6 months and should include significant events, achievements and memories. This will contribute to the child's life story work and can include pictures.

Exemplar letters and guidance have been produced and will be shared with those who will be writing these letters.



THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER:

The foster carer's social worker should contact the foster carer to hear what they would like to discuss as part of the review process. This information needs to be shared with the IRO so they can think about what discussions need to take place and the structure of the review.

The supervising social worker should explore any concerns or challenges before the review and support the carer to identify solutions to avoid this happening within the child's review.

The supervising social worker should also support the carer to think about what to include in their letter to the child.

2 - THE REVIEW

THE ROLE OF THE IRO:

The IRO has a key role in coordinating the review alongside the child's social worker and making sure the views of significant people are included in the whole process.

Deciding who will attend

Children may wish to include their carers, parents, social worker and IRO in their review and possibly the supervising social worker and an advocate, as appropriate. However, the child may prefer to do an activity with just their IRO or with 1 or 2 extra people. When this is the case, the IRO will consult with key professionals as part of the review process. They can arrange a series of separate discussions if required.

We would not expect teachers and health professionals to attend but to contribute separately via the child's social worker or through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and Health Care Plan. The IRO can also have a separate discussion with them to make sure their views are considered.

Parents should be invited to attend the review as long as this is considered to be in the child's best interests and consistent with the child's views. When parents, for any reason, cannot be invited or are unable to attend the review, the IRO can have a separate discussion or meeting with them.

Deciding where it will be

Reviews are typically held where the child is living but there could be other suitable venues or activities to consider. It could be an outing e.g. a picnic in the park, a trip to the beach. Children and young people need to have their say about where the review will take place.

We want to avoid using council or other offices for the review, unless the child has requested this.

Deciding how it will run

The IRO should contact the child's social worker one week before the review to find out how the child has been prepared and what the child would like their review to look like. This will help the IRO identify suitable activities to use and will support discussions during the review.

INFORMATION SHARING:

To ensure the new Looked After Review process meets statutory requirements, information about the child's progress will be detailed in the report completed by the child's social worker, 'All About Me Review and Care Plan'. Additional information will come from discussions between the IRO, social worker, carers and other professionals before the review.

We want to move away from reviews where a lot of time is spent sharing and often repeating information. Reviews should be more analytical, celebrating achievements and coming up with solutions to current challenges as well as setting goals for the future. The review will still inform the care plan and make recommendations but with the child's involvement.

The IRO will speak with the child before the review to re-visit what they have discussed with their social worker during their preparation and confirm what they would like to cover in their review.

IROs will have a range of activities and resources to use with children and young people within the review process. They will be creative in their approach and ensure these are adapted to the child and their circumstances. The IRO should identify a few suitable activities or methods beforehand so these can be used flexibly within the review itself. They could use one to structure the whole review, or use several within it to encourage a child's participation, guide a discussion or to map out future plans. Each Looked After Review should be personal to each child.

Using visual aids and recording as part of the review is encouraged. This could include taking a photo of participants, using flip chart paper to track discussions or sticking things up on a wall. Children and young people should keep any physical resources used at the review but photos can be taken to ensure they form part of the record of the review, and will be shared in the IRO's letter to the child and stored on their file.

3 – PAPERWORK

New paperwork has been developed to support the new approach to Looked After Reviews.

‘My All About Me Review and Care Plan’ is a report written by the child’s social worker before the review. It will be written to the child in the style of a later life letter, using clear, plain language. This should include key information about the child’s wellbeing, their progress and the care plan. It should also include the child’s views gathered during preparation and planning.

Following the review, the IRO will write a letter to the child. This should be written to the child based on the age they were at that review and will only be sent to the child. This will provide their own record of the review and can include pictures of the review. Exemplar letters and guidance for how these should be structured are available.

The IRO will also complete the ‘IRO report’ which will be shared with professionals, the child and family members. This report will record the process and experience of the review, analysis of the information shared and include any recommendations. The IRO will also complete a monitoring form after each review to capture key data.

Everything, including letters and reports, should be written to the child rather than about them. Clear, uncomplicated language should be used and the paperwork should evidence a strength-based and solution focused approach.

Alongside the bi-annual letters written by carers, the review paperwork will contribute to each child’s life story.



FEEDBACK:



We are planning to review the new approach at regular intervals and look forward to receiving feedback from everyone involved in the Looked After Review process.

If you have any questions or queries, please speak to the child’s Independent Reviewing Officer directly or contact the Quality Assurance Team Managers.

MENU OF CHOICES

We want you to be able to get the best from your Looked After Review and for your views to be heard.

A few weeks before your review, your social worker will talk to you about what you would like your review to look like and how it should run on the day. You may have important things you want to discuss at your review or something you want to do. You also need to think about how can join in and how other people can help you with this. You can share this with your carer or social worker and they will make sure your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) knows.

On the day of your review, your IRO will meet with you before it begins and make a plan with you for your review.

One the next page are some ideas of things you can do before the review and some ideas to help you on the day. You may have your own ideas so just let your social worker, carer or IRO know!



IDEAS TO HELP YOU GET READY FOR YOUR REVIEW:

- Have a discussion with your social worker
- Make a video blog
- Do something creative to share at the review, for example using pictures, stickers or poem to tell everyone what they should know about you
- Write a letter
- Make a PowerPoint presentation
- Do some preparation with your foster carer or key worker
- Do something else that you think would be good

IDEAS YOU MIGHT WANT TO USE AT YOUR REVIEW:

- Share what you have done to get ready for your review. This can be the focus of a discussion
- Do something creative
- Map out future plans
- Interview your social worker, carer and IRO about how they can support you to achieve your dreams
- Chair your review
- Celebrate your achievements
- Use your own special ideas



FLOWCHART OF THE NEW LAC REVIEW

Children's social worker prepares child for review by exploring with them where it will be held, who will attend, what they would like to be discussed and how they would like it to run. Discussion should also take place with foster carer / keyworker as they will have a good idea of the child's talents and interests. Menu of choices is used to share ideas for how the child can prepare for their review, and how they might like it to run.

Supervising social worker contacts foster carer to hear their views of what they would like to discuss as part of the review. This should be shared with IRO to enable them to structure review discussion. SSW supports foster carer to identify solutions to challenges outside of the child's review, and to write a twice yearly letter to the child.

Child's social worker explains the new model to families who are attending their child's review and supports them to attend where this is in the child's best interests and consistent with their views.

Children's social worker records the child's views in their report which is shared with the IRO at least 3 days before the review to allow the IRO time to prepare. The report is written to the child in the style of a later life letter.

Where the child wants just their IRO and 1 or 2 other people present the IRO will consult with key professionals as part of the review process or hold a series of discussions as required.

IRO prepares for review. They contact the child's social worker to find out the child's views on how they would like their review to run, and the child to confirm what they would like to discuss. IRO then identifies suitable approaches prior to the review that will best facilitate child's participation in their review

IRO runs the review with the child and others that the child has requested to be there.

IRO writes their review report and a letter to the child, and uploads to the file any photos of the review.