‘Our reviews, our choice’
Child-Centred Looked After Reviews

A guide for Independent Chairs, Social Workers, carers and other professionals on Hackney Children and Young People’s Service’s new creative approach
Background

Hackney Children and Young People’s Service (CYPS) have developed a new and more engaging and child-focused approach to Looked After Reviews that can best capture the child’s views and experiences and ensure it is a process they enjoy, wish to take part in and are at the centre of.

This booklet aims to ensure that everybody involved in the review process for our Looked After Children (LAC) understands our new approach and how they can contribute to it.

Why have we changed how we do things?

Statutory guidance requires that an extensive agenda be covered in reviewing the child’s situation. Our conventional approach has been to convene a meeting to cover this agenda, invite the child and encourage them to contribute to a discussion about themselves in a meeting. Some reviews using this approach can go very well for young people, but many are reluctant to take part in their reviews, not because they do not want to be involved in decisions that affect them, but because the process can feel alienating and adult-focused.

Research into the views of young people on their Looked After Reviews has regularly shown that they find them ‘too long’ and ‘too boring’. The National Children’s Bureau research into the Role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England (2014) 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 2014, the Hackney Gets Heard (Hackney’s Children in Care Council) Pledge Inspection identified that:

- young people continued to feel the need to be better informed and prepared for their Looked After Reviews
- young people wanted to have a say in who was invited and where the review took place
- there was a need for young people to be supported should they wish to be involved in chairing their own review.

Hackney CYPS believes that good Looked After Reviews should empower young people by placing them at the centre of their care planning process. Looked After Reviews should be a process rather than an event and should allow for creative approaches to be utilised to ensure that a child’s wishes, feelings and experiences are the focus and that they are at the centre of the process.
At the same time, Looked After Reviews need to meet statutory requirements, ensure the child’s welfare continues to be safeguarded, that progress against the Care Plan is measured and that care planning fully considers the wishes and feelings of the child alongside the views of parents, carers and other key professionals.

We are all working with children and young people and we need to celebrate their successes with them. The most prevalent message from our foster carers about changing the review process was to ‘make it a celebration’ and ‘make it fun!’ There are sometimes difficulties that need to be explored, but this will be done in the context of building upon the child’s strengths and through being solution focused.

**What will Hackney CYPS be doing differently?**

We will actively think about our approach and manner going into the homes of our foster carers and the residential homes of our LAC. We will bring a strengths-based approach to build upon and celebrate the successes and achievements of the child. Where there are concerns to be addressed, we will think carefully about how these are explored with the child and ensure that we are solution-focused. We will look to gather and share information in a meaningful way that can contribute to children and young people’s life story work.

All of the above will be brought to bear on the 3 key elements of the LAC Review process:

i) Preparation for the review

ii) The LAC Review

iii) Paperwork that is written to the young person rather than about them

**i) Preparation for the review**

Looked After Reviews go well when everyone is prepared and has a shared idea about how the review will run and what it will achieve.

The child’s social work unit, foster carer and IRO all have key roles to play to ensure that everyone, including children and their parents, feel prepared and able to engage in the review.

**The role of the social work unit**

**Preparing the child**

A member of the child’s social work unit should visit the child prior to the LAC Review - ideally 2 - 3 weeks before - to explore who the child would like to attend their review, where they would like their review to take place and what they would like to be discussed.
Together with Hackney Gets Heard, we have developed a *Menu of Choices* (see page 10) to support children and practitioners prepare for Looked After Reviews which includes:

- Having a discussion with their social worker
- Creating a video blog
- Doing some direct work to share at the review, for example helping a child to bring something to tell people about themselves
- Writing a letter, producing a drawing or a PowerPoint presentation
- Doing some preparation with their foster carer
- Using methods from the *Looked After Review Activities Guide*

The social worker should broadly explore with the child how they might like their review to run. This could be through a creative activity or a role play, through the young person interviewing the adults present or chairing their own review, or mapping out future goals and how to achieve them.

The child’s social worker should record the child’s views in the social work report *My Looked After Review and Care Plan* and share this with the IRO at least 1 week before the review to allow time for the IRO to prepare.

**Preparing the child’s family**

Parents and families need support to know what to expect in their child’s reviews, to think about their contribution and to understand what will be achieved. The child’s social worker will explain the new model to families who are attending their child’s review and support them to attend where this is in the child’s best interests and consistent with their views.
Preparing the foster carer or keyworker

Prior to the review, the child’s social worker should have a discussion with the foster carer or keyworker to discuss ideas on what the child might like to do within their review. Carers often know children better than practitioners so will have a good idea about their talents and interests.

The role of the foster carer or keyworker

Foster carers and keyworkers often know children and young people better than anyone in the professional network and so have a key role in supporting children to prepare for their review. Carers should also think through with the child whether they might like to do a creative activity or have either a role play or discussion-based review and let the social worker and IRO know their views. There might be particular activities that carers think would work well as the basis for a review and ways of ensuring that the child gets the most out of it.

Carers also need to be well prepared for reviews, thinking in advance of what has gone well for the child, what should be celebrated and how best to address any challenges together. Reviews should be child focused, but this should not prevent difficult discussions from taking place. Where required, the carer can speak separately to the IRO just before or after the review session to share experiences and explore how best to resolve any issues.

We are aiming for our Looked After Reviews to contribute to life story work. We wish to ensure that the views and experiences of carers regarding the child or young person’s experiences as part of the family over the past 6 months are captured, including significant events, memories and achievements. Our foster carers have therefore developed a template which carers can use to write regular later life letters to children as part of their reviews (as opposed to reports about them). The IRO or social work unit will provide carers with a copy of the template.

Where a decision has been made to hold Looked After Reviews annually (where the child is in a long-term placement), we still encourage foster carers and keyworkers to complete letters on a bi-annual basis to contribute towards the child’s life story work.

The role of the fostering social worker

It is an expectation that the foster carer’s social worker will contact the foster carer to hear their views of what they would like to discuss as part of the review. This information should be shared with the IRO to enable them to think about the structure of the discussions in the review.

The fostering social worker should support the carer to explore any challenges before the review and identify solutions rather than this happening within the child’s review. The fostering social worker should also support the carer to think about what to include in their letter to the child that will form part of the review.
ii) The Looked After Child Review

The role of the IRO

The IRO will have a key role in co-ordinating the review alongside the social work unit and in ensuring that the views of all key people are included.

Deciding who will attend the review

In their review, children may want to include their carer, parents, social worker, IRO and fostering social worker, and, where requested, an advocate. Alternatively, the child may prefer to do an activity with just their IRO and one or two other people. Where this is the case, the IRO will consult with key professionals as part of the review process or hold a series of discussions if required. Teachers and health professionals will usually be consulted separately by the social work unit and can contribute their views through the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and Health Care Plan, but the IRO can also have a separate discussion with them to ensure that their views are included.

Parents should always be invited to attend the review providing that this is in the child’s best interests and consistent with the child’s views. Where parents, for any reason, cannot be invited to the child’s review, the IRO will offer to have a separate meeting or discussion with them.
Deciding where the review will take place

It is essential that the young person gets a say in where their review is held. This is usually at home with their carer, but it could be at a local youth hub where there are a range of activities available that could be used as part of the review process. If everything is going well, the review could take place in the form of an outing, for instance, over a picnic in the park. Unless the child has requested it, the review should not take place in an office space.

Deciding how the review will run

The IRO should contact the Social Work Unit at least one week before the review to find out how the child has been supported to prepare and what their views are on how they would like their review to run. This information will be shared with the IRO to enable them to identify activities that might help structure the discussions during the review.

Information sharing prior to the review

To fulfil the statutory requirements of LAC Reviews, information about the child’s progress should be fully detailed in the social work report *My Looked After Review and Care Plan* prior to the review and in pre-review discussions between the IRO and social work unit, foster carer/keyworker and any other key professionals. Rather than spend time on sharing information, the review itself should be analytical, bringing together views on successes and achievements, finding solutions to challenges that have arisen and setting goals for the future while spending time with the child to inform their Care Plan and recommendations going forward.

The IRO will meet the child prior to the review to confirm what they would like to discuss and re-visit the ideas agreed with their social work unit during preparation. A separate *Looked After Review Activities Guide* for the IRO brings together a wide range of approaches and methods to engage children or young people and facilitate the review process in a way that suits them. The IRO should have identified some suitable methods or approaches prior to the review that will best facilitate the child’s participation and aid future planning. The activities can be used flexibly: the IRO may decide to use one method to facilitate the entire review or a couple of specific methods to explore particular issues or give feedback. The methods and activities can also be adapted to be responsive to the individual child, incorporating their interests where possible to make the review process relevant and personal.
iii) Looked After Review Paperwork

To support our new approach to reviews, we are also using new Looked After Review paperwork.

The social work report *My Looked After Review and Care Plan*, which is completed prior to the review, will reflect upon all aspects of the child’s wellbeing and demonstrate how the child’s views are being considered within planning. Instead of writing about the child, the report will be written to the child using clear uncomplicated language consistent with life story work, celebrating success, identifying any concerns and planning goals.

The record *Summary of My Review* will be written by the IRO to the child, providing analysis of the social work report *My Looked After Review and Care Plan* focusing on the child’s experiences, and will include their views in planning. It will review how the *Hackney Promise to Children and Young People in Care* (see page 9) is being kept to the child. It will record the process and experience of the review which may include photos of an activity, or materials created by the child such as pictures, PowerPoint presentations, videos etc. As such, the Looked After Review paperwork will be more personal than the conventional format with the aim of being both engaging for young people to read and also contributing towards their life story work.

Foster carers and keyworkers will write a letter to children to contribute the information shared and to create an ongoing collection of memories alongside existing life story work that is already underway.

**What next?**

We will be reviewing our new approach to Looked After Reviews regularly. As with most new things, we will be learning through our experiences and building upon what we have learned over time. We are excited to be taking up this new challenge and approach together and look forward to hearing your feedback throughout this process.

If you have any questions or queries please speak to the child or young person’s Independent Reviewing Officer directly or contact the Service Manager for the Hackney CYPS Safeguarding and Reviewing Team (the IRO or social work unit can provide this information).
WE PROMISE THAT WHEN YOU BECOME A LOOKED AFTER CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON, WE WILL LOOK AFTER YOU THE BEST WE POSSIBLY CAN.

COMING INTO CARE

WE PROMISE THAT WE WILL BE HONEST WITH YOU ABOUT THE REASONS FOR BEING LOOKED AFTER BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AND TELL YOU ABOUT DECISIONS THAT ARE BEING MADE.
WE PROMISE WE WILL SHARE AS MUCH INFORMATION WITH YOU AS WE CAN ABOUT YOUR FUTURE CARERS.
WE PROMISE WE WILL LISTEN TO YOU ABOUT WHERE AND WHO YOU WOULD LIKE TO LIVE WITH, IF WE CAN'T PROVIDE EXACTLY WHAT YOU HAVE ASKED FOR WE WILL EXPLAIN WHY THIS IS.

BEING IN CARE

WE PROMISE THAT WE WILL LISTEN TO YOU AND TAKE TIME TO GET TO KNOW YOU AND DO OUR BEST TO MAKE SURE YOU FEEL SUPPORTED BY US.
WE PROMISE THAT, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, YOU WILL KNOW ABOUT AND BE READY FOR ANY CHANGES THAT ARE COMING.
WE PROMISE THAT WE WILL TALK TO YOU AND DISCUSS IF AND HOW YOU CAN BE SUPPORTED TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

EDUCATION

WE PROMISE TO LISTEN, RESPECT AND SUPPORT YOU IN WORKING OUT YOUR DREAMS AND AMBITIONS AND IN HELPING YOU ACHIEVE THEM, INCLUDING THROUGH MAKING SURE THAT YOU GET GOOD EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES THAT MATCH YOUR NEEDS.

GETTING WELL AND STAYING WELL

WE PROMISE TO DO OUR BEST TO HELP YOU TO GET BETTER WHEN YOU ARE UNWELL AND TO HELP YOU TO STAY WELL.
WE PROMISE TO HELP YOU TO LEARN TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF AS YOU GET OLDER.

MEETINGS

WE PROMISE TO MAKE SURE THAT YOUR NEEDS, THOUGHTS AND IDEAS ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, THAT YOU ARE AT THE CENTRE OF ALL MEETINGS ABOUT YOU (EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT ABLE TO ATTEND) AND THAT YOU ARE SUPPORTED TO TAKE PART IN A WAY THAT YOU FEEL HAPPY WITH.

YOUR RIGHTS

WE PROMISE THAT AT EVERY STAGE IN YOUR LIFE, YOU WILL KNOW WHAT OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU TO BE ABLE TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES.
WE PROMISE THAT WE WILL HELP YOU TO FIND SOMEONE WHO YOU CAN SPEAK TO IF YOU ARE UNHAPPY ABOUT ANYTHING, INCLUDING ANYTHING THAT WE ARE doing OR HAVE DONE.

BECOMING AN ADULT

WE PROMISE THAT WE WILL PREPARE YOU TO BECOME AN ADULT AND SUPPORT YOU TO MAKE THE DECISIONS THAT ARE RIGHT FOR YOU.
WE PROMISE THAT YOU WILL ALWAYS HAVE SOMEONE TO TALK TO.
‘Our Reviews, Our Choice':
Child-Centred Looked After Review Menu of Choices

Together with Hackney Gets Heard (HGH), we have developed a Menu of Choices to help you get ready for your Looked After Review.

After speaking with HGH, we thought it would be helpful to give you some ideas about how you can get the best from your review so on the next page are some ideas that you might find useful to help you get ready for your review and to help you on the day. If you have other ideas, let your social worker and carer know!

Leading up to your review, your social worker will talk to you about how you would like your review to run. There may be important things that you would like everyone to focus on at your review or ideas for how everyone can make sure that you feel included so make sure you let your social worker or carer know and they can tell your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

On the day, your Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will meet with you before your review begins to make a plan with you about your review.

Looked After Reviews will not all be held in the same way, but the most important thing is making sure your views are heard and that you get the most out of it.

HGH is our Children in Care Council and consists of a group of young people who are in care or have just left it. HGH work with social workers so looked after children and young people enjoy the best care possible. They do lots of fun activities too. If you want to know more about HGH, call **020 8356 7404** (between 9.00am and 5.00pm) or email info@hackney.gov.uk
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 poems to tell everyone what they should know about you!
- Write a letter.
- Make a powerpoint presentation.
- Do some preparation with your foster carer.
- 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