



# **PRACTICE STANDARDS AND GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE**

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**Independent Visitors**

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- Care Experienced Young People
- Independent Visitor Service Co-ordinators
- Independent Visitors
- Social Workers and Managers
- Independent Reviewing Officers
- Foster Carers
- Local Authority Commissioning Managers

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# Introduction

This document sets out the practice standards and guidance for appointing Independent Visitors, (IV), for care experienced children and young people. The standards and guidance have been developed following an assessment of practice with regard to IVs, a consultation with stakeholders and work with an advisory group of stakeholders and groups of young people. The national standards build on practice standards developed by the National Independent Visitor Development Project (NIVDP) working across England and Wales. Welsh Government commissioned NYAS Cymru to undertake a practice assessment and develop the standards on behalf of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Improving Outcomes for Children.

A number of other outputs accompany the national standards practice guidance and are included here as appendices:

- Information for young people (designed by a group of young people) - see Appendix B.
- A tool to assist local authorities to assess eligibility for the appointment of an IV against the 'best interests' criteria set out in the Codes of Practice accompanying the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 - see Appendix C.
- A commissioning framework - see Appendix D.
- A list of useful websites and resources for further information - included as Appendix E.

This section of the document sets out the role of the IV and the legal framework surrounding the appointment of IVs for children and young people who are care experienced as well as advice on using this practice guidance. The next section of the document presents the key findings from the practice assessment, mapping the use of IVs in Wales and highlighting the main practice themes arising from interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. It also describes how the national standards and the practice guidance have been developed. The final section sets out the 14 national standards and practice guidance.

## **What is an Independent Visitor?**

The role of the Independent Visitor was first introduced in the Children Act 1989. The concept was that looked after children who had little or no contact with their families could be matched up with a volunteer - known as an Independent Visitor - who would visit them on a regular basis to befriend, advise and provide an independent source of support. The Independent Visitor could 'stick up' for the child, or as one young person told us, "be on their side", making sure their rights were respected. The relationship would be different from that of an independent professional advocate, providing the child with a positive, consistent bond with a significant adult over a long period of time, even when any changes of placement and of their social worker took place. The role of the Independent Visitor is similarly prescribed today, although the eligibility criteria were expanded in 2008 to include any case where it appears to be in the child's best interests to have one.

When a child or young person is 'looked after' by the local authority, the authority has a duty to act in the child and young person's best interests. In promoting well-being, the local authority must consider a range of provision including where the child is placed, contact with birth family members, education and health care plans. All such arrangements are regularly reviewed as part of the care plan under the

scrutiny of an independent reviewing officer (IRO). In this context, local authorities have a duty to consider, in the case of all children it looks after, the appointment of an IV, if it considers the appointment would be in the child's best interests and the child or young person consents. IV's are to be volunteers and independent of the local authority. Currently, in Wales suitable volunteers are recruited, trained and supported by one of three voluntary organisations and in many cases provided alongside a larger contact for independent professional advocacy services.

An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who does not work or have formal connections with social services, and is there to visit, advise and befriend a child or young person who is looked after, and is living away from home. IVs endeavour to become and remain a consistent adult in the child's life who doesn't change when placements or social workers change and will at all times stay child-focused. The role of the IV demands consistency and reliability in order that children can build a trusting, positive relationship with them over time. The child will have the opportunity to try new activities, and spend time with their IV, away from their placement.

### **The Legal Framework**

IVs were first prescribed in The Children Act 1989. The concept was that children looked after, (CLA), who had little or no contact with their families could be matched up with a volunteer - known as an IV - who would visit them on a regular basis to befriend, advise and provide an independent source of support. The relationship ideally would provide the child with a positive, consistent bond with a significant adult over a long period of time, even after any changes of placement and of their social worker. Ordinarily the appointment of an IV would be regularly considered at the statutory reviews of CLA. The appointment would be explored in the context of the child's overall care plan and the arrangement would be reviewed at subsequent CLA statutory reviews.

The criteria for appointing an IV as stated in The Children Act 1989 (Schedule 2, Paragraph 17) was extended by The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 (Part 2 16 (1) b). The new provision widened eligibility significantly, stating that as well as for looked after children who received infrequent communication with their parent or someone with parental responsibility, the local authority must appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor, 'in any other case, it appears to them that it would be in the child's interests to do so'.

The aforementioned provision was incorporated into the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and came into effect in April 2016. Section 98 (1) confirms the role of the IV as someone who must visit, befriend and advise the child and repeats the 'best interests' criteria that had been introduced in 2008. When a local authority determines that it is appropriate to appoint an IV for a child, it must explain the role of an IV to the child, in a way that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding. It should also ascertain the child's wishes and feelings and only proceed with the child's consent.

Whether a child needs an IV should be considered as part of the development of the child's Part 6 care and support plan, or when a child's case is reviewed. The Codes of Practice accompanying the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act refer to the Regulations that specify a number of factors, which the authority should take into account in reaching a decision about appointing an IV.

These include:

- whether the appointment of an Independent Visitor would make a positive contribution to the child's well-being;
- where the child is placed at a distance from home, or is placed out of the local authority area, whether the placement makes it difficult to maintain sufficient contact arrangements (for example, with family and friends);
- whether the child is unable to go out independently or whether they experience difficulties in communicating or building positive relationships;
- whether the child is likely to engage in behaviour which may put the child at risk of forming inappropriate relationships;
- where the child is placed in a children's home, whether the child's well-being would be promoted by the opportunity to establish a relationship with an Independent Visitor<sup>1</sup>.

It remains that a local authority looking after a child has a duty to appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor where it appears to them to be in the child's best interests to do so - section 98(1) of the Act. This duty remains the same in Wales as it is for local authorities in England. For further reference, the pertinent legislation and the relevant sections of the Codes of Practice are replicated in Appendix A of this report.

In addition, there are a number of broader legal frameworks, which in Wales apply to a child or young person who becomes looked after. These frameworks help to ensure that they remain the most important person in the process.

### ***The well-being outcomes set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.***

Well-being outcomes for children and young people:

- Protection from abuse and neglect
- Promotion of physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- Promotion of physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioral development
- Maintenance or development of family or other significant personal relationships
- Involvement in education, training and recreation activities
- Development and maintenance of social relationships and involvement in the local community
- Social and economic well-being (including not living in poverty)
- Living in suitable accommodation.

### ***The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)***

The UNCRC is part of Welsh law<sup>2</sup> and article 12 of the Convention whereby, 'Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to

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<sup>1</sup> National Assembly for Wales (2018) [Code of Practice on looked after and accommodated children](#). Paragraph 333

<sup>2</sup> The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a duty on the Welsh Ministers to have due regard to specified rights under the UNCRC and its optional protocols

have their opinions taken into account', is central. The Children and Young People's National Participation Standards are endorsed by Welsh Government and reflected in these practice standards for IVs.

### **Using the practice guidance**

The practice guidance has been written for all those who have responsibilities towards care experienced children. It will be most relevant to:

- Social workers and their managers
- Corporate parents
- Foster carers
- IROs and their managers
- Children and young people – an information leaflet for young people has been developed with a group of care-experienced young people in Wales and is included in Appendix B
- People who volunteer as an IV or those who are interested in doing so
- IV service co-ordinators who recruit train and support volunteers appointed as IVs
- Local authority commissioning managers.

The guidance sets out:

1) **National standards** by which a local authority is inspected by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). An inspection will take account of the standards and ascertain if the local authority is meeting them. They are not statutory based standards, as they are not contained in the Act, Regulations or Code of Practice, but they are standards endorsed by the Welsh Government and they will assist local authorities and inspectors in achieving and maintaining the highest possible standards in supporting our young people in care;

2) **Good practice guidance**, which has no statutory authority but sets out, for all those concerned with the child or young person, how to achieve and maintain these high standards.

## Practice assessment – key findings

The development of the standards and practice guidance has been informed by an assessment of practice in Wales (conducted in 2018) and the work already undertaken by a network of IV service co-ordinators (NIVDP) on quality practice standards applicable to Wales and England. Drafted by a stakeholder group working with NYAS Cymru and a consultant, the standards were then subject to further consultation. NYAS Cymru distributed the draft standards and a survey to a wide range of stakeholders; brought some care experienced young people together for a workshop to consider the draft standards and received feedback from foster carers at meetings organised by the Fostering Network. The consultation programme provided really useful and pertinent feedback from nearly 50 people including young people (16), foster carers (12) and other stakeholders (19).

This section of the report sets out the key findings from the practice assessment. Current provision of IV services was mapped with the assistance of the three current service providers: TGP Cymru, NYAS Cymru and Swansea Council for Voluntary Service (SCVS). The Co-ordinators of the IV services across Wales supplied information on the numbers of children and young people matched with IVs on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 by local authority and the numbers waiting on this ‘snapshot’ date.

The more detailed assessment of practice was informed by the reflections of a wide group of stakeholders including local authorities (IROs, service managers, social workers and commissioning managers), IV service co-ordinators, IVs, young people, social workers and foster carers. Over 50 respondents were interviewed (on the telephone or face to face).

### Key Findings

#### *Use of Independent Visitors*

- ❖ The numbers of children and young people matched with an IV on the snapshot date is very low and represents less than 1% of the total number of looked after children in Wales<sup>3</sup>. In total, 47 children were matched with an IV on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 with one local authority accounting for a third of these matches. Eleven local authorities have no IVs matched, with three local authorities accounting for 70% of the matches. A further 37 children were waiting to be matched. By comparison, a mapping exercise undertaken by NIVDP in England in 2015 identified 2,200 children matched with an IV – 3.2% of the total CLA population<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ The young people matched with IVs on the snapshot date were aged between 10 and 19; the majority (70%) were 13 and 17 years of age. Over a third (36%) of young people were placed out-of-county. Of the 37 children and young people who were waiting for an IV to be appointed on the snapshot date, 44% were living in out of county placements. Nearly a third of those on the waiting list had been waiting for a match for over 12 months.

#### *Commissioning arrangements*

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<sup>3</sup> 5954 children were looked after on 31 March 2017. Stats Wales (December 2017) [Experimental Statistics: Children looked after by local authorities, 2016-17](#)

<sup>4</sup> Gordona, A. and Graham, K. (2016) [The National Independent Visitor Data Report](#) Barnardo's and the Tudor Trust.

- ❖ There are three third sector organisations providing IV Services in Wales. NYAS Cymru and TGP Cymru are commissioned to provide IVs in 16 local authorities through five regional contracts. Most but not all, are nested within the contracts for independent professional advocacy. Another four local authorities have a spot purchasing arrangement with one of these providers. One local authority commissions its IV service from a Council for Voluntary Service. This latter arrangement has been in place for nearly 20 years and is by far the most successful in matching IVs.
- ❖ Contracts varied greatly in their size. Two local authorities; Cardiff and Swansea have a relatively generous commissioning arrangement who fund an IV Coordinator and subsequently have the most matches in place, but the majority of IV services are commissioned on a regional basis with a very limited amount of funding provided for recruiting, training and supporting IVs alongside a much larger independent professional advocacy provision. The most common commissioning model in use is not delivering an adequate service in terms of the numbers of volunteers matched. In addition, there are concerns from some commissioning managers and service providers that the current arrangements for monitoring and evaluating performance, service quality and ultimately, outcomes for children and young people are not fit for purpose.

***Eligibility criteria, procedures for appointing an IV and levels of awareness***

- ❖ A number of local authorities who engaged in the practice assessment were confused or unaware of the criteria currently in use for the appointing an IV. Some local authorities did acknowledge the more recently established criteria of appointing IVs if it is judged to be in the child or young person's best interests. As part of this development project, an assessment tool has been developed, (see Appendix C) to assist local authorities in determining eligibility against the 'best interests' criteria.
- ❖ In most of the local authorities there was limited knowledge and understanding about their procedures to appoint one. Some foster carers reported being confused about the role of an IV and the role of an independent professional advocate. In general, the provision does not seem to be particularly valued or pro-actively considered as an option. The exceptions are when the contract allows for a dedicated, locally based, IV service co-ordinator. The co-ordinator is then in regular contact with the CLA team and the trusting relationship brings increased understanding and awareness of what the IV service can provide and how appointing an IV can improve outcomes.

***Provision***

- ❖ IVs are appointed to visit, befriend and advise the child. They are trained and supported by the service provider and matched as closely as possible to the child or young person's ideal. All three providers have a thorough application process with interviews, the taking up of references, and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks<sup>5</sup>. Once approved, the IVs are subject to training on a range of topics including safeguarding, setting boundaries, starting and ending, diversity and cultural sensitivity.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

- ❖ In all of the services in Wales, IVs visit the child or young person with whom they are matched – regularly. The frequency ranges from once a week to once every six weeks. The IV takes the child/young person on an activity. This could be playing sport or visiting a museum but it could equally be a coffee and/or a walk on the beach. Importantly, the activity is the child/young person’s choice within the limits of the funding available. The aim of IV provision is to enable the child to build and sustain a positive, stable and long-term relationship with an adult and the practice assessment identified many examples of cases where IVs had contributed to positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people (see below).

### ***Challenges***

- ❖ The biggest challenge in providing IV services is identified as the lack of resources and the consequent difficulties of recruiting volunteers. With adequate resourcing the most successful model for recruiting suitable volunteers seems to be those with a locally based and dedicated, volunteer co-ordinator. The commissioning model in use across most local authorities – where IV services are added on to independent professional advocacy services, with some staff working on both contracts - is not working. A common theme of the reflections from both providers and commissioners has been the dominance that the professional advocacy service has had over IV services. Of the 17 local authorities in Wales who are commissioning active IV services - many pay for the equivalent of less than two hours’ staff time per week. It seems that this amount of resource cannot support a viable IV service.
- ❖ Recruiting male volunteers is a particular challenge for all service providers. Services covering large geographical areas report finding it hard to recruit volunteers in the exact locations where they are needed. All providers report challenges in setting up an IV match for a child or young person who is placed out of county. However, we were told of many examples of volunteers following young people around the UK.

### ***Contributions to positive outcomes***

- ❖ The practice assessment garnered a whole host of case studies where IVs had contributed positively and significantly to improving the well-being of a child or young person. They illustrate how, for care experienced children and young people, building relationships with IVs over the long term, can provide some stability in their life, and a continuing and consistent relationship with someone who is there for them through their time in care and into adulthood. The examples included situations where young people had been supported over many years through changes of placement, through leaving care, through changes of school and other transitions. Managing change can be a particularly difficult time for a young person and the support of a significant and trusted adult when everything else seems to be changing was seen by young people and social workers as particularly valuable. Other examples included situations where IVs were helping to support a placement at a difficult time; and helping to support young people with their career and education choices, their hobbies and their life choices. We have heard too of how IVs have been able to provide support for young people who are newly arrived in this country and are unaccompanied and have no official guardians to look out for them or help them adjust to their

new situation. This evidence of the benefits of IVs provides a powerful rationale for the value of IV services.

- ❖ The young people and those working with and caring for them, who contributed to the practice assessment, were very positive in their feedback. Respondents emphasised the following benefits to be gained from a child or young person's relationship with an IV:
  - **Friendship, with choice and control** was seen as a major benefit by young people and by foster carers. Having a friendship which they felt they had a degree of choice and control over, was particularly important to young people when they were going through changes, e.g. in social worker, in school, bereavements and moving placements.
  - **Someone to speak up for me and encouraging me to speak up for myself** was another major benefit identified by young people. IVs and social workers also commented on the growth in confidence and self-esteem that they had witnessed as the young person's relationship with the IV developed.
  - Young people speak of the **encouragement and support** that IVs provide them with. For particular activities or interests or to try something new. There was also a general sense of the IV providing welcome encouragement and support through some difficult times.
  - The **consistency and continuity** offered by the IV relationship is a real benefit of the IV relationship, which young people value deeply. For care experienced young people having a consistent, significant adult by your side – someone you can rely on and trust, to be there for you - is so important.
  - **Preparing for independence** was a benefit cited by some young people and practitioners. Support networks are crucial at this time as care experienced young people tell us repeatedly, so in circumstances where support from an IV can continue through the leaving care phase – it can bring real benefits.

The key findings from the practice assessment illustrate how IV relationships can make a real difference to children and young people in care. The value of a single consistent adult relationship cannot be underestimated and IV services clearly provide another important opportunity to establish such a relationship and improve well-being outcomes for looked after children. Research constantly reminds us of the protective nature of such relationships.

The assessment has also shown that the use of IVs in Wales has continued to decline. It is discouraging to note that in March 2018 only 0.4% of children looked after are matched with IVs; that there were stubborn waiting lists in areas where IV services are inadequately resourced; and that despite the huge potential evidenced in the practice assessment, children and young people are missing out on opportunities to develop consistent and trusting relationships with an adult. On a more positive note the practice assessment did identify pockets of good practice - three of the larger local authorities in

Wales are still investing in IV services and seemingly valuing the contributions IVs make to positive outcomes for care experienced children and young people.

The aim of the IV national standards for Wales is to improve the quality of practice; establishing a consistent and rights based approach whereby all eligible children and young people are offered the possibility of being visited and developing a long term relationship with a suitable independent volunteer. The accompanying Assessment Tool and the Commissioning Framework are designed to provide much needed support and guidance to local authority service managers, service commissioners and IV service providers alike. In addition, the *Care Inspectorate for Wales* can monitor progress in improving practice against in the national standards and the Ministerial Advisory Group can evaluate the effectiveness of the project.

## **National Standards and Practice Guidance**

This section sets out each of the 14 national standards and specifies ways in which the local authority (social workers, their managers, IROs, commissioning officers) and IV service providers can demonstrate compliance. A quote from young people involved in the project illustrates why they see the standard as important. Finally, pointers for good practice are included. The practice standards should be read in conjunction with the relevant Codes of Practice accompanying the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (contained in Appendix A). This document complements the Code of Practice; it does not replace it. The practice standards are grouped as follows:

<b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It's your right and it's your choice</li> <li>2. Led by the views and wishes of the child or young person</li> <li>3. Confidentiality</li> <li>4. Listen to the views and ideas of children and young people in order to improve the service.</li> </ol>
<b>VOLUNTEERS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Recruitment and selection</li> <li>6. Training and support</li> </ol>
<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Starting and ending</li> <li>8. Friendly and trusting</li> <li>9. Regular feedback</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Independent</li> <li>11. Keeping safe</li> <li>12. Appropriate resourcing</li> <li>13. Equality and diversity</li> <li>14. Making a complaint</li> </ol>

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### Standard 1: It's your right and it's your choice.

Children and young people who are care experienced understand their right to have an IV to visit, befriend and advise them – if they want one.

Children and young people understand how and who to ask for an IV.

### What this means for young people

*“Every child and young person in Wales must be told about independent visiting and be able to have one should they need and want one. This should include children and young people placed out of county. Information should be given to them in different ways such as in leaflets, videos and on websites.”*

#### Local authorities will:

- ✓ Publicise and promote IV services in line with our duties as corporate parents.
- ✓ Consider the appointment of an IV for all children over 7 years of age in line with the ‘best interests’ criteria.
- ✓ Social workers, foster carers and IROs should further consider the appointment of an IV at all available opportunities and at least, at every Statutory Review.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Produce a suitable range of publicity material in a variety of formats and disseminate to social workers, foster carers, residential care providers and other relevant persons.
- ✓ Provide training and information to social workers, foster carers, residential workers and IROs.

### Good practice

- Local authorities have a duty to consider the appointment of an IV for any child they are looking after, if it would be in the child's best interests. Eligibility criteria should be clearly stated in a way that is compliant with legal obligations - including doing so, fairly and equitably. (See Appendix C for a helpful assessment tool).
- Establish clear referral procedures and pathways for accessing an IV service, based on co-production principles thereby allowing for young people to self-refer.
- Promote and publicise IV services including putting up information on the local authority and the service provider's websites and providing information in a range of formats to all children and young people who are looked after.
- Raise awareness amongst children and young people of their right to be offered an IV. Ideas proposed by stakeholders included: the local authority offering every child or young person over 7 years of age an IV on entry into care and doing so subsequently (at least) at every Statutory Review (there could be an 'opt out' to this active offer - if the 'best interests' criteria is not met). Many children and young people who are looked after across Wales do not know about IVs – who they are and what their role is.
- Incorporate a reminder that IROs should ensure consideration of a child's eligibility for an IV in all Statutory Reviews. Any decision not to offer an IV should be kept under review to make sure that the opportunity is considered again if the child's circumstances change.
- In addition, foster carers, residential workers, social workers, advocates and participation workers should all consider opportunities to inform children about what an IV is and how they might go about getting one. Examples of promotion are to include information about IVs in the training of foster carers.
- Consider how best to manage referrals received for young people who are placed out-of-county or those with additional needs/ behavioural support needs. For example, services could collaborate within regional and national networks to support matches for children that are placed out-of-county. The placing and hosting local authorities should work together to understand how best to provide an IV when needed.
- Local authorities to actively consider (as part of the young person's Pathway Plan) continuing to support IV matches for young people as they are leaving care if the match continues to be in the young person's best interests. In line with *When I'm Ready*, good practice will also include the consideration of new referrals for an IV match, for care experienced young people up until the age of 25.

**Standard 2: Led by the views and wishes of the child or young person**

IV service provision is led by the views and wishes of the child or young person.

Children and young people can choose if they want an IV and decide on things to do together.

**What this means for children and young people**

*“We want to be fully involved in choosing our IV and want to be given a choice where ever possible. We want to be kept informed about the matching process from our IV service and our social worker. We want our IV to listen to us and involve us in deciding on the types of activities that we do together on visits.”*

**Local authority will:**

- ✓ Listen to the child or young person and respect their views and wishes as to the arrangement they would like.

**IV service providers will:**

- ✓ Listen to the child or young person and respect their views and wishes including on the type of IV they would like, their interests and personality; and how they would like to be introduced.

**Good practice**

- Children and young people should be informed and consulted at each stage of the recruitment and matching process, with their needs and views clearly identified. Both social workers and IV service providers have responsibilities here. For example, after referral the IV service meets with the child or young person to tell them about the service, and to create a profile of the young person to inform the matching process. The child is consulted with and given information about prospective IVs. The child is given a choice of IV where possible.
- IV service providers should keep children and young people informed about the recruitment and matching process, including any delay in setting things up. Update them regularly either by letter or directly through someone they trust.
- Children and young people’s wishes and feelings on the activities they wish to do with the IV should always be sought. IVs should work with the child and young person to make best use of the budget available.

### Standard 3: Confidentiality

Children and young people can be confident that the IV service provider will not tell anyone the things they tell them unless it is to keep them or someone else safe.

#### What this means for children and young people

“It is important that we are able to trust our Independent Visitor and speak to them privately about things without this being shared with others without our say so, unless this would mean that we or someone else was a risk of harm. The Independent Visitor service should explain confidentiality to us in a way that we understand.”

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Ensure that compliance with confidentiality policy is included in the service specification.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Ensure children, young people and volunteers understand the service’s policies on respecting confidentiality, on record keeping and safeguarding including the circumstances when information does need to be shared.

#### Good practice

- IV service providers should explain the confidentiality policy of the IV service to the child or young person including how their information will be stored, and their access to that information.
- Social workers making referrals to IV services referrers should agree with the child or young people exactly what information is shared about them with the IV service.
- IV service providers should explain the confidentiality policy of the IV service to the child or young person which should include that information will not be routinely shared with social services without their prior consent unless such information is needed to safeguard the young person or others.
- In such circumstances where information needs to be disclosed to social services the IV must remind the young person of their organisations confidentiality and safeguarding policy and ensure that the young person is kept informed and fully involved in the process.
- Social workers making referrals to IV service should agree with the child or young person exactly what information is shared about them with the IV service and have clear processes in place to fully involve the child/young person making the referral.
- IV service providers should provide training to volunteers on confidentiality and record keeping, to ensure they understand what information can be shared by an IV and how it should be done.

**Standard 4: Listen to the views of children and young people in order to improve the service**

**What this means for children and young people**

*“We want independent visitor services to listen to our experiences, ideas and suggestions about how best these services should be run. We should have the opportunity to be involved in focus groups, events and young person advisory groups/panels. These should take place at times that we can attend and should be fun and interesting. Our input should be recognised and rewarded by the independent visiting service”.*

**Local authority will:**

- ✓ Make sure that children and young people are given the opportunity to feedback their views and ideas on the way the service works.

**IV service providers will:**

- ✓ Ensure that the views of children and young people are included in the service specification and will ask for evidence of this practice in the application and reporting process

**Good practice**

- Service users should be given regular opportunities to participate in the planning, monitoring and review of the service. As well as the ideas proposed by young people in the quote above, children and young people can get involved in service development by responding to a survey, organising an activity day, training and interviewing volunteers and working on particular projects such as designing a new leaflet or short video.

## VOLUNTEERS

### Standard 5: Recruitment and selection

Children and young people will be matched with a volunteer who has been chosen as suitable to spend time with them and who understands the importance of having a relationship for the long term and providing stability and consistency over time.

#### What this means for children and young people

*"We want independent visiting services to recruit IV's from all walks of life - people with different experiences, interests and skills. We want services to make a special effort to recruit volunteers who have experience of being looked after themselves."*

*"We should be involved in the recruitment of Independent Visitors for the service through activities such as drawing up volunteer specifications, interviewing volunteers and having a say in who is chosen. Our input should be recognised and rewarded by the independent visitor service."*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Seek evidence of the recruitment, selection and matching policy of a provider before awarding a contract.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Operate a thorough, safe and transparent process for recruiting and selecting volunteers.
- ✓ Ensure that volunteers understand the long-term commitment required of the role.
- ✓ Recruit volunteers who are able to meet a range of needs such as speaking Welsh and other languages (as required) and also skilled in connecting with children with communication difficulties.

### Good practice

- Take steps to recruit a diverse volunteer group considering the diversity of the care experienced population and the children and young people referred. Service providers should consider the different types of volunteers and their respective strengths and contributions, e.g. students, care experienced adults, retired social workers and other relevant individuals.
- All volunteers should have enhanced DBS checks and supply at least two references. More than one person should be involved in approving volunteers to become an IV. Successful applicants should demonstrate the necessary skills and attributes to effectively support children and young people, evidenced from training, interviews and references.
- Involve children and young people in recruiting and choosing their own IV as much as possible.
- Children or young people's views and wishes should be paramount in the matching process. Think about their interests and the activities they would like to do as well as the age, gender, experiences of both the young person and the volunteer. Include young people's requirements (for example in terms of interests and personality) in the IV person specification.
- Provide opportunity to explore a change of IV if a child or young person feels any current match is not working.
- The IV relationship with the child/young person is a unique one which exists to promote safe spaces and opportunities exclusively for the individual which is led by the child/young person. Generally, service providers should match an IV to one child/young person during their time within this role, however, there could be exceptions to this to enable flexibility in certain circumstances. For example:
  - When an IV has a specific skill/expertise in a related field that would benefit the child/young person and recruiting an IV with these skills sets are challenging
  - When a child/young person is placed out of county and the placing authority service provider agrees to this arrangement
  - When there is an agreement between service providers and the IV
  - When an IV relationship is being phased for ending.
- Due to the IV role requiring a long term befriending commitment, service providers will ensure this is covered within the recruitment and selection process of potential IV's. It is important to address that the expectation is to commit to at least a year of volunteering to ensure consistency and building stability for a child/young person who has often had many disruptions and endings. There is no limit to the length of time an IV can be matched with a child/young person as long as it is agreed within their care plan and regularly monitored within an individuals looked after review meeting.

- Every effort should be in place to secure a match within 3 months of the referral being received. This is important to avoid drift and allow for the right match to be made at much as possible. During this time the service providers will maintain contact with the child/young person and the local authority to ensure they are provided with updates on the progress of the matching process.

## Standard 6: Training and support

Children and young people will be matched with a volunteer who has received training and continues to receive support to help them undertake their role.

### What this means for children and young people

*“We want services to include us in the training of Independent Visitors. This might include helping to develop training materials as well as delivering the training so our experiences can be heard and taken on board. The independent visitor service should recognise and reward our contributions”.*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Seek evidence of the training and supportive policies of a provider before awarding a contract.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Ensure that IVs get support and training before and during the time they volunteer.

### Good practice

- Children and young people should be involved in the design and delivery of the volunteer training programme.
- Initial training of volunteers should include: safeguarding, the background and circumstances of children in care (including children with disabilities and unaccompanied asylum seekers), boundaries, confidentiality, communication, equality and diversity, and health and safety.
- Support for IVs from the service provider should be comprehensive and include: regular face to face meetings, group sessions, access to support out of hours and access to training and development opportunities.
- The local authority commissioning the service should require service providers to explain and demonstrate how they are supporting IVs to manage the demands on their role.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### Standard 7: Starting and ending

Children and young people will be told how the service works, including how they will first meet their IV and how they might say goodbye.

#### What this means for children and young people

*“We want to be fully involved in being referred to the independent visitor service. We should be able to refer ourselves once it is agreed that we should have an Independent Visitor. We should be given clear information about how to do this and it should be simple and straightforward to do so. We want to be able to have a say about what information is shared with the independent visiting service and have other people who are important to us to also input into our referral such as foster carers and family members if we so wish.”*

*“It is important for us to have a say about when and how our relationship with our Independent Visitor ends, visits should not just stop and we should be able to say goodbye properly. We want Social Services to allow us to continue having our Independent Visitor after the age of 18 if this is what the young person and Independent Visitor want to happen.”*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Put in place a clear process for referring a child or young person (or supporting a child to self-refer) to the IV service, explain to them what they can expect in terms of waiting times and the matching process and regularly update.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Put in place a clear and consistent process for referral, matching, and positive endings.

#### Good practice

- Local authorities should have a clear procedure in place for considering and appointing an IV for a child or young person including specifying who can make referrals and how. Where possible, referrals should be accepted direct from children or young people as well as from those working with and caring for, the child or young person.
- All those eligible to make a referral should be advised and made aware of the procedure.
- Introductions and advice on developing positive relationships and on ending the IV relationship if it is not working should be agreed with the child and young person concerned.
- Local authorities should routinely consider as part of the Pathway planning process, the benefits of continuing an IV match beyond the age of 18 to support transition into living independently.

### Standard 8: Friendly and trusting

Children and young people can expect that the IV will build a trusting relationship with them by visiting regularly and by being friendly.

#### What this means for children and young people

*“We want our Independent Visitor to be reliable and committed to being our volunteer for the long term. We want our Independent Visitor to be able to come to our social services meetings to support us as a friend if this is something that we would like to happen and have agreed it.”*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Talk to the child or young person about their match with their IV and how it is working for them.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Support the IV to befriend the child and establish a relationship of trust through regular visits and contact. To also check with the child/young person that their IV relationship is working.

#### Good practice

- Frequency of visits will to some extent depend on the individual service and each match, however IVs should expect to visit a minimum of once a month. Anything less frequent will make it extremely difficult to build up a trusting relationship.
- The IV relationship is between the volunteer and the child/young person, it is not appropriate for family members of the IV or others connected to the child/young person to attend visits.
- The child/ young person should not be permitted to go to the IV’s home under any circumstances and this should form part of setting the boundaries within IV training and induction. This should also be made explicit at the outset with young people.
- IVs must adhere to be [All Wales Child Protection Procedures](#) and the IV service provider’s policy on communication/social media. The IV service provider must make it clear to the child/young person and the volunteer that they should avoid contact via mainstream social media and these boundaries need to be explained at the outset of the relationship.
- Where a child/young person has expressed they would like their IV to attend formal meetings with social services or other organisations this should be supported wherever possible. The IV service provider should make clear to both the IV and the child/young person the role of the IV, and where clear distinctive professional advocacy issues arise this should be signposted to the local advocacy provider with the child/young person’s consent.

## MANAGEMENT

### Standard 9: Regular feedback

Children and young people will be given regular opportunities to say what they think about their IV to make sure they are safe and happy with the relationship.

#### What this means for children and young people

*“The independent visiting service should regularly check in with us to make sure that things are going ok with our match. Young people should be able to decide how they are contacted by the independent visiting service e.g. telephone, text, visits. We should know who and how to contact the service if we need to get in touch.”*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Talk to the child or young person about their match with their IV and contact the service if there are any concerns.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Regularly check IV relationships are working well, listening to children and young people - to make sure the child is safe and happy.

#### Good practice

- Feedback should be requested from children and young people on a regular basis – both by the social worker and the IV service provider. For example, asking them: What they think of the relationship with their IV? What they have achieved together? And how the IV relationship is making a positive difference to them?
- The IV arrangement should be reviewed by the local authority at every Statutory Review with the IRO asking for feedback from the child/young person, IV, carers, and social workers. Service providers should also be regularly obtaining feedback directly from the child, the IV, the social worker and the carer to monitor the match.

### Standard 10: Independence

IVs are volunteers and do not work for or have any formal relationship with the child or young person's social services department.

#### What this means for children and young people

*"It is important to us that our Independent Visitor does not have anything to do with the Social Services Department that we are involved with."*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Commission an independent provider to run and manage the service.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Ensure the child is matched with a volunteer who is independent of the child's social services department.

#### Good Practice

- During the recruitment process it is vital to ensure the potential IV has no conflict of interest with the matching of any child/young person. This would include a social worker, IRO, foster carer or anyone who has day to day decision making on the care plan for the child/young person where it would be deemed that a conflict would arise. Social Workers, IRO's and foster carers can become IV's if the child/young person has had no previous experience with the individual and if they are working for another local authority that is different from where the child/young person is residing. In these circumstances any future conflict will be monitored through supervision and best practice meetings with the IV and service provider.
- The concept of 'independence' is very important to children and young people. IVs, social workers, foster carers and residential workers should act and behave in a way that demonstrates the IV's independence from social services.
- Advice on commissioning for such an independent role has been developed and included as Appendix D.

### Standard 11: Keeping safe

There are rules in place to keep children/young people and, the IV safe when working together.

#### What this means for children and young people

*“Independent visiting services need to be clear with us on when and how they need to keep young people and Independent Visitors safe and provide us with information that is clear and easy to understand such as risk assessments for activities.”*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Set a service specification that requires the provider to have policies and procedures in place in line with the All Wales Child Protection procedures and Protection of Vulnerable Adults.

#### IV service providers will:

- ✓ Put in place policies and procedures to ensure children and young people are protected in line with the All Wales Child Protection Procedures and Protection of Vulnerable Adults. Will also need to update as and when new procedures are in place.

#### Good practice

- IVs should receive training on the all-Wales Child Protection Policies, the local authority's procedures and the IV service provider's child protection procedures.
- The child's social worker should promptly update the IV service on any changes to the risk profile.
- Due to the nature of the IV role (out-of-hours), IV service providers should have in place an appropriate lone-working policy and reporting system - thereby advancing the safety of volunteers and young people. For example, Swansea Council for Voluntary Service provide an out-of-hours social services number to report any safeguarding concerns immediately and discuss this during the volunteer training. NYAS have an internal, out-of-hours contact number that volunteers are to use in an emergency.
- Service providers should also have in place policies on data protection, confidentiality, information sharing, volunteer agreements and the use of social media.

## Standard 12: Appropriate resourcing

There is enough funding to provide management and staff support for all children and young people who are entitled to have an IV if they want one.

### What this means for children and young people

*“All local authorities in Wales must ensure that they provide an independent visiting service for looked after children and young people. Whether we have an Independent Visitor should not depend on where we live. Social services must also make sure that they provide enough funding to our Independent Visitor services so they can provide a good enough service and meet our needs.”*

#### Local authority will:

- ✓ Undertake an annual mapping exercise to determine eligible numbers of care experienced children and use this estimate as the basis to determine the funding for the IV service.
- ✓ Allocate an appropriate level of resources to ensure sufficient funding is in place to support all children and young people who are assessed as being entitled to support from an IV in line with current legislation.

#### IV service providers will:

Allocate an appropriate level of funding for management, staff and activities and travel costs.

### Good practice

- When commissioning IV services local authorities should do so on the basis of an assessment of the needs of its CLA population. The assessment tool in Appendix C can assist local authorities to map eligible numbers out of the total CLA population.
- Resources allocated for the IV service need to include sufficient funds to cover the cost of regular visits (with frequency ranging from weekly to monthly) including the cost of an activity and the IV’s travel costs. Current advice from service providers is that the provision and support of an IV match costs around £2,400 per annum.
- There should be a system in place, which allows for the consideration of additional funding being made available to cover costs in response to changing needs and circumstances. For example, if a child moves to an out-of-county placement and the costs of the IVs travel are increased significantly or if it is decided to extend the support for the match past the young person’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This is already happening in a number of local authorities.

**Standard 13: Equality and diversity**

Children and young people can expect that the IV Service will treat everyone fairly and respect them.

**What this means for children and young people**

*“We want our IV Service to take into consideration our particular needs resulting from our gender, sexuality, ethnicity, culture, disability and language, and ensure that we are not treated unfairly.”*

**Local authority will:**

- ✓ Set an expectation in the service specification that the provider will have equality and diversity policies in place.

**IV service providers will:**

- ✓ Promote equality and diversity ensuring that no child, young person or volunteer is discriminated against.
- ✓ The service promotes equality when meeting the diverse needs of the local authority’s looked after children, for example children whose first language is Welsh and children who have recently arrived in Wales from other countries.

**Good practice**

- The children and young people accessing the IV service should reflect the characteristics of the care experienced population in that area.
- Resource allocation considerations need to acknowledge that in particular circumstances there may be a need for additional resources. For example, to meet the full cost of transport when children and young people are living in remote locations or are placed out-of-county, or, for newly arrived children/young people needing an interpreter.
- Volunteers should receive training on equality and diversity.

**Standard 14: Making a complaint**

Children and young people understand how they can make a complaint about the IV Service.

**What this means for children and young people**

“We need to know how to make a complaint if we need to, we need to be given clear and easy to understand information on how to make a complaint and be supported by someone from the IV service if this is needed”.

**Local authority will:**

- ✓ Set an expectation that the provider agency will have a robust complaints procedure.

**IV service providers will:**

- ✓ Put in place a clear and easy to use complaints procedure and respond quickly and seriously to any such representations.

**Good practice**

- Children and young people, IVs, carers and social workers should be given written information on the service’s complaints procedure. It should also be explained verbally to check that all concerned understand how to make a complaint about the IV service.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Extract from Part 6 - Code of Practice on the exercise of social services functions in relation to Part 6 (looked after and accommodated children) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (revised April 2018) (Pages 86-88)**

#### **Independent visitors**

330. A local authority looking after a child has a duty to appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor where it appears to them to be in the child's best interests to do so - section 98(1) of the Act.

331. The CPPCR Regulations specify that a local authority must consider whether it would be appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for a child they are looking after where:

- the child has not lived with a parent (or a person with parental responsibility for the child) during the preceding 12 months
- contact between the child and a parent (or a person with parental responsibility) has not occurred or has been infrequent.

332. Whether a child needs an independent visitor should be considered as part of the development of the child's Part 6 care and support plan, or when a child's case is reviewed.

333. The CPPCR Regulations specify the following factors which the authority should take into account in reaching a decision about appointing an independent visitor:

- whether the appointment of an independent visitor would make a positive contribution to the child's well-being
- where the child is placed at a distance from home, or is placed out of the local authority area, whether the placement makes it difficult to maintain sufficient contact arrangements (for example, with family and friends)
- whether the child is unable to go out independently or whether they experience difficulties in communicating or building positive relationships
- whether the child is likely to engage in behaviour which may put the child at risk of forming inappropriate relationships
- where the child is placed in a children's home, whether the child's well-being would be promoted by the opportunity to establish a relationship with an independent visitor.

334. The role of an independent visitor is to visit, befriend and advise a child - section 98(2) of the Act.

335. When a local authority determines that it is appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for a child, it must explain the role of an independent visitor to the child, in a way that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding. It should also ascertain the child's wishes and feelings. The local authority must not appoint an independent visitor if the child

objects and the authority is satisfied that the child has sufficient understanding to make an informed decision.

336. The CPPCR Regulations place certain restrictions on who can be appointed as an independent visitor, to ensure that a visitor is genuinely independent of the local authority. The following must not be appointed:

- an elected or co-opted member of the local authority or any of its committees
- an officer of the local authority who is employed in relation to specified functions, including its education or social services functions
- the spouse or civil partner or other person (whether of the same or a different sex) living in the same household as the person who is a member or an officer of the local authority.

337. Local authorities should consider at each review whether the child continues to need an independent visitor, and whether it is appropriate to continue the appointment of their particular visitor. The local authority will need to consider the most appropriate way of ascertaining the child's wishes about the continuation of the relationship. The authority must terminate the relationship if the child objects to it and the authority is satisfied that the child has sufficient understanding to make an informed decision. Where this happens they will need to discuss with the child whether it would be appropriate to appoint another independent visitor.

338. An appointment as an independent visitor for a particular child comes to an end if the child ceases to be looked after by the local authority. It can also be terminated in writing by the visitor or by the local authority. Where an independent visitor is acting in respect of a number of children, termination of appointment in respect of one child does not automatically terminate appointment in respect of the others. Each case should be considered separately.

339. The independent visitor is entitled to recover from the local authority any reasonable expenses. Such expenses should cover travel and out of pocket payments, but does not include a regular payment or salary for undertaking the role.

# APPENDIX B

## Leaflet for young people

### What is an Independent Visitor?

Independent Visitors (IVs) are people from all walks of life who **VOLUNTEER** to spend their free time to become a friend and trusted adult to children and young people who are in care.

You have a **RIGHT** to an IV if this would be in your **BEST INTERESTS** and this is something that you **CHOOSE** to have.

Your relationship with an IV is **LONG TERM** so you are able to build a lasting **FRIENDSHIP** together.

IVs come to see you on a regular basis and you get to do **FUN ACTIVITIES** together and share **NEW EXPERIENCES**.

IVs are not associated with Social Services, so they are able to look out for your **BEST INTERESTS**.

The relationship with your IV is **CONFIDENTIAL** this means they will not share anything you talk about with anyone else unless you or someone else are at risk of being harmed.

It's important that children and young people in care get to **HAVE A SAY** about how their IV Service is run and are invited to share their views and experiences to help shape those services.

### HOW SHOULD INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICES BE RUN?

In Wales we have the **Welsh Independent Visiting Standards**. These set out what IV Services should look like for children and young people across Wales. They are there to make sure that children and young people get the best out of their IV Service.

You can find the young person's version of the IV Standards by going to [\(link here to Welsh Gov\)](#)

### IF I WANT AN INDEPENDENT VISITOR HOW DO I GET ONE?

Ask your Social Worker or Independent Reviewing Officer and they can help you to be referred to your Independent Visiting Service.

Or you can find out who your Independent Visiting Service is by contacting MEIC and they can help you speak to someone in the IV Service directly on Freephone **0808 802345** or text **84001**

### Beth yw Ymwelydd Annibynnol?

Ymwelwyr Annibynnol (YA) yw pobl o bob math o feysydd sy'n **GWIRFODDOLI** i dreulio eu hamser rhydd i ddod yn gyfaill ac yn oedolyn dibynadwy i blant a phobl ifanc sydd mewn gofal.

Mae gennych **HAWL** i YA os ydy hyn **O LES** i chi ac mae hyn yn rhywbeth yr ydych yn **DEWIS** ei gael.

Mae'ch perthynas â YA yn **HIR DYMOR** er mwyn i chi greu **PERTHYNAS DA** parhaol gyda'ch gilydd.

Daw YA i'ch gweld yn rheolaidd a chewch wneud **GWEITHGAREDDAU HWYLIOG** gyda'ch gilydd a rhannu **PROFIADAU NEWYDD**.

Nid yw AY yn gysylltiedig â'r Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol, felly gallent edrych ar ôl eich **LLES CHI**.

Mae'r perthynas â'ch YA yn **GYFRINACHOL**, mae hyn yn golygu ni fydden yn rhannu unrhyw beth yr ydych yn sôn amdano ag unrhyw un arall oni bai eich bod chi neu rywun arall mewn perygl o gael eich niweldio.

Mae'n bwysig bod gan blant a phobl ifanc mewn gofal **LLAIS** i ddweud am sut mae eu Gwasanaeth AY yn cael ei redeg ac yn cael eu gwahodd i rannu eu barn a'u profiadau i helpu i lunio'r gwasanaethau hynny.

### SUT DDYLAI GWASANAETHAU YMWELWYR ANNIBYNNOL CAEL EU RHEDEG?

Yng Nghymru mae gennym **Safonau Ymwelwyr Annibynnol Cymru**. Mae'r safonau yma yn nodi sut ddylai gwasanaethau YA rhedeg ar gyfer plant a phobl ifanc ledled Cymru. Maent yn i sicrhau bod plant a phobl ifanc yn cael y gorau o'u Gwasanaeth AY.

Gallwch ddod o hyd i fersiwn o'r Safonau YA i bobl ifanc ar [www.gov.wales](http://www.gov.wales).

### OS YDW I EISIAU YMWELYDD ANNIBYNNOL SUT YDW I'N CAEL UN?

Gofynnwch i'ch Gweithiwr Cymdeithasol neu'ch Swyddog Adolygu Annibynnol i helpu i gael eich cyfeirio at eich Gwasanaeth Ymweld Annibynnol.

Neu gallwch ddarganfod pwy yw eich Gwasanaeth Ymweld Annibynnol trwy gysylltu â MEIC. Gallen nhw eich helpu i siarad â rhywun yn y Gwasanaeth AY yn uniongyrchol un rhad ac am ddim ar **0808 802345** neu tecst **84001**.

## APPENDIX C

### Appointing an Independent Visitor: Which children and young people?

In line with Standard 1 local authorities are advised to consider the appointment of an Independent Visitor (IV) for all children looked after (CLA) over the age of 7 years using the best interest's criteria set out in the Codes of Practice accompanying the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. This tool has been developed in consultation with stakeholders to assist local authorities to assess whether the appointment of an IV (or the continuation of an IV match once a child looked after (CLA) turns 18 or has a change of circumstance in relation to contact with family) would be in the child's best interests. The tool sets out the legal framework for the provision and the factors that should be considered when reviewing whether a child should be offered an IV. It has been designed for the child's social worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to complete in preparation for a Statutory Review. It will also be used by the IV service provider to help determine eligibility. The tool could also be used by the local authority to assess eligibility and estimate the target population for an IV service across a CLA population and thereby aid strategic planning and needs-led approaches to commissioning services (see Appendix D).

#### Who should be offered an IV?

A local authority looking after a child has a duty to appoint an IV where it appears to them to be in the child's best interests to do so. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2016 states that whether a child needs an IV should be considered as part of the development of the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, or when a child's case is reviewed. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (CPPCR) Regulations specify that a local authority **must** consider whether it would be appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for a child they are looking after where:

- The child has not lived with a parent (or a person with parental responsibility for the child) during the preceding 12 months.
- Contact between the child and a parent (or a person with parental responsibility) has not occurred or has been infrequent.

The Regulations do not define 'frequency' of parental contact or include reference to the quality of that parental contact although a number of local authorities do set a threshold of less than 4-6 contacts a year and do consider the quality of that contact in their decision-making.

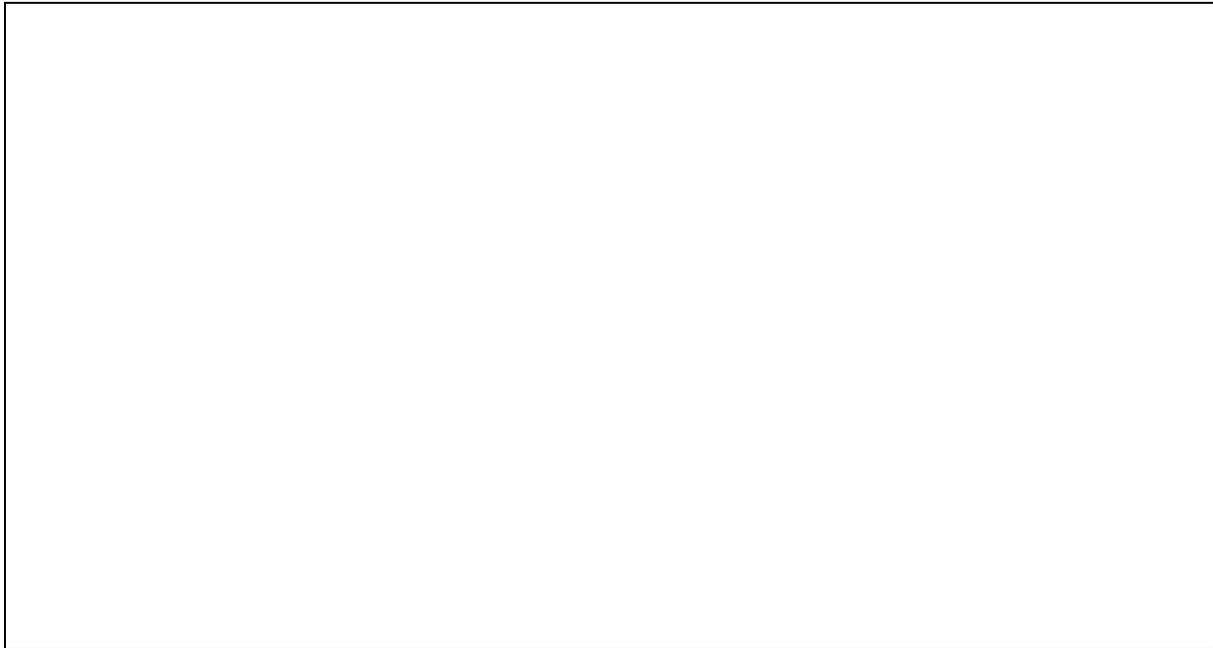
In addition to considering the primary criteria of frequency of contact with the parent (or person with parental responsibility) during the preceding 12 months, the Regulations also specify that the appointment of an IV should be considered if it is deemed to be in the child's best interests. A number of factors are to be considered when determining the 'best interests' criteria. The following table sets out a list of all the considerations.

Factors to consider	(tick)	Comments
<p>Has no or little contact with family</p> <p>Contact with family is not meaningful</p> <p>Would the appointment of an Independent Visitor make a positive contribution to the child's well-being? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) to their physical and mental health and emotional well-being;</li> <li>b) to their education, training and recreation;</li> <li>c) to their protection from abuse and neglect;</li> <li>d) to their enjoyment of safe and healthy personal relationships;</li> <li>e) to feeling valued and engaged in their community;</li> <li>f) to their social life and to helping them grow up and be independent;</li> <li>g) to access information and advice, to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their voice heard and be listened to<sup>6</sup>.</li> </ul>		
<p>Is the child placed a distance from home (particularly out-of-county) which makes it difficult for them to maintain sufficient contact with friends, wider family and social worker.</p>		
<p>Is the child unable to go out independently or do they experience difficulties in communicating or building positive relationships?</p>		
<p>Is the child engaging (or likely to engage) in behaviour which may put the child at risk of forming inappropriate relationships?</p>		
<p>Is the child placed in a residential setting and would the child benefit from the opportunity to establish a unique, individual relationship with an independent visitor?</p>		
<p>Is the child experiencing multiple placements and the consequent difficulties of maintaining a continuous positive relationship with at least one adult?</p>		

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<sup>6</sup> These reflect the national well-being outcomes that are to be achieved in terms of the people who need care and support under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Please summarise here the case for appointing an independent visitor for the child and/or for continuing the support for an independent visitor match when a young person turns 18. Please include reference to the well-being outcomes for the child and your concerns of what might happen if the child is not supported in this way and/or whether other services have been approached. Please attach this assessment tool to the referral form when referring a child for an IV service.



### **Consent**

The role of an independent visitor is to visit, befriend and advise a child. When a local authority determines that it is appropriate to appoint an IV for a child, the Regulations state that they **must** explain the role of an IV to the child, in a way that is appropriate to the child's age and understanding and ascertain the child's wishes and feelings. The local authority must not appoint an IV if the child objects and the authority is satisfied that the child has sufficient understanding to make an informed decision.

## APPENDIX D

# Commissioning Framework - A National Approach for Commissioning Independent Visitor Services across Wales

## Section 1 Introduction

This framework has been developed to support high quality collaborative commissioning that delivers consistent and effective Independent Visitor (IV) services across Wales. The framework should be read and understood alongside the main document: *Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide*.

### Objectives

The objectives of the commissioning framework are to:

- improve the quality of IV services throughout Wales through the implementation of the 14 National Practice Standards
- ensure all care experienced children and young people throughout Wales that require an IV service can be matched with appropriately trained Independent Visitor
- ensure the delivery of IV services throughout Wales is consistent, accessible and in-line with key legislation
- enable local authorities individually and collectively to respond to emerging and fluctuating needs
- support the procurement of IV services from the most capable and efficient providers.

### Audience

This framework is intended for:

- Directors of social services and heads of children services
- Commissioners within local government
- Individuals with responsibility for children's services or budget setting within local authorities
- Local authorities and corporate parents.

It will also be of interest to:

- National politicians with an interest in children's services
- Providers of IV services
- Individuals and organisations with an interest in public policy as it relates to children looked after (CLA).

## Section 2 National Practice Standards

The following are the national Independent Visitor standards as set out in the *Practice Standards and Good Practice Guide*. The implementation of these standards is a key objective of this framework.

<p><b>Standard 1: It's your right and it's your choice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people who are looked after understand their right to have an Independent Visitor to visit, befriend and advise them – if they want one.</li><li>• Children and young people understand how and who to ask for an Independent Visitor.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 2: Led by the views and wishes of the child or young person</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Independent visitor provision is led by the views and wishes of the child or young person.</li><li>• Children and young people can choose if they want an IV and decide on things to do together.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 3: Confidentiality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people can be confident that the IV service provider will not tell anyone the things they tell them unless it is to keep them or someone else safe.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 4: Listen to the views of children and young people in order to improve the service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Service users should be given regular opportunities to participate in the planning, monitoring and review of the service. As well as the ideas proposed by young people in the quote above, children and young people can get involved in service development by responding to a survey, organising an activity day, training and interviewing volunteers and working on particular projects such as designing a new leaflet or short video.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 5: Recruitment and selection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people will be matched with a volunteer who has been chosen as suitable to spend time with them and who understands the importance of having a relationship for the long term and providing stability and consistency over time.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 6: Training and support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people will be matched with a volunteer who has received training and continues to receive support to help them undertake their role.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 7: Starting and ending</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people will be told how the service works, including how they will first meet their independent visitor and how they might say goodbye.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 8: Friendly and trusting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people can expect that the Independent Visitor will build a trusting relationship with them by visiting regularly and by being friendly.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 9: Regular feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people will be given regular opportunities to say what they think about their Independent Visitor to make sure you are safe and happy with the relationship</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 10: Independence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Independent Visitors are volunteers and do not work for or have any formal relationship with the child or young person's social services department.</li></ul>
<p><b>Standard 11: Keeping safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are rules in place to keep children/young people and, the Independent Visitor safe when working together.</li></ul>

<b>Standard 12: Appropriate resourcing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is enough funding to provide management and staff support for all children and young people who are entitled to have an Independent visitor if they want one.</li></ul>
<b>Standard 13: Equality and diversity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people can expect that the Independent Visitor service will treat everyone fairly and respect them.</li></ul>
<b>Standard 14: Making a complaint</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people understand how they can make a complaint about the Independent Visitor service.</li></ul>








## Section 3 Legal Framework

This framework has been developed to support commissioning of IV services in-line with key legalisation and regulation.

### Legislation and regulation relating to Independent Visitors

A local authority looking after a child has a duty to appoint an independent person where it appears to them to be in the child's best interests to do so. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act states that whether a child needs an independent visitor should be considered as part of the development of the child's Part 6 Care and Support Plan, or when a child's case is reviewed. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (CPPCR) Regulations specify that a local authority **must** consider whether it would be appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for a child they are looking after where:

- The child has not lived with a parent (or a person with parental responsibility for the child) during the preceding 12 months
- Contact between the child and a parent (or a person with parental responsibility) has not occurred or has been infrequent.

**In addition** to the above, care experienced children and young people **can also** be considered for an IV if it is deemed in their best interests, so several other factors should be taken into account in reaching a decision about appointing an independent visitor for an individual child or young person (subject to the child's consent). The most important overarching element is that the appointment of an independent visitor would be in the child's best interests. The main factors for consideration when determining the 'best interests' criteria are:

1. Would the appointment of an independent visitor would make a positive contribution to the child's well-being? For example:
  - a) to their physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
  - b) to their education, training and recreation;

- c) to their protection from abuse and neglect;
  - d) to their enjoyment of safe and healthy personal relationships;
  - e) to feeling valued and engaged in their community;
  - f) to their social life and to helping them grow up and be independent;
  - g) to access information and advice, to be treated with dignity and respect and to have their voice heard and be listened to.
2. Is the child placed a distance from home (particularly out-of-county) which makes it difficult for them to maintain sufficient contact with friends and wider family?
  3. Is the child unable to go out independently or do they experience difficulties in communicating or building positive relationships?
  4. Is the child engaging (or likely to engage) in behaviour which may put the child at risk of forming inappropriate relationships, for example with people who are significantly older?
  5. If the child is placed in a residential setting would the child benefit from the opportunity to establish a unique, individual relationship with an independent visitor?

### **Legislation and regulation most relevant to commissioning IV services**

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 has created a national approach for how social services are planned, designed, commissioned and delivered. This framework has been developed to ensure this is adhering to this approach.

The Code of Practice and guidance on the exercise of social services functions and partnership arrangements, in relation to Part 2 (General Functions) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

This requires local authorities to involve people who require care or support in commissioning. Consequently, local authorities' **must**:

- Put in place transparent arrangements where care experienced children and young people are equal partners in planning, developing and evaluating IV services.
- Report on what they are doing to support co-production in the director's annual report.

## Section 4: A commissioning framework for IV provision

A commissioning framework is an approach that local authorities use to ensure that the commissioning decisions they take and the services that are eventually delivered are the most effective that they can be.

The way this commissioning framework is applied will vary for each local authority but by adopting the framework councils will ensure that best practice is achieved constantly across Wales and outcomes for care experienced children/young people are improved.

### Principle 1: Local authorities have a duty to provide IV services

Local authorities have a clearly articulated legal duty to provide access to Independent Visitors to care experienced children and young people. As such, local authorities should have in place adequately resourced and appropriately maintained processes through which a child or young person can access an IV within a reasonable timeframe.

*“All local authorities in Wales must ensure that they provide an independent visiting service for looked after children and young people. Whether we have an independent visitor should not depend on where we live. Social services must also make sure that they provide enough funding to our independent visitor services so they can provide a good enough service and meet our needs.”*

Young person, Consultee on the IV Practice Standards

### The Commissioning Cycle

The commissioning cycle concept is widely understood and accepted by those responsible for the delivery of children’s social care in Wales. There are many different versions of the commissioning cycle, however, it can broadly be broken down into 4 elements – **Analyse, Plan, Deliver & Review**.

All stakeholders should be clear about what is happening at each stage of the commissioning cycle, what good should look like, and who is responsible for carrying out the specified activities.



## **Principle 2: Recognise why IV services are important**

Successful commissioning of any service requires everyone involved to be aware of what the service entails and why it is so important.

An independent visitor is a volunteer who does not work or have formal connections with social services, and is there to visit, advise and befriend a child or young person who is care experienced. IVs endeavour to become and remain a consistent adult in the child's life who doesn't change when placements or social workers change and will always stay child-focussed.

IVs are someone to 'stick up' for the child, to promote the empowerment of the child, and to make sure their rights are respected. It is important to note that Independent Visitors are not professional independent professional advocates. Although Independent Visitors can and do, support children in speaking out if that is what the child wants.

Consistent relationships with significant, trusted adults are a 'protective' factor for care-experienced children and young people. As such, IVs play a very important role in the children and young people they support. The New Economics Foundation has developed a framework<sup>7</sup> for depicting outcomes for children and young people and what can be achieved through such relationships.

Long term outcomes are listed as:

- Personal well-being: improved confidence; self-esteem; trust; resilience; able to ask for help;
- Personal relationships; better able to form and maintain relationships with peers and new contacts;
- Social interaction: expanded network of support; improved social interaction, skills and behaviours;
- Practical skills & problem-solving e.g.: staying safe, making decisions, budgeting;
- Achievement e.g. personal, educational, developing skills and range of experience.

They also identified potential outcomes for individual and society:

- Reduced truancy and exclusion from school;
- Reduced risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training);
- Reduction in risk of youth and adult offending;
- Reduced risk of addiction;
- Reduced risk of [poor] mental ill-health.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://neweconomics.org/2014/06/relationships-children-care>

## ***Element one: Analysing***

The first element of the commissioning cycle is to analyse need, and then understand why current arrangements are not meeting any unmet need.

Following the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 local authorities have in place consistent mechanisms for capturing data related to children's social care need, at a local and regional level. As such, it should not be onerous on local authorities to collect and analyse data relating to the need for IV services and compare with other similar authorities. Thus enabling the commissioned IV provision to be needs led and based on the rights and entitlements of children/young people in line with the legislation.

### **Principle 3: IV provision should be needs led**

Once fully implemented the IV Assessment Tool (that has been developed alongside this document) will enable the continual analysis of the level and range of services that are required to meet need across CLA populations at a local authority regional and national level. This is because the tool captures the need for an IV service at an individual and aggregated level.

In April 2019 only 0.4% of Welsh care experienced children and young people have access to an IV. This figure however masks significant variability with many councils not providing any IV services to any child or young person that is looked after.

Although there has been a divergence in children's social care between England and Wales (so a direct comparison is not possible) it should be noted that 3% of English children and young people that are looked after have access to an IV.

Commissioners should consider if they are meeting unmet need by looking at several factors, such as, data relating to care experienced children and young people that

- have 3 or more placement moves in a year (The Welsh average is 10%)
- are placed out-of-county (The Welsh average is 27%)
- are placed out-of-country, that is outside Wales (The Welsh average is 4%)

The position of each local authority will be different however it is probable that there is unmet need. Given the above factors it would seem reasonable to expect that 2.5-5.0 percent of care experienced children and young people have access to an IV.

### **Future proofing**

Any analysis should also consider future trends, so commissioners should therefore consider:

- Predicted changes in populations of children looked after
- Potential service remodelling

### Involvement of care experienced children and young people

Feedback from care experienced children and young people who have access to, or should have had access to, an independent visitor should also be analysed. Data relating to their experiences of accessing an IV service should also be considered. This may include length of time for a match, reasons why a match wasn't available and any data they have provided on their perception of the quality of service they received.

### Protected characteristics

In addition, commissioners should be mindful of their overarching equality duties when considering commissioning IV services. Specifically, this should include:

- a consideration of any inequalities in access to IV services.<sup>8</sup>
- how IV services contribute to a reduction in inequalities in the outcomes achieved by care experienced children and young people?

<p><b>What commissioners should publish</b></p>	<p><b>IV needs analysis</b></p> <p>Once the “analysing “element has been undertaken local authorities should publish and share their findings. This can be published separately, or as is more likely as part of a wider analysis of need. The rationale behind publishing the needs analysis is to ensure that the co-productive element Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is maintained. A key element of this is transparency.</p> <p>Any IV needs analysis should include an indicative target for the numbers of Independent Visitors with different attributes that local authorities expect they will be need over the coming years. This will inform the rest of the commissioning process and support effective engagement with providers.</p> <p>Over time data from the Assessment Tool should also be published. This would enable consistent comparisons across regions and nationally.</p>
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### ***Element two: Planning***

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<sup>8</sup> An example of this could be that there are insufficient numbers of men in the cohort of people who act as independent visitors, and as such this may result in boys and young men not having a suitable match with an independent visitor. It may also lead to boys and young men not being offered an independent visitor, even when it is in their best interests. This in turn could lead to an under reporting of need.

Once the analysis of need has been undertaken commissioners need to set about deciding how they will plan to deliver IV services. In doing so they will no doubt be mindful of their legal duties under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; and associated regulation, in areas such as co-production and the promotion social enterprises, co-operatives, user-led services and the third sector. This framework does not specify an exact commissioning approach, model or suggest whether commissioning is undertaken locally or regionally, alongside or separate from the independent professional advocacy service in the region. There is not enough evaluated experience to discern the best service models and approaches for IV services other than to say that the funding has to cover enough hours of a dedicated IV Co-ordinator post to enable a focus on recruiting and supporting volunteers at a local rather than a regional level. Commissioners will need to consider how they can:

- provide matches for children that are placed out-of-county or out-of-country
- provide matches for children that require specific matches related to a protected characteristic
- meet the needs of Welsh language speakers, young people with other linguistic backgrounds and children with communication difficulties, e.g. learning disabilities.

It is likely that planning will involve some degree of cooperation between local authorities however commissioners will need to consider within their budgets how matches that can provide a shared understanding of a particular community, town or city and indeed, language can be best supported. For example, a young person from a west Wales town that is placed in Torfaen may have a more suitable match with a person from their home town, rather than someone recruited locally. In other cases, there may be a preference for recruiting a volunteer who resides nearer to the actual placement. These choices will depend on the child's wishes and feelings and their care plan.

#### **Principle 4: Resource appropriately**

Commissioners must consider the scale of budget required to ensure that enough resources are deployed.

At an individual and budgetary level Independent Visitors are a low-cost element of the care system. Current data suggests that a figure of approximately £2,400 per child per year is a viable amount to be given to a provider to enable a sustainable IV service. This includes the cost of recruitment and selection processes, induction and ongoing training, cost of supervision, quarterly and annual reports provided to the local authority and the expenses reimbursed to the independent visitor for each monthly visit. The IV is a voluntary role and the costs associated are for the provider to ensure safe practices are embedded and in line with the National IV Standards.

Reasonable resources should be set aside to provide the service. As a guide it would therefore be reasonable for an authority to set aside a figure that equates to:

**Children and young people expected to require an IV x £2400.00 = reasonable budget**



<p><b>What commissioners should publish</b></p>	<p><b>IV Commissioning Plan</b></p> <p>Commissioners should set out how they plan to meet the needs identified during the analysis phase. The plan will include strategic procurement options and the outputs and outcomes IV services are expected to achieve for the funding available. By focusing on outcomes, rather than just processes and outputs, local authorities can demonstrate how they intend to meet the needs of care experienced children and young people through the provision of an IV service.</p>
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### ***Element three: Delivering***

Once a plan is in place commissioners are required to make arrangements for the delivery of an IV service.

#### IV services and independent professional advocacy services

Currently some local authorities have chosen to commission IV services and independent professional advocacy services together, as part of a single regional package. Although some provider organisations do deliver both services, commissioners should however be mindful that they are very different:

- Independent Visitors are volunteers who give up their time to befriend children and young people that are looked after. They may informally advocate however this is not their substantive role in the care system. They are there to befriend the child or young person, offering informal counselling, support and advice over a long time period.
- Independent professional advocates are people professionally trained to enable children and young people to express their wishes and feelings. This form of advocacy can be short term in nature and is usually focused on issues that the young person is concerned and decisions that want to have a say in.

These differences do not preclude joint procurement arrangements however they make them considerably more complicated. If joint commissioning is undertaken commissioners must:

- clearly separate the expected outcomes that are required from an independent professional advocacy service and an IV service;
- issue separate service specifications;
- build budgets that enable providers to meet the need, and demonstrate how they meet the need, for both independent professional advocacy and IV services.

## Specification

Those responsible for procurement will need to create a specification that considers the specific nature of an IV service, this should include:

- The outputs and outcomes that need to be achieved through the contract;
- How the local authority expects a provider to deliver on its statutory requirements regarding IV services;
- How the local authority expects a provider to deliver on the 14 national IV practice standards for Wales.

<b>What commissioners should publish</b>	<b>IV Specification</b>  Commissioners should set out a clear specification that include the outputs and outcomes that IV services are expected to achieve through the contract.
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## ***Element four: Reviewing***

Commissioning arrangements for IV services should be formally reviewed periodically to identify:

- Have the IV services that have been commissioned delivered what was expected;
- What care experienced children and young people using the IV service think of the service
- How the market for IV services changed;
- How need has changed within the commissioning cycle.

<b>What commissioners should publish</b>	<b>IV commissioning report</b>  A report to summarising findings from formal evaluation of the service and identify priorities for next commissioning cycle. This should also set out recommendations for next steps.
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## APPENDIX E

### Further Information

#### Current providers of Independent Visitor Services in Wales

##### [TGP Cymru](#)

12 North Road, Cardiff, CF10 2DY

Tel: 029 2039 6974

Email: [admin@tgpcymru.org.uk](mailto:admin@tgpcymru.org.uk)

##### [National Youth Advocacy Service \(NYAS\) Cymru](#)

[main@nyas.net](mailto:main@nyas.net)

##### [Swansea Council for Voluntary Action](#)

7 Walter Road, Swansea, SN1 5NF

Tel: 01792 544000

Email: [scvs@scvs.org.uk](mailto:scvs@scvs.org.uk)

#### Other

##### [Children's Commissioner for Wales](#)

Oystermouth House

Phoenix Way, Llansamlet

Swansea, SA7 9FS

Tel: 01792 76500

Email: [post@childcomwales.org.uk](mailto:post@childcomwales.org.uk)

##### [The National Independent Visitor Network](#)

Barnardo's

Barkingside, Ilford, Essex

IG6 1QG

##### [Coram Voice](#)

Coram Voice, Gregory House, Coram Campus, 49 Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2QA

Tel: 020 7833 5792

Email: [info@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:info@coramvoice.org.uk)

#### References

*Practice Standards and Good Practice Guidance: Reviewing and monitoring of a child or young person's Part 6 Care and Support Plan.* Ministerial Advisory Group, Welsh Government.

*Assessing the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in undertaking childcare cases and review the role of Independent Visitors (IV) with Looked After Children and Young People.* Ministerial Advisory Group, Welsh Government.