**Practice Guidance: IRO and CP Chairs Challenge and Resolution Process**

**Overview**

The statutory duties of an IRO are set out in the “IRO Handbook Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities in relation to case management and review for Looked After Children” DCSF 2010.

The IRO has a statutory duty to monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to individual children’s cases and to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. The Trust’s Quality Assurance Service (QAS) will apply the same principles to the child protection planning process. This will include identifying highlighting good practice in addition to providing challenge and resolving problems.

Challenge and resolution are an integral part of the IRO and CP Chairs role. Ideally resolution processes are there to resolve any problems at the lowest level and as quickly and completely as possible with the child’s best interest remaining at the centre of the challenge and dispute resolution process.

**Stages of Resolution**

**Informal Resolution –** To be undertaken in all situations as a means of trying to reach a collaborative outcome of the issue. Generally, this will be undertaken in direct communication with the Social Worker and/or Team Manager though may on occasions include direct communication with a Service Manager, or Head of Service.

**Formal Resolution –** Should only be commenced where informal resolution has not resulted in achieving a positive outcome for the child and where the area to be addressed remains outstanding.The IRO or CP Chair will liaise with a Team Manager within the QAS service before starting the formal stages of resolution so that compliance with the stages can then be monitored.The stages and timescales for the formal stages of resolution are as follows: -

**Stage 1** – Team Manager (timescale for response - 24 hours (imminent risk) to maximum 5 working days)

**Stage 2** – Service Manager (timescale for response - 24 hours (imminent risk) to maximum 5 working days)

**Stage 3** – Head of Service (timescale for response - 24 hours (imminent risk) to maximum 5 working days)

**Stage 4** – Director (timescale for response - 24 hours (imminent risk) to maximum 5 working days)

**Stage 5** – Consideration of Independent Legal advice and/or referral to Cafcass. Any formal resolutions reaching this stage will also be informed to the Chief Executive

**Progression through Formal Resolution Stages**

As the issues that will be the subject of formal resolutions should be those that are currently impacting most significantly for children at risk of harm, the timescales for responses are given in order minimise further delays and ensure speedy address of the matters. Escalation through each stage should only occur if either: -

* There has been no response from the relevant Manager responsible for that stage and no agreement reached with the IRO or CP Chair for them to extend this timescale; or
* The response received does not address the issue(s) raised by the IRO or CP Chair.

At each stage of the Resolution process, all parties should make every effort to communicate to seek a resolution to the issues as they impact on the child. In most instance, the formal Resolution Process will commence at Stage 1 and escalations occur through each stage. There may be, however, exceptional circumstances, likely in high and imminent risk situations for a child or young person that require a more immediate and/or senior management response. In these circumstances the Resolution may commence at a higher stage of this process.