

Independent Reviewing Officer Resolution Process

(Previously known as the Dispute Resolution Process - DRP)

1. Purpose

All Local Authorities are required to have a Dispute Resolution Process (DRP) in accordance with the Children Act 1989, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) handbook. Where an issue of poor practice, or delay in progressing a child/young person's plan is identified, this policy provides a framework for IROs to have challenging conversations with social workers, their Managers and where necessary senior managers to ensure that the identified needs of children are met in a timely way and their desired outcomes are consistently achieved through a staged process provided by the DRP policy.

Durham Local Authority has adopted the Signs of Safety Practice framework and all work undertaken with children, young people and their families should be strength-based and place the quality of relationships at the centre of everything we do. The same is true of our work within and between Teams and Services. Feedback from our children and families was that we need to be mindful of the language we use within our service areas and how this can create barriers to working with one another or be counterproductive when working with peers, children and their families. Therefore, we have decided that our DRP process will be known as the IRO Resolution Process. There needs to be a culture of high support and high challenge within and across services to improve care planning for children.

The Resolution Process should bring people together to look at what needs to change for the child's plan to be successful. This process should focus on achieving outcomes for the child/ren and ensure timebound reviewing of this to make sure what was agreed has been achieved. The Resolution Process should provide a consistent approach to raising a worry or issue of concern and a resolution that plans can progress for the child/ren. It also provides a clear audit trail of agreed outcomes to move a child's plan on, evidence of positive outcomes or identify areas where things may need to change, wider changes needed for the services supporting children and improvements for children and young people.

This Resolution Process is used for any concerns in relation to both Child Protection and Children who are Looked After/Care Experienced.

This process is for use within the Local Authority. The Multi-Agency Challenge Process is to be used for challenges with agencies outside of the Local Authority. There is a challenge process within the DSCP regarding the outcome of a child protection conference. [Click here](#)

2. When to use this process

The Resolution Process should always be used in the child's best interests and the child must remain the focus of all conversations and agreed outcomes. Highlighted below are examples of where it is appropriate to instigate this process. The list is not exhaustive and there may be other instances where an IRO feels it is appropriate to seek a resolution in a formal or informal way.

- Drift and delay within care planning; failing to ensure that care plans are progressed within a timeframe appropriate to the child/young person.
- Where care planning is not fulfilling its duty.
- Where the quality of the assessments or care plans are impacting on the plan progressing and/or do not

equip professionals with the appropriate information to ensure safe decision making can be made.

- Concerns that the proposed care plans will not safeguard the child or young person.
- In some instances, the IRO may use this process even if this is not in accordance with the child's wishes but may, in the IRO's view, be in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as their human rights.
- There will be times when the IRO may be advised that obstacles in the way of resolving the issue are outside or beyond the Local Authority's control. For example, court delays or independent commissioned assessments. If these are impacting on the ability of the Local Authority to meet the needs of the child as identified in the child's care plan, the IRO should continue to challenge by working with the Social Work team and where necessary Managers to identify creative solutions that enable the care plan to progress and have appropriate conversations about what could have been done to minimise this for future children.

3. When this process should not be used

This process is not to be used to address a complaint or a grievance with a member of staff. The appropriate HR procedures should be used in these instances. Any practice issues with a member of staff should be sent direct to that line manager who will manage this accordingly.

Any complaint from a professional, child or family member needs to be directed via the complaint procedure. [Link to complaints procedures](#)

4. Stages of the Resolution Process (RP)

There are 7 stages of the Resolution Process which should be completed within 17 working days. The resolution should begin at the appropriate level depending upon the nature of the issue identified, the resources required to find a resolution and risks identified as specified by the IRO.

There is an expectation that there is an early resolution to any issues of concern and that we should always speak with the person involved to try to move things on for the child/ren quickly. The stages have been determined to enable an early resolution. The stages will only be progressed if this resolution cannot be achieved in a satisfactory and timely manner as set out within the process.

The IRO will determine the level at which the process will need to commence based upon the complexity of the issue identified and the nature of the resource required to achieve a resolution.

Should an immediate safeguarding concern arise, this will be addressed via the safeguarding procedure and not within the resolution process. The IRO will document their actions within a case note and alert the appropriate social care manager or EDT immediately.

If families cross over multiple teams such as Children with Disabilities and Families First, a joint approach to meeting the needs of the children will be needed. The IRO will make contact with all respective managers and a joint meeting will be required to establish who will need to take the lead in any changes required for the child. If a formal challenge is required, the IRO will make this with the lead team who has main case

responsibility. This may still require other service areas input to resolve an issue for a child, but the collated response will come from the child's Social Worker/Team Manager or service.

Should the IRO not agree with the proposed care plan for the child during care proceedings, the IRO will notify the relevant manager of this rational and share this with the Guardian. They may seek independent legal advice if required and can provide a statement to court of this rational. (Refer to flow chart at end of policy)

5. Process for Resolution Process Completion

1. The resolution process should only be used when it has not been possible to identify a resolution during all informal discussions. In turn, it is hoped that good quality conversation between the IRO, professionals, the child and their families can prevent a formal resolution process (RP) from escalating. However, it is accepted that on occasion a higher level of management input may be required to address a specific level of need to come to the best resolution for the child. In the first instance, IRO will add an IRO case note on liquid logic under 'Informal Resolution'- Stage 1. If the IRO believes the issue should be highlighted to senior management for information, the case note can be assigned to the relevant manager for their attention. This intervention should be discussed between the team manager and Social Worker within the child's supervision record to make sure the agreed outcomes are reviewed and achieved. This should also be highlighted within any care planning panel or review for the child. This will make sure that the agreed plans to resolve the worries are progressing and making a difference for the child.
2. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO will progress a formal RP on Liquid Logic as a Formal Resolution- Stage 2.
3. The IRO should inform the Social Worker/Team Manager that the formal RP process will be instigated. The IRO will determine what level to initiate the RP upon consideration of the urgency of actions to be taken and needs of the child. The RP report is to be completed on Liquid Logic by the IRO and sent to the relevant management level within 2 days in accordance with the table on page 5. This report should clearly set out what the worries are, what has been tried to resolve these worries, timescales for any required outcome for the child and the impact upon the child/young person if this matter is not resolved. The focus of this report should be on what needs to happen for the child's plan to progress.
4. Upon receiving the RP, the relevant manager must investigate, have a conversation with the IRO via telephone, virtual call on Microsoft Teams, to discuss any further context for the formal Resolution, complete the form on liquid logic and assign back to the IRO within the timescales set out in the flow chart. Any adjustments to the timescale will be considered by the IRO in circumstances where a response within the timescale would not bring a resolution to the worries raised but could be if additional time was agreed. This must be recorded on the child's case file by the IRO clearly stating what the benefit is for the child and the further enquiries required prior to the manager completing the RP on liquid logic and that the IRO is satisfied with this extension.
5. If resolved, then the respondent will complete the RP report on Liquid Logic and re-assign this to the IRO. The IRO will review this and record their agreement, satisfaction or response and arrange monitoring meeting will be set within 10 working days to ensure that the agreed plan to resolve the issues raised has been achieved. If unresolved, the RP will be escalated to the next stage in the resolution process. This process will not start again from the informal stage but will escalate to the next stage within in the resolution process.

6. Monitoring

The IRO will set an RP monitoring meeting within 10 working days with the lead Children's Social Care manager who is taking the resolution forward to conclude for the child to ensure the actions of all parties have been progressed. This is to ensure that agreed outcomes are achieved in a timely way. The outcome will be recorded on Liquid Logic by the IRO as a case note 'IRO RP Monitoring Meeting'.

Children's Social Care managers are to raise RP's within the relevant Social Workers supervision sessions and record actions or areas for learning and development. IRO Managers will review any reoccurring themes which can be used for wider service learning to prevent issues of delay for children in care planning in the future.

Children's Social Care managers will share with senior managers details of the resolution in children's care planning panels and evidence what has been done to progress the child's plan and minimise any potential for further issues in the future.

The IRO Service will analyse Formal Resolutions information raised and report to Children's Social Care Strategic Managers through the appropriate channels on a regular basis any learning from this. This will include details on numbers, team breakdowns and key themes. The Annual Report will provide a summary of effectiveness of resolution process and will be reported to Corporate Parenting Board.

7. Immediate Concerns

It is hoped that resolution can be achieved quickly but there may be exceptional situations that require an urgent response such as when it is considered that a child is in immediate danger. If the IRO is concerned about the immediate safety of the child following a discussion with the Team Manager, then immediate discussions are to take place with the relevant Senior Manager responsible for the service in question. If the situation cannot be resolved at this level then the issue will be escalated to the relevant Strategic Manager of Children's and Young People's Services, then Head of Children's Social Care if concerns are immediate and the level of risk is high. These discussions need to be completed within one day. The written record of the Formal Resolution Process report will be completed by the IRO retrospectively and sent to the relevant manager within 2 days.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

The responsible IRO has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Using a reflective, collaborative and problem-solving approach for an early resolution should be the first point of contact in all instances. IRO's should contact the responsible manager and discuss the concerns, worries or challenges for the child and try to resolve this right away with a clear timeframe set.
- Determine at what level to initiate the RP upon consideration of the issue and urgency of the child's needs.
- Notify the Team Manager that a RP will be raised and have a conversation to reflect and agree on the best way to progress things for the child.
- Activating the RP on Liquid Logic and notify the line manager of the person the RP is raised with of the nature of the resolution.
- Escalating in line with the timescales outlined in the process.

- IRO to update the RP Report at each level and assign to relevant manager who can provide the resolution to the worries.
- RPs to focus on identifying the concerns, impact on the child, what the IRO will expect to see for this issue to be resolved and move the child's care plan on with a positive outcome.
- Review the progress and impact of the RP within 10 working days and record this as a RP Monitoring Meeting.
- Record the outcome and impact of the RP within the monitoring meeting and any additional oversight needed from this to make sure that agreed outcomes are carried out.

The responsible Social Worker or Team Manager has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Using a reflective, collaborative and problem-solving approach for an early resolution should be the first point of contact. Team Managers should contact the IRO and discuss the concerns, worries or challenges for the child and try to resolve this right away with a clear timeframe set.
- To work collaboratively with the IRO to resolve issues raised from the RP. This needs to be a conversation about what needs to happen and by when to make sure the child's plan will progress. This needs to have a clear focus on the needs of the child and how these can be met in a timely way.
- Reflective conversations to be held between the IRO, Social Worker and Team Manager at the first stage of the informal resolution process. Should a formal resolution be required a conversation should still be held with all involved to seek a resolution and set a timeframe to review this.
- Respond to informal challenge within 1 working day and set a clear plan of what needs to be done with a timeframe that supports the child's care plan to progress.
- Raise RP within the allocated Social Worker's next supervision session and actions and learning to be recorded.
- Reflect upon any wider service learning or themes from the RP in supervision to prevent any further drift or delays in care planning.
- Review the agreed outcomes in the child's care planning panels, meetings and supervision to make sure no further delays occur and feed this into wider learning for the team and service.

The responsible Team Manager has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Investigate the RP report at the informal stage as to what was identified to progress the child's plan but did not progress and take any learning from the informal resolution process to support in decision making at stage 2.
- IRO to arrange a meeting between, IRO, SW and Team Manager to review the RP raised and agree a plan to resolve these issues.
- Respond to the RP 2 report within 4 working days with identified outcomes and when these will be reviewed to make sure that the agreed actions are progressing.
- Operations Manager to follow up on outcomes agreed at the RP stage 2 meeting with the Team Manager to make sure plans are progressing.
- Analyse themes from RPs and develop strategies to improve performance and outcomes for children to prevent similar issues occurring.
- Raise RP with the allocated team managers next supervision session and any learning to be recorded to inform any wider team or service learning. Follow up on any care planning panels or meetings with any agreed outcomes from the RP meeting.

The responsible Operations Manager has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Meeting to be arranged by the IRO to include the IRO, IRO Operations Manager, Social Care Operations Manager and Team Manager and any other person as determined by the Strategic Manager's within 5 working days at Stage 3.
- Operations Manager to follow up on outcomes agreed at the RP stage 2 meeting with the Team Manager and IRO.
- Raise RP with the allocated Operations Manager for discussion within supervision sessions; actions and learning to inform any wider service needs. Should any re-occurring themes, learning, performance, or resource issues need further review, this can feed into Supervision with the Head of Service and/or learning groups such as Quality Improvement Board (QIB).

The responsible Strategic Manager has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Meeting to be arranged by the IRO to include the IRO, IRO Operations Manager, Social Care Operations Manager and respective Strategic Manager's and any other person as determined by the Strategic Manager's within 5 working days at Stage 4.
- Strategic Manager to follow up on outcomes agreed at the RP stage 3 meeting with the Operations Manager and IRO.
- Raise RP with the allocated Strategic Manager for discussion within supervision sessions; actions and learning to inform any wider service needs. Should any re-occurring themes, learning, performance, or resource issues need further review, this can feed into Supervision with the Head of Service and/or learning groups such as Quality Improvement Board (QIB).

The Head of Children's Social Care has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Meet with Strategic Manager and IRO Operations Manager & Social Care Operations Manager, IRO and anyone else necessary as determined by them within 5 working days at Stage 5 to agree how the matter will be resolved. Any points for learning may feed into learning groups such as Quality Improvement Board (QIB).

The Corporate Director and Children and Young People's Services has a responsibility to:

- Meet with Heads of Service and Strategic Managers within 1 working day at Stage 6 to agree how the matter will be resolved.
- A written response needs to be sent to the IRO and IRO Operations Manager within 1 day.

The Chief Executive has a responsibility to:

- Meet with Corporate Director and Heads of Service within 1 working day at Stage 7 to agree how the matter will be resolved.
- A written response needs to be sent to the IRO and IRO Operations Manager within 1 day.

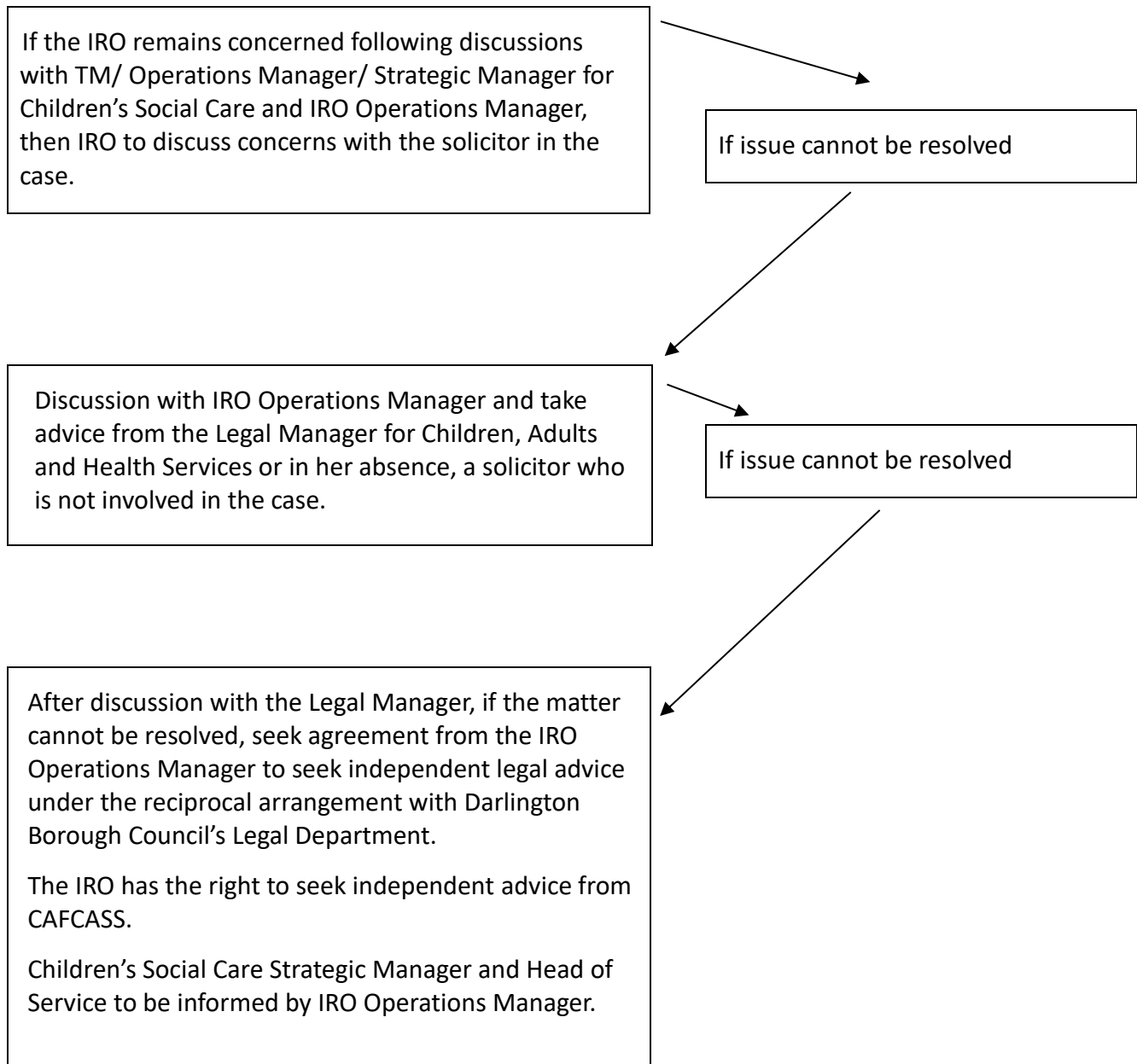
Resolution Process Stages


Stage	IRO to assign to	To be notified for information	Type of Contact	Response required within?
1 Informal challenge and resolution of issues	Social Worker or Team Manager	n/a	<p>This stage must involve a 1-1 discussion between the SW/Team Manager and the IRO. If an issue is across service areas- a meeting is to be held to establish collaborative working and who is best placed to progress or make the difference for the child and feedback to the IRO. Record to be made on liquid logic under IRO professional challenge. Agree a time frame for issues to be resolved and an IRO monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days to ensure issues have progressed.</p> <p>Progression to the next stage should only be considered if the complexity of the situation is such that additional resource, or creative use of resources are required that Practitioners/Managers at the current level do not have the delegated authority to access/use in the way required.</p>	1 Working Day
2	Team Manager	Operations Manager	<p>IRO to arrange a Stage 2 RP meeting to be held between IRO and TM. The purpose of this is to look at the worries raised and come to an agreement of how to move things on for children. There needs to be an agreed timeframe for any tasks set and a person responsible for the completing of these tasks.</p> <p>RP monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days between the IRO and TM to ensure that the plan is progressing for the child.</p> <p>Record of this conversation is to be made on liquid logic by IRO of the agreed outcome from the meeting and if any further RP Monitoring Meetings are required.</p> <p>Progression to the next stage should only be considered if the complexity of the situation is such that additional resource, or creative use of resources are required that Practitioners/Managers at the current level do not have the delegated authority to access/use in the way required.</p>	
3	Operations Manager	Strategic Manager	<p>IRO to arrange a Stage 3 RP meeting to be held between IRO, TM, Social Care & IRO Ops Managers. The purpose of this is to look at the worries raised and come to an agreement of how to move things on for children. There needs to be an agreed timeframe for any tasks set and a person responsible for the completing of these tasks.</p> <p>RP monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days between the IRO and TM to ensure that the plan is progressing for the child.</p> <p>Record of this conversation is to be made on liquid logic by</p>	4 Working Days

			<p>IRO of the agreed outcome from the meeting and if any further RP Monitoring Meetings are required.</p> <p>Progression to the next stage should only be considered if the complexity of the situation is such that additional resource, or creative use of resources are required that Practitioners/Managers at the current level do not have the delegated authority to access/use in the way required.</p>	
4	Strategic Manager Children's Social Care	Relevant Operations Manager; IRO Operations Manager; Legal Advisor (in PLO or care proceedings).	<p>IRO to arrange a RP Stage 4 meeting to include IRO, IRO Operations Manager & Children's Social Care Operations Manager, Strategic Manager; others to be determined by the Strategic Managers. Outcome to be recorded on RP Form by Strategic Manager with clear agreed timeframes to progress the child's plan.</p> <p>Record to be made on liquid logic of agreed outcome by the IRO.</p> <p>RP monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days between the IRO and TM. If the agreed outcomes have not been achieved this may need to be escalated to the Operations Managers for follow up.</p> <p>Progression to the next stage should only be considered if the complexity of the situation is such that additional resource, or creative use of resources are required that Practitioners/Managers at the current level do not have the delegated authority to access/use in the way required.</p>	5 Working Days
5	Head of Children's Social Care	Strategic Manager; Operations Managers; Legal Advisor (as appropriate).	<p>IRO Operations Manager to arrange a RP Stage 5 meeting to include: Head of Children's Social Care, Strategic Manager, IRO Operations Manager & Children's Social Care Operations Manager</p> <p>Outcome to be recorded on RP Form by Head of Children's Social Care.</p> <p>Record to be made on liquid logic of agreed outcome by IRO.</p> <p>RP monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days between the IRO and TM. If the agreed outcomes have not been achieved this may need to be escalated to the IRO Operations Managers for consultation of next steps required.</p> <p>Progression to the next stage should only be considered if the complexity of the situation is such that additional resource, or creative use of resources are required that Practitioners/Managers at the current level do not have the delegated authority to access/use in the way required.</p>	5 Working Days

6	<p>Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services</p> <p>Head of Legal Services- to be notified and case note recorded</p>	<p>Head of Service; Strategic Manager; Operations Managers; Legal Advisor (as appropriate).</p>	<p>Meeting to be arranged by IRO Operations Manager. Attendance as: Corporate Director of Children and young Peoples Services.</p> <p>Heads of Service, Strategic Manager, IRO Operations Manager</p> <p>Outcome to be recorded on RP Form by Corporate Director of Children and Young Peoples Services. Record to be made on liquid logic of agreed outcome by IRO.</p> <p>RP monitoring meeting to be held within 10 working days between the IRO and TM. If the agreed outcomes have not been achieved this may need to be escalated to the IRO Operations Managers for consultation of next steps required.</p>	1 Working Day
7	<p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Head of Legal Services- to be notified and case note recorded</p>	<p>Corporate Director</p> <p>Head of Children's Social Care</p>	<p>Meeting to be arranged by IRO Operations Manager. Attendance as: Corporate Director</p> <p>Heads of Service, IRO Operations Manager</p> <p>Outcome to be recorded on RP Form by IRO Operations Manager.</p> <p>Record made on liquid logic by IRO.</p>	1 Working Day
8	<p>Referral to CAFCASS</p>	<p>All above to be advised by IRO Operations Manager.</p>	<p>Strategic Manager to arrange meeting between Independent Legal Advisor, IRO, IRO Operations Manager and Strategic Manager to make arrangement with CAFCASS.</p> <p>Referral progressed to CAFCASS.</p> <p>Record to made on liquid logic by IRO operations Manager and IRO of worries, what has been done to prevent this, outcomes not achieved and impact on the child/young person.</p>	

Flow Chart for IRO Legal Advice





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