

Haringey Council – Children’s Services IRO Annual Report 2016/17

The Contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Haringey as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Annual Report should be presented to the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Purpose of service and legal context

The Independent Review Officer (IRO) Service is governed by the framework of the updated IRO Handbook and set within the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were first introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the looked after planning and review process to a wider overview of the children’s case management including regular monitoring between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Looked After Children (LAC) and for challenging drift and delay in case decisions and plans.

The National Children’s Bureau (NCB) research ‘The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England’ (March 2014) provides a wealth of information about the IRO role and function and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO Services more broadly. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson makes the following comment:

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

The NCB research outlines a number of important recommendations with the following three having a particular resonance for IRO work plan priorities:

1. Where IROs identify barriers to their ability to fulfil their role, or systemic failures in the service to looked after children, they must raise this formally with senior managers. These challenges and the response should be included in the Annual Report.
2. The IRO method for monitoring cases and how this activity is recorded should be clarified.
3. A review of IRO core activities and additional tasks should be undertaken. There is a need to establish whether IROs additional activities compromise independence or capacity.

Key messages – learning and improvement

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO services in Haringey, as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Service was subject to the Ofsted single inspection process which took place between 20th May 2014 and 11th June 2014. The Ofsted inspection report was published on 18th July 2014. The Ofsted (2014) inspection concluded that the IRO Service needed to add rigor and challenge and included the following recommendation to:

"Ensure that the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is enhanced so that they properly challenge drift and delay in plans and escalate concerns about the quality of service provision, so that risks posed to specific groups of children and young people are known and understood and action is taken."

Appendix A includes a summary of the Ofsted (2014) inspection recommendations.

"In addition to the Ofsted (2014) inspection process and recommendations", the IRO Service has been engaged in a range of improvement activity throughout the 2016- 2017 year. In this regard we have significantly increased our quality assurance role by better communication and relationships with our front line staff; we are more robust in our challenge in review and through escalation in order to improve the experiences and lives of our Looked after Children and we are building specialisms within the team to address emerging social themes and issues, such as child sexual violence (CSE), gang culture, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Honor Based Violence (HBV) etc.

We are also:

- Embedding a culture of supportive challenge and support within and in-between LAC Reviews through ongoing monitoring of children's care planning and processes
- Improving our quality assurance reporting by challenge to professionals where we see shortfalls in LAC service delivery. This is initially undertaken by direct communication in the first instance followed up by more formal procedures as outlined in the Quality Assurance Escalation Policy.
- Attending the Resource Panel and Permanency Tracking Meeting to contribute knowledge of permanency and placement issues.
- Embedding the practice of endorsing care plans based on achievable, realistic outcomes with specific outcome focused decisions through the use of the Signs of Safety model
- Visible challenge of practice when service contravenes the IRO guidance in relation to the movement of children to placements, or returning home or other decisions not in the child's interest.
- Using the Dispute Resolution Process when all other lines of communication do not result in the best outcomes for the child.

IROs' work plan priorities:

Work plan priorities were reviewed following the Ofsted (2014) inspection and included in the service plan. Since this time we have improved our performance and quality of plans by the following:

- The team will continue to embed - through training, supervision and team meetings the Signs of Safety model.
- We hold monthly reflective team meetings where we reflect on our service delivery and explore ideas and resources to further improve the IRO service
- We have monthly individual supervision sessions to look at individual learning and development.
- We are continuing to build and reinforce our communication and relationships with front line staff to work more effectively and collaboratively to ensure a more robust LAC service
- We will continue to develop specialisms within the team to meet the current emerging socio-emotional community issues relating to CSE, Gang culture, Domestic Violence, FG, HBV, drug & alcohol, Mental Health, UASC.
- We will continue to link individual IRO with specialist teams to build our knowledge base and intelligence relating to our service users.
- The Service Manager will continue to ensure, wherever possible, a more robust 'matching' process between IRO and LAC child in relation to specialist skill sets and geographical locations.
- The Service manager will continue to ensure the IRO's continuing learning and professional development through workshops, action learning sets, training and supervision
- Meet with the Director of Children's Services to feedback ongoing issues and the child's LAC journey.

Professional Profile of the IRO Service

The IRO Team is part of the Conference and Review Service which sits within the Safeguarding Quality, Impact and Practice Service based at River Park House. The core function of the team is to ensure our LAC children and young people receive an effective and efficient service that embraces their wishes and feelings and ensures they are in an environment where they can develop and thrive as healthy and happy individuals with their aspirations and ambitions supported and encouraged.

In this regard our IRO team has many highly skilled individuals and all are employed at the same grade as Team Managers and all registered HCPC Social Workers.

Although there has been staffing recruitment changes, the current team has been stable for the past six months which is evidenced by improved relationships with front line teams and is providing more consistency and continuity for our LAC population.

IRO Establishment

The IRO service is made up of the following:

- An Interim Head of Service has been in place since April 2017
- An Interim Service Manager has been in place since April 2017
- 7.5 IROs (6.5 permanent, 1 interim)

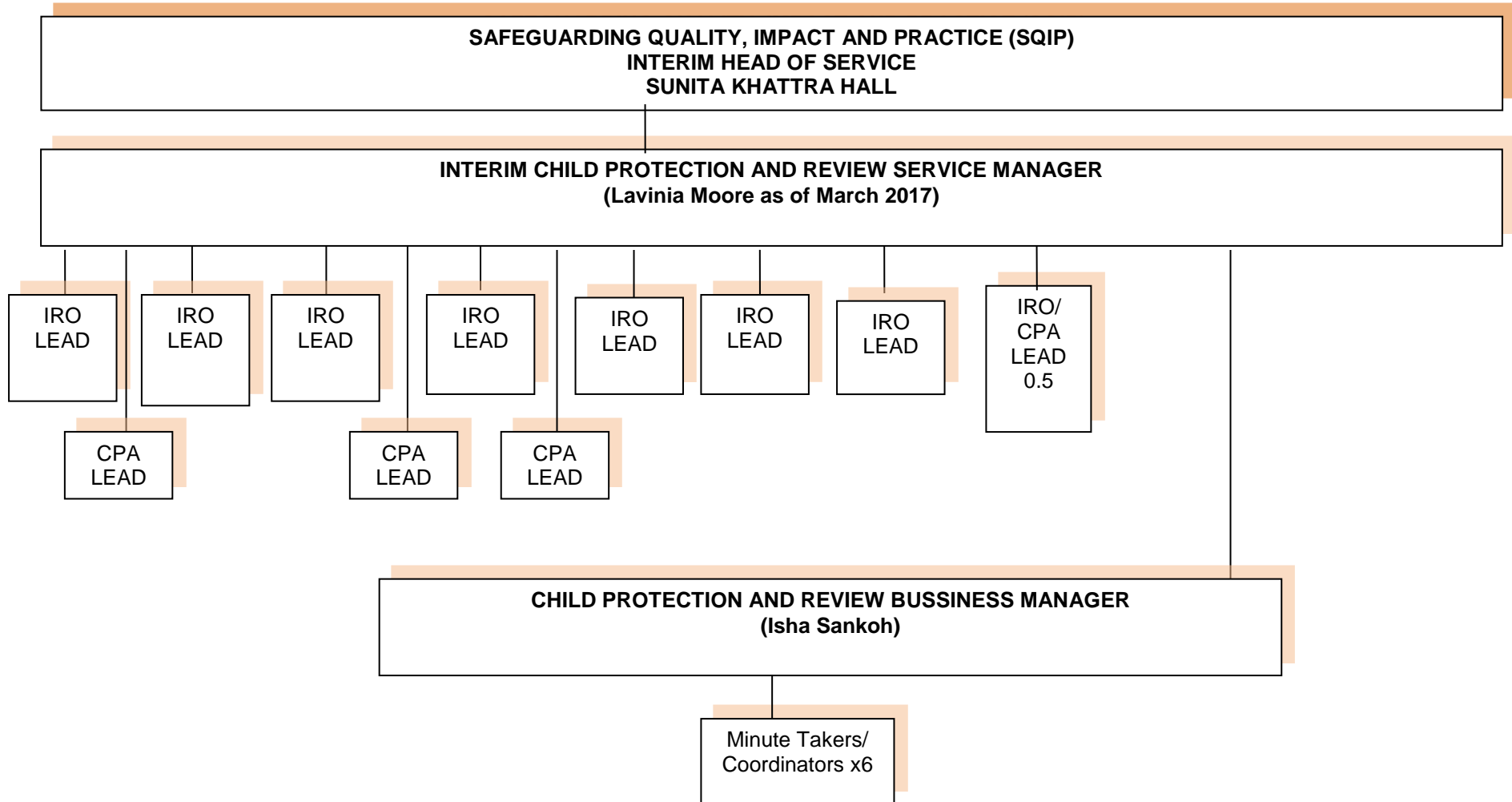
Ethnicity and Gender of IRO Staff:

IROs are employed on the same grade as Team Managers and are all qualified and registered HCPC Social Workers and are made up of the following diverse ethnic and gender profiles:

- 1 white male
- 2 white females
- 1 Asian male (part time post)
- 1 Asian Female (Interim)
- 1 African Caribbean female (part time post)
- 2 white Eastern European males from Albania

This is broadly representative of Haringey Looked after population (Black British, White, European and Asian) in respect of ethnicity and cultural backgrounds, but does not meet our gender mix which features more male than female LAC children and young people.

IRO Service 2015/2016 Structure:



Quantitative information

Key Messages

The Looked After Child (LAC) population for 2016 – 2017 has increased throughout the year from 407 to 437 as of 31/3/2017. The overall trend has shown a small increase in LAC that has remained stable over the past six months. IRO caseloads have remained stable between 65 – 70 per IRO, which compares with the recommended case load of 50-70 as set out in the IRO Handbook. A total of 1128 Reviews were Chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2017.

44% of children and young people who started to become looked after during 2016 – 2017 were aged between 13-17 years old, which equates to 56% of LAC aged between 0-12 years old.

27 children with disabilities had LAC reviews in 2016/17 and increased time and skill was required for the 61 Review Meetings held to ascertain the wishes and feelings of a child by using more targeted communication methods.

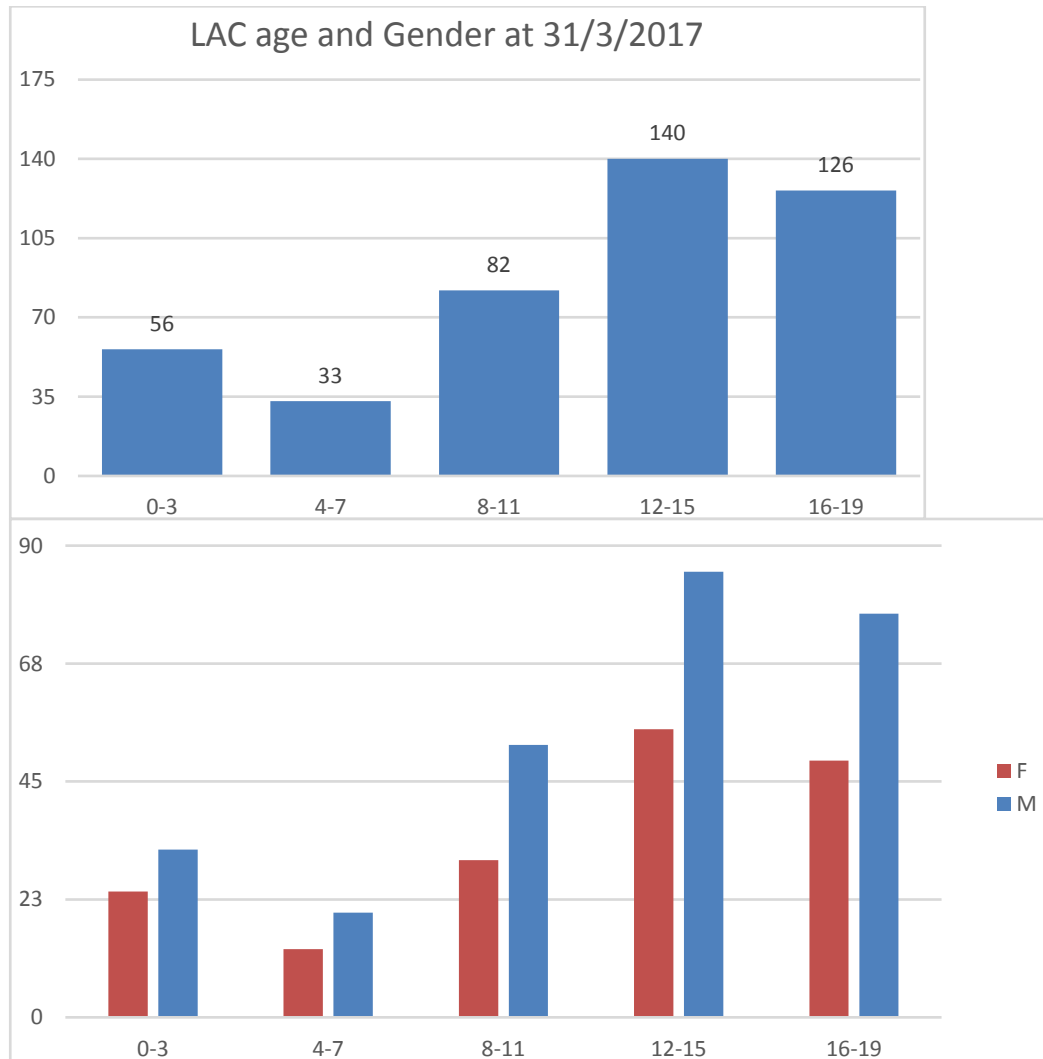
In the same period the majority of Reviews 94% were held within timescale, which is an increase of 2% from the previous year of 92%. Clear expectations are in place from the Service Manager that no LAC Reviews can be postponed or re-arranged once booked without the agreement of the Head of Service and that this will only be agreed in exceptional circumstances. Clear guidance to manage review timescales, in line with the IRO guidance and best practice, has been provided to the all IROs by the Interim Head of Service and Interim Service Manager. The service plan requires that 100% of reviews in 2017/18 take place within timescale.

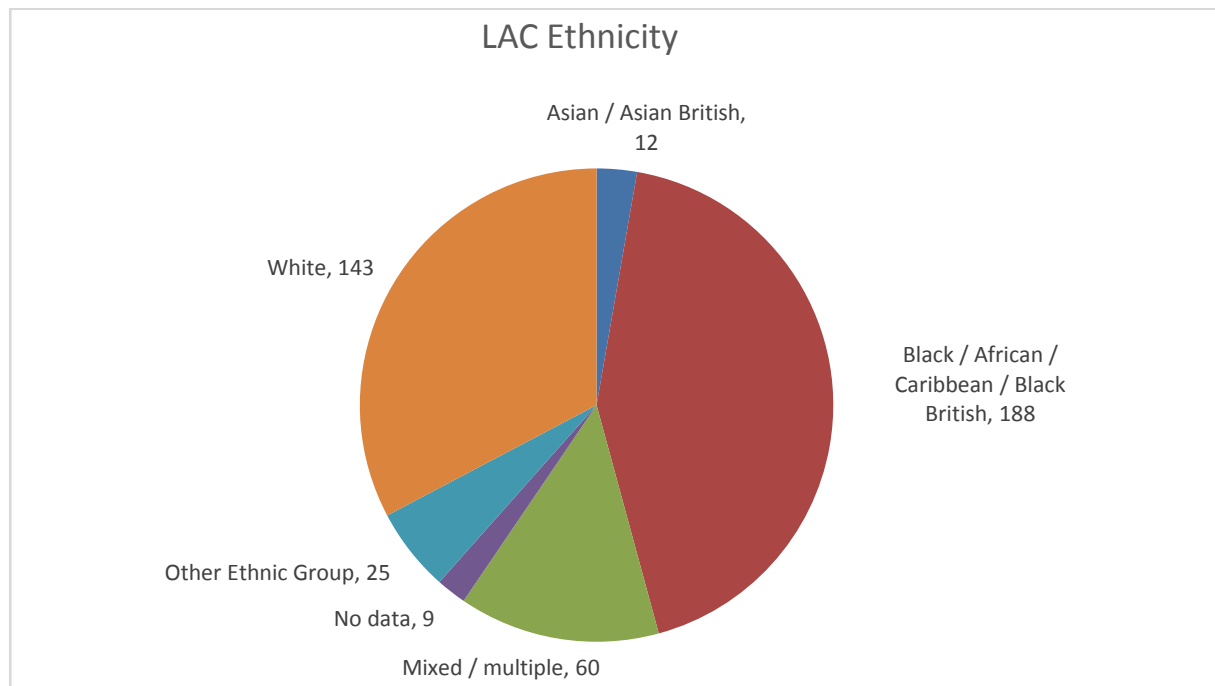
In terms of permanency outcomes, 171 children and young people ceased to be looked after during 2016/17 for the following reasons:

- 81 ceased to be LAC, mainly due to turning 18 years
- 60 children / young people were rehabilitated home to the care of birth parents
- 12 children were placed with adoptive parents
- 9 children made subject of a Special Guardianship Order
- 5 children / young people were placed with a relative or friend
- 3 young people detained under the Criminal Justice Act
- 1 child was placed abroad with relatives.

Looked After Child population during 2016/2017:

Age, Gender & Ethnicity of our 2016/17 LAC cohort



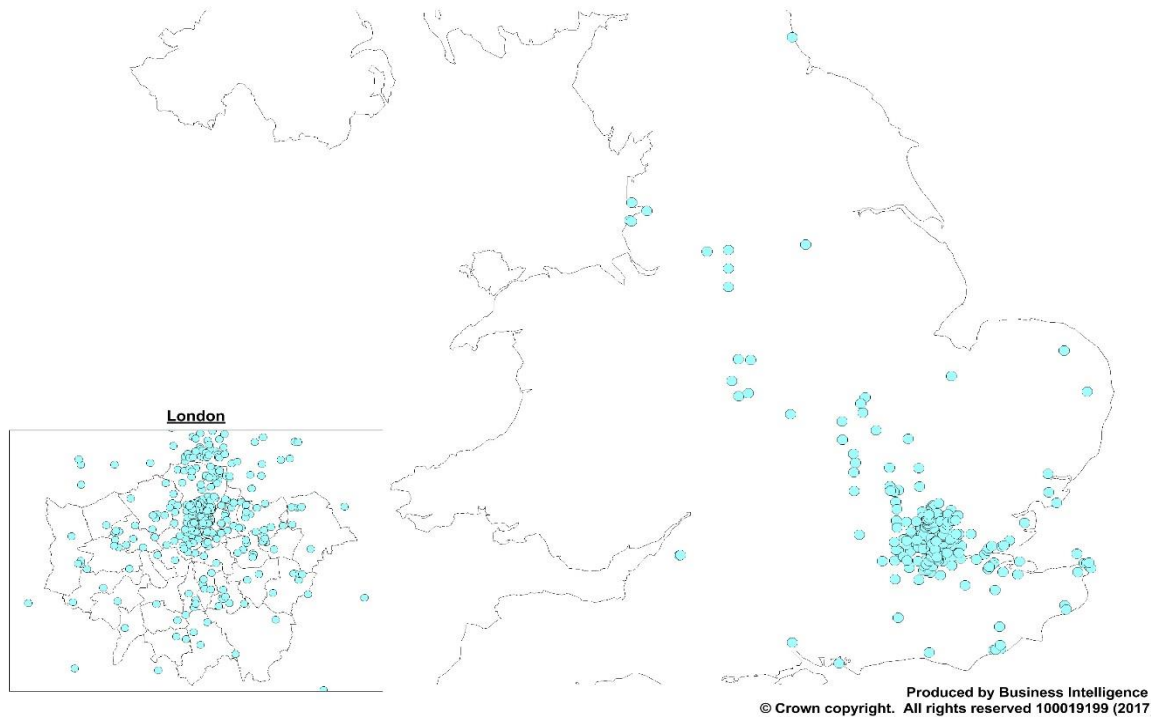


- 16.43% of children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31st March 2017 were aged less than 1 year old
- 15.9% of children who started to be looked after were 1 to 4 years' old
- 10.8% of children who started to be looked after were aged 5 to 8 years' old
- 13.5% % of young people who started to be looked after were aged 9 to 12 years' old
- 43.6%% of young people who started to be looked after were aged 13 - 17 years +

304 looked after children and young people were placed outside of the local authority area (82% of the LAC population) that resulted in IROs spending a significant period of their working week travelling away from the borough / office. This impacted on their capacity to complete other IRO duties including, on-going monitoring and visits to looked after children and young people in line with the IRO guidance.

However, they have ensured they have had regular consultations with social workers and accessed electronic case records to ensure they were kept fully informed of the LAC process.

Haringey LAC Placements as at 31/03/2017



Timeliness of reviews

94% of Looked After Reviews took place within the statutory timescales. IROs completed some reviews in a two meetings (Part one/Part two) to ensure that relevant people were involved and so that the meeting remained child-focused and friendly. Although the timeliness of LAC reviews has not reached our target of 100%, this is an improved performance on previous years which as 82% in 2012-13, 86% in 2013-14, 84.4% 2014-15 and 92% in 2016-17.

Entitlements and Advocacy

As part of their pathway plan review process all care leavers in Haringey are provided with information regarding their entitlements in order to help and assist young people stay in education, employment and training up until the age of 21 years. The level of support provided is dependent on the level of assessed need.

All care leavers in Haringey who are in receipt of / or claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) are provided with support via DWP and a work coach to assist them in negotiating the transition into employment and a chosen career. This is explained to each care leaver initially when making a JSA claim.

CYPS policy is to provide each young person with a copy of their needs assessment informing their pathway plan.

The IRO continues to chair a final Pathway Plan Review and at this review entitlement are considered and confirmed

At the present time however, there is no established IRO mechanism for capturing if children / young people are receiving the appropriate entitlements or advice about their entitlements. However, going forward, IRO's are currently looking to gain further information on what formal mechanisms are in place which will enable IROs to report any concerning cases where young people have not received these entitlements and the outcome for how these matters were resolved.

Qualitative information - achievements and impact of IRO service

Children and young people's participation, feedback and views in and outside of the reviews:

Out of 1126 reviews, 30% approximately of children were under 4 so they could not convey their views. Out of the remaining 70% LAC reviews for children above 4 years, 85% of children and young people participated in their Reviews for the year ending 31st March 2017. Participation includes attending and / or contributing to their Review.

However, to address shortfalls, HCYPs are in the process of procuring the I.T. Application, Mind of my Own (MOMO) www.mindofmyown.org.uk. This is an application that our LAC population can access via their mobile phones, iPad or Laptops to tell us 'what's working well, what they are worried about and what needs to happen?'. Although MOMO targets all ages, it will also support IROs in encouraging our older LAC population in chairing their own review or setting their own agendas wherever appropriate.

Since March 2017 through file review, observation, supervision and team meetings, the IRO Service Manager IROs has noted the following good practice;

- The child / young person remains the focus of the review record and his or her views are represented.
- The child is spoken to alone if appropriate and if he / she attends
- The IRO explained the care plan in a sensitive and appropriate manner dependent on the Childs age and understanding
- The IRO remained child focused and applied challenge and passion when appropriate.

The child's voice

As well as chairing their LAC Review Meetings, IROs stay in contact with their allocated looked after children and young people through contact via telephone, text or letters and undertake visits whenever possible. Contact is made by the IRO both prior to LAC Review Meetings and, when possible, in between LAC Reviews at the Midway point. The IRO Service Manager has observed the majority of IROs chairing of LAC Reviews Meetings and has seen evidence of good direct work with looked after children and young people. Within LAC Review records the child and young person's journey and life story is generally well documented.

Quality of Care Planning

IROs continued to monitor Care and Pathway Plans during the reporting year 2016 to 2017 with 89% (down from 90% in 2015/2016) of children having an up to date care plan and 92% (up from 81% in 2015-2016) of young people having an up to date Pathway Plan. The IRO Handbook practice standard sets out a clear expectation that all looked after children and young people will have an up to date Care Plan, or where appropriate a Pathway Plan which has been a significant and persistent performance priority and is the subject of our targeted improvement action plan.

The IRO Team continues to be concerned about a number of children not having up to date Care Plans, with individual IROs ensuring they have clear care planning discussions prior to and within reviews meetings which are entered on MOSAIC, as well as escalating their concerns to the relevant social workers and team managers.

This action aims to acknowledge the efforts that are being made to stabilise and strengthen the workforce within the Children in Care Teams whilst working to establish a clear understanding about relevant Care and Pathway Planning issues. This action does not indicate an acceptance of sub-standard practice and it is anticipated that performance will continue to improve as workforce stability and retention are addressed.

Personal Education Plans and Health Assessments

IROs review education and health planning processes as part of the LAC Review process. Personal Education Plans (PEP) and Health Assessments (HA) feed into the review process to ensure our LAC children are receiving a good standard of care.

As at 31st March 2017 performance was as follows:

- 85% of looked after children / young people had an up to date PEP
- 95% of looked after children / young people had an up to date HA

This is a decrease from previous years' performance on PEPs at 89% and HA from 97%, which relates to a statutory change in how we measure our data from bi-yearly in 2016 to term time measurements in April 2017..

To ensure continuity between services The Head of Service has attended Health Operational Meetings and continues to work closely both at an operational and strategic level to ensure that LAC health needs are identified and addressed. The Service Manager also holds regular consultations with the LAC Virtual School network and the LAC Senior Teacher regularly attends the IRO Team Meetings.

Management oversight

The revised statutory guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the recommendations from the LAC Review before they are finalised as decisions. This is due in part to the need to ensure that any resource implications have been fully considered and addressed as well as wanting to ensure management agreement. Once the recommendations are completed the Manager has 5 days to raise any queries or objections before they are endorsed and agreed as the LAC Review decisions.

IROs have routinely produced LAC Review recommendations within five working days for consideration by social work managers. More recently, this process has been developed and formalised within guidance endorsed by the Heads of Service and Service Managers whereby IROs send their recommendations in an email to Team Managers while copying in the relevant Service Manager. Team managers respond within a further five working days, after 10 working days these recommendations become confirmed decisions. It is anticipated that any disputes are resolved within the initial 10 working days, failing which they are escalated to senior management.

Quality Assurance

Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation

IROs routinely give verbal feedback, backed up by emails of both good case work and shortfalls in practice that have not met agreed standards. There is also culture of celebrating good practice and learning through critical challenge and reflective practice, with IRO's ensuring they are visible and approachable to give advice and support to front line teams.

As part of this developing strong practice based culture, the CYPS Dispute Resolution Procedure (DRP) was refreshed and re launched in April 2017, as below:

Refreshed Dispute Resolution Procedure:

The revised Dispute Resolution Procedure (DRP) was launched by CYPS in April 2017. Since this time the IROs have raised both **informal** concerns and **formal** disputes.

These have been raised under the following categories:

- Management decision making
- Care / protection assessment and planning
- Provision of services / resources
- Practice standards
- Working together with multi-agency/disciplinary partners (nb: unresolved safeguarding issues raised by CYPS with partners should also be raised formally via the LSCB)
- Child / Parent /Carer's views, wishes and feelings

The expectation is that the DRP should be activated by the IRO in their role as a champion of LAC (and by CPAs for children subject to a Child Protection Plan) and as part of their role as a critical friend to the service. A summary of DRP activity is as follows

DRP Analysis

There were three formal DRP's that were initiated in 2016 – 2017. All three related to young people that were between 16 and 18 and the issues were primarily around the entitlement to a package of support for the young person. However, following analysis that these formal escalations did not generate the appropriate improvement and response required, a revised escalation policy has been introduced. (Appendix B)

However, the IROs have many informal discussions with team managers regarding practice issues in terms of care planning for children and young people and this activity can be seen on the case file. Out of the 437 looked after children the IROs have been active with 350 LAC plans. This ranged from issues around permanency, quality assurance of care and adoption packages and contact issues but did not reach the DRP criteria as resolved within the informal stage.

Supervision and training

IROs have scheduled one to one reflective supervision at least every four weeks (on a monthly basis) as per the CYPS supervision policy and can obtain management advice, guidance and support on an ad hoc basis when required. There are fortnightly IRO & CPA Meetings and a bi-monthly Service Meeting. The Interim Director of Children's Services currently meets with the whole SQIP Service monthly to gain a greater understanding of our QA role, and findings, within the service.

IROs have met with the Children and Family Court Advise Service (CAFCASS) to discuss ongoing practice standards and developments including implementation of the Public Law Outline and relevant case law.

IROs also attended group reflective supervision sessions, which concentrated on the following issues;

- Case discussions
- Implementing SOS model
- Endorsement / non endorsement of care plans
- Chairing meetings and the use of appropriate authority

All individual case discussions are placed on the relevant child and young person's electronic (Mosaic) file under either 'IRO reflective supervisions' or 'IRO management decisions' which evidences decision making within the IRO service and strengthens IRO practice.

Overview and Summary

The Ofsted (2014) inspection highlighted the need to strengthen and improve the IRO services for looked after children and young people which would enable CYPS to achieve a “good” judgement. As a response to this feedback the IRO Service has started an improvement journey in order to strengthen its own practice as well as developing its ability to provide challenge and support to CYPS in relation to care planning and corporate parenting responsibilities. Whilst the role of the IRO can be uncomfortable, especially when challenging practice within the department, it is important that CYPS embraces this aspect of the service as a valuable contribution to ensuring that the needs of looked after children and young people are championed and promoted.

The IRO Service has brought rigor and challenge to care planning practice for looked after children and young people in the following ways:

- Challenging placement moves which are not in the best interest of the child / young person
- Challenging drift and delay through use of informal and formal DRP
- Working with both Social Workers and Virtual School staff to improve PEP compliance and quality
- Supporting and critically challenging the quality and compliance of individual Care Plans
- Monitoring children who cease to be looked after to ensure that the decision is made in their best interest as part of the LAC Review process or is at least decided in consultation with the IRO
- Using the LAC Review process for placements that are at risk of breaking down
- Learning from shared practice through reflective group supervision
- Ensuring that IRO case specific reflective supervision and management decisions are placed on the child’s file
- Inviting the IRO Service Manager to sit on the Permanency Tracking Panel meeting and the Resource Panel to add rigor and challenge

Although there has been significant progress at pace within the IRO Service where the IRO has increasingly provided more rigor and challenge during the course of 2016/17, the following areas of development remain a priority to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people:

1. Consulting with children / young people to improve ways in which their views, wishes and feelings are ascertained and acted upon (together with implementing the MOMO IT Application (Mind of my Own’)
2. Adding further rigor and challenge to care planning issues in respect of the following:

- Ensuring permanency plans are in place at the second LAC Review to avoid unnecessary drift and delay
 - Ensuring appropriate Special Guardianship support plans are approved and in place in a timely manner
 - Ensuring the process for agreeing matches for looked after children and young people living in established long term independent fostering agency placements is clarified and acted upon in a timely manner
 - Ensuring the timely revocation of Placement Orders when necessary and appropriate
 - Ensuring the timely revocation of Care Orders where necessary and appropriate
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- Implementing a robust system for recording entitlements and advocacy and pursuing advocacy where required
 - Embedding the IROs use of authority to record whether proposed Care Plans are endorsed, or not
 - To provide quarterly reports for children and young people in respect of resolution of DRP activity, impact and outcomes

Annual work programme for April 2017

The IRO work plan is outlined as follows:

- Continue to embed the Signs of Safety model in all IROs service delivery
- To redesign all IROs documentation in line with the Signs of Safety model
- Increase engagement of children and young people in their care planning decision making
- Increase parent and carers participation in care planning and reviews
- Monthly team meetings for IROs, together with monthly supervision.
- Increase IROs learning and professional development through reflection, analysis and challenge
- IROs to continue to have specialist training in line with the emerging social issues in relation to CSE, Gang Activity, FGM & HBV
- IROs to continue to act as a critical friend to challenge and support practice and look to improve service delivery in relation to Mid-way reviews in between LAC Meetings.

- IROs to facilitate 'Bite Size Learning' sessions from January 2018 to increase social work professionals understanding of the IROs role and their duties and responsibilities in respect of Care Plans, PEPs, and Health Assessments.
- To improve children's feedback via MOMO app (Mind of My Own).
- Head of Service to introduce a new bespoke QA/Audit service whereby IROs undertake midway point audits of their most complex cases
- Director of Children's Services to meet with IROs monthly to identify any ongoing issues with the LAC child's journey.

Appendix A



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Appendix B



Haringey Escalation
Policy 2017.docx
