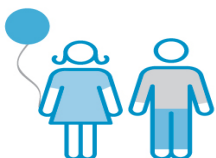


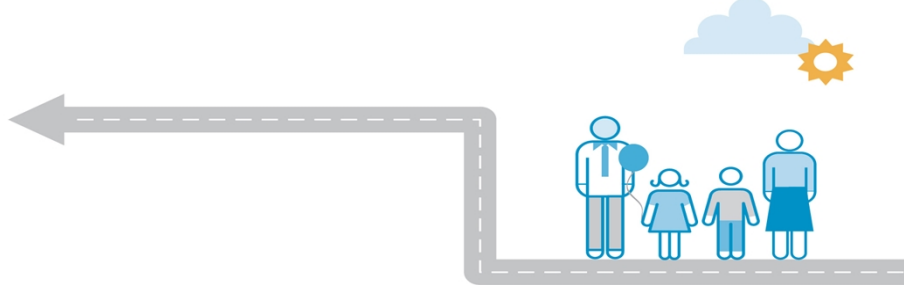
**City of London Corporation
Department of Community and Children's Services**

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)
Annual Report 2018/2019**

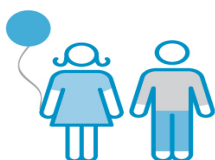
***The Contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officer to Quality
Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care***

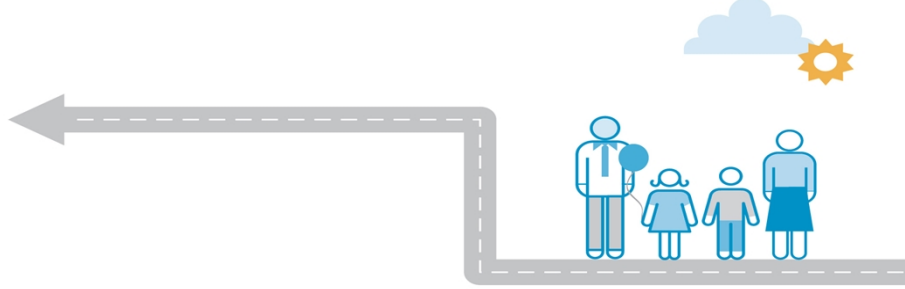
August 2019





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Appendix 1 IRO Profile

1. PURPOSE OF SERVICE & LEGAL CONTEXT

The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance that were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children in care and for challenging drift and delay.

Specifically, the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

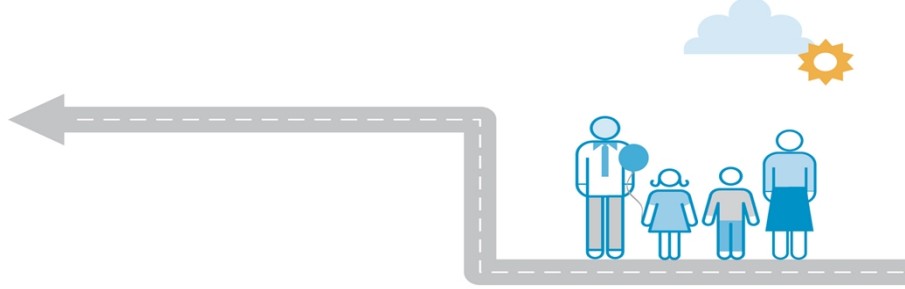
- ❖ Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- ❖ Participate in any review of the child's case; and
- ❖ Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the authority.

The IRO's primary task is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.

In carrying out the monitoring function, the IRO's duty extends beyond the focus on individual cases to include the collective experience of and services to looked after children. Where concerns about the local authority's services to its children in care are identified, the IRO is obligated to immediately alert senior managers.

The National Children's Bureau research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. Mr Justice Peter Jackson, the author of the foreword in the research report, makes the following comment about the significance of the IRO function:





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.

This annual report provides evidence of the effectiveness of IRO services provided to and on behalf of the City of London's children in care between April 2017 and March 2018

2. THE IRO SERVICE

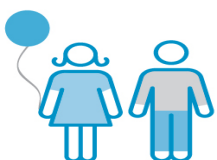
2.1. Local Arrangements

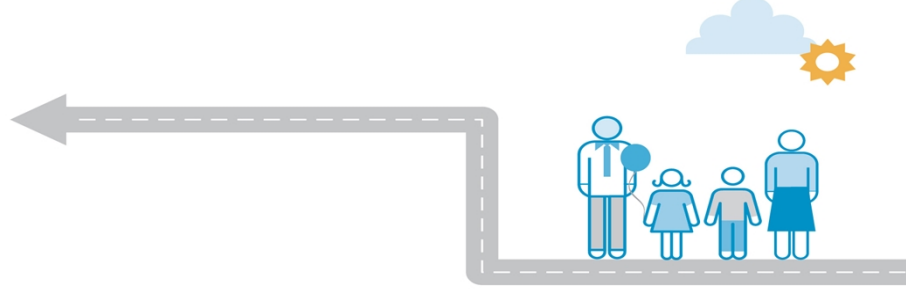
The City of London has provided an in-house Independent reviewing service since April 2015 and there is one full time IRO who is responsible for carrying out the functions of the role to all children in the care of the City. The IRO service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (S&QA) Service and is managed by the S&QA Service Manager who reports directly to the Assistant Director of the People's Division.

The current IRO has been in post since February 2017, ensuring consistency for the children and young people in the City of London.

The Children and Families Team ensure that the IRO is notified of all children received into care within 72hrs and the IRO assumes immediate responsibility for monitoring the child's care planning and ensuring the statutory reviews takes place within timescales from the point of allocation onwards.

Where relevant, the IRO service would be guided by the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice for Public Law Work protocol to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to children's safety, wellbeing and permanency needs. This is further monitored within the permanency panel meetings chaired by the Assistant Director of People.





The IRO's independence is assured by the fact that the position is held by someone who is not involved in the preparation of the child's care plan, management of the child's case, or the control over resources allocated to or required by the child. The IRO sits away from the Children's Social Care Team, which serves to reinforce the independence of the role.

In order to ensure that the needs of children in care are met at all times, the City have engaged Aidhour, an external provider, in an agreement for their IRO associates to be spot-purchased in the unforeseen and unlikely event that the in-house IRO becomes unavailable.

There was consideration given to entering into reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring local authorities but due to significant resource limitations, this was not found to be a feasible option. Aidhour was selected as the most reliable and appropriate contingency plan because of their access to experienced and reputable IRO associates that can be called upon at short notice and because the company directors are already familiar with the local children in care population through the independent auditing work they do for the City.

The IRO has not had any periods of unplanned absence and therefore has not had to call upon the back up support of Aidhour. The service provided has been stable and reliable for each child that has been in care at any point throughout this reporting year and this consistency has supported the development of positive relationships between the children and IRO.

While there has been minimal need throughout this period, where relevant, the IRO service has been guided by the CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer Good Practice for Public Law Work protocol to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to children's safety, wellbeing and permanency needs.

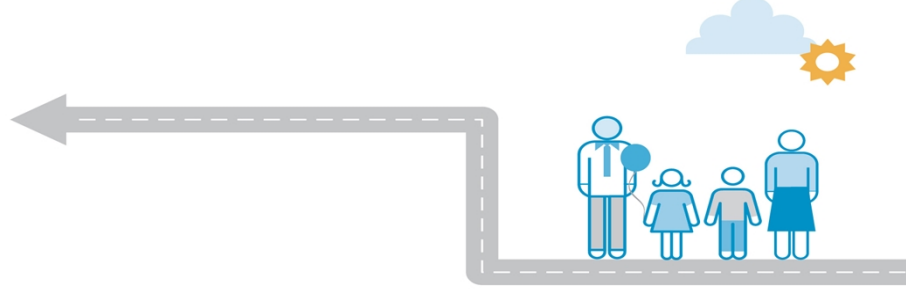
2.2. Professional Profile

The IRO who is currently in place since February 2017, has a background in child protection, with previous managerial and IRO experience. The IRO is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) as well as being DBS checked on an annual basis.

The current IRO is white British and female. The vast majority of the children in the City of London's care population are male Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), whose nationality, language, ethnic, religious and cultural identities within the population are diverse. It would be difficult to reflect this diversity across the workforce; however, every effort is made to ensure that their needs are represented in where they are placed and how they are supported.

The IRO is committed to understanding the identity needs of individual children through her direct contact with them, independent study, and care reviews with their allocated social workers and foster carers.





The IRO adopts and advocates Anti Oppressive Practice as part of all aspects of service delivery including direct contact with children, foster carers, and the Children's Social Care Team.

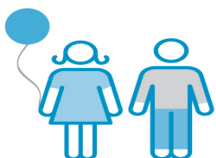
2.3. Scope of the Service

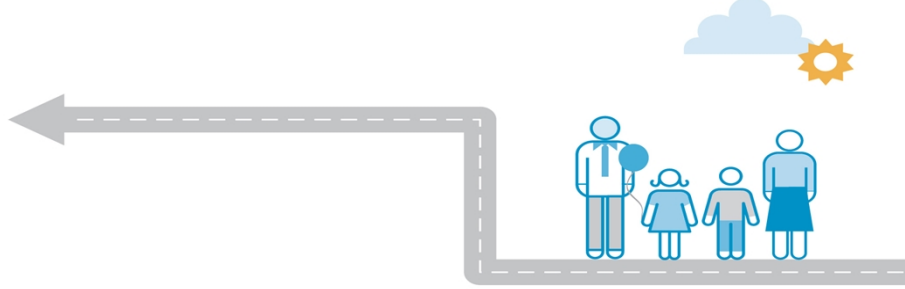
The IRO service fulfils its statutory duties by:

- ❖ Charing and co-chairing statutory Reviews
- ❖ Visiting children in care
- ❖ Case discussions with allocated social workers and the management team
- ❖ Consulting with foster carers and parents
- ❖ Reviewing case file records
- ❖ Participating in any additional meeting required by the needs of the child
- ❖ Maintaining up to date knowledge of relevant legislation and practice developments

Additionally, the scope of the IRO service includes:

- ❖ Chairing Child Protection Case Conferences
- ❖ Core Membership in Permanency Tracking Meetings
- ❖ Core Membership in Permanency Panels
- ❖ Core Membership in the Children Looked After & Care Leavers Service Improvement Group
- ❖ Core Membership in the early years and social care Service Improvement Board
- ❖ Core Membership in Quality Assurance Review Meetings
- ❖ Core Membership in the commissioning and review of all Children's Rights Services
- ❖ Management of the Annual Consultation of Children and Young People
- ❖ Participant in the quality assurance process of Independent Fostering Agencies
- ❖ Core Membership in ICS – Framework I – Sub Group
- ❖ Training delivery





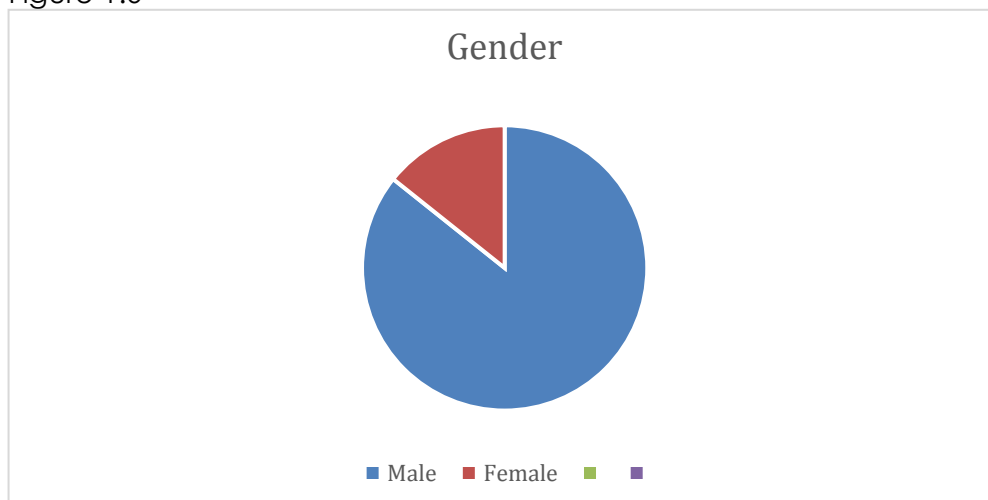
3. SERVICE ACTIVITY

3.1. Children in Care

There were 10 children looked after on 1st April 2018, 20 as of 31st March 2019, and 38 in total throughout the year.

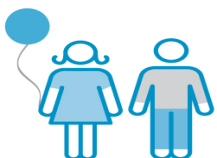
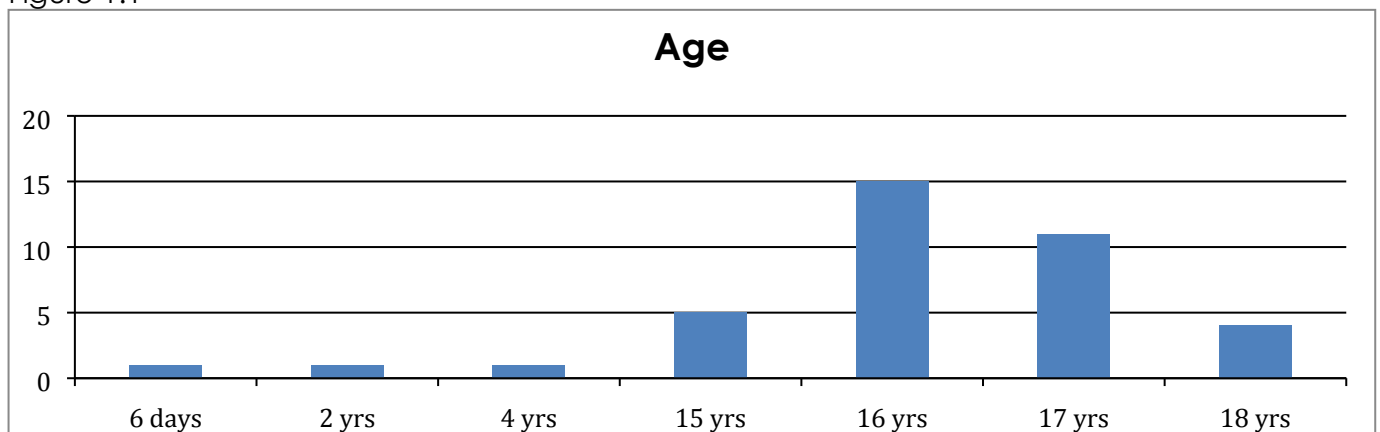
The following illustrates the profile of the individual children, reason for accommodation, legal status, and placement arrangements.

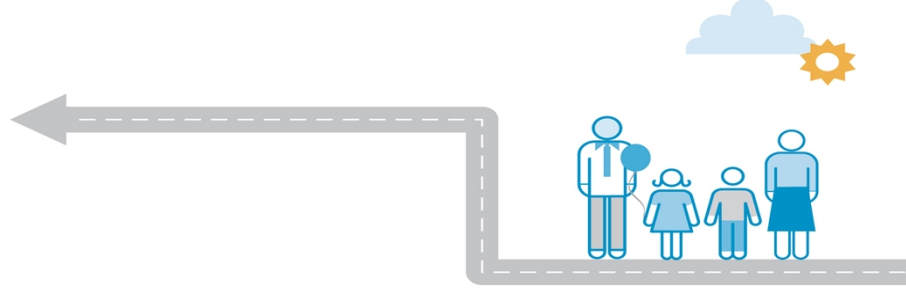
Figure 1.0



Of the 38 children looked after during this period, only 4 were female.

Figure 1.1

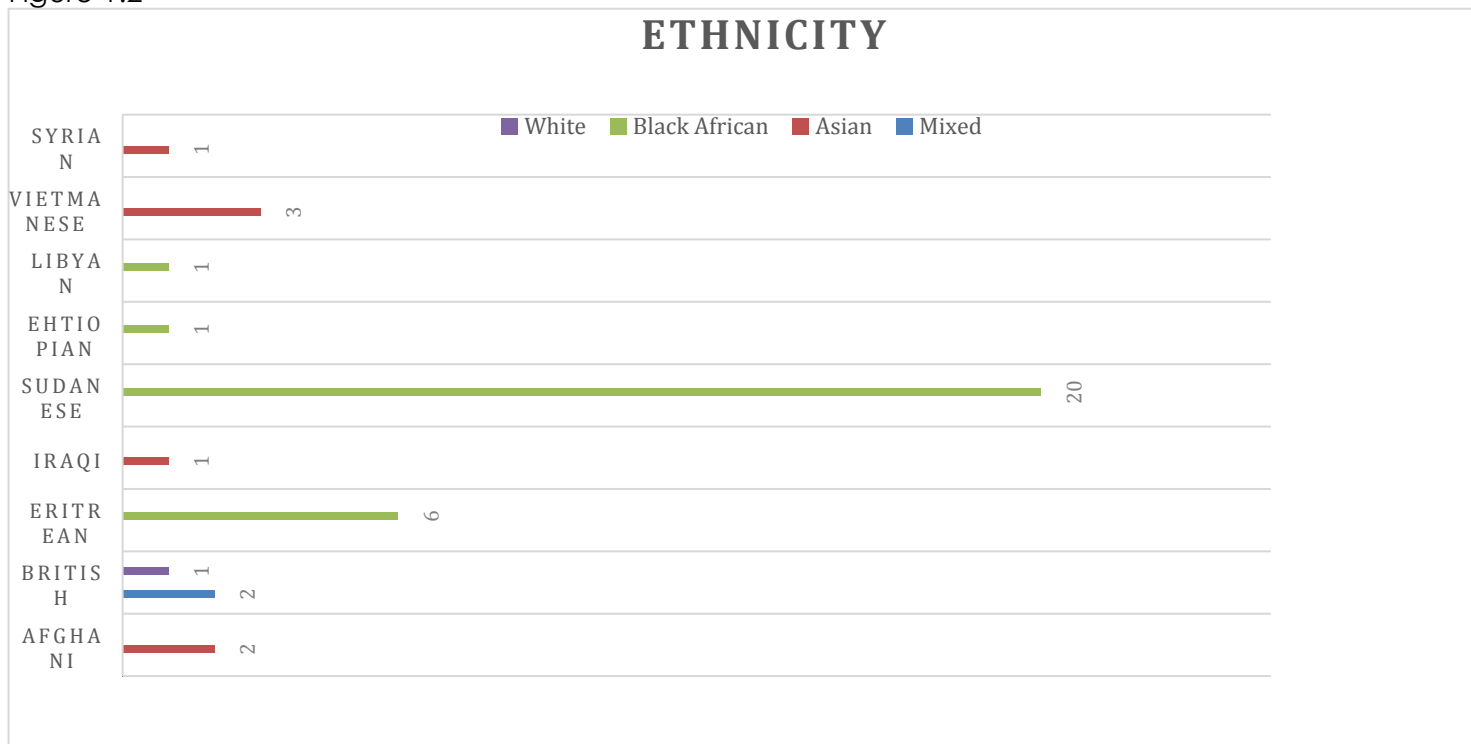




The ages reflected in Figure 1.1 refer to the age of each of the 38 children as of 31st March 2018 or the date when they ceased to be looked after.

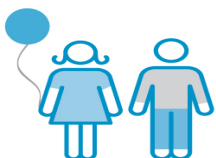
Of significance, 68% of the children cared for during this period were aged 16 or 17, with this age range remaining our largest cohort of Looked After Children.

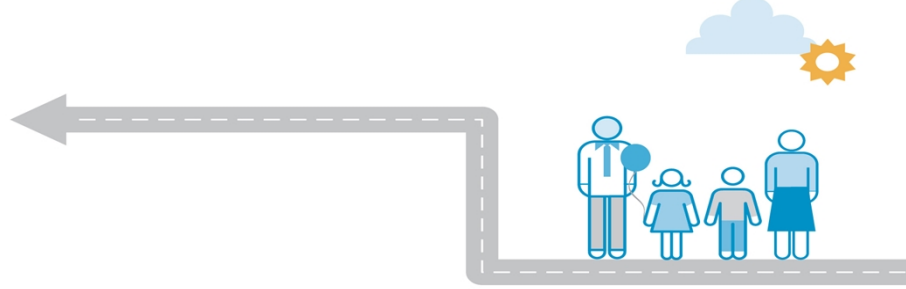
Figure 1.2



The countries of origin illustrated in the above also account for the nationality of each child. Of note, the City of London's largest cohort of children in care is of Sudanese nationality, at 52%.

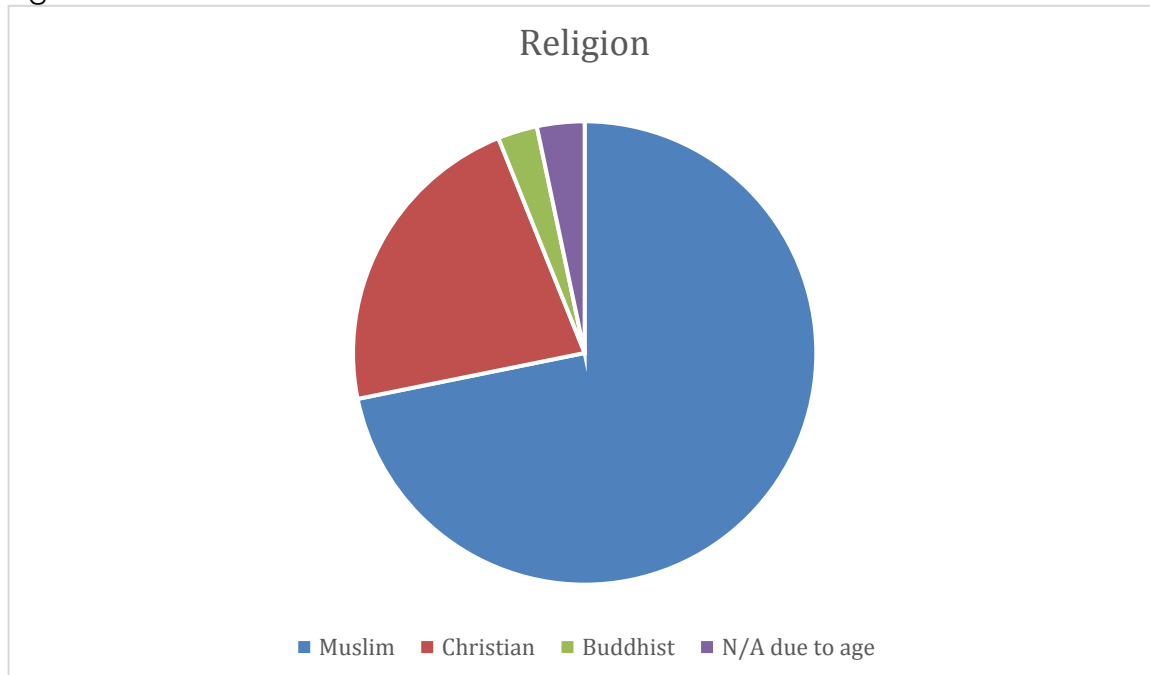
92% of the children in care during this period did not speak English with Arabic being the most widely spoken language at 57%. Therefore, the main communication need identified throughout this year was interpretation and translation services. Overall, the quality of the interpreting service has been good. However, due to the differing dialects within the Arabic language, it has been important to specify that Arabic interpreters originate from the same country as the child. 1 of the children speaks Oromo which has been continually difficult to source interpreters for.





Religion

Figure 1.3

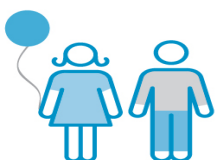


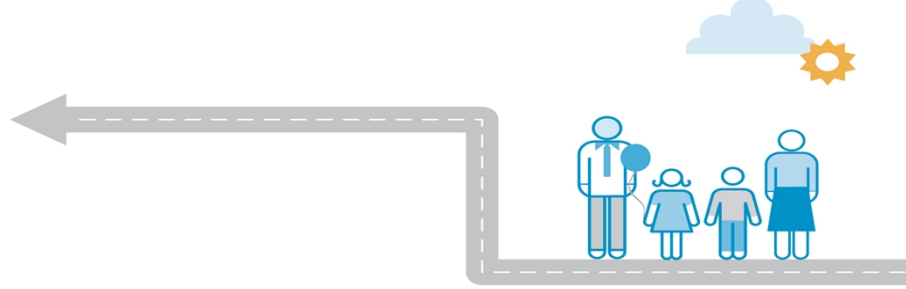
Islam represents the highest number of our Looked After cohort with 68% of children identifying as Muslim. The IRO has initiated the action of ensuring all children and young people who identify as a practising Muslim, are given a prayer mat upon becoming Looked After and access to mosques and churches is established at placement planning meetings for all children who practice a religion.

Victims of Torture

Of the 14 new UASC cases who have remained in the City of London's care over this reporting year, 8 of the young people have reported being victims of torture. All 8 of these young people are Sudanese and the torture occurred sometime in Sudan before they left, but all of the 8 experienced it in Libya.

The initial health assessments for these 8 young people, corroborated their claims with numerous burn marks and scars observed and recorded.





Experience of torture has not previously been commented on in previous IRO reports. However, looking at the cohort of 10 UASC Looked after children who were in care from the start of April 1st 2018, 2 young people reported being the victim of torture. This shows an increase in victims of torture becoming Looked After in the City of London. Therefore, the services required, namely mental health, are being reviewed. Specialist therapeutic services such as Freedom from Torture are being utilised to provide the young people with emotional support. The service manager for children and families is also in on-going discussions with the mental health teams at strategic level to identify any changes needed to our current contract with CAMHS to reflect this changing need.

Figure 1.4a

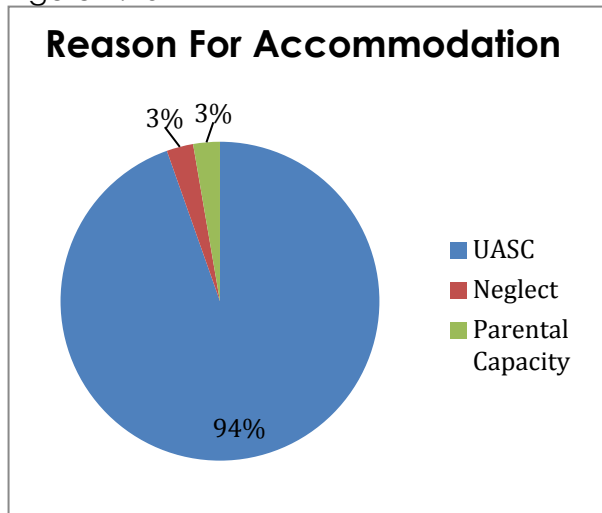
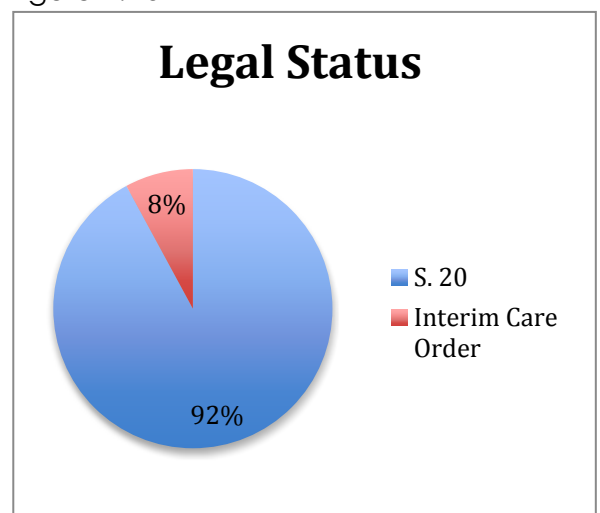


Figure 1.4b

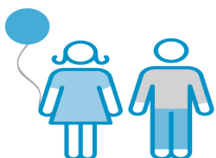


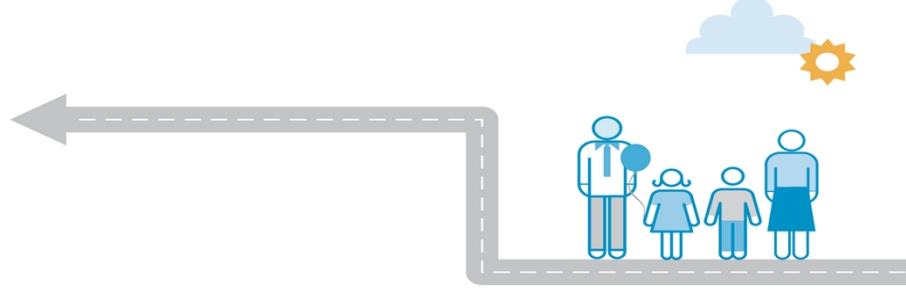
35 of the 38 children looked after during this period required accommodation due to being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and in each of these cases, they were received into care under S.20 and appropriately remained looked after under this legal status throughout the year. Five of the 35 UASC became care leavers upon reaching the age of 18 during this reporting year and are being supported by the local authority accordingly.

1 UASC was transferred to a different Local Authority, under the national transfer scheme. 10 UASC were transferred to different Local Authorities under the Croydon Rota scheme. 1 UASC was established by the Home Office to be a 30 year old Moroccan national, due to information held on record about him, and was subsequently detained by the Home Office.

1 child who was subject to an interim care order ceased to be looked after when they were placed with their originally non-resident parent's care under a Supervision Order.

The profile of children in the care of the City at year end is unique for the following reasons:



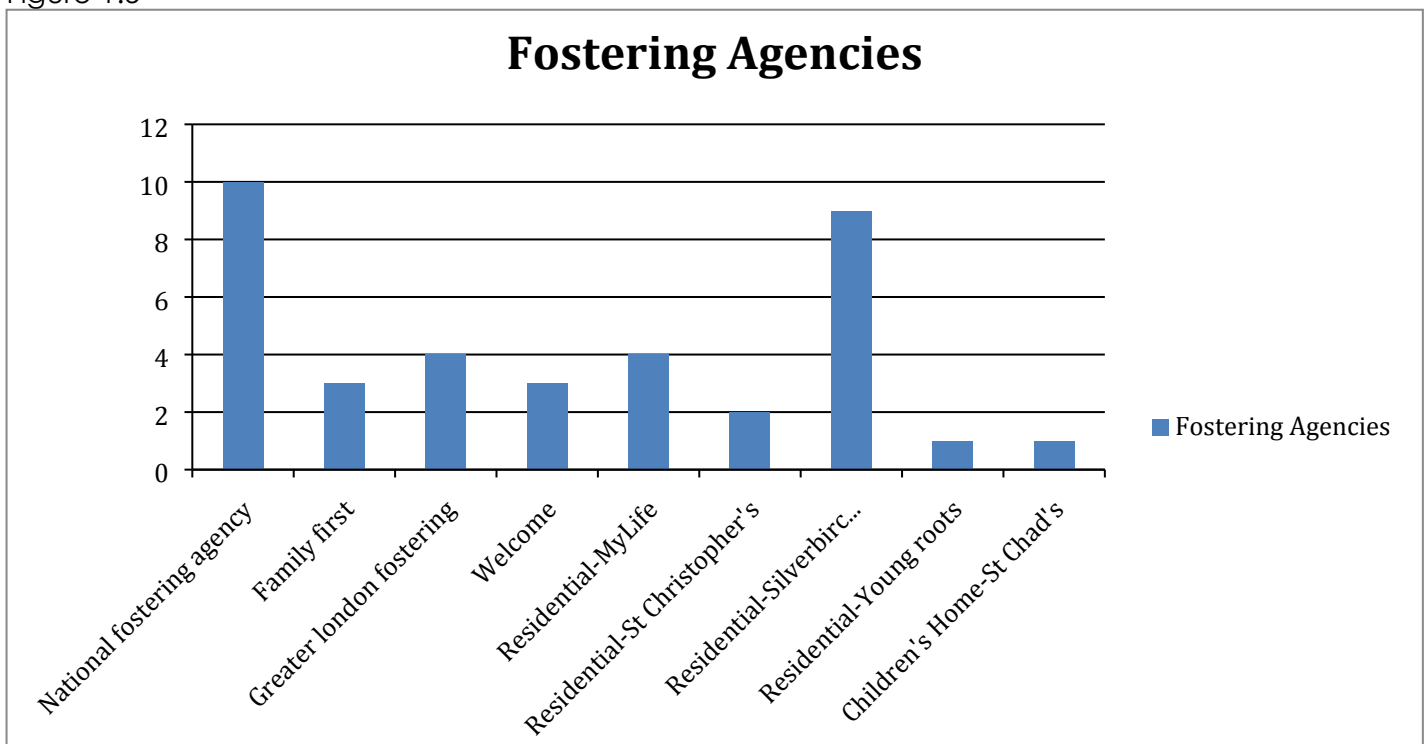


- ❖ 90% are UASC; and
- ❖ 90% are male

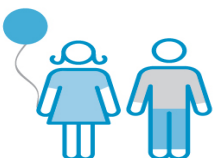
It is also worth highlighting that:

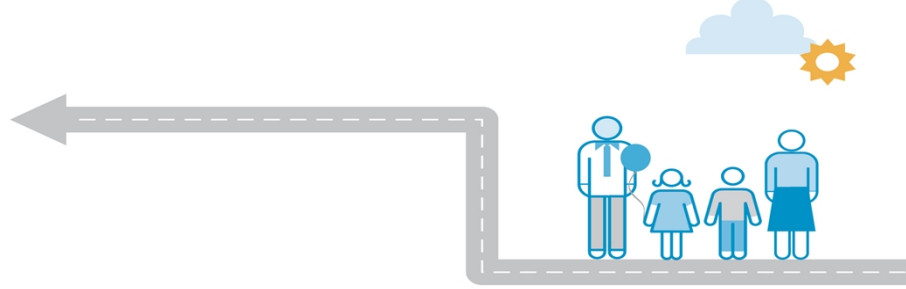
- ❖ The total number of children in care during this reporting period is 46% higher than the last year (2017/18) and 123% higher than the preceding 2 years (2015/16 and 2016/17) and in all but two cases, this increase is accounted for by the rise in UASC;
- ❖ None of the children in care during this period have presented with or been assessed as having a disability.

Figure 1.5



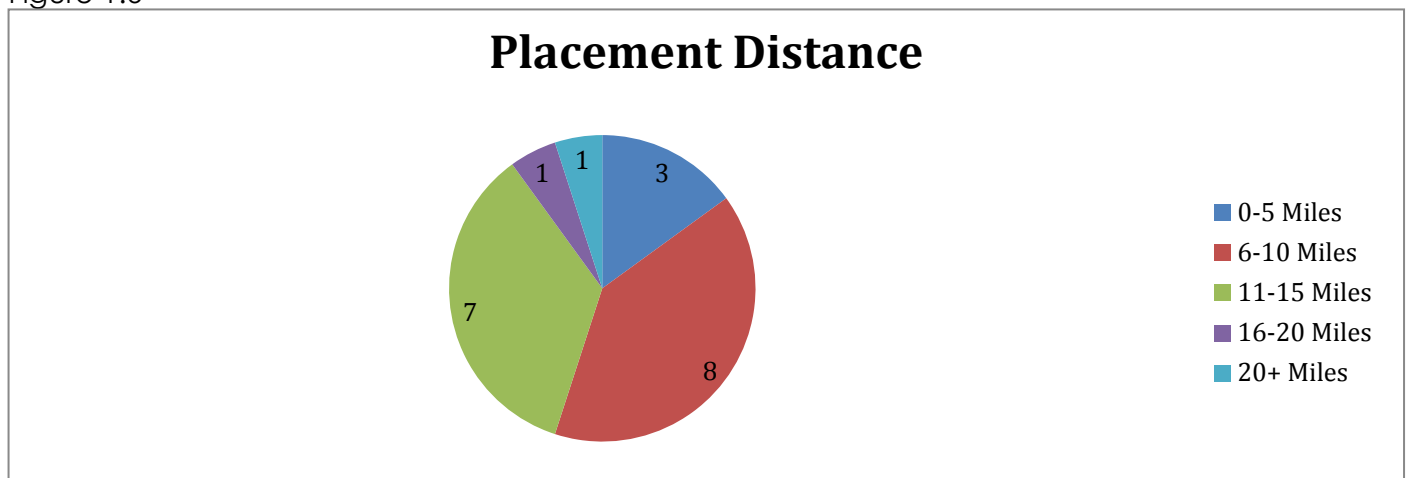
The City of London does not have an in-house fostering service and therefore commissions placements from external agencies for each child according to their individual needs. Throughout this year, the City's children in care were placed with 14 different independent fostering agencies (IFAs) or residential placements and 1 placement in a children's home. The 10 children in care as of 31st March 2019 were placed across 4 different Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) and 4 residential homes. Each agency used was rated Good in their most recent Ofsted inspection.





In January 2019, the IRO raised concerns to commissioning, children's social care and early help service manager and team manager about the quality of one residential placement provider that has 3 locations, with 4 children in total placed with them. Concerns were around mismanagement of young people's finances, lack of initiative in communicating with non-English speaking children and not progressing LAC review recommendations. One young person was taken out of a placement in Leytonstone as he was detained by the Home Office due to him being an adult. Two young people were moved from one placement in Ilford and one young person remains in this provider's placement in Harrow. The remaining young person was offered a new placement but after discussions with the placement staff and monitoring their progression of required actions, the young person was clear he wanted to remain there. The quality of this remaining placement continues to be monitored by the social worker and IRO. Going forward, an agreement has been made with commissioning and the Children's Social Care team that no further placements will be made with this particular provider.

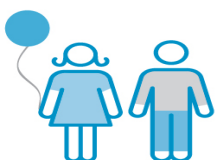
Figure 1.6



As of 31st March 2019, 95% of placements of the remaining 20 children in care, were within 15 miles of the City with 10 of the 20 children living within the 0-10-mile range. Of the 5% that have been placed further than 15 miles away, this is a long-term arrangement and the young person has established strong links with their community and education.

3.2. Statutory Reviews

42 statutory reviews were held in 2017/2018. 15 were initial reviews, 9 were second reviews, and 18 were subsequent reviews as illustrated below.



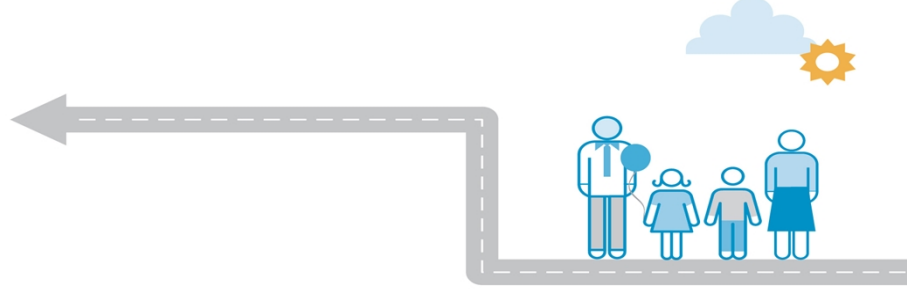
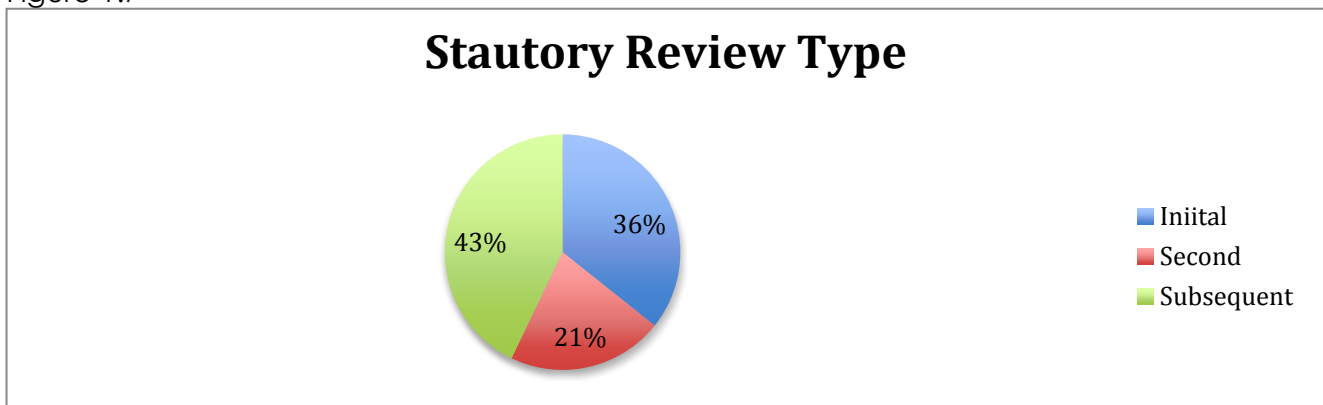


Figure 1.7



42 reviews occurred as single meetings this year and 2 reviews took place as a series of meetings. The 2 reviews that took place over a series of meetings were arranged to facilitate children's participation and to support the completion of pathway planning activity.

There have been no LAC reviews out of timescales since October 2017.

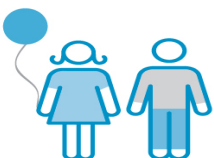
3.3. LAC review minutes

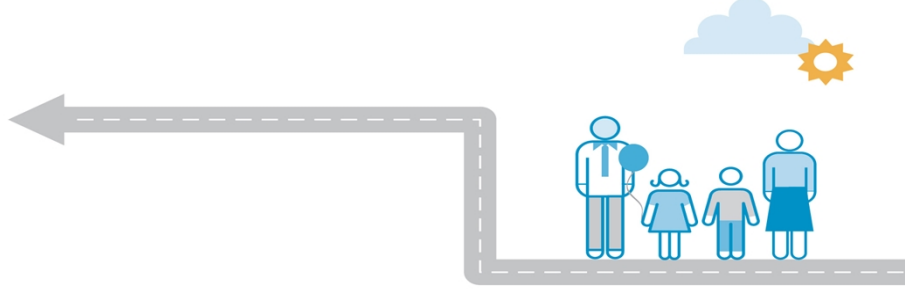
The new format of LAC review minutes, comprising of a letter written directly to the child in care, which was initiated in 2018, remains in place. This has been commented on positively by recently by Independent auditors.

The electronic record form on Mosaic, the City of London's electronic recording system, is also still being sent out as this must be completed for recording statutory data on the electronic system.

3.4. IRO visits

The IRO conducted 20 standalone visits to meet with children during this reporting period, an increase of 25% from the previous reporting year. The purpose of these visits was to introduce the role of the IRO to newly accommodated children and in all cases, to consult children and monitor the quality and progress of their care plans.





The majority of these visits took place at the child's placement in order for the IRO to observe the child's bedroom and placement.

In 100% of the visits conducted, the IRO met with children on their own.

3.5. Consultation and Participation in Reviews

The IRO service is committed to and guided by the duty to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children in care and to ensure that these are given due consideration by the local authority.

After a review of consultation methods in 2017, the Mind of my Own application was implemented on 23rd January 2019. This is an app that can be used and downloaded on any computer, laptop or smart phone. It has a number of different consultation pages that children and young people can either complete on their own or with a worker. There are 2 formats of the application, Mind of my own one, which can be used independently by children and young people and Mind of my own express which can be used with younger children or children with English as a second language. This method of consultation is also utilised across other service areas, including child in need, child protection and early help.

To date, 21 young people have registered for their own Mind of My Own account. In total, 37 Mind of My Own statements have been produced using the app. This is a combination of workers completing it with the child or young person or the young person sending the document in independently. The highest use is of workers completing a statement with a child or young person. This indicates the importance of ensuring the work force remain motivated and engaged with using Mind of My Own.

The breakdown of topics in the statements are as follows:

Mind of My Own One:

Getting ready for a conference: 24%

Preparation for a meeting 29%

Share good news 24%

My worker is visiting 24%

Mind of My Own Express:

About me 27%

My day 23%

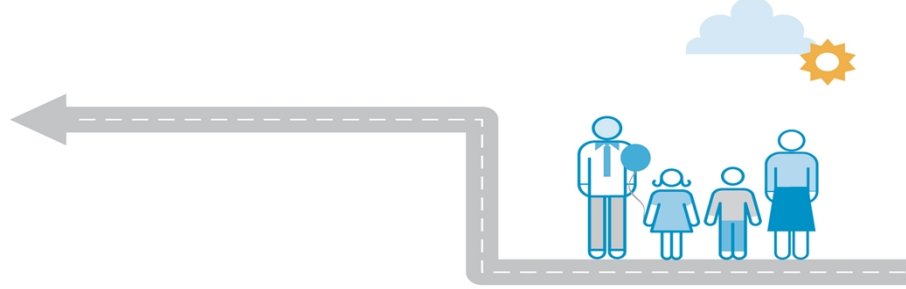
My education 9%

My health 14%

My life 27%

Children's views about all aspects of their care planning and review processes are ascertained by the IRO during Pre-Review and Midway Visits, and by reviewing completed Mind of My Own





documents. During review meetings children are given the space to express their wishes and feelings, encouraged to ask questions, and supported to raise issues when needed.

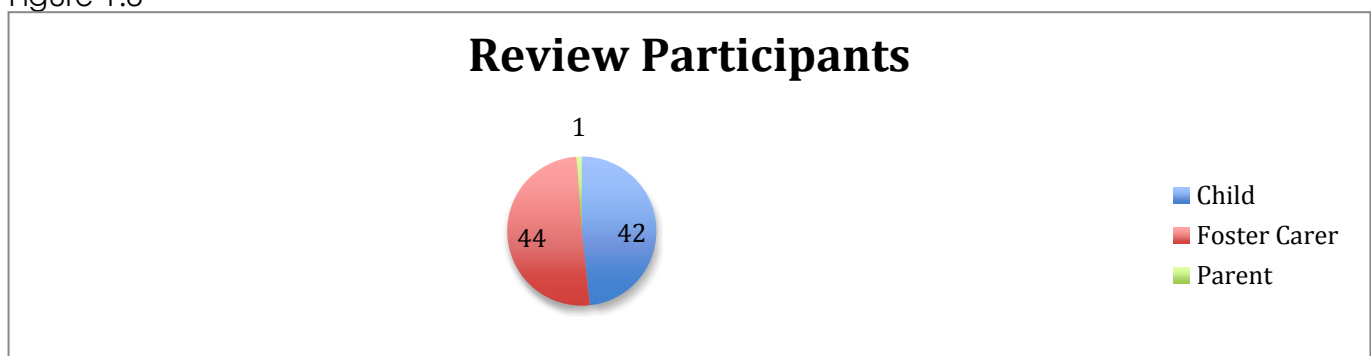
The impact of ensuring children and young people's engagement has meant that they feel more involved in their care or pathway plan. In the recent Action for Children survey, when asked 'are changes made as a result of the views you share', 10 out of 11 respondents stated in the affirmative.

The IRO also ensures that the views of the children's foster carers are established during placement visits and during review meetings. At the time of the Mind of My Own app being implemented, a new online foster carer consultation form was also developed by the IRO. This form can be emailed to the foster carer's or posted. Whilst use of the Mind of My Own app has been good, the use of the foster carer consultation form has been low, with only 1 being completed to date. This is an area of improvement that is needed.

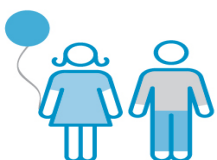
The IRO contacted and consulted directly with the parents for both of the 2 children whose parents' whereabouts the local authority knew.

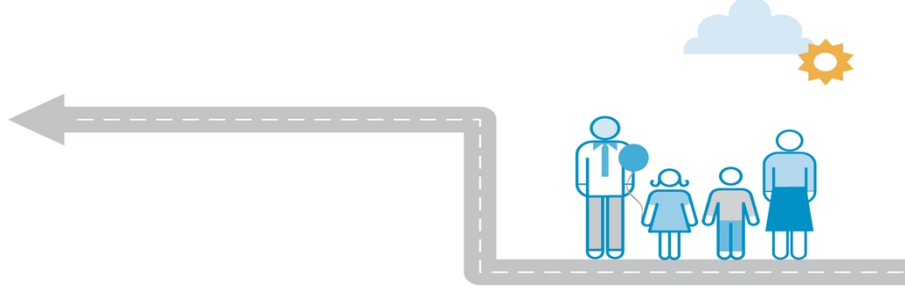
Consultation with any of the parents or family members of the UASC in care has not been achieved due to either the children indicating that this is not possible or social workers' reporting that they have not been able to reach the parents for whom they had been given contact details. The IRO service acknowledges the complicated nature of family relationships for UASC and is sensitive to the safety considerations required as a result.

Figure 1.8



As illustrated in Figure 1.8, foster carers or residential workers attended 100% of the 44 reviews that took place during this reporting period; children were present in 95% of the reviews and a parent or significant family member was present in 1 of the review meetings.





In one of the reviews where the child did not attend, the IRO is satisfied based on her own contact with them, that due to their young age it was not appropriate for them to be present in the main part of the LAC review. However, the IRO conducted a separate visit to the child and liaised with the CAFCASS guardian and social worker to ensure the child's views were represented throughout.

The IRO works with social workers to promote children's participation by ensuring that review meetings are arranged at a time and place that best suits the child and that they are consulted about who should be invited.

In keeping with children's expressed wishes, review meetings have taken place in placements, at schools and once, in the local authority's office.

All children are offered the opportunity to chair their own reviews and are provided with support from the IRO to prepare them if they choose to chair their meeting. This helps to promote their active participation in the decision-making processes of their lives and to empower them through increased self-esteem. In this reporting year, whilst many of the young people took a large directive role in their reviews, none of the children wished to chair their own meeting. This could be due to the majority of the children in care (71%), being either, too young, transferred on the national transfer scheme or new to the service.

3.6. IRO introduction

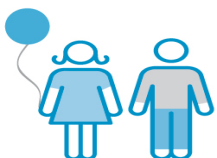
The IRO has produced a document outlining the role of the IRO, the purpose of LAC reviews and explaining what a care plan and pathway plan is. This document has been translated into 7 of the main languages used in our Looked After Children Cohort and given to children when they first come into care. See Appendix 1.

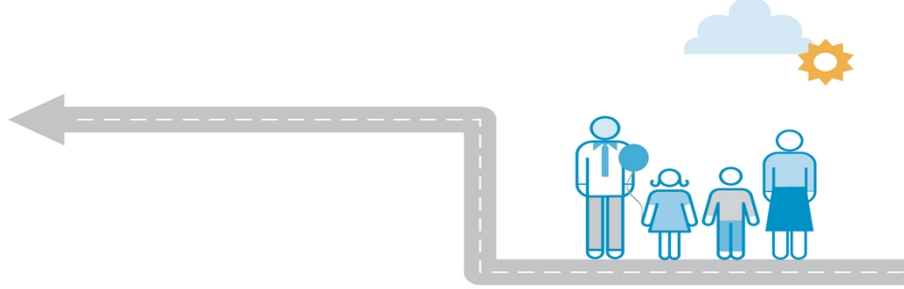
3.7. Children's Rights

Action For Children provide the full range of children's rights services for the City's children in care.

The IRO works hard to ensure that children in care understand, have access to, and make use of their right to independent advocacy, independent visiting services (IV), and the complaints process by maintaining this topic as a standing agenda item for each review meeting and contact the IRO has with children.

There has been significant increase in use of the independent advocacy service this year with 13 of the 44 children accessing the support of an advocate. This represents a 52% increase from the previous reporting year. By the end of the reporting year, the City of London Advocacy Service worked with 13 young people, all of them young refugees. Action for Children received 12 new





referrals during this reporting year with 11 of these referrals occurring in the second half of reporting year. 12 of the new referrals related to being put on the National Transfer Scheme list and young people were requesting to stay in London. All children remained in London. 4 children asked for support from their advocates to challenge the decision to age assess them. 2 children raised concerns about their placement with these concerns being resolved to the child's satisfaction.

All cases were allocated to advocates within 24 hours, with 10 of them being allocated on the day of referral.

Advocates report very good communication with social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers.

Advocates have been observed to be very involved with the young people they are supporting and regularly attend LAC reviews.

Compared to the advocacy services, there has been a continuing decline in the allocation of independent visitors with none of the new children in care during this period being allocated one. One child has a long-term independent visitor that they benefit from. Due to the concerns raised by the children about the national transfer scheme and age assessment process, the need for advocacy has been more prevalent. However, now the majority of the disputes about the national transfer scheme have been resolved, there is scope for an increase in focusing on independent visitor referrals.

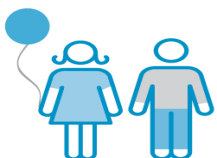
Every child in care has a copy of the City's Pledge in 8 of the main languages used in the City of London's Looked After cohort. The IRO ensures that all children's rights information is routinely shared with foster carers specifically so that they are equipped to support the children in their care to exercise their rights.

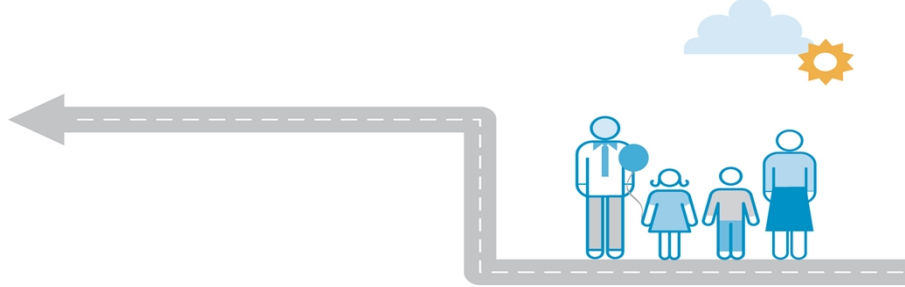
4. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN CARE

4.1. Care Planning

Services and support provided to looked after children in the City are of a high quality. The size of the looked after population is such that each child in care is known to all members of the team and senior management group and there is clear time and resource commitments made to ensuring their needs are met. A survey completed by Action for Children shows the high level of support children feel from their social worker. Of the seven Looked After children interviewed, 100% of respondents gave their social workers top marks in terms of finding their social worker easy to get in touch with/ getting a lot of help/ being consulted and asked for their views.

It is clear that children feel supported by their social worker and involved in their care planning. Completion of initial care plans in statutory timescales has increased since last year. 26 children





were due an initial care plan within the statutory 10 working days of them coming into care, during this reporting period. An additional two children were transferred to a different Local Authority under the Croydon Rota scheme before their initial care plan was due. Of the 26 care plans due, 14 initial care plans were completed in statutory timescales and five were completed but out of timescales. Of the children that were moved under the Croydon Rota scheme, seven initial care plans were not completed, and the children were subsequently transferred to a different Local Authority with no care plan.

The development of the quarterly LAC meetings has helped to ensure managers are aware of this issue and this was immediately acted upon by the team managers at the time. The electronic record process has since been amended so that next workflow steps cannot be generated without completing the care plan., Therefore, it is probable that this figure will improve in next reporting year.

Pathway plans

Pathway planning has been of a good standard with children's views and engagement with the process clear. Adherence to statutory timescales has been an issue at times with 54% first pathway plans due within 3 months being completed on time. However, the remaining plans were out of timescales by a matter of days not weeks. This suggests that finalising the document on the electronic system was the prevailing issue. Again, this issue was raised by the IRO at the quarterly LAC meetings with managers and adherence to timescales has improved in subsequent quarters.

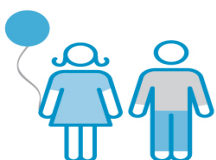
Post 18 reviews

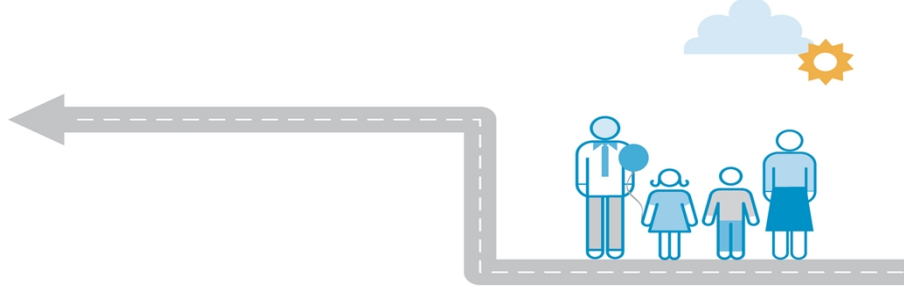
The Post 18 independent review protocol, an enhanced service which sets out the circumstances when an independent oversight of pathway plans for care leavers can be offered, remains in place. All young people are informed/reminded of this service at their last LAC review before turning 18 and how to request this. To date, no care leaver has requested this service.

4.2. Placement Stability

There have been three placement breakdowns in this reporting year which is a significant reduction from the previous year which had 8 placement breakdowns.

Two of these moves were for young people who have been in the City of London's care for over 2 years. One of these young people has experienced a number of placement moves in the past four years he has been in care. However, since their move in June 2018, they have remained in their current placement for over 1 year which is the longest time they have stayed in one place. The other long term Looked After Child who moved, had a significant amount of time spent with them and the foster carer to repair the relationship. Unfortunately, both the foster carer and the young person concluded that they were mutually unable to continue.





The third placement move was for a young person claiming asylum. After an initial 1 month in their first placement, they felt a move to a household that practiced their same religion would be better for them.

4.3. Achieving Permanency

Of the 38 children looked after during this reporting period:

- ❖ 5 transitioned into adulthood and continue to receive support from the City as care leavers
- ❖ 1 transferred to a Local Authority outside of London under the National Transfer scheme
- ❖ 10 transferred to a Local Authority under the Croydon Rota scheme
- ❖ 1 was returned to the care of their father under a Supervision Order
- ❖ 1 was detained by the Home Office after being found to be a 30 year old Moroccan National
- ❖ 3 are in established long term fostering arrangements under S.20
- ❖ 2 are under the age of 4, currently subject of court proceedings and in fostering arrangements with a care plan of future adoption
- ❖ 9 are in foster placements that require further assessment to ascertain potential for permanency
- ❖ 5 are in semi-independent placements that require further assessment to ascertain potential for permanency
- ❖ 1 is in a children's home that is a stable placement

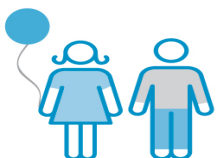
Of the 20 children remaining in care as of March 31st, 2019, six are in placements that are either long term or established placements until they reach 18 or outcome of court proceedings are concluded. Of the remaining 14 placements, 13 have recently become Looked After Children in the 3rd and 4th quarter of the reporting year. Therefore, more assessment time is needed to confirm if the placements can be long term or made permanent.

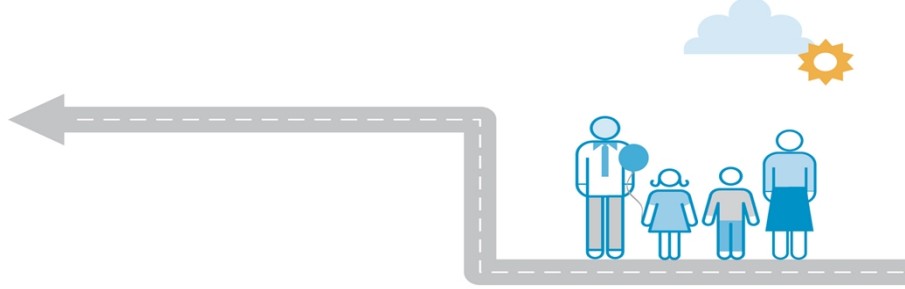
4.4. Health

The timescales for initial health assessment is within 20 working days of coming into care. 10 newly accommodated children were moved to a different Local Authority under the Croydon rota scheme and 1 under the National Transfer scheme, before their first LAC health assessment was due. In total, Initial health assessments were completed within timescales for 12 out of the 17 newly accommodated children this year that have remained with City of London.

All yearly LAC health assessments due in this reporting period were completed within timescales.

The IRO service has continued the quarterly review meeting process with the designated Children Looked After Nurse to improve the independent monitoring of the care and health services needed by and provided to children in care. Findings from these meetings are fed back to the local authority in the form of recommendations or notifications of agreements reached. The social work team manager has responsibility for implementing these recommendations.





All children who were accommodated and remained in care during this reporting year were offered baseline CAMHS assessments. As discussed above, there has been an increase in young people in care reporting being victims of torture. More specialised therapeutic services are being utilised to meet this need.

4.5. Education

All children in care, bar one, as of March 31st, 2019 were in education. This reporting year has seen the introduction of a City of London tutorial group, based on the local barbican estate, 3 days a week. This means newly arrived children/young people in care can access education immediately, whilst they wait for a college or school place to become available. The tuition group teaches ESOL and PEPS are held with contribution from the two tutors running the class.

The virtual school head is responsible for overseeing the educational placements of Looked After Children.

Throughout the reporting year, the majority of cases had Personal Educational Plans (PEPs) completed within timescales and ahead of statutory review meetings. Since being highlighted as an issue in previous annual reports, there is now a system in place for the social work team to ensure PEP reports are shared with children, education establishments and carers.

Extracurricular tuition was also offered to children completing their GCSE's.

The one child not accessing education had been offered the tuition group but declined. A college and local ESOL class was also identified but the young person has yet to attend.

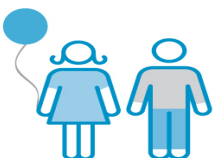
4.6. Life story work

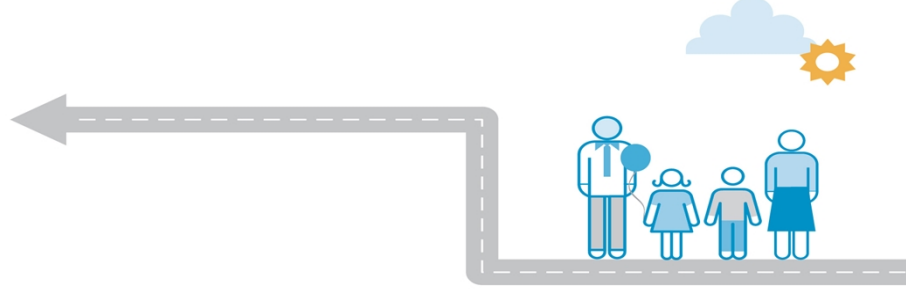
This was previously identified as an area where work was needed to bring together the existing work being done by the social work team. After a review of the options available, some research suggested that in-depth life story work would not always be appropriate or welcomed by asylum seeking children (eg: Ravi Kohli). Looked After UASC were also asked about life story work in the Action for Children survey, with some echoing the research:

"It's about the present now. I don't want the emotions to come back."

"I have a very bad story. I don't want to go to the past. I think about life now."

Subsequently, it has been agreed that all UASC children in care will be given a hard cover memories and experiences book on their arrival. Any photos, drawings and memories they share or experience can be put in the book. This is a way of compiling their experiences in care but also a place they can record memories of their home country and family life if they choose.





Some in-depth life story work has been used with the 2 children in foster care with a care plan of adoption. This includes later life letters from family members and professionals.

4.7. Midway monitoring

Midway monitoring has continued on each Looked After child, using the template developed in the previous year.

4.8. Practice Recognition and Dispute Resolution

One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve issues arising from the care planning process. In the City this is called the Dispute Resolution Process for Independent Reviewing Officers (DRP). The DRP is a 6-stage process that begins with the team manager and ends with a referral to Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) but it encourages resolution at the lowest appropriate level and anticipates that in the vast majority of cases, issues can be resolved through discussion between professionals.

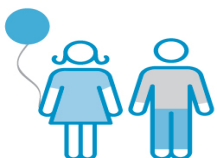
During this reporting year, the IRO escalated concerns to stage 3 of the DRP in 2 cases. All disputes were regarding the national transfer scheme and the length of time it was taking to transfer the children. The 2 children were waiting in excess of 10 weeks, during which time they had made attachments to their placement, were attending the tuition group and made links in the community. The City of London social work team were proactive throughout in requesting updates on the transfers from the Home Office and senior management agreed that the transfer times had become too long. However, the quota of children in care had gone significantly over threshold and there was an impact on the resources available.

The 2 children utilised the support of an advocate regarding the transfer issue.

The original premise of the National Transfer scheme was for children to be transferred within approximately 1 month. All UASC children, upon coming into care, were informed about the scheme and the care plan was for them to be moved. However, once it became apparent that the transfers were not happening quickly, the children became frustrated and anxious about an impending move whilst they were trying to settle. The dispute was subsequently resolved with an agreement that the language used by professionals with the children, when discussing the transfer scheme, was adapted. Children were no longer told that the care plan was to be transferred. The emphasis was and continues to be, on ensuring all social, educational, health and placement needs were met. If a transfer became available, this would be discussed with the child to see if they felt this would be a good move for them. To date, since the National transfer scheme came back into operation in October 2018, no transfer has been offered by the scheme.

The IRO Dispute Form was used to record the management of this dispute for both cases.

All other concerns have been resolved through informal challenge within the service and during quality assurance monitoring meetings. In no particular order, the tables below provide samples of the good practice recognised and the issues of concern identified throughout 2018/2019.



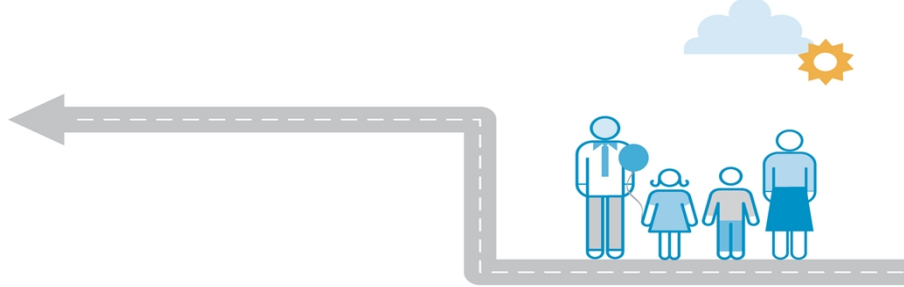


Table 1.0

Good practice identified
City of London tuition group created
New consultation methods implemented
Voice of the child is listened to
SW Support to UASC with immigration process
SW and Virtual school head support with education
Quality and timeliness of statutory visits
Transfer of learning between reviews leading to improved practice
Involvement of children in placement changes
Quality of SW/CLA relationships
Support for children to engage in CiCC
SW efforts to consult and engage parents and significant family members

Table 1.1

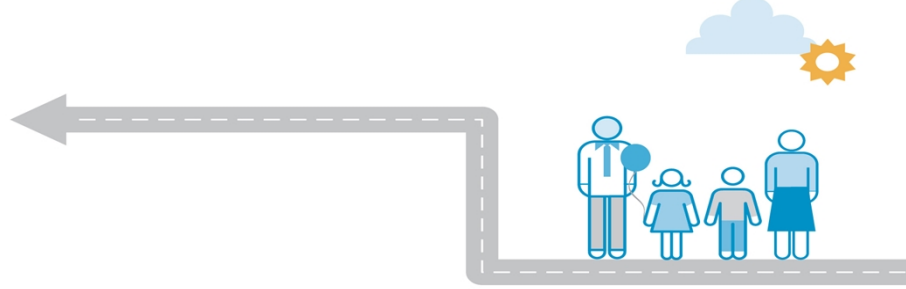
Issues of Concerns Identified	Current Status
Foster carer consultation forms not being completed	A new consultation form was created but lack of completion has been an issue.
Delay in children being moved to new placement under National transfer scheme	The National transfer scheme remains in place with delays on-going. IRO's and senior management teams across London are voicing their concerns to the Home Office,
Initial care plans not being completed in timescales	This has improved since change was made to process of electronic records

5. Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

5.1. Supervision and Management Oversight

The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager supervises the IRO once every 4weeks. These sessions focus on practice issues as well as service development needs.





The revised statutory guidance states that designated senior managers must consider the decisions from reviews. This is in part due to the need to monitor and account for any decisions with resource implications. Any disagreements with the decisions made are required to be sent to the IRO in writing within 5 days for resolution and where this is not possible through informal means, the DRP will need to be used. In the City the social work team and service managers are the designated seniors responsible for considering review decisions. The fact that there haven't been any disagreements raised indicates that managers are overall satisfied with the recommendations and decisions made by the IRO.

5.2. Performance Monitoring

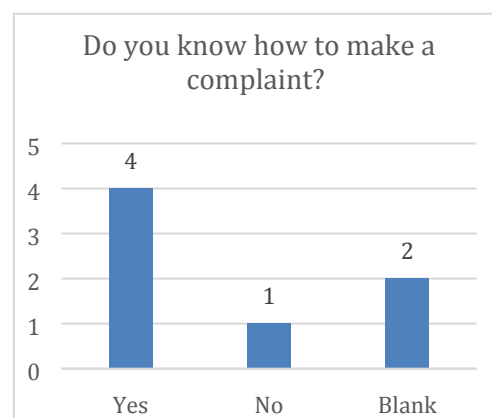
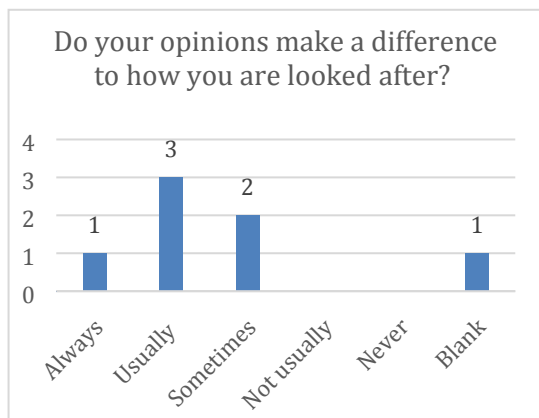
The IRO meets with the Performance Analyst regularly to monitor compliance with statutory review timescales and the degree to which the IRO is 'keeping in touch' with children in care. There have been no issues of non-compliance identified as part of this process. The IRO's performance is reported into the People's Directorate Senior Management Team, the Safeguarding Sub Committee, and the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership Quality Assurance Sub Committee. There are also quarterly Quality Assurance meetings held at the City of London where the relevant LAC figures are communicated.

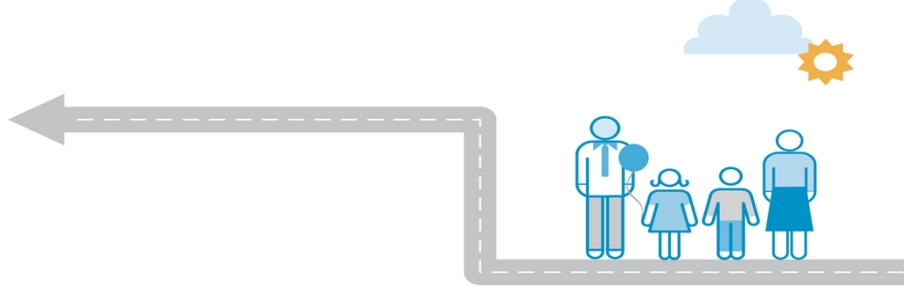
5.3. Case File Auditing

The IRO's footprint and the quality of the service provided are considered as part of all formal case file audits. There has been an independent full-scale audit completed by external agency, , in 2018/19. The audit commented on the good use of the dispute resolution process and a good level of IRO oversight on cases.

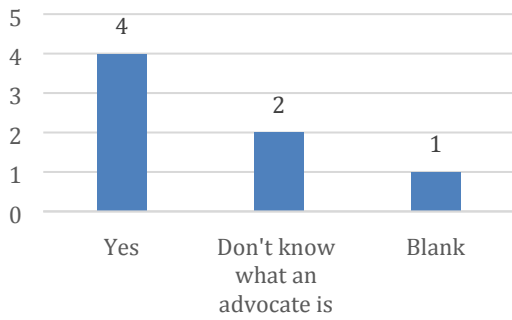
5.4. Children's Views

Children's views about the IRO and their review meetings are an important aspect of the quality assurance process of the IRO service. Here are some examples of what children in care had to say, taken from the recent Action for Children survey:

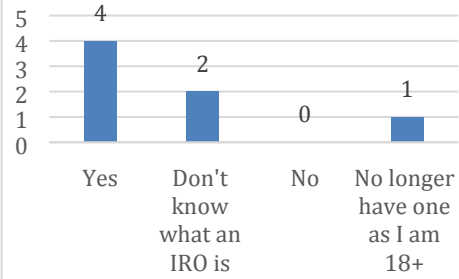




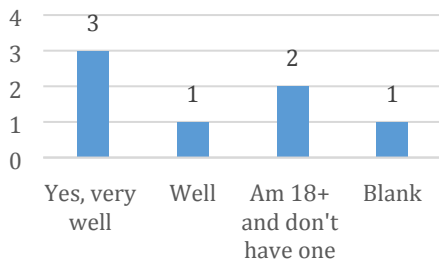
Do you know how to get an advocate?



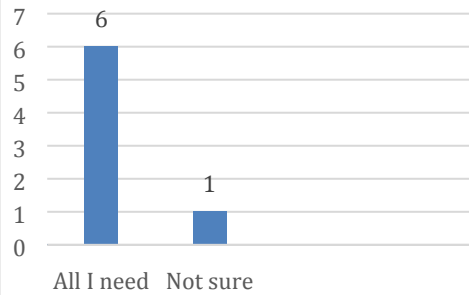
Do you know how to get in touch with your IRO?



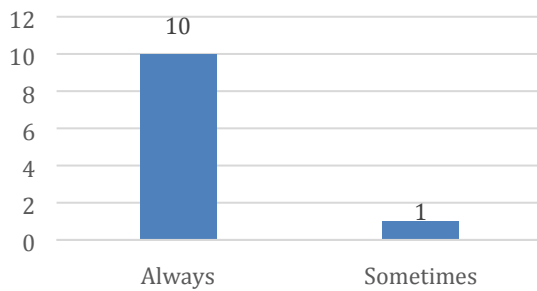
If you have an IRO, are they helping you to ensure that you get the care you need?



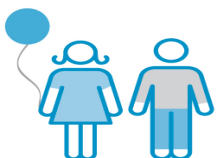
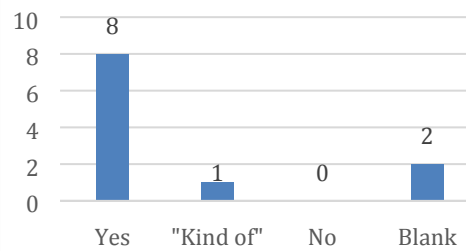
How much support do you receive about leaving care?

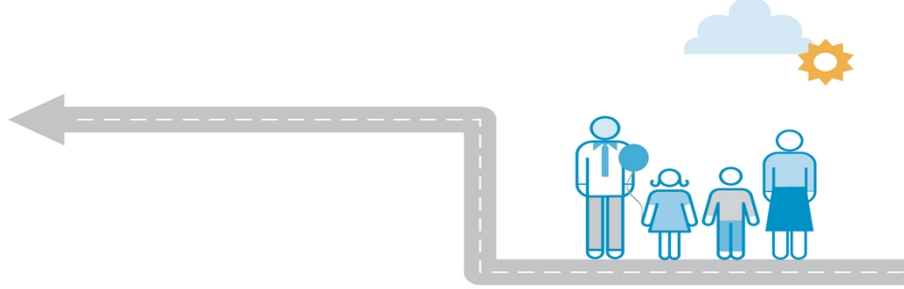


Are changes made as a result of the views you share?



Has anyone worked with you to help you understand the reasons why you came to be looked after?





6. Overview

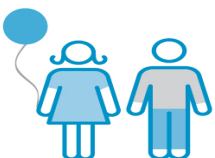
6.1 Achievements

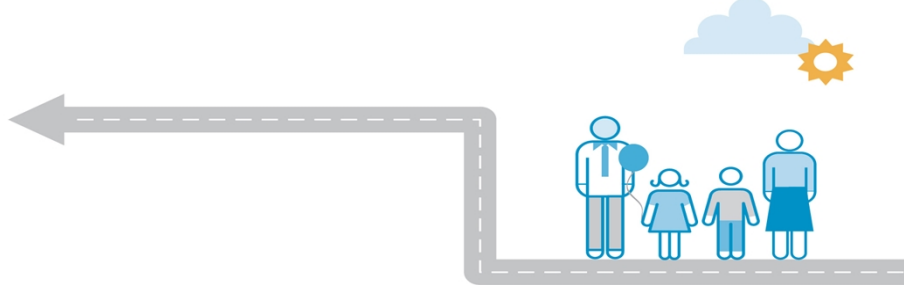
The positive impact of the IRO service in 2018/2019 is evident in the following list of achievements:

- ❖ Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
- ❖ Initiating purchase of prayer mats so all Muslim children can be given a prayer mat on their arrival into care
- ❖ Development of new IRO introduction form in different languages
- ❖ Implementation of new consultation tool
- ❖ All children seen alone by the IRO outside of review meetings
- ❖ Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods
- ❖ Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the ICS workflow
- ❖ The promotion of the Children's Right services
- ❖ The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse

In addition to direct work with children and the local authority, the IRO takes part in the London IRO Practitioner Network and serves as a practitioner representative to the London IRO Managers' Group. Engagement in these pan-London groups facilitates the IRO's access to information and the experience of colleagues from larger authorities. It also ensures that the experience and needs of the City's children in care are represented in forums that have the potential to influence the direction of practice and statutory guidance about the services and supports they receive.

The IRO service has been alert to safeguarding issues for children in care and will continue to monitor care plans closely to include actions that address the known risks of all forms of exploitation and aims to build safety and stability according to the needs of each child. The IRO continues to access learning and training to aid their development and understanding of the needs of Looked After Children.





6.2 Update on planned objectives for 2018/2019

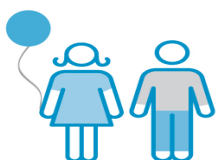
Objective at end of 2017/18	Update 2018/19
Implementation of new app-Mind of My own	Completed. Mind of My own was implemented in January 2019.
Improved consultation form for foster carers	Completed. Foster carer consultation form was updated into an electronic version that can be emailed to foster carers/ However, response rate has been slow and will need to be reviewed in next reporting year.
2 monthly meetings with team managers to review service data and identify trends	Completed/On-going. Meetings held at end of each quarterly reporting period.
Mosaic system to be checked to ensure care plan document is being generated	Completed. Care plan is now a mandatory document to be completed on Mosaic before next steps of forms can be generated.
Welcome pack for children coming into care to be reviewed and updated and translated into 10 most common languages of LAC cohort to increase understanding	Completed. IRO introduction sheet has been created and translated into 7 languages. This is given to children coming into care in their welcome pack.
Increase IRO visits before the first LAC review	On-going. The significant increase in LAC numbers during this reporting year has made this more difficult.

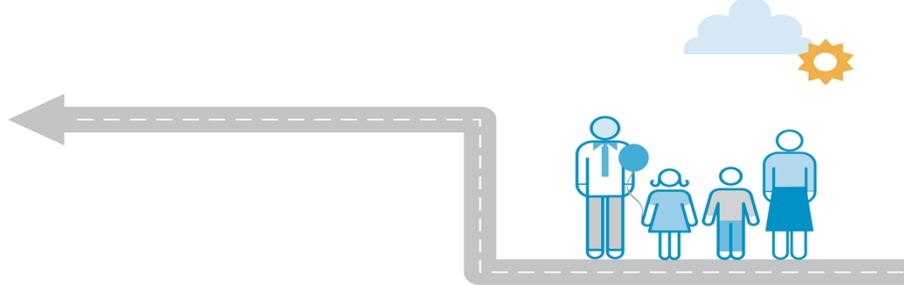
6.3 Areas for Improvement

The IRO service acknowledges the need for improvement in the following areas:

- ❖ Increase IRO visits to ensure Looked After children have opportunity to discuss their care plan before reviews
- ❖ Increase understanding of National transfer scheme and the implications on service delivery

6.4 Conclusion





The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2018/2019. There has been a focus on ensuring children coming into care have increased understanding of the role of the IRO and the meaning of their care plan. Cultural and religious inclusion has also been a theme this year, with the IRO initiating the purchase of prayer mats so children of Muslim faith can pray when they first come into care.

The implementation of new consultation methods has been successful with a positive commitment from the social work team to engage the children with this new format.

The IRO service notes that this has been a challenging year in some respects, due to the significant increase in numbers of looked after children. Throughout, the social work team have shown commitment and energy in supporting the children.

7. Planned & Recommended Improvements For 2018/2019

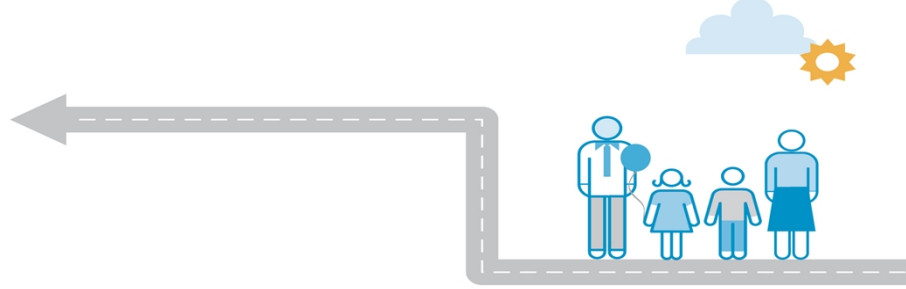
The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service will continue to develop the IRO service across the full range of its roles and functions.

The following outlines the key practice priorities planned for the IRO service in the coming year.

Table 3.0

Objective	Actions
Implement Life story books	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise purchase of Life story books Meet with social work team to discuss how to use them with children Ensure books are given to children in their first month of being in care.
Increase in IRO visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aim for each child to be visited on a separate visit prior to their review Request to Mosaic team for IRO visit to be a document instead of current case note form-to ensure visit rate can be reported on.
Continue to develop the LAC review process to make it inclusive for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore different mediums such as PowerPoint and video as a format to support children in their reviews Review systemic model and how this can be developed in the LAC review process

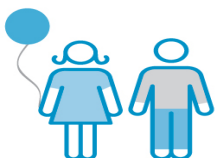




The list below is the IRO service's recommendations for development to the local authority.

Table 3.1

Improved use of foster carer consultation forms	Ensure the forms are being sent out by social workers and foster carers encouraged to use them
Clarification of role of National transfer scheme	Plans for City of London procedure re transfer of UASC, in light of the transfer scheme not being operational
Encouraging use of new consultation method	Ensure social work team have been registered for the Mind of My Own app and use it with children.



Appendix 1 IRO profile Independent Reviewing Officer- I.R.O

Hello, my name is Ria Lane and I am the Independent Reviewing Officer- I.R.O at the City of London



What does an IRO do?

Because there is no family member to look after you in the UK, you are being looked after by the City of London Corporation, the Corporation has the same role as a London Council.

You are living with a foster family or in a residential home with support staff.

Your social worker has to make sure there is a plan for you-it is called a **care plan**. This plan records

things like:

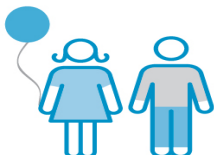
- Where you live
- Your education
- Your health
- Activities you like to do
- Contact with your family
- Culture and religion

meeting to find out what you are thinking and if there is anything you want to talk about in the meeting.

If you are 16 or 17 years old, your care plan will be called the '**pathway plan**' after 3 months of you being in care or turning 16. This records all of the things that a care plan does. It also makes plans for **your future**, for when you become an adult at 18 years old. It is my job (the IRO) to make sure that your plan is the right one for you and to make sure your feelings and opinions are listened to.

I will hold a meeting called a **Looked After Child Review** within 20 days of you coming into care. You will be invited to this meeting, with your social worker and the adults you are living with. At your first meeting I will give you my contact details and information about advocates.

I hold this meeting to make sure the plan for you is working and you agree with it. I will always talk to you on your own before your



At the end of the meeting, I make a list of things the social worker and adults in your life need to do. I will check that these actions have been completed before your next meeting.

I will hold these meetings for you **every 6 months**, throughout the time you are in care.

I will visit you before your meeting and you can tell me the things you would like to happen and we can plan your meeting together.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

