

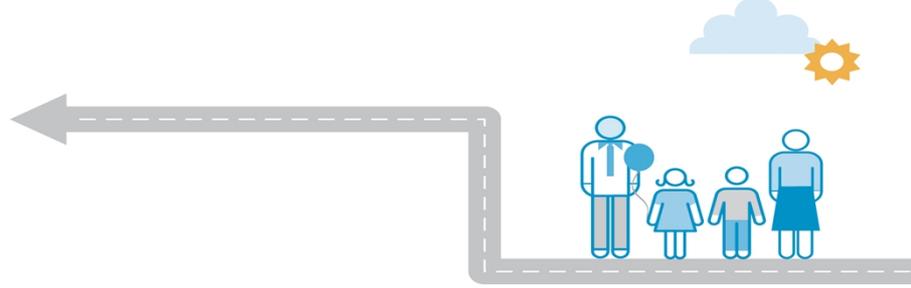
**City of London Corporation
Department of Community and Children's Services**

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)
Annual Report 2017/2018**

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

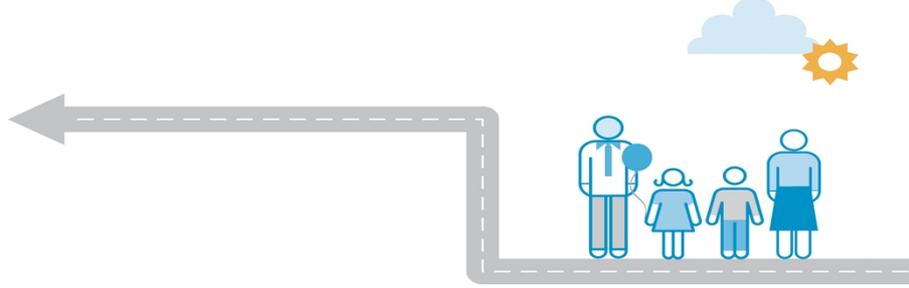
July 2018





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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.

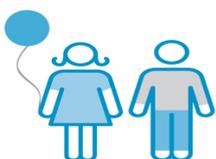
Specifically, the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

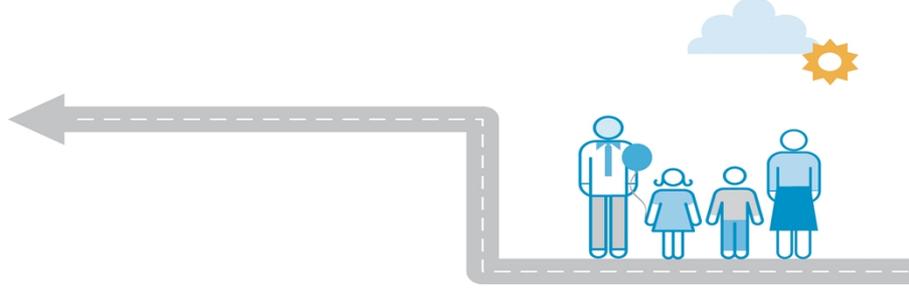
- ❖ Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- ❖ Participate in any review of the child's case; and
- ❖ Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the authority.

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

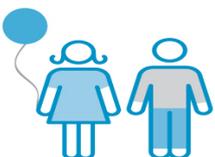
2.1. Local Arrangements

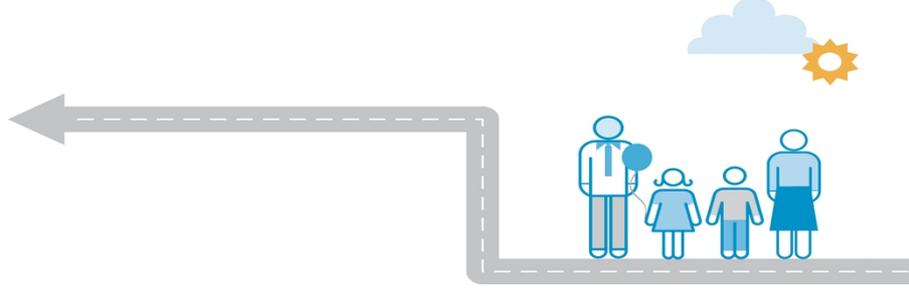
The City of London has provided an in-house Independent reviewing service since April 2015 and there is one full time IRO who is responsible for carrying out the functions of the role to all children in the care of the City. The IRO service sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance (S&QA) Service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

The 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.

This has enabled consistency for children and young people in the City of London, whereby they have had the same IRO from April 2015 to February 2017, when a new IRO was appointed to take over. Every effort was made during this period of transition to ensure that children and young people had the opportunity to say their goodbyes to their IRO and be introduced to the new IRO.

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.

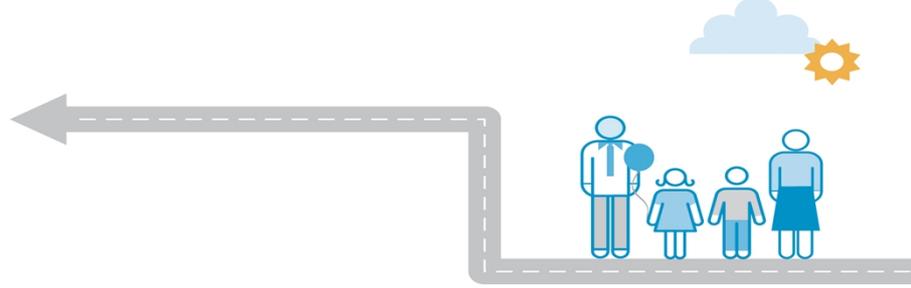
The IRO has not had any periods of unplanned absence and therefore has not had to call upon the back up support of Aidhour. The service provided has been stable and reliable for each child that has been in care at any point throughout this reporting year and this consistency has supported the development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

While there has been minimum 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

There has been a change in the IRO and operational service for this reporting year. The previous full time IRO left in February 2017. There was a part time IRO in position from this point, until September 2017 when the IRO became a permanent full-time member of staff at City. It has meant that for half of this reporting year, the IRO service was being managed part time until the permanent full-time position commenced. The IRO who is currently in place 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

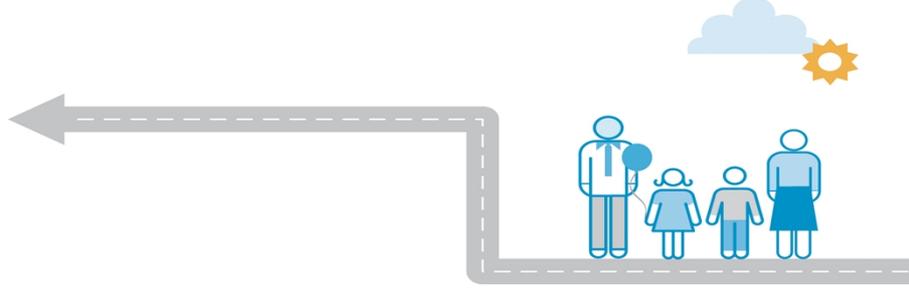
The IRO service fulfils its statutory duties by:

- ❖ 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





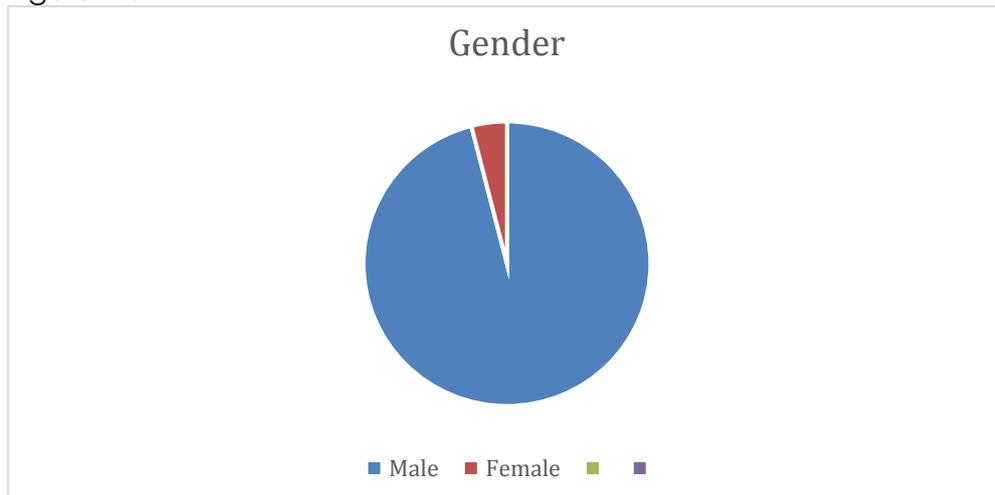
3. SERVICE ACTIVITY

3.1. Children in Care

There were 12 children looked after on 1st April 2017, 10 as of 31st March 2018, and 26 in total throughout the year.

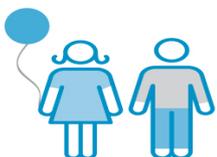
The following illustrates the profile of the individual children, reason for accommodation, legal status, and placement arrangements.

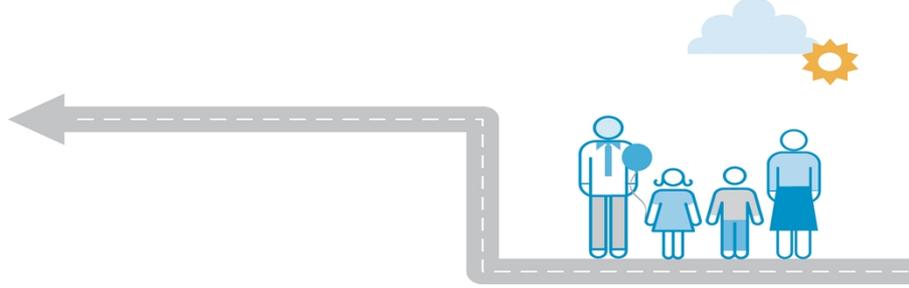
Figure 1.0



Of the 26 children looked after during this period, only 1 was female.

Figure 1.1

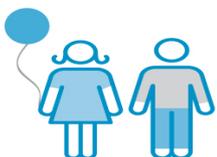
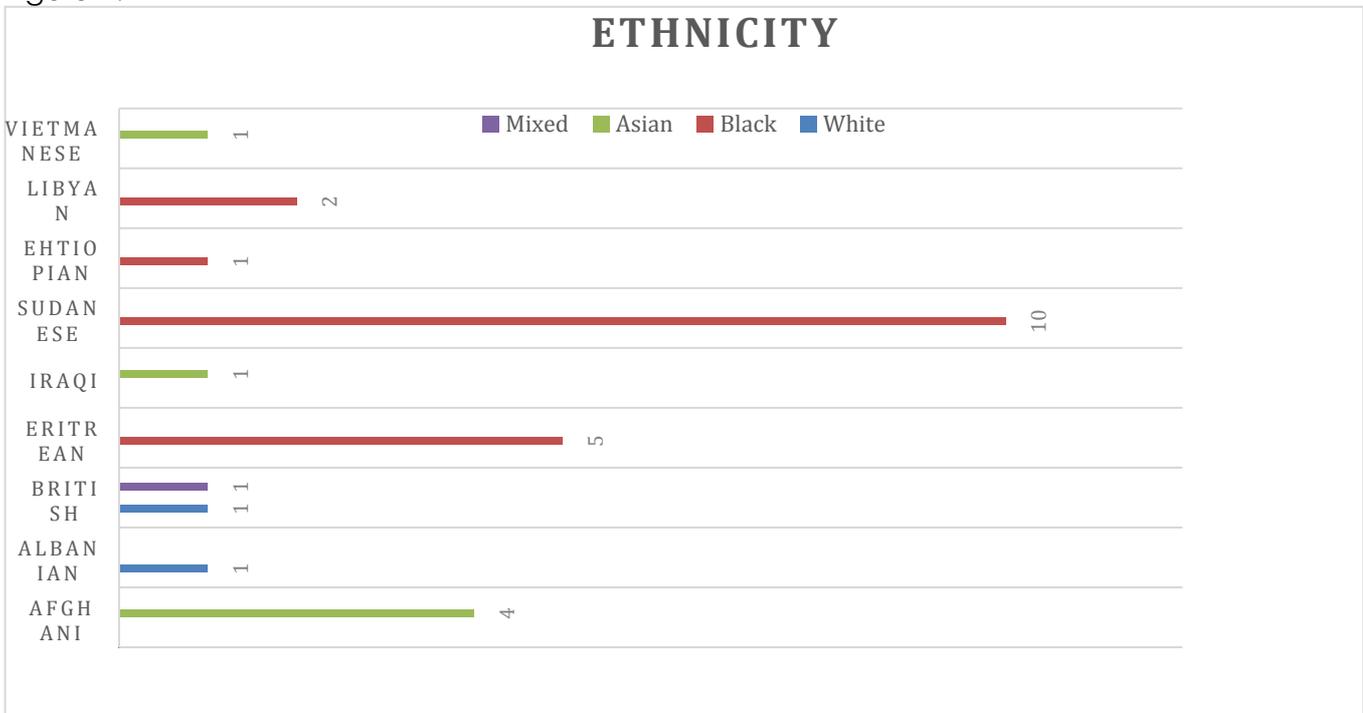


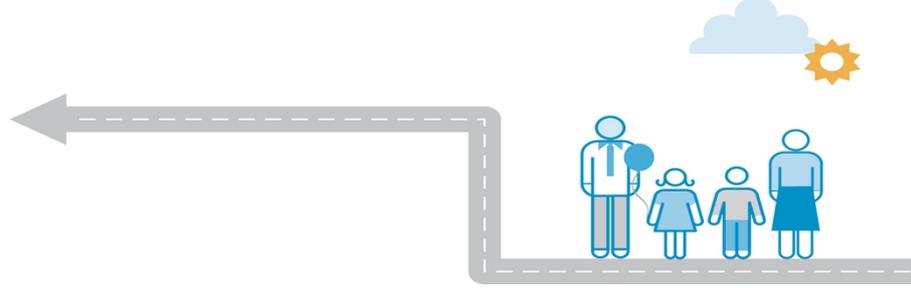


The ages reflected in Figure 1.1 refer to the age of each of the 26 children as of 31st March 2018 or the date when they ceased to be looked after.

Of significance, 65% of the children cared for during this period were 15years or older and the child who was 5 years old had not remained in care by 31st March 2018, which means that 100% of children in care at the end of this reporting period were 15years old or older.

Figure 1.2





The countries of origin illustrated in the above also account for the nationality of each child. Of note, the 1 British child that was in care throughout the year, did not remain looked after as of 31st March 2018 thereby increasing the percentage of non-British children from 96% to 100% at year end.

The only communication need identified throughout this year was interpretation and translation services given that English was an additional language for the 96% of children who were not born or raised in Britain.

Figure 1.3a

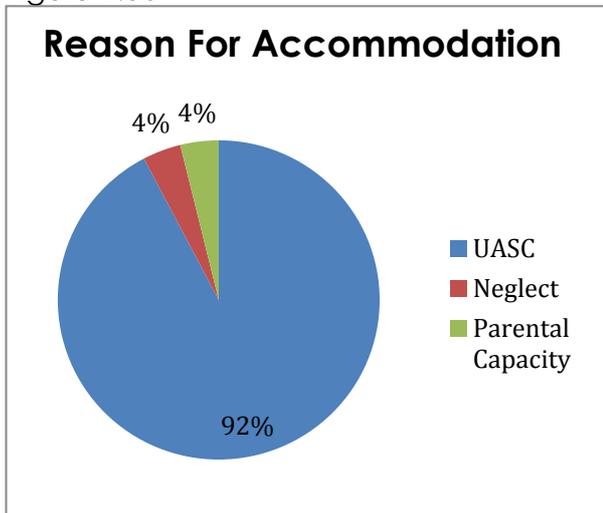
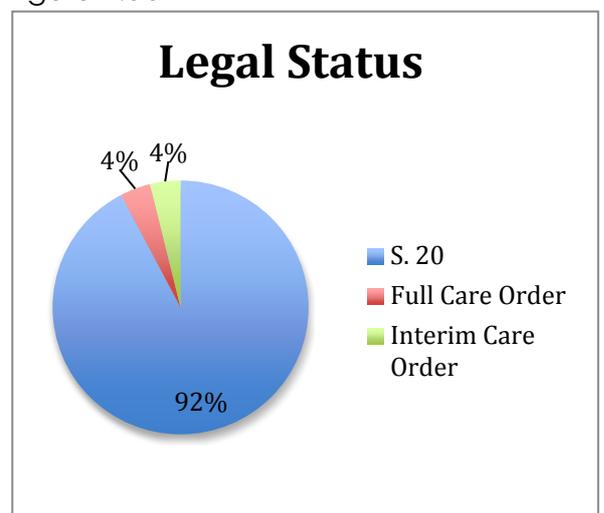
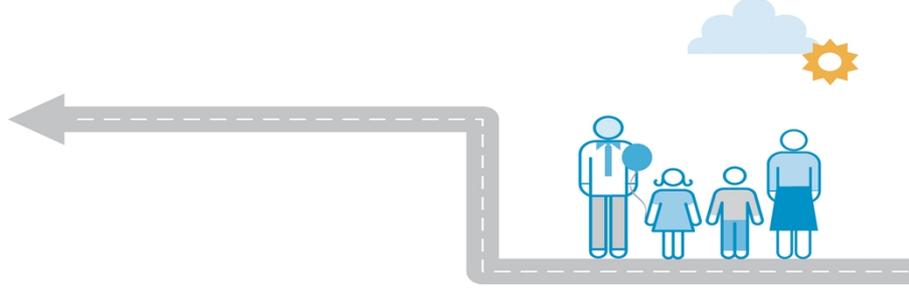


Figure 1.3b



24 of the 26 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. Six of the 24 UASC became care leavers upon reaching the age of 18 during this reporting year and are being supported by the local authority accordingly. One further UASC





became a care leaver after a judicial review, due to them contesting a previous age assessment. This makes 7 UASC care leavers in total.

Six UASC were transferred to a different Local Authority, as they were on the national transfer scheme.

One UASC went missing from care after 6 days in their placement after stating they did not want to be in looked after accommodation, instead preferring independent accommodation. The missing protocol was instigated but the police were unable to locate the young person. The young person had all relevant details for professionals and his foster placement but after a significant duration, did not return. The case was subsequently closed to City of London.

The child who was subject to an interim care order ceased to be looked after when they were returned to their parent's care under a supervision order.

A child subject to a Full Care Order became a care leaver on their 18th Birthday, leaving no children in care under S.31 as of 31st March 2018.

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

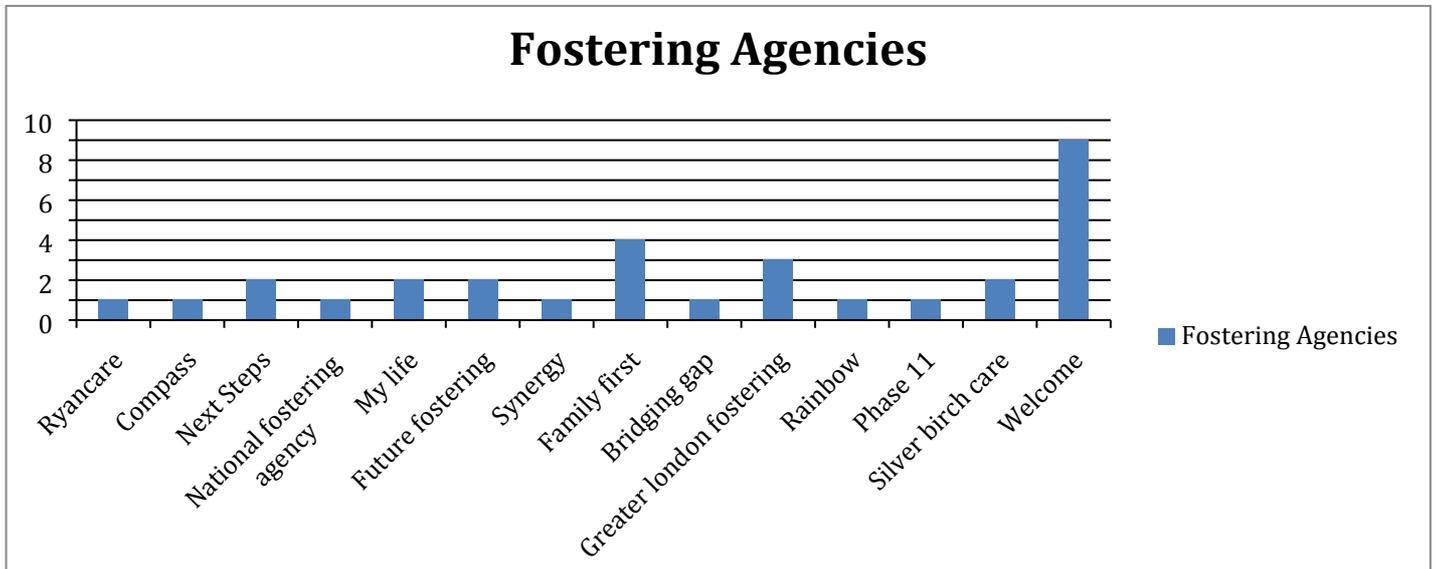
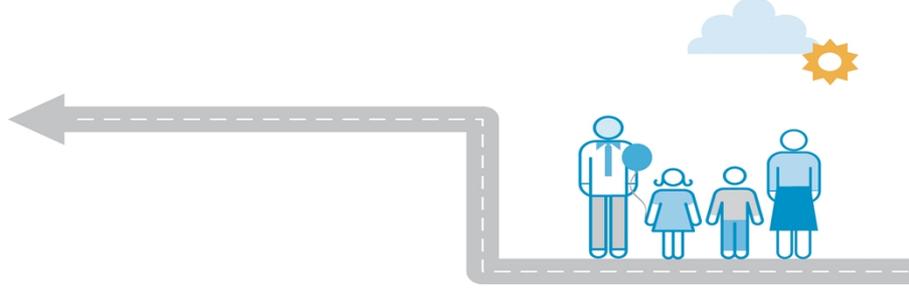
- ❖ 100% are UASC; and
- ❖ 100% are male

It is also worth highlighting that:

- ❖ The total number of children in care during this reporting period is 53% higher than the last two years and in all but two cases, this increase is accounted for by the rise in UASC;
- ❖ There has not been any City of London resident child accommodated throughout 2017/2018; and
- ❖ None of the children in care during this period have presented with or been assessed as having a disability.

Figure 1.4

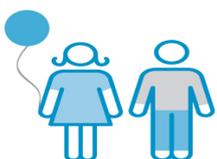


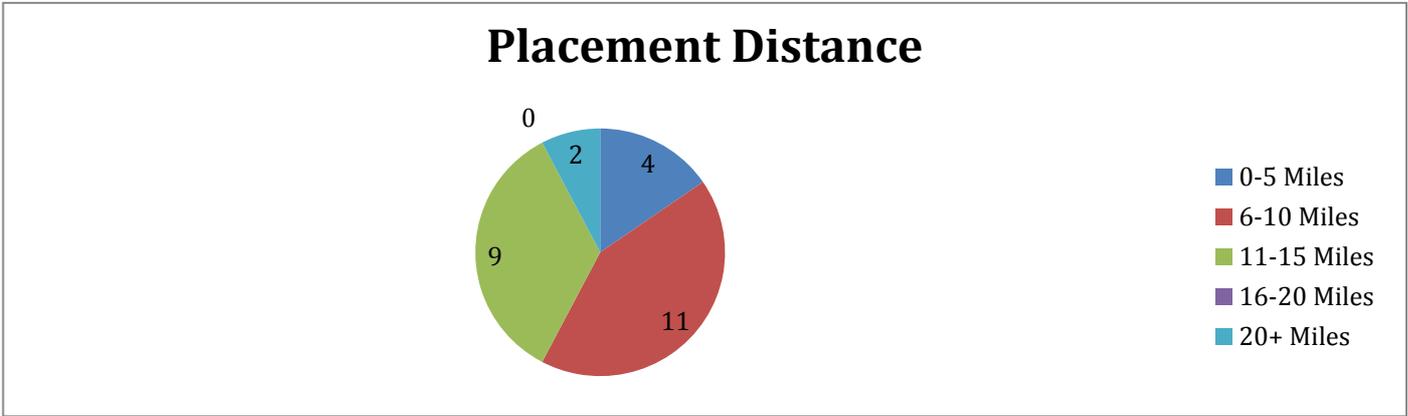
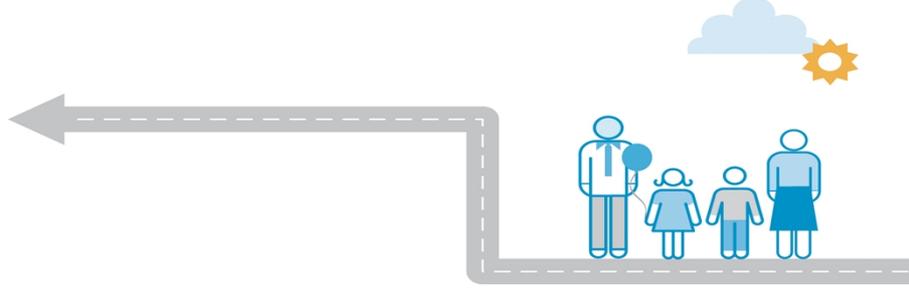


The City of London does not have an in-house fostering service and therefore commissions placements from external agencies for each child according to their individual needs. Throughout this year, the City's children in care were placed with 14 different independent fostering agencies (IFAs). The 10 children in care as of 31st March 2018 were placed across six different IFAs. Each agency used was rated Good in their most recent Ofsted inspection.

There was an issue in December 2017 when an independent fostering agency we were using for two placements-future fostering, had an Ofsted monitoring visit where significant concerns were raised about the agency. It was found that inexperienced and unqualified staff were carrying out social work roles, resulting in the insufficient assessment of potential foster carers. Upon being notified of this inspection outcome, the two children in care in separate placements, were moved to a new foster carer with a different agency and a semi-independent provision within 1 week of the concerns being raised. Future fostering is no longer in operation and City of London continue to check Ofsted ratings before placements are agreed.

Figure 1.5



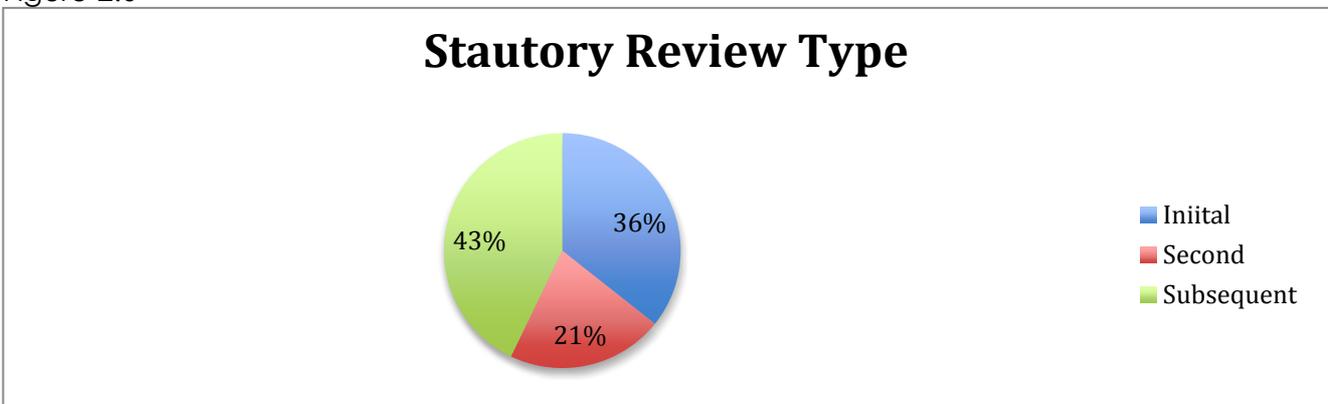


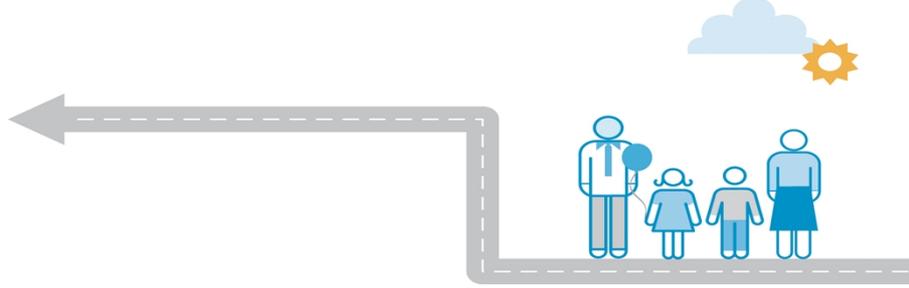
As of 31st March 2018, 92% of placements were within 15 miles of the City with 15 of the 26 children living within the 0-10-mile range. Of the 8% that have been placed further away, one has been in placement long term with a celebration event to commemorate the permanency of the placement. The other was a planned move in line with the young person's wishes. They have since become a care leaver and have chosen to stay in the area.

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 2.0





39 reviews occurred as single meetings this year. The three 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.

5 Statutory review meetings did not take place within timescales. The reasons for each meeting are outlined below:

1. Child missing from care
2. Unplanned appointment from CAMHS offered to child
3. Transfer of dates between old and new IRO
4. Foster carer and young person away for holiday
5. Foster carer and young person away for holiday

There have been no LAC reviews out of timescales since October 2017. All LAC reviews are now booked 1 month before their due date.

3.3. Focus of LAC reviews

There has been a change in the focus of LAC review meetings. Previously, it had been expressed by social workers and children that LAC reviews were at times too long. It is important that children and young people feel their review is purposeful and engaging. Therefore, the reviews now focus primarily on the agenda of the child/young person with any other important issues of note covered if needed. Information such as PEP meetings and dates of health assessments can be gathered from the social worker LAC review report and included in the new template of minutes pre-review. This process of 'front loading' the review with relevant information, means the LAC review meeting is shorter and more focused on what is important to the child/young person. This then contributes to them feeling more involved in their care plan.

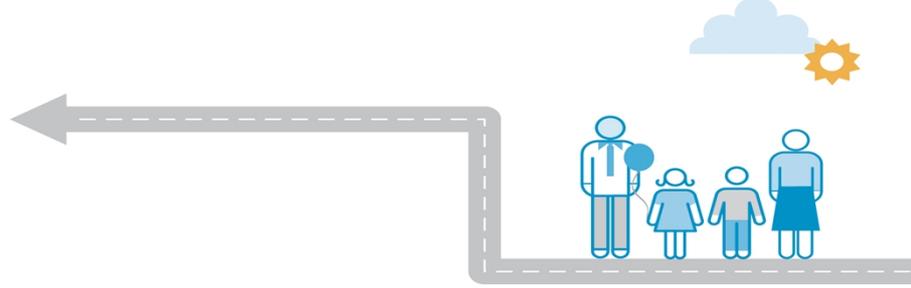
3.4. LAC review minutes

There has been a change to the format of minutes that are sent out to children and young people. Previously, the completed form on the child's electronic file (using computer system mosaic) would be sent out to all attendees and children. This form is heavily data based and refers to the child/young person in the third person.

There is now a new word document template that addresses the child/young person directly. It also includes, if appropriate, photos of key events and achievements of the child/young person.

The aim of this new form was to increase the involvement of children/young people in the review process, their care plan and to celebrate their achievements. Please see appendix 1 for an example of the new format.

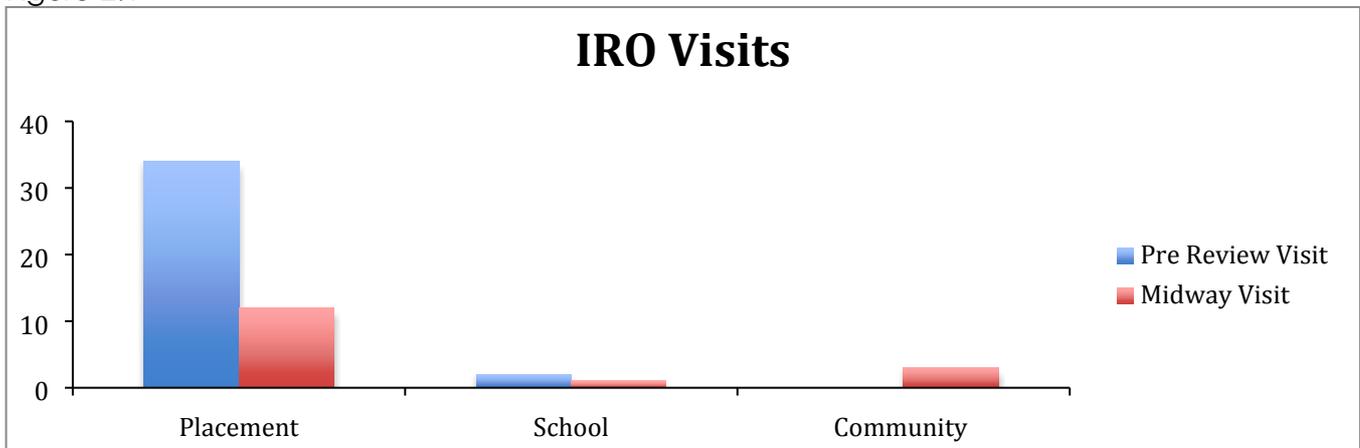




The electronic record form is also still being sent out as this must be completed for recording statutory data on the electronic system.

3.5. IRO visits

Figure 2.1



The IRO conducted 16 standalone visits to meet with children during this reporting period. 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.

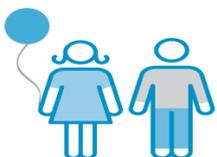
There were also 36 pre-review visits, whereby the IRO met with the child/young person on the same day as their meeting but in a separate visit, prior to the meeting starting. The purpose of these visits was to confirm the agenda of the meeting with the young person and ensure they understood the review process.

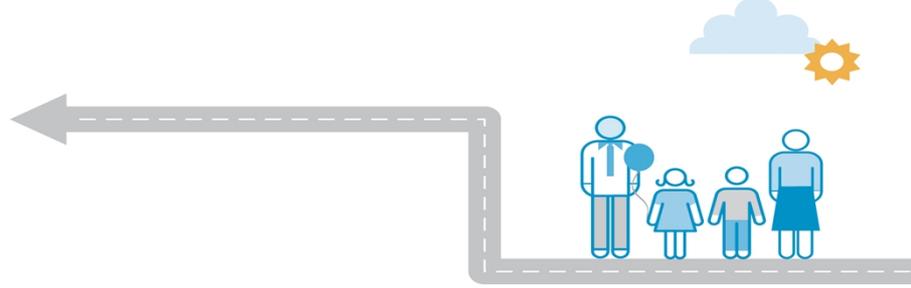
A midway visit is recorded as a separate document on the system and is a stand-alone piece of work. A pre-review visit is noted in the LAC review documents

Of the 16 midway visits, 12 took place at the child's placement, 3 in the community and 1 in the child's school.

Of the 36 pre-review visits, 34 took place at the placement and 2 took place at the child's school.

The majority of midway visits took place in the children's placements at 75%, with the remaining 25% occurring at the children's schools and cafés local to their placement. Even in the cases where visits took place in various community settings, the IRO has met with the foster carers and children in each case in their placements on at least one occasion.





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

3.6. 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.

Children's views about all aspects of their care planning and review processes are sought after by the IRO during Pre Review and Midway Visits, by reviewing completed Have Your Say consultation booklets, and during review meetings where children are given the space to express their wishes and feelings, encouraged to ask questions, and supported to raise issues when needed.

The IRO also ensures that the views of the children's foster carers are established during placement visits, through consultation forms and during review meetings.

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

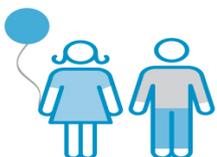
Consultation with any of the parents or family members of the 24 UASC in care has not been achieved due to either the children indicating that this is not possible or social workers' reporting that they have not been able to reach the parents for whom they had been given contact details. The IRO service acknowledges the complicated nature of family relationships for UASC and is sensitive to the safety considerations required as a result.

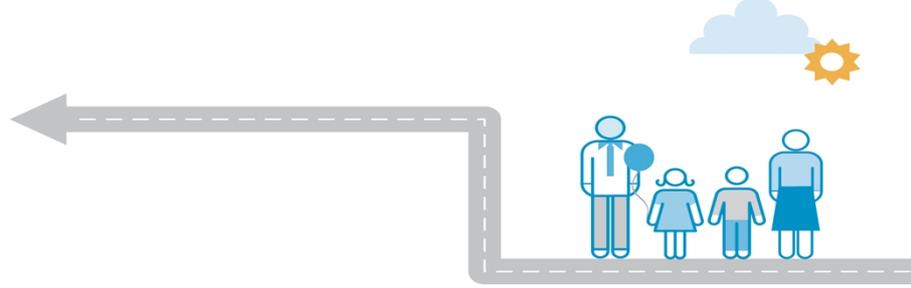
Consultation documents

Use of the consultation documents has been an area requiring improvement for at least the last 2 reporting years. In 2015/16 38% of children were completing the consultation documents and 40% of carers. In 2016/17 this number had reduced and for this reporting year, of the 42 reviews that took place 11% of children completed consultation documents.

A factor influencing these figures could be due to the change in IRO service as for the first 6 months of this reporting year, there was not a full time IRO in position. This meant there was less emphasis on reminding social workers to send out the forms. Furthermore, there has been a continuing theme of children and foster carers expressing their views that the consultation booklets were not of high quality and were laborious to use. The ethnicity of young people is also likely a factor. The consultation form is in English with no graphics to aid communication.

Since September 2017 when the IRO has been in full time post, the issue of consultation methods has been a significant focus of work. A business case was compiled and presented to senior management which reviewed the current situation and options that could be used. The outcome was a recommendation for the City of London to purchase a contract with a service called



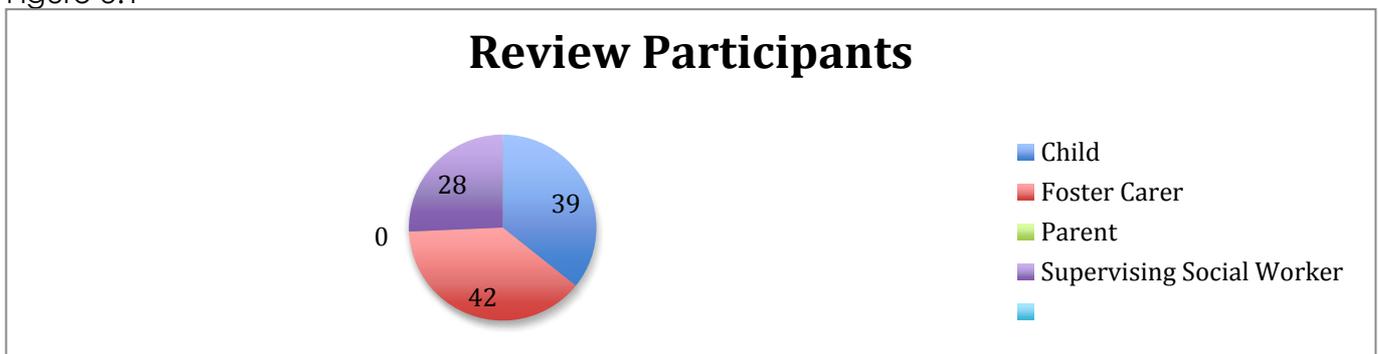


MOMO (Mind of my own). This is an app that helps young people express their views and workers evidence them. It can be used on smart phones, tablets, laptops and computers. Every child will have their own account and can express their views via the app at any time. These views will then be sent electronically to the City of London where they can be uploaded on to the child's file. There are sections for the children to communicate directly with specific workers such as their social worker, IRO and virtual school head. For children where English is not their first language (which is 100% of the end of year cohort of Looked after children), they can use visual aids on the app to support them to communicate and/or use the app with their social worker, IRO or other professionals.

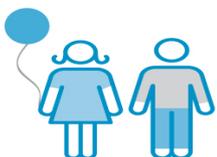
The app is solely for children meaning that carers will continue to receive consultation forms. However, the format of this will be amended to make it clearer and more accessible for them to use.

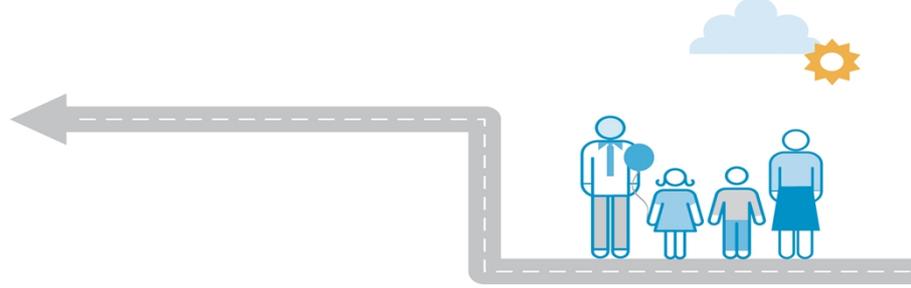
It has been agreed by the senior management team to progress with purchasing MOMO. The implementation period will be a key time to train social workers and foster carers as they will be the key line of support for children in using the app. The plan is for MOMO to be active in the City of London by the end of 2018.

Figure 3.1



As illustrated in Figure 3.1, foster carers attended 100% of the 42 reviews that took place during this reporting period; children were present in 92% of the reviews; a parent or significant family





member was present in none of the review meetings; supervising social workers attended 88% of the meetings.

In one of the reviews where the child did not attend, the IRO is satisfied based on her own contact with him that due to his young age it was not appropriate for him 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.

One further child did not attend their review as they were given a last-minute appointment with the Home Office. The child was happy to convey their views through their social worker and the IRO spoke to the child pre and post review to ensure their views were represented.

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; meetings have excluded a parent in one case at the child's request.

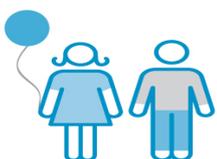
All children are offered the opportunity to chair their own reviews and are provided with support from the IRO to prepare them if they choose to chair their meeting. This helps to promote their active participation in the decision-making processes of their lives and to empower them through increased self-esteem. One child successfully chaired their meeting this year and one other child has expressed an interest in chairing their next review.

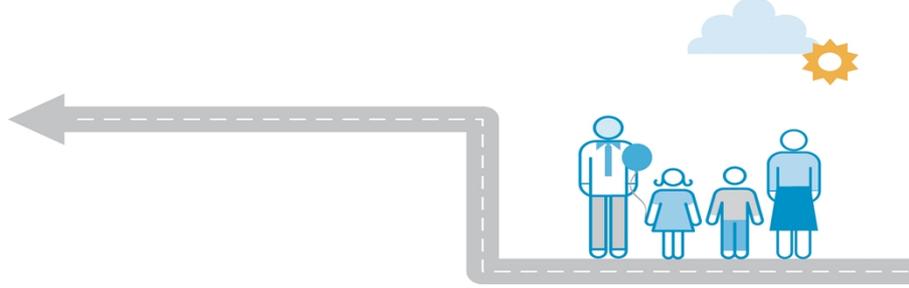
3.7. Children's Rights

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.

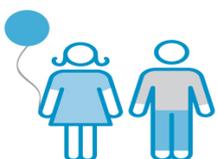
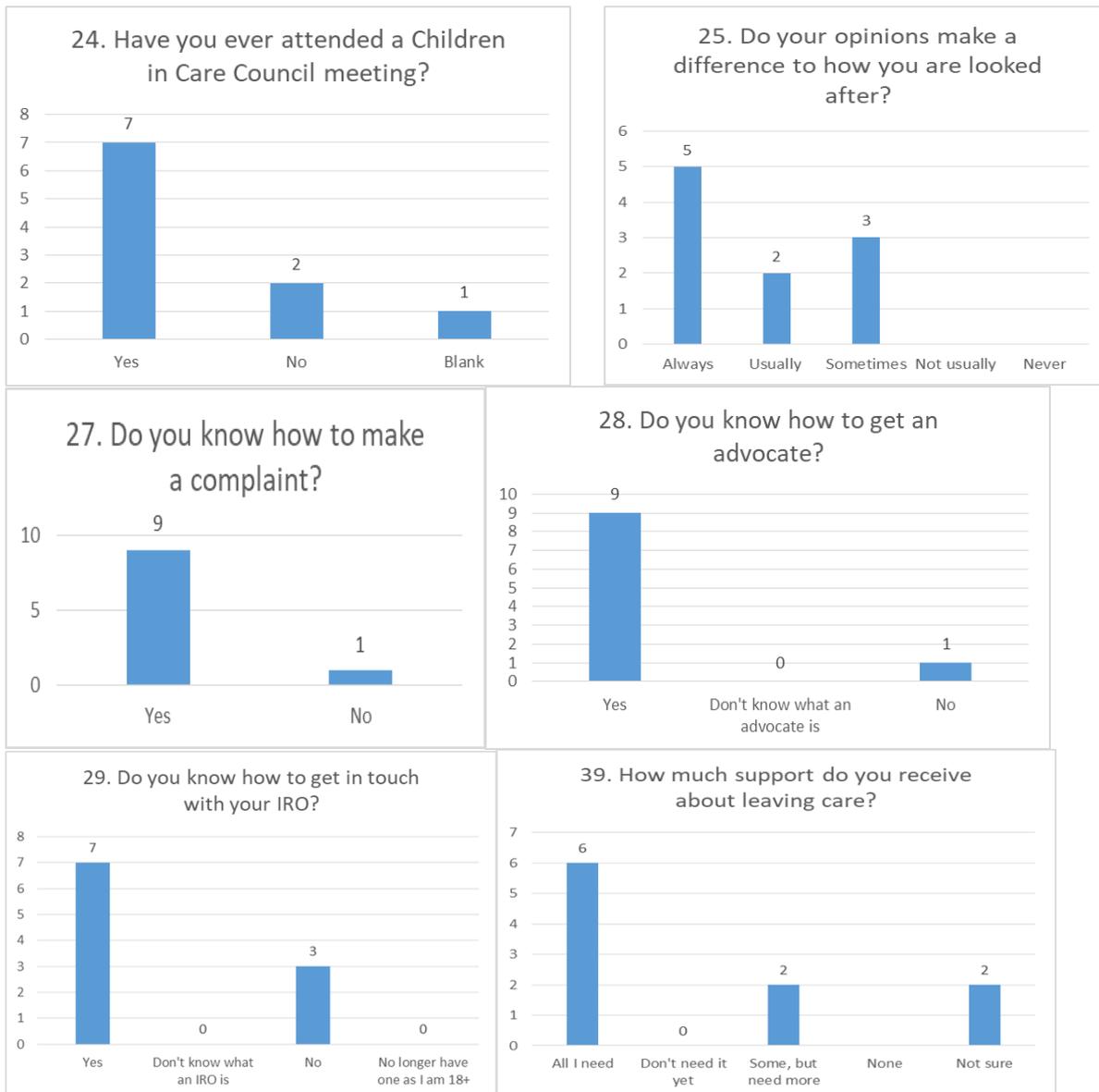
There has been good use of the independent advocacy service this year with five of the 26 children accessing the support of an advocate. The advocates have been key in supporting the children with the issue of the national transfer scheme. The 5 children who used advocates had been placed on the national transfer scheme due to the quota of children in care in the City of London being significantly over the threshold. All five children with an advocate contested this move as the length of time to move them had gone past the recommended 4 weeks. One of the children used their advocate to make a stage 1 complaint. The four other children used their advocate to express their dissatisfaction with the plans for moving them out of London. All five children remained in the care of the City of London after the complaints and disputes were raised.

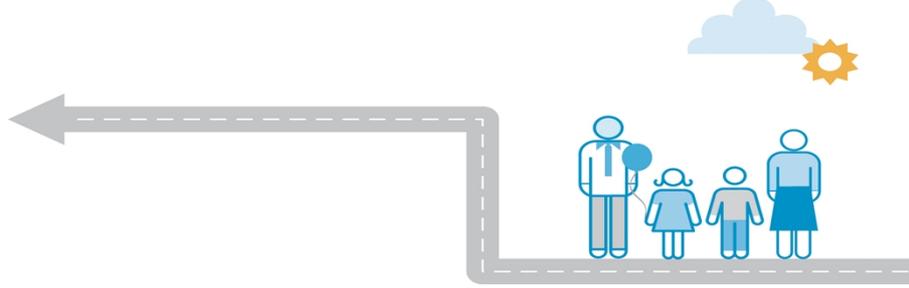




During February and March 2018, Action for Children carried out the Annual Service User Survey among children and young people supported by the City of London Children's Services Teams.

Below are some examples of their findings:





Compared to the advocacy services, there has been a slower response to allocating children with an independent visitor if they request one. There have been two instances where a child had turned 18 or was about to turn 18 before they were able to be matched. Three children have long term visitors and they have stated they enjoy their company and the support they provide.

Every child in care has a copy of the City's Pledge in English and in their native language. 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. The survey completed by Action for Children shows the high level of support children feel from their social worker. Of the 10 children interviewed by Action for Children in their annual survey, 80% said they knew what their care plan was and understood it.

However, this evidence is not always being recorded on children's files. Of the 14 children who came into care during this reporting period, only 21% had a care plan recorded on their file within the statutory 10 working days of them coming into care. Of the remaining 79%, 54% left City of London care under the national transfer scheme with no care plan on file. 36% had a subsequent pathway plan and one care plan recorded on their case file.

Pathway plans

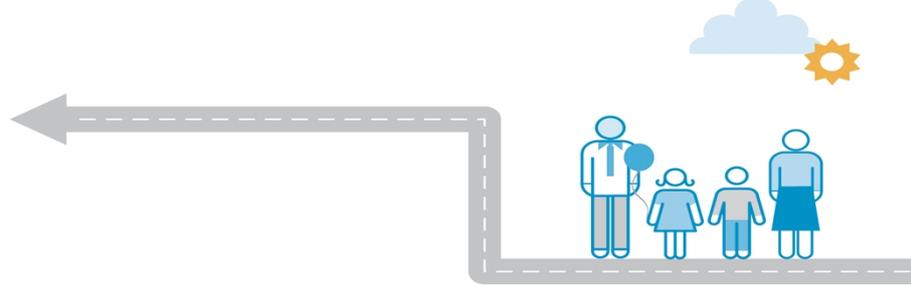
There is a similar trend regarding the completion and/or recording of pathway plans. Of the 26 children accommodated during this year, 20 reviews or first pathway plans were due for 13 of the looked after children. Of these 20 pathway plans 10 were completed on time, equalling a 50% adherence to timescales.

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. Going forward, the plan is for letters to be sent to care leavers, 6 months before they turn 19 to remind them of this service.

4.2. Placement Stability





Of the 26 children looked after during this reporting period, 13 were newly accommodated UASC and 6 of them have experienced placement breakdown within the first 6 months. 2 further children who were in long term placements experienced a placement breakdown, one of whom has had 3 placement breakdowns over the course of 1 year (which is explored further below).

Given the City's care population of predominately UASC and there being no planned accommodations throughout this year, the initial placement of children is either an emergency arrangement or through London Asylum Seekers Consortium duty rota system. This means that all placement searching activity is done with little information about the child, is always time pressured, and significantly limited by the shortage of foster carers experienced in looking after the needs of UASC in this current climate of increased migration.

Where the social work team have had the opportunity to plan placement moves, the quality of the search and matching process is good. Children are involved in the process, the application of learning from the breakdown is evident, and the search is informed by the child's short and long-term care needs.

As of 31st March 2018, 3 of the 10 children in care are living in placements that are not a match across any aspects of their identity. In each of those cases, the children declined the opportunity to search for placements more reflective of their ethnic, religious and/or cultural identities. In the remaining 7 cases, the children and the foster families share similar identities in at least one respect and there is a commitment to understanding and supporting the children to practice and develop their individual identities in line with their backgrounds and expressed wishes.

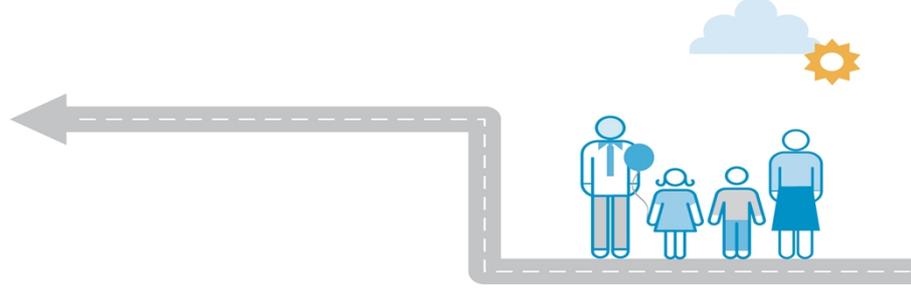
4.3. Achieving Permanency

Of the 26 children looked after during this reporting period:

- ❖ 7 transitioned into adulthood and continue to receive support from the City as care leavers
- ❖ 6 were transferred to Local Authorities outside of London under the National Transfer scheme
- ❖ 1 was returned to the care of their mother under a Supervision Order
- ❖ 3 are in established long term fostering arrangements under S.20
- ❖ 4 are 16 years or older and in the foster families they intend to remain with until they reach 18
- ❖ 1 child went missing and has not returned
- ❖ 1 child turned 18 shortly after coming into care and subsequently transferred to support of NASS.
- ❖ 3 children are 16 and are in placements that require further assessment of their suitability for long term care.

Of the children remaining in care as of March 31st, 2018, 70% are in placements that are either long term or established placements until they reach 18. Therefore, the above range of permanency outcomes for the children in care this year is good.





4.4. Health

The timescales for initial health assessment is within 20 working days of coming into care. Initial health assessments were completed within timescales for 10 out of the 14 newly accommodated children this year. 2 children were moved to new carers with a new local authority before their initial health assessment had taken place. One child missed their first initial health assessment as their foster carer forgot the appointment and one initial health assessment was out of timescales due to a late referral from the social worker.

All 26 children in care throughout this year received their statutory health assessments and of the 8 review health assessments due during this period, 7 were completed within the 12month timescale.

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. An example of the effectiveness of this arrangement is a recent issue regarding leaving care health assessments were not occurring in timescales. A system has now been put in place for the social work team to alert the health team when a child is due to be turning 18 and leaving care.

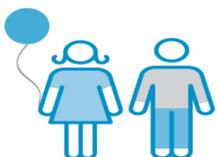
All children who were accommodated and remained in care during this reporting year were offered baseline CAMHS assessments. As of March 31st, 2018, none of the children remaining in care continue to access therapy services at CAMHS.

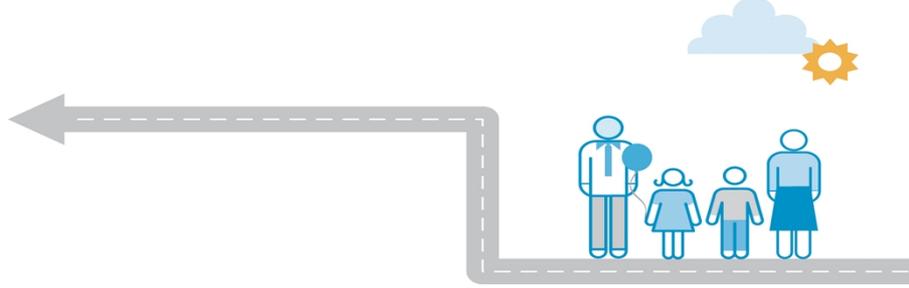
4.5. Education

All children in care as of March 31st, 2018 were in education with one in a school placement and 8 in colleges. One child was in a provision that was an alternative to mainstream college. This was due to a number of unplanned placement moves and lack of space in local colleges at short notice. The virtual school head is responsible for overseeing the educational placements of Looked After Children.

Throughout the reporting year, the majority of cases had 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 offered to all children throughout this period with specific additional support made available to the 3 children who were in their GCSC year and UASC who were not able to secure education placements in a timely manner due to their in-year arrival or disputed age.





A common theme in LAC reviews is for children to request a laptop to support their studies. The Action for Children survey also identified this as an issue that children spoke about. A new protocol regarding laptops has now been agreed and implemented. Laptops will be routinely provided to children if agreed at their PEP meeting, up to sum of £200.

While there has been some progress made with respect to supporting children in care to access work experience placements through the City, this is an area in need of further development.

4.6. Life story work

A review of the children's files shows evidence of innovative and positive life story work being completed with children and young people. However, at present, there is no specific place for this work to be located and each piece of life story work is saved as a single document alongside other pieces of work such as assessments, care plans etc. The current system means that if a young person were to be presented with a life story book, it would entail searching through a child's file to locate each piece of work that has been saved. There is also no current process of gathering pieces of life story work and presenting them to children and young people in the form of a book.

4.7. Midway monitoring

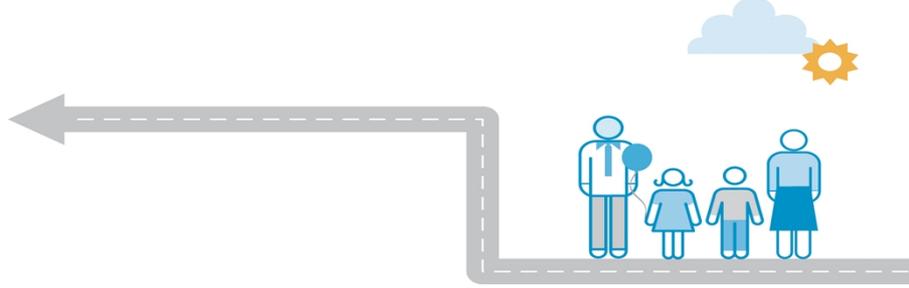
There has been an increased emphasis on midway monitoring this year with a new template now in action. The list of actions from each LAC review are checked against information from the child's record with information on outstanding or unrecorded actions requested from the social worker.

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.

The IRO escalated concerns to stage 2 of the DRP in three cases and stage 3 in 2 cases. All disputes were regarding the national transfer scheme and the length of time it was taking to transfer the children. All five children were waiting in excess of 10 weeks, during which time they had made attachments to their foster carers, started attending college 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.





All five children utilised the support of an advocate regarding the transfer issue. One child made a stage 1 formal complaint.

All five formal disputes raised by the IRO were resolved, with the children remaining in the care of the City of London.

The IRO Dispute Form was used to record the management of this dispute for two out of the five cases, but documented in the children's case file for all disputes.

Whilst the National transfer scheme remains in place, the IRO recognises that formal disputes will likely be raised again in the future. It has been nationally recognised that the National transfer scheme has not fulfilled its purpose and has resulted in significant delays for children, causing them emotional distress. Therefore, it is the role of the IRO to continue to raise this as an issue. It is important to note however, that senior management have consistently agreed with the concerns raised by the IRO but are in a difficult position of having to manage staff resources and budgets.

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 2017/2018.

Table1.0

Good practice identified
All children placed in foster families to 18
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
No unnecessary Age Assessments initiated
Children supported to develop talents/interests
SW efforts to consult and engage parents and significant family members



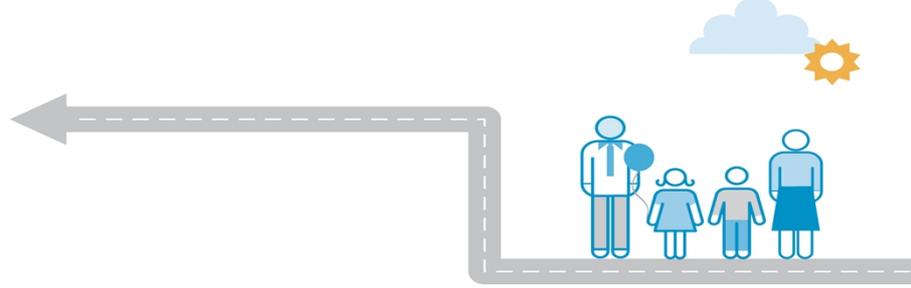


Table 1.1

Issues of Concerns Identified	Current Status
Children's preparation for review meetings	There need to improvements in children's involvement in planning their review and the support offered to them in completing consultation documents. A new method of consultation will be going live by the end of 2018.
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,
Care and pathway Plans recorded in statutory timescales	2 monthly meetings with team manager have been initiated to keep track of timescales across the LAC service and increase early identification of issues.
Life story work	Current system remains in place. Plans are being made for this to be reviewed in 2018/19 reporting period.

5. Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

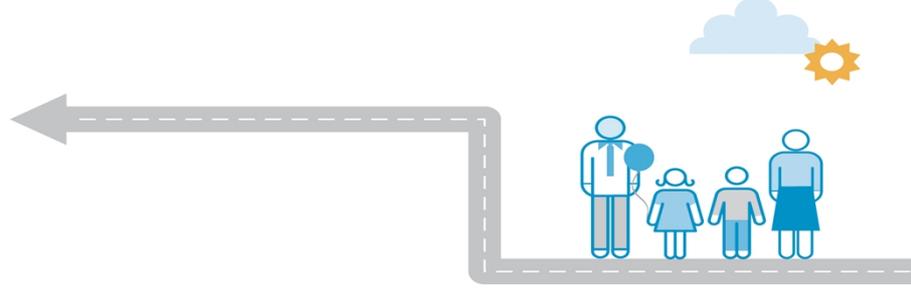
5.1. Supervision and Management Oversight

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. The one issue raised has been regarding the LAC reviews out of timescales, for which the mitigating reasons have been recorded and the issue resolved. There have been no other 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 Board's 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, Aidhour, in 2017. The audit identified that:

"There is evidence of good quality LAC reviews. The IRO 'footprint' is clearly evident on the case file through mid-point reviews and ongoing scrutiny and oversight in case notes".

"Social workers, IRO, first line and senior managers are to be commended on their breadth of knowledge and expertise in supporting asylum seeking young people. There is outstanding evidence of IRO challenge around delays in the National Dispersal Scheme with equally outstanding and timely responses from management at all levels".

The 4 cases recorded with overdue LAC reviews were also noted in this audit and as stated in this report, the issue has been resolved with no further reviews out of timescale.

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:



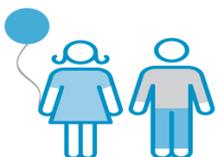
They are great. They are doing their job.

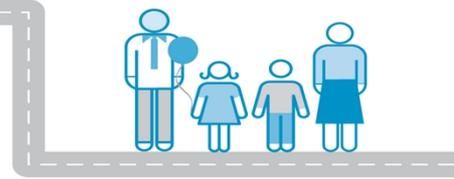


I asked for a winter coat and they got me one. "



I'm happy always where I live because my foster family is very nice



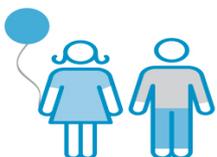


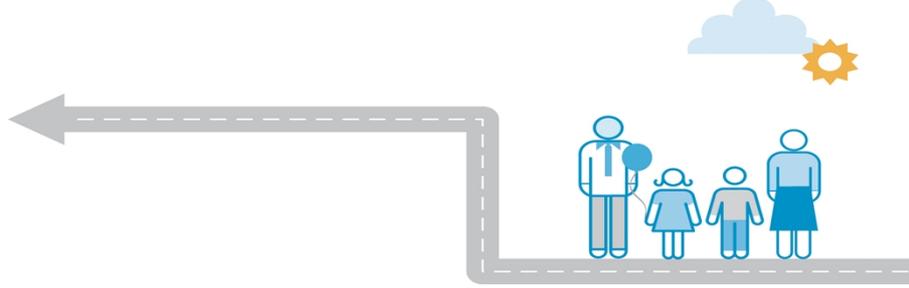
5.5. Social Works' Views

The social work team was invited to provide feedback about the IRO service over the course of this year and responses were received from

Table 2.0

What does the IRO service do well?	What could the IRO service do better?	Any other comments
She is child focussed but has a good	Perhaps there could be more of a challenge	She is an approachable and understanding colleague. She clearly





<p>understanding of pressures on frontline SWs.</p> <p>It is evident during meetings that she has a detailed understanding of the child/young persons needs.</p>	<p>around timescales when they are not met.</p>	<p>cares about children and young people and this is particularly evident in the time she takes to understand their care plans.</p>
<p>Relationship building with young people.</p>	<p>Communication around upcoming review dates.</p>	<p>Incorporate the social workers views when decision-making is made at senior management level.</p>
<p>Relationship building with social workers and other professionals.</p>	<p>Social work visit frequency to be reviewed at each review.</p>	
<p>Innovation.</p>	<p>Make more use of social work reports for CLA reviews. Sometimes it feels as though this is a simply form filling exercise for the social worker.</p>	
<p>Mid way monitoring is thorough and useful.</p>		
<p>Flexible, supportive approach to social workers whilst maintaining professional boundaries and challenging when needed.</p>		
<p>Being approachable, friendly and helpful.</p>		

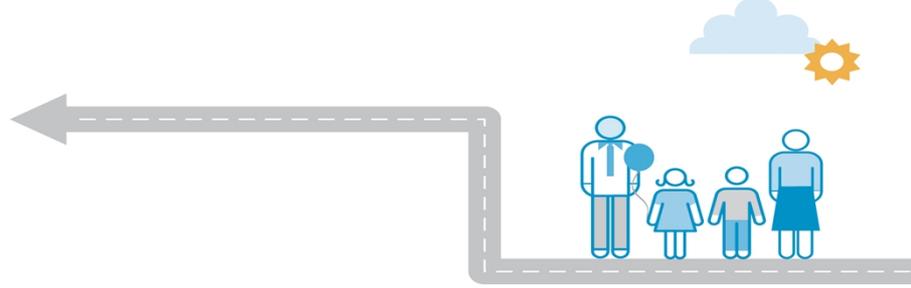
6. Overview

6.1 Achievements

The positive impact of the IRO service in 2017/2018 is evident in the following list of achievements:

- ❖ Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
- ❖ Development of new LAC review minutes template





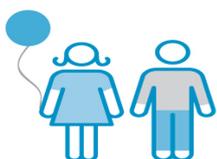
- ❖ Development of new consultation tool
- ❖ Reduction in LAC review meeting length to ensure meetings are purposeful and engaging
- ❖ All children seen alone by the IRO outside of review meetings
- ❖ Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods
- ❖ Review minutes, contacts 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, VSH and CLA Designated Nurse

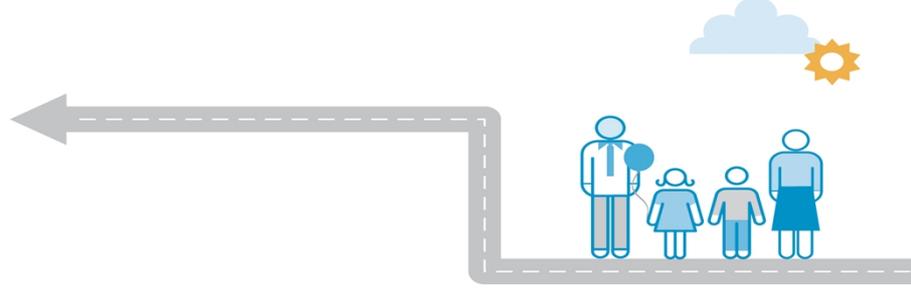
In addition to direct work with children and the local authority, the IRO takes part in the London IRO Practitioner Network and serves as a practitioner representative to the London IRO Managers' Group. Engagement in these pan-London groups facilitates the IRO's access to information and the experience 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 objective for 2016/2017

Objective	Actions	Update
To look at more innovative ways of engaging with young people in the engagement of their reviews and hearing their voice.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look at different mediums to use to consult with young people. 2. Look at the different models currently being used in other LA's. 3. Consult with the CiCC to ascertain their views about the models reviewed. 4. Consult with the Children and Families and SMT. 5. Trail new model and evaluate impact. 	<p>Actions 1-4 have been successfully completed. Review of consultation methods was presented in a business case along with feedback from young people in care. Agreement has been confirmed for new application to be implemented across children's service to improve consultation methods.</p> <p>Action 5: New application will be implemented by December 2019.</p>





		Evaluation of impact will be monitored throughout.
Improve the quality of reviews and child protection conferences.	<p>1. By setting clear expectation that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports are shared with young people, parents/ carers in adequate time before reviews and conferences. • That all professionals who attend the children's looked after review and child protection conferences provide a written report. • If reports are not provided contact will be made with the professionals line manager to ascertain why. • That any meeting involving children and families involves their views in the first person. • That monitoring forms are completed at each review/ conference and this performance data is reviewed within SMT and QA Meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Child protection conferences have proceeded with reports being completed and shared with families before the day of conference. • First person recording of views remains an area of improvement. It is hoped the new application Mind of Mo Own (MOMO) will support the improvement of first person recording. • Monitoring forms remain an area for improvement. This action will be moved on to objectives for 2018/2019 work.

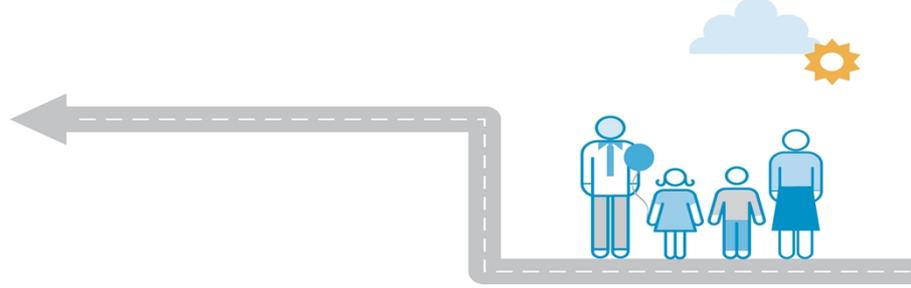
6.3 Areas for Improvement

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

- ❖ Include social work visit frequency in LAC review actions
- ❖ Schedule allotted time with social workers to discuss and confirm plans for upcoming LAC reviews
- ❖ More robust challenge of timescales not being met
- ❖ Ensure all children and young people know how to contact the IRO

6.4 Conclusion

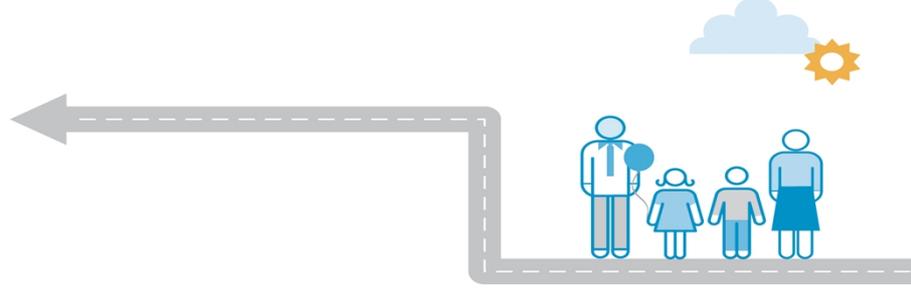




The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2017/2018. The monitoring functions of the role have been strengthened and the IRO's knowledge of and relationship with the children in care is a positive feature of the service. The LAC review process has been changed to ensure the meetings and records are more accessible for children and young people.

The IRO service notes that the presiding theme throughout this year has been the consistent and positive relationships that social workers build and maintain with the children and young people in care. The enthusiasm and commitment they show for the service is appreciated, along with the positive communication they have with the IRO. The presiding area of improvement is to ensure that these positive relationships and sound work is being recorded appropriately on the children's' files.





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.

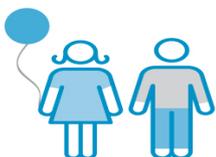
Table 3.0

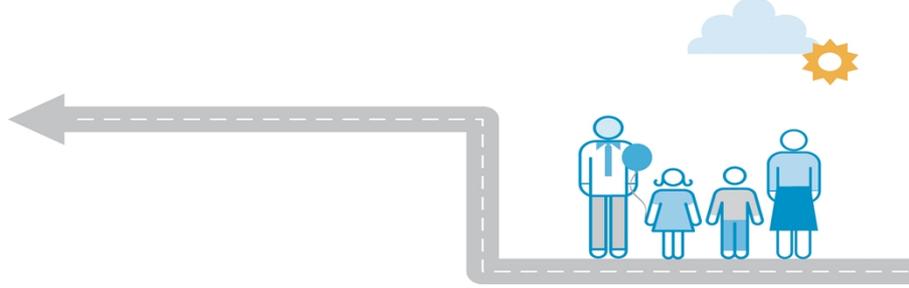
Objective	Actions
Consultation methods to be updated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Implementation of new app-Mind of My own 7. Improved consultation form for foster carers
Care plans to be completed within statutory timescales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2. 2 monthly meetings with team managers to review service data and identify trends 3. Mosaic system to be checked to ensure care plan document is being generated
Improve children and young people's understanding of IRO role and ways to contact the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome pack for children coming into care to be reviewed and updated 2. Welcome pack forms to be translated into 10 most common languages of LAC cohort to increase understanding 3. Increase IRO visits before the first LAC review

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

Table 3.1

Improve financial arrangements and planning for children	Ensure children have a say in the planning of their review meetings
Update radicalisation risk assessment	Continue to develop understanding and analysis of the equality and diversity needs of UASC in all aspects of care planning
Life story work-improve how this is recorded and compiled on child's record.	Develop knowledge and practice of contingency planning in relation to UASC's immigration outcomes.





Appendix 1 New template for LAC reviews

Hi M , this is a record of your Looked After Child (LAC) review that happened on 3rd April 2018.

Before the meeting you told me that the issues you wanted to talk about in your meeting were the following:

Your agenda:

Football-you would like to join a club.

Bike-Siobhan needs to apply for one on a bike scheme

Friend visiting

Laptop

Attendance

Attending your meeting was:

I chaired the meeting (Ria Lane, Independent Reviewing Officer).

M M-interpreter

H W-supervising social worker

N U-your foster carer

S M-your social worker.

I have done a summary of our meeting and the reports below. We agreed some actions that needed to be completed after your meeting and I have listed these at the end.

Previous actions

These are the actions we agreed at your last meeting and an update on them:

M to have secure plans for future-Completed/On-going

M to have developed independent living skills-Completed

M to have access to education and supported throughout to achieve best outcomes-completed

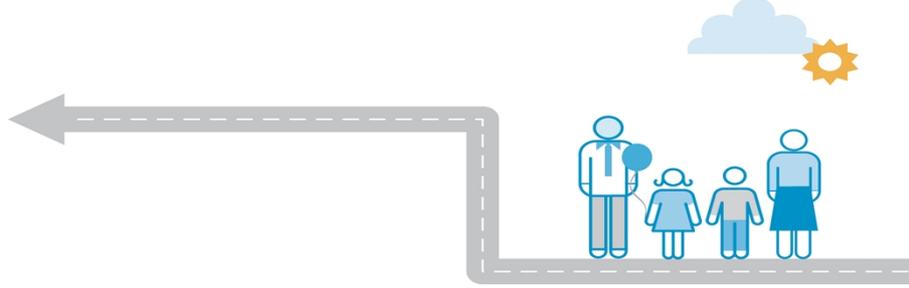
M to have emotional support to process his life experiences-On-going

M to have access to social and leisure opportunities (football team)-Not completed

Future plans (Pathway plan)

You have talked this over with Siobhan and you have decided you want to stay with your foster carers until you are 18. This will be discussed at the next Permanency panel in June 2018 where a decision can be made if your arrangement can be made permanent. The panel will need to discuss your foster carer's level of English.





Independence skills

You told the meeting you have learnt a lot of skills whilst living with your foster carers-you are learning cooking from Nighat, and you are always cleaning your room and the house. You said you are always happy to learn new skills.

You told us you are responsible for your own clothing budget now.

You need to get a bank card for online shopping.

You will do some Independent skills work with the supervising social worker.

Immigration status

You told us you had some good news-You have been granted 5 years leave to remain by the Home Office. You now have a National Insurance number on the back of your biometric card.

Education

I have read the report from your last education meeting (PEP) which took place on 12/01/2018
The actions from your PEP were:

Diane, ICT teacher to assist M to log onto Headway so he is able to practice grammar exercises.
Completed

Lucy to find out how M enrolls onto entry level 2 ESOL

Julia to send M some past exam papers and M to practice the papers at home. M to try writing small sentences in English via email

Your next education meeting is due to take place by June 2018.

You have recently passed your ESOL level one course and received a certificate-well done M!

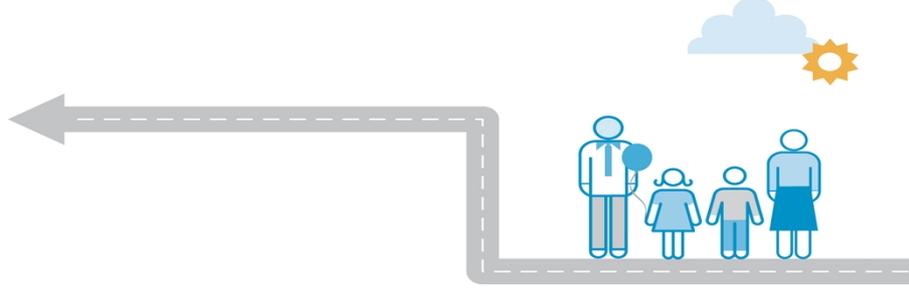


(Photograph cropped for this appendix for data protection)

You still have not received your laptop and this needs to be looked into.

Health





Your most recent health assessment was last year on 17/08/2017. The list below were the actions that needed to happen about your health:

Issues	Action required	By when	Update
GP registration	To register once photographic ID obtained	1 month	Completed
Knee pain	For GP to please review and consider imaging (XR/MRI) and possible referral to orthopaedics if required	1 month	Better now
Rash on chest	For GP to please prescribe anti-fungal treatment	1 month	Completed
Immunisations	For GP to please given catch up immunisation as per letter	1 month	Completed
Infectious disease screen	Referral to UCLH	1 week	Completed
Dental registration	To register once photographic ID obtained	1 month	Completed 17 th April next appointment
Opticians			Completed
Emotional wellbeing	Counselling	1 month	Not completed

In your meeting I also checked if the following things had been done:

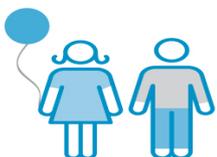
Referral to infectious diseases
SDQ-completed
Blue book-not given

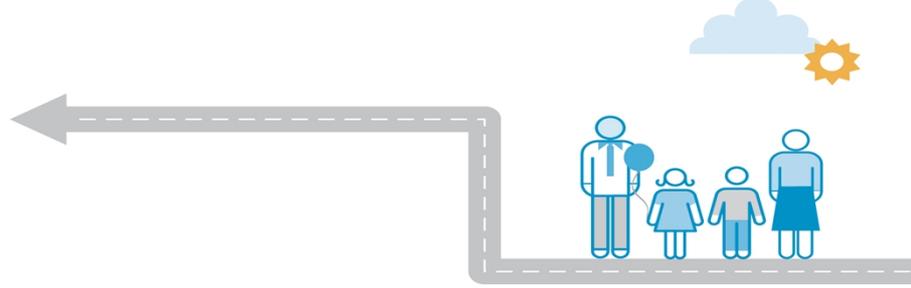
Social and leisure

You enjoy meeting your friends and travel independently around London. You play football often with your friends and you said you are the best player! You would like to join a proper football team though.

You have been invited to a Pizza making session at welcome foster care tomorrow

You are planning to attend the next Children In Care Council on 5th April-where you will be doing some rock climbing





Your friend Mohammed who was transferred to live in Leeds is coming to visit you-hopefully over the Easter holidays. Holly has spoken to the manager in Leeds and needs your social worker to sign a form and plans can be made. You said you are happy for Mohammed to share a bed with you for one night.

Money

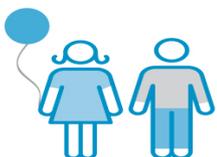
You are managing your allowances well and are now in charge of your own clothing budget.

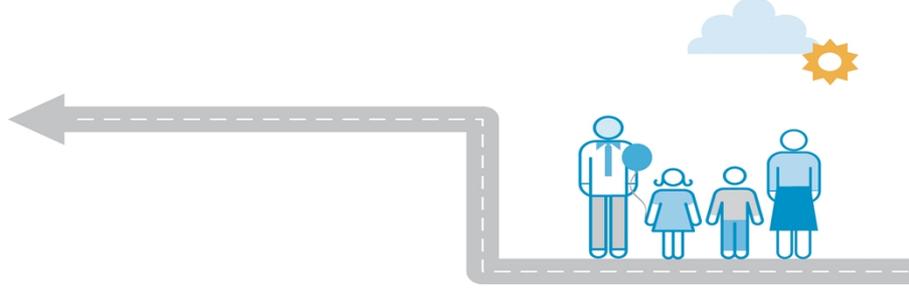
Safeguarding

No safeguarding concerns at present

Actions

What is important	Action	Who will do this	When will they do it by
You are healthy	Blue book	S and H	30/04/18
You are independent	Independent skills checker SSW	H and S	30/06/18
You have positive social and leisure opportunities	To join a football team	N and H	10/04/18
	Bike referral scheme	S	10/04/18
	H to confirm arrangements with both social workers about your friend Mohammed visiting	H	10/04/18
You are supported with your education	Laptop	R and S	11/04/18
You have goals for your future	Pathway plan	S, SW	18/07/2018
	Permanency panel -confirm date (Ria)	R and S	10/04/18
	Travel document	S	30/04/18
Social worker visits every 4-6 weeks			





Your next LAC review meeting: Thursday August 16th 2018 at 11am

Next Children in Care Council: Thursday 5th April 2018 at 10:30am

