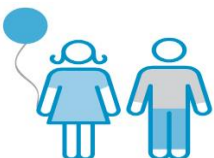


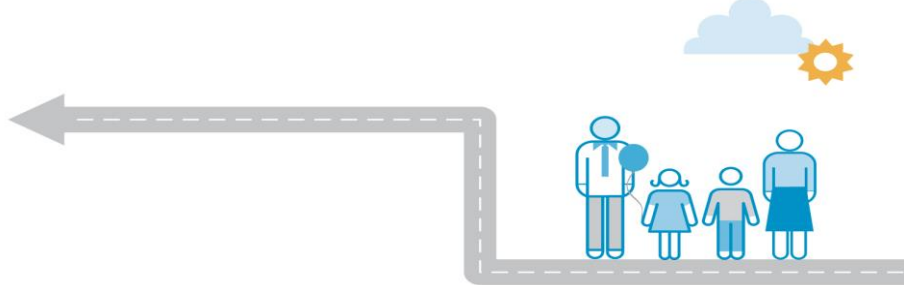
**City of London Corporation  
Department of Community and Children's Services**

**Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)  
Annual Report 2019/2020**

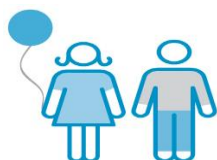
***The Contribution of the Independent Reviewing Officer to Quality  
Assuring and Improving Services for Children in Care***

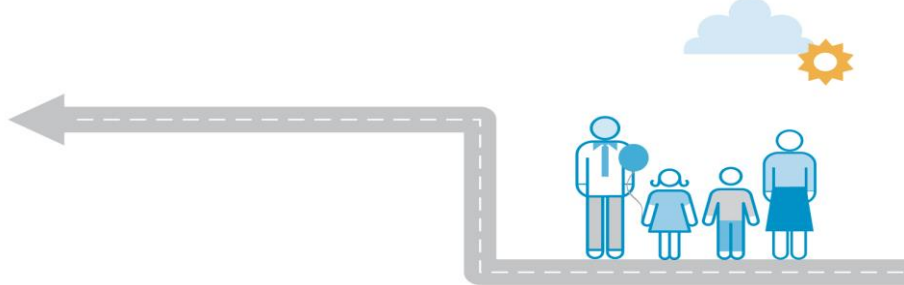
**July 2020**





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#### 6.4. Conclusion

### 7 Planned & Recommended Improvements for 2020/2021

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#### Appendix 1 Independent skills checklist

## 1. PURPOSE OF SERVICE & LEGAL CONTEXT

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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.

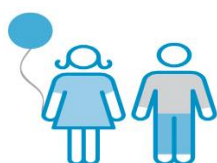
Specifically, the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

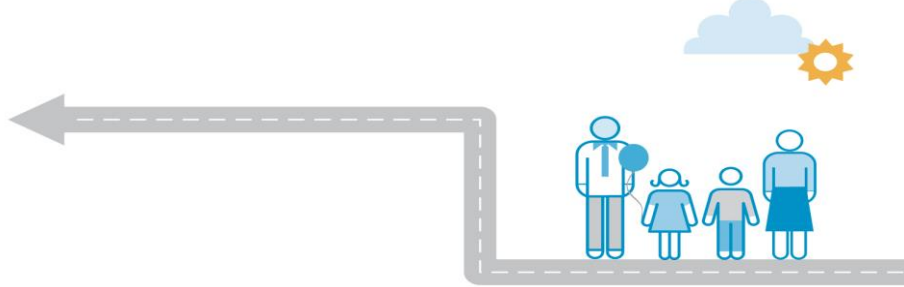
- ❖ Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- ❖ Participate in any review of the child's case; and
- ❖ Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the authority.

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 2019 and March 2020

## 2. THE IRO SERVICE

### 2.1. Local Arrangements

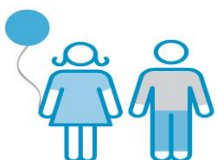
The City of London has provided an in-house Independent reviewing service since April 2015 with 1 full time IRO. The current IRO has been in post since February 2017, ensuring consistency for the children and young people in the City of London.

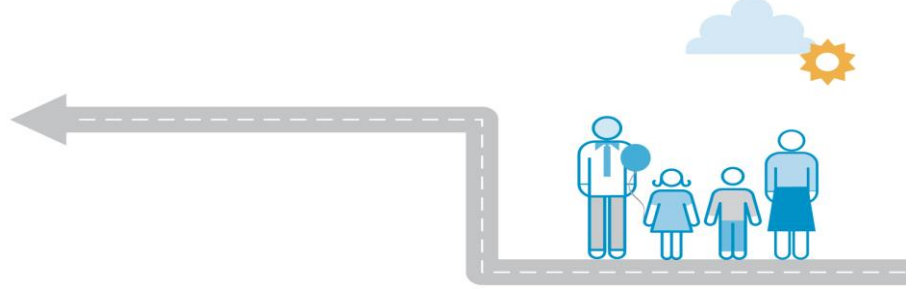
Since January 2020, an additional IRO started in a part time role to support pathway plan reviews for care leavers and to hold a small amount of Looked After Children cases to support the full time IRO. The IRO for care leavers has since gone full time in May 2020 to meet the growing demands of the service. 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 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.





There is an arrangement in place with Aidhour to spot purchase services of IRO's in case of ill health or emergency of inhouse IRO. However, with the addition of the new IRO, it is hoped that any absences can be covered in house.

During this reporting period, 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 in place since February 2017, has a background in child protection, with previous managerial and IRO experience. They are white British and female.

The second IRO, in post since January 2020, has a background in Child Protection, Unaccompanied Minors, with Managerial experience, Child Counselling and Trauma Informed practice. The second IRO is Black British and Male.

The 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. The IRO team is able to reflect a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and experiences to support the children and young people.

Both IRO's are registered with Social Work England as well as having an enhanced DBS check on an annual basis.

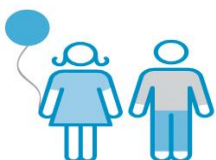
The IRO is committed to understanding the identity needs of individual children through her direct contact with them, independent study, and care reviews with their allocated social workers and foster carers.

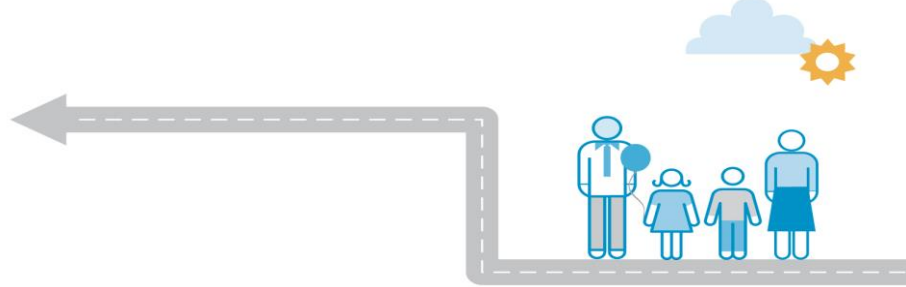
The IRO adopts and advocates Anti Oppressive Practice as part of all aspects of service delivery including direct contact with children, foster carers, and the Children's Social Care Team.

## 2.3. Scope of the Service

The IRO service fulfils its statutory duties by:

- ❖ Charing and co-chairing statutory Reviews

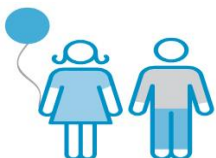


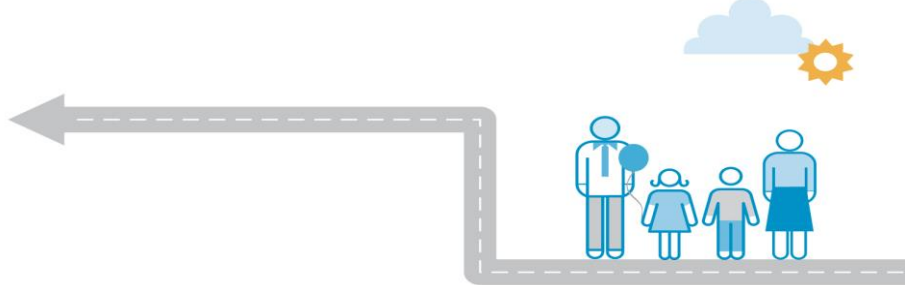


- ❖ Visiting children in care and care leavers in their own accommodation
- ❖ Case discussions with allocated social workers and the management team
- ❖ Consulting with foster carers and parents
- ❖ Reviewing case file records
- ❖ Participating in any additional meeting required by the needs of the child
- ❖ 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 (Achieving Excellence 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

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#### 3.1. Children in Care

There were:

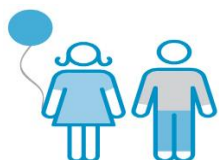
24 children looked after on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 which is a 140% increase from previous year (previous figure was 10)

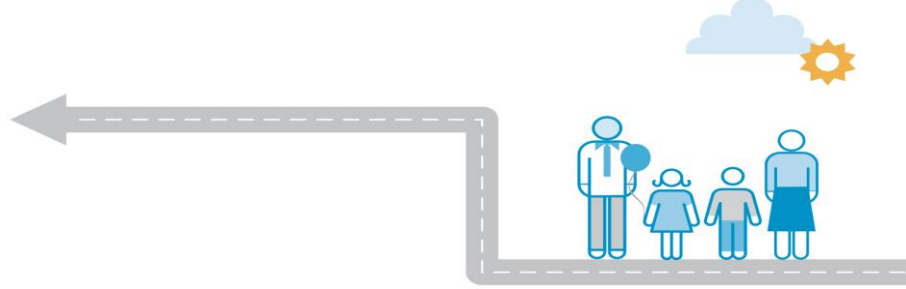
25 as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 which is a 20% increase from the previous reporting year (previous figure was 20)

45 throughout the reporting year which represents an increase of 18% from the previous year. (previous year was 38)

It is also worth highlighting that:

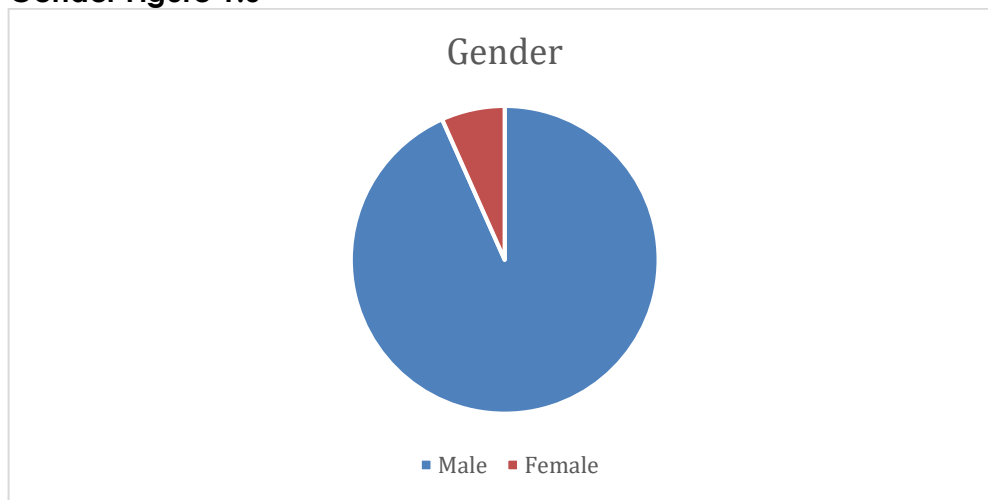
- ❖ The total number of children in care at the start of the reporting period shows an increase of 140%
- ❖ The total number of children in care at the end of the reporting period shows an increase of 20%
- ❖ The total number of children in care during this reporting period is 18% higher than the last year (2018/19) continuing the trend of yearly increase.
- ❖ None of the children in care during this period have presented with or been assessed as having a disability.





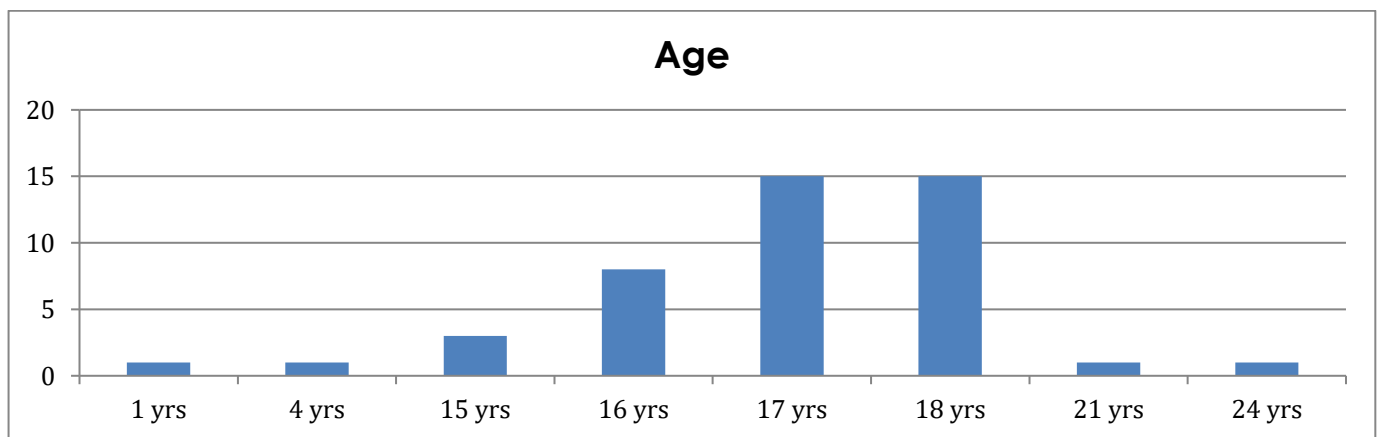
The following illustrates the profile of the individual children, reason for accommodation, legal status, and placement arrangements.

**Gender Figure 1.0**



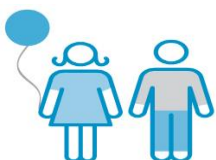
Of the 45 children looked after during this period, only 3 were female.

**Age Figure 1.1**

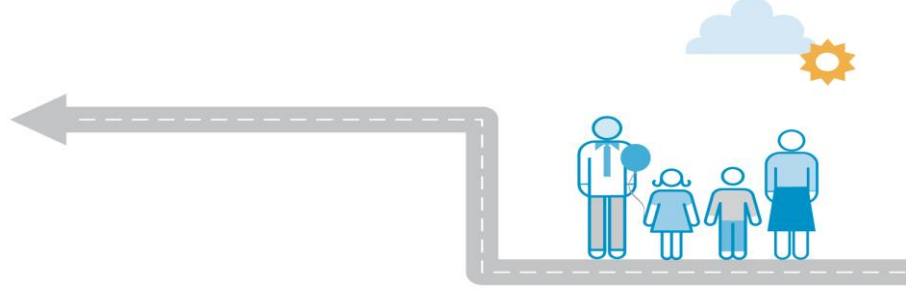


The ages reflected in Figure 1.1 refer to the age of each of the 45 children as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

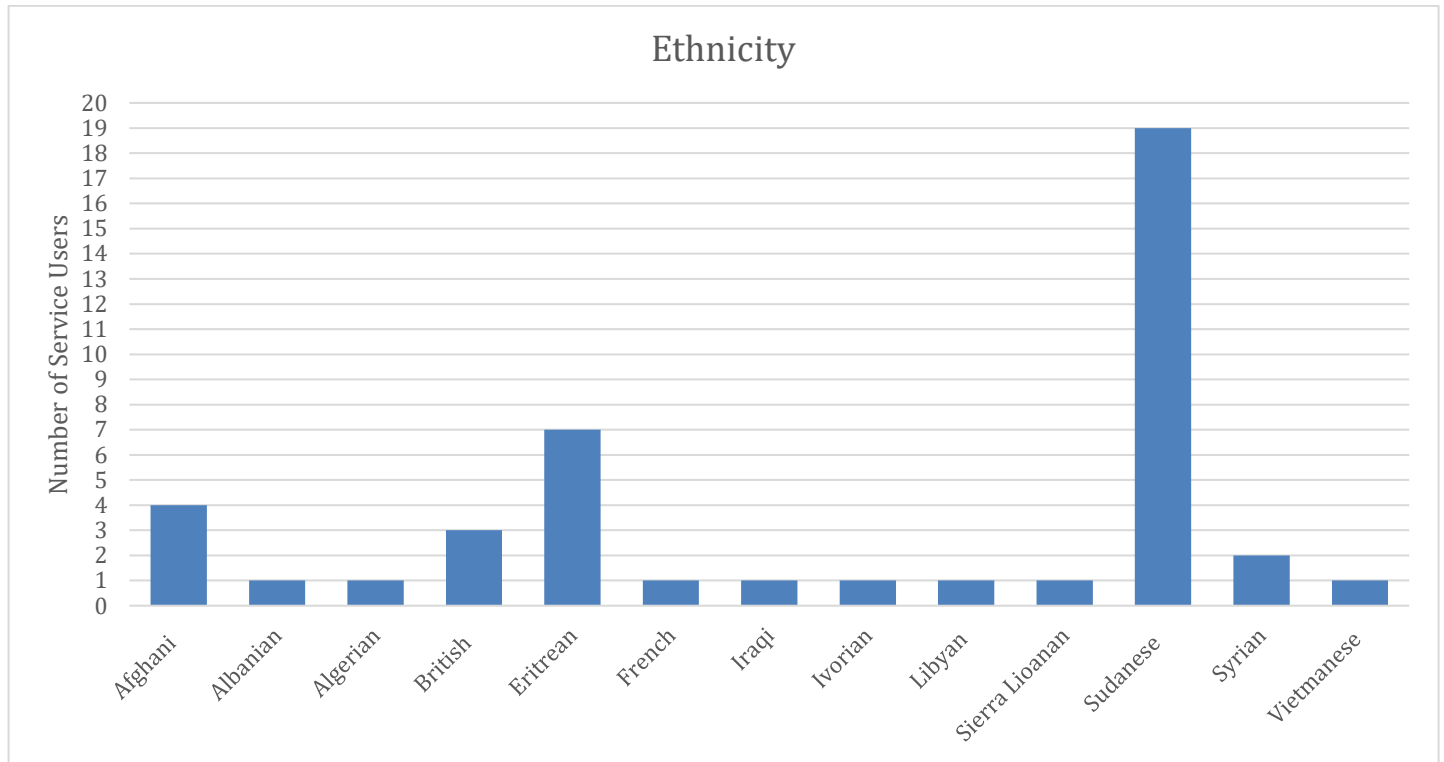
Of significance, 51% of the children cared for during this period were aged 16 or 17, with this age range remaining our largest cohort of Looked After Children.



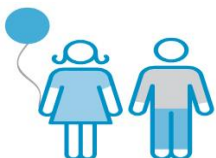


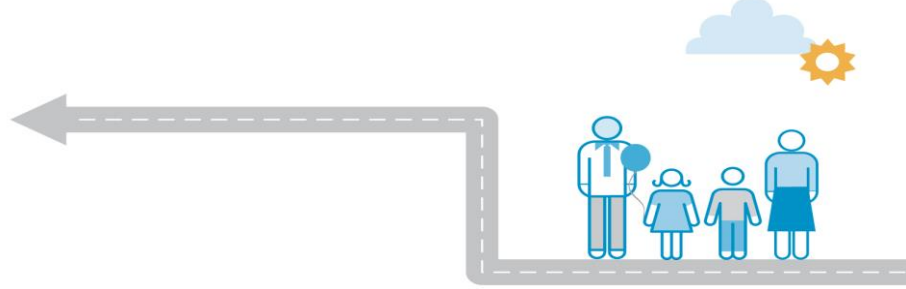


**Ethnicity**  
**Figure 1.2**

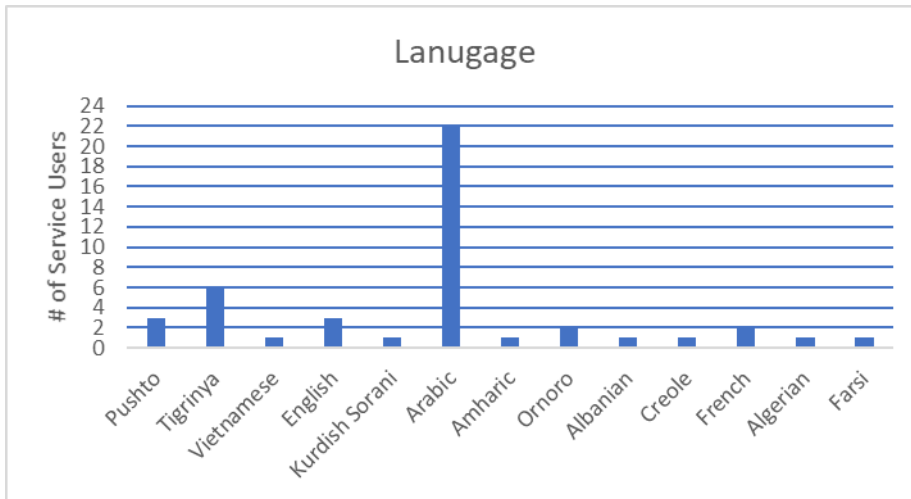


The countries of origin illustrated in the above also account for the nationality of each child. Of note, the City of London's largest cohort of children in care is of Sudanese nationality, at 42%.



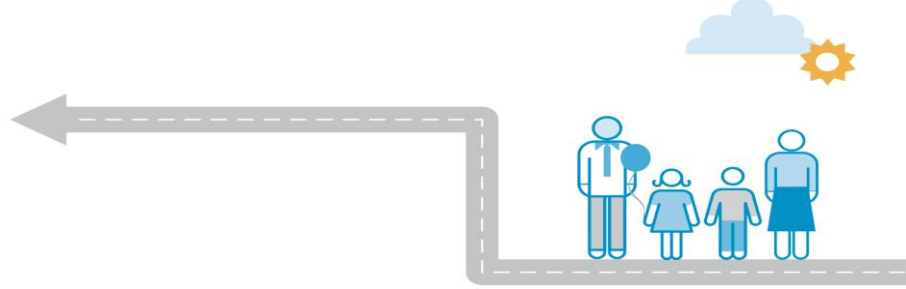


**Language**  
**Figure 1.3**



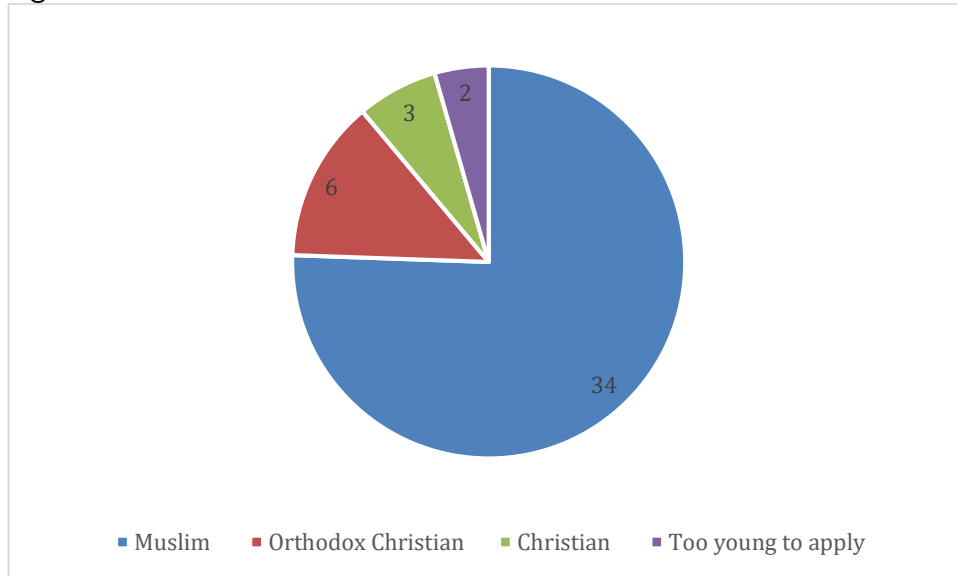
93% of the children in care during this period did not speak English with Arabic being the most widely spoken language at 48%. Therefore, the main communication need identified throughout this year was interpretation and translation services. Overall, the quality of the interpreting service has been 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. 2 of the children speak Oromo and another speaks Creole, which has been continually difficult to source interpreters for.





## Religion

Figure 1.4



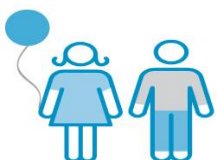
Islam represents the highest number of our Looked After cohort with 34 children (75%) identifying as Muslim. The IRO has initiated the action of ensuring all children and young people who identify as a practising Muslim, are given a prayer mat upon becoming Looked After and access to mosques and churches is established at placement planning meetings for all children who practice a religion.

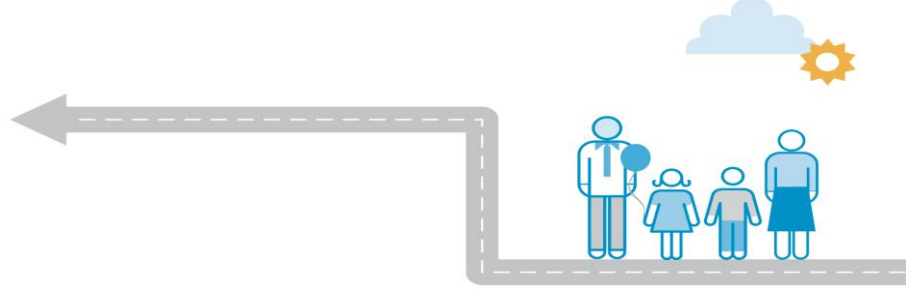
## Victims of Torture

Of the 45 children in care during this reporting year, 19 children are known to have experienced torture on the journey to the UK or in their home country which represents 42% of the Looked After Children cohort. The majority of incidents of torture occurred in Libya where many of the children were held as slaves.

The initial health assessments for these children have corroborated their claims with numerous burn marks and scars observed and recorded.

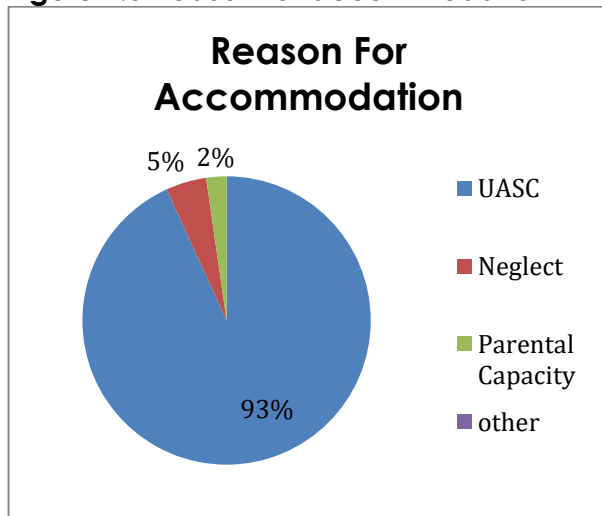
Last reporting year, the figure of known torture victims was 8, indicating a significant rise in this issue impacting the children in care.





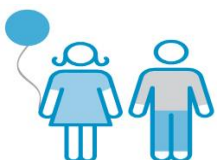
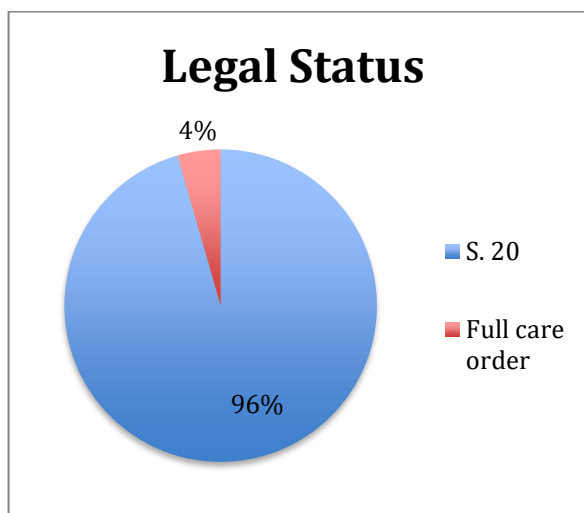
Specialist therapeutic services such as Freedom from Torture have been utilised to provide the young people with appropriate emotional support. The service manager for children and families has also commissioned a new mental health provision in partnership with Coram and the City of London Family Therapy Training Clinic, jointly run with Kings College London.

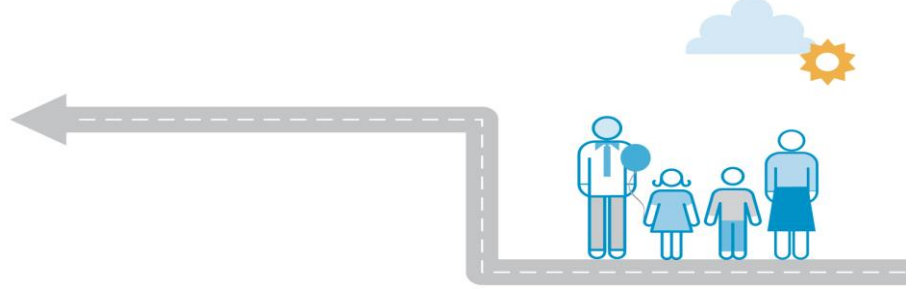
**Figure 1.5 Reason for accommodation**



N.B 'Other' represents a child who was supported to return to their country of origin.

**Figure 1.6 legal status**





41 of the 45 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. 11 of the 45 UASC became care leavers upon reaching the age of 18 during this reporting year and are being supported by the local authority accordingly.

2 children absconded from care with 1 of them choosing to travel independently to Belgium and 1 child travelling to Ireland.

4 children were assessed as over the age of 18 when they first sought care from the Local Authority and were not offered care.

2 children were accommodated and subsequently age assessed and found to be over the age of 18 and referred to over 18 asylum services.

1 child was supported to return to their country of birth (France).

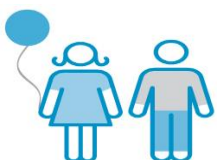
1 child returned to the care of their parent after a period of respite due to parenting issues.

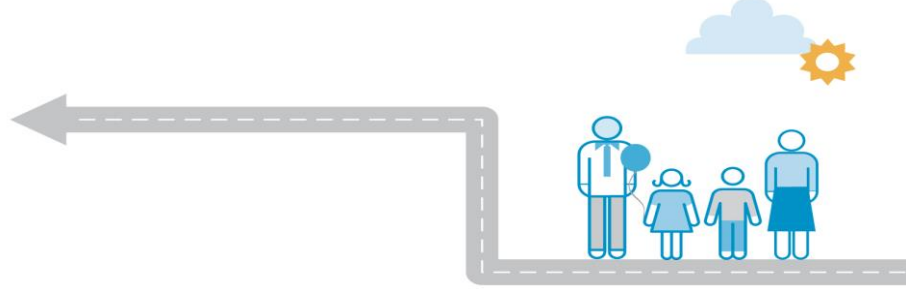
The profile of children in the care of the City at year end is unique for the following reasons:

- ❖ 91% are UASC; and
- ❖ 91% are male

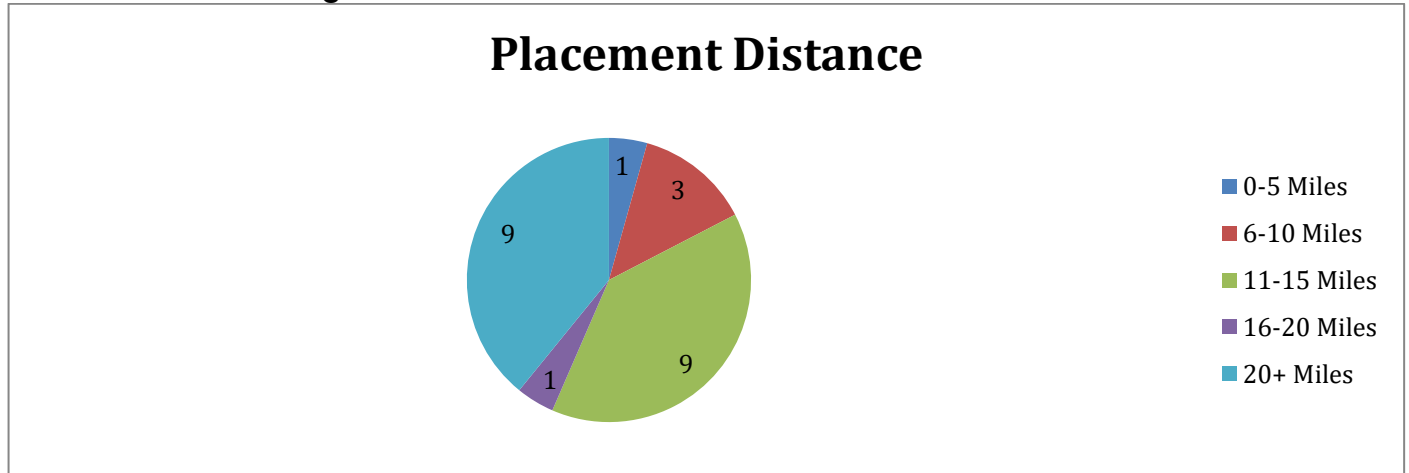
The City of London does not have an in-house fostering service and therefore commissions placements from external agencies for each child according to their individual needs.

Of the 24 children in care at the end of the reporting year, 15 are in foster placements and 9 children are in a semi-independent provision.





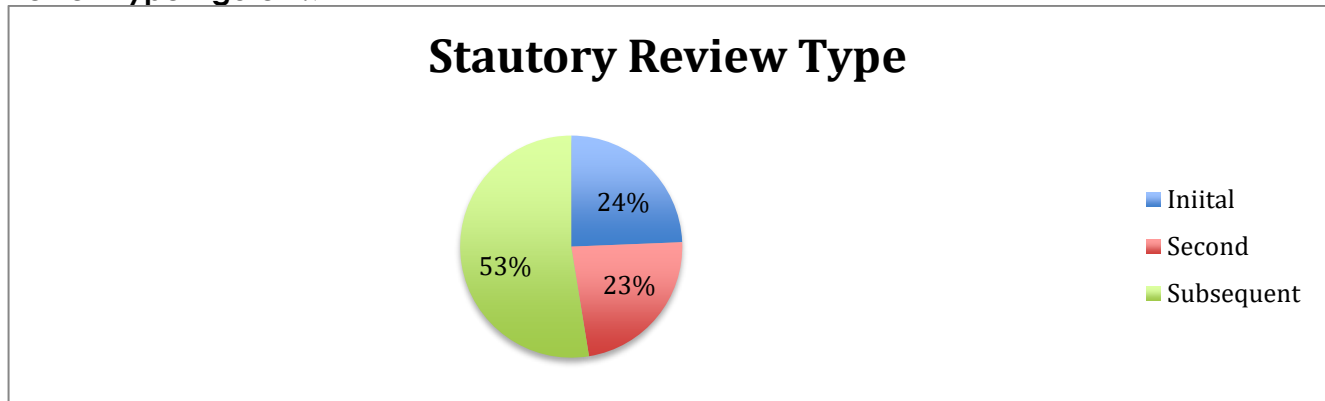
**Placement distance Figure 1.6**



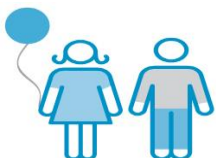
As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, 58% of placements of the remaining 24 children in care, were within 15 miles of the City with 4 of the 24 children living within the 0-10-mile range. Of the 41% that have been placed further than 15 miles away, they are either in long term fostering or adoption placements or in a semi-independent provision in the Luton area. All children living outside of London have established strong links with their local community and education.

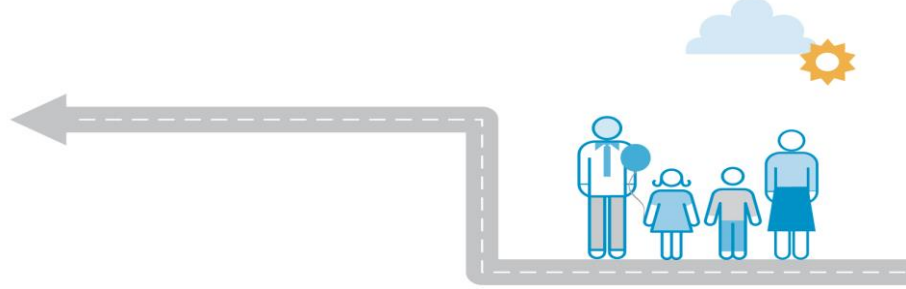
### 3.2. Statutory Reviews

**Review type Figure 1.7**

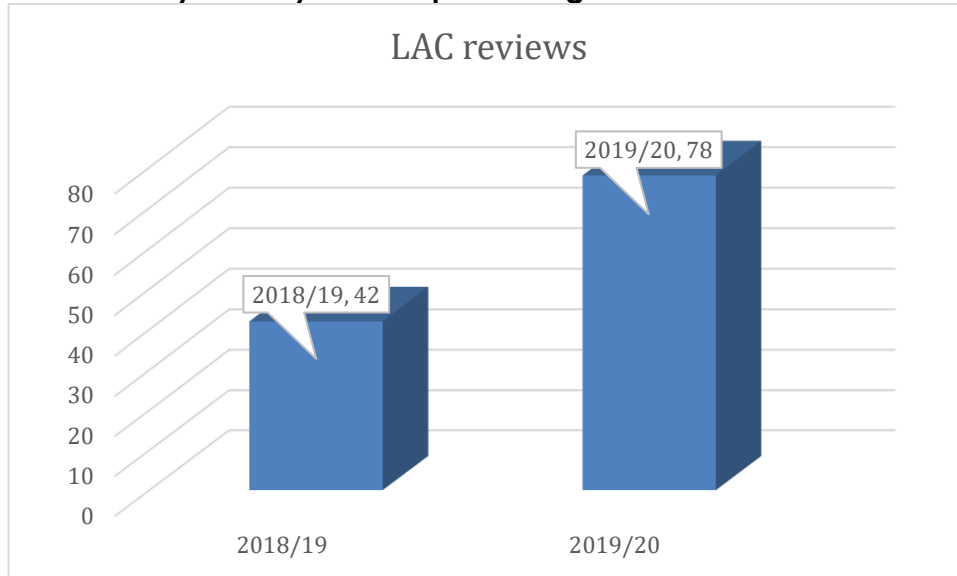


78 LAC reviews took place this year which is an increase of 77% from the previous reporting year:





**LAC review year on year comparison Figure 1.8**



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

### 3.4. IRO visits

The IRO conducted 11 standalone visits to meet with children during this reporting period, a decrease of 45% from the previous reporting year. The decrease in visits correlate to the 77% increase in LAC reviews that the IRO service experienced during the year, meaning there was increased workload and travel time which impacted on availability for separate visits. However, the IRO met and spoke to all Looked After children alone prior to their Looked After Child review.

The purpose of the IRO 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.

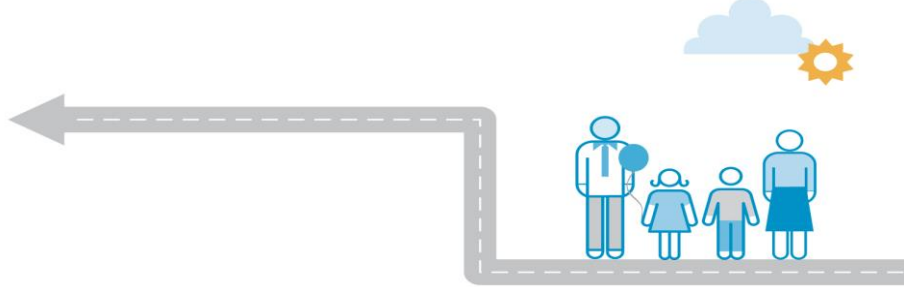
The majority of these visits took place at the child's placement in order for the IRO to observe the child's bedroom and placement.

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 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 the social worker and 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.

This reporting year, a total of 34 service users had a registered account, which is an increase from previous year of 21. 48 statements have been produced which is an increase from previous figure of 37.

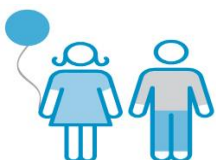
However, on closer inspection, the significant use of this application has been from the Early Help service. LAC or Care Leavers have not produced a statement (either independently or with the support of their social worker) or used the application since 29/08/2019. There has been an influx of new team members in the social work team which may account for the steep decline in usage of the app. A training session has been organised for new social workers to integrate them with the application.

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. There has been limited engagement with this consultation tool and to date, only 1 foster carer form has been received.

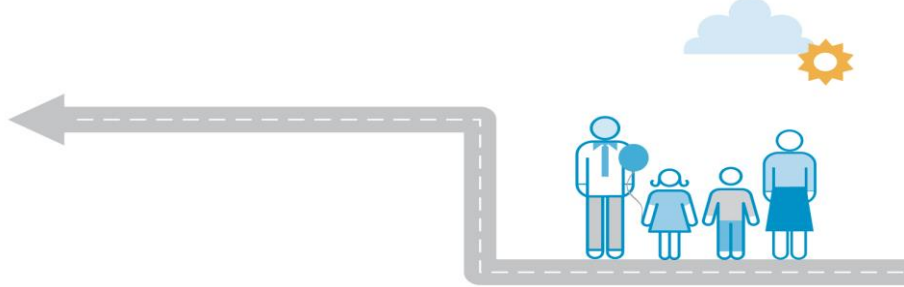
However, there is evidence that Children's views about all aspects of their care planning and review processes are ascertained by the IRO during Pre-Review and Midway Visits. During review meetings children are given the space to express their wishes and feelings, encouraged to ask questions, and supported 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 which was noted by Ofsted in their March 2020 inspection.

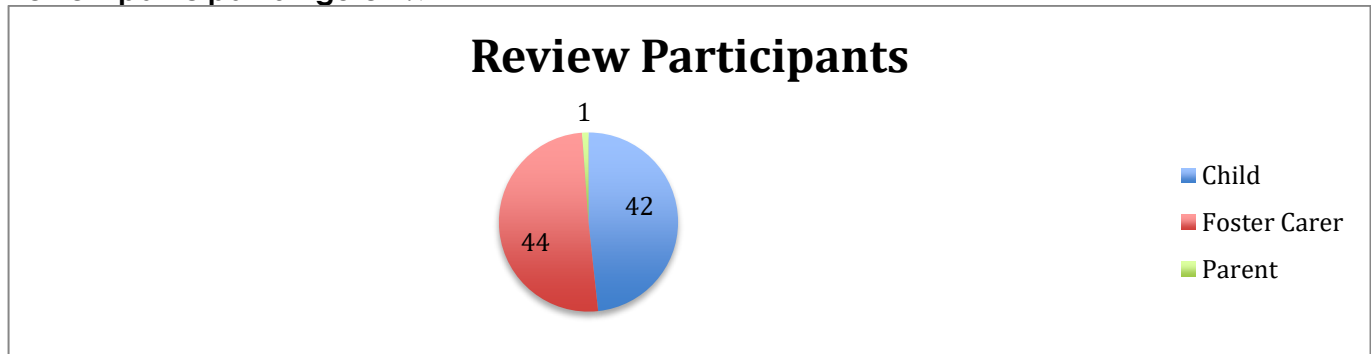
Consultation with any of the parents or family members of the UASC in care has not been achieved due to either the children indicating that this is not possible or social workers' reporting that they have not been able to reach the parents for whom they had been given contact details. The IRO service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







**Review participants Figure 1.9**



As illustrated in Figure 1.9, foster carers or residential workers attended 100% of the 78 reviews that took place during this reporting period and children were present in 94% of the reviews.

In two of the reviews where the child did not attend, the IRO is satisfied based on their 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. In the two other reviews where children were not present at their LAC review, multiple attempts were made to contact them separately, but they did not respond. Their views were communicated by their social worker.

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.

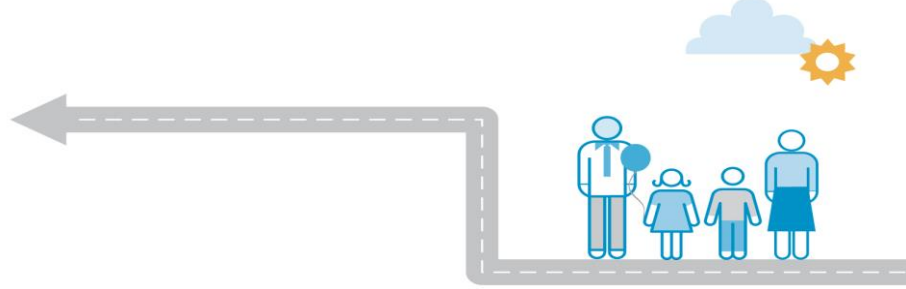
In keeping with children's expressed wishes, review meetings have taken place in placements, at schools and in the local authority's office.

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.

### **3.6 Covid-19**

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> the UK government announced a nationwide lockdown to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. From March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020, no face to face LAC reviews took place and the service moved to a virtual delivery. This comprised of reviews being held as a series of separate telephone calls to children and placement providers and the information and discussion written up in the LAC review document. Or alternatively, LAC reviews were held using video conference calls with applications such as Microsoft teams or zoom. IRO visits have been conducted using the video function on whatsapp as this is often the preferred communication method of the children. As this new





functionality occurred so close to the end of the reporting year, more detail on this issue will be reported on in the subsequent 2020/21 report.

### 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 continues to be an increase in the use of the independent advocacy service this year with 15 of the 45 children accessing the support of an advocate.

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.

There has been a renewed focus on the independent visitor service and 5 children in care now have an allocated independent visitor-an increase of 4. There is also an additional 7 pending referrals and 4 children are on the waiting list.

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

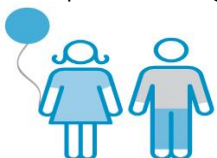
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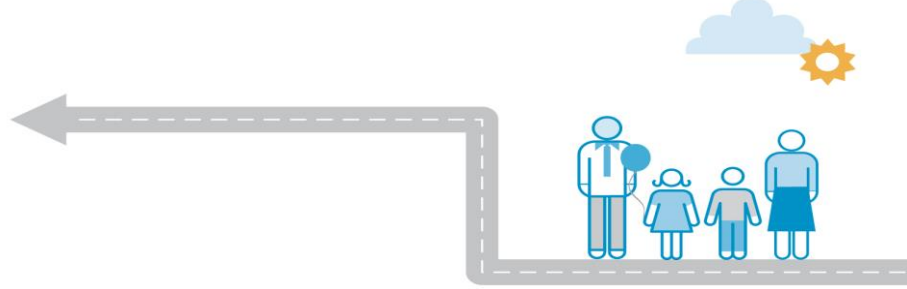
### 4.1. Care Planning

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.

Statutory completion of initial; care plans is within 10 working days of a child coming into care. This has been an area of focus due to previous reporting figures showing this was an area of non-compliance. Figures for this reporting year show there has been a slight increase since last year. Of

18





The 25 new arrivals into care this reporting year, 19 were due an initial care plan within the statutory timescale of 10 working days, (the other 6 children had moved to a new authority before this point).

Of the 19 care plans due, 11 initial care plans were completed in statutory timescales representing a 57% completion rate, compared to a completion rate of 53% last year. 4 were completed but out of timescales and 4 care plans were not completed.

### **Pathway plans**

Pathway planning has been of a good standard with children's views and engagement with the process clear. Over the course of the reporting year, 39 pathway plans have been completed for children in care.

There has been a new feature added to the pathway planning called the independent skills checklist (see appendix 1). This is a checklist that is sectioned off into key areas of independence skills with a column to record if it has been achieved and one to show evidence of this. Social workers have been requested to show evidence of using this checklist in the children's pathway plans. Any gaps identified are then addressed in LAC reviews and relevant actions are discussed and agreed upon.

### **Post 18 reviews**

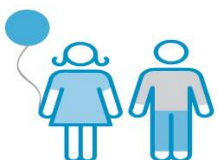
The Post 18 independent review protocol was a service that offered independent review of care leaver's pathway plans if requested by the young person. This service has now been enhanced and now, every care leaver has a 6-monthly review of their pathway plan by the new IRO in post since January 2020.

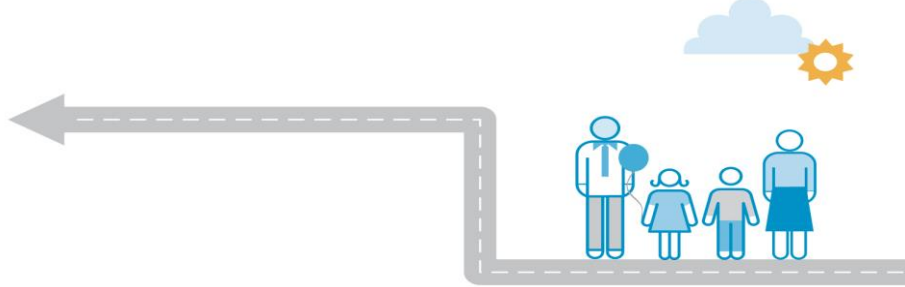
The IRO's core task is to monitor the young person's pathway plan and to ensure that this plan fully meets the needs of the young person as they grow into their independence.

The IRO works with all care leavers up until the age of 21 and/or 25 if the young person remains in education. Due to the emerging need of the service, the City of London have seen an increase in its care leavers who have all required and benefited from the new and adopted function of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance service.

For the reporting year from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 the total number of care leavers was 35. The total number of care leavers as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 was 32. All these young people have the criteria of 'Former Relevant Child'.

So far since the IRO has taken post there have been 21 completed pathway plan review meetings. These meetings are held every 6 months, or earlier depending on the young person's needs.





Pathway planning has been of a good standard with children's views and engagement with the process clear. Pathway plans are completed with the young person and social worker and any other professional or significant person in the young person's life every 6 months. This process is then reviewed every 6 months via a Pathway Plan Review Meeting (PPRM) and chaired independently by the IRO.

All young people are informed prior to their PPRM and encouraged to attend. To date, all care leavers offered a PPRM have engaged with this process and find this very useful. This is a way in which the City of London monitors the young person's current pathway plan and identifies any further issues that require support.

Midway monitoring has been introduced for all pathway plans for care leavers since April 2020. The aim is to monitor and keep up to date with case by case progress in order to prevent drift and delay. Appropriate challenge is raised with social care management. So far, since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 there have been 4 midway monitoring forms completed. This is recorded on the young person's case file and any escalations raised are passed to the necessary level of management as compliant with the City of London's Dispute resolution protocol.

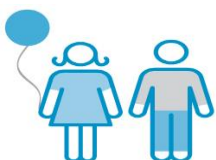
#### **4.2. Placement Stability**

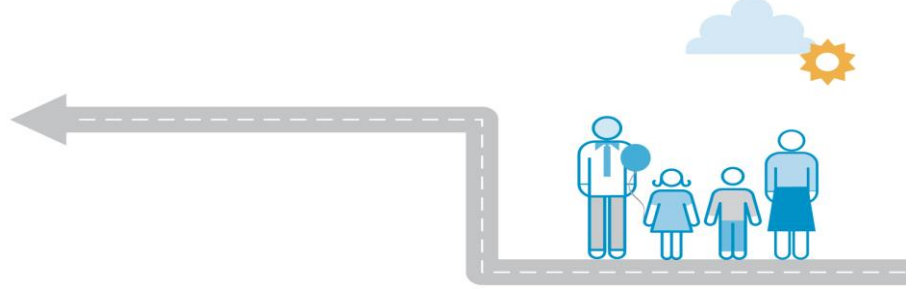
There have been 21 placement breakdowns in this reporting year which is a significant increase from the previous year which had 3 placement breakdowns. The total placement breakdowns comprised a total of 12 children, meaning some multiple moves for children.

Of these 21 placement breakdowns the reasons are listed below:

- 2 absconded and voluntarily left UK to seek employment/care in another country
- 6 safeguarding concerns were raised about 4 different placements resulting in the child being moved
- 5 placement breakdowns where both the child and placement provider had requested for placement to end
- 7 due to allegations made by child against placement provider. Allegations not proven but moved due to high level of dissatisfaction.
- 1 due to concern raised by child about their feelings of safety in the placement area.

Of the 5 placement breakdowns and 7 allegations against providers, there were complex and multi-faceted reasons for disruption. However, some common themes emerged which included children not adhering to rules of placement, children complaining of the food they were provided with at placement and lack of emotional warmth from the providers. The food issue has been a prominent one with this being a key feature in 3 placement disruptions. The complaints centre around the children's mistrust of cooking and storing food in the fridge when their preferred method is to cook on the day and not store leftovers. There were concerns raised by children





about the type of food they were being served as it was too oily and not similar enough to their previous diet. This issue has been communicated throughout the service and placement planning meetings will now increase their focus on food and preferences. The children in care council has also addressed this issue and plans to deliver workshops on food hygiene and storage.

In the instances of allegations and placement breakdowns, concerns were investigated and local LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) notified plus placement disruption meetings were held. No allegations to date were upheld.

The 1 placement breakdown due to feeling unsafe in their placement area was managed supportively by the social work team. The area in question has other children placed there and discussions were had with the young person as they felt more suited to a quieter area.

Of note, 75% of the 12 children who experienced placement breakdowns this year, were victims of torture, compared to the overall figure of torture victims in care of 42%. This indicates that being a victim of torture significantly increases the likelihood of placement disruption.

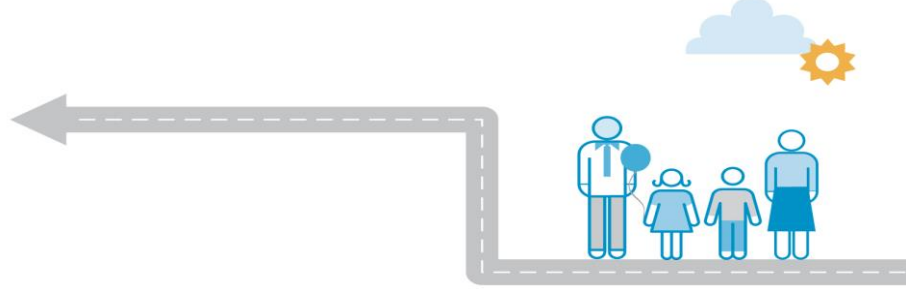
The increase in placement disruption has contributed to discussions about the mental health needs of the children in care. A mental health service has been developed and commissioned to provide the children in care with a tailored approach, specialising in asylum seeking and victims of torture. The expected commencement of this service is August 2020.

The significant increase in children coming into care has also placed pressure on finding available placements and ensuring they are of good quality. There is a current Quality assurance system in place where the safeguarding service manager and commissioning team undertake checks on a placement before placing them on the list of verified providers. Of the 6 placement breakdowns due to safeguarding concerns, 5 were regarding semi-independent providers. Of these 5, 2 breakdowns occurred when the number of children coming into care had risen significantly and all approved providers had no space left. Subsequently, two children were placed in an unapproved (by City of London QA process) provider (however, it had been approved and used by other local authorities). Emerging concerns were identified within a week of children being placed there and they were removed promptly.

2 children were at a placement provider who had been identified through social work and IRO visits as not providing high quality of care. This information was conveyed to commissioning and senior management and the provider was taken off the list.

1 child was at a placement that had been quality assured and was assessed positively by social work and IRO on visits. However, possible (not proven) links of staff with undercover criminality were discovered by police and City of London notified. The child was removed from this placement promptly.





1 foster carer placement had safeguarding concerns and the child was removed and fostering agency notified that foster carers could no longer be used by City of London and they were also referred to fostering panel for review.

### 4.3. Achieving Permanency

Of the 45 children looked after during this reporting period:

- ❖ 11 transitioned into adulthood and continue to receive support from the City as care leavers
- ❖ 1 was returned to the care of their mother under a voluntary arrangement
- ❖ 8 are in established long term fostering arrangements under S.20
- ❖ 2 are under the age of 4, subject to a full care order in an adoptive placement, awaiting full adoption order
- ❖ 5 are in foster placements that require further assessment to ascertain potential for permanency
- ❖ 9 are in semi-independent placements that require further assessment to ascertain potential for permanency
- ❖ 4 were not accepted into long term care as their age was not accepted
- ❖ 2 had their period of care ended after undergoing full Merton age assessment
- ❖ 2 absconded from their placement and travelled independently to another country
- ❖ 1 was supported to voluntarily return to France

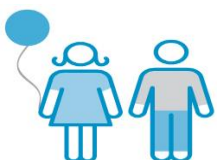
Of the 24 children in care at the end of the reporting year, 4 are in foster placements, preparing to live independently once they become care leavers. 2 are in adoptive placements, awaiting full adoption order. 4 are in long term fostering. 9 are in semi-independent placements and 5 are in foster placements that require further assessment before being confirmed as long term.

### 4.4. Health

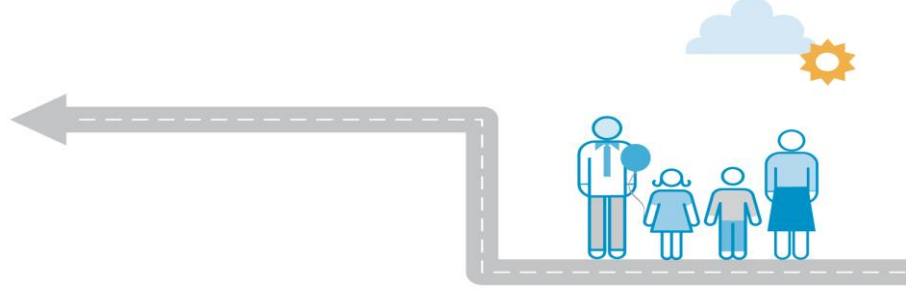
The timescales for initial health assessment is within 20 working days of coming into care. 6 newly accommodated children left care before their first LAC health assessment was due. 18 newly accommodated children required an initial health assessment and 15 of these were within timescales. 1 assessment was late due to a foster carer missing the appointment, 1 was due to a child moving to a new placement and 1 was due at the same time as the national lockdown occurred due to the pandemic, making it 1 day late.

All yearly LAC health assessments due in this reporting period were completed for children in care.

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, as of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2020 were in education, however, the nature of this was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and education had moved to an online setting across all provisions.

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

Throughout the reporting year, the majority of young people 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 and 6 children had extra tuition support throughout the reporting year.

#### 4.7. Midway monitoring

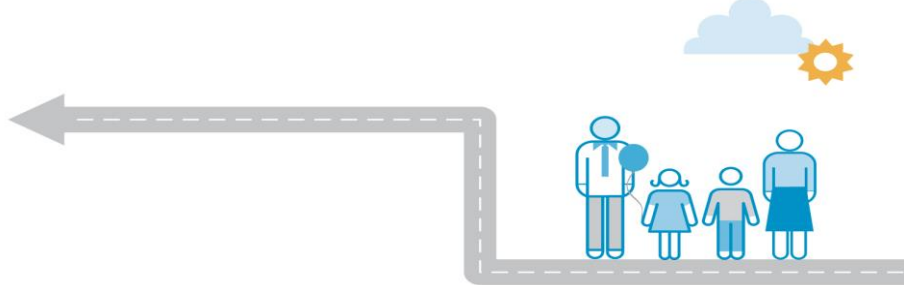
Midway monitoring has continued on each Looked After child, using the template developed in the previous year.

#### 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 1 of the DRP in 1 case. The concerns were in relation to lack of case recording, lack of progression of LAC review actions and the child's disagreement with their care plan. The issues were resolved promptly at stage 1 and the IRO and the child were satisfied with the change to their care plan. The child utilised the support of an advocate throughout this process. The IRO Dispute Form was used to record the management of this dispute.





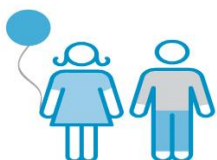
All other concerns have been resolved through informal challenge within the service and during quality assurance monitoring meetings. In no particular order, the tables below provide samples of the good practice recognised and the issues of concern identified throughout 2019/2020.

Table 1.0

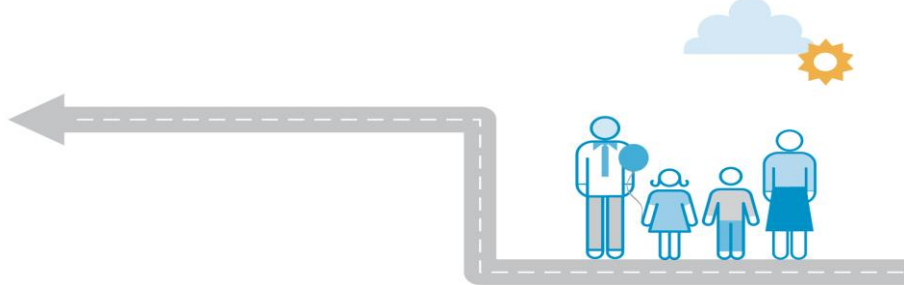
<b>Good practice identified</b>
Voice of the child is listened to
SW Support to UASC with immigration process
SW and Virtual school head support with education
Quality and timeliness of statutory visits
Transfer of learning between reviews leading to improved practice
Involvement of children in placement changes
Quality of SW/CLA relationships
Support for children to engage in CiCC
SW efforts to consult and engage parents and significant family members
Significant increase in use of independent visiting service
Continued good use of advocacy service

Table 1.1

<b>Issues of Concerns Identified</b>	<b>Current Status</b>
Significant increase in placement disruption	Quality assurance process developed to ensure high quality placements. Robust and consistent communication between teams to highlight placement concerns. Development of new mental health initiative to support children.
Decrease in consultation application	There has been a change in social work staff who were not familiar with the application used. Training has been delivered to new staff to encourage increased use.
Initial care plans not being completed in timescales	This has improved since change was made to process of electronic records but more progress is required







## 5. Quality Assurance of the IRO Service

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### 5.1. Supervision and Management Oversight

The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager supervises the IRO once every 4 weeks. 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

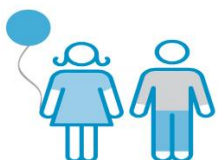
The IRO meets with the Performance Analyst regularly to monitor compliance with statutory review timescales and the degree to which the IRO is 'keeping in touch' with children in care. There have been no issues of non-compliance identified as part of this process. The IRO's performance is reported into 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.

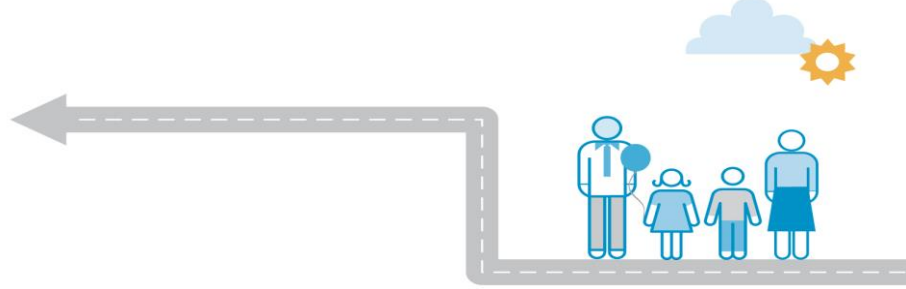
### 5.3. Case File Auditing

The IRO's footprint and the quality of the service provided are considered as part of all formal case file audits. Audits throughout this reporting year have shown that the IRO's in their roles have been visible and offered appropriate challenge when required

### 5.4 Ofsted inspection

On 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Ofsted undertook an inspection of City of London's children's social care services. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers was given a judgement of outstanding. It was noted that children's plans are clear and reviews are timely with most children supported to participate. The report outlined that "IRO's get to know the children well and advocate strongly for them". There was praise for the LAC review minutes template describing them as written in a "clear and sensitive style". The social work team received praise for the frequency of visits to children in care and how well children's views are articulated in plans.



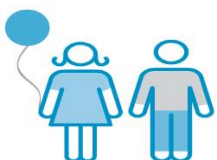


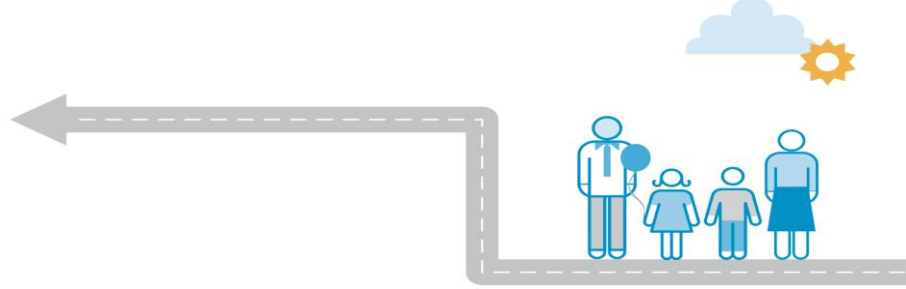
Social workers were described as showing “great sensitivity to the cultural needs and identities of the children”.

#### 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. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the annual Action for Children survey (which gives a comprehensive outline of children's views and is utilised for this report) has been delayed. The completion date should hopefully be September 2020 and will be attached as an appendix to this report once available. However, anecdotally, some views of children in care have been compiled to give a brief overview:

- *“Thanks you very much for standing up for us and I really appreciate for everything you've done in city CICC. Thanks”*
- *“I feel I am treated differently to other children in care”*
- *“I have a clean and spacious room and staff that show respect and allow me freedom to socialise”.*
- *“Thank you very much we're happy to hear from you people. God will bless all of you people that's happening to us to stay in this country. God will guide and protect you people and your children”.*
- *“At the moment I'm doing well at university. I am studying Software engineering and recently got an unconditional conditional offer at google when I graduate”*
- *“I do not feel happy at all. Mentally I do not feel well. I've been living here at this house for the last 3 months and I have been promised a lot of things – which has not come. For example, a PlayStation and telephone. This is why I try to avoid coming to the placement and rather stay out with my friends as much as I can.”*





## 6. Overview

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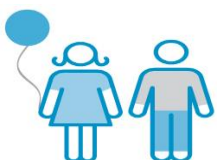
### 6.1 Achievements

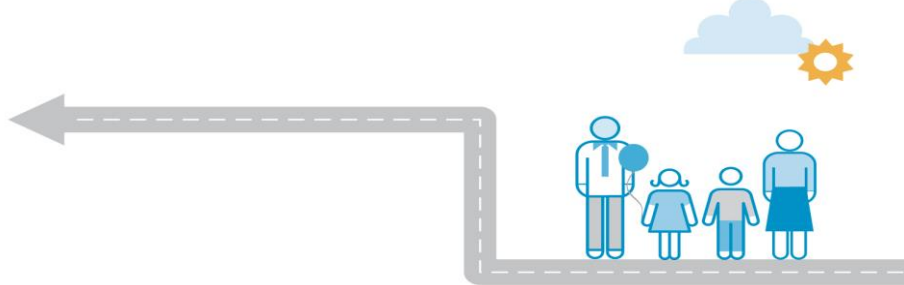
The positive impact of the IRO service in 2019/2020 is evident in the following list of achievements:

- ❖ Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
- ❖ All children seen alone by the IRO outside of review meetings
- ❖ Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods
- ❖ Design and implementation of independent skills checklist
- ❖ Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the ICS workflow
- ❖ The promotion of the Children's Right services, seeing a significant increase in advocacy and independent visiting service
- ❖ The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse
- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> IRO in post, focusing on needs of care leavers

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 2019/2020

Objective	Actions
Implement Life story books	This has been achieved. All children in care are given a life story book and are used in ways that suit the child.
Increase in IRO visits	This has not been achieved due to a 77% increase in LAC reviews being held. Consideration to increase virtual visits in form of video calls.
Continue to develop the LAC review process to make it inclusive for children	On-going. Regular review of service and new ideas implemented such as the independent skills checklist.

## 6.3 Areas for Improvement

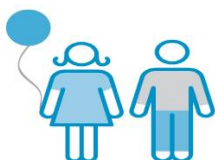
The IRO service acknowledges the need for improvement in the following areas:

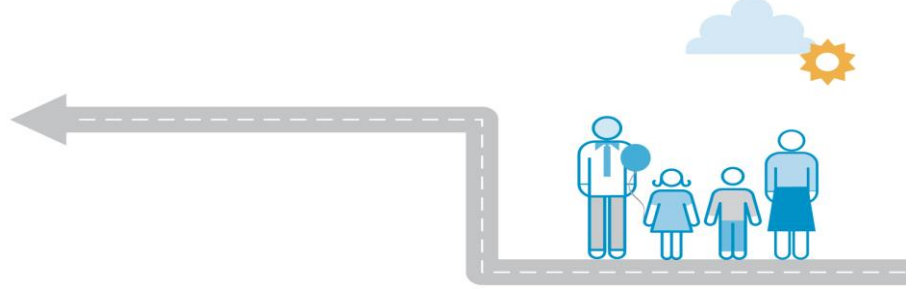
- ❖ Increase IRO visits to ensure Looked After children have opportunity to discuss their care plan before reviews
- ❖ Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for IRO service to be prepared digitally and ensure service delivery can be maintained at a high standard remotely/virtually.

## 6.4 Conclusion

The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2019/2020. This was evident in the outstanding rating given by Ofsted in the March 2020 inspection. 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.

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 and their significant mental health needs. The IRO service is committed to supporting placement stability and ensuring that this is an area of improvement. Throughout this reporting year, the social work team have shown commitment and energy in supporting the children and the focus is on continually reviewing the service to ensure best outcomes for the children and young people.





## 7. Planned & Recommended Improvements For 2020/2021

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.

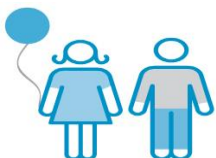
Table 3.0

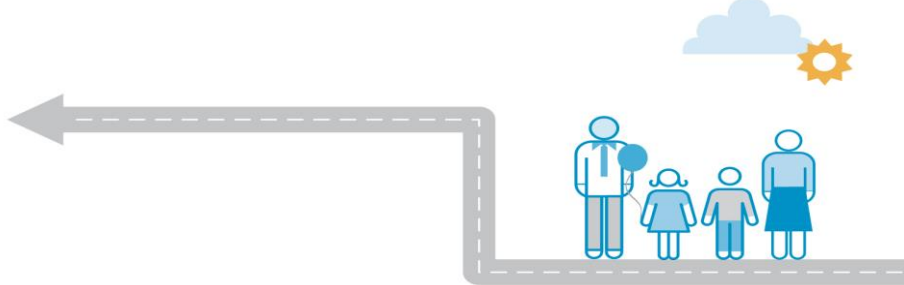
Objective	Actions
Review of care plan document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the care plan document reflects needs of UASC cohort</li> <li>• Support children's team to increase the completion rate of initial care plans</li> </ul>
Increase in IRO visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim for each child to be visited on a separate visit prior to their review</li> <li>• Goal is to increase current IRO visit rate to 40 per reporting year</li> </ul>
Continue to develop the LAC review process to make it inclusive for children and ensure anti-racism policies are embedded within the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore different mediums such as PowerPoint and video as a format to support children in their reviews</li> <li>• Review systemic model and how this can be developed in the LAC review process</li> <li>• Ensure all looked after children are aware of their rights and service providers operate a consistent anti-racist policy.</li> </ul>

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

Table 3.1

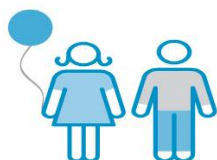
Increase the completion of initial care plans in statutory timescales.	Team manager to ensure care plans are completed in timescales-calendar alerts for dates due
Implement the new mental health initiative	Increase the amount of children receiving therapeutic support and decrease waiting times to receive this

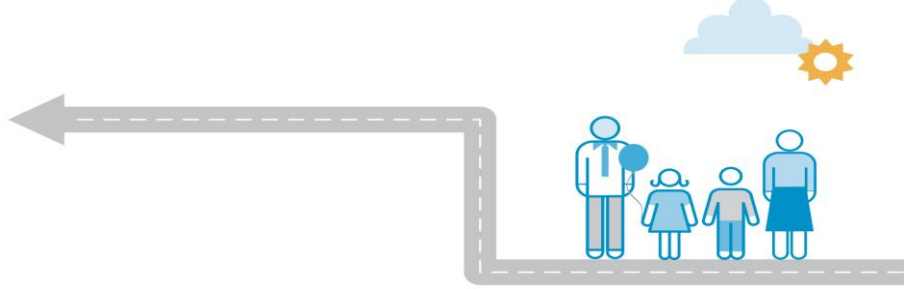




Encouraging use of electronic consultation method

Ensure social work team have been registered for the Mind of My Own app and use it with children.

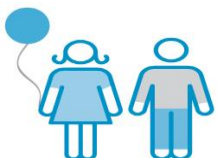


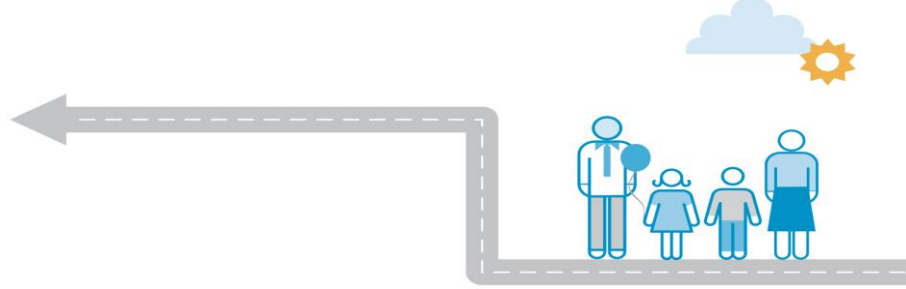


## Appendix 1

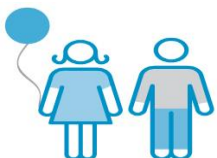
### INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS CHECKLIST

	Completed?	Evidence?	Supported by?
<b>PERSONAL CARE</b>			
<i>Personal hygiene</i> - Do you wash regularly and brush teeth every day?			
Do you understand risks of smoking, alcohol and drugs?			
Do you understand importance of safe sex, contraceptives and where to access them?			
<b>LAUNDRY</b>			
Do you know how to use a washing machine and how to dry clothes?			
<b>MONEY MANAGEMENT</b>			
Do you have a bank account?			
Do you understand the value and use of coins and bank notes?			
Can you budget your allowance?			
Do you know how to save?			

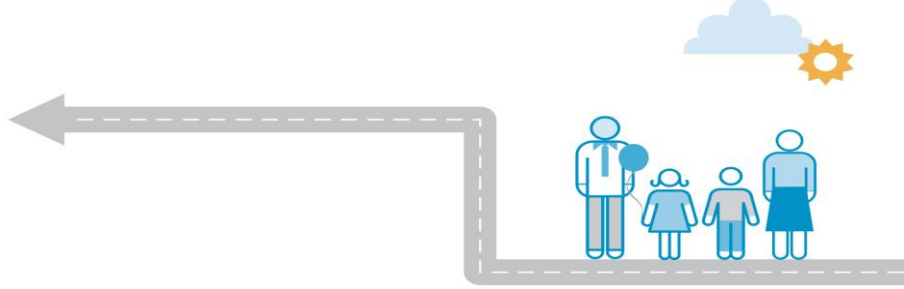




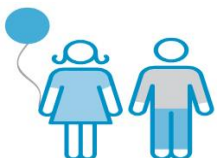
Do you know costs/bills of independent living?			
Do you understand credit cards/loans and what interest means?			
<b>FOOD</b>			
Can you cook meals? (Four minimum)			
Do you understand basic nutrients; need for a mix of protein, carbohydrates, fibre; and the importance of fruit and vegetables?			
Do you know how to store food safely? Do you know how long food can be kept in the fridge, and how to use the fridge freezer?			
<b>TRAVEL</b>			
Can you navigate London transport systems (e.g. buses, trams, Underground, Overground and rail)?			
Can you work out a new route?			
Can you travel independently?			

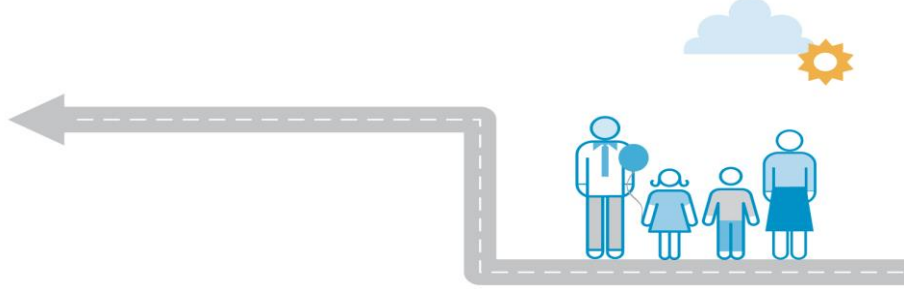






Can you book train tickets for travel outside of London?			
<b>DIARY MANAGEMENT</b>			
Can you keep a diary of your appointments?			
Can you make important appointments (e.g. with doctor/GP, dentist, solicitor)?			
Do you have an email account and know how to send and read emails?			
<b>HOME MANAGEMENT and SAFETY</b>			
Can you change a lightbulb?			
Can you check the electricity and gas meter?			
Can you change batteries in a smoke alarm?			
Do you know importance of having a smoke and carbon monoxide alarm?			
Can you clean and tidy a home, including? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• change bed covers</li> <li>• fridge</li> <li>• microwave</li> </ul>			





Do you know what to do in the event of an emergency (e.g. fire)?			
<b>SAFETY</b>			
Do you know how to be safe in public?			
Do you know how to call the emergency services (e.g. police, fire, service, ambulance)?			
Do you understand internet safety			
<b>SUPPORT</b>			
Who would you contact if you need support with an issue?			
Do you have phone numbers saved of people who can support you?			
<b>EDUCATION</b>			
Are you in education?			
Have you made plans for your future education?			
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>			
Do you know how to look for employment?			
Do you have a CV?			

