



INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE 2013 – 2014

ANNUAL REPORT

An Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service for Bromley's Looked After Children.

The report contains a summary of the work completed by Bromley Independent Reviewing Officers between 1st April 2013 and 31st March 2014

Report Author – Virginia Read, Group Manager
CSC Quality Assurance & Safeguarding
Education and Care Services

Young Person's Portrait of their IRO



Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Legal Context of the Service	4
3. The Independent Reviewing Team	5
4. Activity of the IRO Service	7
5. The Children in our Care	8
6. Children and Young People's participation	11
7. Impact of the IRO Service on Outcomes for Children and Young People	12
8. Making a Significant Contribution to Service improvement for Looked After Children	14
9. Quality Assurance of the Independent Reviewing Service	15
10. Recruiting and Retaining Skilled and Knowledgeable Staff	21
11. Safeguarding Children and Young People in our Care	21
12. Recent Changes that have impacted on the Service for Looked After Children	22
13. Progress against Service Developments identified for 2012/13	23
14. Future Service Developments for the IRO Service in 2014/15	24
Appendix A: Foster Carer, Social Worker and Guardian Questionnaires and Feedback	25

1. Introduction

1.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 created a new power for the Secretary of State to issue statutory guidance to IROs known as the 'IRO Handbook'. The Handbook contains the guidance for IROs and Local Authorities around their functions in relation to case management and review of Looked After Children (LAC).

1.2 The Handbook states the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the local authority corporate parenting board. This report will be available as a public document on the local authority website. This report will also be placed on the Bromley website for looked after children.

1.3 This report provides an analysis of how the IRO Service monitors the performance of the local authority in relation to its looked after children. It discusses the development of the IRO Service over the past year. It also provides some statistical analysis of the performance of the IRO Service in relation to Bromley's looked after children population. It highlights good practice and areas which require improvement for the forthcoming year.

2. Legal Context of the Service

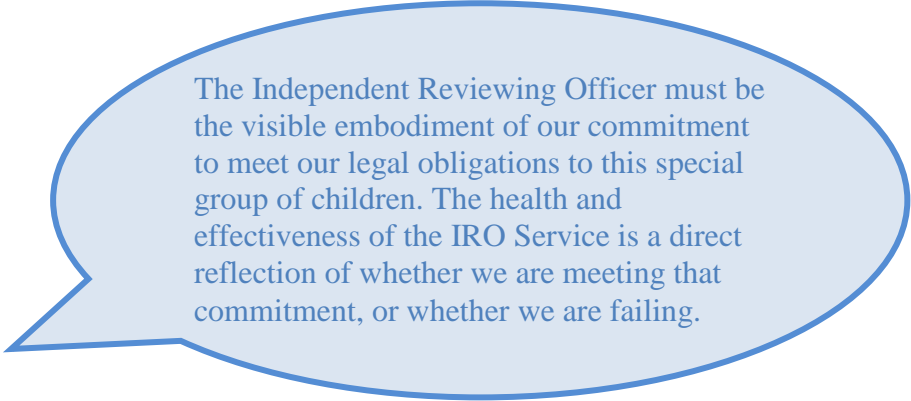
2.1 Since 2004 all local authorities have been required to appoint Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to protect children's interests through the care planning process. The requirement to appoint IROs arose from concerns that the care planning for looked after children could 'drift'. IROs must be independent from the immediate line management of the case. The effectiveness of their role has subsequently been questioned as to whether they can be sufficiently robust in their challenge of the local authority. Therefore an attempt was made to strengthen the IRO role through statutory guidance and the IRO Handbook.

2.2 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the IROs' responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to only a child's *review* to the more encompassing role of monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's *case*.

2.3 As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent. The IRO should highlight any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern emerging not just around individual children but also more generally in relation to the collective experience of its looked after children of the services they receive.

2.4 The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs. The actions set out in the plan should be 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.

2.5 The recently published National Children's Bureau research entitled 'The Role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings in regards to the efficacy of IRO services. Mr Justice Peter Jackson in the Foreword makes the following comment:

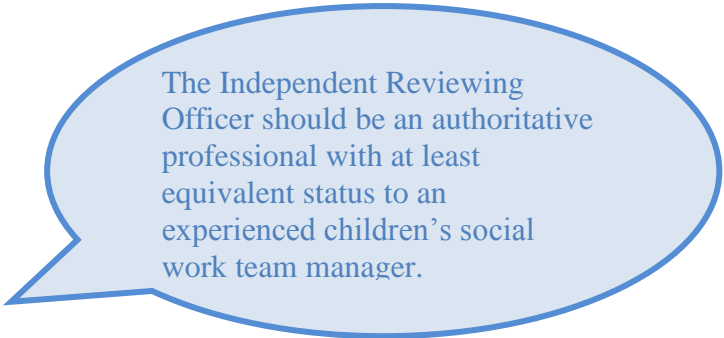


The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO Service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

3. The Independent Reviewing Team

3.1 The IROs are employed by the London Borough of Bromley. They are line managed by a Quality Assurance Group Manager. As required by the statutory guidance, their management is independent of the immediate case management of Bromley's looked after children.

3.2 Since April 2012 the staffing establishment has been 5 full-time IROs. The guidance states:



The Independent Reviewing Officer should be an authoritative professional with at least equivalent status to an experienced children's social work team manager.

- All five IROs have extensive relevant social work experience of 16 years or more.
- Three of them held management positions immediately prior to becoming an IRO.
- In terms of diversity there are 2 male IROs and 3 female IROs.
- There is one IRO from a BME background which is not proportionate to the 36% of looked after children in Bromley who are from a BME background.
- One IRO had 7 years of experience of working with children with disabilities prior to joining the IRO Service 6 years ago.

3.3 The IRO Service has a very good staff retention record. None of the staff have left during the past year. However during 2013-14 the IRO Service has experienced some long-term sickness. The Service employed an agency IRO for 4 months and another IRO on a sessional basis to reduce the impact of sickness absence. Inevitably this has resulted in some children having experienced a disruption in the continuity of service from their allocated IRO. All 5 permanent IROs have now returned to work.

3.4 Statutory guidance recommends the caseload for a full time IRO should be between 50 and 70 looked after children to enable the delivery of a quality service. In 2013-14 each IRO has held a caseload of approximately 60 children. The caseload management has to take into consideration the geographical location of placements and travelling time. The National and London IRO Manager networks have identified that caseloads exceeding 60 has a significant impact on the IRO's ability to fulfil the full requirements of the statutory guidance.

3.4 A newly looked after child will be allocated an IRO within a couple of days of becoming looked after. The IRO will then make contact with the allocated social worker. When appropriate the IRO will also make contact with the child. Good practice is for the IRO to visit the child before the day of the Review. The purpose of the visit is to introduce themselves, discuss the role of the IRO and the purpose of Reviews. The IROs try to achieve this whenever possible.

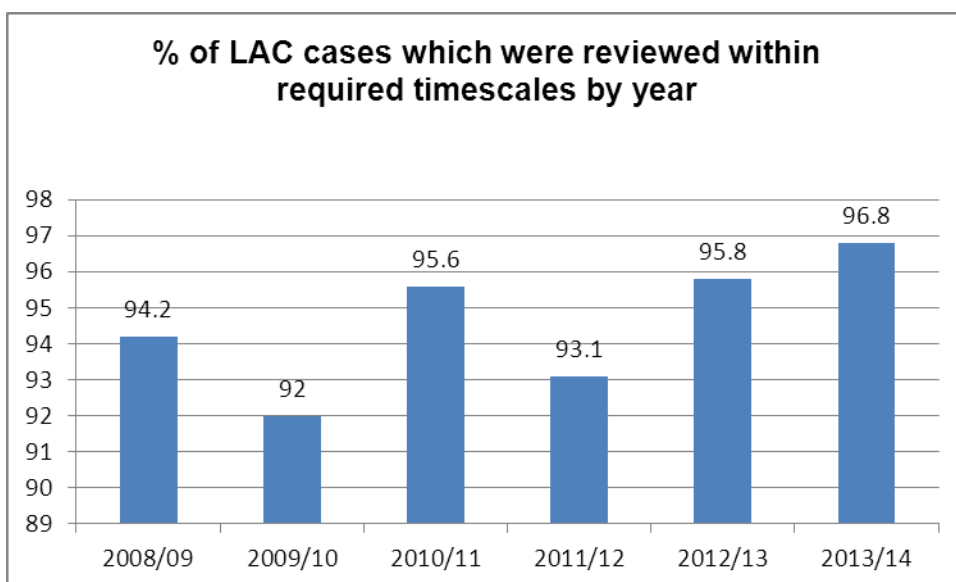
3.5 A looked after child will retain the same allocated IRO for their duration in care unless the IRO leaves the employment of the local authority. In exceptional circumstances there may be a change of IRO.

4. Activity of the IRO Service

4.1 From April 2013 to March 2014 the total number of looked after children has fluctuated between 277 and 291. This figure has remained fairly consistent since 2010. There has been a total of 165 new admissions into care during the year and 169 have left care. Children may leave care because they have been adopted or placed on a Special Guardianship or a Residence Order. Some young people will have turned 18. Others will have returned home.

4.2 The total number of individual children and young people's LAC reviews held in 2013/14 was 849. 96.77% of these Reviews were held within statutory timescales. The Service's target is 100%. The key issues impacting on this figure are:

- Placements with Connected Persons not recorded as S.20
- B and B accommodations for 16/17 year olds where S.20 is backdated



4.3 Monthly activity for IROs is shown below and averages at 14 children's reviews per 20 working day month for each IRO without taking into account annual leave, bank holidays and other duties required of the IRO within the service. The average time for the Bromley IRO service to write up the report for the Review is 12 working days. The IRO Handbook states the IRO should produce a full record of the review within 15 working days.

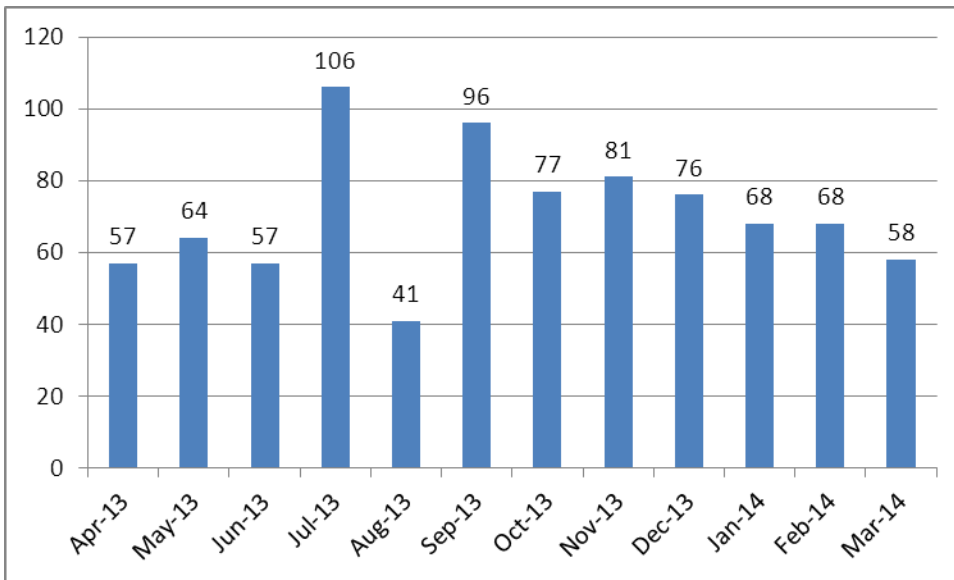


Figure 1 - Number of LAC reviews April 2013 - March 2014

4.3 The Bromley IRO Service is supported by two full time business support officers who have responsibility for the setting up of reviews including sending out invitation letters, consultation forms and reminder letters. They play a very significant part in helping to ensure reviews are kept within statutory timescales. They also send out the IRO reports following the Review. They scan any associated Review documents on to the Children’s Social Care database. They assist in maintaining the electronic systems for the child. They also have responsibility for sending out the paperwork for looked after children medicals and entering data for medical and dental appointments including adoption medicals.

5. The Children in our Care

5.1 Over the past year of the children placed with foster carers, an average of 68.5% of our looked after children were placed with Bromley foster carers. 22.8% were with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers. A further 8.7% were with extended family members or friends, known as Connected Persons placements. A further 12.3% of looked after children were in residential placements and 7.2% were in a pre-adoptive placement.

5.2 Children’s Social Care is committed to improving permanency for all looked after children which is outlined in the Department’s Permanency Strategy. In 2013/14 14 children were adopted, a slight decrease from 17 in 2012/13. The decrease is accounted for by court delays and delays in the legal process and completion of required court reports.

5.3 As at 1st April 2013 40 children were subject to an adoption plan and awaiting an adoption placement. A further 18 children became subject to Adoption plans in 2013/2014. Of the total of 58 children:

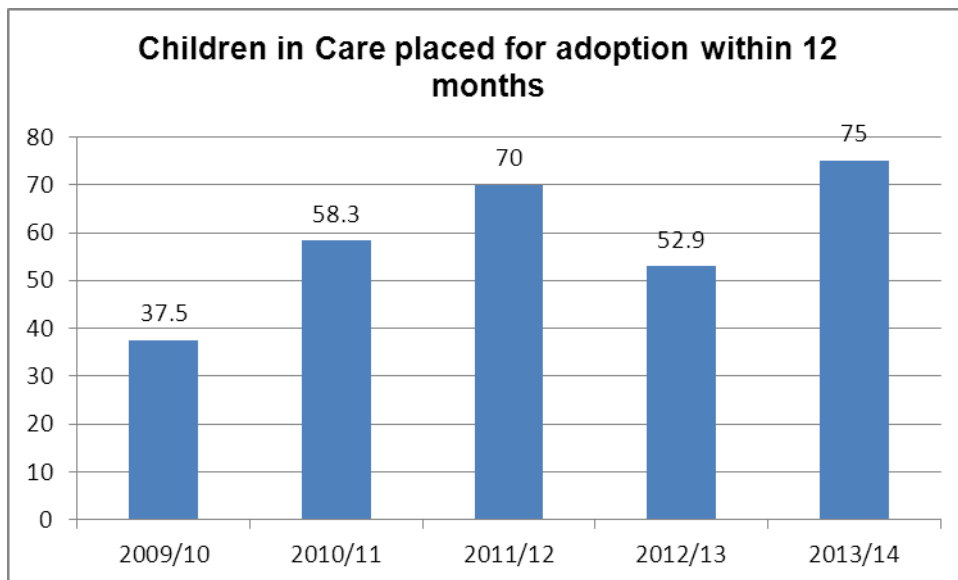
- 26 children were matched with an adoptive family during the year 2013/14
- 13 children had their adoption plan rescinded during 2013/14
- 19 children were actively being found an adoption placement as at 31st March 2014.

5.4 There were 27 looked after children placed with prospective adopters during the year. This was an increase of 17 compared to the previous year. Out of the 27 children placed in the year 2013/14:

- 7 children were granted the Adoption order during the year
- 20 children were in their pre-adoptive placements as at 31st March 2014 and we are working with them and their adopters to ensure they achieve permanency through an adoption order in 2014/15

5.5 28 children were made subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). This is a significant increase on the 10 children who were made subject to SGOs in 2012/13.

5.6 In 2013/14 under the Court Pilot, Bromley issued 53 sets of care proceedings involving 91 children. 28 Court Pilot cases were concluded by 31 March 2014 involving 50 children and of these, 23 cases were concluded within 26 weeks. IROs have a responsibility to ensure that care plans are progressed in a timely way and to address any issues that may hinder this. The decisions of the Review play a key part in keeping plans on track.



5.7 Local authorities have, for a number of years, had an obligation on them to identify sufficient placements locally for their looked after children. There has been recent significant interest in young people being at risk of sexual exploitation. This has galvanised Government to ensure that children are only placed at a distance from home, and in particular in residential accommodation

where there is good reason for this to be the case. This has led to changes to the Children's Homes Regulations (some of which came into force in January and the remainder were enacted in April) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations.

5.8 The changes to the Regulations cited above introduce additional requirements on local authorities and in particular the DCS to ensure that there are robust processes in place to ensure that care planning, especially when it is felt that the needs of the child are best met in a placement away from the local authority area, takes into account the associated possible risks and puts safeguards in place to reduce the risks. Sometimes a residential placement at a distance may be chosen specifically to protect a young person who has been identified as at significant risk of sexual exploitation.

5.9 As of 17 March 2014, 129 children were placed outside of the borough boundaries. Of these 129 children:

57 were placed more than 20 miles from their home address, of which:

- 25 (44%) were placed with foster carers
- 4 (7%) were placed with connected person foster carers
- 3 (5%) were placed in preparation for independence accommodation
- 25 (44%) were placed in residential accommodation.

Of the 25 children and young people placed in residential accommodation:

- 11 (44%) are children with a disability

In relation to the types of placements for the 25 children placed in residential accommodation:

- 4 (16%) were placed in secure/YOI settings
- 11 (44%) were placed in residential schools
- 9 (36%) were in children's homes
- 1 (4%) was in a mother and baby residential assessment unit.

5.10 When scrutinising the care plan IROs will always consider whether the placement is meeting all the needs of the child. Consideration will be given as to whether an alternative placement closer to Bromley would lead to better outcomes for the child. The safeguarding of the child is a primary concern.

A young person, aged 17½ years, has complex special needs and is in the final stages of transition planning to Adult Care Services. He has been in his residential placement for nearly 10 years. A recent Ofsted inspection identified significant shortfalls in relation to the residential unit. The IRO attended two Professionals Meetings to discuss care planning and to ensure the young person remains adequately safeguarded. Decisions included

- Some unannounced visits by the social worker, and on every visit the social worker to read the care records.
- Bromley Community Health to audit the Health Care Plan
- Parents have very frequent contact. Their view was they had no concerns about the care the young person was receiving and wanted him to remain in the placement.

The IRO has continued to monitor. A follow up Ofsted inspection concluded there had been improvements at the unit.

6. Children and Young People's Participation

6.1 The IRO Handbook makes it clear that the IRO must ensure that a child's wishes and feelings are taken into full consideration in the care planning and review process. The IRO will always try to meet with the child prior to the Review. Last year 98.8% of children and young people aged over 4 participated in their Review. This is an increase on 97.8% for last year. They may have participated by attending their Review and speaking for themselves, or they may have conveyed their views in a written format or through an advocate or their IRO.

One IRO invites the child or young person to bring a piece of their work they are proud of to show at their Review and/or to demonstrate an achievement e.g. playing a musical instrument or singing. Children have experienced this as very positive and a really good way of feeling a central part of their Review.

Another IRO bought a stress ball for a child to hold and squeeze during Reviews after the child had realised that holding a cushion during his sessions at CAMHS helped him to talk about his feelings.

6.2 Some young people are encouraged to chair or co-chair their own Review. Having listened to the views of young people on the Bromley Living in Care Council, training is going to be provided to empower more young people to

chair their own Review. One of the IROs has been involved in the planning of this training and will co-deliver the training with the Active Involvement Officer for children and young people. The first of these training sessions was planned for April 2014 but unfortunately had to be postponed until the summer due to sickness. The intention is that this will become a rolling training programme.

A young person who had been very socially isolated and was lacking in confidence has been encouraged by his IRO to chair his own Reviews. He has now very successfully chaired 3 of his Reviews. He has learnt his views are important. He wrote to the Judge and contributed to his own Care Plan agreed by the Court.

6.3 In partnership with the Living in Care Council the pack given to every newly looked after child now has a dedicated section on the IRO and an age appropriate information leaflet on the role of the IRO and their contact details.

6.4 IROs contact some children and young people between their Reviews. This may be through visiting the children or through phoning them. Not all children want this additional contact and the children's wishes are taken into account. The IRO's contact is likely to be more frequent if the child is not in a settled permanent placement.

7. Impact of the IRO Service on Outcomes for Children and Young People

7.1 All authorities are required to have in place a procedure for escalating concerns. In Bromley there is a process for escalating concerns between IROs and the Local Authority. This is used if the IRO has more serious concerns about the progress of the care plan and has not been able to resolve the issue informally with the case holding manager. The formal escalation process is initiated by the IRO and cannot be ended until the IRO is satisfied that the concern has been appropriately addressed and resolved. The Department's Escalation Policy is available in the Procedures Manual and has recently been updated. This document includes templates for the IRO to complete for each stage of the process.

7.2 The table below shows a significant increase in the number of formal escalations over the previous 2 years. This does not indicate a deterioration in social worker practice from previous years, but reflects the IRO service becoming more challenging of poor performance. Issues are addressed initially at the lowest level possible and only involve senior managers when the issue has not been successfully resolved. Examples of issues escalated over the past year are:

- delay in implementing significant Review decisions
- the Placement Order not having been rescinded
- delay in recording the PEP meeting
- a delay in completing the Connected Person assessment

- the Pathway Plan not having been updated
- social worker visits to the child being outside of the statutory timescale.

IRO Escalations

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Total no. of children where issues have been escalated	14	9	36
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Deputy Manager and resolved	11	7	26
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Group Manager and resolved	2	2	7
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Head of Service and resolved	1	0	3
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Assistant Director	0	0	0
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to CAFCASS*	0	0	0

7.3 Other practice issues may be resolved outside of the Escalation Procedure either through the IROs' midway monitoring or through informal raising of issues. A new template has been added to ICS to record informal resolution of concerns by the IRO.

7.4 IROs contribute to positive outcomes for children and young people in other ways. Below are a couple of case examples.

An IRO arranged work experience within the Council for two looked after young people. One has an interest in politics and shadowed a local MP including visiting the House of Commons. Another young person wants to be an architect. Work experience was arranged in the Planning Department for two weeks and included going out on site visits.

In a review a foster carer requested that a child accompany the family on a skiing holiday to France. Initially the mother refused and was reluctant to discuss further as neither she nor her children had previously been outside of the country. After discussion outside of the review and a further meeting with the IRO, the mother agreed to allow her daughter to go.

8. Making a Significant Contribution to Service Improvement for Looked After Children

8.1 The IRO Manager presents an Escalation and Midway Monitoring Report to the Senior Management Team on a quarterly basis. This outlines the IRO monitoring activity over the previous 3 months and gives examples of issues raised in relation to performance and outcomes for looked after children. This includes both issues relating to individual children and also concerns that are more generalised across the service to inform strategic planning.

8.2 The following are examples that were identified for service improvement:

Delay in care planning for young people with learning difficulties who are borderline in terms of meeting the threshold for a service from the Transition Team. This was addressed by the Head of Care and Resources arranging a meeting of the managers of the Independent Reviewing Service, the Leaving Care Team, Adults Learning Disability Team and the Transition Team. This resulted in a plan to achieve more timely and coordinated care planning.

Delay in completing assessments of Connected Persons. This was addressed by appointing a Deputy Manager in the Fostering Service with responsibility for Connected Persons assessments.

8.3 The Assistant Director and the Heads of Service for Children's Social Care are invited to meet with the Independent Reviewing Officers annually. It is an opportunity for two way feedback about how the Independent Reviewing Service can contribute to driving up performance in identified areas, and also for Senior Managers to hear first-hand from Independent Reviewing Officers about the challenges and recommendations for the service for looked after children.

8.4 A strong relationship between the Living in Care Council and the Independent Reviewing Service is also seen as essential in service improvement for looked after children. Nobody is in a better position to know what the service is like on a day to day basis than the children and young people who are in receipt of the service. The Living in Care Council's wish is to meet with representatives from the Independent Reviewing Service on a quarterly basis.

8.5 This IRO Annual Report is also an important tool for improving the service for looked after children. For this reason this Report will be presented to:

- the Senior Management Team for Children's Social Care
- the Living in Care Council
- the Director
- the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group
- the Lead Member for Children's Services
- Care Services and Education Portfolio members
- Bromley Safeguarding Children Board.

In addition it is a public document and will be published on the Bromley website and the Bromley Looked After Children website.

9. Quality Assurance of the Independent Reviewing Service

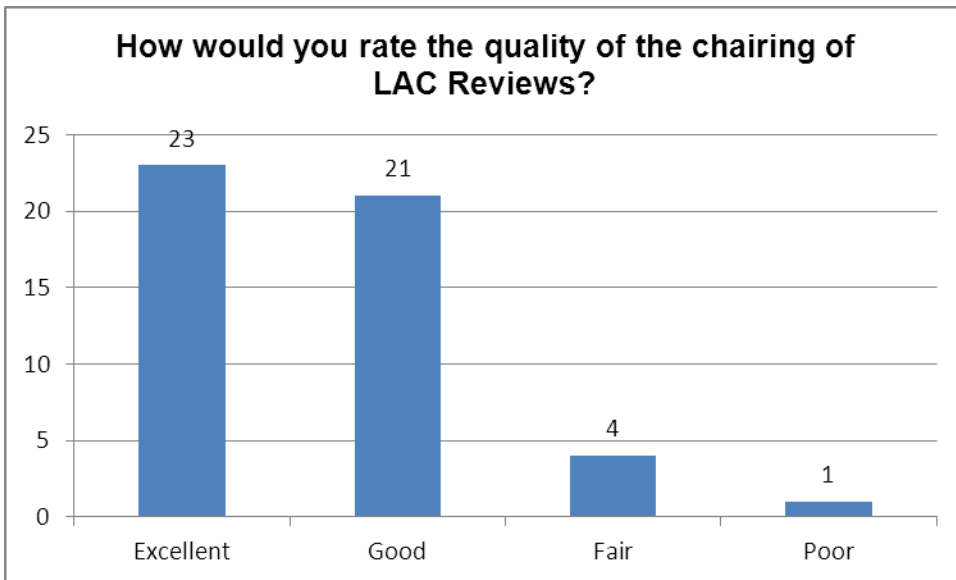
9.1 If the IRO Service is to be successful in making a positive impact on outcomes for looked after children, it is essential to ensure that the local authority has a robust and effective IRO Service.

9.2 The IRO Manager observes each IRO chairing a Review as a minimum of once per year. The observation is recorded on a template designed specifically for the purpose. The IRO is given verbal feedback followed by a copy of the completed observation template.

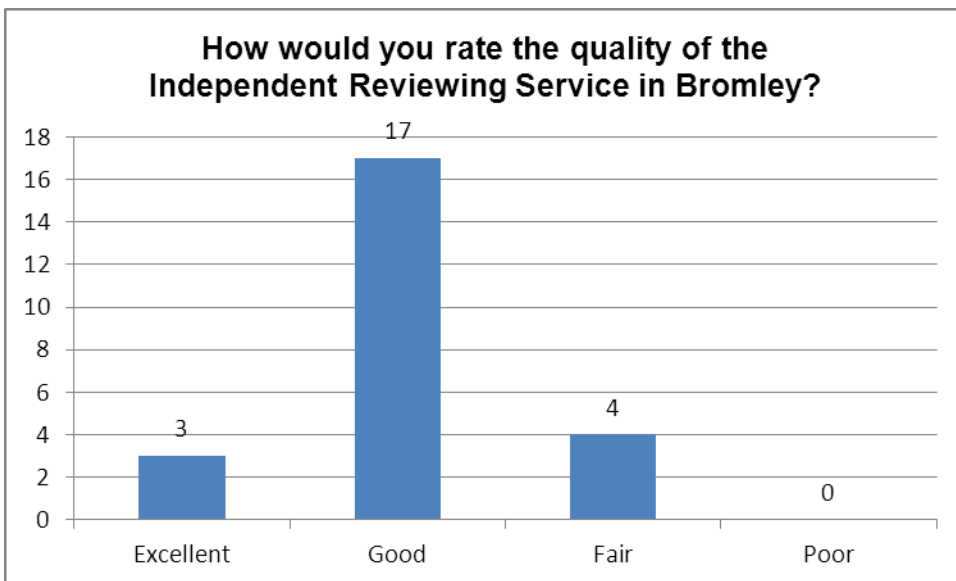
9.3 The IRO Manager regularly audits Review records against agreed standards. The findings are shared with the IROs to improve practice.

9.4 Feedback about the Independent Reviewing Service has been sought from stakeholders. Written questionnaires were distributed to foster carers, social workers and Children's Guardians in March 2014.

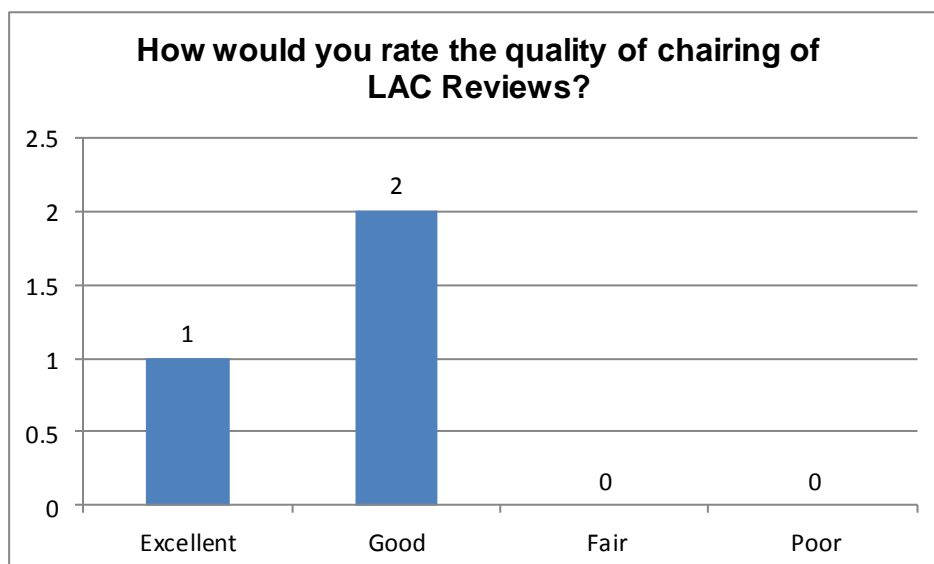
- There was an excellent return rate from foster carers of 40% (48 completed questionnaires of a possible 120).
- The return rate from social workers was adequate at 21% (26 completed questionnaires of a possible 124)
- The return rate from Children's Guardians of 12% was disappointing in spite of reminders being sent to Cafcass. Only 3 completed questionnaires from 26 although a number of Guardians had not been allocated to any Bromley children and were therefore unable to respond. It is important to be mindful of this low return rate when analysing the feedback to the service from Cafcass. The results of the feedback are displayed in the tables in Appendix A.



Feedback from Foster Carers



Feedback from Social Workers



Feedback from Guardians

9.5 Examples of what foster carers said:

I have always found the service to be very professional and helpful

..both tough enough to ensure the social workers get things done but patient enough to be great with the children.

IROs need to listen to foster carers more

..all very supportive towards helping the children

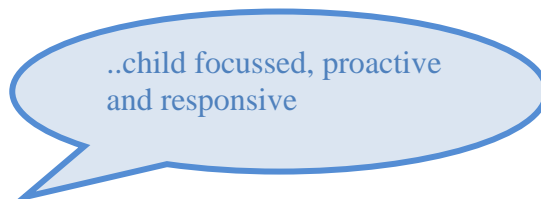
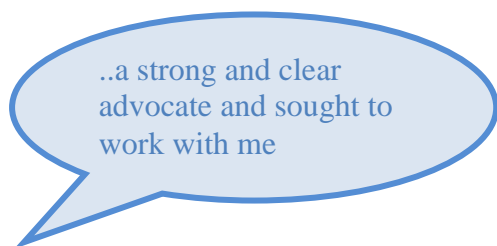
And social workers:

..very helpful not just at LAC reviews but for consultation/case discussion

...very good at ensuring the children's views are gathered

Different IROs work in different ways

And Guardians:



9.5 Feedback about the Independent Reviewing Service has been obtained from the young people on the Living in Care Council. Further feedback from children and parents is going to be obtained by a service independent of the local authority. There has been successful tendering for this service however unfortunately the feedback is not available for this Report.

9.6 The young people said they liked;

- The structure of Reviews
- It is the same people who are invited each time
- The option of being able to chair their own Review
- The Review gathers all the information together.

9.7 The young people also identified some areas for improvement:

- In the main they would welcome more contact with their IRO between Reviews and it was mixed about whether they would know how to contact their IRO.

What have we done?

This has been addressed by IROs giving their 'business card' again to children and young people, not just to the newly looked after children. The business card includes the contact details for the IRO. IROs are making more contact with children between reviews. IROs are contacting children and sometimes arranging a visit to children between reviews.

- Children would find it helpful to have the Review process explained to them again. They felt there was an assumption that because they had attended a number of Reviews they therefore fully understood the process.

What have we done?

IROs are discussing this when they meet with children and young people before Reviews.

- Sometimes information is copied and pasted from previous reports and reviews and this information may no longer be correct. Audits of reviews had also identified this as an area for improvement.

What have we done?

IROs have been reminded to be very careful about what information is copied and pasted and to read through it carefully to check it still applies

- They thought it would be useful for the IROs to receive their consultation booklets prior to the Review if possible.

What have we done?

The accompanying letter which is sent out with the consultation booklet has been amended to reflect this. Still relatively few are returned prior to the Review however IROs make a point of going through the consultation booklet with the child or young person in the pre-meet.

- They felt that sometimes the Review was more for the adults' benefit and not for their benefit. They described the adults sitting round discussing them.

What have we done?

It is hoped that this will be addressed in part by increasing the confidence of more young people to chair their own Reviews through the training that will be provided. IROs are also mindful of this feedback when chairing Reviews.

9.8 In May 2013 Bromley volunteered to be one of two pilot sites for a Peer Review of their services for looked after children. Their finding was that "IRO reports were normally produced in a timely fashion" however the "quality of IRO decisions was variable and lacked a solid care planning foundation in identifying milestones with related actions/timeline".

What have we done?

The IRO Report template was amended so that decisions clearly identify the desired outcome, how this will be achieved and who is responsible, the timescale and the outcome indicator for knowing whether the outcome has been achieved.

A Young Person's View of their IRO



10. Recruiting, Retaining and Developing Skilled and Knowledgeable Staff

10.1 The IRO Service in Bromley has a very good record of retaining staff, both IROs and the business support staff. In the past 3 years only one IRO has left the service approximately 18 months ago and was replaced by an internal candidate, initially as a secondment and then as a permanent IRO. This has resulted in children benefitting from continuity of allocated IRO.

10.2 Learning is shared through bi-monthly group supervision. Changes in legislation, recent case law and new procedures are discussed as well as practice issues. The group supervision is in addition to monthly individual supervision. Reflective practice is promoted through IROs auditing their own work. The case is also audited by the manager of the IRO service and the learning is subsequently discussed in supervision. Feedback from observations of reviews is also a useful learning tool.

10.3 Six days of training specifically for the IROs was commissioned during the last year. The IROs took it in turns to present a case to the group. The role of the IRO, care planning and outcomes for children were then discussed in depth. This training enhanced the IROs' analytical skills and encouraged them to reflect on cases in different ways. This learning has been continued through group supervision, discussions between IROs and through self-auditing. The IROs also take responsibility for their own learning and service development through researching new ideas and bringing them to group supervision for discussion.

10.4 IROs are actively encouraged to attend relevant training. Examples of training attended over the past year include the BSCB annual conference around Child Sexual Exploitation; Attachment, Trauma and Behaviour; Domestic Abuse Awareness; Public Law Outline; Young People with Undocumented Immigration Status and the London IRO Annual Conference. As part of their social worker registration with the HCPC, the IROs must maintain a record of their continuous professional development outlining all activities that have contributed to their ongoing learning.

11. Safeguarding children and young people in our care

11.1. The statutory requirements for the IRO in relation to safeguarding are found in 3.40 of the IRO Handbook.

'In most cases where a child who is the subject of a child protection plan becomes looked after it will no longer be necessary to maintain the child protection plan. There are however a relatively few cases where safeguarding issues will remain and a looked after child should also have a child protection plan. These cases are likely to be where a local authority obtains an interim care order in family proceedings but the child who is the subject of a child protection plans remains at home, pending the outcome of the final hearing, or where a child's behaviour is likely to result in significant harm to themselves or others.'

Where a looked after child remains the subject of a child protection plan it is expected that there will be a single planning and reviewing process, led by the IRO, which meets the requirements of both the Regulations and the guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children'

11.2 In 2013/14 29 children were subject to joint Child Protection /LAC plans. For the majority of these children the Child Protection Plan was ended at the first or second Review after they became looked after. They were either safeguarded by the legal proceedings or were no longer at risk of significant harm because their circumstances had changed by becoming looked after.

11.3. The IRO will address any safeguarding concerns that are raised within the reviewing and monitoring process. Young people who are assessed to be at risk of sexual exploitation are referred to the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel which meets monthly. This Panel decides whether a Multi-Agency Planning (MAP) meeting should be called to consider the concerns in more detail. Relevant professionals working with the young person are invited to attend. Over the last year Bromley has commissioned Barnardo's to work with young people who are assessed as being at significant risk of sexual exploitation. Weekly sessions over a period of 6 months are offered to the young person. The IRO will ensure the decisions of the MAP meeting dovetail with the decisions of the Review. The MASE Panel was set up in July 2013 and a total of 26 young people have been referred to the Panel of whom 5 were looked after. 3 looked after young people have gone on to be considered at a MAP meeting.

11.4 Safeguarding also encompasses children and young people who go missing. The IRO should be advised by the allocated social worker if a child has gone missing. The IRO monitors whether the Missing Children Procedure is being followed and will raise concerns either informally or through the Escalation Procedure as necessary.

11.5 Other safeguarding concerns for looked after children include gang affiliation, substance misuse and children who are at risk of offending.

12 Some Recent Changes that have impacted on the Service for Looked After Children

12.1 **Delegated Authority** aims to normalise the experience of children growing up in care and reduce their sense of difference. Placement Plans must specify who can give permission for things such as overnight stays with friends, school trips and holidays. Birth parents and/or others with Parental Responsibility must be involved in the agreement about what decisions can be delegated to the foster carer. IROs must ensure there is a clarity about what decision making has been delegated.

12.2 The Children and Families Act 2014 April 2014

- gives some young people in care the option to stay with their foster families. Bromley has introduced a new Staying Put policy. As young people approach the age of 18 the IROs will ensure the option of 'staying put' is discussed at Reviews when appropriate.
- a maximum 26 week time limit has been introduced for completing care and supervision proceedings (except where an extension is needed to resolve the proceedings justly). IROs will monitor whether the care planning is staying on track.
- sets out the statutory requirement for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. If the child is looked after a copy of this plan should be provided to the IRO and the decisions of the Review will dovetail with the EHC plan.
- requires every local authority to have a virtual school head to champion the education of looked after children. IROs work in tandem with the virtual school head and her team to improve the educational attainment of looked after children.

12.3 The Children's Homes and Looked after Children Regulations 2013

strengthens the safeguarding of looked after children placed in residential homes by specifying they must have a policy regarding missing children and they are required to notify the police and the local authority when a child is suspected of being a victim of sexual exploitation. Children's homes must appoint an independent person to visit and report on the children's homes. IROs will need to monitor these changes are being adhered to.

13. Progress against service developments identified for 2012/13

13.1 In the 2012/13 IRO Annual report the following service developments were identified for 2013/14:

"The IRO Service will continue to improve their relationships and working partnerships with stakeholders. The IRO service will have a 'stall' at the Market Place event for Looked After children and young people to promote the understanding of the IRO role which will be attended by Looked After children and young people, their carers and other professionals".

What have we done?

The questionnaires sent to stakeholders has evidenced some very good areas of practice and areas for improvement in relation to working in partnership however generally the feedback was very positive. The IRO Service had a stall at the Market Place event for looked after children as planned.

"Two themed audits for Looked After and Leaving Care Services in 2012/13 identified two areas for improvement in the IRO service. Providing a more consistent recording of SMART review decisions and being more ambitious in the long term decision making for young people. A Peer Review of our Care

Practice in May 2013 gave a key message to the IRO service that there was a need to continue improvements to IRO practice and increase clarity of their accountabilities to support improvement in basic practice. There will be additional training and support to the IROs in 2013/14 with an action plan for improvement in place by June 2013”.

What have we done?

Review decisions are improving in terms of being SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timescales). However it is recognised that this is still not sufficiently consistent and there needs to be continuing improvement in this area. Equally the decision making is not consistently ambitious for children and young people. The additional training was provided as described above and an action plan for the IRO Service is in place.

14. Future Service Developments for the IRO Service in 2014/15

14.1 All Review decisions will be consistently SMART and ambitious in their outcomes for children and young people. This will be achieved through discussion in supervision and both auditing and self-auditing of decisions.

14.2 IROs will ensure that for every child there is a Delegated Authority agreement when appropriate.

14.3 IROs will ensure that all children understand the IRO role. They will negotiate with individual children and young people on their caseload how they will maintain contact with each other and include this in the recording of the child's Review.

14.4 Design new Review consultation documents for parents/carers to replace the current documents which are outdated.

Virginia Read
June 2014

APPENDIX A

Table A: Foster Carer Feedback

Are you informed by the first Review of the IRO's name and contact details for every Bromley looked after child who is placed with you?											
Always	24	Usually	17	Sometimes	1	Occasionally	3	Never	2		
Are you invited to attend the child's LAC Review?											
Always	45	Usually	3	Sometimes		Occasionally		Never			
Do you receive a consultation form to complete prior to the LAC Review?											
Always	27	Usually	16	Sometimes	2	Occasionally	3	Never			
Are you sent a copy of the LAC Review record?											
Always	33	Usually	11	Sometimes	3	Occasionally	1	Never			
How would you rate the quality of the chairing of LAC Reviews?											
Excellent	23	Good	21	Fair	4	Poor	1				
Do looked after children (of sufficient age and understanding) know how to contact their IRO?											
Always	11	Usually	14	Sometimes	4	Occasionally	1	Never	5	N/A	12

Table B: Social Worker Feedback

Do looked after children know how to contact their IRO?										
Always	2	Usually	8	Sometimes	7	Occasionally	3	Never	3	
Do IROs encourage children and young people to participate throughout their Reviews?										
Always	8	Usually	10	Sometimes	3	Occasionally	4	Never		
Does the information you share at Reviews contribute to good outcomes for children and young people?										
Always	4	Usually	16	Sometimes	4	Occasionally	2	Never		
Do you think the IROs provide robust scrutiny and appropriate challenge of the Care Plan?										
Always	6	Usually	14	Sometimes	6	Occasionally		Never		
Do IROs facilitate examination of whether the placement meets the assessed needs of the child or young person?										
Always	7	Usually	15	Sometimes	2	Occasionally	1	Never		
The IROs have a duty to monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to Looked After Children. How well do you think the IROs do this?										
Very well	9		Quite well	15			Poorly			

Are IROs suitably challenging of other agencies?									
Always	3	Usually	8	Sometimes	6	Occasionally	4	Never	
Are IROs consulted about the Final Care Plan in Court Proceedings?									
Always	4	Usually	4	Sometimes		Occasionally		Never	
How would you rate the quality of the Independent Reviewing Service in Bromley?									
Excellent	3	Good	17	Fair	4	Poor			

Table C: Guardian Feedback

Are you informed promptly of the IRO's name and contact details for every Bromley looked after child in Proceedings?									
Always	1	Usually	1	Sometimes	1	Occasionally		Never	
Are you invited to attend the child's LAC Review?									
Always		Usually	2	Sometimes	1	Occasionally		Never	
Are you sent a copy of the LAC Review record?									
Always		Usually	1	Sometimes	2	Occasionally		Never	
Does the IRO alert you to any significant issues that arise in planning and review meetings?									
Always	1	Usually		Sometimes	2	Occasionally		Never	
How would you rate the quality of the chairing of LAC Reviews?									
Excellent	1	Good	2	Fair		Poor			
In your experience do looked after children (of sufficient age and understanding) know how to contact their IRO?									
Always		Usually	1	Sometimes	2	Occasionally		Never	
At the end of proceedings is there a discussion with the IRO identifying any outstanding issues?									
Always		Usually	1	Sometimes	2	Occasionally		Never	