Report No.
CS17087

London Borough of Bromley

PART ONE - PUBLIC

Decision Maker:	**CARE SERVICES POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**
Date:	**Tuesday 10th January 2017**
Decision Type:	Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key
Title:	**BROMLEY INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**
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Chief Officer:	Janet Bailey, Interim Social Care Director, Education and Care Services
Ward:	Borough-wide

1. Reason for report

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 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.

1.2 This report presents to the Care Services Policy development and Scrutiny Committee details of activity and development of the IRO Service over the past year. It further summarises how the IRO Service monitors the performance of the local authority in relation to its children looked after. Explain why we have developed the strategy and what the committee might find interesting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the Annual report (attached at Appendix A).

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: N/A

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy: Statutory
2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable
2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable
3. Budget head/performance centre: Children's Social Care
4. Total current budget for this head: £N/A
5. Source of funding: Approved Revenue budget.

Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): N/A
2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: N/A

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
2. Call-in: Not Applicable: No Executive decision.

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): N/A

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: N/A

APPENDIX A

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) SERVICE 2015 – 2016

ANNUAL REPORT

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

The report contains a summary of the work completed by Bromley Independent Reviewing Officers between 1st April 2015 and 31st March 2016

Report Author – Wendy Kimberley, Group Manager
CSC Quality Improvement & Safeguarding
Education and Care Services

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Independent Review Officers' (IRO) role in Bromley will remain subject to continued improvement following the Ofsted single inspection in April 2016. This report is written in context of the overall improvement plan and details work undertaken in 2015/16 and objectives for 2016/17. Since the inspection the IRO service has been involved in improvements in particular the establishment of the Early Permanence Panel which scrutinises the care plan of all newly looked after children.

The IRO service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were updated June 2015. 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 looked after and for challenging drift and delay.

1.2 This report provides a summary of how the IRO service monitors the performance of the local authority in relation to its children looked after. 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 children looked after 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 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*.

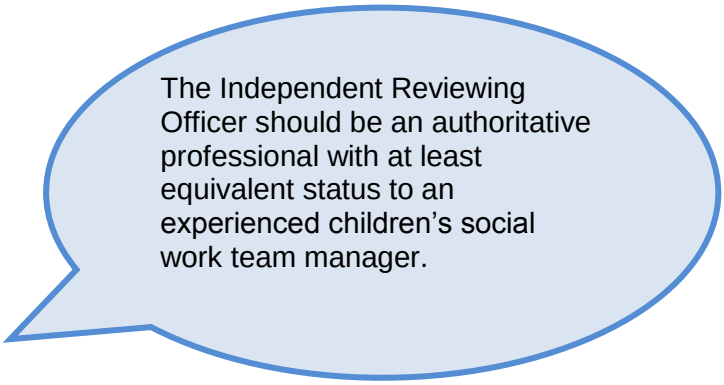
2.3 As part of the monitoring function, the IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent. The IRO should highlight any areas of poor practice. This should include identifying patterns of concern emerging not just around individual children but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

3. The Independent Reviewing Team

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

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



- Our five IROs have extensive relevant social work experience of 18 years or more.
- There are three male IROs and two female IROs.
- There are three IROs from a BME background
- One IRO has 8 years of experience of working with children with disabilities prior to joining the IRO Service 8 years ago.

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3.3 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 2015-16 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 and those authorities who have significantly higher have been awarded inadequate judgements in the single inspection framework.

3.4 A child or young person coming into care will be allocated an IRO within 24 hours of placement. 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 them, discuss the role of the IRO and the purpose of Reviews. The IROs try to achieve this whenever possible.

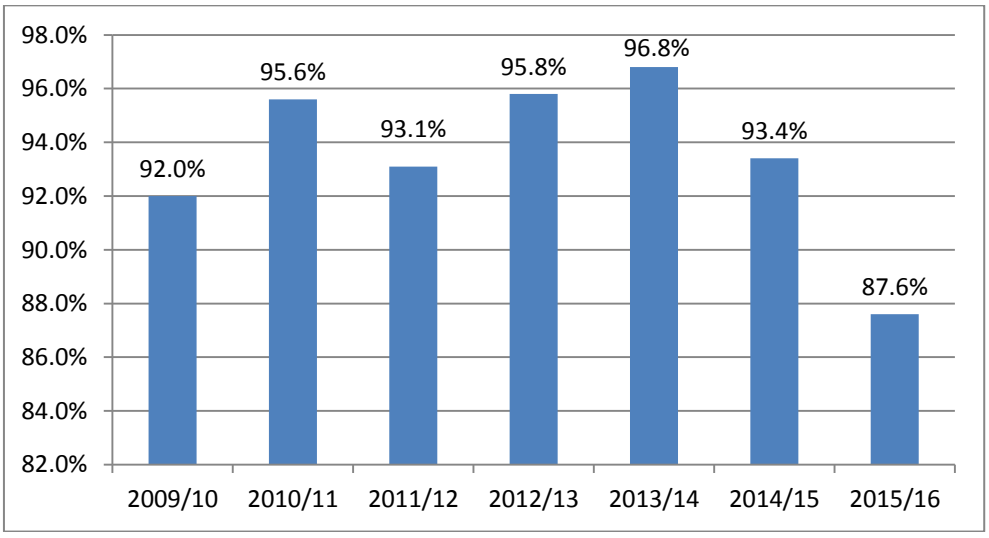
3.5 A child looked after will retain the same allocated IRO for their duration in care unless the IRO leaves the employment of the local authority. In exceptional circumstances there may be a change of IRO.

4. Activity of the IRO Service

4.1 From April 2015 to March 2016 the total number of looked after children has fluctuated between 264 and 286. The fluctuation between these points has remained fairly consistent since 2010. There have been a total of 161 new admissions into care (from 150 children) during the year and 141 episodes of care have ceased (134 children left care). Children may leave care because they have been adopted or placed on a special guardianship or a child arrangement order. Some young people will have turned 18, others will have returned home.

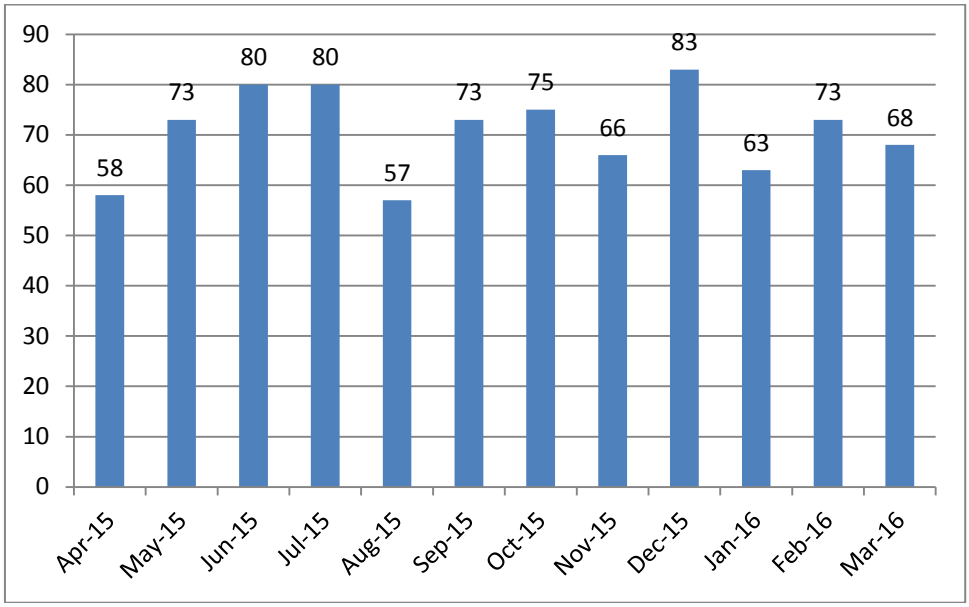
4.2 The total number of individual children and young people's LAC reviews held in 2015/16 was 849. 87.6% of these Reviews were held within statutory timescales. The Service's target is 100%. A key issue impacting on this figure are:

- Placements with Connected Persons not recorded as S.20



% of CLA cases which were reviewed within required timescales by year

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.



Number of LAC reviews April 2015 - March 2016

4.4 The Bromley IRO Service is supported by 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 the responsibility of ensuring that the initial and subsequent health checks take place within the statutory timescales. They send out the paperwork for children looked after medicals and for entering data for medical and dental appointments including adoption medicals.

5. The Children in our Care

5.1 As at 31 March 2016 49.3% of our children looked after were placed with Bromley foster carers. 10.1% were with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) foster carers. A further 5.7% were with extended family members or friends, known as Connected Persons Placements. A further 9.1% of children looked after were in residential placements and 6.3% were in a pre-adoptive placement.

5.2 Children's Social Care is committed to improving permanency for all children looked after which is outlined in the Department's Permanency Strategy. In 2015/16 15 children were adopted, a decrease from 20 in 2014/15.

5.3 As at 31st March 2015, 11 children were subject to an adoption plan and awaiting an adoption placement (carried over from the previous financial year). A further 23 children became subject to Adoption plans in 2015/2016.

Out of the total of 34 children (11+23):

- 17 children were matched with an adoptive family during the year 2015/16
- 2 children had their adoption plan rescinded during 2015/16
- 15 children were actively being found an adoption placement as at 31st March 2016.

5.4 There were 18 children looked after placed with prospective adopters during the year**.** Out of the 18 children placed in the year 2015/16:

- 4 children were granted the Adoption order during the year
- 14 children were in their adoptive placements as at 31st March 2016 and we were working with them and their adopters to ensure they achieve permanency through an adoption order in 2016/17

5.5 13 children left care on SGO, 6 to former foster carers and 9 to other carers

5.6 Local authorities have, for a number of years, had an obligation on them to identify sufficient placements locally for their children looked after. 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.

5.7 The changes to the regulations introduced 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.

5.8 As of 31st March 2016, 156 children were placed outside of the borough boundaries. Of these 156 children:

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

- 18 (31.5%) were placed with foster carers
- 6 (10.5%) were placed with connected person foster carers
- 1 (2%) were placed in preparation for independence accommodation
- 31 (54%) were placed in residential accommodation.
- 1 (2%) were placed with a parent

Of the 31 children and young people placed in residential accommodation:

- 20 (65%) are children with a disability

In relation to the types of placements for the 23 children placed in residential accommodation:

- 2 (6%) were placed in secure/YOI settings
- 4 (13%) were placed in mother & baby units
- 24 (77%) were in children's homes

5.9 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.

6. Children and Young People's Participation

6.1 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. 98% of children and young people aged over 4 participated in their Review. They may have participated by attending their Review and speaking for themselves, or they may have conveyed their views via the mind of my own (MOMO) advocacy app or through an advocate or their IRO.

6.2 Some young people are encouraged to chair or co-chair their own Review.

Since January 2015 children and young people have been asked to complete a questionnaire following Reviews to ensure we understand we are meeting their needs and to help us make improvements in the way reviews are held.

6.3 In partnership with the Living in Care Council the pack given to every newly child looked after 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 make every effort to contact 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 been updated. This document includes templates for the IRO to complete for each stage of the process.

7.2 The table below shows the number of formal escalations over the previous two years. 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.

7.3 Since April 2016 Heads of Service are automatically copied into all escalations and the number of escalations has increased sharply in line with Ofsted recommendations.

IRO Escalations

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Total no. of children where issues have been escalated	36	36	34
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Deputy Manager and resolved	26	30	26
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Group Manager and resolved	7	5	8
Total no. of children where issues were escalated to the Head of Service and resolved	3	1	2
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. Increasingly IROs are meeting and discussing concerns at earlier stages and using informal processes to resolve straightforward issues.

7.4 The work of the IRO service fits with the aims and objectives in the corporate parenting strategy and the group manager attends the strategy group. The group manager and active involvement officer gave a presentation at the newly reconfigured board in September 2015 on the aims and objectives of the corporate parenting strategy

7.5 IROs participate in auditing casefiles and contribute to learning through dissemination of the audits with social workers and partner agencies.

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

8.1 IRO monitoring activity is recorded and taken to senior managers and gives examples raised in relation to performance and outcomes for children looked after. This includes both points relating to individual children and also concerns that are more generalised across the service to inform strategic planning.

8.2 The Assistant Director and the Heads of Service for Children's Social Care are invited to meet with the Independent Reviewing Officers twice a year. 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.

8.3 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. We plan to allocate an IRO to be the link person and the Group Manager meets regularly with the participation worker.

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

- the Senior Management Team for Children's Social Care
- the Living in Care Council
- 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 Children Looked After 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.

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. As a consequence of observation feedback this year the IROs have focused on SMART care planning.

9.2 Use of MOMO has helped the service prioritise young people's needs and for young people to share good news about what's happening in their lives while in care for instance one young person shared good news about being in the top set for maths!

- This year feedback about the reviews has been requested at every review meeting and children/young people and their parents and carers have provided written comments which are collated into quarterly reports.
- At the end of March there were 141 completed Looked After Children Review Evaluation Forms – and of those: 28% (44) were from children and young people, 28% (44) were from parents, 44% (69) were from carers
- 91%) felt able to say what they think at the review meeting - nobody said that they did not feel able to say what they think
- 80% felt prepared for the review meeting
- 93% felt that going to the review was useful
- 77% felt that that the review will make things better for them
- 94% felt listened to at the review

In summary during 2015/16 more parents and carers think that the review is useful and will make things better for them. Between November and March all children felt listed to at the review meeting

9.3 Examples of what young people said in preparation for their reviews via MOMO

10. Recruiting, Retaining and Developing Skilled and Knowledgeable Staff

10.1 The IRO Service in Bromley has had a good record of retaining staff, both IROs and the business support staff. However in 2015/16 despite having two vacancies we have recruited to 1 and have a long term locum staff member in the other.

10.2 Learning is shared through 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. Feedback from observations of reviews is also a useful learning tool. In addition all IROs have been trained in using the signs of safety model so that we can use this approach in supervision and reviews

10.3 IROs are actively encouraged to attend relevant training. Examples of training attended over the past year include the BSCB annual conference 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. A team away session allowed for focus on the quality of care plans

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 A small percentage of 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 Planning (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. Progress on Developments for 2015/16

12.1 Embed Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children March 2015, including provision of Health Passports for 18 year old care leavers
Outcome: The initiative of health passports for 18 year olds has been successfully introduced

12.2 Incorporate statutory guidance permanence, long term foster placements and ceasing to be a looked after child March 2015
Outcome: A themed audit on the effectiveness of planning for children who return home in planned for November 2016

12.3 Following the YOS Inspection in February 2015 emphasis should be placed on effective communication between IROs and YOS workers so that offending behaviour and care needs are comprehensively understood and worked with.
Outcome: Regular updates on the effectiveness of joint working between children's social care and youth offending service have been delivered to the corporate parenting board and good communication between YOS and the IRO service has been maintained.

12.4 IRO's monitoring and reviewing plans to ensure they are SMART and appropriate to the level of involvement with partner agencies including YOS
Outcome: the IROs ensured that youth offending information was available at all reviews and that there is better join up between the services for the benefit of all young people involved.

13. IRO work priorities 2015-16 included

- Complete Reviews in timescales
- Making sure the young person's views are fully incorporated into plans which includes introducing mind of my own app MOMO
- Promoting introduction of the third PEP meeting
- Promoting the advocacy service
- Holding reviews at the child's placement except in exceptional circumstances
- Introducing signs of safety methodology into review meetings so that the percentage of young people who feel their review is helpful increases.
- Ensuring that invitations to YOS and attendance by YOS staff at children looked after and care leaver reviews is monitored and added value recognised in the care plan
- Work with CLA and LCT managers to consider the suitability of all placements over 20 miles from Bromley.

13.1 Progress

The IRO service completed 88% reviews in timescale and there has been a good increase of reviews held within the child's home environment. The IROs have prioritised the needs of children and young people so that they can meaningfully engage in the review process. The percentage of young people using the mind of my own app has been good and the comments in section show our young people are able to express their views about how they feel and what they would like to happen. In addition members of LINCC attend one of the IROs team meetings to embed the principles of the Bromley Pledge.

Training in signs of safety has laid the ground work for introduction of using the approach reviews and the service aim to do this consistently in the autumn 2016.

IROs have promoted the advocacy service and at the end of March 2016 45 young people had made use of the advocacy service.

Attendance by YOS workers at reviews has increased and joint working continues to be a priority.

The service recognises the need to escalate and challenge practice in a robust and consistent manner and this is a particular so that these challenges can be part of improving poor practice.

14. The Improvement Plan

The IROs are 100% committed to improvements in the service and contributed to the improvement plan. Our priorities include the following for 2016/17

- Review and revise the existing the escalation processes so that these are routinely utilised by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- Mandatory training session for all IROs and GM QI on practice standards and requirements of their role.
- An independent quality assurance review and audit of CLA Reviews, to scrutinise and challenge IRO practice and ensure CLA reviews meet statutory requirements. Review to include consideration of IRO caseloads and administrative systems, quality of minutes and children's consultation and mid-way monitoring. Report to identify key areas for improvement and a SMART IRO improvement action plan to be monitored by the GM QI.
- Quarterly report of progress against IRO improvement action plan to the Improvement Board.
- Continue to embed the work and monitoring of the Early Permanence Panel.
- Joint work with Bexley IRO service to provide peer challenge.

Wendy Kimberley
November 2016