

# Annual Report

Independent Reviewing Officers for Looked After Children  
2017-2018



THE LONDON BOROUGH

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## Purpose of Report

An annual report of the Independent Reviewing Service for looked after children is required in accordance with the *Children and Young Person's Act 2008* and provides a summary of the work undertaken by the IROs for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018. It also provides themes for further service improvement for the financial year 2018-2019.

## Introduction

- 1.1 The Group Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service was appointed in February 2018 and has brought stability and leadership to the Service.
- 1.2 The appointment of an Independent Review Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. In March 2010, the government issued new statutory guidance for local authorities and IROs on care planning and reviewing arrangements for looked-after-children as contained in *Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Statutory Guidance*. This came into force from April 2011. The IRO handbook 2010 supplements this and provides guidance to IRO's about how they should discharge their distinct responsibilities to Looked After Children (LAC).
- 1.3 The annual report is a management responsibility as set out in the IRO Handbook 2010, Chapter 7, Strategic and Management responsibilities where Section 7.11 states; "The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting board. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed".
- 1.4 Every parent wants the best for their child and as a corporate parent, Bromley Council is working to ensure that the aspirations for 'our' looked after children are healthy, safe and happy, do well at school, enjoy good relationships with their peers and can grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives.

- 1.5 Each child has their own IRO from the time they start to be looked after. The IROs role is to bring rigour and challenge to care planning, escalate contentious issues, drive plans for permanence and monitor the performance of the local authority as a corporate parent. Above all the IRO must make sure the child's current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.
- 1.6 This report explores the local authority's responsibilities as outlined above.
- 1.7 In 2017/18 Ofsted undertook a number of monitoring visits to Bromley Children's Services. The letter published on the 29 November 2017 stated:
- 1.8 *'The local authority is making steady progress towards ensuring that it makes timely and appropriate decisions in order to achieve permanent placements for children who cannot live with their birth families. The systems and processes in place provide effective oversight of the progression and timeliness of plans. Oversight occurs through regular permanency planning meetings and the early permanence panel, which is chaired by the head of fostering, adoption and resources'. (Ofsted fifth monitoring visit, October 2017)*
- 1.9 *'Senior management oversight of the quality of practice for children looked after is good. Regular auditing of cases undertaken by all senior managers identifies areas for improvement. Training and support are revised accordingly, to meet emerging themes and target areas for improvement. The overview of audit findings is increasingly outcome focused, specific and measurable, and is informing priority actions. This is improving practice for children looked after in Bromley'. (Ofsted fifth monitoring visit, October 2017)*
- 1.10 *'.. children looked after in out of borough placements receive visits more frequently than the statutory minimum. This has led to more positive relationships and effective support'. (Ofsted third monitoring visit, October 2017)*
- 1.11 *'In nearly all cases seen on this visit, the social workers, independent reviewing officers, and personal advisors, demonstrate they know the young people well'. (Ofsted third monitoring visit, October 2017)*

## **2. Profile of the Independent Reviewing Service in Bromley**

- 2.1 The IROs are placed within the Quality Assurance Service in the Children's Social Care Division of the Children and Young People's Directorate to maintain their independence.
- 2.2 The Team is comprised of 5 full time IROs and 1 part time fostering IRO who are managed by the Group Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. The fostering IRO conducts the annual review of Bromley foster carers to ensure they are meeting fostering standards and providing good parenting to children living in care. There is one Business Support Officer who is managed by the Senior Business Support Officer. In 2016 Ofsted deemed that the IROs have failed to challenge the local authority in cases of drift and delay in implementation of care plans. Since then, the IRO Team has had a service review and an audit of the individual IROs practice. An action plan is now in place with a focus on building knowledge, skills and abilities of the IROs. The supervision process and staff appraisal picks up and addresses concerns in relation to competency and ability to perform the role. There is now high support and high challenge to IROs to improve outcomes for children and make a real difference to their lives.
- 2.3 The team reflects the diversity of the looked after population in Bromley and requires that all IROs have the skills and ability to meet the needs of children from diverse communities.
- 2.4 Guidance from the IRO Handbook outlines that each IRO should have a caseload between 50 to 70 children. During the period of this report the IROs had an average caseload of approximately 60 children.
- 2.5 The IROs have been linked to specific social work teams to act as a point of contact for advice, information and to ensure effective planning for looked after children remains a primary focus. Although these "links" are in place, their effectiveness has been hindered by the instability in the workforce and the IROs not being as robust in helping to improve care planning and outcomes for looked after children and contributing to improvements across the local authority.

### 3. Corporate Parenting Board

- 3.1 The Deputy Leader is the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and is proactive in ensuring the Council and its partners as corporate parents are demonstrating a strong commitment to ensuring children and young people growing up in care receive what they need into adulthood.
- 3.2 The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to ensure the Council with its partners effectively discharges its responsibilities as Corporate Parents to all children and young people looked after and care leavers.
- 3.3 The Corporate Parenting board is made up of representatives of the Council, its partner agencies and members of the LinCC and is influencing development and improvement in services. The Board is jointly chaired by the Portfolio Holder and the Chair of LInCC
- 3.4 As a Corporate Parent to all children and young people looked after and care leavers the Council and its partners must act as a responsible and good parent.

### 4. Voice and Influence of Children and Young People



4.1 Children and young people have the opportunity to participate in decisions and activities that shape and influence practice, policies and services that can impact on their lives. Some examples of this are as follows:

- Three care leavers are members of the Fostering and Adoption Panel and actively participate in panel meetings.
- Co-Chair the Corporate Parenting Board
- Two members of LinCC attended the Bromley Youth Council (BYC) manifesto event on the 8th March.
- The previous Chair of LinCC, received a Bromley Mayors Young Volunteer Award on the 15th March for his contributions to LinCC over the past 6 years.
- Co-Production Manager – Bromley CCG met with LinCC on the 22nd March and carried out a focus group on the current provision for Emotional Wellbeing.
- LinCC had their annual training residential from the 6th – 9th April 2018, which included their elections. A new Chair and Vice Chair were appointed and joined the Corporate Parenting Board on the 7th June 2017. The group selected their top 10 priorities for the year; which was shared with the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care Leavers and the Director of Children Services in order to gain support.
- Care leavers Forum had their first meeting on the 12 April 2017
- Celebration of Achievement Award held where all award winners received their certificates, award packs, and for those that attended the ceremony their photos with the Mayor.
- Corporate Parenting Fun Day held in July 2017 attended by over 200 attendees, including children and young people their foster carers , support workers, Councillors and Officers. It was a traditional family BBQ with sports day activities.
- LinCC worked in partnership with Councillors and managers to ensure that this year's event (29<sup>th</sup> July 2018) is as successful as the previous one..

4.2 The LinCC developed with Councillors the qualities they expect their corporate parents to have

**LinCC**

## Corporate Parenting Qualities

We asked our Elected Corporate Parents at the Councillor Induction Programme 2018, to name one quality of a good corporate parent. They told us all the things below and therefore this is what we expect of you all.

**We expect you all to:**

- Challenge yourself to be the best Corporate Parent you can**
- Ensure the system is working in the best interest of us**
- Show us empathy**
- Treat us like your own children**
- Be active listeners**
- Be open to learning from us**
- Have compassion**
- Be engaged and involved with us**
- Be ambitious for us**
- Gain an understanding of our experiences**
- Offer us support**
- Ensure we are safe**
- Show us love**
- Show concern for us**
- Take responsibility for us**
- Be caring**
- Be involved with LinCC**
- Be willing to change your views**

4.3 The following outlines the different ways Independent Reviewing Officers hear about the views of children and young people and understand what is important to them.

- Independent Reviewing Officer Visits

- Engagement in Reviews
- LinCC.
- Advocacy and independent Visitors
- Complaints
- Social Work reports
- Permanency Panels
- Placement Panel
- Corporate Parenting Panel Chairs
- Consultation documents

4.4 The IRO Service is committed to listening to the voice of looked after children and enabling them to influence and shape practice and service development. During 2017/2018 positive steps have been taken by the service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and to respond to the issues raised. We recognise that continued improvement is required and that we will need to revisit some issues to ensure changes are embedded.

## **5. Action taken to improve IRO Performance**

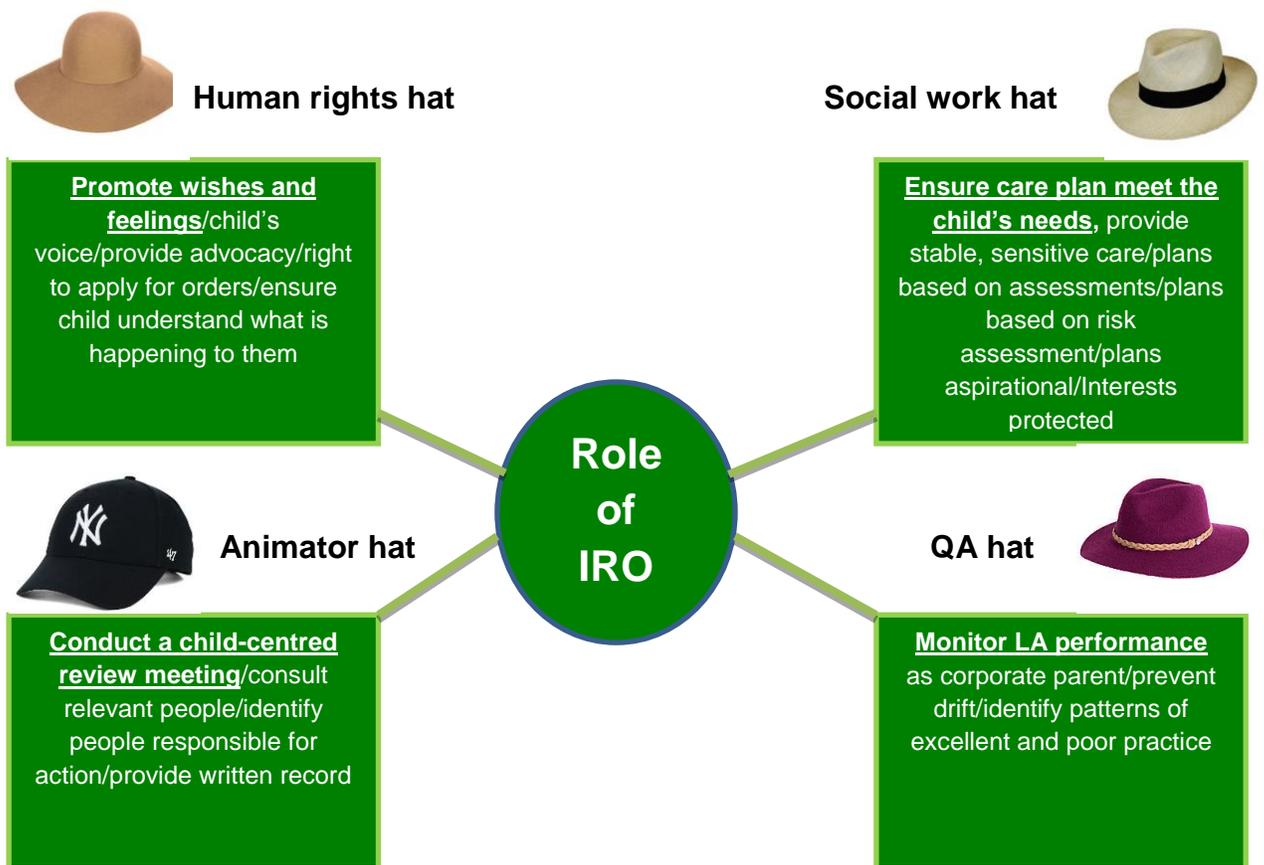
### ***Supervision, Training and Development for IRO's***

5.1 IROs receive monthly supervision and have access to informal supervision as and when needed. Managers remain committed to ensuring the level of supervision and support to the IROs is of the highest standard.

5.2 An IRO Service Audit and Service Review was undertaken in 2017 identified areas around their skills, knowledge and ability. Training was undertaken by an external consultant with direct observation of practice. 103 cases of children and young people

living in care were audited. IROs were provided with verbal and written feedback including analysis of their work around specific issues such as chairing child centred meetings, evidence of IRO challenge and mid-way monitoring by IROs. A number of recommendations were made to improve the service which are part of the service improvement plan and are actively being addressed in team meetings, training and supervision.

5.3 Training has been provided on the “4 hats” to look at the various role of the IRO and how reviews could be done differently to better engage children and young people.



**The four IRO hats**

5.4 The IROs also have fortnightly team based briefing on child care issues and new developments in practice. In the next reporting period a number of professional including the Head Teacher of the Virtual School, Fostering and Adoption Services and the Principal Lawyer among others will be invited to attend the IRO meetings for briefings to upskill IROs.

- 5.5 IROs account for their work in supervision. The IROs should be the eyes and ears of the service and make a contribution to service improvement. Where IROs fall short of fulfilling their quality assurance function, action will be taken to address performance issues more robustly than had been the case in the past.

### ***Midway reviews to track progress of plan***

- 5.6 Mandatory Midway Monitoring was introduced in January, 2018 so that every IRO has to check the records of a Looked After Child to find out if the plans are progressing in a timely way and to raise practice alerts where there is delay. IROs now set the midway review date at the Review Meeting with the social worker. Practice alerts have not been consistently raised, when care plans are in drift or delayed but this is being addressed in supervision and team meetings to ensure IROs are clear in their understanding of process issues or those that impact children and young people.

### ***Quality Assurance and Monitoring***

- 5.7 IROs are increasingly using electronic case notes to monitor and challenge progress between reviews. There is evidence on children's files of oversight and challenge about issues of compliance such as some social work reports not being available for the review meeting, Placement Plans not always being updated to reflect the current situation and lived experience of children and young people in addition to the supervising social worker for foster carers not regularly attending children's reviews.
- 5.8 We are strengthening the quality assurance functions of the IRO so that the service has an oversight on the quality of assessments and care plans so that specific teams can be identified for training and input to improve practice. A Monitoring Form has been introduced as a tool to provide qualitative and quantitative oversight of care planning on a case by case basis. Collated results from the monitoring form help managers to have a service wide grasp on the quality of social work assessments and care plans for looked after children. This will enable managers to identify specific teams for support and ascertain the direction of travel in the attainment of good quality assessments and care plans. Good quality assessments and plans are vital to the achievement of positive outcomes for looked after children.

### ***Strengthen the quality of permanency planning for Looked After Children***

- 5.9 The IRO Service has recognised this is an area that requires strengthening in the next recording period will make this a priority to ensure that older children have ongoing permanency planning until achieved.
- 5.10 Work to return older children to the care of their parents has been an ongoing challenge for the local authority. It is widely accepted that teenagers who are not rehabilitated within 3-6 months of coming into care tend to remain in the care system until they become adults. There needs to be a focus on service provision to enable a timely rehabilitation of teenagers. This will be a priority in the next recording period 2018/19. However, only 2% of children have been re-accommodated in a 12 month period which positively suggests that very low numbers of children return home to unstable situations.
- 5.11 The IRO Service in accordance with the IRO Handbook has started to ensure that children age 0-5 years have 3 monthly Reviews. This practice is mostly embedded and should assist to reduce the delay for young children in addition to improving the attainment of permanency through adoption and special guardianship orders.

### ***Ensure children receive all the money that has been saved for them***

- 5.12 The IROs have raised concern about the need for a savings policy and the tracking of savings for looked after children when they have changed placements. A project with the Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption has started to ensure a savings policy is established.

### ***Children's participation in and satisfaction with Reviews***

- 5.13 Children participate in the review process in a multiple of ways. Some like to attend the meeting for a brief period, whilst others prefer to stay in the whole time and some do not attend but share their view with the IRO, foster carer or keyworker. In this recording period there were 934 review meetings with children and young people attending over 75% in person.

	<b>Participation Code</b>	<b>Nos</b>	<b>%</b>
P10	child under 4 a time of review	121	13
PN1	child attends and speaks for themselves	506	54
PN2	child attends and an advocate speaks for them	46	5
PN3	child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	3	.3
PN4	child attends but does not speak for themselves/convey their views	7	.7
PN5	does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	68	7
PN6	child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the meeting	168	18
PN7	child does not attend or conveys their view to meeting	15	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>934</b>	

- 5.14 In the next recording period a priority for IROs is to encourage more children and young people to attend their review and encourage them to chair their meetings. It is hoped that as the IROs make the meetings shorter and more child centered, children and young people will become more engaged and want to chair their meeting.
- 5.15 An increasing number of children part chair their review but this is still an area of development and one that the IRO Service will need to address to empower young people.
- 5.16 The response from foster carers and from parents is inconsistent, formal participation / consultation activity in the next year requires improvement. Again this is an area that the IRO Service will need to examine and respond to and evidence clear meaningful communication going forward.
- 5.17 In the next reporting year the IROs will ensure that every child is seen or contacted prior to or following the review meeting so that their wishes and feelings can be ascertained. This is particularly important as Consultation Documents are not being returned consistently before, at or after the review. In 2018/19 the Consultation Documents will be reviewed and updated with a plan for an electronic version to be available which may result in an increase in recorded feedback from children and/or their carers.

### ***Dispute Resolution Processes***

- 5.18 The IRO Service has strengthened the challenge function of the role over the last year through the Dispute Resolution Process to address delay and drift for children in care. Constructive challenge is an expectation identified in the IRO Handbook and an element of the service which will be scrutinised and validated throughout quality assurance framework and regular auditing and feedback.
- 5.19 There were 85 Dispute Resolutions in 2016/17, with the majority being resolved at a local level at Level 1 and 2. The majority of Dispute Resolutions were rooted in a lack of timeliness within the required timeframe. Further areas for resolution were the Care Plan/Pathway Plan processes, usually around the timeliness of their preparation but in some cases about the quality of the content.
- 5.20 In the next recording year there will be a summary of Practice Alerts raised to ensure learning and development of practice from the primary issues and concerns that have been raised and resolved in the Dispute Resolutions Process. The summary report will be presented to the Senior Management Team meeting quarterly.

### ***Impact of Staff Turnover***

- 5.21 The turnover of social workers has decreased since March 2017. Any repeated changes of social worker impacts on the willingness of the young person to engage with successive social workers. We acknowledge the efforts made to recruit and retain staff and recognise the difficulties. Nevertheless it is the IRO Service's role to promote an optimum service to all of our young people in line with national requirements..

### ***Late Notifications of care entry:***

- 5.22 A late notification is defined as 2 or more working days after the child has come in to care. A delay in the IRO service being notified promptly delays an IRO being appointed and makes it harder to ensure that the initial review takes place on time. In 2017/18 there were 15 late notifications, a significant improvement on the previous year

### ***Areas which require sustained improvement***

- Life story work for children in permanent placements needs to be undertaken consistently
- The distribution of review minutes are not consistently circulated in a timely way to participants
- Improvements achieved in supporting the smooth transition of young people as they move towards independent living needs to be sustained
- Children and young people will continue to be encouraged and supported by IROs and social workers to take an active part in their reviews, including the number of children who chair all or part of their Review.

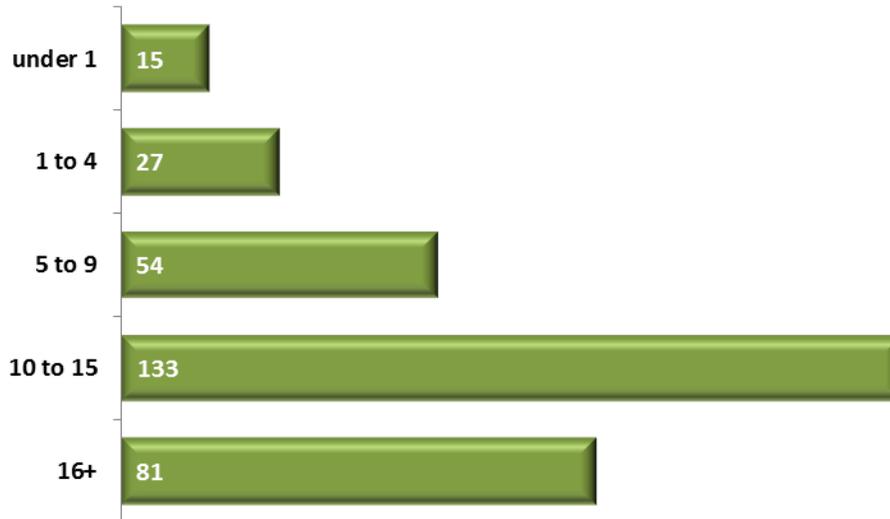
## **6. Profile of Looked After Children in Bromley**

### ***Numbers of Looked After Children & Young People***



- 6.1 There has been a steady increase in the number of looked after children in Bromley over the past three years and the rise reflects an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children subject to child protection plans being accommodated and older children coming into care due to being beyond parental control. Although there has been an increase in the care population Bromley remains below the national statistics. The looked after population by gender is comprised of 183 males and 127 females with the largest ethnic grouping being White British children at 52%.

### ***Age profile of looked after children and young people***



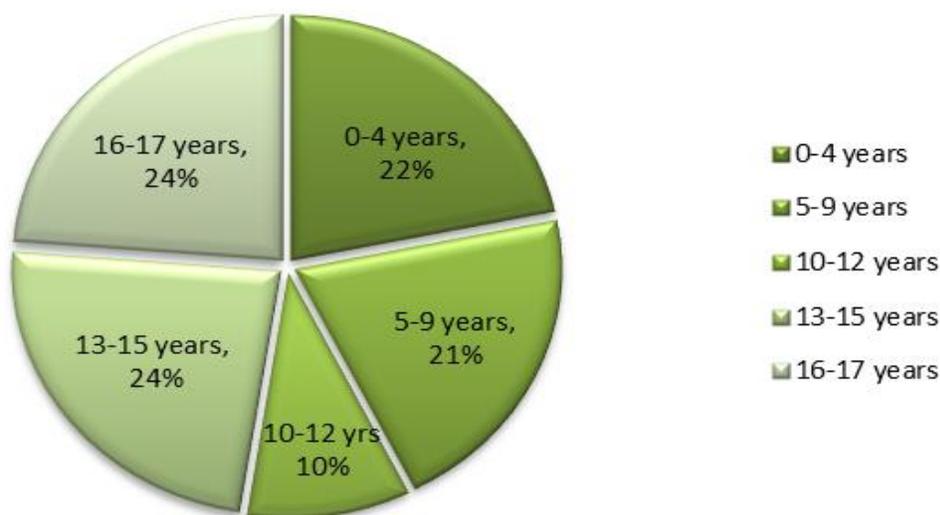
- 6.2 The data above shows that a higher proportion of older children are in care. In 2017/2018, 166 children and young people became looked and of that 79 were age 9-17. Older children tend to come into care because of CSE concerns, challenges to effective parental control, parental dysfunction, historical child protection concerns and/or previous social care involvement in addition to being unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 6.3 Older children tend to find it hard to settle in placements which can result in multiple placement moves. A constant focus is maintained on placement stability as it is fundamental to doing well in education and developing stable relationships. Placement stability will be a focus in the next recording year 2018/19 which will be scrutinised at panel by the Head of Service for Quality Improvement and Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption.
- 6.4 Older children are vulnerable to exploitation by adults and peers and are more likely to go missing from care. The understanding of missing patterns and themes for Looked After Children is being considered in the return home interviews.

6.5 The local authority has improved the tracking of children who are at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), missing or gang affiliated through the multidisciplinary MEGA (Missing, Exploitation and Gang Affiliation) panel. From the current care population, 18 children are currently being tracked.

6.6 The Department for Education has piloted different approaches in relation to engagement of teenagers to make positive choices in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire, Manchester and Rotherham. The IROs will give consideration to these approaches and whether there is any learning that can be incorporated into planning for Bromley children in relation to safeguarding them whilst in care or rehabilitated home.

6.7 The majority of looked after children are in foster placements (60%), including older children. A smaller proportion are placed with connected carers (13%), residential placement (18%) and children's home (8%). Some young people are placed at a distance from Bromley due to the complexity of their needs and also for their own protection.

**Age at Becoming Looked After YtD**

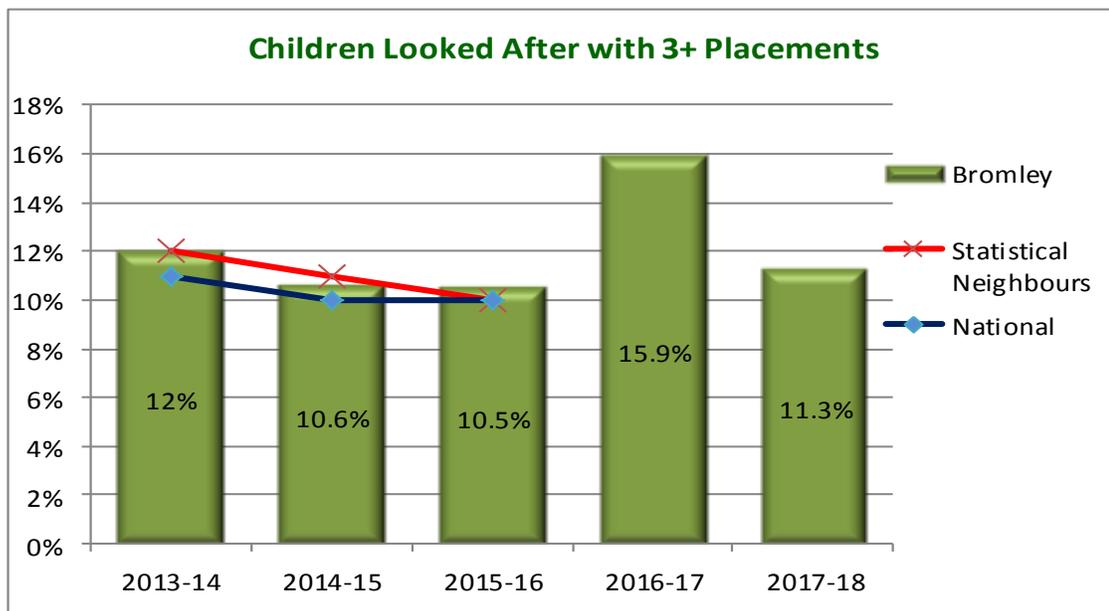


6.8 In Bromley during this recording period there are 164 children and young people with legal permanence who are subject to Care Orders. There are 48 children subject to

interim care orders and 72 being looked after with parental consent (Section 20). There has been a recent case law in relation to the use of Section 20, the local authority has reviewed a number of these care arrangements and proceedings have been initiated where appropriate to achieve permanency.

### **Placement Stability**

6.9 Placement stability is an improving picture in Bromley. Short term placement stability measure of 3 or more moves in the year has improved from 16% in 2016-17 to 10.6% 2017-18 and is now in line with England at 10%. However, long term placement stability has reduced from 72% to 67% for children looked after for 2 years or more in the same placement. This is higher than our statistical neighbours but in line with the national average. It is recognised that placement stability is moving in the right direction but more needs to be done and this will be a specific area of focus..



### **Permanency Outcomes**

6.10 Permanency is considered at all stages of the child's journey. Where this requires a legal order, there is a developed Legal Gateway Panel, chaired by the Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning - East, and legal advice is available from specialist lawyers within the council. Any delay in achieving permanency is subjected to the Dispute Resolution Process when needed.

- 6.11 During this recording period 47 children have been rehabilitated home, 14 children have been adopted and 11 have been placed with relatives under a Special Guardianship Order. A number of looked after children have gone on to independent living in preparation for living on their own while 91 children have achieved permanence in their foster placement. There is a robust focus on permanence with the creation of the Early Permanence Panel which ensures that within 8 weeks of being accommodated there is oversight of planning for children.
- 6.12 IROs continue to promote timely planning via the review process for young people who are accommodated under section 20 to avoid any drift or delay within the care system and ensure that a clear permanence plan is achieved by the second review. Increased scrutiny between Looked after Children Reviews and the use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol is assisting in ensuring timely planning for individual children and young people are within their timescale. Additionally, the weekly Placement Panel oversees the progress of Section 20 cases and reviews cases within particular cohorts such as children placed at home subject to Care Orders.
- 6.13 Achieving placement stability for children and young people in care will need to remain a priority for the IRO service. The Group Manager for the IRO Service has and will continue to contribute to the Placement Panel and will be challenging the service and professional networks around young people to strengthen placement stability for children and young people who have complex care needs.

## **7. Services for Looked After Children and Young People**

### ***Health***

- 7.1 In 2017-18 100% of under-fives had a Children looked after medical assessment. This is better than the England average of 82%. 95% of our children had a health assessment completed compared to 97% in the previous year, which is better than the England average of 89%. Additionally, 88% had a dental check which is better than the previous year and the England average of 83%. 96% of children looked after were up to date with immunisations in Bromley compared with 84% in England. This is very good performance.

- 7.2 The Phoenix Centre is responsible for children's statutory medicals and the Looked after nurses for the monitoring and oversight of looked after children's health needs. In June 2017 the Specialist Children's looked after nurse conducted a leaving care health summary audit of 36 young people via a telephone questionnaire. The unanimous result was that young people wanted to receive their health summary in writing rather than an APP. As a result all young people that have their final health assessment carried out by the Children Looked After Health Team will receive their health care plan and health summary prior to leaving care at 18.
- 7.3 Information from the Looked after nurse indicates the physical health of the looked after population has been generally good with no significant themes arising. There are a small number of children with complex health needs who are being supported by specialist services within the children with disabilities team.
- 7.4 During the year 115 children looked after completed a strengths and difficulty questionnaire (SDQ) with an average score of 16.7. This is used to identify children who need CAMHS support. This score is higher than previous years and is due to improvements to the way that the score was carried out. These results more accurately reflect children's need. Although the SDQ scores are used to inform referrals to CAMHS, senior managers are also linking these into progress monitoring and care planning.
- 7.5 Within the next recording year there will be a focus on collecting information on the health of looked after children to ensure there is a clear picture, trends are understood and challenges addressed. In addition to ensuring the physical health of our looked after children there will be a focus on the mental health and wellbeing of the looked population. The local authority will be working with Bromley Healthcare Trust to consider the benefits of a health passport for looked after children. Additionally, there will be renewed focus on the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).

### ***Education***

- 7.6 The educational attainment of Bromley Looked After Children is being monitored by the Virtual School. Annually there is a Celebration of Achievements night to recognise both academic and personal achievement or improvements of looked after children.

- 7.7 The Bromley Virtual School has been actively supporting children and young people in addition to social workers to find creative ways to provide education to those who have not had successful classroom experiences. These creative options have included home tuition to get children ready to return to school and alternative forms of education.
- 7.8 Every looked after child has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) to ensure they receive the support they require in addition to the Pupil Premium funding available to schools. The Personal Educational Plans are reviewed twice per year usually in the form of a meeting with the Virtual School Advisors, teacher, parent, social worker and carers in attendance. Currently the number of Personal Education Plans completed on time is 84% but we remain aspirational and have set a target of 95%. The Head of the Virtual School continues to monitor and report on the progress and the quality of PEPs.
- 7.9 Looked after children in Bromley have been achieving at the same level as other looked after children nationally with exception to the children in their GCSE year who were in the top 5%. We are aspirational for looked after children and want to see them attain university level where possible. In this recording period 8 young people started at university and we want to see this number grow.
- 7.10 In the last financial year the local authority has provided pupil premium funding to schools with an initial payment of £1,400 for each eligible child, although many children had the full allocation or more than the full allocation.

Pupil premium funding last year paid for

- Alternative education provision for CLA out of school
- 1:1 tuition for YR6, Yr10 and YR11
- Various TA support provision for individual CLA.
- The YR8 Aspiration projection in partnership with Greenwich University
- Theatre tickets for CLA
- EP and other assessments where these need to be carried out urgently
- The VS conference
- YR11 transition project – ensuring all YR11 students had an appropriate post-16 destination

For examples of how we have used PP+ for individual Children Looked After, see Appendix 1.

- 7.11 Every effort is made to keep education stable especially when a foster placement is new and bedding in. Transport is organised even if this means transporting young people some distance if it is in their best interest and for planned periods of time. The Virtual School Head is on the distribution list for 'newly accommodated' children and is proactive in checking on the possible impact of a move with social care. The Virtual School has worked hard to ensure social workers understand the education implications of their decisions. The Virtual School monitors the progress and attainment of Bromley's looked after children and young people with termly data collections. The analysis of data gives the Virtual Head her priorities in terms providing challenge and support to schools on individual or group progress

### **Advocacy**

- 7.12 A new Advocacy Service, '*Advocacy for You*' has been commissioned who will provide advice, information and supports children looked after and young people leaving care from April 2018.
- 7.13 In the next reporting year, information on service usage and the key issues will be collected and reported on to ensure looked after children and young people have received the support they need and if or whether there have been any service shortfalls.
- 7.14 The IROs will routinely check that the children and young people know about the advocacy service and how it can support decisions about their lives.

### **Living in Care Council (LinCC)**

- 7.15 Bromley Living in Care Council is established and supported by the Participation Officer and promote the Pledge for children and young people.
- 7.16 During the next reporting period the IROs will seek opportunities to work with LinCC and the Participation Officer to obtain more service user involvement to make changes to the Consultation Documents and how the IRO service can be improved.

## **8. Planned developments and key priorities for 2018/19**

8.1 There are likely to be many challenges in the coming year which will require the IRO Service to continue to focus on the quality of provision to children and young people, improvements, both within the offer to children in care but also on how it fulfils its roles and to continue to ensure the child remains at the centre of all of our work .

### ***Children 'voice and influence'***

- Consultation documents to be more child friendly to encourage a higher percentage of completion
- Child friendly meetings to be expanded to encourage children and young people to chair their Review
- Increase the percentage of children co-chairing their review meeting by 10%
- Children will be given the opportunity to contribute to their 'looked after' reviews in more creative ways using technology
- IRO visits to children and young people between reviews to be embedded
- IROs meet with the children and young people 30 minutes before the review to obtain any specific issues they want to discuss
- Work closer with LinCC and Participation Officer to develop the IRO service

### ***Performance - continuous development and improvement***

- Evidence of IRO footprint is more consistent aiming for each case to have IRO oversight prior to the review, at 4 weeks and midway between each subsequent review
- Embed the use of the Monitoring Forms to provide feedback to social workers and team managers about the quality of care planning

- Further work will be undertaken by the IRO Group Manager to ensure that minutes of the reviews are consistently added to the child's case file and distributed within the required timescales
- Further training and supervision on Outcome Focused planning for IROs to ensure recommendations are consistently outcome focused providing clear measureable outcomes
- During 2018 the IRO service started to refine the information collected in order to provide more detailed information to Children's Service, with regard to number, teams and stages where escalations were being made in order to pinpoint and manage issues more effectively. Therefore, from September 2018 a much more detailed picture of dispute resolutions will be provided. The Dispute Resolution Process will continue to be embedded and a quarterly report produced by the IRO Group Manager to ensure learning from the information this will be presented to SMT chaired by Director to enable further scrutiny

### ***Quality Assurance of Practice***

- Quality assurance systems to be further developed to support tracking of key performance data
- IRO Group Manager to observe 2 looked after reviews per month and audit 10 cases per month to ensure consistency of practice
- IROs to embed the use of the DRP (Dispute Resolution Policy) process to improve practice in relation to care planning especially in relation to improving PEPS
- IRO service to work with the looked after nurse to ensure there is an overview of looked after children's health and the usage of a Health Plan/Passport
- IROs to meet with their "link" service/teams quarterly to ensure they are supporting performance improvement
- IROs to embed their role in ensuring permanence, placement stability and transition to adulthood

- IRO Service to work with the social work teams to ensure SDQs are completed in addition to action taken to address any identified support needs

### ***Dispute Resolution***

- Dispute Resolution Process to be reviewed
- Process for escalating to partner agencies and services will be strengthened and embedded.

### ***Learning and Development***

- IROs to access learning opportunities via Research in Practice
- IROs to be provided with legal updates and developments in court practice

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1 The Independent Reviewing Service has made demonstrable progress during the last 12 months and this has resulted in an improvement in practice, plans, arrangements and outcomes for looked after children. However, the Service has much more to do if we are to achieve our aspiration to be an outstanding Independent Reviewing Service.

9.2 The Independent Reviewing Service has set the following firm foundations on which further development and improvement can be built upon:

- Stable management and leadership with clear insight and understanding of service strengths and development needs and a robust service plan in place;
- Statutory role and responsibilities of the Independent Reviewing Service are now well understood across Children's Services and partner agencies;
- The culture and conditions are now in place that will enable the service to move forward and achieve its aspiration to be a fully effective Independent Reviewing

Service that is driving continuous development and improvement in practice and services for looked after children;

- Dispute Resolution Protocol is regularly used by the Independent Reviewing Officers. We will embed this and ensure the learning from practice is taken so the same issues do not keep repeating themselves within the system.
- The learning from audits; SDQ's and children's feedback will be part of our Getting to Good and Managers Forums to ensure Children Social Care continue to improve outcomes for 'our' children

### 3 examples of creative use of PP+ for individual CLA:

#### Student A

##### ***YR9 Selective School***

Student A has presented as a very distressed child over a number of months and his behaviour in class, though not malicious, became distracting for teachers and peers. He sang, seemingly without his knowledge and fidgeted with whatever equipment he had available; he became less and less able to complete his work. A claimed he had no friends though he was seen around the school with a group of boys and did not seem to have the same difficulties in unstructured time. A learning support assistant had previously been funded and A had access to the learning support centre which he made use of at time of high stress or if he was sent out of the classroom. None of those interventions reduced the 'stress behaviour' exhibited in the classroom, though it became clear that he could relax in the presence of certain known adults in the school. A was refusing to meet with a psychotherapist through CAMHS.

The need to co-regulation was discussed in PEP and other meetings in school and the Virtual School agreed that, alongside 1:1 tuition for catching up with missed work during the school day, it would fund additional hours for a known member of staff to provide 'Co-regulation' for A. The remit of this member of staff, who replaced exiting TAs in most classes, was to observe when A was becoming agitated and then to sit next to him without speaking or directing him, if possible, to support A to regulate his emotions and provide a window for engagement and learning in lessons.

This occasional support for A proved successful through a trial period in the spring term and was extended into the summer term. The success of this work can probably be accounted for by the lack of dialogue/direction, the presence of which had been unacceptable for A when delivered by previous 1:1 support. This co-regulation model may be used as a trial for other students.

#### Student B.

##### ***YR3 Mainstream with high levels of support through and EHCP***

Following a year in which B made better than expected progress with speech and language (S&L) skills, it was agreed that pupil premium plus funding could be used for a private speech

and language therapist to visit him in school every week. Not only did this result in further accelerating of this S&L skills but it released his Learning Support Assistant to undertake intensive handwriting support for him. This produced an improvement from working at Reception YR for handwriting to working at just below age-appropriate within the academic year (see below).

Before (Sept 17)	After (Sept 18)
<p>Wednesday September 13<sup>th</sup> Assessment</p> <p>m y w a s p e n o t u b  m y b e t b e s t d a y  w a s a p i n o s t  s w i m m i n g p a n  h a t v</p>	<p>bath bath bath bath ba</p> <p>fast fast fast fast g</p> <p>last last last last l</p> <p>past past past pas</p> <p>after after after a</p> <p>ch l d ch l d ch l d</p>

### Student C

#### **YR3, Independent special school**

Student placed, mid-year, into specialist provision. Previously a young carer, this child exhibited lack of physical coordination and poor fine and gross motor skills. C needed physical containment and nurturing in her new provision as well as support to behave in a more age-appropriate way around other children (not 'little mother'). School has used pupil premium to develop her 'team player' skills by introducing team sports and supporting her to join clubs inside and outside school. Her coordination skills have been improved through horse-riding and swimming lessons. An OT (sensory) stool has been provided to enable C to get sensory feedback from rocking without the risk of physical harm.