

Decision Maker: **ECF Sub-Committee**

8th October 2019

Date:

Decision Type: **NOTE**

Title: **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER REPORT FOR 2018/19**

Contact Officer: Penny Davies, Head of Quality Improvement
Children, Families and Education

Chief Officer: Janet Bailey, Director

Ward: All

1. REASON FOR REPORT

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2018 and the 31 March 2019. This report analyses and evaluates practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children and the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service in ensuring the local authority, as a corporate parent, discharges its statutory responsibilities towards looked after children.

2. PURPOSE OF SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were nationally introduced to represent the interests of looked after children. Their role was strengthened through the introduction of statutory guidance in April 2011. The Independent Review Officers (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) and linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011.

This report identifies good practice as well as highlighting areas for development in relation to the IRO function. The IRO has a key and statutory role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The responsibility of the IRO is to have an overview of the child's care planning arrangements in respect of the child's wellbeing in placement, and plans for the future, as well as oversight of the child's health and education. The IRO will offer constructive and targeted scrutiny and challenge regarding case management through regular monitoring and follow up between children's reviews as appropriate.

3. Summary & Key Messages

3.1 In line with statutory guidance this annual IRO report provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO service in Bromley and the key findings are outlined below.

- The profile of Looked After Children locally shows that our cohort of children are mainly aged 10-17.
- The majority of children become looked after when they are very young in age group 0-4 and when they are in late adolescence at age 15-17, but an increasing number become looked after aged 4-9.
- The majority of children have a Looked After Care Plan that is based on assessed need and they are satisfied with this plan.
- The IRO Service continues to evidence strength in the timeliness of reviews, their encouragement of children and young people's participation in reviews and case monitoring and quality assurance between and at the point of review
- IRO monitoring suggests that the majority of children's care plans are of good quality. Some of the good rated plans reflect the work in practice by the social worker and network although the written record of the Care Plan could be improved.
- The average caseload for IRO's in Bromley is 58 young people. This is in the middle of national guidance for the number of cases held (50 to 70 per IRO). The fewer cases that are held, less IRO time is taken with chairing and recording looked after reviews and more time is available for monitoring progress, escalating concerns, contributing to practice improvement and other practice meetings.
- Evidence suggests IROs monitor and escalate issues appropriately.
- The new model of writing review minutes to the child is now embedded. This change was recognised in the Ofsted 2018 inspection, which stated *"the quality of looked after reviews has improved markedly since the last inspection. Review notes are written directly to the child and demonstrate genuine warmth and care"*
- In the year 2018/2019 IROs undertook active monitoring and informal escalation and where necessary formal escalation in a small number of cases . This level of oversight contributes to achieving good outcomes for our looked after children and young people.
- The large majority of monitoring completed by IRO's did not require a formal escalation process to be initiated to achieve progress in the child's plan. This can be seen as evidence of the necessary robust oversight of the quality of Care Planning including the informal escalation and active monitoring between Reviews by the IRO team.
- When cases are escalated the majority are resolved at a local level with team or group manager with very few progressing to more senior management for review and action.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members of the Committee **NOTE** the content Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: see report attached
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Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not applicable
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People
-

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not applicable
 2. Ongoing costs: Not applicable
 3. Budget head/performance centre:
 4. Total current budget for this head: £
 5. Source of funding:
-

Personnel

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

Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Statutory Requirement
 2. Call-in: Not applicable
-

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications:
-

Customer Impact

1. The work of the IROs is intended to improve the outcome for looked after children
-

Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Not applicable

3. COMMENTARY

See attached report

Non-Applicable Sections:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• MARKET CONSIDERATIONS• STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION• SUSTAINABILITY / IMPACT ASSESSMENT• OUTLINE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY AND CONTRACTING PROPOSALS• POLICY IMPLICATIONS• COMMISSIONING AND PROCUREMENT• LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS• FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	None

Children's Social Care

Annual Report on Independent Reviewing Officers for Children Looked After

The contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to quality assuring and improving services for children in care of Bromley Council

2018-2019



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Purpose of Report

An annual report of the Independent Reviewing Service for children looked after 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 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019. It also provides themes for further service improvement for the financial year 2019-2020.

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 IROs about how they should discharge their distinct responsibilities to children looked after.
- 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 make sure that the aspirations for 'our' children looked after 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 become 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.

2. Profile of the Independent Reviewing Service in Bromley

- 2.1 The IROs are placed within the Quality Improvement Service in the Children, Social Care Division of the Children and Young People's Directorate to maintain their independence.
- 2.2 The Team is composed of 6 full-time IROs and 1 full-time fostering IRO who are managed by the Group Manager (Quality Improvement Service). 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. With the increasing number of children becoming looked after in September 2018 the team was given an additional IRO post.
- 2.3 During this period there has been a continuation of high support and high challenge to IROs to improve outcomes for children and make a real difference to their lives. The focus has remained on professional development in building knowledge, skills and abilities of the IROs. Supervision, role modeling, case discussions and focused training has resulted in the improved performance of the team. The new model of writing review minutes to the child or young person is now embedded. This format ensures the meeting is accessible to the children and young people. This change has been recognised in the Ofsted 2018, inspection report which stated "*The quality of looked after reviews has improved markedly since the last inspection. Review notes are written directly to the child and demonstrate genuine warmth and care.*"
- 2.4 The Team has also incorporated in its writing The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT), Language that Cares lexicon to further break down any language barriers to the

children understanding their care experience and being empowered to own their plan. Additionally the supervision process and staff appraisal have picked up and addressed concerns in relation to competency and ability to perform the role.

- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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 58 children.

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 Living in Care Council (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.

CORPORATE PARENTING PRINCIPLES

The corporate parenting principles set out seven fundamental needs for looked after children and care leavers, as follows:

1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of children and young people.
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To take in to account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. To help those children and young people gain access to and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and it's relevant partners.
5. To promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. For those children and young people to be safe and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.



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. Bromley have a dedicated team to work directly with children in care to support their inclusion in services, they are called the Active Involvement Team (AIT). 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-Chairing the Corporate Parenting Board.
- The Care Leavers Forum was erected in May 2018, the AIT has spent time building positive working relationships with the group in the following ways:

- *Meals out*
 - *Bowling*
 - *Young parent sessions*
 - *Film and takeaway evenings in the Breakout Room*
- LinCC had their annual training residential in April 2019, the group selected their top 10 priorities for the year. Top 10 Priorities (2018-2019):
 - *To campaign for a longer annual training residential*
 - *To meet and seek advice from other Children in Care Councils*
 - *To promote LinCC to the care population via the newsletter*
 - *Take part in fundraising to support new LinCC projects*
 - *To use feedback from the care population to be representative*
 - *To deliver a LinCC manifesto event*
 - *To support educating Elected Members about the experiences of children looked after*
 - *To gain LinCC sponsorship*
 - *To recruit new members*
 - *To campaign for an international exchange*



- Alongside this some of the members have participated in the recruitment of staff and visited the Corporate Parenting Strategy Board. They hosted the Care Leavers Dissemination meeting and participated in a care leaver's awareness session during Care Leavers week in the Breakout Room.
- In June – August 2018 all care leavers in Bromley were asked to participate in an online survey, Bright Spots, to find out how they felt about their lives. The survey was

developed by Coram Voice and the University of Bristol. The findings have challenged the local authority to think about the emotional wellbeing of young people and how to ensure they feel supported, happy, and have opportunities for employment, education and training. The local authority responded to the findings with two joint sessions with young people and professionals to think about what specific actions could be taken. Coming out of those sessions the local authority has identified a specific dedicated space for children looked after and care leavers to call their own. Additionally, the local authority has partnered with the London Borough of Greenwich and Lewisham on the Aspire program which focuses on working with young people who are not in education, employment or training.



- Celebration of Achievement Award was held on in February 2018 where all award winners received their certificates, award packs, and for those that attended the ceremony their photos with the Mayor.
- Easter Egg Hunt was held for the younger children looked after in April 2019.
- Corporate Parenting Fun Day held in July 2018 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.
- Interviews for permanent members of staff.

5. Action taken to improve IRO Performance

Supervision, Training and Development for IROs

- 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 The IROs have fortnightly team meetings which include briefings on child care issues and new developments in practice. In this reporting period the team based briefings included data and performance information from the Performance Team, the Head Teacher of the Virtual School, Ron Shockness Lead Solicitor, Project Officer for SEND, Atlas Team Manager for Missing/CSE/Gang Affiliation, SGO/Connected Carer Assessments, Metro Charity (LGBT+), Liaison meeting with Practice manager from Cafcass and Designated Nurse for CCG. These briefings have helped to develop the knowledge, skills and ability of the IROs, focus their thinking in relation to quality assurance and awareness of the available resources when planning for children and young people.
- 5.3 The workflow of the IRO is now visible on Carefirst, the local authority electronic recording system. With the documents being embedded this allows transparency and supports tracking of key performance data.

- 5.4 To further ensure the review meeting notes are accessible to children and young people, the name of the document was changed to My Review Report and also was amended to reflect TACT, Language that Cares lexicon.

Midway reviews to track progress of plan

- 5.5 IROs set the midway review date at the Review Meeting with the social worker. There has been a positive change in the practice and culture in relation to tracking the progress on plans. A Midway review meeting is embedded practice and the accompanying Midway Monitoring Review document in Carefirst provides record of this tracking meeting.
- 5.6 When plans are in drift or delayed IROs are not consistently raising informal or formal practice alerts. This remains an ongoing area of development to ensure there is consistency across the team.

Quality Assurance and Monitoring

- 5.7 IRO footprint on the children's and foster carers' files provides evidence of oversight and challenges. The CLA Review Preparation Checklist and Monitoring document is a tool to provide qualitative and quantitative oversight of care planning for each child. In the pre-meeting (IRO and social worker meeting before the review) the IROs ensure statutory requirements have been completed or are in progress, confirm the care plan in addition to identifying areas of good practice or where challenge is required.
- 5.8 This new tool will allow managers to track work with individual children in addition to identifying any trends across a specific team or service along with any practice issues.
- 5.9 The Midway Monitoring Review provides an opportunity for the IRO to track and quality assure the progress and timeliness of planning for children. When required, challenge can now be raised using the Dispute Resolution Form which is now embedded on the child's electronic file.

Strengthen the quality of permanency planning for Looked After Children

- 5.10 The IROs ensure that children age 0-5 years have 3 monthly Reviews. This practice is embedded and has focused planning by the local authority to reduce the delay for young children and has seen an improvement in the attainment of permanency through adoption and Special Guardianship Orders. Permanency planning for older children has improved but still requires the IRO to remain active to drive this in an ongoing manner until achieved.

Children's participation in and satisfaction with Reviews

- 5.11 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 1023 review meetings with children and young people attending over 77% (includes all attended irrespective of whether speaks for themselves) in person.

	Participation Code	Nos	%
P10	child under 4 a time of review	153	15.0
PN1	child attends and speaks for themselves	669	65.4
PN2	child attends and an advocate speaks for them	33	3.2
PN3	child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	2	0.2
PN4	child attends but does not speak for themselves/convey their views	4	0.4
PN5	does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	24	2.3
PN6	child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the meeting	116	11.3
PN7	child does not attend or conveys their view to meeting	27	2.2
	Total	1023	

- 5.12 In this recording period there has been an increase in children and young people chairing, co-chairing or being more of an active participant in their meeting. Although not consistent with all IROs, there is a focus on empowering children and young people to

take charge of their meeting or that it is a co-production with the IRO. Children who chair their reviews are sent a certificate to acknowledge their achievement and encourage their ongoing involvement.

- 5.13 An audit of the number of consultation booklet's returned by children was undertaken looking at 271 review meetings held. A total of 24 consultation documents were returned. There is acknowledgement that children and young people are unlikely to complete the consultation booklets without support and encouragement. To drive participation, the consultation booklets were divided into two age groups, 4-10 and 11-18 years with the addition feature of being an electronic format. IROs encourage the carers and social workers to support the children to provide their written view to their meeting.
- 5.14 To know what children are saying from their written feedback there was a further audit of the consultation booklets. A random selection of 12 consultation booklets was reviewed to see what children were saying about their placement, education and whether they understood why they were in care. The children and young people were 8-17 years and mix of either gender. Overall the children and young people were happy in their home, positive about their education and they all knew why they were in care. One young person said he liked "nothing" about this home but school was positive and he knew why he was in care. This child was subject to care proceedings and was vocal about wanting to return home to his birth family.
- 5.15 When asked about their placement 11 stated they were happy and did not identify anything they wanted to change. All 12 children and young people were positive about their education with only 2 expressing worries about learning "hard words" and "not getting into 6th Form school".

Participation of Foster Carers and Parents

- 5.14 The response from foster carers and parents is inconsistent in providing written feedback to the review in the form of the consultation booklet. In this reporting year there was an audit of number of consultation booklet returned within a 3 month period. From the 271 review meetings held a total of 48 consultation booklets were returned. There

were 22 from foster carers and 2 from parents. Feedback from the IROs indicated that foster carers reported not receiving the booklets or had not completed the information in time for the review.

- 5.15 Within the IRO team, parents were not consistently invited to review meetings which meant they were not sent the consultation booklet. This has been addressed and where appropriate parents will be sent a consultation booklet to ensure their views is known even if they are unable to attend the review meeting. In addition IROs, where possible, contact parents before the review to confirm their attendance and ascertain their view on the care planning.
- 5.16 The Business Support Officer now record when consultations booklets are distributed and returned to assist in improving this performance.
- 5.17 To allow more flexibility in how consultation booklets are distributed, completed and returned by carers and parents, the booklets have been updated to an electronic format. The new booklets should be in circulation by July 2019.

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 (DRP) to address delay and drift for children in care. As this process becomes embedded in the electronic recording system, Carefirst, the number of practice alerts is likely to increase.
- 5.19 There were 144 Dispute Resolutions in 2017/18 which is a marked increase from 2016/17 of 66. The majority disputes raised were resolved at a local level at Level 1 and 2 with the Team Manager. The majority of Dispute Resolutions were related to process issues such as the lack of placement plans, delegated authority and timeliness in carrying out statutory requirements.
- 5.20 In this recording year, the IRO quarterly reports to the Senior Management Team set out a summary of Practice Alerts raised to ensure learning and development of practice. One of the clear findings from the reports was the lack of challenge to the Leaving Care

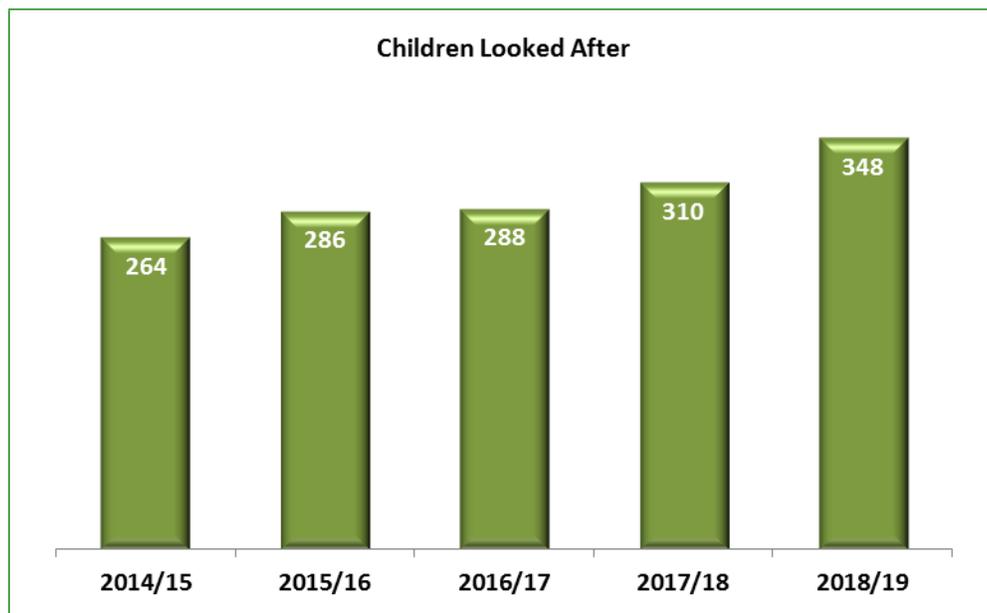
Service. The IROs need to give consideration to whether they are being aspirational for young people and ensuring they are appropriately prepared for adulthood and independence.

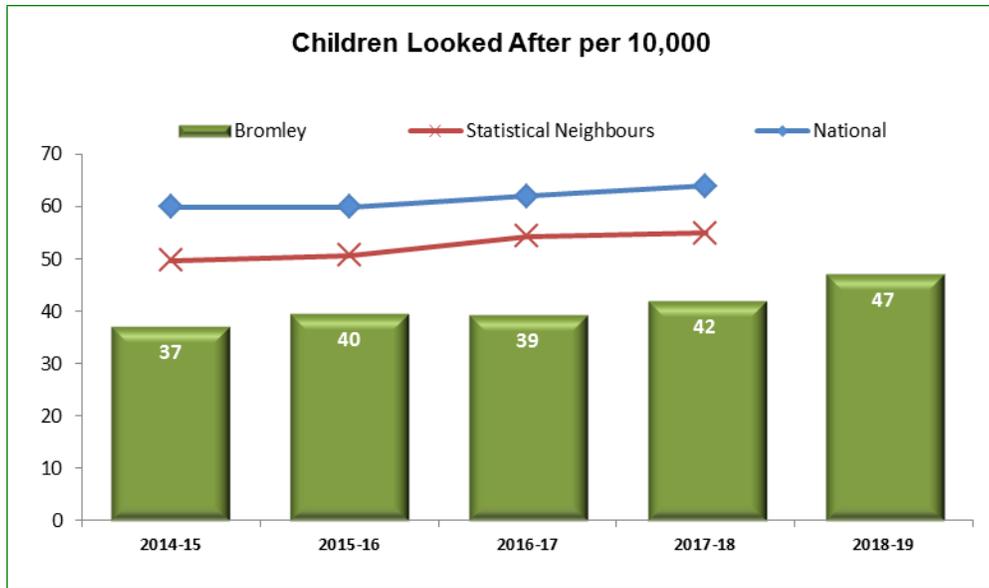
Impact of Staff Turnover

5.21 The turnover of social workers continues to be challenging for the local authority. Repeated changes of social worker impacts on the willingness of the young person to engage with successive social workers in addition to negatively impact care planning. The IROs 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.

6. Profile of Children Looked After in Bromley

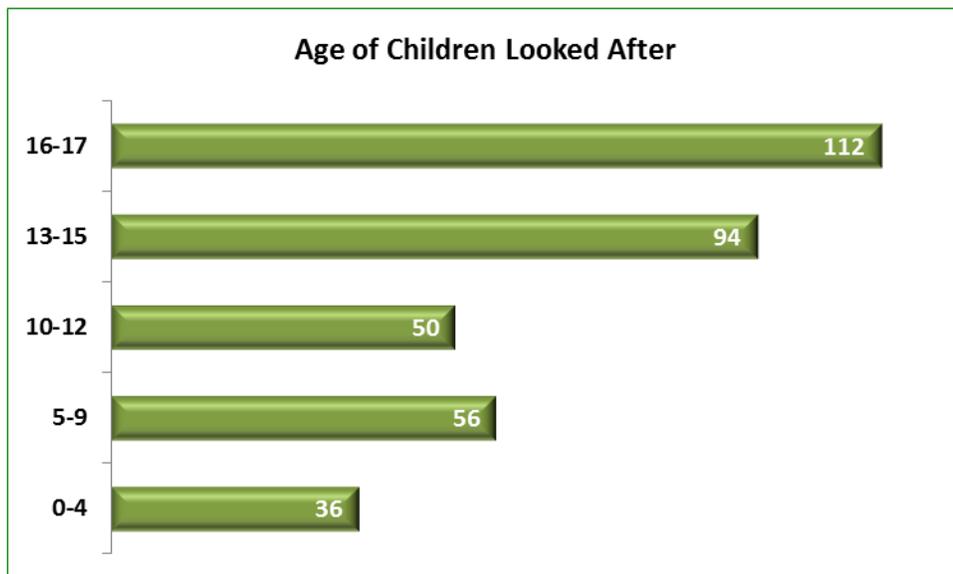
Numbers of Children Looked After & Young People



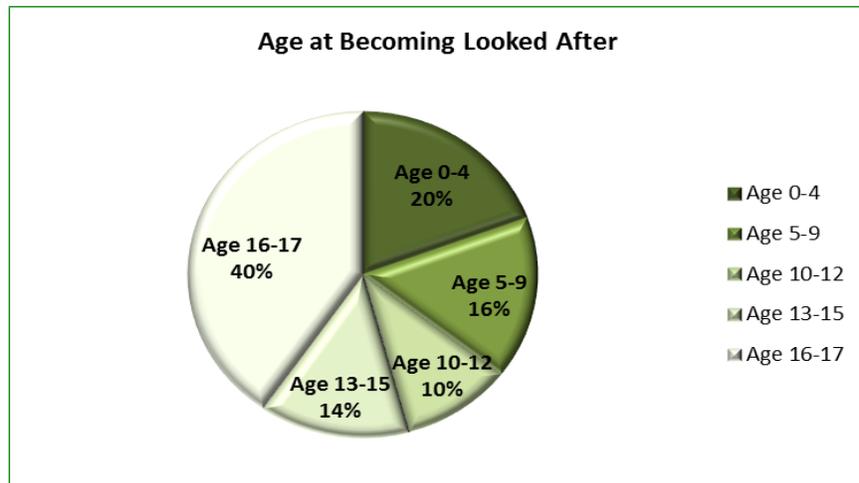


6.1 There has been a steady increase in the number of children looked after in Bromley over the past three years and the rise reflects an increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children subject to child protection plans being accommodated and older children coming into care due to being beyond 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 206 (at 31/03/19) males and 142 (at 31/03/19) females with the largest ethnic grouping being White British children at 51% (at 31/03/19).

Age profile of children looked after and young people



6.2 The data above shows that a higher proportion of older children are in care. In 2018/2019, 182 children and young people became looked after and of that 125 were age 9-17. Older children tend to come into care because of child sexual exploitation (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.



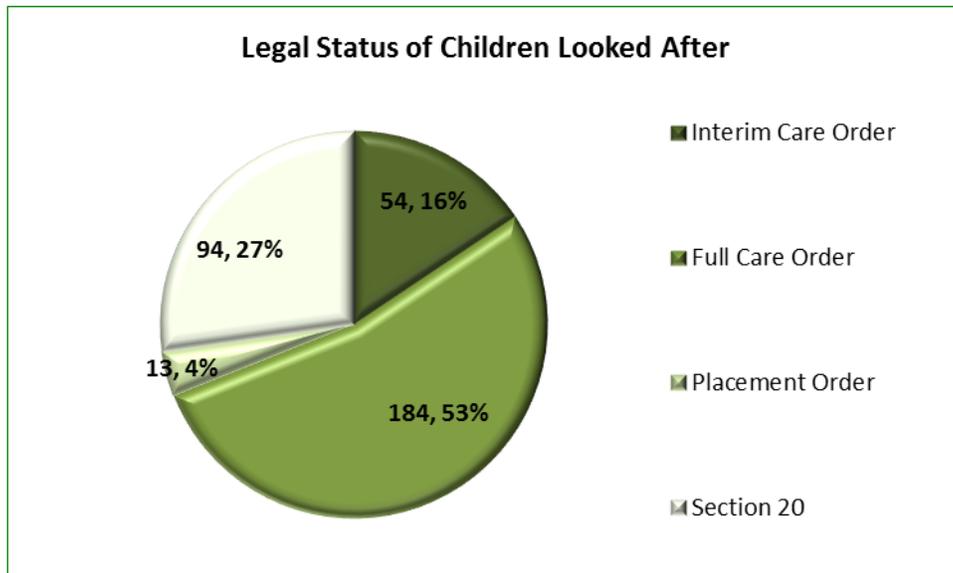
6.3 Older children tend to find it hard to settle in placements which can result in multiple placement moves. A constant focus is maintained on placement stability as it is fundamental to doing well in education and developing stable relationships. Placement stability will be a focus in the next recording year 2019/20 which will be scrutinised at panel by the Head of Service for Quality Improvement and Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption. A corporate parenting sub-committee on stability has been established which will consider placement stability as one of its priorities. The Group Manager in Quality Improvement is a member of the committee and will bring challenge to the local authority where required.

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 children looked after 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, missing or gang affiliated through the multidisciplinary MEGA (Missing,

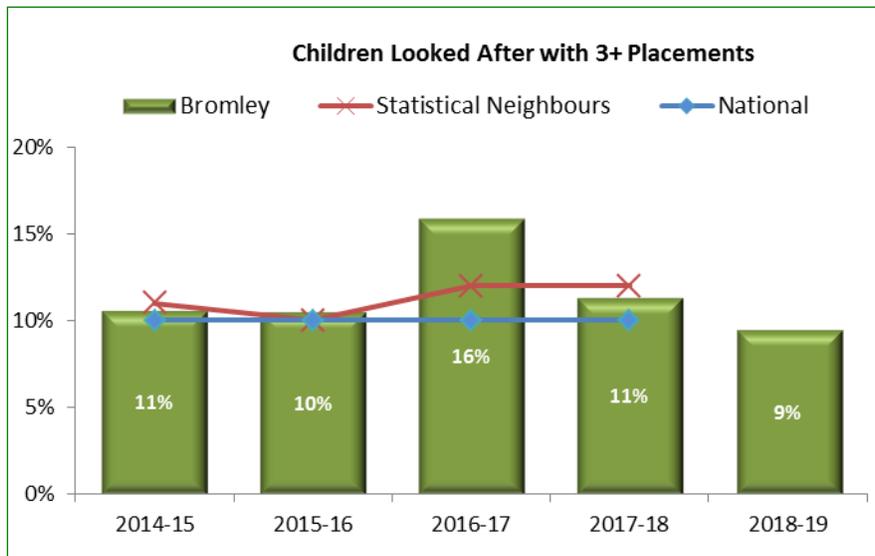
Exploitation and Gang Affiliation) panel. From the current care population, 40 children are currently being tracked.

- 6.6 The majority of children looked after are in foster placements (59%) (excluding family & friends), including older children. A smaller proportion are placed with connected carers (15%), residential placement (10% excluding children’s homes but including residential schools, mother & baby unit, hospital or NHS residential, YOI) and children’s home (9%). Some young people are placed at a distance from Bromley due to the complexity of their needs and also for their own protection.
- 6.8 In Bromley during this recording period there are 197 (full care orders and placement orders) children and young people with legal permanence who are subject to Care Orders. There are 54 children subject to interim care orders and 94 being looked after with parental consent (Section 20).

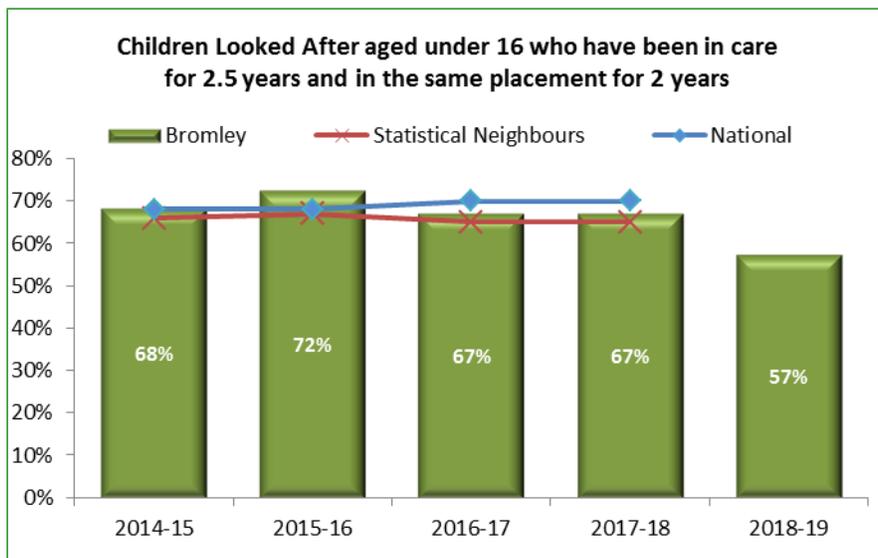


Placement Stability

- 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 11% in 2017-18 to 9% in 2018-19 and is better than the National average at 10%.



6.10 However, long term placement stability has reduced from 67% to 57% for children looked after for 2 years or more in the same placement. This is higher than our statistical neighbours and the national average. It is recognised that more needs to be done regarding placement stability and this will be a specific area of focus



Permanency Outcomes

6.11 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

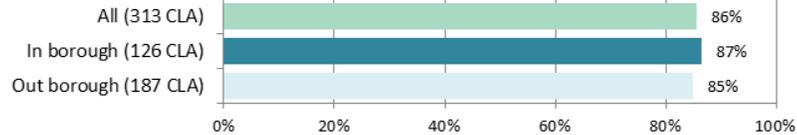
and Care Planning (East Locality), and legal advice is available from specialist lawyers within the council. Any delay in achieving permanency is subjected to the Dispute Resolution Process when needed.

- 6.12 During this recording period 42 children have been rehabilitated home, 18 children have been adopted and 21 have been placed with relatives under a Special Guardianship Order. A number of children looked after have gone on to independent living in preparation for living on their own while. In addition, 65 children have achieved permanence in their foster placement and 21 by family & friends. There is focus on permanence with the 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 children looked after 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. Additionally the Group Manager will be a member of the corporate parenting sub-committee on stability which will also bring scrutiny and challenge to the local authority planning for children and young people.

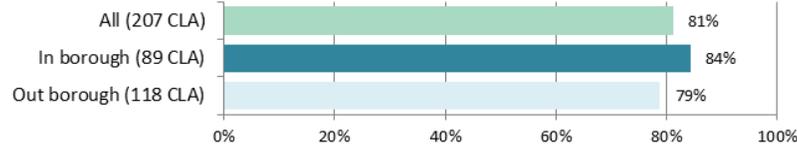
7. Services for Children Looked After and Young People

Health

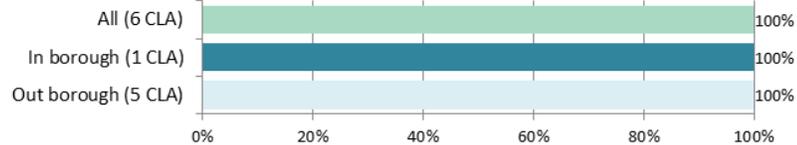
Annual health assessment up to date [in care 1 month+]



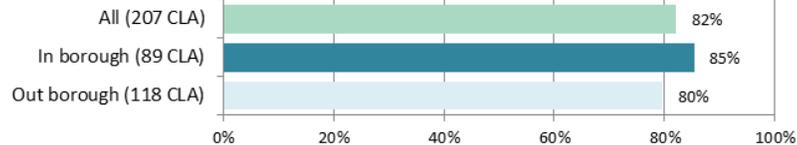
Teeth checked by a dentist [in care 12m+ rolling year]



Under 5 health surveillance checks up to date [in care 12m+ rolling year]



Immunisations up to date [in care 12m+ rolling year]



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. 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 185 children looked after completed a strengths and difficulty questionnaire (SDQ) with an average score of 13. 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.

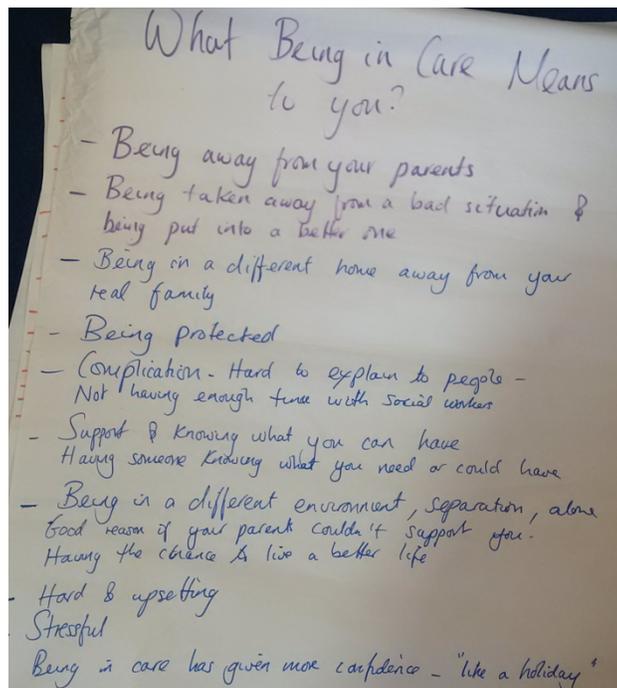
Education

- 7.5 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 and improvements of looked after children.
- 7.6 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. 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 children looked after 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 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 pro-active 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 children looked after 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

- 7.11 A new Advocacy Service, 'Advocacy for You' was commissioned in April 2018 who provide advice, information and supports children looked after and young people leaving care.
- 7.12 The IROs 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)

- 7.13 Bromley Living in Care Council is established and supported by the Active Involvement Officer and promote the Pledge for children and young people (See section 4.1 for the LinCC priorities).

8 Progress of developments and priorities set in 2017/18

Children 'voice and influence'

- Consultation booklets were divided into two age groups, 4-10 and 11- 18 years with the additional feature of being in electronic format.
- IROs have also incorporated in their writing the TACT, Language that Cares lexicon to further break down any language barriers to the children understanding their care experience and being empowered to own their plan.
- More children and young people are chairing their review meeting or are co-chairing with the IROs. Children and young people are sent certificates to acknowledge their achievement and encourage their ongoing involvement. This still remains a focus and priority to have all IROs.
- IROs meet with the children and young people 30 minutes before the review to obtain any specific issues they want to discuss and to set the agenda for the meeting.



Performance - continuous development and improvement

- Evidence of IRO footprint is more consistent and with the IRO workflow now embedded in Carefirst, transparency of the work is now possible.
- 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 measurable 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

- The CLA Review Preparation Checklist and Monitoring and Midway Review documents provide qualitative and quantitative oversight of care planning for each child. These documents are now embedded in the electronic recording system, Carefirst which allows for tracking of key performance data.
- IRO Group Manager has observed practice, audited cases and conducted auditing activities during this recording period. Challenge was been made to the IROs where improvement in practice is required.
- The Dispute Resolution Process is now embedded in Carefirst and will continue to need developing to ensure performance data can be extracted.
- There has been significant improvement in the completion of SDQ (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire) for looked after children. The next phase will be to ensure action is taken to address any identified support needs.
- The Fostering IRO has made a significant difference in highlighting and driving improvement in practice in the fostering service

Dispute Resolution

- Dispute Resolution Process is now embedded in practice and in the electronic recording system, Carefirst. Further work is required to ensure performance data can be extracted to understand practice and drive practice improvements.

Learning and Development

- Briefings in the team meetings have been an ongoing feature to ensure IROs remain current in their practice.

9 Planned developments and key priorities for 2019/20

- 9.1 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'

- New consultation booklets to be in circulation by July
- 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
- Work closer with LinCC and Active Involvement Officer to develop the IRO service
- Speech and Language therapist to attend team or service briefing to discuss writing to children and provide feedback on review notes to children to further develop practice
- Planned audits to ensure that the voice of the child is clearly evidenced on file.

Performance - continuous development and improvement

- IRO Group Manager as a member of the corporate parenting sub-committee for health and stability to bring scrutiny and challenge to the local authority's planning for children and young
- IROs to meet with their "link" service/teams quarterly to ensure they are supporting performance improvement

Quality Assurance of Practice

- Dispute Resolution Process on Carefirst 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
- IRO Service to work with the social work teams to ensure Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) are completed in addition to action taken to address any identified support needs
- Process for escalating to partner agencies and services will be strengthened and embedded.
- Planned audits

Learning and Development

- IROs to access learning opportunities via Research in Practice and Bromley Training and Development program.
- Team meeting will also allow for further training and development and peer to peer learning.

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. This was recognised in the Ofsted report which outlined that reviews are managed more efficiently and IROs are visiting children between reviews. 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;