
Decision Maker:	CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES PDS COMMITTEE		
Date:	Wednesday 10th March 2021		
Decision Type:	Non-Urgent	Non-Executive	Non-Key
Title:	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER REPORT 2019-20		
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Chief Officer:	Janet Bailey Director of Children's Services		
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 2019 and the 31 March 2020. 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. The report contains and Appendix A to evaluate the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

The Committee note the progress and actions of the Independent Reviewing Officers in discharging their statutory duties and contributing to the aims of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

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

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact:

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. 3% of our children living in care are in this age range.
- 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.
- The average caseload for IRO's in Bromley is 54 young people. This is in the lower end of national guidance for the number of cases it is recommended IROs hold (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. Caseloads fluctuated during 2019-20 but this end of year caseload reflects the increasing stability of the IRO group heading into 2020-21.
- Evidence suggests IROs monitor and escalate issues appropriately but have not always recorded this in line with the expected method (Dispute Resolution Protocol) and have relied upon informal methods of raising issues of concern.
- The model of writing review minutes to the child is fully embedded. IROs are motivated and enthused to continue developing this model.
- 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.
- The IRO service realigned its role in June 2019 meaning that all our IROs now work with children living at home with their families with Child Protection Plans and our children living in care. This was necessary to ensure children and families receive consistency in their plans and reviews, and build a relationship over time with one Reviewing Officer. In particular, children and their families no longer need to repeat their narratives in their care plan reviews and get to know a new IRO should they become looked after. We are also seeing caseloads reduce as the realigned role takes effect and this will support further service development moving forwards.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Not Applicable
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: No Cost:
2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:

3. Budget head/performance centre: N/A
 4. Total current budget for this head: N/A
 5. Source of funding: N/A
-

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:
-

Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A
-

Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): All Bromley children in care
-

Ward Councillor Views

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

3. COMMENTARY

See full report below.

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

See Section 2 above.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Policy Implications, Financial Implications, Personnel Implications, Legal Implications, Procurement Implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]

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

2019-2020

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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 2019 and 31st March 2020. It also provides themes for further service improvement for the financial year 2020-2021. The Quality Improvement Service underwent transformation during the first quarter of 2019-20 and the IROs now combine their role with that of chairing Child Protection Conferences and are known by the title of Reviewing Officer. The rationale for this was to ensure that children did not need to make a relationship with a different independent reviewing officer if they transferred from Child Protection to become a child looked after. This report focuses on the discharge of the IRO role and responsibilities. The terms Reviewing Officer (RO) and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) are used interchangeably in the report.

Introduction

- 1.1 After consultation with staff in the Quality Improvement Service, a change to a dual role of Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chairperson was implemented from June 2019 and this combined role is called Reviewing Officer.
- 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. This report should be read in conjunction with the Corporate Parenting annual report.
- 1.5 Each child has their own IRO from the time they become looked after. The IRO role is to offer support and challenge and advocacy, to be a critical friend in ensuring care planning is meeting the holistic needs of children within the timescales that children need, escalate issues that are adversely impacting on achieving good outcomes for children to the right level of the management structure, drive and champion plans for permanence, and monitor the performance of the local authority as a corporate parent. Above all, the IRO must make sure that children’s wishes and feelings are given full consideration in relation to their care plans and the support being given to them by their social workers.
- 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 Reviewing Officers are placed within the Quality Improvement Service in the Children’s Social Care Division of the Children, Families and Education Directorate, People Department. Reviewing Officers have a unique position within the Division in that they do not hold the case decision making responsibility or supervisory responsibilities with social workers and can therefore take an independent view of the service and care planning being provided for children. The Reviewing Officers are valued members of the Children’s Social Care Division and are not independent of the Local Authority, something that is a common misconception.
- 2.2 Following the change of role for the Reviewing Officers that took effect from June 2019, the service was structured to be composed of 8 full-time ROs, 3 part-time ROs and 1 full-time Fostering IRO (FIRO). The Reviewing Officers are managed by two Group

Managers. The fostering IRO conducts the annual review of Bromley foster households to ensure they are meeting fostering standards and providing good parenting to our children living in our care. There is one Business Support Officer who leads on the administration of looked after reviews, who is managed by the Business Support and Children & Families Reception Manager. The restructuring of the Reviewing Officer role was a positive step for the service to build its relationships with other services in the Division. However, this had an effect of seeing an unusual turnover during the 2019-20 period which is not uncommon when realigning and improving a service. This contributed in the short term to temporary instability and some variable performance at times, with both realistic workloads and recording systems being developed as remedial actions to bring the service calmly and confidently through this fundamental change. In many ways, by the end of the reporting period, the Quality Improvement Service could almost be described as a new service, with permanent recruitment taking priority and a number of Reviewing Officers with a wealth of different statutory and third sector social care experience forming the nucleus of an ambitious group. The service recruited two new Group Managers and a permanent Head of Service to deliver a long term commitment and enthusiasm to achieve lasting and continuous improvement of the service as part of the Division's striving for excellence for our children and young people. Despite these changes (for the better) key areas of performance were maintained with the timeliness of the core function of looked after reviews increasing to 91% within the reporting year.

- 2.3 During this period there has been a continuation of high support and high challenge to Reviewing Officers 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 continued improvement of the service in discharging its role. The model of writing review minutes to the child or young person is fully embedded and acknowledged by our regulators as key development. Starters in the service receive a full induction to support their skills in this aspect of their role. This has included additional training and learning support to help staff who previously chaired Child Protection Conferences to adapt and adjust to the IRO element of their new dual role. Reviewing Officers have become increasingly a part of significant meetings that respond to vulnerabilities of young people. This includes evidencing their overview and involvement in supporting and challenging social workers and their managers through ever increasing use of midway reviews and proactive visiting of young people between reviews. Reviewing Officers are increasingly

demonstrating their 'footprint' within children's records. With a significantly changed group of Reviewing Officers and their leadership, base line performance standards have been maintained. Group Managers and the Head of Service have extended the reach of the Quality Improvement Service through membership of the full range of decision-making panels, including Legal Gateway Panel, Placement Panel, Children in Need panel and the Permanency Panel. The challenge for the service is to achieve consistently good and excellent work to demonstrate how the role impacts in supporting the Division to achieve the best and most timely outcomes possible for children and young people.

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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 experienced some fluctuation in workloads which in part was due to some staff wishing to leave rather than be part of the innovation of the introduction of the dual role. Successful recruitment of permanent Reviewing Officers and an increase in the quality of some locum staff recruited, caseloads at the end of the period were 54 and an equitable split between Child Protection and IRO work had been achieved for all the Reviewing Officers. This change in Reviewing Officers did have short term impact on the quality of some reviews and the experiences of young people, some of whom did ask their new ROs if they would now be staying as their RO.

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 senior officers of the Council, its partner agencies and members of the Living in Care Council (LinCC) and is driving improvement in services through rigorous challenge and support. The Corporate Parenting Board is jointly chaired by the Deputy Leader of the Council, and Portfolio Holder for Education, Children and Families, 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.
- 3.5 A refreshed Corporate Parenting Board was launched on 24.04.19. Key partner agencies agreed to chair operational sub-groups to develop and progress action plans to feed into the Board for its scrutiny. This has included the Change for Care Leavers group and LinCC having sight of documents for the Board in advance and questioning sub-group leads about the progress and ambition of their work as part of Strive sessions at each Board meeting.
- 3.6 The Quality Improvement service has ambition to play a part and it has joined the membership of each of the sub-groups, although at this stage does not have a lead area of development that it is reporting into the Board which will be addressed in the next iteration of the Corporate Parenting Board refresh 2021. The strategic areas the sub-groups are responsible for are Support and Stability, Health and Wellbeing, Education and Enjoyment, Transitions and Independence.

4. Voice and Influence of Children and Young People

- 4.1 While this report should be read in conjunction with the Corporate Parenting annual report, children and young people can 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 our children to support their inclusion in services, they are called the Active Involvement Team (AIT). Some highlights of note during the 2019-20 period include as follows:
- The annual corporate parenting fun day was held in July 2019. This was well attended and gave children and young people a chance to meet senior leaders and elected members while taking part in organized activities.

- The Active Involvement Team ran a summer programme in 2019 for young people and care leavers. This included a residential trip for eight young people with their children to promote bonding and outdoor play while staying on a farm. Day trips for care leavers were also offered and a music project.
- LinCC members delivered an inspirational session to the 2019 annual staff conference for all Children's Social Care with a relationship building theme.
- A Celebration of the success of care leavers was held in October 2019 during care leavers week. More than 30 young people and 20 staff attended the event.
- LinCC and CFCL put on a coffee morning during the Care Leavers week in October 2019 to raise funds and these were used to provide housewarming gifts for young people who have achieved their own tenancy.
- The annual celebration event for our children was held in February 2020. Despite growing concern about Covid-19, the event was attended by over 50 young people and their carers to celebrate both academic and personal achievements during the previous year.
- A small group of care leavers took part in group work to help develop their financial skills through MyBank in March 2020.
- Children and young people were consulted about the impact of the Bromley Pledge for Children in Care and their feedback helped the revision of our Pledge to Children in Care and Care Leavers, Bromley's Promise.

4.2 One of the key roles of Reviewing Officers is to offer a critical friend role if there is concern as to how the Local Authority is discharging its Corporate Parenting duties. This can involve raising themes and trends identified with the senior management team or it can on an individual child level see an issue of disagreement escalated for resolution. However, a positive development as the service has evolved during 2019-20 is an increased onus on relationship building and Reviewing Officers have dedicated days to visiting young people outside of reviews when they have expressed concern about specific issues such as their accommodation or desire to engage with support. This has been a pro-active means of supporting the Department and collaborating with colleagues and young people to help the discharge of corporate parenting responsibilities around matters such as suitable accommodation and listening to the wishes of young people.

5. Action taken to improve IRO Performance

Supervision, Training and Development for IROs

- 5.1 Reviewing Officers 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. Group Managers have audited files to assess the quality and visibility of IRO support and challenge and have analysed individual areas for focus as required to drive improved practice and performance. The Quality Assurance framework including Practice Assurance Stocktakes support the identification of areas for improvement. The service is aware of the need to achieve consistent tracking of the progress of children and evidence actions taken to support and challenge social workers and their managers if the RO is concerned about how any aspect of a child or young person's needs are being responded to, and where there is an indication of drift or delay that can be remedied to achieve timely and ambitious outcomes. The dual role's design is demonstrating a move towards achieving this consistency and at the end of 2019-20 the service had come through its change and had the promise of a stable staff group ahead.
- 5.2 Training and development included taking part in sessions to begin implementing the Department's overarching Practice Model, the Bromley Relationship Model (BRM) and also focused on upskilling and building confidence to deliver the Child Protection Conference chair role for those staff who had always been IROs and vice versa.
- 5.2 The Reviewing Officers continued to have fortnightly team meetings which included briefings on childcare issues and new developments in practice. The focus following the change to the dual role, a new staff group and a change in the management group during this reporting period meant that the focus was on building relationships within the service and achieving a future vision and direction for the service therefore during this period. The ROs enjoy access to all the same training and development opportunities made available for managers and social workers within the department.
- 5.3 Review meeting records have been fully embedded and are written to the child or young person in sensitive language. Shadowing and learning from the best examples of 'My Review Report' have been a key element of induction of new starters in the service. A large range of induction materials across 3 folders was put together for new starters and all new permanent starters have been facilitated with a full 2 weeks induction period.

- 5.4 The ethos after the completion of the change to a dual role for Reviewing Officers has moved to one of collaborative learning through the development of group supervision and reflection sessions. Reviewing Officers have been committed to the goal of achieving excellence for children and young people and have attended where possible all Getting to Excellence seminars and the annual CSC staff conference.

Midway reviews to track progress of plan

- 5.5 Reviewing Officers now routinely coordinate midway reviews to track the progress of care plans between reviews and consult with children, young people and their carers where this is in a child's best interests. The greater visibility of Reviewing Officers involvement and providing a critical friend voice through their interventions and 'footprint' on children's social care records has been recognised through the undertaking of Practice Assurance Stocktakes. The challenge, now that the service began to show signs of a new stability at the end of the year, is to achieve consistency across the Reviewing Officer group.

Quality Assurance and Monitoring

- 5.7 IRO footprint on the children's and foster carers' files provide 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) in advance of reviews that ROs are required to hold. These meetings help 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. They also ensure that any contentious issues can be discussed more discretely so that these do not affect the quality of the child or young person's review meeting.
- 5.8 This tool allows 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 is raised using the Dispute Resolution Form. This form was only embedded with ROs routinely using this from the autumn of 2019 which with the changes of ROs and managers within the service made it more difficult to identify case escalations.

However, the senior management team now receives a DRP weekly performance report as part of the standard performance data so that RO concerns are known and tracked throughout the Senior Management Team chaired by the Assistant Director.

Strengthen the quality of permanency planning for Looked After Children

- 5.10 The Reviewing Officers have continued to ensure that children aged 0-5 years have 3 monthly Reviews rather than the statutory 6 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 significantly improved but requires the RO 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 many ways. Children and young people are supported and encouraged to take part in the review of their care plan as they feel most comfortable with. Some like to attend the meeting for a brief period, whilst others prefer to take part in the whole meeting, while others do not attend but share their views with their RO, foster carer or keyworker. In this recording period there were 992 review meetings, with children and young people attending over 69% (includes all forms of attendance) in person.

	Participation Code	Nos	%
PN0	child under 4 at the time of review	146	14.7
PN1	child attends and speaks for themselves	629	63.4
PN2	child attends and an advocate speaks for them	19	1.9
PN3	child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	2	0.2
PN4	child attends but does not speak for themselves/convey their views	2	0.2
PN5	Child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	9	0.9
PN6	child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the meeting	154	15.5
PN7	child does not attend or conveys their view to meeting	31	3.1

	Total	992	
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- 5.12 There is a strong sense of the participation of children and young people in their reviews. Only 3% do not participate in some form, although we would like to see more children and young people attending their review meeting in person and feeling able to play an active role in the meeting. This is because over 18% of children and young people have chosen not to attend reviews in person. However, if excluding the youngest children who participate through non-verbal cues and play, we can see that three quarters of our children and young people aged over 4 are attending their reviews and playing an active part in their meeting. This practice continues to drive permanence plans being achieved at as early a stage as possible for children but is an area we are ambitious to improve on. The year saw a dip in numbers of young people who decided not to attend in person but convey their views for the meeting (this is the PN6 code that increased to 15.5%. This has been an effect of the service realignment and periods of short staffing impacting on review arrangements and young people's attendance in person. To improve participation, we have sought stability among our RO group and the recruitment of ROs who demonstrate deeply held motivation to work directly with young people and build helpful relationships.
- 5.13 The service continued to receive a low return of written feedback booklets by way of consultation. This is evident not just from children and young people but also from parents and foster carers. This became more pronounced as the reporting year came to an end and the pandemic took more of a hold on everyone's lives during February and March 2020. This said, it is very clear from review records that ROs consult fully with children and young people in line with their wishes, and the Group Manager has tabled this issue with regional IRO managers who have universally shared similar experiences in how the process of consultation, be this through a written or virtual platform, is used by children, young people, their parents and carers. Where needed, ROs have taken specific and proportionate actions to support young people who have expressed dissatisfaction with the service they have received including intervening where necessary in care proceedings to ensure that children's wishes and views are heard by all those responsible for making care planning decisions for children.
- 5.14 During the reporting year, 95 consultation forms were received. This breaks down in to 51 forms received by ROs as part of the review consultation from children and young people, 31 forms received from foster carers and 13 forms received from parents.

Participation of Foster Carers and Parents

- 5.15 Foster carers and parents have been routinely invited to attend reviews, or consult with ROs through a separate meeting if it is assessed to be unsafe, not in a child's best interests or contrary to a child's wishes and views to have a parent or foster carer present in their review meeting.

Dispute Resolution Processes

- 5.18 The Reviewing Service experienced difficulties evidencing the formal challenge function of the role during 2019-20 year through its use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP). As this process becomes embedded in the electronic recording system, Care First, the number of practice alerts is likely to increase. A report from Care First became active in the autumn of 2019. Regrettably, to that point there had not always been compliance with recording escalation on Care First electronic systems and these activities were primarily stored in individual emails. There has been considerable activity to ensure that ROs evidence their escalation of issues affecting children on their files. This includes the performance report, that is reviewed on a weekly basis with ROs and by the Senior Management Team. This threads as a weekly item discussed between the management group, as a standing agenda item at the ROs team meetings and in individual supervision. ROs now routinely have case discussions with their line managers if they are considering whether a practice escalation should be raised. This is improving performance and the RO footprint is now found consistently on children's records. The management group has worked hard with ROs to support them to take a system-based approach to escalation as this promotes a more impactful outcome for children. Two recent examples of this approach ensured improved structures are in place to identify when a young person being privately fostered may need to be offered Section 20 accommodation, while another led to improvements in the joined up care planning systems for new born babies.
- 5.19 In total, there were 22 DRP forms completed by Reviewing Officers on Care First. It would be more usual to see a significantly higher number as evidenced by the previous two years reporting of 144 and 66. While Reviewing Officers were challenging practice, embedding how this is undertaken and recorded required a much higher level of stability and knowledge of children's cases. Part of improving

again (see appendix A) was to prioritise and invest considerable energies in recruiting the right people for the role to implement the transformation of the service and its management. The service has decided to take a strong line that a DRP is not an escalation if it is not properly recorded and tracked as such to ensure this practice is embedded fully and this, alongside the temporary impact of high turnover in the service, affected the numbers being reported. Those DRPs that were raised with colleagues across the services were purposeful and assisted in drawing attention to drift and delay in progressing care plans for children. The escalation work of ROs is now reliably captured as part of ROs footprint on children's case records and is on target to reach 80 DRPs in 2020-21.

- 5.20 In the specific context of the 2019-20 year, the service ceased its compilation of quarterly overview reports and the refresh and renewal of this is part of the service plan moving forwards.

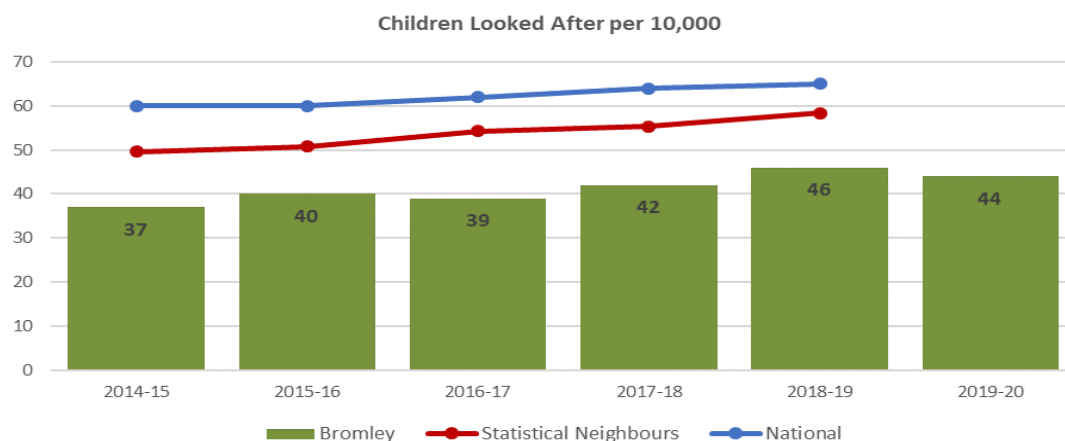
Impact of Staff Turnover

- 5.21 Nationally recruitment of social workers is challenging, and Bromley have continued to strive for stability with the ambitious target of 90% permanent social workers. We know that changes in social workers impacts on children and their relationships and can impact on care planning.
- 5.22 It's the RO Service's role to promote an optimum service to all our young people in line with national requirements. The most significant impact in this reporting year on the discharge of the RO function was the turnover of Reviewing Officers following the move to a dual role. This had an impact on the capturing of case escalations using the Dispute Resolution Protocol (DRP) and fluctuating performance at times in evidencing footprint and midway reviews. Despite this, the service was able to hold its review performance within timescale at 91%, and the change of role is envisaged to demonstrate better impact moving forwards as a stabilised service rebuilds more effective relationships with families and colleagues. The consistency of one reviewing officer when children who have child protection plans become looked after is beginning to show impact in children and young people not needing to repeat their stories to a new professional and reducing the complexities of having two reviewers involved with dual plans. Our Covid response is now seeing an increase to 95% of reviews held within timescale at the end of quarter 3 of 2020-21.

6. Profile of Children Looked After in Bromley

Numbers of Children Looked After & Young People

- 6.1 Following a steady increase in the number of children looked after in Bromley each year from 2016 to 2019, these numbers dropped from 348 children in March 2019 to 328 at the end of March 2020 but were above the predicated number of 298 post the Ofsted 2016 report. Bromley's rate of looked after children per 10,000 children has always been below the national average and remains significantly so at 44 per 10,000 children (compared with a national average of 64 per 10,000 children). The looked after population by gender is comprised of 59% males (at 31/03/20) and 41% females, so there is a significant disparity between gender.

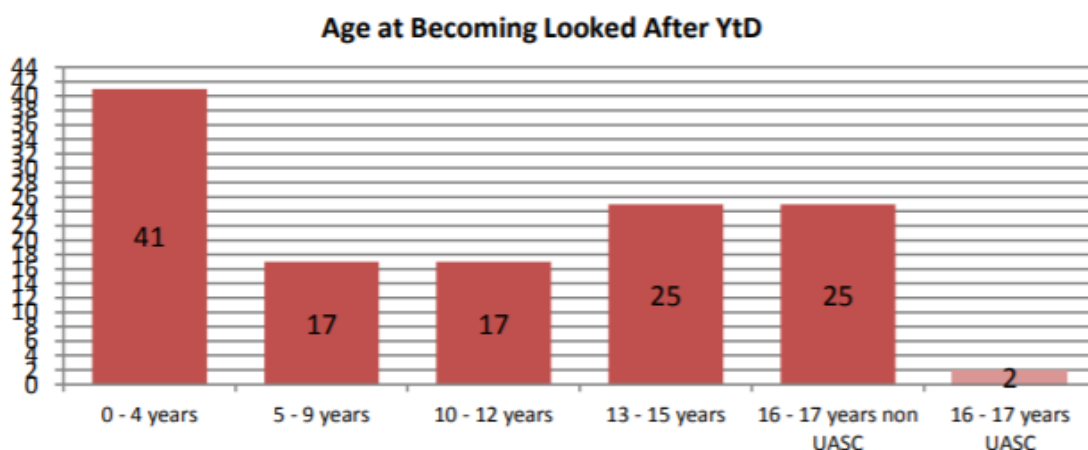


- 6.2 The ethnicity of Bromley's cohort of children looked after evidences significant disproportionality in relation to the demographics overall of Bromley's under 18 population. While this is not a Bromley specific pattern in the children looked after

population (and those receiving Children's Social Care services overall), this pattern does require closer analysis to help gain an understanding of how this pattern could reduce and be mitigated. The demographics of Bromley's looked after children population at the end of March 2020 was 60% White, 7% Black African, 8% Black Caribbean, 4% Black Other, 15% Mixed Heritage, 2% Asian and 4% are identified as Other. In total, 40% of our children in Bromley have Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) ethnicity. This contrasts with 23% of the overall child population in Bromley.

Age profile of children looked after and young people

- 6.2 The data continues to show, as in the previous year, that a higher proportion of Bromley's older children are living in care. In 2019/20, our cohort of 16 and 17 year old's living in care was below the national average (30% of the looked after population in Bromley compared with a national average of 37%), while our 10-15 year old age group constituted 43% of the looked after population, which is above the London average of 39%. This means 73% of the Bromley looked after population is aged between 10 and 17 years old. Younger children reflect national averages more closely, with 15% of children being aged from 0-4 years and children aged 5-9 years make up 13% of the looked after population. Older children tend to come into care because of child criminal exploitation (CCE, which includes the sexual exploitation of children) concerns, challenges to effective parental control, parental dysfunction and the breakdown of familial relationships, historical child protection concerns and/or previous social care involvement. There is often an extra-familial contextual risk, that is particularly apparent for older males and can contribute significantly to missing from care episodes and the safeguarding responses that our Children Looked After and Leaving Care service regularly put in place for these young people. These older children also often experience placement instability and can pose challenges in finding suitable accommodation. Two older children have needed, for their safety, to be placed in Secure Accommodation under welfare grounds and one young person was placed in this type of accommodation at the end of March 2020. The Head of Service now conducts the Secure Accommodation Criteria Reviews that are held to review whether the criteria to be placed in such provision are met in the view of a panel on the date of the review.



- 6.3 It is understandable that older children have had life experiences and contextual needs that can mean they tend to find it hard to settle in placements, which can result in a series of 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 has been a focus during 2019/20 which has seen a Group Manager from the Quality Improvement Service attend a permanency panel chaired by the Head of Service for permanency and an older children's panel chaired by the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Leaving Care. This presence feeds in Reviewing Officer perspectives to the permanency needs of children and young people. A corporate parenting sub-committee on stability is established which has considered placement stability as one of its priorities, led by the Head of Service for Permanency. Achieving timely permanence and stability has been an improving picture during this reporting year.
- 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, which are offered every time a child returns from a period that they have been missing from care. Our approach is that when one of our children does not return when they should we immediately report this to the police irrespective of the length of time they are missing. This is because risk to children is present and live in all periods of time that children are not where they are expected to be, however short or long that time is.
- 6.5 The local authority has continued to demonstrate effective tracking of children who are at risk of child criminal (including sexual) exploitation, missing or gang affiliated through

the multidisciplinary MEGA (Missing, Exploitation and Gang Affiliation) panel. At the end of March 2020, 16 of our looked after children are currently being tracked. A Group Manager from the Quality Improvement service continues to sit as a panel member.

- 6.6 The majority of children looked after are placed with foster families (60%) Of these children, 110 (32%) are placed with Bromley approved fostering households, while 97 children (28%) are placed with fostering households approved by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). A smaller number of 51 children are placed with family and friends who are known as connected persons (15%), A higher number of 69 children (20%) with especially complex needs were placed in residential placements (these can include children's homes, infants living with parents being assessed in mother and baby units and residential schools as well as young people who are being detained on remand). At the end of March 2020, 41% of children were placed locally in Bromley, while 59% were placed outside of Bromley's boundaries and 55 children were placed more than 20 miles from their home borough. The Quality Improvement service supports the efforts being made by our services for Children Looked After and Care Leavers, Fostering and Commissioning to continue to seek innovative ways to bring children closer to home for whom this can be safely achieved through ongoing campaigns to increase our in house fostering.
- 6.8 In Bromley during this recording period there were 177 children subject of Care Orders (51%), 64 children subject of Interim Care Orders (19%), 12 children were subject of Placement Orders awaiting adoption (4%), 72 children were subject of Section 20 accommodation including 20 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (21%) while three young people were held on remand (1%).

Placement Stability

- 6.9 Placement stability experienced challenges in Bromley during 2019-20. Short term placement stability measure of 3 or more moves in the year increased slightly from 9% to 10% year on year. However, this is in line with national averages.
- 6.10 Long term placement stability, which had reduced to 57% for children looked after for 2.5 years who have lived in the same placement for 2 or more years, increased to 60% in 2019-20. However, the national benchmark is 69%. A Group Manager from the Quality Improvement Service joined a taskforce established by the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care Leavers to strengthen practice to promote placement

stability. Reviewing Officers advocated for early stability meetings when they identified a potential risk of placement disruption and continue to do so with what has been a significantly improving picture moving in to 2020-21.

Permanency Outcomes

- 6.11 Permanency is considered at all stages of the child's journey. Where this requires a legal order, there is a strong 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 and this includes escalating concern if the transition planning to permanence is not focused wholly on the needs of the individual child.
- 6.12 During this reporting period 29 children have been reunified home, 8 children have been adopted and 31 have been placed with relatives under a Special Guardianship Order. There is a focus on permanence with the Permanence Panel, which ensures that within 8 weeks of being accommodated there is oversight of planning for children. At the end of March 2020, only 3% of children looked after for 2 months plus did not have a clearly defined permanence plan and 105 children had achieved permanence during the year. Our success with our court work with children and families has contributed to these levels of overall performance. In 2019-20, we issued care proceedings for 102 children. Of these, 61 children (60%) achieved permanence within their families via Supervision Orders, Special Guardianship Orders or long term connected persons placements with family or friends. 26 of these children (25.5%) were placed in long term foster care or placed for adoption. We can refer 10 families each calendar year to the Family Drug and Alcohol Court (FDAC). Of the 10 families referred during 2019-20, This has supported reunification with families and the outcomes have included 5 cases concluded with children remaining with their birth parents, 2 cases concluding with Special Guardianship Orders and 1 child returning to their parent with a Supervision Order made to the Local Authority. The other two cases referred to FDAC remain uncompleted with the family court.
- 6.12 ROs 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. Children are considered at the Legal Gateway Panel if they have been accommodated under Section 20 for three months and Reviewing Officers feed their views into this panel through the panel membership of one of the Quality Improvement Group Managers.

- 6.13 Achieving placement stability for children and young people in care will remain a priority for the Reviewing Officers. 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 partner networks around young people to strengthen placement stability for children and young people who have complex care needs. In addition, the new Head of Service chairs this panel on occasion.

7. Services for Children Looked After and Young People

Health

- 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. 91% of children having an annual health assessment within 12 months, but a very slight decrease saw 95% of children fully up to date with their immunisations and 88% of children had seen a dentist in the previous year at the end of March 2020.
- 7.4 All of our children have a completed strengths and difficulty questionnaire (SDQ) with an average score of 12. A score of 0-13 indicates that a child's emotional wellbeing is within the normal range. The questionnaire is used to identify children who need CAMHS or other wellbeing support. Although the SDQ scores are used to inform referrals to CAMHS, senior managers are also linking these into progress monitoring and care planning. Reviewing Officers check and consider how the SDQ score may affect the care planning needs of children and young people.

Education

- 7.5 The educational attainment of Bromley Looked after Children is primarily monitored by the Virtual School. There is an annual Celebration of Achievements to recognise both academic and personal achievement of our 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. Fewer of our children are receiving fixed term exclusions from school year on year. During 2019-20 this figure dropped to 18 young people, leading to 66 lost days at school in total for those young people.
- 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 on a termly basis 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. PEP performance is strong with 93% of children having an up to date PEP at the end of the 2020 Spring term. Reviewing Officers scrutinise PEPs before each review to ensure that these are ambitious for children and are progressing meeting any additional needs in a timely way. This is especially important for children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) or who are considered to require assessment with a view to having an EHCP, as 41% of our children have an EHCP compared with 27% of children looked after nationally. We know that our older entrants to care often have needs that can be masked by behavioural needs. Joint working to identify additional needs with learning has improved through the regular attendance and input of the Virtual School at the weekly multi-agency Placement Panel, chaired by the Head of Service for Children Looked After and Leaving Care. This has seen timely recognition of need and starting the Education and Health Care planning assessment process.
- 7.9 Looked after children in Bromley have been achieving well in their education. In the 2019-20 period, 46% of students achieved 5 GCSEs and 71% achieved at least 1 GCSE. We are aspirational for all our looked after children and want to see them attain higher education opportunities including university level outcomes where possible. In this recording period 22 young people were attending higher education and we want to see this number grow.

	2020 Reporting cohort of 28 pupils	2019 Reporting cohort of 31 pupils	2018 Reporting Cohort of 20 pupils	2017 Reporting Cohort of 19 pupils
5 at grade 4 and above incl. English and Maths	21% (6 pupils)	29% (9 pupils)	15% (3 pupils)	26% (5 pupils)
5 at grade 4 and above	25% (7 pupils)	29% (9 pupils)	20% (4 pupils)	26% (5 pupils)
5 GCSEs	46% 13 pupils	45% 18 pupils	65% (13 pupils)	47% (9 pupils)
1 GCSE	71% (20 pupils)	58% (18 pupils)	80% (16 pupils)	84% (16 pupils)

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 of providing challenge and support to schools on individual or group progress.

Advocacy

7.11 Independent advocacy to support children and young people with specific issues about their care plan or the service they are receiving is available to all our children. The service is provided by Advocacy for All. We would like to continue promoting increased

use of advocacy by our children and the advocacy service has been more successful to date in working with children who are subject of Child Protection plans. In 2019-20, there were 25 advocacy involvements for specific issues for looked after children. 15 of these involvements provided support so that young people could participate in line with their wishes in their looked after review meetings. There were 42 advocacy involvements in relation to care proceedings, which increases the numbers of looked after children who wished to receive independent support. There were no advocacy involvements in relation to accommodation. 11 referrals were made to the advocacy service by the Children Looked After and Leaving Care Service, and close work has been undertaken with the service to seek to increase the awareness and use of advocacy as an essential means of support for children and young people in addition to their social workers, carers, Reviewing Officers and others.

- 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. It continues to be a challenge to translate this promotion in to use of this service by our children but as we move forward we will ensure that they have the choices and options available to them.

8 Progress of developments and key priorities for 2019/20

- 8.1 There were many challenges during the reporting year which required the Reviewing Service to continue to focus on the quality of provision to children and young people, both within the offer to children in care, but more fundamentally around how it fulfils its role and ensures the child remains at the centre of all of our work.
- 8.2 The developmental work in relation to the discharge of the role has been affected by a review and formal consultation to change the contractual requirements of the role so that Reviewing Officers fulfilled both a Child Protection conference chair role with families and the Independent Reviewing Officer role for our children looked after.
- 8.3 The purpose of this change was to benefit our children, but some Reviewing Officers and their managers were tested, and a number of Child Protection Chairs left their roles. Some who had historically been recruited as IROs gave the new role some

months before deciding whether the role was the right one for them and elected to leave posts.

- 8.4 During this transition period the service relied on agency staff and saw periods of staff shortages and covering of work that adversely affected morale. The new management team, including the Head of Service, was in the early process of developing relationships both with each other while recruiting and building what was, to all intents and purposes, a new service. As a contingency, the service used a specialist agency for a short time to ensure that reviews were held on time.
- 8.5 This said, performance held up well except for embedding the Dispute Resolution Process. With the role change in the, Reviewing Officers did not always record their case escalation and data was not available to track. This was fixed and a performance report provided on a weekly basis became a core part of the weekly performance data shared with the senior management team. By the end of the year the service was once again in a position where it could clearly demonstrate work it had undertaken to challenge and support continuous improvements in practice and service delivery for children and young people.
- 8.6 Through this process of change, strengths were identified through the Practice Assurance Stocktake framework. In general, Reviewing Officers footprint and overview was embedding and improving. Observations of practice were largely positive about the quality of relationship and delivery of reviews through mechanisms such as Practice Week and observation by managers.
- 8.7 New recruits understood how we write review records for children and a Speech and Language therapist attended a team meeting. The service continued to audit and sample records to challenge Reviewing Officers constructively around how they are evidencing the voice of the child including empowering young people to co-chair reviews.
- 8.8 With new staff, the service held a joint getting to know session with colleagues in the Children Looked After and Leaving Care service to build relationships and collaborate on the services vision of collaborative working that will demonstrate excellence.
- 8.9 The service became more visible and involved in a range of meetings where it could support and challenge services around their planning and work with children. This has

included attendance at strategy meetings for young people missing from care, developing attendance at Corporate Parenting sub-groups and commencing planning with the Active Involvement team to explore how best to seek to work more closely with LinCC to achieve their involvement in developing the Reviewing service.

- 8.10 The work of the service continues to be assessed at every round of Practice Reviews (audits) and Practice Assurance Stocktakes lead by an external independent social work consultant.

Priorities for 2020-21

- 8.11 The Reviewing Service will achieve stability and increase permanent staff to the group. This stability will support the successful building of relationships with children and young people as well as strengthening relationships with our colleague services through relaunching links, learning from each other with appreciation of the challenges colleagues face.
- 8.12 The use of case escalation will increasingly demonstrate a curious and appreciative systems-based approach to helping learning across the services when we make mistakes, or our systems don't work as intended for children and young people. Case escalation will demonstrate support and robust challenge where necessary but will not focus on achieving set numbers at the expense of the quality of the escalation and its impact for a child.
- 8.13 The Reviewing service will be increasingly visible with its overview and tracking of the progress of care plans and participatory with colleagues as they develop plans to meet children's needs.
- 8.14 The service will continue to build its presence at key strategic planning groups in relation to the Corporate Parenting priorities and will seek to establish closer relationships with the Active Involvement team and its work including with LinCC for their support and challenge in developing the reviewing service in the best interests of children and young people.
- 8.15 We will have a clear sense of young people's experience of reviews and develop our methodologies for consultation, feedback and practice observation in a way that

reflects the Bromley Relationship Model (BRM) and demonstrates our ambition to achieve excellence.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 The Independent Reviewing Service experienced a year of significant but needed change which caused temporary disruption as it seeks to join all colleague services across Children's Social Care in striving to deliver excellence. The changes made to the service throughout 2019-20 are a vital step in supporting consistency of reviewing for children and their families, and supporting the development of a wholly consistent and seamless service for our children as they journey from our front door services through our safeguarding and care planning service to the Children Looked After service. At the year end, the service has introduced several new permanent Reviewing Officers and has retained only its very best locum Reviewing Officers who reflect a diverse range of experience and knowledge that can promote the growth of the role. We continue to try to convert these workers to permanent but in line with the recruitment programme we only want the best for our children.
- 9.2 There remain challenges for the service to demonstrate its impact consistently and this will include promoting collaborative working partnerships with all our colleague services to build a culture of appreciation and understanding of the unique role that Reviewing Officers hold within the Children's Social Care Department, and how this can be put to the most effective use. Dispute Resolution as an appreciative learning exercise and playing a significantly more active role in the Department's overarching Quality Assurance Framework will expand and build on this shift in the Reviewing Service.

APPENDIX A

THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC

As the 2019-20 year was ending, it was increasingly clear from February 2020 onwards that work patterns were needing to adjust to the growing risks of a novel coronavirus that had started to transmit within London and the UK. The speed of the growth of the pandemic meant that by the end of March 2020, we were all working remotely and everyone was living under unprecedented lockdown conditions that severely limited direct social contact and interaction.

For professionals who are motivated to undertake work that is premised upon the impact of social relationships and meeting unmet social and care needs, these changes posed a huge challenge. These challenges ranged from adapting to the increased and all-embracing reliance on IT, to the impact of being at home and not seeing children and young people in person. This regular contact with children is one of the primary motivations for becoming a Reviewing Officer rather than pursuing a more traditional career pathway in the line management and supervision of front-line social workers.

The nature of the Reviewing Officer role means that the service is not part of managing the allocation of resources for children and families, and therefore the direct delivery of additional support and services for looked after children. It is also a role where direct face to face visiting, where restrictions have made this possible for short periods of time during the past 10 months, have necessarily and rightly been prioritised for social workers to undertake. However, where young people have expressed a specific wish to meet in person with their Reviewing Officer, this has been considered in terms of risk and has on several occasions been able to happen safely during the summer months in an open space.

Reviewing Officers have not been requested or required to work from the Civic Centre offices since the lockdown commenced in March 2020. The service had delivered a new Children & Families Reception via its Business Support team, which was providing a safe and discreet venue for young people experiencing difficulties and attending to

see their social workers could wait, be given a drink and a biscuit and have social care staff chat with them to increase their comfort before seeing their social worker. Naturally, this reception closed in March 2020 and has needed to remain closed to date.

Before the national lockdown was announced in March 2020, reviews with our children had continued as small meetings in the venue of young people's choice. This is usually in their placement. Post lockdown, meetings have been undertaken virtually. Unfortunately for the first period of lockdown there were Skype conference call facilities for the majority of Reviewing Officers and Webex licenses were subsequently purchased but the platform was unsuccessful for the service. The delivery to staff of Microsoft Teams as a virtual platform heralded significant progress in providing a virtual platform that could cope with broadband width and give a visual means that better supported Reviewing Officers relationships with children and young people, their carers and others. Upon delivery of this platform, it immediately became the means to deliver reviews and consultations in advance of reviews with children and young people. Not all our children are comfortable with virtual platforms and some can experience shyness or a lack of confidence when on a screen.

Invitations to reviews are always sent electronically and include the consultation form and the information leaflet setting out the service offered by Advocacy for All.

The service has contributed to the refreshed Linkin Bromley website for our children. This has included ensuring there is a dedicated page about the service and its role, as well as a dedicated page detailing the advocacy offer to all children and young people. Advocacy is promoted at all reviews and a dedicated page has also been added to the Council website. An impact of the pandemic has been hugely improved placement stability, but a side effect is that reductions in the use of advocacy have been noted. There is clear evidence that social workers are thinking of advocacy and both they and Reviewing Officers are taking opportunities to discuss with children and young people how an advocate can help at appropriate intervals. The Advocacy for All service is reporting that the range of methods taken to promote the service is having impact and advocacy referrals are again on the rise as the third quarter ended.

The service has achieved the stability it had aimed for. A locum Reviewing Officer has converted to become permanent and the use of locum ROs has reduced. Those locums the service has employed and retained add considerable strength and depth

to the skillset of the RO group overall. During the year, two locum ROs have left and 1 permanent RO will be leaving before the end of the year as she wished to return to a team manager role. This has felt more akin to natural turnover of the staff group. One Group Manager also left the service in June 2020, and permanent recruitment was achieved with an internal applicant being successful, meaning this member of staff also converted from a locum position to a permanent role in the service.

Shortly before the pandemic took hold, the senior management team had commenced its planned aim to deliver excellence for our children and young people. The SMT defined excellence in Bromley as;

‘Consistently going above and beyond, enabling our children, young people and their families to grow and flourish, being aspirational and building resilience for the future.

We strive to create opportunities to be innovative and reflective within an organisation that nurtures relationships, always seeks feedback and has self-confidence to listen and act.’

The Quality Improvement Service has used this to deliver its definition of excellence in relation to the role of the Reviewing Officers as;

To be champions of best practice with children and their families. We endeavour to give high support to social workers and our partners to achieve the very best outcomes, with high aspirations for our children.

We go all out to build relationships, listen carefully to our children, families, colleagues and partners and act accordingly. We challenge where challenge is due, in the right way at the right time. We challenge sensitively where we believe we can do better for our children. Our intent is to be drivers of continued improvement and learning across our organisation.

The staff in the service have developed their motto of “impact, impact, impact” and morale has remained consistently high despite the disappointment in being unable to see children and young people in person. Reviewing Officers have continued to wish to have two keeping in touch meetings as groups to bookend each working week and have a WhatsApp group that regularly remains in touch and supports with resolving any IT problems or other difficulties that are affecting individuals working alone in their homes.

A positive impact of the stability gained in the service is that developing the leadership aspects of the Reviewing Officer role has been taken forwards. Reviewing Officers who have constructive ideas to strengthen the service can lead working groups to develop proposals around these to the management group. This has included a RO leading a group of colleagues in reviewing the impact of the dual role.

The Black Lives Matter movement had a significant impact on the staff group in the service. Managers facilitated open conversation with staff to help reflections on how the issues of discrimination, unconscious and conscious bias and structural inequalities experienced by people of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds affected them personally and in their work. These discussions were hugely appreciated by the staff group.

The service has become increasingly valued and involved in contributing to the broader developments across services. ROs now routinely attend newly developed final care planning meetings for children who are subject of care proceedings and their contributions are valued by colleagues. 35 children have been subject of these meetings since July 2020 and the meetings show joint ownership, shared thinking and the adoption of a holistic approach to care planning for children. Liaison with CAFCASS Guardians is fully embedded and now occurs in all cases. Our Safeguarding service has established a virtual court in the rooms usually used for Child Protection conferences and this has facilitated court hearings for families on two occasions. This has included confidential space for parents to consult lawyers. ROs attend permanence panel for young people they are involved with and contribute to these planning sessions, but in ways that does not compromise their position. ROs are delivering the Bright Spots survey with children and are seeking to embed exit discussions when children and young people cease to be looked after. Because of the impact on relationships with children and young people, ROs have written individualised introduction letters to send to children when they become their Reviewing Officer.

The use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol is now fully embedded. Numbers will fluctuate month on month but the way escalations are now managed by ROs is focused on taking an appreciative systems based approach. Along with the refreshed launch of RO links across the service areas, this is helping build more collaborative and impactful relationships that are evidencing a contribution to improved outcomes for children and young people. In November 2020, 11 DRPs were raised concerning children looked after and these focused on quality of practice and the impact for young people. The ROs are increasingly identifying themes and trends through their regular reflective sessions, and these include lobbying and raising a need for improved evidence of how life story work is undertaken, to considering whether for children with disabilities their planning may reflect a medical model rather than a clearly prioritised social model of care delivery.

Alongside the above, the service has become increasingly integrated and involved in the delivery of the Quality Assurance Framework. This has seen ROs now contribute two practice reviews towards each practice review cycle, support YOS inspection preparation through taking on a specific practice reviewing role with the YOS service. The Head of

Service has recently formed part of the small team conducting a Practice Assurance Stocktake of our services for care leavers under the coaching of our external independent social work consultant.

Key performance indicators have maintained or improved. Our reviews are now 95% within timescale, an increase from 91% and 90% in the previous two years.

Building on its definition of excellence, the service has agreed an ambitious service plan that has been progressed and will be fully achieved in 2021-22. Learning and development is at the forefront and reflective group supervision has been introduced to give additional career and professional development sessions for our Reviewing Officers. Our Fostering IRO has completed a training the trainers course and used this to develop and deliver learning seminars for supervising social workers of lessons learned from serious case reviews. The service embraces the Bromley Relationship Model and its managers deliver a range of training including Practice Standards and Diversity in its Widest Form. Our Reviewing Officers and Business Support colleagues will all receive bespoke Bromley Relationship Model training later this year.

The service is aware it has a lot to achieve to demonstrate its excellence but the pandemic response from staff has demonstrated real commitment and passion that gives cause for much optimism.