

**Brent Council – Children and Young People Services
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2015/16**

1. Introduction

This Annual Independent Review Officer report describes the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to quality assuring and improving services for Children in Care. It provides qualitative and quantitative evidence relating to the IRO Service in Brent as required by statutory guidance for the year 2015/16.

The IRO service is delivered in accordance with the statutory guidance set out in the updated national IRO Handbook introduced in April 2011. The Handbook describes the changed responsibility of the IRO from the management of the looked after children's review process to a wider overview of the looked after children's case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The IRO Service in Brent consists of an IRO Manager and one IRO employed within the Council and a service commissioned from Aidhour which provides the majority of the direct IROs children in care.

The importance of the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is captured in the foreword of the research conducted by the National Children's Bureau in 2014, written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson.

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

2. Summary of key messages for 2015-2016

What has gone well?

- 86% of children and young people participated in care planning either directly or through others at their reviews and gave feedback to their IRO. There was an increase in the number of children who physically attended their review and conveyed views verbally;
- 80% of children with a plan for adoption had decisions made in a timely way. IROs contributed to this improved performance by actively driving care planning;

- Issues raised by IROs are being resolved quickly by social workers and team managers;
- There has been a reduction in children who experienced three or more placements from 16% in 2014/15 to 12.5% children 2015/16. IROs are actively involved with any change of placement and escalate concerns when appropriate;
- Children have said that they value continuity of their IRO.

What are we worried about?

- Some children have fed back that they have experienced frequent changes of social workers;
- Some children have informed their IRO that they had a change of placement without consultation or a choice;
- Social workers' reports and up-to-date plans are not always available before the review. This does not allow time for the child, family or IRO to read the contents of the report before the review;
- Consistent recording by IROs is needed that demonstrates the child's voice in reviews, mid-way reviews and IRO activity;
- Pathway Plans need to be consistently available for all eligible young people at the review held on or around their 16th birthday.

3. Review of IRO Service priority actions 2015/16

The IRO Annual Report 2014/15 identified priorities and actions which have been completed as follows:

3.1 Closer monitoring and contract management of Aidhour IROs. A quarterly contract monitoring meeting will take place with the IRO manager.

Quarterly meetings have taken place throughout 2015/16. These meetings are held to resolve practical issues, offer training and look at areas which have led to escalations to reduce reoccurring issues.

3.2 The IRO group including permanent and Aidhour IROs will meet together bi-annually to discuss developments in the area of their work and be further updated on Children's Social Care in Brent.

Aidhour IROs working for Brent met as a group met twice and worked together for on key priorities such as incorporating the Signs of Safety model into the reviewing process. A meeting was held with the Operational Director and the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services to ensure all IROs understand and feel part of Brent support for children in care.

3.3 Closer monitoring of timescales and midway reviews.

A total of 96 % of reviews were held within timescales. A sample of audits completed by the Aidhour director and the IRO manager demonstrates that there an increased numbers of midway reviews have been completed. This remains an area for monitoring.

3.4 Incorporate the Signs of Safety model to the review process.

The IRO manager has undertaken Practice Leader training for Signs of Safety and two of the Aidhour IROs are trained in the full Signs of Safety model. In addition three Aidhour IROs attended training on Signs of Safety specifically for IROs and Child Protection Advisors. This was a low attendance of IROs and this is being addressed with Aidhour. A draft LAC Review template incorporating Signs of Safety has been devised in consultation with practitioners, IROs and the project manager for Signs of Safety and will be introduced in November 2016 once consultation with the Children in Care Council is completed.

3.5 Increase the gathering of children's feedback to improve the quality and responsiveness of the service and individual reviews.

Themes and trends from children's feedback are more systematically being gathered to feed into learning and development and service improvement. This has built on monitoring of the escalation processes which has demonstrated that individual issues are being resolved promptly. The reduction of children being subject to three or more placement moves is an example of some of the progress being made.

3.6 The IRO manager continues to observe reviews of the in-house and Aidhour IROs. Any feedback themes discussed at the bi-annual meeting to support IRO development.

Each IRO was observed completing a LAC Review throughout the year. Overall IROs demonstrated a high level of understanding of the review process, ensuring that the child's voice is at the centre of decision making. In all of the observations, IROs spoke to children on their own and took their views on board. These observations identified that IROs were using two different templates for minutes. This has impacted on recording of the views of children and young people consistently and is being addressed with a new template being implemented for November 2016.

3.7 Children to be supported to write and present an annual report about their experiences of being in care in Brent.

Children were consulted as part of this report but have not written their own annual report and this will be an area of priority for 16/17. A young person's summary of this report is available and will be distributed young people in care age 10-17 (Appendix 1).

3.8 Investigate further opportunities to strengthening the tracking system for children who have an adoption decision, so that the reviewing process supports swift action towards a child's final placement.

The IRO manager attends the tracking panel for children looked after and feeds back any concerns or issues raised. Timeliness of placements of looked after children for Adoption following best interest decision of Adoption was 80%. This is an increase of 23% from

2014/2015. IROs play a proactive role in monitoring and driving this process. The adoption service was judged as good during the 2015 Ofsted inspection.

3.9 Continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers incorporated into the Learning and Development offer.

Key messages from children and young people are fed back to services. For example the high number of changes in social workers alongside placement moves without a full consultation or an opportunity to see the proposed placement first has been fed back to the relevant services and is being monitored by the IRO Service. Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council, have delivered training to staff to raise awareness about the Brent Pledge.

The IRO Annual Report 2014/15 identified two priorities where actions have been completed partially, as follows:

3.10 Increase parental participation in children's reviews by producing a 'guide to your child's review' and promote understanding and the use of an advocate for parents where necessary.

A booklet is drafted and planned for launch November 2016. We have promoted use of advocates, however this has not led to an increased take up. We are developing further options for advocacy through a commissioned service.

3.11 Revise the current review meeting template in partnership with the Children in Care council.

Through our developing Signs of Safety practice, we have developed a new template for review to optimise the voice of the child. This is being consulted with by the Children in Care council for launch before the end of 2016.

4. Professional Profile of the IRO Service.

The IRO Service sits within Brent Children and Young People's Service as part of the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service.

The service is managed by an IRO Manager who manages one permanent in-house IRO and a commissioned service called Aidhour, which provides the majority of the reviews through contracted, experienced social work practitioners.

All of the IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked, Health Care Professional Council (HCPC) registered, fully qualified (above the minimum requirements) and experienced. Many of the IROs have been undertaking reviews for Brent for a number of years and know the children well. In some instances, the IROs have been the most consistent and trusted person in the child's life.

The service provided by Aidhour has remained stable, with two IROs leaving in the last 12 months. This high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input and stability for many looked after children.

The IRO manager ensures the service stays in touch with developments nationally and across London, in respect of recent court judgement and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings through DfE hosted London IRO manager network meetings. These meetings include regular updates with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) on current issues.

During 2015/16, the IRO manager has contributed to wider service development including participation in the recruitment of social work staff, presenting at the Children & Young People's Service staff induction and attending regional and National events, ensuring this information and learning is fed back to the organisation.

In terms of gender diversity there is a mix of IROs within both the in-house and Aidhour IRO provision. The IROs, including those in-house and from Aidhour, comprised 8 (57%) males and 6 (43%) females. This is similar to our looked after children population at 31st March 2016 with 204 (61%) male and 133 (39%) female children in care.

The ethnicity of IROs is less diverse than that of the looked after population.

IRO Ethnicity	
White	10
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	2

5. Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

- The Looked After population at 31st March 2016 was 337 in comparison to 326 at 31st March 2015.
- 29 children or 8.6 % were aged 0-4 years;
- 56 children or 16.6 % were 5- 10 years;
- 125 children or 37% were 0-15 years;
- 127 young people or 37.6% were 16 plus.
- The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who were Looked After by Brent at 31st of March 2016 was 64 comparing to 48 at 31st March 2015.
- 14 Looked After Children have significant or complex disabilities.

The ethnicity of the cohort of Looked After Children as of 31st March 2016 was as follows:

Ethnicity		
	Number	Percentage
White	88	26.26%
Mixed/ Multiple	73	22%
Asian or Asian British	59.18	17.5

Black or Black British	109	32%
Not stated	1	2.3%
Other	7	2%
Total	337	100%

Children looked after by Age and Gender		
	Male	Female
Under 1	6	7
0-4	17	12
5-9 years	30	26
10-12	15	16
13-15	57	35
16 over	83	44
Total	204	133

6. Referral and allocations

Referrals to Aidhour are completed via the Aidhour Director who ensures children are promptly allocated to an Aidhour IRO, promoting smooth communication and liaison with allocated social workers and the IRO Service.

Full time IROs carry a case load of 60-65 children at any given time. This case load is in line with national guidance and Ofsted recommendations. IROs are valued by social work staff as experts in the field of looked after children and as such offer guidance on care planning, as well as tracking individual plans through regular mid-way reviews.

Once allocated, IROs are expected to provide and maintain continuity and consistency in reviewing a particular child's care plan whilst they remain looked after. In addition, the IROs complete the midway reviews and liaise with the Child's Guardian if there are court procedures and other professionals, as and when required.

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to Brent 'Mosaic', the integrated children's service database so that they can input their reports and review the progress of a child's care plan. They are able to add a case note to a child's case record on Mosaic, record the midway review of care plans and identify any relevant issues that require escalation to senior managers for resolution.

IROs have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange between IROs and Brent social workers and managers, thus complying with data protection requirements. This promotes a joined up approach in order to achieve the agreed care plan for the child.

7. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service



Contract meetings take place quarterly and are attended by the Director of Aidhour, the Head of Safeguarding and the IRO manager. Agenda items for this meeting include practice and service developments. During 2015/16 these meetings took place on 15/07/15, 28/11/15 and 14/01/16.

Throughout the year, audit and observation of reviews have been undertaken by the IRO manager and Director of Aidhour. Each IRO has been observed once during the year and a number of audits were completed on the quality of review minutes and mid-way reviews. In addition to Brent's internal quality assurance systems, Aidhour Ltd also monitors the work of their IROs to ensure it is undertaken in line with the care planning regulations to agreed standards and deadlines.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach reviews are assessed to be good. However, mid-way reviews did not appear on every file audited and this is an area that requires improvement. In addition IROs do not always upload escalations and e-mail correspondence to children's files. Therefore it is at times difficult to see the IRO footprint in some case files. This has been raised with Aidhour at the quarterly meeting and will continue to be monitored.

IROs have direct access to the Operational Director of Children's Social Care and the Strategic Director of Children and Young People to raise issues in respect of Looked After Children should they require it. An annual meeting with the Strategic Director for Children and Young People attended by IROs took place on 14/01/16. IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social work staff. IROs were updated on action which meant that Social workers have reduced caseloads and closer supervision and support. IROs were also informed of the plan in place to increase the proportion of permanent staff.

The IRO Service has a protocol to escalate cases to CAFCASS. This has helped to ensure cases in proceedings are subject to robust analysis and challenge about the matters of critical importance to the child's safety, wellbeing and permanency.

Brent Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted from 14th of September 2015 – 8th October 2015. A number of IROs were interviewed as part of the inspection individually and as a group. Inspectors also observed looked after children reviews, audited files, looked at sample of Looked After Children review minutes, the Brent escalation procedure and spoke to children and young people.

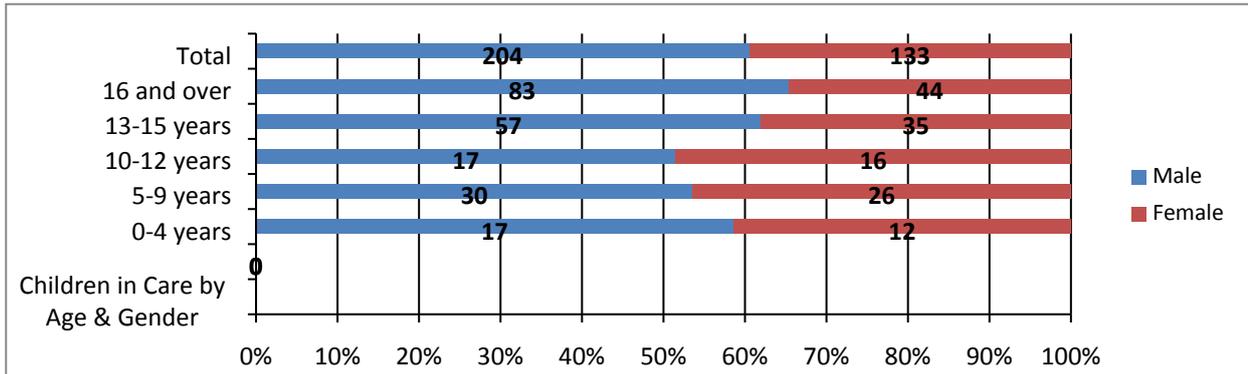
Comments made by the inspectors with regard to the IRO service included:

'The stable, long standing, independent reviewing officer (IRO) has continued to support children and has provided them with some stability during a period where there has been a significant turnover in social workers. A high percentage of children and young people attend their looked after children review.'

Inspectors saw 'evidence of appropriate use of the dispute resolution processes. In a minority of cases, recording of reviews and decision looked after children lacked sufficient clarity or relevant timescales for completion'.

8. Performance information about the IRO service

- A total of 990 reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2016. This is an increase of 60 reviews in comparison to the year 2014/15.
- The overwhelming majority of children and young people aged 4 years plus (602 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves
- On a month by month basis the majority of Reviews (96%) are held within the appropriate time scales.



8.1 Participation of children

Reviews offer an important opportunity for children to have their say about their care plans and for professionals and carers to listen and take children views into account. It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. In some cases, children may choose not to attend their review or professionals agree that this will not be appropriate. IROs are sensitive to these children's needs and work with the allocated social worker and carer to listen to a child's views, wishes and feelings in a way more suited to them and incorporate this into their care plan.

If a child does not want to attend the review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded against the following heading listed in the chart below.

Type of participation	Number of children	% of total LAC Reviews
<i>Child physically attends and conveys verbally</i>	677	68%
<i>Child does not attend but is represented</i>	154	16%
<i>Child age under four</i>	88	9%
<i>Child does not attend but conveys through medium</i>	36	4%

<i>Child does not attend and is not represented</i>	13	1%
<i>Child attends but does not convey and is not represented</i>	12	1%
<i>Child attends and is represented</i>	7	1%
<i>Child attends and conveys symbolically</i>	3	0%
Total	990	100%

In 2015/16, the child attended and conveyed their views in 68% (677 review) of LAC reviews, an increase compared to 65% (608 reviews) in 2014/15. This increase has been a result of greater focus by the IROs and the social workers to ensure that the child's voice is heard and that reviews are held at a time and place to facilitate the greatest opportunity for attendance.

LAC review minutes are routinely distributed to relevant parties by social workers, however the reduction in administrative support has resulted service not holding central oversight on the distribution of minutes and the timeliness of this process. An interim solution is being developed to track timeliness using current team resources as there is a statutory requirement for decisions from reviews to be distributed within 20 days.

8.2 Placement moves

IROs are routinely consulted on placement moves and other significant events or changes to a child's care plan. During the year 2015/16 12.5% of children and young people looked after had three or more placement moves compared to 16% the year previous. An audit of the escalations shows that IROs has been pro-active in advocating on behalf of young people and preventing moves where this is assessed to be in the young people's interest and their expressed wish. In the majority of the cases there is clear evidence of agencies working collaboratively to support the child and the placement which may have contributed to the reduction in placement move.

8.3 Health of looked after children

A sample audit of LAC review minutes has shown that IROs routinely check annual health assessments of Looked After Children, incorporate health within their recommendations and monitor progress. A total of 96.1% of Looked After Children had their annual health assessment completed within appropriate timescales.

8.4 Advocacy Service

IROs routinely check that children and young people know about advocacy and how it can support them in having a say in decisions affecting their lives. At each review IROs consider whether an independent visitor or advocate is needed and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

The Advocacy Service for Looked After Children is provided through a contract with Aidhour and commissioned on an individual basis when required.

The total number of children referred to the Advocacy Service was 41 representing 12% of the Looked After Children population.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2016 include:

- Children with a registered disability;
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children;
- Children whose first language is not English;
- Children in secure accommodation;
- Children placed at a distance from their home address.

The majority of advocacy requests related to young people's concerns in the following areas:

- Entitlement to pocket money and other funds for activities;
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement;
- Contact with family members;
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order.

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989 are always provided with an Advocate as a matter of course. This ensures that their views are transmitted to each Review to consider if they should be immediately released.

8.5 Timeliness of reviews

In 2015/16 96% of reviews took place within the statutory timescales. IROs completed some reviews in a series of meetings to ensure the relevant people were involved and the meeting remained child focused and friendly.

A small proportion did not take place within the required timescale for the following reasons:

- Late notification by allocated social workers
- IRO illness on the day of a review
- Unplanned change of placement on the day of the review

As a result of the number of late notifications for reviews, a new process has been put in place to ensure that social workers notify the IRO manager immediately when a child becomes Looked After.

8.6 Quality of care planning

IROs continue to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan that is written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people can expect to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. IROs routinely check the care planning process has helped children and young people to have their say on matters important to them and help them to understand what is happening and why.

The IRO manager is part of Brent's Permanency Tracking Panel to monitor the progress of all children who are looked after over 2 months who are not permanently placed.

8.7 Activities between LAC reviews

IROs routinely contact social workers for updates on the progress of looked after children review decisions alongside visiting or phoning the young person between reviews. All looked after children and young people are given a child friendly leaflet entitled 'My Independent Reviewing Officer' at their initial review. The leaflet has details of their IRO's name, contact number and email address. Young people often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

8.8 Management oversight of care plans

The revised statutory guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the decisions from the review before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions are reached the manager has five days to raise any queries or objections. However, instances of this are rare, which indicates that managers are overall satisfied with the recommendations and decisions at reviews.

IROs have continued to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure these meet the expected standard with most attention paid to the child's progress in physical health, emotional wellbeing, school life and academic attainment, permanency and identity needs.

IROs and children and young people have given feedback to indicate that sometimes they are not consulted when decisions are made about a move of placement. As this is a significant change in the life of a child or young person, the IRO manager has raised this issue with service areas. There have been improvements in this area and this evidenced by a reduction in IROs raising this as an issue.

IROs have fed back a priority for development is clarity around young people moving to adulthood as social workers do not routinely provide Pathway Plans to review meetings in the timescale the young person needs. Pathway Plans should be developed with young people from the age of 15 and a half. This has been raised with service areas and feedback from IROs in contributing the development of a revised independent living assessment tool.

IROs are able to access children's case records and can track the progress of their Personal Education Plans and liaise with the Virtual School to support any actions required to enable Looked After Children to access their education.

8.9 Permanency outcomes

During 2015/16 the majority of children achieved permanency through returning home to their parents or a family member, followed by children achieving a permanency arrangement in long-term foster care. Audits of the work of the IROs and Ofsted feedback indicate that most children have the right care plan to meet their needs.

There has been an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and this contributes to the number of Looked After Children over the age of 13. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children generally enter care at the age of 14-17 and do not generally have family connections in the UK.

9. Children's Views about their IRO and their review process

Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. Children and young people have told us that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs, their independence and availability. Children and young people have told us that their IRO listens to their concerns and takes up issues with the relevant services where this is needed and that the issues are often resolved quickly.

Children and young people have fed back that they value the consultation forms given before the review but have asked to be given enough time to complete them and for the department to explore a creative and interactive way of getting feedback.

The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people to their reviews:

My IRO helped me to move to my Nan. I would like to see my family every day!

My IRO listens and helped me to remain in my placement

I cannot wait to go back home and my IRO is helping me!

My IRO sorted my bursary and Laptop.

I would like to become a publicist!

My IRO is the most consistent person!

I miss my previous IRO who knew me from a young age and I miss him, can I have him back?

10. Escalation and conflict resolution

One of the key functions of the IRO is to identify and resolve problems arising from the care planning process. In Brent this is called the Looked After Children Escalation Management Process.

The IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker and the social worker's manager. If this is unsuccessful the IRO escalates this to the Team Manager and Principal Officer.

If the issue is not resolved by the Team Manager or Principal Officer, the IRO will escalate further to the Head of Service.

Information elicited from the issues identified in escalation is used to target support and challenge practice to make improvements. Young people have reported that they feel supported when IROs raise concerns and alerts about practice or plans.

A total of 58 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2015/16.

Among the 58 case escalations raised by IROs the majority were resolved at the SW/Team Manager and Principal Officer level with the remainder at a Head of Service level. They include the following areas:

- Policy and procedures not being followed including incomplete paperwork
- Education issues, including timely securing of a school place for unaccompanied minors and completion of PEP for 16 – 18 year olds by sixth form colleges.
- Transition to semi-independent units.
- IROs not being consulted regarding a change of care plan

None of the issues raised required to be escalated to the Operational Director or the Strategic Director in 2015/16.

Following a court ruling on the use of section 20 (looked after with the voluntary agreement of a parent, or the young person if over 16) and in line with the national trend and scrutiny in monitoring cases by the courts, all IROs were given a briefing in this area by Brent Legal and the Operational Director Social Care. As part of this trend in court direction, a review took place of all looked after children subject to section 20 and care proceedings were initiated where necessary.

Under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 the IRO has the authority to refer the case of any looked after child to CAFCASS if they are of the view that the child's human rights have been breached. In 2015/2016 there were no referrals made to CAFCASS by IROs in Brent.

The use of the escalation and dispute resolution protocol often proved successful in negotiating a positive outcome. An example of this was when a young person was unhappy about a proposed move and this was resolved through the intervention of the IRO.

11. Impact and outcomes

The IRO service has contributed in bringing positive impact and outcomes on the following areas:

- Supporting the service to have greater placement stability by avoiding unnecessary placement moves.
- Actively promoting and driving permanent placements for children who cannot return to their birth parents
- Strengthening the challenge function by embedding the Dispute Resolution process. This an expectation in the IRO Handbook and an element of the service which Ofsted commented upon during the Inspection in 2015.
- Driving the importance of education in improving outcomes for children and young people and meeting with the Virtual School to ensure ongoing liaison and discussion and through monitoring of the Personal Education Plan (PEP).
- Accessing PEP reports in advance of LAC Reviews to enable good preparation for the meeting and providing challenge where necessary.

12. What the IRO Service plan to do in 2016/17:

Planned activity to improve the IRO service and make an impact on positive outcomes for looked after children for 2016/17 are as follows:

1. Further incorporate the Signs of Safety framework in the LAC Review process to drive the use of this framework with social workers and partners. This includes revising the template for LAC Reviews in consultation with Brent's Children in Care Council.
2. Strengthen the challenge function of the IROs and ensure this is evidenced on case files
3. Ensure systems are in place to systematically gather themes and trends from children and young people, families, parents, carers, professionals and IROs to feed into organisational learning and service improvement.
4. Closer monitoring of midway reviews including ensuring these are completed in a timely way and capture the child's voice
5. Support the Children in Care Council to complete a Children's Report for 2016/17
6. Ensure there is a robust system in place for the distribution of LAC Review minutes within the statutory 20 day timescale

13. What Happens Next?

- This Annual Report will be presented to the Children and Young People Leadership Team and to the Children in Care Council for their comments and to agree on any actions arising.



- It will then be shared with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and with the Corporate Parenting Board for information and to inform multi-agency strategic planning
- The IRO Service Action Plan for 2016/17 will be amended with any feedback given for actions to be taken.

Author-Goitom Mebrahtu, IRO Service Manager

28th August 2016

Appendix 1: Young Person's Summary of the IRO Annual Report

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report, 2015/6 - Young People's Summary

As a child or young person in care, you have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who leads your review of your care plan and makes sure the right care plan is in place for you. The IRO checks to make sure everything agreed at the meeting happens. The IRO will also speak or meet with you between reviews.

What is an IRO Annual Report?

Every year the IRO Service writes an IRO Annual Report that outlines what is going well with the service and what needs to improve. The report includes what IROs have learned throughout the year and includes feedback from children and young people. The report is published on the Brent website. You can ask for full report if you would like to read it.

Participation and having a say

A key role of the IRO is to make sure that children and young people can have a say and that their views are listened to and taken seriously. Your IRO will always ask to speak to you before your review.

One of the ways we gather the views of children and young people is the consultation paper that you complete out before your review. This Annual Report was redesigned with the support of the Brent Care in Action Group, a group of children and young people in care who help us to improve services. Are you interested in joining the Brent Care in Action Group? You can call Shirley on 020 8937 4173 or send her an email: Shirley.ricketts@brent.gov.uk

Summary of key messages

What has gone well?

- We are really pleased to see that 86% of children and young people participated in care planning either directly or through others at their reviews and gave feedback to their IRO.
- We know that IROs make sure care plans are moving forward as agreed in the LAC Review. When they don't, or problems arise, we can see that issues raised by IROs are being sorted out quickly by social workers and team managers
- Children and young people should only move placements when they really need to. IROs monitor placement changes and have helped to reduce the number of children who have a lot of placement changes.
- Children and young people have told us that they value their IRO remaining the same person.

What are we worried about?

- Some children and young people experienced frequent changes of social workers
- Some children and young people have informed their IRO that they had a change of placement without consultation or a choice

- Sometimes reports and up-to-date plans are not always available before the review. When this happens, it does not allow time for you, your carer or the IRO to read the contents of the report before the review.
- Although we know that most IROs make sure your voice is heard, we want to make sure your voice is always captured
- Sometimes eligible young people do not have a Pathway Plan prepared at the review held on or around their 16th birthday.

What are we doing to improve things?

- IROs met with Gail Tolley, the Director of Children's Services, and let her know concerns raised by children and young people about too many changes of social workers. Gail knows this is important and is working to have more permanent social workers in Brent.
- IROs are working with social workers to make sure young people are consulted before any placement moves. IROs are also working with social workers to make sure reports are ready before the review and that young people have a Pathway Plan ready around their 16th birthday.
- We are developing the Care Plan and review process using a model called Signs of Safety, to ensure that children and young people's opinions are more regularly taken into account.
- The IRO Manager is working with all IROs to make sure your voice is captured during and in-between reviews.
- The IROs will continue to raise issues and concerns when things aren't right. Please make sure you let your IRO know if you need any help or support. The IRO can help to sort things out and improve services.

Would you like more information?

If you would like a copy of the full report, or find out more, please contact the IRO Manager Goitom Mebrahtu by telephone 020 8937 4563 or email goitom.mebrahtu@brent.gov.uk.