

**Brent Council Children and Young People
Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report**

Period of review: 01/04/17 to 31/03/18

This report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. It also contains quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO provision in Brent as required by statutory guidance. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council.

1. Summary of Key Messages

What has gone well?

- Children and young people tell us that they feel they are involved in decision making about their lives (section 7).
- IROs have consistently commented on the strong working relationships between social workers and the Youth Offending Service, contributing to robust care planning across professional networks (section 6).
- IROs are positive about the quality of permanency planning in Brent including involvement of the wider family network at the earliest possible stage of permanency planning (section 6).
- When children ask their IROs for support, there is evidence that issues are raised by IROs and resolved quickly avoiding escalation (sections 7, 8.3 and 10).
- Social workers and managers are receptive to IRO challenge, leading to reflection on the IRO's position and changes in care plans where appropriate (section 12).
- Children's Guardians have commented positively on social work and IRO practice (section 6).
- IROs are involved in scrutinising Pathway Plans and preparation for independence when young people reach age 16 (see sections 3 and 7).
- Children have said that they value keeping the same IRO throughout their time in care (section 11).

"Based on several reviews, I am really impressed with the social worker. She is clear, consistent and provides appropriate explanations for her decisions. She manages challenges well and does not shy away from addressing difficult issues. I anticipate positive outcomes for some of the young people we are working with."

Independent Reviewing Officer

"I have known my IRO for more than 10 years. He is cool and always keeps in touch with me"

Young person, age 15

What can be improved?

- There continues to be a high number of changes in social workers for children (section 6).
- Social workers' reports and updated care plan are not always available before the review. This does not allow the child, carers, parents and the IRO time to fully prepare for the review (section 8).
- IROs need to become more involved in the scrutiny of Looked After Children going missing, monitoring and ensuring that national and local procedures are followed (section 8).

2. Purpose of the IRO Service

The Children Act 1989 and the Adoption and Children's Act 2002 make it a legal requirement for the Local Authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to each child in care. The IRO Handbook provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and their employers on their functions in relation to the case management and reviews for Looked After Children. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for Looked After Children and challenging drift and delay.

The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, nor supervise the social worker or devise the care plan. Although it is important for the IRO to develop a consistent relationship with the child, this should not undermine or replace the relationship between the social worker and the child.

The IRO has the authority, independent of their employing Local Authority, to refer cases to the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) should they believe the Local Authority's plan for the child is not in their best interests. The Statutory guidance states that the IRO Manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the Corporate Parenting Committee and the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

"It is vital that children's care plans are reviewed by individuals who are not directly involved in providing support to either the child or the foster carer. IROs need to be objective, to scrutinise and hold to account the individuals and agencies who are charged with meeting the needs of the child."

BASW 2018

3. Professional profile of the IROs

The IRO function sits within the CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. From Jan 2018, the IRO function was brought together with the Brent Youth Parliament and Brent Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Service (SENDIAS) to form the Review, Engagement and Participation (REP) team in order to promote best practice in engagement with children and young people and their parents.

The REP Team is managed by an experienced social worker who is able to undertake reviews when necessary. Brent directly employs two full time IROs. The remainder of the IROs are experienced social work practitioners contracted through an independent agency, Aidhour (a not-for-profit company established 1998). All IROs are Disclosure and Barring Service checked, Health Care Professional Council registered and fully qualified (above the minimum requirements). 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 IRO contract with Aidhour was extended to 31 March 2019 following a review of the current arrangement. The current model of having in-house and commissioned IROs gives flexibility to respond to service demands while maintaining continuity and consistency for children and young people.

IRO provision has remained stable with two permanent and 10 Aidhour IROs being in place. This overall high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IROs' input, stability for many of our Looked After Children and a high level of scrutiny and challenge.

There are 12 IROs in Brent including those permanent and from Aidhour which is an increase of 1 IRO from last year. There is a good representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 6 females).

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

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	7
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	2
Black or Black British	2

While it is noted that the ethnic composition of the IROs is not fully representative of the borough's Looked After Children population, services are provided within an equal opportunities framework and all IROs, as qualified social workers, are expected to adhere to the Health and Care Professional Council code of conduct and Brent's internal policies and procedures. In addition to chairing LAC reviews, the 2 internal IROs also participate in undertaking audit and learning and development activity for staff.

Case Study: AW

AW is a 14 year old unaccompanied child from the horn of Africa. Prior to coming to the UK, AW experienced trauma while travelling through the Sahara desert and across the Mediterranean Sea. When AW was placed with a Brent foster carer he was in a state of confusion and the carer was not experienced in supporting young people with this of trauma. The IRO requested that an advocate to be appointed and asked for a professionals meeting to take place. This resulted in AW being better supported in this placement, which was culturally appropriate. AW has remained with his foster carer where he is settled and happy.

4. Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

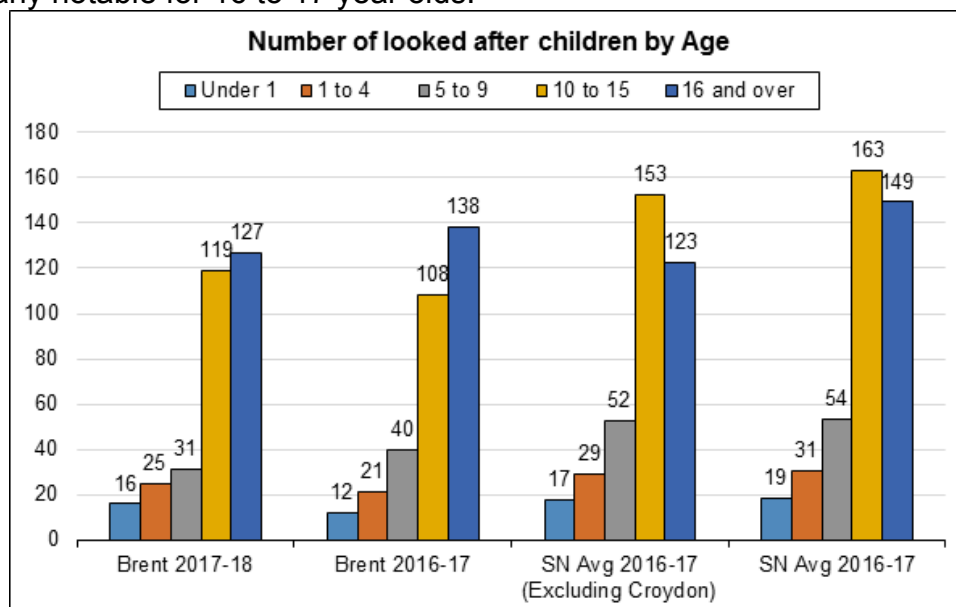
Although there is a slight increase in Looked After Children in the 0 to 4 age range, 77% of Looked After Children on 31/3/2018 were over the age of 10 and 41% were 16 and 17 years of age.

Looked After Children by age

	2016/17	2017/18
0 to 4 years of age	33	41
5 to 9 years of age	40	31
10 to 15 years of age	114	119
16 to 17 years of age	132	127
Total Looked After Children	319	318

"I enjoyed the Brent Celebration of Achievement Awards and sitting at the same table as my IRO."
Young person, age 16

There is a significant disproportion of Looked After Children by gender, with males accounting for 63% of Brent's Looked After Children population and females at 37%. This is particularly notable for 16 to 17 year olds.



Looked After Children by age and gender

The ethnicity of looked after children as of 31/03/2018 was as follows:

Looked After Children by ethnicity

Ethnicity	2016/17	2017/18
White	93	77
Mixed/ Multiple	61	60
Asian or Asian British	64	59
Black or Black British	92	97
Other	9	25
Total	319	318

"My IRO took me out to a restaurant at the design centre to celebrate my 18th birthday. She is the best IRO I have had."
Young person, age 18

5. Referrals and allocations

The REP Team Manager is responsible for ensuring children who come into care are allocated an IRO. 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 REP Team. The service is supported by 0.5 post of a business support officer who processes invoices, liaises with Aidhour and allocated social workers and completes other administrative work as necessary.

Full time IROs carry a case load of 60 to 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 mid-way reviews.

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

IROs carrying out review tasks have secure remote access to 'Mosaic', Brent's integrated children's services database, to 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 also have secure remote access to the Brent internal e-mail system which facilitates confidential communication and information exchange, thus complying with data protection requirements.

6. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the REP Team Manager in Brent oversee the work of the Aidhour IROs through group supervision, quarterly contract monitoring, audits, meetings and direct observations. Group supervision takes place once every two months and contract meetings take place once a quarter. Practice improvement discussions are facilitated at this meeting through consideration of case studies.

The REP Team Manager and Director of Aidhour carry out regular audits looking at the quality of minutes, participation of looked after children in the decision making process, and any drift in the care plan, health or education issues. The audits have evidenced IROs' oversight and escalation having a positive impact on outcomes for looked after children. The audits also evidence IROs' involvement of children and young people's views in decision making processes. 100% of the files audits have shown that children were spoken with on their own before their LAC review or on the day of the LAC review. Where children do not attend their LAC review, IROs contact children and young people between reviews to ensure that children and young people remain involved in their plan and review.

Through the LAC tracking panel, audits were carried out focussing on 7 areas including: appropriateness of placement and placement changes, education and health outcomes; vulnerabilities; quality of care plan pathway plans; visits; quality of LAC review minutes and immigration status. The audit identified good practice around participation of children and child-focused LAC review minutes. Areas for development for social work practice by teams included the timeliness of age assessments and the completion of SDQs.

IROs receive bi-monthly group supervision. These sessions are used to give IROs time to reflect on practice, highlight areas of good practice, raise any issues with managers and receive feedback on audit themes and outcomes. This space allows for reflection on how cases have been successfully escalated in the best interest of children and discuss practice themes and trends. For example, IROs have consistently commented on the strong working relationships between social workers and the Youth Offending Service, contributing to robust care planning across professional networks. They are positive about the quality of permanency planning in Brent including involvement of the wider family network at the earliest possible stage of permanency planning.

The REP Team Manager attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meetings. This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across the sector in respect of recent court judgements and meeting the expectations of the court in care planning cases in proceedings. These meetings look at local and national issues affecting looked after children as well as highlighting any learning that can be taken forward. Brent IROs have a good working relationship with Children's Guardians within West London Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and IROs took place on 18/01/18. IROs raised a number of issues including the impact of the turnover of social workers. IROs were updated on the increase in permanent staff and the Department's direction, including the realignment of social work in Localities, Looked After Children and Permanency and Safeguarding and Quality Assurance. They were informed that although the challenge of recruiting experienced and permanent social workers continues to be present, the turnover of social work staff has reduced with the proportion of permanent staff increasing. IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues to the Strategic Director if necessary.

Brent IROs have an established protocol with CAFCASS regarding good practice for Public Law work. 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. Children's Guardians have provided positive feedback on both social work and IRO practice. In particular, Children's Guardians have stated that they have found Brent IROs responsive and independent.

Overall the quality of the minutes and how IROs chair and approach LAC reviews are assessed through Brent internal audit to be good. Mid-way reviews and other activities such as escalations are visible on every file audited with some improvements required in the way some IROs upload their minutes on Mosaic.

"Plans are mostly clear and reviews are timely and effective. There is good evidence of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) scrutiny and challenge with good impact."

Brent Ofsted ILACS Report May 2018

7. Performance of the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 874 reviews were chaired by IROs 2017/18, a decrease of 115 reviews compared to 2016/17.
- The vast majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (648 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis, 93.5% of Reviews are held within the statutory timescales. This represents an increase of 2.5% in comparison to 2016/17. The reason for the lateness include late referrals and unavoidable last minute cancellations.

7.1 Participation of children

It is always preferable that children attend their review meetings and give their views. However, there are some children with additional needs and children who have suffered trauma that may impact on their behaviour who therefore may not be able to participate fully at their review meeting. 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. Children and young people are allowed to say how and who should attend their review. The service has actively sought out best practice examples to improve participation of children and young people. The IRO service has identified the

'We get to talk to the Director directly. She helped me get a problem sorted and she actually cares about young people. You can tell by her actions. She comes to CIA meetings when she doesn't have to. She is really appreciative of us. One time she sent me an email to say thank you for something I had done. I think it was for when I was on the interviews'

Young person age 16

chairing of reviews by the young person as an innovation with positive impact. CIA was consulted about this proposal which will be trialled in 2018/19.

Case study: JB

JB is a 15 year old who entered care at the age of 8 and is part of group of 4 siblings. Since entering care JB has had 13 social workers. JB's behaviour became a concern to all professionals with frequent missing episodes, placement breakdowns and offending behaviour. JB's IRO has been the IRO for all the children in the family for the past 8 years and is the most consistent professional in JB's life. In preparation for JB's latest review, the IRO looked at JB's journey with a view of giving him the opportunity to express himself and draw up a tight care plan and contract with him, focussing on reducing JB's missing episodes. The IRO also referred JB for an advocate and agreed to be contacted should JB need to talk to him.

7.2 Attendance and participation at reviews

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's views into account. IROs encourage children to attend their reviews. If a child does not want to attend their review he/she can participate in a number of other ways. Participation types are recorded in the chart below:

Type of participation	Number of reviews 2016/17	% 2016/17	Number of reviews 2017/18	% 2017/18
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	646	66%	575	66.6%
Child does not attend but is represented	158	16%	17	2.5%
Child aged under four	109	11%	102	11.83%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	33	3.3%	139	16.18%
Child does not attend and is not represented	22	2.2%	21	2.62%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	10	1%	15	1.82%
Child attends and is represented	3	0.3%	4	0.68%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	2	0.2%	1	0.2%
Total	984	100%	874	100%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (575 or 66.6% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is a similar percentage to 2016/17 (646 or 66% of reviews).

Children's participation continues to be a strong focus of 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.

Case study: WW

WW is a 17 year old who is living in semi-independent accommodation outside of London. He was well settled and had developed his network and secured a college place. Shortly after he started college, WW experienced bullying. WW and the provider proposed to move WW to resolve the issue. Upon being contacted by WW, the IRO called for an early review and objected to the move. As a result, the provider agreed to support WW to maintain his placement, allowing WW to settle and continue with his education.

8. 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. They also check at each review whether an independent visitor is needed and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.


The advocacy service for looked after children was provided through a contract with Aidhour and commissioned on an individual basis when required. Since the end of March 2018 Brent has appointed a Children's Rights Officer who carries out advocacy for looked after children. The total number of children referred for advocacy support in 2017/18 was 56, an increase of 9 from 2016/17 and representing 18% of looked after children. In addition, 13 children had an independent visitor allocated.

The Children's Rights Officer also undertakes Return Home Interviews for Looked After Children who go missing from care and these interviews have been the main source of the increased number of children being offered advocacy. Return Home Interviews have identified an action for IROs to be more actively engaged with monitoring the support and intervention for looked after children who have gone missing.

The broad profile of children referred for advocacy as of 31st March 2018 include children with a disability, unaccompanied asylum seekers, children who are unhappy with overall service provision and children in secure accommodation.

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

- Communications and relationships with their social worker.
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact.
- Reviewing a secure accommodation order.



"I wanted to see my sister every weekend, my IRO helped me with this."
Child, age 8

Children placed in secure accommodation for their own safety under s25 of the Children Act 1989 are always provided with an advocate.

9. Quality of Care Planning

One of the IRO's primary functions is to monitor the quality of care plans. IROs report that most children have a child friendly care plan, written in a clear and coherent manner. Children and young people are supported to contribute to their care plan and receive their own copy. IROs have stated that they do not always receive a completed review and care plan document on Mosaic but this is improving with more than 80% being received on time. 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.

10. Progress between reviews

IROs contact social workers for updates on the progress of looked after children review decisions. This is conducted mid-way through the review period by visiting or phoning the young person. Children have reported they would like the number of their IRO directly so they can contact them more easily when they wish and this is now routinely provided. 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.

Case Study: JB

JB is a 17 year old young person placed in a semi-independent unit who works fulltime. JB, together with his siblings, was made subject to a full care order and placed together until JB moved to his current placement in October 2017. James contacted his IRO raising concern about contact with his sister and also worried he may not be able to see her for Christmas. The IRO called an early review, agreed a clear contact plan and Christmas arrangements resulting in James seeing his sister regularly.

11. Oversight of care plans

IROs continued to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure these meet the expected standard with 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 they are not always consulted when decisions are made about a placement move. A change of placement is a significant change in the life of a child or young person. IROs provide challenge and support to social work practice by advocating for children and young people to be fully consulted before any placement change takes place.

IROs continue to drive social work practice by ensuring that young people have a Pathway Plan provided in a timely way and escalating concerns if this is not in place. This includes promotion of Housing Vulnerability reports and encouraging an exploration of Staying Put arrangements.

Case Study: IB

IB is an 18 year old who lives in semi-independent accommodation to prepare for adulthood. He has a good rapport with his IRO who has been a consistent person in his life. At IB's last review a decision was reached for him to move in to independent living, but only if he viewed the new accommodation and was happy with it. IB called his IRO to say he wasn't happy with the offer of a flat, but felt pressured to move. The IRO escalated the matter and ensured IB had advocacy support to plan any transition.


When children subject of a Child Protection Plan becomes looked after, IROs work closely with Child Protection Advisors to bring forward the Child Protection Conference and avoid dual plans. This area of practice will continue to be developed and monitored.

12. Children's views about their IRO and their review process

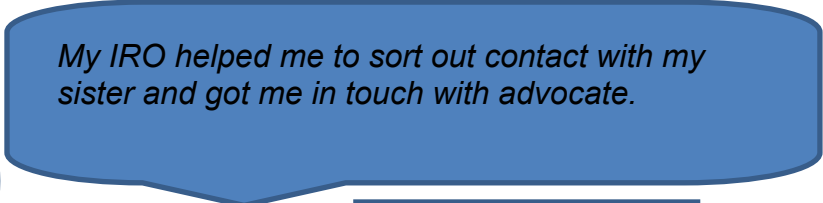
Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. The REP Team Manager regularly attends Care in Action, Brent's Children in Care Council. Children and young people state that they appreciate the consistent approach of IROs alongside their independence and availability. Children and young people have also said 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. The majority (82%) of children (8-11yrs) and young people (11-18yrs) who have given their feedback to the service stated that their lives were getting better.

Children and young people say that they experience frequent change of social workers. In some cases children and young people have also experienced change of placement without proper consultation or not having the opportunity to view the proposed placement beforehand. This reinforces the importance of IROs being informed of any placement move and any other change, such as extension of Reg 24 assessments. Children and young people said that they value the consultation forms given before the review but most appreciate being seen and spoken with on their own. Children and young people also appreciate access to advocacy which is always granted upon request by children and young people or other professionals such as IROs and foster carers.

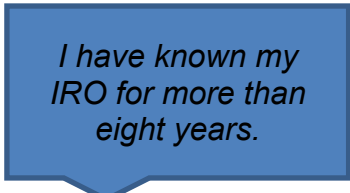
The following examples are taken from the feedback from children and young people from their reviews:



My IRO helped me to move placement.



My IRO helped me to sort out contact with my sister and got me in touch with advocate.



I have known my IRO for more than eight years.

13. Escalations 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 Service Manager. If the issue is not resolved, 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 47 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2017/18 compared to 50 escalations in 2016/17.

Of the 47 case escalations raised by IROs, all but two were resolved at the social worker, Team Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service levels. Two reached the Operational Director level. Issues raised include the following areas:

- SDQs not being completed.
- Regulation 24 assessments not completed within the required 16 week period and/or lack of consultation with IROs on extension of the timescales.
- Care plan and review paperwork being incomplete including Pathway Plans.
- Delay in the process of transfer of unaccompanied minors to another borough.
- Transition to semi-independent units and the completion of housing vulnerability reports.
- Delay in completion of age assessments for unaccompanied minors
- Contact with siblings and wider family members.

The use of the escalation processes proved successful in resolving issues in the vast majority of cases. In a small number of escalations, complexities of the case meant that the issues raised by the IRO could not be fully resolved and compromises were reached or differences of opinion acknowledged.

14. Review of IRO provision priority actions

The IRO provision had 7 priorities to improve services and make an impact on positive outcomes for Looked After Children in 2017/18.

Priority 1. Close management and monitoring timeliness of LAC reviews with the aim of increasing this to at least 95%.

Monthly performance reporting is now in place to drive timeliness of LAC reviews. As of 31 March 2018 timeliness of LAC reviews was 93.5%, an increase of 2.5% from 2016/17.


Priority 2. Work closely with the business support officers on a more effective system and coordination of reviews. Identify resource through the Department administration review to support more effective coordination of reviews.

From January 2018, there has been a dedicated administration support for LAC reviews. A weekly performance monitoring meeting takes place to scrutinise the effective co-ordination of LAC reviews.

Priority 3. Taking forward the messages from the 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact through an annual survey with a target of 40% of Looked After Children responding.

The outcome of the Bright Spots survey was distributed to all Looked After Children and an action plan developed with the Looked after Children and Care Leavers partnership meeting, chaired by the Head of Looked After Children and Permanency. As an example, one action was to review contact arrangements between siblings. This led to an increase in direct work with children on the contact arrangement they wanted with their siblings and wider family. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2018 commented positively on contact arrangements with siblings.

Brent has worked with Bright Spots to carry out a second survey in April/May 2018 which has achieved a 29% response rate. This is in line with other local authority response rates and an improvement from the 2017 return rate of 25%, although short of the target of a 40% response rate. The outcome and analysis of the survey will be presented to the Looked after Children and Care Leavers partnership meeting once it is made available.



"Careful consideration is taken of the relationships between brothers and sisters. Contact arrangements are well considered if brothers and sisters are separated. Children and young people's voices are listened to and heard."

Brent Ofsted ILACS Report, May 2018

Priority 4. Thematic audits on identified issues including IRO scrutiny of Pathway Plans and independent living, timeliness of LAC review paperwork and IRO involvement in placement moves. Learning and Development initiatives to be put in place following these audits as required.

Thematic audits have been undertaken evidencing robust IRO scrutiny of Pathway and Care Plans, with an increase in escalating issues as appropriate. The inputs from IROs

have been seen to be measured and sensitive to the needs of Looked After Children. Some areas for development such as early identification of CSE were identified in audit activity and training provision was made available to all IROs. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2018 acknowledged the scrutiny and challenge by IROs as having a positive impact.

Priority 5 Consult and decide upon the future arrangements for the IRO functions of the service and have these in place for 1st April 2018.

A consultation was undertaken with Care in Action, IROs, Team Managers and social workers on the future of the service and looked at all the options available. The model of having a part permanent and part commissioned service with an additional in-house IRO was agreed to be the preferred option. This increased the number of in house IROs from 1 to 2. A second IRO was recruited in April 2018.

Priority 6. Review the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews. This is to ensure that the use of Signs of Safety in LAC reviews becomes a more impactful and helpful approach for all Looked After Children, their carers, social workers and IROs.

Work was undertaken with IROs on the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews and ways of making minutes child and young person centred, with the minutes to be written in a letter format to the child or young person. Children and young people were involved in making these changes. The new way of working was piloted in January/February 2018 and implemented across all LAC reviews from the 1st of March 2018. Children and young people have said that the new way of writing the review minutes has made the experience of reviews more personal and given them a feeling of ownership and control. Professionals have also responded positively.

*"I have found the letter format LAC review minutes
Brent implemented to be very child friendly, focused
and a pleasure to read."*

Team Manager, Brent LAC and Permanency Service

Priority 7. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

Feedback, themes and trends from LAC reviews are collated and shared regularly with Localities and the LAC and Permanency Services. These themes have also been incorporated into the Learning and Development offer for both social workers and foster carers. This has led to young people co-delivering training on matters that are important to them. For example, young people are involved in delivering training on child-centred care planning.

*"My IRO has been the one consistent person since I
came in to care and helped me to move to my current
home."*

Young person age

15. Impact and outcomes

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

- Scrutiny of care plans and avoiding drift. IROs have supported the outcome of increased permanency for children, in particular Special Guardianship Orders and long-term fostering.
- Young people given more control to decide and lead their looked after children review, contributing to feedback from children that they feel they are involved in decision making.
- The IRO Service has worked with social workers and Children's Guardians to ensure that children's voices are heard and are central to decision making during care proceedings.

16. What the REP Team plans to do in 2018/19

The REP Team focuses on hearing children's voices and ensuring actions are taken based on what children say. Planned activity to improve the IRO functions for 2018/19 are as follows:

1. Identify at least five young people who can chair their LAC review and provide training to pilot this approach.
2. Take forward the messages from the 2018 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact.
3. Continue to monitor and ensure the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews is fully embedded.
4. Increase IRO involvement in the scrutiny of Looked After Children going missing from care by monitoring and ensuring that national and local procedures are followed.
5. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.
6. IROs to work closely with Child Protection Advisors in particular where children become looked after following a period of being subject to Child Protection Plan
7. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% reviews being completed within timescale.

Goitom Mebrahtu, Review, Engagement and Participation Principal Officer
Sonya Kalyniak, Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

October 2018