

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

Period of review: 01/04/18 to 31/03/19

This report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Brent as required by statutory guidance. The report outlines the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) on quality assuring and improving services for Looked After Children. This report includes feedback from Looked After Children gained through consultation with Care In Action, Brent's Children in Care Council. **Goitom Mebrahtu, Interim Service Manager Safeguarding and quality Assurance**

1. Summary of Key Messages

What has gone well?

- In 2018/19 99.5% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews.
- The majority of children (94%) tell us that their life is improving as a result of the support provided by their social worker and IRO.
- The majority of children and young people benefit from having the same IRO throughout their care journey and children and young people feedback positively about this.
- 94.5% of reviews are held well within timescales and managed in the way that best responds to the child's needs.
- IROs fulfil their challenge function, including escalation when appropriate, ensuring impact for children and evidencing good practice.
- IROs have worked closely with Child Protection Advisers to share good practice.
- IROs' knowledge and expertise ensures that IROs offer appropriate oversight and challenge to inform effective care planning and promote best practice.
- Social workers and managers understand the requirement for IRO scrutiny and challenge and welcome their independent perspective

'Further to S's LAC review, I am very impressed with the social worker and how she has supported S. Through the dedication and commitment of the allocated social worker S has been involved in Tiger Spike, is part of Care in Action and has Joined Brent Youth Parliament. This has helped S to develop a positive sense of herself and built her confidence'

Independent Reviewing Officer

'you are the person who makes sure I get good education and do well'

Young person, age 15
about their IRO

What can be improved?

- There continue to be some instances when IROs are not consulted prior to a change of a care plan. The Service Managers within Permanency and Care Planning Service have attended the IROs meeting and will monitor compliance and address the concerns.
- Social workers' reports and updated care plans 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.
- IROs need to become more involved in the scrutiny of Looked After Childrens' health and incorporate all health assessment recommendations within the review.

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.

'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'

Mr Justice Peter Jackson, foreword: 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (NCB, March 2014)

3. Professional profile of the IROs

The IRO function sits within the CYP Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. From Sep 2018, the IRO function was brought together with Child Protection Advisors who chair Child Protection conferences and the LADO (Local Authority Designate Officer) to form the Review and Safeguarding Team.

The Review and Safeguarding Team is managed by an experienced social worker. Brent directly employs two full time IROs and five Child Protection Advisors. 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.

One of the in-house IROs was on an internal secondment from April 2018 to 31st of March 2019 and has now been successfully appointed on a permanent basis. Following a review of the current arrangement, Aidhour have been recommissioned to continue providing IROs for 2019/20. 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.

There are 12 IROs in Brent including those permanent and from Aidhour. The number has not changed from last year. There is a good representation of male and female IROs (6 males and 6 females). This overall high level of retention of IROs has led to continuity of IRO input, stability for many of our Looked After Children and a high level of scrutiny and challenge

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

IRO Ethnicity	Number
White	9
Mixed	1
Asian or Asian British	1
Black or Black British	1

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 equalities 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 and are part of the LAC tracking panel.

Profile of Brent's Looked After Children

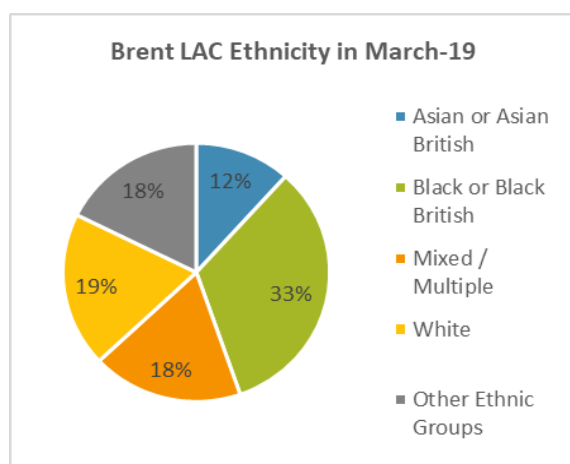
There has been a slight decrease in the number of Looked After Children in the 0 to 4 age range, 78% of Looked After Children on 31/3/2019 were over the age of 10 and 42% were 16 and 17 years of age.

	2017/18	2018/19
0 to 4 years of age	41	29
5 to 9 years of age	31	36
10 to 15 years of age	119	105
16 to 17 years of age	127	128
Total Looked After Children	318	298

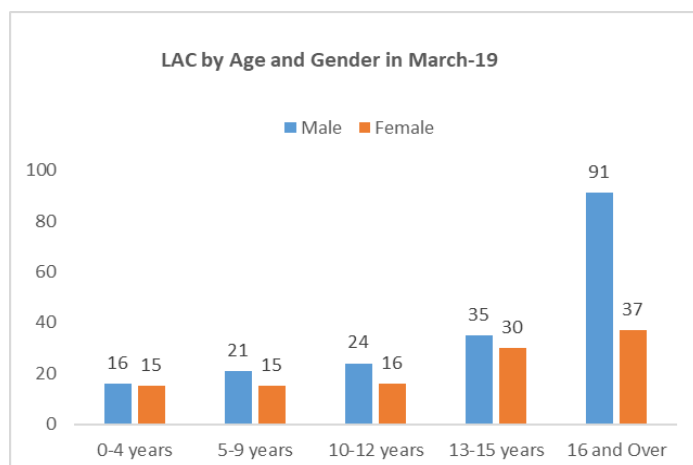
"I thought of you when I heard Eden Hazard was going to Real Madrid, I recommend you support Arsenal instead of Chelsea"
T, 15-year-old Arsenal supporter's advice to his IRO

The ethnicity of Looked After Children as of 31/03/2019 was as follows:

Ethnicity	2017/18	2018/19
White	77	57
Mixed/ Multiple	60	54
Asian or Asian British	59	36
Black or Black British	97	98
Other Ethnic Group	25	53
Total	318	298



LAC by age and gender as of March 2019 is summarised below



4. Referrals and allocations

The interim Review and Safeguarding 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 effective communication and liaison with allocated social workers and the Review and Safeguarding Team. The team 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.

5. Quality assurance and monitoring of the IRO service

The interim Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the interim Service Manager 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 interim Service Manager and the two in-house IROs are also members of the LAC tracking panel, carrying out regular audits looking at the quality of Review minutes, participation of Looked After Children in the decision making process, any drift in the care plan, and identifying any health or education issues. The audits have evidenced that IRO oversight and escalation are having a positive impact on outcomes for Looked After Children. The audits also evidence IRO supported involvement of children and young people's views in decision making processes. 100% of the file 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.

IROs also ensure that parents / guardians are involved where this is appropriate and in the best interest of the child.

Through the LAC tracking panel, audits were carried out focusing on areas including: immigration status, PEP (personal educational plan), appropriateness of placement and placement changes, education and health outcomes; vulnerabilities; quality of care plans and pathway plans; visits; quality of LAC review minutes. 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 some discrepancy in the way IROs have used the new letter format when writing minutes with lack of a consistent approach in this area.


Case Study: IH

IH is a 16-year-old unaccompanied asylum seeking child from Albania. Prior to coming to the UK, IH experienced trauma while travelling through Greece, Italy and France. IH was placed with a foster carer and settled well. IH was worried about his immigration status and the delay in making a decision to his application. The foster carer and the IRO were keen in supporting IH to get a decision on his status as this was having an impact on his emotional health. IH through his solicitor with the support of his IRO and foster carer applied for a judicial review on the basis of the delay in decision making by the Home Office. As a result, IH was given a decision and leave to remain for five years was granted. IH has remained with his foster carer where he is settled and happy and will be staying there under Staying Put arrangements.

IROs, both in-house and Aidhour receive bi-monthly group supervision following the Signs of Safety approach. 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. As part of the development for IROs, guest speakers from services are invited - for example the London wide and Brent hosted Rescue and Response, launched in January 2019, attended a meeting in March 2019. The LAC health nurse and the Virtual school are invited to attend periodically.

IROs have commented on the good working relationships they have established with Child Protection Advisors. This has assisted in both IROs and Child Protection Advisors responding to the needs of children and young people who becomes looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan, in a timely manner. Child Protection Advisors are invited to the initial LAC review of any child who becomes LAC after a period of being subject to CP plan with a view of contributing to robust care planning across the professional networks.

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 and the joint working observed between the locality and care planning services.



'I am fine at my placement. It feels like home'
D, 11 years old

The interim Service Manager attends London IRO Managers and West London Children's Guardians Meetings. This ensures the service stays in touch with developments across authorities 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). Following Brent's Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in May 2018 and the positive comments made about the IRO service, a number of local authorities have requested information so that they could adopt Brent's model of writing review minutes in a letter format. Managers from two Local Authorities visited and met with the interim Service manager and some of the IROs and looked at Brent's approach to LAC reviews. They gave positive feedback as to what they saw.

The annual meeting between the Strategic Director for Children and Young People and IROs took place on 20/01/19. IROs were updated on the outcome of the Brent ILACs inspection of May 2018 and the action plan devised following this. IROs were also updated on the continued drive to increase the number of permanent staff and the department's

direction. The Strategic Director clarified that no issues had been escalated to her in the past year. IROs were encouraged to escalate any unresolved issues 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 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.

6 Performance of the IRO service

Performance summary:

- A total of 776 reviews were chaired by IROs 2018/19, a decrease of 98 reviews compared to 2017/18.
- The vast majority of children and young people aged over 4 years (529 reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves.
- On a month by month basis, 94.6% of Reviews are held within the statutory timescales. This represents an increase of 1% in comparison to 2017/18. The reasons for the lateness include late referrals and unavoidable last minute cancellations.

Reviews are responsive and managed in the way that best responds to the child's needs. Examples include:

- K, a LAC of 15 years of age, a Looked After Child who had frequent missing episodes. The IRO in discussion with K and other professionals identified that K would like more regular reviews than every six months. Reviews took place every three months and K actively participated in these reviews. The IRO also ensured they kept in touch in between reviews. The impact for K was a reduction in repeat missing episodes.
- An IRO identified a delay in achieving permanency with M, a new-born looked after child. The IRO identified improvements in case allocation processes which led to an allocation of the case to Looked After Children and Permanency service and a swift resolution of permanency planning.

7.1 Attendance and 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.

Case study: SK

SK is a 17-year-old who entered care at the age of 16. SK came in to care due to her mother's mental health concerns. SK was taking care of her mother and as a result has missed on her education and other social activities. Given the trauma SK went through as a young carer she lacked confidence and was finding it difficult to socialise with her peer group. Her IRO explored the possibility of SK joining Brent Care In Action and Brent Youth Parliament in order to help SK build her confidence and interact with other young people. SK was also recommended to get involved in Tiger Spike, Brent's initiative that is currently developing a pathway plan app in partnership with young people and practitioners. At her last review SK presented as a very confident person and stated her involvement with the different groups has helped in building her confidence and thanked her IRO.

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 2017/18	% 2017/18	Number of reviews 2018/19	% 2018/19
Child physically attends and conveys verbally	575	66.6%	529	68%
Child does not attend but is represented	17	2.5%	7	0.9%
Child aged under four	102	11.83%	83	10.6%
Child does not attend but conveys through medium such as an advocate	139	16.8%	130	16.7%
Child does not attend and is not represented	21	2.62%	6	1.5%
Child attends but does not convey and is not represented	15	1.82%	9	1.1%
Child attends and is represented	4	0.68%	6	0.7%
Child attends and conveys symbolically	1	0.2%	3	0.3%
Total	874	100%	776	100%

The majority of children and young people aged over four years (529 or 68% of reviews) attended their review and spoke for themselves. This is an increase of 2% from 2017/18.

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. Seven LAC chaired or co-chaired their review in 2018/19. IROs are increasingly encouraging children and young people either to chair or co-chair their reviews.

Case study: RS

RS is a 4-year-old who came into the care of the Local Authority at the age of two. RS became Looked after due to concerns of significant neglect from his mother who struggled with chronic mental health issues. RS was placed with a Brent foster carer. RS soon felt part of the family and over time developed close relationships with members of the foster carer's family. RS social worker engaged RS with play therapy early on and helped him to open up about his experiences at home with his mother. Through the help of school RS was able to continue this therapeutic work and his teachers supported RS to shift his focus back onto his school work. He soon started to excel and surpassed expected progress. As part of the permanency plan RS's Aunt on his mother's side who lives in Amsterdam was identified as a possible carer. RS's social workers reached out to her and following a positive assessment, all including RS agreed that he would be best placed with his Aunt. RS has recently returned from a visit to his Aunt where he met his cousins for the first time. RS told his IRO that he was very happy to be reunited with his extended family and he is looking forward to moving there permanently.



*'I found my review helpful by setting out plans and committing people to specific tasks'
P, a 15-year-old young person who co-chaired her review*

7. 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. As part of the initial LAC review children and young people are given information on Brent's advocacy and complaint service by their IRO. They also check at each review whether an Independent Visitor is needed and if there are any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

In April 2018 Brent appointed a Children Rights officer on a fixed term contract to support advocacy for Looked After Children, with Aidhour commissioned on an individual basis as and when required. The total number of children referred for advocacy support in 2018/19

was 62, an increase of 8 from 2017/18 and representing 21% of Looked After Children. In addition, 10 children had an Independent Visitor allocated. This is a reduction of 3 from last year.

The Children's Rights Officer undertook Return Home Interviews for Looked After Children who go missing from care and has worked closely with IROs to ensure that IROs are more actively engaged with monitoring the support and intervention for Looked After Children who have gone missing.

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

- Support required to progress their immigration status.
- Young people not happy with their proposed care plan.
- Choice of placements and wanting a certain type of location or placement.
- Contact with family members, particularly children wanting an increase in contact.

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

8. Quality of Care Planning

One of the IROs' 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. During 2018/19 seven young people either chaired or co-chaired their LAC review with the support of their IRO. These young people were identified by their IROs. Five of the young people are placed in long term permanent placements and all have known their IROs since coming in to care. The young people have stated that they found the experience very positive as this gave them control and ownership of their care plan. 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.

'I enjoy seeing them (social workers) and see them just enough'

Anonymous young person's response to the Bright Spots survey

9. Progress between reviews

IROs keep regular contact with social workers and monitor progress on permanency and care plans through a mid-way review conducted either by meeting with the social worker or via a telephone call or e mail with the social worker. The two in-house IROs take part in the LAC tracking panel and feedback to the wider group of the IROs at the IRO meeting of any emerging themes and patterns for all IROs to consider.

All Looked After Children 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. Children often contact their IROs directly to discuss issues worrying them.

'My current placement is very supportive of my hopes and dreams. I love being there'
F, young person age 16

10. Oversight of care plans

IROs continue to monitor the quality of social work reports to ensure that reports 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. Social workers' reports and updated care plans 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.

LAC have given feedback to indicate that they are not always consulted when decisions are made about a placement move. IROs are also not always informed or their views sought. 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. There continue to be some instances when IROs are not consulted prior to a change of a care plan.

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.

When children subject of a Child Protection Plan become 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.

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


Overall the experience reported by children of their IROs continues to be positive. The interim Service Manager regularly receives feedback from the Looked After Children's Participation Officer and 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 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.

In 2018/19 99.5% of Looked After Children over the age of four communicated their views, wishes and feelings at their reviews. This may have been through their attendance, through correspondence or completing a consultation form, by briefing an advocate, or through discussion with the IRO. IROs report that young people contact them between reviews by email or phone to share information or request support. IROs support children to chair or co-chair the meetings if they wish to do so.

The 2018/19 Bright Spots survey said that 94% of Looked After Children who responded to the survey stated that their life is improving, as a result of social work and /or IRO support.

Children and young people say that they do not always agree with their proposed care plan with some still experiencing 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. There has been a marked increase in social workers consulting IROs prior to placement move and this has resulted in better understanding and a more consistent approach. Children and young people said that they prefer and appreciate the face to face discussion they have with their IRO prior to their review than having to complete consultation forms. Children and young people have said that having to complete consultation forms is not interactive enough. 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 allocated social workers, IROs and foster carers.

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



'My IRO is alright you know'.

'My IRO helped me to get involved'

'My IRO is fantastic'.

'I have known my IRO for more than eight years'.

12. 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 49 escalations were initiated by IROs in 2018/19 compared to 47 escalations in 2017/18.

'I need more contact with mother and family more money'

Anonymous young person's response to Bright Spot survey

'need more opportunities for clubs at the civic centre, more time to speak to my social worker.'

S, young person age 14

Of the 49 case escalations raised by IROs, all but three were resolved at the social worker, Team Manager, Service Manager and Head of Service levels. Three reached the Operational Director level. The three cases dealt by the Operational Director concerned lack of clarity on a care plan for a baby, an unplanned placement move regarding a young person who had repeated missing episodes and a request for the Local Authority to consider secure accommodation. The overall issues raised in escalations include the following areas:

- Unplanned placement move
- Drift and delay in progressing care plan.
- Care plan and review paperwork being incomplete and young people often not having sight of this before the review.
- Transition to semi-independent units and the completion of housing vulnerability reports.
- Safeguarding concern such as CSE and young people going missing
- 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 response to the issues raised by the IRO did not fully resolve the IRO's concern. In these cases differences of opinion were acknowledged and senior management oversight ensured there was clear Local Authority decision making in the best interests of the child. One example of this is when an IRO disagreed with the care plan to return two siblings home following a short period of being in care. The IRO recommended the return home timescale be extended but the Social Care view was that this would not be in the children's best interest. The Head of Service, in line with the escalation processes, reviewed the decision making. The children returned home to their parents' care and remain there. The IRO was kept informed that the children settled well back in their parents' care.

13. 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. Identify at least five young people who can chair their LAC review and provide training to pilot this approach.

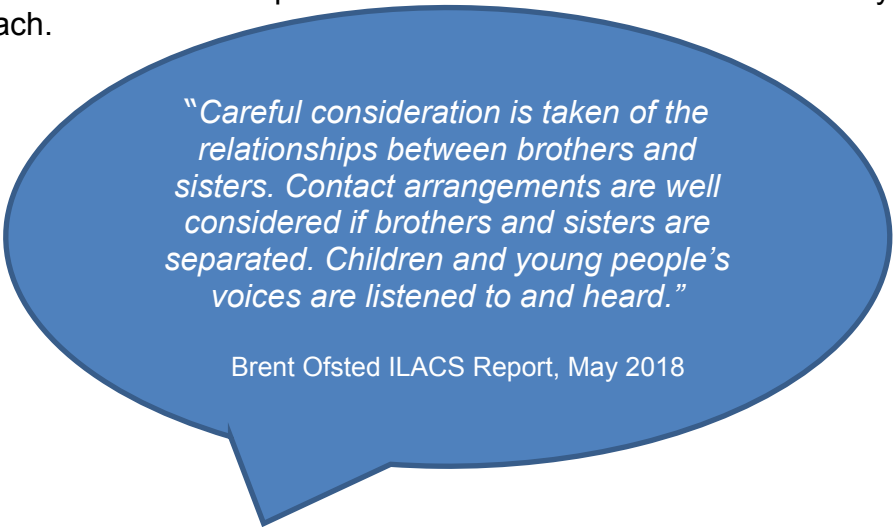
Seven young people were identified by IROs and either chaired or co-chaired their LAC review. Young people have stated that they have found this experience rewarding as this gives them control and ownership of their care plan.

Priority 2. Take forward the messages from the 2018 'Bright Spots' survey, working with children to develop services and monitoring impact.

The outcome of Bright Spots survey was presented to Brent's local partnership group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers meeting where a representative of Care In Action and the interim Service Manager for Review and Safeguarding are present. Actions taken included increasing life story work and addressing sibling contact were put in place. These were monitored throughout the year.

Priority 3. Continue to monitor and ensure the application of the Signs of Safety model in LAC reviews is fully embedded.

The application of the Signs of Safety model has been fully embedded in LAC reviews, this includes reviewing the way minutes are written by IROs. Children have given feedback that they find IRO practice child friendly. This has been identified as a good model by a number of local authorities who have requested use of Brent materials so that they can adopt a similar approach.



"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. 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.

Thematic audits on identified issues including IRO scrutiny of children going missing from care have showed an increased involvement and liaison of IROs with the Children Rights officer and referring and raising issues in a timely manner. As a result, IROs are increasingly attending professional and Missing strategy meetings and work closely with social workers and other partner agencies.

Priority 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.

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.

Priority 6. IROs to work closely with Child Protection Advisors in particular where children become looked after following a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan

The IROs and Child Protection Advisors are now part of one team and work closely in particular where children become looked after, after a period of being subject to a Child Protection Plan. Prior to the first LAC review the IRO and CPA liaise with each other. Child Protection Advisors attend the initial LAC review and consideration is given as to whether the child should remain subject to a Child Protection Plan or the Plan should be ended. Social workers have found this approach more effective avoiding duplication of meetings for children and families.

Priority 7. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% reviews being completed within timescale.

Monthly performance reporting is now in place to drive timeliness of LAC reviews. As of 31 March 2019 timeliness of LAC reviews was 94.6%, an increase of 1.5% from 2017/18. The majority of the late reviews were due to last minute cancellation owing to sickness of either the social worker, IRO or a foster carer. This is being monitored closely with a view to increasing the percentage to above 95%.

14 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 closely with social workers, Child Protection Advisers, Children's Guardians, and the Children Rights officer to ensure that children's voices are heard and are central to decision making. IROs will continue to encourage young people to chair their reviews where this is appropriate and in line with the child and young person wishes and feelings.

15. What the Review and Safeguarding Team plans to do in 2019/20

The Review and Safeguarding 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 2019/20 are as follows:

1. Complete the appointment of a permanent Service Manager by Autumn 2019.
2. Monitor timeliness of LAC reviews to reach a target of at least 95% of reviews being completed within timescale.
3. Increase the number of LAC chairing or co-chairing their review from 7 to 14 in 2019/20.
4. Work with social work teams to ensure social work reports and updated care plans are available before a LAC review and IROs are consulted of any proposed change to the care plan prior to the change been implemented.
5. Ensure IROs demonstrate consistent scrutiny of Looked After Children's health and incorporate health assessment recommendations into LAC reviews.
6. Evidence that continuous learning from feedback from children and young people, parents, professionals and carers through LAC reviews is fully embedded into the Learning and Development offer.

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