

Family and People Services Policy & Scrutiny Committee

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Title:	Looked After Children and Care Leavers Report: Independent Reviewing Service
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Cabinet Member Portfolio:	Family Services and Public Health
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Thriving Communities

1. Executive Summary:

- 1.1 This report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to Westminster City Council services for Looked After Children in 2018/19, as required by statutory guidance.
- 1.2 As of 31st March 2019, 209 children and young people were Looked After by Westminster City Council, which is same number as the previous year. Whilst the total number remains static, the care population in Westminster is changing. The number of children coming into care from the generic population of children under 13 years of age is reducing and the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children arriving in Westminster is increasing.
- 1.3 490 Looked After children Reviews were undertaken in 2018-2019, of which 94% were undertaken within the statutory timescales. 96% of children over 4 years of age contributed to their statutory review, with 92% of children attending. The voice of the child / young person is key to all discussions and care planning arrangements.

- 1.4 The dispute resolution protocol is a key mechanism by which the IRO raise concerns with the Social Work Locality Teams and the LAC Services. During 2018 – 2019 there were 10 informal and no formal disputes. The informal challenges related to the de-registration of a connected carer, care planning decisions, delays in accommodation notifications and social report in advance of review, and the lack of preparation of a young person for their review. All dispute challenges were resolved.
- 1.5 The introduction of minutes in the form of a letter to children is valued by children and professionals. It helps to ensure that the child/young person is kept at the centre of the reviewing process, that the minutes are personal, that the language is clear, and that the plan is purposeful.
- 1.6 The annual work plan for 2019 – 2020 will focus on strengthening the voice of the child / young person in the Looked After reviewing process. It will: increase the use of minutes in the form of a letter; drive forward improvements to the quality of reports and care plans; work closely with the social work teams, participation and advocacy officers to deliver on our corporate parenting responsibilities; develop a collaborative approach with the LAC Service to meet the needs of our UASC population; ensure safeguarding plans are in place to protect young people vulnerable to exploitation and further develop the dispute resolution protocol to inform our understanding of practice and best outcomes for children.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 This annual report has been produced under the requirements of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The Independent Reviewing Service has a key role in assuring the quality of a local authority's care planning for Looked after Children (LAC) and improving the overall quality of services offered.
- 2.2 This report has been prepared for those with executive responsibility for Children's Services and Corporate Parenting to enable consideration of the services on offer, and to consider whether the local authority is achieving optimum outcomes for our LAC. This report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and Local Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- 2.3 This report discusses the important work of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) over the last 12 months. The report starts with an introduction to the IRO team before looking at: whether children looked after reviews are being held on time; how IRO's raise concerns about a young person's care and the participation of young people and their families in IRO reviews. The report provides an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement; identify emerging themes and trends; report on work undertaken to date and outline the service development priorities for the coming twelve months.

3. Profile of the Westminster independent reviewing Officer (IRO) Service

- 3.1 The Independent Reviewing Service has been a statutory requirement since 2004. In 2010 the government published the 'Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook' Statutory Guidance for IROs and Local Authorities, the service

therefore operates within the framework of the IRO Handbook. This is statutory guidance which has been issued to local authorities since April 2011. It is linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance, which was introduced at the same time. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement and quality assurance of the Care Planning for LAC and challenging any drift and delay.

3.2 IRO's have a responsibility to ensure that plans are timely, effective and achieve good outcomes for children and young people. They have a responsibility to promote best practice and high professional standards across the Children's Social Work Service. They have a duty to prevent drift and delay in care planning and ensure that the local authority's efforts are focused on meeting the needs of children and achieving the best possible outcomes for them.

3.3 IROs make an important contribution to the consistency of practice from all those who have a corporate responsibility for LAC and Care Leavers. IROs monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent, ensuring that appropriate actions are taken to meet the child's assessed needs. They ensure that the local authority is operating in line with care planning regulations. They have a responsibility to identify patterns of concern that emerge in respect of individual children and collectively, and to alert senior leaders where necessary.

3.4 The Independent Reviewing Service continues to be part of a combined Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance Service. It became a Bi-Borough service in March 2018. The IRO service is independent from the frontline service. This supports it to promote the role of being a 'criteria friend' and to deliver a quality assurance approach that is embedded within our practice systems. This allows the service to hold a lens up to practice and ensure positive outcomes are being sought for all our LAC.

3.5 The IRO service in Westminster consists of:

- Angela Flahive, Bi-Borough Head of Safeguarding Review and Quality Assurance
- Marsha Rainford-Hay, Bi-Borough IRO Service Manager
- 3 permanent FTE IRO's, 1 seconded IRO (until January 2020), 1 FTE business support officer and a 0.5 FTE Children's Right's Officer

3.6 The team is culturally diverse and predominantly female. They bring a range of skills and experiences to the role.

3.7 There have been low levels of staff turnover and there has been no change to the permanent team structure. The newest team member joined in early 2018. Assisted by the team's stability, the IROs have strong and enduring relationships with the children and young people they review. Where possible the same IRO will review all the children in a sibling group, which maintains continuity for children and parents alike. Many children have had the same IRO for several years. Maintaining this ongoing consistent relationship is seen as very important by children, parents and IROs alike.

3.8 During this reporting period the management arrangements changed, with the previous IRO Service Manager retiring. The current post holder has twenty years

of post-qualifying experience and is registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council. The manager delivers casework oversight, professional advice and management support to each IRO and to the children's rights officer. This includes monthly supervision, case consolidations, team-meetings and awaydays. The manager ensures that the IROs access appropriate training and support to meet their individual and service needs.

3.9 As well as access to the core children's services training and development programme, IROs also receive coaching sessions throughout the year. These are based on the principle of promoting reflective practice to develop creative thinking skills and encourage active engagement with work processes. During 2019/20, greater efforts will be made to provide access to training, such as for modern slavery, and working more effectively with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

3.10 IROs are observed by their manager on a regular basis when they chair looked after children's reviews. Their performance is considered in line with the expectations set out in the IRO Handbook. The opportunity is taken to provide/seek feedback from all those involved in the review process and this supports the professional development of the IROs. Observations are formally recorded and where applicable form part of the annual appraisal process. This has proved to be a helpful opportunity to reflect on practice and learning and gives managers and IROs a chance to hear from children, parents and professionals directly about what it is like to be involved in a Looked After Review.

3.11 The IRO management team are integral to several Panels, forums and planning groups. The IRO perspective is valued as part of the decision-making process, alongside that of the children's social work service. These include the Joint Children Services Management meeting, corporate parents meeting, care panel, Bi-Borough permanency meeting and joint consultation regarding high risk LAC cases. This provides an opportunity for the IROs to act in their challenge role and hold a mirror up to practice.

3.12 The Westminster IRO Service is represented at the London Regional IRO Practitioners and Regional IRO Managers forums. IROs have also attended the annual regional IRO conference which was held in London in June 2019.

3.13 The IRO Handbook recommends that a caseload for a full-time IRO is between 50 and 70. Nationally, we are aware that caseloads are variable. In Westminster the average caseload is within this quota, ranging from 45 to 65 depending upon the IRO's capacity. The size of the caseload alone does not indicate the workload for each IRO, as this is determined by the number of other responsibilities e.g. the number of out of authority placements, large family groups, and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

4. Local Profile of Looked After Children

4.1 There were 209 children and young people in care on 31 March 2019. This is the same number as at the 31 March 2018. A breakdown by age over time can be seen in Table A.

4.2 Table A - WCC LAC - Total numbers as at 31st March 2013-2019



4.3 Although total numbers have remained static, the care population in Westminster is changing. Whereas the numbers of children coming into care from the generic population are reducing, the numbers of UASC arriving in Westminster is increasing – pushing the total numbers of new starters up. See Table B:

4.4 Table B: New LAC starters

	0-5	6-13	14+ (excl. UASC)	14+ UASC	Total
2016/17	35	31	30	50	146
2017/18	21	11	25	105	162
2018/19	23	10	39	103	175

4.5 The local authority has a range of placement options when a child or young person comes into the care:

- Kinship foster care (placement with extended family supported and regulated by the LA)
- Foster care
- Independent foster care (private agency)
- Residential care
- Supported lodgings
- Other (semi-independent, independent housing)

4.6 In 2018/19, 24 of the 33 children aged 0-13 (73 %) were placed with foster carers (kinship, LA and independent agencies) – see Table C:

4.7 Table C: New starters aged 0-13, Placement Type

Placement Type	Total
Kinship Foster Care	1
LA Foster Care	20
Independent Foster Care	3
Residential Care	8
Supported Lodgings	-
Other	1
Total	33

4.8 In 2018/19 the majority of children aged 14+ coming into care were placed in supported lodgings. This reflects the high numbers of unaccompanied minors coming into Westminster who are almost all aged 16 and 17 years old. See Table D below:

4.9 Table D: New starters aged 14+, Placement Type 2018/19

Placement type	Total
Kinship Foster Care	3
LA Foster Care	34
Independent Foster Care	10
Residential Care	4
Supported Lodgings	89
Other	2
Total	142

4.10 The table below (Table E) provides a breakdown of the reasons for new care episodes for 14-17-year olds during 2018/19. This cohort represents 141 children (81% (175) of new entries to care), of which the highest proportion entered care due to absent parenting (108 children, 76.5%). UASC accounted for 73% (103 children) of adolescent care entrants. During 2018/19 the proportion of adolescent entries into care due to remand arrangements remained low with 4 young people placed in custody.

4.11 Table E – Need type of young people aged 14-17 years entering care

Need type for entries to care in 2018-19, aged 14 to 17 years	Total
Abuse or neglect	13
Child's disability	1
Parental disability or illness	3
Family in acute stress	2
Family dysfunction	13
Socially unacceptable behaviour	1
Absent parenting	108
Total	141

4.12 Care planning and reviewing for children originating from other countries brings additional levels of complexity in relation to issues such as establishing jurisdiction, use of interpreters and cultural needs, all of which require additional time to ensure effective care planning.

4.13 Within Westminster there has been an increase in the total number of UASC care entries since 2016/17 (see Table F). Westminster's UASC numbers have impacted greatly upon our overall current LAC and Care Leaver populations. Nationally there has been an increased UASC population from 1,950 in 2013 to 4480 as at 31 March 2018.

4.14 Table F – UASC at the end of each year

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Total UASC at year end	47	69	82

4.15 The increase in the numbers of UASC has led to an increase in caseloads. This has resulted in several challenges for the IRO in undertaking the wider range of quality assurance activity. It has been addressed by additional IRO workforce capacity continuing into 2020.

4.16 There is ongoing pressure to identify and meet the needs of a wider range of children and young people with special educational needs through the provisions of the Children and Families Act, following joint planning with partner agencies. It is anticipated that external inspection by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission will assess the local area's effectiveness in meeting these demands.

5. Reducing the numbers of children looked after.

5.1 IROs are responsible for ensuring that looked after children achieve permanence and that this occurs without unnecessary drift or delay. During 2018/19, 183 children were recorded as having left care. This figure is higher than the previous years (132 in 2016/17) and (140 in 2017/18).

5.2 In 2018/19, 7 children (4%) who left care did so because of adoption. 42 children (23%) left care because they returned to their parents. Work is continuing to ensure these children do not remain on care orders any longer than is necessary

to ensure their reintegration into their family. 6 (3%) exits from care related to children on a Special Guardianship Order and 1 child ceased to be looked after due to a Residence Order. Table F below provides a full breakdown. The majority of our children cease to be Looked After when they reach 18 years of age.

5.3 Table G – Reason for ceasing being child in care 2018-19

Nos. of children (episodes) leaving care with reasons			April 2018 to March 2019
		Total leaving care	% of all leaving care
E11	Adopted - application for an adoption order unopposed	6	3.3%
E12	Adopted – consent dispensed with by the court	1	0.5%
E3	Care taken over by another local authority in the UK	51	27.9%
E4A	Returned home to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with parental responsibility as part of the care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order).	22	12.0%
E4B	Returned home to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with parental responsibility which was not part of the current care planning process (not under a special guardianship order or residence order or from 22 April 2014, a child arrangement order).	14	7.7%
E13	Left care to live with parent(s), relative(s), or other person(s) with no parental responsibility.	6	3.3%
E46	Special guardianship order made to former foster carer(s), other than relative(s) or friend(s)	5	2.7%
E47	Special guardianship order made to carer(s), other than former foster carer(s), who was/are a relative(s) or friend(s)	1	0.5%
E5	Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked after: supportive accommodation providing formalised advice/support arrangements (such as most hostels, young men’s Christian association, foyers, and care leavers projects)	22	12.0%
E6	Moved into independent living arrangement and no longer looked after: accommodation providing no formalised advice/support arrangements (such as bedsit, own flat, living with friend(s))	1	0.5%

E7	Transferred to residential care funded by adult social care services	1	0.5%
E9	Sentenced to custody	2	1.1%
E14	Accommodation on remand ended	2	1.1%
E15	Age assessment determined child is aged 18 or over and E5, E6 and E7 do not apply, such as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) whose age has been disputed	3	1.6%
E8	Period of being looked after ceased for any other reason	46	25.1%
	Grand Total	183	100%

5.4 The information in this table would suggest that care planning for LAC remains dynamic, that there is good throughput and that there is a positive focus on achieving permanence through family-based options.

5.5 As a service we are planning to undertake the following activities in supporting children entering and leaving care during 2019/20:

- Setting service objectives for all IROs to be proactive in seeking family-based care for children looked after, with a focus on engaging fathers and extended family as potential care givers.
- Care Plans and SW Reports submitted to the Review must be updated accordingly and reviewed prior to any LAC Review or Pathway Plan Review taking place.
- All LAC Reviews and Pathway Plan Reviews must quality assure the following documentation; PEPs, Care Plans, initial and review health assessment and Education and Health Care Plans. This will inform the network's understanding of need and the recommendations required to meet that need.
- The IRO Service offer to our UASC population needs to be strengthened. Training will be undertaken to develop our practice in respect of meeting the needs of our UASC population.

6. Timeliness of reviews

Numbers of reviews held 2018/19

6.1 Between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 a total of 490 LAC Reviews were chaired by an IRO.

REVIEWS UNDERTAKEN 2018 - 2019	
Total number of Looked after Children reviews April 18 to March 19	490
Numbers of reviews held within timescale	476
Number reviews held outside of timescale	14
Percentage of reviews held within statutory timescales	93.9

6.2 Reviews can be late for a number of reasons. In 2018/19 late notifications to the IRO Service was the primary reason.

6.3 As an IRO service we are planning to undertake the following activities in supporting improved timeliness of reviews during 2019/20:

- IRO designated leads will have visited the various teams and reinforced timescale expectations on a quarterly basis. Inductions about the role and the expectations of IROs will be provided to new staff members.
- We will use existing reporting mechanisms to understand where late requests are coming from and identify themes earlier. We will share this with relevant social work managers.
- We will develop the working relationship with our Tri-Borough placement services and will better use softer information e.g. from the placements service to more quickly pick up newly looked after children.
- IROs will send out informal alerts to managers where notifications are not received, to capture the reason behind the late notification and to identify patterns and inform better practice.

Participation in review meetings

6.4 We are committed to ensuring that all children who are looked after have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate and engage in their review process. We must ensure that we encourage and facilitate their engagement and participation in their review meetings, as far as they wish to take part in these. We must ensure that we keep the focus of the meeting on them and their needs.

6.5 In 2018 – 2019 96% of children over 4 years of age contributed to their statutory review, with 92% of children attending.

6.6 We use a range of methods to seek their views:

- Text
- Phone
- Face-to-face
- Consultation forms

6.7 The table below provides the participation descriptions for reviews undertaken in 2018/19:

6.8 Table H - Participation codes for reviews undertaken in 2018-19

Participation Code	Total
PN0 - child under 4 at time of review	51
PN1 - child attend and speaks for themselves	396
PN3 - child attends and conveys their views non-verbally	5
PN4 - child attends; does not speak for themselves / convey their views	2
PN5 - child does not attend but asks advocate to speak for them	10
PN6 - child does not attend but conveys their feelings to the review by the facilitated medium	8
PN7 - child does not attend nor conveys their view to the review	18
Grand Total	490

Permanency Planning

6.9 IROs continue to maintain a focus on permanency and to ensure via LAC Reviews that permanency is always under consideration and that there are parallel plans in place. Where possible family placements are prioritised and social workers with the support of IROs will work hard to return children to their birth families. The numbers of children placed for adoption is relatively low and this reflects the low numbers of very young children coming into care. IROs have noted that in some instances potential adopters who have children in placement need greater support to feel ready to apply for the order. Where there have been any delays in the adoption process following placement, IROs have been made aware of the reasons and have not deemed this placement drift.

7. Qualitative information about the IRO service

Consultation with children and young people

7.1 A key responsibility for IROs is to ensure that the child's wishes and feelings are known and are used to formulate the care plan. IROs must also establish whether the child understands their own rights and entitlements in law, for example that they can make a complaint, or apply to court to under S8 of the Children Act.

7.2 As part of the preparation for a review, the social worker should consult with the child before the review to ascertain their views about both the practicalities of the meeting (e.g. who is invited, venue, how the child wants to participate) and about what they would like to be discussed/decided.

7.3 In addition to consultation by the social worker, the IRO Handbook requires that IROs meet with children separately and prior to the review meeting, or as part of the process. Not all children and young people want to come to a meeting but may prefer their views to be obtained via another means. A core aspect of the IRO's role is to consult with the young person before the meeting and ensure that their voice is heard within the care planning and reviewing process.

7.4 In total, during the year, 490 consultation activities through participation of review (see Table H) were recorded by IROs. A consultation activity includes a visit or an attempted visit or, less commonly, a telephone call, to a child or young person in connection with their looked after review. When excluding children under 4 years old (51) and does not convey views (18), face-to-face consultations took place on 403 (95.7%) occasions.

7.5 As well as consulting with the child/young person prior to the review, IROs also encourage and support children and young people to attend their review meeting. The child/young person's participation is prioritised above that of family members, if it is not possible for both the child and family to meet.

7.6 During 2018/19 51 (10.4%) of Looked after Children were aged 4 or under at the time of the review. They would be unlikely to attend the review meeting but would be visited by the IRO as part of the review process and observed with their caregivers. Efforts will be made this year to examine ways in which we can improve children's active participation in their review meetings, for example by holding the review as a series of meetings rather than one big meeting.

7.7 The intention of these various consultation activities, and of encouraging children to take part in the review process, is that they can have their views heard and taken proper account of in the care planning process. Throughout the consultation and review process, the IRO will seek to establish the extent to which the child/young person understands their current circumstances and the plans for the longer term.

7.8 The IRO is now routinely notified of any complaints made by their looked after children so that they can be aware of the issues leading to the complaint. They can even use the reviewing process as a way of achieving resolution.

8. Feedback from practice observations – what review participants say

8.1 All IROs are observed chairing a review as a matter of course at least once per year. Feedback is sought from the review attendees, including their views about the IRO. In the past year we have targeted observing reviews where children are present. Some of the comments received about IROs are below. Comments are shared with IROs as part of their professional development.

In answer to the question: *“Is there anything you really liked about the review or thought was done well by the IRO?”*

- ***‘I am very glad with I have got and what I have done since become a part of Westminster and a part of the family.***
- ***‘Thank you. I have no word to describe what I am feeling now. What I can say is thank you all for everything’. 17 year old UASC.***
- ***‘Everything is going well with me and I am happy and pleased with all the people who looked after me’. 15 year old YP’***
- ***‘Move me to my own place. I have been asking for ages’ 17-year-old YP***
- ***‘My room is big, I like the food, I like the way Chris looks after ne. Chris is kind, caring and funny’ 10-year-old child***

- ***“Make the reviews more frequent than 6 months. Anything can happen between May and November, they are too rare!” 15-year-old YP***

8.2 As an IRO service we are planning to undertake the following activities in supporting the improved involvement of children and young people during 2019/20:

- Appraisal targets for IROs will reflect our continued commitment to setting high expectations in this area – IROs are expected to see 85% of children aged 5 and above.
- Routine audit of review records, to identify how children’s views are obtained and recorded, along with routine feedback from children attending reviews as part of the observation of IRO’s practice.
- IROs will be expected to highlight those children who choose not to attend their review meeting and establish what would need to change for them to attend.
- There will be more joint working with the children’s participation worker to focus on supporting/better understanding what needs to change for children/young people to attend.

9. Quality of Care Planning

9.1 A function for an IRO service is to identify issues and trends in services provided to looked after children. We do this by routinely completing monitoring data after every review, and by monitoring the issues that are being raised by IROs as part of quality assurance processes or informal and formal disputes.

9.2 IROs must evidence their monitoring of the progress of plans between reviews. They do this by conducting a brief “mid-point monitoring” exercise between reviews, which is an opportunity for touching base – an evidenced dialogue between IRO and social worker to ensure that care planning is on track. IROs also demonstrate their “footprint” on a case by adding their comments, relevant email correspondence etc. to children’s records. By actively monitoring progress in this way it becomes less likely that, when it is time for reviews to take place, the IRO is faced with any unexpected developments on cases.

9.3 In the mid-point monitoring process the IRO will: review the activity on the child’s record; review the care plan; consider the review decisions/recommendations of the last statutory review and raise with the allocated social worker and team manager any queries or challenge to the progress for the child.

9.4 Overall, we can see that most social workers plan and prepare well. For the plans that require improvement, the IRO should identify actions required to: drive forward progress; raise an informal challenge and, if necessary, communicate their concerns to the manager. In some cases, a formal dispute resolution might arise if the issues are not resolved.

9.5 As an IRO service we are planning to undertake the following activities to improve the Quality of Care Planning during 2019/20:

- Improve the focus on outcome-based care planning within the social workers' care plan and the IRO's report.
- Strengthen links with the social work teams by offering direct input via team meetings and inductions for new social workers and team managers.
- Develop further our work on safeguarding plans for those children most at risk of exploitation, and specifically our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- Ensure that the minutes of Looked After Children's Reviews are written in the form of a letter to the child/young person, which is age appropriate and accurately reflects the discussion and actions agreed.

10. Corporate Parenting

Rights and entitlements

10.1 As a service we endeavour to ensure that the children and young people that we are responsible for receive the best possible support and care, and that we are aspirational for our children and young people. Alongside ensuring, where appropriate, that children and young people feel in control of their lives and are able to overcome the barriers they may face.

10.2 IROs should establish whether children have been given a copy of the Promise by their social worker. Where this hasn't happened, the IRO should ensure the young person is provided with a copy.

10.3 Part of the role of the IRO is to understand factors which contribute to drift and delay in achieving the agreed permanence plan. This may include factors outside the local authority's immediate control such as the contribution of partner agencies. In the IRO's judgement there has been a range of reasons for this. Amongst the most frequently identified issues are delays caused by the legal process and issues with the child's placement.

10.4 As an IRO service we are planning to undertake the following activities around corporate parenting during 2019/20:

- Work with the Virtual School to identify and address the causes of delays in progressing agreed care plans where there are educational issues.
- Work with the social work service to strengthen the quality of analysis and develop a more outcome focussed approach to care plans.
- Work with the social work teams and the Fostering and Adoption Service to strengthen our focus on permanency in its widest context.

11. Quality Assurance role of the IRO service – Key Messages

The informal and formal process – Dispute Resolution

- 11.1 Westminster IROs have good professional relationships with children’s social work teams. Where problems or differences of opinion exist, IROs will always seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker’s manager. This approach supports a restorative practice agenda and both the IRO service and the Children’s Social Work Service have continued to embrace this approach within our challenge agenda.
- 11.2 A significant aspect of an IROs’ work is focussed on the continuing oversight and scrutiny of each child’s care plan in between statutory reviews. This includes effectively and swiftly addressing any concerns identified within care planning about potential drift or social work practice concerns through firstly informal discussions with the social worker and their manager.
- 11.3 Alongside the Social Work service, we have adopted a solution–focussed, collaborative approach to prevent issues escalating into a formal dispute and have averted potential formal disputes through a process of negotiation, conversations and meetings.
- 11.4 There have been 10 informal management alerts raised during 2018/19, and no formal dispute resolution challenges were undertaken. All challenges were resolved. Challenge themes have included: pathway plans not being completed in advance of the review; concerns raised with the Fostering Service about de-registration plan for connected carer; lack of progress to advance the education requirements of young person’s care plan; delays in notification to the IRO service; delays in social work reports being tasked to the IRO and questions about the support offered to a young person in preparation for their Initial LAC Review. All the management alerts and escalations are now being tracked and progress will be monitored by the IROs themselves and the Manager.

Quality Monitoring

- 11.5 As a service we will be introducing a Quality Assurance monitoring form to be completed after every review that is chaired. This will then be available on the child’s record for social workers and managers to see. This will provide feedback on issues such as “was the child well prepared for the review?”, “is the care plan of good quality?”, “is the relationship between child and social worker a good one?” etc. The data from this can then be anonymised, aggregated and analysed to produce a picture of what is working well for all LAC from the IRO perspective. The Service has re-established the system of IROs having an allocated team link which allows them to share information and issues across children’s services more effectively.

Challenges ahead

- 11.6 Based on the issues and feedback from IROs, the main issues to be aware of in the coming year would include:

- Developing the role of IROs to drive even better practice and improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Meeting the needs of the rising numbers of Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who have complex needs impacted by traumatic experiences.
- Responding to the needs of young people vulnerable to exploitation and criminal activity – working with partners to ensure that robust safeguarding plans are in place.
- Continued monitoring of Unregistered Placements for our young people post 16 years of age.
- Continued monitoring of Unregulated Placements to ensure that the welfare needs and protection of the children Looked After is promoted.

Appendix 1 Annual work programme for April 2019- March 2020

THEME ONE: INCLUSION & INVOLVEMENT IN REVIEWS

Service Outcome: Children and young people are consulted with, in a meaningful way, prior to their reviews

- Maintain the level of IRO consultations with children prior to reviews at 100% for all children and young people over the age of 7 years of age.
- Offer creative engagement with children, including children with additional communication needs. This includes varying the format of meetings, the use of tools and toolkits, increasing the numbers of children who lead their own reviews in some way, and ensuring reviews are child-centred meetings.
- Ensure that all children and young people are proactively engaged in the Looked After Children's Reviewing processes and are supported to attend their own review.
- Work with the designated team for UASC to develop a greater understanding of the young person's needs and their personal cultural context, to maximise opportunities for involvement in the Reviewing processes and the wider corporate parenting offer.

THEME TWO: IMPROVING QUALITY OF CARE PLANNING

Service Outcome: Looked after reviews make a difference for children and young people by improving the quality of social work reports and care plans.

- Ensure looked after review meetings and the resulting reports and decisions are focussed on desired outcomes for children and young people. Decisions and actions have a direct link to an outcome.
- Ensuring that the right work is undertaken with the child in a timely way and that this is captured in child friendly language on the child's file.
- IROs to review the Personal Education Plans for all Looked After Children, and where relevant all Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) are considered, in advance of the statutory Review being held to ensure that a comprehensive plan of action is devised to meet the child/young person's needs.

Service Outcome: Every IRO contributes to practice and performance improvement activities in respect of social work with children and young people.

- In addition to reviewing and monitoring of care plans, every IRO to undertake at least one piece of training / development / practice improvement activity per year intended to improve the quality of social work practice around care planning.

- All section 20 accommodation arrangements to be regularly reviewed by the IRO to ensure that the care plan is still relevant and meets the needs of the child/young person.
- The dispute resolution template to be updated and all formal and informal challenges to be recorded by the relevant IRO.

Service Outcome: Every IRO will to ensure that 100% of Looked After Children's statutory Reviews take place within the expected timescales.

- IRO to ensure that all services are committed to undertaking the statutory reviews within the required timescales.
- The dispute resolution protocol to be used as relevant.
- The child/young person to be prepared in advance of their statutory review.

THEME THREE: Maintaining Links with Birth Family and Connected Persons

Service Outcome: Looked after Children remain in contact with members of their birth family. The possibility of reunification with wider family is regularly explored and promoted where safe to do so.

- Permanency planning is considered for all children and young people, in its widest context, with robust focus and planning from the commencement of being Looked After.