

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 10 October 2017

**Subject:** Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

**Report of:** Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding

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**Summary**

This annual report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. This is supported by a presentation.

This report evaluates practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children in 2016/2017 and the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service in ensuring the local authority as a corporate parent is discharging its statutory responsibilities towards them.

**Recommendations**

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Contact Officers:**

Name: Linda Evans  
Position: Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding  
Telephone: 0161 234 4960  
E-mail: l.evans1@manchester.gov.uk

**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

None



**MANCHESTER**  
CITY COUNCIL

# **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016 - 2017**

**Report to:** Children's Management Team  
Children and Families Leadership Team  
Corporate Parenting Panel  
The Group

This report will also be published on the Children's Area of the Manchester City Council external website.

**Principal Author:** Linda Evans, Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding  
Sharon Cooper, Lead for Children's Safeguarding

**Co-Authors:** Marian Flaherty, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager  
Jim Stewart, Interim Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager

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## Foreword

This annual report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017.

This report evaluates practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children in 2016/2017 and the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service in ensuring the local authority as a corporate parent is discharging its statutory responsibilities towards them.

Independent Reviewing Officers have a pivotal role to play in ensuring care plans for children effectively address their needs, take into account children and young people's ascertainable views and opinions and improve outcomes for them.

This report demonstrates continuous development and improvement in the Independent Reviewing Officer service over the past year and highlights the improvements that are required if the service is to achieve its aspiration to be an Outstanding fiercely child-centred.

Manchester City Council and its partners have refreshed its promise to look after children and care leavers in the past year and the Independent Reviewing Officer service are clear about their role and responsibilities in relation to the delivery of the promise.

The Chair of the 'Voice and Influence' sub a young person with care experience stated:

**The role of IRO is dead important to children and young people who need to be listened too and involved in decision making about their care. Children and young people don't always understand why they are looked after and why decisions are made. Young people tell us what they want us to do better at and IRO's can help make this happen.**

**I have in the last year delivered training to Manchester IRO's and I also opened the North West IRO Conference and I had the opportunity to get these message across which is great.**

The report will be presented to the Children's Services Management team, Children and Families Leadership team and the Corporate Parenting Panel. An easy read version of the report will be created for the Children in Care Council 'The Group'.

Progress against recommendations and actions identified in the 2015/2016 annual report are referenced throughout this report. Please note that data provided in this report for 2016/17 is provisional pending year end validation processes and submission to and publication by the Department for Education.

**Linda Evans**  
**Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding**

## 2. SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT

### 2.1 The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

The purpose of the Independent Reviewing Officer role is to ensure that the care plan for a looked after child fully reflects the child's needs and that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration.

The appointment by local authorities of an Independent Reviewing Officer is a statutory requirement. The Children and Young Person's Act 2008, followed by revised care planning regulations and guidance which came into force in April 2011, strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to [section 25B (1) -1989 Act]:

- monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- participate in any review of the child's case;
- ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.

The primary task of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects their current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's statutory responsibilities towards the child. As corporate parents each local authority should act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent would act.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of an Independent Reviewing Officer:

- i. chairing the child's review; and
- ii. monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service in Manchester sits within the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit. It is managed independently of children's social work line management and is therefore offering an appropriate level of independence that enables the service to effectively challenge plans, arrangements and the practice of the local authority. The strategic lead for the service reports directly to the Director of Children's Services. Independent Reviewing Officers and their managers have no involvement in preparing a child's care plan, management of the case, operational decision making and/or allocation of resources to looked after children.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of Local Authorities in establishing an effective Independent Reviewing Officer service.<sup>1</sup>

Manchester Children's Services is committed to achieving a fully effective Independent Reviewing Officer service that is Outstanding. Work has continued in the past year and the following have

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<sup>1</sup> Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook <https://www.gov.uk/government/.../independent-reviewing-officers-handbook>

been achieved:

- We have been successful in creating a culture and climate within the local authority that values the Independent Reviewing Officer service and encourages and expects robust child-centred scrutiny; expects and is receptive to challenge.
- Independent Reviewing Officers now have improved professional status and respect, the services is adequately resourced.
- Independent Reviewing Officers are increasingly equipped with the right knowledge and skills that enable them to effectively scrutinise practice, plans and arrangements and know how and when to challenge.
- Independent Reviewing Officers have open access to expert advice, including the provision of independent legal advice.
- A dispute resolution protocol is embedded that works effectively, from informal conversations to the escalation of cases to senior management and CAFCASS if necessary.
- There is increasing evidence of Independent Reviewing Officers practicing in a child-centred way and of their footprint on the child's case file.

***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  
Family Division Liaison Judge for the Northern Circuit  
NCB The role of IROs in England final Report 2014***

## **2.2 Manchester's Vision and Plan for Children**

Our commitment to continuously develop and improve of the Independent Reviewing Officer service, is underpinned by high aspiration for Manchester's children, young people and families' as set out the Children and Young People Plan 2016 - 2019 'Our Manchester, Our Children' which is underpinned by key behaviour and principles; none no more than delivering services that are fiercely child-centred and having by strong and high aspirations for children, young people and families in Manchester.

The Children and Young People's Plan, 'Our Manchester, Our Children' 2016 - 2019<sup>2</sup> and Our Manchester<sup>3</sup>. All priority objectives identified within this Strategy will be an integral part of the Children's Services Single Plan.

Manchester Children and Young People Plan 2016 - 2019, 'Our Manchester, Our Children', sets out the following vision for children and young people in the City:

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<sup>2</sup> Children and Young Peoples Plan 2016 - 2019

<sup>3</sup> Our Manchester Strategy 2015 - 2025. <http://www.manchester.gov.uk/mcrstrategy>



- Safe** *All children and young people feel safe; their welfare promoted and safeguarded from within their homes, schools and communities*
- Happy** *All children and young people grow up happy - having fun, having opportunities to take part in leisure and culture activities, and having good social, emotional, and mental health*
- Healthy** *All children and young people enjoy good physical and mental health that enables them to lead healthy, active lives, and to have the resilience to overcome emotional and behavioural challenges*
- Successful** *All children and young people have the opportunity to thrive and succeed in their education, emotional and personal lives.*

The children and young people plan sets out 21 priorities and 4 'passions' which Manchester City Council and its partners have agreed to relentlessly focus on:

- Children and young people living in stable, safe and loving homes
- Safely reducing the number of children and young people who are in care
- Children and young people having the best start in the first years of life
- Children and young people fulfilling their potential

Manchester has a new vision and way of doing things - Our Manchester. The Our Manchester strategy 2025 sets out a shared ambition for the city for the next 10 years. The Our Manchester approach puts people at the centre, recognising that people are more important than processes, procedures or organisational boundaries and connecting with people in a different way that starts from a focus on people's strengths and asks not "what's the matter with you" but instead "what matters to you". The approach is grounded in four underpinning principles:

- Better lives - it's about people
- Listening - we listen, learn and respond
- Recognising strengths of individuals and communities - we start from strengths
- Working together- we build relationships and create conversations

### **2.3 Profile of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service in Manchester**

There was a stable management team during 2016/2017 that provided vision and leadership for the continuous development and improvement of the Independent Reviewing Officer service. The Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding has Strategic responsibility for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service and has been in post since October 2015; they are supported by a Service Lead and two Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers.

Manchester has in the reporting period had 19 full time Independent Reviewing Officers who are managed by two Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers. The Independent Reviewing Officers in Manchester are dedicated roles to review children's care plans; they do not undertake a dual role in child protection conferencing.

We have one Independent Reviewing Officer who undertakes a specialist service to unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The Independent Reviewing Officer team remained relatively stable during 2016/2017 and consistency and continuity has been offered to look after children. Three Independent Reviewing

Officers left the service during the year, one new Independent Reviewing Officer was recruited and two experienced Independent Reviewing Officers transferred to vacancies from the Child Protection team. A small number of agency staff have helped to cover during periods of recruitment or staff sickness this has ensured caseloads across the service have remained stable.

The Independent Reviewing Officer team has a good balance of experienced Independent Reviewing Officers and those newer to the role. The profile of the team is diverse being balanced with male and female workers from different ethnic backgrounds. This helps in reflecting the diversity of the Looked after Children population in Manchester.

#### **2.4 Independent Reviewing Officer Capacity**

Service resourcing has consistently ensured there is an adequate number of Independent Reviewing Officers in post enabling the service to maintain caseloads within the number of 50 - 70 children recommended in the Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook. The average caseload in 2016/17 for Independent Reviewing Officers was 63 a reduction from previous years.

Caseload levels offers Independent Reviewing Officers the time and space to carry out their role fully which is critical when considering concerns had arisen historically that Independent Reviewing Officers did not have sufficient oversight or make appropriate challenge when the local authority practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children is poor and not in children's best interests.

The Ofsted Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers that took place in July 2014 stated, "Independent Reviewing Officers and conference chairs do not challenge poor social work practice effectively".

"Some conferences and reviews do not receive social work reports and the allocated worker does not attend. These meetings and consequently the outcomes, are compromised as a result". In highlighting areas requiring improvement Ofsted stated Manchester needed to improve the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service, particularly in relation to listening to the views of children, the rigour of challenge that is given to care plans and the process of escalation where there are continuing concerns about practice and progress of plans.

In 2016/17 Ofsted undertook a number of monitoring visits to Manchester Children's Services, one of which focused specifically on the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit, thus the Independent Reviewing Officer Service. The letter published on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017 states:

**'Inspectors found that progress has been made to improve the effectiveness of the safeguarding unit. Caseloads have now reduced; this has assisted child protection chairs and IROs to have an increased influence in cases. There is evidence of their increased scrutiny in the majority of cases seen. Strengthened auditing processes have resulted in increased levels of oversight and this is beginning to impact on practice'**

The key findings were:

- Additional investment in staffing has resulted in recent reductions in workloads for IROs, who now report to having between 70 and 78 cases\*. Staff spoken to said that this helps them to provide a more effective service, for example by increasing the time spent with children before reviews to gain their views and by increasing the number of challenges

raised if plans are not progressed quickly enough. *\* Please note this figure included caseloads of Safeguarding Chairs.*

- There is evidence of the active involvement of IROs in most of the cases looked at during the monitoring visit. However, the majority of challenges raised by IROs are focused on issues around processes rather than practice. Fewer escalations are raised in relation to the quality of social work practice, the experiences of children or the contribution from other professionals involved in children's plans.
- IROs are increasingly using electronic case notes to monitor and challenge progress between reviews. There is evidence on children's files of oversight and challenge about issues of compliance such as legal planning meetings not being held in a timely way and about the supervising social worker for foster carers not attending children's reviews.
- Reliable performance data is available and is used regularly by managers to monitor and track the progress of any issues raised by IROs. Although this is having an impact, it is not yet fully effective in all cases. Inspectors saw that in a number of cases when an escalation had been raised by an IRO, it was not responded to quickly enough.
- When there is drift in children's plans or delay in tasks being completed, escalations are not always raised quickly enough by IROs.
- When there is a significant change in a case such as a change of social worker or team manager, or where there is a change in a child's circumstances, this is not always shared with the safeguarding unit. This means that IROs do not always know about issues that could influence the progress of children's plans.

The Monitoring Visit letter in respect of the performance of Adoption Services dated 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017 further confirmed evidence of progress within the Independent Reviewing Officer service:

**'Looked after children reviews seen were timely, with regular attendance by social workers and minutes that evidenced clear recording of discussions, actions and timescales. Case sampling evidenced independent reviewing officers' involvement in the case, with appropriate challenge and escalation when required'.**

## **2.5 Supervision and training**

Independent Reviewing Officers receive monthly supervision and have access to informal supervision as and when needed. Managers remain committed to ensuring the level of supervision and support to Independent Reviewing Officers is of the highest standard.

Supervision is now being monitored and current levels of formal supervision offered on a monthly basis has been on average 80.5% in 2016/2017.

A new Supervision Policy was implemented by Children's Services in January 2017. The Independent Reviewing Officer managers are using the new pro formas which link to Signs of Safety, to ensure the framework continues to be embedded across the service.

In 2016/2017 all (with the exception of one who was not in work) Independent Reviewing Officer received an appraisal which considered individual their strengths over the last 12 months and learning needs.

## **2.6 Independent Reviewing Officer Learning and Development**

In 2016/2017 Human Resources Organisational Development supported the service to undertake a training needs analysis. This was identified as a key objective in the 2015/2016 Annual Report. This used information gained from an Independent Reviewing Officer self-evaluation, annual appraisals, whilst taking into consideration statutory and local requirements, the Local Government Association Peer Review and OFSTED observations.

The training needs analysis considered 28 areas of competency. For example:

- Planning, prioritising and organising tasks and activities, time management, self and team, setting goals using SMART objectives.
- Communication skills for colleagues and service users, questioning and active listening, building trust, empathy and mutual understanding. This is to include writing skills and the language used in CP plans.
- Managing relationships, interpersonal, peers, upwards, obtaining approval for projects, changes etc.
- Planning and chairing meetings, effective follow-up.
- Innovation, vision, creativity, taking initiative, problem-solving and decision-making.
- Quality awareness and managing, according to quality standards and procedures.
- Keeping up to date on new legal requirements and new legislation.
- Understanding of Signs of Safety.
- Understanding of Strengths Based Conversations.
- Voice of the child/child centred view.

The training needs analysis (plus other identified areas of learning) was used to influence the agenda of whole service development days. These have taken place on a quarterly basis throughout 2016/2017.

The agendas have included among other topics: OFSTED monitoring Visit feedback; The Children's and Young People's Plan; Our Manchester and the delivery of Autism training delivered by a care experienced young person.

The information was also used to inform specific Independent Reviewing Officer development days, that took place in 2016/2017; and covered topics such as Independent Reviewing Officer standards, children's participation 'voice and influence', the vision for Children's Services in Manchester and legal developments around the use of section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and Special Guardianship.

It was agreed in our 2015/2016 Annual Report that advanced training would be offered to Independent Reviewing Officers in 2016/2017. During 2016/2017 two of our experienced Independent Reviewing Officers undertook and passed the Advanced Practice for Independent Reviewing Officers course delivered by Edgehill University. The course has been accredited and is awarded 20 credits at Masters Level.

The course module learning was as follows:

- Critically analyse the role of the IRO with reference to current legislative, policy and guidance frameworks for looked after children in England
- Critically analyse effective approaches to risk assessment and management
- Critically analyse effective approaches to planning, delivering and evaluation of care and support for looked after children

- Critically reflect on and evaluate learner's practice in IRO role for looked after children to identify strengths and areas and strategies for effective professional development.

A further four members of staff are currently undertaking the course and are due to complete the course in July 2017.

The two Safeguarding and Improvement Unit Managers and two Independent Reviewing Officers completed a five-day course about the Signs of Safety Framework, and are now practice leads. Seventeen of the Independent Reviewing Officers also completed two days Signs of Safety course training course, and there are regular sessions now held to discuss how the model and accompanying tools can be used in everyday practice

## **2.7 Independent Legal Advice**

Manchester Independent Reviewing Officers have had consistent access to good quality independent legal advice via Wigan Children's Services, as part of a reciprocal arrangement Manchester has agreed with Wigan.

The provision of independent legal advice has helped inform Independent Reviewing Officer thinking and decision making. In 2016/2017 Independent Reviewing Officers the reason for seeking independent legal advice included:

- Care Planning
- Immigration issues.
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Change of name.
- Older children.
- Children accommodated under Section 20.
- Threshold issues.
- Timescales for discharge of legal orders.
- Special Guardianship Orders.
- Adoption.
- Use of s38 (6).
- Legal Gateway and Public Law Outline processes.

### 3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE “FRONT AND CENTRE”

Manchester Children’s Services is committed to placing children and young people front and centre to everything that we do. The Children’s Board provides overall leadership for delivering the vision for children, young people and their families; which is ‘**Our Manchester - building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for children and young people**’.

A Voice of Children and Young People Framework is an integral part of our Quality Assurance Framework. It sets our expectation that clear and immediately accessible information about the child or young person, their views and ascertainable wishes and feelings are available. Its purpose is to:

- Outline expectations in relation to how we will engage with children and young people to elicit their views and ascertainable wishes and feelings.
- Ensure clearly defined roles and responsibilities and strong lines of accountability.
- To ensure the views of children and young people influence the care and services they receive and service development.
- Bring about improved outcomes for children, young people and their families by improving professional practice and the quality of service delivery.

We aspire to be an outstanding Independent Reviewing Officer service that is fiercely child centred and strive to ensure the local authority meets its statutory responsibilities and that practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children are of a consistently good standard.

The Independent Reviewing Officer role is central to building an outstanding Children’s Services in which “our” children have the best care experience and life opportunities.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service has the role to examine and challenge where needed to ensure that Manchester Children’s Services are fulfilling that commitment along with fulfilling its Promise to our looked after children and care leavers. (Appendix 1)

We are driving continuous development and improvement by:

- Placing children and young people at the centre of everything we do ensuring their rights, needs and welfare is promoted.
- Ensuring children and young people’s voice is consistently heard and influences, practice plans and arrangements for them and service development and improvement.
- Creating the conditions in which strong positive relationships can be developed between the Independent Reviewing Officer and the looked after child.
- Exploring more creative ways in which the child or young person can participate in care planning and reviews.
- Developing SMART care plans and pathway plans that are clear, accessible and understood by our children and all caring for them.

- Having plans that are robustly reviewed both at review meetings and the period between them, to ensure they are delivering the outcomes in a timely manner, adapted and changed when needed.
- Respecting our children and young people, they are shown the priority they deserve and have a right to quality reports and plans that identify both the needs and outcomes along with their wishes and feelings.
- Seeking assurance that our children and young people are receiving the best of care and that their right to regular health and dental checks, personal education plans and a passport.
- A service that will robustly challenge any areas of poor practice exhausting all stages of the Dispute Resolution and powers to have the child's needs met promptly.

### **3.1 Corporate Parenting Panel**

The lead member for Children's Services is proactive in ensuring the Council and its partners as corporate parents are demonstrating a strong commitment to ensuring:

***'A child who is looked after by the Council or a care leaver has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a responsible and good parent'.***

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Panel is to ensure the Council with its partners effectively discharges its responsibilities as Corporate Parents to all children and young people looked after and care leavers.

As a Corporate Parent to all children and young people looked after and care leavers the Council and its partners must act as a responsible and good parent would act.

Every good parent:

- Ensures their children are kept safe and have a secure and stable environment in which to grow and thrive
- Supports their children to remain healthy and promotes their emotional well-being and resilience.
- Protects their children from harm and ensures they know how to keep themselves safe and are supported to cope with the dangers and challenges life presents.
- Hold high aspirations for their children's future and wants the bests for their children and encourages and supports them to attend education regularly and reach their potential.
- Nurtures their children and prepares and supports their transition to adult life promoting their economic prospects and preparing them to become responsible citizens.
- Recognises, celebrate and shares in their achievements and celebrates them.
- Listens to their children views and ensures they are taken into account.

The corporate parenting panel is made up of representatives of the Council, its partner agencies (including Coram Voice) and members of the Children in Care Council (The Group) and The Care Leavers Council (The Change Group) and is influencing development and improvement in services.

The Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding is the strategic lead for Corporate Parenting.

### **3.2 Children's Rights**

Coram Voice has delivered Manchester's Children's Rights Service which includes the provision of advocacy and Independent Visitors since 1 November 2015. Their Manager has confirmed that Independent Reviewing Officers continue to strongly promote both aspects of the service in conversations and through sharing promotional materials.

Over half of referrals (53.5%) to the advocacy service are made directly by children and young people. Advocates can have an important role in communicating children's views to their 'Looked After Children's Reviews' where this is what the child or young person wants. In 2016/2017:

- 85 children were open for advocacy at the end of the year covering a wide range of issues.
- The cases for 98 children have closed in the year.
- 218 young people accessed community advocacy services.
- 52 young people were offered support through the Helpline.
- 174 young people were allocated an advocate.
- Support at looked after children reviews had been requested by 22 children still open to the service and 15 children whose case had been closed.
- The total number of children and young people accessing the Manchester Independent Visiting service in the year 2016/2017 was 52

### **3.3 Complaints**

Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility to ensure that children are aware of the complaints procedure in Manchester. As identified in the 2015/2016 we have continued to monitor complaints in order to improve services.

During 2016/2017 there were 27 formal complaints made by looked after children and young people in comparison to 12 in the previous year. The majority of the complaints (74% 20 out of 27) were made by via Coram Voice. Complaints:

- Linked to placement (44% 12 out of 27).
- Issues around passports (14% 4 out of 27).
- Social Worker issues (11% 3 out of 27).
- Child did not feel listened to = (11% 3 out of 27)
- Issues around finance (7.5% 2 out of 27)
- Issues around contact (3.7% 1 out of 21)
- Young person not supported post 16 (3.7% 1 out of 27)
- Child upset as his dog was removed as the placement could not accommodate it (3.7% 1 out of 27)

These reports are presented at the Children's Management Team meetings, the Voice and Influence sub group, Corporate Parenting Panel and the Quality Assurance Framework meeting to monitor progress on themes and actions resulting from complaints.

Issues raised by looked after children and young people are examined in Section 4 of this report Voice and Influence of Children and Young People.



### 3.4 Voice and Influence of Children and Young People

Children and young people have the opportunity to participate in decisions and activities that shape and influence practice, policies and services that can impact on their lives. Some examples of this are as follows: young people have been involved in the recruitment of staff including the CEO, 12 young people took over key roles including Director of Children’s Services, Head of the Virtual School, Designated Nurse, Strategic Lead for Social Work as part of Take Over Challenge 2016, young people have been consulted and involved in developing a communications plan for looked after children and young people and they have delivered presentations to staff, attend the Corporate Parenting Panel and Chair a group aimed at promoting the Voice and Influence of looked after children and care leavers.

In 2016/2017 the Voice of Children and Young People Framework was developed that outlines the opportunities for professionals to listen to and seek the views of children and young people. This Framework includes a learning and improvement cycle aimed at ensuring what children and young people tell us about their experience of being after influences practice and service development and improvement for them and others.

The following outlines the different ways Independent Reviewing Officers hear about the views of children and young people and understand what is important to them.

- Independent Reviewing Officer Visits
- Engagement in Reviews
- Voice and Influence sub group
- Children in Care Council ‘The Group’.
- Children’s Rights - advocacy and independent Visitors
- Complaints
- Social Work reports
- Surveys
- Corporate Parenting Panel representative.

The following are examples of things children and young people told us were important to the them during 2016/2017.

Promise	Young People told us	We have....
<b>RESPECT YOU</b> listen, value, involve, engage	They wanted more ways of contacting social workers and IRO’s.	Made sure social workers and IROs give you their contact details and those of their Managers.
<b>CARE FOR YOU</b> stability, wellbeing, relationships, advice and rights	They wanted to be more involved in decisions that effect them.  They want to understand why they are looked after.	We have made sure more IRO’s visit young people before their reviews and will continue to do better at that.
<b>SUPPORT YOU</b>		

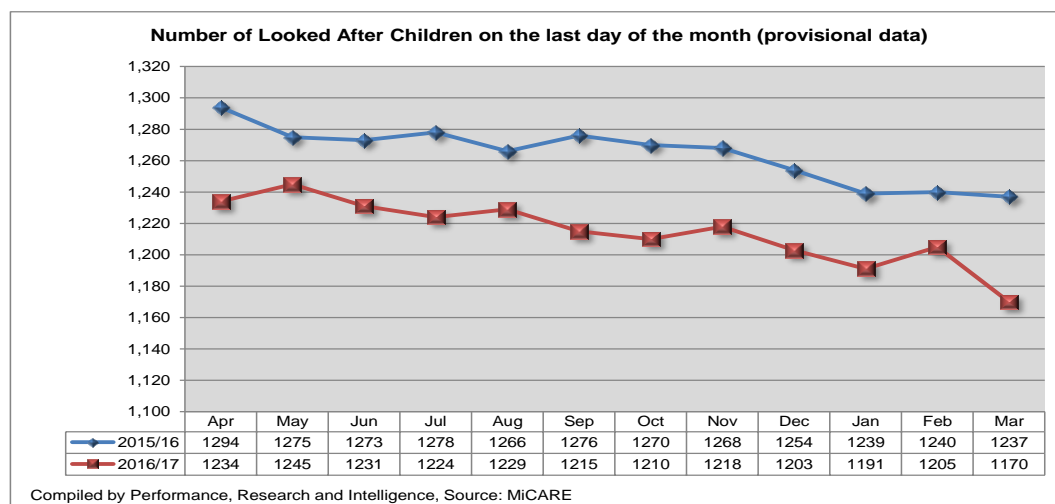
<p>education, pathways, hobbies, dreams</p>		
<p><b>HELP YOU GROW</b>  <b>independence, transition, active citizens</b></p>	<p>They wanted more contact with their families and needed to understand why this is sometimes not possible.</p> <p>More prepared and better supported in the transition to adulthood.</p> <p>They wanted us to better consider LGBTQ issues.</p>	<p>We have more actively encouraged young people to attend their reviews, contribute their views via better Have Your Say Booklets or Chair.</p> <p>We are now sending out review minutes in a more easy read format I.e. letters to young people.</p> <p>We have put plans in place to introduce 'My Own' MOMO a communication app and are looking at using Facetime and as another option for young people who would prefer that as a way of speaking to their IRO's.</p> <p>IRO's are now seeking the views of young people more often and their voice is more evident in review minutes and records. We have more to do.</p> <p>IRO's have a much better focus on Plans for young people, we need to do more in relation to Pathway Planning.</p>

The Independent Reviewing Officer service is committed to listening to the voice of looked after children and enabling them to influence and shape practice and service development. During 2016/2017 positive steps have been taken by the service to listen effectively to the voice of children and young people and to respond to the issues raised. We recognise that continued improvement is required and that we will need to revisit some issues to ensure changes are embedded.

#### 4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION DATA 1 APRIL 2016 - 31 MARCH 2017

##### 4.1 Looked After Children Population

At 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 provisional data indicates that Manchester City Council had responsibility for 1170 Looked after Children. This represents a decrease of 67 children and young people over this financial year following a reduction of 138 children and young people over the previous two years. Nationally the number of looked after children has risen year on year from 2012 to 16. The local trend is demonstrated in the diagram below.



This performance reflects the focus in Children's Services on:

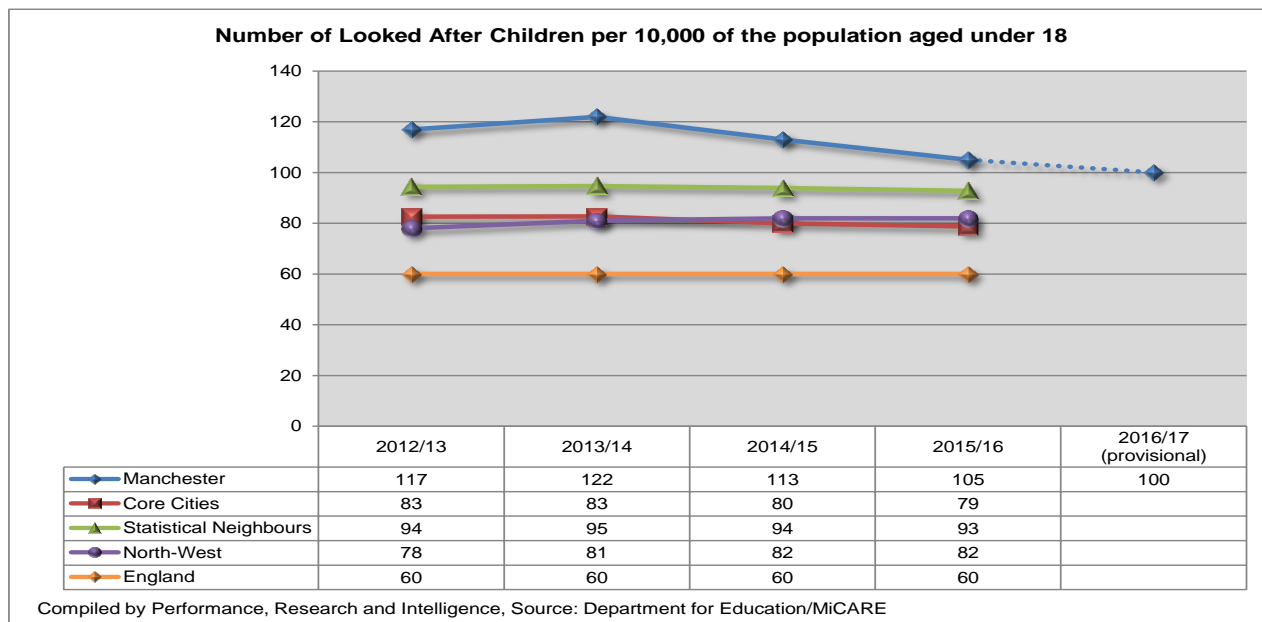
- Strengthening the 'front door' service via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).
- Continuing work to ensure that children only become accommodated under section 20 where necessary.
- Focussed permanency planning.
- Ensuring that children return home when safe and appropriate.
- Work to achieve Special Guardianship Orders where suitable carers have been identified
- Discharge of legal orders primarily Care Orders when they are no longer necessary.

A residential 'edge of care' provision opened in early 2017 named Alonzi House. Alonzi House offers intensive support, family group conferencing and short break care to children who are at risk of family breakdown. The impact and outcomes of this new service is yet to be fully evidenced, but keeping children at home with their families in times of crisis where safe, has been made a priority in the provision of preventative services in Manchester.

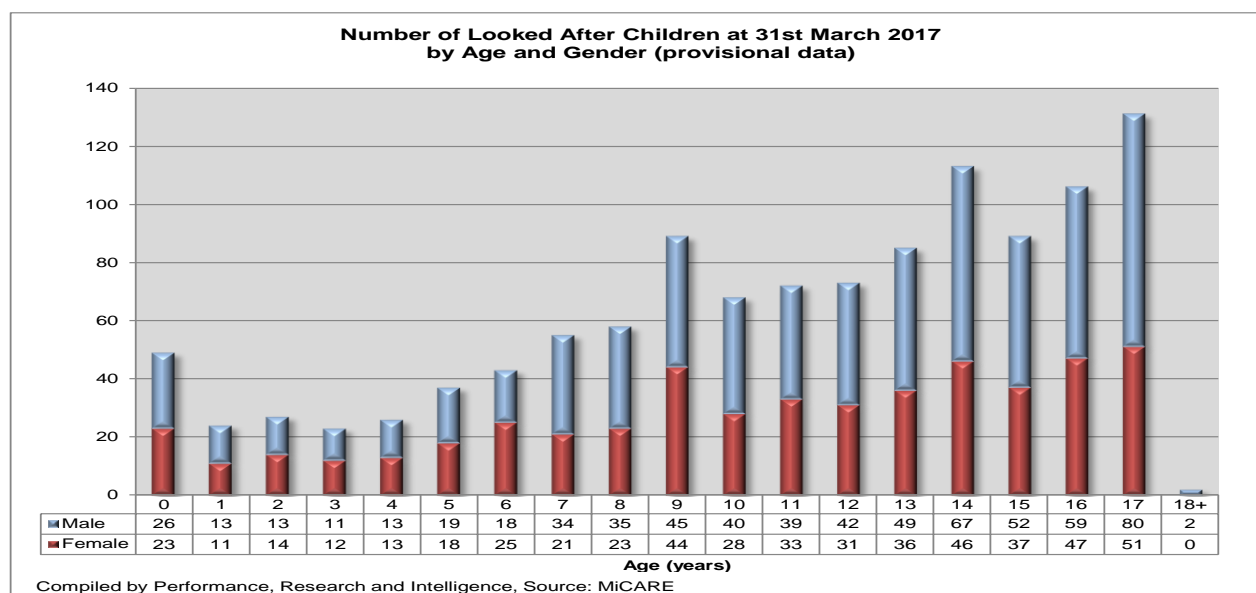
Increased scrutiny by Independent Reviewing Officers has also continued to contribute to the safe reduction in numbers of looked after children.

In 2016/2017 there was an increase in the number of applications made by Children's Services to discharge Care Orders. The total number of Care Orders which ceased was 131 in 2016/17. This will have included children who turned 18. At times this presented a challenge for Independent Reviewing Officers when ratifying the child's care plan, and more detailed discussions were required with Social Worker, Team Managers and with our colleagues in CAFCASS to ensure this was the right plan for the child.

Despite the continuing reduction, the number of Looked after Children in Manchester remains high when comparing statistical comparator rates for 2015/16 (most recent data available). The provisional rate of children looked after per 10,000 population in March 2017 was 100 which marks a reduction of 5 from last year's confirmed rate but remains above the 2015/16 rate of our statistical neighbours which was 93, the North West average rate which was 82, the Core City rate which was 79 and the England average rate of 60. The long term target remains to safely reduce numbers to the Core City rate.

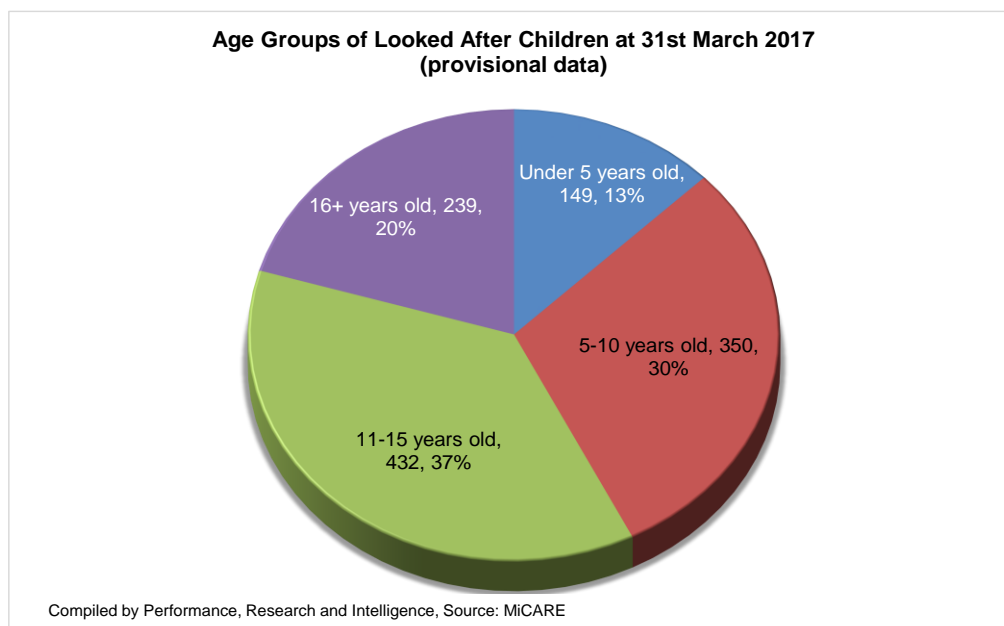


#### 4.2 Age and Gender of Looked After children as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017



There continues to be more boys (655 = 56%) than girls (513 = 44%) looked after in Manchester. The number of girls looked after has remained the same with the number of boys looked after decreasing from 690 in 2015/16 to 655 in 2016/17.

The local picture in 2017 exactly mirrors the national picture in 2016; at 31 March 2016, 56% of children looked after nationally were male and 44% were female and these percentages have been stable for England for a number of years.



The number of looked after children aged 1-4 years old has fallen by nearly a third from 197 to 100 in the course of the last year. The figure of 100 children equates to 8% of the total looked after children population in Manchester which is lower than the last available national figure.

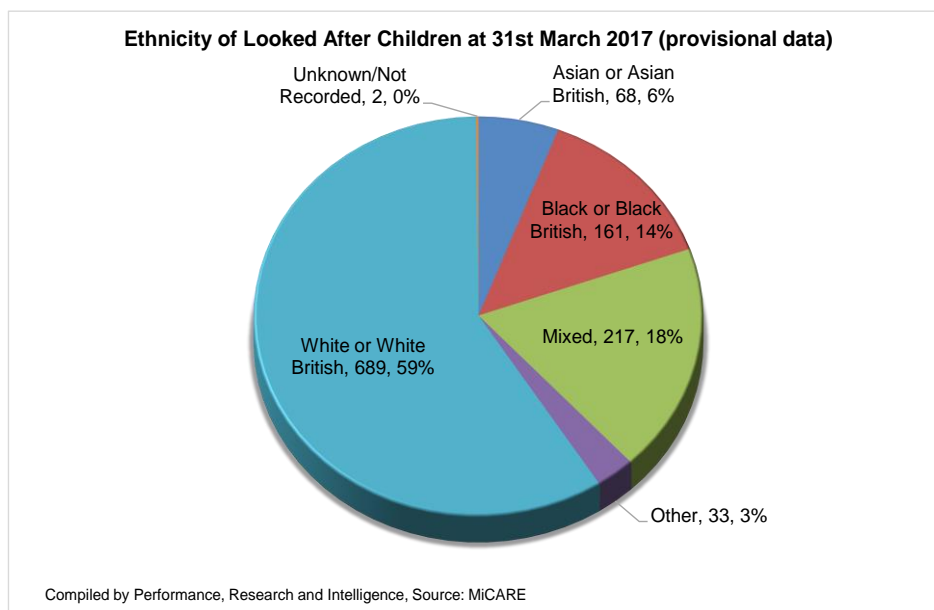
Nationally there has been a reduction in the number and percentage of children below the age of 4 in the total looked after population; the percentage fell from 18% to 13% between 2012 and 2016.

The number of looked after children under 1-year-old in Manchester fell slightly from 52 to 49 over the year which accounts for 4% of all looked after children. Nationally the percentage of looked after children under 1 fell from 6% to 5% between 2012 and 2016, suggesting Manchester is in line with the national trend.

There were 671 looked after children aged over 10 years old in Manchester at 31 March 2017. The figure for 2015/16 was 668, therefore there has been a slight decrease. Nationally there had been a steady increase in the number and proportion of older children between 2012 and 2016. The percentage locally in 2017 (57%) is only slightly lower than that nationally at 31 March 2016 (62%).

Locally, the number of looked after children aged 16 and 17 years old has been relatively stable over the last year. It has fallen by 4 from 241 to 237. The IRO team have reinforced the crucial importance of pathway planning and assessment and support for independent living for this age group through the review process. This can be evidenced through the 'Dispute Resolution' process which will be considered in more detail later in this report.

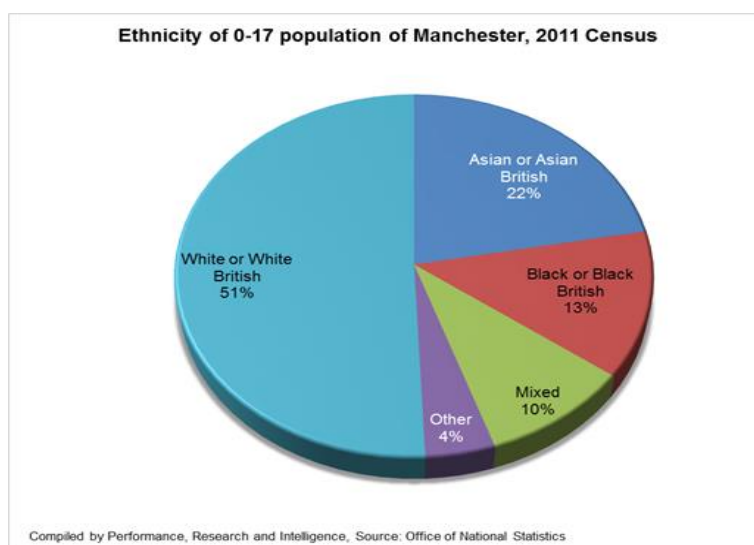
#### **4.3 Ethnicity of Looked After Children as of 31 March 2017**



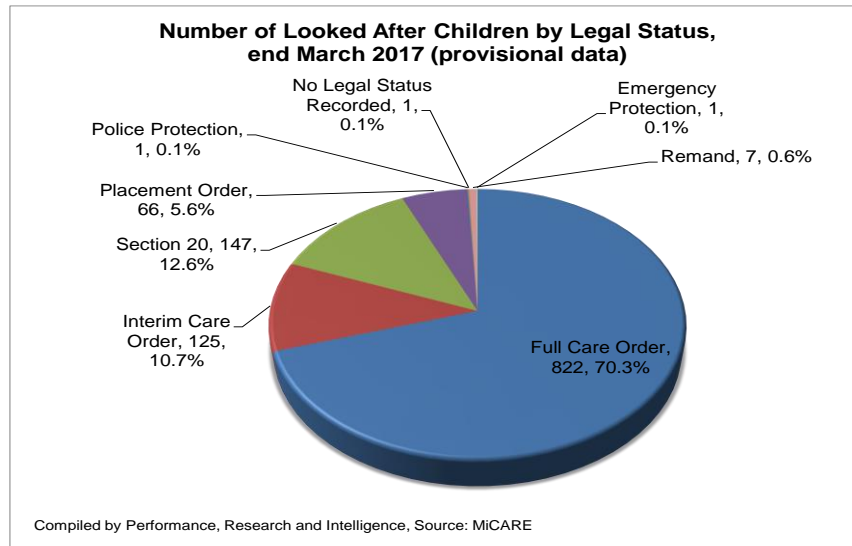
The ethnic background of the 'looked after child' population has remained stable over the last few years.

- The majority, 59% (689), of 'looked after children' in Manchester are White British. This compares to 61% (752) in 2015-16.
- Almost 18% (217) are identified as being of 'mixed' ethnicity, with 14% (161) being Black or Black British, a reduction of 10 but the same % as in 2015-16.
- At March 2016, 4% of looked after children nationally were Asian or Asian British. The number of percentage of Looked after Children in Manchester who are Asian or Asian British has fallen by one to 68 in the last year, but the percentage has risen slightly from 5% to 6%;

The most recent Information on the ethnicity of the wider child population of Manchester from the 2011 Census is set out below. When comparing the ethnicity of our 'looked after children' population with the ethnicity of children in Manchester 6 years ago, we have proportionally more White British (59%/51%) and substantially less Asian or Asian British (6%/22%) who children who are 'looked after'.



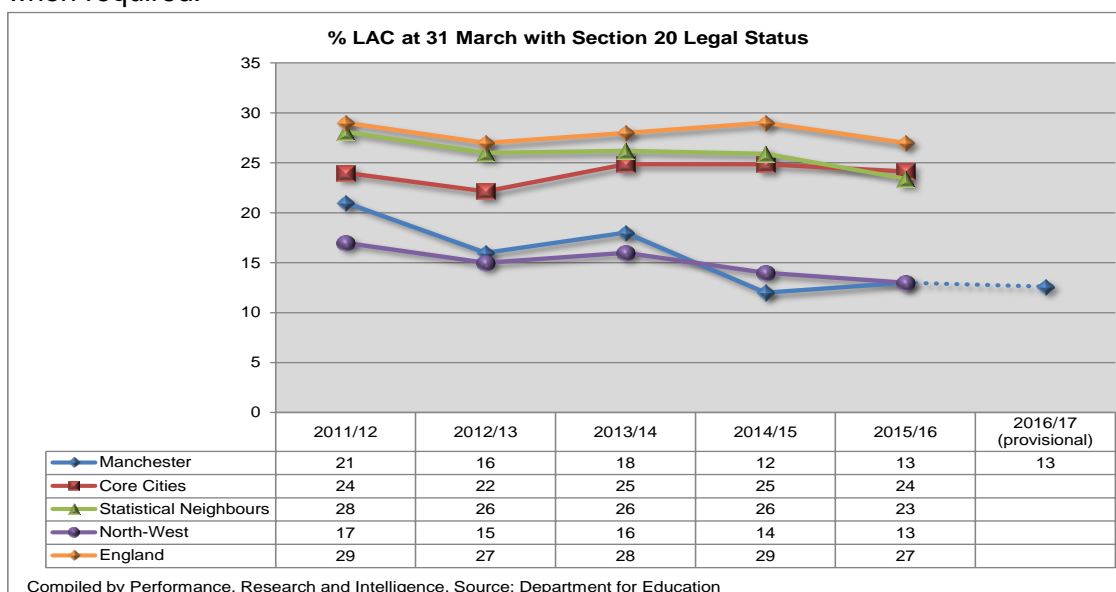
#### 4.4 Legal status of Looked After Children at 31 March 2017



The majority of children looked after (70%) are subject to Care Orders. The number has fallen by 36 children but the percentage of the total has increased by 1% at the end of the year. Nationally 65% of all looked after children were subject to care orders at 31 March 2016.

The number of children subject to Interim Care Orders has risen from 111 (9%) to 125 (11%). As a key part of the reviewing process, Independent Reviewing Officers consistently scrutinise access by social workers to legal advice and legal planning where necessary. The increase in the number of children subject to interim care orders indicates that fewer are remaining subject to Section 20, which is positive.

The number of children subject to placement orders has fallen from 93 at 31 March 2016 to 68 at the end of this financial year. The number of placement orders nationally has fallen from 14% in 2013 to 8% at the end of March 2016. Historically, there has been drift and delay in applications to court to revoke Placement Orders when the Care Plan is no longer one of adoption. The reduction in numbers highlights the focus of Independent Reviewing Officers in identifying this cohort of children in a timely manner and escalating concerns via the Dispute Resolution process as and when required.



At the end of the 2016/2017 reporting year there were 147 children looked after subject to Section 20 Children Act 1989 this was 12.6% of all LAC. The figure has reduced by 21 in comparison to the year before when 13.59% of the looked after child population were subject to Section 20. This matches the national percentage published by the Department for Education and the North West average at the end of March 2016 (both 13%). It remains significantly lower than the percentage for Core Cities (24%), Statistical Neighbours (23%) and the England average (27.0%).

One of the key objectives identified in the 2015/2016 Annual Report was that Independent Reviewing Officers would provide increased scrutiny of children who were 'looked after' under Section 20. There were 9 Dispute Resolutions raised in respect of Section 20 in 2016/17 and also 9 re the delay in the Social Worker submitting court paperwork. Use of Section 20 is only intended to be a short term measure and this has been reinforced in legal judgements nationally this year. Escalations have highlighted that in some cases Section 20 arrangements have continued for too long when assessments had concluded that it is no longer in the child's interest to return home.

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to promote timely planning via the Review process for young people who are accommodated under section 20 to avoid any drift or delay within the care system and ensure that a clear permanence plan is achieved by the second review. Increased scrutiny between Looked after Children Reviews and the use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol is assisting in ensuring timely planning for individual children and young people are within their timescale. Additionally, the weekly Placement Panel oversees the progress of Section 20 cases and reviews cases within particular cohorts such as children placed at home subject to Care Orders.



## **5. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES 2016/2017**

### **5.1 Placement with Parents**

At the end of 2016/2017 reporting year Manchester had 123 children subject to Interim Care Orders and Care Orders placed at home (10.5%). The figures are comparable to those last year when there were 121 (10%) children subject to Care Orders placed at home.

A Care Order discharge team has been in operation for 3 years in Manchester and Independent Reviewing Officers work closely with this team to monitoring and track progress cases where Care Orders need to be discharged.

Independent Reviewing Officers have a key role when considering the appropriateness and safety of a plan to return home and then to monitor and track progress children's cases where Care Orders need to be discharged.

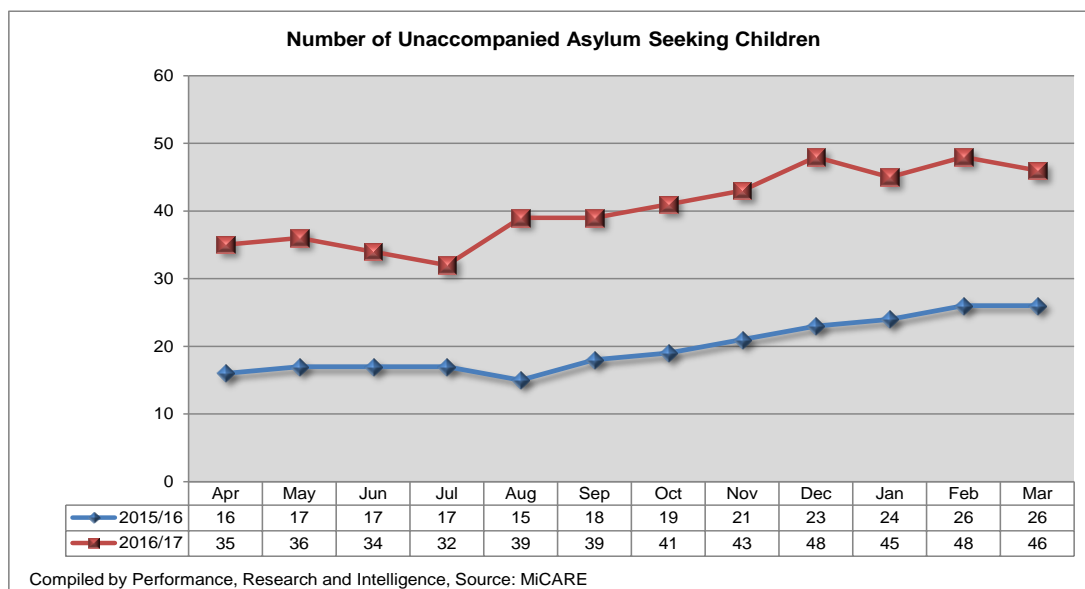
Independent Reviewing Officers will need to be more robust in their challenge when agreeing a return home, the need for the order or the safety of the rehabilitation. Recent research from Bristol University indicates 48% of return home placements breakdown, it identified poor assessment, risk management and planning were the main contributions to failed reunification.

There has been a focus on this cohort of children in 2016/2017, with Care Order ceasing in respect of 131 children; 41 (31.29%) of Care Orders that were discharged during the year were children Placed with Parents.

As agreed in the 2015/2016 Annual Report there was increased scrutiny in this area and there were a number Dispute Resolutions raised in relation to children who were placed with parents during 2016/2017. These raised questions if the rehabilitation is safe, if a robust risk and needs assessment and plan were in place. Also there were a small number of children subject to Care Orders who returned home without the knowledge of the Independent Reviewing Officer. It was agreed in these cases that a dispute resolution at stage 3 would be raised by the Lead for Children's Safeguarding, as this was not agreed practice in that the Independent Reviewing Officer in these cases had not ratified the Care Plan. Furthermore, to ensure there were appropriate plans and arrangements for the child it was agreed that a post LAC review would be held.

### **5.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

The diagram below illustrates the accelerated increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children over the last 12 months, and they now represent 46 (3.9%) of the looked after children population. There are a total of twenty more unaccompanied children and young people at 31 March 2017, double the number of December 2016. Our rate is higher than our Statistical Neighbour at 1.7%, North West Average at 0.4%, Core City Average at 1.3% but slightly higher than the England Average at 3.8%. The numbers reflect the national picture, Government policy and the international situation in respect of refugee and asylum seekers.



The majority of this group of children and young people have continued to be reviewed by an identified Independent Reviewing Officer who has developed expertise in this area of work and a specialist knowledge of the particular needs of these young people. This ensures their needs are being met and their rights upheld. This focus supports their quality assurance role and helps awareness raising work with social work teams.

As identified in the 2015/2016 Annual Report the scrutiny in relation to this specific group of looked after children is recognised as being important. Throughout 2016-17 the IRO has continued to escalate concerns regarding legal status and delays in Age Assessments being completed. However, the number of escalations has decreased. Dispute resolutions were raised in 12 cases linked to this or the availability of Appropriate Adults. Children's Social Care have responded positively to this by providing clear advice and guidance to social workers, increasing the number of experienced social workers trained to undertake Age Assessments and Child Action North West have been commissioned to offer Appropriate Adult support.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children can have access to an Independent Visitor; there can be difficulties in matching Independent Visitors to older children including UASC and the process of matching children to Independent Visitors can be quite long. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are also referred on to other outreach services which they value including the 'All4One' Group run by a support worker at the GMIAU and the Hope Project (Youth Group) run by the Children's Society.

### 5.3 Leaving Care

A Pathway Plan is important to a young person as it details the services and support needed by young people aged 16 years and 3 months to 21 years. It is the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer to review the Pathway Plan as it is critical to the process whereby young people map out their future, articulate their aspirations and identifying interim goals along the way to realising their ambitions.

It was identified in the 2015/16 Annual Report that too many young people did not have a good quality pathway plan in place between 16 years 3 months and 18 years at their Looked After Child review. At the start of 2016 the percentage of children with a Pathway Plan totalled 40%. This

increased by almost 30% to 70% by the end of March 2017, and was 100% by May 2017. 14 dispute resolutions were raised about the absence of a pathway plan for children and 11 in respect of issues re a pathway plan for children after they reached the age of 18 between August 2016 and February 2017. Independent Reviewing Officers have not achieved the objective set out in 2015/2016 to improve the quality of Pathway Planning. As well as ensuring continued compliance Independent Reviewing Officers need to focus more on the quality of this work and ensuring improved outcomes for young people. Pathway Planning improvement will remain a focus of all Independent Officers and moving forward they will receive weekly reports of children aged 16 years and 3 months who do not have one in place.

#### **5.4 Children remanded to Custody**

The number of children on remand and looked after has remained stable; there are 7 at 31 March 2017 which represents an increase of 1 child in comparison to the end of 2015/2016. Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for reviewing the Care Plan for this small group of 'looked after' children. Work is currently being undertaken with our colleagues in the Youth Offending Service to update our procedures in this area to ensure that they have a robust plan when their remand status ceases and/or children who were Section 20 prior to receiving a custodial sentence have a robust discharge plan in place.

#### **5.5 Children subject to a Secure Order**

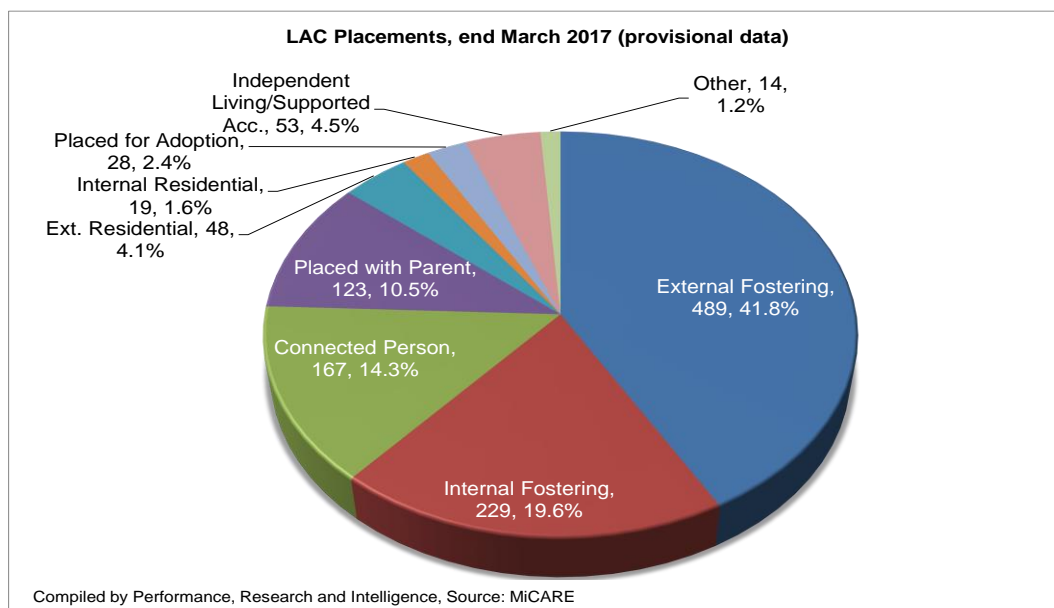
The use of 'secure accommodation' by local authorities is dealt with by section 25 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Secure Accommodation) Regulations 1991. A child who is being 'looked after' by a local authority by being provided with accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act cannot be placed or kept in accommodation which has the purpose of restricting the child's liberty unless the requirements of section 25 are met. They are:

- that the child has a history of running away and is likely to run away from accommodation which isn't secure; and
- if he runs away, he is likely to suffer significant harm; OR
- if he isn't in secure accommodation, he is likely to injure himself or someone else; 'likely' means a real possibility, a possibility that can't be ignored when looking at the nature and extent of the harm its feared will come to the child.

If the local authority apply for a secure accommodation order, the court will have to be satisfied that those requirements exist. In 2016/2017 there was 1 child made subject to a Secure Accommodation Order. The child was place in a secure unit for 7 months. During this period all statutory requirements were met.

## 6. THE PLACEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AT 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2017

### 6.1 Type of Placement



The majority of children and young people, 75.7%, continue to be placed in foster care or with connected carers which is an increase from March 2016. Nationally the figure at the end of March 2016 was 75%. 14% of children and young people were placed with connected carers (also known as extended family and friends' carers). There were 18 fewer children living with connected carers at 31 March 2017 than there were at the end of March 2016. This represents a reduction of 1% to 14% of all looked after children.

The number of children placed in residential homes has fallen from 86 (7%) to 67 (5.7%), which is positive. The Independent Reviewing Officers recognise the importance of children being placed within a family unit, wherever possible, and provide regular updates to the Director of Children's Services with regard to children in residential care who are under the age of 11 years, the reasons why and what plans are in place to safely move them on into a foster care placement, to extended family or back home to the care of their parents.

There were 123 (10.5%) children Placed with Parents at home on full Care Orders at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017. This is a decrease of 2 children overall. The aim is to return children home safely where this is possible and to return to court to discharge the care order when children have been successfully returned home for longer than 12 months.

The number of children placed for adoption has fallen; there were 47 in 2016/17, a decrease of 26 from 73 in 2015/16.

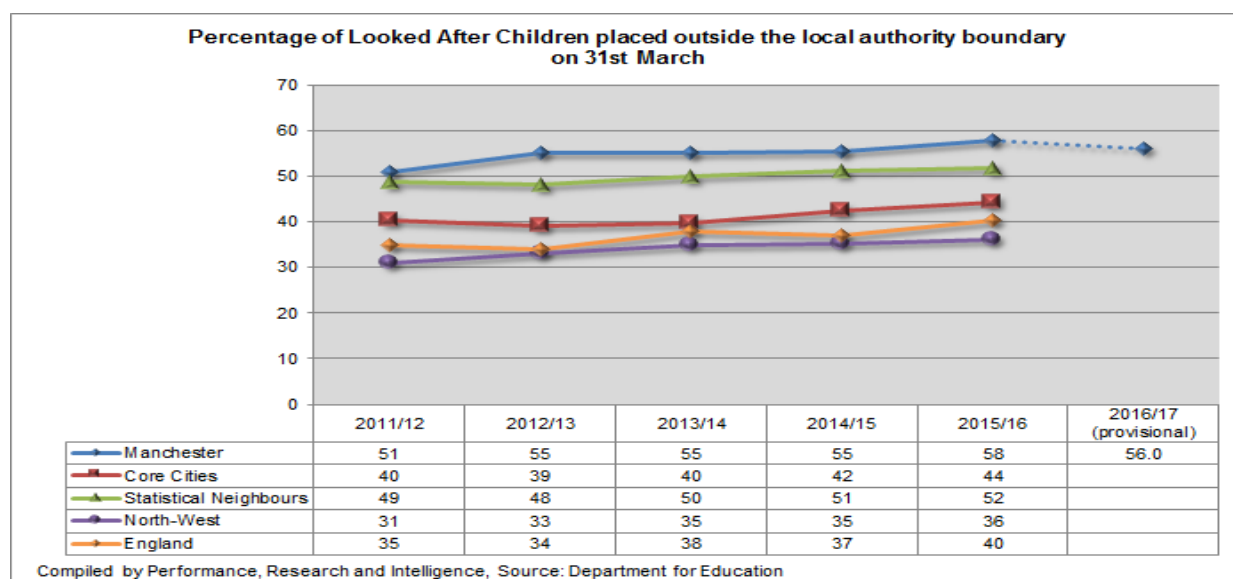
The number of adoption placements made may seem low. However, when compared to decrease in the number of children under the age of 4 who were 'looked after' (and by virtue of their age should be relatively easy to place) from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 (197) to 31<sup>st</sup> March 17 (149) this shows comparable if not improved performance.

Nationally, the number fell by 18% in the last year and accounted for 4% of all looked after children at the end of March 2016.

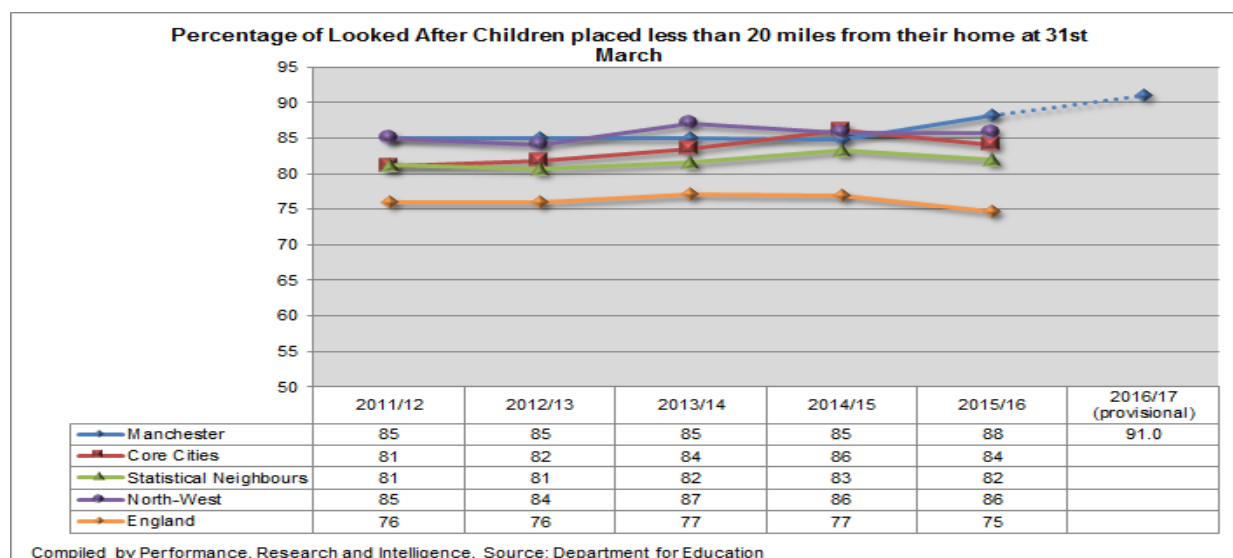
## 6.2 Placement Location and Distance from Home

In 2015/16 there was a slight increase in the percentage of looked after children placed outside Local Authority boundaries in Manchester from 55% to 58%, as there was regionally and nationally. There was a slight decrease in 2016/2017 from 58% to 56%, with 637 children placed outside the local authority in total. Manchester has a higher percentage of children placed outside the Local Authority boundary than its statistical comparators. The percentage has remained between 51% to 58% over the last five years.

The table below confirms that this area of performance had remained fairly stable for the last three years, but continues to remain higher than the figure for England. It is also higher than our Statistical Neighbour, North West Regional and Core City averages.



In contrast Manchester's performance in placing children within a 20 miles' radius from their home has improved for another year, increasing from 88% to 91%. However, there are still 102 children placed in placements more than 20 miles away, which can impact on the educational stability and their contact arrangements with their immediate family.

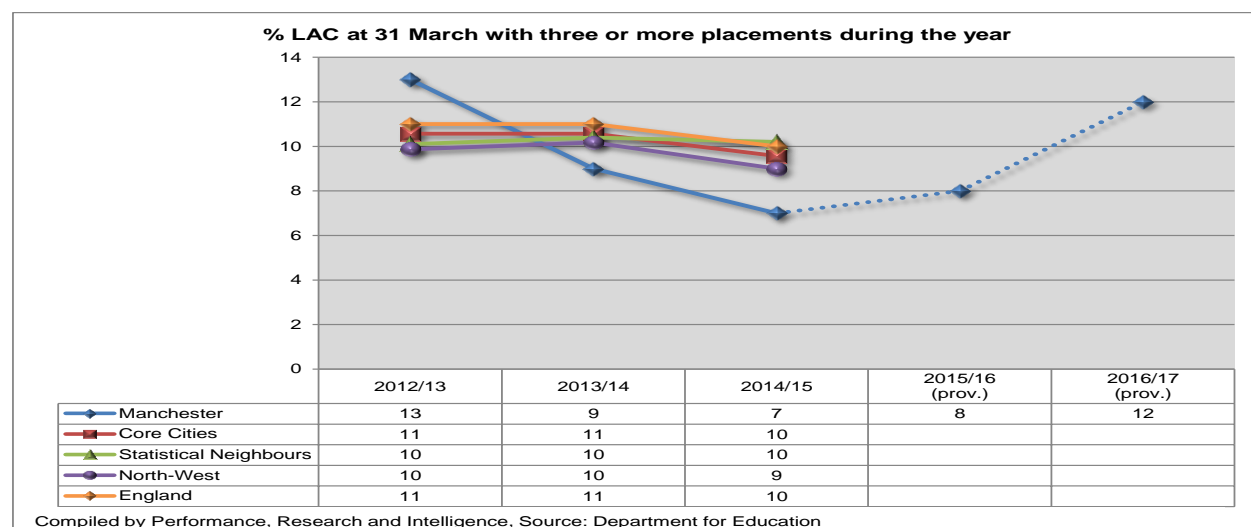


## 7. PLACEMENT STABILITY

### 7.1 Three or more placements

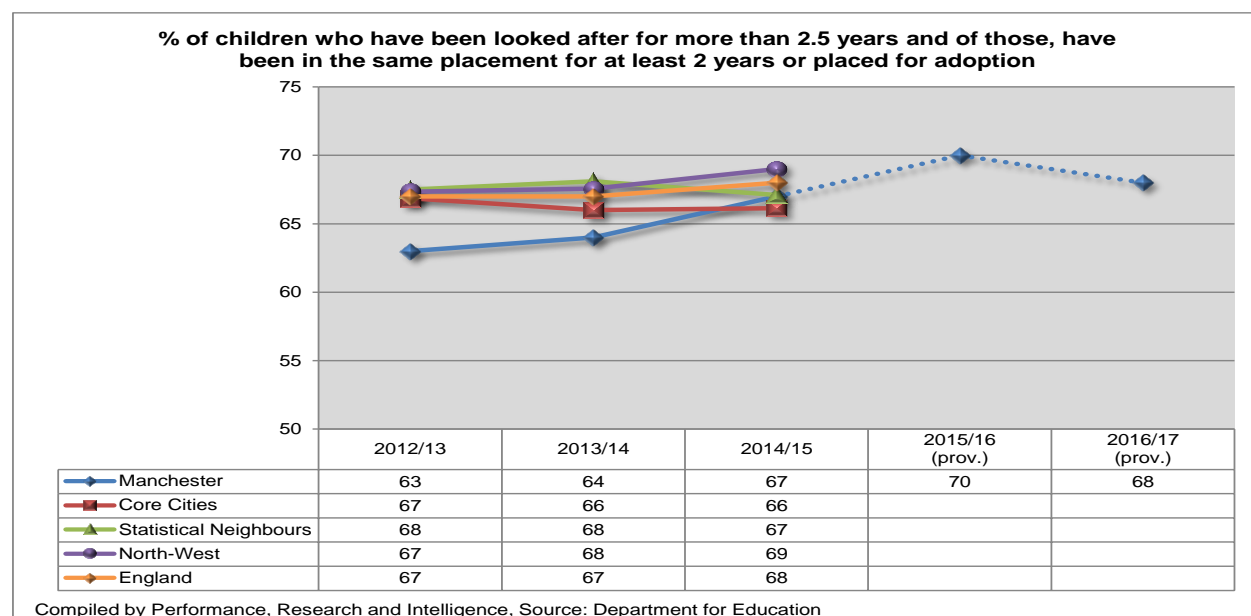
During 2016/2017 Placement stability has been a challenge for Manchester Children’s Services and the percentage of children with three or more placement moves has risen from 8% to 12%.

There has been a significant increase in the number of placement moves for children and young people in 2016/17 and this is higher than the North West, 9% Core Cities 9.6%, statistical neighbours 10.2% and England Averages 9%.



### 7.2 Placement for 2 years or more

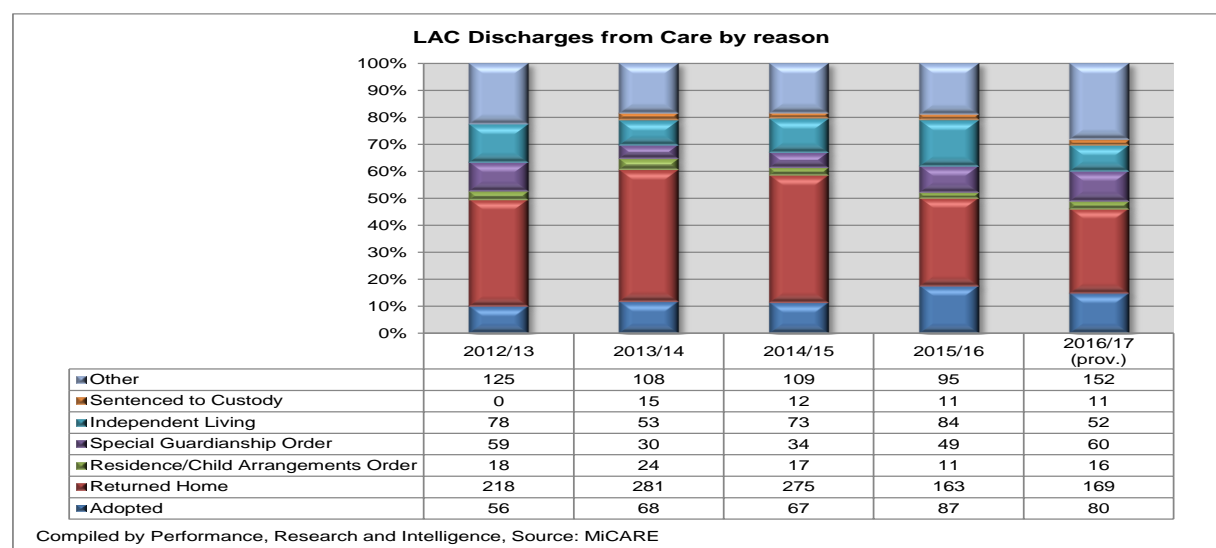
At 31 March 2017 the percentage of children under 16 years and looked after for at least 2.5yrs, in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption was 68% (372 of 566). This represents a slight reduction from the previous year. Comparative data is not yet available.



Change is often traumatic for anyone, this is especially true for our looked after children given the quality of their care and relationships were probably compromised and led for the need for them to come into care. The potential attachment disruptions and conflict of loyalty to carers are also extremely unsettling; this should not be compounded by unnecessary and frequent changes of placement. Placement stability is critical for the emotional wellbeing of our Looked After children, enabling them to build relationships and to invest in their future by engaging in their education and local community groups.

### 7.3 The reasons why children cease to be looked after

The table below shows that returning home continues to be the most common outcome for looked after children ceasing to be looked after. Independent Reviewing Officers have an important role to play in ensuring decision making in relation to rehabilitating children home in a child's best interest and that they and their families are provided with high quality support both during the transition period and after.

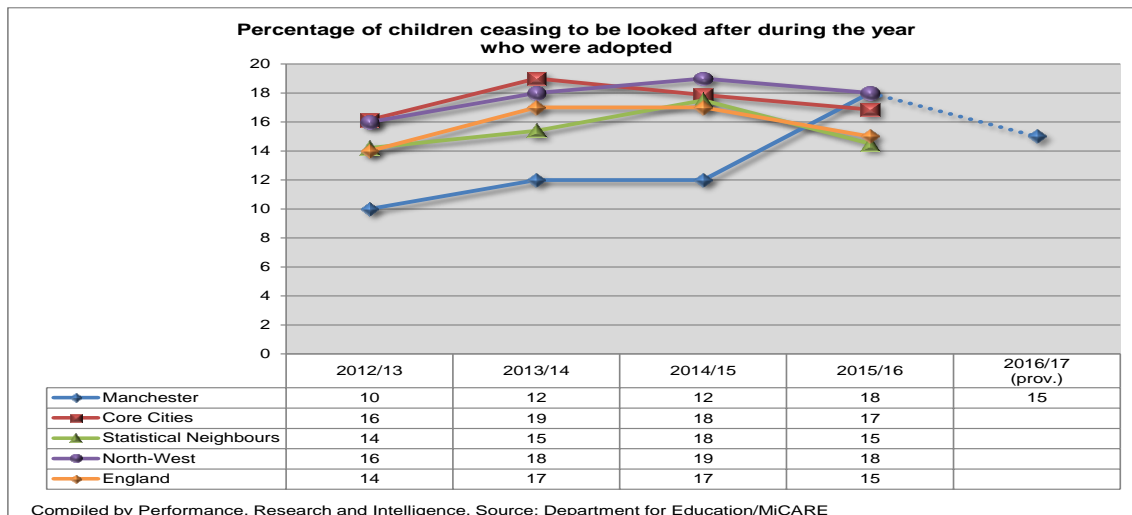


The percentage of children leaving care for specified reasons in 2016/17 are as follows:

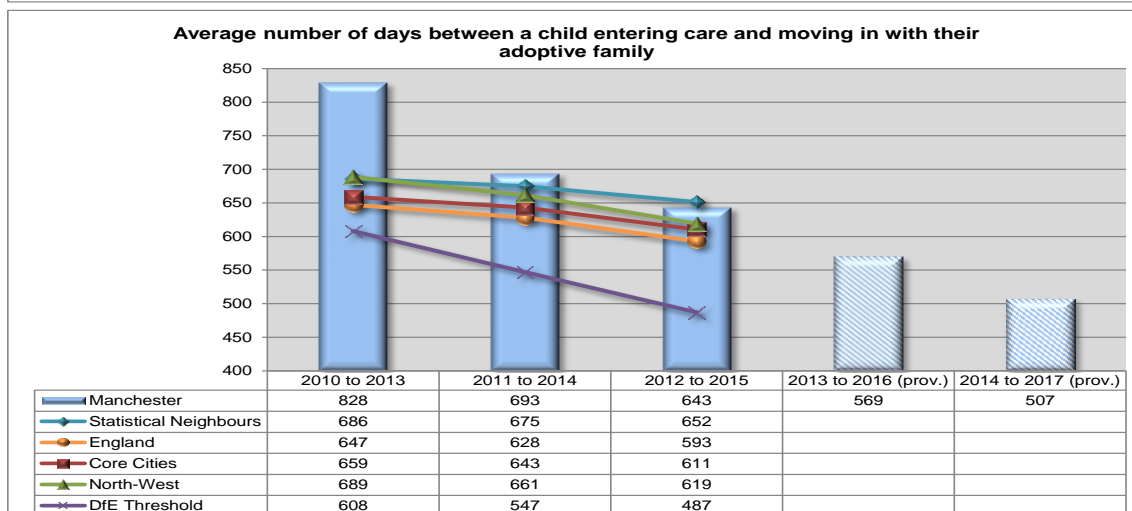
- 31% Returned home (a 2% decrease on the percentage for 2015/2016)
- 28% Care ceased for any other reason (a 12% decrease)
- 15% Adopted (a 3% increase)
- 10% independent living (a decrease of 7%)
- 11% Special Guardianship Order (a 1% increase)
- 3% Residence / Child Arrangements Order granted (same as 2015/2016).
- 2% Sentenced to custody (same as 2015/2016)

## 8. ADOPTION

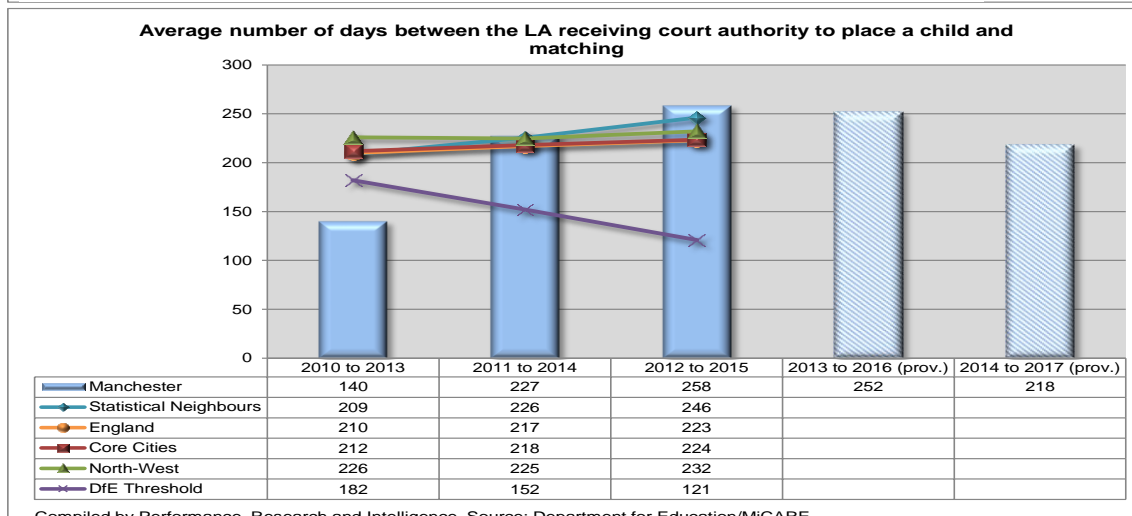
There has been continued improvement in the timeliness of adoption during 2016/2017, which has had a positive impact on the three year averages measured by the Department for Education in the Adoption Scorecards.



Compiled by Performance, Research and Intelligence, Source: Department for Education/MiCARE



Compiled by Performance, Research and Intelligence, Source: Department for Education/MiCARE



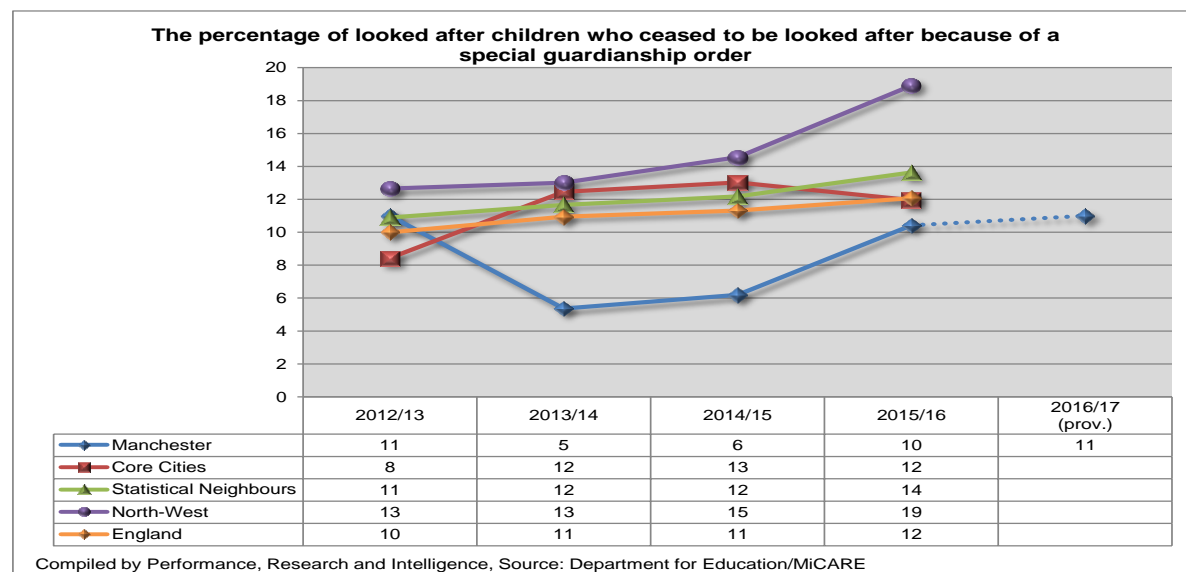
Compiled by Performance, Research and Intelligence, Source: Department for Education/MiCARE

There has been a slight reduction in the percentage of children who were adopted in 2016/2017.



## 9. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

The percentage of children who became subject to Special Guardianship Orders has increased over the year and reached the 11% figure reported in 2012/2013. Figures for comparison are not yet available.



Independent Reviewing Officers have highlighted delay in relation to Special Guardianship Order Assessments being completed in 1 formally escalated case in 2016/17. However, it should be noted that Safeguarding Chair also raise escalations in respect of delay in this area where children are subject to Child Protection Plans. There were 65 in 2016-2017.

## 10. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STATUTORY REVIEWS

Practice and services to Looked After Children has continued to be improved over the last 12 months. Much of this has been prompted by the continued vigour and pace led by the children's management team and a more focussed Independent Reviewing Officer Service that is scrutinising practice, plans and arrangements and influencing continuous development and improvement in services.

### 10.1 Timeliness of LAC Reviews

	2015/2016		2016/2017	
	Count:	% in timescale	Count	% in timescale
<b>In timescale</b>	3379	95.56%	3265	94.15%
<b>Out of timescale</b>	157	4.44%	203	5.85%
<b>Total</b>	3536	100%	3468	100%

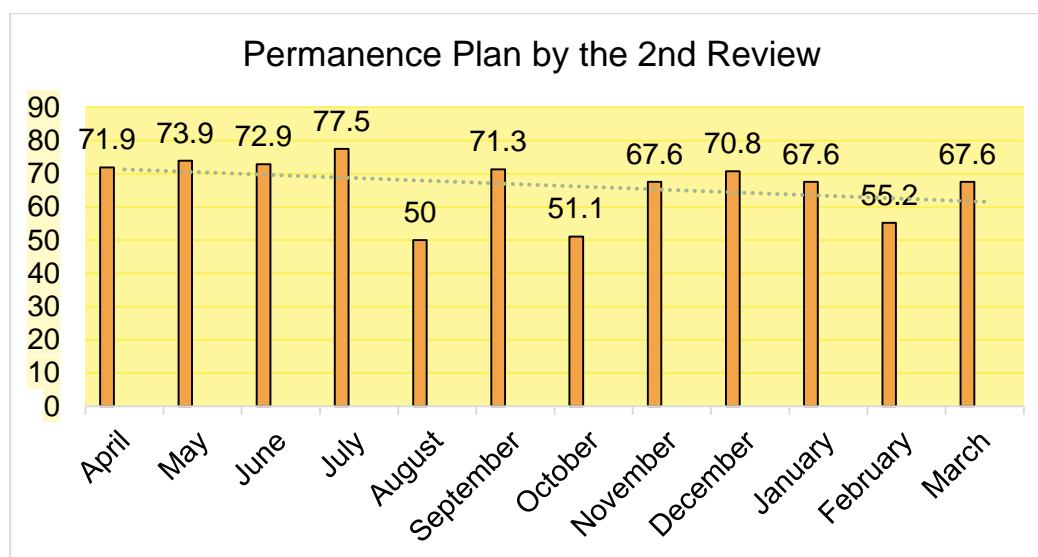
The % of LAC Reviews held within timescales fell by 1.41% in 2016/2017, which is disappointing given the reduction in the average caseloads of the Independent Reviewing Officers over the 12-month period.

Where some Initial Looked after Child Reviews the Review have taken place out of timescale this was often linked to a late Looked After Child notifications being received from the allocated Social Worker and difficulties around communication with social workers and worker availability.

In additions during this reporting year four members of staff within the service were off long term due to ill health. Whilst cover was provided by agency members of staff this did create a level of instability within the service. There were also some issues with Independent Reviewing Officers simply miss-counting the date as to when the review was due to take place. New processes have now been put into place to ensure that there is a centralised diary, with every 'looked after' child having a date for their next LAC review. This was not in place previously and will be kept up to date by the business support unit and overseen by the IRO Managers.

Cases are allocated to Independent Reviewing Officers within 24 hours of notification. Independent Reviewing Officers are committed to arranging the initial Reviews within the 20-day timescale.

## 10.2 Permanence



Independent Reviewing Officers are clear about their role and responsibilities to track permanence decisions as soon as the child becomes looked after and in-between the first and second looked after children reviews. Improvement in this area has been too variable throughout the year and requires improvement and Independent Reviewing Officers will be required to more robustly scrutinise this performance and offer challenge via the Dispute Resolution Protocol more consistently during 2016/2017.

One of the key objectives identified in the 2015/2016 Annual Report was that improvements would be made in this area of performance. In 2015/2016 the % of children who had a permanence plan identified at the second review was 59.6%. In 2016/2017 this increased to 66.4%.

An audit of Permanence Plans by the Lead for Children's Safeguarding took place in January 2017. This considered 609 LAC reviews which had taken place between the 1<sup>st</sup> October and the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016. Out of the 359 identified to be the second review it was reported that there was no permanence plan in place in respect of 135 children. In 92 of the cases audited this was not the child's second review, the information provided by the Independent Reviewing Officer was not accurate and in 13 cases there was evidence that a permanence plan was noted in the LAC review

minutes or in the commentary on the monitoring form. The audit concluded that overall number of children with a permanence plan at the second review would have been 237, totalling 88.7%. This is significantly higher than what has been reported and would have been above 87% on a monthly basis (Oct 87.7% / Nov 94.2% & Dec 89.8%). As a result of the audit the options on the Chair's Monitoring Form have been simplified and the response box is compulsory so going forward this should assist with accurate reporting throughout 2017/2018.

To promote permanence across Children's Services a Permanence Plan template was created in late 2016 and will be presented to the Independent Reviewing Officer at the second review. This will clearly state what the permanence plan is for the child and enable the Independent Reviewing Officer to give a view on permanence and any twin tracking which may be required.

### **10.3 Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People in Looked After Children Reviews**

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service is always seeking ways to improve the engagement and participation of children and young people in all areas of practice including the statutory review process. Increased capacity and managed caseloads have provided Independent Reviewing Officers with the capacity to develop routine home visits to consult children and young people's engagement and participation in reviews. Overall participation and engagement in the LAC review process has increased. The number of children attending their LAC reviews has increased by 5.3%.

<b>PN codes</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	17.59%	14.16%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	30.43%	35.76%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	1.41%	0.87%
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally)	0.37%	0.14%
PN4	Child physically attends but does not speak for him or herself, does not convey his or her view symbolically (non-verbally) and does not ask an advocate to speak for him or her	0.54%	0.49%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	26.78%	24.63%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	15.33%	19.41%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	7.55%	4.56%
Grand Total (number of LAC reviews)		3536	3468

The 2015/2016 Annual Report identified a key target in this area that 60% of children and young people engaged and participating in their review. In 2016/2017 we exceeded this target and it equalled 80.81%

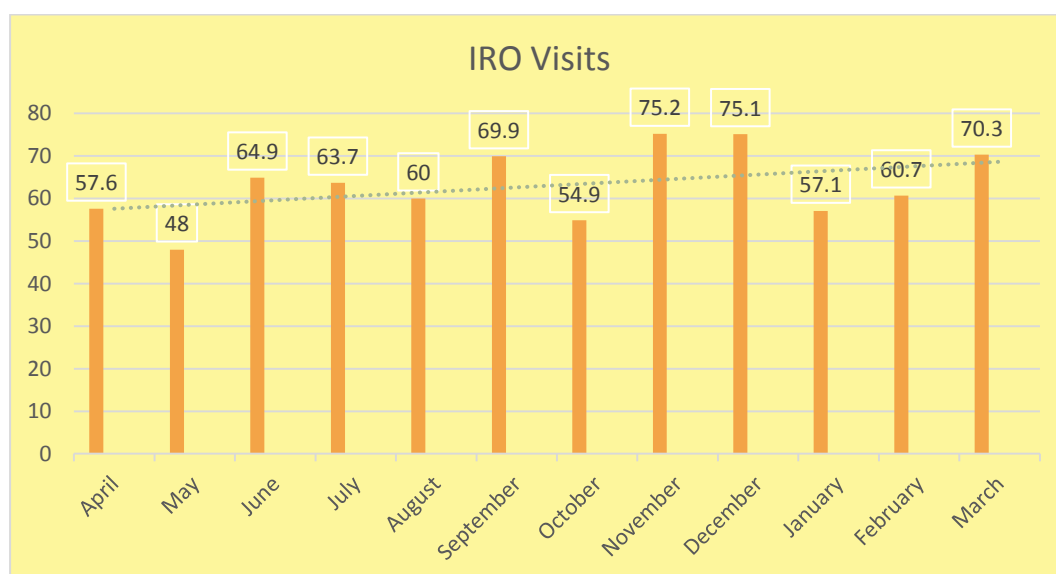
We also stated that minutes of reviews would be consistently written in an 'easy read' child and young person friendly way. This has been achieved.

Manchester will be commissioning an online application which young people would be comfortable be used to share their views. The plan is to introduce this technology in 2017/18.

Independent Reviewing Officers routinely confirm that children know about individual advocacy and how to make a complaint. They also check at Reviews whether an independent visitor is needed, and any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

#### **10.4 Independent Reviewing Officer Visits**

Independent Reviewing Officer visits to see children in the six weeks prior to their LAC review are important, and this visit is where the child is consulted about how their review will be managed (who will attend; agenda etc.) and how the child will participate.

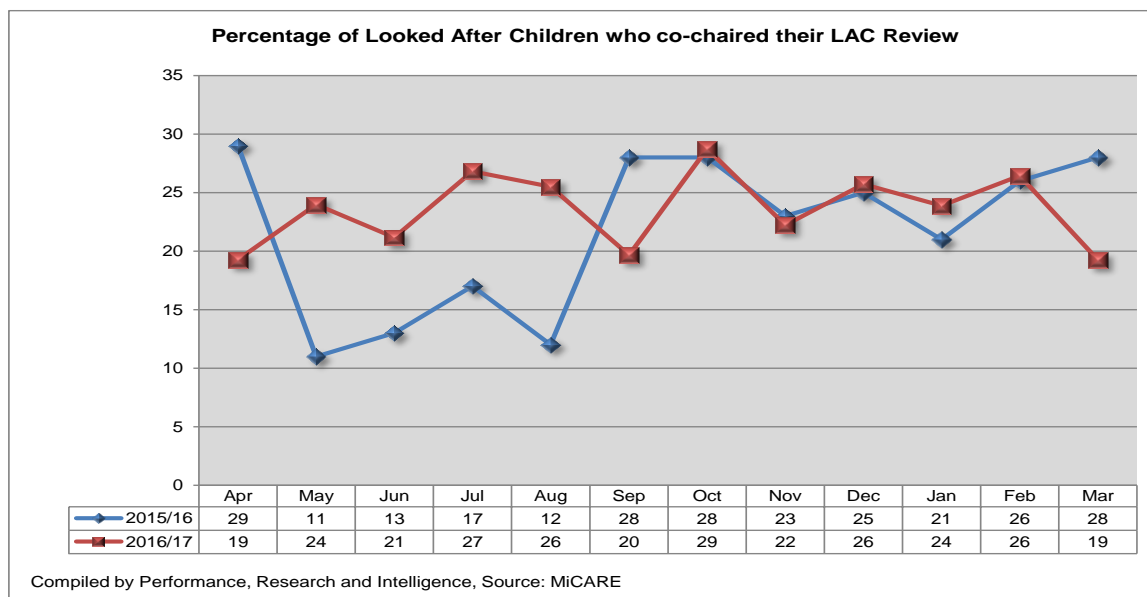


The % of visits taking place in 2016/2017 has been variable averaging at 63.1%. This information is not routinely collated by other local authorities and therefore we have no comparative data.

Performance around home visits has been affected by a period of changes in Independent Reviewing Officers in the latter part of the year, a period of extended cover for one member of staff and also the fact that some older young people choose not to see their Independent Reviewing Officers. Where this is the case Independent Reviewing Officers will offer telephone contact.

#### **10.5 Young people co-chairing their reviews**

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to support and encourage young people to chair/ co-chair their own review or to agree their own agendas wherever appropriate.



The number of young people co-chairing their Review meetings has continued to improve. This figure was 261 in 2015/2016. In 2016/2017, 283 reviews were co-chaired by the young person which is an increase of 22 over the year totalling 31%.

We have not reached the ambitious provisional target of 45% as set out in the 2015/2016 Annual Report and work will continue in the coming year to improve performance.

It is not an easy option for many young people to chair a Review and it requires considerable negotiation, planning and support from the Independent Reviewing Officers. The improvement has been assisted by the IROs visiting the children on their caseloads before each review and asking them to set the agenda, decide on the venue and attendees. By building supportive relationships and trust this will assist children and young people to feel more confident in co-chairing.

The Independent Reviewing Officers and Managers will continue to support young people to chair their LAC Reviews. Other creative ways have been explored that could help increase the influence young people are able to exercise in their own review and planning.

### **10.6 Parental Participation**

Enabling parents to engage in review processes wherever appropriate is important to children because the parent(s) can share an understanding of the child's journey and demonstrate a level of commitment and loyalty to their child even if at this moment in time they are unable to care for them. It is obviously vital if there is any consideration of reuniting them with their child in the future.

Practice requires improvement in this area at the 2015/2016 year end in March 2016 only 31.1% of parents attended their child's review. Performance did improve slightly in 2016/2017 when the percentage increased slightly to 33.8%. Feedback from parents may identify the barriers to their attendance.

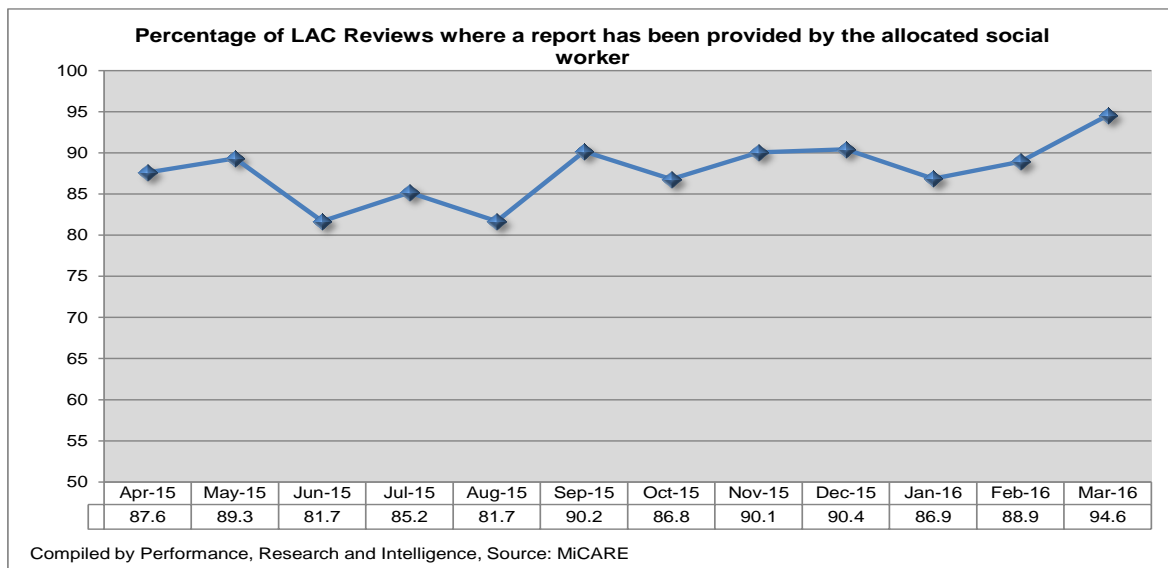
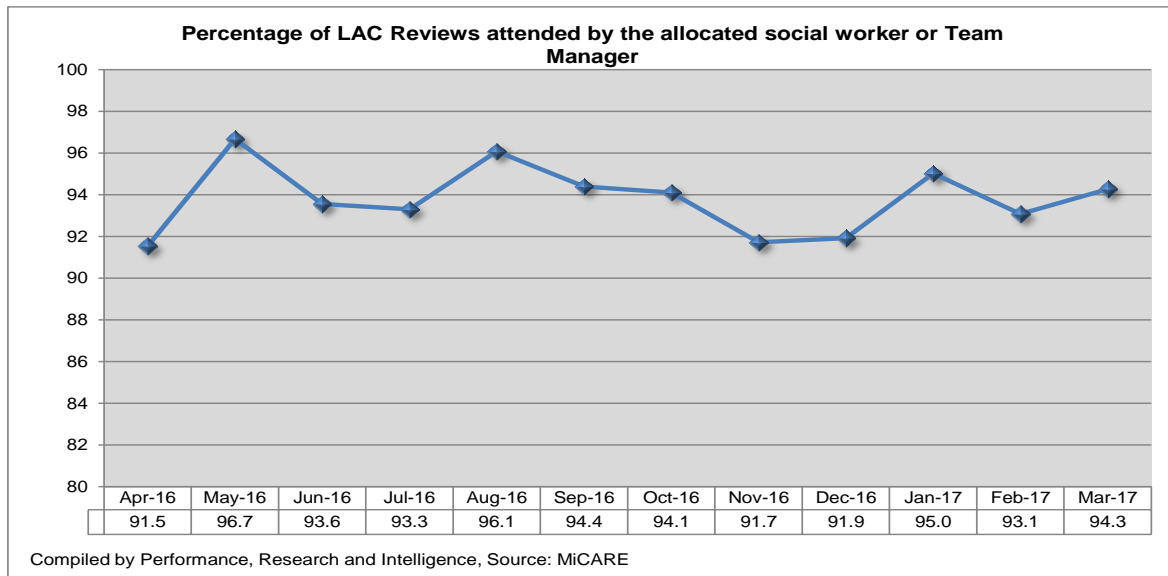
Safeguarding and Improvement Unit will be looking at achieving service user, and agency feedback in 2016/2017. Whilst it can be expected that some parents will not engage in the review,

performance is low. The data collected does not allow us to understand whether there is a difference between mothers and father’s attendance at the review.

### 10.7 Social Worker Attendance and Reports to LAC reviews

The positive improvement in social work practice in relation to the allocated social worker attending and providing reports to LAC reviews and further improvement in the provision of reports has been maintained this year supported by IRO scrutiny and the dispute resolution process.

The charts below illustrate the slight fluctuations in social work attendance and the ongoing improvement in the presentation of reports at looked after children’s reviews over the year:



## **11. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE IMPACT**

The Independent Reviewing Officer has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989, 25B (1) to ensure plans and arrangement for looked after children are consistent with their individual needs and welfare and that the local authority is fulfilling their legal responsibilities towards the child.

In accordance to the Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook, escalations are vital to quality assure Care Plans, practice and arrangements and the overall effectiveness of services to looked after children. Escalations can be issues, actions or questions that the Independent Reviewing Officer has raised within the review process but have not been addressed.

### **11.1 *Dispute Resolution Protocol***

In November 2015 the Dispute Resolution Protocol was reviewed and re-launched. The Key principles that underpin the Dispute Resolution Protocol are as follows:

- The rights, needs and welfare of children must remain central at all times.
- Managers at all levels, other professionals and Independent Reviewing Officers must endeavour to establish and maintain positive channels of communication at all times and should seek to resolve issues and concerns that arise about practice, plans and arrangements for children looked after informally wherever possible and in a timescale consistent with the child's welfare.
- Independent Reviewing Officers must ensure there is a record of all issues and concerns raised, action taken and agreements reached on the child's case file.
- Allocated social workers, manager at all levels and other professionals as appropriate must always respond promptly to issues and concerns raised.
- Other professionals as appropriate i.e. Legal team, Head of Virtual School, Designated LAC Nurse etc. as appropriate will be alerted to the issue and concern at any stage of the protocol if it is believed they have a role to play in resolving the particular issue or concern.
- When there are disagreements which need to be resolved quickly in order to safeguarding and promote the child's welfare. Professional judgement must always be used and the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person is paramount. In circumstances where there are immediate concerns or there is a delay in receiving a response at the varying stages of the protocol consideration should be given to by passing stages and escalating sooner. This decision should be made in conjunction with the Service Lead for Safeguarding.

The protocol expects Independent Reviewing Officers to engage with colleagues to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity and in a timely manner informally wherever possible. Where the colleague does not respond, the response is not timely or where resolution cannot be reached the issue will be escalated through a six stage process. The aim is for issues to be resolved at the earliest opportunity but always within 20 working days as per Statutory Independent Reviewing Officer handbook guidance.

**Stage 1** Informal Escalation which is sent to Team Managers by Independent Reviewing Officers,

**Stage 2** Formal Escalation and is sent by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager to the Locality Manager,

**Stage 3** Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager to the Head of Service,

**Stage 4** Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding to the Strategic Lead for Social Work

**Stage 5** Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding to the Strategic Director of Children's Services

**Stage 6** Referral to CAF/CASS. (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)

This Dispute Resolution process is completed on the Children's Information System and escalations during 2016/2017 were tracked outside of the system pending development for inclusion in the Children's Information System.

Monthly reports including data and themes are provided to the Head of Service. Emerging themes are fed back to the Children's Management Team Children's Services Improvement Board, Performance Clinic on a monthly basis and Corporate Parenting Panel.

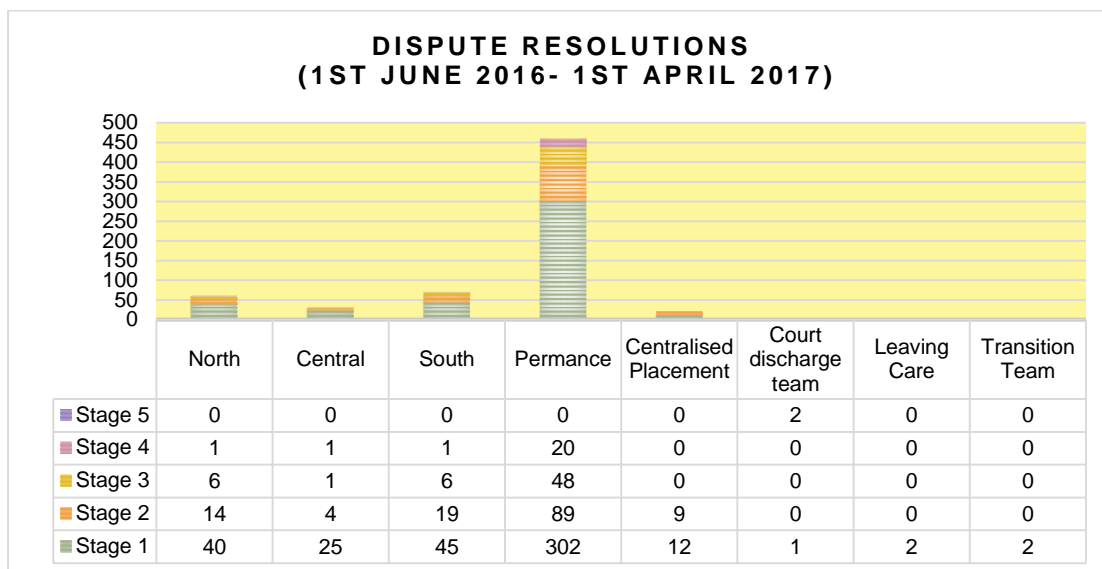
Audits have confirmed/ provided evidence that Independent Reviewing Officers have regular oversight of practice and planning and constructively challenge and influence practice, service development and improvements through use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol.

Low level information regarding dispute resolution activity has been collected for the past 2 years.

There were 782 dispute resolutions raised and/or escalated between the 1.4.16 – 31.3.17. In April and May 2016, the total was 49.

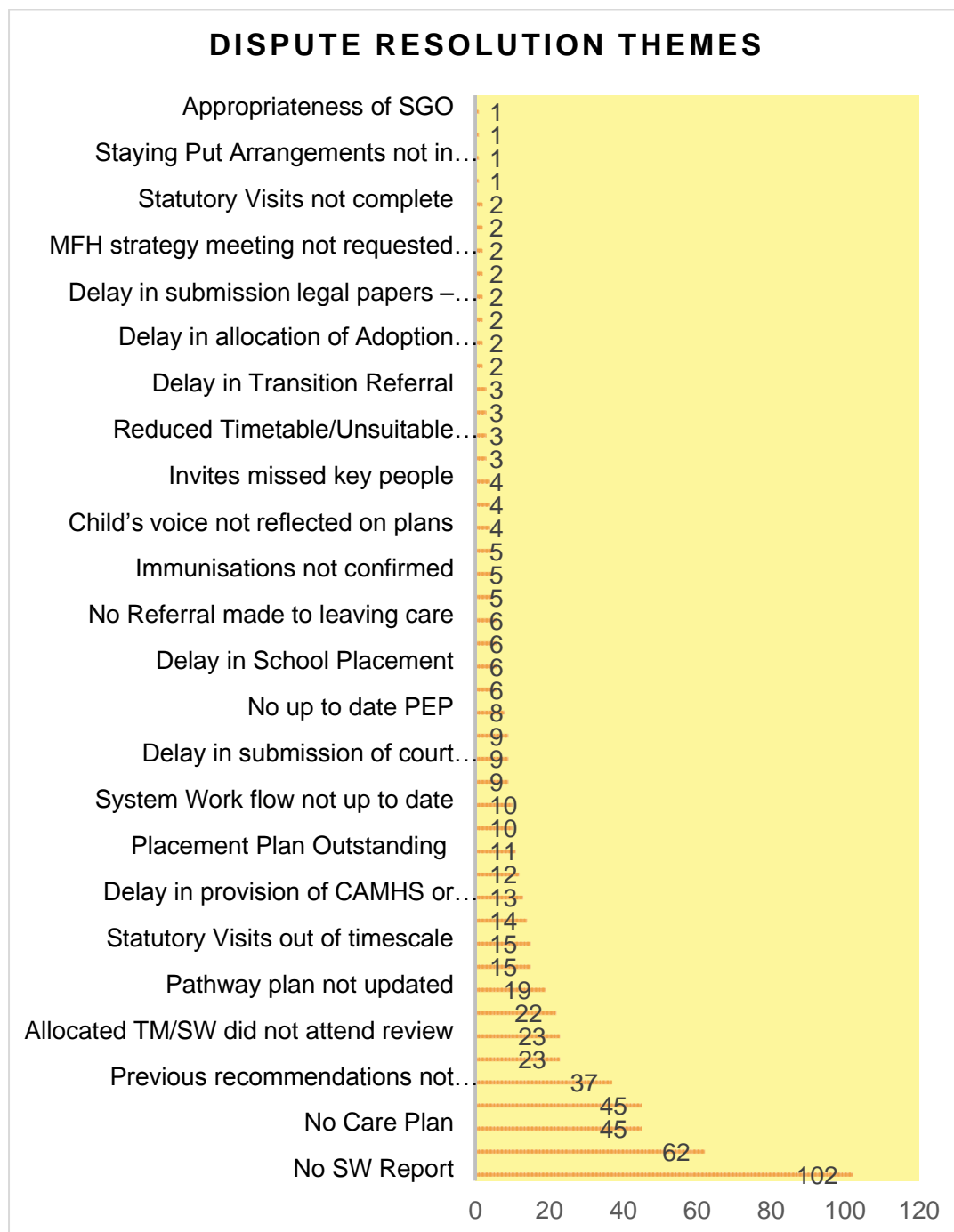
During 2016/2017 the Independent Reviewing Officer service started to refine the information in order to provide more detailed information to Children's Service, with regard to number, teams and stages where escalations were being made in order to pinpoint and manage issues more effectively. Therefore, from June 2016 a much more detailed picture of dispute resolutions can be provided.





The above table represents the number of dispute resolutions escalated per team and stage. It is expected that the Permanence Team will receive a higher number of escalations as the Independent Reviewing Officer in the main review cases from this area of children’s services.

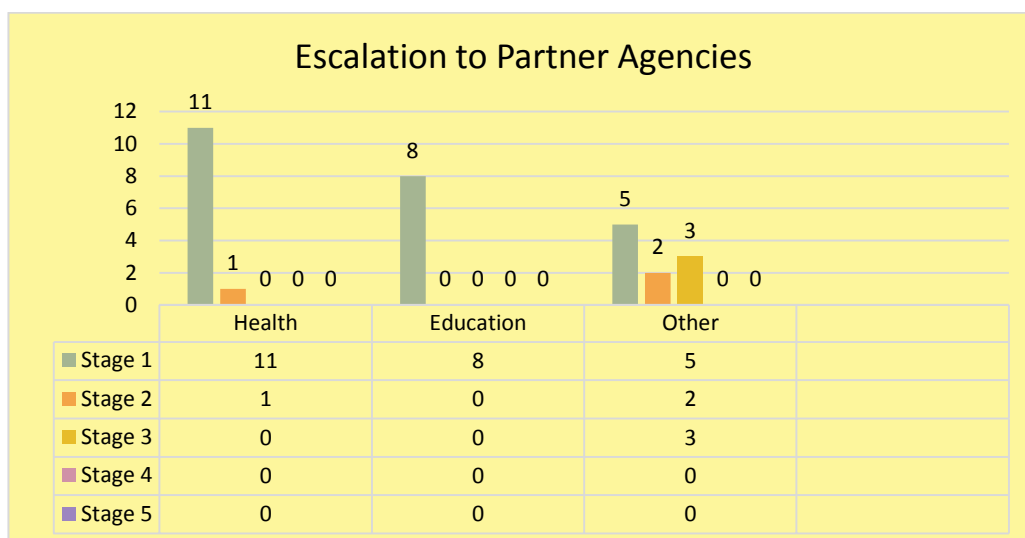
In August 2016 a high level summary of issues escalated within the dispute resolution protocol started to be collated on a monthly basis, so themes could be identified across the Children’s Services. Escalations often included more than one issue and for a sibling group generated a multiple count of the issue.



The most common escalation issues in 2016/17 were:

- No social work report for the looked after child review
- Care Plan not developed, updated or was insufficient
- No evidence of action on previous recommendations/case work activity
- Statutory visits out of timescale
- Drift in Permanency Planning
- Pathway Way Planning not in place, not reviewed or updated.
- Allocated Social Worker or Team Manager did not attend the review

Escalations in relation to partner agencies specifically are raised by email and responses are recorded on the episode by the Independent Reviewing Officer ensuring evidence of the activity on the child's file.



The revised and senior management supported Dispute Resolution, the ongoing improvement journey of Manchester's children's services, and the increased audit and scrutiny of practice has been reflected in ongoing identification of practice issues such as attendance and timely production of reports.

One of the key priorities from the 2015/2016 Annual Report was that Independent Reviewing Officers would more robustly evidence outcomes for children by having improved oversight of the practice, plans and arrangements; and use of the dispute resolution process. In 2016/2017 there was an increase from 564 to 782 in the number of escalations made by Independent Reviewing Officers, evidencing their understanding and use of this process is now embedded. This will help to ensure the needs of 'looked after children' are being met in order to improve outcomes. Furthermore, there is now evidence that Independent Reviewing Officers are more consistently using the process in relation to our partner agencies. There is still an expectation that overtime the service will see a reduction in the number of escalations and a shift of theme from practice standards, to a sharper focus on care planning, the quality of practice, plans and arrangements, the engagement of children and the timeliness of progress in implementing plans. Also, child's wishes not being considered/ evident and challenges on decisions that may not be best meeting the child's needs and the most common challenge of preventing drift.

### **11.2 Independent Reviewing Officer Impact**

Independent Reviewing Officers have demonstrated impact during 2016/2017. The increased and more consistent use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol has contributed to improvements in:

- **Permanency planning** Audits have demonstrated that permanency planning is more robust at the second LAC review and resulted in agreed actions for more consistent practice and recording within the teams.
- **Pathway planning.** Independent Reviewing Officers have undertaken work to ensure that robust Pathway Plans are in place for young people by the age of 16 years and 3 months

that map out their future, articulate their aspirations and identifying interim goals along the way to realising their ambitions.

- **Use of Section 20** Independent Reviewing Officers provide increased scrutiny of use of Section 20, Children Act 1989. This will ensure arrangements are appropriate and do not continue for too long when assessments had concluded that it is no longer in the child's interest to return home.
- **Placement of looked after children with Parents** Independent Reviewing Officers are more robust in their scrutiny and challenge in these cases where children return to the care of the parents ensuring placement with parent's regulations are adhered too.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children** Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to offer scrutiny and challenge in order to ensure age assessments and decisions are made at the earliest opportunity.
- **Audit** Continuous development and improvement in the overall quality of practice for looked after children has been demonstrated in 2016/2017 with more practice either meeting the required practice standards or part meeting the required practice standards in audit. Likewise audit has demonstrated the overall outcomes for children to be improved there was no cases judged to be Inadequate December 2016 to March 2017.

## **12. WORKING WITH PARTNER AGENCIES**

As identified in the 2015/2016 Annual Report the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit has developed closer communication and working between Independent Reviewing Officers and Children's Guardians during care proceedings over the year. Services will need to improve how it works with CAFCASS.

A meeting between Safeguarding and Improvement Unit and CAFCASS managers took place in November 2016 and CAFCASS have subsequently attended a development day to discuss emerging issues and consider how best to develop communication. Potential for some joint training and shared learning resources have been identified. There is a shared commitment to ensuring that Independent Reviewing Officers and Children's Guardians develop productive working relationships, both and when seeking to resolve a dispute on behalf of children.

In discussions CAFCASS officers have noted that they have observed an improvement in the Independent Reviewing Officer service in Manchester.

Quarterly meetings also take place with our colleagues in health who are responsible for assuring good health outcomes for our 'looked after' children, and we have strong links with the 'Virtual School'.

The Independent Reviewing Officers and Safeguarding and Improvement Unit managers attend and contribute to the following meetings and forums:

- Corporate Parenting Panel
- The Virtual School Board.
- LAC Health sub group.
- Two 'Child Sexual Exploitation' Champions who attend clinical supervision.
- The Leaving Care Service sub group.
- Missing from Home Panels.
- Voice and Influence sub group.
- North West Regional IRO meetings.
- Edge of Care LAC Sub Group.
- UASC Meetings.
- Learning Circles.

### 13. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2016/2017

- **SERVICE PLAN** - A robust Service Plan is in place to continue to drive improvements across the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit and as such improve outcomes for children. (Identified in the 2015/16 Annual Report)
- **CASELOADS** - Independent Reviewing Officer caseloads have remained within the recommended guidelines of between 50-70. This has enabled Independent Reviewing Officers to focus on the care, plans and arrangements for 'looked after' children to ensure care planning arrangements produce good outcomes and if they do not escalate concerns where necessary.
- **OVERSIGHT and QUALITY ASSURANCE** - Independent Reviewing Officers continue to offer improved oversight and quality assurance. This is evidenced by an increase in dispute resolution which focus on specific issues which impact on the day to day care of children, such as ensuring children have an up to date care plan, are safeguarded and are in a placement which meets their needs. There has been increased scrutiny in keys areas of practice; Revocation of Placement Order; Placement with Parents; SW reports for LAC reviews; Care and Pathway Planning. This has ensured that care planning does not drift; children are subject to the right legal order which meets their needs and care plans are appropriate and focus on ensuring children can meet their potential.
- **IRO FOOTPRINT** - There is clear evidence on the child's case records of the Independent Reviewing Officer footprint via Independent Reviewing Officer Case Overviews and escalations. This has been maintained, and demonstrates that Independent Reviewing Officers are monitoring practice, plans and arrangement for children in-between review aimed at improving outcomes.
- **PERFORMANCE INFORMATION** - Monthly Performance Reports outlining child and service level data are routinely shared with Independent Reviewing Officers aimed at bringing about continuous development and improvement in practice as Identified in the 2015/16 Annual Report.
- Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement frameworks are now in place and are driving continuous development and improvement in practice and /performance clinics. Following a focus on compliance this is now becoming more focused on quality and outcomes.
- **CHILDREN FRONT AND CENTRE** - Children now receive an introductory letter from their Independent Reviewing Officer when they become looked after and an information pack. This includes a picture of the Independent Reviewing Officer and contact details, so every 'looked after child' knows what they look like and how they can contact them directly, in order to promote better relationships and therefore improved discussions about what matters to the child.
- Many more children are now visited by Independent Reviewing Officers' prior to review meetings, whilst further improvement is required the child voice, wishes and feelings are more evident in the review process than before. This has ensured Independent Reviewing Officers build a relationship with the child who they are reviewing and therefore can more rigorously seek out their views and understand what 'outcomes' they want from their meeting, and how care planning can improve their lives.
- All 'Looked After' children review minutes are written in a style directly to the child. The letter to the child gives a more direct and personal account of the child's journey through care. Feedback suggests that children prefer this rather than a standardised report as it is about them and for them.

- **TIMELINESS OF LAC REVIEWS** - There has been consistently good performance re LAC Reviews in timescale - over 94%. The good timeliness of review ensures that the care planning arrangements for children are being reviewed consistently across the service, so if a child's needs are not being met or good outcomes promoted this can be appropriately challenged. It should be noted that in Manchester a review is also held when there is a significant change in the child's care plan.
- **SOCIAL WORKER ENGAGEMENT IN LAC REVIEWS** - Improvements in Social worker attendance and their provision of reports to Looked After Children Reviews has been maintained. This is key to ensuring that the person who attends the review knows the child, and can provide up to date relevant information to the review. If the allocated worker does not attend the quality of the meeting will be compromised and will not focus on the needs / outcomes for the child.
- **ENGAGEMENT WITH CAFCASS** - A meeting has taken place with CAFCASS to discuss and enhance protocols/working relationships. This has ensured that agreed procedures are effective and communication is open and direct. This enables the Independent Reviewing Officer to gain another independent view of the child's care plan and vice versa.
- **ENDORSEMENT OF CARE PLAN** - A form has been developed to accurately record the Independent Reviewing Officer's endorsement of the LAC Care Plan. This is to ensure that the views of the Independent Reviewing Officer are recorded clearly on the child's file and not 'represented' by the social worker.
- **INDEPENDENT LEGAL ADVICE** - Independent Reviewing Officers have directly accessed independent legal advice when needed. This has been utilised appropriately and effectively to ensure that the independent view of the Independent Reviewing Officer is not compromised by legal advice offered to the local authority.
- **INDEPENDENT VISITING AND ADVOCACY** - The Independent Visiting and Advocacy services delivered by Coram Voice have been actively promoted by Independent Reviewing Officers. The use of the service has been evident in the review process and enables children to present their views in a different way and often challenge professionals about the plans that have been agreed.
- **CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL WORK** - Independent Reviewing Officer managers attend and contribute to the North West Regional IRO Group. Manchester hosted the North West Independent Reviewing Officer Conference that took place in May 2017.
- **LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT** - Independent Reviewing Officers have received bespoke training re Signs of Safety. (Identified in the 2015/16 Annual Report) Signs of Safety is child centred and is another step towards ensuring the focus of the review is the child and ensuring the meeting and subsequent work produces good outcomes.
- Independent Reviewing Officer's attend regular developmental sessions with their managers. Agenda's involve presentations from Partner Agencies and Legal Services.
- An Independent Reviewing Officer Signs of Safety development group meets regularly to discuss the Framework and how to align practice in LAC Reviews as identified in the 2015/2016 Annual Report.
- Since September 2016 Manchester Independent Reviewing Officers have had access to this accredited Edgehill University course Advanced Practice for IROs and this is driving improvement in practice. Funding has been secured for all Manchester Independent Reviewing Officers to undertake this course and colleagues will make applications for places in the coming 2017/2018 academic year.
- **THEMATIC AUDITS** - Audits have taken place re Permanence Planning and briefings delivered to Independent Reviewing Officer's. Practice has improved in this area and the focus on permanence will ensure that children have a permanence plan which is robustly

monitored, timely and that children are in the right placement as soon as possible. Evidence suggests that the sooner permanence is established for children the better the outcomes.

- **BUSINESS SUPPORT FUNCTION** - A fully staffed administrative team has been in operation for over a year. It has supported Independent Reviewing Officers to improve practice and performance around invitations to reviews and the subsequent distribution of review records. This has enabled Independent Reviewing Officers to focus on their core functions.
- **MOBILE WORKING DEVICES** - All Independent Reviewing Officers now have mobile working devices that enable them work flexibly away from the office. Management have researched voice recognition technology and Independent Reviewing Officers will be supported to implement it during 2017/2018.



## **14. KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2017/2018**

### **14.1 Children 'voice and influence'**

- Children will consistently be able to choose the date (within statutory timescales), time and venue for all subsequent reviews. Children are already sent a 'child friendly' invite to LAC Reviews but this needs to be developed further.
- Children will be given the opportunity to contribute to their 'looked after' children reviews in more creative ways using technology.
- Children will be able to communicate their views via up to date technology; MOMO (Mind of My Own).
- Child friendly meetings to be developed to encourage younger children to participate i.e. themed reviews.
- We will increase the % of children co-chairing their LAC reviews by 10%.

### **14.2 Performance - continuous development and improvement**

- The timeliness of LAC Reviews to increase with a target of 95-100%.
- Independent Reviewing Officer's to continue visiting children in the 6-week period prior to their LAC Review. Data accuracy to be improved to clarify the reasons why visits are not taking place and whether alternative contact methods are being offered where young people decline visits.
- We will increase the number of birth parents attending LAC Reviews, and ensure if they do not wish to attend or cannot attend they can contribute and are fully informed of the decisions being made about their child.
- Independent Reviewing Officer and managers will receive weekly performance reports in relation to children accommodated under Section 20; children on Placement Orders for over 12 months; Children on Care Order and placed at home; and the quality and timeliness of Pathway Plans.
- Further work will be undertaken by Managers with the Business Support Unit to ensure that Recommendations and minutes of Looked After Child reviews are consistently added to the child's case file and distributed within the required timescales.
- Evidence of IRO footprint is more consistent aiming for each case to be overviewed by the IRO at 4 weeks, 3 months after the review and before the next review as a minimum.

### **14.3 Quality Assurance of Practice**

- An audit will be undertaken by a Social Work Consultant which focuses on the quality of LAC review and outcomes for children.
- IRO Managers will observe at least 1 LAC review per month.
- We will seek to understand the reasons for children and parents not attending LAC Reviews by introducing feedback forms to inform planning.

### **14.4 Dispute Resolution**

- The Dispute Resolution Process will continue to be embedded across Safeguarding and Improvement Unit and the way in which we collate information to be streamlined
- Process for escalating to partner agencies and services will be strengthened and embedded.

### **14.5 Supervision and Appraisal**

- The Safeguarding Supervision Agenda a Template to be revised & updated to reflect 'Signs of Safety' Framework.
- Independent Reviewing Officers will receive an appraisal under the new agreed process 'About you'.

#### **14.6 Signs of Safety**

- All staff have access to Signs of Safety training
- Signs of Safety to be successfully used and embedded across the Independent Reviewing Officer Service.
- All documentation should reflect the Signs of Safety Framework.
- Partner Agency Reports for LAC Reviews will be aligned with the Signs of Safety Framework.
- Foster carers will provide a report for LAC Reviews aligned with the Signs of Safety Framework

#### **14.7 Working with Partner Agencies**

- CAFCASS to be represented at future service development sessions
- Improved access to electronically held court paperwork will be achieved for Independent Reviewing Officer with the council legal service.

#### **14.8 Learning and Development**

- More members of the team will attend the Advanced Practice for IRO course in the coming year following positive feedback from the recent course participants.
- Managers will attend regional groups and developments.
- Independent Reviewing Officers to access learning opportunities via Research in Practice.
- Independent Reviewing Officers to be provided with legal updates and developments in court practice.

#### **14.9 Technology**

- Independent Reviewing Officer's will be enabled to use 'Voice Recognition' technology. A pilot will be taking place using an in-built functionality using Windows 7.

## 15. CONCLUSION

The Independent Reviewing Officer service has made significant progress during the last 12 months and this has resulted in an improvement in practice, plans, arrangements and outcomes for looked after children. However, the service has much more to do if we are to achieve our aspiration to be an outstanding Independent Reviewing Officer service.

Independent Reviewing Officer service has set the following firm foundations on which further development and improvement in the can be built:

- Stable management and leadership with clear insight and understanding of service strengths and development needs and a robust service plan in place;
- Statutory role and responsibilities of the Independent Reviewing Officer service are now well understood across Children's Services and partner agencies;
- The culture and conditions are now in place that will enable the service to move forward and achieve its aspiration to be a fully effective Independent Reviewing Officer service that is driving continuous development and improvement in practice and services for looked after children;
- Dispute Resolution Protocol is well established and regularly used by the Independent Reviewing Officers. We will embed this and ensure the learning from practice is taken so the same issues do not keep repeating themselves within the system.
- Appropriately skilled and experienced Independent Reviewing Officers who are provided with appropriate support and learning and development opportunities.

We are committed and focussed on delivering our promise to looked after children and care leavers as follows:

**As your Corporate Parents we promise to respect you as an individual and support YOU on your journey to be a resilient and confident person in your own right.**

### **Respect YOU**

- We will make sure we support you in a kind, compassionate, honest, considerate and timely way
- We will LISTEN to you and VALUE your voice, as an individual and through our Children in Care and Care Leavers Council
- We will involve YOU in decisions and plans about your life
- We will make you feel comfortable and supported to attend your meetings and reviews if you wish to
- We will try to help YOU to understand why you are in our Care
- We will talk to you in a language or use methods that you understand

### **Care for YOU**

- We will make sure we provide a stable environment for YOU to live and learn in
- We will do everything to make sure your happiness, well-being and safety is our priority
- We will support YOU to stay healthy and make sure YOU get good health care when you need it (including your physical, mental and sexual health)
- We will make sure you get good, nutritious meals and help you to make healthy choices
- We will make sure you live with people who care about and support YOU
- We will wherever possible help YOU keep in contact with the people that matter to YOU

- We will provide you with accurate information and advice and help YOU to access services that can help you
- We will make sure YOU know your rights and who to turn to if you are unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint

### **Support YOU**

- We will make sure people champion your rights in your school or education setting and understand the issues that YOU may face
- We will try to avoid unnecessary placement and or school changes
- We will help YOU to find hobbies and interests to develop new skills and friendships
- We will support YOU in any pathways YOU choose beyond School or College including going to university or into an apprenticeship
- We will encourage YOU to be the best you can be and achieve the goals and dreams YOU have set

### **Help YOU Grow**

- We will help and support YOU to become independent and take charge of your own life
- We will do everything we can to build the skills and confidence to help YOU make a smooth transition into adult life
- We will support YOU to become responsible for your own actions and to participate as an active citizen
- We will make sure when you leave our care that you live somewhere you feel safe and happy in
- We will support you even if things go wrong, and will continue to challenge you and celebrate your achievements

## 16. REFERENCES

IRO handbook: statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2010 (pp 9–12);  
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