



Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

Annual Report 2018-2019

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Report to: Children's Leadership Team
Corporate Parenting Panel
The Change Group
The Group

This report will also be published on the Manchester City Council external website.

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1. FORWARD

This Annual Report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019. It evaluates practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children and Young People (previously referred to as Looked After Children) and the effectiveness of the IRO service in ensuring that Manchester Local Authority as a Corporate Parent is discharging its statutory responsibilities towards them.

IROs have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that care plans for children effectively address their needs, take into account Our Children and Young People's ascertainable views and opinions and improve outcomes for them.

This report demonstrates the continuous development and improvement in the IRO Service over the past year and highlights the improvements that are required if the service is to achieve its aspiration to be outstanding.

Manchester City Council and its partners continue to be committed to its promise to Our Children and Young People. The IRO Service is clear about its role and responsibilities in relation to the delivery of the promise. The report will be presented to the Children's Leadership Team, and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Julie Daniels

(Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Practice Improvement)

**Please note that data provided in this report for 2018/2019 is provisional pending year end validation processes and submission to and publication by the Department for Education. Rates per 10,000 of the Child Population have been calculated using the latest available population estimates published as part of the CIN Census data. This may be slightly different than the population figure used by the Department for Education to calculate rates per 10,000 in subsequent data publications later in 2020.*

2. SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT

2.1 The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The primary task of the IRO is to ensure that the care plans for Our Children and Young People fully reflect their needs, ensures that their wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities. As Corporate Parents each Local Authority should ensure that they act for the children and young people they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent.

The appointment by local authorities of an IRO is a statutory requirement.

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.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of an IRO:

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

The IRO Handbook sets out the statutory roles and duties as well as the strategic and managerial responsibilities of Local Authorities in establishing an effective IRO Service. [1]

The IRO Service in Manchester sits within the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit. The service 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 the practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children by the Local Authority. The Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Practice Improvement reports directly to the Strategic Director of Children's Services. IROs 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 Our Children and Young people.

Manchester Children's Services is committed to achieving a fully effective IRO Service that is outstanding. We continue to be successful in creating a culture and climate within the Local Authority that values the IRO Service. We aim to offer support and challenge to the social work service.. Professionals across Children's Services and our partner agencies encourage and expect IROs to offer robust scrutiny, be child-centred and to offer challenge as and when required.

IROs in Manchester are equipped with the right knowledge and skills that enable them to effectively scrutinise practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children and Young People. They continue to

have open access to expert advice through the provision of independent legal advice from Wigan Council. The Dispute Resolution protocol is embedded and works effectively, from informal conversations to the escalation of cases to senior management and the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) if necessary. Most importantly there is clear evidence of IROs practising in a child-centred way and of their footprint on the child's case file.

Here in the Safeguarding Improvement Unit we believe that we can make a difference to the lives of children and young people as articulated by Nadim Zahawi who stated ***“I want to see IROs realise their potential to make a real difference in the lives of all looked after children across the country. They have an opportunity to improve practice and I am really pleased to see them embrace this. It is crucial that we hear the voices of children and their families to drive better decisions, taking their views on board in care planning in a meaningful way, to ensure that they can experience stable lives and have access to the same opportunities that we would want for our own children. I know that this will take some hard work and demands the sponsorship of local leaders and politicians so I am calling to those people to stand up for the voice of their children and families and lend their support to this important programme.” Nadhim Zahawi MP, previous Minister for Children and Families (2019)***

2.2 Profile of the IRO Service in Manchester

There were significant changes in the SIU Management Team during 2018/2019. In January and February 2019 the Head Of Safeguarding and the Lead for Children's Safeguarding moved on to new roles. The new Head of Safeguarding or Strategic Lead for Safeguarding and Practice Improvement came into post in April 2019. The Lead for Safeguarding was temporarily covered by an Interim Manager.

In the reporting period Manchester had 19 full time IRO posts with 21 staff (as some work part time) managed by two Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers. The IROs in Manchester have dedicated roles to review practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children and Young People. They do not undertake a dual role in child protection conferencing.

The IRO Team remained relatively stable during 2018/2019. Two IROs left the service during the year. One to take up a post closer to home and one to take up the opportunity of a 2 year career break. Two applicants were recruited to these posts. A further two posts were recruited to for 12 month maternity cover. Reducing the change in IROs for Our Children and Young People by retaining a skilled and stable workforce continues to be a priority.

Due to the increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) the number of IROs offering a specialist service to this specific group of children increased from 2 to 3.

The IRO Team has a good balance of experienced IROs and those newer to the role. The profile of the team is diverse, being balanced with male and female workers of varying ages and from different ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the diversity of Our Children and Young People in Manchester.

2.3 IRO Capacity

Service resourcing throughout the year has ensured there is an adequate number of IROs in post enabling the service to maintain caseloads within the number of 50 - 70 children recommended in the IRO Handbook. The average caseload in 2016/17 was 67, this reduced to 66 in 2017/18. In 2018/19, the average caseload increased to 70.

Manchester is committed to caseload levels remaining under 70 per IRO to provide the capacity to carry out the duties and functions to a high standard. As a Safeguarding Improvement Unit we are continually reviewing resources to ensure that we have capacity within the service to offer sufficient oversight and challenge.

2.4 IRO Learning and Development

We are invested in the Learning and Development of the IRO within the service and ensure that all IROs are offered 4 weekly Supervision, annual Appraisals and Direct Observations with the aim of improving practice across the team.

The IRO Service have monthly Team Meetings and Service Development Days have taken place in June 2018, December 2018 and February 2019. These days have enabled staff members from across the service to contribute to key service development plans for 2018/2019. Guest speakers have included representatives from CAF/CASS, input from an FGM specialist and Permanence Briefings.

During 2018/2019 two IROs undertook and passed an accredited IRO Advanced Practice course delivered by Edgehill University. We now have 7 IROs who have successfully completed the course. IROs have reported that this course has offered them a positive learning and development opportunity and improved their confidence in practice.

In 2018/19 three members of staff from across the service took part in Phase 1 of the National Assessment and Accreditation system (NAAS). All managers have either completed or are completing ILM Level accreditation as part of drive to enhance effective leadership across the city.

In January 2019, all IROs were offered training on scrutinising the quality of Pathway Planning.

We continue to drive the Signs of Safety approach and the Signs of Safety Practice Leads continues to be offered regular development sessions focussed on embedding the model into practice.

During 2018/2019 Manchester City Council introduced a new Framework for Achieving Permanence across the city and all IROs undertook the training to ensure they had the knowledge of the framework and that their expertise contributed to driving the quality of securing permanence at the earliest opportunity.

3. VOICE AND INFLUENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Manchester Children's Services is committed to placing children and young people front and centre to everything that we do. **'Our Manchester - building a safe, happy, healthy and successful future for children and young people'**.

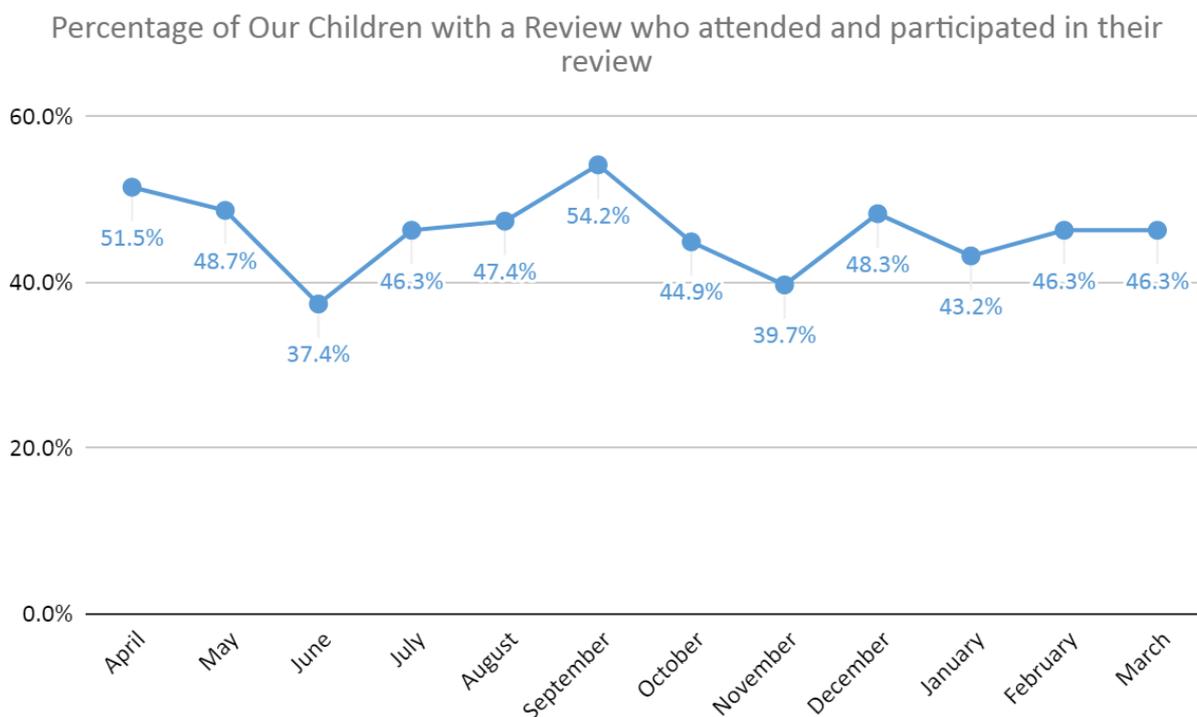
The IRO role is central to building an outstanding Children's Services in which Our Children and Young People have the best care experience and life opportunities. It places children and young people at the centre of everything we do, ensuring their rights, needs and welfare are promoted.

This section explores the varying ways that children and young people participate in their own planning and influence service development and improvements. We continue to champion the Promise made in 2016 (appendix 1).

IROs continue to invest in the Signs of Safety approach when working with children and young people. The approach allows for children and young people to recognise their strengths and articulate what they are worried about to ensure that their voices are heard and influence the plans.

3.1 Participation and Engagement of Children in Our Children Reviews

The IRO Service is committed to listening to the voice of Our Children and Young People and enabling them to influence and shape practice and service development. During 2018/2019 positive steps continued to be made and practice embedded to ensure we have a service which listens effectively to the voice of children and young people and responds to the issues raised by them. We recognise that continuous improvement is required and that we will need to revisit some issues to ensure changes in our practice become part of our everyday work.



The IRO 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 IROs with the capacity to develop routine home visits to consult children and to promote young people's engagement and participation in reviews. Overall participation and engagement in the review process has increased. The proportion of children attending their reviews has remained stable. Overall, there are now more children attending and participating in their review, with an increase from 44.2% in 2017/18 to 46.3% in 2018/19.

The below table gives some further details of children and young people's participation in their reviews.

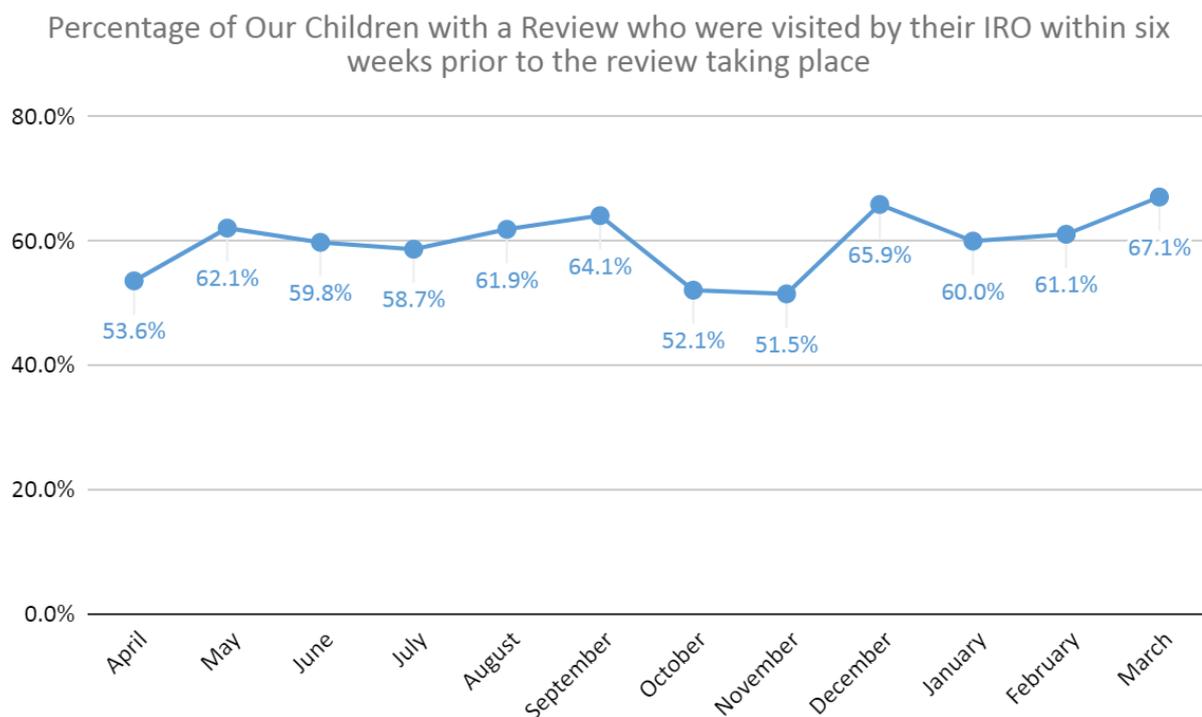
PN codes	Definition	2017-18 % of total reviews	2018-19 % of total reviews
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	16.5%	15.9%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	35.5%	36.0%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	0.8%	0.8%
PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally)	0.5%	0.4%
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	0.4%	0.3%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	18.3%	18.7%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	25.2%	23.4%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	2.8%	3.6%

The minutes of reviews continue to be consistently written in an 'easy read' letter to the child and young person, without the use of jargon. Young people provide positive feedback in regards to this style and have a greater understanding of their care plans, what people are worried about, how well they are doing and what the next steps are. This provides them with a greater understanding of the agreed recommendation and the participation of others in achieving them. We believe this empowers them to be able to have influence over their planning.

IROs are committed to ensuring all children know about individual advocacy and how to make a complaint. At each review they consider whether an independent visitor is needed, and any communication needs requiring additional or specialist support.

There has been a focus in 2018/19 to encourage participation and to develop more child centred reviews incorporating child led themes to meetings, which draws on the child's interests. IROs have found that when they have adopted a different approach to the reviews when required the children have felt more comfortable to engage and attend.

3.2 IRO Visits to Children & Young People



IRO visits to see children in the six weeks prior to their review are important. This visit is where the child is consulted about how their review will be managed (who will attend; venue, agenda etc.) and how the child wishes to participate. IROs are able to utilise a range of tools to assist the children and young people to share their wishes and feelings eg the Signs of Safety 3 Houses or Wizards and Fairy communication tools.

The proportion of visits taking place in 2018/19 has averaged 60%, a significant decrease from 79.2% in 2017/18. Performance around visits has been affected by a period of changes in IROs in the latter part of the year and also the fact that some older children choose not to see their IRO. In cases where children do not wish to see their IRO, a range of alternate methods will be offered for them to share their views, set their agenda and be able to influence their care plans. This will include the Mind Of My Own App, Facetime, telephone contact or 'Have your Say' booklets. Young people are also encouraged to use the advocacy service where they wish to have independent support to have their views considered.

3.3 Our Children co-chairing their reviews

IROs continue to support and encourage young people to chair/ co-chair their own review or to agree with their own agendas wherever appropriate. 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 support and encourage young people to chair/co chair their own review with a review of the target that is currently set at 45%. This year the proportion has fallen to 20.8% , which is a decrease from 2017/2018 when we reached 26.8%.

3.4 Corporate Parenting Panel

As a Corporate Parent to Our Children and Young People, the Council and its partners must act as a responsible and good parent would act. The Corporate Parenting Panel is made up of representatives of the Council, its partner agencies and members of the Our Children Council (The Group) and the Our Young People 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.

As well as being members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Our Children and Young People agree the agenda and lead the meeting on a quarterly basis.

Our Children and Young People have also been involved in a number of other events including the annual Achievement Awards, to recognise and celebrate the achievements of Our Children and Young People during 2018-19. Approximately 300 young people from the age of 5 - 25 years have been nominated for a wide variety of achievements. This year the categories have been linked to the Skills for Life Curriculum which are, Team Work, Self Management, Self Belief, Communication and Problem Solving.

3.5 Mind Of My Own

Manchester continue to invest in the Mind of My Own app and have had a number of successes in using this to allow children and young people to communicate with their IRO. The app is an additional tool that supports children and young people the opportunity to express any worries, highlight their achievements and give feedback on meetings among other resources.

Through the use of MOMO in 2018/2019 we know:

- The apps are being used a lot more via worker accounts than young people accounts.
- We have champions within the service that routinely use the app with children and young people.
- Worker's views Using Mind Of My Own, children and young people are more engaged in Looked After Reviews and Education Plans; Using Mind Of My Own has saved me time when working with young people; Mind Of My Own is an innovative way of capturing the young person's voice, so the child's voice will be captured more often and they will have more awareness of the process of statutory meetings; My children are much more engaged in all meetings by using Mind Of My Own; Since using Mind Of My Own, my children are much more willing to engage as most young people like using mobile phones!
- A very high percentage of young people are feeling positive across all age ranges - 94% when it comes to talking about where they live. Far more young people aged 10 to 16 and 17+ were unhappy with where they live vs aged 0 to 9 - 12% of the 0 to 9, 28% of 10 to 16, 24% of 17+

3.6 Children's Rights

Advocacy

NYAS began working on the Manchester Children's Rights Service at the beginning of May 2018. NYAS have met with the Independent Reviewing Officer Service to raise awareness of the new service and share promotional materials.

In the period May 2018- March 2019

- NYAS received 427 new referrals for children and young people – All referrals were allocated to an Advocate in an average of 2 working days
- 327 referrals were closed during the period and 95 were ongoing
- The average age of referral for a child or young person referred was 17
- 46 of the young people were care leavers

The top four reasons for a child or young person to receive support from NYAS were around

- Relationship issues with the Local Authority
- Placement moves
- Issues in their placement
- Wanting to change arrangements regarding seeing their family

Examples of feedback about the service which have been received from children and young people are

"thanks, I didn't think you would phone me so quickly" Young person

"I never knew about advocacy workers until I was 17. I wish I had known them earlier." Young person 19 years

"Advocacy helped me because I was scared to have my own say till I had an advocate to help me make my point." Young person 12 years

Independent Visitors

In the period May 2018-March 2019 there have been 36 new matches and 15 closed matches. Feedback for the service has been –

"I love my visits. They are really good. To be honest I am a Man Utd fan so the match we went was Man City v Burnley which I had agreed to go to with my IV, but I am hoping the next match will be to Man Utd!" Young Person

Foster Carer – "All going fantastic with the IV she knows him inside out and they go off and have some fun real together. She knows how to manage and get through to him."

Foster Carer – "They seem to be getting along really well. He looks forward to seeing her - It's been brilliant and she is lovely. They've done some great visits, most recently to the cinema and also doing a treasure hunt round Manchester."

3.7 Complaints

IROs have a responsibility to ensure that Our Children and Young People are aware of the complaints procedure in Manchester. As identified in the 2017/2018 report we have continued to monitor complaints in order to improve services.

During 2018/2019, there were 31 formal complaints made by Our Children and Young People. This much lower than last year when there were 43 complaints.

In 2018/19 the general themes were:

Theme	Stage	Number
Immigration/ID	3 Stage 1 & 1 Stage 2	4
Placement	6 Stage 1 & 1 Stage 2	7
Funding	7 Stage 1	7
Issues with SW/PA	13 Stage 1	13
Total		31

29 of the cases were referred at Stage 1. 2 cases moved to Stage 2. These were cases where the issues were in respect of Immigration and placement. 16 of the Stage 1 complaints were not upheld (52%); 12 Stage 1 and 2 Stage 2 complaints were upheld (45%) and 1 was partially upheld (3%).

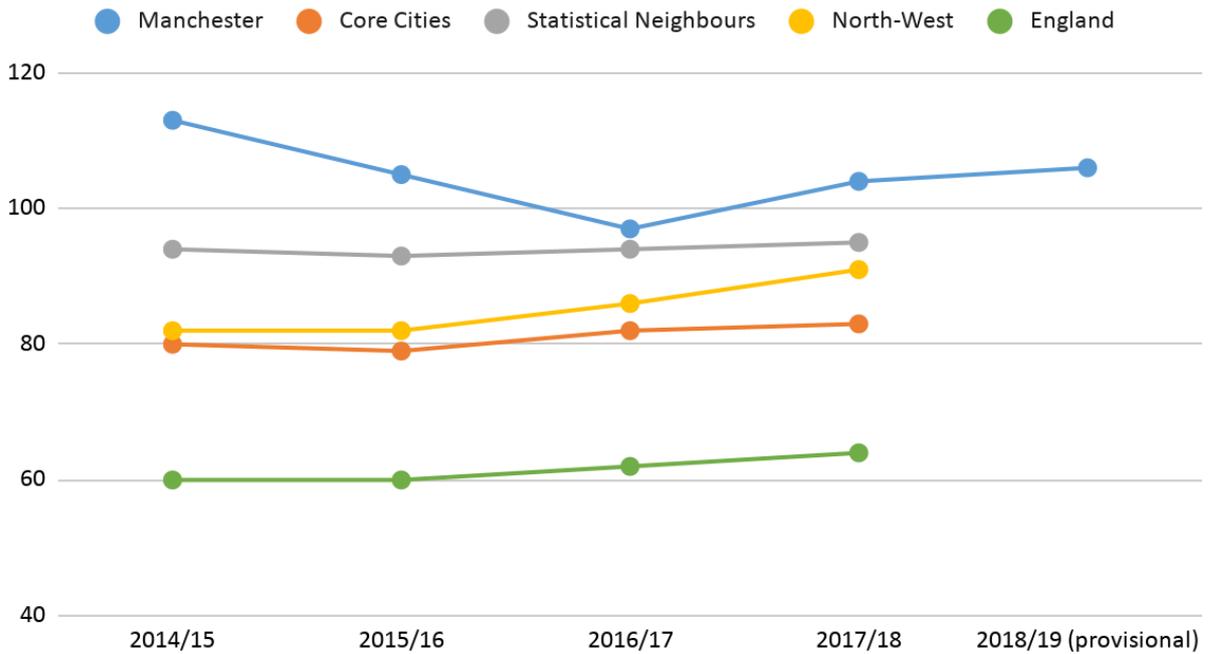
Complaints reports are presented at the Children’s Leadership Team meetings, the Voice and Influence sub group, Corporate Parenting Panel and the Quality Assurance Framework meeting to monitor progress on themes and action taken to improve practice and services resulting from complaint.

4. OUR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE DATA 2018/2019

4.1 Our Children and Young People Population

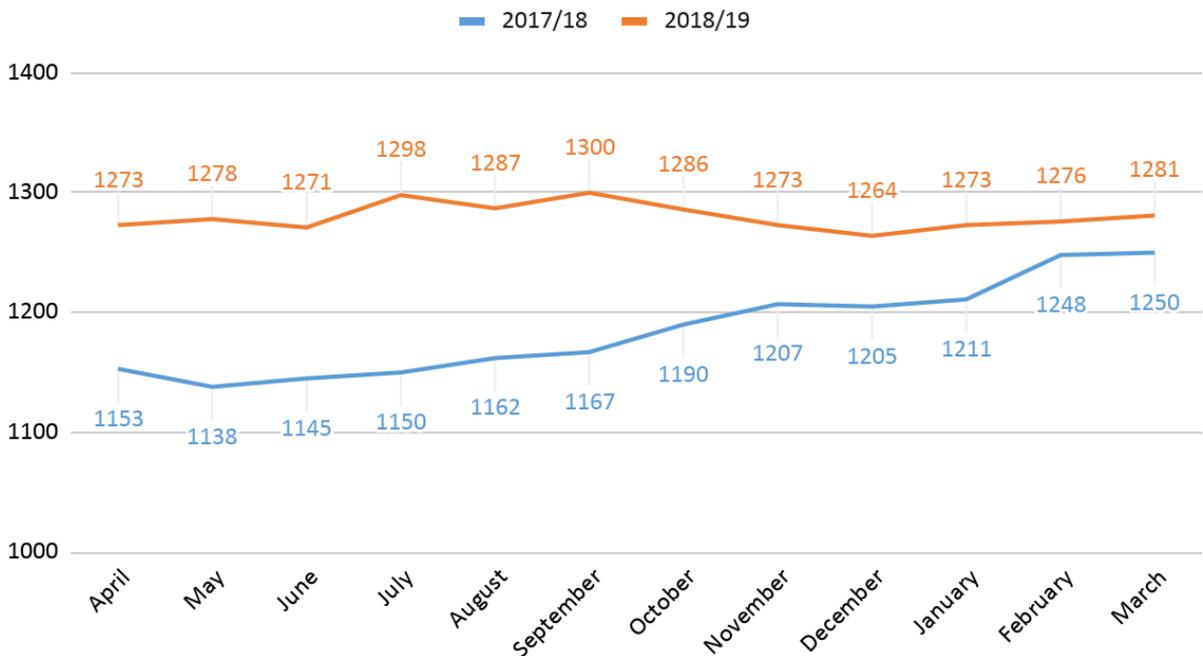
At 31 March 2019 provisional data indicates that Manchester City Council had responsibility for 1,290 of Our Children. This represents an increase of 33 children and young people over this financial year and follows an increase of 83 children and young people in the previous year. The number of Our Children in Manchester remains high when compared to statistical comparator rates for 2017/18. The provisional rate of Our Children in March 2019 per 10,000 population was 106 which marks an increase of 2 from last year’s confirmed rate. Nationally the number of Our Children and Young People has been increasing up to 2017/18. National 2018/19 data has not yet been published by the Department for Education.

Rate of Our Children per 10,000 of the population aged under 18



The local trend is demonstrated in the diagram below.

Number of Our Children at the end of each month (provisional data)



Levels of demand for children’s social care service - Manchester’s rate of Referrals per 10,000 of the child population in 2018/19 was 916, a reduction from 1092 in the previous year when Manchester’s rate was the highest in the country. Manchester’s rate is still higher than other

comparator groups of local authorities such as the Core Cities (734) and the statistical neighbours (687) and is now the 5th highest in the country.

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has risen from 26 in March 2018 to 79 in March 2019 and now represents 6.1% of the total Our Children population. Again there has also been an increasing trend amongst other local authorities.

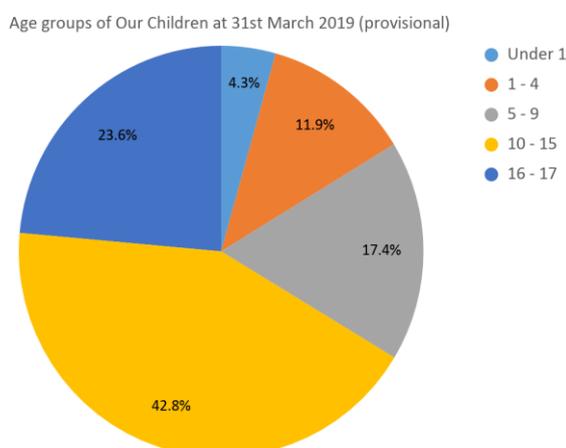
The focus across service remain on:

- Ensuring the right help at the right time for all children and young people - reducing complex demand through effective early intervention and prevention.
- Strengthening the 'front door' service.
- Ensuring that children remain / return home when safe and appropriate.
- A continued focus on achieving early permanence.
- Increased scrutiny by Independent Reviewing Officers contributing to the reduction in numbers of Our Children and Young People where it is safe to do so.

4.2 Profile of Our Children and Young People as at 31 March 2019

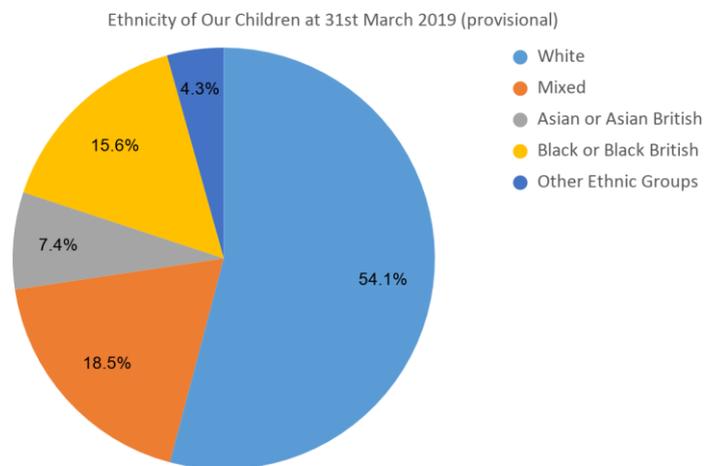
As in previous years there are more boys (721 = 55.9%) than girls (569 = 44.1%) who are looked after in Manchester. This closely resembles the national gender split of children and young people looked after (56%/44%).

Comparing against the age groups nationally, Manchester has a lower Under 1 percentage (4% v. 6%), age 1 to 4 percentage (12% v. 13%) and age 5 to 9 percentage (17% v. 19%). The other age group percentages are then higher, age 10 to 15 (43% v. 39%) and age 16 to 17 (24% v. 23%). This would support the hypothesis that continued strengthening of the early help offer and effective partner agency working through early help and the frontdoor are a factor in the decrease of younger aged children coming into care.



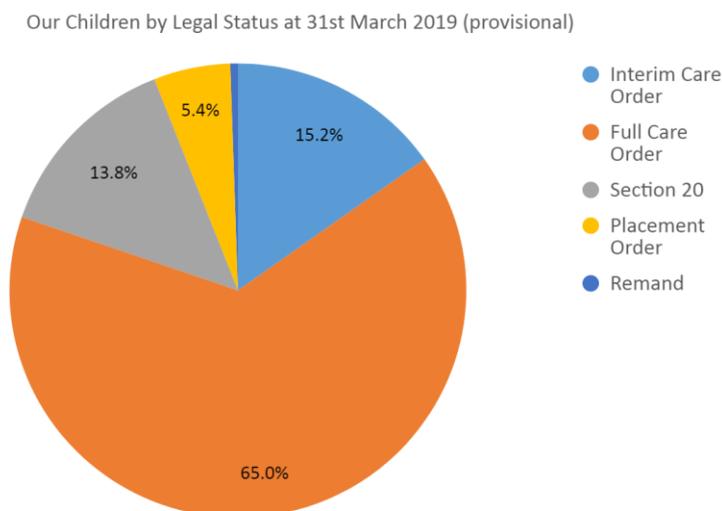
Locally, the number of Our Children aged 16 and 17 years old has increased from 269 at 31 March 2018 to 304 at 31 March 2019. Breakdown in family relations is the most common reason for this cohort of children coming into our care. The IRO Teams have reinforced the crucial importance of

Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences as part of the Permanence Framework to enable young people to remain within their wider family. Where this is not possible, IROs promote the need for quality pathway assessment and planning to ensure young people are well supported if their Care Plan is to live in semi-independent accommodation or live independently. This can be evidenced through the Dispute Resolution process which will be considered in more detail later in this report.



In regards to ethnicity there has been an overall increase in children in our care, there has been a slight reduction in the proportion of Our Children who are White or White British (56% to 54%), those who are of dual heritage (20% to 19%), those who are Asian / Asian British (8% to 7%) and an increase in Black / Black British from 13% to 16%.

4.3 Legal status of Our Children at 31 March 2019

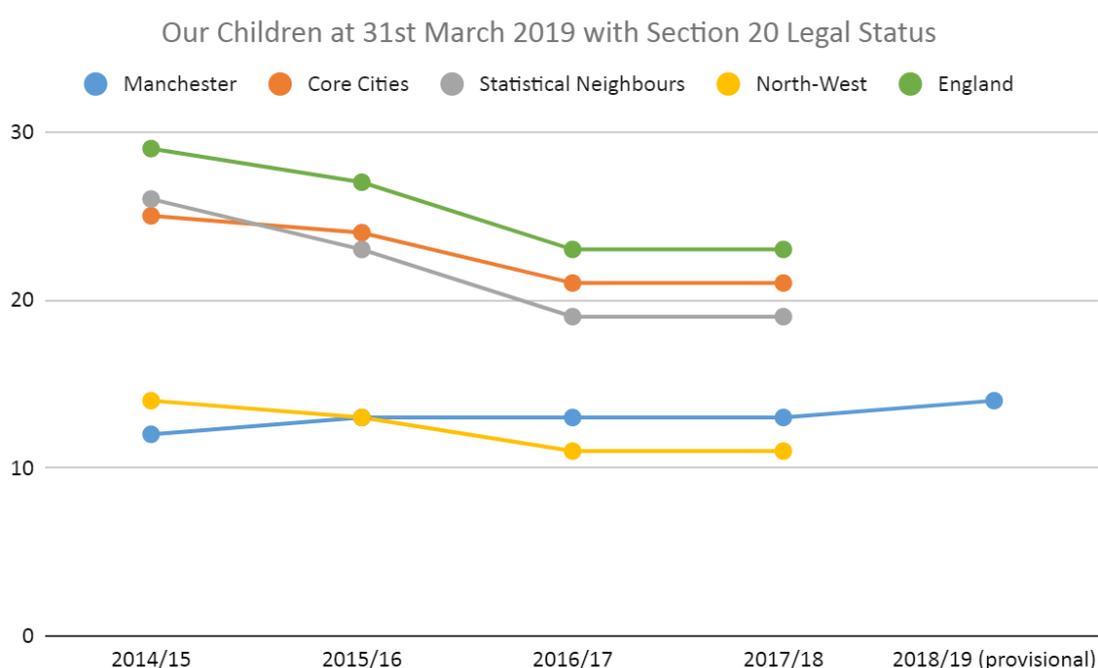


The proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders (ICO) has risen to 15%. In 2018/2019 we have a total number of children subject to ICO as 196 and in 2017/2018 there was 191. As a

key part of the reviewing process, IROs robustly scrutinise plans for children to ensure no drift or delay in achieving permanence.

The majority of Our Children (65%) are subject to Care Orders. The number has increased by 17 children in this period but still represents 65% as last year. In order to secure permanence for our children there continues to be a focus upon achieving a sense of belonging and stability within one settled family unit for the child. Between March 18 - March 19 there were 25 Care Orders that were discharged due to Special Guardianship Orders and 1 child to a Child Arrangement Orders within wider birth family.

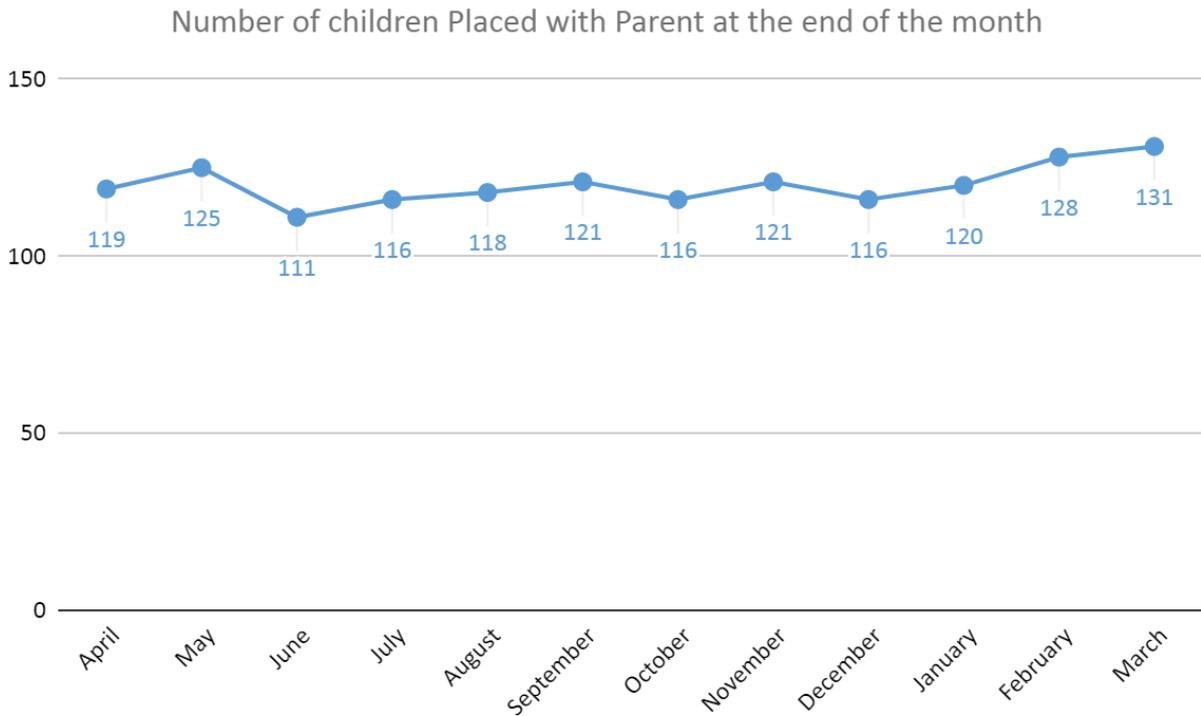
The number of children subject to Placement Orders has remained relatively static over the year and accounts for approximately 5% of Our Children. IROs will ensure the right plan is in place for the child at the right time. They have oversight of the case progression manager's court tracker and permanence trackers in each locality, to be able to challenge where drift and delay is identified with care plans and assessments required for court.



On the 31 March 2019 there were 178 (13.8%) children voluntarily looked after, subject to Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act 1989. Manchester has remained at 13%-14% for the past four years, which is significantly below the level seen nationally (23% in 2017/18).

5. OUR CHILDREN IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES 2018/2019

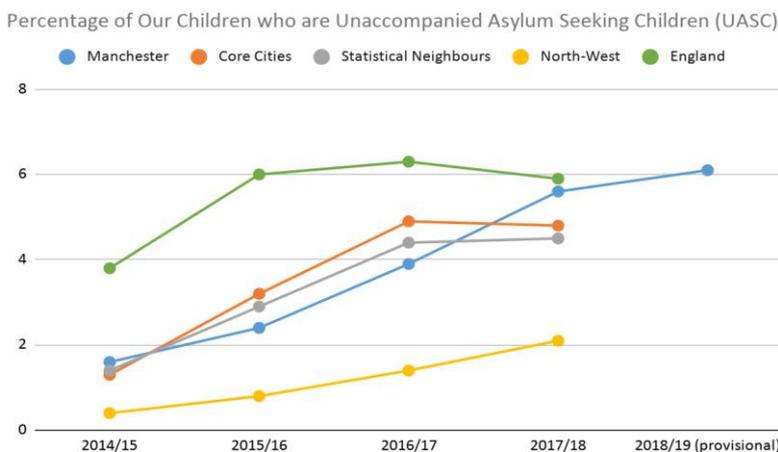
5.1 Placement with Parents



IROs have a key role when considering the appropriateness and safety of a plan for a child to be placed at home subject to a Care Order. This has been an area of increased scrutiny in the last year with a greater number of dispute resolutions. The IROs also monitor and track progress of children placed with parents and subject to Care Orders who can be safely discharged and raise challenge where delay occurs in discharging these Care Orders.

IROs will need to maintain a robust oversight of care plans and support arrangements when endorsing a return home, considering the need for the Care Order to remain or the safety of the rehabilitation.

5.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children



The diagram above illustrates the continued increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (USAC) over the last 12 months now reaching a total of 79 which represents

6.1% of Our Children population. The total is 13 more than at the same point last year. The proportion is higher than our Statistical Neighbours (4.5%), the North West Average (2.1%) and Core Cities (4.8%) and the national average (5.9%) for 2017/18.

Due to the continued increase in children and young people in 2018/19, the Safeguarding Improvement Unit now has two identified IROs who have developed expertise in this area of work and a specialist knowledge of the particular needs of this cohort of young people to support the work across the service. This ensures their needs are being met and their rights upheld and promotes greater awareness amongst social work teams. This additional resource provided an opportunity to share and develop expertise in this area.

5.3 Leaving Care

In October 2018 the Leaving Care Service moved back to be managed by Manchester City Council and we have worked hard together to establish a stronger working relationship. There is a greater focus upon the quality of good pathway planning being a comprehensive, well rounded, aspirational plan to meet a young person's individual needs. At 31 March 2019 97.4% of young people either in need of a Pathway Plan or care leavers had a plan in place, with 77.7% of those reviewed within the last six months. This represents an increase from 96.3% at the same point the previous year.

5.4 Children remanded to Custody

The number of Our Children on remand has remained relatively stable. There were 7 at 31 March 2019 which represents a decrease of 1 child in comparison to the end of 2017/18. IROs are responsible for reviewing the Care Plan for this small group of Our Children.

The Safeguarding Improvement Unit has developed strong links with Youth Justice service to enhance IRO understanding of Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act. Leads from the Youth Offending Service have attended the IRO Team meetings and development sessions. There is a recognition of national issues raised re access of young people to sufficient programmes of education and core curriculum subjects. This has been raised as a thematic issue during the year with our colleagues in Youth Justice and IROs ensure this is of focus of Our Children Review meetings.

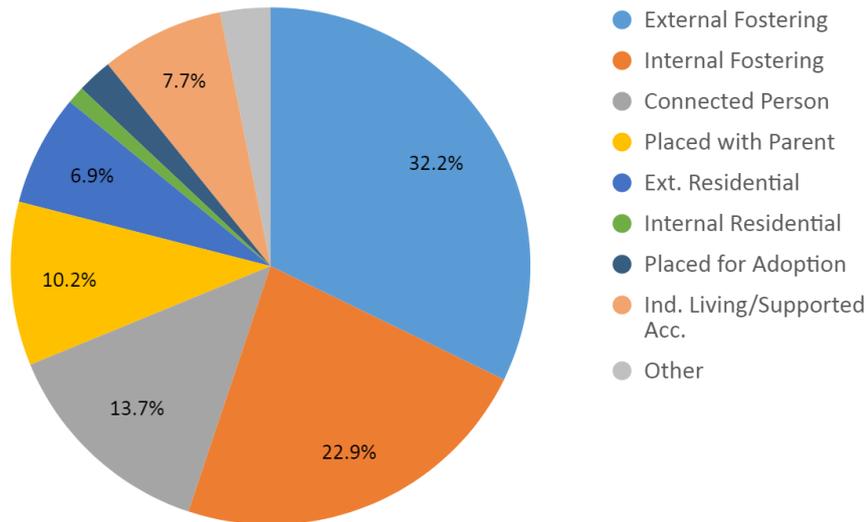
5.5 Our Children subject to a Secure Order

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. In 2018/2019 no children were made the subject of a Secure Order.

6. THE PLACEMENTS OF OUR CHILDREN AT 31 MARCH 2019

6.1 Type of Placement

Our Children by Placement Type at 31st March 2019 (provisional)



The majority of children and young people (69%), continue to be placed in foster care or with connected carers. This is a slightly reduced proportion from last year when it stood at 74%. It remains close to the national figure of 73%.

There continues to be a drive in Manchester to increase the number of our foster carers who can support Our Children within more local areas and be supported by Manchester family placement team and support services. The success of this is reflected in the significant reduction in the percentage of children placed with external foster care from 35% last year to 32% in March 2019.

The percentage of children and young people placed with connected people has decreased in 2018/2019 from 15.6% to 13.7%.

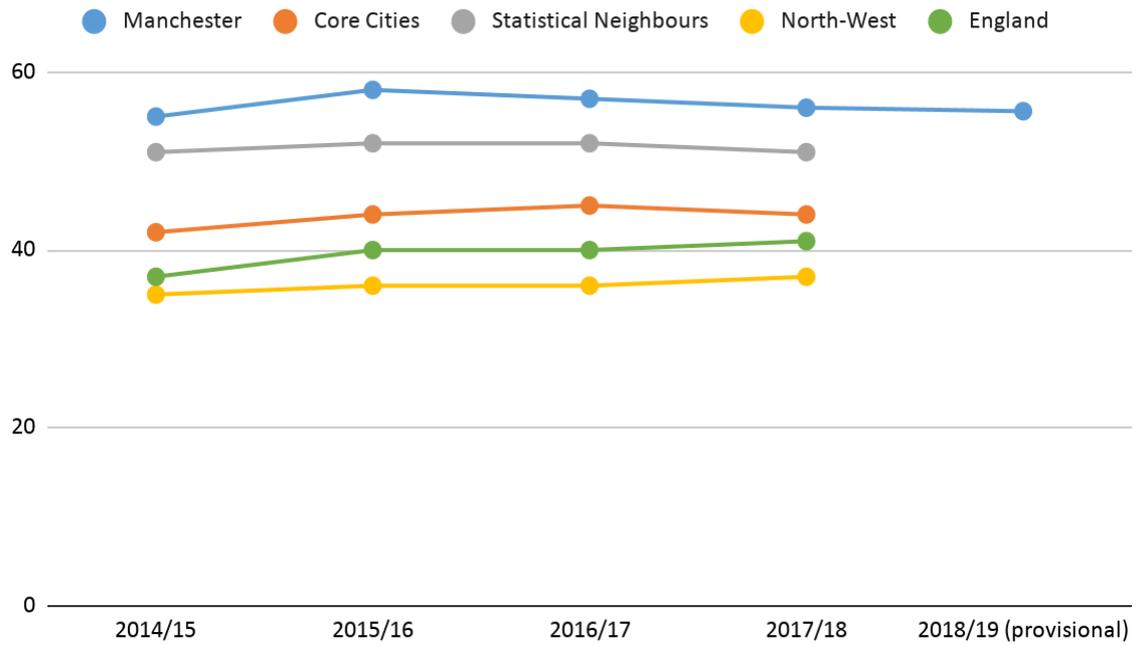
In terms of other placement types there has been an increase in the use of residential care from 7% to 8%.

In the year between 2018/2019 there has been an increase from 28% to 33% in independent living/supported accommodation. Provision of good quality accommodation for young people moving towards leaving care is a current focus for our improvement journey.

6.2 Placement Location and Distance from Home

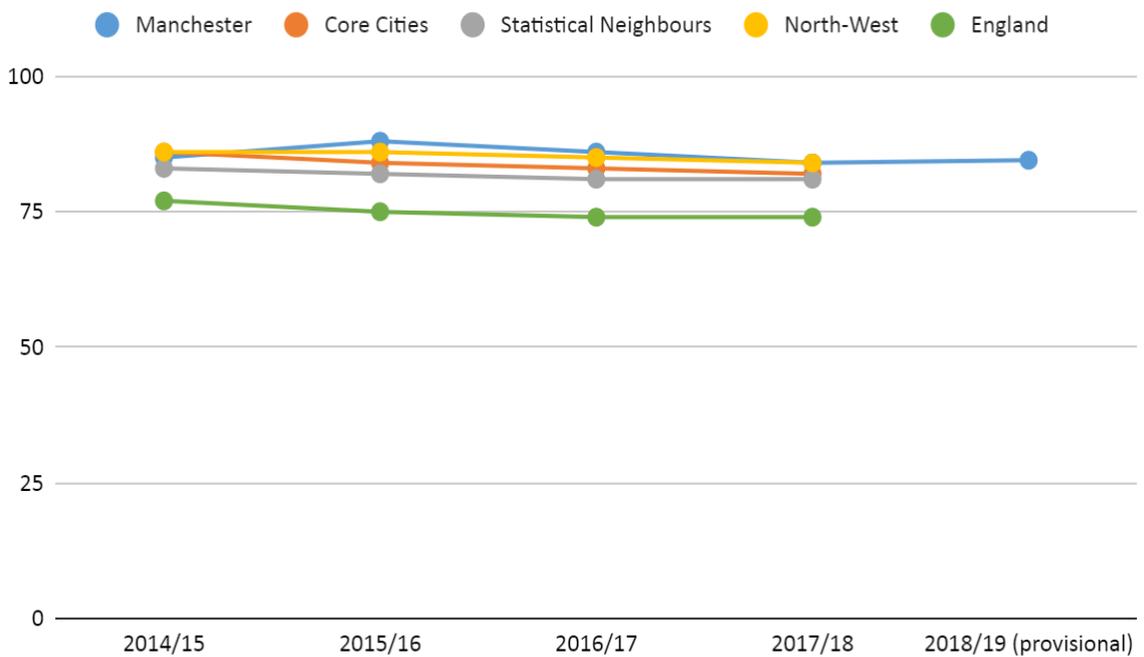
In 2018/19 the percentage of Our Children placed outside Local Authority boundaries in Manchester remained the same as 2017/18 at 56%. Manchester has a higher percentage of children placed outside the Local Authority boundary than its statistical comparators and this may be due to the relatively elongated shape of Manchester. The percentage has remained relatively stable at between 55% to 58% over the last five years.

Percentage of Our Children placed outside the local authority boundary on 31st March



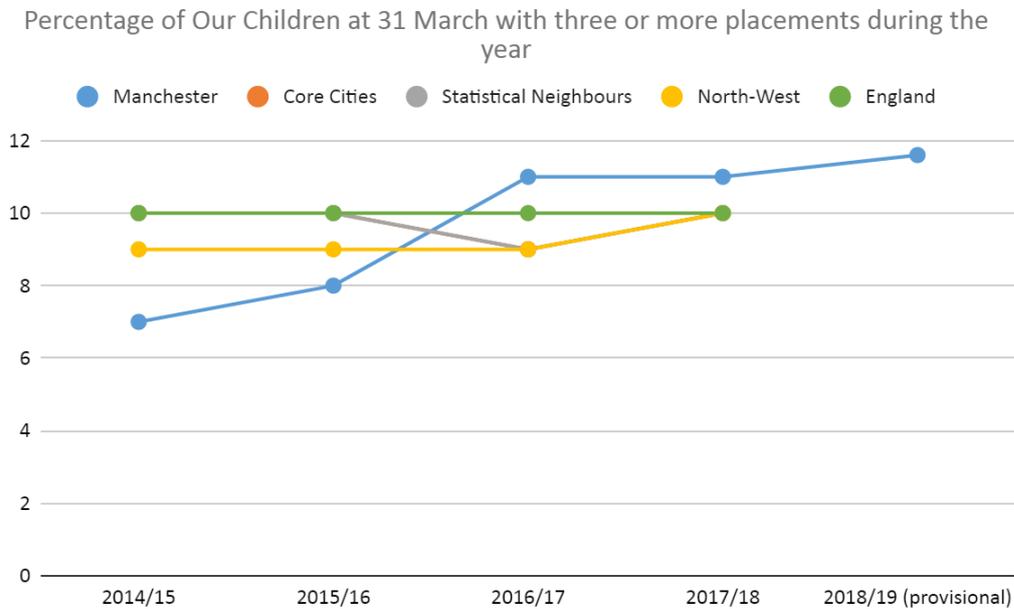
In contrast Manchester’s performance in placing children within a 20 miles’ radius from their home, remains at the same level as last year, level with the north-west average but better than the national average and other comparators.

Percentage of Our Children placed less than 20 miles from home at 31st March



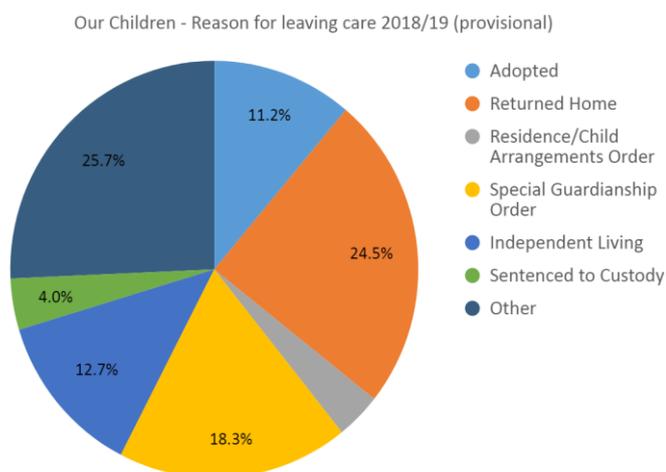
6.3 PLACEMENT STABILITY

6.3.1 Three or more placements



During 2018-2019 placement stability continues to be a challenge for Manchester Children's Services and the percentage of children with three or more placement moves has risen from 11.0% to 11.6%.

6.4 The reasons why Our Children cease to be looked after



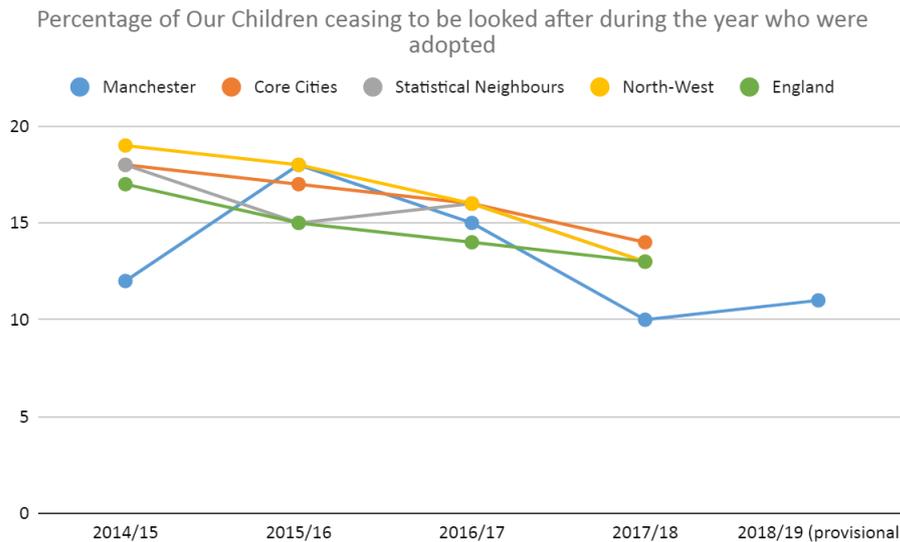
The percentage of children ceasing to be looked after, leaving care for specified reasons in 2018/19 are as follows:

- 24.5% Returned home (a decrease from 35.5% in 2017/18)

- 25.7% Care ceased for any other reason (a decrease from 28.2%)
- 11.2% Adopted (an increase from 10.4%)
- 12.7% Independent living (an increase from 9.8%)
- 18.3% Special Guardianship Order (an increase from 10.8%)
- 3.6% Residence / Child Arrangements Order (the same as last year)
- 4.0% Sentenced to custody (an increase from 1.7%)

The chart below shows that “Other” continues to be the most common outcome for Our Children ceasing to be looked after. IROs have an important role to play in decision making to ensure that rehabilitating at home is 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.

7. ADOPTION SERVICE



Manchester had 47 children placed for adoption between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 - 37 were placed with Adoption Counts adopters while 10 were placed with external adopters.

The number of children with SHOBPA (Should be Placed for Adoption) decisions has increased in the year 2018/19 to 67 from 65 in 2017/2018.

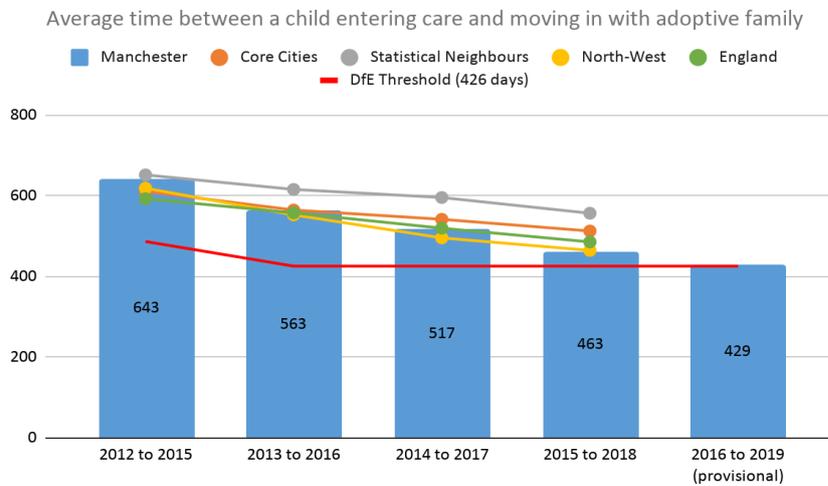
At 31 March 2019 Manchester had 30 children placed for adoption but not yet adopted - 18 placed over 10 weeks

Manchester also had 56 children waiting for adoption but not yet placed (this is anyone with an active SHOBPA who has not been placed for adoption). Of these 56:

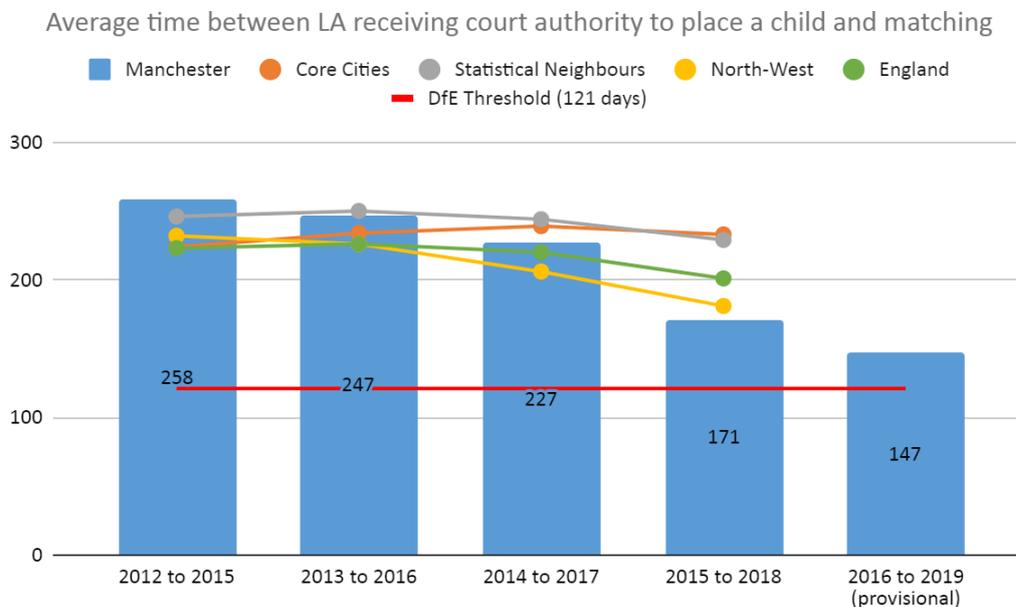
- 15 children have been waiting less than 3 months
- 9 children have been waiting between 3 and 6 months.
- 19 children between 6 and 12 months.
- 8 children have been waiting over 12 months but less than 2 years.

- 5 children had been waiting over 2 years

IROs work closely with the social work teams and the adoption service, Adoption Counts. They have an overview of the progress in respect of timely adoptions and ensure that children who have been waiting for over 9 months are reconsidered at adoption panel, to ensure this plan remains the right one for each child.



There has been continued improvement in the timeliness of adoption during 2018/19, which has had a positive impact on the three year averages measured by the Department for Education in the Adoption Scorecards. As you can see from the above graph the average number of days for a child entering care to being placed with the adoptive family has decreased year on year since the 2012-2015 Scorecard. Provisional 2016 to 2019 data shows that Manchester's performance (429) is now very close to the DfE Threshold of 426 days.



The average number of days between the local authority receiving agreement via the court to place a child for adoption, and matching has also fallen consistently and provisional performance (147) is moving closer to the DfE threshold.

8. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

The percentage of looked after children who became subject to Special Guardianship Orders has significantly increased in 2018/19 compared to previous years. Due to a change in how this data is published by the Department for Education it is no longer possible to compare against other local authority groups.

It is important that wherever possible, children should be placed with family members, friends or permanence secured via a Special Guardianship Order with their foster carer. For children who cannot be adopted this enables children to have as normal a life as possible without continued statutory intervention

9. OUR CHILDREN STATUTORY REVIEWS

Practice and services to Our Children and Young People have 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 IRO Service that is scrutinising practice, plans and arrangements and influencing continuous development and improvement in services. This was recognised in the OFSTED focus visit in October 2018 it was acknowledged that since their last inspection, the local authority has made improvements to the timeliness of statutory requirements, such as reviews.

Achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity through good quality assessment and planning is vital. Permanence is defined in the statutory guidance that accompanies the Children Act 1989 as providing children with:

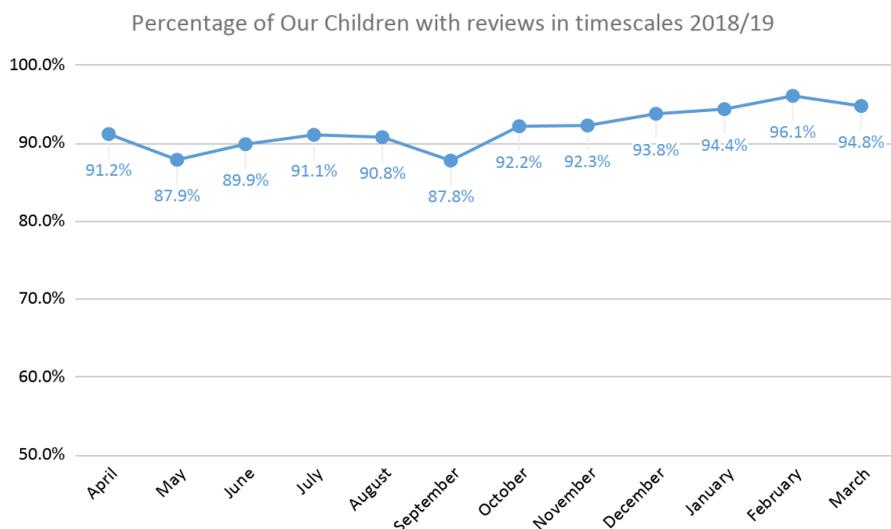
“A sense of security, continuity and identity ...a secure, stable and loving family to support through childhood and beyond.”

Continuing high quality relationships are important for children in care because they;

- Help children build security through developing secure attachments
- Support their ability to form healthy, positive relationships as future adults
- Help children to develop a strong sense of belonging and positive identity.

The role of the IRO is to ensure that planning for permanence commences as soon as a child comes into our care and that all options within the family are explored appropriately. The plan for permanence should be presented at the second review where the IRO will endorse a care plan, if appropriate. It is vital that review of the care plans is timely.

9.1 Timeliness of Our Children Reviews



The performance of Our Children Reviews held in timescale has fluctuated between 87% and 96% over the course of the year. The final end of year figure for 2018-19 as a whole is 91.8%.

Where some Initial Our Children Reviews have taken place out of timescale, this was often linked to a late notifications being received from the allocated Social Worker and difficulties around communication with social workers and worker availability. Other issues which led to reviews taking place outside of time scale, included IROs miscalculating review dates or misunderstanding how reviews can be chaired as a 'series of meetings'. Social workers are now encouraged to email the IRO team managers immediately when a child comes into our care becomes looked after to enable an IRO to be allocated on day one. Cases are allocated to IROs within 24 hours of notification. Additionally IROs have been spoken to with regard to timeliness and the statutory guidance with regard to how a 'series of meetings' should be managed.

New processes have now been put into place to ensure that there is a centralised diary, with every child having the date known centrally for their next 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. IROs are committed to arranging the initial reviews within the 20 day timescale.

9.2 Permanence

IROs are clear about their role and responsibilities to track permanence decisions as soon as the child comes into our care and in-between the first and second Our Children Review looked after children reviews. Achieving Permanence by the second review is a key objective and in line with the Achieving Permanence Framework. In 2018/19 the average figure of children who had a permanence plan identified at the second review was 76%. This is a decrease from 2017/18 when the overall percentage was 80.7%.

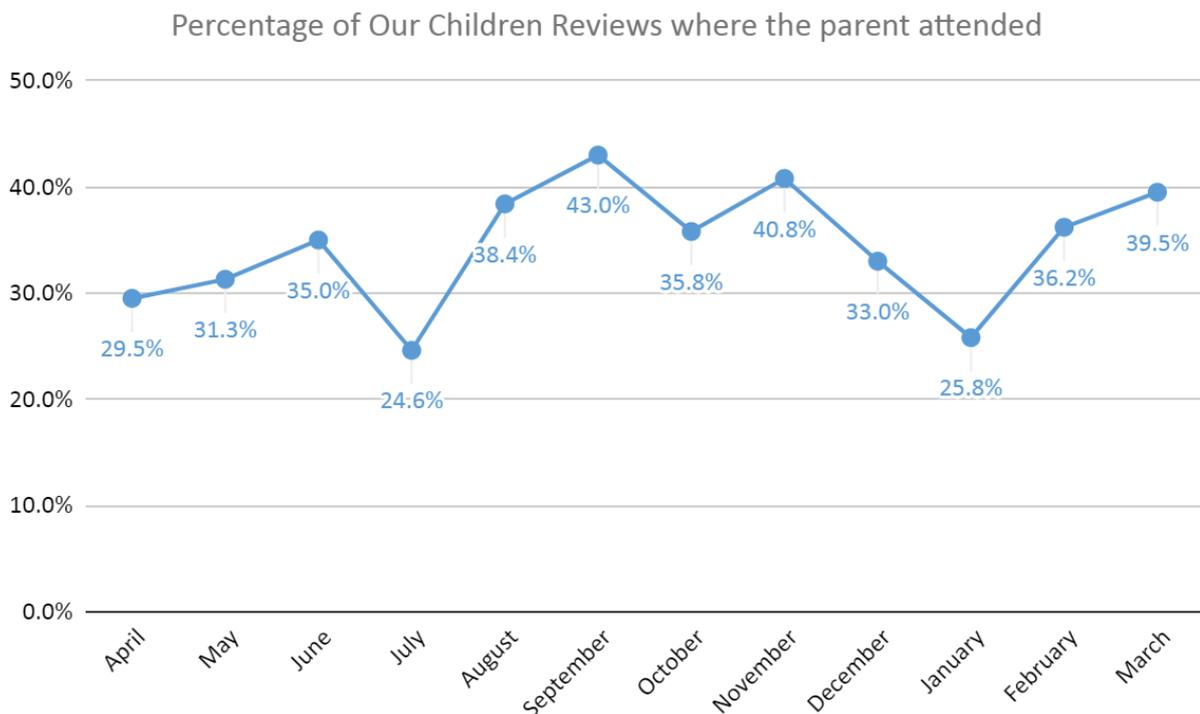
The IRO Service has been part of the planning and implementation of the Our Manchester Our Children - Permanence Planning Policy. There has been an introduction of tracking meetings to prevent delay in permanence being achieved through fostering. Our aim is to achieve

improvements for these young people in line with improved adoption timeliness. IRO involvement in the project has included:

- Observing the Permanence Tracking Panel pilot in the North Locality which is now being rolled out to other locality areas.
- IROs will document when the permanence plan is endorsed or the match with a permanent foster carer is endorsed.
- The 'Chairs Monitoring Record' will now evidence key dates with regard to permanency decisions.
- Our Children and Young People minutes will clearly record the IRO view of the plan, date of endorsement and any challenge, if required.
- IROs will consult with the court progression manager to track cases through the pre-proceedings process to the conclusion of court proceedings.
- IROs will continue to access caselines - e-bundle. This will ensure that they have swifter access to court documents, enabling greater scrutiny of progress within care proceedings.

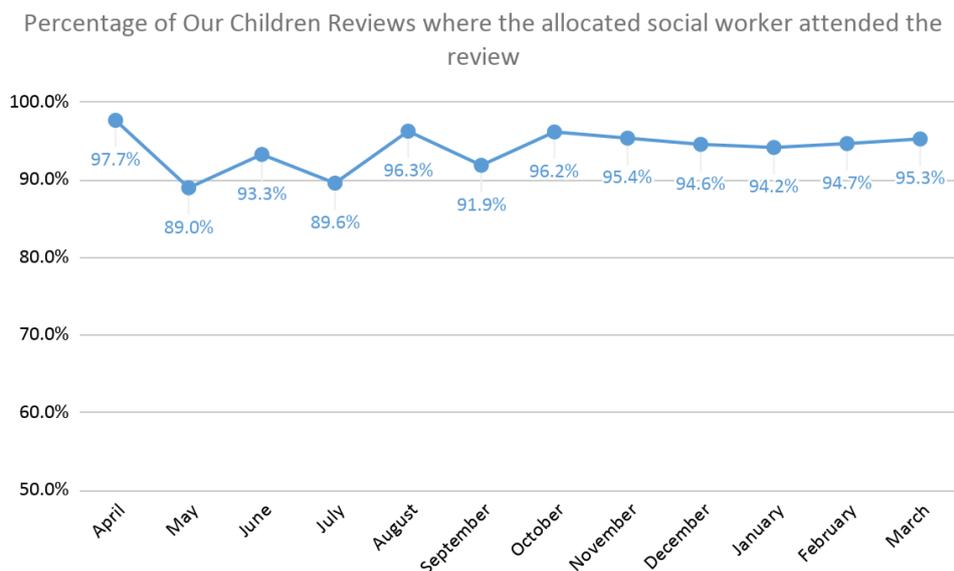
9.3 Parental Participation

We actively encourage parents to engage in the review process, wherever appropriate, as it is important to children that parent(s) can share an understanding of their child's journey and demonstrate a level of commitment and loyalty to their child even if living apart. Performance in this area has fallen slightly from 2017/18 when 35.3% of parents attended their child's review. In 2018/19 the proportion was 34.5%. As part of their over views, IROs strive to ensure appropriate challenge is made regarding efforts to identify the whereabouts of parents who are no longer in touch with social work services. IROs will offer to meet separately or call parents who cannot attend in order to capture the parent's views or care plans and arrangements for their child.



9.4 Social Worker Attendance and Reports to Our Children Reviews

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



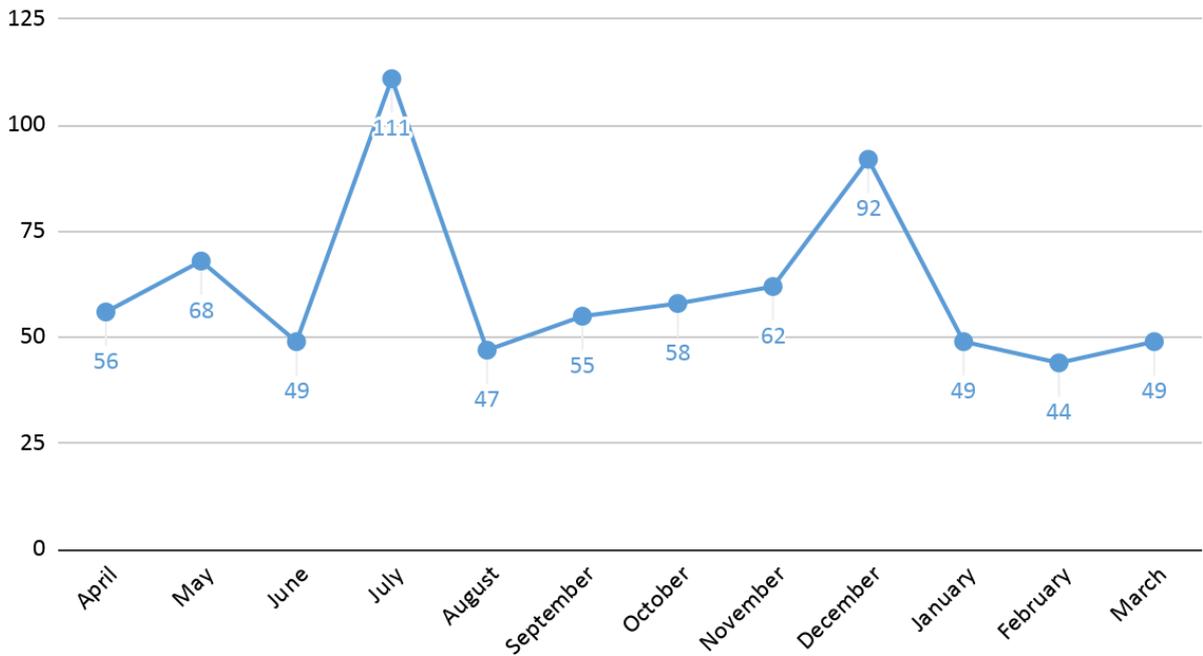
10. Dispute Resolutions

The IRO has a statutory duty under the Children Act 1989, 25B (1) to ensure practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children and Young People are consistent with their individual needs and welfare and that the local authority is fulfilling its legal responsibilities towards the children.

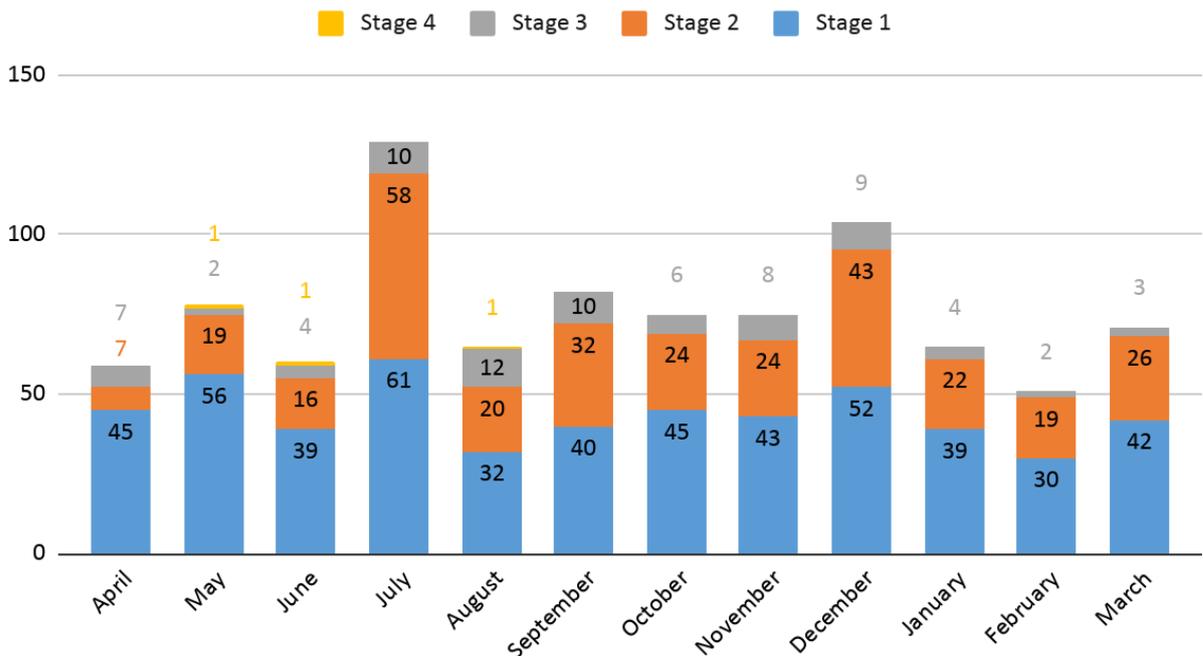
In accordance to the IRO's Handbook, escalations are vital to quality assure the overall effectiveness of services to our children and young people. Escalations can result from issues, actions or questions that the IRO has raised within the review process but have not been addressed.

The IROs engage with colleagues across Social Work teams to resolve issues at the earliest opportunity and in a timely manner informally wherever possible. Where there has been no timely response 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 IRO handbook guidance.

Number of Dispute Resolutions relating to Our Children started each month



Number of Dispute Resolutions relating to Our Children by Stage and month



The overall number of disputes is showing a reduction towards the year end. The second graph gives the data on how many dispute resolutions have been completed in the month at each stage of the process. The data demonstrates that the service is responsive to the dispute and escalation protocol, with the vast majority of disputes raised by the SIU reaching a satisfactory resolution at stage 1 and 2 of the process. In addition no disputes reached stage 5 of the dispute process (Strategic Lead for Safeguarding to Strategic Director for Children's Services).

The key themes for 2018/19 in relation to dispute resolution relate to attendance at reviews, quality of recording and the progression of children's care plans. The themes from disputes have been fully considered by the service and reflect the priorities that have been set for 2019/20. These include permanence planning for children and quality of practice:

- With regard to planning for permanence, a revised framework was implemented in October 2018 - *Our Manchester, Our Children - Securing Permanence: Policy, Procedure and Practice*, with a strategy to address 4 key areas:
 1. **Creating a robust performance information structure;**
 2. **Tracking Individual cases;**
 3. **Redesigning work processes, procedures and guidance in order to support improved practice;**
 4. **Ensuring that the skills and knowledge of the workforce support robust planning for children.**

- In relation to quality of practice the Quality Assurance Framework has been fully revised and implemented in September 2019 which focuses on driving quality social work practice across Children's Social Care, Early Help and Youth Justice Services. The SIU play a key role in the new framework with newly aligned and dedicated links to the localities. The aim of this is to strengthen and support the drive on practice improvement.

11. WORKING WITH PARTNER AGENCIES

Quarterly meetings continue to take place with our colleagues in health who are responsible for ensuring good health outcomes for Our Children and Young People and we also have strong links with the 'Virtual School', CAFCASS and Youth Justice who attend our IRO team meetings to work together and drive up practice standards.

We continue to drive the ePEP tool, which has been the vehicle through which the Virtual School has sought the views of Our Children and Young People about their education, employment and training, their aspirations and the wider aspects of their lives. The team were very pleased that Ofsted acknowledged that PEPs for Our Children and Young People "effectively capture the voice of the child". The Virtual School's aspiration for the use of the ePEP system has always been that we are not only able to ensure that the views of individual young people are heard and responded to but also that we are able to collate, analyse and consider the collective views of all of Our Children and Young People and to identify education and wider service improvement requirements arising from them.

In regards to other key partners we have developed a closer working relationship with CAFCASS over the last 2 years. There is a shared commitment to ensure that IROs and Children's Guardians develop productive working relationships to ensure the best outcomes for children. CAFCASS will continue to be invited to Service Development Days and Team Meetings. CAFCASS attended the June 2018 Service Development Day. The aim is to maintain twice yearly direct contact between the two services. As a result we now have oversight of the Supervision orders for the 12 months that provides an independent oversight to effectiveness of the order.

Agencies are regularly invited to the IRO Team meetings. In 2018 -19 attendees from Barnardos, the Virtual School, Health, Legal and Adoption Courts were some of the agencies invited.

The IROs and their managers attend and contribute to the following multi agency meetings:

- Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The Virtual School Board.
- Missing from Home Panels.
- Voice and Influence sub group.
- North West Regional IRO meetings.
- Mind Of My Own Implementation Group meetings.
- Permanence Tracking Meetings for each district of Manchester

12. IRO Impact in 2018 / 2019.

In 2018/2019 we have continued to strive to deliver a high quality service to Our Children. We have achieved the following:



Stable workforce

We have been fortunate in the IRO service that we have had little movement amongst staffing over the last twelve months and this has been a trend of the previous years. The IRO in 2018/2019 have worked within the statutory guidelines for caseloads. This has allowed IROs to invest in visiting the children and ensuring that they are engaged in their reviews.



Successfully continue to drive a child friendly review process, which includes minutes being written to the child and reflects the child or young person's understanding.

We have worked with our partners to ensure that the review meetings are focused on and celebrate the progress and success of our children. IROs have recorded the meeting details as a personal letter to the child to increase their understanding of their care plans. Our children have told us that they enjoy receiving these letters and have a better understanding of what is going on in their lives.



A high percentage of children participate before and during their care planning review meetings.

IROs have encouraged young people to give their opinion about how their care plan is meeting their needs through a range of methods. We strive to have face to face conversations with their IRO visiting. Where young people choose to communicate in other ways, we have offered online feedback, telephone discussions about their care plan and /or they complete their 'have your say booklet'. We use strength based conversations with children to build confidence to be able to

attend or co -chair reviews.



Our Children Reviews are timely.

We have developed our communication with social work teams to ensure that we are aware of children who have become looked after are known to us within 24 hours and an IRO can be allocated to arrange their reviews in advance of an electronic notification. This ensures we have more time to consult with children about their own agenda and arrangements for their meeting. Our centralised tracking system for all reviews, through business support, will alert IROs and managers when meetings are due.



IRO contribution to Permanence planning for children has improved.

This means that IROs have the opportunity to share their views in the progress of permanence plans for our children directly with Service Leads who chair the tracking meetings in their area. In addition to dispute resolutions, this is an early opportunity to highlight where any drift or delay has been identified, or IROs wish to offer challenge to local authority planning.



Mind of My Own has been implemented and used by Independent Reviewing Officers to engage with children and young people.

IROs have encouraged our young people to engage in this form of communication so that they can give feedback to their social worker or IRO using technology. IROs also routinely use the app with the young person to build confidence and model its use.



The Have Your Say Booklet has been updated this year and is strength based.

In consultation with our young people, we have redesigned our Have your say booklets to make them easier to read with questions that the young people felt were most important to them in each area of their lives, including where they live, school, health and visits to family. We have adopted language preferred by the young people to describe their living arrangements and care plans.

13. KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2019/2020

In 2019/2020 we will continue to work relentlessly in ensuring 'Our Children' experiences of being looked after is positive and that they are healthy, happy, safe and successful. The Safeguarding

Improvement Unit should use their expertise to ensure that children and young people's plans are smart and thrive to achieve positive outcomes.

<p>Our Goals - What Good Looks like - Practice Improvement Approach</p> <p>In early 2019 we have driven the “Golden Threads” as the vehicle to provide a clear focus on the key standards for improving the quality of practice in getting to Good. The Golden Threads will become embedded into the revised Quality Assurance Framework throughout 2019/2020 and the foundation for practice improvement. The Golden Threads are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good Quality Assessments - Good Quality Plans - Impact chronology supports decision making - Good management oversight - Voice and experience of child / young person evident throughout - Evidence of strong engagement with parents, family and carers throughout our involvement. <p>We promise as IROs that we will share our expertise to demonstrate what good looks like using the Golden Threads as a vehicle.</p> <p>We will ensure that the are timely and thrive to get 90% of recommendations on the child’s file within 5 days of their review. We will improve the % of review minutes sent out within 20 working days.</p>	<p>What we will Do</p> <p>We will ensure that all children have up to date good quality assessments that influence the care plans. When this is not evident we will provide appropriate support and challenge using the expertise of the IRO to drive practice improvement.</p> <p>We will provide scrutiny of care plans by providing regular oversight to ensure they focus on ensuring children’s holistic needs are being met and permanence is achieved. This will be strengthened by the engagement of the monthly audits.</p> <p>We will contribute to the Quality Assurance Framework and participate in monthly audits and the feedback from the audits to influence practice.</p> <p>We will bring to the attention through strong links with localities examples of good and poor practice through regular bio-monthly locality quality of practice meetings.</p> <p>We will continue to utilise the dispute resolution process to drive better outcomes for children and young people. This includes driving informal resolutions on key practice themes.</p> <p>Continue to work within a strength based model - Signs of Safety.</p> <p>We are committed to ensuring that the IRO caseloads remain within the standards set out in the IRO handbook to ensure effective work.</p> <p>We will ensure our IT systems support IROs to communicate with children, carers, parents and professionals in a timely way following a review.</p>
<p>How will we evidence success / Impact</p> <p>Throughout 2019/2020 we hope to see better quality assessments are children and young people's case records that demonstrate the impact of the Social Care intervention on improving their outcomes.</p>	

We hope by engaging in the Quality Assurance Framework we can learn from audits to influence improved practice that clearly articulates the child's voice and lived experience.

Our Goals - Strengthening participation

We will look in 2019/2020 to engage children and young people more creatively to participate and/or chair their own reviews. This includes ensuring children and young people feel they are being listened too.

We aim to improve the timeliness of Children's Meetings to 98% in timescale.

To increase the percentage of Our Children and Young People seen by their IRO within 6 weeks of their meeting to 80%.

We will work at increasing the number of parents engaging in children's reviews

We will engage better children and young people in participating in the delivery of the services.

What we will Do

The IROs will continue to visit all children allocated to them before their reviews and ask them to set the agenda, think about attendees and venue. By building supportive relationships and trust this will assist children and young people to feel more confident in co-chairing.

The IROs and managers will continue to support young people to chair their 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.

To continue to champion Mind Of My Own with Our Children and Young People and professionals.

To ensure that Our Children and Young People are routinely offered an advocate and an Independent Visitor.

We will continue to promote the engagement of parents in the child's meeting by making contact prior to the meeting and/or after the meeting.

In 2019/2020 we will invite children and young people to be involved in decision making around service delivery by involving them in recruitment and learning and development of IROs.

How will we evidence success / Impact

Through the quality assurance framework, Safeguarding Improvement Unit has a greater role in the auditing of children's records city wide. We aim to be able to demonstrate an increase in the number of children who attend their reviews and show how the wishes and feelings of our young people is being taken into account and able to influence their plans. We will work with NYAS to ensure children are getting the right support at the right times in their lives and gain feedback on the service offered.

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<p>Our Goal - Actively seeking Feedback</p> <p>We will invest further in 2019/2020 to utilise varying tool for obtaining feedback starting with articulating the service offer to children, young people, parents and carers so that they feel invested in the service and know what they are providing feedback on. We will use this information to learn about the impact we have had on improving outcomes for children & young people and this will feed into improving service delivery.</p> <p>We will concentrate on how we reach out to parents who have reduced or ceased their involvement with the social work service. To encourage them to continue to take an active part in planning for their child.</p>	<p>What we will Do</p> <p>To develop feedback forms for parents to identify and address barriers to their attendance.</p> <p>To develop feedback forms for professionals who attend children’s reviews.</p> <p>To collate the information on the feedback from our children and young people about their Independent Reviewing Officer, their meeting and evidence changes in practice as a result.</p> <p>Will we drive Mind of my Own as an app to capture ‘How did the meeting go’, which provides a great opportunity to capture the views post meeting. It asks young people questions such as how they feel the meeting went, if they understood everything that was said, if they want anyone to re-explain anything from the meeting again.</p> <p>We will find creative ways to engage with parents prior and after the review, such as sending emails / text messages asking for comments and feedback.</p>
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<p>How will we evidence success / Impact</p> <p>The service we deliver will be delivered with a greater insight into the experience of children, young people, parents and carers and that will see better engagement throughout the involvement with the unit.</p>	
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Our Goal - Promoting Stability	What we will Do
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<p>We will promote the importance of placement stability as being critical for the emotional wellbeing of Our Children and Young People'. We will drive the importance of Our Children build relationships and investing in their future through secure placements and investment in their local community.</p>	<p>We will provide training in regards to Adverse Childhood Experience for all IROs to develop their knowledge on the effects of ACE.</p> <p>IROs scrutinise plans and arrangements for foster carer support at reviews to promote access to training for foster carers to build ongoing stability.</p> <p>As part of IRO scrutiny we will ensure that the right placement is identified for the child in the first instance through early planning and ensure children's rights to be part of that process and meet with potential carers is promoted.</p>
<p>How will we evidence success / Impact</p> <p>Children will remain in settled and secure placement with less disruption.</p>	

<p>Our Goal - Pathway Plans driving ambition</p> <p>We aim to focus on strengthening our oversight of Pathways Plans. We know that Pathway Needs Assessment and Plans assist young people to move successfully into independence and we will make this a priority for 2019/2020 to improve the quality of pathway plans.</p>	<p>What we will do</p> <p>The IROs will ensure through regular oversight that the Pathway Needs Assessment are completed with the young people and provide an analysis of the young person's education journey, including EHCP, successes, ambitions, predictions and desired outcomes.</p> <p>The IROs will oversee the plan at every review to ensure there are clear goals for young people, specific to continuing success or improving outcomes; whilst realising goals and ambitions.</p> <p>IROs can decide to hold a further post 18 Pathway plan review when they are not satisfied that plans and arrangements are secure enough to meet the young person's needs.</p>
<p>How will we evidence success / Impact</p> <p>IROs will consistently scrutinise Pathway plans at each care plan review for young people over 16yrs. We will see young person contributing to their plan and owning the short and long term goals. This means that young people will be confident citizens when turning 18 and be successful in independence.</p>	



<p>Our Goal - Permanence Practice Promise</p> <p>We promise in 2019/2020 we will drive the Our Manchester Permanence Practice promise of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Permanence from Day 1● Least Interventionist Approach● Purposeful drive at pace to ensure plans are in place● Everyone’s responsibility to get it right - working collaboratively	<p>What we will Do</p> <p>We will continue to ensure that children have their permanence plan identified by their second review and that it is robust with a contingency plan in place. We will have a relentless focus to ensure there is a clear permanence plan evidenced.</p> <p>We will work closely with the Social Work teams to ensure that through high challenge and high support coaching for better outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>Ensure that we continue to have a focus on “Our Promise” for securing permanence.</p> <p>We will continue to improve the IRO footprint on unaccompanied asylum seeking children’s file and evidence more frequent overview between meetings.</p>
<p>How will we evidence success / Impact</p> <p>Children will achieve a timely permanency plan so that they are happy, healthy, safe and successful in life.</p>	

REFERENCES / Key Documents for further reading

IRO handbook: statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked children, Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2010 (pp 9–12); www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/a0065612/independent-reviewing-officers-iros

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