

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 9 October 2018

**Subject:** Draft Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2017 - 2018

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

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**Summary**

The purpose of this report is to introduce the draft Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2017 - 2018. The report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2017 and the 31 March 2018.

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

This report draws on evidence from the views of children and young people, carers, and professionals from the local authority and from partner agencies.

**Recommendations**

Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee are asked to review and consider the content of the report.

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**Wards Affected:** N/A

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**Alignment to the Our Manchester Strategy Outcomes (if applicable)**

<b>Manchester Strategy outcomes</b>	<b>Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS</b>
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Effective Children's Social Care Services are critical to ensuring the most vulnerable citizens are able to connect and support the drive towards a thriving and sustainable City
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Ensuring the most vulnerable in our society are given the opportunity to access and achieve in the City is supported by the delivery of a strong and cohesive social care system
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our	Improving social care services helps build the resilience children and families need to achieve their potential and be integrated into their

communities	communities
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Improving outcomes for the children's and families across the City, helps build and develop whole communities and increases the livability of the City
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Successful services support successful families who are able to deliver continuing growth in the City

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

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2017 - 2018

# **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

## **Annual Report 2017-18**

**Linda Evans**  
**Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding**  
**30th June 2018**

**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. Foreword

This annual report provides an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018.

This report evaluates practice, plans and arrangement for looked after children, now known as 'Our Children and Young People' 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 outstanding.

Manchester City Council and its partners continue to be committed to its promise 'Our Children' whether they are currently 'looked after' or have left care in the past year. 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:

***'Well done to everyone that has helped us on this improvement journey and is making sure we get things right for our children and young people and that they have happy, healthy successful lives.'***

***'There is good evidence that the voice of our children and young people is being heard by Independent Reviewing Officers. We are getting some really good feedback from children and young people about the use of MOMO, which was introduced by Children's Services in late 2017. Children and young people are telling us when things are not going right and also telling us when we are getting things right. However, there is still some work to do. Independent Reviewing Officers are in the right place to support Foster carers and other professionals working directly with children to use MOMO and to ensure our children and young people continue to get their voices heard.'***

***Macauley Parr*** Lead for Voice and influence Subgroup of Our children and Young People in Manchester (2017-18)

The report will be presented to the Children's 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 2016/2017 annual report are referenced throughout this report.

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

*\*Please note that data provided in this report for 2017/18 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 2018.*

## **2. SERVICE AND LEGAL CONTEXT**

### **2.1 The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer**

The primary task of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to ensure that the care plan for a child cared for by the local authority fully reflects the child's needs, ensures that the child's 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 towards the child. As corporate parents each local authority should ensure that they act for the children they look after as a responsible and conscientious parent.

The appointment by local authorities of an Independent Reviewing Officer is a statutory requirement. The Children and Young Persons 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.

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 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. [1]

The Independent Reviewing Officer 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 plans, arrangements and the practice of the local authority. The strategic lead Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding for the service reports directly to the Strategic 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 'Our Children'.

Whilst undertaking their statutory duties the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit are also fully committed to adhering to and embedding the 'Our Manchester' principles.

- We work together

- We're proud and passionate about Manchester
- We take time to listen
- We 'own it' and were not afraid to try new things.

Manchester Children's Services is committed to achieving a fully effective Independent Reviewing Officer service that is outstanding. We continue to be successful in creating a culture and climate within the local authority that values the Independent Reviewing Officer service and professionals across Children's Services and our partner agencies encourage and expect Independent Reviewing Officers to offer robust scrutiny, be child-centred and to offer challenge as and when required.

Independent Reviewing Officers are respected and 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, including the provision of independent legal advice. The dispute resolution protocol is embedded and works effectively, from informal conversations to the escalation of cases to senior management and CAFCASS if necessary. Most importantly there is clear 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 the Independent Reviewing Officer service is underpinned by high aspirations for Manchester's children, young people and families as set out in the Children and Young People Plan 2016 - 2019, 'Our Manchester, Our Children 2016 - 2019' which is underpinned by key behaviour and principles; none more than delivering services that are fiercely child-centred and by having high aspirations for children, young people and families in Manchester.

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:

- 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.

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 2017/2018 that continued to provide 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.

In the reporting period Manchester had 18 full time Independent Reviewing Officers who are managed by two Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers. The Independent Reviewing Officers in Manchester have dedicated roles to review children's care plans. They do not undertake a dual role in child protection conferencing.

The Independent Reviewing Officer team remained relatively stable during 2017/2018. Consistency and continuity of service has been offered to our children and young people. One manager and two Independent Reviewing Officers left the service during the year. Another Independent Reviewing Officer was successfully promoted to the vacant manager post. One post was moved from the Independent Reviewing Officer Team to support the Child Protection Conference Chairs and the Designated Officer Service. This decision was taken following the reduction in the number of looked after children and young people. Our Children and young people in the first 6 months of the year. A small number of agency staff have been engaged to cover during periods of recruitment or staff sickness. Reducing the change in Independent Reviewing Officers for our children and young people by retaining a skilled and stable workforce continues to be a priority.

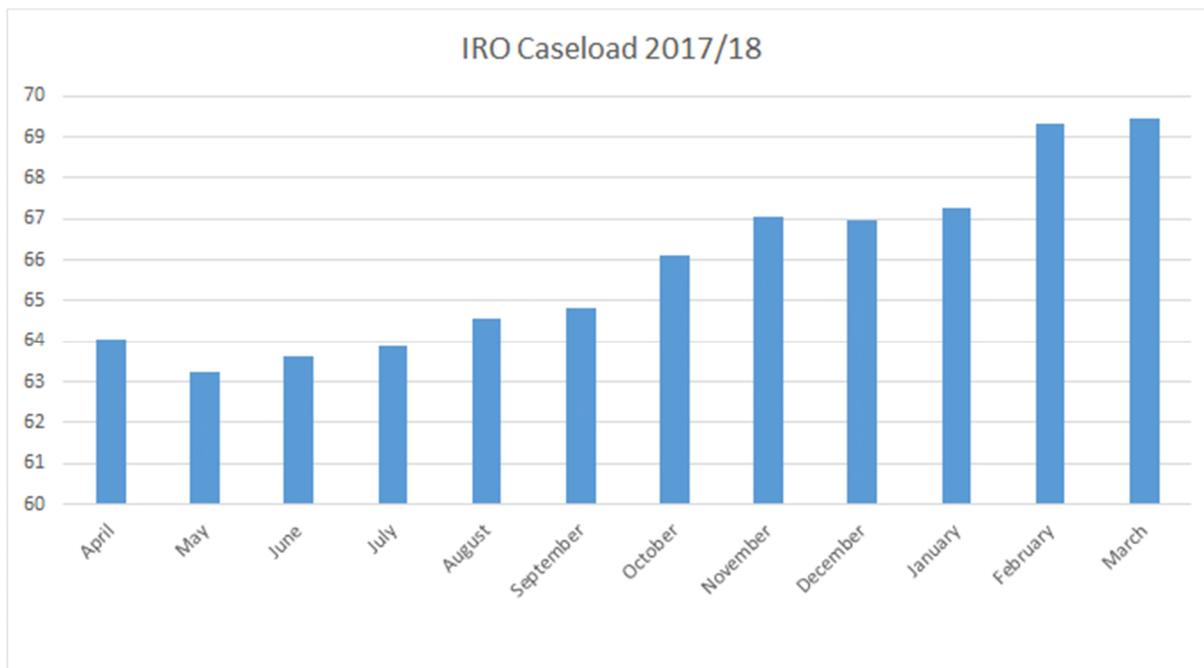
Due to the increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) two Independent Reviewing Officers now offer a specialist service to this specific group of children.

It is also good to note that all of the Independent Reviewing Officer posts were permanently filled, which will increase stability moving forward and is also an indication that the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit is held in high regard by colleagues within the authority and by experienced professionals who are now applying to come and work in Manchester.

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 of varying ages and from different ethnic backgrounds. This reflects the diversity of our children and young people in Manchester.

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

Service resourcing throughout the year has 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 was 67, this reduced to 66 in 2017/18.



Manchester is committed to caseload levels remaining under 70 per Independent Reviewing Officer to offer them the time and space to carry out their role fully. This is critical when considering historical concerns (Ofsted Inspection Report 2014) that Independent Reviewing Officers did not have sufficient oversight or challenge appropriately when the local authority practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children were poor and not in children's best interests.

In October 2017, Ofsted undertook a re-inspection of services for 'Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children looked after and Care Leavers'. The Report was published on the 21st December 2017.

***"Services for children in Manchester are no longer inadequate. They now require improvement to be good". (Ofsted Inspection Report 2017, page 2)***

***"The Independent reviewing service is strong. IROs reduced caseloads now enable them to work effectively across the full range of their responsibilities. Their influence is evident throughout all stages of case planning, including during care proceedings. The right people are actively involved in timely and robust statutory review meetings. Between reviews, IROs work hard to get to know children, who participate well in the planning for their futures". (Ofsted Inspection Report 2017, page 19).***

The IROs and managers appreciated this positive feedback from Ofsted and it is testament to the hard work and dedication of the Independent Reviewing Officers and managers over the last 3 years. The momentum to improve further and deliver an outstanding service is very strong.

## **2.5 Supervision, Observation and Appraisal**

### **2.5.1 Supervision**

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, oversight and support to Independent Reviewing Officers is of the highest standard.

Supervision is offered to Independent Reviewing Officers on a monthly basis. In 2017/2018, the monthly average was 79.6%. This reflects a small drop in performance when compared to last year's figure of 82% mainly due to a manager leaving and a period of sickness.

Independent Reviewing Officer managers are now using supervision pro formas which reflect 'Signs of Safety', to ensure the framework continues to be embedded across the service.

### **2.5.2 Appraisal - About You**

In 2017/2018 15 of the 18 (83.3%) Independent Reviewing Officers had an annual appraisal which considered individual strengths, areas for development and learning needs. This reflects a drop in performance from last year where 17 of the 18 (94.4%) staff had an appraisal mainly due to a manager leaving and a period of sickness. The new Corporate 'About You' proforma was used.

### **2.5.3 Observation**

18 out of 20 staff members were observed chairing our children and young peoples reviews meetings within the period. This data was not provided in last year's report. The emerging themes are summarised below.

What is working well?

- There is evidence of Independent Reviewing Officers visiting children before their meetings, discussing the venue, agenda and attendees. One young person was observed co-chairing her meeting.
- There is good evidence of use of 'Signs of Safety' in the meetings, promoting the use of simple language and less jargon.
- There was some robust scrutiny of the quality of assessments and plans for children.
- There was evidence of challenge in respect of contact arrangements, missing Health Assessments, Personal Education Plans and Social Work Reports.
- There was strong evidence of good Independent Reviewing Officers relationships with children, families and involved professionals.
- There was evidence of Independent Reviewing Officers ensuring there are contingency plans for young people.

What are we worried about?

- Independent Reviewing Officers need to ensure their visits to children are recorded in a timely way. They need to evidence their oversight and preparation for the meeting.
- In some cases, parents were not invited to the meeting and the reason for this was not explored by the Independent Reviewing Officer.
- The 'Mind of My Own' App was not always promoted routinely via the Independent Reviewing Officer visits and 'Our Children' meetings.
- Recommendations were not always SMART.

What needs to happen?

- The Service needs to address the worries highlighted in the themes above in the next 12 months.
- The Service needs to ensure that themed meetings are promoted and reflect the child's interests.
- The Independent Reviewing Officers need to continue to engage our children and young people in their meetings as their input is critical. It is clear that meetings where children and young people have not been involved or engaged are less child focussed and this is something we need to work on going forward.

The outcomes of observations have been discussed with individual Independent Reviewing Officers in supervision and themes will be shared with the team with the aim of improving practice.

Manager will be required to observe each Independent Reviewing Officer on no less than two occasions during 2018/2019 in accordance with the Quality Assurance Learning and Improvement Framework.

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

A training needs analysis informed by Independent Reviewing Officer self-evaluation, annual appraisals, statutory and local requirements, the Local Government Association Peer Review and OFSTED recommendations.

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. 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.

On 18th May 2017, Manchester hosted the North West Independent Reviewing Officer Conference. Independent Reviewing Officers from all over the North West and representatives from CAFCASS attended. The speakers included the Director of Research in Practice, Judge Newton and young people themselves. There were also workshops led by Adoption Counts (Regional Adoption Agency), Coram Voice (Children's Rights Service) and our young people.

Service development days have taken place held in May 2017, September 2017 and January 2018. These days have enabled staff members from across the service to contribute to key service developments. Guest speakers have included legal services, CAFCASS, Prevent Officers (WRAP training) and the Chair of the Voice and Influence group delivered autism training. Independent Reviewing Officers have contributed to and engaged well in development days that have focussed on discussing and agreeing service development plans for 2018-19.

During 2017/2018 three of our experienced Independent Reviewing Officers undertook and passed an accredited Advanced Practice for Independent Reviewing Officers course delivered by Edgehill University. We now have 5 Independent Reviewing Officers who have successfully completed the course. The accredited course awards 20 credits at Masters Level.

The course module learning is as follows:

- Critically analyse the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer 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 Independent Reviewing Officers role for looked after children to identify strengths and areas and strategies for effective professional development.

A further two members of staff are currently undertaking the course and are due to complete in July 2018. Independent Reviewing Officers 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 will take part in Phase 1 of the National Assessment and Accreditation system (NAAS).

Signs of Safety, Practice Leads continue to be offered regular development sessions focussed on embedding the model into practice.

## **2.7 Independent Legal Advice**

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 2017/2018 Independent Reviewing Officers contacted Wigan on 20 occasions. The reason for seeking independent legal advice included:

- Issues related to children remanded to custody.
- How to assist a child to make a complaint about his solicitor.
- The use of Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act.
- Placement with Parents Regulations.
- Interim Care Orders.
- Immigration issues.
- Overseas adoption.

## **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.

The Independent Reviewing Officer 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.

Independent Reviewing Officers have an important role to play in championing and ensuring Manchester City Council and its partners are fulfilling the Promise that it made to our children and young people. (See 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 voices are consistently heard and influence, practice plans and arrangements for them, service development and improvement.
- Creating the conditions in which strong positive relationships can be developed between the Independent Reviewing Officer and our children and young people.
- Exploring more creative ways in which the child or young person can participate in care planning and reviews, including the use of MOMO.
- Developing timely plans for permanence, 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, ensuring 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 is met.
- Offering 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 *The voice of 'Our Children'***

The Independent Reviewing Officer 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 2017/2018 positive steps continued to be made and practice embedded to ensure we continue to have a service which listens effectively to the voice of children and young people and responds to the issues raised. 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 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 and contact with young people prior to reviews.
- Engagement in their 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.
- MOMO (Mind of My Own).

### **3.2 Corporate Parenting Panel**

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. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council.

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.
- Understand children and young people make mistakes and offers guidance and support.

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.

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.

During 2017-2018 our children and young people have influenced changes in a number of key area:

- They asked for the MOMO (Mind of My Own) App and they got it.
- They helped to plan the first North West Regional Conference for Children in Care.

- Youthforia. They have attended the regional youth council events and influenced which topics go onto the National Make Your Mark Ballot
- Social Worker's Mobiles Policy. They raised the issues and now every young person has their social worker's work mobile phone number.

In March 2018 at a youth person led corporate parenting panel, they highlighted a number of issues surrounding the stigma of being in care. One of the issues related to words commonly used by professionals when talking about cared for or care experienced young people. They identified five key terms; Contact, Placement, LAC, Care Leavers and Hard to Reach. Young people and corporate parents were asked to consider alternative words that could be used. The top five words voted for were; family time instead of contact, home instead of placement, our children and young people instead of Looked After Children, LAC or Care Leavers and Unsuitably supported instead of hard to reach. The Director of Children's Services has asked staff across children and education services and partner agencies to use these alternative words in their day to day work. The young people signed off the Director's letter sent out to all partner agencies informing them of the new words, and we are already seeing them being put into practice.

Through their direct influence corporate parents from across Manchester have made the following promises:

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Promise</b>
<b>Youth Justice Service</b>	Set up a writers workshop on the use of 'professional jargon' in court reports. Making better use of everyday language to describe a young person's care experience.
<b>Barnardo's</b>	Support The Change Group to fight stigma and the challenges this causing them in their lives. Help the change group to be a real force of change. Don't label Treat young people as individuals Use the new words
<b>Coram Voice</b>	Hold people to account when young people are not viewed as individuals
<b>Health</b>	Listen to children and young people and promote their views. Specialised lac nursing team will not label care leavers and use these new words
<b>Manchester Foster Care Association</b>	To make sure all carers at training know the impact of young people's experience of care
<b>Deputy Director Children's Service</b>	Mind my language, understanding the impact of labels, using alternative words that better explain things.

<b>Virtual Schools</b>	Promise to use the new terms chosen by the young people at all times. When liaising with professionals refer to 'our children' and young people in order to ensure that they will understand that 'our children' are the same as all of the others they teach/support and records.
<b>Director for Children's Services</b>	Promote plain language across partnerships Use of 'Our Child' to describe a looked after child Ask for forgiveness when I don't and explain why
<b>Manchester Foundation Trust</b>	Use the words/labels that young people prefer us to use
<b>Elected Members</b>	To use the language young people prefer us to use
<b>Engagement Team</b>	To use some of the terms when in conversation with others and in written reports

A member of 'The Group' chairs the Voice and Influence Group, which is attended by key partner agencies from across Manchester.

'Our Children' have also been involved in a number of other events:

- 'Take Over' Day led by the Virtual School and the Head of Safeguarding 'Our Children' took over key roles within Manchester City Council, including Director and Head of Safeguarding.
- The Virtual School also organised the 'Our Children' Achievement Awards.
- Interviewing new staff and influenced key appointments such as Head of 'Looked After' Children and Head of Localities.
- Commissioning of the new Children's Rights Service, the National Youth Advocacy Service.
- The Bright Spots Survey last year resulted in "We will Statements" which were disseminated across Children's Services.

### **3.3 MOMO (Mind of My Own)**

In November 2017 Manchester Children's Services launched Mind Of My Own. This is a mobile app which allows children and young people to communicate with their Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer online. They can express any worries, achievements, give feedback on meetings among other options. The launch has been a great success with Manchester having been nominated for an award at the MOMO Annual Conference for the 'Swiftest Implementation'. There are currently 362 staff and 151 children have signed up to MOMO. 134 documents have been sent by children and young people to their Social Worker or IRO. 126 documents have been created by workers alongside children and young people to capture their views. The documents are uploaded on Micare. In 2017 -18, 72 forms were completed using the app for 'Our Children' reviews.

Our Children have been key in the promotion of the MOMO App at staff engagement events, delivering information to over 200 people in total, and will continue to be involved in the embedding the sign up and use of the App across Children's Services.

Through the use of MOMO we know:

- Respondents are from across a wide age range.
- The majority of respondents, 53 were in 'our' care, 13 lived at home, 3 were Care Leavers and the remaining did not respond.
- 148 felt excited, happy, enthusiastic, calm, hopeful, fine, cool and okay as they prepared for their review.
- 43 felt unhappy, confused, anxious, angry, unsure, ignored, nervous, stressed, annoyed and not bothered.
- 196 told us they were happy where they live, it was 'okay', 'it suits me', were settled, supported they 'loved it, liked it', were fine and safe. It was 'cool' or 'super'. 1 said they were 'staying put'. 13 said they were unhappy, felt unsafe, not supported, it didn't suit them or in 1 case they had bad neighbours.
- When asked what was good in life they said; My friends (37), Family contact (47), Where I live (36), My School (34), My pets (27), My health (26), My money (14), My hobbies (13), Sport (13), Something I have achieved (10), How I feel (9), A place I go (8) and My care plan (7).
- When asked what was 'Not Good in Life' they stated; My care plan (8), Where I live (10), Someone else (6), Family contact (17), My school (6), My money (4), How I feel (6), My friends (3), My health (1) and My hobbies (2).

As MOMO becomes more embedded in our everyday work the IRO's and IRO Managers need to seek assurance that the feedback from 'Our Children' is being listened to, heard and acted upon.

### **3.4 IRO Survey**

In May 2018 a survey was sent out to 579 of 'Our Children' aged between 11 and 16 years. 92 (16%) responses were received. The survey provided us with the following information about what 'Our Children' think about Independent Reviewing Officers and their reviews.

- 72.1% of 11-16 years olds surveyed told us that they enjoyed attending their reviews (score of 5 or more).
- 81.4% said that they felt comfortable in their review (score of 5 or more).
- 82.7% of children advised they were given the opportunity to have their say in reviews.
- 74.4% said they knew what had been agreed at their review and 76% said these had been done.
- 59.3% stated they received a written copy of the record of their meeting.
- 95.2% stated that their Independent Reviewing Officer listened and acted upon what they were being told.
- 91.9% rated their most recent review okay, quite good or very good.
- Although 58% had not heard of Signs of Safety, 100% said that their Independent Reviewing Officer asked them 'What they were worried about'

and 97.7% asked them 'What was Working Well' indicating that Signs of Safety is being routinely used in reviews.

- 79.5% did not know what a 'themed review' was, so it is not surprising that 92.2% had not had one.
- 51.7% of children were aware that they could chair their own review, and 14.8% said they had done so.

They also told if they did not attend their reviews, why; what would need to change to help them to attend; what were the characteristics of a good Independent Reviewing Officer. They also designed their own review. The Safeguarding and Improvement will use the information gathered to improve the review process and build upon what children are telling us. The results of this years survey will also be used to inform the questions we formulate next year. For example, comparing what children have stated makes a good Independent Reviewing Officer with their view of their own Independent Reviewing Officer.

### **3.5 Children's Rights**

#### **3.5.1 Advocacy**

Throughout 2017-18 Coram Voice delivered Manchester's Children's Rights Service which included the provision of advocacy and Independent Visitors. They have been providing this service since the 1st 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.

- 283 young people accessed community advocacy services in the year.
- 119 young people self-referred for support.
- 251 young people were allocated advocates. Other accessed support via the helpline.
- 191 allocated cases were closed within the year.
- 79 allocated cases remained open after 31 March 2018
- The age of children where there was the highest number of allocations was 17 years.
- There were slightly more females allocated to the number of males 142 and 126 respectively.

The top 4 issues raised by young people were:

- Request for support at meetings.
- Assistance to make a complaint.
- Concerns about the Social Worker or Personal Advisor.
- Requests to increase opportunities to meet with family and friends.

When the work is completed by the advocates at Coram Voice children and young people have the opportunity to feedback to the Service. These are some of the comments:

*“It’s been good working with you, its built up my confidence. I pay attention in meetings and speak up now”.*

*“Having an advocate changed the situation, it’s nice to have someone on your side”.*

### **3.5.2 Independent Visitors**

The total number of children and young people accessing the Manchester Independent Visitor Service (IV) in 2017/2018 was 57, which is an increase of 5 from last year.

The Manchester Independent Visitor Service was nominated and shortlisted for a Spirit of Manchester Award in 2017. This recognises the service as a ‘Volunteer Involving Organisation of the Year’.

Feedback from children and young people about their Independent Visitor:

*“It’s been good, I’ve loved it. My IV is bubbly and nice. She has visited me when no one else has, even when I’ve moved”.*

*“My IV listens to me. A good thing about having an IV is to get away from my sisters for a while”*

### **3.6 Complaints**

Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility to ensure that children are aware of the complaints procedure in Manchester. As identified in the 2016/2017 report we have continued to monitor complaints in order to improve services.

During 2017/2018, there were 43 formal complaints made by Our Children and Young People which is much higher than last year when there were 27 complaints. 38 of the complaints were made via CORAM VOICE. The themes were:

- Poor Service/Service Failure (25.5%) - the concerns ranged from issues in respect of contact, young person feeling unsupported, delays in acquiring passports, delay in progressing a placement to permanence and delay in change of school.
- Disagreed with a decision (25.5%) - the concerns mainly linked to young people wanting to remain in their current foster placement. In some cases the complaint led to a placement freeze. One young person asked for a contact worker to supervise contact with her mother, another wanted a school move and one young mother objected to the removal of her child.
- Lack of contact/consultation (23%) - the concerns mainly linked to children and young people not feeling listened to by their Social Worker. There was an issue around a reduction in contact and a young person wanting to remain in her placement post 18.
- Funding issues (12%) - the concerns linked to a young person having to leave University due to immigration and funding issues and another was regarding a funding request for clothing and new flooring.

- Dissatisfied with suggested placement move (7%) - the concerns linked to issues around a suggested temporary placement.
- Dissatisfied with current placement (5%) - the concerns related to a young person wanting to move back to Manchester and another young person who wanted to return to his previous foster carer.
- Change of level of service provision (2%) - the concerns linked to the delay in identifying a new placement, issues with school and lack of contact from the Social Worker.

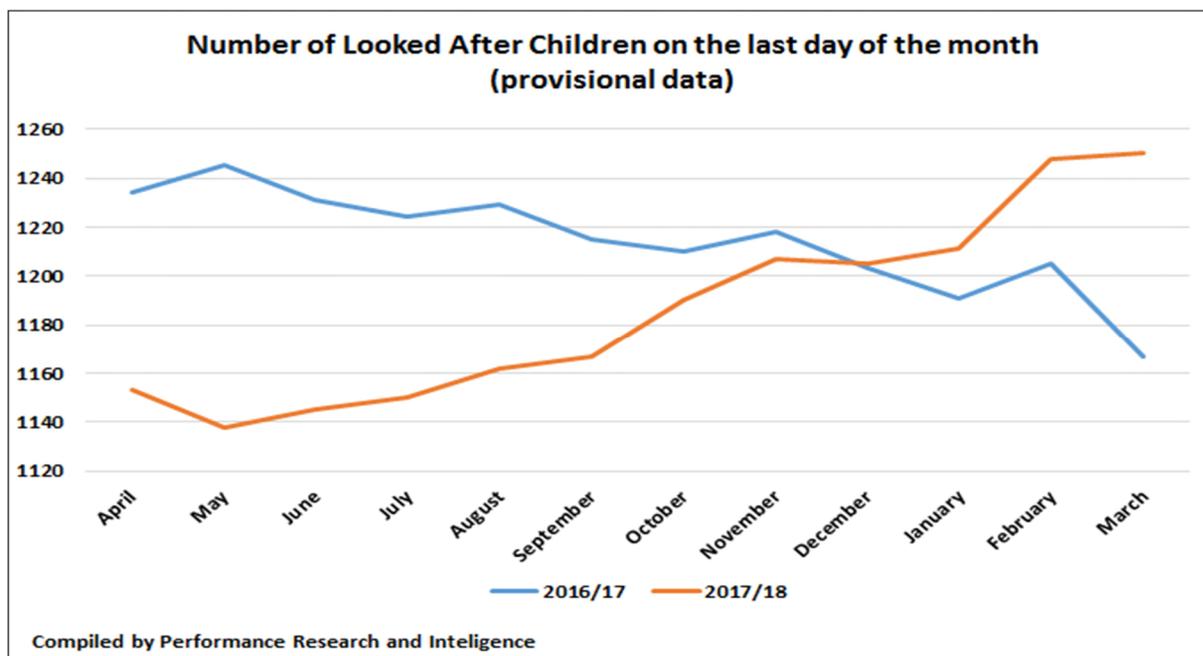
43 of the cases were referred at Stage 1. 2 cases moved to Stage 2 and 1 to Stage 3. These were the issues around a placement move and University funding. 23 of the complaints were not upheld; 15 were upheld and 5 were partially upheld.

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 complaints.

#### **4. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION DATA 1 APRIL 2017 - 31 MARCH 2018**

##### ***4.1 Looked After Children Population***

At 31 March 2018 provisional data indicates that Manchester City Council had responsibility for 1,250 Looked after Children. This represents an increase of 83 children and young people over this financial year and follows a reduction of 70 children and young people in the previous year. The number of Looked after Children in Manchester remains high when compared to statistical comparator rates for 2016/17. The provisional rate of children looked after in March 2018 per 10,000 population was 104 which marks a increase of 7 from last year's confirmed rate. Nationally the number of looked after children is also increasing. The local trend is demonstrated in the diagram below.



There are ongoing challenges that have resulted in a reversal of the downward trend and the current increase in numbers of 'Our Children'. As set out in the report to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 30 January 2018, Manchester recognises that:

We have experienced significant growth in our overall population and that of children and young people in recent years. As part of this overall increase we have an increase in children and young people with additional needs. There is increasing complexity in the issues and needs of children and their families requesting a children's social care service.

There remain high levels of demand for children's social care service - a rate of 1019 referrals per 10,000 population in 2016/17, against statistical neighbour averages of 728, and national of 548. The provisional rate for 2017/18 stands at 1,113 per 10,000.'

The number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has risen from 26 in March 2016 to 66 in March 2018 and now represents 5.3% of the total Looked After Children population.

The report sets out that whilst Children's Services are still aiming to reduce numbers to 1,000, this will take longer to achieve than originally planned due to the profile of children being looked after, an increasing complexity of need and the need to ensure stability of existing children and young people in care.

The focus in services for our children remains on:

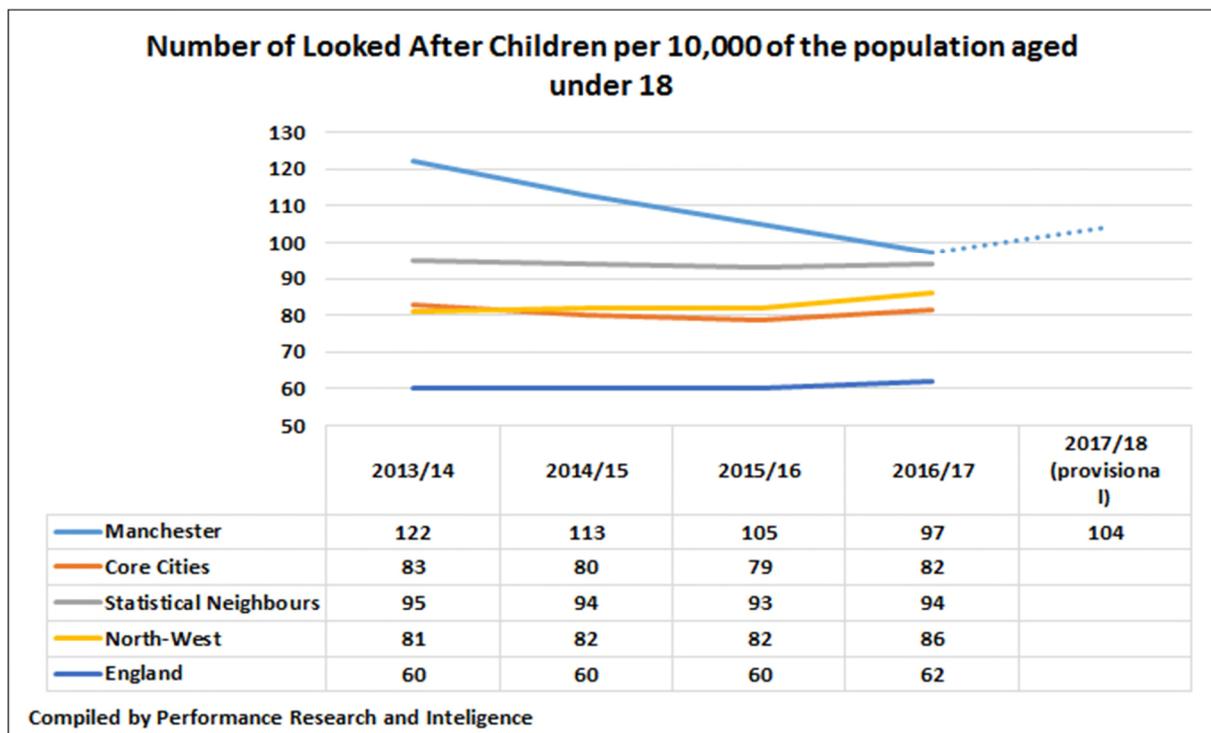
- Ensuring the right help at the right time – reducing complex demand through effective early intervention and prevention.
- Strengthening the 'front door' service via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

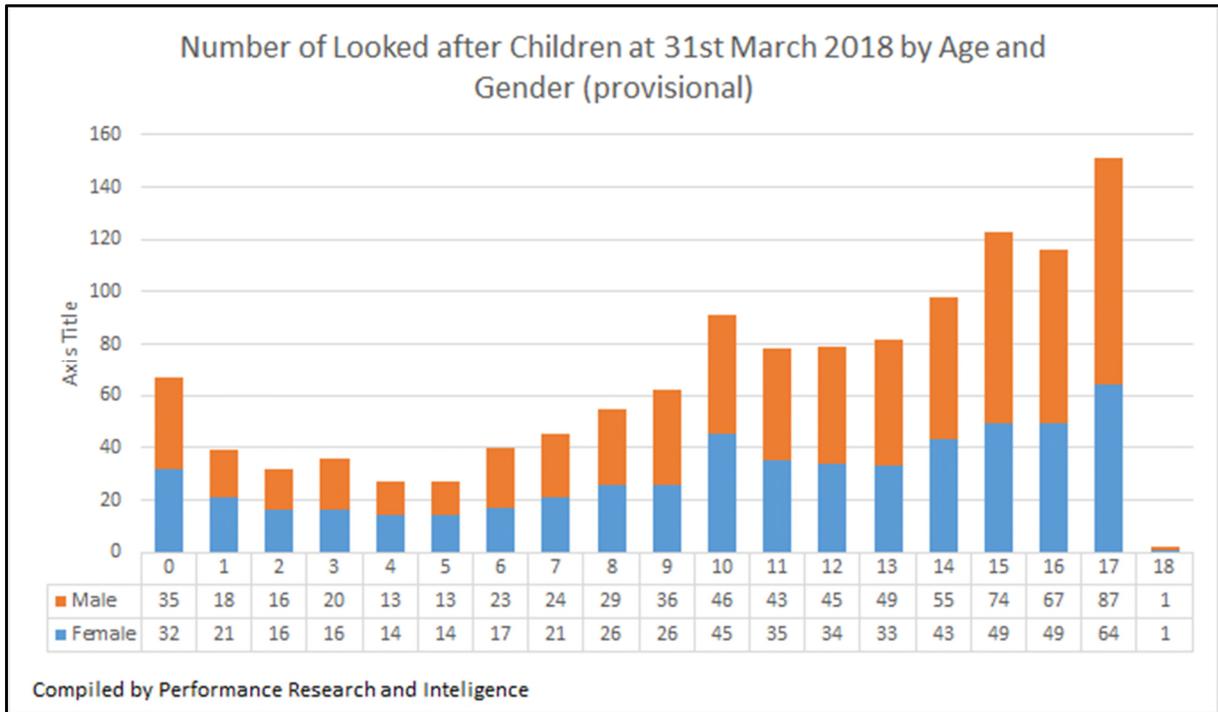
- Continuing work to ensure that children only become accommodated under section 20 where necessary.
- Timely permanence planning.
- Ensuring that children return home when safe and appropriate.
- A continued focus on Special Guardianship Orders within families, which will be achieved through increased confidence in the support and incentives offered.
- Work to convert settled and long term foster placements to achieve Special Guardianship Orders where it is safe to do so.
- Timely discharge of legal orders primarily Care Orders when they are no longer necessary.

In early 2017, a residential 'edge of care' provision opened in Manchester, Alonzi House. Alonzi House offers intensive support, family group conferencing and short break care to children and young people who are at risk of breakdown in family relationships. Keeping children at home with their families and providing support in times of crisis where safe, has been made a priority in the provision of preventative services in Manchester.

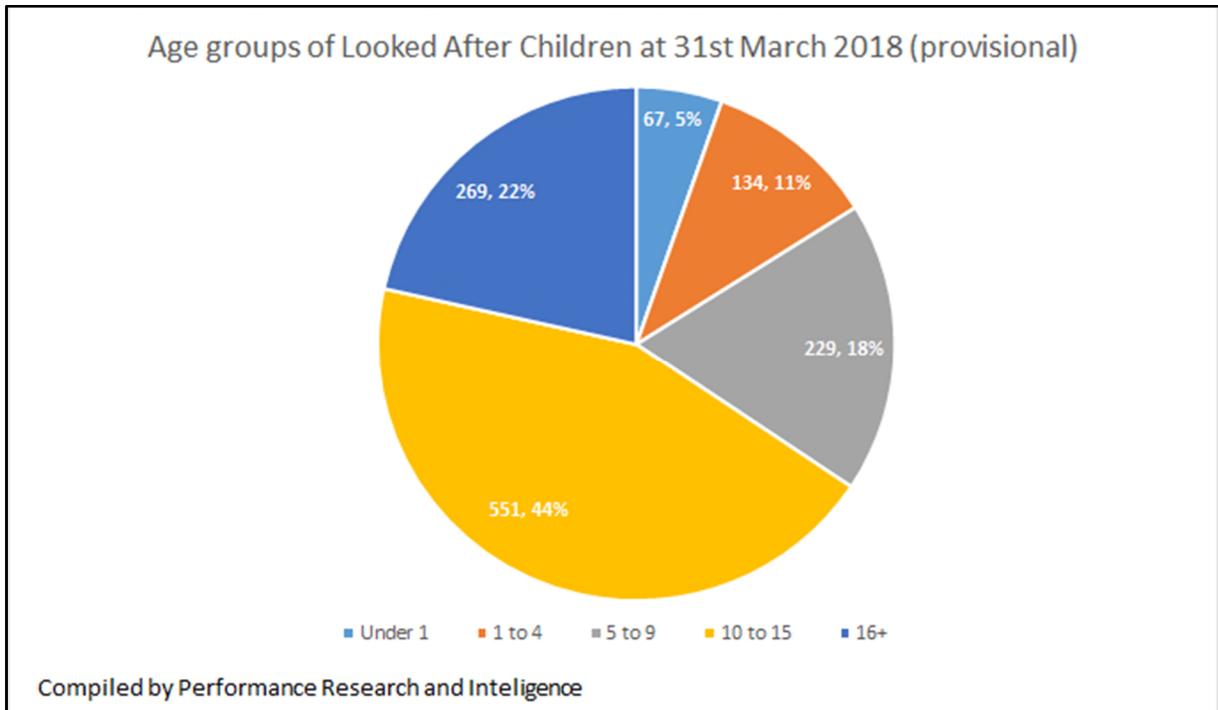
Increased scrutiny by Independent Reviewing Officers continues to contribute to the reduction in numbers of 'Our Children' who are looked after, where it is safe to do so. In 2016/2017 there was an increase in the number of applications made by Children's Services to discharge Care Orders. The total number of Full Care Orders which ceased was 144 in 2017/18. At times this has 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 CAF/CASS to ensure this was the right plan for the child.

#### 4.2 Age and Gender of Looked After children as at 31 March 2018





As in previous years there are more boys (694 = 55.5%) than girls (556 = 44.5%) who are looked after in Manchester, although both have increased from 2016/17. This closely resembles the national gender split in Looked After Children.



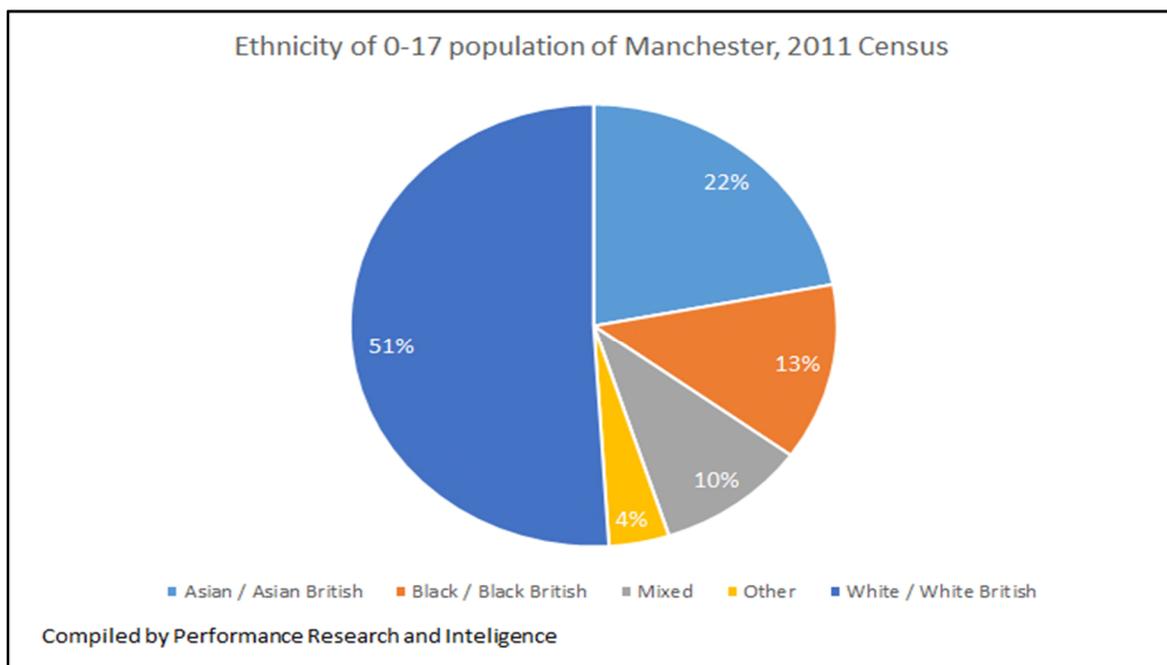
The number of looked after children has increased across all age groups with the exception of those aged 5 to 9 which has seen a reduction of 53 (5.8%). Proportionally all other groups have increased as a result of this fall.

When comparing these figures to the national picture, Manchester is in line with the national trend regarding the same proportion of children looked after who are aged under 1 (5%); a slightly smaller than national proportion of 1 to 9 year olds (29% against 32%) and a corresponding slight increase in the proportion of those aged 10 and over (66% against 63%). This would support a hypothesis that continued strengthening of the early help offer and effective partner agency working through early help and the Mash are a factor in the decrease of younger aged children becoming looked after.

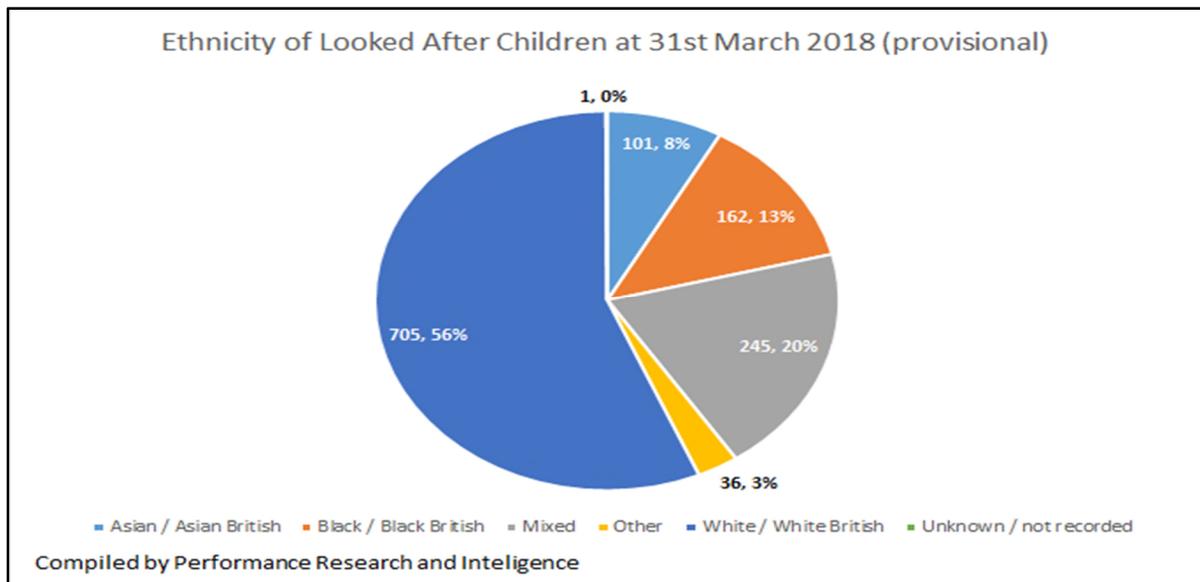
Locally, the number of looked after young people aged 16 and 17 years old has increased from 239 (20%) at 31 March 2017 to 269 (22%) at 31 March 2018. Breakdown in family relations is the most common reason for this cohort of children coming into our care. The Independent Reviewing Officer teams have reinforced the crucial importance of family group conferences to enable young people to remain within their wider family. Where this is not possible, Independent Reviewing Officers promote the need for quality pathway planning and need assessments 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.

During 2017-2018 it was agreed that Independent Reviewing Officer would undertake Post 18 Pathway Plan reviews. These take place when Independent Reviewing Officers have not been satisfied with the plans and arrangements in place to support the young people into independence. Young People can also request that a Post 18 review takes place. There have been a 14 of these post 18 reviews in 2017-2018, which have been held to ensure all actions have been carried out by the Social Worker and other agencies as agreed, to agree additional support and strengthen the transition process.

#### 4.3 Ethnicity of Looked After Children as of 31 March 2018

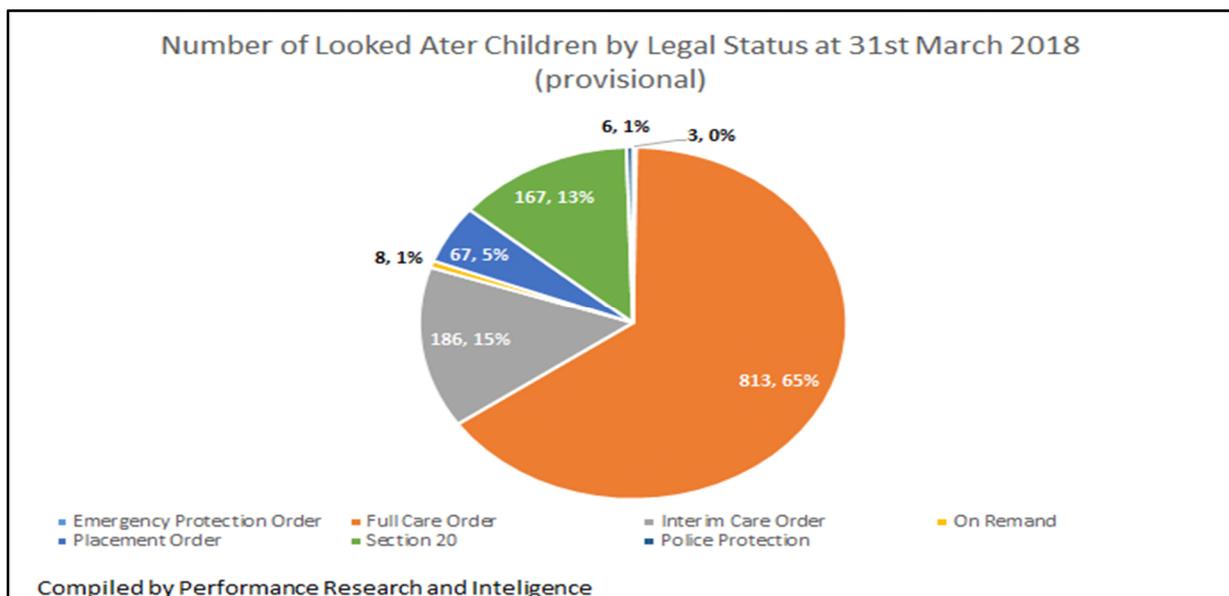


The most recent Information on the ethnicity of the wider child population of Manchester from the 2011 Census is set out below. When comparing the ethnicity of our 'looked after children' population with the ethnicity of children in Manchester 7 years ago, we are looking after a greater proportion of children of mixed ethnicity and White / White British ethnicity, compared to proportionally fewer young people of Asian / Asian British ethnicity.



The ethnic background of our looked after child population has remained stable over the last year. Whilst there has been an overall increase in our looked after children population, there has been a slight reduction in the proportion of Looked After Children who are White or White British (59% to 56%) and a slight reduction in Black / Black British young people from 14% to 13%. The percentage differences have been mirrored by slight increases in the proportion of those young people of mixed ethnicity (18% to 20%) and Asian / Asian British Ethnicity (6% to 8%).

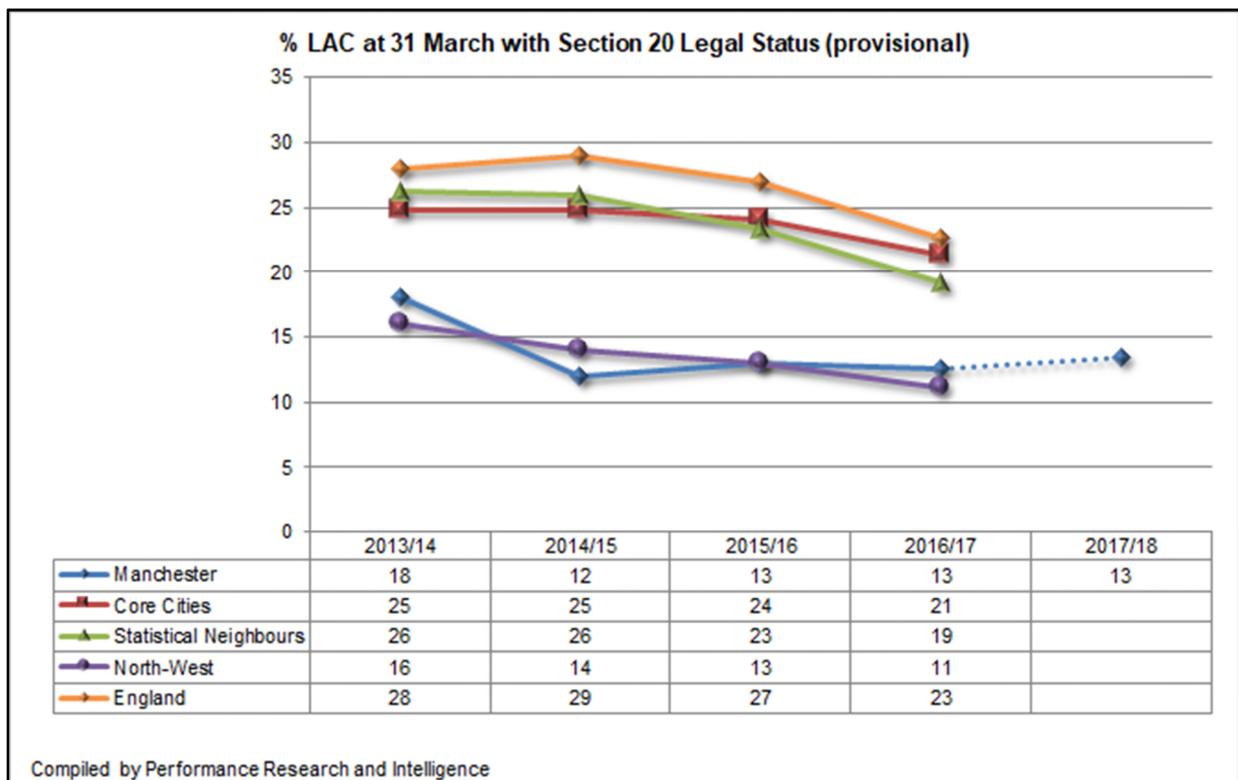
#### **4.4 Legal status of Looked After Children at 31 March 2018**



The proportion of children subject to Interim Care Orders (ICO) has risen to 15% as 61 more children are subject to ICO than was the case at the same point last year. As a key part of the reviewing process, Independent Reviewing Officers robustly scrutinise plans for children who have been voluntarily accommodated under Sec 20, CA 1989, for more than 3 months. IROs scrutinise access to legal planning through legal gateway meetings and challenge where permanence plans are not being achieved within the child's timeframe. The increase in the number of children subject to Interim Care orders, now 186, indicates that fewer are remaining subject to Section 20, which is positive.

The majority of our children looked after (65%) are subject to Care Orders. The number has only fallen by 9 children during the year, but due to increasing overall numbers of children this actually represent 65% of the cohort as opposed to 70% 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 2017 and March 2018 there were 15 Care Orders that were discharged due to Special Guardianship Orders and a further two moved to 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 Looked After Children. Independent Reviewing Officers will ensure the right plan is in place for the child at the right time. They have access to the case progression manager's court tracker, to be able to challenge where drift and delay is identified with care plans and assessments required for court. Equally, IROs will challenge any drift through the dispute resolution process with regard to the revocation of Placement Orders where this is deemed that adoption no longer the best plan for the child.



On the 31 March 2018 there were 167 (13%) children voluntarily looked after, subject to Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act 1989. Manchester has remained at approximately 13% for the past four years, which is significantly below the level seen nationally (23% in 2016/17).

One of the key priority areas identified in the 2016/2017 Annual Report was that Independent Reviewing Officers would provide increased scrutiny of children who were 'looked after' under Section 20, of the 1989 Children Act. The IROs and team managers are now provided with weekly performance reports highlighting those children who have been Section 20 for over three months.

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.

There were 37 Dispute Resolutions raised in respect of Section 20 issues in 2017/18 and also 14 Dispute Resolutions with regard to the delay in the Social Workers submitting court paperwork. Use of Section 20 arrangements is only intended to be a short term measure and this has been reinforced in legal judgements nationally over recent years. 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.

To further enhance tracking in the area of securing early permanence, Manchester are one of four local authority areas within England who are taking part in a DfE Innovation project in conjunction with the Coram research organisation. The IRO service have been closely working with Coram to track children in a pilot project from their entry into care, to achieving early permanence. This has been effective and a permanence tracker is now being cascaded out to all districts. It is identified that Independent Reviewing Officers play a key role in the tracking and endorsing of plans for each child. Our recording mechanisms on the child record have been adapted this year to contribute to tracking key activity and decisions at our children and young peoples reviews.

Independent Reviewing Officer managers also undertook an audit of a sample month in 2017 to identify trends where some young people had been subject to Section 20 arrangements on two or more occasions. The data used for this audit was based on the cohort of children and young people who became Looked After under Section 20 for a second or subsequent time during the period January 2017 to January 2018. The purpose of the report was to highlight emerging themes; to ensure that effective plans were being put in place to bring about lasting change within the family setting and where this was not possible, alternative permanence plans were being made to avoid multiple Section 20 entries into the care system. The data list contained the details of 56 children. Of these 26 were now the subjects of Care Orders or Interim Care Orders and as such were not considered.

## Findings:

- 3 children returned to their parent's care by default as a placement could not be identified. They then returned into Local Authority care when this broke down.
- The mental health of the young person was identified as a factor.
- Some parents required support regarding children with additional needs including ASD and ADHD as their behaviour was difficult for parents to manage.
- There was evidence of a number of children becoming 'looked after' for short periods e.g. between 1 and 11 days. whereby the LAC notification came to SIU post discharge. This meant there was no Independent Reviewing Officer oversight of the plan.

What is clear is that Independent Reviewing Officers need to consistently challenge premature or inappropriate discharge plans by ensuring discharge reviews always take place and that any dispute resolutions sent to managers progress to the correct level. There is evidence to support that Independent Reviewing Officers are escalating these issues.

Also Social Workers and Team Managers are now encouraged to email the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit as soon as a child becomes 'looked after' and so an Independent Reviewing Officer can be allocated. Greater scrutiny regarding support plans for this cohort of children is in place.

## **5. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN SPECIFIC CIRCUMSTANCES 2017/2018**

### **5.1 *Placement with Parents***

At the end of 2017/2018 reporting year Manchester had 116 children subject to Interim Care Orders or Full Care Orders placed at home (9.3%) which is a slight reduction from 123 children (10.5%) last year. Nationally this figure stands at 6%.

The number of care proceedings between the end of March 2017 to the end March 2018 that concluded with Care Orders Placed with Parents (PWP) was 20. A further thirteen children had care orders granted and support was working towards 'Placement with Parents' arrangements.

Independent Reviewing Officers 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 and a greater number of dispute resolutions. 64 were raised regarding the quality of planning and arrangements for this cohort of children. The Independent Reviewing Officers 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.

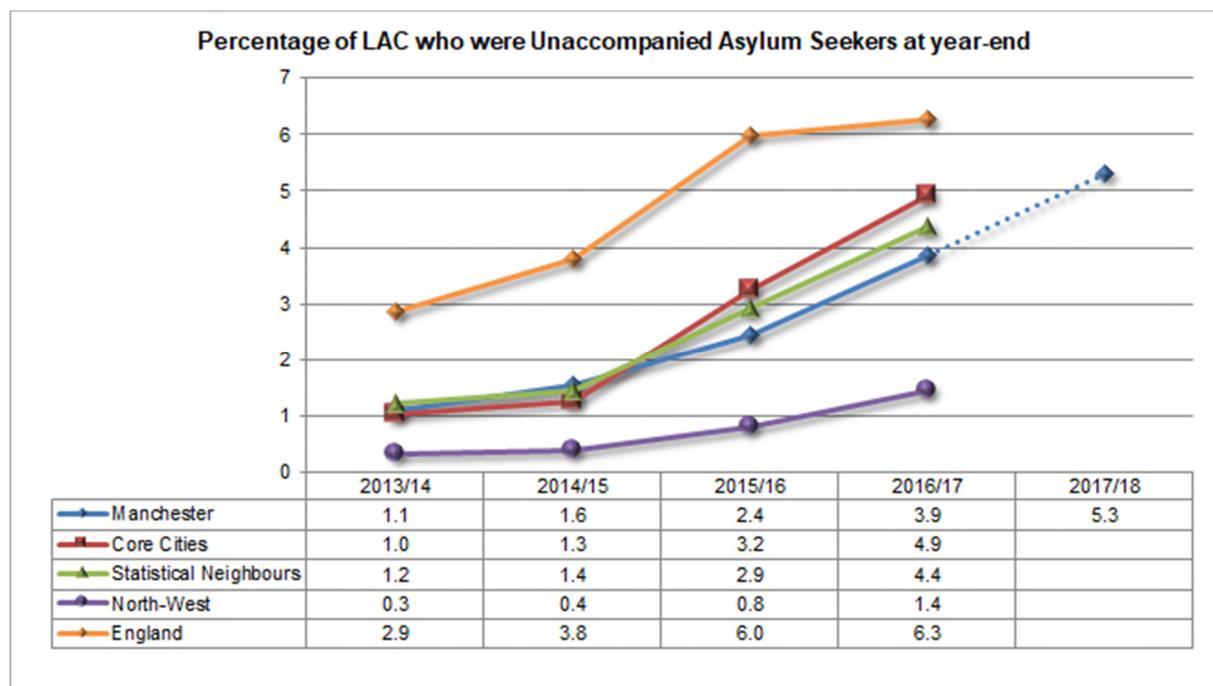
In 2017 the Independent Reviewing Officer Team managers took part in a North West regional audit looking into the reasons why local authorities in the area had a

higher proportion of children subject to Care Orders placed with parents than the national average. The Audit aimed to determine, why 13% of children in the North West were placed with parents in 2016 compared to the England average of 5%. The audit set out to consider if this was of concern? Findings indicated that further periods of “testing” were often cited as the reason for Placement with Parent arrangements with either a new parent being assessed during proceedings, (commonly fathers), parents where previous children had been removed; or a balance of risk when older children wished to remain at home.

Independent Reviewing Officers 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. Research from Bristol University indicates 48% of return home placements breakdown, identifying poor assessment, risk management and planning as the main contributing factors. This area of work will be audited during 2018-19.

Also there were a small number of children subject to Care Orders who returned home without the knowledge of the Independent Reviewing Officer. Dispute resolutions were raised as the Independent Reviewing Officer in these cases had not ratified the Care Plan.

## 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 66 which represents 5.3% of the looked after children population. The total is 20 more than at the same point last year. The proportion is higher than our Statistical Neighbours (4.4%), the North West Average (1.4%) and Core Cities (4.9%) but slightly lower than the national average (6.3%).

Due to the increase in numbers in 2017/18, the safeguarding unit now has two identified Independent Reviewing Officers who have developed expertise in this area of work and a specialist knowledge of the particular needs of this cohort of young people. 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.

As identified in the 2016/17 Annual Report the scrutiny in relation to this specific group of children is recognised as being particularly important. Throughout 2017/2018, the Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to quality assure and triangulate information in respect of UASC with our Performance and Intelligence Team, Health and Finance. Information is collated weekly and monthly in respect of new UASC on arrival in Manchester, including information of country of origin, mode of arrival, religion, language, trafficking, among other issues. LAC Review dates are shared with the specialist UASC LAC Nurse on a weekly basis.

The UASC Leaving Care Service offers specialist advice to young people and Personal Advisors get involved as soon as they've been allocated.

Manchester also has agencies commissioned to support our UASC. These include Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (with their Asylum Claims) and Child Action North West (Appropriate Adults for Age Assessments)

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children can also have access to an Independent Visitor. They 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.

The Independent Reviewing Officers have escalated concerns regarding placement, legal status and delays in Age Assessments. 7 Dispute Resolutions were being completed with regard to Age Assessment in 2017-18. Others fit into other categories used for all of 'Our Children' such as Placement, Pathway Plans and Health.

### **5.3 Leaving Care**

A Pathway Plan is important to a young person as it details the services and support they need from the age of 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 has been identified in the previous 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. The Ofsted inspection report published December 2017 also highlighted that:

*“The quality of help and support for young people leaving care is not consistently good enough. In too many cases, pathway plans lack sufficient detail and do not*

*contain enough information about how to develop young people's skills to be able to live independently"*

Independent reviewing officers and their managers now receive weekly information regarding young people who are in need of a first Pathway plan or Pathway Plan review, in order to more consistently challenge to improve practice. There is also 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 2018 96.3% of young people either in need of a Pathway Plan or care leavers had a plan in place. This represents an increase from 89.7% at the same point the previous year.

In 2017-18 36 Dispute Resolutions were raised about the absence of a Pathway Plan for young people and 21 in respect of issues re a pathway plan for children after they reached the age of 18. The objective set out in 2015/2016 to improve the consistency of good quality of Pathway Planning has not yet been achieved. 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 in 2018-19.

In order to strengthen our oversight of Pathways plans that assist young people to move successfully into independence; Independent Reviewing Officers 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 need. The young adult at 18 is asked if they wish the Independent Reviewing Officer to remain involved and a further review can be held up to 3 or 6 months post 18 years. There have been 14 such reviews which have taken place since this initiative started. Reasons for review have included unstable accommodation plans, transitions to adult services not yet secured and/or issues securing cross boundary services for young people residing outside Manchester.

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

The number of children on remand and looked after has remained relatively stable; there were 8 at 31 March 2018 which represents an increase of 1 child in comparison to the end of 2016/17. Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for reviewing the Care Plan for this small group of 'looked after' children. Work has been undertaken with our colleagues in the Youth Offending Service to update our procedures in this area to ensure that the young people have a robust plan of support 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.

The Safeguarding and 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 Independent Reviewing Officer 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

Independent Reviewing Officers ensure this is of focus of Looked After Children review meetings for these children.

### 5.5 Children subject to a Secure Order

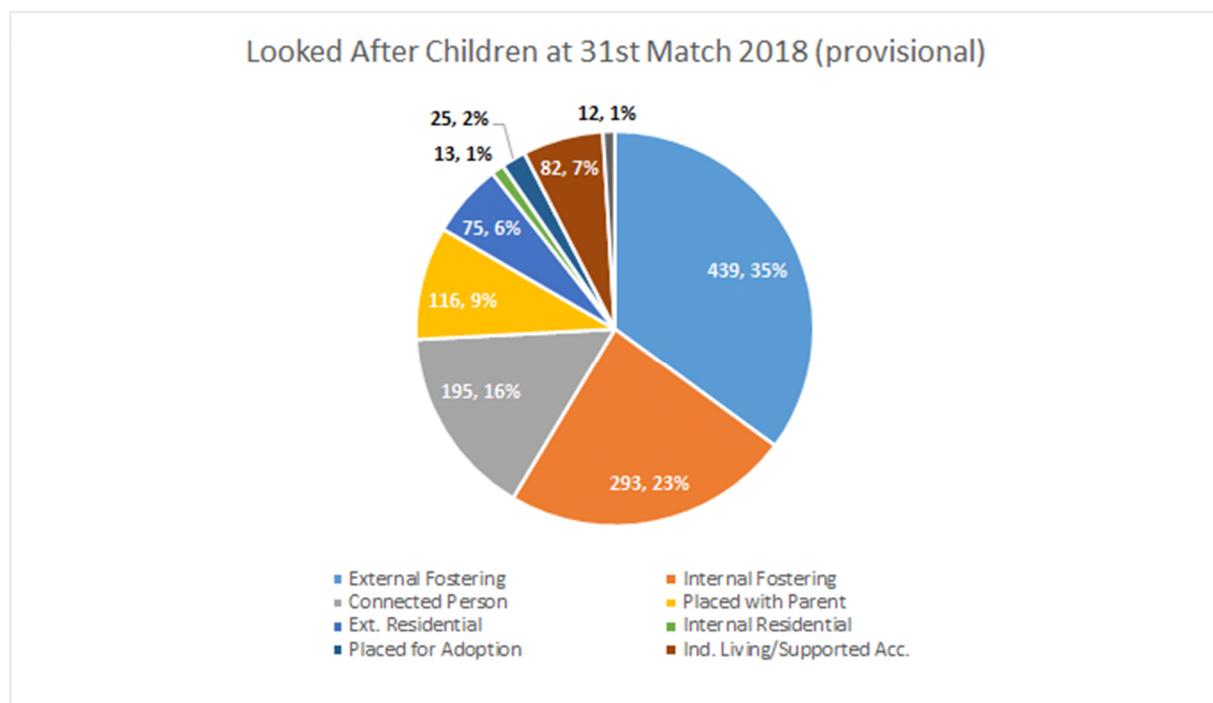
The use of 'secure accommodation' by local authorities is dealt with by section 25 of the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Secure Accommodation) Regulations 1991. A child who is being 'looked after' by a local authority by being provided with accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act cannot 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 2016/17 there was 1 child made subject to a Secure Accommodation Order. The child was placed in a secure unit for 7 months. During this period all statutory requirements were met. In 2017/18 no children were made the subject of a Secure Order.

## 6. THE PLACEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AT 31 MARCH 2018

### 6.1 Type of Placement



The majority of children and young people (74%), continue to be placed in foster care or with connected carers. This is a slightly reduced proportion from last year when it stood at 75.9%. It remains very close to the national figure of 73.5%.

Within the last 3 years there has been a significant 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 number of children placed with external foster care. In March 2017 there were 489 children in external fostering placements, (41.8%). The number has reduced by 50 in March 2018 to 439 children (35%) This is balanced an increase of 64, in the number of children placed with internal foster carers, now at 293 (23%).

Numbers placed with connected people also increased by 28 during the year, indicating that more children are being placed with family and friend carers.

In terms of other placement types there has been an increase in the use of residential care from 67 places to 88 (7%). Independent Reviewing Officers recognise the importance of children being placed, wherever possible, within a family unit and will review what plans are in place to safety move this cohort of young people on in to a foster care placement, to extended family or back home to the care of their parents.

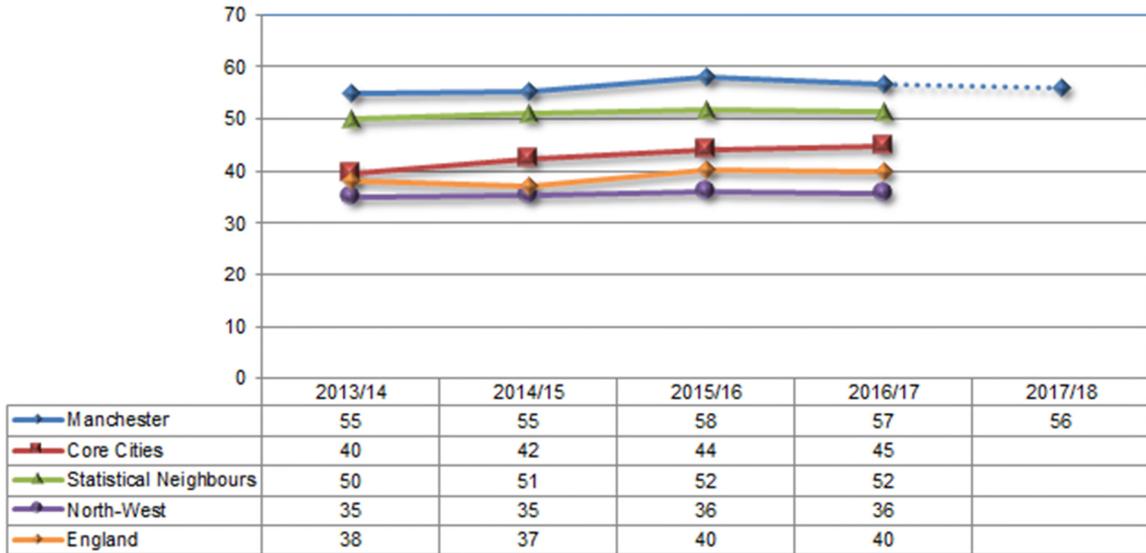
In the year between March 2017 and 2018 there has been an increase of 29 places in independent living/supported accommodation. Provision of good quality accommodation for young people moving towards leaving care is a current focus for our improvement journey. As noted by Ofsted, Children's Services are working with our corporate colleagues to ensure that young people leaving care have better access to safe and suitable accommodation.

## **6.2 Placement Location and Distance from Home**

In 2017/18 there was a slight decrease in the percentage of looked after children placed outside Local Authority boundaries in Manchester from 57% to 56%. Manchester has a higher percentage of children placed outside the Local Authority boundary than its statistical comparators. This is probably due to the fact our neighbouring authorities are in close proximity. However, the percentage has remained relatively stable at between 55% to 58% over the last five years.

The table below confirms that this area of performance has remained fairly stable for the last five 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.

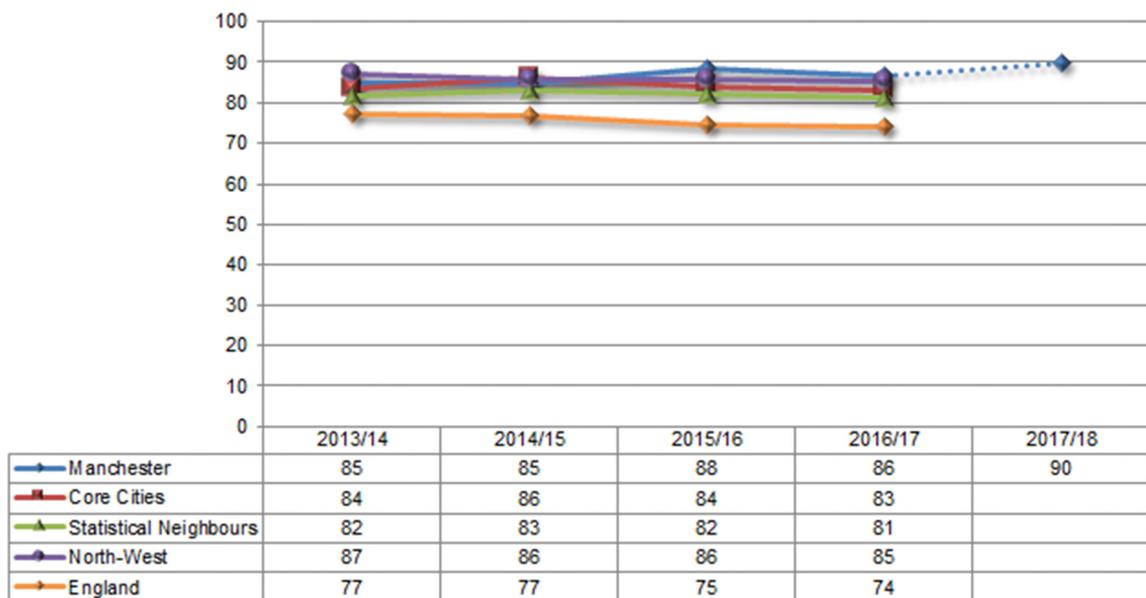
**Percentage of Looked After Children placed outside the local authority boundary on 31st March**



Compiled by Performance Research and Intelligence

In contrast Manchester's performance in placing children within a 20 miles' radius from their home, remains better than the national average and all other comparators.

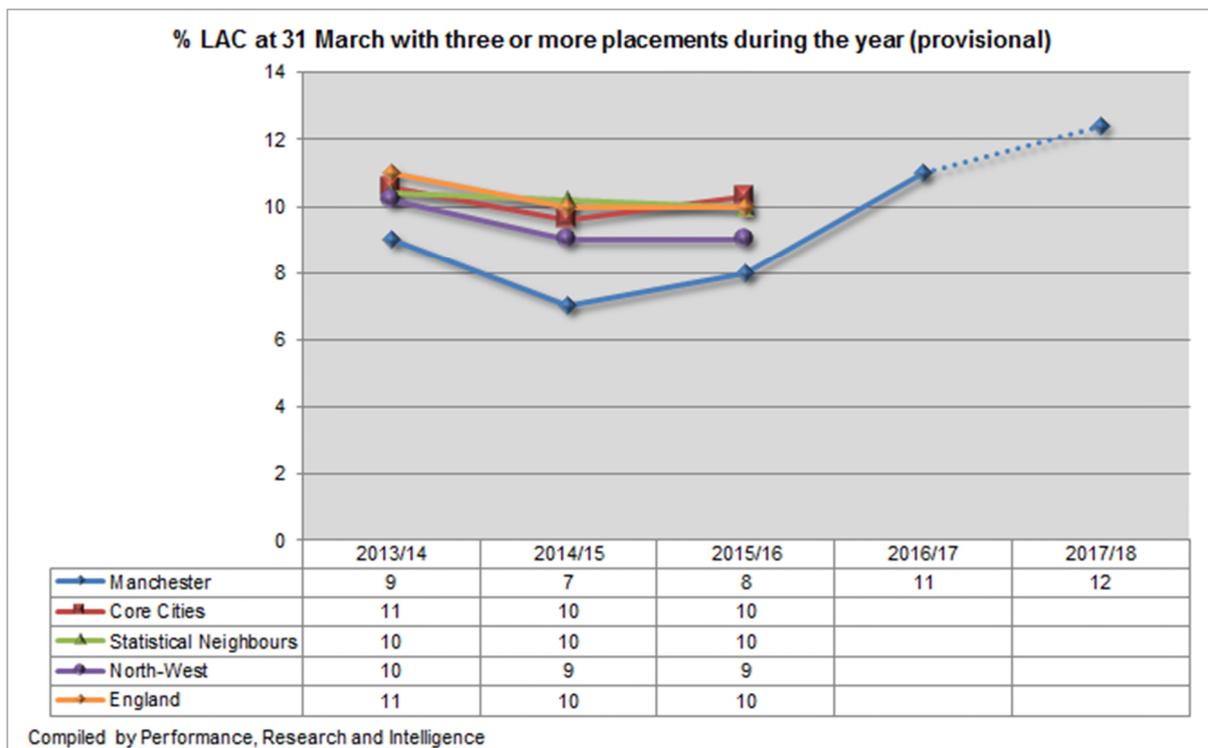
**Percentage of LAC placed less than 20 miles from home at 31st March**



Compiled by Performance Research and Intelligence

## 7. PLACEMENT STABILITY

### 7.1 Three or more placements



During 2017-2018 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 11.0% to 12.4%. There needs to be more scrutiny of this areas of work in 2018-19.

Placement stability is critical for the emotional wellbeing of our children and young people', enabling them to build relationships and to invest in their future by engaging in their education and local community groups. 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. In order to support carers to have a greater understanding of young people's attachment needs and how early life experiences can impact upon the child's ability to form secure trusting relationships; Manchester has committed to ensure all its foster carers are able to access the Secure Base training. This model aims to increase this understanding, build resilience in carers and hence reduce breakdown of placements. Independent Reviewing Officers scrutinise plans and arrangements for foster carer support at reviews to promote ongoing stability.

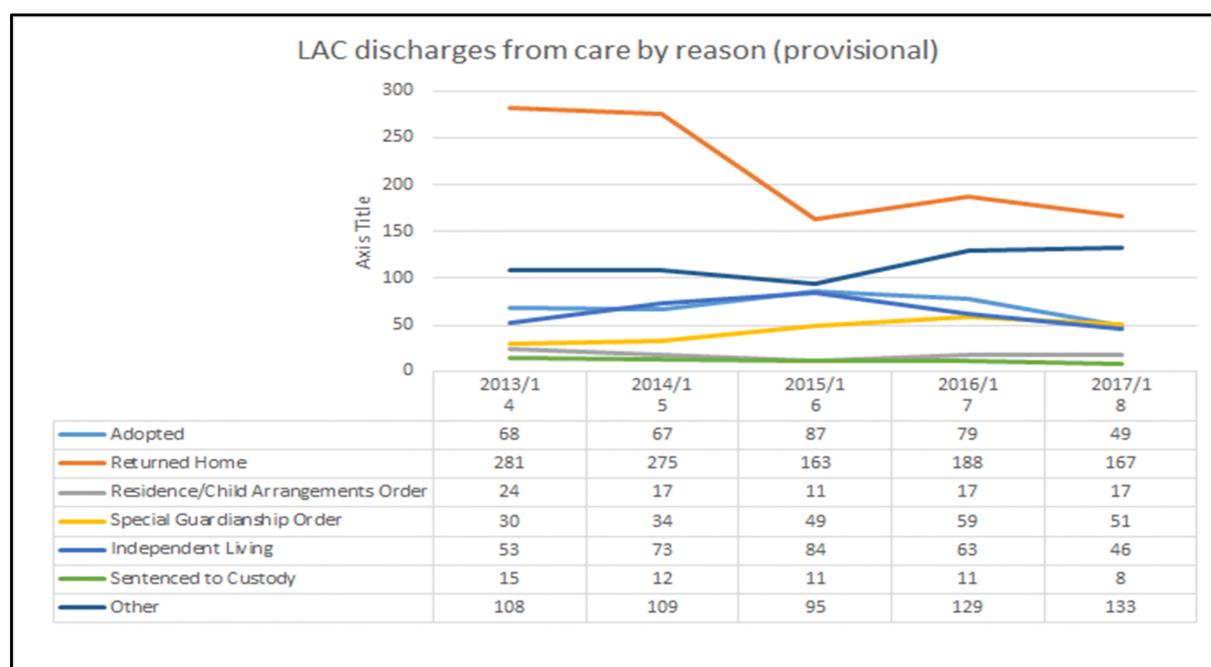
Disruption in attachments and change is often traumatic for anyone, this is especially true for our looked after children given the quality of their care and relationships were probably compromised and led for the need for them to come into care. Our children and young people and those who have left care have told us that maintaining relationships with previous foster carers is important to them and they would like Independent Reviewing Officers to consider this at reviews when discussing 'Who is Important to Me'. This has been shared with IROs to take forward in future plans.

## 7.2 Placement for 2 years or more

At 31 March 2018 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 63% . This represents a slight reduction from the previous year.

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

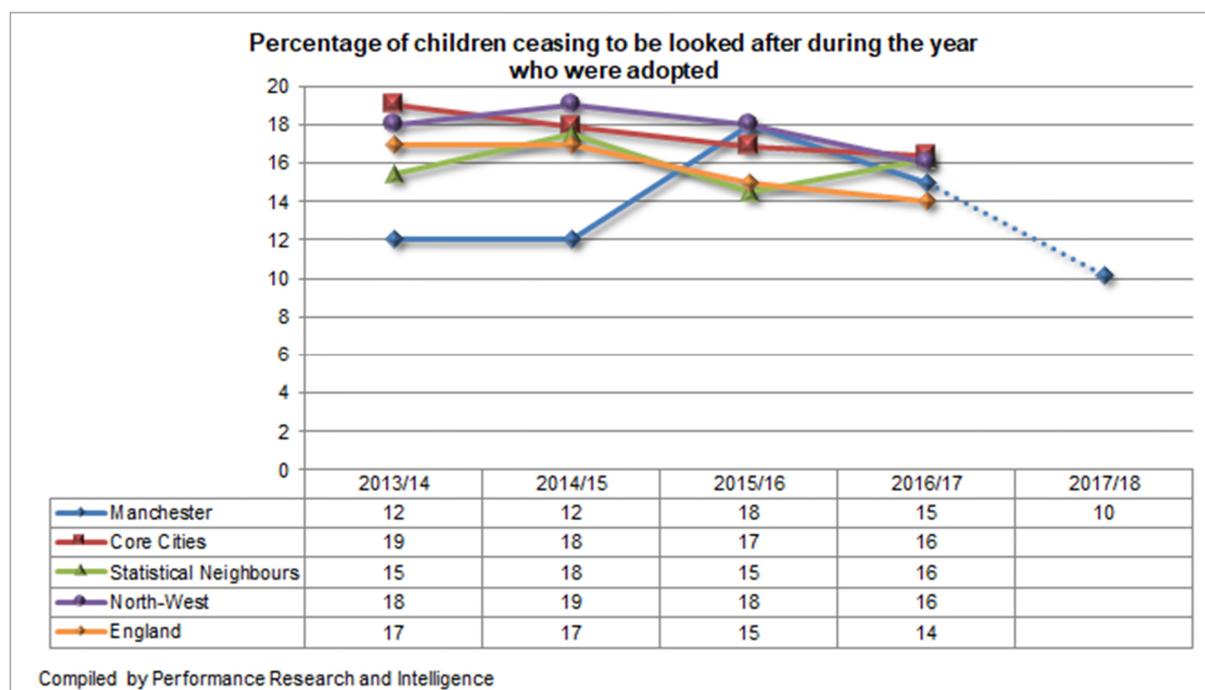
The table below shows that returning home continues to be the most common outcome for looked after children ceasing to be looked after. Independent Reviewing Officers have an important role to play in ensuring decision making in relation to rehabilitating children home in a child's best interest and 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 2017/18 are as follows:

- 35.5% Returned home (an increase from 34.4% in 2016/2017)
- 28.2% Care ceased for any other reason (an increase from 23.6% in 2016/17)
- 10.4% Adopted (a decrease from 14.5% in 2016/17)
- 9.8% Independent living (a decrease from 11.5% in 2016/17)
- 10.8% Special Guardianship Order (the same as 2016/17)
- 3.6% Residence / Child Arrangements Order granted (an increase from 3.1% in 2016/17).
- 1.7% Sentenced to custody (a decrease from 2.0% in 2016/17)

## 8. ADOPTION



Information for 2017/18 has been supplied from Adoption Counts. Adoption Counts are a collaborative adoption agency, bringing the professional expertise and specialist skills of five local authorities from across Greater Manchester and Cheshire together to deliver adoption services of the highest quality.

*'Manchester had 44 children placed for adoption between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. In the 3 month period April to June 2017 before Adoption Counts went live 11 children were placed. 6 of these were inter-agency placements and 5 were with Manchester approved adopters. In the period July 17 to March 2018 33 children have been placed. 27 of these were in house, as in Adoption Counts adopters, and 6 were inter-agency placements. In the previous year 2016 / 2017, 48 children were placed for adoption, of whom 50% were placed in inter-agency placements.'*

Adoption Counts have advised that this reduction in children placed is due to two factors.

1. A number of complex children waiting from previous years were successfully placed in 2016/17.
2. There has been a national reduction in the numbers of Placement Orders granted by the courts. Although this trend has now reduced, with more Placement Orders being granted, it has continued to have an impact on numbers placed and adopted in the year 2017/18.

The number of SHOBPA decisions has increased in the year 2017/18 so this may lead to an increase in numbers placed moving forwards.

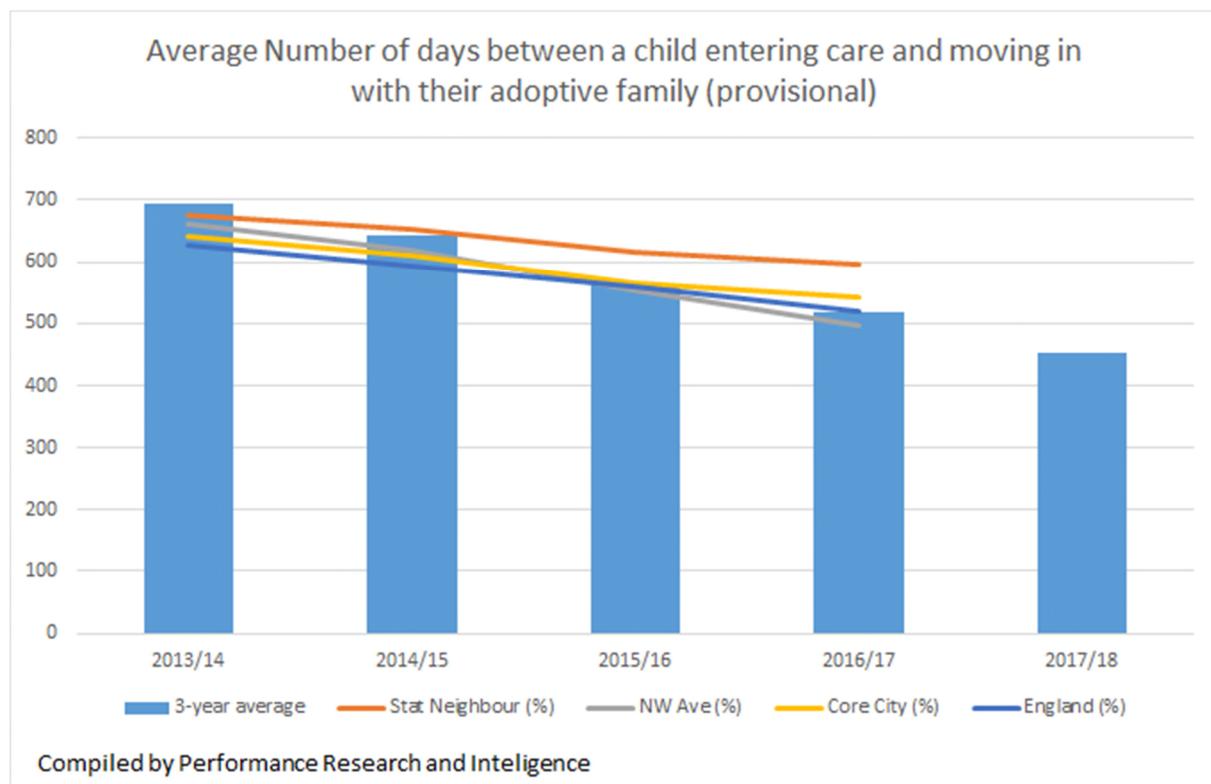
Adoption counts further stated that as at the 31 March 2018 Manchester had 27 children *placed for adoption* but not yet adopted. 3 of these had been placed for over

10 weeks without an application being submitted by their adopters to the court for an adoption order. This was a sibling group.

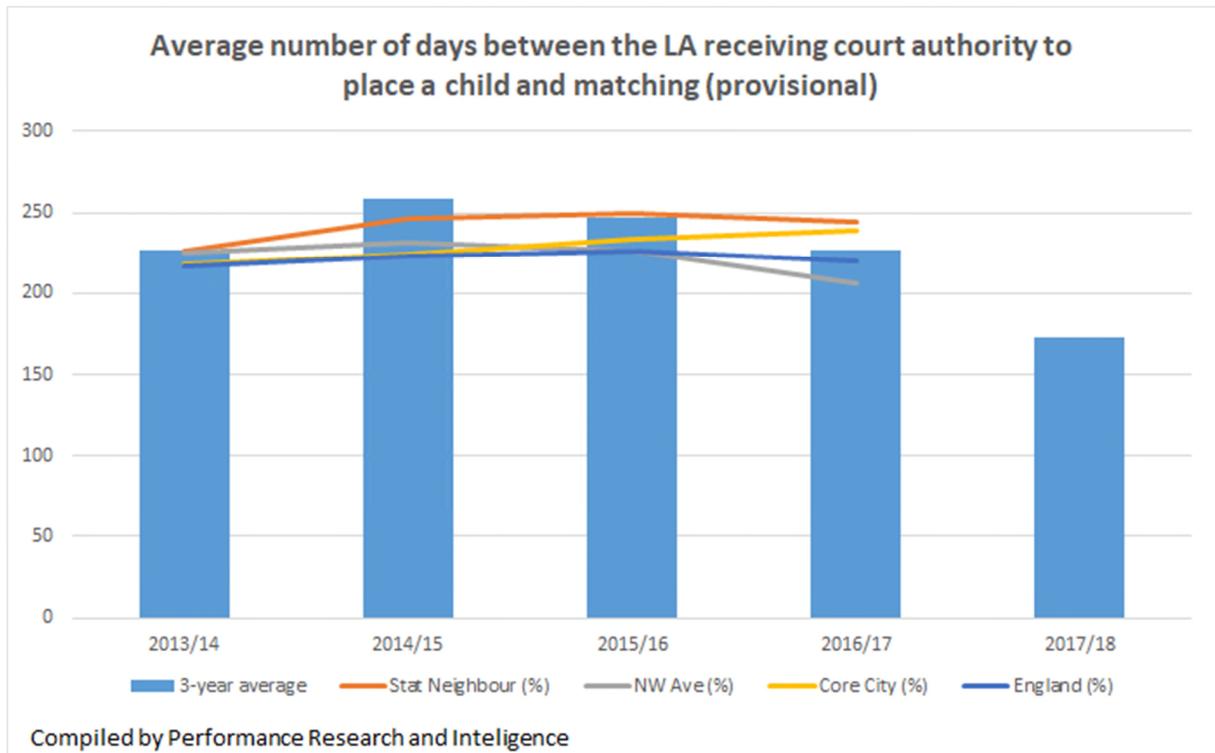
As at the 31 March 2018 Manchester had 34 children *waiting for adoption* but not yet placed. These are made up of 9 singleton children, 1 sibling group of 5, 2 sib groups of 3 and 7 sibling groups of 2.

- 11 children have been waiting less than 3 months.
- 3 children have been waiting between 3 and 6 months.
- 14 Children between 6 and 12 months.
- 6 children have been waiting over 12 months but less than 2 years.

Independent Reviewing Officers work closely with the social work teams and the adoption service, they have an overview of the progress in respect of timely adoptions and ensure that children who have been waiting 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 2017/2018, 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 2013/14.



Also following a rise in 2014/15, 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.

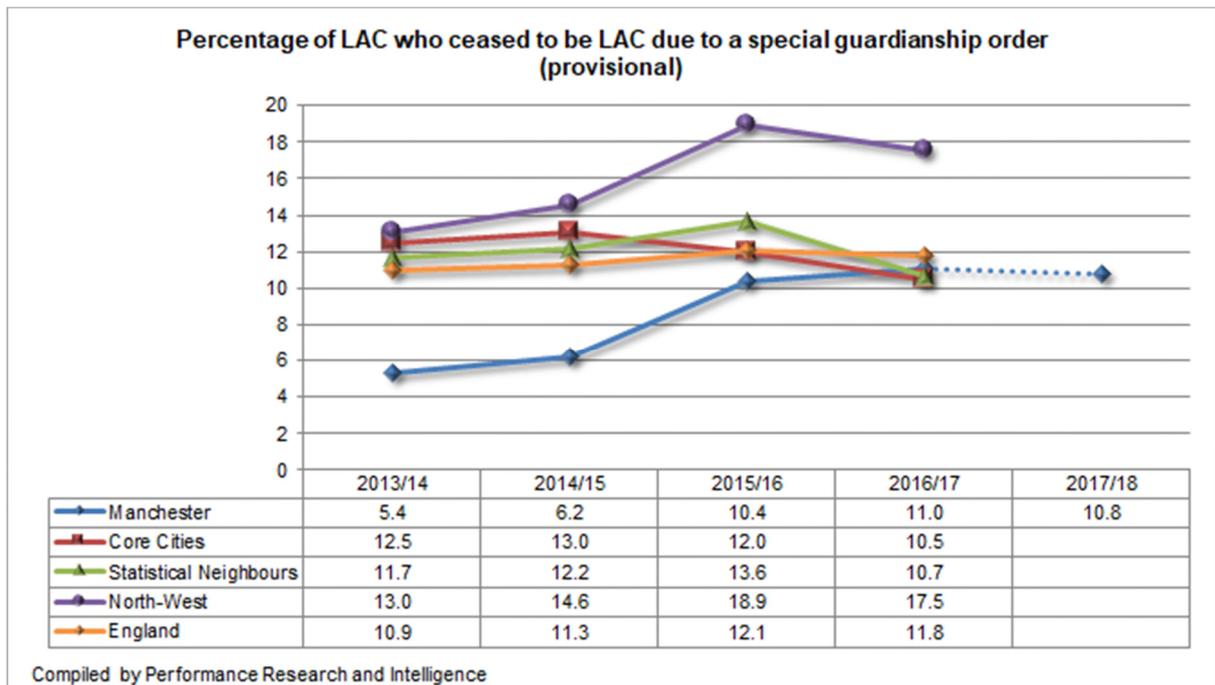
At the same time the proportion of children discharged from looked after status through adoption has fallen. The age of children coming in to care is a factor in achieving permanence through adoption.

Nationally, there has been an increase in the numbers of children over ten years old when becoming looked after over and the proportion of children under one years old has fallen. This is being reflected in Manchester although DCS Paul Marshall has indicated we are also experiencing the predicted population growth in Manchester in respect of under 5's.

According to information from the court case progression manager in Manchester, the type of legal orders at end of proceedings are changing. There has been a steady increase in Special Guardianship Orders being granted. The dedicated Special Guardianship Order team within Family Placement team has been successful in their work to advance the understanding of Special Guardianship with foster carers and connected person carers. The Special Guardianship Order team now undertake the introductory visits to explain Special Guardianship Orders in Manchester, complete the full assessment and support plan. This more streamlined service has resulted in more children being able to achieve their permanence and sense of belonging within their current family unit and not requiring to transfer attachments on to new parents through adoption.

## 9. SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

The percentage of looked after children who became subject to Special Guardianship Orders has been maintained at approximately the 11% figure reported in 2016/2017. This is commensurate with our Core Cities, Statistical Neighbours and the England Average.



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 interventions.

## 10. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STATUTORY REVIEWS

Practice and services to 'Our Children' 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 Independent Reviewing Officer Service that is scrutinising practice, plans and arrangements and influencing continuous development and improvement in services. 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:

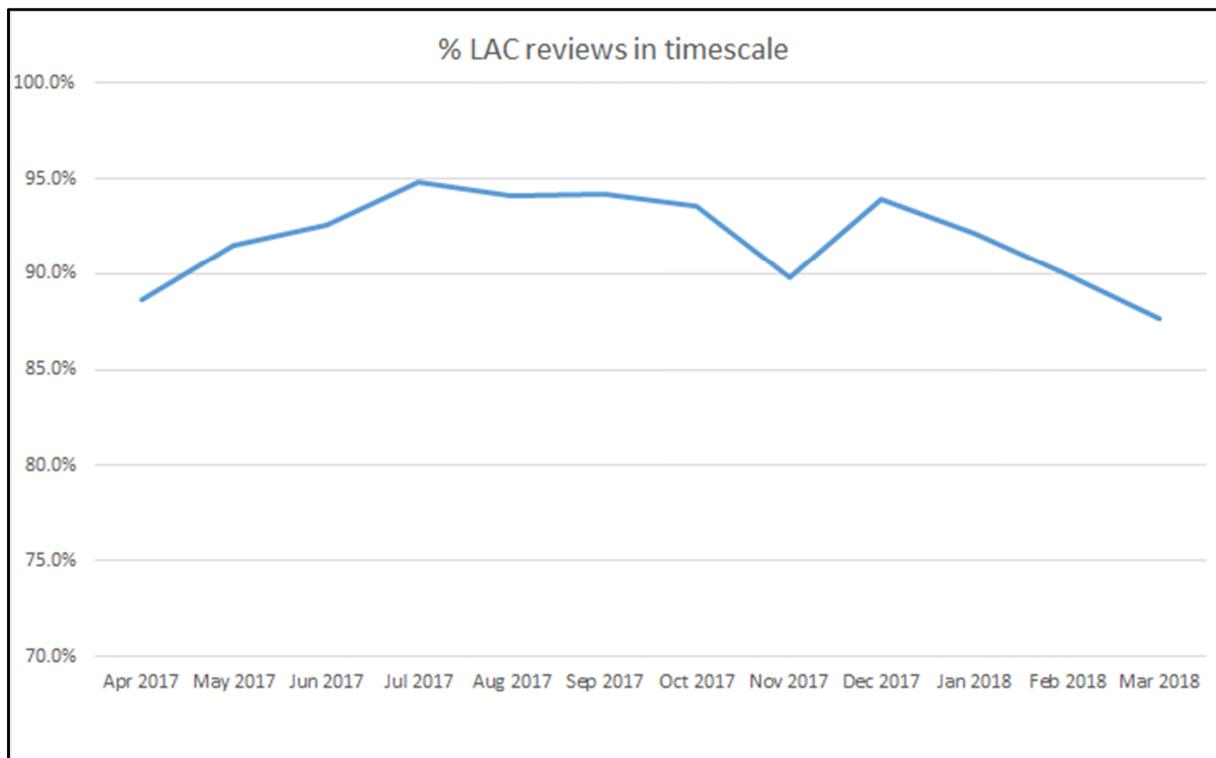
"A sense of security, continuity and identity....a secure, stable and loving family to support through childhood and beyond."

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 Independent Reviewing Officer is to ensure that planning for permanence commences as soon as a child becomes looks after and that all options within the family are explored appropriately. The plan for permanence should be presented at the second review where the Independent Reviewing Officer will endorse a care plan, (if appropriate. It is vital that review of the care plans is timely.

### **10.1 Timeliness of LAC Reviews**

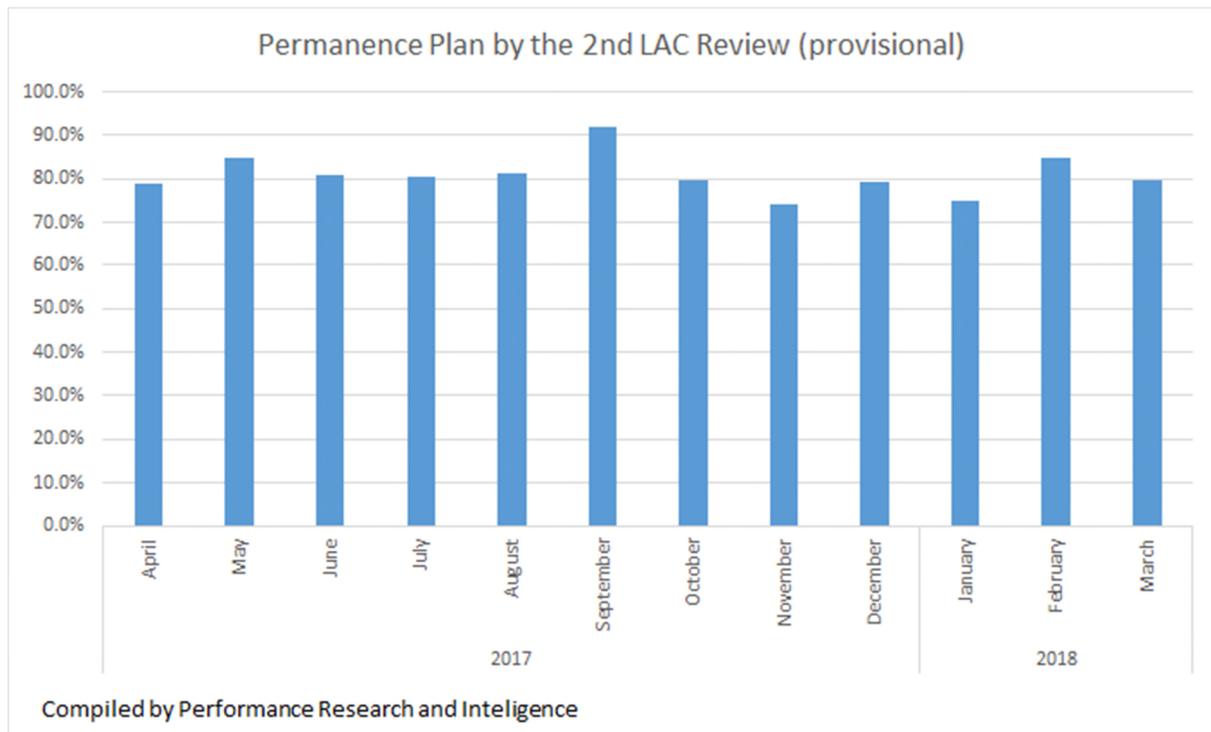


Performance of Looked after Child Reviews held in timescale has fluctuated between 87% and 95% over the course of the year. This is due to the timeliness and accuracy of recording. The final end of year figure for 2017-18 is 95.9%.

Where some Initial Looked after Child Reviews 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. Other issues which led to reviews taking place outside of timescale, included IRO's mis-calculating 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 becomes looked after to enable an Independent reviewing officer to be allocated on day one. Cases are allocated to Independent Reviewing Officers within 24 hours of notification. Also Independent Reviewing Officers 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 'looked after' child having the date known centrally 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 Independent Reviewing Officer Managers. 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 2017/2018.

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%. In every month of 2017/18 performance was above this level, averaging out at 80.7% for the year.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service has been part of an DfE innovation project, supported by Coram i to improve timeliness of securing permanent families for those children whose long term plan is one of fostering. 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. Independent Reviewing Officer 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.
- Independent Reviewing Officers to have agreed to 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' minutes will clearly record the Independent Reviewing Officer view of the plan, date of endorsement and any challenge, if required.
- Independent Reviewing Officers will consult with the court progression manager to track cases through the pre-proceedings process to the conclusion of court proceedings.
- Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to access caselines - e-bundle. This will ensure that Independent Reviewing Officers have swifter access to court documents, enabling greater scrutiny of progress within care proceedings.

### **10.3 Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People in Looked After Our Children and Young People 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 review process has increased. The proportion of children attending their reviews has remained stable. Overall, there are now more children participating in their review, with a decrease of children not participating or conveying their views from 4.6% to 2.8%.

<b>PN codes</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>	<b>2017-2018</b>
PN0	Child aged under 4 at the time of the review	14.2%	16.5%
PN1	Child physically attends and speaks for him or herself	35.8%	35.5%
PN2	Child physically attends and an advocate speaks on his or her behalf	0.9%	0.8%

PN3	Child attends and conveys his or her view symbolically (non-verbally)	0.1%	0.5%
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	0.5%	0.4%
PN5	Child does not attend physically but briefs an advocate to speak for him or her	24.6%	18.3%
PN6	Child does not attend but conveys his or her feelings to the review by a facilitative medium	19.4%	25.2%
PN7	Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review	4.6%	2.8%

Last year we also stated that minutes of reviews would be consistently written in an 'easy read' letter to the child and young person, without use of jargon. This has been consistently achieved. Young people have given feedback that they prefer this style and have a greater understanding of why they are in care, what people are worried about, how well they are doing and what the next steps are.

Manchester has commissioned an online application, Mind of My Own (MOMO) which will support young people to share their views. This was introduced in November 2017.

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.

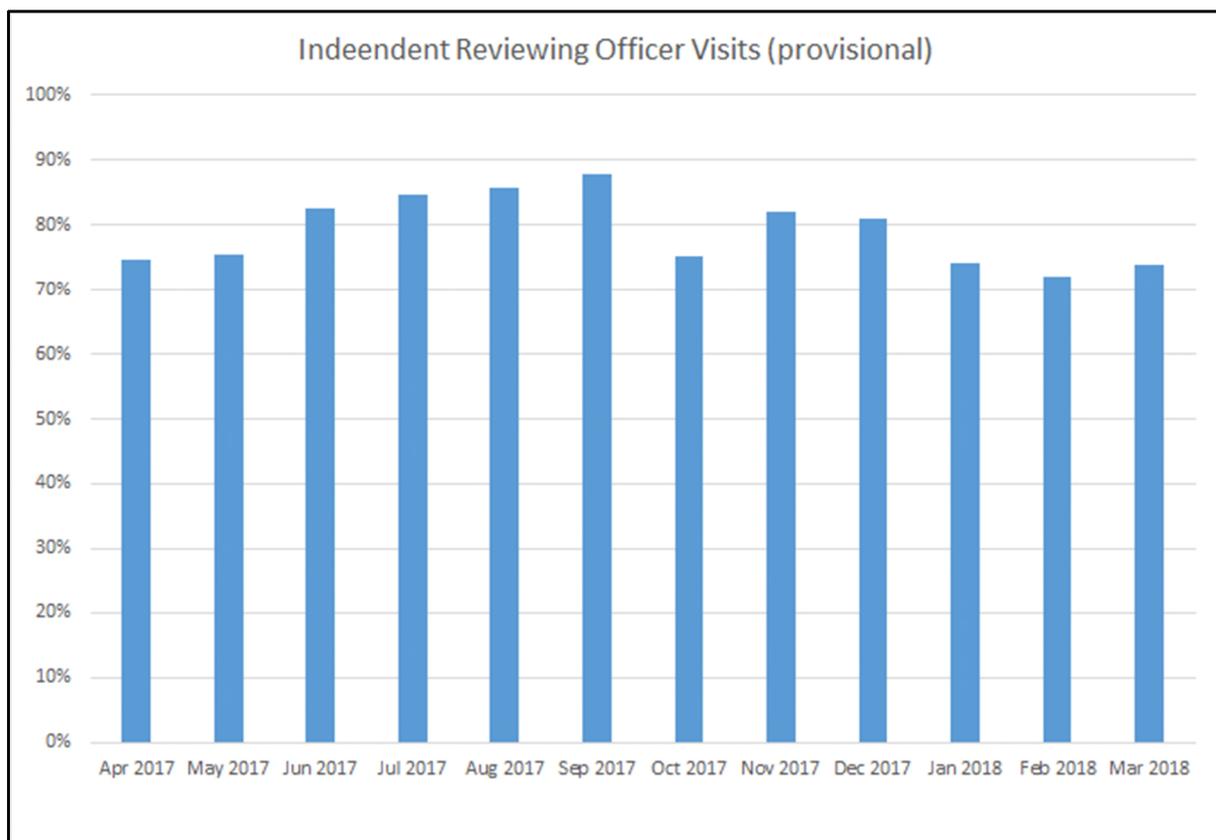
There will be a further focus for 2018/19, to encourage participation and to develop more child centred reviews incorporating child led themes to meetings.

Independent Reviewing Officers are able to use a series of meetings to facilitate smaller meetings for the child that they are comfortable attending.

Also Signs of Safety, the strengths based model of working promotes reviews being a celebration of the child's achievements. This model is now being used routinely by Independent Reviewing Officers.

## 10.4 Independent Reviewing Officer Visits

Independent Reviewing Officer 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. Independent Reviewing Officers are able to utilise a range of tools to assist the children and young people to share their wishes and feelings (Signs of Safety 3 Houses or Wizards and Fairy communication tools).

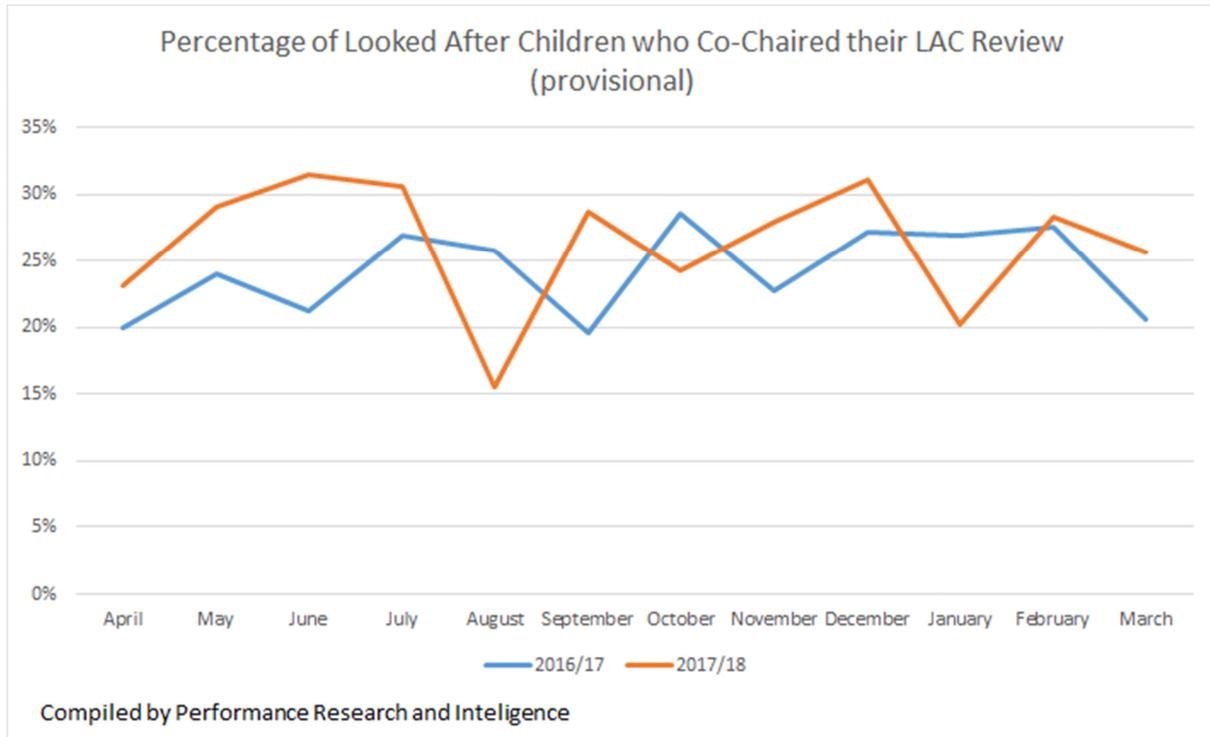


The proportion of visits taking place in 2017/2018 has averaged 79.2%, a significant increase from 63.5% in 2016/17. This information is not routinely collated by other local authorities and therefore we have no comparative data.

Performance around visits has been affected by a period of changes in Independent Reviewing Officers in the latter part of the year and also the fact that some older children choose not to see their Independent Reviewing Officers. In cases where children do not wish to see their Independent Reviewing Officer they will offer a range of alternate methods for children to share their views, set their agenda and be able to influence their care plans. This will include the Mind of my own (MOMO) 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.

## 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.



Despite significant fluctuations the proportion of young people co-chairing their review meetings has continued to improve. This figure was 24.1% in 2016/2017 and has risen to 26.8% in 2017/18

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 further.

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 Independent Reviewing Officers 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 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 the review process 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 vital if there is any consideration of reuniting them with their child in the future.

Performance in this area has fallen slightly from 2016/2017 when 33.5% of parents attended their child's review. In 2017/2018 the proportion was 32.9%. Feedback from parents may identify the barriers to their attendance.

The Safeguarding and Improvement Unit will look at achieving service user, and agency feedback in 2018/2019. Whilst it can be expected that some parents will not engage in the review, we need to understand why performance is low.

A Parental Participation Audit was undertaken in March 2018. This audit has taken place to seek assurance that when appropriate birth parents continue to be involved in the care planning for their children. The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook states:

*'The IRO should ensure that the views of the following are considered at the review, whether or not they attend the meeting: Birth parents and any other adult with Parental Responsibility.'* (IRO Handbook, page 17, paragraph 3.22).

The aim of the audit was:

- To establish how robust the Independent Reviewing Officers are in checking out the accuracy of reasons given for parental non-engagement.
- To evidence that parents are routinely being invited to 'Our Children' Reviews unless there are justifiable reasons why they should not be present at the child's meeting.
- To ascertain if Independent Reviewing Officers are seeking to establish the views of birth parents where they have not attended the review meeting and to look at how these views are recorded.
- To ascertain the frequency with which parents are sent minutes from meetings.
- To establish whether Independent Reviewing Officers are involved in encouraging parents to participate in their child's meetings and that they are invited to review meetings.

A random sample of 100 cases were looked at in detail as part of the audit from October 2017. Differentiation between birth mother and father's participation was gathered in order to explore whether there are different participation levels between parents. Information regarding communication with parents, how their participation was encouraged, how their views were ascertained was sourced from monitoring reports, review minutes, review attendance sheets and case notes.

Identified themes:

- Parents who were invited to their child's meeting but did not attend were not always included in the participation list. This meant they did not receive the minutes which also include the date of the next meeting.
- Independent Reviewing Officers were not always recording their contact with parents outside of the review process.
- There was little evidence of the Independent Reviewing Officer contacting parents directly to update them or establish their views.
- Some Independent Reviewing Officers task the Social Worker to update the parents.
- The Views of Others Section in the minutes rarely includes the views of the parents.

#### Recommendations:

The full audit outcome will be shared with the Independent Reviewing Officers as a practice development opportunity and their managers will audit casework in this area on a quarterly basis to ensure compliance.

Independent Reviewing Officers will contact parents who do not attend their child's meeting as appropriate. Their views will be included in the minutes or they will be an explain why their views are not available. .

Parents will be asked for their feedback about their experience of attending their child's meetings in 2018-19; feedback will be used to drive continuous development and improvement.

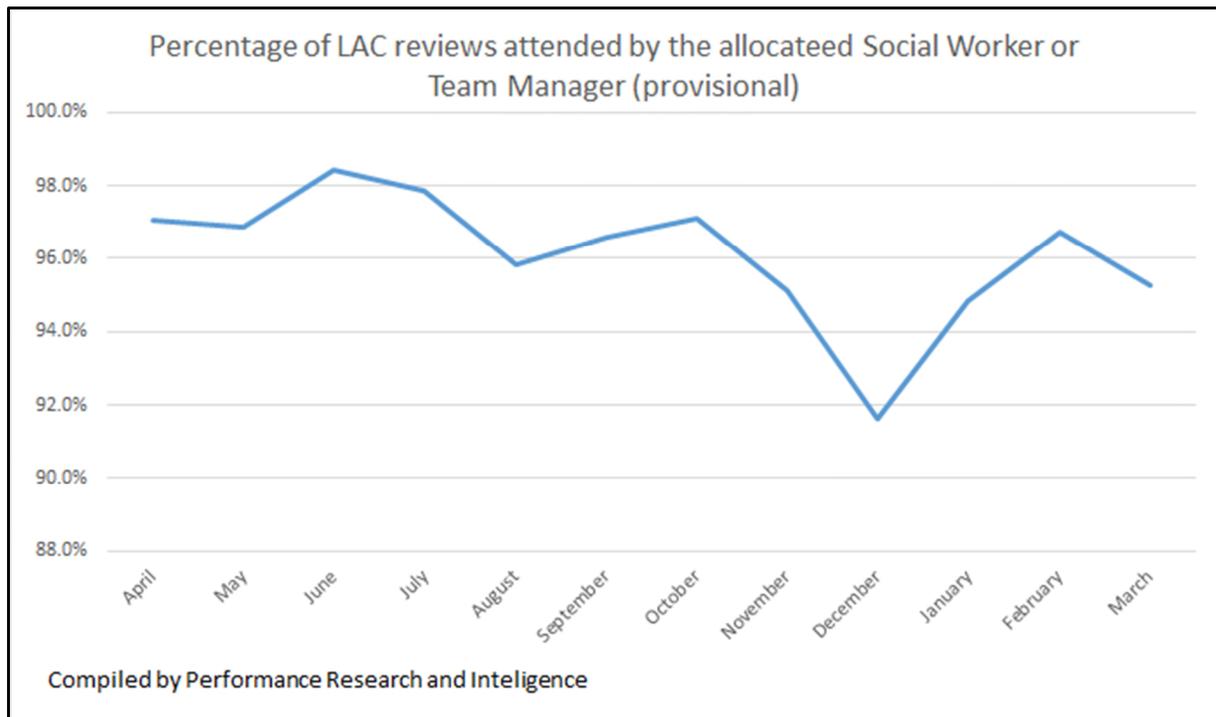
Parents will routinely be sent copies of the minutes which include the date of the next review (unless there are safeguarding reasons not to do so)

Parents will be sent an Introduction letter from the Independent Reviewing Officer to open up contact opportunities.

#### ***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 reviews and further improvement in the provision of reports has been maintained this year supported by Independent Reviewing Officer scrutiny and the dispute resolution process.

The charts below illustrate the slight fluctuations in social work attendance and reporting 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 practice, plans and arrangements for Our Children 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 Independent Reviewing Officer's Handbook, escalations are vital to quality assure the overall effectiveness of services to our children and young people. Escalations can be issues, actions or questions that the Independent Reviewing Officer has raised within the review process but have not been addressed.

The Independent Reviewing Officers have provided some examples of positive outcomes for our children and young people' as a result of their involvement in 2017/2018:

- 5 siblings placed in the same foster home. The carers wanted to adopt all the children but couldn't reach agreement with the LA about the package of support they might receive, and decided to pull out. The children were understandably upset. This was escalated to Stage 4 of the Dispute Resolution Protocol, and after a meeting with senior managers and agreement was reached with the carers and the application to adopt has been made.
- A 13 year old boy, subject to a Care Order since 2013 and in a foster placement since 2014. He had been placed with his sister who was about to reach 18 and would be leaving the foster home. He told his Independent Reviewing Officer when she visited that he didn't want to be left on his own in

the foster home. He said he would like to live with his grandmother. At the next meeting it was recommended that grandmother should be assessed as a potential carer. The child is now living with his grandmother.

- The 1 year old child's parents are both Polish so his first language was Polish, which continued when he was first looked after. The plan was adoption. When placements were being considered, the Independent Reviewing Officer asked if there were any suitable adoptive carers of Polish origin. The response was that there were two families but they weren't being considered. The Independent Reviewing Officer challenged this decision on the basis that as long as they were considered a suitable match, they would meet his cultural needs and be able to speak to him in his first language. Polish carers were considered and he is thriving since being placed with them.

### **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, managers 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 Looked After Child 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 safeguard 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.

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 which is sent by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager to the Locality Manager,  
**Stage 3** Lead for Children's Safeguarding to the Head of Service,  
**Stage 4** Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding to the Deputy Director,  
**Stage 5** Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding to the Strategic Director of Children's Services,  
**Stage 6** Referral to CAFCASS. (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)

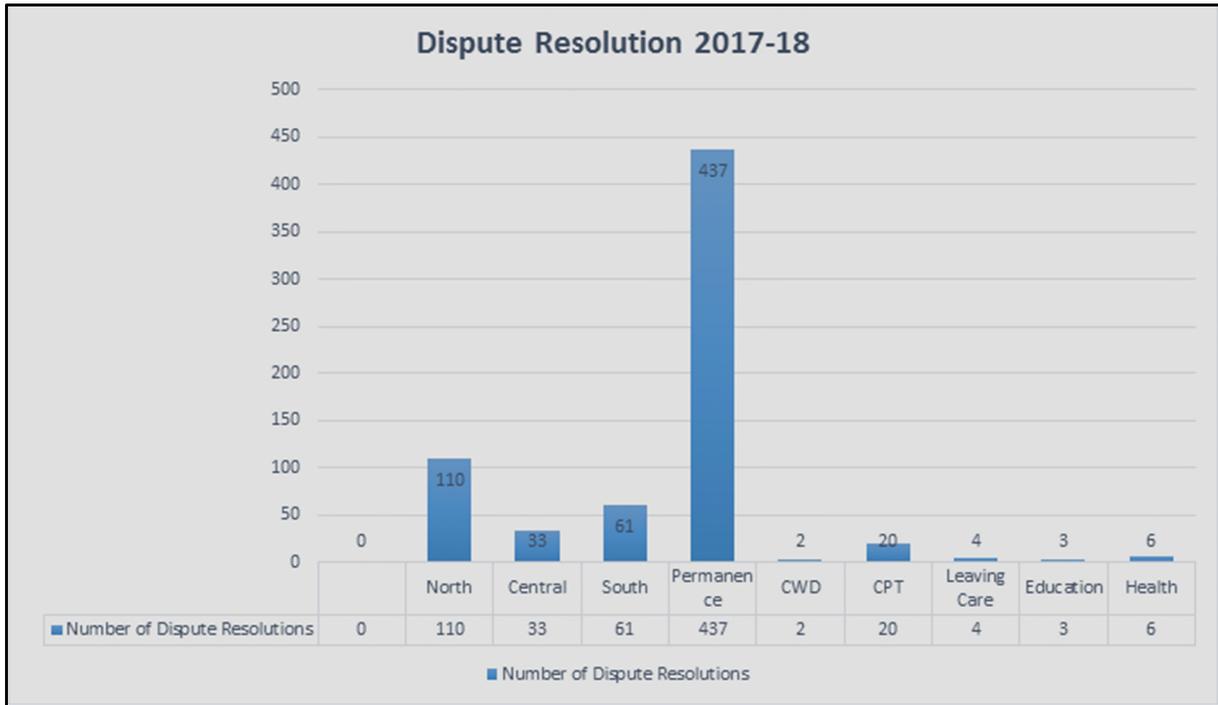
This Dispute Resolution process is completed on the Children's Information System and escalations during 2017/2018 were tracked outside of the system pending development for inclusion in the Children's Information System. This was in place from March 2018.

Monthly reports including data and themes are provided to the Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding. 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.

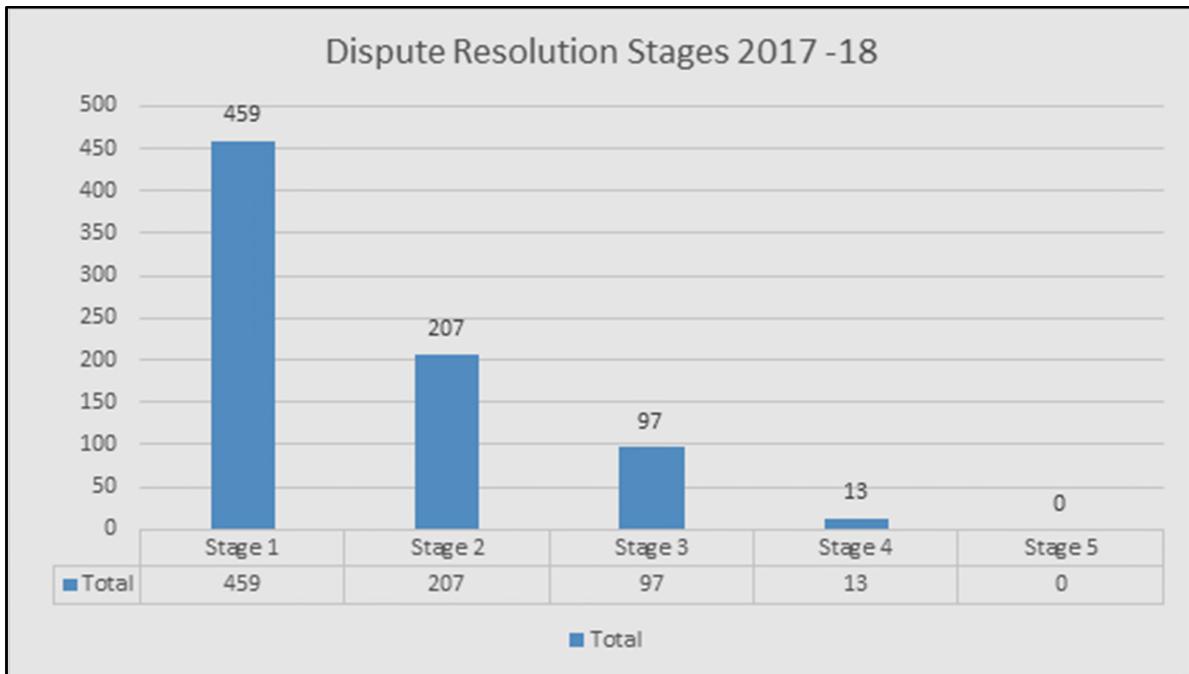
Audits have provided evidence that Independent Reviewing Officers have regular oversight of practice and planning and constructively challenge and influence practice, service development and improvements through use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol.

The 2017 Ofsted Inspection report stated:

*'IROs challenge any delay in plans for children appropriately and escalations of concerns to senior managers are increasingly focused on the quality of practice rather than compliance with procedures. (Ofsted report 2017, page 19).'*



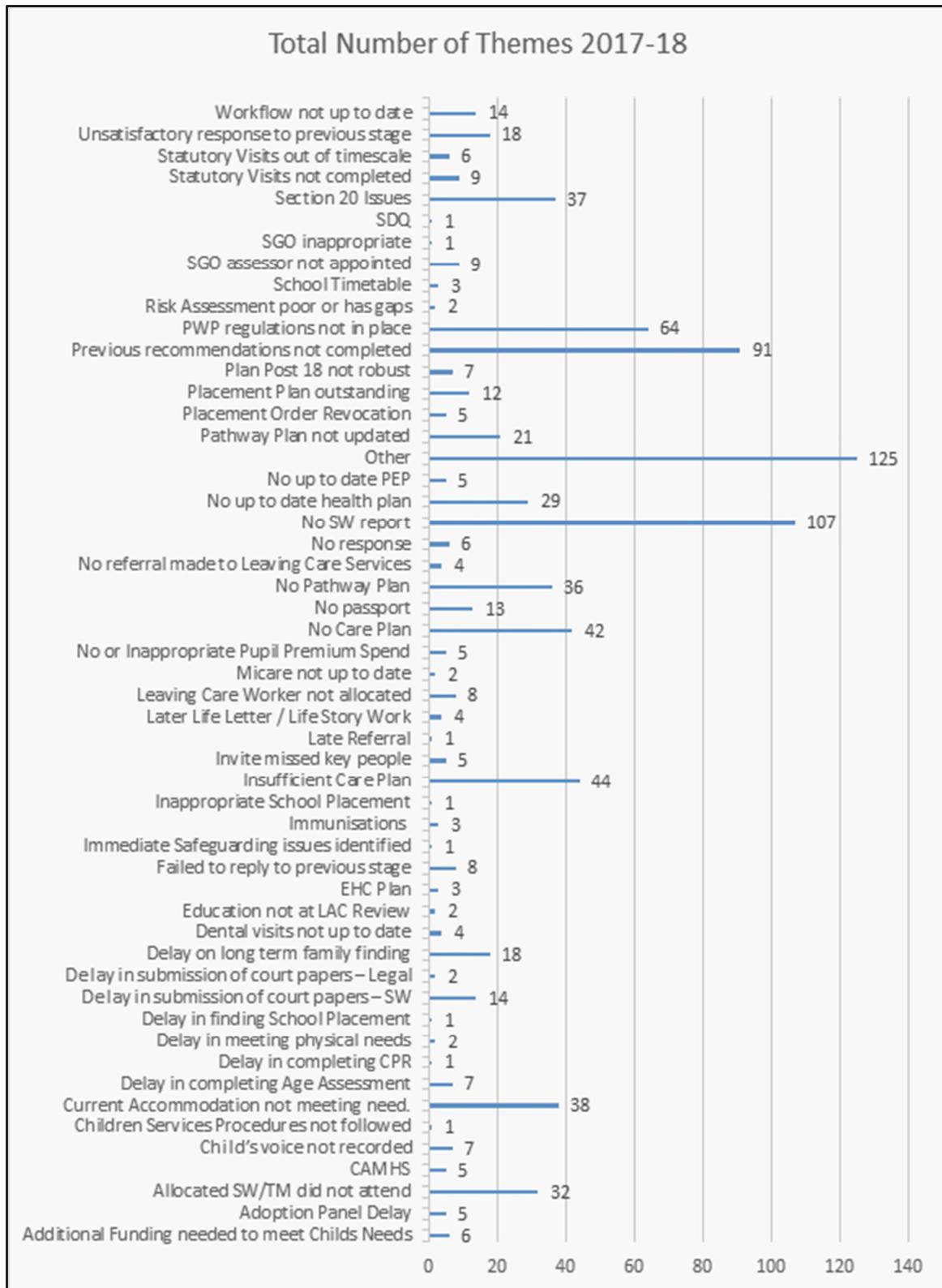
The total number of escalations have reduced this year from 782 in 2016/2017 to 676 in 2017/2018. The fact that numbers have slightly reduced suggests that there is an improving picture in relation to Social Work, but alongside this Independent Reviewing Officers continue to play a key part in driving up performance.



\* Please note there will be more Dispute Resolutions overall per stage, as the same dispute resolution can move through several stages.

The Safeguarding Unit also provide monthly performance information with regard to the different stages where the dispute resolution protocol is utilised. As you can see from the graph above, as expected the highest number of escalations were made

and resolved at Stage 1, reducing in number of the stages progress to Stage 5. No escalations reached Stage 5 (Director level) this year, and it as noted that as the year progressed less were being managed at Stage 3 & Stage 4, which is positive and indicates the process is now embedded at Team Manager level.



In total Independent Reviewing Officers raised a total of 891 issues during 2017-18. This year the top 5 (No Social Work Report for LAC Review; Previous recommendations not completed; Placement with Parent not authorised by a Senior Manager; Insufficient Care Plan and Care Plan almost mirror those highlighted in 2016/2017 regardless of the reduction in numbers overall. The majority of the escalations were sent to the Permanence Teams as these are the teams with the majority of our children and young people. One of the main frustrations for the service is recommendations being agreed and then not completed in timescale. This leads to a lot of dispute resolutions escalating unnecessarily. There remain issues around the data linked to Partner Agency Dispute Resolutions and collating information. This should be resolved when the new recording system is in place in 2019.

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

Independent Reviewing Officers have demonstrated impact during 2017-18. The increased and more consistent use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol has contributed to improvements in:

**Permanency planning** Performance measures (increase from 59.6% to 80.7%) and case audits have demonstrated that permanency planning is more robust at the second Looked After Child 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 parents regulations are adhered to.

**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 'Our Children' was scrutinised by Managers within Children's Services throughout 2017-18. 9 reports were produced as part of the Quality Assurance Framework which focused specifically on 4 areas of Independent Reviewing Officer practice.

- 1. The child's voice 'their ascertainable wishes and feelings' have been sought and taken into account by the IRO as part of the reviewing process. The child*

*or young person has been enabled to participate in their review when this is age appropriate and consistent with their wishes and feelings.*

61% of case Met this Practice Standard, 23% Part Met the standard with 12% Not and 4% being 'Not Applicable'.

- 2. The IRO's footprint on the child's case file demonstrates that they are scrutinising practice, plans and arrangements and ensuring positive outcomes for the child.*

67.5% of case Met this Practice Standard, 26.5% Part Met the standard with 4% Not and 2% being 'Not Applicable'.

- 3. The Independent Reviewing Officer has visited the child in the six weeks prior to their review or they have had contact with the child if the child themselves has expressed a wish to have an alternative form of communication with them.*

52% of case Met this Practice Standard, 25% Part Met the standard with 23% Not and 0% being 'Not Applicable'.

- 4. In order to ensure the child's needs are met in a timely manner and to avoid drift; timescales must be consistently met. - i.e. minimum of 20 days of being looked after, thereafter within 3 months of the Initial review and subsequent reviews are conducted at no more than six monthly intervals. Independent Reviewing Officer Monitoring Forms and minutes are evident on the child's case file.*

83% of cases Met this Practice Standard, 11.5% Part Met the standard with 5.5% Not and 0% being 'Not Applicable'.

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

As identified in the 2017-18 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.

There is a shared commitment to ensuring that Independent Reviewing Officers and Children's Guardians develop productive working relationships to ensure the best outcomes for children. CAFCASS were invited to attend the North West Independent Reviewing Officer Conference on 18 May 2017 and attended a meeting with Independent Reviewing Officers in November 2017 and June 2018; maintaining twice yearly direct contact between the two services.

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 ensuring good health outcomes for our 'looked after' children, and we have strong links with the 'Virtual School'.

Agencies are regularly invited to the Independent Reviewing Officer team meetings. In 2017-18 attendees from Barnardos, the Virtual School, Health, Legal and Adoption Counts were some of the agencies invited.

The Independent Reviewing Officers and their managers attend and contribute to the following meetings and forums:

- Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Voice and Influence subgroup
- The Virtual School Board.
- Looked After Children Health sub group.
- We have 2 'Child Sexual Exploitation' Champions who attend clinical supervision.
- The Leaving Care Service strategic group.
- Missing from Home Panels.
- Voice and Influence sub group.
- North West Regional Independent Reviewing Officer meetings.
- CORAM i meetings.
- UASC Meetings.
- Learning Circles.
- Liquid Logic development and implementation groups.
- DFE Innovation project.
- MOMO Implementation Group meetings.

### **13. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2017/2018**

- The Independent Reviewing Officer Service undertook its first direct survey with 'Our Children' which focused on the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer and the review process.
- We increased the number of themed audits undertaken; Pathway Planning; Parental Engagement, Section 20 cases; Placement Order & Permanence Planning.
- MOMO was introduced and implemented.
- There was an increase in the % of 'Our Children' being seen prior to their review meeting from 63.5% in 2016-17 to 79.2% in 2017-18 and improved data accuracy to clarify the reasons why visits are not taking place and whether alternative contact methods are being offered where young people decline a visit.
- Children are now consistently able to choose the date (within statutory timescales), time and venue for all subsequent reviews.
- Children are sent a 'child friendly' invite to their reviews.
- Children have been given the opportunity to contribute to their 'looked after' children reviews and communicate with their Independent Reviewing Officers in more creative ways using technology.
- The % of children co-chairing their reviews has remained stable.
- Some children have participated in themed reviews but this needs to be offered consistently.

- The timeliness reviews has increased in line with our 2017-18 target of 95-100%.
- Through audit we now understand why birth parents are not attending reviews, and need to improve performance in this area to 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 Officers and managers now 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 has commenced with our Performance Team to enable us to accurately measure what % of review recommendations were added to the child's file within 5 working days of the child's review.
- There is evidence of the Independent Reviewing Officer footprint on each child's.
- Weekly performance information is now being received by managers and Independent Reviewing Officers. Work has been undertaken with Business Support to ensure that the service have improved processes to ensure improvement in performance in the circulation of minutes in timescale.
- 83.3% of Independent Reviewing Officers were observed by managers last year and received constructive feedback with regard to their practice, performance, learning and development needs.
- The Dispute Resolution Process has been embedded across Safeguarding and Improvement Unit and the way in which we collate information has been streamlined.
- The safeguarding supervision agenda template has been revised and updated to reflect 'Signs of Safety' Framework
- 83% of Independent Reviewing Officers received an appraisal under the new agreed process 'About You'.
- All staff have continued to have access to Signs of Safety training.
- Signs of Safety is now successfully used across the Independent Reviewing Officer Service.
- Manchester Independent Reviewing Service hosted the 2017 North West regional conference.
- CAF/CASS attended the North West regional conference in May 2017, Service development day June 2018 and team meeting in November 2017.
- IRO Managers contributed to North West ADCS Audits with regard to 'Children placed at Home on Care Orders'.
- Independent Reviewing Officers have access to electronically held court paperwork via caselines.
- 3 more members of the team attended the Advanced Practice for Independent Reviewing Officer course at Edge Hill University and passed the course.
- Managers continued to attend regional groups.
- All Independent Reviewing Officers continue to have access learning opportunities via Research in Practice.
- Independent Reviewing Officers continue to be provided with legal updates and developments in court practice.
- Independent Reviewing Officers took part in a pilot which enabled them to use 'Voice Recognition' technology.

#### 14. KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2018/2019

- To have a relentless focus on ensuring permanence is secured for our children and young people at the earliest opportunity; a permanence plan is in place for our children and young people by their second review.
- Drive up the quality and effectiveness of Pathway Planning
- To continue to promote the engagement of parents in the child's meeting.
- To develop feedback forms for parents to identify and address barriers to their attendance.
- To develop feedback forms for professionals who attend children's reviews.
- To increase the number of children being offered a child friendly meeting and themed reviews.
- To continue to champion MOMO with 'Our Children' and professionals.
- To increase the number of children co-chairing their review meetings from our 2017-18 performance figure.
- To continue to improve the Independent Reviewing Officer footprint on the child's file and evidence more frequent overview between meetings.
- To increase the percentage of staff observed by their manager over 12 months from 83% to 90%.
- 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.
- To improve the Partner agency Dispute Resolution process as part of the Liquid Logic development.
- To decide on whether the roll out of Voice Recognition will take place across the service.
- To ensure that we evidence that we have listened to Our Children about labels and stigma, that we use plain language and change our terminology. We will not use LAC but will refer to Our Children, LAC Reviews will be referred to as the Child/Young Person's meeting, Contact will be referred to as meeting with families and friends.
- To improve the timeliness of Children's Meetings to 98%.
- To increase the percentage of children and young people seen by their Independent Reviewing Officer within 6 weeks of their meeting to 80%.
- To ensure 90% of recommendations are placed on the child's file within 5 days of their review.
- To improve the % of review minutes are sent out within 15 working days.
- To ensure that all of our reports align with the SOS Framework in tandem with the implementation of Liquid Logic.
- To ensure that 'Our Children' are routinely offered an advocate and an Independent Visitor.
- To ensure that our children and young receive an excellent service as they move into adolescence and adulthood, through scrutiny of Pathway Plans and Post 18 reviews.

## 15. CONCLUSION.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service has continued to build on the significant progress it has made over the last 3 years during 2017-18 which has resulted in strengthening the improvement in practice, plans, arrangements and outcomes for looked after children.

We were very proud of the comments made by OFSTED made following the 2017 Inspection; that the Independent Reviewing Officer Service in Manchester is 'strong' and that 'their influence is evident throughout all stages of care planning'. Furthermore that the 'right people are actively involved in timely and robust statutory review meetings' and that 'between reviews Independent Reviewing Officers work hard to get to know children who participate well in the planning for their future'.

In a survey of 'Our Children' 72.1% of 11-16 years olds surveyed told us that they enjoyed attending their reviews and 81.4% said that they felt comfortable in their review. 82.7% of children advised they were given the opportunity to have their say in reviews. Most importantly 95.2% stated that their Independent Reviewing Officer listened and acted upon what they were being told. 91.9% rated their most recent review okay, quite good or very good.

The Independent Reviewing Officer service is continually building upon the firm foundations of previous years.

- We have stable management and leadership with clear insight and understanding of service strengths and development needs and a robust service plan in place;
- Our Independent Reviewing Officers are appropriately skilled and experienced. They continue to be provided with appropriate support, learning and development opportunities and their views on future service developments are fed into our business plans;
- We are demonstrating continuous development and improvement in practice and performance as well as monitoring the performance of others;
- Statutory role and responsibilities of the Independent Reviewing Officer service are now well understood across Children's Services and partner agencies and our Dispute Resolution processes are well embedded evidencing how we robustly challenge all corporate parents (internal & external);
- We are now engaging with our children and young people more effectively through reviews processes, visits, MOMO and surveys to gain their views and build upon what they are telling us they want from our services.
- We are moving closer to our 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.

## 16. REFERENCES

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