

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS SERVICE

I R O

Annual Report 2020



Every picture paints
a life story



Leicester City Independent Reviewing Officers' Annual Report 2019-20

1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

The Independent Reviewing Officers' Service operates within the context of Leicester City Council being the 'Corporate Parent' for all of the children and young people in its care.

As Corporate Parents, the Council's ambition is not merely limited to ensuring that children and young people in care are safe and their welfare promoted, but they achieve their possible outcomes.

In order for the aspirations and expectations for children who experience our care to be realized, it is important for the Corporate Parenting Board (responsible for achieving them) to receive regular reports setting out progress. The annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report is part of that process.

As a service, we believe that transparent challenge and a collaborative approach across the Council and its partners, are more effective in improving the experiences and the outcomes for children in our care. Therefore, this report is aimed to provide opportunities for reflection and potentially influence/ inform future plans of actions and development of services across the Council.

2. Strategic aims and principles for Leicester City's looked after children – our aspirations for our children

The Local Authority has high standards for how we want our children to be cared for, as such there are key principles that underpin all our work:

- Being passionate advocates for children, young people and families
- Being respectful, compassionate, able to evidence relationship-based practice
- Honouring / valuing strengths and difference
- Having a shared understanding of the child's story
- Working in partnership with families, networks and colleagues
- Keeping families together wherever safe and practical to do so; where it is not, promoting permanency, identity, connections and relationships

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young

3. Independent Reviewing Officers - Legal context

person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Leicester City's IRO Service is part of the wider Safeguarding Unit and Quality Assurance Service. The Service is fully independent with the IROs having no involvement with the preparation of children's care plans, the operational decisions and management of cases or have any control over resources allocated to a child.

In summary, the statutory responsibilities attached to the IROs are defined by the IRO Handbook (2010) with main focus on:

- promoting the voice of the looked after children, their participation and understating of their situations;
- scrutinizing and ensuring that care plans for looked after children are well informed by assessments and meet their holistic needs;
- monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent (further details of children's demographics and Leicester City's key performance indicators are available in **Appendix 1**).

These three areas will be further explored later on in the report.

4. Profile of the IRO Service – Who we are

During the reporting period, there has been a slight change in the IRO service personnel, with one member of leaving the team and one staff member joining the team on a permanent basis, one staff member has undertaken a secondment as a promotion we therefore have 1 Agency staff member. The service comprises eight permanent IROs, five of the team work full time and four part time, providing a full time equivalent 7.8 posts. There are 7 females (1 British Asian, 5 White British, 1 mixed heritage) and 2 male (White British, European).

All IROs working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring enhanced checks. All IROs have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience from various areas of children's social care practice. All IROS have substantial experience of effective direct work with children and young people.

Through the year, the Service has had consistent leadership from the current IRO Service Manager. The post holder is a qualified Social Worker, registered with Social Work England and subject to regular Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks. The Service Manager ensures there is casework oversight, professional advice and management support for each IRO. This includes monthly supervision sessions, team and peers' meetings and access to appropriate training and research materials.

The IRO Service manager is a member and attends the East Midlands IRO managers Regional network on quarterly basis. These meetings provide opportunities for professional network development, peer-support and sector-led improvement.

We are committed to ensuring our practice standards are high by providing our IROs with continuous opportunities for professional development. The Local Authority has invested in the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice framework across Children Social Care and Early Help Division. This is a strength-based approach and further details around the ethos and principles of the framework are available on <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/support-for-children-and-young-people/early-help/signs-of-safety/>. Throughout 2019 - 20, the IROs have continued to be trained in using the Signs of safety. Stability/Success Framework and are become Practice leads with implementing the model within our current practice . The new framework has brought significant changes in the way LAC Reviews are being held, with more measurable engagement from the child and young people and more focus on their lived experiences, wishes and feelings. **Appendix 2** gives a further example of how the model has been used to effect change and enable a young child to give her views to her IRO.

5. Our core commitments to children and young people – key roles of the IRO

In 2019-20 the average caseload of an IRO was 78 children per FTE. The IRO Handbook notes the case load size for an IRO should be between 50 -70 cases per FTE. However, the size of caseloads alone does not indicate the overall workload for each IRO as individual roles and responsibilities vary depending on the case complexities and the stage of the child's journey.

The IRO Service Manager oversees all new children entering care ensuring:

- timely allocation to an IRO, alongside allowing for a thoughtful allocation 'match' between the child and the IRO;
- a clear oversight of any emerging issues pertaining to the circumstances of new looked after children.

In 2019-20 the IRO Service chaired 1,693 LAC Review meetings, a decrease of 88 meetings from the previous period, which has continued to reflect the overall reduction of our Children Looked After population.

Statutory review meetings for our children have been timely, with strong service performance of 97% of meetings being held within timescales throughout the year, 3% of meetings were not held in time and an analysis of the reasons behind this relates to unforeseen IROs' absences, awaiting the finalising of care plans where specialist assessments were outstanding

It is important to note the strong performance relating to the timeliness of Reviews has been achieved through partnership working with Leicester City Council's operational teams (Social Work, Fostering, Residential and Adoption Services etc) and other statutory, and targeted community agencies. Again throughout this year, there has

been a continued improved partner contribution and commitment within the childrens Reviews and within the Corporate Parenting Board.

5.1 Promoting the voice of the looked after children, their participation and understating of their situations

The IRO Service is committed to ensuring that our children and young people have opportunities for their experiences, views, wishes and feelings to be shared and included in the development and implementation of their care plans.

Participation figures for children and young people taking part in their Reviews have been relatively consistent across this period with an average of 96% which is an increase of 9% from the previous year. This has been due to targetted work to support young people that tended to not want to participate in their Review previously . Additionally the improvement in children's engagement is due to the various pathways we developed in the previous year and further embedded in this year to facilitate and enable children and young people to have their say:

- IROs visiting / being in contact with a child prior to their Review (where appropriate to their age and circumstances). This is an opportunity for the child to get to know their IRO, better understand their role and ensuring a level of familiarity at the point of the formal meeting. IROs visited children on 246 occasions out side their Review
- Bespoke LAC Reviews Consultation Papers for 3 age bands of children have been re-designed, with the assistance of the Children in Care Council and lead Participation IRO. They have now been implemented with positive comments received.
- IROs being creative in using technology to ensure children and young people are able attend their own meeting and being held at a time when convenient for the children (taking children for a refreshment/ activities, writing letters/cards , skype calls etc)
- IROs ensured the children and young people have access to trusting adults who would be able to represent their views. If one is not identified within the child's social network, IROs offer their support or make referrals on the child's behalf to Leicester City's Advocacy service.
- Oppurtunities for 16+ young people to 'lead' their own review meetings (with the assistance of the IRO). While this approach has been in development, and by discussion with the Care Experinced Consultants, our continuing aim is to have most of our young people chairing or taking the lead in reviewing of their own care plans. We have a small number of young people who are 'leading' their own meeting. We are looking at ways of using the assistance of our Participation Service to progress this task further via facilitating peer mentors to support young peoples increased engagement, confidence and negotiation skills..
- The IRO Service Manager took the lead role in the management and development of the Independent Visitor Service for CLA. The number of Visitors increased in the period with production of a range of information to support the Visitors in their work. The Independent Visitor Co Ordinator jointly worked with

an IRO with the Visitors to encourage them to support LAC in their LAC Reviews

The IRO Service seeks feedback from children, young people, families and carers about their experience in care and the difference the IRO has made to the lives. This information is collated, used to drive improvements and service developments and is included in Children Social Care and Education quarterly quality assurance reports.

In 2019 -20, 132 children provided feedback in relation to how well their IRO supported them in the review process: as follows



'explain to me how the meetings can help me'

'nothing more can be done for me, really everything is good,'

'I'm reassured that I do not have to go home and that people are helping me.'

In scaling how their meetings are helping matters to improve for them (1- 10 with 10 being the highest rating) 124 children/young people responded with:

- 19 children/ young people scaling between 1 & 5
- 82 children/ young people scaling between 6 & 10
- 23 children/young with no scaling identified

All feedback received from children is discussed and reflected upon by the IRO service Manager and IROs during team meetings and individual supervision sessions where appropriate.

Feedback from complaints

Two statutory complaints were made into the service from parents in relation to decisions made about children's care plans, All but one of the complaints were resolved satisfactorily with lessons learnt with one complaint considered under the Stage 2 statutory complaints process.

Another important aspect of the IRO role relates to scrutinizing and ensuring that care plans for looked after children are well informed by assessments and meet their holistic needs. To strengthen the IRO oversight, we have developed a comprehensive action plan with 4 focused areas as follows:

- ✚ *Planning and preparation for LAC reviews* – this included quality assurance activities to ensure updated assessments/ reports were timely and shared with children, families, carers and the IRO prior to the meetings.

Within the period, the IROs have continued to drive and promote our culture around respectful practice by redefining and clearly articulating the expectations from Looked After Children's Reviews.

To ensure good preparation for Reviews, a pre-meeting oversight by the IRO occurs two days prior to all meetings. This activity provides the opportunity for the IROs to have discussions with all relevant parties, review the existing reports and ensure these had been appropriately shared with others (children, foster carers, family members etc).

Through advanced preparation the quality and duration of the LAC Reviews have improved, with more targeted and solution focused discussions leading to better informed recommendations and decisions made in relation to the children. It is pleasing that in this period IROs were able to report that in 82% of parents that attended their child's Review they felt that they were able to make a positive contribution to the Review. This increase from previous years could be accredited to the amount of contact IROs are having pre meeting with parents .

Parent and carer feedback has been received on 62 occasions, examples of feedback have been:

'I feel x who leads the meeting is excellent and has a very child centred approach, she is approachable and it is great to work with her – thankyou x'

'nothing more – they are already doing a good job'

We also received constructive feedback such as:

..for the IRO to consider 'more mediation between parents and the social workers when being affected by the decision to be placed for adoption'

'I would like a visit before the Review – this has happened before and was helpful to me'

"I would like the IRO to ensure that foster carers views are always considered"

There has been relatively consistent compliance in relation to Social Work reports being available to the Review meetings, however has had a slight down turn of 2% to 87% than in the previous period.

IRO oversight in between the meetings

In addition to scrutinising the children's care plans at statutory Reviews, IROs have a responsibility to monitor the children's progress between meetings. To achieve this, we have an internal RAG rating system to assist our IROs in identifying and ensuring appropriate levels of challenge and oversight are applied to particular children's situations. The expected standard is that as a minimum each child's records can reflect IRO oversight in any quarter period. The primary aim of this system is to ensure IROs focus on the most vulnerable children and that critical tasks/ actions are completed in a timely way for the benefits of children.

Similarly, to the pre-meeting oversight, this tracking system has led to IROs:

- having a better grip and understanding of their caseloads;
- ability to identify cases that require a closer monitoring and actions;
- improved communications between the IRO Service and SWs, Foster carers, other professionals;
- experiencing a decrease in the number of formal escalations that need to be actioned.

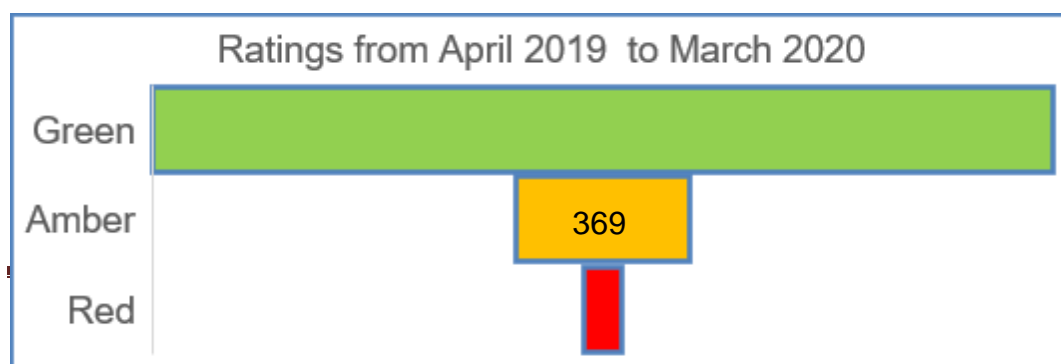
The RAG criteria are agreed following a Review, with clear actions/timescales noted for the IRO to track as follows;

Red: Time-critical elements of the care plan are becoming subject to drift or delay or where there are significant safeguarding issues, and this is likely to have an impact on outcomes for the child. These actions will subsequently be subject to IRO review and oversight within two – four weeks. The IRO has options to set an earlier date for a review, require an up-date from the social worker at regular intervals, and/or monitor activity on the child's file. They may also complete an escalation and where the concern includes the manager's oversight of the case, they will alert this to the Service Manager or Head of Service.

Amber: Where there is emerging evidence of potential drift or delay or where less critical elements of the care plan are not being progressed, the IRO may require an interim up-date from the relevant member of staff, and/or check the child's records up to 6 -8 weeks from the Review meeting.

Green: The care plan for the child in the main progresses appropriately. The IRO completes a 'Desktop mid-way review' and implements with the child their 'In Contact Plan' to understand their view of how their care /pathway plan is progressing

The table below shows ratings made in the last year with 1,232 cases rated green. It is positive to note that in all 81 red rated cases, the operational services and partner agencies have responded and acted upon the IROs' recommendations in a timely way.



The Mid-Way Review process developed in the previous period is now fully implemented to monitor the progress of the care plan.

The IROs oversight (between LAC Reviews) in this period has significantly increased, with a total of 2,886 case records being added on children's records, indicating the IROs' footprint and oversight on cases. This represents 1,304 recordings more than the previous period, leading to less formal escalations occurring due to the amount of communication with social workers/managers and informal tracking

- ✚ IROs having bespoke 'In Contact Plans' with the children they are responsible for to enable better relationships

The principles of 'In-contact Plan' is an agreement between the child and his/her IRO of how IROs will keep in touch with them in between or at their Reviews. This has been completed by meeting face to face, phone, text, letter or skype etc .

- ✚ Promoting and facilitating the Local Authority's Advocacy offer

The LA's independent advocacy offer aims to support children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings at key points of involvement within statutory services.

The advocacy service is delivered via the Rights and Participation (P&E) Service through the appointment of Independent Advocates. The IROs have been essential in embedding the culture of advocacy across social care. All children who have not engaged with the Review process (by any means) have been considered for a referral to the Advocacy Service by their IRO.

Between April 1st 2019 and 31st March 2020, the P&E Service received 58 referrals to support young people in their LAC Reviews. The overall feedback from young people regarding the input of the Advocates is highly positive:

- *"You worked well with me, you was not rude, you did not talk over me"*
- *"Having an advocate made me feel more confident and I felt that I was listened to".*
- *"If I had been alone doing the complaint I may be anxious. It was good having support and guidance".*

5.3 Monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent

Further details around children looked after demographics and performance of the Local Authority as Corporate Parents are available in Appendix 1.

The role of the IRO Service is to monitor the activity of the Local Authority and partners, to quality assure, acknowledge positive practice and challenge any areas of practice deficits. Where IRO escalations are made, they need to be meaningful, effective and improve the quality of services provided to children and young people.

The IRO SM has attended the Corporate Parent Forum following recent developments to strengthen the corporate offer and from partnerships, and given feedback on areas of progress and concern to the Corporate Parent lead. The IRO SM will continue to have oversight of the Forums work/performance and consider how the Pledge for children in care is being met and with liaison with the Care Experienced Consultants. A summary of Corporate Parenting data is summarized as follows:

Education: The compliance in relation to Children's Personal Education Plans has remained good (98% at the end of March 2020). IROs have ensured that the children's educational needs had been considered during the Review meetings and when specific provisions have been required to cater for individual needs, these were discussed with the Virtual School's representatives.

Health: Up to date health assessments have increased significantly, while dentist, initial and review assessments required closer monitoring. The IRO Service undertook a joint Audit with our Health colleagues focusing on timeliness and quality of provision. One escalation was made in the period to senior health managers to progress a child's case, the senior member of the health partnership responded timely and appropriately.

Safeguarding: IROs ensure children's safety is given paramount consideration alongside the team around the child. In addition in this period, the team have ensured the right procedures are followed where criminal exploitation has been a concern, and have received training to chair meetings related to identifying harmful sexual behaviour from young people to young people.

Positive Activities: IROs monitoring forms note that 98% of children have access and opportunities to enjoy some forms of leisure activity appropriate to their age, with 98% of children's cultural needs being met, this is a consistent area of positive practice.

Employment Training and Transitions (EET/NEET): IROs have oversight of the Pathway Plans of 16+ young people and actively promote EET. Where young people are not engaging, IROs have met them separately outside of their Review to further explore and understand any barriers to support them in overcoming these. Appendix 1 gives further overview of the progress of EET/NEET (Not in education/employment and training)

Formal Escalations:

One of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. The IRO Service has a formal 'Escalation' policy as part of their statutory function and have a set criterion for raising concerns (that includes all statutory work and safeguarding requirements that have drifted or not in place according to the needs of the child). Electronic forms are within our recording system (Liquid Logic) that enable the issues to be escalated and tracked and visible to all.

In the period, the IRO Service generated 61 formal escalations, concerning 73 individual children with 152 concerns raised. These escalations have all been resolved at Social Worker/Manager level without any concerns being raised to Director or externally to CAFCASS. While the number of formal escalations has reduced – the proportionate number of children these relate to has increased as well as a significant increase in IROs having oversight and tracking cases in the period.

IROs acknowledged the good and outstanding practice of Social Workers by generating 21 formal good practice forms (8 more than the previous year) IROs assist Social Workers and other practitioners to achieve their best practice through regular feedback and through their 'critical friend' role. Generally these have related to where the impact of a SWs work can be found in a Signs of Safety /Success approach to their practice with children /families.

6. Other achievements of 2019 - 20

- IROs have contributed to the generic Childrens Early Help, Social Care and Education Division's Quality Assurance Framework through completion of monthly thematic audits and taking part in various QA training. Learnings from audits and various reviews are integral part of IROs professional developments;
- The IRO service contributes to the induction and learning programmes for newly qualified and qualified social workers, to emphasise the role of the IRO in care planning and what makes a good review for children and young people;
- We have held joint workshops with our partners through the year eg Transitions Team , Cafcass, Virtual School, Health and Wellbeing leads, Service Manager Placements & Care Leavers, Adoption Manager and Participation and Engagement service in understanding each other's service areas and priorities, setting out joint tasks to improve outcomes for our children
- We have enabled young people to lead part of their LAC/Pathway Reviews- we will build further on this with the Care Experienced Consultants in 2020-21
- All IROs have lead development roles which enable them to work with colleagues and partners to drive improvements for the service and our children.

This report and additional documentation evidences the continued progress and

7. Conclusions and next steps

improvement made by Leicester City Council and its partners to the nature and quality of care provided to children looked after. It also summaries the challenges ahead and the impact the IROs practice and oversight has had in improving the outcomes of our children and young people.

The IRO Service has continue to enhance and embed our practice standards We will remain committed to our ethos to put the children and young people first, ensuring their experiences, views and feelings are at the heart of their care plans. Having a stable team means we continue to build on our ability to monitor the progress of plans in between meetings, by applying our RAG rating system, Mid-way Review process, IRO oversight and using the SoS (Stability and Success) model.

For the next period:

- we will continue focusing on ensuring our children and young people reach their permanency and long term stability with no delay (in all aspects of their lives),
- we will drive and promote the agenda of children's participation and co-production
- and we will ensure the pathway plans provide young people leave care with the basis and skills to prepare them for the adult life.

At the end of March 2020 the Local Authority took measures to implement practice guidance and quality assurance processes to manage the effects of COVID 19 for children, families, carers and staff. This will be reported on in the 2020-21 IRO Annual Report

Julie Jordan

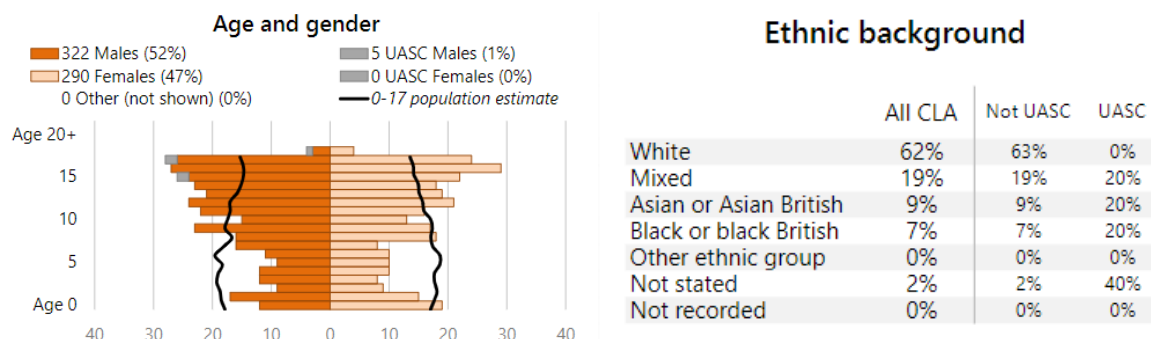
IRO Service Manager

Safeguarding & Quality Assurance Unit

APPENDIX 1:

Corporate Parenting Performance 2019 - 20 –Demographics of looked after children and young people

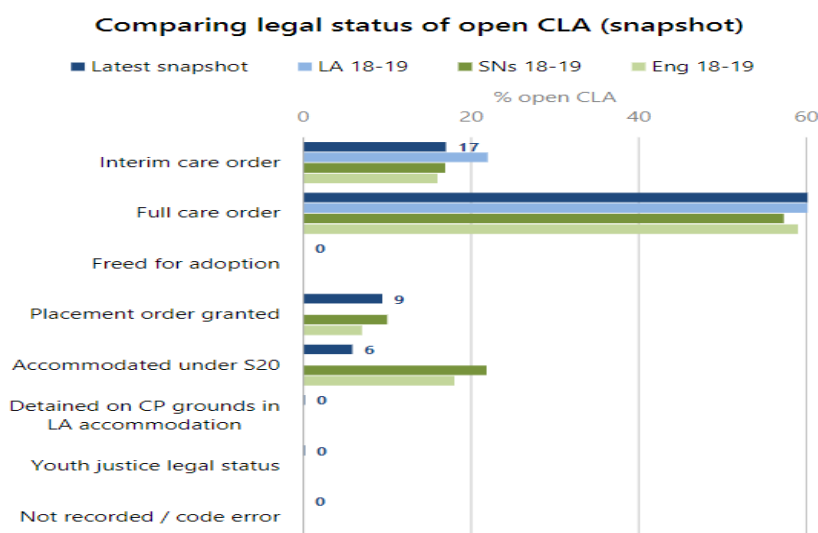
Considering the profiles of our CLA, the charts below provide an overview of their age, gender, ethnic background, legal status, placements and stability of children.



As in previous years, the number of males in our care continues to be slightly higher than females, and also of the upper age group.

In relation to the diversity and ethnic background, there is no significant change in the period and along with gender and age Leicester City CLA population is broadly comparative with national trends.

The below graph notes that most children are looked after under a Care Order, Section 31 of Children Act 1989. The Local Authority has maintained its practice around rigorous use of Section 20 voluntary accommodations, with numbers continuing to decrease further from previous years. Over the past year, the number of children subject to placement orders (for adoption plans) has again increased. This has been a positive trend year on year.



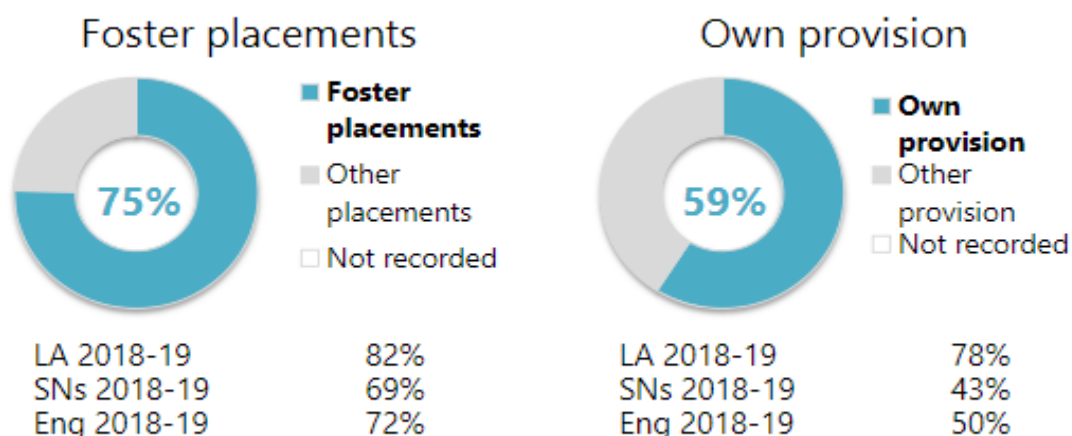
Placements

As of March 2020, most of our children were placed in foster care followed by residential care. From the previous year there has been a slightly higher % of children being placed in foster care provision overall. In the same period there has been an increase in the use of independent foster care services and of private children's home provisio, this generally relates to larger sibling groups needing to be placed at any one time.

In relation to the location of the placements the majority of our children are placed within Leicester/Leicestershire. There are circumstances whereby children being placed beyond the boundaries of Leicestershire are considered to be in their best interests (for example for those children/young people at risk of sexual exploitation).

The 16+ Accomodation Strategy aims to provide suitable accommodation for young people who are leaving care or require semi independent provision. Our in house residential services have excellent Ofsted gradings of Good or Outstanding

CLA placements by type and provision



Placement type (open CLA)	Own LA	Private	Other	Total
Foster placement	331	130	4	465
Placed for adoption	7	0	7	14
Placed with parents	0	0	28	28
Independent living	0	23	1	24
Residential employment	0	0	0	0
Residential accommodation	0	2	6	8
Secure Children's Homes	0	1	0	1
Children's Homes	26	41	0	67
Residential Care Home	0	2	0	2
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	3	3
Family Centre	0	1	1	2
Young Offender Institution	0	0	1	1
Residential school	0	0	1	1
Other placements	0	1	0	1
Temporary placement	0	0	0	0
Total placements	364	201	52	617

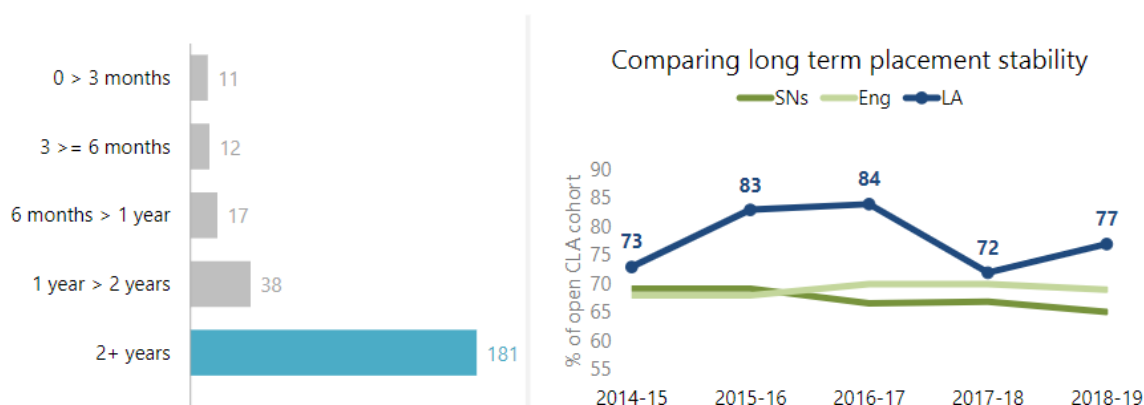
Stability is measured by placement moves for children, the lower the figure the more stable children are likely to be. At the end of March 2020 while less children were placed into care through the year, the duration of placements have lasted significantly longer. This can be attributed in part to the activity around a tighter grip on matching, achieving permanence placements for children earlier on, the implementation of 'mapping' children's cases under Signs of Safety to have assured safeguarding and a greater use of 'Placement Support Planning' and 'Disruption Planning' meetings held where pre-planning can take place if a disruption is likely to or has occurred.

The impact of a full time 'kinship care worker' post has enabled the LA to reduce the amount of negative assessments by one third, thereby focussing on the quality and timeliness of assessments and placements.

IRO's receive an electronic alert to inform of any emergency unplanned move so they can have immediate oversight with the aim to scrutinise the arrangements being made as being appropriate. Alongside this the IROs will visit/ support children through their In Contact Plan until there is a rearranged meeting usually held within 20 working days.

Duration of placements

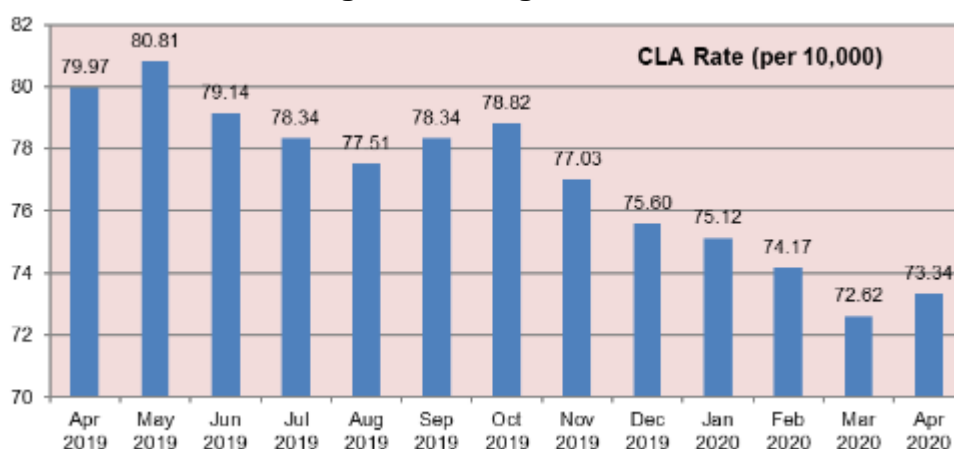
Duration of latest placement for each current CLA aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2½ years or more



Children entering and exiting care

Between April 2019 and March 2020, a total of 193 children entered into care. This is a reduction of 10 children from the previous period. The graph below notes the rate of CLA per 10,000 population of children aged under 18 years reflecting the decrease, and fluctuations over the period.

Children entering and exiting care

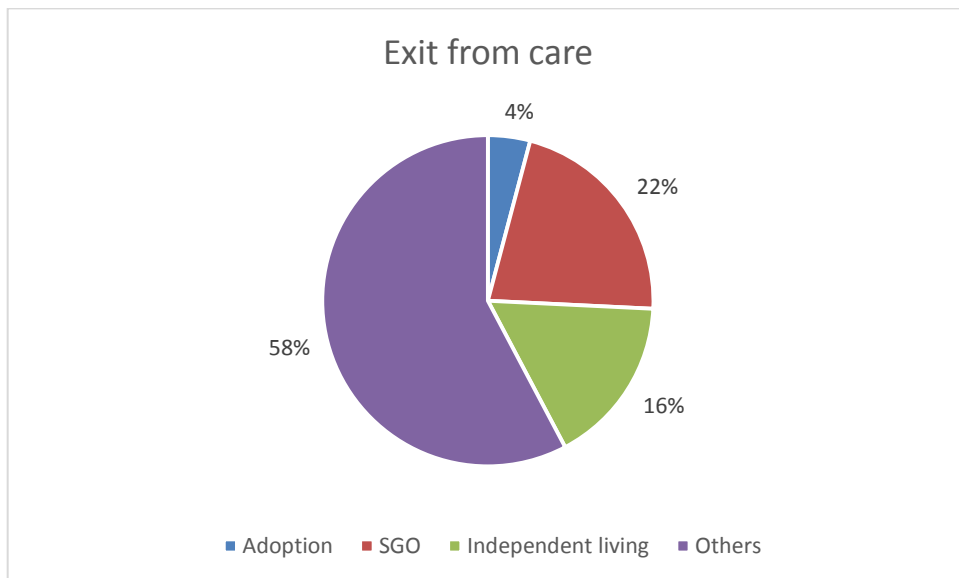


There has been a further 5 % increase in the number of children who were subject to pre-proceedings being 'stepped down' (64%) as opposed to being escalated to the Courts and becoming looked after. As of March 2020 121 children of 68 families were subject to Public Law Court Proceedings, this is a reduction of 50 children of 21 families less within the Court process from the last period.

This is reflective of the Local Authority's commitment to strengthen and support children and families through provision of targeted, Edge of Care Services including MST Services and Family Group Conferences. In addition the impact of the Signs of Safety methodology is likely to be having a positive effect within Social Work Teams. The number of children subject to pre-proceedings and care proceedings continues to be managed and tracked by the Case Work Progression Manager, with good liaison with the IRO Service and the operational teams.

While the performance measurement for completion of Court Proceedings within 26 weeks continues to be a challenge for Leicester/Leicestershire Courts in the period there has been a 1% increase (from 27% to 28 %) of cases referred to the Courts that have concluded within the above timescales. This is a continuing area of priority for the Local Authorities and Judiciary, with an improvement plan being in place, overseen by the Family Justice Board and Ministry of Justice.

There were 233 children who ceased to be looked after in the period, a reduction of 19 children from 2018- 19. The graph below notes the key exit plans from care in the period.



- 20% more children than the previous year ceased to be looked after due to being adopted than the previous year.
- 4% more children ceased to be looked after due to a special guardianship orders (SGO)
- 5% less young people went onto live independently than the previous period demonstrating placement durability is lasting longer for the older age range.

In January 2019, Mark Riddell, DFE National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers was invited by the Local Authority to review Leicester City’s provisions and services for young people who leave our care. Mr Riddell advised on a range of matters with the view to strengthen the care leavers offer across partnerships and made a number of helpful recommendations to be considered by the Authority, in consultation with care leavers. In 2019- 20 95.4 % of young people/care leavers aged 16 – 18 years of age were deemed by the LA to have been placed in suitable accommodation.

Health of Children Looked After

Following a review of health services for CLA and close tracking of performance the number of children subject to an up to date health assessment when being in care for 12 months or more at the end of March 2020 was 93% This is a consistent picture from the previous period. While there remain challenges in the timeliness of Initial and Review Health Assessments and in dentist examinations these have improved and remain subject to close monitoring via the Corporate Parenting Board.

The IRO Service Manager liases with the senior managers of the Strategic Health Board for CLA contributing to the progress of the improvement plan.

A joint audit was undertaken earlier within th year by the Health lead and IRO Service Manager of a small sample of children and young people across the care spectrum in order to understand the strengths /deficits in multiagency practice, alongside the children’s experience and outcomes of their health plans.

A number of recommendations were made in the Audits, in particular in relation to strengthening the Health Summaries for young people leaving care,the figure for this period is 74.6% of 16 -18 year olds have received their health information.

Education Employment & Training of Children looked after

The Leicester City's Virtual School, under the leadership of Virtual Headteacher, oversees all the Personal Education Plans (PEPS) of children looked after, from reception class to Year 11. In this period there have been strengths and challenges in relation to educational outcomes.

As of March 2020, 98% of PEPs are completed and up-to-date an increase of 1% from the previous period. The completion of PEPs are subject to ongoing analysis and scrutiny from the Virtual Headteacher, IRO service and the Authority.

The Virtual Head continues to quality assure all PEPs completed for Leicester's children looked after. During the year, the quality of these PEPs has risen significantly from 62% to 85%. Academic targets for the children are set by school. Sometimes these are based on end of their Key Stage outcomes however they are always aspirational and data indicates that across the year, an average of 64% of the children are on track to meet their targets.

Key Stage 1 results showed a fall in the number of pupils achieving or exceeding the standard compared to last year. Outcomes have fallen for all children, regardless of the length of time they may have been in care. At the same time, outcomes for all children in Leicester and nationally have remained largely stable, so for this small cohort the gap has widened slightly.

At Key Stage 2, results also showed a fall and remain an area of focus going forward by the Corporate Parent Board as these children move into their secondary education. From time to time results can fluctuate related to the cohort of children and young people who enter care who may have missed significant periods of schooling for example.

Year 11 results in this period (whilst still lower than the results for non-looked after young people), show improvements in all areas. Outcomes for all measures have risen significantly in this grouping. Early analysis would seem to indicate that the strategic plan to target one to one support for Year 11 learners has paid dividends for a good proportion of those young people. Whilst there is still some way to go, there are a range of good or better outcomes this year and all Year 11s with results have received a card of congratulations from the Local Authority.

The Local Authorities data indicates that 114 young people are currently noted as NEET due to illness/disability/pregnancy/parenting, and other individual reasons, this is an increase by 19 young people than in the previous periods cohort.

These young people's circumstances, as well as those young people subject to Education and Health Care Plans are regularly reviewed, led by LCC Education Department, and activity is being focused on this cohort of young people. In particular the Mayorals ambition for young people as a next step is to achieve 70% of our LAC in EET. There have been a range of innovative projects within the Council to support this such as ring fenced posts for care leavers, apprenticeships, with further initiatives being built on such as within the construction industry for care leavers.

The IRO service continues to have a crucial role in improving the quality of education received by our children, with provisions in place for all IROs to have access to children's E- PEPs, (& EHCPs) an on-line platform to appraise the most up to date information. The education of CLA is fully explored and discussed within/outside of LAC Reviews and any identified actions are monitored and subject to further review by the IRO.

Appendix 2

Example of an impact an IRO has made using Signs of Safety, Stability, and Success in a young child's Looked After Review

Background:

When she was a few months old in 2015 N was placed with a relative due to domestic abuse within the home environment. N's father was imprisoned and when released it became apparent he had been having contact with his daughter outside of the Courts agreement. Legal planning meetings were held to consider the concerns and trust in the family carers ability to continue to work together with the local authority to keep N safe and she was subsequently placed for brief period in a foster placement.

IRO Intervention in Signs of Safety, Stability and Success

The IRO visited N in her placement and used the '3 Houses' Signs of Safety (SoS) toolkit to gather her views before her LAC Review. This is building a pictorial understanding for young children about their circumstances and to gain their views based on this

During this exercise it was evident to the IRO that N's family remained important to her and that she wanted to see her siblings. At the LAC Review the Signs of Safety framework helped professionals to understand that N was settling well in her placement when looking at the strengths and what is working well for N. This highlighted the need to explore more of her extended family to look after N with timescales for viability assessments having been agreed in regards to what needs to happen next.

Following the LAC Review the IRO advocated for N to be placed with her Aunt who had a positive assessment and this was agreed as part of the SoS meeting. After the move to her Aunt the IRO continued to chair N's LAC Reviews and identify the support that the family needed to continue to look after her

N continues to remain living with her Auntie and Uncle, they were approved as N's Kinship carers at the beginning of 2020. At her last LAC Review it was evident that she is settled in her placement and she continues to have regular contact with her family. N started school which she enjoys going to, she is making friends and progressing academically.

The importance of Life Story Work and reviewing contact arrangements are areas the IRO has focussed on to help N's understanding of her circumstances, as well as ensuring there is no drift or negative consequences for the placement due to the previous circumstances of the family dynamics

The IRO continues to oversee the progression of N's care plan between LAC Reviews by keeping in contact with the SWs, attending professional meetings and applying the IRO Oversight process.

Outcome and impact for N

N remains in a long term kinship placement that offers her permanency and stability and ensures that all of her needs are being met. N is supported to develop and build positive relationships with her family whilst feeling loved and safe. The role of the IRO contributes towards this by attending and advocating for her during professional meetings, overseeing her Care Plan during LAC Reviews and ensuring that N's relationship with her parents and siblings is maintained. This is important for N, as she has voiced, and has been observed to be happy in her placement, and to see her siblings and her parents safely . N continues to build a positive and trusting relationship with her kinship carers.

IRO Service Continuing Priorities for CLA 2020 – 22
Review of progress and development Action Plan

Priority Area	Measurement <i>*Update of Progress against measurement of 2018-19</i>	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2020-22
Committed confident and competent workforce			
Continue to develop and embed Signs of Safety (SOSSS) approach to planning and reviews	<p><i>*All IROs are SoS trained and incorporate principles in their practice</i></p> <p><i>IROs attended a range of SoS workshops some targeted at the role of the IRO as chair of meetings and the progression of the child's care plan</i></p>	Better participation and strengthened relationships, enabling networks to support better outcomes for children & families	<p>Develop evidenced based outcomes for the foster carers contribution to the Review</p> <p>Use the LAs LL recording system to best effect when the SoS methodology is built in the system</p>
<p>Ensure children are enabled to participate in meetings that inform their plans which are succinct, contain clear details, actions and timescales</p> <p>IROs and the children they are responsible for have a positive working relationship based on mutual trust and respect</p> <p>Young people are supported and encouraged by their IRO/SW to lead some /part of their Review as their choice</p>	<p><i>*Children have an offer of a visit/ 'In Contact' Plan with their IRO as part of their care planning arrangements</i></p> <p><i>*Advocacy is available to CLA and easily accessible when required- IROs making referrals on behalf of children</i></p> <p><i>Implemented the Advocacy offer for children /young people in their Review</i></p> <p><i>Completed the work of the redesign and production of communication material for children/young people's reviews</i></p> <p><i>Some young people have chosen to lead their Review but a framework is required to support this being fully embedded</i></p>	<p>Children feel included and heard, they contribute to plans, feel more empowered and involved in the decisions that are made with them and about them</p> <p>CLA will understand their past and current circumstances through life story and direct 1-1 work</p> <p>Children are comfortable in contacting their IRO and have their contact details</p> <p>Young people will have the opportunity to experience greater sense of empowerment and enhance their skills in negotiation, confidence, respectful challenge. Lundy Model is the framework for participation & Engagement.</p>	<p>Review the way in which we involve children in their meetings, for IROs to have a greater use of technology such as skype, apps on SMART phone to demonstrate their reach of children & young people and to produce a child friendly version of the IRO Annual Report with children in /leaving care.</p> <p>Lead IRO for participation to discuss with CIC/CEC and pilot preparation workshops for key personnel including young people being peer mentors for other LAC (in progress)</p>
Parents participation in LAC Review process is given greater consideration by	<i>Parents inform that they are treated with respect, their views are considered, and</i>	Parents participation in the network strengthens the plan and outcomes for	Discussion with parent participation leads, develop an information sheet that enables parents to

Priority Area	Measurement	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2020-22
their feedback about the service	<p>*Update of Progress against measurement of 2018-19</p> <p><i>responses are appropriate to the situation, they have told us what we could do better to support them in circumstances such as when an adoption plan is decided upon</i></p>	children/young people where it is appropriate to do so	understand the review process and their contribution, alongside the opportunity to take a full part in the SoS toolkits pre/during Reviews.
Effective Partnerships			
<p>Key services/agencies fully understand their role in the process and have a shared vision for high aspirations for our children in and leaving care.</p> <p>Transition Services are planned for enabling care /pathway plans to progress without delay</p>	<p><i>*Agency contributions have increased by attendance at Reviews, reports to Reviews and there is more evidence of robust action planning in care plans via audits</i></p> <p><i>Lead IRO for Transitions /Care Leavers attends partnership meetings reporting on progress and the IRO Team are fully engaged with aspirational planning</i></p> <p><i>Completed development of RAG rated system in place to track the outcomes for care leavers one month pre leaving care</i></p>	<p>Childrens outcomes and opportunities will improve as a result of strong and meaningful partnership working</p> <p>Young people are supported into adulthood and to be as independent as they can , making safe choices and a positive contribution to their overall goals & aspirations</p>	<p>Analysis of the RAG rated system by auditing cases to ensure there is a positive impact for care leavers, and to discuss with professionals (Sws, PAS, Transitional workers) the findings as to how much more we can do to increase timely referrals and pathways are in progress at the right time the young person leaves care</p>
<p>Health Improvements</p> <p>Continue to Improve the range of health outcomes to enhance children & young people's overall well being with IROs QA Health plans for our CLA</p>	Timely progression of IHA, RHA, SDQ Health Summaries and care packages of intervention	Health plans reflect the specific needs of each child and young person and young people leave care knowing how to access services at a time they need them.	IRO SM/ lead for Health and Well Being works within the partnership to audit cases to consider the qualitative aspects of children's health care plans
Educational Attainment			
Further improve the educational/employment /training outcomes for CLA in Leicester City	<p>All IROs appraise PEPs prior to LAC /Pathway Reviews to ensure appropriate challenge and</p> <p><i>Virtual School head facilitated a workshop with IROs focussing on the quality of PEPs and use of pupil premium for CLA.</i></p>	PEPS reflect the educational needs of the child and drive the areas for educational attainment and attendance leading to less NEET	<p>SM/HoS closer liason with the Virtual Head and the Corporate Parent lead to understand the journey to improvement of the Key Stages for children and young people as noted in 2019-20s outcomes.</p> <p>IROs Escalation policy to be used to highlight gaps, drift and delay in educational /employment prospects for children /young people</p>
Knowing ourselves well			

Priority Area	Measurement <i>*Update of Progress against measurement of 2018-19</i>	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2020-22
The Performance Management and Quality Assurance framework identifies areas of strength and of improvement. A dataset for the service provides in-depth performance information which drives improved and timely care	A Performance Book for the service informs on trends, directs service planning and development <i>IROs took part in the Peer Review challenge in 2020</i>	IRO service will contribute to a child's experience whilst in care by using performance information to support informed decision making to meet the range of needs of CLA	Continue to review and improve the IRO Service dataset to provide meaningful reporting. Build a new IRO Monitoring Form that is reflective of SoSSW and can inform the service of the areas of progress / where targetted action needs to take place across the outcomes for LAC Learn from Regional Leads by visiting good/outstanding LAs/ & SM/IROs having further opportunity to take part in a Peer Review/ Challenge