

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS SERVICE

I R O

Annual Report 2020



Every picture paints
a life story



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 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.

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 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

These have been incorporated in the Pledge to the children in our care, the Leicester's strengths-based practice shared goal:

'Supporting children, young people and families to be safe, be independent, be ambitious for themselves and live the best life they can'

3. Independent Reviewing Officers - Legal context

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young 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 three more staff members joining the team on a permanent basis. The service comprises nine permanent IROs, five of the teamwork full time and four part time, providing a full time equivalent 7.8 posts. There are 8 females (1 British Asian, 5 White British, 1 mixed heritage) and 1 male (White British).

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 two Service Managers who work part time and cover the whole of the service. The post holders are qualified Social Workers, registered with Social Work England and have been subject to Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks. The Service Managers ensure there is casework oversight, professional advice and learning, management support and development for each IRO. This

includes monthly supervision sessions, team & peer meetings and access to appropriate training and research materials.

The IRO Service managers are members and attend 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/>. The IROs become practice leads, implementing the model within our current practice and being champions for social workers/other practitioners to embrace and contribute to the expectations of the Review - building on children's care plans to the highest standard as our overall goal. The framework has brought significant changes in the way LAC Reviews are being held, with more measurable engagement from children and young people and more focus on their lived experiences, networks, wishes and feelings.

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

2020/2021 has been an unprecedented year due to the Covid 19 pandemic leading to many changes for the children, young people families and carers we work with, as well as changes in practice and ways of working for the team and partners. As expected, arrangements have been fluid and dynamic as we adjusted to these unusual times. Practice Guidance and Risk Assessments were developed and amended throughout the year to support safety for all and in line with government and local guidance. (The government published additional materials and information under Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for Children's Social Care Services <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-childrens-social-care-services/>)

In line with the national 'stay at home' guidance, the teams' office base closed in March 2020 with IROs and colleagues/partners being home-based. The service adapted quickly, moving to a model of virtual meetings and visits taking place mainly via Skype and MS Teams. This transition has been quite smooth and led to a significant increase in the attendance to the reviews.

The extended lockdown in Leicester City also impacted upon the ways in which the IRO service has functioned throughout 2020-21 with virtual meetings and visits continuing through much of the year. IROs rose to the challenge and embraced new ways of working, while supporting each other as a peer group. In addition, we worked in partnership with our colleagues in social care and partner agency colleagues to adapt our practice to provide child and family orientated meetings. In particular, IROs worked sensitively with the foster care service when

sadly a number of carers became ill through the pandemic leading to an impact for a number of children and foster care families.

In 2020-21 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 Managers oversee all new children entering and exiting 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.
- ensuring safe discharge from care arrangements at any stage of their journey

In 2020-21 the IRO Service chaired 1544 LAC Review meetings, a decrease of 149 meetings from the previous period, which has continued to reflect the overall reduction of children in our care with either less children coming into care or left care by a range of orders, turning 18 years of age or by other means

Statutory LAC Review meetings for our children have been timely, with strong service performance of 99% of meetings being held within timescales throughout the year, which is an increase in % in time by 3% from last year. Of the 1% of meetings (12) which were not held in time, an analysis of the reasons behind this relates to unforeseen IROs' absences, awaiting the finalising of care plans where specialist assessments were outstanding and the early impact of COVID 19. Meetings were rebooked within a month.

It is important to note that 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 and coproduction figures for children and young people taking part in their Reviews have been excellent, with a perfect 100 % involvement/ collaboration in their reviewing process. This great performance has been achieved due to a number of existing mechanisms facilitated by the Ros ' flexibility and to talk with children/young people at different times of the day, be in touch prior to their meeting or after as part of their review process. Additionally, the improvement in children's engagement is due to:

- various means of use of technology being available to children throughout COVID 19 due to face to face visits being limited due to lockdown within national and local arrangements
- implementation of using the bespoke LAC Review Consultation Papers for three age bands of children/young people with positive comments received.
- IROs ensured children and young people have access to a trusting adult advocate 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 Councils Advocacy service.
- opportunities for 16+ young people to 'lead' their own review meetings (with the assistance of the IRO). In this year we have worked in co-operation with our Participation Service colleagues to progress this initiative to support young peoples increased engagement, confidence, and negotiation skills. there has been an increase in Independent Visitors (IV's) for LAC and more timely referrals and matches made, with IVs undertaking some creative ways of holding virtual meetings and dropping activities at the door for children/young people to complete such as a 'bake off' challenge In the previous year the Independent Visitor Co-Ordinator jointly worked with an IRO to develop the support for LAC in their LAC Reviews by their IV .In this year there has been an increase of IVs joining the children /young people's LAC Reviews with their consent and ensuring their voice is heard.
- development of the participation framework for engaging children and young people to be empowered to have a voice and influence in decisions made with/about them known as the *LUNDY model

It is important to acknowledge the Local Authority's commitment to put the voice and participation of children and families at the heart of everything we do. This commitment has been formulated via the new Participation strategy, launch in October 2021. This pioneered approach based on the Lundy Model of participation is already well embedded within the work of the IROs.



We would like to share an example of feedback received from a Young person's advocate following a Review meeting. This was a review chaired by a young person with the support of the IRO:

“The young person held her placement and all the professionals to account and conducted the meeting in a welcoming manner. She was clear and concise; she was totally amazing and natural in her role as a chair.

The IRO and social worker enabled and created the environment to allow K to do this, K was able to share her feelings as well as chair her meeting, even though difficult conversations needed to take place. The IRO/SW managed those conversations in a sensitive manner empowering the young person to reflect on experiences, look at solutions and create a plan in partnership with K. Thank you, you really have brightened up my day by seeing such great practice.” (Voice of an advocate)

Another source for learning and reflection is the formal complaints received from children and families in relation to the IROs service delivery. Within the period only one statutory complaint was received from a parent in relation to communication from an IRO, this was investigated at Stage 1 and resolved satisfactorily for the parent. Lessons were learnt from this incident. We believe the low number of complaints is strongly linked to our ways of working and communicating with all parties involved, summarised in the next section of the report.

5.2 Scrutinizing and ensuring that care plans for looked after children are well informed by assessments and meet their holistic needs

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 and utilise 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, careers 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 for 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 the children and all relevant parties, review the existing reports and care plan, and to ensure these had been appropriately shared with others (children, foster carers, family members etc).

Due to this advanced preparation the quality and duration of the LAC Reviews have continued to improve, with more targeted and solution focused discussions leading to better informed recommendations and decisions made in relation to the children.

The period of COVID 19 had both benefits and challenges in parents being able to join online meetings, however IROs and SWs endeavoured to gain their views.

- In this period 77% of parents were able to give a meaningful view to the meeting. While this is a reduction from the last period (by 5%), an analysis of the reasons for the parental non-attendance indicate some parents were unable to attend Reviews due to technological issues.
- 52% of parents benefited for 1-2-1 discussions with the IROs prior to their meetings. Some of the parents declined to have these prior consultations and attended the main meetings.

There has been relatively consistent compliance in relation to Social Work reports being available to the Review meetings, however, there has been a downturn to 77% (9% reduction from the previous year). An in-depth look at this issue identified the drop in performance was linked to the complications of embedding a new report processes in the electronic system; with the support from the SW teams and IT department, these are now rectified.

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 (Red, Amber, Green) to assist our IROs in identifying and ensuring appropriate levels of challenge and oversight are applied to children's situations. The expected standard is that as a minimum each child's records can reflect IRO oversights 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 closer monitoring and actions.
- improving communication between the IRO Service and SWs, Foster carers, other professionals.
- experiencing a decrease in the number of formal escalations that need to be actioned.

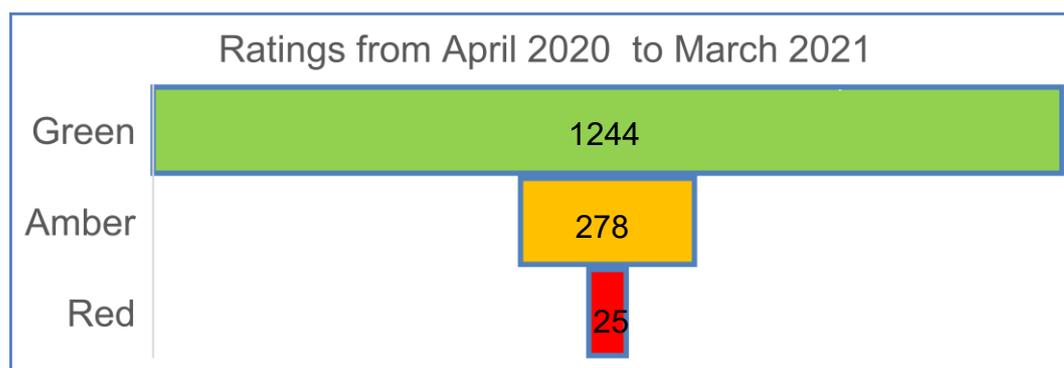
The RAG criteria are agreed following a Review, with clear actions/timescales noted for the IRO to track as follows.

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 from an immediate action up to 4 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 5 -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 undertakes conversations with SWs, children, carers etc to understand their view of how their care /pathway plan is progressing

The table below shows ratings made in the last year with 1,244 cases rated green, a small increase from last period, with 278 Amber cases and 25 Red rated cases having decreases in this period. Where Childrens cases have required formal/informal escalations the operational services and partner agencies have responded and acted upon the IROs' recommendations in a timely way.



IROs oversight (between LAC Reviews) in this period has significantly increased, with a total of 3,604 case records being added on children's records, indicating the IROs' footprint and oversight on cases. This represents 718 more recordings 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 stepchildren's Rights and Participation Service through the appointment of Independent Advocates. The IROs role has been essential in continuing to embed 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, 2020 and 31st March 2021, the Participation, Engagement and Childrens Rights Service received more than 86 referrals of advocacy to support young people in their

LAC Reviews/ Childrens Rights support. The overall feedback from young people regarding the input of the Advocates is highly positive:

A young person's perspective:

"During this difficult and stressful but amazing period of my life growing my daughter in my stomach I have to say that my advocate has helped me a lot. She has supported me and guided me in ways I never thought she could. She has been there every step of the way and helped me be heard by those who I felt never listened. Working with her has made me more optimistic and made me work harder and better towards a better future for me and my daughter. I want her to carry on working with me and assisting me during my assessment and meetings so that I can remain confident that my side is being put across. I appreciate her help and her hard work, and it is I believe beneficial for us to remain in contact."

Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer: (FIRO)

The FIRO is managed by the Service Manager within the Child Protection Independent Chairs and the LADO services in the SQUA. The role is for the Independent Chair to review the foster carer/home environment to required standards on an annual basis and make recommendations in their suitability to continue to foster as well as their learning and development. This arrangement has enabled one manager to have an holistic overview and in-depth understanding of any issues/ strengths emerging from both the foster homes reviews process and the LADO investigations.

Of the cohort of foster care reviews that were required to be held in 2020- 2021 95% (255) were held in timescales. This is a significant improvement from the previous period. The Reviews that were not able to go ahead the reasons largely relate to illness of the carer/ carers being subject to the LADO process etc. The service has held learning events around improving the support and development of foster carers and in keeping children safe.

Independent Visitors Scheme for LAC:

The service is located within the IRO Service. This enables the IROs to quickly identify with children, networks, social workers, carers those young people where they may need an Independent Visitor (IV) as a special person to develop a relationship with outside of their foster family or residential placement (in particular where they may have little to no contact with their birth family). Independent Visitors core role is to listen, befriend and advise children and young people by taking them out to activities of their choice generally monthly and stay in touch in between. This IV also helps to build children's confidence and increase their social skills and sense of belonging. In this year, despite lockdown, 9 new IVs were recruited and matched with children by the end of March 2021. We have increased the pool of volunteers in the year with presently at 29 successful matches.

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 virtually through the year on occasions and has had oversight of the performance book and linking to the 5 subgroups where appropriate. The IRO SMs will continue to have oversight of the Forums work/performance. An Independent Visitor joined the 'Active Citizenship' subgroup in this year to give a perspective of how children and young people can take part and achieve life skills and friendships that are enduring. A summary of Corporate Parenting data is summarized as follows:

Education, Employment, Training: The COVID 19 period brought many challenges to the education of our children and young people, not least that there were no exams/tests. While carers, Virtual School, parents etc supported on line sessions, some of our vulnerable children and children of keyworkers were able to attend school on occasions. Through this period IROs have continued to ensure that the children's educational needs including 16 + young people had been considered during their Review meetings and when specific provisions have been required to cater for individual needs, these were discussed with the Virtual School, relevant schools/colleges to promote rapid solutions. The impact for children /young people's educational outcomes will be monitored throughout the next year and considered within the data that will be made available locally and from the DFE in time

Where young people are not engaging, IROs have had discussions with young people to further explore and understand any barriers to support them in overcoming these. Appendix 1 gives further overview of the progress of EET/NEET (In/Not in education/employment and training)

Health: Up to date health assessments have increased significantly, while dentist, initial and review assessments required closer monitoring. An IRO Service Manager undertook a joint Audit with our Health colleagues focusing on timeliness and quality of provision. In addition, in this period one escalation was made to a senior health colleague regarding a child's health review, this was responded to swiftly and a resolution made

Safeguarding: IROs ensure children's safety is given paramount consideration alongside the team around the child. In this period Child Criminal Exploitation/Child Sexual Exploitation meetings have become independently chaired from within the SQUA. The team continue to also chair meetings related to Harmful Sexual Behavior from young people to young people.

Positive Activities: IROs monitoring forms note that 99% of children have access and opportunities to enjoy some form of leisure activity appropriate to their age, with 98% of children's cultural needs being met, this is a consistent area of positive practice. This is a slight increase from the previous period and is reflective of the time taken and opportunities available to engage children through the pandemic to support their social, physical, and mental wellbeing.

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 11 formal escalations, concerning 11 children with 22 areas of concern. These escalations have all been resolved at Social Worker/Manager level without any concerns being raised to Director or externally to CAFCASS. This is a decrease from the previous period however there have been less children and young people in the system and as noted greater IRO Oversight in the period.

IROs assist Social Workers and other practitioners to achieve their best practice through regular feedback and through their 'critical friend' role, including auditing of children's lived experiences. Generally these have related to the IRO role being a 'champion' for bringing the Signs of Safety /Success approach to their practice with children /families and where there is a strong network that supports the child through challenges and successes for their future adult life.

6. Other achievements of 2020-21

- IROs have contributed to the generic Children's 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.
- The IRO Service has continued to enhance and embed our practice standards while recognising some of the limitations in the last year. 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 Sops

(Stability and Success) model. The service also takes pride in having the additional benefit of advocates, Independent Visitors, and Independent Foster

7. Next Steps

This report and additional documentation evidences the progress and steps that Leicester City Council, the IRO Service and its partners, have taken over this unprecedented time, to continue to progress and improve the quality of care provided to our children looked after. It summaries the collective challenges we have faced, but also the commitment to continually improve our practice. As a result of these challenges, we have adapted our practice where possible to find new solutions and ways of working to meet the needs of children and families in the context of a post global pandemic that we will embed where appropriate in our work over the next year.

For the next period we will:

- ✚ continue to increase the opportunities for young people age 16+ to chair their own reviews, where children & young people actively choose not to chair their review, we will support them to effectively participate and influence their meeting
- ✚ seek post review feedback, separate to pre-meeting consultation documents, to gather more varied information of children, young people, parents, and professionals' views to inform how well we are doing and what more we can do
- ✚ continue to promote the stability and success of children and young people through their care plans and Looked After Reviews, ensuring safety planning is established and effective and there be rigorous in ensuring a network is well established
- ✚ review new ways of working and measure the success of undertaking Reviews in different ways for children and young people as we have learnt t in this year
- ✚ align our work to the LA's 3-year plan that sets out the priorities for Social Care and Early Help Services where we have key activity to achieve.

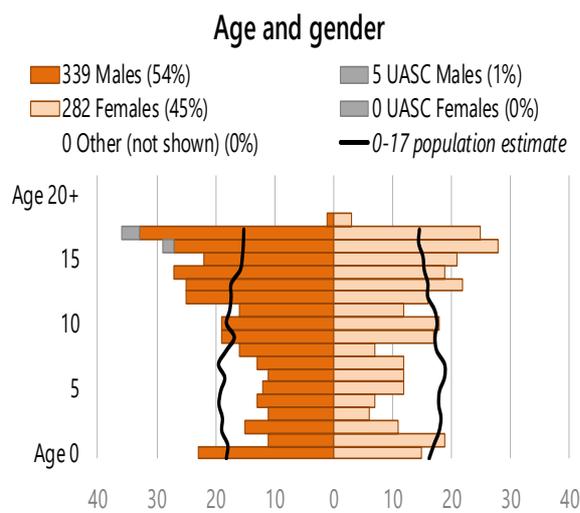
Julie Jordan
IRO Service Manager
SQUA

Julia Khoosal
IRO Service Manager
SQUA

APPENDIX 1:

Corporate Parenting Performance 2020 - 21 Demographics and analysis 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.



Ethnic background

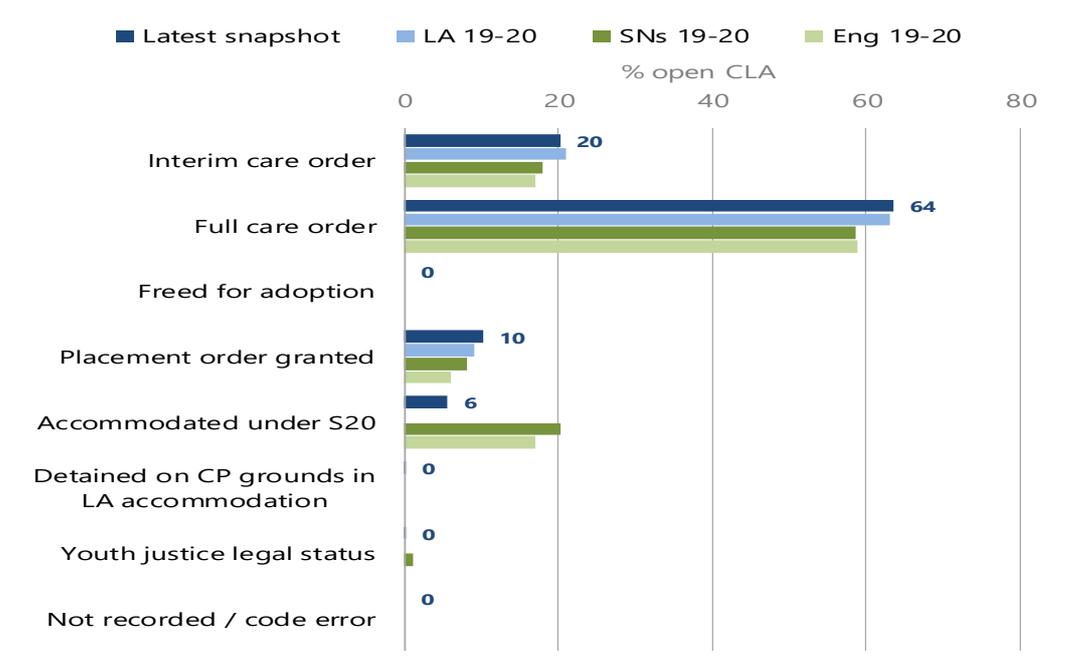
	All CLA	Not UASC	UASC
White	62%	63%	0%
Mixed	19%	19%	0%
Asian or Asian British	10%	9%	60%
Black or black British	7%	7%	20%
Other ethnic group	1%	1%	20%
Not stated	1%	1%	0%
Not recorded	0%	0%	0%

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 with a slight increase in these orders in the last year. The Local Authority has maintained its practice around rigorous use of Section 20 voluntary accommodation. In 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.

Comparing legal status of open CLA (snapshot)



Placements

As of March 2021, most of our children were placed in foster care followed by residential care. From the previous year there has been a slightly lower % of children being placed in foster care provision overall. In the same period there has been an increase in placements for children into childrens homes , this generally relates to children being placed for specific therapeutic reasons out of area.

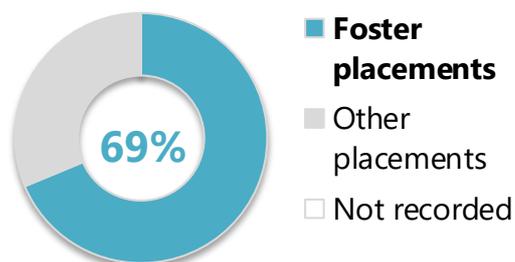
In relation to the location of the placements the majority of our children are placed within Leicester/Leicestershire. There are circumstances whereby children being placed beyond the boundaries of Leicestershire are considered to be in their best interests (for example for those children/young people at risk of sexual exploitation).In this period we undertook an audit of children under 12 years of age placed in our local residential care services as well as external placements to understand their trajectory towards being placed in family care. A range of recommendations were made while also seeing some excellent examples of direct therapeutic work with children and young people that has impacted on their ability to be placed into a foster care family into the near future.

The IRO SMs attend a monthly panel to have oversight of the children/young people who require long term foster care placements.This provides both a tracking and monitoring function as well as reflecting and developing best practice in achieving permanency.

The 16+ Accomodation Strategy continues 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

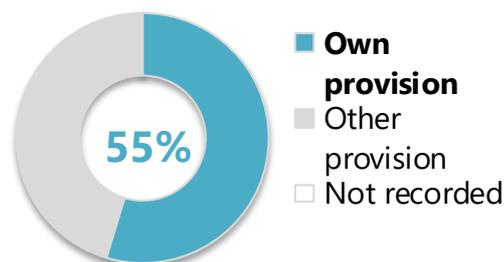
CLA placements by type and provision

Foster placements



LA 2019-20	77%
SNs 2019-20	71%
Eng 2019-20	72%

Own provision



LA 2019-20	70%
SNs 2019-20	42%
Eng 2019-20	49%

Placement type (open CLA)	Own LA	Private	Other	Total
Foster placement	303	125	2	430
Placed for adoption	14	0	18	32
Placed with parents	0	0	46	46
Independent living	1	21	0	22
Residential employment	0	0	0	0
Residential accommodation	0	6	3	9
Secure Children's Homes	0	1	0	1
Children's Homes	24	47	0	71
Residential Care Home	0	2	0	2
NHS/Health Trust	0	0	3	3
Family Centre	0	4	0	4
Young Offender Institution	0	0	1	1
Residential school	0	4	0	4
Other placements	0	1	0	1
Temporary placement	0	0	0	0
Total placements	342	211	73	626

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 2021 while less children were placed into care through the year, the duration of placements continued to be as stable. This can be attributed to the continued tight grip on matching, achieving permanent placements for children earlier on, the implementation of 'mapping' children's cases under Signs of Safety /Stability 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.

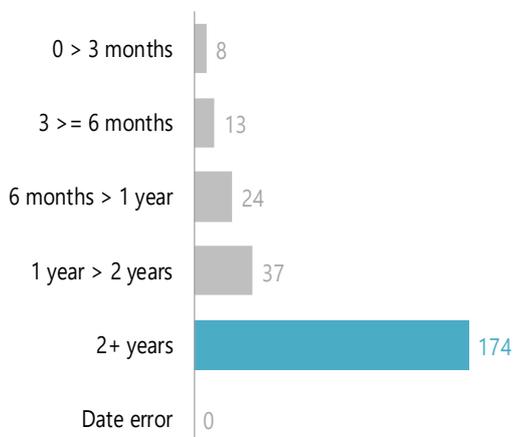
In addition to children in care being 'placed with their parents', there has been an increase in children who were subject to Section 38.6 arrangements and remained living with their parents through the period of assessments authorised by the Court, and of those children being placed at home as part of a transitional plan for revocation of care orders again through the Courts. In total the increase has been of 22 children.

The impact of a full time 'kinship care worker' post has continued to make improvements. This post has enabled less external foster care agency assessments needing to be undertaken thereby focussing on the quality and timeliness of the assessments and placements for children and carers. .

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.

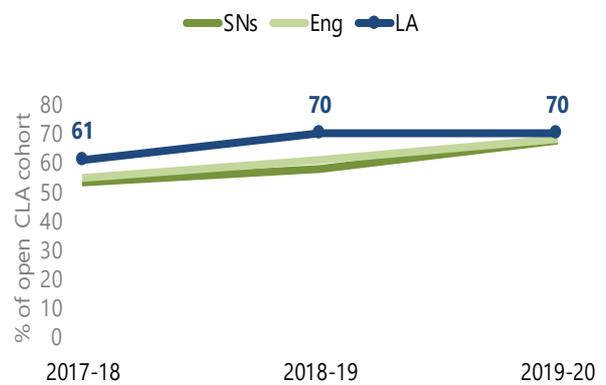
Duration of placements

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



May include "status" changes as well as placements

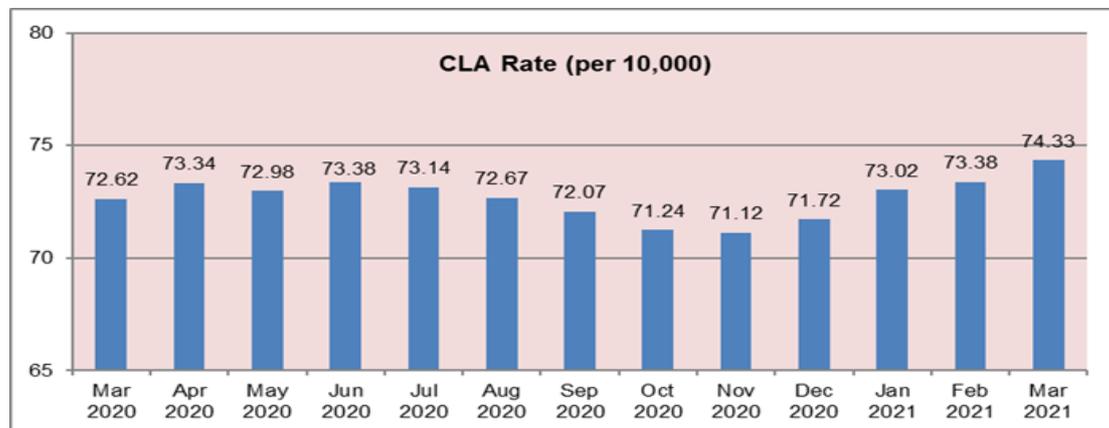
Comparing long term placement stability



Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present long-term stability alongside published statistics

Children entering and exiting care

Between April 2020 and March 2021 there were fluctuations in children entering and exiting care. The graph below notes the rate of CLA per 10,000 population of children aged under 18 years in care at that point in the year.

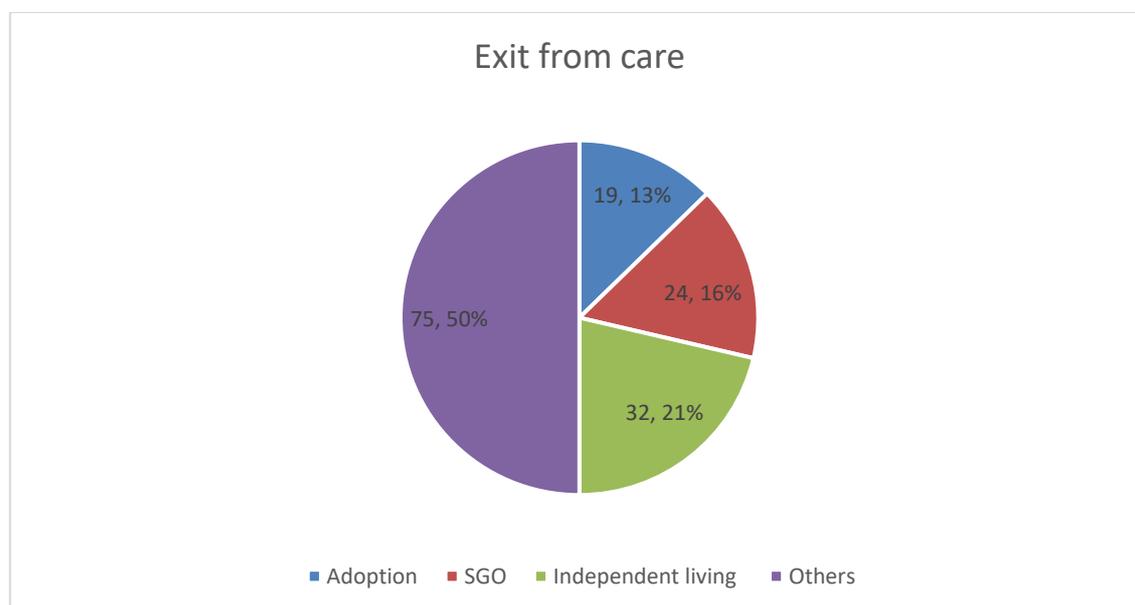


As of March 2021 52 families (71 children) had been subject to Public Law Court Pre- Proceedings, this is a slight reduction of families within the Court process from the last period. The number of children subject to care proceedings fluctuated through the year with the impact of COVID 19, and as children returned to schools for example there were periods of increase in issuing for interim/care orders to the Court. Some delays have been experienced in childrens court care cases being finalised.

While the performance measurement for completion of Court Proceedings within 26 weeks continues to be a challenge for Leicester/Leicestershire Courts there has been an improvement within Leicester City 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.

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 continues . 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.

There were 150 children who ceased to be looked after in the period, a reduction of 53 children from 2019- 20, however through the year there had been less CLA in the care system . The graph below notes the key exit plans from care in the period.



In 2020 – 21 94 % of young people/care leavers aged 16 – 18 years of age were deemed by the LA to have been placed in suitable accommodation, this is a very slight reduction from the

previous period (1.1%) The COVID pandemic had an impact on the availability of placements on a local and national scale.

Health of Children Looked After

Tracking of performance of 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 2021 was 92% 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.

From previous activity in relation to strengthening the Health Summaries for young people leaving care, the figure for this period is 85.7% completed of 16 -18 year olds have received their health information which is an increase of 11.1 % in the year

The IRO Service Managers liaise 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 the 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.

Education Employment & Training of Children Looked After

Leicester City's Virtual School, under the leadership of the 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 2021, 98% of PEPs of school age children are completed which is the same outcome as in the previous year. The completion of PEPs are subject to ongoing analysis and scrutiny from the Virtual Headteacher, IRO service and the Authority.

The Local Authorities data indicates that as at March 2021 post 16 PEPs were completed in 60% of young peoples cases. At the same point 65 % of young people are currently noted as EET, the 35% that are NEET are due to illness, disability, pregnancy/parenting, and other individual reasons. This is getting closer to the LCC Mayoral ambition to achieve 70% of our LAC in EET. There continue to be 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. These young people's circumstances, as well as those young people subject to Education and Health Care Plans & SEND processes are regularly reviewed, led by LCC Education Department, and activity is being focused on this cohort of young people

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

7 Minute Briefing – Good Practice Review 3



Minute Briefing – Good Practice Review 3

1

Background

Leicester CSC were granted Interim Care Orders in Dec 17 for 4 siblings (of 5) due to neglect, parental substance use and domestic abuse. 2 girls (aged 6 & 7 at the time) were placed together in foster care. The concerns did not change. Their social worker was a strong advocate for permanency wishing to support their wish for a new family, whilst maintaining connections with the birth family. Placement Orders were granted in July 2018. Extensive family finding took place and the girls moved to their adoptive family in April 2019, with Adoption Orders being granted Feb 21.

The adopters are committed to supporting ongoing contact with birth family and the older siblings have been very involved with providing information, photos and updates to support their sisters' sense of self and understanding of their experiences.

This has been identified as 'good practice' due to permanency through adoption being an unusual outcome for older children.

Why it matters

A Good Practice Review is part of LCC QA framework and is an opportunity to recognise and showcase positive practice.

The purpose of the Review is to:

- Recognise good practice and gather feedback
- Provide opportunities to all for reflection
- Understand what supported the positive practice to occur.
- Share learnings across the division and consider actions to enable future positive practice.

7

Implementing change

Reflect on the findings and discuss the implications for your service/practice.

Identify and outline the steps you and your team will take to improve practice in line with the findings and recommendations



Reflections and recommendations (R&R)

3

- a) The importance of direct work, **ongoing conversations with children** about their experiences and their plans and all being prepared and able to do this. Honesty even in uncertainty.
- b) The importance of the **belief in adoption as an option for all who cannot live within their birth family**, if that is what is best for them, understanding the benefits and impact & developing plans to manage the impact.



6

g) Effective working relationships between CIN / Adoption SW - drawing on expertise of the adoption team to build confidence and build best plan to support children.

h) Importance of networks for adopters (and carers)- to include those who can provide day to day practical consistent support, accept and integrate children into the network, alongside good SW support and specialist therapeutic support for child and family where needed.



5

R&R

e) Consistency of SW / IRO and school -supports building relationships with children, their families and networks, a consistency of message and plan, an ability to ask questions and be supported by those who know your experiences which help in managing transitions.

f) Valuing and supporting the role that school can play in meeting needs, supporting plans and transitions. The role of positive adults for children, particularly those who are consistent for the



4

R&R

c) Integration - Working with wider birth family to build relationships, valuing, and promoting connections, gathering information, supporting children to have an integrated sense of self.

d) Placement Orders for older children – working with them, reframing the idea of ‘new parents’ / ‘new family’, permission for children to make the transition in their own timescales. Support for children and adopters to go



IRO Service Continuing Priorities for CLA 2021- 24
Review of progress and development Action Plan

Priority Area	Measurement	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2021-24
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>Embrace the LUNDY model within our work – this has been implemented by IROs since 2021</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, the LUNDY model provides us with a framework</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</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>

Priority Area	Measurement <i>*Update of Progress against measurement of 2018-19</i>	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2021-24
		framework for participation & Engagement.	
Parents participation in LAC Review process is given greater consideration by their feedback about the service	<i>Parents inform that they are treated with respect, their views are considered, and 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 We need to prioritise this action again since the lockdown from the pandemic</i>	Parents participation in the network strengthens the plan and outcomes for children/young people where it is appropriate to do so	Discussion with parent participation leads, develop an information sheet that enables parents to understand the review process and their contribution, alongside the opportunity to take a full part in the SoS toolkits pre/during Reviews.
Effective Partnerships			
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. Transition Services are planned for enabling care /pathway plans to progress without delay	<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 RAG rated system in place to track the outcomes for care leavers one month pre leaving care</i>	Childrens outcomes and opportunities will improve as a result of strong and meaningful partnership working 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	Analylsis 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 timley referrals and pathways are in progress at the right time the young person leaves care
Health Improvements 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	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			

Priority Area	Measurement <i>*Update of Progress against measurement of 2018-19</i>	Intended Impact for children & families	Further Action 2021-24
Further improve the educational/employment /training outcomes for CLA in Leicester City	All IROs appraise PEPs prior to LAC /Pathway Reviews to ensure appropriate challenge and <i>Continue to promote educational outcomes and EET for our looked after young people even through the challenges such as in the last year</i>	PEPS reflect the educational needs of the child and drive the areas for educational attainment and attendance leading to less NEET	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 2020-21s outcomes. IROs Escalation policy to be used to highlight gaps, drift and delay in educational /employment prospects for children /young people
Knowing ourselves well			
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>A new performance book has been developed for 2021 and beyond</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, appropriate RAG rating 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