



**London Borough of Lewisham
Independent Reviewing Officer
Annual Report
2016/17**

CONTENTS

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Purpose of service and legal context**
- 3. Summary and Key Messages**
- 4. The IRO Service: Context**
- 5. Profile of Looked After Children**
- 6. Performance, Scrutiny & Challenge**
- 7. Participation of Children & Young People**
- 8. Areas for Improvement**

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this annual report is to provide an account of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Service between 1 April 2016 and the 31 March 2017. This report analyses and evaluates practice, plans and arrangements for looked after children and the effectiveness of the Independent Reviewing Officer service in ensuring the local authority, as a corporate parent, discharges its statutory responsibilities towards looked after children.

2. Purpose of service and legal context

- 2.1 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were nationally introduced to represent the interests of looked after children. Their role was strengthened through the introduction of statutory guidance in April 2011. The Independent Review Officers (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) and linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011.
- 2.2 This report identifies good practice as well as highlighting areas for development in relation to the IRO function. The IRO has a key and statutory role in relation to the improvement of care planning for looked after children. The responsibility of the IRO is to have an overview of the child's care planning arrangements in respect of the child's wellbeing in placement, as well as oversight of the child's health and education. The IRO will offer constructive and targeted scrutiny and challenge regarding case management through regular monitoring and follow up between children's reviews as appropriate.
- 2.3 The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research [‘The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England’ \(March 2014\)](#) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing.

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

2.4 The NCB research outlines a number of important recommendations with three having a particular influence on IROs' work plan priorities, these are;

- Where IROs identify barriers to their ability to fulfil their role, or systemic failures in the service to looked after children, they must raise this formally with senior managers. These challenges and the response should be included in the Annual Report.
- IROs method for monitoring cases and how this activity is recorded should be clarified.
- A review of IROs core activities and additional tasks should be undertaken. There is a need to establish whether IROs additional activities compromise independence or capacity.

2.5 The majority of Lewisham's Looked After Children are allocated within the Looked After and Care Leaving Social Work Teams (approximately 70%), and some of the children are allocated to other service areas (approximately 30%) as demonstrated in the table below.

Service	Number of LAC	
Children with Disabilities	39	8%
Family Social Work	80	17%
Looked After Children, Leaving Care and Adoption	330	71%
Referral and Assessment	14	3%
Youth Offending Team	5	1%
Grand Total	468	100%

Figure 1 Looked After Children by Service 08/04/17

3. Summary & Key messages

3.1 In line with statutory guidance this annual IRO report provides both quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO service in Lewisham and the key findings are outlined below.

- The profile of Looked After Children locally shows that our cohort of children are mainly aged 10-17.
- The majority of children become looked after when they are very young in age group 0-4 and when they are in late adolescence at age 15-17.
- The majority of children have a Looked After Care Plan that is based on assessed need and they are satisfied with this plan.
- IRO monitoring suggests that the majority of children's care plans are assessed as good or outstanding quality (90%)
- The average caseload for IRO's in Lewisham is between 64 and 72 young people. This is at the top end of national guidance for the number of cases held (50 to 70 per IRO).
- Evidence suggests IROs monitor and escalate issues appropriately.
- In the year 2016/2017 IROs targeted 45% of LAC cases for active monitoring and where necessary informal escalation in a small number of cases. This level of oversight contributes to achieving good outcomes for our looked after children and young people.

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

- 94% of monitoring forms completed by IRO's did not require a formal escalation process to be initiated.
- In the small number of cases that fell into Amber and Red categories, this active monitoring by the IRO on the quality of Care Planning should be seen as evidence of the necessary robust oversight expected of the role.
- When cases are escalated the majority are resolved at a local level with few progressing to more senior management for review and action.

3.2 Improvement activities for 2016/17 have included

- Recruitment of permanent IROs to provide a stable and responsive service (see 4.2 below).
- Further embedding of closer working partnerships with internal and external agencies including the Virtual School, Looked After Health Team, Serious Youth Violence Team and the Youth Offending Service
- Promoting IRO specialist oversight to key work streams.

4. The IRO Service: Context

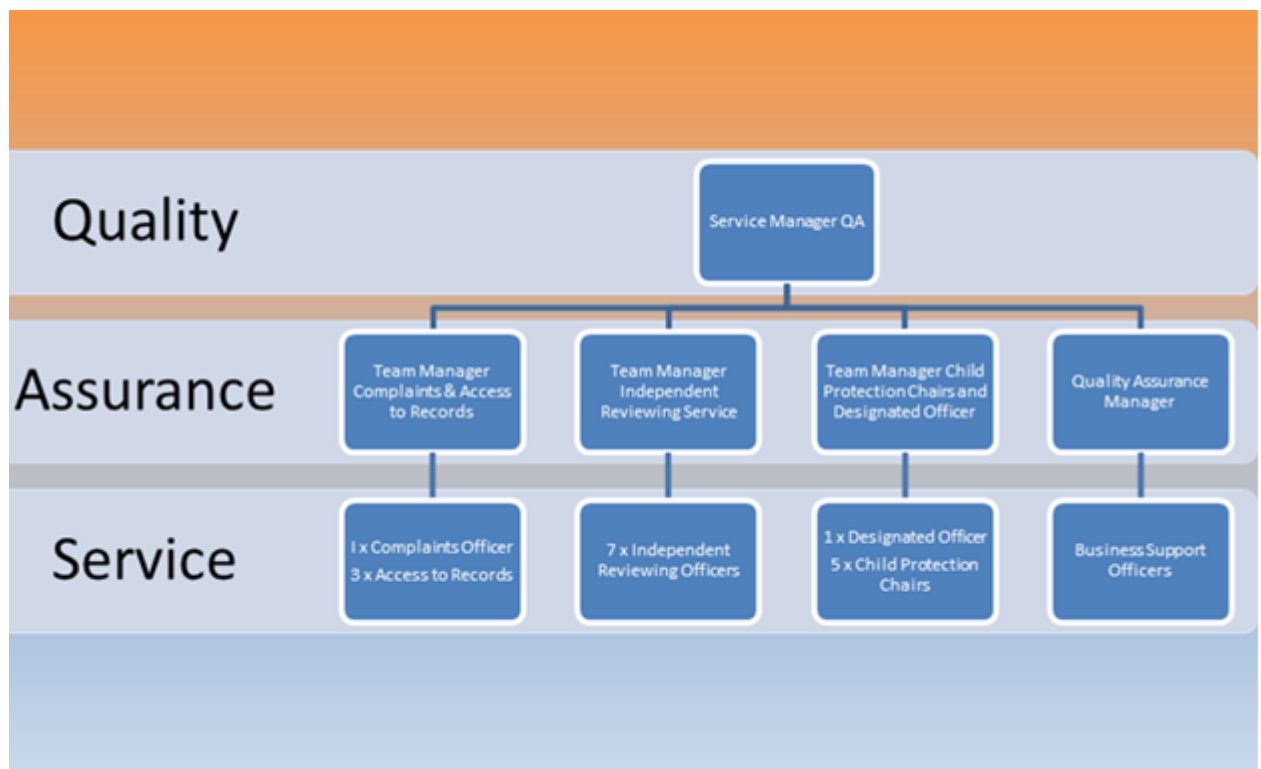


Figure 2 Quality Assurance Service Structure

- 4.1 The IRO Service sits within the Quality Assurance Service as part of Children's Social Care. The core functions consist of reviewing the Care and Pathway Plans for all children looked after under 18, promoting good practice in care planning for our Looked After Children, addressing any deficits in social work and other service delivery to young people, as well as monitoring Lewisham's commitment to the children and young people for whom it is a corporate parent.

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

- 4.2 The team has experienced some change with the departure of two long term IROs and one becoming part time. We have recruited experienced locum staff in their place and continue to seek permanent IRO's to enable long-term continuity for children and young people to again be a feature of the service provided.
- 4.3 IROs are qualified, experienced Social Workers with some previous management experience. Lewisham has 7 full time IRO posts currently covered by 6 full time and 2 job share IROs. There is a Team Manager who is line managed in turn by the Service Manager for Quality Assurance. The IRO Service is made up of staff who come from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and has a good gender and age balance enabling the Service to meet the needs of Lewisham's diverse looked after population.
- 4.4 All IROs have formal monthly supervision provided by the Manager of the IRO Service where their caseload, practice issues, personal welfare and professional development is discussed.
- 4.5 The IRO Team works exclusively with Looked After Children, but works alongside the Child Protection Chairs team at key transition points between CP processes and reception into care.

5. Profile of Children Looked After in Lewisham

- 5.1 There were 459 children and young people looked after by Lewisham as of 31/03/2017. All children and young people have an allocated IRO and case load average is 65 cases per FTE.

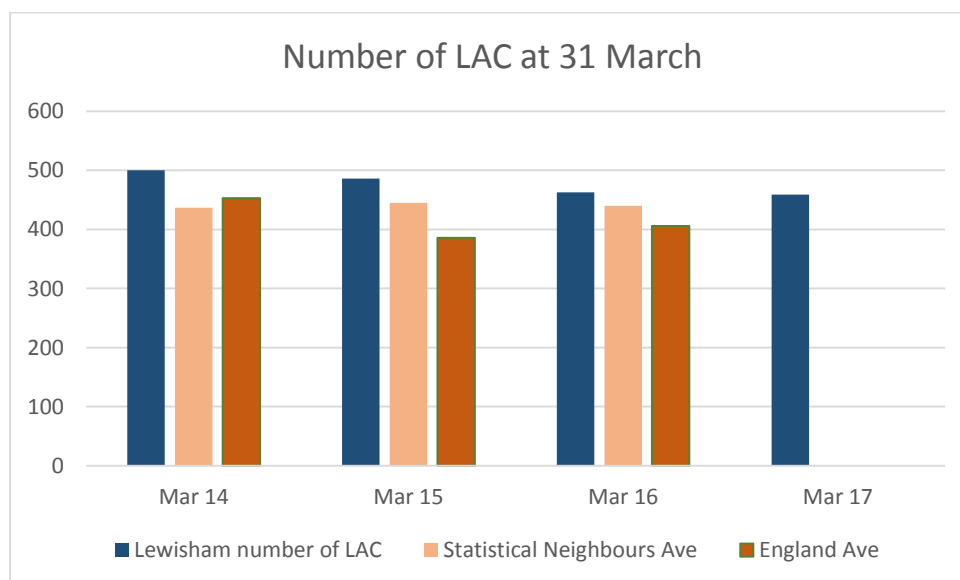


Figure 3 Number of LAC at financial year end

- 5.2 Numbers of Looked After Children in Lewisham have been traditionally higher than both statistical neighbours and the England average, although as can be seen there has been a slight downward trend from 2014. This can create pressures on both the Social Work and the IRO services in ensuring that children's placements are well sourced, promote wellbeing and stability in relation to their health, educational and emotional needs.

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

- 5.3 The table below demonstrates the year on year reduction in the LAC population locally per 10,000 of children and young people in the general population (2014 to 2017). Although still higher than statistical neighbours and the England average we are moving towards greater alignment and the increase in targeted support at the Early Help and Edge of Care is likely to support this trend going forward.

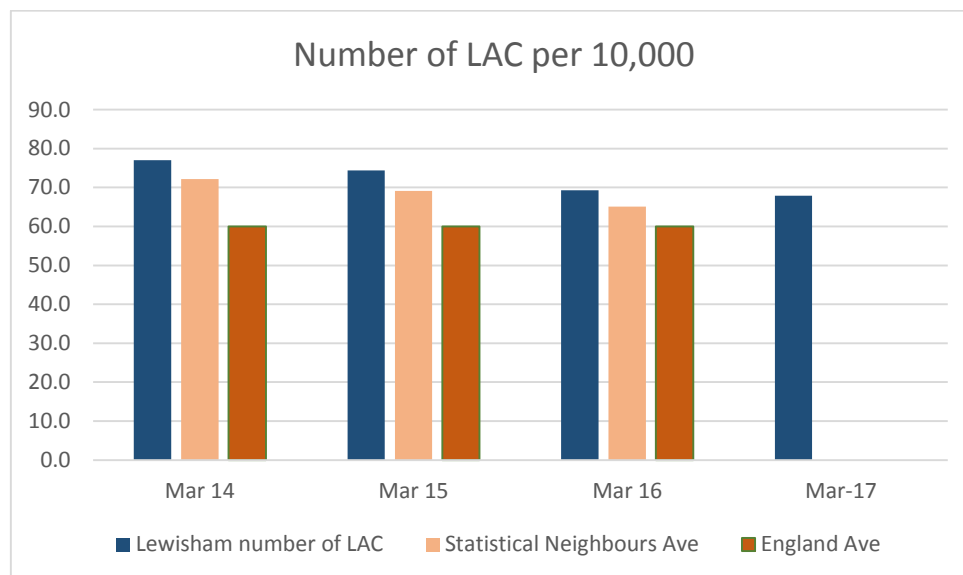


Figure 4 LAC Population per 10.000

- 5.4 The following information indicates the numbers of Looked After Children by age group. As can be seen, the highest proportions of our LAC population are in the older children and adolescent categories (10 to 14 years and 15 to 17 years). In the year 2015/2016 the 15 to 17 age group increased by 6.2%. There has been a small decrease of 1.6% in 2016/2017 for this older group but an increase year on year of 3.6% in children aged 0 -4 becoming looked after.
- 5.5 The increase in the adolescent population, who often are accommodated as a result of family breakdown or challenging behaviours has led to specific challenges. Maintaining placements for an older LAC population requires both the Social Work and Placement teams and the IRO Service to ensure that placements are resilient, that care and pathway planning is effective in preparing young people for independence and transition to adulthood. Those children accommodated in early years are more often subject to Care Proceedings necessitating the IRO working with social work colleagues to ensure good permanency planning and working to the CAFCASS/IRO protocol.

Number of LAC by age group	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17	Totals
Mar-14	98	77	154	171	500
Mar-15	79	77	149	181	486
Mar-16	50	73	139	201	463
Mar-17	66	60	141	192	459

Figure 5 LAC by age

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

% of LAC by age group	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17
Mar-14	19.6	15.4	30.8	34.2
Mar-15	16.3	15.8	30.7	37.2
Mar-16	10.8	15.8	30	43.4
Mar-17	14.4	13.1	30.7	41.8

Figure 6 Percentage of LAC by age

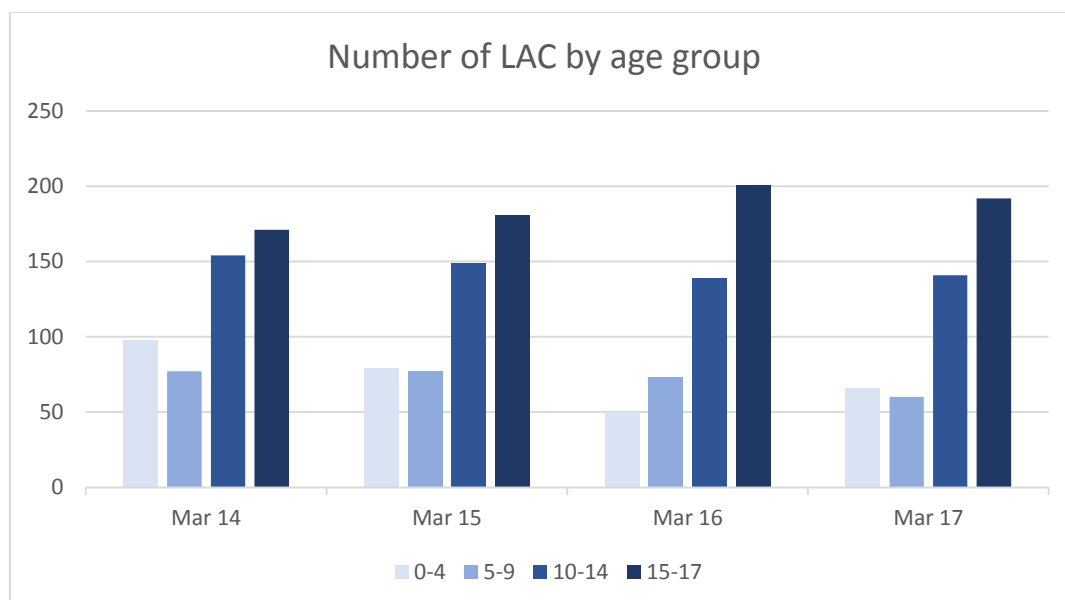
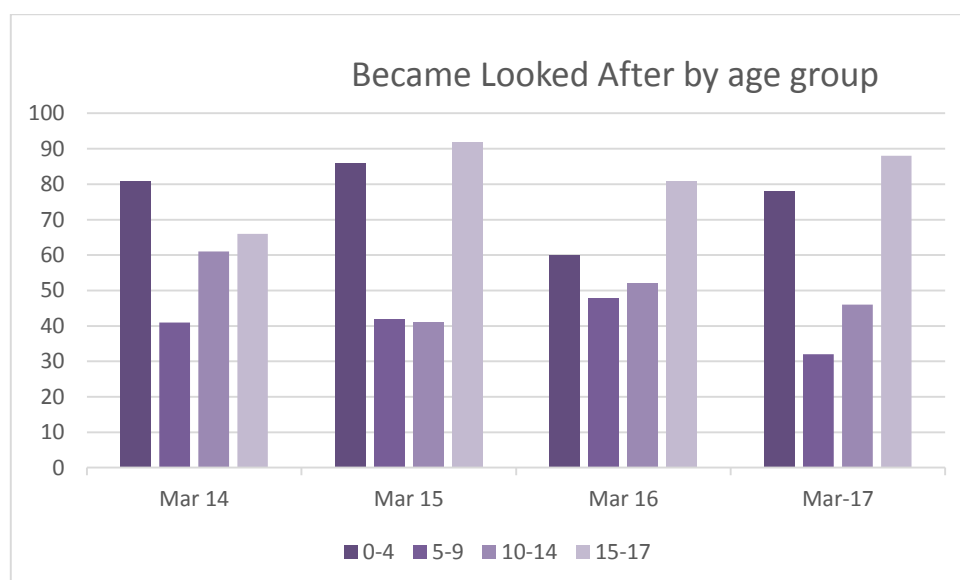


Figure 7 LAC by age



London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

BLA by age group	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-17
Mar 14	81	41	61	66
Mar 15	86	42	41	92
Mar 16	60	48	52	81
Mar-17	78	32	46	88

- 5.6 The information above shows the age children became looked after. The highest numbers are age 0-4 and the 15-17 year group. This was especially marked in 2015/16 with 33% (81) of young people in the older age group. In the year 2016/17 this was still the most frequent age range for becoming looked after but there was a similar rise in the 0-4 year age group (78). Children entering care at the younger age range is increasing through more targeted action for those children who have been on Child Protection Plans for two years and more; and where improvement is not evidenced or able to be sustained. Those at the older adolescent stage come in to care for reasons related to acute family stress, socially unacceptable behaviour or when family circumstances reach crisis point and breakdown, often involving challenging behaviours that parents are no longer able to manage.
- 5.7 The proportion of Looked After Children by ethnicity is shown below for the years 2014 to 2017. The proportion of children and young people who are classified as encompassing those children from Black African/Black Caribbean/Black Other continues to be the predominant population within the LAC cohort-with a 5% increase since 2014. Those children and young people who are classified within the White British/White Other strand including those from Ireland and Europe has seen a very small reduction but has been constant within a 1-2% range since 2014. Similarly with that group of young people who are classified as of Mixed heritage. Young people of Asian heritage also fluctuate within a 1-2% range but form a much smaller cohort within the wider LAC population. A further very small group has not self-identified or been categorised within an ethnicity banding.

% of LAC by Ethnicity	BLACK	WHITE	ASIAN	Mixed Heritage	OTHER
Mar-14	37.8	31.2	5.4	21.6	4
Mar-15	39.9	32.7	6	18.1	3.3
Mar-16	41.3	30.9	7.1	19	1.7
Mar-17	41.0	30.3	5.0	21.4	2.4

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

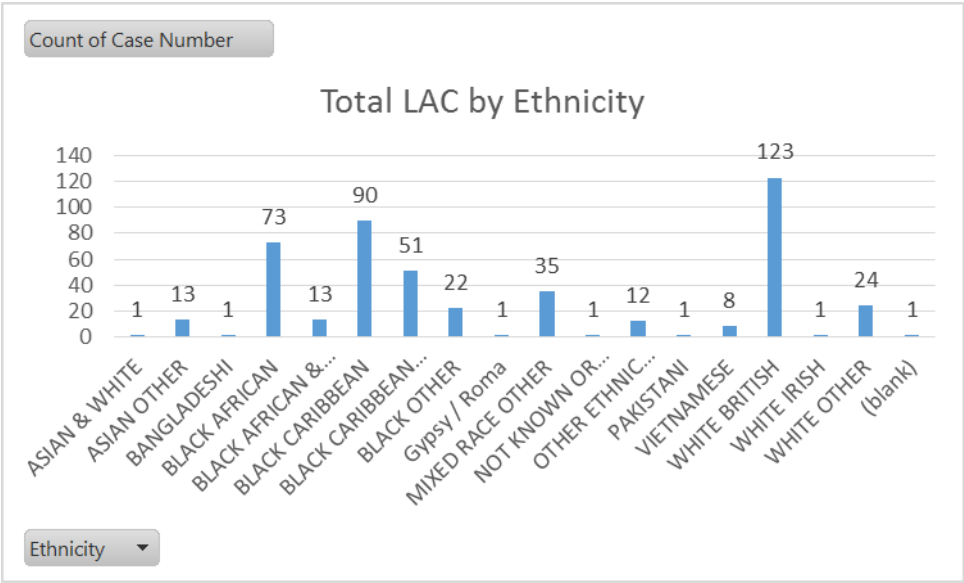
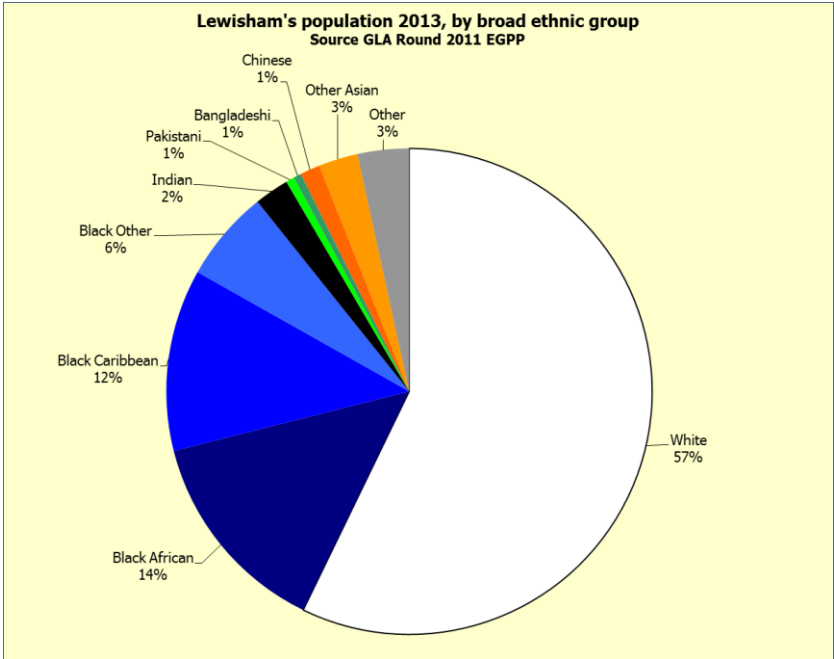


Figure 8 Percentage of LAC by ethnicity

5.8 This range of needs represented by a diverse LAC population again has implications for IROs in ensuring that placements for children and young people are attentive to and address the cultural needs of our LAC population. This is addressed through appropriate care planning and subsequent review by the IRO Service, working with the social work and placement teams, of these needs and how they are met.



5.9 The LAC population suggests an over-representation of children and young people from BME communities. Although the majority of the population in Lewisham and indeed children in care are categorised as White/British, forty-six per cent of Lewisham residents are of a black and minority ethnic heritage. This rises to just

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

over 76% among school aged children, so there is an alternate context for what appears to be a higher number of BME children and young people.

6. Placement Type

- 6.1 When a child or young person becomes looked after they need to live in the environment that will best meet their needs. For most this will be permanency within a fostering setting where the child can grow up feeling that they are accepted, will be supported and that they have a sense of belonging. For some children this can be difficult due to their own experiences within birth families, impacting on their ability to settle and thrive within a family-based setting. For some children particularly in the adolescent age range, who have not had clear boundaries or have become involved in a lifestyle where their main attachments are outside the family perhaps in a negative peer group, similar problems that occur within birth families can emerge in fostering settings. For some of these young people a residential setting may suit their needs better.
- 6.2 Some children are in specialist placements due to specific needs as a result of a disability or other complex need. For some Looked After status can come with an extended period on Remand within a Youth Justice setting. There is a distinct group of young people who present as in need of support after their 16th birthday and for whom fostering and residential settings may not be appropriate. These young people may be placed straight into a setting such as a semi-independent placement or supported lodgings where they can be supported to develop their independence. More recently children who have been looked after may “stay put” with their foster carer. Another growing group are those who are placed with family members under Special Guardianship Orders (SGO’s). For all of these children and young people the goal is a successful transition to a successful adult life rooted in a stable and nurturing care experience. It is those outcomes that the Care and Pathway Plans seek to be the vehicle for and which the IRO seeks to guide.

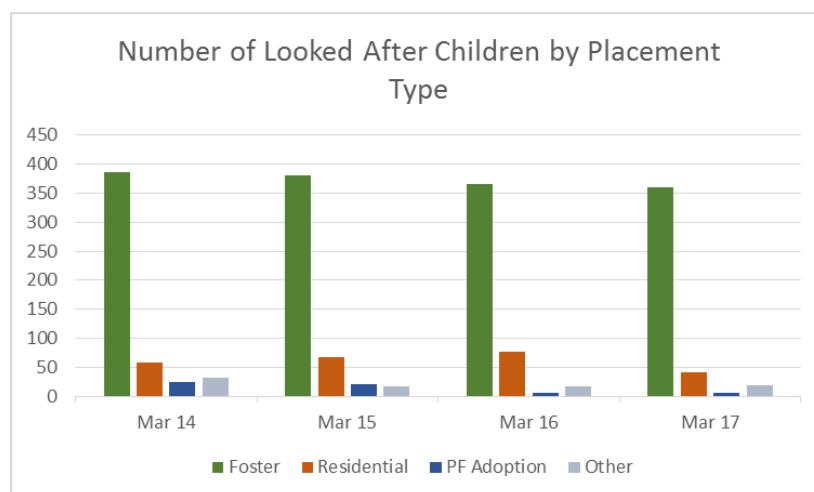


Figure 10 LAC by placement type

Provision	Inside LA Boundary	Outside LA Boundary	Total	% of all Total
Residential School		3	3	0.70%

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

LBL Fostering	96	48	144	31.60%
Agency Fostering	50	134	184	40.40%
Residential Care	1	32	33	7.20%
Semi Independence	19	19	38	8.30%
Kinship Fostering	13	14	27	5.90%
Mother and Baby Unit		3	3	0.70%
In lodgings or Living Independently with no formal support	5	1	6	1.30%
Placed for Adoption	1	3	5	1.10%
Secure Accommodation		4	4	0.90%
Medical / Nursing Care	2	1	3	0.70%
Prison / YOI		5	5	1.10%
Placed with parent(s)	1		1	0.20%
Grand Total	188	267	456	

- 6.3 The majority of children are in foster placements provided either in house via Lewisham foster carers or by independent fostering agencies. In common with many London authorities placement sufficiency in-Borough is an ongoing issue due to the availability of in-house carers who are able to care for young people with challenging needs and those who have the room to care for sibling groups. The impact of Independent Fostering agencies and the proximity of other authorities is also a challenge for London Boroughs. These areas of challenge are being addressed locally by the Fostering and Placements Service through targeted recruitment activity and sourcing of placements to meet children's identified needs. Over the period 2016/17 we have invested in our placements service to increase Family Finding capacity, to enhance long term matching; search capacity, to ensure that we are rigorous in our search for a good match for individual children's needs and placement choice and a contracts officer to add further rigour to placements providing good value for money, deliver on service specifications and meet specified outcomes. We expect continued improvement through 2017/18 as our Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy actively addresses those areas where we have identified a need such as engaging with London Care Services to ensure the widest possible range of services are available through their framework. Engaging with regional partners in South London to explore alternative delivery models and options for joint working whilst continuing to develop a high quality in-house fostering service. Through targeted training enhance the capacity of in house foster carers to meet the complex needs of some of our young people.
- 6.4 Placement stability is always a focus for IRO activity as children need a permanent stable base and a sense of belonging if they are to flourish. IROs monitor the stability of placements, undertake disruption activity when placements appear fragile and ensure that support is planned and in place to attain this for each child. The IRO ensures that there is a clear placement agreement setting out expectations for the carer and the young person. At the Review of the Care Plan detailed discussions take place about how far the placement is continuing to meet the child's needs, whether the child or young person is unhappy in any way with their placement, and whether there are any strains and needs of support for the carers so that these can be attended to. Despite this placements do break down for a variety of reasons including that the placement is not a good match for the

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

child. One challenge we have for a small number of young people is that they do not engage with the support or key-work on offer at their placement and abscond to engage with the negative activities that have become an established way of life for them. It can take years of support and intervention to successfully break these cycles. 10% of children and young people had experienced placement breakdown in the previous year (2016/17) but this remains below the statistical and England averages as outlined in the chart below.

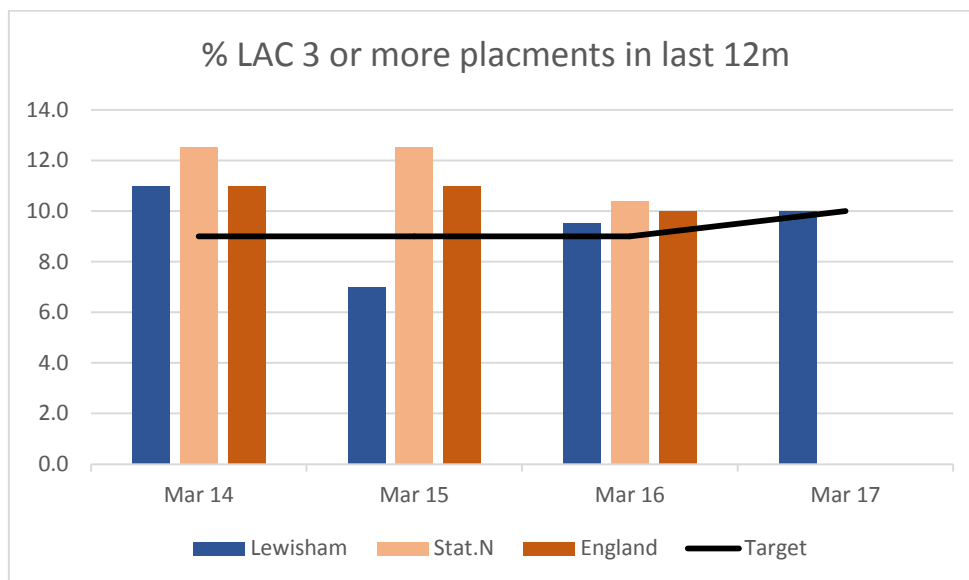
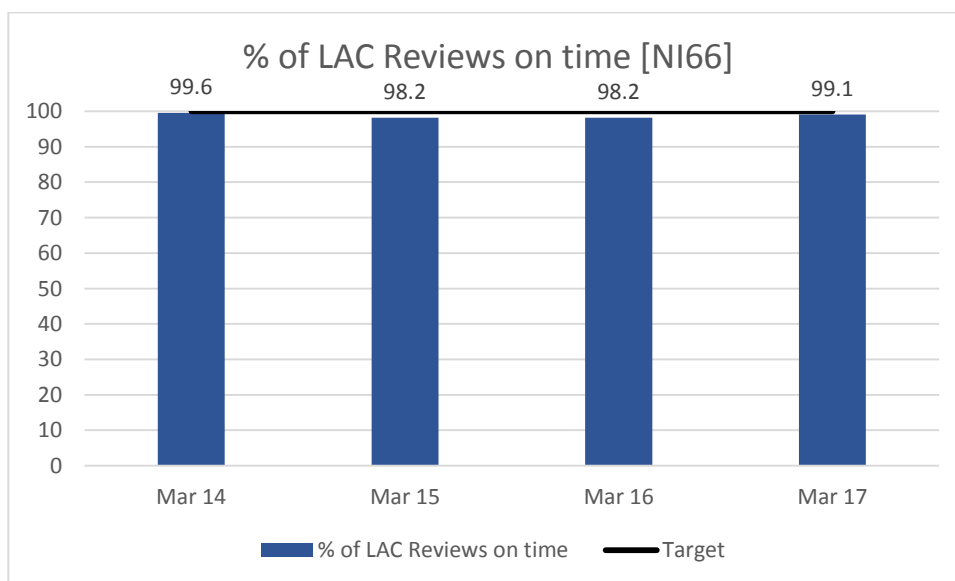


Figure 9 Children with 3 or more placements

7. Performance, Scrutiny & Challenge

7.1 Timeliness of reviews



% of LAC Reviews on time [NI66]	Mar 14	Mar 15	Mar 16	Mar 17
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London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

% of LAC Reviews on time	99.6	98.2	98.2	99.1
Target	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Key areas of IRO activity include ensuring that reviews are held in timescales set out in guidance (the [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulation, 2010](#)) and ensuring that concerns in respect of delay and drift to care planning are escalated appropriately. The graph above shows the former national indicator NI66 (% of LAC Reviews in timescale). Comparative national and regional data is no longer available for this indicator as it is no longer reported nationally, but the figures above demonstrate that local performance has been maintained.

8. Escalation of Issues Regarding Children Looked After

- 8.1 Lewisham's IRO Service utilises a quality assurance model that uses both monitoring and escalation to highlight issues which may require redress and attention either from the social worker or varying levels of management.
- 8.2 IROs highlight and detail concerns and through the use of a RAG rating system flag up children where swift action is needed. The details are noted on the post review monitoring form, placed on the child's records and the team and service manager notified so that action to address the concern is progressed for those cases rated at Red or Amber. Examples of these concerns are:
1. Gang related activity - suspicion that young person is involved in drugs related activities and may be running "county lines". Care Plan is appropriate but choosing not to engage with the support available. IRO will monitor progress.
 2. Young person is not in education pending a school decision on re-integration. This is not acceptable and issue should be raised with the school. IRO satisfied that the social work team are taking the appropriate steps.
 3. Missing Episodes, Risk of Sexual Exploitation, and Health Concerns including substance misuse / physical/emotional/mental health. There has been significant improvement in Secure Unit, does excellent Education work, however needs to be found a move on from Secure.
- 8.3 IROs target cases for active monitoring, which signposts that informal escalation is needed on some aspects of the work being undertaken. Cases rated Amber or Red indicates that there is concern about a child or the plan to address these concerns is not yet adequate in the IRO's view.

% of Informal and formal Escalation for Looked After Children to end of March 2017			
	Informal escalation (monitoring)	Formal Escalation	Total Number
	%		
Total of Reviews where IRO has	45%	6%	51%

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

escalated a concern.			
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Figure 10 Escalation by %

% of Informal Escalation for Looked After Children by service area to end of March 2017		
Teams/Service	Informal Escalation by service area	Formal Escalation by service area
Adoption	4%	0%
CWD	7%	17%
FSW	26%	2%
R&A	3%	13%
CLA & LC	55%	66%
YOT	4%	2%
Grand Totals	45% of total reviews	6% of total reviews

Figure 11 Escalation by service area

8.4 Some of reasons behind the 47 formal escalations in 2016/17 include the following:

- A 9 year old boy. Issues around placement availability within 24 hours of a carer going on holiday.
- A 17 year old young person. The move-on plan from residential school had not been formalised/approved by senior management. Escalation was resolved after IRO met with Team Manager to discuss the concerns and progress plan agreed.
- A 17 year old young person. Lack of planning for young person at risk of gang violence.
- A 14 year old girl. Updated education and health assessments and planning needed.
- 16 year old boy. SMART plan needed for rehabilitation plan

8.5 Concerns are highlighted with the relevant service areas and work undertaken to resolve the immediate issue or to look at other wider service issues.

8.6 The tables above show both the number and % of escalations made by IROs by team in the year to the end of March 2017. As the team with the most cases is the Children Looked After and Leaving Care Service it is unsurprising that they should feature in this statistic.

9. Escalation of themed Issues to senior management level

9.1 IROs have a responsibility to bring themed concerns to senior management attention. In Lewisham this is done by collating individual monitoring form information into a monthly report which is presented at the senior management team meeting. This

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

provides a clear and regular account of practice standards as well as issues or concerns which have led to cases being formally escalated.

9.2 Issues raised by the IRO team this year have included:

- Impact for Looked after young people in secure training centres or other custodial settings.
- The need for IROs to receive documents related to children in care proceedings and attendance at legal planning meetings
- Better coordination of inter-agency communication, planning and action for young people at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation, Missing and criminal/gang involvement.
- The importance of establishing a child's nationality and immigration status.
- Issues around the quality and sufficiency of placements.

10. The wellbeing of, and services delivered to, looked-after children for the year ending 31st March 2017.

10.1 The table and graph below is taken from the IRO monitoring forms for LAC Reviews. There are a proportion of cases (8%) where the Care or Pathway Plan does not appear to be based on an updated/current assessment of need at the time of the LAC Review. In these situations the IRO will escalate the issue to the social worker and team manager for action as it has a critical impact on the Reviewing process.

10.2 Overall, care planning for Looked After Children ensures that children have an updated care plan based on assessed need, children and young people are aware of the content of their care plan and, importantly, the majority are satisfied with the Plans being made with them (84%). In those situations where young people have expressed dissatisfaction with the Care Plan, the IRO will discuss their concerns and discuss any remedy with the social work team. A recommendation that the young person has access to an independent advocacy service, such as our commissioned service at Coram Voice, is also an option.

Care Planning for Looked After Children		
% of Children	Yes	No
Updated Care Plan based on Assessed Need	92%	8%
Did the child receive a copy of Care Plan	89%	11%
Is the child satisfied with the Care Plan	84%	16%

Figure 12 Quality of Care Planning

Poor 1%	Requires Improvement 16%	Good 80%	Outstanding 3%
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London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

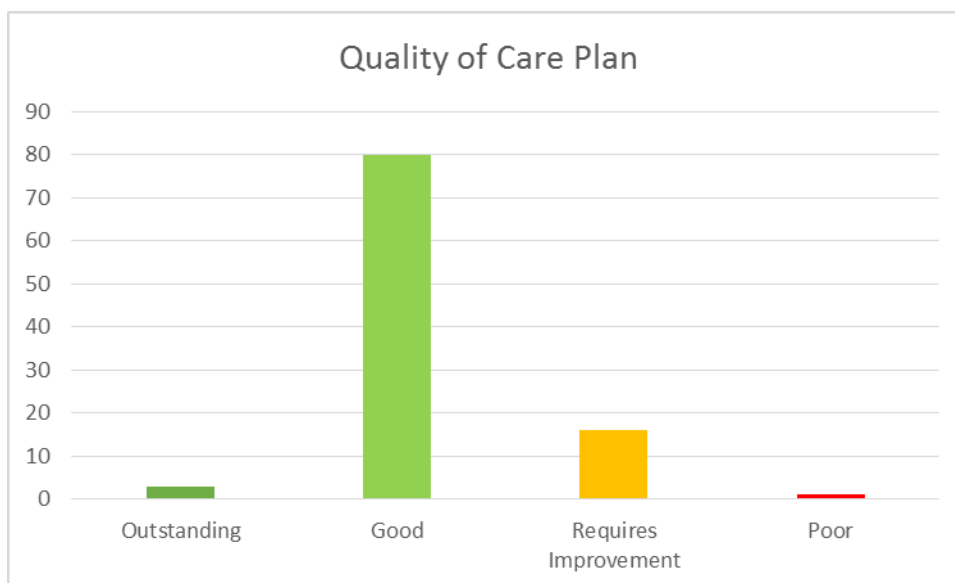


Figure 13 Care Plan Quality

10.3 The above graph shows that the majority of care plans (90%) are deemed to be of outstanding or good quality. A proportion were graded by the IRO as requiring improvement or poor (16% and 1% respectively). Where this has been the case, the IRO will highlight this both with the social worker and Team Manager asking them to address identified areas of deficit in a timely way. The findings in 2016/17 demonstrate an improvement in the quality of Care Plans which was an identified area for priority action within Children's Social Care. The improvement is a result of work across social work services and the IRO team bringing clarity about standards expected and the provision of briefings and training sessions. This is in addition to the regular informal and formal escalation by the IRO team, and the presentation of monthly performance data to the senior management team in the IRO monthly monitoring report which identifies area for review and where necessary improvement.

Core themes taken from the Monitoring Forms relate to the timeliness of transfers between teams which can delay necessary actions, particularly as children and young people adjust to being in care; placement Sufficiency and the need to recruit suitable local foster carers, skilled and willing to care for children with more challenging behavioural and emotional needs. This particularly for that older cohort who enter care in adolescence and have difficulties adhering to care boundaries.

10.4 As outlined previously there is a dedicated work strand that is looking at Placement Sufficiency and work is also being done around timely transfer between teams including the roll out of new Policies to provide the transfer framework. Investment in digital upgrade and how this impacts on the availability and accuracy of performance data also enables services to actively monitor the quality of the delivery to looked after children and young people.

11. Participation of Children & Young People

11.1 When children and young people come into the Council's care they are provided with an information pack, which includes the Lewisham Pledge to Looked After Children which gives the following assurances:

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

- To have a named Social Worker
- To have a care plan all about them and their needs
- To review the care plan with them and regularly check that all is well
- To have a named IRO
- To involve children in decisions about them
- To give children in care the same chances as each other and other children and respect their different needs and treat them equally
- To listen and respond if they are unhappy about their care

11.2 The IRO has a key role in representing the wishes and feelings of young people within the Review setting and holding the social work service and other parts of the children's partnership to account. Advocacy can be an essential addition for some children and young people and these processes can make a vital contribution to safeguarding and promoting their welfare and rights.

11.3 IROs routinely check that children and young people know about how to access advocacy services and how this service can support them in having an alternative voice represent them in the decision-making affecting their lives. Likewise IROs ensure that children and young people know how they can make a complaint and who they can complain to.

11.4 In Lewisham the Child in Care Council (CICC) is active and one of its activities is surveying children's views. The IRO team work together with the CICC to learn about how they can best support children in care and respond to their views. Children's views about their statutory Reviews vary greatly; some would prefer not to have them at all as they feel this emphasises their difference to other children. Some children and young people are very keen to be fully involved and participate by setting the agenda.

11.5 For young people in the transition period to leaving care the Review is of great importance in confirming the type and level of support they will need to promote a successful transition to independence post-18. For younger children whose future may be being considered within court proceedings and who do not know whether they will be remaining in care or returning home, the Review can be a helpful arena to ask questions, explore the care plan and find out what people are thinking and saying.

11.6 The IROs in Lewisham are acutely aware of the need to positively engage children and young people in their Review. An individual participation plan for each young person is drawn up which ranges from seeing a child outside of the meeting, to the young person leading the meeting. Alongside this the IRO facilitates the participation of parents and the range of professionals involved, to provide the young person with an enhanced experience where perhaps for the first time they are truly listened to throughout the planning and review process by all involved.. There are regular discussions within the team about how to talk with a child in a meaningful way without asking any questions and garnering views without the child or young person feeling quizzed. An example in response to children's feedback that reviews can be boring was to ask the child to describe what was most important to them within the review. The important next task is to ensure this is carried through in the discussion and in the decisions. One recent

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

example of this was a girl new to being looked after whose wish was to go to school every day and on time.

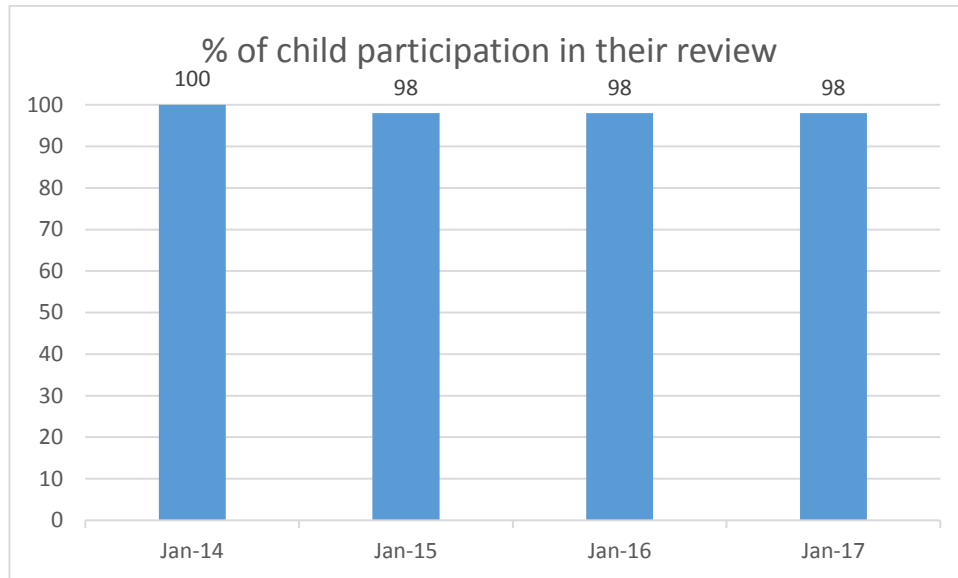


Figure 14 Participation by LAC

11.7 As can be seen from the above chart, performance has been stable from 2014 to 2017. Of the children at the end of the year 2016/17, only 2% did not participate in some manner. Everything possible is done to encourage children and young people to participate in their reviews and IROs will speak to children before, during and after reviews to garner their views and thoughts on how well they feel that their placement is meeting their needs. If a child or young person cannot attend their Review the IRO will try to visit them separately or contact them by phone or some other method. Children and young people are encouraged to complete either an online consultation or a paper consultation which is accessed by the IRO prior to the Review. This provides a valuable insight into what is happening for the child, what needs to be focussed on in the review and enables the IRO to represent the wishes and feelings of children who may have more difficulty in speaking out. The social work report and Care Plan will also include the child's voice and a range of audit activities seeks evidence of continual dialogue with children and young people about the plans being made for them.

12. Areas for Improvement

- 12.1 The IRO Service continues to evidence strength in the timeliness of reviews, their encouragement of children and young people's participation in reviews and case monitoring between and at the point of review. The Service however is not complacent and have identified the following areas for further development.
- Completion of monitoring forms on LCS. The IRO Service reports to SMT monthly on the outcomes from monitoring activity on children and young people's care planning needs. The service has worked with the Digital Transformation Team to develop a revised monitoring form which will go live from July. This will assist in providing enhanced data/reporting on themes to senior management.
 - IRO Liaison across Children's Social Care to highlight and address areas of mutual concern and development, for example, input to Care Scrutiny Panel, Permanence Planning Meetings and Legal Planning Meetings. Our aim is to assist in preventing delays to care planning, improve the quality assurance of placements and promote placement stability and promote wider (health, education and personal) outcomes for children and young people. We have introduced link IROs to provide consistency and expertise to these activities. The service also provides training to develop understanding and support aspirational expectations for our planning g for children and young people. This is targeted at newly qualified social workers and students social workers currently but we envisage a wider take-up from more established social workers also.
 - Enhanced representations. We are working with colleagues in Legal and operational Social Work services to ensure the IRO is supported to give informed views in Care Proceedings; through participation in Legal Planning meetings and awareness of the outcomes of Assessments and Directions ordered by the court.
 - Increased consultation with children and young people in between reviews to ensure their understanding of the purpose of care planning and involvement in the process.
 - To ensure that a greater number of young people are supported to chair their own reviews and explore the use of new media platforms for enhanced participation and consultation activity.

13. CSC Areas for review based on IRO monitoring

- 13.1 Placement sufficiency and stability – this is being addressed in the Placement Strategy Review
- 13.2 Continued focus on the clear and coordinated response to young people with increased vulnerabilities through missing episodes, exploitation via gang activity and criminal involvement. Activity through the MET(Missing, Exploited & Trafficked) multi-agency forum identifies particular vulnerabilities and the IRO Missing Strategy meeting when looked after children go missing reviews the

London Borough of Lewisham Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2016/17

particular issues associated with a young person, including additional vulnerabilities such as CSE or gang affiliation.

- 13.3 Further scrutiny on the quality of social work reports for children's statutory reviews, targeting the presence of the child and parent's views, timeliness and relevance to the child or young person's lived experience. The IRO team will continue to raise this as relevant on individual cases and on a collated basis to monthly senior management meetings. IROs will continue to offer briefings, individual and team training sessions and consultation on expected standards. Children's Social Care Social Work services will undertake planning improvement action through performance management and social work supervision.
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