

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT 2017-2018

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1. Introduction and Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to meet the statutory requirement for the IRO Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board, established by the IRO Handbook (2010).
- 1.2 Following presentation to the Bath and North East Somerset Corporate Parenting Board and the Bath and North East Somerset Local Safeguarding Children's Board, this report will be placed on the Council website as a publically accessible document.

2. Reporting Period

- 2.1 This report covers the period from 01 April 2017 to 31 March 2018. Some of the data sets vary slightly from those published by children's social care due to minor variations in the timeframe for data capture, and the uploading of data onto various systems.

3. The Legal, Statutory and National Context of the IRO Role

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 In March 2010 the IRO Handbook was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IRO's should discharge their duties. Significantly, the Handbook stated:

The IRO has a new role conferred upon them to monitor the child's case as opposed to monitoring the review, effectively monitoring the implementation of the Care Plan between reviews (at para. 3.74)

The Handbook goes on to state that the primary role of an IRO is:

To ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's current needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child (at para. 2.10)

- 3.3 In discharging this role, the Handbook notes (at para. 2.14) that the IRO has a number of specific responsibilities, including:

- *promoting the voice of the child;*
- *ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;*
- *making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;*
- *offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them; and*

- *monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands*

3.4 In February 2018, Narey and Owers published 'Foster Care in England' A review for the Department for Education. The reach of this stocktake included consideration of the role of the future of the IRO role in England. Narey argued that careful consideration needed to be given to evaluating the cost of the service against the perceived benefit to improving outcomes for Children in Care within the context of the financial challenges that Local Authorities face. The response locally to this challenge has been overwhelmingly in support of the IRO service, whilst the IRO service have rallied to the challenge of finding new ways of evidencing the impact of their work.

4. Local Context – Bath and North East Somerset Council as Corporate Parent

4.1 B&NES IRO Service operates within the context B&NES Council as 'Corporate Parent' for all of the children and young people in its care. As Corporate Parent, the Council's ambition is not merely limited to ensure that children and young people in care are safe and their welfare promoted but that, as parent, the Council strives to achieve the best possible outcomes for its children and young people.

5. The B&NES Council IRO Service

5.1 During the reporting period, the IRO service has been subject to some slight changes in personnel. The Service now comprise of six, permanent Independent Reviewing Officers, all of whom work part time, providing a full time equivalent of 3.1. The IRO's are experienced and authoritative Social Work practitioners with management experience. During the last 12 months there has been no reliance on agency staff.

5.2 All IRO's working for the Service are qualified Social Workers registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and subjected to regular Disclosure and Barring enhanced checks. All have relevant and appropriate skills, bringing to the role specialist knowledge and experience including Children's Social Care safeguarding management, fostering and adoption work, work in therapeutic and third sector services, residential services management, performance management and quality assurance work. All have substantial experience of effective direct work with children and young people.

5.3 All IRO's are independent of B&NES Social Care and sit within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance team. They are not involved in preparation of children in care plans or the management of children in care cases or have any control over resources allocated to a case.

- 5.4 All IRO's have access to independent legal advice upon request through a reciprocal arrangement with Bristol City Council, we have used this service once during the reporting period.
- 5.5 All IRO's are members of the National Association of Independent Review Officers (NAIRO), and are encouraged to participate in the South West Regional IRO Practitioners Group (SWIRO) for peer-support and sector-led improvement opportunities .
- 5.6 All IRO's access training opportunities, relevant to their role and interests.
- 5.7 During the reporting period, the Service has had consistent leadership. The post holder is registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and subject to regular Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced checks. The manager ensures casework oversight, professional advice and management support to each IRO, including monthly Supervision and Team Meetings and work to ensure the IRO's access training appropriate to need. The post holder has additional responsibility for oversight of the LADO function (managing allegations against staff), and the Safeguarding and Quality assurance team who deliver child protection conferences. This coverage of service ensures that for children entering care via the child protection process there is strong independent oversight and scrutiny of their journey to ensure their needs are fully met.
- 5.8 The Team Manager sits outside of the Children's Social Care Management Group, and their roles and is not involved in operational management, the preparation of children's care plans, the management of individual cases or resource allocation. Accordingly, there is no conflict of interest.
- 5.9 During the reporting period, the administrative support for the IRO's has continued to be provided through a full time dedicated post holder.

6. IRO Caseloads and Services Performance

- 6.1 The IRO service, in common with some of its regional peers, is developing the capacity for the service to have dual roles. There are currently three members of staff who are employed in a dual role; as well as the independent review of children and young people in care they provide independent Chairing of Child Protection Conferences, which is a separate statutory function under Working Together 2015 for which they are accountable to the Director of Children's Services. The most significant benefit of integrating Child in Care Reviews with the Chairing of Child Protection Conferences is the opportunity to provide a greater level of consistency and oversight for children and young people. The benefit of continued and sustained relationships, and the potential for relationships to improve outcomes for children, irrespective of a child's status, is considered to be a key and important strength. The argument in favour of separating the functions as is the case with three of the IRO's is the ability to prioritise children and young people in care cases all of the time. It is acknowledged that the integrated model places additional tasks upon individual workers, which is why the variations in post exist.

Table 1: Total Number of Children in Care and IRO caseload

	March 2018	March 2017	March 2016	March 2015	March 2014
Children In Care allocated to IRO	168	160	158	141	146
Average IRO Caseload for FTE	62	60	N/A	N/A	N/A

6.2 Table 1 shows case load by quarter for the reporting period and historical comparisons. The data suggests a notable increase in the 2016/17 numbers of Children in Care. Collating the data on case load averages will help to build a more robust understanding of work of the IRO in B&NES. The large variation in caseloads at the end of Q.4 reflects a change-over of staff with the recruitment of two additional IRO's into post (0.7 FTE).

6.3 To contextualise the caseloads, the IRO handbook suggests that an average caseload should be between 50-70 children and young people for a full time post (FTE). However, the Average IRO caseload is a crude indicator of the work undertaken by the IRO's, as children and young people's circumstance and situations vary in complexity, and in distance which needs to be travelled. Children who are recently accommodated, placed at distance, involved in care proceedings or are in placement disruption require a higher level of scrutiny and oversight than children who are in long term settled foster placements. There additionally needs to be enough flexibility in the service to respond to peaks in demand and associated workload, whilst maintaining a focus on quality and oversight. Therefore a key change to this year has been the introduction of caseload monitoring system.

6.4 The caseload monitoring system utilises a scoring system based on the complexity of the child's situation and distance from Bath, the scoring is then regularly reviewed in supervision with Staff. The caseload monitoring has shown that there is less variance in case load than the above figures suggest, with those IRO's who have a large case load having a higher allocation of local, settled placements that are on 6 monthly review cycles.

Table 2: Number of Children in Care Reviews

	March 2014	March 2015	March 2016	March 2017	March 2018
Children In Care allocated to IRO	146	141	158	160	168
Total Reviews held	393	403	398	404	461

6.5 Within the reporting period the IRO service have chaired a total of 461 Children and Young People in Care reviews, a 14% increase on the previous financial year. This increase reflects a rise in the numbers of children coming into care, and also an increase in legal proceedings which require a high level of scrutiny. This has placed additional pressure on the team, who have worked incredibly hard to ensure that the quality of the service remains at a high standard.

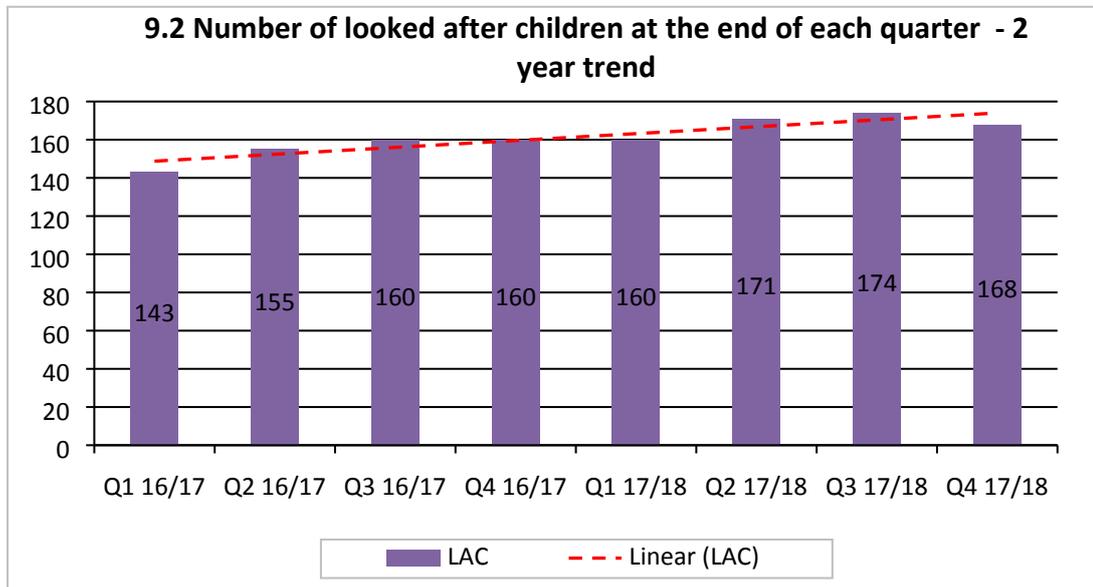
6.6 **Timeliness of reviews:** Table 3 reports the percentage of Looked after children who had *all* of their reviews on time within the reporting period. Overall performance of this indicator continues to be positive, although timeliness has decreased. However it remains above the target figure of 87%. This is in part due to a high increase in children accommodated during the end of Q.3 and beginning of Q.4, which coincided with a change in staffing arrangements. Due to the high pressure of increased numbers of children in care and the complexity of our children's circumstances, this has been a real achievement for the team to ensure so many reviews are held within timescales.

Table 3: Timeliness of reviews

Reviews in timescales:	2017-2018				March 2017	March 2016	March 2015	March 2014
	End of Q.1	End of Q.2	End of Q.3	End of Q.4				
NI66 - % of LAC in care for a year or more where all of their reviews in the financial year are on time	95%	94%	93%	88%	94%	95%	93%	100%
	93%							
Local NI66 - % of LAC with all reviews on time (includes CIC who have been in care for less than one year)	94%	93%	85%	82%	90%	93%	96%	100%
	89%							

7. Profile of Children and Young People in Care in B&NES

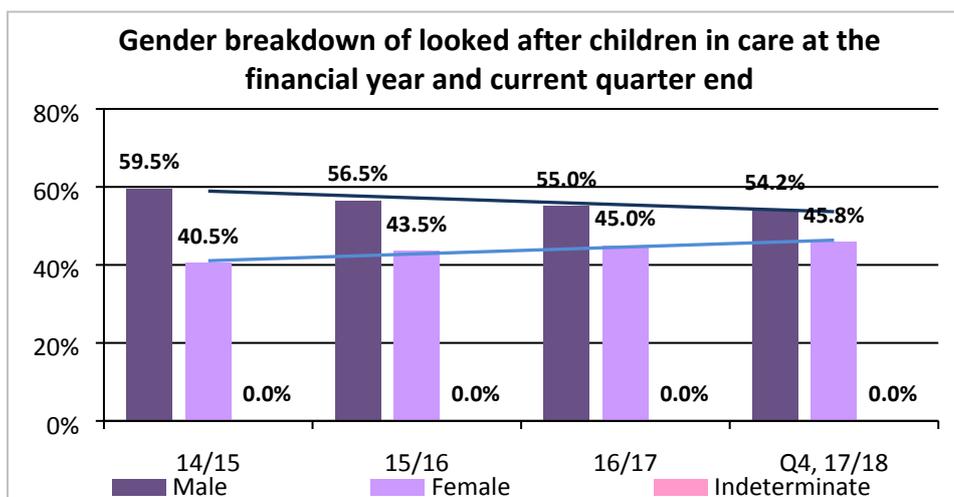
Graph 1: Number of children and Young People in Care



7.1 Within the reporting period, the number of children and young people in the care of the B&NES Council has steadily increased. The national picture also confirms upward pressures on CLA numbers with current figure being the highest since the mid 1980's. It is also important to highlight that the rise in CLA figures will also include the Unaccompanied Asylum seeking/ Trafficked Children that have been accommodated since June 2016 as part of the national dispersal scheme.

7.2 The increase in numbers of looked after children has put additional pressure on the IRO service leading to a slight increase in case load across the team.

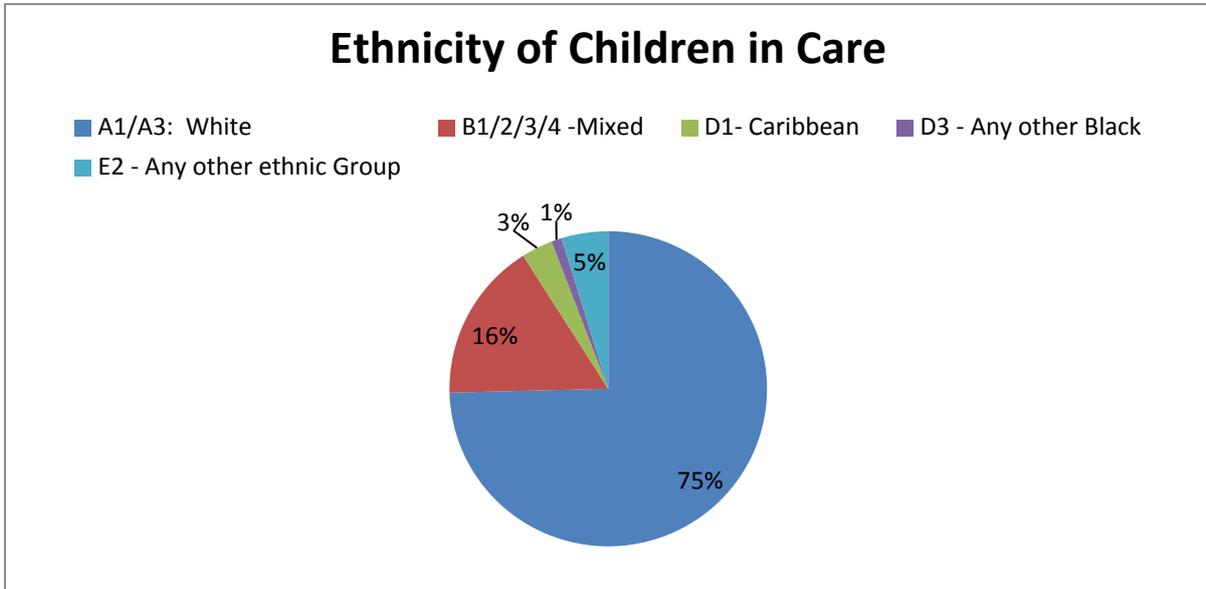
Table 4: Gender breakdown of looked after Children in Care



7.3 The gender breakdown as demonstrated above remains relatively stable in relation to previous years, although when viewed over the four year period it is

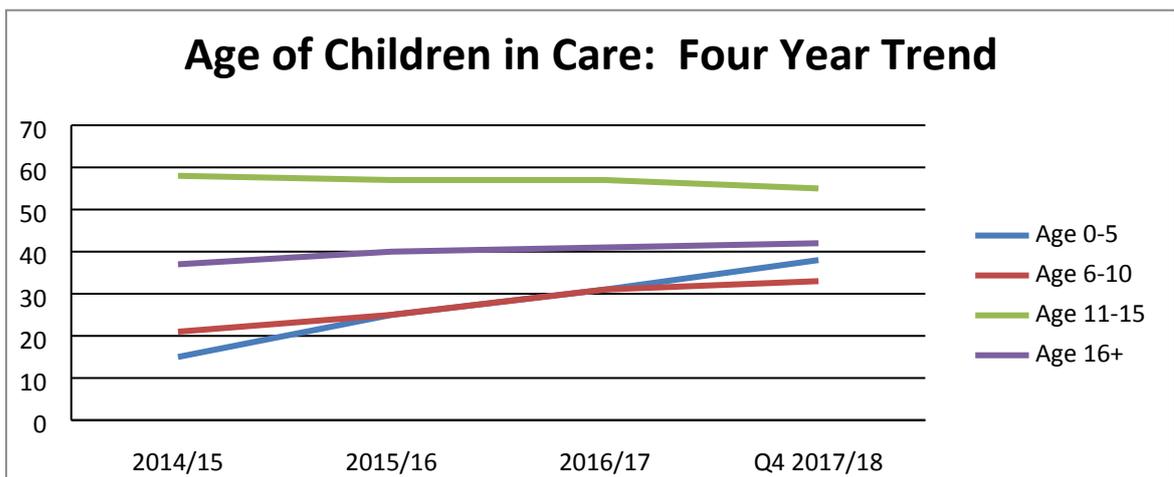
interesting to see a gradual trend in the narrowing of the gap between boys and girls coming into foster care, which more accurately reflects the national picture.

Graph 2: Percentage of Children in Care by Ethnicity at financial year end



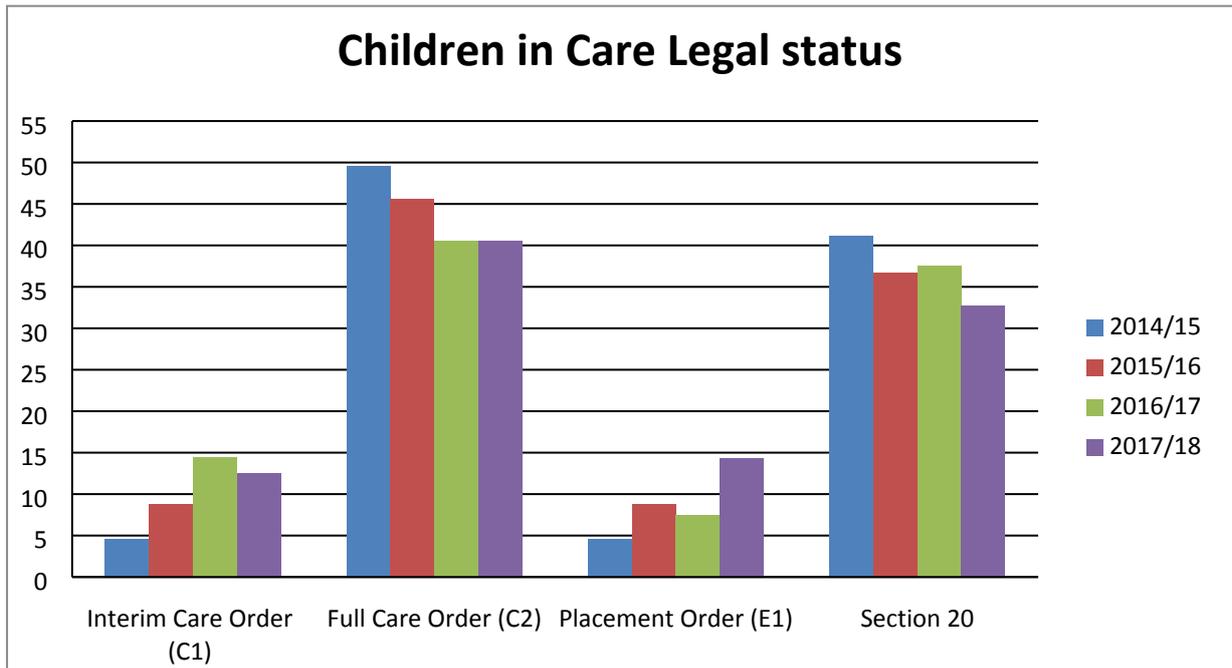
7.4 There has been a shift in ethnicity of Children in Care with White British children falling from 81% to 75% in the previous financial year has stabilised this year at 70%, they still remain the highest proportion of Children in Care. It is thought that this changing demographic relates closely to an increase in the accommodation of asylum seeking children.

Graph 3: Number of children by age on 31st March 2018



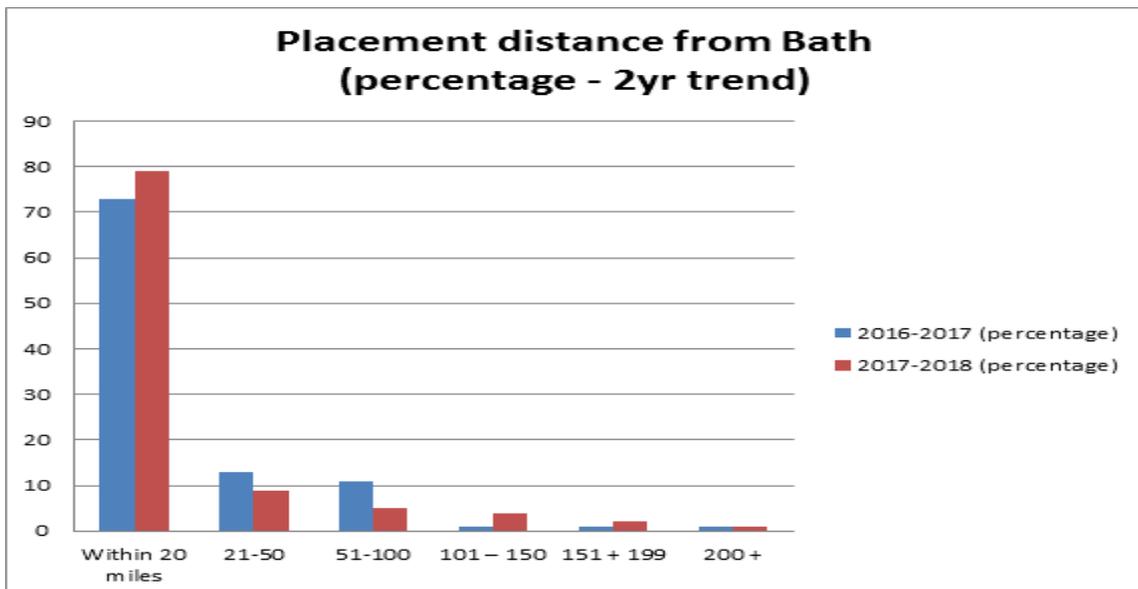
7.5 The four year trend shows an overall reduction of Children aged 11- 14yrs looked after. This may be linked to an increase in the use of alternative permanence options which have been increasingly used over recent years with the younger cohort, examples of this would be the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement orders.

Graph 4: Legal status of Children and Young People in Care



7.6 This data provides a breakdown of the legal status for young people under the age of 16 in care. The data shows a decline in the number of children on a full care order, which reflects the increase in alternative permanence options such as special guardianship Orders or Child arrangement orders being granted by the courts alongside a steady rise in children placed for adoption. This trend is also reflected in both regional and national trends. However, there has also been a steady decrease in the numbers of children under the age of 16 accommodated under S.20 (Children Act 1989).

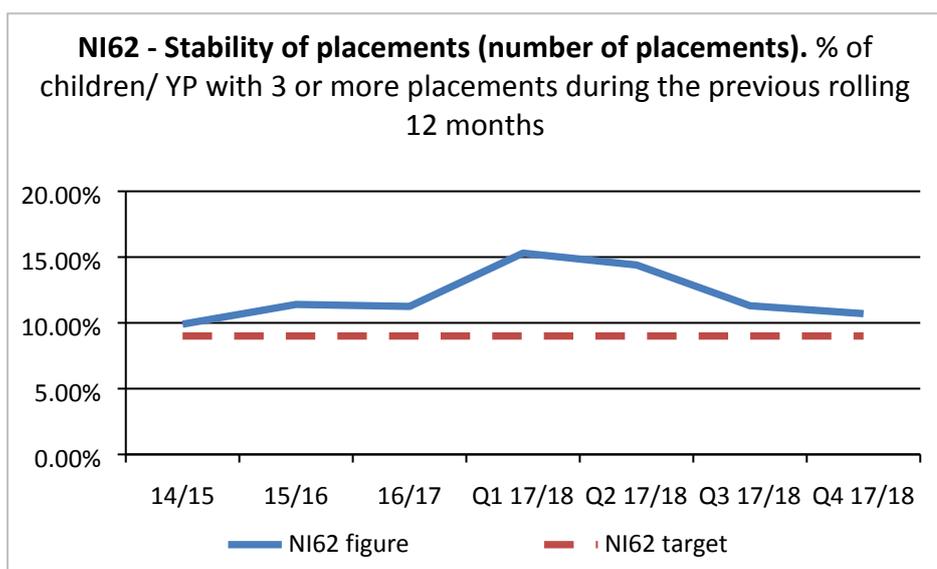
Graph 5: Children placed at distance from Bath



7.7 The above summary chart showing the distance of CLA placements from Bath, all children placed within the local authority and within neighbouring LA's less than 20 miles away constitute 79% of all placements for CLA. The service recognises the need for every effort to be made to place the children as close to their home and community as possible so far as is consistent with their need to be safeguarded, or to have access to specialist therapeutic services.

7.8 The IRO service raised concern in the previous financial year that for a small minority of children in care who have complex needs and extreme behavioural support needs there are very limited local options, for care available, and are often the those which end up placed at distance. For some of these young people with the highest need, they would benefit most from being kept close to Bath as this would encourage increased social work visiting, local schooling and health and to be supported to maintain local links with friends and family. The IRO service are encouraged to see a positive shift towards Children increasingly being placed closer to Bath.

Graph 6: Placement Stability of Children and Young People in Care. Percentage of Children and Young people having 3 or more placement moves within 12 month period.



7.9 Placement stability is strongly correlated to the progress that children and young people make in care, as compound moves can negatively impact on a young persons sense of worth, emotional resilience and is disruptive to developing friendship and support networks and educational achievement, which we want for all our young people. Therefore a key role of the IRO is to support placement stability through scrutiny of placement plans. The service raised the concern in the last financial year that there had been an increase in placement breakdowns and multiple moves. This report is pleased to report that the actions undertaken appears to be showing signs that this issue is being addressed through a fall in placement moves.

7.10 Unaccompanied and Asylum Seeking Children and Trafficked Children:

B&NES currently has small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and Trafficked Young People. These young people bring unique issues with them. Some of them have been trafficked into the country and may still be at risk from their traffickers. All of them have language issues and it is likely that they are all experiencing emotional health issues, from being separated from their family members, experiences from their home country, as well as their journeys to the UK and the delays in processing asylum claims.

7.11 Bath and Northeast Somerset LA has not been able to identify any placements within the local authority for these young people and does not currently have resources within the authority (such as language classes) to support them. This has meant that all of the young people have been dispersed to other local authority areas and this has reduced the opportunity to build networks between the young people or with other services.

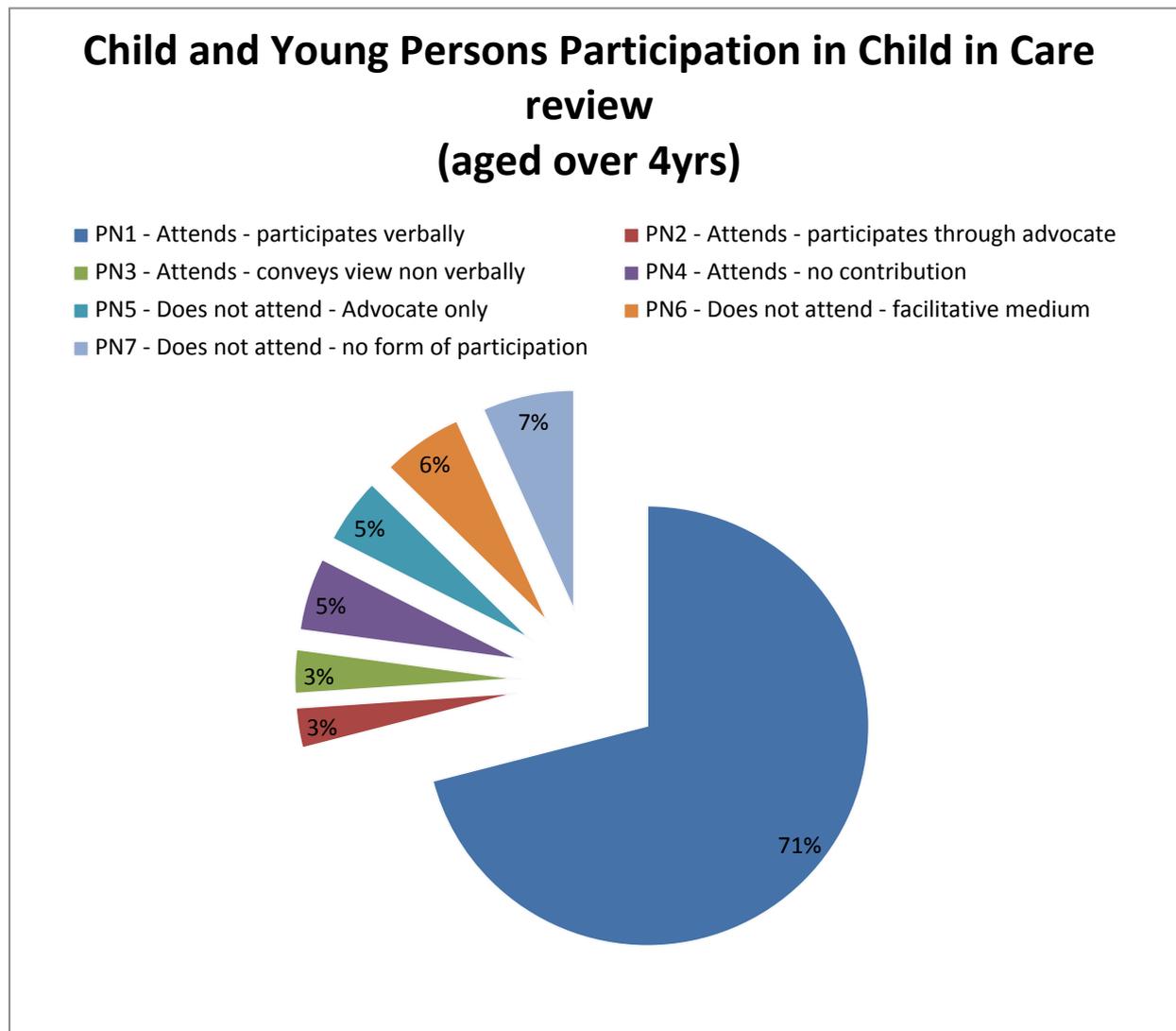
7.12 The IRO service is meeting with children's social care managers to consider the needs of these young people and how these can be met over time. The IRO services believes this is a crucial area for development.

8. The Work of the IROs - Child Focused Reviews, Participation and Feedback

8.1 **Participation:** During the financial year the IRO service facilitated 461 Child in Care reviews. Within this process, Involving Children and Young People in there reviews is central to child centred planning.

8.2 Within the reporting period 93% of children above the age of 4 were involved in some way with their child in care review, which is reflection of the commitment of the IRO team to put children and young people at the heart of their review. The IRO service is dedicated to the promotion of the child's voice within their review and for those children and young people who have not directly been involved in their review the reasons are always closely scrutinised. During this financial year the two primary reasons for non-participation are either because this is the clear informed choice of the young person, or the child has been too unwell and it was carefully assessed that the consultation would be detrimental to them. In these circumstances the IRO's work closely with the connected network of the young person to gain as full a picture of the child's life as possible.

Graph 6: Method and Percentage of Young People participating in their review



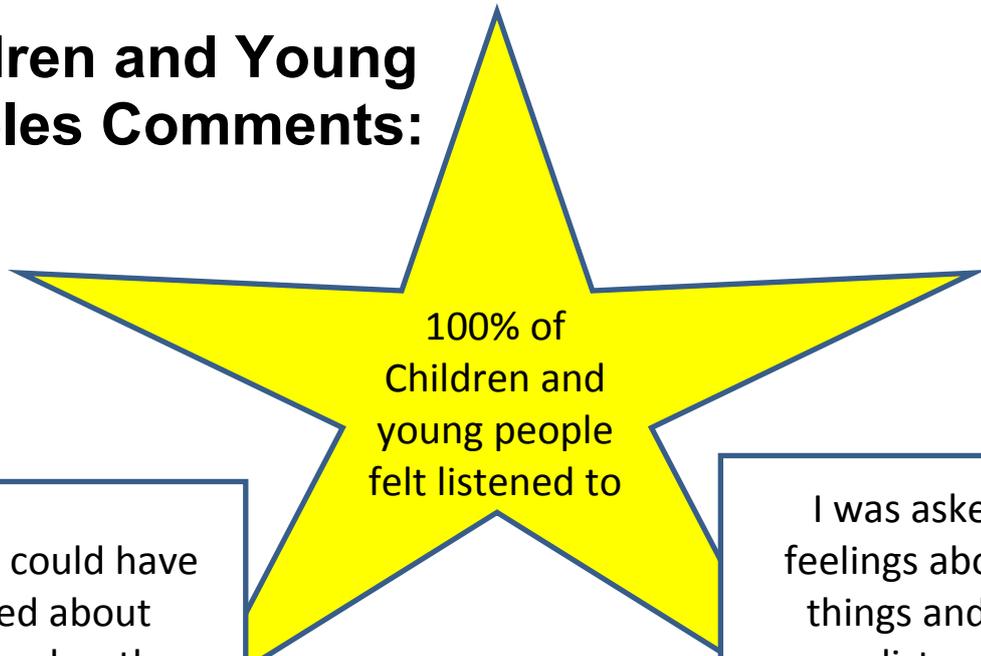
8.3 Children and Young Peoples Feedback: Following Child in Care reviews, the IRO service encourage young people to complete feedback forms to help us improve our service. All feedback is sent through to the IRO responsible, and the monthly feedback is shared at team meetings to make sure that any issues are quickly picked up and responded to, and that the young person’s feedback is meaningful and influences practice. Table 4 shows overview of the comments we have received.

8.4 The children and young peoples feedback is important in thinking about how we run the service. The feedback this year whilst overwhelmingly positive has sent a clear message that more work is needed before the meeting with the Young Person to better understand who they would like to be at the meeting, and to challenge the service to think more about how to facilitate more parents attending their child’s review.

Table 5: Children and Young Peoples feedback about reviews

Question Asked	Response		
Where you sent a consultation form?	71% - Yes		
Did you fill it in?	73% - Yes (of those that received it)		
Did you foster carer or social worker ask your views	95% - Yes		
Did you think the review talked about the right things?	100% - Yes		
Did you say what you wanted to?	95% - Yes		
Did you feel your views were listened to?	100% - Yes		
Was anyone missing you would have like to be there?	81% Yes	15% would have liked a family member to also attend. 4% would have liked another professional invited.	
What do you think about the time it took?	Too short	About right	Too long
	5%	90%	5%
Was any one there you didn't think should be there?	0%		
How good is the IRO at listening? (where 1 is terrible, and 10 is really good)	1-3 (not every good)	4-6 (OK)	7-10 (Really good)
	0%	10%	90%
Do you plan to take part in your next review?	81%		

Children and Young Peoples Comments:



Some things could have been talked about without my teacher there.

I was asked for my feelings about a lot of things and felt very listened to

My advocate helped me to decide

I would like my nan to be at my review

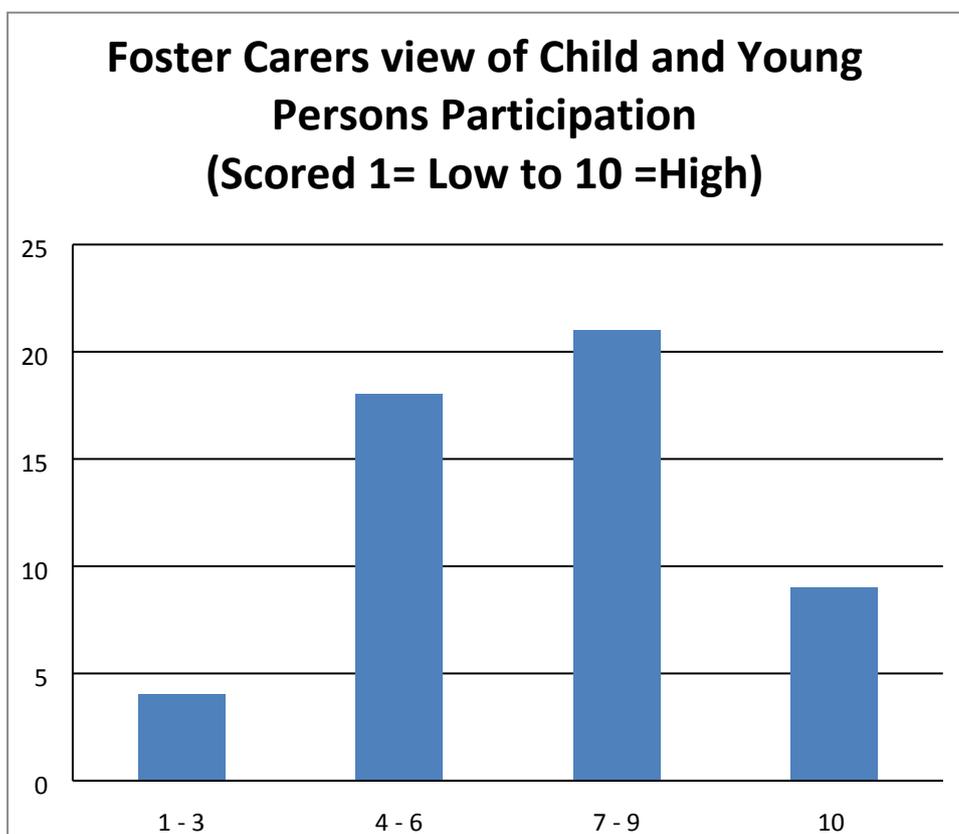
I would have liked my Therapist to be at the review

IRO could do better at keeping track of what is going on



8.5 Foster Carers Feedback: The IRO service additionally seeks feedback from foster carers, asking them their views of the review, and their perspective of the child or young persons involvement:

Graph 7: How well do you feel the young person engaged in the meeting?



8.6 Feedback from foster carers themselves (72):

Receive a consultation form	78% Yes		
Did you complete the consultation form? (if received)	96% Yes		
Was the place and time of the meeting convenient?	89% Yes		
Were you able to share your views in the meeting?	93% Yes		
Did you feel the meeting focused on Child's needs and plans	97% Yes		
	Too Short	Just about right	Too Long
What do you think about the length of the meeting?	1%	98%	1%

8.7 Parents Feedback (8):

Did you receive a consultation form	88% Yes		
Did you complete the consultation form? (if received)	75% Yes		
Was the place and time of the meeting convenient?	100% Yes		
Were you able to share your views in the meeting?	100% Yes		
Did you feel the meeting focused on Child's needs and plans	100% Yes		
	Too Short	Just about right	Too Long
Length of meeting		100%	

8.8 Most Children and Young People in Care maintain relationships and regular contact with their Birth parents. For many children this is an important process as they maintain close bonds with their birth family, and it forms a significant part of their identity. Positive relationships between parents and carers can support and maintain placements and help children to gain the stability they need. This is not always possible, and there are circumstances where it is not in the child's best interest to promote such regular contact.

8.9 Regardless of the particular circumstances for the family, it is important for parents to be consulted on the care for their child, and for them to be kept informed of their progress. Therefore where it is not possible for parents to physically attend the review meeting the IRO will undertake to make phone contact with the family or visit the family. In addition to this consultation forms are routinely posted to families prior to review.

9. The Work of the IRO: Scrutiny and challenge of individual care plans, service delivery and practice evaluation

9.1 Dispute resolutions and escalation: One of the key functions of an IRO is to ensure and promote the needs and rights of every young person in the care of the Local Authority. This responsibility is outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2015 and IRO Handbook 2010. Every child in care has an Independent Reviewing Officer appointed to ensure that their Care Plan fully reflects their needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the Local Authority's legal responsibilities towards them as a child or young person in care.

9.2 An IRO will ensure that the wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the Local Authority throughout the whole time the child is in care and will monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the child's case. On occasions this means that it will come to the attention of the IRO that there is a problem in relation to the care of a child or young person, for example in relation to planning for the care of the child, or the implementation of

the plan or decisions relating to it, resource issues or poor practice by the Social Worker. When this happens the IRO is required to seek a resolution.

- 9.3 It is acknowledged that the resolution of disputes can be time consuming and can create tensions between the IRO and the Local Authority. Nevertheless, the child's allocated IRO is personally responsible for activating and seeking a resolution, even if it may not be in accordance with the child's wishes and feelings if, in the IRO's view, it is in accordance with the best interest and welfare of the child, as well as his or her human rights. In compliance with the IRO Handbook 2010 there is in place a formal Dispute Resolution Process whilst acknowledging and giving primacy to informal resolution where possible.
- 9.4 B&NES IRO's manage most disagreement and challenge very effectively on an informal basis. More often than not, discussion with social workers and their managers are effective in achieving the progress required. That said, achieving a culture of effective challenge is difficult and success is ultimately rooted in confident and respectful professional relationships. At its best, challenge is perceived as helpful and supports professional learning and development which social workers and managers take forward in other cases and elements of their practice. A Dispute Resolution Process is only effective if IROs, social workers and managers all perceive it to be effective and this remains an area which requires further and continued monitoring.
- 9.5 In March 2017 the first, and benchmarking audit was undertaken looking at a snapshot of recommendations and escalations made by the IRO service. A further follow up audit was completed in March 2018 to consider the profile of issues raised by the reviewing service in the last 12 month, and consider the effectiveness of the revised Issues Resolution Policy. To identify possible trends, and to understand the way in which the Independent Reviewing Service manage and escalate challenge.
- 9.6 Since the last financial year the Divisional Director has prioritised oversight of high risk escalations and review of systematic themes. This is achieved through monthly escalation meetings between the IRO manager, Director for Children's Services and Children's Social Care Service Leads. These meetings offer an opportunity to have open and honest conversations, and provide an additional resolution forum to ensure commitments are followed through. The view of the IRO manager is that these are valuable meetings, and have helped to create a positive culture, and ensure issues are fully and transparently addressed.
- 9.7 Reviewing the recommendations from last years audit, children's social care and the IRO team have made some notable progress:
- Consult on the use of 'forms' in Liquid Logic (Children record system) to raise and conclude issues resolution, which will allow for greater monitoring of outcomes, and greater understanding of 'impact' and get report written by Liquid Logic team as below

Achieved. This was consulted on, but not suitable in practice.

- Ensure that Liquid Logic is able to run reports on case notes classified 'IRO informal Challenge' and 'IRO formal Challenge' to support management scrutiny.

Achieved.

- To work with the Child Protection and Court Team to consider how to improve IRO and Social worker communication in relation to assessments which are subject to court proceedings.

Achieved. The issues have been highlighted, and the working protocol updated in conjunction with children's social care and legal. Children In Care review minutes are now filed with the court as standard practice.

- To work with the Children in Care Team to address issues of needs assessments for Pathway plans and updating Pathway plans.

Ongoing: Audit completed, and working group at final stages of the process.

- Accurate Issues resolution information needs to be reported in the quarterly SLA to provide greater organisation oversight to issues arising.

Ongoing – some delay due to reporting, now resolved.

- Monitoring of progress of issues resolution from informal to formal needs to be undertaken in the next 12 months.

Achieved.

9.8 Audit of IRO Challenge - The Deputy Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance looked at a random sample of 20% (40) of Child in Care files. The auditor scrutinised IRO case recordings from April 2016- March 2017 to consider:

1. How many cases had IRO actions recorded
2. Recommendations/ actions agreed as part of the Child in Care review
3. Evidence of Informal Challenge, and the issues this related to
4. Evidence of Formal Challenge and the issues this related to.

9.8.1 The information for each case was classified into sub categories to support with analysis, and interpretation of the findings. Definitions for these are set out below:

Children in Care Recommendations: The IRO is responsible for completing a review record on behalf of the responsible authority. This includes the identification of any changes that are necessary in the light of information presented at the review, and the intended outcomes of any changes, a list of the decisions made and the relevant timescales. These recommendations are issued following a review, and become actions within five working days if they are not challenged.

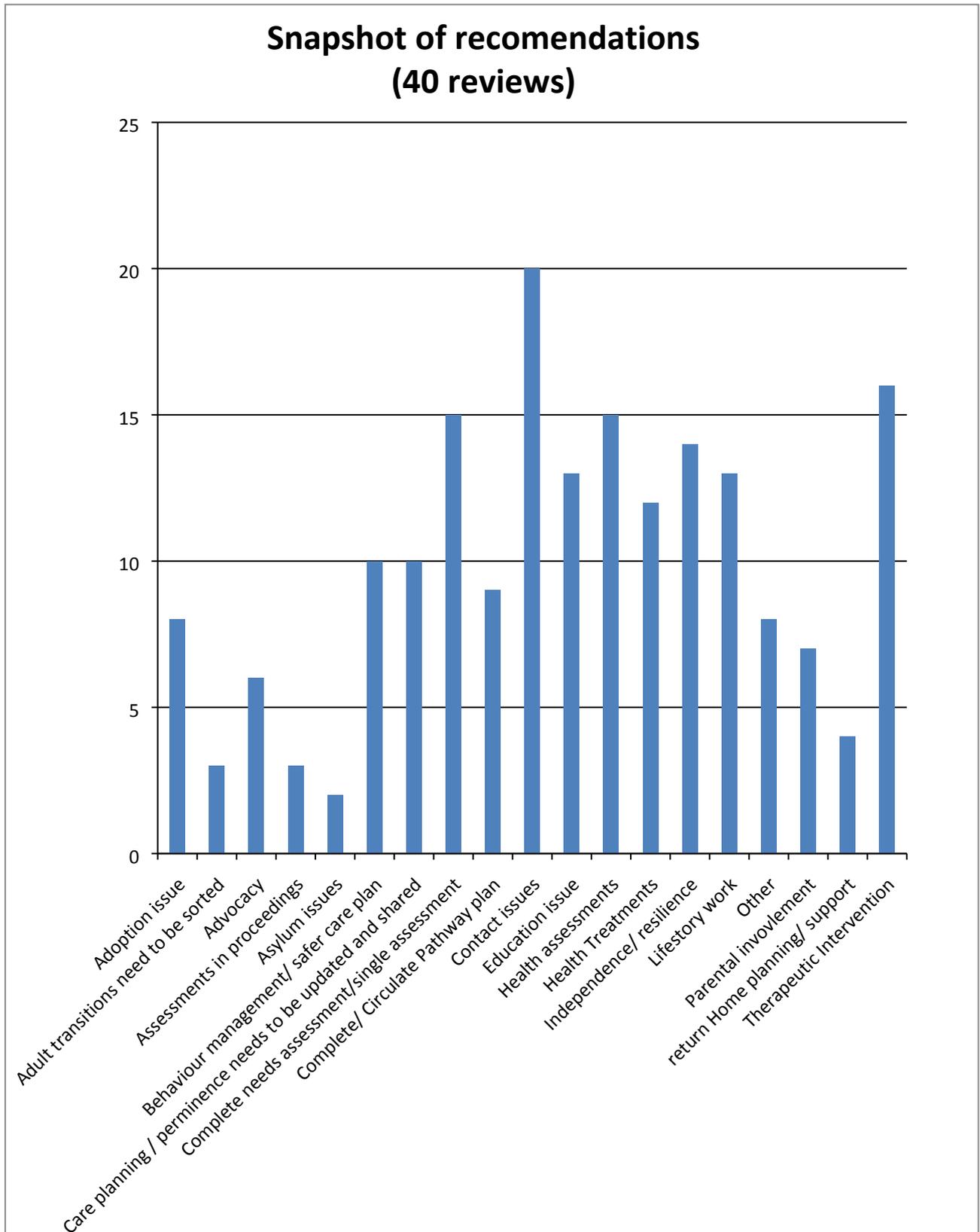
Informal Issues Resolution: The IRO's routinely feedback to social workers and team managers about individual cases and areas for concern, both during and between review periods.

Formal Issues Resolutions: The majority of issues will be addressed in the above process, however on occasion a concern either has not been sufficiently addressed, or a significant concern has been highlighted, and the issue is then brought to the attention of the team manager and service manager.

9.8.2 Overview of Findings: The auditor found that all of these cases had recommendations made following a child in care review, 11 had evidence of informal challenge raised primarily through email and 8 children had evidence of formal challenges being raised. The auditor identified that the IRO's have raised 188 individual issues across 40 cases, however the recommendations are not distributed evenly, with some cases attracting more recommendations than others. It is worth noting that this is a significant increase on the previous year. The auditor noted that overall, there appears to be a general pattern of decreasing levels of recommendations the longer a child remains in care and becomes settled. This is normal as the child settles and issues are addressed.

9.8.3 The sub categories of issues have been presented below, it is of note that the most common recommendation as in the previous year relates to variations in contact. The local authority's duty, as set out in the Children Act 1989, states that 'unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with his/her welfare, to endeavour to promote contact between a looked after child and his/her parents or others.' The Care Planning Guidance (2015), recognises the importance of the role of contact as a key vehicle for developing and for maintaining important relationships in the child's life, and is therefore an important area to consider and reflect on at each review, to ensure that it is updated to meet the needs of the child and their circumstance.

Graph 8: Snapshot of IRO recommendations following Review



9.8.4 The next highest category which is much more prevalent than the previous year is therapeutic intervention/ support needs being identified.

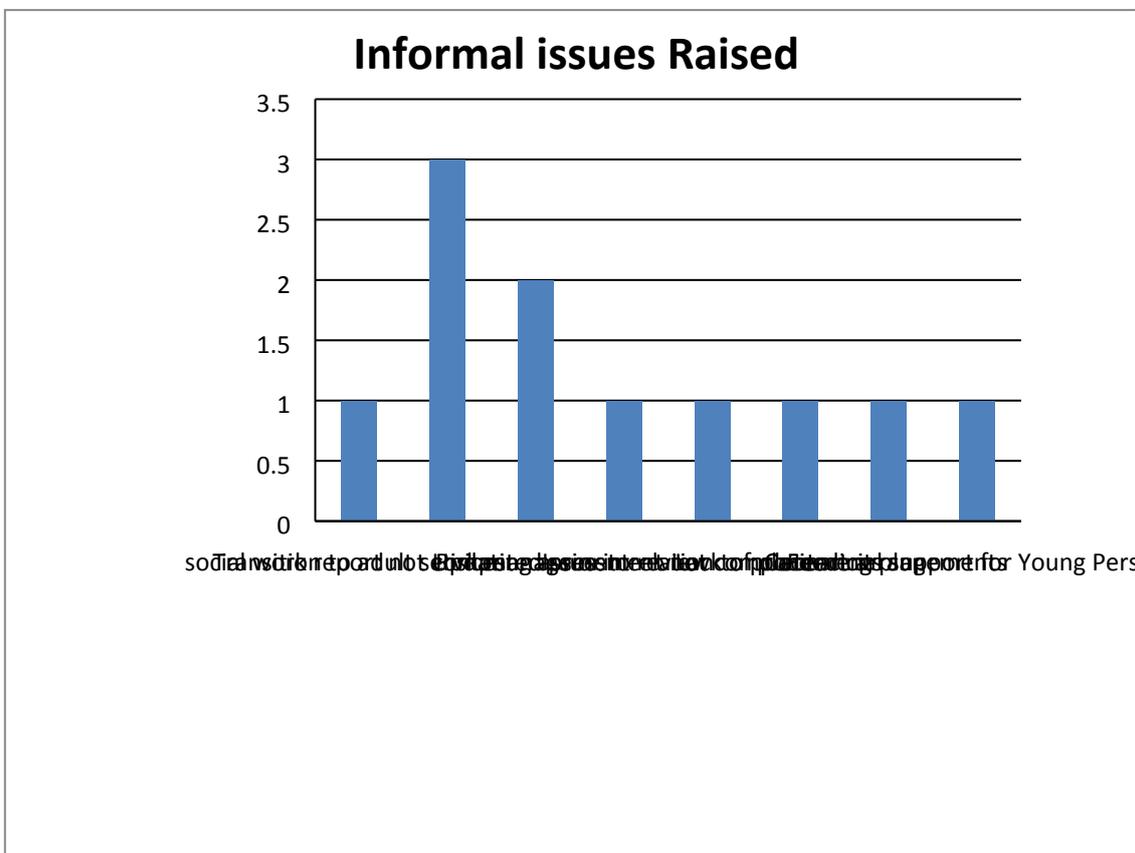
9.8.5 The need for assessments to be updated to improve understanding of the child’s circumstance. The use of the term ‘assessment’ in this audit is used in its broadest terms, and reflects a range of different assessments, including:

- Risk assessments
- Viability Assessments
- Parenting Assessments
- Needs assessments
- Child Permanence Report
- Court papers

9.8.6 The IRO’s have been working together with all teams to address the need for up to date assessments to build careful, proportionate and appropriate care plans which are responsive to children and young people’s needs. This year the IRO team have focused on looking at needs assessment which underpin pathway planning for our older children in care, building on the work stream identified by OfSTED, this will be discussed later in the report.

9.8.7 Informal issues raised: As stated above there were 11 informal issues raised by the IRO’s in the last 12 months, within this sample of 40. These are broken down as follows:

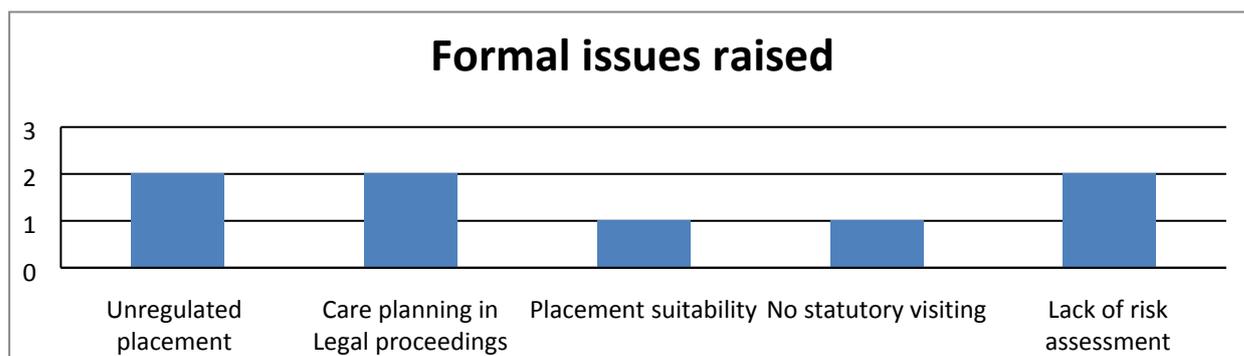
Graph 9: Informal issues raised by IRO’s



9.8.9 The spread of a range of issues suggests there isn't a particular area of systematic concern, but rather issues arising on a case by case basis.

9.8.10 Formal issues raised: Of the 8 (20%) children audited where IRO's have recorded a formal escalation within the IRO notes on the child's file, accounting for 5 separate issues as set out below:

Graph 10: Formal Escalations raised by the IRO



9.8.11 Of the formal issues raised all have been resolved at time of writing.

9.8.12 It is the view of the service that the formal issues raised in relation to placement suitability have been very concerning. The service recognises that this has not been necessarily a practice issue, but rather a reflection of a shortfall in the sufficiency of the market sector to provide suitable placements for our most vulnerable children. Appropriate, quality accommodation for looked after children who have specialist additional needs, such as behaviour are challenging to find. This means for a very small number of our most complex children they experience uncertainty about the permanence of their care.

9.8.13 Conclusion: The IRO Handbook sets out that one of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. It is expected that IROs establish positive working relationships with the social workers of the children for whom they are responsible. Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case, for example in relation to care planning, the implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to it, resources or poor practice, the IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The IRO should place a record of this initial informal resolution process on the child's file. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO should consider taking formal action.

9.8.14 This audit shows strong evidence across a range of cases of genuine and robust challenge from an IRO service that is confident in their practice, and competent at raising issues. That the IRO's are confidently recording on the child file the level of challenge and timescales for it to be addressed. However, further work is needed in terms of establishing robust systems of systematic analysis to capture the outcomes of challenges, as this continues to remain difficult to

discern easily from the records. We have asked our Liquid Logic colleagues to provide data from the records of challenge which we now record under Liquid Logic and that we are waiting for these reports to be built – this will enable better oversight of Challenge.

9.8.15 The audit has identified a continued theme in relation to the timing of assessments, including risk assessments to inform care plans and decisions for children. These assessments predominantly sit with cases who are going through court proceedings, and may be reflective of quickly changing circumstances for children; what is needed is improved mechanisms for providing IRO's with updated assessment information.

9.8.16 The audit additionally identified an issue in relation to suitable placements for the most complex young people.

9.8.17 Recommendations of the Audit

- Further work needs to be undertaken in relation to improving consistency of risk assessments, for example a small task and finish group to look at the learning from specific cases and good practice examples to develop a standardised framework.
- Further work needs to be undertaken in relation to preventing accommodation for the under 16's in unregulated placements, and improved care planning responses where this occurs.
- Increased communication during proceedings between social workers and IRO's, to ensure that care planning is well structured.
- Further work needs to be undertaken to understand the apparent increase in unmet need in relation to therapeutic intervention for children in care, with a view to reviewing the provision of services.

9.9 Needs assessment underpinning pathway planning audit: In the previous financial year the escalation audit highlighted that there was a consistent concern in relation to Pathway plans (16+) being produced without adequate needs assessments underpinning them. This was further highlighted in the OfSTED report. One of the IROs therefore undertook an audit in September 2017 to establish the extent of the practice:

9.9.1 This audit was completed by the Independent Reviewing Service in September 2017. It covers the area of planning for our children leaving care.

9.9.2 The OfSTED inspection of 2017 has highlighted this area as one needing attention seeing that quality of plans is variable. This is an area that has also been highlighted in a number of Independent Reviewing Service Annual Reports over the years.

9.9.3 Policy & Procedure:

- All young people will have a Pathway Plan in place within 3 months of becoming eligible and, wherever possible, a Pathway Plan will be in place by the young person's 16th birthday.
- All Young People - Eligible, Relevant or Former Relevant - must receive a multi-agency assessment of their needs as to the advice, assistance and support they will need when leaving care. This should be completed using the agreed template (see Leaving Care Assessment of Need Template).
- This assessment should be completed no more than 3 months after the young person's 16th birthday or after the young person becomes Eligible or Relevant if this is later. The timetable must take account of any forthcoming exams and avoid disrupting the young person's preparation for them.
- The young person's Care Plan together with information from the most recent assessment which will form the basis of the Needs Assessment. B&NES also has a stand alone Young Person Needs Assessment and Guidance for the worker to use as a guide to check all necessary areas are covered. The Needs Assessment word document can be completed where there is no recently completed single assessment. (See Young Person's Needs Assessment: Guidance for Workers).

Guidance is available at:

http://bathnes.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_leaving_care.html

9.9.4 Methodology: The audit below was a snapshot taken in September 2017 and records the date evidence on Liquid Logic of the most recent Single Assessment, the Needs Assessment and the Pathway Plan for each child in the B&NES care population in need of such planning.

9.9.5 Findings: 48 young people were audited. These young people are those Looked After Children in B&NES in need of planning for their future up to and leaving Care. 3 young people had their files restricted so the auditor discounted these from the data. 8 young people had an EHCP and were discounted from the data.

9.9.6 Of the 37 children remaining:

- 30 young people had a Single Assessment in place within the last 2 years (within timescales)
- 7 had either no Single Assessments or the Single Assessment was outside timescales.
- 7 young people just turned 16 were awaiting their Pathway Plans (within timescales)
- 10 young people were overdue a Pathway Plan having none on record in Liquid Logic.
- 20 young people had a Pathway Plan in place

- None had a Needs Assessment in place

9.9.7 Recommendations: That the Local Authority put in place a system of monitoring each Looked After young person 16+ to ensure that they have a Pathway Plan & Assessment underpinning this that addresses their needs as to the advice, assistance and support they will need when leaving care.

1. Managers and the Independent Reviewing Officers should monitor the assessment and planning process to ensure that each young person moving into adulthood has an up to date and rigorous Pathway Plan in place that reflects their needs & how these will be met.
2. Reviews of these Pathway Plans should ensure that quality of the plan is addressed to ensure they remain up to date of good quality and relevant.
3. IRO's should address shortfalls in the Pathway Planning process through Reviews and monitoring. Where necessary IROs should use the dispute resolution process & escalate cases where there is shortfall.
4. Another audit is completed to look specifically at those young people with EHC Plans to consider the robustness of their planning. Anecdotally and with experience of this sector of the Care population, the IRO service are aware of gaps in the assessments that underpin EHC planning.

9.9.8 Recommendations from this audit were taken to Senior Managers who commissioned a working party. An IRO, a manager in the CIC& MOT as well as the Principal Social Worker have drawn up improvement options for the service. These options have been taken to the Service Improvement Board who have agreed an approved way forward.

9.9.9 This working group has now enlisted the help of Liquid Logic team to take forward the improvements needed. Once the systems are in place then this will be rolled out across the service with training. The new systems in line with Regulations will be in place by September 2018.

9.9.10 The IRO's have been in discussion with management of children's social care for some time about how to ensure that Care Plans are consistently of a high quality and that copies are available to children, their parents and carers. Versions for children need to be appropriate to their age and understanding.

9.9.11 A small working group has looked at this issue over the past 3 months and proposals made about how the Care Plan will look, both for the adults and

children's versions. The children's version was discussed at the last steering group of the Children in Care Council and the Children in Care Council have been requested to consider if they wish to design versions for children and young people.

9.9.12 Once versions of the Care Plan have been agreed, training for staff to ensure consistency will be rolled out in the autumn.

9.10 Placement stability audit: An Audit of Placement moves was conducted in January 2018 as part of this years IRO plan.

9.10.1 The Audit looked at whether there are any patterns emerging in relation to placement moves, and any recommendations around practice for IRO's or issues to be raised to social work teams.

9.10.2 Policy & Procedure: The impact upon children of multiple placement moves is well documented. Placement instability reduces a child to develop secure attachments and exacerbate any existing behavioural and emotional difficulties (Scofield and Beek 2005). Research indicates the following factors increase the risk of placement breakdown for a child:

- Teenagers 11-16 have 50 % chance of placement breakdown
- A frequent change of social worker
- Over optimistic expectations
- Child's level of disturbance and motivation to remain in the placement

The role of the IRO in this process is clear in the handbook around the process of managing placement moves under the review process. The monitoring role of the IRO is set out in the 1989 Act [Section 25B, 1989 Act] and the social worker must inform the IRO of significant changes this includes:

- proposed change of care plan for example arising at short notice in the course of proceedings following on directions from the court;
- changes of allocated social worker;
- unexpected changes in the child's placement provision which may significantly impact on placement stability or safeguarding arrangements
- where the child is running away or missing from the approved placement;

9.10.3 A review will not be required for every change and the IRO will determine whether the change requires a review to be convened. The IRO should consult with the child, where appropriate, and the child's wishes and feelings about the impact of the proposed change on his/her life should be taken into consideration in reaching a decision as to whether a review is necessary.

9.10.4 If, following communication with the social worker, the IRO is satisfied that the arrangements in the care plan continue to meet the child's needs or that the change does not have significant implications for the care plan and that a review is not necessary, a record of this agreement and the reasons for it should be placed on the child's file. The child and other relevant adults, both within the family and the professional network should be advised of this decision where appropriate.

9.10.5 However, a review must be convened in the following circumstances, prior to any of the following changes being implemented:

- wherever any unplanned change is proposed to a child's accommodation that would have the effect of disrupting his/her education or training;
- where a change of placement is proposed that would interrupt the arrangements for the education of a child in Key Stage 4
- where a change of placement is proposed for a child who has remained settled and established with the same carer for a significant period of time.

9.10.6 The IRO should ensure that the plan for the move has been subjected to detailed scrutiny in order to establish that it meets the child's needs and is in his/her interests. The plan should be viable and sustainable. If the IRO concludes that the plan is not likely to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, the IRO should request that the local authority freeze the placement move.

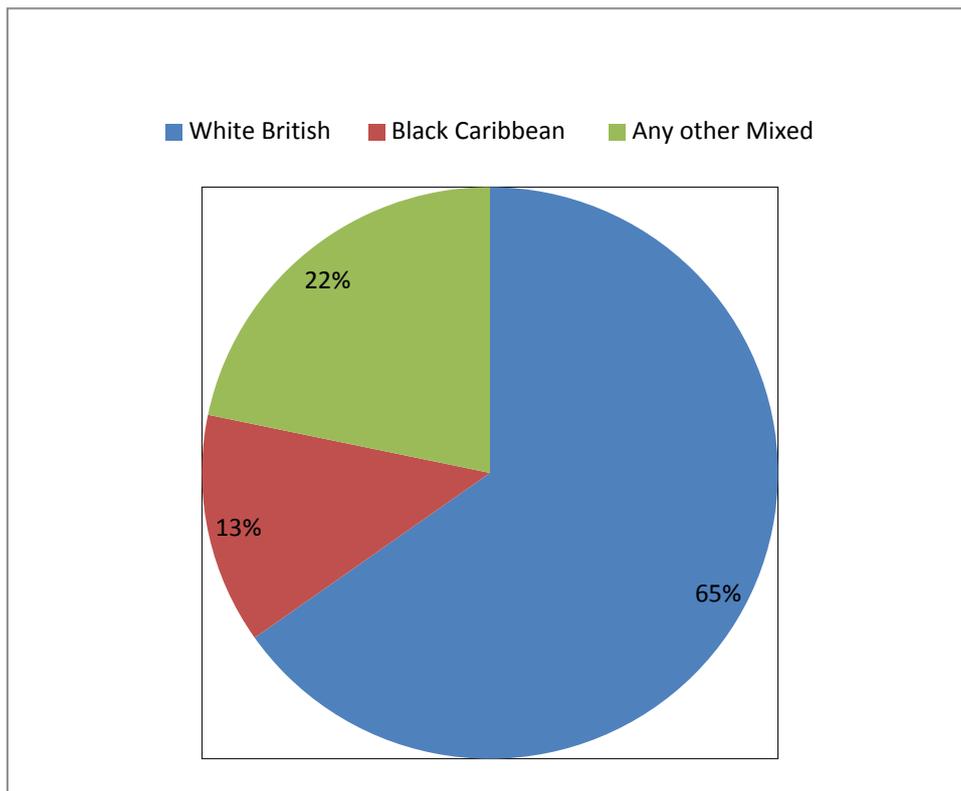
9.10.7 For children who have experienced multiple placement breakdowns, or have persistently run away or gone missing, the IRO should be satisfied that the new care plan addresses the risks to the child and that the search for and selection of the new placement and the provision of appropriate support to the child and the new carers identifies how the placement will offer stability to the child and/or minimise the likelihood of him/her running away or going missing.

9.10.8 Methodology: The Audit looked at the time span between January 2017- January 2018 and looked at any children with 3 or more placements. The Auditor used liquid logic systems to look at each individual child, management decisions and CIC review notes. Following on from the guidance above the data was looked at to consider the ethnicity, age and gender of the children as well as their legal status and the type of placement. The file was checked to see if there was planning a round the move and if a CIC review was held in timescales of each move with the ethos that such a meeting would be beneficial to bring everyone together and consider and scrutinise the ongoing care plan for the child. There is no comparable data for the numbers of children Looked after during this time period so the comparisons of the general CIC population are based on current figures so are limited in this respect.

9.10.9 Findings: There were 23 children who experienced three or more placements in this period, In January 2017 there were 170 children with CIC status, this would represent 13% of the current population. These were from a spread of teams including disability team, Child Protection and Court and CIC teams.

9.10.10 8 out of the 23 children recorded were recorded as ethnicity other than White British; this represents 35% of these children. However, the current in care demographic suggests that non-white British children account for 25% the total cohort, this means that within this small group they are greatly over represented in terms of placement disruption. In real terms this means that a non-white British Child is 40% more likely to face disrupted placements than a white British Child. However, the numbers looked at are small, and care needs to be taken in interpreting these results.

Graph 11: Ethnicity of Children and Young people experiencing three or more placement moves in a year

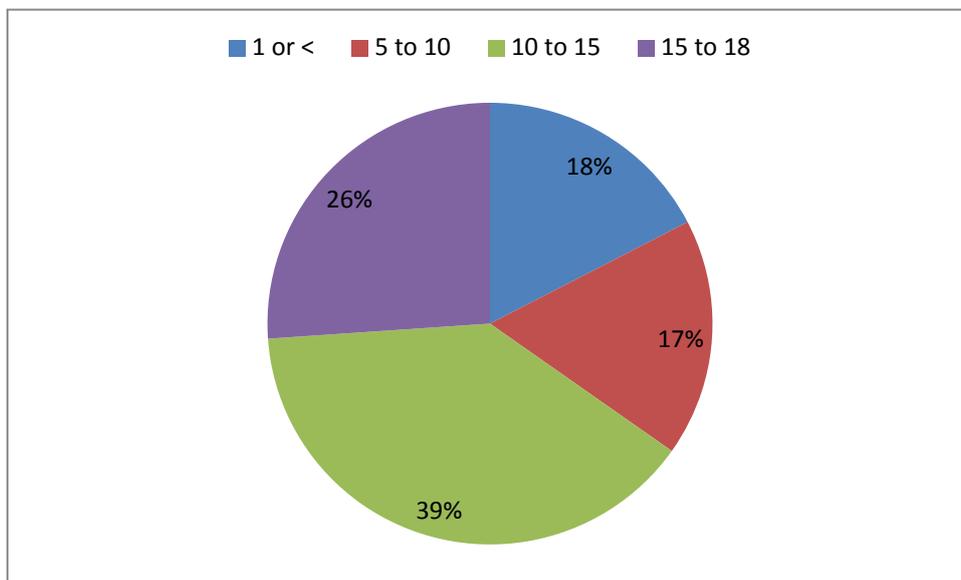


9.10.11 12 out of 23 children recorded were female; this represents 52 % of these children. When comparing this to the BANES care population (46% are females) it indicates that a slightly higher proportion of females are in this 3 plus moves group.

9.10.12 7 out of the 23 children recorded had a section 20 status (30%), this is fairly comparable to the wider cohort, where S.20 represent approx. 33% of children under 16. It was evident that some moves involved the use of families either through regulation 24 placements or with the use of placement with parents. When looking at placement with family members this appeared to do little to avoid further placement moves and appeared to be more of a bridging placement as there were no placements available.

9.10.13 In terms of age categories 4 children were 1 or under (17%), 4 were 5-10 (17%), 9 were 10-15 (40%) and 6 were 15-18 (26%). The number of children under 1 who have had 3 or more moves is unusual with research indicating that this is less likely. Upon further scrutiny of these cases three of the 4 cases involved plans of assessing the children to live with their parents either with mother and baby placements or residential, the last case involved two moves of hospital and a search of early permanence carers had been considered but one could not be found. This does not therefore indicate a matter of huge concern in this area of care planning.

Graph 12: Age at the time of the 3+ placement move



9.10.14 In 3 out of 23 placements the rationale for one of the movements related to issues between siblings placed together, it is not evident whether siblings assessments were undertaken in respect to these children prior to placement.

9.10.15 Unsurprisingly all of the children in the sample had a period of placement outside their local area and a number of them involved residential provision. It was noticeable in one case that the placement had broken down due to distance from home and the child's clear wish to return to the local area which was voiced prior to placement move.

9.10.16 10 out of the 23 children (57 %) had an instance of their CIC review being held within 20 working days of placement moves on one or more occasion.

9.10.17 The timing of reviews is set out in The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume:2: Care planning, placement and Case review (2015)

Timing of reviews

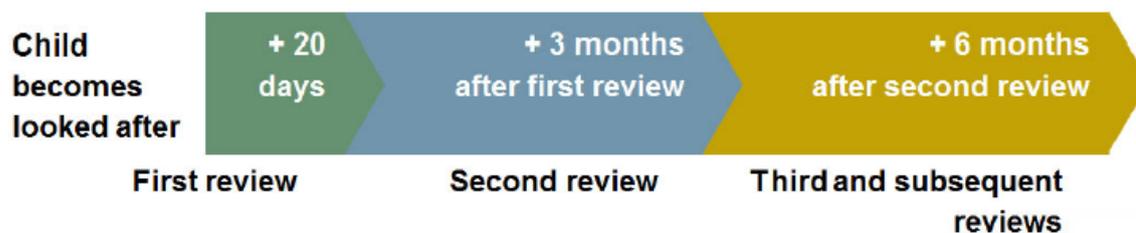


Figure 2: Maximum intervals between reviews

9.10.18 The specified frequency of reviews is a minimum standard. A review should take place as often as the circumstances of the individual case require. Where there is a need for significant changes to the care plan, then the date of the review should be brought forward. Therefore if the child is making a planned move as part of a wider care plan an early review would not be as much of a priority as a placement breakdown and change of care plan.

9.10.19 Further exploration is needed in regards to the individual cases to examine if social care are informing IRO's and they are deciding not to hold a review or if this is an issue around social care understanding the guidance around placement moves. If these discussions are taking place it could be helpful if this could be recorded in the CIC minutes in some way to make clear when summing up the child's placement moves since the last review.

9.10.20 57% of reviews were held within 20 working days of placement move.

9.10.21 The rationale for the placement moves were not easily obtainable on the child's individual case file for example note on each child's file on the case notes as significant event with detailed reason for breakdown. This would be helpful when considering how a child may view their records in the future.

9.10.22 A number of the placement moves appeared to relate to children behaviours, this was most noticeable in the placement moves over 3. In these cases the young person often moved to residential placements as carers did not feel they could meet their needs. As is evident in the research, children with multiple moves often have significant loss, trauma and abuse in their lives prior to placement and therefore support high end preventative and targeted support for carers when they are identified as a high risk group would seem most sensible.

9.10.23 There was not a consistent clear plan evidenced in supervision notes or management decisions when placements broke down around how to ensure that the next placement would be stabilised.

9.10.24 The IRO, as set out in the IRO handbook (para 3.79) has the right to request a placement freeze and to initiate the dispute resolution process. It does not appear to have used in any of these cases.

9.10.25 The audit did not find any evidence of placements moved for financial reasons.

9.10.26 Recommendations:

- Children who are in the high risk groups are identified at the start of the CIC journey by IRO's when considering advocating for support to carers as preventative rather than a crisis response.
- Remind teams of need to contact the IRO when placement move occurs to ensure reviews are held on a more consistent basis. If decision not to hold Review is made by IRO and social worker this to be clearly recorded on file and to be commented upon in the CIC minutes.
- Consideration of how placement moves are recorded on children's files to make these easily identifiable and the details for the move are outlined; this will help children understand their journey in more detail.
- CIC who are at risk of move or who have moved should be subject of supervision recorded on file within 28 days of this occurring to ensure planning is in progress and reflection on care plan and next steps can be seen.
- IRO's to consider the appropriateness of requesting a freeze on placement if it is felt to be in the child or young persons best interest.

10 The Work of the IRO: Involvement in strategic review

10.1 IRO involvement with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB):

The IRO service have a permanent representative on the LSCB Children in Care Quality Assurance group. This group started directly reporting to the LSCB as a subgroup in September 2015 to ensure the best Corporate Parenting for children and young people in Bath and North East Somerset. The group aims to

contribute to this purpose through quality assurance of work carried out in multi-agency care planning.

10.2 In this reporting period the IRO service undertook a number of audits and contributed to an overview of multi-agency working to support young people in Care who had been affected by:

- Domestic Abuse
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Trafficking & Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking

10.3 The work from this group feeds into the LSCB's oversight and monitoring of multi-agency service collaboration and assessment of risk. The Group have identified a number of areas of good practice, in particular the partnership between health and social care to ensure young peoples physical health assessments and health needs are met. The group has also identified areas for future development.

11 Next Steps for the IRO Service: 2018-2019

11.1 The IRO team plan for 2018/2019 identifies a number of key development areas:

- Continue to use the feedback from children, parents and foster carers to change and influence practice.
- Further develop risk assessment framework to inform care planning.
- Continue to focus on improving the quality of needs assessments informing pathway planning for post 16's.
- Key audit to understand the rise in request for therapeutic intervention/ support.
- Implement the recommendation from the placement stability audit.
- Seek Assurance that improvements in Care Plans are embedded consistently across the service.
- Development of service for Unaccompanied Asylum seeking Children and Trafficked Children.
- Support and facilitate Children's requests for who attends their review.

12 Summary

12.1 This year has ended with a full complement of permanent staff. The service has seen a rise in demand, and a challenge in matching appropriate local placements for a minority of complex needs with challenging behaviours. The IRO service remains dedicated to ensuring that children in the Care of the Local Authority have the best possible outcomes, and ensuring robust challenge when services fall short.

13 Request to the Corporate Parenting Board.

13.1 It is requested that Bath and North East Somerset Corporate Parenting Board consider the following:

- Note the areas of positive performance referred to within the Annual Report, particularly the evidence that the Service are directly contributing to improving outcomes for Children and Young People in Care.
- Note and support the IRO service's commitment to ensure that the LA delivers its statutory responsibilities to children and young people in care and their parents and carers, in particular ensuring the robustness of the issues resolution process to quickly resolve issues for children and young people.
- Use the annual reporting requirement of the service to inform the ongoing work of the Corporate parenting Board in raising the outcomes for the children and young people in B&NES.