

Brighton & Hove City Council Children's Services  
Families, Children & Learning Performance and Safeguarding

**Independent Reviewing Officer  
Manager  
Annual Report  
2016/17**



**Brighton & Hove  
City Council**

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## **Executive Summary**

The IRO team is well positioned to have an overview of Corporate Parenting in Brighton and Hove.

Most children and young people have their health and educational needs identified and met by committed and caring people. Children and young people are nurtured, encouraged and well cared for. However, too many children experience multiple changes of care placement.

The Local Authority has systems in place to track children's permanency outcomes and IROs have used challenge processes to address any issues of drift or delay.

IROs have provided a consultative role - sharing expertise, insights and knowledge to support effective care planning ahead of review meetings.

Overall IROs report that Social Workers, Managers and Carers are committed to building trusted and effective relationships with all involved in decision making and planning, improving the outcomes for children and ensuring the voice of the child is always sought and valued.

IROs in Brighton and Hove have raised issues where necessary and have worked collaboratively with professionals to resolve issues early and to prevent drift in the care planning process where possible.

### **The IRO Team has delivered on its key work plan priorities for 2016/17:**

- IROs have carried out their statutory functions to a good standard.
- IROs have provided effective monitoring of the performance of the Local Authority as a corporate parent.
- IROs have used a balance of positive as well as challenging feedback to the Local Authority as a means to support continuous learning and improvement.
- IROs have ensured that children have permanency plans in place by their second review.
- IROs have ensured that the child's wishes, views and feelings are given full consideration and have used practice recognition and challenge processes to support learning and improvement.

Sharon Martin, Safeguarding and Review Manager, July 2017

## **1. The Purpose of the Report**

This annual report has been produced by the Safeguarding & Review Service in line with statutory guidance. It sets out the quality of Corporate Parenting for children in care within Brighton and Hove.

The report provides an opportunity to;

- highlight areas of good practice and areas for improvement
- identify emerging themes and trends
- report on work undertaken to date
- outline service development priorities for the coming 12 months

It provides the results of the quality assurance activity including the identification of trends, gaps and issues that warrant further analysis and action.

## **2. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Role**

The core purpose of the IRO role is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's needs and to ensure that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration. The appointment by local authorities of an IRO is a legal requirement.

The Children and Young Person's Act 2008 followed by revised care planning regulations and guidance in April 2011, strengthened the role of the IRO so that the IRO is not only responsible for chairing statutory reviews but also for monitoring cases on an ongoing basis.

The rationale behind this was that concerns had arisen over time that IROs had not sufficiently challenged local authority decisions when practice was poor and not in the child's interests.

The IRO also has a duty to monitor the local authority's overall performance as a Corporate Parent and to bring any areas of poor practice in the care and planning for children in care to the attention of senior managers. Measuring the impact of service delivery is essential to achieving improved outcomes for children and their families and reducing the impact of disadvantage for vulnerable children and young people. The Munro Report (2011) highlights the importance of developing approaches and quality assurance measures that

better reflect outcomes for children and young people: The report also highlights the benefits of quality assurance approaches such as case audits;

*Critical appraisal of the assessment and planning for a child and family....should be seen as central to good practice in reducing error. Ideally, this should be part of the culture and seen as not a personal attack but an outsider helping to pick up the unseen spots or offering a new angle on the problem (2011, p91).*

Diagram to show the role of the IRO: Legal and National Context



### 3. The Brighton and Hove Safeguarding and Review Service

#### 3.1 Professional Profile

The IRO team is part of the Safeguarding and Review Service situated within the Performance and Safeguarding Unit and is accountable to the Head of Safeguarding, Families Children and Learning Directorate.

The Safeguarding and Review Service has 10.5 full time equivalent posts with 7.6 IRO post holders who specialise in children in care and chair the Looked After Reviews. Another 3.9 IRO post holders carry the title of Child Protection Reviewing Officers (CPROs) and predominantly undertake the chairing of Child Protection Conferences.

IRO caseloads have remained within the parameters set out in the IRO Handbook (caseloads have not risen above 70 children per IRO).

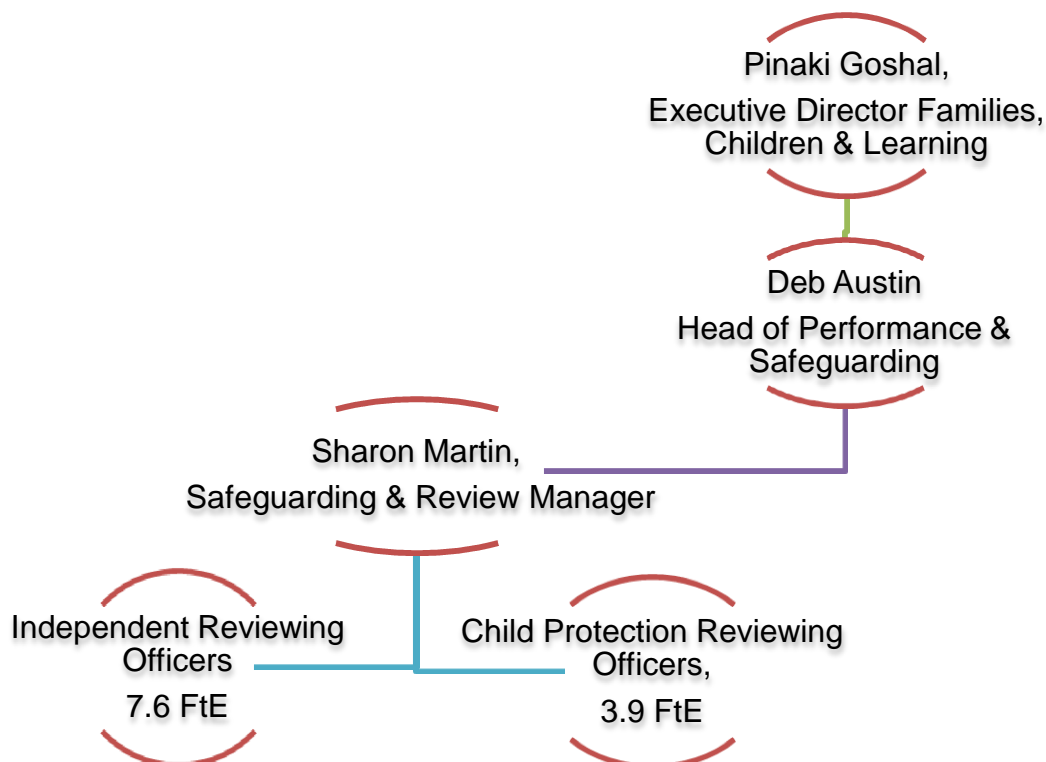
The IROs have continued to fulfil the following additional responsibilities as part of their collaborative work with children's social work services;

- To chair all children's Secure Accommodation Reviews.
- Monthly Regulation 44 visits to Tudor House and Drove Road
- A post-18 Pathway Plan Review

In terms of diversity, the profile of the service is not at the same level as the child in care population but is representative of a range of gender, age, sexuality, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds.

Brighton and Hove has benefitted from a stable group of IROs and it is typical for an IRO to be in post for a number of years. It is a priority to ensure that changes of IRO are kept to a minimum. The IRO is often has the longest professional relationship with the child, holding much of the child's story.

The diagram below presents the service structure:



## **4. Contribution to national improvements**

The Safeguarding and Review Manager is the elected Chair of the National IRO Managers Partnership. The partnership meets at the Department of Education (DfE) three times a year, leading the work of the IRO regional networks covering the nine regions of England. Priorities are set out in national and regional work plans.

## **5. Findings from Ofsted Inspection 2015.**

The Brighton and Hove IRO service was inspected as part of the Ofsted single inspection of Children's Services in April 2015. Overall the feedback from inspectors was positive with a rating of 'Good' for children in care and care leavers which includes the contribution made by Brighton and Hove IRO service.

## **6. Profile of Brighton and Hove looked-after population**

### **6.1 Key Messages**

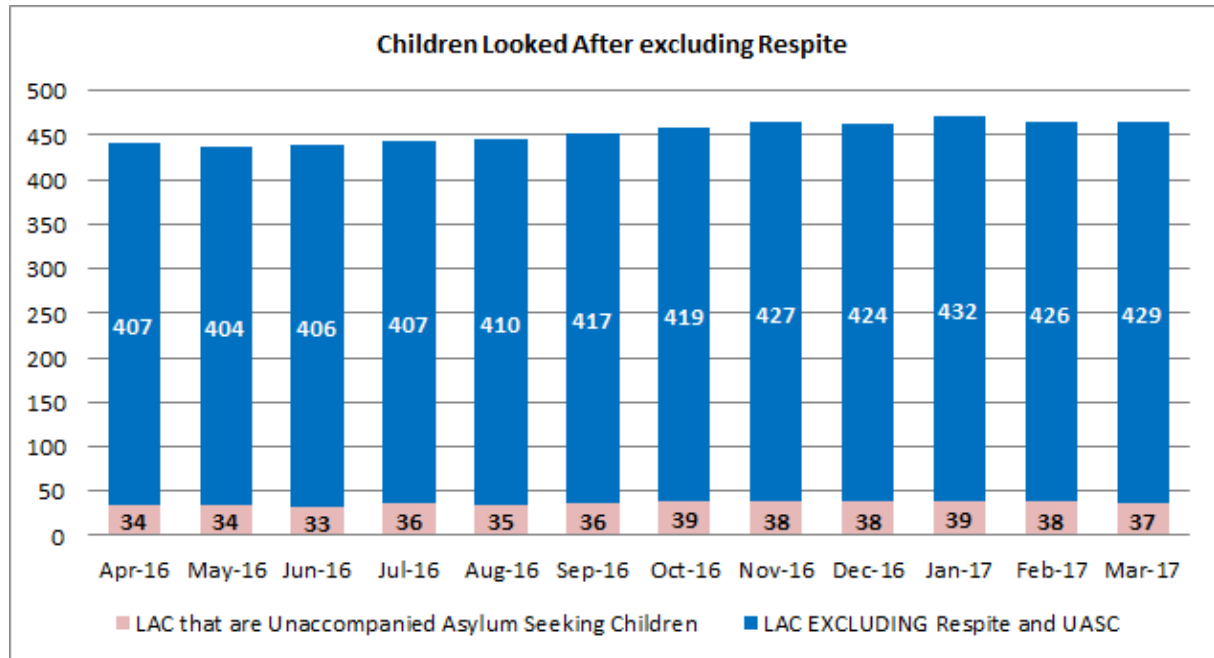
- At 31 March 2017, (466) children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 91 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 438 at 31 March 2016 (a rate of 85.5 per 10,000).
- The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) is up from 34 at March 2016 to 37 at March 2017.
- A total of 1,238 Reviews were chaired by IROs in the year ending 31st March 2017.

The National IRO Managers Partnership has helped bring about improvements in policy and practice by ensuring the interests and experiences of children in care and young care leavers are known at the highest level.

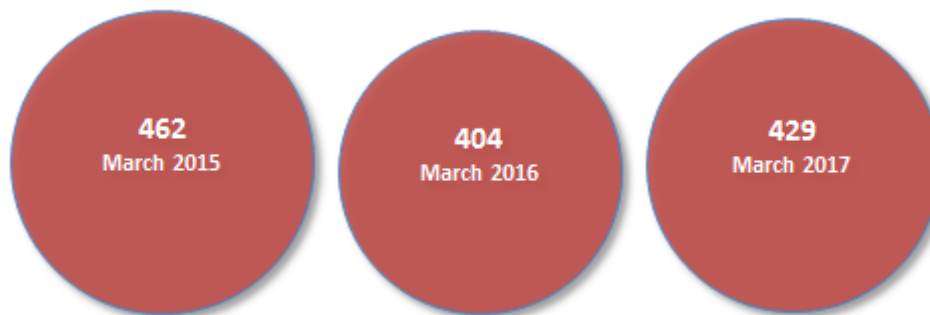
Ofsted (2015):  
The Brighton and Hove IRO service works well and effectively ensures that children's care plans progress without delay. IROs carry out their core duties effectively and also engage with children looked after outside of their reviews to establish meaningful relationships and monitor the progress of their care plans, Ofsted.

- On a month on month basis 94% of statutory reviews of children and young people's care plans were held within timescales.

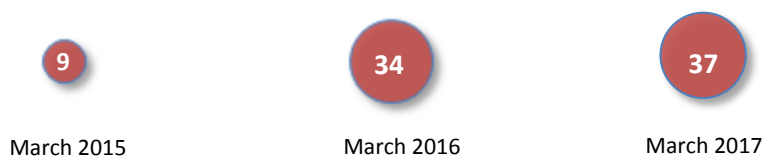
The following chart shows the children in care population during 2016/17:



#### Children in care excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children



#### Unaccompanied ssylum seeking children

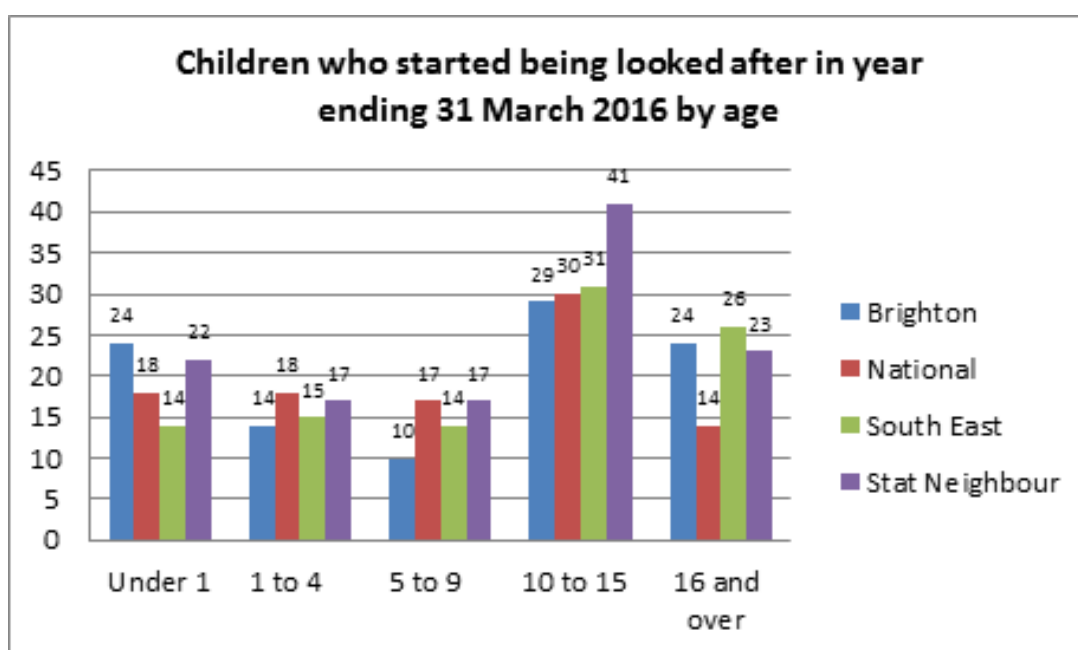
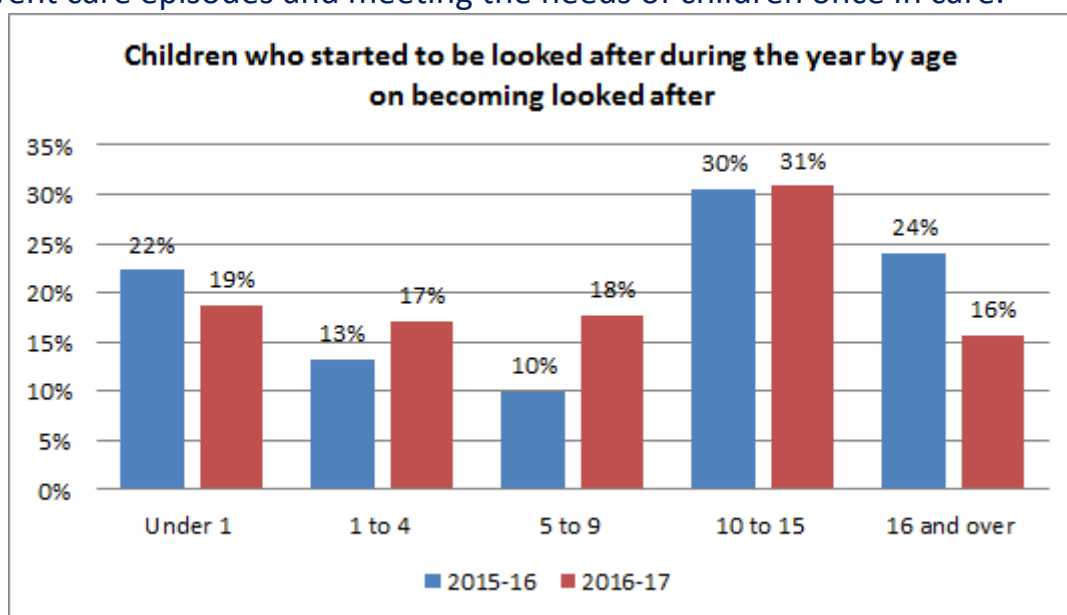


## 6.2 The age children and young people started to be looked after

Young people age 10 – 15 years are still the largest cohort of children in Brighton and Hove's looked after population. This mirrors the national picture



but it is important data to be aware of in terms of supporting families to prevent care episodes and meeting the needs of children once in care.



The relatively large proportion of children aged 16 and over in Brighton & Hove and the South East may be accounted for by the increase in unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the area.

51 % of children in care were male as at 31st March 2017 and 49% were female. Nationally, 55% of children in care were male as at March 2017. As a snapshot, taking the number of children in care (excluding respite) at 31st March 2017, 8% have a classified disability. There were 22 children in care (excluding respite) in the Children with Disabilities Service at 31st March 2017.

## **7. Entitlements and Advocacy**

### **7.1 The Brighton and Hove IRO position on entitlements and summary of what has gone well**

The Brighton and Hove IRO service considers children and young people's entitlements at each statutory review.

The Brighton and Hove IRO webpage and the Youth Advocacy Project webpage provide information about children's entitlements. They include a set of YouTube films commissioned by the Safeguarding & Review Service and produced by young people. The films are intended to help young people's understanding of what they should expect of their IRO and the review process.

### **7.2 Youth Advocacy**

In 2016-17 children in care and children leaving care made up 40% of the total number of referrals made to the Advocacy and Participation Team.

In addition to these new referrals, the Advocacy and Participation Team supported a number of young people already open to an advocate (in the previous year).

### **7.3 The Education of Children in Care**

Brighton and Hove IROs have provided challenge about the quality and timeliness of some personal education plans (PEPs).

### **Five Entitlements for looked after children**

- 1) A care plan that says what the child's needs are now, what will be done to meet those needs and what the plans are for the future.
- 2) The Care Plan must include the child's views and when deciding what to do people must take those views into consideration.
- 3) No important decisions, for example, a placement move, should be taken without a review meeting being held unless it is an emergency.
- 4) Looked after young people aged 16-19 should get a £1,200 bursary if they stay in full-time education.
- 5) When a social worker visits they must speak to the child alone unless the child refuses, it is not appropriate at that time or the social worker is unable to.

### **Five Entitlements for Care Leavers**

- 1) The young person can ask the authority for £2,000 for the setting up home allowance.
- 2) The local authority must provide the young person with help with costs of being in education or training up until the young person is aged 21 (or 25 if still in education).
- 3) The local authority must provide the young person with help with the costs of getting and keeping a job (up until age of 21 if the young person is in education, employment or training).
- 4) The local authority must give a copy, and full explanation, of the young person's assessment and Pathway Plan.
- 5) If the young person is in higher education, the local authority must provide them with vacation accommodation (or money towards it).

Some examples of the types of challenge raised are listed below:

- Personal Opportunity Plan not updated for young person about to finish her A level course. She had asked for additional information about apprenticeships and other courses and this had not been set up for her.
- No Personal Opportunity Plan or updating information from College.
- Decisions made at both PEP's and looked after reviews about need for referral to CAMHs and Educational Psychologist Assessment not acted upon or followed up promptly.
- Full details of educational support provided to child with disabilities not included in Personal Education Plan and lack of clarity about how residential setting would meet the child's educational needs.
- Delay auctioning referral to CAMHs after it was agreed at a PEP.

The proportion of children in care with an up-to-date PEP and the quality of these plans has improved.

Brighton and Hove IROs promote effective joint working between schools and social workers. Where problems are identified, IROs have provided challenge and escalation to the Virtual School and this can help prevent school exclusion and disruption.

#### **7.4 Care Plans**

Brighton and Hove IROs endeavour to carry out their core duties effectively and consider the quality of each child's care plan at each review. This involves engaging with children in care outside of their reviews to establish meaningful relationships and to monitor and chase the progress of care plans, challenging where necessary to avoid delay.

#### **7.5 Care Leavers**

At 31st March 2017, there were 34 care leavers 'staying put' (remaining with foster carers beyond the age of 18), up from 31 on the previous year. At 31<sup>st</sup>

#### **Positive outcomes for children**

Review health assessments are of good quality.

Children are seen regularly by social workers who know them well and who see them alone where appropriate.

#### **What could be done better**

Parental consent for initial health assessments need to be more timely, particularly for children over the age of five.

Timely and effective assessment and support by CAMHS.

Timely assessment to inform young people's exit and transition plans.

March 2017, of the care leavers who ceased to be looked after on their 18th birthday and were eligible for care leaver support, 61% were living with their former foster carers, above the national average of 54%.

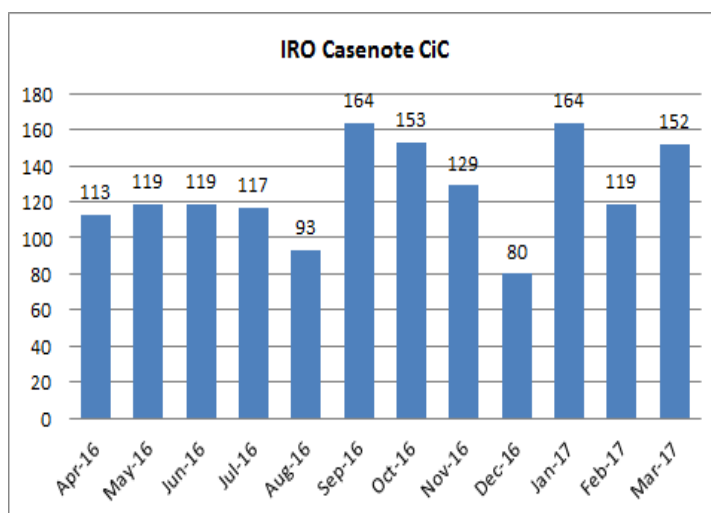
## 8. Performance & Quality Assurance

### 8.1 Timeliness of reviews

The rolling year average for reviews held on time was 88%. This is down from 96% in 2015/16. Out of these none were more than 1-14 days late.

### 8.2 Children and young people's preparation and involvement in review

93% of children and young people participated in their reviews for the year ending 31st March 2017, unchanged from last year. Participation included attending and/or contributing to their Review. IROs have also supported and encouraged young people in co-chairing their own review or setting their own agendas where appropriate.



### 8.3 Progress-chasing between reviews

IRO communications between reviews are important to ensuring the child's care plan is on track. During 2016/17 IROs evidenced this via 1,522 IRO Case Notes which detail IRO oversight and scrutiny of a child's plan in between reviews.

### 8.4 Permanency Outcomes

Achieving permanency for children correlates with better outcomes for children. Children and young people's permanency needs are considered by the IRO at every review. During 2016/17 the majority of children in the care of Brighton and Hove achieved permanency through a return home to live with birth parents/relatives (33%) with 11% of children being adopted and 13.7% subject of a special guardianship order.

## Children looked after by Brighton and Hove:

- At 31 March 2017, (466) children were being looked after by the local authority (a rate of 91 per 10,000 children). This is an increase from 438 at 31 March 2016 (a rate of 85.5 per 10,000).
- Of this number, 255 (or 55%) lived outside the local authority area. 385 (83%) of children were placed within Sussex and 36 (8%) were placed for adoption.
- 37 children were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

## In the last 12 months:

- There have been 21 adoptions, down from 40 during the previous 12 months.
- 25 children ceased to be looked after through special guardianship orders, down from 42 during the previous 12 months.
- 170 children ceased to be looked after, down from 253 during the previous 12 months.
- 4 young people ceased to be looked after and moved on to independent living compared to 3 during the previous 12 months.

Some of the changes to the rate of children being adopted or moving to special guardianship orders, reflects similar changes to the pattern of orders granted nationally.

Brighton and Hove IROs consider the stability of children's care arrangements at each looked after review and intervene between reviews if required. The rate of children having, three or more placement moves is 13.7% at 31st March 2017, above the national average of 10%. Longer-term stability is 69% at 31st March 2017, better than the national average of 68%.

Achieving stability in children's experiences of care is really important to enabling children in care to form secure and meaningful relationships. However, sometimes a change is necessary and does not always lead to a

### The Ofsted Inspection in Brighton & Hove reported the following findings:

- When children become looked after, the quality of care plans for them is good. In the vast majority of cases, they are comprehensive and appropriately detailed.
- Children are encouraged to have ongoing contact with their own families and friends wherever this is safe and appropriate
- Where young people are able to express their views, these are taken into account in both case and placement planning.

negative outcome. Some disruption may be necessary to achieving permanence.

## 8.5 Quality of Care Planning

IROs continue to quality monitor care plans. Most children have a child friendly care plan written in a clear, coherent manner. Children and young people can expect to contribute to their care plan and to expect that they will have their own copy. IROs routinely check that the care planning process has helped children and young people to have their say about matters important to them and helped them to understand what is happening and why.

## 8.6 Learning from Children and Young People's Views

Exit Interviews are offered to all care leavers. The interviews are conducted by a former carer leaver who works for the Advocacy and Participation Team. The findings presented below are from interviews with eleven young people aged 21-23 yrs.

### Experience of Coming into Care

- A few young people felt that the social worker did not explain to them the reasons why they were coming into care.

### Experience of Education

- Some young people said that they have had to move to many different schools
- Most young people said that they received help with their college work
- Most young people said they had a tutor to help with their school work.

### Maintain Contact with Family and Friends

- Young people said that their social workers would arrange contact with their family most of the time
- Some young people said that they did not have much support to see their family
- All of the young people said that they did not get help or support to stay in touch with their friends and had to do it off their own back.

### Experience of Foster Care

- Most young people felt comfortable with their foster carers and got on well with them
- Most young people said that they had good foster carers but they also had bad ones where they felt that they were not accepted into the family home
- Young people seem to like it when there are pets or small children in the foster placement.

### Health

- Young people said that they would like to know more about healthy eating
- Most young people said they felt healthy in care
- Most young people said that they would not feel comfortable talking to their social worker about health.

### Work with Social Workers and Personal Advisors

- Most young people said their social worker from the Support Through Care Team or 16+ Team was their best social worker they have ever had.

### Preparation for Independent Living

- Many of the young people said they did not like living in hostels when they left their foster placement
- Most young people said they would have liked to learn more practical skills such as cooking and budgeting before they left care
- Many of the young people said they took part in the activities with the Youth Participation Team.

## 8.7 Identifying Good Practice, Problem Resolution and Escalation

The Brighton and Hove IROs recognises the importance of establishing good relationships with children's social work teams as the primary means of ensuring good care planning. Where problems are identified the IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers.

In order to ensure good practice is fed back to practitioners, a formal 'Recognition of Good Practice' tool was developed in February 2013.

Some extracts of good practice recognised by IROs via the formal recognition of social worker's good practice are presented below:

[...] I wanted you to know that (social worker) has done an impressive job in getting on top of the outstanding lifestory work and child friendly care plans. She produced all of the required paperwork and reports in advance of the meeting and, in my view, the work she has put in has had an impact on the quality of the placement ...

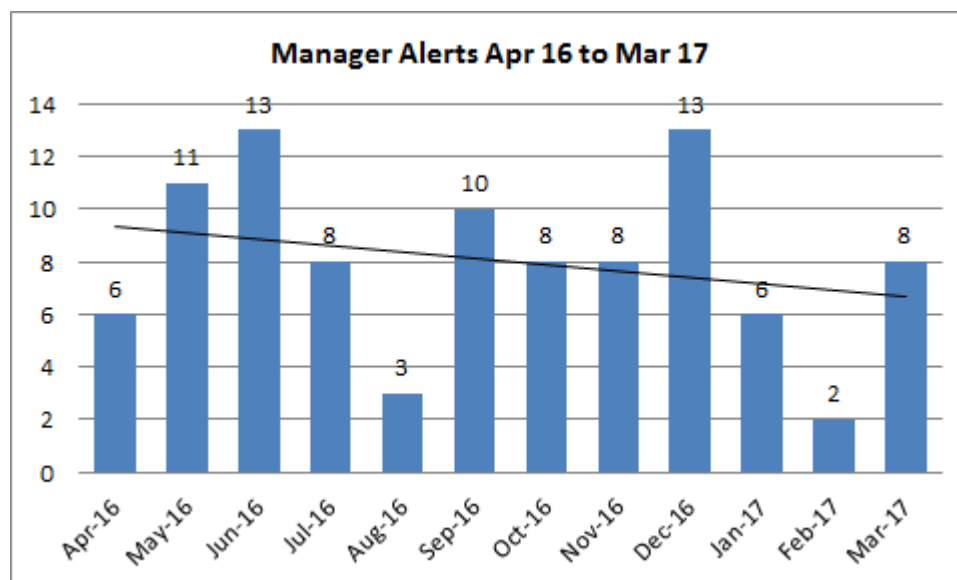
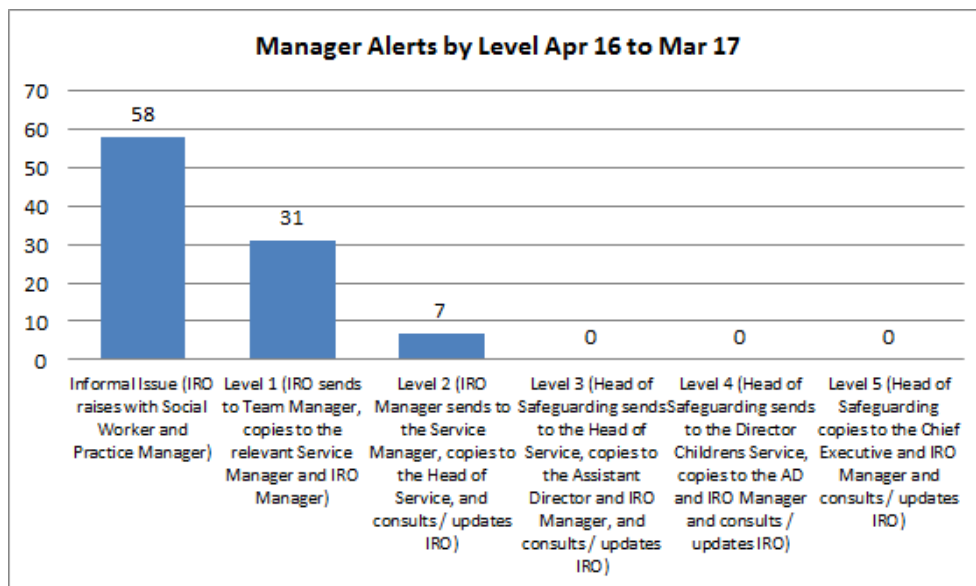
[...] social worker provided me with (more than) adequate time and information to prepare for an initial LAC review. The report was completed and authorised well in advance of the 5 days we ideally seek. With it also came a chronology which was amazingly helpful and a list of contact details, explaining who was who. She had also completed a first PEP meeting by the initial review ...

[...] clearly worked very hard at forging a credible, open and meaningful relationship with 'J', and has maintained this even in the most challenging of circumstances. Lynne (social worker) did not recoil from restating challenging truths to 'J' – who has seriously assaulted (social worker) in the recent past.



## 8.8 Children Looked After Manager Alerts:

IROs have had to challenge managers informally on 58 occasions and formally on 38 during 16/17. The data suggests that there has been a reduction in the number of informal issues raised (58 in 16/17 compared to 65 raised in 15/16). In 2016/17 IROs escalated 38 issues to formal dispute - a reduction from 53 raised during 2015/16.





## **8.9 Issues raised by IROs**

**All challenges raised by IROs relate to a range of issues. The most frequently reported issues are:**

- **Decisions not actioned from last review.**
- **Relevant reports / plans or background information, including an up-to-date care plan, not provided or available to the IRO at least three working days before the review.**
- **Care Plan drift and delay.**
- **Concerns about health / education / care placement.**
- **Statutory visits out of timescale or child not seen alone.**

## **8.10 Resource issues that are putting at risk the delivery of a quality service**

The IRO role is not to identify the resources needed to meet a young person's needs but to ensure that the needs of the young person are appropriately identified and met. No such issues have been raised by Brighton and Hove IROs during 2016/17.

## **8.11 Supervision and Training of IROs**

IROs have scheduled monthly supervision (pro rata) and adhoc supervision. As part of our commitment to ongoing learning and development, IROs continue to have access to learning events such as legal briefings, staff roadshows, LSCB training, and IRO specific conference events via the South East IRO Regional Network.

## **9 Priorities for 2017/18**

- To integrate a model of relationship-based practice.
- To increase children's influence over their review by better enabling them to have a say about who attends, choice of venue and activities.
- To better support children's developing life story, with review records written to the child in simple language.
- To increase the number of reviews held in time.
- To better evidence attempts to elicit the parents views.