
**REPORT FOR: CORPORATE
PARENTING PANEL**

Date of Meeting: 20 October 2015

Subject: Independent Reviewing
Officers Report

Key Decision: No

Responsible Officer: Chris Spencer, Corporate Director of People
Services

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Brown, Portfolio Holder for
Children and Families

Exempt: No

Decision subject to No

Call-in:

Wards affected: All

Enclosures: 'The Child's Journey – an evaluation of the
impact of the Independent Reviewing
Officers'

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report details information about the children looked after activity in Harrow during the period 1 April 2014 through to 31st March 2015 and is an evaluation of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers.

Recommendations:

Panel is requested to consider the report and ratify.

Reason: The local authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that there are Independent Reviewing Officers reviewing the Care Plans for Looked After children and young people. (See report attached)

For Information Only

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

The Independent Reviewing Officer is a statutory requirement and their role is integral in ensuring that the local authority provides a quality service to its Looked After population which is in line with the Council's vision and corporate priorities.

Current situation

See report attached.

Legal Implications

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. As their role is independent they should have access to independent legal advice when required.

Financial Implications

No financial implications arising from this report. The staffing costs of the Independent Reviewing Officers and the administrative staff that support their role are met within the Children's Services budget.

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

The looked after population is a diverse cohort where certain ages and racial groups are disproportionately represented so a focus on this will by implication have more impact on these groups. Two thirds of the Looked After population during the period were from BME groups with the numbers of teenagers entering care outweighing the younger cohort.

Council Priorities

The Council's vision:

Working Together to Make a Difference for Harrow

Please identify how the report incorporates the administration's priorities.

- Making a difference for the vulnerable

- Making a difference for communities
- Making a difference for families

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Jo Frost.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 15/10/15.....		
Name: Helen Ottino.....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 19/10/15.....		

Ward Councillors notified:	NO, as it impacts on all Wards
EqIA carried out:	NO – information report only

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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The Child's Journey – an evaluation of the impact of the Independent Reviewing Officers

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officers

Barbara Houston

1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

This report details information about the children looked after activity in Harrow during the period 1 April 2014 through to 31 March 2015. It is an evaluation of the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers and the effectiveness of children looked after reviewing processes in contributing to timely, quality plans for children who are looked after and to making a positive difference in their lives. The report format includes aspects of the Draft National Annual IRO Report template.

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- 8. Update on priorities identified for 2013/14**
- 9. Improvement priorities for 2015/2016**

1. The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

- 1.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- 1.2 The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IROs') operate within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children Looked After and for challenging drift and delay.
- 1.3 **Looked After Reviews:** Within the reviewing process the Independent Reviewing Officers have a number of specific responsibilities:
- Promoting the voice of the child/young person
 - 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 see one
 - Offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them
 - Monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that Care Plans have proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feeling and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands the implications of any changes made to his/her Care Plan. (2.14 IRO Handbook)

In addition the IRO will identify any issue to do with permanency planning; health; education and PEPs, Pathway Planning; cultural, identity and religious needs of a child/young person; Care Leavers including those not in education, employment or training (NEET); Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC); offending behaviour, contact with family and friends, any issues to do with alcohol or drug misuse and any additional vulnerabilities due to mental health, disability, missing from placement or being at risk of sexual exploitation. This is not an exclusive list as every child is different but it highlights the complexity of the IRO role and their need to, where appropriate, challenge senior managers within the local authority. The improvements that have been made within 2014/15 including the implementation of the Dispute Resolution Protocol and Monitoring Form are helping to support these responsibilities and will continue to be built on going forward in 2015/16.

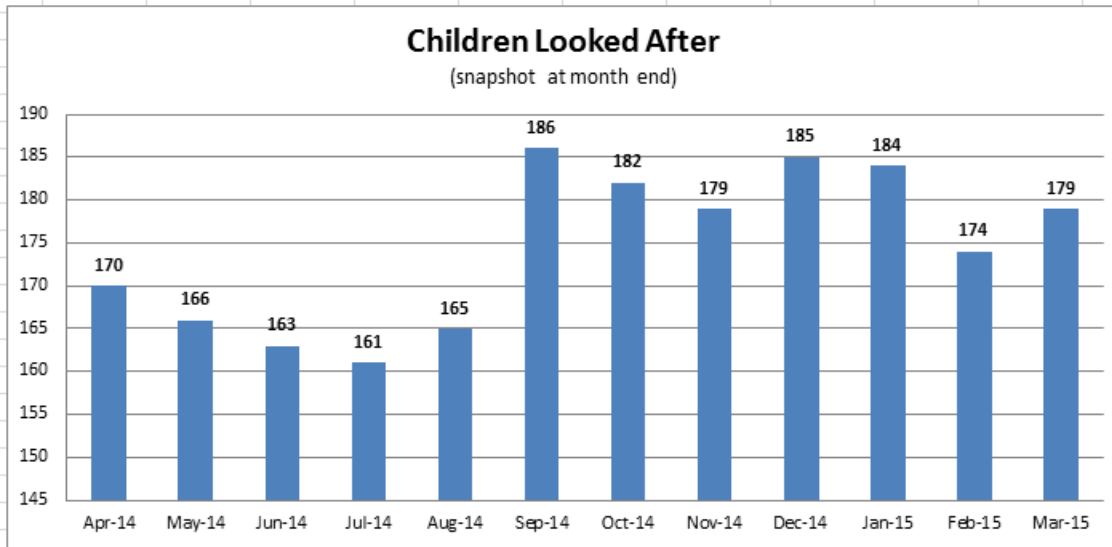
2. Independent Reviewing Officer's and Administrative Support

- 2.1 There are 3.2 permanent IRO posts who chair the reviews of Children Looked After (CLA). This is currently covered by 4 permanent members of staff, 2 full-time and 2 part-time, who have been employed in their roles for a considerable period and therefore bring a wealth of knowledge and stability to the service. In addition there has been an increased flexibility developed within the last couple of years with a number of Child Protection Conference Chairs also having the skillset to chair Looked After Reviews. This helps to ensure that work is completed within timescales, particularly at points of pressure within the service.

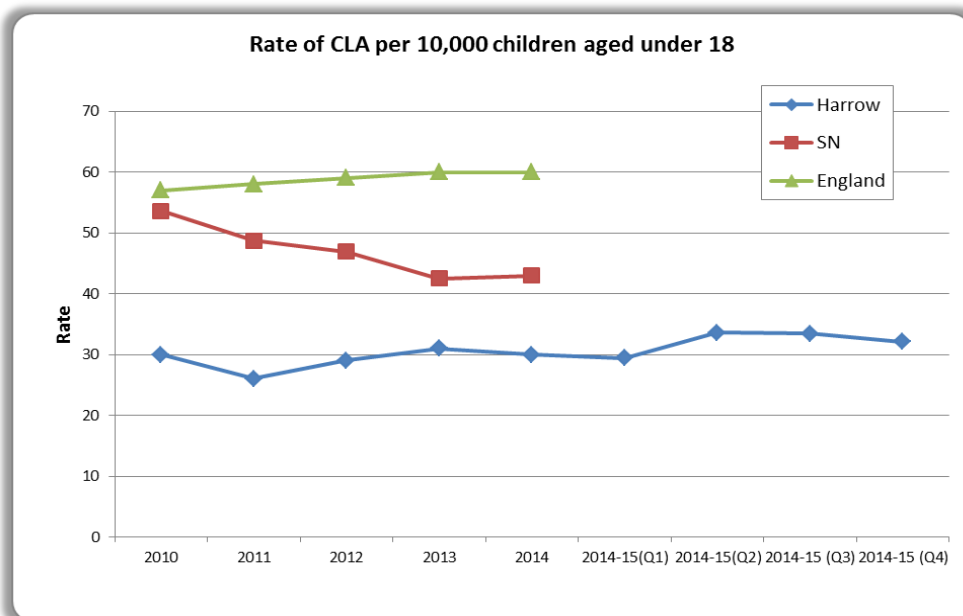
- 2.2 The IRO Handbook recommends that caseloads for IROs should be between 50 and 70, (Full-time equivalent). The average full-time equivalent caseloads over the period were 53 to 55 and so IRO caseloads in Harrow are well within the recommended number.
- 2.3 In addition to their caseloads each IRO has a Championing role covering areas of permanency planning, Health Assessments, Personal Education Plans (working closely with the Virtual School) and Participation. Audits throughout the year have provided clear evidence of IROs escalating concerns and following up if issues are not addressed. IROs also have links with the social work teams and attend Team meetings, including with the Fostering Team, Children Looked After and Children in Need Teams, Leaving Care and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Team and the Children with Disabilities Team. This helps to improve consistency within the social work teams and to build up good working relationships between the IROs and social workers. There has been an improvement in IROs being routinely invited to significant meetings and having their views sought. We have also sought to strengthen the link between Harrow IROs and CAFCASS and it is envisaged that there will be quarterly meetings between the IROs, Quality Assurance Manager and CAFCASS contact. In addition the Quality Assurance Manager and CAFCASS link are taking forward the development of CAFCASS/Harrow protocol.
- 2.4 The team of IROs are supported by 1.5 business support workers who administratively arrange the reviews, send out invitations and consultation documents and afterwards distribute the IRO recommendations and reports.
- 2.5 The Independent Reviewing Officers are managed by a part-time Quality Assurance Manager and are placed within the Quality Assurance and Service Improvement Service with what has been an evolving role in QA. Their position within this service area has supported their need for independence and challenge as their management line, up to and including Head of Service, is different to that of the children and young peoples' social workers and managers. The Quality Assurance Manager provides the IROs with professional supervision and works with the IROs, other staff members and managers, external agencies and service users to ensure continued development and review of the IRO Service. Examples of this within the period 2014/15 has included the development of a revised and improved Dispute Resolution process; IRO Monitoring Form and development of a Chair's report which is more fit for purpose, SMARTer and less bureaucratic.

3. Children looked after (CLA) data 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015

PI Description	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15
Number of CLA (snapshot)	170	166	163	161	165	186	182	179	185	184	174	179



3.1 The number of children looked after relative to the total child population in Harrow remains small and is overall consistent with the number in 2013/14. At its peak in September 2014 there were 186 children looked after compared with the months of June, July and August when there were 163, 161 and 165 respectively.



3.2 Harrow's rate of Children Looked After (CLA) has risen during the year and at 31st March the rate per 10,000 children was 30.9 compared to 30 at the same time last year. . A proportion of this increase can be attributed to a 2% rise in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This growth in numbers of children in care has not been unique to Harrow, with rates for England also showing a 1% increase (*BAAF Data*) and whilst rates have remained stable in London, actual numbers of children taken into care have increased each year since 2011 (*DfE 2014 LA tables revised*). However Harrow continues to have a significantly lower rate of Children Looked After than comparators (almost 10 per 10,000 lower). Further analysis of the statistical neighbours group shows that Merton, Kingston, Redbridge and Sutton have similar rates. The average is pulled up by Brent, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Ealing which have high numbers of CLA (300+).

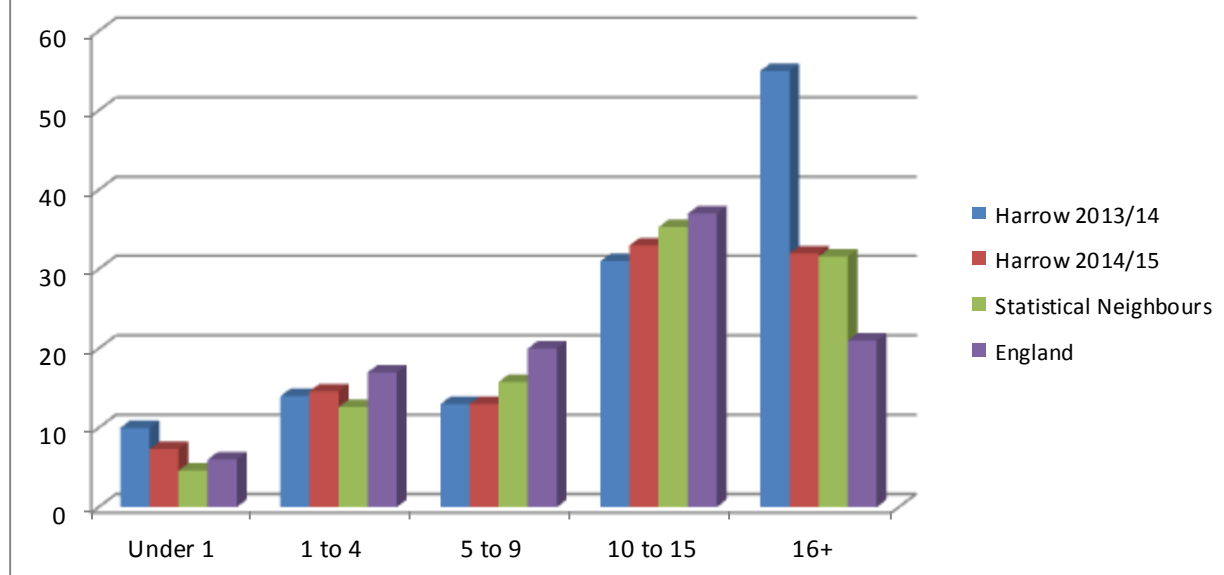
Some explanation of Harrow's comparatively lower rate is provided by a more detailed look at the population. It is a comparatively affluent borough and its high levels of diversity reflect well established communities, particularly of South Asian origin. Strong extended family networks are common. At the same time, Harrow has significant areas of deprivation, and the incoming population and high birth rates suggest that CLA rates could increase further. Recent incoming population has tended to be from Eastern Europe, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and East Africa, with a tendency towards higher levels of vulnerability.

Number and percentage of children looked after by age group as at 31 March

	Under 1	1 to 4	5 to 9	10 to 15	16+	Under 10	10+
Harrow 2014-15	7.3	14.6	13.0	33.0	32		
Harrow 2013-14 (%)	10.0	14.0	13.0	31.0	55	60	105
Statistical neighbours	4.6	12.6	15.8	35.3	31.6	32.9	66.9
England (%)	6.0	17.0	20.0	37.0	21.0	43.0	58.0
Harrow (number)	15	25	20	50	82	86	176
Stat Neighbour (number)	12	33	41	94	14,460	29,240	39,600
England (number)	3,880	11,440	13,920	25,140	32.0	37.0	63.0

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Percentage of CLA at 31st March By Age Group



3.3 The number and proportion of CLA aged up to 4 is higher than statistical neighbours and England averages and lower for age groups between 5 and 15. The increase in younger children entering care in Harrow since 2011 is attributed to reviewing and lowering of social care thresholds at the front door and identifying children earlier who are more vulnerable.

Compared to 2013-14 data there are small but not significant changes in different age groups, with the exception of the 16+ age group where in 2013-14 there was a significant increase. However for 2014-15 that number returned to a more expected level although it is noted that over the last five years the number of teenagers entering care has continually outweighed the younger cohort, with the 10-15 year old age group having the most new entrants in each of the 5 years, averaging 36% of the cohort. This is in line with statistical neighbours and London. The 16's and over are the next highest with an average of 23%. When added together the two eldest groups contribute to an average of 59% of the total looked after population.

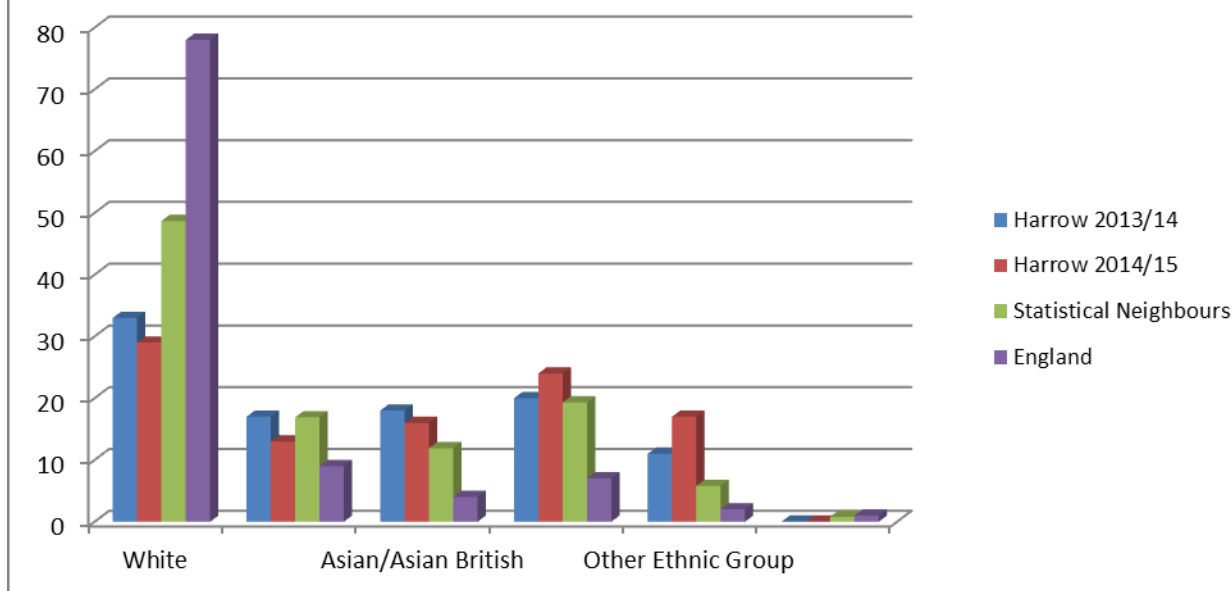
Number and percentage of children looked after by ethnic origin as at 31 March 2014

	White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Other Ethnic Groups	IR or NO*
Harrow 2014-15	29	13	16	24	17	0
Harrow 2013-14 (%)	33.0	17.0	18.0	20.0	11.0	0.0
Stat Neighbour (%)	48.7	16.9	11.9	19.3	5.8	0.8
England (%)	78.0	9.0	4.0	7.0	2.0	1.0
Harrow (number)	55	30	30	35	20	0
Stat Neighbour (number)	120	45	36	53	13	2
England (number)	53,440	6,140	2,540	4,620	1,530	570

* Information Refused or Not Obtained

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

Percentage of CLA at 31st March By Ethnicity



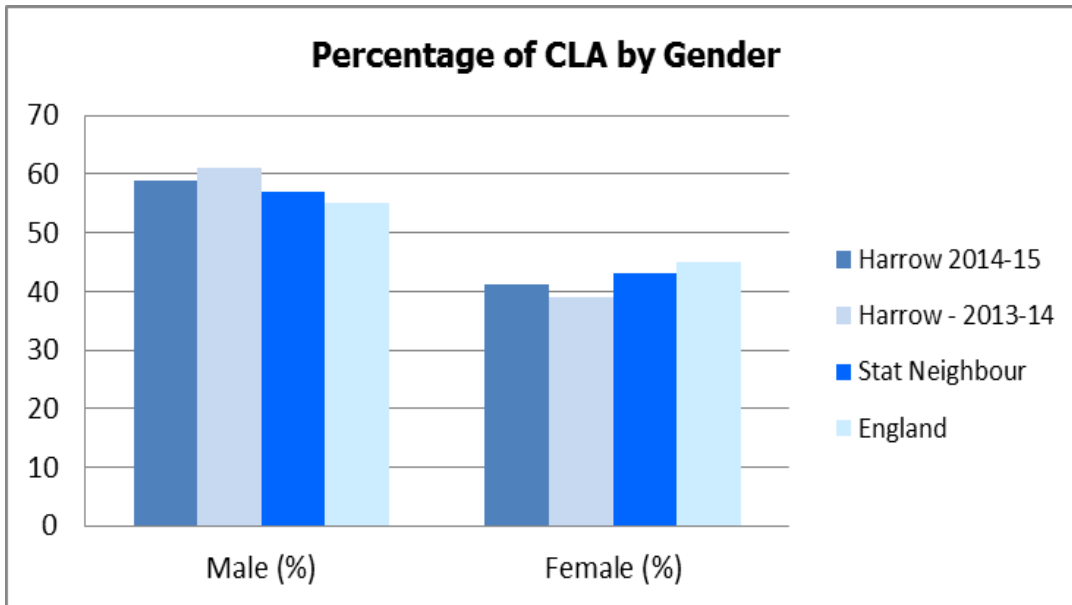
3.4 Harrow's population is one of the most diverse nationally. Diversity Indices rank Harrow seventh highest nationally for ethnic diversity and second for religious diversity (*GLA 2011*). In the 2011 Census 69.1% of residents stated they were from minority ethnic groups, 31.9% of residents stated they were White-British, 26.4% were of Indian origin, the largest minority ethnic group. Harrow is also home to the country's largest Sri Lankan born community. [Source: Census 2011]

Two thirds of Harrow's Children Looked After population were from BME groups although there had been some changes in the ethnic background of the CLA population since March 2014 as the proportion of CLA in mixed groups, Asian and White groups had dropped. There had also been an increase in the proportion of looked after children from Black ethnicity and from other ethnic groups. Overall there is an overrepresentation of children of 'Black' and 'Mixed' ethnicity in Harrow's CLA population and an underrepresentation of 'Asian' children compared with the local population. With such a diverse CLA population, with differing needs, it is vital to ensure foster carers and staff reflects the diversity of our Children in care and the IROs have a key role in ensuring that children's cultural and religious needs are appropriately met within their placements and care planning.

Number and percentage of children looked after by gender as at 31 March 2014

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (Number)	Female (Number)
Harrow 2014-15	59	41	97	68
Harrow - 2013-14	61.0	39.0	100	65
Stat Neighbour	56.9	43.1	147	114
England	55.0	45.0	38,040	30,800

Source: DfE Children looked after in England including adoption

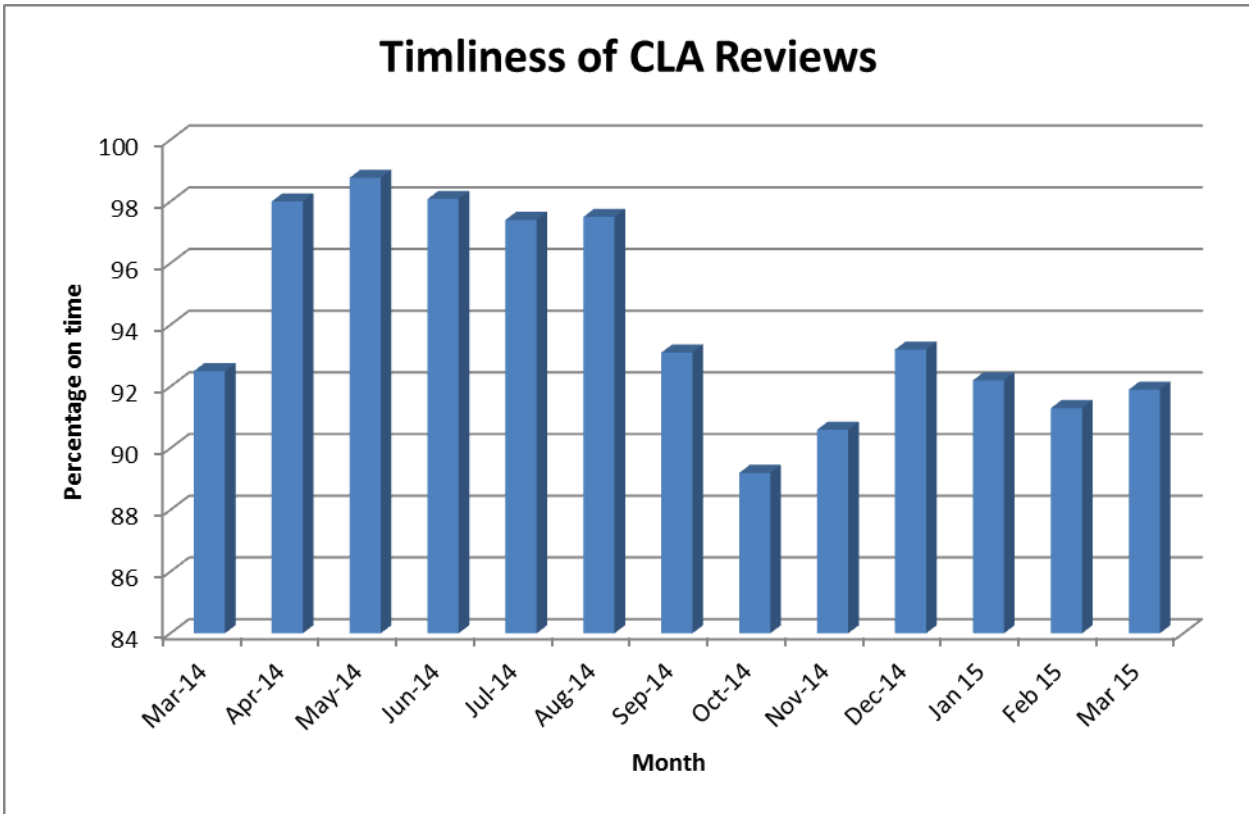


3.5 In line with comparators, London and England, Harrow historically has a higher proportion of males who are looked after, although this has dropped slightly since March 2014. The snapshot of looked after population data below identifies a greater proportion of teenage young men driving up the number of children looked after from the age of 15 years. This is likely to be a result of more boys coming into care in their teenage years which has an influence on the gender balance of those in care.

The age of females looked after is more consistent through the age range, although some additional young females are coming into care at 14 and 17 years of age. However historically, and in line with all but eight authorities in England, the number of girls coming into care (new entrants) in Harrow continues to be lower than the number of boys.

Timeliness of CLA Reviews

PI Description	Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-14	Dec-14	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15	Comments
Timeliness of CLA reviews (%)	92.5	98	98.77	98.08	97.4	97.5	93.1	89.2	90.6	93.2	92.2	91.3	91.9	151 out of 158 CLA reviews were done on time



3.6 According to the statistical information 158 out of 172 Reviews were completed on time and this percentage of 91.0% remained stable in comparison with the previous year. Reasons for some Reviews falling out of timescale included the fact that there were 2 interim IROs during the 2014/15 period and a small number of next Reviews were set slightly outside the required timescales by these temporary IROs.

Children looked after (CLA) workflow												
PI Description	Apr 14	May 14	Jun 14	Jul 14	Aug 14	Sep 14	Oct 14	Nov 14	Dec 14	Jan 15	Feb 15	Mar 15
Rate of CLA per 10,000 population. Measured Quarterly. (snapshot)	30.7	30	29.4	29	29.8	33.6	32.9	32.3	33.4	33	31.2	32
Number of children looked after under short breaks (codes V3/V4) (snapshot)	2	2	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Number of New CLA (month on month)	10	9	13	6	4	17	10	11	9	12	3	11.0
Number of Ceased CLA (month on month)	8	12	13	9	0	0	9	6	4	11	11	7.0
Timeliness of CLA reviews (%)	N/A	98.8	98.1	97	97.5	93.1	89.2	90.6	93.2	92.2	91.3	92
% of New CLA placed more than 20 miles from home	0	5	14.3	9.5	13	0	30	9.1	0	0	0	0
% of CLA placed more than 20 miles away from home (snapshot)	17.6	19.3	16.4	18	18.1	16.7	18.8	19.6	12.9	18.5	18.9	18
% CLA in residential accommodation (snapshot)	17	15.7	14.7	16	15.1	14.5	15.4	13.4	13	13.6	12.6	11.2
% CLA fostered by relative or friend / Kinship (snapshot)	5.3	7.2	6.7	5	4.2	4.3	14.8	12.3	12.4	12.5	12.1	11.7
% CLA in in-house foster placements (snapshot)	37.1	33.7	36.8	32	31.5	25.8	37.9	43.6	45.4	45.1	40.8	40
% CLA in agency foster placements (snapshot)	28.2	50.7	30.1	17	16.4	12.9	20.3	18.4	17.8	18.5	20.7	19.6
% CLA in adoptive placements (snapshot)	1.8	1.8	0	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.6	3.4	3.2	2.7	2.9	2.8
% CLA in semi independent or independent living placements (snapshot)	10.6	10.8	12.3	12	12.7	12.9	11.5	12.8	14.1	14.7	15.5	17
% CLA placed with parents (snapshot)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
% of CLA placed out of borough (snapshot)	49.4	55.2	49.1	48.4	47.9	46.2	47.2	43.6	41.1	41.3	42.0	41.3
CLA placement stability: number of moves (% with 2+ moves)	1.2	1.8	1.8	3.7	3.6	4.8	6	7.8	8.6	8.7	8.7	9.5
CLA placement stability: length of placement (%)	42.9	40.9	43.5	50.0	50.0	40.0	40.0	33.3	40.0	34.5	34.5	34.5
Number of CPP who are also CLA (snapshot)	21	19	15	9	11	20	28	26	23	17	14	9
Number of statutory school age CLA (snapshot)	96	94	98	77	Summer Hols	82.0	89.0	87.0	87.0	94.0	82.0	85.0
Number of school age CLA (1 yr + at 31st March) (snapshot)	49	51	50	43		45.0	54.0	55.0	55.0	59.0	54.0	56.0
Number of CLA recorded as missing (month on month)	4	6	3	7	4	4	3	4	11	17	16	11

3.7 The above data highlights that, other than in July, August and February, the numbers of children who became Looked After, month on month was reasonable consistent with 17 being the highest in September. The numbers who ceased to be Looked After was also fairly consistent except in August and September, when the number was zero.

3.8 The majority of children were placed with in-house foster carers, with smaller numbers placed in agency foster placements, residential accommodation, kinship placements or semi-independent living. Not unusually for London approximately 50% of children and young people were placed out of Harrow although the numbers of new CLA placed more than 20 miles from home was very low with 6 months of the year being zero.

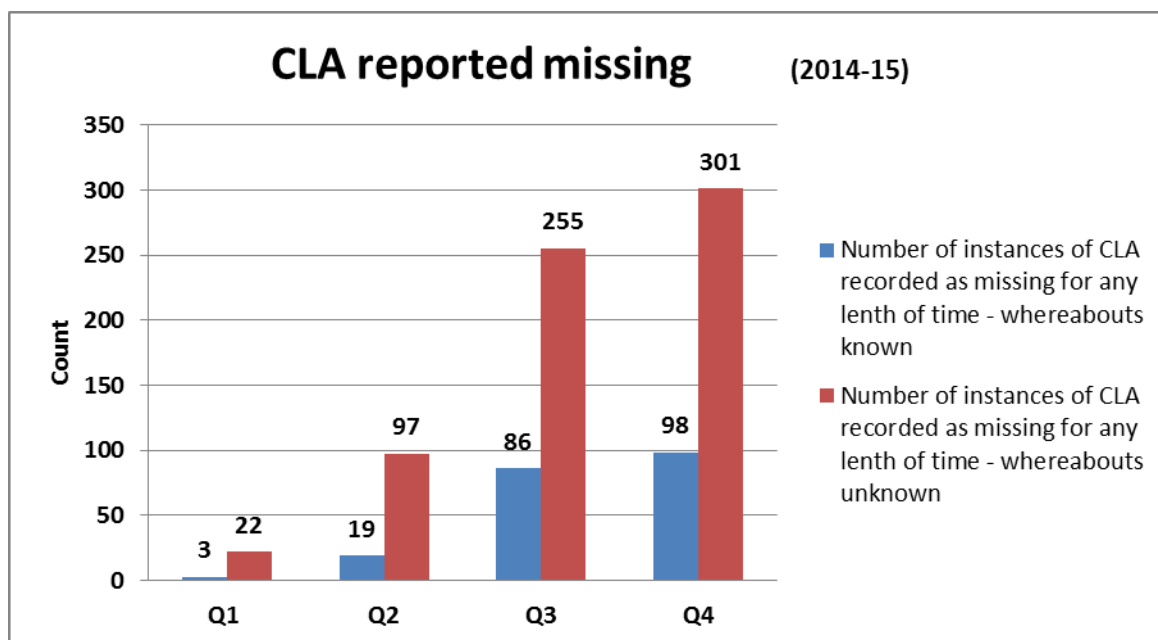
3.9 Looked after children outcomes are generally more positive when the children enjoy the benefit of long term stable homes. This is performance managed in 2 ways. One key performance indicator looks at placement stability as children enter the care system (% of children with 3 placements within 12 months of entering the care system), and a longer placement indicator that measures children that have been looked after for 2.5 years, being in the same placement for at least 2 years (young people aged below 16). In 2014/15 in Harrow 11.5% of young people had 3 or more placements, which is broadly in line with the average for England, and below statistical neighbours. Long term stability was 34.5%, at the end of March 2015, compared to an England average of 67% and statistical neighbours 64%. The reasons for this disparity was that a number of children moved to long term placements during this reporting period, but did not yet register as lasting for 2 years. This was also impacted by a number of children being made subject of Special Guardianship Orders which took them completely out of the looked after children system, and is a positive outcome for their stability.

Current outcomes is that looked after children in this cohort has as planned now increased to 64.3% being in the same placement for 2 years or more which is broadly in line with other authorities. Children adopted was low (4%) compared to national average (17%) and statistical neighbours (9.9%). In 2015/16 it is planned that the number of adoptions will double to around 10 young people, and the length of care proceedings (target 26 weeks for completion) demonstrates positive outcomes in Harrow, with an average of 24 for completion.

4. Looked After young people who are missing and/or at risk of sexual exploitation.

CLA Missing Children Data

	2014/15			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of instances of CLA recorded as missing for any length of time - whereabouts known	3	19	86	98
Number of instances of CLA recorded as missing for any length of time - whereabouts unknown	22	97	255	301



4.1 Children that go missing may be running away from a problem, or to somewhere they want to be. These young people may also have been coerced to run away by someone else. Children Looked After can be particularly vulnerable when they go missing from their placements, and the associated risks of sexual exploitation for this group of vulnerable children has been well documented in numerous reports commissioned by central government, the Children’s Commissioner, and a number of high profile local authority serious case reviews. An OFSTED report “Missing children” 2013 stated that children looked after are 3 times more likely to go missing than children who are not in care (data from End Child Prostitution and Trafficking ECPAT).

During 2014 Framework I, the social care client system, was reviewed and redesigned to streamline and improve recording of the instances of children reported missing. For this reason the instances in Harrow of CLA reported missing over the 2014/15 period increased significantly as the systems to collect and record this data improved. The majority of reasons given by looked after children and young people for being absent from their placement were to do with having contact with their families, including siblings and spending time with friends. The majority of young people did not see themselves as 'missing' as they were choosing to spend time with family and friends, often after their curfew time.

As stated in the IRO Handbook 'For children who 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 any new placement identifies how the placement will offer stability to the child and/or minimise the likelihood of him/her running away or going missing' (3.80). There is an expectation in Harrow that the IROs will be informed and involved in the process when a looked after young person goes missing, including offering to meet with the young person. It has also been recognised that there needs to be significant oversight and scrutiny of the children that are reported missing and weekly Missing Children Meetings are planned to take place within the Children and Young People Division, chaired by the divisional director and attended by all Heads of Service. This weekly meeting is designed to develop and maintain a strategic grip of practice relating to missing children, and to ensure that any high profile children are communicated to elected members and senior managers. These meetings will also improve the collation of data, and intelligence regarding this group of children.

CSE data and Children Looked After

September 2014 to August 2015

Gender	Females – 7 Males – 0
Age (at time of referral)	13 – 1 14 – 1 15 – 1 16 – 4
Ethnicity	Asian or Asian British – 2 White or White British - 2 Black or Black British – 1 Mixed background - 1 Other Ethnic background – 1
Placement Type	Foster care – 3 Semi-independent Home – 2 Foster care with relative / friend – 1 Children/young people's home – 1
Placement Location	Harrow – 4 Outside of Harrow and within 20 miles - 2 Outside of Harrow and further than 20 miles - 1

4.2 Child Sexual Exploitation is not a new phenomenon. In Harrow the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation panel was set up in July 2014, with a role and responsibility to provide advice and guidance in relation to individual young people, including those who are Looked After. A CSE Co-ordinator was appointed and improvements have been made to the social care client system, with it being reviewed and redesigned to streamline and improve recording of children

and young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation. As there was limited data for the period 2014/2015, this report has included data from September 2014 to August 2015.

There were 7 young people who were looked after and referred to the CSE Coordinator during the period September 2014 to August 2015. These 7 young people were presented to the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel and 4 of the 7 met the threshold for MASE panel's input. The level of risk assessed by the panel was 3 young people were low risk/didn't meet the threshold; 3 were medium risk and 1 was high risk. The 3 low risk/didn't meet threshold were deemed to not have a current CSE risk.

Of the 4 that were subject to on-going MASE involvement the periods under MASE were as follows:

- 1 month
- 1 month and currently still active
- 6 months
- 7 months

The type of CSE risk that was identified for the young people referred was broken down as follows (please note, some young people's risks were multiple):

- Peer – 4
- "Boyfriend" – 2
- Opportunistic – 2
- Internet – 1
- Trafficking – 1

Common themes of additional vulnerabilities were as follows:

- 4 of the young people were or had been involved in crime and at some stage known to the Youth Offending Team or Triage.
- 4 of the young people were affiliated with gangs.
- 4 of the young people were either not in employment, education or training (NEET) or had low school attendance.
- 4 of the young people were either misusing substances, alcohol or both.

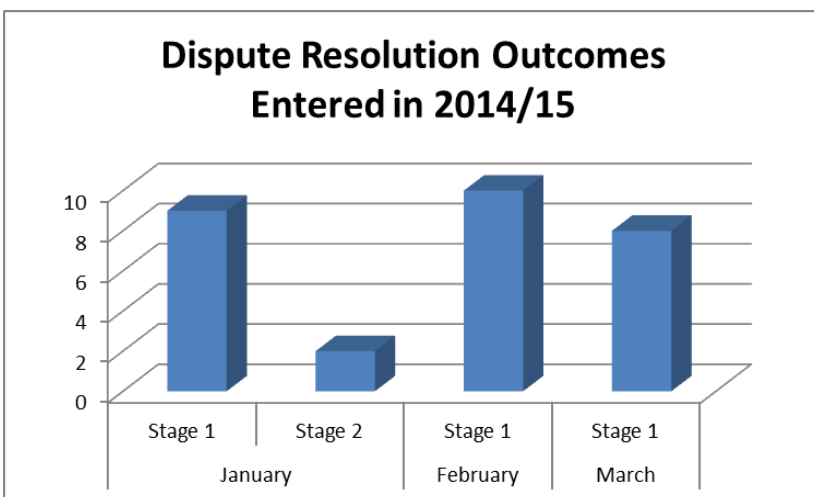
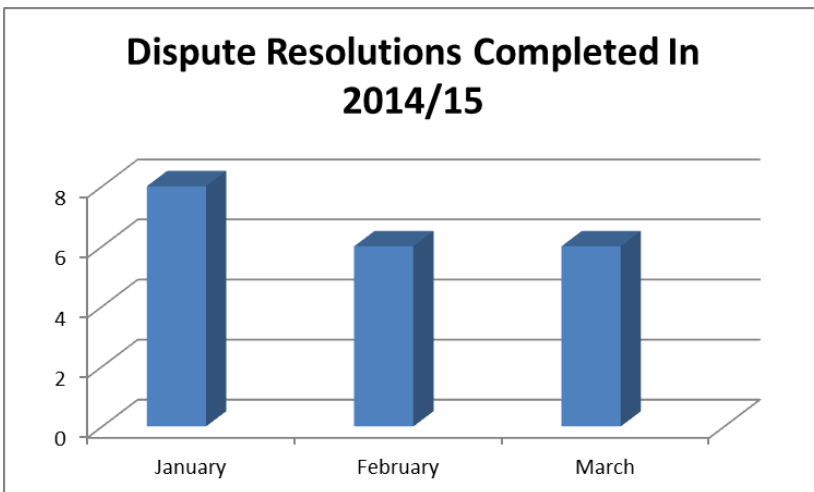
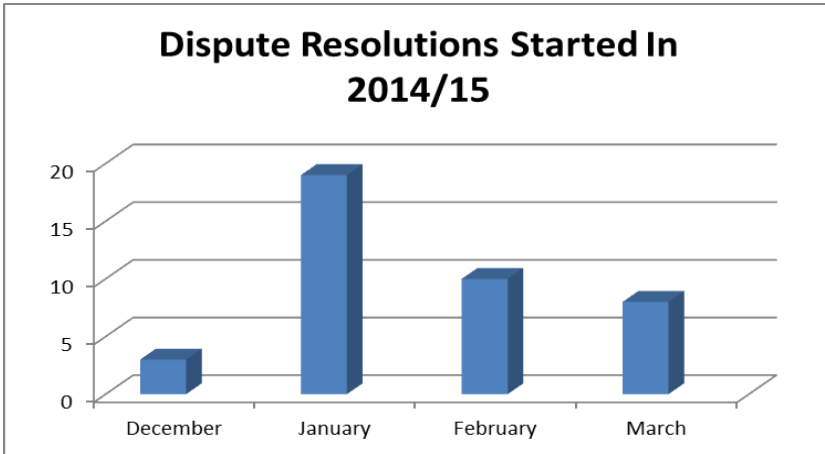
5. Monitoring Form and IRO Chair's report and recommendations

5.1 During 2014 a Monitoring Form was introduced for IROs to complete after every review. This highlights any issues to the relevant first line manager with regards to practise and care planning which are not of a significant enough nature to warrant implementation of the Dispute Resolution Protocol. The Monitoring Form is Tasked to the first line manager who then responds receipt of the Monitoring Form and the issues identified.

5.2 In addition a review took place of the IRO recommendations and report format and the templates for these were updated in April, 2015 to help create SMARTer review recommendations and to allow for better use of IRO time as previous review decisions and basic information on a child now prepopulates on to the IRO Chair's report. The new report format is due to be reviewed in October 2015, by the Quality Assurance Manager, to include

feedback from children/young people, IROs, carers, social workers and key others with regards to the changes and their effectiveness.

6. Dispute Resolution Protocol



6.1 The Dispute Resolution Protocol relates to the resolution of serious and significant issues identified during the Looked After review process. It does not replace procedures or systems

in place for resolving any other problems or conflicts in relation to a case or between other parties and is solely a mechanism for the IRO to address matters within the Local Authority in relation to care planning or practice standards.

6.2 The data for the Dispute Resolution Protocol only covers part of the year following its implementation. 40 episodes were completed during the period with the majority being at Stage 1 and successfully resolved at this stage.

6.3 Overall the themes included some Care Plans requiring updating, Personal Education Plan compliance, Pathway Planning and Health Assessments not taking place at the appropriate times. It should be noted that with the introduction of the new service for undertaking Health Assessments there has been a significant improvement with Health Assessments now taking place within required timescales. Social Worker visits taking place at the required frequency was a strength as only four Dispute Resolutions related to concerns about the frequency of visits.

Specific examples include:

- A child who had moved to their permanent placement but where a school place had not yet been identified for them. The IRO took this up with the relevant manager which led to prompt action and the outcome was that a school place was found.
- A vulnerable young woman where the Care Plan was for her to move to a semi-independent placement. The IRO was concerned about the level of support that she would receive in the placement and liaised with the relevant manager to ensure that an appropriate support package was put in place.
- A young person who had not yet had a Pathway Plan completed. The IRO liaised with the relevant manager and this was then completed with the young person.
- A child whose Personal Education Plan had not been updated within the required timescale. The IRO liaised with the relevant manager and a meeting was arranged with the relevant people to update the Personal Education Plan.

7. The Voice of the Child

7.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer's always meet with a child or young person before a Review, unless a young person refuses to do so. For children who are under 4 years of age, the IRO will still visit the placement to see the children.

7.2 From the information provided by the Participation Co-ordinator, it is reported that 69% of children felt completely listened to in Reviews with 48% of parents feeling completely listened to. 69% of young people found IRO support helpful in Reviews.

7.3 Some feedback from children and young people included 'The Review was very long'; 'We are always being consulted but nothing happens' and 'when I was unhappy in the placement I felt listened to'.

7.4 17 children and young people received advocacy support which was 27% of the total receiving this service during the period. With regards to support in making a complaint, there were 3 young people who were looked after and 4 care leavers who received support from an advocate which equated to 63% of those who raised a complaint during the period. Issues

included a young person where there had been a delay in getting IT equipment for a college course plus gym membership; a young person who was unhappy at a residential school and the outcome was that the Social Worker helped to address the issues at the school and a young person in supported housing who was worried that she might not be housed by the council when she reached 18. Following support from the advocate, the housing options were discussed with the young person and she was reassured that she would be referred to social housing when she turned 18.

7.5 Examples where the Independent Reviewing Officer supported a child or young person include where the IRO queried that a young person with complex needs in a residential school should have provision of a clothing allowance, pocket money, toiletries and savings. This was raised at Head of Service level and was then resolved so that the young person started to receive all of these. On another occasion a young person from Eritrea stated at his Review that he felt isolated and could not communicate with the carer as he did not speak English. The IRO discussed this with the Team Manager and it was agreed that the young man should move to a more appropriate placement where he later reported he felt happier as he was able to communicate with other young people who spoke the same language. In addition a young man from Albania stated that he wished to claim the education bursary but did not have a bank account. The IRO spoke with the Head of Service and following liaison with a local bank, the young person reported that he now had a bank account and was in receipt of the bursary.

8. Update on priorities identified for 2013/14

Key priorities:

- Improving permanency planning: by tracking care plans, alerting managers to delays and by representation at the Care Planning Group.
- Improving the timeliness and quality of health assessments by identifying and addressing delays with colleagues.
- Improving educational outcomes for children looked after by alerting managers to resources and services that would assist children looked after and representation by the IROs in the Virtual school.
- Young people to co-chair their reviews.

Update:

- Quality Assurance Manager attending Child Care Planning Group. IROs view CPG agenda in advance and inform QA Manager of any care planning issues. QA Manager presents issues to monthly CPG and these are taken in to account in actions agreed to progress care planning in a timely manner.
- Use of the Dispute Resolution Protocol by IROs to raise issues with regards to timeliness and quality of Health Assessments. In addition from June, 2015, the Health Team has been introduced which IROs are reporting has already had a positive impact in ensuring that Health Assessments are happening within timescale.
- One of the IRO's has a championing role with regards to education and links with the Virtual School, attending meetings etc. IROs have also been using the Dispute Resolution Protocol to escalate concerns with regards to educational issues for individual children and young people.
- There has been some reluctance by young people to co-chair their review and so a pilot is currently underway with one Independent Reviewing Officer encouraging all the

young people that she reviews, aged 14 and above, to undertake some co-chairing within their Review. This will be reviewed after a 4 month period.

9. Improvement priorities for 2015/2016

- **Implement Action Plan relating to IROs from Serious Case Review June, 2015**
- **Review Dispute Resolution Protocol**
- **Review new Chair's Recommendations and Chair's Report templates**
- **Complete quarterly reports to inform Annual report**
- **Improve information sharing between the IROs and the Virtual School**
- **IROs to participate as CSE Champions in training and development opportunities across the Service**