



East Sussex
County Council

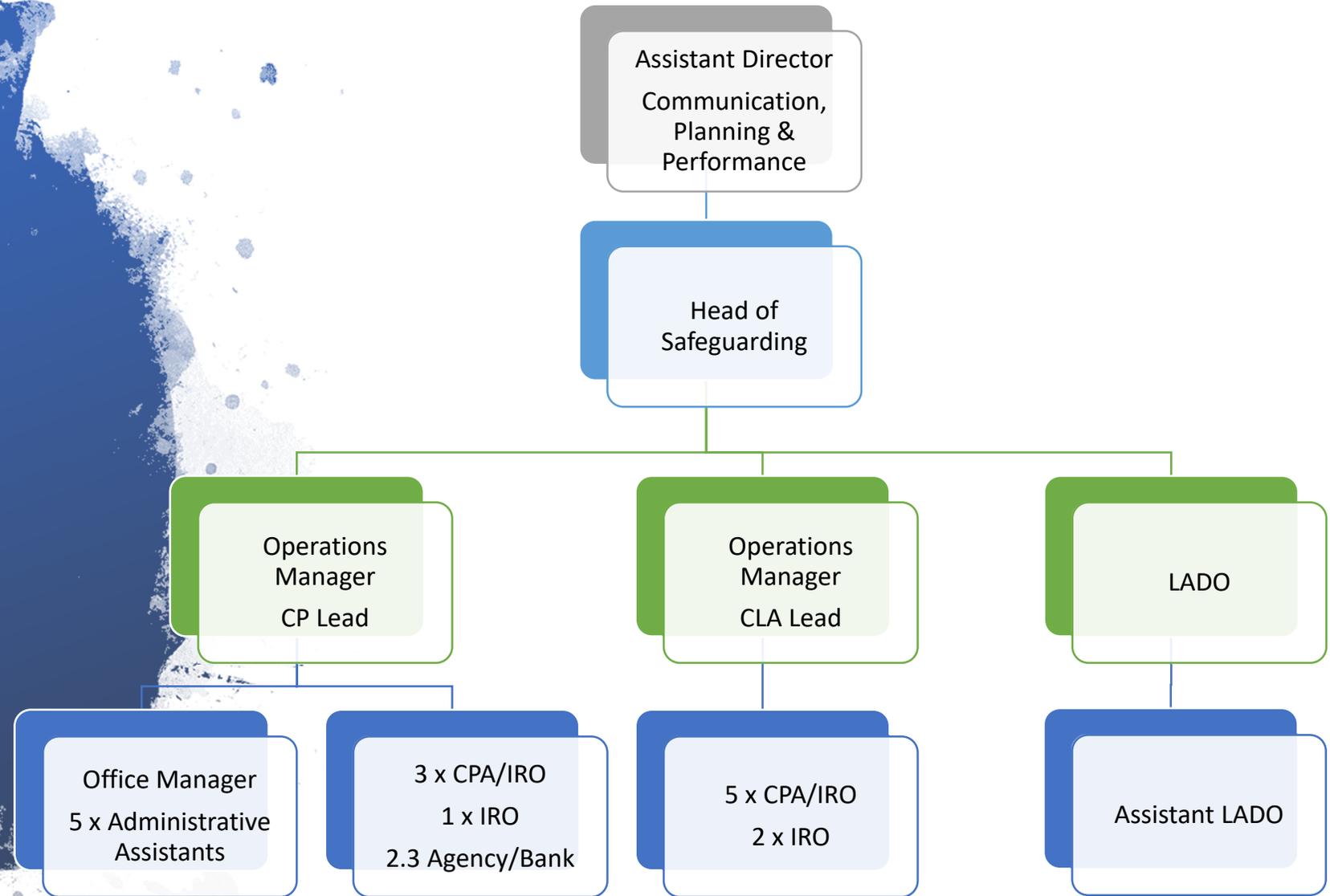
East Sussex
Independent Reviewing Service
Annual Report 2019/2020

Fiona Lewis Operations Manager

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

The IRO Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Children's Safeguarding Unit



Please see Glossary for definitions

Professional Profile of the Unit

IRO/CPAs are registered social workers with extensive experience. They have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to plans for the most vulnerable children in our county.

IROs chair statutory Looked After Children review meetings whilst CPAs chair Child Protection Conferences; the two roles are separated by different legislation and regulatory protocols which each require a depth and breadth of expertise. In ESCC and in common with much of England and Wales, most staff operate a dual role; this ensures that Chairs retain a sense of the child's holistic experience. The separate management streams ensure a focus on legislative / practice developments and quality assurance of each function.

The Unit has a diverse staff group who bring a wealth of personal and professional skills and experiences to their role.

Role of the IRO

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

Mr Justice Peter Jackson 2014

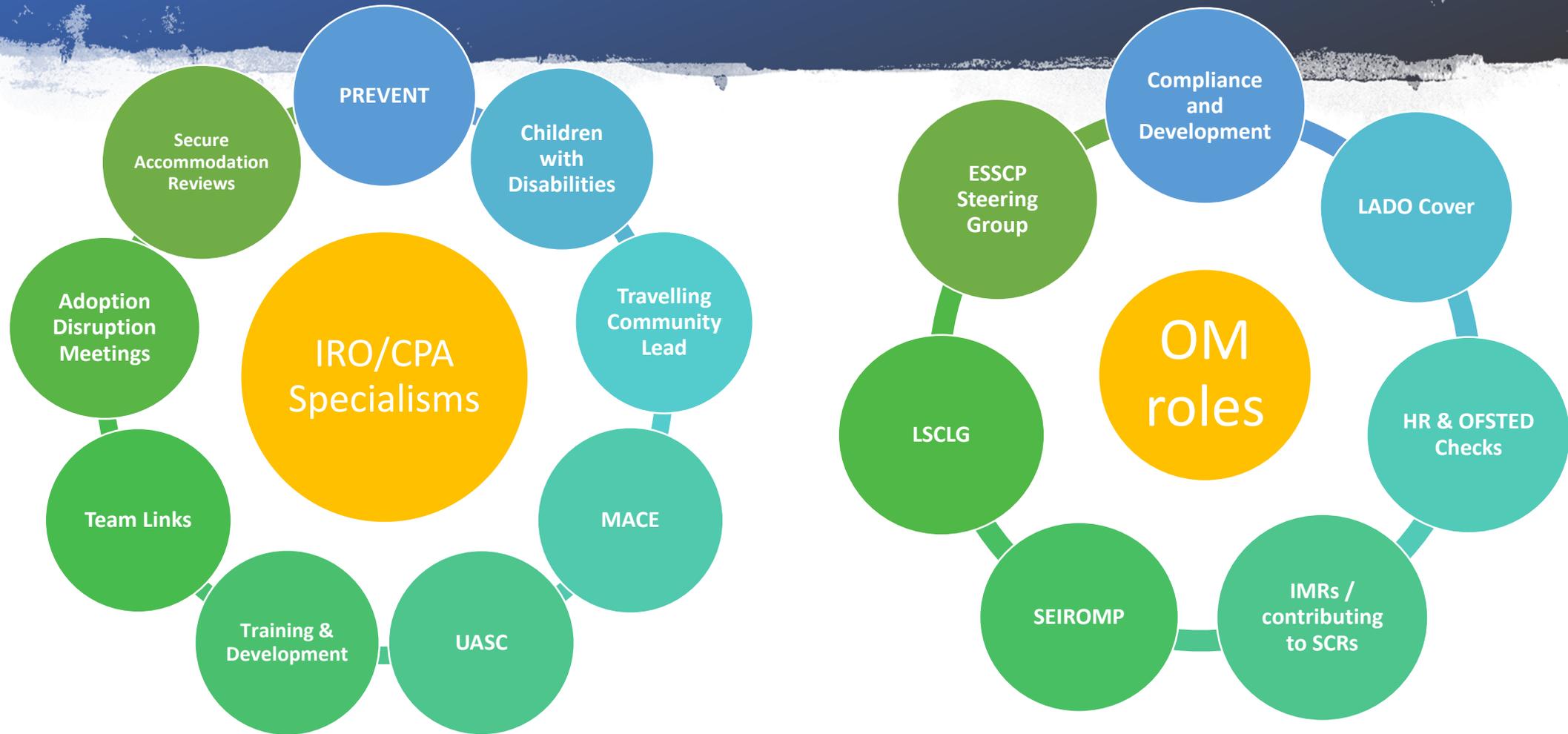
It is a legal requirement for every Looked After Child to have a named IRO. IROs quality assure the Care Planning process for Looked After Children and ensure that their wishes and feelings are understood.

The statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the Local Authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case.
- Participate in any review of the child's case.
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority.
- Perform any other function as prescribed in the regulations.

The Independent Reviewing Service contributes to East Sussex's Core Offer for Children's Social Care: Provide care and support for children and young people where there is evidence that they have suffered significant harm or are at immediate risk of significant harm and provide an alternative home for children who are unable to live with their parents or in their extended family.

Additional Unit Responsibilities



Quality Assurance Monitoring and Audits

Strategy Discussion
to ICPC

ICPC not leading to
CP Plan

Repeat Plans within 2
years

Health Plans Audit

Ethnicity and
Diversity Data on
Child's Record

SAB Multi-Agency
Audit: Young People
at Risk of Exploitation

CLA Participation

QA of IRO Outcomes

CLA Reviews out of
timescales

Issues Resolution
themes and
compliance

CLA Placement
Stability

Short Breaks

Continuing Professional Development

IROs have engaged with CPD across the year, cascading learning in Unit Meetings including:

Quality Justice Circle

Community Care Conference

Effective Challenge and Participation Development Day

Recurrent Removals: Contemporary issues in research and practice

OM Action Learning and Development

PM Action learning and Development

NAIRO – cascade

The MIRRA (Memory – Identity – Rights in records – Access) study

Prevent/Channel

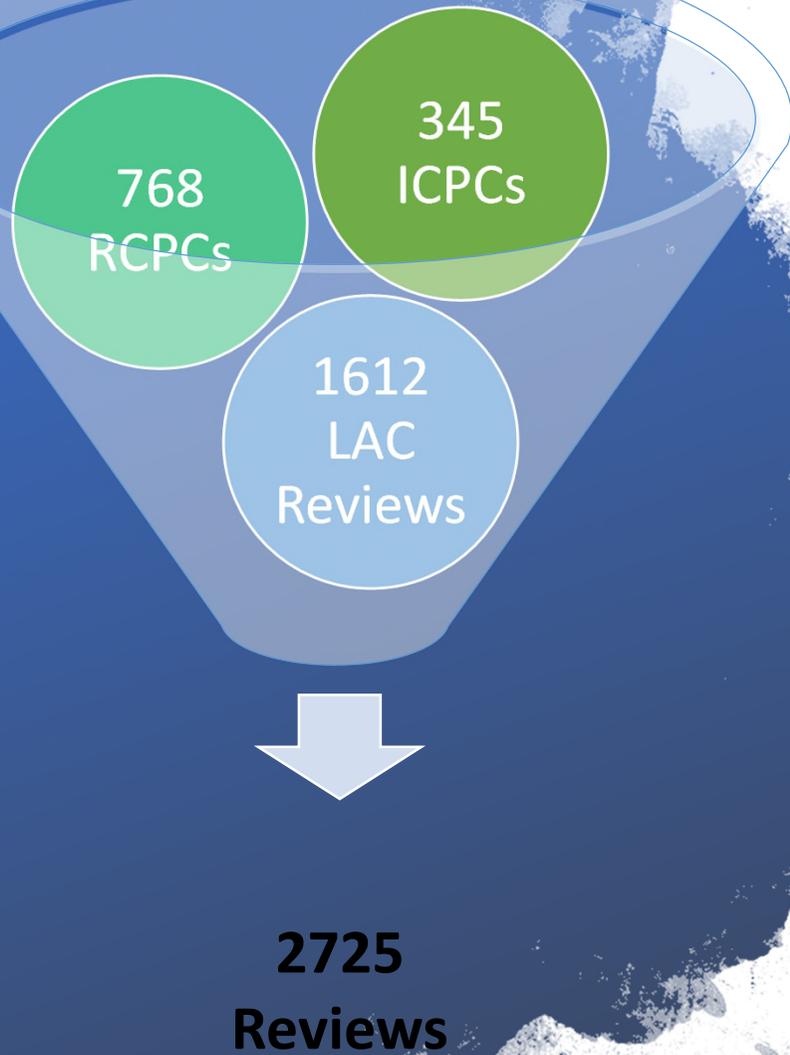
Black History Month Equality Issues for our LAC

Reducing Parental Conflict

Managing Mental Health

Caseloads

- The majority of LMG2's in the Safeguarding Unit hold a dual role; reviewing both Child Protection and Looked After Child plans. CPA caseloads are not legislated; however the government has set statutory guidance for IROs: a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice. (The IRO Handbook DfE). At the end of March 2020 CPA/IRO combined caseloads averaged 97 children.
- In common with other Authorities ESCC operates a weighting system recognising that whilst IROs have additional responsibilities for LAC; Child Protection caseloads can be more dynamic, meetings can involve multiple children and may involve a higher level of risk. Covering both roles necessitates an advanced depth and breadth of professional knowledge.
- Highly successful recruitment across Quarter 4 will reduce reliance of Agency/Bank staff and allow for reduced caseloads going into 2020/2021



Conferences and LAC Reviews* are usually held as a single meeting involving all relevant family and professionals. However meetings may be held in two or more parts to ensure that they are effective and safe.

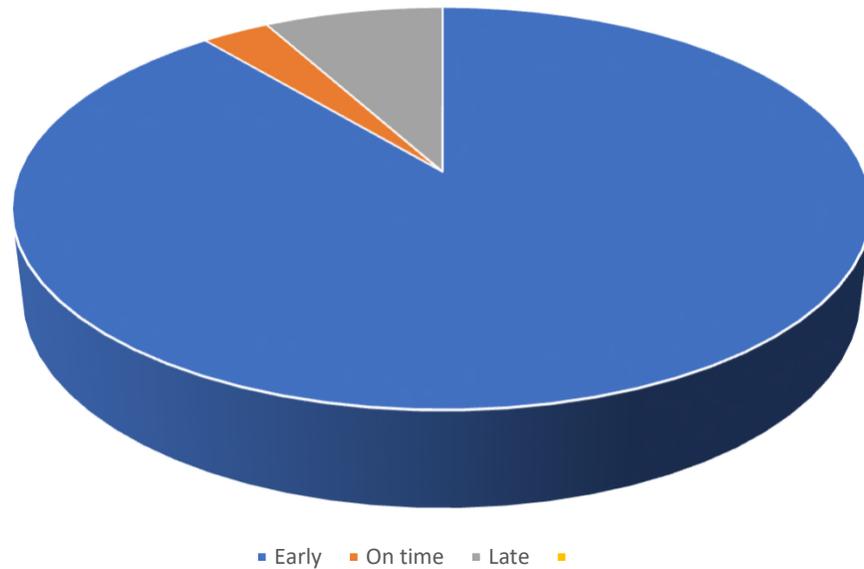
Chairs are also responsible for preparation work with parents and carers, pre-meets with social workers and meeting with children who are Looked After, as well as completing QA and Outcome documents.

Over the year the Unit chaired:

- 1113 Conferences concerning 2244 children
- 1612 individual LAC Reviews
- Equating to 215 meetings/303 Plans per chair

*LAC Reviews in ESCC are now 'My Voice Matters' Meetings; this change came into effect in March 2020 so the term was not used during the 2019/20 reporting cycle. Please see details of My Voice Matters Development later in this report.

Timeliness – LAC Reviews



92% of all LAC Reviews were held early or on time in 2019/20.

The majority of late reviews were delayed in the child's best interests or because an essential party was unable to attend.

Capacity issues and unexpected long term absence during Quarters 3 and 4 resulted in a decision to prioritise Safeguarding. Some LAC Reviews were pushed back to make way for ICPCs and others postponed to preserve the existing IRO relationship. These Reviews were only postponed where the child was settled and in discussion with their social worker.

Meetings continue to be scheduled well in advance which contributes to a high level of compliance.



Participation

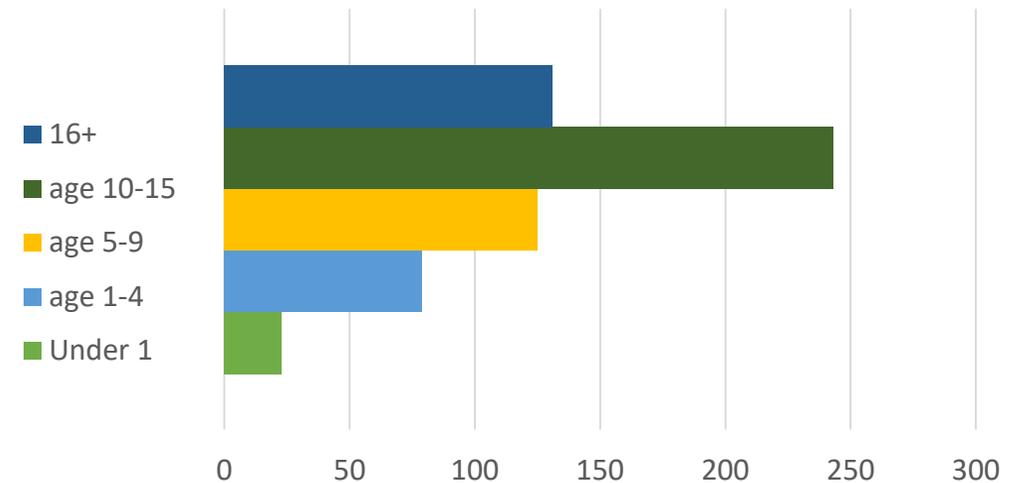
Children and Young People make their voices heard in lots of different ways.

In 2019/20 91% of Young People and Children aged 4+ participated in some way in their Review. New processes in 2020 will ensure that this involvement is increasingly meaningful and held at the centre of the Review.

Knowing our LAC - Demographics

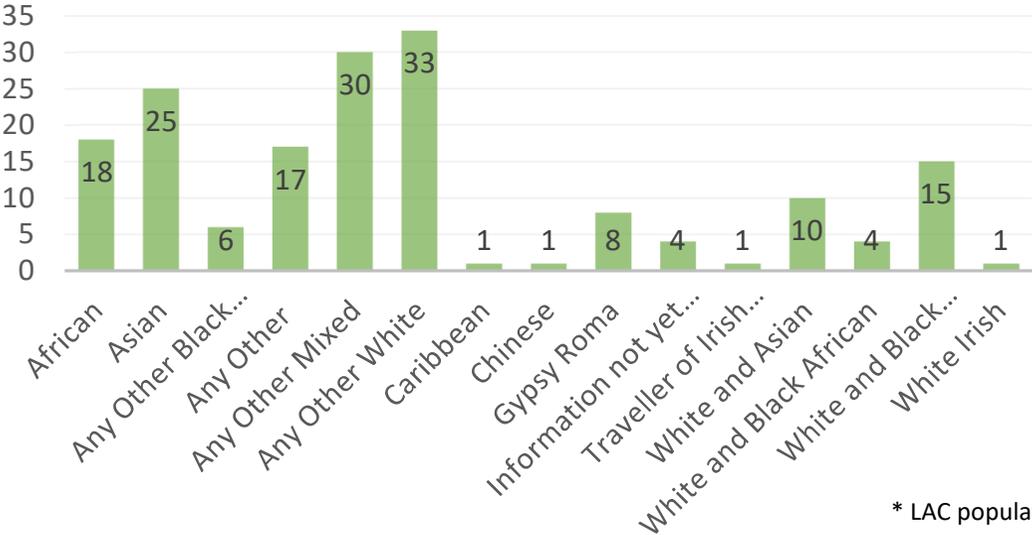
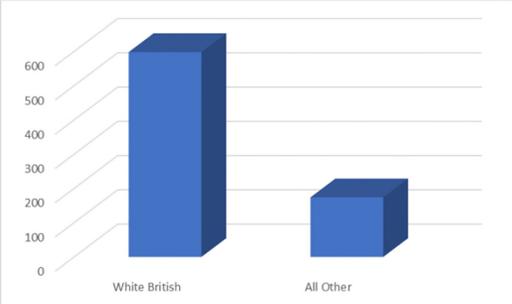
- At the end of March 2020 ESCC was looking after 601 children and young people, equivalent to 56.5 per 10000.
- This was a slight decrease on the previous year and sits below IDACI.
- The number of LAC was relatively stable throughout the year.

Age of LAC on last day of Quarter 4
2019/20



23% of LAC in ESCC identify as being minority ethnic or mixed heritage.

38% of ESCC IROs identify as being minority ethnic or mixed heritage.



* LAC population across 2019/20

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

- 48 UASC were Looked After by ESCC across 2019/20; the majority of these children came from Vietnam and Iran followed by Sudan, Iraq, Albania and Afghanistan with one child from each of Ethiopia, Mali, Kuwait and Kurdistan.
- 25% of UASC were aged less than 16 years old



Where do Children and Young People live whilst in our Care?

The majority of LAC in ESCC are in foster care.

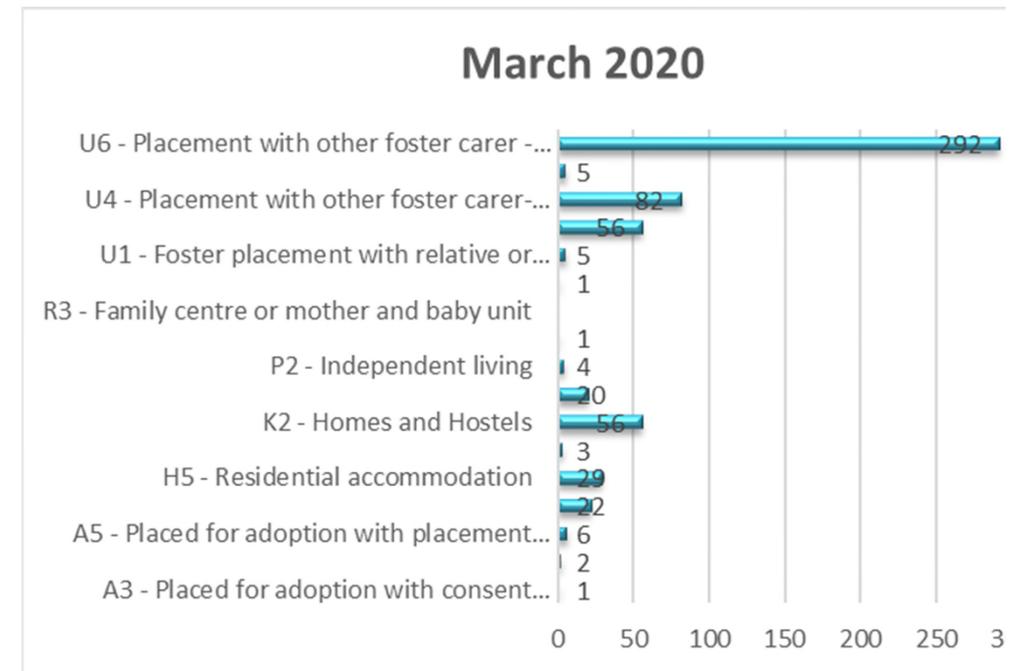
42% of LAC in ESCC had been accommodated for 2.5+ years and of those 61% had been in the same placement for at least 2 years. This is slightly lower than the National average but higher than statistical South East neighbours.*

12% of LAC had 3 or more placements across the year.*

IROs particularly scrutinise those plans where children have had a series of moves or where their placement appears insecure.

ESCC continues to promote children having long term relationships with the same IRO and ensuring that brothers and sisters have the same IRO wherever possible.

*As at last day of Quarter 4 2019/20



Legal status and Care Plans

- Care Proceedings for East Sussex sit slightly below IDACI and statistical neighbours.
- IROs generally report constructive discussions with social work teams and with some Children's Guardians during Care Proceedings.
- The IRO must be consulted in respect of the final Care Plan and their views provided to the Court. There is a significant tension in the time available within court schedules for IROs to fully consider all documents in order to provide a balanced, informed analysis. This is a potential risk for the service; with 2019/20 seeing an increased scrutiny of the IRO's position both Nationally and Locally.
- IROs have been reminded of the need to address children's legal status at all stages of their journey through care to ensure that it remains the most appropriate plan.

Issues Resolution

- Quality Monitoring of Child Protection Plans and evidence of independent challenge is required under Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (DfE) and Local Safeguarding Protocols.
- A 'local dispute resolution process' is a statutory requirement of the Independent Reviewing Service.
- OFSTED and Government require evidence of effective challenge by CPAs and IROs to be visible on children's files. This was an area for improvement in our most recent inspection.
- The Safeguarding Unit operates a consistent approach to challenge across Child Protection and the Independent Reviewing Service.
- This approach was reviewed in 2019/20; a new electronic form now sits on the child's file which requires compliance with timescales and ensures visible professional debate.

Themes from Issues Resolution 2019/20

The majority of Issues Resolutions across both CP and CLA related to delay or non-compliance with statutory documentation

- Impacts on fair, effective meetings
- Blocks electronic workflow
- Results in an incomplete record

Visits or other statutory tasks not visible on child's file

- Practice Requires Improvement
- Recording / Administration Requires Improvement

Concerns regarding the Child Plan / Care Plan

- Dispute about the direction / quality of the plan
- Drift / Delay
- Impact of resources on Plan

Progress on Priorities for 2019/20

Participation:

- The child's views are now a mandatory part of the electronic record
- Children and Young People are now prioritised in the organisation of their review
- Development of Parent/Carer Information and digital feedback is an ongoing piece of work with Business Support

Improving the quality and depth of Care Plans:

- My Voice Matters meetings focus on the child's experience and use language that is appropriate for the child
- The new IRO Outcome document focuses on the impact of the Care Plan and the Placement
- The revised process will enable better use of translation services to ensure that children are able to access their Plan
- The Issues Resolution Process has been revised with improved tracking and a focus on consistency between IROs

Children with Disabilities – status and Care Plans:

- Social Workers from the Children with Disabilities team played an integral part in the development My Voice Matters
- The new documentation allows for better accessibility options e.g. converting letters into the child's preferred communication style
- CLA CWD were included in the Health Audit with the team performing consistently well
- An Audit of Short Breaks children / children potentially eligible for Short Breaks helped to clarify process

Improved Data Monitoring:

- LCS continues to present challenges in terms of Review data however these are now better understood and a number of errors have been corrected.
- CLA documents have been streamlined to focus on what is important for individual children and to enhance QA function

Improved compliance with documentation / data to ensure effective meetings

- The Independent Reviewing Service now proactively tracks and prompts social workers to ensure that monitoring undertaken by the IRO is focussed on the quality of the Care Plan and the child's experience rather than paperwork.
- Midway Reviews will allow formal monitoring and QA

Children and Young People asked us to rename the LAC Reviewing process. They suggested 'My Voice Matters'. They asked us to keep meetings small, to use careful, child friendly language and to focus on what was most important to them. So from 2020 we've done just that.



We have reduced paperwork to free up time for Social Workers to spend with the child, to build relationships and understand their world.

A My Voice Matters page within the Review document has replaced consultation forms; ensuring the child's voice is central to their meeting and cannot get lost.

IRO outcomes will focus on the child's experience, celebrating their achievements and identifying any changes needed.

Children will receive a letter from the IRO following their My Voice Matters Meeting. This letter will be shared with the team around the child and will form the record of the meeting.

My Life

My Plan

My Voice Matters

My Voice Matters:



Informed by Key Learning from The Care Experienced Conference April 2019 and 'Language that Cares' TACT March 2019 and the CICC!

Improves compliance with statutory requirements and with the philosophy of being 'Corporate Parents'

Removes unnecessary duplication, unhelpful language, confusion and bottlenecks in the electronic record

Increases the 'footprint' of the IRO on the child's file

Ensure that the Care Plan is clear and up to date

Return the child to the centre of the process

My Life

My Plan

My Voice Matters

IRO Service Priorities for 2020/21

Elevate
the
Child's
Voice

Embed
My
Voice
Matters

Digital
Feedback
and
Consultation
for Parents
/Carers

Increase
use of
Midway
Reviews

Develop
IRO Lead
Areas

Improve
quality and
compliance
through
consistent
monitoring



Glossary

CP – Child Protection

CPA – Child Protection Advisor

ESSCP – East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership

HR – Human Resources

IMR – Independent Management Review

IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer

LAC/CLA – Looked After Child

LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer

LSCLG – Local Safeguarding Liaison Group

MACE – Multi Agency Child Exploitation

OM – Operations Manager

SCR – Serious Case Review

SEIROMP/NAIROMP – South East / National IRO Managers' Partnership

UASC – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child