

Committee	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub Committee Community & Children's Services Committee	03/10/2019 07/11/2019
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2018 to 2019	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Ria Lane, Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Chair	

Summary

This report gives Members an overview of the independent reviewing service in the City of London covered in the IRO annual report for 2018 to 2019.

The report summaries the statutory requirements of the IRO service and how the City of London has performed in this regard. There is an overview of the IRO role and their performance in ensuring children's key needs is met. Strengths of last years practice and areas of development for 2019/20 are identified.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO) service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance that 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 in care and for challenging drift and delay.

Specifically, the statutory duties of the IRO are to:

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
 - Participate in any review of the child's case; and
 - Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the authority.
2. The IRO's primary task 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. As corporate parents, each local authority should act for the children they look after how a responsible and conscientious parent would act.

Current Position

3. A permanent IRO has been in post since September 2017.

The achievements identified within the annual report for 2018 to 2019 are;

- Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
- Initiating purchase of prayer mats so all Muslim children can be given a prayer mat on their arrival into care
- Development of new IRO introduction form in different languages
- Implementation of new consultation tool
- All children seen alone by the IRO outside of review meetings
- Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods
- Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the ICS workflow
- The promotion of the Children's Right services
- The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse

In addition to direct work with children and the local authority, the IRO takes part in the London IRO Practitioner Network and serves as a practitioner representative to the London IRO Managers' Group. Engagement in these pan-London groups facilitates the IRO's access to information and the experience of colleagues from larger authorities. It also ensures that the experience and needs of the City's children in care are represented in forums that have the potential to influence the direction of practice and statutory guidance about the services and support they receive.

The IRO service has been alert to safeguarding issues for children in care and will continue to monitor care plans closely to include actions that address the known risks of all forms of exploitation and aims to build safety and stability according to the needs of each child.

4. The IRO identifies following areas of improvement and an action plan has been put in place:

Implement Life story books	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organise purchase of Life story books• Meet with social work team to discuss how to use them with children Ensure books are given to children in their first month of being in care.
Increase in IRO visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Aim for each child to be visited on a separate visit prior to their review Request to Mosaic team for IRO visit to be a document instead of current case note form-to ensure visit rate can be reported on.

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5. Conclusion

The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2018/2019. The monitoring and challenge functions of the role have been strengthened and the IRO's knowledge of and relationship with the children in care is a positive feature of the service. The planned focus for 2018/19 was implementing the new format of consultation. This has been achieved with a new service in place.

A key priority for 2019/2020 is to embed this change in the service with the support of increased IRO visits, along with a focus on developing life story work with children and young people.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2018-19

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