

Committee: Safeguarding Sub Committee	Dated: 06/02/2018
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2016 to 2017	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
Report author: Pat Dixon, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager	

Summary

This report gives Members an overview of the Independent Review Service in the City of London covered in the IRO annual report for 2016 to 2017. During this time period there has been a change of IRO, which had an impact on the development of the service while interim arrangements were in place. In July 2016, the Independent Review Service was subject of the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services. During this inspection, looked-after children spoke about their experiences, which they described as being very positive in relation to services and help.

This report summarises 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 that children's key needs are met. Strengths of last year's practice and areas of development for 2017/18 are identified.

Recommendation

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* 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
 - 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 look after the children in their care as a responsible and conscientious parent.

Current Position

3. The Independent Review Service was brought in-house in 2015 and, between April 2015 and February 2016, the City of London employed an agency IRO to support the development of this service. The IRO developed strong relationships with the young people and considerably improved the quality of service, which was evidenced through the judgement of "good" given in the service's Ofsted inspection in 2016. In February 2017 the IRO left and interim arrangements were in place while the post was advertised for permanent recruitment. Young people had the opportunity to say goodbye to their IRO and were introduced to the new IRO, who covered the service part-time.
4. In August 2017 a permanent IRO was appointed. There was no change in IRO for the young people as the interim IRO applied for the permanent post and was successful. However, while the interim IRO was in place, there was limited capacity to develop the service.

The achievements identified within the annual report for 2016 to 2017 are:

- all statutory reviews are held within timescales
- increased participation of children in their review meetings
- 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 Integrated Children's System workflow
- the development of the permanency tracking and approval process
- the development and promotion of the Children's Rights service
- the development of a local dispute resolution process.

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. The service aims to build safety and stability according to the needs of each child.

5. The IRO service acknowledges the need for improvement in the following areas:

- distribution of review meeting records within timescales
- developing more innovative ways of consulting with children and young people
- exploring different ways of engaging children and young people in their reviews
- developing performance indicators that will evidence the quality of practice and engagement of children and young people
- ensuring that all review participants are able to contribute to discussions in meetings.

Conclusion

6. The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2016/17. 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. This was recognised in July 2016 when the Independent Review Service was subject to Ofsted's Single Inspection Framework for children's services. The judgement of the impact of the IRO role was "good".

7. A key priority for 2017/18 will be to look at more innovative ways of engaging young people in the consultation and the direct impact of their views in influencing change within children's services. The children who received the *Have Your Say* consultation booklet ahead of their reviews and chose not to use it shared that they did not find the document useful and preferred to express their views verbally during their review meetings.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2016 to 2017

Pat Dixon
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager

T: 020 7332 1215

E: pat.dixon@cityoflondon.gov.uk