

Committee:	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub Committee	08/02/2019
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report 2017/18	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 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2017/18.

The 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 2018/19 are identified.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The 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 managing the review process to taking 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 local authority's performance and 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 local authority.
2. The IRO’s primary task is to ensure that the child’s care plan 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 in the same way that a responsible and conscientious parent would act.

Current Position

3. A permanent IRO has been in post since September 2017.
4. The achievements identified within the annual report for 2017/18 are:
- 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 (ICS) workflow
 - Commissioning a service to improve consultation of children and young people in care
 - Improved timely distribution of looked-after children (LAC) review minutes
 - The development of a local dispute resolution process which has been actively used since implementation.
5. 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.
6. The IRO service has been alert to safeguarding issues for children in care. The service 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.
7. The IRO has an action plan to improve the following areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More robust challenge of timescales not being met. 	<p>IRO to hold quarterly meetings with social work team managers and LAC</p>
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	providers to share data and areas for improvement.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that all children and young people know how to contact the IRO. 	Contact details of IRO given to all children at first LAC review. IRO business cards to be ordered in the key languages of the LAC cohort.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve how the life story work is recorded and compiled on each child's record. 	IRO to undertake an overview of the current system in January 2019, with recommendations to be implemented by March 2019.

Conclusion

8. The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2017/18. 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.
9. The planned focus for 2017/18 was looking at more innovative ways of engaging young people in the consultation so that their views could have a direct impact on influencing change within children's services. This has been achieved with the commissioning of a new service.
10. A key priority for 2018/19 is to embed the change in the service, including results from the overview of current life story work to improve how this is recorded and given to young people.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2017–18

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