

Committee(s)	Dated:
Safeguarding Sub Committee	
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2019-2020	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 2019/20

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 children's key needs are met. Strengths of last years practice and areas of development for 2020/21 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 2019 to 2020 are;

- Ofsted rating of outstanding for LAC and Care leavers service
 - Consistent 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
 - Design and implementation of independent skills checklist
 - Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the ICS workflow
 - The promotion of the Children's Right services, seeing a significant increase in advocacy and independent visiting service
 - The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse
 - 2nd IRO in post, focusing on needs of care leavers
4. The IRO identifies following areas of improvement and an action plan has been put in place:
- Increase IRO visits to ensure Looked After children have opportunity to discuss their care plan before reviews
 - Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for IRO service to be prepared digitally and ensure service delivery can be maintained at a high standard remotely/virtually.

5. Conclusion

The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2019/2020. This was evident in the outstanding rating given by Ofsted in the March 2020 inspection. There has been a focus on ensuring children coming into care have increased understanding of the role of the IRO and the meaning of their care plan.

The IRO service notes that this has been a challenging year in some respects, due to the significant increase in numbers of looked after children and their significant mental health needs. The IRO service is committed to supporting placement stability and ensuring that this is an area of improvement. Throughout this reporting year, the social work team have shown commitment and energy in supporting the children and the focus is on continually reviewing the service to ensure best outcomes for the children and young people.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2019-20

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