

Committee: Safeguarding Sub Committee	Dated: 11/10/2021
Subject: IRO annual report 2020/21	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Contribute to a flourishing society
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

This report gives Members an overview of the independent reviewing service in the City of London covered in the IRO annual report for April 1st 2020 to March 31st 2021.

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 2021/22 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 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 2020 to 2021 are;

- Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
- Increase in IRO visits
- Increase in advocacy and independent visitor allocation
- Increase in completion of statutory care plans
- Increase in extra tuition services for children in care
- Decrease in placement disruptions

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:

Objective	Actions
Complete Review of care/pathway plan document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that the care plan document reflects needs of UASC cohort • Support children’s team to increase the completion rate of initial care plans
Continue to increase IRO visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim for each child to be visited on a separate visit prior to their review • Goal is to increase current IRO visit rate to 40 per reporting year
Continue to develop the LAC review process to make it inclusive for children and ensure anti-racism policies are embedded within the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review systemic model and how this can be developed in the LAC review process • Ensure all looked after children are aware of their rights and service providers operate a consistent anti-racist policy.

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5. Conclusion

The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2020/2021 amid a challenging background of the covid-19 pandemic. 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 2020/21 was increasing IRO visits and a decrease in placement disruptions. This has been achieved.

A key priority for 2021/2022 is to embed this change in the service and ensure the IRO service is able to respond to the challenges of delivering a service online when required.

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