

<b>Committee:</b> Safeguarding Sub-Committee	<b>Dated:</b> 10/10/2022
<b>Subject:</b> Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2021–2022	<b>COVER REPORT: PUBLIC</b> <b>APPENDIX: NON-PUBLIC</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	1, 2, 3, 4
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children’s Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Ria Lane, Independent Reviewing Officer, Safeguarding team	

### 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 for 2021–2022.

The report summarizes 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 2022–2023 are identified.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

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 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 milestone 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 act as a responsible and conscientious parent for the children they look after.

### **Current Position**

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

The achievements identified within the annual report for 2021–2022 are:

- Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
  - Increase in IRO visits
  - Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods. This helps to prevent actions stalling, meaning the looked-after children cohort continue to have their needs met and feel supported
  - Embedding the use of the independent skills checklist. This has been a key area of focus for the IRO service and is prioritised when reviewing their pathway plan. This helps to identify any gaps in young people's skills and helps them to be more prepared when they start to live independently
  - Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the online record system workflow
  - The promotion of the Children's Right services, resulting in a significant rise and consistent use of advocacy and independent visiting service. This helps to increase the level of support for our looked-after children and gives them access to social opportunities
  - The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse
  - Second IRO in post, focusing on needs of care leavers.
4. 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.

5. The IRO service has been alert to safeguarding issues for children in care and aims to build safety and stability according to the needs of each child. The service will continue to monitor care plans closely to include actions that address the known risks of all forms of exploitation.
  
6. The IRO identifies the following areas of improvement and an action plan has been put in place to address them.

Objective	Actions
Implement the new care/pathway plan document and process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the care/pathway plan process is implemented across the service</li> <li>• Support children’s team to increase the completion rate of initial care plans</li> </ul>
Continue to develop the Looked-after Children (LAC) review process to make it inclusive for children and ensure that anti-racism policies are embedded within the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the systemic model and assess how this can be developed in the LAC review process</li> <li>• Ensure that all looked-after children are aware of their rights, and that service providers operate a consistent anti-racist policy.</li> </ul>
Continue to monitor and flag health assessment timescales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hold monthly meetings with Health managers to ensure that LAC health assessments are being completed within timescales.</li> </ul>
Consideration for new ways to communicate with children in LAC reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of documents in teams</li> <li>• Sharing photos in LAC reviews of children’s achievements</li> <li>• Use of portable projector in face-to-face meetings to aid discussions.</li> </ul>

### Corporate & Strategic Implications

7. There are no strategic implications directly related to this report.
  - Financial implications – N/A
  - Resource implications – N/A
  - Legal implications – N/A
  - Risk implications – N/A
  - Equalities implications – N/A
  - Climate implications – N/A
  - Security implications – N/A

## 8. Conclusion

The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2021–2022. 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 2021–2022 was implementing the new format of the care and pathway plans. The new format has been achieved and the key priority for 2022–2023 is to embed this change in the service.

## Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2021–2022

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