

Committee(s): Safeguarding Sub-Committee	Dated: 23/11/2023
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2022–2023	Public Appendix: Non-public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1,2,3,4
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£ N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Discussion
Report author: Ria Lane, Independent Reviewing Officer, Safeguarding team	

City’s Corporate Plan

Contribute to a flourishing society

1. *People are safe and feel safe.*
2. *People enjoy good health and wellbeing.*
3. *People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential.*
4. *Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need.*

Support a thriving economy

5. *Businesses are trusted and socially and environmentally responsible.*
6. *We have the world’s best legal and regulatory framework and access to global markets.*
7. *We are a global hub for innovation in finance and professional services, commerce and culture.*
8. *We have access to the skills and talent we need.*

Shape outstanding environments

9. *We are digitally and physically well-connected and responsive.*
10. *We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.*
11. *We have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment.*
12. *Our spaces are secure, resilient and well-maintained*

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 2022–2023. It 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 2023–2024 are identified.

Recommendation(s)

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 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 2022–2023 are:

- Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
 - Consistent IRO visits and communication with children
 - Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods to help prevent actions stalling so that 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
 - Implementation of new pathway and care plan process, leading to an increase in plans being completed in the required timescale.
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 facilitate 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 alerted 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.

Options

6. IRO service to review recommendations from report and plan work required for continued service improvement. No cost commitments required.

Proposals

7. The IRO identifies the following areas of improvement, and an action plan has been put in place to address them.

Objective	Actions
Modify the care plan template to ensure that it is reflective of all looked-after children and their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The care plan template now needs to be amended to reflect the needs of children in care more fully
Continue to develop the looked-after child 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"> Review systemic model and how this can be developed in the looked-after child review process Ensure that all looked-after children are aware of their rights and that service providers operate a consistent anti-racist policy
Continue to monitor and flag health assessment timescales, so that children's health needs are assessed in a timely way and intervention is taken to improve health outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly meetings to be held with health managers to ensure that looked-after children's health assessments are being completed according to set timescales
Consideration for new ways to communicate and share information with children as part of their review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of documents in teams Sharing photos of children's achievements in looked-after child reviews Consider how to use the Children in Care Council (CiCC) webpage that is being developed to share information

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of a portable projector in face-to-face meetings to aid discussions
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Key Data

8. 11 children looked after on 1st April 2022 which is a 45% decrease from 1st April 2021 (which had a total of 20 children)

9 children looked after on 31st March 2023 which is an 18% decrease from previous reporting year (previous figure was 11).

21 Looked After children throughout the reporting year which represents a decrease of 30% (previous year there were 30 children looked after throughout the reporting year).

Corporate & Strategic

9. 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

Conclusion

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

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022–2023

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