

Committee: Safeguarding Sub-Committee	Dated: 2 nd July 2024
Subject: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Annual Report for 2023–2024	Public Non-Public Appendix 1
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 Information
Report author: 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 2023–2024 (see non public Appendix 1). 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 2024–2025 are identified.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

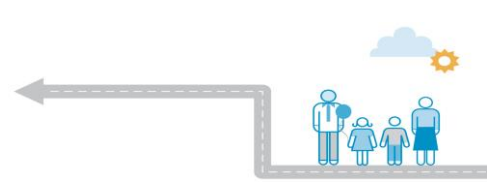
- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The IRO service follows the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, which is 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 children's ascertained wishes and feelings concerning their 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 in the Annual Report 2023–2024 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 – helping to prevent actions stalling, meaning that children in care continue to have their needs met and feel supported
 - Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files in the online record system workflow
 - Consolidation of the Pathway and Care Plan process, leading to an increase in the number of plans being completed within timescale
 - Launch of The Pledge and Celebration Event.
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 practice and statutory guidance on 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





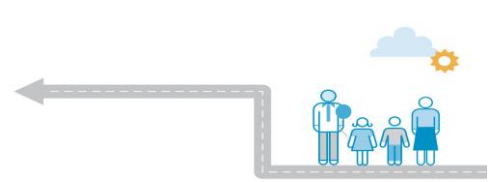
6. The IRO service should review recommendations from reporting and planning work required for continued service improvement. There are no cost commitment required.

Proposals

7. The IRO identifies the following areas for improvement. An action plan has been put in place to address them.

Objective	Actions
Modify the care plan template to ensure that it reflects all children and their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The care plan template now needs to be amended to more fully reflect the needs of children in care
Continue to develop the 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 review process • Ensure that all children in care are aware of their rights • Ensure 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 interventions are introduced to improve health outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly meetings to be held with Health managers to ensure that children's health assessments are completed within timescales
Consideration for new ways to communicate and share information with children as part of their review process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the use of the Caring Life app once it is in place • Work with the Children in Care Council to get feedback about the review process • Consider feedback methods outside of the Annual Survey
Annual Survey and Annual IRO report to be aligned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correlate the reporting period so the Annual Survey of children reflects the same time period and can be reported on in the IRO Annual Report





Key Data

8. There were nine children in care on 1 April 2023, which is a 18% decrease from 1 April 2022 (11 children). After the growth of children in care numbers in 2017–2020, a large majority are now 18 years old and are being supported as care leavers.
9. The National Transfer scheme was effective last year. This means that most new unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who are initially accommodated by the City of London are now moved to a local authority outside of London within a few weeks of being accommodated.
10. There were seven children looked after on 31 March 2024, which is a 22% decrease from 31 March 2023 (nine children).
11. A total of 16 children became looked after in 2023–2024.
12. In total, throughout the reporting year, there were 25 children in care. This is a 19% increase from 2022–2023 (21 children).
13. One child in care during this reporting period presented with, or was assessed as having, a disability.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

14. 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

15. The IRO service has made significant contributions to quality assuring and improving services for children in care throughout 2023–2024. Initial and subsequent reviews, midway monitoring and care arrangement stability continues to be embedded and maintained at a high level.

Appendices

- Non-Public Appendix 1 – City of London Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2023–2024

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