


## REPORT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY BOARD

05 February 2018

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016-2017</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio:</b>	<b>Councillor Simon Hackett - Cabinet Member for Children's Services</b>
<b>Director:</b>	<b>Executive Director of Children's Services – Jim Leivers Director – Children and Families – Vince Clark</b>
<b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>	
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b>	Carol Singleton, Principal Social worker & Group Head Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Carol_singleton@sandwell.gov.uk

### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board:**

1. Consider the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016-2017.
2. Consider areas of positive performance referred to within the Report, particularly evidence that the IRO Unit has directly contributed to improving outcomes for children and young people in care.
3. Consider the IRO Unit's commitment to better deliver its statutory responsibilities to children and young people in care and their parents or carers, in particular increased consultation, participation and challenge
4. Make any comments and recommendations as necessary.

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To present the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016-2017 in line with the statutory requirement for the IRO Manager to produce a report for the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Board, as detailed in the IRO Handbook (2010).
- 1.2 The report provides an overview on the quality and provision of the Service provided to Sandwell children by the Council's Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Chairs Service. It covers the work of the unit for the period from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 and outlines recent developments and concludes with detailing the proposed future developments of the Unit.
- 1.3 Following presentation to the Sandwell MBC Corporate Parenting Board and the Sandwell Safeguarding Childrens Board, this report, and a Children and Young People's version, Once will be a publicly accessible document.

## **2 IMPLICATIONS FOR SANDWELL'S VISION**

- 2.1
  1. Sandwell is a community where our families have high aspirations and where we pride ourselves on equality of opportunity and on our adaptability and resilience.
  2. Sandwell is a place where we live healthy lives and live them for longer and where those of us who are vulnerable feel respected and cared for.
  4. Our children benefit from the best start in life and a high quality education throughout their school careers with outstanding support from their teachers and families.
  5. Our communities are built on mutual respect and taking care of each other, supported by all the agencies that ensure we feel safe and protected in our homes and local neighbourhoods.
  10. Sandwell now has a national reputation for getting things done, where all local partners are focused on what really matters in people's lives and communities.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

### **3.1 Key points and highlights**

The IRO Unit has undergone significant change and progress over the last 12 months. The Unit is now starting to deliver quality independent

reviews of the care and care planning for looked after children. Looking forwards the ongoing changes and improvements to the IRO Unit offer the opportunity to meaningfully improve the experiences and outcomes for looked after children within Sandwell. With the achievements made during 2017-18, the IRO Unit can look forward with confidence to the next twelve months.

- Section 1 introduces the annual report and its purpose
- Section 2 details the reporting period of the annual report (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017)
- Section 3 details the legal, statutory and national context of the IRO role
- Section 4 informs the reader about Sandwell's IRO Service
- Section 5 focuses on IRO caseloads and unit performance
- Section 8 focuses on the profile of looked after children in Sandwell
- Section 9 provides details about the impact on the outcomes for children and young people as a result of the work of the IRO Unit.
- Section 10 provides an update on the Quality Assurance & Safeguarding priorities for 2015/16
- Section 11 discusses the service improvement plan for 2017/18
- Section 12 details a closing summary
- Section 13 identifies recommendations for the Corporate Parenting Board

## **4 THE CURRENT POSITION**

### **4.1 The Sandwell IRO Service**

Responsibility for the IRO service in Sandwell comes under the Service Director for Children and Families. The IRO Unit are located at the Metsec building where there is office space and conferencing facilities. Over the course of the next year (2017/18) there is a refurbishment of the building planned, as the service moves into a Trust, with an emphasis on upgrading the conferencing facilities with an emphasis on making it 'family friendly'.

4.2 All IROs have a mix of Child Protection (CP), Looked After Children (LAC) and Foster Carer Reviews (FCR) which allows them to develop their skills and knowledge in more than one area. This gives the service a flexibility, increasing its capacity to respond to any fluctuations in demand with respect to CP conference dates. Progress has also been made this year in relation to the timeliness of Foster Carer Reviews.

4.3 The IRO Unit has a permanent and stable management team in place. During 2016/17 there was recruitment to the management team and permanent managers appointed. The Group Head for Safeguarding

started in the service in May 2016. The second IRO Team Manager post was recruited to and this manager started in June 2016. A new Business Support Manager was appointed and started in June 2016. The IRO Team Managers are members of the West Midlands Regional IRO Group and attend regularly. The Group meet on a bi-monthly basis to share information, report on common and emerging themes and priorities and provide peer support and sector-led improvement opportunities.

## **5 CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

### **5.1 Consultation Prior to Reviews**

Table 7 (Page 8) shows the percentage of children and young people seen and spoken to by the IRO prior to the Review.

### **5.2 Consultation using MoMo (Mind of My Own App)**

In order to increase the participation of children and young people the MoMo (Mind of My Own) App was introduced in October 2016. Table 7a and Table 7b (Page 9) show the number of staff trained to use Momo and the number of statements made by children and young people.

5.3 To ensure that there is a variety of consultation methods, work was undertaken in Q4 of the reporting period to design and introduce consultation documents that can be sent out to family, carers and children. This has been launched in April 2017 and will be another method of consultation with children and young people. In addition, the IRO Unit is keen to know what children and young people think of their IRO and how their reviews are run. Over the next 12 months the IRO Unit will be engaging children and young people in a feedback survey. It is envisaged that feedback will be gathered by the Participation Team each year.

### **5.4 Family Friendly meetings**

It is intended that all CP and LAC meetings are family friendly that enable parents/carers/family members as well as children to participate in their meetings

5.5 Feedback has started to be gained for CP conferences but this is still to be implemented for looked after children's reviews. This will commence in April 2017. IROs are now routinely visiting children and this report evidences the improvement made.

5.6 Consultation with children needs to be more dynamic than just visiting and the IRO Unit has designed a consultation document during Q4 for

children and carers and professionals, which will be launched in April 2017.

- 5.7 This report highlights that there is improvement still to make to children's involvement and participation in their meetings. Most children who need an Advocate and Independent Visitors (IV) now have them, and the service has funded additional IVs to bridge a gap identified in the service.

## 6 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 There are no alternative options.

## 7 STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Increasing numbers of child protection cases and looked after children during the course of this year (2017/18) has implications for the budget – staffing required to manage the high numbers.

## 8. LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Section 3 (page 2-3) reports:

- The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a looked after child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- In March 2010, the *IRO Handbook* was issued, providing Local Authorities with statutory guidance on how the IRO's should discharge their duties. The Handbook (para. 2.14) states that the IRO has several specific responsibilities. These include;
  - promoting the voice of the child;
  - ensuring that plans for looked after children are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs;
  - making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one;
  - offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them; and
  - and monitoring the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands
- the regulations require that the Local Authority appoint an IRO to all children who become looked after and that an IRO must also be a

qualified Social Worker. Further requirements of the IRO are detailed in Section 3.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 The IRO Unit has a commitment to better deliver its statutory responsibilities to children and young people in care and to ensure there is an equal, positive impact on each of the equality strands (protected characteristics).

## **10. DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 There are no data protection issues arising from this report.

## **11. CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.
- 11.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risk associated with this decision/project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.

## **12. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

### **12.1 Service Improvement Plan for 2017/18**

The service improvement plan for 2017/18 identifies 5 key areas for the IRO Unit to work and build on over the next 12 months. These are linked to the overarching Directorate Improvement Plan.

## **13. HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

- 13.1 Health implications and wellbeing are not applicable in this context.

## **14. IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

- 14.1 There is no impact on Council managed property or land.

## **15. CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 That Members note the content of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016/2017.

16. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

17. **APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1 - Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2016 - 2017.

**Jim Leivers**

**Executive Director of Children's Services (Interim)**