

**IT’S ALL ABOUT ME**

or

The Independent Reviewing Officer Manager’s Report

to

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

in

Tower Hamlets Care

**MAY 2022**

**We want you to find this report easy to read so here are some initials or abbreviations that we are going to use and what they mean. Adults call this a Glossary.**

**We’ll always write names out in full for the first few times we use them so you become familiar with them but may use the initials they are usually known by if we have to use them a lot in this report. This way you will know what they mean if you hear your social worker or other professionals using them when they talk to you.**

**IRO = Independent Reviewing Officer**

This is the person who chairs your review meeting that is normally held every 3 – 6 months depending on how long you have been in care or if you have had a lot of things going on where you’ve been living that means another meeting might be helpful. We have a separate leaflet that tells you in more detail what your Independent Reviewing Officer does and is responsible for.

**CPB = Corporate Parenting Board**

This is the name given to a group of people that includes the Director of Children’s Services, various Heads of Service, other senior managers, manager of the IRO team, representatives from the Foster Carers Association, participation workers who work with children and young people in care, and representatives of young people who have been in care are also invited to attend. The Corporate Parenting Board gets reports from different managers in the Council about the work they have been doing (usually every three months) that relates to planning and the experience of children in care. Their role is to make sure that collectively we are listening to you and doing the best job we can in caring for you.

**CLICC = Children Living in Care Council**

CLICC is the abbreviation that children and young people who are or have been in care to Tower Hamlets chose to be known and referred to. At the moment the main group is for young people 16+ who are or were in care, and they ae trying to recruit children and young people for a junior CLICC and teen CLICC. The Corporate Parenting Board likes to hear the views and feedback from these groups at their meetings about the things that concern them and any changes they want to be made.

**Participation Worker**

Samantha Anderson is one of the Participation Workers and at the moment is the main person working to get more children and young people in care to join the junior and teen CLICC groups.

**Personal Advisors**

Personal advisors can be but are not always social workers and are part of the Throughcare Service. They are people who have knowledge and information around benefits and lots of other things it’s helpful for you to have support around when you move from being a young person to an adult.

Hello!

You are probably wondering what this report is all about, who’s writing it, and why you should read it. Good questions.

So, the manager of the Independent Reviewing Officers team has to write a report once a year for the Director, senior managers, councillors, and a combined group of senior managers, councillors and other people called the Corporate Parenting Board, to let them know how well we’ve been working with you during the year and what we can improve on. By we, we don’t just mean the Independent Reviewing Officers, but social workers, managers, and everyone connected with your care. We weren’t sure you would want to read that longer report so we’re writing this one especially for **YOU**. because it’s **all about you right**?

If you are interested in seeing the other report, just tell your Independent Reviewing Officer, person caring for you, or your social worker, and they can share it with you.

By the way, in case you’re not sure, your Independent Reviewing Officer is the person who chairs your meeting, called a review, every few months to check that the plans your social worker is making for you are still right for your needs, as well as anything else important that you might want to talk about. They usually talk to you and see you before your meetings. People often abbreviate their job title and call them IRO’s and I’m going to leave a space here for your Independent Reviewing Officer to write their name or for you to write it in yourself.

**My Independent Reviewing Officer is:**

**and I can contact them on this number or email address:**

**What you feel, think is or isn’t going well, or would like to see done differently**

The manager and team of Independent Reviewing Officers have been talking to and working with the participation workers who are involved in supporting the young people involved in the main and teen Children Living in Care Councils to find out more about what you think, feel, and want. Samantha, the participation worker, is trying to get more children and young people like **YOU** involved in the teen and junior groups so we can hear what you think too as we have mainly heard from older young people.

The main CLICC group is mostly young people who have left care who like to be known as care-experienced young people and are over 18. They told us about the things they would like to be different early in 2021 and this was in a presentation they made known as the **CLICC Wish List**.

Here’s what in the **CLICC Wish List** and what we have done so far about it. There are some things in the wish list that other teams and services have been working on and they have been reporting on those to the Corporate Parenting Board. In this report we’re just concentrating on the areas that the Independent Reviewing Officers team has been working on.

**Wrap-around service and Staff Rapport**

The social work team is working hard on this and from the Independent Reviewing Officer team we are too. We try to make sure that we don’t give you a change of IRO during the time that you are in care so that they can build a good relationship and connection with you. We also give brothers and sisters the same IRO so that when they look at the plans for each person individually, they can also think about how it affects the plans for all of you together. The IRO team has been a stable team for a long time and we find that we sometimes have a longer relationship with you than others, for example if you have had to move from where you have been living and had a change of carer or social worker for any reason. Sometimes brothers and sisters can’t all live together in the same home and so having the same IRO can help. Your IRO can also talk to team and senior managers if they feel there are or has been too many changes in your life that are affecting the plans for you. They can also try to make sure that all the important people in your life talk to each other so that you get the right kind of help or support at the time you need it.

**A smooth transition and referral fatigue**

Making the move from being a young person to being an adult isn’t always easy and we understand that it can be a scary and sometimes lonely time for some of you. This is what adults mean by transition. That is why your review meetings start being called your pathway meetings and your care plan becomes your pathway care plan from the review closest to your 16th birthday. We start to talk and plan in those meetings about the support and help you’re going to need to help you feel prepared for living independently and taking on the responsibilities that comes with being an adult. We know that this can be exciting but also a little frightening, especially if you move into a semi-independent home where you are totally responsible for yourself when you have been used to having an adult supporting or advising you.

The IRO team have been talking to managers over the last year and bringing to their attention their concern that the support and advice you need to make this transition easier doesn’t always happen as smoothly as it could and what needs to be done to make it work better for YOU and young people like you. We call this using the IRO resolution process. Mostly this has been about you being transferred to the right team or allocated a personal advisor early enough for you to form a relationship with so they can better support you through these changes by the time you are 18.

We have also been talking to them about those of you who have travelled to the UK from another country, usually fleeing some kind of conflict, don’t have anyone you know in the UK, and sometimes waiting for age assessments to be carried out. New arrangements have now been made for you by the Head of Service of the Throughcare Service for young people in those situations to be transferred more quickly so that the assessments can start earlier, which should mean a smoother transition for you. The IRO team will continue to work with the Throughcare and other services to try and make this a standard for **all** young people who need a personal advisor. You can talk to your IRO if this is affecting you, you’re unhappy about the support you’re receiving, or you’re uncertain about anything connected to this.

**Creating CLICC ambassadors**

Right now, there is a small group of about five young people in the teen CLICC and we want to try and get more of you involved. We also want to get some of you involved in the junior CLICC too. To try and do that we are putting on an event on 26th July, at the start of the school holidays, where you can take part in fun activities as well as joining in some creative ones where you can tell us how you feel about different things to do with being in care. We hope you come and have a great time. There will also be a chance to tell some of the senior managers who come at the end of the day about some of the things you have been doing or feel strongly about. This is your chance to tell them how you feel about your experience of being in care in Tower Hamlets! The IRO team have a close link with the participation workers involved with the three CLICCs and will be supporting them in their ambition to create CLICC ambassadors. Tell your IRO, person caring for you, or social worker if you’re interested in joining the junior or teen CLICC.

**Training and development for social workers**

One of the ways that the IRO team are contributing towards the training and development of social workers is the work we are doing around trying to improve the quality of the care plans they write for your meetings. These are the care plans we talk to you about before and in your review meeting.

IRO’s have been talking to social workers and their managers to make sure that **YOUR** care plan is **QUALITY,** that you have had a chance to say what you want in it, what you think about it, it uses words that you can understand, you understand what the plan means, and receive a copy before your review meeting. IRO’s think this is important because it is about **YOU** and **YOUR LIFE** and we want to know that when we talk to you, you understand what is in your plan and how it affects your life, so that you can tell us about anything you’re unhappy about or changes you want made.

We have just finished the first stage of examining some care plans, this is called a dip sample audit. We are now planning the second stage which will include working with social workers and managers to agree what can be done to make care plans better and more meaningful documents that you can relate to, and how we can make sure that you are involved in producing them. You can always talk to your IRO if you haven’t seen or received your Care Plan before your meeting or about anything that you’re unhappy about or want to change/add to your plan**.**

**Oyster cards**

Oyster cards are often discussed in review meetings and IRO’s have been conscious that some young people who don’t have any identity documents or are waiting for age assessments have not been able to get Zip cards to access free travel. This is something they have been taking up with managers and will continue to for every young person without an Oyster card.

**Local offer**

The Throughcare service have worked with CLICC and updated the Local Offer. Your IRO will make sure that this is explained to you when it is the right time and that you understand what it means for you. Always ask if you’re unsure.

**Mindfulness, using child and young people friendly language, not making judgements**

The IRO team have been very conscious about the use of language we use in our meetings with you and how we write. Since the end of 2019 we have started writing our summary and decisions from your review meeting directly **to you** in the form of a letter instead of a report **about you**. We are being careful not to use words or phrases that you might not understand, like, or that might feel as though it’s labelling you. We understand that the words ‘mental health’ covers a lot of things that apply to all of us at some time or another but to some young people including the word ‘mental’ means something negative. We therefore talk to you about feelings, emotions, fears, worries, or behaviours in a way that you can understand and use words like well-being to help you relate and connect to the conversations we have in your meetings and think about what kind of emotional or other support you might find helpful.

Some of you have told us that you think this way of writing to you after your meeting is better. What do **YOU** think? Let us know. Especially let us know if you didn’t receive your letter from your meeting and no-one talked to you about it to make sure you understood everything in it or there was anything you didn’t like or agree with.

**Being approachable and how we’re trying to find out more about what you think/feel/want**

As well as your IRO talking to you in person or on video, text, or email, before and in your reviews, the IRO team are also going to be working with the junior and teen CLICC to get feedback from you about the way we work with you individually and as a team to learn what you might want us to do differently, as well as your overall care experience that might involve other people and services. It’s ok for you to tell your IRO about anything you don’t like, are unhappy about, or want to be done differently but if you don’t feel comfortable doing that, then please get involved with CLICC because that is another way you can pass on your views without feeling embarrassed or awkward. We can also put you in touch with an independent advocate who can support you to get your views heard, make a complaint, or just be with you to give you support in your review or any other meeting.

**Complaints procedure, advocates, and independent visitors**

It’s part of your IRO’s job to make sure you have support to have your say. Tower Hamlets has a contract with a national children’s charity called Barnardo’s to provide people called advocates or independent visitors for children and young people in our care. **Advocates** help you tell adults how you feel about anything you are unhappy about, want to change, or make a complaint about. IRO’s think that it would be good for **YOU** to also think about having an advocate just to support you in meetings. That could be your review meeting or a meeting with your social worker if you want to talk to them about something you’re unhappy about or want changed or added to your **Care Plan**. **Independent visitors** can take you out on an activity and be an independent adult you can talk to if you don’t see or spend a lot of time with members of your family, or don’t have any family in the UK. Your IRO can make sure that this is in your care or pathway care plan but you can always tell them, your social worker, or person caring for you if you would like an advocate of independent visitor.

Here are some other things IRO’s have been doing and we would like to know what you think about them.

**How we hold your meeting**

We know that not everyone likes having to meet with adults to talk about themselves. But, because the review meeting is **about YOU and YOUR LIFE,** we really want you to be involved in a way that is comfortable for you. We want you to know everything that is being planned and decided for you, and most importantly, to have a say. IRO’s have been doing lots of different things to help you feel more involved and in control of your meeting.

Some examples are getting you to set the agenda, that means telling the IRO and others what **YOU** want to talk about, taking charge and chairing all or part of your meeting, deciding if you want to do an activity as part of your meeting to help you and others relax, like drawing pictures, making a short video, playing a game, singing, reading a poem or something you have written, who you want to meet with, and even if you want to be there for all or just part of your meeting**.** Remember it’s YOUR meeting so always talk to your IRO about what you want to do or talk about.

**How we support you to make a choice about where you live when you become an adult**

We know that young people who live with their own families don’t automatically leave home when they are 18. We want to give **YOU the** same opportunity of staying with your foster carer after your 18th birthday if that is something that you both want. Tower Hamlets calls this **Staying Put** and we start having these conversations with you and your foster carer when you are around 16½-years-old so that by the time you are 17 everyone is clear about whether the plan is for you to stay with your foster carer or to move into what we call semi-independent accommodation around your 18th birthday.

**How we are trying to keep your parents and wider family informed and involved in your life**

It may not feel like it at times, but we do understand how important it is to keep your parents and family members involved in your life wherever and however possible. IRO’s try to talk to your parents before your review meeting and involve them in your meeting wherever possible. Sometimes, this has to be in a separate meeting but your IRO should always talk to you and them about this if that is the case and get your view.

Some parents have told us that your review meeting is where they find out what has been happening in your life and would like to be told more regularly about anything important that has happened and/or decisions that are made for you. The IRO team is therefore working with another team called the Family Group Conference service to see if specially trained advocates can be used to improve the communication and relationship between social workers and parents in those situations. We think this will help social workers share information with parents in-between your review meetings so they don’t feel as if they don’t know what’s happening in your life. Tell your social worker and IRO about anything you are unhappy about or want to change about how involved your parents are in your life while you are in care. They may not always be able to do what you what, but they should listen to you, and explain why, if they can’t.

IRO’s are also working together with the Family Group Conference service on a project called Lifelong Links. This project is helping parents, children, and young people like **YOU** think about who else in their wider family or important friendships that you have lost touch with since you came into care that **YOU** would like help reconnecting with. A lot of thinking, talking, and planning happens first and nothing will happen without your consent. We are going to make sure we think about this for you in every review but you can also tell your social worker or IRO in-between your meetings if there is anybody you think of that is important to you that you would like to see or talk to, or even just find out more about.

**How you can contact us**

You should already have your IRO’s contact details but if not, you can ask them for it when you speak to them, ask your social worker, or tell whoever is caring for you. You can also ask the IRO Group Manager. Here are her contact details.

Shirley Quashie-Dunne, IRO Group Manager

Ring, text, WhatsApp: 07507 686 110

Email: Shirley.quashie-dunne@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Here are the contact details for Samantha if you want to join one of the CLICCS.

Samantha Anderson

Ring, text, WhatsApp: 07985607928

Email: Samantha.anderson@towerhamlets.gov.uk

If you want to know more about what your Independent Reviewing Officer should be doing for you, here’s a link to the child friendly version of their Handbook that sets it all out clearly.

[YOUNG PEOPLE’S GUIDE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS’ HANDBOOK (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221761/young_20peoples_20guide_20to_20the_20independent_20reviewing_20officers_20handbook.pdf)

**The Independent Reviewing Officer Team**

Who is your Independent Reviewing Officer?



**Aysha Ahmed (IRO) Alison Harris (IRO) Gail Harris (IRO)**



**Sylvie Mouret (IRO) Xenia Solomou(IRO) Tracy Whitehead (IRO)**



**Caroline Campbell (IRO) Shirley Dunne Geraldine O’Donnell**

 **IRO Group Manager Head of Service**