

Corporate Parenting Board

17 September 2020

Report title	Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2019 - 2020	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor John Reynolds Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All wards	
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Originating service	Safeguarding	
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Report has been considered by	Children's Leadership Team	31 July 2020
	Children in Care Council	26 August 2020
	Cabinet Member Briefing	07 September 2020

Recommendations for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2019 – 2020.

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 Wolverhampton Safeguarding Service has statutory responsibility for overseeing and ratifying the care plans for Children and Young People in Care via the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officers. As a result, the service is duty bound to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an annual report that outlines the activity of the service, the impact for children and recommendations for service improvement that will enhance young people's experiences.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 reinforced and strengthened the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), enabling more effective independent oversight and scrutiny of the child's case. It has ensured that the child is able to meaningfully participate in planning for their own care and that the care plan that the local authority prepares for them is based on a thorough assessment of the individual child's needs.
- 2.2 In March 2010 the Government issued statutory guidance, The IRO Handbook, for Local Authorities and IROs on care planning and reviewing arrangements. The IRO Handbook states that the statutory duties of the IRO are to:
- monitor the Local Authority's performance of their functions in relation to the child's case;
 - participate in any review of the child's case;
 - ensure any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
 - perform any other function which is prescribed in regulations.
- 2.3 All children and young people in care, including children who are in an adoptive placement prior to an Adoption Order, are covered by the legislation. This applies to all children who are the subject of a care order (under section 31 of the Children Act 1989), or who are voluntarily accommodated for a period of more than 24 hours (section 20 of the Children Act 1989), including those described in this report as in Short Break Care, or who are placed for adoption under the Adoption and Children Act 2002. It also covers those who are compulsorily looked after, such as those remanded by the court to local authority accommodation. Since the publication of the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (LASPO) in December 2012, it has been the responsibility of the Local Authority to look after all young people who are remanded into custody. These young people require an allocated IRO and reviews in their place of custody.

3.0 Progress, options, discussion, etc.

- 3.1 The annual report provides an outline of activity covering the period 2019-2020 and determines actions to be progressed in 2020-2021.
- 3.2 The IRO service has remained stable, with an experienced and capable staff team. The Ofsted Inspection of 2017 found that 'Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are effective in driving improvements in practice and performance, leading to better outcomes for children looked after. A stable and experienced team of IROs has been given additional resources, to ensure that IROs are able to continue to deliver a high-quality service'.
- 3.3 Caseloads for IROs have been manageable, which has enabled the team to be more effective in driving improvements and to spend more time seeing children.
- 3.4 The report shows that, overall, the service has been effective in meeting the statutory duties of reviews and achieving meaningful participation of children in their reviews, but there is always room for improvement. This is reflected in the plans for 2020-2021.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The IROs are funded from the approved Safeguarding Children budget.
[MK/09092020/S]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 The relevant legislation is contained within the body of the report. There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.
[TC/09092020/C]

6.0 Equalities implications

- 6.1 The Annual report recognises issues of equality for children who access the Safeguarding Service and how equality is represented within the service.

7.0 Climate change and environmental implications

- 7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report

8.0 Human resources implications

- 8.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report

9.0 Corporate Landlord implications

- 9.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report

10.0 COVID 19 Implications

10.1 Throughout the COVID 19 pandemic the IRO service has operated an adapted model of service delivery. This has seen reviews undertaken in a variety of ways utilising technologies such as MS Teams meetings and use of WhatsApp. In some cases, participation of young people has improved with the implementation of these approaches and this will be considered as part of future service delivery models.

11.0 Health and Wellbeing Implications

11.1 The health and wellbeing of young people within the care system is of paramount importance. As part of reviews, it is the role of the IRO to hold professionals to account in ensuring that this is being maintained in a timely and robust manner.

12.0 Schedule of background papers

12.1 The annual report for 2019 -2020 is attached. The Corporate Parenting Board has received Annual reports in preceding years.