

<b>Report title</b>	Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2020-2021	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All Wards	
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<b>Report has been considered by</b>	Children's Leadership Team	23 September 2021
	Children in Care Council	13 October 2021
	Children and Young People in Care Managers' Meeting	13 October 2021
	Cabinet Member Briefing	23 November 2021

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**Recommendation for action:**

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2020-2021.

## **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**

3.1 The annual report provides an outline of activity covering the period 2020-2021 and determines actions to be progressed in 2021-2022.

- 3.2 The Service had an establishment of 10.5 FTE IRO's at March 2021. The service had additional support from agency workers during this time owing to long term sickness and vacancies during April 2020 – March 2021. During this period the Safeguarding Service created a full time Team Manager post to support the service and successfully recruited to the vacancy. There have been some staff changes and it remains an experienced team; some of whom have worked for Wolverhampton for many years, meaning some IROs have been consistently involved with the same young people. The IROs have a range of experiences and backgrounds which is an asset to the 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, we want to continue to improve. 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.  
[JG/15112021/P]

#### **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.  
[SB/13112021/O]

#### **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 All other Implications**

##### **Climate change and environmental implications**

- 7.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report

##### **Human resources implications**

- 7.2 There are no direct implications arising from this report

##### **Corporate Landlord implications**

- 7.3 There are no direct implications arising from this report

## **COVID 19 Implications**

- 7.4 Throughout the COVID 19 pandemic the IRO service has operated an adapted model of service delivery. This has seen reviews undertaken utilising technologies such as MS Teams meetings. 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.

## **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

- 7.5 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.

## **8.0 Schedule of background papers**

- 8.1 The annual report for 2020-2021 is attached. The Corporate Parenting Board has received Annual reports in preceding years.

## **9.0 Appendices**

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2020-2021