

Report title	Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2021-2022	
Cabinet member with lead responsibility	Councillor Beverley Momenabadi Children and Young People	
Wards affected	All Wards	
Accountable director	Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families	
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Report has been considered by	Children's Leadership Team	01 September 2022
	Children in Care Council	31 August 2022
	Children and Young People in Care Managers' Meeting	31 August 2022
	Cabinet Member Briefing	06 September 2022

Recommendation for action:

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service 2021-2022

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.
- 2.4 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 2021-2022 and determines actions to be progressed in 2022-2023.
- 3.2 Caseloads for IRO's have been manageable and it was reported in the annual health check that IRO's felt caseloads had improved. We have implemented a dual caseload so that caseloads are fair and consistent.
- 3.3 The report shows that, overall, there has been progression of the priorities identified in the last annual report and the service is meeting the statutory duties of reviews and increased participation of children in their reviews in 2020-2021.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The IROs are funded by the Safeguarding Service within the People directorate.
[JG/02092022/I]

5.0 Legal implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The IROs are funded from the approved Safeguarding Children budget.
[TC/02092022/B]

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

- 7.1 None.

8.0 Schedule of background papers

- 8.1 The annual report for 2021 - 2022 is attached. The Corporate Parenting Board has received Annual reports in preceding years.