

# Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	<b>Children, Adults, Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel</b>	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	<b>16 December 2024</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	<b>Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2023-2024</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2023-2024		

## 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 An annual report of the Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service for Looked After Children is required in accordance with the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published by the Department for Education. The report is produced in order to provide the Director for Children's Services, the Lead Member for Children and the Corporate Parenting Board with information pertaining to the work of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRS) which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the care provided to children and young people for whom the Local Authority are corporate parents.
- 1.2 The Children's Health and Wellbeing Panel review the annual report so as to ensure members are appraised on the care provided to children for whom the Local Authority are responsible.

## 2 RECOMMENDATION

### The Panel is asked to;

- 2.1 Note the challenges that have been identified within this reporting period, which has led to some children having changes in their IRO, with some children having had contact with two – three IRO's in this reporting period. There have also been periods where child in care reviews have not occurred within the statutory timeframes. Since the end of this reporting period, please note that the service has returned to having a full complement of staff and the substantive head of service has returned to the service, these factors have led to children receiving a much more consistent service and an improvement in the timeliness of child in care reviews, with 98% on time by Q2 of 2024-2025.

**2.2** Promote the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for the children in the care of the Local Authority. Recognising the value that IRO's offer to children in care, the relationship at times being one of the most long standing and providing consistency for the child. IRO's seek to form positive relationships with the children in which they are allocated, empowering them to participate in their child in care reviews and share they wishes and feelings.

### **3 THE REPORT**

3.1 Please see attached the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report for 2023-2024 which sets out how the IRO Service continues to ensure that Bath and North East Somerset Council are meeting the needs of the children and young people for whom it is corporate parent.

### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority is a legal requirement under section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Since 2004 all local authorities have been required to appoint an IRO to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process.

4.2 The IRO Handbook was introduced in 2010 providing statutory guidance for IRO's and setting out the functions of the local authority in terms of case management and review for looked after children.

4.3 The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulation 2010 apply specifically to children who are looked after by a local authority. The objective of these Regulations is to improve outcomes for children in care by improving the quality of the care planning processes.

4.4 IROs are required to oversee and scrutinise the Care Plan devised for every child or young person placed in the care of the Local Authority. The IRO will ensure that everyone who is involved in the child or young person's life fulfils the responsibilities placed upon them.

4.5 IRO's are expected to ensure that;

- Review meetings are held for all children and young people who are being cared for by the Local Authority,
- The views and wishes of children and young people in care are heard and considered when decisions are being made about them,
- Children and young people understand their care plan and any changes to this,
- The Local Authority is a good corporate parent to all children and young people in care by ensuring they get the same opportunities, support, love and care that other children living within their families receive.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 No request is being made for additional resources, however the service has faced significant pressures during this reporting period due to staff absence, there is never sufficient capacity within the service to support absenteeism.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached.

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

8.1 The Independent Reviewing Service seeks to use the most efficient means of transport when travelling to see children in care to reduce the services carbon footprint. The service has sought to implement ways of sending correspondence securely using digital methods.

## **9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

9.1 None

## **10 CONSULTATION**

10.1 This report has been reviewed and endorsed by all Independent Reviewing Officers within Bath and North East Somerset Council.

10.2 The report has been shared and endorsed by the Director for Children's Services and Education.

<b>Contact person</b>	Sarah Hogan, Head of Service Children's Quality Assurance and Safeguarding
<b>Background papers</b>	None
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	