

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Children's Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	09 November 2021	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2020-2021	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2020 -2021		

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 continued work and commitment of the Independent Reviewing Service within Bath and North East Somerset during a national pandemic. IRO's have maintained contact with all children in care and their carers despite significant changes in working practices, 94% of child in care reviews have been held within statutory timescales and IRO's have scrutinised and where necessary challenged care plans when these have been identified as not being in the child's best interest.
- 2.2 Note that 70% of children in the care of Bath and North East Somerset are placed 20+ miles from their family home or from the local authority boundary. In order for IRO's to maintain direct contact with these children and continue to

have close oversight and review of their care plans, the IRO service needs to have all vacancies filled so that the number of children allocated to an IRO remains within the 50-70 range.

2.3 Note the input of the IRO service in:

- Working with children's social care to develop a reunification policy,
- Ensuring children are appropriately matched to carers who can meet their identified long-term needs.
- Identifying and considering the needs and experiences of unaccompanied, asylum seeking and trafficked children
- Reviewing children placed in all unregulated placements, including those placed in Reg 24 ADM approved placements, children placed with their parents and children in accommodation with support (including supported lodgings)
- Supporting children to participate in the 'Your Life, Your Care'

2.4 Acknowledge the progress in the areas for development/ improvement identified for 2020-2021 despite the significant challenges brought about by Covid-19.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 Please see attached the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report for 2020-2021 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.

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 was completed in October 2020 and can be found on the Children's Services Equality Impact Assessment Web Page- [Children's Services Equality Impact Assessment Web pages](#)

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 The Independent Reviewing Service uses various methods of travel which will contribute towards reducing the services carbon footprint. Over the last 12 months the service has encouraged the use of email to share documents reducing the need to print documents.

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.

The report was shared with the Director for Education and Safeguarding and approved on 20th October 2021.

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Background papers	None
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	