

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Children’s Health and Wellbeing Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	15 December 2025	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
TITLE:	Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2023-2024	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
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 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 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 stable numbers of children in care, the improvement in child in care timeliness compared to the previous year (2023-2024) and the rigour of the IRO service in reviewing plans for children in care. IRO's continue to offer challenge where there are themes impacting on children in care evidenced by IRO's use of the revised dispute resolution protocol.
- 2.2 Consider the feedback received and the findings of internal audit on the IRO service, where the service was awarded level 4 – substantial assurance. The service has good awareness of the areas requiring improvement which are areas of focus for 2025-2026.

- 2.3** 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 2024-2025 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 continues to face significant pressures when staff are absent or leave the service.

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. It was presented at the Corporate Parenting Group meeting on 03/12/2025.

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