

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	20 JULY 2023
Report Title:	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	RAEANNA GRAINGER GROUP MANAGER, INFORMATION, ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE SERVICE & SAFEGUARDING
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There are no effects on the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.
Executive Summary:	<p>The report details the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service between April 2022-March 2023.</p> <p>The report sets out the legislative framework that governs the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service. Primarily the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role is to ensure the child's care plan is appropriate and meeting their developing needs, that they challenge any issues of delay in achieving the objectives of the care plan and/or any issues of delay. The role has a strong emphasis on quality assurance and challenging the Local Authority when they are not satisfied in areas of decision making.</p> <p>The IRO's in Bridgend also undertake the chairing of Child Protection Conferences, their role is to ensure professionals make decisions based on evidence and safeguarding procedures. Most importantly the IRO Service must ensure the child's voice is central to decision making and that they are informed of their rights and their circumstances.</p> <p>There is a strong focus on qualitative data in the annual report and compliance rates but also strengthened processes and how the service has met the annual plan objectives.</p> <p>The report considers how the service has responded to increased demand and rising numbers of children subject to the Child Protection registration and what is being done to reduce this figure.</p>

	<p>The report also sets out the improvements made in relation to the child's voice being central to decision making and how the significant increase in referrals to advocacy are supporting this.</p>
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	<p>The updated annual plan can be read at the end of the report in Appendix 1, and this highlights the aims for the next reporting period.</p>
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide a report to Corporate Parenting Committee in line with The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

2. Background

- 2.1 The appointment of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) by Local Authorities is a legal requirement and their core functions are governed by legislation and guidance as follows:

- The Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service has an authoritative role, in assuring the quality of care planning is achieved. The Independent Reviewing Officers Guidance (Wales) 2004 states that the Independent Reviewing Service report must identify good practice but must also identify issues for further development, including those where urgent action is required. The guidance urges the Local Authority to make effective use of the reports from its IRO service so that it can be satisfied that its services can achieve best outcomes for the children and young people concerned.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The Independent Reviewing Service report, **Appendix 1**, covers the work of the IRO service from April 2022 to March 2023. The report contains performance information in respect of the statutory reviewing of children who are Care Experienced, including children with plans for Adoption and Young People with Leaving Care LAC/Pathway Plans (under 18) by Bridgend County Borough Council. It also includes information on children subject of a child protection plan and reviews of these plans at Child Protection Case Conferences.
- 3.2 The report also includes information that relates to regulatory requirements in respect of resolution of case disputes, IRO caseloads, participation and consultation of young people in their Reviews, challenges and achievements in the reporting period, and service priorities for 2023-2024.
- 3.3 As described in the report the IRO's chaired/reviewed 406 (51% increase) Initial Child Protection Case Conferences between April 2022 and March 2023 compared to 200 the previous year. A total of 659 Review Child Protection Case Conferences (RCPC)

between April 2022 and March 2023 were convened compared to 508 (23% increase) in the previous reporting period. All RCPCs were held within the statutory timescales. In this reporting period, 1,125 Care Experienced review meetings were held between April 2022 and March 2023 compared with 1,159 the previous year. This reduction is mainly as a result of greater placement stability.

- 3.4 Following each meeting the IRO completes a quality assurance audit. The Audit is available to the Social Worker and the Team Manager to notify them of outstanding work/actions. The audit supports the IRO in the tracking of the case and supports the identification of good practice and areas for improvement. The audit also supports the Team Manager when carrying out supervision with the Social Worker.
- 3.5 Previous work has been undertaken to improve the consultation document for children and young people. However very low response rates were still experienced. The introduction of Microsoft Teams has enabled a greater number of young people to attend their meetings, particularly their Care Experienced Review meetings. The introduction of Signs of Safety will place much greater emphasis on participation and it is expected that this will be reflected in the data.
- 3.6 The report does highlight a significant increase in referrals for advocacy which supports and captures the voice, wishes and feelings of the children and young people worked with.
- 3.7 The IRO service continues to work with the safeguarding teams, education, the Health Visiting services, School Nurses and Midwifery Services to improve practice around child protection conferences. The next stage is to work at improving the quality of Looked After Children reviews on a multi-agency basis. The IRO Service Manager in this period has facilitated training on the Wales Safeguarding Procedures and partner agencies are included in the roll out of the Signs of Safety practice model and the training for this.
- 3.8 Continuous service improvement is always sought after and as such the IRO Service aims to continue to have a greater impact in terms of improving the quality of the lives of care experienced children and young people. The IRO Service Action Plan is incorporated towards the end of the report in **Appendix 1** and reflects the areas of focus for improvement over the 12 months following the timescale of the reporting period for the service which will be under constant review.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (SSWBA) 2014, in turn, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 within the County Borough of Bridgend. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the well-being goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term** – The IRO Service has a legal requirement to assure the quality of care planning is achieved for children and young people enabling them to reach their full potential in life.
- **Prevention** –the IRO service works closely with safeguarding practitioners and Early Help services in developing a comprehensive outcome focused plan for the child or young person, to maximise their opportunities and identify focused support at the earliest stage.
- **Integration** – the implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners, to ensure care, support and protection of all and more specifically its most vulnerable. The report evidences consultation between professionals and partner agencies with a specific focus on the safe care planning and protection for children and young people within the County Borough of Bridgend.
- **Collaboration** – This is currently managed in order to provide the best possible intervention for children and young people across Bridgend.
- **Involvement** – the key stakeholders are the care experienced children and young people of Bridgend. The IRO service's engagement with these individuals is essential to ensure their voices are heard and included in their meetings. The IRO service speak to children and young people and utilise consultation documents, quality monitoring forms, complaints process and advocacy services to support this. The provision of accessible information and advice helps to ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard and responded to.

6. Climate Change Implications

6.1 There are no specific climate change implications arising directly from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 This report sets out the work undertaken by the IRO Service in respect of safeguarding and promoting the well-being of children, young people and families. The report sets out the role of the IRO Service in ensuring there are effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific financial implications arising directly out of this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Committee notes this report and the IRO Service Action plan

Background documents

None