

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	4 SEPTEMBER 2024
Report Title:	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024
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 2023 to March 2024.</p> <p>The reports 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>

	The updated annual plan can be read in Appendix 2, and this highlights the aims for the next reporting period.
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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. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: IRO Annual Report 2023-2024

Appendix 2: IRO Action Plan

2. Background

- 2.1 The report considers the focused work undertaken in the reporting period to reduce the number of children subject to the Child Protection Register and care experienced. It identifies areas of compliance and the work being undertaken to fully embed the Signs of Safety practice model.

3. Current situation/ proposal

- 3.1 The report highlights a wealth of improvements in the service, including recruitment and reduced numbers of children subject to the Child Protection Register. Significant strides have been made in the implementation of Signs of Safety compliant conferences and in how the service is taking forward communication with children and families.

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 to 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 One of the core functions of the IRO Service is to promote children's rights, ensure they receive a quality service and that their voice and the voice of their family is central to decision making.

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(s)

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

Background documents

None.