

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	29 OCTOBER 2025
Report Title:	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025
Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member	CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES & WELLBEING DEPUTY LEADER, Cllr JANE GEBBIE
Responsible Officer:	RAEANNA GRAINGER GROUP MANAGER, MASH, IAA & SAFEGUARDING
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There are no effects on the policy framework or procedure rules arising from this report.
Executive Summary:	The report details the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service between April 2024-March 2025. The reports sets out the legislative framework that governs the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Service. Primarily the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's)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 Authority when they are not satisfied in areas of decision making. 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. 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. The updated Annual Plan can be read at the end of the report and this highlights the aims for the next reporting period.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Committee with the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report (Appendix 1) and Action Plan (Appendix 2).

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 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, , covers the work of the IRO service from April 2024 to March 2025. 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 2024-2025.
- 3.3 As described in the report the IRO's chaired/reviewed 169 Initial Child Protection Conferences, this is a reduction from the previous year (376) this reduction is linked to strengthen processes, greater management oversight and a more proportionate way of working with a strong focus on early intervention. 484 Review Child Protection Conferences were held compared to the previous year of 749. Compliance in both areas remains very high for Initial Conferences (94%) and the 6% of non compliance only related to 9 cases over the year. Compliance for Review Conferences is 99.6% which is an improvement from the previous year (98%) Compliance for Care Experienced Reviews remains high at 98.9% which is an improvement from the previous year (96%) The report details the reasons behind the significant reduction in numbers.

- 3.4 The reports highlight the significant impact the implementation of Signs of Safety has had on the team and the directorate as a whole.
- 3.5 Following each meeting the IRO completes a quality assurance audit. The audit forms are 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.
- 3.6 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 Signs of Safety practice model and the training for this.
- 3.7 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 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 2014 (SSWBA), 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 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 Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting notes the Annual Report and Action Plan.