

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE (FORMAL)	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
21 JULY 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, Executive Director People and Communities	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Lynne Ayres Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Marie Saunders – Deputy Safeguarding Lead	Tel. 07730613958

ANNUAL REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: <i>Alison Bennett – Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance</i>	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that The Corporate Parenting Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Members are asked to note the report and raise any queries with the lead officers. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Committee by The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Department, Peterborough City Council (PCC) in line with annual requirements.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 a) The purpose of this report is to provide statutory review and analysis of the Independent Reviewing Service.

b) The report shall be presented to Members of The Corporate Parenting Committee as requested on 20 March 2019 for their work programme.

2.2 This report is for The Corporate Parenting Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference 2.4.4.2 To receive statutory reports in relation to the adoption, fostering, commissioning, looked after children services and children's homes with a view to recommending any changes.

2.3 *How does this report link to the Corporate Priorities?*

This links to all areas of the Children in Care Pledge and Care Leavers Charter.

2.4 *How does this report link to the Children in care Pledge?*

As above

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
Date for relevant Council meeting		Date for submission to Government Dept. <i>(Please specify which Government Dept.)</i>	

4. **BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 This Annual Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in Peterborough as required by statutory guidance. This report covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.
- 4.2 The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. In March 2010, the government issued the 'Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and Statutory Guidance.' They also published the 'IRO Handbook, Statutory guidance for IROs and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children.'
- 4.3 In respect of this report, the IRO Handbook states: 'The manager should be responsible for the production of an annual report for the scrutiny of the members of the corporate parenting panel. This report should identify good practice but should also highlight issues for further development, including where urgent action is needed.' (IRO Handbook 2010, page 48, paragraph 7.11.)

5 **Children in Care Reviews**

- 5.1 Between April 2020 and March 2021, 99.9% of reviews took place within statutory timescales which continues to be excellent. The majority of reviews took place virtually during the year in response to restrictions of the Covid-19 Pandemic.
- 5.2 A total of 1021 CIC reviews were held in 2020-21.
- 5.3 The effectiveness of the IRO service and the difference they make to children's experiences of being in care in Peterborough is monitored through the activity of the Quality Assurance Team including the ongoing thematic audit programmes. In addition, team and senior managers undertake a programme of case file audits and use Ofsted judgements to grade cases. All cases where remedial actions are identified and monitored by the QA Team to ensure that appropriate action is taken in a timely manner. Audit themes and areas for development inform service improvement plans for each service.
- 5.4 All IROs complete a monitoring form after each statutory meeting. This is sent to the social worker and responsible team manager. If the IRO identifies an immediate cause for concern they will raise a case alert. They will always discuss their concern with the case responsible manager/senior manager and agree a course of actions with timescales. This will then be followed up with an email to the responsible manager and Head of Service and any other managers as appropriate. This ensures that immediate action is taken to safeguard and protect the child.
- 5.5 During 2020/21, the Independent Chairs raised 102 case alerts. Thirteen formal DRP cases were active throughout the year; most of which were addressed within timescale and two are outstanding with further discussions taking place. Of the 13, 3 were escalated to Stage 3, 3 were escalated to stage 2 and 7 were resolved at stage 1.

6. **Summary**

6.1 The IRO Service has continued to provide effective provision for reviewing and monitoring the Care Plans for children in care. It contributes to improved outcomes for children in care through increasing participation of children and young people in the decision making about their care, as well as making independent representations to operational teams and management on planning and practice issues. The independent scrutiny provided by the team is valued by social workers and management. IROs have shown continued strength and resilience throughout a very difficult year and have contributed to a creative and high delivering service.

7. **Independent Reviewing Officer Achievements in 2020/21**

7.1 IROs have:

- Ensured robust oversight of all vulnerable cohorts in light of COVID-19 through enhanced audit activity.
- Maintained oversight of all key decision making and milestones in the child's journey.
- Worked to ensure all essential meetings were able to go ahead via virtual meetings, providing additional support to families where required.
- Remained proactively responsive to the changing situation by leading the way and developing creative solutions.

7.2 Caseloads – Independent Reviewing Officers' caseloads have remained within the recommended guidelines of between 50 and 70. This has enabled the IROs to meet expectations for a high-quality service whereby all aspects of their role are undertaken.

7.3 Oversight and Quality Assurance – IROs have actively addressed concerns, poor practice, and non-compliance in a systematic and professional manner to promote the improvement of standards amongst social work teams and partner agencies. They have challenged as denoted within the IRO Handbook and ensured that timescales are adhered to.

7.4 IRO footprint – There has been clear evidence obtained throughout case audits, supervisions and dataset analysis of the consistent presence and oversight of the IRO and clear demonstrations of the IRO footprint on their caseloads.

7.5 Children's voices – There has been a consistent approach by IROs to maximise the engagement of children and the evidence within reports demonstrates an awareness and objective to ensure that the voice of the child is heard achieving 100% in the year.

7.6 Themed audits – the Quality Assurance team continues to undertake a significant number of thematic audits across Children's Social Care and a number of audits across the IRO service have evidenced robust systems and competent and effective practice and established performance.

7.7 Learning and development – The IRO service continues to promote good practice and to develop and embed learning and supportive relationships within the wider sector. IROs take responsibility in organising and managing meetings with operational team managers to identify impacts and issues within the service and to recognise areas of good practice as well as areas for improvement. They work together in maintaining a respectful, transparent, and learning-abled forum within which to identify and design models of ideal working.

7.8 The IROs also take turns to represent Peterborough City Council at the Eastern Regional IRO network. Unfortunately, the annual IRO conference due to take place in May 2021 has been postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak but discussions are ongoing in relation to setting a new date in 2022.

- 7.9 The IROs have contributed to the increase in dental checks and health assessments for children in care due to increased monitoring. They have also been instrumental in the increased oversight of children at risk of CSE or Missing episodes.
- 7.10 The IROs have shown remarkable professionalism, dedication, and creativity since the outbreak of Covid-19 and have risen to the challenges of the virtual world, engaging young people in care, carers, parents, and professionals in timely and effective reviews. No reviews were cancelled as a result of implications caused by the pandemic in 2021.
- 7.11 Full detail and information can be found in the appendix 1 of the Annual IRO Report.

8. **CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Parents, carers and children were consulted as part of the review process.
- 8.2 Further consultation with Health colleagues in order to agree a plan to move forward in terms of maximising outcomes for children.

9. **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

- 9.1 *Consider the anticipated outcome of consideration of this report.*

To ensure there is a more robust approach to supporting the experiences of children and young people in order to improve their lives.

10. **REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 10.1 Statutory requirement

11. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 11.1 *N/A*

12. **IMPLICATIONS**

12 **Financial Implications**

- 12.1 *None*

Legal Implications

- 12.2 No direct implications, as the report provides factual information about a statutory role.

Equalities Implications

- 12.3 *None*

- 12.4 *None*

Carbon Impact Assessment

- 12.5 I have considered the Carbon Implications in respect to Carbon Impact and this is considered to be neutral for the report.

Other Relevant Implications

- 12.6 Child Care Reviews are held for all children in care.

The purpose of the Child in Care Review is to bring together the child, parents, carers and other professionals to plan for the child and review the Care Plan. This ensures that everything that needs to be done to enable children to achieve the best outcomes and not drift in the care system is identified and being undertaken.

14. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

14.1 *None*

15. **APPENDICES**

15.1 Appendix 1 - Annual IRO Report

This page is intentionally left blank