

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 17 October 2023

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2022-23

When does the decision need to be implemented? For information

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Director Contact Details: Nancy Meehan, Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 An annual report of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) for cared for children is required in accordance with the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2010 as set out in the IRO Handbook. The annual report should be presented to the Director of Children's Services, Lead Member for Children and the Corporate Parenting Board at minimum and should also be available as a public document on the relevant Council website. In line with our aspirational Corporate Parenting Strategy, the IRO Annual Report requires endorsement from Cabinet, reflecting each and every Member and Officers role as a corporate parent.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

2.1 There is a legislative need for the IRO Annual Report to be considered as part of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

2.2 Torbay's vision is one whereby its people are healthy, happy and prosperous ; in line with Torbay's corporate parenting responsibilities, our cared for and care experienced young people require particular focus and support, in order for them to achieve their goals and aspirations, and be safe, happy and healthy. This report evaluates the effectiveness and impact of the Independent Reviewing Service; Independent Reviewing Officers play a key role in ensuring that care plans for children are progressed with a central focus on their needs, their ascertainable wishes and feelings and what intervention and support is required to help children achieve their goals.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

1. That the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022-23 as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report be approved to enable the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022-23 to be published in accordance with the legislative requirements.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022-23

Background Documents

The IRO Handbook: [iro_statutory_guidance_iros_and_las_march_2010_tagged.pdf](#)
(publishing.service.gov.uk)

Supporting Information

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The IRO Annual Report provides an overview of the activity of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, which sits within the wider Safeguarding, Reviewing and Early Help service within the Children's directorate. The report also considers the staffing structure, developments within the service and the key improvement objectives for the service moving forward.
- 1.2 The report highlights the enhanced stability of the service and how this has contributed to continued progress and development. In particular, there is significant evidence on continued improvement in terms of achieving permanence for cared for children, with a high number of cared for children leaving care as a result of adoption, or becoming subject to a Special Guardianship Order in 2022-23. A large proportion of those who ceased to be cared for at aged eighteen, who had been cared for in a foster placement at the point of ceasing to be cared for, entered into a Staying Put arrangement with their former foster carer (18 of 20 young people).
- 1.3 The report reflects a range of data in relation to cared for children. As of 31st March 2023, Torbay cared for 314 children, in comparison to 299 at the same point in the year before. However, there is a notable increase in cared for numbers due to Torbay's engagement with the National Transfer Scheme and increasing numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) being cared for by Torbay. Of the 314 cared for children, 23 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, with a number remaining within the age assessment process. Despite this increase, the timeliness of reviews increased in 2022-23 to 94% completed on time, from 92% in 2021-22.
- 1.4 Despite some of the national challenges in terms of access to dental treatment, the percentage of cared for children with a dental check in the last twelve months increased and is significantly above the national average. Similar improvements are highlighted in respect of the percentage of children with review health assessments completed within the last twelve months, and those with their immunisations up to date.
- 1.5 Key areas for improvement noted within the report include: continued focus on seeking parent and child feedback, through additional work on the virtual feedback form; monitoring the impact of the Dispute Resolution Process following the reconfiguration of this pathway on the system this year; and the development of a specific service dashboard on Power BI.

2. Options under consideration

- 2.1 No options have been considered as this proposal is for information only.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 3.1 The IRO Annual Report does not make recommendations in terms of any changes to the current service or staffing structure and therefore the decision to endorse does not carry with it any financial implications.

4. Legal Implications

- 4.1 The IRO Annual Report is required in accordance with the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 and subsequent statutory guidance published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2010 as set out in the IRO Handbook. There are no legal implications as a result of the decision to endorse this Annual Report.

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 A priority of the Independent Reviewing Officer service has been to enhance and develop the opportunities for children to participate and engage with their own cared for reviews, and also service improvements. This feeds into a wider participation strategy, and a continuous and embedded culture whereby the views of our cared for children and young people are sought, listened to and acted upon.

6. Purchasing or Hiring of Goods and/or Services

- 6.1 The endorsement of this Report does not involve the procurement of services, the provision of services together with the purchase or hire of goods or the carrying out of works.

7. Tackling Climate Change

- 7.1 None.

8. Associated Risks

- 8.1 Should this Report not be endorsed, Torbay will not be compliant with the statutory requirements as outlined. Should the Report not be endorsed, there will no change in terms of the fundamental function of the service however the Report would not be published, and could not be transparently published which would limit the ability of the service to share learning in respect of patterns and trends, and achieve clarity across the service about the priorities for improvement.

9. Equality Impacts - Identify the potential positive and negative impacts on specific groups

	Positive Impact	Negative Impact & Mitigating Actions	Neutral Impact
Older or younger people	The IRO Annual Report outlines the strengths, areas to strengthen and the priorities for the Independent Reviewing service who play a critical role in overseeing the implementation of plans in relation to cared for children.	N/A	N/A
People with caring Responsibilities	The Report considers placement stability, and as part of this, feeds into the fostering service development plan in terms of continuing to enhance the support we provide to our fostering families.		
People with a disability	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
Women or men	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
People who are black or from a minority ethnic background (BME) (Please note Gypsies / Roma are within this community)	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
Religion or belief (including lack of belief)	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
People who are lesbian, gay or bisexual	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
People who are transgendered	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.

People who are in a marriage or civil partnership	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
Women who are pregnant / on maternity leave	N/A	N/A	There is no differential impact.
Socio-economic impacts (Including impact on child poverty issues and deprivation)	The ambition of the IRO Annual report is to ensure that any child, no matter their level of need or their socio-economic status, has access to the highest quality support as a cared for child as possible.		
Public Health impacts (How will your proposal impact on the general health of the population of Torbay)	The IRO service plays an integral part in overseeing the holistic care plan for a child, including their educational and health needs; as such, the provision of the highest quality IRO service can have a significant, positive impact on the longer term health outcomes for cared for children.		

10. Cumulative Council Impact

10.1 None.

11. Cumulative Community Impacts

11.1 None.