

Meeting: Cabinet **Date:** 18 November 2025

Wards affected: All

Report Title: Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report 2024 - 2025

When does the decision need to be implemented? For Information

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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.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 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 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 able to thrive; 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.
- 2.3 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 Members of Cabinet endorse the Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report 2024 - 2025 and the publication of this in accordance with the legislative requirements outlined above.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) Annual Report 2024 - 2025

Background Documents

N/A

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 contains comprehensive analysis in respect of key performance indicators relating to cared for children specifically, including long and short term placement stability, those becoming and ceasing to be cared for, permanence outcomes and the timeliness of reviews. 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 continued stability of the service, and the impact this has in terms of outcomes for children. There has been an increase in efficiency, with 811 cared for reviews taking place in 2024-25 despite an overall reduction in the number of cared for children, evidencing increased reviews being held at significant points in a child's cared for journey. The timeliness of review has also increased to 99%, from the strong performance of 96% in 2023-24.
- 1.4 The number of cared for children in Torbay has decreased to 280 as of the 31 March 2025, from 298 as of 31 March 2024. The report highlights strengths in terms of permanence outcomes for cared for children, particularly in terms of Staying Put arrangements, Special Guardianship and adoption.
- 1.5 The report highlights some challenges particularly in respect of foster placement sufficiency at both a local and national level and the impact that placement instability (and insufficiency) can have on a child's sense of permanence, safety and wellbeing. Similarly, there remain some challenge in respect of compliance in terms of health assessment, and the report references action being taken within the partnership to promote the health of our cared for children.

2. Options under consideration

- 2.1 N/A – no other options have been considered.

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

- 3.1 N/A

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.
- 4.2 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 N/A

7. Tackling Climate Change

- 7.1 N/A

8. Associated Risks

- 8.1 There are no associated risks with endorsing this Annual Report.
- 8.2 Should this report not be endorsed, Torbay will not be compliant with the statutory requirements as outlined above - there will no change in terms of the fundamental function of the service however if the report cannot be published this 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

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old. 55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. 27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.	There is no differential impact.		
Carers	At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.	There is no differential impact.		
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness.	There is no differential impact.		

Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.	There is no differential impact.		
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	There is no differential impact.		
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	There is no differential impact.		
Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the	There is no differential impact.		

	South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.			
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	There is no differential impact.		
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	There is no differential impact.		
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	There is no differential impact.		
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay, 5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.	There is no differential impact.		

Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)		There is no differential impact.		
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)		There is no differential impact.		
Human Rights impacts		There is no differential impact.		
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council, and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	There is no differential impact.		

10. Cumulative Council Impact

10.1 N/A

11. Cumulative Community Impacts

11.1 N/A