



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	11 May 2023
Subject:	Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023)

Summary:

This report is the annual report for the Independent Reviewing Service for 2022 to 2023. It serves to update members of the Corporate Parenting Panel on the work undertaken between April 22 and March 2023.

This report provides evidence relating to the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Service in Lincolnshire as required by statutory guidance and sets out updates on work undertaken over the year.

Actions Required:

- (1)** Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are invited to consider and comment on the detail contained in this annual report on the Independent Reviewing Service and seek assurance that the Independent Reviewing Officers are fulfilling their obligations in respect of children in care.
- (2)** Members are invited to comment on the proposed service priorities for 2023-2024, which are:
 - i. Development of regular joint working with CAFCASS
 - ii. The Development and embedding of the IRO's MOSAIC Monitoring tools.
 - iii. Embedding a new framework for linking with locality teams
 - iv. The Development of IRO Good Practice Guidance
 - v. Further develop practice around those Children Placed with their Parents under the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations (2010)
 - vi. Development of a bespoke IRO Induction package
 - vii. Launch of Children in Care Consultation and engagement materials

1. Background

The attached annual report addresses the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to quality assuring and improving services for children in care in Lincolnshire.

The Independent Chairs have a dual role as Independent Reviewing Officers and Independent Chairs who Chair child protection conferences. This report focuses on the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to children in care. Activity relating to their role as Independent Chair is detailed in a separate report which is presented to the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership. As such any previous and ongoing targets in relation to Child Protection will not be reported on within this report.

This IRO report provides evidence relating to the IRO Service in Lincolnshire which must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board as required by statutory guidance.

2. Purpose of service and legal context

The IRO Service is set within the framework of the IRO Handbook 2010 which provides the statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for children in care.

The guidance is issued as part of a suite of statutory guidance which sets out how local authorities should carry out the full range of responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and review for looked after children. The aim is to provide looked after children with the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and improve their outcomes.

Throughout this report the term child/children refers to all those under the age of 18. However, it must be acknowledged that some young people in the upper age bracket like to be referred to as Young People.

3. Conclusion

Numbers of children in care have remained higher over the past three years, which when combined with workforce pressures in the social care teams creates additional work for the IROs. It should be noted though, that these are still lower than statistical neighbours. It is of note that key performance indicators remain on target. Due to some delay in court proceedings and revised timetabling, Chairs are frequently having to rearrange meetings in order ratify plans prior to QAAG and filing dates. As identified above in this report, in the past 12 months there have been 889 reviews rearranged. It must also be noted that the IRO's also chair Child Protection meetings where there are similar challenges and tensions around readiness for conferences. This also has an impact on their capacity and ability to work.

It should be noted that the Chairs are at the upper limit in terms of children allocated as set out in the IRO Handbook, which provides guidance around case capacity in order to carry out their duties effectively.

As this report outlines, despite the high number of meetings that are rearranged and challenges within the locality Social Work teams, the service feels it is an achievement to

have only 8 Child in Care meetings genuinely out of timescales out of 1786 during the past 12 months.

4. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

N/A

5. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report (1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023)

6. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Carolyn Knight, Head of Service, Quality & Standards Team and principle social worker who can be contacted on 07879 603618 or at Carolyn.knight@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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