



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 25 September 2023

REPORT TITLE:	INDEPENDENT REVIEWING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

Since March 2010 there is a requirement that the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service within each local authority produce an Annual Report of activity, with regards to children looked after (CLA).

The purpose of the IRO Annual Report, which is attached at appendix 1 is to evaluate the extent to which Wirral Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to its Children Looked After for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

This report provides an overview to the Children Young People and Education Committee for scrutiny and comment.

This report is aligned to the Wirral Plan 2021-26 priority: Working together for brighter futures for our children, young people, and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background.

This affects all wards but is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and scrutinise the information contained in the IRO Annual Report attached at appendix 1.
2. Approve the publication of the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The role and function of the Safeguarding Unit and the Independent Reviewing Officers is governed by law and statutory guidance. Each Local Authority has a legal requirement to provide an Independent Reviewing Officer for every child or young person looked after, fundamentally to ensure their Human Rights are respected.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to evaluate the extent to which Wirral Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to our children looked after for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023, including its corporate parenting function.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 It is a statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Service to produce an annual report.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Role of the Safeguarding Unit

- 3.1 The overall aim of the Safeguarding Unit is to ensure that children looked after are safe, secure and achieve the best possible outcomes. Independent Reviewing Officers have high aspirations for their future and encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings. The Service aims to ensure that all children and young people are supported to access services and are fully prepared for adulthood.
- 3.2 Supplemental to the core roles, an IRO has responsibility to support children and young people who are privately fostered. These children and young people are identified in accordance with The Private Fostering Regulations as set out in Part 9 and schedule 8 of the Children Act 1989. There were 4 identified during this reporting year.
- 3.3 Service Managers within the Unit are also required to chair Sudden or Unexpected Death in Infancy and Childhood Meetings, SUDIC, in line with Working Together 2015 and Wirral's Safeguarding Partnership procedures, along with Secure Accommodation Reviews (SAR) and Suspected Fabricated or Induced illness strategy meetings.

Key Performance Data

- 3.64 As of March 2023, Wirral had 781 looked after children. The overall number has remained consistent with 789 children looked after as of 31 March 2022. The majority of children and young people, 40%, aged between 10-15.
- 3.5 Approximately 92% are white British and 8% from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. Of our looked after population 10% of this cohort are recorded as

having a Disability. At the time of this report, there are slightly more boys than girls in our care with boys representing approximately 52% of the cared for population.

- 3.6 The number of Children Looked After by Wirral has remained largely consistent throughout the year. We have however seen a steady decrease in the numbers from June 22 onwards, then a decrease from Dec 22. It is positive to note the data showing that Wirral is now in line with our statutory neighbours and England national average.
- 3.7 During the reporting period 2022-2023 a total of 2100 children looked after review meetings were held. These review meetings are held every 6 months and therefore each child looked after will have their care plan reviewed twice per year. 93% of CLA reviews have been held in within statutory timescales and reflect the hard work and commitment of the Independent Reviewing Officers.
- 3.8 When a Looked After Child reaches 15 years and six months old, they become a Care Leaver. The Local Authority will initiate their Pathway Plan. There are two parts to a Pathway Plan. Part 1 is all about what the young person needs, leaving care assessment of need, and part 2 is all about their goals and plans. The young person's first Pathway Plan will be completed by their 16th birthday. For this year a total of 734 Pathway Plans were reviewed

Quality Assurance

- 3.9 Quality assurance and learning improvement activity has continued during this review period to ensure senior management oversight of the quality of service being delivered. Since July 21 IRO's have contributed to bi-monthly case file audits along with the Safeguarding unit managers conducting monthly audits. There are clear expectations that monthly audits will be completed alongside the social worker and viewed as learning opportunities and a reflective space for the practitioner.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)

- 3.10 The LADO has a specific function in overseeing the allegations and investigations relating to professional staff and those in a position of trust where the allegations involve children and young people. Wirral has one full time Designated Officer. The table below shows the number of contacts to the LADO and the number of referrals leading to multi-agency strategy meeting or discussion.

Total number of Contacts (see definition)	No of referrals leading to multi-agency strategy meeting or discussion
Initial Consultations 267	
Referrals 133	133 (33.25%)
Total 400	

Escalations

- 3.11 One of the key functions of the IRO is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process.
- 3.12 Over the last year we have seen 155 formal escalations raised. The majority of these escalations (75%) were raised due to concerns regarding drift and delay and Statutory requirements not being met. We have also raised 483 informal escalations.

Key Priorities 2022-23

- 3.13 There are 4 key priorities the Unit is working towards in the coming year these include:
1. Provide children with a variety of methods to participate in their review and encourage physical attendance.
 2. Ensure all children understand the role of the IRO and what the child looked after review meeting is about.
 3. Embed new Quality Assurance Framework, using live audits with the team and reflecting upon practice.
 4. Focus on achieving permanency at the second review.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An annual report of the Independent Reviewing Service (IRO) for looked after 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.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The work outlined within the report highlights how CYP directorate risks are being managed and mitigated.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The primary objective of the IRO service is to ensure that children and young people are included in the decisions made about them and they actively participate in their

meetings. Within the reporting period 2021/22, 78 children looked after were supported by Barnardo's in the form of Advocacy or from an Independent Visitor.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision, or activity. An EIA has been completed.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environment and climate implications arising from this report. However, it is important for our children and young people to understand environmental and climate implications. The IROs oversee how as a Local Authority the corporate parenting responsibilities are discharged including how a holistic approach is undertaken when caring for our children to have a broad understanding of the environment and climate.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 One of the responsibilities of the IROs is to oversee the plans of the Local Authority to support our young people into education and to be ready to enter the employment market. Children Looked After with the right support and encouragement will make a significant contribution to the wealth and wellbeing of the local community.

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Appendix 1-

IRO Annual Report 2022/23

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The IRO Handbook

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with section a of its Terms of Reference:

1. Exercising management, oversight and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children, Young People and Education Committee	21 June 2022