

Report of:	Karen Simmons, Interim RAD Manager/Practice Lead
Submitted to:	Corporate Parenting Board 18 th October 2022
Subject:	Independent Reviewing Officers 2021/22

Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy

This report relates to the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers in their dual role as Child Protection Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers for children who are looked after. The guiding principles below apply in relation to children who have a child protection plan and remain at home and also children and young people cared for by Middlesbrough Borough Council.

Your Home

Supporting and safeguarding children and young people in their own homes when safe to do so. For those children and for children and young people cared for by the local authority, making sure that their home arrangement is safe, secure and encourages them to flourish.

Your Family and Friends

Working to support families to stay together and build their networks within their extended families, with friends and within their communities. For children and young people who are cared for by Middlesbrough Borough Council, making sure that family time and relationships with family members and significant people are promoted

Your Education, Your Adult life, Your Health and Wellbeing

Making sure that plans and arrangements for children actively promote their educational potential and provide the building blocks to support children and young people to grow up to be healthy, emotionally secure and thrive in their adult life.

Your Voice and Influence

Actively listening to children and young people so their voices and views shape the services they receive.

Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?

No

What is the purpose of this report?

To provide members of the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Independent Reviewing Officers' Report 2021/22

Report Background

Context

This report covers the period from the 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022. It provides an overview of the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).

The report is a statutory requirement under *Section 7, paragraph 11 of the IRO Handbook*, which sets out that the manager of the IRO Service must provide an annual report on the delivery of the IRO Service which can then be scrutinised by members of the Corporate Parenting Board. It provides information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for children in care and young people leaving care.

In Middlesbrough, the IROs have a dual role and therefore this report includes consideration of those children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

In summary the purpose of an IRO is to:-

- Monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands
- Offer a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for looked after children and the delivery of services to them;
- Promote the child's voice

Progress

Children in our Care

OFSTED's Monitoring Visit of March 2022 regarding planning and decision making for children in care reported that:-

- *There is an improved oversight of independent reviewing officers. Mid-point reviews between the IRO and the social worker keep plans on track. Children know their IRO and are visited by them before their review. This is ensuring that children's views are known and are informing care planning.*

This view is confirmed by our own oversight of IRO practice through performance and quality assurance activity which indicates improvements in practice for IROs over 2021/22.

There were improvements in the timeliness of Reviews for children in our care with 82% in time compared to 65% in 2020/21.

There was an increase in children and young people being seen and spoken to prior to their review by their IRO (68% of reviews, a 25% increase on 2020/21)

There was cumulative evidence through increased visits and midway reviews of a 52% increase of the IRO footprint on the child's record compared with 2020/21

Use of IRO challenge through the Issues Resolution Process was sustained over 2021/22 with 80 challenges made to make sure plans for children in our care meet their needs

Child Protection

Over 2021/22 There were improvements in the timescales for child protection conferences with 83% of initial child protection conference in time compared to 65% in 2020/21 and 78% of child protection plans being reviewed in time compared to 69% in 2020/21

The evidence of IRO oversight including use of midway reviews, on case records improved by 20% since last year.

IROs raised 70 issues regarding children subject to child protection plans to make sure they received an appropriate response to their needs

Areas for Improvement

The IRO improvement journey will remain closely linked to the Children's Services' Improvement Plan and our priorities for 2022/23 are to make sure that practice across the Team is consistently of a high standard.

This includes:-

- Improve compliance with key performance indicators Increase child participation in meetings about them, including use of advocacy
- Strengthen the IRO engagement with children through visits and regular contact between reviews
- Gather the views of parents and carers regarding their experience of conferences and reviews
- Embedded use of Mid-way reviews to drive planning for children
- increased continuous oversight for those children without stability and permanence
- Strengthen the impact of IRO Challenge and demonstrate IROs have high aspirations for Middlesbrough children
- IROs contribute to the overall practice priorities of Children's Services by monitoring quality of performance and informing learning and development.

Appendices

The Independent Reviewing Officers' Report for 2021/22 is appended to this covering report.

Recommendations

That the Corporate Parenting Board notes the areas of improvement and those for further development outlined in the Independent Reviewing Officers' Report for 2021/22.

Why is this being recommended?

This is recommended so that members of the Corporate Parenting Board are kept fully apprised of the progress being made by Children's Services and the particular areas needing focus.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended

N/A

Impact of recommended decision

No specific impact from noting the report.

N/A in the context of noting this report.

Financial

N/A in the context of noting this report

Policy Framework

N/A in the context of noting this report

Equality and Diversity

N/A in the context of noting the report

Risk

N/A in the context of noting the report

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)

The Service Plan for the Independent Reviewing Officers will remain closely linked to the Children's Services' Improvement Plan which continues to be monitored by MASIB

Background papers

None

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