



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 5 SEPTEMBER 2016**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES**

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of the report is to present to the Committee the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer with regard to children in care, and the evaluation of the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to the children in its care for the period 1st April 2015 – 31st March 2016; including its corporate parenting function.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) has a statutory role to ensure effective and improved care planning for children and young people, securing better outcomes, with their wishes and feelings being central and given full and due consideration. (IRO Handbook March 2010).
3. This Annual Report is a requirement of 'The IRO Handbook - Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children' (March 2010). The content and format follows the prescription set out in the guidance; the report will comply with the expectation that it will be available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as accessible as a public document and most importantly, communicated to Leicestershire's children in care in a child and young person friendly version.

Background

4. The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests

throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.

5. The IRO Service in Leicestershire is hosted within the Safeguarding & Improvement Unit (SIU), part of Children's Social Care (CSC), which sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS). Whilst part of CSC, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams.
6. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is essential to the quality assurance and effectiveness of the looked after experience of children and young people, not just on an individual basis but collectively too, with IROs having a key part to play in monitoring the performance of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent; drawing out themes for improvement and development and helping to drive forward change.
7. The effectiveness of the role has rightly been subject to scrutiny since its inception and the legal framework and statutory guidance was revised in 2010 to support a strengthened position. This is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.
8. The report is an opportunity to pinpoint areas of good practice and those in need of development and improvement, providing information that can contribute to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. It highlights emerging themes and trends, and details areas of work which the service has prioritised during the year, including progress on the areas of development that were identified from the 2015-16 IRO Service Annual Work Programme, as set out in Appendix A.

Resource Implications

9. There is an identified need for increased capacity in the IRO Service and this will have a financial implication. It is the plan that this will be subject of a business case to DMT within this current financial year.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

10. None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2015-16.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

11. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children and young people in care, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The IRO Service has a diverse compliment of staff with good representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.

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