



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2024 - 2025**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. This report is to provide a summary of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2024 – 2025. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service provides oversight, review and challenge to care planning of children in care. The Service ensures that the Local Authority is meeting its statutory duties and responsibilities to children in care.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service and works to bring a consistent approach to planning and implementing practice standards, for the most vulnerable children. Whilst the service sits within the Children and Family Department and is part of the management structure of Children's Social Care, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams. The independence of the IRO ensures that they can advocate and challenge on behalf of children and families to ensure that they receive the right service at the right time to both protect and support them.
3. The legal framework and statutory guidance for the IRO role for children in care is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010. The Handbook requires an Annual Report to be written and is prescriptive as to content and format (which the report follows). 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.
4. This annual report does not recommend or involve any changes to key policies or procedures.
5. The role of the IRO supports the Department's delivery of the commitments set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025 in championing what is in the best interest of children in care and their care planning. It also aligns with the Achieving

Excellence Through Purposeful Practice 2024 -2027 plan, and the Children and Family Departmental Plan 2024 – 2026.

6. This matter was previously considered in respect of the 2023 – 2024 annual report.

### **Background – Key Information from the Annual Report**

#### **Key Statistics**

7. As of 31 March 2025, there were 694 children in care, representing a 4.4% decrease compared to the previous year. During the reporting period, a total of 1,989 review of arrangements meetings were held, with 98.1% completed within the required timeframe.
8. Children's participation in their reviews remains strong, with 92% of children aged four and above contributing to their review meetings. Face-to-face reviews accounted for 64.2% of all meetings, an increase from 55.1% the previous year, with the remainder conducted virtually or in a hybrid format.
9. Health and wellbeing outcomes continue to be prioritised, with 91.2% of children and young people receiving timely health assessments and 93.1% undergoing dental checks. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were completed each term for between 95% and 98% of children and young people.
10. Long-term planning is well embedded, with 92.1% of children and young people having a long-term plan in place. Notably, 8% had their plan agreed prior to their second review.

#### **Key Achievements**

11. In April 2024, Ofsted rated Leicestershire's Children's Services as Outstanding, specifically commending the positive practice of IROs in supporting care planning.
12. All IRO posts are now permanently filled, significantly reducing reliance on agency staff and contributing to service stability. Creative approaches to engagement have been evident, supporting children in expressing their views and participating meaningfully in their care planning.
13. The use of the 'My Review' booklet has increased, with 227 submissions received from children and young people prior to their review meetings, compared to 128 the previous year. The service has also supported the launch of the 'Language that Cares' Toolkit, which promotes child-chosen language and has been actively embedded into practice.
14. IROs raised 244 quality assurance alerts during the year, demonstrating strong advocacy for children and young people and a commitment to improving their support and care planning. The Service continues to celebrate children's achievements through dedicated events and awards.

#### **Plans and focus for 2025 – 2026**

15. The Service aims to further increase the use of 'My Review' consultation documents to enhance child participation in review meetings. Further focus will be given to embedding and ensure consistent application of the 'Language that Cares' Toolkit across all aspects of practice and reviews.
16. Improving health and education outcomes remains a priority, with a focus on enhancing assessments and support mechanisms. The Service will also promote the development of networks and connections through tools such as cultural genograms.
17. Finally, there will be a continued emphasis on improving data collection and streamlining administrative processes to support the timely completion and recording of review documentation.

### **Consultation**

18. The annual report includes feedback from children and young people regarding their IRO, alongside feedback from professionals, family members, and carers. Feedback requested directly after each reviewing of arrangements meeting.

### **Resource Implications**

19. There are no specific resource implications as part of the annual report. The Service is fully resourced and is operated within its financial budget.

### **Conclusions**

20. Overall, the annual report highlights the achievements of a strong Independent Reviewing Officer which brings scrutiny and quality assurance to the care planning and support given to children and young people in care by the Department.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

21. None.

### **Equality Implications**

22. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **Human Rights Implications**

23. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Appendix B - Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025 (one page version)

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