

Cabinet

29 January 2026

Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report

For Review and Consultation

Cabinet Member:

Cllr C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

Local Councillor(s): n/a

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

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Statutory Authority:

Report status: Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

Executive summary

1. This annual report provides evidence relating to the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service in Dorset Council, as set out in the IRO Handbook. In Dorset IROs are called QAROs as they undertake wider Quality Assurance work. It covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
 - 1.1 The report evidences a service which continues to develop and provides good quality work to support children being well cared for and achieving good outcomes. The report includes key information outlining the work of the service with and for children in care and the report includes case examples of IRO work with children.
 - 1.2 This report includes a profile of the service, performance data including timeliness of review and the extent of participation, a profile of our children in care, including their age, gender and ethnic background, details of the dispute resolution process and how effective this is. The report concludes with a review of aims and objectives set in the last annual report and aims and objectives for the service for the upcoming year.
2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Members are invited to consider the content of the report and give a view on the strengths, challenges and forward plan for the service.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 To ensure that the QARO service continues to develop and evolve to offer the best possible support and challenge to the Local Authority in meeting the needs of our children in care, and to ensure voices of children and young people in care are heard and acted upon.

4. **The report**

- 4.1 The report is added as an appendix, please see item 13 below

5. **Alternative options considered**

- 5.1 N/A This is a statutory service

6. **Legal considerations**

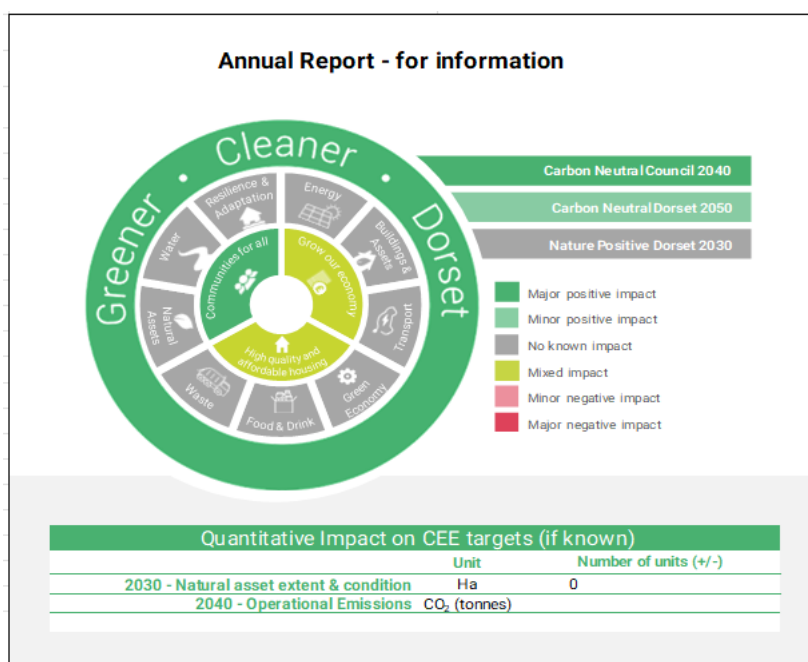
- 6.1 The service fulfils the council's responsibilities set out in [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)', and [Independent reviewing officers' handbook - GOV.UK](#)

7. **Financial implications**

- 7.1 An effective QARO service helps to reduce costs in Children's Services by reducing drift and delay in care planning, promoting early support and reducing escalation of need and higher support costs later in life.

8. **Natural environment, climate & ecology implications**

- 8.1



Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	No known impact
Buildings & Assets	No known impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	No known impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact
Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	neutral
High-quality and affordable housing	neutral
Communities for all	strongly supports it

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 An effective IRO service contributes to improved health and wellbeing outcomes for children in care, and those who will go on to live in family arrangements or adoption.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None identified

11. Risk implications

- 11.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

12. Equalities

- 12.1 The IRO service key responsibility is to provide independent oversight of care planning by the Local Authority for children in care. One pillar of this is to ensure the child's views are obtained and taken into consideration by the local authority.
- 12.2 Another key aspect of the role is to provide independent oversight of the work of the Local Authority in respect of the Children Act 1989 and relevant guidance and associated additional acts. There is a requirement inherent to the role to challenge the Local Authority where performance is not meeting the required standards through the 'dispute resolution' process, and the service performance in respect of this is detailed in the report.
- 12.3 The requirements for the role of IRO include being an experienced social worker registered with Social Work England. To do this there is a requirement to adhere to professional standards including:
- 12.4 Promoting the rights, strengths and wellbeing of families and communities'
- 12.5 Not to 'Abuse, neglect, discriminate, exploit or harm anyone, or condone this by others'
- 12.6 Report allegations of harm and challenge and report exploitation and any dangerous, abusive or discriminatory behaviour or practice.
- 12.7 This report includes a description of ongoing work by the service to improve practice in relation to hearing the views of care experienced young people in a variety of ways and evidence impact on practice. It describes specific work as part of the Corporate Parenting Delivery Group Plan on supporting young people's identity with reference to protected characteristics, and barriers to equity.
- 12.8 The report draws attention to the importance of diversity within the staff team and that this is an area we seek to improve.
- 12.9 As such I conclude that this service contributes positively to equality. Whilst acknowledging there is much more we can do, there is active work ongoing to achieve this, and this is reflected in the forward plan at the end of the report.

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1: IRO Annual Report 24 – 25 final draft

14. Background papers

- 14.1 None

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)