IRO Annual Report 2025-26: Summary for Young People

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) are people who help make sure that children in care are listened to, have good plans, and get the support they need. They chair your reviews, hear your views, and challenge services when things are not happening as they should.

What went well this year?

✅ **Dorset Children's Services were rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted**, including services for children in care. Inspectors recognised that children are encouraged to take part in their reviews and have their voices heard.

✅ **More children took part in their reviews.** Around **92% of reviews included young people's participation**, showing that most children and young people were involved in decisions about their lives.

✅ **IROs stayed in touch with children.** By March 2026, **95% of children who were expected to have contact with their IRO had been contacted within the previous six months.** Many had contact more than once.

✅ **Reviews happened on time.** The IRO service completed **1,348 reviews**, with **93% held within timescales**.

What have young people told us?

Young people have told Dorset Council that they want:

- Better support for their **mental health and emotional wellbeing**.
- More **choice and control** in decisions about their lives.
- Clear, respectful records about their lives and experiences.
- Better understanding of their life stories and journeys.
- The IRO team has continued to work closely with the **Youth Voice Network** and use **Mind of My Own** to help young people share their views.

What still needs to improve?

The main concerns raised by IROs this year were:

- Delays in planning for children's long-term futures (permanence planning).
- Missing or out-of-date care plans.
- Making sure children's records are complete and accurate.
- Issues around identity, emotional health and family time
- IROs challenged services about these issues through recommendations and escalations, helping to make sure action was taken for children and young people.

What will happen next?

During 2026-27, the IRO service will focus on:

- Listening even more to what young people say matters.
- Improving planning for children's futures and transitions into adulthood.
- Improving the time it takes to write up minutes from reviews
- Making sure important decisions are checked and challenged when needed.
- Providing training based on the experiences and feedback of care-experienced young people.

A final message

This report shows that children and young people in Dorset are having their voices heard and are influencing change. The IRO service is proud of the positive feedback from young people and remains committed to making sure every child in care is listened to, supported, and helped to achieve the best possible future.