



One minute guide

Independent Reviewing Officer

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What are Independent Reviewing Officers and what do they do?

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) make an important contribution to the goal of significantly improving outcomes for looked after children. Their primary focus is to quality assure the care planning process for each child or young person, and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

As part of this role, IROs chair the review meetings of children who are looked after. These reviews take place at different intervals depending how long the child has been in care but are held at least every six months.

IROs are qualified social worker with at least five years' experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

Why do we have IROs and which children do they work with?

The appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a legal requirement under Section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. All Local Authorities must ensure that, once a child becomes looked after (also referred to as being in care), they have their own IRO who should remain with them whilst they are in care.

As set out in the Children Act 2004, the local authority has a statutory duty to appoint an IRO for every looked after child, which includes children placed, or authorised to be placed, with prospective adopters by a local authority, as well as young people remanded in secure accommodation.

Chairing Review Meetings

Chairing review meetings is a key responsibility of the IRO. It is very important that an IRO chairs reviews in a manner that should:

- Hold the welfare of the child as the paramount consideration

- Ensure the voice of the child is heard clearly throughout the process

- Ensure critical scrutiny of the child care plan, and challenge the local authority in relation to that care plan if required and in the best interests of the child.

To do this, the IRO will arrange to meet the child and speak with them in private before every review, and ensure that the child or young person knows how to contact them between their reviews.

What are their statutory duties?

It is the IRO's statutory duty to:

- monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child;
- participate in the child's reviews;
- ensure the wishes and feelings of the child are considered; and
- perform any other function prescribed in regulations.

In doing this, the IRO must:

- promote the voice of the child;
- ensure there is an up-to-date, effective plan for the child(ren), based on a detailed, informed assessment that responds fully to each child's needs;
- identify any gaps in the assessment process or provision of service;
- make sure the child understands that they are entitled to an advocate and how they could be helped by one;
- prevent any 'drift' in care planning and the delivery of services; and
- monitor the activity of the local authority as a corporate parent, ensuring care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings.

Independence of the IRO

The Government decided that it is very important that an IRO cannot be a person who is already involved in the management of a child's case. To support this, the IRO service is located within the Integrated Safeguarding Unit which is managed separately to the Children's Social Work Service.

IROs can challenge poor practice using the quality assurance (informal) and dispute resolution (formal) processes. They also have the authority to refer serious concerns directly to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS).

Key contacts and for more information

The Independent Reviewing Service in Leeds consists of three area teams situated within the Integrated Safeguarding Unit (ISU). Each team comprises eight full time equivalent IROs and a full time Team Manager.

The IRO Team Managers are:

Anne Baxter - East North East tel: 0113 3782844

Siobhan Brad - West North West tel: 0113 2477455

Alison Ryan - South tel: 0113 3782833

[Independent reviewing Officer Handbook](#) and [Young People Guide to the Independent Reviewing Handbook](#)