

The role of an Independent Reviewing Officer

By Katie Brinkworth



Key Legislative Frameworks

Independent Reviewing Officer Mandate

The Children Act 1989 (section 25A) requires every looked-after child to have an Independent Reviewing Officer ensuring their best interests are protected.

- Establishes the legal requirement for appointing an IRO for every looked-after child.
- Sets out the IRO's duty to monitor care plans and participate in reviews.
- [Children Act 1989 – Legislation.gov.uk](#)

IRO Roles and Responsibilities

Care Planning Regulations 2010, especially Regulation 45, outline the detailed responsibilities and duties of the IRO in care planning.

- [Care Planning Regulations 2010 – Legislation.gov.uk](#)

Statutory Guidance and Independence

The IRO Handbook 2010 provides statutory guidance on maintaining independence, effective scrutiny, and monitoring cases for looked-after children.

- Comprehensive guidance on the IRO's role, independence, and escalation procedures.
- Details expectations for scrutiny, challenge, and advocacy.
- [IRO Handbook – GOV.UK](#)

Key Legislative Frameworks



Evolving Frameworks and IRO Role

The Families First Partnership Programme introduces new teams, but independent oversight by IROs remains a statutory and essential safeguard.

- Sets out the government's reform agenda including Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams.
- Confirms the IRO role remains statutory within the new framework.
- [Children's Social Care Reform – GOV.UK](#)

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

- Multi-agency statutory guidance for safeguarding and promoting welfare.
- Reinforces the role of reviews and oversight in care planning.
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children – GOV.UK](#)

IRO: Daily Key Functions



Chairing Statutory Reviews

IROs lead formal meetings for looked-after children, ensuring each child's voice is heard and considered in planning.



Monitoring and Intervening

IROs track progress between reviews, stepping in if a child's care plan stalls or changes unnecessarily.



Scrutinising and Escalating Concerns

They examine care plans for legality and stability, raising urgent issues if a child's welfare may be compromised.

Scrutiny and Quality Assurance



SMART and Child-Focused Plans

Care plans should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound, centring on the child's needs for effective outcomes.



Legal Compliance and Relevance

Plans must reflect current requirements and comply with legal standards to ensure children receive the best and most appropriate care.



Continuous Scrutiny and Documentation

Regular scrutiny prevents drift or poor planning, while clear documentation and high standards ensure effective quality assurance across agencies.

Checks and Balances in Action

Safeguarding Child Welfare

The IRO intervenes when decisions could harm a child's wellbeing, ensuring their safety and proper care are prioritised.

Addressing Planning and Placement

The IRO acts on delays in permanency planning and challenges unsuitable placements, promoting stability for children.

Uplifting Child's Voice

Children's views are ensured to be heard, and issues are escalated when poor engagement or legal status concerns arise.



Independence and Challenge



Maintaining Professional Independence

IROs must stay separate from case management and resources to provide fair and unbiased oversight for every child.



Objective Scrutiny and Advocacy

Independence enables IROs to objectively review cases and advocate effectively for the child's best interests.



Challenging and Escalating Concerns

IROs should respectfully challenge agencies, escalate issues constructively, and seek independent advice to ensure the child's needs are prioritised.

Looked After Reviews: Timing & Content



Review Scheduling

Reviews are scheduled at specific intervals: initially within 20 working days, then at 3 months, and every 6 months thereafter.



Focus on Child's Voice

Reviews prioritise listening to the child's views and wishes, ensuring their opinions shape decisions about their care.



Comprehensive Assessment Areas

Key review areas include care plan scrutiny, placement suitability, contact, progress, legal status, education, and health.



The IRO in Families First

Statutory Safeguard Role

IROs serve as a statutory safeguard, ensuring independent oversight and upholding children's rights within families.

Child-Centred Planning

IROs prioritise planning that puts the child's needs at the heart of decisions, promoting positive outcomes.

Multi-Agency Collaboration

IROs complement multi-agency teams, encouraging cooperation and integrated approaches for comprehensive family support.

Independent Challenge

IROs provide independent challenge, preventing drift in care and ensuring accountability in decision-making processes.

IROs: Safeguarding Children

Advocacy and Protection

IROs play a vital advocacy role, protecting looked-after children and ensuring their voices are always heard in decisions.

Independence and Scrutiny

Maintaining independence, IROs rigorously review care plans, providing oversight to uphold children's best interests.

Driving Better Outcomes

Through principled challenge and statutory responsibility, IROs drive improved outcomes for children in evolving care systems.



Any Questions?

