# 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.

Oare 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.
- P 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.

#### **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**

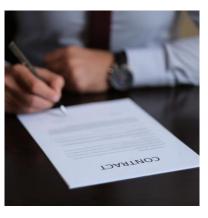
They examine care plans for legality and stability, raising urgent issues if a child's welfare may be compromised.

# 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?**

