

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)



What are they?

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years' experience, and who have ideally had some management experience. But, most importantly, an IRO must be someone who is capable of challenging senior managers, using the courts if necessary whenever local authorities are failing to do everything that they should for children in care.

The IRO is the person responsible for making good things happen for children in care.

The law [Children Act 1989 amended 2004] says that when a child or young person (referred herein as the Child Looked After) first comes into care an IRO must be appointed. Once appointed they **must** speak in private with each Child Looked After (CLA) before their review (unless this is inappropriate or the child does not want this).

A CLA should already have a care plan before they come into care or within ten days of becoming looked after. The Care Plan sets out the local authority plan to care for the individual child, based on an assessment including what the child has said they want to happen.

IROs chair reviews for children who are "looked after" or "in care". They have an important role in deciding what happens in a looked after child's future. In Bolton, an IRO is allocated to a child within two/three days of the child becoming Looked After. The IRO will liaise with

the allocated social worker to share information and set up the first review within 20 working days, then three month and six monthly thereafter for the duration of the child's time being looked after.

Independence of the IRO

Many IROs are employed by the local authority they work for as they are in Bolton. The Government want IROs to be able to challenge poor practice and has given IROs powers so that they can be even better at making sure good things happen for children in care. They have set, as the minimum level of independence, that an IRO cannot be a person who is already involved in a child's case.

What do Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) do?

The role of the IRO is to review, monitor and scrutinise the care plan. The review checks that the care plan is the right one; and that what is in it is actually being carried out. If the IRO believes that the practice or policy of the local authority is detrimental to the child's welfare or if the child's human rights are at risk of being breached, they have a duty to challenge the local authority.

IROs are also there to make sure that reviews are run properly; that children and young people's views are listened to and that their best interests are protected.

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5 Minute Facts

Regulation 32 [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010] says:

“The responsible authority must not make any significant change to [a child’s] care plan unless the proposed change has first been considered at a review of [the child’s] case, unless this is not reasonably practicable”.

It is the IRO’s responsibility to make sure that decisions taken are ones that are best for the child.

The IRO also has a job to make sure that the local authority knows when it is not doing well enough as a “corporate parent” for children in its care. But, because sometimes good practice is not always easy to spot, IROs will also tell local authorities about where things are going particularly well for children.

Where there has been poor practice (that means decisions or actions that are not always best for the CLA) and a local authority is failing to act in a child’s interests, the IRO can take a number of steps informally and formally through dispute resolution and where they feel this has not worked as a last resort can report them to CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service). CAFCASS may then ask a court to look into the matter further.

Statutory Duties of the IRO

IROs are guided by the IRO Handbook. The “Handbook” says that the IRO must:

- promote the voice of the child
- ensure that plans are based on a full and proper assessment of each child’s needs
- make sure that each child knows how they can get hold of an advocate
- act as a safeguard against children staying in care longer than necessary, or not getting the services they need, because of a lack of good planning
- listen to children and see that they understand any changes to their care plan
- make sure that the local authority is a good “corporate parent” to children in care

Key contact...

Contact can be made with IROs in Bolton via email: iroduty@bolton.gov.uk
Tel: **01204 337460**

All the local info I need is just a **click away!**



www.mylifeinbolton.org.uk

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