

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) are experienced social work managers whose duty is to ensure the care plans for children in care are legally compliant and in the child's best interest. They do this by Chairing review meetings and by monitoring cases on an ongoing basis.

All local authorities have a duty to appoint an IRO to every child in care. In Portsmouth the IROs are located within The Service Quality Team (SQT) and work alongside the Child Protection Advisors (CPAs) who chair Child Protection Conferences and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who coordinates the safeguarding and investigative process in response to allegations made against people working with children. The IRO responsibilities are set out in the IRO Handbook (2010), which is statutory guidance.

The IRO must make sure children's views are heard and recorded and that the LA is being a good "corporate parent" meaning that children in its care get the same services as other children would and that the LA is doing everything as well for them as a good parent would do for their own child at home.

No significant changes should be made to a care plan for a looked after child without consulting the IRO.

What are Looked after Child Reviews?

All looked after children (LAC) should have a care plan within 10 days of becoming looked after - if not before. There are statutory timescales for when a review of the care plan should take place. The first review must be held within 20 working days of the child coming into care, the second within 3 months and thereafter at 6 monthly intervals unless there are any sudden changes to the care plan, such as placement disruption, which should trigger an early review. Dates for reviews are set in advance and are recorded on the case management system.

The purpose of the LAC review is to consider the quality of the child's care plan (and pathway plan for young people aged 16 years+), based on the social worker's assessment of the child's needs. The review will also consider the quality of the placement plan and how well the current placement is meeting the child's needs. The IRO will also want to see that there is an appropriate personal education plan (PEP) and health plan in place for the child.

The review meeting will oversee the progress of the plan and will make recommendations to amend the plan as necessary and appropriate in light of updated information and changing needs and circumstances. It is important that the child or young person is central to this process and that the care plan gives full and proper consideration to their views, wishes and feelings. The child's voice must be heard within the process and it is the job of the IRO to ensure that this happens. This can include children and young people being involved directly in person in their review meeting, consulting with the IRO separately, by making representation in another way (such as recording their views via the digital Application 'Mind of My Own') and/or being represented by an independent person or advocate acting on their behalf.

Every child has a right to be supported by an advocate and the IRO will make the arrangements to request an advocate if required. Reviewing is a flexible process and will vary in relation to each child. It may be one stand-alone meeting attended by all relevant people in the child's life, or a number of meetings, with one central meeting attended by the IRO, the child, the social worker and some of the relevant adults.

Before the Review

In order for the meeting to be productive and sensitive to the needs of the child, time and careful preparation is necessary. The IRO must speak with the child before the review. The IRO will need to consult with the social worker 15 days before the review to discuss the arrangements.



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The date, venue and time for an initial LAC review will usually be agreed between the IRO and the child's social worker following the child coming into care, taking into account what is likely to be in the child's best interests. Reviews for school age children should be held outside of school hours and should not clash with any significant events such as health appointments, regular clubs and/or contact. Children should be consulted about the venue, agenda for review meetings and about significant people they wish to be present. It is an expectation that parents will be included unless there is a good reason not to do so - such as causing distress to the child - in which case the IRO will offer to consult with the parents separately.

Due to Covid 19, LAC reviews are currently being offered via virtual platforms such as MST or Zoom and we have introduced a wide range of mediums for communicating with children and young people and enabling their participation, such as WhatsApp.

Prior to the meeting, The IRO should be provided with or have access to any relevant reports, the health plan or report from the medical assessment and the current PEP /POP.

It is a statutory requirement for the child's social worker to send an up to date version of the child's care plan, along with the Social Worker progress report (completed within Mosaic), to the IRO. All of this should be made available at least three working days before the commencement of the review.

The social worker will need to ensure there is a clear record of all involved with the child's care plan within both the progress report and care plan. If this is the child's initial LAC review the progress report will need to contain information regarding the rationale for the child becoming LAC. For subsequent LAC reviews the social worker will need to ensure that decisions made at the last review are addressed and an update provided. Decisions from previous reviews can be found in the child's electronic case file where they will have been recorded on the last LAC Review IRO report.

The views of the child or young person, parent(s) and carer(s) should also be recorded within the reports and any recommendations for changes to the Care Plan.

The care plan and progress report should be Quality Assured by the Team Leader before sending to the IRO.

During the Review

There are statutory requirements about issues to be considered within the review. These include:-

- Significant changes since the last review
- Whether the decisions of the previous review have been successfully implemented
- Safeguarding concerns
- The legal status of the child and whether it is appropriate
- Permanence planning
- Contact and the maintenance of significant relationships for the child.
- Whether the placement is meeting the child's needs and appropriate Delegated Authority is in place.
- Education - including the current PEP/POP. If the child has an EHCP, then the involvement of the SEND team is crucial and the IRO will want to ensure the coordination/streamlining of SEN Reviews and Transition arrangements.
- Leisure activities
- Health needs
- Identity needs
- The child's views and whether the child understands the complaints procedures and arrangements for advocacy and Independent visitors.
- Reunification and whether this should be considered and/or progressed and any action to be taken



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Adoption - Where the child is 'authorised to be placed for adoption' or has been placed for adoption, the child's review will be subject to the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 until an Adoption Order is made.

After the LAC Review

Following the LAC review, the IRO will complete the IRO Progress report and write a letter to the child (if they are aged 5 years+). Together these documents make up the formal record of the review. IROs are required to distribute this record within 20 working days of the review having taken place. Children under 5 years of age are sent a certificate of participation in their review. The IRO letters and certificates will form part of the life story work for the child.

Within the Progress Report the IRO will make some recommendations regarding the care plan for the child, these are then actioned to the Team Leader to be reviewed. The recommendations are reviewed by the relevant line manager who has responsibility for implementing them. The recommendations become decisions after a further 5 working days have elapsed. If there are any queries regarding the recommendations, the expectation is that the social worker and/or relevant line manager will discuss this with the IRO.

After the whole review process has been concluded the social worker is required to update the child's care plan to reflect any changes that have been agreed. The social worker is required to do this within 10 working days.

For more information:

O Handbook - Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children' DfE (2010) can be found [here](#)

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care planning, placement and case review DfE (June 2015) can be found [here](#)