



## **THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS**

[www.nairo.org.uk](http://www.nairo.org.uk)

### **NAIRO PRESS RELEASE 26.5.22**

#### **NAIRO responds to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care**

NAIRO has carefully considered this report. We are pleased the review recognises the central importance of protecting and sustaining important relationships for children, and the need for respectful, positive help for families.

However, we strongly reject the review's proposal that large parts of the independent reviewing officer function should be transferred to the child's social worker and their manager, and to advocates, and that the IRO role itself should be abolished. If accepted by government, this recommendation would remove vital independent oversight and protection from children who are looked after by local authorities.

Parliament passed the legislation requiring IROs as a means of ensuring the human rights of children in care were safeguarded, following the Human Rights Act 1998. There is nothing in the review's report to suggest that this human rights protection is no longer required; indeed, the reverse is true.

The review does not dispute that the functions of independent reviewing officers are vital. Where it has gone seriously wrong is believing that independent scrutiny and challenge can be shifted to those within local authorities who are directly responsible for the child, and to independent advocates.

An advocate ensures the voice of the child is properly heard and their rights protected; the role of the advocate is entirely driven by the wishes and feelings of the child concerned. Advocates do not access information, or take action, without the child's consent or instruction. They are there to give as much power as possible to the child's views and perspective.

Conversely, the IRO provides a service for every child in care, whatever their age and capacity. IROs form a professional view of the child's best interests, and

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champion these within the local authority, seeking external challenge from Cafcass and the courts when necessary. The IRO makes sure the child's wishes and feelings are properly taken into account, including by helping the child access an advocate when they want one. But they come from a holistic position, considering the child's best interests in the round, including through consulting with parents and carers and all professionals involved with planning for the child's care – teachers, health professionals and nursery staff for example. They provide essential continuing protection for children's rights and children's welfare. IROs are, by law, required to be experienced social workers.

IROs and advocates should work closely together, but it is a fundamental mistake to believe that advocates can replace the IRO role.

We believe it would be a dangerous erosion of children's rights and a threat to their welfare to remove the protection of the IRO service and we urge the government to reject this unwise recommendation (as it has rejected similar proposals in the recent past).

NAIRO of course recognises that there are many ways in which the IRO service can continue to be strengthened and improved and we will be pleased to engage in future discussions about achieving this.

## **NAIRO**

**May 25<sup>th</sup> 2022**

### **Notes for Editors**

#### **NAIRO**

NAIRO was founded in March 2009. It is the professional organisation for IROs in this country. It is a registered charity.

NAIRO is committed to improving outcomes for looked after children by maximising the positive impact of the reviewing process.

For more information see our website [www.nairo.org.uk](http://www.nairo.org.uk)

#### **Independent Reviewing Officers**

An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a qualified social worker who has a statutory duty to review the cases of children in care at regular intervals. A key element of the role is to scrutinise the local authority care plan for the child, in particular taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and being mindful of the child's rights. If the IRO believes the LA plan is not in the best interests of the child, she/he has the duty to challenge the local authority to whatever level is necessary to resolve the matter.

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