



Young person's guide to Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's)



What is this booklet about?

We have put some information together for you to understand the role of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). They are people who review your care plan. It also tells you about your reviews and what you should expect from these. The information will also support you in being more involved in decisions that affect your life and support you to have more of a say in those decisions.



What is an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)?

The job of an IRO is to make sure that your care plan meets your needs and any decisions taken are the best for you. We will ask you what you think as part of this.

The Government have told IRO's that they must:



When an IRO meets a child, they should do this one to one so that the child can talk freely. They must check with the child, and other people working with the child, on whether the child is OK and happy where they are living and with their care plan. They must regularly ask each child whether they are happy with how things are being done for them, and keep checking what is happening for each child against that child's care plan and the decisions made at their reviews."

If there has been poor practice (for example a decision has been made or an action undertaken that is not always best for you) and Lambeth Council is failing to act in your best interests, the IRO can report the council to CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service). CAFCASS may ask a court to look into the matter further.

When a young person first comes into care, they must be appointed an IRO and the IRO must speak in private to each child/young person before their review unless you say that you do not want this.



The IRO role

Your care plan says how the council plans to care for you based on an assessment including what you have said you would like to happen.

The role of the IRO is to:

- Ensure your voice is heard and taken seriously
- That you have been fully involved in the development of your care plan
- That your care plan is based on a full and proper assessment of your needs to make sure you get the best support, and the right decisions are made in your best interests
- Your IRO can help you understand what an advocate is and how you can get hold of one
- Make sure that children and young people do not stay looked after for more than they need to, or they are not getting the right services because of lack of good planning
 - Listen to children and young people and make sure that they understand any changes made to their care plan and the reasons for this
 - Make sure that the council is a good corporate parent to you as a looked after child/young person

Importantly, an IRO is someone who can challenge senior managers, whenever councils are failing to do everything they should for children and young people in their care.

Is an IRO really independent?

An IRO should be able to challenge poor practice. They cannot be someone who is already involved in your case and cannot be managed by someone who is.



Ten important things about your IRO

- 1 If you are a looked after child/young person, the council must appoint an IRO for you
- 2 Your IRO chairs your case reviews (unless you would like to do this, then they will support you)
- 3 If you have brothers or sisters in care, they will have the same IRO as you
- 4 You should know who your IRO is and how you can contact them
- 5 You should keep the same IRO for the whole time you are in care, unless there is a good reason for changing
- 6 If you are a parent yourself of a child who is also in care, you should both have different IRO's
- 7 You should be given written information explaining the role of the IRO and telling you what you can do if things decided at your review are not carried out
- 8 If your IRO leaves (perhaps to go to another job or retire) they must introduce you to your new IRO
- 9 Apart from your first week in care, you should never be without an IRO
- 10 Your IRO should meet with you in person before your reviews.

Your review

The review is not of you, it is a review of your care plan.

Every child and young person looked after has a review at least every six months (when you first come into care this will be within 20 days and then again after three months). The purpose of the review is to check that your care plan is the right one for you and what is in it is actually being carried out, Care plans and reviews are there to help you achieve everything you can and help the council to act as the best possible 'corporate parents' to you.

If there is a potential change to your placement, then this cannot happen until there has been a review of your care plan to make sure this decision is in your best interests.

Each review must consider:

- Whether to confirm or change your care plan
- What actions need to be taken to implement your care plan
- Who needs to do what
- When the actions need to be done by

IRO's are there to make sure that your review runs properly. In carrying out the review, your IRO has a number of roles including:

- Speaking to you alone before the review
- Making sure that your views are central to your review
- That your best interests are protected
- That your care plan is up to date and fully considers your needs
- That the actions within the care plan are being carried out

Remember – this is a review of your care plan and not of you, if you feel you are able, with the right support, we would encourage you to chair your own review.



Before the review

Your IRO will meet with you to talk about:

- how the review meeting will be run and who you think should be there
- Where and when the meeting should be held
- Your ideas about what you want to say at the meeting
- They will ask you if you want to chair your own meeting and they will offer support for you to do this

During the review

It is important that you feel you are central to the review as this meeting is about the care and support you need. You should feel your voice has been heard and taken seriously and that you understand everything that is being said during the review.



Your review will consider:

- Any changes in circumstances since your last review
- Whether decisions since your last review have been carried out and if not, why not
- Whether your legal status is right and whether it allows proper plans to be made in your long term interests
- Whether contact with your family and friends is what you want, and what you need
- Whether your placement is meeting your needs
- Your education and what progress you are making, to see whether any actions need to be taken to better support you
- What activities you are involved in and like doing
- A report on your health and if any actions need to be taken to stay healthy
- Any help you might need in understanding who you are and your history
- What advice, support and assistance you might need
- What support you might need when the time is right for you to leave care
- Whether you have been visited enough by your social worker and that you feel they have listened to you
- Whether decisions for you have been taken and acted upon quickly enough.

Record of the review

The IRO has to make sure that a full record of your review is taken, including those who attended, and any decisions taken to change your care plan. You will get a copy of this in a format that you understand.

Your care plan will be updated with any changes.

What do you do if you are not happy with decisions being made?

Your IRO will make sure that you know about your right to complain and provide you with help to get an advocate if you need one. If you do ever decide to complain to the council about things you are not happy with, your IRO will continue to work for you to try and get things sorted.

