

The role of Independent Reviewing Officers in providing safeguarding consultation and in Team around the Child meetings

To be reviewed in March 2018

The purpose of this document is twofold:

1. To clarify the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in providing safeguarding consultations where the social work team is considering an initial child protection case conference (ICPC), and the pathway for this.
2. To clarify the role of the IRO in reviewing Team around the Child plans (TAC), and chairing TAC meetings.

1. Pre-ICPC consultations

Consultations between Children's Social Care and IROs before conference have been introduced to offer expert safeguarding consultation to identify the possible way forward in a *limited number of cases*. There is no expectation that all cases proceeding to an ICPC would require an IRO consultation - the need for consultation is at the discretion of Children's Social Care and might be used in circumstances where it is believed that an independent perspective may be of benefit to the progression of the case. All decisions in respect of case management sit with the social worker and their managers, and not with the IROs.

Where it is felt that a consultation with an IRO might be helpful, contact should be made with the duty IRO at the Safeguarding Children Unit. All consultations should take place with the agreement of the social worker's team leader, and usually prior to any strategy discussion/meeting.

Following a request for an IRO consultation, the duty IRO will read significant case file information including the most recent social work assessment, the chronology, the most recent TAC minutes and the TAC plan. The social worker should also highlight any other important documents to be considered. Having read the relevant documentation, the duty IRO and the social worker will have a telephone discussion. This should take place on the same working day as the request is made.

Consultations will be recorded by the relevant IRO on the child's file on the case management system (EIS), and in accordance with the recording policy. Records should include a detail of the documentation read, the advice given and the rationale for the advice.

If the IRO recommends that the case could be best managed in the tier 3 Team around the Child (TAC) process, and the social worker and team leader agree, an IRO will chair the next TAC meeting within 15 days of the consultation. The responsibility for the organisation and recording of the meeting lies with the social worker, but the minutes should be agreed by the IRO.

Within the meeting, the IRO will have due consideration to the threshold for conference and membership of the TAC, highlighting if additional members need to be brought into the plan including adult's services who are providing support or treatment to a parent/carer. The IRO chair will provide independent scrutiny to the plan and progress so far, and will review the engagement of all parties, including the child and parents/carers to the plan.

In circumstances where the IRO does not believe a case meets the threshold for an ICPC, but the social work team does, this should be escalated by the social work team leader to the service leader for a final decision - this should occur within 24 hours of the consultation taking place.

Where the IRO requests or recommends additional information and/or assessment, any subsequent requests for consultation should be made to the same IRO.

In summary:

1. The decision as to whether to convene an ICPC is one for the social worker and team leader in conjunction with their service leader.
2. Consultation with IROs is to offer safeguarding support to the social work team and should be called on in circumstances where the social work team feels that this would aid the decision making process.
3. In most cases, requests for IRO consultation should precede the strategy discussion.
4. If an IRO does not believe a case meets the threshold for an ICPC but the social work team does, this should be escalated by the social work team leader to the service leader for a final decision within 24 hours of the consultation.
5. If the IRO and the social work team are in agreement that an ICPC is unnecessary, the IRO will chair a TAC meeting within 15 working days of the consultation taking place.
6. All IRO consultations will be recorded by the IRO on the child's file within EIS. In advance of the consultation taking place, the IRO will have read the recent case file including the most recent social work assessment, the chronology, the most recent TAC minutes and the TAC plan. The social worker must also highlight any other important documents to be considered.

In order to ensure that there is a consistent high quality of advice being given, the service leader, safeguarding, will undertake a monthly dip sample which will consider the timeliness and quality of advice and the timeliness and outcome of the resulting TAC meeting if advice has been not to go to ICPC.

2. IROs and the Team around the Child process

IROs may become involved in the TAC process in the following circumstances:

Following a pre-ICPC consultation - where a consultation regarding the appropriateness of an ICPC has occurred and Children's Social Care is in agreement with an IRO recommendation to manage the case within TAC, the IRO will chair a TAC meeting. This should take place within 15 working days of the consultation taking place, and matters for consideration are detailed at point one of this document.

Following step-down from a Child Protection Plan - where a decision is made at a Review Child Protection Conference that it is appropriate for a child's plan to be stepped down to the TAC process, the IRO should consider chairing a TAC meeting. The purpose of this would be to offer on-going independent scrutiny of the plan for the child concerned.

IRO involvement following step-down from a Child Protection Plan will not be appropriate in all circumstances. It should, however, be systematically considered by the IRO and may be decided upon in consultation with the family, and the multi-agency core group. Factors influencing the decision may include, for example, the complexity of the presenting issues, the duration of the Child Protection Plan and the unanimity of the step-down decision.

Ordinarily, the IRO will chair the third TAC meeting following the Review Conference. This is subject to some flexibility, and the IRO will be guided by the circumstances and needs of the individual child and their family.

<http://www.safeguardingchildreninstockport.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Stockport-Multi-Agency-Step-Up-Step-Down-Protocol.pdf>