

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

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 conference (ICPC), and the pathway for this.
2. To clarify the role of the IRO in reviewing Team around the Child plans (TAC), and where there may be a role in chairing TAC meetings.

1. Pre-ICPC consultations

Consultations between Children's Social Care and IROs before conference are available 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 prior to any strategy discussion/meeting. Consultations should always take place between the IRO and the relevant team leader; where possible, the allocated social worker should also be included.

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 work team should also highlight any other important documents to be considered.

Having read the relevant documentation, the duty IRO and the team leader will have a discussion. This should take place on the same working day as the request is made.

Consultations will be recorded by the IRO in the child's case record on the relevant form within Liquid Logic. The case recording 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 be available to chair the next TAC meeting if this is considered to be helpful. Ideally, this will be the same IRO who offered the consultation, and the TAC meeting should be scheduled within 15 days of the consultation taking place.

An IRO should always chair the next TAC meeting in circumstances where there is professional disagreement between partner organisations about the need or otherwise for an ICPC.

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. 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 should be led by Children's Social Care and should result from a multi-agency strategy discussion and any subsequent section 47 enquiries.
2. Consultation with IROs is to offer safeguarding advice and 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 be available to chair a TAC meeting within 15 working days of the consultation taking place if this is considered to be helpful. An IRO should always chair the next TAC meeting in circumstances where there is professional disagreement between partner organisations about the need or otherwise for an ICPC.
6. All IRO consultations will be recorded by the IRO on the child's case record within Liquid Logic. 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 work team 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 for safeguarding, will undertake a quarterly dip sample which will consider the timeliness and quality of advice.

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 is available to chair the next TAC meeting if this is considered to be helpful. 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. An IRO should always chair the next TAC meeting in circumstances where there is professional disagreement between partner organisations about the need or otherwise for an ICPC.

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, consideration should be given as to whether it would be helpful for the IRO to be involved in chairing subsequent TAC meetings at identified junctures. 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 decided on 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. Any agreement for an IRO to chair a TAC meeting in one or more of these circumstances should be recorded in the minutes of the final child protection review conference.

Where a TAC plan runs alongside a Supervision Order – where care proceedings conclude with the making of a Supervision Order, an IRO may be involved in reviewing the Supervision Order by way of attending TAC meetings. The reviewing IRO should ideally be the same as the one who reviewed the child/ren's LAC care plan. The level of IRO involvement should be detailed in the Local Authority's final care plan filed with the Court, and should be agreed by the IRO in advance.

Typically, an IRO would review a Supervision Order within a TAC meeting at 3, 6 and 11 months into the 12 month duration of the order. It is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure that the nominated IRO is invited to TAC meetings at pre-agreed intervals.