

Practice Guidance: Undertaking Independent Reviewing of Pathway Plans of Relevant and Former Relevant Young People.

Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers

The IRO handbook describes the role of Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to care leavers:

*“Where a review concludes that it is appropriate for a looked after young person to make the move to independent living arrangements, and such a move takes place, **this does not automatically result in the young person ceasing to be looked after.** It is likely that given their vulnerability most young people will benefit from the support that results from being looked after (including having a pathway plan that is kept up to date and reviewed by an IRO) until the age of 18. However, where there is consideration that it might be in a young person’s interests to no longer be looked after and become a ‘relevant child’ then this **entirely separate** issue must be considered by a properly constituted statutory review of the pathway plan, chaired by the IRO. The proposed pathway plan for the young person concerned must be available for scrutiny at this review. The review should also stipulate how in future the pathway plan is to be reviewed and whether there would be any benefits in these meetings being chaired by an independent person, with an established competence in the provision of leaving care, housing support and other services to care leavers”.*

(IRO Handbook Paras 5.16 & 5.17)

The offer to relevant and former relevant young people is that their pathway plan will be reviewed at 6-monthly intervals for a further 2 occasions by an Independent Reviewing Officer. This will be the same IRO who previously reviewed their looked after care plan, as this ensures continuity in the planning and reviewing process, minimises the number of new professionals the young person needs to deal with, and maintains the relationship between young person and their IRO.

The IRO will offer to chair a maximum of 2 reviews following the young person ceasing to be looked after. The decision to continue the independent oversight of the Pathway Plan will be led by the young person, who may not want the IRO to continue in this role or may want the IRO to chair only one of the maximum 2 further reviews offered.

Outline Process:

Final Cared for review

Every young person looked after will have a final looked after review, usually a few weeks or months before their 18th birthday. If the young person is a relevant young person, the final looked after review may be held at a point before or soon after their 16th birthday.

The final looked after review will be chaired by the IRO. The PA should be allocated well in advance of this final review, and be in attendance at the meeting, along with the outgoing social worker.

The final looked after review will make decisions with regard to the implementation of the young person’s pathway plan. One of these decisions will be regarding the on-going arrangements for the future reviewing of the plan. The young person’s view regarding whether or not they wish the IRO to continue in their role will be the primary determining factor.

A date for the first pathway plan review will be set no later than 6 months from the final looked after review.

The review can take a variety of forms but the consent and active involvement of the young person is essential. Ideally the Pathway plan review takes the form of a meeting involving young person, PA and reviewing officer. Additional attendees could include the carer or accommodation provider, and any other professionals who are contributing to the pathway plan e.g. College. The young person’s views of who should attend the meeting will be a key determining factor.

Alternatively the Pathway plan review takes the form of the IRO contacting those involved with the young person either in person or by phone/email (dependant on the young person's consent) to gather information regarding the progress of the pathway plan. IRO leads the discussion involving PA and /or young person.

Prior to the review:

4 weeks prior:

1. IRO contacts PA to confirm the time, date and format for the review. PA provides verbal update regarding young person's circumstances, contact details etc.
2. IRO contacts the young person to arrange a time to meet before the review. Ideally this will be in the young person's home or other venue of their choice. If the young person declines to meet their IRO face to face, or this is not practically possible, some other form of contact will be offered e.g. telephone call, e-mail etc.
3. No less than 3 working days prior to the review: PA updates the current plan and sends to the IRO
4. IRO reads the updated Pathway Plan – this document will be used as the basis for the Pathway Plan review.

Pathway Plan review

Usually the pathway plan review will take the form of a meeting. The attendees will be the young person, their PA, the IRO, their carer or accommodation provider, and any other professionals who are contributing to the pathway plan e.g. College. The young person's views of who should attend the meeting will be a key determining factor.

The contributors to the meeting will not be required to complete written consultation forms as they do for a looked after review. The contributions and views of review attendees should be captured within the Pathway Plan. It is the responsibility of the PA to determine the views of other agencies and ensure these are accurately recorded within the Pathway Plan.

The Team Manager for the PA will countersign the plan by way of authorisation, before it is seen by the IRO.

The IRO will record a summary of the issues and decisions in the "Actions" section of the pathway plan, clearly denoting this is part of the pathway plan review.

The review agrees a future date for the second pathway plan review and this is recorded in the Pathway Plan. The plan is finalised by the IRO, adding the decisions and updates discussed at the review.

A copy of this is then forwarded to the Team Manager as the agreed plan. Copy sent to Team Manager for sign off. The Team Manager receives the reviewed plan – There is then 5 working days to contact IRO for discussion if the Team Manager does not agree with any aspect of the plan.

If the young person wishes the IRO to continue to oversee the subsequent Pathway Plan review/s (second), these are then conducted in similar way.

Reviews will continue to take place at 6-monthly intervals while the young person has relevant or former relevant status under the Leaving Care Act. These will be carried out by the social worker or Personal Advisor.

Disputes and Challenges.

On occasions, after conducting a review of the Pathway Plan, the Reviewing Officer may identify areas where there is drift, delay or lack of progress with aspects of the plan. For example the young person may be in unsuitable accommodation, their health or education needs are not sufficiently met, or there is a safeguarding concern. Decisions or agreed actions from the previous review may not have been followed up, without good reason.

In these circumstances the IRO will challenge the Local Authority by

1. Recording the issue as a Quality Assurance issue on the reviewed pathway plan and
2. Logging the quality assurance issue on the young person's record, similar to the existing Quality Assurance Process for Looked After Children.

The record of the quality assurance issue will stipulate the action needed and a clear timescale. The relevant Team Manager and the Team Manager will be notified of the issue by the IRO.

Once the timescale has been reached, the IRO and PA will share information as to if and how the issue has been resolved. If the issue is not resolved to the IRO's satisfaction, the matter is escalated to the Service Manager for Looked After Children.

If this does not resolve the matter to the IROs satisfaction, the issue could be escalated again to the Head of Service for further action.