



Job Description

Job Title: Independent Review & Conference Officer (IRCO)

POSCODE: HAY02686

Grade:

Overall Purpose of Role

Please write one or two sentences about why the job exists. Focus on the achievement of the key end results of the job.

The Independent Reviewing & Conference Officer (IRCO) is a specialist independent role with professional accountability enshrined in statutory guidance to deliver Northamptonshire Children's Trust's statutory responsibilities to promote and safeguard the welfare of children through: -

- Independent oversight of Children in Care cases and ensuring that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.
- Monitoring the performance of the local authority's function as a corporate parent and identifying areas of poor practice, reporting deficits to senior managers and to the Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) where in the IRCO's professional judgement it necessary to do so.
- Specialist professional expertise with regard to child protection practice which includes: -
 - Independent oversight and quality assurance of child protection planning (including chairing of child protection conferences), ensuring that the child's interests are promoted throughout.
 - Monitoring the local authority's performance with regard to child protection practice, identifying areas of poor practice and reporting deficits and recommending actions to senior managers, working with senior managers on remedial action where necessary.

The IRCO team consists of 27 (FTE) posts and sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The post-holder reports to a Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager.

- Post holders must be passionate about children, tenacious, knowledgeable and driven to pursue the best outcomes for the vulnerable group. Caseload may be predominantly Children in Care or Children subject to Child Protection Planning dependent upon service need.

- IRCOs will offer cover arrangements for Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) when required.

The IRCO sits within the Northamptonshire Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service (SQAS). The service is responsible for monitoring and reviewing all cases of children in care and children who are subject to child protection plans. The IRCO will ensure that outcomes improve for children and young people who require statutory in care and child protection services, that practice meets statutory requirements and ultimately that the Children's Trust can evidence effective practice to the regulator, within the inspection framework for children's services. In doing so, the service, through IRCOs, offers specialist professional expertise and challenge to front line practitioners and managers at all levels of the organisation with regard to matters relating to child protection and children in care. The overall objective of the service is to quality assure the social care and inter-agency practice with regard to children in care and children who are subject to child protection plans and to take remedial action where necessary. The IRCO maintains their relationship with the child throughout the care cycle and therefore plays a crucial role in planning for individual children.

The service is offline from direct service delivery and as such, the IRCO does not have case accountability for care planning. However, the role encompasses the statutory duties enshrined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and related regulations and guidance in relation to all children in care including those receiving short breaks, within the youth justice system, detained in secure accommodation, admitted or detained compulsorily in hospital, and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

The role also encompasses the role of the child protection conference chair enshrined in Working Together to Safeguarding Children and Young People 2018, in which the guidance states that the chair is accountable to the Director of Children's Services and that the status of the chair should be sufficient to ensure inter-agency commitment to the conference and the child protection plan.

In accordance with the IRO Handbook guidance, the role requires the IRCO to be an authoritative professional and a registered social worker with at least equivalent status to an experienced children's social work team manager.

The role is a specialist one which stands alone in the local authority and in which a large degree of autonomy to ensure that the local authority fulfils its statutory duties. The role may therefore involve challenging senior managers and requires the IRCO to use their inherent authority to seek legal remedies if the local authority fails in its duties.

Main Accountabilities

Main Accountabilities	
1	To fulfil the statutory duties of the Independent Reviewing Officer enshrined in Section 25B (1) of the Children Act 1989, specifically to ensure that the performance of the local authority with regard to children in care cases is monitored and challenged, that care plans are actively progressed and that outcomes for children in care are the best possible for each child.
2	To fulfil the statutory role of the child protection conference chair, enshrined in Working Together to Safeguard Children and young People

	2018, specifically to ensure that there is multi-agency engagement in child protection planning for children and young people who have suffered or are at risk of suffering significant harm and that child protection plans are timely and effective in safeguarding each child's welfare.
3	To provide specialist expertise with regard to professional practice relating to child protection and children in care cases to front line practitioners, and managers within the Children's Trust and within the safeguarding children's partnership. This may be the mentoring of front-line staff in specific areas of practice and contributing to the strategic planning and development of practice, procedures, and service delivery.
4	To undertake independent management reviews and regular audit of children's cases where there have been practice shortcomings or routinely as part of the quality assurance framework, ensuring that all relevant lines of enquiry have been followed, that critical issues are identified and appropriately escalated, that learning and recommendations follow from the findings and that action plans are developed and monitored to evidence improvements in practice.
5	To provide an independent view on the quality of placement provision for each looked after child subject to review. This includes the contract monitoring of agency or out of county provision to ensure that it meets child's needs and provides value for money for the county council and providing reports to foster carer reviews.
6	To develop and maintain partnership and multi-agency working in order to ensure that services work together to assess risk and respond to identified need to safeguard and promote the best possible outcomes for children who are subject to child protection plans or are in care.
7	To secure improvements to outcomes for children in care or subject to child protection plan through effective management of performance information and qualitative data for each child, developing effective mechanisms for monitoring and tracking actions specified at the review. This includes contributing to the overall service performance reporting and personally managing all performance data and tracking systems relating to the individual caseload.
8	IRCOs will support and offer cover arrangements for Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) duties.
9	To ensure that all practice directly delivered or subject to monitoring and review is delivered in accordance with Northamptonshire Children's Trust's Equality Policy.
10	To ensure that health and safety requirements are met in relation to location of service delivery, specifically child protection and childcare reviews.
11	To carry out other duties which fall within the broad spirit, scope and purpose of the job description and which are commensurate with the grade of the post and the statutory duties of the role. This may include deputising for the line manager and representing the service on internal and external projects and leading on initiatives appropriate to the role.

Safeguarding commitment *(Include for roles involving work with children/vulnerable adults)*
We are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people/vulnerable adults. We require you to understand and demonstrate this commitment.

Person Specification

Qualifications, Knowledge, Skills and Experience

Minimum level of qualifications needed for this post

Qualifications Required	Subject	Essential/Desirable
A registered Social worker holding a CQSW, Dip SW, B.A. or M.A. Social Work of equivalent		Essential
Social Work England Registration		Essential

Minimum levels of knowledge, skills and experience required for this post

Identify	Details	Essential/Desirable
Knowledge:		
<p>A demonstrable knowledge of statutes, case law and practice guidance that underpins the Children's Services agenda relating to services for Children in Care, young people and their parents / carers and children subject to CP Plans. This will include, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children Act (1989) • Children Act (2004) • Children and Young Person's Act (2008) • Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) and the IRO Handbook • Children & Social Work Act (2017) • Working Together (2018) <p>And other relevant statutes, case law and practice guidance as may become required from time to time.</p>	<p>Significant experience within Children's Social Care service areas and / or extensive Court proceedings experience as a Children Guardian.</p> <p>It is expected that IROs have 'at least equivalent status to an experienced children's social work team manager' (IRO Handbook). CP Chairs are accountable to the Director of Children's Services and the status of the CP Chair should be sufficient to ensure inter-agency commitment to the conference and the child protection plan.</p>	Essential
<p>A thorough understanding of practice standards and role responsibilities / expectations of the IRCO.</p>	<p>Demonstrable knowledge and understanding of the IRO Handbook and Working Together (2018).</p>	Essential
Skills:		
<p>Ability to work with all corporate parents, operational and strategic managers, and partner agencies in a child focused manner.</p>	<p>Ensure the outcome of the child is at the centre of everything you do.</p>	Essential

Ability to work as part of a team of experienced IRCOs, whilst acknowledging the independent status of the role.	To support fairness and equality across the team to develop good working practices for individuals and the team.	Essential
The ability to apply negotiation skills with colleagues and partner agencies during potential conflicting debates and discussion.	Listen, discuss and influence to achieve the best solution for children. This includes a statutory requirement to refer children's cases back for judicial review if their Care Plan is not met.	Essential
To demonstrate good communication skills, both written and verbal.	Excellent communication skills, with the capability to influence, negotiate and develop a strong rapport and professional credibility with all stakeholders.	Essential
To be able to demonstrate an understanding and experience of training and presentation skills.	Experience of creating and delivering presentations to a range of audiences.	Desirable
To demonstrate ability to write informative, timely and qualitative reports.	Experience of writing reports to include robust data, analysis, conclusions and recommendations.	Essential
To demonstrate good analytical skills in reports and discussions.	A logical, analytical, proactive and responsive approach to tasks with accuracy and attention to detail.	Essential
To have experience and skill in dealing with conflict management.	Ability to manage potential conflicts in a timely, effective and professional manner.	Essential
Experience:		
Significant post qualification experience within children social care service areas and / or extensive court proceedings experience as a Children Guardian.		Essential
You should have management experience as a Team Manager, experienced Practice Manager, or other relevant management experience and bring proven experience of achieving outcomes for children.		Essential
Equal Opportunities:		
Ability to demonstrate awareness/understanding of equal		Essential

opportunities and other people's behaviour, physical, social and welfare needs.		
Safeguarding (include for roles working with children/vulnerable adults)		
Demonstrate an understanding of the safe working practices that apply to this role.		Essential
Ability to work in a way that promotes the safety and well-being of children and young people/vulnerable adults.		Essential
Disclosure Level		

What DBS Level is required for this post?	
None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Standard	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhanced Child Only	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhanced Child/Adult Bar	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Working Arrangements

What work type does this role fit into? (tick one box that reflects the main work type, the default workers type is flexible)	
Fixed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Field	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home	<input type="checkbox"/>