

NAGALRO PRESS RELEASE

GOVERNMENT REVIEW PUTS VULNERABLE CHILDREN AT RISK

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The Department of Education's review of foster care in England, conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers and published on 6th February 2018, recommends that the role of Independent Reviewing Officers for children in care should be dispensed with. Nagalro, whose members work with children in the Family Court and care system every day, strongly believes that such a move would put vulnerable children at real risk.

Independent Reviewing Officers ('IROs') were introduced under s118 Adoption and Children Act 2002 to deal with the problem of children, coming into local authority care under detailed plans to ensure their future welfare, only to find that those plans were never implemented and the child suffered life-long harm as a result. The role was further strengthened by Care Planning Regulations in April 2011. The task of the IRO is to be the voice of the children, who cannot speak out for themselves. The IRO must ensure that they are not lost and forgotten under pressure of more urgent cases and budget cuts. The IRO also has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority's function as the child's corporate parent and to identify any areas of poor practice.

Giving local authorities the ability to dispense with IROs was one of the provisions rejected by Parliament when the Children and Social Work Act 2017 was being debated and Nagalro is very disappointed to see this proposal revived.

The proposals are based on a 5-year-old Ofsted report. They ignore a later study by the National Children's Bureau, funded by the Nuffield Foundation¹ which concluded that the scrutiny of council plans for children in care was '*crucial to ensure that the quality of care plans is not compromised*'. The authors of that report went on to conclude that '*where the role works well, it can make a real difference to children's lives and good practice needs to be shared – and celebrated*'.

An Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in Wolverhampton in January 2017² found that

'Independent reviewing officers are good at making sure that children and young people get the right help, support and protection. They provide effective critical challenge.'

'Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are effective in driving improvements in practice and performance, leading to better outcomes for children looked after. A stable and experienced team of IROs has been given additional resources, including a dedicated

¹ The role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in England; NCB, March 2014.

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/NCB%20The%20Role%20of%20Independent%20Reviewing%20Officers%20in%20England%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

²

https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/local_authority_reports/wolverhampton/052_Single%20inspection%20of%20LA%20children%27s%20services%20and%20review%20of%20the%20LSCB%20as%20pdf.pdf

foster carer reviewing officer, to ensure that IROs are able to continue to deliver a high-quality service. At the time of this inspection, 90% of reviews had been completed on time. Children and young people are well engaged in the review process, and 92% of them participate in their reviews. Although there is still some variability in practice, the majority of care plans are clear, concise, up to date and outcome-focused.'

Acting Chair of Nagalro, Sukhchandani Kaur, whilst acknowledging that the system of IROs was not perfect, believes that it is crucial that children in care have a named professional, responsible for making their voice heard and ensuring that their care plans remain in their interest and are implemented. She said that 'it needs to be better resourced and strengthened to protect the most vulnerable children in our society'

The Government has often expressed its opposition to children, as it puts it, 'languishing in care'. Nagalro believes that these proposals would bring about just such an outcome.

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For further please information contact:

Karen Harris, Principal Administrator Nagalro, 01372 818504, 07793 949634,
nagalro@nagalro.com

Sukhchandani Kaur, Acting Chair of Nagalro, 01372 818504, 07946 593801

Notes to Editors:

1. Nagalro is the professional association for Family Court Advisers, Children's Guardians and Independent Social Workers. Its members represent the interests of children in a range of public and private law proceedings. Nagalro members are senior, highly experienced children and family social workers who work in a variety of roles. Many work as independent social workers and risk assessors providing expert witness reports in a wide range of complex cases coming before the family courts; in fostering and adoption agencies; in independent practice providing therapeutic services; as academics; as supervisors, mentors and consultants. Members have significant experience as managers, chairs of Adoption Panels and other specialist social work practitioner roles.
2. The Nagalro website is at www.nagalro.com