

NAGALRO RESPONDS TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Nagalro has issued an initial response to Josh MacAlister's report '*The Independent Review of Children's Social Care*'. Nagalro's Chair, Carole Littlechild, said that the proposal to rebuild the routes for delivering early family help for struggling families and steer them away from the crises which might lead to children having to be removed was welcome. This is something Nagalro argued for in its response to MacAlister's document *The Case for Change* last year. We also argued that funds for early family help should be ring-fenced so that they could not be drained away to fund acute child protection cases and it is encouraging that the final report includes this proposal.

Carole, however, was cautious about the future of these proposals because (as she points out) they are *not* government proposals and we will have to wait until the end of the year to read the government's considered response. We can trace back many reports, some going back almost 40 years, recommending more use of early help for families and the vast majority of them were never implemented. 'We shall have to see' said Carole, 'what the government plans to do in response'.

From its formation, at the same time as the Children Act 1989 came into force, Nagalro has always had a central concern about making sure that the voice of the child was heard. Nagalro is, therefore, concerned to see that the report proposes to dispense with the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

There was a proposal to give local authorities power to dispense with IROs in the Bill which subsequently became the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Parliament rejected this. In 2018, the proposal was revived in the review of foster care conducted by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers. Josh MacAlister now proposes that the IRO should be removed and replaced with an advocacy service for looked after children. Nagalro believes that Josh MacAlister has failed to fully understand the role of the IRO and is in danger of 'throwing out the baby with the bathwater'. Nagalro would welcome children in care having access to dedicated advocates who can act as advisers, facilitators and a spokesperson for their views. What advocates cannot do, however, is to keep the plans and timetable for the child on track and prevent drift. Because of their statutory position within the local authority, they are able to do this and this was the initial reason why the role of IROs was first created. The social worker and their manager may well think that the plan is working well but a good IRO, who has spent time listening to the child, can not only point out where the plan is not working for the child but, because of their statutory role and authority, can make the necessary changes.



Chapter three of the report suggests that a reason for dismantling the IRO service is to provide the necessary experienced social workers to fill the need for Expert Child Protection Practitioners (Section 3.1). Nagalro deprecates any attempt to remove the ongoing and authoritative monitoring and oversight of the looked after child's care to simply meet a staff shortfall.

-ENDS-

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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