

NIROMP - strategic priorities and vision

**2019 -
2022**

Source: National IRO Managers Partnership
(NIROMP)

This documents sets out a draft vision and priorities for NIROMP for the next three years. We provide some ideas on how to achieve our vision and we want your thoughts on those priorities. Please share your views via our online feedback by going to: www.niromp.org. Your responses will help us shape our future work plans and support IRO services deliver key improvement priorities.

Securing better life chances and choices for all children and young people in care and leaving care.

Foreword

We are working with the sector to agree and promote a set of shared priorities and actions to support the continuous improvement and a modern approach to the delivery of increasingly effective IRO services.

A ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to achieve continuous improvement won’t work, but what NIROMP can do at the national level is help to refine strategic thinking and work with others to ensure that ideas, thinking, approaches and tools are shared, helping to enhance approaches to workforce planning and contributing to sector led improvements.

Sharon Martin, Chair - National IRO Managers Partnership



Sustainability, transformation and improvement

We welcome the government's continued support to work with organisations representing IROs and Local Authorities - to consider how the role of IROs can be put to best effect in the current system and under existing legislation.

MESSAGE TO IROs FROM CHILDREN'S MINISTER NADHIM ZAHAWI:

"We will work with organisations representing Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and LAs to consider how the role of IROs can be put to best effect in the current system and under existing legislation. The variability of practice nationally is well known. There is potential for IROs to bring about significant practice improvements, alongside their role in ensuring that young people experience the best care from their fostering service. Where IROs are valued and listened to, they provide a legitimate and respected challenge function for individual children's care plans and the wider service delivery. We want to iron out the inconsistencies, where these serve only to undermine the function of the IRO and to ensure that where practice differs, it is for good reason."





"We should not be satisfied until children in care perform as well as their peers. Anything less is setting our sights too low. More can, and must, be done to help the most vulnerable in our society."

(OAKLEY 2018, P.7)



Strategic priorities - the change we want to see



Voices of children - loud, proud and entitled

Secure love and care - children feel loved and securely cared for

Relationships - a focus on people, networks, wellbeing and resilience

Public Affairs - clear vision, leadership and direction





NIROMP has an established network of regional alliances covering the nine government regions of England.

Our networks aim to:

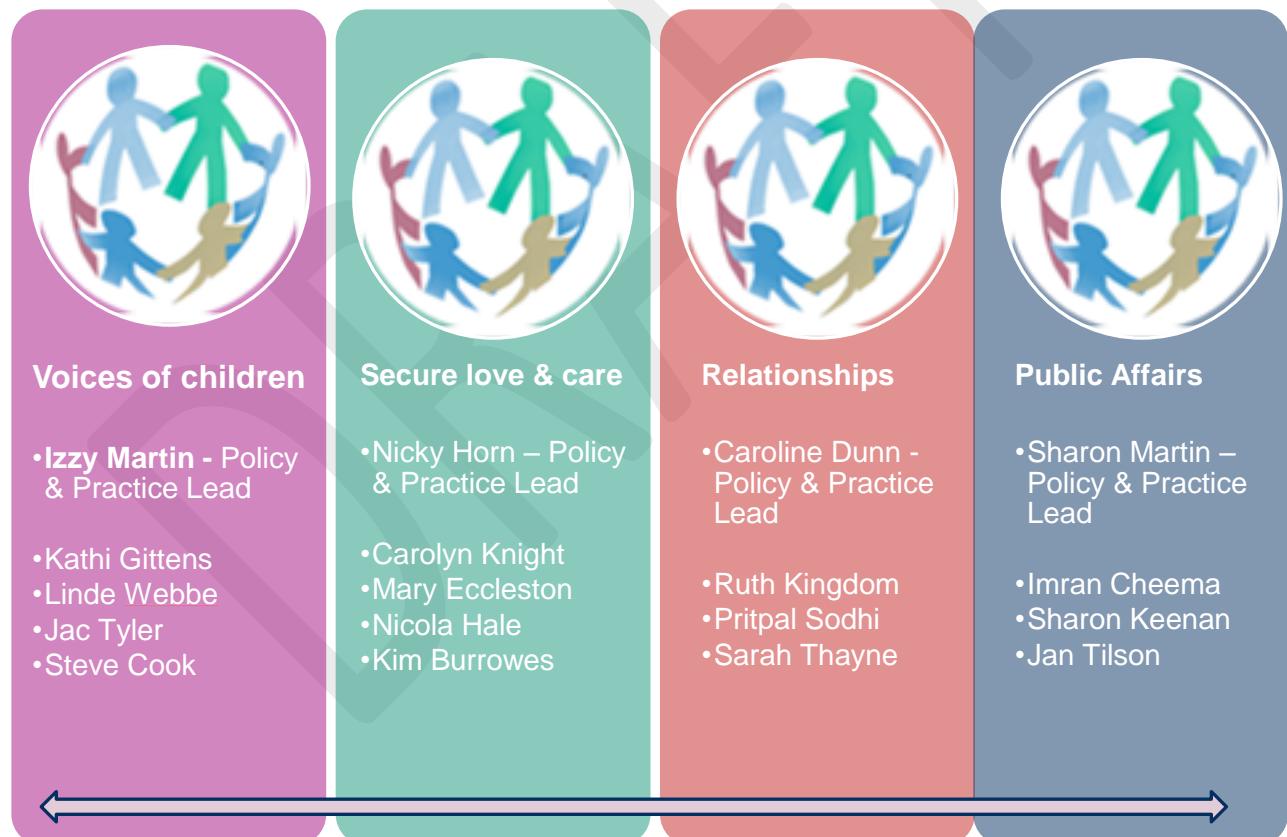
- help IROs achieve continuously better and more consistent practice;
- be responsive to policy and practice updates, consultation exercises and research projects - keeping members up to date with developments and service issues;
- ensure contributions from IROs draw on their expertise - to use this towards the effective learning, development and consistently effective delivery of IRO services at local, regional and national level;
- to use the regional networks to understand local variations and challenges to practice which are driving regional priorities;
- allow flexibility for local, regional and national priorities;
- provide leadership of task and finish groups which can be called on for specific support by DfE, local authorities and other key stakeholders, as required.



Strategic taskforce

We have regional leads attached to the nine government area regions across England.

NIROMP, through the regional leads bring a broad knowledge, experience and skills base to secure better life chances and choices for all children and young people in care and leaving care.



Voices of children - loud, proud and entitled

Inconsistencies across the care system are resulting in some children having little or no awareness of their rights.

Participation strengthens accountability:

Building opportunities for children to engage in issues of concern to them in their local community not only contributes to civic engagement, but also strengthens capacity for holding governments and other duty bearers to account. Knowledge of one's rights, learning the skills of participation, acquiring confidence in using and gathering information, engaging in dialogue with others and understanding the responsibilities of governments are all vital elements in creating an articulate citizenry.

EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO BE HEARD (2011). P10



Young person, Care Crisis Review (2018):

“If we were encouraged to understand more then I feel that we could be empowered to participate in decisions that affect us. But we can't because things are not explained to us properly and we often get lost with all the big words and use of jargon. I think that assumptions are often made - that because we are children we cannot understand or we're not mature enough to understand. But what people do not realise is that quite often because we have experienced so many traumas that we tend to mature a lot sooner – much more than those who have not been traumatised”.

Young people in care who do not feel included in decisions made about their lives are **3 times** more likely to feel low well-being.

(‘OUR LIVES, OUR CARE’ 2017).



“Some children and young people speak very positively about the efforts made by their social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to ensure their views are included in reviews but some describe the review system as ‘pointless’ and ‘ineffective’”

(CARE CRISIS REVIEW 2018, P.10)

55% of children in care do not know that they can access an independent advocate.

(‘HELPING CHILDREN GET THE CARE EXPERIENCE THEY NEED’ 2015).

50% of children aged 4 – 7 have not had an explanation of why they are in care.

(‘OUR LIVES, OUR CARE’ 2017)

Children have a unique body of knowledge about their lives, needs and concerns, together with ideas and views from their direct experience. Decisions that are fully informed by children’s own perspectives will be more relevant, more effective and more sustainable.

(‘THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD’ 2011, P.5)



The change we want to see

- For children's views to be sought and for their views to be at the heart of care planning, the review process and decisions that are made about them - that they are fully aware of their care plan and all decisions are fully explained to them.
- The rights of children are a central focus in all decision making about matters of importance to every child.
- Increased participation of children in their care plans for their lives, including consistently meaningful participation in all meetings.
- Children's voices are consistently sought and heard - there is evidence that their wishes and feelings influence their care plans.
- Championing the rights of every child and challenging where appropriate to ensure these are integrated in policy and practice.
- Children's views, wishes and ideas inform continuous improvements to service design and delivery.



How will NIROMP make a difference?

- We will ensure children and young people's interests; voices and rights are always front and centre of our local, regional and national agenda.
- We will champion the rights of children and young people who are looked after.
- We will actively promote children and young people's views about 'what works' in relation to their participation and involvement in planning and review of the things that matter most to them.





Secure love and care - children feel loved and securely cared for

Local Authorities take on the responsibility to be a “corporate parent” for children in care, and those leaving care. This means that when caring for children they adhere to seven key principles which outline a commitment to loving care (OAKLEY 2018, PP.12-13):

“

Act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;

Encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;

Take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;

”

Help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners;

“

Promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;

Provide for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and

Prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living. **(OAKLEY 2018, PP.12-13).**





The change we want to see

- IROs ensuring best practice in early permanence planning and stable care for all children who have entered the care system is paramount, minimising harmful delay and involving parents and family members.
- IROs ensuring the needs of parents involved in care proceedings are considered including their emotional support, access to legal advice and help to address their welfare rights.
- IROs ensuring all options for care by family have been considered.
- IROs ensuring children's return home to family is considered and pursued without delay where this is in the best interests of the child.
- Sufficient, high quality and suitably supported and trained foster carers and alternative family care provision that is well matched to the child's needs and promotes placement stability.



How will NIROMP make a difference?

- We will ensure the right decision is secured for every child.
- We will work with the sector to better understand need, valuing care and ensuring the money spent on children in care is making a positive difference.
- We will promote use of case law, research, findings from consultations and good practice guidance and tools to support effective care planning and review.
- We will promote use of the LGA guidance to councillors and help them to understand their corporate parenting responsibilities and that they effectively scrutinise services for looked after children.
- We will promote the good practice in relationship-based work with the whole family and their network.
- We will promote more active consideration to the collateral impact and harms caused by poverty and inequality.





Relationships - a focus on people, networks, wellbeing and resilience

We will have the right conversations, with the right people, at the right time.

Applications for care proceedings in England and Wales reached record levels in 2017.

Beneath the national average statistics lie pronounced regional and local variations in rates of children looked after and in care order applications.

The reasons for these local and regional differences are not fully understood but, in addition to deprivation and other socio-economic factors, how legislation, policies, practices and services are implemented at local and regional levels are thought to be determining outcomes for children and their familiesⁱ.

In all UK countries the rates of children looked after are increasing year on year. In England, the number has risen from 50,900 in 1997 to 72,670 in 2017. However, not all

The numbers and rates of looked after children have been rising in both England and Wales since the early 1990s.

There are also marked variations in the rates of children in care across the nine government regions of England. The evidence suggests differences in the likelihood of some children becoming looked after are strongly linked to areas' levels of deprivation.

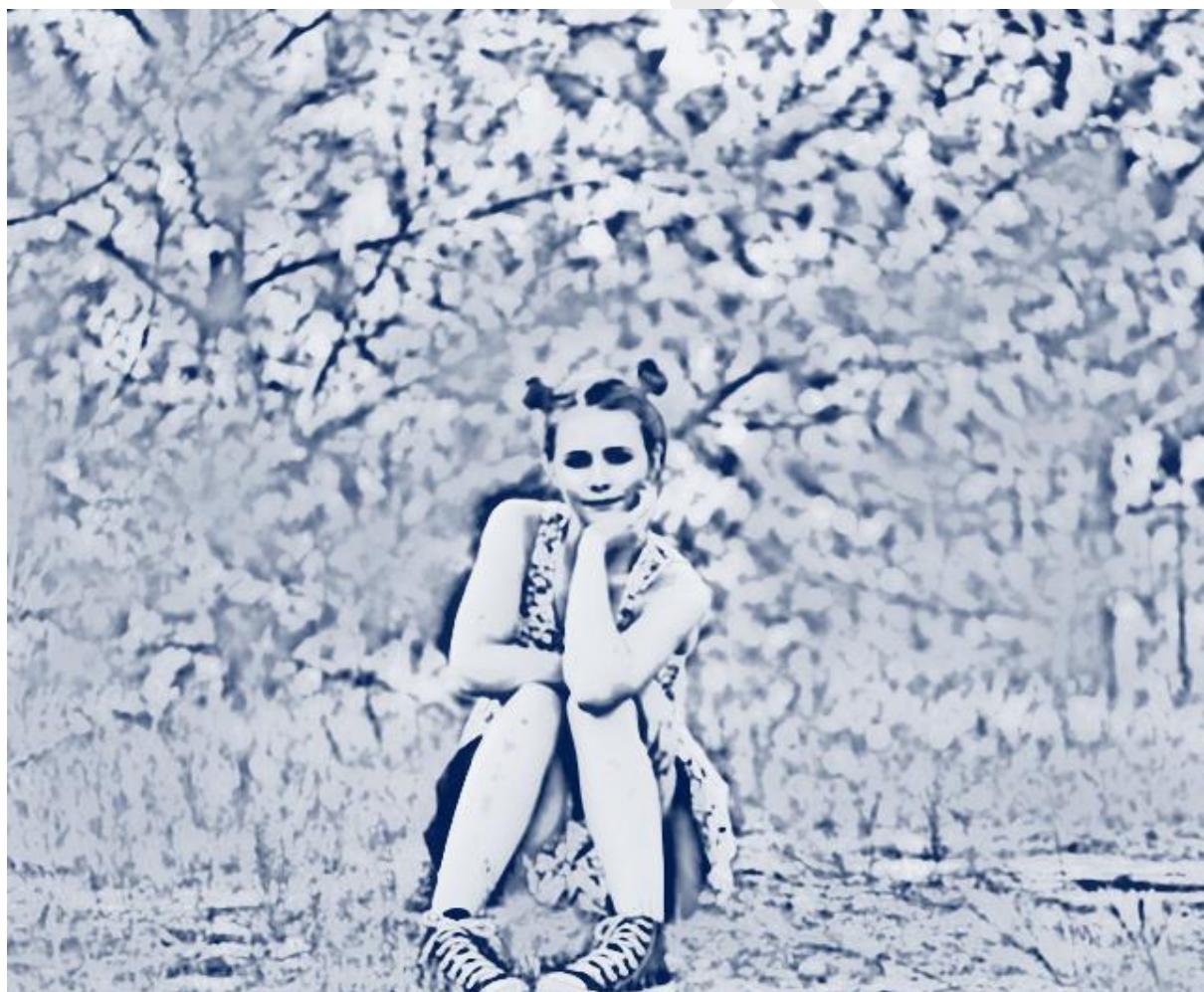
There are serious concerns about the mounting pressures within the systems. There is much uncertainty about whether the children's social care and family justice systems can be sustained with the current levels of demand and resourcing for care.

BYWATERS, P. ET AL (2017).



local authorities have seen a rise and the reasons for this need to be better understood.

A study by the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care indicates that both economic factors and service quality matter. Ofsted ratings and involvement in the Innovation Programme, which reflect local social work practice have also been associated with decreases in care rates.





The change we want to see

- A stronger focus on change and development that is focused on children, their wellbeing and resilience.
- Relationship building within and between agencies and the family justice system; within families, between families and practitioners.
- Partnership with parents, and viewing long term voluntary accommodation and shared care (between extended family and state) as a valuable alternative to Court.



- A national learning programme for IROs, to help develop the consistency of practice within and between local authorities across England.
- Sufficient financial, organisational and staff resources for IROs.





How will NIROMP make a difference?

- We will promote relationship-based and strengths-based practice with the significant people in the child's life.
- We will share learning and promote learning from ideas about 'what works'.
- We will support the call from the ADCS and the LGA for Government to commit to a full assessment of the overall funding needs of local Government and a national child poverty reduction strategy.
- We will promote approaches that support the untapped resource within a child's community.



Public affairs - clear vision, leadership and direction

- Building on collective contribution to work across England that influence government departments and politicians in the interests of children in care and care leavers.
- Ensuring representation of IROs voices through our work, NIROMP is seen as a strong collective voice for IROs and IRO Managers.
- Where relevant providing scrutiny in relation to policy, practice and legislation.
- Meetings with the Department for Education to inform, promote dialogue and to represent the interests of children in care and care leavers.
- Representation on Advisory Boards and working groups.
- Building on the strength of existing partnerships such as NIROMP's membership of the Alliance for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Pursuing the development of new alliances and approaches to collaborative working and shared aims and improvement.
- Strengthening IROs contributions to our regional networks.



Citations and Bibliography

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