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# Reviewing Officer Handbook *2024 - 2030*

Social Work Scotland  
Reviewing Officers Subgroup

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# Mission Statement, Pledge and The Promise

## Pledge to Children and Young People

Local Authorities have a statutory duty to uphold the rights of the children and young people, ensuring that the voice of the child is clearly heard, and decisions reflect their voice. Reviewing officers have a critical role in fulfilling this duty. We will support parents and carers to be involved in planning and decision making to promote shared accountability to best support children and young people to reach their potential.

## Mission Statement

As Reviewing Officers, we promise to:

- ✓ Get to know children and young people and be a key relationship for them before, during and after their meeting.
- ✓ Advocate for their rights and make sure they know their voice matters.
- ✓ Drive their plan forwards.
- ✓ Play our part in keeping them safe.
- ✓ Involve all family members who are important to children and young people.
- ✓ Make sure everyone is following the plan that the child or young person has helped shape.
- ✓ Make sure the meeting feels safe, is child led and enables children and young people to be fully involved.
- ✓ We will do our part to keep The Promise.





# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Context

A Reviewing Officers Network has met for over fifteen years and in recent years has joined Social Work Scotland as the Reviewing Officers Subgroup, one of several subgroups reporting into the Children and Families Standing Committee. Social Work Scotland is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. National conferences held between 2019 and 2023 agreed that Local Authorities would benefit from a handbook to encourage and improve consistency of practice across Scotland. The Social Work Scotland Reviewing Officers Subgroup has since developed this guide with the assistance of the Social Work Scotland national team.

In Scotland, the majority of the 32 Local Authorities employ staff whose main task is to chair Child Protection Planning Meetings and Looked After Child Reviews. For this handbook, the title Reviewing Officer will be used, although it is acknowledged several different job titles and associated responsibilities across the Local Authorities are used to encompass the role.

In Scotland we work within the parameters of the law, regulations, and Scottish Government guidance. These focus on the definition and purpose of a review, timescales, frequency, and the key components of overseeing and reviewing a child's plan. This handbook seeks to be more specific about the role of the Reviewing Officer in Scotland. It should be read in conjunction with the [Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#). And [The Guidance on Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) which underpin the statutory duty to reviewing children's plans.

In England and Wales there is a specific Independent Reviewing Officers role and related handbook [Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook \(England\)](#). We have referred to this in compiling this handbook, while reflecting the Scottish landscape for looked after and care experienced children and young people.

We are grateful for the support of [The Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection](#) (CELCIS) who aided this work by facilitating Practice Exchange Workshops in 2016/17. The 2018 CELCIS Report, noted that *"a principal theme arising from the practice exchange workshops refers to strengthening and maximising the consistency of the role in Scotland"* and the role should be underpinned by *"CPD training focussing on leadership skills; policy practice; and application of research"*. This handbook aims



to assist in strengthening the consistency of how the Reviewing Officer role is carried out.

## 1.2 Policy and Legal Context

In Scotland, [Getting it Right for Every Child](#) (GIRFEC) is our overarching government policy underpinned by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which outlines that children should receive the right help at the right time. It builds on the minimum intervention principles of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Assessment of need, working together and a child's plan are central aspects of GIRFEC. This highlights that:

- ❖ A personalised child's plan is developed when those working with the child or young person and family identify that a child or young person needs a range of extra support planned, delivered and co-ordinated.
- ❖ The child's plan should reflect the child or young person's voice and explain what should be improved for the child or young person, the actions to be taken and why the plan has been created.

In Scotland, the [Independent Care Review](#) which resulted in The Promise set out how Scotland should care for, support, nurture, and love children who are looked after. The Reviewing Officer role is critical to the delivery of the foundations of The Promise which we have linked to our Mission Statement and Pledge:

**Voice: Children must be listened to and meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved properly listening and responding to what children want and need. There must be a compassionate, caring, decision-making culture focussed on children and those they trust.**

**Family: Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way**

**Care: Where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters where safe to do so and belong to a loving home, staying there for as long as needed**

**People: The children that Scotland cares for must be actively supported to develop relationships with people in the workforce and wider community, who**



**in turn must be supported to listen and be compassionate in their decision-making and care.**

**Scaffolding: Children, families and the workforce must be supported by a system that is there when it is needed. The scaffolding of help, support and accountability must be ready and responsive when it is required.**

### 1.3 Listening to Children and Young People

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\) \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#) outlines how we uphold and protect the rights of children in law

[UNCRC](#), which is enshrined in this legislation, outlines that children and young people have the right to be listened to and taken seriously. It also outlines that the voice of every person with care experience must be heard in their care journey with real weight given to their wishes.

The Promise underlines this stating that we must listen to and keep listening to our children. They must be meaningfully and appropriately involved in decision-making about their care, with all those involved hearing and responding to what children say.

In line with this we have identified that Reviewing Officers should:

- ❖ Be given the time and space to listen to and support the child or young person's participation in their meeting.
- ❖ Ensure that children's voices and views are heard or interpreted by understanding their observable behaviours. This requires a sound understanding of child development to ensure promotion of the child's voice as central to decision making.
- ❖ Understand and act upon quieter voices, infants, and those with communication challenges. No child should be hard to reach or have their views heard. See [Voice of the Infant Pledge](#).
- ❖ Have an important role in modelling / mentoring and coaching of the workforce. Reviewing Officers are well placed to demonstrate good practice and listening and understanding skills to the wider workforce, building participation and engagement capacity.



## 2. An Overview of the Reviewing Officers Role and Functions

### 2.1 Care Planning and Reviews

[The Guidance on Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) and the [Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#) reflects expectations of Review as the forum where:

- ❖ Through regular, prescribed timescales the Local Authority exercises its duty to agree, oversee and revise plans for children.
- ❖ Any significant changes the care plan for looked after children are made.

Discussion with the chairperson and the social worker prior to the review meeting should take place in order that any controversial issues around care planning can be resolved in a manner that is both sensitive and supportive of the child/young person's needs.

The Reviewing Officer should ensure that every review provides the opportunity to:

- ❖ Take stock of the child's needs and circumstances to ensure the local authority is fulfilling their statutory responsibilities and child's wellbeing needs.
- ❖ Consult formally with parents and children, acknowledging and taking account of their views. This may include promoting advocacy for vulnerable adults to facilitate their participation.
- ❖ Assess the effectiveness of current plans as a means of securing the best interests of the child.
- ❖ Oversee and make accountable the work of professional staff involved.
- ❖ Agree plans for the child.

Reviewing Officers have several other professional responsibilities which promote good practice including:

- ❖ To support a culture in the team around the child that is focussed on wellbeing and improved outcomes through listening and responding to children and their families.





- ❖ To demonstrate positive and effective leadership by ensuring good practice is maintained in line with policy and procedure, agreed standards and legislation and in accordance with statutory obligations.

The Reviewing Officer has a role in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of planning and support for children by quality assuring care planning and reviewing processes to ensure positive outcomes for young people and their families. This should drive service improvement and embed best practice.

This handbook recognises that it is not the responsibility of the Reviewing Officer to manage the case, supervise the social worker or devise the care plan. It is important to develop a consistent relationship with the child, which should complement the relationship between the social worker and the child.

In addition to speaking to the child or young person, good practice indicates that there are preparations that the Reviewing Officer should make to ensure the meeting is able to be both productive but also sensitive. These include:

- ❖ A preparation for review meeting or discussion between the Reviewing Officer and social worker to ensure that all the necessary pre-meeting work has been carried out and that the Reviewing Officer is aware of any drift and plans for how this can be resolved. This ensures that meetings can be both child focused and child friendly.
- ❖ The Reviewing Officer should have access to the review report / plan in a timely manner before the review to support their preparation (this timescale should be identified in each Local Authorities procedures) alongside timescales for when families will receive the relevant paperwork to allow them to make similar preparations.
- ❖ The review should be child-focused, and consideration should be given to ensuring children and young people are consulted in preparing invite lists. Priority should always be given to the child or young person attendance at the review which may mean the Reviewing Officer considering separate meetings with professionals or others to hear their contribution and assessment.
- ❖ Effort must be made to ensure that the review takes place in an environment which suits the child's needs and at a time which causes the least disruption to the child.
- ❖ The Reviewing Officer should support and encourage all participants to make a meaningful contribution to the review, to manage the meeting and to



challenge areas where the plan has not progressed as expected or where there are concerns about how a child's care is being managed. Please refer to Chapter 6: Dispute Resolution.

## 2.2 Outcome of the Review

All Local Authorities will have different expectations in terms of recording the outcome of a review, however, as a minimum, it is expected that:

- ❖ An accurate and comprehensive record of the meeting is produced and provided to all participants.
- ❖ Participant's views are recorded and importantly the views of the child or young person are recorded and decision and the reasons for these are clear.
- ❖ The minute is recorded in an accessible and child-friendly way, or a child friendly version is produced.
- ❖ Decisions, the responsible person, and timescales for achieving tasks are clearly outlined.

The Reviewing Officer may link with professionals at any time in the review period to monitor the ongoing process of the child's plan.

## 2.3 Child Protection

In some Local Authorities, Reviewing Officers may also chair Child Protection Planning Meetings. The [National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 - updated 2023](#) states that each child whose name has been placed on the Child Protection Register should have an allocated Reviewing Officer or independent chairperson to ensure that their plan is progressing within an appropriate timescale and to ensure a fresh perspective from someone who has no day-to-day management of the case.

The Child Protection Planning Meeting should be seen as a process and not as an event and it should always be child focused. The same good practice would apply to a Child Protection Planning Meeting as to a Child Care Review. The meeting must ensure timely and effective planning that supports the reduction of risk by forming a multi-agency plan that outlines what the outcomes are and who will help to achieve this. This includes contributions from professionals and families. This should be in line with national and local child protection guidance, and children or young people and



their families should be fully included and involved in decision making and planning about their care and protection.

Where a child is on the Child Protection Register and also has looked after status, there should be a single reviewing process, one plan and one meeting.

## 2.4 Advocacy and Children's Rights

Every looked after child or young person should be able to access independent advocacy, and each Local Authority must have mechanisms in place to provide such a service. Reviewing Officers should ensure children and young people are aware of their rights regarding advocacy and this should be discussed at each review.

Children and young people should also be given the opportunity to identify a specific person whom they trust to support them at a review or child protection planning meeting. This may be their advocate if they have one, or another individual. The trusted person is an additional support for the child or young person in relation to their care.

In England and Wales, Independent Reviewing Officers have specific legal responsibilities, which include meeting and consulting with children and young people, The Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook for England and Wales stipulates:

*“When they meet the child, they should do this one to one so that the child can talk freely. They must check with both the child and other people working with the child on whether the child is okay and happy where they are living and with their current care plan. They must regularly ask each child whether they are happy with how things are being done for them and keep checking what is happening for each child against that child's plan and the decision made at their Reviewing”.*

Whilst there is no similar a legal responsibility in Scotland – the duty to gain and reflect views sits with the local authority - good reviewing practice would be that the reviewing officer finds creative ways to encourage and support children to attend and participate in their reviews. This means prioritising listening to children, ensuring their voice is heard in all meetings and that supporting participation.



## 3. Considerations for Specific Groups

### 3.1 Specific Groups Overview

Regulation 44 and 45 of the [Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#), differentiates three groups of looked after children. Each has slightly different provisions about the frequency of their Reviews.

**Group One:** Children who remain at home with birth parents and are subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO).

**Group Two:** Children who are looked after away from home and placed with approved kinship carers or approved foster carers or in a residential establishment. This group includes children who are subject to a Compulsory Supervision Order (CSO), placed via Section 25, or subject to a Permanence Order. These children reviews are covered by regulation 45(2, 4, 5 and 6).

**Group Three:** Children who are placed in short-term (respite) placements, with approved kinship carers, approved foster carers or in residential care, and children placed in an emergency care placement. These children's reviews are also covered by regulation 45 noted above.

In the previous chapter, we outlined what must be common to all reviews. The role of the Reviewing Officer remains the same regardless of the legal or wider context of a child's placement, but considerations within the review may change to take account of specific aspects of a child's life. Some of these are listed below.

- ❖ Sibling groups
- ❖ Children looked after in kinship care
- ❖ Permanence plans
- ❖ Short breaks (short break regs add here)
- ❖ Additional communication needs
- ❖ Youth justice
- ❖ Children in hospital
- ❖ Unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people



- ❖ Children affected by disability

### 3.2 Sibling Groups

Sibling relationships are among our longest lasting relationships and positive sibling relationships can promote resilience in children and be a source of support and family connection as children grow up. The [Children \(Scotland\) Act 2020](#) outlines the importance of maintain links between looked after children and siblings highlighting that there should be a promotion of contact and connected care planning between children in our care and their siblings. Reviewing Officers must take into account the views of siblings in care planning and the Act also places a new duty in Children's Hearings to consider contact with relevant persons and siblings.

[The Staying Together and Connected: getting it right for sisters and brothers: National Practice Guidance](#) supports the implementation of the new duties for Scottish Local Authorities: that every looked after child will live with their brothers and sisters, where appropriate to do so. See also [Stand Up for Siblings](#).

### 3.3 Kinship Care

Looked after children are in the care of the local authority, who will always consider placement with a relative/close friend before considering 'stranger care'. A kinship carer of a looked after child must, within 12 weeks of the child being placed, be assessed and approved as appropriate to care for the looked after child. The ongoing appropriateness of the placement will be part of the child's review including ensuring that suitable emergency, interim and full assessment and approval, required within 12 weeks of placement, is in place. Kinship carers themselves, however, may have their own needs that do not sit comfortably as part of the child's reviews. This may include practical assistance, training and support for them as carers, and personal events and changes in their circumstances that are not appropriate to discuss within a group established to focus on the child's needs. There should be space annually, therefore, for kinship carers to reflect on their own needs in relation to caring for children, and this element may be planned and linked to the children's reviews. See [Kinship Care Legislation and Guidance](#).

### 3.4 Permanence Plans

[Carol Wassell in her 2013 research](#) highlighted potential improvements in permanence practice and noted the main aims of a review and the reviewing officer role where permanence is being considered or pursued. These remain relevant today:



- ❖ Preventing drift in care planning.
- ❖ Making sure plans meet children's needs.
- ❖ Monitoring the activity of the child's corporate parent.
- ❖ Producing plans that are timely, focused on the individual and are sensitive to those involved.
- ❖ Quality assuring the services provided to looked after children by the Local Authority.

From the start of each child's involvement in the looked after system the local authority has a duty to achieve stability and security for the child, in an environment where they are safe, and their developmental needs met.

Reviewing Officers should ensure that parents are clear about the efforts they are expected to make to achieve this, how they will be supported, and to recognise that if this cannot be managed, alternative plans will be made. Guidance requires that within a timescale of six months there should be a clear picture of the direction of travel for an individual child. Where a child has not returned home by this stage, or if significant progress towards that has not been achieved, then the review should consider whether a plan for permanence away from birth parents is required.

The Reviewing Officer leads a review of the plan, and with the multi-agency team decides the following:

- ❖ If the plan should no longer be the return of the child to the birth parents.
- ❖ If the child would benefit from growing up in an alternative family or in another long-term, stable placement.
- ❖ If this requires a legal change to underpin the security of a placement; and
- ❖ What programme of work is required, including referral to the adoption / permanence panel for consideration and an agency decision in relation to any recommendation for adoption. Some local authorities may also take other permanence recommendations to their permanence/adoption panel.

Some of the elements in this work that the Reviewing Officer must ensure have been completed or will be completed to progress the child's plan, include:



- ❖ That the child, if appropriate, understands that returning home is no longer planned.
- ❖ That opportunities for the child to express his or her views have been provided, or if too young to do this verbally, asking for the views of the carers or significant others from observations of a child's behaviour
- ❖ Clarifying the change in the child's plan with the birth parents, explaining the reasons for this, the different stages in the new pathway and how they can make their views known at each stage. As well as advising them on seeking their own legal advice, consideration should be given to the allocation of a separate worker to work with the parents through the permanence process or to seeking other available options for counselling and support.
- ❖ Considering and promoting sibling connections and keeping children together where possible.
- ❖ Where a child is already with kinship carers, discussing their position and whether this is a permanent option now that long-term care is needed and if so, how this is best secured legally.
- ❖ Where the child is placed with foster carers or in residential care, exploring whether there are other members of the child's kinship network who could offer permanent care. Use of family focused decision-making approaches may be useful at this stage in identifying potential long term/permanent options.
- ❖ Establishing with the child's current carers and dedicated social worker, where relevant, whether it is appropriate for them to continue looking after the child on a permanent basis.
- ❖ Ensuring that a date for an adoption/permanence panel is sought following a review recommendation for adoption or permanence.
- ❖ Seeking legal advice from the local authority legal adviser to explore the options available and the evidence for these.
- ❖ Gathering all the information required for any referral to the adoption/permanence panel and the collation of material for and writing of the report for this. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that the relevant medicals, legal advice and specialist reports are requested timeously.



- ❖ Where the child is subject to a supervision requirement from the Children's Hearing, considering whether a Children's Hearing Review should be sought prior to any advice Hearing after the agency decision.
- ❖ Following a decision by the agency decision maker, in line with the legislation, an immediate referral to the Children's Hearing for advice.

The review should also state the timescale within these actions are to be achieved. The maximum time to complete all the above steps should be by the next six-month review but may be sooner for a young child where much of the information is already clear. Reviewing Officers should have cognisance and ensure adherence to, the statutory guidance and timescales for permanence.

A small but significant group for whom this is particularly important is young infants when there may have been pre-birth child protection activity due to parental concerns and the strength of information about older children of these parents and the consequent risks to any other children. Where a baby has been accommodated away from a parent's care since birth and there is no evidence of change which may indicate consideration of a return to birth parents, early reviews should already be actively addressing the need for a permanence plan.

A Reviewing Officer can make decisions with associated timescales for progression of a child's plan. If there is unnecessary drift or delay in planning, or specific parts of the plan are not implemented within timescales, the Reviewing Officer may wish to use their internal escalation process. The Reviewing Officer has a quality assurance role and the timescale for the child must be the deciding factor.

Reviewing Officer's role gives them a key role to play in preventing drift in care planning for looked after children, where plans are for a return home or for permanence. They should ensure that the local authority adheres to national guidance in relation to planning for and achieving permanence for all looked after children. As part of this role, they should request tangible evidence of actions that the local authority has taken.

### **3.4 Short Breaks**

The legislation lays out less frequent review periods for plans for children who are looked after by reason of a series of short breaks than plans for other looked after children. See [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#).

When reviewing the plans of children in short breaks, it is important that the Reviewing Officer is mindful of the context. Many, though not all, children who receive short





breaks, do so as part of a plan of support to enable parents to continue to care for a child with a disability. In such scenarios, the close and active involvement of parents in the placement arrangements is likely to be more intense. Given this parents, as well as children and young people, may particularly value the independent perspective of the Reviewing Officer.

A short break review has a similar focus to other reviews in ensuring that the child's needs are fully met while the child is away from their parents. Aspects of wider packages of care are likely to be more of a feature, and the primary role of the parent in caring for the child means relationships are often different in nature to full time placements. As with all looked after children, consideration should be given to the child's wishes and feelings and to ensuring that appropriate alternative methods of communication are considered.

### **3.5 Additional Communication Needs and Children with Disability**

If a child has additional communication needs the Reviewing Officer should be informed, and the child's preferred communication method should be recorded in their care plan. As far as is appropriate and possible the child should be involved in the review using their preferred style of communication.

Children with communication needs may be supported by their parent, or an independent advocate or someone they trust. The Reviewing Officer should ensure from the outset that the child has access to the support they need to provide their wishes and feelings effectively. This support should be made available throughout the care planning and reviewing process including when any significant changes are proposed.

### **3.6 Youth Justice**

Reviewing Officers have an important role in ensuring that the local authority fulfils their duties to looked after children who are at risk of offending or involved in the youth justice system. This includes making sure that the child's care plan addresses any unmet needs that may lead to offending and that, if appropriate, targeted services designed to prevent offending are provided. It is also important to consider the suitability of the placement in managing any behavioural problems.

If a court decides to remand a young person under the age of 18 years to a secure setting it is the duty of the local authority's duty to source and support this placement. Where a child is sentenced to a secure setting, Scottish Ministers hold responsibility for that placement. The Reviewing Officer should be notified as soon as soon as a



child is accommodated to a secure setting, including the details of where they are placed and the relevant order.

Secure placements are the most interventionist form of care provided to children, and specific and detailed duties in terms of review and CSWO duties apply. See [Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) and [The Secure Accommodation \(Scotland\) Regulations 2013](#) and [‘Secure Care: Pathway and Standards’](#).

### **3.7 Children in Hospital**

An admission to hospital where a child is already looked after, whether planned or unplanned, is a significant change for the child and the relevant Reviewing Officer should be kept informed to ensure that there is a plan in place to meet the needs of the child. If the hospital stay is likely to be for a considerable period of time, there should be discussion with the social worker about whether an early review is required. Where consent to specific treatment is required, this should be noted.

Where a child is admitted to a psychiatric unit, whether as a voluntary patient or because of a compulsory admission under the Mental Health Act, it is important to ensure that the interface between mental health legislation and looked after legislation is as smooth as possible. Given such a significant change in circumstances an early review is usually appropriate, and the Reviewing Officer should be satisfied that appropriate plans to meet the child’s needs and planned outcomes are in place before discharge, and that the local authority looked after duties are also being fulfilled while the child is detained.

### **3.8 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People**

The Home Office has deemed that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children should be looked after. In Scotland this is achieved using Section 25 Children (Scotland) Act 1995 though for those aged 16 and 17, it is necessary for the individual young person themselves to consent to being accommodated. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have the same rights and entitlement to support as other looked after children. They are though less likely than other children to have a parental figure available to them, may not have English as their first language and are likely to have specific identity needs. Some will also be ‘age disputed’ and the local authority may be required to undertake an age assessment. Immigration and asylum status issues are features to consider.



As part of their role, Reviewing Officers should work with the social worker and team round the young person to help the child to understand the Scottish care system, and be aware of the implications of all these issues when they meet for the first time before the initial review. At the first and subsequent reviews the Reviewing Officer will need to be satisfied that the care planning considers specifically culture, language and religious issues alongside wider asylum and immigration considerations as part of its plan to meet the child's needs, in addition to all the other needs the child has as a looked after child. There should also be consideration of family reunification matters and connections for siblings, and any supports which may be necessary to facilitate a child or young person's participation in the review such as interpreters. Reviewing Officers should also be aware of the specific role of the Guardian and the Guardianship Service, and any advocacy or rights groups who may be supporting the young person.



## 4. Planning Transition to Adulthood

### 4.1 Policy, Legal and Practice Context

[The Children's \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#) and the [Children and Young Persons \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#) state that local authorities and other corporate parents have duties to prepare looked after young people for life after being looked after and to provide advice, guidance, and assistance to eligible care leavers. The aim of this is to support them to make successful transitions out of care based on their plans reflecting their needs and aspirations. See [Scottish Government Transition to Adulthood Strategy](#).

The Reviewing Officer should be satisfied that the local authority is making appropriate arrangements to meet the child's needs at such times. They should have sufficient knowledge and experience of aftercare, throughcare and continuing care provisions.

Where a young person is eligible for continuing care, and they and their carer agree that a young person may remain in their previous care placement (continuing care) the review should note this and ensure that the right support and provision and aims of the placement are noted. Where the young person wishes to move into continuing care, but the placement is not available, then the review must ensure that support equivalent to that provided in the previous care placement is provided. Details of continuing care eligibility and local authority duties is available in Scottish Government continuing care guidance [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 part 11 - continuing care: guidance - gov.scot](#) and Reviewing Officers should ensure they are familiar with this and that it is applied in young people's reviews.

The legislation and guidance for continuing care [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 part 11 - continuing care: guidance - gov.scot](#) and aftercare [Guidance on Part 10 \(Aftercare\) of the Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014 - gov.scot](#) describe the timescales for reviews and local authority duties. Reviewing Officers should adhere to these and within reviews undertake the following tasks:

- ❖ Ensure that all young people, in preparation for a transition into adulthood have the required a pathway plan. The Reviewing Officer must make sure, through the reviewing process that the pathway plan addresses the needs of the young person, and crucially their views on what they want to happen and how to achieve this.
- ❖ Ensure that the young person is involved in their review, or all attempts have been made to include them in the review process if they cannot/will not attend



the review itself. The young person should be at the forefront of their plan, steering their support with professionals upholding their right to support into adulthood.

- ❖ Determine and ensure any proposed move will meet the young person's needs in such a way that the young person can progress in their gradual journey to assuming the responsibilities of adulthood.
- ❖ Make sure that the plan will maintain as much stability as possible for the young person, including family contact and links with the community in which they have been living. A young person must not be expected to make a move that will disrupt his/her plans to continue in education, participate in training or gain employment.
- ❖ Ensuing children know their right to [Continuing care](#) and along with the team around the child, support children to be fully involved in their care planning. See [Your Right to Continuing Care](#).

## 4.2 Children and Young People with a Disability

The transition to adulthood is a period where young people are increasingly recognised and respond to new challenges. They also make important decisions about their futures. Young people with disabilities will face many of the same experiences as other care leavers but with additional challenges as they navigate the transition from support by children's services to, for some, support from adult health and social care services. Other young people with a disability will not meet the eligibility criteria for an adult service and their aftercare needs will be met by children's aftercare services. The Principles of Good Transitions developed by young people and their families outlines what a good transition looks like with related tools to aid that transition. [Principles of Good Transitions - Scottish Transitions Forum](#)

The Reviewing Officer should be rigorous in scrutinising pathway plans (transition plans) for young people with disabilities and ensure that planning begins early and no later than the age of 14 years. The earlier the assessment is commenced, and an appropriate support plan and where required a placement identified, the more likely it is that there will be a smooth transition. The Local Authority should have an agreed health and social care protocol in respect of transition arrangement.



## 5. Concerns/Dispute Resolution and Complaints

### 5.1 Concerns/Dispute Resolution

The Reviewing Officer in their quality assurance role has a responsibility to resolve any difficulties with the child or young person's care plan. This may be in relation to care planning, the implementation of the care plan or decisions relating to that care plan. Children young people and professionals should all be aware of the importance of resolving any disagreement and it is good practice to record any disagreement about a plan in the review minute, and to ensure that where informal resolution is not reached that individual are aware of the local complaints process.

Reviewing Officers also have a responsibility to raise poor practice. This should be handled sensitively and initially informally with the social worker or the social work manager, who would take forward any concerns. Where poor practice continues the Reviewing Officer should raise this with the manager, and more formal action may be agreed.

Each Local Authority will have different structures and therefore some variation in the process for managing practice concerns, and local processes should be followed.

Where an issue that is beyond the control of social worker or social work manager, for example, staffing, inter-agency or resource issues, this should be raised with a more senior manager, and local authority process followed.

The resolution of practice disputes can be time consuming and may create tensions. To support a culture of learning, the local authority, and senior members of staff, should ensure that the Reviewing Officer has sufficient time and support to carry out their work effectively, and specifically creating a culture where feedback is two way and support growth and development, and thereby aids the structure for meeting the needs of their children and young people.

Disputes and concerns should be recorded appropriately in the child's case record or within the record of the meeting. Concerns about practice should not be recorded in a child's file unless there is a particular reason to do so.

### 5.2 Complaints

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, outlines in law how Scotland meets the needs of children and



uphold and protects their rights. In preparation for the legislation being enacted, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) officially launched guidance for a new approach to handling complaints involving children and young people. Please refer to this guidance in managing any complaint arising from a review [Child Friendly Complaints Handling Principles](#). Individual Local Authority procedures should reflect these principles and Reviewing Officers should implement their local procedures accordingly.

Reviewing Officers must ensure that children and young people are aware of their local authority complaints process. The child or young person should have access to an advocate or trusted person to access the complaints process if required

If the child or young person does not have the ability or understanding to instigate a complaint, consideration should be given to who is best placed to do so on their behalf. This would often be the person with parental responsibilities and right. The right to make a complaint extends to parents, those with parental responsibility, local authority foster carers or anyone else whom the local authority considers having sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare. This should include the Reviewing Officer.

As with their wider duties to the wellbeing of the child, the Reviewing Officer should ensure that the welfare of the child or young person is paramount in the complaint process. They may in certain circumstances deem that a complaint is sufficiently serious to escalate to their Head of Service or equivalent or Human Resources.

The Reviewing Officer should be made aware in advance of any review if a child or young person has an outstanding complaint. They should make themselves available to any investigating officer if appropriate or requested.



## 6. Strategic and Management Responsibilities

### 6.1 Role and Function of the Reviewing Officer Manager

Each Reviewing Officer should have a designated manager who will be accountable for the quality of service provided by the Reviewing Officer to each child and or young person. The manager should provide support, advice, and oversight, as well as professional supervision.

### 6.2 Competencies and Qualifications

The role of the Reviewing Officer is a specialist one which ideally stands alone in the local authority. It is a role that is uniquely placed to oversee the quality of care and practice being provided in the local authority, and it may thus involve challenging leaders and areas of practice that fall below the threshold of good practice. To undertake the role, it is preferable that the Reviewing Officer should have:

- ❖ A minimum of five years post qualifying experience in children and families or extensive knowledge of child protection and childcare.
- ❖ At least the equivalent status to an experienced children's social work team manager / leader.
- ❖ Registration with the [Scottish Social Services Council \(SSSC\)](#) as a social worker.
- ❖ Good group management and chairing skills, and excellent communication skills.

Due to the complexities of the role, the Reviewing Officer should not be:

- ❖ A person involved in preparing the child's care plan or the operational management of the child's case.
- ❖ A person with control over the resources allocated to the case.

As registered social workers Reviewing Officers must take individual responsibility for retaining their registration and their continuous professional development.





The manager should be a qualified and registered social worker with a sound knowledge of the legal framework and care planning process governing local authority duties and responsibilities towards looked after children and young people. The manager should have the independence, ability, and confidence to support the quality assurance aspect of the reviewing role and to support the Reviewing Officer's practice and development.

The manager should ensure there are policies in place to facilitate the quality of the service delivery. This should include regular feedback from children, parents, and social workers in an audit of the records and/or direct observation of the Reviewing Officer in their performance of their role. The manager should ensure that the Reviewing Officer is able to fulfil their role to the best of their ability and comply with policy, procedure, guidance, and the legal framework.

The manager should ensure Reviewing Officers have relevant training to fulfil the role. The manager should hold responsibility for ensuring quantitative and qualitative data is collected and analysed to support improvement work and evidence good practice. Each local authority should have their own procedures about quality assurance records.

The manager should oversee a Reviewing Officers workload ensuring capacity for effective quality assurance, auditing and developmental support especially in relation to active participation of children and young people in the review process. It is estimated that a caseload between 65 and 85 would represent good practice and facilitate delivery of a good service, including the full range of functions set out in this handbook. This range should reflect the diversity and complexity of each case.

The manager should ensure the Reviewing Officer has time to:

- ❖ Undertake the tasks associate with a review including consulting with all relevant family members or carers; reading documentation in advance of a review; meeting with the child or young person in a meaningful way before the review.
- ❖ Provide and approve a full record of a review.
- ❖ Quality assure documentation.
- ❖ Undertake any follow up work after a review.
- ❖ Monitor drift.



- ❖ Record and share good practice and alert the relevant manager of areas of poor practice.
- ❖ Consult with the social worker and the child or young person after a significant change.
- ❖ Resolve any concerns informally wherever possible.
- ❖ Undertake training for professional development.

The Chief Social Work Officer is ultimately responsible for the effective undertaking of the reviewing officer functions within their local authority. This may be delegated to a senior manager

The Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO)/senior manager should:

- ❖ Understand the statutory functions of the reviewing process and the benefits of having a standalone Reviewing Officer role.
- ❖ Have a sound understanding of the legal framework and care planning process governing how the authority meets its responsibilities towards looked after children.
- ❖ Be satisfied that policies and procedures are in place to ensure direct communication between senior managers across the departments and partner agencies.

Partner agencies should be clear about their corporate parenting duties and the local authorities statutory reviewing function. Reliable systems must be in place to ensure collaborative working practice is achieved and is of good quality. The CSWO or delegated senior manager has a particular responsibility to address wider organisational features to facilitate multi-agency working.

### **6.3 Good Practice**

Every child or young person who is looked after should have a designated Reviewing Officer prior to their first meeting. Whether siblings are placed together or not, where the same Reviewing Officer can review each child, this should be done, noting that the size of a sibling group or a conflict of interests between siblings may make this inappropriate or unmanageable.



The child or young person should know how to contact their Reviewing Officer, and ideally the Reviewing Officer should ideally follow the child through their care journey providing consistency of approach and relationship. Where a parent and child or young person are both looked after, there should be careful consideration of who should review each to avoid any conflict of interest.

The Local Authority should have a written policy or procedure regarding the how the child or young person's case will be reviewed. This policy or procedure should be available to relevant family members and professionals. Records should also be kept of reviews, Reviewing Officer, dates and any changes, both for administrative purposes and within the child's case records

Where a new Reviewing Officer takes over, there should wherever possible be an in-person handover with the child or young person and their family.

#### **6.4 Administration of the Review Process**

The local authority should provide sufficient administrative support to facilitate the delivery of an efficient and effective reviewing process, enabling review meetings to take place in accordance with regulations and good practice.



## References and Further Reading

- [Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#)
- [Children \(Care and Justice\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
- [The Centre for Excellence for Children’s Care and Protection](#)
- [Continuing Care – CELCIS](#)
- [Children’s Hearing Policy](#)
- [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#)
- [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#)
- [Child Friendly Complaints Handling Principles](#)
- [Foster Children \(Private Fostering\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 1985](#)
- [Foster Children \(Scotland\) Act 1984](#)
- [Getting it Right for Every Child \(GIRFEC\)](#)
- [IRO Handbook Statutory guidance for independent reviewing officers and local authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for looked after children, Department for children, schools and families, CDSF Publications, Nottingham, 2010](#)
- [National Guidance for Child Protection 2019, updated 2023.](#)
- [Principles of Good Transitions - Scottish Transitions Forum](#)
- [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#)
- [The Promise Scotland](#)
- [The Residential Establishments - Child Care \(Scotland\) Regulations 1996](#)
- [The Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care \(Scotland\) Regulations 2003](#)
- [The Secure Accommodation \(Scotland\) Regulations 1996](#)
- [The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [Voice of the Infant Pledge](#)
- [Scottish Social Services Council](#)
- [Family Rights Group](#)
- [Staying Together and Connected](#)
- [Stand up for siblings](#)
- [Who cares Scotland](#)
- [Children’s Advocacy Guidance - Scottish Government](#)
- [National Trauma Training](#)
- Page 4 image accessed online in publications of The Promise Scotland.



## Acknowledgements

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