

**DCS/Section 151 Officers/Finance Officers Seminar Programme**

**Seminar 4 – Value for money for whom: Challenges of managing costs within children’s social care**

**6 February 2024**

**Dr Lisa Holmes, Professor of Applied Social Science, School of Education and Social Work, Sussex University**

**Attendees:**

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| DCSs | John MacilwraithHelen WatsonLucy ButlerRobert HendersonSarah Hammond | BuckinghamshireWokinghamWest SussexSouthamptonKent |
| S151 Officers | Taryn Eves | West Sussex |
| Officers | Al MooreEmma Shrimpton Honor Green Danny Doherty Paul Ring Marie Taylor Lisa Bursill Sonia Johnson | WokinghamWokingham East SussexOxfordshireSouthamptonWiltshireBrighter Futures for Children, ReadingBracknell Forest |
| Organisers | Lisa HolmesDeborah GlassbrookCarol Flach | University of SussexSESLIP ConsultantBFfC Reading /SESLIP  |

**Attachments:** [**https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6396f8ec8fa8f5530c49bf25/LA\_Interventions\_report\_December\_2022.pdf**](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6396f8ec8fa8f5530c49bf25/LA_Interventions_report_December_2022.pdf)

**Presentation:** Value for money for whom: Challenges of managing costs within children’s social care

**Discussion and Reflection on Presentation**

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| DAG – understanding how unit costs are agreed | LH – unit costs published as part of s251 return Research projects often refer to unit costs that were relevant at the time and not uplifted for inflation or current times so can be misleading for policy makers. Each LA has local context that can impact on unit costs which then might differ from national unit costs which raise local issues on why that is the case |
| JMc – is there a case for considering more place based research and greater collaboration with third sector given the who pays/who benefits discussion | LH – welcomed the appetite for more collaboration with the third sector, acknowledged some of the budgetary constraints from doing research together and the challenge of funding for longitudinal impact studies.  |
| RH – acknowledge the risk of financial challenges leading to short termism and the need to create a culture that believes in and invests in long term evidence based work. Financially prudent decision to abandon the PAUSE project even though there is an evidence base the long term objectives don’t work with short term funding cycles. Noted the need for an evidence base around cost avoidance. Need for a system wide approach to evidence cost avoidance from police, health, schools to buy into the family safeguarding model for example.How do we evidence the cost of poor outcomes – how do you evidence that better to be good or outstanding with good outcomes and that the cost of inadequacy and improvement is greater. What evidence is there around how much it costs to improve.  | LH – welcomed the move to family safeguarding and noted the work that she is doing with Hertfordshire around developing a cost avoidance tool around safeguarding noting that the tool has assumptions and transparency so should have wider replicability with other authorities. LH welcomed the commitment to trying to create a culture of long term evidence and research. LH referenced the work in North Yorkshire which has embedded a data analyst to the No Wrong Door Project.   |
| SH would welcome an understanding of what it costs to remain good or outstanding and can authorities afford to aim to be outstanding or should we become content to be good.SH questioned if we in social care should be stepping back from a range of responsibilities that others in the system should be leading on e.g. health, criminal justice etc. SH questioned if we can learn from post war austerity and the difference between personal and state responsibility. SH questioned if we should continue to feel responsible for every child and allow a system to have an agreed level of failure rather than trying to constantly fix everything for all children and all families.  | LH reflected on the opportunity to look at the leaning from post war.  |
| TE commented on the definition of value for money and whether that always means low cost. TE noted the challenge around quantifying outcomes that are not monetarised and trying to shift adults and social care to 3-5 year budget cycles. TE also commented on the work with the third sector as a partner rather than as delivering for the Council. TE offered a financial perspective on cost avoidance and evidencing cost avoidance. TE stressed the importance of data as starting the conversation. TE noted that Members believe it will cost as much again to move from good to outstanding as it did from RI to good and can that be afforded in the financial situation we are in at the moment.  | Commitment from the group to try to work on an agreed approach to calculating cost avoidance – drawing on the Hertfordshire cost avoidance tool. .  |
| MT commented on the transformation reserve programme in Wiltshire and how that is used to invest to save and building local council owned provision and assets.  |  |

**Next Steps:**

Agreement from the group to discuss developing a position statement with key recommendations from the SE region for how we might take research forward that looks at cost avoidance and a longitudinal study as well as understanding more about how the benefits from investment in social care impact the wider system.

It was noted that investment in the social care market brings employment in the region but profits especially those in relation to placements are often in the hands of private companies.

**2024 Seminar Programme**

The following meetings will be held in person at Broadway House, St James’, London following on from the regional DCS meeting. There will be an option to join remotely as well.

* 17 May – focus on SEND and the learning and impact from Safety Valve and DBV with Chris Kelly from Newton.
* 20 September – focus to be advised
* 6 December – focus to be advised

**Circulation list**

* Please can you update us if you know someone has moved on so that we have the most up to date circulation list for DCS and section 151 Officers.

**Evaluation**

* Please share your thoughts on what more you would like, topics, discussion areas.

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